



# **FIREFLIES**

BY

**DONJA R. LOVE**



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.



FIREFLIES  
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The world premiere of FIREFLIES was presented by Atlantic Theater Company (Neil Pepe, Artistic Director; Jeffery Lawson, Managing Director), New York City, September 2018. It was directed by Saheem Ali, the set design was by Arnulfo Maldonado, the costume design was by Dede Ayite, the lighting design was by David Weiner, the sound design and original music was by Justin Ellington, the projection design was by Alex Basco Koch, and the production stage manager was Cody Renard Richard. The cast was as follows:

CHARLES ..... Khris Davis  
OLIVIA ..... DeWanda Wise

FIREFLIES was developed in part with the support of Rising Circle Theater Collective at the INKtank Play Development Lab for Emerging Artists of Color.

## **CHARACTERS**

### **OLIVIA**

W, Black, early thirties; she's weary—it's as if she's carrying the weight of this fiery world. She writes a lot, she smokes a lot, she stares off a lot, she hears bombs a lot.

### **CHARLES**

M, Black, early thirties; Olivia's husband, he's a preacher. Though he drinks a lot, it's something about him that we like—that makes us feel like he's the type of man that can lead people through the smoke and into the promised land.

## **TIME**

Fall  
1963

## **PLACE**

Somewhere down South,  
where the sky is on fire

## **NOTE**

This play is part 2 of a trilogy that explores Queer love through Black History (slavery, the Civil Rights movement, the Black Lives Matter movement). Part 1 is SUGAR IN OUR WOUNDS.

*“The God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgitful and lowdown.*

*She say, Miss Celie, You better hush. God might hear you.*

*Let ’im hear me, I say. If he ever listened to poor colored women the world would be a different place...”*

—Alice Walker,  
*The Color Purple*

# FIREFLIES

## Scene 1

*Dark.*

*We hear...*

*Humming.*

*Humming in the air.*

*It makes the whole air light.*

*We see...*

*A beautiful sky that stretches out for as far as the eye can see.*

*Then...*

*Fireflies begin to fly.*

*They cover the entire sky.*

*It glows a bright red.*

*Like it's on fire.*

*This fiery sky provides just enough light for us to see...*

*The shadow of a woman standing under it.*

*It's Olivia.*

*A Black woman in her early thirties; she's weary, but let the world tell it she's angry.*

*She looks like she's carrying the weight of this fiery world.*

*She's staring up.*

*At the fire in the sky.*

*She's probably been standing here, in this exact spot, for hours.*

*Still.*

*She smokes a cigarette and watches as the sky continuously cracks itself open, and bleeds in the near distance.*

*Then...*

*She pulls a piece of paper from her dress and begins to write a letter.*

OLIVIA. *September 15, 1963*

Dear Ruby,

It's been a while. The sky...it's been burning so bright since you left.  
It reminds me of you.

*BOOM*

*BOOM*

*BOOM*

*Bombs burst in the air.*

*They startle Olivia.*

*Beat.*

*She turns the paper over and begins to write on the other side.  
To God.*

God,

I keep hearing these bombs. When will it stop?

*She looks up and waits for an answer.*

*For God...*

*Nothing.*

*But...*

*BOOM*

*BOOM*

*BOOM*

I can't do this.

*She shoves the letter in her pocket, as the explosions...*

*Kiss  
The  
Sky.*

## Scene 2

*Dusk.*

*We're in a home.*

*You can tell somebody who's somebody lives here.*

*We're in the kitchen, to be exact.*

*The room that probably gets the most use.*

*It has your basics: stove, refrigerator, sink, and a table. It even has a telephone, a radio that's playing, and a "work station"—that holds paper, pens, and packages.*

*There is a package that Olivia stares at—as if she's in a daze, as if the package is taunting her. After a few moments of staring, as her hands shake, she reaches for the package. Before she can grasp it, the music playing from the radio goes off and we hear...*

RADIO NEWS REPORTER. Reverend Charles Emmanuel Grace gave a touching speech while in Birmingham, Alabama, following the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, which killed four young colored girls yesterday morning.

*She immediately cuts the radio off.*

*She closes the package, pulls a paper from out her pocket, and grabs a pen.*

*She begins to write.*

*Probably the same letter as before.*

*Or probably a new one.*

*She's writing.*

*And smoking.*



*Maybe smoking helps with her weariness.*

*Maybe writing helps her talk to Ruby/God.*

*She smokes.*

*And writes.*

*And smokes.*

*And writes.*

*Until, she hears...*

*A car pull up. She quickly puts the letter down, gets up, and looks out the window...*

*From the look on her face, we see that she sees someone outside.*

*So...*

*She runs back to the table and puts the cigarette out in an ashtray and hides the ashtray.*

*ANYWHERE.*

*Don't think too hard on it.*

*Just hide it.*

*She quickly grabs the package and runs out the kitchen. She returns without the package, but with perfume. She sprays it in the air. She runs out the kitchen again to put the perfume back.*

*She returns again, gets some gum and starts to chew it.*

*After a few moments, she cuts the radio back on, then grabs the green beans that's been sitting on the table and begins snapping them.*

*She sits at the table, snapping green beans.*

*SNAP!*

*SNAP!*

*SNAP!*

*She sees the letter is still on the table. She grabs it, puts it in her pocket, and continues to snap the green beans all before...*

*The kitchen door swings open.*

*In walks Charles.*

*A Black man in his early thirties; there's something about him*

*that we like—that makes us feel like he's the type of man that can lead people through the smoke and into the promised land. He's wearing a suit. It's probably his favorite because it looks like it's worn often.*

*As soon as he sees Olivia, he lights up brighter than the sky.*

CHARLES. Oliviaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

*He goes to Olivia, lifts her up, and hugs her.  
Tight.*

OLIVIA. *(Smiling.)* Charles!

*A moment.*

CHARLES. I missed you.

OLIVIA. I missed you, too.

CHARLES. Come on, let's cut up. Like we used.

*Charles turns the radio up and makes them dance. Well, it's actually Charles doing most of the dancing as Olivia looks at him like...*

*"Boy, you's a fool!"*

OLIVIA. I have to finish snapping these beans for supper.

CHARLES. Those beans can wait, baby.  
*I need those fingers of yours, right now!*

OLIVIA. ...

CHARLES. What?

OLIVIA. Just listening to you talking how you're talking.

CHARLES. Maybe you'll hear me better if I'm singing what I'm singing.

*Charles cuts the radio off and begins to sing to Olivia. You can hear the fire in his voice for her.*

I couldn't wait to hold you.

OLIVIA. Sweetie, after I finish cooking you can hold me all you want. I promise.

*Charles reluctantly lets Olivia go.  
Still singing.*

# FIREFLIES

by Donja R. Love

1 man, 1 woman

Somewhere in the Jim Crow South, the sky is on fire. A pregnant Olivia's fierce speechwriting is the true force behind her charismatic husband, Charles, and his successful Movement, galvanizing people to march towards freedom. When four little girls are bombed in a church, Olivia and Charles' marriage is threatened—as this tragedy and years of civil unrest leave Olivia believing that “this world ain't no place to raise a colored child.”

*“A jaw-dropping and explosively dramatic two-hander...a powerful tale of love flashing its light in the dark. ...FIREFLIES is a drama of extraordinary depth and complexity... Love thrillingly crafts an intimate story that comes to feel cosmic in its enormity by the end.”* —**TheaterMania.com**

*“We are used to seeing [Martin Luther King Jr.] fictionalized... But we haven't seen much onstage about Coretta. In FIREFLIES...playwright Donja R. Love daringly sets out to correct that, subverting the standard portrait of a great-man marriage by making the wife infinitely more interesting than the husband. ...Perhaps it will not spoil too much to note that FIREFLIES is the second play in a trilogy [described] as an exploration of queer love through black history. ...I was moved by Mr. Love's willingness to imagine, amid the terror of the times...other kinds of lives than the ones that history books offer.”* —**The New York Times**

*“This is language as lush catharsis, language as endurance, language as empowerment... it feels like going to church...”* —**New York Magazine**

**Also by Donja R. Love**  
SUGAR IN OUR WOUNDS

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