

WHEN THE MOON YELLS

A 10-minute play

by Shawntai Brown

Synopsis:

A porch-dwelling woman who is blind and last-bus-out non-binary singer who regularly pass each other in the night finally let down their guards and speak as the night unfolds and unwraps them from isolation.

Characters:

Shelby - Woman in her 40s who is mostly blind

Marquesa - A non-binary person in their late 20s to 30s who works at a car manufacturing plant.

Setting:

Neighborhood on the Northwest side of Detroit at night, some time between 2010 and now. The sounds of cars, sirens, and occasional distant gunshots can be heard or imagined.

Lights come up to half so the stage remains mostly dark as a city night. Shelby sits on her porch at night in an old chair sunken in from years of sitting. Next to the chair is a tea kettle and tea cup. She is running her fingers across the pages of a book in Braille. Her hand searches for the knob of her teacup and she takes a sip and resumes reading, laughing to herself occasionally. Marquesa enters in work boots, work coat, and skull cap with headphones on, carrying a weathered backpack and bobbing to the music.

SHELBY: The dead continue to walk.

Marquesa takes the headphones off, turning toward Shelby and shocked to be spoken to.

MARQUESA: What was that?

SHELBY: The dead walk. I finally figured it out. You work for a dying breed.

MARQUESA: You mean the auto plant?

SHELBY: Feels like they still are closing a new plant every few months. That was my last guess as far as figuring out where you were coming from so late in the night.

MARQUESA: I've been walking pass by your house for the past seven months nearly every night. I see you reading your book, laughing to yourself. You never so much as looked at me.

SHELBY: I listened to you. Smelled you.

MARQUESA: That's not weird at all.

SHELBY: I know it's weird. It's just my way of looking so I can figure the world out. I have a little trouble with sight.

MARQUESA: Oh, I didn't realize you were - . But why didn't you just say hello?

SHELBY: Hello. I'm Shelby.

MARQUESA: I'm Marquesa. I work at the plant on Plymouth Rd.

SHELBY: I read on my porch at night. I work for a call center from home during the day.

MARQUESA: So, you're part of a dying breed, too. I hardly hear anything other than an automated voice when I call companies.

You have to know a special code to dial to get a human being.

SHELBY: And when you crack the code, you talk to me, Shelby.

MARQUESA: Still, why didn't you just ask where I worked?

SHELBY: It's more fun to guess. You didn't smell like fast food, so I ruled that out right away. Then, I thought maybe you were a night school student. I could hear the backpack against your jacket in fall. But when you sang it didn't sound like you were carrying anything heavy like textbooks. You've got a very nice voice, actually, Marquesa. I can tell you wear a heavy boot and pant. You have a distinctive whoosh and clump to your walk. But

it was the layoff notices last month I heard on news. And then I didn't hear you walk by for a few weeks. But here you are again, obviously back to work. The dead walk.

MARQUESA: Thank god the dead walk... So you like my singing. I usually don't sing in front of people.

SHELBY: I wasn't people. I was just a woman you pass every night. Probably not much different than walking past a tree that's green all year, I imagine.

MARQUESA: You definitely don't blend in with the trees. I noticed you. Why are you out here at night when most of the world's gone to bed? I mean, I know why I'm out here. I have to be. I catch the last bus before daybreak. If I could afford the Uber, I'd take it. But you seem to like it out here.

SHELBY: The moon yells to me and pulls.

MARQUESA: The moon? You a witch or something?

SHELBY: Just a night owl, human by day. I spend all day talking to people. Angry people mostly. I stay inside during the day with the shades pulled so the light doesn't hurt my eyes as much. Night's my time. As soon as the moon calls, I come sit here. At night, it's mostly peaceful.

MARQUESA: Peaceful? All I hear are sirens, bullets, drag racing in the distance.

SHELBY: Oh, that never turns off. It just the way the city night sounds. Gives the crickets and cicadas something to compete with. Still, I think it's musical. Like you.

MARQUESA: I think you like watching me with your nose and ears. Who else you watch?

SHELBY: Come see for yourself. Guy across the street drives a muscle car I haven't been able to identify. He gets home in about 5 minutes. . . . You want some T?

MARQUESA: You think I need hormones.

SHELBY: Perfect as is. This is a different kind of T.

Marquesa joins Shelby on the porch. Marquesa takes a sip of the teacup and promptly spits it out over the side of the porch.

MARQUESA: That ain't tea, Shelby.

Shelby laughs. Marquesa fishes a thermos out of their bag and takes a sip to wash the tequila down.

SHELBY: The T stands for tequila. I can pour you a cup.

MARQUESA: No. I'll stick to my 12-hours-old-coffee. I'm sober for now. Got a DUI last year. Have to drop every month.

SHELBY: Is that what started you taking the bus and walking?

MARQUESA: That's what started everything. I was a delivery truck driver. Decent money. Enough to have a car and health insurance. I used to deliver flowers. Big arrangements.

SHELBY: And did you sing? I can just imagine, you singing and handing some woman a bouquet of flowers. Let that have been me! The smells and the sound of that voice. Would have been too much.

MARQUESA: I think you may have a crush.

SHELBY: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable.

MARQUESA: I didn't say I was uncomfortable.

Beat.

MARQUESA: I don't have the friends I used to. Can't really go to the bars and clubs anymore. It's just not as fun. I'm asleep during the day and I'm at work at night. Hard to keep up with people.

SHELBY: I don't get out much either. There used to be a jazz club, The Comfort Zone, over on McNichols. I would go there, hear the bands. Best thing was I could walk. Not even a full mile away. My sister hated me walking at night, with my vision and all. But she couldn't stop me from living being that she's all the way in Iowa. I went at least twice a month; every week sometimes. Then the Comfort Zone went out of business. Place

shut down, and so did my social life. I mean, I have friends, but they have families and kids and Netflix accounts, and well, that's how that goes.

MARQUESA: How's my voice compared to those jazz musicians.

SHELBY: You kind of like me fancying your voice, Marquesa.

MARQUESA: Is that all you fancy?

Shelby blushes but says nothing.

MARQUESA: It's just that you're the only one besides my mom to hear me sing. I'm just curious what you think.

SHELBY: I'm excited if I hear you coming with your headphones on at night. I really love when you play Luther. You let your voice carry when you sang along with him. I might get a little live show while you walk by. The nights haven't been the same while you've been laid off.

Marquesa turns away, embarrassed to be caught in a sheepish smile, but then realizing the smile wouldn't be seen.

MARQUESA: What you reading?

SHELBY: A joke book in Braille. My sister saw it on Amazon and thought I might like it.

MARQUESA: Tell me a joke.

Shelby finds a page in the book and traces her hands over the pages until she finds a joke.

SHELBY: How many people does it take to screw in a light bulb at a convent?

MARQUESA: I don't know. How many?

SHELBY: Nun.

Shelby laughs to herself.

SHELBY: Come on! That's good wordplay.

MARQUESA: That's pretty bad.

SHELBY: Oh they get worse... Here comes the car. He's home right on time. Ok. Tell me what it is?

The sound of a sports car is heard. Marquesa stands and goes toward the sidewalk to eye the car.

SHELBY: Does he drive a Mustang, late '90s edition?

MARQUESA: '98 GT.

SHELBY: Oh, I knew it! I swear I get better and better every year. Thank you. I've been trying to figure that one out since he moved in.

Beat.

I've kept you. I'm sure you're tired. I can't believe I kept you over a car bet I made with myself. You could have been home by now, probably. I'm sure there's someone at home waiting on you to walk through the door.

MARQUESA: I live alone.

SHELBY: Hmm.

MARQUESA: How about another joke?

SHELBY: Yeah?

MARQUESA: You have a whole book of them. There must be at least one I can appreciate. Besides, I've got 10 hours before my next shift, and I like the sound of your laugh.

Marquesa sits on the porch at the foot of Shelby's chair and leans slightly into her leg, just enough for their shoulder to find a space in the curve of her calf. Shelby inhales, accepting the touch of another person and letting it settle. A warmth comes over her, so strong she has to collect herself with the fanning of her hand. She opens her book and clears her throat.

SHELBY: What do you call your girlfriend who works at the zoo?

MARQUESA: I know that one. You call her a keeper.

Lights fade to black as they laugh softly together.

MARQUESA: Tell me another one, Shelby.

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