

A LULLABY

by Destinee Holt

Desiree: A teenage girl, trying to hold her family together

Willie: Drunk father of Desiree

Marissa: Workaholic mother of Desiree

Dawn: Ghost of Desiree's recently deceased grandmother

SCENE 1

(DESIREE gets off of the school bus and walks toward her house. The yard is a mess. Weeded and overgrown, as SHE gets closer to the door, she notices that the morning paper is still on the porch. SHE scoffs, grabs the paper, and opens the door.)

(DAWN, the ghost of DESIREE's grandmother, stands at the door and walks in behind her. DESIREE does not notice the presence.)

DESIREE *[yelling]*
Daddy! You in here?

(SHE begins to cough. The living room is dark, with dark sheets over the windows. The room smells of alcohol and cigarettes. DESIREE coughs and waves smoke out of her face.)

DESIREE
Dad? I ... I got the paper... you, *[coughs]* left it on the porch.

(DESIREE mumbles to herself. DAWN shakes her head.)

DESIREE
He left the morning paper out again... and its almost 4... *[Sighs]*

(DESIREE hears her father groaning in a distant room. SHE searches for him. DAWN points towards WILLIE's location. DESIREE feels pulled in that direction.)

DESIREE
Daddy? Are you ok? Say something. I don't know where you are, Dad.

(WILLIE groans become louder as DESIREE hones in on his location. HE is in the bathroom on the floor. DESIREE shrieks in fear and jumps to the floor. DAWN follows DESIREE into the bathroom. SHE stands and shakes her head. DESIREE holds her father.)

WILLIE *[groans]*
I w-was, I ...

DESIREE
Daddy, sit up.

(DESIREE goes to the bathroom sink and gets a warm rag. SHE takes the rag and presses it onto her father's forehead. DAWN sighs and looks away.)

DESIREE
Daddy you stink! You smell like alcohol! Have you been drinking?

(DESIREE looks around the bathroom and sees that there are six bottles of liquor intermingled with cleaning products under her father's sink. Still holding him she begins to cry. She rocks her barely conscious father as if he were an infant. Desiree hums a song.)

WILLIE *[muffled]*
I was.. I was just.. Getting a drink.

(DAWN looks at WILLIE, disappointed.)

SCENE 2

(DESIREE is in the kitchen, cooking. WILLIE is in the living room, slumped in a reclining chair, asleep. DAWN is sitting on the couch, knitting. A television set is faintly audible in the background. DESIREE opens a window, and after cooking a little while longer, the house phone rings. DESIREE answers it.)

MARISSA *[on the phone]*
Hey, baby. How was school?

DESIREE
It was ok I guess, I got my progress repor-

MARISSA *[in a rushed tone]*
That's great, baby. Listen, I'm working a double shift tonight at the diner, and I'm gonna need you to find something for you and your father to eat.

DESIREE
I figured... I've already gotten dinner started. Fillet Mignon, grilled asparagus, and parmesan garlic, baby red mashed potatoes.

(MARISSA, DAWN, and DESIREE all chuckle. DESIREE peers across the room to see if her laughing had startled her father sleeping. DAWN pushes her hand at him. WILLIE shuffles in the chair.)

MARISSA
Girrrl, just make sure you spray the pan with Pam before you put the chicken tenders in the oven. I'll be home late. I love you, Des. Forever and always.

DESIREE
Forever and always. Later, Ma.

MARISSA
Later, baby girl.

(DESIREE puts the phone back on the hook. SHE smiles, already nostalgic for her phone conversation. Suddenly, SHE goes back to cooking. DAWN walks over to the kitchen and watches the chicken tenders with pity.)

SCENE 3

(DESIREE is sitting in her living room with dinner on the coffee table. The television is no longer on. SHE is on the couch doing homework. WILLIE is still in his recliner. HE is beginning to wake up.)

WILLIE *[yawning and groaning]*
Ahhhhh... *[WILLIE rubs his head]*

(DESIREE glances up and continues her work.)

WILLIE
What time is it? *[WILLIE reaches in his pockets searching for something]*

DESIREE
Nine.

WILLIE
You cook?

DESIREE
Yup.

WILLIE
What?

DESIREE
Chicken tenders... same as yesterday... same as all week.

(Dawn shakes her head.)

WILLIE
What's with the attitude? You getting smart with me?

DESIREE
Nope.. just doing my work. That's all..

(WILLIE stares at DESIREE and scratches his head. SHE looks up from her work.)

DESIREE

I got the paper from this morning... I looked through the classifieds and highlighted a few things. Where you here all day? I thought you had gone out job hunting after mom left for work.

WILLIE *[says with attitude]*

I didn't see anything that could help us. I'm not about to go out and bust my a -- for a measly \$7.50 an hour. Besides, your mom says I need to be here with you.

DESIREE *[mumbling]*

I believe she said here "for" me not with me.

WILLIE

What did you say?

DESIREE

I said that you need to be here for me

WILLIE *[he smacks the arm of the chair startling the ghost his mother]*

I am here for you! I'm here when you leave. I'm here when you get back! I'm here Des! Am I not?

DESIREE

Yeah, sure. You're right. You're here.. What-ever dad. *[SHE stars back at her work]*

WILLIE

Whatever?

(WILLIE gets up, stumbles and walks over to DESIREE, snatches her papers, and tosses them to the floor)

DESIREE

That's due tomorrow!

WILLIE

What's due today is an a -- whipping! I don't know who you think you've been talking to lately around here. Marissa's the talker. I am not.

(HE begins to unbuckle his belt.)

DESIREE *[laughing nervously]*

So what? You're gonna hit me because I'm telling you what I feel? Because you're mad? Go ahead! Do it, Dad!

(WILLIE sways and catches his balance, swings the belt, and hits DESIREE across the

face. DAWN jumps up and puts her hands on her hips. SHE is yelling at WILLIE, but it is inaudible.)

(DESIREE [screams and clenches her face with both hands. Tears immediately begin pouring down her face.]

(WILLIE raises his hand again but is surprised when he is suddenly pushed onto the coffee table by DESIREE. Glass shatters, and the chicken tenders fly into the air.)

DESIREE

Why did you hit me!? In- in my face?

WILLIE *[getting up from the rumble of the coffee table]*

Because you're acting like I don't run s --- around here. I run this!

DESIREE

No, Dad. You don't. You run your mouth! You run to the store to spend money on cigarettes and booze! You sit home all day and run the bills up, and you're running mom away! It's no wonder she's never home. She leaves me here to deal with you! She's gonna work herself to death, and you'll still try and suck the life out of her. You're a drunk! You're an animal! I -- I hate you!

WILLIE *[mockingly]*

Boo hoo hoo! Think I give a d -- n? Yo mama ain't going nowhere, and neither are you. Wish Dawn hadn't died so your a -- could've been over there going to school, instead of over here, causing problems with that smart mouth of yours. And you watch your mouth when you're talking to me. Still ain't learned huh?

DESIREE *[SHE holds her face with one hand, and DAWN stands behind her in support]*

How can you shut up about my granny! How can you talk about your own mother that way? And I wish she were still here too! You'd be normal again and not drunk out of your mind every day! She'd take care of me, cook for me. Real food!

DESIREE

Ah, shut up! And clean up this mess.

DESIREE *[walking off]* I cleaned up an even bigger one after school today.

(DESIREE goes to her room, and Dawn follows. WILLIE shakes his head and then reaches back into his pocket. HE pulls out a

key chain with many keys on it. HE shuffles through them and then holds the key chain by one small silver key.)

SCENE 4

(DESIREE is now in her room. SHE is on her bed, crying. SHE reaches into a bag on her bed to pull out her cell phone.)

DESIREE *[talking aloud to herself]*

I should just call the police. Have him locked away forever. Then I won't have to deal with this. Mom won't have to ignore this.

(SHE pauses.)

But I can't. If I call the police and have him locked away forever, no one is gonna be here when I get home from school. And mom's gonna have to quit her job and find a new one with shorter hours...

(DESIREE mocks her mother's voice.)

"And when the hours are short, the money is short."

(DESIREE takes another pause, and then abruptly sits upright on her bed.)

DESIREE

I'm 14! I'm old enough to be here alone. I have my own key, and my cell. And I won't answer the door for anyone. And I can bake tenders if I get hungry...

(DESIREE groans and dials 911; SHE looks around the room nervously and presses call. The phone rings once, and SHE hangs up.)

DAWN

Nieta?

DESIREE *[panting, looking around the room but not noticing her grandmother's ghost]*

What am I doing? I can't call the police on my dad. They'd take him away and probably mom too for being at work so much... Then I'd end up in some weird Amish foster home or something..

(DESIREE taps the phone against her knee. SHE lets out a deep sigh.)

DAWN

Nieta? Now, think, before you do something that can't be undone.

DESIREE

I don't want to have to do this but...

(DESIREE scrolls in her phone and dials again. SHE is still ignorant of her grandmother's presence.)

H-Hello? May I Speak with my Mom?

VOICE 1 *[annoyed]*

She's working her table, honey. I'll have her call you back on her next break. She keeps taking calls like this, and she'll be working through her breaks! *[hangs up]*

(DESIREE gets up and paces the floor of her room. Upon walking, SHE notices her face in her dresser's mirror. DAWN is behind her, still undiscovered. Immediately, DESIREE begins to cry and touch her cheek. DAWN touches her shoulder to comfort her.)

DESIREE

Oh, my gosh! My face!

(DESIREE traces the large welt on her face with two fingers. The phone rings and startles her, breaking the trance of her stare into the mirror. The phone rings again. DAWN smiles. DESIREE answers the ringing phone. The background on the other line is buzzing with conversations and music from the diner where her mother works.)

DESIREE (cont.)

Hello? Mom?

MARISSA

Hey, baby?

DESIREE *[dryly]*

Hi, mom.

MARISSA

What up? [Giggles] you must be full from the five star dinner you just had.

DESIREE

No...

MARISSA

Well, then you must have room for pie? I'll bring home a piece. I saw your literature teacher here. She was sitting in my section. She says you got really good grades.

DESIREE

Yeah.. I guess..

MARISSA

You guess? Well, we'll just have to have a look at it over some cherry pie and ice cream. I'll wake you up when I get home. I got to go, baby girl. I love you. Forever and always.

DESIREE

Love you too, ma.

MARISSA

Forever?

DESIREE

And always.

MARISSA

Hey, Des?

DESIREE

Yeah Mom?

MARISSA

I miss your grandmother too... especially her cooking. We all miss her.

DESIREE

Yeah, I'll just have to pretend that it's better than Grandma Dawn's cherry pie ...

MARISSA *[laughs softly]*

That'll do. I gotta go, baby girl. Later.

DESIREE

Later, Mommy.

SCENE 5

(DESIREE is back in the living room. The mess from the table is swept into a pile, and the room is once again heavy with cigarette smoke. SHE looks around the room to find her work. DAWN is standing near it, pointing to the floor.)

DESIREE

It's ruined! And I have to turn this in tomorrow to Mrs. Winfield. She'll be so confused. I turn in exemplary work all year, I'm the only kid in the entire school with an A in her class, and now I have this to show for it. I'd better start working now if I want to turn this train wreck around.

(DESIREE dusts the couch off and starts on a new piece of work. For a few moments, it's quiet and DESIREE can work in piece. DAWN sits close by and watches her.)

WILLIE *[yelling loudly from off stage]*

Where is it? Where's my sh --, girl?

DESIREE *[to herself]*

What is this man screaming about now?

(DAWN sighs and shakes her head.)

WILLIE *[now in the living room with Desiree]*

Where is my gin? Scotch? My vodka? Where are my bottles? They were in the bathroom. I- I remember they were under the sink.

DESIREE

Dad, I don't drink. Why are you asking me where your things might be? I'm 14!

WILLIE

Don't get smart with me! I remember you in the bathroom with me, and I remember you going to the sink. Don't lie to me!

DESIREE

Why would I lie? I'm telling you I don't know!

WILLIE

So you're telling me that what I remember is wrong?

DESIREE

No, I'm telling you that you don't remember everything.

WILLIE

Oh, please do remind me of what I "don't remember." I keep that sink cabinet locked.

[WILLIE holds up the silver key.]

DESIREE

Fine I will! I'll tell you what happened. I was in the bathroom with you. You scared me almost to death the way you were laying there on the floor, just as cold as the tile, passed out, drunk!

WILLIE [talking while DESIREE is talking]

That still doesn't explain where my bottles are!

DESIREE [tears in her eyes]

You hush! Let me finish... I did go to the sink. I went to get a warm rag to put on your face, you see... this isn't the first time I've come home to you like that. I did see your bottles. The cabinet was open when I came in.

(Shaking her head, DESIREE digs deep to recall what she had tried to erase.)

I pried an empty Jack bottle from your hands. That headache you had earlier.. That's why. I cleaned the cut on your head too.

(WILLIE touches a gash he had not noticed before on his head.)

DESIREE

You must have fallen and hit your head... there was blood on the toilet... and, and...

WILLIE

That still doesn't explain where my bottles are! It's none of your business, but I keep them locked in the bathroom. No one knows but me. And I'm guessing you too now! If I drunk all the Jack Daniels, then there would at least be the empty Jack bottle left, don't you think?

DESIREE

I, I guess there would be.

WILLIE

So where is it?

DESIREE

I poured them out, ok! Dad, I can't keep doing this. You can't keep doing this to me. Don't you want better? For Me? For yourself? Things are hard enough around here, dad.

WILLIE

The hell do you mean you poured it out? All of It?

DESIREE

You're more concerned about the fact that's its gone than the fact that you have a problem?

WILLIE

You aren't in the position to be asking me any of this s - - -, Des! Get out of my face. Go to your room.

DESIREE

But dad, I was only trying to....

WILLIE [pointing]

Now!

(DAWN stands with her hands on her hips and her mouth open, shaking her head at her son.)

WILLIE (cont.)

Who does this girl think she is? Asking me these questions with that smart a - - tone. I'll let Marissa deal with her, cuz if I have to put my hands on her again... I might just ... I might kill her.

SCENE 6

(DESIREE is now back in her room and slams the door. SHE lies down in her bed and is quiet for a few moments... SHE begins to hum "A La Nanita Nana," the song SHE had hummed when SHE found her dad in the bathroom.)

DESIREE [Humming, then begins singing to herself softly]

Ruisenor que en la selva.

Cantando y llora...

(DESIREE stops singing, but a voice joins her when SHE begins again.)

DESIREE AND DAWN

Calla mientras la cuna se balancea, A la nanita nana, nanita, Ella.

(DAWN's ghost sits on the edge of Desiree's bed. SHE watches until DESIREE rolls over. Then, DAWN leaves the room.)

SCENE 7

(DAWN approaches WILLIE and confronts him. WILLIE can hear and see DAWN.)

DAWN

Until you are ready to get yourself together, my grand baby will suffer, your marriage will suffer... you will suffer. You need to get it together, William. And I mean now. You're robbing her of her childhood, William, and you don't even see it. That's a woman there in that 14 year old body, believe it or not, and it's not fair. It's not her time for these things nor should it ever have been.

WILLIE

Mama I-

DAWN

Don't mama me, Willie. You're d - - - near all the girl's got, and that isn't much from what I've seen here today.

WILLIE

It's just overwhelming, Mama. You were so good with her. She listened to you. I minded what you said. She, she loved you, Ma. That girl... hates me.

DAWN

Not a bone in my body believes my Nieta hates you, boy! She's just tired that's all. You don't know what she goes through... do you even care to know?

WILLIE

I do... I just get so, so mad at the situation we're in, and I get this urge, Ma. The urge to drink is as strong as the urge that I feel when I have to go to the toilet badly. It is an overwhelming, persistent, and, and ceaseless urge.

DAWN

Not as overwhelming as the urge I have to knock you clean upside your head right now, boy. You sound crazy! I'm sorry son, I hear you and I understand... but you've got to give it to God. You gotta let all of that frustration go for the betterment of this family. Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. Break that habit.

(DAWN hugs her son tightly. WILLIE sinks into her arms. DAWN ends the hug and walks toward the door.)

DAWN (cont.)

You weren't the only one who lost me, Willie. I gotta go home now... But I'll be back soon to check on you, and I expect better, you hear me?

WILLIE

Yes, ma'am.

DAWN

Alright now.

(DAWN walks back to Desiree's room, where SHE has now cried herself to sleep. DAWN sits on the bed and strokes her granddaughter's hair and begins to sing "A La Nanita Nana.")

"A La Nanita Nana" (lyrics in English)

Let's Sing a Little Lullaby

Come, let's sing a little lullaby, come, let's sing

My baby girl is sleepy, blessed be, blessed be

Come, let's sing a little lullaby, come, let's sing

My baby girl is sleepy, blessed be, blessed be

Little spring running clear and loud

Nightingale that in the forest

Sings and weeps

Hush, while the cradle rocks

Come, let's sing a little lullaby

Come, let's sing a little lullaby

Come, let's sing

My baby girl is sleepy, blessed be, Blessed be

Little spring running clear and loud

Nightingale that in the forest

Sings and weeps

Hush, while the cradle rocks

Come, let's sing a little lullaby

(The play fades to black as DAWN finishes signing to her granddaughter and looks protectively over her.)

"A La Nanita Nana" (lyrics in Spanish)

A la nanita nana nanita ella, nanita ella

Mi nina tiene sueno bendito sea, bendito sea

A la nanita nana nanita ella, nanita ella

Mi nina tiene sueno bendito sea, bendito sea

Fuentecita que corre clara y sonora

Ruisenor que en la selva

Cantando y llora

Calla mientras la cuna se balancea

A la nanita nana nanita ella

A la nanita nana nanita ella

Nanita ella

Mi nina tiene sueno bendito

Sea, bendito sea

Fuentecita que corre clara y sonora

Ruisenor que en la selva

Cantando y llora

Calla mientras la cuna se balancea

A la nanita nana nanita ella