

“THE VIOLET BLOOM”

Lights up.

VIOLET sits at the dinner table, heavy, seductive stage make up still on. Her twin brother and dance partner RUDOLPH paces behind her, shirt half-buttoned, glitter still clinging to his collarbones.

VIOLET

(softly)

I feel tired, Rudy. Not old—Lord knows I ain’t even thirty— just... rubbed thin. Like somebody handled me too much and the shine wore off.

(touches face)

Ya know, a woman starts to look like what her man thinks of her.

RUDOLPH

Oh, Vi. You’re my sister and I’m your brother and we’re **Bloom Twins**, not tired house pets on a blistering corrugated iron roof! We’re alive! We’re performers. At least we used to be, before it was all about the inheritance. They used to chant our names— “Violet and Rudy! Gilded Babies of Bourbon Night!” Now they ask—

(pained)

“They still performin’?”

Like we’re ghosts they ain’t sure they saw.

A heavy thump upstairs. MAWMA coughs—long, rattling.

RUDOLPH

Mawma’s awake.

VIOLET

Mawma’s always awake. Death’s knockin’, and she’s too stubborn to answer, clinging onto our inheritance.

Enter MAWMA, regal in her decay, wearing Big Daddy’s old robe, hair silver and defiant.

MAWMA

Children, you’re talkin’ like failures again, and I won’t have that sound in my house. Your Big Daddy and I bought and built This home on our twin stars’ accomplishments, your glitter, and your spring storm.

RUDOLPH

(trying to joke)

Not to mention our stage earnings.

MAWMA

A magnolia dies pretty! Can you promise the same, Rudy?

Rudolph turns away, wounded.

VIOLET

Oh, Mawma, stop picking on Rudy! You don't make no sense anyway, always rambling about magnolias as if they mean something.

Mawma exits COUGHING.

A knock at the door, sharp, authoritative! DIXON enters, uniform still on, cap under his arm. He looks at Violet with a mix of longing and suspicion.

DIXON

Vi. You ain't home. Again.

VIOLET

(stands, smoothing her robe)

We was... rehearsin' after the show. Rudy had new choreography.

DIXON

Rehearsin'.

(eyes Rudolph)

You two rehearse more than the whole damn police department trains.

RUDOLPH

(grins, needling him)

Art requires attention, Officer Murphy.

DIXON

Art don't pay bills. Art don't build a marriage. Art don't keep a woman home at night.

RUDOLPH

With all due respect, Dixon... Art does pay the bills. It pays the bills here and in that tiny little apartment two share. She performs because she must. We both do.

DIXON

(steps closer, firm)

She don't owe that stage nothin'. She owes me.

VIOLET

(starting to tear up)

Dixon, please! I am home. Ain't I? It ain't like I'm running around on you with those rich men from the club.

MAWMA re-emerges, voice like cracked thunder.

MAWMA

Officer, If you want to marry a porcelain doll you can keep on a shelf, then you chose wrong. My children were born for the lights, even when the lights burn. Like the magnolia tree when it's struck by lightning!

RUDOLPH

Mawma, let's go to your room and make sure you took your medications.

DIXON watches Rudy, the glitter-stained show pony, escort the dying matriarch away. His fading showgirl wife sits in her robe and skimpy costume, lighting a cigarette and blowing the smoke in Mawma's direction.

He suddenly sees the house for what it is: a shrine to glamour long past its expiration, a trap of silk and shadows, and the place Violet will always return.

DIXON

Vi... If you keep livin' like this... Nights at the club, days with Mawma, and now nights with Mawma, too? I'm gonna lose you.

(quiet, defeated)

And I won't have anything left to hold.

VIOLET

Don't be silly, Dix. Rudy and I may belong to the stage, but I belong to you.

DIXON

Is that so?

Dixon withdraws a letter for Rudolph from The Boneye Theatrical Society in NYC.

VIOLET

What is that? Rudolph Bloom, you get in here right now!

RUDOLPH enters and freezes, seeing the letter in Dixon's hand.

RUDOLPH

What is what?

MAWMA's COUGHS BELLOW.

VIOLET

What is this letter, Rudy?

A long pause. The house hums with cicadas, heat, fear, love, and the sounds of a streetcar named Fagsire.

VIOLET

Answer me now, Rudy. What is this letter about?

RUDOLPH

It's private!

VIOLET

There has never been and will never be anything private between the two of us, Rudolph Bloom! Now, I demand you open this letter and tell me what it says right now!

DIXON

He doesn't have to open it if he doesn't want to!

VIOLET

You stay out of this Dix! This is between the Bloom twins!

RUDOLPH

He's right, Vi. I don't have to tell you.

He leaves the room. Violet SOBS AND WAILS AND LAMENTS.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

The next day, Violet and Dixon sit across each other, tense. Rudolph serves the table and sits between them.

MAWMA enters the stairs, and Violet gets up to pour herself a drink.

Mawma takes her seat.

MAWMA

If I wait on you children to come to my deathbed, I'll die of boredom first.

(eyes them)

Lord, look at you—three magnolia off a fallen branch.

VIOLET

Mawma, don't start talking about magnolias again.

MAWMA

What else is there to talk about? You two? My star magnolias, born holdin' on to each other. I seen the way you look at one another like the world is some rude stranger interruptin' a conversation.

(smiles, cruel)

It ain't natural, but the trouble is: you both want the same thing. The whole thing to yourselves and no one else. This house, your inheritance.

RUDY

We just want you comfortable, Mawma.

VIOLET

And... to keep the house. Maybe.

MAWMA

"Maybe."

(laughs, coughs)

I ain't decided yet. I might leave it all to the church, or to that little hospital that took me in when I "fell" off the veranda in '52.

VIOLET pales. DIXON notices.

VIOLET

Mawma, this is our home. It's our inheritance!

MAWMA

Home is where the magnolia blooms, baby.

(leans back,)

I'm suddenly tired. I'm goin' back to bed.

Silence. DIXON notices a glass bottle he picks it up examines it.

DIXON

This supposed to be medicine?

VIOLET

Everything in this house is medicine for something that can't be cured.

DIXON

(smells, recoils)

Smells like poison.

RUDY

It's just strong. It's how Violet likes her forgettin'...Vi, about the letter...

I got an offer, Vi. I won't be a big fish in a small pond anymore. I won't be a headliner, but then again I never was, was I? But it'll be a new city. New people. People who don't know what I was.

VIOLET

(suddenly feral, grabbing him)

You can't go live another life and leave me behind. What about the inheritance? What about Mawma? What about me? We are the same blood, Rudy. Nobody knows you like I do. Nobody knows what you did when you were small and scared and I held you so tight your heart beat right into mine.

DIXON

What did he do when he was small and scared, Violet?

VIOLET looks stricken, then defiant.

DIXON

(to Rudy)

Rudy, You ever notice how your sister holds on to you like a... like a woman who got married once and didn't like it?

RUDY

You don't know what you're talkin' about.

DIXON

Maybe not. But I know this: I married Violet. Not Violet-and-Rudy. Not "The Bloom Twins featuring special guest, the law." I thought I was gettin' a wife. Instead, I got a glass menage a trois, whole sideshow, and a house that smells like somebody else's perfume.

He slams the bottle down.

VIOLET

You wanna be rid of me, Dix? Is that it? Mawma's gonna die, Rudy's abandoning me, and you'll throw me out like last week's newspaper? Shut the door on me, lock it with your big, shiny badge?

DIXON

I want you to be decent. I want you to choose me. Just once.

VIOLET

I chose you. I stood in that little rented dress and I signed that paper and I moved into that tomb apartment and called it home. I chose you.

(voice cracking)

But when my heart's hammerin' like somebody locked me in a trunk... Rudy's the only real thing I got. He's the only thing that can calm me down.

DIXON

I can't breathe in this house.

He grabs a bottle of liquor, takes a swing, walks to the doorway, and then turns.

DIXON

And if I find out you been takin' money from those men at the club—if I find out you been a bad woman —I swear, Violet...

He can't finish. He exits, slamming the door. The sound makes MAWMA cough upstairs.

VIOLET

You hear that? He can't breathe. Poor Dixon. The air chokes him. The truth chokes him. Everything chokes him because he swallows it whole and refuses to let it change him. It'll always be like this with other people, Rudy. How can you even think of life without me?

RUDY

Because it's my life, Violet! It's my life, not yours!

VIOLET cradles the bottle of medicine.

RUDY

What is that?

VIOLET

Something the backstage girl gave me. Said it'd "cure a woman of her troubles." Smells like medicine. Tastes like revenge.

(low, shaking)

Rudy... if I died, if I just slipped out of our dance, would you care enough to grieve?

RUDY

Don't talk like that, Vi. Give me that bottle.

VIOLET

Maybe I ought to let you and Dixon see how it feels to be a tragic starlet. The magnolia without the bloom. Just dry stems and dust.

RUDY

Violet, get a hold of yourself! You're talking like Mawma!

She holds the bottle up, hand shaking.

VIOLET

If I died, you couldn't leave. You'd be bound here by guilt and memory. And Dixon... he'd finally understand what it is to want somethin' gone and find it gone and feel that magnolia like a second bloom in his chest.

RUDY

Violet, You're not making any sense!

VIOLET

It's all nonsense! Life, marriage, funerals, inheritance! The only thing that ever made sense was you and me, whisperin' secrets like prayers.

She drinks. A long swallow. RUDY lunges.

RUDY

Violet!

She coughs, gasps, and drops the bottle. It shatters. She clutches her throat.

VIOLET

Oh—oh God—Rudy—

She collapses onto the floor, writhing.

RUDY

(shouting)

Dixon! Mawma! Somebody help!

Lights flicker; the fan creaks louder. Upstairs, MAWMA COUGHS. DIXON bursts back in, shirt collar loosened now.

DIXON

What happened?

RUDY

She drank—somethin'—medicine, poison, I don't know—

They crowd around VIOLET on the floor.

VIOLET

(weak, delirious)

Don't... don't let go of me, Rudy...

Her hand clutches his. Dixon sees.

DIXON

What did you drink, Violet?

VIOLET

(smiles faintly)

The cure... for a woman's trouble...

Her eyes roll back. She goes limp.

RUDY

(shakes her)

Violet! Vi—wake up—

RUDY presses his ear to VIOLET'S chest. A beat.

RUDY

She's... she's still got a beat! Faint. Like... like when we were in Mawma's belly, and they said there was only one baby till they listened close. Then they heard my heart beating. You were always the stronger one! Why'd you go and do that, Vi? You fool... You damn, beautiful fool...

DIXON

I'm the fool. I feel like I been breathin' for three people, and still can't catch my breath, and now I'm suffocating.

RUDY

I grew up living that feeling. Violet and I grew up all around each other, like two roots stranglin' the same tree.

DIXON

And where does that leave me?

RUDY

Wherever you stand, you fool. You married her. Nobody forced you. You liked the shine. You liked showin' your friends down at the station that you had the prettiest girl on your arm. Not to mention the prettiest man.

DIXON

You think I don't see it? The way she clings to you. The way you let her. The way this whole house feels like... like some fever I caught the day I said "I do." Maybe if I put my hands around your throat, all the wrong things in this house will finally stop talkin'.

He steps towards Rudy. DIXON's hands go to Rudy's shirtfront, bunching the fabric, pushing him onto couch and straddling him.

DIXON

Maybe that's what it takes. Somebody finally choosin' who lives and who dies.

DIXON strangles RUDOLPH beside VIOLET's body on the ground. She stirs faintly but does not wake.

RUDY

(breathing hard)

You ain't the law here, Dixon.

DIXON's grip loosens. His forehead comes to rest against Rudy's, breath ragged. Rudy's hands slide up to DIXON's shoulders—not fully embracing, not fully pushing away.

RUDY

Let go.

For a second, it's unclear whether Rudy means let go of his throat, his shoulders, or something deeper. DIXON kisses RUDY, possessively and aggressively rips Rudy's shirt away.

LIGHTS FALL

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

Soft morning light. The fan turns languidly. VIOLET sits up, cutting herself on the shards of broken bottle. DIXON stands looking out the window, shoulders tense.

VIOLET

(hoarse)
Did I die?

RUDY enters carrying his suitcase, now fully packed.

RUDY

Not yet.

VIOLET

Pity. I had the prettiest last words...
What happened?

RUDY

You drank some woman's idea of a cure to keep us here. Turned out to be a real fancy nap.

VIOLET

You were cryin'. I remember. You were cryin' over me.

RUDY

I was cryin' over the mess you made. Same thing.

VIOLET finally notices his suitcase.

VIOLET

What's that?

RUDY

It's the rest of my life, Violet. It's all I'm takin' with me.

VIOLET

No. No, Rudy, what about the inheritance? What about Mawma? What would Big Daddy say about you abandoning your family? You said we'd bloom together, Rudy!

RUDOLPH leaves. VIOLET sits very still. DIXON stands, unsure, a man without a role.

VIOLET

He's really gone. Who will I dance with? Who will shine with me?

Above, MAWMA calls, half-dreaming, half-gone:

MAWMA (offstage)

VIOLET! RUDY! The magnolia blossoms have withered!

VIOLET looks up toward the sound, then down at her hands: empty, trembling—still alive.

Lights begin to dim, isolating VIOLET in a small pool of light.

DIXON is a dark silhouette by the light. RUDY is gone.

BLACKOUT.

END OF PLAY.