

BLACK & WHITE & BLUE

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CAST

Anthony "Tony" Cornish.....late twenties/early thirties
Margaret Chasen.....middle aged

TIME

Now

PLACE

A New York City apartment

A note on casting : ideally, the actor cast as Tony is an actor of color. The few lines in the script which make reference to this may be adapted to suit the background of the actor who is cast. Thank you.

BLACK & WHITE & BLUE

1.

(At rise : a New York City apartment, stripped of furniture. Personal belongings and cardboard boxes spread about the room, surrounding Tony. Also in the room is Margaret, standing, in silhouette, frozen. Tony speaks to us :)

TONY

When I think of her, and I do, it's her hands I see. Slender, elegant, animated.

Odd, don't you think? I'm the pianist, she was the vocalist, you'd think my hands would make the impression while you'd remember her voice. But for some reason

(indicating Margaret) This woman here - her mother. With her, it's the eyes that get you. See if you don't agree.

(Lights up on Margaret who comes to life as Tony scoops up a dress on a clothes-hanger and models it)

And this little number?

MARGARET

Mine.

TONY

Sorry, dear. Over-ruled.

MARGARET

Because?

TONY

You're taking everything. You've got to give the other girls a turn.

MARGARET

Listen, Mr. Cornish -

TONY

Tony.

2.

MARGARET

I appreciate what you're trying to do here and I understand I haven't provided much help but under the circumstances I'm afraid I must insist -

TONY

(overlapping)

Yes, exactly, under the circumstances, the dress is coming with me. Unless you think it makes me look too...je ne sais quoi...?

MARGARET

What are you saying?

TONY

Zoftig.

MARGARET

I don't understand.

TONY

.Aunt Jemima-ish.

MARGARET

Speak english. Does no-one speak english in this godforsaken city?

TONY

Hips. Hips. Like I'm all about hips. Busts. Derrieres. I try to make allowances for upstaters, dear, but you are gilding the lily. I'm asking you : does this dress make me look overweight?

MARGARET

Why didn't you ask?

TONY

I did.

MARGARET

In your mind.

TONY

What's left of it. (handing Margaret the dress) Here. Take it. It's yours. And a little advice, dear? I don't know what prescription you're abusing but you need to lower the dose. What are you taking?

MARGARET

I'm looking at a photograph.

TONY

Of?

MARGARET

I don't recognize anyone.

TONY

(examining the photograph)

Her second year Julliard divas. And how could you recognize anyone? You would've had to come down to the big "godforsaken city" to hear one of her recitals to meet anyone.. But this apparently was too much for you. Take it. It's yours. Brat pack trust fund primadonas no thank you I get more than enough of that crowd monday to friday.

MARGARET

What are you taking?

TONY

(examining a book cover)

The Waterville Panthers -

MARGARET

Uh-uh, no, no, that's her high school yearbook.

TONY

That little withholder, she never showed this to me and I am No-one if not Mr. Prom and Homecoming Queen. Wait, wait, don't tell me : glee club?

MARGARET

The book is coming with me, Mr. Cornish.

.

4.

TONY

Tony. And fine. But only if you help me channel. Chorus?

MARGARET

Yes.

TONY

The Spring Musical?

MARGARET

Every year.

TONY

Let me guess. South Pacific?

MARGARET

Carousel.

TONY

Into the Woods?

MARGARET

Sweeney Todd.

TONY

Evita?

MARGARET

Gypsy and Wicked.

TONY

In Waterville?

MARGARET

I may be an “upstater” to you but it doesn’t mean we’re immune to culture.

TONY

Anything north of 14th Street, dear, I’m on a “need to know” basis so I’ll take your word for it. (picking up a cd collection) Ouch. Here’s a divorce fight if we’re not careful.

5.

MARGARET
What?

TONY
Her cd collection.

MARGARET
I'll take them.

TONY
Not so fast, Miss Piggy, and don't start with me. When you can't get your
derriere down here and all the grunt work falls to me, you kind of forfeit your
place in line. And I'm not even mentioning not inviting me to the funeral.

MARGARET
The funeral was in Waterville.

TONY
You came down here on a train but I can't catch one going north?

MARGARET
No-one from the city was invited -

TONY
(overlapping)
So I'm just "no-one" -

MARGARET
I'm not saying you're "no-one" -

TONY
What are you saying?

MARGARET
I'm trying to explain to you why I -

TONY
(overlapping)
How I played piano in half a dozen nightclubs in this city while your daughter
sang but I don't qualify as "someone?"

6.

MARGARET
I had no number -

TONY
Get a phone book.

MARGARET
Without a name?

TONY
You call Julliard information and describe me, after ten years I'm pretty well known -

MARGARET
(overlapping)
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. All right? Is this what you want to hear? Is this what you need? I'm sorry. I make mistakes. I don't think clearly. I get upset. It's not every day I lose my only child.

(A long pause. Silence. Neither quite knows what to say, or do, or where to look. Finally :)

TONY
Ok., Margaret, I say we take a break, go down to the Greeks on the corner and I get us a decaf and bran muffin. If you behave yourself, I'll take you over to The White Horse for Black & Tans and Makers Mark chasers and we can both start seriously licking our wounds.

MARGARET
I have a 7:20 train back up to Waterville, I'd like to wrap this up.

TONY
Agoraphobia acting up?

MARGARET
I beg your pardon?

TONY
Just don't say I never invited you anywhere.

7.

MARGARET

I don't intend to.

TONY

Wonderful. Here's the plan so pay attention : we negotiate these cd's one at a time. The goal? To remain civil. If you can't hold up your end of the bargain, I get the machetes from the closet and it's every woman for herself. Understood?

MARGARET

No.

TONY

Good. Nina Simone - mine. Shirley Bassey - mine.

MARGARET

Wait a minute -

TONY

Lester Young - mine.

MARGARET

Not so fast -

TONY

Boy George - there's an accident waiting to happen - yours.

MARGARET

What are you do - ?

TONY

Billie Holiday - mine. Billie Holiday - mine.

MARGARET

Slow down -

TONY

Billy Holiday - mine. Black & White & Blue - our one and only cd - this goes under my pillow.

MARGARET

I'm afraid not.

8.

TONY

I play piano on this.

MARGARET

She sings.

TONY

Time for the machetes.

MARGARET

No, I think it's time for you to leave this apartment.

TONY

No, I think you're taking an early train back up to Horse and Buggyville.

MARGARET

Waterville.

TONY

Whateverville. I'll call you a cab.

MARGARET

I'll toss you out a window.

TONY

Don't fuck around in Mr. Rogers's neighborhood after the sun goes down, dear and it's setting now.

MARGARET

(overlapping)

Oh, and it's shining in my neighborhood after the day I've had?

TONY

(overlapping)

You want to try my two hours on the phone screaming at Con Edison to disconnect the juice to this place?

MARGARET

(overlapping)

- three hours on Amtrak down from Albany - no air conditioning - after an hour and a half delay?

9.

TONY

(overlapping)

- some sleazebucket absentee landlord screaming at me from his pool in Massapequa that Kelley never put down a security deposit?

MARGARET

(overlapping)

- twenty five minutes begging in the rain for a cab at Penn Station whose driver can't or refuses to speak English?

TONY

(overlapping)

- and now some uptight, upstate New York bitch is in my face for trying to clean up after her daughter?

MARGARET

(overlapping)

- and now some self-righteous, black homosexual is in my daughter's apartment going through her underwear?

TONY

I beg your pardon?

MARGARET

And the sun ain't shining in your neighborhood?

TONY

"Going through her underwear?"

MARGARET

(overlapping)

You must be kidding, Mr. Rogers, Aunt Jemima, whoever the hell you are -

TONY

(overlapping)

You don't know who I am?

MARGARET

(overlapping)

or think you are -

TONY

(overlapping)
You want to know who I am?

MARGARET

(overlapping)
or you need to go on some serious medication.

TONY

(overlapping)
I was her lover. She was mine. And if you hadn't been such an ostrich that one night you "braved" it down to the "big Sodom and Gomorrah" to hear us at Smart's, I wouldn't be laying this Queenie number on you.

(a long pause. silence. Finally, Tony breaks the impasse, approaches Margaret and hands her the Black & White & Blue cd.)
For you.

MARGARET

Thank you.

TONY

Tony. And for the record : Xanax, thrice daily. Black? Can't quarrel with you there, guilty as charged, pay the bailiff, next case. Homosexual? No. Bisexual. Self-righteous? That one I'll ponder.

MARGARET

I'm sorry. I'm not myself. I am but I'm not.

TONY

I'm sorry you had to hear it from me but "under the circumstances" there's no other choice.

MARGARET

For how long?

TONY

From her first day at Julliard, when I heard that voice. I may be the lowly rehearsal pianist, but I know the voice of a lifetime when I hear it.

MARGARET

She loved you?

TONY

Graduation in May, a June wedding, July 1st an apartment together on Canal Street. Those were the plans. But as we all know, "mann tracht und God lacht." ("man plans and God laughs.")

MARGARET

Why didn't she tell me?

TONY

Did you ask?

MARGARET

All the time..

TONY

And what did she tell you?

MARGARET

That she was dating a first year boy who couldn't come meet me because he went home every weekend to visit his ailing amish mother.

TONY

"Ailing amish mother?"

MARGARET

And two little sisters.

TONY

The little liar. I knew she was protecting you but "ailing amish mother?"

MARGARET

Protect me from what?

TONY

Not "what." "Who."

MARGARET

Who?

TONY

Who do you think?

13.

MARGARET

(overlapping)
a few of my "issues"?

TONY

(overlapping)
you might have gotten your butt down here more than once in two years -

MARGARET

(overlapping)
such as? -

TONY

(overlapping)
to see what your daughter was up to -

MARGARET

(overlapping)
losing my husband at 34 to a stroke?

TONY

(overlapping)
maybe even be a part of it -

MARGARET

(overlapping)
Raising a daughter on my own?

TONY

(overlapping)
then maybe she might've confided in you.

MARGARET

(overlapping)
only to lose her to you?

TONY

(overlapping)
you didn't lose her to me, she came here to sing -

MARGARET

(overlapping)
I lost her to you -

TONY

(overlapping)
on a full scholarship -

MARGARET

(overlapping)
to you to you to you to you -

TONY

(overlapping)
and she was fabulous.

MARGARET

(overlapping)
and where did it get her?

TONY

Where did it get her?

MARGARET

Where did it get her? Where did it get her? Answer me. Where is she now?

TONY

You know where she is.

MARGARET

Beaten to death. In a park. For walking home from school. Walking home from school. Why? Why? Why? Why? Because I let her come here.

TONY

Because she had to.

MARGARET

Because I caved in.

TONY

You want to know where it got her? Give me the cd.

15.

MARGARET

(overlapping)
because she begged and begged and begged and begged -

TONY

(inserting the Black & White & Blue cd into a listening device)
This is where it got her -

MARGARET

(overlapping)
and I knew it was wrong I knew it was a mistake I knew I'd live to regret it -

TONY

(overlapping)
Listen to her.

MARGARET

(overlapping)
and what did I do? I let her come. To this city. To this hellhole. To you to you to
you to you. -

TONY

(overlapping)
Listen.
(the cd plays. Kelly the vocalist, Tony playing piano. Kelly is
as good as Tony's build-up. The song comes to an end. Tony removes
the cd from the player. Silence. Finally :)
I'm going down to the Greeks. If you're coming, come. If you want some time.....
you know where to find me.

(Tony goes. Margaret picks up an item - a sweatshirt with Julliard
emblazoned across the front. She holds it up to herself, smoothing out
the front. She stands, in silhouette, frozen, as on another part of the stage,
Tony appears. He speaks to us :)
I'd like to say she joined me for that coffee but she didn't. When I went back up
to the apartment she was gone.

And so we soldiered on. Me back to Julliard for the daily grind - minus one diva -
and she.....who knows?

(Margaret animates and speaks to us :)

MARGARET

Going home on the train I wondered if my daughter would have invited me to her wedding. Would I have even known it was taking place? To think that your only child could freeze you out of her life so completely and then lay it at your feet because you're so "provincial"How smug. How convenient. How self-serving. How superior. How unbelievably unimaginable. But this is what life gives you, isn't it? The unimaginable.....and then it is.

This partner of hers. Lover. Tony. How can I justify being angry with him? Kelly feels unsupported by me, it hurts her, he has to live with it, he lashes out. What lover wouldn't? What he doesn't know is the larger pattern. This isn't the first time Kelly's shut me out. It's not as if I never shut her out. After her father died, everything changed for us. We became so up and down roller-coaster emotional. We'd be close, we'd fight like cats, we'd grow close again, off again, closer still, cold. But we always came back. To the two of us. "Home." So maybe this was just another one of our phases. Maybe I'd've come down for her graduation, she'd've told me everything and we'd plan the whole wedding together. Or maybe not. Maybe that's just a fantasy. Maybe we never.....

It's the not knowing that haunts you. In the end. As the days turn to weeks, to months, to.....You realize and accept you'll spend the rest of your days wrestling. But with what? This is the question. Despair? Or hope?

TONY

(to us)

And then the oddest thing happens. About seven or eight months later I get a voicemail at Julliard :

MARGARET

Hello, Tony. This is Margaret Chasen. I was wondering if I came down to the city if you would care to go hear some music at Smart's?

TONY

(to us)

Imagine my surprise.

(to Margaret)

When?

MARGARET

(to us)

And so we went.

TONY

(to us)
Just the two of us. And it was actually.....ok.

MARGARET

(to Tony)
Only "ok?"

TONY

(to us)
And now, every April, like an anniversary, she comes down from Waterville -

MARGARET

(to us)
Like a virus spreading south.....

TONY

(to us)
I pick her up at Penn Station and we head over to Smart's. Maybe you've seen us
- the odd looking pair at one of the front tables?

MARGARET

(to Tony)
Speak for yourself.

TONY

(to us)
I'm not suggesting we're joined at the hip now because we're not. We're
mature. We know what we have. When she looks at me, I know who she sees.
Because when I look at her, I see those hands. Those slender, elegant,
animated.....

(Lights fade to black. End of play)