

Shala Miller

PARK NIGHTS

*wide*

*and*

*seek*

# hideandseek

Shala Miller

Friday, 2 October  
Saturday, 3 October 2026

## **PARK NIGHTS**

Serpentine Pavilion 2026  
Designed by Isabel Abascal  
and Alessandro Arienzo, LANZA atelier

## **I CAN'T REACH THE SUGAR ON MY BACK**

AN ANTI-LOVE SONG ABOUT LOVE SONGS MADE WITH  
BUTTER IN MY HANDS AND A DANDELION TO MY CHIN

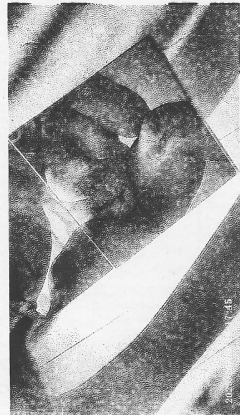
A one act play

*There is one desk that sits at the front of the stage. The room is dark, but there is a tiny bit of light to show the silhouette of the desk and a figure sitting behind it. The light is almost a mist, or fog. The figure that we see is MRS. LOVELY. She reaches for a lamp that sits in front of her. The light turns on but only shows half of her body, starting at the neck. She is dressed in black but wears a colorful scarf around her neck.*

**MRS. LOVELY:** There was a woman right there in the yard looking for something this morning. Frantically, might I add. Just tearing up the front lawn, throwing weeds and mushrooms and large handfuls of dirt. *(shouts and opens the curtains)* What is it that you're looking for? Is it gold? *(quickly)* If so, I can tell you now you will find no such thing remarkably similar to...equivalent in value to...or even remotely shiny, my dear. I don't even think there are dandelions in any of this...unless you are looking for gold metaphorically? Perhaps something is gold to you?

*Mrs. Lovely pauses.*

**MRS. LOVELY:** I don't allow people to call me by my first name. Mrs. Lovely...Mrs. Lovely is what I like to be called, it is what I prefer, so please...please, call me that. That's what I say to people. *(shouts out, facing forward)* Whatever it is, I want to see it! Matter of fact, whatever it is, it is probably mine, so...you should give it to me, and after you give it to me, you should tidy my yard *(quieter)* because you are destroying it.



*She sighs, takes off her scarf, and grips it in her hand.*

**MRS. LOVELY:** No, Lovely is not my real last name and no, there is no story...no reasoning for it. I don't think I have that thing about me, I am not kind, nor sweet. *(pause)* The woman... at the corner. She wears the same tight blue shirt every day and one day she told me of a love letter she had just received. Immediately when she read the last line I said, "of course." When you have the blue tight shirt, the eyes that are somehow always humming or taking your heart. And you laugh. But you don't laugh, really. You make people say in their souls, "Oh, yes, ok. I enjoy this life," all because of your rhythmic physical reaction to something you thought was funny...or lovely. So, yes, I said, "of course", and she smiled thinking I was giving her a compliment, and then she asked me if I could ever go on without love *(scoffs)*. And I said, "of course." And then walked away. I mean...how stupid of her...to ask a woman with blueness at her fingertips a question like that.

*Mrs. Lovely cuts the light off. She repositions herself in the chair and now CHERYL has appeared. The repositioning and attitude of Cheryl's voice is supposed to suggest a change of character, but in the same body. Cheryl turns the light on, and we see her with the bright scarf in her hand. Her hand is resting close to her chest.*

**CHERYL:** My name is Cheryl. *(pauses briefly and then quickly continues)* And whenever people call me on the phone and ask, "Can I speak to Cheryl?" I always say, "Yes, this is Cheryl", because I can never remember if you're supposed to say, "Yes, this is her" or, "Yes, this is she". And I figured that Cheryl sounds a lot like "she", so...

*Cheryl pauses and begins to fiddle with the scarf very delicately.*

**CHERYL:** I used to see a guy sometimes who liked to call me Cherry. (*taps the glass at the crack when 'Cherry' is said*) (*pause*) But he ended up telling me one day, after being in between my legs, that I wasn't all that sweet. I told him, "That's ok" because I never liked how big the seed was in cherries and how they always stained my teeth. (*pause and then quieter*) My middle name is Maybles. But people very often will read it too quickly and say "maybe." Because that's how it's spelled, like 'maybe' but with an 'L' and an 'S' thrown in. (*sighs and whispers*) "Maybe, maybe. Cheryl Maybles. Cheryl, maybe". (*pause*) I think, maybe, that name came from a friend of my mother's...I remember my mother telling me a story...oh no, my grandmother. Her name was Eglantine, but everybody called her "Teenie". She was a stout woman, there was nothing teeny about her, but she was French, and her name was very French and hardly anyone could pronounce it, so we called her "Teenie" out of convenience.

*Cheryl shakes the scarf.*

**CHERYL:** I don't really know how my grandmother and grandfather met. I just know that he left her sixteen days after they got married. And just three days after my grandmother found out she was pregnant. And just one day after she realized that it was all happening. It, being love and family and joy and sun coming through the kitchen window...you know, all of those sort of things.

*The light goes off and, in the darkness, Mrs. Lovely shouts:*

**MRS. LOVELY:** (*sarcastically*) It hasn't even rained today! There is no rainbow in the sky, so you will find no pot of gold anywhere in this town, let alone in my yard! (*pause*) Unless there is something metaphorically gold to you?

**CHERYL:** But my mother told me that anytime she'd ask about her father, Grandma Teenie would just start to sing. And she would always sing the same song. It was in French. My mother used to sing it too, but usually when she was cleaning or taking the rollers out of her hair.

*The light turns on and Cheryl and Mrs. Lovely's monologues become interwoven.*

**CHERYL:** (*sings, almost mumbles, softly*)

*Peut-être*

*Peut-être*

*Peut-être*

—

*Mm mmm mm*

**MRS. LOVELY:** (*quickly and quietly*)

A rock?

*Peut-être*

*Peut-être*

*Peut-être*

An unusual rock?

*Mm mmm mm*

A stone?

*Peut-être*

*Peut-être*

Your birthstone? You think...

*Peut-être*

*Mmm mm mmm*

You think you'll find

*Peut-être*

Sapphire in my front lawn?

*Peut-être*

Ha!...Sapphire in my front

*Peut-être*

lawn.  
*Mmm mm mmm*

*The light goes off, but Cheryl's hum lingers on very softly. Then, suddenly, the sound of a woman's frustrated grunts and rustling come from the stage. In darkness, this woman, LAURA, begins to speak:*

**LAURA:** *(sharply and loudly)* I had four children. Three of them hated me and I only loved two of them. Was I a fair mother? No, but what mother is? Being fair and being a mother are two separate things and I'm tired of people telling me that they aren't. *(pause and then in a lower tone)* He was always gone. Always leaving...leaving me in the shadows. *(sarcastically)* Husband... husband, love of my life, partner to my life, the air I breathe, the...the love songs I wish I could sing.

*Laura turns the light on. She is seen using the scarf to clean the desk.*

**LAURA:** Yes, he was a very tall man and was always heading out the door and then one day...he went out and stayed out. And on that day, I didn't go anywhere. And I talked to no one. Two of my kids, the two I don't love, asked me where daddy went and if we had any more cereal. I said nothing. I ate the last three strawberries in the fridge, one of which was starting to mold. And then I sat down. And you know what I did?

*She pauses and looks to the audience.*

**LAURA:** I laughed. *(chuckles)* I laughed so hard. My children started to laugh with me.

*She begins to clean the desk again.*

**LAURA:** I found a box of corn flakes under the sink where the pots and pans are. And then I laughed even harder. A man sure does know a lot about leaving. Leaving when they're needed and then leaving shit around in the wrong places.

*Laura turns the light off and Cheryl begins to speak in the darkness.*

**CHERYL:** I never caught onto the rest of the words, but my mother told me *peut-être* means, 'maybe'. And from there she came up with my middle name. But I still don't like it when people get my name wrong, I mean I think people should take their time when they're reading, especially when it's my name.

*Cheryl's light turns on and she draws the curtain back.*

**CHERYL:** Or anybody else's name. It's Cheryl Maybles...Cheryl Maybles Smith. *(quickly)* And I don't want anyone to give me a nickname, not a baby, a honey, sweetie, sweet, sugar. Nothing! Because once, a man called me "Cherry" and then changed his mind and said I wasn't sweet. And yeah, I never really enjoyed cherries that much...and the cherries, the fake ones, in sundaes, those always seemed real sinister to me. But I was trying my hardest to get to a place where I could enjoy myself.

*Cheryl pauses and then adjusts herself. With this adjustment, Cheryl now becomes Mrs. Lovely.*

**MRS. LOVELY:** This woman, in my yard, destroying it left and right...her name is Louise.

*Pauses.*

**MRS. LOVELY:** That's what I've decided. Her name is Louise and she's in love. She's a witch in love and she came down here

because she's in love with me, and her mother, who is also a witch, told her to come to my lawn and look for a stone in the shade of orange, and this will be the last step she has to take in order to cast a love spell on me. And she'll cast it, and I'll want it to work because I...I need sun to always shine through my kitchen window and I need to see someone who looks like love songs and will sing them to me. But it won't work. *(pause)* Because I am rotten.

*Mrs. Lovely takes the scarf from her neck and then begins to clean the light. Laura has now reappeared.*

**LAURA:** I regret everything I ever did up until today. All of it. Because before today, I wasn't listening to myself. I didn't hear anything I was saying, I could only hear...my mother. My mother, ya' know *(sarcastic tone)* telling me that it's such a blessing having children, family makes the heart beat. My father, "Don't cut your hair so short! Ain't nothing wrong with looking pretty."

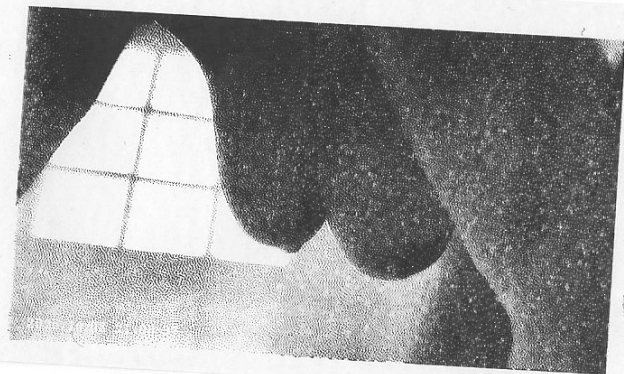
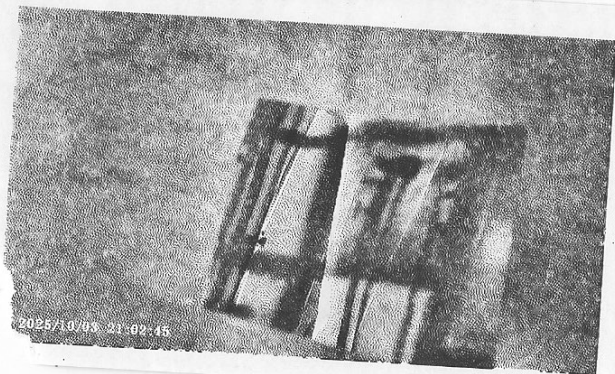
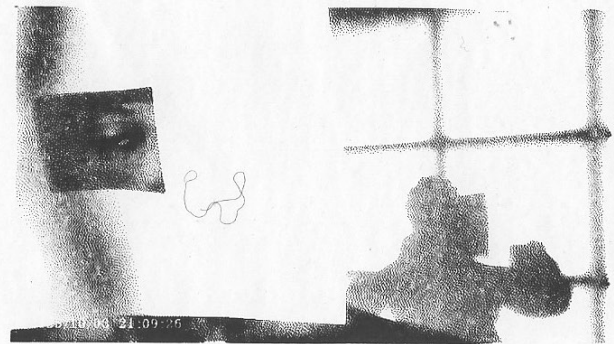
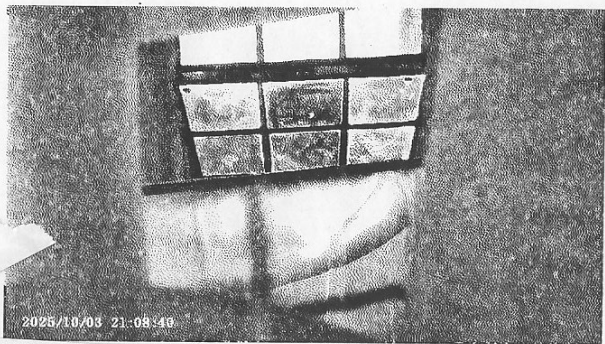
*Laura pauses.*

**LAURA:** My dad didn't allow my mother to wear perfume, he said it was dangerous, sinister. He didn't like it. After I married my husband, the first thing my daddy said to him was, "Congratulations" and the second was, "Throw out anything she's got with a smell, a good smell." And so, he did exactly that. *(pause)* Today, I bought a perfume, a big bottle too. It's called "Warm Winds". It's got uhh...geranium, lavender, and vanilla. My daddy never explained why he didn't like perfume, but I got the hint. Probably had something to do with not wanting his woman to be even more desirable than she already was. Oh, no...a woman that's too desirable...she could get away and that's...dangerous. Listen, I don't care about being the apple of someone's eye, but I sure do love to smell sweet.

*Laura turns the light off and adjusts herself. Cheryl has now appeared.*

**CHERYL:** If I ever have a baby, she'll be a miracle, because I'm going to do it all by myself. I'll...plant a seed in my pussy, I'll water it every day, I'll whisper sweet nothings to it, I'll call it beautiful when it's crying. I'll say a prayer if I have to...and even God knows I'm not religious. I just know that if I'm bringing any life into this world, it's not going to happen because I let someone get into me. I'll have my daughter and I'll probably name her Miracle, or Joy. Something really uncreative but still gets my point across. I'll hold my daughter's hand like I'm holding a trophy, and I'll make sure to tell everyone that Miracle or Joy got here because I got to a place where I could enjoy myself. And yeah...I'll feel bad for objectifying my Miracle or Joy. And I'll tell her, "Sorry". But I'll also tell her that sometimes you have to make sure other people know that...that you know exactly how to make things, beautiful things...happen for yourself. *(pause)* And then maybe after that...you'll be able to believe it too.

*She cuts her light off.*



## scar light

scar light      a room of              recounted hours sullied              and rootless mathematics  
doctors want to   write a lyric of my body      but i say      let flesh be flesh              i want it  
as the real thing   not poem this time      not even gospel              and yet here i am      looking  
to the windows   trying to find              the scripture about              single mothered suicidal organs

they learn to say names              how they see it              at this teaching hospital              before the  
senior resident shoves              their fingers inside              before they hear the screams              before i  
cup my hand and              show them the              cell of my pain older than      i              before the vomit  
before shaming   myself for              holding a              vigil for              the wrong side              it's the  
left, damnit!      before the              hallway              before being asked      if i can just      walk  
before the dirty bandage              before the      ovary mispronounced dead              at the scene  
before      black becomes              purple              to be red again              before              they tell  
me to      leave              they say              inshallah              or              so i              thought

i wish i understood the life of this              little thing inside me      i can't tell if it's      defiance      punk  
rock and roll      the first jazz              a runaway              an SOS      or              failure to language  
disguised as history              there is fannie lou      there is mississippi      decatur street              and  
reminding people it's a              long a in my first name              there is the strangulation              before  
daddy's funeral              there is the boot              on the              belly after we screamed              intifada  
there are              tummy aches              night terrors      no children              the              trace of where i was  
split in half      and rubble              post op      i ask the              doctor if it's              all connected  
he      smiles and      says that's              a beautiful              thought              but no





## MRS. LOVELY

**MRS. LOVELY:** In what used to be my front yard there is a house. Built by two fools, I must say. Their garden, which I am convinced is full of evil, starts at their back door and is beginning to reach mine. Or what is left of mine.

*A man walks out of the back door and begins to tend to his garden.*

*Mrs. Lovely yells out:*

If you're going to have the weeds there at least, for the love of God, protect them from the lilies! *(pause)*

*She bangs on the glass of her front door. She leaves her hand there and moves her face closer and quietly pretends to speak to the man tending his garden.*

*(quietly)* Can I be straight with you? Can I get right to the point? This is sort of like a transaction for me, you see. But I'm greedy. And I want to give you very little.

If you can, package the way your gold chain sort of follows the edge of your white tee. I want that. It makes me crazy. Say hello to my mother when you walk in, but don't talk too much. She's convinced everyone is trouble these days. What? You are trouble? Oh, I thought that's what you said. Tell me that the way that I move when I dress in the morning is like poetry. *(quickly)* Even though you know I hate poetry and think it's a language for the weak. *(pause)* Say it anyways. And say it—

*A woman walks out of the back door, greets the man with a kiss*

*and begins to help tend to the garden. MRS. LOVELY gasps quietly and steps back from the front door. She pauses for a moment, drops her shoulders a bit.*

*(desperately)* It can't all be so practical, can it? What if once we die and are reborn we get exactly the evil thing we've been praying for?

*She moves closer to her front door and watches the couple.*

I feel like when he sees me, he sees a woman. But when he looks at her, he sees a girl. And for some reason, *(pause)* I don't like it. For some reason, him seeing her as a girl, feels like him, him seeing possibility and joy. But him seeing me as a woman, he sees me as a complete sort of thing. That doesn't need anything else. Therefore cannot give anything to anyone. *(pause)* How do I make it known that I am incomplete and am yearning for... just. All of it. I want it all, god damn it. Prove to them that I am destructible. I can be taken apart.

I'll crawl on top of you. We'll take turns devouring each other while the prettiest song in the world plays. It'll be cinematic and stupid. I'll ask, "Who did Aretha Franklin write 'Day Dreaming' about?" You'll tell me to be quiet. *(pause)* I want to hear you sing, because I know you can. I want you to open your mouth wide when you hit the high C, because I know you can, and you will, and I'll jump right into your mouth. Swim in your belly, dreaming of the next heartache. I want to lose my mind in you.

Swallow me whole. I'll take refuge in your insides, your system. We'll build a house there. It'll be our own special little disease. We'll call it the Lilac syndrome. The kitchen will be my favourite room. I'll hear the black mothers talk about their black daughters they don't understand from the window. And you'll somehow come from behind, bend me. Force me into bad posture and

your favourite position and grab hold of my neck. And I will moan.  
And I will tell you to squeeze harder.

And I'll question, is it that I'm asking you to beat me to  
it? Is it that I want you to take me over the edge, lead me to  
a kind of death? Before I can do it myself? And then you'll  
spit in my mouth and I'll remember that thoughts of suicide no  
longer taste the same. It will be different around you.



## **We are a kind of spider creature when together**

We are a kind of spider creature when together. Our heads, we have several, can be in multiple places. We are given a new head when the feeding from one is not enough. When we're thirsty, when we're hungry. Our mouths touch and they fill with water but we alternate. You drink from mine, I drink from yours. We are courteous creatures. Our vision is completely circular. I can blink and only see the tops of your cheeks and bottom lashes while we kiss, or I can blink again and see the second head between your legs. Or I can blink again and see your other leg find my center. It likes to be there. Six heads all of us together now so it's perfect symmetry. I, we, have enough power to go deeper. The farther my tongue goes, the more roots grow with branches. Some of them break and it's good. The snap is a spanking. Growing gardens. And then it turns to peach. It is sour and has syrup, not juice. Good. We can really stick.





**Shala Miller** is an artist based in New York City working across photography, printmaking, video, writing, performance, and music. Her practice grapples with a search for self, internal tension and bodily memory. Recent exhibitions include the 59th Carnegie International, Pittsburgh, US (2026); MMK Frankfurt, DE (2025-26); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, US (2025); The International Center of Photography, New York, US (2025); and CPW, Kingston, US (2025). Her performances have been presented at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, US (2024); Artists Space, New York (2023); Performance Space New York (2021); among others. Miller's artist book *Tender Noted* (2022) was included in MoMA's list of 10 Favourite Photo Books of 2022. Her artwork is in the collections of MoMA, New York, US; the Studio Museum in Harlem, US; the Hessel Museum, Hudson, US; the Akeroyd Collection, and lumber room, Portland, US; among others.

**Samantha Feliciano** is an artist based in New York City working across live performance, film scoring, composition and production. Under the alias Princesa, she performs experimental music with harp and voice blending song, noise and ambient layering. Princesa's practice centres on themes of collective grief, dreaming and Caribbean folklore. Her most recent scores have been presented at the 59th Carnegie International, Pittsburgh, US (2026); BlackStar Film Festival, Philadelphia, US (2025); MoCA, Los Angeles, US (2025); Miami Film Festival, Coral Gables, US (2025); and Ojos Caribe, San Juan, Puerto Rico (2025).

**Dorothy Carlos** is an experimental cellist working across performance and sound installation. Her work uses amplification and digital manipulation to challenge conventional ways of playing the cello. She is interested in electronics' ability to construct alternative realities and seeks to blur boundaries between acoustic and synthesised sound. Recent performances have been presented at the Bemis Center, Omaha, US; The Renaissance Society, Chicago, US; Fridman Gallery, New York, US; e-flux; CNMAT at UC Berkeley, US; default, The Hague, NL; FELT, Copenhagen, DK; Rhizome; and the Chicago Jazz String Summit, US. Carlos' practice has been featured in *The Wire*, *The New York Times*, *Artforum*, *Bandcamp* and *The Quietus*. She has released music on 29 Speedway and D.O.T. Audio Arts.

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*hideandseek*

Friday, 2 October  
Saturday, 3 October 2026

## **PARK NIGHTS**

Serpentine Pavilion 2026  
*a serpentine*  
designed by Isabel Abascal and  
Alessandro Arienzo, LANZA atelier

### **Performers**

Shala Miller, vocals  
Samantha Feliciano, vocals and harp  
Dorothy Carlos, cello

### **Image credits**

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pp. 18-19, 22-23 details from Ruby Dee in *The Balcony*, 1963.

Serpentine Park Nights 2026 is curated by Claude Adjil,  
Curator at Large, and Liz Stumpf, Assistant Exhibitions Curator.

Produced by Andy Downie, Velocet  
Production Coordinator: Lucia Fortune-Ely

PARK NIGHTS 2026: SHALA MILLER  
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SERPENTINE

