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THE ORDINARY MAGIC OF DAUGHTERS

A screenplay

by

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EXT. CORNER OF THE ROOF OF A SMALL HOME IN THE SOUTH – DAY

Water drips from the roof. It’s raining. Traditional gospel music, Mahalia Jackson, is heard.

EXT. SIDE OF THE HOME – DAY

A hen walks through the rain. Girl’s pink bike leans against the side of the home. Above and to the right is a window with an air conditioner.

EXT. FRONT OF THE HOME – DAY

Small, modest home. Porch with plants, vines and a few chairs. Two cars are parked outside.

EXT. FRONT OF THE HOME – DAY

The home is seen from above. It is in the foreground and we can see the woods behind the home and the cloudy, rainy horizon.

EXT. HIGHWAYS – DAY

Highways, crisscrossing in several directions.

INT. CAR ON THE HIGHWAY – DAY

Through the front window we see lanes of highway going in both directions. Highway signs overhead. One sign reads “New York EXIT 3A 60 MILES.” It is still raining.

INT. CAR ON THE HIGHWAY – DAY

Through the front window we see the metropolis in the distance.

INT. CAR ON A NEW YORK CITY STREET – DAY

Through the front window we see a commercial street, department stores and throngs of people.

INT. CAR ON A STREET – DAY

Still raining. Through front window we see apartment buildings, brownstones and lots of people.
INT. CAR ON A STREET - DAY

We see neighborhood stores – nail shops, liquor stores, bodegas, etc. and lots of people in the rain.

INT. CAR PARKED ON A STREET - DAY

Through the passenger’s window we see a city bus pull away from a bus stop, making a splash as it pulls off. Several brick high rise buildings are revealed.

EXT. SIGN OUTSIDE HIGH RISE BUILDINGS - DAY

Sign reads Delano Senior Housing Complex

INT. INSIDE FOYER OF SENIOR BUILDING - DAY

Light comes in through thin, rectangular windows. Figures in silhouette move en masse towards the camera in a menacing way.

VOICE #1
Skinny legs!

VOICE #2
She got that can’tcha hair!

VOICE #3
She looks like a giraffe!

VOICE #4
Country ‘bama!

Voices multiply until it all becomes noise. People finally walk into light and we can see clearly - senior citizens dressed as teenagers - sagging jeans, oversized white T shirts and sneakers; tank tops and tight jeans for the females.

INT. LIVING ROOM OF GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR’S APARTMENT - DAY

ABEBE JOHNSON bolts upright, in profile. She is a ten year old African American girl, from Augusta, Alabama. Dark skinned and tall for her age, she speaks with a Southern accent. Her hair is unprocessed, braided into three braids and adorned with barrettes. She shakes her head. Stares ahead.
MALE VOICE (O.S.)
(French accent)
We had a house! Cars!

Abebe looks in the direction of the voice. We see a sofa bed that hasn’t been folded up, a kitchen table next to it with a dresser drawer on top. Beyond the table is a galley kitchen.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
We sleep on a pull out bed! My son sleeps in a drawer!

Abebe is on an oversized chair, which doubles a her bed. She looks around the room. An upright piano buried under stacks of music sheets, worn, faded, some torn. The stacks are piled high and threaten to fall. Shelves above the piano and on all sides are filled with LPs. To her left are plastic storage bins, also piled high. A small chair and table are squeezed to one side of the bins. Abebe throws back her bedding, swings her legs out of her bed and bangs her foot into the metal frame of the sofa bed.

ABEBE
Sugar honey ice tea! Sugar honey ice tea!

She falls back onto her bed, holding her foot and rocking back and forth. Clothing placed on the back of the chair fall on top of her head.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Everything costs too much!

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
I know it’s difficult baby, but…

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Abebe needs boots for the winter, a coat, sweaters, school supplies…

Abebe’s listens. Her face shows concern.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
I know. I know…

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
You wanted to come here! I was --
FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
We agreed...opportunities in New York...

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
(Louder)
I can’t even walk around in my drawers ‘raine! A man should be able to walk around his own house in his drawers if --!

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
Shhh! They’ll hear ... Come here...

We hear a door slam. Abebe hurriedly throws the covers over herself, turns towards the wall and pretends to be asleep. FRANCK CADET enters the living room and stops at the drawer on the kitchen table where his infant son sleeps. He is a dark skinned young man in his mid-twenties, native of Haiti. Tall and good-looking. He looks into the drawer on the table. Looks over at Abebe. Looks around the living room, then grabs his jacket at the door and exits.

LORAINE
(Rushing. Whispers)
Franck.

LORAINE JOHNSON CADET is a thirty-something African American woman, also from Augusta. She speaks with a Southern accent. Dark skinned. Quietly attractive. In her robe, she stops at the dresser drawer and looks at the closed door.

LORAINE
Wait.

She looks into the dresser drawer and adjusts the covers on the baby. Looks over at Abebe, then at the storage bins. Loraine squeezes between the bins and the sofa bed and takes several bins down, placing them on the bed.

LORAINE (cont)
Abebe, are you up? Abebe?

Loraine opens a bin and looks through it.

ABEBE
I couldn’t sleep.

She turns over to face her mother.
ABEBE (cont)
I had a nightmare.

LORAINE
I shouldn’t have let you eat those greasy wings.

ABEBE
I don’t think it was the wings Ma. Some people were chasing me.

LORAINE
They cook everything in the same oil and they don’t change it enough. Fries, chicken, shrimp. That’s why I don’t like eating outside food. I was just so tired, but no more greasy wings for you.

She takes a nurse’s uniform out of the bin and puts the bins back in place. Takes an ironing board from beside the refrigerator and sets it up in the space between the table and the kitchen.

ABEBE
Ma, I don’t feel well. Do I have to go to school today?

LORAINE
Because of a nightmare? Of course you do baby.

Loraine begins ironing.

ABEBE
My stomach hurts. I think you’re right about the grease.

LORAINE
You can’t stay home baby. There’s nobody to watch you.

ABEBE
I can stay with Uncle Junior. I’m almost eleven. I can stay by myself.
LORAINE
No Abebe. Get the Pepto Bismal out of the medicine box. You’ll be fine by the time we leave.

ABEBE
But I shouldn’t go to school sick. The teacher said we should stay home, so we won’t get anybody else sick.

LORAINE
That’s if you have a cold or the flu, something contagious. You’re going to school.

ABEBE
What if I get sick at school? You’ll have to leave work to come take me home.

LORAINE
Abebe --

ABEBE
I won’t bother Uncle Junior. I promise.

LORAINE
Abebe, your Uncle has given up his space and his privacy for us. You see how tight it is. I just want to give him back his home for a few hours a day.

ABEBE
I promise I won’t bother him. I’ll just stay out here. I won’t make any noise or mess up anything.

LORAINE
Abebe, listen. I need you to --

ABEBE
I could do the laundry for you.

LORAINE
Maybe you are sick, offering to do some work! Come here.
Abebe walks to her mother. She feels Abebe’s head.

    LORAINE (cont)
    You don’t feel hot. Stick out your tongue.

Abebe complies.

    LORAINE (cont)
    Your throat looks okay, too. But look in the box under the table there, the one marked RX, and take out the medicine box.

Abebe walks back to the table and pulls out a large box. She takes a small plastic box from it.

    LORAINE (cont)
    Take out the Pepto and bring it to me and then get a tablespoon from the kitchen.

    ABEBE
    One of the boys was coughing and sneezing and he didn’t cover his mouth.

Abebe takes the Pepto Bismal and starts towards the kitchen.

    ABEBE (cont)
    I think I might have got something from him.

    LORAINE
    Abebe, give me the Pepto before you --

Abebe drops the Pepto and it breaks, splattering on the walls and on Loraine’s uniform.

    LORAINE
    Abebe! Damn!

    ABEBE
    I’m sorry Ma.

    LORAINE
    I can’t wear this now! I’m going to be late for work! Damn!
ABEBE
I’m sorry.

LORAINE
Get somewhere and sit down! No! Go see if you can go to the bathroom. Damn!

ABEBE
I didn’t mean to Ma.

Abebe starts to the bathroom.

LORAINE
Wait! Get some paper towels from the kitchen and clean this mess up! I don’t have time for this! I told you to --

The baby begins to whimper.

LORAINE (cont)
Wonderful! Now Franckie’s awake!

Loraine picks up the infant and begins to pace.

LORAINE (cont)
(To baby)
Shhh! Shhh! Come on. Shhh! Shhh! Yes, baby. Shhh! Shhh!
(To Abebe)
I’m sorry Abebe.

ABEBE
I’ll stay and clean up everything Ma. You don’t have to be late.

LORAINE
Oh, you’re going to school. I wanted to see about a bill, but I’ll just try to call them. You go on and try to pass your bowels. I think I got some Alka-Seltzer samples in my purse.

(To the baby)
Come on baby! I know, I know. All these folk walking ‘round here loud talking, breaking your sleep! Come on now. I know. Shhh! I know. Shhh!
ABEBE
Ma?

LORAINE
Hmmm huh?

ABEBE
I think I broke my foot.

LORAINE
Broke your foot?

ABEBE
When I got out of bed, I accidentally banged my foot against the metal part of the sofa bed. I think it’s broken.

LORAINE
Abebe, if I didn’t know better, I’d think you were trying to avoid going to school today.

ABEBE
Oh no! I really did bang my foot.

LORAINE
If your foot was broken baby, you’d know it. You wouldn’t be able to walk. Come. Let me look at it.

Abebe limps over.

LORAINE
Which foot?

ABEBE
The right one. See the bruise.

LORAINE
You were dragging your left.

ABEBE
Uh...

LORAINE
Abebe, go on and --
ABEBE
I could help Uncle Junior. I could get him his medicine and --

Loraine motions to the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Abebe looks at herself in the mirror as she brushes her teeth. She bows down out of the frame to spit.

VOICE #1 (V.O.)
Country bumpkin!

VOICE #2 (V.O.)
Giraffe girl!

VOICE #3 (V.O.)
Need to do something about that head!

Abebe comes back into the frame, but doesn’t see anything but her reflection in the mirror.

NEWSCASTER (O.S.)
...unprecedented rain...we’re approaching a record, aren’t we Brad?

We see the rain out the bathroom window.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Abebe is brushing her hair.

ABEBE
...six, seven, eight...

Loraine enters.

LORaine
Abebe, it’s almost eight o’clock! You’d better hurry up. You feeling any better?

ABEBE
Huh? Oh, yeah. A little. Not really though. Ma?
Lorraine takes the brush and begins to brush Abebe’s hair.

LORAINEText:

Yes?

ABEBEText:

You think, for my birthday, could I get a weave?

LORAINEText:

A weave? Abebe, what’s a ten year old need a weave for?

ABEBEText:

For my birthday Ma, please! I’ll be eleven. I’m almost a teenager.

Loraine begins to section off Abebe’s hair and braid it.

LORAINEText:

Abebe, you’re not getting a weave. You’re a little girl. I don’t even have a weave.

ABEBEText:

But all the girls at school have them!

LORAINEText:

Like I said, a ten, eleven year old girl, in the fifth grade, doesn’t need a weave Abebe. We don’t have any money for a weave!

ABEBEText:

This girl at school said she got hers for only fifty dollars.

Loraine stops braiding.

LORAINEText:

Do you know what we could do with fifty dollars child? Your own hair is just fine baby. It’s healthy and beautiful. You don’t need a weave.

ABEBEText:

Please Ma?

Loraine starts braiding again.
LORAINE
Abebe, stop asking me the same question. My answer’s not going to change!

ABEBE
What if I use the money Grandma gives me for my birthday?

LORAINE
Abebe, I said no, and I mean it!

ABEBE
I don’t have nothing!

Loraine stops.

LORAINE
And don’t call your Grandmother to ask her, either! Don’t you call and ask her for anything, you hear me? Do you understand me, Abebe?

Abebe nods.

LORAINE (cont)
Use your words.

ABEBE
Yes.

LORAINE
I don’t want your Grandmother worrying, so don’t you ask her for a red cent! If she sends you something for your birthday on her own, that’s okay, but don’t you ask her, you hear me?

ABEBE
Yes.

LORAINE
(Softening)
I might consider some braid extensions, but no weaves.
ABEBE
Can I get it colored, too? A lot of girls in my class have their hair colored.

LORAINE
I said I’d think about it.
Loraine finishes Abebe’s hair.

LORAINE (cont)
Now get a bowl of cereal and hurry. I gotta drop baby Franck at Miss Mattie’s, so we need to be walking out of here no later than 8:45.

ABEBE
Ma, you ever miss Augusta?

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Loraine and Abebe enter. Abebe pours herself cereal and milk. Loraine begins to dress the baby.

LORAINE
At least once a day. Don’t use that much sugar.

ABEBE
So...why don’t we just go back? Grandma took care of baby Franck. You and Daddy Franck had your privacy—

LORAINE
I thought you wanted to come to New York. You were bragging to Florence and your friends so.

ABEBE
I miss Florence Ma! And Grandma. I miss my bike—

LORAINE
Abebe, I know this hasn’t been easy for you. Me and Daddy Franck are working as hard as we can to get our own place.

ABEBE
Is Daddy Franck moving with us?
LORAINE
Of course he is. Why’d you ask that?

ABEBE
(Shrugs)
I on’t know.

LORAINE
You heard us in the bathroom, didn’t you? Listen baby, married people disagree all the time, but that doesn’t mean we’re breaking up. We’ll work it out. Don’t you worry.

ABEBE
But Ma, he was mad! He cursed and--

LORAINE
He’s just very frustrated right now, but we love each other and as soon as we can, we’re going to get our own place. Things’ll get better. I promise.

ABEBE
Will I have my own room?

LORAINE
Yes Abebe, your own room. Just like you had back home.

ABEBE
Can Florence come and stay with us?

LORAINE
Well, she can’t stay with us, but she can come and visit. Maybe during your spring break.

ABEBE
And can I get a new bike?

LORAINE
Yes Abebe. Put your bowl in the sink when you’re through. You still need to dress and it’s almost 8:30. Get your jacket ‘cause they say the temp’s going to drop.
ABEBE
And some extensions. Maybe a weave...?

INT. HEATHROW INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT – EVENING

We see people and hear a SWISHSWISH sound.

YEYE (O.S)
(Singing)
Yemanja, oh Yemanja!
The mother of us all
Yemanja, oh Yemanja,
She’ll never let us fall!

As YEMANJA (Yeye) moves through the airport, people open a space for her, but we don’t actually see her. They look, whisper and point. The swishing sound continues. Yeye is humming now.

LITTLE GIRL
Look Mommy! That lady has a –

MOTHER
(Back to Yeye)
Shhh! It’s not polite to point.

LITTLE GIRL
But Mommy! Look!

MOTHER
(Turns to see Yeye)
What the hell...!

LITTLE GIRL
Mommy!

NEWSTAND

VENDOR is restocking newspapers. Covers all have headlines about record rains in Europe.

VENDOR
(Sees Yeye and starts laughing hysterically)

STARBUCKS

Couple on line turns to see Yeye.
MAN

Is that a --

WOMAN

(Turning away)

Hmmm oh! I haven’t had my coffee yet.

SECURITY CHECKPOINT

Two AIRPORT SECURITY OFFICERS stand at separate podiums at the entrance to the gates, checking identification and boarding passes of the travelers. Passengers on line near Yeye turn back and forth to look at her and to look at the security officers.

SECURITY OFFICER #1

Next.

Yeye finally steps into view. She is a copper colored woman, about 5’3” tall. Her silver locks are gathered and pulled back from her face and she wears a bird’s feather, tucked into her hair. She wears a light blue and white blouse and seven skirts of tulle. A woman of a certain age, she has a sense of self that causes men to slow their stride. Little boys just want to be near her.

Yeye

Good morning love.

(She holds out her passport and boarding pass)

SECURITY OFFICER #1

What the hell -- What are you doing? You can’t carry on a duck!

We see Yeye’s YORKIE on a leash.

Yeye

Duck? No.

(She bends to pick up the duck)

This is Yorkie. I have the reservation and ticket from American. I can put her in her bag, if you’d like.
SECURITY OFFICER #1
Lady, I don’t care about your reservation or your bag! That’s a damn duck! It’s got to go baggage. Step to the side!

YEYE
No! With all the respect that is due you sir, I will not step aside. This is my puppy, Yorkie. Dog leash?
(She holds up the leash)
Registration.
(She holds out the form)
Ticket!
(She holds out the ticket)
What?

He snatches ticket from her. We see a close up of Yeye, smiling and holding Yorkie in her arms.

SECURITY OFFICER #1
Look, I don’t have time for this!
(Into his lapel walkie-talkie)
Sgt. Romell! Sgt. Romell! Station one!
Please! Station one! Step aside lady! Move your old a—-

SGT. ROMELL
Davis! Can I help here?

YEYE
This gentleman refuses to allow my dog passage.

SGT. ROMELL
Ma’am. That’s clearly not a dog.

YEYE
(Calmly. Holding her forms)
Sir, the policies...
SGT. ROMELL
(Takes her forms)
Ma’am, I’m sorry. Please –

YEYE
...clearly state...

SGT. ROMELL
(Steps to one side)
...come with me and I’ll--

YORKIE
Arf!

Sgt. Romell and all nearby movement stops.

YEYE
...dogs are allowed in the cabin.

YORKIE
Arf! Arf!

YEYE
May we go through now?

SGT. ROMELL
(Returns paperwork. Guides her off to one side)
Ma’am please. Just...just put the...put it in your bag and keep it in the bag during the flight, ok. Please. For my sake.

YEYE
Of course. Thank you Sgt. Romell.

She eases Yorkie into the bag and zips it closed. Yeye enters the secured section of Heathrow International Airport.

INT. FIRST CLASS OF PLANE

Two seats on each side of the aisle. Yeye sits in the aisle seat, placing her bag in the seat near the window and buckles it in. FLIGHT ATTENDANT stops at Yeye’s seat.
FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Newspaper ma’am? We have the Sun, the Mirror, the Guardian, the Herald and the New York Times.

YEYE
Yes. Thank you. Let me have the Times please.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Here you are.

YEYE
Thank you.

Close up of the Times
Headline – UNPRECEDENTED RAINFALL IN NORTH AMERICA, EUROPE and AFRICA.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Looks like they were right about that global warming.

YEYE
I beg your pardon me? Oh, you mean the rain?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
It’s rained here every day for almost a month. Looks like it’s starting in the U.S. now.

YEYE
Things are out of balance.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Simply, but well said. Excuse me, but are you Yoruba? My family is from Ibadan.

YEYE
Yes Angel! I’m from Nupe. We are a long way from home, yes?
FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Yes ma’am. A very long way.
(In Yoruba)
Gba nkan rere timo fefune. Accept my best wishes.

YEYE
Thank you for the blessing daughter. May it return to you multiplied.

Flight attendant continues down the aisle. Yeye runs her hands across the Times headline.

INT. BILLIE’S BEAUTY SALON AND BOUTIQUE – DAY

BILLIE and INEZ, beauticians, are working with women sitting in their chairs. BILLIE is mid-thirties and African American. INEZ is also mid-thirties, but of Caribbean descent. She has a gold lame tank top on, part of her Parade costume. Loraine is in Billie’s chair. Abebe sit, waiting her turn.

BILLIE
(Takes hot comb and pulls it through Loraine’s hair)
Yesterday, she had to take the baby to the doctor’s. I understand that. All I’m asking is for some cooperation. Work with me, you know, if I’m working with you!

LORaine
Did she call to say she was running late?

BILLIE
Did she call you this morning? That would be the professional thing to do. Hold your ear Loraine. Inez, what time she come waltzing in yesterday? One? One thirty?

INEZ
It was two o’clock Billie. Judge Mathis was coming on. And she was late day before that, too. Maybe she was picked up by a big wave and carried out to the ocean!
BILLIE
Unacceptable. Her people are from Louisiana. They’re used to rain and water.

LORaine
But Billie, it’s raining like it did in the Bible, in Noah’s time!

BILLIE
And the weatherman says it’s going to keep right on raining, through Labor Day. That’s going to mess up yalls parade Inez.

INEZ
West Indian Day Parade?
(Sucks her teeth)
Rain don’t matter. They’ll be out there anyway. You going Billie?

Billie doesn’t respond.

INEZ (cont)
Billie? You going to the Parade this year?

Billie doesn’t respond.

INEZ (cont)
Oh, you don’t hear me now. Well, I’m going. Going to play mask! You oughta come with me Billie! You need to shake it up--

BILLIE
Well good for you, Inez! Take your Trini ass and parade up and down Eastern Parkway, but leave me the hell alone about it, okay? Hell, I’m going to be too damn tired from doing the shampoo girl’s job, to go to a damn parade! Keep your costume here, but you know I don’t truck with you walla wallas!

Abebe looks up from her book at Miss Billie.
INEZ

The child Billie.

BILLIE

Oh, I’m so sorry darling! Please forgive Miss Billie’s potty mouth. If Ivory would get her narrow ass to work on time, the child would have been under the dryer and she wouldn’t have heard me!

The front door opens and VENDOR MIKE, drenched, squeezes inside, trying to keep the elements from coming in with him. VENDOR MIKE is in his mid-thirties and African American. He’s carrying several garbage bags of women’s clothing. Once inside, he begins to open the bags and set up his displays.

VENDOR MIKE

I don’t know what the brother did to the sister, but I sure wish he’d go back and apologize. Good afternoon my Nubian queens, my sisters in Christ, Allah and Jehovah. Salud a mis Latinas en la casa. How are you all doing on this very fine day?

BILLIE

Hey Mike.

INEZ

Fine day? You smoke something before you came in here?

(Sucks her teeth)

Between the barometric bull and the precipitation, I’m about to snap!

BILLIE

You ain’t but a signature away from Bellevue on a good day!

VENDOR MIKE

Nawl, she’s right Billie. Al Roker was saying how all of this rain is causing people emotional distress.
INEZ
Exactly. That’s what I’m saying. Mark my words. We’re going to see more assaults, domestic abuse, robberies. All kind of craziness. You watch!

LORAINE
Abebe’s been going crazy, stuck in the house.

Abebe nods in agreement.

BILLIE
And that’s another reason I’m not going to that parade Inez. Those kids are going to be out there buck wild!

VENDOR MIKE
With all this rain and no sun, and that’s our main source of vitamin D, that means real trouble for lots of people. But that’s why Vendor Mike is here. Bringing beautiful things for beautiful women, to chase away the blues! Miss Inez, I got those earrings you asked me for, right here.

BILLIE
You may be on to somethin Mike, ’cause soon as I see Miss Ivory, I’m going to lay her out! Tell the judge the rain made me do it.

Billie and the others laugh.

VENDOR MIKE
You don’t want to do that. Right now, we’re seeing the destructive side of rain. That’s why I said whoever the brother is that pissed off Mom Nature, he needs to say sorry.

BILLIE
Mike, how do you know it was a man that made a woman cry? Why couldn’t it just as well have been a woman did the onion to a man? Maybe that, huh?
VENDOR MIKE
Nawl Miss Billie, ain’t nobody cry like this, but a sister, and can’t nobody make a sister cry like that, ‘cept her man.

LORAINE
Her children could.

Abebe looks to her mother.

VENDOR MIKE
All right. I’ll give you that. Her man and her kids. But nine outta ten, I betcha it was a male child, and he needs to apologize, so we can move this rain cloud on about its bidness!

BILLIE
That’s just an old wives tale Mike. Like when it’s raining and the sun is shining.

LORAINÉ
The devil is beating his wife!

INEZ
Now that’s just an old lie! If the sun is shining, that’s a good thing, eh? We should celebrate, not fight, the way I see it. (She sucks her teeth)

Yes sir, I bet the devil was “beating” her all right! She crying and laughing ‘cause he put that ting on the girl! Beat me, baby!

BILLIE
Inez! Inez! The child! Don’t forget the child!

INEZ
(Nods in Abebe’s direction)
Lorraine, was it a rainy night in Alabama? Was the sun shining?

Abebe looks to Loraine, puzzled.
LORAINE
(Laughing)
I don’t play the dozens Inez! Billie, tell this woman she don’t know me like that!

INEZ
(Singing, badly)
A rainy night in Alabama! Loraine, did that fine young ting sneak up on ya and put the ting on ya girl?

LORAINE
(Laughing)
Inez...

INEZ
(Singing badly)
...it was a rainy night! A rainy night!

Door opens again. Yeye enters, humming and carrying several plastic bags. Though it has been raining steadily, she is bone dry. Her seven skirts make a swishing sound and all turn, except Billie.

YEYE
(To Billie)
If you would be so kind madam, I’d like to show my custom fragrances and creams to your lovely clients.

BILLIE
(Turns to see Yeye)
Custom fragra -- did it stop raining?
(She looks around Yeye)

YEYE
I managed to walk between the raindrops!

Abebe smiles. Yeye smiles and nods at Abebe.
YEYE
What a pretty young lady!

LORAIN
Thank you. What do you say when someone compliments you Abebe?

ABEBE
Thank you.

YEYE
And such lovely manners.

ABEBE
Thank you.

YEYE
You are very welcome.

(To Loraine)
May I give her this gift madam?

YeYe holds up a little girl’s nail polish kit.

LORAIN
Thank you. That’s very nice of you Miss, but you don’t have to do that.

YeYe walks over to Abebe and bends down so that they are on the same level.

YEYE
A princess should have pretty things.

ABEBE
Thank you. Ma, look!

LORAIN
Yes, that’s very nice Abebe. That’s very kind of you ma’am. Thank you.

YEYE
My pleasure. A well behaved child is a joy to the whole village.
Abebe admires her gift.

BILLIE
Bring your perfumes over here. What you got for the proprietor?

Yeye walks over to Billie.

YEEE
For you, I have a very special fragrance, out in my vehicle. Honey mixed with jasmine, apricots and the petals of day old lilies.

VENDOR MIKE
Sounds expensive!

YEEE
Not to worry, young man. I’m not selling anything today. Today, I’m giving away samples.

VENDOR MIKE
Let me hold the door for you.

They all laugh.

YEEE
I am looking for work though ma’am. I saw your sign for a shampoo girl. Is the position still open?

BILLIE
(Hesitating)
Well, ah… no. The job’s been filled. Damn, I wish it wasn’t.

YEEE
Well then I’ll retrieve the fragrances from my vehicle. Be right back.

Yeye exits.
Loraine
Changed your mind about Miss Ivory. Huh?

BILLIE
You know I can’t fire her. Ma would kill me!

INEZ
Billie, why’d you put a sign in the window, if you didn’t plan to fire her? Just to scare her?

BILLIE
Thing is, I didn’t put a sign in the window.

Billie walks over to the window and looks out. Abebe begins humming Yeye’s song.

INT. BEAUTY SHOP – LATER

MISS IVORY has finally arrived and is shampooing Abebe’s hair. MISS IVORY is in her early twenties and African American.

INEZ
She didn’t have a thimble full of hair, and she wants some Beyonce curls! Good thing you were able to make it here this evening Ivory. Some woman came by here, looking for a job as a shampoo girl.

IVORY
Why’d she come in here, looking for a shampoo job?

INEZ
Good question. Somehow, she knew.

IVORY
Knew what, Miss Inez? Knew what? Huh?!

BILLIE
(To Loraine)
How’s the apartment hunting going?

LOR AINE
Very slowly. We looked at three places Saturday. I did, anyway. Franck was at work.
BILLIE
You didn’t like any of them?

LORAINE
One was eight blocks from the subway, the second one had busted locks on the front door, and the last wasn’t big enough, and they wanted $1800 a month.

BILLIE
First and last month’s security?

LORAINE
That’s $5,000! We don’t have anywhere near that.

BILLIE
That’s New York for you. Anywhere decent is going to run you that, or more for two bedrooms. Maybe you should just look for a one bedroom, for now.

LORAINE
We may have to. It’s just that with the baby, and leaving all of our family and friends, I just wanted Abebe to have her own room.

BILLIE
I understand. But realistically, if you can’t afford it, you know, this is New York. We all make adjustments. Till we can do better. How is Mr. Fine Franck doing?

LORAINE
He’s okay, I guess. Working. Between the cab and the garage, he’s getting three, maybe four hours of sleep a day.

BILLIE
A man’s supposed to provide.
LORAINÉ
It’s not just that. He’s always irritable. When he’s home, he can’t sit still, and you know how tight it is in Uncle Junior’s. We need the money, but I think he’s working so he doesn’t have to be there.

BILLIE
You all need to find a place.

LORAINÉ
What about your cousin? I’m getting desperate. Does she have anything?

BILLIE
I’ll ask her.

LORAINÉ
We can’t even --

(She lowers her voice)

you know. Abebe’s sleeping in a chair next to the sofabed and Uncle Junior’s in the next room. And he doesn’t ever go out!

BILLIE
So when was the last time...

LORAINÉ
We had to sneak away and do it in the car! Like teenagers! And we had to take Baby Franck with us, because Abebe’s too young to watch him, and Uncle Junior’s too old.

BILLIE
The backseat Boogie! Oh hell yes! Yall need an apartment today! That was okay when we were teenagers! But you’ll catch a cramp for sure, at your age.

LORAINÉ
My age? Heifer, you’re three years older than me!
BILLIE
And that’s why I know you all need to get out of that car! You’re lucky the police didn’t roll up on you!

LORAINE
I know. Between my Abebe, stuck in the house and my man, who doesn’t want to come home, I’m in the proverbial.

IVORY
(To Abebe)
So you have a new baby brother? How old is he?

ABEBE
He’ll be seven months old next month.

IVORY
Oh, he’s a brand new boobie! How do you like being a big sister?

ABEBE
It’s all right.

IVORY
I bet you all spoil him. Baby of the family is always spoiled.

ABEBE
Sometimes.

IVORY
And he’s a boy? He’s going to be the Golden Child. Mamas and their sons have a special bond. Mamas and sons, Daddies and their little girls. You close with your Daddy?

ABEBE
My Daddy died. Daddy Franck is my step daddy, but Ma said don’t call nobody step or half nothing.
IVORY
Oh, I’m sorry baby. Here now, sit up so I can wrap this towel around your hair. You’re ready for the dryer.

Ivory sets Abebe up under the dryer and calls her next customer. Abebe’s eyelids begins to get heavy.

INT. FIFTH GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY

Desk for twenty fifth graders are arranged in groups of four. Students are working with pencils, markers and construction paper. MR. RHODES, the teacher stands with one of the groups. MR. RHODES is tall, average weight and African American. We can see the drizzle outside.

MR. RHODES
Remember your blog can incorporate all media. Music, images from the internet. You can write a rhyme, include a copy of the text, video someone performing it and upload the video.

TRISTAN
Like facebook!

TRISTAN is an eleven year old African American male.

MR. RHODES
It’s very much like facebook. Think of it as a bigger, badder, more focused facebook. (To Tristan’s table) These colors complement each other.

BERNARD
You on facebook Mr. Rhodes? I bet you be getting girls like me, right Mr. Rhodes?

BERNARD is an eleven year old African American male.

TRISTAN
Mr. Rhodes, he trying to impress the new girl!
The class laughs. We see Abebe who is sitting at the table with two other girls and Bernard.

BERNARD
(Laughing)
Shut up Tri! Shut up!

At the table with Abebe is ALEXUS MARIE, who makes a face to her neighbor, who laughs. ALEXUS MARIE is twelve and African American. She is dressed in tight jeans, a tank top that shows her midriff and gold high top sneakers. Lots of jewelry.

ALEXUS
(To her neighbor)

Her neighbor falls out laughing.

MR. RHODES
All right Romeo Junior! Focus your power for good on your group’s storyboard.

Alexus and her neighbor laugh. Abebe, typing on a laptop, pretends to ignore them. Mr. Rhodes walks over to Abebe’s table.

MR. RHODES (cont)
Ladies! LaCrema. Fettuccinni.

The class laughs. FETTUCCINNI JONES and LACREMA HARPER are also twelve, African American females and dressed in a fashion similar to Alexus.

FETUCINNI
That’s not my name, Mr. Rhodes!

MR. RHODES
I’m sorry. FetTUccinni. How are your story boards coming?
ALEXUS
Mr. Rhodes, I’m tired of talking about the rain! Rain! Rain! Rain! Rain! Can we do something else? Anything! Please!

MR. RHODES
What would you like to do Alexus?

ALEXUS
I don’t know! Just anything but the rain!

FETTUCCINNI
Yeah, it was cute for a day or two. I got to wear my cute little boots, carry my pink umbrella, but now? Enough already!

LACREMA
It’s just overboard! Three weeks is too much!

MR. RHODES
I hear you.

TRISTAN
Can’t go outside, can’t hoop!

MR. RHODES
Just a bunch of no’s, huh?

Other students agree.

FETTUCCINNI
It’s depressing! I’m a go crazy and kill somebody if it doesn’t stop soon! I’m just saying.

Students laugh and agree.

ALEXUS
Yeah Mr. Rhodes, how we supposed to find the good in this? Where’s the evidence to support your central idea?

Students and Rhodes laugh.
ALEXUS (cont)
My auntie’s basement flooded, so she had to move in with us, and now my little brother is sleeping in my room! Now there ain’t no good in that!

MR. RHODES
I’m sorry about your Aunt’s house Alexus. That’s dirty and expensive, so, no, that’s not a good thing. But if I say to you, that you and your brother, your family, are creating memories of you all pulling together in a time of crisis, and that you’ll have these memories forever, would you call that lame?

TRISTAN
Mr. Rhodes, you’re smooth. That sounded good.

The class laughs again.

MR. RHODES
Our central idea, Alexus, is to explore the negative and find the positive in it. We don’t pretend that bad things don’t happen. That would be crazy. But our reaction to the bad, is what’s important. You know the story about Michael Jordan. He was cut from his high school varsity team. If he’d given up, he never would have made that team. He never would have attended North Carolina.

STUDENTS and MR. RHODES
Or won the NCAA. If he had given up, he never would have won six NBA championships. He didn’t give up when faced with adversity. Instead, he worked to make his dream a reality.

Mr. Rhodes and students all laugh.
MR. RHODES
All right, you got it! So, the storyboards must present both the negative and positive aspects of water.

MR. RHODES (cont)
(To Abebe’s table)
Who’s typing the text for you all?

ABEBE
Me Mr. Rhodes. I’m almost finished.

Mr. Rhodes looks over the storyboard.

MR. RHODES
That’s very clever. “The Three B’s” “Born in water, Baptized and Bathing.” Did you come up with that Bernard?

BERNARD
It was Abebe’s idea. But I helped Mr. Rhodes.

MR. RHODES
The repetition of the “B” grabs the reader’s attention.

ABEBE
Thank you.

MR. RHODES
Easy to remember.

ABEBE
I saw a movie on National Geographic. They said babies grow in a sack of water inside the mother.

MR. RHODES
Good visual design. Was that your idea, too?

ABEBE
No sir. That was LaCrema’s idea. She drew the triangles and cut the pictures for the collage.
ALEXUS
(Mocking Abebe’s southern accent)
Cut the pictures for the collage!

MR. RHODES
Very good LaCrema. You and Abebe make a good team.

LaCrema smiles but looks ambivalent. Abebe smiles, too.

BERNARD
They can both be my girlfriends!

The class laughs at Bernard’s joke.

MR. RHODES
Bernard, how much did those chips cost? Those are Nacho flavored Doritos, right?

ALEXUS
Oh, you busted!

BERNARD
What?

He tries to hide the chips.

MR. RHODES
The chips. How much do they cost?

BERNARD
(Not understanding)
Fifty cents.

MR. RHODES
Good. Divide that by two. That’s how much time you gotta give me after school on Friday.

Students laugh.

TRISTAN
I told him!
BERNARD
Thirty minutes! Mr. Rhodes! I ain’t do nothing!

MR. RHODES
Thank you brother. I’m glad we can agree on something. Tell your grandmother so she won’t worry. All right, the bell’s about to ring. Let’s put away our storyboards neatly. We’ll work on this tomorrow. Captains, please collect the materials.

Students begin to pack up.

MR. RHODES
Abebe, come here please. Will you take this note to Mrs. Williams and wait for her to give you something to bring back to me?

Abebe takes the note and exits.

MR. RHODES (cont)
Tristan, Malia, close the windows please. The rain is picking up again.

Dismissal bell rings. Students begin to leave.

MR. RHODES (cont)
Alexus, Fettuccinni and LaCrema, would you wait a moment please.

The girls groan.

LACREMA
Mr. Rhodes, we didn’t do anything. What did we do?

MR. RHODES
Girls, it’s not always trouble when the teacher asks to speak with you.

LACREMA
Oh. Okay.
ALEXUS
Ok, but what is it, Mr. Rhodes? I got to get home!

MR. RHODES
Your classmates will follow your lead, so I’m asking for your help.

LACREMA
OK.

MR. RHODES
Abebe Johnson started school late, so it’s a little hard to make friends, once the semester has started.

FETTUCCINNI
You want us to be her friend?

MR. RHODES
No, I wouldn’t try to tell you who to befriend.

FETTUCCINNI
‘Cause you can’t -- oh!

MR. RHODES
No, I’d never ask you to do that. You choose your own friends.

ALEXUS
Right!

MR. RHODES
I don’t want you to sit with her at lunch. I won’t ask you to play with her at recess or to walk her home or to share your secrets with her.

FETTUCCINNI and LACREMA
Oh, ok.
MR. RHODES
As leaders, I simply want to ask you to leave her alone. Bullying is unacceptable behavior. I want it to disappear – abracadabra! Am I clear ladies?

FETTUCCINNI
Mr. Rhodes, we didn’t do anything! She’s always looking at us!

LACREMA
Yeah!

MR. RHODES
(Sharply)
This is not a discussion ladies.
(Softly)
LaCrema, you two worked well together. I believe you’d all find more in common than you realize.

ALEXUS
In common with her? With her country ways? Mr. Rhodes, please! We don’t hardly --
(She turns to the other two)
Them bummy sneakers and that hair! Oh my God!

They start laughing.

MR. RHODES
Ms. Marie, I hope that we don’t have to revisit this again with your mother.

LACREMA
No Mr. Rhodes.

MR. RHODES
Ms. Marie? Ms. Jones?

ALEXUS and FETTUCCINNI
No Mr. Rhodes.

ALEXUS
Can we go now?
MR. RHODES
Yes, of course. Thank you.

LACREMA
Good night Mr. Rhodes.

MR. RHODES
Good night LaCrema. Good night ladies.

Alexus gives LaCrema a blistering look. They exit the class just as Abebe enters.

MR. RHODES
Abebe did you find Mrs. Williams?

ABEBE
Yes sir and she said to tell you thank you.

MR. RHODES
Thank you Abebe. Would you sit for a minute? I like to get the attendance in before I leave.

Rhodes enters something into his computer.

MR. RHODES (cont)
Done. Abebe, how did you do in school back in Augusta?

ABEBE
I did ok. I had perfect attendance for the last three years.

MR. RHODES
Three years? Impressive.

ABEBE
Yes sir. Me and my - my best friend and I - had a competition. We’ve been together since kindergarten.

MR. RHODES
That’s a long time. I bet you miss your friend?
ABEBE
Yeah. Sometimes.

MR. RHODES
It’s hard moving to a new school, but you’re smart. You’ll make some new friends and then you’ll be able to introduce your old friend to your new friends.

ABEBE
Thank you Mr. Rhodes. I hope so.

MR. RHODES
Abebe, anybody bother you, you have a problem, you let me know. It’s not snitching.

ABEBE
Thank you Mr. Rhodes. I’m ok.

MR. RHODES
You sure?

ABEBE
Yes sir.

MR. RHODES
Are you sure sure?

ABEBE
(Laughs)
I’m sure sure.

Mr. Rhodes rises and walks Abebe to the door.

MR. RHODES
I think you’ll be just fine. I’ll call your mother to let her know I kept you.

ABEBE
My mother is at work, but you can call my uncle.

MR. RHODES
Ok, what’s his name?
ABEBE
Great Uncle Junior is all I know.

MR. RHODES
He’s your mother’s uncle? He keeps you while your mother works?

ABEBE
No sir, I mean yes sir. He’s my Daddy’s uncle. When we moved here, we moved in with him, till we get our own house.

MR. RHODES
All right. Dial and let me talk with him.

Rhodes hands Abebe his phone. She dials.

ABEBE
Hi Uncle Junior. It’s Abebe. Hold on, my teacher wants to talk with you.

She hands the phone back to Rhodes.

MR. RHODES
Good afternoon sir. I’m Matthew Rhodes, Abebe’s homeroom teacher and science teacher.
(Pause)
Yes. Yes sir. I’m calling because I kept Abebe after class today.
(Pause)
No sir, she’s not in any trouble. I just wanted to see how she’s adjusting to New York.
(Pause)
Yes, you should be proud.
(Pause. Laughs)
Thanks sir. I appreciate the invite. She’s on her way now. OK. Thank you, thank you. Good bye.
(He disconnects)
Very nice man. All right Abebe. Remember what we talked about. I’ll see you tomorrow.
ABEBE
Thank you Mr. Rhodes. See you tomorrow.

Abebe exits.

EXT. OPENING TO A PARK – LATER

Yeye, sells ices from a cart. Her pet Yorkie is leashed and inspecting insects nearby. Yeye is shaving down ice and singing. Abebe approaches her. The rain has stopped.

ABEBE
I used to sing that song with my best friend! We’d stick our feet in the mud and make homes--

ABEBE and YEYE
--for the frogs.

ABEBE
Yeah! How’d you know? Hey! Aren’t you the lady from the --

YEYE
Would you like an icee young lady?

ABEBE
No thank you ma’am. I don’t have any --

YEYE
Orange and lemon. Your favorite, right?

Yeye hands the icee to Abebe.

ABEBE
Yeah! How did you – wait! I’m not supposed to talk to strangers!

YEYE
Your parents are absolutely right!

WOMAN
Hi Miss Yeye. Can I get two lemons?

Yeye makes two lemon ices and gives them to the woman who pays and walks off.
YEYE
I know your Great Uncle Junior, though. He’s an old friend.

ABEBE
You know Uncle Junior?

YEYE
Your mother, too. Nurse Loraine.

Alexus, LaCrema and Fettuccinni approach. They are walking, draped over teen aged boys much older than they.

FETTUCCINNI
Hey! Give me a orange/grape icee.

ALEXUS
Me, too.

One of the boys notices Abebe, who had stepped back. He takes his arm off Alexus and circles Abebe.

TEENAGE BOY
You tall as a model. Cute, too.

Alexus punches him in his back.

ALEXUS
Like a giraffe! I know you don’t want her skinny butt!

Group laughs. Abebe starts to leave, but Yeye motions for her to stay.

TEENAGE BOY
Skinny or not, she’s rocking her own hair!

The boys laugh.

YEYE
Ladies, I am sorry, but I am all out of lemon. Please come back again.

Yeye begins to close up shop.
FETTUCCINNI
All out? OK, let me get an orange one.

YEYE
I’m so sorry, but I’m all out of flavoring.

Alexus spies Abebe’s lemon and orange icee.

ALEXUS
Country ’bama got the last of the flavoring?

Alexus steps to Abebe.

ALEXUS
She got the orange, too!

Fettuccinni steps closer.

YEYE
Certainly you wouldn’t begrudge my granddaughter an icee?

Abebe turns quickly to look at Yeye, and then turns to watch the trio of girls.

TEEN BOY
Oh, our bad Miss. She didn’t know she was your granddaughter. Watch your mouth Alex!

ALEXUS
Her granddaughter better watch her mouth! Before I put it on swole!

Teen boy puts his arm around Alexus and begins to walk off.

TEEN BOY
Don’t pay her no mind Miss. Come on!

ALEXUS
(Over her shoulder)
Watch your mouth country giraffe!

The girls and teen boys walk off.

ABEBE
Thank you Miss.
YEYE
Miss Yeye. All the kids know me.

ABEBE
Thank you Miss Yeye. My Uncle is waiting for me.

YEYE
What a beautiful fan!

ABEBE
Fan? You mean this?

Abebe holds out her silver umbrella.

YEYE
Yes! It’s a lovely fan! Powerful, I bet! Is it your mother’s?

ABEBE
Thank you. No ma’am. My grandmother gave it to me.

YEYE
(Surprised)
Your grandmother? I know it’s powerful! A cooling fan! A calming fan! A transformative fan!

ABEBE
Miss Yeye, it’s an umbrella.

YEYE
Um-brel-la? When it’s open, it looks like a fan. Is that what you call them over here?

ABEBE
Miss Yeye, you’re not from New York? Me neither. I’m from Augusta, Alabama!

YEYE
How do you use it?

ABEBE
The fan? I mean, the umbrella?
YEYE
Yes, the um-brel-la. How do you use it?

ABEBE
You just open it up when it rains.

YEYE
(Excited)
It stops the rain!

ABEBE
It doesn’t stop the rain. It just doesn’t let the rain get on you when you’re under it.

YEYE
Under the um-brel-la. Fascinating!

ABEBE
(Laughing)
Miss Yeye! You’ve seen an umbrella before! It’s been raining for two weeks.

YEYE
Three weeks. Seventeen hours and thirty-three, thirty-four, thirty five seconds.

ABEBE
Wow! Mr. Rhodes has the days marked off on the calendar, but we don’t count the hours and the seconds.

YEYE
Abebe, could you show me how you use the um-brel-la?

It begins to drizzle.

ABEBE
Miss Yeye! It’s like you made it start raining!

Abebe opens the umbrella and places it over herself and Yeye.

ABEBE (cont)
No more rain. Right here anyway.
Yeye marvels at the underside of the umbrella.

**YEYE**
Amazing! It stopped the rain!

**ABEBE**
But just here under the umbrella.

**YEYE**
Perfect. This will be perfect. It’s beautiful to look at and it’s powerful! Your grandmother must have trusted you deeply, to have given you such a powerful um-brel-la!

Yeye stands back and studies Abebe closely.

**YEYE** (cont)
One must have wisdom to handle such. You say your grandmother gave this to you?

**ABEBE**
Yes ma’am.

**YEYE**
She trusts you with an um-brel-la that can stop the rain? I will trust you then Abebe. You may be the one.

**ABEBE**
(A bit nervous)
Miss Yeye.

**YEYE**
Yes darling?

**ABEBE**
My uncle will be looking out for me. I’d better go.

**YEYE**
Of course. Please forgive me for detaining you. I’ve just been trying to find an um-brel-la to help me get back home.
ABEBE
Maybe my mother can help.

YEYE
(Excitedly)
Your mother has an um-brel-la, too? How many um-brel-las does your family possess? Yours must be a very important clan, to be the keeper of so many um-brel-las!

ABEBE
My mother has one. Uncle Junior has one and Daddy Franck has one. But lots of people have umbrellas! Look. They’re everywhere!

YEYE
Oh my! Before you go, could you do one more thing for me? Would you put away your um-brel-la and make the rain stop?

ABEBE
I can’t make it stop raining. I wish I could!

YEYE
Oh, just try it. You never know what you can do if you give up!

ABEBE
OK Miss Yeye. I won’t give up. I may get wet, but I’ll
(She closes the umbrella)
make the rain stop!

The rain stops immediately.

ABEBE
Oh wow!

YEYE
Wow oh! Try it again! Try it again!

Abebe opens the umbrella. It begins to drizzle.

YEYE (cont)
Now close it!
Abebe closes the umbrella and the drizzle stops.

YEYE
Now open it!

Abebe opens the umbrella and the rain starts up again.

ABEBE
Oh wow! Miss Yeye –

YEYE
I knew you could! Oh my dear! I knew you could! I knew you could!

Yeye and Abebe laugh hysterically.

INT. LIVING ROOM OF GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR – LATER

Abebe sits at the kitchen table, doing homework. The sofa bed has been put away. GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR enters from the rear, talking on a landline phone. Great Uncle Junior’s age is somewhere past 65. He is a small framed man. Light skinned with a bad hip.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (Into the phone)
I can still beat you at Gin Rummy! I just let you win sometimes, ‘cause I’m a gentleman, and I didn’t want you to feel bad!

Abebe looks up from her homework and watches Great Uncle Junior. He sees Abebe, winks at her, and then limps into the kitchen.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
All right. Half an hour then. Apartment 16A. I’m looking forward to seeing you, too.

He hangs up the phone and limps back into the living room. Takes down the ironing board and puts it away.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
Abebe! You gotta boyfriend?

Abebe giggles and shakes her head no.
GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
What you laughing at gal? When I was ten, I had a wife and two kids!

She laughs again. Great Uncle Junior taps her lightly on her nose. He takes some cans from the table and puts them into cabinets.

ABEBE
Uncle Junior! You weren’t married!

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
And you don’t even have a boyfriend? Gal, you better get moving! You gotta speak up! Ask for what you want.

He limps over to the cocktail table and begins to straighten out the magazines.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
Wait! Abebe, you do like boys, don’t you?

Abebe hides her face, laughing, but nods yes.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
Oh. OKAY! I’m just asking! ‘Cause if you don’t, well, you know, ‘cause if you like girls, that’s okay, too. You like ‘em? I love ‘em!

They both enjoy his joke.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
But, you ain’t got no boyfriend here in New York yet, do you?

ABEBE
(Laughing)
No Uncle Junior!

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Good! Did you have one down in Augusta?

ABEBE
I had a friend boy.
GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
A friend boy! Abebe, you’re too young for a friend boy or a boyfriend! When I was your age, I was chasing behind some ol’ hound, barefoot and free. There’ll be plenty of time for boys, after you finish college...

He taps her nose.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
...and find yourself a good job. What you wanna be? A teacher? A nurse like your Mama?

ABEBE
I think I wanna be a nurse and a singer.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
You’re smart, just like your Grandma Betty. She was the oldest, and baby, you through with that plate? Put it in the sink for me. Your Grandma was one of the brightest people you’ll ever meet! You favor her, too, around the cheekbones. Them ol’ high, Indian cheekbones. Your Grandma was president of the missionaries and superintendent of the Sunday school. She even went to college down in Jacksonville.

ABEBE
She did? I didn’t know. I don’t know much about Daddy’s side of the family.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
I know baby. After he died, your Mama stayed in touch with us, but it was hard, yall down in Alabama, and our family up in Charlotte.

ABEBE
I think I have a picture of Grandma Betty in my photo album.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
She was sharp! Could a done any damn thing she set her mind to, ‘scuse my French, if she hadn’t taken up with your ol’ triflin’ ass grand pappy! So, no! No boyfriends, no friend boys – put these sheets in the hall closet.
for me baby - you just focus on your education. Abebe, can you run the sweeper here in the living room for me?

Abebe puts linen away and then walks over to the kitchen to get the broom and starts sweeping.

ABEBE
I want to go to college Uncle Junior. Did you?

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
No darling, I been pass a college, but your Great Uncle ain’t set foot in a college, but I got a degree all right, from living. Gotta Ph.D. from that!

ABEBE
Me and my best friend Flo are going to the same college. At least, that’s what we planned before we moved.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Flo? I used to go with a gal named Florence. Big legged woman! Yes Lord! Have mercy!

Abebe makes a face.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
Don’t worry ‘bout that darling. But I’m a tell you straight about them boys. I ain’t got no fairytales or no stories about no storks.

He straightens pillows on the sofa.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
Your Mama can teach you about being a nurse and about being a woman, but only a man can tell you ‘bout men.

Abebe stops sweeping and gives her uncle her full attention.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
Baby, get behind the couch there.
He limps over and pushes the couch away from the wall. Abebe complies.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
There you go. Now, what was I -- yes. Men. Abebe, men are visual animals. We want to see you ladies looking good, and smelling good, and we just wanna kiss on ya!

Abebe breaks into a wide smile and lowers her head.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
Don’t act all shy! You need to understand what I’m saying, so you can protect yourself! ‘Cause Abebe, a man will tell you whatever he thinks you wanna hear! He’ll tell you that you’re so fine, he’ll drink your dirty bath water!

Abebe shudders and then bursts out laughing.

ABEBE
Ewww!

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
It’s lame, yes, but it made you laugh!

ABEBE
(Still laughing)
Dirty bath water? That’s disgusting Uncle Junior!

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
That’s just part one baby girl. Get you smiling and laughing, then he’ll tell you that he loves you, that you’re the only woman for him, that he loves you more than life itself! Tell you any ol’ kind a lie, if he thinks it’ll get you to give up Precious.

Abebe stops laughing. Eyes get big.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
You know what I mean when I say Precious, don’t you? All right. I figured your Mama had told you, since she had lil’ Franckie. So,
once a man gets that? Gets Precious? He’s gone! And you sitting by the phone, looking out the window and pining for your used to be! And feeling used! So Abebe, you save Precious for the right one.

ABEBE
(Uncomfortable)
Yes sir.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
‘Course, quiet as it’s kept, women are some visual animals, too!

ABEBE
We are?

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Of course you are! Well, not you, per se, but women. They play coy. Pretend. But I’m here to tell you, women like men just as much as men like women. In my seagoing days, I met some women? Make the devil blush! And now these young gals today? Dancing ‘round in them videos, that BET! Throwing Precious around like she’s a baseball or something!

ABEBE
You watch BET Uncle Junior?

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
They think they gonna get famous, get discovered. Some fella done told them, “Take off all your clothes and then you and a bunch of other no name girls, dance around me, damn near naked!

ABEBE
I just want to be a nurse.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
But the same way a man wants to get with every woman he sees, that’s the same man, don’t want his woman to be with nobody but him!
ABEBE
That’s not fair!

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Who said anything about fair? Fair is for double dutch and baseball. We ain’t made this world Abebe, and you might as well learn now: life ain’t fair. Period. It ain’t fair to poor folks. It ain’t fair to disabled folk. It ain’t fair to women. It ain’t fair to Black folk, and it sure ain’t fair to no Black women folk. You gotta make your own “fair” baby. Decide for yourself, what can you live with? What can you take and stand before your God with? You understand me? Gal, you talkin’ ‘bout fair? That’s wasted breath.

He looks at his watch.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
After you get yourself a career, then you can worry ‘bout some ol’ hardheaded boy! They ain’t going nowhere! But the time sure is getting away.

With his good hip he pushes the couch back against the wall.

ABEBE
I’ll get the dust pan.

Abebe goes into the kitchen.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
All right, hurry now. Of course, you Johnson women, yall a different breed. Your grandma had five husbands!

ABEBE
Five! Wow! She was pretty, huh?

She returns and sweeps up the trash.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Men just wanted to wife her. Her last husband? Went to work every day, hard work, at the steel mills, and every day,
he left behind her second husband, asleep upstairs!

ABEBE
Uncle Junior…?

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Awl, Old Man Merritt was beat down and sickly. He wasn’t gonna bust a grape, but I’d be damned if I went to work and left another man in my house with my wife! But your Grandma just had a way about her. People always wanted to be around her.

ABEBE
What was my grandfather like?

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Yours? I told you. He was a piece of work!

Abebe walks over to the shelves above the piano.

ABEBE
Uncle Junior, why are the faces cut out of some of these pictures?

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Just ‘cause she liked him, don’t mean I had to!

They look at each other and laugh. It turns into a full out belly laugh.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Your Mama got that same magic. Got that lil’ Haitian to marry her and leave his family to follow her up here to New York. Franck ain’t a bad looking man either. Could have any woman he like, with that lil’ parlay vou of his. But he laid eyes on your Mama, and he wasn’t no good, no more! And she got a child by another man!

Abebe is quiet.
GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
Baby, I didn’t mean no harm. You’re lucky, really. There ain’t a lot of men who’d take on another man’s children, that’s all.

He takes Abebe’s chin in his hands and looks closely.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Yeah, you look just like your Grandma. ’Cept your hair. She had long Indian hair. You musta got your hair from your Mama’s side of the family.

ABEBE
What was my Daddy like Uncle Junior?

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
He loved him some you!

ABEBE
I wish he was still alive.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
He’s still with you Abebe. He’s watches over you.

ABEBE
Maybe if he was still alive, we’d still be in Augusta.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Don’t waste your time with the shoulda coulda beens Abebe! You got too much living in front of you.

Abebe starts crying.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
Whoa! Whoa Abebe! Listen, you’re just a lil homesick. I know it’s been tough going, having to duck and dodge security in and out of the building. But it’s temporary baby. You’ll have your own room and your own bed. The rain will even stop.

Abebe laughs.
GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
So don’t cry baby. It’s gonna be all right!

ABEBE
(Whimpering)
I’m sorry. I don’t have any friends at school. Nobody likes me.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Nobody likes you? That can’t be possible. Not one student in your whole class?

ABEBE
Well...none of the girls.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Oh! The boys like you? Then don’t sweat the rest! They’re just jealous. You sure you don’t have a boyfriend?

ABEBE
No! It’s just one boy. He’s nice, but he’s not my boyfriend.

Great Uncle Junior starts singing in a Nat King Cole style.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Abebe’s got a boyfriend!

Abebe laughs.

ABEBE
I do not! I do not!

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
(Singing)
She has a friend boy!

Abebe joins him in singing, but has different lyrics.

ABEBE
Uncle Junior has a girlfriend. A girlfriend, a girlfriend!

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
And that’s funny? ‘Cause I’m old? Well, I’ll have you know, Missy, that I do have a
girlfriend. Well, she ain’t really my girlfriend, per se, not yet. Tell you the truth, I remember her, but I don’t. She say I was liking on another girl, so she broke it off, and she left.

ABEBE
You mean Miss Wilson?

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Who?

ABEBE
Miss Wilson. The pie lady?

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Oh no! She ain’t my girlfriend!

ABEBE
Remember that red velvet cake?

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Do I? I ran my sugar up, messing with that red velvet cake!

ABEBE
And the butter pecan with peach slices! Made my stomach smile!

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Mine too, Abebe. But she ain’t wife material! Let’s just say she’s my friend girl, OK? And don’t you mess around and get the two mixed up, you hear me Abebe Louise Johnson? Doggone it, you don’t miss much, do you?

Great Uncle Junior looks at his watch again.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
You hungry? You want some Chinese food?

ABEBE
Yes! Can I get some chicken wings?

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
I got a taste for some General Tso.

Abebe starts dancing with the broom.
ABEBE

Hmmm uh!

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR

Here.

He takes out his wallet and takes out a twenty.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)

Go to the Chinese place over on Vincennes. Don’t go to the first one, with the faded picture in the window. They got Mexicans working up in there. I don’t know why they think I’m going to buy Chinese food from a Mexican! So go on past that one to the spot I took you to, and get me a large General Tso’s chicken...an order of lobster with lo mein, extra onions...some vegetable Yat Gaw mein, a large lemonade and two spring rolls. Get yourself whatever you want. Now hurry up now.

ABEBE

Let me write it down --

Great Uncle Junior looks at his watch.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR

(Becoming exasperated)
You can’t remember that lil’ order? Here Abebe, pick up your clothes and shoes! Come on! Hurry up! Hurry up! Your Mama and Franck work too long and hard to provide for you to be throwing their money around like this!

Abebe picks up coat from her bed.

ABEBE

Sorry Uncle Junior.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR

Tell you what. When you get to the restaurant, just ask for Mr. Kam. Tell him you’re Mr. Johnson’s niece. I’ll call ahead and give him my order, and you can get anything you want, just eat it there.
ABEBE
Alone? But yours will get cold!

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Don’t worry. I can always heat it up.

ABEBE
You don’t think Ma will be mad with me, going out by myself?

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Abebe your Mama ain’t going to know, unless, someone tells her, and why would you want to worry her?

ABEBE
It’s just that Ma said I should always go with somebody.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Tell you what. It’ll be your first New York adventure, okay? We’ll keep this between you and me. Don’t get back here before 6:00, okay? All right. Hurry now!

The doorbell rings and we can hear thunder in the background. Great Uncle Junior walks over to the door and looks through the peephole.

Great Uncle Junior
Ye!

He opens the door to find Yeye and Yorkie.

Yeye
You were expecting someone else?

Great Uncle Junior
No, no, I ah —
(Points to Yorkie)

ABEBE
Miss Yeye!

YEYE
Abebe! I’d hoped I’d find you here.
GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
How do you know my niece? What’s with the duck?

YEYE
Are you going to invite me in, or just interrogate me?

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Of course! Forgive me. Come in, come in. Here, let me take your wrap.

They embrace.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
It’s good to see you again. Have a seat.

Yeeye hands her wrap to Great Uncle Junior, who lays it on the sofa.

YEYE
Thank you.
(To Abebe)
It’s good to see you again. Be a dear and tie Yorkie in the bathroom for me please.

Abebe takes Yorkie and exits to bathroom.

YEYE (cont)
(To Uncle Junior)
It’s a long story.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Oh. All right. It’s really good to see you. You look great! Like you haven’t aged at all! What’s it been? Fifteen? Twenty years?

YEYE
At least. I was going through some old papers, and I found your number.

Abebe enters the living room and heads for the door.

YEYE (cont)
Abebe, where are you headed?
ABEBE
To the Chinese restaurant.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Say, how do you two know each other?

YEYE
Your beautiful niece helped me with some bad, bad characters.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Really? Well, she does come from good stock!

ABEBE
Uncle Junior, Miss Yeye helped me!

YEYE
We helped each other. She kept me dry with her magical umbrella.

Great Uncle Junior gently guides Abebe to the front door.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
I’m glad she was so helpful, but she’s hungry, and she was just headed out to get something to eat.

YEYE
Chinese? That’s sounds inviting. What are you getting?

ABEBE
Chicken wings and fried rice and lots of stuff for Uncle Junior. You want something Miss Yeye?

YEYE
I think I do. Wait.

She reaches for her wrap and rises.

YEYE (cont)
I’ll go with you.
GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Listen, I don’t want you to have to go out again. Abebe can bring it back. What do you want? I’ll call it in.

Great Uncle Junior reaches for the phone.

YEYE
Hmmm. I don’t know. What are you getting June?

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Lobster with lo mein, some Yat Gaw, shrimp and lemonade. Get whatever you want Yeye.

YEYE
I don’t have a taste for anything in particular. I think I’ll just go with Abebe, and decide once I get there.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
You don’t have to go back out in the rain! You can have half of what I’m getting. I’m getting plenty.

YEYE
I’m allergic to lobster June. Besides, that’s a long way for Abebe to go and come back by herself. Come on Abebe. Get your umbrella.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Look, I’m not going to let you go out. Let me get my jacket...

He limps towards the rear of the apartment.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
…and I’ll go out and get it.

YEYE
You’re a sweetheart. But that hip and the rain don’t go together.

Yeye rubs his arm.
GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
You’d be surprised at what these hips can do!

YEYE
Just as stubborn as ever!
Now you listen. Let me and Abebe go. I can
look at the menu and decide once I get there.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
I’m telling you, you’ll love the Yat Gaw! I -

YEYE
We won’t be long June.

Yeye walks towards the door.

YEYE (cont)
We’ll be back before you can miss us.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
I already miss you.

YEYE
And once I’m fat and full, you can have
your way with me!

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
I’m going to hold you to that Ye!

YEYE
I certainly hope so!

Abebe frowns. Looks from Yeye to Great Uncle Junior and back.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
OK. OK. I don’t feel good about this,
but go on, I guess.

YEYE
Abebe can bring me up to speed on all
of the females I’ll have to chase off!

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Ye, you know you’re the only one for me.
He sings the Flamingo’s song, “I Only Have Eyes for You,” and walks to the door and opens it.

YEYE
You always made me laugh June! Come Abebe. Bring your umbrella. The rain’s started up again.

Abebe smiles and winks at Uncle Junior. She and Yeye exit.

INT. HALLWAY OF THE SENIOR COMPLEX – AFTERNOON

Abebe and Yeye walk to the elevator.

YEYE
Open that beautiful umbrella please.

ABEBE
I’ll open it when we get outside Miss Yeye. It’s bad luck to open an umbrella inside.

YEYE
Bad luck?

ABEBE
Grandma said it was bad luck. A whistling woman, sweeping somebody’s feet, opening an umbrella inside. She has a lot of sayings like that.

YEYE
Must be the power. Too much power to be contained inside.

ABEBE
What do you mean Miss Yeye?

YEYE
The fan, your umbrella. Back home, only the wisest women possess the fan.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET – AFTERNOON

Abebe and Yeye are walking. It’s drizzling.
ABEBE
Only the ladies have umbrellas? What does everybody else do?

YEYE
It’s a fashion statement, dear, but only the wisest and most beautiful ladies of Oyo are trusted with the fan. In the wrong hands, someone with a hard heart, can do much harm.

ABEBE
Oyo? Where is Oyo?

YEYE
Two stoplights past the full moon.

ABEBE
(Laughing)
So, two lights past the moon, ladies use umbrellas like guns, like knives?

YEYE
Worse than you can even imagine!

They turn a corner of a building and “see” the city of Oyo. What they see is a bustling market as in Dakar or Lagos.

YEYE (cont)
Oyo is the capital of the kingdom of Bini. It is the oldest city. It is the city of the smartest, the bravest, the most beautiful people.

Inserts of vendors haggling in the market, trucks rumbling by, a police officer directs traffic, a boy drives some straggling goats, school girls in uniforms laugh and talk as they head to school.

YEYE (cont)
That slippery, sneaky Ozi - Ozi is my little brother! He “borrowed” my fan to impress some silly girl!
EXT. GARDEN IN THE CITY OF OYO - DAY

Ozi presents an oversized silver fan to a young woman who is with several other young women. Ozi is a short man, with sparkles for eyes. He has one long braid, that hangs across his shoulder, that he loves to stroke.

YEYE (V.O.)
She ran off with her foolish girlfriends and took my fan with her!

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREETS - DAY

ABEBE
I’m sorry Miss Yeye. Oyo sounds awesome. But you could buy an umbrella here for $3.

YEYE
I’ve tried! I’ve tried a dozen umbrellas, three dozen, but none of them have worked! I need to get back to Oyo, for my Festival. Or some bad, bad things are going to happen!

Yeye stops walking, but Abebe continues a few paces before she realizes that Yeye has stopped.

ABEBE
(Turns back to Yeye)
Are you all right Miss Yeye?

YEYE
Let me just catch my breath.
(Her breathing is labored)
Ozi and his simple girlfriends! I need my fan!

ABEBE
What’s the Festival like? And what bad things are going to happen?

YEYE
Tell me something Abebe - besides stopping and starting the rain, what else can you do with your umbrella?
ABEBE
(Shrugs)
Sword fight?

YEYE
Your mother, your grandmother. Have you ever seen them with their umbrellas, chanting?

ABEBE
Chanting?

YEYE
Maybe they sang about the cattle or the fields or the market.

ABEBE
The cattle? We had a few chickens, but we don’t have any cows Miss Yeye. Grandma just sings church songs.

YEYE
Are you sure Abebe? Maybe they danced and sang with the umbrella when there was a disagreement between two friends or the neighbors threatened to go to war.

ABEBE
No, I would remember something like that Miss Yeye!

YEYE
Think for a moment darling. It’s important.

They walk into a neighborhood Chinese restaurant.

ABEBE
OK.

(Pause)
I’m sorry Miss Yeye.

YEYE
It’s got to be. You made the rain stop before!
ABEBE
I didn’t make the rain stop.

YEYE
I saw you! Your braids, your hair beads, the silver fan --

ABEBE
Umbrella.

YEYE
Fan, umbrella! I’ve got to get home!

ABEBE
I miss Augusta, too.

CLERK
Next order.

YEYE
Hi. Oscar Johnson called in our order.

CLERK
Almost ready. Give me a couple of minutes.

YEYE
Thank you.

Abebe and Yeye take a seat at the lone table.

YEYE (cont)
(To Abebe)
Abebe, bad, bad things will happen if I don’t get home to Oyo soon.

Yeye wipes the moisture from the window of the restaurant and we are transported back to Oyo.

YEYE
If I can’t get my fan-umbrella back, and I don’t get home, everything will unravel!

Inserts of the vendors arguing over a customer, the boy drives the goats into traffic, the police officer leans against a building, casually enjoying a cigarette. The schoolgirls are fighting.
ABEBE
Wow!

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

YEYE
Yes, so you understand my circumstances. This rain is only the beginning.

ABEBE
I don’t understand.

YEYE
Your mother and Daddy Franck. Have they been arguing a lot lately?

ABEBE
Yeah, they have.

YEYE
Has Baby Franck been sick and irritable and crying?

ABEBE
He’s always like that.

YEYE
And those girls at your school have been bothering you. Abebe, how long has it been raining?

ABEBE
Do you think it’s because of all of the rain Miss Yeye?

YEYE
No, baby, the rain, the fights, the flooding, it’s all because Ozi stole my fan!

ABEBE
Miss Yeye, I don’t understand what that’s got to do with anything?

CLERK
Order for Johnson!
Abebe and Yeye rise, go to the counter, pay for the food and exit. Abebe opens the umbrella against the drizzle.

YEYE
It’s all tied together Abebe. Everything and everybody is connected. When Ozi took my fan, he set up an imbalance. His selfish act has to be met by an act of selflessness. To re-establish balance. Harmony. Something good must come from this bad thing.

EXT. DELANO SENIOR HOUSING COMPLEX ROOFTOPS – DAY

A wet, hot day. Sound of an airplane. From outside we see a large window fan. Sound of the plane fades out and the sound of the fan fades in.

INT. GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR’S LIVING ROOM – DAY

Abebe is humming into the fan. Loraine enters from a rear room.

LORAINÉ
Abebe stop. Don’t do that. If that fan falls on you, the blades’ll cut you.

She takes Baby Franck out of the car seat and plays with him.

LORAINÉ
(To the baby)
Yes it will! Yes it will! Tell your big sister. If that fan falls on her, she’ll be cut to pieces!

Loraine puts the baby back into the seat and resumes her ironing.

ABEBE
(Into the fan)
Ma, I’m on the radio! This is Abebe Johnson on WAAG-FM, Augusta, playing all of your favorites.

LORAINÉ
Abebe.
ABEBE
Classic soul, R&B and the blues...

LORAINELORAINE
Abebe.

ABEBE
...the best of the South...

LORAINELORAINE
Abebe, I’m not going to ask you again.

Abebe stands and turns to her mother.

ABEBE
I’m bored! Ain’t nothing to do!

LORAINELORAINE
Why don’t you draw something? Draw some pictures for Flo.

Abebe begins counting her Uncle’s albums.

ABEBE
...three, four, five...all I’d have to draw is some rain!

LORAINELORAINE
You could draw a picture of the Children’s Museum. We had a good time there, didn’t we?

ABEBE
...nine, ten, eleven...I could draw her some fat rain drops or some tall rain drops. Short rain, wide rain...

LORAINELORAINE
Or, you could come over here and learn how to iron. You want to learn how to iron?

Abebe plops down at the table.

ABEBE
...raindrops with dreadlocks, raindrops with weaves...
Loraine laughs.

ABEBE (cont)
Ma, it ain’t funny. I can’t go outside, and there ain’t nothing to do in here!

LORAINE
Here, take my phone. You can play your video games.

Abebe rises and heads towards the front door.

ABEBE
Ma, can I go outside? Just for a little bit? Just on the benches?

LORAINE
Baby, you know you can’t go outside? We won’t be here forever.

ABEBE
It already feels like forever!

LORAINE
When we get our own place, you’ll look back on these days and laugh.

ABEBE
Not me! Ma, you need me to go to the store for you?

LORAINE
Abebe, if security sees you around too much, they’re going to ask questions. I’ve told you that. You don’t want to get Uncle Junior put out of here, so please, sit your behind down, play a video game, or draw a picture for Flo, but don’t ask me again about going outside, OK?

Abebe pouts.

INT. FOYER OF UNCLE JUNIOR’S BUILDING – AFTERNOON
Abebe walks into the foyer, happy. Singing. She buzzes the bell to get into the building. No response. She tries again and a third time. Finally, someone buzzes her in.

INT. OF GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR’S LIVING ROOM – LATE AFTERNOON

Abebe enters the apartment singing and stops short, stunned by what she sees. There is clothing everywhere, tossed and ripped, strewn all over the sofa bed, the other furniture, even hanging from the pictures. Her mother and Great Uncle Junior sit at the table. Loraine has been crying.

ABEBE
Ma, what happened?

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Come on in and close the door.

Abebe enters and closes door. She walks over to her mother.

ABEBE
What happened? Are you all right? Is baby Franck ok?

LORAINE
Abebe change out of your school clothes.

ABEBE
But what hap –

LORAINE
Abebe, please just do what I ask you to do! I said go change your clothes!

YEYE
Yes ma’am.

Abebe starts to the bathroom.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Come out after you change and we’ll talk, ok?

ABEBE
OK.
INT. BATHROOM OF GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR – LATE AFTERNOON

Abebe listens at the door.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Bad as you feel darling, you can’t take it out on Abebe.

LORAINE
I know Uncle Junior. I find I’m apologizing a lot lately. To Franck, to Abebe, to you... must be my period of apologies.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Keep on living.

LORAINE
I just blew! I saw him sitting in the car. I’d bought some lamb for him, for dinner. I just wanted to make up for last night. I just wanted to make peace. Before I even saw the brown bag, I knew he was drunk. I could smell him!

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
I’m not taking sides ‘Raine, but can’t a man have a beverage or three if he’s put in his eight?

LORAINE
Uncle Junior, Franck lost his cab job.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
I didn’t know.

LORAINE
Three weeks ago. He said the man didn’t like his accent.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Didn’t like his accent? All cabdrivers have accents!
LORAINE
He’s been hustling, doing day work, and he’s trying, really. It’s hard, I know.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
I’ll talk with him ’Raine.

LORAINE
Uncle Junior, his papers have expired.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
(He whistles)
Pouring rain!

LORAINE
He can only work off the books. I’m afraid that if he gets stopped, they’ll run his name and find out.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
But I thought when you got married it made everything official.

LORAINE
Doesn’t matter. Any time during the first three years they can declare your marriage a fraud and deport him.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Well damn! Even with a kid?

LORAINE
That’s in the courts right now. But they sent his friend Vincent back to Trinidad last spring and he had twin toddlers.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Caught between a hard place and a harder place.
LORAINE
All of this hanging over us, and I come home and find him chillin’ with a couple of drunks after I’ve been wiping people’s behinds for ten hours! It was too much.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Sometimes, it’s good to cut lose. You had it snowing cotton up in here! And rayon and plastic…!

LORAINE
(Sings to the melody of the Weather Girls’ song)
“It’s raining cotton! Hallelujah!”

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
Tell me something. When you were cutting up his clothes, did it ever come to your mind that you’d have to clean up all of this?

LORAINE
For about a minute, but I didn’t care! It was worth it, every rip, tear and busted seam!

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
And now you’re going to have to replace all of his clothes, too.

LORAINE
I lost my ever loving mind! It felt good Uncle Junior, it just wasn’t smart.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
He’s down in the car? I’ll take a walk down and see if I can’t talk with him.

LORAINE
He respects you Uncle Junior.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR
You better see to your other baby.
Great Uncle Junior motions to the bathroom, rises from the table and walks over to the door.

GREAT UNCLE JUNIOR (cont)
Hang in there Loraine. This too shall pass.

Uncle Junior exits.

LORAINE
Abebe! You can come out now.

Abebe enters and looks around the room. She’s changed into her play clothes.

LORAINE (cont)
Look Abebe. I’m sorry. I was angry about something else, and I took it out on you.

ABEBE
What happened? Where is Daddy Franck?

LORAINE
He’s out. Hey! I got some lamb chops for dinner!

ABEBE
I like chicken. You bought that for Daddy Franck!

LORAINE
Abebe, I…thought you liked lamb.

ABEBE
I ate it, but I don’t like it.

LORAINE
I’m sorry. If I’d known, I’d have gotten you something else.

ABEBE
What happened?

LORAINE
This is an adult concern. You don’t have to worry about it.
ABEBE
You cut up all of his things...his shirts, pants, even his underwear!

LORAINE
Sometimes adults...when you’re grown and have a family of your own, then you’ll understand.

ABEBE
You would have whipped me for this.

LORAINE
I...ah, you’re probably right. Listen, Come over here.

ABEBE
I hope he doesn’t come back. I hope he gets arrested or leaves so we can go back to Augusta.

LORAINE
Abebe! That’s a cruel thing to say. You don’t mean that.

ABEBE
Yes I do! I want to go home! I hate it here!

INT. HALL OF THE SCHOOL – DAY

Students are moving in the hallway between classes. Abebe and a friend are walking and talking together. Alexus, Fettuccinni and LaCrema are walking several paces behind.

FETTUCCINNI
(To Alexus and LaCrema)
There’s giraffe girl!

ALEXUS
Look at her hair!

LACREMA
I kinda like her accent though.
ALEXUS
(Mocking Abebe’s accent)
I kinda like her accent, though!

FETTUCCINNI
Oh yeah, that’s right. That’s your partner now!

LACREMA
No she’s not! I’m just saying.

ALEXUS
Look! Yall got the same colors on!

FETTUCCINNI
Sure do!

LACREMA
Forget yall! Watch this.

LaCrema catches up to Abebe and bumps into her as she passes.

ALEXUS
You need to watch where you’re going! You can see up there, can’t you?

ABEBE
What? I was looking. She bumped into me!

LACREMA
You were walking too slow! I got to get to class!

FETTUCCINI
(Mocking Abebe)
I was looking! She bumped into me!

The trio laughs.

ALEXUS
Get your gear up, before you talk! Get you some hair! Grow some titties!

The trio walks off, laughing.
ABEBE
I didn’t bump her! She bumped into me!

ODETTE
I know. They think they run everything. I can’t stand them!

ODETTE IS TEN OR ELEVEN. AFRICAN AMERICAN.

ABEBE
I ain’t do nothing to them! They’re always starting with me.

ODETTE
I know. Alexus don’t like you because of her boyfriend.

ABEBE
I don’t even know her boyfriend! She can have him, for all I care!

ODETTE
Yes you do! He picks her up after school every day.

ABEBE
(Shaking her head)
And…?

ODETTE
That tall, cute dude in the Egy jacket?

ABEBE
Like I said, I don’t—Oh! Him! He’s too old for me! I don’t like him!

ODETTE
I heard he played her in front of you.

ABEBE
He came up to me. I wasn’t thinking about him.

ODETTE
Hey! You want to get her back? Take her boyfriend from her!
ABEBE
I just oughta!

ODETTE
Then you can tell her, “Get your gear up, girl!”

ABEBE
Yeah! Get your gear up girl!

ABEBE and ODETTE
Get your gear up, girl! Get your gear up girl!

They continue down the hallway.

INT. GIRL’S BATHROOM AT SCHOOL – LATER IN THE AFTERNOON

Alexus is at the mirror, applying lipstick. LaCrema and Fettuccinni are in the stalls, doors closed. A third stall is also occupied. Abebe opens the door to the bathroom.

ABEBE
(Enters. Over her shoulder)
See you tomorrow.

She turns to see Alexus, hesitates momentarily, but goes in and takes the fourth stall, closing its door.

ALEXUS
Well. I didn’t know giraffes used the bathroom.

FETTUCCINNI
What?
(She exits the stall. Alexus points to the stall that Abebe entered)
Oh! Yeah! They should have a separate bathroom for the animals.

ALEXUS
Most definitely!
LACREMA
(Exits the stall)
Who yall talking about?

FETTUCCINNI
Your partner!

LACREMA
Forget you Fettuccinni.

ALEXUS
Animals from down South oughta stay down South!

FETTUCCINNI
I know that’s right!

ALEXUS
Need to mind they own business, before they get their world rocked!

LACREMA
I know that’s right.

ALEXUS
Uh uh! I’m being real! Whatn’t no problems, till wild animals started showing up. Tall, skinny, nappy headed animals!

FETTUCCINNI
I know, right? Talking smack! Talking about we think we all of that!

ALEXUS
She gon’ take my boyfriend? Ain’t that nothin’!

FETTUCCINNI
Like she could! Like somebody wanna be bothered with her old stank butt! Please!
ALEXUS
I oughta whip her stank butt, just for saying it!

FETTUCCINNI
Right!

Abebe exits the stall and goes to the sink to wash her hands.

ALEXUS
What you think Ababy? What should you do when somebody disrespects you?

Abebe looks at Alexus in the mirror, but doesn’t respond.

ALEXUS
Huh? You heard me! What should I do when somebody disrespects me?

LACREMA
Come on Alexus. Let’s go.

FETTUCCINNI
Nawl LaCrema. Let her say what she wants to say.

ALEXUS
Abebe?

ABEBE
I don’t want no trouble. I don’t want your boyfriend --

ALEXUS
Slut! Keep my boyfriend’s name outta your mouth!

FETTUCCINNI
Why you bringing her boyfriend into this?

LACREMA
Come on yall! Leave it alone. Let’s just go.
ALEXUS
You mess with my boyfriend, I’m gonna rip your face apart!

ABEBE
Don’t nobody want your boyfriend!

ALEXUS
Oh really? That’s not what we heard! Somebody said you said you were going to take him from me! Like you could!

ABEBE
Well, I didn’t say that!

ALEXUS
Oh! So, now I’m a liar, huh?

ABEBE
I just know that I don’t want your boyfriend.

Abebe heads to the exit. Alexus throws a wad of wet paper towels that strike Abebe in the back of the head. Abebe turns and punches Alexus on the side her head.

FETTUCCINNI
Oh snap!

She helps Alexus up.

FETTUCCINNI
Giraffe Girl, you in trouble now!

A school safety officer comes around the corner.

OFFICER
What are you girls still doing in the building?

LACREMA
We had to go to the bathroom. We’re going now.

OFFICER
The main exit is locked. You’re gonna have to leave through the Lafayette exit.
Odette exits the bathroom.

OFFICER
Who else is in this bathroom?

ABEBE
Odette!

Odette pretends to be deaf and ignores Abebe.

ABEBE
Odette! Odette!

FETTUCCINNI
Don't nobody wanna be bothered with you!

OFFICER
Hey! What's going on here? You three!
(To the trio)

You, you and Italian food named girl! Wait here with me. You other two, go on home.

Abebe and Odette leave.

ALEXUS and FETTUCCINNI
We didn't do nothing! You gotta stop them, too!

OFFICER
As a matter of fact, come with me to the office.

Alexus
You can't make us stay! It's after school!

LACREMA
Let me call my mother!

OFFICER
I have to stay till 5 o'clock. If you don't want to be here till then, shut up and come with me. NOW!
The trio reluctantly heads down the hall way to the office. Abebe and Odette walk the long hall to the Lafayette entrance, without saying a word.

**EXT. SCHOOLYARD – LATE AFTERNON**

Abebe walks quickly through the yard and out onto the sidewalk. She looks over her shoulder.

**EXT. CITY STREET – LATE AFTERNOON**

It is raining again. Abebe walks past a billboard for silky hair care products. She crosses the street, past a store window display of weight loss drinks. She walks past a poster of a rapper, surrounded by girls. On the side of a phone booth is an ad for breast enhancement surgery. She walks down a street that has been dug up and where new water pipes are being installed. She sees Yeye’s ice cart, but no Yeye.

**YEYE’S VOICE (O.S.)**

Abebe? Abebe?

**ABEBE**

(She looks around)

Miss Yeye? Miss Yeye? Where are you?

**YEYE**

ABEBE! Down here!

Abebe leaves the sidewalk and walks into the canal that’s been dug in the street. The canal is fenced on both sides, but there is a break in the fencing.

**ABEBE**

(Spots Miss Yeye on her back at the bottom of the canal)

Miss Yeye! What happened? Are you all right? Let me help you!

Abebe starts down, carefully, into the canal.

**YEYE**

Loss my balance. Careful baby.

Abebe reaches her and helps Yeye to sit up.
ABEBE
Are you all right? Here, let me help you stand up.

Yeye starts to stand, but falls back.

YEYE
Wait darling. Hold on.

ABEBE
You don’t look good Miss Yeye. Let me get Uncle Junior.

YEYE
No darling. Your Uncle can’t help me.

ABEBE
He can get a cab and take you to the doctor! Please Miss Yeye!

YEYE
I need to get to Oyo darling. No doctor can help me now. I must get to Oyo or –

She starts coughing. It shakes her whole body.

ABEBE
Please Miss Yeye! I’m scared! Let me just get somebody!

YEYE
Darling, you’re going to have to help me.

ABEBE
Ok! OK! Let me get an adult to –

YEYE
We don’t have time baby. Those girls are almost here! You’re going to have to help me!

ABEBE
How Miss Yeye? That’s what I’m trying to do! Let me get somebody to help us --
YEYE
You, Abebe. Here, give me your hand again.

ABEBE
OK.

Abebe helps Yeye to stand.

ABEBE
OK! Good! Can you walk?

YEYE
I think I can. Hold my arm.

ABEBE
OK! Good! Hold on! Hold on! OK now.

Slowly, they climb out of the canal. Abebe helps Yeye to her cart.

ABEBE
Here Miss Yeye, lean against your cart.

Abebe opens her umbrella to protect Yeye.

YEYE
Abebe, you’re going to have to take me to my sister. I don’t think we can make it to Oyo.

ABEBE
Ok! OK. Where does she live?

YEYE
Take your umbrella baby, keep it open, and stand it on its handle.

ABEBE
On the handle?

YEYE
Yes.

(She coughs again)

Now. Bring it closer. Yes. OK.
Yeye holds the umbrella in place by holding the tip.

YEYE (cont)

Now baby, put your hand on top of mine.

FETTUCCINNI

(From half a block away)

There she is!

YEYE

Right here. That’s right! Don’t worry about them. Now hold the top of my hand as tight as you can.

ALEXUS

(Running)

I’m going to kick your butt!

ABEBE

Miss Yeye, what are you doing? They’re going to get me!

Yeye begins to spin the umbrella on its handle and sing.

YEYE

Yemanja, oh Yemanja!
The mother of us all,
Yemanja, oh Yemanja!
She’ll never let us fall!

Yeye spins the umbrella into a whirlwind and she and Abebe disappear.

INT. WAREHOUSE – NIGHT

Lots of hissing radiators, pipes, humidifiers, hot springs and clouds of steam. At the far end of the room is a series of oversized pipes that double as the throne for WARRIOR WATERS, who sits with her back to the small group of people who have come seeking her assistance and blessings. Warrior Waters is Amazonian, tall and shapely thick, and very feminine. Chaka Khan hair. All of the people, the animals - turtles, ducks, seagulls and frogs - move around or sit with paper bags over their heads.
Just in front of the throne stands a man who acts as the host/gatekeeper. His head is also covered with a paper bag. He “reads” from a tablet.

HOST
Number 2! Step up!

An elderly couple, both on wooden canes, approaches the throne as quickly as they can. The woman has an infant strapped to her back, causing her to bend low and to walk slowly, just behind her husband.

ELDERLY MAN
Number 2! Here we are sir!

HOST
State your business.

ELDERLY MAN
Our daugh--

HOST
Speak up, old man!

ELDERLY MAN
(Shaken)
Yes, yes sir. We -- our daughter ran away with a very bad man. She took up drink and only the Waters know what else she took up. She came home after a year with this child that my wife carries on her back.

Warrior Waters lifts a goblet to her lips.

WARRIOR WATERS
Host, if they come looking for their daughter, they waste my time.

ELDERLY MAN
No, no Warrior Waters. We do not want to offend.
WARrior WAters
Now, that very bad man, he might well be here!

She laughs a haughty, mocking laugh. The other petitioners laugh, afraid not to. Warrior Waters takes a long drink from the goblet. Abebe and Yeye walk up, take a number and take a seat to one side of the throne.

ABEBE
Miss Yeye, where is your sister?
Why does everybody have a bag over their head? Even the animals!

YEYE
Shhh!

Yeye scribbles something on a note and passes it up to the host.

WARrior WAters (cont)
So then why do they come? Quick!

ELDERLY MAN
Your kindness is spoken by every tongue, your righteousness abounds. We are old, life is hard –

WARrior WAters
You are not telling me anything I don’t know.

ELDERLY WOMAN
Help us bury our daughter, dear Waters.

The place gets quiet.

WARrior WAters (Momentarily stunned)
Your daughter, she left you the child?

ELDERLY MAN
Yes ma’am. We are determined to raise her up in a way that pleases you.
LANDSCAPE

WARRIOR WATERS
How long has your daughter be dead?

ELDERLY MAN
She has been down for over two weeks dear Waters.

WARRIOR WATERS
And you come to me now? The custom is three days!

ELDERLY MAN
Yes, yes, we know dear Waters. We came as soon as it happened.

WARRIOR WATERS
No wonder it stinks in here!

ELDERLY MAN
(Carefully)
We arrived within a day of her death dear Waters. They said you would be back. You had just stepped out to Florida for a cigar break.

WARRIOR WATERS
I am due some pleasure, old man! Toss her body into the Water. I am done.

HOST
Your time is up. Next! Number 3!

The elderly couple, crushed, moves on.

WARRIOR WATERS
Host, wait. I have a note. My sister is here!

Yeye and Abebe stand.

YEYE
In the flesh and in the blood!

WARRIOR WATERS
Of the world, below as is above! Come, come up Yeye!
Yeye takes Abebe’s hand and they approach the throne. Warrior Waters continues to speak with her back to Yeye and Abebe.

WARRIOR WATERS
I thought you were slumming in the Bronx with CiCi. How she can stomach the outer boroughs, I can’t fathom! You’ll never catch me above 59th Street!

YEYE
Ozi! That fool stole my fan!

Warrior Waters gasps.

YEYE (cont)
Yes! And left me stranded there! He took it to show off to some pretty face, and one of them ran off with it!

WARRIOR WATERS
That’s why it’s been raining so! I should have known! That young thing doesn’t know the first thing about how to handle the fan!

She rises from her throne, back still turned away. Paces. We can see that she’s wearing a belt of various weapons - knives, machetes, swords, etc.

WARRIOR WATERS
Come on! Let’s go and find him!

YEYE
I’ll lay my hands on him soon enough, but I need to get back for the Festival, Warrior.

WARRIOR WATERS
The Festival? You’re still doing that?

YEYE
I need to get back or this bit of rain will look like a walk in the park.
WARRIOR WATERS
Settling disputes between humans. Quaint.
Why don’t we go and find the strumpet
instead, and get your fan back! I can
“settle” this with a few turns of my blade.
I’ll give her a reason to hide her face
behind a fan, all right!

Warrior Waters brandishes a short blade expertly, the light
bouncing off the blade.

YEYE
Right now, I just need to get back to Oyo. I
was wondering if you could use your fan to
get me there.

WARRIOR WATERS
Oh Yeye! If you’d just come a few
minutes earlier! I’m on my way out!

YEYE
Cuba?

WARRIOR WATERS
Florida. My Marlins are in the World Series!

YEYE
Good luck! I just need you for a moment
Sister. It won’t take long. Please.

Warrior Waters collects her weapons.

WARRIOR WATERS
Dear Sister, a minute earlier, and I would
have been glad to help, but I’ve got to catch
the red eye. It’s a morning game.

Yeye leans against Abebe.

YEYE
Please Sister. I wouldn’t ask if I didn’t
really need it.
WARRIOR WATERS
And I hate to leave you stranded. Did you try Konla or Awoyo?

YEYE
You know that Konla doesn’t fan anymore! She’s curled up around the prow of some ship and I can’t reach Awoyo because it won’t stop raining long enough. If she can’t crown herself with her rainbow, she refuses to come out.

Warrior Waters moves towards the door.

WARRIOR WATERS
Host, tell those people to sit tight. I’ll be back in two weeks. Kisses!

YEYE
Warrior!

WARRIOR WATERS
Go Marlins!

She exits. A small entourage follows behind. Yeye falls back onto a bench. There’s a loud clap of thunder.

ABEBE
She wasn’t very nice Miss Yeye. Are you okay? You’re hot and sweating.

YEYE
I’ll be all right. I just need to sit for a minute.

ABEBE
Maybe I can call Uncle Junior.

YEYE
Abebe, your Uncle June can’t help us here. Let me think for a moment.

Abebe looks around at the others.
ABEBE
Miss Yeye, you never said why everybody had a paper bag over their heads? Are they criminals?

YEYE
Despite her many shortcomings, Warrior has a wise head. Those people aren’t criminals.

ABEBE
Then why the bags? Hey! If we wore bags in school, maybe they wouldn’t pick on me. If they couldn’t see what I had on or how I looked!

YEYE
Warrior’s lesson is not that we shouldn’t judge each other Abebe.

ABEBE
It’s not?

They exit.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE WAREHOUSE - DAY

ABEBE
Miss Yeye it’s morning! We went inside last night!

YEYE
My sister is beautiful, but she’s slower than a broken watch.

ABEBE
Why’d she keep her back to us? That’s rude, isn’t it?

YEYE
Abebe, you don’t want to look at her eyes. Once she’s looked at you, you become transfixed. You’d be chained to this warehouse for the rest of your life.
ABEBE
So that’s why the people had bags over their heads!

YEYE
That’s one reason, but the main reason the people wear bags is so they don’t see their reflections and judge themselves. Come on little girl. Let’s see if there is anything left in that umbrella of yours.

Abebe and Yeye open the umbrella and balance it on the handle. Yeye places her hand on the top of the stem and Abebe places her hand on top of Yeye’s. Yeye sings, slowly.

YEYE
Yemanja, oh Yemanja!
The mother of us all
Yemanja, oh Yemanja!
She’ll never let us fall!

INT. A WAREHOUSE OF ICE – DAY

Lots of icicles, snowy mounds and ice sculpture. Abebe and Yeye stumble, still holding the umbrella.

YEYE
Whoa! A little rocky, but I’ve still got it.

ABEBE
It’s freezing in here! Where are we Miss Yeye?

YEYE
My sister Akua’s place.

Yeye removes one of her skirts and places it around Abebe’s shoulders.

YEYE
This should keep you warm.

ABEBE
Thank you.
AEYE
Akua is the baby of the family. She summers in the two waters where the ocean and river meet. Come Labor Day, she heads home to this Winter Palace.

ABEBE
Even though it’s cold, it’s beautiful.

We see huge ice sculptures of fish and swans and ducks and turtles. We can hear faintly, a percussion orchestra (think Afoxe of Brasil).

AEYE
Come. Let’s follow the music.

They walk and the music grows louder, till they come into an opening to find a crowd of people, dressed in all white and dancing. Icicles and ice sculpture. Abebe, holding Yeye’s hand, begins to dance, too.

ABEBE
Come on Miss Yeye. Dance with me!

Yeye
Come on Abebe.

ABEBE
You can dance, can’t you?

Yeye
Little girl, you don’t want to try Yeye! I’ll dance you into tomorrow!

They join the others dancing. Some couples nearby stop and begin to watch and gather around Abebe and Miss Yeye as they dance. People even begin to chant.

DANCERS
Go Yeye! Go Yeye! Go Abebe! Go Abebe! Go Yeye! Go Abebe!

The crowd opens up and a statuesque woman, dressed in all white, long flowing skirts, and beautiful white locks dances into the opening. She is AKUA, Yeye’s little sister. She joins Yeye and
Abebe and dances with them. After a minute, Yeye tires and reaches out to hug Akua.

AKUA
I should have known it was you!
No one can shake things up as well I, but you!

Yeye stops dancing to catch her breath. Abebe stops, too. Akua continues dancing and never stops.

YEYE
You look every bit the diva! Dancing With the Stars had better ask somebody!

AKUA
You are still crazy! Who is this gorgeous one?

YEYE
Akua, this is Abebe. Abebe, this is my youngest and favorite sister, Akua.

AKUA
She says that to all of us, and that’s why we love her so! It was actually Abebe who caught my attention. I saw her above the crowd. You move well. Are you a dancer?

ABEBE
Thank you. I just like to dance.

YEYE
Akua, she’s just ten years old.

AKUA
Ten! Darling you are one long, tall drink of water!

ABEBE
Yes ma’am.

AKUA
Nice manners, too.
YEYE
I want to ask you to stop dancing –

AKUA
But you know I can’t!

YEYE
I know doll. You make me tired just looking at you!

AKUA
You do look a little peaked.

YEYE
My fan, Ozi stole my fan!

AKUA
(Gasps)
Oh my Waters! How can I help you? You must be sick with worry.

YEYE
And I’ve got the Festival coming up in two days!

AKUA
What are you going to do? Ah! That’s why it’s been so wet around here! Yeye, you’ve got to do something, or all hells are going to break loose!

YEYE
I know. That’s why I’m here. I need your help to get back to Oyo!

AKUA
Oh Yeye...

YEYE
My strength is zapped! I found Abebe in New York City. I saw her braids, her beads, but it was the umbrella that sealed it.
AKUA
Ah! Yes. Um-brel-la? Is that what they call them in New York? It’s very similar to a fan in appearance, but does it have the same magic?

YEYE
Not even close, but between her innocence and my experience and faith, I’ve made it work. But I need you to cast a spell.

AKUA
Yeye...

YEYE
The umbrella can get me around on short hops, but I can’t get across the water to Oyo. It’s just not that strong.

AKUA
Yeye! You know I don’t do that anymore.

YEYE
But I need you! I wouldn’t ask if I weren’t desperate.

AKUA
I’m happy. I’m dancing. I cook up some poultices for the sick, but beyond that, it’s about being happy and dancing. That’s all.

YEYE
Akua, you don’t understand.
(She pauses to collect herself)
In two days’ time, if I’m not back in Oyo for my Festival, all of this will come tumbling down! It won’t just be the Waters either. Planets will collide. Brother will go against sister, parent against child!

AKUA
Then don’t go. Stay here with me and dance. Just dance dear.
YEYE
Just this once Akua. One more time.

AKUA
I’m sorry Ye. I’d do anything for you, but I can’t do that. It’s too hard. Come on and dance some more.

YEYE
I wish I could darling.

AKUA
I’m sorry Ye. Can I have somebody get you and Abebe something to eat? Something to drink?

YEYE
That’s kind of you, but no thank you. We’d better be going.

AKUA
Are you sure? My chef makes the tenderest honey glazed dog this side of Oyo.

YEYE
I’m sure, but no thanks.

Yeye reaches out and hugs the still moving Akua.

AKUA
Take care sis. Nice to meet you Abebe. Please take care of my sister.

ABEBE
Yes ma’am, I will. Nice to meet you, too.

Akua dances away.

ABEBE (cont)
Here Miss Yeye. Lean on me.

YEYE
Thank you darling.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE ICE WAREHOUSE - NIGHT
ABEBE
Miss Yeye, it’s night time! You only have one day left! I’m no closer to Augusta than I was two days ago!

YEYE
I know.

ABEBE
Why wouldn’t she help you Miss Yeye?

YEYE
She’s searching Abebe. Like everybody. She hasn’t learned the lesson of adversity yet.

ABEBE
The lesson of advers…advers…

YEYE
Adversity. You take your weakness, your fear and use it to strengthen you.

ABEBE
Huh? Take your fears and make them work for you?

YEYE
Akua was a little Water when it happened, she was just learning her power. Ozi was involved in that mess, too! She was learning to cast spells and Ozi told her to cast a spell over a particular man’s house.

ABEBE
The spell didn’t work?

YEYE
(Ye grabs a handful of snow and tosses it up into the air.)

We see a house on a hill and a little Water at the foot of the hill, practicing her magic. Ozi, playing with his braid, reclines on a nearby log.
YEYE (V.O.)
The house belonged to a man who’d just finished the Boston Marathon. SHANGO, the God of Thunder, was sleeping the sleep of one hundred years.

We see SHANGO, sleeping and snoring inside his house. Shango is red and black, larger than life and very handsome. Each time he breathes out, the curtains, window and walls all shakes. We see a dream bubble above his head. In the bubble we see Shango running the Marathon.

YEYE (V.O.)
Ozi knew that, but he was angry with Shango. He’d stolen one of his lady friends. So Ozi had Akua cast the spell, and it woke Shango, and he came out of his house belching smoke and fire, he was so angry!

We see Shango, at the door to his house, belching fire and smoke.

ABEBE (V.O)
Did he burn her?

YEYE (V.O.)
Worse. He heaved a hundred years of garbage into the river, killing all of the fish and the sea world. The children couldn’t swim there anymore.

We see Shango belch up so much garbage, that it flies over his house and into the nearby river. We see fish flee, fishermen and washerwomen flee, screaming.

YEYE (V.O.)
The fish dried up and fishermen went out of business. The village women had to walk ten miles more to find clean water. Akua always blamed herself.
ABEBE
But it wasn’t her fault! Your brother is mean! Let’s try again. We can’t give up. Sing with me!

Abebe spins the umbrella and sings.

Yemanja, oh Yemanja
The mother of us all
Yemanja, oh Yemanja
You never let us fall!

EXT. CANAL DUG IN STREET IN ABEBE’S NEIGHBORHOOD – LATE AFTERNOON

The canal, about ten feet deep, runs for the length of a block and is fenced in on all sides. Two large ceramic pipes, big enough to stand inside, are laid in the canal, end to end. Yeye and Abebe lay flat on their backs in the canal.

ABEBE
Miss Yeye? What happened? We’re back in New York!

Miss Yeye, eyes closed, doesn’t respond.

ABEBE
Miss Yeye?
(Shakes her)
Miss Yeye? Are you all right? Miss Yeye!

YEYE
(Coming around. Groggy)
Aw! My head!
(Sees Abebe)
There you are! Are you all right?

ABEBE
Are you all right? You scared me!
We’re back in New York!
YEYE
I was afraid of that. I’m sorry Abebe, but I can’t --
(She pauses to catch her breath)
I’m sorry darling. I’m afraid I just don’t –
(She starts coughing)

Abebe rubs her back.

ABEBE
Take it easy Miss Yeye. Don’t try to talk. Catch your breath.

YEYE
You’ve been an angel. I couldn’t have done this without you. I’m sorry I couldn’t get you back to Augusta.

It starts to drizzle.

ABEBE
It’s okay Miss Yeye. Let’s just get out of here.

YEYE
I’ll need your hand Abebe.

Abebe stands and struggles to help Miss Yeye stand. Alexus runs towards the canal.

ALEXUS
Where the hell did she go?

Abebe stops.

ABEBE
(Whispers)
Hold on Miss Yeye!

FETTUCCINNI
There’s her grandmother’s cart!

Miss Yeye stops and she and Abebe crouch down. The trio runs to the cart.
ALEXUS
(Pointing)
There they are!

Alexus, Fettuccinni and LaCrema spot Miss Yeye and Abebe in the canal. Alexus runs to a break in the fencing and starts down into the canal. The rain has made the hill leading down slippery and she falls. Abebe picks up her silver umbrella.

ABEBE
Come on Miss Yeye! Grab hold to the umbrella!
(Sings)
Yemanja, oh Yemanja!
The mother of us --

YEYE
I can’t - It won’t

ABEBE
Come on then!

Abebe and Miss Yeye walk/stumble away from the trio.

YEYE
I don’t have the strength! You go on!

ABEBE
No! Come on!

LaCrema and Fettuccinni enter the fenced in area, slip and fall down into the canal. LaCrema tries to grab hold to one of the plastic traffic barriers, but it slides down behind her, blocking the entrance to the fencing.

LACREMA
Ooooooh!

She falls face forward into a large puddle. Fettuccinni panics, looses her footing and falls into LaCrema.

FETTUCCINNI
OUCH! My back!
ALEXUS
Come on! Come on! They ran into the pipes.

Water begins to collect inside the pipes.

INT. INSIDE THE CERAMIC PIPES

Alexus enters the pipes. It’s dark. She takes out a lighter and flicks it on.

ALEXUS
Come on yall!

Alexus can only see a few feet ahead. We can hear Miss Yeye’s breathing.

ALEXUS
Got you now, Miss Abebe!

YEYE
Go on Abebe! They won’t do anything to me!

ABEBE
I’m not leaving you!

FETTUCCINNI
This water is getting higher in here!

LACREMA
My arm! I think I broke my arm!

ALEXUS
Come on! Come on! Just follow me!

Abebe and Miss Yeye stumble into a wall and fall. The end of the piping has been capped.

FETTUCCINNI
I can hardly walk! I messed up my back!

LACREMA
My arm is broke! I’m outta here!

Alexus is several yards ahead of LaCrema and Fettuccinni.
ALEXUS
Don’t punk out now! We almost –

Alexus sees Abebe and Miss Yeye.

ALEXUS (cont)
Got you!

She swaggers slowly towards Abebe and Miss Yeye. The water is rising.

FETTUCCINNI
Alexus, I’m outta here!

Fettuccinni turns and limps away.

LACREMA
Me, too!

LaCrema also turns and heads back out of the pipe. Abebe points the umbrella at Alexus.

ABEBE
Stay back Alexus!

ALEXUS
What are you going to do? It’s three against one! Your Grandma is going to watch you get your face tore off!

YEYE
Your friends have left you! You started all of this!

Alexus looks back and then turns quickly to face Abebe and Miss Yeye.

ALEXUS
That’s all right, ‘cause I’m ‘bout to finish it, too!

ABEBE
Leave my grandmother out of this!
I’ll fight you, but leave her alone.
ALEXUS
You don’t tell me what to do!

She lunges at Abebe. Abebe swings the umbrella, holding Alexus back.

ALEXUS
You hit me with that umbrella, I’m gonna really mess you up!

Alexus lunges again. Abebe swings the umbrella again.

ABEBE
You’re gonna know you were in a fight!

YEYE
Alexus, your time is up! Look! The water is rising!

The water is now at their shins.

ALEXUS
(Panics)
What? Oh God! I can’t move! I can’t move!

She turns and stumbles back to the opening and bumps into LaCrema and Fettuccinni.

LACREMA
There are pit bulls up there!

EXT. AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE FENCED IN AREA

We see three dogs on the street, barking.

FETTUCCINNI
(Crying)
Help! Help!

ALEXUS
Shut up! Shut up! Help! Somebody! Help!
The water continues to rise. Abebe, helps Miss Yeye walk towards the trio.

YEYE
No one can hear you.

There is thunder and lightning.

THE TRIO
(Screams)
HELP! SOMEBODY! HELP! MA!

We hear the dogs.

ABEBE
Miss Yeye, can you call one of your sisters?

YEYE
They couldn’t help me before Abebe.

Thunderclap.

LACREMA
This is your fault Alexus!

FETTUCCINNI
Yeah! You just had to get her!

ALEXUS
(Crying)
Shut up! Shut up! Please Miss!
Please! Help! Help me!

ABEBE
Wait. I’ve got an idea!

Abebe heads back into the pipes.

ALEXUS
What are you doing? That end is shut!

ABEBE
Then stay here, but I’m getting out!

Abebe helps Miss Yeye walk back into the pipe. LaCrema and Fettuccinni follow. Alexus, standing alone, runs to catch up
with the others. Abebe stops near a small hole cut out of the top of the pipe. The rain pours through the hole.

ABEBE (cont)
If I can get up there, I can get help.

ALEXUS
How are you going to get up there?

ABEBE
You call me giraffe, right?

ALEXUS
(Embarrassed)
You ain’t that tall!

ABEBE
You’re right. You and LaCrema are going to boost me up!

ALEXUS
What?

ABEBE
Hold hands with LaCrema.

LACREMA
I can’t. My arm is broken!

ABEBE
OK, ok! Just hold her good hand.

The two girls, LaCrema and Fettuccinni hold hands.

ABEBE (cont)
(Directing them)
Here. Hold your hands in front of you. Criss cross them.

They comply.

ABEBE (cont)
Yeah, like that. Okay. Miss Yeye, I’m going to need one of your hands, too.
Abebe reaches out to steady Miss Yeye as she joins hands with the girls.

ABEBE (cont)
To make up for LaCrema’s hand.

Miss Yeye joins hands. Thunder and lightning. The water rises.

ABEBE
Okay, come over here, near the wall.
Now bend down a little, so I can stand on your hands.

Alexus drops her hands.

ALEXUS
You’re not standing on my hands!

FETTUCCINNI
Shut up Alexus and put your hands back!

YEYE
You can do this!

Alexus jerks her head and looks at Miss Yeye. Puts her hands back.

ABEBE
Now, bend down. Ok. I’m going to step up in your hands and get my balance.

Abebe climbs into their hands.

ALEXUS
Hurry up! Hurry Up! You’re heavy!

ABEBE
Ok, now, move towards the hole, slowly.

They begin to move.

ABEBE (cont)
Slowly!
As the group moves from the wall and towards the hole, Abebe stands erect, balancing herself against the wall and “walking”, with her hands, across the curving wall of the pipe.

ABEBE
Higher! Just a little bit higher!

ALEXUS
You’re heavy! Hurry up!

ABEBE
Ok, Ok! I’m almost there...

Abebe is at her full height and able to touch the lip of the opening. The rain is coming down all over her and the people holding her up.

ABEBE
Got it! Just a little bit more!

She holds onto the lip of the opening. LaCrema falls away.

LACREMA
I can’t hold it no more!

LaCrema has knocked Miss Yeye down. Alexus is alone.

ALEXUS
I can’t breathe! I can’t breathe!

Alexus pushes Abebe one good time and then falls, too.

ABEBE
I got it!

Abebe pulls herself up and through the hole.

ABEBE
I got it! I got it! I made it!

Lightning and thunder.
EXT. SMALL, MODEST HOME IN THE SOUTH – DAY

Abebe and her friend FLORENCE are sitting on the porch, playing the card game, War. FLORENCE is African American and eleven. Abebe places a card on the table in sync with each syllable.

ABEBE
I-de-clare-war! I’m out!

FLORENCE
I quit!

ABEBE
Poor loser!

FLORENCE
You got that right! Let’s play a game I’m good at!

ABEBE
But what would we play, Flo’? I beat you at checkers, Crazy 8 and War!

FLORENCE
You did not beat me at checkers!

ABEBE
Did!

FLORENCE
Did not!

ABEBE
I did!

Abebe calls to someone inside.

ABEBE (cont)
Marie! Tell this girl I won all three of the checker games we played!

Alexus Marie exits through the screen door eating a dreamsicle and carrying two more.
MARIE
My name is Bennett and I ain’t in it!

She sits down next to Florence and hands her a dreamsicle. Then she hands the other one to Abebe.

FLORENCE
Oh, I see how it goes. You New Yorkers stick together, huh?

MARIE
Like peanut butter and jam!

FLORENCE
And yall used to not be friends? That’s wild!

ABEBE
I know, right?

MARIE
When you come up, we’ll introduce you the other girls who weren’t her friends.

FLORENCE
I’ll visit, but I’m not staying. Yall too wild for me!

MARIE
We too wild? Girl, these big ‘um mosquitos yall got are badder than anything we got in New York!

FLORENCE
Nuhuh! I saw that rat on the train! On YouTube!

ABEBE
Flo’ the rats walk past you and say, “What’s up?”

They laugh.
ABEBE (cont)
One time Flo,’ a rat asked Marie, “You got any spare change?”

MARIE
Don’t tell her that! She won’t wanna come!

Marie pokes Abebe.

ABEBE
Marie told him,”I was just about to ask you the same thing!”

Abebe runs into the house. Marie chases her.

MARIE
You stupid!

Florence sits on the porch, laughing and enjoying her dreamsicle.

INT. BILLIE’S BEAUTY SALON AND BOUTIQUE – AFTERNOON

Billie is working with Loraine in her chair. Abebe is under the dryer.

WOMAN’S VOICE (O.S.)
Sweet heart. Sweet heart.
(She shakes Abebe)
I need to see if your hair is done.

ABEBE
(Groggy)
Huh?
(She rubs her eyes)

WOMAN’S VOICE (O.S.)
You got you a good little nap.

We see a close up of the woman.

ABEBE
Miss Yeye! You’re here!
(Abebe jumps up and hugs the woman)
WOMAN
(Surprised)
I don’t know who Miss Yeye is, but I’ll take hugs all day long!

LORAINE
Abebe! Are you all right?

ABEBE
This is Miss Yeye Ma!

WOMAN
I’m Eunice sweet heart. I look like your Miss Yaye Yaye, huh?

ABEBE
But...we were stuck in the canal, trying to get away from the dogs and running from Alexus and her friends and we went to see your sisters, the Waters in the steamy place and the cold place, but you wanted to go to Oyo for the Festival and you were going to take me to Augusta!

BILLIE
My goodness, you must have been dreaming child! You did some travelling!

ABEBE
But, it was you, Miss Yeye! I remember!

BILLIE
Inez, come on and do this child’s hair.

Inez enters from the back. She still has on her glittery top and a large feather in her hair.

ABEBE
You had a feather in her head like that!

Abebe takes the seat at Inez’ station.
BILLIE
You probably saw Inez modeling she costume for the West Indian Day Parade before you dozed off.

LORAINE
She’s been having trouble sleeping – nightmares. I think it’s the outside food we’ve been eating.

BILLIE
That could do it.

ABEBE
Ma, it was real.

LORAINE
We’ve been here for the last hour and a half. You dreamed it baby.

ABEBE
(Doubtful)
But, she looked just like that lady!

EUNICE
They say everybody got a twin.

INEZ
True that.

EUNICE
Maybe it’s my twin you dreamed about.

ABEBE
(Resolutely)
It was real.

EUNICE
Oh good, the rain’s stopped. Darling, you like sweets? Run right quick and get an icee from the corner store and get yourself one, too. Anybody want one?

THE END