

The Matter of Nadiyah Hassan
a new play by Emily Acker

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Characters

MaryJane Cunningham: *A student. White.*

Lulu Rotham: *A student. White.*

Dr. Mark Marcel: *The headmaster. White.*

Mrs. Eleanor Cunningham: *Member of the board of the trustees. White.*

Nadiyah Hassan: *A student. Black. Muslim.*

Setting

St. Anne's Academy for Girls

The headmaster's office

The hallway

Springtime.

Note

A / indicates overlapping dialogue

A character name with no dialogue underneath is a silence response of any duration

Arabic pronunciation of Nadiyah: *Nuh-DEE-ya*

American pronunciation of Nadia: *NA-dia*

All poetry is meant to be performed as slam poetry

Prologue.

Blackness.

A light appears on NADIYAH HASSAN.

NADIYAH

Why is it that you fear me?

What is it about my name

that breaks

the rules, you fools,

of fear, that blinds you

from what between us is the same?

Why is it that you fear me?

I do not pray on bended knee

atop worn pews, cherry stained,

below glass color stained, but instead,

I bow again and again,

calling out his name.

Does that justify your disdain?

How am I to win at your game?

A shift.

One.

The office.

DR. MARK MARCEL looks small behind his desk.

He fusses with some paperwork.

MRS. ELEANOR CUNNINGHAM enters holding two cups of coffee.

She watches him a while until he notices.

MARCEL goes to her.

He hugs her like it's been a while.

MARCEL

Did you get my flowers?

CUNNINGHAM

Peonies. You're the best.

MARCEL

How's MJ?

CUNNINGHAM

She's here. She's ok. We're not really ones to sulk.

Pause.

CUNNINGHAM

What about you? How are you doing?

MARCEL

Umm. I'm good. I'm fine.

CUNNINGHAM

Nice.

MARCEL

I am!

CUNNINGHAM

I believe you.

MARCEL

I am, I am, you didn't have to come in because of me. I'm totally under control.

CUNNINGHAM

Please, I came in because of *me*. I had to get out of the house.

MARCEL

Ok. Alright, well. Then since I have you –

CUNNINGHAM

Ha.

MARCEL

No, just. Since you're here. I have a few questions – just a bit of scheduling and procedure. Just so I'm squared away on tradition and the rest.

CUNNINGHAM

Fire away.

DR. MARCEL rummages through some paperwork on his desk.

MARCEL

Is this right?

CUNNINGHAM

Is what right?

MARCEL [*Re: papers*]

This, here. We're supposed to bring in student council members to listen to disciplinary hearings?

CUNNINGHAM

To provide student body testimony for their peer in question.

MARCEL

Isn't that a bit, I don't know ridiculous?

CUNNINGHAM

It's what we've always done.

MARCEL

But that's just. It's a minefield, no?

CUNNINGHAM

A minefield?

MARCEL

For gossip. For vengeance. For high school to blow up on itself.

CUNNINGHAM

No, not at all. It's an opportunity to treat our students as adults.
"Students evaluating students", that's how my mother described it to me.

MARCEL

That's so... progressive?

CUNNINGHAM

Right up your alley then.

MARCEL

No I love it, I'm all for it. I'm just surprised that *you are*.

CUNNINGHAM

I'm that uptight?

MARCEL

Well yes.

But I'm doing my job right? This is *official* procedure?

CUNNINGHAM

The official and traditional procedure.

MARCEL

But St. Anne's is so *old*.

CUNNINGHAM

You mean, waspy? You can say waspy. I'm the only one here.

MARCEL

I mean old. And this is so not *old* of us.

CUNNINGHAM

MARCEL

Stop laughing at me!

CUNNINGHAM

It's just the way we've always done it. You're fighting something that's never going to change.

MARCEL

Fighting it? No, I said love it. Just wanted to make sure I'm reading it right.

CUNNINGHAM

You're reading it right.

DR. MARCEL shuffles through some more paperwork –

CUNNINGHAM

The student council members for twelfth grade are MaryJane and Lulu.

MARCEL

CUNNINGHAM

...I'm a mind reader.

MARCEL

Ok. Well. I should let them know soon because –

CUNNINGHAM

I'll let them know. You just sit.

MARCEL

Alright, you'll let them know.

And nursing staff should be here in twenty. Which means the girls should come in around one. And that should get us out of here by the bell. Yes?

CUNNINGHAM

Look at you. What do you need me for?

MARCEL

Honestly, I'm glad you're here. I know I said you could've stayed home, but.

CUNNINGHAM

It's going to be fine. As long as we stick to the handbook with this sort of stuff, everything comes out ok.

MARCEL

You've been a part of one of these hearings before?

CUNNINGHAM

I was the subject of one of these hearings.

MARCEL

What?!

CUNNINGHAM

In ninth grade.

MARCEL

For what?

CUNNINGHAM

I got caught sucking face with Louis Parcom in the walk-in refrigerator after school.

MARCEL

And they sent you to a *disciplinary hearing*.

CUNNINGHAM

My mom had just gotten elected Head Mistress and she didn't want to be accused of nepotism or favoritism or what have you, so she got very *official* about it.

MARCEL

And your classmates testified?

CUNNINGAM

Alexandra Teagress and Molly Conroy.

MARCEL

Wow.

CUNNINGHAM

I had to work in the dining hall stocking the fridge for six months.

MARCEL

How did I never hear about this?

CUNNINGHAM

Classified.

MARCEL

You'd don't have anything classified.

CUNNINGHAM

I don't know my mother shamed me into silence, I guess.

MARCEL

In the refrigerator, though?

CUNNINGHAM

All girls school for twelve years, I was repressed.

MARCEL

You were the opposite of repressed.

CUNNINGHAM

Cheryl snuck you into school all the time.

MARCEL

Who's Cheryl?

CUNNINGHAM

Davis? Your girlfriend...

MARCEL

I wish.

CUNNINGHAM

Yes you were.

MARCEL

She was more *advanced* than me.

CUNNINGHAM

Everyone was more advanced than you.

MARCEL

I always imagined my mother would find out if I ever kissed one of her students, that she'd flunk them out of algebra as retribution.

CUNNINGHAM

Not your mom. My mom, maybe. Your mom was the best.

MARCEL

Still. Kept me out of school refrigerators – did you know Louis Parcom beat me up in the Mapes parking lot/ and I had a black eye for prom.

CUNNINGHAM

And you had a black eye for prom. Yeah, I know.

MARCEL

I can't believe you dated him.

CUNNINGHAM

We didn't date. He did my book reports.

MARCEL

Nice.

CUNNINGHAM

It was high school!

MARCEL

CUNNINGHAM

Ok fine, I was bad.

MARCEL

Harmless though. Not like this anyway.

CUNNINGHAM

Yeah, well.

Anymore questions? *Official scheduling and procedure...*?

MARCEL

You tease but I know you care about this stuff.

CUNNINGHAM

I used to *not* care as much, but. Now that she's, well. I feel like I have to care more.

MARCEL

That makes sense, this school was her baby. Not her baby, *you're* her –

CUNNINGHAM

Nope. That's right.

Pause.

MARCEL

So no pressure!

CUNNINGHAM

Mark!

MARCEL

I'm kidding. That was a terrible joke, I mean for *me too* no pressure!

CUNNINGHAM

Yeah *Head Master*, pressure's on you.

MARCEL

Don't / do that. That's not funny.

CUNNINGHAM

I shouldn't have done that. You'll be fine. Don't vommit, ok?

MARCEL

You're very mean, you know that?

CUNNINGHAM

You started it.

Beat.

MARCEL

The nurses. Then girls. Then Nadiyah. Ok?

CUNNINGHAM

Will you say her name again? I always feel like I mispronounce it.

MARCEL

Nadiyah. Nadiyah Hassan.

A shift.

Two

The hallway.

*Focus on a solitary,
NADIYAH,
fishing for books in her locker.*

*LULU ROTHAM enters.
She fumbles with her padlock.
Actually, she has no idea how to use a padlock.*

*NADIYAH drops one of her books. Boom.
She bends down to pick it up, but can't seem to reach.
She tries again.
LULU notices her struggle.
She goes to help.*

LULU picks up the book.

LULU

I was totally gonna try and avoid having to work on this book report outside class, but Sra. Robinson is literally gonna flunk me.

NADIYAH

She's the worst.

LULU

Like why do I have to call you Señora? You're not *actually* Spanish. *Actually*, you were born and raised in Bryn Mawr. Like your name is *literally* Mrs. Robinson. Deal with it.

NADIYAH

I've never thought of that.

LULU

But it's so ironic because there's no way she's ever slept with a man in her life let alone some hot younger guy.

NADIYAH

I really just don't want to do this. It's not like college is gonna see this semester's grade anyway.

LULU

Honestly I'm prayingggg that Penn State takes mercy on my soul because I literally will die if I went through twelve years of St. Anne's just to go to community.

MARYJANE CUNNINGHAM enters.

MARYJANE

St. Anne's doesn't send girls to community college.

LULU

Ohmygod MJ. How are you? What are you doing here?

MARYJANE

I'm ok.

NADIYAH

I'm sorry about your grandmother.

MARYJANE

Thanks.

LULU

I didn't think you were coming back until Monday.

MARYJANE

My mom had to come into the office for some special meeting, I don't know.

LULU

That's weird.

NADIYAH

What's it for?

MARYJANE

She doesn't really tell me anything.

LULU

Did you hear yet?!

MARYJANE

Mrs. Fellers says sometime this week.

LULU

I thought they were supposed to let you know yesterday.

MARYJANE

By April 1st.

LULU

Eeee!

MARYJANE

She told me to be optimistic. Best chance of getting in out of the past three graduating classes.

LULU

She said that?!

MARYJANE

In so many words.

LULU

How many?

MARYJANE

Her praise is rather ineffable.

NADIYAH

Ha. Ha.

LULU

Uneffable?

MARYJANE

Ineffable. SAT baby.

LULU

Bite me.

MARYJANE

You're still waiting too?

NADIYAH

Yup.

MARYJANE

Fingers crossed.

LULU

Last night I did a college rain dance.

NADIYAH

Bring on the rain, but if my scholarship doesn't come through, I'm not going anywhere.

MARYJANE

No you're smart. You'll be fine.

NADIYAH

Unfortunately, that's *actually* not how they work.

MARYJANE

But you have so much going for you.

NADIYAH

I *did* wear a burka on all my interviews. Affirmative action baby!

MARYJANE

Ha. Ha.

NADIYAH

Checked *all* the boxes that apply.

LULU

I thought about checking Native American, but apparently they ask you to prove a bloodline, and I forget which tribes came from Pennsylvania –

MARYJANE

You're an idiot.

NADIYAH

I don't actually own a burka.

LULU

Just the headscarf.

MARYJANE

It's called a hijab.

LULU

Are all burkas black? Like could you get a crushed-velvet magenta –

NADIYAH

They're not meant to be flashy.

MARYJANE [*To LULU*]

Do you hear yourself when you talk?

NADIYAH

How freaked out would you be if I came in one day with a one on?

LULU

If it was crushed velvet, I'd be like whhooaa.

MARYJANE

You'd be way out of uniform. Marcel would get out his handbook.

LULU

Marcel doesn't care about that sort of stuff –

A crackling from the intercom above:

MARCEL

Is this the – oh, it’s on, it’s on.

Good morning scholars: It’s me! Dr. Marcel – Ms. Henderson is sick, So.
I’m doing the – announcements. Alrighty.

It is the last day to stop by the used book sale in the lower school gallery – be sure to check it out.

Oh – I forgot, the 27th. March 27th. Wednesday. Is the date.

Today the *Good Measures* will be singing for us during fourth period and varsity basketball will be dismissed from class at 2:40pm for their game against... against – Our Lady of Mercy. Wish the Angels luck!

Reminder: the annual spring dance is in two weeks. Please tell your parents that we are in need of one more volunteer chaperone. We will be checking hem length! ... so don’t, well.
Just tell your parents about chaperones.

Let’s see....the word of the day is resolute.

MARYJANE

Admirably purposeful, determined and unwavering.

MARCEL

Let us pray:

The girls join in the morning ritual, by miming the prayer of the day with the intercom:

MARCEL

Lord,
May all that we do this day,
from morning until night,
begin with your inspiration,
and continue with your powerful help.
May our work this day
be rooted in love and mercy,
that we might love you,
and love our neighbors,
as perfectly as you love us.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

LULU [*Teasing*]

I hope you’re not so *resolute* on Princeton that you haven’t applied anywhere else.

MARYJANE

That’s not how you use it in a sentence.

LULU

A rejection letter might be a blessing in disguise.

MARYJANE

Why would you even say that?

LULU

Orange is totally gonna wash you out.

MARYJANE

I'm going to chapel.

MARYJANE exits down the hall.

LULU

I can't believe she came back already. Like I know she has a stick up her ass about college, but her *grandmother* died. And Mrs. Cunningham. That's like, her mom.

I don't know, they're just so intense sometimes.

NADIYAH

Yeah, I don't know.

LULU finishes putting books in her locker.

LULU

What do you do when we're at chapel?

NADIYAH

Nothing.

LULU

At all?

NADIYAH

Homework? I don't know.

LULU

You ever pray by yourself?

NADIYAH

Nope.

LULU

Never?

NADIYAH

With my family.

LULU

So you don't really care.

NADIYAH

As much as I'm supposed to I guess.

LULU

Enough that you asked not to go to Chapel.

NADIYAH

My parents asked.

LULU

But you agreed.

NADIYAH

Would you wanna go to my mosque?

LULU

I'd go. I'd like to see it I think.

NADIYAH

Nothing to see.

LULU

I went to my neighbors Bat Mitzvah in seventh grade. I don't really remember much about the synagogue, but they gave out monogrammed sweatshirts as party favors after – it was kind of awesome.

NADIYAH

That's not what mosque is like.

LULU

That's not what church is like either.

Pause.

NADIYAH

Do you like it?

LULU

Chapel? No it blows.

NADIYAH

But do you believe in all of it?

LULU

I need as much help getting into heaven as I can get.

NADIYAH

So you buy into that?

LULU

I don't know. I like the idea that someone's looking out for me.

Beat.

LULU

I'm gonna be late, so.

NADIYAH

See you later.

LULU

Sorry about MJ before.

NADIYAH

What about her?

LULU

About the scholarship stuff.

NADIYAH

It's whatever.

LULU

She's inconsiderate about that kind of stuff and kind of a drama queen so if it were me, I'd kinda wanna hit her in the face.

NADIYAH

But it's not.

LULU

She just gets upset by people who are as smart as her, that's all.

NADIYAH

Good luck to her at Princeton then.

LULU

If she gets in.

NADIYAH

Haven't her parents paid somebody off by now?

LULU

They don't pay people off. They make *charitable donations*.

NADIYAH

Yeah...

LULU

Mrs. Cunningham doesn't call in favors. *If it's meant to be, God will provide.*

NADIYAH

Strings have been pulled. Mark my words.

LULU

No seriously. She believes in merit.

NADIYAH

How noble.

LULU

Plus MJ is too arrogant to think she needs any outside help.

NADIYAH

You always talk about her like this?

LULU

Like what?

NADIYAH

Like you hate her.

LULU

I don't hate her! I love-hate her. We love-hate each other.

NADIYAH

Nice.

LULU

You know what I mean, like if your best friend has a boyfriend and you don't, you secretly hope they break up, and if you both have boyfriends, you think about how much hotter yours is. But not actually. Actually you're just happy for each other.

NADIYAH

Lulu, you're a mess.

LULU

That's what my therapist says.

NADIYAH

She says that?

LULU

Her praise is rather ineffable.

NADIYAH

LULU

You wanna get your nails done with me after school?

NADIYAH

Really?

LULU

Sorry, is that like – are we just school friends?

NADIYAH

I don't know.

LULU

–Sorry.

NADIYAH

–No I mean. I can't.

LULU

–You're not allowed to get your nails done?

NADIYAH

–What?

LULU

–Do you have rules about that?

NADIYAH

–What are you talking about?

LULU

–Sorry, sorry. I don't know.

NADIYAH

I have to go to work after school.

LULU

Ohh ok. What's that place called again?

NADIYAH

Suds n' Bubbles.

LULU

Do they at least give you get a discount?

NADIYAH

Sometimes they'll let me steam my uniform for free.

LULU

My mom would die! She's always ironing my pleats.

NADIYAH

My dad is a weirdo about pleats.

LULU

Actually?

NADIYAH

He hates when we leave the house wrinkled.

LULU

Is he like a mister mom?

NADIYAH

So bad.

LULU

Like packs your lunch and tucks you in?

NADIYAH

I'm not seven.

LULU

But that's so nice he's around I mean.

NADIYAH

Why wouldn't my Dad be around?

LULU

No, I mean, I just don't know your situation—

NADIYAH

There's no situation.

LULU

No, that came out wrong—

NADIYAH

You don't need to apologize, we're just school friends.

LULU

No.

NADIYAH

Yeah, in a *love-hate* sort of way.

LULU

Wait, what?

NADIYAH

I really don't need people like that today.

Pause.

LULU

I'm sorry I said anything. I'm late to Chapel anyway.

I really was just asking.

NADIYAH

It's fine, Lulu.

LULU

I just thought, well. Just cause we graduating soon doesn't mean it's too late, to like. I don't know.

I think everybody needs a friend sometimes.

LULU retreats down the hall.

NADIYAH watches her go.

A shift.

Three.

The office.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM and DR. MARCEL continue their discussion.

CUNNINGHAM

Who was that lady in blue at the funeral?

MARCEL

Who?

CUNNINGHAM

Sitting next to you. Cute, but a little schoolmarm-y.

MARCEL

Oh. That's um. That's Jennifer.

CUNNINGHAM

Ohhh *that's* Jennifer?

MARCEL

I didn't introduce her because –

CUNNINGHAM

–Oh no, it's fine–

MARCEL

–It felt, just like–

CUNNINGHAM

–I totally get it–

MARCEL

–And I wasn't going to bring her at all because the circumstances were –

CUNNINGHAM

–Of course–

MARCEL

–But she said she'd like to be there *for me*, which was, um.

CUNNINGHAM

–Really sweet.

MARCEL

–New for me, yeah. So. Yeah.

CUNNINGHAM

Mark this is so great.

MARCEL

Yeah, it's nice. I'm not like, I'm too old to get my hopes up, but. All around good so far.

CUNNINGHAM

That's wonderful. She looked nice.

MARCEL

She is.

CUNNINGHAM

-I didn't mean schoolmarm-y - she's very attractive.

MARCEL

-It's fine.

CUNNINGHAM

I'm excited about this! Are you excited?

MARCEL

I am. She's coming to my sisters for Easter actually.

CUNNINGHAM

And that's the first time with your family?

MARCEL

We ran into Jerry at the supermarket once, but.

CUNNINGHAM

Well who cares what Jerry has to say.

MARCEL

Exactly, yeah.

CUNNINGHAM

- You're nervous!

MARCEL

- Yeah.

CUNNINGHAM

- I love making you uncomfortable.

MARCEL

- I'm not, uh. It's just nice to talk about her with someone.

MARCEL

Do I sound like I'm in middle school?

CUNNINGHAM

Look at us, we're all giddy.

MARCEL

Well I should've told you before.

CUNNINGHAM

I get it, you want to keep it casual and I'm a gossip —

MARCEL

You're not —

CUNNINGHAM

Yes, I am. I confess to it to Father George every week.

MJ's the same way. It's just about the only thing she gets from me —

It's why I don't have a Facebook.

MARCEL

Also because you're fifty-two.

CUNNINGHAM

A young fifty-two!

MARCEL

A very young.

Pause.

CUNNINGHAM

But the kids and the Internet, nothing is sacred.

MARCEL

Which is why it's so surprising that Nadiyah's been able to be so discrete.

CUNNINGHAM

I want to help her keep it quiet. That feels like the right thing.

MARCEL

Has MJ said anything to you?

CUNNINGHAM

She's a Princeton one-track mind these days.

MARCEL

When does she hear?

CUNNINGHAM

Supposed to be yesterday.

The family could take some good news this week.

MARCEL

I'm sure it will be.

CUNNINGHAM

But I certainly would've heard something from Lulu if the students knew about any of it.

MARCEL

Because they all *do* pay such close attention to her.

CUNNINGHAM

What do you mean?

MARCEL

Not overtly. Not being mean or anything, just.

Before her, the closest they had ever come to a Muslim was the six o'clock news.

CUNNINGHAM

It's hard to place blame there.

MARCEL

No but they thought she was from Iraq.

CUNNINGHAM

And she's.... / Nigerian.

MARCEL

Nigerian. Yes.

I just, I feel a little helpless here. At least when I was her English teacher I had a way in.

CUNNINGHAM

You're still connected. The girls still love you. And so does the board.

MARCEL

Oh please, they have you here to check up on me.

CUNNINGHAM

I resent that.

MARCEL

CUNNINGHAM

I do! You're the one with all the nervousness and questions. I'm just here to help.

MARCEL

With no input from the board whatsoever...

CUNNINGHAM

You're still new –

MARCEL

New?

CUNNINGHAM

Not new-new, new to the job.

MARCEL

It's been almost a year.

CUNNINGHAM

And a lot of things are changing.

MARCEL

They knew I thought the school needed a facelift when they promoted me. If they were actually worried about enrollment, they need to be willing to do something about it, because. We're only going to survive on strong SAT scores for so long.

CUNNINGHAM

Thirty percent of last year's class was National Merit Scholars, so.

MARCEL

Thirty percent of a class of thirty-seven girls. That's just too small to be sustainable.

CUNNINGHAM

But our reputation isn't going anywhere as long as our core values don't get lost.

MARCEL

What *core values* have I overturned? She is not a *core value*.

CUNNINGHAM

I know that. *They* said that, I didn't say that. *I* would never say anything like that.

MARCEL

Well I'm not sure how I'm supposed to talk to you anymore.

CUNNINGHAM

You act like they want to fire you.

MARCEL

Then why are you babysitting me?

CUNNINGHAM

I'm not babysitting you. The board fully trusts in your decision.

MARCEL

My decision.

CUNNINGHAM

Well it's not mine.

MARCEL

You're not going to help me?

CUNNINGHAM

Are you kidding? Three seconds ago you're jumping on your soapbox and now you need my help?

MARCEL

I need *your* help. Not the board's.

CUNNINGHAM

Well I'm part of the board. They have my ear and I have theirs, but that doesn't mean I'm not here in service of you or the girl.

MARCEL heads towards the office door.

CUNNINGHAM

Where are you going?

MARCEL

I need to pee. Or do you want to watch me doing that too?

CUNNINGHAM

Don't raise your voice at me.

MARCEL

Well Jesus, Ellie!

CUNNINGHAM

Don't do that.

MARCEL

I'm sorry, but. This all feels very final to me.

CUNNINGHAM

I don't know why, No one has made a decision yet. We're being methodical. We're going through all the appropriate procedures.

MARCEL

But any official action seems so permanent.

CUNNINGHAM

She's pregnant, Mark. What could be more permanent than a child?

MARCEL exits the office.

A shift.

Four.

The hallway.

NADIYAH gathers books inside her locker.

She heads down the hall.

DR. MARCEL enters from the office.

MARCEL

Oh! Nadiyah wait a moment—

I'm glad I caught you.

NADIYAH

Yes, Sir?

MARCEL

Did you talk to your parents?

NADIYAH

My mom says she's sorry she can't be here this afternoon.

MARCEL

Not everyone has free afternoons.

NADIYAH

Still she thanks you for meeting her last night. She said you were very kind.

I told her you would be, but.

MARCEL

I'm glad we got to meet face to face.

NADIYAH

It's sort of a trip to get out here, so.

MARCEL

It was no problem at all.

And what about you? How are you feeling?

NADIYAH

I'm good.

MARCEL

That's all?

NADIYAH

MARCEL

C'mon Nadiyah.

NADIYAH

It's embarrassing.

MARCEL

Would you prefer to talk to Nurse Wilkens?

NADIYAH

That's not...

You're one of the ones who like me.

MARCEL

Nadiyah, we all like you.

NADIYAH

Knows me.

MARCEL

All the more reason not to hold back with me then.

NADIYAH

It's weird now.

MARCEL

Nothing has changed. I'm still your teacher.

NADIYAH

No.

MARCEL

Not your English teacher, but your—

NADIYAH

It's just weird.

MARCEL

I don't see how.

NADIYAH

Then why are we having a disciplinary hearing? If nothing is different, what are we even doing today?

MARCEL

There are a lot of moving parts.

NADIYAH

MARCEL

I'm on your side, Dear. We all are.

NADIYAH

It's probably better this way.

MARCEL

Better which way?

NADIYAH

I don't actually fit in here.

MARCEL

That's ridiculous.

NADIYAH

I don't mean smart-wise, I know I'm smart. People are just, um.

Pause.

NADIYAH

Do you believe in affirmative action?

MARCEL

Sure I do.

NADIYAH

Sure you do.

MARCEL

You're angry with me.

NADIYAH

And that's why I'm here, right?

MARCEL

Where is this coming from?

NADIYAH

Everyone has such a sense of humor.

MARCEL

About you? Did someone make fun of you?

NADIYAH

We're all just kidding around.

MARCEL

Who was?

LULU enters down the hall.

LULU

Dr. Marcel!

NADIYAH

I have class, Sir.

MARCEL

You can talk to me, Nadiyah.

NADIYAH

I just want to be in class.

NADIYAH exits.

LULU

Dr. Marcel! I figured since Mrs. Cunningham was in the office you wouldn't need me for work-study third period.

MARCEL

Oh really?

LULU

I mean, like, I didn't want to interrupt so I started catching up on my Jane Austen.

MARCEL

Ahh yes.

MARCEL takes the book from her.

He cherishes it a moment.

LULU

I got a test on Monday, got any cheat sheets for me?

MARCEL

Cheat sheets?

LULU

No, not *cheat sheets*. I already read the spark notes, but like, do you know which passages he's gonna use?

MARCEL

Lulu.

LULU

I mean you have to know. You must've taught this class for at least twenty-five years.

MARCEL

Ms. Rotham, how old do you think I am?

LULU

Ok twenty years.

MARCEL

Saxby writes his own tests, Dear.

LULU

Worth a shot.

MARCEL

But I am a sucker for Sense and Sensibility.

LULU

I've been told I have neither of those things.

He laughs a moment, but wishes he didn't.

MARCEL

No, I mean. Don't sell yourself short, you're far wiser than you let on.

LULU

I think I have you fooled, Sir.

MARCEL

Not at all. Your help in the office is unparalleled.

LULU

Work-study is a mandatory part of my scholarship requirement.

MARCEL

What about being elected a class representative? That's a competitive post.

LULU

I was MJ's running mate. I wouldn't've won by myself.

MARCEL

I don't think that's true. You bring an entirely different skillset.

LULU shrugs.

LULU

I'm just sort of freaking out I guess.

MARCEL

When do you hear back?

LULU

Imminently.

MARCEL

Good word.

LULU

Just kind of sucks.

MARCEL

Don't say sucks.

LULU

Sorry – sorry. It just, like. How am I going to get into college if I couldn't even get into the *Good Measures*?

MARCEL

I didn't know you tried out.

LULU

Only as a bucket list senior-year-resume-stuffer. Not like I actually cared.

MARCEL [*Checking his watch*]

They should be parading through here any minute now.

LULU

I should go then. Mary Haliday got in instead of me and she always stares me down all smug and mellifluous.

MARCEL

Mellifluous?

LULU

MJ makes me quiz her. Sometimes I catch on.

MARCEL

Well can you sing?

LULU

I mean I thought so. I've been volunteering with the special needs choir at church since I was, like, pre-pubescent. But now if I think about it, how are *they* supposed to tell if I have a good voice?

MARCEL

Lulu, please!

LULU

But I said special needs. Which, by the way, is a totally ridiculous saying.

MARCEL

And why is that?

LULU

Everybody has special needs. The peanut-free kids. Or like the honors math kids. Or, I don't know this is stupid, but even like, single parent kids.

MARCEL

That's true but the point is to not use uglier jargon.

LULU

Don't you think we're missing the point – we're all so ready to help the special needs kids – to go out of our way but when's the last time someone went out of their way for your special needs, or mine? And I know it sounds like I'm saying I'm against helping out retarded / kids but I'm not.

MARCEL

Ms. Rotham!

LULU

-oooooh. I see what I did there. My therapist says I forget to filter.

MARCEL

God teaches us to take care of all of his children.

LULU

I guess.

Pause.

MARCEL

Lulu, can you do something for me?

LULU

Yes, Sir?

MARCEL

I want you to tell me something you're good at.

LULU

I was just philosophizing, Sir. I should get to the library.

MARCEL

Ok but, just. Tell me something you like about yourself.

LULU

I'm not suicidal, Dr. Marcel.

MARCEL

Dear Lord, Lulu. I don't think you're suicidal. I just want you to tell me one thing you're proud of.

LULU

Well we know I suck at singing.

MARCEL

Don't say suck.

LULU

Sorry – I'm not musically inclined.

MARCEL

Ok.

LULU

And I'm never on time.

MARCEL

Something *you are* good at – we don't need to use process of elimination.

LULU

Apparently I don't even know / how to be a good friend.

From the office:

CUNNINGHAM

Mark?

MARCEL

A good friend. That's wonderful!

LULU

No Sir, you didn't hear me. / I said I'm *not* good friend.

From the office:

CUNNINGHAM

Mark? Are you there?

MARCEL [*To LULU*]

Good work, Dear. Good talk.

DR. MARCEL scurries back inside his office.

LULU

Sure.

A shift.

Five

MARCEL enters his office.

CUNNINGHAM is waiting for him.

MARCEL

I'm sorry about before. I didn't mean to lash out at you.

CUNNINGHAM

What are friends for?

MARCEL

It's just, I'm insecure about all this, because—

CUNNINGHAM

You miss teaching.

MARCEL

CUNNINGHAM

It's barely been a whole year. You've got to give it time.

MARCEL

I thought it'd feel more natural by now.

CUNNINGHAM

You still interact with students, don't you?

MARCEL

Not as much as I would like.

CUNNINGHAM

But as department head all you talked about was wanting more of a say in school policy.

MARCEL

Lulu told me she's reading *Sense and Sensibility*. Makes me nostalgic, that's all.

CUNNINGHAM

You saw Lulu? Did she tell you the good news?

MARCEL

She said she didn't hear yet!

CUNNINGHAM

No, she hasn't heard, but.

CUNNINGHAM

Marcy broke down to me, how she's afraid that even if Lulu was accepted she wasn't going to be able to afford it. Just totally hysterical, so.

Dan and I have offered to pay her tuition.

MARCEL

I'm sorry?

CUNNINGHAM

Not all of it, but.

MARCEL

Wow.

CUNNINGHAM

She's been through a lot.

MARCEL

I didn't realize you had that much money.

CUNNINGHAM

-Mark!

MARCEL

-Sorry, but. That's a lot of money.

CUNNINGHAM

-I said, not all of it.

MARCEL

-You think she'll get in now?

CUNNINGHAM

-What do I know?

MARCEL

-I don't know.

CUNNINGHAM

-I thought you were close with her.

MARCEL

-I am.

CUNNINGHAM

-So why are you acting like this is a bad thing?

MARCEL

–I’m not. It’s a wonderful thing.

CUNNINGHAM

–Are you asking me if I’m paying her way in?

MARCEL

–What are you talking about?

CUNNINGHAM

–Because I’m not.

MARCEL

–You’re putting words in my mouth.

CUNNINGHAM

Lulu and MaryJane have been best friends for a decade and I’ve never known her to be academically inclined. So what? So I’m just going to stand by and let her *not go to college?* I resent the accusation that my efforts are anything but honest and charitable.

MARCEL

I never said they weren’t.

CUNNINGHAM

It’s a shame that the church and the school can’t offer larger sums.

MARCEL

It is.

CUNNINGHAM

And St. Anne’s promises its students one-hundred percent graduation, one-hundred percent matriculation. It takes a village, I’m just doing my job.

MARCEL

You know Nadiyah’s on scholarship here too?

CUNNINGHAM

MARCEL

I’m kidding! –oh my goodness –stop! I’m kidding!

CUNNINGHAM

I try to help where I can –

MARCEL

I was completely joking. Ellie, I was / *completely joking.*

CUNNINGHAM

I do, I have only good intentions –

MARCEL

Ellie, stop it. Don't look like that.

CUNNINGHAM

MARCEL

Ellie! This is why I don't use sarcasm.

CUNNINGHAM

Because you're bad at it.

MARCEL

Because I'm very bad at it!

CUNNINGHAM

I'm *not* choosing *not* to help her.

MARCEL

El, you're one of the most generous people I know.

CUNNINGHAM

I could give more –

MARCEL

This school is on its feet because of you and your family.

CUNNINGHAM

But it's not enough.

MARCEL

I wish I didn't say anything. It's not your burden.

CUNNINGHAM

Maybe I should talk to her parents. See if I can help.

MARCEL

I've talked to her mother.

CUNNINGHAM

When is she coming in today?

MARCEL

I met her downtown yesterday. She can't take off work today.

CUNNINGHAM

Not even for this? What does she do?

MARCEL

She's a hospice nurse.

CUNNINGHAM

And her father?

MARCEL

He's some sort of religious leader at their mosque. And also, an insurance rep? Something like that, I know he has a second job.

CUNNINGHAM

Well what did she say? Was she devastated? Do they need help?

MARCEL

They want this to remain as much of a family matter as possible.

CUNNINGHAM

We all want that but that's not exactly an option.

MARCEL

Well it's not public knowledge yet.

CUNNINGHAM

Yet, exactly. I just can hear pretty pretty princess Tammy Gregerson in my ear, her and the rest of the parents association throwing a special mass or a petition, or a bake sale!

DR. MARCEL laughs.

CUNNINGHAM

And all the mainline mommies start the whispering and enrollment just....

MRS. CUNNINGHAM makes the sound of a downward spiral.

MARCEL

Let's not go there.

CUNNINGHAM

It's down eleven percent.

MARCEL

I'm aware.

CUNNINGHAM

This isn't the kind of word of mouth campaign the board was aiming for.

MARCEL

But being a pregnant teenager doesn't mean what it used to mean.

CUNNINGHAM

Oh yeah it's the new cool thing these days?

MARCEL

It's not the 1950s. We're not in the middle of some place in the cornfields, it's not unheard of.

CUNNINGHAM

But this is not not a *big deal*.

MARCEL

Of course it's a big deal.

CUNNINGHAM

And it's not exactly Catholic.

MARCEL

No not exactly.

CUNNINGHAM

It's not exactly Muslim either.

MARCEL

It's not.

CUNNINGHAM

So I'm allowed to be upset.

MARCEL

I'd hope so, it's terribly upsetting.

CUNNINGHAM

Have you talked to Father George?

MARCEL

I haven't.

CUNNINGHAM

Should we not?

MARCEL

I was going to ask you.

CUNNINGHAM

He might be able to offer us guidance.

MARCEL

That's probably right.

CUNNINGHAM

But I really do want to keep the details close. The more people know, the more likely it is for one stupid tweet or buzz and then we're just –

CUNNINGHAM makes the sound of a downward spiral.

MARCEL

Well *I* don't have a twitter, *do you?*

CUNNINGHAM

No I don't have a – Mark, what did we say about your sarcasm?

MARCEL

I just don't want you to get too, well. Frazzled. / The girls are coming in soon.

CUNNINGHAM

I'm not frazzled, *you're* nonchalant—

MARCEL

We have a long day, it's too early to be—

DR. MARCEL makes the sound of a downward spiral.

CUNNINGHAM [*No longer laughing:*]

There's a lot for me to consider in this decision.

MARCEL

I thought I was the one making the decision.

CUNNINGHAM

You are—

MARCEL

Can we just, stop for a second. I don't want to argue with you.

CUNNINGHAM

Afraid you'll lose?

MARCEL

Maybe it's not about me.

CUNNINGHAM

You're afraid you'll lose.

MARCEL

Maybe this is one of those things where there's just nothing to say. It's a feeling, or I don't know a mutual understanding or something.

CUNNINGHAM

There's a lot to still talk about, Mark.

MARCEL

Even so, just sit with me a moment, El.

Just for a little while.

They sit for a moment.

*The Good Measures rendition of Amazing Grace is heard in the hall.
A shift.*

Six.

The hallway.

MJ and LULU listen to the end of Amazing Grace being sung nearby.

LULU

Do you think that song is about a girl?

MARYJANE

No.

LULU

Like he's writing about an ex-lover, or wife or whoever, and how much he misses her.

MARYJANE

It's about redemption, Lulu.

LULU

Yea like Grace saved him from his sorry sorry life.

MARYJANE

You're utilizing the wrong definition of grace.

LULU

I'd like to be someone's Grace.

MARYJANE

Oh god.

LULU

I wonder if Jonny thinks about me as his Grace.

MARYJANE

Because he's such a catch?

LULU pulls out her phone.

LULU

Isn't he though?!

MARYJANE

If you're into acne...

LULU

He's on Accutane. It's hereditary.

MARYJANE

Hereditary, good word.

LULU

He asked me yesterday if I want to stay together in college.

MARYJANE

What'd you say?

LULU

That I didn't know yet.

MARYJANE

You're not sure you want to?

LULU

I think it'll be fun to be able to meet new people.

NADIYAH enters, passing by quickly.

LULU

Nadia! I didn't know you had a free now too?

NADIYAH

Calc with Dr. O'Reilly, three minutes ago –

LULU

Please don't be mad at me.

NADIYAH

I'm not mad at you.

MARYJANE

What happened?

NADIYAH

Literally nothing.

MARYJANE

Sounds about right.

LULU pulls out her phone

LULU [Re: Jonny]

Don't you think he's cute?

NADIYAH

Um...

MARYJANE

His skin, right?

LULU

His skin is not that bad!

NADIYAH

This is your new boyfriend?

MARYJANE

She wants to break up with him so she can sleep around in college.

LULU

That's not what I said.

MARYJANE

Basically.

LULU

Are you staying with your boyfriend next year?

NADIYAH

We broke up.

LULU

Noo!

MARYJANE

When?

LULU

Is that why you seem sad?

NADIYAH

I'm not sad.

MARYJANE

Was it mutual?

NADIYAH

Yeah...yeah. You know he's older, in college...

We got different things going on, so. Just got a little complicated lately.

LULU

I get it.

MARYJANE

Boys suck.

LULU

Like you know.

NADIYAH

True.

MARYJANE

Nobody needs that distraction.

LULU

Oh god please, you sound like your mom. Except she was probably married with a kid by nineteen.

MARYJANE

Twenty-four.

LULU

So hypocritical. She's all like, go to college, change the world, don't date, but you better have a kid before you're thirty.

MARYJANE

She doesn't say that.

LULU

My mom does.

MARYJANE

I'm not really that interested in getting married.

NADIYAH

Like at all?

MARYJANE

I mean, not *at all*. After law school maybe if it lines up.

LULU

You're not not going to get married.

MARYJANE

I don't know.

LULU

Have you told this to your mom?

MARYJANE
Obviously no.

LULU
My mom would literally kill herself if I never had kids.

MARYJANE
That's not true.

LULU
That's true for every mom. Nadia, doesn't your mom want you to have kids?

NADIYAH
Um, yeah / I don't know, yeah.

LULU
See.

MARYJANE
I'm not saying I don't ever want a family, just.

NADIYAH
You want to have a job.

MARYJANE
Yeah.

LULU
Me too, I just don't want to be lonely.

MARYJANE
They're not mutually exclusive.

LULU
I never really understood what that meant.

NADIYAH
Like you can have a job and not be lonely. Like you can have two things at once.

MARYJANE
I just don't see the draw in dating some bespectacled-video gaming-high school-snot nose.

LULU
So what you're really saying is that you're not above marriage, you're just waiting for a Princeton boy.

MARYJANE
What I'm really saying is shut the fuck up Lulu.

NADIYAH

Ha!

LULU

Fingers crossed for Princeton, girl.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM enters:

CUNNINGHAM

What are you ladies doing out of class?

LULU

MJ and I have free.

NADIYAH

...and I'm running late for calculus.

Good to see you, Mrs. Cunningham

CUNNINGHAM

Good to see you, Dear.

NADIYAH exits down the hall.

CUNNINGHAM

How are you, Honey?

MARYJANE

I'm good.

CUNNINGHAM

You're ok? Not too behind in class.

MARYJANE

I'll be fine.

Pause.

CUNNINGHAM

So I wanted to talk to you because there is a disciplinary hearing set for one o'clock today and as the senior class council members you are being asked to attend and offer the student body testimony.

LULU

Oh my god, really?

MARYJANE

You're just telling us this now?

CUNNINGHAM

We wanted to keep the hearing a private matter as long as possible.

LULU

You didn't trust us to keep a secret?

CUNNINGHAM

We just wanted to be cautious. And now that you do know, please do keep this to yourselves.

LULU

Yeah, totally.

MARYJANE

Of course.

CUNNINGHAM

Lulu?

LULU

It's like barely an hour of secret, that's completely doable.

MARYJANE

I'll watch her.

CUNNINGHAM

Alright then.

MARYJANE

We're going to the library.

CUNNINGHAM

Dr. Marcel and I will meet you here after lunch.

CUNNINGHAM returns to the office.

MARYJANE

Bye, Mom.

LULU

See you later!

*MARYJANE and LULU exit down the hall.
A shift.*

SEVEN.

*MRS. CUNNINGHAM enters the office.
DR. MARCEL is searching for something.*

CUNNINGHAM
What are you doing?

MARCEL
I can't find my handbook.

CUNNINGHAM
Don't you have it memorized?

MARCEL
No I do not have it memorized.

He opens a file on his desk.

MARCEL
Have you read through all of this?

CUNNINGHAM
She's a good student. Good recs, good writer.

MARCEL
You read the poems?

CUNNINGHAM
Some of them.

*DR. MARCEL passes MRS. CUNNINGHAM a piece of paper.
She considers the page as a spotlight appears on NADIYAH in the hallway.
A manifesto:*

NADIYAH

My name is Nadiyah.

Not Nadia.

Not Nawdia.

Not, *do you have a nickname?*

Nadiyah is what my mother calls me. It lends itself to confusion,
lends itself to the neck-pivot in homeroom
because no one knows a, Nadiyah?

can say a, Nadiyah?

Say it again.

Nadiyah.

I lend myself to you

soaking in the lessons of your fore fathers, mine
tucks me in at night.

Advanced placement gerrymandering
me here, pulling strings

on my mind, opening it up

to worlds and words *ain't no body 'spect me to know.*

She's such a bright student, they say.

Thank you, I say.

Silent insolence bubbles up, I push it down—

Thank you.

Gratitude runneth over,

pouring into new texts, my lexicon grows,

brain swells, *look at her go!* But please

don't confuse my appreciation with jealousy, I see me no less than
these designer girls, I don't design my world

after you or yours, mine do me more than fine, I told you,

I come from a father who tucks me in at night.

A house of love, with a leaky roof,

but a house of love *no* less.

So call me what you need to call me,

name me what you need to name me.

Just let me drink from your well.

The leak in my roof drips much too slow.

A moment when NADIYAH stands taller.

Spotlight out.

She exits.

CUNNINGHAM takes a moment to reflect.

CUNNINGHAM

Am I saying her name wrong?

MARCEL

It's Nadiyah.

CUNNINGHAM

Nuhdiyah, ok.

What was the assignment?

MARCEL

Just a standard poetry unit. McNeal's senior English.

CUNNINGHAM

Oh Lord, McNeal? Is he still spending three weeks a year on comma splices?

MARCEL

He doesn't do that.

CUNNINGHAM

Uh yeah he does— October. All of October.

MARCEL

You're exaggerating.

CUNNINGHAM

And you know I still mess up a while and awhile. What is the difference actually?

MARCEL

Google it.

CUNNINGHAM

And *you* miss teaching.

MARCEL

—How old is he now?

CUNNINGHAM

—Well Mom with eighty-one so...

MARCEL

—He is not eighty.

CUNNINGHAM

—His tweed jacket is.

MARCEL

—Does that thing smell, or what?

CUNNINGHAM

–He’s got to be pushing seventy-five.

MARCEL

–It’s offensive really. Maybe I’ll get him a new one for his birthday or something.

CUNNINGHAM [*Re: poem*]

–I’m surprised he’s into this.

MARCEL

–It’s good!

CUNNINGHAM

It’s wonderful. It’s just not very McNeal.

MARCEL

There is a new normal here. Not like when you were a student.

CUNNINGHAM

You don’t say.

MARCEL

Sometimes I feel like I learn more from them than the other way around.

CUNNINGHAM

MJ is so much smarter than me at her age, it’s almost like she’s not even mine.

MARCEL

And Nadiyah. The whole department has been introduced to slam poetry because of her. We made a little home together there.

Pause.

CUNNINGHAM

So I talked to Anna Gutierrez on the phone this morning about it.

MARCEL

You told her?

CUNNINGHAM

The board wanted to hear what she had to say as Nadiyah’s advisor.

MARCEL

Alright.

CUNNINGHAM

She took me by surprise actually. She got on the phone and was really very angry.

MARCEL

With you?

CUNNINGHAM

With Nadia. I imagined she'd be sympathetic, she knows what growing up in that neighborhood is like. I thought she'd offer an important perspective or, I don't know, be even-keeled about it at least.

MARCEL

Right.

CUNNINGHAM

But she was *so* pissed and honestly, I was really taken aback.

MARCEL

Well it's upsetting. We're all upset.

CUNNINGHAM

But I told her she can't be upset at Nadia, that's not the right way to feel. This girl is lost and scared, on and on like that, but. But after I talked to her, well. I got angry too.

MARCEL

She made a mistake.

CUNNINGHAM

Kids make mistakes all the time. They crash the car. They skip confession. They *confuse* Tylenol with Xanax. This isn't a mistake.

MARCEL

She certainly didn't do it on purpose.

CUNNINGHAM

We made a home for her, like you said, you just said that. And now she's just gone and ...

MARCEL

But not on purpose. This isn't out of disrespect.

CUNNINGHAM

–Not out of disrespect. But Anna even said, Anna stuck her neck out for this girl.

MARCEL

– Yeah.

CUNNINGHAM

– She brought her to us out of some, I don't even know. Where'd she go before?

MARCEL

The school closed because of cuts.

CUNNINGHAM

– That’s right.

MARCEL

– I forget which one.

CUNNINGHAM

And as far as I know, Nadia has been for the most part happy here, or I don’t know *happy*, but. She’s comfortable, right?

MARCEL

Relatively I think.

CUNNINGHAM

MJ told me she held an assembly last year on Ramadan?

MARCEL

Ramadan, yes. Very informative assembly, I remember.

CUNNINGHAM

We’re learning from her and she’s learning from us.

MARCEL

Certainly.

CUNNINGHAM

So maybe she doesn’t have so many girlfriends, but we let her do what she needs to do. We don’t make her go to chapel, she gets to be herself.

MARCEL

I agree, El.

CUNNINGHAM

So I think Anna’s right. I think it’s right to be angry with her. Because I feel duped, or. I don’t know, disappointed.

MARCEL

Disappointed isn’t the same as angry.

Pause.

CUNNINGHAM

I would only say this to you, so please don’t judge me.

MARCEL

CUNNINGHAM

Really, only to you —

MARCEL

I understand.

CUNNINGHAM

...St. Anne's is going on one hundred forty-seven years and now, well. Now the *non-catholic* girl gets pregnant? That's just. What am I supposed to do with that?

MARCEL

Yeah.

CUNNINGHAM

I'm not saying she represents the whole of it, but. It's never happened before, that's all I mean.

MARCEL

Ok.

CUNNINGHAM

Don't say it like that.

MARCEL

CUNNINGHAM

I'm just pointing it out.

MARCEL

I get that, but. She's not *just* the non-Catholic girl—

CUNNINGHAM

That's not what I said—

MARCEL

We have to be sensitive to—

CUNNINGHAM

That's not what I think. You know I don't think that.

MARCEL

No, I know, just. C'mon, El. You can't talk like that here.

CUNNINGHAM

You said you wouldn't judge me!

MARCEL

I'm not judging you. I'm sure I was thinking it too. On some level, lots of people will think that, just. It's not a reason for St. Anne's not to be inclusive.

CUNNINGHAM

Of course it's not. That's not what I want. That's not what I was saying. I'm saying it's just a fact of the matter, that's what I mean. It's a fact, that's all.

Bursting through the office door:

MARYJANE

Mom are you in here! Mom—

CUNNINGHAM

We're in a meeting, you can't just—

MARYJANE

I need to talk to you right now

CUNNINGHAM

What's wrong?!

MARYJANE

Can you come outside? *Please?!*

MARYJANE pivots back and runs into the hall.

CUNNINGHAM

I need to—

MARCEL

Go, go! It's fine!

MRS. CUNNINGHAM leaves the office to find her daughter.

A shift.

Eight.

The hallway.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM tries to console her MARYJANE.

CUNNINGHAM

MJ.

C'mon Honey.

MARYJANE

I can't.

CUNNINGHAM

It's Princeton?

A moment of fighting gravity or something greater

as MARYJANE gasps for air.

She shakes her head 'yes'.

MARYJANE

I didn't get in.

CUNNINGHAM

Sweetheart.

MARYJANE

That was everything.

CUNNINGHAM

I know.

MARYJANE

What do I do now?

NADIYAH enters with a bagged lunch.

Shocked by the broken down MARYJANE, she halts in place and stares.

CUNNINGHAM

Excuse me, do you need something?

NADIYAH

No, sorry.

CUNNINGHAM

Don't you have class, Dear?

NADIYAH
It's lunchtime.

CUNNINGHAM
Oh.

NADIYAH
I'll just be a moment.

NADIYAH turns and hides her head in her locker.

MARYJANE
Can I go home?

CUNNINGHAM
You already missed so much school last week.

MARYJANE
I can't stay here.

CUNNINGHAM
We have the hearing in a few minutes.

MARYJANE
I still have to go?

CUNNINGHAM
We can go home right after.

MARYJANE
Please, Mom.

CUNNINGHAM
If it was any other day—

MARYJANE
Everyone's going to know.

CUNNINGHAM
Who cares about everyone, you're still the smartest girl in your class.

MARYJANE
So what?

CUNNINGHAM
I'll call Nancy tonight.

MARYJANE

She clearly doesn't have that much pull.

CUNNINGHAM

It's worth a conversation.

MARYJANE

It's over.

CUNNINGHAM

Maybe not.

MARYJANE

Just stop.

CUNNINGHAM

If there's something to be done, then—

MARYJANE

JUST STOP, just.

It's fine.

CUNNINGHAM

Now you're fine?

MARYJANE

No! Just.

Pause.

CUNNINGHAM

You deserve the world, MJ. That's all I'm trying to give you.

Pause.

CUNNINGHAM

Come on, MJ, Not here —

But MJ can't help but cry.

So MRS. CUNNINGHAM let's her

CUNNINGHAM

Sweatheart.

Ok. It's ok.

You're ok.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM holds back tears as she offers her daughter a silent prayer.

CUNNINGHAM
Alright?

MARYJANE
Yeah.

CUNNINGHAM
Alright, Honey.
Go fix yourself.

MARYJANE
What?

CUNNINGHAM
Like this –

*We watch Mrs. Cunningham 'put on a good face,' and then
We watch Mj hesitantly 'put on [the same] good face.'*

MARYJANE
Mom?

MRS. CUNNINGHAM turns back.

MARYJANE
Don't tell anyone.

CUNNINGHAM
Of course not.

She exits.

*After a long while,
Mj feels NADIYAH staring at her.*

MARYJANE
Please don't tell anyone I was crying.

NADIYAH
Do you want to talk about it?

MARYJANE
...that I didn't get into Princeton, no I don't want to talk it.

NADIYAH

Ok...

Pause.

MARYJANE

I gave up any semblance of a high school experience for them.

NADIYAH

Every girl in this school wants to be you.

MARYJANE

They're morons.

NADIYAH

I want to be you.

MARYJANE

No you don't.

NADIYAH

I'm serious.

MARYJANE

I thought you kind of hated me.

NADIYAH

I kind of do.

MARYJANE

... so?

NADIYAH

Because this is the worst thing that ever happened to you.

MARYJANE

Worst things are relative.

NADIYAH

Yeah, but—

MARYJANE

I'm allowed to have a worst thing.

NADIYAH

I never said you weren't.

MARYJANE

I really wanted this, Nadia. I shouldn't have to feel sorry for that—

NADIYAH

That's not what I meant.

MARYJANE

You know the only time I've had a beer was at Tom Manders sweet sixteen? And I was only invited because he liked Lulu and I was her ride.

NADIYAH

MARYJANE

Obviously she ended up making out with someone else and randomly Tom started hooking up with me, which was, whatever. I was drunk off *a* Corona Light and barely remember any of it except that he sort of had something garlic stuck in his braces.

That's my craziest story.

NADIYAH

That's *kind of* crazy...

MARYJANE

I'm eighteen years old. That's not crazy, that's pathetic.

NADIYAH

It's not, it's...I mean you are who you are.

MARYJANE

But I gave up high school to be this way and I didn't even get anything for it!

NADIYAH

You're really not missing much.

MARYJANE

You can say that because you've done all of it. You're normal.

NADIYAH

Nothing about my life is normal.

MARYJANE

Maybe not normal, but at least you'll go to your first choice.

NADIYAH

If they don't want you, you don't want them.

MARYJANE

You don't actually believe that.

NADIYAH

It helps sometimes.

MARYJANE

But you're gonna get in wherever you want. You're smart. You're a minority. Maybe you even took my spot or something.

NADIYAH

You can't just say that!

MARYJANE

C'mon I'm joking.

NADIYAH

I laughed about it this morning but actually it's really not that fucking funny.

MARYJANE

I'm saying it's a good thing for you. It's a plus.

NADIYAH

Oh yeah?

MARYJANE

I'm sorry. I thought we were being candid.

NADIYAH

Oooh we're being candid.

MARYJANE

I said I was sorry. I didn't mean it to be offensive.

NADIYAH sits on her knees.

MARYJANE

What are you doing—

NADIYAH

This is what it's like to be *a plus!*

NADIYAH grabs MARYJANE by the wrists, bringing her to her knees.

MARYJANE

Let go! / Nadia! Let go!

NADIYAH

C'mon. It's special. I'm soooo special.

*Now manic, NADIYAH pushes MARYJANE to the ground,
bowing her head, forcefully holding her down.*

NADIYAH recites:

NADIYAH

Tabarakasmo rabbika thil jalali wal ikram.

MARYJANE

You're hurting me! Get off! / GET THE FUCK OFF OF ME!

NADIYAH

Blessed be the name of thy Lord, Allah full of Majesty, Bounty, and Honor –

They struggle a while before MARYJANE scrambles to her feet.

MARYJANE

You're a fucking psychopath!

NADIYAH

YEAHH, I'm reeeal scary. Everybody's afraid of me.

LULU skips in.

LULU

Where were you? The dining hall had breakfast for lunch—

MARYJANE

Lulu, Lulu. / She's fucking crazy.

NADIYAH

MJ's really upset.

LULU

Ok. It's ok.

MARYJANE

She tried to make me pray with her!

LULU

What?

MARYJANE

She pulled me to the ground, like violent, like—

LULU
Wait what?

MARYJANE
Is there a bruise? / On the back of my neck, do you see?

NADIYAH
Oh please.

LULU
I don't see anything.

NADIYAH
That's because nothing happened.

MARYJANE
I was yelling stop, but she wouldn't let go!

LULU
Are you ok?

NADIYAH
That's not even close to what happened. You know she's a drama queen, you told me yourself.

MARYJANE
You said that?

LULU
No.

NADIYAH
Don't lie, Lulu. Not to your *best friend*.

MARYJANE
You don't believe me?!

LULU
I don't know, you're saying different things!

MARYJANE
You're gonna believe her over *me*.

DR. MARCEL and MRS. CUNNINGHAM come out into the hallway.

CUNNINGHAM
MaryJane, Lulu. We're ready to begin.

A breath.

MARYJANE and LULU fall in line behind the adults.

They consider each other.

They consider NADIYAH.

The door shuts emphatically behind them.

NADIYAH remains.

She closes her eyes, and places her hand softly on her belly.

She begins to rock back and forth.

Alone: she whispers her baby a lullaby:

NADIYAH

When we grow up

I'm going to tell you about the day I made you.

Of the rain that stabbed the pavement
outside his split-level on Diamond Street.

Of the thunder that made me jump,
clapping louder than the sound of our skin on skin.

Of the room that reeked of broken down dreams
and raspberry tea leaves, with only bad news.

I'm going to tell you
of the night that I became my own disappointment,
because no one was surprised enough to be disappointed
in me. You are

in me

now. You are

my pride and my shame.

May I pass on nothing to you but my name.

A shift.

Nine.

The office.

DR. MARCEL and MRS. CUNNINGHAM find their seats.

MARYJANE and LULU stand uncomfortably in the doorway.

MARCEL

Come on in, girls.

We're going to start with the school oath.

DR. MARCEL rummages around his desk to find his handbook.

MARCEL

I'm just looking for, the um. Handbook was.

No luck.

MARYJANE opens her backpack and offers him her copy.

MARCEL

Oh, that's. Thank you, I'll just flip to, let's see—

MARYJANE

Page twelve.

MARCEL

Right.

He reads:

MARCEL

Praise St. Anne, alma mater.

MARYJANE

Praise St. Anne, alma mater.

LULU

Praise St. Anne, alma mater.

MARCEL

Let thy standard guide me straight and faithful with the Lord.

MARYJANE

Let thy standard guide me
straight and faithful with the Lord.

LULU

Let thy standard guide me
straight and faithful with the Lord.

MARCEL

What I may achieve from now until my end, I am indebted to you, O Lord.

MARYJANE

What I may achieve from
now until my end, I am
indebted to you, O Lord.

LULU

What I may achieve from
now until my end, I am
indebted to you, O Lord.

MARCEL

May You bless me with both knowledge and wisdom and may You grant me the power to discern the difference.

MARYJANE

May You bless me with both
knowledge and wisdom and
may You grant me the power
to discern the difference.

LULU

May You bless me with both wisdom
and knowledge – knowledgeandwisdom –
and may You grant me the power
to discern the difference.

MJ rolls her eyes.

LULU shrugs.

MARCEL

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ.

MARYJANE

Amen.

LULU

Amen.

CUNNINGHAM

Amen.

MARCEL

And according to this... in the case of disciplinary hearings, I'm supposed to add...
*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to
do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

MARYJANE

Micah, chapter six.

MARCEL

Very good.

DR. MARCEL gives the handbook back to MARYJANE.

CUNNINGHAM

Having ascertained that all the necessary parties are present, I would like to commence the disciplinary hearing on the matter of Nadia Hassan. Do I have a second?

MARCEL

Second.

CUNNINGHAM

We are here to discuss the good standing of Nadia Hassan and whether she can continue on as a student here at St. Anne's.

LULU

What does good standing mean? What did she do?

MARCEL

The specifics of the hearing are going to remain a private matter.

MARYJANE

How are we supposed to give testimony if we don't have any context?

MARCEL

The subject matter is sensitive and not open to the student body.

MARYJANE

But why did you bring us in if you weren't—

CUNNINGHAM

MaryJane, please.

MARCEL

Even without a full understanding of the circumstances, we're asking that you offer a character assessment of Nadiyah and some thoughts about her contributions to the school... then we'll follow up with a few routine questions, alright?

LULU and MJ nod 'yes'.

MARCEL

Lulu, would you mind going first?

LULU

You want me to just start talking about her?

CUNNINGHAM

We're not talking about her. We're here on her behalf.

MARCEL

What's she like as a classmate. Things like that.

LULU

Ok. Umm.

Well, you know about her poetry? Which is well, I think that's cool. She writes for the Looking Glass, she's in lots APs with MJ.

CUNNINGHAM

We have her transcript and her extracurriculars, Sweetheart. We're more interested in what you think of her as a person.

LULU

Ok, ok gotcha.

Pause.

CUNNINGHAM

Whenever you're ready.

LULU

So when I first met her I remember how intimidated I was by how smart she was, and like, how smart she knew she was... which I'm kinda jealous of, not jealous, but. Not that I would ever want to be her.

MARCEL

Why not?

LULU

I feel bad for her. It must be hard for her here.

CUNNINGHAM

How so?

LULU

She doesn't have anyone.

MARCEL

Has anyone reached out to her in a serious way?

LULU

We're friends. Friendly I guess. Like we joke around but I'm not sure she actually likes me.

MARCEL

Everyone likes you.

LULU

No they don't – but, that's not. What did you want me to say?

CUNNINGHAM

Can you summarize what you mean in some sort of context involving her character?

LULU

Ok, well. If it were me, I mean. I don't know what I would have if I didn't have St. Anne's. I'm not as... I'm not like her, she's.

LULU

I can't think of the word.

MARCEL

Take your time.

She does.

LULU

Resolute?

MARYJANE

Yeah, that works.

CUNNINGHAM

You admire her determination / you mean?

LULU

She knows herself, I mean.

MARCEL

She's self-confident?

LULU [*to MJ*]

Would you say that?

MARCEL

No, we'll get to MJ in a minute. I'd like to hear from you.

LULU

Sorry.

MARCEL

What do you mean *knows herself*?

LULU

Like when we're in religion class, we'll be learning certain scripture and sometimes I think, no offense, but like, how it's not really that important to me. It's not like *that* big a deal in my house. Enough that I go here I guess, but.

CUNNINGHAM

And you're saying that Nadia knows about her religion?

LULU

Well, yeah like. I remember last year we were learning about lent and Sister Anthony was asking us about what we were planning on *abstaining from* and Carly Waters was joking how she's giving up carbs, and Sister Anthony got upset like, *it's not a diet it's a sacrifice* and so she used Nadia as an

LULU

example, asked her to explain about the discipline of praying five times a day, what it's like committing to something like that. And everyone got a little uncomfortable but Nadia was like totally game to share about the ways she remains dedicated, you know?

MARCEL

You enjoyed learning about it?

LULU

It wasn't so much that I was even listening exactly, just the way she talked, she had a perspective on things, knew where she came from. Like, *you wanna know about me, this is me.*

A spotlight appears on NADIYAH in the hallway.

NADIYAH

In Philly we pay for the bus with a token.
 I think we are the last major American
 city to hold on to such an antiquated system of
 you in the front and me in the back
 or give up my place to send
 me to a place where you're more comfortable,
 cause you end all your sentences with an up tick,
 like a question would make it not offend
 or upend the order that makes this world go round,
 walk round, the Kaaba, slide round
 down the curve of the crescent moon, a star in the middle
 in place of the Dreamworks boy.
 He's out of place in the sky, doesn't belong up there,
 Up there where the stars all look the same, but couldn't be more different.
 Up there he couldn't be
 more different
 Stuck up there, the only way down is to
 Jump.

In Philly we pay for the bus with a token.
 A souvenir of the real thing, cash is too complicated.
 A token is a placeholder in earnest, but your good intentions don't hold
 to nothing but silent tensions,
 niceties and curiosities for what's hiding under my hijab.
 A token for a whole you'd rather not know
 but it's the right thing to do, so
 you ask the impossible of questions
 about exotic tongues I know nothing about,
 suddenly a spokesperson for millions of ancestors, I know nothing about.
 I know nothing about, but you ask and I answer
 This is my nature.

NADIYAH

I know nothing about the deserts of the East
cause when you walk east in Philly you hit, Jersey.
I'm from the neighborhoods North
from the first minutes of rain smelling like sour rust summer.
Not the South where the whip goes crack,
boots stuck in viscous mud, can't run duck hide.
I'm from the North
where the jump rope goes tocka, tocka,
 And crack of the whip
skips fast like my childhood
 and crack of the whip
skips like the bootleg recording of Two Fast Too Furious.
(Paul Walker's poster on my wall, yes I was allowed to have posters of men on my wall.)
I'm from the North and my
favorite food is brussel sprouts that grow on a bushel
like cotton, I know nothing about.
Not from the East nor the South.
Just Philly, free
to take the bus to school
out to where the trees out number the number of brown faces
to places, to this place
I know nothing about.

I know nothing about me.
So please, stop asking.

*The spotlight goes out.
Back to the office:*

CUNNINGHAM

It's great to hear that the teachers engage her like that.

LULU

All the time. Everyone's super interested.

CUNNINGHAM

That's wonderful, Sweetie. Thank you.

LULU

It's funny though because she's not even that religious.

MARCEL

What do you mean?

LULU

She told me.

CUNNINGHAM

She said that, that she's not religious.

LULU

Just like, it's a family thing. But she doesn't really care.

MARYJANE

But she knows a lot about it.

MARCEL

And she prays.

LULU

Not at school.

MARCEL

Yes at school.

CUNNINGHAM

She does?

LULU

That's not what she told me.

CUNNINGHAM

You've seen her pray at school?

MARCEL

I encouraged it.

CUNNINGHAM

You did?

MARCEL

When she came here. I told her that it's important that all our girls take time in their day for spiritual fulfillment. That she should feel comfortable practicing and being totally herself.

CUNNINGHAM

I didn't know you told her that.

MARCEL

I asked her to come early in the morning. To take whatever time she needed.

LULU

I don't think she does that.

She told me, she's not that religious.

MARCEL

I didn't know. She didn't say anything to me.

LULU

Well did you ask?

MARCEL

CUNNINGHAM

You wanted to make her feel comfortable here.

MARCEL

Yes.

CUNNINGHAM

I'm sure she appreciated it very much.

MARCEL

I thought it was the right thing to do.

LULU

But maybe it wasn't. I mean I'm sure you meant it to be nice, but. That's not who she is actually.

MARCEL [*A bit shellshocked:*]

CUNNINGHAM

Thank you, Lulu. That's very helpful.

LULU

But she *was* just making MJ pray in the hall, so I don't know maybe sometimes—

CUNNINGHAM

Excuse me?

MARYJANE glances at LULU.

LULU

Nevermind.

CUNNINGHAM

No what'd you say?

MARYJANE

Nothing.

LULU

You should tell them.

CUNNINGHAM

What happened in the hall?

MARYJANE

LULU

Nadia forced MJ to pray with her.

MARYJANE

Lulu!

CUNNINGHAM

I'm sorry, what?

LULU

It sort of got violent.

MARCEL

Why are you just telling us this now?

CUNNINGHAM

Did she hurt you?

LULU

I walked in at the end.

MARCEL

So you didn't see it happen?

CUNNINGHAM

Where did she touch you? Let me see.

MARYJANE

It's not a big deal.

CUNNINGHAM

It sounds like a very big deal.

MARYJANE

We were having a serious conversation that got sort of, I don't know. She was explaining all of it to me.

LULU

That's not what you said in the hall.

MARYJANE

Will you stop talking please?

MARCEL

Take us through what happen.

*A timid knock on the office door.
Everyone considers the door, then each other.*

MARYJANE

Who's that?

MARCEL

Nadiyah.

LULU

She's coming in here too?

*Another knock.
Beat.*

CUNNINGHAM

Open the door, MaryJane.

MARYJANE hesitates.

CUNNINGHAM

Go ahead.

*MARYJANE opens the door
NADIYAH stands in the doorway.*

A breath.

MARCEL

Nadiyah. Please join us.

NADIYAH closes the door behind her.

NADIYAH

I thought you said two o'clock.

MARCEL

No, no come in. Right on time.

CUNNINGHAM

Please, join us.

MARCEL

Lulu and MaryJane are here as representatives of the student body.

NADIYAH

Alright.

MARCEL

Just um, briefly, before we begin the hearing, can you tell us about the altercation you had with MaryJane this afternoon.

NADIYAH

It wasn't an altercation.

CUNNINGHAM

MaryJane said you tried to make her pray with you.

LULU

That's not what MJ said.

MARYJANE

Shut up, Lulu

MARCEL

MaryJane, we need to find out what happened.

NADIYAH

I was showing her.

MARCEL

What do you mean?

NADIYAH

MaryJane was crying because she got rejected from Princeton.

LULU

You did?!

MARYJANE

I just found out.

CUNNINGHAM

That's a private matter.

NADIYAH

That's what she told me.

LULU

—You told her before you told me?

MARYJANE

—She was there when I found out.

NADIYAH

And she was pretty upset, so I was trying to make her feel better.

But then she accused me of taking her spot because I was a “minority,” and that “that was a plus.”

MARCEL
You said that?

CUNNINGHAM
MaryJane, that's not very –

MARYJANE
I didn't mean it like that

NADIYAH
Which I thought was pretty insensitive.

MARCEL
It is.

CUNNINGHAM
You said, "*a plus?*"

MARYJANE
Isn't that true though?

MARYJANE
I just meant that we go to the same school. We have the same opportunities, why should our religious whatever put one of us in front of the other?

NADIYAH
We don't have the same opportunities.

MARYJANE
You're in all my classes. We have the same teachers, basically the same grades. You're president of the Looking Glass and I work under you.

NADIYAH
And that's all there is, right?

MARYJANE
I really didn't mean anything by it. I just think like, there are so many things about us that are the same.

MARCEL
She's telling you you hurt her feelings MJ.

MARYJANE
So that means she can force me to bow on the ground?

CUNNINGHAM
That's what she did? She made you bow on the floor?

MARYJANE

MARCEL
Nadiyah, there is a zero tolerance policy regarding any sort of physical violence.

NADIYAH
I don't really know what to say.

MARCEL

You're gong to have to try harder then.

NADIYAH

Something was built up inside— it just happened.

MARCEL

That's not an answer.

NADIYAH

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to get aggressive, but *I* have to live here like *you* all everyday.

MARCEL

What do you mean?

MARYJANE

What does that have to do with it?

NADIYAH

Like you should know what it's like to be me sometimes.

CUNNINGHAM

It's my understanding, and please tell me if I'm wrong, that the girls and your teachers have made room for you to be yourself in all ways they know how.

NADIYAH

...because they're scared of me.

LULU

I'm not scared.

MARYJANE

Not before today.

CUNNINGHAM

Resorting to violence—

MARCEL

No one is scared of you, Nadiyah.

NADIYAH

You don't get it.

CUNNINGHAM

Lulu just told us about Sister Anthony highlighting your religious practice as an example for the girls to look up to.

NADIYAH

Well that doesn't really make me feel good.

CUNNIGNHAM

No?

NADIYAH

Nevermind.

MARCEL

No, please. This is an important conversation.

NADIYAH

Did you ever think that it might be a lot of pressure on me to speak for a whole swath of people?

MARYJANE

– You always participate.

LULU

– Yeah, you never say you don't want to.

NADIYAH

What would you like me to say?

I'm sorry about the hall— that wasn't me. I freaked out. It won't happen again.

MARCEL

Thank you for that but your behavior won't be without consequence.

NADIYAH

I understand.

MARCEL

But I also owe you an apology.

If anyone here, myself especially, has made you feel singled out, well. That's really not our intention.

CUNNINGHAM

Certainly not, but may I ask you a question, Sweetheart?

NADIYAH

Ok.

CUNNINGHAM

And you don't have to answer if you're uncomfortable.

NADIYAH

Ok.

CUNNINGHAM

But could you tell us what you would prefer us to do instead?

NADIYAH

Instead of?

CUNNINGHAM

Engage with you?

NADIYAH

CUNNINGHAM

I'm sorry, I'm not sure how to phrase it—

LULU

Like how are you supposed to make her feel welcome and not make her feel welcome at the same time, if she doesn't like that.

CUNNINGHAM

Well, not quite that, but. I just don't want to say the wrong thing.
I'm afraid of saying the wrong thing.

MARCEL

I think you're saying that we want to support you at St. Anne's to the best of our ability.

NADIYAH

I'd like it if you just left me alone.

MARCEL

You are a member of this community, we will not just leave you alone.

NADIYAH

But you don't need to put my picture in the school newsletter every other month.

CUNNINGHAM

We're proud of your accomplishments.

NADIYAH

You wanna tell people black girls go here.

LULU

Black girls do go here.

NADIYAH

Did you let Ms. Gutierrez bring me here to put me on some cover?

CUNNINGHAM

You deserve to be here just like everyone else. You've taken advantage of everything this school has to offer.
We're very proud of that.

NADIYAH

But I didn't sign up to be a poster child.

CUNNIGNHAM

That really isn't our intention.

MARCEL

Certainly not.

NADIYAH

Just like MJ doesn't want to be a poster child either.

CUNNINGHAM

What do you mean?

MARYJANE

That's not what I said –

LULU

Yes she does.

NADIYAH

Like she's trying to hold up to some crazy standard of perfection you've set up for her but really I think she'd like to be allowed to stay up past ten to watch *The Real World*.

MARYJANE

– I don't want to watch *The Real World*.

LULU

– This season sucks.

CUNNINGHAM

You have fun.

MARYJANE

– Do I?

LULU

– No.

MARYJANE [*To Lulu*]

– Not like you.

LULU

– Stop doing that!

MARCEL

Girls, please.

CUNNINGHAM

You could've said something to me.

MARYJANE

No I couldn't –

CUNNINGHAM

MARCEL

Ok this, um. We've fallen off the path a bit.

CUNNINGHAM

We have.

MARCEL

Let's agree that today's happenings in the hall were a bit of a misunderstanding and bit of frustration, and well. For now, I'd like to move on to the actual matter of the hearing.

NADIYAH

That you want to expel me because I'm pregnant?

MARYJANE

What?

You're, wait
what?

CUNNINGHAM

Nadia!

You can't just,
What are you
thinking?

MARCEL

They didn't know that.

GIRLS, Ok. Yes.

Alright, let's regroup.

LULU

Pregnant?

This is, like.

Whoa.

NADIYAH

What? Isn't that true?

MARCEL

That was meant to remain a private matter.

NADIYAH

It's my matter. I don't care who knows.

CUNNINGHAM

You're lashing out because you feel overwhelmed.

NADIYAH

I'm fine.

MARCEL

Watch your tone, Nadiyah.

CUNNINGHAM

You don't seem fine, Sweetheart.

NADIYAH

You don't have to call me, Sweetheart. I know you think I'm ungrateful. Because how could a grateful person do something like this.

MARCEL

We don't think that.

NADIYAH

She doesn't respect us. She doesn't respect herself. She's a hassle.

MARCEL

We don't think that, Nadiyah.

CUNNINGHAM

No one here thinks that.

NADIYAH

I've lived up to your expectations exactly.

CUNNINGHAM

We're only concerned for your well-being.

NADIYAH

But not quite enough to keep me in school, right?

MARCEL

I haven't made a decision.

NADIYAH

Exactly.

CUNNINGHAM

We just want to make sure you understand what challenges are coming your way.

NADIYAH

Respectfully, Mrs. Cunningham I have parents. I don't need this lecture from you too.

MARCEL

That's enough, Nadiyah.

CUNNINGHAM

I'm not trying to, I know you have parents.

NADIYAH

And I know that there's a lot to think about.

CUNNINGHAM

As the only other mother in the room, you couldn't possibly know.

NADIYAH

I'll be ok.

CUNNINGHAM

Your professors next year are *ok* with a crying child in in their lectures?

Do you know the cost of a bassinet? Or how to change a diaper?

If you have trouble making friends now, imagine your freshman year pushing a stroller across campus.

NADIYAH

Do people not know how to change a diaper?

CUNNINGHAM

I'm umm—

LULU

I don't.

MARCEL

Ellie, let's step outside a moment.

NADIYAH

I'm the oldest of five, Mrs. Cunningham, and I've helped raise them all.

CUNNINGHAM

But this isn't your brother or your sister, Dear. This child is yours.

NADIYAH

My parents will help.

CUNNINGHAM

You want them to raise her for you?

NADIYAH

That's not what I said.

CUNNINGHAM

Have you been taking pre-natal vitamins?

NADIYAH

No.

CUNNINGHAM

Are you going to breast-feed?

NADIYAH

Pretty sure.

CUNNINGHAM

Have you picked out a pediatrician yet?

NADIYAH

I have to check if we can use mine.

LULU

Whoa.

CUNNINGHAM

I'm not trying to scare you, I just want you to understand that there's so much to prepare for.

NADIYAH

I'll figure it out.

CUNNINGHAM

And this isn't something to be cavalier about.

NADIYAH

You think I think this baby is a joke?

MARCEL

Nadiyah let's talk in the hall, just us.

CUNNINGHAM

I think you believe you can go to college and have a newborn, and you have no idea how impossible that will be.

NADIYAH

Well thanks for the heads up.

MARCEL

Nadiyah, please.

CUNNINGHAM

It's part of my job to send you to college. And at present, you've made decisions that inhibit you from doing that so I'm trying to help you reevaluate.

NADIYAH

Just because I'm not doing it in your order doesn't make it impossible.

CUNNINGHAM

Mark, can you help me please?

MARYJANE [*Embarrassed*]

Mom, let's just go.

MARCEL

Mrs. Cunningham isn't denying that there are many ways to raise a child.

NADIYAH

I don't want to take parenting advice from Mrs. Cunningham.

CUNNINGHAM

Excuse me?

MARCEL

Please, Nadiyah.

NADIYAH

The way you've controlled her every move. Is that how I'm supposed to raise my daughter? Fill her with all the proper things a girl should know, send her to prep school so that she's married by thirty attending board meetings and dinner parties?

CUNNINGHAM

You're in no
place to
patronize me,
Nadia.

MARCEL

Nadiyah you
need to watch
yourself right
now.

LULU [*To MJ*]

But she likes it. I
thought you liked
it?

MARYJANE

That's not what I
said!

CUNNINGHAM

Your parents don't even care enough to attend today's hearing.

MARCEL

Ellie what are you doing?

NADIYAH

You don't know anything about them.

CUNNINGHAM

Knowing someone's child is knowing someone themselves.

NADIYAH

And MJ is a shining reflection of her upbringing.

CUNNINGHAM

To covet is to sin, Dear.

MARCEL

Eleanor, enough!

MARYJANE

Mom, you're embarrassing me!

NADIYAH

I don't want anything from you.

CUNNINGHAM

I've already given you everything and you've squandered it all!

NADIYAH

There it is!

MARCEL

Ellie!

NADIYAH

See you *are* angry with me.

CUNNINGHAM

– I'm disappointed.

NADIYAH

– No you're not.

MARCEL

Ellie, if you don't stop talking I'm going to have to go to the board.

CUNNINGHAM

Because you were supposed to be different.

MARYJANE
MOM!

LULU
Stop yelling at her.

NADIYAH

But I ended up being just like the rest of them, huh?

CUNNINGHAM

Well certain people don't belong in certain places.

MARCEL
You're going to be out of
a job!

MARYJANE
Mom, you can't say that!
Leave her alone!

LULU
Please stop yelling at her!

CUNNINGHAM

She has no idea what I've done for her.

NADIYAH

Oh god! My manners! Have mercy on my soul, my savior. My provider.

*NADIYAH gets down on her knees,
maneuvering around her pregnant belly,
she bows, supplicating at CUNNINGHAM'S feet.*

NADIYAH

Thank you! Thank you Lord, full of Majesty, Bounty, and Honor.

Bow.

NADIYAH
Shookran!

Bow.

NADIYAH
Shookran!

*NADIYAH struggles to stand,
both her tears and her belly weighing her down*

NADIYAH
Shookran!

*She runs out of the office.
LULU runs after her into the hallway.*

MARYJANE
Mom, really?

MARYJANE runs after LULU.

*DR. MARCEL watches MRS. CUNNINGHAM in silence a moment.
He heads towards the door to find the girls—*

CUNNINGHAM
Mark, wait.

A shift.

The hallway.

*NADIYAH holds her lower back as she tries to catch her breath and hide her tears.
LULU and MARYJANE stand around her helpless.*

LULU
Do you need to sit down?

NADIYAH
Actually, I'm—

She tries to sit but can't quite lower herself down.

NAIDYAH
I'm fine—

For the first time, the girls consider a fourth person in the room.

After a long while:

MARYJANE
I'm sorry about my mom.
I'm not like that.

LULU
I'm not sure she's like that either.

MARYJANE

But I don't think that.

LULU

She doesn't think you think that.

NADIYAH

Now you speak for me?

LULU

That's not what I meant.

NADIYAH

JUST LEAVE ME ALONE!

LULU

I'm trying to help.

NADIYAH

Lulu. I don't need you. Get out of my face.

LULU

Because nobody here can fucking stand me. I'm just everyone's fucking whipping boy.

MARYJANE

What did *I* do?!

LULU

Every single day of my life it's something. I'm so stupid, I'm so embarrassing, tease me about grades or boys, or I don't fucking know how I hold my pencil, what I had for lunch.

MARYJANE

Then say something if you are upset about it –

LULU

Do you even like anything about me?

NADIYAH

Stop whining, she makes fun of you because she's jealous.

MARYJANE

No I'm not.

LULU

No she's not.

NADIYAH

Because you're prettier than her and you're spontaneous and you have time to watch TV.

MARYJANE

You're an asshole, you know that?

NADIYAH

You're defensive because it's true.

MARYJANE

We've been friends our whole lives, you don't get to boil this down and act like you know everything about us.

NADIYAH

THIS ISN'T ABOUT YOU!

MARYJANE

I didn't say that—

NADIYAH

You're trying to console me cause your mother verbally kicks the shit out of me and the both of you end up talking about *yourselves*!

MARYJANE

I was trying to apologize—

NADIYAH

You're making this about *you* and *your issues* but the truth is you have nothing to hurt about. Neither of you. So you create drama where there isn't any because your lives just aren't that interesting.

LULU

You don't know me.

NADIYAH

You're not that complicated.

LULU

Neither are you.

NADIYAH

Oh really?

LULU

You're pregnant and feel sorry for yourself. I don't care. You're not the only one with issues.

NADIYAH

And your suburban wonderland isn't a forgone conclusion.

LULU

Oh yeah, you *know* me?

NADIYAH

You're a St. Anne's girl.

LULU

You don't even know what that means.

NADIYAH

Your dad bought you a Beamer for your first car.

College is paid for and your trust fund matures when you turn twenty-one.

You're all good.

LULU

I don't have a car, I take the bus to school.

My dad walked out on my mom when I was nine. I have no idea where he is.

I'm on a scholarship here, just like you and I don't even know what a trust fund is *so fuck you*.

Beat.

NADIYAH

Sorry—

LULU

Because I could tell something was weird with you and I've been nothing but kind—

NADIYAH

I don't know what to say.

LULU

I was trying to be your friend.

A shift.

The office.

MARCEL

What the hell just happened, Ellie?

CUNNINGHAM

I don't know.

MARCEL

I have to go find her.

Again, he heads towards the door—

CUNNINGHAM

Wait a second—

MARCEL

What do you want from me?

CUNNINGHAM

I'm sorry—

MARCEL

I have nothing to say to you.

CUNNINGHAM

Then sit with me. Just sit with me for a moment.

MARCEL

CUNNINGHAM

Please.

*And they sit together for a moment.
A shift.*

The hallway.

NADIYAH

Thank you.

LULU

Don't just say it to say it.

NADIYAH

I'm not. Honestly, thank you.

*Together the hallway and the office fade into blackness,
except for a spotlight on a solitary
NADIYAH.*

NADIYAH

Why is it that you fear me?
 I do not pray on bended knee
 atop worn pews, cherry stained,
 below glass color stained, but instead,
 I bow again and again, calling out His name.
 Does that justify your disdain?
 How am I to win at your game?
 Because we seem to have lost the instructions manual.

And still, we carry on with this Monopoly and its very simple objective:
 Own everything.
 Charge everyone.
 Weakness is taking a mortgage.

Mortgage is seeking help, finding a shoulder—
 you are alone, need a loan— to lean on means
 you're weaning off
 someone else, needing something from someone else,
 getting something you did not earn.
 If we want to pass go and collect our cash,
 you'll have to nail us to the planks of this boardwalk, parkway
 my way or highway
 certain people get certain things,
 certain people belong in certain places.

Leaving the rest of us to loop around, loop around,
 these circumstances often cyclical, this America
 bends towards the biblical, new tests
 challenge the hypocritical, one nation under God indivisible, buutt—
 we loop around, loop around, scoop up
 that community chest, praying for that chance
 to propel us somewhere unexpected, somewhere respected,
 that we may be accepted—
 Thank you for letting me play with you.

Blackness.
End of Play.