

WELL-INTENTIONED WHITE PEOPLE

by Imani Vaughn-Jones

UNLICENSED

Imani Vaughn-Jones
402-972-0660
imanivaughnjones@gmail.com

Author's Note:

At times this play will seem to give a fuck about structure. It will follow formatting and reflect the rules.

At other times, this play will give structure the finger. It will desecrate formatting, it will abuse punctuation, and it will tell "the Rules" to go fuck itself.

Thus has been my lived experience occupying a Black female body in a white man's America.

UNLICENSED

Punctuation:

- (-) The line is cut off by the next line/action
- (/) The next line starts here, overlapping
- (.?) or (?.) A question and a statement
- (??) (???) (????) etc Black bewilderment

Characters:

Nia

Player One - Topher / Tyson / White Man

Player Two - Felicity / Annalee / Ariyah / Rebecca / Black Woman / Giselle / The Organizer

Player Three - Jeff / Charlie / Alix / Darnell / Black Man / Quentin / The Protestor

Casting Note: Nia and Player Two are to be portrayed by Black women.

Player Three is to be played by a Black man.

Player One is to be played by a white man.

Setting:

Atlanta. About midway through the Trump era.

Performance note: This play does not work if anyone is a villain. This is an exploration of whiteness, not a condemnation of white people.

Set Note: I imagine this play is performed in two spaces; Nia and Topher's house, a fully realized space; and a second more versatile black box type space. Ultimately, it's up to you. Set design is not my job. Just do it with love.

Production and Development History:

Midwifed by the Cultivators, Atlanta GA. 2020.

Originally developed by Theatrical Outfit & Working Title Playwrights, Atlanta GA. 2021.

Virtual reading by Hear Me Roar Theatre Company, Knoxville TN. 2021.

UNLICENSED

Part 1: Nia and Topher's house. Evening. An open layout. Dinner is on the table.

At Rise: Topher, an unthreatening white man, sits at the dining table while Nia, a presently stressed Black woman, paces the kitchen.

NIA

Time check?

TOPHER

6:36.

NIA

What is the point? Is it a power move?

TOPHER

It most likely is.

NIA

We should tell them they can't come anymore. Restaurant rules. You're half an hour late to your reso, you lose it.

TOPHER

We should charge them a cancellation fee too.

NIA

Plus additional expenses for pain and suffering.

TOPHER

"Suffering?"

NIA

I hate. Waiting. I hate it with a passion.

TOPHER

We should sue them for damages.

NIA

I actually worked at a restaurant that cancelled your reso if you were 15 minutes late.

TOPHER

I'll contact the lawyer at once.

NIA

You know, we could have fucked by now.

TOPHER

We could have.

NIA

We didn't, because "Nooo, your parents are going to be here soon." But we could have fucked twice. Three times even.

TOPHER

Okay, give me some credit.

She looks at him.

NIA

We could have fucked three times.

TOPHER

Yeah, you're right.

Nia grabs the food off the table and puts it in the microwave, then slams the microwave shut and punches in numbers.

TOPHER

What are you doing?

NIA

I'm reheating this shit because I'll be damned if your mom complains about it being cold.

TOPHER

She wouldn't do that.

NIA

Oh, she would. And she has. When we hosted Christmas in Minnesota, she complained about cold everything - food, the house, the weather.

TOPHER

She was just being a snot to try and get us to move back home.

NIA

Well, she succeeded.

TOPHER

So, maybe she'll be nicer. She said they're excited to see the new house.

NIA

Maybe. Except that they're 36 minutes late right now, so it's not looking great.

TOPHER

Who cares? Fuck my mom, okay? It doesn't matter what she thinks.

NIA

That is easy for you to say because you were born to her against your will. I wittingly married into this family, and as such, feel like I have something to prove.

He takes her in his arms and kisses her.

TOPHER

You do not have to prove anything to my mother. She is crusty and sad. She's always late, I think she likes when people wait on her or something. Just let her cling to whatever makes her feel important.

The doorbell rings.

NIA

Here we fucking go.

Nia takes the food out of the microwave and puts it back on the table. She and Topher go to the front door, briefly count to three, then open the door.

NIA

Jeff! Felicity!

TOPHER

Mom, Pop!

In step TOPHER'S PARENTS, JEFF and FELICITY. Old money white moderates.

FELICITY

Christopher!

JEFF

Hi, son!

They hug Topher profoundly.

FELICITY

And hi, Nia.

They both hug her politely.

FELICITY

Wow, the home is beautiful!

NIA

Thank you.

FELICITY

We brought you a house-warming gift, actually!

Felicity hands Nia a giftbag.

FELICITY

Don't open it now, but I saw them and I thought of you.

NIA

Thank you so much.

TOPHER

Do we want to sit and eat?

FELICITY

Don't you want to give us a tour?

NIA

Of course, we do, but we know you like the food hot.

FELICITY

You're right. Dinner first, tour afterwards.

*Nia sets the bag on the kitchen counter.
They all sit down at the dining table.*

TOPHER

How was the drive, Dad?

JEFF

Pretty smooth. Not much traffic, which is a surprise for Atlanta.

(To Nia.)

You'll learn that pretty fast.

FELICITY

Yes, how have you liked the moved so far, Nia? Topher told me you joined a little writing group.

NIA

Yeah. I've been having some writers block, so I found a group online that was looking for writers of color. We've actually already met three times, and tomorrow, we find out about a grant they recently applied for.

FELICITY

Wow, that's really good. You're so ambitious already.

NIA

I'm trying to be. They say Atlanta is the home of hustlers.

JEFF

You should be more like your wife, son.

TOPHER

I'm not working quite as hard, but I am looking for acting classes.

NIA

I think he feels less pressure than me since he's from here.

JEFF

Don't get too comfortable, things have changed since you were last here.

FELICITY

What do you need acting classes for? We paid for four years of an acting degree.

TOPHER

Mainly to network. Meet industry people and learn more about film.

FELICITY

That's smart. Let us know how much they cost and we'll chip in.

TOPHER

You don't have to do that.

FELICITY

Of course we don't, but you gotta meet people!

JEFF

They say the film industry is all about who you know.

FELICITY

Exactly. So, you gotta know people. What was the point of buying that degree if you don't get to use it!

TOPHER

I'll... think about it, Mom. Thank you.

FELICITY

I love it. You two a famous power couple.

NIA

That's the goal.

FELICITY

Nia can write Oscar-worthy movies and you can star in them.

TOPHER

Nia's leads don't quite fit my type-cast.

FELICITY

Oh, do you mainly write women?

NIA

Yeah. Black women, but yes, women.

Felicity laughs.

FELICITY

Well, I think that is fantastic. Obviously, I want Christopher to be a star but we don't need more leads that look like him.

TOPHER

Mom

FELICITY

It's true! Nia's on the right track. We need a shift in Hollywood.

Felicity winks.

FELICITY

Although you could write in at least one cute white boy so Toffee can score a nom.

Nia grabs Topher's hand.

NIA

Anything for Toffee.

TOPHER

What about you guys? How have you been?

FELICITY

We've been alright. Trying to stay entertained and busy now that we're in "retirement." We tried doing some "old people things" like golf and gardening but your *father* and his blood pressure medication...

JEFF

She acts like I chose this.

FELICITY

We can't really do anything that involves being in heat. And it's not like I have grandchildren...

TOPHER

Mom,

FELICITY

I'm not trying to rush you, I'm just putting it out there. Whenever you're ready.

NIA

That'll be no time soon.

FELICITY

Well you can't wait forever.

NIA

With modern medicine, I kind of can.

FELICITY

Well please don't. I've never been so bored.

NIA

They'll come eventually. I promise. And when they do you can spoil them to your heart's content. But they are phase two. So, in the meantime, you may need to pick up a hobby.

JEFF

We went to the MLK museum yesterday. You liked that. You guys should go.

NIA

There's an MLK museum here?

JEFF

Of course there is. Martin Luther King was born here. You should know that.

FELICITY

You all should go, though. So very interesting. There's a lot of thought-provoking stuff in there.

(A new brilliant idea.)

We should go together! I can show you my favorite parts.

NIA

Your favorite parts of the Martin Luther King museum.

FELICITY

I can be you guys' personal tour guide.

NIA

How is the food, is it warm?

FELICITY

It's actually a little too hot for me, I'm waiting for it to cool down.

JEFF

S'good to me.

FELICITY

It's good we were late. You must have been cooking up until the last minute for it to still be so hot.

NIA

Well-

FELICITY

It's great, though. While I wait for it to cool, I can sit

and chat with you guys!

TOPHER

We can put it in the freezer for a minute, mom.

FELICITY

No, no, no, I'm fine! I'd hate for it to get too cold and then we'd have to put it in the microwave and kill all the nutrients.

NIA

Anything but the microwave.

FELICITY

I was watching Doctor Oz and microwaved food is so bad for you. The thing just kills all the nutrients and pumps your food with cancerous radiation.

NIA

Didn't Doctor Oz have cancer?

FELICITY

Then he would know better than anyone, wouldn't he?

NIA

I'm not sure if that's-

JEFF

Doctor Oz is a quack. All of Oprah's people are quacks. Doctor Phil, Iyanla, all of them.

NIA

I actually agree, Jeff.

FELICITY

Well, I love them.

She ends the conversation with this and picks up her fork. She takes a forkful of corn. Maybe it burns her mouth. Maybe she blows on it. Maybe it wasn't actually that hot to begin with.

FELICITY

Oh wow. That is amazing. What is that?

NIA

It's elote.

FELICITY

Wow. That's *amazing*. Is that an African dish?

NIA

It's Mexican, actually. Mexican street corn. Sometimes they

serve it on a cob, sometimes like this.

FELICITY

Oh! We'll have to go to Mexico sometime.

NIA

You can get it in America too. Actually down the street, we ran into this really cool indoor mall called Plaza Fiesta.

FELICITY

Oh, honey, we discovered that place ages ago. Jeff, you remember that place?

JEFF

I learned that "alcohol" is Spanish for "alcohol."

FELICITY

Exactly. Nobody there speaks English, so it's impossible to navigate.

TOPHER

Some of the people speak English, Mom.

FELICITY

I mean, barely. But that's okay! They deserve a place where they can be themselves. I was actually just reading up on "safe spaces" and how they help people of color rest and reset. I wouldn't want to impede on their safe space.

TOPHER

That's really sweet, mom.

Felicity turns to Nia and grabs her hand.

FELICITY

And I hope that if you're ever in need of a recharge, you can find a safe space in us.

Nia is????? Like?????????

FELICITY

We know that things have been really ugly lately. These cops... And this president! I mean, he made some nasty promises during his campaign but Lord has he exceeded expectations in the worst way. It's been... a lot to live through. And we want you to know that we love you and we are here for you.

NIA

... Wow.

FELICITY

It's okay. You don't have to say anything. But! I'd love it

if you opened the gift we brought. Jeff, can you grab her gift?

Jeff gets up and retrieves the giftbag. He hands it to Nia.

FELICITY

I hope you love them.

Nia unearths from the bag a CALENDAR and a WHITE PORCELAIN ANGEL WITH CURLY BLACK HAIR.

NIA

Oh. Wow.

FELICITY

The angel is made by a black woman on Etsy! She makes all sorts of adorable dolls but I saw this one and knew it was just perfect for you and the new place. Plus I think it kind of looks how you and Topher's kids might come out! It's supposed to watch over you. And then the calendar... I received one for my monthly NAACP donation and I thought it was so impactful, so I ordered another one for you.

Nia flips through the calendar.

NIA

Every day has a moment of violence in Black history.?

FELICITY

Yeah, it really humbled me to read. Like, today, in 1918, Mary Turner was lynched by a white mob in Lowndes County, Georgia.

NIA

Wow.

FELICITY

I just thought it was really incredible to read and be reminded of all that's happened and how much work we have left to do. And I know you're really vocal about social justice.

Nia sits in silence for a really long time. Finally.

NIA

Thank you.

As long as it fucking takes.

TOPHER

Honey, do you want some more wine?

NIA

No, I actually... I feel kind of lightheaded.

TOPHER

Yeah, you look a little faint.

Topher rises and begins guiding her to the bedroom offstage.

TOPHER

You should lay down. You've been standing all day.

FELICITY

Is she gonna be alright?

TOPHER

She's gonna be fine, she just -

Topher and Nia disappear into the room, leaving Jeff and Felicity. Felicity looks genuinely concerned while Jeff continues to eat.

JEFF

Honey, you should eat your food before it gets cold.

FELICITY

I can't eat, Jeff!

JEFF

It's gonna go cold. She passed out partially from making this dinner, least we can do is eat it.

FELICITY

Jesus Christ, Jeffrey

Topher reemerges.

TOPHER

She's gonna be fine, she's been on her feet all day. She had to take three different "walking meetings" at work today.

JEFF

What is a "walking meeting?"

TOPHER

It's this new fad where instead of sitting at a table, you conduct your meeting while doing laps around the building or the courtyard or wherever.

FELICITY

I understand getting your steps in but how can you focus?

JEFF

She's in marketing, those types are always trying to stay thin. "A walking meeting" sounds like something your Doctor Oz came up with.

FELICITY

Now is not a time for jokes, Jeffrey.

TOPHER

The point is, she's gonna be fine, I think she just needs to rest right now.

Felicity makes a big deal of pushing her plate away.

FELICITY

Well, I, for one, cannot eat. I'm worried sick.

TOPHER

Mom—

FELICITY

No, Christopher. I won't be able to stop worrying until your wife is feeling better and she needs peace and quiet. Do you have some Tupperware so we can box this up?

JEFF

Felicity, we don't need to leave.

FELICITY

She practically collapsed on the floor, Jeffrey! Now scrape your damn plate so we can give these kids some peace! Topher, Tupperware!

TOPHER

We don't have Tupperware.

FELICITY

You don't have *Tupperware*?

TOPHER

We're trying to be more sustainable; we ordered some glass containers but they're not here til Thursday,

FELICITY

Do you have foil?

TOPHER

We have parchment paper.

FELICITY

Do you have paper plates?

TOPHER

Yes. Well, they're compostable.

FELICITY

Okay, bring us two of those to cover our plates and we'll bring them back when we see you next week. And you'll give us that tour!

Topher quickly retrieves two paper plates while Jeff and Felicity grab their belongings.

FELICITY

You keep us posted on her, okay? She looked pale. I didn't even know - you let us know when she's alright.

TOPHER

Okay.

JEFF

We love you, son. You tell Nia we love her too.

TOPHER

I will. I love you too, Pop.

They take turns hugging Topher.

FELICITY

I love you, honey. It's nice to have you home.

TOPHER

I love you too, drive safe.

Felicity and Jeff exit. Topher watches from the window and waves as they pull off. He watches until their car is out of sight then...

TOPHER

(Yelling.) They're gone.

Nia emerges from the bedroom.

NIA

What the *FUCK* was that?!

TOPHER

I don't even *FUCKING* know!

NIA

LYNCHINGS? A calendar full of *LYNCHINGS?*

TOPHER

And she memorized today's?! Like there was going to be some kind of fucking test!

NIA

And this angel! What is this fucking angel?

TOPHER

I have no idea, I have absolutely no fucking idea.

NIA

Is *THIS* what she's hoping our kids come out like?! Because she's in for a rude surprise!

TOPHER

It looks like Nick Jonas.

NIA

It does! A very effeminate Nick Jonas!

TOPHER

There's gotta be a return policy. Etsy has a return policy, doesn't it?

NIA

We don't keep angels in the house. *They* don't even keep angels in the house!

TOPHER

It's like she saw the first remotely black thing on Etsy and thought "Oh, Nia's black!"

NIA

Exactly! That's exactly what she fucking did! And I didn't know what to fucking say!

TOPHER

Neither did I! Like, "Thanks, mom. Your heart is in the right place but this is fucking racist."

NIA

She would have died. She would have died right there in her "African" corn.

TOPHER

Jesus Christ, I'm sorry. She's fucking out of control.

NIA

Twice a year, Topher! I only had to see her twice a year when we lived in Minnesota and it was never this bad.

TOPHER

I think she's stir crazy from going into retirement. Like,

she's gone into hyper-Felicity mode and lost her mind. I'm not saying it's an excuse but... I'll talk to her.

NIA

Please! Get your mother!

TOPHER

I will.

NIA

As soon as possible.

TOPHER

I will.

NIA

I'm surprised she didn't stay and "be my safe space." You were quick on your feet with the "walking meeting" thing, where did you get that?

TOPHER

I saw a TEDTalk about it?

NIA

TEDx?

TOPHER

No, like, legitimately TED.

NIA

Oh, okay I might have to check it out.

She plops down in the same dining chair as earlier. Topher comes up from behind and rubs her shoulders.

TOPHER

I'm so sorry, baby.

Nia locks eyes with the angel on the table in front of her.

NIA

What the fuck do we do with this now?

TOPHER

We throw it away. We throw both away.

NIA

We can't do that!

TOPHER

Why not?

NIA

I don't know. It feels wrong to just throw away an angel.

TOPHER

We're not religious

NIA

I'm not religious but I am... reverent? Cautious? You don't just throw away an angel.

Topher grabs the calendar.

TOPHER

Okay, but I'm getting rid of this right now.

NIA

Wait.

TOPHER

Wait?

NIA

I want to read through it first.

TOPHER

You're kidding.

NIA

I mean, I would never buy it myself, but it is full of Black history, so I might as well read it before I throw it away.

TOPHER

There's not seriously violence on every day.

NIA

Oh, there is.

She grabs the calendar and flips to May.

TOPHER

Yesterday?

NIA

1896. The US Supreme court upholds that segregation is constitutional in Plessy v Ferguson.

TOPHER

And tomorrow?

NIA

Oh, tomorrow's eventful! In 1861, Kentucky declares neutrality while North Carolina becomes the 11th state to secede from the Union. Then, same day in 1961, a bus of

nineteen Freedom Riders is attacked by a white mob in Montgomery, Alabama.

TOPHER

Jesus Christ

NIA

But wait there's more. The bus was supposed to have police escorts, but it was discovered that the Public Safety Commissioner had promised the KKK several minutes to attack without police interference.

TOPHER

I think this is going to make you sad.

NIA

It probably will. But she already fucking bought it and it's *here*, so.

TOPHER

Okay...

NIA

I'll work my way through it slowly.

TOPHER

So, we're keeping the racist calendar and the racist doll?

NIA

We're keeping the racist calendar strictly as an academic resource. And we're *not* keeping the doll. We're just holding on to it until I can sell it on Facebook marketplace or something.

TOPHER

Okay. Where should we put the doll in the meantime?

Nia surveys the room.

NIA

On the bookshelf, I guess.

TOPHER

You can't be serious.

NIA

Where do you suggest?

TOPHER

In the back of the pantry.

NIA

We can't put an angel in the back of the pantry!

TOPHER

You're not religious!

NIA

It's about respect. The back of the pantry just... doesn't sit right with my spirit.

She grabs the angel and places it on the bookshelf. They both scrutinize it.

NIA

I hate it.

TOPHER

Me too.

NIA

I'll make a listing tomorrow morning.

TOPHER

Do you want me to do it?

NIA

No, I've got it. Thank you.

He pulls her into an embrace.

TOPHER

Of course, baby.

He starts to whisper in her ear as they begin to rock back and forth.

TOPHER

Now she's gonna be up there, judging us, watching us get nasty...

NIA

Who said we were getting nasty?

TOPHER

I recall a certain activity we'd wanted to partake in before my parents arrived. A certain activity you were confident we could have completed three times.

NIA

Oh yeah?

TOPHER

Oh yeah.

They kiss and fall onto the couch. The stage falls under night with one crystal light shining on the angel. Voyeuristic bitch.

What is she getting up to?

In the dark, we faintly see Nia and Topher transition into slumber. Lights indicate that a new day has started. Nia wakes up first and realizes she's late. She quickly changes in the bedroom. During her change, Topher wakes up and eventually makes his way over to the bedroom, bumping into Nia just as she's exiting. They trade places, kissing good-bye as he enters the bedroom and she fetches her purse from wherever in the house it's ended up. She zooms out of the house into:

Part 2:

The next day. Early afternoon. A PENrich meeting - like "enrich" but with a pen because they're corny and to varying degrees, self-important. Their meeting space is bare bones - mainly comprised of a table and chairs. Cheap chairs. Public funding chairs. A library or a church. Maybe they're mismatched. Maybe this shit looks like a *Charlie Brown Thanksgiving*. Nia spends a lot of time feeling like Franklin.

At Rise:

ANNALEE and CHARLIE, white neoliberals, stand chatting, plastic champagne flutes in hand. Nice ass plastic flutes though, from the party section at Target. Nia enters and Annalee hugs her and hands her a flute. Excitement is in the air. Charlie sits down with a bottle of champagne between his legs, slowly coercing the cork out.

CHARLIE

See, now most people go for the big "POP" because that's what's exciting. But actually, when you pop it, you're damaging the champagne. I was taught that properly opened champagne should sound slow, long, and full - like an old lady's fart.

He finally loosens the cork enough and the bottle does indeed make a... slow, long, full sound. He valiantly removes the cork.

CHARLIE

Okay, who wants some?

ANNALEE

Fucking no one, Charlie.

NIA

Admittedly, not quite sold on the old lady booty juice.

CHARLIE

Come on, it's a celebration!

ANNALEE

We have sparkling apple cider in the back. Tyson's getting it.

TYSON, also white, also neoliberal, enters on cue, holding the bottle like an Olympic torch.

TYSON

Sparkling cider, for those averse to booty juice.

Everyone except Charlie fills their glasses with sparkling apple cider. They raise their glasses.

TYSON

A toast; to growth, to building each other up, to supporting each other's work, and to upholding the PENrich core mission of "enriching the world through our pen."

ANNALEE

And to all the fucking money we just got! We kick ass!

They clink as much as you can clink plastic flutes and drink. Annalee knocks hers back and pours herself some of the real champagne.

ANNALEE

I'm so excited, I can't believe it. Ten thousand fucking dollars.

NIA

Sounds like I joined at just the right time.

ANNALEE

That you did!

Annalee throws her arm around Nia's shoulders.

ANNALEE

And I know I say it all the time, but it's so nice to have you because I was getting so tired of this sausage fest.

CHARLIE

Last time I checked, you liked my sausage.

Charlie kisses Annalee on the cheek and she playfully slaps him.

ANNALEE

Gross. As you can see, I've been starved for female energy.

NIA

I get that, I've been starved for creative energy.

ANNALEE

Shit, yeah. Did you get the writing prompts I sent you?

NIA

Yeah, I wrote like half a page. Nothing substantial. I can't even think of things to write for my blog.

CHARLIE

You have a blog?

ANNALEE

I told you, babe. She writes about poetry and racism.

NIA

Well, I used to.

ANNALEE

Well, we are going to turn that around. Maybe we can hire a creative catalyst now that we've got ten thousand dollars, bitch!

Annalee downs the rest of her champagne and muses dreamily.

ANNALEE

10k, 10k, 10k. What do you want to do with it first?

TYSON

Well, obviously it's something we have to sit down and define as a group once Olivia and Royce are back from Prague.

ANNALEE

I know, but just *daydream*.

CHARLIE

Maybe it's low hanging fruit, but I want a snack budget.

ANNALEE

No, snacks is good! I want *good* fucking snacks too!

CHARLIE

It would be cool if we could rent some space to do a few staged readings of our plays. Nothing major, just music stands and an audience. But damn, an audience would be nice.

ANNALEE

Yes, babe! And it would be rad if we could get some merch. A sick ass shirt that says "PENrich" - or beanies!

TYSON

I'd wear a PENrich beanie.

NIA

I'd love to pour a little money into advertising, just getting our name out there.

ANNALEE

Nia with the strategy!

NIA

The group definitely needs more name recognition if we want to really make an impact. Also: membership. We could use some people with admin skills, and I'd love to see more inclusive diversity.

TYSON

I agree.

CHARLIE

I think that's good, but is diversity really our goal?

Violent white silence.

Nia is ??

She's also ????????????????????

Within the vacuum, she considers every single way the question could be considered.

She cannot come up with an interpretation that doesn't hurt.

Finally, she raises the words:

NIA

What do you mean?

CHARLIE

Just like... We intentionally founded the group small, so we could take risks and be vulnerable with our work. So moving forward, we should decide if the focus of the group is

"inclusivity" or if it's to incubate our work in a safe and intimate setting?

NIA

For me, they go hand in hand.

CHARLIE

And that's fair.

NIA

Okay.

CHARLIE

But exclusivity is kind of the whole point of PENrich. Exclusive intimate feedback.

NIA

Yes. And I think we can continue to be exclusive as a group while encouraging inclusivity amongst our members.

CHARLIE

But that's the point. How many more members are you trying to add? At what point does evening the scales become oversaturating the group?

NIA

I don't know. But personally, I can't grow as an artist or a human, for that fact, without receiving diverse perspectives on my work.

CHARLIE

Which is completely achievable through several other avenues.

NIA

So, you're saying I have to go somewhere else if I want diversity?

CHARLIE

No. I'm just asking if the purpose of the group is "diversity" or "intimacy?"

NIA

They're not mutually exclusive. And I personally cannot have the latter without the former.

TYSON

I think if diversity is of major importance to you, then we're all onboard with you inviting a few friends to join.

NIA

I don't have friends to invite. And even if I did, that's

not the point. It's not about me, it's about the *group* agreeing that diversity is important and collectively committing to making the space more inclusive.

TYSON

I don't want to speak for those who aren't in the room, but I'm certain that we all agree diversity is important.

ANNALEE

For sure. That's how we got you! You saw we were looking for people of color.

NIA

And I think that's a great start but I'm the only one.

ANNALEE

Olivia's Armenian.

CHARLIE

I guess I'm just offended that you don't see the group as diverse already.

NIA

You're offended?.

CHARLIE

I feel like you're erasing the life experience we all bring to the table. Maybe we're white, but we also come from different economic backgrounds, different sexualities, different levels of education, and even different countries. Annalee grew up rich in South Africa. I was raised poor in Ames, Iowa. That's two different types of white. Tyson and I are both men but he's gay and I'm not. It's kind of offensive that you would invalidate everyone's lived experiences and assume we have no diversity of thought based on our skin color.

NIA

Tyson, when you were growing up, what were you taught about police?

TYSON

They protect and serve. I should flag one down if I couldn't find my mom.

NIA

What were you taught, Annalee?

ANNALEE

That... they were installed to keep us safe and maintain the peace.

NIA

Tell me, Charlie, how Tyson and Annalee were raised across the world from each other, but they still got the same lesson on police?

CHARLIE

I know what you want me to say, but the cops round my way were cracked out. They would pull you over just to search your car and steal your drugs.

NIA

But did anyone die?

CHARLIE

...No.

NIA

Did you feel safe to call them when there was an emergency?

CHARLIE

I tried not to because I don't like them—

NIA

But did you feel safe? Safe enough?

CHARLIE

Yes.

NIA

So, you, too, despite their crookedness, believed cops were there to protect you.

CHARLIE

I know the point you're trying to make and—

NIA

There is no "and." You all grew up in different parts of the globe and yet somehow all learned that the world was built to protect you - that your safety mattered. Somehow, I didn't get that lesson. Somehow, my parents followed a very different lesson plan. A lesson plan I, too, will one day teach—

CHARLIE

Nia—

NIA

But we're talking about "diversity of thought," right? There are so many unique perspectives among you already: like when I came in late today and you were debating the candidates. How lovely that you all have the privilege of *debating* which presidential nominee is worse. How beautiful

fume. The light on the angel is brighter.

NIA

-III WANTED TO FUCKING SCREAM!

TOPHER

You should have!

NIA

I WANTED TO, BUT I COULDN'T.

TOPHER

I wish I was there. I would have done something.

NIA

Like what?

TOPHER

Told them to fuck off! Told them they're fucking assholes! Flipped them the fucking bird and walked out the door as soon as they started saying that shit. And when they asked where we were going, replied "other avenues."

NIA

I would have done that but I couldn't see straight. I was literally blind with rage. I felt like I could hear my heart beating in my ears. And I didn't even say what I *wanted* to say! And then Tyson makes a vote to end the meeting early before I was even done talking. I was so full of fucking ANGER, I just left in silence because I knew I was going to explode. I didn't even say good-bye, just booked it out of there screaming on the inside.

TOPHER

What a joke. How insulting.

NIA

It was *COMPLETELY* insulting. And Annalee texted me afterwards saying the whole thing was fucked up and she's "here if I want to talk" but like... Where were you when the whole thing was going down??? They all just stood there while it happened and no one *objected*, they chimed in a little but they didn't say anything, they acted like-

Something catches in her throat, and suddenly Nia is sobbing. Topher rushes to hold her as she falls to the ground.

NIA

Like what he was saying was okay. Tyson said there were "great points on both sides," like what does that even

mean? I was saying that I need the space to be more inclusive so I can fucking survive and Charlie was basically telling me to "pick one." As if diverse perspectives wouldn't help his own white ass fucking work.

She sobs into Topher's shirt for a while. He does not rush her, but he does shift to check his watch. Nia feels the movement.

NIA

What?

TOPHER

Nothing, baby.

NIA

What?

TOPHER

Nothing. How's the quest to sell the angel?

NIA

Fruitless. Surprise, no one wants the fucking thing.

TOPHER

It's okay. We'll figure something out.

He continues holding her and takes another peek at his watch.

NIA

I can feel you checking your watch. What?

TOPHER

I have to get ready for improv class.

NIA

You didn't tell me you had a class tonight.

TOPHER

I was on the waitlist and somebody dropped out last minute. I couldn't really bring it up when you came home...

NIA

Do you have to go?

He doesn't want to say yes. But the answer is absolutely, positively, yes.

NIA

I just don't want to be alone right now.

TOPHER

Baby, I know, but the class is so exclusive, and it's

taught by a working actor. There's a final showcase for producers...

NIA

You can't just go next time?

TOPHER

I just got off the waitlist. If I don't show up tonight to claim my spot, I go back to the bottom.

If only there was a rational way to say "With all due respect: fuck your dreams. Fuck your career. Fuck your degree. Fuck your goals. Fuck your aspirations. Fuck your ambitions. Put them on hold. Stay with me. I need you. I need you. I love you and I support you and I want the best for you but right now I'm dying and what's best for you will leave me bleeding on the floor."

But there isn't. So, they sit in silence, because she's too rational to ask him to stay. And his gut says it's wrong to say he must go.

Finally:

TOPHER

Hey, what if you come with me?

NIA

What?

TOPHER

I know from the website that they have a waiting room. You can hang out in there. Bring your laptop and channel all this PENrich bullshit into your writing.

He kisses her forehead in between his words.

TOPHER

You can even peek in every once in a while and see your stud husband embrace spontaneity.

NIA

Are you sure I'm allowed to be there?

TOPHER

Why wouldn't you be?

NIA

Because you just described it as an exceptionally exclusive, profoundly sought-after class.

TOPHER

Yeah, but you wouldn't be in the room.

NIA

People have been arrested for less, it's called loitering, Topher.

TOPHER

I highly doubt you'll be arrested for loitering.

NIA

Can you please call ahead and ask?

TOPHER

Ask if you'll be arrested?

NIA

Ask if it's okay that your wife sits in the lobby.

TOPHER

Honey,

NIA

It would make me feel better.

A brief moment.

TOPHER

Okay. Let me change shirts and I'll call.

Topher disappears into the bedroom. Alone, Nia's eye is drawn to the angel. Has it moved? Is it bigger? It feels like it really might be watching.

Nia is about to touch it when Topher comes out in a new shirt, phone up to his ear, flashing a thumbs up. Nia grabs her laptop bag and the two exit, heading over to:

Part 4:

Alix Andre's Actor Workroom. Lobby. Later in the same evening. A clean but sparse lobby with some chairs, perhaps a plant. Large double doors lead to the classroom.

At Rise:

ALIX ANDRE, a charming older white man, stands in the lobby, equipped with a clipboard housing a check-in list. He's

checking in ARIYAH, a young Black woman, as Topher and Nia enter holding hands.

ALIX

Thanks, Ariyah. Have a wonderful class.

Ariyah enters the classroom.

ALIX

And I only have one name left, so you must be Christopher! Welcome!

Alix shakes Topher's hand.

TOPHER

Thanks, you can call me Topher.

ALIX

"Topher" is good. There are a lot of famous "Christophers" and far too many "Chrises." "Topher" is good.

TOPHER

Thank you.

ALIX

And you must be Nia, our esteemed lobby-dweller.

Alix kisses Nia's hand. It is genuinely not creepy.

NIA

It is I.

ALIX

It's lovely to meet you both.

He steps back and looks at them as a unit.

ALIX

You have newlywed energy.

NIA

What?

ALIX

Newlywed energy. How long have you been together?

TOPHER

Married two years this fall.

ALIX

I knew it. I can sense that you still really like each other.

NIA

Thank you?

ALIX

Do either of you need anything? We don't allow anything other than water in the classroom, so that's all I can offer you, Topher. But, can I get you something, Nia? Carbonated water, a snack?

NIA

Um, if you have SunChips or something, that would be great.

He quickly produces SunChips as he goes into the ground rules, constantly switching focus between Nia and Topher.

ALIX

Easy enough. We have a bathroom down the hall. That's more so for your knowledge, Nia. I don't allow my students to use the bathroom during class. We have two 10-minute breaks, you can potty then. We also have a break room downstairs. Just go to the end of the hall. Again, more so for Nia's benefit. Students are not allowed in the breakroom, however, you might find you want to go down there. These double doors do not hold sound for shit, so it can sometimes get loud in the lobby during class. Sound good?

TOPHER

Sounds good.

NIA

Thank you.

ALIX

No problem. Thanks for letting us borrow your husband.

Topher kisses Nia and hands her the car keys.

TOPHER

Take these. In case you want to lie down or something.

They kiss again.

NIA

Break a leg.

Alix and Topher enter the classroom.

Nia settles into a chair and begins to unpack her stuff. She checks her phone. No

texts. Opens Facebook, immediately closes Facebook. Decides to put her phone away. Opens her SunChips and eats a few as she takes in the space. Being out right now sucks, but at least this place is warm and they gave her free chips and her love is nearby.

She opens her laptop. Just as she's getting situated, class starts up. Alix was not fucking lying. You can hear the whole class clear as day.

ALIX (O.S.)

Okay, everyone! My name is Alix Andre, welcome to my Actors Workroom. Some of you may recognize me from some of your favorite movies and TV shows from the 80s, 90s, and early 2000s. Some of you may not. Those who are the latter will be issued an instant fail.

The class laughs. Nia is somewhere between a chuckle and rolling her eyes. She half listens as she works.

ALIX (O.S.)

Jokes aside, there is no "failing" this class. There are no grades. There's only two ways to get dropped from this class; poor attendance and intolerance. Intolerance because we're here to make art and art requires a safe-space, and attendance because you need to be here to make that art. Sound good?

The class murmurs positively.

ALIX (O.S.)

Now, you cannot fail, but you can excel. As some of you may have heard, I play favorites. At the end of the term, I select the five best students to perform in a private showcase for some of my producer friends. Would you like to meet my producer friends?

Nia thinks this is a dumb ass question. Obviously that's why everyone's here- you know what? Whatever. The class is too excited to share the same sentiment, they respond positively.

ALIX (O.S.)

That's what I thought. Alright, enough admin bullshit.

Let's get on our feet. I wanna jump right in. You, what's your name again? Aliyah?

ARIYAH (O.S.)

Ariyah.

ALIX (O.S.)

Off by a consonant. My apologies. Please come up here. And... let's have you, Topher.

Nia silently cheers. That's what I'm fucking talking about! Let my husband wow you! She closes her laptop to listen.

ALIX (O.S.)

I'm going to give you guys a scenario and I want you to feel your way through a scene until I say "stop." Sound good?

They respond affirmatively.

ALIX (O.S.)

Okay, you two are siblings. You're rummaging through his stuff and he catches you. That's all I'm giving you. Go!

TOPHER (O.S.)

Amy, what are you doing under my bed?!

ARIYAH (O.S.)

Um... would you believe me if I said waiting to scare you?

TOPHER (O.S.)

You are so busted. Get out before I tell, Mom.

ARIYAH (O.S.)

Don't, or I'll tell her about all the porn down here. You're into some weird stuff.

The class laughs.

TOPHER (O.S.)

Tell her about my magazines and I'll tell her all your Google searches for "boobs" had nothing to do with health class.

The class laughs and "oohs." Nia silently celebrates. Go, baby! Fuck yeah.

ARIYAH (O.S.)

Okay, okay, no need to get crazy. I'll go.

TOPHER (O.S.)

Good.

ARIYAH (O.S.)

Good!

TOPHER (O.S.)

Go!

ARIYAH (O.S.)

I'm going!

TOPHER (O.S.)

Good!

ARIYAH (O.S.)

Good!

TOPHER (O.S.)

Stop copying me!

ARIYAH (O.S.)

Stop saying what I'm going to say before I say it!

TOPHER (O.S.)

Copy this! Mom!!!

ALIX (O.S.)

And scene! Can we get a round of applause? Thanks, you guys. There's a couple great lessons here. One is specificity. Your whole career, you will always be using improv because your scene-partner will always be giving you something different. The way you navigate that is through specificity. You guys had some great specific lines in the beginning. Topher, the line about her Googling boobs was brilliant.

Yes, it fucking was!

ALIX (O.S.)

Now the reason I stopped the scene was because it began to peter out at the end. That's a no no. You want to drive towards that clear final moment. People think improv has to be funny but that's not always true. You can end the scene on a major punchline or a major conflict. People love comedy and they love cliffhangers. But still, great scene, you guys. Let's give them another round of applause.

The class claps.

Nia no longer gives a fuck now that her husband is no longer performing. She returns to her work and half-listens to the next round between DARNELL, a thirty-something

Black man, and REBECCA, a mid twenty-something white woman.

ALIX (O.S.)

Okay, next up, you two. Let's do... you're at a Starbucks. You're in line. His order is taking way too long. Keep in mind: specificity and working towards a big moment. Okay? Go!

REBECCA (O.S.)

Excuse me. *Excuse me.* Excuse me, what is taking so long?!

DARNELL (O.S.)

They messed up my drink.

REBECCA (O.S.)

Well, maybe if you hadn't ordered such a complicated drink.

DARNELL (O.S.)

It's a Starbucks, they're used to complicated drinks.

REBECCA (O.S.)

Yes, but *some of us* have places to be this morning. *Some of us* have jobs.

DARNELL (O.S.)

Oh, I have a job.

REBECCA (O.S.)

I'm sure you do.

DARNELL (O.S.)

And what do you do? Stay at home and spend your hubby's money.

REBECCA (O.S.)

Please honey, I'm a doctor.

DARNELL (O.S.)

Remind me to stay clear of your practice.

REBECCA (O.S.)

Oh yeah? And what do you do?

DARNELL (O.S.)

I teach at the College of Art and Design.

REBECCA (O.S.)

Ohhhh, that would explain a lot.

DARNELL (O.S.)

How so?

REBECCA (O.S.)

You teach fashion for a living, which would explain all the fruity little syrups and creams you put in your drink... And those shoes.

DARNELL (O.S.)

My shoes?

REBECCA (O.S.)

I thought they looked like something a faggot would wear.

Nia wakes the fuck up.

ALIX (O.S.)

Woah! And scene! Okay, let's all just take a moment.

Nia waits. The class is silent.

ALIX (O.S.)

Okay... wow. First... Can we give these two a round of applause? Seriously, that was brilliant.

There is hesitant applause. Nia almost leaps from her chair.

ALIX (O.S.)

What are your names?

REBECCA (O.S.)

You can call me Rebecca.

DARNELL (O.S.)

Darnell.

REBECCA (O.S.)

You can also call me Beck.

ALIX (O.S.)

So many great things. The conflict was delicious. That build. Darnell said he worked at the college and Rebecca, you 'yes-and'ed it so masterfully into that final moment. I cut it off because at that moment, we had no idea what might happen. Are they gonna fight in the Starbucks? Is she getting a drink in her face? We had no idea but we were hooked.

And that's what I'm talking about when I talk about "specificity." Rebecca came in with such a clear character and she really helped drive the scene.

REBECCA (O.S.)

I've never even said anything like that in real life. Like,

I've never called someone that.

ALIX (O.S.)

But it felt real. Because you allowed yourself the space to make her real. And that's what I'm talking about when I tell you all to get specific. This is acting. You're not getting on the stage to "be yourself," you're getting up there to be someone else. So be someone else! Rebecca called Darnell a "faggot," but that wasn't really Rebecca. That's not who she is.

Listen, I'm an old white guy. That means I get cast a lot to say mean things. I can't tell you how many times I've had to say "nigger." At this point, it's like I call someone a nigger once a week. But you know why they cast me? Because I'm not afraid to go there if that's what the character needs. That doesn't make me a racist. That makes me a damn good actor.

*The class is completely silent.
Nia is in trauma.*

ALIX (O.S.)

Okay, let's go ahead and take a quick ten here, and then we'll pick up when we get back.

Nia begins packing her things, haphazardly shoving them into her bag. She aims for the exit when Topher emerges from the double doors.

TOPHER

Hey, where are you going?

NIA

I'm going home,

TOPHER

Nia-

NIA

I can't be here, Topher!

She bolts out the doors. Topher rushes back through the double doors to grab his things - maybe he quickly apologizes to Alix- before chasing after her into:

Part 5: Nia and Topher's house, even further into

this eventful day.

At Rise: Nia throws open the door and drops her shit on the ground. Topher almost trips over her stuff as he follows behind her. She flings her keys and phone on the coffee table, then beelines for the bedroom. Topher tries to follow but she closes the door in his face. He waits outside, unsure.

Nia emerges from the bedroom, she's changed into pajamas. Topher watches as she aimlessly charges through the house before her eyes land on Topher's computer on the dining table. She opens it up and enters his password. The light on the angel begins to pulse, its frequency growing as the conversation unfurls.

TOPHER

What are you doing?

NIA

You're going to write a review.

TOPHER

A review?

NIA

Of "Alix Andre's Actor Workroom." You're going to give them one-star and talk about how the owner is a homophobic washed-up racist, who also gives shitty acting advice.

TOPHER

Okay well, hold on, I don't - you want me to do this right now?

NIA

Yes.

TOPHER

Okay, yeah, what happened, that was fucked up but / I

NIA

What do you mean "but?!"

TOPHER

I mean... is there any way to post it anonymously?

NIA

I don't know. Maybe on Yelp, but I'm pretty sure you can't write Google and Facebook reviews anonymously.

TOPHER

Whoa, you want to review bomb him?

NIA

Yes!

Topher lets out an incredulous laugh.

NIA

Is something funny?

TOPHER

No! Nothing is funny, you're stressing me out.

NIA

I'm stressing *you* out?

TOPHER

I don't think you're thinking 100% clearly.

NIA

I am.

TOPHER

You almost left me back there.

NIA

I was going to send you money for an uber. I just... needed to get out of there.

TOPHER

And you were silent the whole car ride.

NIA

I was unpacking, Topher. I'm not allowed to be with my thoughts?

TOPHER

And then we get home and your solution is to leave a bunch of scathing reviews, it just doesn't-

NIA

I don't see you presenting any better options! Do you have any ideas?

He's silent. She pushes the laptop towards him.

TOPHER

I mean, I don't know. That seems... I don't want my name on

that.

NIA

What do you mean you don't "want your name on it?"

TOPHER

Well it's just like... people are gonna see that, they're gonna see me, they might look me up and see that I'm an Atlanta actor and maybe it'll... I don't know, word gets around, y'know? Maybe they'll - I don't know -

NIA

So, you're... upset... that other racists may see your review condemning a racist... and not cast you?

TOPHER

I mean... I don't - I don't know. I don't know how it's going to go down but they might-

NIA

So, what's??? What's the fear? You want to work with racists?

TOPHER

Well... no. But-

NIA

Then, what's the problem?

TOPHER

I just want to - I don't want to ruin my chances of having a career here by slandering a well-known actor / and teacher

NIA

It's not "slander," it actually happened. He actually sat up there and said "nigger" twice!

TOPHER

Okay but think about it. Nobody knows who I am, they could-

NIA

Who is "they?!"

TOPHER

Theatre people! Film people! The industry!

Nia starts typing.

NIA

Fine. I'll write it.

TOPHER

Are you going to use my account?!

NIA

No, I'll use my account.

There is silence as Nia types. Topher shifts uncomfortably, staring at the ground before finally mumbling:

TOPHER

I mean... I don't know how often people sit in on his classes - he's probably gonna remember you... And who you came with.

Nia stares at Topher, unable to believe, unable to comprehend, unable to accept.

NIA

So. You won't write the review. And I can't write the review. So we're just going to... what? Pretend nothing happened?

TOPHER

No-

NIA

Because that's what it sounds like you want / to do

TOPHER

I'm not - Nia, I'm scared-

NIA

And that's what it sounded like you tried to do in the room. You didn't say anything. You're scared? You're afraid to jeopardize your career? You know who were probably really afraid? All the Black people in that room! All the queer people in that room!

TOPHER

And what would it have looked like if this straight white man got up and spoke for them?

NIA

It's not speaking for them, it's speaking for yourself! Because *you personally* have a zero-tolerance policy for that behavior!

TOPHER

It's hard to speak up in the moment!

NIA

I know! Which is why I'm asking you to do something now! If you won't leave a review, then write him a fucking email! Tell him his class was offensive and he completely failed to create a safe space.

TOPHER

I'm probably already on his bad side for leaving early, he's not going to give a fuck about some nothing actor emailing him with a bunch of unreasonable demands.

NIA

Asking someone not to say "the n-word" is not an unreasonable demand?!

TOPHER

And what if he says no?! What if he tells me to fuck off?! What if all his producer friends blacklist me?!

NIA

Then those aren't people you want to work with! I can't believe you're being such a coward!

TOPHER

I am not a coward.

NIA

You are.

TOPHER

I am not a coward!

NIA

Yes, you are! You had the chance to stand up then, you have the chance to stand up NOW and you're choosing "nothing." And you're telling me to choose "nothing" too. You're putting yourself above every marginalized person in that room. Including me. And for what? The chance to rub shoulders with a racists' closest friends? And then what? Get typecast to also play racists? That's your big fucking dream, Topher?!

TOPHER

You have no idea-!

NIA

I have every fucking idea!

They hold each other in stalemate for a moment before Nia charges into the bedroom. We hear hasty rustling and zipping. Topher begins to approach the commotion when Nia emerges with a duffle bag.

TOPHER

What is that? Where are you going?

NIA

You're going.

TOPHER

What?

NIA

Go stay at your parents'.

Nia throws the bag at Topher's feet.

TOPHER

Nia-

NIA

GET OUT.

*They're locked once again.
The light on the angel stills.
Finally, as long as it takes, Topher bends
down to pick up the bag. He silently goes to
the dining table and grabs his computer,
checks to make sure he has his keys, and
leaves.*

*Nia remains motionless the entire time. It
isn't until the front door slams that she
falls into tears.*

*She cries while standing for a moment before
dropping to her knees.*

*Eventually, she makes her way to the couch
and crawls onto it, curling into the fetal
position.*

*She reaches for her phone and dials. It
rings, and she really needs someone to pick
up but it rings again, and she doesn't
realize it but she's holding her breath and
it rings a third time, and she squeezes her
eyes shut whispering "please please please
ple-", but the voicemail picks up.*

NIA

Hi, mom. I really wish you picked up. I miss you. And need you. Right now. I don't know how I keep doing this. It made sense in Minnesota but I thought it would be different in Atlanta. But it's not. I keep... finding myself in these

fucking white spaces where no one looks like me or talks like me or sees me and I'm so... lonely.

She sobs more before taking a deep breath, the kind that cleans you out and makes room for what's next.

NIA

I love you. I hope you don't listen to this message. But I also hope you do. I feel... lost. Like maybe I made the wrong decisions... with my life. I don't know. And that scares me.

She lays there with the thought. Maybe it wracks her with sobs again. Maybe the thought is so scary that she's paralyzed. Finally:

NIA

Okay. I love you. Bye.

She hangs up the phone and lies there a moment. After some time, she picks the phone up again and starts scrolling.

Mindless scrolling. A second nature coping mechanism. Hunting for dopamine.

She scrolls. Taps. Scrolls. Taps. Scrolls. Scrolls. Taps. Then we hear from the phone, three voices; a Black woman, a Black man, and a white man. The sound of the video engulfs the whole stage.

WHITE MAN (VOICE)

Do you know why I pulled you over?-

BLACK MAN (VOICE)

No, sir-

BLACK WOMAN (VOICE)

Officer, I want you to know you're being recorded-

WHITE MAN (VOICE)

I saw you texting and driving-

BLACK MAN (VOICE)

Sir, no I wasn't-

BLACK WOMAN (VOICE)

Officer, you are on Facebook live-

WHITE MAN (VOICE)
It's a crime to lie to an officer-

BLACK WOMAN (VOICE)
He wasn't texting-

WHITE MAN (VOICE)
License and registration-

BLACK MAN (VOICE)
It's in my glove compartment-

BLACK WOMAN (VOICE)
I was on my phone! Maybe you saw-

WHITE MAN (VOICE)
Can you shut her up?-

BLACK WOMAN (VOICE)
I'm just tryna tell you-

WHITE MAN (VOICE)
License and registration.

BLACK MAN (VOICE)
I keep my gun in the glove compartment-

BLACK WOMAN (VOICE)
Officer, did you hear him?-

WHITE MAN (VOICE)
No because you're yelling-

BLACK WOMAN (VOICE)
He's trying to tell you he has a gun in the glove-

WHITE MAN (VOICE)
Control her, please-

BLACK MAN (VOICE)
She's just trying to help-

WHITE MAN (VOICE)
She's not-

BLACK WOMAN (VOICE)
Officer-

WHITE MAN (VOICE)
I'm not talking to you-

BLACK WOMAN (VOICE)
Baby, make sure he knows-

BLACK MAN (VOICE)

He knows-

BLACK WOMAN (VOICE)

I don't think he d-

WHITE MAN (VOICE)

License and registration. Now-

BLACK MAN (VOICE)

Yes, sir, it's right here in-

WHITE MAN (VOICE)

You're moving too / fastwhatsthatWHATSTHAT

BLACK WOMAN (VOICE)

We told you there's-

*The video, the stage, and Nia are swallowed
by the sound of gun fire.*

Blackout.

Act 2

Part 6: A coffee shop. Midday. Four days later.

At Rise: Nia sits at a table typing away on her laptop. She tears away for a moment to check if her guests have arrived. No one yet. Unbothered, she returns to her writing.

Topher enters. At first they don't notice each other. It's when he gets his drink that he takes note of her all-too-familiar silhouette. He's not sure how to approach, but he does.

TOPHER

Nia.

NIA

Hi.

TOPHER

Hi.

He wants to sit down. She kind of wants that too.

TOPHER

How are you?

Nia smiles sadly and shrugs.

NIA

I'm alive.

TOPHER

That's good news.

NIA

I guess, contextually.

TOPHER

This is kind of far from your job.

NIA

Oh, this isn't - I'm not on lunch. I took a few days off.

TOPHER

That's awesome.

NIA

Yeah. They were like "if anyone needs a mental health day with 'all that's going on', that's what PTO is for" so I went for it.

TOPHER

Hell yeah, white guilt in the workplace.

Nia laughs.

NIA

Exactly.

TOPHER

I really love that you're writing again.

NIA

Me too. I mean, they're not scripts or anything but it's *something*. It feels so good to finally be in the zone y'know? I feel like me again.

TOPHER

That's amazing. I read that blog post you made about PENrich. It was brutal.

NIA

No, don't say that!

TOPHER

It was good, though. People need to read stuff like that.

NIA

It wasn't obvious that it was about them?

TOPHER

No. I knew because I know you but to a stranger? It could be about almost every creative space in this country. That's the fucked up part.

NIA

Okay good, that's what I was going for. The universality of it.

TOPHER

You hit it on the head, baby.

Nia almost winces at "baby." They fall into silence for a moment.

TOPHER

I think you should write about Alix next.

NIA

I already planned on it.

TOPHER

Well. I support you.

NIA

Thanks, I guess.

TOPHER

Have you been getting my messages?

NIA

Yes.

TOPHER

And?

NIA

I don't want to do this here.

TOPHER

I don't want to do this here either but it's the first time I've seen you in four days, so-

NIA

Topher. I just need more time.

TOPHER

Okay.

NIA

Thank you.

TOPHER

How much time?

NIA

I don't know. I've never been married and in this particular situation before-

TOPHER

Okay,

NIA

You really did a number on me, Topher. So, I don't have a timeframe for you. I'm just. Trying to figure it out. How I feel about it. And you. And us.

TOPHER

Do you... still want us?

Nia takes a deep breath. This question has been sitting on her chest for the past four days.

NIA

I don't know. I'm not... I don't know.

TOPHER

I love you.

NIA

I love you too. I just don't know if that's enough.

Her words hang between them. Until finally:

NIA

I'm waiting on some people.

TOPHER

Right. My break is almost over.

But he doesn't move.

TOPHER

I'm sorry. I'm really sorry.

He goes. Nia takes a moment to regroup before returning to her writing. She barely gets into it before a young Black woman and young Black man, GISELLE and QUENTIN, approach her.

QUENTIN

Are you Nia?

NIA

Yes, that's me! Quentin?

QUENTIN

That's me!

GISELLE

Hi, I'm Giselle.

NIA

So nice to meet you.

GISELLE AND QUENTIN

Nice to meet you too.

They laugh.

NIA

Do you guys know each other?

QUENTIN

Girl no, we just met in the parking lot.

GISELLE

I asked him to help me park.

QUENTIN

She can't parallel park for shit.

They all laugh.

GISELLE

Have you ordered anything yet?

NIA

No, I was gonna wait until you guys showed up.

QUENTIN

Well let's make an order before they call the cops on us.

They laugh again.

QUENTIN

Imma get an espresso. You girlies want anything? My treat.

NIA

Are you sure?

GISELLE

That's so nice!

QUENTIN

My ex finally sent me my half of our tax return. So you can thank him and Uncle Sam.

GISELLE

I'll take an espresso too.

NIA

I'm good, thanks.

Quentin goes to place his order.

NIA

Thank you so much for coming.

GISELLE

For sure. I saw your Facebook post and was like "omg yasss, this is exactly what I'm looking for."

NIA

No, but I really appreciate it. I know a few other people said they wanted to come, but no one besides you two RSVP'd.

GISELLE

No biggie. My grandma always said the ones who show up are the only ones that matter.

NIA

Yeah, I guess that's true.

GISELLE

So, how have you been?

Nia chupses and Giselle bursts out laughing.

GISELLE

Girl, same!

NIA

It's been rough.

GISELLE

Rough is an understatement.

NIA

I mean, that's why I made this group. I just... needed to share in this - all of this - with other Black people. Black creatives.

GISELLE

I totally get that.

NIA

What about you?

GISELLE

It's been crazy. But I feel like what's even crazier is the response.

NIA

Yes!

GISELLE

I don't know, I think it's because it was recorded. Like, from start to finish. So, there was like, no way to spin it.

Quentin returns, drinks in hand.

QUENTIN

What?

GISELLE

The shooting.

QUENTIN

Chile, please. Which one?

They laugh.

NIA

No, I think you're right. There was no way to middle-of-

the-road this one. No "let's wait until the full footage comes out" because it was already there. All of the people who like to pretend there's not a serious issue had nothing to cling to.

QUENTIN

Exactly. Had all the white girls and gays shook.

GISELLE

Okay but can we talk about that? I don't like, really have any white friends, but a few people I went to college with, like, sent me money.

NIA

That happened to me too.

QUENTIN

What am I doing paying for espresso when y'all over here getting reparations?

GISELLE

I didn't keep it, I sent it back.

NIA AND QUENTIN

You sent it back?

GISELLE

You kept it?!

NIA

Free money is free money.

GISELLE

It just like, didn't sit right with me. It's been years since I spoke to any of them, I don't even know why they sent it.

QUENTIN

Because you're Black and they feel guilty.

NIA

It's one of the few times white guilt has worked out in my favor.

QUENTIN

I know that's right.

NIA

It doesn't fix anything. It doesn't heal any of the past trauma. It doesn't bring back the two Black lives lost by some stupid fucking racist ass cop. But it does fill up my tank and I'm gonna get my nails done, so I'll take it.

GISELLE

Shit, maybe I should ask them to send it back.

They laugh. This space, this exchange, this energy - it is medicine for all involved.

GISELLE

Have y'all been out protesting?

QUENTIN

Chile, no. These cops are getting way too crazy.

GISELLE

Same! Did you see the video on Twitter-

QUENTIN

Of them smashing homegirl's windows?

GISELLE

Yes! Last thing I need is to buy a new windshield.

NIA

I'm going tonight.

They both gasp.

GISELLE

You are way braver than me.

QUENTIN

Record everything. You never know when shit's bout to go down.

GISELLE

Yes, and write my number on your arm. In case you get arrested. I know a couple bail funds.

NIA

If I get locked up, I'm just gonna call the Bank of Quentin.

They laugh, more medicine coating their throats.

GISELLE

Just make sure you take care of yourself. During and afterwards.

NIA

We all need to take care of ourselves right now.

QUENTIN

A word.

GISELLE

Oh, I have been. It's been journaling, face masks, and half a joint every night.

QUENTIN

That sounds therapeutic and expensive.

GISELLE

It's definitely both. But it's been helping. Especially with the anxiety.

QUENTIN

My anxiety's been through the roof.

GISELLE

My partner and I were talking about conceiving before this all popped off. And now I just don't know. Like, this shit just keeps happening.

NIA

It's almost like it's getting worse.

GISELLE

Exactly. Do any of y'all have kids?

QUENTIN

Just a dog, which I won in the settlement.

GISELLE

Talk yo shit, boo.

NIA

No kids. I really want to. But not now. I'm starting to wonder if ever.

GISELLE

I feel that.

NIA

It's like. I know the world has been worse - they aren't dragging us in the streets every night - but it's still really bad. And I feel like I can't protect them.

QUENTIN

You can't.

GISELLE

And it's not your job to. It's your job to prepare them.

QUENTIN

Yeah. And love them.

NIA

I love them so much already, it hurts.

GISELLE

Then you're already in a great place. Don't stress about it too much yet. Besides, we've got healing to do.

NIA

Yeah, I've mostly been mourning the past few days. I haven't really been in the self-care stage.

QUENTIN

Well, this group is a first step.

NIA

It definitely is. You can thank my mom. She helped push me to found it.

GISELLE

Look at momma. Giving you medicine even from afar.

NIA

Yeah, sometimes she gets it right... So I guess, since we're on the topic, we should get to the art sharing. Does anyone want to go first?

GISELLE

Y'all can go. I'm still deciding on what piece to share.

QUENTIN

I brought a pilot. But I think since you did the work to organize this, you should have the honors.

NIA

Oh, okay. Mine is still kinda rough. It's a poem but I haven't been able to figure out the ending.

GISELLE

We got you.

NIA

Okay. Here we go:

Nia begins reciting at the table. As the poem goes on, she stands and begins to change clothes, getting dressed for a protest.

NIA

When I was six years old, I learned
that despite all my mother had said I was
ugly.

My nose was too big,
My hair was too greasy,

My eyes were not blue.

I was ugly for many years
and then around 12,
boys discovered sex.

My nose was still big,
My hair was still greasy,
My eyes still not blue,
but they allowed me these failings because
My lips
My hips
My breasts.

The sons swooned.
The daughters howled.

I was desirable.

Nowhere on this journey did I ever get to be
Beautiful.
I was ugly,
then I was sexy,
and there was no in-between,
no otherwise,
no as well.

*Nia dons eye black as she steps back into
her living room.*

Now I am ugly again,
This time by choice.
A different kind of ugly, but ugly all the same.
Ugly
Nasty
Stank
Rude,
Misnomers for "uncompromising,"
Malicious metonyms for "nobody's fool."

*There is a knock at the door that snaps Nia
into:*

Part 7: Nia and Topher's house. The same day.

At Rise: Nia opens the door to find Annalee waiting.
The light on the angel is dimmer.

NIA

Annalee? Um, hi.

ANNALEE

Hey.

They stand awkwardly for a moment.

ANNALEE

I'm sorry. This is weird.

NIA

It is.

ANNALEE

Maybe I shouldn't have - just dropped by

She does not go to leave, though.

ANNALEE

S'okay if I come in?

NIA

Um. Sure.

*Annalee enters, surveying the surroundings,
never making eye contact with Nia.*

ANNALEE

Is Topher home?

NIA

Not right now.

More awkward silence.

NIA

Do you want some water or something?

ANNALEE

Sure.

*Nia fetches her a glass of water as she
continues to explore the space.*

ANNALEE

Your place is nice.

NIA

Thank you. Yeah, I guess you've never been inside, right?

ANNALEE

No, I just dropped you off that one time.

NIA

Yeah. We're still getting things set up, but it's mostly there.

ANNALEE

It's cute so far. Different than I expected.

NIA

Oh yeah?

ANNALEE

Yeah, I thought you'd have more plants. And like, a big fucking wicker chair or something.

NIA

A what?

ANNALEE

You know, like Huey P Newton?

NIA

Why?

ANNALEE

I don't know. I think I saw you save one on Pinterest or some shit.

NIA

Maybe.

*Annalee continues to walk around the space.
Something about her is so off.*

NIA

Is there a reason why you stopped by?

ANNALEE

I just wanted to talk. We haven't talked in a minute. Since the meeting.

NIA

We haven't.

ANNALEE

Maybe I picked the wrong time for this though,

She notices Nia's outfit.

ANNALEE

Are you going somewhere?

NIA

I was gonna go to a protest at the Capitol.

Annalee furrows her brow and falls silent.

NIA

Are you... okay?

ANNALEE

No, Nia, I'm not.

NIA

Okay.

ANNALEE

Did you get my Venmo?

NIA

I did.

ANNALEE

You didn't say anything.

NIA

I didn't know what to say.

ANNALEE

See, it's shit like that.

NIA

Shit like what?

ANNALEE

Like not letting me know you got the money. It makes me feel... like you don't care.

NIA

I didn't exactly ask you to send anything.

ANNALEE

No, but a "thanks" or even an "I got it" would be nice. Ya know? Just so I know.

NIA

Why did you even send it in the first place?

ANNALEE

Because shit's crazy right now. I don't know. I wasn't trying to be weird, but you didn't respond, so now it's weird.

NIA

No, it was weird from the beginning.

ANNALEE

Well, it wasn't supposed to be.

NIA

Well, I got it. Ablution received. You can go home now.

Annalee doesn't move.

ANNALEE

I'm not trying to fight you, I came here as your friend.

NIA

Do you force your other friends to say "thank-you" when you do them favors?

ANNALEE

No. I don't. Fuck. I'm sorry. I'm just- I've been dealing with a lot of shit since the last meeting.

NIA

It was a pretty rough meeting.

ANNALEE

It was. But the thing is, it was rough for *all* of us.

NIA

Did I ever imply it wasn't?

ANNALEE

You kind of did in your blog post.

NIA

Okay! Finally! So, *this* is why you're here.

ANNALEE

Well, I tried typing it out over text but you can't fucking hear tone, so I thought I'd do it in person.

NIA

I can't believe this.

ANNALEE

Honestly? I'm hurt, Nia. I'm really fucking hurt that instead of coming back this Saturday and working through things, you chose to publicly slander us.

The word "slander" invokes such ????????

ANNALEE

I just wish you had reached out to Charlie for further clarification before jumping straight to public

humiliation. It hurt. It hurt him and it hurt me. Maybe our friendship is still too new but I thought it was deeper than that. I'm sorry you feel the way you do - I get why you feel the way you do - but the way you handled it.

NIA

You should have saved yourself the trip because this doesn't sound any better in person.

ANNALEE

You act like you're the only one who was there, the only one who was affected.

NIA

I would love to know how you were affected.

ANNALEE

It was awful! It was supposed to be a happy occasion and instead I had to watch two people I care about fucking rip into each other.

NIA

I'm so sorry that I ruined your opportunity to peacefully get drunk on cheap chardonnay.

ANNALEE

This is what I'm talking about. You just don't fucking care. About any of us. You pretended you did when there was grant money involved, but when Charlie suggested we didn't use it the way you wanted to, you switched up.

NIA

Care about you? I don't know any of you! We've been friends for what, three weeks? A month? And that's all it took for the whole group to show their ass-

ANNALEE

Now you're just trying to be mean-

NIA

And it's interesting that you're backpeddling right now because the day of, I swear you were in my inbox telling me how "fucked up" the whole exchange was.

ANNALEE

Well, I've thought about it more and I think maybe Charlie wasn't the only one at fault.

NIA

Did you reach that decision before or after I failed to thank you for your white guilt gratuity?

ANNALEE

Make all the petty jabs you want, it doesn't change the fact that instead of sitting down and working things out like a grown up, you decided to tear us apart on the internet.

NIA

No, I didn't.

ANNALEE

You did! You called us "ignorantly liberal" and said we were racist.

NIA

Because you are! You're fucking racist! Every single one of you! I'm starting to realize you can't help it! You were raised in this fucking machine that told you every single day you were important. And you believe it! The fact that you came into my home just to tell me that you don't like how I made your boyfriend look?! I don't even know where to begin unpacking!

ANNALEE

It's not just about "my boyfriend," it's about all of us. You smeared the whole group.

NIA

That's the funny part! I didn't actually say anything about you guys! PENrich was not once mentioned in the post. I said "an all-white writers group," do you know how many of those exist?!

ANNALEE

If we're so fucking bad, then why did you hang out with us?

NIA

Because if I cut off all my white friends for being racist, I'd have no friends left!

A beat. This is not the answer Nia intended to give.

ANNALEE

I'm not a racist, Nia.

NIA

I never said you were.

ANNALEE

You just did.

NIA

I said you were racist. Adjective.

ANNALEE

What's the fucking difference?

NIA

It's not my fucking job to tell you!

The angel falls on its side, still within the bookcase. The sound makes both Annalee and Nia jump.

NIA

Okay, great talk. This is over.

ANNALEE

Wait, we can't leave it like this.

NIA

We can. We will.

ANNALEE

You have been so difficult since I stepped in the door! Why are you being so-

NIA

Ugly? Because you're right: I no longer fucking care.

ANNALEE

I didn't come here to burn a bridge.

NIA

You didn't come to mend a fence either.

ANNALEE

Nia, just wait. This isn't what I wanted.

NIA

And what did you want?

ANNALEE

I wanted you to hear me out. I wanted us to still be friends.

NIA

I have heard you. You haven't heard me.

ANNALEE

I do hear you, I just think you're wrong!

NIA

So that makes you right? When you planned this visit in your head - imagined accosting me in my own home just to

tell me I'm wrong - tell me honestly: how did it ever end with us still being friends?

Annalee doesn't have an immediate response. Nia opens the front door and holds it agape. She slams the door behind Annalee as she exits.

Nia takes a moment for herself then checks the time. She's late. She goes into the bedroom and retrieves a backpack as well as a large cardboard sign reading:

"The need for change bulldozed a road down the center of my mind. - Maya Angelou."

She does a quick once-over to make sure she has everything and runs into:

Part 8: An outdoor protest. Same day. Early evening.

At Rise: The ORGANIZER, a commanding Black woman, holds a sign in one hand and a megaphone in the other. The PROTESTOR, a passionate Black man, holds up his own sign. The organizer's sign reads:

"Freedom is never given, it is won -A. Philip Randolph,"

while the protestor's reads:

"The best way to make dreams come true is to wake up -Mae C. Jemison."

They chant in unison. Nia runs into the fold and joins them.

ALL

Stand up! Fight back! No more Black lives under attack!
Stand up! Fight back! No more Black lives under attack!
Stand up! Fight back! No more Black lives under attack!

All three freeze, signs held boldly above their heads, as Nia speaks.

NIA

When we say "may they rest in peace," we are begging.
May our elders,
May our cousins,
May I rest in peace?

ALL

Stand up! Fight back! No more Black lives under attack!

NIA

What about the ones that weren't recorded?
We don't know their names
or their murderers.
But we know they're there.
We feel their absence,
even in anonymity.

ALL

Stand up! Fight back!

NIA

I have wanted to be a mother my whole life.
I used to breastfeed my baby dolls.
One day,
One day,
One day,
When the money's right
Career on lock
Biggest house on the safest block
A little bit more therapy
That's when I'll finally be a mother.

"Just have a kid," they said.
"You'll never truly be ready,
"Just take the plunge."
"But you don't understand."
I'm not having a child,
I'm having a protest.

The brownest baby you've ever seen;
Jet black curls with onyx eyes,
Nose wider than wealth gaps,
Lips thicker than grits.

This copper child incubated
In the biggest Black belly you've ever seen.
I'll carry it everywhere—

Inspire an insurgence of crop tops and brown baby bumps.
A constant reminder that we cannot be stopped,
Stamped out,
Exterminated.
Oops. Here comes another one.

When my belly bursts,
Should I survive,
The real work begins
With a kiss on the forehead
And full disclosure -
The secret that took me years to see:
You are divine.

We're making super soldiers.
Black children who've been told they are
Beautiful
Capable
Brilliant
Valued
Vital
Valid.
They'll have to call in the National Guard.

Bred in bodies that know better,
Carried by arms free of baggage.
Whatchu gonna do with all these wombs?
It is a revolution.
An army of swollen abdomens,
Tummies upon tummies harboring love,
Carried by parents who healed themselves prior
In preparation of the protest.

They are once again frozen. Then:

ALL

Stand up! Fight back! No more Black lives under attack!

*The protestor and the organizer begin to
peel off, exiting the stage as the chant
continues.*

ALL

Stand up! Fight back! No more Black lives under attack!
Stand up! Fight back! No more Black lives under attack!

Nia lowers her sign and reads it, allowing

the weight of the words to fully set in. Resolute, she tucks it under her arm and heads into:

Part 9: Nia and Topher's house. The same day. Evening.

At Rise: Nia opens the front door and switches on the lights to reveal Topher sitting in the living room. He's wearing a suit and surrounded by flowers and candles. On the dining table, take-out boxes are artfully arranged around a gift bag. He stands when Nia enters.

TOPHER

Hi baby.

Nia is stunned.

NIA

Hi.

TOPHER

Welcome home.

NIA

Were you... sitting in the dark?

TOPHER

It wasn't that long. I promise.

He walks over to the dining table.

TOPHER

I got all your favorites, extra crab Rangoon. There's wine chilling in the fridge and I got this for you.

He reaches for the bag.

TOPHER

It's a few new notebooks. And pens. The 10mm gel kind you like. Since you've been writing again. I know you flow better when you write by hand and-

For the first time he notices what she's wearing.

TOPHER

Where were you?

NIA

At a protest.

TOPHER

Oh my god, are you alright?

NIA

I'm fine.

TOPHER

Is the car okay?

NIA

What? Yes. Why?

TOPHER

Protestors have been destroying shit, setting shit on fire,
/ people are

NIA

No, they haven't, that's all been the cops. Where are you
getting this from?!

TOPHER

The news?

NIA

Why would you trust white news media?

TOPHER

I - that's just what my parents had on.

NIA

Oh, great. Well I'm glad they're staying informed.

TOPHER

What have you been watching?

NIA

Twitter. Instagram. And I went. It was completely peaceful.

TOPHER

That's good-

NIA

But even if it was violent, can you really blame anyone?
Two innocent people were killed, that kind of makes me want
to set shit on fire.

TOPHER

You're right. I'm - I didn't mean it to sound like that.

NIA

Okay.

*Silence surrounds them. Topher shifts,
frustrated and anxious.*

TOPHER

Can we start over?

NIA

Do you want me to go back outside?

TOPHER

No. I just need. If we could go back even two minutes. To the gift. Please.

NIA

Fine. It's two minutes ago.

Nia holds up the giftbag.

NIA

Thank you. This is very sweet.

TOPHER

Of course, baby. I also got some massage oil, in case you wanted a foot rub or a back rub.

NIA

Thank you. That's very sweet, too.

They stand awkwardly.

TOPHER

So, are you hungry?

NIA

Topher, what are you doing here?

TOPHER

I'm earning you.

NIA

I told you I still needed time.

TOPHER

You did. But I don't think "time" has to mean "time apart."

NIA

Yes, it does.

TOPHER

Why? You've had four days to meditate, whatever you came up with we can work on together now.

NIA

That's not what I want.

TOPHER

What about what I want? I'm half this marriage, do my wants matter too?

NIA

Not when you're the one who did the damage.

TOPHER

I'm trying to fix it.

NIA

You can't. It's insulting to think that you can. Honey chicken and ballpoint pens can't fix this.

TOPHER

I don't think they can, I just - goddamn it!

Topher rests his head in his hands.

TOPHER

Can we start over?

NIA

You want to go back to the bag?

TOPHER

No. I want to go back to where this first all fell apart and try again. Please hear me: I'm sorry. You were right. I was being a coward, and I'm sorry. And I know it's going to take you a while to forgive me, but I just. I miss you. And I want to do better.

NIA

I'm not sure if that's where things first fell apart.

TOPHER

What?

NIA

A lot of people have reached out to me these past few days. White people. Friends from Minnesota, ex-classmates, people from my childhood. Some sent me money, one person sent me a fucking poem. And honestly, most of it has pissed me off.

I was holding it together okay, but I finally lost it when my old roommate shared my post featuring the mayor's phone number. Something about it, maybe it was her caption, it was just so fucking fake. So, I asked her if she had actually bothered to call it and she said "no."

I knew she was gonna fucking say no because she never gave

a shit about it in college so I doubt much has changed now but still - I lost it. I was just in all-caps, yelling about how she needs to do more than just "feel bad" and share links, she needs to actually *do* something, and that's when I realized. Or I guess, it's when I wondered:

What have you ever done to fight for Black people? I remember you going to a protest with me back in college, but besides that, I've never seen you sign a petition. Never seen you call or write our representatives. You never remember to vote unless I bring it up. Why?

TOPHER

I don't know. I get busy.

NIA

I'm busy too.

He does not respond.

NIA

See, I spent a lot of time thinking and writing and crying these past few days. And as I thought and wrote and cried, I came to this conclusion that... it's because you don't care.

TOPHER

I do care.

NIA

Not really. Not enough. Not enough to get uncomfortable, to sacrifice a job opportunity. That was the word that kept coming up for me. "Sacrifice." You care, but you won't sacrifice for the end goal. You still put your personal goals and comfort above the lives and comfort of others. I guess I never noticed before, because you were always so good to me. But then this thing with Alix happened and now I see it's always been a problem.

TOPHER

I've been selfish. I fully own up to that. And with Alix, I was afraid and I put myself before everyone, including you. But that doesn't make me a monster.

NIA

No one said you were. That's why this hurts. Because I think you're a good person. I do. Maybe not in action, but in essence. You've always loved me. But loving me cannot be your sole contribution to supporting the Black community.

TOPHER

Nia-

NIA

So, I think you're a good person. But you're not an ally.

She lets the words sit with him. The words hurt; to hear, to say. They sit in it.

TOPHER

Okay. Yeah.

NIA

I've been thinking about what that says about me. Who am I? Who can I claim to be when I preach one thing, but willfully come home to another? Am I a good person? How can I say I stand for these things when this is how things are in my own home?

TOPHER

No. I fucked up. That's not on you to carry.

NIA

But it is, / if I choose to stay in this.

TOPHER

No, it's not. Wait.

He's not quite sure if he heard that correctly.

TOPHER

If you choose to stay?

Nia is silent.

TOPHER

What does that mean?

NIA

It means I can't be married to someone who's not an ally.

TOPHER

So, what are you saying?

NIA

I'm saying I need change.

TOPHER

I can change. We can work on change together.

NIA

No-

TOPHER

No?

NIA

I don't want to. I don't want to do all that work. I talked to my mom while you were gone -

TOPHER

You told her about this?

NIA

Yes. You didn't tell your parents?

TOPHER

No.

NIA

Why did they think you were over there?

TOPHER

I just made something up, I didn't want them in our business.

NIA

Well, I told my mom. And she told me to choose the option that'll bring me the most peace. Teaching you how to be a proper ally isn't going to bring me peace. It wouldn't even end with you. After you, we'd have to work on your parents-

TOPHER

Then I'll do the work on my own. I can educate them too.

NIA

It's not that simple.

TOPHER

But it is possible.

NIA

Topher-

TOPHER

It's possible! I love you.

NIA

I love you too.

TOPHER

Then that should be enough.

NIA

It's not.

TOPHER

Why not?

NIA

Because loving me didn't keep you from hurting me before.

TOPHER

I can do it. I can read all the books, sign the petitions, go to marches, write all the senators.

NIA

But do you *want* to?

TOPHER

Of course, I want to!

NIA

Then why didn't you do it before?

TOPHER

I just didn't - I don't know. I don't know why!

NIA

And that's where I've been stuck the past four days.

Topher takes Nia's hand.

TOPHER

I am not perfect. I'm nowhere near it. But every day I try to be. For you. Doesn't that count for something?

NIA

No. That's the whole problem. I don't want you to be a good person because of me. I want you to be a good person because that's who you are.

TOPHER

So, what are you saying?

NIA

I'm saying this isn't going to w-

They both jump, startled by the sound of the porcelain angel crashing to the ground. Its pieces spray across the floor, jagged fragments covering the area. Nia and Topher stare at the sea of glistening shards, unmoving. Then they look at each other.

End of play.