

Woke
By Avery Sharpe

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Characters

Jesse Blanche	A young white man. Has an incredible amount of charm. Smart and knows it.
Adrian Strong	A young black man. Thoughtful and passionate. Has underlying swag.
Martha Blanche	Jesse's mother. Overly affectionate and full of energy.
Frank Blanche	Jesse's father. Something about him says "all-American".
Tanisha McCoy	A young black woman. Genuine and undeniably the finale of a fireworks show.
Natasha Boyd	A young black woman. Outrageously sweet. Has an aura that is calming with a dash of sass.

Notes

- The "a" in the name Blanche is pronounced like the beginning sound of "Autumn"
- **A beat** is a brief time of non-verbal communication
 - **A spell** is a beat that lasts longer
 - **A moment** is a beat that lasts longest
- A line that contains // denotes where the next line begins to overlap
- **CHARACTER A // CHARACTER B** denotes that the characters speak different things simultaneously.
- This script is intended to have a brisk pace. Similar to the pacing of a comedy. However, there will be stretches where the characters need to take their time because of the weight of the moment. So don't be afraid of silence when it is appropriate, but earn those moments with the pacing elsewhere.
- There are times where the stage directions are very generic in the way that it describes the speech/action. Of course, don't create a whole new play, but please feel the freedom to ad-lib your ass off. It is a beautiful thing.

Avery Sharpe/Woke_v4

Act 1 Scene 1

The lights come up on ADRIAN STRONG and JESSE BLANCHE walking into the Blanche living room. It is apparent from the surroundings that, while the Blanches are not millionaires, they are not doing badly for themselves.

ADRIAN

Listen, I'm not saying Kendrick Lamar isn't gonna go down as **one** of the greatest of all // time, okay?

JESSE

One of // the greatest? Are you—

ADRIAN

It's just that no matter what Eminem is **the** greatest of all time.

JESSE

Even with "To Pimp a Butterfly"? That album is not just the greatest for Kendrick, but for every hip-hop artist before or since.

ADRIAN

It was a good album, but—

JESSE

No, there's no but // about it!

ADRIAN

Eminem's flow, wordplay, aggressiveness, comedic ability, musicality, freestyling, and rawness is unmatched. He's the full package.

JESSE

Adrian, you are killing me. You don't know anything about your own people's art form.

ADRIAN

Jesse, I know plenty. That's why I'm telling yo pasty, salutorian ass what the truth is.

JESSE

You're just mad that my intellectual prowess goes beyond yours.

ADRIAN

You should say that to Mariana Rivera.

JESSE

Mariana Rivera was only valedictorian because of a technicality.

ADRIAN

You should put that in your graduation speech.

JESSE

Oh my GOD. Don't remind me I have to do that. I hate public speaking.

ADRIAN

You're gonna be fine. As long as you stop being a pussy about it.

JESSE

Screw you, douche. You're just mad I get better grades than you. And rap better than you too.

ADRIAN

Jesse! Wow! You're funny. That joke really does need to be in your graduation speech.

JESSE

I don't rap as bad as I used to anymore!

ADRIAN

I could wipe my ass with your bars, son.

JESSE

I'm not kidding. I've been practicing. You're not ready.

ADRIAN

I'm not ready? Lemme see this. I sure do need this laugh.

JESSE

Ninja, please.

(A hip-hop beat is turned on)

You want me to go first this time?

ADRIAN

I don't know why you always try this. Not even Hammer can touch these bars, son.

JESSE

Son? You gonna be calling me daddy in a minute. Just like your mom.

ADRIAN

Bruh, you can't say that about my mama! You know her!

JESSE

Yeah I do. Every inch of her!

ADRIAN

Bitch! Spit it or quit it.

JESSE

Spitters are quitters, which is what I told your mom.

ADRIAN

Just go!

JESSE

(Rapping)
Yo...yeah...check it...

*Just sitting in the house ain't worried about a thing,
'bout to go off to college be the undisputed king.
Poor Adrian thinks he's the man no doubt,
but his mom screams my name as I'm making her shout.
oh boo hoo am I rhyming too hard? Bitch, never ever say Jesse don't got bars.*

ADRIAN

Oh it's like that, huh? Okay. I got something for you. Yo...

*Lemme spit a second for the student number dos
You wanna get like me but it's not even close
I see you tryna flex doin lame mama jokin
don't act like you dunno that yo mama be chokin
on this dick, got the pics, I done took about like six
she do it so good Bill Clinton wanna hit.
Damn mama said Obama on some presidential shit
Jesse you don't want these rhymes on some real credential shit.
I got a flow so sick, it made all the doctors quit
I can roast yo ass all day, you don't even have to pay
'cause it called freestylin, I don't care about you cryin
I'm the king of this shit, I'm a muthafuckin lion—*

JESSE

Alright, alright! Damn. I got it.

ADRIAN

Oh but I was just getting started—

JESSE

Yeah I know, I know.

ADRIAN

You sure you had enough?

JESSE

Shut up, bro.

ADRIAN

No, but for real though, you did actually get better. You came with a lil fire.

JESSE

Well, I still don't got nothing on you. Much like Eminem doesn't have anything—

ADRIAN

To have so much “intellectual prowess”, you kinda slow.

JESSE

Well, your mom likes how slow I—

MARTHA BLANCHE enters.

MARTHA

Jesse! Don't be so gross!

JESSE

Oh hey Mom! I didn't know you would be home yet. Sorry.

MARTHA

So gross mother jokes are okay as long as I'm not home?

JESSE

Yes—I mean no. Honestly, Adrian started it.

ADRIAN

What! No I—Miss Martha you know I would never say anything sideways like that about you.

MARTHA

Oh really?

ADRIAN

Of course not.

MARTHA

Yeah right, ya little booger-head. Why are you guys home so early?

JESSE

Seniors only had a half-week.

MARTHA

Wow. The year just flew by, huh?

JESSE

Thank the Lord it did. Aren't you usually at zumba class right now?

MARTHA

My instructor is taking a two-week vacation to go to Singapore with her husband. Frank never takes me anywhere. Some people just have it all. Perfect cheekbones...exotic vacations...my life is so unfair sometimes.

JESSE

Mine too. I'm only not valedictorian because of half a percent.

ADRIAN

I mean...I ain't gotta car yet.

JESSE

You don't need a car. I'll chauffeur you around like Driving Miss Daisy for the rest of our lives, bro.

ADRIAN

I think I wanna shoot higher in life than Missy Daisy.

JESSE

Why? Who wouldn't want a personal chauffeur?

ADRIAN

I mean—

MARTHA

Oh that would be an absolute dream. You better take advantage of Jesse while you still have him.

ADRIAN

Yeah, lucky me.

MARTHA

Aww! You both are going to be gone so soon! I should take advantage of the time I still have with my boys!

JESSE

God please no.

MARTHA

But Jesse you're going to be a full-grown college man soon!

JESSE

I'm technically already a full-grown college man.

ADRIAN

She's right. We'll be gone in no time.

JESSE

You are such a—

MARTHA

What were you guys planning to do today? I can hang.

JESSE

Ew. No, Mom. We were—

ADRIAN

We were just doing some freestyling. You got bars, Miss Martha?

MARTHA

Bars of what?

JESSE

Verses, Mom. Freestyling is rap that you make up off the top of your head.

MARTHA

Rap? Oh no. You know I don't do that stuff.

ADRIAN

Why not?

MARTHA

Have you heard it? For one, you can't even understand what they're saying half the time, and when you can it's definitely nothing appropriate.

ADRIAN

I mean, that's not totally—

MARTHA

Do you like that stuff, Adrian?

ADRIAN

Yeah. I love it.

MARTHA

I never thought you would...well...not that you're...

JESSE

You're the whitest black guy ever so you loving rap is just funny.

MARTHA

No I don't mean that like—you're just not...you know...

JESSE

Stereotypical.

MARTHA

But that's a good thing!

JESSE

But not that being stereotypical is bad—

MARTHA

Well, right. Of course not—

ADRIAN

(Laughing)

It's okay guys. I totally get what you mean. I'm an oreo.

JESSE

Yes // that's exactly it!

MARTHA

Right! That's exactly it. You're just as sweet as one, too.

ADRIAN

Thanks, Miss Martha.

MARTHA

You know I love you, honey. By the way, how are Gary and Renee?

ADRIAN

Mom and Dad are doing fine. They're just busy getting stuff ready for graduation. They're more excited than I am.

MARTHA

They should be. It's not everyday your baby boy graduates.

JESSE

That's true. This whole graduation weekend is going to be so amazing! Right, Adrian? Wink wink nudge nudge.

ADRIAN

Yeah...wink wink...?

MARTHA

Oh my boys are going away and leaving me forever!

ADRIAN

I mean, I'm going to Morehouse. That's just in the city.

MARTHA

That's true. That's not too far away. I hear such great things about that school.

ADRIAN

Yeah, my parents really pushed for me to go there.

MARTHA

Didn't Dr. Martin Luther King go to that school? I think I read that somewhere.

ADRIAN

Yep. So did Killer Mike.

MARTHA

Whoa. Who is that?

ADRIAN and JESSE

A rapper.

MARTHA

Well...I'm sure it's a great school, and they're going to be lucky to have you.

ADRIAN

Not as lucky as Dartmouth is going to be to have Jesse.

JESSE

Well, not quite as lucky as whatever school Mariana freaking Rivera is going to.

ADRIAN

Hater.

MARTHA

Both schools are going to be lucky because you are both very sweet, smart, and spectacular boys.

ADRIAN

Are we so sweet, smart, and spectacular that you would make some of your special brownies for us?

JESSE

Oh my GOD. Would you?

MARTHA

Like right now?

ADRIAN

Yes // ma'am!

JESSE

Please yes!

MARTHA

Well, since you're going away I guess I could—

ADRIAN and JESSE freak out.

Well, I'll get started on that then. You guys have fun with your freestyling bars.

JESSE

Mom, no. Just go.

MARTHA

Just don't be too nasty and gross.

ADRIAN

Thanks, Miss Martha.

MARTHA

You're welcome, *Adrian*.

MARTHA exits.

JESSE

Hey, I was just kidding, Mom!

ADRIAN

Man, your mama's a trip.

JESSE

Yeah, she can be such a mom sometimes.

ADRIAN

(Lightheartedly mocking)

"My life is so unfair being a stay-at-home mom with my rich ass house and my rich ass life and my rich ass zumba classes." She can cook though.

JESSE

We're honestly not that rich.

ADRIAN

Dude, you're going to Dartmouth, which is seventy thousand a year. And you said your scholarships cover tuition and housing, which still leaves how much to pay for?

JESSE

Like ten thousand.

ADRIAN

That's right. And your parents are footin the bill.

JESSE

So? That doesn't mean we're rich necessarily.

ADRIAN

Man, if my parents had to pay ten thousand dollars a year for me to go to school, we would all be homeless and workin the night shift on some corner. Hell, the day shift too.

JESSE

But you got scholarships—

ADRIAN

And loans too. The only family helpin me foot the bill is Uncle Sam.

JESSE

You mean that same Uncle Sam who was selling moonshine out of his trunk at our junior prom?

ADRIAN

First of all, that was Uncle Cephus. And second, you know what I meant, ya dick.

JESSE

Yeah...I'm sorry bro. I guess maybe—

ADRIAN

I mean it's not your fault you're rich and a genius. I just wanna focus on having fun this weekend.

JESSE

Oh my GOD! I'm actually a complete idiot! I forgot to tell you!

ADRIAN

Tell me what?

JESSE

Wink wink nudge nudge!

ADRIAN

No, you definitely said that shit earlier.

JESSE

No, I'm saying we are going to have *so* much fun this weekend!

ADRIAN

Yeah, I know. Party hoppin is gonna be lit.

JESSE

I'm talking about even after that. We're going to come back here and—

ADRIAN

Yeah I already know I'm spending the night so // why are you—

JESSE

Dude...some girls are coming over.

ADRIAN

What?! Here?! Who?!

JESSE

Shhh shhh shhhh! So I've still been talking with Tanisha McCoy.

ADRIAN

I knew it!

JESSE

Really?

ADRIAN

Duh! You get the same way every time you like a girl, man.

JESSE

What do you mean?

ADRIAN

Ever since 7th grade bro...

JESSE

7th grade?

ADRIAN

Yeah. I know you remember Jessica Chapman.

JESSE

Ew. You didn't have to bring up Jessica Chapped Lips.

ADRIAN

Whatever, bro. You were crazy about her.

JESSE

I was in 7th grade! Everybody's just generally crazy!

ADRIAN

Every time you "fall in love" it's the same thing, Jesse. You get distant and when we do hang out you always wanna watch some chick flick.

JESSE

That's ridiculous.

ADRIAN

I've barely seen you the past few weeks, and you were gonna ask me to watch a girl movie today weren't you?

JESSE

My Big Fat Greek Wedding 2 isn't a girl movie. It's great for the whole family.

ADRIAN

Oh my God, man....

JESSE

Whatever. You're just a misogynist.

ADRIAN

Why didn't you just tell me about Tanisha, man?

JESSE

I wasn't really sure if there was anything to tell yet.

ADRIAN

Well, I'm happy for you. She's awesome. I love you two together.

JESSE

Yeah, she's awesome, but I wouldn't say we're together yet. Just talking.

ADRIAN

Yeah, whatever. But wait—she's coming over here after we party hop?

JESSE

She's going to sneak over when I give her the all clear.

ADRIAN

Even with your parents upstairs?

JESSE

Well, my dad has to catch a flight for some business trip like right after the ceremony Friday morning so he'll be gone all weekend. And you know my mom sleeps like a rock in a diabetic coma.

ADRIAN

Man, I couldn't pull no stunt like that at my house. I swear my mom can hear a fly yawn. Hashtag: growing up black.

JESSE

This is going to be so hashtag:lit!

ADRIAN

“Hashtag: lit” though? Hashtag: white people.

MARTHA enters.

MARTHA

You know, I just thought about it. Since my zumba class is cancelled, we can spend time together by having our own class! Doesn't that sound fun?

A beat.

JESSE

Hashtag: white people.

ADRIAN

Hashtag: white people.

MARTHA looks confused as the boys laugh. The lights fade.

Act 1 Scene 2

Graduation night. It is very late. ADRIAN and JESSE are inside the Blanche living room. They have had several beers apparently.

ADRIAN

You sure she's not up?

JESSE

I'm sure. She's been texting me all night, but she's not anymore which means she must've passed out.

ADRIAN

Like on a scale of one to ten, how sure are you?

JESSE

Dude, stop being paranoid.

ADRIAN

Man, you know my mama. I'm not being paranoid, I'm just feeling my self-preservation instinct kick in.

JESSE

Dude, remember when I used to sneak out and steal my mom's car and we would go to waffle house?

ADRIAN

Yeah, All-star breakfast breakouts was my shit.

JESSE

We only did it when Dad was on a business trip.

ADRIAN

um...?

JESSE

When my mom was sleeping like a rock in a diabetic coma.

ADRIAN

Okay listen I'm just saying sneaking out is one thing but girls sneaking // over here—

JESSE

She's not going to find out, man.

ADRIAN

Just text her one more—

JESSE

HEY MOM!!! // ARE YOU UP? WE'RE ABOUT TO SNEAK GIRLS OVER, AND ADRIAN'S BEING A PUSSY!!!

ADRIAN

Whoa! Yo yo yo hey man! What the—

They listen.

JESSE

See? Not a peep.

ADRIAN

Don't you do no dumb shit like that ever again.

JESSE

Dude, breathe. At least, you're not going to be a third wheel.

ADRIAN

How am I not? Who's coming?

JESSE

You'll see.

ADRIAN

For the love of God! Why won't you just tell me?!

JESSE

Patience, grasshopper.

ADRIAN

You gonna make me chop yo throat! Just tell me this...is it Holly Peterson?

JESSE

What? No, it's not Holly Peterson.

ADRIAN

Then it has to be...

ADRIAN and JESSE share a beat.

JESSE

I didn't want to lie to you.

ADRIAN

You didn't wanna lie? Oh well great. Now you're not a punk ass bitch anymore.

JESSE

I just figured you might bail if I told you.

ADRIAN

I think I should bail.

JESSE

How would you get home? You rode with me.

ADRIAN

I don't give a damn. I'll catch an Uber or fuckin hitchhike.

JESSE

Dude, it's not that bad. She's pretty, and you guys would be great together.

ADRIAN

Man, I'm not getting with Natasha fuckin Boyd.

JESSE

What's wrong with Natasha Boyd? I thought you guys had fun at prom.

ADRIAN

She wanna get too serious, man.

JESSE

What's wrong with that?

ADRIAN

We're all about to go to college.

JESSE

But she's going to Spelman, right? Isn't that right down the street from Morehouse?

ADRIAN

It don't matter, man. I'm not trying to be tied down to nobody in my first year.

JESSE

Whatever, bro. Listen, don't give up a good thing just because you're a dumbass.

ADRIAN

Ain't nobody got time for yo hopeless romantic shit, Jesse.

JESSE

Dude, I'm just saying you should give her // a chance—

ADRIAN

Lemme call this damn Uber so I—

JESSE

Come on, Adrian. Do me this favor.

ADRIAN

You should be alright without me, bruh.

JESSE

No, you don't understand. Tanisha said she would only come if Natasha could too.

ADRIAN
So all y'all bitches set me up?

JESSE
I think I really like her.

ADRIAN
Tanisha is outta your league.

JESSE
You said you love us together.

ADRIAN
That doesn't mean you're on her level though.

JESSE
Maybe I'm just lucky. Let's find out.

ADRIAN
Nobody's luck is that good. I hope she shuts you down.

JESSE's phone gets a text.

JESSE
Hey, they said they're pulling up. You're staying, right?

ADRIAN
Jesse, look man—

JESSE
Just do me this solid, please.

ADRIAN
You're such a triflin bitch...

JESSE
After all these years, you're going to leave me hanging like this?

ADRIAN
Man, if you // do some shit like this again, I swear to God I will bounce.

JESSE
Please, please, please, please, please, please, please—

ADRIAN

Yo! Chill, nigga! I said I would do it!

(JESSE laughs)

What?

JESSE

You sound so ridiculous saying that word, bro.

ADRIAN

You lucky you my boy—

JESSE

Hey, I owe you one. I really do appreciate it.

(They do their special handshake)

Let me go get them. Wink wink nudge nudge.

ADRIAN

I hate you.

JESSE exits. ADRIAN checks his appearance on his phone. He thoroughly makes sure that he looks and smells good because no matter what... girls are still girls. JESSE enters with TANISHA MCCOY and NATASHA BOYD.

JESSE

Adrian, may I proudly present to you the most attractive part of the 2016 graduating class!

TANISHA and NATASHA

Heeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeey!

ADRIAN

Sup y'all.

NATASHA

Hey Adrian! It's so good to see you!

ADRIAN

Hey Natasha. You look really nice.

NATASHA

Thanks! I'm trying to be cute or whatever.

TANISHA

Yeah you know we had to come correct for graduation.

JESSE

Well, Tanisha McCoy you came one hundred percent correct if you ask me. Would you ladies like some beer or some wine?

TANISHA

OOO what you got?

JESSE

A few ciders, some PBR, and some cabernet.

TANISHA

Yaaaas! I'll take some of that Cabernet.

NATASHA

I'm good. I'm driving us.

TANISHA

Girl, get you something. We ain't got no more parties to hop to so we can take our time.

NATASHA

Well still I—

TANISHA

Natasha, stop tripping. We graduated! You need to get in formation. Get her a cider.

JESSE

Yes, ma'am! You need another PBR, bro?

ADRIAN

Yeah, man. Gimme two. I'm gonna chug em.

JESSE

That's what I'm talking about! Double fist it!

ADRIAN

That's right. Grown man status.

JESSE

We're about to get so lit!

JESSE exits to get drinks.

ADRIAN

He is so white sometimes.

TANISHA

So are you.

ADRIAN

Woooo // oooow.

TANISHA

I'm just playin! I'm just playin!

NATASHA

Don't pay her no attention. She's been drinking. Driving her around has been a trip.

TANISHA

Girl, shut up. Driving me around has been a privilege.

NATASHA

What have you guys been doing tonight?

ADRIAN

We did some party hoppin. Y'all shoulda been at Justin Wilkerson's party though. It was so turnt.

TANISHA

Yaaaas! Wilkerson's party was everything! We were there.

ADRIAN

Oh. We must've left before we saw you.

NATASHA

Aww that sucks. The music was so good.

ADRIAN

...Yep...

TANISHA

I honestly could still hit a mean twerk right now. Y'all got a speaker?

NATASHA

Oh Lord.

ADRIAN

Well, we would have to check with Jesse about music but I don't think—

JESSE enters with all the drinks.

JESSE

God please yes! Music is a great idea!

ADRIAN

Um, don't you think—

JESSE

We should have a toast together, and then Adrian will chug his beers as promised, and then we back that ass up.

ADRIAN

But isn't it gonna—

JESSE

Hey bro it's going to be fine. Wink wink nudge nudge.

ADRIAN

Okay whatever, man.

JESSE

You know, all of this is really reminiscent of prom. That was such a great night.

TANISHA

It really was a perfect night. You and that damn white tux. You looked good though.

JESSE

Well, honestly I was just trying to keep up with you.

TANISHA

Boy bye.

JESSE

You're a lot to keep up with so...

ADRIAN

So we were toasting, right?

JESSE

Yes a toast! Would you like to do the honors?

ADRIAN

No thanks. You do it.

JESSE

Dude, you know I hate public // speaking.

ADRIAN

Oh my God. Stop trippin, man. It's literally just us.

TANISHA

Yeah, you'll do great.

JESSE

Well damn... okay... how about to us graduating?

TANISHA

And to you giving that dope ass salutatorian speech. It was so good.

JESSE

Wow really? Thanks. I wasn't sure how it came out.

TANISHA

It deserves a toast.

JESSE

Okay well let's toast to that too. Anything else?

NATASHA

To exciting new beginnings and to wonderful possibilities in the future.

JESSE

Hell yes I'll toast to that! Anything else?

ADRIAN

Let's just get on with it.

JESSE

Class of 2016! // Wooooooo!

TANISHA and NATASHA

Class of 2016!!!

They all take a generous gulp of their drinks while ADRIAN chugs one of his beers. Everybody watches and cheers him on. ADRIAN makes a face of disgust for a moment, but the prodding of his peers propels him into chugging the next one. When ADRIAN finishes, they all laugh and applaud him.

ADRIAN

(With a disgusted face)
That's right. Grown man status.

NATASHA

I can't believe you just did that!

TANISHA

Yeah, that shit is so nasty.

JESSE

Nasty? Oh well nasty's my second middle name.

JESSE turns on music and begins to dance.

TANISHA

Okay! What you know about that, Jesse?

TANISHA starts dancing with JESSE. ADRIAN and NATASHA awkwardly try not to look at each other. Another song begins to play.

JESSE

Hey Adrian! This is your song, right? Come dance, man!

TANISHA

Yeah, y'all acting brand new. I know you can dance, Adrian. Show Natasha a few things.

ADRIAN

Yeah, no. I'm okay.

NATASHA

Yeah, you know I don't dance, Tanisha.

TANISHA

That's why I told Adrian to show yo ass.

JESSE

I don't believe for a second you can't dance.

NATASHA

Not all black people are just born knowing how to dance, Jesse.

JESSE

I wasn't saying that at all—

NATASHA

Then what's your point?

TANISHA

Girl, you need to stop trippin! Tryin to play yo race card and shit.

NATASHA

I ain't trippin I—

TANISHA

Adrian Xavier Strong. Get yo off-brand, Carlton Banks ass up and dance with this girl!

JESSE

Yeah, let's see that grown man status.

A beat. ADRIAN gets up and offers his hand to NATASHA. She takes it. They get verbal affirmation from JESSE and TANISHA as they begin to dance. At first, it is awkward, but they do eventually find a rhythm between them that is complimentary. ADRIAN breaks away abruptly.

ADRIAN

I gotta pee.

JESSE

Uh-oh. Don't break the seal, bro.

(ADRIAN exits)

It doesn't stop once you do.

TANISHA

What's his problem?

JESSE

He had to pee.

TANISHA

He had to pee?

NATASHA

He had to pee.

TANISHA

Look, I've been sayin it this whole time. Do you still not believe me?

NATASHA

Don't start, okay? Just drop it.

JESSE

You've been saying what this whole time?

TANISHA

Nothing apparently. I'm just tryin to keep this buzz goin.

JESSE

You're only buzzed? You need to catch up. Oh! I know what would help. So Tanisha...truth or dare?

TANISHA

Oh nuh-uh!

JESSE

Aw come on. Do it for the buzz. Truth or dare?

TANISHA

This game is just an excuse to get me to flash my titties or something. You ain't slick.

JESSE

Look, if there's something you don't want to do or don't want to answer, then you just have to chug your drink for three seconds. One way or another it's fun for everybody.

ADRIAN enters with another beer.

NATASHA

Okay let's do it. I love truth or dare.

ADRIAN

Wait, truth or dare?

JESSE

Yeah, bro. It'll be fun.

TANISHA

Natasha, yo non-dancing ass loves truth or dare though?

NATASHA

I love the boldness. It takes guts to do a dare, and it takes guts to tell the truth.

TANISHA

Um, it takes guts to twerk, bitch.

JESSE

Listen, how about we start off easy and work our way up, okay? Natasha: truth or dare?

NATASHA

Truth.

JESSE

Is it true you really can't dance?

NATASHA

Yes, it's true. I love to dance, but I just don't have rhythm for whatever reason so I get self-conscious when I have to.

JESSE

Well okay then. See? Easy enough. But in your defense, I think you look absolutely fine when you dance so don't be so self-conscious. Right, Adrian?

ADRIAN

Right.

JESSE

Now it's your turn to ask somebody.

NATASHA

Truth or dare, Tanisha?

TANISHA

Dare.

NATASHA

I dare you...to kiss Jesse.

They all talk trash.

TANISHA

Okay. Let me show you a few things.

TANISHA and JESSE kiss. It's actually a really sweet and passionate kiss.

JESSE

Whew. Wink Wink nudge nudge.

TANISHA

Sorry, not sorry. Now it's my turn, right? Adrian, I dare you to kiss Natasha.

ADRIAN

You didn't even ask me // truth or dare.

NATASHA

Yeah, you have to ask him truth or dare first.

TANISHA

Oh my God, whatever. Truth or dare?

ADRIAN

Truth.

TANISHA

You lil punk bitch. That's okay though...is it true Adrian that you don't date black girls?

ADRIAN

Is it true that's really your question?

JESSE

Remember, if you don't want to answer the question, you just have to chug for three seconds.

TANISHA

Remember, if you don't wanna be a punk bitch, you just have to answer the question.

NATASHA

Why you starting stuff?

TANISHA

I'm just playing the game. It's all about having guts, remember? So guts or not, Adrian?

A beat.

ADRIAN

It is true that I do date black girls. I date all types of girls // regardless of—

TANISHA

Let me rephrase. Is it true you prefer other races over black girls?

ADRIAN

I already answered your question. This ain't Law & Order.

NATASHA

Tanisha—

TANISHA

Okay, okay. I'm done. Go ahead, Adrian.

ADRIAN

Okay. Jesse, truth or dare?

JESSE

I'll do truth.

ADRIAN

Tell us the truth about what's goin on with you and Tanisha.

NATASHA

OOO that's a good one, Adrian.

JESSE

Well...we both just graduated, and we are both going to college—

ADRIAN

Man, stop it. You know what I'm asking.

JESSE

Yeah okay...grown man status. Um...Tanisha and I are dating.

TANISHA

Wait, what? Are we?

JESSE

I mean, we're not technically yet, but we've been talking a lot and hanging out a lot for the last two months. Almost everyday since prom. And even before prom too so...I don't know. Like—I'm not—you know—like—I'm not saying you're my girlfriend or anything, but I would definitely go so far as to say we're at least dating. And who knows? Maybe—I don't know...going to different colleges is going to be a hump, but people do it all the time. And NYU and Dartmouth aren't impossibly far apart so...I'm willing to try if you are.

TANISHA
You mean it?

JESSE
Yes. I do mean it.

TANISHA
Okay. I'm down for the cause.

JESSE
Wow. Okay. Wait really?

TANISHA
Really really.

JESSE
(Like Biggie Smalls)
And if you don't know // now you know.

TANISHA
(Joining JESSE)
Now you know.

JESSE and TANISHA giggle and snuggle and smooch each other.

ADRIAN
Well...wink wink nudge nudge indeed.

NATASHA
Why do you guys keep—

The garage is heard opening.

JESSE
Why is the garage...Oh shit! That must be my dad!

TANISHA
Your dad?! // What do you mean your dad?

NATASHA
Are you serious?! // Your dad?

ADRIAN

Your damn dad?! I thought you said he was on a business trip!

JESSE

He was! You girls need to get in this closet! We never really use it for anything!

TANISHA

I ain't about to get in no damn closet!

NATASHA

Grab yo stuff and bring yo ass!

JESSE

I know it's bad. I'm sorry. I didn't know though.

TANISHA

This is the worst date ever!

TANISHA and NATASHA get into the closet. JESSE closes the door behind them.

JESSE

(To the girls as FRANK BLANCHE enters)

I know it's bad, but I'll make it up to you. I promise.

FRANK looks at JESSE strangely.

ADRIAN

Oh hey, Mr. Frank! How was your trip? Not too tired? We thought you were gonna be gone all weekend. We missed you. By the way, you look great!

FRANK

Um thanks Adrian...what are you guys doing?

JESSE

We were just hanging out after party hopping // just doing—

ADRIAN

Just doin some freestyling bars // actually it's just called—

JESSE

Yeah! We did it for Mom the other day // but it—

ADRIAN

She didn't really like it though // because she—

JESSE

She did like Martin Luther King though // so that's good—

ADRIAN

But that's why Jesse was saying it's so bad // because—

JESSE

Yeah I'm not as good as Adrian so—

ADRIAN

He was just coming to grips with that just now when you walked in—

JESSE

But I promised to make it up to him.

A spell. FRANK sees all the bottles.

FRANK

So you guys kinda drank a lot, huh? Does your mom know?

A beat.

JESSE

No. She doesn't.

FRANK

Well good. Let's keep it that way. She would have a fit if she knew "her boys" were drinking underage. I personally think if you guys are old enough to go die for your country, you should be able to have a few beers without it being a big fuss.

JESSE // ADRIAN

Yeah, that's what I think all the time, Dad. // You're absolutely right about that, Mr. Frank.

FRANK

Well, just make sure you clean all this up and take it outside. Out-side. Tonight. Before you guys go to bed. There won't be anything I can do to help you if she sees any of it in the morning.

ADRIAN and JESSE

Yes, sir.

FRANK

Alright, well I'm off to bed. Can you believe this—in the middle of my flight almost all of the meetings I was supposed to have got cancelled. I'm beat.

JESSE

Yeah, it's been a long day for us too. And it looks like it's going to keep getting longer.

FRANK

Yeah well just try to keep it down guys. I know your mom sleeps like a cemetery, but I'm actually a normal person, so throw me a bone, okay?

ADRIAN

(Laughing way too hard)

That was good, Mr. Frank!

(FRANK and JESSE look at him)

You said cemetery...throw me a bone—

JESSE

We will keep it down, Dad. Get some rest.

FRANK

Night, fellas.

ADRIAN and JESSE

Night.

FRANK starts to walk away and then turns back abruptly.

FRANK

Hey, whose car is outside? You didn't buy a car recently did you, Adrian?

ADRIAN

Well...uh...

JESSE

It belongs to a friend of his.

FRANK

A friend of yours?

ADRIAN

Yeah. A friend.

A spell. Does he know? Maybe he does or maybe he doesn't.

FRANK

Well...that's nice they let you borrow it for graduation night. Really nice. Good night, fellas.

ADRIAN and JESSE

Good night.

The boys stand their ground until FRANK completely disappears and they hear his bedroom door shut. They finally exhale.

ADRIAN

Holy // shit...

JESSE

Oh my GOD.

ADRIAN

This is why I gotta stop hangin out with white people. Gonna give me cardiac arrest.

JESSE

Dude, that was crazy!

ADRIAN

A friend's car though?

JESSE

It was the best I could come up with on short notice. You weren't saying shit.

ADRIAN

I'm just glad he didn't ask me anything else. Like who that friend was.

JESSE

I would've said Natasha.

ADRIAN

Out of all people?

JESSE

Well, she is your friend and it is her car, right? It wouldn't have been lying to him. Unless she's not just your friend...

ADRIAN

No, she's just a friend.

JESSE

I don't know, bro. You guys were dancing kinda hot and heavy—

The girls emerge from the closet.

TANISHA

So were you ever gonna let us out the damn closet or nah?

JESSE

Oh, shit! I'm so sorry!

TANISHA

You right about that.

JESSE

See, this is why you gotta stop hanging out with white people.

A beat.

TANISHA

You good to drive, girl?

NATASHA

Yeah, I'm good.

TANISHA

Let's roll out then.

NATASHA

Thanks for having us over. It was fun.

JESSE

Yeah, we should have a do-over without my dad barging in next time.

TANISHA

Yeah, and next time when he inevitably does come barging in, let us out the damn closet wit yo ole smart, dumb ass.

JESSE

There won't be a next time!

TANISHA

Really? I actually had a lot of fun but if there's not gonna be a next time then...

JESSE

Oh, well then don't worry...

(JESSE walks over to TANISHA and kisses her)
There will definitely be a next time.

TANISHA
Boy bye.

JESSE
Text me when you get home, please.

TANISHA
Okay, I will.

JESSE
Night, Natasha.

NATASHA
Goodnight, Jesse.

JESSE nudges ADRIAN.

ADRIAN
Oh—uh—bye, Natasha.

NATASHA
Bye. Friend.

JESSE closes the door behind the girls and turns around with an embarrassingly big smile.

JESSE
Did you see the way Tanisha was looking at me, man?

ADRIAN
Yeah, man. My mind is blown.

JESSE
I told you, bro! Wink Wink—

ADRIAN
Don't say that lame shit no more.

JESSE
Don't hate.

Lights fade.

Act 1 Scene 3

The lights come up on the Blanche dinner table.

MARTHA

Jesse, would you mind saying grace, honey?

JESSE

Um, yes. I do mind.

MARTHA

Why? You pray so well, sweetie.

FRANK

You guys always make such a big deal out of // this. Can't we—

MARTHA

It is a big deal. My boys are going to be // gone so soon—

FRANK

They're not boys // anymore, Martha.

JESSE

I never see you breaking your neck to say grace, Dad. Why can't you // just do—

FRANK

I pay for the food I shouldn't have to say grace too.

JESSE

What? That doesn't // even—

MARTHA

Please do your poor mother a kindness—

JESSE

Mooooooooom, I hate talking // in public.

FRANK

You're just praying for the four // of us.

JESSE
Don't take her side!

FRANK
I'm just ready to eat!

JESSE
Adrian, help a brother out.

MARTHA
Just stop being a brat and say grace.

JESSE
Grace.

MARTHA
Jesse Nicholas Blanche.

JESSE
Martha Patricia Blanche.
(MARTHA gives JESSE the mother glare)
Okay fine. Ready?

MARTHA
Thank // you.

FRANK
Finally.

JESSE
Okay...rub-a-dub-dub thanks for the grub.

MARTHA
Really?

FRANK
That's good enough for me.

MARTHA
No, Frank. Nobody touches a single thing until grace has been said.

FRANK

Come on, Jesse! Screw your man nuts on tight and get this over with.

MARTHA

Frank! Don't be // crass!

FRANK

Whaaaaaaat?

ADRIAN

I'll say grace, Miss Martha.

JESSE

See? Adrian said he would do it.

FRANK

I love the initiative.

FRANK and JESSE quickly bow their heads and close their eyes.

MARTHA

Thank you, Adrian.

ADRIAN

Lord, we thank You for this food, and we thank You for Miss Martha going out of her way to make it for us, and we thank You for the time that we get to spend together tonight. Not everybody gets that blessing so...we just wanna be sure to thank You for that. We pray all these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

EVERYONE

Amen.

MARTHA

That was lovely, Adrian. Thank you. At least *one* of my boys respects me.

JESSE

Boy? Is she referring to me, Dad?

FRANK

I don't know. I thought you were a man.

JESSE

I thought I was too.

FRANK

I mean, *I* think you are but maybe *other people...*

MARTHA

You know, you're lucky Adrian was here to save your butt.

JESSE

And always feel free to do so, buddy.

MARTHA

He won't be able to save you from doing dishes tonight though.

JESSE

What! But it's Dad's turn!

MARTHA

Well now it's your turn since you want to be a wise guy. Right, Frank?

FRANK

That's right. So screw your man nuts on tight and get them over with.

MARTHA

Frank!

JESSE

You're such a traitor! Adrian, back me up. That's not cool, right?

ADRIAN is silent.

JESSE

You okay, man?

MARTHA

Yeah, you've been really quiet tonight. Is everything okay?

ADRIAN

I'm cool.

A beat.

MARTHA

What's wrong, Adrian?

ADRIAN

No, for real. It's nothing.

MARTHA

Don't make me come over there and snuggle you.

ADRIAN

It's just been a weird day is all.

JESSE

Oh...because of the...?

ADRIAN

Yeah.

MARTHA

Wait, because of the what?

JESSE

Mom, the police shooting.

MARTHA

Oh...right. I'm sorry, Adrian. It's been everywhere on Facebook and the news.

FRANK

Yes. It really has been. Ant—Ar—Al—um...Sterling, right?

ADRIAN

His name was Alton. Alton Sterling. But I wasn't talking about him. That was last night. I was talking about Philando Castile. He was shot today.

JESSE

(To FRANK and MARTHA)

He was the one in the car with his girlfriend doing the Facebook live video.

ADRIAN

Yeah.

MARTHA

Oh, wow. I didn't know there was another one.

FRANK

There are so many of those videos going around that it's hard to keep track of who is who.

ADRIAN

Huh.

A spell.

JESSE

How are you feeling?

ADRIAN

I feel scared.

JESSE

Yeah, I can understand that.

MARTHA

I think it's tragic...but we love you and you're safe here. I really hope you're not too worried about yourself.

ADRIAN

Why not?

MARTHA

Well...you know...I think there's so much we don't know about these types of things.

ADRIAN

What do you mean?

FRANK

Well, let's take the Ferguson, Missouri situation. With the Michael Brown guy. First of all, the racial baggage of that town was set up in such a way that it was only a matter of time before something blew up.

MARTHA

Yeah, the cops are being trained to be racist, and the civilians are being trained to hate cops...

FRANK

That just creates a cesspool of hostility. It was a ticking time bomb.

ADRIAN

But that's not an excuse to kill human beings.

FRANK // MARTHA

I absolutely agree with you. // Of course not, honey.

FRANK

Nevertheless, the facts of the given circumstances still remain. But I think what she was saying is...it's not like that here. Or even when you go to Morehouse it won't be like that.

MARTHA

Right. And besides you're not like...well...you would never be in a situation like that. You're a very sweet, smart, and spectacular boy.

FRANK

Right. An officer would never have a reason to—

ADRIAN

Wait wait wait... are you saying Alton Sterling or Philando Castile wasn't sweet or smart or spectacular?

MARTHA

No, that's not what I meant! I'm saying that the contexts are—

ADRIAN

Context? I don't know what more context there needs to be.

FRANK

I watched the Alton Sterling // video—

ADRIAN

Alton Sterling. Alton.

FRANK

Alton. Sorry. I watched it, and honestly after watching it...I think there is a lot of room for questions. Don't you think?

A beat.

ADRIAN

Yes. I do have lots of questions.

MARTHA

Honey, we are on your side. Of course, you should be upset that people are being killed, and you should be upset if there are racial implications. I just think equality of scrutiny is important to achieve actual justice.

ADRIAN

Equality of scrutiny. Right. Okay. Do you think Alton Sterling would've died if he wasn't black?

FRANK

I don't think it's that sim—

ADRIAN

Better yet, do you think *I* would've died if it was me?

FRANK // MARTHA

I think the situations— // That's not even—

ADRIAN

No, the video doesn't lie! Alton Sterling was literally already on the ground! There was no reason to shoot him at point blank range when he was already restrained! And it would've ended the same no matter whose black ass was on the ground!

MARTHA

I know a lot // is going on—

FRANK

Let's just take a breath—

JESSE

Dude, I think I agree with them. You never would've been on that ground in the first place.

ADRIAN

Why?! Oh! Because I'm different. I don't act like a nigger—

MARTHA

Whoa, Adrian!

ADRIAN

(Cont'd)
—or talk like a nigger I just look like a nigger, right?

FRANK

Adrian, there's no need for—

ADRIAN

(Cont'd)
—I'm a nice nigger, I'm a “well-spoken” nigger, I'm a college-bound nigger so that doesn't really make me a nigger, right???

FRANK

Now that's enough, Adrian!!!

A moment.

MARTHA

(Genuine; hurt)

Do you really think we don't see where you're coming from?

ADRIAN

Thanks for the food guys. Excuse me.

ADRIAN begins to leave.

FRANK // MARTHA

Hold on— // Adrian, honey—

JESSE

Hey don't leave, man.

ADRIAN

I can take an Uber. I'll be okay.

JESSE

Don't be ridiculous. I'll take you. Come on! Stop!

(ADRIAN stops)

Mom. Dad. Would you mind?

FRANK // MARTHA

Yes. of course. // Sure, honey.

MARTHA

Take whatever time you need.

FRANK

Yes, you guys take your time. Adrian...I want you to know that you're always welcome here, buddy.

MARTHA

Yes. You're like a son to me, and I never want you to feel unsafe or unloved. We love you // immensely.

FRANK

Yes absolutely, buddy. We love you.

ADRIAN

I know.

A beat.

MARTHA

Feel better, honey.

FRANK and MARTHA leave.

JESSE

Dude. Are you okay?

ADRIAN

I don't know. I just feel ...a lot.

JESSE

I can see that. How can I help you?

ADRIAN

Could you scrape my skin off?

JESSE

I don't think there's anything wrong with your skin.

ADRIAN

Enough of the country does. We all know the cops are gonna get off scot-free.

JESSE

We don't know that.

ADRIAN

It's been proven time and time again.

JESSE

My parents aren't on that side though. I think they were just trying to lend some perspective.

ADRIAN

You know what...over the past few years that's what I've been trying to do too. Have some perspective. See things from the other side. But it's all fuckin bullshit, Jesse. Because somehow my perspective is the only one that ends up dead on the street. Or in jail. Or a fuckin hashtag.

JESSE

Adrian. Look, I love you but honestly... I don't think anyone winds up dead without at least having some responsibility.

ADRIAN

All I have to do is wear baggy clothes and a hoodie and I immediately become suspect. White girls wear that shit all the time.

JESSE

I think it's a little of a stretch to say you would end up dead though. You would be respectful and obedient and they would see you were no trouble.

ADRIAN

Or they would just see that I was black and wearing a hoodie! Don't act like that didn't just happen a few years ago!

JESSE

Okay. You're right, // but I think you should still apologize to my parents.

ADRIAN

I'm not trying to be right. I'm just trying to—what?

JESSE

I think...you should still apologize to my parents.

A spell.

ADRIAN

Why do you think I should do such a thing?

JESSE

I mean you kinda freaked out on them, bro.

ADRIAN

You haven't been listening, man.

JESSE

We all hear you, brother.

ADRIAN

You're not fuckin *listening* though.

JESSE

You're saying the whole world hates you because of your black skin, but clearly nobody in this house hates you.

ADRIAN

Yeah. Clearly. I just have to apologize to your parents.

JESSE

Yeah you do, man! It's just out of respect! Don't make them out like they agree with the slaying of black people.

ADRIAN

Because all lives matter, right?

A beat.

JESSE

We're not racist, Adrian.

ADRIAN

Why not? Because you listen to Kendrick? Because you wanna date a black girl?

JESSE

Well, it certainly doesn't make me racist.

ADRIAN

But it doesn't make you woke either.

JESSE

What are you talking about?

ADRIAN

You're not woke... and until just recently neither was I.

JESSE

What?

ADRIAN

Nothing, man.

A spell.

JESSE

Adrian, look I don't—

ADRIAN

I'll apologize. I don't know when but...even though I was right, I was wrong.

JESSE

Um, okay. Yeah. Thanks.

ADRIAN

I'll catch an Uber home.

JESSE

I can give you—

ADRIAN

Just stop, man.

JESSE

Okay, Um...I'm sorry you had a rough day.

ADRIAN

Right. Me too.

ADRIAN leaves JESSE in an awkward void of imploded confusion and helplessness. Lights fade.

Act 1 Scene 4

JESSE, TANISHA, and NATASHA are in the Blanche living room. JESSE and TANISHA are all cuddled up with each other.

TANISHA

Okay so I have a confession, y'all...

NATASHA

Oh no...how many weeks along are you? Should we make a Go Fund Me account?

JESSE

Hold on // no, ma'am.

TANISHA

Natasha, shut yo dumb ass up. Don't be playin around like that.

NATASHA

But y'all would have some beautiful hazelnut macchiato babies.

TANISHA

Girl, stop talking and immediately kill yourself. Ain't no coffee bean babies comin outta me anytime soon.

JESSE

Oh hell naw to the naw naw naw.

NATASHA

Oh my God. Calm down, dang. I was just playing. Y'all are doing the most.

TANISHA

As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted...I gotta say that I'm actually a little scared to move. Like for real.

JESSE

I thought you were excited about it?

TANISHA

I was but now it's all starting to hit me. We're all about to leave and be so far away from each other.

NATASHA

I know. It's crazy. When's your move in date again?

TANISHA

NYU doesn't start classes until after Labor Day so I won't move in until the 28th.

JESSE

Yeah, Dartmouth doesn't start until September 12th so I will probably just move in the week before.

NATASHA

Dang! Spelman starts school on the 17th! Of August!

TANISHA

What?! That's literally like five days away.

NATASHA

I know, and I haven't even thought about starting to pack yet.

TANISHA

Girl...well, at least you're not the only one. I'm sure Adrian's ass ain't packed yet either. Morehouse starts the same time too right, Jesse?

JESSE

How should I know? I'm not going there.

TANISHA

But I know Adrian told you. Where is he, by the way?

NATASHA

Yeah, I thought he would be here.

JESSE

I don't know. I texted and called him all last week to let him know we were having a little farewell kickback, but he didn't answer.

NATASHA

That's really weird.

TANISHA

It is weird! Let me tell you, girl. The butt buddies are fighting, and this one won't even tell me why.

JESSE

I told you it's no big deal. And we're not butt buddies.

NATASHA

It's a very big deal, Jesse. I don't think I've ever seen you two not together. What happened?

TANISHA

Yeah. Who did what to who?

JESSE

First of all, it's "who did what *to whom*"...

TANISHA

First of all, bitch, I'm studying linguistics at NYU so I know how to correctly use an object pronoun. If I choose not to do so because of colloquial conveniences, it is with full cognizance and not an ignorance of standard conjugative bylaws, asshole.

JESSE

Geez babe okay. I was just playing.

TANISHA

You around here playin like this is Chuck E Cheese. You need to stop dodgin and tell us what's goin on with y'all.

JESSE

Look, it's really nothing—

MARTHA enters carrying groceries.

MARTHA

(Seeing JESSE and TANISHA)

Ooh la la, Jesse.

JESSE

God please Mom no.

MARTHA

Hi girls! I remember both of you from prom. You were so beautiful. Tanisha and...? Sorry, would you remind me of your name again?

NATASHA

Natasha.

MARTHA

Right! Tanashta 'n Natish—whoops—I mean.... It's hard to say one after the other like that.

TANISHA

Yeah.

NATASHA

It gets easier.

MARTHA

Well, you can call me Martha or mom or whatever you want really. I will answer to anything. Y'all just make yourself at home, okay? By the way...

(Goes to touch TANISHA's hair)

can I tell you how much I love your hair, Tanisha?

JESSE

Whoa Mom no!

(JESSE slaps MARTHA's hand away)

You can't touch a black woman's hair like that!

MARTHA

Oh! Really?

JESSE

Yes, Mom. It's a thing.

MARTHA

Is he being serious?

TANISHA and NATASHA

Yeah, it's a thing.

JESSE

It's just disrespectful. And um...and like there's a lot of time and money and care put into getting hair done and people don't know how to touch it without messing it up. And nobody likes being put on display...that was pretty close, right?

NATASHA

It was pretty // good.

TANISHA

You could've done better.

MARTHA

I'm so sorry! I didn't know!

JESSE

Well as a wise man once said (*like Biggie Smalls*) "if you don't know now you know."

MARTHA

Who said that?

JESSE

Biggie.

MARTHA

I don't know who that is.

TANISHA

That makes sense.

MARTHA

Well, I really didn't mean to be disrespectful, honey. I just think your hair is the coolest.

TANISHA

You're not the first.

NATASHA

And you won't be the last.

MARTHA

Well...I will go ahead and get out of your hair—literally—

JESSE

God.

MARTHA

And how about I bring out a batch of my special brownies for you all?

JESSE

Really? Thanks, Mom!

MARTHA

Absolutely sweetie!

TANISHA

Special brownies?

MARTHA

Yes. I make them from scratch and not to toot my own horn, but they have won multiple awards.

JESSE

Yes, they're soooooo good. You'll eat like eight of them.

NATASHA

Eight? Won't that kill you?

MARTHA

I mean they may contain more cholesterol than is ideal but...

TANISHA

Like, you mean...*special* brownies?

JESSE // MARTHA

Oh! No, no, no! // Oh goodness! No! Just special! Not illegal!

NATASHA

I was about to say...

TANISHA

You would've been immediately invited to the cookout.

NATASHA

For real.

MARTHA

Oh are you having a cookout soon?

A beat.

NATASHA

It's just a saying.

MARTHA

Oh. Okay. Oh! I think I get it. Oh, that's funny. Not funny like strange I mean funny like comical. You know, let me get those brownies.

JESSE

Good idea.

NATASHA

Thanks for having us, Mrs. Blanche.

TANISHA

Yeah thanks, Mama Martha.

ADRIAN

(Entering)

Mama Martha?

A beat.

MARTHA

Adrian! Long time no see.

ADRIAN

Yeah. Long time no see. Hey, guys.

JESSE and TANISHA and NATASHA

Hey, Adrian.

A spell.

MARTHA

Well...let me know if you need anything. You kids have fun, but not too much fun.

MARTHA exits.

ADRIAN

Sorry. I texted you that I was rolling up.

JESSE

I hadn't looked at my phone in a while.

ADRIAN

I would've texted you earlier, but I honestly didn't know if I was coming or not.

JESSE

Well, I've been texting and calling you for a week so I just assumed you weren't going to show.

ADRIAN

Well, I did show. I had a lot to think about...but I think I got everything figured out so here we are.

JESSE

Here we are.

TANISHA

Yeah so where is that exactly?

JESSE

Tanisha—

TANISHA

No, don't sit there and have some secret conversation like we're not here. Tell us what's goin on.

NATASHA

Yeah, what's the problem, guys?

JESSE

I don't know. Is there a problem?

ADRIAN

No, there's not a problem. Not anymore.

NATASHA

Then what was the problem?

ADRIAN and JESSE

Nothing.

TANISHA

Oh hell naw. Stop being stubborn and talk to us. There is clearly something wrong.

NATASHA

Yeah, maybe we can help you guys get an outside perspective.

ADRIAN

Perspective! Wow. Perfect wording.

JESSE

Are we back there? Really?

ADRIAN

I said I would apologize. Just because I forgive doesn't mean I have to forget.

NATASHA

Apologize? Forget what?

ADRIAN and JESSE

Nothing!

TANISHA

(trying not to be too loud)

Hey listen! Y'all better start talking right now! Don't make me start saying the N word inside of my white boyfriend's mama's house!

ADRIAN

It's not like she hasn't heard it before.

JESSE

Come on. Please don't.

TANISHA

Wait, what you mean, Adrian?

JESSE

Adrian. Please.

A beat.

ADRIAN

Last time I was here, I said the N word in front of his parents. A lot.

TANISHA
What? Why?

JESSE
Adrian...

ADRIAN
They pissed me off. A lot.

TANISHA
Why?

JESSE
Please // man...

ADRIAN
I was having dinner with them on the day Philando Castile got shot. And this was already right after Alton Sterling died the night before so I was pretty heavy anyway.

NATASHA
Okay...

ADRIAN
They asked why I was so upset and I told them...and then they basically said three things to me. One: there wasn't enough video evidence to say whether the police had committed murder. Two: if it were me in the situation, I wouldn't have been killed because I'm a "nice kid." Three: They weren't being racist. They were just trying play devil's advocate and give me perspective.

TANISHA and NATASHA
What.

ADRIAN
Yeah.

JESSE
Listen—

ADRIAN
So that was when I got angry and started shooting the N word at them.

NATASHA
Okay wait, but what does that have to do with Jesse?

ADRIAN

He thought they were right, and he wanted me to apologize to them for being rude at their dinner table.

TANISHA // NATASHA

Are you for real? // Are you serious?

A beat.

ADRIAN

I agreed to apologize because to a degree he was right. They didn't deserve having my emotional vomit all over them. They really are good people who love me.

TANISHA

Good people?

MARTHA enters with brownies.

MARTHA

Hey girls! I cannot wait for you to try my completely legal but still completely special brownies.

JESSE

Hey Mom, I thought you had zumba today, right?

MARTHA

That's on Wednesdays. Do you girls do zumba? Or maybe like hip-hop aerobics? I've seen that on commercials and it looks really fun.

JESSE

God, Mom.

TANISHA

Did she just—?

NATASHA

Tanisha...

FRANK enters.

FRANK

Thank God it's Friday. Hey guys and dolls.

(Sees ADRIAN)

We having fun?

MARTHA

Hey honey, do you remember these lovely ladies?

FRANK

Um. No sorry. I can't say that I do.

MARTHA

Prom, Frank! They went to prom with our boys. // You'll have to excuse him.

FRANK

Oh, oh, oh right! Yes, please excuse me. I'm the worst with names and I guess faces too. Must be getting old.

TANISHA

Yeah, it must be.

NATASHA

Tanisha...

JESSE

Mom and Dad. This is Tanisha and Natasha. Okay. You guys can go now.

MARTHA

Don't be rude, Jesse.

TANISHA

Yeah, don't be rude, Jesse.

FRANK

Yeah, don't be rude, Jesse. And Adrian, I've missed you so much, buddy. It's so good to see your face.

ADRIAN

Yeah, you too.

JESSE

Okay. We all see each other's faces. Bye Mom and Dad.

TANISHA

Jesse, just stop it! Adrian, are you really going to do this?

JESSE

No. Please. Not like this.

MARTHA

Do what, honey?

JESSE

I don't know what she's talking about.

TANISHA

You're too smart to play dumb.

FRANK

What's going on, guys? Jesse?

A beat.

ADRIAN

I'm here to apologize to you.

FRANK // MARTHA

Apologize? // For what?

ADRIAN

I need to apologize to you because...I shouldn't have said the things I said the way I said them that one night.

FRANK // MARTHA

Oh no. There's no need— // Adrian, it's not even—

ADRIAN

No, hear me out. I don't apologize for what I said. Just the way I said it. You deserve more than me freaking out on you like that.

MARTHA

Okay. Thanks. I'm sorry, too.

FRANK

That means a lot, Adrian. I'm sorry.

TANISHA

(Starts to gather her things)

Well, whoop-dee-freakin-doo.

JESSE

Wait, Tanisha. // Please.

TANISHA

I can't be here anymore.

JESSE

Give me thirty seconds.

TANISHA

I can't be here anymore, Jesse.

NATASHA

Tanisha, you should hear him out. I know you'll regret it later if you don't.

TANISHA

Okay. Fine. Thirty seconds.

MARTHA

Was it the hair thing earlier? I'm sorry. I really didn't know.

FRANK

The hair thing?

MARTHA

I didn't know that you couldn't touch African-American girls' hair.

FRANK

You touched her hair?! Why would you // do that?

MARTHA

No, I didn't. I almost did, but Jesse // stopped me—

JESSE

MOM and DAD!!! Can we please have a moment?

MARTHA

Let me just leave these brownies over here just in case—

FRANK

Jesus, Martha! I'll eat the damn brownies! Let's just give them some space.

MARTHA

But they—

JESSE // FRANK

Mom! // Martha!

MARTHA

Okay okay!

MARTHA and FRANK exit.

JESSE

Okay. Listen—

TANISHA

What is there to talk about, Jesse? We're done. Your family is racist.

JESSE

What? That's a strong word don't you think?

TANISHA

I'm studying linguistics. I said what I fucking meant.

JESSE

They're not racist—no—they're just—they were just having a conversation.

TANISHA

And you said they were right.

JESSE

It was more layered than what you heard.

TANISHA

Just like the videos, huh?

JESSE

Tanisha—

TANISHA

Don't say my name. Say their names.

JESSE

What? Whose names?

TANISHA

The black human beings slaughtered by people who weren't racist.

A beat.

JESSE

Alton Sterling and—um. No, I know it. Phil...um...

TANISHA

Philando Castile—

JESSE

Right. That's who I was—

TANISHA

And we always hear about the men so there's no way you would remember Sandra Bland, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Tanisha Anderson—

JESSE

Listen...I'm sorry I don't know all of those names. I really am. But it doesn't mean I'm racist just because I don't know them.

TANISHA

Wake up, Jesse! It doesn't take you lynching people or bombing churches to be racist. It just takes you being blind.

TANISHA leaves. A beat and then NATASHA follows behind. A moment.

JESSE

I'm not a racist.

The statement hangs thick in the air like the sulfurous fumes of a demolition site as JESSE and ADRIAN recognize the ever-insidious, ever-alienating social chasm that lies between them. Lights fade.

End of Act One

Act 2, Scene 1

JESSE, FRANK, and MARTHA are in their living room. MARTHA and FRANK are doing one of their favorite karaoke songs. Maybe it's their wedding song or maybe it's

a typical karaoke song, but whatever it is Jesse is struggling to stay engaged. The song finally ends.

FRANK

Wow! I've missed doing that with you, honey!

MARTHA

That song is so hashtag: fun!

FRANK

I recall introducing you to that song so you bet your hashtag: sweet ass it's fun.

MARTHA

Hashtag: I will never forget the night you played me that song...

FRANK

Hashtag: in that Thunderbird I used to have...

MARTHA

Hashtag: with those cream leather seats...

FRANK

Hashtag: overlooking the lake...

MARTHA

Hashtag: and I looked into your eyes...

FRANK

(Suggestively)

Hashtag: and I—

JESSE

Please stop...saying hashtag. Y'all aren't even using it right.

FRANK

How are we using it wrong?

JESSE

It's not supposed to be used like you're on a walkie-talkie. Hashtag doesn't mean "over".

MARTHA

We know that, Jesse. We're not that out of touch.

JESSE

Oh okay yeah sure.

MARTHA

It's supposed to be used to make jokes.

FRANK

Yeah like hashtag: your karaoke skills.

MARTHA

Ooooooh! Got him!

JESSE

Wow.

FRANK

I'm just hashtag: kidding. Come on and pick a song, buddy.

JESSE

I'm having fun just watching you guys.

FRANK

Come on, we should send you off with a good, ole-fashioned Blanche Karaoke Battle!

MARTHA

Yes! We have to make our last BKB a good one!

FRANK

You made up the BKB so you can't not sing something.

JESSE

Actually, it was Adrian who made up BKB.

FRANK

No, I thought it was your idea // to name it—

JESSE

No, you don't remember? When Adrian said we should call it the BKB, you said it sounded like KGB.

MARTHA

Oh yep, you had a little too much scotch that night. You sang "I'm too sexy for my shirt".

JESSE

You did it like Arnold Schwarzenegger because you said you didn't know what a Russian accent sounded like...

MARTHA

Which confused us because the band isn't Russian.

JESSE

Nor is Arnold Schwarzenegger.

MARTHA

Then you really got into it—

FRANK

And I took off my shirt...

JESSE // MARTHA

Yes, you did. // You sure did, honey.

FRANK

And Adrian sang "Hotel California".

MARTHA

He sure did and actually // he won that night.

FRANK

He won that night.

JESSE

Yeah, he did.

A spell.

MARTHA

Do you know if he's liking school so far?

JESSE

We haven't really been talking like we used to.

MARTHA

Oh I see. I'm sorry, honey.

A beat.

JESSE

Do you think we're racist?

FRANK

What?

JESSE

Like accidentally racist?

MARTHA

What do you mean?

JESSE

I keep thinking about what Tanisha said that night—

FRANK

Um...Tanisha—

MARTHA

Goodness gracious, Frank. Ex-girlfriend.

FRANK

Oh yes. Right. Tanisha. Wait—she called us racists?

JESSE

She said “it doesn't take bombing churches or lynching people to be racist. It just takes you being blind”.

FRANK

And we're the blind ones in this scenario?

JESSE

I don't know. Maybe.

MARTHA

Jesse, surely she doesn't believe we're racist, does she?

FRANK

You were dating her for crying out loud. How racist could you be?

MARTHA

And we didn't care one way or another what color she was.

FRANK

She could've been neon pink for all I cared.

JESSE

I don't think that was her point.

FRANK

Then what was her point?

JESSE

Well... I've been doing a lot of reading...

FRANK

Okay...

JESSE

And there are many people who would say we have white privilege.

MARTHA

White privilege?

JESSE

We can do things other people can't simply because we're white.

FRANK

That doesn't make sense.

JESSE

Why not?

FRANK

I have to pay my taxes just like everybody else.

JESSE

I don't think that's what it means though. I think it's more about opportunity.

FRANK

That's what I'm telling you. Everybody has to work hard to get anywhere in life. It doesn't matter if you're red, yellow, black, or white.

MARTHA

Jesse, we haven't always lived like we do now. When we first got married, we were dirt poor. Nobody handed us anything.

FRANK

That's damn right. I wasn't handed anything. I had to fight tooth and nail for every scrap.

JESSE

But you were given the opportunity to fight tooth and nail. Some don't even have that.

MARTHA

Of course, there will always be those who want to keep other ethnic groups down, but for the most part that kind of thinking is gone.

JESSE

What about—

FRANK

In fact, the system is working for ethnic people now. I'm not saying it's a scam...you know what—yes I am—affirmative action is load of crap.

JESSE

Are you serious? It helps so // many people who wouldn't—

FRANK

I'm just saying, Jesse. If the goal is to be fair, then there is nothing fair about affirmative action.

JESSE

Applicants for affirmative action still have to have excellent credentials, Dad. They don't just accept Joe Schmoe off the street.

MARTHA

But you couldn't benefit from that. That's not fair.

FRANK

And I don't care about them being black or Mexican or whatever. I don't like anybody getting anything they didn't work for.

JESSE

Well...I mean black people specifically did work for it though. For centuries. And their kids never got to see the benefits of that work. That's not fair.

MARTHA

Of course not, honey. That's not fair. But slavery was a long time ago.

FRANK

We've come so far since then, // and to keep bringing—

JESSE

Wait what? How have we come so far?

FRANK

Um, the civil rights movement—

MARTHA

Integration—

FRANK

Like seventy percent of the NBA—

MARTHA

Beyoncé pretty much rules the world—

FRANK

Barack Obama actually does rule the world—

MARTHA

In fact, I wouldn't mind if Beyoncé ruled the world. I love her.

FRANK

You see, Jesse? It doesn't matter anymore what color your skin is. Sure there's still some bad police stuff, but we've progressed as a country and so should people who're stuck with the "white devil" mentality. It keeps everyone from just getting along.

A beat.

JESSE

So we believe Alton Sterling didn't die because he was black...

FRANK

We've been through // this. The context—

JESSE

Which means we also believe that about Philando Castile...

MARTHA

Jesse—

JESSE

And Eric Garner...

FRANK

I'm not sure—

JESSE
But what about Trayvon Martin?

MARTHA
What do you mean?

JESSE
He was a kid.

FRANK
Yes he was...

JESSE
Kids shouldn't be killed. Period.

MARTHA
You're right. They shouldn't.

JESSE
I'm not too far from being a kid. Do you think it could've been me?

MARTHA
Jesse...

JESSE
Because we don't think it could've been Adrian, right?

FRANK
A few bad—

JESSE
Did you know that under the Anti-Drug Abuse Act someone who uses crack gets a more severe sentence than someone who uses powder cocaine?

MARTHA
What are—

JESSE
Eighteen times more severe to be exact. And before 2010, it was a hundred times more.

FRANK
Jesse, why the hell are we talking about cocaine?

JESSE

The only difference between crack and cocaine is that crack uses baking soda and is found more often in predominantly black areas.

MARTHA

Drugs have nothing to do with you or Adrian.

JESSE

I've smoked weed before, Mom.

FRANK // MARTHA

Jesse, what! // Have you lost your mind?!

JESSE

Adrian and I have done it together.

MARTHA

You know I don't want you getting involved // with drugs.

FRANK

Yes! Don't get a record from being young, impulsive, and stupid.

JESSE

I think I would be okay.

FRANK

You would not be okay. That type of stuff follows you around, son.

JESSE

Adrian is ten times more likely to be arrested for weed charges than me so statistically it would probably just follow him around.

MARTHA

Was it his idea for y'all to smoke?

JESSE

Why would you assume that?

MARTHA

Jesse, I don't need your sarcasm right now. I am—

JESSE

I'm just saying maybe it's not a coincidence that you just assume it was the black kid.

MARTHA

No, I assume it was Adrian because I raised you better than that.

JESSE

Give me a break. When you first met Adrian, you didn't like him, did you?

MARTHA

What?

FRANK

Don't change the subject. We—

JESSE

You both didn't like him, right?

FRANK

Don't be ridiculous. I love Adrian.

MARTHA

You know he's like family to us.

JESSE

But not at first.

MARTHA

Wh—I—...how could you even say that?

JESSE

I remember you didn't want me spending the night at his place when he first moved to the district.

MARTHA

I didn't know Adrian or Gary or Renee then. Any mother would've said no.

JESSE

No, but then you found out we had started hanging out more and I remember you sitting me down, Mom...and I didn't understand it then but you said, "He seems nice. Just make sure that he doesn't get you in trouble."

MARTHA

Well, it doesn't seem like you listened to me. You're smoking weed.

JESSE

But you said that before you even knew him.

FRANK

You're not going to sit there and blame us for being caring parents.

JESSE

Why did you care so much about Adrian? You didn't care that much about Blake Walker.

MARTHA

We knew him and his family from little league baseball.

JESSE

Yet he wanted me to join one of the biggest meth distribution circuits in the state.

FRANK and MARTHA

WHAT?!?!?!?

JESSE

He thought the operation could use my brains.

FRANK

Well good for you for not getting wrapped up in that mess.

JESSE

Yet no warnings about him. Just Adrian.

A beat.

FRANK

What are you trying to say?

JESSE

We live in a gated community in one of the safest neighborhoods in the country. Who are we keeping out?

FRANK

What. Are you trying to say, Jesse?

JESSE

What if the whole country is one giant gated neighborhood?

FRANK

Now that's enough! We're not "accidentally racist". We're not racist at all, and we didn't raise you to be either. We believe that everyone should be treated the same, and that means everyone. Do I think it's hard to be black? Sure, of course it is. But it's hard to just be alive. The system doesn't just suck for minorities—it sucks for everybody who's not in power. I've faced my fair share of injustices, but you don't hear me crying about the broken system. I work hard, and I make the system work for me. Some people aren't willing to do that.

JESSE

Or aren't able to do that!

FRANK

Jesse, we voted for Obama. // Twice!

MARTHA

Twice!

JESSE

OH MY—

FRANK

We are not racist, and neither are you and that's that!!!

A spell.

MARTHA

You should take a shower before bed, Frank.

FRANK

Right. We have an early morning tomorrow. Good night.

JESSE and MARTHA

Good night.

FRANK exits.

JESSE

I'm sorry. I've just been learning so much.

MARTHA

You've always been a very good student.

JESSE

I just hate when things go over my head. I don't want to be stupid.

MARTHA

Or blind.

JESSE

Especially not blind.

MARTHA

You're neither of those things, Jesse.

JESSE

Maybe.

A beat.

MARTHA

I...I did have my...hesitations...about Adrian.

JESSE

What?

MARTHA

Adolescence was a really hard time for you, Jesse—for all of us actually. I just wanted to make sure you had good people around you.

JESSE

Did Adrian not seem like a good person?

MARTHA

Jesse, I grew up a certain way—hearing certain things and...well...I just didn't know Adrian. I love him so incredibly much though. He really is like another son to me. You know that.

JESSE

Yeah.

MARTHA

I'm sorry, Jesse.

JESSE

I'm sorry too.

MARTHA

If it's okay with you, I would like to hear more about the things you're reading.

A beat.

JESSE

It's all very...humbling.

MARTHA

I'm sure it is. You've made your father very upset.

JESSE

Yeah. I didn't mean to.

MARTHA

I know you didn't...but...maybe it's not such a bad thing that you did.

A beat.

MARTHA

Look at my little full-grown college man.

JESSE

I love you.

MARTHA

I love you.

Lights Fade.

Act 2 Scene 2

JESSE sits in the living room Skyping with his parents.

JESSE

Mom, it's really not a big deal.

MARTHA

Yes it is, Jesse! You're home from college and we're stuck in freakin Thailand!

FRANK

There are worse places to be stuck, honey.

MARTHA

If we'd just gone to Singapore like I wanted, I bet our flight would've never been delayed!

FRANK

I got a package deal through my job to go to Thailand! I thought you just wanted to go somewhere not Singapore specifically!

MARTHA

They're two completely different countries.

FRANK

They probably eat just as many noodles there, too.

JESSE

You can't // say that, Dad.

MARTHA

Don't be so insensitive, Frank!

FRANK

I'm not being racist, but considering the region, there is a high probability that they do eat noodles in Singapore.

MARTHA

Frank, if you don't shut that stupid hole in your face!

FRANK

Hole in my—?

MARTHA

And if you thought you were going to get lucky with me tonight, you thought wrong.

JESSE

Mom! // Gross!

FRANK

Martha, really? In front of Jesse?

MARTHA

He's a full-grown college man if I recall correctly.

JESSE

Nobody should be that grown.

The doorbell rings.

FRANK

You expecting someone?

JESSE

Yeah, it's Adrian.

FRANK // MARTHA

Adrian, really?! // Wow, really?

FRANK

You guys keeping in touch?

JESSE

Kinda.

MARTHA

Tell him we said that we love him, and we miss him.

FRANK

Yeah, ditto.

JESSE

Yeah, sure. I'll see you in a few days.

MARTHA

Yes and I'll bring you a Christmas present from Thailand. I wish it could be from Singapore but...

FRANK

Are you really // going to—

MARTHA

Hey you guys better not mess up my house! Love you!

JESSE

Okay yeah love you too. Bye.

JESSE ends the Skype and goes to answer the door. He takes a breath and opens the door to ADRIAN and NATASHA standing on the other side.

ADRIAN

Sup, man.

JESSE

Hey guys! I didn't know you would be here, Natasha.

NATASHA

Yep...here I am.

JESSE

Well, make yourself at home. How's things been for you, Natasha?

NATASHA

Good. How you been?

JESSE

Good. Dartmouth is a whole other world so I'm glad to be home for a moment. At least it's still warm down here.

NATASHA

It's actually a little colder than it's been recently. I just had on shorts and flip-flops for Thanksgiving.

JESSE

They call it Hotlanta for a reason.

NATASHA

Um...yeah...

A spell.

ADRIAN

So what's this all—

JESSE

So wait—you guys are...are y'all...?

ADRIAN

Yeah, we are.

JESSE

Finally! It took long enough!

NATASHA

I know, right?

ADRIAN

I mean...I had a lot going on.

JESSE

No you didn't, bro. You were just being stupid.

ADRIAN

Um...

NATASHA

Yeah. You were just being stupid. But actually he did tell me about it though.

JESSE

About being stupid?

NATASHA

Yeah.

JESSE

Really?

ADRIAN

Well, when we got to school, there were so many new things going on that it was nice to know someone familiar.

NATASHA

So I would visit him or he would visit me.

ADRIAN

Eventually, I saw her everyday.

NATASHA

Which I wasn't complaining about.

JESSE

I bet you weren't.

NATASHA

His company was nice, but I had moved on actually.

JESSE

Whoa.

NATASHA

There were plenty of fine brothers trying to holla so I wasn't even studying no bum-ass Adrian no more.

ADRIAN

Which I started to notice and it made me kinda jealous honestly.

JESSE

Which you never told her about of course.

NATASHA and ADRIAN

Of course.

NATASHA

But I noticed that he started acting weird.

ADRIAN

So she asked me what was goin on.

NATASHA

Then out of nowhere he explodes into tears!

JESSE

What?!

ADRIAN

It wasn't that dramatic.

NATASHA

It was that dramatic because I started crying too.

JESSE

You started crying too?

NATASHA

I'm a sympathetic crier, and I was already having a stressful week.

JESSE

I'm dead.

NATASHA

So I'm bawling, and he's snoting everywhere—

ADRIAN

My allergies were acting up.

NATASHA

And now I'm mad too because I'm crying for no reason and that makes me even more mad which makes me cry even more—

ADRIAN

She cries when she gets really mad.

NATASHA

So he's like "I'm sorry that I'm sitting here crying like a little bitch, but I've been so stupid, Natasha. So stupid."

JESSE

You didn't actually say that did you?

NATASHA // ADRIAN

Yes! He totally did! // Yeah I actually did fuckin say that in real life.

JESSE

I can't!

ADRIAN

But then she's like "Why are you being such an asshole? And why the hell are you crying? And stupid about what?"

NATASHA

And then I almost kicked him out when he did the little kid crying thing. You know the—*(she imitates the violently repeated snuffle thing that little kids do in a fit a crying)*.

JESSE

Dude.

ADRIAN

There was a lot I had goin on!

NATASHA

But what he said when he finally got it together...was really brave and sweet.

JESSE

What did you say?

ADRIAN

I told her the truth. About everything. How I was devastated over all the police brutality shit. How I was devastated over the Trump shit. How being at Morehouse and learning with my

people about my people from my people revealed to me a lot of lies that I didn't even realize I believed about myself. That's why I couldn't—well—didn't date her before. I thought she wanted more—needed more. I just didn't know I could be myself. So I was stupid. Just fuckin stupid.

NATASHA

Yeah. That's basically what he told me.

JESSE

Wow.

NATASHA

After he said that, everything about him and me just made sense. I could always tell there was something going on under the surface, but for a long time I just didn't know how to connect with him. But then he let me in...and it all made so much sense. I told him he needed to forgive himself, and I told him I would always support him. *Him*. Not some generic idea of what a black man should be, but Adrian Xavier Strong. I didn't need him to be anything other than the beautiful black man he already was. I just hoped that he could embrace me for the beautiful black woman I already was.

ADRIAN

Yeah. That's basically what she told me.

JESSE

Dang.

ADRIAN

Yeah so we just sat there for a while sobbing together and then...she kicked me out.

JESSE

What?

NATASHA

It had been a long week.

ADRIAN

So for the next two weeks, I asked her out like everyday. She kept saying no.

NATASHA

I had to get him back for all that time he wasted, and plus I had to make sure he was for real.

JESSE

Petty.

ADRIAN

Petty as hell. But anyways, here we are.

NATASHA

Here we are.

JESSE

Yeah. Here we are.

ADRIAN

Actually...why are we here?

JESSE

Right. Um I don't quite know how to say this...

(A beat)

I was stupid. Fucking stupid. And I want to apologize.

ADRIAN

You want to apologize?

JESSE

Yes, I do. Ever since that night of the kickback, I've been doing a lot of research.

ADRIAN

Research about what?

JESSE

About systemic racism. About white privilege. About why I can't say the N word even if it's in a song.

NATASHA

Amen.

JESSE

And I'm sorry for everything, guys. Especially you, Adrian... I'm really sorry I made you apologize that day to my parents.

A beat.

NATASHA

That's really sweet, Jesse. Thanks.

JESSE

And I want to apologize to Tanisha too.

NATASHA

You do?

JESSE

Actually...this may be a long shot...but I want her back.

ADRIAN

You want Tanisha back?

JESSE

Yeah, man. And I'm gonna need your help because I don't even know where to start.

A beat.

ADRIAN

You called me over here for girl problems? For real?

JESSE

Wait no. It's not like that, man.

ADRIAN

That's pretty much what it looks like.

JESSE

No, I really wanted to apologize to you.

ADRIAN

And you did. 'preciate it. Deuces.

JESSE

Listen, Adrian. I don't know what to do, and you were right. I'm totally out of my league with her on so many levels.

NATASHA

What makes you say that?

JESSE

I keep on thinking about what she said that day. "It doesn't take you bombing churches or lynching people to be racist. It just takes you being blind."

ADRIAN

She was right.

JESSE

I know she was right! She's the reason I started doing research.

ADRIAN

I've told you stuff like that before.

JESSE

I know. That's why I need you to know how sorry I am.

ADRIAN

Fuck your sorrys, man. Let's go, Natasha.

NATASHA

Adrian...

ADRIAN

There's nothing more to talk about.

NATASHA

Adrian, shut up! Don't you see? He's trying to understand. That never happens. Besides, don't act like you weren't in the exact same place not too long ago. Except you were crying and snoring about it.

ADRIAN

I don't owe him nothing.

NATASHA

I didn't owe you anything either, but I listened to you and I gave you a chance. That's all he's asking for. You need to check yourself.

(a beat)

So you really like her?

JESSE

I mean...I'm pretty sure I love her.

NATASHA

Oh wow. Well... here's the only problem I can see.

JESSE

What?

NATASHA

You have to be willing to listen to her.

JESSE

Of course I'm willing to listen to—

NATASHA

No. You see that's the problem. People always say they're willing to listen, but when somebody tells them the truth, they come up with every excuse in the book. And then they make you apologize to their parents.

ADRIAN

Imagine that.

NATASHA

Adrian.

ADRIAN

I'm just sayin—

NATASHA

Just stop! Come on now...he's your best friend since the 7th grade. You wouldn't have come over if you still didn't love him.

JESSE

And I still love you, bro. In fact, I think I even love you more now.

ADRIAN

Love me more now?

JESSE

It's so unfair what you have to face everyday. It's hard out there in them streets.

A beat.

ADRIAN

“Hard out there in them streets” though?

JESSE

Yeah, I probably should've phrased it better. Hashtag: white people.

ADRIAN

Hashtag: white people....so you think you down with the swirl huh?

JESSE

I'm trying.

ADRIAN

Yeah...I guess you are.

NATASHA

It really means a lot, Jesse. Maybe it'll be enough for Tanisha.

JESSE

You think so?

NATASHA

Tanisha comes off intense sometimes, but she's really a softy and needs reassurance just as much as anybody.

JESSE

Can she get that from me even though...

ADRIAN

You're white as shit?

JESSE

Yeah.

NATASHA

She doesn't care if you're white.

JESSE

Okay, but how do I even get her to talk to me?

NATASHA

Tell me the truth.

JESSE

What?

NATASHA gets extremely close (like absurdly close) to JESSE and intensely stares him directly in the eyes.

NATASHA

Don't lie to me. I'll be able to tell if you do.

JESSE

Whoa. Um, okay.

NATASHA

Are you serious about her?

JESSE

Yes.

NATASHA

Is this to fulfill some fetish you have with black girl magic?!

JESSE

What, no!

NATASHA

Because I will rip out your spine and use it as fucking jump rope if you hurt her!

JESSE

Okay! Jump rope! Got it!

NATASHA pops out of her demon state.

NATASHA

Okay cool. I'll help you get your opportunity.

JESSE

You will? Wait but what do I do?

NATASHA

Just acknowledge your privilege and listen to her when she inevitably tells you how it is.

JESSE

Okay cool. Acknowledge and listen.

NATASHA

I can't promise anything, but that's your best shot.

JESSE

Thank you so much.

ADRIAN

Don't fuck up.

JESSE

Thanks bro.

ADRIAN

Just warning you.

JESSE

No, really. Thank you, Adrian.

*JESSE holds his hand out to do their special handshake.
ADRIAN does it.*

ADRIAN

No, really. Don't fuck up.

JESSE

I love you too, bro.

Lights fade.

Act 2 Scene 3

JESSE is in the living room keeping himself busy. He keeps checking his phone, and he radiates an acute anxiousness. He gets a call from ADRIAN. As they speak, JESSE prepares the environment by lighting candles and setting up African Violets in just the right places. It's a little over the top.

JESSE

So what's the verdict, bro?

ADRIAN

Green light on Operation Milky Milky Cocoa Puffs.

JESSE

Wait, what? Is that seriously what y'all are calling it?

ADRIAN

No, just me.

JESSE

That's not even right.

ADRIAN

Honestly, I don't know how Natasha even convinced her to talk to you.

JESSE

It's definitely nothing short of a miracle. Hopefully, we can go two for two on miracles.

ADRIAN

What are you planning?

JESSE

A minor miracle.

ADRIAN

Okay um...like what?

JESSE

Just a minor miracle, bro. That's it.

A beat.

ADRIAN

Jesse. I know you.

JESSE

Dude, there's nothing to worry about.

ADRIAN

No, there is something to worry about because you're gonna do some Jesse-hopeless-romantic shit and mess—

JESSE

Dude, it's not going to be anything // crazy.

ADRIAN

This is not the time. I promise // you.

JESSE

Dude, I graduated salutatorian of our entire class. I'm not an idiot.

ADRIAN

Oh, you're not? So you're not planning some elaborate Jesse-hopeless-romantic shit?

JESSE

Dude, I have it under control.

ADRIAN

Natasha will kill you if she finds out you messed everything up // over your bullshit!

JESSE

Dude, the reception is getting fuzzy. Can you even hear me // anymore? Maybe you—

ADRIAN

Oh my Goooooooood. Okay whatever, man. I'll see you at your funeral.

JESSE

Screw you, douche. I'll be at your funeral.

ADRIAN

Don't count on it.

JESSE

Count on deez nuts.

ADRIAN

Seriously don't—

JESSE

K. Bye.

(JESSE hangs up.)

What is he freaking out about? I'm not even doing half of what I really wanted to do. There's absolutely nothing wrong with adding a little Jesse magic to seal the deal.

The doorbell rings. JESSE goes to answer the door but then stops and contemplates. He decides to hurriedly turn on some music before he gets the door. Perhaps the music is really soulful or perhaps something else entirely, but you can tell he had to do some research or ask somebody or something. It's. So. Black. And it just screams "Jesse-hopeless-romantic shit." JESSE goes to answer the door and TANISHA walks in.

TANISHA

Lucky for you I owe Natasha—

(A moment. She notices every single detail)

What the fuck!

JESSE

I remember you saying you like the color purple—not the movie—even though I’m sure you like the movie too—but like the actual hue of purple. These are African Violets.

A spell.

TANISHA

If you don’t turn this shit off like right now...

JESSE

Okay. Sorry.

(He turns off the music. A beat.)

Okay, listen. I know this was a little—wait do you want to sit down? Actually never mind, you can stand if you want or sit if you need to or whatevs. Anyway, I know you love these candles so I thought maybe—you know, on second thought, I should’ve just—Jesse, chill out, man.

Okay...um what I’m trying to say...is that I now realize I’m privileged. I have white privilege, and I want to apologize to you.

TANISHA

Okay. Go ahead.

JESSE

Tanisha, I am so sorry. For my parents. For me. For everything. From the bottom of my heart, I am really so sorry.

A beat.

TANISHA

Okay. I accept your apology...is that all you have to say?

JESSE

Yes.

TANISHA

Oh. Okay. Well...thanks.

JESSE

No, wait...I want you back, Tanisha.

TANISHA

I want you back too.

JESSE

Wha—really? That’s great. I didn’t know you—

TANISHA

We can't get back together.

JESSE

What? What do you—? We can't get back together?

TANISHA

Not right now.

JESSE

But you just said—

TANISHA

I know, but it's not that simple though.

JESSE

I think it is that simple. You want me. I want you. We can make the distance work.

TANISHA

Yes, Jesse. We could make the distance work.

JESSE

Then what's the problem? I don't understand.

TANISHA

No, you clearly don't understand. I swear to God, I wish there was a way to explain it to you.

JESSE

Explain what?

TANISHA

The fact that you don't understand.

JESSE

I will spend the rest of my life saying sorry if I need to—

TANISHA

I know you would! I know you would learn and support—

JESSE

Just tell me what I need to do. Please.

TANISHA

Okay fine. Tell me about intersectionality, and we can get back together.

JESSE

What?

TANISHA

It's how the interconnected categories of race, class, and gender create overlapping systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

JESSE

Okay...I got it. Now you tell me about the aromatic hydrocarbon Benzene.

TANISHA

What does that have to do with anything?

JESSE

Exactly. The future of our relationship shouldn't be contingent on whether or not we know vocabulary words.

TANISHA

See. This is what I mean. Intersectionality isn't just some SAT word. It's my everyday life.

JESSE

I saw what point you were making. I'm not an idiot. I was salutatorian.

TANISHA

Oh my God—everybody fuckin knows! We also know that Mariana Rivera was valedictorian.

JESSE

My point is...just because I don't know the word doesn't mean I can't understand the phenomenon. I've been reading articles and watching things. I saw that Ava Duvernay documentary "13th".

TANISHA

But you don't understand 13th.

JESSE

Yes I do. Prison systems have become the new form of slavery.

TANISHA

You don't understand.

JESSE

Because I'm white?

TANISHA

That's not even it, Jesse.

JESSE

Then what's wrong with me?

TANISHA

Nothing is wr—okay look—you're thoughtful and sweet and ambitious and funny and an absolute genius...I mean if I had a top-five-qualities checklist you would have them all...

JESSE

But...

TANISHA

But you're not ready for Michelle Obama.

JESSE

I'm not—what? Michelle Obama? What are you—

TANISHA

Say my name. My full name. Say it.

JESSE

Tanisha Denise McCoy. And I already know what you're about to say. I would probably get a job before you, which is horrible. But I do understand that.

TANISHA

No, you don't get it. My name means I'm lucky just to have my resume not thrown away.

JESSE

Tanisha, you graduated 5th out of 513 seniors, and you're going to NYU for linguistics—

TANISHA

The first thing they read is the name, Jesse. When they see my resume, they see a black woman, and right off the bat they start making decisions. For you, they just continue reading your resume.

JESSE

Granted. There is that, but I can support you through it.

TANISHA

Everywhere I go, I'm just another black girl from Atlanta. Michelle Obama is smart, tenacious, and she slays for days, but before she was first lady she was just another black girl from Chicago.

JESSE

Tanisha...I can learn every excruciating nuance about how the system is fucked up. I can learn. I will learn how to support and defend you.

TANISHA

I know you will, Jesse. That's another thing I love about you. I know you will learn...but Barack didn't have to learn. He already knew. He didn't have to defend Michelle because she already knew how to defend herself. All he had to do was understand.

JESSE

I thought...I thought you said it wasn't because I was white.

TANISHA

It's not. I mean it's some of it, but there are plenty of black guys who aren't ready for Michelle Obama either.

A beat.

JESSE

Sandra Bland: a 28-year-old black woman who died in jail after being arrested during a traffic stop.

TANISHA

What are you doing?

JESSE

Aiyana Stanley-Jones: A 7-year-old black girl shot during a televised police raid in Detroit.

TANISHA

Jesse...

JESSE

Tanisha...Tanisha Anderson: A-37-year-old black woman who died after police slammed her head into the pavement.

TANISHA

Knowing information isn't the same as understanding.

JESSE

I'm trying here, okay? Give me the benefit of the doubt.

TANISHA

I want to. I really want to but...

JESSE

Why did you even come here tonight?

TANISHA

I don't know. Natasha told me you were trying to understand...I guess I just wanted to see it for myself. You are trying.

JESSE

But it's not enough...

TANISHA

I need someone who understands, not someone who's just trying to...I think someday you'll get there.

A moment.

JESSE

Oh I'll get there. So I hope you're ready for this new grown man status. Level: Obama.

TANISHA

I know you'll be on your Obama shit before too long.

JESSE

Damn right I will.

TANISHA

Just never ever in yo life try as hard as you did tonight with the flowers and music and shit. It was way too much. And yes that's completely because you're white.

JESSE

Well, it made me nervous knowing you were coming over. I didn't know what to do.

TANISHA

(Walking over to JESSE)

Well...as a wise man once said. If you don't know...

TANISHA throws her arms around JESSE.

JESSE

...now you know.

They relish in the ephemeral comfort of their bittersweet embrace. Lights Fade.

Act 2 Scene 4

TANISHA and NATASHA and JESSE are drinking and hanging out in the Blanche living room. The “Jesse-hopeless-romantic-shit” song plays. TANISHA laughs as JESSE and NATASHA share separate but equal expressions of discomfort.

NATASHA

Are you—this has to be a joke—is this a—Jesse Blanche please tell me this is a joke!

JESSE

I mean—well—there were flowers too and—

TANISHA

No lie though. The flowers really were cute.

NATASHA

All you were supposed to do was // acknowledge and listen!

JESSE

I know—acknowledge and listen! I did that!

TANISHA

He actually did listen.

NATASHA

Obviously not well enough.

JESSE

I did, Natasha, I did! I just thought I would add a little Jesse magic // to seal—

NATASHA

No no no no you don’t add no little damn Jesse magic to nothing! You ain’t no Houdini!

TANISHA

Girl, calm down. It wasn’t gonna work out for him no way.

NATASHA

Girl, stop it. He ain’t your man. Don’t defend him.

TANISHA

I'm just saying. It was at least a good laugh.

NATASHA

I'm sure it was. Ole wannabe magic mike ass...

TANISHA

Lookin like a fake Justin Timberlake ...

NATASHA

With his "I heard this song once in Little Five Points" ole crusty skittle head ugly ass—

JESSE

Wow. I'm literally standing right here.

NATASHA and TANISHA

We know.

TANISHA

It would just be plain mean and bitchy if you weren't here.

JESSE

Well...I was trying to be mature about everything but if we're just going to sit here and talk about it...

TANISHA

Okay for real though... the thought was sweet with the flowers and all. It really was.

JESSE

Funny way of showing it.

NATASHA

First of all, you deserve it.

TANISHA

And we wouldn't make fun of you if we didn't like you.

NATASHA

Nor would we be here.

JESSE

Yeah, okay. That's fair.

TANISHA

We didn't come just because we could Uber down with you.

NATASHA

Yeah thanks again. I've never been to the Peach Drop for New Year's.

JESSE

Thank my dad actually. He gets an Uber allowance from his job and he said we could use it tonight so you know what that means...

NATASHA

No D.D. for me! Finally!

TANISHA

I ain't accepting his white-guilt-Uber-reparation money.

NATASHA

Except you kinda are.

TANISHA

Ain't nobody ask yo ass.

JESSE

Well we can go ahead and get down there as soon as Adrian gets here.

NATASHA

He should be close. He texted me earlier saying he was just dropping off Justin Wilkerson and a few guys to another party.

JESSE

Cuz now he can in his CAR! Wow! It still gets me.

NATASHA

Yeah, it was a pretty nice Christmas present to himself.

JESSE

Well, he better be taking you out for real now. No more MARTA dates.

TANISHA

Ain't nothing wrong with taking the bus nor the train. I think it's kinda adventurous and fun actually.

JESSE

MARTA is a scary cesspool of germs.

NATASHA

(Looking at her phone)

Weird.

JESSE

Right? It's so weird. How is it so permanently grimy?

NATASHA

No. I mean Adrian just sent me a weird text. I think he must've hit some wrong keys. I can't quite make it out.

JESSE

Let me see. "Betting pilled oget. U call doom." It sounds like he's already hammered.

TANISHA

Yeah, that's a horny drunk text if I've ever seen one.

JESSE

Yeah... "pilled." He's definitely saying something about the pill.

NATASHA

He's not going to drink and drive like that. He knows cops are everywhere tonight. Should I just call him?

JESSE

Wait...are you on the pill?

TANISHA

Shut yo dumb ass up.

NATASHA's phone rings.

NATASHA

Oh, that's him! I guess he beat me to it.

(She answers the phone)

I guess you heard us talking about you, huh? What, Adrian? // Hello? You there?

TANISHA

(Trying to be heard through the phone)

Bring your ass on, Adrian! I look too good for you—

NATASHA

Wait shut up. Hello? Adrian?

JESSE

Is it breaking up?

NATASHA

No, I can hear him but he has his head away from the phone or something.

JESSE

Maybe he butt-dialed you—

NATASHA

Wait, shhh shhh. Listen.

NATASHA puts the phone on speaker so they can all hear. At first, things are hard to distinguish, but then multiple voices and sounds can be made out. It is all a lot to take in until one unmistakable sound reverberates through the phone. Gunshots. A beat passes before NATASHA and TANISHA and JESSE realize what they just heard.

JESSE

Were those // gunshots?!?!

NATASHA

Adrian, // where are you?!?!

TANISHA

What the fuck?!?! //Adrian, can you hear us?!?!

JESSE

Who are you with // Adrian?! And where are you?!?!

NATASHA

Adrian?! // Baby please talk to me! Where are you?!

JESSE

Why are // they fucking shooting?!?!

TANISHA

Adrian // please! Say something!

NATASHA

Adrian?! Can you hear us???

The phone call is ended from the other side.

Fuck! Oh // my God. JESSE

No! No! No! NATASHA

Call him back! TANISHA

NATASHA makes the call.

Shit! Straight to fucking voicemail! NATASHA

They must've turned it off. JESSE

What do we do? TANISHA

A spell.

I got to get the fuck out of here. JESSE

Where are you going? TANISHA

Find Adrian. JESSE

How? TANISHA

He has an iPhone we can track it. JESSE

Not if it's turned off. TANISHA

Well, I don't fucking know, but I'll drive through all of Atlanta if I have to! JESSE

TANISHA

I don't know, Jesse. We been drinkin a lot.

JESSE

Fuck that! Adrian is probably somewhere lying in a ditch right now!

NATASHA

Don't fucking say that!!! We don't know that!!!

TANISHA

What's your problem?!

JESSE

I'm sorry...I don't know what's—we just...we have to do something.

TANISHA

Getting thrown in jail or crashing on the way to God-knows-where won't help anything!

JESSE

I can't just sit here.

NATASHA

She's right. This isn't the night to be acting stupid.

JESSE

I think it's more stupid to do nothing while he needs our help.

NATASHA

You don't think that I want to go out and help Adrian?! Don't come at me like I don't wanna fuckin do something!

JESSE

I'm not saying—I'm just—fuck—we need to do something. Anything.

NATASHA

Okay then what's the plan? Because I don't have a clue, do you?

TANISHA

I don't even know where to start.

JESSE

Yeah...I don't know either.

A moment.

TANISHA

“Getting pulled over. I call soon.”

NATASHA

What?

TANISHA

That’s probably what he tried to text earlier.

JESSE

“Getting pulled over. I call soon.” Shit.

The gravity of the situation deflates them as they wait for an absolution that will never come. Lights Fade.

Act 2 Scene 5

A different day. Lights come up on JESSE in the Blanche living room. He is watching the Philando Castile video. It ends. After a while, ADRIAN walks in. A moment.

JESSE

We tried calling you like five million times.

ADRIAN

I’m so sorry, man. My phone died.

JESSE

What?

ADRIAN

Yeah there was a chase and everything.

JESSE

What exactly happened?

ADRIAN

A car right behind us blew past the checkpoint and hit a cop car and kept going. I guess the cops were trying to shoot out the tires. They had to hold me down at the station for a while as a witness so I used their phone to tell my mom what happened. I specifically told her to let y’all

know that I was cool so I didn't know that she just rushed down to the station without telling y'all. That's when I texted you on her phone.

JESSE

Okay. I guess that makes sense now.

(a spell)

You seen Natasha yet?

ADRIAN

I let her know I was okay, but I told her I wanted some time with you first.

JESSE

Wow that must've pissed her off.

ADRIAN

Oh yeah. She's pissed...but bros before—well...um...

JESSE

Nice young ladies.

ADRIAN

Yeah, bros before nice young ladies.

A spell.

JESSE

I thought you were dead.

ADRIAN

Yeah, it's hard out here in them streets.

JESSE

You tried to tell me that, and I couldn't see it until you almost died.

ADRIAN

Listen, man—

JESSE

I'm so ashamed.

ADRIAN

You already said sorry—

JESSE

No, that doesn't mean shit. I didn't see what you were saying well enough for me to mean it then.

ADRIAN

Dude, you don't—

JESSE

You could've died. Please. I love you, man.

ADRIAN

Hey listen...I forgive you. And I love you too, bro.

ADRIAN goes to do their handshake. JESSE hugs him. A moment.

JESSE

So...I'm gonna be a hardcore ally not just someone who reads stuff...so I need you, man...

ADRIAN

You need me?

JESSE

Yeah, dude. I don't know...maybe we can watch something?

ADRIAN

Like what?

JESSE

Maybe we should start at the beginning. Like Roots.

ADRIAN

Roots though?

JESSE

I'm not even kidding. I want to know everything. Help me.

ADRIAN

I think I got a good starting point where I know you need help.

JESSE

Great! What is it?

ADRIAN

Yo busted ass bars.

JESSE

Oh. Okay...well... with all due respect, bitch, that's one place I know I'm solid.

(A hip-hop beat is turned on)

You still haven't learned yet?

ADRIAN

I'm the one doing the teaching!

JESSE

Oh well you gon learn today!

They hype each other up as they wait for that first verse drop to roll around. The lights fade.

End of play.