

THE MUSEUM ANNEX

a full length comedy

By Mildred Inez Lewis

DRAFT

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The Museum Annex is set in the recently built women's annex to George C. Wolfe's *Colored Museum*. It is an interactive museum.

The play proceeds through a series of exhibits.

CAST (all African American)

NJERI (20s) Afro-Latinx, embracing Bohemian style. A recent college grad, she is a daughter of Black Lives Matter. She has the fire of a recent wokeness convert.

ANGIE (30s) A bourgie Southern girl and natural hair enthusiast. Surprisingly progressive on some things. She's a natural joiner (Links, Democratic club) and leader.

BREE (20s) A sheltered, working class woman, who is still learning. Her life philosophy comes from memes and posts. Building the Annex is her first foray into a bigger Black world.

MARGOT (60s) Fly and jazzy. Doesn't look her age, but plays elderly when it suits her purposes. A young grandmother, she didn't go to college but has lots of mother wit.

LALA (40s) Must be played by a queer actor, with a **strong preference for a transfemme actor**. She is smart and pushy, in a good way. Half Nigerian, but only speaks in that accent when under stress.

KAREN (pre-recorded voice) Should be recorded by a cast member using her "white" voice.

PRODUCTION NOTE

The play can be staged as a series of exhibits that audience members walk to, or on a single, simple set. Exhibit titles can be announced or shown with a placard, projection, billboard or sign. Existing stage directions are for a single set.

Production design, props and costume changes should be kept simple. This is a bootstrap operation. Props may be stored in the open, e.g., in the wings or on the sides of the stage. Certain props can travel between exhibits.

Directors may want to have the women "frame" the stage to symbolize the museum being built. Text in brackets suggests some opportunities to do this.

PROLOGUE

Party music. Something like Kool and the Gang's "Celebration," but royalty free.

NJERI, MARGOT, LALA, BREE, and ANGIE ENTER dressed as tour guides. Their outfits can be as simple as paste on name tags.

MARGOT

Welcome to the Museum Annex.

ANGIE

Hey y'all!

NJERI

¡Hola!

MARGOT

We've built the first interactive museum dedicated to the African American women's experience for you. And we're honored to serve as your tour guides. First, we have to give props to our role model and inspiration. All hail the *Colored Museum*.

They clap and snap their fingers.

DRAFT

LALA

That said, an annex celebrating Black women was way overdue.

ANGIE

But don't get it twisted. This museum's for errbody. [hip hop slang for everybody]

BREE

Remember those corny songs from grade school? "We're all one big family." I loved that stuff.

NJERI

Me, too! It's the only thing I kept from my pre-woke days.

BREE

Anyway, that's what this Annex is. Just keep in mind, all families fuss from time to time.

ANGIE

Sisters come in every color, shape, political persuasion and nationality. You'll find some way to connect. You might even discover something that sends you to ancestry dot com. (Winks.) If you know what I'm saying.

NJERI

We're bootstrapping this thing. Writing the exhibits, appearing in them, guiding you. Like Papi always says, you only got one job? You lazy.

MARGOT

It's time. Get up on your feet.

LALA

Or stay in your seat and wiggle with it.

She demonstrates, then stares at the audience.

LALA

Um, what happened to "listen to black women"? That faded out real quick. Let's try this again.

ANGIE

Sway, tap, bob, clap. Don't worry about being on beat.

They demonstrate joyously until they get a response.

LALA

That's it.

The guides applaud the audience.

NJERI

Yes, queens, kings, he's, they's and she's. You got this. Normal museum rules? [Snaps her fingers.] Suspended.

DRAFT

She keeps snapping as Afro-Cuban music begins.

ANGIE

Prepare for a real good time.

NJERI twirls ANGIE. LALA bachata dances in front of MARGOT.

BREE

Oooo, the forbidden dance.

MARGOT

(sits)

I'm just going to be over here patting my foot a little.

The women dance for a few beats, then MARGOT taps her wristwatch. "Time." The music stops.

ANGIE

If you miss something, it's okay. You'll get the gist.

BREE

We'll be so grateful if you just give us a chance.

NJERI

There you go being absurdly grateful for the bare minimum when --

BREE

Just cause other people suck doesn't mean we have to.

The women consider, then nod in agreement.

BREE

See us in all our glory and messiness and contradictions. But see us.

LALA

Because out of sight means excluded from care. And we desperately need to care and to be cared for.

The women put their arms around each other.

MARGOT

This museum is designed to heal us. You, too.

BREE

When we get free, everybody gets free.

NJERI

Our exhibits will take you through the beautiful struggle, from slavery to today's issues.

DRAFT

ANGIE

We're dragging everything out from the shadows into the light.

LALA fans herself.

LALA

Tea will be served.

ANGIE

Washed clean.

BREE

Made whole.

The music stops.

Blue light bathes the stage with the sound of running water, rain, the ocean.

The women gently rub their faces, arms, legs clean with the light. They help each other with the hard to reach spots, then collectively take a breath.

MARGOT

Are you ready?

BREE

Say 'yes' and come build with us. A museum without visitors is just an empty space.

NJERI

The cost of admission's more than the ticket price. Share your hearts and souls.

LALA

This is a 'no spin' zone. And there's a lot to dish.

MARGOT, then the others clench their fists.

MARGOT

To build this we have to fight to let go of the pain, but keep the power. That's the struggle.

They struggle to unfurl their hands.

BREE

I struggle.

LALA

I struggle.

DRAFT
ANGIE

I struggle differently, but I struggle.

NJERI

We were going to insert a montage here of slave ships, lynchings, police brutality, then ...

She makes eye contact with the other guides. They silently nod agreement.

ANGIE

Nuh uh. Not this time. No trauma for entertainment. We're reaching for joy.

They reach their hands to the sky.

BLACK OUT

ACT IEXHIBIT/SCENE 1

THE COMMUNITY EXHIBIT

The brand new Hood Air Oasis waiting room. Bright colors and cheap folding chairs. The opening day banner has come undone.

BREE (O.S.)

Welcome to The Hood Oasis. The Oasis offers underprivileged residents 27 minutes of free, pure oxygen. This service generously provided to you by Power & Water. We screwed things up in the first place, but we're working hard to make things ... right? No. Barely tolerable? (warmly) Yes, that's it!

Door knocking starts.

ANGIE ENTERS wearing a gas mask, carrying a stack of clipboards. She shrugs off the knocking, re-hangs the "Welcome to the Hood Air Oasis" banner, then checks herself out in the "mirror."

ANGIE
Global warming is ruining my style game.

Door pounding begins.

ANGIE
Coming!

She opens the door.

NJERI
We've been waiting out here over an hour.

LALA
Didn't you hear us?

ANGIE
I don't have any help and I was in back. Hurry, bad air's getting in.

MARGOT, LALA and NJERI ENTER coughing and clutching flyers. Their masks are in disrepair. ANGIE shuts the door and the women remove their masks.

ANGIE
Welcome to the Oasis. Where clean air is the star. You're our sista girl cohort.

MARGOT, LALA and NJERI greedily gulp
in air and start to sit.

ANGIE

Wait!

The ladies freeze.

ANGIE

Let me get a picture.

NJERI

What? Why?

ANGIE takes out her cell phone.

ANGIE

I'm not trying to pimp you out, buuuuuut if our funders see how grateful this
population is.

NJERI

We're not a population. We're a community.

ANGIE

(shrugs)

Whatever. If this goes right, the company might expand this to our local schools.

(after no reaction, she

sings)

"I believe that children are our future."

The women melt, then nod except for
NJERI.

NJERI

Did you get that in writing?

ANGIE holds up the flyer.

ANGIE

It is written. We must never question the flyer.

LALA

Isn't that how Native Americans got screwed?

MARGOT

Something's better than nothing. If it helps the kids ...

NJERI

Wouldn't it make more sense for them to just clean up the air?

ANGIE

Girl, you funny.

The other women laugh.

ANGIE
Eat the fish. Spit out the bones. Smile!

They break out big grins and cute poses.
ANGIE snaps the picture.

ANGIE
Got it. Now, if you can fill these out.

ANGIE hands out the clipboards. LALA
and MARGOT start writing.

NJERI
We already answered these questions online.

ANGIE
I know. Be right back. I want to make sure everything's ready.

ANGIE EXITS. NJERI balks.

MARGOT
(to NJERI)
Do it so we can get this show on the road.

NJERI
(OFF dirty looks)
Fine.

DRAFT
LALA
How'd everybody find out about this?

MARGOT
The flyers were all over King Drive.

NJERI
Poor Dr. King's still out here working. New in town and want to know where we
congregate at? Find King Drive.

BREE (O.S.)
Bienvenidos al Hood Air Oasis damas y --

ANGIE ENTERS and turns off the sound.

NJERI
I was listening to that?

ANGIE
It was in Spanish, hun.

NJERI
¿Y qué?

ANGIE

Oh you're one of those Latinx sisters. News flash: Latinx Isn't real . Chicanos and Ricans. Those are real. If you don't want to identify as regular black, just say so.

MARGOT

We get it. We want good mortgage rates and the presumption of innocence, too.

NJERI

You think there's an advantage to anybody calling themselves Afro anything?

They contemplate.

LALA

Ditto transitioning. Gained my truth, gave up safety and good pay. The struggle is real.

LALA and NJERI fist bump.

MARGOT

Still, we're right to be cautious. Everybody gets over on our struggle.

ANGIE

Sadly, no lies detected.

NJERI

I cop to some privilege. Some things definitely come easier for me. But it's also a trip to be side-eyed by both cultures. I belong.

DRAFT
ANGIE

We'll take you at your word. Let's not waste this good air gabbing.

NJERI

Gracias.

MARGOT

(to ANGIE)

Can you up the oxygen in here while we wait?

ANGIE

What do you say?

LALA

(under her breath)

Give people a little bit of power --

MARGOT

(to ANGIE)

Please.

ANGIE turns it up.

ANGIE

Clipboards, ladies.

ANGIE collects them and leaves.

BREE (O.S.)

Power and Water salutes our community partners: Wish Check Cashing, and Louisiana Fried Chicken, Donuts and Chinese.

NJERI

I bet the air's fine wherever Power & Water is.

ANGIE returns with only Lala's clipboard.

ANGIE

Okay, I'm about to take you in.

(to LALA)

Talk to you for a sec?

LALA

Sure.

They retreat. The other women lean in.

ANGIE

(lowered voice)

It's women's day. Come back after hours and I'll take care of you. I don't have a problem, but First Baptist donated the building. If they found out --

NJERI

Hold up. That's some straight

DRAFT

ANGIE

She'll get seen.

LALA

It's okay.

MARGOT

No ma'am, not okay. I'm sick of everybody telling us who is and who ain't a sista.

LALA

I had you pegged as a church lady.

MARGOT

I am. Big hats don't make bigots. Small minds do.

ANGIE

They take away this building and it's back to square one.

NJERI

We won't know for sure unless we test it.

ANGIE

Oasiz is no different than any place else. We've got to have our rules and regulations.

Says who?

LALA

We're choking on rules. Literally.

NJERI

Easy for you to say. Do you know how hard I fought to get this for you people?

ANGIE

The women catch attitudes.

NJERI

Oh, hell no. First, population, now "you people"? I'm from the hood, boo. Homies don't play that.

NJERI starts removing her earrings.
MARGOT holds up a hand to stop her.

MARGOT

Please, no clichés. We should only enjoy those in the privacy of Bounce or BET.

ANGIE

It took miracles to make this place happen. Five years of nonstop microaggressions. They're willing to let us choke out. Want me to take a stand? Or should I save who I can?

NJERI

All this for access to crumbs. **DRAFT**

ANGIE

Crumbs are better than no meal at all.

MARGOT

Are they though?

LALA gathers her things.

LALA

Forget it. I don't want to mess things up for everybody.

NJERI

You're not.
(to ANGIE)
I'm not going in unless she does.

MARGOT

Me either.

LALA

You're standing with me?

NJERI

What does it look like, fool?

All of us or none of us.

MARGOT

ANGIE mumbles something.

Can't hear you.

MARGOT

Everyone will be seen.

ANGIE

Cool. I should go first.

MARGOT

Hold up. Just cause you old that don't mean nothing. I've got 14 hours of Uber ahead of me.

LALA

ANGIE pulls out a paper bag.

Oh hell no. Not the paper bag test. (OFF NJERI's look) She's gonna let whoever's lighter than the bag go first.

MARGOT

That was a thing?

NJERI

Are you blind? It's never stopped being a thing. J-Lo? (Thumb up.) Dark skinned Celia Cruz? (Thumb down.)

LALA

If you're yellow, you're mellow. If you're brown, stick around. If you're black, get back. I've been listening to this foolishness since I was a child. No more.

MARGOT

I was kidding. It's to help you breathe once you go back outside.

ANGIE

Stare down.

Everyone gets an extra 25 minutes on me.

ANGIE

Or however much time we need. Let's go.

MARGOT

MARGOT, LALA and NJERI go inside,
leaving ANGIE. *South Park* parody music.

ANGIE

(to the audience)

I learned something from this exhibit. We've got to define ourselves. And it's not as easy as it looks. No ma'am. But if you don't define who you are, you're choking yourself out.

ANGIE [*Optional: adds another piece to
the museum*] EXITS.

BREE (O.S.)

And ... breathe.

END SCENE

DRAFT

EXHIBIT/SCENE 2THE SLAVERY CULTURAL COMPLEX
EXHIBIT

BREE ENTERS as a tour guide. [Optional:
BREE adds a title sign.]

BREE

We're now entering the history section of the Annex. It'll take you from slavery to modern times. Herstory on the March!

A parody of *Citizen Kane's* "News on the March" newsreel music.

BREE

Buckle up.

BREE EXITS. LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS RISE. The Rising Stars Acting Studio. More ambition than access.

LALA, dressed as a slave, is tied to a whipping post. This should look like the 1800s. There's one tip off. Her blouse is artfully draped off her shoulders.

MARGOT strides in dressed as an overseer.

MARGOT

(almost a whisper)

They's watchin'. I gots to be hard on you.

NJERI and ANGIE ENTER dressed as field slaves. They quietly hum a spiritual and rock back and forth.

MARGOT raises her whip to strike. A sharp intake of breath from NJERI and ANGIE. MARGOT strikes the ground next to LALA. Is she getting off on it?

BREE (O.S.)

That's a little too gung ho. Let's take it again.

MARGOT raises the whip and is clearly about to strike LALA. LALA rolls away.

LALA

Hey!

Where you think you goin'?

MARGOT

LALA speaks in a Nigerian accent for the first time in the studio. Her accent remains throughout this exhibit.

I'm triggered.

LALA

Woah.

ALL EXCEPT LALA

Girl, where'd that voice come from? I thought you were from the hood?

ANGIE

I grew up in Compton, but I'm half Nigerian. The accent comes out when I'm under stress.

LALA

Chile no wonder you get so much work.

ANGIE

BREE rushes in with her camera.

Scene! What now?

BREE

This is ... I can't.

DRAFT

LALA

LALA unhooks herself from the whipping post.

What's tomorrow people?

BREE

The big audition.

ANGIE, MARGOT AND NJERI

BREE looks pointedly at LALA.

I'm terribly sorry. I prepared, but the crack of the whip. It's all too much.

LALA

How do you think I feel?

MARGOT

To be honest, you kinda looked like you might be getting off on it.

ANGIE

I was acting.

MARGOT

LALA

Imagine the damage this scene could do in the real world.

MARGOT

Look, this is the only meaty role for a black woman over 40 I've seen for a long time.

NJERI

Still, must be nice to audition for a *featured* role.

MARGOT

I got my start playing video ho's. Then I aged out of sassy best friend. I didn't get cast as a judge, what do you expect me to do?

BREE

This movie could educate people. We could be part of the racial reckoning.

ANGIE

This year's or are we still working on last year's? Sorry, I get mixed up.

BREE

She does get freed by the end.

NJERI

When her master falls in love with her and marries her? Folks are sick of that particular fantasy. And if they're not, they should be.

ANGIE

People still need to be educated about slavery.

LALA

Agreed, but we need realistic portrayals.

BREE

Those are kind of a drag.

LALA

Then movies where slaves win.

BREE

You're absolutely right. (Beat.) We also need paychecks.

MARGOT

That's it right there.

BREE

We're in the entertainment *business*. It's brutal for everyone.

NJERI

I was with you till you started both sides'ing.

BREE

This film's going to be a critical hit and I'm not just talking BET awards. This is the closest we've gotten to the big show.

LALA

I just don't think I can go through with it.

BREE

12 Years A Harriet Django is the biggest film of the year for us. If you book the lead, we can all come up.

MARGOT

I won't have to split my mortgage payment.

ANGIE

If the *Girlfriends* movie doesn't happen, I'll have to ...

ANGIE rolls her neck.

ANGIE

... all season long. I'm already at my chiropractor's way too much. I need this.

LALA

I know. I know.

NJERI

If you don't book this, I might get kicked out of the studio.

BREE

Six months, you don't book a job you're out. We're the *Rising Stars* studio.

NJERI

This studio's the only place where I get to be a real artist.

(to LALA)

I'm begging you.

MARGOT

Why can't you just go along?

LALA

You're asking for a piece of my soul.

BREE

So? What's wrong with that? This is America.

LALA

Maybe I should go all the way and sell myself straight up. I could ...

LALA takes a stripper swing around the post.

NJERI

Looking good girl. Pilates?

LALA

Really?

BREE

That was nasty.

LALA

Stop that. Our bodies aren't nasty. Objectification's nasty.

BREE

It's hard to hear, but sometimes choices boil down to the lesser of two evils.

NJERI

Why are our choices always a skooch more on the evil side?

LALA shrugs.

MARGOT

So in other words, since you've already got it good --

LALA

A gig on the CW isn't that big a deal.

ANGIE

Sure, Jan.

LALA

For goodness sake, it's a tween Zombie Western, airing for losers on Saturday nights.

NJERI

If you don't want it, I'll take it. It's hard out here for a Latina whose Spanish isn't great.

*

DRAFT

ANGIE

You'd toss us under the bus to avoid playing a slave? Really?

BREE00

A slave who gets freed!

LALA

I am *trying* to get you under fives on *Dynasty*. As high class bitches!

ANGIE

I didn't do all this for eleven seconds on camera and five random lines of dialogue.

LALA shakes her head 'no.'

ANGIE

(under her breath)

It's so unfair. There weren't even any queer people during slavery.

MARGOT

Nah, sis. That ain't it.

NJERI

What she said.

BREE

Decision time. Do you keep playing the irrelevant best friend? Or do you level up and take us with you?

LALA

Try to understand. This movie's going to re-traumatize our folks.

ANGIE

Don't worry, sugar. This movie isn't really our thing. *Girl Trip* is for us. *Black Panther's* for us. *12 Years A Harriet Django* is for other people.

LALA

Which other people?

ANGIE

Oscar voters.

MARGOT AND BREE

Sold.

NJERI

They do *love* slave movies. And maids...

LALA

Picture black history month. You're in a class with mostly non-black people, a two hour bus ride from Compton to Beverly Hills, because your parents love you.

NJERI

Ooo, your parents were scamming sending you out of zip code. Does your dad write those e-mails?

(in a British accent)

I am Prince T'challa [*Black Panther*] writing to tell you, you have won one hundred thousand dollars. Please send me --

LALA

Anyway. The other kids and the teacher believe slavery was a million years ago. Your textbook's from Texas. It calls slaves 'immigrants'.

MARGOT

Sure you're right. The school sent my grandbaby home with some "book", *A Birthday Cake for George Washington*. George and Martha were hard on us. You know his slaves weren't grinning about anything.

LALA

As I was saying, the movie comes on. You sweat. Your hair starts to go back. Everyone stares. You feel like you're about to throw up --

BREE

Let's pretend you skipped school that day. Where's your commitment? When this audition hit the net, you were all for it. Now you're throwing us away.

NJERI starts to sob. MARGOT puts her arms around her. NJERI snaps out of it.

NJERI

See? I've been practicing.

MARGOT

We're your fam. We'll be here when the CW kicks you to the curb.

LALA

They've made me promises. There's a Sally Hemmings' series in development.

ANGIE

Who's going to tell her?

MARGOT

Honey, Scarlett Johanssen's already signed.

LALA

What if we tell stories about slavery without joining the Slavery Cultural Industrial complex? Produce our story, our way. True, but exploitation free?

BREE

You have connections to make this happen?

LALA

Of course I do. We do. We've got this space. What more do we need?

BREE

Cold, hard cash.

DRAFT

LALA

You just don't understand.

LALA steps toward the door.

BREE

I'm not saying you owe us. But if we hadn't been bigging you up on Insta and Twitter, would you have health care?

NJERI

Would Fluffy have vet insurance and Freshpet?

The women make puppy dog faces.

LALA

Fine.

LALA rechains herself. BREE EXITS.

BREE (O.S.)

Let's do this one for Sojourner Truth. And, action!

END SCENE

EXHIBIT/SCENE 3

THE PROMISE OF RECONSTRUCTION

A Mississippi Freedmen's Bureau office,
1866.

[Optional: BREE and NJERI drag another
piece of the museum frame into place.]
MARGOT then watches them labor over
ledgers stacked on desks or blocks.
There is a stack of handkerchiefs and
small plaques.

A knock at the door. ANGIE appears,
but hesitates.

MARGOT

Morning, madam.

ANGIE

Madam? (Looks around, panicked) Who dat? I's just a pickanninny.

MARGOT

It's all right. You were a pickanninny. Reconstruction's come. You're free.

ANGIE

You ain't gon' get me in trouble acting 'bove myself.

MARGOT

There's no more getting in trouble. We colored women can look anyone square in
the eye now.

BREE

Praise the Great Emancipator.

MARGOT

No, dear. We owe President Lincoln something, but not everything. We fought,
bled and died for our freedom.

BREE

I keep forgetting. The PR is strong.

ANGIE

Y'all talk so proper.

NJERI

You can learn. We did.

ANGIE

I likes the way I talk. I can speechify some, too.

Of course you can.

MARGOT

She nods sadly to BREE and NJERI.
"She doesn't understand."

But please, continue.

MARGOT

ANGIE
Is this place really what they say? You kin help us?

MARGOT
We're here to uplift the race.

ANGIE
I only found out we wuz free a few weeks ago.

NJERI
It's been a year!

ANGIE
My mistress don't hardly let us out. We can't read or write. We don't know nothin'.

MARGOT
If you give me her name --

ANGIE
No ma'am. She don't even know I'm here. I aims to keep it that way.

NJERI
She can't do anything to you.

ANGIE
Where you from? Wakanda or thereabouts?

MARGOT
I'm from here. My grandfather bought his freedom. It's why I give back. Come in. You've every right.

ANGIE ENTERS hesitantly.

MARGOT
Start a record.

BREE begins writing.

MARGOT
Tell us your name, dear.

ANGIE
Move Gal.

NJERI

That's just wrong. You deserve a proper Christian name.

ANGIE

I'm not Christian.

MARGOT AND NJERI

Whoa.

BREE

It's okay. Once you meet Jesus --

ANGIE

Already met him at the end of a whip.

NJERI

Well ...

MARGOT

The faith's not what they've been telling us. We offer Christian education classes if you're interested.

ANGIE

Believe I'll stick to the old ways awhile longer.

MARGOT sighs an 'okay', then nods to
NJERI.

DRAFT
NJERI

Are you married?

ANGIE

Yes'm. Dat's why I's here. I just got word my man was killed.

MARGOT

Oh my. We are sorry.

ANGIE

I figur'd, but to find out for sho' ... Still cain't take it in.

NJERI

How long were you married?

ANGIE

Nine years.

MARGOT

I hope your master didn't ... ?

ANGIE

He didn't put us together to breed. We got to choose each other.

BREE

Thank goodness you were spared that.

Everybody sighs with relief. Horror story averted, for now.

MARGOT

Your husband's name?

ANGIE

Hurry Up Coon.

NJERI

Dios Mio.

ANGIE

Masta' called him Coon. I calls him Hurry.

MARGOT

Any children?

ANGIE

No, ma'am.

BREE

That's too bad. Chirren are a blessing from the Lord.

ANGIE

Least we never had to see our young'uns sold.

MARGOT

Thank goodness that's all over with. We colored people are marching into a bright, new future.

Brief snatch of the *Citizen Kane* "History on the March" parody music.

ANGIE

We just gon' keep giving ourselves new names? We going from pickanninny to colored. Heard some talk 'bout Negro. Where does it end?

NJERI

Every time we get a new name, we get closer to who we really are.

ANGIE

I know who I is. I'll just take my 40 acres and a mule to go.

BREE

Umm.

MARGOT

We're still working on that.

ANGIE

I could get by on two and a half with a good hound.

MARGOT

Here's what we can offer. A freedom plaque! Ta da!

NJERI gives ANGIE a plaque. ANGIE
stares at it like they're crazy.

NJERI

Isn't it dignified?

MARGOT

Maybe you should visit your people before making any final decisions.

ANGIE

They been gone so long. Don't know if they's living or dead. Now Hurry's passed,
too.

ANGIE starts to cry. NJERI gives her
another handkerchief.

MARGOT

A lot of widows find taking a new name cheers them up.

NJERI

What about something like Liberty? It means freedom.

ANGIE

But is we really free?

DRAFT

MARGOT

It's kind of aspirational. (Noticing Angie's confusion) Hopeful like.

ANGIE

I know y'all mean well, but names make meaning insida us. I'm keeping mines.
You ain't got nothin' else for me?

MARGOT

That's not fair. We're trying to do a great deal with very little.

NJERI gives ANGIE a silent warning, "be
careful."

ANGIE

I don't mean no harm. I 'preciate anything you kin do for me.

MARGOT

Let's look into the widow benefit. Did you bring your marriage license ?

ANGIE

Seems like the gummint oughta know we couldn't get them kind of papers.

MARGOT

Let's try another way. Which regiment was your husband with?

ANGIE

All I know's he fought for the Confederacy.

MARGOT

I'm afraid we can only help Union widows.

ANGIE

I don't get that 'tall. Our men were fighting fo' us no matter what side they was on. He sent somethin' to me most every month.

NJERI

A lot of Spanish men were caught like that, too. Well off Spaniards mostly went with the confederates, but poor men went whichever way the wind blew them.

ANGIE

Spanish men? How many kinds of pickaninnies is there?

MARGOT

(to NJERI)

I don't think we need make the story any more complicated than it already is.

(to ANGIE)

The confederates were traitors. Sadly, we cannot help you.

ANGIE

But y'all sho nuff helpin' these owners. I hear tell they got their rep'rations already.

MARGOT

(hangs her head)

True.

ANGIE

Ain't this somethin'?

MARGOT

The regulations are clear. There's no way we can help.

ANGIE looks around the office.

ANGIE

Don't go getting too comfy'table. Seems like to me, you might not be here too long. Rules and regulations seem kind of fickle.

NJERI

We've got the full faith and backing of these United States.

ANGIE

Sounds good, but --

BREE

Our prayers will bear fruit. If the Lord says the same, we're going to elect a Negro senator soon.

ANGIE

That a fact?

MARGOT

We'll live to see more of our great men in office. I can feel it.

ANGIE

Any wimmins?

Beat. Everyone laughs, stop, laughs again.

NJERI

Good one.

ANGIE

Guess I'll mosey on back to the plantation.

MARGOT, NJERI AND BREE

No!

NJERI

If you go back, that means they won.

ANGIE

Mebbe they already have. The Union mighta won the war, but sho' looks like the Confederates is winning the peace.

ANGIE starts to leave.

MARGOT

Wait, here's your commemorative freed slave kit.

BREE gives ANGIE a tiny kit.

MARGOT

There's some jerky, and a small Bible, a gift from our Quaker friends.

BREE

We can't neglect the word.

ANGIE

I cain't read, 'member?

MARGOT

Then this is your chance to learn. Oh, and there's an Emancipation Proclamation commemorative silver dollar.

ANGIE

Now dat I can use.

MARGOT

Go out and seize the day. You're free!

MARGOT, NJERI and BREE clap.

ANGIE

Free to ... ?

MARGOT

Exactly.

MARGOT, NJERI and BREE clap again.

ANGIE

Maybe I will go look for mama. I'd like to see her 'fore I close my eyes.

ANGIE covers her mouth.

NJERI

What's wrong?

ANGIE

Feels scary saying out loud somethin' you wanted so bad for so long.

BREE

My husband put an ad in the paper. We were able to get most of our people back.

ANGIE

(to MARGOT)

Could I get some help for dat?

MARGOT

We could write it, but you'd have to put some money in first. Then we'd give you the rest. "Skin in the game" they calls it. There are thousands doing the same. People along the way help. It proves our sense of family was never broken.

DRAFT

ANGIE pulls a fabric scrap from her bosom.

ANGIE

This all I got left of mama.

She smells the cloth.

ANGIE

I can hardly catch her scent on it, I've smelled it so hard.

MARGOT

You've got your freedom. Get out there and go find her.

ANGIE

I hears about peoples going missing off these roads. With Hurry gone, who would even know where to start lookin'?

MARGOT

We've got to take risks. It's unfair, but we're a courageous people.

ANGIE

What if I find her and she don't know me no mo'?

Beat. There's no answer for that.

MARGOT

Sadly, it seems as if there's not much we can do ...

After a mournful beat, MARGOT gently gestures toward the door. ANGIE starts to leave.

NJERI meets ANGIE at the door and secretly hands her a sawed off shot gun.

NJERI

(whispers)

From one of our veterans. He wants us mujeres to be safe.

NJERI and ANGIE fist bump.

MARGOT

(to NJERI)

Yoo hoo. We need you.

NJERI

Yes 'm.

ANGIE EXITS. Offstage, she racks the gun.

MARGOT

What was that?

DRAFT

NJERI

Sounds like the down payment on forty acres and a mule to me.

END SCENE

EXHIBIT/SCENE 4

THE CIVIL RIGHTS EXHIBIT

Pastor's study, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. 1955.

[Optional: In darkness, we hear hammering. Another part of the exhibit "frame" has been nailed into place.]

LIGHTS RISE. ANGIE, NJERI, MARGOT each wear 1950s cat eye glasses, but are dressed differently. MARGOT is sexy. NJERI is stylishly masculine. ANGIE is decked out in Southern frills.

BREE ENTERS. The women touch up their lipstick.

ANGIE

Is the Rev. Doctor Martin King ...

ANGIE, NJERI and MARGOT sigh sexily.

ANGIE

... on his way?

BREE

Pastor won't be able to join us. I can tell you're disappointed --

MARGOT shakes her head 'no.'

NJERI

(too quickly)

No, no.

ANGIE

Nuh unh.

BREE

It's dangerous for him to move around too much.

ANGIE

I agree with that. We can't move too fast on this civil rights thing.

NJERI

Let's see, it's been about eighty years since Reconstruction. Think another eighty will fix things?

MARGOT

Her people aren't from here, so she just don't know.

(to NJERI)

Honey, things move different down here. A step forward, then two steps back.

ANGIE

Danger always lurking.

NJERI

Roger that. Checking my privilege.

BREE

We're not just concerned about pastor's safety. The man's bone tired.

MARGOT

He may be weary, but the good reverend sure was moving in that pulpit last Sunday. Mmm, mmm. When he called for volunteers, I had to answer the call.

ANGIE

I'm not mad at you. Why do you think I'm here?

BREE

We're supposed to go to church for the message.

MARGOT

I can do more than one thing at a time. Shoot, I'm still a flesh and blood woman. Ain't no harm in looking.

DRAFT

BREE

All right, calm down. We need you to be careful about what we share here.

ANGIE

No one knows we're here, right?

BREE

There's nothing to worry about. Deacon Brown's outside keeping an eye out.

ANGIE

One eyed, lame Deacon Brown?

BREE nods.

MARGOT

Oh lawd.

BREE

He's got his pistol. And we've got somebody on the inside. They'll warn us if we're in any danger.

MARGOT

I never known one of them to turn against their own when it comes to us. Who is it?

BREE hesitates.

NJERI

We're risking our lives just coming to a meeting like this.

BREE

Jemima ...

ANGIE

Aunt Jemima? That stuck up --

NJERI

Sell out --

MARGOT

Oh hell to the no!

BREE

She's worked for the mayor since she was a child.

NJERI

And been selling us out ever since. She can't be trusted.

BREE

She did what she had to do, just like the rest of us. She's helped us before many times.

NJERI

Whaaat?

DRAFT

ANGIE

Color me shooketh.

BREE

Jemima's promised to tell us if she hears anything. No matter what time, day or night.

ANGIE

We need to start putting some respect on her name.

NJERI

I'll confess, I've read her for filth. I'm gonna have to start telling people --

BREE

Not one word. Run your mouth and she's useless to us.

ANGIE

Just goes to show, you sure can't tell a book by its cover. Still woulda been nice to hear all this from reverend. That voice!

BREE

This is probably the most important work any of us'll ever get to do. If personal desires have to be set aside, so be it.

ANGIE

Nah, we deserve some tenderness now. What if we don't live to tell the tale?

NJERI

Por seguro. Who knows how long this'll take? Or if it'll even work? It's not like people haven't tried before.

MARGOT

Look around, this room should be full. Folks are scared. I don't blame them.

BREE

We believe the time is now. One of us sits in the front of the bus. They get arrested, then we begin our boycott. We've been working on this plan for years.

ANGIE

I'm here because I believe in the movement. I also believe Dr. King and all the brothers around him are fiiiine.

MARGOT

Give me Pastor C.T. Vivian.

NJERI

I'll take a side of Reverend Abernathy. Those chubby cheeks.

MARGOT

Which cheeks you talking about?

The women hoot.

BREE

Ladies!

DRAFT

NJERI

We can't be respectable all the time.

BREE

You can darn well try. You'll never catch me talking about our best the same way they do.

MARGOT

People do talk. Is Dr. King really a communist?

BREE

What do you think?

MARGOT

Sometimes I don't know what to think. My granny listens to Elder Michaux on the radio. He's a race man, and he says Dr. King's a commie, for sure.

ANGIE

That's just silly. Could Reverend keep Coretta Scott in all those fancy suits if he was a commie? Those things are high as kites.

(with a uppity accent)

Naturally, that would not do at all. Not at all.

They laugh, BREE, despite herself.

BREE

Ladies, we need foot soldiers who aren't scared to stand up. Which of you is willing to sit in the front of the bus and get arrested? We could use more than one.

The women look around.

NJERI

You mean dragged off, possibly beaten or worse?

ANGIE

Aren't any men available?

BREE

It needs to be one of us. A brother might come up missing.

NJERI

Didn't Claudette Colvin already get arrested for that?

BREE

She was too young to be the face of the movement.

MARGOT

You mean, too dark and poor.

ANGIE

Plus she was ...

ANGIE gestures pregnancy.

ANGIE

That was the lick that did it right there.

BREE

That issue's been settled. Do I have any takers?

A guilty, but determined silence.

BREE

There are other ways to contribute.

(to MARGOT)

We're hoping your funeral home will let us use the hearse for the boycott. In case we need to get folks to the hospital.

NJERI

Cause you know the regular ambulance will let us bleed out.

MARGOT

I don't know ...

BREE

Your family's one of the few that can afford to take a chance. You don't need them to make a living.

MARGOT

They don't have to let us do our job at all. After Red Summer, mama told me they didn't let them bury anybody 'til almost Christmas. As long as you keep things quiet we'll put in more money, but I can't let you have the hearse. I'm sorry.

MARGOT EXITS.

ANGIE

I'm hoping to work directly with the pastors.

BREE

Can you take dictation?

ANGIE

No.

BREE

Type?

ANGIE

Nope. I was thinking more along the lines of me advising them on sensitive community matters. I work the juke joint on the weekends. I hear things. Maybe we could talk about things over dinner sometimes.

BREE

I'll ask, but those are the skills we're looking for. What about being on the front lines of the boycott? Can I put you down for a training?

ANGIE

And get my skull bashed in? No, thank you. I'm okay with our water fountain. See you at missionary meeting.

ANGIE leaves.

NJERI

Any other jobs left?

BREE

That's it for now.

NJERI

I'm always on the party line. Ring me anytime.

NJERI EXITS. A phone rings O.S. LALA
ENTERS.

LALA

Ma'am, a Mrs. Parks for you.

BREE

The seamstress? We already have somebody to sew the wall hangings. Thank her for me.

LALA

No, ma'am. She wants to sit in the front of the bus and get arrested.

BREE

No, it has to be the right person at the right time.

LALA

Then Mrs. Parks is perfect: stellar reputation, works for herself. Light skin-ded.

BREE

She's too ... mild.

LALA

Are you kidding me? Mrs. Parks is a bad ass. Her whole family's been down for the struggle.

BREE

A seamstress in her 40s is going to take this on?

LALA

She's 42. So what? Black don't crack.

BREE

I don't think so.

LALA

Look at the advantages. They don't have kids. One sibling and he's long dead.

BREE

What in the world's her family got to do with the price of tea in China?

LALA

No chance for embarrassment. If she can work with those NAACP Negroes and not fall out with anybody, she's a keeper.

BREE

(Exits.)

I'll take the call.

LALA

Lord help straight people. Why is it always up to us queers to get the party started? May Saints Pauli Murray and Jimmy Baldwin keep lighting our path.

LALA EXITS.

A hip hop remix of a quick take from "We Shall Overcome." ANGIE, BREE, LALA, MARGOT and NJERI ENTER.

ANGIE

(snaps her fingers)

And just like that --

The hip hop remix abruptly stops.

ANGIE

We entered the modern age. We started being Negroes, with a few Afro-American hold outs. From segregation to the board room.

BREE

Kinda sorta. There's still a whole lot of folks that got left behind.

NJERI

I know that's right.

ANGIE

The Annex's almost out of space. You think we can skip Jim Crow?

LALA

Definitely, *The Help* and *Green Book* have got that covered.

MARGOT

A moment to mourn segregation. Even though it sucked, it had its upsides.

NJERI

All black everything: towns, resorts, hospitals, shopping.

They bow their heads.

ANGIE

But every step forward comes with backlash.

LALA

It catches us off guard every single time.

NJERI

The Barackalypse ushered in Jim Crow 2.0. It's wild.

MARGOT

During segregation, we might've hated on someone. But we understood there wasn't another side to be on. Now ...

ANGIE

We've learned to hurt each other.

Thunderclap.

BLACKOUT. END SCENE

EXHIBIT/SCENE 5

HALL OF TERRORS

Darkened stage. Frantic, painful sounds of museum being attacked.

MALCOLM X (V.O.)

"The most disrespected person in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman." [https://youtu.be/z_g_Z9A0RuQ] [Sound design note: May want to remix this for some overlapping, etc.]

LIGHTS RISE. ANGIE strides out.

ANGIE

That is so messed up for us. I'd like to speak to the manager.

LALA, MARGOT, BREE, and NJERI rush on with joyous squeals. They dance together.

ALL

Down, down, baby. Down by the roller coaster. Sweet, sweet, baby. I'll never let you go. Shimmy, shimmy, ko ko bop. Shimmy shimmy pow. Shimmy, shimmy ko ko bop. Shimmy shimmy pow. [Tune: <https://youtu.be/pCyBMztWUFk>]

NJERI bumps into BREE a little too hard by mistake.

BREE

Bitch.

NJERI

Black bitch.

MARGOT, LALA and ANGIE flinch. MARGOT takes out a remote control and "freezes" BREE and NJERI.

LALA

That's how fast our delight in each other can be shattered.

ANGIE

Over and over and over again.

MARGOT

We have to try to fix us. Commence: "The Never Ending Sociological Study of Carefree Black Girl Fragility."

MARGOT, LALA and ANGIE don lab coats. MARGOT unfreezes BREE and NJERI with a remote.

BREE

Say sorry.

NJERI

You better get over yourself.

MARGOT freezes them again.

MARGOT

The fear and hurt are there, underneath the anger. You see it?

LALA

Behind the eyes.

ANGIE

Poor things. They don't realize that pain's been lurking there since before they were born.

MARGOT

Doctor Chloe Halle's study dates it from when sisters find out they're not even safe in their own beds.

LALA

We can't keep this from them. We've gotta tell them.

MARGOT

No interventions. Our agreement with the Fjord Foundation --

LALA

Fjord, Fjord, Fjord. We can too intervene. This isn't *Star Trek*.

MARGOT

Without Fjord's generous support --

ANGIE

To "study" something an alert six-year-old could break down. They've got the money. Why don't they just let us fix it?

LALA

You know, that's something to think about.

MARGOT

Think about it some other time. They specifically didn't fund intervention. Let's run the retail simulation.

ANGIE types on a tablet. MARGOT unfreezes NJERI and BREE. NJERI's a store clerk. BREE, a customer.

BREE

Excuse me, miss. Do you work here?

NJERI studiously ignores BREE.

BREE

Miss?

NJERI turns to BREE with a scowl.
MARGOT freezes BREE and NJERI .

MARGOT

Note: chin tilted to invoke maximum disdain.

ANGIE

Fifty three degrees.

LALA

That scowl, wow. I put it at nineteen out of twenty on the contempt chart.

ANGIE types it in, then nods to MARGOT
who unfreezes BREE and NJERI.

BREE

I'm looking for --

NJERI

Do you see it?

DRAFT

BREE

No --

NJERI

Then we don't have it.

NJERI looks at an invisible non-Black
customer with a wide smile.

NJERI

Hey Jan! Let me know if there's anything you need.

NJERI whips back to BREE with a more
intense scowl.

ANGIE

(whispers)

Confirms the literature exactly.

BREE mumbles.

NJERI

Say that again, to my face.

MARGOT

Intonation's at dis level eight and rising fast.

NJERI and BREE circle each other.

LALA

They may still be able to pull back from the brink.

MARGOT

Possibly, if one of them's spiritual.

NJERI rolls her neck.

ANGIE

Homo Sistagirlus alert.

BREE and NJERI menace each other.

LALA

The window for peaceful resolution's closing. C'mon ladies. Don't do it. We're rooting for you. We're all rooting for you.

MARGOT

We can't advocate for results. Scientific objectivity --

LALA

Then let's redefine scientific objectivity. With climate change, how helpful is it anymore?

DRAFT

NJERI

Who in the hell do you think you are?

NJERI rolls her neck the other way twice.

ANGIE

Not the double back.

MARGOT

There's only fifteen seconds for the other subject to back down. Begin the countdown.

ANGIE

Timing now.

ANGIE taps her tablet's stopwatch.

LALA

C'mon, c'mon. You can do it. Back away from the stereotype.

BREE sucks her teeth.

LALA

Subjects are escalating.

Yo' mama.

NJERI

Oh snap.

ANGIE

MARGOT freezes them.

MARGOT

You don't cross the mama line, ever. Our mamas love us in a world that would destroy us as soon as look at us.

LALA

Mine held my hand all the way through my transition.

ANGIE

Beat us cause it was all they knew to save us. I understood it was wrong and knew it was love.

MARGOT

(to LALA)

We still have to let it happen.

MARGOT unfreezes NJERI and BREE.
They circle each other malevolently.

NJERI

I'm not taking that off you.

DRAFT

BREE

So it's like that?

NJERI

Guess so.

BREE balls her first. LALA seizes the
controller from MARGOT. She freezes
the women.

LALA

(to BREE and NJERI)

Stop!

NJERI and BREE break free from
MARGOT's control.

NJERI

She thinks she's better than me.

BREE

She led with attitude.

LALA

Look at each other. NOW!

They do.

LALA

Your faces are mirrors of each other's. Stop talking at each other and talk to each other.

NJERI

I don't have an issue.

BREE

Please. You had the biggest smile for the last customer. I came and you uglified up. It's like you've got something against your own.

NJERI

Whatever. You know what? I'm good.

ANGIE

It's a wrap. The finality of "I'm good" is unsurpassed.

NJERI

Well I'm not good.

NJERI balls her fist.

MARGOT

There's nothing more we can do.

LALA

Says who? What's it all for then? The degrees, the titles? What was it all for if we're not going to help?

(to BREE and NJERI)

You're acting out a script written by forces that want us to betray ourselves.

BREE

I'm my own woman. No one tells me what to think.

LALA

None of us are our own. "We are each other's harvest. Each other's business. We're each other's magnitude and bond."

NJERI

Prophetess poet Gwendolyn Brooks. Nice, but that was a different time.

LALA

Then try Audre Lorde. She schooled us. This cruelty between us is the legacy of the hate we've been handed. Our anger can't protect us. It's killing u.

BREE

So what are we supposed to use to make it through?

LALA

The only way is by destroying every lie we believe about ourselves. And loving on each other.

MARGOT

You're right. Whatever the question, the answer starts with love.

NJERI

That sounds like a fairy tale.

LALA

(to NJERI and BREE)

Forget we're here. Talk to each other.

BREE

(to NJERI)

I need you.

Beat.

BREE

See? She doesn't want to --

NJERI

You hurt me. I'm fighting not to hurt you back.

BREE

I hurt me when I hurt you, but I can't always stop myself. So how are we supposed to love on each other.

NJERI

I'm not always sure I know what love is.

LALA

bell hooks laid it out for us: care, respect, commitment, trust.

NJERI

Then I'm a long way from that. I'm not sure I've ever seen it.

BREE

I commit to trying to get there. What about you?

Beat.

NJERI

I'll try. No promises.

LALA

You better work!

MARGOT

That's enough. You can go now.

BREE and NJERI EXIT in opposite directions. ANGIE closes her tablet.

ANGIE

I don't think Fjord will count this as a win.

LALA

The question is, how do we count it? I call it a victory.

ANGIE

I've got to put down "partial."

MARGOT nods agreement.

LALA

Y'all do whatever. Hands up.

LALA celebrates.

BLACK OUT.

END SCENE

END ACT I

DRAFT

ACT IIPROLOGUE

101 FLAVORS OF BIAS

The dessert station in the Women's Annex food court. It is labelled '101 FLAVORS'. 'OF BIAS' is covered with masking tape.

A 1950s retro pop jingle plays. NJERI and BREE ENTER, waving at the audience.

BREE

We're baaaack!

NJERI

'Sup?

NJERI rings the bell for service.

NJERI

Don't mind us. We need to fortify ourselves before we continue your tour.

BREE

I'm starving. Truth telling takes a lot out of you.

ANGIE ENTERS wearing a jaunty soda jerk hat.

ANGIE

Hey y'all. What kind of racism, I mean ice cream can I get for you?

NJERI

(to BREE)

You go ahead. I'm still making up my mind.

BREE

So many flavors to choose from. I can't decide. Can we swirl?

ANGIE

(big, suggestive wink)

Absolutely. But if you want all the flavors together, try rainbow sherbet. All the colors, ever so lightly tinged.

NJERI

So Midwestern.

ANGIE

Nothing wrong with the mighty Midwest. I'm a southern girl, but I've got folks in Ohio.

BREE

Who doesn't? The Great Migration, hello? Can I get a sample?

ANGIE hands BREE a sample spoon.

BREE

Mmm, nice. It sort of makes me want a jello mold.

NJERI

Ugh! I'm a Big 10 alum. I could tell you stories about Midwest "nice." I like things charged. That way you know where you stand. I'll take a Southern Comfort-laced rocky road, please.

ANGIE

You sure? Things definitely get dangerous once they're charged.

BREE

It's not like she's asking for Black Lives Matterspresso. Now that's extreme --

NJERI

I'll stick with charged. When things are tinged, who knows? Extreme things get too inflammatory, then danger Will Robinson.

BREE

(to ANGIE)

Come to think of it. Things are better up North. Maybe I'll go with a maple.

NJERI and ANGIE fall out laughing.

NJERI

Oh, no. The North's definitely in the mix. Trust.

ANGIE

Maybe we should only carry western-themed ice cream. It's free from all this baggage. How about a marionberry cone?

NJERI

Chile, please. Oregon was the only state to outright ban black people. Like the whole state was a sundown town.

ANGIE

That's crazy.

NJERI

Puts all those lattes into perspective, doesn't it?

BREE

You know, it seems like desserts are a lot like racism.

NJERI

Just cause you're used to one flavor doesn't make it any better than the others.

BREE

No flavor's un-problematic. The best we can do is pick our poison.

Theatre warning bell.

ANGIE

Well, it's time for the show! Next up on your tour, the contemporary issues wing:
fashion, activism --

BREE

S-e-x. Anyway, you'll see.

ALL

Byeeee! Enjoy the show.

LIGHTS OUT.

END SCENE

DRAFT

EXHIBIT/SCENE 1

THE SELLING OF SOUL

1960s. The Fashion Fair/*Ebony* travelling high fashion show
 [HTTPS://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/EBONYFASHIONFAIR]. A hotel banquet room in a small Midwestern city.

BREE sits at a table, sipping a cocktail.
 ANGIE ENTERS. Both wear hats and white gloves. Their foundation is too light.
 [Optional: The exhibit title is pasted on a fake *Ebony* cover.]

ANGIE

May I ... ?

BREE

As long as you don't buy the same outfits. I can't stand to see myself going and coming.

ANGIE sits.

ANGIE

Oh sure. It's my first time.

BREE

I don't remember seeing you here before.

ANGIE

I just married Bill Samuelson and moved into town.

ANGIE displays her ring.

BREE

The undertaker?

ANGIE nods enthusiastically.

BREE

Death never goes on vacation. Plus you work for yourselves. You're going to have a great life. We were wondering when he'd remarry. Okay, the most important question: AKA or Delta Sigma Theta?

ANGIE

Mary McLeod Bethune High School. I was voted Miss Congeniality.

BREE pats Angie's hand.

BREE

Well, that's an achievement all on its own. Where are my manners? I'm Mrs. Charlie McMaster.

ANGIE

He prints the church fans!

BREE

That's the one. I'll have him check to make sure Mr. Samuelson's policy is up to date. Men can be lost when it comes to details. If you have questions, just reach out. Here's my card.

They prissily exchange calling cards.

ANGIE

Everyone hasn't been as kind.

BREE

Jealous. You should've seen the casserole brigade storming his house after Hagar died. The man didn't have to cook for years. A lot of good it did them. He went and plucked you from, from ...

ANGIE

From what? If you don't mind my asking? It's not like my people are sharecroppers.

BREE

We wouldn't have let him marry into that. Not that there's anything wrong with good, honest, hard work. Bright side! Your life's so about to change. Mrs. Johnson, of the *Ebony*/*Jet* Johnsons, brings the top European designers to us. You can imagine what that takes.

ANGIE

How'd she even know where to start?

BREE

She's a visionary.

LALA ENTERS. She is super high fashion.

LALA

Are we ready ladies?

They applaud.

LALA

We have something so exciting for you this year. New music, new looks, and a whole new attitude.

ANGIE and BREE applaud. Soul music plays. BREE and ANGIE are not fans.

LALA

What do you think?

BREE

That music's, music.

LALA

Isn't it great?

ANGIE

I never heard anything like it. That's for sure, (lower) thank goodness.

LALA snaps her fingers. Three projections of 1960s style fashion appear. [NOTE: These can be indicated or shown. The point is the women's reaction.]

LALA

Here we go. Givenchy, Pierre Cardin, Yves St. Laurent.

BREE and ANGIE ooo and aaah.

ANGIE

The Cardin is definitely me.

LALA

That was just the warm up. Our next model takes the stage in Valentino.

BREE

I love the Italians. The French don't know what to do with hips.

DRAFT

LALA claps. A projection of a dark-skinned Black model in a bright yellow print.

BREE

Dark skinned girls shouldn't wear loud colors.

LALA

That ensemb' is exquisite. She resembles the first African woman to walk the plains.

ANGIE

She looks like an ooga-booga out of *Tarzan*. I don't wear a bone in my nose.

BREE

Agree.

LALA

Might les mesdames be better served by Dillard's? They won't let you try anything on, but you might catch a glimpse of yourself as they usher you out the back door.

ANGIE

Still, if this is what style is, maybe I don't want it.

LALA

Big picture. Have the scholarship funds this event raises become unnecessary? Are our Negro colleges taking students free of charge?

ANGIE and BREE settle down.

BREE

(to ANGIE)

Mr. Samuelson wants you to have a new dress. We don't want to disappoint him.

LALA

Finally, this year's pièce de résistance. Fashion with sooooooul.

No response.

LALA

Soooooul ... (Dies out.)

LALA claps. MARGOT ENTERS with a splendiferous afro and a red, black and green African-inspired ensemble.

LALA

Notice our model's wearing the new hot hair style. We call it --

ANGIE

The field hand?

LALA

The afro. This look signals a whole new attitude, black power.

BREE

(to MARGOT)

Why'd they let you come out here like that? Doesn't someone love you?

MARGOT snaps her fingers, then sashays away. After a sharp turn, she gives a black power salute and EXITS.

BREE

That's dangerous.

ANGIE

(whispers)

Was she wearing a girdle?

LALA

No, ma'am.

ANGIE and BREE gasp!

BREE

If we set the booty free, God only knows where that might lead.

ANGIE

You can look ten pounds thinner in a girdle. And nothing jiggles.

LALA pats her butt.

LALA

What if it's not supposed to be flat? What if it's supposed to jiggle?

ANGIE and BREE are aghast.

LALA

Ladies, it's time for you to embrace a new idea: Black is beautiful.

ANGIE

I just got to be a Negro. We were colored for the longest. I can't keep up.

LALA

Embrace the truth. Our hair, our bodies are wonderful as they are.

BREE

Don't be ridiculous. We came here for the clothes to make ourselves beautiful.

LALA

You can get on board this train now or wait for the white man to sell it back to you. At a huge mark up.

ANGIE

I don't have a problem waiting.

LALA

Indulge me. See how it sounds in your mouth, Black is beautiful.

ANGIE

Black ... I don't even like the way black sounds.

BREE

It feels like an insult.

LALA

I won't let you see the rest of the show if you don't say it.

BREE

Are you absolutely sure you have the Dior?

LALA nods. BREE nudges ANGIE.

ANGIE AND BREE

(quickly, struggling)

Black's beautiful.

LALA

Now was that hard?

ANGIE AND BREE

Yes.

LALA

You're beautiful. Both of you.

LALA gently, lovingly wipes the foundation off Angie's face.

ANGIE

What are you doing?

LALA holds up a mirror.

ANGIE

Is that really me?

LALA nods, then wipes BREE's face.

BREE

Wow. I'm not giving up moisturizing though.

LALA whips out a big bottle of Vaseline.

LALA

Moisturizing is sacred. No matter what we must fight the ash!

END SCENE

DRAFT

EXHIBIT/SCENE 2

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

The minimal set of an early 2000s YouTube show. There are two chairs, draped in cloth. A small video camera is set up opposite them. There is a small table with a speaker phone between them.

[NOTE: Callers can be off stage or seen, but not in the same space.]

[Optional: NJERI and MARGOT walk through the audience with a cheerful, banner or poster that says *Let's Talk About Sex* exhibit decorated with condoms and dental dams, etc.]

ANGIE (V.O.)

For a brief shining moment before the trolls, the Web seemed like it would solve everything. Sisters were out here creating content for us, by us. Talk shows, beauty vlogs. Thinking we were empowered, instead of handing over our data.

LIGHTS RISE. Bouncy talk show music. NJERI strides out waving Oprah-style.

NJERI

Hello! Welcome to *Let's Be About It!* Today YouTube, tomorrow syndicated t.v.! My next guest is no stranger to us and needs no introduction. But you may want to grab some libations because today's topic is, wait for it, sex. C'mon out here, doc.

BREE ENTERS. Note, they both wear long weaves that they periodically "work."

BREE

Heeeey.

They do the black girl hug rock, then sit.
[<https://twitter.com/ALBDamn/status/1526576719678918657?S=20&t=YE2jWtPmbWk0MUJgseEJ3Lg>]

NJERI

I'm so excited for today's show. If you're calling in, the number's 888-BLAKGRL.
(to BREE)
When I announced the topic for today's show, you called right away and said, "put me on."

BREE

Had to. I'm one of only three black sexologists in the entire state. We desperately need providers who understand how race and sex connect.

NJERI

Tell us a little about your background.

BREE

My parents made me sign a purity pledge. Yes, they were those kind of black parents. No sex ed. No dating. I didn't even realize that my parents were lovers until I was in my 20s. One day we were at the park and my mother looked at my dad with so much heat, I fell off my chair. That's why I've made sexual healing for us my mission.

NJERI

For real, we need this desperately. Yesterday someone told me she thought hot flashes were middle aged flames of passion. I mean ...

BREE

That's what happens when you get sex ed from BET.

BREE displays the whip from the Slavery scene.

NJERI

Umm...

BREE slips the whip under her chair.

BREE

Just letting your viewers know, nothing's off the table. Access to pleasure should be a human right. You would not believe how many women have never had an orgasm.

NJERI

Woo, let's get to it. What's the most important thing you've learned as a sexologist?

BREE

Our country's drenched in sex.

NJERI

We sure sell everything with it.

BREE

Bet. But we never actually talk about it. We don't know how to ask for what we need. Or how to stay safe. I figured it out when I was in Paris for study abroad. I did the deed with this Senegalese brother. He whipped out two condoms and said: (accented) "lambskin or latex?" Just like we say "Coke or Pepsi." In that moment, I got it. Our country's backwards as hell when it comes to sex.

NJERI

The Puritans are definitely still in charge of our sexual imaginations.

BREE

Did you want to share your situation with your listeners?

NJERI

I'm swirling with a Japanese man. Girl, we need to stop sleeping on Asian men because okay? It forced me to deal with some body issues. I was terrified my coochie hair would be too coarse for him. But I combed it out and ...

NJERI does a happy dance in her chair.

BREE

Girl, free yourself. He already knows. That comb can't get everywhere.

They laugh.

BREE

See? Misinformation's everywhere. Sex is a critical part of life. Treating it like it's dirty or a mystery or a joke ain't it. Everything starts with understanding your body and embracing it. Then the most important part. You've got to reprogram your mind.

NJERI

Tell us where to start.

BREE

I tell clients to start with how they think about our sheroes. If we let them have their full, complex sexuality, it'll trickle down to the rest of us.

DRAFT

NJERI

Break it down.

BREE

Maya Angelou was raped, but was also a madame for a minute.

NJERI

Dr. Angelou was like god in my house. I know both those things were in her book, but I can't put that information together in my head.

BREE

That's my point. Angela Davis is an icon. But do we let her speak freely about her bisexuality? No. It never seems to come up that Coretta Scott King supported gay rights with her whole chest. And don't get me started on how we get desexed. Case in point, our girl Harriet Tubman was snatched.

(BREE gestures an hour
glass figure.)

Twice married, the last time to a hot, younger man. It was on and popping.

NJERI

What? Girl, shut your mouth and keep on talking.

BREE

Let's get into it. I'm ready for some callers.

NJERI

Okay, our first caller is from Center City.

MARGOT (O.S.)

Hello? My question's about pornography.

BREE

Go for it.

MARGOT (O.S.)

My man and I just got back together. We decided to spice things up. There were no and I mean no normal black couples. Not to mention anybody over 35. Old people make love too! 90% of blackness was white women with black men. And that stuff showed every sexual stereotype about brothers on steroids.

NJERI

What's your question, love?

MARGOT (O.S.)

At first we were laughing it off, but now it seems like he's starting to like some of that madness. I put my foot down, but I can feel his resentment building. I think he might be watching some on his own. What do I do?

BREE

First, good for you. Setting boundaries is usually the hard part.

MARGOT (O.S.)

Yeah, but it's not working. Do I quit him?

BREE

Here's what I think is going on. He's probably repulsed and flattered.

MARGOT (O.S.)

I don't get it. He doesn't have a giant ... And he doesn't need to. I'm completely 100% satisfied. I don't see why --

BREE

We all get so many mixed messages. Jezebel, Mammy, Buck, Coon, Uncle Tom. My advice? Exorcise this demon with a swap. Playing with master, mistress slave stereotypes comes with heavy baggage. I'm not here to kink shame, but it's not worth the risk. Are you near your computer?

MARGOT (O.S.)

Yes.

BREE

Type in black married couple, sex, romantic. Check out the videos from Black Love is Black Wealth. They should do the trick.

MARGOT (O.S.)

Oooooo. These are (husky) very nice. Doc, you're the bomb.

BREE

Remember, you've gotta decolonize your mind before you can decolonize the sheets.

NJERI

Our next caller's from the fashionable west side.

LALA (O.S.)

Let me get right to it. With the support of my family and friends, I'm becoming transfemme. I'm tackling everything that comes with it: the physical, social, medical, interpersonal.

BREE

Support is all you need. All any of us need really.

LALA (O.S.)

Damn straight. I know how lucky I am. But here's the thing. I'm going on my first real date in two hours.

NJERI

Snap!

LALA (O.S.)

It's complicated, not gonna lie. Emotions. A lot of hysterical shit went down to get me to this point. And some shit that wasn't so funny.

BREE

With men, women, non binary - ?

LALA (O.S.)

Yes. I spend about 85% of my hookup planning bandwidth figuring out the best time to tell someone. And how. Anyway my date and I've been video chatting for a few weeks.

BREE

The first thing is for you to be safe. Meeting in a public place?

LALA (O.S.)

Check.

BREE

Mud on the license plate?

LALA (O.S.)

Check. I'm not trying to become another statistic.

NJERI (O.S.)

Safety first, girl!

LALA (O.S.)

Got it. But I need help, stat.

BREE

Is this date going to include sex?

LALA (O.S.)

(sings)

Yes!

NJERI

I know that's right.

BREE

Are they cis?

LALA (O.S.)

Yes.

BREE

Okay, tricky. First, don't let them treat you like some kind of unicorn. At the first sign of a Tyler Perry joke, flee! If they only know Laverne Cox, slow down.

LALA (O.S.)

Got it. But when do I disclose? Before the panties, but after the bra?

BREE

The real question is tuck or untuck?

LALA

Overlooked that. More details. Cause I'm excited, terrified, scared to death and ecstatic.

BREE

Tell it all. They take all of you on your terms or not at all. I'm not saying it's going to be easy. We both know it's not. The best and safest thing you can do is trust yourself. Listen to your inner voice.

LALA (O.S.)

I don't trust my inner voice. It had me hiding me from myself for way too long.

BREE

When we know better, we do better. Text them and make sure you're not some kind of experiment, and if it's all systems go, put on your best hot outfit and make climate change a little hotter.

LALA (O.S.)

(laughs)

If this doesn't work, I'm calling back to read you on air.

BREE

I'd expect nothing less.

NJERI

Good luck, caller! Our last caller's from the East Side.

ANGIE (O.S.)

First, giving honor to God who is the head of my life. I worship at Mt. Hope where Rev. Murray is the pastor. I'm blessed to --

NJERI

We're happy to welcome you, but today's subject --

ANGIE (O.S.)

I know: sex. I called to testify.

She shakes a tambourine.

ANGIE (O.S.)

Last Thursday, I found the Song of Solomon. In the *Bible*, y'all! (Sexy voice.) "You're like a palm tree and your breasts are like its clusters." I found my sexy at service that night. The spirit was high. Everyone was shouting and singing. Then someone started the Holy Ghost dance. [e.g. YouTube: https://youtu.be/v1P_Yz4Yeas] You know how we do.

BREE

Actually I don't.

ANGIE (O.S.)

No big hip moves. Hold your chest still so boobs stay in place. Anyway all of a sudden I started to really feel it. I started leaping and jumping. Joy spreading through my whole body. My G-spot turned on, hel-lo!

BREE and NJERI get swept up and Holy Ghost dance, as church music plays over Angie's tambourine. Finally, Angie stops shaking the tambourine and the music stops.

ANGIE (O.S.)

That much pleasure had to be from some version of God. Anyway, be blessed.

NJERI

And that's our show. We'll let Brother Marvin play us out.

Marvin Gaye's "Sexual Healing" plays as the lights fade.

END SCENE

EXHIBIT/SCENE 3

THE PIETÀ, OR THE COMING OF KAREN

LALA holds BREE like the figure in Michelangelo's sculpture. In his words, a sculpture made to show the "religious vision of abandonment."

LALA

I can't help you unless you tell me what's wrong. Talk to me, sis.

BREE

(weakly)

I thought we were cool.

LALA

We are.

BREE

Not us. Me and Emily, my bestie. But today, she flipped on me.

LALA

Flipped? You mean like this?

LALA does the white woman hair toss. A fan blows her hair.

BREE

(fading out)

That, but everything else flipped, too. Her tone, her attitude ...

LALA

What happened next?

LALA shakes BREE to no avail.

LALA

I'm losing her. I can't do this on my own. Divine Nine, assemble.

MARGOT, NJERI and ANGIE enter doing a black sorority step dance.

MARGOT

Delta Sigma Theta in the house. Ooooo, oooooop.

NJERI

AKA. Skee wee!

ANGIE

Zeta Phi Beta.

ANGIE makes the Zeta Phi Beta hand sign. [NOTE: Pinky and Index finger raised, middle fingers on top of the thumb.]

ANGIE

Sigma Gamma Rho, Alpha Phi Alpha, Iota Phi Theta, Kappa Alpha Psi and Phi Beta Sigma are on other missions.

NJERI

Our Omega Psi Phi brothers send power.

MARGOT, NJERI and ANGIE bark like "Que Dogs," [slang for Omega Psi Phi] then surround BREE and LALA with a final foot stomp.

LALA

Thank goodness you're here.

BREE lifts her head weakly, then sinks.

BREE

They won't help me. I didn't pledge. I'm not into black stuff.

MARGOT

You're still our sister.

BREE shakes her head 'no.'

BREE

I ... I just can't relate. My ancestors were free.

NJERI

Very strange. Half of bourgie blacks claim to be descended from free blacks, but 95% of blacks were enslaved. Hard to square that circle.

BREE

Anyway, I grew up in the suburbs. We're not democrats. Thanks, but --

LALA

Then why'd you come to me?

BREE

I was desperate. Then I remembered you from hip hop yoga.

MARGOT

We can't leave without knowing you'll be okay. Who can we call?

BREE

My family's on a square dancing retreat. No phones. There's no one. Our friends turned out to be her friends. I'm so atypical. And awkward!

NJERI
(whispers to ANGIE)

Another one.

MARGOT

Listen, young lady. There's not a thing you've done or ever could do another Black person hasn't already done.

LALA's phone rings.

LALA

It's my client. What do I -- ?

MARGOT

Go get that money. We'll take it from here.

LALA leaves.

MARGOT

Let us at least try to help. Tell us exactly what went down before you collapsed.

ANGIE

Don't omit any details. Even things you think might be insignificant.

NJERI pats Bree's shoulder.

BREE

My best friend, Emily ...

DRAFT

MARGOT

Is Emily white?

BREE

More like an olive cream. We've been besties since third grade. This morning she flipped on me. We were taking a walk to air things out. We passed an African American woman. She said, 'hey sis,' so I nodded. Emily asked me, "did you know that woman?" I said "no." Then she said, "so why did she call you 'sis'?" Why are Black people always calling each other brothers and sisters? We don't do that. It's ridiculous." Her tone was so harsh. It felt like a kick to the ovaries.

NJERI

Whoa.

ANGIE

This is a serious case.

MARGOT

Had she ever made you feel like "the black girl" before?

BREE

Never. I was stunned. Her family adores me. They put up candles for Kwanzaa and a Black Lives Matter sign in their basement. Not that my family's into that, but still!

ANGIE

Got it.

MARGOT

What's her full name?

BREE

Emily Eaton. Her parents are Hap and Buffy. Can this be fixed?

MARGOT

(to ANGIE)

There might be a chance. Run the Eatons through Bloogle.

BREE

Bloogle?

ANGIE

Black Google. It's in beta. Staffed by fired Black women Silicon Valley geniuses who couldn't get venture capital.

NJERI

Powered by an equity algorithm that never sells our data. This is not to be shared. Understood?

BREE nods.

NJERI

I need verbal assent.

DRAFT

BREE

I promise I won't.

ANGIE

They're an insurance family, correct?

BREE nods tentatively.

ANGIE

I'm sorry to tell you, but the Eatons are beneficiaries of the slave trade.

BREE

Are you sure? There has to be some mistake.

MARGOT

The algorithm's fool proof.

NJERI

Where'd you think old money came from?

BREE

This is awful, if true. But all that was a long, long, long time ago.

NJERI

Actually, it's only like one great grandmother ago.

MARGOT

Run the results through Bloogle's wealth meter.

ANGIE does.

ANGIE

62% of their current wealth's directly attributable to the trade.

BREE

She doesn't know. She couldn't. She would've told me.

NJERI

In the deepest recesses of your soul, you know we're telling you the truth. What do you want to do about it?

BREE

I ... I don't know.

ANGIE

Has she ever been to *your* house? Not dipped in, but actually stayed the night?

BREE

No. It always falls through.

ALL EXCEPT BREE

(with great pity)

Hmmmm .

DRAFT

BREE

We launched a start up that's finally taking off. I've got to save this relationship.

ANGIE

Friendships in her world move differently. Look at Ivanka and Chelsea.

BREE

I don't get it. This came out of nowhere. She won't even talk to me. There's got to be an explanation. Please. Tell me.

A glance between ANGIE and MARGOT.

MARGOT

I'm very sorry to tell you. You're experiencing the birth of Karen. It usually begins sometime in the 20s.

NJERI

It only affects about 38% of the population. But once it begins, the prognosis is ...

NJERI mournfully shakes her head.

ANGIE

Healing starts with truth. What role did you play in this?

BREE

None!

NJERI

Are you sure? Did you invite her to the cook out?

BREE hangs her head in shame. The other women respond.

ANGIE

You gave her a hood pass, too, didn't you? Shoot, have you ever even been to the hood?

BREE

Worse.

ALL EXCEPT BREE

You let her call you "my nigga"?

BREE

Just the one time. In bed.

ANGIE

Help us, black Jesus.

BREE

We were in our bicurious phase.

ANGIE

You can't Instagram trend your way through life.

BREE

I need help. Not judgment.

MARGOT

Fair. You definitely have Pet Negro syndrome. You collapsed because of severe whiteness withdrawal.

BREE

Is there a cure?

BREE's phone pings with a text from Emily.

BREE

It's her.

ANGIE

Don't read it.

MARGOT

What's the last thing you remember telling her?

BREE

That she wasn't a racist, but she did a racist thing.

NJERI

Well shit. How'd that work out for you?

Another text.

ANGIE

We've got to get you into treatment, stat!

BREE

But if I don't respond she might think --

NJERI

You in danger, girl. Not from Emily. From your own self.

Bree's phone rings.

BREE

I'm taking it.

WOMEN EXCEPT BREE

Nooo

BREE

Karen, no I mean Emily?

EMILY (O.S.)

That made me uncomfortable.

BREE

Listen. We can work things out --

DRAFT

Nonsensical whining sounds escalate into one, then many police sirens.

ANGIE

Evacuate.

BREE covers the receiver.

BREE

Let me explain to her.

MARGOT

It's too late. Take cover.

They do. BLACK OUT. The sounds of WWIV [World War 4] are unleashed on the women. Eerie, ghostly LIGHTS RISE.

Each woman holds a red rose.

MARGOT

The dying process is surprisingly relaxing.

ANGIE

All our worries and cares fading.

NJERI

I still owe student loans. Take that mofos! Bwah ha ha ha ha!

BREE

I'm so sorry.

(sings)

"Lift every voice and sing."

ANGIE

"Freedom, freedom, where are you?" [from Beyonce's "Freedom"]

NJERI

We held each other down until the end. That's all that matters ...

The ladies start "dying" in character.

LALA ENTERS.

LALA

What do you think this is? You don't get to die. We've got work to do for the culture.

The ladies wave LALA off and keep dying,
LALA claps her hands. An old fashioned
mic descends from the ceiling. LALA
speaks into it as a fight bell dings.

LALA

No, I'm not having it, Fight your way back to the light! I summon the strength of a
thousand Fannie Lou Hamers and LaTosha Browns. Fight!

LALA circles the women. Imploring them.

The women start to rise.

LALA

(to the audience)

Ladies and gentlemen, you are witnessing an amazing spectacle. They are literally
fighting their way back from the dead. And, and ...

The women help each other stand.

LALA

They've made it. On the scale of black girl magic ... Ten!

Thunderous canned applause.

MARGOT

Don't you ever, not never again --

BREE

Got it.

BLACK OUT

END SCENE

THE SOCIAL JUSTICE SCRAMBLE

EXHIBIT/SCENE 4

A park after an evening protest. LALA and MARGOT carry placards. LALA wears a beat up back pack. MARGOT has a small rolling bag. They race for the lone bench. LALA gets there first. She speaks in her Nigerian accent.

LALA

I got here first.

MARGOT

What happened to "the people united"?

LALA

I'm united in my desire not to lay my head on concrete tonight.

MARGOT

You think you deserve this bench more than me? Bitch, please.

LALA

(under her breath)

Akata.

DRAFT

MARGOT

What did you say? You think I don't know that's a derogatory slang term y'all use for African Americans? Surprise!

LALA

It slipped out. I didn't mean it. Sorry.

MARGOT

That's no excuse. My parents were slaves, but yours came here voluntarily. New flash: that doesn't make you any better than me. Even if you're more acceptable.

LALA

We do have more education and a better work ethic. But it's not your fault.

MARGOT

What? Please. You let outsiders waltz into your house and own you for centuries. Plus the fact that you wouldn't be here unless it was for the Civil Rights movement. Before then, they were only letting like ten of you in a year.

LALA

Fair point.

MARGOT

Points.

LALA

Fine. Now, back to our dispute. Who gets the bench?

MARGOT

I've been protesting since grade school. I've been arrested eleven times. Twice in utero. I earned this bench.

LALA

I've only been arrested three times, but I was misgendered twice. The bench is ours.

MARGOT

I don't think so.

LALA

Look, I hate that I was born after the civil rights movement. I know I missed all the excitement.

MARGOT

How old do you think I am? I cut my teeth on anti apartheid. Honestly people think any black person over 35 was marching with Martin.

LALA

Well, I've been doing all I can. I've been with Black Lives Matter since the beginning. Before the donations started rolling in. When it was pure.

An angelic sound.

DRAFT
MARGOT

(raps)

We want to see Winnie and Nelson free.

(speaks)

Boop! What else you got?

MARGOT make the Morpheus (*Matrix*)
'come hither' move.

LALA

I cut my teeth on Marriage Equality.

MARGOT

That wasn't even black.

LALA

I'm intersectional!

MARGOT

Oh no, you're one of those Obama babies. He made you believe racism was dead.

LALA

For a brief moment, I think we all did.

MARGOT

We can't afford to be wrong like that. No more black faces in high places for me. You come at me, you better be coming with an armful of policy.

LALA

So true. Look we should just share.

LALA plops down.

MARGOT

Doesn't work for me. I've got arthritis. I need to stretch out. Don't think I'm afraid to throw hands.

LALA

Don't make what my parents always said about you be true.

NJERI ENTERS. She is black protest chic. Think DeRay.

NJERI

Ladies? I'm the co-convener of the protest. Problem?

MARGOT

Looks like it, doesn't it?

NJERI

Okay. Let's all take a deep cleansing breath.

(She does. They don't.)

Before we dialogue, I speak as a dis-, middle class, Ivy League educated --

LALA

Speaking as a transfemme radical, can you hurry it up? I'm getting cold out here.

NJERI

(rapidly)

Able bodied, womanist. We stand on the unceded territory --

MARGOT

You forgot to arrange for housing.

NJERI

I was in the middle of --

MARGOT

I'm not listening to another acknowledgment until we start chasing down those missing indigenous women and girls.

LALA

Least we could do. Probably find a bunch of our own in the process. It's cold out here.

(points at her nipples)

These babies should not be standing at attention.

NJERI

Okay, I take your point.

MARGOT

My bus doesn't leave till 5 a.m. I wouldn't have come if I'd known.

NJERI

So, so sorry about that. Did you RSVP on Facebook?

MARGOT

Who RSVP's for a protest? It's not a cocktail party.

LALA

Damn straight. Those are e-mail harvesting operations.

NJERI

We can't let ourselves become paranoid, my sister.

LALA

We shouldn't be paranoid? About Facebook?

NJERI

Meta.

LALA

Seriously?

NJERI

They're a sponsor.

LALA

We are so screwed.

MARGOT

I left at least seven voicemails. Got here early, but couldn't find anyone who could help me.

LALA

I've gotta let her off the hook for that. This isn't 1999. No one listens to voicemails any more. Hang up and send a text.

NJERI

I acknowledge there have been communications issues.

LALA

Great. Could you acknowledge us a room? The Motel Five doesn't leave a light on, but it's only 39.99 a night.

MARGOT

We'll need two rooms.

(to LALA)

I don't know you like that.

NJERI

What? No, I'm sorry. We don't just hand out cash.

MARGOT

There was a sea of guilty faces out here today. You had to have raised a ton of money. How much exactly?

NJERI

I'm not at liberty to say.

LALA

I bet it was more than two times 39.99.

NJERI

You can't stay here. We promised the authorities.

LALA

You promised the cops? You think if you keep your word, what?
(sings Black Panther ditty)

The revolution will come.

MARGOT

They roughed up a few people today.

NJERI

Really? Well we didn't see anything like that. No one reported --

LALA

Reported to who? That's the whole problem. We don't just need allies. We need people on the ground looking out for us.

MARGOT

Wait a minute. I didn't see you on stage after you spoke.

LALA

Come to think of it, me neither. She could be an informant.

NJERI

We were at a remote location for safety. There have been death threats.

MARGOT

And you just left us out here?

NJERI

Sorry. Listen I have to go, but I can drive you to the shelter. Stay here. I'll bring the car around.

NJERI walks away.

LALA

Hold up.

NJERI stops.

What is it now? NJERI

Are those red bottoms? LALA

Donated. NJERI

Revolution via Louboutins? MARGOT

I'm not apologizing. NJERI

We didn't ask you to. MARGOT

Our own people'll turn their backs on us if we don't "look" a certain way. NJERI

Maybe you're feeling a bit ... guilty? LALA

I'm not like those Women's March leaders. I didn't take the money and run. NJERI

They didn't start off with multi-million dollar homes. Selling out always starts small. MARGOT

I have an obligation to take care of myself and my family. Our country doesn't have a great track record when it comes to taking care of its revolutionaries. NJERI

Taking money from a bunch of donors trying to wash dirty money clean is an insult to the ancestors. MARGOT

Where else is the money coming from? NJERI

The people. LALA

Our celebrities. MARGOT

The people don't have a nickel to spare. How many celebrities do you think there are to go around? If, and that's a big if, they were inclined to finance change. There's a big gap between Muhammad Ali and Colin Kaepernick. NJERI

That's so cynical. LALA

NJERI

Why don't you reach out to some Nigerian oil millionaires? I'll wait.

LALA hangs her head.

NJERI

Look around. Everyone should be out here supporting us. But no. They're home watching old acts on Versuz. They'd rather listen to last century's hip hop on Instagram than fight for freedom today.

MARGOT

It's always been like that. The peanut gallery watches the fight, then collects the spoils. Doesn't mean you don't keep fighting. Or doing the right thing yourself.

LALA

You know what's a trip? None of us have said anything wrong.

NJERI

But everybody marched with King though.

MARGOT

And Malcolm and Jesse. In their minds. They think they're here tonight.

They all laugh.

MARGOT

It seems like all our movements disintegrate. Path one: leaders don't make it. Too many of our women wind up forgotten, old, black and broke.

NJERI

Definitely do not want.

MARGOT

Path two: you stick with it, diminishing returns, but you keep plugging away. It's a grind, for real, for real.

LALA

That's us.

MARGOT

Exactly. We're not sitting around reliving the glory days. We're here.

NJERI

You were squabbling over a park bench.

MARGOT

I'd love to be squabbling over a hot tub. But certain folks didn't take care of business.

NJERI

Ouch. Sorry.

MARGOT

Path three: you get paid. And do as much good as you can. That's the only way I can see.

LALA

You forgot the sell outs and the traitors.

MARGOT

I can't even get mad at them any more. I'm not built for it, but I get it. It's human to want to save yourself.

LALA

Even at someone else's expense?

MARGOT

The cost of freedom comes high.

LALA

Then what the hell's wrong with us?

MARGOT

We're built different. Born a Path Two. Die a Path Two, I guess.

LALA

I'm going to try for some of that Path Three energy though.

NJERI

There's hope. Our new, digital tools -

MARGOT

No shade, but I don't think we're going to be able to point and click our way to justice.

LALA

You're right. We need another solution.

Beat.

MARGOT

Canadians.

LALA

Say what?

MARGOT

You've heard about Hurricane Carter? Who stuck with him? Canadians. Where did exiled Panthers do best? Canada. If we were in Canada, we'd have a place to stay right now.

LALA

And health care.

They hum. "O Canada."

MARGOT

Can't you just picture Harriet Tubman waiting to greet us with margaritas in Toronto?

NJERI

We could lay flowers at the end of the Underground Railroad.

LALA

What a beautiful dream.

NJERI

Dreams aren't reality. I'll bring my Tesla around.

MARGOT and LALA exchange glances.

LALA

Tesla?

NJERI

A gift from --

LALA

There are so many things wrong with that picture.

NJERI

I can't protect you if the cops show.

MARGOT

You know what? You never could. It's okay.
(to LALA)

LALA and MARGOT snuggle up on the bench.

NJERI

Last chance.

MARGOT

You take care of yourself. Oops! You already have.

MARGOT and LALA put on hair bonnets.
C'est fini. NJERI hands them her card.

NJERI

If you change your mind, text me.

NJERI EXITS.

MARGOT

Was this stupid of us?

LALA

Probably, but also principled.

MARGOT
Can't put principles on bread and eat them.

LALA
How much longer do you think we can last?

MARGOT
Tonight?

LALA
Out here period.

MARGOT
I'm not sure. I'm thinking about taking this gig down south, organizing Amazon workers in Alabama. Pay sucks.

LALA
Doesn't it always?

MARGOT
But it comes with an apartment.

LALA
Girl! What is you waiting for?

MARGOT
I hate to leave the city. But maybe I will. I'm getting old for this.

DRAFT
LALA
Do it. I'm going to try to find something like the for myself. If you hear about anything ...

MARGOT
I'll keep you posted. Give me your phone, I'll type my number in.

LALA does.

MARGOT
Night, Madame C.J. Walker.

LALA
Night, Marsha P. Johnson, Flo Kennedy, Ursula Burns --

MARGOT
Okay, that's a wrap.

BLACK OUT.

END SCENE

EXHIBIT/SCENE 5

ESCAPE TO SPACE

NASA Command Center. Late night.
Muted high tech beeps and clicks. NJERI
sits alone at a console.

NJERI

Commander? Please come in. Please. Please? Over and out.

Nothing.

NJERI

Look around. Everyone else gave up on you. You're my bestie, my road dog, ace
boon ... If you don't come back ... They're about to declare the mission a total loss.
You know what that means.

LIGHTS RISE on ANGIE, wearing a space
suit, suspended in air or standing on a
ladder.

ANGIE

Let them.

NJERI

Thank goodness. Girl, what in the cinnamon toast crunch fuck are you up to?
You don't get time off. You're a role model. You have responsibilities!

ANGIE

Our people need to wean themselves off role models.

NJERI

They're still very much needed.

ANGIE

Please. We're interchangeable. Do you know how many people mistake me for
Mae Jemison? She's about to retire!

NJERI

Let's get you home and we can argue about it. Initiating status check.

Beeps and clicks.

ANGIE

Hold off on that a sec. Messaging you via our private channel. I need you to see
something.

NJERI

GoddessBeyoncéStaceyMeghan channel open.

When the message is received, the stage
is lit with the MACS J1149+2223 star
cluster [Note, this is an actual cluster.]

NJERI

Oh my ...

ANGIE

Isn't it?

NJERI

Amazing.

ANGIE

Icarus. You're the first person on earth to see it.

NJERI

We made it from the South Side to the end of the galaxy.

ANGIE

Correction, commander: to the beginning of the next one.

NJERI

Hell yeah! This is so dope!

ANGIE

It proves your thesis beyond a doubt.

NJERI

Our thesis.

ANGIE

Look at what else I found.

A second earth appears in the distance
for a moment as a pin light or projection.

NJERI

Get out. A second earth?

ANGIE

It was there, hidden, all the time. Just like we thought.

NJERI

It looks so much cleaner than ours.

ANGIE

No shit, Sherlock. There are no signs of human habitation. It's all one land mass.

NJERI

How much can you see?

ANGIE

Not much. I can only see it for a few seconds at a time.

NJERI

But there's other life?

ANGIE

I think so.

NJERI

We're finally going to get the respect we deserve. As soon as we get off, I'm calling my undergraduate advisor to rub his face in it.

ANGIE

You're not usually that petty.

NJERI

I will be this time. We're going to be the most famous space scientists ever. Endorsement deals. The hidden figures women need a piece of the action --

ANGIE

I love you for thinking like that. I love that we're really the first this time. Not just the first to do something a white guy already did. This is a triumph of our imaginations.

NJERI

We're definitely on track for a Nobel. We could afford to live in Harlem again. What're we wearing to the ceremony? We have to coordinate.

ANGIE

(laughing)

I'll let you worry about that. But keep everything to yourself for the moment.

NJERI

I don't know how I'm going to hold back.

ANGIE

I'm not coming back, sis.

NJERI

You have to come back. You've only got food for another three days. That's why we're all freaking out.

ANGIE

You're the only one here. Everybody's not freaking out.

NJERI

Some truth, but I also volunteered. Listen, we both know you're coming back. Let's think in practical terms. Your edges are in bad shape. Pretty please touch them up before you land.

No response.

NJERI

You know our people are going to drag you if you come back looking a mess. Look at how they did Simone Biles. I tried to get you to take a bonnet, but noooo.

ANGIE cuts the cord that's attached to the monitor.

VOICE (O.S.)

Commencing decoupling from planet earth in 30 seconds. Affirmative?

ANGIE

Proceed.

NJERI

You're serious?!

ANGIE

This is something I have to do.

NJERI

Die? Because without earth support --

ANGIE

Only nerdy white guys get to gamble on their dreams? I thought we agreed --

NJERI

You get back here right this minute.

ANGIE

The decision's been made. I've been prepping. Hydroponics for food --

NJERI

That explains the excess water usage. I covered for you by the way. You're welcome.

ANGIE

I'm taking a chance on second earth. If it doesn't work out? It's been real.

NJERI

I'm not letting you embrace death.

ANGIE

I made my peace with death when I became an astronaut. Remember that mountain of paperwork they made us sign?

NJERI

Do you think they're going to just let you walk away with a \$5 billion dollar space ship?

ANGIE

I'm thinking a couple of hundred years of scamming us from slavery to Jim Crow ought to cover it.

NJERI

They'll hunt you til your dying day. I won't be able to stop them. Nobody will.

ANGIE

I thought you said they were ready to scrap the whole mission?

NJERI

Abandoning you was their call. You don't get to live carefree on their dime. You'll be the new Ona Judge. They will chase your butt until your dying day.

ANGIE

Didn't she die a free woman?

NJERI

Free, but looking over her shoulder. I don't want that for you. I can't believe this is a real conversation. You've got to come back. You just have to. Not for them, for me.

ANGIE

I'll stay in touch on this channel as long as I can.

NJERI

Then what?

ANGIE

Assume success and throw the biggest party at the best barbecue joint in town. Screw the Keto. I'm not importing fatphobia into the new world.

NJERI

So what? I get to live forever wondering?

ANGIE

We've already taken the biggest risks. You're ready.

NJERI

What if I want to come?

ANGIE

You've got kids --

NJERI

I don't like the oldest one that much.

ANGIE

She's a little toughie. My money's on her.

NJERI

Your family's going to suffer. The media will turn you into a freeloading space bandit, welfare queen.

ANGIE

One wrong step and they would have done that anyway. They're always itching for that.

NJERI

What about yo Mama?

ANGIE

She'll do just fine. It's one of the few upsides of being from a military family.

NJERI

The kids who look up to you - and there are a lot of them - are going to be devastated. You're their shero.

ANGIE

That's half the reason I'm doing this. I didn't sign up for that.

NJERI

None of us did. It comes with the territory, like it or not.

ANGIE

We've been consuming our role models since King and we're worse off. Maybe it's time to try another way.

NJERI

Just because you've outgrown something doesn't mean everyone else has. You're being selfish.

ANGIE

I'm choking on being a role model. I want to be human. Flawed, messy. Whole. I get that our people need --

NJERI

So much. Not just them. Me too.

ANGIE

I wish I could do that for you without it eating me alive. I've tried. I can't.

NJERI

We convert that hunger into hope. It's how we keep going.

ANGIE

At some point, hope's like heroin. One hit, then another. Emptying out everything it touches. Never satisfying. If I come back to earth, they'll hollow out what's left of me. I'll have nothing left.

NJERI

I'm gagging on it, too.

ANGIE

You're stronger than me and tethered to earth. I don't think I ever was. My chains are broken. You can't ask me to put them back on. Not even for you.

NJERI

I sure can. We've been friends since third grade, all knobby knees. Pretending to be grown.

ANGIE

Nothing can stop our connection, not even death. I'll name everything I can after you.

NJERI

Please don't do that colonizing shit on my behalf.

ANGIE

That's my girl.

NJERI

They'll try to force me out, you know.

ANGIE

You're a brilliant scientist and a bureaucratic genius. You'll make it through.

NJERI

I'm taking a screen shot.

ANGIE

Don't. It's not safe.

NJERI

Look who's talking safe all of a sudden. I need this.

QUICK BLACK OUT on ANGIE before
NJERI can take the photograph.

NJERI

Damn you.

ANGIE

You'll always be able to see me when you look to the stars.

NJERI

That, right there's some soft rock crap. Do better.

ANGIE
(sweet/sarcastic)

Love you sis.

NJERI

Then this is it for real?

ANGIE
(nods)

Resume countdown.

VOICE (O.S.)

Five, four, ...

NJERI AND ANGIE

... three, two.

WHITE OUT. BLAST OFF.

END SCENE

COMMUNION, THE EPILOGUE

LIGHT RISE on the women completing the "frame" around the museum. MARGOT hammers the last nail, then the women sit down. They're dressed as tour guides.

MARGOT

(to the audience)

Thanks for coming to the soft opening of the Museum Annex.

ALL EXCEPT MARGOT

Bye!

MARGOT

Just a minute. We've got some things to do before we let them go.

ANGIE

Oops.

NJERI

I forgot.

BREE

Me, too. That's what comes of working two jobs.

DRAFT
LALA

(Nigerian accent)

Totally slipped my mind.

Women double-take for a second.

LALA

We're off the clock.

MARGOT

Anybody want to say a few words before --

ANGIE

We're hippopotamus happy and peacock proud to have served as your guides.

LALA

Girl, you sure are country.

ANGIE

Bama forever, baby. Roll tide!

MARGOT

Best practices say that at the end of a tour, we should make sure you understood everything.

BREE

Bump that. We're decolonizing this puppy.

LALA

Yas, queen.

BREE thinks, then nods.

BREE

Okay, I will allow it.

LALA nods. Progress.

MARGOT

We wanted to leave you with something better than some trinket or pamphlet that ends up in a drawer, forgotten. We thought long and hard --

ANGIE

Guess what it is y'all!

NJERI

(channeling Oprah)

You get a car! You get a car!

(She raises an eyebrow.)

Lest we forget. That mess eventually led to Dr. Oz. I'm still trying to forgive Oprah.

ANGIE

Dang. Do you ever take a break from being a Debby Downer?

NJERI

When we're free, maybe.

MARGOT

Our gift to you are ...

(drum roll)

... apps. Not the kind 20-year-old dudes come up with. We've got enough food, weed and porn delivery apps.

The women line up.

LALA

We gift you a fluidity app. May you never be trapped by anybody else's idea of who you should be. And if you are? Tap the app. Become who you were meant to be. It's never too hard, never too late to live in your truth.

NJERI

(to LALA)

Solid.

(to ANGIE)

Tossing it to you.

ANGIE

I came up with the virtual reality care app. It lets you feel the hugs of a thousand big mamas. Self care at your fingertips.

The women turn on the app and hug themselves.

MARGOT

Mmmmm. Never get too old for this.

NJERI

How old are you exactly?

LALA

Leave that ageist stuff out. We've got enough problems.

NJERI

Just asking.

MARGOT

Not telling.

LALA

(to MARGOT)

You don't look a day over gorgeous.

MARGOT

I know.

NJERI

We ...

(NJERI points to MARGOT
and BREE)

... developed a courage training program on Virtual Reality. Give us five weeks and you'll have the classy grit of Michelle Obama.

BREE

Satisfaction guaranteed.

MARGOT

(to NJERI)

Did you forget? We're throwing in the Barbara Jordan wisdom app.

(to the AUDIENCE)

It helps you imagine the world you want in SistaVision (echoes). It is so dope.

NJERI

Like Ella Baker said, "give light and the people will find the way."

LALA

That's what this annex is all about. Vision. A new way of seeing. A living legacy worthy to be put in anybody's permanent collection.

ANGIE catwalks, stops and poses.

ANGIE

I love the dignity this place gives. The way the word 'museum' feels in my mouth. Dignity on our terms. With style and a sense of humor.

MARGOT

Don't forget legacy. The ancestors are pulling for us.

BREE

What's our museum been to you? A diversion? A laugh or a cry? Some factoids? We hope you got a lot more. Something to take home and chew on. To share. There's so much to learn, and unlearn.

NJERI

No matter what you got from the annex, it's been a gathering of hearts.

MARGOT

Ours to yours.

The stage and audience are bathed in blue light.

LALA

More than anything, it's all ...

NJERI and BREE embrace, then the rest of the women join hands.

ALL

Love.

BLACK OUT

END SCENE

END ACT II

END PLAY