THE SPLIT SHOW

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ABSTRACT

The Split Show is inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement. It places the two realities created by the construct of race side by side and examines the consequences of Black skin in America. Using sit-com humor, gospel play tropes, and multimedia, it follows a Black family in the death of their son to police violence and a white family as they decide whether or not to keep the bi-racial baby they conceived in a fertility clinic mix up.

The play centers on two women, Porsha Wilson and Melissa Brustein. Porsha, a young African-American woman, is fresh out of college and preparing for her first job interview with the help of her zany neighbor, Momdukes. Porsha’s bickering parents have decided to end their marriage and their dueling infidelities distract Porsha to no end. When Momdukes needs something from the store, Porsha texts her little brother, Deyshawn, and sends him to run the errand. Melissa, a white woman in her early forties, runs a non-profit. She and her husband have finally conceived a baby through egg donation and in-vitro-fertilization. To their shock, the Brusteins find out their egg donor (and the baby Melissa is carrying) is Black. Driving home from the doctor’s office, Melissa witnesses and records a police officer shooting and killing Deyshawn. The way Porsha and Melissa choose to deal with Deyshawn’s death forever changes their lives.
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CHARACTERS
Maybelle “Momdukes” Clemmons: 50s, African American. Played by a man, Momdukes is the Wilsons’ no-nonsense, next door neighbor who calls it like she sees it.
Porsha Wilson: 20s, African American. She’s the good daughter, who believes being respectable will protect her from racism.
Mr. Wilson/ Warm-up Guy: 50s, African American. A working class man with a good heart. Also plays warm-up comedian.
Dora Wilson: 50s, African American. Wilson’s “bourgie,” estranged wife, she’s determined to rise above her station.
Melissa Brustein: 40s, White. A liberal mom-to-be who runs a non-profit, she strives to live her values.
Isaac Brustein: 30s, White. Melissa’s husband.
Warren, 40-50s, African American. A dentist.
Announcer/Newscaster/Judge/ Voice Overs.
Protester: any age, White.

SETTINGS:
Momduke’s House
Doctor’s Examination Room
Dentist’s Office
Car
Isaac and Melissa’s House
Police Station
Clinic/Rally
Court

SYNOPSIS:
The Wilsons, an African-American family, lose their son in police shooting just as the Brusteins, a White family, discover the child they’ve conceived through IVF is bi-racial.

NOTE:
The stage is split so that two different worlds exist side by side. The Wilson’s world is initially played broader in the vein of a sitcom or gospel play. In contrast to this, the Brusteins’ world is initially played naturalistically. The Wilson’s world should intrude on the Brusteins’ world and gradually envelope Melissa as she commits to her baby. This intrusion can be a sound or light cue, or a gesture that Momdukes does and Melissa picks up.
(Sound stage of a television show taping. The set looks like an old Victorian House. There is a parlor with doilyed furniture, knickknacks, and braided rugs. Family pictures hang on the wall, one or two are crooked. Stairs lead to a never seen second floor. The parlor opens into a kitchen with avocado appliances.

Warm-Up Comedian enters.)

Warm Up Guy

Alright! Alright! We got a great show for you tonight! You ready for the show? (Waiting for audience response) If you ready for the show, let me hear you say, “Ow!” Say, “Ho!” Somebody scream! Thank you. Thank you. I do that so I can see how many White people in the audience. (Laughing) No, no, for real, though—Black people take a pre-show call and response as, like, a warm up! It’s like stretching! (Bending at the waist) (Imitating a Black audience member) “Oh, this shit must gon’ be funny. I better loosen up. I don’t wanna pull nothing. Ha ha ha haaaaah! Ha ha ha heeeee!” White people get confused….then they get mad: “ ‘Ow?’ ‘Ho?’ What is—this—is bullshit! I paid good money to be entertained, not to participate! Come on, we’re outta here—Melissa! Melissa!” White guys always date women named Melissa. Jessica. Emily. Black parents be like, “Okay, okay, that’s good for the first three syllables, but where the accent gon’ go? I got a aigu, a grave, and a circonflexe!” Jennifer-oncé! Emiletha. (Spotting a white audience member) That’s what you wore? Man, my father would still be beating my ass I try and leave the house looking like that. (Laughing) You can dress casual and still coordinate, you know. Black people got style —

You ever notice comedians always do that “White people this…” “Black people thiiissss…”? And it’s funny, ‘cause, like, we all know what we’re talkin’ about. (Imitating a White walk then a Black walk) We all know the stereotypes; we all know what it’s supposed to mean. It’s almost like laughing at ourselves brings us together. ‘Cause, really, we are more alike than we are unalike. (Encouraging applause from the audience if there is any) You can clap. You can clap. It’s a beautiful thought. (Beat) It’s malignant bullshit, but it’s a beautiful thought.

Because every Black person in here knows being Black is a whole ‘nother reality! And I suspect White folks know it, too, ‘cause not one of you would change places with me! None of you! And I got a big dick! (Laughing) Huuuuge!

It’s like there’s two worlds, side by side, the Black one and the White one and…ah, fuck it. You’ll see.

(He exits. Momdukes enters. She is a large man dressed as a large woman with silver hair and glasses. She wears a flowered dress. She seems content and
satisfied. She begins preparations to cook a meal when **there is a light shift**. Perhaps it’s lights up on the house. It should have the feel of being at a television show taping. The theme from “What’s Happening” plays. **There is applause** as an announcer speaks :)

ANNOUNCER
You’ve seen her in “Momdukes Opens a Daycare:”

(Momdukes calls off to someone stage right.)

MOMDUKES
I will put my foot so far up your behind you’ll have toes for teeth!

**(SFX: Laughter)**

ANNOUNCER
You loved her in “Momdukes Takes the West Wing:”

(Momdukes shifts her demeanor and shouts stage left.)

MOMDUKES
Mr. President, you can tell Congress to kiss the blackest part of my ass!

**(SFX: Laughter)**

ANNOUNCER
But you’ve never seen her like this! She’s Momdukes!

(Momdukes flashes her signature smile and **house lights go down, but the stage still has a sitcom feel.** Throughout the Momdukes scenes in Act One, there should be moments when the SFX of a studio audience’s response can be heard.)

(Momdukes clicks off the TV from the kitchen. She notices something missing. She looks in cabinets and bangs pots and pans as she searches intently for the missing item.)

(Porsha enters.)

PORSHA
Hey Momdukes!

MOMDUKES
(Still searching) Porsha, what I tell you about coming in my house without knocking?
PORSHA
You said the next time I came in here you were gonna get a bag of hot nickels

(This pass happens quickly:
Momdukes lifts a saucepan full of change off the stove.)

MOMDUKES
Mmhm —

PORSHA
Put ‘em in a sock

(Momdukes pours them into a sock.)

MOMDUKES
Mm hm —

PORSHA
And bust me upside the head!

(Momdukes swings the sock. Porsha ducks.)

PORSHA
(Laughing) I ain’t scared of you, old lady.

(SFX: Giggles)

MOMDUKES
Give me some sugar.

(Porsha kisses Momdukes on the cheek as they hug.)
(Momdukes goes back to searching the kitchen.)

PORSHA
Momdukes, what are you looking for?

MOMDUKES
I can’t find my grease. I was about to fry up some chicken and I can’t find my grease.

PORSHA
Bacon grease?
Yes.

In a can?

Uh-huh.

Bright blue Crisco can?

You seen it?

I threw that out yesterday.

(SFX: Laughter)

You what?!?

I threw it out. You shouldn’t be cooking with that stuff anyway! Did you know that hypertension and heart disease is the number one killer of Black people in America?

No, I didn’t; I thought it was the police. (SFX: Laughter) I’ll send your brother to store. (Walking toward the door, then stopping) Deyshawn home?

No, I came over here looking for him.

Text him for me.

(Porsha takes out her phone and begins texting. A smiling pic of her brother, Deyshawn is projected for the audience to see.)

Tell him to run up to the store and get me some Crisco—

(Texting) get some Crisco…
MOMDUKES
— the blue label, not the yellow —

PORSHA
(Texting) blue …

MOMDUKES
—the three pound can, not the six —

PORSHA
(Texting) three, not the —

MOMDUKES
—and make sure it’s a cherry pie on the label, not no cookies, cause they took the saturated fat out that one and you can’t fry chicken right without —

(SFX: Laughter)

PORSHA
Momdukes! Anything else?

MOMDUKES
Yeah, tell him to bring me some skittles. And a Arizona Iced Tea.

(Porsha sends the text and reads the response.)

PORSHA
He said he’s on his way.

MOMDUKES
Well, since I can’t fry no chicken…. (Sighing) What you want with Deyshawn?

PORSHA
He’s supposed to help me get ready for my interview.

MOMDUKES
Is that today?

PORSHA
Tomorrow. I want to practice my answers so I’ll be perfect.

MOMDUKES
Well, I can help you do that. I used to work in H.R.
PORSHA

What happened?

MOMDUKES

Economy got so bad I had to lay myself off.

(SFX: Laughter)

MOMDUKES

Okay, okay, (Moving to couch) what I’m doing?

PORSHA

Great, here’s a list of questions.

MOMDUKES

I’m the interviewer?

PORSHA

Uh-huh.

MOMDUKES

(Affecting an attitude, adjusting glasses, clearing throat, etc.) Heller. (SFX: Giggles)

PORSHA

Pleased to meet you.

MOMDUKES

I see here, you graduated top of your class, feed the homeless, visit the sick and shut in—you smoke weed? (SFX: Giggles)

PORSHA

What?

MOMDUKES


PORSHA

(Reaching for paper) That’s not on there!

MOMDUKES

You need clean pee? I can get you some pee. Got a cousin on the west side don’t do nothing but drink water all day. (SFX: Laughter)

PORSHA

I do not need someone else’s urine!
MOMDUKES
It’s a joke, babygirl, meant to make you laugh.

PORSHA
There’s nothing funny about marijuana!

MOMDUKES
Listen at you—you sound like Jehovah’s loneliest witness.

PORSHA
Well, I’m not! I have…fun.

MOMDUKES
What’d you do last night?

PORSHA
I finished building a website for this interview, then I went to the Young Republican’s Mixer at the—

(Momdukes laughs.)

Don’t laugh! That’s a perfectly good evening! Everything can't be “fun.” You have to have goals. “The only goals you don’t reach are the goals you don’t set”-- that's what I tell Deyshawn. Instead of playing video games all day, learn to program them; instead of hanging out with your friends, start to network. I want to do things! I want to go places! I want to be—

—white.

MOMDUKES

PORSHA
What? No.

MOMDUKES
Where you get all that from—your mama? Don’t forget, I knew her before she got fancy. She always thought white folks’ water was wetter.

PORSHA
She just wants me to make something out of myself; that has nothing to do with wanting to be white. It’s wanting to be…respectable. If my chicken is baked instead of fried and my politics are fiscally conservative instead of entitled, it’s because it’s going to make Porsha’s life better in the long run. Ugh, Porsha. Why did my father name me after a car?
MOMDUKES
When your daddy came up he didn’t have nothing but dreams; the only way he was going to have a Porsche was to make one.

PORSHA
Well, I don’t want to be lumped in with every Lexis and Mercedes from around the way; Mom said tell people it’s from Shakespeare. Deyshawn ought to do the same thing. Pick a name. Call himself Shawn or David, so when people see his resume—

(Mr. Wilson comes downstairs. He is half-dressed.)

MR. WILSON
I don’t smell nothing frying on the stove but we can get cookin’ in the kitchen! Guess who’s ready for Round 2!

PORSHA
Daddy?

MR. WILSON
Porsha!

(Mr. Wilson quickly dresses, buckling his belt, buttoning his shirt.)

PORSHA
Daddy, what were you doing upstairs?

(MOMDUKES)
(Quickly) Fixin’ my pipes!

(SFX: Laughter)

MR. WILSON
Fixin’ her pipes!

MOMDUKES
My pipes needed fixin’.

MR. WILSON
Her pipes needed fixin’.

MOMDUKES
They hadn’t been used in a while —

MR. WILSON
And I cleaned ‘em out.
PORSHA
(Skeptically) Where your tools?

MR. WILSON
My what?

PORSHA
Your tools, daddy, where are your tools?

MOMDUKES
He used his snake—

(SFX: Laughter)

MR. WILSON
Maybelle! (Beat) (To Porsha) Why you over here anyway?

PORSHA
Looking for Deyshawn—

MR. WILSON
That boy disappears faster than a fart in a hurricane.

PORSHA
He was supposed to help me prepare for my interview.

MR. WILSON
For that job you wanted?

MOMDUKES
The one she gon’ need if she keep throwing out people cooking grease.

PORSHA
Miss Clemmons, Daddy, are you two…?

MR. WILSON
It’s complicated.

PORSHA
It’s just…it seemed like you and mom were working things out.
MR. WILSON
Sweetheart, I don’t even know what’s going on. But I’ve never lied to you or your brother. Your mother and I are—

(Dora appears at the door. She stops and poses dramatically.)

DORA
Over.

(Dora walks in. She is the same age as Mr. Wilson. She is prim and proper, laced up, perhaps an ostentatious handbag. There is tension between her and Momdukes.)

Good afternoon, everyone.

PORSHA
Mom?

DORA
Sweetheart.

MR. WILSON
Dora—

DORA
I’ve come to get my belongings.

PORSHA
Get your belongings for what?

DORA
I’m leveraging my core competencies, cutting my losses, and taking my assets elsewhere.

MOMDUKES
Say that in English.

MR. WILSON
She’s leaving me.

(SFX: Laughter)

PORSHA
Mom?

DORA
I’m sick and tired of being married to a janitor

11
Custodial technician!

whose only ambition

whose hard work

is mopping the floors of an elementary school!

paid for that house, the kids’ schooling, and every stich on your back!

When I met your father, I was in college—

\emph{Junior} college!

On my way to a degree, and he was a janitor. He fed me all kind of stories about going into business for himself —

We had children, Dora —

And I believed him, until you were about four or five and Deyshawn came along —

Who was gonna feed ‘em, Dora? What was they supposed to eat —

When it finally dawned on me, this man \emph{liked} being a \emph{janitor}. He didn’t have an ounce of

Ambition?!

He was gonna mop floors until there weren’t any left to mop!
MR. WILSON
I’m a good man, Dora.

PORSHA
Mom?

DORA
Sweetheart, believe me, I kept up appearances as long as I could.

MR. WILSON
I gave you everything I had to give.

DORA
Nothing from nothing leaves nothing.

MOMDUKES
And he hadta have something’ to put up with you — hell, I need some Hennessy and reefer just *listening* to you.

(Momdukes takes out a flask, then a joint and lights it.) *(SFX: Laughter)*

MR. WILSON
I loved you.

DORA
Past tense. I like that. Let’s keep it that way. In fact, I’m rather pleased to see you moving…(Looking Momdukes up and down) on. I’ve moved on, too —

MOMDUKES
How ‘bout “along?’ How do I get you to move *along*?

DORA
That’s exactly why I’m here, Maybelle. (To Mr. Wilson) Warren will be coming for the remainder of my things.

MR. WILSON
Warren?!

PORSHA
Our dentist?

MR. WILSON
You’re leaving me for a dentist?
DORA
Not just a dentist; he’s got a considerable periodontal practice, too. (SFX: Giggles)

MR. WILSON
I shoulda known! All those cleanings and check-ups —

MOMDUKES
She do got nice teeth.

MR. WILSON
I bet Deyshawn didn’t even need braces!

DORA
We’ve been discreet. Warren sensed I was unhappy. One evening, after a particularly difficult root canal…

MOMDUKES
You let him fill your cavity. (SFX: Laughter)

DORA
I confided in him! He was a perfect gentleman until I made up my mind to end my marriage. And I have made up my mind.

MR. WILSON
I sat in that bastard’s chair! Let him put his hands all in my mouth!

(Porsha is visibly upset. She snatches her things)

Babygirl—

DORA
Sweetheart—

PORSHA
I have to go—I have to, I need to, uh, pick up my suit, from the cleaners. For my interview —

(Porsha rushes out.)

(Momdukes shuts the door. Dora and Mr. Wilson look at her as she walks through to the kitchen.)
I don’t know what y’all look at; ain’t been a threesome in this house since Peaches and Herb came to town. (Singing :) *Shake your groove thang, shake your groove thang, yeah yeah, Show 'em how we do it now...*

(Lights down.)
(A room at a clinic. There are bad paintings, industrial furniture, a ficus, and an ultrasound machine.

The lighting should be different from the previous scene and more realistic: the default for “normal.”

Melissa, 42, white, reclines on the examining table with her feet in the stirrups. Isaac, 30s, white, enters and stands beside the ultrasound machine. They are passionate in their love and their words chase each other.)

ISAAC
Surprise!

MELISSA
Oh my god! Isaac! You’re here! What are you doing here?

ISAAC
I love you, I love our baby…and every time you put an appointment into your phone, I get an email reminder.

MELISSA
Oh.

ISAAC
What’s the matter?

MELISSA
I’m disappointed.

ISAAC
I disappointed you?

MELISSA
I’m a little disappointed.

ISAAC
Why are you disappointed? I’m here.

MELISSA
Because your phone told you to come.
ISAAC

Because my phone told me to come.

MELISSA

You never use the Daddy Diary I got you.

ISAAC

I love the Daddy Diary.

MELISSA

You do not love the Daddy Diary. You think the Daddy Diary is dumb.

ISAAC

I do not!

MELISSA

Did you do the daily daddy diaper detail in the datebook?

ISAAC

I doodled on it.

MELISSA

Ah HA! You don’t want this baby!

ISAAC

I want the baby.

MELISSA

You just want what I want!

ISAAC

That’s true! I want what you want! (Beat.) What do you want?

MELISSA

I want you to want the baby the way I want the baby.

ISAAC

(Cautiously) Sweetheart, you want the baby...a lot. A lot a lot.

MELISSA

I’m 42.

ISAAC

I know.
MELISSA
It’s hard to get pregnant at 42. You shouldn’t’ve married an old lady. You should have had your babies with —

Melissa…

ISAAC

MELISSA
someone younger—

ISAAC

Don’t do this—

MELISSA
and more fertile—

ISAAC

Let’s not go down this road—

MELISSA
with a million fresh ova and adequate cervical mucus —

ISAAC

I love your mucus—

MELISSA
to get your little guys through my vagina alive. My vagina hates you.

ISAAC

No, it doesn’t. It’s very fond of me.

MELISSA
It was inhospitable to your sperm! It was a hostile environment to your seed!

ISAAC
And we got pregnant anyway! What does that say —that my sperm love you so much they scaled the walls of your bleak, desolate, surly vagina to make a baby!

MELISSA
And we lost it.

(Beat.)

(Melissa wails. Isaac rushes to comfort her.)
ISAAC
No, no, nonono, honey, that’s not what I meant. That’s so not what I meant. That was then, this is now. And through the miracle of science and the kindness of strangers, we’ve taken a donor egg and my loving, determined sperm and we made a baby. A baby. And he’s in there and he’s cooking and he’s gonna come out hearty and hale with your eyes and not my nose and it’s gonna be fine. Everything is gonna be fine.

(Isaac rushes over to his bag and takes out an iPad.)

MELISSA
What are you doing?

ISAAC
I read somewhere that at sixteen weeks he can hear sounds outside your body.

(He plays John Coltrane’s Naima. They listen and Melissa calms down.)

I’m gonna start him on some Coltrane, then a little Charlie Parker, Lester Young.

MELISSA
Kenny G?

ISAAC
I can’t love you when you say things like that. It is very, very hard. (Putting iPad to Melissa’s belly) Amniotic fluid is a good conductor of sound —

MELISSA
You read the Daddy Diary!

ISAAC
So by the time he’s born, he’ll have—

MELISSA
How do you know it’s a boy?

ISAAC
I didn’t say it was a boy —

MELISSA
You said “he” —

ISAAC
I didn’t want to say “it.”
You want a boy!

No I don’t!

Yes you do! You totally do!

Alright, I do. Every man wants a son. To throw the ball around —

You suck at sports.

And carry on his legacy.

Twenty milk crates of dusty old jazz records?

He might be the next Dexter Gordon or Sonny Rollins.

It might be a girl, you know.

Ok, Billie Holiday or Sarah Vaughn.

She might like…Disney Princesses and Selena Gomez.

Ughk.

And Wal-Mart. What if she doesn’t know not to like Wal-Mart? And that we listen to NPR and recycle and shop at Whole Foods—

Liss—
MELISSA
(Panicking) I mean, really, what sort of person sells their eggs? There’s something...desperate...about that.

ISAAC
And kind. It’s a kind thing to do. And you don’t judge people.

MELISSA
You judge people all the time.

ISAAC
Not like that.

MELISSA
For liking crap music, yes, you do.

ISAAC
Not for being poor.

MELISSA
For liking Kenny G.

ISAAC
That’s not the same as being poor. It shows a tremendous poverty of taste, but it is not like being poor. There are...things, systemic forces, sociological dynamisms that stunt potential and ruin lives. And we are lucky, lucky, to have 30 grand to give a woman who probably works some awful minimum wage job in exchange for the chance to have a baby.

MELISSA
Are you going to do that when the baby comes? Be the cool liberal dad who volunteers at soup kitchens and champions the rights of the poor while I’m the bitch of a mother who earns money for private school and ski-trips and hockey equipment?

ISAAC
Aha! You said hockey equipment! You think it’s a boy!

MELISSA
Everything’s a joke to you. I could have Rosemary’s hillbilly baby in my belly and you think it’s funny.

ISAAC
(Gingerly) Honey...
(Isaac takes a piece of paper out of his pocket.)

(He holds the paper out like a shield.)

MELISSA

Don’t!

You asked me to do this…you said if you were ever—

I am NOT hormonal!

(Reading) I, Melissa Brustein, being of sound mind and body, give my husband, Isaac Brustein, permission to lovingly remind me of the shit-ton of hormones coursing through me right now and their deleterious effects on my emotions.

MELISSA

I said “deleterious?”

(Showing her the paper) Yep. Right here.

MELISSA

(Snatching paper) That’s not the point! The point is this egg might be the sum total of a lifetime of Yoo-hoo and Ring-Dings! This egg has never read Ulysses or War and Peace or seen the Mona Lisa or wept through the first movement of Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto in No.2 in F Major!

ISSAC

Melissa? You’ve never done any of those things. Not a single one.

MELISSA

That’s the point! That is my point! I want an egg from someone who knows that those are good things!
ISAAC
Nature vs. nurture—everybody starts out the same! (Tenderly) Sweetheart, the egg doesn’t have to come from someone who likes Bach instead of Ring Dings. We’re gonna do all that shit with him when he gets here. All that matters (Picking up Melissa’s chart from a folder on the table) is that we made a baby with an egg from a 20 year old, in excellent health, no genetic disorders, no mental disorders, Harvard—see, you were worried about nothing—average height, average weight, brown eyes, brown hair, African American —

(*Pulse of the sitcom lighting, unnoticed by Melissa and Isaac)

(Beat.)

MELISSA
What?

(Isaac rifles through the folder.)

ISAAC
That can’t be right.

MELISSA
Oh my god. Oh my god.

ISAAC
That must be wrong.

(Isaac finds what he’s looking for.)

ISAAC
It’s true. (Beat.) Honey? How do you feel?

MELISSA
(Eerily calm) Litigious.

ISAAC
(Resumes looking through forms) How did we miss this?

MELISSA
We? I don’t recall the “you” with the “I” that would make “we.” You went off into a room and diddled yourself while I filled out mounds and mounds of paper work —

ISAAC
Here it is! (Showing her) Right here!
Where?

There! That box.

It’s a box.

It’s not checked.

I didn’t check it.

You didn’t check it?

Why would I check it?

Why wouldn’t you check it?!

I’m not a racist!

Melissa—

That box is racist! I opted not to check the racist box!

It’s not a racist box! It’s the box that would have told them we wanted a white egg donor.

That sounds awful.

It does not sound awful.

(Funny voice) Sit in the back of the bus! Don’t drink from that fountain! Keep your separate but equal eggs to yourself!
That is not what that means.

(Explanatorily) I’m a Democrat.

I know.

I voted for Obama.

Me, too.

Twice.

So, even though a minute ago, you were freaking out because you thought you were carrying Honey Boo Boo, a Black baby is perfectly fine?

(Beat.)

(Wailing) Nooooooooooo!

So it’s not just me.

Oh god, oh god, oh god—I’m a racist!

(Melissa begins to hyperventilate. Isaac helps her put her head between her legs.)

(Lights down)
Scene 3

(Sitcom lighting. Dentist’s office. A reclining examining chair and dentist’s light. Warren straightens up. Dora enters.)

WARREN
Dora! What, uh, a pleasant surprise!

DORA
I told him.

WARREN
About us?

DORA
Yes.

WARREN
Dora, I thought we were going to take this slowly—

DORA
I know. It wasn’t the way I’d planned—

WARREN
I thought you wanted to wait until Deyshawn finished school.

DORA
I do...I did—

WARREN
Did you tell Porsha?

DORA
I did.

WARREN
How did she take it?

DORA
As well as could be expected. (Laughing) She’s a lot like me—ambitious...and a little old-fashioned. (Beat) That’s what I want to talk to you about. Warren, I don’t like sneaking around.

(Dora takes Warren in a passionate embrace. He squirms.)
DORA
I’ll admit, at first, our clandestine assignations did provide a certain dangerous…thrill. But that’s just it. I can no longer afford the risk of being seen as one of your chippies.

WARREN
Dora, you know you mean more than that to me.

DORA
I know, darling, but I need everyone else to know.

Everyone?

WARREN
I’m running for City Council.

Elected office?

DORA
Yes! Oh, Warren, it’s the perfect time for me. I’m at the height of my powers; I have a successful career, my children are thriving, and I am madly, passionately in love. Our wedding will be the social event of the season. Everyone will attend—Jack and Jill, the Links—we’ll get the mayor to do the ceremony, my sorors will be my bridesmaids—

WARREN
W-wedding? Dora, don’t you think you’re rushing this a bit?

DORA
When I make up my mind to do something, I do it. I love you, you love me—where’s the problem?

WARREN
You don’t think leaving your husband for another man will be a scandal? Think of the family values voters.

DORA
I’ve Olivia Pope’d this, honey! I’ve got a good friend down at the paper and she’s going to do a profile piece on me, you know, second chance at love, soul mates, dream come true, yada yada. I will be an inspiration to every woman who’s ever picked up socks or put down a toilet seat and wondered why she’s with the slug she married.

WARREN
Dora, you know I’m a very private man.
DORA
I know, darling, your discretion is part of your allure. But, soon, we won’t have to hide our love anymore! I will take my rightful place in society just as soon as I rid myself of that dreadful janitor and replace him with the handsome, professional, telegenic love of my life.

(Dora kisses Warren.)

DORA
I finally have everything I’ve ever wanted. I love you, Warren.

WARREN
Dora, I —

DORA
(Gathering her things) Oh! I’ve got to cancel our dinner date tonight. I’ve got a meeting with my campaign manager at Le Bistro! Ta ta!

(Dora exits.)

(Warren makes sure she’s gone. He lets out a sigh of relief. )

(Porsha pokes her head out of the closet.)

(SFX: low “oooooooo” of an audience)

WARREN
Why’d you run?

PORSHA
(Leaving the closet) Why do you think!

WARREN
Porsha, we weren’t doing anything wrong—

PORSHA
She’s my mother! And if I had known how serious she was about you, I’d never have let you take me out to dinner….or to the ballet….or to the fair…

(Warren holds Porsha.)

WARREN
We had a nice time at the fair, didn’t we? You made me feel like a kid again.
PORSHA
(Squirming out of his embrace) This has to stop.

WARREN
I was going to tell her tonight at dinner. She just took me by surprise. If you’re asking me to choose—

PORSHA
To choose? Between my mother and me? Listen to how you sound! That’s some dysfunctional, ghetto-infused Woody Allen shit.

The heart wants what it wants—

WARREN
What about what I want?

PORSHA
I can give it to you, anything you want. I got you that interview—I can get you a car, an apartment, a trip to Paris—what do you want?

PORSHA
I—don’t know. I don’t know! (Beat) Nobody’s ever asked me before. I’ve always done what I was told, what was expected of me: go to college, get good grades, date Republicans. I thought everything would fall into place; I didn’t plan on falling in love with my mother’s boyfriend!

You love me?

PORSHA
This is messy; I don’t like messy—

You love me.

PORSHA
And trifling—

(Warren laughs and embraces her.)

PORSHA
And not the least bit funny! What will people say?
WARREN
It’s none of their damn business, who cares what people think?

PORSHA
I do! My parents—and, trust me, neither one of them thinks you’re son-in-law material right now—and my little brother. Deyshawn is my heart and I don’t want him seeing me in the middle of my mother and my father and you.

WARREN
So you’d rather be respectable more than h—

PORSHA
(Placing a finger over his lips) —than anything else in the world.

(Porsha reaches in her bag, takes out her phone and begins texting. Deyshawn’s picture is projected again.)

(Laughing) I want good credit and a house in the suburbs, is that so wrong?

WARREN
Will that make you happy?

PORSHA
It will keep me safe. (Looking at phone) Deyshawn hasn’t even left for the store! Momdukes is gonna kill him. (Texting:) I’ll meet you at the store. Wait in the parking lot. Do not forget the Crisco!!!

(Porsha starts to leave.)

WARREN
Porsha, if I have to choose—

I’m not asking you to—

WARREN
I already have—

PORSHA
Don’t do anything yet.

(Porsha kisses him.)

PORSHA
Please? Just wait, ok?
(Porsha exits.)
Scene 4

(Natural Lights up on Isaac in the driver’s seat and Melissa in the passenger seat. They drive along for a bit in a shock of silence.)

(Isaac reaches over and touches Melissa’s hand.)

ISAAC

You okay?

(Melissa doesn’t answer.)

(A red light.)

ISAAC

Dammit.

(Isaac taps the steering wheel impatiently.)

(Isaac and Melissa look to the left as if a car has pulled up beside them at the light. The loud, bass-heavy thump of rap music emanates from the car beside them. Melissa gives Isaac a quick glance and they stare ahead.

Green light. They drive for a bit in silence again.)

MELISSA
I went to the dentist. I started flossing again and my gums were bleeding all over the place and I hadn’t had a check-up in a while —

ISAAC

You can go to the dentist. You don’t have to tell me why you went to the dentist.

MELISSA
And I had this thing in my mouth, it’s pulpy, like a bruise and I’m thinking, what if it’s an abscess and it gets infected and what if it hurt the baby, so I went to the dentist.

ISAAC

You did a good thing, honey. That was a good thing.

MELISSA
And there was this Black girl…

ISAAC

Oh, no—
MELISSA
This Black girl, who was all of twenty—twenty three at the most—and she’s in these bright purple scrubs, and this hair, this *hair*, that blonde at the bottom and black at the roots and swooped up and around all over and she’s wearing false eyelashes, caked with mascara, her cheek is pierced, her cheek! And I’m thinking, is that hygienic? Is it even sanitary? But I don’t say anything because…because…I don’t. I’m old —

ISAAC
You’re not old. Stop saying that —

MELISSA
—and maybe that’s what young people are doing with themselves, I mean, I spent the 90s dressed like Kurt Cobain’s sleazy sister, I could have easily panhandled, *easily*, all I needed was a cup, and if it was a phase for me, it could’ve been a phase for her, I don’t judge (Shooting a look at Isaac) I’m not judgmental. So the dentist tells her to x-ray the tooth with the thing and she plops the lead cape on me and fumbles around in my mouth. She runs out of the room and clicks the, you know, *bzuzzt*, and she looks up at the screen. She’s messed up the x-ray. She does it again. And again. Finally, the other dental technician comes in, and she was…

ISAAC
White?

MELISSA
I don’t see color—

ISAAC
You just said—

MELISSA
(Annoyed) That’s not the point! That is not the point! The point is the other technician, the white technician went *bzuzzt* she’s got the x-ray in, like, ten seconds. Why couldn’t the Black girl do it? I mean, why couldn’t she at least be competent? Not like the Stephen Hawking of dental technicians, just competent and capable and worthy of the trust I put in her when I opened my mouth.

ISAAC
Our dentist is Black. Warren’s a really good dentist.

MELISSA
An *excellent* dentist! And so well-spoken. I started seeing him right after the inauguration —no! The Peace Prize, right after Obama won the Nobel. And I have nothing but good things to say about him. I have recommended him to many friends.
(Red light.)

But this girl…  

ISAAC

This girl was all attitude and arrogance. She got mad at me because the x-rays came out wrong! And I knew the white woman would do it perfectly, something in me knew the Black girl would screw it up. I’m like do it right, prove me wrong! Prove it to me; change my mind about you and every girl who looks like you behind a counter or at a bus stop!

MELISSA

Maybe…maybe, it’s not about you.

ISAAC

Ok, not me, but us.

MELISSA

Us?

ISAAC

White people. A little effort, please.

MELISSA

But you—

ISAAC

Us—

MELISSA

We. Maybe we have all the proof we need. We’ve got a good president and a great dentist and maybe, LaQuisha—

(Green light.)

ISAAC

I didn’t say her name was LaQuisha—

MELISSA

I mean—

ISAAC

I didn’t say her name at all—
ISAAC

You know what I mean —

MELISSA

I don’t know that I do—you just said, “LaQuisha—”

ISAAC

Whatever her name was—

MELISSA

superciliously—

ISAAC

I was not supercilious! I’m on LaQuisha’s side! Sweetheart, you can be a handful when patient care is not to your liking. And maybe she was just having a bad day. Maybe she just likes Rhianna or Beyoncé or whoever dresses like that. There are a million, no fifty million reasons why her screwing up had nothing to do with her being Black.

(Beat.) (While they’re talking, the lights slowly shift to the whirling red and blue lights of a police cruiser begin in front of them about a block away.)

MELISSA

(Realizing) You want a Black baby.

ISAAC

What?

MELISSA

You have adapted to the idea of little Leroy —

ISAAC

(Waving hands) Yes! A boy!

MELISSA

Or LaQuisha with Zen-like ease.

ISAAC

No I haven’t—

MELISSA

You want a Black baby. Now, you want this baby —

ISAAC

We haven’t had time to process what just—
MELISSA  
—because it’s YOURS! It’s your sperm, it’s your genes, and it’s your DNA!

ISAAC  
It’s our baby.

MELISSA  
It’s not my anything. (Beat) We can sue.

ISAAC  
Melissa, I don’t want to think about suing until—

MELISSA  
Until what? The baby comes?

ISAAC  
No, I...just...I...is this the worst thing in the world? A healthy baby? I’m warming to the idea. And yes, it’s mine, but any baby we have is going to be biologically mine and you’re carrying him and you’re going to give birth to him, and, when he gets here, you’re going to love him. I know you will. I know you, Liss.

MELISSA  
How am I going to explain this at Gymboree?

ISAAC  
You were never going to Gymboree.

MELISSA  
I was so going to Gymboree.

ISAAC  
You still can. Sandra Bullock has a Black baby. Charlize Theron, Angelina Jolie, Madonna—

MELISSA  
Madonna has a Black baby?

ISAAC  
Two. I read US Weekly in the waiting room while you’re with the obstetrician. You’ll be hip. Diane Sawyer will interview you. You’ll do a TED talk about turning lemons into lemonade and heal the nation of its race problem. You—
MELISSA

Madonna does *not* have Black babies.

ISAAC

She does.

MELISSA

I would have known—

ISAAC

She didn’t tell you?

MELISSA

I mean, I keep up on these things. I’m aware of them. Are they Dennis Rodman’s?

ISSAC

No.

MELISSA

I don’t believe you.

ISAAC

Look it up.

MELISSA

(Reaching in the back seat for the iPad) I will. That is exactly what I am going to do. I can’t believe I didn’t know—two, you say? What are their names?

ISAAC

(Thinking) David…and Mercy, I think.

MELISSA

(Incredulously) Oh my god, you’re not kidding? Now I *have* to find it.

(Melissa taps the iPad and glows different websites on her face.)

ISAAC

You’re funny.

MELISSA

No, seriously, she’s a celebrity. I know her life like intuition. She married Sean Penn, he tied her up in a chair, she can fellate an Evian bottle—what do I put in, “Madonna’s Black babies?”—I just know that. I don’t know when it entered my awareness or why I’ve even retained it, but I *know* and two African-American—
African. She got ‘em from Africa.

Ethiopia?

No…

Rwanda?

Uh-uh.

(Finding the information) Malawi! Malawi! I forgot about the thing she did with the charity and Africa and—

(Suddenly, police sirens are heard and the police lights intensify.)

Isaac slams on the breaks to avoid hitting someone running in front of the car.

Almost simultaneously, lights up on Momdukes’s house. Mr. Wilson enters Momdukes’s house. He slams the door behind him. The door slam should sound like a gunshot.

Melissa holds up the iPad and frantically records the scene. There are four more gunshots.

As lights go down on Melissa and Isaac, it’s clear they’ve seen something terrible happen, but their mood should not bleed into the next scene.)

Scene 5

(Sitcom lights. Momdukes folds laundry as Wilson enters.)

MR. WILSON

Deyshawn here?

MOMDUKES

Naw, and I’m waiting on my cooking oil. (Beat) What’s the matter with you? Face longer than a night in jail.
MR. WILSON
I just packed up the rest of Dora’s things for Warren the dentist to pick them up.

Feel bad?

MOMDUKES

MR. WILSON
Lower than a rattlesnake’s belly.

Wanna feel better?

(Mr. Wilson perks up. He hitches up his pants and strides over to Momdukes.)

MR. WILSON
If you think it’ll help—

(Mr. Wilson massages Momdukes’s shoulders.)

MOMDUKES
I’ll fry up some chicken soon as that boy gets back here with my oil.

MR. WILSON
Chicken?!

MOMDUKES
The only thighs you need right now is crispy and full of cholesterol. (SFX: Laughter)

MR. WILSON
(Sitting on the couch) Maybe it ain’t as bad as it seems. I could sell that old house, get an apartment for DeyShawn and me. It’d be nice to spend some time with him. You know me and him? We used to go fishing every summer. Taught him how to bait a hook, cast a line.

MOMDUKES
See there, you got rid of one barracuda, now you can go catch you another. (SFX: Giggles)

MR. WILSON
Aww, Dora’s not that bad. She used to be fun. When I first met her? We’d dance all night and make love all day. She’s a piece of my heart I can’t never get back.

MOMDUKES
Listen, Wilson, you love sick and heart broke, so I’m a be the voice of reason you need:
(Music comes in and Momdukes sings:)

You started life together
promised her forever
but you were in for a surprise
‘cuz Dora’s up and gone
and you’re still holdin’ on
while she’s out with other guys —

This ain’t no bump in the road
your marriage ran its course
Don’t be a chump, drop that load
It’s time to get divorced!

She left you for a dentist
said goodbye and meant it
and had a real good laugh —
She gave away your honey
the next to go’s your money
cuz you know she’s taking half!

This ain’t no bump in the road
your marriage ran its course
Don’t be a chump, drop that load
It’s time to get divorced!

(Porsha bursts into the room. She is visibly shaken, in shock.)

PORSHA
They shot Deyshawn. Deyshawn is dead.

(Blacksout.)

END OF ACT ONE.
Act Two
Scene 1

(Natural Lights up in Melissa and Isaac’s living room. They are watching T.V. Melissa leans forward, taking in the newscast, while Isaac slouches in his chair.)

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
Police say seventeen year-old Deyshawn Wilson brandished what appeared to be a weapon then charged at an officer before being shot and killed. The officer suffered minor injuries. Authorities say it was lawful use of deadly force and no charges will—

(Melissa angrily jabs the remote at the T.V., shutting it off.)

MELISSA
That’s not what happened!

ISAAC
Honey—

MELISSA
That is a lie! A bald-face lie!

ISAAC
Honey, we don’t know that—

MELISSA
Yes, we do! They’re lying!

ISAAC
We can’t be su—

MELISSA
Yes, we can! We can be totally sure! We saw it with our own eyes!

ISAAC
It was dark, there was a lot going on—

MELISSA
He ran in front of our car! You slammed on the brakes—

ISAAC
—lights were flashing, there were sirens, people were everywhere—

MELISSA
He was running away! He was running in the opposite direction!
(Melissa fishes through her purse for the iPad.)

MELISSA

I saw it with my own eyes!

(Melissa presses a button and she and Isaac watch the footage. “Why you following me?” I ain’t take nothing! I got the receipt!” “Hey come back here! Stop!” is heard, followed by footsteps, and five gunshots. Melissa is trembling.)

He was running away.

ISAAC

Turn it off—just—turn it off!

(Beat.)

(Earnestly) Why did he run?

MELISSA

What?

ISAAC

The cop told him to stop. He kept running.

He wasn’t running—

MELISSA

Yes, he was—

ISAAC

I mean, yes, he was running—

MELISSA

He was definitely running.

ISAAC

He was stumbling, he could not get purchase, and he was stumbling forward.

MELISSA

Why didn’t he…stop?
MELISSA
Stop?

ISAAC
Yes. When the cop said stop, just stop.

MELISSA
I don’t know—

ISAAC
Maybe stop. And turn around. And put his hands up (Raising hands) like this.

MELISSA
Surrender?

ISAAC
No! Stop. Like, like…I would. That’s what I would do, raise my hands.

MELISSA
Raise your hands?

ISAAC
To show I didn’t have a weapon or…or drugs, that I didn’t have any drugs. And I’d say, “Officer, is there a problem?” That’s what I would do. And you would, too; you’re always mouthy with the police.

MELISSA
I’m not mouthy with police. I’m not mouthy with anyone.

ISAAC
That speeding ticket you got in a school zone?

MELISSA
I was decelerating! I was descending to the speed limit—

ISAAC
And the first thing you said was—

MELISSA
I know my rights! It was a violation that should have been mitigated by the fact that I was obeying the letter of the law; I was slowing down! When he stopped me, I politely asked to see his radar gun. “Officer,” I said, “has this radar gun been calibrated recently?” “Are you sure you weren’t moving when you clocked my speed?” These are questions every motorist should ask. I was not mouthy. I was charming. Very charming.
ISAAC
But you didn’t run.

MELISSA
No. Why would I run — (Realizing she just got had) that’s not the point! That is *not* the point—

ISAAC
You’re right. You’re right — look, it’s the rotten end of a terrible day. Why don’t we just relax? Chubby Hubby or Chunky Monkey?

MELISSA
—the point is: we have to go to the police!

ISAAC
Oh god—

(Melissa puts on her coat and gathers up her purse and iPad.)

MELISSA
There is a *story* forming, a *narrative* building and it is wrong! We’ve got video!

ISAAC
That shows a Black kid evading arrest —

MELISSA
That shows a cop shooting him in the back!

ISAAC
This has nothing/ to do with us!

MELISSA
It has everything to do with us!

ISAAC
This happens every day in every city —

MELISSA
There is a—

ISAAC
—it’s probably happening right now, at this very moment, and if I had taken a different route, had taken right instead of a left, we would be in bed watching *Mad Men* on Netflix instead of having this conversation!
MELISSA
There is a *mother* out there short a son and she deserves the particulars of her grief!
(Clutching her abdomen) What if this was us and it was Leroy—

ISAAC
Jesus!

MELISSA
—or LaQuisha and all we had left to bury were lies the police told?

ISAAC
That will *never* be us! Because we don’t antagonize the police; because we wouldn’t raise a thug; because we’re *not* having this baby!

(Beat)

MELISSA
What?

ISAAC
That came out wrong —

MELISSA
(Hurt) What did you say —?

ISAAC
I didn’t say what you think I said —

MELISSA
You said we weren’t having this baby —

ISAAC
That’s not what I meant to say —

MELISSA
Don’t you want this baby?

ISAAC
Of course I do, we’ve been trying —

MELISSA
It’s *your* baby —

ISAAC
I know it’s my baby —
—even more than mine and I want this baby. (*Pulse of sitcom lighting.*)

You do?

Yes. I think so. Yes.

You weren’t sure —

We’ve been trying for so long—

In the car —

In the car, I was…entertaining scenarios—

You did more than entertain; you invited them to stay!

I never said anything about not having this baby —

Lissa—

I never said I didn’t want this baby.

Sweetie, we haven’t talked about this, we haven’t processed—

Fine, let’s talk —

It’s ten o’clock —

Let’s talk about it right now —
ISAAC
I have feelings about it that I can’t put into—

MELISSA
I’m not getting any less pregnant! I’m getting more pregnant by the minute, so we might as well—

ISAAC
We’ve been dealt a hand! Okay? This isn’t what we planned. I mean, it’s like having a baby with a birth defect—

MELISSA
Being Black isn’t the same as a having a birth defect—

ISAAC
No! Of course not! Different, I mean, it’s something different—

MELISSA
Nature vs. nurture? We all start out the same? In the car, you were making play dates with Madonna!

ISAAC
That was/before—

MELISSA
Different was okay then!

ISAAC
That was before I saw a Black kid get shot right in front of my eyes!

(Beat.)

MELISSA
(Icily) Black kids get shot every day. That’s what you said; there’s probably one getting shot right now.

ISAAC
Stop saying what I said, I know what I said —Melissa, what do we know about raising a Black child?

MELISSA
I don’t know. What do we know about raising any child? We’ll love her, feed her, and keep her away from Kenny G.
ISAAC
What if it’s a boy?

MELISSA
I thought you wanted a boy—

ISAAC
I did—I do—

MELISSA
—to throw the ball around with —

ISAAC
— I suck at sports—

MELISSA
—or play Coltrane for! A Black boy might be a boon!

ISAAC
That’s racist.

MELISSA
It is not racist! There is a preponderance—a preponderance!—of Black people in both sports and music. Saying that about our baby isn’t racist; it’s optimistic.

ISAAC
Our baby?

(Melissa puts Isaac’s hand on her belly for a moment.)

MELISSA
Our baby.

ISAAC
(Taking his hand away) There are also a lot of Black people in jail.

MELISSA
That’s pessimistic.

ISAAC
But it’s true—

MELISSA
You’re being very pessimistic.
ISAAC
—and maybe there’s a reason shit shakes out the way it does but I don’t know what it is or why it happens or if I want to spend the next eighteen years of my life trying to keep it from happening! I don’t want this baby!

(Melissa shoves him with both hands.)

MELISSA
You don’t get to choose! You don’t get to choose! I want this baby!

(*Pulse and SFX of applause that only Melissa hears.)

I’ve got this one shot at having a child—

ISAAC
—we can adopt—

MELISSA
—carrying a child and I’m not going to let it go because you want to do my child the dishonest kindness of not bringing her into an unjust world! (Grabbing the iPad) I’m taking this to the authorities!

(Melissa moves to leave, but Isaac grabs her by the arm to stop her.)

ISAAC
What if it is a girl?

MELISSA
(Sarcastically) LaQuisha instead of Leroy. That’s better for you?

ISAAC
It’s different.

MELISSA
Good different.

ISAAC
A difference I can navigate.

MELISSA
Tolerate?

ISAAC
Work through. (Beat) Wait.
(Isaac puts a hand on the iPad. Melissa doesn’t let go.)

We’ll know in a few days. If it’s a girl. Then we can make decisions.

MELISSA

About—

ISAAC

—everything. Don’t do anything yet.

(Isaac kisses her.)

Please? Just wait, ok?

(Melissa lets go of the iPad.)
Scene 2

(Sitcom Lighting. Momdukes’s house. Mr. Wilson comes downstairs.)

MR. WILSON
I can’t get through to nobody. How do you know who to call? I called everybody and nobody was the right one. Police station; wrong precinct. Coroner’s office. When they finally picked up the phone, they say I need the case number. Where I get that? The precinct. Round and round.

MOMDUKES
It’s the middle of the night. I’ll go down there in the morning.

MR. WILSON
The police station?

MOMDUKES
Po-po know me. I been in the back of more police cruisers than a near-sighted hooker. (SFX: Laughter)

MR. WILSON
You been arrested that many times?

MOMDUKES
I ain’t say I was arrested, I said I was in the back seat. It’s a difference. You gotta listen. Where Porsha?

MR. WILSON
I asked her to tell her mother. Dora got to know. Then I told her to get some rest. She got that interview tomorrow. She need some sleep.

You do, too.

MOMDUKES

MR. WILSON
Nah. Can’t. (Going to the door.) I’m a go get some pictures for the undertaker. I’ll be back. (Beat.) If you don’t mind. Too many ghosts in next door.

MOMDUKES
You still ain’t gettin’ none.
MR. WILSON
(Laughing in spite of himself) Just want some company. That’s all. You a good woman, Maybelle.

MOMDUKES
Mm hmm.

(Mr. Wilson exits.)

(Momdukes goes to the kitchen and gets the never-ending basket of laundry. She sits back on the couch, clicks on the TV, and folds clothes.)

COMMERCIAL V.O.
Need money?

MOMDUKES
Hell yeah!

COMMERCIAL V.O.
Need it quick, fast, in a hurry, no hassle?

MOMDUKES
Whoo, you must know me!

COMMERCIAL V.O.
Call Pay Day Loans—

MOMDUKES
Aw, shit. I take out five hundred and owe you a thousand? I could screw Wilson and come out better.

(Momdukes changes the channel. A basketball game is heard. “James gets the rebound…he goes coast to coast…and a monster slaaam!” She changes the channel. A video is on. Rihanna. Beyonce.)

Why she writhing? What she got make her writhe? She need that good-good!

(Momdukes takes a swig from a flask behind a pillow on the couch.)

MOMDUKES
Ow!

(Momdukes twerks. Well. Very well. She puts a leg up on the couch—) (SFX: Laughter)

(Laughing) Let me stop.
(Momdukes clicks to a news station just as Mr. Wilson comes in. Somewhere projected, we see what is on their television screen. An image of Deyshawn from social media appears—projected. He is scowling, flashing the peace sign. The lede beneath him says “Possible Criminal History.”)

TELEVISION ANNOUNCER
Seventeen-year old Deyshawn Wilson attacked police after what appears to be a foiled robbery attempt. Authorities say—

MR. WILSON
That’s not true! That’s not true—

(Mr. Wilson storms in and shits off the T.V.)

MOMDUKES
Wilson.

(Wilson fumbles with the scrapbook. It is an old-school photo album, with clear pages covering the pictures, stuffed with yet-to-be placed photos tumbling out.)

MR. WILSON
I know him! I know him! (Shaking photos of each memory) He play ball! He went to prom! He caught a fish!

MOMDUKES
Wilson.

MR. WILSON
They got him on that T.V. mean-mugging and crooking his fingers—that ain’t him! I know my boy! (Calming down) (Sitting next to Momdukes) I know my boy. Deyshawn ain’t never got too far from me. Out the corner of my eye, I saw him. Raising a Black boy like being on a rollercoaster. He got his arms in the air, head back, but you, you holding on, tight as you can. Not too tight. So you let him fall. Not too hard. A skinned knee. A broken heart. Nothing you can’t fix. And you pick him up, by the scruff of the neck. An ass-whooping. A talking to. Something he’ll remember. “Shut your mouth.” “Open that door.” “Mind me.” So he so afraid of you he won’t see how weak you really are: you can’t protect him. (Beat) (Bitterly) You can’t love him. What kinda love come out of fear? There can’t be nothing soft between you. Or else he liable to take that out into the world and get his fool self…

(Mr. Wilson comes to a picture of Deyshawn in the scrapbook. It is projected where the previous pictures were.)

MR. WILSON
He got a suit. A blue suit. Two-buttons. He wanted more but I told him don’t nobody wear five button suits but pimps and preachers. When he put it on, look like I could see all his days laid out before him.

I let myself believe it was a hope and a future for him.

(Handing the picture to Momdukes) That’s the suit I’m gon bury him in.

(The door slams open and Dora, visibly angry, enters followed by Porsha.)

PORSHA
Daddy, I tried to calm her down—

DORA
What! Happened?!

MOMDUKES
In light of the unfortunate circumstances, I’m overlook you bustin’ in my house like you ain’t got no knuckles.

DORA
Shut your double-breasted lips! (SFX: **“ooo”**)

PORSHA
Mom!

(Momdukes picks up a lamp to strike her, but Mr. Wilson jumps between them. He holds Dora back.)

DORA
What happened to my son?

MR. WILSON
(Still holding Dora) Dora, Deyshawn…Deyshawn is dead. The police shot him.

DORA
(Breaking his embrace) I know that! Porsha told me. And you don’t think I don’t have a television?! I want to know why my honor student, college bound, church-going son is splashed all over the media looking like a common thug!

MR. WILSON
That’s what I wanna know. Baby, I—
DORA
Don’t you “baby” me! This is *all* your fault!

MR. WILSON
My fault?!

DORA
Mopping! Sweeping! Scrubbing!

MR. WILSON
My being a janitor got nothing to do with this!

DORA
It has everything to do with this! He never saw anything from you to aspire to but a lifetime of menial drudgery! Walking around with his pants hanging off his behind, listening to that trash he called music—it’s no wonder he turned to a life of crime!

MR. WILSON
That’s not true!

DORA
The news said he stole a box of cigars and a pack of gum —

MOMDUKES
Er, did they mention a can of Crisco? *(SFX: Giggles)*

DORA
—right before he attacked the police!

MR. WILSON
That ain’t true!

DORA
It’s in the news!

MR. WILSON
Don’t mean it’s true! It don’t make sense. Deyshawn *had* money! I give it to ‘im myself! He ain’t have to steal nothin’! And he knew we was waiting on ‘im; he going to go and attack the police? What Black man in his right mind see the police and don’t run the other way?

DORA
See there? That’s what I’m talking about. *You* gave him that siege mentality; everybody’s his enemy. How was I supposed to raise him to be a man when you were teaching him to be a nigger?
(Mr. Wilson and Dora begin to argue heatedly.)

MR. WILSON
You the reason he soft in the first place! Lettin’ ‘im run around here acting like a white boy thinking he can do and say whatever he please—

DORA
I am not! I did not! I told him he could be anything he wanted to be! At least I had dreams for him! At least I carried myself with dignity and —

(Porsha separates them.)

PORSHA
Mom! Dad! Please! Stop all this! It’s no one’s fault!

MOMDUKES
She’s right; it ain’t nobody’s fault but the one who shot him: the police. And come daylight we going down there and find out the truth.

MR. WILSON
You a lie and your nickname shit if you think they going to tell us anything.

MOMDUKES
(Crossing to the kitchen phone and begins dialing) Oh, they gon’ tell me something. They gon’ tell me everything I want to know.

PORSHA
Who you calling?

MOMDUKES
Al.

DORA
(Alarmed) Sharpton?

MOMDUKES
No, Roker. (SFX: Laughter) Yes, Al Sharpton. (Into phone) Heller? National Action Network? This is—

(Dora grabs the phone and hangs it up.)

DORA
You’ll do no such thing!
MR. WILSON
Dora! Don’t you want to get to the bottom of this?

DORA
I want to get past it!

MR. WILSON
I know you upset—

DORA
—as quickly and as quietly as possible! If Sharpton shows up, he’ll bring cameras and questions and chaos with him. I can’t have that now.

PORSHA
(Comforting Dora) Oh, Mom, you’re upset.

DORA
Yes. Something like that.

MR. WILSON
I know you grieving, Dora, but something about this don’t sit right with me.

MOMDUKES
Me neither. Boy went around the corner to the store, shoulda been back fifteen, twenty minutes tops and now he’s dead.

DORA
That happens you know.

MR. WILSON
You right. Shot dead. By the police!

DORA
Happens every day, in every city in the world. We need to understand—

MR. WILSON
We need to fight

DORA
that this is not just some singular tragedy

MR. WILSON
‘cause a Black boy ain’t safe
that has befallen our family

in a world that look at him

it is pervasive

like he a criminal

to the point of being systemic

or a monster

what can one broken family do but

I’ll tell you what I ain’t gon’ do is

let it go!

Call Sharpton!

(Momdukes moves to the phone.)

Don’t pick up that phone!

(Momdukes stops. With attitude, though.)

You can’t pick up that phone! Please, let’s just lay Deyshawn to rest. In the family plot. With a tasteful, private ceremony.

(MOMDUKES)

(Almost to herself) She sure in a rush to get the ashes to the ashes and the dust to dust. (SFX: Laughter)
MR. WILSON
Well, call somebody! I want it in the papers, on the news! If won’t nobody talk to me—

DORA
I’m running for office!

(Beat.)

MR. WILSON
You’re what?

DORA
Running. For office. City Council.

MR. WILSON
Dora.

DORA
I leave my brilliant career, a few years of humble public service, (mumbles) marry Warren—I might even get a judgeship one day!

MR. WILSON
Marry Warren?!

MOMDUKES
Be a judge?!

MR. WILSON
Our son is dead—

DORA
(Clearly not devastated) And I am devastated, devastated, really I am, but I have plotted my ascent down to the minutest detail like the grey streak I will allow in my hair to appear wise and judicial. Deyshawn’s unfortunate passing wasn’t part of the plan, obviously, but his criminal activity, an investigation, Al Sharpton! No, no, nonononono! I’ll be stopped before I even start. No, no, there’s nothing for us to do but lay our dear child to rest and…uh…you know…

MOMDUKES
Grieve?
DORA
Grieve! Yes! Yes! (SFX: Laughter) Grieve, of course, grieve. Privately and inconspicuously.

MR. WILSON
Don’t you care that the police killed that boy?

DORA
In self-defense!

MR. WILSON
In cold blood!

DORA
We have no proof of that! You saw those pictures! (Imitating gang signs) Gang signs! Blunt in his mouth! I hardly recognized him! Maybe he had a secret life, a split personality—I don’t know, but I cannot and I will not have this played out in the media and laid in my lap!

MR. WILSON
(Shaking his head) Some small part of me, some small and foolish part of me thought that this might bring us together. That somewhere under all that was the woman I married, the mother of my children. But I don’t hardly recognize you. You one cold b—

PORSHA
Daddy!

MR. WILSON
I’m sorry, babygirl. (Beat.) What do you want?

PORSHA
Me?

MR. WILSON
He was your brother, sweetheart.

(Porsha should somehow find herself between her mother and her father.)

PORSHA
I want…I want…I wanna know what happened. I mean, he was just going to the store. Deshawn has gone to that store a million times since he was kid, for candy and pop and —

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(Dora clears her throat.)

But maybe...maybe Mom has a point. It’s already...messy. I don’t want to see him dragged through the mud any more than he’s already been, but—

DORA
It’s settled! Porsha agrees with me— the only thing to do is bury your brother quickly and...uh...er...

MOMDUKES
Grieve?

DORA
Grieve! Yes, grieve! (SFX: Laughter) Porsha? Darling?

PORSHA
If you say so, Mom.

DORA
I do. And Warren does, too.

PORSHA
(Surprised) He does?

DORA
He will when I tell him to.

MOMDUKES
Don’t Wilson here have a say?

DORA
Family vote. Two to one.

MOMDUKES
I side with Wilson.

MR. WILSON
Yeah, she sides with me.

DORA
She is not family!

MR. WILSON
She just as much family as your Warren!
DORA

That’s *your* poor choice!

PORSHA

Please, you two! Don’t start this again!

MR. WILSON

(Hugging Porsha.) Aw, babygirl, I’m sorry, I forgot you got a lot on you, too. Dora, will you at least go down to the station with Porsha and me in the morning?

DORA

Me? Oh, I can’t be seen at the—Momdukes? Could you—?

MOMDUKES

I don’t know. I’m not…*family* to you.

PORSHA

You were to Deyshawn.

(Beat)

MOMDUKES

(Stubbornly) Alright. Porsha pick up your daddy and meet me down there after your interview.

(Mr. Wilson, Dora, and Porsha exit.)

MOMDUKES

Damn. Damn! DAMN!

(Lights down.)
Scene 3

(Natural lights Melissa’s office. It is nice, well-appointed, a desk with a blotter, a ficus. Porsha, dressed in an interview-perfect suit, sits. She has been waiting. She takes a deep breath to steel herself.)

(Melissa bumbles into the room. (SFX: Laughter but only Melissa reacts as if to say “What is that?” and looks around for a half beat.) She is carrying a purse, a messenger bag that is spilling over with papers and medicines, Porsha’s interview folder, and her iPad. Porsha’s presence is one more pebble on a precarious pile.)

MELISSA
Oh! Uh…um… (Trying to get to the folder, but dropping her purse) I…uh...

PORSHA
(Extending hand) Porsha.

MELISSA
Porsha! Porsha.

(Porsha moves to show Melissa on the computer.)

MELISSA
Shakespeare! Yes, of course! Have a seat.

(Porsha disentangles herself from the things she is carrying. She comes to the iPad. She stares at it.)

PORSHA
(Reaching for iPad) I have a website, if you’d like to see it. I can show it to y—

MELISSA
(Alarmed) What?! No! I mean, this is my personal device; I would be happy to look at your website once I get to my computer. You have a website?

PORSHA
Yes, I developed it my senior year and I’ve been looking for a company that could use something like this.

(Porsha moves to show Melissa on the computer.)
It’s mobile friendly; I thought it would be a good way to reach underserved communities —

Underserved communities?

African Americans—

Blacks.

Some Hispanics, but mostly African-American—Blacks.

And they’re underserved?

Yes.

Is there data on causality?

It’s systemic.

On our end?

Industry-wide.

Oh. Oh. I didn’t know. I just assumed if it was there for me, it was there for everyone.

Well, if you click on this icon, you’ll see, I built a web portal that takes your African-American consumers away from the main page to a dashboard with customized content just for them. It allows everyone to experience it differently.

(Melissa is amazed by the site’s transformation.)
I see one thing and they see another…

Yes.

But it’s the same thing.

Well, research shows experience affects a host of other factors—trust, compliance.

They don’t trust me?

The industry. They don’t trust the industry.

I’m just trying to do the right thing. All I’ve ever wanted to do was the right thing.

I don’t mean to sound immodest, but I think my program will help them get what they want.

(Melissa nods a beat.)

What do they want?

(Confused) Black people?

Yes. No! Our consumer! Our underserved consumers. Many of whom are…Black.

What everybody else wants, I guess.

The same thing. Of course.

(Melissa stares for a beat. The computer beeps. Melissa startles.)
PORSHA
You need to do something.

MELISSA
What?

PORSHA
It’s been idle too long. It beeps to tell you, you need to do something.

MELISSA
Oh. (Smiling) That’s so interesting. (Looking through folder) Where did we find you?

Well, I graduated from State and —

MELISSA
(Reading file) Warren recommended you. (To Porsha) He’s our dentist. What a guy! So well spoken. Great hands. Do you go to him?

Er, yes.

Your whole family?

MELISSA
Yes. Well, not my dad. I mean… I…

Do you come from a big family?

PORSHA
Normal. It’s… normal. (Changing the subject) I tweaked the site a little to—

MELISSA
(Not really listening) I wanted a big family. Not big, big, but big, like four or maybe five children. All girls and one boy. Girls are so much easier than boys. I think. I mean, that just how I imagine it. Although, lately, I’ve been thinking about boys. (Patting her stomach) Having a boy.

PORSHA
Oh… are you… congratulations.
MELISSA
My first. And probably my only. Mr. Right didn’t come along until a few years ago. A boy would be great to…”kick the ball around,” ”carry on the family name.” A girl could do that, right?

I suppose. I suppose she could—

PORSHA

Do you have a brother?

MELISSA

What?

PORSHA

A brother. Do you have a brother?

MELISSA

Yes. No. I do. I did. He’s dead.

PORSHA

Oh. That’s terrible. I’m so sorry, I didn’t—

That’s alright—

MELISSA

What happened—?

PORSHA

We don’t know.

MELISSA

That’s terrible.

PORSHA

I’m sorry, I really shouldn’t—

MELISSA

No, no—it’s okay. It’s so okay. I bring personal stuff to the office all the time/ All the time—

PORSHA

It’s just—I’m so prepared for this interview. I practiced—
(Porsha bursts into tears. Melissa grabs a box of tissues and comforts her.)

(Calming down after a beat) It’s not knowing.

MELISSA
How he died?

PORSHA
What happened. He was shot by the police last night—

MELISSA
Oh. Oh my god.

PORSHA
—but we don’t know what happened. It doesn’t make any sense. That’s not how you’re supposed to die. You die like that in Afghanistan, Iraq, not two blocks from your home—

MELISSA
He was two blocks from home?

PORSHA
He was running an errand; he’d just gone to the store for a neighbor. He was a good kid. I mean, he was my little brother, (laughs) so he was a pain in the butt—but he was a good kid. And I loved him. The last time I talked to him, I texted him, “Meet me in the parking lot. I’ll give you a ride home,” with a smiley face or something stupid like that. I was so sure I was going to see him. It never crossed my mind that I wouldn’t see him again. You don’t think when you’re texting your little brother you’re supposed to tell him you love him and you’re proud of him and everything else there is to say. (Catching herself) Oh my goodness—I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry—I’m a very professional person, a very respectable, business-oriented person! I don’t cry at weddings, let alone work, I hope you don’t think—

MELISSA
Are you kidding? I would have never made it to a job interview after what you’ve been through! Porsha, I am thoroughly impressed, with your website, with your research, and your composure, you— (taking Porsha’s hand) you have passed this interview with flying colors. (Looking Porsha in the eye) You’re going to hear something from me, something very important, soon.

PORSHA
Thank you, Ms. Brustein, thank you so much.
(Melissa watches Porsha leave. She picks up the iPad, then puts on her coat and goes to the door.)

MELISSA

(To an offstage secretary) Barb? Can you cancel my appointments? I’m going to be out for the rest of the day.

(Melissa exits.)
(Inside the police station. **The Sitcom/Natural Lighting alternates in this scene.** There is a low wooden railing, a waist-high processing desk downstage. Chairs are upstage. Occasionally **police station sounds**—a radio, a dispatcher, a ringing phone—are heard.

Momdukes and Melissa enter at the same time. Melissa has the iPad; Momdukes has a pocketbook. They speak side by side facing the audience.)

**MOMDUKES**
I need to talk to somebody.

**MELISSA**
Officer? This is important!

**OFFICER (O. S.)**
(Laconically) Someone will be with you in a moment.

(Momdukes moves stage right while Melissa moves stage left to wait.)

(Isaac rushes in. **Lights up on them.** Isaac grabs Melissa by the arm and heads for the exit.)

**ISAAC**
We’re *outta* here!

**MELISSA**
(Snatching her arm away) Let go of me! Isaac, what are you doing here?

**ISAAC**
I stopped by your office—

**MELISSA**
You stopped by my office? You never stop by my office—

**ISAAC**
I stopped by your office to be *nice*, to be *kind*, to—

**MELISSA**
—to see if I was *there* instead of *here*!

**ISAAC**
I specifically told you—

**MELISSA**
You *told* me?
ISAAC
I asked you not to do this—not to do anything!

MELISSA
I can’t not do this! (Beat) (Lowering her voice) His sister!

ISAAC
What?

MELISSA
His sister! She came to my office this morning!

ISAAC
Did you tell her?!

MELISSA
No! I interviewed her. For a job.

(Lights switch to Momdukes. Wilson enters with Porsha. He is visibly drunk and leaning on Porsha. He is carrying the blue suit. He wobbles straight to Momdukes.)

MR. WILSON
(Slurring a little) You got my boy?

MOMDUKES
Wilson!

PORSHA
I’m sorry, Momdukes, he was like this when I picked him up.

MR. WILSON
I’m here for my boy!

PORSHA
He must have been drinking all night.

MR. WILSON
I got the suit. We gon’ bury him in.

PORSHA
Daddy, you can’t act like this in here.
MR. WILSON
I want to bury him in this suit! I got the suit. (Whispering loudly as Momdukes reacts to his breath) I put twenty dollars in the pocket.

MOMDUKES
Twenty dollars? For what?

MR. WILSON
So he won’t have to steal in heaven.

MOMDUKES
Read your bible, Wilson, read your bible. Jesus fed the hungry and healed the sick; that’s food stamps and Medicaid right there—heaven is free. (SFX: Giggles) (Beat) And Deyshawn ain’t stole nothing. Don’t you eulogize that lie. If you’d let me call Al Sharpton—

PORSHA
Momdukes, please, my mother said not to involve nobody—

MOMDUKES
—so she can save face. Your mama been putting on a show for a long time. I knew she was fake when I met her. But this is real. And every time this happen, every time the news say somebody Black shot—somebody walking, somebody sitting in a car listening to music, someone playing, someone praying got shot, I hold my breath. I breathe in deep ‘til my lungs are balloon-stretched and I wonder what pop, what prick, what nip the news gon’ find to puncture this I got inside me. What normal, human thing were they doing that had to be stopped by a bullet? Was it rap music? A cut through an alley? A toy gun, a bb gun, the backfire of a car—what! ‘Cause when they tell me and I let out a sigh instead of a scream, I know it’s gon’ be another one. And there are mothers out there—not like Dora, real mothers, and sisters and fathers who thought they were going to have years before they had to learn how grieve.

Find out the truth of what happened to your brother.

(Lights switch to Melissa and Isaac.)

ISAAC
So? What’d she say?

MELISSA
She said the things a sister would say — that she loved him and misses him and wants to know what happened. She said the exact same thing I’d say if something happened to you.
Isaac: Did she change your mind?

Melissa: What?

Isaac: Something happened; you’re here. Did she change your mind?

Melissa: About the video? Wouldn’t it change yours? If you could answer her questions, if, if, if you had the power to mitigate someone’s pain, an iota of their suffering—

Isaac: About the baby.

(Beat.)

Melissa: How’d you know?

Isaac: You put it in your phone. Every time you put an appointment in your phone

Melissa: —it sends an email reminder to you. I forgot.

Isaac: Well, “abortion,” in all caps with three exclamation points is a hell of a reminder. I wanted to talk about it—this is something we should talk about—so I went to the clinic and then your office, and it finally dawned on me you’d be here.

Melissa: Do you want me to?

Isaac: Turn in the video?

Melissa: Terminate the pregnancy.

Isaac: It’s your choice. Totally. Your body, your choice. But…why didn’t you tell me? I could’ve come and held your hand and—
Trust me, it’s not the kind of thing you want to go through with your spouse.

You’ve had an abortion?

Whoa, Judge-y McHypocrite—who happened to choice, totally my choice?

I’m sorry, I’m sorry, that was surprise, not judgment. (Beat) Yes.

(Hurt) Yes?

Yes.

You said you wanted to wait—

I don’t.

And I was going to wait. I was weighing my options when I made that appointment; I’m not sure—

I am.

(Melissa tries to grasp the meaning of what Isaac has said.)

Yes.

(Taking a deep breath) Yes, I want you to —

(Melissa spots MomDukes, Porsha, and Mr. Wilson. Melissa pulls Isaac aside.)

(Whispering) Oh my god, that’s her!

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Who?

MELISSA
The sister! That must be his family!

ISAAC

Where?

MELISSA

Over there!

(Isaac looks. Melissa hits him:)

Don’t look! Oh, god.

(Lights back to MomDukes and Mr. Wilson. Wilson sits with his head on MomDukes shoulder.)

MOMDUKES

Porsha, go get your daddy some coffee. I saw a machine out in the hall way there.

(Porsha exits.)

MR. WILSON

Maybelle?

MOMDUKES

Hm?

MR. WILSON

I been thinking…

MOMDUKES

You sobered up?

MR. WILSON

A little…

MOMDUKES

‘Cause the only thing worse than a drunk man is a drunk man thinking. My nerves bad.

MR. WILSON

It won’t fray your nerves what I’m thinking.

MOMDUKES
It’s trying my patience, Wilson, what is it?

    MR. WILSON
You right. We got to find out what happened to Deyshawn.

    MOMDUKES
You sure?

    MR. WILSON
I got to do right by him.

    MOMDUKES
Are you sure? (Taking out her phone) ‘Cause I can have Sharpton here faster than you can say press n’ curl — (SFX: Giggles)

    MR. WILSON
Call him. I ain’t worried about what I might find out; I ain’t afraid of police; and I definitely don’t give a damn about—

(Dora enters in sunglasses and a scarf. Momdukes’ back is to Dora.)

    MR. WILSON
Dora!

    MOMDUKES
(On the phone) Aww, we finta set it off in here! (Shimmying) No justice! No peace! No justice! No—(Turning around and seeing Dora) oh, heller. (SFX: Giggles) (Beat) What you doing down here; I thought you ain’t want to be seen?

    DORA
I don’t. But I’ve got too much to lose; I need this done right, so I’m doing it myself. (Beat) Where is the body?

    MOMDUKES
We ain’t even talk to nobody yet.

    MR. WILSON
We need to find out what happened—

    DORA
That won’t be necessary, just find out where the body is and get it over to Boyd’s—

    MR. WILSON
The funeral home?
(Porsha enters with a coffee.)

DORA
If we cremate him today we can hold a memorial service tomorrow and—

MOMDUKES
And have all this swept under the rug before your press conference next week. I hate to mess up your plans, but we got to get the death certificate, request an autopsy—

DORA
Autopsy!

MR. WILSON
For the investigation—

PORSHA
Mom, maybe getting to the bottom of this isn’t such a b—

DORA
This is the bottom! And I’m going to climb out with this story: “My son, despite all the advantages I gave him, chose a misguided path that ended in his tragic death”—case closed! There will be an investigation over my dead body!

MOMDUKES
Then it’s gon be some slow singing and flower bringing—catch these hands, woman!

(Momdukes raises her arms to strike Dora with her pocketbook.)

(They freeze as lights shift to Melissa and Isaac, who are watching the Momdukes and Dora.)

ISAAC
Whoa!

MELISSA
Oh! (As if reacting to seeing a blow) Oh!

(Isaac takes Melissa’s hand to lead her out of the precinct)

ISAAC
Let’s get out of here, yeah?

MELISSA
Yeah—no.

(Melissa stops.)
ISAAC

No?!

MELISSA

Yeah, no—Isaac, I can’t!

ISAAC

You can’t what?! Melissa, we are not getting involved with this!

(The sound of punch.)

Jesus!

MELISSA

There is something wrong, something deplorably, lamentably wrong, when a kid—a kid!—gets shot in the back and we don’t want to get involved! Because he’s Black and maybe he did it and even if he didn’t do it he might do it. That makes you sleep better? That makes you feel safer? (Pulse of sitcom lighting here)

(The sound of slap.)

ISAAC

Look at them! Black on Black crime! They do this to themselves!

MELISSA

Yeah, well, you kill my child; I might punch a couple people, too!

ISAAC

Oh, now you’re mother of the year! An hour ago you were scheduled for, what, your second? third? abortion?

(Melissa slaps the taste out of Isaac’s mouth. (SFX: “ooo”) She grabs the iPad out of her purse and moves toward Momdukes and Dora.)

ISAAC

(Calling after her) Melissa! Melissa!

(Lights up on everyone. Dora, MomDukes, and Mr. Wilson resume motion.)

MR. WILSON

Dora! Maybelle! Stop! Stop!

(Melissa has iPad above her head and presses play. Immediately after Mr. Wilson yells “stop” the sound of the police officer on the video yelling “Stop,” silences everyone.)
(They gather and watch the screen. After it finishes playing, Porsha and Melissa see each other. Beat.)

(Lights down.)
Scene 5

(The following Saturday. Outside Shaker Women’s Services, stage left. The lights are full sitcom. Perhaps the “Seinfeld” theme plays. Abortion protesters march back and forth with signs with anti-abortion slogans. Like a fish swimming upstream, Melissa weaves her way through them. Maybe it’s just one actor marching with a sign who keeps blocking Melissa’s way. At some point, the protester recognizes Melissa.)

WOMAN

Melissa?

MELISSA

Uh…

WOMAN

Melissa…Brustein, right?

MELISSA

Yeah, uh, yeah…Katie?

WOMAN

Sharon. We met at/

MELISSA

That thing, for the thing, with the people in suits—

SHARON

the fundraiser/

MELISSA

At the place, with the pictures and the art/

SHARON

The museum, yes! How’s Isaac?

MELISSA

(Lying) He’s…great. We’re great. Everything’s great.

(Melissa starts to head into the clinic.)

SHARON

You’re not going in there, are you?

MELISSA

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What? No! Me? No, no, no. Not me. (Beat) Yes. Yes I am. (SFX: laughter) They do other stuff. Not just that. Birth control! That’s it! I’m getting birth control!

(Sharon doesn’t believe Melissa. She holds her sign underneath her arm and rummages through her purse.)

SHARON
I’ve got some literature—

MELISSA
And a mammogram! And a pap smear! Can’t have too many of those, can you?

(SFX: Laughter)

SHARON
Have you seen our literature?

MELISSA
Look, I’m not having an—

(Sharon shows Melissa a gruesome picture. Melissa looks away. Maybe Sharon follows Melissa with the picture and they circle each other; it should be comical. (SFX: Laughter))

SHARON
Babies/

MELISSA
Fetuses/

SHARON
can hear sounds outside the body at sixteen weeks—

MELISSA
Can it hear my brain seeping out of my ear rather than process this conversation right now?

(SFX: Laughter)

SHARON
Your precious little boy/

MELISSA
or girl!
can hear us now, discussing this! He’s terrified, he’s/

bared sentient!

he’s frightened, he’s/

Black!

(Beat.)

My baby is Black.

(A reaction skitters across Sharon’s face that she tries to hide.) (SFX: Laughter)

What’s wrong, don’t Black lives matter?

(Momdukes has entered for Deshawn’s rally on the other side of the stage. She comes to Melissa’s side and gives a sassy :)

MOMDUKES

Mm hmm!

(Momdukes and Melissa high five. Melissa’s phone rings—the Seinfeld music ringtone, like a button on that exchange. Sharon joins the other marchers. Melissa moves downstage a bit while Momdukes drifts upstage.)

MELISSA

(On the phone) What? Yes, this is Melissa. Yes, yes I want to know….a boy. (Pause.) (Desultorily) No. That’s…great. Thank you.

(Melissa looks stage left, at the clinic entrance. She places her hand on her belly.)

A boy.

(She makes the choice not to go into the clinic.)

(Melissa drifts upstage and blends in with the knot of marchers. The marchers’ flip their signs. They are now protesters at a rally with signs that say “#Black Life Matters,” “No Justice, No Peace,” “Hands up, Don’t Shoot,” etc.)

(Everyone faces stage right as if listening to Al Sharpton.)
(Sitcom lights up on Dora downstage. She is in a power suit and paces as if backstage at a rally.)

DORA
(Practicing) Ladies and gentlemen, I am a mother. But more importantly, I am a candidate. No, no, other way around. Ladies and gentlemen, I am a candidate, but more importantly, I am a mother. A mother who has lost her son to—that’s it! I’ve got to get more sonorous tones, like Angela Bassett channeling Tina Turner. (Affecting accent) I’m a mother, I’m a mother—

(Porsha enters.)

PORSHA
Mom?

DORA
(Cheerfully looking through her notes) Porsha, darling! I was just rehearsing my address for the rally. Now, shall I start with implicit bias in law enforcement and the targeting of Black males or the presumption of guilt in communities of color and its role in the prison industrial complex?

PORSHA
Mom—

(Dora touches up her make-up in a compact.)

DORA
I wanted to say something about white supremacy and its historical erasure of Black personhood, but white people vote, too, so I’ll save that for re-election. Or redistricting. I have been immersed in research—there’s so much to learn! So many political issues and academic buzzwords! This has really been a boon—

PORSHA
(Incredulous) Deyshaw’s death?

DORA
—a tragic, tragic boon to my campaign. (SFX: Laughter)

PORSHA
Mom, this rally is about for justice for Deyshaw—

DORA
(Seeing Porsha) Child! Look at your face!
(Dora begins putting make up on Porsha.)

*Al Sharpton* is here! Do you know how many cameras he brought with him?! ABC, NBC, BET— and you’re in here looking like a Kardashian in a rainstorm!

**PORSHA**

I’ve been crying, Mom —

**DORA**

They make waterproof mascara; that’s no excuse!

**PORSHA**

I’ve been thinking about what I want to say about Deysahwn—

**DORA**

Oh, dearest, I’ve been so busy with interviews—did you see me on Anderson Cooper?—I haven’t had time to say the things you need to hear—

(Dora takes Porsha in her arms.)

**PORSHA**

Thanks, mom.

**DORA**

I’ve hired a crisis management team! They’ve shown me how to spin this so we won’t be lumped in with *those* Black people: I’ll say something like “I planted two seeds in a garden, one became beautiful flower and the other a weed trampled beneath the jackboot of the police!”

**PORSHA**

Mom!

**DORA**

What? You’re the beautiful flower!

**PORSHA**

Deyshawn wasn’t a weed! He was your son! And he did everything right, everything you taught us to keep us safe, and he’s still dead! And there’s no *those* Black people, just *us* Black people and we are dying every damn day!

(Warren sticks his head in.)
WARREN

Sweetheart?

PORSHA DORA

Yes?

PORSHA

(Pointedly to her mother) He means me.

(Porsha exits with Warren. They walk around and Porsha mounts a platform.)

DORA

OH HELL TO THE NAW! My little girl took my man! But she did snag a doctor—shit, I don’t know whether to be pissed or proud.

(Flings her wig to the floor)

(SFX: Laughter)

(She shuts her compact, puts it in her handbag, and exits as lights cross fade to a different part of the stage where Porsha is elevated on a platform, addressing the crowd.)

The lighting is normal. Mr. Wilson, Momdukes, Warren, and Melissa are in the crowd.)

PORSHA

My brother…was a pain in the butt. But he was my pain in the butt. He was also kind, generous, and thoughtful. He was a whiz at math and had more sneakers than one person should own. He loved Kendrick Lamar and Chipotle. I don’t know what amazing person he might have grown up to be; but I do know the world is poorer because he’s not in it. Because he mattered. His beautiful Black life mattered…

(Warren moves to help Porsha down, but she raises a finger as if to say “Just a sec,”)

…so I say this: sag your pants. Blast your music. Protest. Write. Sing. Dance—love! Let America know that we are here and we are alive right now and forever!
Scene 6

(The protest continues but we are aware that time has passed. Perhaps it’s a light change. **Maybe lights are back to Sitcom lights.** Protesters marching at a rally. Melissa is just starting to show, leads the crowd in a wordless chant.)

(A man, taps Melissa on the shoulder. He hands her an envelope and leaves.)

(Melissa opens the envelope. She looks in the direction the man went.)
Scene 7

(A courtroom. 3 or 4 months later. Melissa and Isaac are on chairs facing front about five feet apart. **Sitcom lighting for Melissa, Natural lighting for Isaac. How? Theatricalize! When someone is on the witness stand, lights are on them and not the other person.**)

(“People’s Court” music. Melissa takes the stand. She raises her right hand, then sits.)

**MELISSA**

Melissa Brustein.

I’m a couple weeks into my third trimester.

The father? Yes. He’s right there. Isaac Brustein.

We’re married—well, separated. Divorced, soon. I hope. I mean, any husband who’d drag his pregnant wife and unborn child into a courtroom—sorry, your honor.

Huh? Yes. Right. Uh...a year ago, the Isaac and I contracted with the Happy Family Fertility Clinic for IVF, in-vitro fertilization—you knew that, sorry—eventually, we were matched with a donor and I became pregnant — what? Why is that important? This isn’t about assigning blame—(Reacting as if a gavel has banged). No. I did not check the box.

**(Lights up on Isaac.)**

**ISAAC**

2009, that’s when we were married. Beg your pardon? Oh, right away, we started trying to have a baby right away. But Melissa’s older

(Melissa reacts audibly.)

**ISAAC**

and we had several miscarriages, before the clinic discovered her eggs were no longer viable. I really wanted a child. A boy. To throw the ball around. Carry on my legacy.

(Melissa scoffs O.S.) (A gavel bangs.)

I did, your honor. (Pouring it on)The idea of being a father meant the world to me. So you can imagine how I felt when I found out the baby Melissa was carrying—my biological child!— was African American. Confused. Angry. Upset.

**(Lights up on Melissa.)**

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MELISSA
Really? Do I have to answer that? It does not seem germane to the matter at hand, the larger question of why we are here. (Beat.) I could plead the fifth—yes, that is exactly what I’ll do. I am pleading the fifth! I can’t plead the fifth? How about the sixth? (SFX: Laughter) Alright, alright! It’s just, it’s not something I’m proud of—not that I’m ashamed. It’s still legal you know. And it’s a choice. A choice a woman makes—Yes. I made an appointment.

(Beat, a question Melissa listens to intently is being asked.)

Because I don’t want to terminate this pregnancy. I love him. Already. He’s mine—

(Lights up on Isaac.)

ISAAC
I grew up in a small town in Ohio—a small, homogenous town. Tree-lined streets, split-level homes. I remember one Christmas Eve, our entire neighborhood, Biff and Chad and I, met at the town square to go wassailing—Oh, sorry, yes, it was mostly white, much like where Melissa and I live now; well, I live, she’s moved out. No, I did not have any significant interactions with African Americans—I’m a great admirer of the idiom of jazz, but—oh, uh, the, uh, numerous psychologists I’ve consulted say I would have to relocate—at considerable cost—to a more racially-diverse community so that the child’s skin color would not be a hindrance to receiving fair and equal treatment from business establishments, the municipal school district, or law enforcement.

And then there’s the question of hair…the…texture. I have no experience with it and Melissa doesn’t have a clue, and because we know absolutely no people of color, well, the color of the child in question, in utero, the psychologists said this would lead to a perpetual state of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty that would be deleterious. To us. And the child.

Nope, I don’t know any Black people at all.

(Lights up on Warren. He is sitting in Melissa’s chair.)

WARREN
Yes. I know them both. Since 2008.

(Lights up, Melissa is back in her chair.)

MELISSA
No, I am not a part of this lawsuit; this is all Isaac. I was brought here under duress. I am a hostile witness. I am as hostile as a witness can be. (SFX: Laughter)
MELISSA

I think it’s frivolous.

If my child’s skin color and, and hair texture give some bigot license to treat him like crap, that’s not a problem that can be solved with money. And what is it saying, what message are you sending, when a judge says it’s so stressful having a Black child that my soon-to-be ex-husband deserves—how much is he asking for?

(Incredulously) A quarter million dollars?!

A quarter million dollars to a white guy who would only be mildly inconvenienced by the faint echo of racism he’d hear as the father of a Black child! What about actual Black people! Why not give them money? Why not pay every single Black person in America for the bias and bigotry and bullshit they’ve put up with every single day for four hundred years!

(Beat)

JUDGE (O.S.)

(Banging gavel furiously) Case dismissed!

(Isaac stops as he exits the court room.)

ISAAC

(Sarcastically) Nice going, Rosa Parks.

(“Seinfeld” button as he exits.)

(The two chairs representing the courtroom are removed as Melissa takes a few steps away as if she is in a corridor of the courtroom. Porsha walks by. This is neither sitcom nor natural. Just kinda…human.)

MELISSA

(Catching up to Porsha) Porsha! Hey, wait a minute—

PORSHA

Ms. Brustein! I’m sorry, I know I’m supposed to be at work, but they’re pressing charges against the officer who shot Deyshawn and I wanted to be here for the press conference—

MELISSA

It’s okay. It’s so okay.

PORSHA

Thank you.
(Porsha starts to leave.)

MELISSA

Porsha?

PORSHA

Yes?

MELISSA

Do you mind if I come with you?

(Porsha smiles. They exit.)

(Theme from an earnest kind of TV show—“Hill St. Blues,” maybe—plays.)

END OF PLAY