

It Happened On George Street

SCENE ONE

[Aiyana paces back and forth, nervously and repeatedly peeking through the blinds and biting her nails, keeps trying to walk away but then checks the blinds again, almost comically.]

[Michael enters the room, breathing heavily, huffing as if he just finished carrying something heavy, maybe shaking out his arms to show this.]

Michael: Okay, Aiyana, his bed is set up, his bookshelf has been put together and I hung up that basketball hoop above the driveway. Fucking IKEA makes it impossible to—

[Aiyana cuts him off, already distracted while he was speaking and still checking the window.]

Aiyana: Did you put a toothbrush in the bathroom? In case he forgot one? I want him to feel at home.

[Michael breathes as he's about to say yes but Aiyana turns to him suddenly, cuts him off before he can finish his breath]

Aiyana: I read a whole article on how toothbrushes are associative with home and make people feel apart of a family and...

[Michael begins laughing and she stops, crosses her arms, sticks out a hip and gives him a look.]

Aiyana: What is it, Michael?

[Michael walks over and puts his hands on her shoulders and slides them down her arms to pull her into a hug by her lower back, the two still facing each other, as he speaks.]

Michael: C'mon, babe, you gotta stop stressing. He's already part of a family.

Aiyana: I know, I know. But what if he—I'm just afraid he'll resent me. For leaving him behind when his dad and I separated. He was young when we got divorced and he was too young to understand that there was no way I could stay in a place where I couldn't get a good job. I had ambitions and plans and the whole reason I left his dad was because he was holding me back and just *think* about black women in inner cities tryna get ahead in the business world...I don't want him to think I don't love him.

[Michael kisses her forehead and pulls her into a real hug, her head on his chest.]

Michael: Of course Jeremiah knows you love him; he's your son.

[Aiyana pulls away to protest, facing him again.]

Aiyana: Yeah, but—

Michael: Aiyana, you begged your ex to send your son to live with you permanently after years of only getting to see him over school breaks just so he wouldn't have to go to high school in the hood like you did. You got a city kid to move out to the suburbs.

[As he's speaking, Michael slides his hands up to her forearms to grip them.]

Michael: *Of course* he knows you love him. And he's gonna love living here now.

[Aiyana smiles and rolls her eyes, beaming with pride. Then seems to snap back to attention and brushes Michael's hands off her arms to point at him.]

Aiyana: You're right, he is. Because you're gonna bond with him. *Really* bond with him, Michael. No awkwardness, no "you ain't my real dad" talk, I don't wanna hear none of it...

[Michael laughs to himself at her.]

Michael: Aiyana, Aiyana, I got it. I got him a little housewarming gift. Show him I'm a cool guy, not just a step dad.

[Aiyana smirks at Michael and folds her arms over her chest again.]

Aiyana: "A cool guy." *Mhm*. What'd you get him?

[Michael reaches into a drawer by the couch and has a small gift bag and hands it out to Aiyana. She reaches inside, pulls out a box, shakes it and pulls out two airpods. She looks up at the ceiling and sighs hopelessly, then looks at Michael.]

Aiyana: Michael.

Michael: Yes?

Aiyana: What the fuck is this shit?

Michael: Their *air pods*. Little wireless headphones. You said Jeremiah likes basketball; he's an athlete. He needs these so he can listen to music to focus while he plays. He'll think I'm thoughtful.

[As he's speaking, he takes the gift back to repackage it.]

Aiyana: He mighta needed them back at his dad's house to drown out the sound of drive by shootings but he's on George Street now. What is there to distract him on a block this quiet? He's outta the projects now, he don't need these.

Michael: Yeah, thank god you got him out of there...

[Michael is interrupted by the doorbell ringing.]

Aiyana: Oh! Oh, he's here.

[Aiyana runs to the door, pauses to smooth out her curly hair and shirt, takes a deep breath and opens it. Jeremiah steps in with all his suitcases and drops them to hug her.]

Jeremiah: Hi, Mom.

Aiyana: Hi, baby.

[The two are talking into each other's necks since they're still hugging. She lets go and moves out the way so he can greet Michael. Michael goes in for a hug while Jeremiah goes in for a handshake, then they switch, and then they stop, awkwardly laugh at themselves and Michael daps him up.]

Aiyana: Alright, lemme get your bags.

[She's smiling really excitedly and even though it's too much, she takes up all the bags in her arms and starts towards the stairs with them.]

[Michael and Jeremiah speak at the same time.]

Jeremiah: Mom, you don't gotta—

Michael: Aiyana, let me get it—

[Aiyana keeps struggling with the bags up the stairs.]

Aiyana: No! No, I got it. You two talk.

[Jeremiah looks at his feet, shyly and Michael looks at Aiyana pleadingly, while she looks back at him.]

Aiyana [*mouths*]: *Talk.*

[*The boys awkwardly stare at their feet until Aiyana is completely off stage.*]

[*Jeremiah coughs, awkwardly. Michael clears his throat. They both look up as if they're about to say something.*]

Michael: So, the suburbs are a lot different from the city, huh?

Jeremiah: Uh, yeah.

[*They awkwardly laugh and then there's a pause.*]

Jeremiah: Didn't y'all just have an anniversary?

Michael: Yeah, last month. Seven years.

[*Another pause.*]

Michael: Didn't you just have a fifteenth birthday?

Jeremiah: Six months ago, but yeah.

[*Michael laughs but quickly grabs the bag on the table by couch.*]

Michael: Consider it a belated birthday gift.

[*Jeremiah opens the gift and smiles politely.*]

Jeremiah: Air pods. Thanks, Michael.

Michael: No problem, man...

[*Interrupted by Aiyana finally coming downstairs.*]

Aiyana [*enthusiastically*]: Alright! You're all set! You can unpack now if you want or just hang out...

Jeremiah: I don't know anybody to hang out with yet.

Aiyana: No—well—you could hang out with us!

[*Jeremiah and Michael both look at Aiyana pleadingly.*]

Aiyana: ...Or do anything else.

Jeremiah: You guys got basketball courts out here?

Michael: No, but we got a hoop out in the driveway.

[Michael goes behind couch to reveal a gym bag and pulls out a basketball that he tosses to Jeremiah who catches it.]

Michael: Go crazy.

[Jeremiah heads towards the door to go outside and play.]

Jeremiah: Thanks, Michael.

[Door closes behind him. Aiyana walks up to Michael and slaps him upside the head.]

Michael: What the—?

[Michael turns to face Aiyana, visibly annoyed and confused.]

Aiyana: We're supposed to be *bonding*. Not sending him outta the house the minute he gets here. He didn't even want to unpack. This is supposed to be home, a place where we can keep him out of trouble...

Michael: We can't make this place home by forcing him to hang out with two old people. That wouldn't be keeping him out of trouble; *that* would be holding him hostage.

[Aiyana throws up her hands and sighs nervously and frustratedly, glancing towards the window.]

Michael: Listen, Jeremiah is a good kid, he can go outside without causing any trouble.

[Just then, they hear the sound of a basketball bouncing off the rim, hitting a car and the alarm going off. The two sigh and the lights dim.]

SCENE TWO

[The lights go up and the set is now Sandra and Giancarlo's house just moments before the car alarm goes off.]

[Giancarlo is laid back on the couch reading a book. Sandra runs in from the side in an old basketball jersey and jeans with a cheesy apron and is covered in flour and other ingredients. She has a spoon in hand and runs up to stick the spoon in his mouth.]

Sandra: Try this.

Giancarlo *[approvingly]*: Mmmm.

[Sandra runs out, and right after he opens his book back up, she comes back in with a fork of something and again, sticks it to his mouth.]

Sandra: Okay, try this.

Giancarlo: Mmm.

[Giancarlo kisses his fingers, as if to say perfect.]

[Sandra runs back, and right after he opens his book, comes back with a different spoon and he closes his book, exasperated, and turns to her.]

Sandra: Okay now, try this.

[Giancarlo opens his mouth and chews very slowly on purpose, to which Sandra rolls her eyes and breathes frustratedly.]

Sandra: Giancarlo, *please*.

Giancarlo *[as if the food was mediocre]*: Ehhhh

Sandra: I *knew* I added too much sugar.

[Sandra turns to go back to the kitchen, looking defeated, but Giancarlo grabs her by the waist and pulls her down on to the couch and kisses her neck.]

Giancarlo: I'm just kidding, I am joking with you, *bellissima*.

Sandra *[pouting]*: Well, don't. This is serious, Gian.

Giancarlo: Sandra, you need to relax. All of this on your feet can't be good for the—

[Sandra groans and cuts him off.]

Sandra: I can't be scolded right now. I have a mac and cheese, potato salad and sweet potato pie to finish before your mother gets here. If I can't win your mother over with my *charm*, I'll do it through my *food*. You Italians love a good meal.

[Sandra turns to kiss him on the cheek then pushes out of his arms to stand up.]

Giancarlo: You don't need all of this to make her like you. You know my mother always says, "una cena senza vino e come un giorno senza sole."

[Sandra rolls her eyes.]

Sandra: A meal without wine is a day without sunshine.

[Giancarlo smiles at her, nods, and sits up to hold her hand in his.]

Giancarlo: Exactly. I can go to the store right now, pick up a bottle, and we will make it through another visit with my mother as we always do.

Sandra: Except no, we might not, because it's entirely different this time and you know it, Giancarlo. This time, I'm announcing to the woman that hates me that I'm carrying her son's baby. And there's another saying your mother always says...

[Giancarlo rolls his eyes, defeated.]

Giancarlo: "Nulla nuova, buona nuova." No news is good news.

[Right then, the sound of the ball hitting the car and the alarm going off is repeated.]

Sandra: What was that?

Giancarlo: Stay here, I will check.

[Giancarlo walks out the front door to see what's going on. Sandra walks to the window to check the blinds. Giancarlo returns after a moment.]

Giancarlo: Don't worry, a kid just accidentally hit the car, but he put a dent in the hood.

[Sandra sighs, frustratedly.]

Sandra: The *new* hood. Put a dent in the *new* hood of our *new* car.

[The doorbell rings and Giancarlo opens the door to reveal Aiyana. Sandra sees her and immediately straightens up, fixing her shirt and hair.]

Aiyana: I am so sorry, my son was playing basketball in the driveway and he's new around here and—I will definitely pay for the dent in the car. Who should I write the check out to?

[Sandra wipes her hands on her jeans and brushes past Giancarlo and extends her hand to shake Sandra's.]

Sandra: Hi, I'm Sandra. This is my husband Giancarlo. We actually moved in last week.

Aiyana: Oh, yes, I noticed. I've been meaning to find a chance to come over and introduce myself but work is crazy...my name is Aiyana, Aiyana Taylor, by the way.

Sandra: Well come in! We haven't really gotten to know each other.

[Sandra turns to Giancarlo.]

Sandra: Gian, baby, go get Aiyana some water please.

[Giancarlo nods and turns to go to the kitchen as Aiyana sits on the couch beside Sandra.]

Sandra: So, you and your son live right next door?

Aiyana: Yes! Yes, with my husband Michael.

Sandra: Oh, that's amazing. Have you always lived here?

Aiyana: Michael grew up not too far away but I moved here almost ten years ago. But what about you? What brought you and your husband to George Street?

Sandra: We got married earlier this year and wanted to start a family in a nice neighborhood...and now we are, actually. I'm due February 25th.

Aiyana: Wow! Congratulations! You found out recently, then, I'm assuming?

Sandra: Yup!

Aiyana: This is an exciting time. God, I remember what that was like.

Sandra: How old is your son?

Aiyana: Fifteen.

Sandra: Wow, a teenager.

Aiyana [*nostalgically*]: Yup, but he'll always be a baby to me.

Sandra [*leaning in and lowering her voice*]: So, do you have any advice? For raising a black child here? I was worried about it when Giancarlo picked this neighborhood—there are only so many black families in these suburbs and I'm only half of one.

Aiyana: Oh no, Jeremiah didn't grow up he—

[*Aiyana stops herself, smiles at Sandra whose leaning into her eagerly, puts her hand on top of hers, and takes a breath.*]

Aiyana: Love them like you're running out of time. That's my advice. You'd be surprised how often it feels that way.

[*Giancarlo comes back with the glass of water.*]

Giancarlo: Sorry it took so long, my wife has left the kitchen a mess trying to prepare dinner for tonight.

[*Sandra springs up.*]

Sandra: *Shit*. My food is burning.

[*Sandra runs to the kitchen. Giancarlo sets the water down in front of Aiyana but she politely holds a hand up and stands.*]

Aiyana [*while approaching the door*]: Thank you so much but I probably better go. I promise to stop by later to drop off the check. Thank you, again and I am so sorry about the car.

Giancarlo: It's no trouble at all. We have a little troublemaker on the way, we should get used to this.

[*Aiyana smiles and nods. Giancarlo closes the door behind her. The lights dim.*]

SCENE THREE

[*The car alarm sound repeats and then cuts off. The lights go up and Steven is sitting on the couch with a phone to his ear.*]

Steven: Hi, yes, I'm sorry a car alarm went off outside. My name is Steven Goodman, I want to make a reservation for my wife, my daughter and I for dinner tonight...Yes, 7:30 would be great...Alright then...Alright th-thank you...Have a great day.

[Steven hangs up right as Kathryn enters the living room with a beer and hands it to her husband. She sits beside him and he puts an arm behind her on the couch.]

Steven *[smiles, says in friendly voice]*: Thank god that car alarm finally went off. Thought I was going deaf for Christ sakes.

Kathryn: You should be checking to make sure it's not your daughter in the driveway since Lord knows how she managed to get a driver's license just in time before leaving for college.

[Steven laughs and puts his arm around his wife.]

Steven: It's like it was only yesterday she put a hole in the garage door. Now she's making a four hour drive back down here to come see us for the summer.

Kathryn: That's exactly why we should be afraid that car alarm is hers.

Steven: Better it be Rachel than a car thief. You know the Murphy's were telling me about all the damn thefts happening over on their side of the neighborhood. A bunch of thugs walking right through people's front yards and breaking into their garages. It's ridiculous.

Kathryn: You know I ran into Sharon at the grocery store and she told me someone stole the mountain bikes she just got the kids.

[Steven pulls arm away from Kathryn to open his beer.]

Steven: Seriously? I swear, Kathryn, the crime in this country is out of control if things like this can happen here. They really haven't been tough enough on these people who just think they can come in and...*do* this to nice, good people. It won't be long 'til it reaches George Street.

Kathryn: Well I've been telling you to install a security system for how many years now, Steven...

[The doorbell rings. Kathryn stands up to go answer it and Rachel walks in with her college sweatshirt and hat and Lulu Lemon stretch pants with adidas. She stands her suitcases up to hug her mom.]

Rachel: Hi, mom.

Kathryn *[in that motherly voice]*: Rachel, honey!

[As the two hug, Steven stands up at the couch. Rachel comes out of the embrace and they smile at each other as he opens his arms wide.]

Rachel: *Dad.*

Steven: *Rachel.*

[She leaves her suitcases at the door to walk into a big hug. Steven rubs her upper back as he squeezes her.]

Steven: We missed you, kid.

Rachel: Says the guy who said he wouldn't get empty nest syndrome...

[Kathryn pulls her suitcases further into the house and closes the door.]

Kathryn [*jokingly*]: He only cried himself to sleep in your bed every night.

Steven [*jokingly*]: *Kathryn*, you promised not to tell her about that.

[Kathryn walks over to them and puts a hand on Rachel's shoulder.]

Kathryn: Well, sit down and tell us everything! We want to know all about your first year as a college girl!

[The whole family sits down.]

Rachel [*as she takes off her hat and Kathryn smooths out her hair*]: It. Was. Transformative. I learned how to use nunchucks on catcallers in a women's self defense class, I joined an I Stand With Taylor Swift twitter campaign after the Kimye drama—

Kathryn [*interrupts*]: Kimye? Is that that ethnic food you like?

Rachel: No, mom, that's Kimchi.

Steven: It's that drink she kept asking us to send her in the care package.

Rachel: *That's* Kombucha. Kimye is a famous couple—who, by the way, unfairly targeted a successful woman in the music industry for reasons deeply rooted in misogyny—

Kathryn [*interrupts*]: Alright, honey, what else did you do?

Rachel: I volunteered to help teach little Asian children how to speak English—

Kathryn: You speak Chinese?

Rachel: No, but I got a lot of cute pictures with them. I'll show you later.

[*Kathryn nods with a smile.*]

Rachel: Oh, and I knit my own hat for the Women's March—

Steven [*interrupts*]: Oh yeah, your mom showed me the Facebook photos of you in your cute little cunt hat.

Rachel [*frustrated*]: Dad, they're called pussy hats, as in Pussy Grabs Back...and cunt is a derogatory, sexist and violent word...

Steven [*laughs exasperatedly*]: *Violent*. A word is *violent*. Everything is violent to my little girl now.

[*Rachel opens her mouth to protest but Kathryn cuts her off.*]

Kathryn: Well, your little girl isn't so little anymore, especially now that she's got a job here for the summer.

Rachel [*proudly*]: That's right, I, Rachel Goodman, am interning for the first female candidate for mayor of our district.

Kathryn: She's actually the third—

Rachel [*interrupts*]: The *first* third female candidate for mayor in our district. The point is she's making history.

Steven [*jokingly*]: And you wonder why you're making seventy-nine cents to our dollar...

[*They all laugh and Rachel smacks Steven's arm.*]

Rachel: Dad!

Steven: I'm just joking, Rach, I'm more than proud of all you're doing to make the world a better place.

[*Steven stands up and stretches.*]

Steven: ...which is why I got us a reservation for dinner tonight at Cara Mia Pizza.

Kathryn [*pats Rachel's knee*]: Your favorite!

[*Rachel looks offended.*]

Rachel [*glancing at both parents*]: Guys, I'm a vegan now. Do you know what they *do* to the animals that make your cheese and pepperoni?

Kathryn [*standing to lean in and half whisper to Steven*]: Did we not tell her where pepperoni comes from before she left for college?

[*Rachel stands and wedges between her parents.*]

Rachel [*groans*]: Mom!

Steven: Alright, alright, I will cancel the reservation and we will figure dinner out. Let's just get Rachel's bags upstairs.

[*Kathryn and Steven each grab a suitcase and roll it to the staircase, while Rachel grabs her duffel bag and they all exit the stage. The lights dim.*]

SCENE FOUR

[*Lights come up and the audience is in Michael and Aiyana's house again. Michael is sitting on the couch with Jeremiah as they flip through channels, all of which give audio foreshadowing Jeremiah's death. The phone rings and Michael quickly mutes the TV.*]

Michael: Hello?...Oh yes, this is Michael Taylor...a table just opened up?...Fantastic, hold on let me ask my...my...give me a second.

[*Michael covers the mouth of the phone and turns to Jeremiah.*]

Michael: Hey, man, someone cancelled a reservation at Cara Mia Pizza. We can still get a table if you're up for it.

Jeremiah: Nah, I'm kinda exhausted after basketball today. Can we stay in tonight?

Michael: Oh yeah, of course.

[*Michael uncovers the mouth of the phone.*]

Michael: Yes, hi...we're actually going to pass tonight but thank you for calling back to check in...Thanks again...Okay, have a good night.

[Jeremiah turns to Michael right as he puts the phone down and is about to pick up the remote.]

Jeremiah: I'm sorry again, about hitting the car and everything. I'm not tryna be a burden on you or my mom.

Michael: Don't worry about it, Jeremiah. You're never gonna be a burden here.

[There is a pause, then Michael turns to Jeremiah, with a serious shift in atmosphere.]

Michael: Now I don—I don't know if you know this but...your mom. She refuses to sit near glass windows when it's possible. It's a miracle she can even get in a car to drive herself to work. On our first anniversary, I got this private table at a fancy restaurant downtown. Great view. I wanted her to finish dessert and turn to look out the window and see this violinist and cellist serenading her and a bouquet of roses and a banner that said "I Love You, Aiyana." It was the most romantic thing I'd ever done for anybody. But when we got there, she hated the table. She was so stubborn about it. Told me if we didn't move our table, she'd go home and eat there. I was pissed.

[Michael clears his throat.]

Michael: But I found out later, that when your mom was in high school, back when she still lived in your old city, that she was eating at some pizzeria with her friends at night when a riot started. People were pissed about the mayor refusing to do something about dirty water or something. So people—they're yelling, and screaming and knocking over newspaper stands and jumping on cars and acting all wild. A bunch of guys pick up a trash can, light it on fire, and haul it at the window of the pizzeria your mother is sitting in.

[There's a pause.]

Michael: Second degree burns from the fire, cuts from the glass shattering, a concussion from the impact of the trash can. She got the worst of it. All because she was a teenager in the wrong place, at the wrong time, in a neighborhood as dangerous as hers. She doesn't want you to have to go through that. She wants you here more than anything, Jeremiah.

[Jeremiah swallows hard and nods. Before he can speak, his cellphone rings.]

Jeremiah *[croaks]*: It's my dad, I gotta take it.

Michael: No worries.

[Jeremiah gets up and goes upstairs to talk on the phone.]

Jeremiah *[as he's leaving]*: Hey, dad...

[After a pause, Michael gets up and stands near the stairs, straining to hear Jeremiah's conversation.]

Jeremiah *[from off stage]*: Yeah, the suburbs is mad different...The house is cool. I got my own bathroom and everything...Yeah I think Mom and Michael and me are gonna eat soo—Oh yeah, Michael is mom's husband...

[Michael looks offended.]

Michael *[says quietly to himself]*: This nigga don't know who I am?

[Aiyana comes in through the front door.]

Aiyana *[as she drops a checkbook into her bag and drops it on the couch, then sits to begin taking her shoes off]*: I just dropped off the check at the Moretti's. Real nice, young couple. The black woman reminds me of me. We gotta invite them over for dinner one nigh—

Michael *[turning to her to put a finger over his mouth]*: Shhhh!

[Aiyana gives him a warning look.]

Michael: Jeremiah is on the phone with your ex.

[Aiyana goes over to him quickly to strain to listen as well.]

Jeremiah *[off stage]*: ...Yeah, Michael got me some airpods...It was real thoughtful...

Michael *[turning to Aiyana and whispering]*: Told you.

Jeremiah *[off stage]*: ...I mean there ain't a lot to do yet but I just got here so...No, Pops, it wasn't a mistake...you made the right choice. So did Mom...I understand why you had to...Michael told me about Mom's burns and concussion in that riot, did you know about that?...

[Michael closes his eyes and sighs knowing he's in trouble. Aiyana leans away in astonishment and walks to the center of the room.]

Michael *[walking towards her]*: Aiyana—

[Aiyana silently holds up a hand to cut him off while looking at the floor.]

Aiyana [croaks quietly]: You told him about the riot?

[*The two speak quietly so Jeremiah can't hear.*]

Michael: Aiyana, we were bonding—

Aiyana: What does that have to do with the two of you?

Michael: It has everything to do with him, he's your *son*...

Aiyana: Exactly. He's my *son*. He does not need to be knowing my business like that...

Michael: He should be able to *get to know you*. You're the one who said he was too young to understand why you left and you were afraid he'd resent you for it—

Aiyana: —Wait, wait, hold up. "Get to know me"? Now you're trying to make me seem like some kinda absent mother?

Michael: You think I would ever compare you to an absent mother? I know what it's like to be the abandoned kid; Jeremiah is far from that.

[*The two speak over each other.*]

Aiyana: Then why would you say—

Michael: Aiyana, this is ridiculous...

[*Aiyana exhales sharply and rubs her temple, turning away from Michael.*]

Michael: Kids want to understand their parents. After my dad left, there was just this hole in my sister and I that I can't even begin to describe. If I could talk to him, ask him why he did what he did, there's no doubt that I would. Jeremiah is your son, Aiyana. He has a right to know these kind of things.

[*Aiyana shakes her head and turns back to Michael.*]

Aiyana: You—you don't have children, Michael. You don't. You don't have any children.

Michael: Yes, Aiyana, I know—

Aiyana: So you don't get—you don't understand that he doesn't. He doesn't get a right to know these kinds of things. Not when he's a black boy...

Michael [*beginning to interrupt her*]: Aiyana, what does that have to do with—

Aiyana [*holding up a hand*]: He is a *black boy*, Michael. And I am his black mother. Something you know nothing about.

[*Michael exhales.*]

Aiyana: Being a black mother means being afraid all the time. All the time. Especially where Jeremiah and I come from. Back in the city, I was afraid his dad would keep gambling and stay unemployed and we'd end up on the street. I was afraid he'd meet the wrong people at school in the hallway one day or on the walk home or hanging out with his friends and he'd end up a dropout statistic. I was afraid every morning when I left for work that he wouldn't be there when I got back. I was a black mother in the Projects, I wore fear like skin.

[*Aiyana exhales, as if out of breath.*]

Aiyana: I moved him out here because more than anything, I am tired, no, *exhausted* by, being that afraid, from this far away. I moved Jeremiah out here so that *he* wouldn't have to be afraid—He has a right to know these kinda things? No, he has a right to be unafraid. And to live his life. And to be *happy*. I'm the one who gets to be afraid, I'm his *mother*.

[*Michael looks down, ashamed, and swallows.*]

Aiyana [*softly, almost weakly*]: He shouldn't have to know fear like that. It would eat him alive. No one I knew died in that riot but my childhood did, Michael. I just want my boy to stay a boy as long as he can.

[*The sound of Jeremiah coming downstairs sounds and he enters the stage from the staircase, zipping up a hoodie, coming to a slow when he realizes they're having a serious conversation.*]

Jeremiah: Hey...sorry...do y'all care if I go running?

Aiyana [*adjusting her voice*]: Running? This late?

Jeremiah: I just wanna get in shape before school starts. I don't know how hard it's gonna be to make the basketball team at my new school.

Aiyana: Jeremiah...

Jeremiah [*pleading sweetly*]: Please Mom? It's not even 8:00 yet.

Aiyana [*resigning*]: Alright, just don't get back too late—and not too far, stay in places you recognize...

Jeremiah [*smiling at her worrying*]: Alright, Mom, alright.

[*Jeremiah strolls towards the door and takes his airpods out of the pockets to put in his ears.*]

Jeremiah [*holding up the airpods*]: Thanks again for these, Michael.

Michael [*solemnly*]: No problem, Jeremiah.

[*As Jeremiah exits, he pauses in the open doorway to put his hood over his head. The lights go down as the door closes behind him.*]

SCENE FIVE

[*The lights go up and the audience is back in Sandra and Giancarlo's house.*]

[*Giancarlo is standing in the living room with his mother, an older, bigger Italian woman with a dissatisfied and frustrated look.*]

Mrs. Moretti [*disgusted*]: A baby. A baby.

[*Mrs. Moretti shakes her head in disappointment.*]

Mrs. Moretti: A baby, Giancarlo, really?

Giancarlo: *Mamma*...

Mrs. Moretti: This is too soon. I told you not to marry her because she will do everything too soon. She even made you buy this house too soon, *propose* too soo—

Giancarlo [*interrupting*]: Sandra did not make me do anything, *Mamma*. I love her.

Mrs. Moretti: I know you think I am being dramatic but I know the type of American girl she is.

[*Giancarlo throws up his hands.*]

Giancarlo: The type of American girl she is? Who is that?

Mrs. Moretti: *Her* type of American girl. They are fast, they are troublemakers, they are...what do you call it...they are a...a...*aggressive*—sometimes they do drugs...

Giancarlo [*cutting her off*]: *Mamma. Abbastanza.* Her type of girl? You mean to say *black* girls. *Africanoamericano.*

Mrs. Moretti: You act like we do not get American TV in Italy.

Giancarlo [*scoffing*]: *TV.* That is how you know so much about black girls, *Mamma?* TV?

Mrs. Moretti: Do not talk down to your mother this way. I do not mean a TV show. I mean the American news. I see with my own eyes what they do. Always starting fights. Never in school or making money. That kind of girl is not a wife, not for my Giancarlo.

Giancarlo: I have had enough of this from you. *Sul serio.* Don't you realize you are not just insulting my wife anymore? This is your grandchild you are talking about.

Mrs. Moretti [*rolling her eyes*]: *Ridicolo.* I am an Italian. You are an Italian. My grandchild will be an Italian...

Giancarlo [*softly interrupting, as if delivering saddening news*]: No, *Mamma.* Not in America they won't be. Your grandchild is black here. Whether *you* like it...whether *they* like it...or not.

[*The two are interrupted by Sandra, now in a nice dress, coming in with Mrs. Moretti's jacket and tupperware.*]

Sandra [*handing her the items*]: Here's your jacket, Mrs. Moretti. I also packed you some food from dinner for the road.

Mrs. Moretti [*displeased*]: Oh, yes, more of those...that green...mush...

Sandra: Collard greens.

Mrs. Moretti [*giving a fake smile to Sandra and Giancarlo*]: *Fantastico.*

[*Giancarlo quickly helps his mother put her jacket on and walks her to the door.*]

Giancarlo: Goodbye, *Mamma.*

Mrs. Moretti [*kissing his cheeks*]: Goodbye, Giancarlo.

Sandra: Thank you for coming, Mrs. Moretti.

Mrs. Moretti: Congratulations again on your baby, Sandra. Good night.

[*The door closes behind her. There is a pause as Giancarlo faces the door.*]

Sandra: You know you didn't have to rush her out like that...

Giancarlo [*cutting her off*]: No. No, I did. You didn't hear what she was saying...

Sandra [*cutting him off*]: I did, actually. I heard all of it.

Giancarlo [*turning to face her*]: I don't understand how you don't say anything. How you are so nice to her?

Sandra: Because what would I say? If you, the man she sees her as her perfect, innocent, baby boy can't change her mind then how could I? C'mon, Gian.

Giancarlo [*sighing heavily*]: That is true.

Sandra: Besides, it's not like I see her that often.

[*Giancarlo seems to perk up at this, remembering something he has to tell her.*]

Giancarlo: Maybe if you spent more time together, she would understand you more.

Sandra: Giancarlo...

Giancarlo [*walking towards Sandra to hold her hands*]: Sandra, I mean it. If the two of you, my favorite girls in this whole world, spent time more time together...

Sandra [*cutting him off*]: She doesn't *want* to understand me more. She hasn't since the day you introduced us.

Giancarlo: This is different. You both have someone to bond over this time.

Sandra: Oh because we couldn't bond over you, her son, before?

Giancarlo: A baby is not the same, Sandra. When you raise a child with someone--

Sandra [*looking appalled*]: *Raise a child?* Do not try and tell me you want her to *come raise this child* with us.

Giancarlo: It's her grandchild.

Sandra: It's my baby.

Giancarlo: I am not saying that is untrue, I am just saying my mother could come over a few days a week to help with--

Sandra [*cutting him off*]: No. No. That's too much to ask, Gian.

Giancarlo: What happened to winning her over?

Sandra: This is different.

Giancarlo: How?

Sandra: I heard what she said Giancarlo. And so did you. What if we have a daughter? That daughter will be a black girl. I can't raise a black girl around a woman who thinks we're thugs and sluts and drop outs. I don't even want to know what she thinks about black boys.

[*Giancarlo opens his mouth to speak but is cut off.*]

Sandra: It doesn't even matter if we have a girl or boy, Giancarlo, the fact is that you can't raise a black baby around a woman who will constantly try to tell them they aren't black. I can't do that to them. They can deal with racist shit from their white family on holidays or whenever we go visit but I'm not letting them grow up around someone who's going to try and take that identity away from them.

[*Giancarlo looks down at the floor, nodding solemnly.*]

Sandra: I'm sorry if I blew up it's just...I want them to feel at home in their own skin.

[*Giancarlo kisses her temple.*]

Giancarlo: I know, and that's why we came here, to George Street, to make a home for them. And we will. We will be good parents. I know it.

[*A gunshot sounds and the lights fade to dark.*]

SCENE SIX

[The lights come up and the audience is back in Steven, Kathryn and Rachel's house, before the gunshot.]

[The Goodman's bust through the front door angrily after returning home from their family dinner.]

Rachel: I cannot believe you right now!

Steven: You're being ridiculous!

Kathryn: You two need to stop—you've already embarrassed us in front of the whole damn restaurant!

[Steven stops and turns around to face Kathryn and Rachel.]

Steven: No, Kathryn, what's embarrassing is that our daughter thinks we would just let her hop on a plane to that city with everything going on there right now...

Rachel: I don't even care what's going on there right now! It's all going to die down by the time summer's over anyways...

Steven *[staring hard at Rachel, in a serious voice]*: You. Are. Not. Going!

Rachel *[yelling back]*: Yes! I am! It's a once in a lifetime opportunity!

Kathryn *[interjecting with a raised voice to be heard, annoyed but not angrily]*: It is not a once in a lifetime opportunity, Rachel, don't be ridiculous!

Rachel: It is! Do you know how many people get accepted to do this internship? I can't turn it down because you two are worked up over nothing!

[Steven looks away incredulously and scoffs.]

Steven: Nothing? Nothing! How are those riots and protests "nothing," Rachel? They've been setting *fires*! They've been *looting* stores! They even *shot* a police officer! In what world is that nothing!

Rachel: It's going to be forgotten about by the end of the month for god's sakes! Everything will be back to normal! I'm not letting a bunch of angry rioters or *the two of you* stop me from moving to the city to take this internship!

Steven: You're not moving to the city, Rachel!

Rachel: Yes, I am!

Kathryn: It's not safe, Rachel! You can't act like the whole world is George Street!

Steven: George Street is barely safe as it is! They think they can just steal from anyone now!

[Rachel angrily storms over to the couch and sits with her arms crossed. Steven walks towards the garage door.]

Kathryn *[walking towards the couches]*: The point is, Rachel, that we raised you in a nice, safe neighborhood all your life and you chose a wonderful school in a nice, safe town and you've been sheltered from how some people in this country can be.

[Steven takes the keys out of his back pocket as he grabs the doorknob and it twists before he puts the key in the hole.]

Steven *[sounding panicked]*: Why is the garage door unlocked?

Rachel: I'm not letting those people get in the way of me getting ahead! You can't stop me from going!

Steven *[stepping into the garage and yelling]*: Why is the garage door unlocked dammit!

Kathryn: You can't expect us to just be okay with you taking a year off of school to live in a place where people burn their own neighborhoods down!

Rachel: Oh my god! Mom! I get school credit!

Kathryn: You're not going, Rachel!

Rachel: Yes, I am! I don't care about those people! I'm going!

[Steven steps out of the garage with a gun. Rachel and Kathryn turn to him, shocked.]

Rachel: What the fuck is that!

Kathryn: Steven, put that thing away!

Steven *[walking towards the window and peeking out the blinds]*: I saw someone. Outside. There's a man right outside our fucking house.

Rachel: You have a fucking gun in this house? With all the mass shootings in this country and you have a—

Steven [*not turning away from the window*]: —Not now, Rachel!

[*Kathryn walks to the garage door to look into the garage.*]

Kathryn: Steven, is anything missing?

Steven [*anxiously*]: Did you leave the garage door unlocked?

Rachel: Who's out there?

Steven [*louder*]: Did you leave the garage door unlocked?

Kathryn: I haven't been in the garage all day!

Steven [*turning away from the window and walking to the front door*]: And you want to go live in the fucking city!

Rachel [*yelling after him*]: Dad!

[*Steven throws the door open and walks out. Rachel runs to the window.*]

Kathryn: Steven, where are you—?

Rachel [*screams*]: Daddy!

[*The sound of a gunshot goes off and the lights dim.*]

INTERMISSION

SCENE ONE

[*The lights go up and the audience is in the Goodman's house. Steven is on the couch with his elbows on his knees, staring at the floor. Kathryn is next to him with her hand rubbing his back. Rachel is curled into a ball on the opposite end of the couch, drumming her fingers anxiously. They all look tired and distressed.*]

[*A lawyer sits at the chair beside the couch, leaning forward to look at the legal documents all over the coffee table.*]

Lawyer: So let's break this down again. You see the door to your house from the garage is unlocked so you go get the gun you keep in there for protection...

Kathryn: Do we really have to make him re-live this?

Lawyer: I'm sorry, Mrs. Goodman, but I need to have the story straight if I'm going to defend your husband against the murder charges.

[When he says "murder charges," Steven looks up, Kathryn looks into his lap and Rachel begins to cry, quietly.]

Lawyer: So you get the gun...

Steven *[with a scratchy voice]*: ...and I-I go to the...the, um, window, and I look out.

Lawyer *[reaching for a particular document he then reads off of]*: And you spot the African American male on your property, hunched over and concealing his face and hands.

[The lawyer looks up to confirm and Steven nods.]

Lawyer: And you approached while giving him two warnings—

Steven *[interrupting]*: —*Three*. I walked over and I asked him three times who he was and what he was doing just waiting outside my house like that an-and he ignored me so—

Lawyer *[interrupting after picking up a different document]*: Asked? Or told?

Kathryn *[looking offended]*: Excuse me?

Lawyer: Did you ask Jeremiah Simmons who he was and what he was doing on your property? Or did you tell him?

[Steven looks lost and opens his mouth then closes it.]

Lawyer *[while looking at document, reading from it in a monotone voice]*: Your next door neighbor told police she heard you say, "Get the fuck away from my house. Who the fuck do you think you are. Hey, you, get the fuck away from my house. You're a fucking criminal. What are you doing. I said, get the fuck away from me and my family."

[There's a pause and Steven swallows.]

Steven *[weakly]*: I...I...

Lawyer: You don't have to stress over that. We can always call it hearsay.

[*The lawyer puts the document back down on the coffee table and sifts through the rest.*]

Lawyer: And what happens next is...

Steven: He just...it just happened so fast. H-he made this sudden movement and he just—he turned towards me and m-my fight or flight—it just, it just kicked in and I...I...

Lawyer [*picking up the document he was looking for*]: And this is when you pulled the trigger. Twice.

[*Steven runs both hands down his face and Kathryn puts her face in his shoulder.*]

Steven: Yes.

Lawyer [*reading from the document*]: Then Simmons falls to his side, you approach him aiming the gun and poke him with your feet...

Steven: T-to see if he's okay. To see what happened...

Kathryn: It all just happened so fast...

Lawyer [*sympathetically*]: It always does. You're a parent, Mr. Goodman. A compassionate father. A loving husband. You've lived on George Street for twenty years now, you're a friendly neighbor. You were scared for your family and your community because you're a *good person*. And that's exactly how we're going to present you to the jury.

Kathryn [*beginning to cry*]: Yes. Yes, thank you. My husband is not the murderer they're trying to turn him into online.

Lawyer [*smiling*]: I know he's not a murderer, Mrs. Goodman. Anyone could've been in your husband's shoes. An unfamiliar man lingering outside your house in the dark, while your wife and child are inside, with his face and hands hidden in a sweatshirt, is a frightening experience. We can make the jury see that.

Steven: But the people online...

Lawyer: The people online are trying to demonize a man who experienced a misunderstanding. People aren't perfect. They don't know what it was like to look outside and see this...this *figure* outside your home. But if I do my job right, they will.

[Rachel finally turns to face them, wiping at her red eyes.]

Rachel: So you're going to make sure my dad doesn't go to jail?

Lawyer *[smiling at her]*: Yes.

[Lawyer sifts through some more documents on the table, gathering a few in his hands.]

Lawyer *[scanning through the documents]*: It might be a bit challenging since they have the advantage of the media already painting Williams as a martyr...he had just turned fifteen in May...a student...no criminal record...*but* here it says he was from an inner city. There's a dangerous culture out there, you know. We could work with that. I intend to use it in court.

[Lawyer sifts through the pages in his hands and then his Apple watch buzzes and he begins gathering all of his pages together.]

Lawyer *[placing papers in his suitcase]*: Well, I've got to meet with another client in thirty so I will keep in touch.

[Everyone but Rachel stands and they walk the lawyer to the door.]

Kathryn: Thank you, again.

Steven *[extending his hand]*: Thank you.

Lawyer *[shaking Steven's hand]*: It's no trouble. This nightmare will be over soon, Mr. Goodman.

[The lawyer walks out and Kathryn closes the door behind him. The lights dim.]

SCENE TWO

[The lights go up and the audience is back in Aiyana and Michael's house.]

[Michael is slowly and heavily pacing in the living room, his jacket in his hands. He keeps nervously walking to the bottom of the stairs, peering up, and opening his mouth to speak but changing his mind. He does this twice and then turns on the TV to stop himself, but it's a news report on Jeremiah's death.]

News Reporter *[white voice sounding from TV]*: It's been three days since Jeremiah Simmons, an unarmed African American teenager, was shot and killed by a neighborhood man on their

shared street, George Street, in a quiet suburb residents say is known for its friendliness and safety.

Neighborhood Woman [*white voice sounding from TV*]: All my neighbors are so kind, we all know each other, we're such a strong community, I really just don't understand how this could happen here, I really don't...

[*Michael cuts off the TV in frustration and throws the remote on the couch. He walks back over to the bottom of the stairs, still visibly anxious and calls up to Aiyana.*]

Michael [*calling her gently*]: Babe? You okay up there? You almost ready to go?

[*The audience hears Aiyana slowly making her way downstairs before eventually seeing her, looking very disheveled, with damp tissues in her hand and pockets of her black cardigan. Her eyes are red and she is visibly exhausted.*]

Aiyana: As ready as I can be.

Michael [*trying hard to sound okay*]: Okay, great, do you have your jacket?

[*Aiyana keeps walking slowly after reaching the bottom of the stairs, past Michael.*]

Aiyana: I've got to get it out the garage. I didn't think I'd need a black jacket in the summer so I never took it out...

Michael: That's okay! That's okay, I can—I'll get it out the garage, you sit tight.

[*Michael swiftly walks over the garage door and disappears into it. The audience can hear the sound of him rustling around through the boxes in there. Aiyana speaks weakly.*]

Aiyana [*stopping to lean against the arm of the chair when she reaches it*]: My parents got here early this morning.

Michael [*from the garage*]: You talked to them? How was their flight?

Aiyana: Probably too long. Too far.

Michael: Hopefully they had time to get some sleep...are you sure it's in the garage and not upstairs?

Aiyana: I looked up there already.

[*Sound of boxes moving in garage.*]

Aiyana: The flight has always been too long. That was always my excuse for never going back. *It's too far and I don't get enough days off, Jeremiah. It's too far and you're coming to visit in a few weeks anyways, Jeremiah. It's too far and I can call you to catch up any day you want, Jeremiah. It's too far and...It's too far and...It's too far and...* If it was too damn far then why would I leave? What mother leaves?

[*Michael emerges from the garage slowly with a black jacket. He sighs heavily.*]

Michael [*looking down at the jacket in his hands*]: Aiyana...

Aiyana: I didn't see the distance then. I saw The Dream. I saw everything I'd ever wanted. Right in reach. My own office. A Mercedes. A freshly mowed lawn. Silence to go with my morning coffee. A downtown with no bulletproof windows. Recognition from my boss. Proof that hard work pays off. It was all right here—so I needed to be. Even if they weren't.

Michael [*incredibly softly*]: That doesn't make you selfish, Aiyana.

Aiyana: No, it doesn't. Wanting the credit and the house and the salary isn't what makes me selfish.

[*Aiyana breathes in sharply.*]

Aiyana: Darryl and I...our marriage was...he had already told me he didn't love me anymore by the time I got the job offer. He said something about how I was in love with the man I *thought* I could turn him into. How he...he resented me for that. I think that's why he didn't really argue when I said I wanted to take it, to go, to leave. You know what he said instead? He said, "Get on that plane if you want but my son is staying with me." *My son is staying with me.* As if he wasn't even mine. As if it wasn't him I dragged my ass to that shitty job for everyday. As if the only reason I put up with anything in that city wasn't Jeremiah.

Michael: Of course he was yours.

Aiyana: Of course he was mine. He was my son. My responsibility. My priority. The one thing in this world I would've done anything to protect. I thought I was protecting him. I thought it was easier to walk away from what coulda turned into a nasty custody battle, and send home the checks that would keep him off the street and in a good basketball program, that would pay for school, that would keep the lights on even if Darryl couldn't—a-and Darryl, he promised to get a real job. To quit smoking. To be better. And he did it. The moment I said I would leave he became the man and the father we always needed him to be. It looked easier—it looked *safer* to leave.

Michael: Nothing about that is something to be ashamed of, Aiyana. You didn't—

Aiyana [*interrupting*]: —No, no, lemme finish. I moved to George Street in the summer. On my first night, I called Darryl. We weren't speaking. We officially signed divorce papers and didn't talk unless we had to—you know, for our kid. So I called him. And he put Jeremiah straight on the phone instead of saying hello. And I remember listening to what he was saying, about his day at school, how Dad had let him get McDonald's for dinner, all that. And in the background I heard these pops. These bursts. Explosions. And I felt that sudden...*feeling* you get living in the city when you're trying to figure out if the pops are bullets or fireworks. And I remember thinking, *I made it. I made it out alive. I'm so happy that I'm not there.*

[*Aiyana and Michael both look up and really look at each other for the first time since the conversation started. They pause like this.*]

Aiyana: That's what made me selfish. That's what I should be ashamed of. I heard danger and I thanked god I had gotten out of there. I left my son back there. In a place I was afraid of dying in. I left my son.

[*Aiyana's voice cracks at the end and she wipes at her tearing eyes.*]

Aiyana [*trying to steady her breath*]: You know, I told you about how I was afraid all the time. Afraid something would happen to him. And I was, everyday, every minute. From the moment I woke up until after I went to sleep I was afraid for that boy. But apart of me thinks I was more afraid to go back. More afraid of going back to the city and seeing the unemployment and the crime and the homelessness they just shove behind numbers and statistics now, and that I would see it, really see what conditions I had left Jeremiah in, and regret everything. I loved my job and I loved my life here and I was afraid if I went the distance, if I went back to the city, I would have to regret leaving him there. I was afraid I had done something to protect him and that I was wrong. I was selfish and I didn't want to be wrong. And instead of going back to see if I was really, truly wrong I fought with Darryl until he let Jeremiah come live with us. Because I wanted to protect him but I didn't want to go back and see that. See what I left.

[*Aiyana begins to cry and it is clear in her voice.*]

Aiyana [*weeping*]: I did something to protect him and I was wrong, Michael. I was so, so wrong. And he got killed for it. For *my* mistake. I wanted him here so badly. *So badly.* And I got him killed, *I killed my son.*

[*Michael rushes over and sweeps up Aiyana into his arms, hugging her tight as if preventing her from slumping over and falling to pieces.*]

Michael: Shh, don't say that.

Aiyana [*voice watery from continuous crying*]: I did it, I did this!

[Michael presses her into him and rubs her back as if handling an infant.]

Michael: Shhhh...

[Michael continues consoling her as Aiyana's cries grow quieter. The lights dim slowly.]

SCENE THREE

[The lights go up in Giancarlo and Sandra's house. A lawyer is sitting in the middle of the couch, papers neatly laid out on the coffee table in front of him. He is holding a notepad and pen which he is balancing on right thigh. He has glasses and a very serious-looking face. He is black. Sandra is sitting in the chair to his right while Giancarlo is standing across from her, resting against the stairs' bannister.]

Lawyer #2: Around what time was it when you heard the gunshots?

Giancarlo: Oh, I do not quite remember.

[Sandra is visibly antsy, gripping both arms of the chair and bouncing her leg.]

Sandra: Well, what time did your mother leave?

Giancarlo: I don't know, 8:00? 8:15?

Sandra *[insistently]*: Well, which one?

Giancarlo *[sensing her hostility]*: 8:15.

[The lawyer nods and writes it down, Sandra tries to peer at what he's writing.]

Lawyer #2 *[turning to Giancarlo]*: You said your mother was here?

Giancarlo: Yes, this is true.

Lawyer #2: Coming from where?

Giancarlo: *Torino*. In Italy.

Lawyer #2: Yes, I'm familiar. My niece studied abroad in Turin, Italy last spring.

Giancarlo: Oh, how nice—

Sandra [*annoyed*]: Do you have anymore questions?

Lawyer #2: Yes.

[*The lawyer clears his throat and pushes his glasses up his nose.*]

Lawyer #2: What was the occasion? Anything special?

Giancarlo: She came to eat dinner. We were telling her for the first time that we are expecting.

Lawyer #2 [*turning to Sandra and smiling*]: Congratulations.

Sandra [*tersely*]: Thank you.

Sandra [*after a moment*]: I'm sorry, can I ask how this is relevant?

[*The lawyer sighs and puts his notepad and pen on the coffee table. He leans forward in her direction, putting his elbows on his thighs.*]

Lawyer #2 [*deeper, more serious tone*]: Mrs. Moretti, you and I both know what happened to Jeremiah Simmons that night in front of Steven Goodman's house. I'm not here to find out exactly how he was killed, I'm here to find out exactly what we can use to try and win this case, because as we both know, it doesn't happen for us very often.

[*Sandra nods slowly.*]

Lawyer #2: So to do that, I'm focusing less on the actual details you tell me but about who you are and who you were in that moment. I want to be able to use you both as witnesses in court, and it's *critical* to know you're witnesses before they walk into a courtroom. All I ask, Mrs. Moretti, is that you let me get to know you as best I can.

[*Sandra nods again.*]

Sandra: I'm sorry, it's all so...*overwhelming*. I just want to see justice for this boy.

Giancarlo: We all do.

[*The lawyer and Sandra both seem as if they just noticed Giancarlo is still in the room.*]

Lawyer #2: So, you said your mother came from Turin. I'm assuming that's where your accent comes from?

Giancarlo: Sì. I lived there until I came to America for university.

Lawyer #2: You came here for opportunity then, correct?

Giancarlo: Of course. Nearly everyone I knew at school in Italy went to America. The smart students at least.

Lawyer #2: So America was where you went if you were smart.

Giancarlo: If you had a dream. And was determined to make the dream come true.

Lawyer #2: Do you think that's true?

Giancarlo: I finished university. I have a job. I live here. I have a beautiful wife. I am going to be a father. All my dreams came true. America did that for me.

[Sandra laughs sarcastically under her breath.]

Giancarlo: What?

Sandra: You can't really believe that. Not after this.

Giancarlo: I do believe it. I believe in this country. What happened to that boy is not who America is.

Sandra: Really? You think so? Because it's actually *exactly* who America is...

Lawyer #2 [*interrupting their argument*]: Alright, Mr. and Mrs. Moretti, my next question is about after you heard the gunshots. What happened?

Giancarlo: We went outside to see what happened and saw Steven Goodman walking across his front lawn to the sidewalk, and he stops at this dark...uh...*mucchio*?

Sandra [*helping him remember the word*]: Heap. The heap of body on the sidewalk.

Giancarlo: Oh yes, he stops at the heap on the sidewalk and touches it with his foot. I thought it was a cat or raccoon or something for a few moments.

Sandra: He kicked his body like he was some dead animal. It was disgusting.

Lawyer #2: You feel strongly about it.

Sandra: Well, how could I not? He killed someone, killed someone's little boy, a black boy, right next door to our house.

Lawyer #2: This is personal to you.

Sandra: Is it not personal to *you*?

Giancarlo: Stop answering him with questions, Sandra.

Sandra: Yes, it's personal. I'm a black woman living in *America*, I know how ugly it gets. And yes, I am *personally* offended and *personally* angry and upset and disappointed that this is happening.

Lawyer #2: I'm assuming I can conclude that you *don't* believe in America?

Sandra [*looking at Giancarlo*]: Never have, never will.

[*The lawyer's phone rings and he takes out of his pocket to see who's calling.*]

Lawyer #2: Excuse me, Mrs. Moretti, I just need a minute to step outside and take this call.

[*Sandra motions towards the door and the lawyer leaves to do this. When the door closes behind him, Giancarlo exhales loudly and walks forward a step so he's no longer leaning on the bannister.*]

Giancarlo: This is intense...

Sandra [*interrupting*]: Do you really think that? That this isn't who America is?

Giancarlo [*crossing his arms as if preparing to get defensive*]: Yes, Sandra, I really believe that. I have not seen reason not to.

Sandra: What, this isn't good enough for you?

Giancarlo: I do not believe in blaming a whole group for the choice of one person. Steven Goodman made a horrible and wrong choice, but he is not America.

[*Sandra laughs sarcastically under her breath again.*]

Sandra: He's as American as it gets, Gian. The house in the suburbs, the freshly cut grass on his lawn, the flowers in the windows, the nice car in the driveway. He's living the dream the rest of us actually have to work for.

Giancarlo: Who is the “rest of us”?

Sandra: Forget it.

Giancarlo: No, who is the rest of us?

Sandra: I said forget it, Giancarlo. Just let it go.

[The two begin talking over each other for a moment so that speech is incomprehensible.]

Sandra *[louder so it stands out among the bickering]*: Well the “rest of us” is obviously not white men like you.

[There is a long pause, then the lawyer enters again.]

Lawyer #2 *[going to sit back where he was]*: Alright folks, let’s try this again.

[The lights dim.]

SCENE FOUR

[The lights go up in the Goodman’s living room again, this time with Rachel on the phone, facing the front door and leaning against the back of the chair facing the living room as Kathryn comes downstairs softly. Her daughter doesn’t notice her. She is carrying a half eaten plate of food.]

Rachel *[into the phone]*: I...I don’t think I understand...

[Kathryn walks up behind her silently, stopping to bend and place the tray on the coffee table as she listens.]

Rachel *[into the phone]*: So...so that’s it? You’re firing me?

[Kathryn is visibly concerned.]

Rachel *[into the phone]*: Because my fa—my father isn’t the one interning, what does he have to do with the campaign?

[Rachel listens.]

Rachel *[into the phone]*: No, you’re *not* sorry—you know what? Goodbye.

[Rachel hangs up and looks up at the ceiling, covering her eyes with her hands. She turns around and when she drops her arms to her side is startled to see Kathryn.]

Rachel *[exhaling]*: Mom.

Kathryn: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you.

Rachel *[wiping at her eyes]*: What are you even doing?

Kathryn *[gesturing to the tray]*: Well, I was taking the food your father barely ate back down to the kitchen since he's refusing to get out of bed.

Rachel: And you stopped to eavesdrop?

Kathryn: Honey, what's wrong?

[Rachel sighs and drops down into the seat.]

Rachel: The first third female mayor. She had her staff fire me. Apparently having the daughter of a man involved in a murder trial is bad publicity.

Kathryn: Oh, Rachel...

Rachel: No, no, it's fine. There'll be other internships.

[Kathryn pauses to sit on the edge of the coffee table across from Rachel and touches her knee.]

Kathryn *[softly]*: I just know how much this one meant to you.

[Rachel takes a deep breath and blinks rapidly, as if trying not to cry.]

Rachel: It's just...this is so *unfair*.

Kathryn: I know.

Rachel: I didn't even *do* anything. I didn't even get to go to my first day.

Kathryn *[nodding understandingly]*: I know, Rachel.

Rachel: And what bad publicity would I draw? I'm a good student, I care about people, I do the right thing. I don't deserve this.

Kathryn: Not at all.

Rachel [*quieter*]: And Dad doesn't either.

Kathryn: No, he doesn't.

[*The two look down at the floor in silence for a moment.*]

Rachel: We're not racists, are we?

[*Kathryn looks up suddenly and the two look at each other for another moment.*]

Kathryn [*whispering*]: Of course not. *Of course* not.

Rachel: I know they think we are. That's why they fired me.

Kathryn: You have never been that type of person. Never, Rachel.

Rachel: I mean, it's not like I walk around in a white hood and support slavery. We voted for *Hillary* for god sakes.

[*The two pause again.*]

Rachel [*softly*]: We're not bad people, right, Mom?

Kathryn [*softly*]: We're not.

Rachel: I mean, it's not like Dad shot him because he was...African American, right? He shot him because he was on our lawn, in the dark, at *night*. How could he have known how old he was or what he was doing there?

Kathryn: He couldn't have.

Rachel: And how is it his fault that he wanted to defend his family from this...this *guy* just outside our house? Right?

[*Kathryn nods solemnly.*]

Rachel: I mean, what was he even doing here? Stopping right here? This isn't his house. This is barely even his neighborhood. He can't just show up in places that aren't his and act like they are. They do this all the tim—

[*Rachel and Kathryn both look up to stare at each other at the exact same time, horrified.*]

Rachel [*stammering*]: I-I didn't mean...

Kathryn: I know you didn't.

Rachel: I didn't mean they. It just slipped out...

[*Kathryn stands quickly.*]

Kathryn [*sternly, as if defensive*]: I know you didn't, Rachel. Okay?

[*Kathryn takes the tray of food and brings it into the kitchen, leaving Rachel alone. The lights dim.*]

SCENE FIVE

[*The lights go up and the audience is back in Aiyana and Michael's house.*]

[*Aiyana is slumped in the chair beside the couch, staring at a bunch of food in tupperware on the coffee table. She looks physically exhausted with dark bags under her eyes. She is dressed in black.*]

[*Michael walks in from the kitchen, also dressed in black.*]

Michael [*softly*]: I don't know if we can fit anymore tupperware in the fridge...how much is left?

Aiyana [*closing her eyes with her face to the ceiling*]: Mac and cheese, a sweet potato pie, two things of collard greens, pasta, catfish and cornbread.

Michael: Wow, that's...that's a lotta—

Aiyana: Black people and their comfort food.

[*Michael gives a small laugh and walks over to the edge of the coffee table nearest his wife and moves some tupperware over so he can sit on the edge and face her. He takes her crossed foot and slides her black heels off her feet for her.*]

Michael [*sighing as he slips off the shoes*]: Yeah, well, I think everyone needs the comfort right now.

Aiyana [*voice breaking*]: Yeah, we do.

Michael [*looking heartbroken with her feet in his hands*]: C'mon, Aiyana, let's go to bed.

Aiyana: Not yet. It's only seven.

Michael: You've barely slept.

Aiyana: I'm not tired.

Michael: You're exhausted.

Aiyana: My baby's dead, I'm always gonna be exhausted.

[*Michael looks down into his lap, solemnly and Aiyana opens her eyes. The whole room seems to hold it's breath.*]

Aiyana [*taking her bare feet out of Michael's lap*]: You should go up, you've been on your feet all day.

[*Michael begins to protest.*]

Aiyana: —I promise I'll come up, I just need a minute.

[*Michael stands up and bends forward to kiss Aiyana's forehead.*]

Michael: I love you.

Aiyana: I love you, too.

[*Michael goes upstairs. Aiyana exhales and closes her eyes again. After a long pause, the doorbell rings. Aiyana stays in her seat but it rings again. On the third ring, she pulls herself up with a lot of effort.*]

[*Aiyana opens the door and Sandra steps inside with tupperware in hand.*]

Aiyana: Sandra...

Sandra: I'm sorry to be showing up late like this but I...I just...I had to bring you something. I just, I had to—it's collard greens.

Aiyana: How...how thoughtful. Thank you, Sandra. If you could set it over there...

[Aiyana points at the coffee table and Sandra walks over and sees all the food they already have. Aiyana walks behind her, slower.]

Sandra *[speaking frantically]*: Oh god, I'm an idiot. Of course you have food already. I'm so sorry, you don't have to take this, I'll bring something else, whatever you need—

Aiyana *[slumping back down into the chair]*: Sandra.

[Aiyana gestures to the couch and closes her eyes again. Sandra sits tightly with the tinfoil in lap, looking around the room and at Aiyana who hasn't said anything. She stares, confusedly, for a long pause.]

Sandra: So, should I come back or...?

Aiyana *[eyes still closed]*: You know I had to cancel his first appointment with Dr. Carter? She's a pediatrician. I found her right before he came so he could get all the shots he needed before school started. He still went to a *pediatrician*. He was going to show up at that office, look away when they drew blood because needles make his stomach turn, and then they were going to stick a bandaid with cartoon characters over his arm. Cartoon characters.

[Aiyana opens her eyes and sits up, looking at all the food on the coffee table.]

Aiyana: He was so afraid of needles, afraid of blood. Look at where we are. He never knew this is what I was afraid of.

[Sandra opens her mouth helplessly, at a loss for words. Aiyana rubs her eyes, as if waking and remembering Sandra is there.]

Aiyana: You said anything I need...you know what I need? An undo button. A magic wand. A time machine if that's easier. I would've never let him walk out this house with that damn hoodie on. Or those headphones in. You'd think a black mother would know these things but I've never really been a good one, have I...?

Sandra: Aiyana, that's not true. Don't say that—

Aiyana: —You asked me three days ago my advice for raising a black child on George Street.

Sandra *[gently]*: You said to love them like I'm running out of time.

Aiyana *[straining her voice]*: I change my mind. Don't love them like you're running out of time. If they're black, they're already out of time. Love them like it's too late. It always is.

[The lights dim.]

SCENE SIX

[The lights go up in Giancarlo and Sandra's house. There is no one in the room until suddenly, the front door swings open and Sandra walks in. The door closes loudly and firmly behind her and she takes off her jacket as she walks over to the chair opposite the stairs. She lays the jacket on and then bends forward as she begins to cry, her arms supporting her by resting one hand on the chair while the other clutches her stomach.]

Giancarlo: Sandra? *Bellissima?*

[The sound of Giancarlo coming down the stairs sounds and then he appears, barrelling down the stairs quickly. Sandra immediately straightens up and wipes her very visibly puffy and teary face.]

Giancarlo: What's wrong?

Sandra *[shaking her head and sniffing]*: Nothing.

Giancarlo *[walking up to her and stroking her shoulders]*: No, what's wrong?

Sandra *[tougher]*: I said nothing, I'm fine.

Giancarlo *[urgent with worry]*: What happened? Did something happen?

Sandra: Gian, please. Nothing happened.

Giancarlo: Something happened at the Taylor house...

Sandra *[pushing his arms off her shoulders and brushing past him to sit on the couch]*: I'm pregnant and emotional and my feet hurt and I'm craving food! It's nothing!

[Giancarlo pauses to look at her sadly as he watches her take off her shoes slowly, as if worn down.]

Giancarlo *[softly, hurt]*: Why are you shutting me away?

[Sandra sighs.]

Sandra: Shut you *out*. I'm not trying to shut you out.

[Sandra looks up at him and he looks at her sadly.]

Sandra [*gently, trying to sound happier*]: I'm just hungry, okay? I've been craving sweet and salty stuff all week long. I ate a sandwich with *peanut butter and bacon* yesterday.

[*They both laugh lightly.*]

Giancarlo [*smiling slightly*]: That is disgusting, Sandra.

Sandra [*smiling back*]: I know.

[*There's a pause.*]

Sandra: Right now I'm kinda in the mood for some chips and ice cream, but we have none left in the kitchen...

Giancarlo [*jokingly sighing*]: I will have to go get some then.

[*Sandra smiles up at him playfully and he walks over to kiss her on the cheek. Then he walks to the door where his jacket is hanging on the wall, puts it on and walks out the front door. There is a pause as she waits to hear him get in the car, and when we hear the door close, she stands up and goes to the window and watches him drive away as the car is heard pulling out the driveway. When alone, Sandra pulls out her phone.*]

Sandra: Hello, is there any chance Robert James is in his office? ...

[*Sandra waits for an answer.*]

Sandra: He is? Of course he is. May I speak to him please?

[*Sandra leans back into the couch, immediately at ease.*]

Sandra: If he's in a meeting, you can tell him his daughter is calling.

[*Sandra waits a moment, moving her shoes aside and re-adjusting herself so that her feet are on the couch, knees together and pulled into her chest.*]

Sandra: Hi, Daddy...yes, I'm good, baby's good, Gian's good, everything's good...the new neighborhood? Have I adjusted yet?

[*Sandra inhales and looks down at her lap.*]

Sandra: Well, I was. Not so much anymore.

[Sandra looks up and blinks hard, clearly about to cry again.]

Sandra *[voice breaking]*: It's just...a boy, a black boy, was killed three days ago, Daddy. And I'm just, I'm so...

[Sandra looks at the ceiling, her face conveying she's looking for the right words.]

Sandra: I'm afraid.

[Sandra sniffs.]

Sandra: ...I know, I meant to tell you sooner...Yes, I'm perfectly safe here, I'm fine...We didn't know him. I just met his mother that very same day he...he died.

[Sandra wipes a tear away from her eye.]

Sandra: ...Yes, they brought up criminal charges...No, he wasn't arrested...Their lawyer came to interview Giancarlo and I as witnesses today...I'm not going to walk you through everything I said, Dad...I already know they won't pick me, the man could tell how I biased I was...God, you're such a lawyer. You can't even help it.

[Sandra smiles to herself a little bit.]

Sandra: ...It's just, I never had to deal with this, you know? You wore a suit to the office at your firm everyday, we came home to a safe apartment building where no one really knew their neighbors, we took public transportation to wherever we wanted to go so I knew anybody could end up anywhere. It didn't matter if someone looked unfamiliar, almost everyone was. I just, I'm not used to living with people who act so friendly but are so guarded and, and *possessive* over what they've decided is theirs, it's just, it's—

[Sandra pauses and then laughs.]

Sandra: I'm "just not used to suburban white people"? Really, Dad?

[She pauses.]

Sandra: Well, in a way I guess you're right. I'm not used to the quiet or the assumption that I'm Giancarlo's housekeeper when I answer the door or the fact that I am constantly reminded that they see me as just...*less*. You know, I knew we didn't have it all when I was growing up. We got winter coats at Goodwill every winter. Mom brought coupons to every trip to the grocery store. I knew you were a public defender and Mom was a teacher and that your careers weren't exactly gold mines but I knew you both loved what you did when you went to work everyday. I never

once had to question if we would still have a roof over our heads or food on the table. Every Christmas I woke up to gifts.

[She pauses and smiles at something he says.]

Sandra: And yes, you paid my college tuition even though I didn't get the financial aid you needed me to get. But I was surrounded by black people who were doing the exact same thing. All the adults I knew wore their nice shoes to church on Sundays too, they complained about the rent getting too high and their old spots getting gentrified. They sent their kids to colleges they couldn't pay full tuition for, they loved the Jackson's like they knew them and they supported each other because no one could really do it on their own. I had a black community when I came home and here...

[Sandra sighs.]

Sandra: ...Here we've got boys dead in the streets for wearing hoodies at night. And no one knows what it feels like to go from that to this but me. No one around me at least.

[She pauses.]

Sandra: That's why I called. To hear your voice. I needed to remind myself there's a black community somewhere. There's gotta be a safe place somewhere...right?

[Sandra pauses.]

Sandra: O-oh, don't worry about it Daddy, I know you've got work to do. We're gonna try and visit soon. I need a break from all this....Yes, I promise to call later...I love you more.

[Sandra hangs up. The lights dim.]

INTERMISSION

SCENE ONE

[Aiyana is standing at the window, peeking through the blinds as she did during her first scene. She is antsy but not pacing, just leaning against the window as if she is too weak to stand. The sound of a car pulling into the driveway and then a person getting out and shutting the door brings her fully to her feet. The doorbell rings and Aiyana swallows hard and pushes her hair out of her face as she walks over to answer the door with a forced casualness.]

[Aiyana opens the door and a man with a very distinct difference in dress from all other characters walks in. He is clearly not from George Street and appears angry. He seems guarded, doesn't take his hands out of his pockets and stands very squarely, like the room is too big and too small at the same time.]

Aiyana: Hello, Darryl.

[Aiyana is eyeing him intensely, almost dissecting him with her eyes. It's clear she hasn't seen him in a long time. He is looking everywhere but at her, eyeing her entire living room in disgust. He walks as if trying hard not to touch anything. Looks out of place.]

Darryl *[dryly]*: Not as big as you made it sound. Where do all your little butlers sleep?

Aiyana: I never said it was big. Just bigger. I know it's not a mansion—

Darryl *[interrupting to point at the TV]*: A flat screen? Impressive. You must got cable, too.

Aiyana: Darr—

[Takes a tentative step onto the carpet, as if his stained timbs will ruin it.]

Darryl: Now, *this*, this shit looks exotic. Where you got it from? Morocco? Bangladesh?

Aiyana *[tersely]*: Made in China.

Darryl *[smiles to himself coldly]*: Bet you were impressed I knew the names of those places, though. We both know I don't get out much.

[Aiyana takes a few steps towards Darryl as he lifts the edge of a throw blanket with the tip of his thumb.]

Darryl: What? Cashmere?

Aiyana: It's not cashm—

Darryl: Surprised you don't got no lion's fur or some fancy shit like that.

Aiyana: Darryl, *please*, just—

Darryl: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. You just spent so much time hyping this damn place up...I just expected more.

[Aiyana looks down at the floor and then turns her back to him as her hand covers her mouth and she sniffles, trying not to cry.]

[Darryl surveys the few photos on the mantel below the TV beside the candles and vase. He then walks back to the center of the living room, positioning himself behind the coffee table and in the center of the couch, and with one big exhale, shrugs off his denim jacket, throws it on the chair to his right, wraps himself in the throw blanket and puts his feet up on the coffee table, kicking off his timbs which land haphazardly on the floor. He snuggles into the couch cushions.]

[Aiyana turns slowly, wiping her eyes and sees Darryl. She looks horrified.]

Aiyana [*angrily*]: Okay, what is this? What the fuck is this, Darryl?

[Darryl laughs to himself as he pulls the blanket into him tighter.]

Aiyana: This is a joke to you?

Darryl [*still laughing*]: Aiyana, baby, don't you get it? Yes. Yes! Yes, this is a joke to me. I look absolutely fucking *ridiculous* right now.

[Darryl throws the blanket off of him and stands quickly.]

Darryl: I mean, I look like a game of Spot the Fucking Difference. I don't look like I belong here.

[Darryl gestures all around the room, pointing as he names objects.]

Darryl: ...with your flat screen TV and your flower pot and your fancy ass blanket. Your *coasters* and your *welcome mat* and your *paved driveway* and *mowed lawn*. I know this table ain't from a fucking Ikea. We don't belong here. We never will—

Aiyana [*offended*]: Oh no, Darryl, don't even start that shit with me. We'll never belong here? I've made a name for myself at my job here. I earned every piece of furniture in this house. I've paid my lawn mowers every cent they've ever charged me. And yes, I have fucking coasters, because I paid too damn much to get water ringlets on this oakwood coffee table...

[Aiyana trails off as she notices Darryl has begun laughing to himself.]

Aiyana: What's funny?

Darryl: You thought I meant us. When I said "we."

[Aiyana's arms drop to her side, the defensiveness and anger evaporating.]

Darryl: Jeremiah always looked like me. Always. Couldn't've convinced Stevie Wonder he wasn't my son. I may not have always been there for him the way a father should but I couldn't've left if I damn well tried. That boy wore me on his face. The best of me. The parts of me I still liked.

[The two pause for a long time, both looking at the floor. Darryl walks around to the front side of the coffee table and sits as he reaches for his shoes, strewn on the floor. With his elbows on his knees and one shoe in his hands dangling between his legs, he stops.]

Darryl: That's why I know he never woulda belonged here. He woulda grown up to be *this*. Woulda grown up to be *me*. So big and black he'd dirty up your cashmere blankets. He'd leave water spots on your bougie ass wood. He'd track a mess up in your pretty little house because the welcome mat wouldn't've been enough to stop him. He woulda come in your house after hours of playing basketball smelling like sweat. He woulda talked too loud on the phone with his boys back in the city. He woulda grown up to be a reminder of what you hate the most—*home*.

Aiyana [*stammering*]: Th-that's not fair. That's not fair.

Darryl: Am I wrong? You acted all sad about leaving, like I ripped Jeremiah from you, but he was never in the plan in the first place. It was always about you getting out of here. No one would stop you. Not even us.

Aiyana: S-stop it.

[Darryl steps towards Aiyana.]

Darryl [*pointing at photos on the mantel below the TV*]: There's not a damn photo in this whole room of who you used to be. Not a single picture of someone from back home. You got baby photos of that damn husband of yours but none of you. How come, Aiyana? How many school pictures I sent you in the mail? How many of his homemade Mother's Day cards did I stick in an envelope for you? We were almost broke enough to be on food stamps and I spent money and time on buying postage stamps to send shit to you and not a single one made it into this room. It's like Lil 'Yana From Eighty Seventh never existed. You know who Jeremiah spent Mother's Days with? Your mom. When was the last time you called her, huh? When was the last time you called her? You know how much time I spent dodging questions about why Mommy lives all the way over there when all the other mommies on the block are waiting to pick up their boys when they get outta school?

Aiyana [*sniffles and pushes hair out her face*]: I'm not letting you make me feel like a terrible person for having this job. You can't make me feel terrible for being successful. For wanting to stay that way. You can't, Darryl.

[Darryl takes more steps toward her.]

Darryl: What I *shoulda* told him was Mommy lives all the way over there because she'd rather have the coasters and the oakwood than have to spend one more second here with you.

Aiyana [*shouting*]: *I did it because I love him!*

Darryl [*shouting back*]: *Don't give me that bullshit, Aiyana!*

[The two begin yelling at each other to the point of the dialogue being incomprehensible, Aiyana continuing to insist that she did it for Jeremiah while Darryl says she's just selfish. They walk towards each other until they are in each other's faces, yelling.]

Aiyana [*shouting her loudest*]: I did everything for him! You think it's easy walking away from everything you've ever known? God, no! I did it because I loved him more than anything in this world!

Darryl [*shouting even louder*]: No! You didn't! Because I did! I stayed with him! I refused to let him go! I was the one who couldn't imagine life without him! I was the one who made sure he had cake every birthday! I was the one who read him the same story three times in a row every night before he'd go to bed! I was his Santa Claus and his Tooth Fairy and his Easter Bunny! I quit smoking for him! I got a job I hated for him! I kept the water and the lights on for him! I was at rock bottom! It woulda been easy to let you take care of him on your own! I could barely take care of myself! It woulda been easy! But I didn't let you take him! Because the only thing I liked about myself was how I loved that boy! How that boy was mine! I was the one who loved him more than anything!

[Darryl's voice breaks and you can hear in his voice he is fighting back tears.]

Darryl [*voice weepy, he aggressively hits his chest with every "me"*]: I did! It was me! It was me! Me! Me! Me!

[Aiyana looks scared for him almost as she gently grabs his wrists to stop him from hitting his chest. He finally calms down and bends his head to meet his hands, his wrists still in Aiyana's light grip, and sobs for a few seconds. She is silent.]

[Darryl sniffles and gently pulls his hands away from hers and takes a step back.]

Darryl [*quietly, his voice still shaky*]: The only thing I liked about myself was how I loved that boy. I never loved anything harder in my life. I never wanted him to come here.

[Darryl looks up, as if remembering where he is.]

Darryl: But *you* convinced me. *You* told me he'd be better off here. *You* told me I was hurting him keeping him in the city. *You* told me he'd be safe. And a few weeks and a three hundred fifty dollar plane ticket later, I'm standing here to come and pick up his stuff and I've never felt more unsafe in my life.

[Darryl sits back down at the coffee table to put his shoes back on.]

Darryl *[tying his shoes]*: You know, at least in the city, the white people too afraid to come near us. They stay in their little gentrified neighborhoods. Pretend we aren't there. Don't walk on our sides of the block when it gets dark. Warn their friends to stay away from us. The white people here? They smile at you. Wave at you while they water their flowers in their front yards and shit. They look you up and down and ask you if you lost. If you don't pay attention, you might think they friendly or something. But turn your back for a second—a split second—and they've killed your son. Killed a child like pulling up the weeds growing in their driveways. We don't got those in the city.

[Darryl stands once his shoes are tied and reaches for his jacket, which he shrugs back on.]

Darryl *[clears his throat]*: Now, I'd like Jeremiah's things back. Now.

Aiyana *[chokes out the words, which are slightly above a whisper]*: This way.

[Aiyana leads the way up the stairs to his old bedroom. Darryl follows behind.]

[The lights dim.]

SCENE TWO

[The lights go up in the Goodman's living room. Steven is at the far left end of the couch, one elbow on the arm of it, bouncing his leg with impatience and nerves, his thumb and forefinger holding his chin as he stares off into space. He's interrupted by the sound of Rachel and Kathryn emerging from the garage with hands full of games. They walk over and set them down on the coffee table.]

Rachel *[trying to be perky]*: We've got Battleship, Sorry!, Clue, Scrabble, Chess...

Kathryn: We could play Monopoly, Uno, Yahtzee...whatever you want, honey.

Steven *[solemnly]*: Or you could let me watch the news.

Kathryn *[shoulders drooping]*: The news isn't going to make you feel any better, Steven.

Steven: Then let me read the paper.

Rachel [*gently*]: It's not going to be any different, Daddy.

Steven [*slightly frustrated*]: Then at least let me read the mail for Christ sakes, I can't just sit around and play games after my lawyer calls me to tell me he's got to come over to talk.

Rachel: You already read the mail, it's right here.

[*Rachel reaches for the coffee table and picks up the stack of opened envelopes.*]

Steven: Well go check if there's more, then.

[*Rachel and Kathryn look at each other, worried, but Rachel shrugs and goes to the door but when she opens it, the lawyer is there about to knock.*]

Rachel [*moving aside to let him in*]: Oh, hi.

[*Rachel closes the door behind him and Kathryn and Steven both stand upon seeing the lawyer as he walks towards them to sit at the side chair he sat in last time. Steven turns to Rachel as he sits down.*]

Steven: The mail, Rachel?

Rachel: Daddy...

Kathryn: Your father wants you to go check on the mail.

[*Rachel exhales, annoyed, but leaves the adults alone.*]

Kathryn [*to the lawyer*]: So...?

[*The lawyer puts his briefcase up on the coffee table and takes a breath, looking into each of their faces.*]

Lawyer: They dropped the charges.

[*Kathryn looks at Steven who is frozen.*]

Kathryn: What?

Lawyer [*breaking into a smile*]: The prosecutors. They dropped the charges.

[Kathryn smiles and exhales with relief, hugging Steven who is still immobile.]

Kathryn: Oh my, oh my god! Th-they, they, they just dropped it? Just like that?

Lawyer: Sometimes prosecutors know when the jury will be in favor of the defendant and so, to not waste their time or their client's time, they just drop the charges so everyone can move on with their lives.

Kathryn [*ecstatic*]: This is just...Oh! This is great news!

Lawyer [*turning to Steven*]: I wanted to tell you in person, Mr. Goodman. Consider yourself a free man.

[The lawyer extends his hand and after looking at it for a beat, Steven seems to remember where he is and shakes it. Kathryn stands and walks the lawyer to the door.]

Kathryn: We really just cannot thank you enough for believing in him through all of this. I know it was a short time but we really do appreciate everything. Thank you so, so much. Have a great day.

[While Kathryn repeatedly thanks the lawyer, Steven picks up the opened mail which he begins pulling out of the envelopes and scanning through again, his eyebrows stitched. Kathryn closes the door and is beaming as she walks back over to Steven.]

Kathryn: Finally, this is settled and we can go back to our normal lives. It's about time...what's wrong?

Steven: Back to our normal lives? You wouldn't even let me turn on the TV five minutes ago. Our lives will never be normal again.

Kathryn: Oh stop, honey. The news will get out that the charges were dropped and everything will quiet down...

[Kathryn slows as she watches Steven pick up another letter, unfold it and clear his throat to read it.]

Steven [*reading from the letter*]: Steven Goodman, you are a monster. After everything you've done you deserve to burn in hell.

[Steven tosses the letter down on the coffee table and unfolds another.]

Steven: Dear Steven Goodman, you should be rotting in a prison cell like the murderer you are. I can't wait to celebrate when they give you a life sentence.

Kathryn: Steven, quit it.

[Steven ignores her and pulls out another letter.]

Steven: Steven Goodman, you should know that I think you're a disgusting pig and a coward.

[He opens another.]

Steven: Hello Steven Goodman, I hope this letter finds you well. I wanted to let you know ahead of time that if I ever see you walking down the street, I will not hesitate to plow over you with my car.

[He opens another.]

Steven *[voice shaking]*: Dear Steven Goodman, I hope someone shoots and kills your own daughter. There is nothing I want more than to turn on the news and see her bloody head getting rinsed out of the pavement...

[Kathryn takes the paper out of his hand and crumples it and throws it away.]

Kathryn: That's enough.

[Kathryn sits down beside Steven as he cries and pulls his head into her shoulder.]

Kathryn: That's enough, do you hear me?

[The couple sit like that for a moment until Steven quiets and sits upright.]

Steven: It doesn't matter if the charges are dropped. It doesn't make me innocent.

Kathryn: Stop with that. There are people who don't see you as some supervillain. There are people who know you did what you did because you had to.

Steven: Oh, I didn't even read you the kindest one.

[Steven rifles through the letters and plucks one out, which he opens and unfolds.]

Steven: Dear Mr. Steven Goodman, we wanted to reach out to you to tell you that we know you are not a monster, and wanted to extend our support to you. We are praying for you every day. We understand that the events that took place earlier this summer were acts of self defense

and, quite honestly, acts of bravery. What you did was not easy and we are standing in solidarity with you and your cause. We also wanted to take the opportunity to personally invite you to join the Klu Klux Klan, as we were more than impressed with your work. You are making the world a better place and we would love to have you.

[Kathryn repeatedly opens her mouth to start a sentence but has nothing to say.]

Steven: I'm afraid of myself, Kathryn. I didn't recognize him. And we were fighting with Rachel. And I was already angry and scared and then I just...I just...I'm afraid I showed who I really am. And I can't call that person innocent. Charges or no charges, someone is dead because of me...

Kathryn: Listen. I'm not saying you did nothing wrong. I'm saying you made a *mistake*. You're human. You're going to regret this for the *rest* of your *life*. I know that because I know you. I know you're a good man. And you're going to take the horrible things in those letters to heart. But that's not who you are.

Steven *[weakly, almost a whisper]*: I killed someone's son.

Kathryn *[almost immediately]*: You are someone's son. And someone's loving husband. And someone's caring father. You're someone's trusted colleague and someone's best friend. You are a person, too. You can't forget that.

[Steven looks really hard into Kathryn's eyes and the two gaze at each other as the lights dim.]

SCENE THREE

[The lights go up and the audience is back in Sandra and Giancarlo's living room. Sandra is in sweatpants curled up on the couch with her laptop, intensely reading something on the screen. She doesn't look up at the sound of Giancarlo coming in through the front door with a grocery bag in hand.]

Giancarlo: I have the potato chips, *amore*. And before you say it, yes, I have the ice cream, too.

[Sandra doesn't respond, she is clearly too wrapped up in what she's reading.]

Giancarlo: *Dio mio*, this needs to end.

[Giancarlo walks over and closes Sandra's laptop.]

Sandra: What the hell, Giancarlo?

Giancarlo: You cannot sit and read the stories of the boy's death over and over again. The reading makes you stressed. It's not good for the baby.

Sandra: No, what's not good for the baby is that a black boy was just shot and killed by our neighbors.

[*Sandra throws open her laptop, frustratedly.*]

Giancarlo: You read and you read and you read and you read. You have the details stuck in your brain already. Have a break, Sandra. I worry about you.

[*Sandra sighs and puts the laptop aside.*]

Sandra: I can't take a break from this, Giancarlo. I just can't. This isn't outside of me anymore. I'm going to be a mother now. I'm going to be the one who has to worry she'll get a call to come collect her kid's body off the sidewalk. I'm going to be the one who has to police her kid before the real police do. I'm going to be the one who'll have to make her kid grow up too fast so they don't die young. I can't take a break. This is the rest of my life, not a day job.

Giancarlo: I know that, I understand but—

Sandra: —But you don't, Giancarlo. You don't understand.

Giancarlo: Thank you for letting me finish.

Sandra: Gian...

Giancarlo: No. You have made up all of your mind already. I know nothing. I will never be able to be a good father. I am not smart enough, not worried enough, not American enough to understand how to raise the baby we will have together in nearly eight months.

Sandra: That's not what I meant.

Giancarlo [*defensive*]: Then what did you mean?

Sandra [*also defensive*]: I *meant* that this is so different for me than it is for you—

Giancarlo: You always say that. It is different. You are different. I know there are the differences between us. I know. But you act like the...the...*vittima*...victim, like you are so alone when—

Sandra [*raising her voice*]: Act like? That's because I *am* alone. I am so completely alone in this. I am the only one who can look at Jeremiah Simmons and see my own child. I am the only one who watched his face pop up on the news every night and felt, really *felt* in my heart that it was

my baby who died. I am the only one who knows what it's like to know what fear looks like in your parents eyes before you fully know what there is to be afraid of yet. And I feel that fear now, for a person who isn't even a person yet, and it is heartbreaking to be in this alone. And you say you know the differences but I don't *believe* you, Giancarlo. I don't believe you because I know your two favorite girls in the world are a black woman carrying your future child and a racist—

Giancarlo: *Veramente?* You are going to insult my mother now?

Sandra: Giancarlo...

Giancarlo: No, no, please continue to explain how wrong it is for me to love my mother and my wife equally.

Sandra: You're missing the point—

Giancarlo: No, you are missing the point. I always tell my mother that when she lets silly things like race get in the way of a relationship she is moving backward in time, and I never let her get away with saying the things that she does. But the person I needed to talk to was you, Sandra, because this is ridiculous.

Sandra: How the hell is this ridiculous?

Giancarlo: You always said race would never be able to get between us—

Sandra: It's not between us! It's all over us! It's around us! Welcome to America, Giancarlo Moretti because here, race is not a "silly little thing." It's everything. And pretending it's not a problem is what gets people killed.

Giancarlo: So now it's a problem? Our whole relationship has been a problem?

Sandra: No! No, that's not what I'm saying.

Giancarlo: Then what are you mad at, Sandra? Tell me. What's the real problem here, then. Since I clearly cannot understand.

Sandra: You're white! You're Italian! You don't understand race like Americans do! And so I'm dealing with this all by myself and yeah, if you really want me to tell you, I'm mad. I'm mad that you can't get that.

[Giancarlo opens his mouth, then closes it and nods. He pulls the ice cream and potato chips out of the plastic grocery bag and places it on Sandra's lap then gets up and heads towards the stairs.]

Giancarlo: Fine. I don't understand race like Americans do. But from the way I see it, things like this wouldn't happen if Americans actually understood race to begin with.

Sandra [*apologetically*]: Gian...Gian, come back...

[*Giancarlo trudges up the stairs, leaving her alone. The lights dim.*]

SCENE FOUR

[*The lights go up and the audience is back in Aiyana and Michael's living room. Aiyana is sitting on the couch, her legs beside her, the throw blanket covering her from the waist and below. She's fingering the edge of the blanket when Michael quickly comes downstairs with a TV remote in hand.*]

Michael: The charges against Steven Goodman have been dropped?

Aiyana [*sighing*]: The prosecutors said there was no way we could win. We might try suing the city for wrongful death instead. At least then we get some money out of it. Apparently that's all matters to me. The money.

Michael: What do you mean "no way we could win"?

Aiyana: The lawyers told me that they reviewed it and the jury just wouldn't find Steven Goodman at fault.

Michael: Are you fucking kidding me?

Aiyana: Let it go, Michael.

Michael [*angrily*]: No, don't tell me to let it go, that's bullshit.

[*Aiyana throws the blanket off her legs to stand up and walk to the window, rubbing her temples.*]

Aiyana: Well there's nothing we can do about it so let's just drop it.

Michael: They just dropped the charges. Just like that.

Aiyana [*growing annoyed*]: Yes.

Michael: Bullshit. That's bullshit. Did you even fight them on it?

Aiyana: Obviously I asked them for any other alternative to letting the man who killed my son get off free, Michael. There's just no way.

Michael: That can't be true. They need to review it again. Three times if they have to.

Aiyana: Well, Michael, they're the professionals, not us.

Michael: So that's what we're doing? We're accepting this as okay?
[Aiyana is silent, and just rubs her temples as she looks out the window.]

Michael *[scoffs]*: "wouldn't find Steven Goodman at fault." Who's at fault then, huh? Someone tell me who.

[Aiyana turns suddenly, finally fed up with Michael talking about the charges being dropped.]

Aiyana: Me! Me. I'm at fault. Because I'm his mother and I got distracted and said "stay in places you recognize" instead of "stay alive." I said "don't get back late" instead of "don't put that fucking hoodie on, are you trying to get killed?" I'm at fault.

Michael *[sighs]*: Don't do this, 'Yana.

Aiyana: Or maybe it's his fault. Because he grew up in the city and should've known better by now. He got that talk about the hoodie from Darryl years ago. He must have. He's *fifteen*. He was fifteen...

[Michael opens his mouth to speak but Aiyana speaks again.]

Aiyana: It's Darryl's fault. Because he was raising him on his own perfectly fine and he should've ignored me the moment I came up with the idea to have him move out. Jeremiah was in school, he had friends, he was fine. But Darryl was dumb enough to listen to me even though he *knew*, knew more than *anyone*, I'm a terrible mother.

[Aiyana begins to tear up. Michael walks over to Aiyana and pulls her into his chest tight.]

Michael: You're not a terrible mother.

Aiyana: Yeah, because I'm not even a mother anymore. I had a great one. She made sure I was safe, and she kept food on the table, and she never, ever once made me feel as poor as we were until I was old enough to figure it out myself. And Darryl was right—I never call her. I call her on Christmas, on Mother's Day, when I need to ask her if she wants me to send money in

the mail or file her taxes. I *never* call my mother. So how would I have possibly known how to be a good one?

Michael: You. Are not. At fault. Do you hear me, Aiyana?

[Aiyana suddenly pulls away from Michael, looking disgusted.]

Aiyana: No, you know who's at fault? *You*.

Michael: *Me?*

Aiyana: Because you gave him those damn headphones. It all came down to those headphones. The reason the jury can't find Steven Goodman guilty is because of those "warnings" Jeremiah couldn't hear because of the headphones, the *airpods*, Steven Goodman couldn't see.

Michael: Aiyana, I...

Aiyana: You're a *black man*. You should've understood him more than anyone else. How dangerous it was for him. *You* should've seen it coming and been a role model for him and looked out for him and warned him and you didn't.

Michael *[stammering]*: I-I...

[Aiyana pushes Michael's chest with full force, but he barely moves because of how much smaller she is than him.]

Aiyana: *You* should've told him not to put that hoodie on.

[She pushes his chest.]

Aiyana: *You* should've given him headphones people could actually see.

[She pushes his chest.]

Aiyana: *You* should've told him to stay where it was safe.

[She pushes his chest.]

Aiyana *[crying and shouting]*: *You* should've kept him alive! *You* should have! Why couldn't you do that? Why couldn't you just keep him alive? Why couldn't I just keep my own son alive!

[Aiyana trails off as she collapses into a teary mess and Michael holds her tight and guides her to the couch where they both sit for a moment.]

Michael *[tearing]*: Aiyana...I am so, so sorry.

[Aiyana finally sits up and wipes her face, pushing hair away from it. She looks over at Michael's face and wipes the tears from his eyes.]

Aiyana: No, I'm the one who should be sorry. I don't know why I...I'm sorry.

Michael: Are you okay?

Aiyana: Yeah, I just need a breath. By myself.

[Michael nods knowingly and stands up.]

Michael: I'll give you some space.

[Aiyana nods and Michael walks up the stairs. Before going up all the way he pauses, turns to Aiyana.]

Michael: I love you.

Aiyana: I love you, too.

[Aiyana looks around the room and pauses. She stands up and refolds the throw blanket and puts it back where it's supposed to be. She sits back down on the edge of the couch and sits in silence for a moment before pulling her phone out her back and dialing a number. She puts the phone to her ear and the audience waits.]

Aiyana *[into the phone]*: Mom?

[The lights dim.]

SCENE FIVE

[The lights go up in the Goodman's living room. Steven sits on the couch, folding back up the letters from earlier and carefully placing them back into envelopes. Rachel comes downstairs, slowing when she notices her dad.]

Rachel: Oh, hey Dad, I didn't know you were still down here.

Steven: Yeah, just, uh, cleaning up a little bit.

Rachel: Not trying to sneak in some screen time, are you?

[*Steven laughs. Rachel walks over to him.*]

Rachel [*softly*]: Mom told me the good news.

Steven [*smiling weakly*]: Oh, yeah, the good news.

Rachel [*after a pause*]: I've got some good news for you, too.

Steven [*joking*]: You're not engaged, are you?

Rachel [*joking back*]: No, just pregnant and I'm quitting school to join the circus.

Steven [*smiling*]: You know how to make me proud, Rach.

Rachel: I decided I'm not going to take that internship in the city after all.

[*Steven looks up, surprised.*]

Steven: You're sure?

Rachel: I'd rather be closer to home than farther from it, right now.

[*Steven's eyes fall into his lap.*]

Rachel: I don't know though, by the end of the summer that could change. Being around you two party animals might wear me out.

[*Steven laughs.*]

Steven: I just want you to be happy, Rach. If you want to go then I'll...I'll understand...

Rachel: I am happy. I promise. And it works out because Betsy Devos is supposed to give a speech on campus and now I get to be there for the protests.

Steven [*smiling*]: And we can't have you missing that.

Rachel: Nope.

[*There's a pause.*]

Rachel: Well I'm going to meet up with some friends so I'll see you after dinner.

[Rachel walks towards the door.]

Steven *[joking]*: You have friends? What friends?

Rachel *[smiling and rolling eyes]*: High school friends, Dad.

Steven *[suddenly serious]*: Be safe, please, Rachel.

Rachel: I will. Love you, Daddy.

Steven: Love you, too.

[Rachel leaves the house, shutting the door behind her. Steven goes back to the letters, and reaches into the drawer of a side table and pulls out a blank piece of paper and reaches for a pen on the coffee table.]

Steven *[as he writes]*: To Whom It May Concern— My name is Steven Michael Goodman. You've seen my face. A close up of my family Christmas card is on the news almost every night. I think the reporters stole it from my wife's Facebook and cropped her out of it. They also cropped out my daughter, Rachel Goodman, who turned eighteen years old a month before those photos were taken. They cropped a lot more than just my family out of that picture. Or any of the photos of me that have surfaced on your phone or your laptop or your tablet or whatever it is people get their news on nowadays. They cropped out the moment before the picture was taken, when my wife laughed while she told me to stop putting up bunny ears behind our daughter's head in the photos. I thought it was funny the way only dads do. She thought it would be too tacky to send out to all of our family, friends and neighbors. So the photo we decided on was of all three of us smiling together, something we do a lot in my house. They cropped out my house. It is "two floors of love," as of my own father would say. It's where my wife and I first moved in after getting married, the first place we took Rachel home to from the hospital where she was born, the place we've hosted every birthday, every Superbowl Party, every Fourth of July barbecue since as long as I can remember. No one knows this, but it is also the place my wife first told me she was pregnant with our second baby and the same place we mourned when she lost it. Believe it or not, I know what the loss of a child feels like. They cropped that out, too. My feelings. My emotions. The fact I'm human, too. When my wife Kathryn lost the baby we were devastated. All a parent wants to do is love and protect their child, and it's hard to do that when of all the dangers in the world, most will probably be out of your control. That scares me everyday. Cropped out of the photos you've seen are the little things I yell at my daughter for like texting while crossing the street or leaving her keys unattended or not eating enough vegetables or not calling enough just to let me know she's safe and alive and healthy. I yell at her because I love her and I don't know how to protect her. I yelled at Jeremiah Simmons that day because I loved her and I didn't know how to protect her. That doesn't make me any

less guilty of being the reason someone's dead. But I'm not guilty of being the emotionless monster you've accused of being in that picture. The most important thing they cropped out of that picture is a family man. A father and a husband. Someone who had never used a gun in his late adult life but bought one to keep his wife and child safe at all costs. Someone who cried when no one was watching after his little girl left for college. Someone who knew he had met his wife the moment he saw soon-to-be Kathryn Goodman and had already named their baby Rachel by the first date. I've spent a long time thinking about who I really am: a terrible person, the Devil, a white supremacist, a racist pig, to name a few of the suggestions you've given me to that question all over the internet. But at the end of the day I'm Steven Goodman, and I'm okay with that.

[Steven puts down the pen, puts together the pages of his letter evenly, holds them up in front of himself and then rips the pages into pieces. He walks over to the stairs and throws the ripped papers into a trash bin and then slowly but surely walks up the stairs and out of sight. The lights dim.]

SCENE SIX

[The lights go up in Sandra and Giancarlo's house. Just like at the start of the play, Giancarlo is pacing and checking the window as Aiyana had done in the very first scene. Sandra comes downstairs in pajamas, rubbing her eyes and stomach. It is the middle of the night.]

Sandra *[softly]*: Giancarlo?

[Giancarlo turns quickly at the sound of her voice and quickly walks across the living room, towards Sandra as she approaches the bottom of the stairs.]

Giancarlo *[holding her hand to help her down the last step]*: Careful, *amore*. What are you doing awake?

Sandra *[dropping his hand now that she is standing]*: I could ask you the same.

[Giancarlo sighs and looks to the window, taking a few steps away from her.]

Giancarlo: I could not sleep. It is hard to do when a killer is walking free a few houses down...

Sandra: C'mon, Giancarlo, come to bed.

Giancarlo: How can I? With all that's happening here? How are you suddenly okay with this?

Sandra: I'm not. Never will be. But I know this isn't the first time something like this has happened. It won't be the last. People toughen up. They cope. They keep moving. We can, too.

[*Giancarlo is standing at the window again, looking through the curtains. He seems to have stopped listening.*]

Giancarlo: We can protest.

Sandra [*almost as if talking to a child*]: Giancarlo...

Giancarlo: We can. I heard in the news there is a big one against police brutality in Washington D.C.

Sandra: We're not going to D.C., Giancarlo.

Giancarlo: We can get Steven Goodman fired—call that fancy office of his and demand it.

Sandra: Giancarlo, seriously...

Giancarlo [*growing more frantic*]: —We can have people protest outside his house until he gives an apology. How has he not given an apology?

Sandra: Gian...

Giancarlo: We can write him. Tell him he has made a perfectly nice place and made it unsafe. People's children are supposed to grow up here. He took that from them. Doesn't he realize he just—just took it from them?

Sandra: Gian, enough.

Giancarlo [*suddenly turning to face her and look her in the eyes*]: We can move.

Sandra: Don't be ridiculous.

Giancarlo: No, no, we have to move.

Sandra: We're not moving.

Giancarlo: And why not? We came to raise a baby here so they could be safe. So they could learn to ride a bike in the driveway and maybe mow our neighbor's lawns for extra allowance and one summer set up a lemonade stand that all of the neighbors would buy from just to be kind. *You* said all of that. We can't do that here anymore. It's not safe here. We have to move. We just have to move.

Sandra: Where? Move where, Giancarlo?

Giancarlo: I don't know, anywhere—anywhere but here.

Sandra: There's nowhere—

Giancarlo [*interrupting*]: —There has to be.

Sandra: *Giancarlo*. There is *nowhere to go*.

[*Giancarlo turns back to the window and then down at the floor in defeat.*]

Sandra [*solemnly*]: This doesn't just happen on George Street.

[*The lights dim.*]