

FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND THE FALLEN ANGELS

Written by Mel Nieves

FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND THE FALLEN ANGELS

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Drip of a drop. Don't name it a tear, It's hard to cry with tears, harder without, To smother a sob without a sound, to bite your forefinger in helplessness, and cry out - Hey! Where's the pill I can take to cure this? What's the doctor's name? What operation can save me?

Piri Thomas

September 30th, 1928 – October 17th, 2011

writer, poet, activist, educator, author *Down These Mean Streets*

Special thanks to The LAByrinth Theater Company, The Actors Studio Playwright-Director Unit, Shira-Lee Shalit and the creatives who generously gave their talent and insights during the development process.

This play is dedicated to the memory of

Kevin Scully Geer

November 7th, 1952 – January 25th, 2017

actor-friend-mentor-brother

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CHARACTERS (F7/M3)

Clara Bingham, 60's

Lucia Fernandez, 40's

Allison Shapiro, 40's

Milagros Santoro, 30's

Roylan Vargas, 30's

Lester Collins, 60's

Sondra Fernandez, 30's

Titania Fernandez, 16

Bianca Torres, 40's

Antonio Torres, 16

SCENES

#1 - Bus Stop, a few blocks away from The Frederick Douglass Housing Projects

#3 – Neighborhood Bar, a few blocks away from The Frederick Douglass Housing Projects

#4 School yard

#5 - Tenement Building/Amsterdam Avenue, a few blocks away from The Frederick Douglass Housing Projects

#6 - Teacher's Lounge

#7 - Benches/Frederick Douglass Housing Projects

#8 - Front of school

#9 - Milagros Apartment, Frederick Douglass Housing Projects

#10 - Benches/Frederick Douglass Housing Projects

#11 - Frederick Douglass Housing Projects Playgrounds

#12 - Café, a few blocks away from The Frederick Douglass Housing Projects

#13 - Benches/Frederick Douglass Housing Projects

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SCENE 1

Bus stop, day A few blocks away from The Frederick Douglass Housing Projects where SONDRA FERNANDEZ and her niece TITANIA are waiting for the Bus to arrive.

SONDRA. I gotta say young lady you are one seriously frustrated person. *(Titania gives her aunt a dismissive glance.)* Don't be doin' the side glancin' thing.

TITANIA. I'm not.

SONDRA. Please, you've been doin' it since you was littler than you are now. You do it whenever you don't like what it is you be hearin' about yourself, listen up, I know what bein' frustrated looks like on a person.

TITANIA. You do?

SONDRA. Fuck the hell yes, I do, shit I know what it looks like on me, and I can definitely see what it looks like on you and your list of frustration's ain't half as long as mine is that's for sure.

TITANIA. You be projectin' things about yourself on me Titi, that's what you be doin'. I seriously ain't about anything what it is that you be sayin' about me.

SONDRA. Is that right now?

TITANIA. Damn shit straight up it is. Don't be playin' on me like you are, I'm wise, I been around, I know things, I see things, I go to school.

SONDRA. Not lately you haven't been goin' to school from what I've been hearin'.

TITANIA. You know what, whatever, forget this show.

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SONDRA. Excuse me, slow yourself down. Let me tell you straight little miss, you don't ever be fuckin' "whateverin'" me like you just did, are you crazy or something, do I look like one of your fuckin' school yard dumbass mentally challenged friends who be toleratin' your routine, do I?

TITANIA. What'd you got to be gettin' all frustrated about things anyway, I'm just a kid, I'm just learnin' about life...Damn, we just havin' a conversation with each other, it's not like I'm one of those girlfriends of yours that you always be fightin' with and complainin' about from time to time.

SONDRA. You best be holdin' yourself tight right now girl if you know what's good for your little ass.

TITANIA. What, now you threatenin' me, for what, I ain't judging on you, I never have, you're my Titi, your business is your business, I been knowin' how things are with you for the longest time, anyway it's no biggie with me and anyhow it's no big-time top secret that nobody like, don't be knowin' about you and your ways.

SONDRA. That's because it never was no secret period and it's also none of yours or anybody's damn fuckin' business neither what I do or for that matter who I do behind my door, shit.

TITANIA. Oh right, I feel that, I get you now, I see how you playin' things out, it's all clear as glass, so what you sayin' here is, it's okay for you to be wantin' to be gettin' all diggy into my business, but I can't be gettin' that way into yours, yo, uh-uh, I'm sorry, but no to the no Titi, I ain't buyin' none of that today, that's just straight up bullshit in my book right there.

SONDRA. Fuck you and your punk-ass book. You know, I could easily just turn myself around right now, give you my back and not give a flying fuck about you or your life. I could do that in a snap, but that's not what I'm about. I'm a bigger person than that, plus I'm bigger period, so

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you best do yourself a favor and think real hard about how you coming off and who it is that you comin' off to like you are, 'cause I'm truly the very last person on this here earth that you want to be crackin' wise to like you are right now. *(There's a moment of quiet between them.)*

TITANIA. I got me a long list too. *(No response from Sondra.)* I hate takin' this damn bus by myself. It gets real quiet up there.

SONDRA. You want me to come with you to the cemetery?

TITANIA. No, you don't have to.

SONDRA. Look, I hear where you're coming from and all, I do, serious, no lie, but your moms, she's dealin' with a lot of stress right now in her life and I know for a fact that she ain't handling it too good just by lookin' at you how you are.

TITANIA. You lucky you don't have to be livin' with her.

SONDRA. I did, once, so yeah, believe me, I know the consequences.

TITANIA. It's all about stress when it comes to bein' her.

SONDRA. You know, you reactin' to her in the way that you're reactin' just lights up that fuse in her even higher than it needs to be.

TITANIA. I know all I need be knowin' about her fuse. I ain't got nothin' to do with it bein' lit up any higher or whatever. So don't be puttin' it all on me like you doin', that ain't right at all. You should be talkin' with her like you talkin' to me. She the one that comes home late. She's all wired up about the business being slow, pacing up and down with no sleep because of it. You know that her breath be smellin' all the time like she was her only payin' customer.

SONDRA. She's drinking again?

TITANIA. You ain't been around but take a whiff of the air she be breathin'.

SONDRA. I'm sorry to hear that.

TITANIA. I can't be stayin' with her when she's like this...she got my stomach feelin' all tight.

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SONDRA. Where you been stayin' at these last few days if not with your moms?

TITANIA. I stayed over at Cousin Louie's place.

SONDRA. That little punk still livin' by Stuyvesant town?

TITANIA. Yeah, he's real cool people.

SONDRA. Haven't seen his ass in forever.

TITANIA. He's workin' over at D'Agostino's now as a deli man.

SONDRA. Sweet. Good for him.

TITANIA. I also be stayin' with some of my friends from school.

SONDRA. Your friends' parents let you stay over; they don't say anything about you not stayin' at your own home?

TITANIA. We pretend like we lose track of time, like we be studyin' for a big test, like the regents, until it's way too late for me to be going home by myself. Anyway, they know where I be livin' at, so they cool with it and all. I'm runnin' out of couches though.

SONDRA. And now here she is, comin' knockin' on my door.

TITANIA. Can I hang with you?

SONDRA. Little girl you are one serious capitol A plus pain in the ass conundrum in my book.

TITANIA. Can I then?

SONDRA. I know for sure I'm gonna be regrettin' this shit, but yeah, you can hang with me. But I'm gonna be straight with you, what you're lookin' at ain't a motherin' type of person. I ain't into any of that shit.

TITANIA. I ain't lookin' for that from you.

SONDRA. Good 'cause I ain't givin' it no how...you know she's real worried about you, you know that right?

TITANIA. No. You talked to her about me?

SONDRA. We talked.

TITANIA. Good, maybe that'll sober her ass up.

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SONDRA. What started things up with you and my Sister this time around?

TITANIA. I started askin' her questions about papi again. Today would've been his birthday. Her voice always be gettin' all tight and an octave higher whenever his name comes up in conversation.

SONDRA. And what about yours?

(No response from Titania.)

SONDRA. I figured as much. You know, you and my Sister are like those two peas in a pod types of people.

TITANIA. No, we not. I ain't no pea. We way different types of people. Don't be sayin' things like that.

SONDRA. How old are you now. I keep forgettin'?

TITANIA. Sixteen.

SONDRA. You seriously gotta start thinkin' about changin' things up with yourself.

TITANIA. It's not like I'm expressin' anything new that you ain't never heard me say before.

SONDRA. That there's part of both of your problems. You two gotta resolve this shit. It's not good for a mother and daughter to be behavin' in this way with each other. It's not right. It's a sin. It says so right inside the Bible.

SONDRA. I forget the exact words, but it's in one of those chapters where they talk about "thou be this way and that way and no other way when thou heareth what thy parents be sayin' and just shut up about it." Next time I go into Holy Name I'll find it for you.

TITANIA. I'm supposed to stay all quiet every time she goes off on papi?

SONDRA. Be the better person, that's all I'm sayin'.

TITANIA. But the things she be sayin' about him are really hurtful, you

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don't know.

SONDRA. A lot of bad was passed around between them, that's no lie.

TITANIA. You gonna start talkin' shit about him too now?

SONDRA. No, not today.

TITANIA. What if I say I don't want to hear it on any day? Where's this fuckin' bus? I don't want to be hearin' about what kind of a motherfucker he was to her, okay? I don't wanna be hearin' it from her. I don't wanna be hearin' it from you. I don't wanna be hearin' it from anybody. Not today, not ever. He ain't around no more. He can't be defendin' himself. That's what I'm here for...I wish that she would just one fuckin' time say something nice about him. I didn't get the chance to know him like she did. All I ever be hearin' from her is how messed up her life is because of him. How she's fuckin' drowning in debt 'cause of him.

SONDRA. She needs to bury that bar, that's what she needs to be doin'. Sooner than later. Bury that shit deep before it buries her deep.

TITANIA. That's what scares me, Titi. I don't wanna be nobody's orphan. It's bad enough I gotta be takin' this bus up to see one parent.

SONDRA. You ever tell her that?

TITANIA. No. I just want her for once in my life to tell me something good about him, something nice, something beautiful. The only picture I got in my head are of him being this monster. I would like to hear some nice things about him for once, that's all. Even a smile from her when his name comes up would be alright by me. I'd just like to have some other types of pictures of him in my head when I think about him, that's what I be wantin'.

SONDRA. Here comes your bus. You need money for flowers?

TITANIA. Yeah.

(Sondra takes a few bills from her pocket.)

TITANIA. Thank you.

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SONDRA. Don't forget to take these.

(Sondra hands her a set of house keys.)

SONDRA. I'm responsible for your little ass now.

TITANIA. I appreciate it.

SONDRA. Don't go appreciatin' it too much. Listen, I don't know what time you gonna be comin' over, but if it's late and you wake me, I'm just gonna beat you.

TITANIA. I'll be quiet.

SONDRA. Alright then.

The bus arrives.

SCENE 2

Building entrance, Frederick Douglass Housing Projects We see a sign that reads: WELCOME TO THE FREDERICK DOUGLASS HOUSING PROJECTS, A WONDERFUL COMMUNITY. BIANCA TORRES steps out from inside the building's entrance wearing her school security guard uniform, cellphone in one hand, coffee container in the other.

BIANCA. Yeah, oh yeah, I hear you straight up cuz. You comin' in loud and clear on that. We one of a kind types you and me on this here topic. Listen up, this is what my girl did, she done opened her front door, asked the schemin' bitch, whose name shall not be spokin', asked for her house keys back. Told the schemer to get the fuck out. End of story. She's just like me. She don't play. When it's time to close the door. She closes the motherfuckin' door. Yo, it's like I always be sayin' to you, when you get burned, you get experience. You wanna know what I said to her when we first hooked up, I said to her, "You don't need to be buyin' me things baby. All I want from you is you." Yes, I did say that, straight up, those were my exact words. She had to take herself a step back with my kind of independent talk. She said that shit too, "I need to take myself a step

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back." She did. I ain't lyin' to you. Shit, she ain't never been with a girl like me. You know it, it's all about primetime. 12 weeks strong now. It's a beautiful thing.

LESTER COLLINS, a one-time jazz saxophone player with several jazz bands, steps out from the same building entrance, box of cookies under his arm, tips his hat to Bianca, gets no acknowledgement, takes a seat on the bench, places the box of cookies on his lap, leans back and enjoys.

BIANCA. Yo I gotta be goin', that's her buzzin' on the call waitin'. I love you too chula (*She clicks to other call*) Hola dime mi amor que te pasa baby. I'm doin' good. Better now that I'm talkin' to you. What's up? You soundin' kinda down. Say that again one more time I'm not understandin' you, repeat that one more time to me please. Right, right. Hold up, wait a minute, you sayin' she called you. Okay. Right. Let me ask you, you saw it was her number on the caller ID, but you still answered? Wait a minute now, slow up, I'm not jumpin' into anything. I just want to know what was she callin' you for? Oh, just to talk, some chit chattin'. Okay, talkin' some chit chattin' about what? Things. Like what things? Hold up, my tone ain't changin'. I'm talkin' like I always be talkin'. She called; you talked to her. I know what a conversation is, don't be fuckin' around with me, I'm tryin' to have one with you now. You know what you're doin' with me now with this kind of talk. You being fuckin' vague. Yeah, you are, fuckin' vague. I'm an adult, you talk to me straight up or you don't talk to me at all. I'm listenin'. Right, gotcha, okay, okay, so what I'm hearin' from you is that you thinkin' about life and your place in life, right, so, now you're being like some Dali Fuckin' Lama type of bitch. I am open to things. Come again? Oh, oh okay, so that's how you want to be doin' me. You want to take a break, take a step back, you need space to do some thinkin' for yourself. Cool, I get it. No, I'm fine. I'm a big girl. Listen up though for a second,

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you do this one favor for me, alright, while you're thinkin' about all the things that you're gonna be thinkin' about, you think about this one thing, think about how it's gonna be feelin' for you to be walkin' around the neighborhood with a Black and Decker power tool drillin' itself up inside that skanky cunt ass of yours 'cause that's what's gonna be a part of your life the next time I see you, you betraying bubble butt bitch.

(She throws the cellphone to the pavement; it smashes on impact. She turns to see Lester looking at her.)

BIANCA. What old man?

LESTER. Would you like a Mantecaditos?

BIANCA. Ah what?

LESTER. A cookie.

BIANCA. I know what it is.

LESTER. Dona' Garcia in 14G made them fresh. They're delicious. Would you like one?

BIANCA. Don't be talkin' to me. I ain't in no kind of mood for anybody's damn generosity.

She walks away.

SCENE 3

Neighborhood Bar, a few blocks away from the Frederick Douglass Housing Projects.

LUCIA FERNANDEZ, preps the bar while CLARA BINGHAM, sits with her beer.

CLARA. *"...Wash away my troubles, wash away my pain, with the rain in Shambabla..." You're truly one of God's chosen children.

*(*Lyric from Shambala by Three Dog Night)*

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LUCIA. Thank you.

CLARA. I only say what's inside my heart.

LUCIA. Clara, you've known me for a long time now. You see me, how I am. How I treat people. I'm one of the good ones, right?

CLARA. "Love thy neighbor."

LUCIA. That's right, that's what I'm all about. I personally don't backstab or bad mouth anybody, not if I can help it. You don't like me, fine. I don't like you, fine. We take a walk from each other. Goodbye. I have no problem with that set up. But what I do have a problem with is understandin' how me and my sweet little girl became one of those "You don't like me, I don't like you, walk away from each other. Goodbye." types of people. We ain't supposed to be that way with each other. That's not the way things are supposed to be between a mother and her child. We're family for Christ sakes.

CLARA. "For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

LUCIA. This here situation between me and her makes no kind of sense to me. I've been a very good parent under the circumstances. Raised her practically all by myself. What prize do I get for that, I'll tell you what prize, I get a daughter who doesn't want to be in the same room with me.

CLARA. I'm not off my medication. I know what time it is.

LUCIA. Good for you Clara, I'm glad to hear that...Clara-Strong.

CLARA. You know Lucia, I'm just a messenger of the Lord who simply loves her Jesus. I'm not ashamed of acknowledging that love. I bathe in his

LUCIA. You're not hearing anything I'm saying to you, are you? (*No response, except a smile.*) That's okay, I still love you, I'm used to it you know and not just from you...anyway, you ready for another one?

CLARA. Yes, please.

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LUCIA. *(She serves her up a beer.)* Here ya go, big froth, just like you like it.

CLARA. Like the clouds up in heaven. You're not havin' any with me?

LUCIA. Maybe later for lunch. I'm tryin' to watch my figure.

CLARA. My doctor, he told me I should watch my figure too.

LUCIA. He did?

CLARA. I told him, that's okay, I got no boyfriend, I'm the only one that's lookin' at it.

LUCIA. Tell me about it.

CLARA. I went to this meeting at the community center yesterday.

It was for people who don't

have families. The group leader said that, that wasn't true at all. She told us to not let our personal blindness keep us from seeing what's right there in front of us and then she told us to look around the room at each other, 'cause each person that you're seein' is a part of your family. We just need to open our eyes and look.

LUCIA. That's really beautiful.

CLARA. She gave me this pamphlet too.

(Clara takes out a pamphlet from her purse, hands it to Lucia.)

CLARA. Read what it says to me.

LUCIA. I'm not very good at reading things like this.

CLARA. He doesn't judge, you know.

LUCIA. Oh God, okay, I'll do it for you, "Oh God, whose fatherly care reaches to the uttermost parts of the earth. I humbly beseech you graciously to behold..."

CLARA. This is the best part.

LUCIA. "And bless those whom I love, now abscent from me."

(Lucia hands her back the pamphlet.)

CLARA. How is Titania?

LUCIA. We don't talk. We fight. That's why she's staying away from

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me. I don't know, I just don't know anymore, maybe it's me, maybe I'm the problem, maybe I've just haven't been a very good mother to her. I try. I really try. I just...

CLARA. God has a mother's heart. He said, "*I will comfort you as one is comforted by its mother.*"

LUCIA. That's beautiful, he really said that huh?

CLARA. You know what today is? Today is my shopping day.

(She goes into her purse and takes out a handful of coupons, spreads them on the bar. She touches Lucia's hand.)

CLARA. "*Do not fear he said, for I am with you; do not be dismayed for I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*"

LUCIA. I could use some of that righteous holding up about now.

CLARA. I know you know about the pain I got going on inside me. How it never lets me rest. It's part of my remembrance.

LUCIA. I know it is.

CLARA. I'm going to tell you something and you listen to me, Jesus is so very much in love with you. It's true. He's so deeply in love with all of you. I know these things for a fact.

She finishes the rest of her beer, collects her coupons. A visibly pregnant MILAGROS SANTORO enters, followed by her boyfriend ROYLAN VARGAS.

ROYLAN. Come on, Millie don't be doin' this to me, not in this way that you're doin', it ain't right!

MILAGROS. Just leave me be Roy, please. I need space to do myself some thinkin', some breathin' alright, can't you understand that?

(She takes a seat at a table.)

LUCIA. You two gonna order anything?

ROYLAN. I don't know. It's still a little early. You want something?

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MILAGROS. No.

LUCIA. You sure, Millie, how about some ice water?

MILAGROS. Thank you.

ROYLAN. I'll have a beer. Cheapest brand.

(He takes a seat.)

ROYLAN. Look, I get you, I do, I get that you got a lot of thinkin' that you need to be doin' for yourself. I'm right there with you on that, but please, just for today, can me and you, can we like talk to each other, like two people who used to like each other at least, can we do that, even if it's for a little bit?

MILAGROS. I'm tired Roy. Can't you see I'm tired.

(Lucia brings over the beer and water.)

ROYLAN. Thank you...I know that you're tired baby, I can see you got a lot of disappointment goin' on inside you. I can see it and I truly understand where it is that it's comin' from and all.

MILAGROS. Do you?

ROYLAN. Of course I do, what'd you take me for, I'm all in for you baby, that's what I'm all about when it comes to you, but you can't just be treating me like I'm some buzz in the air that you can just swat away.

MILAGROS. Tell me something Roy, straight up, in all honesty, what have we been to each other over all this time we been together?

ROYLAN. What'd you mean?

MILAGROS. Have we been two butterflies dancin' on the same flower?

ROYLAN. No, not exactly, not all the time, I guess.

MILAGROS. What we've been to each other is nothin' more than two sinkin' bricks heading straight to the bottom of the ocean floor.

ROYLAN. So, tell me somethin' then, what you got bouncing around inside you, that doesn't enter into this picture at all for you?

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MILAGROS. What I got bouncing around inside me is my responsibility.

ROYLAN. Your responsibility, only you? Ain't that a kick, I can't believe what I'm hearin', you bein' serious with that too, I can tell.
(Clara comes over to their table.)

CLARA. Jesus, loves all his children, don't you ever forget that.

ROYLAN. Oh man.

MILAGROS. Be nice to her Roy.

ROYLAN. Clara, this seriously ain't the time.

CLARA. He's waiting for you.

ROYLAN. That's great, beautiful, thank you, do me a solid, tell him I'll get there when I get there, okay?
(Clara walks away from them.)

ROYLAN. Let me ask you something straight up, how are you justifying cutting me out of the picture like you are?

MILAGROS. By you makin' it very clear to me what your priorities are.

ROYLAN. My priorities, but what am I supposed to do, tell me, what, I'm supposed to stop what I'm doin' with my life. I'm trying to be a responsible person over here. I'm tryin' to step up to the plate, you know what I'm sayin'. I'm tryin' to be a man.

MILAGROS. You callin' yourself a responsible person?

ROYLAN. Yeah.

MILAGROS. You in school?

ROYLAN. No.

MILAGROS. You workin'?

ROYLAN. Not exactly.

MILAGROS. You pullin' down a steady salary?

ROYLAN. Not steady, no.

MILAGROS. I rest my case.

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ROYLAN. I'm a musician, an artist, that's 24/7. We ain't about the 9-to-5 thing.

MILAGROS. You ain't about that paycheck thing neither.

ROYLAN. What happen to your faith?

CLARA. Faith. We all gotta have us some faith.

ROYLAN. Clara please, not now.

CLARA. You know sometimes that's all we got to hold onto till the next day comes. If we don't got any faith, then you best better forget about getting into tomorrow, 'cause tomorrow will be gone.

(Clara walks back over to the bar.)

ROYLAN. Millie, listen to me please, you know that the one thing that keeps me above this earth, that's keeps me from sinkin' into that dark place of feelin' nothin' for myself is my music.

MILAGROS. I've heard this talk before.

ROYLAN. I know I'm not tellin' you anything new. You've heard it all before since that first day you answered your doorbell and let me in... Millie, if you tell me right now that you believe in me, that you got faith in me, I'm talkin' about serious type of faith like the kind of faith that Clara was just talking about. I will guarantee you that not only is that baby's belly always gonna be full, but it's gonna have a roof over its head and a father it can be proud of. That's a kinda check that ain't ever gonna be bouncin'.

MILAGROS. I can't keep living on nothin' but dreams with you no more Roy, I'm sorry, I can't do it.

ROYLAN. Dreams is all I got that keeps me goin' baby.

MILAGROS. I'm through sleeping. Look at me. My eyes are open. I'm wide awake. You need to wake up too.

ROYLAN. Wake up to what?

MILAGROS. To what's real.

ROYLAN. Millie, listen to me, I'm close.

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MILAGROS. Please.

ROYLAN. Don't you see that I'm real close. I can feel it in my bones baby.

MILAGROS. You've been close before.

ROYLAN. But this time it's a different feelin' type of a thing I'm feelin', I swear to you it is.

MILAGROS. Why, why is it different, because you say it is?

ROYLAN. No, because I'm different. Me, I'm different. Listen to me please, there's an honest to God's truth in what I'm feelin'. I ain't never felt the music before like I'm feelin' it the way I am now. I swear, it's traveling through me to places it ain't never been to before. I know in my soul that if I can feel it like this, in this way, in me, that I can make someone else feel it in the exact way that I do.

MILAGROS. You call me, you call me when you find that other person that feels it in the way that you're feelin' it, you do that for me.

ROYLAN. You're a social worker ain't you?

MILAGROS. What does me bein' a social worker have to do with anything that we're talkin' about?

ROYLAN. 'Cause by definition, you being a social worker and all, the way that you are, means you got empathy for those who are less fortunate. So, what I'm sayin' to you is that why can't you be a social worker with me and treat me in that very same socializin' kinda way with the same understandin' and the feelings of compassion that you do with the people you meet up with in your day to day?

MILAGROS. You only see things from your side of the picture frame. I've let things slide between us for the longest of times. I can't be doin' that no more to myself, not with the way things are now, not in my conditon. Please try to understand, this ain't about wanting to hurt anybody. This here is about surviving.

(Milagros gets up and leaves. Roylan finishes his beer. Goes over to the

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bar.)

ROYLAN. Yo Lulú serve me up another.

LUCIA. Tap or bottle?

ROYLAN. I don't care if it's in a freakin' dog dish man.

(Lucia hands him a bottle of beer.)

LUCIA. If it's any consolation to you, we've all been there, sometimes sadly more than once in our lives.

ROYLAN. Whatever man.

LUCIA. I'm not a man.

CLARA. Some men put their trust in horses; some men put their trust in chariots...

ROYLAN. Here we go.

CLARA. I put my trust in neither. My trust belongs to the Lord.

ROYLAN. Clara please...

CLARA. One day you're gonna be gone and all those material things that you've acquired in life...

ROYLAN. Fuck me.

CLARA. All those things that have been weighing you down. Those things that you think you own. They're just borrowed.

ROYLAN. Stop please.

CLARA. They don't belong to you.

ROYLAN. ENOUGH FOR FUCK SAKES!

LUCIA. Hey, Watch the tone.

CLARA. Walk away from those burdens, be free of those shackles, embrace the Lord.

ROYLAN. I just want to be left alone.

LUCIA. You want to be left alone. You got problems with Millie, we know, we heard. It don't give you license to go on and take out your frustration's on somebody who ain't got nothin' to do with your relationship crap.

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ROYLAN. My relationship ain't crap.

LUCIA. Could've fooled me.

ROYLAN. Later for you.

LUCIA. NO LATER FOR YOU!

ROYLAN. Fuck me, all I'm doin' is tryin' sit here and drink my beer in a peaceful way. Like a regular type of citizen. Can I not do that?

LUCIA. Then do that, finish your beer in peace and then take a walk with yourself.

ROYLAN. I'm not tryin' to start anything with anybody. I'm a lovin' personality type of person. Look, I like you Clara, I really do.

CLARA. I like you too.

ROYLAN. I just want to sit here and drink my drink in peace, that's all.

LUCIA. Then do that and leave.

ROYLAN. *(to himself)* It's not like we all tight anyways.

LUCIA. *(whispering)* What was that, you sayin' you ain't tight with her?

ROYLAN. It's not like it came out.

LUCIA. Isn't it?

ROYLAN. No.

LUCIA. Well then, shame on you anyway for sayin' such a thing, knowin' what you know about her.

ROYLAN. I know plenty of what I need to be knowin'.

LUCIA. Then you know that this week will be fifteen fuckin' years since that radiator blast burned her entire family to death. Her home, her life, everything she knew, everything she had, was totally ruptured.

(Roylan stays quiet.)

LUCIA. Yeah, you know plenty of what you need to be knowin' don't you, you big fuckin' dumbass.

(Roylan gets off the stool, tosses a few bills on the counter, turns to leave.)

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CLARA. Jesus loves you, you know that don't you, you must, he really does, unconditionally so, no matter who you are, no matter what you do in your life. He's just loves. That's all he knows how to do, to love.

(He turns back to Clara.)

ROYLAN. I'm truly sorry.

Roylan exits the bar.

SCENE 4

School Yard, Bianca and ANTONIO TORRES, her son, are in the middle of a situation.

ANTONIO. Please, mom just hear me out, seriously, that's all, that's all you gotta be doin' right now for yourself, for me and our growin' relationship, that's it, that's all, just for you to be listenin' to what I gotta be sayin' for just a second, that's all I'm askin' from you.

BIANCA. Yeah, right, okay, I gotcha, okay, that's all I gotta be doin' for myself right now according to you and that's it, to just be hearin' you out.

ANTONIO. Yeah, that's all I'm askin' and that's all you gotta be doin'.

BIANCA. I can't believe I'm hearin' this shit.

ANTONIO. Come on, look, I know it's a lot that I'm askin' from you and all, but givin' my past history, our history, as mother and her child, you know how clean my record is, I believe I'm deservin' of a listen to, don't you think?

(Bianca gives Antonio a "I can't believe you just said that" look of disbelief.)

BIANCA. Go on.

ANTONIO. You see, it's like this, things ain't like in the way that you be thinkin' they are regarding this here situation that I've found myself

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involved in like in the way that I am.

BIANCA. I see, okay, I get it, so you gonna be settin' my mind straight about this here situation that you've found yourself involved in, is that what I'm hearin' that you gonna be tellin' me?

ANTONIO. Not only that, but I'm gonna be tellin' you the truth, straight up, served with no kind of bullshit on the side too.

BIANCA. That's a switch.

ANTONIO. Oh, come on, don't be like that. That's not a very productive type of attitude to be havin'. Look, all you gotta do is be open to hearing my side of things.

BIANCA. I've been doing that since you were born.

ANTONIO. And I've always been very appreciative of that fact, but Like I just said to you, things didn't go down in the exact way that you may have heard that they did.

BIANCA. They didn't?

ANTONIO. No, not at all, you see, this here thing that's goin' on is nothin' more than some doped up circumstantial type of evidence type of thing, that's what this is, that we got goin' on here.

BIANCA. No, my love, it's not, now let me set you straight here, you see, this here thing that you're involved in, that you got goin' on, is a serious fuckin' ridiculous deep dish shit type of thing, that's what this here thing is that you got goin' on. I'll tell you something straight up, you my son, my blood, I love you, but you have become the frosting on top of my seven-layer cake of bullshit this week with this nonsense of yours. What's goin' on with you, you pissed off at me about something or are you just acting out your aggressions, talk to me.

ANTONIO. No, it ain't nothin' like that.

BIANCA. Then what the fuck is it like then, tell me now, just like you said, straight up, no bullshit.

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ANTONIO. It's just like I said, it's not like how they be tellin' you it went down. They're lyin' about me.

BIANCA. Oh, they're lyin'? Fuck, when you put it that way, shit, it's all clear then, we all cool now with each other, come on, let's go get us a big chocolate milkshake, I'm buyin'.

ANTONIO. You see, now you just bein' all sarcastic-like with me.

BIANCA. No, not like, I am, period. Boy, what the hell am I supposed to do with you?

ANTONIO. But what I'm sayin' to you is true, I swear it is.

BIANCA. I can see what's goin' on here.

ANTONIO. Mom please...

BIANCA. Motherfuckin' Ray Charles himself can see this shit from a mile away on a cloudy day.

ANTONIO. Don't be thinkin' about me in that way that you're lookin'.

BIANCA. And why shouldn't I?

ANTONIO. 'Cause first of all, I wasn't even the only one that was there at the time of the so-called incident.

BIANCA. Who else was there with you?

ANTONIO. I can't rightly say.

BIANCA. Don't you fuckin' dare stand there now and tell me that you're livin' by some motherfuckin' code of honor bullshit, I swear to God I will beat the livin'...

ANTONIO. I'm not, I swear, I'm not.

BIANCA. Don't be swearin', don't be swearin' and lyin' to me.

ANTONIO. I'm not.

BIANCA. Who else was there with you, tell me.

ANTONIO. You know Titania Fernandez?

BIANCA. Yeah, yeah I know that little Puerto Rican Miss with the attitude. She's that girl who likes to wear the heavy perfume from the family dollar store.

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ANTONIO. Yeah, yeah that's her. Well anyway, that day she was wearin' her perfume especially thick and heavy. In fact the scent was so powerful and shit, it was travelin'.

BIANCA. What?

ANTONIO. Yeah, seriously true, as a matter of fact, it traveled all the way down to where the security guard at the front desk was stationed at.

BIANCA. Which security guard you talkin' about?

ANTONIO. Lenny Del Valle.

BIANCA. I can deal with Lenny and his dunkin doughnut cream filled eatin' ass, keep talkin'.

ANTONIO. So, Lenny comes up the stairs where we at lookin' at us all agitated, breathin' heavy and shit from the cardiovascular issues that he got, so anyway, he sees us how we hangin', he asked us what was up. But the thing of it is since he was breathin' all heavy like he was, sucking in the air deeply like he was doin', he got himself a strong whiff of the perfume Titania was wearin'.

BIANCA. Yeah, so?

ANTONIO. But listen up, the thing of it was though, was that her scent got real strong on account of she started to sweat up heavy and so the mix of her heavy sweat and the perfume she was wearin' made the aroma around us smell just like weed, you see, so he got all police officer suspicious-like and told us to open up our bags.

BIANCA. Okay, so, but you weren't smokin' right?

ANTONIO. Yeah, no, no I wasn't, nobody was, we was just hangin' like kids do, it was just the perfume and sweat combo, but the thing of it is when he got to me, he noticed that I had on my person this 007 style blade stickin' out from my back pocket.

BIANCA. What the fuck were you doin' with a blade like that in your back pocket?

ANTONIO. It wasn't mine, I swear.

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BIANCA. Whose blade was it?

ANTONIO. I was holding it for Titania.

BIANCA. Fuck me.

ANTONIO. I'm sorry.

BIANCA. Fuck me.

ANTONIO. You see earlier in the day I was helping her break into her locker.

BIANCA. This is bullshit.

ANTONIO. She forgot the combination to her lock.

BIANCA. This is fuckin' ridiculous. What are you doin' hangin' out with a girl like that in the first place, let alone carryin' her fuckin' knife. You are seriously constipating me with all this nonsense of yours today.

ANTONIO. She's just a friend, that's all she is, just a friend.

BIANCA. Fuck friends. You hear what I'm sayin' to you. Fuck them. Fuck 'em all. Especially the ones like her. You listenin' to me?

ANTONIO. Yeah.

BIANCA. Fuck them. Fuck her. Real friends don't pin shit on you like she just did.

ANTONIO. She didn't pin nothin' on me.

BIANCA. What the fuck do you call it then, what, if it ain't about that, what is it, you tell me, what's up, what's the deal here, you like her, you into her or something like that, is that what this whole thing here is all about?

ANTONIO. No, it ain't like that between us.

BIANCA. Why am I not believin' anything that's comin' outta your mouth right now?

ANTONIO. It's true. I swear.

BIANCA. Shit, I need to think. Back up and give me some space, I need to breathe.

(He takes a step back from her.)

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BIANCA. Okay, first thing I see I'm gonna have to be doin' here is havin' a talk with Lenny, see if he can forget about this incident and not do a full report on you.

ANTONIO. I think he already let me slide.

BIANCA. Excuse me?

ANTONIO. He knows I'm your son.

BIANCA. So, you sayin' he didn't file a report?

ANTONIO. That I don't know. I don't think so, not on me I don't think. He may have with the others.

BIANCA. I'ma talk to him anyway. What happen to the knife, he took it?

ANTONIO. No.

BIANCA. You gave it back to her?

ANTONIO. No.

BIANCA. What the fuck happen to it then?

ANTONIO. Well, 'cause of all the commotion and confusion that was goin' on, we got ourselves all stressed out, everybody, even Lenny was stressin', so long story short, I still got it on me.

BIANCA. I don't believe this, this is like a bottomless pit of shit. You still got it on you. Serious?

ANTONIO. I do; I have it.

BIANCA. Come on, hand it over...goddamnit.

ANTONIO. I'm sorry about all this.

(He goes into his book bag, takes out the blade.)

ANTONIO. It's a real nice one too. I like the handle, it's pretty.

BIANCA. Shut up. What'd you be knowin' about knives anyway?

ANTONIO. Look where I be livin' at. It's a wonder I ain't all weaponized.

BIANCA. Just don't talk. My head's ready to pop here. The second thing I see I'm gonna have to be doin' is havin' a serious talk with that

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girl of yours. Set her ass straight about the real world. But you, you my son, you're a whole different story I gotta be dealin' with.

ANTONIO. I said I was sorry.

BIANCA. Sometimes that ain't enough...This here day is on the top of my list for the seriously fuckin' unbelievable. Don't you realize that I go through the shit that I do because I want you to have a better life for yourself, better than the life I had for me.

ANTONIO. Yeah.

BIANCA. Good. So do your mother a big favor now and tell her something good, something real good to help her breathe easy, something like how you rescued a mangy stray cat from a tree or helped some poor granny with a shopping cart cross the street or how good you're doin' in your classes, just please leave all the other nonsense shit from your day to day out of it.

ANTONIO. I did alright. I'm ahead of all my classes.

BIANCA. Serious?

ANTONIO. Yeah.

BIANCA. You see, you see that, you cheer me up when you tell me things like that. It helps me to sleep at night with no bad dreams tensin' me up...you know that this here place, it ain't like the ones in the other boroughs.

ANTONIO. I know.

BIANCA. You can't see hope in those other projects, but these over here, you can see it right across the street from your own window, like a teasing lover, that's what makes the wanting so much more painful.

ANTONIO. They nice lookin' buildings though.

BIANCA. Fuck those buildings you be seein', fuck them with their fancy balconies and private tennis courts, they make you want things that you know you'll never gonna be gettin' the chance to have. I was born in these here projects. I'm gonna probably die here too.

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ANTONIO. Don't be talkin' like that.

BIANCA. It's true sweetie. You may not like hearin' it. I know I don't like sayin' it, but it's the truth. But that's not gonna be happenin' to you, that ain't the destiny I see for you. There's a whole big world out there waiting for you just outside of these here projects that I don't want you to be missin' out on. That's my mission in life for you baby, to make sure you see the world, all of it. That's why I do what I do. I know I ain't perfect.

BIANCA. Thank you. You know about all this other stuff that's constantly circling around you, I'ma tell you straight up, that shit's like a cancer bug to my heart, you understandin' me?

ANTONIO. I understand you. I mean, I know it is. I'm really sorry mom. I don't want you to be feelin' all sick like that 'cause of me.

BIANCA. I don't want you hangin' out with that girl, period, you hear me?

ANTONIO. I won't.

BIANCA. You going directly home after this?

ANTONIO. I think so, yeah.

BIANCA. I might be home late myself

ANTONIO. You gotta date?

BIANCA. I got a situation.

ANTONIO. You want me to make you something?

BIANCA. Nah, I might order something from that Teriyaki Taco place.

ANTONIO. That's cool.

BIANCA. Look at you.

ANTONIO. What?

BIANCA. You growin' up on me real fast. You know somethin', you really startin' to look handsome, you know that about yourself, that you becomin' handsome?

ANTONIO. Stop.

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BIANCA. Stop nothin', I've seen how the little girls around this here school be starin' at you.

ANTONIO. I don't pay no attention to any of that.

BIANCA. Yeah that may be true, but it don't stop you from noticin'.
(He smiles shyly.)

BIANCA. Yeah, you know I'm right. You be careful with that shit though, you hear. I'm being serious with you about this. I ain't ready to be nobody's grandma. I'm too young for that nonsense.

ANTONIO. I hear you.

BIANCA. Wait. You are using protection right?

ANTONIO. What? No.

BIANCA. WHY THE FUCK NOT!?!

ANTONIO. 'Cause.

BIANCA. 'Cause what?

(No response, Antonio stays uncomfortably quiet.)

BIANCA. What are you not tellin' me?

ANTONIO. Nothin'.

BIANCA. What is it, tell me.

ANTONIO. Well, I haven't exactly, officially like done anything yet.

BIANCA. Oh...Serious?

ANTONIO. Yeah. Can we please change the subject.

BIANCA. Come here.

(She embraces him tightly, showers him with kisses.)

BIANCA. I love you handsome.

ANTONIO. I love you too mom.

BIANCA. Get yourself going. I'll see you later tonight.

ANTONIO. Okay. Yo, you want me to come along and help you with your situation tonight. Ride shotgun. I can be intimidating you know?

BIANCA. I got it in check.

ANTONIO. You gonna be talkin' to Titania?

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BIANCA. Yeah.

ANTONIO. Like you just talked to me?

BIANCA. I'm gonna be talkin' to her.

She watches him walk away.

SCENE 5

Tenement Building/Amsterdam Avenue, a few blocks away from the Frederick Douglass Housing Projects

Sondra and Lucia are sitting together on the front stoop.

LUCIA. It's never been an easy thing for me to be doin' this type of thing with you, I mean, talkin' with you about, personal things, things about myself like this...me coming to you like I am, in this way...it makes me feel weak. Look, I know that you and me, we've never been all that close with each other, like sisters are supposed to be with each other and all. You understand?

SONDRA. I'm listening to you. I'm here.

LUCIA. I mean, the way that we both grew up was so way different from each other. I mean, we both lived in the same house and all, even shared clothin' with each other from time to time, but it just was so different with how mami was with you and how she was with me. I noticed it. I kept quiet. But I saw. It didn't mean I never had any love for you. She had love for you too. You know that, don't you. She did. I know she did. It's just that, well, you had your own kind of life.

SONDRA. You mean my lifestyle don't you?

(No response from Lucia.)

SONDRA. It was different for sure. It's alright though, I got used to it and I got over it real quick too. Without no therapy, either mind you. But

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yeah, you and me, we're not here to talk about our personal history right or lack thereof, we're here to talk about you and Titania.

LUCIA. Isn't it all a connected type of thing?

SONDRA. Yeah, I guess it's a connected type of thing, just like you say it is, but you know, I gotta tell you, it's real fuckin' funny to me what's goin' on here.

LUCIA. What's funny about it?

SONDRA. You. This here situation.

LUCIA. Me?

SONDRA. Yeah, you, especially you right now, right there in the way that you're lookin' at me.

LUCIA. What are you talkin' about?

SONDRA. I could read your eyes totally, you know that?

LUCIA. Tell me How am I lookin' at you?

SONDRA. You are lookin' at me now in that very same exact way that mami used to be lookin' at me all those years ago. You know what I'm sayin', you must, you saw, you were there, she with that look of hers that said, "What happen, why she is the way that she is. What I do wrong?" It's alright. It's all gone now. It's all good. I done let all that nonsense slide the fuck off my back a long time ago. It is what it was and now it just another zero in my back pocket.

LUCIA. That's why you left.

SONDRA. She was making me feel less than what I am. Yeah, that's right, that's why, so I left.

LUCIA. I'm not doin' that to you am I?

SONDRA. You know what, it's a whatever type of thing, let's not go there with each other, it's like I said, it's just another zero in my back pocket to me.

LUCIA. I never thought of you like that. My God never. I'm not doin' that now. Honest Sondra, I'm not.

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SONDRA. I wasn't feelin' safe there, can you understand that, I mean, even now I find it unbelievable. Don't you? I mean seriously, really can you believe something like that shit happenin', to a person, to the little girl that I was, to not be able to feel safe in your own fuckin' home with your own mother lookin' at you in the way that she was lookin', like you were some kind of mistake, thinkin' that you be needin' to be corrected when there was nothin' about you that needed correcting? But you know what, enough of that, it's like they be sayin', what comes around is a bitch.

LUCIA. I'm not following you.

SONDRA. You not, well open your eyes, look at the situation we got goin' on here Lucia, seriously it's one of the reasons she came running to me now in the first place. It's the reason why I'm finding myself connectin' to what Titania's going through with herself. Lucia, look at me straight, you really don't see it?

LUCIA. What are you sayin' that she's like..?

SONDRA. Stop, I'm cuttin' you off right there. I don't want you to be sayin' somethin' that makes you sound like an ignorant fool, when I know that you're not, you not right?

LUCIA. No, I don't think so.

SONDRA. Anyway, you don't have be worryin' yourself over somethin' else that you don't need be worryin' yourself about, especially what you're thinking, she's not like me.

LUCIA. I wasn't thinking that.

SONDRA. Whatever, but I'll tell you somethin' truthful though, if she's like anybody sittin' here, she's like you and that's no fuckin' compliment believe me.

LUCIA. I know...How is she doing?

SONDRA. Angry. Hurt. Scared. Confused. How else do you think she'd be feelin' after what you've been puttin' her through?

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(No response from Lucia.)

SONDRA. I like sittin' out here on this stoop. I like having a church across the street from where I live. You remember Father Carney?

LUCIA. No.

SONDRA. Don't matter, he died more than ten years ago. I was thinking about him the other day. I've been thinkin' lately about him a lot actually. He was a very wise man. He could see into people. He knew what my feelings were all about even before I knew. His church was my home. It was my safe place. I could just be...Tell me, what's your safe place?

LUCIA. I don't have one.

SONDRA. No, that's right you don't and neither does Titania and that's not good. You seein' what I'm seein' now?

LUCIA. You think I don't know that?

SONDRA. I don't know what you know. I don't read minds. You don't talk to anybody. I'm shocked you even here sitting with me knowing our history with each other and not at that freakin' bar killing yourself. Tell me somethin', why aren't you at the bar anyway, it's not a holiday today is it?

LUCIA. There was nobody there. It was practically empty. It's always empty, except for Clara.

SONDRA. She still comes around?

LUCIA. Yeah, she still does.

SONDRA. If you ask me that place is way past its' expiration date.

LUCIA. You don't understand.

SONDRA. I understand that you're sitting here with me and not working at the bar and that your daughter is staying with me instead of you. Fuck, are you not seeing what's wrong with this picture?

LUCIA. WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME??? I'm tryin'. I'm fuckin' tryin'. Everyday I'm fuckin' tryin' okay. I'm one person. Nobody

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understands. Jesus Christ, I'm all by myself. I gotta do everything. Everything. Nobody's helping me.

SONDRA. Bullshit, you're not doin' everything. If you were doing everything we wouldn't be here talkin' like we are.

(Lucia gets up.)

LUCIA. This was a mistake. I need to go home.

SONDRA. To what home, seriously what's there waiting for you except emptiness? Talk to me. Help me to understand.

LUCIA. I'm just so tired.

SONDRA. I see it. I hear it in your voice. Sit back down. Don't be running away from me.

(Lucia sits back down.)

LUCIA. I don't know what to do.

SONDRA. Sell the bar. Get your life back.

LUCIA. Sondra you don't understand, I just can't...

SONDRA. Be a mother to your daughter, don't look at me like that, like this is somethin' new that you just now are hearin', that's your job title, 'cause I sure as hell ain't doin' it. You wanna know what she told me the other day; she told me that I should take a whiff of the air you're breathin'.

LUCIA. What?

SONDRA. Those were her words, not mine.

LUCIA. "I should take a whiff of the air I'm breathing?"

SONDRA. Blow into your hand and then take in a deep breath.

LUCIA. She doesn't know what she's talking about.

SONDRA. She don't? Look at me, watch me breathe. I'm breathing in the air around you...smells awfully familiar.

LUCIA. I don't have a problem.

SONDRA. You know she paid a visit to her father.

LUCIA. She did?

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SONDRA. She went for his birthday. Before she left on that bus she told me she was scared that she was gonna have to pay the same kind of visit with you sooner than she wants to.

LUCIA. She said that?

SONDRA. Yeah. Now I'm sayin' it too.

LUCIA. I need to breathe.

SONDRA. Lucia, please, just sell the damn place and be over with it.

LUCIA. Sell it to who?

SONDRA. I don't know, some fuckin' yuppie white boy with a trust fund lookin' to invest in something like a new coffee shop. It's a prime piece real estate for them.

LUCIA. And then what will I do for a job?

SONDRA. You ask them to hire you for something.

LUCIA. Hire me as what?

SONDRA. I don't know as their fuckin' barista when they reopen the place.

LUCIA. Me, a barista. At my age?

SONDRA. Listen to me sister, I know about these things, you lookin' seriously sexy good and you know Milf's are a hot item right now, Chica.

SONDRA. You mean you won't.

LUCIA. What you said before...I know what it feels like not to feel safe in your own home. I'm not blind to those feelings.

SONDRA. I know you're not.

LUCIA. He still comes to me you know. Sometimes in my sleep I see him comin' to me, lookin' just like the way he was, and I find myself gettin' all tight and not bein' able to breathe right...I can feel him touch me and I get so cold inside myself, I chill up like a fever.

SONDRA. Listen to me, you bury the bar. You bury him forever. Viti's been six feet under for more than ten years now and he still has you by

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your fuckin' throat. Let him go. You don't owe him a fuckin' thing anymore. You owe yourself and you owe Titania. That's what's important right now, not that fuckin' bar.

LUCIA. I'm scared.

SONDRA. I hear you. I'm scared for you. I'm scared for both you and Titania. Shit I'm scared for me. I don't wanna be losing you and then I have to be the one to raise that little girl of yours on my own. I'm gettin' night sweats and fever chills myself just thinkin' about that scenario.

LUCIA. She's a handful.

SONDRA. You ain't easy either, but your my sister. She's my niece. Both of you are my blood, tu sabe? Look at me. This, this here is your safe place, mija, you don't ever be forgettin' that shit.

LUCIA. Thank you.

SONDRA. Come on.

LUCIA. Where we going?

SONDRA. Riverside Park, just like we used to do back in the day, but first, let's you and me take a walk over to Mochito's Bodega and get us a Malta El Sol and some Ring Dings.

LUCIA. I'd like that.

SONDRA. Come here, baby girl.

Sondra and Lucia embrace. They walk arm in arm down the street until out of view.

SCENE 6

Teacher's Lounge, following day.

ALLISON SHAPIRO, 11th grade teacher tries to calm her nerves with her Chamomile tea, while Bianca heats up a hot pocket in the microwave.

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ALLISON. I just don't know anymore. It's like this, I look into the mirror of my life, like in a really deep type of way, and I see my entire teaching life passing before me and what I'm seein' is that I'm seriously fucked.

BIANCA. What happened now?

ALLISON. Mental cardiac arrest of the brain is what you see that I got goin' on over here. Seriously, I'm literally blanking out when it comes to how to handle them and their, "This how it be miss, just get over yourself" posturing's and attitudes. Let me ask you, you know Titania Fernandez?

BIANCA. Oh yes I do, do I ever. I'm about to get to know her a whole lot better too once I confront her little trouble making ass.

(Microwave signals the hot pocket is done.)

ALLISON. She hasn't been around school for a while.

BIANCA. I seen her.

ALLISON. Well, she hasn't been in my class.

BIANCA. That's a whole different story.

ALLISON. The administrative office was trying to reach out to her parents to find out what was goin' on with her, on account of her missin' all these classes. They leave a bunch of messages, her mother finally calls back, apologizes about not returning the calls sooner, then says that Titania ain't stayin' with her and that she doesn't know of her whereabouts. That's crazy talk in my book. I mean, how can anyone believe that? Seriously, what kind of a person, who calls themselves a parent, a mother for that matter, doesn't know her child's whereabouts? She's all of sixteen for Christ Sakes. It's unbelievable. You said you seen her?

BIANCA. Yeah, bunch of times.

ALLISON. I heard she recently showed her face in Mrs. Santiago's class, but check this out, she was wearing a tan and let me just say and

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this is comin' straight from Mrs. Santiago mind you, it wasn't just any of those Coney Island style types of tans neither, if you get my meaning.

BIANCA. What kind of tan was it?

(Bianca takes a seat.)

ALLISON. Mrs. Santiago said to me, her tan was an Isla Bonita type of tan and believe me Mrs. Santiago knows her tans, plus she was wearing a "Kiss me I'm a Boricua" tank top with one of them frog designs on it.

BIANCA. A Coqui.

ALLISON. A what?

BIANCA. Coqui, it's the national symbol of Puerto Rico, like the Bald Eagle is over here or the Unicorn is in Scotland. But you right, a Coqui is basically a tree frog.

ALLISON. So, it's just like I said it was, a friggin' frog.

BIANCA. Yeah that may be true, but to save you from gettin' your head smacked from left to right and back again, understand that Puerto Ricans don't be seein' it that way and they get very agitated if you call a Coqui a frog. It's like sayin' the Bald Eagle is just another bird, it is, it's part of the bird family, but you just don't be referrin' to it like that. It's a sign of respect, you get me?

ALLISON. You're a Puerto Rican?

BIANCA. No, I'm a Dominicana, we way different types of species honey. Basically, da same two wings. But different birds. If you get my meanin'.

ALLISON. Whatever. You know what, I can't. I just can't. I'm done. I'm cooked.

BIANCA. Can't what?

ALLISON. I just can't. I'm done. I give up. I just plain give the fuck up. You people win.

BIANCA. You people, really?

ALLISON. This city. The entire school system. Political correctness.

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Common core. It takes a village, LBTQ-WXYZ whatever, I'm just so fuckin' over it all, I'm toast.

BIANCA. Girl, you gotta seriously learn to breathe.

ALLISON. Breathe? I don't sleep Bianca. I don't eat. I'm all tight all the time. I can't even enjoy my chamomile tea. It has eighteen known benefits, eighteen of them for Christ sakes, plus a rich healing history and I'm getting squat.

BIANCA. Listen to me, you need to go away this Summer to like Hawaii or Tibet, hang with some monks, let me tell you, they'll set your life straight.

ALLISON. What?

BIANCA. Yeah, cut your hair, walk barefoot on the grass, meditate, eat rice from a bowl with your fingers, Burn you some incense sticks, do some chanting, shit play with some beads.

ALLISON. Please even Summer vacation isn't a Summer vacation no more. It's just more of the same bullshit with workshops on how to improve your relationships with the students, workshops to learn about the new teaching standards because the ones you learned during the previous administration ain't workin' no more, workshops on how to best communicate with the students' parents because it takes a village, blah, blah, blah bullshit. It's nothing more than just a different day within a different year inside a different classroom, containing the same fuckin' nonsense. Fuck me...I know, I know, you don't have to say a freakin' word. I sound like a freakin' cliché over here.

BIANCA. Just try and take it easy.

ALLISON. But Bianca, this is the totality of my whole entire fuckin' life that I'm livin' in now, it belongs to nobody else but me. This is all of it, all of what my life has come to.

BIANCA. You got a family?

ALLISON. No.

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BIANCA. Boyfriend?

ALLISON. No.

BIANCA. Girlfriend?

ALLISON. No. But sometimes.

BIANCA. Sometimes what?

ALLISON. Sometimes I wish I did have a girlfriend.

BIANCA. Serious?

ALLISON. I think about it. I go on the internet. I see things and I think.

BIANCA. You ever been with a girl?

ALLISON. No. Scratch that. College once. Like everybody else. It was between semesters. That doesn't really count though.

BIANCA. It doesn't?

ALLISON. I was doin' a minor in Women and Gender Studies at Hunter. I liked those classes. That's where I first read "A Room of One's Own" by Virginia Woolf. Let me tell you, I learned a lot of shit.

BIANCA. Keep talkin'.

ALLISON. Seriously though, girl to girl, look around at how the way the world is looking right now.

BIANCA. How is the world looking these days?

ALLISON. It just seems that right now, to me, that it seems to be the right time to be living inside your kind of lifestyle.

BIANCA. You think so?

ALLISON. Shit yeah, you don't see it, I mean, it seems to me like society as a whole is leaning over themselves silly making your lifestyle choice as comfortable and welcoming and hip and cool to the world as humanly possible.

BIANCA. Right, right, I hear you, you know I'm sure all those pretty hip cool kids dancin' at that club in Orlando are all sleepin' better in their graves tonight knowing what a welcoming comforting place the

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world is for them right now.

ALLISON. Wow.

BIANCA. Yeah.

ALLISON. I'm sorry. That was a stupid thing to say. I wasn't thinking. It's this place. Please don't hate me.

BIANCA. I don't hate you.

ALLISON. Thank you. I really needed to hear those words.

BIANCA. You're welcome.

ALLISON. I just want to feel comfortable and wanted.

BIANCA. It's coming to the end of another school year. Everybody's feelin' the stress. You ain't alone with what you're feelin'.

ALLISON. It just feels different this time. Don't you sense that?

BIANCA. I don't pay it no mind.

ALLISON. Lucky you.

BIANCA. You seriously think you're the only one dealing with a ton of shit in this here place? Take a number. I've been here at this school for a long ass time and the one thing I've learned that keeps my head from exploding is knowing that number one, they're just kids and number two, they're just stupid. Once you get those two things working for you, you can basically stop pounding your head against the desk tryin' to figure out why they do what they do. They don't even know themselves why they do whatever it is that they do. They just kids and they're just stupid. Do yourself a favor, punch the clock in, punch the clock out and keep on walking. That's what I say and that's what I do. Look at me. You don't see no stress on my face. No gray around the temples. My shoulders are down. I eat my hot pocket in peace.

ALLISON. I don't like any of the kids.

BIANCA. Not one?

ALLISON. There is one or was one to be more exact.

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BIANCA. Who?

ALLISON. Sophia Maldonado.

BIANCA. I know little Sophia.

ALLISON. She was my shining light. My bright star.

BIANCA. I liked little Sophia. I haven't seen her around much lately, she okay?

ALLISON. Better than okay. Her parents got her transferred to a better school. I bet those teachers at that school she's at look ten years younger than I do, because I bet their school is filled with students just like Sophia Maldonado.

BIANCA. You don't know that.

know what's more painful, not finding a Sophia Maldonado or finding a Sophia Maldonado and watching her go away to some other school, knowing you can't go with her, you're the one that's stuck.

BIANCA. You'd rather she stay here and never get to reach her full potential?

ALLISON. I wish the system was set up to help all the kids, not just the Sophia Maldonado's of the world but even the Titania Fernandez's, so that they too can reach their full potential like she's going to now.

BIANCA. You sayin' Titania Fernandez got potential?

ALLISON. She does.

BIANCA. Titania Fernandez?

ALLISON. Yeah, that's what makes her situation so painfully frustrating for me. She wrote this beautiful essay report on a short story about a runaway slave. You have to read it. I made copies. I'll bring one to you. It was the most beautiful, moving piece of student writing I've read in a very long time.

BIANCA. I'll be damn.

ALLISON. I wish she'd come back into my class again.

BIANCA. You ever tell her that her essay was beautiful?

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ALLISON. She's hasn't been around for me to see her.

BIANCA. Well, somebody's gotta tell her 'cause I know for damn sure it ain't gonna be me.

ALLISON. You're right, somebody should tell her.

BIANCA. Yeah, somebody should, don't you think?

ALLISON. You mean somebody like me...that's why we do what we do, isn't it?

BIANCA. I don't teach. I do security.

ALLISON. No, you're right, you don't, that's my job. That's who I am, I'm a teacher, thank you.

(Bianca gets up to leave.)

BIANCA. Later.

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