

Recent Unsettling Events

By
Andrea Stolowitz

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"The belief that there is only one truth, and that oneself is in possession of it, is the root of all evil in the world." - Max Born

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Time:

Now.

Place:

A college campus. The Hudson Valley. New York.

Characters:

JC Clarke: Early 20's. Identifies as African-American. Student. Receives financial aid.

Simone Walters: 20. Identifies as bi-racial (black/white). Does not need financial aid.

Joel Berger: Late 40's. Identifies as White. Dean of Students. Political scientist. Recently divorced.

Sonya Veracruz: 35. Identifies as Latinx. Classics professor. Pre-tenure.

Michael Young: Mid 20's. Identifies as White. Local activist.

Meg Fan: Early 40's. Identifies as Chinese-American. Biologist. Interim Campus Diversity Coordinator.

Blurb:

When a liberal New England college erupts in student protests over its required Western Civilization class, identity politics, free speech, and what it means to change the status quo are called into question.

Theatrical Notes:

-There are narration portions of the script which are documentary, direct address in style

-There are portions of the script where characters step out of the naturalistic moment in order to comment about it or reflect on it

-Where possible it is ideal to use handheld video, cell phone, youtube footage of the events described in the text. These moments are built for the insertion of the footage. Sometimes this footage will be acted out on stage and filmed and sometimes it will be pre-recorded.

Inspirations/Background for this play:

-This play is a work of fiction. It is based partially on actual events. The names, persons, places characters, and dates have been changed and/or fictionalized.

-The "Justin Tong" letter is actual text from a living person. Permission has been granted to use this text.

-I believe that universities and arts institutions are places where challenging complex topics about our society should be explored. At a time when challenges to free speech exist both in a liberal and conservative agenda, I write this play to bring the complexities of the issues into live discussion.

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Scene. 1: Documentary/Chorus.

SIMONE

Me? What do I think of it now?
Well it's still hard.
I'm living with my mom and step-dad in LA. Well, Hermosa Beach.

JOEL

Do I think it had lasting impact on the university? I guess the answer is these things come in cycles.

SONYA

Of course I think about how else things might have played out.
But it felt like a car crash. And once it was set in motion that was the direction it had to go in.

JC

It was an unstable time. There were a lot of feelings I was having about the place, the people, myself. It's good to have some distance.

MICHAEL

It's like this: activists activate. We make people uncomfortable. We wake people up. And of course if we really are true activists we all know that there might come a time when we have to stand alone, without the movement behind us.

MEG

Me? What do I think of it? Well in retrospect I was certainly unprepared for the job. I'm a research biologist. In all actuality, I prefer to spend time with my algae.

SIMONE

There's a theory of memory. It goes like this. We don't remember an actual memory we just remember remembering the memory - or rather we remember the memory as it was the last time we remembered it. If I understand it correctly it's kind of like a xerox of a xerox, or a cassette copy of a cassette copy, or a facsimile of a facsimile. Each time, with each copy of a copy the core memory fades just a bit until in the end whatever happened, whatever the original memory was, well it just, I guess it just fades away.

Joel starts tapping microphone.

JOEL

Hello?

He taps.

Is this thing on? Hello? Testing...
Can you hear...
Hello...

Joel turns away just as the mic is turned on

JOEL (CONT'D)

Shitballs.

“Shitballs” echoes out over the crowd. We pause. We watch a you-tube clip of the events we just saw. We hear “shitballs” and crowd laughter repeated in a loop as if posted on social media. We return to the scene.

Great. Thanks. It’s on now.

MEG (TO SONYA)

Ouch.

JOEL

I hadn’t intended to start my speech quite that way, but there you have it. Sometimes your day doesn’t progress the way you want and you end up uttering profanity in front of 1200 students and their parents.

SONYA

I’m not sure that was better.

Crowd laughter.

MEG

At least they’re laughing.

JOEL

But actually I have to say that this “microphone incident” and the fact that somebody probably already posted it to you-tube is an example of what I wanted to talk about today.

MEG

You going to Wednesday lunchtime yoga?

SONYA

Can’t. Gotta work on the book.
How’s the algae?

JOEL

That is how we live on a campus where not only can we say the unsayable without reprisal, but are in a place and time in history where we have an obligation to do so.

MEG

My collaborator in Arizona lost her funding.

JOEL

And now it’s with great excitement

MEG

Sets me back 13 months.

JOEL

that I enthusiastically welcome the incoming first-year class.

In the crowd, SIMONE whispers to JC.

SIMONE

That's because those are the parents who are here. The first-year parents.

JC stares at Simone.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

It's a ploy. Like it's a fundraising thing.

He's sending a shout out to the first year parents so that they feel his love and feel really happy about spending all that money to send their kids here.

JOEL

We encourage our students to think, to find, to seek and to resist easy answers. We strive to preserve a free and open society around us and we strive to present a place of learning with as many diverse views as possible.

SIMONE

And there it was, his diversity nod.

JOEL

It is time for this collegiate community to stand together and be the change we want to see.

Applause

And now I ask you to please enjoy the rest of this welcome barbecue and as always, we thank the board of trustees who generously funds this event.

SIMONE

That was a disappointing end. "Be the change you want to see"? And he forgot to mention the police shootings.

Simone looks at JC

I'm Simone.

I like to welcome all the new POCs to campus.

I saw you, I mean it's not too hard to see anyone not so lily white in this sea of faces, right?

We have a great new POC center on campus.

We're having some welcome events tomorrow afternoon.

At three.

After the slip-n-slide and jell-o parade.

I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name.

JC

JC. I'm JC.

SIMONE

First year?

JC

Yes. No. Not really. Maybe. I mean...it's kind of complicated.

SIMONE

So look, here's the thing.

Like an hour ago I ate this pot chocolate bar.

(MORE)

SIMONE (CONT'D)

And when I'm high I talk a lot and when I'm really high I kind of see patterns where there really aren't any. And coincidences. And then I kind of start to panic a bit and then I get really, you know, really, well, panicky.

JC studies her, deciding.

JC

Take a deep breath.

SIMONE

What?

JC

C'mon.

In through the nose out through the mouth.

Do it with me.

JC leads her through breathing.

SIMONE

I don't want you to think I'm usually like this because I'm-

JC

Breathe.

They breathe.

SIMONE

You didn't tell me.

JC

Breathe please.

SIMONE

Before this breathing thing happened. Before this happened you were telling me how you were kind of a first year.

Simone takes a deep breath.

I breathed.

JC

Yeah.

SIMONE

You don't *have* to tell me.

I am a good listener though.

I mean I talk a lot too but I can listen.

I mean if you want to tell me.

They stare.

JC

I was here three years ago.
And then I left.
And a lot of those classes from the first year well, I didn't really get credit for them. I was sick a lot.
It's just that it all kind of messed with my financial aid. And I tried to go in to talk to them but whenever I talked to them they told me I could definitely take time off. Go on academic leave. Medical leave. Whatever I wanted.

SIMONE

Everyone takes time off here.

JC

Yeah. They told me.
And then I kept asking about the money and they just said well it was used already to pay for the year of classes that I was failing. So I just left because I wasn't sure where I wanted to be and how I would pay for it.

SIMONE

That sucks.

JC

Yeah.

SIMONE

You had a job or something? I mean in your time off.

JC

Yeah. Some jobs. Some things...some people. Some places. Some more jobs. Some more things. Some more people. More places. You know how it goes.

SIMONE

Yeah. No. Not really. I mean I just came here. After high school. I mean I thought about doing a gap year but my parents, I mean they were like "just go to college and then after college but before graduate school if you want to still take time off you can."

JC

They got it all mapped out for you.

SIMONE

Yeah. Parents, you know.

JC stares.

JC

Yeah.
Yeah.
You feeling better now?

SIMONE

I feel less like I am going to fly off the earth and that gravity is dissolving.

JC
Well that's a positive sign.

SIMONE
And then?

JC
Then.
Well then...I was...Yeah.

JC stops talking. Pause.

SIMONE
Hey, hey there. Come on. Take a breath. In through the nose, out through the mouth, right?
Breathe.
I'm listening.

JC
I was kind of living with someone.
And it got kind of complicated.

SIMONE
Because?

JC
Because it turned out -
well it turned out that
she had fallen in love with someone else.
At a residency. For poets. In Iceland.
And it was her house and all that.
So.

SIMONE
Right.

JC
Yeah.
And then at the same time in July I got this call from the financial aid officer here just like out of the blue saying they could work out my financial aid and they hoped I could return in the fall, even though it was short notice.
So. Here I am.
JC round two.

SIMONE
Hey, that's one of the items we advocated for. Equal attrition rates for students of color.

JC
Equal attrition rates?

SIMONE
Yeah. More students of color, well black students really leave and never come back. White students take a break and come back. Asian students don't take a break.

(MORE)

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Black students just kind of disappear.
We got our parents to call. Board members, trustees, alumni. We demanded that they go back through the files. Make offers.

JC

Oh.
I see. I get it now.

SIMONE

No I didn't mean - I mean it's cool they acted on what they said they were gonna do.

JC

Yeah.

SIMONE

I'm sure they wanted you back. It's not just -

JC

A numbers things. Ratios. Numbers. I know. Diversity numbers. Policy.

SIMONE

Listen I'm sure, these policies -

JC

No it's cool. I'm cool.

A moment between them. Michael enters.

MICHAEL

God, parking was terrible. Sorry I'm late.

JC and Simone still in their moment.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

It's crazy to think in a city with a population of 36,000 that I can't get across town and park within a reasonable amount of time. Hey what's going on?

SIMONE

Hey how ya doin'. This is my new friend JC.

MICHAEL

Michael.

SIMONE

We just met.

MICHAEL

And already you're friends.

To JC

She has that affect on people.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

We're just headed out to dinner.
You're welcome to join us.
Get a look at the lovely small town world of the Hudson Valley.
You like Thai? Also good Mexican.

JC

I really can't. But thanks.

SIMONE

I already tried to get her to hang out.
I ate the Buddha Chocolate.

MICHAEL

Oh so that's what was going on here.

To JC

She's impossible when she's high. It's like she's some kind of manic pixie dream girl character played backwards. Like Manic Pixie Dream Girl meets David Lynch.

SIMONE

It's a film trope.

MICHAEL

I was a film minor.

SIMONE

That's when he was a student. He's an activist now.

MICHAEL

I'll go to law school eventually.

SIMONE

He works for the environmental action network.

MICHAEL

And social.

SIMONE

Environmental and Social Action network. Of the Hudson Valley.

MICHAEL

Greater.

SIMONE

Of the Greater Hudson Valley.

MICHAEL

I'm the campus/town liaison. Get young activists and student groups involved in grass roots protests and organizing. Rallies. That kind of thing.
You sure you don't want to come with us?

JC

I really need to unpack and all that.

MICHAEL

I'll be doing a seminar next week on campus if you want to come. Find out how to avoid the cops' military style tactics during rallies.

SIMONE

Michael, she just got here. Let her settle in.

They all wait. They all stare.

JC

OK then. I'll um...I'll catch you guys around.

SIMONE

Wait-
I'm in the directory.
You can look me up. If you want.

She exits.

MICHAEL

Ready?

SIMONE

Yeah.

MICHAEL

What's up?

SIMONE

I'm just high.

MICHAEL

It was enough for two people.

SIMONE

That's probably why I feel like this.

MICHAEL

I thought we were gonna do it when we went apple picking next month.

SIMONE

I know. I'm sorry.
So you wanna go? I need to be back kinda early tonight.

MICHAEL

You can stay over at my place. Drive you back in the morning.

SIMONE

Early class. Can't.

MICHAEL

Man am I so not ready for the pace of the school year and it's not even my school year.

SIMONE

Summer's different.

MICHAEL

Yeah.

MEG

We don't really talk about those events anymore. We've all just tried to move on. Me, the institution, the students. I do wonder though, I do wonder what it really means to move on.

And we transition to Joel and Sonya in bed.

Scene 2. Joel and Sonya.

JOEL

God why don't people have cigarettes anymore?

SONYA

Because they're terrible for your health.

JOEL

I know but just right now we could have a cigarette and enjoy the moment together.

SONYA

We are enjoying the moment together.

JOEL

We could enjoy the moment more together.

SONYA

While we're dying of lung cancer together? Sounds romantic.

JOEL

You mock me but if you only knew. Here it went like this. We have sex.

He waits

SONYA

Yes. Check. We did that part.

JOEL

So we sit up. Like this -

They act this out. There are no real cigarettes.

JOEL (CONT'D)

And I take the lighter

He motions opening the lighter

And you lean in

She does.

And I light your cigarette

JOEL (CONT'D)

And then you lean back on the headboard.

She "smokes"

SONYA

And then I pass you the cigarette.

A moment. A moment. They smoke a "cigarette" together in bed. We are there. He puts it out in the "ash tray". Beat.

JOEL
That was the ash tray.

She nods. They speak the next line together.

SONYA
Joel?

JOEL
Sonya?

JOEL (CONT'D)
No you first.

SONYA
No really. You.

JOEL
Well I just wanted to say this has been fun. Well more than fun.

SONYA
Are you breaking up with me?

JOEL
What? No. I didn't mean. I mean if you smoke cigarettes together in bed you don't go and break up after that.

SONYA
You don't?

JOEL
No. Do you think you do?

SONYA
No.
Joel. I just wanted to say...

JOEL
Yes?

SONYA
Well it's been fun for me too.

JOEL
And?

They look at each other.

SONYA
I know some people know about us.

JOEL
Ok.

SONYA

And I'm fine with that but overall. Well overall I'd rather keep it-

JOEL

Secret.

SONYA

Yeah. It's not. I mean it has nothing to do with, you. It's not personal.

JOEL

You just would rather if most people didn't know.

SONYA

I'm 10 months out from a tenure decision.

JOEL

And?

SONYA

Joel.

I never thought I would get a job like this.

Have a life of academia like this.

I built this from moment to moment to moment to moment.

And I just can't jeopardize that.

JOEL

Because someone on the tenure committee might not like that we're dating?

SONYA

Because maybe Joel they were friends with your wife.

JOEL

Ex.

The tenure committee's not allowed to consider that anyway.

SONYA

Yet it happens.

She takes a deep breath.

I have worked too hard for this.

JOEL

Ok. Sure. Ok. I get it.

Are we good now?

SONYA

We're good.

She kisses him.

I have class at 3:10.

She begins getting dressed.

JOEL

I have a board of trustees cocktail hour.

He sighs and begins getting dressed.

JOEL (CONT'D)

So what'd you think?

SONYA

Of?

JOEL

The speech.

SONYA

It was welcoming.

JOEL

Did you like the "be the change you want to see"

SONYA

Well that part was trite.

JOEL

But true.

SONYA

But true.

JOEL

This Dean of Students thing...

SONYA

The students always love you. They vote you their favorite professor year after year.

JOEL

Yeah.

Beat

I forgot to mention the police shootings in the speech. I told them I would.

SONYA

Where in the speech were you supposed to talk about police shootings?

JOEL

No. That's the problem. I didn't.

SONYA

I don't-

JOEL

I told them I would.

SONYA

Who?

JOEL

The Environmental and Social Action Network of the Valley. Hudson Valley. Greater Hudson Valley. They want to have a campus wide no-work day to protest racism-

SONYA

Aren't they supposed to just do it? I mean why are they asking permission?

JOEL

Well they don't want to be combative.

SONYA

Will they also want community service credit and a graduate school recommendation? I will never understand this generation. Where were you supposed to mention it?

JOEL

I don't know.

SONYA

Were you also planning on mentioning DACA? The Muslim travel ban? The refugee crisis? The fate of the Rohingya?

They pause. They look at each other.

I think the speech was good. And I also think a lot of students pay a lot of money for this education and they shouldn't maybe have an instructional day taken away without proper discussion at least.

JOEL

The no work day is optional.

SONYA

Well who exactly is going to teach in support of racism Joel? That's what it will look like for anybody who goes to work that day. When were you going to tell us all about this?

JOEL

At tomorrow's faculty meeting...

SONYA

People have planned their classes for the semester already. Removing one class does actually make a difference.

JOEL

Look I asked around a few weeks ago, a small sample of faculty thought it was a good thing for the institution to do. And we're certainly not in the position to suppress free speech. And happy students mean happy parents. And it's one day. And it's the right thing to do.

SONYA

I'm not saying it's not right Joel. I'm saying no one can teach that day and you've decided that. And instead of teaching, instead of offering my class which students pay for which delivers them an education in which they will use classic texts to hopefully analyze complex real world problems, instead of that you want to shut down all teaching and learning. What *is* the point of a university Joel?
I knew this would be complicated between us.

JOEL

Sonya. Isn't it always complicated? I mean we are humans.

SONYA

Joel-

JOEL

Maybe this is where my 47 years of experience comes in.

SONYA

And two divorces.

JOEL

The first one shouldn't count. I was 19 and I was at a four-day classical music festival. And we got it annulled. Come on Sonya. Everything worth it is always complicated.

Sonya smiles.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Right?

SONYA

Why can't it be worth it and also not complicated?

Sonya moves to the podium.

JOEL

Because, as we know, being human is a very messy venture.

And we move into Sonya lecturing.

Scene 3. Sonya lecturing.

SONYA

Being human is a very messy venture. That is why we study the classics. This discipline exists to use the initial texts of Ancient Greek and Roman history, culture and literature to plumb the depths of moral and ethical questions which haunt us today. In this class you will learn to become critical thinkers.

A personal anecdote: I attended a university much like this one in terms of its student body, focus, and curriculum. I credit my study of the classics for helping me become the scholar I am today.

As you know I am sure, there are many wonderful services available to you here. Certainly you know about the new high ropes course, the aquatics center, and the ski cabin but don't forget that also available to you is the writing center. And remember most of all that we the faculty are here for you. Now students please find your conference groups.

The class is dismissed. JC approaches Sonya. Sonya is putting away her bag. Everything from her bag spills all over the floor. Sonya bends down to pick it all up. Sonya finally looks up and sees JC waiting for her. She stands without picking up all the items.

SONYA (CONT'D)

Oh. Hi. Sorry. Did you...Were you -

JC

Pointing at the floor

Do you want me to help you with that? I can -

SONYA

No no. I got it. I'll get it. Later. Can I - can I help you with something?

JC

I just wanted to say hello. Introduce myself.

SONYA

Ok.

JC

I'm JC Clarke.

SONYA

Sonya Veracruz.

Beat.

SONYA (CONT'D)

Did you need to see me about something?

JC

No. I just wanted to, I've been advised to tell you, to tell all my professors at the start of the semester that I might have some academic accommodations.

SONYA

Ok.

JC

I actually, I took this course before but I didn't...I don't remember much of it. I'm coming back to school. I've been away for a few years. So I just wanted you to know. The Student Services Center suggested I tell professors right away. In case I need help. During the semester. So I don't...

SONYA

Slip through the cracks.

JC

Yeah. We're hoping for a more successful outcome this time. I had trouble with this class before. This place, you know it can be, well it can be kind of-

SONYA

Isolating.

JC

Yes.

SONYA

And the material is challenging.

JC

I read a lot.

SONYA

That's good. Remember though that reading critical texts is not like reading fiction for fun. It's not like reading a magazine. These are dense intellectual works. You are reading each sentence for meaning, sometimes reading and re-reading the same sentence until you understand it.

Mastering this skill takes some people longer than others.

JC

I was the valedictorian of my high school. Best GPA in three years.

SONYA

There are a lot of valedictorians with high GPAs here. This class is not easy and it is not intended to be. Most students are used to getting A's before they come here. Their parents are used to that as well. I don't grade on a curve. That means that an average student would be receiving a C. It annoys parents and students alike and frankly it has not made me a very popular professor. That said the students who have persevered have come back to thank me.

Now, have you found your conference group?

Scene 4. Chorus ---> Simone and JC

SIMONE

The second time I saw her was at the rally.

JC

I wasn't really interested in getting involved in campus politics. Or really anything. I wasn't even sure I wanted to be back. I always felt strange on that campus. I like the south. I'm used to the weather, the people, the food. The northeast always feels too busy for me.

MICHAEL

It was a rally I had been helping to plan since the previous spring. That's the thing about activism; you have to show up to other people's rallies if you want them to show up to yours.

JOEL

I had said yes to it because, well...because...well because of all the reasons one says yes to students when they come and ask you for something.

SONYA

Hindsight is 20/20. Joel didn't want the press delivering pictures of student protests to 500,000 potential parental inboxes. So to avoid that situation, he just gave them the instructional day off.

MEG

I think back then most of us just accepted it as a day off. I will admit, well I mean my parents, they survived the cultural revolution...I won't say I felt like the university was pressuring us and the citizenry was carrying out its purges, I just felt kind of a subtle pressure. Don't teach. I used the day to catch up on work in my lab.

MICHAEL

Hello and welcome members of the student body, the faculty, and my co-organizers of this event. It is wonderful to see so many of you here with us today. Today on your campus we boycott racism and fight against police brutality. Since last spring we have been organizing this day, this campus wide boycott of business as usual in order to allow us to sit with these issues as a community. Students, we at the Environmental and Social Action Network of the Greater Hudson Valley stand united with you and support your disruption of power and privilege.

SIMONE

I'm there at the rally. Michael's speaking. I am wearing a "fight the power" t-shirt. I have it rolled up. My belly button is showing.

She does this

SIMONE (CONT'D)

It's warm out. A warm fall day. A Friday. No one is working today. We started planning it last spring. That's how Michael and I met. We saw each other, made eye contact and we felt a kind of electricity. Forty-five minutes later we were having sex in the gender neutral bathroom. Michael. Michael's earnest about everything. Politics, sex. Everything really.

JC

I'm walking across the quad. That super activist guy Michael is talking.

MICHAEL

We stand with you as you agitate against environmental degradation, racism, sexism, ableism...as you provoke action for our sister organizations representing native rights, a free press, and black lives matter.

JC

I'm crossing the quad-

SIMONE

And then suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, there she is, flitting through the crowd. I see her again and I lift up my hand...

Simone waves her hand

JC

And she's waving at me. And as much as I don't like being here it's nice to see someone waving at me. And she's nice in a kind of chatty way. And she's cute. And I've sworn off relationships. And then we are there-

SIMONE

Hi!

JC

Hi.

SIMONE

I didn't think I would see you again.

JC

Campus isn't that big.

SIMONE

I couldn't find you in the directory.

JC

Financial aid issues.

SIMONE

That sucks.

JC

It's OK. They're still letting me sit in on classes.
That your guy up there?

SIMONE

Yeah.
He practiced this morning.
I already heard it.

JC

Oh.

How's it going? SIMONE

Good. Fine. Ok.
You? JC

Is that a real question? SIMONE

Yeah. JC

Because sometimes you don't know if someone really wants to know or if they're just being polite. SIMONE

I ask only real questions. JC

That's good to know. SIMONE

So.
How are you? JC

I don't know.
I alternately love this place and want to leave it. SIMONE

Yeah.
Why? JC

Another real question? SIMONE

JC nods.
Because sometimes it just feels like more fake bullshit in an ever pursuit of the fake bullshit life that was set out for me and it's not always the life I think I want but then again it's the one I am sure I will end up with. Because sometimes this place is just so cheery and not at all really part of real life.

At least it's pretty here. And you gotta live somewhere. JC

And then I'm squinting into the sun. I reach into my bag. I pull out a cigarette. SIMONE

Smoke? SIMONE (CONT'D)

SIMONE (CONT'D)

She's looking at me. She probably hates smoking. She probably thinks I'm nuts.

Beat

SIMONE (CONT'D)

And then she smiles.

JC

Sure.

SIMONE

Really? I didn't think you were the smoking type.

JC

Everyone's got a vice or two right?

SIMONE

And she's smiling at me.

JC

We're just standing in the sun in the middle of the quad smiling.

SIMONE

(to JC)

We have to be fifty feet from the building

JC

We count out fifty paces.

SIMONE

We count alternately as we step.

JC

One.

SIMONE

Two.

JC

Three.

SIMONE

And we continue counting. It's like some kind of walking meditation.

JC

39.

SIMONE

40.

JC

41.

SIMONE

And we reach 50 and we are there, kind of triangularly away from all the buildings.

JC

We can hear the rally happening behind us.

SIMONE

And I lean over. And I light her cigarette.

JC

And we stand there

SIMONE

and we share the cigarette.

Beat.

JC

I don't *really* smoke.

SIMONE

Yeah. Me neither.

They smoke, sharing the cigarette.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

How's classes?

JC

I like the classes.
I get headaches a lot.

SIMONE

You go to health services?

JC

They know.
I got a single room because of it.

SIMONE

Wow. That's big. Must be some tremendous headaches you get.

JC

Yeah.

SIMONE

And we stand there for a while. And we smoke.

JC

I gotta get to class.

SIMONE

You're kidding.
Who's holding class today? Everyone cancelled classes.

JC

Not everyone.
Veracruz.
Core 143.

SIMONE

That cunt.

JC

Naw, she, she's just one of those people.

SIMONE

The cunt-y kind?

JC

She just...I don't know. She's strict.

SIMONE

(To JC)

If there's one person who would intentionally hold class today it's her. You know she almost gave me a D on a paper because it was too detailed. I made her give me extra time to write it to her expectations. My mom was really pissed. She called the dean. Eventually she had to raise it to an A-. So anyway, I'm happy to help you in her class if you want.

(as narration)

And then she says this thing and it kind of sticks with me.

JC

You know I felt it last time. Last time I was here.
Sometimes that class hurts.

SIMONE

It hurts?

JC

Yeah. I mean sometimes, sometimes I think it's all just designed as evidence, a class of evidence in order to support the system we have today. To keep things the way they are. And for everyone who does well in this system, this society, for all those people who prosper, well of course those texts are foundational.

And they are. I get that.

But it's also those same foundational texts that I don't know, allowed slavery to be justified for like 2000 years. I mean since the Greeks, right?

And I just sit there in that class wanting to believe those texts are the most important pieces of intellectual history I'll encounter and at the same time know that if I accept that, I'm turning my back on all the shit they've caused.

And then I just feel it. Like this kind of dull pain.

SIMONE

We smoke.
And then I turn to her

(To JC)

Where does it hurt?

(as narration)

And she's looking at me and she touches her heart.

JC

It hurts here.

SIMONE

And then she takes my hand and she puts it on her head.

JC

And here.

SIMONE

And we pause for a second. And linger.

JC

And then she says,

SIMONE

Come on. Don't go to class. It's sunny. It's beautiful today. Hang out with me.

(as narration)

This is an odd thing for me to say because Michael and I have plans but I don't know. I like her. And I don't know why.

(to JC)

We'll go on a tree-top tour of the campus forest.

JC

Are you kidding?

SIMONE

That high-ropes course is crazy. It's got a zip line at the end. Looks kind of like in that movie *Divergent*. You know that movie?

JC

Yeah.

But I can't.

I gotta go to class.

SIMONE

What if you can't?

JC

Because?

SIMONE

And she's smiling at me.

(To JC)

Because there's a spontaneous rally that blocks the building.

(as narration)

And that's exactly what happens.

Scene 5: Live and also projected as a you tube Video/Cell phone Video. We see Simone standing up on a campus wall surrounded by students. Cheers from students.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Students we stand here united in this fight. This university, this place we have called home is becoming more and more hostile to us. We asked for a day to disrupt business as usual. We asked for a time when we as a campus could come together and recognize the inequities, injustices and mostly we were given that space. People of color are dying in the streets out there and we are here on one of the most liberal campuses in America not even being able to take one day off? And what is the class that's taking place today? What is the class which would be taking place in that building if we were not here to stop it? Core 143. A class which is entirely about the foundation stones that have created this system that we have inherited. We train in the system we've created in order to maintain that system. I am here today, here now, here blocking this building to say it is time to examine these widely held beliefs that we regard as part of the educational tradition that should take us forward and further in our thinking. It is time to ask the fundamental questions we need to ask ourselves. What is this education for and what is the new canon we seek to create? Do we need yet another class that perpetuates the Eurocentric position? Before I came here, earlier this afternoon I was talking to someone who was telling me that it hurts to be on this campus. It does hurt. Every time there's another acceptance of the history, the thinkers, the philosophy that gave rise to the systems of inequity in this country it hurts. We all think this material is of the mind, it's not... It's of the body.

JC

And there we are up on the stairs in front of the humanities building together and all the students are cheering.

SIMONE

And she looks sideways at me and she smiles. Another student jumps up and suggests we have a teach-in for the faculty.

JC

Then 15, 20, 30 people are jumping up there. We're looking out over this moving jolting alive crowd and we are there at the center of it.

SIMONE

Sometimes you feel that together with someone else you are more than the sum of your parts. That's how it was with her.

Scene 6. Later that day. Sonya's place.

SONYA
I don't understand Joel.

JOEL
What?

SONYA
I thought it was voluntary.

JOEL
It was voluntary.

SONYA
So I elected to teach.

JOEL
What did you want me to do?

SONYA
Call security.

JOEL
We have three community safety officers. One wears a kilt. Even if they were capable did you want me to have them taze a bunch of students on the front lawn of the college? How do you think that will look on Newsweek?

SONYA
Is that what this is about?

JOEL
I do have to think about that. I already have had about 1000 phone calls from donors about the you-tube video. Apparently it's going viral.

SONYA
So first they shut down my class and then they reinterpret the content of it?

JOEL
They're in college.

SONYA
So?

JOEL
They are passionate about things. We accept and encourage students who follow their passions.

SONYA
Are you equivocating this?

JOEL
No. But it's one class.

SONYA
You are.

JOEL
Sonya.

SONYA
They blocked the entrances. I was inside Joel. I was trapped inside. I couldn't leave until they went away.

JOEL
They didn't know you were already there.

SONYA
What do they think? We don't prepare for class?

JOEL
No they probably didn't think that you practice your lecture before you give it. I think they thought you would be stopped from teaching.

SONYA
Well I was.
I'm pre-tenure Joel.

JOEL
I know.

SONYA
Suddenly I'm public enemy number #1.

JOEL
You're not.

SONYA
Did you read the comments on the facebook page?

JOEL
Don't read those.

SONYA
So you did read them?

JOEL
Yes.

SONYA
And you think-

JOEL
Facebook is a public platform.

SONYA
They called me a

Don't
JOEL

A whitewashed bitch
SONYA

Obviously the tenure committee is not going to let this affect their decision.
JOEL

And my student evals? How will they look at those? This place puts an inordinate amount of value on student evaluations. That guy Smith a couple of years back over in Art History didn't get tenure because of his.
SONYA

Joel's phone rings. He looks at it.

Shit.
JOEL

He doesn't answer.

It's Owens. He's fund raising in Santa Barbara. I'm guessing he just heard about it.
JOEL(CONT'D)

Joel looks at his phone. Reads a text.
Yup. He heard about it. He wants me to have an emergency meeting with the communications team. Shit. With the emergency communications team.

Joel.
SONYA

What?
JOEL

Nothing.
SONYA

No really. I'm sorry. Tell me.
JOEL

I was scared.
SONYA

What do you mean?
JOEL

I was scared in there.
SONYA

You were?
JOEL

Yeah.
SONYA

JOEL

Why didn't you call, let someone know you were in there?

SONYA

I...I don't know. I froze. I couldn't move.

JOEL

I don't-

SONYA

I couldn't move Joel. Do you know how terrifying that is?

JOEL

I'm sorry.

SONYA

I just wanted you to know.

JOEL

Thank you.

Joel's phone beeps. He doesn't look at it.

Will I see you later?

SONYA

I'll be here working.

JOEL

Should I come by?

SONYA

Do you want to?

JOEL

I do.

He gets ready to go.

Hey Sonya.

SONYA

Yeah?

JOEL

Next time...

SONYA

Yeah?

JOEL

Call me. Please? I am here for you. I am.

Scene 7. Michael and Simone.

MICHAEL

I didn't know you had that in you.

SIMONE

What?

MICHAEL

That oratory skill.

SIMONE

You saw the video?

MICHAEL

3.2 Million people saw the video. I'll be honest. I don't know why you did that.

SIMONE

What?

MICHAEL

We have a strategy here. An activist strategy of the most important topics to follow up on -

SIMONE

And this isn't on it.

MICHAEL

No. Frankly it's not. Black men being killed for selling loose cigarettes in the street is just maybe a little more important than this. Western Civ? Please.

SIMONE

So the agenda is your agenda? I thought you wanted me to find something I'm passionate about.

MICHAEL

Yeah. But something useful.

SIMONE

This is-

MICHAEL

To the 1%.

SIMONE

That's not-

MICHAEL

You are the 1%.

Simone is silent.

You always say you're from LA but it's Hermosa Beach. You pretend you need to shop at Goodwill but you don't.

SIMONE

Fuck you.

MICHAEL

Stop pretending.

SIMONE

I am. That's what this is about. This is the environment I inhabit. Are you suggesting I'm not supposed to want to make it better?

MICHAEL

No. You should make it better. In ways that tie in with the larger actions.

SIMONE

Like?

MICHAEL

In the realm of college education: free tuition, affirmative action, financial support of historically black institutions.

SIMONE

And the actual content of what we learn is insignificant?

MICHAEL

I'm saying it's insignificant to the movement. Which is larger than just this and I wouldn't have necessarily chosen this as our next action. Also I don't approve of spontaneous actions. We've been talking about this for five months. For the whole day to be overshadowed now with a you-tube video, one of questionable value- Well you can see why I'm a little upset right. I mean -- look I realize this is just fun for you-

SIMONE

What's that supposed to mean?

MICHAEL

You're in college. You're just marching all over the campus with a list of demands and then throwing all the great parties.

SIMONE

You like coming to them.

MICHAEL

Oh so now this is going to be about how I like to hang out with college students?

Beat

SIMONE

No. I just -

MICHAEL

Just a little forethought. That's it. That's all I ask. Do you know what it was like up there? All of the sudden I started to see the crowd move away from my speech and they were all headed somewhere...That's not how a movement I organize should go. I should know what's going on all the time. And this isn't some game. People get hurt. People could have gotten hurt.

SIMONE

No one got hurt. And we have so many more supporters now.

MICHAEL

Low hanging fruit. People who want to protest a class taking place.

SIMONE

So suddenly they don't count?

MICHAEL

I'm just saying I was hoping we are building a movement bigger than I don't know -

SIMONE

Some dumb college issue.

Beat.

MICHAEL

You said it.

Beat.

SIMONE

All summer you've been telling me I need to be more personally involved. Not to stand outside the movement.

MICHAEL

I thought you should have come to Colorado to do the training with me not go sailing with your parents.

SIMONE

My mom and her fiancé.

MICHAEL

Whatever.

SIMONE

For your information it was because of JC.

MICHAEL

What about her?

SIMONE

She says the course hurts her.

MICHAEL

She says the course hurts her?

SIMONE

Like to take it. Like even to be here.

MICHAEL

So why's she here?

SIMONE

Are you kidding?

MICHAEL

Look I'm sorry if -

SIMONE

Did you watch the video?

MICHAEL

I watched the fucking video.

SIMONE

The thing is, you were always telling me that if I wanted to be an activist I had to activate.

And that it should feel personally connected, emotional to me.

So I think I found it. The daily fatigue I feel in a place like this...

I want these people here to understand. To get it. To admit that we're all just trying to keep things the way they are, but pretending that we're moving everything forward. It does wear on me. I just never knew what it was.

Look, I didn't think about it until JC said it hurt.

MICHAEL

No offense but she sounds a little -

SIMONE

It DOES hurt. That's the thing.

MICHAEL

There are those moments where you wish you could say what was on your mind. That was one of them. The truth was that underneath it all I was hurt that they were together on the video. I had always imagined that Simone and I would be leading the movement together. On the video they looked so, well complete. Happy. In charge.

SIMONE

They say that when you're falling in love you go kind of crazy. That's maybe what it was. I was falling in love. The movement, her, the life. Something bigger than myself.

JOEL

Relationships always complicate things. I was falling in love.

SONYA

I try not to fall in love.

MEG

It was like at that time everything was centering around high emotion. I could see everything from my lab window. It felt like I was at the center of a storm.

JC

When I was 18 I went home for Thanksgiving. It was my mother, her sister, my uncle and some cousins. My mother always prays before we eat. And she's praying now. Aloud. And we're following along and all of the sudden she's asking God to help us be more perfect. Become more perfect beings. My uncle says all God's beings are perfect and my mother stops and she looks at me. They all look at me.

(MORE)

JC (CONT'D)

And my mother says no. No that's not true. And my uncle, he knows what she's talking about and he doesn't agree with her and he says again that we are all perfect the way God made us. And she says no, she says Jennifer Catherine, she needs God's help to change. And I know what she's talking about. And she's saying that God's biggest present for her would be for God to cure me. And she asks us all to pray that God can help me. And we all just do it. It's funny because you don't really know what that's like until after it happens. It makes you not want to go home for holidays anymore, that's for sure.

Scene 8. Meg and Joel.

MEG

I am pipetting swamp samples in my lab.

JOEL

I seldom go to the bio building. There was that time about eight years ago when the cockroach experiment got out of hand.

MEG

This is actually what my lab assistant is supposed to be doing but she's having adjustment issues and needs some time off.

JOEL

I still have a mental image of roaches covering almost every wall of that building. Ugh.

MEG

So I'm pipetting these samples.

JOEL

Still when duty calls.

MEG

I'm hoping some local environmental groups might want to share this research. It's hard to get research done only with undergraduates. The mathematicians have it worse though. At least mine can stand here and pipette. If only they were able to show up.

JOEL

The bio building always smells a little weird. Like a combination of plant fertilizer

MEG

(To Joel)

And floor polish. I know. You always tell me that.

Joel looks around for roaches.

I haven't seen a roach in here for at least three years.

Joel still looks around nervously.

MEG (CONT'D)

To what do I owe this honor.

JOEL

What honor?

MEG

Why are you here Joel?

JOEL

Right. Well. I have a favor.

MEG
This already sounds bad. You know I'm at a critical stage of my research.

JOEL
Yes the algae.

MEG
Right.

JOEL
Look. I know it's a favor. And it's only an interim thing. I mean eventually we'll hire for this position. But for right now we need it.

MEG
How interim?

JOEL
Just this year.

MEG
Joel.

JOEL
We can give you second semester course relief.

MEG
I have to teach next semester otherwise I won't be able to get any lab assistants.

JOEL
Ok it can be future course relief.

MEG
What is it?

JOEL
Diversity Coordinator.

MEG
Joel.

JOEL
Interim.

MEG
Are you asking me?

JOEL
Begging?

MEG
There's got to be someone better.

JOEL

Well maybe.
Obviously it has to be a faculty member of color.

MEG

Right.

JOEL

Right.

MEG

Why me?

JOEL

Well you of course-

MEG

Tell me the real deal.

JOEL

I asked some others.
Luke in Chemistry. Jorge in Economics.
Luke said no. Said he didn't want to get involved. And Jorge is from Argentina.

MEG

And?

JOEL

Well he's white. I mean sure, yeah, he speaks Spanish, but he can trace his lineage to the court of Ferdinand and Isabella.
And he attended Oxford.
But I asked. And he said no. He said he didn't think he would be the right match.

MEG

Sonya?

JOEL

She's pre-tenure.

MEG

I see.
I can't believe you're asking me to take a job for which I wasn't even one of your top three candidates.

JOEL

It's a favor. I know.

MEG

What do I have to do?

JOEL

Be available to be consulted on diversity matters. Students need to talk to someone, faculty needs to talk to someone and they don't want to, you know, talk to someone who's, you know...

MEG

White.

JOEL

Right. Come on Meg. It could be a good way to get you into admin. You don't want to be in your lab forever right?

MEG

I like my lab. But yes. Overall admin would be good. My daughters are going to college in two years.

JOEL

And the money's better. So it might be a good time.

MEG

It's because of the rally?

JOEL

Well the video got a lot of likes and shares. And the communications people - Sue Ellen...

MEG

Oh I bet they're shitting bricks.

JOEL

And the president - He's shitting bricks too.

MEG

Ok I know it's bad but it's also hard not to laugh. I mean I spend years and years pipetting here in the lab which is after years and years of training and bench science as a grad student with big rides in famous labs that went into articles that almost went into *Nature* or *Science*...

I mean the scope of the work we put in year after year and they're shitting bricks over short term events?

JOEL

I'm glad you find it amusing.

MEG

Come on you do too.

JOEL

Well it is kind of hard not to smile when the president is railing against the students on Skype and he's turning all shades of red and the communications people do look oh so stern.

So look - will you do it.

MEG

Fine Joel. But you owe me.

JOEL

Seriously the college does owe you. Let me talk to the academic committee and confirm that course relief.

MEG

I thought it was confirmed?

JOEL

It is. Will be. I promise.

JOEL (CONT'D)

And I walk out and I'm wondering what is happening around me? I just corralled one of my friends into a thankless job for which she may or may not be compensated.

MEG

The problem with me is that I too often say yes. They say that's what happens to the first-born of the first generation. We want to make everything work out. We end up translating for our parents at school conferences. We make sure the siblings who come after us have it easier. We attend their school conferences instead of our parents. So I guess that's why I said yes when Joel asked. And diversity coordinator. I don't know. Chinese in Boston in the 70s. There were a lot of us. I don't think I ever won anything for being diverse. Poor yes. Diverse no. And anyway, being an Asian woman in a bio department is hardly something novel. So it's like I'm not really diverse. I mean I'm diverse in that I didn't speak English until I went to public kindergarten but then after that, not diverse. Which is why I am not sure I'd be the best person for diversity coordinator. I just wanted to study my algae.

Scene 9. Sonya lecturing.

SONYA

It's nice to see so many of you back after Friday's events. I see evidently that when there are consequences to actions you are all present and polite. I have to tell you it disappoints me that I saw so many of your faces outside the lecture hall on Friday. After reading and discussing Plato's "The Apology of Socrates" you want to shut down the lecture? Have you learned nothing? Think people. Think. You don't make room for new ideas by silencing all discourse. That's not what this education is for. Does anyone want to dare to interrupt me now that we are in the same room? I didn't think so. The missed class Friday notwithstanding your papers will still be due by Wednesday. I won't be holding additional hours for those missed on Friday. Thank you. Class dismissed.

JC approaches. Sonya drop her things. Same situation as before.

JC

Um. Hello?

Sonya stands up.

SONYA

Can I help you?

JC

I wanted to see if I could get my essay back.

SONYA

Office hours are from 4-6PM.

JC

Yeah. I have another appointment then at health services.

Sonya stares at her.

SONYA

Just a minute.

She leafs through a pile of papers. She finds it. She doesn't give it.

I saw the video. Millions of people saw the video. You know what I was doing while you all were having your moment in front of the camera? I was sitting here shaking.

JC

I...

SONYA

Everyone, everyone from the beginning has been wanting me to not have this job, this position. My mother would say "Little Sonya, please, please, do something practical, go into your brother's business, anything. Sonya we worked so hard for you. We came to this country for you."

(MORE)

SONYA (CONT'D)

My teachers in school. "Oh Sonya, you're so good at math, you should pursue engineering, that's where you can help your family the most." And then I sit here in my classroom, the one I have fought to have, to teach a class on how this civilization that we inhabit is formed so we can learn from it, and my students stand outside and hate me also.

JC

That's not what it's about...

Sonya hands her the essay.

SONYA

Fine beginning analysis. Good start. C
A "C" is a good grade. Trust me. Some people failed.
Let me give you some advice here. This access, this privilege you have by being here, it has real value. Don't let it get by. Don't get distracted. Keep your eyes on the prize if you will.

JC nods

Those demonstrators already have privilege. You don't.

JC

Right.
It's just sometimes it hurts.

Sonya stares

SONYA

What hurts?

JC

The way it is. The way it is hurts. This class hurts.
It tells me all the things I'm not.
And it tells me to treasure thoughts of people who think I'm inferior. While I sit here with people who think I am inferior. At a place that's not built for me.
And all the while I have to pretend it's not there.
It's not true.
And sometimes I think this class is required to remind me of my place in this structure.
Don't step too far out of line.
Here are the rules.
Fit in where we tell you.

Sonya and JC stare at each other.

SONYA

Keep working. Keep turning in your papers. Use my office hours. I'm here to help you. Go to the writing center.

JC

Maybe it doesn't have to hurt. Maybe we can just be done with that?

Sonya stares at her

SONYA

There is no “being done with that”.
That’s not how it works.
The trick is not to mind it.

Scene 10. Simone and JC. High ropes course night.

SIMONE
She actually said that?

JC
She did.

SIMONE
She. She just doesn't get it.

JC
No, she gets it alright.

SIMONE
You could file a complaint about being spoken to like that.

JC
I can't.

SIMONE
Why not? We just got the new diversity coordinator.

JC
I know.

SIMONE
And?

JC
I'm on financial aid. When you're on financial aid you don't really complain. When you're on financial aid you're happy to be here.

SIMONE
And then there's this pause.

And I want to say, "look...it can't be all so impossible. Right? There has got to be a way forward."

But I don't say it because somehow in that moment I sense she's what...maybe right? Or I don't want to argue so I change the subject? Or I feel kind of guilty because I don't need any financial aid and I can complain to my heart's content. And we're hanging out there in the trees on this bizarre ropes course and I just want her to like me.

(To JC)
Michael was annoyed.
About the way this is happening.

JC
Do you care?

SIMONE
What do you mean?

JC

Do you really care?

SIMONE

He's got a lot of people who'll help.

JC

You don't need help. You got the entire student body behind you.

SIMONE

I know.

JC

It's like...Joan of Arc.

SIMONE

Joan of Arc?

JC

There's all this speculation about her visions, her divine experiences...she led armies, waged wars, talked to angels. At the time most people didn't understand she was a visionary. Only after. They wrote books about her after.

SIMONE

So you're saying I'm a visionary?

JC

No.

SIMONE

You saying you're gonna write a book about how I'm a visionary?

JC

I'm saying that sometimes you don't know till you're long dead what side of history you're gonna come out on. And that you gotta follow your heart. And that St. Joan went up in flames for what she believed.

SIMONE

(narration)

I like hearing her talk.

We pause again.

JC

And she's saying

SIMONE

(To JC)

you are without a doubt the most interesting person I've ever met

SIMONE (CONT'D)

(narration)

And then she's laughing. And she says,

JC
(to Simone)

You gotta get out more.

JC (CONT'D)
(narration)

And I'm thinking this time I'm supposed to keep my nose to the grindstone. Do the work. Not get distracted. And I'm thinking there's so much she doesn't know. I've lived five lifetimes for her one.

SIMONE

I'm pretending to not be afraid of heights which I am. Because I thought this would be a good idea but it's pretty effing high up.
And we're hanging there mid-air, in the middle of the night and I say

SIMONE (CONT'D)
(To JC)

Listen-

JC

Yeah.

SIMONE

I want to say, I want to say: lets change the fucking world. But I don't because at that moment she leans in

JC

And I say

(to Simone)

let's climb higher.

SIMONE

And she offers me her hand.

JC

And up we go.

Scene 11. Chorus/documentary

MICHAEL

I don't know what's going on. We're hot. We're cold, we're on, we're off. I feel like a bad '70's song. There's another police shooting. Not fatal. Same old. Traffic stop. It keeps going.

SIMONE

This is a movement. We demanded a diversity coordinator. They gave it to us. There's hundreds of students into this.

JC

My headaches are bad. I'm keeping up with work. I'm missing classes then I'm missing work. I'm going to health services. I'm trying to get more sleep. I can't read when my head hurts.

JOEL

I'm trying to keep everyone happy.

SONYA

I'm hearing rumors of more protests.

SIMONE

You can't tell someone that. It sticks in my head. JC sticks in my head. I can't think of anything besides her. You can't tell someone the trick of racism is not to mind it.

MEG

It's my first complaint as diversity coordinator.

SIMONE

I believe we have a duty to report that stuff.

MEG

Even though it was a reported comment, I mean the student complainant didn't witness the abuse but it was reported to her. Nonetheless, I have a duty to investigate it. So I wrote up the incident and sent it off to the faculty council.

JOEL

The students are grabbing national media attention. The press is not favorable. They are critical of the college.

MICHAEL

And suddenly the Environmental and Social Action Network of the Greater Hudson Valley has 3.5 thousand likes. I'm getting calls for interviews.

SIMONE

We have an office in the student center.

JOEL

Things fundamentally change once the class is regularly being protested.

SIMONE

Every humanities lecture has 15 to 20 protestors in it. We are silent. Respectful.

SONYA

They hold signs with the words “race traitor” and point them at me while I lecture.

MEG

They have signs. Some are profane. I enter my building through the back entrance now.

SONYA

I’ve started lecturing sitting down so I can stay seated during the interruptions. I used to stand during lectures.
I don’t speak very loudly.

JOEL

More press. More protests. Headlines like “Protestors block students from attending classes” Counter headlines from our press team saying “We Embrace Dissent.”

SIMONE

We challenge the course content to be conscious of the power it gives to already privileged ideas. Professors we call on you to make time in your lecture for alternative opinions.

SONYA

It’s the afternoon seminar. I’m lecturing on late Greek figurative sculpture.

SIMONE

Which reinforces euro-centric ideas of beauty.

JC

I was there. It was I don’t know. I’ve never experienced anything like that.

MEG

It was unfortunate. I mean no one wanted anyone to get hurt. Well maybe that’s not really true.

MICHAEL

It was all recorded.

SONYA

I’m lecturing -

JC

And then protestors start yelling.

SIMONE

I wasn’t present unfortunately. Had I been there-

MICHAEL

You can see how the camera is being stuck in her face.

We see this video

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

And there's a student

JOEL

And she's screaming

We see the video

MEG

She's screaming at the top of her lungs

We hear the screams/watch the video

SONYA

She's screaming out that it's all lies; that I am an arm of white supremacy, and I'm trying to talk, breathe.

JC

This white girl is like losing her shit about standards of beauty.

MICHAEL

No one does anything. It's on the video.

JOEL

The girl is still screaming.

MEG

Professor Veracruz stands.

SONYA

I stand to dismiss the class.

We see on the video that Sonya stands. And then on stage we see Sonya stand.

SONYA (CONT'D)

My heart is beating hard. I can't breathe. There's this loud screaming.

JC

And time seems to stop.

SONYA

And I can't breathe.

JOEL

More people start screaming.

SIMONE

She's up at the podium. And then she, it looks like she slumps over onto it.

MEG

There's still screaming. She's basically draped over the podium and no one comes.

MICHAEL

And then the video stops.

SONYA

I'm just standing there and I'm draped over the podium and I can't move. I can't pick my head up. I can't breathe. They're all there, 20-30 protestors all screaming at me. Every time I open my mouth to speak, they scream. I'm hot. I'm dizzy. I can't move. I can't breathe.

Image of Sonya's collapse freezes behind her.

SCENE 12: SIMONE and the Student Body.

SIMONE

Fellow students it is nice to be here at this gathering outside the faculty club. We are here to disrupt the dominant system logic. Over on the quad we have some DJs and bands for you all. The party is entry by donation.

Cheering

And if you're our white ally and you feel ready to make reparations by paying a little something extra to cover the cost of cultural appropriation of black music over the last 100 years you should feel free to do that. Show your ally-ship through some cash.

Joel in the faculty meeting

JOEL

Fellow Faculty: We are in the process of reminding the students how and when they are able to speak. We welcome the challenging of our dominant world order and continue to support the students' right to speak up but to do so in an appropriate manner and when invited to speak.

SIMONE

We won't let the faculty continue to spew one sided information in our core required courses. It is time for room to be made for other voices otherwise we will take that room. It is time to stop coddling grown white men who are crying about the loss of Plutarch.

JOEL

As we come into the final days of the semester I plead for increased good will.

SIMONE

We've been asked for our good will.

JOEL

So that we may finish out the semester in peace.

SIMONE

But our good will means that we allow others to hurt us. We demand a correction. And a correction is not peaceful.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

And everyone's cheering-

MICHAEL

It's a powerful speech. I'm walking over to her.

SIMONE

I'm looking around.

JC

I'm standing next to her.

SIMONE

We're surrounded by a buzzing crowd. The band is beginning to play.

MICHAEL

She's the star. Surrounded by this energy and I'm almost there. I'm about to put my arm on her shoulder.

SIMONE

She's there next to me. I want to say something smart. Anything.

JC

I lean in to her.

SIMONE

And she leans in.
And the crowd is cheering and everything is warm.

JC

The other strict rule I had for myself was no relationships. I can get off balance easily. I've spent the last two years up and down and then mostly stable really until the break-up in July.

SIMONE

And suddenly we're there in front of everyone and I kiss her. And suddenly in that moment this is all I've ever wanted.

JC

And I know this is a bad idea. But...well. Yeah.

MICHAEL

And then I see what's going on. Which I have to say I kind of could guess. But it still kind of hurts. I feel like she's the kind of girl who goes with what's cool. Back when I was cool it was me. Now that things have shifted it's not. She's the queen of the movement now.

Scene 13. Meg and Sonya.

MEG
Are you sure you're ok?

SONYA
Just tired.

MEG
I'm sorry about what happened.

SONYA
It's ok. I just. I think it was mostly overwork. Over tired. Stress.

MEG
And you're coming up for tenure.

SONYA
Yes.

MEG
So it's a stressful time.

SONYA
Yes.

MEG
Is there anything else you'd like to say?

SONYA
About?

MEG
Oh I thought Joel told you.

SONYA
Told me...

MEG
Oh.

MEG (CONT'D)
And this is awkward.

SONYA
Told me?

MEG
You know I'm interim diversity coordinator.

SONYA
Yes.

MEG

Well you've...You know what. I'm sorry I think Joel should be here.

SONYA

Why?

MEG

Look, you've been through a lot.

SONYA

Yes.

MEG

There's been a complaint.

SONYA

About?

MEG

A reported comment.

SONYA

Do you want to share it?

MEG

Sonya...The reason I called you in was to get your side of it.

SONYA

I think you can share it without Joel present, I mean he's not actually the person involved in the complaint is he?

MEG

Apparently you told a student of color that

She looks at paper

“the trick is not to mind it” when dealing with racism.

SONYA

I think that's true. Don't you?

Meg thinks.

MEG

I don't know.

SONYA

What do you mean you don't know?

MEG

That's not the issue here.

SONYA

It's not?

MEG

No. The issue is the complaint not whether your advice is correct. The complainant feels that by telling her that you were suggesting to her that she should do nothing about racism.

SONYA

I see.

MEG

Keep in mind this is a reported comment.

SONYA

Meaning?

MEG

Another student filed the complaint on her behalf. It's part of our title IX policy.

SONYA

I know. I watched the required HR videos.

MEG

I'm sorry. Joel was supposed to tell you. He told me he'd tell you and then you and I would meet.

SONYA

Why would Joel tell me?

MEG

What do you mean?

SONYA

Why would Joel tell me? Did he tell you something?

MEG

About?

SONYA

Nothing. Nothing.

MEG

Ummm. Joel appointed me to my position and since my position is interim, he is the supervisor. And he's supposed to convey that a complaint has been filed. We just. We got a little ahead of ourselves. We're learning as we go. So I'm sorry about that. But you are feeling better right?

SONYA

Meaning I'm not going to keel over right here?

MEG

Sonya.

SONYA

I'm on the verge of a tenure decision. A decision which will determine how the rest of my academic life shakes out. Which doesn't help my anxiety.

MEG

It's just a complaint. It doesn't mean it's even correct. You just tell me what happened.

SONYA

How about I do something else?

MEG

Sonya-

SONYA

How about I file a complaint and say that that student screaming during my class as I was trying to teach was silencing the voice of an untenured woman professor of color with a documented disability.

MEG

So you want to file a complaint?

SONYA

Aren't you the diversity coordinator?

MEG

Yes.

SONYA

So isn't this one of the requirements of your job? Or is it just the students who get to file baseless claims?

MEG

Do you want to comment on the other matter first.

SONYA

I don't wish to comment on the other matter at all.

MEG

It'll be sent to the judicial board to review.

SONYA

Wonderful. Let it go there.

MEG

Sonya, maybe this isn't the time...you seem pretty upset.

SONYA

Really? What gives you that idea?

MEG

Look, you've been through a lot.

SONYA

Are you going to take my statement?

MEG

And she describes in detail the events in her classroom. And about the white student screaming at her. About how she can't breathe. And I have to say, comparing the two incidences, well they both seem pretty complex. I give her the paperwork to sign.

SONYA

And I sign the paperwork.

And I feel this sense of desperation. That I'm going to lose everything I've worked for over the past 15 years. It's all going to slip through my fingers and in the coming years no one will remember me. I'll just be that woman professor in the classics who didn't get tenure. And I'm thinking this is how power works. And I have no power.

MEG

My mother told stories. I mean before she died. Well she was losing her mind. Alzheimer's. When I was small she never talked about China. In her mind for us her life began in America. She and my father never even mentioned life before the US. But suddenly here she was, half out of her mind, talking about it. In the most roundabout way. A kid. A girl child. Who had reported in school that someone in her family had read a certain book. My mother seemed to think it was a book of fairy tales. Grimm fairy tales. She kept talking about the Little Red Riding Hood story. Also I am not sure any of this is true because I think my mother learned about Little Red Riding Hood from my 4th grade play. But my mother kept saying the child told the story of little red riding hood to her teacher and he asked her to repeat it to the class. My mother said the child then went home. She said the child didn't tell her parents or grandparents about what happened. Because she was a child and she thought she would get in trouble. My mother babbled for a long time but eventually after weeks what I had put together was that my mother was the child in the story. And it was her grandfather who was beaten and killed in the streets by a gang of red guard school children just a few years older than my mother. And I think about all the weird things my mom would do. She wouldn't sign any forms. Or join any committees at school. I had to forge her signature on permission slips. She never wanted to sign. I never understood that.

But I guess for me it's not come up much. I've never been a complainer. I've never been one to file reports either. And I do think when I think about where I have gotten in my field, well I do think sometimes, often, almost always the trick has been not to mind it.

I just take the report and submit it.

Scene 14: Chorus

SONYA

I've been on leave since the incident. I come to campus for office hours and committee work. Some other professor who feels comfortable with dissent is teaching my class.

JC

Basically a rotation of tenured white men is covering my class. There are back-and-forth discussions with the protestors every class. Sometimes the professors don't even get to speak.

SONYA

I plan to go back to teaching next semester. I have to. I mean I could go on medical leave but it won't look good for tenure. And I just found out that my book has been declined for publication by the University of Chicago.

JOEL

We're grinding through finals week. Students are freaking out about grades, and accommodations, and depression and then there's the added layer of an entire protest movement that has taken over the campus.

SIMONE

We demand that the required humanities class be reformed to represent the voices of people of color.

MICHAEL

We want the college to stop investing in companies that profit from prison labor.

SIMONE

Change the diversity statement to be explicitly "anti-racist"

MICHAEL

Hold an annual "anti-oppression" workshop for everyone on campus.

JOEL

They want the demands met by tomorrow.

SIMONE

Or we will occupy the president's office.

JOEL

It is very tense on campus.

JC

I am studying like crazy to get through these classes. My head hurts all the time. I can't sleep. There's so much noise.

SIMONE

University Community, I ask you to stand with us today. We ask that you boycott your finals. I won't be taking my finals in protest of this institution. The system doesn't break when people with power realize that racism still exists; the system breaks when we refuse, together, to be complicit in it. Stand with me to refuse to take your finals.

JC

I can not boycott my finals. I need to pass these classes. These papers. I have to do it.

MICHAEL

Stand together with us.

SIMONE

We are the campus anti-racism coalition

MICHAEL

and the Environmental and Social Action Network of the Greater Hudson Valley.

SONYA

Joel comes over. He hasn't been around much.

JOEL

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I haven't been around much. Did you get the food?

SONYA

He sent food every day from the expensive natural supermarket near campus. And he didn't skimp.

SONYA (CONT'D)

Joel?

JOEL

Sonya?

SONYA

Why didn't you tell me about Meg.

JOEL

About Meg?

SONYA

Yes.

JOEL

What about Meg?

Sonya stares at him.

What?

SONYA

Weren't you supposed to tell me something? About a complaint.

JOEL

Oh shit. Oh Sonya. I'm sorry. I forgot.

SONYA

You forgot?

JOEL

There's been so much...and I didn't think it was so important. And I didn't want you to get so upset.

SONYA

I had a panic attack Joel not a heart attack.

JOEL

Yes. I know. I'm sorry.

SONYA

And now I think Meg knows.

JOEL

Knows?

SONYA

About us.

JOEL

She does?

SONYA

It was because you hadn't told me so when she mentioned you...I...look it doesn't matter does it?

JOEL

It's not a good time. On campus.

SONYA

What does that mean?

JOEL

It means I think you're right.
We shouldn't tell people about us.

SONYA

That's...what? Joel I thought you completely disagreed with that?

JOEL

I don't want this situation with me to affect you.

Sonya stares.

SONYA

And you know about the complaint?

JOEL

Yes.

SONYA

So what do you think?

JOEL

I think it's drivel. I think it won't stand up.
What did you say?

SONYA

I refused to comment.

JOEL

That might not have been the best; it could be seen as uncooperative-

SONYA

So that's your advice? Be cooperative?

JOEL

Yes.

SONYA

Why?

JOEL

Because we will stay the course, ride this thing out, and make it through to the other side of these events. These are important events which make us better as an institution.

SONYA

Was that just PR hype?

JOEL

Just stay the course Sonya. This thing will burn itself out. We, the institution, we will come out on top. We always do. Stay with us. Trust us.

SONYA

I filed a complaint.

JOEL

What?

SONYA

It just felt...

JOEL

What?

SONYA

It didn't feel fair that they get to complain about my being racist when I'm the person of color collapsing in my own class.

JOEL

Yes.

SONYA

Yes what.

JOEL

Yes you are right. It is not fair. But this is this moment in time.

SONYA

And?

JOEL

So I think you should just stay the course. Let the complaint stand. Let it get investigated. It will get overturned.

SONYA

I'm not going to withdraw my complaint.

Why is it Joel that white professors get to study whatever interests them...they can even be professors of African history. But when I, a person of color, want to engage in the classics, a field which I love because of the fact that it constantly questions the texts that came before, why is that when I, a person of color, when I want to study the classics I can't because I'm a race traitor?

JOEL

Sonya-

SIMONE

And we take over the president's office.

MICHAEL

We use his office as the new command central of the movement.

SIMONE

The office is packed with students. People are sleeping there.

MICHAEL

Time Magazine is coming.

JC

The semester break is coming. I haven't made plans.

SIMONE

I tell my parents I can't come home for Christmas break because we took over the president's office. They send me a microwave and an electric heater through Amazon.

MICHAEL

I donate my toaster.

SIMONE

And on the final night before Christmas break there are 300 of us in there.

MICHAEL

It's a good party.

JOEL

I asked them to leave. Go home for break.

SIMONE

I say hell no.
And everyone cheers.

JOEL

I make a recommendation to hire extra campus security.

SONYA

Campus is very tense. Security is everywhere.

SIMONE

We have the most earth shattering grand party.

JC

I leave early.

SIMONE

She leaves early.

JC

I'm tired. Security guards are everywhere. I feel scared all the time. I feel like they're looking at me. Following me. When I go into the dining hall they spend extra long looking at me.

SIMONE

She's tired. She doesn't want to hang out.

JC

I pass my exams. Just one incomplete. The dorms are going to close. I still haven't made plans.

MICHAEL

Simone dances with me at the party. Nothing else. Just a dance. I'm trying just to be around. Not pressure her. We have some laughs. We have some drinks.

SIMONE

It's nice to relax. This has been stressful.

MICHAEL

Yes it has.

SIMONE

Hell man. It's been a long semester. Thanks.

MICHAEL

For?

SIMONE

Jumping in. Supporting us.

MICHAEL

Of course.

SIMONE

I mean I know you kind of had to. Once I led the rally.

MICHAEL

Yes.

SIMONE

But thanks.

MICHAEL

Yeah. I'm well...I'm excited to see how it turns out. How we can reflect this issue back on to others we are wanting to explore.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

And we dance.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I'm leaving tomorrow I say.

SIMONE

Right. I know.

MICHAEL

St. John's.

SIMONE

I know. With your parents.

MICHAEL

You're still invited you know.

SIMONE

I have to stay here.

MICHAEL

You gonna be alone?

SIMONE

Yes.

MICHAEL

I hope you're not too lonely.

JC

And we move into the president's office.

SIMONE

And we are the only one's there.

JC

And the campus quiets down to real stillness.

JC (CONT'D)

And we eat cereal.

And we watch movies. SIMONE

We play in the snow. JC

We exist in this place. SIMONE

Which feels weirdly like the Garden of Eden. JC

I ask her why she doesn't go home. For Christmas. SIMONE

I don't tell her. JC

She asks about my parents. SIMONE

She explains her multiple iterations of parents and step-parents. It seems like mostly all of her parents want her to be happy. JC

We buy a Christmas tree. JC (CONT'D)

We decorate it. SIMONE

We smoke cigarettes. JC

We eat pot chocolate. SIMONE

We lie in bed and read magazines. JC

We make snow angels. SIMONE

We put maple syrup on snow and eat it. JC

We forget about everything. SIMONE

We forget about everything. JC

And it's just us. SIMONE

JC
In this place.

SIMONE
And then-

JC
Students start coming back.
They're all moving into the president's office.

SIMONE
30 people camping out on the floor.

JC
I move back into my dorm room.

SIMONE
She gets headaches.

MICHAEL
I arrive back from St. John's and there are 45 people in the president's office.

JC
And the second semester starts.

SIMONE
I'm not attending classes. We're reminding students entering classroom buildings that they can make another choice.

JC
I'm taking five classes. And making up the incomplete.

MEG
The algae is blooming. Finally.

JOEL
We are hopeful for calmness.

SONYA
I'm worried I can't handle the classroom environment.

SIMONE
The in-class protests continue.

JC
There are crowds and security all over. I start entering my dorm through the back door.

MICHAEL
I'm noticing the number of new members to the Environmental and Social Action Network of the Greater Hudson Valley is starting to drop.

SIMONE

We are loud. We are proud. We are disruptive. Our branded quote “I’m just sitting here in this office because I don’t like oppression” is being printed on t-shirts.

MEG

And that’s when it happened.

MICHAEL

The arrival of the letter.

JOEL

Which was endlessly shared on social media of all sorts.

SIMONE

I guess it was the beginning of the end.

Meg picks a letter up off the desk

MEG

Dear University Community:

JOEL

We the freshman class are concerned about the tactics employed by the campus anti-racism coalition.

SONYA

Protests we know are supposed to make us uncomfortable but last semester’s protests went far beyond this.

MEG

Students and faculty have reported panic attacks and other students report not feeling welcome to share their opinions if it differs from that of the anti-racism coalition.

SIMONE

We do not approve of the way freshman who have questioned the protests have been shamed and silenced.

JC

We ask the anti-racism coalition to immediately end the protests of the humanities class.

MICHAEL

We demand the right to make up our own minds about the validity of the curriculum by actually being allowed to take the class,

SIMONE

signed, Justin Tong.

MEG

And then there is a list of 327 more names.

JOEL

This was the break we had been waiting for. We were waiting for the movement to fracture from within.

SONYA

I can't teach my classes.

MEG

What do you mean?

SONYA

I start shaking when I enter the classroom. And then I become ill.

MEG

Like physically?

SONYA

Yes.

MEG

What does your doctor say?

SONYA

He says everyone's recovery is different.

MEG

Gosh Sonya. I'm sorry.

SONYA

Yeah.

MEG

I don't have any updates for you. The judicial board has yet to decide how to evaluate claims of racism and if they need to bring in a title IX attorney or not.

SONYA

So...

MEG

So I'm sorry but I don't know what to tell you in terms of timeline.

JOEL

The press picks up the story. We just keep on point. We keep saying "see look everyone, see look...this is what happens when free speech is allowed to flourish...we can have healthy debate. And in a time of fake news and attacks on free speech creating an environment for the open exchange of ideas is vital." Applications jumped up that week. Things were beginning to tip in our favor.

Scene 15. Michael and Joel.

JOEL

It's nice to see you.

MICHAEL

We're off campus.

JOEL

At a little deli I like.

MICHAEL

Nice to see you too.

He used to be my advisor. I was a political science major and film minor.

JOEL

You know Michael my goal for this institution, no, for the students of this institution is for them to be as successful as they can be.

MICHAEL

Of course.

JOEL

I always liked Michael. He did one of the best theses his year. His was on the nature of dissent in 1680 England.

MICHAEL

I feel a little lost I'm saying.

JOEL

It's a tough time right now.

MICHAEL

Is that why you asked me to meet you?

JOEL

Why?

MICHAEL

Because of the tough time?

JOEL

The unrest on campus you mean?

MICHAEL

Yes.

JOEL

Not really.

MICHAEL

Then why?

JOEL

I always liked you Michael. And I like maintaining relationships with alumni.

MICHAEL

And all of the sudden I feel like I have someone to talk to. About everything.

JOEL

And he's telling me that he feels like he can't pull away from the movement on campus. He's telling me the letter from the freshman class makes him uncomfortable.

MICHAEL

I tell him I can't stomach the facebook conversations. I tell him we are losing members.

SIMONE

We can't mediate the comments on facebook.

JOEL

The comments on social media are hard to read.

MICHAEL

Justin Tong, the author of the letter,

JC

Justin Tong's in my class.

MICHAEL

Someone posted the comment on facebook.

SIMONE

It says, it says in the comment

SONYA

"Of course Justin Tong doesn't support the anti-racism coalition's boycotting of the humanities class."

MEG

Because
and it really says this. It says

SIMONE

"Of course Justin Tong doesn't support the anti-racism coalition's boycotting of the humanities class

MICHAEL

because we all know

JOEL

We all know it says

SONYA

We all know that Chinese people are racist against blacks.

MEG

And then Justin Tong is sitting across from me. He wants to file a complaint. We all know Chinese people are racist against blacks. And this is my third complaint.

MICHAEL

Joel's still talking to me.

JOEL

We're talking about what he wants to do. Michael's an idealist.

MICHAEL

And then I'm telling him about Simone. About how we were dating.

JOEL

And I remind him that affairs of the heart and affairs of politics should probably remain separate. I feel like I have good first hand knowledge to recommend this.

MICHAEL

I ask him what he thinks I should do.

JOEL

And I tell him that every real activist knows that sometimes they might need to stand up without the movement behind them. I tell him it's ok to leave a movement.

MICHAEL

And then I'm standing there with Simone and I'm saying...

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

It's time for the Environmental and Social Action Network of the Greater Hudson Valley to step away from the protest movement.

SIMONE

So we give up all the good arguments for this? Because of some stupid nasty facebook post? Because some of the first-year class is against the protest movement?

MICHAEL

I'm not saying you give up.

SIMONE

You're saying -

MICHAEL

I'm saying the Environmental and Social Action Network of the Greater Hudson Valley considers our job here finished. We've done all we can.

SIMONE

You're funny Michael.

MICHAEL

Why?

SIMONE

Because you play everything so safe. Ever the radical until things get nasty. This is nasty business Michael. In this small small part of my universe, this elite campus, I have uncovered the way racism here is institutionalized. I know it's not the biggest discovery but I am, no we are, we are seeking to strip this institution of its power through direct action. And I think we can do it.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Michael smiles.

MICHAEL

This is your fight now.

SIMONE

And he walks out.

Scene 16. Sonya and Joel

SONYA

It was after the Justin Tong letter and the facebook response to it that I knew what I had to do. I had spent so long floundering. I had spent so long powerless. I think I forgot that I had any choices at all. And then something inside me snapped back into place.

JOEL

We were finally getting ahead of the narrative.

SIMONE

The weather was warming up. No one wanted to sit in the stuffy president's office.

JC

I'm turning in all my work and I'm really wondering if I want to be in this place.

MICHAEL

The Environmental and Social Action Network of the Greater Hudson Valley was starting to pursue other partnerships.

JOEL

I'm sitting there at lunch with my ex-wife and her new husband. My phone rings. She shoots me a look and rolls her eyes. I head away from the table.

MEG

It was a big deal. I'm kind of, well I don't know, impressed.

JOEL

And someone's telling me about this CNN interview with Sonya Veracruz. And I look back at my ex-wife and motion to her that I've got to go. She rolls her eyes.

MEG

In the interview she tells it all. Her fear of speaking out. The shaming and silencing she felt as a woman of color on campus. How she felt her job was at stake if she didn't go along with the university's party line. How free speech doesn't mean silencing others.

JOEL

The clips of the interview go viral.

SONYA

When a professor is silenced in her own classroom, when fear reigns supreme, when an orthodoxy of thought prevents free speech and the free exchange of ideas at a university is it not time then to speak out? Is it not time to challenge our notion of safety and embrace the discussion of topics that may make us feel unsafe? When a person of color is shouted down by a student body that is 97% white is it not time to recognize the danger?

JOEL

Why would you do that?

SONYA

I appreciate you're upset.

JOEL

Why? Why would you do that? I told you, I told you just to stay the course.

SONYA

Joel-

JOEL

Why? We just spent months painting ourselves as the only university in the country that's really allowing free speech to occur and now you've flipped it so that we were simply giving power to a bullying mob which itself silenced voices with lesser power.

SONYA

But that is what happened.

JOEL

I know, but why did you want to say that on a national news show?

MEG

What she did which was so brilliant is that she spun the narrative to her version of events. I'm not saying they weren't true, just that she kind of owned the narrative now.

SONYA

Because Joel I want to keep my academic career and I am not going to fall on my sword for this institution.

JOEL

You're on the job market aren't you?

SONYA

Yes.

JOEL

Did you want to tell me? Were you even going to tell me that?

SONYA

You know how it is Joel. A lot of people do go on the job market the year before a tenure decision. Makes sense to look for other jobs, right?

JOEL

And now because of this interview you are now the most talked about Latina classics professor on the job market. You did this to increase your chances of getting an offer.

SONYA

I wouldn't see it like that Joel. I would see it more like the institution which allowed my students to victimize and harass me and asked for my silence told me that I should trust it with my academic future. A future I have worked very hard for. I don't see Joel how staying the course when I had already been run over was going to be my answer.

JOEL

And I nod.

SONYA

And I nod.

JOEL

And we stand there in my kitchen nodding.

SONYA

And just like that it's over between us.

JOEL

You can feel it when something breaks.

SONYA

Ultimately I guess we were just too different.

JOEL

But maybe.

SONYA

Maybe under different circumstances.

JOEL

In a different universe.

SONYA

It might have all been fine.

JOEL

But for now. In this universe.

SONYA

It isn't.

JC

I'm passing all my classes.

SIMONE

I'm sleeping alone in the president's office.

JOEL

We've had to hire a second emergency press team.

SIMONE

I don't even leave to go to the dining hall.

MICHAEL

I have to give it to her. She's stubborn.

JOEL

We're appealing to everyone's reasonable nature. We're holding restorative justice circles.

SIMONE

Sometimes as an activist you have to stand up, alone, without the movement behind you.

MEG

Facebook messages are nasty.

SONYA

Someone posts “hey lily white allies, why don’t you get your asses down to the president’s office and help us”

SIMONE

And then someone else writes “funny that without the *lily-white allies* the revolution is failing.”

JOEL

The national press is printing transcripts of the facebook messages.

MEG

The faculty are depressed. People are afraid to speak. Morale is low.

JOEL

We mandate the shut down of their facebook page.

SIMONE

And then there’s no one in the president’s office. It’s just me. I’m here all day long. I read. I wait. I am not going to leave. Even if I am the last person left I am not going to leave. I can’t.

Scene 17. Sonya's office.

SONYA
I'm in my office packing up.

JC
I knock.

SONYA
Hello.

JC
Hi.

SONYA
What can I do for you?

JC
I just wanted to say goodbye. I am sorry you're leaving.

SONYA
You know, just so you know, I never meant that remark to be offensive.

JC
The trick is not to mind it.
Yeah. I can see that.
And anyway you're probably right. It's just that not everyone's built that way. I mean some of us mind it too much.

SONYA
I know what you mean though.

JC
About?

SONYA
About it hurting. What happened this semester. It does hurt. So maybe you can't not mind it. Maybe I just thought you could.

JC
Yeah.

JC nods.

JC (CONT'D)
I'm leaving too.

SONYA
I'm sorry to hear that.

JC
I passed all my classes. I just, well, I think I'll head back down south. I'm not made for the northeast. I guess I do mind it.

SONYA
Well good luck.

JC
You too.

SONYA
And she's gone.

SIMONE
I get the news via a card.

JC
Dear Simone,

SIMONE
By the time you get this card

JC
I'll be gone.

SIMONE
I hadn't been sleeping well. And I was crushed. I mean crushed. I wasn't talking much to anyone.

JOEL
We had her parents at the ready to fly out. She was posting these long monologues to you-tube about how she wasn't going to sit down and that even if it was just her she was not going to back down.

MEG
She was taking a stand.

MICHAEL
She called me earlier that evening but I didn't answer. She had been leaving me rambling messages. And calling me names.

SIMONE
Her card came in the evening. I was supposed to see her that night. Or I thought I was. I was going to tell her that I wanted to leave this place and I wanted her to come with me. That I don't know, that we could drive across country. That we could move in with my parents. I don't know. That I could win this and then she and I could...I don't know.

JC
I don't know why I didn't say goodbye in person. I just. I guess I just couldn't. My head was hurting all the time. I turned in my last paper and I just wanted to get out of there. I still feel badly about that. I just had to leave. Sometimes you just have to leave.

SIMONE
My mail gets dropped off for me by friends and they hadn't checked it for a few days. So it was sudden.

JC

I wrote in my card
I know you're expecting me to come by Wednesday

SIMONE

Which is today-

JC

So I want to tell you that I'm leaving.

SIMONE

It just was terrible timing I guess. I was already feeling really depressed.

JC

I wish it could be that we could live on the top of the ropes course or in the president's office over semester break forever. Some place where it's just me and you. Maybe one day we'll have that.
Remember Joan of Arc.

SIMONE

Signed

JC

JC Clarke.

SIMONE

I think it was because I was young, and tired, and you know I mean I had just given everything I had for this.

MEG

She recorded it with her phone.

SIMONE

I record the video with my i-phone. Tears are streaming down my face and I'm standing. I'm crying because I'm here alone. And because I believe this matters. And I can't understand why these little issues, the small details of how we say what we say, instead of the truth of what we are saying, why these small details are more important than the whole message.

JOEL

We had just announced that we would add two new texts to the humanity's class. One from the Middle East and one from the Harlem Renaissance. We felt that this was real progress and that that should settle the issue in the minds of the protestors.

SIMONE

Everything was returning to normal. Everyone just forgot that they were fired up for about ten minutes to fight inequality. To disrupt the power structures. Sure we got the diversity coordinator

JOEL

And the class review.

SIMONE

But there's so much more to be done. And it was all going to go away. The whole movement was going to disappear and for what? The system was just returning to the way it always was.

MICHAEL

She remembered what I used to say. Any press is good press. She told me that later in a letter.

SIMONE

My shrink had me write letters to people who were involved. For closure. I mean.

MEG

So she sets up her phone

JOEL

And she speaks

We see this video live on stage as Simone speaks.

SIMONE

This country, our country is divided. This whole system is made to support the power structure that we have. Voting rights, school to prison pipeline. There is a lie in this country that there is equal opportunity. I am tired of closing my eyes to this lie. Those who have the power do not want to make room for equality. If they really wanted equality, we would have it by now. Sometimes we won't admit that anything is true if we can't see it. Well a lot of things can't be seen. Some of us, some of us are like saints, some of us can see the invisible things, the things that are hidden. And for us, well our job is to make the invisible, visible. I take this action to make the invisible pains of racism visible.

JOEL

And she lifts up her lighter...

SIMONE

Remember me when you remember the activists, the martyrs, and the saints.
Remember me when you remember St. Joan.

MEG

And she announces that to make the invisible pains of racism visible-

SONYA

She announces that like St. Joan her cause will be remembered-

SIMONE

And I lift up my lighter-

JOEL

And then on the video everything is engulfed in flames.

MEG

I'm in my lab. And I see this flicker of orange around the windows in the president's office. And I watch for a second trying to understand... And then I understand. And then I call 911. And I run over there.

JOEL

And the video hasn't been uploaded anywhere.

MEG

Her parents ask the press to treat it as a private family matter.

JOEL

Which they respect. Which our media relations team applauds as the best course of action.

SIMONE

My parents asked the media to leave the story alone. They felt it could harm my chances at future employment. Or getting into graduate school.

MEG

When I get there the fire department hasn't yet arrived. I enter the building. It's smokey. And then I enter the president's office. The fire's just around the windows. And then I see her. She just sitting there in the middle of it all.

SIMONE

I hadn't actually lit myself on fire though I had meant to. It was the curtains. I lit the curtains on fire. And then the bookshelves and the ceiling.

MEG

That's why I could see it from my office. Because the curtains were on fire.

SIMONE

And it's smokey and I am thinking, I'm really thinking, good. I hope they all see this. I hope they all see this and learn.

JOEL

And then on the video-

SIMONE

Someone runs in and pulls me out.

MEG

I keep saying to her come on honey, come on walk with me. Walk with me out. We're going to get some fresh air.

JOEL

Thank God Meg was there.

SIMONE

I'm being taken out.

MEG

And we wait there, she and I by a tree. She's breathing ok. We sit down. We hear sirens. The paramedics will be here soon.

SIMONE

She gives me her coat.

MEG

She doesn't say anything. She's in shock I guess.

JOEL

The fire department arrives. The paramedics.

MICHAEL

Of course I feel terrible when I hear what happened.

MEG

We all kind of buried it.

SONYA

And we all went on.

JOEL

The semester, the institution, me.

SIMONE

It was not a failed suicide attempt.
It was a political protest. The root of it all was asking for real change.

MICHAEL

Have I changed? I don't know. I don't know about that.

SIMONE

For a moment. For one small moment there was something that could have changed.
But then it, I don't know. It just passed by. And then we all forgot.

JC

Does anything ever really change?

MICHAEL

I guess it has to.

MEG

I guess in the end we all just need to believe that somehow it has to.

End of play.