

White People By the Lake

A full-length play

By Rachel Lynett

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CAST OF CHARACTERS, 5 actors

SAIDA, she/her/hers, Black/Afro-Latinx, 30s, English professor

ERIN, she/her/hers, white, 30s, artist, dating SAIDA

KATE, she/her/hers, ERIN's mother, 60s, housewife, retired lawyer, though KATE is white in Part I, she is played by a black actor

MATT, he/him/his, ERIN's father, 60s, doctor, though MATT is white in Part I, he is played by a black actor

BECKY, she/her/hers, ERIN's sister, late 20s, "still figuring things out" job-wise, though ERIN is white in Part, she is played by a black actor

LEAH, she/her/hers, SAIDA's mom, Afro-Latinx, 60s, curator, the same actor who plays KATE must play LEAH

JAMAL, he/him/his, SAIDA's dad, Black, 60s, surgeon, the same actor who plays MATT must play JAMAL

CANDACE, she/her/hers, SAIDA's sister, late 20s, in grad school working on her PhD in Physics, the same actor who plays BECKY must play CANDACE

A Note on casting:

In Part I, the roles of Kate, Matt, and Becky are played by black actors. Do not use whiteface. The actors should show their "whiteness" through the clothes they wear, their mannerisms, etc. These roles cannot be played by white actors.

A note on the tone of the play:

Except the very last scene, all of this play is satire. I hate that I have to say that but sometimes y'all miss the point.

SETTINGS

Part I happens in a cabin by the lake in Northwest Arkansas. Part II happens in a house in Chicago.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Moment v shift

I have a hard time with the word "beat." For me, moment is a break in the dialogue, a chance for the characters to reassess. Shift is just a sharp turn in dialogue or action. It's not necessarily a pause. A moment is a passive action/pause whereas a shift is an active one.

This play is bound to offend some people but y'all keep producing these "white people by the lake" plays and then turnaround and tell queer writers of color our stories aren't original enough. Also, when black folks do finally get to tell our stories, y'all make us tell the same stories over and over again. This play demands you face that and I hope you don't try to hide from it. It's hard to tell what actually happened in this play and what didn't. That's kind of the point.

SCENE 1 -- THE AFTERNOON BEFORE THE FUNERAL

SAIDA sits uncomfortably on the couch. Offstage, we hear people moving around in the kitchen. In front of SAIDA on the table is a plate of cut cheese and grapes and an untouched glass filled with a mimosa. Just as she reaches for her phone, ERIN and KATE come in holding what looks like very white and flavorless mac and cheese.

KATE

I almost burned it. Erin and I got to talking and you know how those things go Say-dee-ah, are you sure you're not hungry?

ERIN

It's Saida mom.

KATE

What?

ERIN

Her name. It's Sigh-ee-dah.

KATE

Isn't that what I said?

Oh you know us old folks can't quite keep up. I'm sorry dear.

Can I call you Sigh instead? Would that be better?

ERIN

No mom. It's super important you don't say her name wrong. How would you feel if she asked you if she could call you Katie?

KATE

Semantics love. My name is Katherine. She can call me whatever she wants.

SAIDA

This is a really great cabin.

KATE

Thank you, Sigh. My dad brought for me as a wedding present when I married Matt. I can't believe he's gone. I feel like I

KATE chokes up a bit. ERIN comforts her mother.

ERIN

Mom, I'm so sorry.

KATE

I'm fine. It's just
Have you heard from your sister? When is she getting here?

ERIN

She said she was driving down from St. Louis so she should be here tonight.

KATE

The funeral is tomorrow. I hate that your sister puts everything off to the last limit.
Sigh, have you met Becky?

SAIDA

Uh, no. I don't think so.

ERIN

Yeah you did. Remember when we went to that bar back in like 2018 and she threw up in your car? I feel like that'd be pretty hard to forget.

SAIDA

Yeah. Yup. Remember now.

KATE

She's so adventurous.
Sigh, you're not eating. You sure you're not hungry?

SAIDA

I ate before I came.

KATE

Well, I'm starving. Hope you don't mind.

KATE starts to prepare a plate for herself and for ERIN. SAIDA tries to check the time on her phone without being obvious.

SAIDA

So where is Mr. Greene? I thought he'd be here.

KATE

Mr. Greene? You can say Matt. You're basically family. You and Erin have been dating for so long I keep forgetting you're not married.

ERIN

Mom.

KATE

What? Is that culturally offensive too somehow?

SAIDA

(under her breath)

Jesus.

ERIN

You always do this.

KATE

What do I always do?

ERIN

You bring up the marriage thing when I told you that was not on the table.

KATE

I don't understand why not. Y'all been dating since 2016. What else do you need? I thought for sure after Saida got the flu, you'd start taking marriage a bit more seriously.

SAIDA

It wasn't the flu.

ERIN

She got COVID, mom.

KATE

Isn't COVID a type of flu? People get so upset whenever I say "flu" but technically I'm right. It's a bad, scary flu that kills people but it's still basically SARS and that's still basically the flu. Honestly, Erin, I got all of this from your father. I'm not making it up.

SAIDA

I'm going to step aside for a bit. I forgot I was supposed to call the Dean about final grades.

SAIDA gets up. There is no phone call. She just wants to leave.

ERIN

Mom!

KATE

Listen, my father just died. I would hope you could extend some grace to me.

Moment.

ERIN

I'm sorry about Pop Pop. But please don't bring up marriage around Saida again. And stop calling her Sigh.

KATE shrugs and continues to eat. A moment before MATT and SAIDA walk back in.

MATT

Look who I found standing outside!

SAIDA

The Dean didn't pick up.

MATT immediately sits down in his recliner and stretches out.

MATT

They got you working nonstop.

SAIDA

Yeah I guess.

MATT

You don't work summers though right? Teachers get that time off to do whatever it is y'all do.

SAIDA

I do research over the summer.

MATT

Research? On what? Jane Austen?

MATT cracks himself up. After an awkward beat, KATE joins him in the laughter. This moment gets weird. Maybe the lights dimmer. The laugh gets intense and a little scary. ERIN doesn't seem notice. After a couple of moments of this, the lights pop back and it's like it never happened.

MATT

So what're the plans for the funeral tomorrow, Kate?

KATE

We'll show up to the church around 8 am to set up. It's outside because, you know, but I still want to make sure it looks nice.

You and the rest of the men can show up around 11 am. We'll just need you to carry the casket from the car and then set it on the gravesite, like a procession sort of. Then you can wait in the car until the funeral is over.

MATT

Sounds good.

ERIN

You're not actually going to wait in the car?

MATT

Why wouldn't I? Game's on tomorrow.

SAIDA finally reaches for the mimosa and drinks the whole thing. ERIN notices but doesn't say anything. KATE continues eating. MATT turns on the television.

SCENE 2: EARLY EVENING BEFORE THE FUNERAL

In the bedroom, SAIDA starts unpacking some of her things. ERIN angrily sits on the bed. SAIDA notices but chooses to say nothing. It's already been a day. Finally

ERIN

I just wish you gave my parents more of a shot.

SAIDA

We've been dating for five years and your mother still can't say my name.

ERIN

She's at least trying.

SAIDA

Erin, I told you I didn't want to come. I wanted to stay home. I'm exhausted. I just got done grading what felt like a million papers about how just because they read *White Fragility* they now understand *To Kill A Mockingbird* a lot better now and though the class was called Intro to Black Literature and neither of those books are written by black people, they all wanted A's. What I wanted to do was drink a bunch of wine while sitting on my lovely porch and read just a whole mess of romance novels. Instead, I'm here, being called "Sigh" and your dad keeps touching my butt every time he hugs me.

ERIN

That's just how he hugs people. I told you it's not--

SAIDA

I did not want to be here.

ERIN

So why did you come?

SAIDA

Are you fucking kidding me right now?

ERIN

You hated my grandfather.

SAIDA

He called me your African girlfriend. Multiple times. I am not African.

ERIN

You didn't have to come.

SAIDA

Noted. When I go back in time and tell you yet again that I did not want to come and then you start crying about how you really need my support, I will make sure past you knows that current you said I didn't need to be here.

Moment. SAIDA finishes unpacking and takes out a book.

ERIN

I know they can be kind of
When you don't come to things, they assume you don't like them.

SAIDA shrugs or something similar.

ERIN

I think Becky being here will help even things out. Like there's no way they'll have time to say things to you while Becky is talking about her new boyfriend.

SAIDA

Uh huh.

ERIN

This new one is the same age as dad.

SAIDA

Yup.

ERIN

And is married. And like the wife knows about Becky.

SAIDA

I don't want to do this. Erin, I'm sorry and I love you and while I normally really enjoy gossiping about the hot mess that is your sister, I just want to read my book and zone out for a bit. Okay?

ERIN

Yeah. Okay.

Moment. SAIDA reads. ERIN quietly fumes.

ERIN

I feel like you lump me in with them sometimes and that makes me feel really gross.

SAIDA sets the book down.

SAIDA

I am not responsible for your feelings, Erin. I am only responsible for my actions. And I have come here even though I feel this place is hostile to support you because most days I love you. I am on edge. I know that and you know why. I would not still be with you if I thought you and your family were the same.

ERIN

They're good people.

SAIDA

I'm sure that they are.

Shift.

ERIN

Shit, I'm sorry. Now I'm doing it.
Good people doesn't matter.
God, I'm sorry. I get so
Thank you for being here.

SAIDA

You're welcome.

ERIN

My grandfather was kind of an ass wasn't he?

SAIDA

Yes he was.

ERIN

I loved him though.

I know. I'm sorry he died.

SAIDA

SAIDA and ERIN share a sweet moment.
SAIDA picks up her book. ERIN stands.

ERIN

I think I'm going to go for a run.

SAIDA

Right now?

ERIN

Yeah. Clear my head before dinner.

SAIDA

Um, okay.

ERIN

Want to join me?

SAIDA

No. Because you always run faster than me and I really don't need some random white person calling the cops on me because it looks like I'm chasing a white woman.

ERIN

That would not

SAIDA glares at ERIN. ERIN decides against finishing her sentence and quickly kisses SAIDA instead.

ERIN

I am sorry on behalf of all white people.

SAIDA

I will take your apology to the Wakanda council and allow them to deliberate.

ERIN

Haha very funny.

SAIDA wasn't kidding. Or at least not the way ERIN thought.

SCENE 3: LATE EVENING BEFORE THE FUNERAL

It's late. SAIDA, ERIN, MATT, and KATE all sit watching the TV. The doors swings wide open. Lights and sounds should get weird again. BECKY enters. She's wearing something incredibly offensive (that can be up to the creative team; In my mind she's wearing a horn and a large fur coat that's been splattered in blood).

BECKY

HELLO FAMILY.

BECKY leads a strange chant. MATT and KATE join in. They do the chant around SAIDA, circling her. ERIN doesn't seem notice. Right as SAIDA's about to scream, lights return to normal. Onstage, BECKY takes off her offensive outfit and is wearing a black lives matter shirt and tights and/or jeans. Her hair is dreaded. She walks out of the door. Everyone starts to move backwards as if none of it ever happened. Then a knock.

KATE

Just come in Becky.

BECKY does.

BECKY

Saida! I didn't know you would be here.

BECKY runs over to hug SAIDA and literally jumps on her, squeezing her.

SAIDA

Hi Becky.

ERIN

Of course she'd be here.
Where's Danny?

BECKY

Daniel. We broke up. I said all cops are bastards at dinner and he was embarrassed so I told him I couldn't date someone who didn't support the rights of other people.

MATT

All cops?

BECKY

All cops dad. Right, Saida?

SAIDA

I don't want to--

BECKY

Like even if you're a supposed good cop, you're part of a system that unfair targets BIPOC people.

KATE

God, if they come up with another acronym

ERIN

Mom!

SAIDA

I actually also don't like BIPOC.

ERIN

What? Really?

BECKY

So I burned an American flag on his front lawn.

KATE

You did what?

BECKY

Either you support black people or you don't mom.

KATE

How does burning a flag support Black people? Isn't that a federal offense?

BECKY

Why should it be? It's just cloth.

SAIDA

I mean I think setting anything on fire in the middle of someone's lawn is--

BECKY

Get this. The cops showed up at my apartment and asked me if I did it.

KATE

Dear Lord.

BECKY

I showed them the video of me doing it. ACAB ACAB ACAB

BECKY keeps screaming ACAB. It's like she can't stop. It's not a comfortable moment for anyone.

MATT

Enough!

She stops.

BECKY

So anyway, I got this ticket.

She hands it to MATT. MATT puts on his reading glasses.

MATT

\$500? Your credit card can't cover this?

BECKY

It's maxed out.

MATT

I just paid it off a week ago.

BECKY

Oh?

BECKY pulls out her phone to check her credit card.

BECKY

Thanks Matty!
But I don't want to charge the ticket so

MATT

Yeah I'll take care of it.

KATE

I'm sorry you and Daniel broke up.

ERIN

He was married.

KATE

He was going to leave his wife though wasn't he?

BECKY

I don't think so.

KATE

I bet he would've.

Moment.

ERIN

Is there anything you won't support? She was with a married man!

KATE

Erin, there is no need to get all--

BECKY

God, I can't believe you're still this jealous of me. Get over yourself. I have my own life and my own problems and I don't need

ERIN jumps towards BECKY. They begin to fight. It's carnal and vicious. Lights change. There are jungle sounds playing. MATT cheers on ERIN. KATE cheers on BECKY. It becomes a gross tribal thing that also feels appropriate somehow. SAIDA lights a cigarette and just stares out as the fight continues.

After way too many beats of this, SAIDA puts her cigarette out. ERIN returns to the couch. BECKY stays by her father's side. Though we saw a physical fight, it should be clear that was a verbal fight we didn't hear or see but did happen.

ERIN

I just wish everyone in this family would take me more seriously.

KATE

Erin, if we took you any more seriously we'd die of boredom.

ERIN angrily leaves the room.

KATE

I'll go check on her.

BECKY

No, I'll go.

BECKY leaves to go check on her sister.

KATE

What is it about these funerals that always gets everyone so in their feelings? Next thing you know Becky will be throwing photo albums into the lake and Erin will be setting the house on fire.

MATT

We're passionate people.

KATE

I wish there was more respect for my father and his legacy. Sigh, thank you for keeping your cool. I know how hard that must've been.

SAIDA gets up and leaves the room.

SCENE 4: THE FUNERAL

The outdoor procession is set up beautifully. There are roses and arches everywhere. Kind of a classy-trashy mix.

SAIDA is dressed in black as close to the audience as possible. ERIN is closer to the action, also dressed in black, but near SAIDA.

First, MATT comes in carrying the casket, except it isn't a casket. It's a Bible. He sets it down on the floor. And then says the Lord's prayer.

MATT

OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME; THY KINGDOM COME; THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD; AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US; AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL.

He then glares out at the audience. He's angry. He begins to do a dance that's not really a dance. Just angry movements. SAIDA sneaks in a swig of her flask. His movements get more and more intense.

Next, BECKY comes out dressed in a tight red dress that really is more club appropriate than funeral appropriate. She begins to dance violently as she quotes *Do Not Go Gentle in that Good Night* by Dylan Thomas.

BECKY

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Though wise men at their end know dark is right,

Because their words had forked no lightning they
 Do not go gentle into that good night.
 Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
 Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
 Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
 Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
 And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
 Do not go gentle into that good night.
 Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
 Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
 Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
 And you, my father, there on the sad height,
 Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
 Do not go gentle into that good night.
 Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

BECKY and MATT both begin to dance
 violently. It gets almost sexual? This happens
 for an uncomfortable amount of time. SAIDA
 takes another drink from her hidden flask.
 MATT pushes BECKY to ground. He's about
 to mount her. KATE comes out wearing white.
 She makes a loud yelling sound. Is she
 mourning? No one's sure. MATT leaves.
 BECKY gyrates on the ground. KATE, very
 still comes forward and addresses the audience.

KATE

Thank you all for being here today. Matt, I wasn't expecting you to speak but that was so
 moving. I'm sure daddy is happy to know that I am so loved. My father wasn't a perfect
 man but he was a good man. Losing him means that we no longer--

ERIN

He wasn't a good man!

SAIDA

Oh shit.

KATE

Erin, this isn't the time.

ERIN

I can't keep the secret anymore.

ERIN starts trashing things as she talks. It's very, very dramatic.

ERIN

He hurt me and I'm not keeping it a secret anymore!

ERIN continues to trash everything in sight. BECKY continues to gyrate. KATE starts humming a church hymnal. SAIDA, no longer worried about being subtle, take a long drink from her flask.

SCENE 5: EARLY EVENING AFTER THE FUNERAL

SAIDA sits on the back porch by the lake. It's been a long weekend. She's not drinking or smoking. Just staring out.

MATT comes out.

MATT

It was nice of you to be here to support Erin.

SAIDA

Thanks,

MATT

I know you don't like us.

SAIDA

Oh I

MATT

We just get so invested you know? Like we care a lot. And we know how weird it must look to the other people.

SAIDA

Yup.

MATT

How's Erin's art work doing? She sell a painting yet?

SAIDA

She did. Two months ago. Private donor.

MATT

Good for her.

Moment.

MATT

Today's been really rough on her. Seems like the only thing to cheer up might be a proposal.

SAIDA

I

MATT

Now I know you don't want to get married and you say it's not your thing but

SAIDA

I didn't say--

MATT

But Erin loves you and you love her. What's the worst that could happen? It's been five years and we're not getting any grandkids from Becky, hot mess that she is.

SAIDA

I don't--

MATT

I figure with two of you that's twice the chance. You think about a sperm donor yet?

SAIDA

I haven't--

MATT

Because if you want the baby to have both your genes and Erin's, the only way to do that is if you use mine.

SAIDA

Your sperm?

MATT

Yeah. I went and got tested yesterday. Boys still swimming.

SAIDA

Um

MATT

I know that might be a bit weird but I figure it's got to be a bit weird.

SAIDA

I can't have kids.

MATT

What?

SAIDA

I can't
I can't carry to term.

MATT

Oh.

SAIDA

You'd be impregnating Erin which is um not okay.

MATT

Oh now I never said
I wouldn't want
You sure you can't have kids?
Black women are always popping babies out. Some of my patients got so many kids I
don't think--

SAIDA

Yes. I'm sure.

MATT

Weird. Must be the Mexican side of you. Although those types don't have any problems
with kids either.

SAIDA

I'm not Mexican.

MATT

Oh right. Hispanic. I'm sorry.

SAIDA

I'm not
The funeral was lovely.

MATT

Didn't Kate do such a good job?

SAIDA nods. BECKY comes out.

BECKY

Matt, stop bothering Saida. Mom needs you.

MATT

We were just having fun.

MATT heads back inside.

BECKY

Dad can be a lot.

SAIDA

Yeah.

BECKY

I can't believe Erin made you come to this.

SAIDA

I can.

BECKY

She's such a
Always stealing the attention.
I have something I need to tell them and then she had to go have that outburst at the funeral.

SAIDA

Becky, I have no right to ask you this but if you're pregnant please wait until I'm not here to tell them. I know that's an unfair ask and I'm sorry but I cannot--

BECKY

Shit. Am I showing?

SAIDA

Jesus Christ.

SCENE 6: LATER THAT EVENING

At the dinner table. Everyone is finished up "supper." It's tense. Of course it is. SAIDA picks at the dry stuffing, trying to understand why they made stuffing for a funeral. ERIN angrily glares at her parents. BECKY angrily glares at ERIN.

ERIN

I'm ready to discuss what I brought up at the funeral.

KATE

You had no right ruining daddy's funeral like that.

ERIN

He hurt me.

KATE

Hurt you how?

BECKY

I'm pregnant!

MATT

By who?

ERIN

She's not pregnant. She's just jealous that I'm talking. She always does this. The second everything isn't about her she freaks out.

BECKY

Oh you're one to talk.

ERIN

Get a job, Becky! Stop depending on dad to take care of everything for you.

KATE

Girls!

BECKY

Oh you mean like your job? Your crappy paintings that sell for less than a hundred dollars? The only reason you want to get married is so you can keep leaching off of your black wife.

ERIN

She's not my wife! Would everyone stop bringing that up?

BECKY

Oh is that also a sore subject for you?

ERIN tackles BECKY. KATE jumps in as well. As does MATT. They're all fighting and yelling. It's impossible to know what any of them are saying. The food gets everywhere all over them. It's gross...until it becomes sexual? Suddenly the fight has turned into an orgy and they're all (except SAIDA) into it. This lasts an uncomfortable amount.

SAIDA gets up and leaves, slamming the door behind her. The orgy wraps up. The family returns to their seats. MATT passionately kisses each other women again before sitting down. He lights a cigarette.

MATT

Niggers are just too damn sensitive these days.

The family continues to eat. END OF PART I.

PART II

SCENE 1

Maybe part 1 never happened. Maybe it did and they don't talk about it anymore but SAIDA and ERIN are still together, this time at SAIDA's parents' house. In this reimagined piece of their history, they've been dating for 2 years and not five and this is the first time ERIN is meeting SAIDA's parents. The same set can be used but it should be clear that this is a different home. Unlike the previous set, there is more artwork on walls and possibly a tasteful picture of "Black Jesus."

SAIDA peeks her head in first.

SAIDA

Mom? Dad?

LEAH comes out of the kitchen with an apron on. She looks amazing. She's been cooking all day but you can't tell.

LEAH

Saida! Come in, come in.

LEAH opens the door for SAIDA. SAIDA quickly and respectfully hugs her mother. ERIN enters behind and immediately takes off her shoes.

LEAH

Um what are you

SAIDA

You don't have--

LEAH

You should keep your shoes on. Unless you have house shoes.

ERIN
House shoes?

SAIDA
Slippers.

LEAH
You must be Erin.

ERIN slides her shoes back on and nods.

ERIN
Hi Leah.

SAIDA clears her throat or something to signal to ERIN that's not okay.

ERIN
Right. Shit.

SAIDA sighs.

ERIN
Sorry. Hello Mrs. Washington.

LEAH
Hello. Go ahead and sit down. Dinner will be a minute.

LEAH leaves to go to the kitchen. SAIDA and ERIN sit on the couch.

ERIN
She hates me.

SAIDA
She doesn't hate you. She just met you.

ERIN
I forgot I was supposed to be so formal. I didn't think

SAIDA

It's not formal. It's a respect thing.

ERIN

She's my girlfriend's mom.

SAIDA

My father still refers to my grandmother as Mrs. Rivas. It's a respect thing.

ERIN is tense.

SAIDA

I'm going to go check on my mom in the kitchen.

ERIN

Wait what if someone else comes?

SAIDA

Someone else comes?

ERIN

Yeah. Like your dad or something? Or your brother.

SAIDA

You mean my sister.

ERIN

I'm nervous. I'm not thinking clearly.

SAIDA

You'll be fine.

SAIDA goes into the kitchen. ERIN pulls out her phone and starts texting. There are constant dings as she replies to everything. The door opens and JAMAL walks in. ERIN keeps texting.

JAMAL

Good afternoon.

ERIN
(still texting)

Good afternoon.

JAMAL
Who are you and why are you in my house?

SAIDA comes running out.

SAIDA
Dad! Hi. This is Erin.

SAIDA does something physical to get ERIN to put her phone away.

ERIN
Hello Mr. Washington.

ERIN goes to hug him but JAMAL extends his hand instead. ERIN shakes it.

JAMAL
Hello.
Your mom in the kitchen?

SAIDA nods. JAMAL goes to the kitchen to check on his wife.

ERIN
I feel like I should be handing your parents a resume every time I say anything at all.

SAIDA
You need to loosen up. This is going to be a weird weekend if you don't.

ERIN
I am trying.
Your dad is so...tall.

SAIDA
Gross.

ERIN
What?

SAIDA

You think my dad is hot?

ERIN

I didn't say that.

SAIDA

You have sex eyes. Gross Erin! That's my dad.

ERIN

Don't say that so loudly. He'll hear you!

A moment.

SAIDA

Do you promise me you'll chill out?

ERIN

I promise.

JAMAL re-enters.

JAMAL

(saying it loud enough so LEAH can
hear)

Your mom makes the best cornbread in Cook County.

LEAH

(off-stage)

Oh hush!

ERIN

I'd love to get me a taste of that sweet bread.

SAIDA glares at ERIN.

ERIN

Shit. Sorry.

I mean, crap. sorry. I was kidding.

I didn't mean

ERIN walks outside to get some air. JAMAL stares at SAIDA.

SCENE 2

Later that evening, at the dinner table. It's time for dinner. Everything is laid out perfectly. ERIN, SAIDA, and JAMAL are already seated. LEAH comes out and puts the last dish on the table.

LEAH
(not sitting)

So Erin what do you do?

ERIN

I'm an artist.

LEAH

What does that mean?

ERIN

I make art.

SAIDA

She's a painter, mom.

ERIN

I'm actually a major fan of the gallery you used to have, Mrs. Washington. I read a lot about how important it was to have a gallery in Englewood and I really love that you were able to--

LEAH

Did you ever visit it?

ERIN

No I wasn't sure how safe I'd be in that neighborhood but I read a lot about it.

LEAH

Mmhm.

Time to say grace. Erin, would you like to?

Everyone stands except ERIN. SAIDA nudges ERIN. ERIN pops up.

ERIN

Um sure I'd love to.

A moment. ERIN clears her throat. The lights change. While the words the actor says aren't actually what she says in the scene, it has the same feeling to it.

ERIN

(this is Big Sean's verse on "Blessings" --
it would be great if we could find a way
to use the actual lyrics)

I feel blessed
Way up, I feel blessed
Way up, I feel blessed
(Straight up, look)
I live the life I deserve, blessed
Fuck a vacay I feel better at work
I mean whatever it's worth
I give whatever I'm worth
For my n-words who gon' go to hell and back for me
I'ma give 'em Heaven on earth
Or a hell of a check, yeah, whichever come first
Blessings on blessings on blessings
Look at my life, man, that's lessons on lessons on lessons
Amen.

SAIDA glares at ERIN. The lights return to normal.

LEAH

Amen. Let's eat.

Everyone sits down and begins to make themselves a plate.

ERIN

This is a really nice house, Mr. Washington.

Thank you. JAMAL

You sound surprised? LEAH

No I just ERIN

Mom, it was just a compliment. SAIDA

A lot of insults sound like compliments, Saida. LEAH

They eat in silence for a moment. The door opens. CANDICE walks into the house.

Oh good I didn't miss dinner. CANDICE

Go wash your hands first. LEAH

Mom, I just CANDICE

Go. LEAH

CANDICE goes into the kitchen.

I didn't know Candice was coming over. SAIDA

I didn't either. You know how your sister is. LEAH

CANDICE returns and joins the table.

CANDICE
(as she's preparing a plate)

Who's the white girl?

SAIDA

Candice!

CANDICE

What? Is she your girlfriend or dad's?

CANDICE laughs to herself. No one else does.

CANDICE

Oh I'm sorry. I didn't know everyone lost their sense of humor.

SAIDA

It wasn't funny.

JAMAL

Apologize to your mother.

CANDICE

You apologize to her.
Sorry. What's your name?

ERIN

Erin.

CANDICE

Candice. As you probably figured out. How long you've been dating my sister?

ERIN

Two years.

CANDICE

Y'all getting married or something?

SAIDA

Candice!

CANDICE

What? We don't bring folks home for no reason.

ERIN

Actually, there is something we'd like to share with you.

SAIDA

This isn't a good time.

CANDICE

Jesus

LEAH

Don't take the lord's name in vain!

CANDICE

Sorry mom.

The food is great. The greens are really good this time. You used pork right to get the--

SAIDA

Mom! You said you wouldn't do that.

LEAH

Saida, just because you're a lesbian, that doesn't mean you also have to be vegetarian.

ERIN

This is something that's really important to the both--

JAMAL

It's best you don't finish that sentence.

ERIN shrinks herself.

SAIDA

Well I guess I can't eat anything here.

LEAH

What do you paint, Erin?

ERIN

Well, I'm a figurative artist so a lot of people think I paint porn.

ERIN laughs the joke didn't land.

CANDICE

I am so happy I came home this weekend.

SCENE 3

The stage is silhouette. We can really only see shadows. A figure comes out. It's ERIN. She's wearing lingerie. Her hair is flowing. She looks hot. She starts to do a "sexy" dance. The dance in reality is disjointed and awkward but in her mind it's super sexy . She continues to do this dance. Country music starts playing. She keeps dancing her "sexy" dance. Maybe she gives one of the audience members a lap dance. Maybe she gets close enough that it looks like she might but she doesn't. Suddenly water drops on her. It's sexy sexy (except that it's not). A few minutes, JAMAL walks out. He's uninterested. He wants to walk away. She pulls him over. He walks away. She pulls him over again. She knocks him down and mounts him. He gives in. Lights fade as they have very loud and uncomfortable looking sex.

SCENE 4

The next morning , SAIDA is preparing the breakfast table. LEAH comes out of the kitchen dressed like Aunt Jemima and puts down fresh pancakes.

LEAH

Lawd have mercy.

LEAH sits down at the head of the table.

SAIDA

Breakfast looks great mom.

LEAH

Thank yuh honey.

SAIDA sits down and makes a plate.

SAIDA

Where is everyone else?

LEAH

You know yuh father is a rolling stone. He goes wherever he rolls.

SAIDA

Yeah.

Mom, are you okay?

LEAH

I get tired baby.

SAIDA

Of what?

LEAH

I been wondering when it gets to be our turn. When we get to be the ones who the story is about. I been a good wife. I worked hard. I stood by my man no matter what. He even brought home a baby. Were'nt mine but I loved it anyway. When it gets to be my turn?

SAIDA

You brought home a baby? What baby?

LEAH

Ain't me. No. He brought it home. Told me there had been another woman and asked me to raised it. Done did what was I supposed ta. When it get to be my turn I wonder?

SAIDA

Mom, what're you--

LEAH

(singing)

When Israel was in Egypt's land,
Let my people go,
oppressed so hard they could not stand,
Let my people go.

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
tell old Pharaoh: Let my people go.
The Lord told Moses what to do,
Let my people go,
to lead the Hebrew children through,
Let my people go

SAIDA

Mom, are you feeling okay?

LEAH

(still singing)

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
A long way from home, a long way from home.
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost done,
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost done,
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost done,
And a long, long way from home, a long way from home.
True believer,
True believer,

A long, long way from home,
A long, long way from home.

LEAH starts crying. JAMAL and CANDICE
enter.

SAIDA
Mom, I'm worried. What's going on? Are you

JAMAL
I slept with Erin. And I plan to do it again.

CANDICE punches her father.

SCENE 5

SAIDA and ERIN sit shell-shocked in SAIDA's
childhood bedroom.

ERIN
I didn't mean

SAIDA
Don't.

ERIN
It's not as simple as

SAIDA
You fucked my father.

ERIN
Technically he fucked me.

SAIDA
Are you saying it wasn't consensual?

ERIN
I'm not saying that it wasn't consensual. I'm just not sure that I wanted it.

SAIDA
What does that even mean?

ERIN

I was confused? I didn't know what was happening.

SAIDA

Why were you in the living room?

ERIN

I was hungry. Why are you treating me like I'm the victim here. He came on to me!

Moment.

SAIDA

You could've said no.

ERIN

I didn't feel like I could.

SAIDA

You've ruined my family.

ERIN

It was just a one time thing. It was a mistake.

SAIDA

You fucked my father! You, my wife, slept with my father! What the fuck, Erin?

ERIN

I guess now would be a bad time to tell them.

SAIDA

Yes! It would.

ERIN

I really didn't mean to
He was just there and I wasn't thinking.
Please don't be mad at me.

Moment.

SAIDA

He said he wants to do it again.

ERIN

Oh?

SAIDA

Oh?

ERIN

I mean I thought it would just be
I didn't think he

SAIDA

Erin, are you fucking serious right now?

ERIN

I just thought
I don't know. I'm a young hot thing. I thought he was just, like sexually unsatisfied. I
didn't think he wanted

SAIDA

You cannot have sex with my father again.

ERIN

Okay but think about it. If I did that, then the baby would have both of our DNA.

SAIDA

What baby?

ERIN

You don't want kids?

SAIDA

Erin! Oh my fucking God. I can't believe
I don't want to talk about having kids with you right now.

ERIN

It was really hot.

SAIDA

Two seconds ago, it wasn't consensual.

ERIN

I mean I just thought
Oh your poor mother. I hate that I did this to her.

SAIDA

That you did this to my *mother*?

ERIN

It's just sex, Saida. Loosen up. Black women are so uptight about sex.

SAIDA

How many times do I need to
He was my father!

ERIN

You've never slept with the family member of the person you were dating before?

SAIDA

No! Especially not while I was married!

ERIN

Well that's unfair. You've never been married before.

SAIDA

How are you this fucking heartless?

ERIN

I'm not heartless. I'm just saying this isn't that big of a deal. We can figure something out.

SAIDA

Get out of my house, Erin.

ERIN

Saida.

SAIDA

Leave! Now!

ERIN hesitates. SAIDA starts angrily packing ERIN's stuff, occasionally throwing things at her.

ERIN

I didn't think this would ruin us.

SAIDA

How could it not? How could you do this?

ERIN grabs her things and goes. SAIDA starts to cry on the bed. It's a long, dramatic cry. LEAH and CANDICE join her and cry as well. It's not cathartic. It's uncomfortable.

SCENE 6

The next morning. LEAH is sitting at the head of the dinner table. She's dressed in expensive clothing from head to toe. Her make up is perfectly done. Her hair is perfect. She wears a crown. She looks directly at the audience. CANDICE and SAIDA join her at opposite sides. They're also wearing crowns. Maybe a Beyonce song underscores this.

LEAH

We are Black women.

CANDICE

We are Black women.

SAIDA

We are Black women.

LEAH

We are queens.

CANDICE

We are queens.

SAIDA

We are queens.

We exist to support Black men.	LEAH
We exist to support Black men.	CANDICE
We exist to support Black men.	SAIDA
Even when they wrong us.	LEAH
Even when they wrong us.	CANDICE
Even when they wrong us.	SAIDA
Even when they hurt us.	LEAH
Even when they hurt us.	CANDICE
Even when they hurt us.	SAIDA
Even when they break us.	LEAH
Even when they break us.	CANDICE
Even when they break us.	SAIDA
Even as they abandon us.	LEAH
Even as they abandon us,	CANDICE

SAIDA

Even as they abandon us.

LEAH

We are the leaders of the civil rights movement.

CANDICE

We are the leaders of the civil rights movement.

SAIDA

We are the leaders of the civil rights movement.

LEAH

Nevertheless, we are the side characters, the back up.

CANDICE

We are the side characters.

SAIDA

The back up.

LEAH

Our stories do not stand on their own.

CANDICE

We are the rib from Adam.

SAIDA

We are a small piece of someone else's story.

LEAH

But we are still queens!

CANDICE

Queens!

SAIDA

We are queens!

LEAH

(to her daughters) Fix your crown.

(to the audience) You cain't ever shine like me.

LEAH leaves first. Her daughters adjust their crowns and leave.

SCENE 7

SAIDA sits on the back porch, smoking a cigarette and drinking a glass of wine. The bottle is close by. CANDICE comes outside to join her sister. CANDICE lights a blunt.

SAIDA

Mom and dad are going to kill you.

CANDICE

They've got their own problems right now.

Moment.

CANDICE

I'm sorry.

SAIDA

It's fine.
I mean, it's absolutely not fine in any way but
it's fine, you know

CANDICE

Mom's not going to leave him.

SAIDA

Of course she isn't.

CANDICE

Are you going to leave Erin?

SAIDA

Yeah, of course.

CANDICE

You know I have never dated another black person. Have you?

SAIDA

No.

CANDICE

Don't you think that's kind of fucked up?

SAIDA

It's hard enough to find queer women. Finding black queer women felt impossible. What's your excuse het?

CANDICE

Het?

SAIDA

I thought it would land stronger. I'm just not feeling it I guess.

CANDICE

Were you going for het as in heterosexual?

SAIDA

I was.

CANDICE

Isn't cis supposed to go in front of that?

SAIDA

Are you cis?

CANDICE shrugs.

CANDICE

I have a weird relationship with my gender.

SAIDA

Me too.

CANDICE

It's not like I'm against dating black men. I just feel like there's this expectation. Like I have to be wife, mother, and saint. And none of those are sexy. Meanwhile white women

SAIDA

Yeah. But was that just instilled into us?

CANDICE

Maybe. But maybe it's also a bit true.

SAIDA

Yeah. Who knows?

Moment.

CANDICE

I feel like I don't even know how to be the main character in my own story. We're the supporting role.

SAIDA

I don't even know how to do that right. Sometimes I feel like I'm just watching my life, holding my breath. I'm trying so hard to not say anything that might make things more dangerous for me that I don't even know what it means to be comfortable anymore.

CANDICE

Me either.

They both drink.

CANDICE

I want to be more than reactionary. I want to be more than the supporting character.

SAIDA

We both deserve that.

CANDICE

Like wasn't this supposed to be your story?

SAIDA

It was.

CANDICE

Did it ever feel like it?

SAIDA

No.

Moment.

CANDICE

I want to live in a world where we both get to have a more complex existence than the special guest.

SAIDA

Or the woman who was cheated on.

CANDICE

Or the strong mother.

SAIDA

Or sister. Or friend.

CANDICE

Or the single mother.

SAIDA

Oh Jesus. Yes.

CANDICE

If you could rewrite your story, would you still play yourself?

SAIDA drinks.

SAIDA

I want to play my full self. Just for once. Just to see what it feels like.

CANDICE sets her head on her sister's shoulder. They both look out. One day we'll get to play our full selves.

END OF PLAY.