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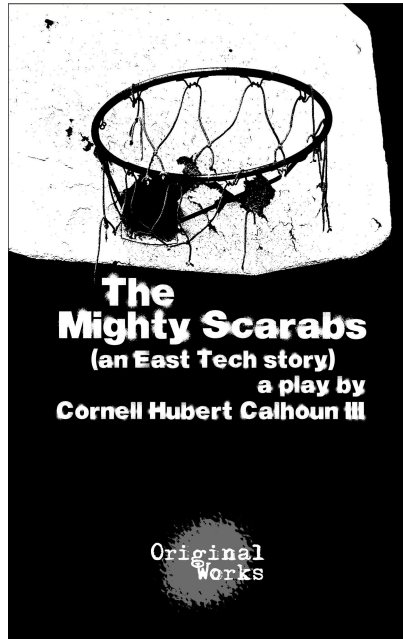
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Black Like Us
©Rachel Atkins
Trade Edition, 2016
ISBN 978-1-63092-094-4

*Also Available From
Original Works Publishing*



The Mighty Scarabs by Cornell Hubert Calhoun III

Synopsis: The ball stops bouncing for everyone... eventually. When the heroes of Cleveland's East Technical High School basketball team won the state championship in '55 the world was theirs for the taking. Thirteen years later, the ball has stopped bouncing and reality has set in. A funny, lyrical and mournful exploration of what happens to inner-city hardwood stars when the glory days are a distant memory.

Cast Size: 5 Males, 4 Females

BLACK LIKE US
by Rachel Atkins

What Does It Mean To Be *Black Like Us*?

A Foreword by Allyson Hobbs, Ph.D

*"I've often wondered why more coloured girls . . . never 'passed' over. It's such a frightfully easy thing to do. If one's the type, all that's needed is a little nerve."*¹

--Clare Kendry in Nella Larsen's novel, *Passing* (1929)

Countless African Americans have passed as white, leaving behind families, friends, and communities. Lives were lost only to be remembered in family stories. To pass as white was to make a worrisome decision to turn away from a black racial identity and to claim to belong to another racial group. In today's multiracial society, the decision to pass may seem foolish or a type of betrayal; it may seem unethical, immoral or an unnecessary form of deception. To many, passing may be understood as a desperate act compelled by the limitations of the bygone era of segregation. Once one circumvented the law, fooled coworkers, deceived neighbors, tricked friends, and sometimes duped children and spouses, there were enormous costs to pay. The experiences of those who passed as white open a window onto the enduring problem of race in American society and onto the intimate meanings of race and racial identity for African Americans. The predicaments of those who could pass as white offer a lens to view the changing meanings of race in American history. From the late eighteenth century to the present, racially ambiguous men and women have wrestled with complex questions about the racial conditions of their times, and they have fashioned complex understandings about their places in the world.

In Rachel Atkins' play, *Black Like Us*, Florence's decision to pass as white is motivated by love. As the play unfolds, the audience wonders whether Florence could have known just how far-reaching the consequences of her act would be. The repercussions of her decision are ex-

1. Nella Larsen, *Passing* (New Brunswick, 1986), 157–158.

perienced most painfully by her sister, Maxine, but also by Maxine's children. At first glance, Florence's decision seems simple, romantic, and daring. But soon, the audience finds that passing is not a "frightfully easy thing to do," as Clare Kendry insisted in Nella Larsen's 1929 novel, *Passing*. We learn of the havoc Florence's decision has wreaked and the family it has divided. Long after Florence makes this decision, the alienation and the isolation remains.

During the long years of Jim Crow segregation, passing meant striking out on one's own and leaving behind a family and a people. Benefits accrued to these new white identities. But a more complete understanding of this practice requires a reckoning with the loss, estrangement, and separation that accompanied, and often outweighed, its rewards. As early as the 1940s and through the 1960s, personal testimonies published in the black press began to declare that the losses caused by passing were simply too much to bear. It was time to give up and "come home."

Throughout *Black Like Us*, the audience observes that the practice of passing affected those who were left behind almost as keenly as it affected those who passed. When the pioneering black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier asked his students at Howard University to write family histories in the 1930s and 1940s, many found that they were incapable of the task. Too many family members had passed as white, leaving many unanswered questions and gaps in genealogies. As anthropologist Caroline Bond Day conducted the research for her master's thesis, *A Study of Some Negro-White Families* (1932), she bemoaned the difficulties of gathering information because of the problems posed by "one or more [family] members who are 'passing' either entirely, or only temporarily for purposes of obtaining lucrative employment."² Passing to work, often known as

2. Caroline Bond Day, "A Study of Some Negro- White Families in the United States," (master's thesis, Harvard University, 1932), 6. Caroline Bond Day Papers, Peabody Museum Archives, Harvard University.

“nine-to-five passing,” was one of the most common forms of passing during the Jim Crow era as it enabled nearly white men and women to access employment reserved for whites only. Passing worked as an effective strategy to expand one’s employment opportunities, especially in white-collar professions. Outmaneuvering racially restrictive hiring practices and enjoying otherwise unfathomable professional success and upward mobility made passing an economically rewarding practice and allowed African Americans the delightful enjoyment of “getting over” on whites or “fooling our white folks” as novelist and poet Langston Hughes described it. But the fun of passing was usually short-lived; even “nine-to-five” and other forms temporary passing required sacrifices and created anxiety that few could tolerate. Tangled family histories, fuzzy lineages, and forgotten bloodlines made many of Day’s and Frazier’s questions difficult, if not impossible, to answer.

In a memoir of her mother’s life, Ronne Hartfield reflected on the expansive sense of black family feeling and captured an enduring theme: “It is said that colored people all over the world will ask each other upon first meeting, ‘Who are your people?’”³ Hartfield’s question signaled the importance of locating black individuals within larger familial networks and sets of kinfolk. Shepherd was quite familiar with the practice of passing: her aunt passed to sell perfume as a counter girl in New Orleans, one of her brothers passed and married a white woman, and another brother passed to work as a foreman at the Link-Belt factory in Chicago. Despite Shepherd’s intimate exposure to passing, she could not make sense of the familial dislocations that passing permanently necessitated: “In slavery

3. Ronne Hartfield, *Another Way Home: The Tangled Roots of Race in One Chicago Family* (Chicago, 2004), 88. Also see Chapter 1, “Now, Who Are Your People?: Norfolk, Virginia, and Littleton, North Carolina, 1903–1918,” in Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill, 2003), 12–45.

days, people got cut off from their families and everything they knew like that, and that was sad, but then there was nothing they could do about it. But these passing people who choose to do that? I can't make any sense out of that at all. All they get in return for giving up everything is people can think they're white. People think I'm white anyway and I don't feel any different. I have my family and my true history. That means something.”⁴

Losing one's family and one's "true history" upset the collective character of African American life; it undermined the ability for traditions, stories, jokes, and songs to be shared across generations. In stripping away one's ascribed status, passing offers a sharper angle of vision onto the personal meanings of racial identity from the perspective of black individuals and communities. The communal politics of passing demonstrate the insufficiency of explanations of passing as a rebellious, individualistic practice and instead reveal the ways that race operated on the most private levels and in the innermost reaches of black communities.

But the practice of passing has two sides: passing produces painful losses, but it also, paradoxically, is the source of levity and humor. Perhaps this is because it reveals the bankruptcy of ideas about racial purity and racial difference. In the final scenes of *Black Like Us*, the grandchildren of Florence and Maxine meet at a suburban Starbucks. The awkward but comic reunion begins with Maxine's granddaughter Tanya looking around at the Starbucks and wondering aloud, "how much whiter can you get?" Then as the grandchildren try to get to know each other, the full range of emotions that conversations about race and family relationships produce come tumbling out: anger, disappointment, powerlessness, and confusion. There is no tidy ending to this reunion and we are left to wonder if this family will be able to overcome the

4. Hartfield, 42.

distance and the misunderstandings that have been created by secrets and distrust. Atkins ends the play in the past, in 1951. Perhaps our current racial conditions remain too fractious to serve as a satisfying conclusion to this play.

Without question, racially ambiguous people in the twenty-first century are living through a very different moment than those who lived in the 1920s or the 1820s. The racial dynamics of the new millennium have created an array of choices that were inconceivable and unavailable to mixed-race people in the past. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the racial landscape had changed and new choices and possibilities emerged. American society began to move toward recognizing mixed-race identities. This change was reflected not only in personal attitudes and experiences but also in federal racial classifications. In 1993, multiracial activists challenged the one-drop rule and argued that mixed-race people should be officially recognized on the 2000 census. In 1997, the U.S. Census Bureau's policy changed for the first time in almost eighty years to allow individuals to "mark one or more" categories. Numerous mixed-race organizations, magazines, college classes, and websites appeared and began to garner greater public attention. The friendly embrace of hybridity in the twenty-first century does not signal the achievement of a "postracial" age, nor does it support the colorblind thesis that race no longer matters. On the contrary, the increasing acceptance of hybridity underscores just how germane race continues to be to contemporary American society. Race is reproduced all around us, at every level of society, including in our everyday lives. But underneath, the core issues of race and identity remain. Hybrid identities are still racialized identities. Racially ambiguous people are racially marked and still must negotiate the terrain of a racist society. As individuals remain racially marked, the practice of passing will continue to remind us of the speciousness of these markings.

BLACK LIKE US was originally commissioned as a 10-minute play by Live Girls! Theater, Seattle, Washington, and subsequently developed and produced as a one-act by Rain City Projects and Annex Theatre in Seattle. The full-length play of BLACK LIKE US was developed and produced in collaboration by Annex Theatre and Brownbox Theatre in Seattle. The play opened on January 31, 2014 at Annex Theatre, with the following cast and production staff:

Maxine - Dior Davenport
Florence- Chelsea Binta
Donna – Devin Rodgers
Tanya - Marquicia Dominguez
Denise - Kia Pierce
Amy - McKenna Turner
Sandra - Alyson Scadron Branner
Michelle - Lindsay Evans

Producer – Tyrone Brown
Director - Jose Amador
Assistant Director- Pilar O’Connell
Stage Manager- Christine Lange
Set Designer - John Clarke
Costume Designer - Julia Evanovich
Lighting Designer - Tess Malone
Sound Designer - Shane Regan
Props Designer - Samantha Armitage

Synopsis

In 1958, a young African-American woman makes the life-changing decision to start passing for white, creating a ripple effect through multiple generations. In 2013, her granddaughters accidentally discover her secret and seek out the family she left behind. Moving back and forth through time, what happens in between is a frank and funny look at the shifting boundaries of tolerance, as they are all faced with the many questions of what identity really means.

Cast

5-8 women, ages 20-50 (able to play a range of ages), racially diverse

Characters

FLORENCE: a light-skinned African-American woman who chooses to start passing for white in 1958, romantic, a dreamer

MAXINE: FLORENCE's sister, darker skinned, a civil rights activist, opinionated, stubborn

DONNA: FLORENCE's daughter, family-focused wife, mother & daughter, a peacemaker

MICHELLE: DONNA's daughter, FLORENCE's granddaughter, the organized one

AMY: DONNA's daughter, FLORENCE's granddaughter, the emotional one

SANDRA: DONNA's daughter, FLORENCE's granddaughter, the "yummy mummy"

TANYA: MAXINE's granddaughter, hotheaded, dramatic

DENISE: MAXINE's granddaughter, rational, calm

Optional double casting:

FLORENCE/TANYA

MAXINE/DENISE

DONNA/SANDRA

This is a play about racial identity. Please cast in a way that is racially conscious to support the story and issues it explores.

Settings & Times:

A variety of settings in Seattle from 1951-2013

Scene Breakdown:

ACT 1

Scene 1—1958, Florence’s bedroom—Florence, Maxine (mid-20s)

Scene 2—2013, Donna’s house—Amy, Michelle, Sandra

Scene 3—1971, Bon Marché perfume counter—Florence, Maxine (mid/late 30s)

Scene 4—2013, Starbucks—Sandra, Michelle

Scene 5—1986, Maxine’s porch—Donna, Maxine (late 40s/early 50s)

Scene 6—2013, Amy’s apartment—Amy, Sandra

Scene 7—2013, Tanya’s kitchen—Tanya, Denise

ACT 2

Scene 1—1995, Donna’s house—Donna, Florence, Maxine (late 50s/early 60s)

Scene 2—2013, Donna’s house—Michelle, Amy, Sandra

Scene 3—1996, outside Safeway—Florence, Maxine (late 50s/early 60s), Donna

Scene 4—2013, inside car—Amy, Michelle

Scene 5—2013, Starbucks—Tanya, Denise, Sandra, Amy, Michelle

Scene 6—2013, outside Starbucks—Amy, Michelle, Sandra

Scene 7—1951, Florence & Maxine’s kitchen—Florence, Maxine (late teens)

BLACK LIKE US

ACT 1

Scene 1: 1958

(Early morning. FLORENCE is in her bedroom, folding clothes, etc. —preparing to pack.)

MAXINE: (*entering*) What in the world are you up to so early?

FLORENCE: (*startled, overlapping*) Oh my lord, you scared me!

MAXINE: Jumpy...

FLORENCE: I just didn't think anyone else was awake yet—

MAXINE: Because no sane person should be.

FLORENCE: Well, you didn't need to come sneaking in here like some kind of cat burglar.

MAXINE: So what are you doing up?

FLORENCE: Nothing.

MAXINE: Since when does Florence Walker get up before nine AM on a weekend if she doesn't absolutely have to? Let alone do her hair?

FLORENCE: I couldn't sleep.

MAXINE: What are you doing with all this stuff?

FLORENCE: Just a little spring cleaning. You know, airing some things out, keeping them fresh.

MAXINE: Who'd you get that helpful hint from, Betty Crocker?

FLORENCE: For goodness sakes, Maxine, how many times do I have to tell you? Betty Crocker is for cooking! It's *Good House-keeping* magazine, and it wouldn't kill you to look at the articles I clip for you once in a while—

MAXINE: Thank you, Grammy. I'm pretty sure I'll survive.

FLORENCE: I'm just saying.

MAXINE: (*picking up a folded dress*) Ooh! This is new! Did you get it with your employee discount?

FLORENCE: I put it on layaway while I saved up. Isn't it gorgeous?

MAXINE: (*holding dress up to herself, teasing*) How does that song of yours go? (*singing*) "I feel pretty, oh so pretty—"

FLORENCE: Keep your voice down! You'll wake Mama and Daddy!

MAXINE: Every other Negro in America is going ape for Chuck Berry, and all my sister listens to is musical theatre. It's embarrassing.

FLORENCE: Seems like you've been listening too, you know the words so well.

MAXINE: I can't help but hear when you're playing the damn thing all the time.

FLORENCE: Maxine!

MAXINE: At least it's better than that (*singing*) "One-eyed, one-horned, flying purple people eater—!"

FLORENCE: I'll have you know that song was a Number 1 Billboard hit! Now give me back my dress, please. It's delicate.

MAXINE: (*not giving it back*) A dress like this must be for something special.

FLORENCE: No, not really.

MAXINE: Maybe *someone* special?

FLORENCE: I just—wanted a new dress, that's all.

MAXINE: Girl, you have always been the worst liar. Come on, lay it on me.

FLORENCE: Maxine—

MAXINE: I'm serious. You want me to unhand this dress? Or you want me to start singing again? (*starting to sing*) "One-eyed, one-horned..."

FLORENCE: All right, all right. (*taking the dress*) It's for a man.

MAXINE: I knew it! This "friend" you keep going to meet? Mama and Daddy will not be happy when they find out you've been seeing some man who hasn't come to pay his respects.

FLORENCE: I know.

MAXINE: So what's the big secret? (*teasing*) Does he listen to Elvis?

FLORENCE: No.

MAXINE: He's a Communist!

FLORENCE: Maxine! I wouldn't date a red!

MAXINE: Is he someone Daddy wouldn't approve of?

FLORENCE: You could say that.

MAXINE: Well, stop beating around the bush and say it then! Who is this Joe Doe?

FLORENCE: His name is Michael Rossetti. He's Italian.

MAXINE: Come again?

FLORENCE: You heard me.

MAXINE: Yes, but I thought I heard you say he's white.

FLORENCE: He's Italian.

MAXINE: Have you lost your mind?

FLORENCE: Maxine. Remember when I went to apply for my job at the Bon? Well, when I walked in...they offered me a counter position! How could I say no to a counter job?

MAXINE: But only white girls work the counters at the Bon Marché.

FLORENCE: I know! I'm a salesgirl in the perfume department.

MAXINE: I thought you were working in the stockroom.

FLORENCE: I never said I was, did I? I just—didn't correct you when you assumed—

MAXINE: So you lied.

FLORENCE: No, I just didn't tell the truth.

MAXINE: And what about to the people at the Bon?

FLORENCE: I just—didn't correct them either. And then I met Michael. He was buying Chanel No. 5 for his mother's birthday.

MAXINE: What is this now, one of your dime store romance novels? He came up to your counter and swept you off your feet?

FLORENCE: He was so sweet. Handsome. We got to talking. He's done so many interesting things in his life, you wouldn't believe it. Maxine! He's been to New York City, and saw *West Side Story* live on Broadway!

MAXINE: (*sarcastically*) Gracious me, a match made in heaven.

FLORENCE: Then it was the end of my shift, and he invited me for a Coke...it just—happened.

MAXINE: It just happened.

FLORENCE: And now I love him! And he loves me. So much.

MAXINE: He loves you? But what does he think? About who you are? What you are?

FLORENCE: He thinks I'm— Italian. Like he is.

MAXINE: Oh my lord. I'm surprised you didn't tell him you were Spanish, so you could really be living *West Side Story*. You do remember it's a tragedy in the end, right? Like Romeo and Juliet?

FLORENCE: Maria is Puerto Rican.

MAXINE: I can't believe this—my own sister.

FLORENCE: Don't be so high and mighty. It's not like I'm the first Negro in history to pass. Don't tell me you wouldn't try it if you could.

MAXINE: Don't even start with me on that, Florence.

FLORENCE: He wants to marry me, Maxine!

MAXINE: Marry you? Girl, you really are a walking cliché.

FLORENCE: Well, I wouldn't know about things like that because I'm not educated like you are. Daddy could only afford to send one of us to college and that was you, remember?

MAXINE: That is not what this is about.

FLORENCE: No, it's about me trying to be happy! See, this is why I kept him a secret. I knew you wouldn't get it.

MAXINE: You're right about that. How in the world do you think this is going to work? What about when he wants to meet your family?

FLORENCE: He thinks I don't have any.

MAXINE: So now you're Little Orphan Annie?

FLORENCE: I told him my family died.

MAXINE: What!

FLORENCE: It wasn't anything personal—

MAXINE: And they say Negroes are the stupid ones.

FLORENCE: He's not like that.

MAXINE: Please. They're all like that, Florence.

FLORENCE: You've never been in love.

MAXINE: I'm not talking about love, Florence! Haven't I tried to help you understand what's going on out there? I showed you Dr. King on that television program!

FLORENCE: Who?

MAXINE: The busses in Montgomery? Hello? Those high school kids in Arkansas?

FLORENCE: The pictures in *Jet* magazine of that mutilated boy in his coffin? No, thank you.

MAXINE: Exactly! That boy was lynched because of the color of his skin. Don't you want to make sure something like that never happens again? We're organizing here, Florence.

FLORENCE: Didn't you already try that? This isn't the South.

MAXINE: Yes, fine, we couldn't get a local chapter off the ground the first time. But that was a couple years ago. There's a movement starting now, and not just in the South.

FLORENCE: But this isn't about some cause. This is about me and my life.

MAXINE: I don't see how you can separate them.

FLORENCE: Of course you don't. But I can. Listen. I have the chance to live a different life. An easier life. When I'm with Michael, it's like there's this bubble of protection around me.

MAXINE: Help change things and we can all have that.

FLORENCE: And you say I'm a cliché?

MAXINE: It's people like you and thinking like that keeping us in our place.

FLORENCE: I'm sorry, Maxine. I don't want to fight with you.

MAXINE: I don't want to fight either. But have you really thought this through? What happens once you marry him? You keep playing Eye-talian? Betty Crocker-etti's gonna teach you how to make spaghetti and meatballs?

FLORENCE: That's not—

MAXINE: The girl who got caught out on every lie she ever told is suddenly going to be able to get away with a lie every minute of every day for the rest of her life?

FLORENCE: It's been working for the last six months.

MAXINE: Sure, at your job! On a date! But married to it?

FLORENCE: Married to *him*. To Michael. It'll be worth it.

MAXINE: So clue me in. What exactly is your plan?

FLORENCE: Well, Michael's up for a job in Portland, and you know I've always wanted a June wedding, so once I have my room at the Y—

MAXINE: I'm sorry, your what?

FLORENCE: The thing is, Michael already thinks I live at the YWCA.

MAXINE: Right—because you killed off your family.

FLORENCE: The Y is a perfectly respectable place for a young single woman to have a room.

MAXINE: But it's the y-W-c-a. W for white.

FLORENCE: It's W for women and you know it.

MAXINE: White or Women, it doesn't matter because it's no Negroes allowed in that building and you know *that*. (*FLORENCE imitates as MAXINE says the following*) Once a week to swim in the pool and that's it, and even then only because they drain and clean it right after. (*MAXINE gives FLORENCE a look and she stops*) You can't get a room there.

FLORENCE: I can.

MAXINE: Wait a minute. Is this why you're up so early? Are you packing to leave? "Spring cleaning," my eye! And you called *me* a cat burglar—you're sneaking out right now! And then what? That's it? We never see you again?

FLORENCE: I don't know.

MAXINE: If we run into each other on the street, we pretend we don't know each other?

FLORENCE: I don't know!

MAXINE: Not that we'll ever run into each other, if you're going to be *passing* from now on.

FLORENCE: You could be happy for me. I'm in love, Maxine! You don't find that every day.

MAXINE: You're actually willing to give everything up so you can live this lie.

FLORENCE: Maxine, please try to understand. I'm not like you. I've never been like you. It's not about college or music, or trying to change the world. I just want to be happy. And Michael makes me so happy! If you could only meet him, you'd see!

MAXINE: But I can't, can I?

FLORENCE: All I've ever wanted is a comfortable life with a home and babies and a husband I love. I'm going to have that now.

MAXINE: But at what cost? And what about those babies? What if they turn out—like me?

FLORENCE: Don't spoil it for me, Maxine.

MAXINE: You think it can't happen? I'm just saying—how can you know? Look at the two of us. (*Pause*) What am I supposed to tell Mama and Daddy?

FLORENCE: You could go back to bed and pretend you never saw me. You've always been the better liar.

MAXINE: Seems like you're a better liar than I thought.

FLORENCE: Maybe so.

(Pause)

MAXINE: Listen. What's your hurry? It's the crack of dawn on a Saturday morning! You've got the whole rest of your life to spend with this Michael. How about we both go back to bed, get up again at a reasonable hour...?

FLORENCE: You're not going to change my mind, Maxine.

MAXINE: I know. I heard you! I'm just saying, what's one more day? Give us one more day.

FLORENCE: Maxine—

MAXINE: You and Michael will still love each other tomorrow. Come on. Come on...how can you say no to a last request from your only sister...? *(the clincher)* What would Maria do?

FLORENCE: All right.

MAXINE: All right! Well, I am going back to bed. You should too. You want your beauty rest, don't you?

FLORENCE: Yes, Grammy.

MAXINE: But I will see you at the breakfast table.

FLORENCE: Sweet dreams, Maxine.

(MAXINE exits. FLORENCE watches her go, listens, waits, then pulls out a suitcase, puts her pile of clothes into it, and exits. She is leaving.)

Scene 2: 2013

(MICHELLE & AMY are in their mother's house, sorting through her belongings.)

AMY: When I die, you have my permission to take a match to everything. Torch the place.

MICHELLE: That sounds exciting. How about a Hindu funeral pyre? We'll set you on top and all your wives can hurl themselves into the flames.

AMY: My wives?

MICHELLE: I'm just saying.

AMY: Seriously, this is bullshit. All this crap. What was she holding onto it for?

MICHELLE: For us. In case we wanted it. You know. Someday. After. Now.

AMY: OK, some of it. Family heirlooms, yes. But this? (*holds up some kind of ridiculous object*) I mean, come on. Do you even have any idea what this is?

MICHELLE: I think it might have been Grammy's...? Just put it in the donation pile.

AMY: Donation? Michelle. Who the hell is going to want this?

MICHELLE: I don't know, someone might. It's usable.

AMY: Usable? You can't even identify it!

MICHELLE: Well, we can't just let it become landfill.

AMY: You really are turning into Mom. That's the attitude that got us sifting through all this crap in the first place!

MICHELLE: It's not crap. It's her stuff. It's her.

SANDRA: (*entering*) Who wants a donut? (*stops*) Oh my god, is this is far as you've gotten?

AMY: (*sarcastically*) How was your mani/pedi?

SANDRA: Divine. Look! (*AMY refuses to look*) What's wrong with her?

MICHELLE: She's pissed because you're late.

SANDRA: But I brought Krispy Kreme!

AMY: I'm pissed that she's late because she went to get a mani/pedi!

SANDRA: (*tempting AMY*) They're still hot...!

AMY: (*taking a donut*) You are pure evil.

SANDRA: It's just so rare that I get any time at all without the kids!
You have no idea how many BJs I had to promise David—

MICHELLE: (*interrupting*) I really don't want—

SANDRA: (*overlapping*) Just kidding! But seriously, he has no idea how hard it is to be alone with them all the time...

AMY: (*overlapping*) It sorta sounds like he does, actually—

SANDRA: (*overlapping*) ...It's just such a treat to get to do something nice for me for a change. The two of you don't get it because you don't have kids, but—

MICHELLE: Right.

SANDRA: I mean— (*stops herself*)

AMY: Nice.

SANDRA: Sorry, Michelle. I didn't mean to bring up the whole—

MICHELLE: I know.

SANDRA: You guys just have to keep trying. You're gonna be a great mom someday.

AMY: Quit while you're ahead, Sandra. Seriously.

SANDRA: Well. Anyway. Do you want to give me something to do or...?

AMY: So how many blowjobs did you have to promise David—?

MICHELLE: No! Amy!

AMY: What? She brought it up!

SANDRA: (*picking up the same object that AMY did*) What's this?

AMY: Excellent question! I was just asking Michelle the same thing.

SANDRA: (*investigating*) Well, whatever it is, what's inside it?

AMY: I don't know.

SANDRA: (*finding a key*) A key? To what?

MICHELLE: No idea.

SANDRA: Mom didn't have anything she kept locked, did she?

AMY: No.

MICHELLE: Wait a minute, yes. The other day, I found this box, I was wondering... (*starts looking*)

AMY: What other day?

MICHELLE: (*looking*) I don't know, last week sometime.

AMY: Why were you here? I thought we agreed—

MICHELLE: (*still looking*) I know, but we have to get everything cleared out before we put it on the market and it just wasn't going to happen all in one weekend—

SANDRA: But we were supposed to do this together.

MICHELLE: (*still looking*) Yes, ideally, but I could be here and you couldn't and it seemed silly to leave everything to the last minute and then make ourselves crazy—

AMY: So now we're supposed to feel guilty?

MICHELLE: No! I didn't—

AMY: But we do, because we were supposed to—

MICHELLE: But we couldn't. And now we are. And—here it is!
(*finding box*)

AMY: I've never seen that box before.

SANDRA: Me neither.

MICHELLE: (*trying key*) It fits.

SANDRA: Wait a minute.

MICHELLE: What?

SANDRA: Maybe we shouldn't open it.

AMY: Why not?

SANDRA: (*meaningfully*) A locked box with a hidden key?

MICHELLE: This isn't an Agatha Christie novel, Sandra.

SANDRA: What if it's private?

AMY: You don't have to look.

SANDRA: But—that's not fair!

AMY: You know what Dad always said.

SANDRA & MICHELLE: Life isn't fair.

AMY: I was going to say "When ifs and buts become candy and nuts,
we'll all have a Merry Fucking Christmas!"

SANDRA: I never understood that one.

AMY: So does it have to be unanimous, to open it or not?

SANDRA: Yes.

AMY: No.

MICHELLE: I don't know.

AMY: Michelle, you're supposed to be the tie breaker.

MICHELLE: Sorry.

AMY: There might be important stuff in there. Papers. Financial stuff. Money...

SANDRA: OK, OK! But I don't want to know what's inside unless it's really important, OK?

AMY: Fine.

SANDRA: Or money. (*exiting*)

AMY: (*opening box & looking inside*) It's just Grammy and Grampy stuff. Social security cards, marriage certificate—nothing secret.

MICHELLE: Then why hide the key?

AMY: (*pulling out envelope*) Wait, what's this?

MICHELLE: A letter?

AMY: Feels like pictures.

SANDRA: (*off*) Are you done yet?

MICHELLE & AMY: No!

AMY: (*hands envelope to MICHELLE*) Read it.

MICHELLE: Why me?

AMY: You're holding it.

MICHELLE: Fine. (*opens letter & reads*) Shit.

AMY: What?

MICHELLE: Maybe Sandra was right.

SANDRA: (*off*) What?

AMY: Are you serious?

SANDRA: (*off*) What?

MICHELLE: Maybe—

AMY: Get in here!

SANDRA: (*entering*) Oh no. Do I need to sit down?

AMY: Just read it, Michelle.

MICHELLE: OK, OK. (*reads*) “Dear Florence, we all missed you at the family reunion this year. I really hoped you might come to this one. Tony and Cheryl would love to meet their cousin someday. I know you said not to, but I thought you might like to see a picture of everyone. With love, your sister, Maxine.”

AMY: What. The. Fuck.

SANDRA: Grammy had a sister? I never knew that.

AMY: Grammy had a sister? Sandra, look at the picture.

SANDRA: Grammy’s sister was black?

AMY: Sandra. *Grammy* was black.

SANDRA: Maybe Grammy was adopted?

AMY: Really?

MICHELLE: Highly unlikely. Besides, there’s another picture in here, an older one, look.

AMY: (*reading back of photo*) Walker family, 1951. That’s Grammy, all right.

MICHELLE: They’re definitely all related.

SANDRA: But Grammy didn't look black.

AMY: I cannot believe you just said that.

SANDRA: You know what I mean!

MICHELLE: She must have, you know—passed.

SANDRA: Passed?

MICHELLE: For white.

AMY: She passed? What are we talking about, the 1800s?

MICHELLE: No, but sixty-something years ago? Pre-civil rights? It would have mattered back then.

SANDRA: But it's not like they were from the South.

MICHELLE: You think racism only existed in the South? Exists?

SANDRA: So then Mom was what? Mulatto? An—octoroon?

MICHELLE: I'm pretty sure we don't use those terms anymore.

SANDRA: But how does it work? Is it like a Jewish thing? If your mother is, then that's what you are? Like David's father is Jewish, but not his mother, so technically he's not.

MICHELLE: I don't think it's like being Jewish.

SANDRA: Well then, is it about, like, percentages?

MICHELLE: Maybe you're thinking of Native American tribal affiliations—?

SANDRA: (*interrupting*) No, Michelle, I'm not thinking about Native tribal—whatever! I just want to know what we are!

AMY: We're the same as we've always been.

SANDRA: No, we're not. We're part black. I mean, African-American. Which do you think we're supposed to say? (*realizing*) Oh my god, this is going to be great for the kids' college applications!

AMY: That is so racist.

SANDRA: How can you call me racist when I'm saying I want us to be black? I mean, African-American?

AMY: Asking that question is racist. Besides, your kids are barely in preschool.

SANDRA: Are you kidding? This stuff counts *now*. Being a minority candidate for anything totally improves your chances of success.

AMY: I cannot believe that's all you're thinking about.

SANDRA: If you don't think this would have helped you with your financial aid situation, you are out of your mind.

AMY: But why would Grammy do this? Why didn't Mom ever tell us?

MICHELLE: Well, clearly Grammy kept it a secret. And who knows when Mom found out? *If* she even ever did.

SANDRA: Do you think Grampy knew?

AMY: We had a right to know.

MICHELLE: Maybe Grammy was ashamed.

SANDRA: In this day and age? Everyone's mixed something. Hello, Obama? It's so not a big deal.

AMY: *It is* a big deal! If you gave yourself two seconds to think about it outside of what it's going to get you—it changes our whole—it throws everything about us into question. And it's not just about being black, or "African-American," or whatever, it's—there's been this secret. For generations. All that time we spent with Grammy. No photo albums, no family stories. Lies! This huge lie, our whole lives.

SANDRA: So it was frustrating when we couldn't fill out our family tree in third grade. So what?

AMY: And *why* she was lying? What if there was something more? Something worse?

SANDRA: (*gasps*) Worse than being black? Now who's racist?

AMY: That's not what I meant!

MICHELLE: Worse like what? They were bank robbers? Serial killers?

AMY: We'll never know, right? Grammy was living this lie and she made all of us a part of it, and we'll never know how or why or anything—

SANDRA: Maybe not. Maybe we could track down Maxine's kids. We've probably got cousins and stuff out there. Haven't you seen those commercials for Ancestry.com?

AMY: No way.

SANDRA: What? Why not?

AMY: It's been a secret all these years and we don't know why? That's good enough for me. I say we lock this box back up and pretend we never saw it.

SANDRA: But we did see it. I'm confused. You're upset about this being hidden from us, but you still want to keep it a secret? It just makes us more interesting. Aren't you curious?

AMY: No.

SANDRA: Well, you can keep it a secret, but that doesn't mean I have to.

MICHELLE: Actually, it might.

SANDRA: What do you mean?

MICHELLE: This is about all of us, right? If you tell people, it impacts Amy too. That's not fair.

SANDRA: Life isn't fair!

MICHELLE: Maybe we need some time to think about it. Process.

SANDRA: I don't!

AMY: Well, maybe you should!

MICHELLE: We don't have to decide what to do this minute, do we?

SANDRA: Technically, no, but it's a slippery slope. How long do we keep putting it off? Until it's *my* kids finding that box after *we're* all dead?

AMY: Does it have to be unanimous?

SANDRA: No.

AMY: Yes!

SANDRA: Michelle, you're the tie breaker.

MICHELLE: I don't know!

AMY: Our whole identity has changed and you're Silent Sally? You have to have an opinion.

SANDRA: Yeah, you've hardly said anything except that Native American baloney. What gives?

MICHELLE: I knew!

AMY & SANDRA: What?

MICHELLE: I knew.

Scene 3: 1971

(At the perfume counter at the Bon Marché. FLORENCE is working & doesn't see MAXINE enter.)

MAXINE: Florence Walker, as I live and breathe.

FLORENCE: (*turning, startled*) Maxine—!

MAXINE: Did you forget our date?

FLORENCE: No—goodness, I'm glad to see you, but—we're supposed to be meeting *after* my shift.

MAXINE: Can you blame me for being eager to see my only sister for the first time since—?

FLORENCE: Maxine.

MAXINE: Fine. I came early. I wanted to be sure that you were where you said you were.

FLORENCE: *I called you*, didn't I? Why would I lie?

MAXINE: Really?

FLORENCE: Well, I'm sorry, but I can't leave my counter yet. Why don't I just meet you later at—?

MAXINE: No, I'm sorry. My only sister, who I haven't laid eyes on in thirteen years, is behind the counter of my local Bon Marché department store like she never left, and yes, I'm a little early, but that's not convenient, so I should just smile politely and buy my Jean Naté—

FLORENCE: Maxine—

MAXINE: Oh no, you don't "Maxine" me, Florence Walker.

FLORENCE: Please, keep your voice down! And it's Florence Rossetti now, remember?

MAXINE: (*playacting*) Well, excuse me, Missus Rossetti, ma'am—

FLORENCE: That's not what I meant. It's just—I'm at work. I know we have a lot to talk about, but—

MAXINE: I don't see any other customers, so why are you trying to get rid of me so fast? (*playacting*) In fact, miss, I'm having a terribly hard time deciding between the eau de toilette and the body splash, so you're going to have to give me some assistance on my purchase.

FLORENCE: (*trying to start over*) Maxine! Don't you look wonderful? You've hardly changed a bit! Beautiful as ever.

MAXINE: Well, they say Black is beautiful now. Or maybe you didn't hear that in Portland?

FLORENCE: Oh no, we heard it.

MAXINE: But you're still—

FLORENCE: Maxine.

MAXINE: Italian.

FLORENCE: Yes.

MAXINE: But what are you doing in Seattle?

FLORENCE: Well, Michael's mother needed some help, so we moved back—

MAXINE: Goodness me. Michael's mother needed your help? That must be hard.

FLORENCE: Yes, it's really—

MAXINE: But what about helping your own parents?

FLORENCE: I know. I'm sorry! But it's not—I did—(*stops herself*)
I'm sorry.

(*Pause*)

MAXINE: How's your little girl?

FLORENCE: Donna? She's good.

MAXINE: I still can't believe you missed the opportunity to name your only daughter Maria.

FLORENCE: Maxine! *West Side Story* is so—1958.

MAXINE: I remember. She's got a birthday coming soon, doesn't she?

FLORENCE: She's going to be eleven years old already. Time does fly.

MAXINE: You have a picture?

FLORENCE: I—I do. Of course I do. (*takes photo out of her purse*) Here she is. That was at her last dance recital in Portland. She does love ballet.

MAXINE: (*looking at photo*) A ballet dancing Negro. Who would have thought that in 1958?

FLORENCE: Maxine!

MAXINE: She must look like her daddy.

FLORENCE: She does.

MAXINE: Lucky girl.

FLORENCE: She's a sweet girl. You'd like her.

MAXINE: (*returning photo*) Your sweet girl's not getting a little brother or sister?

FLORENCE: Well, Michael—he's an only child, so—

MAXINE: Because I remember you'd say you wanted a whole—

FLORENCE: That was a long time ago. Michael and I are happy with our family just the way it is.

MAXINE: Well, isn't that wonderful.

FLORENCE: Thank you.

(Pause)

MAXINE: *(pointedly)* Did you want to see a picture of my kids?

FLORENCE: Oh! Yes, of course I do.

MAXINE: *(takes out picture)* Here's Cheryl. She's seven, the spitting image of her daddy, just like your daughter. And that's Anthony Junior. We call him Tony. No relation to *West Side Story*, of course. He's five, started kindergarten this year. Would you believe we still haven't really desegregated the schools in this city? Voluntary bussing, my eye!

FLORENCE: *(looking at photo)* Is that—?

MAXINE: That's them with their Grammy and Grampy Walker at the family reunion last summer. They look a little different, don't they? Mama and Daddy?

FLORENCE: How long—?

MAXINE: How long has Daddy been in the wheelchair? Since he had the stroke last year. He's doing a lot better now, and Mama's holding up as best she can. It could have been a lot worse. At least there wasn't any lasting brain damage—

FLORENCE: Brain damage!

MAXINE: And I was able to get them into a new place without so many stairs to climb. You know how Daddy always wanted a view—well, now he's got it, right out onto the lake. That's one thing that's changed since you've been gone. We finally got the city to pass that open housing ordinance. No more living in Coon Hollow!

FLORENCE: Maxine, please!

MAXINE: Funny enough, the city decided legal neighborhood discrimination wasn't such a good idea anymore, just a few weeks after Dr. King was killed. You do remember hearing about Dr. King now, don't you?

FLORENCE: Of course I remember.

(Pause)

MAXINE: Florence! What am I doing here?

FLORENCE: I want you to know I tried! I really tried to tell him. But all that activism. The marches, the protests, on the news, in your face, all the time. Michael couldn't—he wasn't—

MAXINE: So you're married to Archie Bunker?

FLORENCE: He's just—old fashioned. So much change in the world. It's been hard on him. And then—he was up for a promotion. He was sure he was going to get it, and then they promoted someone else right out from under him. Someone...

MAXINE: Black.

FLORENCE: Yes. Some kind of new equal opportunity employment something.

MAXINE: I'm familiar with it.

FLORENCE: Michael took it really hard. He quit. But then with the economy being what it was, he couldn't find another job. That's why we're back in Seattle. I had to go back to work. We're living with his mother!

MAXINE: And that's an excuse?

FLORENCE: No, but—how much can you ask a man to take? Besides, it's been so long—

MAXINE: I know exactly how long it's been. But maybe finding out his wife is a *sistah* would put some of his other problems into perspective.

FLORENCE: I couldn't. I can't.

MAXINE: So you're just going to keep on this way.

FLORENCE: I have to.

MAXINE: Your daughter?

FLORENCE: Is a normal, happy little girl, and I want her to stay that way. This isn't how I thought things were going to turn out. I don't expect you to understand.

MAXINE: So what was supposed to happen when you arranged this sisterly get-together today?

FLORENCE: I guess I was hoping—

MAXINE: Because anyone can shop at the Bon Marché now. What if I'd just come in and seen you? Or what if I was working here too? Even *I* could get a counter job now, you know. Equal employment opportunity, thanks to the Congress of Racial Equality. Ever hear of it?

FLORENCE: Of course!

MAXINE: We finally got organized here. So *we* made that happen. *I* made that happen.

FLORENCE: I just need a little more time.

MAXINE: You've had thirteen years, Florence. Enough is enough. I've changed my mind about the Jean Naté. I'll take my business elsewhere.

FLORENCE: Will you still meet me after my shift?

MAXINE: Why don't you wait for thirteen years and see if I show up?

FLORENCE: Why does it always have to be all or nothing with you?

MAXINE: Because if there's one thing *I've* learned in the past thirteen years, it's that things really are one or the other. Black or white. Maybe on your side of the color line you can't see the difference. But over here on my side, it's crystal clear.

FLORENCE: But I'm trying to tell you—I don't want to be on opposite sides. Can't we find a way to meet in the middle?

MAXINE: No. We can't. Because I know who I am, even if you don't. (*sings as she exits*) Say it loud: I'm Black and I'm proud!
Say it loud: I'm Black and I'm proud!

(*Pause*)

FLORENCE: (*sings quietly to herself*) Say it loud... (*picks up phone from behind counter & dials*) Mama? It's me. It's Florence. (*fade out as conversation continues*)

Scene 4: 2013

(SANDRA & MICHELLE are at Starbucks.)

SANDRA: Here's your latte! I got us each of one those cute little cake pop things too—

MICHELLE: Thanks, but I told you I didn't—

SANDRA: So anyway, like I was saying, you get this 14 day free trial—well, I wound up buying the full World Explorer Plus membership—but you can't believe the stuff I've found so far, and not just about Grammy and the—you know—Black side of the family. Would you believe that Dad might have been part Indian? I mean, Native American.

MICHELLE: *(fake)* No!

SANDRA: Like one-sixty-fourth or something.

MICHELLE: It's like we're a League of Nations.

SANDRA: I'm thinking about doing their DNA test. They're running a special on it right now.

MICHELLE: Sandra, it's just another way to get your money.

SANDRA: Whatever, Michelle, I don't know why you have to be so negative about it.

MICHELLE: Not negative, just—realistic.

SANDRA: Same thing.

MICHELLE: I know.

SANDRA: *(offering)* Cake pop?

MICHELLE: No, thanks.

SANDRA: Anyway. Now that we know all of this stuff...

MICHELLE: We?

SANDRA: ...What are we going to do about Amy?

MICHELLE: What do you mean?

SANDRA: You know, saying we should just lock the box back up and pretend we never saw it?

MICHELLE: She doesn't want to dig any deeper right now. You might not agree with it, but you have to respect it.

SANDRA: But isn't it going to be weird when we get in touch with them and have to be like "Yeah, we have another sister but she was ashamed to tell anyone that she's part Black." That's the right terminology, by the way. Black people say "Black" with a capital B. I Googled it.

MICHELLE: Oh my god, Sandra.

SANDRA: What?

MICHELLE: Who exactly are we "getting in touch" with?

SANDRA: With Grammy's family, of course.

MICHELLE: Our Black family. Capital B.

SANDRA: Yes! Honestly, I really don't get you or Amy. This is the most interesting thing to happen to us in—I don't know, ever! And you're both acting like you just want it to go away.

MICHELLE: That's not what I'm saying.

SANDRA: I mean, think about it. Like, is this why we lived in the Central District? We were practically the only white people in our whole neighborhood.

MICHELLE: That's a bit of an exaggeration. Besides, I'm pretty sure moving there was Dad's idea, not Mom's. And Grammy hardly ever came to visit.

SANDRA: Remember how Grampy used to make fun of bad Asian drivers? (*does Grampy's imitation of a slow Asian driver who can't see over the steering wheel*)

MICHELLE: Sandra, stop! People can see you!

SANDRA: (*stops*) Well, that was racist. And when he used to complain about the Black guys he worked with being, you know— (*whispers*) lazy?

MICHELLE: Oh my god.

SANDRA: So doesn't it make you wonder? I mean, did he *know* and still say that stuff in front of Grammy? Or did he *not* know? And either way, how did Grammy feel about it?

MICHELLE: She found it charming, I'm sure—

SANDRA: Remember when Amy went out with that Mexican guy?

MICHELLE: Are we really going to re-examine every interaction any of us have ever had with anyone who wasn't white?

SANDRA: I'm just asking. And it's not going to take that long, really.

MICHELLE: Look, Sandra. Do your Ancestry.com research, get your DNA tested, whatever. But you have to promise you're not going to try to contact anyone until we're all on the same page. It's not fair.

SANDRA: Life isn't fair!

MICHELLE: I know. But you have to promise.

SANDRA: Fine.

MICHELLE: I need you to use your words and say it, please, Sandra. (*SANDRA's cell phone rings: Ebony & Ivory*) What is that?

SANDRA: David, probably.

MICHELLE: No, I mean that song—

SANDRA: (*answering phone*) Hi, honey... No, I'm leaving right now—

MICHELLE: Sandra, wait—

SANDRA: By the way, Michelle, don't think we've forgotten about *your* whole "I knew" thing— *(on phone)* David! What was that?!...You let them do what?! Oh for the love of Mike—*(to MICHELLE)* I've got to go. Sorry...

MICHELLE: But Sandra, we're not done—

SANDRA: *(exiting, still on phone)* David, what have I told you? You cannot turn your back on them for a minute—

MICHELLE: Sandra— ! *(SANDRA is gone.)* Great. *(takes out her own phone and makes a call)* Hey, it's me. It was...just prepare yourself, OK? She's gonna be like a dog with a bone on this one. Talk to you later. *(hangs up, picks up cake pop and eats it)*

(Ebony & Ivory plays.)

Scene 5: 1986

(MAXINE is sitting on her front porch, reading the newspaper.)

MAXINE: Well, would you look at that? A motion to rename King County in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Junior, instead of some crusty old white man nobody's ever heard of. It's about time, County Council! (*turns the page*) Hmm. Now, what is the story with this Oprah Winfrey everyone's talking about these days? I don't see what all the fuss is about...

DONNA: (*entering*) Excuse me?

MAXINE: Can I help you?

DONNA: Hello, ma'am, how are you today?

MAXINE: I'm fine just as I am, thank you, no need to buy your Avon—

DONNA: Oh no, ma'am, I'm not the Avon lady—

MAXINE: Well then Mary Kay or Tupperware or whatever whatnot you've got, no, thank you—

DONNA: No, ma'am, please, I'm not selling anything, I'm just— from the neighborhood.

MAXINE: *You're* from *my* neighborhood?

DONNA: Yes, ma'am. We live down in the next block.

MAXINE: What is this street coming to?

DONNA: (*reading from her note cards*) Ma'am, I'm here as a member of the neighborhood association. Are you aware of what's going on at the house on the corner of Madison?

MAXINE: I am neither blind nor deaf nor stupid.

DONNA: Of course not, ma'am. So then you know it's a crack house, right? Crack cocaine?

MAXINE: Just how old do you think I am?

DONNA: It's very dangerous. That shooting last month? It was a miracle no one from the neighborhood got hurt. Children! The police say they've shut the house down, but they've just moved their business to the pay phone on the corner.

MAXINE: Young lady, you're not telling me anything I don't already know.

DONNA: The neighborhood association is concerned. We want to do something before this problem gets out of hand, and we're trying to spread the word so that everyone knows what's going on and how they can get involved.

MAXINE: (*trying to dismiss her*) All right, then. Thank you.

DONNA: Have you been getting the flyers about the meetings?

MAXINE: Yes, indeed. You're very industrious.

DONNA: OK. We just want to make sure everyone knows they're welcome anytime, and that if you see anything going on that shouldn't be, anything at all, the best thing to do is call the police so we can keep building the official report—

MAXINE: Don't you want to know why?

DONNA: Excuse me?

MAXINE: Why I don't come to your meetings.

DONNA: Oh. I—

MAXINE: All right, now. Put away your little notes there and listen. Because I suspect I'm not the only one of your Black neighbors not joining your association, am I right?

DONNA: That's true, but—

MAXINE: How long have you lived in this neighborhood?

DONNA: About a year—

MAXINE: Do you know how long I've lived here?

DONNA: A long time?

MAXINE: You'd better believe it. My whole life. My parents bought this very house before I was born. Raised me and my sister here. Planted this tree in the front yard. I remember when it was just a sapling. Look at it now.

DONNA: Yes, it's very tall—

MAXINE: Did you know all this land around here originally belonged to a Black pioneer? One of the first in Washington. When other Blacks starting moving here, he sold them pieces of it so they could have their own community. Ever notice how every other neighborhood on a map of Seattle is labeled except this one? Madison Valley, Capitol Hill. And then just a big black hole in the center of the city. No pun intended. Know what the whites used to call it?

DONNA: Oh, no—

MAXINE: Coon Hollow.

DONNA: Oh, that's terrible—

MAXINE: Back then, of course, there wasn't anywhere else Blacks were welcome. When those laws finally changed, my parents moved out. But my husband and I, we bought this place from them. We were just starting out with kids of our own, and we wanted to raise them in our own neighborhood.

DONNA: I totally understand! That's what we want too, that's why we care so much about—

MAXINE: Those drug dealers? We don't want them on our streets any more than you do. But not because we think they're animals.

DONNA: Well, what kind of animal brings drugs into a family neighborhood—?

MAXINE: Family. Exactly. Those young men are not animals. They are our children.

DONNA: Oh my god, your son—?

MAXINE: I'm speaking metaphorically. Not my son, but some mother's son. Those young men are our brothers, our cousins. And the problem is not just that they're selling drugs, but why. Why would a young person choose a life like that?

DONNA: Addiction? Money?

MAXINE: What about lack of opportunity or resources? You want to call the police and have these young people hauled off to jail. But do you really not think that someone else is going to come along and take their place on that corner? And what happens when your so-called animals get back on the streets, but now with a criminal record? Do you suppose they'll have any other options open to them except to go back to dealing drugs? Excuse me for getting up on my soapbox. But you came to my house, so I had to speak my piece.

DONNA: But you don't want them to keep doing what they're doing, do you? It must make the streets feel as unsafe to you as it does to us. You have to see it from our point of view.

MAXINE: Why, when you refuse to see it from mine?

DONNA: A lot of you are older, but we're young. We moved here because we have kids and we want a decent, safe place to raise them.

MAXINE: And you wanted to buy cheap and watch your property values go up.

DONNA: Which won't happen if the neighborhood is overrun by crack heads and drug dealers!

MAXINE: Ain't that the truth.

DONNA: What's important to me are my three girls. I want to let them play outside without worrying they're going to be hit by a stray bullet. I want to let them make friends with the other kids on the block and not be afraid of what kind of illegal drugs that kid's big brother might be offering them.

MAXINE: And you think only white parents want that for their children?

DONNA: Look, I'm not an expert. I'm just a concerned mom.

MAXINE: I was part of the civil rights movement. You think any of us were experts when we got involved?

DONNA: You understand I'm not the one in charge, right? I'm just on the committee for making sure people know about the meetings. I don't have any power or anything.

MAXINE: You know how you get power, young lady? You take it.

DONNA: You sound like my mother.

MAXINE: Do I?

DONNA: She's always been kind of—political, I guess. I remember when Martin Luther King got killed, I was just a kid, but I can still see her sitting in front of the TV and crying.

MAXINE: (*dismissively*) A lot of people cried that night.

DONNA: I guess she was more into the feminist movement. Gloria Steinem. Shirley Chisholm.

MAXINE: Shirley Chisholm. Really?

DONNA: Even though my dad was always against it. He's pretty old school. My mom was pissed—sorry, not happy with me when I got married before I finished college.

MAXINE: And how do your parents feel about you living here now?

DONNA: My mom didn't want us to, to be honest. Not because of the race thing or anything.

MAXINE: (*sarcastically*) Oh no, of course not.

DONNA: I think she just wanted us to be closer to her, you know, for the grandkids. Plus, I'm an only child.

MAXINE: Sounds like you have some experience standing up and doing what you want to do when you need to.

DONNA: I guess.

MAXINE: This is the same thing, isn't it? You want to be a neighborhood association? Then you need to respect and represent the *neighborhood*.

(Pause)

DONNA: I guess I could talk to the rest of the association about what you've told me. And maybe then we can figure out how to do this with all of us?

MAXINE: That would be a start.

DONNA: OK, well, thank you very much for your time. I really appreciate it, Mrs.—I'm sorry, I don't know your name.

MAXINE: It's Slade, dear. Mrs. Maxine Slade.

DONNA: Well, thank you again, Mrs. Slade.

MAXINE: And yours?

DONNA: Oh—I'm Donna. Donna Rossetti-Jensen.

MAXINE: Donna Rossetti?

DONNA: I know, it's a mouthful. I promised my mom when I got married not to give up my maiden name, you know? For feminism. So it's hyphenated.

MAXINE: Well, isn't that interesting. Donna Rossetti.

DONNA: You can just call me Donna.

MAXINE: You know, I have a daughter about your age. She's got little girls also. She's been thinking about putting them into a dance class. Ballet. You know anything about that?

DONNA: Oh yeah, I took ballet when I was a kid.

MAXINE: Did you?

DONNA: I loved it, but I was terrible. Two left feet. Then my mom became a feminist and decided that ballet was sexist, so I stopped going.

MAXINE: Your mother sounds like a very interesting woman.

DONNA: I should go. I'm supposed to get to the rest of this block before the girls' bedtime.

MAXINE: Donna Rossetti, it's been quite an experience meeting you, I have to say.

DONNA: You too, Mrs. Slade. (*checking note cards again*) I hope we can make the neighborhood a better place for everyone. (*exiting*)

MAXINE: Good luck with that— (*DONNA is gone.*) Well, Florence, what do you know? I finally met your Donna after all. Isn't that something?

(*Sly and the Family Stone's Family Affair plays.*)

Scene 6: 2013

(AMY's apartment. AMY is on the phone, waiting for SANDRA.)

AMY: I told you, didn't I? I told you this was going to happen... No, she's late, of course. As usual, *I'm* the one waiting for *her* when *she's* the one who's pissed *me* off!... Well, it doesn't matter if she promised you or not now, does it?... And honestly, Michelle, you're no help with this "I know something but won't say what it is." Don't think I've forgotten—

SANDRA: *(entering)* Who wants a drumstick?

AMY: *(on phone)* I've gotta go. But you are *not* off the hook. *(hangs up)* Are you kidding me?

SANDRA: What? I brought you lunch.

AMY: You brought Ezell's.

SANDRA: You love Ezell's. What, suddenly you don't eat fried chicken? What's the problem?

AMY: You know what the problem is.

SANDRA: No, I don't.

AMY: *(meaningfully)* Fried chicken?

SANDRA: So now we can't eat fried chicken because it means we're trying to be Black?

AMY: Aren't you?

SANDRA: Come on, Amy! We just like fried chicken. It doesn't have to *mean* anything. Lots of people like Ezell's. *Oprah* likes Ezell's!

AMY: You're not helping yourself here. *(SANDRA waves chicken under AMY's nose)* You think I can be bribed with chicken?

SANDRA: Everyone has their price.

AMY: You must give a damn good blowjob, that's all I have to say.

SANDRA: The secret is—

AMY: Never mind! Sandra, I know what you did, and you can't show up here—late, as usual, by the way—and think lunch is going to fix everything.

SANDRA: Amy. I really think you're blowing this whole thing out of proportion.

AMY: I'm sorry, what part of "don't do anything until we've all agreed" was confusing to you?

SANDRA: I just did a little investigating. It's like a treasure hunt! Then one thing led to another—

AMY: And suddenly, oops! You're getting in touch with people when you've been explicitly told not to.

SANDRA: Well, it's too late. Because I've already sent out the messages.

AMY: Messages? Plural?

SANDRA: Walker's a common name!

AMY: How many, Sandra?

SANDRA: I just cut and pasted, no big deal. I'm sure not all of them are our actual relatives. But look! Now we have a family tree! I brought you your very own copy...but if you sign up for an Ancestry.com account—

AMY: No, thank you.

SANDRA: Anyway, I just want to be ready when someone replies. I'm working on a list of questions. You know, stuff I couldn't find on Ancestry.com. Like: what part of Africa are we from?

AMY: Oh my god.

SANDRA: And: were any of our ancestors slaves?

AMY: Sandra, you cannot ask that question.

SANDRA: Why not?

AMY: It's offensive.

SANDRA: It's an important part of our history.

AMY: You might not even hear back from any of these people.

SANDRA: Sure, I will. They've got to be as curious as we are, right?

AMY: I'm not curious! Look, Sandra, you're going to have to count me out.

SANDRA: But I've told everyone there are three of us.

AMY: So?

SANDRA: Well, so when we meet them and only two of us show up—

AMY: When we *meet* them?

SANDRA: ...They might think it's because you're—you know—racist.

AMY: What do I care what some theoretical stranger thinks about me?

SANDRA: But it won't be a stranger—it'll be family!

AMY: Family? Don't even get me started! And what makes you so sure there will even be two of you?

SANDRA: You might not care if some stranger thinks you're racist, but Michelle will.

AMY: Thank you! Michelle! That's who we should be talking about. I mean, what's up with this "I knew" thing?

SANDRA: I don't know.

AMY: You were supposed to ask her about it.

SANDRA: I tried, but—

AMY: But what?

SANDRA: It seemed like she didn't really want to talk about it.

AMY: Since when has that ever stopped you?

SANDRA: I guess I figured if it were something important, she'd tell us.

AMY: You didn't think that was important. You're curious about all this other stuff but not that? See, this is why I want no part of it. If someone is working this hard to keep a secret from me, whether it's Grammy or Michelle or whoever, I don't need to know it.

SANDRA: But I'm not trying to keep a secret. I'm trying to get everything out in the open!

AMY: Wait a minute.

SANDRA: Sweet potato pie?

AMY: Did you know too?

SANDRA: What?

AMY: Did you both know? All that stuff about finding the key and the mysterious box—was it all an act? Did *everyone* know and keep it a secret from me all these years?

SANDRA: Seriously? Now you're just being paranoid.

AMY: Of course that's what you'd say. Why would I ever think that *you'd* tell me the truth?

SANDRA: Are you calling me a liar?

AMY: Now you're going to play innocent?

SANDRA: I *am* innocent!

AMY: You know what? You should go.

SANDRA: You're kicking me out? Fine! I don't know why I'd stick around and listen to you make accusations against me anyway.

AMY: Just go, Sandra!

SANDRA: I'm going! (*exiting, grabs pie*) But I'm taking my pie with me!