

How It's Gon' Be

By JuCoby Johnson

Echo Theater Production Draft 2023

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Characters

Jahaan	(16, He/Him) A boy clawing at the door of manhood
Angela	(late 30's, She/Her) A Queen taken for granted
Kenny	(early 40's, He/Him) A King gone too long
Rashad	(16, He/Him) A soldier always ready for battle
Terry	(16, He/Him) A flower sprung from concrete
Lady	(16, She/Her) An angel growing wings

Time

Summer, early 2000's

Setting

Jacksonville, FL

A slash (/) indicates overlapping dialogue.



Santos Dumont- The Father of Aviation II, 2009, by Kehinde Wiley

“I talked to her that night and thanked her, but I did not push like I was supposed to. I could not see that beneath the shield, beneath the smiles and laughter that were her armor, behind the glowing ax, all of us are waiting to be swept away.” - Ta-Nehisi Coates “The Beautiful Struggle”

i am such

a

sensitive summer thing.

-nayyirah waheed

Prologue

Darkness.

*We hear fireworks in the distance.
A streak of light soars through the sky.*

*A figure is revealed.
It is JAHAAAN.*

*His eyes follow the light to its peak.
It explodes.
Red, white, and blue fire falls from the sky like rain.*

*The rain subsides, and we are in darkness once again.
Another streak of light soars to the sky.
It explodes.
Fire falls like rain.*

JAHAAAN

I asked “Do you love me?”
When you came home.
And you did not respond.

And it was hot.
So hot.
The kind of heat that makes all your clothes sticky
Before you even put them on.

I’d been gasping for air.
I’d been trying to find a breeze.
I’d been crawling toward the ocean.

Then you came home.

And I asked “Do you love me?”
And you did not respond.

And the heat remained.
And my clothes were still sticky.

JAHAAN (cont.)

And I still couldn't catch my breath.

And I still couldn't find a breeze.

And the ocean was still far away from our neighborhood.

But one day, and one day only, it rained.

And the cool water hit my skin.

And I took off all my clothes.

And I took a deep breath.

And a breeze rolled in.

And a wave the size of this whole city

Crash landed to flood the streets of our neighborhood.

It swept me away and I began to tumble under water.

I felt freedom.

Freedom from the heat.

But that freedom slowly turned into terror.

Because I remembered I did not know how to swim.

Because you did not teach me.

Because you, also, did not know how.

And suddenly, I felt your huge hands grab my torso

And pull me into the open air.

And you carried me home in your arms.

And you put me in bed.

And, as you left, you stopped in the doorway.

And you asked "Do you love me?"

And I did not respond.

A beat.

Suddenly, hundreds of streaks of light shoot toward the sky.

They overwhelm the space.

They explode.

A thunderstorm of fire.

Shift.

Act 1
Scene 1

Jahaan's house.

Music fills the space.

*Kool and the Gang, Earth, Wind, and Fire, Stevie Wonder.
Something like that.*

ANGELA is folding laundry.

It's more like a ritual than a chore.

She holds a shirt out in front of her.

It is her husband's.

She brings the shirt to her face and breathes it in.

She holds it close to her body.

It becomes her dance partner.

She sways.

Suddenly, emo punk rock music starts to play in the distance.

Fall Out Boy, My Chemical Romance, Panic! At The Disco.

Something like that.

It is coming from Jahaan's room.

It doesn't drown out Angela's music,

But it gets in the way of it.

Angela turns up the volume of her music to top Jahaan's.

She is successful for about ten seconds before Jahaan does the same.

They go back and forth like this for a while.

A battle for control.

Angela turns her music off in frustration and exits to Jahaan's room.

Jahaan's music dominates the space.

Suddenly, quiet.

Angela returns.

She turns her music back on and returns to her folding.

Jahaan enters quietly wearing a Nirvana T-shirt, ripped jeans, and a backpack.

He tries to sneak past.

He gets almost all the way out when...

ANGELA

Boy!

Don't think I can't see your tall butt tryin' to sneak out the house.

How you gon' be that big and try to sneak past somebody?

Where you think you goin'?

JAHAAN

Rashad and Terry wanted to meet up at the park.

ANGELA

That's all?

Then why you tryna sneak?

Why you ain't just come ask me?

JAHAAN

You looked like you was real focused

And whatever.

I ain't wanna bother you.

ANGELA

Mhm.

Did you clean your room like I asked you to?

JAHAAN

...yeah.

ANGELA

Hm.

So, if I go check your room right now it's gon' be clean?

JAHAAN

Uh...

ANGELA

And I don't mean clothes pushed to the side of the room.

ANGELA (cont.)

I don't mean you bent down and picked some crumbs up off the floor.

I mean clean to *my* specifications.

Vacuumed,

Dusted,

Clothes folded and hung up,

Bed made,

All that.

Is that what I'm gon' see when I go in there?

JAHAAN

...

...

ANGELA

Answer me, boy.

JAHAAN

...

...

ANGELA

Boy, when I ask you a question

I expect an answer.

Now, I'mma count to three.

If I get to two and you ain't answer my question

Me and you gon' have a problem.

Now, on the count of three,

Is your room clean?

One...

JAHAAN

It's clean but the vacuum broke!

ANGELA

What you mean it's broke?

JAHAAN

It turn on and everything,

But it won't suck nothin' up.

JAHAAN (cont.)

I think it's clogged or somethin'.

ANGELA

Well then go fix it.

JAHAAN

I don't know how.

ANGELA

You better go figure it out.

Cos' you ain't leaving this house until that room is clean.

Your Daddy is comin' home today

And I'm not about to have my house lookin' no "any kind of way".

A beat.

A new tension hangs in the air.

JAHAAN

What time does he get here?

ANGELA

His flight lands at 8.

You excited?

Silence.

ANGELA

It's been a whole year.

JAHAAN

I know.

ANGELA

When I talked to him last week,

He said it looks like it'll be a while before he gets his next assignment.

So, he'll be around for a while this time.

JAHAAN

That's good.

ANGELA

Maybe I'll finally be able to sleep at night.

*Jahaan moves to her.
He takes her hand.*

JAHAAN

I hope so.

ANGELA

I hope so too.

Angela moves her hand to Jahaan's cheek.

ANGELA

Look at you.
You almost a grown man.

JAHAAN

I'm already a grown man,
If you ask me.

ANGELA

Yeah,
Well you still live in my house
And you don't pay no bills.
So,
Until that changes,
You my baby.
Even after that,
You'll still be my baby.
I love you, Jahaan.

JAHAAN

I love you too.

ANGELA

Your Daddy loves you too.

A beat.

There's that tension again.

JAHAAN

I know.

ANGELA

It's gon' be good this time, yeah?

JAHAAN

...Yeah.

ANGELA

(singing "The Kiss of Life" by Sade)

When I was led to you

I knew you were the one for me

I swear the whole world

Could hear my heart beat

She smiles.

He smiles.

He kisses her on the forehead.

And begins to exit.

ANGELA

Where you goin'?

JAHAAN

Out to meet Rashad and Terry.

ANGELA

Did you forget about the vacuum?

JAHAAN

Come on, Ma!

ANGELA

Ain't no "come on" nothin'.

Now, I told you yesterday,

If you wanted to go out with your little friends,

Your room was gon' have to be clean.

ANGELA (cont.)

If it ain't vacuumed,
Then it ain't clean.
Which means you need to go on back in that room
And fix the vacuum.
Otherwise, you gon' be right in here looking at the walls all day.

JAHAAN

How am I supposed to fix it when I don't know how?

ANGELA

Learn!
Go in your room,
Sit down with it,
And figure it out.
Just because it's summer time
Don't mean you ain't supposed to be learning.
You got time to learn all the words to that white music,
You can take some time and learn how to fix the vacuum.
Now go on, now.

JAHAAN

Mama...

ANGELA

Boy,
I love you,
But don't make me hurt you.

*Jahaan exits to his room.
A door slams.*

ANGELA

I KNOW YOU AIN'T SLAMMIN' DOORS IN MY HOUSE LITTLE
BOY!

JAHAAN (O/S)

Sorry, Ma!

She is alone.

*She continues to fold for a moment.
She stops,
Takes a deep breath in,
And speaks to the air.
A moment of transcendence.*

ANGELA

Hurry up and come home, Man.
Speak my name.
Make me feel again.

*A vacuum roars offstage.
Angela smiles.*

*RASHAD and TERRY shoot in like lightning.
Terry wears a tank top and basketball shorts.
He holds his shoes in his hands.*

*Rashad wears an Allen Iverson Jersey and cargo shorts.
He holds a basketball,
Shoes still on his feet.*

RASHAD

Yo, what up, Ms. Anglea?

ANGELA

Uh uh, little boy.
I know you ain't walk in here with them dirty shoes on.
Either take them off
Or get out my house.

RASHAD

Oh snap!
My bad, my bad.

He takes off his shoes and sits them off to the side.

ANGELA

Now what ya'll want?

RASHAD

We was just wonderin' if Jahaan was home.

TERRY

We wanted to go play basketball.

ANGELA

He's cleanin' his room right now.

The vacuum stops.

Jahaan runs in.

JAHAAN

Hey, Mama,
I'm done!

ANGELA

You sure?
If I go in there,
Am I gon' be pleased?

JAHAAN

Yes ma'am.

ANGELA

You sure?

JAHAAN

Yes ma'am.
I promise.

ANGELA

Don't promise.
We'll see when I go in there later.
Gon' head and play with your friends.
Be home before them street lights come on,
Not a minute after.
You hear me?

JAHAAN

I hear you.

ANGELA

Alright,
Get on out of here.

The boys begin to exit.

ANGELA

You just gon' run out of here without huggin' your mama?

*Jahaan goes to her and gives her a hug
And a kiss on the cheek.
She holds him close.
Jahaan tries to wiggle away.
But her grasp is too tight.*

ANGELA

Don't try to get away!
I ain't done yet.

JAHAAN

I can't breathe, Ma!
You gon' hug me to death.

ANGELA

I brought you in this world!
I can hug you out!

*Jahaan finally breaks free, laughing.
He re-joins the boys.
They run out, grabbing their shoes as they leave.*

ANGELA

I love you!

She watches them go.

Shift.

Scene 2

The park.

Later that afternoon.

*Jahaan and Rashad are sitting on the ground.
Terry is sitting on a crate.*

Rashad is rolling a joint.

Mid-argument.

TERRY

Look, man,
I said I'm sorry.

RASHAD

Fuck that, nigga.
You owe me twenty dollars.

TERRY

Come on, man,
Don't be like that.

RASHAD

All you had to do was get me or Haan the ball.
That's all you had to do.
Just keep the ball in your hands
Until one of us got open.
And what you do?
You start trying to hit three-pointers and shit.

TERRY

Man...

RASHAD

And, of course,
You missed every single one of them shits.
What was you thinkin'?

RASHAD (cont.)

Jahaan done lost ten dollars,
I done lost twenty cause I had to cover for you,
And we lost control of the court!

JAHAAN

Who gives a fuck?
We ain't never had control in the first place.
We just got there first today.

RASHAD

That ain't the point!

JAHAAN

He said he was sorry.

RASHAD

See,
That's what ya'll don't understand.
I don't care about that!
Terry owe me twenty dollars,
He ain't getting none of this weed,
And you ain't neither if you keep taking up for him.

JAHAAN

Come on, bruh.

RASHAD

What?

JAHAAN

You know he ain't got twenty dollars.

RASHAD

Well, he gon' need to get it.

JAHAAN

From where?

RASHAD

He can go right up there to the barbershop
And ask Mr. Roosevelt if he can sweep the floor.

TERRY

I don't like goin' over there.

RASHAD

Why not?

*We see the flash of police lights.
The boys tense up.*

Rashad hides the joint.

They watch the car slowly drive by.

Silence until it's out of sight.

JAHAAN

The dudes in the shop always be makin' fun of him.
Callin' him fruity and shit.

RASHAD

Well,
Stop acting so damn fruity all the time
And he wouldn't have no reason to call you fruity.
You shoot like a bitch
And you whine like a bitch.
What you think the man gon' call you when you act like that?

JAHAAN

Ay, man.
For real.
Stop bein' like that.

RASHAD

You really gon' make me smoke this all by myself, ain't you?

JAHAAN

Man...

RASHAD

That what they teaching you at that white school?
Conflict resolution?
Debate team bullshit?

JAHAAN

Don't start with all that.
We don't even have a debate team.

RASHAD

Ya'll ain't got a sports team neither.

JAHAAN

We're an arts school!

RASHAD

GAAAAYYYY!

JAHAAN

You just mad you didn't get in.
Mad that your audition was trash.

RASHAD

I don't give a fuck about gettin' in to that bougie ass white school.
I play Varsity at Lee!
I'm the king over there.

JAHAAN

King of the most trash ass team in all of Duval County.
Good for you, bruh.

RASHAD

Fuck you, man.
You and the ball hog over there can kiss this J goodbye.

JAHAAN

It wasn't even all his fault we lost!

JAHAAN (cont.)

You was tryna cross every nigga up
Like you Iverson or some shit.
Knowin' full well you ain't got no handles.

RASHAD

Who ain't got no handles?
Boy I'll break your ankles right now!

JAHAAN

Nigga, please.
Don't make me embarrass you out here.

RASHAD

Let's go.

JAHAAN

Aight,
Bring that shit.

Rashad and Jahaan stand up and prepare for battle.

*Rashad starts doing ridiculous moves.
He's obviously been watching too many AND 1 videos.
He's trash.*

*Jahaan guards him.
He's also trash.*

*Rashad trips.
Jahaan grabs the ball.
He is very pleased with himself.*

JAHAAN

Ooooooh!
You gotta hold on to that /shit boy!
You gotta hold on to that!

RASHAD

Nah, fuck that!

RASHAD (cont.)

Fuck that!
I was just practicing,
Check up.

Jahaan and Rashad go at it again.

*Rashad is more focused and determined this time.
But still trash.*

*He tries to dribble the ball between Jahaan's legs.
Jahaan steals it.*

RASHAD

Son of a bitch!

JAHAAN

I can't be stopped!
I.
Can.
Not.
Be.
STOPPED!!!

*Rashad slams the ball on the ground and sits.
He puts his head in his hands.
He's obviously mad.*

JAHAAN

You mad, bruh?

RASHAD

Nah, man.

JAHAAN

You sure?

RASHAD

Yeah.

RASHAD (cont.)

Just leave me alone right now.

JAHAAN

I don't know, man.
You look a little upset to me.
He look upset to you, Terry?

TERRY

He look REAL upset.

RASHAD

Shut the fuck up!

JAHAAN

Ooooooh.
Look at him getting all red in the face.
You see that, Terry?

TERRY

Yeah, I see it.

JAHAAN

I ain't know niggas could change color like that.

RASHAD

For real, man.
Leave me alone.

JAHAAN

You learn something new every day.

RASHAD

For real, man.

JAHAAN

Are you...
Are you crying?

RASHAD

Ain't nobody crying!

JAHAAAN

Ah, shit
I ain't know you was sensitive.

RASHAD

I ain't sensitive!

JAHAAAN

You should tell Mr. Roosevelt about this Terry.
Maybe he'll start calling somebody else fruity.

Rashad tackles Jahaan.

They wrestle.

Jahaan is stronger and pins him to the ground.

Ad-libbing, within reason, is encouraged for this fight.

RASHAD

Get off me, /nigga!
Stop playing!

JAHAAAN

See, that's what you get for acting like that!

RASHAD

For real, man
I ain't playin /with you no more!

JAHAAAN

I ain't getting up until you say sorry.
/So, you better hurry up!

RASHAD

That's your problem!
/ You play too damn much! Get off me!

TERRY

Hey!

TERRY (cont.)

Hey!
Jahaan get up man!
Yo, Jahaan, look!

Jahaan, still on top of Rashad, looks up.

LADY has entered.

*She looks like she just stepped out of a dream.
Sun dress.
Fresh pair of Jordans.
Hair wrapped.
Damn.*

LADY

Hey.

JAHAAN

What up, Lady Bird?

LADY

Nothing.
Was sitting at home bored as hell,
So I went for a walk.
What ya'll up to?

JAHAAN

Oh
You know...

*He realizes he's still on top of Rashad.
They both scramble to their feet.*

JAHAAN

Just chillin.

LADY

Ya'll smokin'?

JAHAAN

Yeah, you want some?

RASHAD

(quietly to Jahaan)

How you just gon' offer some shit that ain't yours?

JAHAAN

(quietly to Rashad)

Aye man, shut the fuck up.

They all sit on the ground.

Terry gives Lady his crate to sit on.

Lady puts her hand on Terry's cheek and smiles.

Jahaan passes Lady the joint.

LADY

You gon' let me hit first?

JAHAAN

Yeah.

You know,

Ladies first and shit.

LADY

Aight, bruh.

They all watch as she lights the joint and takes a hit.

JAHAAN

How's your summer been?

We ain't seen you around.

LADY

I was with my Dad out in New York for a while.

Just got back a couple days ago.

How bout you?

JAHAAN

We ain't been doin' shit.

JAHAAAN (cont.)

Just chillin.

RASHAD

Speak for yourself, nigga.
I been out here owning these courts and gettin' this cash.

LADY

Word?
I just talked to Ernest and nem
And they told me they gave ya'll an ass whooping in a game of 21.

RASHAD

What?!
They ain't whoop nobody ass!
They got lucky!

LADY

Aight.

RASHAD

For real!
We comin' back for them boys next week!
You tell that weak ass nigga Ernest that when you see him.

LADY

Aight, nigga, damn.
I wasn't askin' for all that drama.
I was just tellin' you what I heard.

JAHAAAN

Don't pay no attention to him.
He just a sore loser.

RASHAD

I ain't no sore loser!
Shit,
We would've won if it wasn't for this fruity ass nigga over here!

LADY

Don't talk about that boy like that!
You always so damn mean.
Every time I see you,
You got a sour ass look on your face.

RASHAD

Whateva.

LADY

Yeah, yeah, whateva.
How you doin', Terry?

TERRY

I'm aight.

LADY

How's your mama?

TERRY

She aight.

LADY

Good.
That's good.
What ya'll doing tomorrow for the 4th?

JAHAAN

I don't know.

LADY

You wanna come over to my house?

Jahaan chokes.

JAHAAN

What?

LADY

If you ain't got shit to do,

LADY (cont.)

You should come over to my house.
My family is havin' a cookout
Then we gon' set off some fireworks.
My mama said I could invite whoever I want.
So,
If you wanna come,
Then come.

The boys look at each other.

JAHAAN

Aight.
Yeah,
We'll be there.

LADY

Aight, cool.
Come over around six for food
And stay however long you want.

Lady stands.
She takes perfume from her bag.
She sprays herself.

LADY

I gotta get back home before Divorce Court comes on.
My mama be trippin' if I don't watch it with her.

JAHAAN

Aight.

LADY

You got gum?

JAHAAN

Nah, I ran out.

TERRY

I have some.

He hands her a stick of gum.

LADY

Thanks, boo.
I'll see ya'll tomorrow, right?

JAHAAN

Yeah.

LADY

Six o'clock.

JAHAAN

We got you.

LADY

Aight, bye.

Lady exits.

*The boys watch her walk away for a while.
They look to each other.*

Shift.

Scene 3

Jahaan's house.

*KENNY stands in the middle of the space in full uniform.
US Army- Master Sergeant.*

*He takes in the space.
It's been way too long.
He takes a deep breath in.
He exhales.*

*Angela enters.
They take each other in.
She steps toward him.
He wraps his arms gently around her waist and brings her in close.
They kiss.
And sway together.*

Did you miss me? **ANGELA**

All the time. **KENNY**

You still love me? **ANGELA**

All the time. **KENNY**

*He looks into her eyes.
He smiles.*

You really back for a while this time? **ANGELA**

That's what they said. **KENNY**

ANGELA

That's what they always say.
Then, before you know it, the phone rings,
And you're gone again.

KENNY

I know.
But we're almost there.
Just gotta get Jahaan off to college.
That's the plan.

ANGELA

The plan sounded easier sixteen years ago.

KENNY

Yeah.
It did.

*They stop swaying.
She takes his face in her hands.*

ANGELA

Me and you.

KENNY

You and me.

ANGELA

All the time.

*They kiss.
She puts her head in his chest.*

ANGELA

Guess what I got you?

KENNY

What?

ANGELA

You gotta guess.

KENNY

Baby,
You know I ain't never been good at guessing.

ANGELA

Look here, Man.
If you want it
You better guess.

He thinks.

KENNY

Zebra cakes?

She smiles.

KENNY

You too good for me, Mama.

ANGELA

And always have been.

KENNY

Oh word?

ANGELA

Word.

KENNY

You too good for this?

*He starts to tickle her.
She tries to wiggle away, laughing.
A moment of youth.*

ANGELA

You better not!

ANGELA (cont...)

/Kenny!

KENNY

I didn't wanna do it.
But look what you done turned me into!

ANGELA

You not playing fair!

KENNY

Uh-huh,
You was talking all that mess,
Now look at you.

ANGELA

I'mma hit you!
I'mm hit you /right upside your head!

KENNY

Go on and hit me!
With them weak punches you got.

ANGELA

Kenny!

KENNY

Say please
And I'll let you go.

ANGELA

I ain't saying please!

KENNY

Say please
And I'll let you go!

ANGELA

No!

Angela can't take it anymore.

ANGELA

Okay, okay!
Please!!

He lets her go.

ANGELA

You ain't been home an hour,
And I see I'mma already have to fight you.
You ready for that?

KENNY

I stay ready.

*She sticks her tongue out at him.
He advances toward her.
She runs to the kitchen.*

*He watches her leave.
He smiles wide.
It truly is good to finally see her again.*

*Jahaan, Rashad, and Terry rush in talking and laughing.
Kenny turns around and sees them.
He and Jahaan lock eyes.*

The world stops for a second.

KENNY

Hey, boy.

Silence.

JAHAAN

Hey.

*Neither of them know what to do next.
The moment grows awkward.*

Rashad goes to Kenny and daps him up.

RASHAD

Hey, Coach K!
Welcome back.

KENNY

Thanks, Rashad.
Good to be back.
You done got big since the last time I seen you.
You even got some whiskers on your face.

RASHAD

I'm glad you noticed!
If you look close enough,
When the light hit me just right,
You can see some on my chin too.

KENNY

Alright, alright.
I guess you becomin' a man now.
I hear your three-pointers done got better since last year.

RASHAD

Yes sir!
I was straight draining threes all season.
Couldn't stop me if they tried!

KENNY

That's good, man.
You learn to pass yet?

RASHAD

I'd pass if they could hold on to the ball!

KENNY

I hear you.

RASHAD

You gon be around for this next season?

KENNY

I'mma try to be.
We'll see what happens.
How's it going, Terry?
You good?

TERRY

Yes, sir.

KENNY

How's your mama?

TERRY

She's aight.

Angela enters with a box of zebra cakes.

ANGELA

What did I tell ya'll about wearin' shoes in here?

RASHAD

But Coach K got his shoes on!

ANGELA

That's because it's his house!
You wanna start payin' some bills?

RASHAD

No ma'am.
We was just about to leave.
We just wanted to walk Jahaan home.
Have a good night, Ms. Angela.
Later, Coach K.

KENNY

Later, man.

*Rashad and Terry start to exit.
Jahaan runs to stop them.*

JAHAAN

Hey, man.
I thought you was gon ask her for me.

RASHAD

I was,
But then she came out
And I got nervous.

JAHAAN

Come on, man!
Just ask her for me.

ANGELA

Ask me what?

RASHAD

You ask her!

JAHAAN

She won't say yes if I ask her,
But if *you* ask her
I might have a chance.

ANGELA

Ask me *what*?

JAHAAN

Come on, man.

ANGELA

If one of ya'll don't just ask me the damn question already,
I know somethin'.

TERRY

Lady Bird's mom is having a party at her house
For the fourth.
Lady was wonderin' if we could come over.
Me and Rashad are goin'.
We were wonderin' if Jahaan could come too.

Silence.

The boys stare at Angela in anticipation.

ANGELA

Jahaan's father just got back into town today.
He ain't seen him for a year.
Jahaan ain't gon' be at nobody's house
But this one.
I'm gon' make some food
And we gon' sit outside
And watch the neighbors do their fireworks.
You and Rashad can have fun without him tomorrow.

JAHAAN

C'mon, mama!

ANGELA

Boy!
Don't you try and buck up against me in front of your little friends.
You heard what I said.
Now, you can stand there with your face all scrunched up
And say "C'mon, mama" all night if you want to,
But the answer ain't gon change.
Go on home, boys.
Ya'll done been together all day,
That should be enough.

RASHAD

Later, man.

TERRY

Bye, Jahaan.

Terry and Rashad exit.

*Angela and Jahaan stare at each other.
A stand off.*

Jahaan starts to exit to his room.

ANGELA

You ain't gon' say nothin' to your father?

JAHAAN

I already said hey.

ANGELA

That's all you gon' say?

JAHAAN

What else am I supposed to say?

ANGELA

How about askin' him how he's doin'?

How his flight was?

Anything!

He been gone-

JAHAAN

A whole year!

I know!

You done said it about fifty times today.

ANGELA

Boy, have you lost your mind?

Don't you ever raise your voice at me in my house.

I don't care nothin' about you bein' mad you can't go to that party.

You see your friends all the time.

You need to spend time with your Daddy.

JAHAAN

Why can't I just go to the party tomorrow,

And spend time with Dad the next day?

ANGELA

Because

We doin' it tomorrow.

JAHAAN

Why?

ANGELA

Because I said so!
I don't need you questionin' me in my house, boy.
I'm the adult,
You're the child.
You don't need to be askin' me all these damn questions.

JAHAAN

Whateva.

ANGELA

What did you just say?

JAHAAN

Nothin'.

ANGELA

Boy-

KENNY

Baby,
Let him go.

ANGELA

What?

KENNY

Let the boy go to the party.

ANGELA

We have plans Kenny.
We was gon' spend time together tomorrow
As a family.

KENNY

We can do it another time.
Just,
Let him go.
It's okay.

ANGELA

No,
It's not okay.

KENNY

Angela,
Let him go.
Me and him will talk some other time.
Tomorrow will just be me and you.
Grown folks time.

A beat.

She turns back to Jahaan.

ANGELA

Go,
Eat some food,
Watch some fireworks,
And bring yourself straight back home.
Do you understand me?

JAHAAN

Yes ma'am.

ANGELA

Aight.
Now, say goodnight to your father
And go on somewhere.

JAHAAN

Goodnight.

KENNY

Aight, boy.

Jahaan exits.

Angela stares after him.

KENNY

Come here, baby.

ANGELA

He should be spendin' time with you.

KENNY

It's okay.

ANGELA

No, It's not, Kenny.

It's not okay.

He's sixteen years old.

He's gettin' ready to be on his own.

You need to talk to him.

Kenny pulls her in close.

KENNY

I know.

ANGELA

You need to let him know you love him.

KENNY

I know.

He kisses her.

Shift.

Scene 4

Same location.

The next morning.

Jahaan is writing in a journal.

Kenny enters.

They stare at each other.

KENNY

Hey, boy.

JAHAAN

Hey.

KENNY

What you doin'?

JAHAAN

Nothin'.

Awkward silence.

KENNY

You still writin'?

JAHAAN

Yeah.

KENNY

Is Mr. Collins still running that poetry club?

JAHAAN

Nah,
He got a job teaching in Texas.

KENNY

Oh.
Sorry about that.

JAHAAN

It's cool.

KENNY

You happy over there at that new school?

JAHAAN

Yeah, it's aight.

KENNY

Arts school.
I didn't even know those existed
Until your Mama told me you got in.
Ya'll don't have a football team?

JAHAAN

No.

KENNY

What about a basketball team?

JAHAAN

We don't have any sports teams.
It's an arts school.

KENNY

Boy,
I can't imagine what school would have been like with no sports.
I mean, we had drama club or whatever,
But you couldn't pull no girls if you didn't play sports.
You got a girlfriend?

A beat.

JAHAAN

No.

JAHAAAN (cont...)

Mama says I can't date.

KENNY

What?
That's ridiculous, boy.
When I was your age I was...
Maybe she's worried you'll be out there like I was.
It might run in the family.
Can't blame her.
But, you know, you gettin' older.
You don't have to tell Mama everything.

JAHAAAN

I don't.
(beat)
I'm gon' go meet up with Terry and Shad.

He walks past Kenny but before he can exit...

KENNY

I'm gon' be around for a while this time.
It's getting' close to time for me to get out of the military.
Finally learn what it is to be a civilian.
Mama wants us to spend more time together.
I know it's been a long time since we talked,
Just me and you,
And...
I don't really know what to say.
I just want to make your Mama happy.
So let's try to do somethin' together sometime soon.
I'll take you downtown to the Landing or somethin'.

Jahaan stares at the floor.

KENNY

Cool?

JAHAAAN

...

Jahaan,
You listening?

KENNY

Yeah.

JAHAAAN

We cool?

KENNY

Yeah.

JAHAAAN

Jahaan exits.

Kenny stares after him.

*Out of thin air, a phone rings.
In reality, it's just the landline in the house.
But to us, it is a much louder, intrusive sound.
An out of place, disruptive, echoing.*

*Kenny goes to the phone and lifts it off the receiver.
He hesitates for a moment.*

Shift.

Scene 5

Outdoors.

Jahaan and Terry are waiting for something.

JAHAAN

Man,
How long is he gon' take?

TERRY

How am I supposed to know?

JAHAAN

I ain't got time to be waitin' for this nigga all day.

TERRY

Where else you gotta be today?

JAHAAN

Anywhere other than here.

(beat)

He don't even like her.

TERRY

Nobody does.

JAHAAN

How long he been in there?

TERRY

I don't know.
Like ten minutes?

JAHAAN

I ain't tryna play look out all day.

TERRY

He'll be out soon.

JAHAAN

How you know?

TERRY

He do this all the time.

He go in there,

He'll be in there for, like, fifteen minutes,

They gon' argue for ten minutes after they finish,

Then he'll come out.

JAHAAN

What you mean

“After they finish”?

TERRY

You know...

JAHAAN

No,

I don't know.

Finish what?

It shouldn't take this long to buy weed.

TERRY

That's not all he doin'.

JAHAAN

What?

TERRY

They fuckin'.

JAHAAN

WHAT?!

TERRY

Aye, man!

Chill with that.

Somebody might hear you.

JAHAAAN

How long he been doin' this?

TERRY

Since, like, Spring break or somethin'.

JAHAAAN

How did I not know this?

TERRY

Well,
We ain't seen you that much after you switched schools.
And you was in Atlanta with your Mama over Spring Break.

JAHAAAN

I done been with ya'll every day this Summer.
Why you ain't say nothin' all this time?

TERRY

I don't know.
It never came up.

JAHAAAN

For real, bruh?

TERRY

Why does it matter?
You know now.

JAHAAAN

That ain't the point!
Ya'll supposed to tell me when stuff like this happens!
I been knowin' ya'll since the playground
And you didn't think it was important to tell me
Rashad is the first one to lose his V-card?

TERRY

His what?

You know, his V-card.
His virginity.

JAHAAN

Why don't you just say virginity?

TERRY

V-card sounds cooler.

JAHAAN

It sounds stupid.

TERRY

Whateva, man.
How is he the first one?

JAHAAN

I don't know.

TERRY

He so damn mean.

JAHAAN

Maybe she likes that.

TERRY

Silence.

What you think it feel like?

JAHAAN

I don't know.

TERRY

You ain't never thought about it?

JAHAAN

Nah, not really.

TERRY

JAHAAAN

Come on, man.
You must have thought about
Bein' with a girl like that at least once.

TERRY

Nah.

Silence.

JAHAAAN

I have.
I even kissed a girl before.

TERRY

No, you haven't.

JAHAAAN

I have, man!
For real.

(beat)

It's scary.
Havin' somebody so close to you like that.
You can't hardly breathe.
And when it's hot like this,
It feels even hotter because they so close.
But, then your lips touch and it's like...
I don't know, man.
It's somethin'.
Then it's over
And all you wanna do is have that moment again.
I want that moment all the time.
But, *gettin'* to that moment?
Them bein' so close.
Not bein' able to breathe.
The heat...
It's scary.

Silence.

JAHAAAN

I gotta pee.
I'mma run around to the backyard.
I'll be right back.

TERRY

Aight.

Jahaan exits.

*Terry stands frozen,
Subdued by thought.
He adjusts his shorts to hide his erection.
He sits on the ground and tries to breathe.*

*Rashad enters putting his shirt on.
He sees Terry on the ground.
He starts to say something, but stops himself.
He takes a joint out of his pocket,
Lights it,
And takes a long drag.
He exhales slowly.*

*He offers Terry his hand
Terry stares at it but does not take it*

RASHAD

Come on, man.

*Terry takes his hand.
Rashad helps him up
And pulls him in close.
He gives Terry the joint.
Terry takes a long drag.
He exhales slowly.*

They look into each other's eyes.

RASHAD

You good?

TERRY

Yeah.

Rashad sees something on Terry's bottom lip.

RASHAD

You got a little something...

Rashad wipes it away with his thumb.

RASHAD

There you go.

Now you're good.

They remain suspended for a moment.

Jahaan enters.

Rashad pushes Terry away roughly.

Destroying any sign of the previous intimacy.

JAHAAN

Finally!

RASHAD

You ready?

JAHAAN

Nigga, I *been* ready!

I was ready twenty minutes ago.

I was ready when we first got here

And you said

“Be out in five minutes, tops”.

TOPS.

Twenty minutes later,

Here I am.

Still ready.

Waiting for yo ass.

RASHAD

Why the fuck you so hostile right now?

JAHAAN

(hostile)

I ain't bein' hostile!

RASHAD

Yes, you are.

You talkin' all loud like you wanna do somethin'.

What's your problem?

JAHAAN

I just don't understand how you're the first one!

RASHAD

The first one to what?

JAHAAN

To lose your V-card.

RASHAD

V-card?

What the fuck is that?

JAHAAN

Your virginity.

RASHAD

Why didn't you just say that?

JAHAAN

V-card sounds cooler.

RASHAD

It sounds stupid.

JAHAAN

Whateva.

I just don't get it.

RASHAD

Ain't nothin to get.
I'm fine as hell and my game is tight.
Simple as that.

JAHAAN

But you so damn mean all the time.

RASHAD

Maybe she likes that.

JAHAAN

(beat)
Yeah, maybe.

RASHAD

Now, is you done?
Let's go before we miss out on this food.
You know how Lady's family be.

JAHAAN

Aight.

They both exit.

*Terry remains.
He hovers in space.
He touches his lips and smiles.*

Jahaan re-enters.

JAHAAN

Terry!
Come on, man!
We gon' be late.

Terry follows him off.

Shift.

Scene 6

Lady's house.

We hear music in the distance.

Brian McKnight, Keith Sweat, Usher.

Something like that.

Jahaan enters slowly.

He looks around to see if anyone is there.

JAHAAN

(whispering poorly)

Yo, Terry!

Rashad!

Where the fuck ya'll at?

Lady enters.

He doesn't see her.

JAHAAN

Man, ya'll play too much.

How ya'll just gon' leave me by myself with Lady's cousins?

You know how they be.

LADY

Yeah, I know.

Jahaan almost jumps out of his skin.

LADY

They always tryna flirt with somebody.

They them fast types your Mama warn you about.

JAHAAN

Hey, Lady.

LADY

Hey, Jahaan.

JAHAAN

I don't mean to be walkin' all through your house.
I know your Mama don't like people walkin' through the house
Without askin'.

LADY

That's aight.
She catch an attitude if you just ask to go the bathroom.
*"I don't want all them people walkin through my house!
They don't need to know what I got."*
I be like,
"But, Mama, that's our family."
She say,
*"Exactly.
Family walk through your house,
See you doin' good,
And think you owe them somethin'.
They ain't pay for nothin' in here.
They can use the bathroom at they own house."*

JAHAAN

Sounds like my Mama.

LADY

All our Mamas sound the same.

JAHAAN

You ain't never lied.

LADY

What you walkin' through here for anyway?

JAHAAN

I'm lookin for Rashad and Terry.
One minute we was eatin with LaTisha and them,
The next minute they was gone.

LADY

What,
You don't wanna be alone with LaTisha?

LADY (cont.)

Seems like everybody does.

JAHAAN

Yeah, well...
She ain't for me.

LADY

You sayin' you too good for my cousin?

JAHAAN

Nah, that ain't what I'm sayin'.
She just...
She just not for me.
She not my type.

LADY

Your type?

JAHAAN

Yeah.

LADY

What *is* your type?

JAHAAN

(beat)
I don't know.

LADY

You don't know.

JAHAAN

Nah, I mean...
I don't know how to describe it.

LADY

Then how do you know LaTisha ain't your type?

JAHAAN

I don't know.

LADY

What *do* you know, Jahaan?

JAHAAN

Not much, I guess.

Silence.

LADY

I heard your Daddy back in town.

JAHAAN

Yeah, he back.

LADY

You happy?

JAHAAN

I don't...
I'm not sure.

LADY

That's the same as "I don't know".

JAHAAN

Well, it's how I feel.
Like,
It don't feel no different.
We don't talk when he here.
We don't talk when he gone.
My Mama always make a big deal when he come home.
We supposed to celebrate,
Jump up and down,
Praise the lord that he back.
But, it don't make no difference.
When he gone,
He might as well be here.

JAHAAN (cont.)

When he here,
He might as well be gone.
It's all the same to me.

LADY

That's sad.

JAHAAN

Maybe, but it's true.
(beat)
How's your Dad?

LADY

He good.
Same old, same old.
Every time I go visit,
He tell me he gon' convince my Mama to move out there
So we can be closer.
He been sayin that since I was five years old
And it still ain't happened yet.

JAHAAN

Why don't you just tell your Mama you wanna move?

LADY

And get slapped and called everythin' but a child of God?
No, thank you.
Daddy can deal with all that.
I was only supposed to be with him for a week this time,
But he kept convincin' Mama to let me stay a little longer.
I got to stay for a whole month.

JAHAAN

Yeah,
You was gone for a long time.

LADY

It was only a month.

JAHAAN

Like I said,
A long time.

LADY

Did you miss me?

Silence.

LADY

You still writing?

JAHAAN

Yeah.

LADY

They must be teaching you some important shit
At that new school.
Got you takin' the bus all the way near the beach
To be away from us.

JAHAAN

Don't nobody wanna be away from ya'll.
They have a writing program,
I applied,
I got in.
Simple as that.

LADY

Well,
I hope you learnin' somethin'.

JAHAAN

I am.
Got me writing all day, every day.

LADY

You did that anyway.

JAHAAAN

Yeah,
But it's different now.

LADY

Why?
Because you got a whole bunch of white people reading your shit now?

JAHAAAN

Yo, don't start with that.

LADY

I'm just sayin'.
You was writin' way before that school even existed.
You been writin' non-stop ever since I met you.
You remember that day?

JAHAAAN

Nah.

LADY

Yeah, you do.
Six years old,
You walked up to my front porch
And handed me a poster you drew on some notebook paper.
Told me you was startin a story club.
Said to meet you at your house the next day
And to bring a pencil and paper.
I thought,
"Who is this weird little boy that wants to write outside of school?"
But, I showed up anyway.
Do you remember how many people showed up?

JAHAAAN

It was me,
You,
Rashad,
And Terry.

LADY

That was a good day.
We wrote some heat!
And we didn't need no uppity white teachers
Tellin' us where to put commas and shit
For us to feel good about it.

JAHAAN

Yeah,
Well them uppity white teachers don't laugh at you for likin' stories.
They don't call you a faggot for writin' a poem.
They don't knock your notebook out of your hand
When you walk down the hallway,
Tear the pages out
And rip them in half in front your face
Just because they feel like it,
Or call you every name they can think of
To make you feel bad about likin' what you like.
Faggot,
Oreo,
White boy,
Uncle Tom,
Bougie,
Uppity,
And whatever the fuck else they can think of in the moment.
We ain't got none of that over there.
So,
It's different.

A long silence.

A silence with history behind it.

LADY

Darryl said he was sorry.

JAHAAN

Tell Darryl he can miss me with his "sorry".

LADY

I ain't tellin' him shit.

JAHAAN

Why not?
That's your boyfriend.

LADY

Not anymore.
(beat)
If you still mad about that,
Why did you even come over tonight?

JAHAAN

Because you asked me to.
(beat)
When did you and Darryl break up?

LADY

The day after you left school.

JAHAAN

I'm sorry.

LADY

No, you ain't.

JAHAAN

You right,
I ain't.

They share a smile.

LADY

I been missin' you.

JAHAAN

Yeah,
I miss me too.

Lady laughs.

LADY

I hate you.

JAHAAN

That's fair.

LADY

(beat)

What was the name of that poem you wrote me on your last day?

JAHAAN

“The Idea”.

LADY

“The Idea”.

Yeah, that was good.

I really liked it.

JAHAAN

Good.

LADY

Read it to me again.

JAHAAN

I left my book at home.

LADY

You don't remember it?

JAHAAN

I remember most of it,

But I might mess it up without my book.

LADY

Just try.

JAHAAN

Look,

Lady,

JAHAAAN (cont.)

I don't know...

LADY

"I don't know, I don't know, I don't know."
That ain't gon' work for me, Jahaan.
I done known you for most of my life.
I ain't never asked you to be perfect.
I'm askin' you to try.
Now, you done come to my house,
Ate my food,
Rejected my cousin,
And admitted that you don't give a fuck
About me and my boyfriend breakin' up.
The least you can do is recite me a poem.
Please.
I won't laugh at you.
I promise.

*Jahaan breathes her in.
He begins hesitantly,
But his inner poet takes over.*

JAHAAAN

The idea of you is scary to me

The idea of your voice saying my name
Saying it with the air of longing
No hate in it
Only sweetness and care

The idea of your hand reaching out for mine
Hoping that I might take it
So that we might walk together
And that that walk might lead to something peaceful

The idea of your hips swinging in my direction
Commanding me to match their pace
To keep rhythm together
Despite the danger that follows such actions

JAHAAAN (cont...)

The idea of your lips...
Well, I could never speak of your lips
Though I might want to
I would never know where to begin

I have been brave in my life
Some would say that walking through the world
In my skin is an act of bravery
But, with you, bravery has eluded me

Because when I look into your eyes
No matter how I fight
No matter how I struggle
The idea of you is scary to me

Silence.

*They are frozen in time.
His words linger in the air around them.
Lady moves in close to him*

JAHAAAN

You kissed me after that.

LADY

I remember.

JAHAAAN

Have you told anybody?

LADY

No.
I like secrets.

JAHAAAN

I've never had any.

LADY

Are you scared?

JAHAAAN

(beat)

All the time.

*Lady moves in to kiss him,
But before their lips meet we hear shuffling outside.*

They hide.

*Rashad enters.
He quickly surveys the room to see if there's anyone there.
He motions to someone offstage.*

*Terry enters.
Terry moves to Rashad and puts his hand around his waist.
They kiss.
Rashad's hard body goes limp in Terry's soft embrace.*

They come up for air.

TERRY

Do you love me?

RASHAD

I...I can't....

TERRY

Shhhh.
It's okay.
We'll work on it.

They kiss again.

Rashad's body is tense for a moment, but eventually submits.

*The kissing becomes more intense.
They move to the ground.*

They are interrupted by a voice outside.

O.S. VOICE

I know ain't nobody in my house!
If you gotta use the bathroom,
Walk down the street to your own house!

Rashad and Terry scramble from the floor.

RASHAD

I'll go out first.
After I leave,
Count to thirty
And then meet me outside.

Rashad exits.

Terry watches him leave.

*He counts to thirty.
Every number making him feel less and less human.
He exits.*

*Jahaan and Lady come out of hiding.
Jahaan stares after his friends.*

LADY

Did you know about that?

JAHAAAN

No.

LADY

Now we all have secrets.

*She takes his hand in hers.
They kiss.
Fireworks explode.
Fire falls like rain.
Black out.*

END OF ACT ONE

Post-Intermission
Something to Bring Us Back

Out of the darkness we hear Lady's voice.
She sings to us.
"The Kiss of Life" by Sade.

The sun begins to rise.

LADY

There must have been an angel by my side
Something heavenly led me to you
Look at the sky
It's the color of love

There must have been an angel by my side
Something heavenly came down from above
He led me to you
He led me to you

Terry is revealed by the sunlight.
He speaks to us.

TERRY

I want to be soft
Like the sheets on my Mother's bed

Soft
Like when she would pull me in close when I was afraid

Soft
Like her voice used to be when she would speak

Which was a long time ago
Before my father left and rendered her voiceless

These days
She tries to speak but
It just doesn't work somehow

TERRY

Her mouth is an empty cave
Her hair shares the habits of fall leaves
Her eyes are permanent midnight
And her skin...

Is soft

I want to be soft

Like that

LADY

*When I was led to you
I knew you were the one for me
I swear the whole world
Could hear my heart beat*

*When I lay eyes on you
Ahhhh
You wrapped me up
In the color of love*

TERRY

I want to be soft
And I want you to be soft with me

Please

Melt with me
Like candle wax

Pour yourself over me
And we will shape ourselves
To a shared liking

We will be flowers
We will be silk
We will be cotton
We will be soft

TERRY

Like your voice when we are alone

We will be soft

Like that

The sun has risen.

A new day.

Shift.

Act 2
Scene 2

Jahaan's house.

Jahaan enters.
He has the walk of a new man.

Angela is waiting for him.

ANGELA

Jahaan.

He freezes.

Angela stares hard at him from across the room.

ANGELA

What happened?
You alright?

JAHAAN

Yeah.

ANGELA

Uh-uh.
Wrong answer.
I asked you what happened
And if you are alright.
Cos it's 8 o'clock in the morning
And you ain't come home last night.
So,
Something better have happened to you.
You better have been robbed,
Kidnapped,
Or put in grave danger.
Cos' those are the only excuses I'm gon' accept.

ANGELA (cont.)

(beat)

Why you ain't come home last night?

Silence.

ANGELA

Boy,
Answer my question.

JAHAAAN

I'm sorry.

ANGELA

That ain't enough.
I can't do shit with your "sorry".
Do you know how worried I was about you?
And I really tried not to be.
Cos' I knew where you were.
I could've easily drove over there,
Rang the doorbell,
And dragged yo black ass right out of that house.
But I didn't.
Because I didn't believe
That you could actually disrespect me the way you have.

(beat)

Who do you think you are?
Boys like you are out there dyin'.
If the police don't get to you,
One of these wanna-be thugs with a gun will.
Don't you know that?
And that little girl you was with all night will kill you too.
You lay down with her,
She spread her legs
And let you in between her thighs for a little while.
Keep you warm.
Make you feel like a man.
9 months later,
She shows up at my doorstep with a child.
Looks me in my eyes

ANGELA (cont.)

And tells me it's yours.
And you best believe I'd make you take care of it.
16 years old or not,
You would have to raise that child.
And that would be a kind of death for you.

(beat)

You don't get to just run around here and do whatever you want.
I don't know what them white kids at your new school do,
But you ain't like them.
Tryna do what they do will get you killed.

JAHAAAN

Why does everybody have to keep remindin' me about that?
I go to school with white kids!
I know that!
I see them every day!
Why does everybody gotta remind me like I don't know?

Angela moves toward him.

ANGLEA

Boy-

Kenny enters.

KENNY

Angela.
Let me talk to him.

Silence.

Angela stares hard at Jahaan.

ANGELA

Don't think I'm gon' forget about this.
You better figure yourself out if you gon' keep living here.
Cos', if you keep it up, you and me ain't gon' make it.

Angela exits.

A long silence.

Kenny takes Jahaan in.

KENNY

Boy, what's wrong with you?

JAHAAN

Nothin's wrong with me.

KENNY

Oh no?

Then maybe you just stupid.

JAHAAN

I'm not stupid.

KENNY

You gotta be.

To blatantly disrespect me and your mama like-

JAHAAN

I ain't disrespect nobody.

KENNY

Boy,

Don't talk when I'm talkin'.

Your mama was up all night waiting for you to come home.

JAHAAN

She coulda came and got me.

She said so herself.

She knew where I was.

KENNY

That's not the point.

She told you to go over there,

Eat food,

Watch fireworks,

And come home.

KENNY (cont.)

They were clear instructions that you agreed to.
And you chose not to honor your word.
You had her up all night cryin'.
Waitin' for you.
And now you walk in here like you ain't do nothin' wrong
And we crazy to be upset.
I don't understand you, boy.
What's goin' on?
This isn't like you.
(beat)
This is not who you are.

Jahaan channels all his strength.

JAHAAN

You don't know me.
You ain't never known me.
You been in and out of this house since I was born.
When you leave,
You don't say goodbye.
I just wake up and you gone.
You don't call.
And when you *do* call,
You don't ask to speak to *me*.
When you finally come home,
You don't talk to me.
You ask me simple questions for the first few days
And get bored when the answers don't suit you.
But you don't *talk* to me.
So, how would you ever know who I am?
Who are *you*?

Silence.

KENNY

You don't leave this house for the rest of the summer.

JAHAAN

What?

KENNY

You don't play basketball with your friends,
You don't ride your bike,
You don't go outside at all unless it's to take out the trash.
You gon' sit right here.
In this house.
Until you get right with yourself.

JAHAAAN

You can't do that!

KENNY

I can do whatever I want.
This is my house.

JAHAAAN

No, it ain't!
It's mine!
I'm here every day!
I sit with Mama and watch her shows!
I hold her hand when she's crying
Because you haven't called in a month!
I'm.
Here.
You might pay bills here,
But this is *my* house.

KENNY

You need to shut up and get away from me, boy.
Go to your room.

JAHAAAN

No.

KENNY

BOY!
You testing my patience.
Go.
To.
Your.

KENNY (cont.)

Room.

JAHAAN

I ain't goin' nowhere.

A standoff.

Angela enters.

ANGELA

What's goin' on?

JAHAAN

Dad's sayin' I can't leave the house for the rest of the Summer!

ANGELA

Well,
I guess you ain't leavin'.

JAHAAN

That's not fair, Ma!

ANGELA

Fair?
I don't give a fuck about fair.
If your Daddy say you ain't leavin' this house,
Then you ain't leavin'.

JAHAAN

That's bullshit!

ANGELA

Boy, what did you just-

JAHAAN

He don't never be here!
He been gone a year and barely called.
He had you locked up in your room cryin' for days.

ANGELA

You need to shut up, right now.

JAHAAN

NO!

Let's talk about it.

Let's talk about how you don't sleep at night when he's gone.

How I have to force you to eat.

How I have to call Aunt Dee to come over

So you don't sit here by yourself day in and day out.

I been here with you!

Not him!

And now he gets to walk in here and make rules?

Tell me what I can and can't do?

Nah, that's not how it's gon' work.

KENNY

Jahaan,

You have 5 seconds to go to your room or-

JAHAAN

Or what?

I have 5 seconds to go to my room or what?

Silence.

Jahaan holds Kenny's gaze.

Five seconds come and go.

JAHAAN

Why don't you call us when you're gone?

Mom thinks I don't know why,

But I do.

ANGELA

Jahaan-

JAHAAN

Just tell us the truth, man.

ANGELA

That's enough!

JAHAAAN

IT AIN'T ENOUGH!

He a grown man,
He can take more.

(beat)

Pathetic.

Everything about this is pathetic.
He's a pathetic excuse for a father
And you're pathetic for letting him be.

Angela slaps Jahaan.

Silence.

Clouds begin to blot out the sun.

We hear thunder approaching in the distance.

Jahaan exits to his room.

Angela and Kenny stand in silence.

Jahaan re-enters with a backpack.

He starts to leave the house,

Stops,

Turns around,

And stares hard at Angela.

He exits.

Silence.

Kenny reaches for Angela.

KENNY

Come here, baby.

Angela pulls away.

ANGELA

Don't do no shit like that to me ever again.

KENNY

What?

Baby, it's okay.

ANGELA

No, it ain't okay!

Did you hear what I said?

Don't do no shit like that to me ever again.

Don't ever put me in that position again.

KENNY

What are you talking about?

ANGELA

When Jahaan was born we became a team.

I back you up,

You back me up.

So, that's what I did.

But that boy wasn't *all* wrong.

He was out of line,

But he wasn't *all* wrong.

(beat)

Why *don't* you call?

Beat.

Kenny steps toward her.

KENNY

Baby-

ANGELA

Stop!

Don't "*baby*" me.

Answer my question.

ANGELA (cont.)

Why don't you call?

KENNY

I don't know.

ANGELA

Oh, no.

No, no, no.

We're past "*I don't know*".

We been past that for a long time now.

I'm not going back.

I've been feeling for both of us for almost twenty years.

Twenty years, Kenny.

Making excuses for your silence.

"Oh you know how Kenny is."

Trying to protect this idea of who you are.

Who I know you to be.

But I can't protect you forever.

You got to do that for yourself.

(beat)

That boy is everything to me.

You know how our parents used to always say

"I'm not one of your little friends"?

I can't even say that to him with a straight face.

He's my best friend in the world.

KENNY

What about me?

ANGELA

My heart is big enough for two.

(beat)

How long are we gon' keep doing this?

KENNY

I don't know what you want me to do.

Who do you want me to be?

We done talked about this a hundred times.

This is the plan.

KENNY (cont.)

It's always been the plan.

ANGELA

No, the plan was that you stay in the military
Because it's a good job with good benefits.
That you travel,
But we stay here so our son can have stability.
And that means we don't see you as much as we want.
I understand that.
I agreed to it.
But I didn't agree to spend my life with a phantom.
Who vanishes for months on end,
Never calls,
And expects his family to be okay with it.

(beat)

You and me.
Me and you.
All the time.
Those words used to send a shiver down my spine.
But the longer we go down this road
The more those words reveal themselves for what they really are.
Words.

Beat.

KENNY

I don't know what I'm doing.
As you get older,
You're supposed to know more.
Gain some sort of wisdom.
But I still don't know nothin'.

(beat)

I spend most of my time alone.
And I've learned that if I keep my head down
And focus on the work,
On the plan...
I don't have to think about how alone I am.
But when I hear your voice on that phone...
I ain't nothing but loneliness.

KENNY (cont...)

(beat)

As for Jahaan
I'm trying.
I'm really trying,
But every time I look at that boy
I'm reminded of all the things I don't know.

*Kenny steps toward Angela.
He takes her hand.*

KENNY

This time is gon' be different.
I'm here.
I'm trying.
I'm gon' make it right.

They search each other's eyes.

*Once again, out of thin air, a phone rings.
Kenny tries to ignore it.
Angela knows he can't.*

*Angela goes to the phone and lifts it from the reciever.
She holds it out to him.*

Shift.

Scene 2

Lady's house.

Jahaan stalks around the room.

JAHAAN

He wanna come back here and make rules like he run shit?
Fuck that!

I'm not a little boy no more.

I ain't sittin' around waiting for him to come home
Or wishing he would love me.

And my Mama just lets him do whatever he wants
Because he's the man of the house.

It don't matter how he make her feel.

He the man of the house,

So he can say and do whatever he wants.

How you gon' be the man of the house

When you don't ever be there?

How you gon' be a man *at all*

When you can't even love your own family?

He can barely breathe.

He is full to bursting.

Lady steps in front of him.

She takes his face into her hands.

LADY

Breathe.

He inhales.

He exhales.

He presses his forehead against hers.

JAHAAN

Can I stay here?

LADY

You know you can't.

I know. **JAHAAN**

I wish you could. **LADY**

Do you? **JAHAAN**

Yes. **LADY**

They kiss.

Lady gently breaks away.

I have to tell you something. **LADY**

Shit!
You're pregnant. **JAHAAN**

What?
No! **LADY**

Oh, thank God. **JAHAAN**

We had sex *last night*.
How would I be pregnant already? **LADY**

I don't know how it works! **JAHAAN**

We had a whole week of talking about it in the sixth grade. **LADY**

JAHAAAN

I wasn't there.
I had pink eye.

She laughs.

*Her smile makes him smile.
But, after a beat,
Lady's smile fades.*

LADY

My Mama knows about last night.

JAHAAAN

How?

LADY

(beat)
I told her.

JAHAAAN

Why would you do that?

LADY

Ever since I was a little girl,
It's been me and her.
Even when my Dad lived with us.
He worked so hard that we barely even saw him.
Then, he got a job offer up in New York
And said he'd send for us when he could.
By the time he sent for us,
Mama had found somebody else.
Somebody who could actually be there.
But she could never admit that to him.
So, she lied for months and months,
Saying we would fly out when the school year was over.
Summer came and went,
And she kept pushing the date back further and further.
Eventually, he figured out.
I think he knew from the start

LADY (cont...)

But didn't want to admit it.
The first time I flew up there to visit
He took me out for ice cream.
We sat on a bench
And he asked me if I had ever seen my Mama and her new man together.
I looked him right in his eyes and said "no".
I lied right to his face
And ain't never told him the truth.

(beat)

A person can only live with so many lies, Jahaan.
I don't want all them lies on my spirit.
I won't live like that.
So, I told her about us.
She said "I did my job.
I done gave you everything I got to give you.
You always talkin' about how you wanna be with your Daddy.
Go on and be with him then."
She called him
And told him she was sendin' me to live with him.

JAHAAN

For how long?

LADY

I don't know.

JAHAAN

(beat)

Don't go.

LADY

I don't have a choice.

JAHAAN

Yes, you do!
Tell her you ain't goin'.
Tell her you a grown woman and-

LADY

I'm not, though.
I'm not grown
And neither are you.
I don't wanna go,
But that's my Mama and she said I have to.
So, I'm goin'.
End of story.

(beat)

I know you're mad at your parents,
But you need to go home, Jahaan.
You need to go home and figure it out.

JAHAAN

I can't go back.

LADY

Can't?
Or won't?

JAHAAN

She slapped me in my face, Lady.
It's been me and her ever since I can remember.
And today, she chose a side.
It's always gon' be him over me.

LADY

She loves you.
She would die for you.
And she loves *him*.
And she would die for him, too.
Ain't no sides, baby.
That's a family.
Go home.

JAHAAN

(beat)

I been lovin' you since I was six years old.

LADY

I know.

JAHAAAN

I don't want you to go.

LADY

(beat)

The idea of you is scary to me.

The idea of your love pouring over me
Like some prophetic rainstorm
Amongst the hammers and heavy stones
That the world employs to extinguish my beauty

The idea of you is scary, Jahaan
The idea of your absence is scary
But the idea of finding you again
Sustains me

Outside, a light rain shower begins.

Shift.

Scene 3

The Park.

The rain continues.

Rashad is working on his handles.

Terry holds his shirt over his head as a makeshift umbrella.

Jahaan sits, thinking of what his next move should be.

RASHAD

So, what you gon' do?

JAHAAN

I don't know.

RASHAD

I would say you can stay at my place,
But you know how my Mama be.

JAHAAN

All good, bruh.

TERRY

You could stay at my house, but-

JAHAAN

I know.

Don't worry about it.

I'll figure it out.

RASHAD

Better figure somethin' out quick.
It's supposed to storm later.
You don't wanna be out here for that.

JAHAAN

Yeah.

RASHAD

(beat)

I mean,

RASHAD (cont.)

You *could* just go home.

JAHAAN

Nigga, did you not hear what I told you?

RASHAD

I heard you.

JAHAAN

Then what kind of suggestion is that?

RASHAD

I'm just sayin', man.

You actin' like she almost beat you to death.

It was a slap.

Yo mama ain't never slapped you before?

JAHAAN

We don't do that at my house.

RASHAD

That explains a lot.

JAHAAN

What's that supposed to mean?

RASHAD

You know what they say.

"Spare the rod, spoil the child".

JAHAAN

Nigga, for real?!

RASHAD

Nigga, all I'm saying is you ain't got nowhere to go.

It can't be that bad to go home

And just deal with it.

Summer's almost over anyway.

You ain't gon' miss nothin'.

JAHAAAN

That's not the point.
He can't just come home and act like he run shit.
Who does he think he is?

RASHAD

Your father.

JAHAAAN

He don't act like it.

RASHAD

That don't matter.
He's there.
Sometimes, all I want is a nigga to come home
And act like he run shit.
How bout you, Terry?

Terry looks at the ground.

JAHAAAN

(beat)

Come on, man.
That ain't fair.

RASHAD

What is it with you and shit being fair?
Shit ain't never been fair for us.
Ain't never gon' be fair.
Just take that word outcho vocabulary already.
I listen to you talk about your Dad like he ain't shit
And it pisses me off,
If you want me to be honest.
He's there.
Even when he's not at home.
He sends the money to keep ya'll lights on.
Keep food in the refrigerator.
What else you want him to do?
Hug you?
It's too hot down here for all that, anyway.

RASHAD (cont.)

Count your blessings, boy.
Go home.

JAHAAAN

Don't call me a boy.
And don't talk to me like you know what the fuck is going on at my house.
You don't know what we go through when he's gone.

RASHAD

I don't?
Then tell me.

Silence.

RASHAD

Boy, go home.

JAHAAAN

I told you not to call me boy.

Rashad throws the ball hard at Jahaan's chest.

RASHAD

Then stop acting like one!

JAHAAAN

So, I'm the boy?
What about you?
You the one out here pretending to be something you not.

A brutal silence.

RASHAD

Whatchu talkin' bout?

JAHAAAN

Nevermind.

RASHAD

Nah, nigga say what you mean.

JAHAAN

Look, man,
Just forget-

RASHAD

“You the one out here pretending to be something you not.”

What.
Do you.
Mean.

*Jahaan looks to Terry.
Looks back to Rashad.*

JAHAAN

Look, man, I...
At Lady’s party I...
I saw you and Terry.
I saw what ya’ll was doin’.

RASHAD

What was we doin’?

JAHAAN

Come on, man.
You know.

RASHAD

No,
I don’t.
Paint me a picture.

*Jahaan looks to Terry.
Terry is frozen still.*

RASHAD

Don’t look at him.
Look at me.

RASHAD (cont.)

What was we doin'?

JAHAAN

Ya'll was kissin'.

Silence.

RASHAD

So,
You callin' me a faggot?

JAHAAN

That's not what I'm sayin'.

Rashad advances on Jahaan.

RASHAD

No,
Cos it sounded like you said you saw me kissin' another man.
Which would make me a faggot.

JAHAAN

No, it don't, man.
There's plenty of kids at my school-

RASHAD

I don't wanna hear shit about your fuckin' school!
I don't give a fuck about what they do over there,
Cos we right *here*!
Them rules don't apply!

Rashad has closed in on Jahaan.

JAHAAN

Okay.

RASHAD

I ain't on that faggot shit, man.

JAHAAAN

Okay. I hear you.

(beat)

All I'm saying is that if...

If you liked other dudes,

You'd still be my best friend.

Silence.

Rashad stares hard at Jahaan.

Rashad turns around and starts to walk away.

JAHAAAN

Rashad-

Rashad turns back quickly and punches Jahaan in the face.

Jahaan goes down hard.

Thunder cracks.

The sky opens up.

The storm is here.

Rashad advances toward Jahaan.

TERRY

Stop!

Terry runs over and grabs Rashad's arm.

They look into each other's eyes.

TERRY

It's okay.

Rashad pulls away.

RASHAD

What are you tryna to do me?!

I used to know myself!

I was sure that I was...

I was sure.

RASHAD (cont.)

Now I...
I can't do this anymore.
I need you to leave me alone.

Terry moves toward Rashad.

TERRY

Rashad-

RASHAD

NO!
I can't...

TERRY

Can't or won't?

RASHAD

Both.

He starts to leave.
He stops.
He turns to them.

RASHAD

I can't even remember what my Father looks like.
Every time I try to picture his face
All I see is blood.
How much blood have you seen?
I'mma guess not much.
And I hope it stays that way.
I hope you never have to wash it off your hands.
Your clothes.
I hope that blood
And memories of your Father
Never mix.
Go home, Jahaan.

Rashad exits

*The rain begins to let up,
But there is still a substantial pour.*

*Terry walks over to Jahaan to help him up.
Jahaan gets to his feet, but is too weak.*

JAHAAN

Wait, wait, wait.
Just-

*Terry sets him back down and sits next to him.
Jahaan lets out a long, exasperated sigh*

JAHAAN

I hate today.
(beat)
I'm sorry, Terry.

TERRY

Don't be sorry.

JAHAAN

I am, though.
I'm really sorry.
I shouldn't have said anything.

TERRY

Something needed to be said.

JAHAAN

You know you my best friend no matter what, right?

TERRY

I know.

*Terry reaches over and turns Jahaan to face him.
He examines the spot where Rashad's fist made contact.
He leans in and kisses Jahaan softly.
It's a surprise to Jahaan, but he doesn't fight it.
They stare at each other.*

JAHAAN

(softly, sincerely)
I'm sorry, Terry.
But I don't think I-

TERRY

I know.
It's just...
Ain't nobody ever loved me like you love me, Jahaan.
I get scared nobody ever will.

A beat.

*Jahaan leans in.
They kiss once again.*

*This kiss is beautiful.
It is not a joke.
Or a tease.
It is vital.
It expresses something words cannot.*

*They sit forehead to forehead.
The rain continues.*

*Angela enters holding an umbrella.
She watches them for a moment before making her presence known.*

ANGELA

Jahaan.

*Jahaan and Terry remain connected for a moment.
Eventually they stand.
And embrace.*

TERRY

I'll see you later.

They pull apart.

JAHAAN

See you later.

TERRY

Goodnight, Ms. Angela.

ANGELA

Goodnight, baby.

Terry exits.

ANGELA

You wanna get under here?

Silence.

ANGELA

I thought we said it was gon' be better this time.

(beat)

What do you want, Jahaan?

Huh?

Tell me what you want and I'll do it.

I'll do it, I'll do it, I'll do it.

But you gotta tell me cos I'm tired of guessing.

(beat)

You and your Daddy.

Thick as thieves and ya'll don't even know it.

(beat)

Look at me.

Jahaan.

I need you to look at me.

He does not look.

She sings.

ANGELA

When I was led to you

I knew you were the one for me

I swear the whole world

Could hear my heart beat

He finally looks.

ANGELA

What do you want, Jahaan?

A moment.

JAHAAN

I want him to tell me that he loves me.
I don't want a "You know I love you".
I don't want a half-hearted "Love you".
I want the whole thing.
I want him to look me in my eyes
And say it.
"I. Love. You."

ANGELA

And then what?
Don't you understand?
The world don't give a damn about his "I love you".
The world wants to destroy his "I love you".
Wants to turn it to dust
And let it blow in the wind
With all the other black boy "I love you's."

JAHAAN

I understand.
And I want it anyway.
What do you want, Ma?

ANGELA

I want you to come home.
Your Daddy got called back out this morning after you left.
He's gotta be in West Palm Beach in the morning.
Then on to who knows where after that.
I want you to come home and say goodbye.

JAHAAN

(simply)
What else?

A moment.

ANGELA

I want it to stop.
The back and forth
Back and forth
Back and forth
I want him to look at me and tell me it's done.
Fuck the pension, fuck the 401K, fuck the security
I want him to say "*I know what we said when we were young.
I know we said we didn't wanna end up like all our friends from the block.
I know we said we didn't wanna end up like our parents with nothing.
But if we keep going like this we will be nothing.
I know we made plans, but fuck plans.
Fuck everything.
Except you and me.
Me and you.
All the time.*"
I want to jump in the car with you and Kenny and drive.
And drive.
And drive.
Until no one and nothing can find us.
Until we can't find anything
Except each other.
(beat)
What I want
And what you want.
Ain't they the same thing?

A moment.

ANGELA

The back door will be unlocked
If you decide to come back.
And I hope you come back.

*She gives her umbrella to Jahaan and begins to exit.
She stops.
She looks up to the sky.
Letting rain fall on her face and in her hair.*

ANGELA

You out here chasin' manhood
But manhood gon' find you first.

She exits.

Jahaan is alone.

Shift.

Scene 5

Music fills the space.

*Kem, Bobby Womack, LTD
Something like that.*

*Kenny sways with an invisible dance partner.
He holds a glass of brown liquor in one hand,
An invisible waist in the other.
Eyes closed.*

*Jahaan enters slowly.
He watches Kenny for a moment.
He's never seen him like this before.*

The music fades away.

Kenny opens his eyes and sees his son.

KENNY

Hey, boy.

JAHAAN

Hey.

KENNY

Welcome home.

JAHAAN

Thanks.

*Kenny approaches.
He reaches out to touch Jahaan's bruised eye.*

KENNY

What happened to your face?

Jahaan moves out of reach.

JAHAAN

Nothing.

KENNY

That's what we callin' nothing these days?

Silence.

JAHAAN

I heard you gotta leave tomorrow.

KENNY

They call,
I come.

JAHAAN

I thought you was gon' be here for a while this time.

Kenny laughs.

KENNY

Yeah, son...that's what I thought, too.
That's what they told me.
That's what I planned for.
That's what I told your Mama.
But, boy, you just...you never know how it's gon' be.
That's what I'm learning.
You can make plans.
You can make promises.
But, when it comes down to reality...
Ain't no tellin'.

(beat)

I wanna stay.

JAHAAN

Then stay.

KENNY

Son, it don't work that way.
You know that.

*Jahaan begins to exit to his room.
He is stopped by Kenny's voice.*

KENNY

I was late to the hospital, when you were born.
I was working nights at this sheetrock company, at the time
And I had a deal with a buddy of mine.
He would take over for me if your Mama went into labor
While I was working.
I had it all planned out.
And I was late.
Because, of course, the time comes and my man is sick.
I call him and he tells me he can't make it.
"Whatchu mean you can't make it?
I gotta go see my son.
My son.
My son."
I run to my supervisor's office and tell him I gotta go.
I begged him...
I begged him to let me leave.
I ain't never begged nobody for nothin' in my whole life.
But, I stood in that office...
I didn't get down on my knees.
I couldn't give him that.
But, I *stood* there and *begged* him to...
Please...
Let me leave and see my first son be born.
He told me that if I left I could kiss my job goodbye.
I ain't have no skills, no other job to count on, nothin'.
But, I looked that man in his eyes and I quit.
Right then and there.
And I ran to my car and started driving faster than anyone has ever driven.
You woulda thought I was in the Daytona 500.
I'm driving, making good time
And then, of course...
Construction on 95 tryin' to get Downtown.
Traffic is dead still.
Five minutes go by and I'm thinkin'
"Okay, alright, can't be too much longer."
Ten minutes go by and I'm cussin out every single car in front of me.

KENNY (cont...)

Fifteen minutes, and my whole body is laying on the horn.
I'm thinking, "If I stay here long enough, maybe God will hear me
And move these cars out of my way so I can see my son.
My son.
My son."
I spent half an hour in that traffic.
I park the car,
I run into the hospital,
I finally find somebody who can tell me where ya'll at,
And I get to the room.
I walk inside and your Mama is holding you in her arms.
She looks up at me and she looks beautiful.
I don't know what I expected her to look like but...
She looked beautiful.
You started crying and she couldn't get you to stop.
She held you up for me to take.
Thinking I could make it better.
I'm standing there, looking at her holding you out to me
And I don't know what to do.
You're screaming.
Wailing.
I take you in my arms and you didn't stop.
You just kept screaming.
I hold you for a little bit.
Trying to get you calm down as best as I know how.
But you just wouldn't stop.
I tried to hand you back to your Mama
But she shook her head and just looked at me like...
"That's you"
I look down at you
Into your squinty crying eyes
Into your toothless screaming mouth
At your tiny balled up fists
And for the first time in my life, I felt...
Purposeful.

Silence.

*Deep inside themselves,
They both want to embrace each other.
They want to fall into each other's arms
And cling to each other for dear life.*

*But they don't know how.
Neither of them have the tools.*

*Instead,
Jahaan he holds out his hand to Kenny.
Kenny takes it.*

JAHAAAN

Promise you'll call me.
Once a week,
While you're gone.
Just...
Call, talk to Mom, then ask for me.
You can tell me another story,
Or we can talk about nothing.
Either way,
Promise you'll call.

KENNY

I promise.

JAHAAAN

Thank you.

*They look into each other's eyes
And really see each other.
There is silence where an "I love you" might go for most people.
For them, this silence will have to do.*

Epilogue

Angela is folding laundry.

Jahaan enters, holding his journal.

Morning.

JAHAAN

Morning.

ANGELA

Is he gone?

JAHAAN

Yeah.
Early flight out.

ANGELA

Silence.

Just because he's gone...
It don't mean you off the hook.
You still on punishment.

ANGELA

I know, Mama.
(beat)
You okay?

JAHAAN

I'm okay.

ANGELA

You sure?

JAHAAN

Not really, no.

ANGELA

ANGELA (cont...)

But I'm gon' do my best to be okay.
How about you?

JAHAAN

Same.

A knowing beat between them.

JAHAAN

You and me.

ANGELA

Me and you.

JAHAAN

All the time.

They embrace.

ANGELA

Read me something.

*Jahaan opens his book
And reads.*

JAHAAN

I asked "Do you love me?"
When you came home.
And you did not respond.

And it was hot.

So hot.

The kind of heat that makes all your clothes sticky before you even put them on.

The space changes.

The walls expand

And we find ourselves in a space outside of time.

Rashad appears.

RASHAD

I'd been gasping for air.
I'd been trying to find a breeze.
I'd been crawling toward the ocean.

Then you came home.
And I asked "Do you love me?"

And you did not respond.

Terry appears.

TERRY

And the heat remained.
And my clothes were still sticky.
And I still couldn't catch my breath.
And I still couldn't find a breeze.
And the ocean was still far away from our neighborhood.

But one day, and one day only, it rained.

Lady appears.

LADY

And the cool water hit my skin.
And I took off all my clothes.
And I took a deep breath.
And a breeze rolled in.
And a wave the size of this whole city
Crash landed to flood the streets of our neighborhood.

It swept me away and I began to tumble under water.

ANGELA

I felt freedom.
Freedom from the heat.
But that freedom slowly turned into terror.
Because I remembered I did not know how to swim.

ANGELA (cont...)

Because you did not teach me.
Because you, also, did not know how.

Kenny appears.

KENNY

And suddenly, I felt your huge hands grab my torso and pull me into the open air.
And you carried me home in your arms.
And you put me in bed.
And, as you left, you stopped in the doorway.
And you asked “Do you love me?”

JAHAAN

And I did not respond.

*The sun breaks through a cloudy sky.
A new day.*

END OF PLAY