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“TO BE QUEER, BLACK, & WOMXN: SELF-DEFINITION OF QUEER BLACK
GIRLHOOD & WOMXNHOOD IN FILM & TV”

by

BRITTANY T. WILLIAMS

Under the Direction of Tiffany King, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Art

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2021

ABSTRACT

This research explores the invisibility and marginalization of Queer Black women and girls in films and television and how these inaccurate depictions and stereotypes in media contribute to the real-world disenfranchisement and abuse of Queer Black women and girls in the United States. I highlight movies and tv episodes with Queer Black female characters and analyze how their character arcs and how their character is utilized to aid the plot within the film or series. I cite literature that examines homophobia, racism, and sexism, socially and institutionally in the US and highlight the research represented within these selected studies and concluded with my own screenplay. My argument is that having more Queer Black women in leadership roles behind the scenes of these productions will aid in more nuanced and equitable representation of Queer Black women on-screen and potentially humanize the way Queer Black girls and women are treated in society.

INDEX WORDS: Stereotypes, Media representation, LGBT+ film, LGBT+ television, Black films, African-American television, Coming of age, Screenplay, Short film, Black girlhood, Black womanhood, Twenties, Afro-Caribbean, Jamaican, Womxn, Masculine centered, Stud, Femme, Trans women, Transfeminine, Queer visibility, LGBT+ marginalization, Queer Black girls, Black lesbians

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2021

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May 2021

DEDICATION

To the soft brown girls,

The scared brown girls.

The sweet brown girls,

The shy, the simple, the sacred.

I see you, hear you, and love you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With deepest, heartfelt gratitude, I give thanks to each of my committee members who saw me and watered my scholarship and my artistry with honesty and encouragement, Dr. Tiffany King, Dr. Chamara Kwakye, and Dr. Jade Petermon Likewise, I give thanks to every teacher who advocated for and supported me throughout my academic journey. Thank you for being another inspiration for me to produce these sacred spaces within myself and in my classrooms with my future students.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Art, Activism, And the Archives: Writing from The Margins

My personal and cultural relationship to art runs deep into the fibers of my being. I am an artist. I identify as an artist. My medium is writing. I write to be free. That is my path to liberation. Art is liberation for me. It is the time capsule of my culture. It is the place in which I seek my archives. I look for the writing of the womxn that came before me to see how they lived, how they survived. I seek guidance in those archives. A pre-paved map to freedom. A suggestion. A quote that keeps me going. I look for a mirror in their art to see myself reflected back to me as confirmation that “Yes, I do exist. In fact, I have existed before. I do not stand alone. I stand among many.”

Art helps me feel less alone in the world. Like my words have meaning – and they do. Activism, for me, is not only inherent to who I am, but a necessity to my survival. I cannot exist, or at least not for very long, without actively fighting for my humanity. But I know activism is not all about “fighting” or “war”. Activism can also be done through the “living”. My existence is resistance. Me just speaking a simple truth can be revolutionary. Activism does not always look like marching, protesting, boycotting, in the ways I have been mostly taught in school. Activism can also be found in the mentorship, the classroom, the church, the kitchen, the bedroom, the friendship, the kinship. Demanding my right and marginalized communities’ rights to self-care is one part of my activism.

I am learning to fight softness with softness. Defending the softness within me and others while sustaining and nurturing it. I love myself into being – and that is my activism, that is what my art encourages. Loving ourselves into being. Especially the most marginalized. In my art – through my writings, I want to examine “the intimate”. The intimate relationships we

have with our own bodies, our minds, our pasts, our souls. The intimacy we seek within others, to connect, to bond, to be validated, to be comforted, to be seen, to be heard, to be valued and cared for. I am most curious about how Black Queer womxn explore the intimate within themselves, in their daily moments. From the way we connect to our own bodies when showering or bathing. To even something as seemingly simple as lotioning our flesh.

I loved the art shown during an interview with Stacey-Ann Chin and Zaneli Muholi in "States of Visual Activism" made in 2015. The bodies in Black and white, the forms and shapes the bodies contoured themselves into, the expressions on each face. Muholi took something as seemingly mundane as the Black form and emphasized the beauty in the simplicity, yet complexity of being Black and Queer and womxn. In all the fighting, we must or are expected to do, we, as Black womxn, can forget the beauty in what seems like such a war zone of living. How do we maintain our inherent softness? How do we protect it? How do we nurture it within ourselves and others? How do we raise children to honor the softness within themselves?

Those are the archival questions that interest me. How have Black female writers written about their own existence, their joy, their pleasure, their healing? Activism has confirmed an inherent truth that I started to doubt as a child – that I mattered. That those pockets of freedom I find and save within this restrictive cage others try to force me to stay in, those moments of agency are mine to safeguard. Activism has shaped me from being a victim to a survivor. Art has shaped me from being the bystander to the author of my own story. The archives have taught me I have existed before, that it is possible to live and live well, if I seek diligently enough.

1.2 Research Questions

For my thesis, I wrote a coming-of-age short film script about a masculine-presenting Queer Black 23-year-old girl. She is an aspiring writer who is in graduate school and lives in Atlanta with her Afro-Caribbean family. My film depicts how she battles homophobia, sexism, and cultural & academic expectations as a young adult while trying to actualize her own desires for independence & self-expression. My thesis examines how the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, sexuality, age, class, location, and education are pivotal themes that shape how Queer Black girls navigate self-determination in TV & film narratives.

My research focuses on the invisibility and marginalization of Queer Black womxn and girls in films and television. My research also explores how inaccurate depictions and stereotypes in media contribute to the real-world disenfranchisement and abuse of Queer Black women and girls. This issue is important because, as a Queer Black girl in America, I have seen and experienced how the systematic erasure and caricatures of Black Queerness harms the self-esteem of LGBT+ youth in the Black community, especially girls. These images are weaponized to justify the prejudice Black Queer girls and womxn face daily. Questions that have inspired my thesis are: 1) how are Queer Black womxn and girls marginalized and invisible within film and television and 2) what solution(s) do I recommend to fix the disenfranchisement of Queer Black women and girls, their poor character developments and storylines?

1.3 Literature Review

My use of the term “womxn” within my thesis is used purposefully as a form of advocacy and inclusivity for the experiences of trans and non-binary femmes along with cis-women. To explore my first question, I examine Queer Black female character development and analyze how their characters are utilized to aid the film or tv series plot. I reference Thomas Cruz’s “The Stigmatization of Queer Black Women in Television”, Mark Reid’s *Black Lenses, Black Voices: African American Film Now*, and Monica White Ndounou’s *Shaping the Future of African American Film: Color-Coded Economics and the Story Behind the Numbers*. To examine my second question, I analyze the intersection between homophobia, racism, and sexism. To do this, I highlight the research represented within Jennifer DeClue’s “Lesbian Cop, Queer Killer: Leveraging Black Queer Women’s Sexuality on HBO’s *The Wire*”, Susan Dente Ross’ and Martin Lester Paul’s *Images That Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media*, and Jim Elledge’s *Queers in American Popular Culture*. To consider my last question, I will examine motion picture works created by Queer Black female writers, directors, and producers who have cultivated their own experiences within their works. Yvonne Welbon’s and Alexandra Juhasz’s *Sisters in the Life: A History of Out African American Lesbian Media-Making*, Nancy Kang’s “Audre’s Daughter: Black Lesbian Steganography in Dee Rees’ *Pariah* and Audre Lorde’s *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*”, and Z’etoile Imma’s “(Re)Visualizing Black Lesbian Lives, (Trans)Masculinity, and Township Space in the Documentary Work of Zanele Muholi”, Campbell Ex’s *Stud Life*, and Cheryl Dunye’s *The Watermelon Woman*.

Reid argues scholars have avoided writing about representations of race in American film & ignore the theoretical importance of womanist approaches to studying gender & sexuality in African American & Black- oriented films. Within his research, he defines African

American film as any film whose central narrative explores the life and experience of the African Diaspora in the US. He also defines the phrase African American film as films directed and/ or (co)written by African Americans. Reid then defines Black-oriented film as films focused on Blackness but directed and written by both Black and non-Black filmmakers. He addresses race & Black as sociological rather than biological categories. His use of a qualitative method uses a womanist post-Negritude approach to analysis by offering a selective survey of many trends in modern Black films. Reid coined the term postNegritude as a concept for understanding how race & Blackness are shaped by the representations of race through varying sociohistorical periods. This concept uses a womanist theory: "committed to the survival & wholeness of entire people, male & female..."(1). In contrast, Imma defines "Black" in recognition of the contemporary South African artists, activists, and researchers who deploy the term self-consciously and politically to signify the populations once categorized as Bantu, Indian, and Coloured by the apartheid state, but, purposefully, capitalizes "Black" as an amendment to "Black" as it was defined in the political discourses of Black consciousness" (220).

Cruz, DeClue, Ross, Paul, Welbon, and Juhasz all agree that the Black womxn, and especially Queer Black womxn, face a more intensified form of invisibility and marginalization due to the disenfranchisement they experience as being both Black and LGBT+ and womxn. Each scholar employs qualitative methods to assist their film, tv, and media analysis. Equally, the authors recognize how harmful on-screen stereotypes reinforce the dehumanization of Queer Black girls and womxn in the real-world. In their anthology, Welbon and Juhasz use a qualitative method to analyze various Black Lesbian filmmakers & their respective films. They argue that African American films often centralize Black men's narratives when exploring

Blackness, whereas feminist cinema frequently concentrates on White women's journeys to agency when narrating womxnhood, and films about the LGBT+ community are mostly focused on White gay men when depicting Queerness. Thus, Black Lesbians – alongside Black transwoman and transmen - are the most forgotten in media and film due to the intersections of marginalized identities they hold racially, sexually, & regarding their gender. Similarly, Cruz uses a qualitative method for his tv series and character analysis to argue "Television, films, and any other types of media that depict Queer Black women need to acknowledge the numerous mistakes that have been made in the past and avoid further contribution to the intersectionality of oppression faced by Queer Black women" (35). Likewise, DeClue uses her qualitative tv series analysis to argue "In order to appreciate the 'theater of desires' at work in representations of Black Queer sexuality, Blackness must be represented without being representative of a totalizing Blackness and without producing knowledge through visceral encounters with sexy, captivating, Black Queer women characters" (60). Her article poses the following questions, "how does *The Wire* illustrate the sexualities of its only two Queer Black characters, how do the stereotypes they embody add to the marginalization of Queer Black women – the cop and the criminal? In similar fashion, Ross and Paul argue "that detrimental racial, ethnic, and gender-based prejudices & stereotypes in the media are numerous, pervasive, & negatively affect the entire American population not just a minority of citizens.". This is the model of my methodology.

Although still relating to Black and LGBT+ film and tv representation respectively, Ndounou and Elledge, had slight differences in their methods and thesis arguments. Elledge utilized a qualitative method for his anthology and he argues that the Queer community in pop culture is remarkably vast, varied, flexible, & timeless. The purpose of his research is to

comprehensively highlight the LGBT+ community within USA pop culture and investigate its representation from the late 1880s onwards (ix, xi). In his research, he notes that he focuses specifically on tv & film because he believes it is the most accessible of all pop culture venues & are the most popular medium. Contrastingly, Ndounou chose a quantitative method and collected nearly 2,000 films featuring Black actors since the 1980s to analyze critical sites of knowledge & empowerment at the intersection of race, culture & economics. She cited and analyzed box office receipts of mostly Black-casted films & Black-themed cinema. She argues that race-based economic principles guide investment decisions & distribution deals in the film industry. With her research, Ndounou's objective is to reevaluate the meaning of success and identify potential sites of cultural & economic empowerment for Black films. Her analysis builds on the work of scholars such as: Jesse Algeron Rhines, Jacqueline Bobo, Mark A. Reid, S. Craig Watkins, Sheril D. Antonio, & Ed Guerrero (4-5).

Kang and Imma both utilized qualitative methods for their respective film analyses. However, Kang paired her own film analysis of Dee Rees' *Pariah* alongside Imma's literary analysis of Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. On the other hand, Imma coupled her analysis of a documentary with an in-depth examination of photography to examine female and trans masculinity and township space as represented in the work of South African Lesbian visual artist and activist Zanele Muholi (219). Kang argues that African-American director Dee Rees' critically acclaimed debut *Pariah* (2011) is a rewriting of Lesbian poet-activist Audre Lorde's iconic "bio-mythography" *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982)" (1). Imma argues that Muholi's documentary texts trouble the spatial, gendered, & highly racialized articulations that make up an increasingly global corrective rape discourse by

discussing the politics of representing Queer and transgender subjectivities in Muholi's recent documentary film and photography

1.4 Methodology

My creative methodology and intervention will be the creation of a script for a Queer Black film. The plot follows a 24-year-old masculine-centered Queer girl who is currently a graduate student and retail worker living with her homophobic and transphobic family. Throughout the film, we observe her journey through self-exploration with the support of her best friend and witness her metamorphosis into a self-solidified Queer Black young-adult entering her mid-twenties.

Following the methods of shot-by-shot analysis, I will attempt to address the often-problematic portrayal of the Queer Black femme lover. Part of my challenge as a screen writer is trying to avoid reproducing the masculine-of-center protagonist's best friend, who identifies as a Queer Black femme, as the same one-dimensional trope of a bisexual and/or pansexual "girl next door" who saves my story's lead from their traumas as shown in Alike's relationship to her crush Bina in *Pariah* and Ziki's relationship to her crush Kena in *Rafiki*. I want to create this bisexual/ pansexual character to be equally or almost equally as complex as my protagonist. As the screenwriter, this supporting character acts not as the solution to the protagonist's internal battles, but as the support that many Black LGBT+ need and thus cultivate within their friendships. She is my lead character's first member of their chosen family.

Challenges I have been contending with are: "Oh shit, the scene or cinematography for a scene I have a vision for has already existed in another film." While studying several coming-of-age story lines in films & tv series by Black Lesbians & Queer womxn filmmakers, I noticed

that some actions and experiences I have planned for my characters have been shown before in other projects. So, in some ways, I have worried about adding to repetitive storylines given to Black womxn and girls searching for themselves in these narratives. Essentially, while developing the creative element of my thesis, I have ruminated on whether the scenes and character development I am including within my film just a collage of other Black Lesbian films that have inspired me.

During my rumination, I concluded that this pattern of seeing certain scenes and or experiences replicated is a key point to the themes that repeat frequently for fellow Queer Black girls and womxn across ages, geographies, generations, ethnicities, etc. While constructing my screenplay, I am also exploring this important thematic question: why are these popular scenes so important to various Black Lesbian filmmakers? In essence, each Black Lesbian screenwriter highlights their own interpretations of how to navigate the oppressive intersections of homophobia, sexism, racism, and classism. As explained to me, these scenes whether it be of romantic intimacy or familial rejection, its patterned repetitions with nuanced differences.

And that is where my film comes in. To add more nuanced layers to the archives of Black lesbian coming-of-age narratives written by and for Black Queer girls and womxn who have yet to see their intersections represented. What sets my film apart and how it fills the gaps missing in Black Lesbian coming-of-age films is my character's ethnicity as an Afro-Jamaican born in the US, her geographical location and familial proximity by living in Atlanta with her working-class mother and older sister, and her age and education level as a 23-year-old first-generation graduate student. As a graduate student, I was inspired to include twenty something (generation X). I also wanted to shift geographies from the west coast or northeast.

Other thematic and cinematic elements that interest me are how Black Queer girls and womxn explore and experience physical touch and intimacy. I have noticed in the films and tv series I observed thus far the differences between the loving touch the protagonists experience from loved ones such as hugs from friends and romantic interests when they need to be consoled versus various acts of physical violence from family members or strangers in their community. An example of this dichotomy can be found in Dee Rees' *Pariah*, where Alike is comforted and platonically cuddled by her masculine-of-center best friend after freshly experiencing a traumatic act of physical and verbal violence at the hands of her homophobic mother when she finally confirms that she is attracted to girls.

Likewise, this dichotomy is also expanded in *Pariah* when comparing the way, her best friend and mother touched versus how she experienced romantic/ sexual physical touch while kissing and eventually engaging in her sexual activity with her crush for the first time. These particular categories of touch – gentle vs violent touch, platonic vs sexual vs familial touch- are also found within several other lesbian coming-of-age films, but through my thesis' short film screen play I would like to also explore how my protagonist explores her own means of personal pleasure and physical intimacy with her mind and body through masturbation and her fantasies of sexual and mental liberation. In my creative thesis, I would like to explore how my protagonist uses personal self-pleasure to compensate for the sexual repression she endures environmentally.

So, I plan on exploring Black masculine-of-center lesbians' erotic life and interior life to break up the narrative of the "touch me not" who only performs for their lover(s). I'm also interested in exploring how my masculine-of-center protagonist feels conflicted with how to feel comfortable engaging in physical touch without feeling like they perverted or predatory as

their mother and family friends have instilled in them that physical intimacy with same-sex individuals is sexually hedonistic. An example of this can be found in *Pariah* and Wanuri Kahiu's *Rafiki* and real-world experiences in churches where mother try to protect their daughters from the outed homosexual girl for fear that the lesbian or bisexual child will attempt to lure their "innocent straight" daughters. Thus, some lesbian and Queer Black girls fear being regarded as predators and avoid or feel uncomfortable with physical touch from their peers and crushes.

Within all the readings, they all share a common theme of the importance of visibility for the most vulnerable within race, gender, and sexual identity. Likewise, all the contributors for my sources also share a common theme of film analysis. For further specification, within Cruz's research, his themes include stigmatization, misrepresentation, stereotypes, & television. Ross and Paul's themes were racism, ethnic stereotypes, sexism, film & tv, advertising, the internet, media representation. Welbon and Juhasz's themes highlight Black lesbian invisibility, Queer cinema, media history, Black lesbian media makers. Reid's main themes within their research are contemporary Black films, nonBlack filmmakers, Black filmmakers, Black-oriented cinema, & brief history of Black films from 1912s-1970s. Elledge's themes focuses on USA pop culture, LGBT+ representation, film & tv, advertising, the internet. The main themes within Ndounou's research concentrated economic disparities for Black film & tv, cultural bias, financial investments in Black art, racism in film & tv industry. Kang emphasized themes which include LGBT+ youth, coming of age, African American film, and Black Lesbians. Imma explored the themes of female masculinity, Queer visibility, township space, hate crime, South Africa. DeClue thematically explores the concepts of representation, archetypes, and polarity

2 FILLING IN THE GAPS: ADDING TO THE ARCHIVES

Before I can speak to what I would like to give back to the archives of Queer Black feminist films, I first would like to give a personal anecdote of what I have received from the lineage of Queer Black femme storytellers who have proceeded me. As an aspiring Black feminist scholar and novice screenwriter, these coming-of-age narratives validated my existence, my intersections, and my reality as young girl. It has reminded me of my birth rights: freedom to self-expression, the need for self-preservation, and the right to honoring my boundaries. Black feminist films has reminded me of the importance of filling my own cup first. That I am worthy of my own love. That I am simply worthy just for existing. I do not have to prove anything.

The way I interpret my Blackness, girlhood, and womanhood are simply enough. I am worth celebrating. There is enough room for me at our table. It has reminded me that the most valuable social opinion about my work is most meaningful when it comes from my fellow Black female peers and/ or Black women and girls. Queer Black coming-of-age films has given me agency. Agency over my body, how I choose to adorn her, how I choose to move through her, and my method of how to nurture her. Black feminist narratives have always taught me strength, whether voluntary or out of survival. What I would like to add to these archives is the reminder and emphasis for self-preservation, self-healing, self-love, honoring our softness, our vulnerabilities, and our need for assistance.

We are not supernaturally strong. I believe, often, we are strong because we do not believe we can depend on anyone else. Like if we do not put the world on our shoulders, the world will go into chaos and it would be our fault. I say, “Forget that!” I do not owe anyone or anything my mental, physical, emotional, nor spiritual health. I cannot save the world if I cannot save myself. We have always been expected to suffer the emotional labor of advocating for not only

our lives, but the lives of our peers, where that be through Black and Brown liberation movements and Women's, Disability, and LGBT+ rights, etc.

Within this long-stretching conversation with Queer Black filmmaking, I want to emphasize that we have the right to heal ourselves while also trying to heal our communities. What example then would we be teaching our youth of how to treat themselves in a world that teach them they do not matter? If we do not care for ourselves how can we be whole and healthy role models? Far too often we see Black women/ Black people with female leaning bodies in many ways dying on the inside. We have constantly been robbed of humanity that we no longer recognize it to maintain it, we do not even realize we are not living in our full humanity, our power, or healing. We need ourselves and each other.

My argument within my thesis is that having more Queer Black women in leadership roles behind the scenes of these productions will aid in more nuanced and equitable representation of Queer Black women on-screen and potentially humanize the way Queer Black girls and women are treated in society. My primary method of research will be to write a screenplay that will be informed by Wanuri Kahiu's *Rafiki* and Dee Ree's *Pariah*. Inspired by interviews with Queer Black female storytellers, my screenplay will address the following questions and gaps: how to depict black Queer women and girls as more than plot devices within narratives centered on Black men (Declue), how do films by lesbians inform me and other filmmakers' work, (Kang), who is a part of the canon of Queer Black female writers and where do they lead me and where do I depart from this tradition?

3 LESSONS & LENSES: THE CONFLICTS & QUERIES OF A NOVICE SCREENWRITER

3.1 Showing, Not Telling: The Significance of Non-Verbal Communication Between Black Queer Womxn on & Off-Screen

One of the principal apprehensions I stumbled upon while crafting and cultivating this draft of my short film screenplay were these subsequent inquiries. Am I writing too much? Am I taking my short film script and turning it into a feature film inadvertently? Is this a story that deserves more of a feature film format and length requirement? How can I condense such a nuanced, multi-layered existence into 50 pages - if not, a bit less? Am I doing myself, my protagonist, and her story - inspired by the lived accounts of others - a disservice? Am I writing enough? Am I writing well enough? And how do I know when a story is done? These are the questions I asked myself as a novice screenwriter.

I tried to make a concentrated effort to create an action-led screenplay rather than one over-done with excessive dialogue and needless exposition. I realized the importance of leaving some dialogue open-ended to allow my audience to draw their own conclusion and be active participants along the journey of uncovering Andrea's inner world. As art imitates life, I found it most relevant and appropriate to have an action-led film because so much of the distinction, beauty, and generational communication of many marginalized communities such as Black femmes and Queer youth is to express one's self beyond the verbal. Our history and our future are in the body. The bodies we are denied adorning, the bodies that we are led to dissociate from, the fullness of our humanity collected and recorded in each cell of our beings. The body being nature's first canvas, it is through the body of my protagonist and the bodies of those

around them that I wanted to display these moments of intimacy, of fear, of transformation, and of freedom.

When constructing the dialogues within my script, I made a conscious effort to allow myself the freedom to transcribe the conversations I heard in my head to paper. As a novice screenwriter and young scholar, I did experience some internal battles about whether it would be “unprofessional” or “unscholarly” to utilize the colloquial spellings of various words and phrases within Jamaican patios and southern African-American Vernacular English. Essentially, I had to frequently apply my many years of anti-colonial study from theory to praxis on a personal and artistic level to color the linguistic rhythm and tone of my characters and their stories.

3.2 Is It Cliché’: Is Physical Violence Vital Within Queer Black Coming-of-Age Films?

As a young Queer Black femme of working-class status, it can be - and often is - exhausting witnessing violence on-screen. I would regularly think, “Why? Why does this have to be included? Why can’t we, too, have stories with happy endings? Why is it that when it comes to Black, Brown, and Indigenous Queer people that it always must include physical violence? Yes, others bring violence to us, that’s true. But I’m tired of being re-traumatized and having the same tale reinforced that I am not safe in my skin and that I will probably face physical, if not psychological, violence in my lifetime. I’m tired.” This is a real and reoccurrent thought I have had as a film lover and writer. While developing the script, I questioned why the climactic scene in the second act even popped in my head while cultivating the storyline and development of my protagonist. Could Drea have her story depicted without physical violence? Would it be just as real to not include it? My short answer is “Yes.” Although I grappled and wrestled with these realizations for a while after writing my first draft of *Sapphire’s Daughter*.

I have given myself the space to not feel like I must get it all right on during my first trial. As I grow as a person & artist, so does my perspective and the quality of my craft.

Because this is only the first draft of my screenplay, as I continue to revise & develop Drea's story, I intend on dialing back the climatic fight my protagonist experiences to instead highlight the many examples of violence she, like many other LGBT+ young adults, survive on a day-to-day basis. I have often found that filmmakers and tv writers outside of the Black LGBT+ community invalidate the micro & macro-aggressions we experience as not being "violent enough" to warrant a "serious enough" conflict, thus physical violence is depicted more readily. As a creative writer & researcher, I want to add to the canon of Queer Black female writers by departing from the blatant physical violence we are shown to make visible and validate the violence that occurs verbally, psychologically, emotionally, professionally, & spiritually.

3.3 The "Free, Flowy Femme": Femme Emotional Labor Within Queer Love & Coming-Of-Age Stories

Another query that frequently circled my mind while writing my script was, "Am I perpetuating a stereotype? Am I doing damage to the same community I'm trying to advocate for?" I speculated, "Is my story truly a story birthed from my own experiences and contemplations or is it just a collage of everything I've already seen?" While writing, I had thought and wondered if my portrayal of Jo, a Queer independent, caring, & expressive femme, was adding to the problem of this masc. and femme Queer relationship trope such as archetypal representations such as Jules in *Euphoria* or Ziki from *Rafiki*.

This trope that this zany, fun, & flirty femme will save, cheer up, & encourage a depressed, discouraged, and abused masculine-centered character into saving themselves.

Femmes are not here to save or heal people of masculine-center. We are all responsible for our own progress, our healing, our behaviors, and our emotions. Jo does not save Drea because Jo is not meant to and cannot save Drea. Drea must save, heal, and encourage herself. It is easy and dangerous for us as marginalized, hurt, and under-supported people to look to the love of a romantic interest to “save” us. That is dangerous, inaccurate, and far often too common in real life to the detriment of all parties involved. As the author, I tried to make purposeful precautions to avoid falling into this trap.

However, I also felt a bit of uncertainty while self-reflecting on why I thought to write my first screenplay about a masculine protagonist rather than a femme one. I still have some thoughts about this. I still am a little conflicted about centering a masculine-centered Queer person over a femme Queer person. Why center a masculine experience over a femme one like my own? Being a writer and scholar, it is always imperative I actively engage in normal honest self-reflection and self-critique. Joining the lineage of Queer Black filmmakers, I must also recognize and acknowledge how I am also a product of my society, and consumer of the same tv and films tropes and plotlines that I am critiquing and rebuking. In my writing process, I had to come face-to-face with my own replications and additions to some of these issues. Even I ran into an issue of trying to cultivate originality in certain plot points only to realize that I may have re-created or recycled a problematic plot device. And thus, ushers in another screenwriting lesson I learned: the issue and dangerous act of portraying trans women, especially Black trans women as “magical negroes” or helpers or guidance for depressed, uninspired cis people

3.4 Honoring Gigi: Honest Self-Reflection on the Proper Advocacy of Black Trans Femme Characters

While in the original creation of my short film, I intended Gigi to have a powerful, helpful, and inspiring talk with Drea about defining one's womanhood and Queerness for one's self. Oof. What a critical mistake I almost made. And how and why did I originally think that this would a be a good, and dare I say "empowering", way to include and portray a Black Trans woman? In all honesty, it was due to those same intersecting trope and myths of Queerness and Blackness that I had long consumed in most of my early years as a now 25-year-old. Trans women, but especially Black Trans women, have just now been getting their just-due as fully realized and humanized characters in tv series and short and feature films. Shows like Janet Mock's *Pose* premiered only but so few years ago and thus there has been so many more negative and detrimental portrayals than there have been nuanced and carefully curated lived narratives from their points of view.

Black Trans women are not monoliths nor here to assist cis people with anything. Their lives deserve more than a cliché one-scene mention and that is a huge lesson and understanding that I had in realizing I almost harmed a part of the community that I love and strive to meaningfully advocate for. I will continue to listen and learn from the oral histories and interviews of my Trans siblings to always make sure I am truly advocating for them in the ways they truly need. As I have argued within this thesis, I believe Black Trans filmmakers should always be put at the forefront in the film and tv industry to write their own lives to picture. My queer identity is not a pass to write on behalf of everyone and I, too, have so much more to learn.

Being a Queer non-binary femme who was raised cis and is often perceived as cis, I take full responsibility for how the privileges of my intersections can be detrimental to my sisters and thus I erased and revised my original scene for that conversation about self-definition and empowerment to occur between Jo and Drea instead. Even including and calling out the ways Drea has also unhealthily emotionally looked to Jo in their friendship. Thus, the full humanity of who Jo has always been is exposed and removes the romanticized bubble Drea placed on Jo as just a seemingly persistent happy-go-lucky Queer femme. Jo is a real person, with real issues who also needs real help too. She's just found that help within herself, as Drea must do and does. Femmes, whether Trans or Cis, are not here to soothe nor solve the emotional dilemmas of masc. people whether men or non-men.

4 CONCLUSION

My short film screenplay chronicles a young Black girl, Andrea aka Drea, who is frequently dismissed as an angry Black girl for simply speaking her mind and not conforming to societal and family expectations. My screenplay's purpose is to dispel the caricature of the "angry Black woman"- Sapphire, that many hurt & pained Black Queer non-men are dismissed as when being beaten and hardened by abuse and marginalization. It is a challenge every day to maintain our softness for ourselves. To re-humanize ourselves for ourselves in the face of constant adversity. I wanted to humanize the caricature of Sapphire as a cinematic and societal trope. I want to show her true humanity, that 1) she feels more than just "angry", she is scared, insecure at times, joyful, anxious, loving, etc. and 2) even when she is angry, her anger is valid.

This narrative about coming-of-age shines a light on this inaccurate depiction of Black girls' pain. We are frequently dismissed as "angry" when we stand up for ourselves, yet when other races do it is seen as "sexy", "brave", "empowering" or "understandable." Likewise, this

story depicts the intersectional experience of being “Black” and “girl” and “Queer”. As well as being gender non-conforming and conscious and vocal. This film also discusses Black women’s true sexuality and society’s jezebel vision of them. The storyline revolves around how Drea battles her own self-definition of her Blackness, Queerness, and transitioning from girlhood to womxnhood against her family and society’s expectations of who she should be and how she should live.

As to be expected, or even at times assumed, parts of Drea’s experiences, thoughts, and feelings extend from my own. Her hopelessness, helplessness, feelings of despair, and frustration toward life’s injustices have all been a part of my life too. I think these cycles or waves of emotions are more common and understood the longer one is living and that is what inspired me to write this script from the perspective and mind of a Queer Afro-Jamaican girl in her mid-twenties. To add to this pre-existing, longstanding intergenerational conversation between Black women filmmakers and storytellers about the struggles and triumphs of adulting as a young adult, especially with the intersection of working-class status, living in the south, and navigating the, at times, treacherous waters of academia. Other than films like Cheryl Dune’s beautiful *The Watermelon Woman*, as a child born in the late 90s, it is so rare for me to see coming-of-age narratives whether on tv or film about the mental growth and emotional development of a young adult in their mid-twenties.

I purposefully refer to my mid-twenties protagonist as a girl because I think far too often society assumes that the internal conflicts and, seemingly impenetrable, roadblocks one experiences inside themselves as they learn through trial and error who they are, what do they really want out of their lives, and what will they not accept or tolerate ends at age 24. Absolutely not! Especially for those of us who are Queer, while our cis-het peers were able to

explore themselves more freely & publicly, some of us did not experience typical adolescent self-discovery until we could safely get away from our unsupportive, and possibly, dangerous homes. And it's due to this oversight and underestimation that *Sapphire's Daughter* was born.

My hope in telling this coming-of-age story is to fill in those gaps. The gaps for Queer people of color in their mid-twenties striving and struggling in the world of academia and the world of adulting. It's hard, it's tough, and it's a journey worth sharing and seeing. Our stories, our voices matter. We don't cease coming-of-age once we leave college or turn 24. It's a lifelong pilgrimage into coming into ourselves and re-discovering and re-defining our lives and our life's trajectory. The questions explored within Dee Ree's *Pariah*, *Rafiki*, and *Euphoria* regarding self-love, romantic exploration, self-autonomy, and personal safety are questions I also explore within my protagonist's personal development.

If art imitates life, then in my writing process, I had to humanize myself in order to humanize my film's characters. I had to take time away from my research and writing to check-in, nurture, and work on myself, so that when I did come back to this project I could return to it fully whole and fully realized, as much as I can be. This thesis and its development required trusted patience, radical honesty, and practiced perseverance. Although this will not be the final form of Drea's journey in script form, this beginning contribution to my journey and personal and professional archive as a writer and scholar is a meaningful, noteworthy marker along my pathway into self and scholastic mastery. I am excited for where the rest of my journey and lessons will take me. With that, I now introduce the first iteration of *Sapphire's Daughter*.
Enjoy.

Sapphire's Daughter (2021)

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. BEDROOM - SUNRISE

The glow of the morning's sun rays radiates and reflects off the cream-colored wall of the old south Atlanta apartment turning it into a canvas of deep warm honey. The white window blinds grow more amber as the morning glow peaks through in caramelized horizontal lines along the unmade, deep scarlet bed linens making the sun's presence more and more known to our protagonist, who is working at their aged Oakwood desk.

The room's slight illumination from its two windows across the bedroom adorns the resting place of a young Afro-centric and modern college student. Decorated across the walls are posters of both O.G. and newer artists ranging from iconic lyrists such as Queen Latifah, Solange Knowles, Sampa the Great to literary legends such as Ntozake Shange, Alice Walker, and Audre Lorde whom receive special veneration above our protagonist's desk. The melodic tones Solange's "Weary" plays softly from atop the tall Oakwood dresser near the front left corner of the room.

A few lush and moderately sized standing and hanging green plants spread throughout the bedroom give the sensation of relaxation and restfulness despite the room's and the protagonist's current state.

ANDREA "DREA" WALKER (mid-twenties), is sitting at her desk as her resting foot rhythmically jitters on the beige carpet floor. Her hand involuntarily trembles with her red ink pen in hand as she writes. She releases a quick sigh, wrinkles her brows, then tightens her grip on the pen to steady her hand. She proceeds to write hastily. At her desk stacked with books, an open packed binder, highlighters & pens scattered, & crumbled balls of paper, Drea finishes grading her last student's essay.

The glow of her desk's salt lamp visually softens the frown lines of Drea's furrowed brows, almost dimming the redness of her heavy bag laden almond eyes. The gleam of her partially opened laptop screen reflects off her glasses as Drea re-tucks away one of her long wavy dark locs from dangling in her face and impeding her writing back into her messy top knot.

She attentively reads and flips to the last page of the essay. She drinks the last remnants of her 2nd energy drink & absent-mindedly drops it next to her 1st empty drink in her garbage can. The can being beside her desk more than half way full of trash, empty caffeinated beverages, and

energy snack bars. Finishing her last pen stroke, she slams her pen down on her desk.

She checks the time on her phone. It is 7:30 a.m. Pausing to take in the image of her phone's wallpaper, the wallpaper reveals an early college photo of Drea's best friend in a semiformal spring dress and strappy chunky heels hugging the grad and a blowing a gum bubble to the camera playfully while Drea is dressed in her cap and gown, smiling as she looks at Jo. Drea smiles weakly then clicks off her phone screen & rests it atop her stack of graded student papers coated with sloppy red ink.

Drea massages her eyes and sighs deeply, resting her face in her hands for a brief moment. Only thirty minutes to leave.

DREA.

Fuck.

Drea then swipes the essay stack, her binder, laptop, writing utensils, and a few books off her desk and shoves it all into her bookbag. Moving briskly, she starts walking to her bathroom, snatching off a worn white sleep shirt of and tossing it into her nearby dirty hamper revealing her sports bra while walking out of frame. Camera shows her old basketball shorts being flung across the room from offscreen.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

In her shower tub, Drea stands stares blankly into space as the warm water from the chrome showerhead rains down on her bronze back. Her coffee-colored eyes searching, contemplating. Her sleep-deprived induced trance begins to melt as her lips begin to open and her eyes closing and tightening. She lets out a desperate gasp, and dry vocal outcry.

Trying to muffle the sounds of her sobs, she covers her mouth with her wet wash cloth as she leans her slumping body onto the plastic cream shower wall. She is here only but for a moment before she jolted back into the present moment Startling her, her phone alarm begins to blare alerting her. Her eyes open and head turns jolting her body off the shower wall, knocking over her Old Spice shower gel off the shower's soap shelf. She picks up the shower gel, placing it back on its shelf, then turns to face the shower head and begins rubbing and rinsing her face with the running water. Soon after, Drea pulls back her white

plastic shower curtains, grabbing her towel from the nearby towel rack, and quickly towels herself as she exits the bathroom

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Wearing a clean set of men's boxer-briefs and a new sports bra, she applies her cologne and Old Spice deodorant set. Drea opens her closet door and begins scanning her disorganized wardrobe consisting of dark and muted tones of comfy, casual streetwear. She puts on a black Hanes t-shirt with a left-breast pocket and dark grey joggers in front of her brown framed standing mirror. While adjusting her shirt, she hears the sounds of partially audible conversation coming from downstairs. She pauses shortly, surveying the voices. She frowns slightly, then turns her attention to her reflection.

Turning sideways, her eyes graze over her chest in her reflection. She hears an outburst of laughter from downstairs. The right corner of her mouth twists as her eyebrows draw close to each other while she slowly touches the slight hills of her breast poking through the cotton fabric, she shakes her head, groans, and hurriedly takes off her shirt, selecting another Hanes tee that is the white equivalent of her previous choice, but drapes looser on her moderately curvy frame.

She nods at her reflection, then releases and shakes out her messy bun as her lightly crimped locs cascade down to the top of her chest and upper back and places her black beanie on her head. She throws on her black bomber jacket, puts on her black G-Shock watch, & quickly grabs her backpack. Her hand automatically searches in her usual spot in the back of her backpack for her wireless earbuds. She doesn't feel them. Her eyes widen. And moves her hand around in the same pocket, looking this time. She doesn't see them. She turns off her blue tooth speakers and turns to scan her room.

DREA. Fuck.

She starts speedily sifting through her medium-sized bedroom for her ear buds case. She quickly and cautiously steps over a pile of new growing pile of dirty clothes on the floor to search toward her bed. Snatching the sheet, she briefly shakes out the crimson bedsheets, then tosses the pillows to the foot of the full-sized mahogany bedframe. She moves back to her cluttered desk searching through its two cluttered drawers. Slamming her desk drawers closed, she then looks down at her watch and sees it's 7:34 a.m. She clenches her eyes and groans, defeated, she closes and slings her backpack over shoulder as she closes her room door and goes downstairs.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

The crackle and sizzle of sliced plantain echoes from the kitchen stove as Drea descends the stairs. The savor scent of saltfish wafts more intensely as she nears the kitchen's doorway where she hears her mother and older sister banter telling her older sister to make sure to not slice the plantains too thin. Drea mouth begins to water from the smell of breakfast being finished cooking, but she swallows and keeps her head slightly lowered making a b-line to the counter, grabs a grocery bag, and begins selecting fruit to bring with her.

TRACY-ANN "Tracy" (mid-fifties) sits and rests at the kitchen table, still in her nursing scrubs as sips on her ginger tea in her coffee mug. Her hospital badge, lunch bag, pens, receipts, and house keys placed in a pile in front her plate of warm ackee and saltfish with a side of cooked callaloo. She hums a gospel hem and looks up from her cup as she sips when Drea enters. Her eyes follow Drea. Scanning her from behind.

Tracy's humming stops. Tracy makes a sound of audible indignation

ANGELA "Angie" (early-thirties), hearing her mother's vocalization whilst cooking at the hot stove, Angie looks over her right shoulder to her mother who glances back at her then looks back to Drea as Drea. Angie then looks over her left shoulder taking in her sister. Angie then shakes her head lightly returning to her task of finishing frying the plantains.

Angie is dressed in her usual cooperate office attire. She wears a light blue button down collared shirt and black peplum skirt and sheer black stockings. Her black leather 2.75 inch heels are resting at the side of the kitchen front door next to her mother's white nursing shoes.

Drea, feeling watched, sighs deeply, moving swiftly to the pantry. Quickly moving removing a couple nutri-grain bars from the box to throw in her grocery bag.

TRACY-ANN Hmph.

Drea ignores her mother.

TRACY-ANN (CONT'D) Go
wash di fruit.

Without turning to her mother, she responds.

DREA
Don't have time. I'll do it when I get to school.

TRACY-ANN
So, you a go eat dirty fruit? Go wash dem.

DREA

No. I'll do it at school.

TRACY-ANN Angela.

Angie sighs, finished with frying the plantains, turns off the stove, and turns to face Drea, who does not look back at her.

ANGIE

Drea

DREA

Angie, I'm running late.

ANGIE

Okay, then let me wash them for you.

DREA I

need to go.

ANGIE Drea.

Drea lets out a groan, looks up from the pantry to her sister briefly, then hurriedly hands her grocery bag to her sister who takes it from Drea, crossing to the sink to begin washing her fruit. Drea simultaneously moves to the front door of the apartment in the kitchen to pick up her old-skool vans lowtop vans. She pulls up a seat at the kitchen table, putting on her sneakers. Tracy still watching Drea, begins picking at and eating her breakfast. Drea does not look at her.

TRACY-ANN

Hmph. An' den if somebody say somethin to 'er she get mad. Hmph.

DREA

Mummy please. I'm running late.

TRACY-ANN

Don't "mommy please" me. Angie, cyan you talk some sense into 'er?

(MORE)

TRACY-ANN (CONT'D) Because

apparently yuh sista likes fi be 'arassed.

Finished rinsing, drying, and placing Drea's cleaned apples and oranges into a brown bag inside her grocery bag, she turns from the counter crossing to the kitchen table to set Drea's lunch bag in front of her. Angie takes her seat at the kitchen at the opposite end of the table. She looks over to Drea.

ANGIE

Drea-

DREA

Angie, just stop.

TRACY-ANN

Don't be rude to yuh sista. She just wash yuh fruit fi yuh. Ah wah do yuh?

Tracy suck her teeth and begins agitatedly eating her breakfast. She takes a bite of her food and frowns.

Angie sighs and stand up again, reaching for her mother's plate.

ANGIE

I'll put in the microwave.

Angie place her and her mother's breakfast plate in the microwave and stands waiting beside the machine. She looks over to Drea who is now standing and struggling trying to fit her lunch bag in her full bookbag. Drea takes some of her books out and leaves on the table to make room.

ANGIE (CONT'D) Andrea, mummy is just trying to help you. She's just worried. And so am I. We don't want anybody to bother you. You get mad when some guys say somethin to you, but you keep dressing like that. Why don't you wear one of my pants. I know your running a bit late, but it's not too late for me to-

Drea let's out an agitated sigh and shakes her head with a furrowed as she puts her arms through her backpack handles.

DREA

I'm good. Angela. Thanks.

Tracy scoffs and shakes her head.

TRACY-ANN

Let 'er go. When sometin 'appen to 'er, mi nah wah fi 'er 'bout it. Oh.

Tracy, with a furrowed brow, rests her chin on her hand and looks away from Drea. Drea looks at her mom, looks at her sister who carries the two heated plates to the table, shakes her head, and takes a deep breath as she exits the through the kitchen's front door.

INT. MARTA TRAIN - MORNING

Drea, sitting on a Marta train bench alone, is leaning her head on the the train window with closed eyes. The movement of the train rocks her gently. She is still, softened, resting. Breathing slowly. Her eyes opens slowly. She glance out the window, watching the world go by. She tilts her. Looks down, thinking. Then, gently reaches in her bag and pulls our a spiral notebook.

She digs a little deeper and in her other backpack pocket and pulls out a mechanical pencil. Re-zips her bag, she pulls one leg up on her bench seat to press her notebook on he thigh. She opens and flips past several pages covered in her pencil and pen writings. She finds the next new empty page. She let out a satisfied breath. She gently lifts her pencil, she writes:

"If a black girl screams in a room full of people who don't care, does she make a sound?"

She pauses, taking in the sentence she just wrote. Looking up, she ponders, and returns back to her page. She continues:

Where did our girls in Nigeria go, and why haven't the rest been found?

Why are we the most stereotyped, the most appropriated?

Why are we the most fetishized, but the most degraded?"

She is about to begin another line when she hears the train conductor over the intercom say her is coming up next. She swiftly close and place her notebook and pencil back into her bag. Sliding out from her bench seat, she stands and holds on to the pole as the train comes to a slow halt. Doors open. She exits.

EXT. MARTA FIVE POINTS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Drea walks with purpose to the nearby Marta train station. While walking, she pulls out her phone and clicks the home button. It's 8:35am

DREA SHIT.

Drea picks up her walking speed ascending up the stairs as fast as she can go without running and drawing unwanted attention.

Drea clicks off her phone screen and prepares to place her phone back in her pocket, but it vibrates. Her eyebrows furrow and raise. It's best friend, Jo. Her eyebrows soften and lower. She unlocks her phone to view Jo's text. Clicking on the message notification, we see Jo telling Drea that she has Drea's earbuds,

that Drea accidentally left them at work, and that she will bring them with her to their job and give them to her during their shift. Jo ends saying she's heading back to bed and wishes Drea a good day. Drea smiles. She begins typing a message to thank her friend.

EXT. ATLANTA SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

While looking down, Drea passes by a group of four Black men (late-thirties) wearing as they sit and stand around at an empty office building entrance. The men are chatting and laughing as they make passing comments to a few female passersby. One notices Drea walking up. He smirks and nudges one of his friends. He chuckles with them.

BLACK MAN #1

Aye, aye. Yo, herego da faggot-ass dyke-bitch.
Aye, where you goin' sweetheart?!

Drea ignores them. She picks up her pace.

BLACK MAN #2

Nah, bruh. Now, you know that ain't no regular female. Dat's a whole nigga right there. Shit, I bet she on her way to some pussy right now.

They begin to follow Drea.

BLACK MAN #3

Well, shiiit, lemme come too then. I bet her bitch ain't never had a real nigga before. Get some real dick in her life.

Hearing their fast approaching footsteps, she prepares to run, but is halted. Black man #4 reaches out yanks her forearm with firm and tight hold.

BLACK MAN #4 Aye, bitch, you sure you like pussy? You know, dyke-bitched just bitches who ain't never been fucked right.

He steps into her closer. Leaning into her ear as she recoils.
I could dick you back to straight if you let me.

Digging her nails into the man, he releases in grips and holds his pained hand. Attempting to run, she backsaway but is cornered Black man #4. All four men block her on all sides.

BLACK MAN #1 Hell yeah,
one good fuck'll set that ass
straight.

He reaches and palms her breasts.

Desperate and disgusted, Drea screams, throwing her hands and arms in fury. Slapping him, punching another in the chest. And elbow and kicking the others. The men are startled by Drea violence at first then prepare to grab her again, but notice a patrolling Marta police car coming down the road toward them. They hold themselves back.

Using this as her chance to escape, Drea runs away around the corner headed straight to her classroom's building up the block. As she runs Black man #1, looks at the approaching police car then back as Drea as she runs. Rubbing his reddened cheek and laughs smugly. He calls after her.

CORNER BOY #1
My bad, ma! Just had to make sure.

He and his friends laugh to themselves. As they try their best to seem inconspicuous to the passing officers.

INT. UNIVERSITY BUILDING - DAY

Sitting at the front left table in the full classroom, Drea face grimaces while reluctantly listening to DR. CLIFF ROGERS (mid to late fifties). He casually leans on his desk during his lecture with one hand in his beige business pants pocket as use the other to point and call on his prominently male class.

Slouched in her chair, watching Cliff with her hand in her bomber pockets, her legs stretched out in front of her. On foot restlessly bouncing.

Drea scans the room. An all Black undergraduate course with only a little more than a handful of Black girls. Drea winces and shakes her head. In an attempt to pass the time, she pulls out her notebook of poetry. While doing so, something from Dr. Rogers lecture makes look up with a face indignation.

DR. ROGERS
-the greatest political thinkers said
'race first. gender second'.

Most male students nod and respond in agreement.

Drea with raised eyebrows looks about the room, attempting to make eye contact with any of the fellow female students. None

respond. Drea shakes her head lightly and raises her hand to add if she may.

DR. ROGERS (CONT'D) Yes
Drea?

DREA
If I could also add, um-
Drea sits up taller in her seat.

DREA (CONT'D)
Interestingly, the concept of 'race over gender' is actually an excellent example of an important aspect highlighting how many of the Black male civil rights leaders you've mentioned actually had major gaps in their collective strategies toward Black liberation, which was their own acknowledgment of their contributions to male privilege. For example, Ella Baker and Fannie Lou Hamer said-

Dr. Rogers glances over to his male students and chuckles, interrupting and throwing off Drea.

DREA (CONT'D)
I-

DR. ROGERS Sorry Drea.
I didn't mean to interrupt.
(MORE)

DR. ROGERS (CONT'D) It's just that the argument you are trying to bring up is the exact argument many White feminists have used regarding their men and then 'Black feminists' take up White women's issue and make it their issue, which actually has shown to have undermined the Black unity and comradery among Black men and women. This distrust and divisiveness started from those who call themselves "Black feminist", "womanist", whatever is actually part of the reason it's still so hard to get our Black community organized now.

His male students express nods and vocalizations of agreement, while Rogers continues.

DR. ROGERS (CONT'D) To be frank, feminism, in essence, is a concept started by White women for White women and, ironically, Black feminism has been quite counterproductive in the fight for Black liberation.-

DREA

Black feminists and womanists didn't create misogynoir, they just contextualized and brought to Black men's attention for correction and reconciliation, which has yet to properly come. Intersectionality is not optional-

DR. ROGERS

Nobody ever said that it was. Look, Drea, I completely agree that all those other issues like gender discrimination and what not are important matters to tackle, but it has been proven historically to now that splitting up our attention as a Black community to issues that just simply are not as pertinent and pressing has come to the detriment of our collective liberation. All I'm saying is, once we conquer racism as a collective, then we can tackle things like sexism, homophobia, ableism, and so on.

MALE STUDENT #1

Nah, that's real. Drea, we gotta be unified. We gotta have the same end goal. If you coming in as a feminist first, if you fightin' for gay rights first, then that means we gone be divided. I mean, look how the gay community has surpassed in getting more support and sympathy for their gay issues. Folks are quicker to cancel somebody over some gay shit, but get real quite when it's a Black boy getting shot by police. Look at how they did Kevin Hart.

MALE STUDENT #2 Exactly! And what these feminists and lesbians always forget is that the inherent imbalance of feminine leadership

through Black matriarchy is truly a big contributing factor to the downfall of the Black community and true Black masculinity among men. Not shade. It's just facts, Dre. Think about it, single Black mothers cannot properly raise a boy into a man and every girl needs a mother to shape her into a woman and every boy needs a father or male presence to nurture him into being a real man. These gay relationships among women cannot adequately raise Black boys and that's just facts.

Rogers and most of the male students nod while the few female students look around and some shift in discomfort. Drea sits up straight in her seat and turns her full body to the class.

DREA

Okay. With all due respect, y'all sound ridiculous and as much as it is really disappointing coming from y'all as a Black man it's also not surprising. The deflection and invalidation that Black men do to gas light and insult Black feminists and womanists are the same recycled oppressive tactics that White men do to y'all, but y'all magically don't see that.

(MORE)

DREA (CONT'D) And Kevin's nasty, homophobic comments about his son is the exact reason why queer Black feminists and womanists are so head-strong about intersectionality and strongly oppose this "race first" strategy because it always come at the expense and livelihood of those most victimized by cis-het Black men. Matter fact,-

Dr. Rogers checks his watch.

DR. ROGERS

Uh, actually, Drea, I gotta cut you off. We're actually outta time and I can't hold up the rest of the class. Alright, class is dismissed, but make sure you upload your reading responses to this week's assignments folders by midnight

tonight. Drea should have those graded with your feedback by this Sunday.

He glances over at Drea.

Irritated and defeated, Drea starts packing up her backpack along with the rest of her students.

As she prepares to leave, she over hears a few of the male students chatting and laughing with Dr. Rogers

Disappointed, she swing her bag over her should and walks across to the back right corner While Drea looks to the few young Black girl in the classroom in hopes that they would speak to her or show some form of solidarity before she leave. To her dismay, they simply pack up quietly and leave the room.

INT. ATLANTA OUTLET MALL - AFTERNOON

Drea, now wearing her name badge, is standing in front of a clothing table, picking up clothes from her clothing cart, folding them and stacking them. Beside her stands Joanne "Jo" Mitchells (mid-twenties). Jo hums along to the chorus of Kali Uchi's "After The Storm" featuring Tyler the creator playing over the store's speakers.

The urban skater streetwear clothing store was partially full with a few customers here and there browsing the colorful selection of skateboards along the wall, bright and vibrant Odd Future graphic tees and Thrasher's classic, fiery apparel, shoe section of Converse, Vans, Adidas, and Nikes, among other things. The mostly young, teen and college aged customers aren't the only ones browsing things their interested in.

Emmanuel "Manny" (early twenties), Drea and Jo's shift supervisor and acquaintance, is currently flirting and failing at the cash register as he chats to two young Latina customers who giggle at Manny's boyish antics to get both of their phone numbers. They are moreso laughing at him than with him, yet he is un-deterred. His nerdy appearance makes him look and almost appear out of place in contrast to the images of gaudy, trendy hype beasts that typically enter the store.

Manny's dark rimmed rectangular glass lens gleam off of the store lights. His short black curls of hair and tan light cinnamon skin is more reminiscent of a wannabe Mario Lopez, if Lopez was slim, lanky, 5'9, but swears he's 5'10. Manny's pastel yellow Odd future tee, covered by a yellow & green flannel opened button up and straight legged dark jeans is perfect blend of geeky, but trying.

Jo glances up looking across the store finding entertainment in Manny goofy lover boy's shenanigans. She laughs to herself,

taking a lot of enjoyment in watching him fail miserably when he attempts to hit on their female customers. Jo, while laughing at looks over to her best friend, who is still folding, deep in thought. Jo's laugh is short-lived. She tilts her head slight to the side, noting her Drea's absent-mindedness. She gently nudges her friend.

JO

Aye, Dre, you good?

Drea , lost in her thoughts, doesn't respond.

JO (CONT'D) Drea?

Jo gently nudges Drea.

DREA Huh?

JO

Did you hear me?

DREA

Nah, sorry my bad. I zoned out for a sec.

JO

Yeah, I know. And it was for more than a sec. You've seemed tense since you walked in. I figured you'd tell me when you're ready, but it's been like twenty minutes in and I can't take seeing you like this. What's wrong, love? Is it that trash-ass, head-ass, triflin'ass professor again?

Drea sighs and looks up at Jo. She blinks realizing she hadn't fully looked at her during their shift until this moment. Her eyes, if for a brief moment, trace up and down Jo's body. Taking her all in.

Jo's deep mahogany brown complexion, deeply set almond shaped coffee colored eyes softly gazing back at her friend with concern. The fullness of her soft, pouty lips deliciously emphasized by the richness of her burgundy matte lipstick. Her face was naturally magnetizing. Her slim body, lightly curvy body adorned a white off-the shoulder peasant top, a long olive green flowy bohemian skirt that fell just below her waist-beads and covered her sandal strappy feet. If her face wasn't enough to catch the attention of average onlookers her big, long, black, curly-kinky mane surely would have caught the eye of quite a few. Jo's appearance was that of what she truly was: an Afrocentric, vegan, holistic yogi. A all-natural humble beauty.

Drea sighs and submits.

DREA

Alright, fine. I'm just tired, man. Rogers had me fuckin' gradin' papers all night, last minute - AGAIN. And didn't give a fuck that I had a whole ass paper that I already told him was coming up for me. I mean, thankfully, I was able to get my paper done, but I still had all those damn papers to grade and I had to finish them or else he'd get on me again for not having them ready like last time. He said that my time management is my problem and that if I'm having a hard time managing my assistantship that he can find another assistant. Like, what the fuck?

(MORE)

DREA (CONT'D)

He said that slick shit on purpose. He don't want me in this fuckin' program. Ion't give a fuck.

Drea returns back to her folding, folding the garments more aggressively as she vents. Jo listening and folding.

DREA (CONT'D)

Really, I don't. I just need this waiver and stipend to save up. I gotta get out the hell out my mom's apartment. I need my own place. It just sucks, ya know? I'm tired of being so fucking tired. I was so exhausted this morning. Barely made it in time to catch the train. I just wanted to make it out the house in peace, but I couldn't just be left alone. They always got somethin' to say about what I'm wearing. Even when I try keep low and keep away from 'em. But how can I avoid when I live wit 'em? Anyway, I was on my way to class when I got your text, and then-

Drea trails off as her hands slowly stops arranging the clothes.

JO Then,

what?

Drea moves to the other side of the clothes table and begins folding clothes on that side.

Jo follows Drea and lightly turns Drea around with both hands on her shoulders. She looks at her friend. Drea looks away.

DREA

Ummm...I just was walking on my way to the Marta, trying to catch my train when- I, uh, those fucking niggas just... they attacked me. Okay? They attacked me. They blocked me in and grabbed my breasts in broad fucking daylight. I finally got away, ran into the train station, and barely caught my train. I honestly hadn't given myself full space to process it. I just kinda blanked and pushed it down to get through my day. I'm- I'm so tired, Jo.

JO

Oh my god, Drea. D...

Seeing Drea's eyes growing more and more glossy, she gently loosens Drea's tightened grip on the garment. And brings her friend to the nearby back corner of the store. She turns Drea to her and deeply embraces her traumatized friend. She begins rubbing her friend's back. Drea softens and allows herself to receive her friend's support.

JO (CONT'D)

I am so, so sorry that happened to you. That's disgusting. You didn't deserve that. Nobody does. It's not your fault. There's nothing you could've done, but get outta there when you could. Shit.

Drea and Jo get interrupted when they hear Manny calling for them from up front.

MANNY

Aye! Drea! Jo! We're y'all at?!

JO

Shit. We gotta get back up there. We'll finish this later, okay? After our shifts over?

DREA

Yeah, okay. Thank you so much, Jo.

JO

You're welcome, D.

Manny quickly comes around the corner.

MANNY

D. Jo. Can y'all save all yo' mackin' for after y'all's shifts? We 'spose to be workin', remember?

Jo smacks Manny on his shoulder as she walks past him back to the rest of the store.

JO

Mackin'? Is this Y2K? And I know you ain't talkin 'bout us when that's all you do up front. Got some nerve talkin' bout workin' when you don't even do that.

MANNY

Ah ah ah, it's could sales pitchin'. As manager, it's my job to make sure out customers feel catered to. I could cater to you too if you'd stop playing.

JO

Boy, the only getting played is you. Out here given these girls discounts thinkin' you doin somethin' when you're really just fuckin' up the money.

DREA

I really don't know how you got the promo over Jo.

MANNY

Shit, I don't really no either.

JO

Pfft, I could think of somethin'.

As Drea and Manny follow behind Jo heading back to the front, they all stop in their tracks as they watch a group of white teens enter their store. The teens visibly display both their upper-middle class wealth and idolization of Black culture in their high-end street wear and hype beast fashion. One wearing cornrows, another wearing gold bamboo earrings, one with a couple of bantu knots, and one boy sporting locs. Drea, Jo, and Manny all simultaneously slow down, taking in the teens. They look at each other. Manny shakes his head and laughs as he begins to head back to the register where a small line has already started to form.

MANNY

Good luck with that one.

Jo and Drea give each other a knowing glance, as they begin approaching the group.

JO

Hi! Welcome to Zumiez. What can we help you find today?

TEEN GIRL #1 Yeah, I'm lookin' for the crop sweater sets. Where those at?

JO

Yeah, thy're with our new arrivals. Follow me.

The girls follow Jo to the other end of the store, leaving Drea with the two remaining boys.

DREA

Hey. Anything I could help y'all with today?

TEEN BOY #1

Nah, we good. Jus' lookn'.

DREA

'kay, cool just let me know if y'all need help with anything.

TEEN BOY #1 Aight,

bet.

The boys and Drea walk away. Drea promptly returns back to her task of fixing and putting away the rest of the inventory. Only a couple minutes go by before Drea notices the second teen boy staring at her from a not so far away distance as his friend browses and pulls sneakers of the shoe display. He quickly looks away when he notices Drea noticing his gaze. She lightly shakes her head, finishing folding and putting away the clothing on her cart.

On her way to the back of the store, she notices the boy staring at her again, then look away. Wrinkling and lifting her brow, she enters the back, grabs a new cart with inventory and heads out. On her way to the front, with her back facing the swinging as she opens it while pulling the cart, she realizes she accidentally hit someone with the door. It's the second white boy by himself.

DREA

Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to hit you.

WHITE BOY #2

Nah, you straight. It's all good. Um, I actually wanted to ask for your help wit' somethin'. Yo locs is so dope. Like, they look mad healthy and got that natural shine to it, you know? I been tryin' get mines like that, but like ion really know all what I'm 'spose to do to it. What products you use?

As he asks his question, he reaches out and holds one of Drea's locs at the side of her head to inspect it. Drea instinctly, pulls her head away and slaps his hand out of her head.

The sound the of the hand smack and the boy's stunned gasp draws the attention of Jo, the girls she's attending, and then other white teen boy. Drea, realizing what she had done with out thinking, looks over her shoulder to see if Manny saw the incident. He didn't. He is smiling having lightly banter with the customers as he rings them up. Drea, then, immediately apologies to the teen.

DREA

Oh shit. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to hit you. I swear. I just, like, flinched, and-

The teen shake his head and scoffs. Looking look at his reddening hand.

TEEN BOY #2

What the fuck? Bruh, forget it.

He leave Drea and walks over to his friend. Drea can hear from a distance the boy telling his friend what happened. Frustrated and concerned, Drea just moves along to another part of the store and begins to put away the items from her cart.

EXT. ATLANTA SIDEWALK - SUNSET

Locking up the store, Manny sets the alarm code, arming the store, he quickly exits the store front with Drea and Jo trailing behind with their backpacks and purse. Manny puts in and twist the key to secure the door before they make their group descent to the Marta train station. Jo nudges Drea.

JO

Sorry we didn't get a chance to finish up our convo about everything that happened today. I know it's probably alot, so I was thinking, if you wanted to, you could maybe join me at Ferrero's tonight to blow off some steam and have some fun at the bar. My coworker and homegirl Gigi's gonna be there performing her set tonight and I think you'd really enjoy it. I'm off tonight, but I'm planning on heading over there by 11 p.m. Whatchu think?

Manny perks up his ears after hearing the discussion of a potential turn up at a bar with Jo and Drea in attendance. He comes up from behind the girls and moves in between them as he puts his hands around their shoulders playfully.

MANNY

Think about what? Y'all goin' clubbin'?

Jo and Drea both roll their eyes. Jo chuckles.

JO

Boy, how you gon' take two buses and a train into OUR conversation and still come in loud AND wrong. Nah, we not going clubbin'. Well, not necessarily. We're going to Ferrero's, which probably won't be your scene.

MANNY

Look at you makin' assumptions. See this that, damn what's it called? Uh, that reverse-homophobia! What makes you think I wouldn't wanna go? Look, a party is a party. Plus, long as they got bottles, good music, and fine women like y'all selves I'll be just fine.

Manny winks at Jo and Drea cracks a light smile at Manny's foolish persistence. She playfully smacks Manny in his chest.

MANNY (CONT'D) Ow! Is this

the thanks I get for trying to brighten up y'all's day with my sweet, debonair charm? Look, I even got D smiling and you know how hard that is.

DREA

Only around you.

Manny fakes and exaggerates being offended by pantomiming getting stabbed in the chest by Drea's words. The girls chuckle and wave him off as he waves goodbye and heads down the staircase to his Marta station, leaving the girls to themselves.

JO

So would you say, Dre? You wanna come?

DREA

I don't know. I pulled an allnighter and I haven't had any proper rest since yesterday, so I'm probably gonna go home and just crash for a bit and then I'll let you know if I'm feelin' up for hangin' out with you tonight. Thanks for inviting me though.

JO Of

course.

They walk in silence for the rest of their short commute to their Marta train station. Drea, hands in her pockets, looks over at Jo, who opens a stick of gum, places it in her mouth, and places the wrapper and the rest of the pack in her external purse pocket. The early spring breeze blowing her hair back lightly. A couple of her loose black coils dangle play in her face. Jo uses her hand to sweep them from her face. She looks over at Drea, realizing her friend staring at her. She chuckles.

JO (CONT'D) What?

Drea looks away and clears her throat.

DREA

Oh, nothing. Just... thinking.

JO

Drea, you think too much.

Drea smiles weakly, and shrugs. Jo blows a bubble with her gum. It pops. She giggles. She glances over at Drea, then opens her external purse pocket again. Pulling out the gum package, she pulls out a stick of gum and place the pack back in her bag. Without looking her hand finds Drea's. Gently she slide the gum into Drea's hand. Drea looks down at her hand. Looks at Jo, who doesn't look back, but keeps playfully chewing and blowing bubbles.

Drea opens the stick of gum, places it in her mouth, and the wrapper in her pocket. She begins chewing the sweet gum, then blows a bubble herself. It pops. She smiles. She looks down at Jo's swinging hand, meeting it with her own. Jo's hand opens and

embraces Drea's. They walk holding hands until they entire their Marta station.

INT. MARTA TRAIN STATION - EVENING

Standing in the lobby as fellow guests move in and around the two girls, Jo puts her just used breeze card back into her wallet and purse. Drea takes a deep breath and sighs. Jo adjust her bag, then turns to Drea for a hug.

JO

Alright, you be safe and text e when you get home.

DREA

I will and text me when you reach too.

They embrace then pull apart to go in their separate directions. Before walking away too long, Drea eyes widen realizing she forgot somehting.

DREA (CONT'D) Aye, Jo!

Wait!

Jo turns around before stepping to the escalator, then begins walking back to her friend.

JO What?

They meet in the middle

JO (CONT'D) What's up?

DREA

I forgot to get my headphones from you when we were at work. Do you still have 'em?

Jo realizing this too nods and begins searching through her bag. not finding what she is looking for she, digs more aggressively and squints her eyebrows in concentration. She pauses looking up briefly, then realizes.

JO Shit.

DREA What?

JO

I left them at home. Their on my kitchen counter. My bad, Dre. I swore I put them in my bag before I left, but I guess I didn't.

Drea frowns, saddened and disappointed.

DREA It's all
good.

Thinking of a way to help the situation, Jo offers:

JO
Nah, I'm really sorry D. I know you already have a rough day as it is and really need 'em, especially for you commute back and dealing with you family. How about this? Just come over to my place. That way you get your earbuds for tonight and tomorrow and then you can just rest up at my house. My other 3 roommates are out the house tonight and won't be back until after midnight, so the house is really chill tonight.

Drea, unsure, contemplates. She looks behind her to escalator. She looks back over Jo. She exhales deeply. And checks her watch. Jo's train will be coming any minute now, and she will be alone.

DREA Fuck it.
Okay.

Jo nods. They hear Jo's train approaching below, so they both quickly turn to run down the escalator to catch the train and board.

INT. JO'S HOME - EVENING

Jo has changed into a big t shirt and sleep shorts while Drea has left her shoes at the front door, her bomber jacket on the coat rack and her backpack beside her shoes. She sits at the breakfast bar eating a plate of Jo's warmed up leftovers of chicken and rice with her earbuds beside her on the bar table. Jo leans standing while eating from her own plate of the same warmed leftovers. Drea takes a sip of juice from her cup as she looks at Jo and then her eyes take in her surroundings.

A moderately sized open concept four bedroom apartment. The space is fairly and clearly represents the home of artists, hippies, and Queer Black youth. The home's furniture and decorations are colorful with eclectic, funky taste.

Like Jo, the rooms are bohemian and Afro-centric with several standing and hanging plants, a hanging decorative tapestry hanging behind the couch, vintage stained glass lamps light up

the living room with a whimsical, water color glow. The home is comfy and peaceful. The continue their conversation.

Drea chews as she speaks with agitation.

DREA

They were basing my sexuality as a lack for helping. They acted like there aren't gay Black doctors, lawyers, teachers. Black women and Black gays are always fighting for them, but they never fight for us, then have the nerve to ask me what does this have to do with anything. There would have been no strategy to the Civil Rights Movement as you know it was out the work a Bayard Rustin. It was the mind of a queer black man who assisted in the progression of a community that would erase him.

Jo responds between chews.

JO

Homophobia funnels down from misogyny. And that into transphobia. Black Trans sistas have always been fighting against police brutality, but niggas don't include them cause they don't fuck with queerness.

DREA

Exactly. Stonewall was Black! It's apart of our history too. Like, what the fuck? It was started by Black and Brown Trans women. But Rogers will compartmentalizes that only to WGSS.

JO

I agree. Me and GiGi have talked about the same thing on our shifts together. I recognize my privilege in our Queer spaces. I've had a lot of privilege as being bi and femme that if I was dating a man people would think that I'm straight.

Jo scoffs and shakes here head.

JO (CONT'D)

But even then, do you know how many straight girls back at school that used to try kiss me at the club trying to perform for their man? Even in the

queerness of my relationships. I still have to check myself on my heteronormative behaviors. Like, because I present fem am I supposed to perform or maternally? Nah fuck that.

Drea shakes her head at the thought. Then, glances around Jo's place as she finishes eating.

DREA

I wish I lived here too. Away from my mom and sister. Thanks for inviting me. After this morning and being- you know, I really didn't want to be around my mom and sister like that.

JO

I understand.

DREA

It's really hard out here, ya know? Just trying to make it out here. Finally reach my independence. But I just feel so behind. Like, I know aunts and uncles look at me and say "Andrea, you're getting you're masters. You only 24. Whatchu mean you "behind"? But, like, I'm still stuck in my mama's house. I still don't have my own car yet and I just feel like I'm constantly toiling at school and hustling at work, and it don't feel like it's really getting me anywhere.

JO

You still wanna teach?

DREA You

know I do.

JO

Well, okay, then why are you letting the absence of what is soon to come in get in the way of seeing how far you already are? Drea, you not as stuck as you may feel.

(MORE)

JO (CONT'D)

Don't get me wrong, I absolutely get you're frustrations and how hurtful it is to feel like you really on you own

gettin' all this shit done. Nah, for sure, this shit - adulting - really do be for the birds sometimes, but you gotta really re-determine what it is that you're doing all this for. You got two months left of this semester. The you got one more year left & you're fucking outta there.

Drea nods, and sighs, finishing her drink and placing it on the table. She checks her watch.

DREA

It' almost 9. I'm gonna lay down before we go to Ferrero's. Thanks for your meal.

JO

No problem. I'll meet you in the room.

She takes up Drea's empty plate on top of her empty one and walks to the sink to wash them.

INT. JO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Drea has switched into one of Jo's sleep shirt and sweat pants to rest in as her outdoor clothes lay over the back of Jo's desk chair. Drea lays under the covers of Jo's bed as Jo enters the room her phone in hand, preparing to rest beside Drea.

DREA

When did you know?

JO Know

what?

Finishes set her last alarm to wake her and Drea up in time to head to the bar.

DREA

When you had to be on your own?

JO

When my mother would get angry at the one queer side character in the tv series, I knew I needed to excuse myself from the room.

(MORE)

JO (CONT'D)

I would become nauseous, physically ill. I could not stomach that fact that my

mother hated me. I was too uncomfortable to sit in that room. So I learned at a young age that I was in an unsafe place. It started at home for me.

DREA

I knew homophobia long before I was introduced to racism.

Jo gets under her covers. Lying on her side facing Drea.

JO

My mom roots herself in her religion. She goes looking for herself in the church. We were at service every damn weekend. I've found more Godly people bartending at Ferrero's than I ever have at church.

Drea nods.

DREA

I find it more often times than not, that people just spew what they've learned, but really believe it for themselves. Our parents claim they hate our community because of their religion, but Christianity is not the original religion of our people in the first place. We were taught to hate ourselves. Both the queerness of our skin and the queerness of how we've loved. Our family and community adopted a hatred that was not our own.

JO

What did Professor Freeman that in that one class? Blackness is inherently queer.

Drea pauses. Trying to push back her emotions.

DREA

I'm more afraid of the niggas on my block than White folk. I've felt the most terrorized by niggas that could be my cousins. My queerness is never be palatable enough.

JO

It's not the job of the oppressed to educate their oppressors. They need to show up more in these spaces to make

themselves vulnerable to not only be called out but also be called in.

Seeing her friend's sadness, she reaches out to pull her friend in lovingly.

DREA

Jo, it really hurts me that my mom and sister can't look outside themselves to see me.

JO

You can't go looking for a whole reflection in broken mirrors though, Dre.

Allowing herself to feel the comfort offered to her. She lays her head on her friends abdomen. She relaxes.

DREA

I know. I can't take medication for other people's headaches. I can't go to the mountains asking about the ocean and be surprised when they look at me strangely. I know. Her issues are not mine. Everyone is responsible for their own emotions. But it still hurts.

JO

They don't know. But you do. You can't expect people who box themselves in every day, to be able to meet you where. My parents would say "I don't have a problem with gay people, I just don't want them near me." So I moved out. My parents have acted oblivious to my relationship with my ex. The root of all this hostility, the shame ,and fear creates. I had to get out of there. And you will too.

Jo place her hand on Drea's shoulder. Drea breaths in deeply.

DREA

I didn't bump into my queerness until college.

(MORE)

DREA (CONT'D) It was through chosen family and community that I met myself. And you.

Drea closes her eyes.

I never came out to them. I didn't feel like I should have to. I wasn't doing anything wrong. Why should I have to come out when they should come in? I didn't want to set myself up like that.

JO

I would never use my spiritual beliefs to weaponize against others. I realized in my own healing that I have to humanize those who hurt me to humanize myself. So I nurture myself. I don't run myself into the ground. I do what I can as I can. And that's enough. That's it. Nothing more. Leisure is not earned, it's a necessity. We watch our families run themselves ragged like your older sister and so we do that with ourselves. Mhm, not me. Not anymore. That's why I left. I realized school one honoring me. So I had to honor myself. It may not seem like much. But it's enough for me. You don't have to leave school to find peace, but you have to choose it for yourself and go from there. So where are you going?

Drea opens her eyes, contemplating.

DREA

Honestly, I don't know.

JO

That's okay. Don't overthink it. I realized for myself that when I slowed down, that's when everythin' I was chasin came around and caught me. It comes to you when you're not looking for it.

Drea perks her head up, listening more intently, realizing she has really heard Jo in this way.

JO (CONT'D)

Ironically, the same text that my parents would use to erase me, I took the good from it and used to humanize her. And that is my peace. I learned early that if I was ever seeking the apology or validation of those who have hurt me, I would die waiting. I learned, over time, that it is in the healing

that I received my justice. I no longer look to them for confirmation. I confirm myself on a daily basis. Dre, what you've taken as confidence is a practiced peace. A practice, Imma be honest with you, you still have not started. You need to focus on yourself, Drea. You can't keep going like this. You always say you feel like you're not getting anywhere, but that's because you're moving in every direction except for yourself.

Jo pauses, then yawns.

JO (CONT'D)

What is it that you really want.

Drea scrunches her face in sincere though. Her face softens. She sighs.

DREA Freedom.

JO

Well, freedom is what we do with what has been done to us. So what are you going to do?

Drea has no response, but lifts herself from Jo. Now laying on her side as Jo turns to look Drea into her eyes.

JO (CONT'D)

I'm not here to heal you. No one is. We all have to heal ourselves for ourselves. I'm not magical. I'm just trying. All this that I am telling you, came from trying. Being scared and trying anyway. Doing it alone and trying anyway.

(MORE)

JO (CONT'D)

We've been best friends for three years, why you didn't know this is before because you never really asked.

Drea shifts a little under the covers and looks down.

DREA I'm
sorry.

Jo growing more sleepy, yawns again.

JO

I'm not mad at you, D. I'm just being honest. I don't need an apology. I need help too, but you can't help me when you don't help yourself.

Drea nods. Looks down at her watch and checks the time. She looks over at Jo who has now closed her eyes and has begun drifting off to sleep. Drea nestles down in the bed, taking note, and closes her eyes too.

INT. FERRERO'S LESBIAN BAR AND VENUE - NIGHT

Urban club music pumps through the speakers as Jo moves swiftly through the packed Friday night crowd. Drea, moving carefully as to not bump into anyone follows as Jo tries to find a them a good view of the stage. Standing one row back from the center. Drea, standing next to Jo, takes in the view of her friend as adjusts a shoulder strap of her bar attire. A wine red, crushed velvet, long spaghetti strap slip dress with one hand as her other holds her long caramel brown peacoat in her matching wine colored suede ankle strap block heels. Jo smiles as the cabaret mc comes to the stage to introduce the next performance

MC

How y'all doin'? Y'all likin' the show?
If y'all likin' the show so far let me
hear y'all make some noise up in this
mothafucka.

They point their mic to the colorful, melanated crowd of folks from all sides of the LGBT+ spectrum as they hoot and holler. The MC puts their hand on their hip and smirks.

MC (CONT'D)

Oh, I know y'all gays can do betta than
that. Quit actin' scary and make some
muthafuckin' noise.

Following cue, the crowd erupts into a fuller, louder celebratory chorus of cheers.

MC (CONT'D)

Aight, now that what I'm talkin' 'bout.
Now we're at the last performance of the
night. You make recognizer her as one of
the bartender's pouring yo shots
tonight, but on this stage you gon'
recognize as her as Ferrero's number one
diva. The one, the only Gigi GlaMORE!

Jo places her peacoat into Drea's hands to hold as she erupts with heartfelt cheers and hoots for her co-worker and friend.

Gigi (early thirties), in all her stunning, tall, ebony glory, struts seductively to the stage as the DJ play's her first set song, Janelle Monae's "The Way You Make Me Feel", adorning a long black satin trench coat and royal blue latex thigh boots. Her long straight hair snatched into a modelesque high pontails, highlighting her gorgeous high cheek bones and full, plump lips as she lip syncs the songs lyrics skillfully. Playfully musing her adoring audience collect ones and fives, she theatrically spins to the center of the stage, snatching of her trench coat. Revealing a glamorous long sleeve pink, blue, and purple sequined leotard.

Jo lights up when seeing her friend's vibrant swirled variant of the bi-pride colors on her fellow bisexual sister. She hollers.

JO

WOOH! LET 'EM KNOW, GIGI!

Gigi looks over to Jo with wink and points an extended finger and arm as she begins to serenade an elated and dancing Jo as they both lip-sing to Janelle's lyrics. Drea looks over and smiles at a mesmerized Jo as she watches in amazement at the captivating and lively choreography of GiGi. Blue latex clad legs doing majorette high kicks in the air. The rainbow colors of the stage lights gleam off Drea's glasses as she watches cheerfully and attentively .

Two lip syncs later. Gigi bows with a beaming smile as she receives a beautiful bouquet of red roses presented to her by the cabaret's mc on behalf of her co-workers of the bar. Jo and Drea both clap and hoot in appreciation for GiGi's extraordinary performance.

Jo looks over to her hoy-filled friend, drinking in the view of an inspired Drea.

Drea still smiling looks over to Jo, returning her deep gaze. Their stares mutual, equally taking in the moment and each other. Jo bites her lips, softly taking Drea's hand into hers, steps in closer, leaning her 5'4 frame into Drea and raises her voice gently over the volume of the dispersing chattering crowd. Drea leans in too.

JO (CONT'D) I'm

glad you came.

DREA

I'm glad I came too, with you.

Jo pulls back looking, into Drea's softened almond eyes. Drea leans her 5'7 frame into Jo's ear, moving her hand to the middle of Jo's back sweetly.

DREA (CONT'D) I want thank
you for being real with me earlier.
I really needed that. You were
right.

Return the Drea's affection by wrapping her arm around also to the middle of Drea's back.

JO
Let's get a drink. My boy at the bars got
us covered tonight.

Drea nods as she and Jo affectionately clasp hands and move in between the crowd toward the bar.

INT. BAR - CONTINUOUS

At the bar, Jo waves her hand high in the air to her coworker and friend, Antonio (late twenties), calling his name and signaling him over.

JO
HEY! ANTONIO! HEY!

Antonio, looking over in her direction as he finishes ringing up a patron, smiles and waves his hand in the air. When he recognizes it's Jo. Whispers into the ear of a fellow coworker who looks over and waves also then takes his place at the register. He pats them on the shoulder and makes his way to the other end of the bar where Jo and Drea stand.

Opening the bar's short swinging door at the base of the bar, Antonio greets Jo with a big hug, who hugs him lovingly back as they kiss each other on the cheek. He pulls away taking in the beauty of Jo's velvet slip dress and curly messy bun.

ANTONIO
Oooh, look at you miss thang! I see you!

Jo giggles as she twirled by Antonio.

JO
Thanks boo! I'm just trying to get like
you.

They both laugh and embrace once more. Antonio looks over to Drea, who stands near behind Jo with her peacoat in hand. He

smiles playfully then eyes Jo, who giggles and then steps over and wraps her arm around Drea's arm introducing her to Antonio. Antonio warmly extends his hand to Drea who returns a warm introductory handshake.

JO (CONT'D)

Drea. This is my Al, Antonio. We be cuttin' up on my shifts and he got us tonight. Tonio. This my best friend, Drea.

ANTONIO

Friend? So you're the Drea I've heard so much about.

He playfully smirks at Jo who winks back at him. Drea peeps their interaction, look down at Jo and smiles.

ANTONIO (CONT'D) Aight. Nice to meet you, Drea. What y'all having tonight?

JO

A shot of Henny for me.

Drea raises her brows. Jo looks to Drea for her order.

DREA

Shit. A shot of Henny for me too.

MANNY

And a tequila shot for me too!

Drea and Jo's faces turn to confusion and surprise as they both turn around, loosening their hooked arms to see Manny approaching behind them with a house margarita in hand. Manny, happy to see Drea and Jo, puts his arm around Drea's shoulder as he sips his marg. Drea and Jo look at each other shaking their heads and chuckling in disbelief that Manny actually came to the bar. Antonio raises an eyebrow and looks from Manny to Jo.

ANTONIO Him

too. Jo nods.

JO

Yeah. He's with us.

Manny smiles and nudges Jo who rolls her eyes.

MANNY

Yeah. What Jo said.

Antonio raises his brows and eyes Jo, then Drea and shrugs. He chuckles too.

ANTONIO

Aight. If y'all say so. Aye, Drea let me get Jo's coat. I keep it in the back. Y'all make sure to come back to the bar to grab the coat before y'all leave.

Drea steps to Antonio handing him the coat. He leaves the trio, heading back behind the bar, placing Jo's coat in a cubby behind the bar and begins preparing their drinks.

Drea and Jo turn to Manny who is grooves dorkily side to side to the sound of the bar DJ's urban club music mix.

MANNY

What's good, y'all? I thought y'all would never show up.

JO

I can't believe you actually came.

MANNY

Of course. I done told you. Long as there's good music, good liquor, and fine ladies, you know Imma be up in there. Did y'all see ol' girl up there on stage just now. God damn! Shawty snapped. Aye yo, Jo, dat's yo homegirl? Hook me up!

Jo and Drea laugh.

JO

Boy bye! You know she's too much woman for you. Plus, you a baby! You're not Gigi's type.

MANNY

Ah, I get it you wanna keep me all to yo'self, huh?

He winks at Jo as he goofily dances and moon walks in front of the Drea and Jo. Drea smile and rubs her eyes as she watches Manny's carefree goofball antics.

MANNY (CONT'D) Hey! What kept you ladies so long anyway?

Drea and Jo simultaneously look at each other. Manny's eyes widen as he assumes what keep the women up.

MANNY (CONT'D)

Uh oh! Okay, Drea! I see you!

He begins to dap up a confused Drea. She is about to refute his inaccurate congrats when Antonio calls over to the trio. They all look over to the bar, seeing Antonio waving them to where he stands at the bar with their shots awaiting them in generous shot glasses.

Manny leads the way as Jo and Drea follow hand in hand through the crowd of POC LGBT+ young adults dancing and conversing. They greet Antonio.

JO Thanks

Toni!

ANTONIO

Anytime, love! Y'all enjoy y'all selves.

He winks at Drea, who smiles back, and waves goodbye as her makes his way over to other awaiting patrons.

Drea, Jo, and Manny each hold their respective generouslypoured shots in their hands. Nudging Drea, Jo lifts her shot to Drea who also lifts her shot, about to clink glasses with Jo and down her drink

MANNY

Wait! We got do a cheers first! What should we cheers to?

Manny looks to Drea, then Jo, who looks from Manny to Drea. Drea looks at Jo, searching her eyes then finding it. She smiles and looks to Manny.

DREA To

freedom.

Drea raises her shot glass.

MANNY

Ooh, dat's a good one!

Raising his glass too. Tossing his empty margarita cup in the trash.

Jo looks from Manny to Drea and nods.

JO

I thinks so too.

Jo raise her shot glass likewise.

The trio clink their glasses together, then downs their shots. Each making struggle face as they swallow their shots with no chaser.

MANNY

Oooh. Imma need some water after that.
Where the bartender at?

Looking to wave down a busy Antonio for assistance, Manny spots Gigi in a short champagne sequin spaghetti strap cocktails dress sips a martini. His mouth dropping. This is his chance.

MANNY (CONT'D)

Uh, y'all ladies be easy, alright. I
think I found my chaser.

Manny runs his finger through his wavy black curls, then makes his way across the bar to Gigi. Drea looks over her shoulder to watch their lover boy on the move. Drea chuckles and shakes her head. As her eyes scan the crowd as they dance to the DJ's mix to Young Thug's "Millions".

Feeling her body relax as the henny begins to hit her system, she squares her eyes to Jo who is also dancing to the DJs set.

Drea leans in and caresses Jo's hand.

Jo, still moving her body with liquid smoothness, glances down at her hand and looks Drea up and down, squaring her eyes on Drea. Her matte wine lips stretching into a coy smile.

Drea confidently leads Jo to away from the bar, to the dance floor.

The DJ smoothly mixes the song, transitioning into Kid Ink's "Ride Like A Pro."

Finding a spot near a center wall, Drea begins rocking rhythmically to beat and bass facing Jo. Jo swirls her hips and hands suavely. Eyes watching Drea and capturing Drea's. Biting the corner of her lips as she eyes a now loose and inhibited Drea. Drea steps in closer, her body lightly grazing Jo's. Jo's responds with a flirtatious grin and fluid twirl of her body, pressing her back into Drea. Drea matches Jo's waist whines as they grind in sultry unison.

The dance floor lights transition to a deep blue, turning the crowd of bar goes into a rocking deep sea of queer inhibition.

Drea, surrendering to the moment, grips Jo's hips. Deepening their grind.

Jo tightly wraps her hand around the back of Drea's neck and places her other on top of Drea's on her hips, bringing Drea's face closer.

Kid Ink's "Ride Like A Pro" transitioning into a chopped and screwed "Do It" by Tay Money.

The warmth of Jo's breathe tickling the Drea's lips. Drea leans in.

Softly and passionately, they kiss one another without missing a beat. Body's still whining in unison.

EXT. ATLANTA SIDEWALK - LATER

Arm in arm, Drea and Jo stand outside the closing bar as other bar goers exit the venue, some standing around laughing and conversing, others making the ways to their cars.

A cool spring night breeze blows. Jo breathes in sharply, unhooking her arm from Drea's briefly to close her long peacoat. Drea assists her. Replacing Jo's fingers and finishes button down her coat for her. Drea places her arms arounds Jo's waist, softly looking into Jo's eyes. Jo smiles, glancing up an looks down at Dra's chest nestling herself in Drea's embrace.

MANNY

There y'all are! Thanks for waiting for me.

Manny walks up briskly to the couple, still half-buzzed. Noting their P.D.A, he smiles and raises a "bruh" fist to Drea. She looks down at the congratulatory fist and smiles. She daps him.

MANNY (CONT'D) Aight, so
what's the move. A uber or a lyft?

Manny begins opening and browsing both apps.

Drea lets go of her embrace of Jo, reaches into her jogger pocket, turning on the home screen. 1:01am. Putting her phone back in her pocket.

DREA

How long's the wait time?

MANNY

About 18 to 20 minute wait.

DREA

It'd take us less walking time to get to the Marta and catch the train which would be cheaper than a Uber. Plus, don't we live in opposite directions? It'd be cheaper and easier to just walk to the nearby Marta and catch our trains.

Drea looks down to Jo, who shrugs and nods.

JO

I don't mind. I only live about 10 minutes walking from the train.

Manny smiles and shrugs.

MANNY Cool with me.

DREA

Aight, we need start walking now if we wanna catch our trains.

Drea drapes her arm around Jo's shoulder as Manny walks up beside and they turn beginning their commute to their trains.

INT. MARTA TRAIN - MOMENTS LATER

After seeing Manny off to his train, Drea and Jo sit in their train cart next to each other as Jo closes her eyes, resting her head on Drea's shoulder.

Drea looks down at Jo and kisses her forehead. Then, turn to the train window, viewing the bright lights of the city go by. Takes in a slow and deep breathe into a satisfied sigh.

She rest her head back on to the back of her seat rest and closes her eyes.

EXT. ATLANTA SIDEWALK - MOMENTS LATER

Drea holds Jo's hand as she walks, moving around the small crowd of train riders also exiting the station.

Drea's arm around Jo's shoulder and Jo's around Drea's waist, the couple, smile, begin their short walk back to Jo's apartment.

It's not long before hears the familiar voices a few Black men.

Drea's eyes widening. Her heart begins to thud. She feels a sudden sinking in her chest. Jo hearing the hackling voices turns

around. Realizing their being followed. With growing concern and the beginnings of a shaking voice, she quickly taps Drea on her back alerting her. Jo quickly grabs her house keys from her coat pocket, putting them between her knuckles.

Drea, not wanting to turn around, quickens her walking pace, promptly grabbing Jo's hand forcing Jo to match her speed. Jo grows more worried as the men begin to pick their speed also

JO Drea.

Drea hears the quickening of their footsteps as their heckles and laughs creep in closer.

BLACK MAN #1 Aye, where
you goin' baby girl? Who's your
friend?

Fear in her eyes, Drea looks to Jo.

DREA Run.

JO Drea?

DREA RUN.

Jo begins to break out into a sprint, with Drea sprinting close behind her.

Seeing their prey getting a way the men chase behind them.

Drea sees Jo's apartment coming up on three apartment's down.

As the street lights pass overhead with each step, Drea sees a creeping dark shadow coming up behind her.

Boom. A blow to her right cheek knocks her stumbling sideways. Feeling a tightened grip overtaking her arm, snatching her. She sees Jo briefly look back as she continues running, terrified.

Blood blowing from her mouth, Drea orders her.

DREA (CONT'D) GO!

Jo reluctantly, but without slowing her pace, continues to run.

Drea trips Black man #2 with an extended leg thwarting his attempt to chase Jo, causing Black man #3 to run into him.

Angered, Black man # 1 lands another blow to Drea face causing her to grasp and groan, disorienting her.

INT. JO'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

With adrenaline running through her shaking body and trembling hands, Jo unlocks and quickly slams the door of her apartment. Hands still shaking, she tightens her grip on her phone, dialing a number

EXT. ATLANTA SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Drea with swelling black eye swings a closed fist in the air, attempting to defend herself, but is punched in the chest by Black man #2. Knocking her back into Black man #3 arms, locking her arms behind her.

BLACK MAN #1 Faggot-ass
BITCH.

Boom. One punch to her jaw.

Boom. One punch to her lip.

BOOM. One punch to her eye.

Black out.

INT. GRADY HOSPITAL - LATER

Drea winces at the the sharp stinging of a cut above her eye. She forces her eye to open enough to take in her surroundings. The other eye unable to unable to to open at all. Swollen shut. She looks down observing the white cotton hospital sheet. Shifting her back slightly, she realizes she is no longer wearing her tee and joggers, but a backless night gown. Confused, she attempts to frown, but the pounding pain of her head and face causes her to groan. Jo's lifts her head from Drea's hand, seated in a pulled up stool to Drea's hospital bed. With teared stained cheeks, look up at Drea, who tilts her head slightly to turn back to her. Jo's eye widen.

JO
Nurse! Nurse!

Hearing Jo's urgent calls, Drea's nurse, standing outside the hospital in the middle of answering the questions of a tearful Tracy-Ann, who is being consoled by a concerned Angie, pauses their conversation and quickly steps in.

Tracy-Ann and Angie quickly following in closely behind.

Jo turns to the nurse.

JO (CONT'D)

It's Drea. She's coming to.

Drea closes her tired eye and opens it again, attempting to open it wide, but finding it a bit too difficult.

Her nurse approaches gently, calmly signal to Jo to get up and scoot away from the hospital bed. Giving her room to do a close analysis of the awakened Drea. She check Drea's monitor and IV fluid.

NURSE You
awake?

Drea groans.

Scanning Drea's eyes. She hold u p 4 fingers.

NURSE (CONT'D)
How many fingers am I holding up?

Drea faces winces, answering weakly.

DREA Four.

NURSE How
'bout now?

Nurse holds up six fingers.

DREA Six.

NURSE
Do you remember your name?

Drea takes a deep breathe as she tries to carefully move her partially painful jaw.

DREA Andrea
Walker.

Attempting to sit up weakly.

Noticing Drea's attempt she gently settle Drea to relax back to the bed as she presses a button to slow raise Drea's upper hospital bed.

NURSE
You're gonna wanna be careful as you adjust yourself. I can imagine you must be in alot of pain right now. Your a strong young woman. I'm glad your coming to. We didn't wanna overdo you with your pain meds, at your mother's request. She

wanted to wait to give you more time to wake up on you own, then go from there. The officers, who interviewed your-

The nurses glance over at Jo, then back to Drea

NURSE (CONT'D) -girlfriend, said to notify them when you regain consciousness, but I'll wait for your consent before I give them a call. I'm gonna notify the doctor of you waking up to begin the process to up your pain meds now that you're up. If you need anything, make sure to press the nurses button either on you bed remote or on the callboard on the side of you bed frames.

The nurse begins the exit the room, pausing to nod her head to both Tracy-Ann and Angie who thank her. They look over to Drea.

Tracy-Ann begins to slowly walk toward her daughter, wiping her tears, and partially covering her face with her closed fist gripping her Kleenex.

Jo steps out of the room to give Drea and her family some privacy.

Drea looks at her mother. Only imagining what her current bruised and beaten state must look like to her.

Tracy stands beside the bed. Shakes her head. Eyebrows furrowed.

TRACY-ANN

Mi knew sumthing like dis woulda 'appen.

Drea sighs.

TRACY-ANN (CONT'D) Mi did try warn yuh, but you wouldn't listen. Ee?

Drea turns her head and closes her eyes. Wishing she could get up herself and leave them room. But she can't. Her body fills like a ton of bricks, too exhausted and bruised to move.

TRACY-ANN (CONT'D)

Andrea, why? Why yuh ah fi be so 'ard-'eaded? It's dis lifestyle yuh choose fi take up fi yuhself dat gets you here.

Unable to take it anymore. Drea turns her head to her mother despite the pain moving her neck quickly creates. With a furrowing brow. She assertively.

DREA Get
out.

Tracy-Ann, taken back by Drea's tone, draws her head back and looks at Drea with shock. Drea clears her throat, repeating herself louder.

DREA (CONT'D) GET.
OUT.

Tracy-Ann, hurt from being kicked out of her daughters hospital room, she suck her teeth, offended, and exits the hospital room. Leaving only Angie and Drea.

Angie witnessing the whole exchange, walks up to Drea, who releases one tear from her eye as she wipes the tear from her eye with her bed sheet.

Angie offers her the near by tissue box from Drea's bed side table.

Angie sit on the stool near her sister hospital bed.

ANGIE
They caught the men. Joanne, your-

She looks over at the closed hospital door.

ANGIE (CONT'D) -partner. She said she called the police from inside her apartment when they grabbed you and attacked you.

Angie, finding it hard to hold back her tears as she looks at bruised younger sister, her voice cracks.

ANGIE (CONT'D)
They said they drove up on them as they kicked you while you laid barely conscious on the sidewalk. They ran, but the officer chased them down.

Drea unable to remember these events, looks over to her sister intently.

Looking into her sister, open and swollen eye. Angie's face wrinkles in sadness as her eyes grow glossy.

She reaches her hand out touch Drea's resting forearm, caressing it gently.

ANGIE (CONT'D) I'm so sorry
this happened to you Drea. I'm so
sorry.

Getting choked up, the pools forming in Angie's eyes spills over her cheeks.

ANGIE (CONT'D)
I love you, Andrea. Your my little
sister. I'd give my life for you. I- I-
when the police called. I thought they
had murdered you. My heart dropped to
the bottom of my chest.

Drea's eyes soften toward her sister.

Angie moves her hand, lovingly stroking Drea's.

ANGIE (CONT'D) I know you
don't trust me. I understand. But I
promise you, I will never leave you.
We may not always see eye to eye. We
may fuss and fight, but always know
that I love you know matter what. No
matter who you are. I love you and I'm
sorry, Drea.

Drea tightens her grip of her sister hand. A tear escaping her eye. Angie nods and leans up from her seat in the stool to gently and carefully kiss Drea on her forehead. Drea still winces at the pressure of the kiss on her still throbbing head.

Angie looks down, hearing Drea's whimpers. She let's go of Drea's hands, grabbing two Kleenexes to wipe away her tears.

ANGIE (CONT'D)
I'll go check on mom and the nurse to see
if they can hurry up and up your dosages.

Angie heads to the the room door opening it, pausing then nodding in acknowledgement to Jo. As Jo shyly nods back and enters the hospital room with a small ice pack and clean wash cloth. Angie close the door.

Jo walks over slowly to Drea, tracing her eyes from the silhouette of Drea's feet to her face.

Drea clears her dry throat, grabbing a Kleenex to dry the evidence of her tears.

Jo look up and watches Drea, then moves to Drea's bedside tray to pour Drea a cup of water in an ice filled cup. She places a bendable straw in the cup and sit in the stool beside the hospital bed.

Drea looks over to her bed side callboard and press the incline button to raise herself up further in the bed.

Jo smiles weakly handing Drea the ice pack wrapped in the wash cloth to soon Drea's bruises.

Drea place the wrapped ice pack over her eye.

Jo, reaching below for the lever for the stool. Lifts up slightly from the stool allowing it to meet her.

She sits down gently. Rolling herself back closer to Drea. Leaning in and picking up the ice water cup from the rolling bed tray.

She hold the cup in one hand and steadies the straw tip in the other, feeding the straw to Drea so Drea doesn't have to lean to sip her drink.

Drea softens her aching jaw, opening it tall enough to take in the straw. She gulps the cold water gratefully. Closing her eyes as she drinks. The refreshing, cooling sensation coats her parched tongue.

Reaching the end of her drink, she hers the drying slurps as she leaves only half melted ice in her cup.

Jo, having watched Drea drink healthily, smiles lightly. She turns to begin pouring and refilling Drea's cup.

Drea, watching Jo's efforts, put down her ice pack on her bed. She reaches out and extends her hand.

Jo, once done, swivels around to feed Drea once more, with filled cup in hand. She looks down at Drea's out stretched hand.

Looks back at the cup, then sets it down behind her on the tray.

She places her hand into Drea's, who squeezes Jo's affectionately.

Drea looks into Jo's eyes intently.

DREA Thank
you.

Jo tilts her head slightly, rubbing her thumb lightly across Drea's hand.

JO

You're welcome.

Jo picks up the wrapped ice pack Drea placed aside and begins icing Drea jaw.

JO (CONT'D)

Everything's gonna be okay.

Looking around her hospital room. Leaning into the ice pack, she tilts her head. Placing her hand over Jo's, then looks loving into her eyes.

Drea nods, and kisses Jo's hand holding her ice pack. Lightly taking the ice pack from Jo's hand. Encouraging Jo to sit in her stool beside her. Jo does. Laying her head down on Drea's lap. Drea strokes Jo face gently.

DREA I

know.

Drea relaxes her head back. Feeling the cooling sensation of the ice pack against her cheek. Smiles to herself and sighs.

FADE OUT:

END

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