

BEHIND THE VEIL



A MUSICAL

by
MINKA WILTZ

MINKA WILTZ
817 E SHERWOOD HILLS DR BLOOMINGTON, IN 47401
404-216-9857

CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
LIVIE PEARCE	AA, PhD Candidate	28	F
Dr. W.E.B DUBOIS, PhD (WILLIAM)	AA, In his time and in Livie's imagination	29	M
NINA GOMER DUBOIS	AA, married to DuBois	27	F
YOLANDE NINA DUBOIS	AA, second child to The DuBois	20+	F
ADRIENNE HERNDON	AA, professor at Atlanta U mentor to Dr. Dubois fair enough to pass for White	29	F
MATTHEW	AA, fellow student, also reads for Countee	25	M
MAMA PEARCE	AA, mother to LIVIE, she is music and holographic imaging removed but influential in Livie's life/imagination. She never "shows up" in person	45	F
FA 1,2&3(Faculty Advisor)	AA, life-sized puppets, group of advisors, appear as AA, motivated by White Elitist sensibilities (to be doubled by actors.	ANCIENT, M/F	
JIMMIE LUNCEFORD	AA, College love interest to Yolande; jazz musician	20s	M

"All womanhood is hampered today because the world on which it is emerging is a world that tries to worship both virgins and mothers and in the end despises motherhood and despoils virgins

But what of black women?

The world that wills to worship womankind studiously forgets its darker sisters."

-- W. E. B. Dubois *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*

SCENE 1

Setting: 2018, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. A studio apartment.

Lights up on LIVIE PEARCE, a 20 year old Black woman packing a suitcase and talking on a smartphone tucked between her chin and shoulder. The room is cluttered with clothing that she is hurriedly trying to fit into luggage. Music is playing. She has to put the phone down or put it on speaker throughout the conversation.

LIVIE

(speak/singing)

Yes, yes, mama. I know. I don't have time. I've gotta pack all my stuff by tonight, be out of here by morning.

She listens. The underscoring is her mother's voice on the other end of the conversation. The same underscoring is played throughout the flashes of W.E.B. moments.

AN IG STYLE SNAPSHOT: Lights up on
Massachusetts. Harvard 1895 W. E.B in
cap and gown holding his diploma and a
suitcase. SCROLL AWAY.

LIVIE

Tell them all I apologize. But classes start next week. I've
got to be ready. I'm behind!

A TIKTOK STYLE CLIP: Lights up on
Gomer living room, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.
1896 W.E.B and NINA GOMER in a simple
wedding gown and veil. The family looks
on. W.E.B, places the ring on Nina's
finger, lifts the veil and gives her a
chaste kiss on the lips. SCROLL AWAY

Music speeds up and begins to take on
the feels of RAGTIME, BLUES, GOSPEL,
R&B...

LIVIE

I did tell them. They said they understood. Maybe your
friends should be more honest

Music stops

LIVIE

Mama? Mama, you there?

.

The rise of a single note from a viola

LIVIE

I love you. I'll let you know when I land.

Livie ends the call, continues packing.
Lights out.

Lights up on AN IG STYLED SHOT of
W.E.B., NINA, BABY BURGHARDT standing
in their dorm room at Fountain Hall on
the campus of ATLANTA UNIVERSITY,
ATLANTA, GEORGIA, 1897

SCENE 2

Atlanta, GA -- 1897 -- Fountain Hall

WILLIAM and NINA are settling into their modest
accommodations when they hear a knock on the door.

WILLIAM

(calling out)

Who is it?!

ADRIENNE (O.S)

Adrienne Herndon! I stopped by to see if you needed anything.

William goes to the door and opens it.

ADRIENNE enters carrying a basket of food and drink. She is regal, beautifully dressed, and wearing gloves. Her appearance is stunning and the DuBois are careful not to seem surprised at how much she looks like a white woman.

ADRIENNE

Good morning Professor.

WILLIAM

Good morning Mrs.--Professor Herndon. Let me introduce my wife Nina Dubois and our little Burghardt.

ADRIENNE

It is so lovely to have you all here. I wanted to come by with some hot food and cool drink for you. Unfortunately you just missed breakfast in the kitchen but this should hold you until supper.

(MORE)

ADRIENNE (CONT'D)

(she motions for the small desk
in the corner, looking at NINA-
- the lady of the home)

May I place it here?

WILLIAM

(quickly)

Yes, that's fine, isn't Nina?

Thank you. We are so happy to be here and I don't mind
telling you how eager I am to get to work.

ADRIENNE

The AU is happy to accommodate you in that, Professor. Our
drama society has a performance in a few weeks and we need as
many hands as we can get to build the sets, organize the
students, memorize lines, gather costumes.

WILLIAM

Excuse me? Theater?

NINA takes the baby to look out the
window.

ADRIENNE

Yes! We are planning another production of Shakespeare in the
Fall or Spring but our next production is Sherlock Holmes by
William Gillette.

(MORE)

ADRIENNE (CONT'D)

You're both named William, I think that's fortuitous. For the Shakespeare piece I have been thinking about the Merchant of Venice but I'm also interested in ---

WILLIAM

Excuse me, but I wasn't aware of being any part of a construction team when I took on this position.

ADRIENNE

Oh come now, Professor, we don't have a "construction team", Dr. DuBois. We have members of a student and faculty body that help in all aspects of maintaining a professional and uplifting community for colored people. Surely you agree with the importance of elocution and dramatic arts.

WILLIAM

I am here to instruct in economics and build a sociology program.

ADRIENNE

And to continue your education on the experiences of the Negro race in the deep south. Am I misled in that assumption?

WILLIAM

No, you are not, however...

ADRIENNE

The dramatic society that I have developed will assist in the extension of your understanding just as dressing in tails and a top hat to interview enslaved and freed blacks in Philadelphia.

WILLIAM

How do you know of that work? It hasn't been published yet.

ADRIENNE

Our people's progress is always most important to me,
Professor.

Nina speaks from the window.

NINA

William, you might forget that the world is talking about
your progress. You never stop.

ADRIENNE

Exactly right, Mrs. Dubois. Also, I have family in
Philadelphia, and colleagues, white and black alike, in
Massachusetts. They are ever eager to know how you will
follow up your impressive accomplishments at Harvard.

Music begins softly

WILLIAM

It has been satisfying, if trying work.

Nina is looking on as she rocks the
baby

ADRIENNE

Indeed! And all stories can be told through the dramatic
arts. It is an incomparable medium.

WILLIAM

Shakespeare himself mined history for his plays.

ADRIENNE

So we do agree! Building a world for storytelling is important for our history.

Music is building as Nina goes into her own world. A hologram of her standing by the window is projected as she begins to sing.

WILLIAM

I do have some building and organizational experience.

ADRIENNE

A Stage Manager, then. You might even be inspired to pen a dramatic piece of your own some day?

WILLIAM

Perhaps.

NINA

William has so many talents. I can never keep him busy enough around here.

ADRIENNE

Don't you worry, Mrs. Dubois. We will make good use of his many gifts!

Nina is quietly humming to Burghardt as
Adrienne says goodbye and leaves. Her
humming turns to a song.

NINA

I SEE IT STARTING
IT BRIGHTENS HIS FACE
HIS BODY CHANGES
AMBITION TAKES HIM AWAY

WILLIAM

(making himself busy)

She seems like a lovely woman. She is an actress, you know.

NINA

Yes, so I have heard. She is very fair.

WILLIAM

Yes, we all have the stamp of that cursed evidenced in our
features. Our hair and skin.

NINA

Some of us more than others, I suppose.

WILLIAM

Nevermind. She seems very agreeable and not at all wrapped up
in her station. Her husband Alonzo Herndon is no scholar of
books but a successful man of industry.

(MORE)

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

I am looking forward to learning how he went from field hand to acquiring millions. It is certainly the most impressive story of our people that I have found, thus far. Burghardt will thrive here, Nina. So will we.

Nina puts the baby down and begins helping with unpacking as she starts to sing.

NINA

I'VE LEARNED TO EXPECT IT
ALONE IN THIS PLACE
WHEN HE IS DETERMINED
STAY OUT OF HIS WAY

THERE WAS A MAN
HE LOVED ME BACK THEN
THE WORLD'S SHINING STAR
CHOSE A HUMBLE GIRL
HE GAVE ME HIS TIME
ALWAYS SHARING HIS PLANS
I KNEW I WOULD HAVE TO
BE PATIENT AND TAKE WHAT I CAN

William is making himself comfortable in the space. He is interacting with the baby and a bit with Nina but finally settles down with his, ink, pens, and paper at the desk.

SCENE 3

LIGHTS UP on Livie in her dorm room,
2019, CLARK ATLANTA. She sings in a
modern upbeat tempo, (something like
NEW RULES by DUA LIPA)

LIVIE

WILLIAM WAS THE MAN
MADE A WAY, HAD A PLAN
WHEN HE BUILT HIMSELF UP
HE MADE STEPS FOR US ALL

I WOULDN'T BE HERE
IF IT WASN'T FOR YOU
I WOULDN'T BE HERE
IF IT WASN'T FOR YOU
IF I HAVE A GUARDIAN
ANCESTOR NOT SAINT
IT'S YOU PROFESSOR
MY GUIDANCE IS YOU

Livie takes out a picture of DuBois and
puts it on her side table. A hologram
of DuBois is projected that seems like
he is observing what she is doing.

Nina is still unpacking the boxes,
DuBois is lost in his work. The baby
cries. Nina stops to comfort him.

WILLIAM

Dear, I am going to take a walk around the grounds. Take some
notes. After baby Burghardt naps, would you like to take in
the view from Diamond Hill?

NINA

I read that it has the best view of the city. That would be
very fine.

Dubois exits. Nina comforts the baby.

LIVIE, NINA

Taking in the small room.

I'VE LEARNED TO EXPECT IT
ALONE IN THIS PLACE

Nina's phone rings. MAMA'S music begins playing

LIVIE

Hey, mama! That's okay. I got a lift. Yeah, I know,
Hartsfield is always crazy.

Mama's music plays in response

Maybe we can meet for dinner tonight?

Music

Oh, I thought you were in town?

Music

You got the role. That's really great, mama! Europe!!!! Oh, wow. Congratulations. Yeah, no, I got plenty to do. It's okay. Yes, ma'am. See you when you get back, maybe?

Music

Yeah, love you too.

Livie ends the call

LIVIE

I'VE LEARNED TO EXPECT IT
ALONE IN THIS PLACE
WHEN MAMA GETS GOING
STAY OUT OF HER WAY

Cheering herself up. She pulls out
books and begins to put things away.

LIVIE

WILLIAM WAS THE MAN
HE DID MORE THAN PAY DUES
YOU ARE MY GUARDIAN ANCESTOR
(MORE)

LIVIE (CONT'D)

DOCTOR PROFESSOR WILLIAM

I CHOOSE YOU

NINA

HE CHOSE ME

NINA, LIVIE

DOCTOR

PROFESSOR

LIVIE

I CHOOSE YOU

SCENE 4

Livie is face timing with her mother.
The music underscores an animated image
of Mama Pearce appears somewhere
onstage

MAMA PEARCE

How did your thesis defense go?

LIVIE

It wasn't a defense, mama. I'm not at that phase yet.

MAMA PEARCE

Oh, I can't keep it straight. I don't think you need more
schooling, anyway.

LIVIE

Job security, mama.

MAMA PEARCE

And I guess I can't relate.

LIVIE

I didn't mean--

MAMA PEARCE

But, you dear old mama is on a major set for television series! If they like my work, I could get a recurring and, not to jinx it, but maybe a spin-off of my own. But, you know, that's lots of sucking up and playing the game.

(a glitch)

Hello!? Hello!

LIVIE

Yeah, I'm still here.

MAMA PEARCE

Okay, well what is it with then. Your study thing. Didn't you say something about a meeting about your thesis.

Light up on Faculty Advisor/Committee
Member 1

LIVIE

I have to meet one of my faculty advisors. I have to stay in touch with them.

MAMA PEARCE

Them? How many you need?!

The Faculty Advisor (FA) / Head Committee Member (CMM1) is a life sized puppet operated by a figure dressed from head to foot in an entirely gray outfit. The puppet is obviously meant to be African-American but is completely controlled by an unseen entity without visible facial features. All that can be seen is gray.

LIVIE

Thank you for seeing me. I only just arrived last week.

FA

We are here to help in any way we can. The journey to your PhD, should you be approved, is a very important one. One that should be taken very carefully. You can meet with each of us individually to get some different perspectives before your final defense.

LIVIE

Yes, I have been dreaming about this moment since I was in high school!

FA

How far have you gotten in your research?

LIVIE

Very far! I was worried that I had too much information.

FA

I have never seen that problem.

LIVIE

It's as though Dr. Dubois is walking right next to me, pointing me in new directions. Sometimes I wonder if he isn't trying to take the thing over himself.

The joke falls flat

FA

(amused condescension)

Ms. Pearce.

LIVIE

You can call me Livie.

FA

Yes, I know. Ms. Pearce, we encourage our candidates to remain open to a variety of topics in case of unforeseen circumstances.

LIVIE

Oh I have thought about every possible scenario. I know tons of people have done research on Dr. Dubois but I haven't seen anything like my premise.

FA

He is very extensively researched.

LIVIE

Yes, ma'am, but he has been my guardian ancestor since I was a little girl.

FA

(ignoring)

And what in particular about your research will set your work apart from the hundreds of other PhD experts on the subject?

LIVIE

He was a feminist. A feminist who stood in solidarity with Black women, specifically.

FA

Really? This is your premise? You believe you can substantiate at least two hundred and fifty pages of writing on that topic?

LIVIE

I have been compiling research since I began my Master's at Harvard.

FA

And you feel compelled to continue this line of research through your dissertation here?

LIVIE

Yes I do.

FA

I see. It appears that you set your academic course to mirror Dr. Dubois. Is that accurate?

LIVIE

Well, I guess I have. Yes.

FA

Are you suggesting that it was an accident? Undergrad at Fisk, Masters at Harvard...did you teach at Willberforce as well? Maybe married a student.

LIVIE

(resisting the urge to lash out
at this person)

I see the correlation.

FA

Can you tell me why you chose to get your Doctorate here, at Clark? Dubois received his from Harvard. You were right there, after all.

LIVIE

The opportunity didn't present itself.

FA

I see.

(MORE)

FA (CONT'D)

(letting the silence weigh down
on Livie)

My office hours are 8-4. I don't usually lunch, so free to
stop by for any advice, when your resolve waivers.

Lights cross fade from FA to MAMA
PEARCE

MAMA PEARCE

Oh, they sound like lots of fun! But why there, honey?! From
Harvard to Clark Atlanta? That was a step down, wasn't it ?
I love telling everybody you went to--

(she hears a noise in the
background)

Oh! Gotta go, baby. I'm being called to set. We'll talk soon.
Love you!

Mama Pearce's image disappears. Livie
stands holding the phone

The song "I'VE LEARNED TO EXPECT IT"
is heard playing as the lights begin to
shift.

We see Nina trying to comfort baby
Burghardt. William makes his way to
Adrienne's door.

ADRIENNE

Professor DuBois. Are you that eager to get started on the production planning? We have to wait until daylight at least.

WILLIAM

I am sorry to disturb you at this hour, Mrs. Herndon. We are in desperate need of a physician

ADRIENNE

Is Mrs. DuBois not well?

WILLIAM

Our baby Burghardt. He has not been well all night and his fever continues to increase.

ADRIENNE

I don't think our doctor is in town.

WILLIAM

You mean your family physician?

ADRIENNE

No, the doctor that sees Negros. But I will send a cable.

WILLIAM

Is there no white doctor in town that will see our baby boy?

ADRIENNE

I am sorry to say, William. This place is truly wretched to us in a different way from the North. But let us keep faith. I will wait here for word. You can try one white doctor that might see him.

She hands him a piece of paper with an address written on it.

William makes his way to Nina and the baby. He takes the baby from her.

Nina is pacing the floor, holding a piece of the baby's clothing, praying. William reenters their rooms, places the baby in the crib.

WILLIAM

(an excerpt from The Death of
The First Born in Souls of
Black Folk)

Ten days he lay there-- wasting away. He died at eventide. I saw his breath beat quicker and quicker, then his little soul leapt like a star that travels in the night.

Nina checks the baby one final time.
She is distraught

In the chamber of death writhed the world's most piteous thing -- a childless mother.

NINA

He will be happy there.

A YouTube styled image of a horse drawn carriage pulling a trailer with a baby sized casket covered with white flowers.

The procession of mourning professors and students is behind. Faces of white people glaring at them as they pass

WILLIAM

We seemed to rumble down an unknown street behind a little white bundle of posies, with the shadow of a song in our ears. The busy city dinned about us; they did not say much, those pale-faced hurrying men and women; they did not say much,—they only glanced and said, "Niggers!"

SCENE 7

Nina and Dubois stand by a graveside,
1899, Great Barrington, Mass.

Livie is seen in 2019, Woodruff
Library, Atlanta Georgia. She is
getting herself situated at a computer.
Putting on her headphones, plugging
into the computer

NINA

Do you think they would have seen him if he were as light as The Herndons? Mrs. Adrienne Herndon could definitely be mistaken for a white woman.

WILLIAM

I can assure you, people such as Mrs. Herndon carries her own tribulations. Wearing the appearance of one group when she knows the truth of another. There is no use thinking about any of that. He is resting now. He won't need to worry about those useless, hurtful things now. He won't wrestle behind the veil as the rest of us do.

What was it you said in Atlanta about his happiness?

NINA

I said, he will be happy there. Oh, but I miss our little Burghardt, now. I will never stop missing him and his little fingers wrapped around my thumb. I don't how I will ever stop the ache, William.

Lights crossfade to Woodruff library on Clark Atlanta University Campus, 2019, Livie is engrossed in a YouTube video. Her imagination of DuBois comes to life on stage in a hologram.

WILLIAM

Ladies and Gentlemen. Socialism and the American Negro. Democracy has so disappeared in the United States that there are some subjects that can not even be discussed.

(MORE)

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

The essence of the Democratic process is free discussion. There was a time when men were not allowed to talk about universal suffrage or the education of women or freedom for Negro slaves. Today, communism is the dirty word and socialism is suspect.

I often refiew-revfe- refer to my education in Democracy. In the little New England town where I was born we had a high school of about 25 pupils. I entered it in 1880 at the age of twelve. As I attended the town meeting annually. In the Spring, there used regularly to appear one of the dirtiest old men I ever saw. He was fat and greasy. And every year he made a fierce attack on wasting his taxes on a high school. I was always furious. I wondered why the citizens sat silent and let him rant, but they did. And then quietly they voted the money for the high school. There I learned my lesson in Democracy: listen to the other side.

Matthew walks by and sees Dubois on the screen

Livie takes off her headphones and begins to take notes when...

MATTHEW

My dad worships that man!

Livie is startled, drops her pen.
Matthew picks it up for her.

MATTHEW

My bad. I don't see people looking at a whole lot of DuBois
YouTube videos.

LIVIE

Yeah, trying to find out as much as I can.

MATTHEW

You going for your Masters or Doctorate?

LIVIE

Doctorate.

MATTHEW

Me too!

Livie might try to hide her suspicion

LIVIE

(about to put on her headphones
and get back to work)

Well, good luck!

MATTHEW

Don't worry, I'm not hunting for a thesis. I'm an engineer,
got my thesis down. Anyway, that's cool, you studying Dubois.
Later.

LIVIE

"Worship" is a strong word.

MATTHEW

Obsessed at least!

He would make us read his essays and shit once a week. If we didn't read them, he would hold us hostage while he read them out loud, and give us pop quizzes. Crazy shit like that.

LIVIE

Sounds great!

MATTHEW

Baby girl...

LIVIE

I am grown !

MATTHEW

Right, my bad. What's your name?

LIVIE

Livie.

MATTHEW

Short for something?

LIVIE

No.

MATTHEW

I'm Matthew. White people call me Matt for short. Black people call me Matthew.

LIVIE

What?

MATTHEW

My pops is white... momz is black...and white people ...you know they like to shorten my name all the time.

(he can't stop rambling)

I never knew why, you know Black folks might give you a nickname like fo'head cuz your head so big or Peanut cause your head is shaped funny, not yours... you got a...you have a really nice shaped head...I'm just saying...anyway, nice to meet you.

LIVIE

Okay. Well, I'm kind of on a deadline -- so --

MATTHEW

Yeah, yeah, coolcoolcool. Okay...

Music starts

LIVIE

OH NO, HE'S STARING

MATTHEW

I CAN'T STOP STARING

LIVIE

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS BOY

MATTHEW

WHAT'S UP WITH YOU, MAN

LIVIE

I'M NOT READY

MATTHEW

NOT READY

LIVIE

NOT READY

LIVIE, MATTHEW

NOT READY

TO BE DISTRACTED

YET

I'M NOT READY

FOR

THIS PART OF IT

I WAS FINE BEFORE

WITH

MY DATING APP

BUT HE / SHE

IS LIVING

BREATHING

BLOOD AND FLESH

WARM TO THE TOUCH

(MORE)

LIVIE (CONT'D)

THIS IS NOT
THE PLAN

LIVIE
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS BOY

MATTHEW
WHAT'S UP WITH YOU, MAN

LIVIE
I'M NOT READY

MATTHEW
NOT READY

LIVIE
NOT READY

LIVIE, MATTHEW
NOT READY

TO BE
Distracted
YET
I'M NOT READY

LIVIE
HE REAL LIGHT SKINNED

MATTHEW
SHE A LITTLE TOO LIGHT

LIVIE

BUT, IT'S BEEN A WHILE

MATTHEW

WHAT A GREAT SMILE

LIVIE

I'VE GOT TO STAY FOCUSED

MATTHEW

STAY FOCUSED, MAN

LIVIE, MATTHEW

BUT IT MIGHT BE NICE.

HOW MANY TIMES

DO YOU FEEL THIS

IN PERSON

FOR REAL

THIS

VIRTUAL LIFE

KEEPS US FROM KNOWING

WHAT'S REAL

IF ONLY WE COULD GET

PAST SCREENS AND CLICKING

THE SWIPING AND LIKES

AND FAKE FEEDS

WHAT ELSE COULD WE DO

WHAT ELSE COULD WE DO

MATTHEW

I WANT TO KNOW YOU

Matthew turns back with strong
determination

MATTHEW

(words tumbling out
uncontrollably)

Okay! I'm from Sacramento, California. I'm weird. I'm in
Atlanta, Georgia where I was told talking to a cisgirl, cis
boy, transgender woman, transgender man, any humanoid really,
could get me shot or robbed but not loved and I promised
myself I was gonna find a friend I can at least talk to face
to face and watch movies, with or without holding hands, I
don't care either way and you're beautiful and probably not
interested so you'll tell me but do you want to go and walk
in the park with the homeless people and...
...talk...about....stuff?

LIVIE

Mkay.

MATTHEW

COOL! But right now I got to get to class. Here's my number.

He writes down his number and hands it
to her

NO presH AT ALL! Just call when you want, if you want. I
won't save it until you tell me to. But I gotta go. Bye, I
mean see you later...I hope. okayBye

He goes

LIVIE

(singing)

I WANT TO KNOW YOU

SCENE 8

Lights up on Nina in Great Barrington,
Mass. She is cradling YOLANDE. 1900

NINA

YOU / I WILL HOLD CLOSE/ YOU / YOU I WILL HOLD SO SO SO
CLOSE/ I WILL BE WITH YOU I WILL COMFORT YOU / I WILL STAY
WITH YOU/ I WILL STAY WITH YOU/ I WILL STAY...

Lights on Paris, France, 1900 World
Expo. Images from the exhibition flash
up on various parts of the stage

WILLIAM

The Negro is capable of greatness! With proper guidance,
education and knowledge. The Negro need not be just a laborer
but also an educator. There are those Negros who are not
equipped to be --

NINA

MOMMY LOVES YOU
DADDY LOVES YOU TOO
EVEN WHEN HE'S AWAY

(MORE)

NINA (CONT'D)

DADDY LOVES YOU TOO
EVEN IF HE IS AWAY
HE IS IMPORTANT
HE MADE A BIG PROMISE
I WILL STAY HERE
I WILL STAY
I AM SO GRATEFUL
YOU ARE HERE WITH ME
I HOPE YOU STAY

SCENE 9

Lights up on Livie in a video chat with
Mama Pearce.

MAMA PEARCE

They gave me a recurring role!!!!

LIVIE

Oh whoa, mom. After all these years! You--I mean not that
you're old. That's just great news mom.

MAMA PEARCE

I know! I'm ancient for this business but things are
changing. That hashtag Metoo thing goes for us old ladies too!

(she lowers her voice to a
whisper)

Did you notice my eyes?

LIVIE

What?

MAMA PEARCE

I got my eyes done.

LIVIE

Botox?

MAMA PEARCE

You can't tell the difference? I did Botox and a lid lift! I heard Pacino got it done. You know who that is? He's a big deal...

LIVIE

Yes, I know who Al Pacino is, mom

MAMA PEARCE

And Goldie Hawn says you should start doing little maintenance nips here and there starting at around 30...keep it gradual

LIVIE

Mama, we're black, it's not the same --

MAMA PEARCE

It's all skin! I might not have enough of melanin content--
So did you hear about that v-v-v-i-i--

The feed begins to short out

MAMA PEARCE

-- Co-v-v-v-v-i-i-i

LIVIE

Mama!? Mom? You're cutting out. Mama???!!!

The connection is lost.

Livie considers her phone, scrolls her
contacts and dials

MATTHEW

(answers his phone)

Hello?

LIVIE

How much do you really know about Dubois?

MATTHEW

Alot. He was a genius and an absentee father.

Lights up on the Dubois family in
Atlanta, 1905, with YOLANDE 5 years
old, possibly a marionette puppet. She
is walking around a desk neatly
arranged with books, pens and papers.
Nina see YOLANDE exploring.

NINA

What you looking for? You looking for daddy? He's not here
baby.

YOLANDE stands still and waits. Looks
out the window

But he'll be back.

YOLANDE

I know it!

Nina speaks a letter to Dubois.

NINA

It gets lonely without you here in the evenings. Ann
sometimes sits with me until I finish my supper.

LIVIE

No offense, but your daddy seems super clingy.

MATTHEW

How much do YOU know about Dubois?

LIVIE

I wrote my Masters thesis on how his work teaching rural
white people in Nashville Tennessee shaped his political and
economic views on the Human condition.

MATTHEW

But how much do you really know?

LIVIE

I agree with you, he was a genius.

Matthew becomes engrossed in his phone

MATTHEW

Aight. You want some food?

LIVIE

You're changing the subject.

MATTHEW

Yup. I don't know you well enough to put you to shame.

LIVIE

Boy please.

MATTHEW

When was his first child born?

LIVIE

October second eighteen ninety-seven. Burghardt Dubois.

MATTHEW

Where?

LIVIE

Great Barrington, Massachussets.

MATTHEW

Where was Dubois when the boy was born?

LIVIE

Working!

MATTHEW

Where was he working?

LIVIE

He was pursuing his purpose. Having a child or getting married shouldn't stand in the way of your work.

MATTHEW

Answer the question, please ma'am.

LIVIE

He was interviewing black families in Philadelphia.

MATTHEW

It took him weeks to see his wife and newborn.

LIVIE

He raced back to be with them. And we have established you may have been raised with some co-dependency issues.

MATTHEW

When did the baby boy die?

LIVIE

What is your point?!

MATTHEW

I can tell you if you like...

LIVIE

May 24th, 1899 in Atlanta, Georgia.

MATTHEW

On this very soil, may he rest in peace.

LIVIE

Yes, but Dubois was here, with them!

MATTHEW

Correct, very sad stuff.

LIVIE

Not absent.

MATTHEW

After they buried the baby in Great Barrington when did they have their second child?

LIVIE

October 21, 1900

MATTHEW

Do you happen to know when The Paris Expo was taking place?

LIVIE

That same year, but he raced back to be with her

MATTHEW

As much as you can race by boat, yeah.

LIVIE

The man was working to provide for his family.

MATTHEW

I'm not arguing that--

LIVIE

Then what are you arguing?! There is a huge difference between a father being absent and not providing support and a father who is away trying to build something for his family. No, he couldn't be there every minute of everyday BECAUSE HE WAS WORKING! More than working, he was building something that no one in the history of Black folks just out of enslavement have done before or since! He was devoting himself to doing work no one else wanted to do for Black Folks!!!! No one but him was going to do that kind of work for our people! Not exploiting them, not pimping them but providing context for their new existence in this messed up world!

MATTHEW

Hey, I didn't mean to get you mad--

LIVIE

(obviously angry)

I'm not mad. No. I'm good. but you might want to focus on what it is you want to be known for...you know, in your field. I'm sure you know that by the time he was our age, he already had two Bachelor degrees, had studied in Germany and was on his way to Harvard to become their first Black PhD.

Livie leaves him

MATTHEW

I thought we were playing!

(calling after her)

But do you got your thesis, though!?

(to himself)

What just happened?

SCENE 10

Livie is walking around the quad
talking to herself.

Nina is standing in the kitchen with
YOLANDE, age 15

LIVIE

He doesn't know me! Some bullshit. What does he know about greatness??? A little weird mixed boy from CALI-FOR-NEEEEEEEYA!?? What ever! Probably don't even know what he talking about. Probably lying about that stuff with his daddy. Shoot, memorizing Dubois. Please!

YOLANDE

But, mother, It wasn't my fault!

NINA

That's not what the teacher said.

YOLANDE

That teacher doesn't like me

NINA

Why do you say that?

YOLANDE

She doesn't like anyone who isn't a Gray!

NINA

YOLANDE!

YOLANDE

That's what daddy calls them! White people are Grays!

NINA

You are not your father.

YOLANDE

She always picks on me! She never punishes the white students.

NINA

Would you like me to--

YOLANDE

NO, please. That just makes it worse.

NINA

I will write to your father and ask him what he thinks should be done. But you need to assert yourself. You know what he has said.

YOLANDE

When is he coming to visit?

NINA

As soon as he can. He has lots of meetings to attend. But you have an opportunity here, one of the top boarding schools in the world! He takes several lectures and works very hard to keep you here. Apply yourself, make him proud.

(Nina feels a pain in her head)

YOLANDE

Mommy? You okay?

NINA

I'm fine. I just need to eat something. I will see you on the weekend. Apply yourself, YOLANDE.

Livie sits and pulls out her phone. She begins searching.

YOLANDE is in her dorm room. She looks at a picture of her father. Maybe a letter.

LIVIE

I bet Mr. Know-it-all didn't read this one.

YOLANDE

I bet daddy would have understood. And mommy isn't feeling well.

LIVIE

So maybe he wasn't there as much. He was there...in other ways.

YOLANDE

I just wish I come home and stay, daddy. Everything seems so much lonelier here.

LIVIE

At least he could provide for them. I bet they understood.

YOLANDE

I'VE LEARNED TO EXPECT IT/ I KNOW YOU'RE NOT HERE/ YOUR WORK
IS IMPORTANT/ I WISH YOU WERE NEAR/ WISH I COULD GO WITH YOU/
I TRY TO BE GOOD/ BUT THERE IS NO ROOM FOR A CHILD/ WHEN
YOU'RE CHANGING THE WORLD

LIVIE

I'VE LEARNED TO EXPECT IT/ THE PROMISE WAS MADE/ THE WORLD
WAS YOUR PLAYGROUND/ I GOT IN THE WAY/ I CAN'T SAY I MISSED
SOMETHING/ THAT WAS NEVER THERE/ I LEARNED TO EXPECT IT/ AND
PRETEND NOT TO CARE

Livie's phone rings with an incoming
video call from MAMA. She looks at it
until it stops ringing.

NINA

I DIDN'T EXPECT THIS/ OR MAYBE I DID/ RAISING A BLACK CHILD
TOGETHER/ WITH YOU FAR AWAY/ LONGING FOR HER HERO/ WHILE YOU
SAVE EVERYONE ELSE

LIVIE

BUT MAYBE

NINA

JUST MAYBE

YOLANDE, LIVIE, NINA

YOU WILL COME BACK AND BE

YOLANDE, LIVIE

THE FATHER

NINA

THE HUSBAND THAT COMFORTED ME/ THOSE EARLIER TIMES WHEN YOU
ASKED FOR MY HAND

YOLANDE

KISSED MY CHEEK

HELD ME CLOSE

DID THAT EVER HAPPEN

LIVIE

I LEARNED TO EXPECT IT/
LOTS OF WOMEN THEY DO/
GIVE YOUR LOVE WITHOUT KNOWING
IF THEY WILL GIVE LOVE TO YOU

NINA

I ALWAYS KNEW
HIS WORK CAME FIRST
BUT

(MORE)

NINA (CONT'D)

A CHILD
CAN'T UNDERSTAND

YOLANDE

I TRY TO BE GOOD
BUT
YOU DON'T
SEEM TO CARE

LIVIE

I'VE GOT ADMIT IT/
WHAT I DON'T WANT TO SEE/
YOU'RE HUMAN LIKE MAMA/
LIKE DADDY/
LIKE ME

SCENE 11

Livie is pouring over a stack of books
and papers. Jazz music is playing
softly in the background

YOLANDE, 20, is dancing close with
Jimmie Lunceford.

YOLANDE

Listen, Jimmie, I really like you.

JIMMIE

I know. That's something we got in common, baby.

YOLANDE

But daddy don't like you at all.

JIMMIE

Good thing I don't want to dance with him.

YOLANDE

He said, he won't give us his blessing to get married.

JIMMIE

I'm going to be a big jazz star! Maybe as famous as your daddy, and then he can't help but to accept us. Besides, my family got real money. Lots of land down in Mississippi. We don't need his blessing!

YOLANDE

I do. Goodbye Jimmie.

Jimmie kisses her hand and leaves.

William walks in controlling a life sized puppet of Countee Cullen who stands next to YOLANDE.

Countee and YOLANDE link arms, a veil is lowered over her face, a ring is placed on her finger.

YOLANDE and Countee are "dancing" as Nina and William confer.

The entire time, William is controlling the Countee-puppet and talking with Nina. There are moments when he loses control of the puppet and it might slump over YOLANDE or step on her foot.

NINA

William, there is something about that boy that doesn't sit well with me.

WILLIAM

He is a very talented and highly respected young man

NINA

Respected by whom, William? You and your colleagues? And how does Nina feel about him? I don't see any love in her manner toward him.

WILLIAM

Love is something that can be cultivated. You weren't in love with me when we met, were you?

NINA

I was at least attracted to you.

WILLIAM

We are holding up a standard for the Negro race; the daughter of excellence and a man of great standing in his own right. Countee Cullen is no slouch, Nina. This union should be celebrated by the entire Negro Community.

William gently drapes the puppet on
Yolande's back as though he is wrapping
her in an expensive garment

Music from the wedding begins to swell
into Can't You See It

THE EYES HAVE IT/
EVERY GLANCE EVERY TOUCH/
WHEN THEY SWAY TO THE MUSIC
IT MAKES THE ROOM BREATHE
WITH HOPE WE NEVER DARED TO HOPE
ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES/

ALL THE THINGS THAT WE'VE SEEN NINA
ALL THE WAYS WE'VE SURVIVED/
CAN'T YOU SEE IT GROWING
NINA/
CAN'T YOU SEE
HOW THEY WILL THRIVE

NINA

I'M NOT SO CERTAIN
NO/
SHE SEEMS,
LIKE MAYBE, I DON'T KNOW/
LIKE MAYBE SHE IS WONDERING
HOW FAR HIS LOVE WILL GO/
HE'S HOLDING ONTO HER HAND LIKE
A SCHOOLBOY WHO'S BEEN TAUGHT/
THERE'S NO PASSION

(MORE)

NINA (CONT'D)

NO FIRE
NO REASON TO BELIEVE
THEY ARE REALLY IN LOVE

WILLIAM/NINA

RUMORS SPREAD SO FAST
WE HAVE NO ROOM FOR DOUBT
WE ARE THE NEW NEGRO CLASS
FRESH EYES ON ALL OF US
EVERYTHING IN MOTION
WHY CAN'T YOU SEE
THERE IS MORE TO ALL OF THIS
THAN JUST YOU AND ME

Nina walks off with the puppet of
Countee draped on her back.

Livie's phone rings. Mama Pearce
appears in the videochat

MAMA PEARCE

You mad at me?

LIVIE

No, I've been busy.

MAMA PEARCE

I thought you would try and call me after that email you
sent. Oh, no, that wasn't an email it was an absurdly long
text message.

LIVIE

I didn't know if you were checking e-mails.

MAMA PEARCE

Child please. Anyway, the answer is 'yes'. I loved your father very much.

LIVIE

Really? You never talked about him. He never came around. I never met him.

MAMA PEARCE

He came around.

LIVIE

Oh. Well...that's all--

MAMA PEARCE

He said you were cute. Sent us money when he could spare it. He just wasn't the fathering type. You know.

The feed begins to glitch

LIVIE

Okay, thanks mom.

MAMA PEARCE

Just...hold up. Give me a minute.

Livie silently agrees. At least she doesn't click off.

MAMA PEARCE

Your daddy wasn't father material and I ain't a smother mother. But, I love you.

LIVIE

You fed me and kept a roof over my head, so yeah, I know.

MAMA PEARCE

How is the boyfriend situation looking over there. Any prospects?

LIVIE

Prospects!? Who are you, right now!!!?

MAMA PEARCE

Seriously. None of us are getting any younger.

LIVIE

What role they got you playing on that show, mama? Plantation matchmaker???

MAMA PEARCE

Ha! Ha! You can't work all the time!

LIVIE

Okay! Tune in next week to find out if I've met anyone! Gotta go, love you mean it, bye!

MAMA PEARCE

Girl! I'm still your mama! You don't hang up or swipe left or whatever it is y'all do. You not doing that to me!

LIVIE

Yes ma'am.

MAMA PEARCE

Alright, they calling me. Kiss kiss. Bye.

The call ends.

Matthew walks in carrying a stack of books.

MATTHEW

Your moms is funny.

LIVIE

Hilarious.

MATTEW

Wanna talk about it?

LIVIE

Nope.

MATTHEW

Okay. Hey! You heard about that virus or something they found in China?

LIVIE

That ain't nothin'. They just trying to distract us.

MATTHEW

Maybe.

LIVIE

Anyway, I got another meeting with a Faculty Advisor tomorrow and I'm starting to freak out.

MATTHEW

Maybe you should think about ano--

LIVIE

No! I'm doing Dubois...not
'doing'...ewww...researching....writing on Dubois! Ugh!

MATTHEW

You sure you don't want to take a break?

LIVIE

We found out that Dubois was kind of assertive when it came to YOLANDE getting married.

MATTHEW

Assertive???!! Come on Livie, HE STRAIGHT UP FORCED HER TO
MARRY A GAY DUDE!

LIVIE

He didn't know he was gay...and she didn't have to marry the
man.

MATTHEW

It was YOLANDE who didn't know he was gay. Dear old daddy
Dubois made a career out of research.

(MORE)

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

You don't think he could have found out!!!!? And you know how much she wanted her father's approval.

LIVIE

She was headstrong

MATTHEW

And she was starving for her father's approval!!!!

LIVIE

Whatever, maybe. I don't know. My point is Dubois was looking out for her future.

MATTHEW

Are we reading the same letters?

He pulls a copy of one of Dubois
letters to Yolande. Dubois appears.
Yolande holds the letter and reads as
Dubois speaks.

WILLIAM

"My dear Yolande. Countee and I have just had lunch to talk over matters. I am hoping this will get to you before he leaves Baltimore. There are several matters that you two ought to talk over carefully. First, as to the size and the cost of the wedding. We must be careful not to be so ostentatious and showy as to be vulgar. The expense ought to be well within our economic condition".

LIVIE

She was doing too much and he was footing the bill!

MATTHEW

Okay, let's continue, shall we?

(continues reading)

"We have ..."

(he interrupts himself)

Did you hear that part?

(reading)

"WE HAVE DECIDED that two hundred ought to be the outside limit for persons invited to the reception".

(stops reading)

You don't find that strange? Especially for the time? The father of the bride paying and organizing the wedding with the groom?? Nina may have been sickly, but she wasn't dead! She could have been more included! Why wasn't she, the mother of the bride, in on these conversations?

LIVIE

How do you know that she wasn't?

MATTHEW

They keep every other kind of letter, where are Nina's ones talking about the wedding of her only surviving child?!

LIVIE

The real question is why you getting so upset. Here's another letter to Countee

(reading)

"With regard to the reception, Mrs. DuBois and I have decided that the proper thing would be a large church wedding and a small reception".

(stops reading)

See! He did discuss it with Nina.

MATTHEW

Weak! Check this one out!

(reading)

"Countee was speaking about your advice to him concerning a PhD and also concerning teaching. If I were you I would not press this. Countee has rare, creative ability. It should not be ruined by mechanical and routine efforts and work". What's that about?

LIVIE

He knew good talent when he saw it.

MATTHEW

Oh, your protest is softening! Your man got some insight on PhDs.

Matthew starts reading.

Lights crossfade from Matthew and Livie
to Dubois and Yolande

WILLIAM

In my day a Ph.D. was a sort of proof of brains on the part
of colored folk. Today it is not.

Matthew stops reading

MATTHEW

We don't need to read that one.

Livie takes the letter from him

LIVIE

No, I want to know what he says.

She is reading it silently to herself

WILLIAM

It is simply a routine certificate which helps a man who
wants a job as a teacher. I do not think Countee ought to
turn aside from his main work just for the purpose of such a
degree. If possible I think he should avoid teaching. The
public schools, as you know, would be deadly for creative
work...if he can establish himself as a creative artist
without teaching, that would be best.

LIVIE

But he got a PhD.

YOLANDE

But daddy, you have a Ph.D. Being a teacher is a noble aspiration.

WILLIAM

Finally, remember that your work and a job which you ought to take seriously is, that of helping a great poet to become greater. You should make it easy for Countee

MATTHEW

DO YOU HEAR HIM? MAKE IT EASY FOR COUNTTEE!! You don't need this while you're working on your stuff.

LIVIE

I want to finish it!

WILLIAM

You should make it easy for Countee to write and keep him regularly at it.

YOLANDE

(taking up the reading)

You should not distract him or make him spend too much time entering to your entertainment. For once in your life and in your own thought, get out of the center of the picture.

MATTHEW

That's enough...

LIVIE

Why?

MATTHEW

You get the point.

Livie snatches the letter back and
reads it to herself as YOLANDE reads it
out loud

YOLANDE

"Stop thinking of yourself or being sorry for yourself or
regarding the world as revolving about you and concentrate on
the main job of having Countee Cullen do a year's work to
which the world will listen."

Like they listen to you, Daddy?

The music of "I've Learned To Expect
It" is heard

LIVIE

I should have never shown you where to find these letters.

MATTHEW

You okay?

LIVIE

Yeah I'm --I'm -- not ---I need you to leave.

MATTHEW

Don't be --

LIVIE

I want to be alone --- see you later, man.

Livie waits fore Matthew to leave.

MATTHEW

Don't you want to read through your 25 pages?

LIVIE

I got it

MATTHEW

You'll let me read them?

LIVIE

Maybe.

Matthew leaves. Livie opens her laptop and pulls up another letter. She starts taking notes.

Lights up on non-puppetted Countee Cullen sitting on the edge of the bed. YOLANDE is dressing.

COUNTEE

Say something.

YOLANDE

I prefer not to speak to you at all right now. In fact, I'd rather not look at you.

COUNTEE

You have every right to be angry.

YOLANDE

I don't need your permission to be angry.

COUNTEE

It's not my fault

YOLANDE

Your inclinations are not your fault?

COUNTEE

I have always known I was different...in that way.

YOLANDE

"That way", you mean sexually! The woman you ask to be your wife has the right to know what to expect in that area! You knew before! You knew and you still allowed my father to push and push for us to be married!!

COUNTEE

I thought--

YOLANDE

You both nearly planned the entire thing without me!!

COUNTEE

Stop being dramatic!

YOLANDE

And father was worried about my 16 bridesmaids!!! You were worried you wouldn't be able to find enough "eligible bachelors" to pair with my bridesmaids??!

(MORE)

YOLANDE (CONT'D)

That's what you told him, Countee? Now I'm wondering how you could possibly have been at a loss to find enough men!

COUNTEE

There is no need to be vulgar, YOLANDE.

YOLANDE

At this point there is not much need for anything I expected, Mr. Cullen. Does my father know? Have you confided this to him, yet? Of course you haven't told him.

COUNTEE

No.

YOLANDE

He will want to know why we're getting such a quick divorce, don't you think?

COUNTEE

YOLANDE, we can make it work. I know plenty of men who are like me and they have very nice arrangements.

YOLANDE

I am quite done with arrangements. My dear dear father "arranged" this fiasco.

COUNTEE

What will people say if I'm not living with my wife?

YOLANDE

Considering the gossip about your unnatural desires that have already found their way to my ears, you can't possibly mind what other people think.

COUNTEE

Please. You won't tell Dr. Dubois, will you? You don't know what it would do to my career if people knew--

YOLANDE

If they knew what? If they knew the truth?

(bitterness)

My mother never liked you. To be honest, I never loved you, but at least I felt some respect. That's gone. Now I just want to be as far away from you as physically possible. You can't help it if you are born this way, and it makes no sense to me.

If you don't want me to tell everyone why we are divorcing, you will be out of here in an hour before I get back. I imagine you will find some very accommodating friendly strangers in Paris. I'm going for a walk. I expect you to be gone when I return.

YOLANDE

I tried, daddy. There is nothing I can do if he was born this way, I don't understand it, but there it is. He asked that I don't tell anyone about this, so you can destroy this letter. I can't wait to get back home.

SCENE 12

Lights up on Matthew outside practicing some dance moves to music playing on his phone.

Livie walks up and hesitates interrupting. She works up the nerve and waits for him to notice her

MATTHEW

Hey! How long you been standing there?

LIVIE

Long enough to judge you

MATTHEW

It's the only way I get any exercise. I hate working out.

YOLANDE

I'm changing my focus.

MATTHEW

You mad at proxy dad?

LIVIE

Don't be a dick.

MATTHEW

Rude.

LIVIE

Nobody really looks at Yolande. I don't know what my angle is going to be but I'm going in that direction.

MATTHEW

How much time you got before you meet your next advisor?

LIVIE

Tomorrow. I'm going to ask for another day, pull some info from what I've already researched. But If you got time, I could use the feedback.

MATTHEW

Yeah, no problem, but I gotta ask you. Why do you want Doctorate?

LIVIE

No, nonono. Don't do that.

MATTHEW

Really! You're-- we only got so many days on this planet. Why spend so many of them on this?

LIVIE

You're getting one too.

MATTHEW

Yeah, but I know my reason.

LIVIE

What is it.

MATTHEW

I'll tell you later. I gotta get to class.

Matthew gathers his things

Text me. We can meet tonight.

Matthew exits. Livie notices a book he left behind. She picks it up and reads the cover.

LIVIE

Black on Both Sides...A Racial History of Trans Identity???

SCENE 13

Lights up on Woodruff Library. Livie is sitting at a study table with books open and spread around her. She is intently trying to concentrate on her computer screen and take notes. Her phone buzzes. She ignores it. Her phone buzzes again. She presses decline without noticing who the call is from. It buzzes again, she picks it up, it is a string of texts from her mother and an urgent Breaking News Feed post.

POST: THE CDC CONFIRMS A HIGHLY
CONTAGIOUS VIRUS IDENTIFIED!

TEXT: Hey sweetie. Just wanted to let
you know, we're in Italy and things
don't look so good.

TEXT: Don't know where they are taking
us.

TEXT: I'll be fine. People are starting
to get sick with something. I will let
you know what's going on. I love you!

William walks up to the table.

WILLIAM

Man! You read about this Virus thing? Sounds like a beer.

LIGHT OUT

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2

SCENE 1

A dance rehearsal room with mirrors

Matthew is listening to music in his headphones and dancing. The music in his headphones is heard by the audience.

After a few moments he is struck with a thought, picks up his phone and starts entering a note. He gets frustrated at trying to find the app, puts down his phone and picks up a pen and paper starts writing.

He goes back to his moves. Livie peeks in the door, Matthew sees her and stops dancing. The music stops

MATTHEW

Hey! What you doing here?

LIVIE

Your roommate told me where to find you.

MATTHEW

Not my question but okay. What's up?

LIVIE

I'm meeting with that second advisor I told you about and I wanted to know what you thought about my new idea.

MATTHEW

I'm sure it's fine but I was in the middle of something --

LIVIE

Yolande. I'm going to show the correlation between Dr. Dubois' absence and how Yolande chose

MATTHEW

(losing his temper)

I said I'm busy! I got my own work to do, you know!

Livie is silent

You been talking about this nonstop! You don't even know why you want Doctorate.

LIVIE

What's wrong with you?

MATTHEW

Nothing. Just...do what you're gonna do, it won't matter in the end anyway.

Livie sits

LIVIE

What did I do?

MATTHEW

Nothing. I'm just tired of hearing about Dubois!

LIVIE

We can talk about something else. I thought you liked talking about him.

MATTHEW

That's all my pops talked about, remember?

LIVIE

Fine!

They sit in silence Livie starts to go

Well I better --

MATTHEW

My dad died.

LIVIE

What?! When?

MATTHEW

This morning.

LIVIE

Was he-- was he sick -- or --?

MATTHEW

Why do people ask that? I mean he wasn't sick but what if he was, it doesn't matter. He died. He's dead. He's gone and that's all.

LIVIE

Can I do something?

MATTHEW

Go talk to your advisor. I'll be fine. I got a flight out tonight.

LIVIE

You sure?

MATTHEW

Yep. Dad would be like, get yourself together son. Life goes on. Keep going.

LIVIE

When are you coming back?

MATTHEW

Don't know.

LIVIE

You can call me if you want to talk. NOT about Dubois.

Livie turns to go

MATTHEW

You're going to be fine, you know. Your thesis is going to be fire!

LIVIE

Thanks. I hope you come back, but I get it if you don't.

Scene

2

FA 2 is an actor dressed from head to foot in the gray outfit that controls the other faculty advisor. There is a puppet crumpled up in the corner of the room.

Livie is late. She enters.

LIVIE

Hello Professor. I am sorry I'm late.

FA 2

I was beginning to wonder if you needed to reschedule

LIVIE

Thank you for waiting.

FA 2

I am eager to learn more about your novel approach to Dr. Dubois.

Livie is staring at the puppet in the corner. The advisor notices

FA 2

Is there something wrong, Ms Pearce?

LIVIE

No

FA 2

Well, impress me.

Livie's phone buzzes. She swipes
"decline". A still image of MAMA
PEARCE's is seen while her voice is
heard.

MAMA PEARCE

They say we are going to have to start quarantining over
here, baby girl. I wish you would pick up. The set has been
shut down and...I don't know whats going on. No one seems to
know. It's like we're in some sci-fi--Ain't this some shit?!
I finally get a real role and ...

(she coughs)

...and now it's cancelled. Indefinitely!

(she coughs a bit more)

On top of all that, I got this cough out of nowhere !!
Anyway, I just wanted to let you know what's going on. I love
you!

The image of MAMA PEARCE goes away

LIVIE

That's it!

FA 2

Well that is not what I expected!

LIVIE

Is that good ?

FA 2

Well...

FA 2 pulls out a sock puppet. Music
begins

LIVIE

Oh no...

FA 2

YOU MAY NOTICE MY HESITATION/ THERE'S A REASON FOR
LIMITATION/ UNDERSTANDING THE IMITATION OF YOUR TOPIC IS
CRUCIAL/ IF YOU GIVE ME JUST A MOMENT/ I WILL WALK YOU
THROUGH THE POINTS/ THAT MIGHT HELP YOU OUT

LIVIE

Excuse me, professor, but are you going to tell me that you
don't think I should pursue this thesis?

FA 2

We don't like to discourage enthusiasm in our potential
candidates but this topic could use a bit more thought.

LIVIE

I HAD A FEELING
YOU WOULD SAY THAT

(MORE)

LIVIE (CONT'D)

PROFESSOR
SOMEHOW I KNEW YOU
WOULD SAY SUCH A THING
SUGGESTING I RETHINK
MY REASON FOR BEING
SUGGESTING I RETHINK
EVERY THING I ONCE THOUGHT
IT ALL HAS NEW MEANING
A BRAND NEW MEANING
AND I DON'T LIKE IT AT ALL

I KNEW IT MIGHT NOT BE EASY
BUT THEY ARE MAKING IT SO HARD
IS IT POSSIBLE THEY ARE TRYING
TO KEEP ME OUT OF THEIR CLUB
WHEN I STARTED ON THIS JOURNEY
I WAS AN EXCITED LITTLE GIRL
NOW I AM QUESTIONING
EVERYTHING
I AM QUESTIONING IT ALL

FA 2

Ms. Pearce, it seems that you might not be in agreement with my assessment which is fine. The rest of the committee might or might not agree with me, but it is important for you to know that, if you are not approved on this round, you get two more two more chances. That is great news, isn't it?!

FA 2 stands up, removes the puppet, places it on the desk and leaves. The life sized puppet in the corner seems to be staring at Livie. She notices her phone has a message.

A hologram of MAMA PEARCE appears. She is coughing uncontrollably. Livie ends the call immediately and starts scrolling the screen of phone.

LIVIE

What the --?! China? Quarantine? How??? How could this year get any worse????? How???

her phone starts buzzing and dingding with notices coming in quickly as news bulletins are flashing across the stage

F U U U U U U U U U U U U K ! What the hell is going on !!????? Okay, calm down, calm down, you're fine. You're good. that last meeting wasn't bad. It went well, I think. It went fine. Okay, not fine but okay. It went okay. You're going to focus on Yolande. You're going to focus!! You got this. You better got this because...if you don't...what else you gonna do?

Lights up on Nina, London England, 1914

NINA

I know you think I spent too much money but I am telling you that it was all because of Yolande. What was I to do, Will? Her comb and hair brush was stolen along with two bags full of clothing. I only spent enough money to buy myself a skirt and two waist shirts for everyday. I also bought fresh eggs and oil, since I can not abide the food here. The doctor has prescribed me a special diet that he says will help my constitution. I feel that I am getting better. Yolande seems to enjoy school better this term. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Lights up on Yolande, age 16 , London
England, 1915

YOLANDE

Dear father, mama says I must leave Bedales at the end of this term. Please don't take me out of Bedales, just when I am starting to love it more than anywhere else in the world! I know I have worked hard at lessons this term. I can't do more and I can't help if I'm stupid. My friends here have signed the petition to ask that you please please please let me stay. If mother must, she can go back to America but I am not a baby anymore and I can stay here to finish out my senior year! It's all very well to bounce us about like wooden puppets with hollow heads for knowledge to be poured in. We have feelings and to take us away from a place we like hurts us just as much as anyone else so please have pity.

Lights cross fade to Livie in her dorm room. She is staring at her laptop, tapping on her pen on the desk repeatedly. She picks up her phone and checks it seconds apart. The phone buzzes. She answers

LIVIE

Hello? Hey hello?!

An image of Matthew is projected somewhere on the stage

MATTHEW

What you doing?

LIVIE

Staring at the screen. What you doing?

MATTHEW

Closing up the house.

LIVIE

How are you ?

MATTHEW

(avoiding)

Did you know that Dubois was super clingy...from a distance. He sent so many letters to Yolande about managing her weight and keeping up with her finances up until she was into her late thirties! Did you find any of those letters?

LIVIE

I read some of them. It was weird to see him being --

MATTHEW

A total helicopter parent!! That man was really kinda OCD with his daughter, right?

LIVIE

I'll give you that but it was because he cared about his family.

MATTHEW

And when she was married to that second dude but nobody liked him.

LIVIE

Yeah, it was fucked up that her second husband couldn't even support them. He straight up left them to try be a professional football player or something.

MATTHEW

In Philly. Yeah yeah. What was that about?! But she still tried to be with him even after they divorced????

LIVIE

A mess!!!

MATTHEW

Yeah, I guess every family gets messy.

Silence

He was cremated. I got to see him before they burned him up but, he wanted to be ashes so...

LIVIE

You got siblings, right?

MATTHEW

Oh, yeah, I got a sister. We got to see people who really liked my pops. Lotta people I didn't know but it was cool.

Silence

You know, I feel bad about how I acted before I left

LIVIE

NO! Don't apologize. I was -- no, it's nothing. You lost your dad

MATTHEW

My best friend. He was my best friend. But that's no excuse for how I was. I just wanted to say I'm sorry and thank you. You're way cooler than anybody I expected to meet in Atlanta. That place is crazy.

LIVIE

You better watch it, you talking about my hometown.

MATTHEW

So you know I am correct.

LIVIE

When you think you'll come back?

MATTHEW

I don't think I'm coming back.

LIVIE

Why?

MATTHEW

My sister is kind of alone out here now and she needs somebody to help with things. CalTech has offered me some really enticing money to finish my doctorate with them...and I just feel...I'm feeling home right now.

LIVIE

You just -- we just met though. How do we know it wasn't more than friendship.

MATTHEW

I know it wasn't. You only have a heart for Dubois.

LIVIE

Shut up.

MATTHEW

So what are you going to do? You know there is a pandemic on the rise, are you doing what you want to do when the world ends?

LIVIE

What are you even talking about ?

MATTHEW

You heard me. They talking about this pandemic getting worse in the next few months and nobody knows what it is.

LIVIE

They'll figure it out.

MATTHEW

But what if they don't, Livie? Folks in Italy are dropping by the hundreds.

LIVIE

Stop trying to scare me.

MATTHEW

I'm not. I just hope you know why you are living the life you're living. That's all.

LIVIE

You know why you're living your life.

MATTHEW

More than ever before.

LIVIE

Tell me.

MATTHEW

Don't you have to get ready to meet your last advisor?

LIVIE

I need a break. Storytime, please.

MATTHEW

Artificial Bodyguards.

LIVIE

Excuse me?

MATTHEW

My mother was murdered when I was 12 years old.

LIVIE

A hate crime. Shit, Black Lives Matter!

MATTHEW

Black Trans Lives Matter too. My parents adopted me and my sister when we were babies. Dad was a white cisgender man who loved a Black Trans woman.

LIVIE

Matthew...

MATTHEW

I figure if she had a bodyguard with her, those bastards wouldn't have been able to-- do what they did.

LIVIE

You don't have to talk about it.

MATTHEW

I do have to talk about it because it's why I stick around. My pops was always reading Dubois to us, getting us to memorize it, to show that we were important. That Dubois was a part of a generation raised by formerly enslaved people.

(MORE)

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Some of them probably still had the welts on their backs from being bull whipped and scars from being branded, or who knows what. He is the reason I don't hate all white people; he was responsible with his privilege. To be honest, he's also the reason I don't let white folks get away with shit either-- because I know what a responsible white person is like. Anyway, if I can create an A I bodyguard...maybe it can protect the most vulnerable of our society

LIVIE

Do you think you'll be able to do it?

MATTHEW

Not around small minds, I won't.

LIVIE

Who's mind you calling small?

MATTHEW

No you! On that campus I was starting to feel like my ideas weren't as important as the legacy of the buildings. In a strange way, it feels like my dad died to get me back to what really excited me about engineering in the first place. The creativity of it. The elegance in the practicality of how a watch works or what makes the wheel such an important but simple design. Coming back home cleared up my vision.

LIVIE

Did they find the person who did that to your mother?

MATTHEW

I don't think they looked real hard. Trans black women are at the bottom of the list of important assault and murder victims. They might tie with black cis women and indigenous women of color. The statistics make my head swim, to be honest.

LIVIE

I feel like I should be telling you this stuff

MATTHEW

Nah, I want to be able to know what I don't have to know. You have to live it more than I ever will.

LIVIE

What about being a Black man.

MATTHEW

Like your boy Dubois!

LIVIE

There ain't now easy path for y'all either.

MATTHEW

It's easy to get to prison.

LIVIE

Not funny.

MATTHEW

I don't want to talk about that. Tell me what is your plan for your thesis, hypothesis or whatever.

LIVIE

I'm writing about Yolande whether they like it or not.

MATTHEW

There you go!!!

LIVIE

I don't want the life to be squeezed out of my ideas!

MATTHEW

Go 'head! Tell em!

LIVIE

And if they don't want to approve my dissertation...

MATTHEW

Yeah???

LIVIE

Then I will move out to California and sleep on your couch.

MATTHEW

We would love to have you.

Livie has an incoming call

LIVIE

Hey Matthew! I gotta get this other call. Can we talk later --

MATTHEW

Yeah, of course. Be easy, home slice!

LIVIE

Later.

Livie clicks over to see a video of
MAMA PEARCE who is looking very ill.

Mama?

MAMA PEARCE

Hey honey. I've got to come home, as soon as they let me out
of this hospital.

LIVIE

What are you doing in the hospital??!

MAMA PEARCE

They said it's the flu, or flu like symptoms. You know I'm
diabetic, so my circulation has been real bad, blood sugar
going all over the place. Anyway, they told me to get in
touch with my next of kin and that's you. You got a pen? You
need to write down this information.

Livie finds a pen and some paper, she
begins to write as they lights dim on
the scene and lights up on Dubois
standing at a grave side

WILLIAM

Eleven years ago, I laid your mother to rest. I thought
surely I would be next but it is you, sweet Yolande. You are
gone before me? Why you, though. I am so old, you had so much
life yet left in you. My sweet girl.

Livie ends the call with her mother.

Lights up on Faculty Advisor 3. Dressed from head to foot in full gray as the other two FA. When Livie enters the room, the advisor begins to strip down to a one piece unitard and white tights. There is no puppet to be seen.

LIVIE

Hello professor? Did I get my appointment time right?

FA 3

Oh, yes, this is the right time. You are the young lady wanting to do yet another dissertation on Dubois.

LIVIE

(to herself)

At least the other advisors pretended to support me

(to FA 3)

Well, professor, I was interested in Dubois but my focus has changed.

FA 3

Oh, so you're no longer focusing on Dubois?

LIVIE

I'm focusing on his daughter Yolande Dubois and the effects of being the only child to a seminal historic figure.

(MORE)

LIVIE (CONT'D)

Born second and the only surviving child of an overachieving father but she never achieved anywhere near his success in any field. Always being advised about keeping her weight in check, her finances were under his watchful eye and her mother didn't agree with the company she kept or where she decided to live.

FA 3

Interesting

LIVIE

You want me to keep going?

FA 3

Yes. Not here, but in your research. There are those who might discourage you looking at Dubois at all

LIVIE

They already have

FA 3

But if you have a fresh angle, one that they haven't considered, I say why not! Dig deep and prove them wrong. Prove us all wrong.

LIVIE

You aren't like the others, are you?

FA 3

I don't know what you mean.

FA 3 pulls out a tub of ice cream, a napkin, and spoon. They place it neatly on their desk.

The committee will reconvene some time in the Fall. Gather as much information as you can and make sure it is air tight. They will try to poke holes in everything so be ready. I will throw in some jabs but nothing too harsh. I want to see this come to life. Do you have any more questions for me?

LIVIE

Yes. Why are you so different from the others?

FA 3

Vanilla Bean.

They pull out a tray of toppings

With gummy bears and chocolate cream sandwich cookies.

LIVIE

Excuse me?

FA 3

(singing)

I MADE A PROMISE
WHEN I GAVE UP THE STAGE
THERE WOULD NEVER BE
A PERSON OF PASSION
THAT I WOULD DISCOURAGE

(MORE)

FA 3 (CONT'D)

I HATED THE FIRST YEAR
I HATED THE NEXT
BUT WHEN I SAW
HOPE IN THE EYES OF
A STUDENT
THE PASSION CAME BACK
THEY WERE LIKE
MY AUDIENCE
THAT WOULD COME SEE
MY SHOWS
THEY GAVE ME
SOME FIRE
SOME JOY
SOMETHING
THAT HELPED ME
TO GROW
I MADE A PROMISE
WHEN I GAVE UP
THE STAGE
THERE WOULD
NEVER BE A
STUDENT WITH PASSION
THAT I WOULD DISCOURAGE

Just make sure you know what you're talking about when you go
in there. You know some of them want you to fall on your
face.

FA 3 is thoroughly enjoying their frozen treat as Livie looks on. She gathers her things and begins to leave.

FA 3

One more question for you, before you go. Have you thought about what you'll do if we say no?

LIVIE

Yes, I have.

She exits.

Scene

On the quad. Livie stands on the grass. She takes off her shoes and socks and places them neatly to the side. She pulls up music on her phone, puts in her headphones and starts dancing. An image of MAMA PEARCE comes up on stage and walks over to watch Livie dancing.

Lights up on Yolande, ageless, time between lives

YOLANDE

There was never any question of your love, daddy. I always knew that you loved us, all of us.

(MORE)

YOLANDE (CONT'D)

When I tried and failed, you loved me, when mama couldn't stay well, you stayed faithful to her. You loved your family, but our people came first. The work for our people came first.

Song

I LEARNED TO EXPECT IT
ALONE IN ONE PLACE
WHEN DADDY WAS WORKING
STAY OUT OF HIS WAY

Livie has worked up a sweat. Her heart is pounding. She stops dancing and looks around at the buildings on the campus

LIVIE

There is music around her. She begins speaking and moves the words into a hurricane of sound

Keep it. You can keep it. Keep it. You can keep it. What does it matter, after they strip the body of all the awards and things you have done, what is the point? Are you happy Dr. Dubois? Nina? Yolande? Burghardt???? Maybe baby Burghardt had it right all along. Taste the life of humanness, get a feel of it's harshness, and ride out on it's brevity.

She sings

KEEP IT CLOSE TO YOUR SOUL
DON'T LET THEM KNOW
HOW MUCH YOU CAN FEEL
THEIR WHISPERS
THEIR PAIN
PUSHES YOURS
THE FIRST ONE
TO BREAK IS WEAK
THE FIRST ONE TO CARE
DESTROYED
THEY MAKE ROOM FOR
MORE THINGS
THEY ONLY MAKE ROOM FOR
WHAT HANDS CAN HOLD
KEEP IT CLOSE TO YOUR SOUL
DON'T EVER LET THEM KNOW
HOW YOU CAN FEEL
THEIR WHISPERS HOW
YOUR HEART CRAVES

THEIR LOVE

Livie dances to the music

END OF PLAY SO FAR