

Spring 5-31-2021

## **An Exploration of the Experiences Black Women Face in Society Through the Lens of Single Black Female**

Danielle James  
djames5@uno.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>



Part of the [Acting Commons](#), and the [Performance Studies Commons](#)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

James, Danielle, "An Exploration of the Experiences Black Women Face in Society Through the Lens of Single Black Female" (2021). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 2887.  
<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/2887>

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uno.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uno.edu).

An Exploration of the Experiences Black Women Face in Society  
Through the Lens of Single Black Female

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements of the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in  
Film and Theatre  
Theatre Performance

by

Danielle James

B.S. Xavier University of Louisiana, 2018

May, 2021

Copyright, 2021 Danielle James

## Dedication

When all else fails remember your two favorite quotes :

“Just keep swimming”-Dory

“If you think you can and if you think you can't, you're right.”-Ford



## Acknowledgments

To the faculty of the University of New Orleans department of Film and Theatre thank you for the knowledge, humor, and insightful conversations that helped me grow as an actor and human being. To my parents, Wanda and Lionel James, thank you for your confidence in me and constant reminders that I can succeed. Lastly, to my Fiancé, Williamson Damone Turner thank you for your limitless encouragement, unwavering support, and always being a phone call away.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

ABSTRACT.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CREATING A WORLD.....	2
PHYSICALITY.....	11
VOICE.....	12
COMPLETING THE WORLD.....	17
PERSONAL AND SOCIETAL SIGNIFICANCE.....	17
SKELTON’S AND DUST.....	22
COVID-19.....	26
ZOOM,ZOOM,ZOOM.....	28
REHEARSAL.....	29
SELF-CRITIQUE.....	34
CONCLUSION.....	35
APPENDIX.....	37
APPENDIX A Single Black Female.....	37
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	65
VITA.....	66

## Abstract

The following thesis is an in-depth actor analysis on my approach to the role of SBF 2 in Theatre UNO's 2020 production of Single Black Female by Lisa B. Thompson. This thesis will include analysis of the text, discussion about social issues, impact of a global pandemic, character objectives, techniques used, self-evaluation and personal reflection. This play was directed by Richon May, and performed Sept 30th- Oct 10th, 2020, as part of the Theatre UNO 2020-2021 academic season, presented by the Department of Film and Theatre in the School of the Arts, at the University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana. Scenic Design was by Kevin Griffith, Lighting design and Technical Director Diane Baas, and Emelie Lasseigne served as the Stage Manager.

Keywords: Theatre, Acting, Zoom Play

## INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses my thesis role in Single Black Female by Lisa B. Thompson. Single Black Female is a two-woman play, comprised of many comedic vignettes that explore and explain the lives of slightly middle aged African American middle-class women. The setting for these two women is a metropolitan urban apartment in The United States . In the play, the two characters search their souls and try to explain things like love, family dynamics, expectations and dignity in a world that “fails to recognize them as individuals amongst a parade of stereotypical images.” This play offers the viewer a brief glimpse into what it’s like to be an African American woman in the United States and the challenges and joys such an existence entails.

My character's name in this play is SBF 2. S.B.F is an acronym that stands for single black female. SBF 2 is described as an outgoing attorney, fashionista, and diva, with an extroverted personality. This thesis illustrates how I create a world in which to act, the personal and societal importance of a play like this, and my personal experience realizing the role within the context and constraints of a global pandemic.

The purpose of an actor creating a world is to provide them a vessel in which to tell a convincing and realized story. Sometimes these vessels are simply transcribed from true accounts while others are fabricated from the writer’s

imagination. However, it is ultimately up to the actor in question to bring those stories to life. To put it simply, in order for an actor to tell a character's story convincingly and honestly, we must first have a place for that character to live.

There are many methodologies an actor may use to help them create a convincing, compelling, and enjoyable experience for the audience. All of them can be valid and is the choice of the actor. In order to explain my process for this character, I will take you through the methodologies I prefer when crafting the world for my character. The methods I choose most often are the Adler and Stanislavsky methods. However, I've grown to also enjoy Checkov's methods.

## **CREATING A WORLD**

The Stella Adler approach focuses on the actor using their own previous experiences and subsequently applying them to how they approach a particular character. Adler believed that "When an actor deliberately notices the textures, aesthetics, and sounds of everyday life, the power of the imagination expands and the actor's toolbox grows." (Ates 2018) This approach encompasses a lot of what I usually do whenever I'm working on a scene or monologue. I read the scene and then ask myself if the character is going through something I recognize in my own life. However, I also look for anything in my own life outside of the character's experience that may spark my own imagination to inform some of that character's decisions. For example, if a character is feeling ostracized or humiliated, I can go

back to a situation in which I felt humiliated and apply it to that character. This point is illustrated in the thought that “ the actor must cross-reference the circumstances of the character with what the actor has observed in life about how those circumstances manifest in society” (Ates, 2018). Because of the versatility that her technique offers, I really think it works for me. An example of me using this technique in the play can be gleaned from the excerpt below:

***SBF 2:** Baby, you look like you've gained*

*SBF 1: Or lost,*

***SBF 2:** Too much weight. Are you eating right? All that working you do, it's just a shame. Don't let them white people make you crazy, now.*

*SBF 1: They're also in rare form during that other American women's guilt orgy—Mother's Day.*

***SBF 2:** I'm sure happy to see you, sugar. I guess I can't expect for you to visit since you've got that fancy job. Our little baby, a big-time college professor and all. You young folks have to live your lives, I guess.*

The above section of text discusses several questions and comments that SBF 1 might receive whenever she visits her family for the holidays. The characters I played as SBF2 in this vignette represented all of her aunts and other maternal figures in her life. In the scene, they were speaking to her in an accusatory manner while conspicuously and unabashedly assessing her romantic

status. The job I had to do for SBF 2 at this moment in the play was to create a distinct voice and physicality for each individual aunt in spite of the fact they all fundamentally are participating in the same activity.

Using the Adler technique I was able to remember times when I was the person being unnecessarily investigated and interrogated at a family dinner, cookout or holiday. I was able to take how I felt in those instances to create an experience that was as authentic as possible. Consequently, I was able to tap into the real women in my life and use how they actually speak and move and combine those experiences together to create honest portrayals of those characteristics. I took bits and pieces from each of them to create the three aunts for this section of the play. If I hadn't had those personal experiences, I'm sure that the feel of the scene would have been completely different. I think that's why I preferred the Adler methodology for acting. To me it stands out as one of the most authentic ways in which I can compose a character.

In that same vein, I know I will become a better actor as I accrue more life experience to put in my "tool box". As a result, I am sure I will be able to relate more to this character as I get older. My character is in her 30s and while I haven't reached that milestone yet, I'm sure once I have, I'll come back to this play and laugh at all the jokes that went over my head. I'll probably also feel more of the touching moments I might not have fully grasped the first time around. However,

since I can't always rely solely on my personal experiences to create a world and character, I also use other methods throughout the play

The next technique utilized was Stanislavski. Stanislavski's method of acting, is a systematic approach that was developed in the first half of the twentieth century. This method discusses many things but I will focus primarily on action verbs specifically. When I'm unsure of a scene, I tend to focus more on verbs. He believed that once you found an appropriate action that "this in turn helps you to portray the emotions that the character is experiencing whilst you complete the objective" (Base, 2011). This philosophy also corresponds with what the program uses for teaching acting. This teaching method is Practical Aesthetics which can be found in The Practical Handbook for the Actor.

The main foundational unit that is used in Practical Aesthetics is the action. Actions are verbs or verb phrases that define "the physical pursuit of a specific goal"(Bruder,1986). In order for an action to be considered adequate to use, it must comply with the following nine rules. These rules can also be found in The Practical Handbook for the Actor. They are as follows:

An Action Must:

- *Be physically capable of being done*
- *Be fun to do*
- *Be specific*



- *Have its test in the other person*
- *Not be an errand*
- *Not presuppose any physical or emotional state*
- *Not be manipulative*
- *Have a “cap”*
- *Be in line with the intentions of the playwright.*

When broken down in a simple format such as this one with nine relatively simple rules to follow, it makes navigating your way on any path clearer for the actor, even if the actor does not completely understand where that path is headed. I find this especially helpful when I am coming across a scene in which I am unsure of what would be the best way to execute a moment. To illustrate how I go about this, I have provided another example from the play:

***SBF 2:** How can a woman find the love of her life using a cold piece of technology? How can you find passion through an inanimate object that crashes, freezes, and God forbid, gives you a virus! Am I putting all my hopes and trust in a plastic box with motherboards and computer chips? What have our lives come to?*

***SBF 1:** Internet dating is cool, I'm telling you. Trust me.*

I come from a generation where basically every bit of information you could possibly want is accessible and online. However, I have no prior knowledge or

experience with online dating whether on a computer or a mobile application. So, I chose for this section in particular to use what I've learned in Practical Aesthetics to formulate the best way to go about the scene. The line starts with SBF 2 saying "*How can a woman find the love of her life using a cold piece of technology?*". For context, in that section of the play, the character, SBF 2, is discussing her grievances with her friend, SBF 1, on the difficulties of dating. SBF 2 can't possibly fathom how she will ever find someone through a computer screen. This line tells me, the actor, that SBF 2 has already tried traditional dating extensively; and it has not worked up to this point in her life. Because of this prior experience, she has very little faith or trust in the idea that a computer will miraculously resolve her woes. She's also asking a question in this instance, which means that she is either skeptical, unsure or simply confused about this idea. The action I chose for the beginning of this section of text was "to doubt." This applies to the doubt in her ability to find that special someone, doubt in her belief that this computer will work, and doubt in her friend for making her do this in the first place.

The second line states "*How can you find passion through an inanimate object that crashes, freezes, and God forbid, gives you a virus!*" In this section, SBF 2 further illustrates her skepticism in the idea that a piece of machinery is somehow going to find her a romantic connection. In this line, she is also

explaining she has previously had bad experiences with technology in the past for which is traditionally built for. The character is combining her previous experiences with failing technology with her other experiences of failing relationships and reasonably expects that combining the two would inevitably result in equally horrible outcomes for her. The action word for this section of the text I chose was “to exclaim.” One of the reasons I chose this action verb is because at the end of the sentence there's an exclamation mark.

Playwrights often give you indicators of their intention with punctuation. Here, that exclamation point serves to demonstrate that SBF 2 is exclaiming how ridiculous she finds the entire concept because to her, it's unfathomable. The last lines she says are “*Am I putting all my hopes and trust in a plastic box with motherboards and computer chips? What have our lives come to?*”. In this section of the text, she is restating how ludicrous it seems to be using technology to find love. She is simultaneously reflecting on how times have changed from when she first started dating. When she says “what have our lives come to?” she is speaking not only about herself, but also her friends and society as a whole. However, in this moment you begin to see a tonal shift within the character. In this moment you see her lay her guard down just a little. This is the first time you see her show a little bit of vulnerability. The verb that captures the frustration she's feeling leading up to her inevitable compliance to her friends wishes is “to submit.” She is submitting

to a change in time, submitting to her friend, and submitting to the reality pushing against her ego in order to give the computer a chance at what she has failed to do herself up to this point in her life.

When choosing all of the different verbs in this particular section, I followed the nine rules provided earlier. Once I had done this, I was then able to apply those rules to not only this scene, but also to any other scene I may or may not have understood personally. One thing I also find helpful is that if by chance you forget your line; as long as you've picked the appropriate verbs, you should be able to find your way back to the reality of the character you are portraying, even if the specific line is not correct. This way, your representation of the character can remain truthful even when your memory fails.

Additionally, having this methodology available to me allows me to apply it in times when I, the actor, may not be feeling my best and still give an adequate performance. This utility is well-illustrated by the article referencing action verbs as “a quick fix for actors because it helps them build chemistry by creating interactions between the characters”(Goodman,2016).

The last acting method I will discuss is Chekhov's. His method is best described as a psychophysical approach wherein the actor integrates their internal and external realities. An example in which I used this technique is when I was doing a scene where I was crying. For this particular scene, I needed the tears to

continue for a bit longer than just a drop or two. Something that helped me in continuing the tears was that in the actual moment my eyes as the actor, were burning. I was so tired from being up late the night before that any amount of moisture and the salt from the tears was just making them burn more. Since my eyes were burning it allowed for more crying. This all aided in helping me get through the scene. As stated in Chekhov “inner event as it is being experienced by the actor is witnessed by the audience as an outward expression related to the contextual moment of the play.”(Petit,2019)

An example in Single Black Female can be found in this excerpt:

***SBF 2:** Is there another game? It's not all about marriage, but we all want somebody. I'm not ashamed to say I'm lonely. The other day I sat next to a darling older couple at Starbucks who told me they've been married for fifty-five years. Fifty-five years! Before they shuffled out the door the husband stopped at my table and whispered to me that he has been the luckiest man alive ever since the day she married him. That's the kind of sweetness I still believe in. I want to be with a man who still feels blessed half a century after our wedding day. How do I get something like that? All my life I've waited for someone to pick ME. Don't I deserve some soul to share this journey with?*

This moment is situated at the very end of the play. I used what I was feeling in the current moment to motivate me. For the ending section the director wanted

to give the audience a feeling of hope, excitement, and overall happiness. Since I only got a chance to do this performance two times, I felt excitement to show it to the world. I was happy and proud of the work the cast and I created. I was also hopeful because I knew it would move many people. At the same time, I also truly believe that love like what's described in this monologue is attainable. I thought about the relationship I have with my fiancé and the long relationships I've seen in my family and got emotional thinking about them, which also served to help me apply the reality of the scene.

## **PHYSICALITY**

In regard to my performance, I had to change my physicality often because within the play I played several characters. These characters consist of elderly women, a young child, a middle aged saleswoman and several others. I needed to make each of them physically distinct because it needed to be clearly conveyed to the audience that these were each very different people even though I was playing all of them. Though I had a different costume and sometimes an accessory to separate them visually, I didn't think that would be enough to ensure the separation was clear dramatically. As such, it was important my physicality and timbre changed along with the visuals.

I made the elderly aunts very fluid and slow in their reactions to things, taking great care to ensure every movement was exaggerated and drawn-out. I

made sure the saleswoman was very deliberate in her actions and very purposeful with as little wasted movement as possible, physically representing the dedication and efficiency that someone in her position would have to exhibit in order to be successful. She walked with purpose and everything was very intentional and direct. SBF 2 on the other hand, moved all the time. She was flamboyant, excited and comfortable in her skin. A lot of her movements were quick and up-tempo. I also made sure that the SBF 2 character was more flexible in her movement in order to demonstrate hyper-femininity within the character. I bent my arms, crossed my legs and tilted my neck to the side because those are also viewed as very feminine gestures as I learned in gender workshops gender workshops based on binary gender stereotypes and their expressions for character development. The changes in physicality required to accomplish this served me well as an additional tool in differentiating the many characters in this play.

## **VOICE**

Along with changing my movements to differentiate characters, I also had to change my voice. One of the best and most useful things I learned from my classes is the ability to place my voice into a lower register. It wasn't until I arrived at graduate school I was made aware of the fact I tend to speak in a higher register. I just consider it my natural voice as it's where I feel comfortable speaking. When I get excited or I'm really interested in something, my voice seems to go up even

higher though I still don't fully recognize it in the moment. I realized this was one of the things I needed to work on. From taking voice followed by voice stylization, I have learned how to bring my voice into a lower chest register. This was of particular use for me when I played Oprah Winfrey within the play:

***SBF 2:** (as Oprah) When we received your fax, you confessed that you were desperate. You acknowledge that you have a problem, is that correct?*

***SBF 1:** Yes, but I'm ready to start over.*

***SBF 2:** I have a check for fifty-eight thousand, two hundred ninety-five dollars and seventy-two cents. Oprah's Angel Network is giving you a new life, debt-free.*

Oprah's character needed to live in a lower register to symbolize her strength and power. In the society Oprah grew up in, she wouldn't be able to have a high and chipper voice like my normal speaking voice and still retain the power and influence she now carries. Some of the things I would do to prepare for that were to use the Roy Hart Theatres methods of vocal scales and vowel sounds going from your lower chest voice down into almost losing your voice with gurgles to going all the way up into your head voice and throwing it away (meaning to stop the sound), and then accepting whatever sound comes out. Doing this repeatedly and getting comfortable with doing so allowed me to be comfortable getting into that lower space whenever I needed to use it in a performance setting. As a result, I



feel very comfortable getting into that register without having to think about it as extensively as I otherwise would have.

Though my portrayal of Oprah required I make use of my lower chest register, I had to use my head voice in this play as well. Especially for characters such as SBF 2's child self :

***SBF 2:** Then there's George Clooney.... (Pause.) Okay, I've got a confession. I almost dated a white guy in ninth grade. He had the worst acne and greasy hair. Myron was a sweet, quiet boy. He played the clarinet in the band. I liked him and he liked me.*

***SBF 1:** You want to go to the dance this weekend? Or we could go to the museum. I mean, if you want.*

***SBF 2:** Oh, Myron. Yes. I'd love to go. (sitting on her front steps waiting) A date. A real date. Mom said no dance, but we were going to the museum and McDonald's for lunch. She called Myron's mother and they discussed it and everything*

In order to illustrate I was my younger self in this dialogue, I had to do two things: change my voice and my physicality. My voice changed by talking in a higher pitch. This higher pitch usually lives in my head voice which means you are not using much of your diaphragm to push the sound out. This sound is mostly coming from the throat. This technique creates the sound that would resemble

someone who probably hasn't hit puberty yet. Another way I achieved a more youthful sound is through the careful usage of breath. I would use a bit more air to signify nervousness and excitement. As you get older, you learn how to control that nervousness such that it isn't necessarily as visible on the outside as it may have been at an earlier age.

In regard to my physicality, I chose to play with my hands a bit more and used a bit of fidgeting to illustrate I was young and nervous. I twirled my hair and my fingers all to establish the sense of nervous tension and excitement that a young girl would have displayed going on a date for the first time. I also smiled quite a bit until the end of the scene when you learn how devastatingly the night ended for her. I did this to illustrate the youthful innocence and hopefulness for the world that you would expect from someone her age. But as the scene progressed, I changed from excited juvenile ear-to-ear smiling with lots of breath to slightly lower with a bit more controlled breath, along with the stillness that often comes in the wake of your first heartbreak.

In a similar but ultimately different direction, when I was the sales worker on the phone I chose to use my nasal resonance:

***SBF 1:** They speak with such distaste and disrespect that it makes me want to*

***SBF 1 & SBF 2:** Go the f\*ck off!*

***SBF 1:** They request my address and it's fine until I get to my zip code*

*SBF 2: Hmm. Where is that?*

*SBF 1: Manhattan.*

*SBF 2: Yes, of course. But what part?*

*SBF 1: Harlem.*

*SBF 2: What did you say, ma'am?*

*SBF 1: My place is in Harlem.*

*SBF 2: I'm sorry, ma'am, I couldn't hear you. Did you say HARLEM?*

*SBF 1: Yes, yes I did. HARLEM, Bill Clinton? Sylvia's? You know, the Upper Upper West Side!*

*SBF 2: Can you hold, please? Thank you. Call security, Marge. Must be a case of identity theft. This Negress is telling me she lives in HARLEM...with Bill Clinton!*

For this character I chose to give her a very nasally resonator as well as making her face scrunch up a lot. She did this in response to the questions on the phone. Nasal resonators often come across in popular media as a bit more annoying and/or irritating. I wanted to convey that in the character because her having an annoying voice and annoying SBF 1 would mirror the annoyance the audience may experience. I also chose to emphasize my words in a way that would indicate a false or forced kindness as to bring attention to the condescending nature of her tone. While in a higher register similar to that of a young SBF 2, the store employee I portrayed here still comes across as an adult due to the difference in

resonance and the facial reactions to this sort of information of which a child would not typically take special note.

## **COMPLETING THE WORLD**

Lastly, the play, Single Black Female, lives in the world of realism and dabbles in surrealistic themes. Realism is a style focused on things being very true to life. The characters are believable and ordinary people you would see and know rather than some sort of nobility. The costumes are usually very authentic to whatever setting the characters find themselves in. The stage is often indoors in a “box set” to portray a realistic setting as opposed to the more elaborate or abstract sets you might find in other types of theatre. The dialogue uses normal vernacular and the protagonist would organically rise up against whatever problem they are facing, allowing you to see how the story plays out. Having this knowledge of what type of play genre and style I was in, allowed me the opportunity to explore it more thoroughly and apply the different methods and techniques I’ve learned in classes.

## **PERSONAL AND SOCIETAL SIGNIFICANCE**

When figuring out what play I wanted to propose for my thesis role, I took a couple of things into consideration. I knew if I didn't have a play I connected with personally, I wouldn't have been able to invest as much of myself within the piece as I did here. It was gravely important to me not only to pick a piece I myself

would enjoy, but also one that would bring a level of diversity that, in my opinion, hasn't been explored fully on the Theatre UNO stage.

Upon looking at the list of shows that have been conducted at the school previously, I knew I wanted to do a play that was uniquely, beautifully and unapologetically black. I didn't want anything from a western Eurocentric point of view, as that type of narrative has been shown a myriad of times in a plethora of different ways. It was critical to me to show black women in a way that wasn't from an outsider's perspective. In my opinion, historically whenever black stories are told from a Eurocentric vantage point or even directed from a Eurocentric view they are almost invariably riddled with hurtful stereotypes and inaccuracies. I wanted to show you can have a storyline where the central characters are women of color. They don't have to be in poverty. They don't have to live in a time of Jim Crow. They don't have to live on the continent of Africa. I wanted to prove this type of show is not only a viable option but can actually thrive. This was so important for me to show to the student body at UNO as well as the faculty and staff because the reality is that the all too familiar narrative that finding "black" plays or playwrights is "too hard" is ludicrous, tiresome and simply lazy.

Encouragingly, the feedback I received from students of color was heartwarming and overwhelmingly positive. As to the rest of the student body, there seemed to be a theme in stating that their eyes were opened. Several admitted

to both the director and I that they had never seen a play featuring black people and the characters not be in poverty or overtly oppressed. The fact that in 2020, students are still bewildered by the visual of successful women of color is saddening and concerning. The purpose of art is to emulate life and this type of interaction says to me that everybody needs to do a better job at telling everyone's stories from credible and reliable sources.

I started my journey of finding a play to achieve my goals by delving into the world of black artists and looking at the beautiful works they had written. While I initially had dozens of candidates that resonated with me, I slowly narrowed it down to five. From those five, I had to narrow it down to three. To help in my decision-making process, I researched a little bit about the individual playwright's. This is how I landed on Lisa B Thompson. She is an award-winning playwright, scholar, and a professor of African and African Diaspora Studies. I learned in my search she was a black woman whose goals aligned with my own in that she wanted to talk specifically about black women and the experiences we face. When I read the play, I saw myself, my mother, my grandmother and my best friends in the experiences she was describing. I wanted to bring that to the stage so I added this play as the front runner of my picks for the season and waited for a decision.

Eventually, I got the news of the pick and I was pleased to learn Single Black Female had been chosen. Now, I had to decide on which character I wanted to play. I could have either chosen SBF 1 who is viewed as a more logical afrocentric earthy character; or I could be SBF 2 who was seen as a more assertive, and confident fashionista. Upon reading the script again I wanted to pick a character that would challenge me emotionally and demand vulnerability. That lead me to choose SBF 2.

Even though SBF 2 and I do share some similarities in terms of aesthetics, our personalities are not similar at all. From her straightforward approach to any topic and quite liberal use of profanity, I knew I would have my work cut out for me. I knew I would have been able to play SBF 1 a little too comfortably to suit the challenge I sought. This is because I generally tend to look at things from a more logical vantage point and I am thus very comfortable in academia. The only major difference between myself and SBF 1 that I would need to contend with was wearing something more bohemian inspired; and that wasn't a big enough challenge for me.

Since SBF 2's personality was different from mine, I had to spend a great deal of time figuring out exactly how to portray her. There is an expression I've heard in the theatre at UNO that says "at the start of the play, your director will know your character better than you. However, by the end you'll know them better

than anybody”. This expression essentially means that you, the actor, have spent more time with that character than anyone else, such that you and your character are almost old friends.

The process of getting to know my character in this way began shortly after confirming we would be doing the show. One of the first steps I took is reading the script again and deciding what I could relate to and what I couldn't relate to. The things I could relate to I would highlight and ask myself “why can you relate to this?”, “when did you relate to this?” and “how did you feel in that moment?”. For the sections in the script I couldn't relate to I asked myself similar questions but altered them so I could meet those differences and work through them. I asked myself why I couldn't relate to something; but followed that up with who I might know that could relate to this and how I would feel if I found myself in in these experiences. This type of deep dive into a character allowed me to fully familiarize myself with the ins and outs of the psychology of my character.

Because of my psychology background as an undergraduate, I almost always ask my characters these questions or similar ones so I can know where their mindsets dwell. Someone who is dealing with some kind of trauma will say a line completely different from someone who has never experienced a hardship in their lifetime. I applied that insight to my role in *Single Black Female*.



Along with my personal reasons for choosing this play, I also thought about how it would inform society or vice versa. When I initially chose the play, I had no idea it would hit so close to home only months later. In the Summer of 2020 while still enduring the unnerving consequences of a global pandemic it felt as though I also had to contend with the country I've lived in my entire life showing all the skeletons they've shoved in the closet and all of the dust they had swept under the rug.

## **SKELETONS AND DUST**

In the spring and summer of 2020 right before I came back for the fall semester a wave of civil unrest erupted in The United States . Perhaps it was a result of growing tensions because of a global pandemic; or, maybe people just decided enough was enough. During this period people finally had enough time to sit and observe what's been happening in The United States for decades by being exposed to a series of tragedies befalling Black Americans at the hands of our white neighbors. The first nationwide tragedy started with the brutal murder of Ahmaud Arbery. This story broke after a black man was jogging in a neighborhood. During his jog, he was chased down, cornered and murdered in broad daylight on camera by two white men. The murderers filmed it and then one of their friends released the footage months later thinking it would remove their implication and justify their actions. Once the story broke, it swept through the

nation and with almost everyone at home trying to stay safe, almost everyone knew about the tragedy. Unfortunately, the perpetrators of this crime were not arrested or charged until months after the crime and, at the time of this writing, over a year after the crime, have yet to be punished for their actions.

This tragedy started a lot of conversations regarding race and what it means to be a black man in The United States . Later on in the same summer there were two more tragedies in the wrongful deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. Breonna Taylor didn't get as much time in the news, but she was murdered in her sleep when the police shot through her house while looking for a suspect who was already in police custody at the time of her murder.

Breonna Taylors death was heartbreaking and significant enough it its own right, but there is one death that shook the globe. That was the death of George Floyd. His death caused a snowball effect of outrage through many communities and caused protests after protests not just in The United States but around the world as well. Then some of those protests at nighttime turned into riots and were commonly reported as sabotaged by imposters. Protests and riots are different things. Though this distinction is important, large portions of the media tend to blend them together while ignoring the fact that it was more often than not, the peaceful protesters that saw violence from law enforcement instead of the rioters that these protesters with which they were incorrectly associated.

When returning back to school after watching and experiencing so much civil unrest during the summer, I felt a little uneasy. Coming back to school after literal months of civil unrest and then doing a show centered entirely around what black women face in The United States was heavy on my heart. But with that being said, I knew I would be able to express my pain in a way the student body could hear. During the time of the rehearsals for Single Black Female I got to dive deeper into the history of certain topics. One of the parts of the play I had to tackle has historical and current relevance. In my opinion, there is historical significance of skepticism of medical professionals toward people of color – specifically black people – was heavy. That skepticism is evident in the vignette in the play surrounding the doctor's office and the gynecologist:

***SBF 2:** Then while this stranger has his latex fingers inside me, I start to imagine all kinds of crazy things. I'm an attorney, I know that it's inappropriate to say, but there are clients I really don't care for. If I'm honest, I know that they don't always get my best work. Is this guy going to give me the best health care if he doesn't like me? Then it hits me. I recall the disdain on his face when he first looked at me. Dear God, what if he's a racist? TUSKEGEE!*

There was also a section of the play that focused on what happens when black women are mistreated, abused, and disrespected and what the responses from society in the general public are. At the time that I was researching for this scene in

the rehearsal process, the verdict for the Breonna Taylor case came out. The end result of that trial lead me to have enough passion to truly express the rage and frustration in words that were written in this excerpt:

***SBF 2:** Paranoid? I'm being bounced by security and my black ass is paranoid? .....* *You can't turn on the television without seeing some dead or missing white woman. Yet nobody cries for little black girls.*

That line hit home for me as that is exactly what happened to Breonna Taylor. In a time where an innocent black woman was killed by police who were looking for a man they already had, the country and the world chose to focus on other things while this young woman's death went without punishment and without the same outrage that other tragedies in this past year drew from people. I wish I didn't have to experience the hardships and the inherent strain of being a black woman in The United States . However, I will say that it did allow me to really dive into this section for my character and I wouldn't trade being me for anything in the world. I bring up these moments because it further highlights the gravity of why I felt compelled to highlight a black female playwright telling a black female story directed by a black female and starring two black females. The fact that a statement like the one above can be looked at ,in my opinion, as an act of rebellion from societal norms is troubling and indicative of a lingering and damaging problem.

I think the current climate we are in feels exhausting. Being a black person in The United States during this time has felt even more exhausting than it usually does. It has been a constant struggle for the past couple of centuries; but at this point you would hope that people would have a bit more racial sensitivity than has been displayed as of late. At the very least you would hope that people realize the impact of their actions and words. Unfortunately, as evidenced by George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and many others.

In light of the emotional pain and spiritual anguish I was feeling during this time, I found it extremely striking and liberating that the story we were telling was celebrating and reflecting positively on black culture, something that so many people try to strip away from us. At the end of this project I knew that if no one else understood it, grasped the concept or even liked it, it didn't matter. It was for black women and I knew my fellow black women would love it; and that was a very freeing and beautiful feeling.

## **COVID-19**

If a year of uproar involving justice, equity and equality that largely impacts my minority group wasn't enough in and of itself there was another obstacle with which we had to contend. That obstacle was the global pandemic of the Coronavirus, SARS-CoV2, or COVID-19 for short. Coronavirus was the main character in everyone's lives in 2020. It made literally everything more difficult.

When you think about live theater and what that means to people, it created a sense of loss and hopelessness in the theater community.

Since my play had the limitations of social distancing and no live audience, the director decided it would be best to do a Zoom play. However, we didn't want this to just be two talking heads on a screen. We wanted it to feel like an immersive experience. The audience should feel like we were talking to them or that they were eavesdropping on our conversations. Although the outcome was ultimately a great one that I am proud of, the journey to get there was definitely an uphill battle to say the least.

During this process, it sometimes felt like the director, cast and I were completely alone. The isolation during this process made it feel like we were on an island by ourselves trying to make something great. I remember working tirelessly to put on a production that it seemed like no one believed in but us. I understood that no one really knew what was going on at the time and that everyone felt confused, but it would have been helpful to have received a little more encouragement and guidance. I remember the day when my cast, crew and I decided if no one around us believed in this work, that was fine because we believed in it. From that moment on we became a true ensemble. Eventually, the enthusiasm did come. It was at the end, but I was happy to receive it. I will say the experience created a very strong sense of community, respect and love that was

desperately needed, especially as an artist after the waking nightmare that was the year 2020.

### **ZOOM, ZOOM, ZOOM**

Zoom plays create a whole new level of frustration for the actor. Theatre actors from the time we were in our first high school drama class are usually told that you feed off of your scene partner and the audience. However, what they do not teach you is what happens if your scene partner and you are never in the same room together. Similarly, they also don't teach you what happens if you cannot hear the audience. To add fuel to that fire, Single Black Female is a comedy.

Without an audience, it is quite difficult to know if a joke landed, if you need to pause or if you need to speak louder. This was one of the biggest obstacles to putting on this show. In live theater the audience engages with the performance. Think of the audience like a thermometer and you're cooking a brand-new recipe you've never seen before. How do you know if it's too hot or too cold if you lose the thermometer? It would be nerve wracking. In a zoom play you just hope everything lands and that people like it because you have to move on with the scene. It was a unique and strange experience but also rewarding in its challenges.

## **REHEARSAL**

My rehearsal process can be broken down into 6 weeks and every week brought a new challenge, obstacle or opportunity for growth within the show. Here I will be breaking down each week and my thought process at the time.

### **Week 1**

I was so excited to get started with my thesis role and develop my skills as an actor. I was enthusiastic but it was a little daunting that this would be over Zoom. Since this was the first play of the semester there were a lot of what-ifs and confusion. The main questions were “how do you do a play through a service that is created for business meetings and PowerPoint presentations?” and “how do you tell a compelling story through a screen without edits”. When you don’t have the elements, convenience and privileges granted by “movie magic”, “How do you do it?”

Single Black Female’s publishing had restrictions on the rights of usage; we could only film in one take. Just in case the inherent obstacles weren’t enough, the start of this week had an unforeseen challenge when a pair of heavy storms were projected to make landfall in Louisiana.

These storms were named hurricanes Laura and Sally and they were coming one right after the other. Because of my experience with Hurricane Katrina, my family and I always leave because of the trauma and devastation that occurred



from that storm. So rather than staying directly in the path of a storm, I decided to go to Mississippi.

My grandparents live in rural Mississippi where there isn't a lot of wi-fi or technological advances in general; so doing anything online became challenging. The first rehearsal I ever had was the table read and because my grandparents wi-fi is so devastatingly slow, I decided to go to the neighborhood McDonalds. I knew it would be faster there; but the only problem was that we were still in a pandemic so I wasn't allowed inside of the establishment. I was doing the first rehearsal in my car in a McDonald's parking lot. The read was very cramped, but I was excited, determined and motivated to continue and make it work. That all being said, the first bit of rehearsal for week one was a bit rocky (also spotty because of the signal) but the camaraderie of the cast allowed me to feel comfortable and that I wasn't letting anybody down knowing they understood why I felt the need to evacuate.

## **Week 2**

In week two I had stable wi-fi again and was back into the comforts of my own apartment. But that comfort was short-lived as the scene that I was the most concerned about was the scene the director wanted to tackle first and that was the gynecologist scene. I was uncomfortable and a little nervous about how the scene would play out. From personal experience I get why SBF 2 hated going. It made

sense that she wanted to block that scene first as it was logistically complicated and more than likely the scene the furthest outside of my comfort zone and she wanted to focus on getting me outside of it. I think this week was the foundation of how we realized we could make this more than just talking heads on a screen. This week we did a scene I personally love because it was focused on family and their personas and how they perceive one another and those are always fun things to do.

### **Week 3**

Week three had a lot to do with the backstories of these characters, and how they got to be the people they are now. In the second act you really see the layers come off in terms of the facades they feel like they have had to put on for society. You see them relax a little bit and become more comfortable on the screen and explaining how they are the way they are. I also think my scene partner and I became more comfortable with each other too. The topics they discuss are racial sensitivity, the traumas and expectations because of it, and the issues they face while trying to maneuver around that in a society that looks at them in a negativestereotypical view more often than not. We also see them open up and be vulnerable about the type of man they would love to have in their life and what it means to them to have a man that resembles the hard-working lifestyle of their father. I enjoyed getting to “paint a picture” of the perfect man for my character.

When I was doing this scene focusing on the dad and how he was in a relationship even though the words on the page don't mirror my life perfectly, the love and adoration she does have for her father was something that I could pull from especially because the day in which we discussed the scene intensively I had actually had a very good conversation with my father shortly before that. I was able to pull from those emotions because I have a very loving relationship with my dad and I was able to use that in the scene. When she was talking about how much she loves her dad and because I tend to use the Stella Adler approach to acting and pulling from real life experiences, that was one I was able to pull out rather quickly since it's happened almost in real time

#### **Week 4**

This week I really started to see the formation of an amazing play coming together. We focused on costuming and props which were particularly important in this show in terms of shifting between characters and distinguishing between different scenes. It was important we used costuming and props as well as our voice and physicality to convey the individual messages and characters in each scene. Whether that was me using glasses to demonstrate me turning into different people or changing from a hat to a bow to indicate a difference in characters, it was important for the telling of the story. Costume fittings were one of the most fun

weeks because I was able to try on different looks and figure out what works best with the timing of the scenes and my individual portrayals .

### **Week 5**

This week was filled with a lot of energy because we were going to be recording it and getting our final tech runs of the show, as well as setting the finishing touches of our costumes for the show. I found it really fun I was able to get my makeup done for this show because we needed it to look older and no matter how much I tried with my own makeup and skills, I couldn't accomplish this. I thought it was really smart of the director to include a make up artist into costumes. This helped tell a more convincing story because we looked visibly more mature. I also enjoyed the fact that by the end we still liked each other a lot and wish we could have performed even longer and done more live performances. Wanting a show to continue is a feeling we can all relate to.

One of the obstacles actors usually don't have to focus on during a performance is the technical side. However, this was a specifically unique circumstance. My castmate and I had to ensure that our audience (the computer's camera lense) was always pointing in the right direction at the right time. Since we are on Zoom, I also had to make sure that I wasn't too loud because then the microphone will cut out on me. In that same breath, I also had to make sure I wasn't too quiet because the microphone will not pick up my voice. Honestly, it

brought a whole new meaning to knowing where I was on stage. Pre-pandemic, the biggest obstacle for actors is not being loud enough in terms of projection but this situation required more patience than I could've ever imagined.

## **SELF-CRITIQUE**

Even though I would consider Single Black Female as a whole to be a success there is always room and opportunities for growth. An area in which I feel I would work harder is memorizing the script sooner. This play required a lot of memorization and a quick turn around. This was the first show of the season and there were only two characters ,so it was a heavy line load. If I could go back , I would absolutely start the memorization process earlier. I did make sure I was familiar with the text and the different vignettes but I wish I would have actively started memorizing too. I would do this so I would have even more time to invest in creating the world and characteristics for SPF 2.

Another thing I would change is letting myself be a bit freer in certain scenes. I tend to be very controlled and specific in my choices as an actor .however, in the context of this play I could have “lived a little”. The way it's structured allows for more flexibility. Since Single Black Female isn't a play that requires a strict rhythm such as iambic pentameter I could've exercised more

freedom. If I could go back , I would take advantage of that specifically in the scenes when my character was dancing

Finally, I would take in the moment more. This was my last production at University of New Orleans and even though I loved the experience ,I wish I could go back and tell myself to enjoy it.

## **CONCLUSION**

The skills I take away from this performance worked hand-in-hand with coursework and previous coursework at the time of production. I was taking a course that focused on self-tape auditions and heavily covered the importance of eye line and not being afraid of the camera. I also have previous experience with a course that basically covered all things film acting. For this performance I had to make sure that whatever I was holding was always in frame. That my eye line matched every time or it would not have been believable. I also had to make a clear distinction from when I was doing a direct address to the audience, dialogue with my scene partner or a completely different change indicating a different point in time. All of which are done with a fractional difference in my eye movements. The breadth of that previous experience gave me a sturdy foundation upon which to create a beautiful picture and experience for both myself and the audience, given the received feedback.

Even though this experience was challenging for me at some seemed rather insurmountable, I think it allowed me prove to myself I am capable as an actor, as a student, and as a black woman even in the face of hardship. Doing this play showed me how important it is to remember who you are and the people that came before you. It reinforced the traditions and knowledge I've gained from the other matriarchs in my life and it made me laugh as well as cry. It allowed me to see not only the beauty in the struggle but the pain as well. It gave me hope that I can use that pain and beauty to propel me in my personal life, professional life, and academia. This process allowed me to truly see how I "the actor" create my worlds, develop my characters and grow as a person and an artist, all to culminate in the realization that there is more than one way to achieve a given goal. Above all else, I was reminded of how honored and proud I am to be a single black female.

# SINGLE BLACK FEMALE

## SETTING

The present. A comfortable, yet stylish brownstone in Harlem, New York. The main room is furnished with chairs, a sofa, a television, a stereo and a coffee table. The stage also has a walk-in closet and/or a dresser that stores various props (clothing, hats, shoes, surgical gloves, etc.) to help the actors create each vignette and character. Musical selections by female musicians and singers, a video monitor, voice-over audio, and slides provide an electronic component that supports a fast-paced, surreal environment.

## CHARACTERS

**SBF 1:** A thirty-eight-year-old African American woman. A literature professor with dreadlocks and a bookish, androgynous style accented with “afrocentric” accessories. She wears clogs and eccentric eyeglasses.

**SBF 2:** A thirty-five-year-old African American woman. An attorney who sports a flowing perm or hair weave and wears high heels and sexy business suits, she is SBF 1’s best friend, confidante, and alter ego.

## Prologue

**SBF 1:** We are often asked what SBF stands for. Those three letters represent many things.

**SBF 2:** Sistas black and free.

**SBF 1:** Sincere blissful friend.

**SBF 2:** Saucy brazen freak.

**SBF 1:** Staying black forever.

**SBF 2:** Soulful, bold, and fierce.

**SBF 1:** Sad blue funk.

**SBF 2:** Sweet bangin’ fuck.

**SBF 1 & SBF 2:** (*In unison*)

We be

Us be

Single

Black

Female

**SBF 1:** Diva.

**SBF 2:** Bitch.

**SBF 1:** Goddess.

**SBF 2:** And nobody wants to hear us. (*Beat.*) You undoubtedly heard of the black male crisis—well, there is also a very serious crisis for the black woman.



**SBF 1:** *(as PowerPoint lecture)* The National Center for Health Statistics informs us that “the marriage rate for white women is 76 percent higher than the rate for black women.”

**SBF 2:** Teach!

**SBF 1:** According to the U.S. Census, 41.9 percent of black women in America have NEVER been married.

**SBF 2:** Damn!

**SBF 1:** And 57 percent of black children reside in single-parent homes.

**SBF 2:** Now what if a sista has a college degree or two—

**SBF 1:** Or three? She's more likely to be hit by a meteor than find a husband!

**SBF 2:** What happens to the black family if we don't find love? What will happen to the African American legacy?

**SBF 1:** Tonight let us introduce you to the world of the single black female.

**SBF 2:** Wait! This ain't sex in the inner city! That's another show. Let's be more specific, welcome to the lives of single middle-class black women.

**SBF 1:** Remember Ellison's *Invisible Man*? Well, we are the invisible women. Black professional intellectual leftists with conservative fiscal ideologies—

**SBF 2:** Except for a sale at Barney's!

**SBF 1:** We're the New Negro African American Black Colored Girls who only consider therapy. And even though nobody wants to hear us—we are tired of being ignored! We will no longer be QUIET!

**SBF 2:** You're anything but quiet. Sullen, or remote when angry—but never...quiet!

**SBF 1:** You're right about that.

**SBF 2:** Still nobody wants to see us, let alone really think about us.

**SBF 1:** But it's about time we get some accurate press.

**SBF 2:** We must thank Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas for putting us on the map.

**SBF 1:** Right, before his dreadful Senate confirmation hearing nobody thought we existed.

**SBF 2:** We STILL believe you, Anita!

**SBF 1:** And now we have sweet little Condi Rice to thank for making us popular the world over.

**SBF 2:** Isn't she single, too? Maybe if the child could get her hair right!!!

**SBF 1:** Don't talk about Condi now! That might prove a little too dangerous.

**SBF 2:** True.

**SBF 1:** People, before Ms. Oprah Winfrey became a media icon, the image of black womanhood was a bit stale and not very complex.

**SBF 2:** Yes, who can forget the long reign of Aunt Jemima, Sapphire, and Jezebel?

**SBF 1:** Now, we concede there were a few bright moments, especially during the late twentieth century. The seventies gave us Julia—thank God for Lady Diahann Carroll. The eighties gave us attorney Claire Huxtable, a Cosby creation. But the nineties gave us—

**SBF 2:**—Thee supreme ringmaster, Jerry Springer!

**SBF 1 & SBF 2:** *(Ad-lib typical talk show guest fight scene complete with hysterical dialogue.)*

**SBF 2:** We still haven't recovered from that hot ghetto mess. And we cannot neglect those hoochies shaking their rumps on BET. *(SBF 2 does booty shake.)*

**SBF 1:** Why would anyone go on those shows? Dance in those videos? I can't understand it.

**SBF 2:** Now, we do get some occasional exposure to remind us that black middle-class women are part

of the American dream.

**SBF 1:** But, even in the twenty-first century the networks still won't cast a black woman as The Bachelorette. And no, *I Love NY* does not count!

**SBF 2:** That's because they believe no man would want us, even if we come with a million bucks! All we can get is *Flavor of Love!* Flavor Flav! That's some bullshit! No, we're not in style.

**SBF 1:** And we are not all the same, but we are looking for the same thing. To put it simply? Love. Unfortunately our generation is more single than double. This is her story and mine...and hers, and hers, and hers. (*Pause.*) And maybe his, too. Our story.

**SBF 2:** Well, at least what we are willing to share tonight.

**SBF 1 & SBF 2:** (*in unison*) Come on in.

## Act 1. A Week in the Life of an SBF

### Scene 1. Identity

**SBF 1:** There are obvious signs if you get beyond the door.

**SBF 2:** Once invited inside her cozy home it's easy to detect.

**SBF 1:** You spot the kitchen and dining ware.

**SBF 2:** On her shelves sit numerous Pottery Barn ceramic bowls and serving platters of every hue.

**SBF 1:** Don't forget the stemware—

**SBF 2:** Champagne flutes for every celebration. Only the French do bubbly, right?

**SBF 1:** But thanks to hip hop, Cristal has gone so ghetto!

**SBF 2:** You are wrong for that. Old-fashion highballs for a shot of Glenfiddich single malt after a long day in court.

**SBF 1:** Four martini glasses with pitcher.

**SBF 2:** Dry, very dry.

**SBF 1:** Wait! Don't forget those four jelly jars for the ethnic touch! (*Both laugh.*)

**SBF 2:** Damn! We sound like alcoholics.

**SBF 1:** A SBF typically owns an impressive collection of cookbooks.

**SBF 2:** As well as a healthy stack of take-out menus for those nights she doesn't cook.

**SBF 1:** Like six out of seven nights? Please. Who has the time? I order Chinese or Thai take-out for those evenings in front of the HDTV. And, for those down home nights? (*Southern blues music starts to play.*)

**SBF 2:** Amy Ruth's, baby! Soul Fixins! AMEN!!!

**SBF 1:** For dessert? Raven the Cake Man's red velvet cake.

**SBF 2:** Sock it to me!

**SBF 1:** SBFs also keep current subscriptions to *Essence*, *The Nation*, *Metropolitan Home*, and *Vibe*—

**SBF 2:** You read *Vibe*?

**SBF 1:** Oh yes, I must keep up with my students.

**SBF 2:** Clothing depends on whether she's an artsy boho—

**SBF 1:** Or a classy hoho?

**SBF 2:** Hey! Hey now! Watch it.

**SBF 1:** She's always well draped and politically—

**SBF 2:** And culturally—

**SBF 1:** Sophisticated. In the summer you'll find her at the Studio Museum of Harlem sporting flawless white linen.

**SBF 2:** She's got to have her Kente cloth bumpin' in February for Negro History Month.

**SBF 1:** Must be head to toe in deep dark chocolate for that night on the town. I read in *Vogue* that chocolate is the new black. Doesn't anybody realize that black folks have been chocolate for years?

**SBF 2:** Talk, girl! By the time an SBF reaches about thirty years old, she's found her style—now she's just trying to find somebody to like her style.

**SBF 1:** Where to meet us?

*(SBF 1 and SBF 2 start to fan themselves with local funeral home fans and mime greeting other parishioners.)*

**SBF 2:** At Abyssinian Baptist Church.

**SBF 1:** Or at Brooklyn Tabernacle's eleven A.M. service. Amen!

*(Sound of gospel music. SBF 1 and SBF 2 start to dance around like they have got the Holy Ghost.)*

**SBF 2:** Praise Jesus! Glory! Glory!

**SBF 1:** Wait! Who has all day to spend in church? It's the twenty-first century! This is not the South, you know. We are in NEW YORK CITY!

**SBF 2:** You can also find us at the bank—

**SBF 1:** Telling the manager to go to hell.

**SBF 2:** Or at the video store. You can usually find several single black women deep in on Friday and Saturday nights.

**SBF 1:** Lines? Please, I got Netflix! Yes, you can also find us at the stylist all day, any day.

**SBF 2:** No more beauty shop for me! I'm a spa girl. A facial every two weeks. A manicure and pedicure once a week and an organic herbal seaweed body wrap at least once a month. It's the role of the black middle class to integrate.

**SBF 1:** The spas?

**SBF 2:** Yes, the revolution—one massage at a time. Each of us has a role. I'm doing my part. I love the look in the eyes of those old Upper East Side society matrons when they see my naked black ass sauntering towards the sauna.

**SBF 1:** Somehow I don't believe that's what Martin, Malcolm, nor Huey and Bobby had in mind.

**SBF 2:** *(quietly)* Don't judge, I'm just doing what I think is right. You know what Audre Lorde taught us: "the personal is political!" After all, we are all women who come from fine stock. Our mothers and grandmothers were strong black matriarchs.

**SBF 1:** Who we've learned to forgive for not being stronger. Not to mention forgiving Daddy.

**SBF 2:** Hooray for therapy!

**SBF 1:** We are three paychecks away from being on welfare and two art openings away from being culturally insignificant.

**SBF 2:** We all have a constant preoccupation with our bee-hinds and hairlines.

**SBF 1:** We are mirrors for each other. *(Beat.)* A typical SBF carries—

**SBF 2:** In her Marc Jacobs purse—

**SBF 1:** Or her Coach briefcase—

**SBF 2:** A healthy supply of that Mango body butter. Don't wanna sport ashy elbows.

**SBF 1:** She also needs stylish business cards and a trusty iPhone. Don't forget the one thing she cannot leave home without—American Express!

**SBF 2:** Platinum. In case of depression, crack open wallet and spend, spend, spend!

**SBF 1:** In her closet an SBF can never have too many—

**SBF 2:** Seven Jeans, or St. John suits, or shoes.

**SBF 1:** During her lifetime an SBF can never have too many—

**SBF 2:** Dates.

**SBF 1:** Stocks.

**SBF 2:** Season tickets for the symphony.

**SBF 1:** And flowers.

**SBF 2:** Don't forget the condoms. These days it's BYO!

**SBF 1:** But an SBF better be careful if she has—

**SBF 2:** Too much weight. Too many wrinkles. Too much debt.

**SBF 1:** Or too much unresolved anger? Relax. Breathe, breathe, breathe.

**SBF 2:** Thank you, girl. After all, being single is a middle-class black thang! You need to understand.

**SBF 1:** Wait! Do you think looking for an appropriate partner is only a black middle-class woman's obsession? Why worry about what a person does for a living as long as they give you good lovin'?

**SBF 2:** Class makes us different. I can't really explain. You try.

**SBF 1:** Explain difference? Difference as defined by Derrida, or Henry Louis Gates Jr.?

**SBF 2:** Here we go! I don't want to deal with Gates. What do you think this is, *The New Yorker*? Are we on *Charlie Rose*? Turn the channel! This is our subconscious, damn it!

**SBF 1:** Okay, you pick the theorist.

**SBF 2:** Let me tell you like my mother would. There is something wrong, folks, when both Mike Tyson and Evander Holyfield were able to marry black women who have M.D.'s! Those women are medical doctors, for God's sake! As for me? I can't do the "he's a plumber why can't you love him" thing. I tried it several times. Don't hate me but my panties get wet when I weave my basket through the aisles of Whole Foods picking up organic cranberries and shiitake mushroom soup.

**SBF 1:** In the morning she brews a South American blend of coffee from Dean and DeLuca. Her last man? Bro went to heaven at the local 7-Eleven.

**SBF 2:** He grabbed a fast cup of joe from McDonald's with his Egg McMuffin. I wind down in the evening with a glass of Pinot Blanc and—

**SBF 1:** Didn't he think Pinot Blanc is a light-skinned Filipino?

**SBF 2:** The last one I dated woke up every morning to 3–6 Mafia's "You Know It's Hard Out Here For a Pimp."

**SBF 1:** Girl here likes the hopeful nuances of Rachmaninov's "Prelude No. 21 18 in F Major B Minor." As for cuisine? I recall that boyfriend wrapped his lips around a fried chicken wang and could not let go!

**SBF 2:** I like turkey breast sliced thin on rye with a whisper of Dijon mustard.

**SBF 1:** She has to have her *Wall Street Journal* every morning. He reads the back of the cereal box!

**SBF 2:** And his idea of "must see TV?"

**SBF 1:** *Cops!*

**SBF 2:** My favorite show of all time? *The Sopranos.*

**SBF 1:** That was not TV—that was HBO!

**SBF 2:** My dream dinner? Scallops and fettuccine in a white wine garlic and butter sauce. His dream? Fried chicken, black-eyed peas, corn bread, and greens.

**SBF 1:** Hold up! Wait! Wasn't that you at the family reunion chowing down on a pig's foot doused in hot sauce? We ain't got that much class or that much education. What about our people? Our community? Maybe that's why we're alone.

*SBF 1 and SBF 2 turn and look at a slide show of various black family photographs intermingled with pictures of single women. The photos reflect diverse families: big and small, urban and suburban, gay and straight, middle-class, and working-class. The montage ends with a rapid succession of single women's photos until they are the last image. Lights fade down.*

## Scene 2. Rappin'

*SBF 2 window shopping at the Time Warner Center.*

**SBF 2:** Brothas love to run game.

**SBF 1:** Yo! Yo! Shortie! Can I spit at you fo' a minute?

**SBF 2:** There are times when I want to say, NO! But if I do, they are guaranteed to say—

**SBF 1:** Fuck you then, bitch! You ain't all that. I didn't want to holla at you NO way. I was just trying to make you feel better, you—

**SBF 2:** Fat, skinny, stupid, stuck-up, bald, weave-wearin'—

**SBF 1:** Stank ghetto hoe!

**SBF 2:** But they don't always come at you like that. Some men can be smooth.

**SBF 1:** Baby, you sure look good. I just wanted to tell you that. Have a wonderful day. *(wide grin)*

**SBF 2:** *(blushing bashfully)* Thank you.

**SBF 1:** No, thank you, goddess. Your very presence has made me whole again. Besides, you remind me of my wife.

**SBF 2:** WHAT?

**SBF 1:** Would you like to join our family? What? You got a problem with polygamy? On the continent this is how the original black man gets down. What? Don't get sassy with me. The ratio is not in your favor, my sista. Come on home to your African king.

**SBF 2:** Brotha, I'll pass on joining your harem. I doubt you can handle the women you've got now.

*(Beat.)* Don't get me wrong. There are times when I really want a man to rap to me. *(catches the eye of an eligible bachelor)* Hey. *(to audience)* Oh, my God, he's amazing!

**SBF 1:** *(as ideal man, interested but polite and reserved)* Hello.

**SBF 2:** Don't we know each other?

**SBF 1:** No, I don't think, wait. Yes. It was at that conference in Seattle. That's right. Good to see you again. How's your work coming?

**SBF 2:** Work? Work is good I—

**SBF 1:** Great. Well, that's my train. I really have to run. You take care now. *(hurriedly walks off)*

**SBF 2:** Wait! Wait! Damn, maybe I should have been more direct. “Hi, I’m looking for a husband. Please marry me!” My friends tell me I should try a more subdued, gentle approach. (*bats her eyes and speaks in a southern dialect*) Naive and charmin’. (*back to normal voice*) In fact, several of my girlfriends told me—

**SBF 1:** I will never get married! Never! Never! Never!

**SBF 2:** Or, I believe in serial monogamy.

**SBF 1:** I don’t believe in the institution of marriage.

**SBF 2:** Marriage is stifling.

**SBF 1:** It oppresses the female gender!

**SBF 2:** Marriage is outdated; people should just live together.

**SBF 1:** I couldn’t live with anyone. (*prances around dramatically*) I need my space, to live, breathe, laugh, work, create—(*freezes mid-sentence*)

**SBF 2:** I admit. For a long time I admired those women. I even envied their bold, carefree attitudes. I tried to emulate their style. Until? They get married. Invariably those are the ones who get hitched. None of them is even divorced yet, not that I’m waiting.

**SBF 1:** You know what they say, ambivalence pays.

**SBF 2:** If I knew then what I know now? I’d have traveled another route. More nonchalant.

**SBF 1:** Less honest?

**SBF 2:** No. I think it’s important to be authentic. I believe at my age I need to put my cards on the table. After all, I’m not getting any younger.

(*Loud sound of clock ticking*)

That ain’t the Monday morning 6 A.M. wake-up call. I’m listening for the sound of my future husband.

**SBF 1:** Hey, sexy, I like those lips.

**SBF 2:** Really, sugar, you haven’t even seen them yet!

**SBF 1:** Woman, you sure look nice. Can I get me some of that?

**SBF 2:** Why would you say something like that to a stranger? On the street? At 11 A.M. on a Tuesday? We’ve got a long way to go as a people.

**SBF 1:** Hey, can I just talk to you for a minute, damn!

**SBF 2:** I was just going to ask you the same thing, young man. Do you know your maker? Is Jehovah in your life?

**SBF 1:** Oh, my God.

**SBF 2:** You see, going Evangelic on a man hasn’t failed me yet. They all run for the hills.

**SBF 1:** Woman, are you nuts?

**SBF 2:** Yes, I am. You want to go out sometime? I like Italian!

### **Scene 3. Shoppin’**

*SBF 1 and SBF 2 shopping at the Gap in the Woodbury Common Premium Outlets.*

**SBF 1:** Remember when the Gap sold Levi’s?

**SBF 2:** Damn, girl, you are getting old!

**SBF 1:** Don't you mean we're getting old?

**SBF 2:** Look at that salesgirl. Every kid that works here has tan skin, naturally curly hair, low-cut jeans, and frosty blue eye shadow. Not everything needs to come back into style.

**SBF 1:** There's little Jennifer now in her too-tight tee shirt and those wedge shoes. She unleashes her insipid persona on everybody who crosses the store's threshold.

**SBF 2:** (*vapid*) Hi, welcome to the Gap. I'm Jennifer. Can I help you?

**SBF 1:** She's like a dope pusher pushing organized nostalgia.

**SBF 2:** It's called leisure wear for those "dress down" days at the office.

**SBF 1:** What is a gap? A gap is nothing, an erasure. A gap is a space waiting to be filled. An opening, absence, silence, emptiness, a fissure between all things relevant and—

**SBF 2:** A credit card.

**SBF 1:** Now Missy Elliot and LL Cool J pitch doo-wop-hip-hop promoting Gap-style black culture. Is black culture a gap?

**SBF 2:** Let's not go down that road, Miss Professor. I want to discuss something really important, like the mirrors the Gap uses.

**SBF 1:** Clearly Gestapo tactics. I look like a fat pig in those dressing rooms. I know I need to work out more, but damn!

**SBF 2:** Hey, girl, don't worry about it, shopping is a sport. You've been to a sale at the Barney's Coop? (*SBF 1 nods.*) All right, then. Besides, these clothes aren't made for our bodies. Those are for white girls. Hello? Mr. Designer Man, we have thighs, hips, and booty!

**SBF 1:** When I don't feel like being followed by some salesgirl, I shop online. One day my pleasure was ruined when I needed to confirm my order by phone. I got one of those customer service reps that spoke to me in a way that left a bad taste in my mouth.

**SBF 2:** You can't even hide in cyberspace! It's like they have a nigga detector on the phone! No matter how much education or money you have, they still know.

**SBF 1:** They speak with such distaste and disrespect that it makes me want to—

**SBF 1 & SBF 2:** Go the fuck off!

**SBF 1:** They request my address and it's fine until I get to my zip code—

**SBF 2:** Hmm. Where is that?

**SBF 1:** Manhattan.

**SBF 2:** Yes, of course. But what part?

**SBF 1:** Harlem.

**SBF 2:** What did you say, ma'am?

**SBF 1:** My place is in Harlem.

**SBF 2:** I'm sorry, ma'am, I couldn't hear you. Did you say HARLEM?

**SBF 1:** Yes, yes I did. HARLEM, Bill Clinton? Sylvia's? You know, the Upper Upper West Side!

**SBF 2:** Can you hold, please? Thank you. Call security, Marge. Must be a case of identity theft. This Negress is telling me she's lives in HARLEM...with Bill Clinton!

**SBF 1:** Thanks a lot. (*hangs up*) That always takes the fun out of my sprees. Being African American can be so inconvenient.

**SBF 2:** Remember that time when you had to call all your creditors because you didn't have enough money to pay bills and you had to ask for a payment plan?



**SBF 1:** I recall no such incident.

**SBF 2:** Well, I do, honey. Remember, we were still roommates back then.

**SBF 1:** Yes, and you encouraged me to get a little help.

**SBF 2:** I advised you to find some of those no good ex-boyfriends who owed you cash.

**SBF 1:** But thank you, Jesus, I was bailed out by my true and powerful role model, an institution, a living legend, Ms. Oprah—

**SBF 2:** (*as Oprah*) When we received your fax, you confessed that you were desperate. You acknowledge that you have a problem, is that correct?

**SBF 1:** Yes, but I'm ready to start over.

**SBF 2:** I have a check for fifty-eight thousand, two hundred ninety-five dollars and seventy-two cents. Oprah's Angel Network is giving you a new life, debt-free.

**SBF 1:** (*rips the check from SBF 2's hands*) Listen, Oprah, I appreciate the bailout, but trust me, I know deep in my heart that I will do this again. I love to shop and I won't stop for anyone. Not even you. That's my program.

**SBF 2:** You are such a shopaholic.

**SBF 1:** Don't talk about me, Ms. DKNY.

**SBF 2:** I'm proud of myself. I know who I am and what I want without a doubt. Besides—

**SBF 1 & SBF 2:** (*in unison*) I can stop shopping at any time. I just don't want to yet!

**SBF 1:** I am only shopping because I need to find something brutal for our twentieth reunion.

**SBF 2:** Girl, how many kids DO you have?

**SBF 1:** That's a good one, but they always unleash their lethal question.

**SBF 2:** You haven't had children yet? You better get started. You're not getting any younger.

**SBF 1:** I smile. (*under her breath*) Asshole! No, not yet, but Hannah, Amber, Megan, Kyle, Dylan, and Owen are just adorable. You look great. Call me!

**SBF 2:** Text me!

**SBF 1:** We will all get together real soon. We sat at that table and talked bad about EVERYBODY. Especially those AKAs.

**SBF 1 & SBF 2:** (*in unison*) Skee wee!

**SBF 2:** Look! That's Kelly!

**SBF 1:** Is she still writing for *Essence*?

**SBF 2:** Maybe she can do an article on you. West coast scholar goes East coast still looking for love.

**SBF 1:** Thanks. I won't hold my breath. Oh, my God. That's Priscilla. Wave!

**SBF 2:** Wow, five foot six and not an ounce over one hundred twenty-five pounds.

**SBF 1:** She does look great. At least I try to work out—aerobics, spinning, yoga, Pilates, and swimming

—

**SBF 2:** Heifer, you do not swim. That thing is called a whirlpool!

**SBF 1:** Whatever.

**SBF 2:** Wait, didn't Priscilla marry that neurologist?

**SBF 1:** No, no, no. He's a novelist.

**SBF 2:** Hah! So she's broke!

**SBF 1:** Nope. He just had his third national bestseller. They own an apartment in the east village, a house in Santa Fe, and oceanfront property near Monterey.



**SBF 2:** Bitch! (*Both wave and smile.*)

**SBF 1:** Oh, yes, I'm fine. Things are great for us. I'm working out, when I can—

**SBF 2:** And shopping.

## Scene 4. Sisterhood

*SBF 1 and SBF 2 compete for space to primp in the club's bathroom mirror.*

**SBF 1:** It's no secret. On some days I hate black women. We can be so damn EVIL! Just mean.

**SBF 2:** I particularly despise the way we turn up our lips, suck our teeth, and roll our eyes.

**SBF 1:** E-V-I-L! Evil!

**SBF 2:** Tell it, girl.

**SBF 1:** One night after teaching, I was standing in line at a sandwich shop on Astor Place, and the sister ahead of me starts going off. Like she was crazed. Just tore back and off the chain! She told this poor woman—

**SBF 2:** Look! You needs to make sure my order is done right. And yo, let me get some of them jal-peños with that!

**SBF 1:** I'm most embarrassed when other people of color witness or receive the brunt of these outbursts.

**SBF 2:** Señorita! Señorita! You needs to learn to speak American.

**SBF 1:** What are you doing? She's making our food, fool! She's your sister in the struggle. Of course I don't say that to her face. She might beat me down. But I think it real loud. (*Beat.*) One weekend I saw an older black woman give a particularly gratifying performance. While walking down the street she stopped me dead in my tracks. She stood before me, serene and regal—this gray-haired angel.

**SBF 2:** Baby?

**SBF 1:** Yes, Ma'am?

**SBF 2:** You're not her. I thought you was her.

**SBF 1:** I'm sorry. Who?

**SBF 2:** That actress, the black woman with the hair. No. You're not her. You look just like her, but you're not as ugly as she is. Whoo-who.

**SBF 1:** You mean Whoopi Goldberg.

**SBF 2:** That's right. But you're not as ugly as her, but you do look just like her, though.

**SBF 1:** Thanks, Ma'am. It never occurred to her that Whoopi is a beautiful black woman. No, that never occurred to her at all.

**SBF 2:** When people see us they assume—single, welfare, no education, and tons of babies. I'm not her.

**SBF 1:** We are all invisible to them and we don't even see each other.

**SBF 2:** I remember when I was the new sista at my firm. During my first day I was introduced to the staff. The senior partner made it a point to tell me a little something about every black woman who works there—all six of their four hundred thirty-two employees. I knew not one of them liked me.

**SBF 1:** Who does she think she is? That broad thinks she's cute. Hmm, she ain't all that. Bet she won't

make partner!

**SBF 2:** That's not me.

**SBF 1:** Have you ever realized that there's a way that a black woman can say "girlfriend" that actually sounds nothing like a term of endearment.

**SBF 2:** That's because "girlfriend" is usually followed by "you need to..." or preceded by "excuse me,— girlfriend." Or, "girlfriend, let me tell you—"

**SBF 1:** I just want to say—

**SBF 1 & SBF 2:** Shut the fuck up, you EVIL bitch!

**SBF 2:** The last club I went to was the 40/40, and let me tell you, I nearly started a riot. The women's bathroom was crowded. So I rolled up on a sista who was standing in the mirror primping and just tightin' up her thang when I got bold and told her, "You look nice." She almost pissed on herself.

**SBF 1:** What?

**SBF 2:** Your outfit—it's really nice. *(Pause.)* That dress becomes you. *(to audience)* She just stood there looking. Then she moved away from the mirror and all her girls walked out behind her one by one by one. The bathroom was empty.

**SBF 1:** Quiet.

**SBF 2:** I stood there with my toes pinched in my high, high heels, startled by my reflection in the mirror.

**SBF 1:** A black girl.

**SBF 2:** An African American queen.

**SBF 1:** A sista.

**SBF 2:** I kept looking for all that evil in my face and eyes. I stared for what seemed like hours. My trance broke when the black woman in the reflection blew a kiss to me from the mirror and softly whispered—

**SBF 2 & SBF 1:** *(in unison)* I love your evil black bitch ass.

*(SBF 1 and SBF 2 grab hands and begin dancing with each other to Cheryl Lynn's "Got to Be Real" as they clear the stage and change their clothes for the next scene.)*

## Scene 5. Computer Love

*Zapp's "Computer Love" plays while they type away on their Apple MacBooks.*

**SBF 2:** How can a woman find the love of her life using a cold piece of technology? How can you find passion through an inanimate object that crashes, freezes, and God forbid, gives you a virus! Am I putting all my hopes and trust in a plastic box with motherboards and computer chips? What have our lives come to?

**SBF 1:** Internet dating is cool, I'm telling you. Trust me.

**SBF 2:** What kind of self-respecting black man looks for a woman on the Net? They don't need to use a computer. Brothas are the most desired piece of equipment on this planet! Everyone wants dark meat, Asians, Latinas, Afghanis.... Black men are the hottest thing on God's green earth, and I believe that far, far away, on a distant star in the galaxy, some purple women want them too. So what am I to do?

**SBF 1:** Just try it—it's not like men are lining up outside your door right now.

**SBF 2:** Nice. Okay. Okay. Which site?

**SBF 1:** I've done the research. The selection is overwhelming. I'm delirious about the plethora of choices. There's a site for every taste, category, and proclivity. Of course, there is the tried and true, [Match.com](http://Match.com). That's where I posted my profile.

**SBF 2:** Anything promising?

**SBF 1:** Well, after I got past the dozens of profiles that made it clear that they were looking for anything BUT a black woman, I met a few interesting characters. Let me warn you, I did unearth several crazies, but I can say this: it has been an amusing distraction from writing lectures and waiting around for the phone to ring. I'm still very hopeful. But we're here for you. Here is another site, The Right Stuff, for snobby singles who attended the Ivy League.

**SBF 2:** Hmm, what about eHarmony?

**SBF 1:** Have you seen their questionnaire? It's longer than *War and Peace*. We don't have that kinda time! Just try [Match.com](http://Match.com). You'll need an enticing screen name.

**SBF 2:** Single sista.

**SBF 1:** That's taken!

**SBF 2:** Of course. How about Diva?

**SBF 1:** Too predictable.

**SBF 2:** Cocalawyer!

**SBF 1:** (*types*) Yes! We're in. Age range? Thirty to forty. Weight?

**SBF 2:** No they don't. Those mothafuckas!

**SBF 1:** Calm down. Fit, a few pounds, or chunky monkey?

**SBF 2:** Fit!

**SBF 1:** Fit?

**SBF 2:** I said fit!

**SBF 1:** Okay, okay. What other essential info do you want to include?

**SBF 2:** Tell them I've got a New York mind, L.A. face, Oakland booty, and Vineyard cash! Sign me up for thirty days.

**SBF 1:** That's a bit too optimistic. How about one year?

**SBF 2:** A year of this? Remember, my clock is ticking!

**SBF 1:** Okay, how about six months?

**SBF 2:** That should be just enough time to find the love of my life.

**SBF 1:** What are you looking for?

**SBF 2:** Well, last time I checked, Barack Obama was taken. So I'll take anybody breathing within a five-hundred-mile radius. That ought to take care of the Tri-State Area, and most of the Eastern seaboard and Atlantic City too!

**SBF 1:** Come on. The point is to be more selective. We've already tried the "everybody" plan and that didn't quite work for the past thirty some odd years. We can do a search by age, race, education, weight, religion, and location—

**SBF 2:** Okay, I want someone who likes to cook, travel, read...

**SBF 1:** That sounds a tad generic.

**SBF 2:** Listen, you want to know what I really want?

*(spoken-word style)*

Give me a roughneck nigga with a law degree

Who pulls my hair and spansks me.

Talkin' 'bout a brotha who understands Hegel, Fanon, and slappin' bones

Who knows better than to sit up at Chez Panisse

Ordering rosé and answering cell phones.

Beggin' for a man who finds box symphony seats the bomb

And knows how to sweet talk my Mom.

He's gotta be sanctified Sunday after sinnin' Saturday night.

His desire must be awakened by African skin on a body that's tight.

He reads Toni Morrison and bets half his check on the Knicks,

Saves for our baby's trust fund and new pair of kicks.

Drives his cobalt Porsche into the ground.

Brings home white tulips on the first day of spring without me making a sound.

Whispers in French as we walk along the Seine

After letting me call across the Atlantic to talk shit with my best friend!

**SBF 1:** Tell it! But come on, that's one tall order, sis! I don't think we'll find that on here.

**SBF 2:** Let's just go ahead and see if these folks can find some kinda match for me. What did it find? Is HE there?

**SBF 1:** Look, ten matches. Okay, wow. Which one? Chuck full of Nuts? Pimpin' Paul? Brooklyn Bobby? Or Chocolate Dream? No, I tried him. He's a nightmare. Ah, a new post. What about this guy, Just-in-time? An eighty percent match! He wants a woman just like you and he's nearly everything you're looking for.

**SBF 2:** Smart, sexy and ed-u-ma-cated!

**SBF 1:** Let me enlarge his photo. Oh, my—isn't that your ex? That's—

**SBF 2 & SBF 1:** *(in unison)* Justin! Damn!

**SBF 2:** Just-in-time? Just in time to piss me off. I guess it's true, you can find just about anything online. Let's log out. I think that's enough humiliation for one afternoon.

**SBF 1:** No, wait. I think I've got something sweet here.

**SBF 2:** A professional, unmarried, and wants kids?

**SBF 1:** Send him a wink! Good luck, girl. I can't wait to see what the cyber world sends you.

## Scene 6. The Date

*SBF 2 standing in bedroom rifling through closets and dressers while SBF 1 sits on the bed thumbing through fashion magazines.*

**SBF 2:** *(standing in bra and panties in front of her closet)* What the hell am I going to wear? Uh! I can't believe I'm going out with a guy I met online.

**SBF 1:** It will be fine. Wear what makes you feel comfortable, mysterious, sexy. *(Beat.)* That's the least of your worries. Do you know the part of a date I worry about most? After the drinks, appetizers, main course, then dessert...the big question looms in the air. Who will pay for dinner? Usually, I

pay and assert my feminist ideals.

**SBF 2:** If he pays? What does he get besides salmon and baked new potatoes with a side of steamed greens and a starter of mussels? Most of the time waiters place the bill skillfully between our well-clad bodies. Why should I pay when I know he makes three times my salary?

**SBF 1:** That's right. He pays and you pay later.

**SBF 2:** Yeah, I pay and still have to wrestle with this mothafucka on my sofa.

**SBF 1:** Who really pays? Has anyone ever calculated the true cost for women to stay date material in the new millennium? (*sound of antique adding machine*)

**SBF 2:** Let's see, eyebrows, bikini line, and upper lip waxed? One hundred and ten dollars.

**SBF 1:** Gym membership for thigh control, one hundred and fifty dollars per month.

**SBF 2:** Teeth whitening process, three hundred dollars.

**SBF 1:** How about the particulars for tonight?

**SBF 2:** Spanx and Donna Karan sandal foot ultra-sheer nylons in jet black, two pairs at twenty-five dollars each.

**SBF 1:** Two pairs?

**SBF 2:** In case of a run!

**SBF 1:** Of course. Next?

**SBF 2:** Foundations.

**SBF 1:** What are we constructing here? An office building?

**SBF 2:** No, honey, we're building toward a dream.

**SBF 1:** Or a nightmare!

**SBF 2:** Wonder-ful bra and lace panties—courtesy of La Perla.

**SBF 1:** Of course. Price tag?

**SBF 2:** Some things are private.

**SBF 1:** Shoes?

**SBF 2:** A pair of Christian Louboutin three-inch high come-fuck-me pumps. Four hundred and twenty-five dollars.

**SBF 1:** Well spent! Don't forget the smell good—Issey Miyake Eau de Parfum Spray, eighty-two dollars.

**SBF 2:** Applied to all the pulse points. (*SBF 2 demonstrates the application of perfume.*) Behind the ears, each wrist, ankles and...(*motions toward crotch*)

**SBF 1:** Wait! No! Don't do that. It burns. Trust me. Makeup?

**SBF 2:** Lipstick by M·A·C—The black middle-class woman's form of crack. (*rifling through her purse*) Chintz, Media, Frenzy, XS, XTC, Film Noir, Diva, Photo, Fetish, Icon—

**SBF 1:** Wait. Are those your favorite colors or a commentary on American popular culture?

**SBF 2:** Same thing, different shade. Foundation by Prescriptives.

**SBF 1:** Custom blended for our skin color. Before M·A·C and Prescriptives, a colored girl couldn't get a break. Remember those shades our mothers had to wear? Frosty pink eye shadow? Devastating.

**SBF 2:** Yeah, no more beige coverage for brown skins or bright orange lipstick for full lips.

**SBF 1:** Mascara, eyeliner, shadow.

**SBF 2:** For that sultry look.

**SBF 1:** And blush.

**SBF 2:** For that demure look. Let's see, makeup, three hundred and eighty-five dollars. Oops! I can't

forget the dress. A nice silk cream Calvin Klein number. One hundred and twenty-five.

**SBF 1:** One hundred and twenty-five dollars? Not bad.

**SBF 2:** Century 21, girl. Grand total?

**SBF 1:** Well over two thousand dollars in credit and cash payments.

**SBF 2:** How much did he spend to get ready for tonight?

**SBF 1:** Nothing. He took a shit, a shower, and a shave. I think you better make sure he's paying for dinner.

**SBF 2:** Damn right. He better give up some lovin' too, so I can get my money's worth. (*Doorbell rings. SBF 2 opens the door and greets her unseen suitor in the hallway.*) Good evening. I'm just about ready, sugar. Turn around and let me see that package. Tight. Nice. (*to SBF 1*) Good night, girl, text you later!

## Scene 7. Sexual Suspect

*SBF 2 arrives at the doctor's office.*

**SBF 2:** I really hate going to the doctor's office. (*whispering*) No, not for the flu, but when I have to go to the...gynecologist. Women's health is a pain in the ass!

(*Lights up on SBF 1 putting on a white lab coat, glasses, and stethoscope.*)

There is something so sterile,

(*SBF 1 puts on latex gloves in a pronounced manner.*)

so impersonal about it. Just business as usual, especially while I was in college and all I could afford was St. Vincent's. No, I'm not trying to get an abortion. The date wasn't that good. I'm here so I don't need to go there. I just have a yeast infection, AGAIN! I hate women who tell me they never had one. I find that just as annoying as those sistas who have never experienced cramps. Well, this particular yeast infection has no respect for that over-the-counter Monistat. I need some nuclear bomb stuff for this one.

(*SBF 1 as white male doctor picks up a clipboard and begins reading the chart, then approaches SBF 2.*)

**SBF 1:** Okie dokie. So what was the first day of your last menstrual period?

**SBF 2:** Huh?

**SBF 1:** I'm sorry, how are we today? What's bothering you? (*starts to scribble notes furiously*)

**SBF 2:** My colleague referred me to Dr. Feel Good because he's supposed to be the best but, what can old boy be writing before I've even said anything? (*to him*) I have some discomfort (*whispers*) with intercourse. And some, uh, vaginal itching. And some (*whispers*) discharge.

**SBF 1:** (*loudly*) Describe the discharge.

**SBF 2:** (*to audience*) Discharge, why do I always think about the army and dishonor when I hear that word? (*to doctor*) Yes, it's a little...a little, it's kinda...

(*Two stirrups drop down from the ceiling for SBF 2 to put her feet in.*)

**SBF 1:** Okay, let's get a look down there. Undress from the earrings down, put on this thin gown that couldn't keep an ant warm that has its back open so that your ass is out to the world, sit on this cold table and wait for me while you look at our stack of out-of-date magazines. You may also

study our informative signs about the reproductive system, the varieties of birth control pills, and scary posters about HIV testing. Freaked out? You may calm yourself by glancing at our fake Monet. (*Beat.*) But sister, don't even think about stealing gloves, KY Jelly, Rantex wipes, or those really big cotton swabs that you can't fit in your ears anyway!

**SBF 2:** So I'm sitting there waiting for him to come back, and this man I've known all of three minutes will look at the place my parents told me not to touch unless I was cleaning it—and then, don't look!

**SBF 1:** Put your feet in these ice-cold stirrups so that you can cock your legs wide open. Now, scoot down so that your buttocks are practically off the table. A little bit more. (*Pause.*) A bit more. One more. (*smothered sound*) Ahh, lady, that's too far! I can't breathe!

**SBF 2:** Then while this stranger has his latex fingers inside me, I start to imagine all kinds of crazy things. I'm an attorney, I know that it's inappropriate to say, but there are clients I really don't care for. If I'm honest, I know that they don't always get my best work. Is this guy going to give me the best health care if he doesn't like me? Then it hits me. I recall the disdain on his face when he first looked at me. Dear God, what if he's a racist? TUSKEGEE!

**SBF 1:** Well, looks a bit tender here. New partner?

**SBF 2:** I wanna say, "And what of it, asshole?" But instead I say, "Yes, but we're careful. We use protection every time."

**SBF 1:** I wanna tell her, "Slut, I reviewed your chart and every time you go to the doctor you have a new partner." But instead I say, "That's good, perhaps you'd better use more lubricant with your partner if he's, uh, excessively large."

**SBF 2:** Honey, don't believe the hype, not all brothas are hung like horses.

**SBF 1:** You'd better consider your fertility. Do you want to have children? Now that you're thirty-five, you are now considered a woman of advanced maternal age, so becoming pregnant can really become an issue.

**SBF 2:** Which I hear as—

**SBF 1:** You better have yourself some babies, you old maid! How did you make it this long without having children? Being single never stops the rest of you hot black mamas from droppin' some illegit shit!

**SBF 2:** I do want a child...

**SBF 1:** A baby...

**SBF 2:** A son...

**SBF 1:** A daughter...

**SBF 2:** But I also want a father for my children. Not a baby daddy. Call me a right-wing traditional anti-black matriarch. Can somebody help me with this? Husband, are you out there?

**SBF 1:** Well, good luck with that. Ha!

**SBF 2:** What is this ritual? The annual Pap smear sprinkled with occasional emergencies—a female problem. I wonder what slave women did when they suffered from bad cramps, or better yet, a yeast infection.

**SBF 1:** (*as slave wench number 9*) Massa, I sho' cain't get in them fields today. No suh, my feminine itchin' gots me real bad like.

**SBF 2:** Then, just about every six months—my favorite moment.



**SBF 1:** From your chart, it looks like you're about due for another HIV test—being that you're single and all...

**SBF 2:** (*rolling up her sleeve*) Yes. (*to audience*) This is even more of a blast!

**SBF 1:** I'll need to take some blood. Have Sandy set up an appointment for your results.

**SBF 2:** They never have trouble finding my vein. I just wish that the only pain was from the needle prick.

**SBF 1:** Now, that wasn't so bad, was it? Miss, you do have a little yeast infection. Not bad enough to take off work, but I'll write you a prescription. Now, you'll need some self-acceptance, a nice gentle lover, peace with your parents, satisfaction with work and, of course, exercise and a healthy diet.

**SBF 2:** Can you phone all that in to a pharmacy near my house?

**SBF 1:** No problem.

## Scene 8. Holiday

(*Loud Christmas music blares from the apartments above and below. Lights up.*)

**SBF 1:** Damn! Christmas again. Hey, turn it down! (*bangs on floor*) Turn that crap off! The holidays make me scream. No, scream, then faint. These sentimental days force me to deal with my aunts, my mother's gang of four sisters from Texas—Aunt Leola, Auntie Price, Aunt Ernestine, and Aunt Mabel Dear. Otherwise known as the married Mafia! They'll all be asking those questions. You know the drill.

**SBF 2:** Baby, you look like you've gained—

**SBF 1:** Or lost—

**SBF 2:** Too much weight. Are you eating right? All that working you do, it's just a shame. Don't let them white people make you crazy, now.

**SBF 1:** They're also in rare form during that other American women's guilt orgy—Mother's Day.

**SBF 2:** I'm sure happy to see you, sugar. I guess I can't expect for you to visit since you've got that fancy job. Our little baby, a big-time college professor and all. You young folks have to live your lives, I guess.

**SBF 1:** Then that wonderful question we've all been waiting for.

**SBF 2:** (*using megaphone*) Sweetie, when are you gonna get MARRIED?

**SBF 1:** Yes, every Christmas, Valentine's Day, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Halloween! But especially during Christmas. Everybody wants you to be happy. I'm convinced that all the Yuletide festivities, from shopping to holiday parties, were designed to make me feel like a loser. Am I the only single person left in the world? At Aunt Mabel Dear's annual Christmas Eve gumbo get-together, those gray-haired gangsters always ask me that same question.

**SBF 2:** When you gonna get serious about somebody?

**SBF 1:** For years I just apologized. I'm sorry nobody wants me, but I did finish my Ph.D. last June.

**SBF 2:** Honey, Junes are for brides. That little degree is all fine and good, but it won't keep you warm at night, baby.

**SBF 1:** My family is crazy. I try to explain, "Oh, I'm not really into the traditional marriage thing—sexism and patriarchy make marriage an oppressive institution for women." Wrong answer. Never give the feminist line to women who believe you'd better fix a man's plate at any human



gathering.

**SBF 2:** Baby, he looks a little peaked. Maybe he needs a bite of something.

**SBF 1:** But Aunt Leola, we are at the Bronx Zoo. They only have stale peanuts.

**SBF 2:** Never let a man go hungry, sweetie.

**SBF 1:** When I visit Auntie Price, it's even harder. I have to answer questions like—

**SBF 2:** Have you considered practicing an alternative lifestyle?

**SBF 1:** Auntie Price has always been a bit—eccentric! Auntie, if I was practicing anything, I would have it right by now.

**SBF 2:** Now, as I figure it, being tri-sexual might better your odds. Seems to me that liking both men and women ought to make things easier. More love to choose from.

**SBF 1:** You would think so, Auntie Price.

**SBF 2:** Too bad that Clayton is a gay. He's such a nice, intelligent young man. And so well dressed, too.

**SBF 1:** Clayton and I are happy being friends. I'll meet somebody soon.

**SBF 2:** Well, one of my friends at the church tells me her daughter met and married some man she met on the [superinformationhighway.www.com](http://superinformationhighway.www.com). Try that!

**SBF 1:** Okay, Auntie Price. *(turns to audience)* Usually, I'm battling the aunts with smart quips. My new reply can even silence the very best-meaning, rude-sounding black maternal figure over fifty years old. *(cautiously turns to another aunt)* Well, Aunt Ernestine, I'm just being a patient and obedient Christian. Whenever the Lord sees fit to bless me with a God-fearin' husband, I guess I'll plan my wedding day. Believe me, when that day comes, you'll be the first to know. Until then, I will do the work He has put before me.

**SBF 2:** Well, I just hopes your daddy will be alive to walk you down the aisle some summer afternoon in the distant future. Ain't none of us gonna be here forever.

**SBF 1:** It's not that I hate the holidays. I wouldn't say that. I just don't celebrate the questions that come along with these festive events. I wish I didn't have to eat the advice that my dear aunts put on the side of my plate next to that extra helping of banana pudding. But you know what? That pudding sure helps it slide down easier. For some strange reason, of all the holidays, I love the Fourth of July. Don't tell my friends, but something about this mid-summer holiday makes me mushy inside. Most people get bent out of shape on New Year's Eve because they don't have a date or Valentine's Day when they are absent a sweetheart. But for me? I feel so unloved sitting on the beach or at the family BBQ with nobody to slather butter on my corn on the cob. Nobody to wipe the Texas sauce from the corner of my lips. Not a soul to feed me peach cobbler. Yes, the big joy of the summer is the fruit. Plums, nectarines, cherries. Oh, I love mangos! And what self-respecting African American doesn't just fall on their knees for a juicy piece of watermelon? In private, of course. As far as I'm concerned, it's the epitome of solitude to pick my own melon and eat it. I'm tired of sifting through those bins. I'm tired of lugging home my prey and hoisting it up the two flights to my one-bedroom apartment. I'd like to ask my baby to come on down and help me lug it up the stairs. I want to share my piece of watermelon on a blanket underneath the warm summer night sky exploding with fireworks!

**SBF 2:** *(enters dressed in a summer dress and hands SBF 1 a large piece of watermelon, then sits down beside her)* Happy holidays!

(*Mariah Carey's "Fourth of July" plays softly. Lights slow fade.*)

## Act 2. Secrets: How We Got This Way

### Scene 1. Why I Will Never Marry

*Nancy Wilson's "Never Will I Marry" plays as SBF 1 revises and reads from a list in her journal.*

**SBF 2:** I've got it! I know how we got this way. I just returned from a Shapely retreat in the Adirondacks.

**SBF 1:** Shapely?

**SBF 2:** You remember, I tried to get you to attend, too. S.H.A.P.E.L.Y., Sisters Hoping and Praying Energetically for Love, Yea! It's a holistic retreat for black women trying to look within to discover how they can heal from family wounds and societal expectations and still find long-lasting monogamous attachments. I discovered exactly why you are still single.

**SBF 1:** This I've got to hear.

**SBF 2:** You hang out with gay men all the time, you read far too many articles in *Essence* magazine, and you watched way too many episodes of *Sex and the City*.

**SBF 1:** What? Well, Miss Shapely, you wouldn't recognize real love if it kissed you on the lips. The real reason you are single is that you jump too fast into bed with the wrong ones, and are too slow to warm to the marrying type.

**SBF 2:** Ow! You may have a point, but you—

**SBF 1:** Stop. It's fine. I don't need your explanations. It's not just about being chosen. I have my own reasons for never getting married.

**SBF 2:** Are you still working on that list? Okay, let's hear it.

**SBF 1:** I now have fifty reasons. Check out number forty-nine: I don't want to spend eternity saying—

**SBF 2:** What do you want to eat tonight?

**SBF 1:** I don't know, what do you want?

**SBF 2:** I don't care. I'll have whatever you want.

**SBF 1:** Let's get Chinese, then

**SBF 2:** Chinese again? I'm so tired of eating Chinese.

**SBF 1:** Then why did you say, whatever you want?

**SBF 2:** Don't start.

**SBF 1:** I'm not starting, you are.

**SBF 2:** Or, how about reason eight? Having to ask, "What's wrong?" and hear—

**SBF 1:** (*sighs*) Nothing. Yes, then there is reason number forty-seven. I refuse to listen to my partner's taste in music. You can't always fall in love with somebody with superior taste. Invariably you find out when it's much too late that they love Kenny G. That's not jazz.

**SBF 2:** How about reason number forty-five? I don't have to like anyone else's parents. That's self-explanatory.

**SBF 1:** And my favorite, number thirty-seven, retaining total and complete power over the remote control. Yes, I watch television: from SOAPnet to ESPN. I've been with my thirty-two-inch SONY longer than I've been with anyone. And my TIVO knows me better than I know myself!

**SBF 2:** Wait! What about reason twenty-four?

**SBF 1:** I get to sleep with a new person (or more than one person) whenever I want! Why do you want to get married?

**SBF 2:** The same reason every SBF wants to get married? You get to have a wedding! A wedding; a thirty-thousand-dollar party. A big public, yet sacred bash that's all about celebrating the man you get to fuck for forever—for the mortgage and health insurance, of course.

**SBF 1:** No, for love! You get to be husband and wife. How grand.

**SBF 2:** Well, I refuse any more weddings except my own. Moreover, I refuse to attend another commitment ceremony, whether it's held in City Hall or on Fire Island. They drag on forever and my gay friends get divorced just like straight folk. Alternative lifestyle, alternative result, right?

**SBF 1:** You think so? Come on, fuck the dumb shit! Are you expecting perfection from folks just because they're gay?

**SBF 2:** Honey, all I know is that I spent over four hundred dollars on Isaiah and Demante's nuptials, not including my own outfit, and they stayed together for six months. Six months! I have had a rash longer than that. I want the gift back! No! Damn it, I want it all! After waiting all these years I don't plan to settle now.

**SBF 1:** So, you honestly want to become a wife? Come on, the world has changed. Now women don't have to stay at home and take care of the kids. In this new progressive age, opportunity abounds. You get to have a fabulous career as a lawyer, architect, or doctor—then come home and take care of the house and kids. We've come a long way, baby. Shoot! I want a wife, too. Yeah, love and marriage.

*(Soft spotlight shifts to SBF 2 while SBF 1 moves in the background with another soft light on her. Nancy Wilson's "Never Will I Marry" plays softly.)*

## Scene 2. Malcolm and My Other Xs

*SBF 1 discovers a stack of photographs on the bookshelf and begins to go through them, laughing to herself and showing them to SBF 2 as evidence. During the scene they project photos of former lovers with a solid black bar covering parts of their faces.*

**SBF 1:** Black love. The kind of love you had with Malcolm. Malcolm—

**SBF 2:** X. Malcolm X. Let's just leave the last names out of things to protect the guilty, the innocent, and the truly pathetic.

**SBF 1:** Right. *(to audience)* Don't worry, this isn't political. He wasn't the Nation of Islam brotha she dated. *(to SBF 2)* That's the only type of man you haven't—*(makes exaggerated air quotes)* dated.

**SBF 2:** Malcolm was the last man I truly loved.

**SBF 1:** *(to audience)* By any means necessary, she was going to keep that relationship going.

**SBF 2:** He was loving, supportive, sexy—

**SBF 1:** And jealous! He believed you were out there screwing anyone and everyone. *(as the boyfriend)* What's up with you and Darren?

**SBF 2:** What do you mean, what's up?

**SBF 1:** First of all, you are always at his shows every Friday and Saturday night. Second of all, you are

always going shopping and shit.

**SBF 2:** That's true, but honey, you know that Darren is gay? He's not on the DL, he's a drag queen!

**SBF 1:** It doesn't matter. I know you're fuckin' him!

**SBF 2:** Ooh, yeah, he was nuts.

**SBF 1:** What about that Kelvin character?

**SBF 2:** Armani suits, Prada loafers, Thomas Pink shirts, and fragrance by Dolce and Gabbana.

**SBF 1:** Talk about my credit problems! Didn't he buy all that stuff with your Visa and MasterCard?

Yep. You even co-signed for a Discover Card just so he could help you discover some more debt and discover himself some more clothes at Neiman Marcus.

**SBF 2:** Wait a minute. All the men I've loved aren't paranoid, crazy, cheap dogs.

**SBF 1:** Really? What about Simon? He was adopted and had a few abandonment issues.

**SBF 2:** Yeah, who doesn't?

**SBF 1:** What about Mr. Perfect, a.k.a. Mr. Julian Nathaniel Richards III?

**SBF 2:** A forty-one-year-old divorced father of none. Tall, muscular, and black black black. So black the man was blue, like the Atlantic Ocean at midnight. And bald, just like Michael Jordan. Um.

**SBF 1:** He spoke French, Italian, and Spanish.

**SBF 2:** Fluently.

**SBF 1:** Wasn't he also learning German so he could read Kant without the fumbling interpretation of a translator?

**SBF 2:** Julian.

**SBF 1:** You just knew he was—

**SBF 2:** Thee One.

**SBF 1:** I couldn't find you most weekends. You two spent Friday nights recuperating from the week by cooking recipes out of the vegetarian cookbook his mother sent you as a housewarming gift.

**SBF 2:** So we played house. Honey, there ain't nothin' like live-in dick. You no longer have to worry about a date for Saturday night. On Sunday mornings Julian and I lounged around our loft eating toast smothered with homemade strawberry jam and reading the *Times*.

**SBF 1:** Wrestling over the Arts & Leisure section. Love. Remember that rainy October night he cooked a five-course gourmet meal and for dessert put a two-carat promise on your finger?

**SBF 2:** Thee finger!

**SBF 1:** (*holding up the ring*) Exhibit A!

**SBF 2:** Julian told me the ring belonged to his grandmother and that it had belonged to her grandmother, who was a slave who stole it from her mistress. Took sixty lashes to have this slaveholder's heirloom. It was now on my hand.

**SBF 1:** It was black history and black pain redeemed by black love.

**SBF 2:** We danced and cried. Candles burned our silhouettes into the brick walls of our living room. The rain serenaded us as we drifted off to sleep. Magic.

**SBF 1:** The next day the phone rang at my office. I'll never forget. It was exactly 4:18 P.M. and I had a line of students outside my door waiting to complain about receiving an A minus.

**SBF 2:** Girl, you won't believe this! Julian's ex-wife called. She lives in Baltimore. She wants the ring back. It belonged to a slave, all right. Her Aunt Sandy, who was a maid in the suburbs of Virginia in 1979, stole it from her boss. Emancipation! She got fired and I just fired him.

**SBF 1:** For lying about the ring?

**SBF 2:** No, for lying about the divorce. They are only separated.

**SBF 1:** Oh, yeah. The review of this breakup was brought to you by Miller Genuine Draft. In recognition of this and every other breakup, Miller would like to contribute seventeen cents to the United Negro College Fund. A black woman's womb is a terrible thing to waste. Thank you. *(Beat.)* I don't know about you, but after every breakup I'm completely embarrassed. I hate to see my colleagues and friends. "So, how are you and so-and-so doing?"

**SBF 2:** That's because for some reason you can't keep your big mouth shut when you've found what appears to be new love.

**SBF 1:** I have to share my new joy with the world. *(phone rings; SBF 2 answers)*

**SBF 2:** Hello?

**SBF 1:** You won't believe it. I'm in love.

**SBF 2:** What! *(SBF 2 abruptly hangs up the phone.)*

**SBF 1:** After a few dates—

**SBF 2:** Or a few months—

**SBF 1:** Even after a few years I must reveal to the world that once again I am back in the land of the single people. *(Beat.)* We broke up—my favorite refrain.

**SBF 2:** He left you.

**SBF 1:** My mother's favorite refrain.

**SBF 2:** It just wasn't meant to be. What can you learn from this?

**SBF 1:** My therapist's favorite refrain.

**SBF 2:** Fuck him! He ain't shit.

**SBF 1:** My homegirl's favorite refrain.

**SBF 2:** Yeah, maybe it's me. Nobody is perfect. But I'm always more suspect if a guy doesn't have something major that needs changing. So, maybe it's me.

**SBF 1:** It certainly can't all be THEM.

**SBF 2:** Ahmad?

**SBF 1:** Too arrogant.

**SBF 2:** Elijah?

**SBF 1:** He was too smothering.

**SBF 2:** Phillip?

**SBF 1:** You did fuck that up.

**SBF 2:** Hey, wait! Isn't this the part when you act supportive?

**SBF 1:** Well, you were only eighteen, so that doesn't count.

**SBF 2:** Yeah, young love. Hey, what about your college sweetheart, Brian?

**SBF 1:** Too demanding. He wanted too much too soon. He wanted us to get married before I finished... before we finished school. Now, that was out of the question!

**SBF 2:** And didn't he catch you messing with his cousin?

**SBF 1:** *(under her breath)* That was actually his line brother.

**SBF 2:** Whoa! Not the one he went through the burning sands with. Damn!

**SBF 1:** Listen, I was freaked out. I certainly didn't understand commitment at that stage in my life. Will I ever live that down? Can we change the subject?

**SBF 2:** (*grabs another photo*) Hey, how about your girl phase? We can't forget about you and Miss Simone.

**SBF 1:** I was tired of being alone and being a lesbian in the late nineties seemed so cool, so Tracy Chapman. So k.d. lang...(*sings*) "constant craving, that's always been."

**SBF 2:** Girl, you talked about Simone all night and all day and all night again.

**SBF 1:** She had my attention. I found Simone—

**SBF 2:** Captivating?

**SBF 1:** We enjoyed ourselves.

(*Loud club music from the 1980s—like Janet Jackson's "Don't Know What You Got 'Til It's Gone"—begins to build.*)

**SBF 2:** Enjoyed? Every weekend you two held everybody at Brown Sugar hostage with your notorious enjoyment.

**SBF 1:** Simone, is that your ex? Is that Gina?

**SBF 2:** (*starts to dance seductively*) Yeah. So what. Are you going to move your body or what? I want to dance, baby.

**SBF 1:** Simone! What were you doing in the bathroom with her?

**SBF 2:** She had a little blow. Don't trip. Come on.

**SBF 1:** I don't want to dance, Simone. I want to know what's up, Simone. Don't put me through all this —

**SBF 2:** Drama! You two deserved the Tony, Emmy, and Oscar. Your exploits at every girl bar in the city are absolutely legendary.

**SBF 1:** I know. The shouting matches, the crying jags, and plenty of she said, she said.

**SBF 2:** Everybody needs a little drama to help tell all the days apart. But I don't get it. I had hopes for you and Miss Simone. Honestly, I always thought lesbian relationships would be different. You can double your wardrobe. Both of you understand your cycles. You can process every ounce of your relationship down to the last sigh! I thought all the bullshit was reserved for the war between the sexes.

**SBF 1:** Wake up! It isn't about sexuality, honey—it's called love. Man? Woman? Parakeet? We're all just trying to find love. Love...(*finds another photo*) Now, what about Charles? I really liked you guys together. Wasn't he some kind of scientist?

**SBF 2:** He called, sent flowers, and made measured slow sexual advances displaying the correct amount of passion and respect. But, he was so...nice. And his style reminded me that most nerdy men wear the wrong clothes! It can be very, very distracting. He just got on my nerves.

**SBF 1:** Well, a couple of weeks ago I saw him pushing a Bugaboo stroller through Central Park with his wife. He was cute; she had him dressed impeccably in Banana Republic weekend wear. Happy. Nice. Like a family.

**SBF 2:** Maybe I never should have let him go. Wow, I feel like I'm watching the clock tick and this game of musical chairs has me standing in the corner while everyone else has a seat.

(*Beat.*) Oh, honey, I needs me a drink.

### **Scene 3. Sleepin' with the Enemy**



*SBF 1 and and SBF 2 mix martinis.*

**SBF 1:** You're not going to win us any support if you insist on sharing this part. It's a delicate subject.

**SBF 2:** We've already covered yearly pap smears and online dating. I really don't think they are leaving. Besides, we can't discuss life for single black women over thirty without discussing the interracial thing.

**SBF 1:** Well...I'm not going start. I don't want to offend—

**SBF 2:** Whatever! White girls!

**SBF 1:** Tell your story.

**SBF 2:** So I'm visiting my homegirl in L.A. and we hit this funky club off the strip where everybody is skinny and slightly acerbic. Folks are posing with their cool hair, cool clothes, and cool cigars. The DJ is playing neo-soul, hip-hop house music and we are divas in Hollywood. I'm with two other fine sisters out to hear some slammin' beats overlaid with ghetto voice tracks. Know what I mean? We've just got paid and feel like wearing shoes that hurt and shirts that give titty lovely. We're eating calamari and drinking like we ain't got no sense.

**SBF 1:** (*takes another drink*) It sounds like a good night.

**SBF 2:** We aren't even thinking about sex.

**SBF 1:** Excuse me?

**SBF 2:** Okay, we're always thinking about sex and we get to talkin'.

**SBF 1:** You are never going to believe what happened in the department meeting last week.

**SBF 2:** And talkin'.

**SBF 1:** Where did you pick up those bad-ass shoes? Those are delicious!

**SBF 2:** At some point I notice that we are the only sistas in the entire joint.

**SBF 1:** I do hate partying in Hollywood.

**SBF 2:** But this is not Wyoming! It's Los Angeles—thee sprawling Negropolis of the West Coast. South Central, Baldwin Hills, Leimert Park, Nat Holden, Maxine Waters, Kobe!

**SBF 1:** True.

**SBF 2:** I know this not the chocolate city, but is it vanilla town?

**SBF 1:** What happened to the black people in Los Angeles?

**SBF 2:** Then my other girl, Miss Life is a Miracle, says—

**SBF 1:** Oh stop! There are plenty of black people. There. There and there.

**SBF 2:** Wait. Those ain't people, those are black men! The plot thickens. We decide to make some advances. This is war. I start dancing in front of the stage. I'm flirting with this dreadlocked brotha in the band playing the keyboard. We make eye contact, laugh, and dance together. He's on stage and our sweating bodies are mirroring each other. Hot.

**SBF 1:** Uh, oh. Did that blonde just step on her toe?

**SBF 2:** Kirstine! Heather! Tammy or whatever your name is, you tramp. You can't even dance.

**SBF 1:** Come on, girl. Let it go.

**SBF 2:** Let it go? She was so close I could smell her cheap perfume. Here I am trying to get at one of the few brothas in the club and I'm outdone by an ABC—an average blonde chick! When I shared my feelings, she says, "Like, I'm sorry, okay? What's the problem? I was just dancing. Why are you people so angry?" Angry?

**SBF 1:** Listen, sister. You're going to have to leave.

**SBF 2:** What? No, I'm,...I haven't finished my drink yet! She steps on my toe and you're throwing me out? Why are you picking on me?

**SBF 1:** Nobody is picking on you. You're just paranoid.

**SBF 2:** Paranoid? I'm being bounced by security and my black ass is paranoid? White women! White women! White women! You can't turn on the television without seeing some dead or missing white woman. Yet nobody cries for little black girls. You know, only sistas understand that O. J. Simpson murdered his wife as an act of aggression and an absolute rejection of African American women. With every slash of her throat O. J. said loud and clear—I would rather be with a white woman that I have to murder to keep than spend my life with some black bitch. Wait! Maybe I'm paranoid.

**SBF 1:** Just a little. Girl, you've taken this white girl thing a bit too far. Don't you realize that who you love is a personal decision? You're putting too many politics into the personal.

**SBF 2:** What about you? Are you going to tell me you haven't noticed this little trend in our post-modern, post-race world? Brothas get all the play and there isn't exactly a stampede of white men running down to the NAACP for a date. I guess sistas aren't much better at sampling all thirty-one flavors. You ever dated a white man?

**SBF 1:** I was always worried about what people would say. Call me a wimp.

**SBF 2:** Wimp. So let's hear it. If given the chance, what white man would you date?

**SBF 1:** Don't laugh.

**SBF 2:** Not another list! How many of those do you have?

**SBF 1:** (*reading from her journal*) Here is my list of white men that even a self-respecting nationalist sista might date. Let's see, Gregory Peck.

**SBF 2:** Yes, Atticus Finch. So stately and principled.

**SBF 1:** Marlon Brando—

**SBF 2:** Before he got so damn fat and drove his kids crazy.

**SBF 1:** Cary Grant, Luciano Pavarotti—

**SBF 2:** Somethin' about that tenor I think is sexy.

**SBF 1:** Paul Newman, Robert Mitchum—

**SBF 2:** Wait. Wait. Why are all those white men dead? There must be somebody who is still alive. What about Keanu Reeves?

**SBF 1:** I don't like him. I prefer my white boys a bit more quirky, like Johnny Depp.

**SBF 2:** Tom Cruise?

**SBF 1:** Mission impossible! Mr. Scientology? I don't think so! He's a white boy's white boy. Plus he's crazy. I wish he would jump up on my couch. I do love me some Brad Pitt, though. Hey Brad, if Angelina messes up, holla at a sista!

**SBF 2:** How about Sting?

**SBF 1:** I can see that. He's got that leftist Amnesty International thing going. (*Beat.*)

**SBF 2:** Then there's George Clooney.... (*Pause.*) Okay, I've got a confession. I almost dated a white guy in ninth grade. He had the worst acne and greasy hair. Myron was a sweet, quiet boy. He played the clarinet in the band. I liked him and he liked me.

**SBF 1:** You want to go to the dance this weekend? Or we could go to the museum. I mean, if you want.



**SBF 2:** Oh, Myron. Yes. I'd love to go. *(sitting on her front steps waiting)* A date. A real date. Mom said no dance, but we were going to the museum and McDonald's for lunch. She called Myron's mother and they discussed it and everything.

**SBF 1:** *(on phone)* Okay. Myron can walk over here. Yes. We'll be expecting him at—. Yes, well of course you'll want to discuss this with your husband. That's fine. No, I'm sure they'll be no problem. The kids. Yes. Well, fine.

*(hangs up the phone)*

**SBF 2:** I don't understand why Mom was so worried. I guess she didn't want me to act up and embarrass her. I put on my lavender cardigan with my gray skirt. I had to wear my knee-highs because Mom said—

**SBF 2 & SBF 1:** No daughter of mine is gonna dress fast!

**SBF 2:** I waited up in my room listening to my big sister's records. I played Smokey Robinson and the Miracles. I started with "Ooh, Baby, Baby" and ended with "Tears of a Clown." Myron never showed up. By the end of the afternoon it was raining. My mother made my favorite, red beans and rice with hot water cornbread, but I wasn't hungry. Later that night she and Daddy went to their room and shut the door so I could watch whatever I wanted on television. I watched *Get Christie Love*. She was one bad mamma jamma doing her super Mama thing. She kicked a bunch of white boy's asses that Saturday night just for me. Then I fell asleep.

*(Gladys Knight's "You're the Best Thing That Ever Happened" plays as SBF 2 falls asleep on the couch under the watchful eyes of SBF 1.)*

## Scene 4. Mother Wit

**SBF 2:** Mom told me—

**SBF 1:** It's important to know how to set a table.

**SBF 2:** Grandmother said—

**SBF 1:** Always wear pretty underclothes. You never know.

**SBF 2:** Mom always reminded me that—

**SBF 1:** Too much makeup is worse than not enough. Simple is better, but too simple is just plain. Don't laugh too loud and be sure to cover your mouth whenever you cough, sneeze or—

**SBF 2:** Burp?

**SBF 1:** Girl, I better not catch you burping anytime, anywhere. You're never going to amount to nothing actin' like that. I'm raising you to be a fine colored lady.

**SBF 2:** Mom also said—

**SBF 1:** Keep your legs closed. Your mouth shut and your hand open. And never go anywhere with anyone with no way to get home.

**SBF 2:** But Grandmother told me, "With a smile like that you'll never have a hard time getting home or anywhere else!" Godmother told me—

**SBF 1:** Sugar, go on and get me some cigarettes at the corner store and take the change to buy yourself some of those jujubes and bring me some, too. On the way home make sure you watch out for them bad-ass boys on the corner and don't you get in Old Man Watson's van no matter what that

crazy fool says!

**SBF 2:** My big sister made me promise—

**SBF 1:** To never let no man ever mess over you and always make sure you can take care of your damn self!

**SBF 2:** I always did what I was told.

## Scene 5. Pops

**SBF 2:** My father worked with his hands. My girls don't know this but I've always had a weakness for a big, strong brotha who sweats at his job. I love the feel of a calloused palm on my cheek. The truth is, I really don't have a problem with a man who doesn't wear a tie to bring bread home.

*(SBF 1 puts on an oversized denim work shirt, boots, and hard hat.)*

**SBF 2:** Keep on walking and look straight ahead. That's what Pops said about walking by a construction site. Don't slow down or speed up, just walk on by. Shoot, whenever I pass by a brotha in a hard hat I break Pops's rule and honk a hello if I'm driving, or blow him a little kiss if I'm walking by. A hard working man deserves a lift every once in a while. Especially if he's fine.

*(SBF 1 whistles in appreciation.)*

Yeah, I like my coffee strong. Why else would I drink it? To tell the truth, for most of my life I didn't understand how my folks got together and fell in love. Pops was a tough guy all his life. A bad-ass nigga.

*(SBF 1 lights a cigarette and pulls a fifth of brandy out of his back pocket.)*

Mom taught me about Puccini, Chagall, and Frank Lloyd Wright. She took me to see Leontyne Price for the first time when I was all of seven years old.

*(SBF 1 sits on chair and flips through TV channels with the remote.)*

We're leaving now. Sure you don't want to go?

*(SBF 1 continues flipping through channels.)*

**SBF 1:** Yeah, I'm sure. Go on now, woman. *(pats SBF 2's behind)*

**SBF 2:** She was delicate and loved her garden. He fixed cars and ran with women.

**SBF 1:** Well? I'll be here when you get home.

**SBF 2:** On Friday nights Pops got home early from work. On most nights he stayed out 'til way after I fell asleep and dinner got cold. But come Friday? Mom said his paycheck burned a hole in his pocket. *(SBF 1 puts on man's blazer and hat)* My uncle said he dressed like he was on his way to church and it was the wrong day of the week for those clothes, but I never saw anyone dress like that at Third Baptist Church. He was sharp—like a straight razor and smooth...like butter, baby.

**SBF 1:** *(looking at himself in the mirror)* Um, um, um. Hot damn!

**SBF 2:** One November night I walked into the living room and saw Pops with Mom.

**SBF 1:** Come here, woman.

*(They slow dance to Dinah Washington's "This Bitter Earth.")*

**SBF 2:** When I watched my parents dance, I knew how they fell in love. The smell of his amber fruity cologne tickled my nose and made me giggle. Our whole house smelled like that, even after he was

gone. Will I ever find that kind of love?

(*SBF 1 and SBF 2 freeze their dance.*)

## Epilogue

**SBF 1:** That's a good question. Will we ever find love? What is love anyway?

**SBF 2:** We've been conditioned by this society to think that having it ALL means having a husband, a career, a home with a white picket fence, 2.5 kids, and a minivan. I took the bait. I'm trying to be super woman, but these men think I look funny in this cape and tights. I don't understand it. We did what we were supposed to do! We earned ourselves law degrees, Ph.D.s, IRAs, and 401ks. We bring all this to the table and Tiger Woods marries a nanny? I could have avoided all those student loans if that's all men want.

**SBF 1:** If 50 percent of all marriages fail, why are so many of us anxiously waiting our turn to play THAT game?

**SBF 2:** Is there another game? It's not all about marriage, but we all want somebody. I'm not ashamed to say I'm lonely. The other day I sat next to a darling older couple at Starbucks who told me they've been married for fifty-five years. Fifty-five years! Before they shuffled out the door the husband stopped at my table and whispered to me that he has been the luckiest man alive ever since the day she married him. That's the kind of sweetness I still believe in. I want to be with a man who still feels blessed half a century after our wedding day. How do I get something like that? All my life I've waited for someone to pick ME. Don't I deserve some soul to share this journey with?

**SBF 1:** Yes, you do. I hear you. From the looks of things I will not be wed anytime soon. This is not the life either of us expected to have as little girls, and that's what hurts. Yes, we are fierce and brilliant and stylish, but deep down? We are just little black girls who want to find someone to make us feel like chocolate magic sunshine.

**SBF 2:** That's cute! Yes, chocolate magic sunshine. I like that.

**SBF 1:** So, I guess we are making our own history.

**SBF 2:** And we ain't going nowhere. (*Beat.*) Let's go shopping!

**LIGHTS FADE DOWN.**

## End of Play

## Bibliography

- Ates, A. (2018) *The Definitive Guide to Stella Adler's Acting Technique*.
- Bruder, Melissa(1986). *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*. New York: Vintage Books,
- Goodman, E.,( 2016) . Tool # 3 ACTION VERBS Or ACTIONS. *Directing Actors: Goodman Directing and Acting Studio*, Los Angeles.
- Petit, L. (2019). *Philosophy - Michael Chekhov Acting Studio: NYC*
- Thompson, L. (2012). *Single black female*. New York, NY: Samuel French.

## LISA B. THOMPSON



Photo by Ricky Yanas

A native of San Francisco, Lisa B. Thompson juggles two careers, one as a playwright and the other as an academic. In both her scholarship and creative writing she's interested in exploring unconventional performances of black identity. She has an M.A. in African American studies from UCLA and a Ph.D. in modern thought and literature from Stanford University. Thompson is an associate professor of African and African diaspora studies at the University of Texas at Austin and the associate director of the John L. Warfield Center for African and African American Studies. Her work has received support from several institutions, including the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research at Harvard University, the Office of the President at the University of California, the Five Colleges Inc., and the Michelle R. Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University. Thompson's plays include *Monroe*, *Dreadtime Stories*, *The Mamalogues*, and *Underground*. Her short works, *Mother's Day* and *I Don't Want to Be*, were included in the anthology shows *Black Women: State of the Union*, and *Black Women: State of the Union—Taking Flight*. She

published the first scholarly study about contemporary representations of middle-class black women, *Beyond the Black Lady: Sexuality and the New African American Middle Class* (University of Illinois Press, 2009). Thompson's critically acclaimed comedy, *Single Black Female*, evolved from her research. The two-character play has been produced throughout the United States and Canada.