

# **NANNY**

Written by

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“For the mouths of her children quickly forgot the taste of her nipples, and years ago they had begun to look past her face into the nearest stretch of sky.” --**Toni Morrison, Sula**

1 INT. HAVS CONDO - AISHA'S ROOM - NIGHT 1

We linger on the face of a jarringly pretty dark skinned woman. AISHA [26], sleeps soundly. A halo of water ripples around her, threatening to engulf her.

A SPIDER, emerging from nowhere, ambles across her cheek. Startled, Aisha's doleful griot eyes pop open. Her ragged inhalations straddle fear and the cave mouths of memories as of yet unseen...

2 INT. HARLEM APARTMENT - AISHA'S ROOM - EVENING 2

Aisha, buried in a twin sized bed pressed against a wall, glued to her cellphone.

We scan her room: quaint as to be expected, but not without brush strokes of style. Shards of African fabric peek from nooks. A small pile of books nestle in a corner of the room.

Pictures encased in baroque frames intimate a life before this.

In one photo Aisha grins happily with a boy in her arms. Her mini me: LAMINE.

Just outside her door, Aisha hears movement. She pops her head out.

3 INT. HARLEM APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS 3

AUNTY SARAH [55], dressed in nurse scrubs, wearily shuffles towards the door. A ragged breath escapes her as though steeling herself for the long shift ahead.

AISHA

Aunty, do you need anything?

AUNT SARAH

No no, just your share for the month.

AISHA

Yes, soon I will have it.

AUNT SARAH

How is it?

AISHA

I start tomorrow. The mother Amy, she's nice.

AUNT SARAH

I pray for you. Just work hard to keep it. Jobs like this - they don't' fall from the sky.

AISHA

Yes. Have a good night.

AUNT SARAH

Bonsoir chérie.

She disappears out the door.

4 INT./EXT. HAVS CONDO - ENTRANCE - DAY 4

Aisha enters, peeling away from the crowd of commuters.

5 INT. HAVS CONDO - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS 5

Her gaze lands on a DOOR MAN [31] behind the desk. He double takes, standing up instinctively, allowing her to take all of him in--muscly, lithe, formidable.

This man, cognizant of his beauty, is MALIK: fully aware of his effect on Women...and men. He flashes a pearly smile meant solely for Aisha.

She pulls out her passport before he can ask for I.D. He studies it.

MALIK

I-SHA. New Nanny for the HAVS right? You know where you goin'?

AISHA

Yes. Thank you.

Aisha tucks away her passport, makes her way to the elevators...

POV OF SECURITY MONITORS. Aisha's pixelated black and white image enter the elevator.

6 INT. HAVS CONDO - ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS 6

Aisha stares at her reflection in the mirrored elevator doors as she ascends. She glides chapstick over her lips.

7

INT. HAVS CONDO - CONTINUOUS

7

Elevator doors open into the condo. AMY [36] An ageless beauty belying a tightly wound undercurrent of nerves.

AMY

Aisha! Welcome.

Amy studies Aisha as she takes off her shoes and unloads her bag.

We see the condo in all its glory: sterile, modern, spacious. Lower upper class by New York standards, relative wealth by national standards. A pristine box encased in floor to ceiling windows.

Aisha knowingly makes her way to the...

KITCHEN SINK

She washes her hands meticulously. The women grant each other tight, but warm smiles.

AMY (CONT'D)

How was the commute?

AISHA

Not too bad.

AMY

Great.

Aisha turns off the faucet and dries her hands.

AMY (CONT'D)

Thank you.

AISHA

Yes...How are you?

AMY

I'm well, but I think Rose is a little better. She's very excited.

AISHA

Aww, I am too. I am very excited.

AMY

Well, these are for you.

Amy presses condo keys into Aisha's palm. Aisha closes her hand around them.

AMY (CONT'D)

Now that it's official let me give you the full tour...

AISHA

Yes.

AMY

Excellent. Ok, follow me.....

Aisha trails Amy--her eyes swimming with curiosity as she takes in the impressive space more closely this time.

Contemporary Art riddles walls traveling up sky high ceilings. Various exotic house plants sprinkle the clinical space with life. A *Bird of Paradise* plant sprawls upwards, branches reaching out for dear life among *schefflera amate* and monstera plants.

The inhabitants of this space are collectors of resplendent, peculiar things.

They pass a slightly ajar door...

Aisha furtively peeks through the sliver of access. A 30x45 FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH of a WAILING AFRICAN WOMAN slumped on her knees SCREAMS back at Aisha. The image is mesmerizing-- whoever exists behind the lens is clearly skilled.

Amy closes the door abruptly.

AMY (CONT'D)

Adam's office. We civilians aren't allowed.

#### GUEST BEDROOM

Amy flicks on a light.

AMY (CONT'D)

And this is yours. Nothing fancy.

Aisha walks in. Quite fancy, actually.

AMY (CONT'D)

For overnights. Please, please make this space yours. Bring whatever you need to feel at home: pictures, books, your favorite pillow. Just one small request: no candles or incense. Rose is hyper sensitive to certain smells.

8 INT. HAVS CONDO - ROSE'S ROOM - DAY 8

ROSE [5], a blonde haired blue eyed cherubic bundle of cheeks, plays with her Venus Fly Trap.

AMY (O.S.)  
Rose, we're coming in!

Amy enters.

AMY (CONT'D)  
Honey, Aisha's here.

Aisha peeks in with a smile.

ROSE  
Hi Aisha!

AISHA  
*Salut petit amour.*

Amy crouches in front of Rose, and takes both of her hands in hers.

AMY  
I want you to be a good girl for  
mommy.

Rose looks to Aisha.

ROSE  
Ok.

9 INT. HAVS CONDO - LIVING ROOM - DAY 9

Amy slides a binder towards Aisha.

AMY  
Please, I don't want you to feel  
overwhelmed. Think of this as a  
loose guide: basic schedule,  
emergency contacts, a list of where  
things are...

Aisha peruses the meticulous multi tabbed planner.

AMY (CONT'D)  
All phone numbers you'll ever need.  
Even her therapist...some blank  
pages for you to fill in and make  
it yours...

Aisha lingers on a tentative schedule with end times "TBD".

AISHA

Thank you.

Amy gathers her belongings, willing herself to leave.

AMY

Ok...

She lingers a beat too long.

AMY (CONT'D)

Is this weird? It's kinda weird.

AISHA

No.

AMY

I mean, it'll be a little bumpy at the beginning but we'll catch our stride.

AISHA

Yes, I'm sure.

Amy approaches Aisha.

AMY

May I?

Amy dives in for the embrace, wrapping herself around Aisha. Aisha hugs her back.

AISHA

Of course.

AMY

Thank you.

Amy scoops up her bag and blazer, and heads out.

10

INT. HAVS CONDO - KITCHEN - DAY

10

A FRIDGE OPENS meticulously organized with labels, color coded stickies--

"gluten free",

"fermented kimchee - do not touch",

"help yourself"...etc.

Aisha scans the fridge landing on a pre-packaged meal labeled "ROSE".

CUT TO:

Settled in a kiddie chair with personalized plastic utensils, Rose turns her face defiantly away from an approaching spoon of organic, gluten free slop.

ROSE

No.

AISHA

Your mommy made this just for you.  
Don't you want to eat the healthy  
food Mommy made?

ROSE

I don't want it.

AISHA

*Encore en français.* Again in  
french. Je ne-

ROSE

Je ne...

AISHA

Veux.

ROSE

Voo.

AISHA

Pas.

ROSE

PAH!

ROSE (CONT'D)

What does that mean?

AISHA

I don't want.

ROSE

Je ne veux pas!

Aisha holds her hand out for a high five. Rose leaps up eagerly, slapping Aisha's hand.

AISHA

Good girl! Ok...

Aisha looks at the slop, braces herself, and shoves a spoonful into her mouth.

Fighting her gag reflex, she forces a pained smile as she swallows.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Mmm. Yum.

Rose giggles at Aisha's pathetic performance. Shakes her head no. She watches Aisha unpack her own carefully packaged lunch: rice, stew, plantains. Rose sniffs the air dramatically. She squinches her nose, curious.

The two are in a stare off. Aisha finally relents.

She scoops a tiny morsel of jollof rice onto a spoon and hovers it before Rose who snaps it up like a baby alligator.

Rose's eyes light up.

CUT TO:

Rose dances happily. She scoops a large spoonful of *rice* off Aisha's plate into her mouth.

Aisha does the same.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Happy now? C'est délicieux?

Rose nods.

ROSE

Say deli-see-you.

AISHA

Your french is so good!

Aisha and Rose hi-five.

11

INT. HARLEM APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

11

Aisha puts on makeup as an attempted *WhatsApp* video call rings endlessly--just as she's about to give up an image flashes on the screen:

A WOMAN: blurry but decipherable. Her name, we will learn, is MARIATOU. She's approximately Aisha's age.

They alternate between their *tribal language* and English.

MARIATOU  
Hello, Hello, Aisha--

Aisha holds the phone up.

AISHA  
Yes! Mariatou? Hello?

Jumbled conversation of people in distant lands struggling to communicate, words tumbling on top of each other, delayed seconds of understanding--

AISHA (CONT'D)  
Can you hear me?

MARIATOU  
Loud and clear!

AISHA  
Is Lamine near you?

MARIATOU  
You know your son is slippery. Hold on...

Aisha waits for what feels like an eternity. She watches as Mariatou scurries off screen, then...

Aisha's son LAMINE[6] appears, in digital flesh. Aisha visibly softens at the sight and sound of him.

LAMINE  
Hi mamma!

AISHA  
Lamine, my baby. Are you being a good boy? Aunty Mariatou tells me you're not listening.

LAMINE  
She's lying.

AISHA  
Ah Ah! You call your aunty a liar?

Lamine shakes his head, No.

AISHA (CONT'D)  
I heard you went to Musa's birthday party. Was it fun?

LAMINE  
They had so much food. I ate too much.

AISHA

Is there anything you want to tell me?

Lamine pretends not to hear his mother.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Hello. Lamine, did you bite Musa?

LAMINE

He took my toy!

AISHA

I don't want to hear about anymore trouble. When you come we will have so many toys you won't want anymore.

LAMINE

Ok...will it be cold?

AISHA

Very cold. There will be snow on the ground. Remember the pictures I sent you.

LAMINE

White cotton candy.

Aisha laughs.

AISHA

White cotton candy. I will have a very warm coat waiting for you. When you come to New York we'll go to *Ray's Pizza*. Lamine it's the best pizza you will ever have...

LAMINE

When will we go to the beach?

AISHA

When it's hot. The water is not as clear...

Lamine is distracted. He talks to someone off screen.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Lamine, I'm talking to you. We don't have much time.

Lamine's voice dissipates into a crackling sound. His image freezes on screen.

AISHA (CONT'D)  
Lamine? Hello? Lamine...

Aisha stares at Lamine's frozen image.

AISHA (CONT'D)  
I don't know if you hear me but  
I'll see you soon, my love.

12

EXT. HARLEM - BACKYARD - DAY

12

We follow Aisha, eyeing the nape of her neck as she saunters into the bustle. She's dressed in *traditional African wear*.

An AFRICAN WOMAN carrying a brimming pan of food darts past as Aisha surveys the space.

A sign strung on a wall reads: "HAPPY 6th BIRTHDAY ROMANO". Ribbons and balloons hang haphazardly. West African music blares from speakers.

Aisha places a carefully wrapped box in a pile of gifts--each distinct wrapping paper an ode from its gift giver.

SALLAY (O.S.)  
AISHA!

SALLAY [30], bright eyed with a permanently mischievous grin bee-lines towards Aisha. Her bright red blush matches her crimson lipstick.

AISHA  
Sallay! As late as I am they're still setting up?

SALLAY  
You know how things go. Time is the white man's invention.

Sallay envelopes Aisha in a warm hug.

SALLAY (CONT'D)  
Besides, Sierra Leoneans know how to party. You know!

Sallay whisks Aisha away, enveloping her in infectious energy.

13

EXT. HARLEM - BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

13

ROMANO [5 today], an effusive child sits at the helm of a table flanked by COUSINS and FRIENDS.

Children wear various superhero party masks, stark American contrasts colliding with continental flair.

A multi-tiered cake is placed before Romano aglow with six candles.

Taking in the scene from her perch, Aisha smiles to herself observing the boy's contagious joy. Fire dances in his eyes.

Revelry plays in slow motion as the crowd rises in a *Happy Birthday* song. Some sing the African version.

CROWD

*Appy birtday to you! Appy birtday  
to you! Everybody like you!  
Everybody like you!*

Romano leans in to blow out his candles.

Aisha closes her eyes and inhales, making a silent wish alongside the boy.

She opens her eyes.

In Romano's place sits another child--Lamine, Aisha's son.

Lamine grants Aisha a dazzling smile before blowing out candles with all his might.

Back to reality, Aisha watches Romano bounce in his chair.

14

INT. HAVS CONDO - DAY

14

Aisha rummages for her cell.

She sees a face-time call from 'AMY' on the screen, deflating a bit as she accepts the call. Rose, glued to her ipad, is lost in her own world.

AMY

Hi Girls! What are you two up to?

AISHA

We're in the middle of French lessons.

AMY

Did Rose finish her food?

AISHA

Every last drop.

Off the cell phone screen Aisha extends her pinkie to Rose who hooks her pinkie finger in Aisha's, promising to keep their culinary adventure a secret.

AMY

Thank god. Picky doesn't even begin to describe that child's eating habits. Adam gets here sooner than expected so I'll need your help getting everything together tomorrow. Can't wait for him to meet you!

AISHA

Looking forward.

AMY

Ok, see you ladies soon.

AISHA

Ok bye bye.

Aisha cups her chin, momentarily lost elsewhere. Rose mirrors her body language. Aisha forces a smile, putting a thread of Rose's hair behind her ear.

15

INT. HAVS CONDO - LATER

15

Aisha glances at a clock. The minute hand ticks. 7pm. Her phone is painfully silent.

The sound of KEYS JANGLING grants a reprieve. Amy barrels into the apartment.

AMY

Sorry I'm late! Things got crazy.

Aisha flips her work binder open, scribbling the date and her hours 8am-7pm.

As bubbly as Aisha can muster--

AISHA

Rose is in bed.

AMY

Everything was smooth. No tantrums?

AISHA

None at all.

AMY

You kept all the receipts?

Aisha flips to a nook in the binder with carefully paper-clipped receipts.

AMY (CONT'D)

You are amazing.

Reciprocal smiles. Aisha gathers her belongings.

AMY (CONT'D)

One more thing. Sorry for the last minute request but can you do an overnight tomorrow? Things will probably go late. We agreed on 100 for overnights right?

Aisha hesitates.

AISHA

No, it was um..It was 150.

AMY

Oh, ok. 150. Okay.

AISHA

Okay, good night Amy.

AMY

Alright, have a good night.

Aisha leaves.

16

INT. HARLEM APARTMENT - AISHA'S ROOM - NIGHT

16

*Laughter* emanates from a cellphone--

MARIATOU

(on the phone screen)

Noooo Lamine!

LAMINE

(on the phone screen)

Hi Mommy. Sing *AYO NENE*.

Aisha, sprawled on her bed stares at a pre-recorded video of her son on her cellphone. She loops it back. We see phone imagery--faces that accompany the voices.

LAMINE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Mommy is in the computer.

MARIATOU

Nooo Kofi!

KOFI

She in America. Hi Mommy! Sing AYO  
NENE.

As though responding to Kofi in the flesh, Aisha sleepily sings a *lullaby*, AYO NENE--rocking herself to sleep.

AISHA

(tribal language)

*Oh my baby, my little baby, who can  
calm you down? Oh my baby, my  
little baby who can calm you down  
and bring you to Saloum--*

17 INT. HARLEM APARTMENT - AISHA'S ROOM - DAY 17

ANGLE ON a duffel bag: A pair of clothes. Panties. Shoes wrapped in an old grocery bag.

Aisha eyes her favorite pillow. Brings it with her.

She grabs a framed image of Kofi, sliding the photo from glass and tucking it into her bag before leaving.

18 INT. HAVS CONDO - VARIOUS ROOMS - EARLY EVENING 18

--Aisha opens the door for CATERERS.

--Aisha helps lay out platters of food. She glances at her phone.

AISHA

Rose?

Aisha peeks around corners, and through doors. She hears RUNNING WATER and towards it

19 INT. HAVS CONDO - MASTER BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS 19

The shower is running as Aisha enters. She turns it off, and hears a child's laughter behind her in...

20 INT. HAVS CONDO - MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS 20

The Master Bedroom.

AISHA (O.S.)

I'm coming to get you!

As Aisha enters her eyes flick across the room, resting on various curated portraits of the *All American Family*: Amy, Adam and Rose--poised like artfully designed photos you'd see in a TIME magazine spread.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Rose?

Two small hands peek out from under the bed. Aisha kneels on the floor beside them and they quickly disappear beneath the skirted bed.

AISHA (CONT'D)

I wonder where she is?

Aisha lifts the bedskirt revealing a beaming Rose.

ROSE

You found me!

Rose shimmers out from under the bed in a Pink fluffy dress and sequined jacket, and jumps into Aisha's arms.

AISHA

I did! I found you. You were under the bed. So smart.

21 INT. HAVS CONDO - ROSE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

21

Aisha playfully dumps Rose in her bed and the two sprawl on their backs alongside each other, gleefully exhausted.

A KNOCK.

Aisha props herself up as Amy enters. Amy's steely expression expands into a warm smile too quickly.

AMY

You two are having fun.

Aisha squeezes Rose's arm, whispers in her ear.

AISHA

Go to Mommy.

A twitch in Amy's saccharine smile as Rose flops back on the bed passive aggressively.

ROSE

I'm tired.

Aisha stands, making room for Amy to sit beside her daughter. As Amy swaps with Aisha she gently squeezes Aisha's hand.

AMY  
Don't go far.

Aisha leaves the two, catching a fleeting moment of Amy clinically smelling strands of Rose's hair...

CUT TO:

22 INT. HAVS CONDO - LIVING BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS 22

The Pregnant Latina, dangerously pregnant to be engaging in physical labor, vacuums an opulent rug.

Our gaze lingers on her a beat too long. She looks up, locking eyes with Aisha.

Aisha smiles. Looks away. Shame blooms under her skin--caught in the act of pity, or projection...

23 INT. HAVS CONDO - MASTER BEDROOM - EVENING 23

Aisha tries not to look directly at Amy's half naked reflection in a mirror.

AMY (O.S.)  
Thank you for picking up the dry cleaning.

AISHA  
I didn't think to bring anything fancy

AMY  
Oh gosh, it's my fault. I should have told you. There's always so much going on at work now. My brain is in a million different places...

Amy balances a glass of red wine in one hand as she slides her naked body into a dress in a

WALK IN CLOSET OFFSHOOT.

Amy is like a moth. Frantic. Evanescent. Perpetually in multiple places at once.

AMY (CONT'D)  
No worries. I have the perfect dress.

Amy explodes from her closet. Poised. Manicured.

She presses a red dress against Aisha's frame.

AMY (CONT'D)

I swear this dress was made for  
your skin. Mahogany red, Imperial  
red, Wine red, the whole family.

CUT TO:

Amy zips Aisha into the dress with finality. It clings to her every curve for dear life--a complimentary second skin.

Amy places her hands on Aisha's hips to turn her around.

AMY (CONT'D)

Oh wow...

AISHA

It's a little tight.

AMY

Oh it's perfect.

The RISING MURMUR of a dinner party well underway SWELLS TO A CRESCENDO.

24

INT. HAVS CONDO - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

24

Shrouded in the shadows, lingering in the space where the living room meets the hallway, Aisha takes in the gathering.

FOUR HANDSOME COUPLES in their late 30's, early 40's.

Aisha hones in on the sole *Black body* in the white space: SANDRA [35], a pretty African American woman framed by a nest of natural hair.

Her ease and grace are palpable. She throws her head back in laughter.

Then Amy, a little too drunk a little too soon. Aisha catches slivers of their conversation.

AMY

...When are we getting another book out of you?!

SANDRA

Oh honey, stay tuned. The apocalypse is not exactly a salve for my writer's block...

Sandra catches Aisha staring and grants her a genuine smile. Aisha smiles back.

At the sound of the elevator opening onto the floor - Amy hushes the crowd as she heads around the corner towards it.

MUFFLED VOICES. A sharp conversation discernible in pieces.

Aisha's POV:

AMY

Well hello there. Nice to see you.

Amy is all over ADAM [37] Rugged and weary. A bundle of repressed emotion comforted by a mask of logic. He turns away as Amy kisses him.

MAN

Stop. Just let me put my shit down.

Amy takes a step back and laughs as she sips her wine.

MAN (CONT'D)

Why are you dressed like that

Amy heads towards their friends.

MAN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry we haven't even-

Amy's FOOTSTEPS inch closer to the group, who instinctively yell-

EVERYONE

SURPRISE!

But it's just Amy. Alone.

She strolls to a nearby table and refills her empty wine glass. Moments behind her...

ADAM

Genuine surprise drains his face as he drops his bags, taking in the small crowd.

AMY

Surprise.

ROSE

Daddy!

Rose leaps from Aisha's arms, sprinting to her father. The room buzzes with renewed vigor. He immediately wears a mask of civility belying an impatience reserved for Amy.

Adam embraces familiar faces, making the rounds. He was missed.

Adam hoists Rose in his arms, whispering in her ear. Rose giggles as he places her down. He reveals a thin hardcover book brought back from his travels--hands it to Rose. She clutches it tightly.

Adam notices Aisha just before a BOB [38] tackles him in a bear hug. Amy looks on with a scowl as Adam effortlessly charms the room.

25

INT. HAVS CONDO - ROSE'S ROOM - NIGHT

25

Rose is fast asleep, clinging to Aisha like a koala. Aisha sits on the edge of her bed, painstakingly peeling the girl off her body without waking her.

She still clutches the book Adam gave her: Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti by Gerald McDermott.

Aisha plucks the book from Rose's hand. She studies it, flipping through its pages.

A CORNER OF ROSE'S ROOM...

A SHELF OF TEEMING WITH CHILDREN'S BOOKS FROM AROUND THE WORLD. Aisha's fingers scan the books. She wedges Rose's new book in between books.

Nearby her eye catches an ever so slight movement. Something mechanical hiding between stuffed animals.

She walks closer to see a NANNY CAM.

The head swivels as she moves, tracking her. Aisha bristles at the discovery.

26

INT. HAVS CONDO - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

26

Aisha peels the red dress off and slips into pajamas as the conversation spills in from the next room.

BOB (O.S.)  
 Seriously, tell me how burning shit  
 down helps the cause.

SANDRA (O.S.)  
Are you cool....

27 INT. HAVS CONDO - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 27

Aisha looks on from the fringes of the room, waiting to be noticed.

As the group engages in a heated debate, Adam's gaze lands on Aisha--still salient in spite of her outfit change.

SANDRA (O.S.)  
(To Bob)  
.....waxing philosophical and being the devil's advocate? Listen the Devils got enough help. You didn't care about the message in the first place.

AMY (O.S.)  
Exactly.

Adam balances Amy on his lap. She's tipsy and he's jet-lagged but catching his second wind.

Adam nudges Amy who looks over at Aisha. The two engage in a tension laced whispered exchange.

BOB (O.S.)  
Tell me how burning shit down and looting stores in your own fucking neighborhood help the cause.

Amy smirks and slinks away, leaving Aisha to Adam.

BOB (CONT'D)  
This is not a rhetorical question people.

CHUBBY GUY  
Ok save the PC bullshit. How does burning shit down and looting stores help their cause? This is not a rhetorical question.

Adam finally stands decisively.

28 INT. HAVS CONDO - ADAM'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 28

Aisha enters reverently, eager to see this space.

Walls are littered with award winning photojournalistic imagery...MAIMED children...PIERCING eyes...MEN darting away from fire...GIRLS covered in burkas, their backs cagily turned to the camera.

Aisha revisits the PHOTOGRAPH of the WAILING AFRICAN WOMAN slumped on her knees, allows her curious gaze to finally return to Adam.

As Adam rifles through his wallet, Aisha watches the bills flit between his fingers. She silently counts with him.

Satisfied, he hands her the small stack of cash, along with a metro card.

ADAM

I'm sorry you'll have to bear with me a little bit. Amy and I had talked about hiring someone but I didn't know that she had. It's lovely to meet you but it's a little bit of a surprise. But she asked me to pay you for tonight. Anyway, I think from hear on out she'll keep track of everything.

AISHA

Thank you.

ADAM

Je parle français aussi.

Aisha suppresses a giggle. Adam's pronunciation is *ugly*. He smiles, able to poke fun at himself.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Yea ok, you can laugh.

AISHA

It's not bad.

Aisha's attention drifts as a photo beckons to Aisha, pulling her by some invisible thread...FLAMES dance behind a BLACK TEENAGER.

ADAM

I was just in Lille, France, they had an uprising there around police violence.

AISHA

Oh.

ADAM

Yea.

A building on fire casts an ominous glow on the Black teen's face. His arms are outstretched, God like. He's elevated on a structure--half his face shrouded in a surgical mask. Protestors gaze up at him.

Adam shares Aisha's fixation.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Yea, that kid had a rare fire in him. Maybe the best public speaker I ever seen, he was like Malcolm X. They hung on his every word.  
(beat)  
He's dead now.

Unnerved by his matter of factness.

AISHA

What happened?

Adam shakes his head. The weight of seeing too much heavy on his shoulders.

ADAM

They said it was gang related...

Aisha returns to the image. Struck by its poignancy. Struck that the boy's extinguished life is now immortalized by the confines of the photograph. They lock eyes long enough for Aisha to turn away. A momentary barely detectable break in the air.

AISHA

I'm going to go to bed now.

ADAM

Please go to sleep.

AISHA

Ok.

ADAM

I wish I could.

AISHA

Bonne nuit.

ADAM

Bonne nuit.

Aisha, well versed in granting smiles that never quite reach her eyes, slides past Adam...

29

INT. HAVS CONDO - GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

29

THREE MISSED CALLS. Aisha's finger flicks through her phone's call history:

MARIATOU.

MARIATOU.

MARIATOU.

Aisha listens to a voicemail from Lamine.

LAMINE (O.S.)

I just called to say goodnight  
mama. Love you.

It's late in New York but even later in Senegal. Aisha takes a chance, pressing the ringing phone to her ear, silently wishing for contact.

The phone rings, endlessly. Aisha gives up.

She unpacks her overnight bag, sliding Lamine's photograph into the groove of a dresser mirror.

CUT TO:

Light sleep finally takes its rightful place. Aisha's chest rises and falls in the darkness--a momentary respite.

An other worldly GUTTURAL GROAN resonates, growing louder...

Aisha opens her eyes. She darts up.

PITTER PATT--the scurrying of feet echo just outside her door.

AISHA

(whispering)  
Rose?

Clammy silence.

She pulls her covers to her chest, creating a thin wall. Heart rate rising. She stares at the door, honing in on the knob...

Scrambling for her cell phone, Aisha activates the flashlight, pointing it at the door.

Just as she's about to turn the flashlight off, the knob turns--ever so slowly.

Aisha sinks into her bed throwing her covers over her head.

She pants for some time under the sheets, struggling to make sense of what she's seeing and hearing.

FEET PAD deeper into the room, settling just inches from her.

Steeling herself, she wrenches the sheets off her head--

WATER CASCADES into her room as an INHUMAN MOAN rises to a piercing crescendo.

30 INT. HAVS CONDO - GUEST ROOM - MORNING 30

Aisha darts out of bed, remembering...She takes inventory of her room.

Glancing at her phone, Aisha checks the time - 8:04.

She hurries over to Lamine's photograph and flips it over inspecting for damage, it is unfazed.

31 EXT. MOVING CAR - LATER 31

Aisha stares out at the passing city from the back seat. New York: perpetually teeming with life. Passing bodies dance on the car's windows.

She closes her eyes.

around Aisha's neck. Holding onto her for dear life.

32 INT. WESTERN UNION - DAY 32

LONG intricately designed NAILS click clack with every bill flitting through deft fingers. 'NIKKI, THE TELLER' [30's] counts out two hundred dollars in twenties.

Aisha watches her behind murky glass, counting silently with her.

NIKKI  
Dakar, Senegal.

AISHA  
Yes. When will they get it?

NIKKI

Two business days. Cool?

AISHA

Yes. Thanks Nikki.

NIKKI

How's your little chocolate drop?

AISHA

He's coming to America, finally! I want him to celebrate his birthday with me.

NIKKI

Oh shit?! You got his ticket and everything?!

AISHA

Not yet. I almost have enough.

NIKKI

He comin to live or just visit?

AISHA

To live, thank God.

NIKKI

Word. African boy comin' to the big apple! He gonna fit right in.

AISHA

How's Nigel?

NIKKI

A raggedy mess. I told him if I gotta come up to that school one more time those teachers gonna have to start a gofundme for his casket.

The women laugh warmly, temporarily in the presence of one another--peripheral mothers forever in the background of privileged mother's highlight reels.

SOMEONE IN LINE coughs loudly.

NIKKI (CONT'D)

AIGHT YALL AINT GOT NO JOB TO GO TO! RELAX! You all set Aisha. Kiss those cheeks for me.

33

INT. AFRICAN HAIR BRAIDING SALON - DAY

33

OVERMODULATED SOUND of a Nollywood movie drones in the background. Exaggerated Nigerian dialects ebb and flow.

Sallay returns to her CUSTOMER, an annoyed African American Girl getting individual braids.

Aisha settles into a salon chair.

The American girl scrolls through her phone. She has a small tuft of hair left to be braided, which she touches hopefully.

Every time we think the tuft is finally too small to part, Sallay parts another smaller tuft to braid.

*Sallay and Aisha speak in their native language, sprinkled with English.*

SALLAY

*I was like, this girl has forgot about me. No call, no text, no visit...*

AISHA

*No no no. They own me, Sallay. I have no life.*

SALLAY

*My dear who are you telling? I've been braiding since last night. This is my only customer today then I'm going to sleep! Work until you die. The American dream, right?*

The girl looks up from her phone.

ANNOYED AMERICAN GIRL

*Sallay, I told you about pulling on my edges.*

Sallay loosens her grip a bit.

SALLAY

*(back to Aisha)  
Have you ever thought about going back...to live?*

AISHA

*To live where? With what money?  
What are you talking about?*

SALLAY

*I know. Nigeria has definitely seen the last of me. I'd rather be a slave in America, than a slave in Africa. Atleast here when you work, you see the money.*

AISHA

Do we?

SALLAY

*You think maybe if you apologize to Lamine's father and his wife...Maybe they can help you. Send you money or something.*

AISHA

*Apologize for what?! It is him who should apologize for impregnating every teen girl on her way to school. He knew he was married when he paid for my school fees, when he gave me money for food, clothes, for my sick mother.*

SALLAY

*Trust me, I know how it is? Big men play with little girls and it's always the girls who are punished.*

AISHA

*He doesn't care whether his own son lives or dies--He's not met him. Can you imagine? cut me off when I was pregnant.*

*(beat)*

*I remember the night I found out. I went to the beach. The moon was so big. The water was so cold at my feet...*

Aisha shakes off the memory.

AISHA (CONT'D)

*This one I would keep. Lamine is the best thing that happened to me, Sallay. He is my greatest work.*

Aisha wipes a lone tear from her eye.

SALLAY

*He's a beautiful boy.*

AISHA

I can't wait for him to meet his  
new girlfriend.

Sallay knowingly erupts with laughter.

AISHA (CONT'D)

He will love you, I know. He's a  
ladies man.

34

EXT. AFRICAN HAIR BRAIDING SALON - DAY

34

Sallay and Aisha pull down the metal gate, closing up shop  
with the strength of five men.

AISHA

I've missed you.

SALLAY

I just want you to be happy Aisha.  
You can't just work from morning  
till night, night till morning. You  
need to get out.

AISHA

I'm ok Sallay, I'm fine.

Sallay looks at her, unconvinced.

AISHA (CONT'D)

I am.

SALLAY

I love you.

Aisha wraps her arms around Sallay.

AISHA

I love you.

They cling to each other, rocking back and forth.

35

INT. HAVS CONDO - VARIOUS ROOMS - DAY

35

KITCHEN

Aisha helps Rose wash her hands, sudsing Rose's small hands  
in hers as they sing.

AISHA

*Wash your hands, wash your hands,  
in between, in between, don't  
forget the backs, don't forget the  
backs, and your wrists, and your  
wrists.*

ROSE

*Wash your hands, wash your hands,  
in between, in between, don't  
forget the backs, don't forget the  
backs, and your wrists, and your  
wrists.*

CUT TO:

Aisha opens and peers into a sparse fridge. Sighs. She grabs a few items in an attempt to whip something up.

Rose plops her coloring book on the counter and begins to color.

AISHA

What are you drawing?

ROSE

A unicorn.

AISHA

A Unicorn?

Aisha turns her back, open cupboards in search of something to spruce up this sad lunch.

She turns back to the counter, and Rose is gone.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Rose?

#### HALLWAY

Aisha peeks into rooms as she walks down the hallway.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Rose?.....Rose?

She walks towards the sound of RUNNING WATER.

#### MASTER BATHROOM

Aisha follow's Rose's gaze, to find Amy in the shower with her arms wrapped around her tucked legs. Her eyes are blank, her face expressionless.

ROSE  
(whispering to Aisha)  
Mommy's meditating.

Aisha scoops her up.

AISHA  
Come.

36 INT. HAVS CONDO - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

36

AISHA (O.S.)  
OK, it's time to eat now Rose.

Eye's ablaze, Rose sees something behind Aisha.

ROSE  
Daddy!

Aisha turns to see Adam smiling at them.

ADAM  
Hey piglet. You two hungry?

ROSE  
Yes!

ADAM  
Hi Aisha.

AISHA  
Hi.

ADAM  
What time are you off today?

She glances at her phone never quite knowing when she's *free* to leave.

AISHA  
Um, I'm not sure. I was going to ask. Amy is here but she is umm....resting.

ADAM  
You wanna come to dinner with us?

ROSE  
Yay!

Aisha barely has time to protest as Rose leaps in her father's arms.

37

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

37

The trio sits outside of the restaurant Aisha and Rose previously passed. A half eaten plate of *doro wat* among other Ethiopian dishes in various states of having been eaten.

Rose claps her hands--giddy.

ADAM

I don't know what you did to her,  
but she hasn't eaten this much in  
months.

Rose is glued to her ipad, as her plate sits near empty on the table in front of her.

AISHA

Really?

ADAM

It's nice.

AISHA

She loves to eat.

ADAM

Who's child are you talking about.

AISHA

I make her some Senegalese food,  
and she loves it. Rose you like the  
Ceebu jen, Se bonne?

Rose peeks over her Ipad at Aisha.

ROSE

Se bonne?

ADAM

What did you do before you came  
here?

AISHA

I was a teacher in Senegal.

ADAM

Of course you were.

AISHA

I studied english and french in  
school.

ADAM

You're a wonderful teacher, and you're clearly very smart. I know. I can tell you won't be with us for very long.....much as I'd like to keep you.

Aisha blushes at Adam's direct gaze.

AISHA

Can I ask you a question...

ADAM

Sure.

AISHA

I am having a difficult time with the hours.

The Waiter hands the bill to Adam.

ADAM

(to the waiter)

Thank you.

AISHA

I don't mind working the hours. But I think maybe sometimes Amy forgets....to pay me...Um, there are many hours I've not been paid. About a weeks worth of pay.

ADAM

I'm sorry. I'll talk to her. I won't say you brought it up. I'll talk to her.

AISHA

Well I was wondering if it's possible, if you could be in charge of my pay. Since your hours seem more flexible.

ADAM

Uh... I would like to but.....

WOMAN'S VOICE

Adam is that you?!

A MODELESQUE ASIAN AMERICAN WOMAN in form fitting yoga gear approaches.

ADAM

Christie?!

Aisha looks on as Adam stands to embrace the woman, CHRISTIE [mid 30's]. Aisha notes the woman's effervescent laugh, the glide of Adam's hand intimately pressed to the woman's lower back, the kisses on both cheeks that linger dangerously close to the lips...

They talk closely, in whispers. Eyes locked on one another.

Aisha looks away, embarrassed, for what she's not sure.

Christie squeals at the sight of Rose.

She kneels beside the table to speak to her, close enough for Aisha to smell her perfume.

CHRISTIE

Remember me, Rose?! Oh my god, look at how big you are now. I saw you when you were just a teeny tiny thing.

ROSE

Bonjour.

CHRISTIE

Ohmygawdsocute! Look at those lashes.

The Woman unceremoniously turns to Aisha.

CHRISTIE (CONT'D)

Hi....

Before Aisha can respond, the Woman returns to Adam. Adam glances at Aisha self consciously.

The waiter places the bill on the table. Adam blindly tosses a credit card down.

ADAM

You two go ahead. Aisha, don't worry about it. But I will talk to her at home...

Adam and Christie take off.

AISHA

Alright Rose, ready to go?

38

EXT. HARLEM STREET - NIGHT

38

Aisha emerges out of a train station slowly, tired, and spots Malik a few steps ahead. The kind of NYC coincidence that makes perfect sense.

Aisha watches Malik, debating. He nods to the music in his headphones. She decides against breaking her voyeuristic perch, and quickens her stride to catch up to him.

At the site of Aisha, a smile spreads wide across his face.

MALIK

Hello.

AISHA

Hi.

MALIK

So you following me or what?

AISHA

Do you want me to be following you?

Malik is giddy, this is the most they've ever talked.

MALIK

I like how you said that.

Aisha smiles in spite of her exhaustion.

MALIK (CONT'D)

So you gonna tell me where you're from or you think I'm a dumb American who thinks Africa is one big ass country?

AISHA

It starts with an S.

MALIK

(singing *Frank Ocean song*)  
Ok, it starts with an S.  
Siseerrrrraaaa Leooooone.

Aisha shakes her head no.

AISHA

No.

MALIK

South Africa?

Wrong again.

MALIK (CONT'D)

Senegal!

Aisha's face lights up. She grants Malik an affirmative smile.

MALIK (CONT'D)

Okay! We got a winner.

Malik breaks into a little victory dance as they both erupt with laughter.

MALIK (CONT'D)

Yo! You didn't think I knew that, huh?...But let me ask you this though. Who has the best jollof rice? Cause let Nigerians tell it...

AISHA

Let Nigerians tell it, they have the best of everything.

MALIK

(jokingly parroting Aisha)  
Let Nigerian's tell it they have the best of - Oh, Ok

Aisha laughs.

AISHA

What do you know about jollof rice?!

MALIK

(licking his lips)  
What don't I know about jollof rice? Jollof rice over here, jollof rice over there.

Malik points to Aisha's bag.

MALIK (CONT'D)

Jollof rice in that bag. Yea, I know you snuck it in there.

Aisha throws her head back and laughs, utterly disarmed by his charms. They lock eyes and she walks away.

MALIK (CONT'D)

That's ok. Good to see you.....Good Night Miss Aisha.

Aisha looks back at Malik's warm smiling face, and waves goodbye.

39

EXT. WEST HARLEM PIERS PARK - DAY

39

Aisha, settled on a bench, checks her cellphone - multiple missed calls from Mariatou

She call her back and listens intently--the familiar ring of an unanswered call--Her ear buds pressed in her ears.

REVELERS flit past, along the pier.

MARIATOU'S VOICE (O.S.)  
 ...Ha just kidding! You've reached  
 Mariatou. Leave a message after the-

Aisha ends the call. She eyes Lamine's new coat, propped beside her on the empty bench.

She removes her headphones and gazes out at the expanse of water. Barely blinking, Aisha appears to be mesmerized by a nebulous force pulling her attention to the dark murky water.

A PIERCING RING fills her ears along with the sound of WOMEN WAILING--visceral cries of suffering.

CLOSE ON dark waves crashing into one another.

As she peers into the water, she sees a WOMAN...The Woman's head rises just above the water surrounded by a halo of thick, black hair. The Woman's sclera, the whites of her eyes, are as black as her pupils, peering through Aisha with an unnerving gaze.

SOUND FILTERS AWAY as Aisha locks eyes with the creature...

SUDDENLY A CHILD'S CRY jolts Aisha back to.

She exhales, unwittingly holding her breath. She turns back to the water, and the woman is gone.

40

INT. HARLEM APARTMENT - AISHA'S ROOM - MORNING

40

The sound of an alarm wakes Aisha. She rouses and drags herself to the edge of her bed, head bowed, eyes closed, a whisper of a prayer only she knows slips from Aisha's lips.

41 INT. HAVS CONDO - LOBBY - DAY

41

As Aisha steps off the elevator she sees a BLACK BOY standing eerily still at the end of a long hallway. His back to her.

The boy looks faintly like Lamine....?

She walks towards him, puzzled but mesmerized...

Malik appears from no where, breaking her trance. He scoops the rambunctious boy in his arms--his son--BISHOP [6].

MALIK

What I tell you about running around, knucklehead? We almost out. I need you to sit still so I'm not unemployed like you.

Malik studies Aisha.

MALIK (CONT'D)

You ok? Look like you saw a ghost.

Aisha laughs it off.

AISHA

How old are you, handsome?

The boy looks at Aisha annoyed.

MALIK

Bishop is 6 going on 25.

AISHA

They let you bring him?

MALIK

(laughing)  
Let me? Shit happens. I brought him.

Bishop wriggles aggressively out of Malik's slippery grasp.

BISHOP

My daddy has a crush on you!

Malik laughs awkwardly.

MALIK

This guy...

Aisha searches Malik's face for confirmation.

MALIK (CONT'D)  
I mean. He ain't lying.

Aisha sees her uber in her periphery.

MALIK (CONT'D)  
You think I could...see you  
outside of here.

Aisha studies Malik's hands noting the absence of a ring.

AISHA  
I think you could.

Malik's phone is out and ready to go. Aisha punches her  
number into his phone and darts off.

AISHA (CONT'D)  
Bye Bishop.

42

INT. HARLEM APARTMENT - BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

42

Aisha sits on the edge of her bathtub, alone with her  
thoughts.

AISHA (V.O.)  
(voicemail)  
Hello. You've reached Aisha. I  
can't come to the phone but leave a  
message and I will call you back as  
soon as possible. Thank you.

MALIK (V.O.)  
(leaving a message)  
Wow, see....I can't believe you got  
me leaving voicemails. When you  
gonna let me take you out finally.  
Come through. We'll have a good  
time, and my grandmother won't take  
no for an answer

CUT TO:

43

INT. HARLEM BROWNSTONE - PARLOR - EVENING

43

Aisha takes in the welcoming space as she nestles into a  
couch. The brownstone is a relic, a menagerie of African  
artifacts and plants.

These are the types of preserved, protected Brownstones a  
transplant could never discover; kept in the family. Passed  
down.

She notes framed photographs: progressions of Malik burgeoning from child to man. His son Bishop...

In Malik's childhood pictures he's flanked by a SMILING WOMAN with empty eyes.

The woman is absent as Malik transitions from teen to Man.

Suddenly, Malik is alone in his portraits. His smile no longer meeting his eyes.

KATHLEEN (O.S.)

Tea? I have hibiscus, ginger  
turmeric, Lipton...

Kathleen emerges with a platter of tea anyway. She places it gingerly before Aisha. Aisha takes the offering, plucking a choice from the array.

She can't shake the feeling...

AISHA

I feel like I've met you before.

KATHLEEN

It's very possible.

They study each other, two formerly acquainted spirits reunited in this liminal space called *life*--the present.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)

I learned about heart-ache in  
Dakar. Lived all over West Africa  
for 10 years. Fell in love with the  
continent. Unrivalled style and a  
certain--a certain pulsating  
vibrance I wish I could bottle and  
sell over here. A dash of Nigerian  
bravado with a sprinkle of Ghanaian  
pride and a heaping serving of  
Sierra Leonean humility...

AISHA

I miss my country. Every day. The  
good parts.

KATHLEEN

Do tell about the bad parts?

Aisha fiddles. Glances down at her tea. Unnerved by her compulsive desire to tell unfettered truth in the presence of this woman.

AISHA

We are supposed to make babies to settle--even for men who don't want us, but some of us would rather make ourselves.

Kathleen takes Aisha in with an agreeable "hmm".

Aisha's curiosity moves to a *collage painting on vinyl*. She approaches the piece--losing herself in the image of a grotesque but beautiful half woman half fish underwater creature with bared teeth sharp as nails.

The Mer-woman's claws sink into the head of a limp human figure succumbing to the creature's power...

Kathleen's voice cuts through like a salve.

KATHLEEN

One of my favorites. It's called "Killing you softly" by Kenyan Arist: Wangechi Mutu. It's an interpretation of *Mami Wata, La Siréne, Yemayá, River Mamma...whatever name a culture chooses, they are genderless ancient water gods. Some believe the mermaid lures with sexuality, money and promises of fertility, but they can also be dangerous, unpredictable and impermanent. Enslaved West Africans brought tales of Mami Wata with them. They're as unpredictable as the water that swallowed too many of us whole--or rather, liberated us...*

Aisha faces Kathleen, worry etched in her face.

AISHA

I think I saw her...them.

KATHLEEN

*Mami Wata?*

Aisha nods, tears welling in her eyes.

AISHA

Am I sick? The kind you can't see.  
Am I losing my mind?

Kathleen presses her hand to Aisha's cheek as though transferring strength into her body.

KATHLEEN

Oh no no no dear don't cry. You're perfectly fine. Mami Wata feeds on whatever you give--whether it's fear or rage or vengeance. The spirits are calling you, trying to communicate something.

AISHA

But, why me?

Kathleen tilts her head, raises her shoulders - her eyes searching Aisha's with sympathy and a deep resignation.

KATHLEEN

Ancestors remind women like us how to survive. It's up to us to answer the call.

An omniscient glimmer in Kathleen's eyes. Kathleen backs away. Relaxes. Sips her tea.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)

On to happier things. What's your boy's name?

AISHA

How do you...

KATHLEEN

Aisha, mothers know other mothers. Children are like ghosts, clinging to your body even when they're not physically present.

MALIK (O.S.)

You two done with the intro course to African gods?

Malik approaches the Women. All smiles. Oozing charisma.

MALIK (CONT'D)

Gram always asks too many questions.

AISHA

She asks them of all the Women who pass through?

A nervous laugh from Malik.

KATHLEEN

Only the one's with a story that piques my interest. There haven't been many...

AISHA

That pique your interest or--

MALIK

Time to go.

Malik kisses Kathleen on the forehead, whisking Aisha away as he hooks his arm in hers.

MALIK (CONT'D)

Love you Gram, stay outta trouble!

Aisha turns back to Kathleen briefly.

AISHA

Lamine.

Kathleen closes the door behind them. She sighs a sigh bone marrow deep, staring at the space Aisha inhabited. Her mind's fingers touch the intangible...The presence of life... The coming of violence...

KATHLEEN

Lamine.

Kathleen grabs the tea tray and leaves, passing the haunting Mami Wata painting, but we don't pass with her.

We linger on the Mer-woman, pushing closer to her...

44 EXT. HARLEM BROWNSTONE - EVENING 44

Malik holds his car door open, and Aisha slips into the front seat.

45 INT. SYLVIA'S RESTAURANT - EVENING 45

Malik and Aisha are tucked into a booth, as a WAITER places a plate of New York's finest cheesecake on the table.

AISHA

Oh no. I can't eat anymore.

MALIK

Just one bite. Best cheesecake on the East Coast.

Malik helps himself. Aisha sips wine from a straw.

AISHA

Malik.

MALIK

What's up?

AISHA

How did she know? How did your grandmother know?

MALIK

Know what?

AISHA

I didn't tell you I have a son.

MALIK

I mean everybody, all of us, were born with the ability to see. Most folks start to close those eyes to survive adulthood.

AISHA

She's...a witch.

Malik almost chokes on his cheesecake.

MALIK

A witch?! Naw. She's clairvoyant. A Priestess.

AISHA

Psychic?

MALIK

Yeah but Gram prefers "Intuitive Consultant" I'm not gonna lie, gives me the heeby jeebies sometimes. Had to let her know I don't wanna know. Let me live it as it comes.

A synaptic breach in Aisha's belief system, crumbling before our eyes, in real time.

MALIK (CONT'D)

Can I see little man?

Aisha pulls out her phone, scrolling. She unveils a digital image of Lamine smiling at the person behind the camera.

MALIK (CONT'D)

That's a lady killer right there--  
or...whoever he wants to kill.

Aisha laughs.

AISHA

He's coming soon. For his birthday.  
I haven't seen him in almost a  
year.

MALIK

That's like forever for a kid.

AISHA

I know...

The weight of time lost hangs in the air. Aisha inhales the  
rest of her wine.

AISHA (CONT'D)

And you?

MALIK

And me.

AISHA

You have how many kids?

MALIK

Five.

AISHA

Really? Four plus Bishop?!

Malik nods, pushing a morsel of cheesecake in his mouth.

AISHA (CONT'D)

How many mothers?

MALIK

Five. I don't like to double dip.

A mischievous smile creeps over Malik's face. Aisha punches  
him in the shoulder.

MALIK (CONT'D)

Ow. Damn!

AISHA

I knew you were lying.

MALIK

Just my knucklehead Bishop. You really thought I was a procreatin' ass nigga out here with mad kids huh? Ain't no Future here. Call me Present.

(off Aisha's oblivious look)

You know...the rapper...Future.

Aisha just stares at Malik. He shakes his head in mock disappointment.

AISHA

I try not to judge. Don't want people judging me.

Aisha and Malik lock eyes. Unspoken secrets lurk just behind their gazes.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Is the woman in the pictures your mother?

Malik clears his throat. His veneer of charisma falters for the first time. He picks at his cheesecake.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Sorry.

That impenetrable grin again.

MALIK

What you sorry for?

Aisha notes Malik's hand on the table. Places hers on his. He pulls it away casually placing it on the back of his neck.

MALIK (CONT'D)

My mom been talking to herself, laughing at the jokes in her head since I could remember. Used to hate when she came to pick me up from school.

He's struck by the memory. Hell is a place of remembering.

MALIK (CONT'D)

Kids used to see her before I did. Pacing back and forth in the lobby in front of everybody. I dressed fly--started pumping weights so no one could say shit to my face about my schizophrenic Mamma.

AISHA

Is she-

MALIK

Dead. Killed herself when I was 8.  
Pops been around as much as he  
could, still is, but Grams raised  
me.

At this Malik looks Aisha straight in her eyes, devoid of his  
cape of humor--naked without his shield of comedy.

Aisha moves food around her plate.

AISHA

I was 12 when my mother died.

MALIK

What happened?

AISHA

She kept her sickness from us for  
as long as she could. She got  
thinner and thinner, stopped  
eating. Then one day she couldn't  
walk. Cancer...

Aisha trails off. This time Malik holds her hand. She takes a  
good look at this man--his wet, rueful eyes...the sharp edge  
of desire cuts through her like a knife.

Strangers inexorably linked by loss.

46 EXT. HARLEM STREETS - MALIK'S CAR - NIGHT

46

Malik steers with one hand, and slides the other behind Aisha  
as they drive through traffic.

47 INT. HARLEM BROWNSTONE - MALIK'S ROOM - NIGHT

47

Aisha and Malik, both naked, face each other as they lie in  
bed...His eyes closed...Aisha's open. She watches him for  
some time before pressing her lips to his.

He opens his eyes. Looks at her.

She kisses him again.

Harder.

Pushes him onto his back as she straddles him.

He stops her, breathing hard. She grips him harder with her thighs.

MALIK

You sure?

She takes his hand, guiding it under her top to the skin of her breasts.

He squeezes.

She moans.

He moves his hands down her stomach, tugging at her *waist beads*.

He fingers the beads curiously then they both take off each other close. Their bodies connect. Aisha is on top setting their pace.

She holds onto him, moaning a prayer to ecstasy.

48

EXT. GRAND CENTRAL PARK - DAY

48

The United Nations of Nanny-dom overtake the park as BROWN AND BLACK CAREGIVERS tend to white and racially ambiguous CHILDREN of varying ages.

LATINA NANNIES populate one corner of the park speaking Spanish.

WEST INDIAN WOMEN chattering in English on park benches keep their charges in their eye-lines.

FRANCOPHONE WEST AFRICAN and HAITIAN WOMEN stick together bonded by their French tinged english.

Aisha, phone pressed to her ear, watches Rose bossily guide a new friend up a ladder.

MARIATOU (O.S.)

Hi, how are you?

AISHA

Mari, how are you--

MARIATOU (O.S.)

Ha just kidding! You've reached Mariatou. Leave a message after the-

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEP.



FLORENCE

Why you let that boy call you by  
your first name?!

Cynthia shakes her head, defeated.

FLORENCE (CONT'D)

Well, my baby Elizabeth: she know  
better.

CYNTHIA

She not gonna know a thing once she  
keel over dead!

ELIZABETH [6], a half korean/half white cherub carefully  
scoops dirt in an unseasonably thin t-shirt.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

You better put a real coat on dear  
Lizzie. Police will lock you up  
quick fast if you make them people  
children sick. You know them quick  
to say "abuse."...

Florence drops to a whisper.

FLORENCE

Too soon, Cynthia. Remember that  
Dominican nanny, Arlenis.

Cynthia's eyes go big. She shakes her head, clucking in  
dismay.

CYNTHIA

(to Aisha)

You heard about Arlenis?

Aisha shakes her head no.

FLORENCE

Had a breakdown. Her employers  
fired everybody else: cleaners,  
night nanny, kept her but worked  
her to the bone and wouldn't pay  
what they owed...then her daughter  
got ill back home.

CYNTHIA

(tapping her temple)

Arlenis was sick. The kind you  
can't see...

Cynthia and Florence's voices fade into an inaudible babble  
as Aisha's gaze locks on something in the distance.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

...slit her employers' child throat  
from ear to ear...

Aisha stands--propelled towards some unseen object. Aisha approaches slowly. Gingerly. Her eyes glossy with dead focus.

We finally see what captivates her...A BOY singing a familiar tune: his back to us.

BOY

*Oh my baby, my little baby, who can  
calm you down? Oh my baby, my  
little baby who can calm you down  
and bring you to Saloum...*

Aisha approaches the child.

Inching closer.

She crouches behind the boy.

He turns to her slowly.

*Is it Kofi?*

She reaches out for the boy.

AISHA

Kofi?

A WOMAN'S SCREAM penetrates the air. Car's SCREECH.

WOMAN (O.S.)

OH MY GOD!

Horns BLARE DEAFENINGLY LOUD.

Aisha darts up.

Her eyes search for the source of the chaos, landing on...

...A NANNY cradling Rose, consoling her. Chloe's beet red face is contorted in a wail of despair.

Aisha turns back to the boy.

He's gone.

Lucid, she takes in the DISAPPROVING GLARES OF NANNIES throughout the park enveloping her like an inescapable wall.

The FILIPINA NANNY holding Rose stomps up to Aisha, handing the red faced child to her.

FILLIPINA NANNY

You better pay attention. Someone will report you. How could you let her get out of the park?!

Aisha grips Chloe's hand, maybe too tightly, as the little girl wipes fresh tears from her eyes.

AISHA

Thank you.

Aisha scoops Rose in her arms, making her way out of the park, escorted by the heavy weight of judgement.

49 EXT. HAVS CONDO - KITCHEN - DAY 49

Rose sits at the table mesmerized by Aisha scooping hefty mounds of ice cream into a bowl.

Aisha hands her the ice cream and she eagerly tucks in with her spoon.

The innocence of puerile amnesia seems to wash away the previous incident...

50 INT. HAVS CONDO - ROSE'S ROOM - EVENING 50

Rose's small finger scans the books on the shelf, finally landing on a selection. She pulls the book from the shelf.

CUT TO:

A fabric fort illuminated by a flashlight. Two figures inside: Aisha and Rose. The silhouette of Aisha's hand, formed into a makeshift shadow spider, dances on the tent walls, growing ominously.

Rose fights sleep--hanging on Aisha's every word as she reads from Chloe's selected book: Anansi The Spider by Gerald McDermott.

AISHA

"Hold on son, for if you fall Death is going to get you," Anansi the spider said to his child. However, the boy could not hold on any longer. Therefore, he fell."

Rose gasps. Aisha's makeshift spider hand climbs up Chloe's arm. Rose bristles.

ROSE  
Anansi's son died?!

AISHA  
Death caught the boy and opened the burlap bag. "It is your father I want... not you." Then he placed the child into the burlap bag. Another of Anansi's daughters cried out to her father. "Puppa, please...my hands are tired. I am going to fall..."

ROSE  
Is Anansi bad, Aisha?

Aisha thinks, flipping through the pages.

AISHA  
Do you know the word *filou*?

ROSE  
Fee. Loo.

AISHA  
Trickster.

ROSE  
Trickster.

Making a small circle with her thumb and pointer finger.

AISHA  
Anansi is this big.

Rose mimics Aisha with her small fingers.

AISHA (CONT'D)  
And most of the people who bother Anansi are as big as me, so he uses his intelligence, sometimes good sometimes bad, to survive. He is a survivor. *Survivant*

ROSE  
SYUR. VEE. VANT. Survivor.

AISHA  
Are you ready to tell me why you left the park?

Rose's lids are heavy. She rubs her eyes.

ROSE  
Anansi told me to.

At this, Rose unceremoniously curls into a ball, falling asleep in the warm fort. Aisha watches her chest rise and fall.

51 INT. HAVS CONDO - EVENING

51

All is quiet as Aisha waits alone in the dark. She plays back the voicemail from Lamine over and over in her head.

AISHA (V.O.)

I know it's late. I just wanted to hear your voice. I miss you....very soon.

LAMINE (V.O.)

Very soon. Always very soon.

AISHA (V.O.)

It's true Lamine. I love you.

LAMINE (V.O.)

Love you too mommy.

THE ELEVATOR DINGS in the distance. Aisha darts up, methodically gathering her belongings.

Stands still as she watches Amy's dark figure stumble into the condo.

Something CLANGS loudly hitting the floor.

AMY

Fuck.

AISHA

Amy.

AMY

Homygawd! Aisha?! You scared the shit out of me. How long have you been standing there?

AISHA

Not long.

AMY

Why are you still here? I told Adam to let you leave. Where is he?

At this, Aisha flicks the lights on, cocooning the Women in brightness.

AISHA

I don't know where he is? I haven't seen him today.

Amy is visibly drunk. She grants Aisha a lipstick smeared smile as she fumbles with her purse. She pulls out a wad of cash, gripping it tightly.

AMY

It's so hard when you're the Woman overseeing everything: expected to get drinks with the guys every Friday to prove I'm one of them but...we'll never be one of them. It's a boy's club. A serious fucking boy's club--And when you're a Mom on top of that...

Amy creeps closer to Aisha. Aisha smells wine on her breath...

AMY (CONT'D)

Guess who got a promotion?!

Amy jumps up and down, giddy. She dances around Aisha to music only she can hear, intertwining her fingers in Aisha's as she forces her to sway with her in celebration.

Aisha let's her use her body as a prop until she doesn't, gently pulling away. Amy won't let her go, embracing Aisha tightly. Aisha's hands hang limply at her sides.

The hug lingers, uncomfortably long. Aisha rips away.

AISHA

Enough!

AMY

(whispering)  
Aren't you happy for me?

AISHA

I need a set schedule. I need you to stick to the times you tell me.

Amy's face contorts. Her lip quivers. Weaponized tears stream down her face.

AMY

I'm sorry. I...I mean this with all my heart: you're like family to us now, Aisha. Rose loves you so much...we'll work out a clear schedule. Promise.

AISHA

Ok...

Amy follows Aisha as she makes her way to the door. She presses the balled up bills in Aisha's hand.

AMY

Do me a favor...Watch Adam for me.

AISHA

(stern)

Goodnight, Amy.

52

INT. HARLEM APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

52

Wet feet step out of the shower.

A hand wipes steam off of a mirror.

Aisha stares at her reflection, a towel wrapped around her damp body.

Invasive whispers of a woman calling her name forces her to turn towards the bathroom door, away from the mirror.

AISHA

Aunty?

Her reflection in the mirror--its back still to us--stands eerily still in spite of Aisha turning to face herself. Her eyes widen...a twinge of dread plucking at her belly. Her reflection lingers backwards, beads of water forming on its moist shoulders.

Aisha retreats as the mirror figure slowly turns to face her, its nebulous features coming into view.

Aisha blinks and looks again to see her reflection staring back at her - all is normal again.

53

INT. HAVS CONDO - EVENING

53

As soon as Aisha takes Rose's shoes off, the girl slips through her fingers, darting into the condo.

ROSE

Dad? Daddy are you here?!

AISHA

Rose!

Aisha runs after Rose but loses her as she disappears into a nearby room.

54 INT. HAVS CONDO - ADAM'S OFFICE - EVENING

54

Aisha pauses at the door's threshold. Light cascades from the room and the sound of ADAM'S VOICE intimates a very important phone call.

Aisha knocks.

ADAM

Come in.

Aisha steps in to see Rose bouncing on her father's lap.

AISHA

(re: Rose)

She's tired.

ADAM

Wanna nap, piglet

Rose shakes her head no but her weary eyes betray her.

Adam hands Rose to Aisha's outstretched arms.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Before I forget...

Adam rifles through paperwork. Finds it. Hands a white envelope to Aisha.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Amy's working late but I know today  
is supposed to be payday?

AISHA

Yes. Thank you.

She balances Rose in one hand and the envelope in the other.

55 INT. HAVS CONDO - ROSE'S ROOM - LATER

55

Aisha tucks rose under the covers. She whisper sings the familiar *native lullaby* to Rose, stroking the girl's cheek.

AISHA

(*Wolof*)

*Oh my baby, my little baby, who can  
calm you down?*

(MORE)

AISHA (CONT'D)

*Oh my baby, my little baby who can  
calm you down and bring you to  
Saloum...*

Long-legs reach out from behind a bookshelf, 2 legs, 4 legs, and finally six legs: spider claws climb along the wall. Unwitting to its presence, Aisha finally beckons Rose to sleep. Stealing a moment to herself, Aisha rifles through the envelope containing her pay. She shakes her head in disbelief.

Her pay is *still* short.

56 INT. HAVS CONDO - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

56

Aisha and Adam collide in the dark hallway. He catches her. Their proximity tense.

AISHA

Sorry...

ADAM

I was just about to come get you.  
Hungry?

57 INT. HAVS CONDO - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

57

A feast. Thai food beckons from the counter. Aisha's stomach growls.

ADAM

Can't finish this all myself.

AISHA

Are you sure?

ADAM

Eat. Please.

They stand-eat, neither getting too comfortable.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Got it extra spicy. Amy swears  
spicy food is bad. "Dulls the  
tastebuds."

AISHA

Adam...

Adam stops mid chew to look at Aisha.

ADAM

Uh oh. Why does it sound like I'm in trouble?

AISHA

Were you able to talk to Amy? She's hard to get a hold of.

ADAM

What is it?

Aisha moves food around the plate--her appetite waning. She reveals her *work binder*. Flips to her meticulous note taking: hours of overtime unaccounted for.

AISHA

The thing is...I need the rest of the money to bring my son here.

Adam stops eating mid chew.

ADAM

Your son?

AISHA

His name is Lamine.

ADAM

Holy shit. What else don't we know about you?

AISHA

He will be 7 in a few days.

Aisha studies Adam. Defiant. Fearless.

Adam rubs his jaw. Thinks.

ADAM

Tell you what, I'll advance you some of the money until we figure this out. Things have been a little tight...for everyone.

Aisha beams as Adam momentarily disappears. She catches her reflection in a nearby mirror. Studies herself.

Adam returns with cash.

ADAM (CONT'D)

I could go to the ATM but this is a start...

Aisha hesitates, takes the cash. Without thinking she hugs Adam. He hugs her back.

AISHA

Thank you. Thank you. You have no idea...

They part too slowly. Adam seizes the opportunity, leans in for a long desired kiss, pressing his lips to Aisha's.

Stunned, Aisha let's him for a few seconds, but something overtakes her--

Adam pulls away sharply, touching his lip. She bit him. Hard.

ADAM

Shit. I guess I deserved that, huh?  
(beat)  
You can't tell Amy about this...the money. She's a little too by the book sometimes. Might complicate things for you.

A PHONE RINGS. Aisha instinctively checks hers but it's Adam's. He presses the phone to his ear, seamlessly falling into work mode, unfazed. He sucks the soreness of his bottom lip.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Hey Scott. Yeah. The exhibit would be a huge step...

Searching for Nanny Cams, Aisha steals the opportunity to leave.

58 INT. HAVS CONDO - MOVING ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS 58

Hands count money. Aisha mouths the amount as she flips through the bills.

She smiles to herself, closer to her goal.

Aisha stares at her reflection. Her face fractured by the elevator mirrors. She wipes the residue of guilt off her mouth.

59 INT. YMCA POOL - DAY 59

Swimming lessons for BABIES.

Aisha participates hands on. She trails through the water, behind Rose's SWIMMING TEACHER, snaking their way among OTHER SWIMMERS.

Rose's small legs kick in and out of the water.

Momentarily distracted, Aisha drifts away. Compelled to be underwater, she sinks lower in the pool until her eyes are all we see above water.

Looking out at the disjointed world: fractured by a slice of water, Aisha submerges herself fully-- pushing herself to the bottom of the pool.

8...7...6...5...4...

She holds her breath for as long as she can, then thrusts herself up--EXPLODING OUT OF WATER. As she sucks in air.

She Turns 360 degrees, realizing she's suddenly alone in the blue water of the pool.

A MURKY FIGURE appears behind her. Aisha turns to face it. Finally recognizing her in all her glory:

*MAMI WATA.*

Closer now.

The Mer-Woman's amphibious EYES kick back light, like a coyote caught in headlights.

Aisha closes her eyes, wills herself to control her breathing.

She opens them again, startled to see a monstrous but eerily beautiful mirror reflection of herself peering back at her with those telltale, wet alien eyes.

She tries to keep one eye on the Mer-Woman's dark, iridescent tail snaking beneath the water.

The mermaid woman leans in closer to Aisha, as though she's about to kiss her.

Unable to move, Aisha looks in horror at the nictitating membrane that flicks across the creature's eye as it blinks.

The Mer-woman wraps her tale around Aisha's legs, SUDDENLY RIPPING HER BENEATH THE WATER'S SURFACE.

Two bodies. Intertwined. Jolted underwater. Descending to the bottom of a depthless sea, the creature's tail envelopes Aisha, like an anaconda squeezing life from her body.

Bubbles rise to the surface as Aisha screams, being dragged deeper and deeper and deeper...

QUICK POP:

Aisha curled in fetal position in a clawfoot tub.

QUICK POP:

A full brown stomach marked with the a black line from navel to vagina--the pregnant belly of a woman half immersed in water.

QUICK POP:

A PLUMP BROWN BABY, fat wrists and ankles adorned with gold bracelets that ring out with every jerk of her new movements.

The baby yawns and stretches with life.

CUT TO:

Aisha jolts up from the clammy cement of the poolside, desperately coughing up water. A LIFEGUARD leans away from her. His work done. He breathes a sigh of relief.

Disoriented, catching her breath, unsure of how much time passed, her searching eyes find Rose, shivering under a strangers towel.

60

INT. HARLEM BROWNSTONE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

60

Aisha raises a glass of ice cold water to her lips. She drinks for some time surprised at the magnitude of her own thirst.

KATHLEEN

Anansi, Mami Wata--They are figures of survival and resistance for oppressed people. They challenge the dominant order, subverting it through chaos, anarchy...creative energy. They refuse to be ruled by the human or the divine and operate on the boundaries between two worlds, refusing to submit to the laws of either...

AISHA

I just...wish I knew what they wanted from me.

KATHLEEN

That, my dear, I can't tell you.

(beat)

I had to learn the hard way.

Aisha glances at a photograph of MALIK'S MOTHER/KATHLEEN'S DAUGHTER. Kathleen follows Aisha's gaze.

AISHA

She was beautiful.

KATHLEEN

Losing her almost broke me, but I had to forgive myself. I didn't fail her. The system did. She wasn't meant to be held down here. She was meant to fly...

Kathleen knows Aisha wants more, needs to hear more...

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)

She started threatening to hurt others, herself. A manic episode like I'd never seen. I wasn't so much scared for myself. I was scared for Malik. He was just a small boy then.

Kathleen swallows.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)

So, I called the police...

Aisha's presence no longer registering, Kathleen's mind slips into the cave mouths of memory.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)

Cops didn't ask questions, didn't care. Stormed in with their preconceived notions ready to rage. Slammed Gloria down like a rabid animal, exposed her body. Handcuffed her. Started to tase her so I threw myself between them. Tried to use my body as a shield.

(beat)

As they drove off in that car, in her eyes I saw something had shifted that was never coming back.

Tears in Aisha's eyes, little fragments of diamond.

AISHA

I'm sorry Kathleen. I am so sorry.

KATHLEEN

The spirits can equip us with  
resilience...escape...

61 EXT. MANHATTAN - DAY 61

Perched on a park bench, Aisha stares straight ahead.

KATHERINE (V.O.)

...but the spirits' tools aren't  
always kind....

62 INT. HARLEM APARTMENT - AISHA'S ROOM - DAY 62

A spider crawls along the ceiling just above Aisha as she  
sleeps deeply, her chest rising and falling in the warm  
embrace of rest.

KATHLEEN (V.O.)

Some want an eye for an eye. Some  
just want you rebirthed so you can  
persist. One can never really  
define good and evil....

The Spider drops onto Aisha's cheek. She flinches. The spider  
pauses, thinking, before slipping into her slightly parted  
lips.

Aisha jerks awake gasping for air.

KATHLEEN (V.O.)

...My question for you, Aisha: *How  
do you use your rage?*

63 INT. HAVS CONDO - KITCHEN - DAY 63

Aisha peers into a sparse fridge. Rose by her side.

AISHA

Que Voulez-vous manger? Tell me  
what you want to eat?

ROSE

*Chebu jën!*

Aisha shakes her head, closing the fridge.

CUT TO:

Aisha pulls her African food out of the oven. Rose can't  
contain her excitement as she bangs her fork on the counter.

ROSE (CONT'D)

*Manger! Manger!*

Aisha blows on a steaming spoonful of rice before hovering it before Rose's mouth. Rose opens wide, happily cleaning the spoon.

Drained of color, Rose stops chewing. She stares at something, someone behind Aisha.

Aisha turns behind her to see what Rose sees...

AMY.

Puffy, bloodshot eyes. Amy's made up face can't hide the fact that she's been crying.

AMY

What are you feeding her?

Aisha, unable to hide her surprise, is momentarily frozen.

AISHA

I didn't know you were here.

AMY

That's not what I asked you, Aisha.

ROSE

I like it, Mommy.

Rose innocently holds up a heaping spoonful of rice. Amy snatches the spoon from Rose's hand, sending rice flying everywhere.

AMY

One of the few times I'm home sick and I find you feeding my daughter food that is one: way too spicy for her tummy and two: blowing germs on her food? What is in this? What if she's allergic? How long has this been going on? When you have your own kids you can feed them whatever you want!

Aisha stares at Amy.

AMY (CONT'D)

Say something!

Instead of saying anything Aisha wrenches open the empty fridge and yanks out molded blueberries, wilted kale, a bottle of Gluten Free Kids Multivitamins...

AISHA

Should I feed her this, or this, or this...?

Amy opens her mouth to speak but stops. Aisha rifles through her purse and pulls out a small stack of receipts paper clipped together.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Since I started I've been buying her food or giving her some of my own. Didn't you ever wonder how your child was eating or you were too busy to care?

Amy crouches down to Rose's eye level.

AMY

Go pick a book for Mommy to read to you. Any country you want.

Rose looks at Aisha for reassurance. The sting of this is not lost on Amy.

AISHA

*Va dans ta chambre.* Let Mommy and I talk.

Rose nods, scooping up her ipad. The women wait for Rose to disappear.

Aisha pulls out her work binder.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Now that I have your attention, I've documented all my overtime hours--

AMY

Did you subtract the hours you spent having lunch and dinner with my husband?

AISHA

My time is not free, you know.

AMY

This is a small community and Nannies and Mothers talk.

AISHA

I am a mother too.

Amy really looks at Aisha. Lucid. Truly sees her.

AMY

I thought so. I knew that from the moment I met you.

Amy plops down on a nearby chair. She stares into space.

AMY (CONT'D)

It can't happen again.

AISHA

It won't.

AMY

I need an overnight from you tomorrow.

AISHA

No.

AMY

I need to get out of here. I need to get away. I can't think clearly in this fucking overpriced shoebox.

Aisha shakes her head no, at the end of her rope...

AMY (CONT'D)

Seven to seven. One fifty flat rate is very reasonable.

AISHA

Two fifty.

AMY

You drive a hard bargain my lady.

AISHA

(emboldened)

In advance.

Amy scoffs.

AMY

You think we just have cash laying around.

AISHA

Plus unpaid overtime.

Fine. I'll withdraw money for Adam to pay you in the morning. It all comes from me, anyway. Pinky swear.

Aisha slides into her shoes, unceremoniously. Amy stares ahead vacantly.

Rose explodes from nowhere, as if she was lurking in the shadows. She clings to Aisha's leg. Holding on for dear life.

AMY

That's enough, Rose. Come here to Mommy.

ROSE

NO!

Aisha nudges Rose towards her mother.

AISHA

I'll be back Rose. *Écoute ta mère*

AMY

Come to Mommy please! Don't you want me to take you to the dollhouse?

ROSE

NO! Aisha Don't leave! Don't leave me! He can't have you!

Rose clings to Aisha defiantly. Aisha tries to pry the child off but she won't let go. Amy finally wrenches Rose off Aisha as the child kicks and punches her mother. She's throwing a full blown tantrum unlike any we've seen before. Tears stream down her red face.

ROSE (CONT'D)

I don't want you! I want Aisha! I want grandmaaaaa...

Aisha cringes, sliding into the elevator.

64 INT. HARLEM APARTMENT - AISHA'S ROOM - EVENING 64

Aisha packs an overnight bag. She stops, frozen in her tracks by Lamine's framed photo resting among his gifts--his face mysteriously water stained beyond recognition.

65 INT. HARLEM BROWNSTONE - MALIK'S ROOM - NIGHT 65

Malik. Deep in sleep. Aisha wide awake. Restless.

She stares at the back of Malik's head, then at his still chest, searching for indicators of life.

She hovers her hand in front of his mouth as he exhales, feeling his breath on her hand.

She turns away from him draped in the relentlessness of insomnia.

She closes her eyes, willing sleep.

CUT TO:

The CREAK of a door. Aisha's eyes dart open, unsure of how long she slept.

Aisha stares at Malik's bedroom entrance, fixating on the door...it doesn't move.

Aisha's petrified gaze follows the direction of a sick CRUNCHING SOUND. She glides sheets off her body.

She makes to scream but can't muster a sound as a SNAKE COILS AROUND HER THIGH, CURLING BETWEEN HER LEGS as it SHEDS its SKIN.

An aborted gasp dissipates as tears stream down her face.

She turns to Malik--reaching. A silent plea for help, but stops short...

In lieu of Malik's body is a writhing mass of hair-like tendrils: brimming, throbbing. The mass gives way to unveil *daddy long leg spiders*, running over one another--toppling onto the bed, climbing over Aisha's skin...

Aisha kicks at the spiders, fighting air as she falls backwards off the bed.

MALIK (O.S.)

Hey! Hey!

66

INT. HARLEM BROWNSTONE - MALIK'S ROOM - DAY

66

Malik leans over the edge of his bed looking down at Aisha on the floor still scrambling backwards, shoving invisible spiders off her.

He grips her wrists, fists still balled.

Aisha comes to, breathless. Tears stream down her face.

Malik stands her upright, hugging her tightly.

MALIK

Shh. It's ok. You're good. Your feet are on the ground...ten toes on the floor. Say it.

AISHA

(sucking air)

Ten...toes...on the floor.

Malik notes bruises on Aisha's inner thighs--visible in the sunlight streaming into his room.

67 INT. HAVS CONDO - DAY

67

From inside the condo, the JANGLE of KEYS resonates--condo entrance being unlocked. Aisha pushes the door open, surveying the eerily quiet space.

Shoes robotically peel off feet. Aisha braces herself for the night ahead.

68 INT. HAVS CONDO - VARIOUS ROOMS - DAY

68

The work binder flips open. Aisha scrolls through pages, finally landing on one demarcated by Amy. Aisha scans the *evening to-do list*.

CUT TO:

Aisha washes a small pile of dishes, mindlessly humming to herself.

She scrubs marble countertops meticulously.

Aisha loads laundry into a drier. She lingers before the machine, staring at her reflection in the spinning abyss of strangers' clothes.

69 INT. HAVS CONDO - GUEST ROOM - DAY

69

Aisha falls back on the bed, closing her eyes momentarily--her body salient against white sheets.

The ceiling water stain actively snakes its way along the plaster, sprawling outwards like a web. Black mold throbs as a lone spider crawls from the mass, ambling its way down the wall towards Aisha's sleeping body.

The spider creeps over Aisha's face, crawling into Aisha's open mouth.

Aisha darts awake choking as small arms wrap around Aisha's neck too tightly. Rose clings to her, seemingly leaping from no where.

ROSE

Aisha!

Aisha pries Rose off her. Instantly looking to the ceiling.

ADAM (O.S.)

That's enough Clo! Let Aisha breathe for a sec.

Rose releases her grasp, plopping down beside Aisha. Adam lingers in the doorway of the guest room.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Yeah. That's getting pretty bad.

AISHA

You see it right?

ADAM

The mold. Yeah. Sorry about that. Didn't realize it had gotten that bad. It comes and goes. Totally get if you want to sleep on the couch tonight? Gonna have someone look at it tomorrow.

AISHA

I might do that.

ADAM

I'll lay out some sheets for you. Gonna run some errands.

Adam makes to leave, but backtracks.

ADAM (CONT'D)

By any chance, did Amy mention where she was going?

AISHA

She didn't tell me.

A perfunctory smile from Adam. He leaves without speaking, moving in the liquid way that is his custom.

ROSE

*J'ai faim, Aisha!*

Aisha, exhausted, faces the small child beside her.

ROSE (PRELAP) (CONT'D)  
LA LA LA LA! LAAAAAAAAA....

70 INT. HAVS CONDO - KITCHEN - EVENING

70

Socked feet slide back and forth on bamboo hardwood floors. Rose SCREAMS at the top of her lungs--her shrill yells battling with COMMERCIALS BLARING on TV as she sprints.

Freshly boiled red lentil pasta trickles into a kiddie bowl.

ROSE  
LAAAA LAAAAA LAAAAA!

Aisha pours homemade tomato sauce on top of the slimy fusilli. She rubs her temple, eyeing Rose sliding back and forth...

Aisha turns her attention to a detailed note clipped to the fridge. She grabs a box of nutritional yeast and sprinkles it on top of the concoction.

Steam rises from the slop.

Rose turns the volume up even higher.

CUT TO:

71 INT. HAVS CONDO - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

71

Rose hovers a spoon of pasta to her face. She sniffs it, pursing her lips in disdain.

ROSE  
*Je ne veux--*

AISHA  
This is what your Mommy wants you to eat tonight. This is what you're eating. *Pas de dispute.*

ROSE  
(whiny)  
But I want your food!

AISHA  
Please.

ROSE  
No!

AISHA

Rose you have to--

Rose shoves the bowl of food, sending it crashing to the floor, sending morsels of red slop splattering on Aisha's face like viscous blood.

Aisha gasps. Rose just stares at her.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Pick it up!

Rose folds her arms, defiant.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Pick it up now! I am not your maid.

Aisha extends a rag. Rose turns her back to Aisha. Rage simmering to the surface, Aisha reaches out to grab Rose but stops herself--hands hovering in a liminal space of indecision.

Aisha scans the space for visible Nanny cams.

Weary, impatient, Aisha takes Rose's hand, forcing her to grasp the rag. She controls Rose like a puppeteer, using her limbs to manually clean the mess...

SOUND OF RUNNING WATER.

72

INT. HAVS CONDO - GUEST BATHROOM - EVENING

72

Rose, wrapped in her kiddie bathrobe, quietly sulks as she watches Aisha run her bath.

BENEATH THE WATER'S SURFACE: Aisha's hand submerges. Her fingers graze the bottom of the tub, testing the temperature.

AISHA

Ok, Rose time for...

Aisha turns to find Rose gone.

Behind Aisha, an oversized arthropod leg curls from the tub, gripping ceramic...

73

INT. HAVS CONDO - VARIOUS - CONTINUOUS

73

Aisha searches for Rose, progressively getting more frantic.

AISHA

Rose!

She rifles through Rose's room, tossing stuffed animals aside. Aisha peeks into various rooms. She rips open cabinets.

74 INT. HAVS CONDO - HALLWAY - NIGHT 74

Rising panic, Aisha stares into the empty hallway.

A CHILD'S MEWLING CRY stops Aisha in her tracks. Sends her hurtling back into...

75 INT. HAVS CONDO - VARIOUS - NIGHT 75

Aisha grabs a knife, terror riding her face.

She creeps towards the child's cry emanating from--

ADAM'S OFFICE.

It sounds like Rose's voice, at first...

76 INT. HAVS CONDO - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS 76

Chest heaving, knife outstretched, Aisha walks in the direction of the child's pleas.

AISHA

Rose?

The pleas rise to a deafening crescendo, morphing into a sickening symphony of sound.

Aisha forces herself to breathe as she creeps closer to the door.

77 INT./EXT. HAVS CONDO - ADAM'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 77

Steeling herself, Aisha touches the knob...turning it ever so slightly. Knife still clenched in her other hand.

The door creaks open as she slides into the room.

Aisha's gaze hones in on the ominous photo of the BLACK TEEN PROTESTOR surrounding by a halo of fire--his arms outstretched as though nailed to an invisible cross.

An intangible thread pulls her closer to the image.

The TEEN is drenched in sweat and moon, unwavering, ascendant, all movement and muscle--fearless.

His mouth is contorted in a soundless battle cry.

A NETWORK OF OTHERWORLDLY BLOOD CURDLING SCREAMS DEAFEN AISHA  
...

Hypnotized, Aisha stares at the still image, her face contorted in torment.

We hold on the eerie image. Fire dances in Aisha's eyes--reflected back at her. Flames leap from the still image breaking the fourth wall.

Blood drips at Aisha's feet, snapping her out of this waking nightmare.

She looks down to see her hand wrapped around the blade of the knife, the softness of her palm sliced by sharpness.

AISHA

No...no...no...

Aisha runs out of Adam's office, slipping on overflowing water trickling out of the...

78

INT. HAVS CONDO - GUEST BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

78

FALLING HARD against the wet tile floor.

CUT TO:

Surroundings gradually fade into focus. Aisha props herself up--remembering. Water overflows onto the bathroom floor, pooling around her feet.

Aisha approaches the brimming tub. Turns off the water.

A crimson viscus of blood at the bottom of the tub catches Aisha's eye.

An UNSEEN FORCE sucks her into water's surface, thrusting Aisha's head beneath the water. She screams underwater, sending bubbles rising in a suffocating frenzy.

The force yanks her head up, allowing her to suck in oxygen.

She spots the bloody knife on the floor. Grabs it, before being plunged underneath again.

Aisha flails, raising the knife.

Her CELL PHONE RINGS SHRILLY from another room, snapping her to. The INCESSENT RING TONE grants a gift of lucidity.

Teeth chattering, body shivering, Aisha holds the knife mid air. A drop of water pools at the blade's sharp tip hovering just above...

ROSE.

Whimpering. In a corner of the tub. Directly in the knife's path.

VOICE (O.S.)  
Aisha.....Aisha...

Aisha drops the knife, scooping Rose out of the tub.

She turns off the tub.

She studies Rose desperately. Rose peers back at her, surprisingly fearless. Aisha spins her around, touches her face. She's unharmed. Aisha chokes back tears, cocooning Rose in a warm towel. She hugs the small child.

79

INT. HAVS CONDO - ROSE'S ROOM - NIGHT

79

Sleep chasing her, Rose's small chest rises and falls. Aisha watches her intently.

AISHA  
Are you ok Rose?.....I Was  
confused.

ROSE  
He made you do it. He's just  
jealous.

AISHA  
Who is jealous?

ROSE  
Lamine.

Rose's eyes become tiny slits. She's falling asleep.

AISHA  
What do you know about Lamine? Why  
would you say that?

Rose turns away.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Rose, what do you know about  
Lamine?...

Rose turns back to Aisha.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Why did you say that?

ROSE

Anansi told me. He said it's my  
fault.

Aisha let's Rose sleep--allows her to shut her eyes, leaving  
Aisha alone with a myriad of swirling questions.

80 INT. HAVS CONDO - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

80

Her cell phone the sole source of light, Aisha stares up at  
the condo ceiling, sleeplessness tormenting her. Her bandaged  
hand hangs off the couch.

MARIATOU (O.S.)

(a voicemail)

Aisha, Sorry. We keep missing your  
call. My cell-I had to...You know  
you never ask about me. My mother  
isn't doing well, she's getting  
worse. But anyway, I'll call you  
back. Talk soon.

Aisha's eyelids gradually draw closed.

81 INT. HAVS CONDO - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

81

Aggressive sunlight pervades the curtain-less, window  
ensconced room. Aisha sits up. Stretches and yawns. Lingers  
on the edge of the couch for some time, remembering...

A long EERIE SILENCE broken by the buzz of an incoming voice  
message. Aisha listens to it.

*ADAM: "Took Rosie to breakfast. Didn't want to wake you. Pay  
is on the table. Get that hand checked out."*

82 INT. HAVS CONDO - KITCHEN - MORNING

82

A white envelope and a letter linger on the kitchen counter.

ON CASH as Aisha rifles through the envelope. She counts out  
money. Beams in triumph.

Overnight bag in hand, Aisha wrangles the condo keys out of her pocket, placing them on the counter decisively.

Her eyes search the room, landing on a Nanny cam. She stares directly into it. We see her pixelated image from the camera's POV.

She leaves the frame.

83 INT. WESTERN UNION - MORNING 83

Long acrylic nails click clack against one another as they count out hundred dollar bills.

Nikki the Teller smiles at Aisha through the glass.

NIKKI  
You good, girl!

Giddy, Aisha skips out of the Western Union.

84 EXT. HARLEM STREETS - DAY 84

On Malik's bike, Aisha grips him tightly as they ride in slow motion.

*We hear the following conversation in Voice Over.*

AISHA  
Is there anything else you need.

MARI  
No. Tickets are booked...Lamine wanted to speak to you but he's napping now.

AISHA  
Don't wake him. Call before you take off.

MARIATOU  
I will try.

AISHA  
See you soon.

MARIATOU  
Aisha...

MARIATOU (CONT'D)  
Yes?

MARIATOU (CONT'D)

See you soon.

85 INT. JFK AIRPORT - MORNING 85

Malik flanks Aisha.

She clutches Lamine's thick bubble coat, lingering at the gate where Lamine and Mariatou are expected to arrive.

She looks on as families greet loved ones with perishable gifts and nostalgic embraces.

She waits.

And waits.

Malik paces, helping her search for Mariatou and Lamine in the crowd.

Finally her gaze lands on a child in the crowd who resembles Lamine.

As she darts through a mass of people dread washes over her as she realizes it's not him.

She looks on as the boy is scooped away by his mother.

Evening turns to night. Aisha listens to her call ring endlessly--

MARIATOU (O.S.)

Hi, how are you...

AISHA

Mari--

MARIATOU (O.S.)

Ha just kidding! You've reached Mariatou. Leave a message after the-

86 INT. JFK AIRPORT - VARIOUS - DAY 86

Aisha approaches a series of AIRPORT WORKERS. She shows them pictures of Lamine on her phone. They all grant her various renditions of unknowing.

87 INT. JFK AIRPORT - CUSTOMS - AFTERNOON 87

Aisha paces as an AIRLINE REPRESENTATIVE types information into a computer.

AIRLINE REPRESENTATIVE

The flight arrived on time. Some of the luggage was delayed so there might be some stragglers but everyone was cleared. No one was detained.

AISHA

But my son and my cousin were on the flight...

AIRLINE REPRESENTATIVE

Miss, there's not much else I can do. Is there any other family--

Aisha grabs her bag and storms out of the office. Malik runs behind her, quietly thanking the representative.

88

EXT. JFK AIRPORT - PICKUP - LATER

88

Aisha stares into space. Malik beside her, unsure of what to say or do. A quiet urge overcomes her.

She tries Mariatou again, pressing the phone to her ear. Listening.

The sound of a phone ringing nearby arrests her attention.

Instinctively Aisha stands up, floating towards the ring. Eyes searching. The distinct ring stops suddenly. just as Mari's familiar voicemail sings out--

MARIATOU (V.O.)

Hi, how are you...Ha just kidding!  
You've reached Mariatou. Leave a message...

But Aisha has already dropped the phone away from her ear. Eyes widening in disbelief--impossibility roaring through her mind.

Her gaze lands on MARIATOU. In the flesh. Rueful but real. The woman we've come to recognize in Aisha's phone, a chimera materialized--the very personification of Aisha's past colliding with her present.

Mariatou is too busy struggling with her oversized suitcase to notice Aisha breathlessly approaching her. She locks eyes with Aisha just as an Airtrain approaches, thrumming closer.

Palpable fear etched in Mariatou's face as she stands to face Aisha, close enough to touch her...

AISHA

Where is he?

Mariatou tries to back away, her gargantuan suitcase impeding her path.

MARIATOU

Aisha...I...

Desperation plucks at both women.

AISHA

Mari, where is he? Where is Lamine?

Tears stream down Mariatou's face. Aisha lost in a colorless rage grabs Mariatou by the collar of her flimsy jacket.

MARIATOU

Please!...Aisha...wanted to tell you...

AISHA

WHERE IS HE?

Mariatou drops to her knees before Aisha. Begging for forgiveness.

MARIATOU

We looked away only for a little time...

QUICK POP:

Soundlessness.

Aisha, pressing BABY Lamine's head against her chest, sunlight drenching them in a veil of protection. Baby Lamine coos in response to his mother's loving touch.

QUICK POP:

Aisha's hands loosening their grasp on Mariatou. Looking up. The canopy of sky above them staggering.

Mariatou. Breathless. Wet with tears, sputtering words...

MARIATOU (CONT'D)

...when we went to the  
Beach...waves were too  
strong...didn't know how to tell  
you...He drowned...We looked for  
him...

QUICK POP:

Soundlessness.

Bath water trickles from Aisha's fingertips onto Baby Lamine's glowing face. He gifts his mother the most loving of smiles. She kisses his escarpment of cheeks, like plots of land.

QUICK POP:

Life teeming around her dissipates to noiselessness--Mariatou seemingly in a faraway place still pleads as Aisha floats away.

A synaptic breach of the soul.

Aisha collapses.

CUT TO BLACK.

89 INT. HARLEM BROWNSTONE - MALIK'S ROOM - DAY 89

Aisha groggily opens her eyes, remembering. She hears a soft susurrus of whispers. Real or imagined, she's not sure. She drifts back to sleep, clutching Lamine's winter coat against her chest.

AISHA (PRELAP)  
I just need some air.

90 INT. HARLEM BROWNSTONE - PARLOR - DAY 90

Aisha drinks tea. Puffy, mournful eyes betray her attempt at a consoling smile. Kathleen studies her before sharing a concerned look with Malik.

KATHLEEN  
What you need is rest.

AISHA  
After this walk. I promise.

Aisha places the tea down. Malik and Kathleen on her heels as she makes her way to the door.

Malik makes to go with her, but Aisha firmly presses her hand to his chest.

AISHA (CONT'D)  
Please.

Malik concedes, lingering on brownstone steps. Aisha turns back to grant an affirming smile.

Kathleen watches her through glass.

91 EXT. HARLEM STREETS - DAY 91

Aisha takes in the air. Stares up at sun in the sky.

92 EXT. WEST HARLEM PIERS PARK - DAY 92

Bucolic, expansive water. Lenticular clouds roll through a blue sky.

Aisha: eyes closed, a backpack strapped to her back, steps off a ledge. Her body collides with water, fracturing its surface.

Sunlight refracts off bubbles forming just above the water's surface as Aisha sinks...

93 INT. UNDERWATER - DAY 93

Aisha descends, her hair dancing weightlessly around her. Whispers rise to a crescendo as she looks down into endless blackness.

Something grazes her face. She looks up. Lamine gazes back at her hovering above her but beneath the water like an aqua angel.

He extends a small hand. She reaches for his hand, gripping it with every fiber of her being. She wriggles her body out of the heavy backpack sending it falling to the water's depths...

Aisha EXPLODES FROM THE WATER'S SURFACE, gripping a hand that belongs to KATHLEEN: teeth gritted, gripping Aisha by the skin of her clothes. Kathleen struggles with Aisha's weight. Malik helps guide her drenched body onto land as MEDICS surround Aisha...

KATHLEEN

She's pregnant, please be careful...

CUT TO:

QUICK POP:

Aisha caresses her Pregnant belly

QUICK POP:

Kathleen, Aisha, Malik and Bishop at home together in momentary joy, in their peaceful familial microcosm.

QUICK POP:

Aisha playing with her and Malik's newborn daughter.

94

INT. HARLEM APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

94

Swaddled in water's warm embrace, Aisha lies at the bottom of a clawfoot tub. The familiar cocoon of fetal position lulls her as she closes her eyes. Grief held a shape within her, something big and loud and so very insistent, finally dissolving to forgiveness.

A nagging, ancestral insistence on survival rests in her curled body...

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END