

PARIAH

Written by

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SUPER:

"WHEREVER THE BIRD WITH NO FEET FLEW, SHE FOUND TREES WITH NO LIMBS." --- AUDRE LORDE

FADE IN:

1 EXT/INT. NIGHTCLUB- EVENING 1

A disembodied gaggle of jersey clad shoulders, jeans, and hats crosses a narrow street. Lights flare, hands are stamped, torsos are patted down. Money exchanges hands. We descend into a black, throbbing tunnel.

Explicit music booms from bassy club speakers. Hips, legs feet dancing.

A GO-GO DANCER struts and wiggles around a brass pole. Hoots and cheers.

The dancer marches in place, rolling her thonged bottom. More cheers, greedy hands stuff dollars into her waistband.

FEMALE DJ (O.S.)
Let's go! Where all my sexy
Sagittarian ladies at?

Arms go up. A collection of whoops ripple the crowd.

The dancer wraps her legs around the pole and oozes upward headfirst. The CAMERA ROTATES as she stretches her booted heels into the crowd. We realize that she has been dancing on the ceiling.

FEMALE DJ (O.S.)
Oh my God!

ALIKE (pronounced AH-LEE-KAY), 17, covers her mouth, laughing and wide-eyed. She tries to back away from the stage, but is pushed forward by a torrent of eager arms waving dollar bills. Among them is LAURA, 18, worldly and smooth.

LAURA
Where your singles at?! Where your
singles at?! Yeah, baby!

Laura strains over Alike's shoulder to tuck a bill into the dancer's boot. Alike drops her beer in all the jostling.

FEMALE DJ
Goddamn I love my job!

Laura stuffs a bill into Alike's now empty hand and forcibly waves Alike's wrist in the air.

Alike pulls free just as the dancer takes notice and begins to direct her attention at her.

ALIKE
Stop! Chill!!

LAURA
Whatchu' come here for?!

Alike shoves the dollar bill into Laura's chest and shoulders her way past the wall of onlookers surrounding the stage. Laura shrugs, puts the bill in her teeth and lays her head at the edge of the stage. Alike looks away and breaks through a snarl of clubgoers just as the dancer begins to descend.

ALIKE
Excuse me. Sorry. Excuse me. Oof,
sorry ladies.

Finally free of the throng, Alike takes a breath and looks at the clock on her cell phone.

ALIKE (CONT'D)
Shit!

She rolls her eyes back to the stage where Laura is no longer visible. Not daring to risk another plunge into the throbbing crowd, she retreats for the bar.

FEMALE DJ
Let's go!

2 INT. NIGHTCLUB BAR- NIGHT

2

Alike beaches at an empty spot at the bar. Her gaze settles on a CUTE GIRL a little ways down, staring out at the dance floor. Alike jerks her eyes away and smooths the front of her shirt and adjusts her hat as she edges toward the girl.

ALIKE
Hi.

The girl ignores her. Alike clears her throat and speaks a little too loudly.

ALIKE (CONT'D)
Umm... Hey! How are you?!

The girl jerks around and frowns at Alike, looking her up and down.

CUTE GIRL
What?!

ALIKE

Umm...sorry. I was just sayin'
Umm...hi.

CUTE GIRL

Oh.

The girl dismisses Alike and turns back toward the floor.

ALIKE

Oh. You wanna drink or something?
Hey! Hey! Over here!

Alike strains, snapping at the bartender. A CONFIDENT WOMAN swaggers up close to the girl and extends her hand. The cute girl takes it and allows herself to be lead to the dance floor. Alike looks around just in time to see her leaving. The bartender finally materializes, and Alike slinks away.

3 INT. NIGHTCLUB BATHROOM - NIGHT

3

Alike slumps into a long line of women waiting to squeeze the cramped, 2 stall bathroom. A COUPLE in front of her makes out vigorously, and she folds her arms and looks away.

A buff 30-SOMETHING WOMAN with locs smiles and winks at Alike. Alike smiles and fidgets with her eyebrows and looks away. The line inches forward. Alike glances around searching for the woman. The 30-something has already lost interest, her attention now fully directed at a much more FEMININE WOMAN strutting out of the restroom. Embarrassed, Alike faces front again. Two androgynous gangsters (AGs) who have witnessed the whole thing nudge each other and sneer. Alike squares her shoulders and widens her stance. One of the AG's breaks out in laughter and they turn around as the line inches forward again. Alike pretends not to notice and slumps out of line and retreats for a lonely oasis of couch along the wall.

4 INT. NIGHTCLUB COUCH - LATER

4

Alike dozes on the couch.

FEMALE DJ

Give it up for Sin-A-Min ladies!!

Alike wakes with a start. She checks the time on her cell phone. Cursing, she scrambles up from the couch.

5

INT. NIGHTCLUB BAR - EVENING

5

Laura dances with a cute SHORT HAIREd GIRL.

Alike spots the pair from afar and heads in their direction.

ALIKE
C'mon, we're late.

LAURA
Huh?

ALIKE
I gotta go!

LAURA
Hold on a minute.

ALIKE
C'mon, why you trippin'?

LAURA
What?

ALIKE
Why are you trippin', you know I
gotta go!

LAURA
What?

ALIKE
You know I gotta go. I'ma get in
trouble.

LAURA
Lemme dance with shortie first,
then I'll be ready.

ALIKE
What?

Laura spins the short haired on the dance floor and the pair continue their wobbling, uneven groove. Alike endures several moments of invisibility as a sea of women, both "feminine" and "butch" push past her without a second glance. Alike tugs at Laura's jersey. Laura, happily tangled in her dance partner's embrace rolls her eyes.

LAURA
Stop pulling on my clothes!

6

EXT. BUS STOP- NIGHT

6

Laura sulks, frowning out at the night. Alike extends the olive branch.

ALIKE

How many numbers you get? One?

LAURA

I could've gotten more, but your moms was holding me up.

ALIKE

Oooh. That's jacked up.

LAURA

How many you get?

ALIKE

Tonya, Denise, Shelley. No wait that's old, I can delete that one. Tonya...

Laura snatches the phone from Alike. Alike swipes at it but misses. Laura fends her off with one hand and scrolls through the numbers with the other.

LAURA

Ain't Shelley that chick from your math class?! Denise... What? These are your damn study group numbers! Why you frontin'?!

Alike snatches the phone and wipes the screen with her sleeve.

ALIKE

I don't see you with no list of numbers.

LAURA

I'm not the one looking for a girlfriend, man. You the one still a virgin!

ALIKE

Shut up!

LAURA

Trying to help your ass. I'm sayin', whatchu waitin' for?!

Alike shrugs it off, her smile fading a little. Laura elbows her and sneers.

LAURA

Kickin' that same 'ol quiet shit since 6th grade. I don't need to press, I gets plenty. Shit.

ALIKE

Wah-wah.

LAURA

I get more pussy than your daddy, nigga, what?!

ALIKE

Oh shit!! Yeah, you got me with that one.

7 INT. BUS - NIGHT

7

Alike becomes more quiet and less playful as the ride wears on. A middle-class Bronx landscape, well-lit with a newly constructed Starbucks and renovated condos flits by the window. Alike reaches over and presses the tape. Laura elbows Alike.

LAURA

Quit playing.

ALIKE

Your stop.

LAURA

Huh?

ALIKE

Your stop-- you're getting off here, right?

LAURA

Nah, I'll roll with you a few more stops.

ALIKE

Why you gon' walk all the way back down for? That's stupid.

LAURA

Make sure you get home okay.

The bus pulls to the curb. The light flicks on over the back door.

ALIKE

You ain't big, nigga. Trying to protect somebody. Hurry up, man, get off!

LAURA

(to bus driver)

That's alright man--next stop. Next stop!

Alike elbows Laura sharply. The bus driver frowns in the rear view.

LAURA

You ain't gotta push me, why're you beastin'?

ALIKE

I'm not beastin'.

Laura climbs over Alike and swings toward the door.

LAURA

You got a problem. Call me.

ALIKE

I'ma call you.

Alike turns and watches Laura stroll away. Laura drums a little beat on Alike's window as the bus pulls off. Alike waves and faces forward again. An OLD LADY sitting nearby shoots her a disapproving look. Alike rolls her eyes and moves to a seat farther away.

8 INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

8

Alike studies her reflection in the window, and takes a breath. She unbuttons her bulky men's shirt to reveal a fitting baby doll shirt that reads "Princess." She stuffs her baseball cap and durag into her backpack and jabs a pair of small gold hoop earrings into her ears. She slumps back against the seat and stares into the night.

The bus stops at a lonely island of curb. Alike is a dark silhouette sprinting around the corner and into the night.

9 INT. ALIKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

9

Alike cracks open the front door just wide enough to slip through. The house is dark except for the flashing microwave clock.

Alike takes off her sneakers and pads down the hallway. Her younger sister, SHARONDA's door cracks open as she passes.

SHARONDA

You late.

ALIKE

(whispering)

Be quiet.

SHARONDA

Where you been this late?

ALIKE

(whispering)

Movies.

SHARONDA

Movie ended at midnight.

ALIKE

(whispering)

Shhh. Shut up.

Alike shoves her sister and tries to close the door. Sharonda yanks the door open wider.

SHARONDA

(whispering)

Don't push me.

ALIKE

(whispering)

Go to bed.

SHARONDA

I know what stays open past midnight.

Sharonda puts a hand to her head and does a little dance.

ALIKE

Shut up!

Alike eases Sharonda's door shut. Sharonda swings the door open wide.

SHARONDA

Good night Lee!

Sharonda slams her door. The light clicks on underneath Alike's parent's door.

AUDREY (O.S.)
Lee? Lee?!

Alike rolls her eyes at her sister's closed door and shrugs into her room.

10

INT. ALIKE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

10

Alike rushes to shove her stuffed backpack under the bed. She tosses her shoes in the closet just as her mother, AUDREY appears in the doorway.

AUDREY
Nice to know you still live here.

Alike peels off her socks and slumps on the bed.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
What're you doing home so late,
anyway?

ALIKE
Lost track of time.

AUDREY
You know what time your curfew is.
Where were you?

ALIKE
Movies.

AUDREY
The show ended at midnight. And
your curfew is twelve thirty.

ALIKE
I lost track of time.

Audrey gets cozy in the doorjamb. Alike turns her back on her and slumps into pajamas.

AUDREY
At least you were cute. Where'd you
get that shirt? 'Princess'. I like
that.

Alike winds the princess shirt around her fist and launches to the top of the closet.

ALIKE
It's old.

AUDREY

Compliments your figure. I saw something just like it on sale, maybe we could go shopping--

ALIKE

Goodnight.

Audrey stiffens and pulls her robe tighter. Vinegar replaces honey in her demeanor as the warmth drains out of her voice.

AUDREY

I really don't care for that young lady you run around with anyway.

ALIKE

Yeah, okay!

AUDREY

And tie your head up.

Alike snags a satin headscarf from the nightstand and slaps it around her head.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

It's your head. And you really should wash your face, too.

ALIKE

I don't have on make-up.

AUDREY

Wash your face anyway.

ALIKE

Mom. I'm seventeen years old, please don't talk to me like--

AUDREY

Watch your tone.

(Beat)

Well, it's your skin.

Audrey leaves. Alike is still. She listens for the door to her parent's room to shut before snatching off the scarf and storming to the bathroom.

11 INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

11

Alike turns on the faucet, wets the soap and puts it back in the dish, wets her wash cloth and puts it back on the rack. She plops down on the toilet and looks up. A crucifix frowns down at her from the wall.

She averts her eyes and stands to leave.

AUDREY (O.S.)
Did you brush your teeth?

Alike wets her toothbrush and throws it back into the holder.

AUDREY (O.S.)
Lee?

Alike squeezes out a dollop of toothpaste and smears a little around the sink. She stares at her reflection.

AUDREY (O.S.)
Lee?

Alike flicks water droplets at the mirror for good measure.

ALIKE
Yes, mom.

12 EXT. SCHOOL - MORNING 12

Alike, bundled in an oversized hoodie edges up to the perimeter of campus and waits against a bus shelter. STUDENTS horseplay and mill about the entrance in groups, chugging their morning Fantas and munching on snack cakes. The school bell rings and the lawn slowly empties into the building. Alike shifts her weight and checks her watch as the last STRAGGLERS finally trickle in. She yanks her hoodie tighter and launches across the lawn and into the building.

13 INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - MORNING 13

A second school bell sounds and the din of slamming lockers and jubilant chatter dies to a hush as students shuffle into classrooms. Alike cracks the back stairwell door and peeks out into the mostly empty hallway before tearing for the bathroom. One last straggler BINA, a 17 year-old girl with mature, but down-to-earth good looks rushes past Alike. The two exchange a brief, confused look then mutually dismiss each other as they hurry in opposite directions.

14 INT. SCHOOL BATHROOM - MORNING 14

Alike hurtles into the handicapped stall and snaps it shut behind her. She rips off her hoodie and the "girly" shirt beneath and flings them to the floor. She pulls out a pair of wife-beaters from her bag and pulls them over her head. She unwads a polo shirt and yanks it over her head.

She stares at her reflection in the window and tries unsuccessfully to smooth her shirt. Her eyes scour her reflection again and again for any imperfections. She spots the earrings and yanks them out of her ears. The late bell beckons and Alike stuffs her "feminine" clothes into her backpack and bolts.

15 INT. MATH CLASSROOM - DAY

15

The MATH TEACHER glides up and down the aisles passing out graded tests. A chorus of groans follows in her wake.

MATH TEACHER

As promised, I will be grading
these on a curve.

Alike is folded into the backmost corner of the classroom. The desks in front her and beside her are empty. She is ignored as the rest of the class chatters and passes notes.

MATH TEACHER (CONT'D)

But the highest grade on the test
was a 98.

The math teacher puts Alike's test on her desk and gives her a little smile. Alike doesn't smile back.

The lunch bell rings and the class is a tornado, clearing the room in a rush of limbs, shouts, and backpacks. Alike jabs her headphones into her ears and packs her bag very deliberately, letting the eye of the storm pass over her before heading toward the door.

16 INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

16

The cafeteria is a whirl of activity and social jockeying. Clusters of girls and boys loud-talk, flirt, fight and horseplay at tables and in tight little groups against the walls. Alike walks alone, staying at the fringes of the crowd and shrugs through the cafeteria line.

17 INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

17

Alike flees the cafeteria, tray laden with rubbery cuisine of dubious nutritional value. She raps on the door of a classroom and slips in.

MRS. ALVARADO (O.S.)

Hey there!

ALIKE

Hey!

MRS. ALVARADO, a middle aged Californian ex-hippie type reclines with her feet on her desk, munching on celery sticks and sunflower seed paste. Her small desk radio plays alternative rock. Sun beams into the empty classroom and Alike squints as she yanks the headphones out of her ears and pulls up a chair next to her desk.

MRS. ALVARADO

Whaddja bring me?

ALIKE

Nothin' you can eat.

MRS. ALVARADO

You shouldn't be eatin' that crap, either.

ALIKE

(over a mouthful of pizza)
I know.

MRS. ALVARADO

Sooo, where's the new stuff?

Alike hands over her purple and white composition book. Mrs. Alvarado thumbs the pages, reading silently.

MRS. ALVARADO

Hmmm.

ALIKE

Did you see the one in the back?

Mrs. Alvarado flips to the back of the book and her mouth moves silently as she reads.

ALIKE (CONT'D)

I'll probably do it in class.

Mrs. Alvarado hands the book back to Alike and digs in to another celery stick.

ALIKE

So?

MRS. ALVARADO

So what?

ALIKE
What do you think?

MRS. ALVARADO
They're okay.

ALIKE
Okay?

MRS. ALVARADO
They're lovely. Of course your
descriptiveness and use of
alliteration is beautiful and all,
you know that. But...I don't know.
Is it your best? No.

Alike frowns through the pages of the composition book.

ALIKE
I thought it was good.

MRS. ALVARADO
It's good. Not great.

Alike slumps back into her seat and considers the book's
cover.

MRS. ALVARADO
I believe you can go deeper.

19 INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - AFTERNOON

19

Audrey is a heat-seeking missile, whipping through the sparse
hallways of the trauma wing, her clipboard and pen in
constant motion. NURSES and AIDES scatter in her wake,
suddenly busying themselves with little bits of chore work to
avoid her caustic gaze. She barks at a cluster of CLERKS chit-
chatting in the elevator bank and all but one manage to
escape. Audrey drills her.

AUDREY
Oh, so your log is all up to date?

CLERK
No I--

AUDREY
And you've checked the round for
any calls?

CLERK
Well I --

AUDREY

Do you even know which doctors are
on the floor?

CLERK

No ma'am I--

AUDREY

Then I suggest you get busy.

The clerk skitters off red-faced, and Audrey looks daggers
into her back before storming the break room.

20

INT. HOSPITAL BREAK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

20

Audrey whisks her lunch bag out of the fridge and heads
toward a table. A few lounging AIDES wad up their garbage and
flee the break room. Audrey settles down at the table and
pulls a fashion magazine from her work tote, pretending not
to be hurt. She peels open a cup of vanilla yogurt and begins
reading. A big red department store bag sits next to her work
tote. The television suspended over the table mumbles
corporate healthcare infomercials. MRS. SINGLETARY, one of
Audrey's co-workers swoops in and plops a plastic grocery bag
on the table across from her.

MRS. SINGLETARY

Hey girl! Mind if I sit here?

AUDREY

No, not at all. Help yourself.

MRS. SINGLETARY

Whatchu got there? You been
shopping?

AUDREY

Oh, no. Just some yogurt. Some
vanilla yogurt.

MRS. SINGLETARY

No I meant in the bag. What do you
have in the shopping bag--the big
red thing?

AUDREY

Oh I'm...I don't know where my mind
is...Yeah, this is just uh--well
let me get your opinion.

Audrey's steely exterior melts away and suddenly she is all
butterflies and giggles. She rifles through the bag and
hoists out a pink ribbed v-neck sweater.

MRS. SINGLETARY
Oh that's nice.

AUDREY
Yeah see isn't this cute?

MRS. SINGLETARY
Umm-hmm. That's for your daughter?

AUDREY
Yeah, this is for Alike.

MRS. SINGLETARY
The youngest one.

AUDREY
No she's the oldest one.

MRS. SINGLETARY
Oh, the other one. Okay.

AUDREY
What, you think it's too young?

MRS. SINGLETARY
No, no. For whatever reason the youngest one popped in my mind first. But I think it should be fine. It's really cute.

AUDREY
Thank you.

MRS. SINGLETARY
It'll compliment her figure.

AUDREY
Now see that's what I thought...
But Lee doesn't like anything I
pick out for her anymore.

Mrs. Singletary takes a bite of her lunch and takes the sweater from Audrey.

MRS. SINGLETARY
Girl, please. My oldest, 17 going on 27 mind you, banned me from buying her any more clothes. We have two completely different tastes. I just give her gift cards now and trust me, we're both happier for it. Is it her birthday?

Mrs. Singletary hands the sweater back to Audrey who smooths it carefully back into the tissue paper.

AUDREY

No, no. I just wanted to get her something nice. You know.

Three ROWDY CO-WORKERS burst into the room chattering and finger popping.

ROWDY CO-WORKER #1

Hey, Brenda!

ROWDY CO-WORKER #2

Oooooh Audrey, you got me a present?

ROWDY CO-WORKER #3

What'chall in here talking about?

AUDREY

Well, no we--

MRS. SINGLETARY

None of yo' damn business!!

The co-workers hoot in unison and descend upon the various parts of the breakroom. Audrey shoves the sweater back in the bag and nestles it between her feet. Somebody cranks on a small radio and a frisky R&B beat invades the air. Mrs. Singletary pats Audrey on the arm.

MRS. SINGLETARY

Let me know how it goes.

AUDREY

Oh I will. I'll call you when--

ROWDY CO-WORKER #3

Hey Bren' this is what I was telling you about!!

Co-worker #3 shoves a tabloid in Mrs. Singletary's face, tapping an angry orange fingernail in the middle of the page.

MRS. SINGLETARY

Is that her?!

ROWDY CO-WORKER #3

Told you!

ROWDY CO-WORKER #2

Look how big she done got!

The center of the room shifts and Audrey is once again alone at the fringes. She collects her shopping bag and looks around to say goodbye, but no one notices her leave.

21 INT. ALIKE'S KITCHEN - EVENING

21

Audrey, Sharonda, Alike, and their father, ARTHUR, 40-something with a used-to-be athletic build, are all gathered around the dinner table for a rare family dinner. Everyone takes half-hearted nibbles at their food avoiding eye contact with each other. Sharonda picks at her food.

SHARONDA

I don't see why we can't just watch TV like usual.

Alike elbows Sharonda.

SHARONDA

Quit it!

ALIKE

Shut up.

SHARONDA

You don't tell me what to do!

AUDREY

Girls.

The phone rings and Arthur beats a path to bedroom to get it. Audrey wilts.

ARTHUR

I'm expecting a call.

Audrey stares after him then glares back at Alike and Sharonda.

AUDREY

This is your father's *night off*.

Alike casts a glance in the direction of the bedroom, where Arthur can be heard talking in hushed tones. She rolls her eyes and slinks down into her seat.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

So straighten up.

Arthur settles back into his chair, his mood a little brighter. Seeing an opportunity for brownie points, Sharonda pitches in.

SHARONDA

Homecoming got moved this year. It's gonna be in September instead of October.

AUDREY

Oh really?

SHARONDA

Yeah. Which means I'll be able to go to Autumn Ball and the Homecoming Dance.

AUDREY

Who are you going with?

SHARONDA

I don't know. Maybe Derek. If he asks me. Maybe Parrish. I haven't decided yet. But for homecoming, I definitely want to go with Craig.

AUDREY

Oooh, I see. Lee, who are you going with?

ALIKE

Umm. I'm not going.

Arthur gives Alike an approving Daddy's girl wink. Alike beams back.

AUDREY

Not going? This is your junior year. How can you not go?

ARTHUR

Leave her alone Audrey, if doesn't want to go, she doesn't have to go.

AUDREY

But it's her junior year, she's not gonna have any memories.

ARTHUR

I don't like all those boys buzzing around my daughters anyway.

SHARONDA

Nobody buzzes around Alike.

ARTHUR

That's right and it better stay that way. Matter of fact, I don't know if I'ma let you go.

SHARONDA

Daaa-aad?!

Alike smirks and takes her plate to the sink. Arthur jabs her on the arm as she walks by. Audrey tears into a dinner roll shooting daggers at anyone who dares to make eye contact.

22

INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

22

Laura brings a steaming cup of Ramen noodles to a worn kitchen table splayed with bills. Her older sister CANDACE, a stout 30 something with pleasant but hard-working looks scribbles notes on the back of an envelope while soaking her feet. Laura takes a sip of her soup and starts sifting through a pile of envelopes.

LAURA

How much we paid him last time?

CANDACE

Six twenty-five.

LAURA

So that makes--we owe another two seventy-five for the rest of the month.

Candace pecks on a calculator and scribbles on the envelope. Laura flips through more bills.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Electric?

CANDACE

Half.

LAURA

Phone?

CANDACE

Let it ride.

LAURA

Gas?

CANDACE

How much?

LAURA

Eighty-five.

CANDACE

Half. No let it ride.

Laura locks her hands on top of her head and leans back in her chair, surveying the financial carnage.

Candace reaches inside a CERAMIC HEN on the table and pulls out a wad of money. She counts out several hundred dollars into an envelope.

LAURA

I can get some more hours--

CANDACE

No. You know what you *need* to do.

LAURA

Nah Candy, I can't just dip out on you like that--

CANDACE

I was doing just fine before you moved in, remember? I can handle it.

Laura sucks her teeth.

CANDACE (CONT'D)

You working was only supposed to be temporary. Mom would've wanted--

LAURA

Who?! Man, don't even--

CANDACE

She would've--

LAURA

Stop.

Laura pushes up from the table and glares at Candace, a showdown. Candace stares back, unfazed. Laura caves first.

LAURA (CONT'D)

I'll get the money orders in the morning.

Laura tugs at the envelope but Candace doesn't let go right away.

LAURA (CONT'D)

I'll look into it alright?

Candace relinquishes the envelope and Laura stalks off down the hallway to her room.

CANDACE

The next test is coming up soon!

LAURA (O.S.)
I said I'll look into it!

Candace smiles wanly and sips her soup. She takes a foot out of the water and kneads it.

23 INT. SCHOOL BATHROOM - MORNING 23

Alike slams into her usual stall and launches into her 'Superman' changing routine. She unrolls pulls a jersey from her backpack and yanks it over her head.

24 EXT. SCHOOL LAWN - AFTERNOON 24

Alike sits off to one side of the stairs, headphoned into oblivion and scribbling into her composition book. A group of FAST GIRLS strut by and encamp on the opposite wall, giggling and yakking on cell phones. One of the girls, MIKA cuts a flirty smile at Alike. Alike turns away and buries herself in her book, but cranks down the volume on her iPod.

MIKA'S FRIEND
It was like seven of us--Me,
Khalil, Misha, Tamara....

FAST GIRL #2
Tamara Marks?

MIKA'S FRIEND
Heeeell no--Fat Tamara.

MIKA
Oh I was about to say, Tamara Marks
is a ughh--I can't stand her.

MIKA'S FRIEND
Anyway, it was all of us and oh
Laura, you know that girl from the
restaurant? She was there with one
of her friends.

Alike's ears prick up.

MIKA
That gay chick? Ya'll be hanging
like that?

MIKA'S FRIEND
Yeah, well it's a couple of them.
She's mad cool though, so sometime
she come out with us every now and
then, anyway--

MIKA

Man, y'all be doin' it on it weekends, let me find out!

FAST GIRL #2

I told your butt to come.

MIKA'S FRIEND

But *anyway*--

MIKA

Some of them AG's are kinda cute--
I'm not saying I would, but I would holla.

FAST GIRL #2

I don't know about all that.

MIKA

Isn't that one of them over there?
What's her name? Amika?--Alisha?

The pack directs their attention at Alike. Alike profiles and attempts to look casual.

MIKA'S FRIEND

Alike.

MIKA

Yeah, Alike--she's cute too.

FAST GIRL #2

Ugh. I don't be looking at them all like that.

Mika smiles as her eyes travel down Alike's physique. Alike, aware of the admiring gaze tugs and smooths at her shirt unnecessarily. She licks her lips and readjusts the book in her lap, fighting hard to keep the grin off her face.

MIKA

Look, I'm not gay--but if I was gay I might talk to her.

MIKA'S FRIEND

She's in the middle anyway.

MIKA

Yeah, but if she was just a little more harder--

Alike looks over and starts to nod when a CUTE BOY with locs swaggers up to the girls, drawing their rapt attention.

CUTE BOY
'Sup ladies?

MIKA FAST GIRL #2
Heeeey. What's up?

The girls erupt into titters, and they melt into conversation. Alike deflates, watching them over the top of her book. She observes every little moment between the girls and the boy, every wink. Another BOY joins the group and they stroll off down the sidewalk.

Alike plucks the headphones out of her ears, watching them leave. Mika casts a parting glance over her shoulder at Alike. Remnant's of Alike's grin return reflexively. Mika's friend jerks her elbow around.

MIKA'S FRIEND
Oooh--let me find out, Mika. You act like you bi- or something.

MIKA
I like girls but I love boys.

FAST GIRL #2 FAST GIRL #1
Umm hmm ! I can't tell!

Alike waits for them to disappear from view before snatching up her bag and bolting in the opposite direction.

25 EXT./INT. - RESTAURANT STOCKROOM - DAY

25

Laura hoists a box of french fries onto her shoulder and moves inside the restaurant.

LAURA
Watch out, it's slippery.

ALIKE
So what do you think?

LAURA
I already told you what I think.

ALIKE
But you know her, right?

LAURA
I said I know of her, I don't know her know her.

Alike hefts up a box and follows Laura back into the restaurant.

ALIKE

I'm saying, you know her friend,
right? You gonna introduce us?

LAURA

Just put those on that stack right
there. Yeah, thank you.

ALIKE

You listening?

LAURA

I'm listening--all I'm saying is--
pass me that milkshake mix right
there.

Alike tosses Laura a bladder of milkshake mix. Laura catches
it.

LAURA

All I'm saying is that I don't
think you should put yourself out
there like that. Especially if you
don't even know if she likes you
like that.

ALIKE

She does.

LAURA

How do you know she does?

ALIKE

I just know she does.

LAURA

Hmmph. We'll see.

Laura holds out her hand as if checking for rain and scans
the ceiling.

ALIKE

What're you doing?

LAURA

I thought I felt a drop of pig
shit.

ALIKE

Shut up.

LAURA

All I know is I been trying to get you to holla at girls in the club for the longest.

ALIKE

I don't want to holla at girls in the club.

LAURA

Obviously. Why you pressed about this chick?

Alike shrugs.

ALIKE

I wanted to ask you about something else too.

LAURA

Oh God, what now?

ALIKE

I need you to get something for me.

LAURA

What?!

Alike cocks her head at Laura. Laura frowns back.

LAURA

What?!

ALIKE

Just for my image.

Alike raises her eyebrow. Laura shakes her head. The light bulb goes off. She roars in disbelief.

LAURA

WHAAAAAT????!! You trying to strap!!?? Whaaatt?!! Oh my God, what are you going through...

ALIKE

Please.

LAURA

What difference you think having a bulge in your pants gon' make?

ALIKE

Pleeeeeease. By next Friday.

LAURA

Next Friday?! Okay-- Whatever. Oh my God I can't believe you !
Alright. Yeah. She better be cute for all of this...

26

INT. ALIKE'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

26

Alike stares at herself in a floor length bedroom mirror in her underwear.

LAURA

I think it looks natural.

A peach-colored dildo dangles stiffly from Alike's waist. The harness bunches her boxers in clumsy tufts. Alike appraises the racially inappropriate apparatus and shoots Laura a look.

LAURA

I'm serious, I mean it doesn't look that bad.

ALIKE

I can't believe you.

Alike frowns at the dildo in profile.

LAURA

What?!

ALIKE

Laura, this doesn't look right. I'ma look stupid.

LAURA

Well, first of all-- I don't think its supposed to be on top of your underwear like that.

ALIKE

I'm not putting this thing next to my skin, it pinches already.

Alike yanks at the harness and her boxers trying to pull it out of her bottom.

LAURA

It's supposed to fit like that.

ALIKE

They didn't have any brown?

LAURA

I didn't have time for all of that.
The brown ones were too big,
anyway.

Alike struggling with the apparatus. Laura smiles.

ALIKE

Ugh! You gotta take it back.

LAURA

I can't take it back.

ALIKE

Here's the receipt!

LAURA

Unh-unh. I'm not going back in
there. One time was embarrassing
enough.

ALIKE

You grown!

LAURA

Still what if somebody would see me
in there? I'm not going back,
that's it.

ALIKE

Then where's my change?

Sharonda bursts into the room.

SHARONDA

Lee, where'd you put my make-up
case...AHHH I'M GON' TELL. OOH LEE,
I'MA TELL DADDY!

Laura leaps from the bed and blocks Sharonda's path to the
doorway. Alike tackles Sharonda and wrestles her down to the
floor. Laura slams the door, shuts and locks it.

SHARONDA

Eeew get that thing, off a me! Get
it off me it's nasty! I'm tellin'!

LAURA

Shhh!!

ALIKE

Shut up!!! Thought you locked the
door?!

SHARONDA
Eew. Get it offa me!

LAURA
I did!

ALIKE
OK, look I'm offa you. Just be
quiet and calm down.

SHARONDA
I'm tellin' that you got that
thing.

LAURA
You can't tell.

SHARONDA
I'm telling.

ALIKE
Shut up.

SHARONDA
It looks nasty.

ALIKE
(to Laura)
See, I told you so.

SHARONDA
Where's my make up case? I know
you got it.

ALIKE
I just borrowed it.

Alike pulls off the dildo and harness.

SHARONDA
Give it back.

Alike fishes the make-up case out of her backpack. She holds
it out to Sharonda. Sharonda reaches for it. Alike jerks it
back.

ALIKE
Promise you won't tell.

SHARONDA
Give it back.

Alike flips open the make up case and jabs the dildo at it,
stopping short of the surface of the make up.

LAURA
I haven't spoken to her in awhile.
She's fine.

AUDREY
Well I hope so. And I'm so glad to
hear your sisters finally getting
back on her feet. Wasn't she--

LAURA
She's good.

ALIKE
Mom?!

Audrey fixes Laura with another hard glance and shoos Sharonda down the hallway. Laura starts to shut the door, but Audrey stops it with her arm.

AUDREY
I think we'll just leave this open.
Let some air circulate in here.

LAURA
I was just about to leave, anyway.
So...

Audrey lingers, looking back and forth between Laura and Alike. Alike frowns at her mother.

Satisfied that the conversation is over, Audrey moves off toward her room. Laura checks to make sure she's gone and whispers to Alike.

LAURA
Just try it.

27 INT. NIGHTCLUB COUCH - EVENING

27

Alike squirms in her seat.

LAURA
Will you chill? You just gotta get
used to it.

Alike tugs at her crotch and attempts to cross her legs.

ALIKE
Owww!

Alike uncrosses her legs and yanks at her jeans. Laura bats her hand away.

LAURA

Sit still, people gon' think you got something.

ALIKE

This joint hurts, man. I'ma go take it off.

LAURA

You not gon' take it off.

ALIKE

I'm gonna take it off.

LAURA

Where you gonna take it off at?

ALIKE

In the bathroom.

LAURA

Then where you gon' put it? You gonna walk around the club with a dick in your hand? Chill. I knew we shouldn't have done this. You blowin' me right now.

ALIKE

Then I'm out.

LAURA

Nah, you're 'bout to stay and go through this. You're the one who wanted to meet her, not me.

ALIKE

Then you come on, too. Hurry up--

A group of girls approaches, one of them we recognize as Mika, the girl that likes Alike, from the bathroom. Laura stands to greet them. Nervous introductions all around. Laura shoots Alike a warning glance.

28

INT. NIGHTCLUB COUCH - LATER

28

Laura is hugged up with two girls at the end of the couch. Alike fidgets in her seat and keeps pulling at the knees of her jeans. Mika hand in chin, stares into space. Alike does another pull-fidget combo. Mika rolls her eyes at her.

MIKA

You alright?

ALIKE

Yeah, no, yeah it's just--there's a spring in the cushion or something.

MIKA

You wanna switch seats?

ALIKE

No, I'm good.

MIKA

And you don't wanna dance?

LAURA

Hey ya'll we're about to go dance!

ALIKE

No, no not really. I'm not really feeling the music.

Mika sighs and looks around at the other dancing couples. Alike gives her jeans another tortured tug. Agonized minutes of awkward booming silence.

MIKA

Well you don't mind right? I mean you don't mind if I go dance with somebody else?

ALIKE

No, do your thing.

MIKA

If you change your mind--

ALIKE

No, no it's cool.

Mika escapes the couch and disappears into the crowd.

29

INT. ALIKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

29

Alike slips off her shoes and eases through the kitchen. Audrey flicks on the light, blocking the hallway entrance.

AUDREY

I hope it was worth it.

ALIKE

Mom I lost--

AUDREY

Save it.

ALIKE
It won't happen--

AUDREY
Oh I know it won't.

30 INT. ALIKE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 30

Alike peels off her jeans and lobs them into the top of her closet. She unharnesses the dildo and wads the tangled mess up in an old t-shirt. She stuffs the wad in back of the closet and slams the closet door shut, staring at her reflection in the mirror.

Alike reconsiders and yanks the wad back from the closet.

31 EXT. ALIKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 31

Alike stuffs the wad into a trash bag and plunges it deep into a neighbor's garbage can. She scurries back into her building and doesn't look back.

32 INT. ALIKE'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING 32

Alike skulks on the couch in wrinkled khaki pants and a cotton button down shirt. An obnoxious R&B video plays on the TV. Sounds of bustling and the drone of a hair dryer fill the room.

AUDREY (O.S.)
Turn that mess off!!

Alike turns the television volume to low and continues watching.

AUDREY (O.S.)
Sharonda?! Sharonda are you ready?!
Stop lollygagging!

SHARONDA (O.S.)
I'm coming!

AUDREY
Lee are you ready?! Lee?!

Audrey hobbles out with one high heel on. She snatches the remote from Alike and snaps the TV off.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
I said off. Thought you were ready?

ALIKE

I am ready.

AUDREY

You're not going to church looking like that. Where's the blouse I bought you?

ALIKE

What's wrong with this?

The front door bursts open, and Arthur tromps in, his police uniform hanging open over a white undershirt. He slings a heavy F.O.P tote bag on the floor and strips off his shirt as he crosses to the kitchen. Audrey rushes over and buzzes around him.

33

INT. ALIKE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

33

AUDREY

Hey there, you're home early--well actually late. I thought you would have called--

ALIKE

Dad--

ARTHUR

Do what your mom says.

Audrey scuttles over to where Arthur is now digging through the open fridge. He pulls out a foil covered plate, tears open one corner, sniffs it.

AUDREY

Are you hungry? Let me heat it up for you.

Arthur heads toward the microwave with the plate. Audrey intercepts the plate from him and dumps the contents into a skillet.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

I'll heat it up on the stove for you. Tastes better.

ALIKE

Dad--

AUDREY

Lee!

ARTHUR
Leave me out of it.

AUDREY
Go get changed.

ALIKE
Dad, what's wrong with this outfit?

ARTHUR
Nothing.

ALIKE
See?

AUDREY
I'm not gonna argue with you.

ARTHUR
Do what she says.

ALIKE
Dad--

ARTHUR
(speaking bad Tarzan
Swahili)
Umgowa!

AUDREY
And put on a skirt!

Alike stalks off to her bedroom. Sharonda bounces into the kitchen.

SHARONDA
Hey Dad!

AUDREY
Too much lipstick.

SHARONDA
It's lipgloss.

Audrey wheels on Sharonda with a death glare.

SHARONDA (CONT'D)
Okay, okay.

ARTHUR
Gimmie kiss.

Sharonda pecks dad on the cheek. Dad wipes his cheek and rubs his fingers together.

Sharonda giggles and bounds back into her bedroom. Audrey slides a steaming plate in front of Arthur.

AUDREY
Did you talk to her?

ARTHUR
Get me a beer, please. Sharonda's fine.

AUDREY
I'm talking about Lee.

ARTHUR
Alike. And I don't see that there's a problem.

AUDREY
I'm tired of this tomboy thing she's got going on. And Laura. You said you were going to handle it.

ARTHUR
Umm-hmm.

AUDREY
She needs a male point of view.

ARTHUR
I said okay, dammit! Now can I please have a beer please?

AUDREY
It's Sunday morning.

ARTHUR
It goes with the spaghetti.

Audrey lifts a beer out of the fridge and slides it in front of Arthur. She pulls up a chair as he plows through the meal, her expression softening as she caresses his forearm.

AUDREY
Do you *have* to work tonight?

ARTHUR
To put food on the table and clothes on our backs, no. To go out to restaurants and keep designer sneakers in the closet, yes.

AUDREY
Are you forever gonna be mad?

ARTHUR

Are you forever going to be happy?
 (beat)
 You made that decision a long time ago.

AUDREY

We *both* made sacrifices.

Alike stomps back into the kitchen wearing the pink v-neck that Audrey bought her and an unflattering pleat-front skirt. Arthur stifles a giggle behind his beer can.

ARTHUR

You look beautiful, baby.

AUDREY

Tuck your blouse in.

ALIKE

This isn't me.

AUDREY

Tuck your blouse in.

ARTHUR

Leave it out.

Audrey frowns at Arthur. Arthur stands his ground.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

I think it's fine out. What's the deal with you and Laura?

ALIKE

What deal?

AUDREY

Comin' in late...

ALIKE

Dad, I hardly ever--

ARTHUR

Why don't you give that a break for a little while?

ALIKE

Dad, come on...

AUDREY

(to Alike)
 You heard him!

(MORE)

(to Sharonda)
Sharonda! You done?!

Alike spins into the living room defeated.

SHARONDA (O.S.)
Coming!

AUDREY
You coming with us?

ARTHUR
Nope. Sleep.

AUDREY
We could go to a later service. The
one o'clock--

ARTHUR
I said NO!!

Arthur slams his fork on the plate. Audrey flinches. Alike looks up. Sharonda appears in the doorway, looking from Audrey to Arthur.

SHARONDA
I'm ready.

Arthur pushes up from the table.

ARTHUR
Alike, you look beautiful.
Everybody looks beautiful, okay?

Arthur disappears into the bedroom. Alike snatches up her bible and launches out the door, Sharonda follows. Audrey pulls on her sunglasses and hat and slams the door behind her.

34 EXT. CHURCH - DAY

34

Alike sits in the passenger seat of the car as Audrey chit chats with other churchgoers. Sharonda sits in the back seat, flipping through a CD case and occasionally passing CD's to Alike to play. Alike faces stonily forward except to cast impatient glances in Audrey's direction. Audrey raps on the window.

AUDREY
Lee! Lee! Here's someone I want you
to meet.

Alike cracks the window an inch.

ALIKE

Huh?

Audrey motions to Bina standing by with her mother, Ms. Singletary. Alike cracks the window a little wider and acknowledges them with a half-hearted wave.

ALIKE (CONT'D)

Oh. Hey.

AUDREY

Get down out the car and come speak.

Laboriously, Alike rolls the window back up, turns off the car radio, and climbs down out of the car.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

What's wrong with you?

ALIKE

Alright, Mom.

AUDREY

You'll have to excuse her, she's been feeling rude lately.

MRS. SINGLETARY

Oh don't worry, Audrey, I understand how it is. Hormones. It's just a phase.

AUDREY

Alike, this is Mrs. Singletary, one of my co-workers and her daughter, Bina. Sylvia, Bina, this is my daughter Alike, we call her "Lee" for short.

Alike shakes both of their hands in turn.

ALIKE

Hi.

MRS. SINGLETARY

Hello.

ALIKE

Nice to meet you.

BINA

Hi.

AUDREY

And this is my youngest daughter,
Sharonda.

SHARONDA

Hi.

BINA

Hi.

MRS. SINGLETARY

Hi there, nice to meet you.

AUDREY

Lee, Bina goes to the same school
as you.

ALIKE

Cool.

BINA

Yeah, I think I've seen you around.
Mrs. Alvarado's class right? AP
English?

ALIKE

Yup.

Audrey looks pleased with herself. Alike squirms.

AUDREY

So. Now that we're all acquainted,
don't be a stranger.

MRS. SINGLETARY

Oh no, we won't.

AUDREY

Bina I think you and Lee may even
go to school the same way. Don't
you live off of St. James Place?

MRS. SINGLETARY

There is something to be said for
safety in numbers.

Bina nods. Alike squirms.

MRS. SINGLETARY (CONT'D)

Well, we need to be pushing off --
I'll call you about those VBS
workbooks.

Alike retreats into the car, Sharonda hops in behind her. Alike reaches over and turns the key in the ignition.

AUDREY
Alrighty, I'll be around. Take care.

Alike toots the horn. Audrey circles and gets in the driver's side.

35

INT. FAMILY CAR - CONTINUOUS

35

ALIKE
You're funny.

AUDREY
I don't know what your problem is.

SHARONDA
Can somebody put in this CD please?

Audrey cranks the ignition and starts to back out.

ALIKE
I don't know what you think is going to change.

AUDREY
I know God doesn't make mistakes. I know that much.

An invisible scab is ripped open in Alike and the fire dies in her eyes. Satisfied, Audrey slips the car into gear.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
You may not like Bina, but you're certainly gonna be spending much less time with that Laura person, I guarantee you that much.

SHARONDA
Moooom, can you--

AUDREY
Be quiet. Nobody's putting in anything. I'm gonna listen to what I want to listen to for a change.

Alike wilts against the window and tacky zydeco music leaks from the car as it jerks away from the curb and into traffic.

36

EXT. STREET - DAY

36

Alike strides down the sidewalk. Bina speedwalks to keep up.

BINA

Look, I don't like lying to my mother, that's all.

ALIKE

Then don't, she doesn't have to know.

BINA

She does. She asks me everyday.

ALIKE

So tell her yeah.

BINA

No, I'm sick of lying to cover for you.

ALIKE

So don't.

Bina stops short. Alike keeps walking.

BINA

Look Alike, Lee. Whatever it is you wanna be called. I'm not trying to hang out with you, either, but I'm not about to take an L for it. So stop dodging me, let's just go to school together and be done with it. We don't have to see each other any other time than that.

Alike doesn't miss a step. Bina yells after her.

BINA (CONT'D)

Whatever, my mother asks me again, I'm telling her. Then she can tell your mother, then it's whatever for you.

Alike stops short. Bina crosses the street and continues in the direction away from school. Alike spins around scanning the street, then catches sight of her on the opposite sidewalk.

ALIKE

Hey!

Bina keeps on pushing, the school now in sight.

ALIKE (CONT'D)

Hey!

Alike checks for traffic then dashes across the street to catch up with her.

ALIKE (CONT'D)

Hey look, I'm sorry.

BINA

Yeah, you sorry your mom is gonna bug out.

ALIKE

No for real, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be that way. It's just... OK, I am concerned that my, my mom will find out, but...

BINA

But?

ALIKE

It's not like that. It's just-- she's just. If you knew her, you'd understand. She's like, I don't know.

The girls walk in silence for a moment.

ALIKE (CONT'D)

So what's your favorite class?

BINA

You don't have to make small talk. Let's just walk.

ALIKE

I said I'm sorry. It's not you, it's just that my mom is like, she's like...

BINA

Overprotective?

Alike relaxes her shoulders, both relieved and surprised.

ALIKE

Yeah.

BINA

I can tell. I've seen--I mean, a lot of people's parents are like that.

ALIKE

Yeah?

BINA

Yeah.

ALIKE

Yeah. But probably not like mine.
But anyway...

BINA

Anyway, like I said, we don't have
to talk. Just walk.

Alike's cell phone chirps--it's Laura. Alike sighs and stuffs the phone back into her pocket.

37 INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - DAY

37

ALIKE (V.O.)

Hi! This is Lee, I'm not able to
answer my phone right now--

Laura snaps her cell phone shut. A GED study book still glossy and uncreased is propped open on the bed in front of her. She opens her cell phone again and pulls up Alike's number. Her thumb hovers over the 'talk' button. She snaps the phone shut and tosses it aside before turning the radio down and dragging the book closer. The cell phone rings and she snatches it up. A picture of a girl making a kissy face with the name "Tasha" underneath blinks onto the screen and Laura snaps the phone shut and tosses it aside. She hoists the GED book into her lap and lets her head hit the wall. There is a knock at her bedroom door and Candace peeks in.

CANDACE

How's it comin'?

LAURA

It's good.

Candace smiles at Laura and hesitates before closing the door. Candace turns the radio off before ducking back out. Laura sighs and flips back to the beginning of the book.

38 INT. SPORTS CLUB BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

38

Alike and Arthur cavort in a sloppy half-court game in the fluorescent glare of the gym. Well-heeled clientele cross to and fro munching power bars and sipping Gatorade. Arthur has an awful shot, but Alike's is worse. Alike heaves a huge airball past the basket.

ARTHUR

Oh my God!!

Alike cracks up as Arthur chases down the ball.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

That's just embarrassing!

ALIKE

You ain't got no range, either.

ARTHUR

Yeah but at least I hit the backboard. Damn.

Alike rushes to guard Arthur who dribbles clumsily around the key. He tries a crossover move and lobs an ugly shot toward the basket.

ALIKE

Brick!!

Laughing, they tussle over the rebound. Arthur recovers.

ARTHUR

What's the score?

ALIKE

One up.

ARTHUR

One?

ALIKE

Yup!

ARTHUR

One? Nah, I definitely have like three. At least three.

Giggling, the pair rollick in another squeaky-shoed play.

39

INT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

39

MACK, the store proprietor leans against the counter flipping through a newspaper. Arthur, in uniform mulls through the sports section. A ratty looking man, SOCK sips from a red plastic cup.

Mack cranks the volume on the tiny television above the counter.

MACK

It's on again... Check it out Free.
Channel 5 and Channel 2.

Arthur appears on the TV screen, dressed in suit, tie, sunglasses and looking impressive. He is talking to a news reporter and a bad news graphic reading "East Side Drug Bust-- Detective Arthur Freeman" blots out the bottom of the screen.

SOCK

Look who's big time.

MACK

Brother was looking clean though.
Looked just like, look like...uh--
Danny Glover!

Arthur and Mack laugh and slap hands. Sock sneers at their revelry.

The bell over the door tinkles and a heavysset BUTCH WOMAN strolls in. Her head is shaved and a thick wallet chain clinks against her ample carpenter pants. All three men turn to stare.

MACK (CONT'D)

Been more of that since they opened
up that new club 'cross the way.

Arthur grunts and returns to his paper.

SOCK

(to Butch Woman)

Excuse me Miss??!! Miiiiissss??!!

MACK

Certain Friday nights they got, you
know special parties going on.

SOCK

Or should I say Sir??!! Siiiiir??!!
Hello?!!

ARTHUR

Chill out, Sock.

SOCK

Hey, my man! You hear me talkin' to
you?!

Mack snatches Sock's cup. Sock pivots around to protest.

SOCK

Hey!!

MACK
Mind your business.

Sock yanks his cup back and turns to resume his taunts. He's caught off guard and stumbles backward as the woman pushes up to the counter with a case of liquor. Arthur steps out of the way and observes.

BUTCH WOMAN
And a pack of Kools.

Mack nods and fishes under the counter.

SOCK
Say, I been trying to get your attention. Do you go by Sir or Miss?

MACK
That'll be all ma'am?

BUTCH WOMAN
Yeah.

SOCK
Look I just had a simple question I wanted to ask. See, I just want to know how does pussy taste?

The woman directs her full attention at Sock for the first time. Mack watches as he quickly punches in the sale. Arthur stiffens.

SOCK (CONT'D)
You know, I just wanna know if you go with women for the taste, or is it just you're too big, black, and ugly so don't no man want you?

Sock laughs at his own nasty joke and takes a sip from his cup.

MACK
\$65.07 ma'am.

The woman counts out the money and smiles at Sock.

BUTCH WOMAN
I can't lie, pussy do taste good.

SOCK
Oh yeah?

The woman takes her time putting away her change.

BUTCH WOMAN (CONT'D)
 Maybe you should try it yourself
 sometime. Or better yet--

The woman picks up her case.

BUTCH WOMAN (CONT'D)
 --ask yo' wife how she likes me!

The woman winks at Sock. Arthur chokes back a guffaw. As soon as the woman clears the door, Arthur and Mack explode in laughter. Sock is livid and screams after her.

SOCK
 Fuckin' Bulldagger! He-She! Dyke!

MACK
 Ask your wife!

ARTHUR
 She told you.

SOCK
 She ain't tell me shit! I don't
 know what the fuck y'all niggas are
 laughing for!

MACK
 Awww shut up. Your big mouth got
 you in trouble as usual.

SOCK
 Thought you was my friend, Mack.
 But I guess I ain't expect you to
 defend me Free, the way your
 daughter is--

Arthur slams Sock against the counter before he can finish his sentence.

ARTHUR
 Say what?!

MACK
 He don't mean nothin'! He don't
 know what he's talking about!

Arthur grinds Sock's collar tighter around his trembling fist. Sock glares back, clearly punked.

MACK (CONT'D)
 He ain't moved outside a two-mile
 radius of where he crawled out his
 mammy's pussy. He don't know shit.

SOCK
 (to MACK)
 I been to Poughkeepsie!

Arthur snorts and flings Sock loose.

MACK
 Carry your Poughkeepsie ass on out
 of my store!

Mack sweeps Sock's plastic cup off the counter and into a
 garbage can. Sock tromps to the door.

SOCK
 Fuck y'all!

ARTHUR
 I should arrest your ass.

SOCK
 Man, fuck y'all!!

MACK
 Free, don't pay him no mind. Just
 talkin' trash.

Mack playfully jabs him in the shoulder and bustles
 underneath the counter. Arthur's eyes linger on the door and
 his jaw tightens.

40 INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN - DAY 40

Laura swings through the front door of her apartment, Alike
 close behind. She slides two twenty dollar bills underneath
 the ceramic hen on the table and breezes into her bedroom.

41 INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - LATER 41

Alike is a paper doll in Laura's floor length mirror, dressed
 only in boxers and a wife beater. Laura holds a bright orange
 polo shirt up in front of Alike's torso. Alike cocks her head
 to the side and considers.

LAURA
 Damn, this is your color. So what's
 the deal incog-negro?

ALIKE
 Mom has me hemmed up.

LAURA

Your phone ain't broke. You coulda called a nigga. Put this on.

Laura pulls away the orange polo shirt and hands Alike a turquoise one instead. Alike hoists the oversized shirt over her head.

ALIKE

My bad. She's making me hang out with this chick from church. It's crazy.

LAURA

Makin' you?! You a grown-ass woman, bruh!

Laura shakes her head as she plucks a brand new baseball cap from the wall rack and drops it onto Alike's head. Alike considers and takes it off. Laura puts another cap in its place. Before Alike can object, Laura tosses her a pair of denim shorts.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Try these with it. So I guess the piers is out for Saturday, huh?

ALIKE

I don't even know if that's me anymore.

Alike struggles into the jean shorts, widening her stance so they don't fall down. Laura tosses her a belt and admires Alike's reflection.

LAURA

Yeah, that's hot, yo. You should rock that.

ALIKE (CONT'D)

I was gonna see if you wanna do something different?

Alike strips off the baseball cap and hangs it back on the rack.

LAURA

Different like what?

Alike peels out of the polo shirt.

ALIKE

I don't know--maybe like a open mic or something.

LAURA

Open mic? Nah, man. It's plenty chicks at the piers, you just gotta be more confident.

Laura crosses to her closet and scans its inventory. The jeans are arranged crisply on hangers from light to dark and some still have store tags. Most of the shirts are still enclosed in protective plastic covers from the dry cleaners. Laura passes Alike a perfectly folded button down shirt.

LAURA (CONT'D)

You can rock this. I haven't even worn it yet. But I understand if you got better things to do.

Alike holds the shirt against her torso and stares at her reflection. She catches Laura's eager look in the mirror and wilts.

ALIKE

Nah, I'm down.

LAURA

You sure? I don't want you getting hemmed up.

ALIKE

Nah seriously, I'm down for whatever.

LAURA

Real?

ALIKE

Promise.

LAURA

That's what's up! I'ma take the whole day off. It's gonna be tight watch... we gon' do it up!

Laura holds a new pair of jeans against her body and does a little dance. Alike laughs wanly.

42

INT. ALIKE'S PARENT'S BEDROOM - EVENING

42

Audrey sits between Alike's knees as Alike oils her scalp. Alike takes her time, massaging each braid between her hands before moving to the next. Audrey reads an Essence magazine, the cover of which reads "101 Ways to Please Your Man."

ALIKE

You should wear your hair down
sometimes.

AUDREY

Your father likes it up.

ALIKE

It looks nice down.

Alike catches her mother's eye in the mirror's reflection,
they share a sad moment. Audrey closes the magazine and
tosses it back onto the bed.

AUDREY

Maybe. Anyway give this back to
Bina's mom when you go over
tomorrow night.

ALIKE

Saturday night?!

AUDREY

We talked about this.

ALIKE

No we didn't.

AUDREY

Lee--

ALIKE

I had plans for this weekend.

AUDREY

Well, you don't have to go to
Bina's on Saturday night, you can
always stay home with me.

ALIKE

Oh my God!

43

INT. BINA'S BEDROOM - EVENING

43

Bina sits on the floor, flipping through CD's. Alike sits in
a chair, head in hand, completely disinterested.

BINA

You like Destiny's Child?

ALIKE

Uhh-uhh.

Jay-Z? BINA

Nope. ALIKE

Fifty? BINA

ALIKE
No, I don't really like any of that
commercial bullshit.

Bina looks up, off balanced.

BINA
Oh. Who do you like?

Alike checks the time on her phone.

ALIKE
Shit!

Alike starts packing her backpack.

ALIKE (CONT'D)
Just more underground stuff. None
of that crap they play on the
radio.

BINA
Like who?

ALIKE
People you probably haven't heard
of. Conscious stuff.

BINA
Like who?

ALIKE
Roots. Black Star. Asheru and Blue
Black. Pharcyde.

BINA
Pharcyde? I heard of Pharcyde.

ALIKE
Ah--for real?

BINA
Yep. Tribe? J-Rawls? Bahamadia?

Alike perks up, looking genuinely interested for the first time.

ALIKE

Uh-oh, whatchu know about Bahamadia? Let me find out....

BINA

I'm not as generic as you think.

The phone rings. Mrs. Singletary answers from another room. Alike and Bina freeze, listening.

MRS. SINGLETARY (O.S.)

Hello? Hi Audrey. Yes. Yeah she's here. I understand--

Alike sulks. Bina flips to the back of the CD book.

BINA

Alright, how about Rock?

ALIKE

It's cool.

BINA

Whatchu know about Santogold? Since you all underground and stuff.

ALIKE

She's tight.

BINA

Tamar-kali?

ALIKE

I haven't heard of her, I heard of Res.

Alike hoists the backpack onto her shoulder and stands to leave.

BINA

Oh no this is way better, you gotta check her out.

Bina jams her iPod onto the stereo adapter. The thick, fierce guitar rhythms of Tamar-kali's "Boot" consume the room. Bina chants the lyrics along with the music.

BINA (CONT'D)

"Her hair is short. Her legs are brown. Her lips are full. Her head hangs down."

Alike plops back down in her chair.

ALIKE

Wow.

44 INT. ALIKE'S KITCHEN - SAME TIME INTERCUT

44

Audrey smooths a pink sticky note onto a foil covered plate and shoves it into the fridge. The doorbell rings and she rushes across the room and opens the door in her most sing-song voice.

AUDREY

He-llooo.

LAURA

Hello Mrs. Freeman. Is Lee home please?

AUDREY

She's out with her friend right now, Laura. You take care.

Audrey starts to close the door. Laura stops it with her hand.

LAURA

Oh. Umm do you know when she'll be back?

AUDREY

No, I believe she's out for the evening.

LAURA

Oh, because we had umm... alright then... Thank you.

AUDREY

Goodnight.

Audrey shuts the door harder than necessary. Laura checks her phone and shakes her head.

45 INT. BINA'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME INTERCUT

45

BINA

"Twist a virgin 'round your dirty little finger!

(MORE)

Blood is gone but the memory
lingers...twist a virgin 'round
your bloody little finger, love is
gone, but the memory lingers!"

Alike is bobbing her head, backpack forgotten on her
shoulder. Bina cranks the volume down.

ALIKE
Yo, this shit is hot!

BINA
Told you. Don't you have to go?
I'll cover. It's cool.

ALIKE
Nah, I wanna stay.

Alike slings her backpack to the floor and pulls the CD book
into her lap. Her cell phone rings and she ignores it.

46 EXT. THE PIERS - LATER

46

The pier is a parade of mohawks, curly weaves, tight jeans,
and rainbow belts as groups of baby dykes, young queens, and
gender queer youth of all shades of brown stroll cavort, and
strut seeing and wanting to be seen. Equally bedecked
observers hoot and yell from bench and rail perches on both
sides. Laura jabs numbers into her cell phone. Competing
threads of house music throb across the boardwalk in muffled
bursts as groups of ballers vogue and prance behind her.

ALIKE (V.O.)
Leave a message and I'll call you
back. BEEP.

Laura yanks her phone away from her ear and looks at the
screen. She starts to hang up but pulls it back to her ear.

LAURA
Where you at? Hit me up when you
get here.

47 INT. BINA'S BEDROOM - LATER

47

Alike and Bina are sprawled in the floor. Bina DJ's from her
laptop.

ALIKE
Mrs. Alvarado was trying to get me
to check out this one place.

Alike hands her the flyer. Bina laughs and tosses it back.

BINA

Oh hell, no. That's for old people--
I'll write down some places you
should check out. Maybe you could
read some of my stuff, too.

ALIKE

Definitely.

48

EXT. THE PIERS - SAME TIME INTERCUT

48

Laura scowls at her cell phone screen. She shoves the phone in her pocket and pulls her hoodie up against the chill of the evening. Brake lights bathe Laura and her circle of AG's in red as late-night predators cruise the strip for fresh meat. Laura catches sight of shady sexual encounters in an alley across the street and looks away. One of the entourage passes Laura a joint and she inhales deeply. A few of the girls have backpacks and the group is pensive as they break off and scatter into the night one by one.

PIER GIRL #1

'Member when we used to stay out
here all night?

PIER GIRL #2

Shit, *used* to?

PIER GIRL #1

You stay with your sister now, huh?

Laura nods and spits.

PIER GIRL #2

Lucky as hell.

49

INT. AP ENGLISH CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

49

AP English class is a safe haven. The desks are pulled together in a rough circle and are filled with heavily pierced, dyed hair, and vintage clothes types. Mrs. Alvarado sits cross-legged atop her desk taking notes. Alike stands at the center of the circle reciting an original poem.

ALIKE

A butterfly, briefly
Suffocated
On the mucous of its own change
Imprisoned

(MORE)

By the membranous chaff of its own
 underdeveloped
 Wings
 And
 Cramped
 In the darkness of the too-tight
 cocoon of its own creation
 Pauses
 Thinking death inevitable
 Prepares to die in the absolute
 solitude
 Of Swollen Husk.
 A c r a c k appears
 A thin jagged light connecting
 The inner to the outer world
 A butterfly, briefly
 Paralyzed by the imminence of death
 Discovers life is possible.

The class claps.

MRS. ALVARADO
 Comments? Critiques? Julie, tell me
 what you think.

A forest of hands go up as Alike winds her way back to her
 seat. A few classmates whisper brief encouragements. Bina
 nods and smiles at Alike. Unguarded, Alike smiles back.

50 EXT. STREET - DAY

50

Bina and Alike troop home at a more leisurely pace. Alike
 breaks the silence for once.

ALIKE
 I liked your story, though. It was
 tight.

BINA
 Yeah? Which one? The one about the--

ALIKE
 The one about karma, how things
 come back to you. That one, I
 thought it was tight.

BINA
 For real? Thanks. I wasn't gonna
 say anything, but I liked yours
 too.

ALIKE
 Why?

BINA
Why did I like it or why wasn't I
gonna say anything?

ALIKE
Why did you like it?

BINA
I don't know. I guess because it
felt honest.

ALIKE
Oh.

BINA
Didn't you have on a different
shirt earlier?

ALIKE
What?

BINA
Nothin'.

ALIKE
No, what'd you say?

BINA
Nothin'.

ALIKE
Yeah, I had on a different shirt.

BINA
Oh... Well, that's cool.

ALIKE
So why weren't you gonna say
anything about it?

BINA
About your shirt?

ALIKE
About the poem.

BINA
Cause you're moody.

ALIKE
Moody?

BINA
And quiet.

ALIKE
Man, I'm not moody.

BINA
Yeah, right.

Bina stops.

ALIKE
What?

BINA
This is me.

Alike looks up at the stoop, surprised.

BINA (CONT'D)
It's not so bad when there's some
conversation, huh?

Alike looks away.

BINA (CONT'D)
You wanna come up?

51 INT. BINA'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

51

Alike sits on Bina's twin bed, looking around and really taking in the room for the first time. She reaches over and picks up a little molded soldier figure off of the shelf. Bina fishes around in a rack of CDs.

ALIKE
Who gave you this?

BINA
What the bear? My dad.

ALIKE
No, this.

Alike holds the figurine out, Bina looks at it over her shoulder.

BINA
Oh that. Girl, my stupid ex-
boyfriend gave me that.

ALIKE
Oh. Cute.

Bina opens a CD case and pulls the booklet out.

BINA

Not really. I mean I guess it was
at the time.

Bina lobs the little army man into a trash can across the
room and hands Alike the booklet.

BINA (CONT'D)

Anyway, this is the other artist I
was telling you about. Her stuff is
like, bouncier.

A buoyant Afropunk beat wafts through the bedroom. Bina plops
down on the bed next to Alike.

ALIKE

This is straight. You'll burn me a
copy?

BINA

Yeah, I have a bunch of other
stuff, too.

(beat)

So who do you hang out with? I
don't really see you with anybody.

Alike shrugs and rifles through her backpack. She pulls out
her composition book. Awkward silence.

BINA (CONT'D)

I didn't mean it like that. I was
just asking because I was curious.
I don't really like anybody that
goes there either.

ALIKE

My friend Laura used to go there.
Not now, but she's going back.

BINA

Oh because, I was just gonna say--
I'm going to this house party and
you can come if you want to.

Bina waves her hand at the radio.

BINA (CONT'D)

They play this kind of music.

ALIKE

Sure. How'm I supposed to dress?

BINA
 You don't *dress*. You just come
 however. Come as you are.

Alike nods.

BINA (CONT'D)
 Can I see?

Bina snatches the book from Alike's hands and starts flipping through pages before Alike can answer.

ALIKE
 Yeah...But that's mainly old stuff,
 though.

BINA
 This is the one you did today?

ALIKE
 Yeah.

BINA
 Nice.

Bina offers the journal back to Alike. Alike reaches for it. Bina pulls it away at the last second--an impromptu game of keep away.

BINA (CONT'D)
 Take it.

Alike misses again. The girls crack up.

BINA (CONT'D)
 Sorry, here.

Bina yanks it away again. Alike gives up, still smiling.

ALIKE
 You play too much.

BINA
 Seriously, it's right here. Just
 take it.

Alike summons the courage for one last swipe. She manages to grab it but Bina doesn't let go right away. The girls lock eyes during the extemporaneous tug-of-war.

ALIKE
 Thank you...

BINA
You're welcome...

Beaming with her victory, Alike busies herself with the journal. Bina recruits a small stuffed moose for her next foray. She dances the moose up Alike's arm and plants an exaggerated peck on her cheek with it.

BINA (CONT'D)
Mmmwaahhh!

The girls erupt into renewed giggles. Bina tosses the stuffed animal aside and scoots closer to read over Alike's shoulder.

BINA (CONT'D)
What's so private?

ALIKE
Nothin', just my writings...

Bina studies Alike's profile. She leans in and pecks Alike on the cheek. Alike lets the kiss soak in, glancing at Bina sidelong. Bina leans in again, this time planting a long kiss on Alike's lips. Alike pulls away. Bina tenses for the verdict.

ALIKE (CONT'D)
Why'd you do that for?

BINA
Sorry---

ALIKE
No, I'm sorry. I just umm...I gotta go.

BINA
I thought--

ALIKE
Sorry.

Alike blindly grabs up her things and rushes the door, Bina flounders in her wake.

Laura and a group of friends play a rowdy game of spades. A cute Puerto Rican girl is draped around Laura's neck like a PERSONAL CHEERLEADER. Music blasts from the TV but doesn't drown out the hoots and banter of the rollicking entourage. There is a knock at the door.

LAURA
You'll get that for me?

One of the friends breaks away from the pack, opens the door without greeting and walks away. Alike is left alone to escort herself in. Laura hardly looks up as Alike stops at the fringes of the pack.

ALIKE
Wassup man.

A collective grumble of greeting goes up around the table although no one addresses Alike directly. Laura slams the table and raises her hands in triumph.

LAURA
Board, goddammit!! I told you!

PIER GIRL #1
Awww, we shoulda been done set you!

Laura slaps hands with her partner. The unlucky pair of partners argue. The personal cheerleader kisses Laura on the neck. Alike looks away.

PERSONAL CHEERLEADER
Good game, baby!

LAURA
What's good, Lee?

ALIKE
Just came to say wassup.

LAURA
Whatchu got, Ty?

PIER GIRL #2
Three, maybe four.

LAURA
We goin' eight!!

Roars of disbelief from around the table. Alike is quickly forgotten in the ruckus. Alike circles to Laura's side. The personal cheerleader looks her up and down.

ALIKE
Can I talk to you for a second?

LAURA
Now I got to cut you!! Grab 'em partner. We gonna run a Boston on that ass!

(MORE)

(to Alike)
Yo, I'm busy right now.

More raucous laughter from the table. Alike endures another few moments of card slapping, table pounding dejection before leaning into Laura's ear.

ALIKE
I really need to talk to you--

LAURA
I said later!

Wide-eyed silence and scattered snickers around the table. Laura resumes her hand and the game banter cranks back up. Alike picks up her face and slips away.

PIER GIRL #3
Thought that was your girl?

LAURA
Mind your business. Bam! That's what I thought!

Laura slaps another card on the table and takes a deep swig of water.

53 INT. ALIKE'S PARENT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 53

Audrey lies awake in bed. The clock on the nightstand indicates a little past two in the morning. She looks at the sliver of light underneath the bedroom door, the sound of Arthur's key in the door breaks the silence. Arthur's voice in hushed tones. Audrey rolls over and faces the wall.

54 INT. ALIKE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 54

Alike watches her father's footsteps break up the light beneath her door. She tosses off her blankets and springs into the hallway.

ALIKE
(loud whisper)
Hey Dad!

She is talking to empty air. She eases down the hallway toward the kitchen and the sound of his muffled voice.

ALIKE (CONT'D)
Dad?

ARTHUR (O.S.)
 Come on now, you know that's not
 what I want. That's not what I'm
 saying. That's not--listen to me.
 Are you gonna listen to me?

ALIKE
 Mom?

Alike stops short outside the kitchen door, confused.

ARTHUR (O.S.)
 Lee? Hold on.

55 INT. ALIKE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

55

Alike swings around the corner.

ALIKE
 Huh?

ARTHUR
 No, not you.
 (into phone)
 Hey, I'll talk to you later,
 alright? My daughter's up.

Arthur flips his cell phone shut and tucks it into his
 pocket. He fishes a beer out of the fridge.

ALIKE
 Who was that?

Arthur sips his beer and walks over to the kitchen table. A
 foil covered plate with a little pink sticky note waits.

ARTHUR
 What you doing up?

ALIKE
 Just wanted to talk.

Arthur crumples the sticky note and tosses it into the trash
 without reading it. He peels up one side of the foil, peeks
 at the food underneath, and launches it into the trash, too.

ALIKE (CONT'D)
 Dad, the plate--don't trash the
 plate.

Arthur strips off his dress shirt and tie and flings them
 into the living room.

Alike rescues the plate from the garbage and carefully lays it in the sink so it doesn't clatter.

ALIKE (CONT'D)
Aren't you hungry?

ARTHUR
Ate already.

ALIKE
You ate at work?

ARTHUR
No, just grabbed some take out.

ALIKE
Oh. Where?

Arthur explodes.

ARTHUR
Why you asking me all these goddamn questions, girl? What's wrong with you? You don't question me.

ALIKE
Sorry.

Alike starts to head back to her room.

ARTHUR
Hold up. I'm sorry, Alike come on back. Look-- I got patties...

Arthur tosses a greasy bag onto the table and pulls out a chair for her.

ALIKE
Beef?

ARTHUR
And chicken. C'mon.

Alike sits happily and the two munch in silence for awhile.

ARTHUR
Listen uh...Your momma's worried that uh...How's school? Straight A's?

ALIKE
Probably.

ARTHUR
That's right. Want a sip?

Arthur offers her the beer. Alike takes it to the head.

ARTHUR
I said a sip. A sip!

Arthur snatches the beer from her. They laugh. Alike picks at her patty, eating little pieces of crust.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
What's on you your mind?

ALIKE
Nothin'.

Arthur snorts.

ALIKE (CONT'D)
What if--what if...say somebody
liked you right?

ARTHUR
They *like* you? Or they like you,
like you?

ALIKE
Say they like you, like you.

ARTHUR
Uh-huh.

ALIKE
I mean, they haven't said anything
yet. But what if... so what if the
person is kinda like a friend, but
you know they like you more than
that?

ARTHUR
Well, I think that's the best way
to start--as friends.

ALIKE
But then what if...What if the
person is --

Arthur scents the heavy news packed in Alike's expressive
pause and scrambles to intercept her at the pass.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
What's his name? What grade is he
in?

(MORE)

I'ma look his ass up in the system.
Ha-ha! Wait 'till your mama finds
out. She'll be so goddamn happy.

Alike plays along, swallowing her disappointment.

ALIKE

Yeah.

Arthur pushes back from the table and pulls a fresh police uniform out the hall closet. He lays it across the back of the couch and unzips his pants. Alike turns her back to give him privacy.

ARTHUR

Say uh--there's this new--uh
women's club up there by the liquor
store--have you--do you--you
haven't heard anything about it,
right?

Alike shakes her head no. Arthur tucks his undershirt into his pants.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Called the Kitty Litter, the
Catbox, something like that?

ALIKE

Nah, I never even heard of it.

ARTHUR

Good. 'Cause you know that's a
uh...it's a rough neighborhood. You
know that right? I had a case over
there. You wanna be careful--stay
away from that element. Just in
case it ever comes up?

ALIKE

I'll be careful.

ARTHUR

Good. I know you will.

Alike glances back at Arthur and sees that he's decent. She scoots back around to face him. Arthur smooths his uniform shirt into his pants.

ALIKE

Dad, when you were on the phone
earlier? It sounded like...I
mean...I guess you're headed back
to work, huh?

ARTHUR
 Yep. Your mama still up?

ALIKE
 Probably.

ARTHUR
 Tell her I had to work.

Arthur picks up his work tote and kisses Alike on the forehead.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
 Love you.

56 INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN - MORNING

56

Laura jams a pillow into a t-shirt as a makeshift pillowcase as she escorts one of the pier girls to the couch. The pier girl looks slightly unkempt and is relieved to plop her knapsack on the floor. Laura tosses the pillow onto the couch.

LAURA
 My sister gets home at six so, you gotta be gone by then.

PIER GIRL #2
 Good looking.

LAURA
 There's some lunchmeat in there too, help yourself.

PIER GIRL #2
 'Preciate ya.

Laura pulls up close to the kitchen table. The GED test prep book, now dog-eared and worn is on the table in front of her.

She finds her place and copies notes and multiple choice answers into a spiral notebook. A stack of old Math and English textbooks are in a chair next to her and the room is peaceful and still save for the scratching of her pencil.

57 INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

57

Alike spies on Bina stuffing books into her locker. She draws her breath and approaches.

ALIKE
 Hey.

BINA

Hey.

A long awkward silence. Alike leans against the bank of lockers, not daring to make eye contact.

ALIKE

I'm sorry about the other day.

BINA

It's cool.

Bina pretends to rearrange books in her locker.

ALIKE (CONT'D)

Things have been crazy. But look, I'm sorry I bugged out. It's just...I didn't know that you...I wasn't expecting that.

BINA

You still coming to the party?

ALIKE

I don't know--I need to try and catch up with Laura.

BINA

Oh.

ALIKE

But I do wanna hang out...I mean...maybe we could do both.

Bina smiles and shuts the locker door.

BINA

Cool.

(beat)

You could spend the night if want to. Avoid the whole curfew thing.

ALIKE

Yeah...

BINA

You sure?

ALIKE

Yeah.

58 INT. FAMILY CAR - DAY

58

Arthur coaches Alike as she navigates the car to a jerky stop in front of Mack's liquor store.

ARTHUR

Easy, easy now. Watch your right hand side.

ALIKE

I am.

ARTHUR

Don't ride the brakes though. Good.

ALIKE

See? I'm getting better!! Can I drive back?

Arthur rubs his chest in mock heart-attack.

ARTHUR

I don't about that. You're shaky girl, you're shaky. Get us some chips and I'll think about it.

Arthur hands Alike a five dollar bill and she bounces down out of the car.

59 EXT. LIQUOR STORE - CONTINUOUS

59

Arthur shouts a greeting to Mack who lounges on a plastic chair outside his door. Sock and TWO OTHER MEN chit chat nearby. Their chatter lowers as Arthur approaches. Alike bops into the store.

MACK

Hey, baby!

ALIKE

Hey Mr. Ferguson!

MACK

I see Alike's been running circles around you again!

ARTHUR

Little bit, little bit. I still got it though.

Arthur claps Mack on the shoulder and glimpses Sock whispering to one of the men.

Arthur follows the men's gazes over to Alike at the potato chip rack. She twirls the string of her basketball shorts round and round her finger and idly hikes the collar of her t-shirt up over her nose. The smile evaporates from Arthur's face.

Sock peers back at him, smirking. Arthur starts toward him, when Alike saunters out between them.

ARTHUR
We better get going.

MACK (CONT'D)
Gone already?

ARTHUR
I'll holler at you later.

Arthur crosses the lot in a bound, snatches the car keys from Alike's hand, and hustles her into the car.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Get in the car.

ALIKE
But you said I could drive--

ARTHUR
I said get in the car!

Alike frowns, then catches sight of the men in front of the store. She slumps into the car and slams the door. Arthur piles into the driver's seat. They sit in silence for a moment, Alike traces the lines in her hands.

60 INT. ARTHUR'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

60

ARTHUR
Look...umm...you know you're
daddy's girl, right?

Alike avoids eye contact, staring out her window. Arthur searches her face a moment longer, then starts the car and pulls away in silence.

61 INT. ALIKE'S APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

61

Audrey reclines on the couch reading a book. The doorknob jiggles and Audrey folds the book against her chest, pretending to be asleep.

Arthur slips in and lays his holster on an armchair, not even bothering to approach Audrey's sleeping form.

Arthur peeks inside the fridge and inspects one of Audrey's foil covered plates. He tosses it aside and gathers sandwich ingredients instead. Audrey yawns and props herself up on one elbow.

AUDREY
Oh you're home?

ARTHUR
Hey.

AUDREY
I must've dozed off. How long have you been in?

ARTHUR
Hour.

Dad takes a bite of his sandwich and shoves the ingredients back into the fridge.

AUDREY
Did you see the plate in there?

ARTHUR
This is fine.

Arthur plops down on an armchair and flips the TV channel to sports highlights. Mom scoots over on the couch.

AUDREY
There's room over here. You can see the TV better.

ARTHUR
This is fine.

Arthur props his feet up on the coffee table and catches Audrey's hurt expression. He winks at her.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Thank you.

AUDREY
Just alike.

ARTHUR
Say what?

AUDREY

You and your daughter. Have you talked to Lee yet? I told you she--

ARTHUR

I talked to Alike.

AUDREY

You did?

ARTHUR

Everything's fine. Like I told you. Matter fact, she's got a *boyfriend*.

AUDREY

Boyfriend?

ARTHUR

Just give her some space.

AUDREY

Space? She's hardly ever home in the first place and you're just like her, creeping in all hours of the night. Both of you. Running around like you got something to hide, like *I'm* the big, bad witch and what about me? I'm home by myself all the time and Sharonda's getting older and starting to go out and pretty soon--

ARTHUR

I don't have anything to hide. Look I told you I talked to Alike and everything is fine.

AUDREY

Did you ask her?

Dad slams down his half-eaten sandwich and stands up.

ARTHUR

No, because I didn't have to. Besides, I would know okay? If anybody would know, it would be me. I know my daughter--

AUDREY

Your daughter?!!

ARTHUR

--better than anyone else and--

AUDREY

So now all of a sudden she's just
your daughter?!

ARTHUR

--I'm telling you she's just
fine!!

AUDREY

Well I guess I better not
have nothing else to say
then, huh?!

ARTHUR

That's your damn problem, you're
too much of a damn worry wart.

AUDREY

Let's hope you're right, *Detective*.

ARTHUR

Will you shut the fuck up?!

Audrey jerks to her feet and flings the book aside.

AUDREY

An hour? Really? I'm not your dumb
damn floozy in the street. And you
will not talk to me that way.

Audrey slaps the sandwich off Arthur's plate and storms to
the bedroom. Arthur sees Sharonda peeking from her bedroom
door but can't summon any words. Sharonda skitters into
Alike's bedroom.

62

INT. ALIKE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

62

Alike is awake, hands folded behind her head. Sharonda curls
up on top of the covers next to her.

ALIKE

I know you're not scared.

SHARONDA

I'm not.

The girls lay silently as they listen to Arthur bang around
in the kitchen.

SHARONDA (CONT'D)

Lee?

ALIKE

Hmm?

SHARONDA

I hope you know it doesn't matter
to me.

Alike rubs Sharonda's head and gives her a little squeeze.

ALIKE

I know.

63 INT. HOUSE PARTY/POETRY SLAM - NIGHT

63

A MOHAWKED WOMAN yowls into a microphone atop a coffee table turned stage. Kids roam from room to room nursing plastic cups. Some in elaborate ensembles, some in thrift store duds, others in plain old jeans, but no two people the same. Alike clad in simple shirt and jeans looks especially comfortable as she and Bina ease their way through the crowd. In between performers, guitar riffs rock the large loft apartment and render their voices practically inaudible.

MONTAGE:

--Bina introduces Alike to different people, Alike is welcomed

--Alike & Bina point out different performers, they laugh and talk in each other's ears

--Alike and Bina dance wildly in the middle of the crowd, surrounded by dozens of other clamorous bodies

--One performer beckons Alike up onto the table, Alike demurs at first, then leaps on top of the table. Bina cheers.

--Alike drags a giggling Bina out of the party and they crash into the open night

64 EXT. THE PIERS - NIGHT

64

Lights glisten across the Hudson River--distant orbs reflected in a thousand shimmering faux stars in weak defiance against the night sky. A sodium vapor glow veils everything in generous haloes, making the night more beautiful than it really is.

Dancing silhouettes, laughing, playing, yelling, flying, always dancing silhouettes punctuate the summer breeze with clapping set to the rhythm of soulful house. Like Puck on a midsummer's night, like Peter Pan and his lost boys. Among the silhouettes is Laura, enthroned atop a railing. Laura, smoking a joint grandly, surrounded by an adoring circle, a sycophantic harem of four.

Laura, completely miserable as she watches two other silhouettes drawing closer, spinning, collapsing, now righting, always connected. Alike and Bina. Bina smiles and snakes her arms around Alike's neck. Alike too shy to react, giggles and folds. Laura watches the pair spin and passes to the left before stalking off toward the connected shadows.

65

EXT. THE PIERS- CONTINUOUS

65

Laura cuffs Alike on the neck, pulling Alike's hoodie up over her face. Alike's laugh is tentative at first, not sure whether this is play or for real. Laura chuckles, breaking the ice. The pair slapbox and rough house, both missing with wild arcing blows. Laura aims a mini charge at Alike that lifts her off the ground and deposits her a short distance away. Alike swipes Laura's hat. Laura claps Alike on the shoulder and Alike waves to Bina. Bina waves and smiles.

ALIKE

So whatchu you think? She's cool right?

Laura looks around and shrugs. Laura plucks a fresh joint out of her coat and lights it.

ALIKE (CONT'D)

She's hot right? I told you. It was so tight. I'm tellin' you, you shoulda been there tonight!

Laura takes a puff and offers it to Alike.

LAURA

This one's just for me and you.

Alike waves it off, oblivious and intoxicated with the night.

ALIKE

And she's smart, too. She does poetry, you should hear it. It's like, it's good, you know?

Laura stops walking and Alike skips ahead, still chattering.

ALIKE (CONT'D)

I was thinking next weekend the three of us could--

LAURA

Look, I'm right here.

Alike snaps out of it.

ALIKE (CONT'D)

Oh my bad, I thought you were
beside me. Anyway, I was thinking--

LAURA

Look, I'm sorry for all the drama.

ALIKE

No, it's cool. I shoulda--

LAURA

What I'm saying is, I probably
overreacted.

(beat)

And then...I don't know. Seeing you
two together or whatever. I'm glad
to see you're finally happy.

ALIKE

C'mon man, you know you're my best
friend. Nobody's gonna --

LAURA

You don't need to say anything. I
just wanted to get it off my chest.
I'm happy for you, that's all.

Alike shakes her head. Her mouth moves but nothing comes out.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Because I love you, alright? And
I'm sayin'...I'm right here.

Alike is stopped cold, as the light bulb finally goes off. Laura takes a long drag on the joint. Bina and Mika stumble over giggling. Bina hooks Alike's arm. Mika kisses Laura on the neck. Laura snaps out of her gaze, her familiar smirk creeping back.

MIKA

We goin' to get something to eat?

LAURA

That's what's up.

ALIKE

Listen, umm--

Laura pinches out the joint and hands it to Mika who tucks it away.

LAURA

That's for later. Bina, nice to
meet you.

Alike folds her arms behind her head. Bina strokes Alike's stomach. Her finger's dance at the top of Alike's pajama bottoms. Their eyes meet. Alike sits bolt upright.

BINA

What're you doing? What's wrong?

ALIKE

This is uh... I never... I'm sorry,
I'm trippin' out.

BINA

It's okay. We don't have to.

Alike leans in and kisses Bina on the lips. Bina considers and takes Alike's chin in her hand and kisses her back. Bina places Alike's hand on her chest. Alike lets her hand linger, then traces Bina's shoulders.

67 INT. LAURA'S KITCHEN - MORNING

67

Laura stands over the kitchen table shuffling through the mail. She pauses at a stiff envelope with her name on it. The return address reads "NYS Educational & Testing Services". She flips the envelope over and looks around, she rips the top off and eases the top of a slip out of the envelope. The top of the slip reads "'Campbell, Laura' GED TESTING RESULTS."

68 EXT. BRONX HOME - MORNING

68

Laura shifts her weight on a painted concrete porch outside a small wooden frame home. The paint is peeling and the flowers in the window-box are dead. A rusted metal mailbox next to the door overflows with circulars. Laura lifts the circulars out of the box and trashes them. She picks up a discarded fast food bag and tosses it too. A dog barks from a neighboring yard. Laura pulls open the screen door and tries to peer in through the diamond shaped window in the main door, but it's covered over in aluminum foil. More barking. Laura surveys the street and bangs hard on the door. She snaps the screen door back and takes a big step backward. Laura shifts her weight and smooths her shirt. LAURA'S MOTHER, 54, and no-nonsense opens the door and frowns down at Laura through the screen.

LAURA

Oh.

Laura's mother crosses her arms and looks at Laura up and down.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Thought you might've stepped out or something? How've you been?

Laura's mother frowns up and down the block before refocusing on Laura. Laura takes a step closer to the door.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Me and Candy, you know we're doing real good.

Laura's mother puts her hand on the doorknob.

LAURA (CONT'D)

We might even be moving to a bigger place soon. You know she's workin' at the hospital now, yeah you'd be real proud of her. She might even go back and get her RN--

Laura takes another step forward.

LAURA (CONT'D)

How--? How's Pops? You look good. You look healthy, yeah you look real good. You know uh, we miss you and everything--

Laura's mother starts to close the door. Laura backs away.

LAURA (CONT'D)

I don't wanna take too much of your time. I just stopped by--you know I uh--I'm getting my stuff together too--I uh--

Laura fishes the stiff envelope out of her pocket and advances on the screen door again, holding it out.

LAURA (CONT'D)

So, I did it. I took the test and--

Laura's mother slams the door. Laura stands on her tiptoes and yells at the diamond shaped window.

LAURA (CONT'D)

I got my GED!

The lock on the door snaps into place. Renewed barking from across the street. Silence from the door. Laura brushes a fist across her eyes and stuffs the envelope into the mailbox.

LAURA (CONT'D)

But listen I--I gotta go. I gotta get to work but I'ma leave it for you to see. It was nice talking to you.

Laura backs off the porch and starts down the walkway. She stops halfway and bounds back onto the porch. She yanks the envelope out of the mailbox and jams it into her pocket. Laura storms off the porch and out of yard, never looking back.

69

INT. BINA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

69

Alike is asleep on the bed. Bina cleans up feverishly, "accidentally" bumping Alike awake. Alike yawns and rolls over, a huge grin spreading across her face as she remembers her surroundings.

ALIKE

Hey.

BINA

Hey.

Bina bolts to the dresser and crams clothes in.

ALIKE

You up already?

BINA

It's after one o'clock, actually.

Bina deposits an armful of clothes into the dirty clothes hamper, and then begins making the bed with Alike still in it. Alike pulls Bina down beside her.

ALIKE

What's wrong?

BINA

Nothin's wrong, I'm just cleaning up. Don't worry about it.

ALIKE

Okay then, I'll help you.

BINA

No, I got it.

Bina snatches a pillow from behind Alike and fluffs it. Alike, still oblivious, grins and traces Bina's shoulder.

ALIKE

Look um--I just wanted to say that
last night...last night was
amazing...thank you for--

BINA

Last night we were just playin'
around, that's all.

Bina flinches away from Alike's touch. Alike shoots a glance
at the door and drops her voice to a choked whisper.

ALIKE

Look... We can slow things down...
Nobody has to know that we're
together.

BINA

"Together"? Whoa, no...

ALIKE

Huh?! I thought... Look if you
don't want to call it that, that's
fine, but don't act like nothing
happened.

Bina moves away and levels her gaze at Alike for the first
time. Alike touches Bina's elbow, Bina flinches away.

BINA

Look, I'm not gay okay? This isn't
me--I wasn't--I'm not ready for all
this...

Alike recruits the discarded stuffed moose and dances it
around on the bed. Bina recoils and snatches it away.
Recognition seeps across Alike's pained face. Bina moves away
from the bed and turns her back on Alike.

Alike finds her pajama pants on the floor and yanks them on.
She pulls on jeans over her pajama bottoms and hauls a
sweatshirt down over her nightie. She flings her backpack
open on the bed and hunts around the room wildly gathering
her things. Alike goes in the bathroom and reappears with an
armful of toiletries, dumping them in the bag. Bina watches
her, arms folded. Alike takes one last look around the room
and heads for the door, running a sleeve across her face.

BINA (CONT'D)

Lee?

Alike ignores her and launches into the hallway. Bina runs
to her bedroom doorway.

BINA (CONT'D)

Wait--Lee?!

Alike beelines for the front door. Bina chases Alike across the room.

BINA (CONT'D)

Lee, stop please?

Alike wipes a sleeve across her swelling eyes and running nose and turns to face her. Bina takes several steps toward her. Alike lets go of the doorhandle, her voice cracks.

ALIKE

What?

BINA

You promise you won't tell anybody?

70 EXT. BINA'S HOUSE/STREET - DAY

70

Alike rages outside, weaving blind fury down the sidewalk. She kicks over a cluster of garbage cans and cyclones out into the street, narrowly missing getting hit by a car. She continues her zag to the other sidewalk, her pace quickening. She rips open her backpack and launches a baseball cap into the air. She tears a handful of wifebeaters from the bag and flings them into the street. Spinning and thrashing she wrenches out a football jersey and jams it into another garbage can. She circles back and kicks the can over. She hurtles her backpack into the trees like a discus and sheds her hoodie like a skin before disappearing into the scream of a subway station.

71 INT. ALIKE'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

71

Lee bursts into the living room and charges to her bedroom. Audrey, who has been waiting in the living room storms in after her.

AUDREY

Where in the hell have you been?!

Alike kicks off her shoes and paces the room.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

You hear me talking to you ?! Where you been? You left Bina's hours ago!!!! Lee--

ALIKE

I'M NOT YOUR HUSBAND!!!!

Audrey gasps in stunned silence.

ALIKE (CONT'D)

I'm not your husband so stop comin'
at me like I am. I'm not your
companion, I'm not your friend --
you made that abundantly clear--I'm
your daughter and I have my own
shit to deal with!!

AUDREY

LEE--don't you dare--Alike--I am
your Mother--

Audrey melts back against the doorjamb. Alike slings off her shirt and slams the door in Audrey's face. A livid Audrey bangs on the door and jiggles the handle.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

You must have lost your damn mind!
Wait until your father gets home!

72 INT. ALIKE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

72

Alike attacks her closet, ripping all the "girly" shirts from the hangers and hurling them toward a small vanity trashcan. She plunges back in and slams an armful of blouses to the floor. She launches a pair of pumps into the wall, followed by a chunky pair of Timberlands. Silent sobs rack her body as she tears off her own shirt and slings it at the mirror. She strips off her jeans and kicks them brutally into a corner. Alike considers her unclothed form in the mirror before collapsing onto the bed. She writhes against the pillows and covers her eyes with her elbow as darts of grief twist through her body. Blackout.

73 INT. ALIKE'S BEDROOM - LATER

73

Alike jerks awake in her bed, a pillow pulled down around her ears. The sound of a muffled argument leaks from her parents's bedroom. The shouting gets louder, and Alike sits upright in her bed as her father's footsteps boom past her doorway and into the living room. Audrey's voice trails him down the hallway, and Alike scrambles into a t-shirt and shorts.

74 INT. ALIKE'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

74

Arthur's hand is on the doorknob, a small tote flung over his shoulder. Audrey blocks the door, her hands on her hips. They both look up as Alike edges into the living room.

AUDREY
You see, that's exactly what I'm
talking about?! Get over here!

ARTHUR
Go back to bed!

AUDREY
No, you come tell your father what
you told me!

ARTHUR
Don't drag her into this, Audrey!
(to Alike)
Go to your room, Alike. Your mom
and I are having a discussion.

AUDREY
We are not discussing!! I wanna
know right now--

ARTHUR
Go to your room!

AUDREY
Your father's leaving us!!

ARTHUR
I am not leaving you!!

AUDREY
Sharonda, wake up!! Come see your
father leaving us!!

ARTHUR
I'm not fucking leaving!! Will you
stop saying that?!

AUDREY
Come say goodbyeeee!!

Audrey shoves Arthur toward the door. Reflexively, Arthur
raises his hand at Audrey. Audrey puffs up.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
Oh, what?! I wish you would!! Go
ahead!! Look girls, your daddy's
going to beat me!!

Sharonda bursts into tears behind Alike. Alike hurries
Sharonda back down the hallway.

ALIKE

Shhh. It's okay. Go in my room and lock the door. Don't come out, 'kay?

Sharonda bawls harder. Alike gently closes the door on her.

ALIKE (CONT'D)

It's gonna be okay.

75

INT. ALIKE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

75

Arthur and Audrey argue viciously.

ARTHUR (O.S.)

No! Dammit, that's not true! Look, will you stop sayin' that?!

AUDREY (O.S.)

It's the truth!!

Alike edges back into the living room, Audrey wheels on her. Arthur is beaten and cornered.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Your daddy's got a new girlfriend! Or did you already know that?! You know, I bet you did!!

ARTHUR

Audrey, stop it!! Alike go back to bed!

AUDREY

Meanwhile, your daughter's turning into a damn man right before your very eyes, and you can't even see it!!

Arthur drops his tote and advances toward Audrey, leveling a stiff finger at her face.

ARTHUR

No you take that back.! You shut the fuck up about that, Audrey!

Arthur gets in Audrey's face. Audrey leers back at him. Alike jumps between them.

ALIKE

Dad?! Stop!

ARTHUR
Go back to bed, Alike!!

AUDREY
Tell him, Lee!

ARTHUR
Don't call her Lee!

ALIKE
Mom, stoppit please!?

AUDREY
Tell your Dad where you hang out!
Tell him about your butch-ass
girlfriend--

ALIKE
Laura's NOT my girlfriend!!

ARTHUR
What the hell are you talking
about?! You don't know what the
hell are you talking about. Alike,
please just go to your room, baby!

Alike drops her gaze and backs away.

AUDREY
Tell him!

Arthur's expression cracks and he tears his focus from Audrey
to Alike.

ARTHUR
Tell me what?!

ALIKE
I'm not tellin' you nothin'.

AUDREY
Tell him you're a dyke! You tell
him you're a nasty ass dyke!!

ARTHUR
No she's not gay. Alike we didn't
raise you that way, baby.

Eyes still downcast, Alike just shakes her head and backs
away.

AUDREY
There!! You see!!

ARTHUR
You shut the hell up Audrey!!

Arthur extends his arms toward Alike, his voice trembling.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
I know that's not true. You tell
your mother right now, Alike. You
tell her it isn't true!!

Alike meets her father's eyes.

ALIKE
Dad--

ARTHUR
Don't you lie now, you tell the
truth!!

ALIKE
You already know.

ARTHUR
No, I don't know. You tell your
mother it's just a phase.

ALIKE
It's not a phase!

Arthur is stopped cold, his shoulders slump.

AUDREY
See, if you would've DONE
SOMETHING!!

ARTHUR
(to Alike)
What's wrong with you?

ALIKE
There's nothing wrong with me!

AUDREY
This is your fault!! If you had--

Arthur tears into Audrey, spittle flying.

ARTHUR
AUDREY WILL YOU SHUT THE FUCK UP!!!

AUDREY
 AND YOU TOO! YOU TOO! YOU TOO! OH
 GOD!!

Tears stream down Arthur's face as Audrey shakes free and aims one last blow at his face.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
 YOU SAY IT'S NOT TRUE!!!

76 INT. LAURA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

76

Click-clack. Click-clack. The rattle of circuit breakers echo through the bare darkness of Laura's small apartment.

LAURA
 Anything?

ALIKE
 No.

Click-clack. Click-clack.

LAURA
 How about now?

ALIKE
 No. Nothing.

LAURA
 Shit. Fucking building.

Laura bangs into something in the darkness.

LAURA (CONT'D)
 Owwww. Shit!

A small light flicks to life and grows larger. In its dim glow, Laura spots Alike leaning against a worn couch. The lights become two as Laura hands Alike a candle.

LAURA
 Here. Good thing I keep some these
 around.

Alike snorts thickly. Her words are slurred and nasal.

ALIKE
 Yeah, for your many women.

LAURA
 Hey, you thanking 'em now.

Laura holds her candle up to Alike's grim face.

LAURA

You okay?

Alike wipes at already dried tear streaks on her puffy face and looks down. Laura slides an arm around her waist and guides her into the small bedroom.

LAURA

You bring clothes?

ALIKE

Huh-uh. I stopped by the house--I stopped by---

LAURA

That's alright, man. You can wear some of mine. It's okay, c'mon. Lets get some sleep. My sister'll be home in a little bit, too.

77 INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - LATER 77

Overturned Ramen noodle cups litter the floor. Laura sips a beer and strokes Alike's head who sleeps fitfully in her lap.

78 INT. ALIKE'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING 78

Arthur is frozen in the middle of the living room with a contractor trash bag. He stoops and piles the shards of a broken lamp into the bag one by one. Sharonda peeks out at him from her bedroom door. Arthur looks up at her and Sharonda pushes the door shut.

79 INT. ALIKE'S PARENT'S BEDROOM - DAY 79

Audrey sits at the edge of her bed in a housecoat. Her hair is ruffled and flyaway. Her ankles are crossed and her hands are dead birds in her lap. Her work clothes are laid out in a neat line beside her: shirt, pants, socks, and shoes on the floor right underneath. The telephone begins to ring, but Audrey does not hear it.

80 INT. BINA'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON 80

Bina and a HIGH SCHOOL BOY sit on the floor, their backs propped against the bed, books spread on the floor. The boy puts his arm around Bina, launching numerous passionate advances, but Bina pushes him away.

The clueless boy continues his clumsy attempts. Bina stares out the window, completely detached.

81 INT. ALIKE'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

81

Audrey, still in her housecoat, stares into the refrigerator, transfixed by the mountain of foil-covered plates. Her eyes are cried-out buttons. Suddenly she remembers to breathe, and her breaths come raggedly tearing out fresh tears. She yanks a foil-covered plate, dumps its contents into the trash can and tosses the plate into the sink. She dumps another and another, her composure returning with each plate tossed. By the time she gets to the last one, her breathing slows and returns to normal. She disappears into the bedroom and reappears with the red shopping bag. She calmly lifts out the pink blouse and stuffs it into the garbage. She wads up the shopping bag and stuffs it in too. She takes a deep breath and wipes her sleeve across her nose.

AUDREY

Okay.

82 INT. ALIKE'S KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

82

Arthur, Audrey and Sharonda are pegged around the dinner table. Audrey's make-up fails to cover the dark circles beneath her eyes and Arthur has a week's worth of stubble. There is a jagged hole where Alike usually sits. Noticing the asymmetry, Audrey bundles up Alike's place setting and sweeps it onto the floor. Sharonda looks from Audrey to Arthur then into her plate.

AUDREY

You want to say grace?

Arthur clears his throat.

ARTHUR

Heavenly Father...

Audrey thrusts her hands out to Arthur and Sharonda. They each take her hand and Arthur begins again.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Dear Heavenly Father we pray... we pray thank you for this food and we pray... we pray for your continued blessing...

Arthur stops talking but his head remains bowed. An awkward silence ensues. Audrey and Sharonda look up at him still holding hands.

AUDREY

Amen!

ARTHUR

Amen.

Audrey switches to an overly cheery auto-pilot mode, babbling to no one in particular.

AUDREY

I got this recipe from a magazine.
Supposed to be very good. And you
see I made those green beans you
like. Sharonda pass the rice
please.

Sharonda, staring at her father doesn't reach for the bowl.

SHARONDA

Dad. You know where she is.

83

EXT. LAURA'S ROOFTOP - WEEKS LATER

83

Alike and Laura sit at the edge of the roof sharing a quart of mint chocolate chip ice cream. Sunset paints the cityscape pink and orange. The faint cadence of children playing drifts in and out on a fickle breeze. Alike's wounds are healing and she seems happy. The friends exchange wordless smiles and soak in the peacefulness around them.

Laura hears a noise at the door and gets up to investigate. Arthur is standing in the doorway. Laura calls out to Alike. Alike looks up and the smile fades from her face. Arthur tries to move around Laura, but Laura stares him down. Laura looks back at Alike. Alike considers, then carefully nods. Laura steps out of the way and watches Arthur pass.

Alike rises to face her father. She stands tall, her weight is centered. Arthur struggles to find her eyes, and she turns away from him. Distant playground voices fill the pause.

EXT. LAURA'S ROOFTOP - WEEKS LATER

Alike sits at the edge of the roof writing in her notebook. Laura swings open the door and Alike looks back in greeting, her smile fading as Arthur appears behind her. Laura motions to Alike. Alike considers, then carefully nods. Laura steps aside and watches Arthur pass.

Alike wanders to the edge of the roof, Arthur follows. Distant playground voices fill the pause.

ALIKE

Where's Mom?

ARTHUR

She...your mother couldn't make it.

Alike shakes her head and peers into the rusty skyline. Arthur slumps his hands in his pockets and edges closer.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Remember our old place? Waaay out in Queens? It was our first apartment, we were so proud. Had all those trees around it? In October, the whooole block would be covered with leaves. You remember.

Alike makes no sign.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

You couldnt've been more than 2 years old. And when the wind would blow, all those leaves would come rushing down the street at us and you thought they were alive. You'd get so scared. You'd cry and you'd scream and beg for us to pick you up. I would try and tell you "they're only leaves, baby" and make you stay on the ground. But you were so afraid and you cried so hard, your mother would always pick you up. She always picked you up.

Arthur is silent beneath the weight of his memory. He dares a glance over at Alike.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

'Member how we used to--

ALIKE

I've been accepted into a early college program. Starts in the Spring. Berkeley.

ARTHUR

California's a long way away--

ALIKE

Ten weeks writing boot camp, workshops. Then I can start summer semester.

ARTHUR

We can talk about that. Okay?

ALIKE

I need you to meet with my guidance counselor. Sign the paperwork so I can graduate early.

ARTHUR

I'm sorry, alright? I'm sorry I let her hurt you--

ALIKE

I need to know now if you'll sign the papers. Yes or no?

ARTHUR

Can you forgive me?

ALIKE

Yes or no?

ARTHUR

You can always come back home. Things are gonna be different, I promise you--

Alike holds Arthur's hand, stopping him.

ALIKE

Dad, I'm not running. I'm choosing.

Arthur's heart breaks, he gasps back a sob.

ALIKE (CONT'D)

I'm not going back home.

ARTHUR

I know.
(beat)
Okay.

Alike nods, squeezes Arthur's hand. Arthur breathes deeply, composing himself. He starts to pull away.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

I better--

ALIKE

Tell Mom that she was right.

ARTHUR

Right about what?

ALIKE
God *doesn't* make mistakes.

ARTHUR
You should tell her yourself.

Arthur squeezes Alike's hand and drifts away. Alike inhales the sunset.

84 INT. HOSPITAL BREAK ROOM - AFTERNOON

84

Audrey is cleaned up, well-dressed and freshly put together. She sits alone at the lunch table, crunching an apple. A bible and a daily devotional guide are spread open in front of her. Alike knocks on the glass, and Audrey looks up stunned. Alike comes in and sits across from her. Audrey glances around, concerned about passing coworkers.

ALIKE
Mom.

AUDREY
Lee--Alike. How've you been?

ALIKE
Fine. Did Dad tell you?

AUDREY
He told me, yes.

ALIKE
How are you?

Audrey gathers her lunch garbage and pushes back from the table.

AUDREY
I just hope you're keeping yourself
safe.

ALIKE
I love you, Mom.

Audrey stacks her devotional guide on top of her bible and stands. She starts to speak, then crosses to the door instead.

ALIKE (CONT'D)
I said I *love* you.

AUDREY
I'll be praying for you.

Audrey disappears into the hallway.

84A EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

84A

Alike writes in her notebook, mouthing the words to a poem. She looks up and studies the horizon from time to time.

84B INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

84B

Alike relaxes at a desk, reading from her notebook. Mrs. Alvarado sits cross-legged on her desk listening.

ALIKE (V.O.)

Heartbreak opens onto the sunrise
 For even breaking is opening
 And I am broken
 I am open
 Broken to the new light without
 pushing in
 Open to the possibilities within
 pushing out
 See the love shine in through my
 cracks
 See the light shine out through me?
 I am broken
 I am open
 I am Broken Open
 See the love-light shining through
 me
 Shining through my cracks
 Through the gaps
 My Spirit takes journey
 My Spirit takes flight
 Could not have risen otherwise
 And I am not Running
 I am Choosing
 Running is not a Choice
 From the Breaking
 Breaking is freeing
 Broken is freedom
 I am not broken
 I am free.

Alike closes her book. The pair reflect in easy silence. Mrs. Alvarado nods.

MRS. ALVARADO

Yeah.

(beat)

Yeah.

85 INT. ARTHUR'S CAR - DAY 85

The downtown Brooklyn landscape hums against the windshield as Arthur and Alike ride in complete silence. Sharonda chews a thumbnail, peering over the backseat. Laura slumps against the window, a smirk hiding at the corner of her lips.

86 EXT. REGIONAL BUS STOP - DAY 86

Laura and Sharonda fumble a suitcase out of the trunk of the car. Alike shrugs into her backpack. Arthur nudges them aside and hefts out the rest of the luggage.

ARTHUR

I got it.

Arthur slams the trunk shut.

ALIKE

Thank you.

ARTHUR

You want me to come in with you?

Alike shakes her head. Arthur starts to back away.

ARTHUR

Well--

Alike pounces on Arthur in a surprise hug. Arthur squeezes her back.

ARTHUR

You can always come back home.

ALIKE

I love you.

ARTHUR

I love you too.

87 EXT. REGIONAL BUS STOP - CONTINUOUS 87

General chaos as passengers, and well-wishes scramble for position.

LAURA

Let me get a hug or somethin',
damn.

Laura squeezes Alike first with one arm then pulls her hand out of her pocket to wrap both arms around her friend.

SHARONDA

Call us when you get there.

ALIKE

You know I will.

Laura backs away and wipes a sleeve at her eye.

LAURA

You just better fuckin' call.

Alike disappears through the bus doors. Laura slouches on a hydrant and Sharonda paces, scanning the windows for Alike.

88

INT. BUS - DAY

88

Sharonda waves maniacally. Alike musters a smile and puts a hand on the window. Laura raises a fist. The bus sails away from the curb.

Alike leans forward to keep Laura and Sharonda in sight as long as possible. As she faces front again, she glimpses Arthur, standing in the doorway of the terminal. A passing van blots him from view and she leans back in her seat. An OLD KOREAN WOMAN next to her offers her a piece of ginger candy. Alike pops the candy into her mouth and takes a deep breath.

Reflections of the retreating city landscape replay across Alike's face and she is able to hold back neither the smile nor the tears that come.

FADE TO BLACK.