



# SCRIPT

## R Town

A motion picture which premiered on June 10, 2010

Written by the students of the D.C. Creative Writing Workshop

**Directed by Tom Mallan**

ACT I

Stage Manager: This play is called "R Town." It was written and produced by the Writing Club, sponsored by CapriSun, Little Debbie, Popeyes, Dominoes, and the corner store. You're going to see Doc Gibbs, Ms. Gibbs, Mr. Webb, Ms. Webb, all their kids, the UPS man, the guy on the corner, J-Boogie, Gucci, Stink, and Britney Spears. The name of this town is Southside, just over the line from Eastover, across the bridge from everywhere else. The First Act shows a day in R Town, March 9th, 1998.

Before dawn in my alley, if you go up the hill, you can see the moon behind the Capitol. And you can see everything else: the new baseball stadium, the Shell gas station, the guy sleeping by the McDonalds. Over there is Congress Heights, over here is the bus stop. The carry out is on Alabama Ave., up the street is the Laundromat, and right across from Naylor Road is The Legend.

We have more churches here than liquor stores, although many people think it's the other way around. Over there is Anna Johenning Baptist Church, God's monument of death. Just down the street lies the Temple of Praise—that's where the elite praise God. There are lots of funerals at both of them, and everyone's welcome to mourn the dead.

Down Alabama is the Seventh District Police Station and the detox center—they kinda go hand in hand. Oh, and there's no shoe stores or clothing stores or drug stores, but we have the ice cream truck. It has everything you'll ever need.

Usually when you go to McGogney, MLK, or Simon, you'll go to Hart, which increases the odds of you going to Ballou. Usually by noon, you'll hear gunshots from up the hill or fire trucks because someone set the school on fire.

Doc Gibbs stays here. Doesn't his house look nice? And Mr. Webb next door works for the East of the River News. He knows everything that's going on. This is basically the most scenery you'll find around these parts.

And when you see all the teddy bears and liquor bottles, that's a memorial to someone who got killed on that spot. It's where all the friends and family go to remember the good times they used to have. T-Bone and Big Joker were our last two fallen soldiers. We still wear their t-shirts twelve years later. Their families still stay around here.

It's getting later.

Not much to our town, as you can see. Now you pretty much know the whole place from top to bottom. But we make do.

Umm, the only light illuminating the streets is the blue neon liquor store sign. Stay around these parts if you wanna be by the light. But stay away if you wanna live, kinda either or.

You'll find it hard to believe how early people start their day around here, or how late other people end theirs. There's something happening around here pretty much 24-7. It's 6am now, and Doc Gibbs is just getting up for work. His wife was up at 5:45 to make breakfast.

Doc Gibbs got smoked ten years ago. They renamed Greater Southeast after his favorite show, "United Medical." His wife passed away before him—she caught a cold while she was visiting her daughter, and they brought her back to Greater Southeast. Then she got pneumonia and just died. She's buried out at Harmony Memorial Park with the rest of her family.

In our town, everyone kinda knows what you do, before you do it. That's just how fast word travels. So if you don't want people to know you did it, don't do it.

(Doc Gibbs is walking up the street. Ms. Gibbs and Ms. Webb both start cooking. Joe Crowell Jr. is leaning against the fence.)

Joe Crowell: 'Sup, Doc Gibbs.

Doc Gibbs: Hey, Joe.

Joe: You're out here early.

Doc: Gotta make a buck. How's school going, Joe?

Joe: My teacher got fired, so I ain't been for a while.

Doc: What's up with that?

Joe: I don't know. I just think they ought to let us keep a teacher for a little while. By the time we get to know one, she's gone.

Doc: You better stay in school, Joe, and get that education. These streets out here ain't nothing. I gotta move along now. It's hard out here for a Doc.

Joe: I heard that.

(Doc. Gibbs moves on.)

Stage Manager: That Joe always was a great kid, but now he's just a product of his environment. He was doing all right, for a while, though. Graduated from Ballou, started taking classes at UDC, he was thinking about becoming video game designer. But there's a war out in these streets. He got shot at a party, killed. All that education for nothing.

(Roger Newsome, in a UPS uniform comes up the street. He leaves a package at Ms. Webb's door, then stops to talk to Doc Gibbs.)

Roger Newsome: I swear, they just fixed that truck and it still bucks like it's out of gas.

Stage Manager: Here comes Newsome, selling candy for a fundraiser.

Roger: How you doing, Doc?

Doc: I'm all right, Roger. Just getting home—had a long night, trying to make that paper.

Roger: I got my hustle on, too. Good thing it's not going to rain for a while.

Doc: Looks like that old truck's about had it.

Roger: She's old, but they keep patching her up and sending her back out again. Once I stack enough ink, I'll buy my own delivery company.

Ms. Gibbs: Hey, UPS man. What you got for me?

Roger: Doc Gibbs' coming up the street right now. He treating you right? Cuz you know I will!

Ms. Gibbs: Looks like you're running late today.

Roger: Yeah, I get lost in the neighborhood since they started all that construction. Streets changing, neighborhood changing. It's always something. Hey, Doc.

Doc Gibbs: UPS!

Ms. Gibbs: Ya'll better get up now, children. Daddy's home!

Roger: Come on truck, let's roll.

Ms. Gibbs: Hakeem! Misha! How was your day, Leroy?

Doc: It was all right. Same ol' same ol'.

Ms. Gibbs: I got your breakfast almost ready. You have time to wash laundry!

Doc: Aww, come on baby. You know I need to catch me a little nap.

Ms. Gibbs: Sometimes I feel you work too hard, Leroy, and don't have time for your family chores. Or me.

Ms. Webb: Wynter! Anthony! Get up or you'll be late for school!

Ms. Gibbs: You need to talk to Hakeem. He's getting lazier every day, and I don't like it, Leroy.

Doc: Is he getting smart out the mouth with you?

Ms. Gibbs: No, but his priorities' not in line. He thinks about his Nintendo and his band practice more than school—Come on, you kids, you better hurry up, now!

Doc: Sss, I don't know what to say.

Ms. Gibbs: Hakeem!

Doc: Better step up your game, son.

Hakeem's voice: Aiight, Dad.

Doc: Don't you hear her calling you? Go see what your mom wants!

Ms. Webb: Wynter! Anthony! Hurry up now, before I hurry you up myself!

Misha's voice: Ma, I got nothing to wear.

Ms. Gibbs: Shut up, your father's trying to sleep. Didn't I just buy you something?

Misha: Uggh, Ma. Bebe is out, Armani's in. I need to be in style, not looking like last year.

Ms. Gibbs: Stop complaining.

Misha: Ma, Hakeem just hit me.

Ms. Gibbs: Both of ya'll about to get it. Now chill out and hurry up, before I wind up not writing you all a note.

(A car horn honks, then three more, loud and long. The children rush in with their backpacks and sit down to eat: Hakeem, about 16 and Misha, 11; and Wynter and Anthony, same ages.)

Stage Manager: There's lots of traffic on South Capitol Street, so there's always someone out there selling NFL jerseys, sneakers, and bootleg DVDs. If it's showing in the theater, you can buy it on South Capitol. And they have all types of sneakers: Lebrons, Kobes, Jordans. You can go to Foot Locker or Shoe City, or you can buy them for less on the street.

Ms. Webb: Shut your mouth and eat, children. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Anthony—no studying at the table.

Anthony: Aw, Ma! Don't call me Anthony. Call me Lil Ant. I got a social studies test today.

Ms. Webb: Well, Lil Ant, you know the rules. You should have studied last night, instead of watching TV. What do you want to be, healthy or smart?

Wynter: I don't have to study, Ma. You know I'm the smartest girl in my class.

Ms. Webb: I know you better eat your breakfast.

Ms. Gibbs: Your daddy will hear about this when he wakes up. Twenty dollars a week ought to be enough for a kid your age. I don't know where all that money goes so fast.

Hakeem: But Ma—

Ms. Gibbs: All you do is spend it on hot sausages and Now and Laters.

Hakeem: I don't know why Misha has all that money.

Misha: I save my money. I don't waste it on junk food.

Ms. Gibbs: Well you're not perfect either. You ought to spend some money sometimes.

Misha: Mama, you know I love money. I'm all about that green. You know, cheddar, cheese, mula!

Ms. Gibbs: Stop talking and finish your Lucky Charms.

The Children: Uh-oh, I'mma be late. I don't wanna eat no more. I gotta go!

(They grab their bookbags and run out.)

Ms. Webb: Anthony, pull your pants up!

Ms. Gibbs: You better not mess with that substitute, you hear me?

Misha: We won't.

Everyone: Bye!

(Ms. Gibbs and Ms. Webb sit together on the stoop.)

Ms. Gibbs: Tricia, I got something I have to let you know before my head explodes.

Ms. Webb: Keisha, giirrrlll! What's the gossip?

Ms. Gibbs: Hold up, let me see that "Starz" magazine...Uh oh, Chris Brown's in it again. Listen, did that fine UPS man come by your house last week? Cuz he looks good delivering packages.

Ms. Webb: Uh uh.

Ms. Gibbs: Well I thought he wanted to see my husband about something, but he just talked his way into my house and offered me nine hundred dollars for my mother's old necklace.

Ms. Webb: Chiile, please!

Ms. Gibbs: OMG, he sure did. I never even liked that crusty old thing. I almost gave it to my cousin Shay.

Ms. Webb: You gone take the money, ain't you?

Ms. Gibbs: Well, IDK...

Ms. Webb: What do you mean, you don't know? That's nine hundred freaking dollars!

Ms. Gibbs: Girl, if I could get Leroy to take me on a real vacation, like a cruise or something, I would have been sold it. You know, Tricia, I would love to go to Ocho Rios, Jamaica. I wanted that since I was a little girl, but I guess that's just a dream deferred.

Ms. Webb: How you think Leroy will take it?

Ms. Gibbs: Well he never says much, but I did kind of hint that if we had the money, he better take me somewhere.

Ms. Webb: Soooo, then what?

Ms. Gibbs: Girl, you know how he is. He just acted nonchalant, as usual. He says he gets nervous being a stranger where everybody acts different. He's just used to Martin Luther King Avenue, so somewhere else doesn't sit well with him. I better let it go. Our little weekend trip to New York is gonna have to be enough.

Ms. Webb: Well, Arnette really obsesses over how much Leroy knows about New York City. He's talked about taking me up there some day, but then he starts in about how Leroy gets the VIP treatment at the clubs, and Leroy knows his way around Brooklyn. He gets jealous.

Ms. Gibbs: True...Leroy gets excited just talking about it. But I'm tired of going up in the Twin Towers and all.

Ms. Webb: Well, if that guy's really serious about buying it, Keisha, you ought to take the money. Just keep bugging Leroy about taking that cruise—that's how I got to go to Atlantic City.

Ms. Gibbs: I shouldn't have even brought it up. I'd just like to see something I never saw before, do something besides what I do every day. I want to get out of Southeast just once before I die.

(The Stage Manager enters and waves to the women. They wave back.)

Stage Manager: Thank you, chickens. Thanks a lot.

Now we're going to jump ahead in time a couple of hours. But first, here's a bit of information about our town. Kind of an urban account, you can say. So I asked a historian from Howard University. Where you at, Professor?

(Professor Willard comes in, with a stack of notes.)

Professor Willard: Yeah, I'm here.

Stage Manager: Now, we don't have all day, so keep it short.

Professor Willard: Right. Anacostia gets its name from a Nacochtank Indian settlement on the river. Historic Anacostia, V and W Streets run through it, it's got some of the oldest black-owned houses around. Black folks, everybody, should be proud of that. The Frederick Douglass home, Cedar Hill is up there, and around the corner is the Big Chair. Barry Farms is one of the oldest African-American neighborhoods in D.C., and St. Elizabeth's Hospital was the first large federally run psychiatric hospital in the U.S. They've got over a thousand brains preserved in formaldehyde.

(Stage Manager looks at his watch.)

Across the river are the monuments, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Jefferson. The Library of Congress has every book ever published in the country. Sterling Brown was the first Poet Laureate of D.C.

Stage Manager: We don't need every detail, Professor. Skip to the part about the people who live here.

Professor Willard: Well, that's been changing a lot lately. Down Mississippi Avenue a little way is Parklands. They renovated it a few years ago and built a brand new water park just for the residents. Up Wheeler Road is where Valley Green used to be. They've just torn it down, and they're going to build brand new townhouses and apartments. And up Alabama Avenue are Stanton Dwellings and Frederick Douglass Homes. They're moving people out of there, and the federal government is giving the D.C. Housing Authority thirty million dollars to build a whole new community. They're going to call it Henson Ridge. We don't know where everybody's going to go—maybe P.G. County.

Stage Manager: Time to wrap it up now, Professor.

Professor Willard: Okay. Ward 8 has about seventy thousand people, and almost 40 percent of them are under 19. The kids run this town. But Ward 8 also has the highest infant mortality rate in the city. The leading causes of death here are heart disease and cancer, followed by AIDS and homicide.

Stage Manager: I think that's enough, Professor. You've taught us plenty. Thank you very much.

Professor Willard: No problem.

Stage Manager: And now, for the politics of our town. Mr. Webb knows all about that.

Ms. Webb: He's coming. He cut his hand while working on his car. Arnette, come on. You got people waiting!

Stage Manager: Mr. Webb works for the East of the River News, and he writes a blog about what's going on behind the scenes.

(Mr. Webb enters, with his hand bandaged.)

Mr. Webb: Well, we're part of D.C., so everybody knows that we're run by the mayor and the city council. But we don't get much say about the national situation. We didn't get to vote for our own mayor until 1974, and we still don't have any vote in Congress.

Stage Manager: And in another twelve years, that will still be the story.

Mr. Webb: Almost ninety percent of Ward 8 voters are registered Democrats, but less than half of them usually turn out for an election. But when it comes to Presidential elections, D.C. always votes for the Democrat. About a third of our people live in poverty, so times are always hard here. And when they're hard everywhere else, they're even harder here.

Stage Manager: What else, Mr. Webb?

Mr. Webb: It's a pretty cool town. Cooler than most. Young folks like it here. There's always something going on for the young folks to do.

Stage Manager: Does anybody have a question for Mr. Webb?

Woman in the Balcony: Is there a lot of drinking around here?

Mr. Webb: Well, I don't know what you mean by a lot...There's a few drunks that hang out by Liff's Market.

Belligerent Man: Why don't you do something about the economy? And prejudice, and teen pregnancy, and gay marriage?

Mr. Webb: Well it seems like everybody spends time talking about what everybody thinks.

Belligerent Man: Why don't you do something about it?

Mr. Webb: I guess we all worry about what people got and what they don't have. We do what we can to help the community. Like most folks, we're trying to find a way for the lazy, shiftless, and trifling to fall to the bottom of the bucket so the real go-getters can rise like cream. There are a few programs to help people who can't help themselves. Those who can, they can go kick rocks. You got more questions?



Lady in a Box: Oh sir? Mr. Webb? Is there any culture in your town?

Mr. Webb: Not much. Well, there's always something to watch on TV. Oh, and there's a marching band at Ballou, and a smaller one at Hart. You got the Beat Your Feet Kings, and a rack of go-go bands, and Writing Club, of course. The museums and universities are all on the other side of the river, but people over here know how to have a good time.

Lady in a Box: Right.

Stage Manager: Thanks, Mr. Webb.

Now we're heading back round the way. It's lunch time, and some folks have already eaten. The kids skipped the school lunch, though, cuz it was nasty. And it's still a long time before dinner.

It's pretty calm, this time of day. Rush hour hasn't started yet, and most of the kids are still in school. There's a bunch of people waiting for the bus on MLK, and you can smell the wings and French fries cooking at the carry out. Everybody loves that mambo sauce. You know how it is.

Oops, I lied. It's later than I thought. The kids are getting out of school already.

(Girls voices are heard. Wynter comes up the street.)

Wynter: Too bad I got to get home, Jasmine. My mom's been blowin' up my cell phone.

Mr. Webb: Girl, what's wrong with you? You're switching your hips like a grown woman.

Wynter: Daddy, I don't get it. You always tell me to grow up, now you tell me I'm too grown.

(She hugs him.)

Mr. Webb: Uh huh. You must want something.

(He leaves. Hakeem comes running down the street, past an old lady.)

Hakeem: Ey! Ms. Forrest!

Stage Manager: (As Ms. Forrest.) Who you calling like that, boy? You should be home studying, instead of hanging on the corner with your little rapper friends.

Hakeem: My bad, Ms. Forrest. What's up, Wynter?

Wynter: Sup?

Hakeem: Your presentation in History class was tight.

Wynter: I was trying to talk about Dr. King, but at the last minute Ms. Corcoran made me do W.E.B. DuBois instead. I was pressed, 'cause I worked hard on both of them.

Hakeem: Either way, you did your thing. Don't think I'm sweatin' you, but sometimes when you sit by the window reading, I can see you from my house.

Wynter: For real?

Hakeem: That's what I said. You be busy.

Wynter: Gotta keep my grades up. I want to get a scholarship so I can go to college.

Hakeem: You smart. Maybe you could help me out with my algebra homework. I don't wanna copy off you or nothing...

Wynter: We cool. If you need help, just call me and I'll hook you up.

Hakeem: Cool! You smart as a mug.

Wynter: I guess I was just born that way.

Hakeem: Me, I like to work on cars. When I finish school, my Uncle Smitty says I can come work for him. When he gets too old, he'll sell me the garage.

Wynter: You mean with the crib upstairs and all?

(Ms. Webb comes out with a garbage bag and a broom.)

Hakeem: Yeah, the whole place. Well, see ya, Wynter. My boys are waiting for me at the studio. We're working on a CD. Talk to you later. Peace, Ms. Webb.

Ms. Webb: Peace, Hakeem.

Hakeem: Take care, Wynter.

Wynter: See ya, Hakeem.

Ms. Webb: Come help me pick up some of this trash, Wynter. That boy Hakeem was talking to you for quite a while. How old is he, anyhow?

Wynter: I-o-no.

Ms. Webb: Hmmm. Ya'll should be about the same age.

Wynter: Ma, I did my presentation in school today.

Ms. Webb: What was it about?

Wynter: Black History and Say No to Drugs. I was good, too, Ma. I think I might want to be a lawyer—Did I pick up enough trash yet?

Ms. Webb: There's a little more over there.

Wynter: Can I you a question, Ma?

Ms. Webb: Yes, child.

Wynter: Do you think I'm sexy?

Ms. Webb: Sure you are, baby. You my daughter, right?

Wynter: For real?

Ms. Webb: Whatever. I just told you yes.

Wynter: Was you sexy, back in the old days?

Ms. Webb: I sure was. That's how I met your daddy.

Wynter: But what about me, Ma? Do I look good enough to get a real boy, you know—interested?

Ms. Webb: Stop this madness now, or I'll stop it for you. You look better than any of these hoodrats 'round here. Now come on in, I've got to start fixing dinner.

Wynter: You never no help, mommy.

Stage Manager: Okay, that's enough outta you two.

There's a whole lotta stuff you haven't seen yet. I guess it's time to tell you that big changes are coming to the hood. We have new houses going up to substitute for the projects, there's a new baseball stadium coming that we so didn't need, and it looks like they're finally going to start building the grocery store they've been promising us on Alabama Ave. They hired a bunch of people from the suburbs to do the work. Maybe someday we won't have to travel abroad for food.

With all the land they're digging up, there's talk about putting in a time capsule for the kids to dig up in the future. Show them what life was like here in 1998. Of course they want to put in the stuff everybody already knows about, like a copy of O.J.'s fingerprint records, M.C. Hammer's pants, and a pair of Nike Air Force Ones. But who knows what people will remember a thousand years from now? All we really know about the people who were here before us is what the history books say, and that's not much. What was everyday life like for the people that lived here a thousand years ago?

Think of it—Valley Green once had a thousand people in it, and all we have left is empty buildings with gang tags on the walls, and go-go flyers stapled to the light poles. But every day in DC, people ride the bus to work, and every night children come home way past curfew and parents sit up late, waiting to catch their sneaky kids. So, I'm going to have them put a copy of

this play in the time capsule. That way people who come along in another thousand years will know more about us than Tupac and Michael Jordan and Marion Barry. They'll know what we did in this little part of DC—where we lived, where we hung out, and how we died.

(The sound of people singing is heard, Hakeem and Wynter are doing their homework, and Doc Gibbs is watching tv.)

It's dark now. The church choir is practicing and the kids are doing their homework. Maybe I should be getting home.

Simon Stimson: Listen up, ya'll! I want to hear you singing, not screaming. Turn it down! You think it's only good if it makes your ears bleed. Let's try it again.

Hakeem: Hey girl, wassup?

Wynter: Nothing. I can't get my homework done. The light bulb bust.

Hakeem: Did you finish your math?

Wynter: Sure. It was easy.

Hakeem: Well I didn't get any of them.

Wynter: It's just percentages.

Hakeem: I don't get it.

Wynter: Just remember that a dime is ten percent of a dollar. That ought to help.

Hakeem: Oh, I get it. It's like money. Why didn't they say that? Thanks.

Wynter: No problem. I wish I could concentrate. I can't hardly see and the church next door is singing all loud. And listen up, the police helicopter is right down the block.

Hakeem: I hear it. I wonder what happened.

Wynter: Well, I'ma chill for a minute before I go to bed. Talk to you later.

Hakeem: All right. And thanks again, Wynter.

Simon Stimson: Oh, shoot. I almost forgot. Who wants to sing for Wednesday night bible study at the Ship of Salvation in Northeast? Put your hands up where I can see 'em. All right, that'll do. Same music we're doing Sunday. Now, "Our God Is an Awesome God." And make it lively this time.

Doc Gibbs: Hey, Hakeem! Come here for a sec.

Hakeem: What'd I do?

Doc Gibbs: Sit down. How old are you, anyhow?

Hakeem: Sixteen and a half.

Doc Gibbs: And what are you going to do with yourself when you graduate? And you better graduate.

Hakeem: I want to be a mechanic. I can work for Uncle Smitty. And I want to keep up with my music.

Doc: You think you can handle it? Getting to work by 7am, working until all the jobs are done? And then do whatever at the studio?

Hakeem: You know me, daddy. What do you mean?

Doc: Funny. I looked out the window last night, and you know what I saw? I saw your momma taking out the trash. Carrying two big old trash bags by herself, when she's got a strong young sixteen year old son sitting inside, playing Madden 98. And that was after she cooked your dinner, did the dishes, and washed your clothes by herself without you lifting a finger to help. I guess she just got tired of asking. You think she works for you? Well, I know you can do better than that. I tell you what—I'm going to raise your allowance, give you an extra five bucks a week. Not cause you're gonna start helping your mom more, though. You'll do that cause you're a good kid.

Hakeem: Thanks, dad.

Doc: So, I'll pay you tomorrow. My pocket's a little light right now. I'll bet your sister will want a raise, too. Now, why ain't your mother home yet? Choir practice ought to be over by now.

Hakeem: It's only 8:30.

Doc: Why is she even in the church choir? Your mother's tone deaf. Can't sing a lick. Wandering all over the city this late at night. Hmm. You need to get to bed.

Hakeem: All right.

(Hakeem goes to sleep. Laughter can be heard from down the street, and Ms. Gibbs, Ms. Soames, and Ms. Webb come into view.)

Ms. Soames: Good night, Ashley. See you later, Mr. Sheen.

Ms. Webb: That sure was funny. I can't wait to tell my husband, so he can put it in the paper.

Ms. Gibbs: Uh-oh. It's getting late.

Ms. Soames: Night, Kim.

Ms. Gibbs: Well, practice went all right, considering... Ooh, both my knees are hurting. I bet it's gonna rain.

(They all look up at the sky.)

Ms. Soames: I didn't want to say this in front of everyone else, but that was messed up!

Ms. Gibbs: What? There you go gossiping again.

Ms. Soames: But that's our church pianist who's drunk all the time. And don't tell me couldn't tell how drunk he was. It's a shame before God.

Ms. Gibbs: Come on, Gina. You know poor Mr. Stimson's been through a lot lately, and Pastor Ferguson knows all about it. If it's okay with the pastor, then it's not for us to judge. Just pretend you don't see it.

Ms. Soames: Pretend I don't see it? What about the smell? It's worse than ever.

Ms. Webb: It is not, Gina, and I been around a lot longer than you. Trust me when I say it used to be a lot worse. Hmm, it's so nice out I hate to go inside, but I better get moving. I bet my kids are still up watching movies. Have a nice night.

(Everyone says good night, and Ms. Webb goes inside.)

Ms. Gibbs: You gonna be alright getting home, Gina?

Ms. Soames: Girl, I'm fine. I can see my husband out there waiting for me. You'd think I was on a date, the way he acts.

(More good nights. Ms. Gibbs goes in.)

Ms. Gibbs: Man we had fun.

Doc: You sure are late.

Ms. Gibbs: Please. I am not. What's the matter with you?

Doc: What took you so long? You're always stopping to run your mouth.

Ms. Gibbs: Stop being a grouch. Let's go sit outside. It's still warm out.

(They go outside.)

See? Isn't it nice out here? What were you up to while I was gone?

Doc: The usual. Watched the game. So what was the talk about tonight?

Ms. Gibbs: Believe me, babe, there was something to talk about.

Doc: So it was Simon, wasn't it?

Ms. Gibbs: I've never seen him so high. What's gonna happen Leroy? The pastor can't keep letting him go on like this.

Doc: I know Simon better than he know hisself, and I know he just don't fit in to this neighborhood. Not much we can do about it but just leave him be. Let's go in.

Ms. Gibbs: I don't feel like it. Listen, Leroy. You need a break. I think we're both long overdue to take a vacation, and if I hit my number, I'm going to make you take one.

Doc: Haven't we been through this before?

Ms. Gibbs: Oh, Leroy, you're so inconsiderate.

Doc: Come on, babe. Let's get inside before you catch pneumonia. (They go in.) I got on Hakeem pretty good tonight. I bet he'll help out around here, at least for a week or two. Let's go upstairs. No cleaning tonight.

Ms. Gibbs: It seems like there's always something to clean. Guess what, Leroy—Ms. Fairchild says she's getting a pit bull to protect her crib. There's so much stuff going on around here lately.

Doc: Give me a break. She's got nothing to steal and the whole world knows it.

(They leave. Misha sits down next to Hakeem.)

Hakeem: Move, Misha. I'm on the computer now.

Misha: No, you move, so I can get on. You been on all night.

Hakeem: Buy your own computer.

Misha: Can you just check my e-mail for me? ...Hakeem, do you think the world's going to end in 2000? My friend told me there's no computers anywhere that are programmed to go past 1999.

Hakeem: Don't be stupid. They're always saying the world's about to end cause of something, and then when it doesn't, they say it's going to end cause of something else. Now go to bed, or I'll tell mom.

Misha: Hakeem, is it time to go to bed for every kid? I mean, like in New York and Miami and even down in South America?

Hakeem: I don't know, probably. Girl, you silly.

(The Stage Manager comes on. A siren is heard.)

Stage Manager: It's ten thirty. Things are pretty quiet, but there's still a television on in most houses. And there's Officer Riche, checking out what's going on at the corner store. And here comes Mr. Webb, home from the night shift.

(Officer Riche comes on from the right, Mr. Webb from the left.)

Mr. Webb: How ya doin', Riche?

Officer Riche: I'm all right.

Mr. Webb: It's nice out tonight, huh?

Officer Riche: Sure is.

Mr. Webb: Any trouble tonight?

Officer Riche: Just Simon Stimson asleep by Holiday Market. His girlfriend's looking for him, so he better lay low. Uh-oh, here he comes.

(Simon Stimson comes on from the left, weaving.)

Mr. Webb: Hey, Simon. It's about time to be getting home, don't you think?

(Simon walks up and just stares at him.)

Yep, it's getting pretty late. I'm about ready to go home myself. Want me walk home with you?

(Simon walks past him without saying anything.)

Okay, I guess not.

Officer Riche: He looks pretty wasted. I don't know how long he can keep it up.

Mr. Webb: He's had a hard life. He just can't handle it. Hey, Riche, if you see my kid smoking, can you smack him upside the head for me? I think he'll take you seriously.

Officer Riche: I don't think he smokes weed. Maybe just a cigarette or two now and then.

Mr. Webb: Really? I hope you're right. See you later.

Officer Riche: You too.

(He leaves.)

Mr. Webb: Tricia? Are you still up?



Wynter: It's me, dad.

Mr. Webb: What are you doing up?

Wynter: I just don't feel like sleeping. There's so much going on. Did you hear gunshots a minute ago?

Mr. Webb: I didn't hear anything. What's bothering you?

Wynter: Nothing.

Mr. Webb: Okay, but your mother better not catch you up this late.

(Mr. Webb goes in, whistling, and disappears.)

Misha: Do you think all of this is real?

Hakeem: What do you mean?

Misha: Well, what if everything we see all around us is just an illusion? What if the whole world is really controlled by machines, and they just create the stuff we think is real? Janelle Crofut says there's probably a giant computer somewhere that controls everything.

Hakeem: So what?

Stage Manager: Well, that's it for Act One, people. You can check your cell phones now, if you need to.

## Act II

Stage manager: It's been three years, now. We've seen the streetlights come on and go off over a thousand times. The summer heat done drove a few people crazy, and the winter fills the streets with potholes. The kids grow up too fast around here. All the little babies from three years ago are now four going on forty, and the youngins' now the oldheads of the block. Seems like, soon as you're old enough to hit the clubs, you don't want to anymore, due to the chronic medication-taking and a natural desire to stay in bed and watch "Days of Our Lives" all day. That's what happens in three years.

I mean, a bunch of stuff has happened. Some complexes have been renovated and others have been torn down. Some people have gotten married and other people have gotten divorced. Pretty much everyone gets married at least once in their lives, and pretty much everyone has kids, married or not. Southeast moves along quickly, sometimes too quickly. People die with babies on the way.

What you saw in the first act was everyday life. Now you're gonna see people getting married. And you can probably figure what the last act's gonna be.

So it's three years later—2000, a new millennium. It's July 7, right about time for cookouts and fireworks. No more school, and people are ready to hit the streets. That's round the time peoples' hormones start jumping. (Ugh.) And some of them think they might as well get married.

But unfortunately, it's been raining for days. The creek's overflowing and the Anacostia River smells like a sewer. Still, when you plan a party, that's free food, so you're guaranteed to have a crowd.

Ms. Gibbs and Ms. Webb are cooking breakfast, well, if cereal counts. There's not much more to say about these ladies. They get they food stamps and feed they kids even through summer vacation. They raised two kids each: changed dirty pampers, did laundry, cleaned up after everyone, and never kirked out.

I think it was Janet Jackson said "You don't know what you've got til it's gone." "So live your life"—that's Rihanna. It just keeps going around like that—people are so busy living that they never stop to think that that's what living is!

Roger Newsome: (Off stage.) Beep beep! Who got the keys to my jeep?

Stage Manager: Here comes Roger Newsome, delivering packages, and Sean Crowell hanging on the corner, just like his brother did.

Sean Crowell: Roger dat!

Roger: What's going on, Sean? Anything happening I should know about?

Sean: Iono. Except Hakeem's quitting the band. And he was the best rapper ever to come out of Southeast.

Roger: Yeah, I heard he could rock a mic.

Sean: It's messed up he had to quit just so he could get married? Would you do that for a woman, Roger?

Roger: I don't know. I never had anything I was that good at.

(Officer Riche enters.)

What's up, Riche?

Officer Riche: I been working all night, trying to keep the streets clear.

Roger: This youngin's guh cause Hakeem's quitting the band.

Officer Riche: Too bad, but there's nothing you can do. Back in the eighties there was a dude who could rap better than anyone, but he got locked up and they moved him out to Colorado or somewhere. Never heard of him again.

Roger: Well, I gotta job to do. I better roll out.

(Officer Riche and Sean Crowell leave. Roger Newsome stops at Ms. Gibbs house.)

Ms. Gibbs: Got anything for us, Roger? People been sending presents all week.

Roger: Yeah. Here's three more. What did they get so far?

Ms. Gibbs: A bunch of towels and kitchen stuff from the cousins. I wish they'd just send money.

Roger: My wife says to tell you good luck. I hope it lasts.

Ms. Gibbs: Thanks, Roger. It better. Tell your wife I hope she can make it to the party.

Roger: You know how she is. She won't miss it for nothing.

(Roger crosses to the Webb house.)

How ya doing, Ms. Webb?

Ms. Webb: I'm all right. Did you bring us more packages? I don't know where to put it all.

Roger: Here's two more.

Ms. Webb: I hope the rain holds off until the wedding party's over.

Roger: That's what Ms. Gibbs said. I guess it will. My wife says to tell you good luck. I hope it lasts.

Ms. Webb: Yeah, me too. Ya'll coming to the party?

Roger: We'll be there.

(Exit Roger Newsome. Doc Gibbs comes in and sits down at the table.)

Doc Gibbs: Well, it looks like they're really going through with it. You're finally getting rid of one of your kids.

Ms. Gibbs: Shut up before you make me cry.

Doc: The groom's in the bathroom, taking pictures in the mirror. He thinks he looks good, too. Keeps saying "I do" over and over again, like he thinks he might forget the words.

Ms. Gibbs: I swear, Leroy, I don't see how they're going to make it. Hakeem can't even remember where he left his asthma pump. He'll be dead in a week if Wynter doesn't keep it in her purse for him. Leroy, they're just so young!

Doc: Remember when we got married, Keisha?

Ms. Gibbs: Not really.

Doc: I was scared to death. I was going to change my mind until I saw you in that dress. You looked good too, baby. I never saw you in a dress before.

Ms. Gibbs: I was scared, too. I threw up the minute I got to the church. I don't know why people go through with it. Weddings are a pain. (She puts a plate on the table.) Here's your breakfast.

Doc: Mmmm, waffles! Thanks, baby.

Ms. Gibbs: No problem. We had a pack of Eggos in the freezer.

(Pause. Doc Gibbs pours on syrup.)

Doc: Did you get any sleep?

Ms. Gibbs: A little bit. I kept waking up and checking the clock.

Doc: Yeah! I was guh every time I thought about Hakeem being a daddy. He's just a baby himself. It's hard on a man having a son.

Ms. Gibbs: It's just as bad for a woman to have a daughter.

Doc: I s'pose they'll go through a lot of problems, but that's their business. I hope they keep it to themselves.

Ms. Gibbs: People go through things. It's life.

Doc: Guess what scared me the most when we got married?

Ms. Gibbs: Oh, stop!

Doc: I was scared we wouldn't have anything to talk about. I thought we'd both say what we had to say in about a week and never have another convo. But here we are after twenty years, still thinking up things to say.

Ms. Gibbs: Well, I always come up with something. It might be boring, but it kills time. Did you hear Misha up there?

Doc: Nope. Usually she's in everyone's business by now, but she's still stuck in her room. I think she's crying.

Ms. Gibbs: Uh uh. She needs to cut that out. Misha! Get in here now and eat your breakfast!

(Hakeem comes in.)

Hakeem: What up, y'all! I got five more hours on death row til I kick it!

(He fakes cutting his throat.)

Ms. Gibbs: Where do you think you're going?

Hakeem: To see my girl.

Ms. Gibbs: Don't you dare go out like that in this rain. Put your shoes on before you get your asthma acting up.

Hakeem: Come on, ma. Just for a minute.

Ms. Gibbs: I can't have you coughing all through your own wedding.

Doc: Do what your mom says, boy.

(Doc leaves. Hakeem puts on shoes.)

Ms. Gibbs: From now on, I don't care. If you want to get sick, go ahead. But in my house, you do as I say. You shouldn't be knocking on their door so early. They might not be up yet. Have a cup of Kool-Ade before you go.

Hakeem: Later. (He crosses to the Webb house.) Hey Ma!

Ms. Webb: Hakeem! Dag, you scared me. Hey, you can stay out on the porch for a second, but you can't come in, right?

Hakeem: What's up with that?

Ms. Webb: Cuz you ain't supposed to see the bride on the big day.

Hakeem: Man, that's dumb. What's up, Mr. Webb.

(Enter Mr. Webb.)

Mr. Webb: Aaay, youngin.

Hakeem: Do you believe that stuff about I can't see the bride yet?

Mr. Webb: Makes sense to me.

Ms. Webb: That's how people do it, Hakeem. You don't want to be the first to break the rule.

Hakeem: Whatever. How's Wynter?

Ms. Webb: She 'sleep.

Hakeem: What?

Ms. Webb: Well, yeah! We were up late making sure everything's perfect. Here, have a bowl of Froot Loops and I'll make sure she doesn't come in here.

(Exit Ms. Webb. Mr. Webb doesn't say anything. Hakeem eats in silence.)

Mr. Webb: (loudly) So, um, how you doing?

Hakeem: (chokes a little) Uh, okay, I guess. Mr. Webb, why does everybody believe in dumb superstitions?

Mr. Webb: Well, on a wedding day, the bride is paranoid, and kinda like a bridezilla...it could be that, right?

Hakeem: I guess so. (pause) I wish I could get married without all this work.

Mr. Webb: I know what you mean, boy, but it ain't no use. The women made things this way. It's all about the bride—no one cares about us men. They just want to make sure there's plenty of witnesses to make it legal.

Hakeem: But, what about you? Do you even believe in it?

Mr. Webb: Me? Oh, sure. Right. Of course I do. Marriage is, um... It's great to be married. Remember that, Hakeem.

Hakeem: How old were you when you tied the knot?

Mr. Webb: Well, I got my education first, went to college and got my degree. I had to play the field a little bit, get it out of my system, you know. But my wife was about the same age Wynter is now. Age ain't nothing but a number. What matters is, umm...other stuff.

Hakeem: What kind of stuff? Finish your sentence, Mr. Webb.

Mr. Webb: Huh? Was I saying something? (Pause) Hakeem, let me tell you what my daddy told me when I was young. He said, Son, make sure your wife knows who's in charge. Tell her what to do and when to do it, and if she doesn't listen, kick her to the curb. Oh, and never let her touch a credit card.

Hakeem: But...that's not how I kick it with the ladies.

Mr. Webb: That's alright. I didn't pay him no mind. I never did anything my father told me. I did just the opposite, and things worked out fine for us. So that should tell you one thing, never let

anybody tell you how to live your life. Say, Hakeem—are you planning on selling accessories at that auto shop of yours?

Hakeem: What do you mean?

Mr. Webb: I just got this catalogue of custom wheels and chrome. I'm thinking of putting some spinners on the Explorer.

(Enter Ms. Webb.)

Ms. Webb: What are you telling that boy, Arnette? He doesn't need to start wasting his money before he even makes any.

Mr. Webb: Go ahead and tell the young man how to run his life, Tricia. I'll give you two some alone.

Ms. Webb: (Pulls Hakeem up.) Hakeem, Wynter's coming down in a minute. She said tell you Hi, but you gotta get out of here. Bye.

(Hakeem goes back home.)

Mr. Webb: You just broke another superstition, you know.

Ms. Webb: Which one?

Mr. Webb: Since way back in the day, the groom is supposed to keep away from his father-in-law on his wedding day. And for a while afterwards, too.

(Both leave. Enter Stage Manager.)

Stage Manager: Hold up! Hold up! DJ stop the track! We want to know what started all this mess, not how to make it worse. How did it happen in the first place? You know how it is, one day you're twenty-one, finally legal and ready to party hard, then time flies and you're seventy, with a mess of grandbabies and an old lady sitting across the table from you, calling you Honey.

How does that happen? Hakeem and Wynter are gonna play it all back for you. Show you that first convo when they realized they were ready to go the distance. But first, try to think back on what it was like for you.

Remember the time as a child when you saw that girl? You know, the two ponytails with the matching hair bows, the malicious hits and tell the teacher, the notes in crayon and bubble in the answer—Do you like me? “Yes, no, maybe.” When you would argue for no reason, just to get a rise out of each other, and laugh when it was over? Those were definitely the days. It was like anything you'd say to one another, no matter how lala and anecdotal it was, was definitely music to your ears. Simply because your secret crush was saying it. Especially the first days of love, when you were like a parrot, saying her name again and again. And you didn't quite hear what was said to you, just the things you wanted to hear. Remember that?

Hear they are, coming out of high school at 3:15. Hakeem was just picked as drum major for the band, and Wynter was voted head cheerleader.

(He sets up the stage.)

Look at them coming down MLK together, so young and in love. They've got a bright future together, a Partridge family replica, if they last that long. At least they've got real love. Most of these youngins nowadays don't care about that. They don't have anything concrete and stimulating. Only travesty and lust!

(Wynter is carrying an awful amount of books.)

Wynter: I can't, Alexis. I've gotta go. I've got chores to do. Tiffany! Are you still gonna do homework with me tonight? Don't you just hate Shakespeare? Tell your mom it's important. Bye Andre! Bye Lisa!

(Hakeem catches up with her.)

Hakeem: Where you about to go, Wynter? Want me to carry your books?

Wynter: No, I'm good.

Hakeem: Hold on, someone's calling me—Chris, if I'm late go ahead and start practice without me. And give Stephan the new drum.

Wynter: Bye, Jeremy.

Hakeem: Peace, Jeremy. Congrats on becoming captain. Um, Wynter? Are you mad or something?

Wynter: No.

Hakeem: Oh. Cause...I feel tension between us.

Wynter: I'm not telling you, because you already know. (She sees a teacher.) Bye, Ms. Cunningham.

(Ms. Cunningham looks at her funny, cause that's not her name.)

Hakeem: Yeah, bye...So what's up?

Wynter: You starting to fake. Not to disrespect you or anything, but you've changed too much. I'm just keeping it real.

Hakeem: Whatchu talking 'bout? I'm still me.



Wynter: No you're not. Last year we were cool, cause we grew up together, but then you started hanging out with your friends from the band and you didn't have time for anyone else. Now the whole world thinks you're stuck up, cause you not trying to speak to no one. So I forgot about you. Sorry if it hurts, but I had to say it.

Hakeem: Well, at least you told me. Thanks for speaking up. I didn't realize what was going on. But look, everybody makes mistakes, ya know.

Wynter: Well I'm sorry, but I expect a man to live up to my standards.

Hakeem: That's not fair. It's easy for you to be perfect, cause you're a girl. A man's gotta survive out on these streets.

Wynter: Hold up. Let me let you know that I'm not perfect. Girls have a lot more to deal with. We've got to be responsible for everything. Anyhow, I'm sorry I hurt your feelings. I shouldn't have said anything.

Hakeem: It's alright.

Wynter: No, it's not. But it doesn't matter anymore.

Hakeem: Do you want to get something from IHOP before you go in the house?

Wynter: If you're paying, sure. You don't have to ask me twice.

(They walk in to the IHOP. Wynter hides her face. Hakeem speaks to people passing by.)

Hakeem: My man. Yo, dog, wassup?

(The Stage Manager seats them at a table.)

Stage Manager: Hey Hakeem. Hey Wynter. What do you want to order? Hold up—Wynter, are you okay? Why are you crying?

Hakeem: Ummm...she's just stressed out. She almost got hit by a Metrobus across from the station.

Stage Manager: Here, have a drink of water. You look wrecked. You gotta watch out crossing the Ave. these days. Gets worst every year. Whatcha want to eat?

Wynter: I'll have a half lemonade, half iced tea.

Hakeem: Naw, Wynter. Have some pancakes with me. Two strawberry banana pancakes, please.

Stage Manager: Coming right up. You know, it's always something out here lately. The police were around here the other day, looking for somebody. There was a shoot out last night and

they crashed the car right out there in the parking lot. Troubled my nerves. I remember when it was peaceful around here. Everybody knew everybody and we could come out at night with no worries. (He puts their plates down.) Here you go. Hope you like 'em.

Wynter: Wow. This must cost a lot.

Hakeem: Don't sweat it. You know I got that paper. Besides, I've got something to celebrate.

Wynter: What?

Hakeem: You. I appreciate you telling me what I need to know.

Wynter: Don't trip off that. I didn't mean it anyway.

Hakeem: Nah, you said it, stick to it. You're the only one who cared enough to tell me to my face. So I'm going to be different, I promise. Now I've got a question for you.

Wynter: Go ahead.

Hakeem: Wynter, if I get in to college next year, will you come visit me?

Wynter: I guess so. But you'll be out there meeting new people and making new friends. After awhile people lose touch, and you'll just get bored hearing about DC. It's a pretty cool place, though.

Hakeem: I'm always gonna want to know what's going on with you. Bet that.

Wynter: I'll fill you in with a text or two.

Hakeem: I'm not sure about spending another four years in school, though. I see plenty of entrepreneurs who say you can learn what you need to know on your own. I can always take classes on-line if I want to. And my Uncle Smitty says I can start working for him whenever.

Wynter: For real?

Hakeem: Really, what do they have anywhere else that they don't have here? I don't want to make new friends if I got to leave my homies behind. What's the point? Besides, you're the best friend I ever had. I don't think I'll ever meet anyone better.

Wynter: Still, it might be good to get out there and learn about bookkeeping and management and stuff.

Hakeem: (Pause.) My mind's made up. I'mma stay right here and put my skills to work. I'll tell my father soon as I get in the house.

Wynter: But you got a whole nother year. You don't have to make any choices yet. You ought to keep your mind on graduating and stop worrying about what comes after that.

Hakeem: Man, you were right about what you said. You know all about my flaws. But one thing you said was straight up wrong. You know how you said I didn't pay attention to anybody? Well, I was paying attention to you. I had my eye on you everywhere you went. But every time I tried to talk to you, something came up. Like yesterday I tried to wait up for you, but you passed right by me with all your friends.

Wynter: Oh wow. How was I supposed to know?

Hakeem: Aight, here's why I'm not going away to college. When you've learned enough to know you found the right one, someone who cares enough to let you know when you mess up, someone you trust to always have your back, that's a kind of education, too. That's as big a deal as college, maybe bigger.

Wynter: For real.

Hakeem: Wynter.

Wynter: What?

Hakeem: If I try to do better...and change my ways...do you think...I mean would you...

Wynter: Sure I would. Are you crazy? I have been, all along.

Hakeem: Well I guess that's it then.

Wynter: I guess so.

Hakeem: Hold up so I can take you home. (He pats his pockets, looking for his wallet. Stage manager returns.) Uh-oh. Um, Mr. Morgan? Can you wait just a second while I run home and get my money?

Stage Manager: What? You of all people?

Hakeem: I'm sorry, but I got a real good excuse. Here, hold my chain until I get back.

Stage Manager: Naw. That's okay. I know where you live.

(Hakeem and Wynter walk out.)

Stage Manager: Well that's how it was, more or less. Now let's see this wedding.

It's a lot you can say about a wedding, so much drama, but we can't say it all here. They're keeping it short and simple so it won't go over budget. But I'm about to play the minister, so I get to talk for a minute.

It's about to get serious.

It's gonna be a real nice wedding, but you can't have a wedding without putting some doubts in some people's minds. So we're going to show you that part, too.

But even with all the doubts and confusion, there will always be weddings. That's just how people are. We just keep trying and trying all our lives, no matter how many times we mess up, we still keep trying to get it right. It'll be that way forever. That's why I'm a man of the church.

And let's not forget the ancestors. I'll pour out a little from my cup for the ancestors, and for all the ones who can't be here with us today.

(The wedding begins. People come into the room and sit. The Gibbs and Webb families come in. Ms. Webb, before she goes to her seat, turns and speaks.)

Ms. Webb: My baby is growing up. Now she's going to marry some other kid she's known forever. And look at me—I'm so happy I'm shooting tears. There shouldn't be anything to cry about, but that's how it goes. Poor Wynter took one bite out of her Pop Tart at breakfast and couldn't eat no more. Why do we do this to our little girls? Why do we send them out into the world when we know they're not ready? I guess it's cause we weren't ready either. Nobody ever is. Oh well, here they come.

The Band Members: Yo Hakeem! Get it dog! You scared? Look at him, 'bout to pee his pants. You a G, man, you know how we do it! Represent!

Stage Manager: All right, that's enough. You don't have to be so ghetto about it. Try and act civilized, like the rest of us.

(He pushes them off the stage. Music starts playing. Hakeem steps out, then back. Ms. Gibbs comes to him.)

Ms. Gibbs: You okay, baby?

Hakeem: This ain't me, ma. I'm not trynna grow old.

Ms. Gibbs: You asked for it.

Hakeem: I ain't ask for all this.

Ms. Gibbs: Man up, son. You can't turn back now.

Hakeem: I'm just trynna be a teenager. I don't need all this stress.

Ms. Gibbs: Hush your mouth! You better not embarrass me in front of all these people.

Hakeem: (sigh) Where's Wynter?

Ms. Gibbs: That's more like it. You scared the mess out of me.

Hakeem: I'll be alright, I guess. Looks like I'm getting married.

Ms. Gibbs: Now I'm stressin'. I can't hardly breathe.

Hakeem: It's okay, mommy. I'll still come chill with you. I'ma make you cook for both us, you watch. Now let's do this.

(Ms. Gibbs fixes his tie. Wynter comes in, but she takes a step back too.)

Wynter: I'm all alone out here. And there's Hakeem with his ugly self—I can't stand him. Why can't I just go ahead and die right here?

Mr. Webb: (comes to her) Calm down, now. It's gonna be okay.

Wynter: Don't make me do this. I want to go home.

Mr. Webb: Chill out. It's too late to change your mind.

Wynter: Can't we just leave? I'm too young to be tied down.

Mr. Webb: Now you listen to me...

Wynter: Haven't you always said you'd take care of me? Why are you pushing me out now? Where's my family when I need them?

Mr. Webb: Look at you. You're a wreck. Hakeem! Get over here. Look, he's a good man. You'll be fine.

Wynter: But, but...

(Hakeem comes over.)

Mr. Webb: Hakeem, this is my baby girl. Can you handle it from here?

Hakeem: I hope so. I'll try my best. Wynter, I'm gonna treat you right, okay boo? I love you.

Wynter: Do you really? I mean from here on out? Cause I need you to love me forever, and I mean forever.

Mr. Webb: Hurry up, you two. Let's go.

Stage Manager: Do you, Hakeem, take this girl...

Ms. Soames: (In the back row, drowning out the minister) Look at that dress. Is that Prada? I bet it cost a fortune. And she looks cute in it, too. She lost about twenty pounds for the wedding.

Hakeem: I do.

Stage Manager: Do you, Wynter...

Ms. Soames: (Drowning him out again) I swear I've never seen a cuter couple. Such a nice wedding, too. They maxed out the credit cards on this one. I hope there's an open bar. Now why am I crying? It's just so sweet to see young people acting happy for a change. I hope things work out for them.

(Everybody freezes.)

Stage Manager: I got the job done again, probably about the hundredth couple I married. And they're all the same. Is it a good idea? Who knows?

The rent, the car note, the day care bills, the I'm-too-tired-to-make-dinner-stage, then the whole adolescent teenager thing—I shouldn't have to explain that, the high blood pressure, the grandkids, the diabetes, the hospital, the funeral bill...(He looks at the audience, smiling sincerely) And every now and then things work out just right.

Ms. Soames: This wedding is da bomb. I hope they'll be happy. I sure do hope they will. That's all that matters, really.

(The bride and groom run up the aisle.)

Stage Manager: Act Two is over. On to the next one...

Act III

Stage Manager: Nine more years have gone by. Welcome to 2010. Southeast is changing. Spinners are getting rare, no one's wearing Tims anymore, but pretty much everyone has a tattoo. We're seeing more business people on the Metro, and all the fares are higher. Kids that used to run around in pampers are dropping out of school and smoking. And they closed P.R. Harris. There are a lot of things that didn't change in nine years, such as people still getting killed. Go-go bands are still here—new bands like TCB, MOB, and CCB, take the place of old bands such as Junkyard, Backyard, and Northeast Groovers, but Chuck Brown is forever.

This place is called Harmony Memorial Park. It's out in Maryland, kind of a long way from Southeast, but everyone knows how to get there. It's quiet out here—people show more respect for the dead than they do for the living. Teenagers in their shorts and tank tops walk around here laughing at their little text talk, OMG...Britt, ur my BFF...LMAO, but that don't bother nobody.

Some of the graves have fresh flowers every week, and some of them never get visited at all, they just get passed over by people on their way to visit someone else. There are families and friends that come out here every Sunday for awhile after the funeral, then maybe once a month or so, then only on their loved one's birthday, or the day they died. The living have to get on with their business, and the dead have to let them. After all, the living only have the time they're given, the dead will be here forever.

It used to be the graves were mostly for old people. And for the war vets who died for a reason. Now you see more and more stones that say 1992-2009. It seems like the young kids who have the most time left don't appreciate life. It's only the old folks who want to hold on to it.

But we all wind up out here sooner or later. Ms. Gibbs is here. And here's Simon Stimson, who played piano at the church. And old Ms. Soames, remember her at the wedding? She was off the hook. And there's real loved ones we've lost, too: Theresa Mabry, Amani's mother; Dale Watkins, Maria's brother; and Michael Davis, whose son was named for him. There's Renita's sister, Terry, who was also Bunny's mom. There's J-Rock and Popcorn and Butta Rocks, there's Siquan and Lip and Li'l Ed, there's Brandon, Swag, and Tank, so many young ones lost. There's Jordan Howe, his grave is still fresh.

Out here, it doesn't matter what kind of shoes you wore or car you drove, but there's something about everyone that does matter. That's the part that stays with us forever. How we remember them tells us who they were.

And there's Josephine Stoddard, the undertaker, out here doing her job. And here comes a youngin who moved out to Maryland, I guess she came back for the funeral.

Samantha Craig: What's up, Mo.

Josephine Stoddard: What's up, Son. Hold up—do I know you?

Samantha Craig: I'm Samantha Craig.

Josephine Stoddard: You did look like someone I knew. I figured you'd come back. It's been a minute, Samantha.

Samantha Craig: It's been eight years since I left. I finished college and now I run my own business. Computer repair. I heard my cousin died, so I thought I'd come through and see the fam. How you?

Josephine Stoddard: Sad. It's messed up when these youngins get taken.

Samantha Craig: I hear you.

Josephine Stoddard: Your people should be up here soon. I had to get out here before them, so my big head son is holding the business down.

Samantha Craig: (reading stones) Old Walter Jackson. I used to wash his car; he had a Benz.

Josephine Stoddard: We brung him out here a few years ago.

Samantha Craig: (reading another) Aww, I remember Mr. Brockenberry, when he used to say, "Get to your third period class before the bell rings." He used to yell at me when I was in the hallways.

Josephine Stoddard: I used to call him Brock. We all did. A rack of people came out to see him off. He meant a whole lot to the kids. And the grown folks, too.

Samantha Craig: (staring at Ms. Gibbs' knees) Hey, this is Aunt Keisha. It slipped my mind that she...man, oh man.

Josephine Stoddard: Yeah, Doc Gibbs' wife's been gone a while now. Today's gonna be hard for him too.

Ms. Gibbs: (to Simon Stimson, in a chill voice) It's my sister Trinity's son, Sam. You know, Sam Craig. He's all grown up.

Simon Stimson: I'm not right when they around. Those living people.

Ms. Gibbs: Hush up, Simon. That's not nice.

Samantha Craig: I wanna know, who decides what it says on the tombstone? Do folks already have something picked before they go?

Josephine Stoddard: Mostly it's the family that picks something out.

Samantha Craig: This doesn't sound much like Aunt Keisha. Not many from her side left with all these funerals. My mom and dad are out here somewhere.

Josephine Stoddard: They're with your dad's family over there.

Samantha Craig: (reading Simon Stimson's stone) He played piano in church, and keyboards at the Tunnel. I heard he was a wino.

Josephine Stoddard: He tried to hide it, but everybody knew. He saw trouble coming to him. (whispers) You know he killed himself, right?

Samantha Craig: For real?

Josephine Stoddard: He had medicine for his nerves. He took a whole bottle of pills. His family kept it on the down low, but you know people talk. He wrote what it says on tombstone.

Samantha Craig: (reading) It's just music notes. What's the point, when we can't hear the music? Hey, Josephine—What happened to her, anyhow?

Josephine Stoddard: Who?

Samantha Craig: My cousin.

Josephine Stoddard: You ain't hear? She died on the table in the delivery room. They lost the baby, too. She left a four year old boy behind.



Samantha Craig: (opening her umbrella) They're gonna put her over there?

Josephine Stoddard: Yeah, this section's full up. They're coming up here now. I'm out.

(A funeral procession comes in and gathers at the grave.)

Ms. Soames: Who's coming, Keisha? That looks like someone I know.

Ms. Gibbs: (without looking) My son's wife.

Ms. Soames: Who, Wynter? What happened to her?

Ms. Gibbs: She died in labor.

Ms. Soames: Oh, right. I knew that. Life sure was hard, wasn't it? (sighing) But good, too.

Simon Stimson: Good, huh. What was good about it?

Ms. Gibbs: Hush your mouth, Simon.

Ms. Soames: I remember her wedding, too. That jont was off the hook! And Wynter was the valedictorian at Ballou, wasn't she? Mr. Branch said she had the highest test scores in the school. I went out to see Hakeem and her right before I passed.

A Woman Among the Dead: They lived on my block.

A Man Among the Dead: Yeah, same trifling neighborhood.

A Woman Among the Dead: I hope they play some good music. I like "His Eye Is on the Sparrow."

(Wynter comes out from the procession. She looks back at the mourners and walks to her chair beside Ms. Gibbs.)

Wynter: Hey, what's up.

Ms. Soames: Hey, Wynter.

A Man Among the Dead: Hey, baby girl.

Wynter: Hey, Ma Gibbs.

Ms. Gibbs: Hi Wynter.

Wynter: It's pouring out here. (She watches the funeral.)

Ms. Gibbs: Don't worry about them. Just chill out. They'll leave in a minute.

Wynter: How long has it been now? Did I just get here? I hate being the new and not knowing what's going on. Hey, Simon Stimson! I remember you.

Simon Stimson: What's good, Wynter?

Wynter: Ma Gibbs, Hakeem and I missed you. We bought a house and had the patio done with the cash you left us.

Ms. Gibbs: What cash?

Wynter: How could you forget? You left us three thousand dollars. Helped us get a good start on life. I guess.

Ms. Gibbs: Oh, right. I remember now.

Wynter: We had a tight ride, too. A used Impala that Hakeem tricked out with 24 inch rims and gold flake paint. He won't want to drive it without me riding shotgun, though. (pause) Live people really don't get it, do they, Ma?

Ms. Gibbs: They don't have a clue, chile.

Wynter: They're all into what's going on now, finding something new to complain about. I feel like I don't know them anymore... Ms. Carter's watching Junebug today. (sees Mr. Carter among the dead) Hey, Mr. Carter. My son's staying with your wife today.

Mr. Carter: That's cool.

Wynter: Yeah, she spoils him rotten and...and...Ma? Why do I feel like I don't belong here? When is it finally gonna hit me that I'm not alive anymore?

Ms. Gibbs: Just chill. You'll get used to it soon.

(The people at the funeral begin to leave. Doc Gibbs comes over to his wife's grave and stands at it. Ms. Gibbs doesn't look up.)

Wynter: Aww. Daddy Gibbs is giving you some of my flowers. I swear Hakeem's the spitting image of him. Wow. Ma, I really never thought about it before—how clueless people are when they're alive. I sure did love him, though. But living people, all they are is messed up, 24-7.

(Doc Gibbs leaves.)

The Dead: The rain's clearing up. And there's a nice breeze, too. That should cool things off for the evening.

(The Stage Manager returns. Suddenly, Wynter has an idea.)

Wynter: I know! I'm gonna go back, Ma. I think I can do it. I was just remembering what it was like to hold my son in my arms, and all of a sudden I felt like I was alive again.

Ms. Gibbs: Well, you could, but you really shouldn't.

Wynter: (to the Stage Manager) Why not? Can I really go be with my family again?

Stage Manager: It's true, people have tried. But they never last long.

Ms. Gibbs: Big mistake, Wynter.

Ms. Soames: You won't like it. It's not like what you're thinking.

Wynter: But I'll pick a really good day. I'll go back to the day I first fell in love with Hakeem. That won't hurt, will it?

(The dead are silent. She asks the Stage Manager.)

Stage Manager: It's not like when you were going through it in life. This time you'll be seeing it differently, because you already know what they don't know. Now you know how things turn out.

Wynter: What's wrong with that? What have I got to lose?

Ms. Gibbs: Well, that's not that's not the whole story. You'll start to get it when you're a little more used to the situation. We're here to forget the past. They have to move on without us.

Wynter: That's just not possible. I can't forget everything I ever knew.

Ms. Soames: It's a bad idea, Wynter.

Wynter: I can't take your word for it. I've got to see it with my own eyes. I'll pick a good day for starters.

Ms. Gibbs: Wait. Don't pick a good day. That would mess you up for real. At least pick a day that doesn't matter. Pick a day you can forget about. It'll be hard enough.

Wynter: Hmm, then I'll have to pick something from before I had my baby, before I started going with Hakeem. I got it. How about my birthday? I'll pick my twelfth birthday.

Stage Manager: Okay, you got it. February 11, 1996. We'll start rolling when you first woke up. There was a blizzard, remember? It'll be a week before the streets get plowed. D.C. schools were opening two hours late.

Wynter: Look! There's Hart, before they built the tennis center next door. You can see the high rise!

(Wynter walks toward the brightness of the scene.)

Stage Manager: It's fourteen years ago. Before a lot of us were even born.

Wynter: That's the hood the way I remember it. It used to be fun as a mug around there. Is my family in the house?

Stage Manager: Yeah, your moms will be in any minute to pour you some cereal. And remember, your daddy was working nights so he's not home yet.

Wynter: Hey, it's Roger Newsome and Joe Crowell. But they're both dead. I just left them back at the cemetery.

(She listens to their voices happily.)

Roger Newsome: I'm about to stack me some paper shoveling all this snow.

Joe Crowell: Well I was here first, so you take the next block.

(Ms. Webb has come into the kitchen, but Wynter doesn't notice her until she calls.)

Ms. Webb: Anthony! Wynter! Wake up and come get your breakfast. It's the most important meal of the day.

Wynter: I'm right here. Wow. I sure don't remember her being that young.

Ms. Webb: Don't come out here with your hair looking like that. Go get me a rubberband.

(Roger Newsome enters.)

UPS! How'd you even get down the street in all this snow?

Roger Newsome: I shoveled it myself. Can I do your sidewalk?

Ms. Webb: No thanks. My son will do it.

Wynter: I can't find my blue scrunchy.

Ms. Webb: Go look again. It's right where you left it on the sink.

Wynter: Oh.

(Mr. Webb comes up Mississippi Avenue and runs into Officer Riche.)

Mr. Webb: How's it going, Riche?

Officer Riche: I'm about to freeze to death out here, but other than that...

Mr. Webb: Take care. I gotta get home.

Wynter: (whispers) It's daddy.

Mr. Webb: Morning, Sugar.

Ms. Webb: Hey Baby, how was work?

Mr. Webb: Nothing special. It's cold as penguin feet out there.

Ms. Webb: I'm making sausage biscuits for Wynter's birthday. Did you bring her present?

Mr. Webb: It's in my pocket. Where is the birthday girl anyway? (He goes to look for her.)

Ms. Webb: Somewhere in this crazy house. Hold up. I already told those kids to get in here.

Wynter: (softly) I can't deal with it. When were they ever so young? And why'd they have to get old? This is just too much to handle.

(She looks at the Stage Manager. He nods. She goes up to her mother and speaks in the voice of a twelve year old girl.)

Hey, Ma.

Ms. Webb: (in her usual matter-of-fact way) There you are. Happy Birthday. I made your favorite breakfast.

Wynter: (to the Stage Manager) I can't take this...

Ms. Webb: Now, I don't care if it is your birthday. I want you to slow down and chew your food. You got a check from Aunt Cheryl, and there's a card with money in it from Grandma. Oh, and Hakeem left something at the door before I got up. He must have froze his butt off.

Wynter: (to herself) He bought me a teddy bear. I forgot about that.

Ms. Webb: Now don't eat too much. Save some for your brother.

Wynter: (with urgency) Ma, stop for a minute and see me like I am. Fourteen years have passed. I'm dead and gone, and you've got a little grandbaby. Think about it, Ma. Hakeem and I got married. And Anthony's dead, too. He crashed a car on Benning Road. It was a tragedy. But right now let's skip all that and just enjoy each other for a minute. Let's be a family again. But you've got to look at me.

Ms. Webb: You said you wanted jewelry, so I got you some earrings to match your gold initial necklace.

Wynter: Thanks, Ma. I love them!

(She hugs her mother, who goes on cooking.)

Ms. Webb: I'm glad you do. I went all over Pentagon City looking for 'em. They didn't have any "W's" at the first two stores I went to. Anthony made you a picture frame out of popsicle sticks, and he worked really hard so you better not laugh at him. And your daddy got you something too, but I have no idea what it is.

Mr. Webb: (off stage) Where she at? Is that my big old birthday girl?

Wynter: (to Stage Manager) I can't stand it. It all goes by so fast. We never slow down to appreciate it. (She breaks down in tears.)

(The lights dim and Ms. Webb disappears.)

I never had any idea this is how we were. We just ran through life on auto-pilot and never even thought about it. I've had enough. I'm ready to go back to the cemetery now.

Bye, DC. Bye, Southeast. And mom and dad, and my old room with the Strawberry Shortcake sheets. Bye to Mama's grilled-cheese sandwiches, and grape soda, and French fries from the carry out. Bye to double dutch and Uno. Bye to hanging out on the steps with my friends. Bye friends. Bye family. Bye sunshine and twilight and darkness. Bye life. I wish I had taken the time to get to know you.

Does anyone ever appreciate what they've got while they've got it? Do people ever really feel life while it's going on?

Stage Manager: Not really. Sometimes the poets do, I guess.

Wynter: Get me out of here. (She goes back to her chair next to Ms. Gibbs.)

Ms. Gibbs: Did you have fun?

Wynter: No. I should have heard what you were telling me. I'm just as deaf and blind as everyone else.

Ms. Gibbs: The clouds are gone. Look at the stars—you can see millions of them out here.

Wynter: You were right, Mr. Stimson. I didn't understand.

Simon Stimson: (angrily) See? That's what I was trying to tell you. Life is nothing but a bunch of crazy fools bumping into each other and stepping on each other's toes. People hurting other people just for fun. And everybody throws away their time like they think they'll live forever. They run around chasing after the next big fashion and all the new gadgets and they never stop for a second to think about what they're really doing with the time they have left. I hope you're satisfied—that's the wonderful life you wished you could return to. Nothing but a dark tunnel of pain.

Ms. Gibbs: Give me a break, Simon. There's more to it than that. Look up at the sky, Wynter. You never get to see all these stars back in the city.

A Man Among the Dead: My daughter was a flight attendant. She went up in that beautiful sky every day, miles up above the rest of us.

Another Man Among the Dead: The night sky will keep you company, you know. You'll never be lonely out here.

A Woman Among the Dead: Amen to that.

Simon Stimson: Look at this. Here comes one of them.

The Dead: What's up with that? No one's ever crazy enough to come out to the graveyard in the middle of the night.

Wynter: Oh, no. It's Hakeem.

Ms. Gibbs: Don't watch him. Look the other way.

Wynter: It's him.

(Hakeem enters from the left and comes toward them.)

A Man Among the Dead: Some of those stars are dead, like we are, and they don't know it either. They're so far away that we still see their light after they're gone. That light has so many millions of miles to travel that it's still on its way here when the star that made it is dead.

(Hakeem falls to the ground at Wynter's grave.)

A Woman Among the Dead: Oh no! He doesn't know how to act.

Ms. Soames: He needs to get back where he belongs.

Wynter: He doesn't get it, does he, Ma?

Ms. Gibbs: No, child. They never do.

(The Stage Manager appears from the right, closing the curtain across the scene. In the distance a siren heard.)

Stage Manager: Most of Southeast is in bed for the night, and if they're not they should be. The cab drivers are still out, but they won't take you across the bridge at this hour. And the hospital staff is up and ready, waiting to see what disasters the night will bring. The sky is looking down on us, or maybe it's not. We don't know whether there's anything else alive out there. There might be. Or it might be just us. Either way, we've got a job to do, and it's getting late. So we better get a good night's rest. Peace.

END