

(Across town, Gabby sits at the kitchen table. A small wire-bound phone book sits on the table. Charles enters)

GABBY

Sit down.

(Charles sits)

CHARLES

What's wrong?

(Gabby slides the phonebook in front of Charles)

GABBY

It belongs to Vara.

(Quiet)

CHARLES

Did she leave it sitting out?

GABBY

No. I took it out of her purse... she's hiding something from us.

CHARLES

I thought you had let that go.

GABBY

The other night Ishmael told me that he wasn't afraid to die. Can you imagine a child saying something like that? Why would he say that?

CHARLES

Look at what's happening. He's responding same as most kids would. Finding some way to make peace.

GABBY

I might believe that if it wasn't for Vara. She acts suspect. She never talks to me unless I talk to her first. Then she's all cryptic. Like she's hiding something.

CHARLES

Maybe she just doesn't like you.

GABBY

Well if she doesn't like me, then why is she in this house?

CHARLES

Cause we pay her to clean our house and cook our meals. It's a job. And because you wanted her to live in because the Pattersons got a live-in.

GABBY

I didn't know she'd bring Ishmael. I didn't realize Ishmael had gotten so big. I didn't recognize him when he walked through the door. I kept thinking it would just be like having another Stevie around. But it's not. He's so big. Yvonne says it's the hormones they put in the milk they sell in poor neighborhoods. That's why he's so big.

CHARLES

He's not that big. He's growing into his teens. He's a manchild. I'd be worried if he was big as me, but he's not. He's about normal for his age.

GABBY

No he's not. Maybe that's normal where he comes from and everywhere else, but's it's not normal here. Our children look like children..

CHARLES

Well he's not supposed to look like a child. He's in between, childhood and adulthood. And he looks perfectly normal how he should look. He doesn't even have facial hair.

GABBY

His size. He walked through the door and I saw how grown he looked and I saw trouble. I saw one of those kids we see on the news. Those, lost, black faces they flash across the screen.

CHARLES

You're just going to make her leave because you're uncomfortable? You arranged this.

GABBY

I tried to discourage her from bringing Ishmael. I said that if she brought Ishmael we wouldn't be able to pay her anything. They would just get free room and board. I thought she'd back off but she didn't. She brought him anyway.

CHARLES

We're not paying her anything?

GABBY

I thought you knew.

CHARLES

How would I know? You've always handled her pay.

GABBY

Well she knew the terms and she accepted.

CHARLES

We have a woman who lives in our house, cleans and cooks our meals, and we don't pay her any money for the work she does. And she's not related to us by blood.

GABBY

Yes.

CHARLES

Okay. One more time. Because you're not getting my point. We have a **woman** who **lives** in **our house**, **cleans** and **cooks** our meals, and we **don't pay** her any **money** for the **work** she does. And she's not related to us by blood.

GABBY

That was the arrangement. I even offered to keep things like they were. But she preferred to bring Ishmael and live-in.

CHARLES

Gabby. Do you realize this makes us slave masters?

GABBY

Oh you're exaggerating.

CHARLES

No I'm not. We own slaves. Two. How did you go from being Angela Davis to Scarlett O'Hara?

GABBY

If you equate what I'm doing to Antebellum slavery, then that's an insult to real slaves.

CHARLES

She has no income. When she leaves here, how is she going to support her son?

GABBY

That's the deal she accepted. And don't you wonder why she accepted? Something she's not telling us. I feel it.

CHARLES

Gabby, please give me the phonebook and let this go.

GABBY

What if she's jeopardizing our son's safety? Someone in this book might know something we need to know.

CHARLES

Well maybe it's personal, and private, and painful, and it's not our business to know.

GABBY

As long as she lives under this roof then her business is my business.

CHARLES

You don't know how wrong this is.

GABBY

You don't know what I saw in Ishmael's eyes. Something in his eyes tells me that for him it's very personal and very close. And it's not something that he's just seen on tv, or knows someone in passing. He said that to me because he thinks he's next...

CHARLES

Now you're putting words in the boy's mouth. Ideas in his head.

GABBY

But he knows something. And don't tell me that's it's his business and not ours. Because he lives in our house with our son. And I have no qualms about invading Vara's privacy if it means protecting my son.

CHARLES

This is not the way.

GABBY

Can't we just be on one accord?

CHARLES

Be on one accord? Why start now?

(Quiet)

GABBY

Was I ever more like you? Or were you more like me?  
'Cause looking at us now, I can't remember what we had  
in common that drew us together.

CHARLES

I liked saving people. I wanted to be a preacher.  
That's what preachers do.

GABBY

I threw the rock.

CHARLES

You still throw rocks. But now you throw them in the  
opposite direction.

(Gabby considers)

GABBY

You could preach that. Wish you'd go back in the  
pulpit.

CHARLES

Wish you'd give me that book... if you give me the book  
then I'll keep it for tonight. I'll pray and sleep on  
it. I won't put it back without letting you know.

GABBY

Pinky swear?

(Gabby gives Charles the book. Then they pinky swear.  
He pulls her in for a sweet, short kiss. Then he  
begins to walk away)

GABBY

Where are you going?

CHARLES

I'm hiding the book.

(He leaves)

GABBY

You're too sincere to hide things well.

(Later that afternoon, Vara should be dusting and polishing but instead she's engrossed in an episode of "Julia." Her cleaning bucket sits nearby. She's so engrossed that she doesn't pay much mind as Gabby enters. Gabby picks up the remote and cuts off the television)

VARA

Mrs. Gabby, I'm on break. Cut the tv back on, pleaaassse. This is my favorite episode. The one were Julia gets a new car and Robert Guillaume is the co-star. I wish I had a car and Robert Guillaume.

(The phone rings. Vara answers)

VARA

Edward's residence, hello...

(to Gabby)

Oh. It's for me.

(Vara gives Gabby a look as if she wants to be alone. Gabby takes the hint and leaves the room. Dorothy appears on the other end of the line)

VARA

Well? What happened? Did you get the job?

DOROTHY

I didn't like that stuck-up s'ditty bitch and she didn't like me.

VARA

What did you do?

DOROTHY

What did I do? Now you're sounding just like them.

VARA

How am I sounding like them?

DOROTHY

Why it gotta be my fault? Why do you automatically think it's something I did wrong? Like she perfect and without fault.

VARA

Well what happened?

DORTOTHY

She said I was clean.

(Silence. Vara doesn't know what to say. In another part of the house, Gabby picks up the phone to listen. She covers her mouth and nose)

DOROTHY

Hello... Hello...

VARA

I'm here.

DOROTHY

Clean. Like I'm not supposed to know how to bath and put on clean clothes.

(Yvonne appears)

DOROTHY

I looked that bougie bitch up and down, side to side then she had the nerve to say...

YVONNE

Oh. You got a chip on your shoulder.

DOROTHY

Damn right I got a chip on my shoulder and I dare you to knock it off.

YVONNE

I wish you all the best in your employment search. However, you are no longer being considered for the position... heifer.

(Yvonne disappears)

DOROTHY

Really think she did something, calling me heifer. I laughed in her face and walked out the door. Now I kept my promise. What about you?

VARA

I haven't talked to Vera yet.

DOROTHY

Why not?

VARA

I can't find my phonebook.

DOROTHY

Don't you always keep it in your purse?

VARA

It's not there. I misplaced it somewhere.

DOROTHY

You didn't misplace your phonebook. You just don't want to call her.

VARA

I did for real.

DOROTHY

Is she in the city phone book?

VARA

I don't know.

DOROTHY

Look.

VARA

Don't tell me what to do.

DOROTHY

Call your cousin or I will look in the book and call her myself and tell her where to find you.

VARA

You wouldn't do that.

DOROTHY

Okay. I wouldn't. But you still need to call your cousin. She needs your support. And the police are hounding her real bad.

VARA

So the police can start hounding Ishmael too?

DOROTHY

It's the right thing to do. Facing her will make a little man out of Ishmael.

VARA

I got work to do. I gotta go...

DOROTHY

Find her number and call your cousin. Vera needs to hear from you bad. Put yourself in Vera's shoes.

VARA

Talking to me won't bring him back.

DOROTHY

Nobody said it will. But you need to call her anyway.

VARA

Bye.

(Vara hangs up. Dorothy disappears)

GABBY

Vera?

(Gabby hangs up the phone)

**End of Act One**

