

BLUR

"But You Don't Sound Black"

Written by

Oneika Mays

WGA 137448

oneikamays@gmail.com
917-428-5987

BLUR REWRITE

"But You Don't Sound Black"

COLD OPEN

INT. ELECTRONICS STORE MALL - SATURDAY MORNING

WIDE SHOT: A WALL OF PORTABLE CASSETTE PLAYERS. PRICE TAGS BENEATH EACH ONE.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

MAKEBA ROOSEVELT, 15, Black, glasses, preppy in a white fisherman's sweater and baggy jeans, stands at a LISTENING STATION. Oversized headphones on. She dances in place, mouthing words to a song only she can hear.

EUGENE ROOSEVELT, 40, Black, weekend-crisp in a pink Izod and blazer, stands near the Walkman wall. He picks up a box, examines the price tag, winces slightly. Puts it back.

He glances over at Makeba. She's still lost in the music. He walks over, waves his hand in front of her face. Nothing.

He taps her shoulder.

She JUMPS, yanking off the headphones.

EUGENE

Which one you feelin'?

He gestures toward the wall of Walkmans. She follows him over, still holding the headphones not quite ready to let go.

At the wall, she reaches for a CLUNKY PORTABLE CASSETTE PLAYER. Picks it up. Tests the weight. Her eyes drift UP to the top shelf.

A YELLOW SONY WALKMAN. Sleek. Perfect.

She puts the clunky player back and POINTS to the yellow one.

MAKEBA

Be this cool car shopping.

EUGENE

Get a job.

He reaches up, gets the yellow Walkman off the high shelf. Looks at the price tag. Rubs the bridge of his nose.

EUGENE (cont'd)

You and your mother think there's a money tree out back.

Hands it to her anyway.

She takes it. Holds it close to her chest for a beat. Runs her thumb over the smooth yellow casing.

MAKEBA
(mimicking him in a
deep voice)
You said buy quality.

EUGENE
Too smart for your own good.

Beat. She looks at him - the playfulness drops.

MAKEBA
But not smart enough for you guys to
let me go to Lenhart Day School.

EUGENE
We don't want you to have values that
aren't... (sighs) Just give this
place a chance. Haven't even started
school yet.

She STOPS walking. Crosses her arms. Exhales slowly.

He holds out his arm. She doesn't take it, but she does start walking again. They head to the register in silence.

EXT. MALL PARKING LOT - SATURDAY MORNING

Makeba pulls on the LOCKED passenger door handle with one hand, shopping bags (Benetton, The Limited) dangling from her other.

Eugene pats his pockets. Jacket. Pants. Back pockets.

MAKEBA
Dad.

He finds them. Clicks the unlock button. She yanks the door open, tosses the bags in, about to climb in when-

CLAIRE HIGGINS, 15, long blonde hair, hippie chic, appears out of NOWHERE. Her body slightly limp but talking FAST.

Makeba instinctively backs up against the car.

CLAIRE
My mom loves your house. Said its
aura was purple. Claire. I live down
the street.

She runs one hand over the top of her head and through her hair as she speaks. Eugene pauses, keys in hand, politely curious.

Makeba watches Claire's hand and moves her gaze up to Claire's face, squinting.

MAKEBA
I'm-

CLAIRE
 (overlapping)
 Makeba—I know. See you Monday! Gotta
 motor. Candle crisis.

She shrugs, throws up a peace sign and drifts off between the parked cars. Eugene and Makeba watch her go, mouths agape.

EUGENE
 Made a friend already. How bout that.

MAKEBA
 I was accosted. You were a witness.

INT. EUGENE'S NEW SPORTS CAR - CONTINUOUS

Makeba rips open the Walkman box. Pulls out the Walkman, foam padding, plastic wrap. Throws it all in the BACKSEAT.

Eugene glances back, shakes his head, annoyed. The MANUAL slips out and falls to the floor at her feet.

She picks it up. Looks at it. Throws it in the backseat too. Eugene laughs—sharp, disbelieving.

EUGENE
 Keeb.

She opens the battery compartment. Eugene reaches down beside his seat, pulls out a pack of AA BATTERIES. Hands them to her wordlessly.

She loads them. Pulls out "The Best of Bob Marley" from her jacket pocket. Pops it in.

Her finger hovers over PLAY.

He reaches over gently, stops her hand before she can press it.

EUGENE (cont'd)
 (earnestly)
 You know what your mom says.

Makeba turns her head to look at Eugene. She then looks forward. Finally, she gazes out the passenger window.

MAKEBA
 Yeah.

Beat. She presses PLAY. Exhales. Closes her eyes for a moment. Touches the glass with one finger.

Eugene checks the rear view mirror. Looks at her. Back at the mirror. His brow furrows.

TITLE CARD: BLUR

ACT I

INT. ROOSEVELT KITCHEN - MONDAY MORNING

A modern, upscale 1980's kitchen. A shiny Mr. Coffee in on the counter. A peg wall holds pots and pans clearly indicating an appreciation of food. Everything has a place. Stacks of wallpaper samples are on the counter and LIDIA ROOSEVELT, 39 stands impeccably dressed in gray flannel pants, silk sweater and relaxed hair perfectly coiffed flipping through wallpaper samples. She looks like a retired model. Next to her is a cup of coffee and a croissant.

BROOKE ROOSEVELT, 8, too smart for her own good and dressed for school eats fruit, grits and eggs at the table. A color television in the kitchen plays the news.

Lidia flips through wallpaper samples without looking up.

Brooke eats neatly, cutting her eggs into precise squares.

Makeba enters, Walkman headphones around her neck, yellow case clipped on her pants. Makeba is wearing a Benetton rugby, Girbaud jeans and Tretorn sneakers. Her very long relaxed hair is pulled into a french braid. She wears large tortoise shell glasses.

She's librarian pretty and becoming aware of her looks.

She goes straight for the Mr. Coffee, pours herself a cup even though she doesn't really like coffee.

LIDIA
(not looking up)
Leave it here.

Makeba adds three sugars. Stirs. Loudly.

MAKEBA
I already changed for you. C'mon.

Lidia finally looks up. Sets down her coffee cup.

LIDIA
(low)
Leave. The. Walkman.

MAKEBA
Dad bought it for me. To use.

LIDIA
Your father is NOT the only one who
makes the rules around here.

Beat. They stare at each other.

Eugene enters dressed for work in a three-piece suit, briefcase in hand. Black Enterprise cover material.

Both Makeba and Lidia turn to him.

MAKEBA
You gave this to me—

EUGENE
Keeb. Think you should leave it.

Makeba's face falls. Her eyes narrow.

MAKEBA
Thought you were off being
successful.

EUGENE
Big day.

Makeba yanks the headphones from around her neck and storms out. Lidia goes back to wallpaper samples. Eugene kisses Brooke's forehead.

BROOKE
Can I have her bacon?

INT. ROOSEVELT HOME MAKEBA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Makeba holds her backpack in one hand and her Walkman in the other. She PLACES THE WALKMAN ON THE DESK. She turns around and GRABS IT putting it in her BACKPACK.

INT. LIDIA'S MERCEDES - MONDAY MORNING

Jazz plays on the radio. Brooke sits in the back seat reading an Encyclopedia Brown book. Makeba looks out the car window.

The air in the car is thick.

At Brooke's school, Brooke grabs her metal lunchbox and opens the car door.

BROOKE
You're the best driver, mom.

A teacher approaching the car waves at Lidia who leans to make eye contact and waves back.

A smiling Brooke walks over to the teacher.

MOMENTS LATER

Lidia turns down the jazz. She puts both hands on the steering wheel. At a light she turns to Makeba.

LIDIA
Can we start again? (beat) I want you
to have nice things. People might get
the wrong idea.

Makeba pushes up her glasses. She reaches into her bag for lip
gloss—moving carefully, body tense.

Lidia notices the careful movement. Her eyes narrow slightly,
but she doesn't say anything.

Makeba lowers the visor and looks in the mirror applying the
lip gloss. She pushes her glasses up on her nose. Sits back.

MAKEBA
Work hard for what then? Why send me
to a school where I'm going to get
mugged?

LIDIA
Okay, Sarah Bernhardt. I get that
you're nervous—

MAKEBA
Not nervous. Pissed.

LIDIA
Listen—not mugged. Noticed.
There's a difference.

MAKEBA
What's the difference?

LIDIA
I want you to stand out. Just...not
like this.

Makeba absently pats her backpack.

MAKEBA
(to us)
Anyone else tired of havin' to be a
(air quotes) credit to the race?

Lidia turns up the radio. Makeba puts the lip gloss in an
outside zipper pocket.

Beat. Lidia turns the radio back down.

LIDIA
(exasperated)
Language! Listen—

Makeba turns to her mother because she knows what's coming.

MAKEBA
(mimicking)
During the Civil Rights
Movement—

LIDIA
During the Civil Rights
Movement—

They both start laughing. Lidia touches her daughter's face.

LIDIA (cont'd)
Beautiful girl. (beat) You're
fortunate and have a responsibility.

MAKEBA
(to us)
Anyone else tired of havin' to be a
(air quotes) credit to the race?

She pulls her LL Bean backpack a little closer to her chest.

Lidia glances over. Sees Makeba's lips moving. Something registers, but she doesn't pursue it.

LIDIA
Say something?

Makeba glances at the camera for just a beat, then back to Lidia.

MAKEBA
We shall overcome.

EXT. LENHART HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - MONDAY MORNING

Makeba watches as Lidia's car pulls off. When the car is out of sight, she pulls out her Walkman and puts on her headphones.

Makeba puts her backpack on and pushes up her glasses. She exhales.

MAKEBA
(to us)
I know I shouldn't lie to my mom. But
there's no point in fighting when I'm
just gonna do what I want.

She presses play and heads to the school.

EXT. LENHART HIGH SCHOOL FRONT STEPS - CONTINUOUS

Two loose clusters of students near the entrance. Close enough to talk across groups, but the division is clear.

NAIMA RODRIGUEZ, 14, Afro-Latina, Janet Jackson cool - oversized shades, gold hoops - leans against the doorframe.

SEAN COOPER, 15, Kangol, jeans, sweatshirt, Cazal glasses, sits on the step beside her with a BOOMBOX. He's rapping along to the music, performing for Naima.

NAIMA
You comin' Friday?

Sean pauses the boombox. Fishes in his bag and pulls out a few cassettes, pausing to look at each one. Nods after her chooses.

SEAN

Your moms throwin' the party though.
You know I love you.(beat) You know I
might wanna (mocks drinks)-

NAIMA

What she doesn't know won't hurt her.

Nearby, Claire sits cross-legged on a higher step, lighting a joint. In her lap- a copy of "Autobiography of a Yogi".

JACK EDWARDS, 15, Polo sweater, untucked Oxford, worn Stan Smiths, leans against the wall beside her. His JFK looks make him one of the most popular white kids at school even as a freshman.

MARA HENRY, 15, white, hovers too close to Jack - her clothes are a less expensive version of his prep look. LeSportsac purse clutched tight.

MARA

You didn't call me back. Did an
emergency breakthrough twice.

JACK

Yeah and my mom screamed at me.
Thanks.

Mara stands close to Jack and strokes his cheek. Jack moves to avoid her touch. She moves closer.

MARA

I'm sorry... I'll make it up to you
on Friday at Naima's.

Jack glances toward Naima and Sean. Caught between groups. Sidesteps Mara.

JACK

I'm actually having people over
Friday. My parents are gone again,
so. And anyway, you know...

MARA

(teary)
Oh.

NAIMA

(calling over)
Why you invitin' people to my party?
(to Jack) No offense. You can come.

Sean laughs. Claire blows smoke circles with her joint and opens her book. Naima looks at Claire.

NAIMA (cont'd)

How are you still the smartest in
school.

CLAIRE
Moderation. Gonna be legal someday,
watch. You'll all be buying it from a
store. My store.

They laugh. Claire's gaze drifts. She's watching something in
the parking lot.

CLAIRE (cont'd)
I know her.

IN THE PARKING LOT:

Makeba steps out of the Mercedes Benz. Lidia's car pulls away.

BACK ON THE STEPS:

NAIMA
In that Mercedes? Course you do.

CLAIRE
Jack, that's the girl. From down the
street.

Jack turns his entire body toward the parking lot. He stares.
Stands up straight and runs a hand through his hair.

JACK
Oh. Wow. (beat) If I'd known I
would've knocked...

Claire and Mara both notice Jack noticing. Claire raises her
eyebrows.

Mara shifts her gaze to the parking lot, watching. Her
breathing increases.

EXT. LENHART HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

IAN TOUSSAINT, 14, Adidas track sweatshirt, maroon Lee jeans,
Adidas Superstars, walks through the parking lot scribbling in
a pocket-sized spiral notebook. Not watching where he's going.

Makeba nervously singing to herself and searching her backpack
as she walks.

Ian and Makeba COLLIDE.

Her WALKMAN hits the ground. His NOTEBOOK skitters across
asphalt.

They lock eyes. Both half smile. She glances away first.

Ian and Makeba go for the Walkman. She GRABS the Walkman.
Clutches it to her chest. Recoils slightly.

MAKEBA

I got it.

Ian's brow furrows.

She picks up his spiral notebook. Glances at it.

IAN

Gimme that—

MAKEBA

You spelled "creaks" wrong. It's C-R-E-A-K-S. "Streets creaks." Sorry didn't mean to...It just jumped out at me.

IAN

(defensive)

It's a rhyme. And a metaphor. I meant water, Princess.

ON THE STEPS:

Claire's hand goes up, waving them over.

BACK TO PARKING LOT:

Makeba's still holding his notebook. Looks down at it.

Ian grabs it from her hands. Walks fast ahead of her toward the steps.

CLAIRE

(calling out)

You met!

Ian turns around.

IAN

Who?

Makeba rolls her eyes.

Ian reaches the group. Claire and Ian fist bump and snap. He grips Jack. Nods to Mara. Gives Sean a pound.

He attempts to hug Naima.

NAIMA

Boy, you were away for a weekend. I'm not your mama.

SEAN

Yo, how was Brooklyn?!!

Ian starts to answer but turns around. Sees Makeba.

IAN

What?

Claire puts out her joint and stands up. She puts her arms around them both.

CLAIRE

Makeba's in our classes. (looks at Makeba) My mom. Talked to yours. Sorry. No privacy in Mountainside.

Makeba nods awkwardly. Shimmies from under Claire's arm. Waves and dashes off.

IAN

Stuck up.

SEAN

Whatever. I'll give her a school tour.

Ian cuts his eyes at Sean. Sean grins and tries to dap up Ian who shoves him and laughs.

The group watches Makeba disappear into the building.

INT. LENHART HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Makeba continues to wade through a sea of faces that all seem to be staring at her. She adjusts HER HEADPHONES to settle herself and sighs when:

MR. RILEY, white, late 40s and dressed in a cheap suit stops Makeba in her tracks.

MR. RILEY

You know there are no electronics.

MAKEBA

It's my first day.

Mr. Riley holds out his hand.

Makeba takes a step back.

MR. RILEY

Ah- yes. Ms. Ma-ma, Marissa Roosevelt, right? (beat) You can pick it up after the final bell.

MAKEBA

Makeba. I can just put it in my locker. Like I said it's my first day.

Mara walks by the watching the exchange. MARA LOOKS AT THE WALKMAN in Riley's hand and snickers.

MR. RILEY

Final bell.

Makeba hands over the Walkman. As Mr. Riley takes it she holds on a little too tightly and he has to tug it from her hand. She plasters a saccharin smile on her face.

UP AHEAD:

Mara isn't watching where she's going and winds up walking into Naima who sucks her teeth. Naima has also seen the exchange.

INT. ADMIN OFFICE - MORNING

Makeba stands overwhelmed at the counter, arms full of books. MRS. JOHNSON 60s, Black, hair in an updo, dressed in a turtleneck, wool skirt and sensible shoes flips through a stack of forms.

MRS. JOHNSON

Alright, - locker number's 207-B.
Combo's 12-15-4. Sign here.

MAKEBA

Thank you so much. This has been,
like a crazy morning.

Two Black girls also 15 stop talking at the sound of Makeba's voice. They titter and watch her. Mrs. Johnson eyes them.

Mrs. Johnson puts a pen on the counter along with a BINDER THAT READS LOCKER ASSIGNMENTS.

Makeba puts the books on the counter and a few slide off the top of the stack. She tries to steady them.

Mrs. Johnson looks at the pen and clears her throat. Makeba picks up the pen.

MAKEBA (cont'd)

(while writing)

Oh my god, sorry. I like have to
hurry. (to herself) Makeba Dinah
Roosevelt.

Makeba feels eyes on her and *WRITES LOCKER 206 B.* A couple of Black girls nearby glance over. One smirks.

GIRL 1

(mocking)

Your name *like* really Makeba?

MAKEBA

(smiling)

Yeah.

GIRL 2

(mimicking Makeba)

But *like* that's a Black name. And you
don't sound Black.

Mrs. Johnson cuts her eyes at the girls. They slink off but stare at Makeba as they leave.

Makeba sighs.

MAKEBA
(to us)
In 1985 there was only one way to be
Black. (beat) And I wasn't it.

INT. LENHART HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mara walks in the hallway while reading a note from Jack.

JACK (V.O.)
I do forgive you but I just wanna be
friends. Jack

Mara blinks back tears. They fall anyway. She's folding the note and wiping tears when she reaches her locker:

Makeba is standing there fumbling with the lock. Makeba stands at a locker, wrestling with the dial. It won't budge. She checks her slip of paper again.

MARA
What do you think you're doing?

MAKEBA
Uh... opening--well, trying to open my
locker.

MARA
It's not your locker.

MAKEBA
It is. Says so right here.

MARA
Then why isn't it opening?
(beat) Get a clue.

Makeba blinks, stung but still trying to hold her ground.

INT. ADMIN OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Makeba stands at the counter, arms full, avoiding eye contact.

Mrs. Johnson looks at the paper, pointing to the Makeba's error. She raises her eyebrows.

MRS. JOHNSON
Done trying to break into someone
else's locker?

MAKEBA
Yes, ma'am. I just-

MRS. JOHNSON
(interrupting)
Locker 207-B. Combo's the same.

She crosses her hands and places them on the counter separating them.

MRS. JOHNSON (cont'd)
Details matter. Have a good day,
baby.

INT. LENHART HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

ROGER GREENVILLE, THE JANITOR (60s, white) passes a frustrated Makeba with his MOP BUCKET.

Makeba YANKS at her locker. THE BELL RINGS.

JANITOR
Help ya?

MAKEBA
(defensive)
Got it.

He watches her for a beat, then shrugs.

JANITOR
One of those that likes the struggle,
huh. It's a gift and a curse.
Careful.

He rolls off. Makeba STARES at the locker. GIVES IT THE FINGER.
Then grabs her books OFF THE FLOOR and rushes off haphazardly.

INT. AP HISTORY CALVIN RIVERS CLASSROOM - MORNING

CALVIN RIVERS, 40s, Black, dressed like a scruffy professor -
corduroy blazer with suede patches, khakis and Converse hi-
tops - sits on a desk.

The class, about 20 students, have desks arranged in a circle.

On the blackboard: "ART AS A RADICAL ACT"

CALVIN
People. (beat) Help me out. The Women's Liberation Movement. It
wasn't only supported by protests. Art played a role.
(beat) Music propelled movements. It can be the voice-

Ian enters from the bathroom. Passes Makeba in the doorway as
she's entering.

He mumbles something under his breath - quiet, but loud enough
for her to hear.

IAN
(mumbled)
Oreo.

Makeba's jaw tightens. She enters, holding all of her books.

The class has their desks arranged in a circle. Claire sits in
meditation, palms up on her legs.

CLAIRE

"I am not free while any woman is unfree even if her shackles are very different from my own" - Audre Lorde. Respect, Aretha. Women's Lib didn't include all women. Just sayin'.

She opens her eyes. Looks to Calvin and sees Makeba

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

(to Makeba)

Hey!

She then steps back.

MAKEBA

I- got the wrong locker.

CALVIN

Just in time. Welcome to AP History.

Calvin gets up and takes the stack of books from her, puts them by the window.

Calvin walks back to perch himself on the desk. Jack and Claire wave her over. Makeba noisily moves a desk between them.

Annoyed students move to accommodate Makeba's desk and widen the circle. Time seems to slow down.

Sweat forms on Makeba's forehead.

CALVIN (cont'd)

Tell us- is there a song that makes you feel free?

Makeba is awkwardly trying to sit, aware of the class staring. She's simultaneously taking off and putting on her backpack.

MAKEBA

(terrified)

I liked Free to Be You and Me.

Makeba finally settles.

Calvin raises his eyebrow.

Some students half smile. Some doodle.

CALVIN

I don't think I-

MAKEBA

(impulsive and
LOUD, singing)

"TAKE MY HAND, COME WITH ME WHERE THE
CHILDREN ARE FREE--"

Makeba clamps her hand over her mouth.

Jack nudges Makeba and smiles. Some students clap genuinely. Some are making fun, but everyone is engaged.

CALVIN
They're ALIVE! (beat) How does music
speak to protest and liberation now?

IAN
(confident)
Rap. It's protest. Poetry.

RANDOM KID
Rap isn't music.

Beat. The class shifts.

MAKEBA
(rambling)
It is. People don't understand. Don't
know how hard it is to express. And
if you can't find the right music...you
have to make your own.

IAN
Thought I was gonna mug you this
morning. What's that express?

He draws his arms to his chest with floppy wrists while
whimpering.

MAKEBA
It wasn't like that-

IAN
It was just like that.

The class shifts uncomfortably. Some titter nervously.

Claire leans back, watching.

CALVIN
Hey. Let's debate ideas, not each
other-

OVER THE INTERCOM:

An announcement crackles to life. Monotone institutional voice.

VOICE (O.S.)
Attention students and staff. There
was an error this morning regarding
lunch, instead of Shepard's Pie we
(MORE)

VOICE (O.S.) (cont'd)
will have Sloppy Joes, tater tots,
and salad.

CALVIN
Alright, let's-

The BELL RINGS.

CALVIN (cont'd)
Pick this up tomorrow.

Students grab their things. Ian snatches his notebook.

Jack stands, approaches Makeba.

JACK
You okay?

Makeba looks up at Jack. Across the room, Ian sees the exchange.

Ian raises an eyebrow.

Makeba sees it. Her face hardens.

INT. ADMIN OFFICE - MORNING

Mr. Riley rushes in holding MAKEBA'S WALKMAN, a pack of Marlboros, a switchblade, an M80, and a pack of Hubba Bubba. He plops it all down on the counter.

His eyes are wild but takes deep breaths.

MR. RILEY
Jesus Christ- it's Sloppy Joe day, I don't need this.

He pats his pockets and pulls out his car keys.

MR. RILEY (cont'd)
I'm running to Mitchell Junior High.
They have buns.

MRS. JOHNSON
The Lord has nothing to do with your buns.

Riley is already walking out.

MR. RILEY
Apologies. Tell Vance I'll be back in thirty. God forbid she have to run the school.

He's gone. She looks at the pile he dropped.

MRS. JOHNSON
(to herself)
Sure, I'll log-

The phone RINGS.

MRS. JOHNSON (cont'd)
Admin, Mrs. Johnson. (pause)
Completely empty? I know Roger just
filled that machine. (pause) I'll
walk down and open it myself. Poor
thing. (pause) Kotex or Tampax?

She hangs up and grabs the school keys that looks like a
jailer's.

THE ITEMS REMAIN VISIBLE ON THE COUNTER as Mrs. Johnson rushes
out.

Mara walks by the office with a LARGE BLOCK OF WOOD THAT READS
'BATHROOM PASS'. She glances in to wave to Mrs. Johnson- sees
the office is empty.

Her eyes land on the WALKMAN.

She looks around. Grabs it. Heads for the exit.

She doubles back. Grabs the gum too.

INT. LENHART HIGH HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Naima pushes a cart down the hallway with a transparency
machine on it.

Up ahead, she sees Mara exit the Admin office, sliding
something under her shirt- MAKEBA'S WALKMAN.

Naima slows the cart, watching.

Mara walks quickly away, doesn't look back. Doesn't realize
she's been seen.

Naima stands there a moment, processing what she just
witnessed.

INT. LENHART HIGH GIRLS BATHROOM - MID MORNING

Makeba sits on the toilet with a nest of toilet paper
underneath her so she doesn't touch the seat. She sniffs a few
times and looks up at the ceiling, blinking back tears.

Naima enters the bathroom. She stands still. Pauses. Listens.
Satisfied she's alone, she turns to the mirror.

Naima fluffs her hair, adjusts her bra straps, rubs her hands
around her ribcage and cocks her head to the side. She brings

her face close to the mirror and blinks, turning her head from side to side.

When Mara (chewing gum) enters she doesn't stop what she's doing, she simply gives Mara side eye.

Mara attempts to meet her gaze but can't and puts her backpack on the sink.

Naima stands back and reaches in her pocket for lip gloss—staring at Mara as a dare.

Mara opens her bag and the Walkman tumbles out.

Naima looks at the Walkman and then Mara. Mara attempts to hold Naima's gaze but fails again.

Mara zips her backpack and hurries out. Glances back—

Naima has turned her entire body toward Mara, arms crossed.

Mara's gone.

Makeba emerges from the stall. Uses her foot to flush. Moves to the sink to wash her hands.

Naima is still there. They're startled to see each other.

Naima looks at Makeba. Makeba holds her gaze.

Naima nods and walks out.

Makeba looks at us. Blinks. *What the fuck?*

INT. LENHART HIGH HALLWAY

Makeba struggles with her locker again. The combo is correct, but the door is JAMMED.

She PULLS. Nothing. She checks the number. TRIES AGAIN.

MAKEBA

Shit. Come oooooon.

Mr. Greenville appears, pushing a mop bucket and wet floor sign.

MR. GREENVILLE

I can help.

MAKEBA

I got it—

He kneels down and runs his hand along the SEAM OF THE LOCKER. He pounds in one spot gently.

MR. GREENVILLE

You just need to know where there's an opening.

Makeba nods like she's listening, but isn't. She instinctively
STEPS BACK-

SPLASH. Her RIGHT FOOT lands in the MOP BUCKET. WATER DRIPS
from her jeans.

MR. GREENVILLE
Have to pay attention too.

She steps out. WATER DRIPPING from her JEANS.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. LENHART HIGH SCHOOL GYM - DAY

Her wet shoe *squeaks* across the glossy gym floor.

Makeba walks to the bleachers and sits assuming she isn't going
to participate. She LOOKS DOWN AT HER WET PANT LEG AND SOGGY
SOCK AND SHOE.

When she looks up Jack is standing in front of her wearing an
old college tee of his dad's, and basketball shorts.

Makeba glances at Jack's shoulders and arms -looks away.

Jack NODS AT HER PANT LEG.

JACK
You're havin' a shit day.

Jack sits next to Makeba on the bleachers. Makeba tries to
reposition herself to look at him but her pant leg is in the
way.

She pushes her sleeves up.

MAKEBA
If I knew, I'da had a better
breakfast.

JACK
You drink your cereal milk?

Makeba instinctively makes a face as if she's going to vomit.

MAKEBA
You should be shot.

JACK
(overlapping)
That's where the nutrition is.

MAKEBA
My mom made grits this morning. Eggs.
Bacon. Usually a weekend thing.

JACK
Grits?

Makeba turns to face Jack. Her wet pant leg clings awkwardly.

MAKEBA
Ya know grits-

They talk quietly and Jack laughs at something she says.

MS. QUINN waves her arms.

MS. QUINN
(Interrupting)
Edwards! Stop flirting. This isn't
the Studio 54. (beat) Since you like
Roosevelt so much. She's on your
team.

Jack smiles and hops up.

Makeba stands up pointing to her clothes. Makeba opens her
mouth to speak.

MS. QUINN
You don't need gym clothes.

On the other side of the gym:

Mara stands by a cart that has all kinds of balls on it. On the
ground next to her is Claire on a floor scooter. She rolls back
and forth as she speaks.

When Mara sees Jack talking to Makeba she grabs a red ball and
starts bouncing it.

MARA
She seems like a bitch.

CLAIRE
Quinn isn't my favorite either but I
don't like calling women bitches.

Mara pushes Claire with her foot.

CLAIRE (cont'd)
Ow. Bitch.

Claire rolls away from her. In the background Ms. Quinn blows
the whistle every three seconds.

MARA
Sheba that new girl. (beat) Jack's
all over her.

Mara hugs herself for a moment and then shakes out her arms,
standing up straighter.

CLAIRE
You messed up, Mar.

MARA
(whining)
I was sad and tipsy.

CLAIRE
Read Cosmo for astrology. Not life
advice.

Claire stands up. She holds Mara gently by the shoulders.

CLAIRE
This is not why our mothers marched.

MARA
What?

MS. QUINN
Look alive. Presidential Physical
Fitness Test is here before you know
it.

Naima and Ian talk as they play.

NAIMA
E. It's messed up.

The dodge ball heads for Naima. Instead of catching it she
moves to the side. The ball flies by and a the team groans.
Naima looks at her nails.

IAN
Ain't my problem.

Ian catches the ball and throws it hard. He glances to watch
Jack and Makeba, turns away.

IAN (cont'd)
Why's Jack all up in her business.

NAIMA
Not your problem though, right?

On the other side of the gym:

MAKEBA
What number are you?

Jack catches the ball looks at a person to hit and launches the
ball.

JACK
270. Having people over on Friday.
Parents are away again. Won't be
crazy. (beat) Not too crazy. Come.

Makeba pushes her glasses up and inhales.

JACK (cont'd)
Claire's coming. I mean if that
helps.

MAKEBA

No that's okay.

Jack looks down, nods and kicks an imaginary rock.

JACK

Well maybe another-

The ball lands in Makeba's hands. She holds it and turns to Jack.

MAKEBA

I meant it's okay if Claire wasn't going. It's cool she is-

MARA

You gonna stand there? Or throw.
Would've loaned you my gym shorts but
I feel like they'd fit weird.

Mara motions to her butt and shrugs.

MAKEBA

Is that why you were crying this morning at your locker? Cause no one can tell the difference between your gym and regular clothes?

Makeba takes aim at Mara's legs and her wet foot slips.

The ball moves in slow motion and lands on Mara's face. Her cheeks jiggling and saliva explodes from her mouth.

The class freezes. Mara's jaw drops. Jack raises his eyebrows.

Naima cackles. Claire nods and shrugs. Ian rolls his eyes.

MARA

(screaming))
I can't move my mouth!!

MAKEBA

(to us)
I did not mean to do that. (beat) Not really.

Ms. Quinn blows the whistle.

MS. QUINN

Roosevelt! Office. Now!

Makeba doesn't respond and walks out of the gym, shoe squeaking on the gym floor.

INT. VP OF DISCIPLINE'S OFFICE - DAY

Makeba sits in a squeaky chair. Her PANT LEG is still damp. On the wall: motivational posters. One shows a chimpanzee dangling from a tree branch with the caption: HANG IN THERE - THE CORNER IS TORN.

MAKEBA
You should fix that. Corner's
peeling.

She stands and reaches for the poster before he can answer.

RILEY
That's alright--
MAKEBA
Got it.

She presses it flat. It TEARS.

RILEY
Please sit.

She does. He flips through a manila folder.

RILEY (cont'd)
You don't seem like a girl who gets
in trouble. You live in a nice
neighborhood and are well-spoken.

MAKEBA
Compared to who?

RILEY
I mean--

MAKEBA
(overwhelmed)
You say that to Mara? It's totally
unfair.

RILEY
(stammering)
Let's not get off on the wrong foot.

Makeba shifts. Picks up a wooden figurine from his desk.

Makeba looks at her PANT LEG. Pushes up her glasses on her
nose.

MAKEBA
(to us)
Too late.

INT. LENHART HIGH SCHOOL OUTSIDE OF VP RILEY'S OFFICE -
CONTINUOUS

Makeba steps out of the VP's office, shoulders heavy.

CLAIRE□
Thought you might need an escort.

MAKEBA□
Why? You're freaking me out.

CLAIRE□
Because high school is a nightmare
factory and you look like you just
got the full tour.

Makeba almost laughs. They start walking.

CLAIRE (cont'd)
What Mara said was fucked up, by the way.

MAKEBA
I was hoping that maybe people would get me.

CLAIRE
I should have said something.
(beat) You hungry? I've got Fig Newtons.

She pulls out a pack. Offers one. Makeba takes it.

MAKEBA
You always wait outside the VP's office for people you don't know?

CLAIRE
Only the interesting ones. (beat) My mom's having a meditation circle Sunday. Come. She'll feed you, ask invasive questions about your chakras, and probably offer you kombucha.

MAKEBA
That sounds... terrible?

CLAIRE
It is. But the lentils are good. And she won't ask you to be anything you're not.

Makeba looks at her—really looks. Claire shrugs.

CLAIRE (cont'd)
Plus, I live down the street. Gonna be seeing each other anyway. Might as well be friends.

She hands Makeba another Fig Newton and walks off, leaving Makeba holding it, a small smile forming.

Down the hall, Ian leans against a locker, mid-convo with his friend SEAN COOPER, 15. Ian catches sight of her, breaks away without a word.

Walks over, he gives her a light shoulder bump. Makes eye contact.

IAN
You good?

Makeba blinks and nods, caught off guard. She turns her head halfway to look at Ian — but keeps walking.

INT. LENHART HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA - AFTERNOON

Clusters of students. Self-segregated tables. Makeba walks in, alone. Just her BROWN PAPER BAG and her still-soggy pant leg that is trying to dry.

Makeba sees Jack, Claire and Mara at a table in the white section. Claire waves her over but when Makeba sees Mara's face she mouths 'That's okay'.

In the Black section she sees Naima, Ian, Sean and the two mean girls. Naima nods for Makeba to come over. Naima can't see two mean girls raise their eyebrows at Makeba menacingly.

Makeba shakes her head nervously and sees an empty table in the middle of the cafeteria. She sits and looks around.

On the other side:

IAN

You heard what she said. I feel bad.
But just sayin'.

He takes a bite of his sandwich.

NAIMA

But Mara took that shit.

IAN

(mouth)
She doesn't know that. Just
came at her.

Naima cocks her head to the side and looks Ian up and down.

NAIMA

You stickin' up for Mara or
tryin' to take down the new girl
'cause she ain't Black enough for
you?

Beat. Ian shifts uncomfortably. Swallows takes a long swing of orange drink from a carton.

IAN

That's not- Don't put that on me. I
was JUST nice to her when she came
outta Riley's.

NAIMA

Mira, ya yo sé. She's corny. Probably
listens to white boy music. Talks
proper. (beat) So what?

IAN

She thinks she's better than-

NAIMA

Thinks she better than what, you? She
put Mara on blast. That's it. (beat)
Unless there's somethin' else.

Ian looks at Makeba sitting alone. Then back at Naima.

NAIMA (cont'd)

And you may not like Mercedes, but
she's people. Remember when I moved
here from Washington Heights?

Ian still doesn't respond. Beat.

IAN
You get on my nerves.

Across the cafeteria

CLAIRE
We should get her. Why didn't she sit here?

Jack looks at Mara.

JACK
Hope she comes Friday.

MARA
Seriously?

Claire raises her eyebrows. Mara looks down at her lunch.

MARA (cont'd)
Think you know everything.

Mara gets up and leaves, snatching her lunch off the table.

Claire and Naima both make a move to get up to go to Makeba's table, Naima gets there first.

NAIMA
Mercedes. Havin' a party on Friday.
Come.

MAKEBA
Who's gonna be there?

Claire gets to the table. Naima looks at Claire not with judgment, but not friendly either.

NAIMA
Good people. Just think about it.

Naima nods at Claire. She walks off. Claire sits next to Makeba.

CLAIRE
What was that?

MAKEBA
She's having a party.

CLAIRE
I know. But come to Jack's. It's up the street and you can sleep over my place. I have hammock. (beat) And- never sit here. They call it the Bermuda Triangle.

Makeba looks confused.

CLAIRE (cont'd)
Not that I care about bullshit conventions but social lives disappear here. So, get up.

INT. LENHART HIGH SCHOOL VP RILEY'S OFFICE - AFTER SCHOOL

Mr. Riley is on the phone as Makeba enters, he waves her in.

MAKEBA

I'm here for my Walkman.

MR. RILEY

Had quite the day Ms. Roosevelt.

Let's hope tomorrow is less eventful.

He looks for the Walkman. No where to be found.

MR. RILEY (cont'd)

Did you take it already?

MAKEBA

How would I do that? I just walked in.

MR. RILEY

(nervous)

Well it looks like someone stole it.
We'll fill out a report. Have your
parents call. I might be able to get
the principal to approve
reimbursement.

Makeba's eyes well up. Mr. Riley shuffles papers on his desk.

He nudges a box of tissue toward Makeba.

MAKEBA

Shit.

MR. RILEY

Language. You don't need any more
trouble.

MAKEBA

You don't know trouble.

INT. LENHART HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Makeba is at her locker. Mara is at hers when Makeba sees her
WALKMAN HEADPHONES AROUND MARA'S NECK.
Makeba marches over.

MAKEBA

That's mine.

MARA

Excuse me?

MAKEBA

My Walkman. What, you have to take
other people's shit cause you don't
have your own?

Mara's body curls in for a moment but then she stands tall,
gaze steady.

MARA

This? It's mine.

Ian appears from around the corner, heading to his locker. He
slows, watching.

Riley appears responding to the raised voices.

MAKEBA
Mr. Riley, she has my Walkman.

MARA
I don't know what she's talking about.

Mara's eyes well up. Her voice shakes.

MARA (cont'd)
This is mine. (breaking) Why is she accusing me?

Riley's expression falters.

MR. RILEY
Can you prove it's yours, Ms. Roosevelt?

MAKEBA
(yelling)
Can she prove its HERS? I was just in YOUR OFFICE. My Walkman that looks like this (pointing) is missing!!!

MAKEBA
(to us)
HAS EVERYONE LOST THEIR MINDS?

MR. RILEY
(to Mara, gently)
Do you have the receipt? The box?

MARA
(wiping eyes)
Why? Maybe. I'm not sure.

Ian's jaw tightens watching Riley's whole demeanor. Makeba rolls her eyes, huffs and throws up her arms.

MAKEBA
She took it from your office—

MR. RILEY
(apologetic)
Without proof, I can't accuse anyone.

MARA
(to Riley, tearful)
Can I go? This is really upsetting.

MR. RILEY
(sympathetic and
suspicious)
Sure. Sure. Yeah.

Mara walks away, Walkman still on. She glances back at Makeba—a flash of smugness crosses her face before she turns the corner.

Ian sees it. That look.

Riley walks away quickly, ringing his hands. Makeba stands there, gutted.

Ian watches her for a beat, then walks off in the opposite direction.

INT. LENHART HIGH SCHOOL CALVIN'S CLASSROOM - AFTER SCHOOL

Makeba sees her book and grabs it. She sits in a chair.

MAKEBA
(to us)
Lidia always thinks she's right. But
her wrath when she's been disobeyed
AND right? Biblical. (beat) And she's
an atheist.

Mr. Rivers walks in.

CALVIN
Heard what happened.

MAKEBA
I'm screwed.

Calvin walks over to his desk and picks up a grade books and some papers.

He hands Makeba a eraser and nods at the blackboard. Makeba erases the little bit of writing that's left.

CALVIN
Creative solutions arise when you
have the right folks on your
side. (beat) But you didn't hear that
from me.

INT. LENHART HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Naima and Ian walk to the front door.

NAIMA
Mira, ya yo sé you don't want to
snitch. But it's OUR problem. Riley's
bullshit. He ain't gonna do shit for
her.

IAN
You're right. Okay? Damn. (beat)
Lemme figure this out.

EXT. LENHART HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - AFTER SCHOOL

Ian quickly walks up to Claire. Jack and Makeba are on the bus.

IAN

You wanna help her? (beat) I have an idea.

CLAIRE

Do tell. Better yet, tell her.

IAN

I don't think she wanna hear from me. But let's meet tomorrow. Lunch in Rivers classroom.

EXT. MOUNTAIN AVE. - AFTERNOON

Jack, Claire and Makeba walk home. Claire walks backwards as she speaks, joint and lighter in hand. Makeba is visibly stressed.

CLAIRE

This was probably not the day you planned.

MAKEBA

It's my night I'm worried about. My mom told me not to bring it.

Jack makes a yikes face. Claire stops to take a hit. Makeba steps back, waving away smoke.

MAKEBA (cont'd)

Smellin' like weed isn't gonna help.

Claire offers the joint to Makeba, then Jack. Makeba has a tight smile, shakes her head, gesticulating with her hands.

Jack takes a small puff. Claire raises her eyebrows—surprised.

JACK

What? I'm wiggling out.

CLAIRE

Ian said Naima saw it go down. Wants to help.

MAKEBA

Why didn't he say anything to me?

CLAIRE

It's complicated.

They stop in front of Makeba's house. Makeba looks at the front door.

MAKEBA

I can probably keep them in the dark for a few days, but by Friday—

Jack hikes his backpack on his shoulders and nods in the direction of his house.

JACK
(hopeful)
You have Friday? Party?

MAKEBA
If I don't get this Walkman back, the
next party I go to will be my
wedding.

Jack and Claire exchange a look—she's not kidding.

INT. ROOSEVELT HOME - MAKEBA'S ROOM - MONDAY EVENING

Dark gray walls. One wall is a collage of magazine photos. Her own stereo, TV, separate phone line.

Makeba sits cross-legged on her bed in pajamas, silk scarf wrapped around her hair. "I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings" beside her. New Wave music plays. She's on the phone.

Brooke sits on the floor reading.

MAKEBA
As long as I get it back. She
probably doesn't even like Bob
Marley.

Lidia appears in the doorway.

MAKEBA (cont'd)
Gotta go. See you tomorrow.

She hangs up.

LIDIA
Glad you made friends already.
Brooke, time for bed.

Lidia walks further into the room.

LIDIA (cont'd)
Keeb, turn off the stereo so Brooke
can sleep. You can play your Walkman
instead.

Beat. Makeba freezes.

MAKEBA
I—I have to read anyway. I can't
concentrate with music.

Lidia's eyes narrow. She knows her daughter.

Brooke sees Makeba's panic.

LIDIA
Since when? Where's your—

BROOKE
(interrupting)
Mommy, can I have water before bed?

Brooke stands, gently steering Lidia toward the door. Glances back at Makeba. Smiles broadly.

LIDIA (O.C.)
Music off, Makeba.

MAKEBA
Got it!

Makeba exhales. Looks at us.

MAKEBA (cont'd)
(to us)
Bought myself one day. Thanks Brooke.

INT. LENHART HIGH - EMPTY CLASSROOM - TUESDAY LUNCH

The alliance sits in a circle: Makeba, Claire, Jack, Ian, Naima. Lunch spread out. Conspiratorial energy.

Claire pulls out a hand-drawn MAP with X's and O's.

CLAIRE
Mara's keeping it in her locker.

MAKEBA
How do we get it?

NAIMA
Mrs. Johnson has the master key.

JACK
Mrs. Johnson doesn't let anything slide.

IAN
For real.

NAIMA
Which is why we need a distraction.

MAKEBA
I heard her talking about redoing her office. My mom's an interior designer. I could offer a consultation.

Naima and Ian exchange a look—impressed.

CLAIRE
 (pointing at map)
 Makeba charms Mrs. Johnson. Gets the
 key. Naima keeps her distracted—ask
 about her son. Ian grabs the Walkman,
 slips it to Makeba.

JACK
 What about Mara?

CLAIRE
 You and I stand lookout. If she
 shows, you distract.

JACK
 (slight grimace)
 That's gonna cost me.

Looks at Makeba and smiles.

IAN
 When? Tomorrow?

NAIMA
 Today. After school. Just before the
 buses pull off. Hallways'll be empty.
 (beat) You'll have to run to catch
 the bus.

They all look at each other. The weight settles.

MAKEBA
 You guys don't have to—

NAIMA
 Riley searched my bag once over
 nothing. He's not gonna help you.
 (beat) We will.

IAN
 (awkward)
 We got you.

Makeba looks around the circle. Nods.

MONTAGE - TUESDAY AFTER SCHOOL (2:45 PM)

INT. ADMIN OFFICE

Makeba stands at the counter with Naima and Ian. Turns on the
 charm.

MAKEBA
 Mrs. Johnson, my mom's an interior
 designer. I noticed your office could
 use some warmth. She'd love to do a
 free consultation—

MRS. JOHNSON
(softening)
Really? That's sweet, baby.

As Mrs. Johnson reaches for the BINDER (LOCKER ASSIGNMENTS), Makeba claps enthusiastically. Naima and Ian nod like backup singers. She doesn't reach for the binder.

MRS. JOHNSON (cont'd)
Let me grab the master key.

She pulls out a KEY RING that looks like a jailer's. Chats with Naima while walking.

NAIMA
How's your son, Huey? Still at Rutgers?

INT. HALLWAY - MARA'S LOCKER

Mrs. Johnson arrives at the lockers and Makeba points to Mara's locker.

Mrs. Johnson opens locker 206-B. The YELLOW WALKMAN sits on top of textbooks.

As Mrs. Johnson turns to answer Naima's question about her son, Makeba quickly hands the Walkman to Ian. He slips it inside his jacket.

INT. LENHART HIGH HALLWAY - CLAIRE'S END - CONTINUOUS

Claire leans against the wall, casual lookout.

Mara appears, holding a hall pass. Heads toward her locker.

Claire steps into her path.

CLAIRE
Hey. Got a light?

MARA
(annoyed)
I don't smoke.

CLAIRE
Since when?

She laughs—loud, stalling. Mara tries to move past her.

INT. HALLWAY - MARA'S LOCKER

The three hear Claire's laugh. Exchange looks.

Makeba quickly thanks Mrs. Johnson and closes the locker.

MRS. JOHNSON
That all you kids need?

MAKEBA / NAIMA / IAN
(overlapping)
Yes! Thank you, Mrs. Johnson!

Mrs. Johnson eyes them suspiciously but walks off.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Mara pushes past Claire, turns the corner.

Mrs. Johnson is already gone.

SLOW MOTION: Naima, Ian, and Makeba walk down the hallway like a crew. Mara approaches from the opposite direction.

They pass each other. Silent. Naima nods slightly, eyes narrowed.

Mara continues to her locker, oblivious.

INT. HALLWAY - OUTSIDE BATHROOMS - CONTINUOUS

The group reconvenes quietly.

Ian discreetly hands Makeba the Walkman. She slips it into her backpack.

They nod to each other. Walk off one by one.

EXT. LENHART HIGH - PARKING LOT - AFTER SCHOOL (3:15 PM)

Makeba pushes through the doors into sunlight. Headphones around her neck.

She heads quickly toward the bus—

Sees LIDIA'S MERCEDES. Lidia rolls down the window.

LIDIA
Thought I told you to leave that at home.

MAKEBA
I'm hardheaded. (beat) I was gonna take the bus.

She gets in the car.

INT. LIDIA'S MERCEDES

Makeba pops Bob Marley out of her Walkman. Puts it in the car stereo.

LIDIA
You love this because of me, you know.

MAKEBA
Blah blah blah.

Lidia gently shoves her. They both laugh. Makeba kisses Lidia's cheek.

She looks out the window. Sees Claire and Jack walking.

MAKEBA (cont'd)
Claire! Jack! Get in!

MOMENTS LATER

The Mercedes turns the corner. Jack and Claire talk quietly in the back.

LIDIA
Weekend plans?

MAKEBA
A party.

LIDIA
Fun! Where?

Makeba sees Ian, Naima walking. Naima waves. Ian smiles. Makeba waves back. She looks at Jack in the backseat in the visor mirror.

She looks at us. Small smile.

MAKEBA (V.O.)
Maybe I don't have to choose just one world. Maybe I can be in both.

Beat. Her smile shifts - the weight of it registering.

"Three Little Birds" plays.

MAKEBA
(to us)
Right?

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD: BLUR