

BLUR

Written by

Oneika Mays
Steve McLaine
WGA 2139334

Created by:
Oneika Mays

COLD OPEN

The classic MTV opening with the astronaut and globe morphs into a satellite view of the earth. Zoom in on the United States... then the state of NJ... then a single house.

MAKEBA (V.O.)

My name is Makeba Roosevelt.

(beat)

There was only one way to be Black
in 1985... and I wasn't it.

TITLE CARD: BLUR

END COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Standard New Jersey finished basement with a wooden bar, wood paneling and a plaid sofa in front of a console television.

Kids (mostly white, one is Asian) sit in a circle playing seven minutes in heaven. Two spots are empty, the occupants currently in heaven, better known as the...

LAUNDRY ROOM

MAKEBA, 14, Black, pretty with long hair and preppy clothes stands against the washing machine, expectant and excited. PETE, 14 and white, is distant and awkward. From outside the door, they hear whispering that isn't really whispering.

WHITE TEEN BOY (O.C.)

Gross. Her lips are so big. He'll drown.

Pete shifts back and forth.

PETE

Look... If you don't wanna --

MAKEBA

No. Really, it's okay.

Makeba attempts to make her lips smaller. Pete reluctantly attempts a kiss.

WHITE TEEN BOY (O.C.)

He's not going to do it. His dad would kill him.

ALISON

Why?

ANOTHER WHITE KID (O.C.)

(sings)

Hey babe, take a walk on the wild side. And the colored girls sing!

They laugh. The kids sing "doo doo doo doo doo." Makeba stiffens. Her eyes land on a gallon of bleach.

In the other room, ALISON, 14 and white looks uncomfortable, but says nothing.

MAKEBA

(shaky)

Forget it. I think my mom is on her way.

Pete realizes the window is closing.

PETE

Well, maybe we can for a second?

She reaches for the door handle, fighting back tears.

ASIAN KID (O.C.)

Isn't this kinda messed up? Can't she hear us?

WHITE TEEN BOY (O.C.)

Nah. They're gettin' dooown! Disco style.

Pete tries to grab her arm.

PETE

Wait --

BASEMENT

Makeba rushes out of the laundry room, looks at Alison and sits back down in the circle. Pete sits. Alison looks at Makeba realizing that she's heard everything.

WHITE TEEN BOY

(whispers to Pete)

How was the chocolate?

PETE

Delicious.

WHITE TEEN BOY'S MOTHER (O.C.)

Malika... Ma... Mareeba? Your, um, mother is here.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROOSEVELTS' OLD HOUSE - DAY

Makeba and Alison stand in front of Makeba's house as a moving truck is being loaded. Alison hands Makeba some albums and cassettes. She also holds a small gift.

ARTHUR, Makeba's very large red Doberman languishes at her feet. Alison hands Makeba the box. She takes it and sets it on Arthur, who doesn't move.

Makeba, struggling to keep the cassettes in her armpit, checks the albums like a protective parent.

MAKEBA
(upset)
This is ruined.

ALISON
I -- I don't think it is.
(pleading)
Please don't be mad?

MAKEBA
(shrugs)
Maybe I am sad. I dunno.

Alison hugs Makeba as she holds the records.

ALISON
There's a mixtape with our
favorites. Well, the ones of yours
I could remember.

MAKEBA
Thanks. Best friends forever?

CUT TO:

INT. OLD MERCEDES - DAY

As the Mercedes rolls along the highway, Makeba sits in the back seat with Arthur's head in her lap. She pulls a lanyard friendship bracelet from the small box.

LINDA, 37 Black, Makeba's mother, is in the passenger seat. Makeba's dad, EUGENE, pretends not to listen.

LINDA
Alison give you that? What a sweet
gesture!

EUGENE
Arthur okay back there, Keebie?

LATER

Makeba stares out the window, lost in thought, then:

MAKEBA
Are my lips too big? Is it, like,
weird that I listen to so much
white music?

LINDA

One, what is white music? Where did
you get that ridiculous idea?

Makeba keeps fiddling with the bracelet. She rolls the window
down and the bracelet flies out by mistake. She watches it
hit the ground.

MAKEBA

It was just a question!
(to herself)
Mick Jagger has big lips.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOSEVELTS' NEW HOUSE - MAKEBA'S ROOM - DAY

The large room is painted a dark gray. One wall is an
enormous collage of fashion magazine pics, album covers,
civil rights icons, and textiles.

Makeba lays on her bed dressed in a Benetton sweater and
Girbaud jeans. Her hair is in a long French braid. Fishbone
plays. Arthur is next to her.

LINDA (O.C.)

That dog better not be on that bed,
Makeba Harriet Roosevelt.

MAKEBA

(slickly)
He's not.

She reaches inside her nightstand and gives him a Twizzler.

MAKEBA

(to Arthur)
This is bullshit.

INT. DAVIDSONS' HOUSE - SMITH'S ROOM - DAY

SMITH, 14, Black, light complexion, curly hair, has the
telephone receiver pulled from the kitchen into his room,
talking to his friend JEFF 14, Black and the epitome of cool.
Rap plays from a stereo in the background.

SMITH

(joyfully)
Yo, I got the call!

JEFF (V.O.)

My man! You know how we do!

SMITH

Uh, I know how you do. Usually I don't... do.

Smith rifles through his closet and dresser, holding up clothes in front of the mirror and throwing them on the bed.

SMITH

What you wearing? I never look together.

JEFF (V.O.)

They said wear red, right? Let's rock the red Adidas. Red hats, too.

SMITH

They didn't have those shoes in my size. Wear your brother's, let me wear yours. I'll put on like six socks.

JEFF (V.O.)

Okay, wait for me at the stop.

Jeff hangs up. Smith smiles at himself in the mirror.

SMITH

Been waiting my whole life, what's a few more minutes?

He sings along to Kurtis Blow's "If I Ruled the World" using the phone as a mic.

KITCHEN

Smith's parents, STEVE and VICKI, and brother ED eat breakfast as Smith bounds triumphantly into the kitchen.

SMITH

Your son made the Top 9 in 9th list.

STEVE

(behind his newspaper)
You better make those trash cans on the curb before the truck comes.

VICKI

The what?

Smith slowly poses in a b-boy stance.

SMITH
The nine flyest Black kids in ninth grade.

ED
Yeah right.

Smith searches the closet and keeps trying on hats.

VICKI
No white kids?

SMITH
They have their own list.

STEVE
I thought we marched against that.

VICKI
Son, you don't need a list to tell you you're fly. Just be yourself.

ED
Yeah, corny.

SMITH
See, Mom, being myself doesn't really work for anyone.

Smith runs out the door, hat in hand.

SMITH
Gotta go, Nikki's waiting.

STEVE
Get the trash!

Pan over to a picture on Smith's dresser of Smith, NIKKI, 14, very, very pretty in a round the girl way and another person with a Run DMC sticker over his face.

EXT. DAVIDSONS' HOUSE - DAY

Nikki puts her bookbag in Smith's outstretched hand. As they walk, Smith switches her bag from shoulder to shoulder.

SMITH
Got you something for luck. For your test today.

Smith hands Nikki a pack of Now & Laters.

NIKKI
(smiling)
How'd you know these are my
favorite?

Smith looks at her like "of course I know that."

NIKKI
I'm nervous. How am I gonna be a
doctor if I can't pass algebra?

SMITH
By listening to your sexy genius
tutor.
(beat)
Who advises you to revisit our
study break talk.

NIKKI
(teasing)
You advise me? You have Wheaties
for breakfast? Like I told you,
kinda cute, semi-smart tutor...

Smith responds in mock pain.

NIKKI
You're sweet, but I don't have time
for a boyfriend right now.

SMITH
Just saying, might want to lock me
down because things change fast...

Smith and Nikki approach the corner. Smith is about to cross,
but Nikki waits for the light.

NIKKI
Go on with your bad self then.

Smith reaches for Nikki's hand.

SMITH
I'll wait.

Nikki lets Smith's hand-holding attempt succeed as he
continues to struggle with the bags.

NIKKI
Need me to get those?

SMITH
Girl, please.

EXT. MCINTIRE'S DELI PARKING LOT - DAY

Smith leans against the deli with his Black friends Jeff and ALTON 14, Black. They are both taller than Smith and wearing school basketball jackets unlike Smith, who isn't on the team.

Smith puts on Jeff's sneakers as his white classmate JASON, 14 with a surfer dude look approaches.

JASON
DUDE, ARE YOU FUCKING READY FOR
THIS FUCKING TEST?!?!?!?

All three of them look at Jason.

JASON
We're going full John Matrix on
this test's fucking ASS, bro!

All three of them continue to look at Jason.

JASON
John Matrix? Commando???
Schwarzenegger?!?!?! It's fucking
insane, bro... You haven't seen it?

SMITH
(smiling)
Not yet, Jase.

JASON
Dude, I'll totally get my brother
to take us... Weekend hang, bro!
Sneak in some brewskis... we'll get
hammered!

Jason heads towards the deli.

JASON
Gotta get my Jolt buzz. Later, bro.

JEFF
I love that guy.

Smith sees KNOWLEDGE, 14, Black, dark complexion, and his crew walking towards the deli and hurries to don the Adidas.

KNOWLEDGE
What's up, Jeff? Al?
(beat)
Litebrite?

Smith follows Knowledge into the deli, trying not to trip over his borrowed sneakers.

CUT TO:

INT. MCINTIRE'S DELI - MOMENTS LATER

Typical deli with a woman at the cash register and a man taking orders at the counter. Students hang out inside.

SMITH

K, you still on that?

Knowledge turns to face Smith as he clomps closer.

SMITH

Like you ain't known my family since we were little. At my house crying to my mom for animal crackers and watching Batman!

(hushed while nodding at Knowledge's crew)

Do the gods know how much you loved Batgirl?

Alton and Jeff laugh.

KNOWLEDGE

Yeah, I did that. I remember y'all were the only ones with the name brand cookies and TWO TVs.

(beat)

But we grew up.

Knowledge walks up on Smith and smirks downward.

KNOWLEDGE

At least most of us did.

Smith's eyes narrow. Knowledge glances at some nearby white students and back to Smith.

KNOWLEDGE

You still playing dress-up, though.

Knowledge flicks Smith's shirt collar. Smith jerks away.

SMITH

Guess I'm s'posed to look like you?

Smith and Knowledge stare at each other tensely until...

JASON (O.C.)

DUDE!

The group looks over to see Jason with two bottles of Jolt Cola and several Tastykake honey buns in his left arm while giving Smith the "rock on" hand gesture with his right.

KNOWLEDGE

(holding out jacket)

Doubt this would fit... "dude."

Knowledge makes the "rock on" sign and walks away. Smith's face tightens.

SMITH

(louder)

We'll see who's laughing at the end of the day... Kenny.

Jeff waves the situation away and looks Smith in the eyes.

JEFF

Whatever. You official now, S.D.

Jeff puts his arm around Smith who relaxes and smiles.

ALTON

Y'all really buying into this list and don't even know who wrote it?

SMITH

Whoever it is must be a genius.

Smith throws some fake punches at Alton.

ALTON

Or crazy. Or the government spying on the Black community.

SMITH

I'm sure Mitchell Junior High is at the top of their priority list.

CUT TO:

INT. LINDA'S CAR - DAY

Makeba primps in the mirror. She applies lip gloss and forces a smile. She tries to make her lips smaller.

MAKEBA

What's the point of fighting? You and Dad, like, totally don't care about what you did. So I'm not going to make a big deal about it. I mean, like, I'm sure that Gramps or Grams wouldn't have moved you in the middle of the school year. But it's fine. I'm okay. Really. Super great.

Linda rolls her eyes.

MAKEBA

Seriously? I go from my first year at high school to a middle school.

LINDA

Why do you have to be so dramatic? It's a junior high school. Good grief. Stop being ridiculous.

MAKEBA

It's like being left back if you think about it. Seriously. What about your dreams for me?

Makeba gestures dramatically.

MAKEBA

A successful future? Don't you want me to become somebody?

Linda turns up John Coltrane's "Naima."

MAKEBA

Mom. In the middle of the year, everything's settled already. I --

LINDA

What if all Black people thought that way?

Makeba rolls her eyes.

MAKEBA

During the Civil Rights Movement...

LINDA

During the Civil Rights Movement...

LINDA

Mock me if you want, Keeb. It's true. You live in a beautiful home.

(MORE)

LINDA (CONT'D)

Your father has worked so hard to provide opportunities for you. And I am making sure that you remember who you are.

She stops at a red light and looks at Makeba.

LINDA

(softly)

I know it's rough. But you are Makeba Harriet Roosevelt, my beautiful, brilliant, oldest child. Who says it has to be settled? Do some unsettling.

Makeba pulls out a cassette and pops it in the tape deck. "White music" begins playing and she turns up the volume.

LINDA

(smirking)

I thought you liked my music.

MAKEBA

Can you take me and Alison record shopping this weekend?

LINDA

(playfully)

To buy more white music?

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

"Rock the Bells" by LL Cool J plays and the back half of the bus erupts. A few rows away, Smith watches transfixed as Nikki and her friends dance in their seats. Jeff taps Smith.

JEFF

(motioning to Nikki)

So what happened?

SMITH

She said she'd let me know.

Jeff looks confused. Smith clasps his hands behind his head.

SMITH

I told her hurry up... Next best thing to being on the list is being with someone on the list.

Smith and Jeff laugh and give each other a pound.

CUT TO:

INT. LINDA'S CAR - DAY

Linda leans in to kiss her daughter's cheek. She squeezes Makeba's cheeks and her lips pucker.

LINDA

Stop worrying about your face. This
is the face of your ancestors.

She turns into the parking lot and we see MITCHELL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL. Lots of white and Black kids are filing in. The white kids are dressed more like Makeba than the Black kids, who look like aliens to her in Lee jeans and shell-toe Adidas.

LINDA

It's so nice to see that there are
more Black kids here than in East
Windsor!

MAKEBA

Sure I'll fit right in.

Makeba pops out the cassette self-consciously. Linda ignores her snide remark and pulls into a parking spot.

MAKEBA

God! No! I can get to class on my
own.

LINDA

Do you want a ride home?

MAKEBA

I'll take the bus.

She kisses her mom on the cheek.

MAKEBA

Love you.

LINDA

Be great.

Makeba rolls her eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. MITCHELL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

All eyes are on Makeba as she approaches the school. KAYLA, 14, a white girl with a group of Black girls, snickers at Makeba as she passes by. Makeba trips and recovers.

KAYLA
(with an affected "Black"
accent)
Who's the white girl?

TRINA, a Black girl walking by, hears Kayla. Trina suffers no fools and has knocked a few out. She gives MC Lyte vibes.

TRINA
Who you calling white girl? White
girl.

Kayla gets quiet and blushes as the Black girls laugh louder. Trina keeps it moving.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL ARRIVAL ZONE - DAY

A new Cadillac pulls up playing Schoolly D's "PSK, What Does It Mean?". DEREK, 14, Black wearing a basketball jacket over flashy clothes, gets out. Derek's mother waves from the window.

SMITH AND JEFF
Heyyyyyy, Aunt Maryyyyyyyy!

Derek leans into the car.

DEREK
You have a BLESSED day, Mom.

The car pulls off and Derek turns to the crew.

DEREK
The day can start now, muhfuckas!

Everyone laughs. He gives pounds as he walks over.

JEFF
Can't believe you still getting
chauffeured to school every day.

DEREK
What I look like riding the bus?

SMITH

Us?

They all laugh. Derek turns to Smith, opens his mouth.

SMITH

She said she'd let me know.

DEREK

Let you know? You bullshittin'...

SMITH

I'm not bull-essing, that's what she said... What you want me to do?

DEREK

I'ma end all this speculation right now.

(looks around)

YO, NIK-KAY!

SMITH

(to himself)

Oh Lord, please no.

JEFF

Bull-essing? I mean, don't say it if you don't want to, but bull-essing?

Derek notices the "new girl" Makeba heading towards the school entrance.

DEREK

Yoooo, hold up... who dat? Yo, new girl! Let me chaperone you up and down these halls.

Jeff and Smith glance at Makeba, then return to their conversation.

Makeba stops, gives Derek a terrified look, and then keeps walking.

Trina tapes a piece of paper to the pole on the basketball court. People gather around to read it.

DEREK

Look at S.D. rolling with the big boys... proud of you! You ready?

SMITH

Been ready.

Derek, Jeff, and Smith pull red hats from their bags and put them on, saunter towards the list. Smith watches his friends' gait and matches it.

There's a little buzz as people notice them. Smith hides a huge grin as he tries to stay cool. We view the backs of their heads as they read the list.

Derek and Jeff look at each other, then at Smith. Smith slowly takes his hat off. He backs away... the Adidas slip off, but he leaves them. As more people gather to discuss the list and congratulate the named, Smith gets pushed to the outskirts of the circle.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. PRINCIPAL RILEY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Corny inspirational posters grace the office. One has a kitten hanging from a tree, underneath it reads, "Hang in there." Makeba holds up a very tattered copy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

MAKEBA

I had this last year.

PRINCIPAL RILEY is intimidated by all teenagers.

PRINCIPAL RILEY

Well, um -- I'm sure that you'll find that you'll, um, fare well -- you're, um, in the best classes.

A stack of papers slides off the desk.

EXT. SCHOOL STEPS - DAY

Nikki takes off her red sunglasses and approaches a shoeless Smith standing off to the side.

NIKKI

Hey --

SMITH

Congratulations.

NIKKI

Thanks.

(beat)

Where's your shoes?

SMITH

Didn't fit.

Smith sits to put on his old shoes, keeps his head down.

SMITH

See why you wanted to wait now.

NIKKI

That's not --

Smith looks up at Nikki.

SMITH

So much for tutoring. Fly kids
don't need math, though. You'll fit
right in.

Nikki's face turns from concern to anger.

KNOWLEDGE (O.C.)

Yo, Nik!

Smith looks over to see Knowledge donning a red sweatshirt.

KNOWLEDGE

(smirking)

Let's go... time to stop playing.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Smith, Jeff, Derek, and Alton walk to class. At the end of the hallway, Smith gives the peace sign and turns right; the other three turn left.

Before there were mostly Black students in the hall, now Smith sees only white students. The noise, greetings, and interactions are all different.

A moment later as Makeba looks for her classroom, a tall GANGLY BLACK KID appears out of nowhere. He wears a bathroom pass around his neck like a medallion. He begins to beatbox.

GANGLY KID

Heard there was a new honey on the
premises!

MAKEBA

Um -- Excuse me? My name is Makeba.

Gangly Kid takes a knee, grabs her hand, and kisses it.

GANGLY KID

(rapping UTFO)

But do you know after all that all
I received was a pat on the back --

MAKEBA

(nervously)

I -- don't know what this is...

Gangly Kid is undeterred.

GANGLY KID

(still rapping)

That's what you get, it happened to
me, ain't that right, Mixmaster I-C-
E?

Makeba tries to move around him but he blocks her way and
puts up his hand. Makeba stands there, a deer in headlights.

GANGLY KID

Roxanne, Roxanne, can't you
understand. Roxanne, Roxanne, I
wanna be your man.

He strikes a b-boy stance, ready for Makeba to jump into his
arms.

MAKEBA

Are you trying to sing the song by
The Police? Because that's not it.

GANGLY KID

The cops? Where the fuck you from?

His face changes from flirtatious to disgusted. He walks
away.

MAKEBA

Wait! I'm looking for 9th grade AP
English!

Gangly Kid doesn't turn around. He throws up a peace sign.

GANGLY KID

I'm out.

Makeba stands in the middle of the hallway. A door opens and
MRS. PATRUSKI 35, white and a hippie throwback pokes her head
out.

MRS. PATRUSKI

(annoyed)

Excuse me! Why aren't you in class?
I'm trying to have a discussion
about Shakespeare in here. We
cannot converse with this racket!

MAKEBA

(smugly)

I am that merry wanderer of the
night.

She tries to hold up the copy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
and drops all of her books in the doorway.

MRS. PATRUSKI
 (impressed, bows)
 If we shadows have offended. Think
 but this and all is mended.

She gestures dramatically.

MRS. PATRUSKI
 It seems that our literary group
 has a new well-read member. You
 must be Ms. Roosevelt. Please take
 a moment to introduce yourself.

MAKEBA
 Um, hello. My name is Makeba
 Roosevelt.

INT. MRS. PATRUSKI'S CLASSROOM - DAY

The class is fairly full, just a few scattered empty desks.
 The students are staring. Smith recognizes Makeba from
 earlier. JACK, 14, white, very attractive and dressed like a
 preppy kids who comes from old money.

MRS. PATRUSKI
 Oh, wonderful. There's a desk next
 to Mr. Davidson.

JACK
 (jokingly)
 Isn't that racist? There's actually
 a bunch of open desks, Mrs. P.

MRS. PATRUSKI
 Mr. Eaton, if you invested as much
 time into your work as you do your
 clever retorts, I might've sat her
 next to you.

The class giggles. She claps her hands. Jack chuckles.

MRS. PATRUSKI
 Let's focus. Back to The Bard of
 Avon. Mr. Davidson, as our esteemed
 class laureate, would you take a
 moment to quietly bring Ms.
 Roosevelt up to speed?

Smith cringes at the laureate mention. Makeba, guarded and
 annoyed, sits next to Smith as Ms. Patruski continues
 teaching.

SMITH

We don't get a lot of girls quoting Shakespeare around here.

MAKEBA

(flatly)

That's very clear. I feel totally lost.

SMITH

Join the club.

MAKEBA

(nods toward Mrs. Patruski)

I don't know, seems like you have it all figured out.

SMITH

I did until about fifteen minutes ago.

MRS. PATRUSKI

Okay! Pop quiz. Give them to me as you finish, I'll grade them on the spot. Ms. Roosevelt, you don't have to take this.

MAKEBA

It's cool. I like "The Bard."

Jack nudges Smith, who is looking for a pen.

JACK

(whispers)

Yo! She's hot. All you, dude.

SMITH

(whispers, still looking)

I got enough girls already. You got this one... if you can handle her.

JACK

Maybe I will, dude. She's hot.

Smith is surprised at this response. He raises his hand.

SMITH

Does anyone have a writing implement?

MAKEBA
 (sarcastically)
 You're the best student? "Writing
 implement?"

SMITH
 (cocky)
 If there's one thing I can do, it's
 write... you'll learn.

Makeba reaches in her bag and pulls out two pens. She holds
 Smith's gaze.

MAKEBA
 Good luck.

She winks at Smith and hands him the pen, pulling it away
 just as he reaches for it. Smith smiles. She does it again
 and this time he takes the pen and their fingers touch for a
 second too long.

SMITH
 (smiles)
 I'm keeping this.

Jack, having watched the entire exchange, is jealous and
 excited.

JACK
 (whispers)
 DUDE!!!!

CUT TO:

MOMENTS LATER

At the front of the class, Mrs. Patruski leafs through the
 quizzes.

MRS. PATRUSKI
 It seems like you could all take a
 page from Ms. Roosevelt. She's the
 only one who got everything right.
 No grading on a curve today.

The class groans and looks over at Makeba who tries to
 distract herself. Smith leans toward her and smiles.

SMITH
 (whispers)
 Lord, what fools these mortals be.

Makeba smiles back.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Makeba fumbles with her locker. It's stuck.

MAKEBA
(to herself)
What the fuck...

An ATTRACTIVE BLACK KID, 14 in a football jersey approaches.

ATTRACTIVE KID
Need help?

MAKEBA
Oh, hey! I'm, like, so hungry and
this won't open.

ATTRACTIVE KID
Like, really?

Makeba flinches. She tugs at the old locker again, the door
flies open with a loud sound. Her lunch falls out.

ATTRACTIVE KID
Hey! I'm kidding. Good job, Valley
Girl. You new, right?

He motions to her lunch.

ATTRACTIVE KID
If you want, come eat with me and
my people. We cool.

MAKEBA
Yeah, okay!

He smiles and heads off. A group of BLACK GIRLS trail him.

GIRL
He's taken.

MAKEBA
Oh! No, I was... He just --

GIRL
(stronger)
He's. Taken.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS

Makeba stands in the doorway of the mostly segregated cafeteria. Attractive Kid sees Makeba and waves from the Black table with the girls.

Trina stands nearby. Makeba waves sheepishly. Jack approaches.

JACK

Nice job on the quiz, Ms.
Roosevelt. Making friends already.

He sees the look on her face and takes in the scene.

JACK

Sorry, that was bad timing. This
must suck.

MAKEBA

(relieved)
So much.

The Black side of the cafeteria watches with rising judgement.

JACK

Come eat with me. I mean us. Over
there.

Jack points to the white side of the cafeteria. Attractive Kid motions to her, while behind him the girls slowly shake their heads no. Makeba makes a "sorry" gesture.

She goes with Jack and the Black kids stare at her, whisper. The word "Oreo" is audible.

ATTRACTIVE KID

(to the table)
...yeah, but she still look good.

He high fives another football player.

Across the cafeteria, Smith, holding his lunch tray, stands next to NAIMA, 14, Black with a caramel complexion sits with DONNA (aka Flygirl aka #1 on the Top 9 at 9th) and some of their young aspiring fans. Naima is impeccably dressed. They watch Makeba walk. Naima notices Smith's frown.

NAIMA

Problem?

SMITH
(still staring)
Thought she'd know better.

Smith plops down next to Naima uninvited and places a copy of the list on the table.

NAIMA
I don't have time for foolishness.

He points to her name while jabbing his cake with a knife.

NAIMA
Obviously... but since when do you care?
(beat)
You're better than this.

SMITH
I assure you I'm not.

DONNA
(laughing, to Naima)
Gotta go... see you in history.

NAIMA
(to her minions)
Could you give me a moment?

They scurry away. Smith watches Donna walk away while moving so that the rest of the cafeteria can get a better view of him and Naima. He jabs at crumbs while studying the list.

SMITH
There has to be room for me here.

NAIMA
Why don't you ask your boys?

SMITH
I need to do this alone... help me.

Smith reaches for Naima's cake to replace his, but she deftly parries by stabbing his hand with her plastic fork.

NAIMA
You can do more constructive things with your time than chase approval.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A bored Derek looks around, spots Smith standing in the hall pointing to the list and attempting to mouth something to him.

DEREK
(loudly)
WHAT?

The teacher and class stop to look at him. Smith gives up.

SMITH
I need your help for the list!

Derek stands, points both fingers at Smith in approval, and walks out of the class. The TEACHER is astonished.

TEACHER
Mr. Henson! MR. HENSON!!!

Derek puts his arm around Smith and leads him down the hall.

DEREK
About time. First thing you need to
do is: Get. These. Hoes...

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DAY

A large group of students, including Knowledge, Alton, and Nikki, sit on the floor looking up at Smith and the GYM TEACHER. Naima sits in the bleachers because she doesn't gym.

SMITH
(nods at teacher)
Thank you, sir.
(beat)
I --

KNOWLEDGE
BOOOOOOOOOO!

GYM TEACHER
That's enough. Mr. Davidson, you
asked to speak, hop to.

Smith clears his throat.

SMITH

(nervously)

Love looks not with the eyes, but
with the mind. And therefore is
winged Cupid painted blind.

Smith exhales. The class is confused. Alton starts playing a
beat on the bleachers.

SMITH

So is mine eye enthralled to thy
shape. Just like your favorite Now
& Laters are grape.

Nikki looks up. The class (except for Knowledge) starts to
feel the performance. Smith looks directly at Nikki.

SMITH

Look, Nikki, I'm not gonna sing...
cause I just don't do that.

The class goes crazy at the LL line. Nikki stares daggers at
an oblivious Smith, who raps to his new audience.

SMITH

See you on the bus, I trip as I get
on. My body gets warm but my mind
is torn.

GYM TEACHER

(to one of the students)

This is Shakespeare?

Kids are clapping along, dancing. Others watch from the hall.

SMITH

You're the type that ignores the
destiny of two. It's not Romeo and
Juliet, it's me and you!

The spectators break into applause. Smith drinks it in, and
doesn't notice Nikki walking away until Alton points
frantically at her. Smith runs in pursuit.

NIKKI

(sweeps her arm at the
people watching)

Really?

SMITH

I want everybody to see. I'm not
ashamed.

Nikki throws the Now & Laters at Smith.

NIKKI

You're not as smart as you think. I failed my test.

SMITH

Sorry.

(reaching for her hand)

Want me to talk to the teacher?

NIKKI

No!

Nikki shoves Smith to the ground. A hush falls over everyone.

NIKKI

(puts on red sunglasses)

Why am I hanging with you anyway?

(beat)

Little-ass white boy.

Nikki walks away amidst screams of "ooooohhhhh" and laughter. Smith scrambles to his feet, fighting his eyes welling. He sees Knowledge smirking and runs toward him.

SMITH

I know you did this! You set me up!

You set me up! You ain't better than me!

Al holds Smith back, while the teacher restrains Knowledge, who just stands there laughing.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. MITCHELL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

End of the day. Some kids make their way to buses, others are on the athletic fields practicing.

Naima is balanced precariously on a bench. Her minions look at her.

Makeba passes. They make eye contact. Naima raises an eyebrow and gives a slight nod in acknowledgement. Makeba overcompensates.

MAKEBA

Hi!!!!

NAIMA

Hey, Makeba.

MAKEBA

How'd y --

NAIMA

I know everything.

(beat)

Like your bus is leaving.

Makeba sees the door close. She runs. The minions giggle.

NAIMA

(to minions)

Your buses are leaving too.

The minions scurry.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - AFTERNOON

Kayla and a few Black kids sit in the front of the bus. Dueling radios play hip hop in the front and U2 in the back. The rest of the bus is white kids (with one Asian kid).

CLAIRE 14, white, wearing a Grateful Dead t-shirt sits in the middle, motions to a harried Makeba.

CLAIRE

Makeba, right?

MAKEBA

Yeah, you're --

CLAIRE

Claire. Nice job in Patruski's. Her quizzes are killer. Welcome. I see many boring weekends with these idiots in your future.

She gestures to the back of the bus, where a group of boys hear her.

BOYS

Hey?!

They shrug and go back to being ridiculous.

The scenery outside changes. Smaller houses become bigger ones. Claire slumps in her seat and begins to discreetly roll a joint. Makeba's eyes get big and she looks around conspicuously.

MAKEBA

(whispering)

Is that weed?!

CLAIRE

You don't smoke?

She makes a weed smoking gesture.

CLAIRE

Just scored a '75 bootleg of Marley and the Wailers playing San Francisco. Come over this weekend and veg out --

Claire licks the joint and tries to figure out how to hold it while collecting her bags. She hands the joint to a stunned Makeba who lets it drop on the floor.

CLAIRE

Do you eat meat? I'm vegetarian, but we gotta figure out how to coexist. You know?

Claire picks up the joint and looks at Makeba with genuine interest.

MAKEBA

I haven't smoked, but I love Bob.

Makeba reaches in her bag and pulls out a few cassettes. She hands them to Claire.

CLAIRE

Sweet.

Makeba really laughs for the first time all day.

Jack makes his way from the back of the bus toward Makeba and Claire, bumping kids along the way.

BUS DRIVER

Jack! No walking while the bus is in motion. I've said this to you a million times since you were five.

Jack salutes him.

JACK

Almost there, Mikey. Almost there.
(to 7th grader)
Can I sit here?

He sits without waiting for an answer. The kid looks both thrilled and terrified.

JACK

(dramatically)
Talking about me?

CLAIRE

We're talking about Bob.

JACK

Bobby Felton? C'mon.

MAKEBA

Marley.

The music in the front of the bus gets louder. The Black kids sing "Oh Sheila." The white bus driver is growing weary.

BUS DRIVER

Turn that radio off. No radios on the bus.

KAYLA

You're racist. You never tell them to turn it off.

The bus driver sighs. A bus stop.

BUS DRIVER

Thankfully, you are home. Go torture some other adults.

Makeba gazes out the window at an out-of-place apartment complex. Kayla is fixated on her.

The bus driver glances in the mirror at Makeba.

BUS DRIVER
Hey, you there. This your stop?

MAKEBA
Um. I don't think so... I'm the
last stop --

CLAIRE
She's an Oak Laner like us.

Kayla stops moving, turns, poised to fight.

KAYLA
Of course she is. Saw your fancy-
ass moms and her car. You never
seen apartments before, preppy
girl?

MAKEBA
(to herself)
Please, just let me get home.

JACK
Bye, Kayla.

Kayla gives him the finger.

EXT. MAKEBA'S NEIGHBORHOOD - AFTERNOON

The houses are large. The streets are wide. Claire, Jack, and
Makeba stand together.

CLAIRE
Later, humans.

She throws up a peace sign and puts on sunglasses. A lighter
is audible, A CLOSE UP of her sparking a doobie.

Makeba waves. She looks at Jack.

JACK
Seriously. I don't know how she
does it. She's a genius.

MAKEBA
You coming?

They walk in silence.

JACK
(flirting)
I know we just met and we only had
lunch, but can I call you?

MAKEBA
 (smiling)
 You don't even know me.

JACK
 (quickly)
 But you smiled at me in Patruski's.
 It felt like a moment, right. Oh
 god, maybe it wasn't. Am I a dick?
 I'm talking too much.

He looks at her.

MAKEBA
 I like your eyes.

They are standing in front of Makeba's house, one of the
 biggest on the block. Jack takes it in.

JACK
 I'm going to leave before I say
 something stupid. More stupid. I'm
 cooler than this, usually. Okay.
 Bye.

He points in the direction of his house and heads off.

JACK
 (to himself)
 She likes my eyes.
 (to Makeba)
 See you tomorrow, Roosevelt!

Makeba gives no reaction but as soon as he turns his back she
 does a happy dance.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOSEVELTS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The family sits around the table eating an elaborate and
 delicious dinner.

EUGENE
 (exhausted but happy)
 Why do you want to spend all of my
 money, Lin? Do you see a tree with
 bills on it outside?

He takes a bite. Linda reaches over and pats his hand.

LINDA
 Can't trust you to spend it
 correctly. Girls, wouldn't you love
 to go to The Bahamas?

BROOKE, Makeba's younger sister, 6, enthusiastically raises
 her hand. Makeba pushes her food around.

BROOKE
 I do! I do! Mommy, this is the best
 dinner EVER!

Eugene and Makeba roll their eyes. Linda smiles at her
 favorite child.

LINDA
 Made in my image.

EUGENE
 How was school, Keeps?

MAKEBA
 Fine.

LINDA
 Doesn't sound fine.

BROOKE
 I saw Makeba talking to a boy.

EUGENE
 What boy?!

MAKEBA
 I'm going to talk to Alison about
 my day. Brooke will eavesdrop and
 fill you in later.

BROOKE
 Will there be palm trees in The
 Bahamas?

EUGENE
 What boy?! He better not be white.

Dad! MAKEBA Gene! LINDA

LINDA
 But he's not, right?

BROOKE
 He was white. Very white.

LINDA
Brooke. Enough.

Brooke sits back, pleased with her work.

MAKEBA
May I be excused? I have to catch
up on some Shakespeare.

LINDA
No. You may not. You CAN clean the
kitchen and then finish your
homework.

INT. DAVIDSONS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Smith searches the refrigerator with the phone to his ear.

SMITH
I need your help, Naima.

NAIMA (V.O.)
Smith? I should've known it was you
the way my mother carried on.
(beat)
Are you okay?

He bites an apple.

SMITH
I will be when I make this right.

NAIMA (V.O.)
Is Nikki worth all this?

SMITH
I'm not sure that matters anymore.
(beat)
They don't get to win.

NAIMA (V.O.)
Who's they? And why even play?

Smith digs around in his bookbag.

SMITH
Knowledge, Nikki, the list, the
whole school. I'm going to win
their game my way. I saw what
worked in gym today.

NAIMA (V.O.)
 Um, is there a different definition
 of success in honors English?

He pulls out the red hat and throws it in the closet.

SMITH
 You with me or not?

NAIMA (V.O.)
 (beat)
 Fine, Smith. But we're even after
 this. I have an idea, let me make a
 call.

SMITH
 (touched)
 Thanks, Eem... I --

Naima hangs up.

INT. ROOSEVELTS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

Makeba wipes the stove down. Brooke is on the floor with
 Arthur who's in a tutu. He doesn't move.

LINDA (O.C.)
 Don't forget to wipe the stove,
 Makeba. Shiny, please.

BROOKE
 Shiny, please!

MAKEBA
 Brown noser.

BROOKE
 Your nose is brown too.

Makeba laughs.

INT. DAVIDSONS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The doorbell rings. Smith, with one KID applying a sleeper
 hold around his neck and another trying a figure-four
 leglock, drags himself to the door.

SMITH
 (choking)
 I... got... it.

Smith opens the door.

LITTLE KID
 (yelling in Smith's ear)
 SUBMIT! SUBMITTTTTTTTT!!!!

Vicki rushes over to greet LAVERNE JACKSON.

VICKI
 (rushing to the door)
 Laverne, hi! So glad you could join
 us for Bible study tonight!

MRS. JACKSON
 Well, thank you for having us. This
 is my daughter Donna.

Smith is awestruck as DONNA JACKSON steps into view. He quickly throws the sleeper hold kid onto the couch.

LITTLE KID
 Whooooaaa! Do it again! Do it again!

DONNA
 Nice to meet you, Mrs. Davidson. I
 like your house... and I didn't
 know you had such a cute son.

Smith can't move or talk. Donna walks past him into the kitchen. He gazes up at the ceiling.

SMITH
 (whispers)
 Naima, I love you!

Smith exits. Then re-enters and looks back up at the ceiling.

SMITH
 (whispers)
 And you, God, of course. And Jesus.
 Okay, thank you.

INT. ROOSEVELTS' HOUSE - MAKEBA'S ROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

Makeba is opening a Tears for Fears album, *Songs from the Big Chair*.

MAKEBA
 (shouts)
 Mom! Thank you!!! I wanted this
 album!

EUGENE (O.C.)
 (cheery but yelling)
 Your mother does not do all of the
 fun things in this family! And stop
 yelling!

MAKEBA
 (shouts)
 Thanks, Dad!!!

Makeba skips to her record player and puts on the album. She
 unbraids her thick hair. She looks like a lion.

There's a crack of thunder as her gray princess phone rings.
 She leaps across her bed to answer it.

ALISON (V.O.)
 (panicked and speaking
 very quickly)
 Keeba, I'm sorry I was calling you
 and they just grabbed the phone --

PETE AND OTHER KIDS
 (muffled and teasing)
 And the colored girls sing "doo
 doo..."

Makeba takes the phone away from her face. She can hear
 Alison.

ALISON (V.O.)
 Stop it! You guys are assholes --

Makeba quietly hangs up. She plays "Shout" again. She walks
 into her en suite bathroom and stares in the mirror. Taking
 in her reflection, she opens her mouth and shouts as loud as
 she can. This is the cold open.

LINDA (O.C.)
 Makeba! Are you okay?

Arthur barks for the first time -- ever. The song slowly
 rises in volume.

MAKEBA
 (to herself)
 I --

There's a knock at the bathroom window. Makeba lifts the
 window to see a soaking wet Jack. She sticks her head out to
 take in the storm and becomes self-conscious when her hair
 gets wet. Jack slides inside and shakes off like a wet dog.

JACK
I had a question.

Makeba tries to push down her hair. It springs back.

MAKEBA
Get out! Are you crazy?! Jack! I --

Jack starts to leave the bathroom.

JACK
Okay. I'll come back through the
front door.

She stops him.

MAKEBA
Question? Fast.

EUGENE (O.C.)
Keeba! What's up with Arthur?

MAKEBA
(whispering)
Go! Now!

JACK
Not until you tell me that you'll
call me.

Makeba keeps trying to fix her hair without looking like she's trying to fix her hair. She shoves Jack to the door.

MAKEBA
(whispering)
Please... My father will kill you
and then me. No, me first, then
you.

Jack climbs back out the window. He talks to her as it pours.

JACK
Will you? Call me --

MAKEBA
Please. Go.

Jack shakes his head, getting water on Makeba. Makeba tries to smooth down her hair. He stops her.

JACK
I love it.

Makeba leans over and kisses him. Jack kisses her back. He slips out of sight. Makeba's bedroom door opens.

EUGENE

Hey! Who you talkin' to? You okay?
We heard screaming?

MAKEBA

Sorry. I love this album.

Makeba walks over and hugs her Dad. Eugene smiles and hugs her back.

EUGENE

It'll feel like home soon. I
promise.

MAKEBA

(smiling)
Maybe.

END PILOT

*