

VERVE

FROM HERE

Written by

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Where are you from? It's a question most immigrants are used to hearing. The answer...

From Here

...an anthology series where each episode focuses on a different immigrant story.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

A half-full bus of uniformed Catholic school children. All of the kids are white except for two black girls.

TITLE OVER: 1996. Manchester, NH.

One of the girls, LIZ (8), bold and bright, sits near the back of the bus chatting animatedly with the students around her. The other, IMANI (9), shy and good-natured, sits near the middle. She keeps to herself as she stares out the window.

The bus slows to a stop. Both girls rise and make their way to the front.

EXT. COLONIAL VILLAGE - DAY

The school bus pulls away to reveal Imani and Liz walking past a faded, wooden sign - Colonial Village. It's a community of apartments with a pool, basketball and tennis courts, and a clubhouse that's consistently empty.

LIZ
You're so quiet.
(beat)
Don't tell her. You shouldn't say
anything about it.

Imani stares at the ground as they continue on their way.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Please?
(beat)
Promise me, please?

They dart up the walkway to their apartment building. Liz holds the door open for Imani.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY - DAY

Imani shuffles through her bag to grab the keys.

LIZ
Please, please, please, please,
please--

Imani places the keys in the lock.

LIZ (CONT'D)
 --please, please, please, please--

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

GRADED TEST - 60%. NAME: Imani Mbunga.

SOPHIE MBUNGA (early 30s), the optimistic and diligent glue that holds her family together, grasps the test in one hand and tends to the stove with the other. She stirs the contents of the pot with a wooden spoon.

Her husband, PAULO MBUNGA (early 40s), full of good ideas far too late, leans against the wall sipping a can of Milwaukee's Best and reading a cheesy brochure for a conference on making and selling computers.

SOPHIE

This is a 60. That is an F. We have to do something about this now. If she keeps getting the Fs, then how will she get into an amazing school like Harvard?

Paulo takes another sip of his beer in response.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Her teacher tells me she is reading at a low-level. It is hard to help her in the schools. There are too many children.

Just then Imani and Liz burst into the kitchen.

IMANI

Can we have a snack?

SOPHIE

Dinner is almost ready.

Liz tries to open the fridge, but Paulo pushes it closed.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

(to Paulo, in Lingala)

Neither of us wants her to continue to struggle. If we want her to succeed, it's imperative that we act, and soon.

LIZ
But I'm hungry now!

Liz hurls herself onto the floor in dramatic fashion. She writhes, clutching her stomach.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Feed me! Feeeeeed meeeeee!

Paulo rolls his eyes and takes another sip of beer. Imani is over it. On her way out...

IMANI
Well, I'm not that hungry.
(sotto)
You're such a baby.

We follow Imani out into the...

INT. APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - DAY

Imani peers into the living room and notices her uncle CLAUDE MBUNGA (late 30s) impressionable and very new to the US, laying on the leather couch reading a book, a french translation. With his nose in his book, the TV is very free. She enters the...

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Imani picks up the remote from the coffee table and starts flipping channels.

We get a feel for the living room. Green plants and African art adorn the spare and plain apartment. The piecemeal decor doesn't fully match.

BACK TO:

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Liz is still fully committed to her "I'm starving" bit, while Sophie and Paulo talk around her.

SOPHIE
 (in Lingala)
 Her teacher passed along the names of some education specialists. If Imani is dyslexic or has a learning disability, then we need to start getting her the proper attention now.

LIZ
 I'm going to die if you don't give me any food right now. Right now.

Paulo starts shaking his head.

SOPHIE
 (in Lingala)
 We know she's smart, but we're hurting her by doing nothing. Each day that she doesn't get help, it makes her feel dumb, but she's not dumb.

LIZ (CONT'D)
 (last breaths)
 I'm starving. I'm starving to death. Mama. Help me.

SOPHIE
 (in Lingala)
 I can take more shifts to cover the cost. Do you want me to call the therapists?

PAULO
 No, no, no, no.

PAULO (CONT'D)
 No! Elizabeth, go to your room and go do your work!

Liz is up in a second and out of the kitchen. We follow her into the...

INT. APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Liz is on her way to her room, when she backtracks. She notices her sister watching TV. She hops into the...

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Liz settles on the floor next to her sister. They're watching *Superman: The Animated Series*. Superman takes down Lex Luthor, who happens to be black, while a crowd of white Metropolitans cheers him on.

BACK TO:

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

PAULO
(in Lingala)
She does not need a therapist.

SOPHIE
(in Lingala)
It's an education specialist.

PAULO
(in Lingala)
It's unnecessary. What she needs is to focus, and that's all. Don't let them tell you we need this. We don't need this, we need our money. Look at their clothes. The girls barely fit in those now. We need to buy them new clothes. That's where any extra money should go.

SOPHIE
(in Lingala)
We can find the money for the clothes. This is more important.

PAULO
(in Lingala)
Where? Where?

He pulls his pockets out of his pants.

PAULO (CONT'D)
(in Lingala)
I don't have extra money. Do you?
Do you?

CLAUDE (O.S.)
You don't need money to get clothes here.

INT. APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - DAY

Paulo appears in the dining room, so he can look at his wife in the kitchen and his brother on the couch. He spots his daughters watching TV.

PAULO
Turn that off and go do your homework.

LIZ
I already did mine.

PAULO

Well, go do something that will put
knowledge in your brain. Go!

The girls scurry to their room.

PAULO (CONT'D)

(to Claude)

How do you not need money to get
clothes? You need money to get
anything here. You need money to
get money.

INTERCUT WITH:

CLAUDE

There are so many clothes to go
around here, they don't care if you
steal.

PAULO

Who told you that?

SOPHIE

(sotto, shaking her head)

How stupid are you?

CUT TO:

INT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

FLASHBACK:

The theater is pretty dead. Claude sweeps while his coworkers
help themselves to everything and anything at the concession
stand.

JOE (16), pimply and pink-faced, clearly thinks you can never
have enough butter as he soaks his popcorn in it.

JOE

This job pays shit.

CALHOUN

(mouthful of nachos)

Total fucking travesty.

CALHOUN (16) long-haired Gen-Xer, licks the nacho cheese off
his fingers.

JOE

I got a girl. She lets me get in
there you know?

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

Lets me get a little...

(boob squeezing motion)

You know what I'm saying. And she doesn't have to do that, so I try to treat her good. Get her stuff. Talk to her sometimes.

CALHOUN

That's pretty stand-up.

JOE

Yeah, right? It's not my fault everything costs so much and pay sucks here.

CALHOUN

It's the fucking man, man.

JOE

Fuck the man.

CLAUDE

Who's the man?

CALHOUN

You know, the man! The cause of all the problems. The reason he has to steal to get his girl something nice so he can get a little touch.

CLAUDE

So you steal the clothes, and you don't get in trouble?

JOE

You just have to know where to go like... Filene's or TJ Maxx or Limited Too.

CALHOUN

Or Claire's. She loves Claire's.

JOE

Even Macy's really.

CALHOUN

Sears.

Claude nods his head taking it all in.

BACK TO:

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Claude is still laying on the couch reading.

CLAUDE

So you see? Clothes are not a problem.

Footsteps come his way. He looks up to see Sophie coming at him with the wooden spoon in hand. She starts smacking him over the head with it.

SOPHIE

(in Lingala)

We did not bring you into this country and into this house for you to be stealing like a peasant. What if our girls heard you, huh? You need to think about that.

INT. APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - DAY

Paulo takes another sip of Milwaukee's Best to the sounds of his wife beating his brother.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - IMANI AND LIZ'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sophie sits on one of the beds. Liz rests on the floor between her legs as Sophie cornrows her hair. Liz opens her mouth in a silent scream as Sophie pulls pieces of hair into place. Imani watches in horror. She's next.

SOPHIE

I just want you girls to understand the importance of education. It can take you anywhere. Are you listening to me?

Imani and Liz give each other a look like this isn't the first time they've come across this particular teachable moment.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Hey! Are you listening?

IMANI

Mhm.

LIZ

Yeah.

SOPHIE

When I was in the Congo, I was being bullied. There were so many girls who were mean to me because I was small and because my shoes never had laces. They thought I couldn't tie them, but I just liked them without the laces.

CUT TO:

INT. CONGO - CLASSROOM - DAY

FLASHBACK:

A pair of unlaced shoes grace the feet of an 8-year-old SOPHIE. She's crouched down under a desk. Children's feet around her signal that class is in session.

SOPHIE (V.O.)

It was comfortable, and I liked the style too. I don't see the problem with that.

CUT TO:

EXT. CONGO - SCHOOL - DAY

The bright colors and landscapes of Africa are a stark contrast to the drabness of New Hampshire.

Three GIRLS surround Sophie. They push her around and shove her into the dirt. One of the girls pulls Sophie's laceless shoe off of her foot and tosses it as far as she can.

SOPHIE (V.O.)

I couldn't take the bullies in my grade, so I started hiding in a different classroom.

BACK TO:

INT. CONGO - CLASSROOM - DAY

The TEACHER (40s) kneels down in front of her and smiles, bemused.

SOPHIE (V.O.)

I didn't realize I was in a 4th grade classroom. That was two grades ahead for me.

IMANI (PRE-LAP)
Mom, I think you're hurting her.

BACK TO:

INT. APARTMENT - IMANI AND LIZ'S ROOM - NIGHT

Imani points at Liz. Tears threaten to fall from her eyes as her head gets pulled this way and that.

SOPHIE
She is fine!
(to Liz)
Are you fine? You're fine. You both
need to listen.

BACK TO:

INT. CONGO - CLASSROOM - DAY

FLASHBACK:

The classroom is empty now except for young Sophie and her teacher. Her teacher hands her a few books.

SOPHIE (V.O.)
So my teacher tells me if I want to
stay in this class, I need to take
a test to prove that I can pass the
second and the third grade.

CUT TO:

EXT. CONGO - STREET - DAY

Sophie walks while reading. She's engrossed and doesn't bother to look up.

SOPHIE (V.O.)
I do not know anything that we are
studying, but I do not want to be
with the bullies. She gives me a
week.

INT. CONGO - HOME - NIGHT

In a modest home, Sophie studies at a desk. A table lamp illuminates her face as she pours over her books and takes detailed notes.

SOPHIE (V.O.)

So I go home every day and I study,
and I study, and I study. I don't
even know what I'm studying or what
I'm supposed to be learning, but I
take in every little thing that I
can.

EXT. CONGO - SCHOOL - DAY

Sophie marches up to the school with her books and notebooks
in hand.

SOPHIE'S POV: The school gets closer and closer and closer.

SOPHIE (V.O.)

So that on that day, I walk up to
that classroom and I am scared, but
I feel ready. So when I take that
test--

LIZ (PRE-LAP)

Can we please not wear cornrows?

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - IMANI AND LIZ'S ROOM - NIGHT

LIZ

Please?

SOPHIE

It's almost done.

LIZ

Everyone's going to make fun of us.

IMANI

They do it every time.

SOPHIE

If you want to shave your head, you
can shave your head, but if you
want to have your hair, you need to
let me take care of it.

IMANI

I hate going to school!

SOPHIE

Hey! Were you not listening to me?
You should not hate your education.

Sophie isn't paying attention to how she's handling Liz's hair.

LIZ
Ow mom! That's my head!

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

In the dark living room, Claude sleeps on the couch covered in a musty comforter.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - IMANI AND LIZ'S ROOM - NIGHT

Liz is tucked in and already asleep in her twin bed. Sophie kisses her on the forehead before moving over to Imani's bed across the small room. She's still awake.

IMANI
Mommy?

SOPHIE
Yes my dear?

IMANI
What happens if I can't be the way
you want me to be?

SOPHIE
You are everything we want you to
be.

IMANI
But I don't feel that way.

Sophie kisses her forehead and whispers in her ear.

SOPHIE
Things will not always be easy, and
sometimes they are easy for some
people and not others. When things
are not easy for you, you are a
person who works hard and a person
who tries hard. That's the best
kind of person to be.

This lifts Imani's spirits a little.

IMANI
Can you sleep in here with me
tonight?

SOPHIE
You know I can't.

IMANI
Please?

SOPHIE
Be a big girl.

Sophie gets up and walks to the doorway.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
Sleep with angels.

IMANI
Good night.

She hits the light switch, and the room goes dark.

INT. APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Paulo sits at the table. Pieces of computer are sprawled across it. He's got a giant book that he keeps referencing as he screws in the motherboard.

Sophie enters. She grabs her keys off the rack by the door. Without turning from the computer...

PAULO
Bye ma cherie.

Sophie opens the door and leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. PHARMACY - NIGHT

A wall clock reads 12:07 AM. It's the night shift.

Sophie counts out pills. She slides them into a bottle before placing the bottle into a small, white paper pharmacy bag. She staples the prescription to the bag before moving on to the next one.

Sophie's coworker DANA FORTIN (30s) mans the computer. He looks like Hagrid, but could never be described as gentle.

ARIANNA DUKAS (20) is the pharmacy tech who loves the late shift because she can watch *The X-Files* on a tiny TV while still getting internship credit. Guess what she's doing now.

SOPHIE

Hey Dana, do you know anything about learning disabilities?

DANA

Do I. I've got like four of them. No joke.

SOPHIE

Oh good. Maybe you can help me--

MAUREEN (O.S.)

Excuse me?

Sophie looks over to see MAUREEN MURPHY (early 40s) impeccably dressed for the late hour. Sophie goes over to assist her.

SOPHIE

Hello. How can I help you?

MAUREEN

I'm here to pick up a prescription.

SOPHIE

The last name is Murphy, correct?

MAUREEN

Yes, that's correct.

SOPHIE

Arianna could you...

She trails off as she turns to see Arianna engrossed in the show.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Ok, let me check.

Sophie moves to the alphabetized shelves of patients' medication. She examines each white, paper bag on the "M" shelf.

Maureen taps her nails on the counter as she grows impatient.

MAUREEN

Is there a problem?

SOPHIE

Um... Let me check the computer.

Sophie walks over to Dana.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
Can you check Murphy, Maureen?

MAUREEN
Don't tell me my doctor forgot to
call it in. That is so like her.

DANA
(to Sophie)
I'm not seeing anything.

SOPHIE
(to Maureen)
And your doctor called this in?

MAUREEN
Yes, but you know, she actually
wrote me a prescription just in
case.

Sophie and Dana freeze.

MAUREEN (CONT'D)
She's probably sick of me nagging,
nagging, nagging all the time. "Did
you call it in? Did you?"

Maureen's fake laughter fades into a sigh. Sophie makes her
way back to the counter.

SOPHIE
May I see?

Maureen hands over the doctor's note. It looks real enough.
It's very chicken scratchy. Sophie examines the note like
it's counterfeit money.

MAUREEN
Is that really necessary?

SOPHIE
This is for Oxycontin. I've been
told to take every precaution.

MAUREEN
With people like me?

SOPHIE
With everybody.
(beat)
(MORE)

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

I would like to call Dr. Rose, but her office is closed now, so we will need to wait until morning if that's ok.

MAUREEN

It's not ok.

(calming herself)

I just mean that I am in a great deal of pain. I had surgery very recently.

SOPHIE

After your car accident four months ago. I remember.

MAUREEN

Yes, well there have been complications and... I can't sleep at night without this.

SOPHIE

I understand, but like I said, I have been instructed to be extremely cautious, so I cannot help you until the morning.

MAUREEN

You can't help me? Really? This isn't a little ridiculous to you?

SOPHIE

Mrs. Murphy, it is very late. We don't usually see you at this time.

MAUREEN

What are you implying?

Arianna still hasn't looked up from the TV, but Dana is paying attention.

SOPHIE

I like to know my customers is what I am saying. That's all.

MAUREEN

This is the only time I could make it here. I schlep two kids around all day. You tell me when there's room in my schedule to get to the pharmacy and pick up my meds. You know what? I'd like to speak to your manager.

SOPHIE
I am the manager.

MAUREEN
You expect me to believe that?

Sophie's look says yes, she does expect Maureen to believe that.

MAUREEN (CONT'D)
Fine. Is there anyone else I can talk to?
(to Dana)
Sir? Can you please come here? I'd like to speak to you.

DANA
Yeah, I'm not going to talk to you.

MAUREEN
And why not?

DANA
'Cause she's the manager. Also, you're hooked on Oxy. You Oxy freaks are pretty scary. Get clean and get help before the PTA finds out.

SOPHIE
Dana!

DANA
What?! We both know it's true.

MAUREEN
I hope you like collecting unemployment checks. I will be reporting this.

DANA
To my manager I'm sure.

A flustered Maureen spins on her heels and marches out of the store.

SOPHIE
(sotto)
So many drugs. Why are these people all on the drugs?

ARAIANNA
(laughing loud)
Damn, I want to believe too. This
show is wicked awesome.

DANA
(beat)
I fucking hate the late shift.

SOPHIE
Please don't swear. You know I
don't like the swearing.

CUT TO:

EXT. COLONIAL VILLAGE - DAY

In the morning, Imani and Liz wait by the Colonial Village
sign. The bus pulls up and opens its doors to let them board.

CUT TO:

INT. PHARMACY - DAY

Arianna is passed out by the tiny TV. Sophie shakes her
awake.

SOPHIE
Shift's over dear.

ARIANNA
Five more minutes.

SOPHIE
Awww.

DANA
Wake the fuck up!

Arianna falls out of her chair as Dana can't stop laughing.

SOPHIE
Are you trying to scare this girl
to death? What is the point of
this?

DANA
The point is it's time to go, and
she's sleeping. The girl's gotta
git, right?

Just then, another pharmacist, CHRISTINE WYRZYK, (early 40s) enters. She's "nice". She makes a beeline for Sophie.

CHRISTINE

Oh Sophie, I'm so glad you're still here.

SOPHIE

We still have ten minutes of our shift.

CHRISTINE

Can you do me a huge, huge favor?
(before Sophie can respond)
Roger can't make his shift today.

SOPHIE

His shift that starts in ten minutes.

CHRISTINE

Would you mind covering for him?

Arianna walks past them on her way out.

ARIANNA

Bye Sophie. Morning Christine.

SOPHIE

So long.

CHRISTINE

Good morning.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

So what do you say? Help a friend out?

SOPHIE

I was here all night. You did not think to call me then?

CHRISTINE

I meant to. I really did. I think I might have actually left a message at your house. That's my fault. I'm so sorry about that.

SOPHIE

I have two children.

CHRISTINE

Sophie. We all have children.

SOPHIE

Dana does not. He is a single man.

Christine looks over at Dana who has his hand down the back of his pants so he can scratch his fat, hairy Hagrid butt.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Very single.

CHRISTINE

Not going to lie, everyone would rather be around you than Dana.

SOPHIE

It feels like you're punishing me because you like me.

CHRISTINE

Oh no. That is not how I want you to feel. I can ask Dana. I'll go ask him right now. I just figured you could use the extra money. I'm sorry. I'm just really all about helping people grow, earn, and reach their full potential. You're so much better than the night shift. Everyone knows that. I thought you'd jump at the opportunity to get on the day shift, even if it's only for a bit. You shouldn't feel like you're being punished though. I know we ask a lot of you here.

The "extra money" bait is much more offensive to Sophie, but she also can't deny that it's true.

SOPHIE

It's ok. I will do it.

CHRISTINE

Thank you so, so much Sophie. You're the sweetest.

SOPHIE

I have to pick up my kids from school.

CHRISTINE

That's fine. That's after the rush so feel free to leave whenever. You really are a trooper. Night into day. I'd need a few coffees just to stay up.

(MORE)

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Hell, I might even need a line or two if you know what I mean.

(laughing)

I kid, I kid! Thanks again. You're a sweetheart!

CUT TO:

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

Uniformed students disembark the bus and rush onto the playground, an asphalt parking lot. The kids play typical games like Red Rover and Tag. Some keep themselves occupied by hurling a Koosh back and forth.

Imani and Liz, both cornrowed, step down the large bus steps and hop onto the sidewalk. The playground sounds slowly dissipate into silence as reality fades into surrealism...

IMANI AND LIZ'S POV: Every student on the playground is still and staring at them. A KOOSH falls from one boy's hand. The RED RIBBON in a girl's hair gets caught in her slack jawed mouth.

As Imani and Liz step onto the asphalt, a small giggle sounds. The kids remain frozen. Nobody's lips move, but the first giggle gives way to more.

FLASH: The reality of the parking lot. The kids are in motion and mostly playing in their own worlds. A GIRL makes a weird, squinty face as she skips by Imani and Liz.

BACK TO:

The kids are frozen again. The laughing still underscores the scene. Tears well up in Liz's eyes as the laughs get louder.

FLASH: A BOY throws a koosh. He looks at Imani and Liz and lets out a snort of a laugh.

BACK TO:

Imani turns toward her sister. She sees the tears. She looks back at the eyes staring at her. The laughs have a reached a deafening pitch. A shrill, hyena-like cackle pierces through the rest of the cacophony, until...

IMANI

Tag! You're it!

Silence. Imani taps Liz on the shoulder then runs off as fast she can. Liz watches Imani sprint through the frozen bodies. They're still staring at her.

ANGLE ON: Liz with a glint of determination in her eyes.

Liz bolts after her older sister through a sea of kids who are mostly involved in their own worlds. The normal sounds of children at play accompany the scene.

CUT TO:

INT. PHARMACY - DAY

Sophie passes a prescription bag to a customer.

SOPHIE
(slightly sing-song)
Here you go. Have a nice day.

Her face falls as soon as the customer turns to leave. The pharmacy phone RINGS. Christine answers.

CHRISTINE
Brooks Pharmacy, how can I help
you?
(beat)
Uh, Sophie. It's for you.

Sophie comes over to take the phone.

SOPHIE
Brooks Pharmacy, how can I-- What
is it?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SUPERSTORE DISTRIBUTION CENTER - OFFICE - DAY

Paulo's on the phone in his office. The walls are paper thin and sound leaks in from the workers outside.

PAULO
Sophie, cherie. How are you?

SOPHIE
(confused)
I'm fine.

PAULO
Good. I'm fine too.

SOPHIE
Paulo? What is it?

PAULO
I have some bad news.

SOPHIE
Oh no...
(in French)
I've been up all night. My heart
can't take bad news right now.

PAULO
It's not so bad.

SOPHIE
Ok, ok. What is it?

CUT TO:

INT. LIMITED TOO - DAY

FLASHBACK:

Quick cut montage:

- Claude stuffing a couple of shirts for girls his neices' ages up his shirt.
- Claude walking out of the store. The alarm sounding.
- Claude and a MALL SECURITY guard sharing a heated exchange.

BACK TO:

INT. SUPERSTORE DISTRIBUTION CENTER - OFFICE - DAY

PAULO
Claude is in jail.

SOPHIE
(forced measure, in
French)
You have got to be kidding me. How
long has he been in this country?
How long?
(beat)
(MORE)

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

It's not a rhetorical question, but since you're suffering a bout of dumbness, as in you can't speak, not as in your stupid, though I should say you are that too, I will answer the question for you. He's been here for two months, and he's already landed himself in jail. You have got to be kidding me.

PAULO

It's those boys he works with filling his head with that craziness.

SOPHIE

(in French)

Claude is in jail, and those boys aren't our problem. You are his brother. Fill his head with something other than crazy.

ANGLE ON: Christine and another PHARMACIST (late 20s) side-eye Sophie.

CHRISTINE

(sotto)

You're French-Canadian right? You understand any of this?

PHARMACIST

(shaking his head)

I just started learning French from my son's Muzzy tapes.

BACK TO:

Paulo takes a deep breath. He's starting to boil.

PAULO

Are you finished?

SOPHIE

(in French)

Don't ask me if I am finished when you know I'm just getting started.

PAULO

(yelling)

You need to get him out of jail.

SOPHIE

(in French)

I need to? And why is that? Please inform me.

PAULO

There's a computer convention in Danvers that I am trying to attend.

SOPHIE

(in French)

Ha! Ok, you have fun with your computers that you keep saying will make us rich, while I take care of your children and get your brother out of jail.

PAULO

Woman, you need to--

SOPHIE

(in French)

Woman. That's correct. One who dreams of being with a real man, but I still haven't slept yet, so...

Paulo hangs up the phone with a slam.

Sophie looks up at the other pharmacists who quickly preoccupy themselves.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Ok, my love. Thank you for telling me. I'll see you tonight.

Sophie hangs up and goes back to work. Everyone else does too. It's like that phone call never happened.

MUSIC CUE: "Canticle of the Sun" as performed by a Children's Choir. The song fades in. The kids' voices are weak, but spirited.

CHOIR (V.O.)

*Praise for the wind that blows
through the trees, the seas' mighty
storms, the gentlest breeze*

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

MONTAGE:

Imani sits at her desk. Pencil poised. IMANI'S TEACHER (late 20s) glides through the classroom with a list of the week's Spelling Words. The teacher says the next word on the list. The pencils in the hands of all the other kids quickly start moving with recognition. Imani's stays still.

CHOIR (V.O.)
*They blow where they will, they
 blow where they please to please
 the Lord.*

CUT TO:

INT. JAIL - HOLDING CELL - DAY

There are a few guys in the cell. Everyone looks pretty small time. Claude stares at a clock in the hall outside the cell. He focuses on each second as the hand ticks and ticks and ticks.

CHOIR (V.O.)
*Praise for the rain that waters our
 fields, and blesses our crops so
 all the earth yields.*

CUT TO:

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY

It's lunch time in the cafeteria. An animated Liz, trades snacks - Hot Fries for Cheddar Cheese Popcorn. She's carefree as she jokes, her friends are enraptured by her.

CHOIR (V.O.)
*From death unto life her mystery
 revealed springs forth in joy!*

INT. CONFERENCE HALL - DAY

Rows of metal chairs are less than half-full in the too big hall. A banquet table in the back has a sad display of finger foods. Paulo sits in one of the chairs vigorously taking notes. The lecturer looks bored as he expounds about the benefits of optimizing hardware.

CHOIR (V.O.)
*The heavens are telling the glory
 of god,*
 (MORE)

CHOIR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*And all creation is shouting for
 joy.*

CUT TO:

INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

The wooden pews are empty except for a few to the right of the altar. The CONDUCTOR (50s) plays an electric Yamaha while simultaneously conducting the children's choir of which Imani and Liz are members.

CHOIR
*Come dance in the forest, come play
 in the field,
 And sing, sing to the glory of the
 Lord!*

The conductor's enthusiastic claps don't feel warranted since this choir is aggressively mediocre, but it makes the kids feel pretty satisfied with themselves.

END MONTAGE

CUT TO:

EXT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Imani and Liz wait by themselves on the church steps.

LIZ
 (groaning)
 I hate waiting!

Imani ignores her as she slides down the railings. She hops up the stairs to do it again.

LIZ (CONT'D)
 I'm so bored.

She watches Imani slide down the railing again and again.

LIZ (CONT'D)
 I dare you to jump from like the
 eighth step.

IMANI
 Uh... no.

LIZ
 Why? Are you scared?

IMANI

I'm not scared. I just don't want to.

LIZ

I think you're scared. I would do it. It's not that far or that high. You'd totally make it.

IMANI

What if I didn't?

LIZ

See I knew you were scared. C'mon just do it. I'll do it right after you.

Imani runs up to the eighth step and stops. She looks at the ground below. She could probably make it. It's not too far or too high, but before they can find out, their mom pulls up.

ANGLE ON: Sophie in the driver's seat.

SOPHIE

I'm so sorry I'm late. I'm so sorry girls.

They make their way down the steps.

LIZ

You realize that anything could have happened to us right? There are serial killers in the world. Do you know that?

Sophie unlocks the back door. Her girls get inside, and she drives off.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

Imani looks out the window as Sophie drives.

IMANI

This isn't the way home.

LIZ

(also looks out)
Yeah, where are we going?

SOPHIE

We need to pick up your uncle.

IMANI
From the movies?

SOPHIE
Well, uh...

LIZ
Can we go see *Toy Story* again? That movie's the best. It better win all the Oscars. If it doesn't, it will be an injustice!

IMANI
It's just a cartoon.

LIZ
It's the best cartoon, not just a cartoon. And the best stuff wins at the Oscars.

IMANI
Whatever.

LIZ
Can we go see it again?

IMANI
That won't be there anymore. That's from last year.

LIZ
How am I supposed to know that?

IMANI
Because that's how movies work.

LIZ
(mocking)
Because that's how movies work.

SOPHIE
Girls, please!

EXT. JAIL - PARKING LOT - DAY

Sophie pulls the car into a parking spot.

INT. CAR - DAY

Sophie shuffles through a Manchester Public Library bag in the front passenger seat. She hands her girls a few books. Liz starts flipping through *The Secret Garden*.

SOPHIE
Ok. You two just sit here, and I
will...

Sophie stares at a few tough looking BLACK MEN walking by the
car.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
Uh...

CUT TO:

INT. JAIL - DAY

Sophie waits in line. She grasps each of her daughter's
hands. As the person ahead of her leaves, Sophie walks up to
the HANK (late 30s), the prison worker at the front desk.

SOPHIE
Hello. I'm here to pick up Claude
Mbunga.

HANK
You're going to have to spell that
for me.

SOPHIE
M as in Mary, B as in Boy.

HANK
Found it. Ok, that'll be \$500 bail.

Sophie lets go of her children to fish out her checkbook.

HANK (CONT'D)
No, no. Cash only.

SOPHIE
Excuse me?

HANK
Cash. Only. They got cash where
you're from?

SOPHIE
I do not carry that kind of money
on me.

HANK
Then you're going to have to go to
a bank and get some and come back.

SOPHIE

(sotto)

I have my children here with me,
and I do not want to bring them
back here. Please, can you take a
check this one time. Please.

HANK

No. Lady, there are people in line
with cash.

SOPHIE

(sotto)

I have never been to a jail. I did
not know. My kids have never been
to a jail. They will never go to a
jail again after this I promise you
that. Please.

HANK

Lady...

SOPHIE

(sotto)

Please. I am not "lady", I am a
person. My name is Sophie. I work
nights.

HANK

The bank isn't far.

SOPHIE

I worked a double-shift. I haven't
even been to my bed yet. I'm so
tired. I am working so hard to have
some money, to have some power so I
can give that to my girls. Please
do not make me beg. I will. In
front of all these people I will do
that.

She glances at his name tag.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Please Hank.

Hank gives her a look like he wants to help her. Sophie is
hopeful.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

Sophie speeds down the street with Imani and Liz in the backseat.

EXT. BANK - DRIVE-THRU - DAY

A plastic cylinder full of cash comes down the Pneumatic Tube. Sophie reaches her hand out of the window to grab it.

INT. CAR - DAY

Again, Sophie speeds down the street.

EXT. JAIL - PARKING LOT - DAY

Sophie's car screeches to a halt in the parking lot.

INT. JAIL - DAY

Sophie slams the money down in front of Hank. She looks ten times more haggard than she did the last time she was here. Hank gently grabs the cash.

PRISON WORKER

Thanks ma'am.

EXT. JAIL - PARKING LOT - DAY

Sophie, Claude, and the girls walk through the lot.

CLAUDE

I am so sorry. I can't believe this can happen to me. The boys say they do this all time. All the time! But me? One time. One time only. They get me. I can't believe this.

They reach the car. Sophie opens the doors and everyone gets in.

INT. CAR - DAY

Claude doesn't let up.

CLAUDE

I am going to say something to those boys. They need to be careful too. If it can happen to me--

SOPHIE

Claude...

Claude turns to his nieces in the backseat.

CLAUDE

Girls, you need to know I was not doing bad. Sometimes there is confusion--

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Please...

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

(in Lingala)

Know your place! This isn't it.

He stops talking, and they drive off in silence.

CUT TO:

EXT. COLONIAL VILLAGE - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Sophie pulls the car into her parking spot.

INT. CAR - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Sophie turns off the car. The harsh yellow street light barely illuminates her family and her as she hands Claude the keys.

SOPHIE

You can go in. We'll be inside soon.

Claude takes them and leaves.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Do you girls know what that place was?

(beat)

Do you?

LIZ

Yes.

IMANI

Yes mama.

SOPHIE

What was that place?

SOPHIE (V.O.)

I would see them talking to so many people. The exchange of money from hand to hand, and I knew they were the drugs. They would say to me, "Sophie, your books aren't going to make you rich. Come with us." Sometimes I wanted to.

BACK TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Sophie is lost in her memory. She stares straight ahead as she speaks.

SOPHIE

When you're young, it's hard to think of the far off future. I wanted everything right then.

Liz looks up from her work. She's only eight, but she deeply identifies with that statement.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

I never went with them. Mostly because I was scared. I ignored them when they would make fun. I would stay in the world of my books.

INT. CONGO - COLLEGE CLASSROOM - DAY

FLASHBACK:

As the students let out of class, a 16-year-old Sophie walks out with her PROFESSOR (40s), so they can keep discussing the lecture.

SOPHIE (V.O.)

One day when I was in college in Kinchasa, the capital, I looked around me and none of the people I grew up with were there.

INT. CONGO - DORM ROOM - DAY

Sophie dials the phone at her desk. She raises the receiver to her ear.

SOPHIE (V.O.)
I wondered where they went. I
called home to ask my younger
siblings what happened to these
people.

INT. CONGO - JAIL - NIGHT

(NOTE: These characters are exactly the same as when we first
met them. Same outfits. They haven't aged.)

In the dark dank prison, the teenage girl with the SILK SCARF
wrapped around her neck is behind bars.

SOPHIE (V.O.)
This person and this person are in
jail.

INT. CONGO - OUTDOOR MARKET - DAY

A crowd is gathered around the dead body of the teenage boy
with DESIGNER SUNGLASSES, now splattered with blood. He's
been shot in the head.

SOPHIE (V.O.)
Another person is dead.

INT. CONGO - OUTDOOR MARKET - NIGHT

The teenage boy with the ROLEX stands in an alley. The
darkness surrounds, then overtakes him. The glint of the
moonlight off his watch is the last thing we see before
complete darkness.

SOPHIE (V.O.)
Nobody knows what happened to that
person. It's so sad because I am
the same as them.

BACK TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

SOPHIE
I could have been in jail or dead
too. They could have been at the
college. Those people in that jail
there? It could be you, but it
doesn't have to be. It shouldn't
be. You understand?

Sophie turns around to check on her daughters. Imani is asleep against the window, and Liz is deep into her homework. She looks up when she realizes her mom is staring at her.

LIZ
I'm listening. I swear.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sophie sleeps in the darkened room. A SHRILL ALARM CLOCK sounds as the tiny anvil bangs the two bells. Sophie shifts, but doesn't move more than that as the alarm continues to ring. Suddenly the door bursts open. Paulo enters.

PAULO
Sophie, you need to wake up! We can't have that ringing through the whole house like that.

Paulo fiddles with the alarm, but can't seem to turn it off. Sophie rises. She's still half asleep.

PAULO (CONT'D)
How do you do this? I can't do this.

He fiddles with it a little more before handing it to Sophie.

PAULO (CONT'D)
Cherie, can you do this?

She takes it from him and quickly stops the alarm. She tosses it onto the bed.

PAULO (CONT'D)
Thank you. You need to get up. You don't want to be late.

Paulo flicks on the lights before he leaves. Sophie shields her eyes from the harsh brightness. As she slowly gets out of bed, we can see that she's still in the same clothes from earlier.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - HALLWAY

Sophie leaves her room in a fresh outfit and ready for work. She stops as she passes the living room. Paulo and Claude sit on the couch drinking beers and watching soccer on Telemundo.

They're jovial and lively as they yell in Lingala at the TV screen. A splash of beer from Paulo's bottle lands on the coffee table. He doesn't notice it, but Sophie glares at it like it's a personal affront to her.

SOPHIE
Can you please clean that up.

Paulo looks over surprised. He hadn't noticed her.

PAULO
What?

SOPHIE
(pointing)
That. Please clean that.

PAULO
Ok, ok. You need to go. You're going to be late.

SOPHIE
I'm going, but please--

PAULO
I'll clean it. I'll clean it.

He settles right back into talking with his brother. Sophie sighs, then leaves for another night shift.

INT. PHARMACY - NIGHT

It's the middle of the night. The place is dead. Soft elevator music plays over the stores speakers (think Carpenters' "Close To You" on the vibes) while Sophie fills out prescriptions, Dana mans the computer, and Arianna can barely keep her eyes open while watching *The X-Files*.

Surprisingly, a customer makes his way up to the counter. He's SKINNY with bleached hair. He's dressed in black JNCO jeans and a black hoodie. He looks like a chump for wearing sunglasses indoors and at night.

SKINNY
(hushed)
Hey.

Everyone remains absorbed in their current tasks.

SKINNY (CONT'D)
Hey.

Sophie hears him and walks over to help him.

SOPHIE
Hello. Welcome to Brooks Pharmacy.
How can I--

Skinny whips out a gun and points it at her.

SKINNY
Give me all the fucking Oxy you
got. Now!

Sophie's hands shoot up into the air.

SOPHIE
Please don't kill me.

SKINNY
Move lady!

Arianna and Dana notice the commotion.

ARIANNA
Oh, fuck no!

DANA
What the hell?

Arianna hits the floor and starts crawling as far out of sight as possible. Sophie heads to where they store the Oxycontin.

SOPHIE
The man wants Oxy. He wants Oxy.

Her hands shake as she grabs the loose pills. Ever the diligent worker, she lays them out and starts counting them before placing them into pill bottles.

SKINNY
Hurry it up!

Dana marches up to Skinny who points the gun right at him.

DANA
What the fuck do you think you're
doing? Huh? What are you doing?

SKINNY
Give me the fucking drugs or I'll
shoot you in the head you fucking
asshole.

DANA
What are you all of 12?

Dana grabs a broom before exiting the pharmacy and going straight for Skinny.

SKINNY

What the--?

THWACK! Dana smacks Skinny upside the head with a broom. Sophie stops counting pills to look at the commotion.

SOPHIE

(sotto)

Oh no, this is not protocol. Oh no,
oh no.

Sophie tiptoes to the phone and dials 911. She watches as Dana and Skinny wrestle on the ground for control of the gun. Dana is huge. He's got both hands on the gun as he starts to stand, but Skinny has an unexpectedly strong grip and won't let go.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Hello, my name is Sophie. My pharmacy is being robbed. It's the Brooks on River Road. Please hurry. The man has a gun. We are all so scared. I am a mother of two. Please you must come very soon.

Dana drags Skinny across the floor. He won't let go.

DANA

Give me the gun limp-dick!

BANG! The gun goes off. Sophie and Arianna scream. Arianna's whimpering cries can be heard from wherever she's hiding. Sophie sinks to the ground. The phone is still to her ear. She starts rocking back and forth and praying in Lingala.

DANA (CONT'D)

You little fuck!

Dana kicks him in the face. The second kick finally gets Skinny to let go. Dana instantly opens up the cartridge to empty the bullets.

DANA (CONT'D)

Your mama's going to be disappointed in you, you slime bucket.

(examining the bullets)

They're blanks!

(to Skinny)

Blanks? Blanks?!

The sounds of Sophie's foreign prayer, Arianna's cries, and Skinny's groans mix in with the elevator music to create a somber elegy to the night shift.

CUT TO:

INT. PHARMACY - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

The POLICE get statements from Dana and Arianna, while ELIAS ST. PIERRE (60s) the boss of the pharmacy talks to Sophie.

ELIAS

I appreciate you following the directives we gave you. Dana is... lucky they were blanks.

Sophie nods. She's half there.

ELIAS (CONT'D)

You ok?

SOPHIE

I'm ok. I'm... Even with no bullets it's very, very...

Just then, Paulo's car comes screeching to a halt in the tiny parking lot. He jumps out of the car and makes his way to Sophie and Elias. He rests a hand on her back, soothing it with consoling circles.

ELIAS

Good to see you again, Mr. Mbunga.

Paulo and Sophie wince as he butchers their name, but they let it go.

ELIAS (CONT'D)

Wish it were under better circumstances.

Paulo nods in response.

PAULO

You're ok?

SOPHIE

I'm ok.

ELIAS

You did everything right tonight. Heck, you do everything right. Feel free to take a couple of days off.

Before she can protest.

ELIAS (CONT'D)
Paid. Of course.

PAULO
I'll take care of the girls in the morning.

SOPHIE
Please, you don't need to--

PAULO
I do. And you need to rest.

ELIAS
And when you get back, we'll talk about having you manage a day shift.

Sophie's eyes fill up with tears of gratitude.

SOPHIE
Thank you.

ELIAS
No, thank you. And in your time off, I think maybe you should talk to someone, a therapist, about what happened tonight. I want to make sure you're ok.

Paulo's hand stops moving along Sophie's back. She can feel him tense up next to her.

SOPHIE
I can't see a therapist. I can't.

ELIAS
Talk to someone. Who do you turn to when you have problems?

CUT TO:

INT. SOPHIE'S CAR - NIGHT

Sophie drives through the sleepy streets.

INT. PAULO'S CAR - NIGHT

Paulo follows behind her.

EXT. COLONIAL VILLAGE - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Sophie and Paulo pull into adjacent spaces. Paulo gets out of his car. He rushes over to Sophie who has barely stepped out of the vehicle when he pulls her into a tight hug and kisses her on the forehead. She's a little surprised at first, but eases into his comforting gesture.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - DAY

In the morning, Paulo places two bowls of cereal onto the table. In the background, Claude lays on the couch in the living room, balancing a bowl of cereal on his stomach.

In uniform and carrying backpacks, his daughters come down the hall. Each sports wild hair sticking up in all directions.

PAULO

You need to get ready for school.
Fix your hair.

IMANI

Mom, always does that.

PAULO

Fine. Go get the brush. I'll do it.
(shouting in Lingala)
Claude, go get a brush and help me
fix their hair you lazy piece of
shit.

CLAUDE

(in Lingala)
Oh I'm lazy? When you are on the
couch with me and we're drinking,
I'm not lazy, but now I'm lazy.

Imani and Claude disappear down the hall while Liz starts into her cereal.

LIZ

Why is it so soggy?

PAULO

Huh?

LIZ

It practically mush.

PAULO
Just eat it. It's food. There are
so many people without food in the
world. Be grateful.

Liz tries not to gag as she takes tiny bites of squishy
textured cereal.

LIZ
Where's mom?

PAULO
She's sleeping.

LIZ
Why?

PAULO
She had a rough night.

Imani and Claude come back into the room with brushes, combs,
moisturizers, elastics, bobby pins. They spread it all out on
the table

PAULO (CONT'D)
What's all this?

IMANI
This is all of the stuff mom uses
when she's doing our hair.

Paulo doesn't even know where to start. He picks up a brush
that looks like it will do. Claude and Liz stare in a mix of
fascination and fear. Paulo sets the brush at the roots of
her hair and tries to pull it through, which elicits a shrill
scream from Imani.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

Asleep in bed, Sophie's eyes open wide at the sound of
Imani's screams. She can't help, but chuckle before trying to
go back to sleep.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Liz sits near the back. Imani sits near the front. They both
have whack ass hair.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Sophie walks up the steps of the church.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Sophie sits in the front row pew. MONSIGNOR MCGARRY (70s) soft-spoken with a constant crooked smile, walks up to her. She gets up to greet him.

MSGR. MCGARRY
Hello Sophie.

SOPHIE
Are we going to the confessionals?

MSGR. MCGARRY
No, no. Sit down. We're not
discussing your sins. Or are we?

Sophie shakes her head no as they sit. She's uncharacteristically jittery.

MSGR. MCGARRY (CONT'D)
Overdo it on the coffee this
morning?
(off her confusion)
You're shaking.

SOPHIE
Oh, I think I'm nervous.

MSGR. MCGARRY
Really? I see you every Sunday, and
every now and then when you come in
to pray before work.

SOPHIE
I know. I am silly.

MSGR. MCGARRY
There's something on your mind
right? That's why you're here.

SOPHIE
For so long, I have been wanting so
badly for someone to listen to me,
to really open their ears and their
hearts and brains and just listen.
Now, I have you, but I don't know
what to say.

MSGR. MCGARRY

It can be very painful. Not being heard.

SOPHIE

I want to talk to you. I'm just not used to talking about myself so much.

MSGR. MCGARRY

I see you chatting with the other moms.

SOPHIE

They chat to me. I do talk about myself, but so much of what I really think, really feel I do not share.

MSGR. MCGARRY

You tell those things to your husband?

SOPHIE

(shaking her head no)
You think I should?

MSGR. MCGARRY

You might want to tell someone. You know you can always turn to god in those moments, but still. Sounds lonely.

SOPHIE

I put so much into my school, my kids, my work. I want to think that someone will put so much into me. I won't have to ask, they just will.

MSGR. MCGARRY

You might have to ask, especially with men.

SOPHIE

I wish that people would tell me my words mean something to them. Maybe my children think of me as someone who talks and talks and talks, but if they could listen properly they would understand. I know they would.

MSGR. MCGARRY

You know the story of Babel, the city and the tower?

SOPHIE

I do.

MSGR. MCGARRY

It's strange to imagine a world with one, universal language. Everybody understanding everybody. Even stranger to imagine god punishing everybody by giving them all different languages.

SOPHIE

I never read it that way. I always thought god must understand difference is beautiful. It's good.

MSGR. MCGARRY

Oh I like that. That's homily material right there.

SOPHIE

You speak french, yes? Monsignor?

MSGR. MCGARRY

No. These days they'll give that title to anyone near a French-Canadian diocese. I'm an Irish lad through and through.

SOPHIE

I don't know any Irish.

MSGR. MCGARRY

Me neither. Well technically nobody does, they speak Gaelic over there.

SOPHIE

Thank you for listening. How I've felt from the moment I came to this country is that there is so much noise, but nobody listens here.

CUT TO:

EXT. COLONIAL VILLAGE - PARKING LOT - DAY

Sophie pulls her car into her spot before exiting the vehicle.

PRE-LAP: Phone dial tone.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM

Sophie is on the phone.

SOPHIE

Hello, yes my name is Sophie. I'm calling to set up an appointment for my daughter.

(beat)

She may have some learning disabilities, I'm not sure.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sophie puts on a record. African music blares through the speakers.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Sophie drops balls of dough into the bubbling, brown oil in the deep fryer.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sophie sits on the couch watching *The Bold and the Beautiful* while eating Mandazi, the African doughnut holes she was making in the fryer. Her eyes are glued in rapt attention to the TV.

SOPHIE

I am confused. I thought she died.

INT. APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - DAY

Sophie sets out a dish of hot Mandazi on the table. She places a small dipping bowl of honey beside it just as her girls burst through the door mid-screaming match.

IMANI

It wasn't funny to me! I would never do anything like that to you.

LIZ

It was just a joke! Chill out. You're so sensitive.

They go silent when they see their mother. Tears stain Imani's face. Her eyes are red. She sprints down the hall. A DOOR SLAMS shut. Sophie stares down Liz who refuses to look up from the floor.

INT. APARTMENT - IMANI AND LIZ'S ROOM - DAY

Sophie slips into her daughters' room to find Imani crying on her bed. Sophie sits down on the bed and rubs her back.

SOPHIE
Did something happen?

IMANI
It feels like something is always happening to me. It's not fair.

SOPHIE
I know it's not fair. Tell me what happened.

IMANI
We got our spelling tests back today.

INT. APARTMENT - HALLWAY - DAY

Liz eavesdrops through the slightly ajar door.

IMANI (O.S.)
I studied a lot, but the letters always get jumbled in my head.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

FLASHBACK:

Imani holds her spelling test. 64 is written in red ink and circled at the top. A blonde girl with RED RIBBON (9) in her hair sits next to Imani. She can't help but look at Imani's bad grade. It's right there...

RED RIBBON
Ouch.

Off Imani's look...

RED RIBBON (CONT'D)
You get a lot of bad grades right?
You just don't really care about school?

Across the aisle from them, a boy holding a KOOSH leans over to look at Imani's test.

KOOSH

Dude that sucks! My mom would kill me if I were this stupid.

Tears start to form in Imani's eyes. She's tight-lipped as she wills them not to fall.

Liz watches from a few rows behind. She gets up and starts making her way down the aisle.

KOOSH (CONT'D)

I wonder if it's because you're, you know, African-American, and I don't mean that in a mean way or anything. I just wonder if that has anything to do with it you know?

LIZ

That's not it.

Imani, Koosh, and Red Ribbon turn to Liz who has reached them.

LIZ (CONT'D)

The thing is--

BACK TO:

INT. APARTMENT - IMANI AND LIZ'S ROOM - DAY

Imani is sitting up now. She hangs her head in shame.

SOPHIE

What did she say? Imani? Tell me what your sister said.

Imani lifts her head to tell her, then freezes. Sophie follows her eyes to the door and barely makes out Liz through the slightly open door. She bounds to the door and swings it open.

INT. APARTMENT - HALLWAY - DAY

Liz tries to run away, but she gets tripped up and falls. Sophie grabs her by the arm and practically drags her back into...

INT. APARTMENT - IMANI AND LIZ'S ROOM - DAY

Sophie grasps Liz's arms and forces Liz to look at her.

SOPHIE

Tell me what you said to your
sister.

Liz knows she's caught. She has no choice.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

FLASHBACK:

Liz stands in the aisle.

LIZ

There are different kinds of black
people. I'm the good kind. Imani's
the dumb kind.

With that, the tears in Imani's eyes finally fall.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - IMANI AND LIZ'S ROOM - DAY

Tears in Sophie's eyes. She's in disbelief at her daughter's
cruelty. Her fingers dig into her daughter's thin arms.

SOPHIE

(heated, in Lingala)

Who are you? Who are you?! Who the
fuck do you think you are to talk
to anyone let alone your sister
like that?

LIZ
 Mom? I can't--
 (beat)
 Stop yelling. What are you
 saying?
 (beat)
 Mom!

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
 (heated, in Lingala)
 I pray to God to send the
 holy spirit to eliminate
 whatever evil is in your
 system, whatever evil makes
 you think you're better than
 anyone. Who the hell are you?
 What have you done? You
 haven't even begun to make
 yourself into somebody you
 insolent child. Do you know
 how much responsibility I had
 at your age? If you would
 open up your damn ears even
 just a fraction of the amount
 you probably should, then you
 would know. You consider
 yourself a good black person?
 Ha! You are still small. You
 are still nothing. You are
 still a child.

LIZ
 I can't understand you!

SOPHIE
 You are still a child. You
 understand nothing.

LIZ
 (beat)
 It was just a joke.

SOPHIE
 It was not a joke! Even if it was a
 joke, it was not funny. Not even a
 little bit. Is it funny when the
 other kids say, "Your hair is
 weird. It sticks up. It looks like
 cotton candy. Why is it so greasy?"
 Is that funny?

LIZ
 ...No.

SOPHIE
 That's right. You don't like it
 when the kids make you feel bad.
 And they don't mean to make you
 feel bad, but they do. How do you
 think your sister feels right now?

LIZ

...Bad.

SOPHIE

You need to stop thinking about your words as without shape and invisible. They are very real. They have power. They can be very hard.

LIZ

You don't think I know that?

SOPHIE

No, I don't.

LIZ

You're the one who is always talking. You said...

SOPHIE

What did I say?

LIZ

You didn't say it, say it.

EXT. CONGO - SCHOOL - DAY

FLASHBACK:

(NOTE: We've seen these scenes from Sophie's flashbacks before, but now they're populated by many white people and token black people.)

Three GIRLS, one black and two white, surround Sophie. They push her around and shove her into the dirt. The black girl pulls Sophie's laceless shoe off of her foot and tosses it as far as she can.

LIZ (V.O.)

But I heard you.

EXT. CONGO - OUTDOOR MARKET - NIGHT

The moonlight glints off the watch as the TEENAGE BOY passes a small baggie to the OLDER MAN, and the man in turn gives him a wad of cash.

LIZ (V.O.)

And I saw you.

INT. CONGO - JAIL - NIGHT

In the dark dank prison, the teenage girl with the SILK SCARF wrapped around is behind bars.

LIZ (V.O.)
And I know what you were trying to
tell us in your stories.

INT. CONGO - OUTDOOR MARKET - DAY

A crowd of white people is gathered around the dead body of the teenage boy with DESIGNER SUNGLASSES, now splattered with blood. He's been shot in the head.

LIZ (V.O.)
You don't want us to be like those
other kinds of black people, the
bad kinds.

INT. CAR - DAY

In the jail parking lot, Sophie stares at a few tough looking BLACK MEN walking by the car. Liz clocks her mother's worry.

LIZ (V.O.)
Because you want us to work hard
and go to college and leave home.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Liz and Imani watch *Superman: The Animated Series*. Superman takes down Lex Luthor, who happens to be black, while a crowd of white Metropolitans cheers him on.

LIZ (V.O.)
So we can get all of the things
that we want in life.

INT. CAR - DAY

Sophie shuffles through a Manchester Public Library bag in the front passenger seat. She hands her girls a few books. Liz starts flipping through *The Secret Garden*.

LIZ (V.O.)
That's what you've been trying to
tell us.

BACK TO:

INT. APARTMENT - IMANI AND LIZ'S ROOM - DAY

SOPHIE
I was trying to set an example for
you. Do what I did! I never said
the other people were bad.

LIZ
But if you're the good guy, then
what are those other people?

SOPHIE
What is this thinking? This good
and bad?

LIZ
That's how they talk about things
on TV.

IMANI
And in church.

SOPHIE
You are still so young, but soon
you will learn that there is rarely
good and bad. There are just
people. We are just people like all
black people. All of our spirits
are as resilient and beautiful.
People, all people, mainly want the
same things. We all want love. We
all want to be safe. We all want
respect. I just want you to be a
hardworking, caring person. That's
all I want for you girls.

LIZ
Well I want to not feel like an
alien all the time. I just want to
be the same. That's all I want. And
I'm sorry Imani. I never should
have said that to you. It was
really mean, but sometimes it seems
like things will be easier if I try
to be like them.

(MORE)

LIZ (CONT'D)

But you're the only one who knows what it's like to be an alien too, and I shouldn't have made you feel even more like one. I'm really, really sorry.

Liz is practically in tears as she finishes.

SOPHIE

I am sorry too.

Sophie grabs Imani's hand and pulls her off the bed and into an embrace with Liz.

IMANI

It's ok Liz. I forgive you.

SOPHIE

(in French)

My god, you helped me navigate a world I wanted to escape. Help my daughters create a world they long to be a part of.

IMANI

What did you say?

Sophie doesn't say a word as she hugs her daughters close.

CUT TO BLACK

END OF PILOT