



ALIYAH

By Ambria Hartie

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Characters

Aliyah, dark skin, huge afro, she starts off the play at age 19, but as she goes through her life story, she is different ages throughout the play. She is strong, independent, highly intelligent, and has a smart-mouth at times.

Mama, dark skin, thick huge afro, Aliyah's mother, she is originally from Africa, she is independent, strong, intelligent, and is a lot like Aliyah.

Father, light skinned (black) ,rude, very racist towards dark skin people, he come off as charming yet he is evil

Jeremy, white, he too also changes age a lot throughout the play, He is Aliyah's love interest.

Deja, white, part of trio, mean to Aliyah

Tiffany, white, part of trio, is mean to Aliyah, but she's dumb

Theresa, white, leader of trio is mean to Aliyah

Boy 1, white

Boy 2, white

Wife, white, European

Ms. Temple, white, Elementary school teachers

Ms. Richards, white, middle school teacher

Casting director, white

Producer, black, intelligent

Woman, white

Mugger, any race

Act 1, Scene 1

ALIYAH

(In a dramatic voice.)

My love, run away with me, for our days are young and we are held at our death bed sooner and sooner.

(She is amazing, she finishes as if she aced the audition)

Thank you.

(she smiles brightly)

CASTING DIRECTOR

Oh yes, thank you Miss-

(he looks around for her resume to find her name)

ALIYAH

Aliyah! Aliyah Anderson!

(she smiles again.)

CASTING DIRECTOR

-Ms. Anderson!

(He finishes.)

That was a great audition, one of the best in fact!

(She gets excited as if she got the part.)

But-

(She looks confused.)

You're not exactly what we're looking for.

ALIYAH

Not what you're looking for? What do you mean sir?

(She takes a hint that it's because of her skin color, but she doesn't make it obvious)

CASTING DIRECTOR

Well it's your-- I mean- look how do you feel about... straightening your hair and dyeing it, or getting one of those-

(He snaps his fingers as if he's trying to find the correct word.)

ALIYAH

Perms?

(She slowly develops an attitude and says this is in disgust.)

CASTING DIRECTOR

No, perms curl your hair. My sister got one of those once.

ALIYAH

Well, For us African American females, it straightens our hair.

CASTING DIRECTOR

Oh, then yeah! That's the word! Yeah, why don't you get one of those? To get your hair straight and not so... that.

ALIYAH

(She touches her hair.)

What's wrong with my hair?

(She says this defensively.)

CASTING DIRECTOR

Umm...Nothing, it's just a little like your skin.

ALIYAH

My skin?!

CASTING DIRECTOR

Yeah, it's just a little too dark.

ALIYAH

Excuse me?!

(The door swings open revealing a slim white woman with long blond hair and blue eyes)

WOMAN

Excuse me. I'm sorry, I don't mean to interrupt anything but, I'm here for the audition?

(She has a high plastic voice, wearing scandalous clothing)

CASTING DIRECTOR

Now see!

(He points at the woman.)

That's true beauty! Look at that hair! And that skin!

(He looks her up and down and says this seductively:)

And those clothes.

(He begins to talk to the woman, and Aliyah escorts herself out.)

CURRENT ALIYAH

(She sits in a chair outside the office feeling defeated.)

You know, this feels too familiar. How come anytime I want to do something I love, my skin color and hair just has to hold me back?

(The producer walks into the room and he sits next to her and busies himself with a phone call, he gets up and walks to the other side of the room, and make gestures as if he's on an important business call, She watches the producer curiously, not knowing that he is a producer. Then she starts addressing the audience. Spotlight on her. Scene transitions to a living room, while she is speaking.)

My mama said that this would happen. Another audition down the drain, 19 years on this planet and I've had way too much of my share of racism. Some say to be successful you gotta work hard, others say you got to have talent, to go places in life. Well, the way life has treated me, I say that in order for you to be successful or go places in life you gotta be white. White, white, white. Since when did a skin color determine the outcome of your life? I don't know. But what I do know, is that ever since I was a little girl I've been surrounded by this oppressive society. And please this is just the beginning.

Act 1, Scene 2

(Lights up, 6 yr old Aliyah, (She will be "Younger Aliyah") and Mama, who is reading a book, are in a living room. Current Aliyah is now a narrator)

CURRENT ALIYAH

Here I am at 6 years old, when it all started.

(Younger Aliyah is sitting at the TV watching beauty commercials, there is no actual TV.)
 Mom...

MAMA

Yes?

(She is still reading the novel)

YOUNGER ALIYAH

How come there's nobody like me and you on TV.

MAMA

(She looks up a little shocked)
 Nobody like me and you ? What do you mean baby?

YOUNGER ALIYAH

Well, you know, nobody has our hair, or our skin color.

MAMA

Aliyah, there are black people on TV.

YOUNGER ALIYAH

Yeah, but they're all lighter than me and you. How come they always show every shade of white person on TV, but they only show light-skinned black people?

(Aliyah is still on the floor while this is happening and she doesn't fully look at her mother until her mother pauses)

MAMA

(She stops and pauses for a long time, to find an answer. Aliyah looks at her.)
 Come here baby.

(Aliyah comes and sits next to her and her mother clicks the remote to turn off the TV).
 Well, back in the day, there used to be slavery and-

YOUNGER ALIYAH

Mama I know that, we learned it in school!

MAMA

How did you learn that already! You're only in 1st grade!

YOUNGER ALIYAH

I'm in advanced classes mom, remember when you signed me up earlier in the year?

MAMA

Well, you're brilliant, you started reading at 4! Started talking at 2, and-

YOUNGER ALIYAH

I know, I know! I started walking at one and a half. Thanks for reminding me!

(She laughs.)

But, answer my question!

MAMA

Well, do you want me to be honest or nice?

YOUNGER ALIYAH

Honest Mama, you always choose to be honest either way.

(She laughs a little).

MAMA

Well, the honest answer is (hesitate) that's just the white man's vision of beauty.

YOUNGER ALIYAH

(Confused.)

What does that mean?

MAMA

That means that in order for you to be considered beautiful in this society, you have to be white.

(beat.)

CURRENT ALIYAH

And that was the exact moment that I decided I wanted to be an actress. To represent my culture. Show other girls out there that it was possible. I know that there were African American women on television, but there just weren't enough. After I told my Mama about my dream, she was all for it! Taking me to acting classes and making me study theatrical skills such as improv and what not, to enhance my ability to perform.

Act 1, Scene 3

(While she is speaking the scene is dark. But now it lights up revealing a classroom, a teacher is standing in front of her desk and students are sitting in their desks)

Fast forward a few years, March of 2010, i was just about 10 years old, in the 5th grade at George Washington Elementary school. An all white school to be exact.

MS. TEMPLE

Students I have an exciting announcement! Principal Ernie has decided to create a theatre program at our school. Any student is allowed to join, as long as you are on honor roll and you have your parents permission. In this program, I will teach the art of theatre, and we will be in preparations for our very first school play!

(The kids in the class could care less.)

JEREMY

(Yells out.)

I thought this announcement was supposed to be exciting.

(The class laughs.)

ALIYAH

(She is the only person excited. Raises her hand)

What play is it Ms. Temple! Hamlet? Romeo and Juliet?!

MS. TEMPLE

Well you seem to know a lot about Shakespeare's plays.

ALIYAH

Yeah they're my Favorite!

JEREMY

NERD!

(Kids laugh and Aliyah looks at Jeremy annoyed and embarrassed)

MS. TEMPLE

Cut it out, Jeremy! Anyways Aliyah, I think it is amazing that you know so much, but this play is going to be a little more modern. Anyone heard of.... Wizard of OZ?

(Kids get excited and starts to talk a lot)

Well, it seems like you have. So please take these permission slips home, so we can know whether you can join the program or not.

(Ms. Temple passes the papers back to the students, All the students stuff the papers into their bags, but Aliyah sits and reads hers)

Make sure you're getting good grades and-

(school bell rings)

Please remember to bring these back tomorrow.

(Jeremy, pulls Aliyah's hair teasingly and quickly runs out the classroom while Ms. Temple is facing her desk, Aliyah is the last one in the classroom, Jeremy makes gestures as if he has forgotten something in the class and is about to go back in, but he stops after hearing Aliyah beginning to talk to Ms. Temple, he eavesdrops instead.)

ALIYAH

Ms. Temple?

MS. TEMPLE

(She turns around)

Yes Aliyah?

ALIYAH

I just wanted to say that I am really interested in this program, I want to be an actress when I grow up, so I am so excited!

(Jeremy silently mocks and teases her from outside the class and rolls his eyes.)

MS. TEMPLE

Well, I'm very happy to hear that!

ALIYAH

Yeah and I can't wait for the Wizard of OZ! I'm going to audition for Dorothy! And-

MS. TEMPLE

Why don't you think about trying out for a different role, other than Dorothy like.... the wicked witch or the scarecrow?

ALIYAH

Why would I, I love Dorothy She's my favorite character and-

MS. TEMPLE

Oh you know, it's just more believable for the audience....since you'll be in a costume..

ALIYAH

What do you mean? Dorothy has a costume!

MS. TEMPLE

Yes, but well, you're not exactly a Dorothy type...how do I say this...I just don't think you're the right type of person to play her.

(Jeremy stops, looks confused and listens more closely to the conversation.)

ALIYAH

What? How come?

(She looks defeated).

MS. TEMPLE

Well Dorothy is, I mean, well, How do I say this? She's-

ALIYAH

White?

(She is shocked and hurt and, and is a little confused about why she said that.)

MS. TEMPLE

Oh no, that's not what I meant, I just think that people like you aren't exactly....right for that type of role.

ALIYAH

People like me?

(Jeremy walks in on purpose to try and stop what's happening, he feels bad after hearing the whole conversation, and he wants to help Aliyah.)

JEREMY

Hi Ms. Temple, Sorry to interrupt, but did I leave my sweater in here?

MS. TEMPLE

Let me check, I'll be right back Aliyah.

(She walks towards the back of the classroom, to look. Jeremy signals to Aliyah to leave, she doesn't understand at first, but soon she does. She reluctantly listens and she runs out silently. He follows her out.)

Jeremy, i don't see a sweater here, but-

(Ms. Temple turns around to see an empty classroom. She shrugs her shoulders and walks out)

CURRENT ALIYAH

And that was one of the very first encounters I've had with being denied a role because I was black. Opportunity was very much lacked. I was very shocked when Jeremy tried to help me. He was always so mean to me. I guess he was just trying to be a good sport.

Act 1, Scene 4

(Scene Transitions to a bedroom with younger Aliyah in it from the same day).

ALIYAH

(She is crying)

Why would Ms. Temple say that to me?

(she's talking to herself)

I just wanted to play Dorothy.... How does my skin color determine how capable i am to play this role. That's it, I'm not doing this dumb program

(At this moment, Mama walks in and the light in the scene turns on.)

MAMA

Aliyah? Is that you crying? What's wrong baby?

(She's goes up to Aliyah and holds her comfortingly)

ALIYAH

Nothing Mama.

(She tries to stop crying and fakes as if nothing is wrong)

It's nothing.

MAMA

Now Aliyah, you and I both know something is wrong.... You hardly ever cry, so if you're crying, something must be really bothering you.

(The alarm on her phone goes off.)

Well, it's time for me to start getting ready for work. The hospital is short on nursing staff this week, so they want me to work day and night, until next week. But if something really is wrong, we can talk. I don't mind being a little late.

ALIYAH

It's fine Mama! Don't be late!

MAMA

You sure sweetie?

ALIYAH

Yes mom, i'm alright. I really don't want you to be late. I'll just heat some dinner up for myself, and i'll be in bed by ten! I promise!

MAMA

This is why i love you, you're so responsible!

(She kisses Aliyah on the forehead.)

I'll see you soon sweetie! Love you!

CURRENT ALIYAH

That was my Mama, a strong and courageous single mother. After years of saving, she moved the two of us to an all-white neighborhood when I was very young, in fear of my safety in the hood, which is where we used to live. She often worked late shifts to afford rent and even so she still managed to help me with homework while she cooked and cleaned, She showed me love everyday. At that time, I decided to let the whole Ms. Temple situation go. I mean, it was only a small mishap (hesitates) right? (pause) By the time I was 13 years old in middle school I

decided to wear my hair in an afro because my mom wore her hair in an afro. It was a pretty hard thing to do, in a town where nobody even knows what bantu knots are.

Act 1, Scene 5

(Back to classroom scene, everyone is older, Aliyah is sitting in the very front with her hair huge and in an afro. Everyone is doing their work, the phone rings.)

MS. RICHARDS

(She picks up the phone.)

Hello? Yes? I did this morning. You want me to come now? But I have a class...Okay I'm coming. Class, I will be right back, please continue to do your work.

(She walks out, The class gets noisy. Everyone starts talking, but Aliyah continues to do her work quietly. Three girls begin to pick on Aliyah.)

THERESA

(Throws a paper ball at Aliyah)

I made it! Who says girls can't play basketball.

(Aliyah stops doing her work for a minute, but continues, trying to ignore her.)

DEJA

(laughs.)

Do you smell something?

(She goes near Aaliyah)

It's right over here, ew! Smells like hairspray and desperation.

(class laughs. Except for Jeremy and Aliyah.)

TIFFANY

(She goes up to aliyah.)

Excuse me, I can't see the board.

ALIYAH

We're doing textbook work.

TIFFANY

Yeah, but I'm trying to see the board for today's date.

ALIYAH

April 22nd. Need anything else?

(she says with an attitude.)

TIFFANY

(She says this uneasy.)

No, i mean like....your um...your-

THERESA

Your hair is in the way! Gosh! Just say it Tiffany!

TIFFANY

Your hair is in the way!

DEJA

Yeah, why is it so big? A trim is overdue!
(They laugh)

ALIYAH

There's nothing wrong with my hair.
(Still sitting down.)

THERESA

Um, there definitely is something wrong, it's too huge and nappy, and not like our hair.

ALIYAH

My hair doesn't need to be like yours.

DEJA

You keep telling yourself that... maybe you should get a relaxer or something, because your hair is stopping my education.
(class laughs. Except for Jeremy.)

JEREMY

That's enough! leave her alone!
(class goes silent everyone looks shocked, especially Aliyah, Ms. Richards walks in)

MS. RICHARDS

Thank you class I had to go- why are you three standing up?

DEJA

Ms Richards! Um...we were just-

JEREMY

They were bothering Aliyah.

MS. RICHARDS

Is this true?

ALIYAH

Umm...

(Bell rings, everyone gets up to leave)

MS. RICHARDS

I want zero bullying in my classroom, if I hear of it again, you will have detention.

(Everyone walks out, including the teacher, leaving Jeremy and Aliyah behind.)

JEREMY

Sorry about that, I-

ALIYAH

Leave me alone.

JEREMY

What? but I-

ALIYAH

Please leave me alone.

JEREMY

Okay... okay.

(He slowly walks out, Aliyah is left alone, she starts to cry, then stands up and runs out. Jeremy watches her, and walks away sadly)

Act 1, Scene 6

(Scene transition, she runs in her mom is following her)

MAMA

Aliyah, what is wrong with you!?

ALIYAH

Nothing, I'm okay, just please leave me alone!

MAMA

Nothing happened today did it? Do I have to whoop somebody's-

ALIYAH

Mom, no. I am fine. Please.

MAMA

Alright sweetie well... when you are ready, you can come out and I'll make you something to eat.

(She stays for a while, there is silence, she then walks off stage.)

ALIYAH

(she is looking at herself in the "mirror" facing the audience)
I guess my hair really is a problem. it's too big, and kinky. I hate it!

(She pulls out a box a perm.)

I thought I would never do this.

(She walks off stage slowly.)

Act 1, Scene 7

(The scene transitions from this to the classroom.)

MS. RICHARDS

(bell rings)

Okay class! Everyone take your seats.

(Everyone sits down, Aliyah is not present.)

JEREMY

(He says this quietly to himself, loud enough for the girls to notice and tease him)
Where is Aliyah?

TEACHER

I'm sorry did you say something Jeremy?

JEREMY

No I didn't say anything.

MS. RICHARDS

Attendance time. Deja?

DEJA

Here!

MS. RICHARDS

Tiffany?

TIFFANY

Present!

Theresa?
MS. RICHARDS

Here, as always!
THERESA

Jeremy?
MS. RICHARDS

Here.
(He's looking around for aliyah.)
JEREMY

Aliyah?
(Silence.)
MS. RICHARDS
Aliyah?
(everyone looks and sees that she is not there.)

She's probably running late from kissing her boyfriend Jeremy.
(She teases him.)
THERESA

She's not my girlfriend!
(Sounds defensive, and embarrassed.)
JEREMY

Does anybody know where Aliyah is?
(Just then, Aliyah walks into the classroom with a hoodie on.)
MS. RICHARDS

I'm here!!
(the whole class looks at her.)
ALIYAH

Ok, thank you. Do you have a late note?
MS. RICHARDS

Um, no....I was just um....my bus came late.
ALIYAH

Oh okay, sit down.
MS. RICHARDS

(she sits.)

Aliyah, would you please take off the hood.

ALIYAH

(She hesitates.)

Ok.

(Everyone looks at her, slowly and reluctantly, she does. Revealing long straight black hair, that goes all the way down to her back. Everyone is in shock.)

BOY 1 & 2 (in unison)

What the HECK

TIFFANY

How in the....I see you finally decided to take our advice.

(She's jealous.)

BOY 1

Haha, she still looks weird though.

MS. RICHARDS

I will be right back guys, I have to take this attendance sheet down to the office, please stay seated and continue to finish your work from yesterday.

(She walks out.)

(One of the girls starts petting her hair, as if she were a puppy.)

ALIYAH

STOP.

BOY 2

Whoa, somebody woke up on the wrong side of the bed this morning.

BOY 1

("Boy 1" pulls her hair really hard.)

Is that all real? I bet it's fake, it's probably a weave!

BOY 2

No dude, that's unbe-WEAVE-able! It's probably horsehair.

(Boy 1 and 2 begin neighing like horses.)

ALIYAH

Don't touch me! And of course it's not fake! Leave me alone!

BOY1

Nah! Black girls can't have long hair like that, it is fake!

ALIYAH

All of my hair is real. Now Please leave me ALONE!
(Just as she yell this, Ms. Richards walks back in.)

MS. RICHARDS

Is everything alright?

ALIYAH

Yes-

BOY 2

Aliyah was just telling me about how she got her hair freshly plucked from a horse's head, from that farm a few miles away from here.

(Boy 2 neighs loudly. class laughs.)

DEJA

That explains it! Because black girls can't have hair that long, everyone knows that!

(She is also jealous.)

THERESA

Right! She thought she was cute.

(She rolls her eyes.)

TIFFANY

Honestly, it was way better when it was all nappy.

MS. RICHARDS

Class! What did I say about bullying! Now you all have one more chance or else i'm writing you all up. Please act like actual students, and not neanderthals.

BOY 2

(Raises his hand)

I have a question.

MS. RICHARDS

Finally, civilized student behaviour! What is your question?

BOY 2

(Stands up.)

How do you think the horses feel about Aliyah stealing their hair?

(Class laughs.)

MS. RICHARDS

Ok, i've had it-

(Phone rings.)

You guys are very lucky right now!

(She answers the phone.)

Hello? Again! But i just came yesterday! Fine, I'm coming.

(She hangs up.)

I will be right back.

(She says angrily. She walks out. The kids get noisy again. Aliyah, is obviously upset. Jeremy notices)

THERESA

Ok class, we're gonna play a game! This one is simple! I'm thinking of a four lettered word used to describe Aliyah.

CLASS YELLS (except Jeremy.)

UGLY!

(everyone laughs. Aliyah covers her face with her hands as if she is crying.)

JEREMY

Can you all just stop it!! You're all just acting like a bunch of jerks! Just leave her alone! She's never done anything wrong to you ever!

(Class gets silent.)

You're all just a bunch of idiots.

(bell rings.)

THERESA

Whatever freak.

(everyone walks out except for Jeremy and Aliyah. Aliyah is still crying and Jeremy is trying to comfort her.)

JEREMY

I'm sorry....I just couldn't watch them hurt you like that anymore.

ALIYAH

(She looks up at him angrily.)

And you're any better?! You made fun of me and teased me all through elementary school and now all of the sudden, you want me to be all happy with you??

(He is silent....)

Yeah, i didn't think so.

(She gets up to leave and he grabs her by her wrist before she completely walks away from him.)

JEREMY

I'm sorry, I really am. I'm a changed guy, honest.

ALIYAH

Oh yeah?! And what made you change all of the sudden?

JEREMY

I don't know...Puberty?

(His voice cracks really hard while saying it. Long pause. They start to laugh nervously, they look at each other in the eyes for a minute and they look away, they both secretly like each other.)

Ok to be honest, i'm asking myself the same thing, I guess i just feel obligated to, since no one else will and also i'm not gonna just stand around and watch you get bullied....you seem like such a cool person, and you're never mean to anyone. And my mom taught me that when no one else stands for what's right, you have to. So I guess that's what i'm doing.

ALIYAH

(She eases up.)

Oh, well...

(Silence.) (Awkwardness.)

That makes since. I...have to go. Thank you, for defending me, I guess. It's just hard for me to speak up for myself, i get all scared inside. I feel like if i do, No one will listen to me.

JEREMY

You can talk to me and i'll listen to you.

ALIYAH

I don't know about that.

JEREMY

Ok, it's fine. Just know i'll be here if you need me.

(He smiles at her.)

ALIYAH

(She smiled back.)

I'll make note of that.

JEREMY

Yeah

(He stares at her admiring her beauty. She gets a little uncomfortable.)

ALIYAH

What, is there something on my face? (She touches her face.)

JEREMY

No, it just...

ALIYAH

What?

(She gets insecure)

JEREMY

I just think you look really pretty with your new hair.

ALIYAH

Oh...so i wasn't pretty before?

(She feels embarrassed.)

JEREMY

No, i mean, you've always been pretty, this is just the first time i could tell you, since this is like our first real conversation ever.

(He laughs awkwardly.)

ALIYAH

Oh

(She's embarrassed, not knowing how to take this compliment.)

Thanks

(She smiles awkwardly.)

JEREMY

Yeah, no problem.

(She begins to walk away.)

Wait Aliyah.

(She turns around quickly)

ALIYAH

Yeah?

JEREMY

So, are we friends now? Or-

ALIYAH

Sure.

(She smiles big.)

JEREMY

(He smiles big too.)

Great! Do you want to play video games at my house today? Or is that too soon?

ALIYAH

(She laughs.)

That's a little too soon, but maybe another day.

JEREMY

Ok, great.

ALIYAH

Now, if you don't mind, i have another class to get to.

JEREMY

Yeah, sorry.

(bell rings.)

And we're late.

ALIYAH

It's ok, i'd be late with you any day. See ya later!

(She walks out.)

JEREMY

Wow, she's so pretty.

(He follows her out.)

CURRENT ALIYAH

Jeremy and I have been the best of friends ever since that day, my mom loved him and he was honestly like the brother I never had. We used to go to each other's houses all the time, we even played video games and he actually let me play with his sacred red controller. That was an accomplishment. This was such an unexpected friendship that I thought I'd never have, he always defended me in school and eventually he helped me build up the courage to defend myself, the kids still messed with me every once in awhile but Jeremy make sure that they didn't. I loved him, like he was family. Until one day when we were 15, his Dad decided to take a job opportunity in Philadelphia and Jeremy had to move away. I was upset and he was upset too... we were just two bummed out kids looking at this sad world that we will have to face without each other later on.

ALIYAH

So this is it, huh....you're finally leaving me.

JEREMY

Aliyah, don't say that. You know i can't help it. I'd stay if i could. You know that.

ALIYAH

I know, i'm just...i'm gonna miss you.

(She gives him a long passionate hug.)

I can't believe you're leaving.

JEREMY

I know, i can't believe it either. I really hate this. I don't want to leave you, Aliyah. You're my best friend.

ALIYAH

You're my only friend.

(They laugh a little and easen up.)

What am i supposed to do, when everyone bothers me again.

JEREMY

You tell them to stop, you can handle them! You've gotten so much stronger. I can't protect you all the time.

ALIYAH

Yeah, you're right...look promise me that even though we will be apart, we'll be together again one day?

JEREMY

(He hesitates, but then says seriously.)

I promise.

(Looks at his watch,)

Oh crap! I have to go, my mom said be back by 3 o'clock. It's 3:01!!

ALIYAH

Ok well, get going then.

(She smiles trying to stay strong.)

JEREMY

(He begins to leave and he stops and turns around and hesitates, but slowly leans in to kiss Aliyah, but he stops, leaving Aliyah disappointed.)

Oh um, sorry...I just, you know what, i should go.... bye.

(He looks at her and slowly walks off stage. She looks so broken.)

CURRENT ALIYAH

And that was the last time i saw him before he left. We were sophomores in highschool at this time and it would be so hard not having Jeremy by my side. People started teasing me because of my hair and skin tone again. I thought that I could defend myself but it seemed like when Jeremy left a part of me left too. I thought I'd never see him again. (Pause.) When my mom found out that I permed my hair she flipped out. I was on the worst punishment ever! I wasn't allowed to do anything. You see if there is one thing that you should know about perms, it's that perms are permanent which means my curly hair would never be curly again unless I cut it all off and let it grow back naturally and start that whole process over.... which I wasn't planning on doing any time soon. She said perming my hair pushed me away from my African roots, she thought I disrespected her and she felt that I disrespected her elders. So of course she flipped out... who knows what I was thinking. I definitely regret perming my hair and to this day I still do, but let's get to the next part of my life...Junior year, a time where my life took an unexpected sharp turn into the pits of hell.

Act 1, Scene 7

(Scene transitions to a Dining room.)

MAMA

(She hands Aliyah a plate of food.)

Here you go sugar! Let's say grace.

(They both bow their heads and she prays.)

Dear Lord, Thank You for this food we are about to eat, let it be nutritious to our bodies, and bless those out there without food to eat. In Jesus' name we pray,

BOTH

Amen!

(Mama starts to eat, but Aliyah isn't, she just looks bothered.)

MAMA

Aliyah, eat your food, I just spent all this time making you a plate!

ALIYAH

I'm not hungry.

MAMA

Not hungry? ALiyah, You just better be hungry! I'm not gonna let you just waste your food, there are so many people out there that would love to have your plate of food right now-

ALIYAH

- Well give it to them! I'm not hungry!
(She raises her voice.)

MAMA

(She stops eating and looks at Aliyah, noticing something is very wrong.)
You alright baby?
(She touches her head, to check if she's feeling sick.)
Is someone bothering you at school? Look, i know it's hard for Jeremy to have left but-

ALIYAH

It's not about Jeremy.

MAMA

Aliyah, i know you're upset, but don't you dare disrespect me, I am your mother!

ALIYAH

Sorry mom, I'm just not happy anymore.

MAMA

Well, what on earth is wrong sweetie!

CURRENT ALIYAH

I told her everything from when the kids at school bullied me, to why i permed my hair. And even that Jeremy called me pretty ...I even told her about the time and when Mrs. Temple rejected me for a role because I wasn't White. I told her why I wanted to be an actress in the first place...and by the time i was done she was not happy.
(Lights back on to the current situation.)

MAMA

Aliyah, why didn't' you tell me any of this?! How the hell was i supposed to know? I'm your mother for a reason. I'm supposed to help you. I'm supposed to have your back! (Silence.)

(She says to herself.)

It's all my fault. I should have been more observant.

ALIYAH

No mama, it's not your fault.

MAMA

Yes it is, I'm the parent, you're the child, I should have had full responsibility.

ALIYAH

No, it's my fault. I should have told you.
(Silence, they both are upset.)

MAMA

I'm sorry baby. I'm so sorry. You are beautiful. You mean the world to me. I love you with everything that i am. I would die for you-

ALIYAH

Mama don't say that-

MAMA

I'm serious, I understand how you feel. When i was your age I was blessed with the opportunity to come to America alone after living my whole life in Liberia, to get my education. As you know, both my parents had just been killed at war. Things were hard. People were racist, rude, ignorant, and plain old nasty. I was an innocent 16 year old orphan moving in a new country with no guidance at all. I was oblivious to my surroundings. In school they made fun of my hair and my skin color all the time! They made fun of the accent i had, teased me, called me names, talked about how dark i was, made fun of my hair, grabbed my butt, ALL THE TIME. That's one thing about being african, Our butts are curses.

ALIYAH

Mama, i wish i had your butt, i'm too skinny.

MAMA

No you're not, you are perfect just the way you are. I wish i knew that about myself when i was your age. I hated myself. Hated my skin, my hair, my accent, my eyes, my nose, my black everything. I wanted to be white with long hair, hazel eyes, a small nose, and i wanted to be skinny like all of the other girls.

ALIYAH

Yeah, I completely get how you felt. I'm like the only black girl in my grade! Why can't i just be like everyone else.

MAMA

You see that's the problem. If you were like everyone else how would you shine? How would you stand out? How would you be any different than them? One thing that is wrong with America is that they have only one beautiful. Blonde hair, blue eyes, and a skinny waist. But sweetie, you have to open your eyes and realize that's not true. There are billions of different types of beautiful! 7 billion to be exact! for 7 billion people on this planet. Whether tall, short, skinny, white, black, orange, green, straight haired, curly haired, long haired or short haired. We are all beautiful and unique. So a society that creates a false image of one type of beauty for 7 billion people to try and be like is ignorant and very foolish. Aliyah you are beautiful... I wish you could see what I see! I see an intelligent, independent, strong African American young woman. A

lady that can do anything in life, be anything she wants to be. I see Aliyah Anderson. My daughter who I am very proud of.

ALIYAH

Wow mama. I didn't think of it like that.

MAMA

Yes and when i met your father, I thought i was in love, we had met at our college library one night and ever since i thought we had hit it off, we started fooling around a little afterwards and one thing led to another and i was pregnant with you when i was 18. I convinced him to marry me and i thought we were gonna be the family i never had. Until one day, i caught him in our bed with some European white chick! I was so devastated that I took you away, when you were just two months old. I'm sorry i never told you this, but that's why you never met him. It was so selfish of me, but I was just so angry. My very own husband who never loved me, replaced me with some white woman. We divorced and have never spoken since. But i'm not mad anymore, I guess we were very young anyways, and didn't know what we were doing. My point in saying all this, is that being black ain't easy.

ALIYAH

Wow, i'm so sorry Mama, you did the right thing. I wouldn't care to meet him anyway.

MAMA

Well that makes me feel better....Do you feel better?

ALIYAH

Kinda...

MAMA

What else is bothering you.

ALIYAH

I really miss Jeremy.... i don't know if you understand.

MAMA

Of course, you two obviously had a thing for each other.

ALIYAH

What!? No mama, we are just friends.

MAMA

Aliyah, I am your mother, i saw the way you smiled at him when he wasn't looking, the way your eyes used to light up when you talked to him, the way you used to lick your lips, every time he rubbed his hands through his hair.

ALIYAH

Oh my gosh mom!

MAMA

And i saw the way that he looked at you too.

ALIYAH

He looked at me!?

MAMA

Oh, but you know it doesn't matter since you don't have a crush on him.

ALIYAH

Ok fine i do! But tell me how he used to look at me!

MAMA

Well, he stared at you a lot when you weren't looking, sometimes i used to hear him say stuff under his breath about how cute you were, and oh don't get me started on the way he used to hug you. Even I was jealous. Sweetie it looks to me like you've found your soulmate.

ALIYAH

Oh gosh mama!
(She laughs.)

MAMA

But let's talk more about it later, do you feel better now?

ALIYAH

Definitely...Can we go get some ice cream or something!

MAMA

Aliyah, you haven't even touched your dinner!

ALIYAH

I know, but please! Just this one time!

MAMA

(Hesitates.)
Ok fine, just this one time!

ALIYAH

Yes! Let's go!

Act 1, Scene 8

(Scene transitions)

CURRENT ALIYAH

And that was one of the best memories I've had of my mother, she really helped me to love myself, hearing that she went through the same thing as me, made me feel like someone finally understood me. Like i wasn't alone. But here, is a moment that will change the rest of my life forever.

(Walking down the street.)

MAMA

(They are eating icecream)

And then I told Shirley, that wig was as crusty as a hermit crab.

(they laugh.)

ALIYAH

She shouldn't have gotten it from overseas, the best hair store is right on our block!

MAMA

That's what i told her! Oh goodness, i almost forgot, why didn't i tell you earlier. Silly me! I have some exciting news about Jeremy!

ALIYAH

(excited.)

What is it?

MUGGER

(right before she speaks, he runs up and aims a gun at them.)

Don't move, don't move! Give me your money!

(Aliyah screams. He aims the gun directly at her.)

Shut up or i'll hurt you!

MAMA

(Jumps in front of aliyah.)

Don't you dare touch her!

MUGGER

Give me your bag or i'll shoot you.

MAMA

No! Leave us alone!

MUGGER

Give me your bag!

MAMA

NO!

MUGGER

I said...give me that bag!

(He reaches for the bag in a pressured yet unwilling way, as if he doesn't really want to do it, and Mama tries to grab the gun and they began to fight for the gun, Aliyah panics, and a gunshot sound is heard, and mama falls to the floor dead.)

ALIYAH

NO! Get away from her!

(The mugger stares at them with a deep sense of regret and fear in his face, he drops mamas bag and runs off. She falls at her mom's dead body and cries)

MAMA!!! NO! PLEASE WAKE UP!!! MAMA, PLEASE SOMEONE HELP ME!!

(She screams)

(Scene transitions to a funeral. The casket should be upstage and all the chairs should face upstage. Lights dim, showing Aliyah crying in front of the casket.)

(Spotlight on current Aliyah)

CURRENT ALIYAH

My mother passed away that day, a shining thirty-seven year old. A wonderful, intelligent, inspiring, strong woman of God. I'm glad i talked to her before this happened, Your life can really change in a twinkling of an eye. I'm gonna miss her bold attitude, curly hair and the smell of African fruits on her skin. It was so unexpected. I guess she really wasn't lying when she said....She would die for me. The courts made an order for me to live with my father until i was of age. Thank Goodness i was seventeen now, because i couldn't last anymore than a year. My dad was very abusive verbally. So many bad things began to happen to me, so i tried to pick up theatre again, though it didn't last long. At this time, i just remember My mom saying she had some good news about Jeremy, for all i know he could have gotten accepted to yale. But now, i would never know.

(Scene transitions to a dinner table. Aliyah, her dad and his wife are eating dinner. His wife sets The table and everyone starts to eat, except for ALIYAH she begins to pray silently.)

FATHER

What are you doing?

ALIYAH

(Eyes still closed while and praying position)
Praying.

FATHER

Well, hell if I had known you were going to come up in here and-

ALIYAH

Amen!
(She says loudly to overpower what he says)

FATHER

(angrily)
Look, no more praying.

ALIYAH

(she looks at him as if he is crazy.)
You can't stop me.

FATHER

Yes I can, now shut up and eat your damn food.

ALIYAH

(silence)
So today at school, I did an audition for the School Musical and-

FATHER

We don't care shut up.

ALIYAH

(She rolled her eyes in disgust)
Rude.

FATHER

(stop eating)
You know what I've just about had it with you. go up stairs bye.

ALIYAH

But I'm not finished eating yet.

FATHER

Bye.

(she gets up and angrily walks off stage.)

WIFE

Do you think you're ever gonna tell her about....you know...your problem?

FATHER

What would a girl like that care about cancer for?

WIFE

I don't know i just thought that since she was your daughter, maybe you should tell her.

FATHER

Now i ain't telling her nothing. The doctor's said i only got a few months left, so....she'll find out sooner or later.

WIFE

Well, you outta tell her before it's too late.

FATHER

I will, i will. I know i may come off a little hard to her but, i'm just stressed. I just wish I had more time. I just want more time.

(He gets sad.)

I thought that I would be safe from it because my father was safe from it. I guess it was my mother's genes that got me this disease. Why does it have to be me? I ain't ever done nothing wrong. Have I?

WIFE

No, but sometimes that's life.

FATHER

A life i don't have much time left to live.

(scene transitions to school cafeteria)

(Aliyah is eating breakfast fast and hungry as a result of her not eating dinner. Jeremy walks up behind her surprising her, he covers her eyes from behind)

ALIYAH

What the? Who is this?

(She's freezes in fear.)

JEREMY

Guess who?

ALIYAH

Jeremy?!

JEREMY

Hey Aliyah.
(he lets go and she turned around fast and pounces at him.)

ALIYAH

Oh my gosh! Jeremy! What are you doing here? I missed you! I can't believe you're here right now!

JEREMY

Well I'm back in town for good.

ALIYAH

What happened?

JEREMY

My parents divorced, so I'm back here with my mom. I told your mom to tell you I was coming didn't she tell you?
(Aliyah is silent and looks visibly upset.)

What's wrong did I say something?

ALIYAH

My mom....got killed.

JEREMY

What?!
(shocked.)

ALIYAH

She got shot trying to protect me from a mugger.

JEREMY

Aliyah, I'm so sorry to hear that.

ALIYAH

It's all right, it's hard... but I'm getting better everyday. And now that you're here for good, i am so much better.

JEREMY

Yeah, it feels good to be back, i hope nobody's been bothering you lately.
(He says seriously)

ALIYAH

Well of course my classmates are, but I'm used to it by now. The only person that seems to purposely want to be on my bad side is my dad.

JEREMY

Your dad?!

ALIYAH

Yep I have to live with him until I'm 18, since my mom passed away.

JEREMY

You can come live with me and my mom you and I both know she won't mind.

ALIYAH

I would love to but I doubt he'd let me. (silence)

JEREMY

Well a lot has happened since I left.

ALIYAH

Yeah.

(she tries to change the subject)

So I got the lead in the school musical.

JEREMY

Seriously! that's great!! what musical is it?

ALIYAH

Wizard of Oz.

(she looks at the audience and smiles.)

I got Dorothy.

JEREMY

This scenario sounds familiar.

ALIYAH

Wait... you know about Miss Temple?

JEREMY

Well yeah. I was eavesdropping on you two and when I heard what she said I got angry and then when I saw you, i had to help you out. I felt so bad.

ALIYAH

Wow you've seen it all.

JEREMY

Yeah I'm proud of you. You have come through so much.

ALIYAH

Yeah well I love to act.

JEREMY

(he tried to change the subject)

Well, since we're both seniors now. have you started thinking about colleges

ALIYAH

I really want to go to UCLA.

JEREMY

Me too!

ALIYAH

Really, what do you want to major in?

JEREMY

I don't know yet. What about you?

ALIYAH

I want to major in theater.

JEREMY

Well, whether we get accepted together or not promise me that at the end of the day you always be with me?

ALIYAH

I never want to leave your side ever again, not to sound creepy.

JEREMY

It sounds inviting.

(they laugh and hug) (school bell rings)

Well do you want to hang out after school?

ALIYAH

I can't I have rehearsal, maybe another time.

JEREMY

Yeah I'll see you later than.

ALIYAH

(She smiles.)

Bye!

(scene transitions to living room.)

(Aliyah walks in the door from rehearsal, her father is sitting at the couch as if he was waiting for her.)

FATHER

Where have you been?

I was at rehearsal.

ALIYAH

For what?

FATHER

The school musical.

ALIYAH

Why didn't you tell me.

FATHER

I was trying to last night, but you sent me to bed without dinner.

ALIYAH

And that's what I'm about to do again.

FATHER

Please no! I haven't eaten since 12 pm today! It's been 8 hours!

ALIYAH

Oh well that sucks doesn't it, next time don't come home so late.

FATHER

But I have to, i'm the lead role in the musical, Wizard of Oz!

ALIYAH

Dorothy?? But you're black! Get out of here.
(he laughs really hard.)

FATHER

I don't understand what's so funny.

ALIYAH

You can't do a white role! Are you crazy? You don't see Janet Jackson trying out for the part of Marilyn Monroe!

FATHER

My skin color has nothing to do with it!

ALIYAH

FATHER

Oh, yes it does! Skin color has to do with everything! Why do you think i chose my wife over your mother?

ALIYAH

You take that back!

FATHER

Your mother ruined my life, forced me to marry her after she got pregnant with you. I made a mistake from even meeting her in the first place. She was always nagging me, and i couldn't stand it anymore, so i got a European beauty. The only good thing that came out of your mother was the fact that I'm getting a a good 300 dollars a month, from having you in my household.

ALIYAH

I said take it back!

(She pushes him and he falls hard onto the ground.)

FATHER

(He gets up angrily and slowly says:)

You are no longer going to be apart of that musical-

ALIYAH

But!

FATHER

Shut up! And you just better come straight home tomorrow. I Swear if you don't i will-

ALIYAH

But you can't pull me out, i'm dorothy! And i love to act, it's what reminds me of my mother.

FATHER

Well, you just better find something else to remind you of her. Now go!

ALIYAH

I HATE YOU!

FATHER

You hate me? You don't even know me. You don't know my struggles. You don't know. Wanna know something. I have cancer, and i've been battling it for 6 years now. I'm tired and i'm done. The doctor's said i only have a month left, Aliyah. I want to live, I don't want to live knowing i have an expiration date. I am going to die. That's that. So you can hate me all you want. But I don't get why you're so caught up on your mother's death when you constantly disrespect me and i'm all you have left. I could care less about the fact that that monkey of a woman has died.

ALIYAH

(Long silence.)

Rot in Hell.

(She runs off crying.)

(scene transitions to a bathroom. Aliyah runs in crying.)

CURRENT ALIYAH

(Defeated.)

That's it. I can't do this anymore.

(Aliyah takes out a huge pair of scissors, hesitates, then slowly walks offstage. Scene transitions back to the cafeteria. Aliyah, bald and beautiful walks in the cafeteria , all of the students are in shock. She walks up to jeremy, who is sitting down., he hasn't seen her yet. And she covers his face from behind.)

ALIYAH

Guess who?

JEREMY

Aliyah! I'm so happy your- (He gets up and sees her.) WHOA.

.ALIYAH

(Frowns.)

What... you don't like it?

JEREMY

No it's just, I just...I mean you...You um (he's mesmerized by her.)

ALIYAH

Spit it out!

(She laughs.)

JEREMY

You look so beautiful.

ALIYAH

(Smiles gleefully)

Thank you.

JEREMY

So tell me, how are things going?

ALIYAH

Well, things are tough at home, and as you can see i cut my hair.

JEREMY

Just curious, why did you?

ALIYAH

I wanted to look in the mirror and see my mother in myself.

JEREMY

Oh, i understand.

BOTH

I need to tell you something.

ALIYAH

Oh, sorry..

JEREMY

You first!

ALIYAH

Well, Jeremy, i wanted to talk to you because, well, you're my best friend and honestly, i've been through so much. I'm constantly shamed and put down because of my skin, my hair and how i am. Last night my dad just made fun of me for wanting to play Dorothy and he made fun of my mother too. You know, I didn't ask to be black, and for the majority of my life i was ashamed to be black. I wanted nothing to do with it, i tried to change myself to fit in many times, and now I wish all this racism would stop. My teachers never cared, and though people may think it's a joke, it causes lasting effects on me. I don't think i'm beautiful, and i hate my skin. I try so hard to love myself but it's pretty hard to do... when everywhere i turn people make fun of me for being me.

JEREMY

Aliyah, I can't say i understand how you feel, because that's just not something people like me go through, but i feel so bad. You're right, it is wrong for people to say such horrible things to you, out of their ignorance. I mean yeah, we were just kids, but like you said...it has lasting effects. I'm so sorry you went through this all. You're beautiful just the way you are, and i know it may sound cliché and all, but i'm telling the truth. I know it's gonna take some time to heal, but just know that I am right by your side. We can get through this, and I can guarantee you, no one will be bothering you anymore.

ALIYAH

Thanks but, these experiences have made me stronger. I am not afraid like I used to be. I am free from the captivity of fear over my mind. I can handle things on my own now..

JEREMY

Wow, i see. We can get through this, you're the strongest person I know.

ALIYAH

Thank you.

(She smiles.)

JEREMY

Now can i tell you something?

ALIYAH

Yeah, sure!

JEREMY

Well,i wanted to tell you for a while now, not to disregard anything you just said, but i REALLY like you.

ALIYAH

Aw, i like you too!

JEREMY

No, i mean....I like you so much.

ALIYAH

Whoa, come again?

JEREMY

I think i love you Aliyah. I don't know it seems like ever since that day we first talked, and you smiled at me when my voice cracked when i said puberty. There was something about you. I mean, what am i kidding?! There was always something about you! You were always different. You stood out to me. And i liked that.

ALIYAH

But, what about you teasing me all the time in elementary school?

JEREMY

I was a kid,.

(He laughs.)

Look, all i know is that you gave me butterflies in my stomach every time i saw you. When those people hurt you in middle school, i couldn't sit there and watch them! So of course i had to speak up. And i'm glad i did, because ever since that day, you and i have been the best of friends. And all i know is that i wanted to protect you, and make you happy. I even let you play with my-

BOTH

Sacred red controller.

ALIYAH

Yeah i know.

(they laugh.)

JEREMY

But when i moved, things were so hard for me. I had lost you, my parents started fighting more, and my grandmother passed away.

ALIYAH

Really?!

JEREMY

Yeah.

ALIYAH

I'm so sorry!

JEREMY

It's ok, but i was alone, at first didn't think anyone would understand. But now i know you do, because you've suffered an even greater loss.

(They sit silent.)

But moving on, when i left, i started to try to date other girls, to try and get you off my mind. But no matter what, i just couldn't. When my parents divorced, i was supposed to move to italy with my mom, but i begged her to take me back here. A whole year has gone by and I thought of you every single day. I still do. Now that I see you in pain, i'm in pain. But you cutting your hair revived the fire for you in my heart. Because no girl would ever do that, but you. You're just so strong and I just want to protect you and hug you all the time. Your courage to face life, despite the challenges that you've endured...inspires me. And that's what makes you special to me.

(Aliyah is tearing up.)

Even if you have no hair, dark...beautiful skin and bold black eyes, You're special to me.. So Aliyah Anderson.

(He gets down on one knee.)

Will you-

ALIYAH

I hope you're not proposing, we're only 17?

JEREMY

No!

(He laughs.)

Will you be my girlfriend.

(He pulls out a ring.)

ALIYAH

Yes, of course!

(He puts the ring on her finger.)

JEREMY

Good! Wear this ring as a promise that you will be mine, till the end of time.

ALIYAH

I promise.

(He stands up and kisses her.)

(Scene changes to very first scene in the office.)

ALIYAH

That day I went home with Jeremy. I tried to stay with Jeremy and his mom until we were old enough to go to college. My dad wasn't having it. He sent the police looking for me and I went to court with him to try to get emancipated. the court decided I can live with Jeremy, since an emancipation wasn't necessary due to the fact that I would be 18 the next month. so that's what happened and Jeremy and I both got accepted into UCLA! So we stayed together like we promised. I decided to pursue my acting career now and that's how I ended up at this office. I don't know what happened with my father. I never saw him again. So now you see how my life was, there was some happy moments and bad moments, exciting moments and tragic moments, but no matter what, I didn't let that stop me from doing what I wanted to do. I had a lot of moments being held back by my skin color or pushed down or looked down at because of my hair. But I wasn't going to let that stop me, so even though I didn't get the role. I won't stop trying. I owe it all to my mama. (She looks up) I love you Mom. But here we are back to where we first started.

(She picks up her bag and begins to walk out the office. The producer stops her.)

PRODUCER

Hello, excuse me miss! My name is Clarence Jordan, From Jordan Productions. I am a producer of the new Broadway show, black don't crack! I was sent to this office to get a lead role for our show, because we still haven't found a good person. You see, our casting director just had a baby, and she won't be back for a while, so i've been on a wild-goose chase trying to look for a lead role. You see, our show is about the oppression of African-American women in a society that shames their hair, skin, and african roots.

ALIYAH

Wow, i didn't know there was a play about my life story!

PRODUCER

(He laughs.)

Well, i'm glad to hear you have some experience! Your hair and skin is perfect for this role.

Here! (He hands her a business card.)

Let's keep in touch, meet me at this address tomorrow, and we'll see if we can set up an audition for you.

ALIYAH

Okay! That sounds...Amazing!

PRODUCER

Ok, but i have to go, be there at ten am on the dot.

ALIYAH

Will do sir! Thank you!

(They shake hands and he walks out the office.)

ALIYAH

I can't believe it...all those years of being black have finally paid off! I can see it already....the academy award goes to...Ms Aliyah Anderson! Hopefully i'll be Mrs. by then.

Wow, i can finally be a role model to all those young black girls like me! I did it mama! I'm gonna make you so proud. Wait till Jeremy, hears about this!!

(She walks away and then comes back.)

Young men and women out there, being black is a gift, it's a superpower! Don't let society hold you down because of who you are, work hard, and stay strong. Because at the end of the day, despite what any body says to you ever....You can do anything you put your heart to. And i Owe it all to God. Thank you Jesus! Thank you.

The End.