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In the Continuum

by Danai Gurira
and Nikkole Salter

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



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FRENCH**

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IN THE CONTINUUM received its World Premiere in September 2005 at Primary Stages (Casey Childs, Executive Producer; Andrew Leynse, Artistic Director; Elliot Fox, Managing Director) in New York City. It subsequently moved to the Perry Street Theatre in November 2005, where it was produced by Primary Stages in association with Perry Street Theatre (David Elliott and Martin Platt, Co-Directors), Patrick Blake, Cheryl Wiesenfeld and Richard Jordan. The production was directed by Robert O'Hara, Associate Director was Gus Danowski with the following designers: Set, Peter R. Feuchtwanger; Costume, Sarah Hillard; Lighting, Colin D. Young; Sound, Lindsay Jones; Props, Jay Duckworth. Production Stage Managers were Kate Hefel and Samone B. Weissman with the following cast:

ABIGAIL and others	Danai Gurira
NIA and others	Nikkole Salter
Understudies	Tinashe Kajese and Antu Yacob

The original production toured from April 2006 through August 2007 to the following venues: Harare International Festival of the Arts, Harare, Zimbabwe; Baxter Theatre, Capetown, South Africa; Market Theatre, Johannesburg, South Africa; Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, Scotland; Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Washington, DC; Cincinnati Playhouse, Cincinnati, OH; Center Theatre Group, Los Angeles, CA; Yale Repertory, New Haven, CT; Philadelphia Theatre Company, Philadelphia, PA; Goodman Theatre, Chicago, IL; and the Grahamstown National Arts Festival in South Africa.

IN THE CONTINUUM was work shopped at The Mud/Bone Theater in New York City, Michael Wiggins, Artistic Director, and developed in part at the Ojai Playwrights Conference, Robert Egan, Artistic Director.

HOW THIS PIECE IS PERFORMED

This piece was born of two actors deeply concerned about the experience of black women in the present fight against HIV/AIDS. Presently, with black women being the population with the highest rate of new infections both in the US and Africa – the co-creators of this piece (one African and one African American) felt the need to have a story told from the black woman's perspective; for her to be more than a statistic on a news report. This piece is designed for two actors to incorporate separate, yet parallel stories of an African and African American woman, and for both worlds to parallel and sometimes collide. Each character is real and is performed as such, not a commentary on a stereotype, but an illustration of three-dimensional human experiences in these societies. The piece as presently designed allows each actor to create their environments, both with sound and movement and minimal props. It is a minimalist piece, performed with no set, and only two chairs on stage. Lighting and sound elements can enhance the creation of each world but are used supportively and only when necessary – the actors create the environment with their bodies and voices. Though the piece is performed with mainly one character on stage at a time, there are moments where the worlds are shuffled in such a way that both the performers and worlds flow, overlap, juxtapose and cohabitate the stage throughout the performance. The stage directions are meant to clarify the way the piece is presently performed, but are by no means meant to restrict future incarnations of this piece.

PLACE

South Central, LA and Harare, Zimbabwe

*It is suggested that the play be performed with
no intermission.*

A NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHTS

In the Continuum was born of our profound concern for the experience of black women in the present fight against HIV/AIDS. Black women currently represent the highest rate of new infection both in the U.S. and Africa and this is a story told from that perspective. Developed during our third year of NYU's Graduate Acting Program with an invaluable artistic community of students and teachers, it is a representation of the humanity behind the statistics and an invitation for more unheard stories to be brought "In(to) the Continuum."

PROLOGUE: BACK IN THE DAY

(Children playing together – CHILD #1 in South Central, Los Angeles, CA; CHILD #2 in Harare, Zimbabwe.)

*CHILD #1. Come on! Com' on! I wanna play...I wanna play hopscotch! C'mon! Hopscotch! Just get some chalk! No, get a brick! Just bang it out. Then draw a circle. Yeah! *(Draws circle on the ground with a 'brick'.)* All the way around. I'ma show you how to play like this alright! But I'ma go first cuz I drew the circle. Huh? Okay, okay...One! Two! Three!

(She throws her marker in to the circle.)

*CHILD #2. Okay saka, totamba chi? Totamba nodo here? Ya! Saka une chalk here? Saka hauna? Oh, ndaiwona pano, mirai, – ngatigadzire circle rakadai, rakadai *(Draws circle on ground with chalk.)* Okay, ini ndotanga, one, two, three...

(Throws stone in the air, tries to catch it and it flies behind her.)

CHILD #2. Oh, shiiit.

CHILD #1. What?

*CHILD #2. Aiwa, richiri jana rangu, aiwa. No man, it's best of three! Iwe waka pusa! Ahh, saka hapana achatamba, hapana achatamba!

IN THE CONTINUUM

(She rubs out the chalk with her feet.)

*CHILD #1. No! It's got to land in the middle of the circle. That's not the way you play the game. You stupid! Fine! *(She rubs out the chalk with her feet.)* Then nobody's playin' this game then! Ain't nobody playin'!

BOTH CHILDREN.

(Singing & dancing together.)

TOMATO SAUCE, SAUCE,
SAUCE, SAUCE, SAUCE, SAUCE (2X)
ELIZABETH, ABETH,
ABE, BE, BE, BETH (2X)
CHIPIKINRINGO, GO
GO, GO, GO, GO (2X)

COUSIN'S ON THE CORNER IN THE WELFARE LINE
BROTHER'S IN THE SLAMMER, HE COMMITTED A
CRIME
PREACHER'S IN THE CLUB ON THE DOWN LOW
CREEP
AND YO' MAMA'S IN THE GUTTER SCREAMIN' H-I-V

(The children separate into their distinct worlds, no longer playing together.)

*CHILD #1. What you say about my mama?

*CHILD #2. Saka wati amai vangu vari HIV?

*CHILD #1. Yo' mama got HIV.

*CHILD #2. Amai vako ndivo vari HIV.

*CHILD #1. Yo' mama, yo' daddy, yo' whole generation

got HIV!

*CHILD #2. Amai vako, nababa vako, nevese vemumhuri menyu vari HIV.

*CHILD #1. You stupid! And you got HIV! And yo' mama got a cauliflower growin' out of her pussy!

*CHILD #2. Iwe waka pusa, newewo uri HIV; futi Amai vako vane maronda panaapa.

BOTH CHILDREN. Ewww!

ONE: IN THE BEGINNING

(The two actresses continue separate conversations in their separate worlds as ABIGAIL and NIA. ABIGAIL takes a seat and commences reading a news report at Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation Studios. NIA is in a stall of a bathroom in a hip-hop night club, hovering over the toilet.)

ABIGAIL. Good evening and welcome to the 8 o'clock main news bulletin. I am Abigail Murambe. Harare. The minister of agriculture comrade Nixon Chibanda warned against any reports by the biased and slandering Western Media which assert that Zimbabwe is facing a famine. He further commented that these irresponsible journalists and their evil cohorts have been the source of Zimbabwe's expulsion from the Commonwealth as well as the crippling sanctions imposed by the United Nations. He asserted that contrary to such reports, Zimbabwe will in fact produce a surplus of agricultural crops in the coming harvest. He admonished against nastyers who...Ahh, ah, what is nastyers? Naysayers? Whooa, ah, but it says nastyers ka. And what is naysayers, someone who says nay? Ah, hey, are

we in Shakespeare or what. Okay, why can't they just say liars or something? Ahh, ahh, look at all these typos man!! And since when was the vice president's name Janet Mujuru? Its Joyce Mujuru man, you want to get me fired?

NIA. *(She vomits.)* It feel like I'm dying. No, I'll be okay. Just give me a second. I haven't had nothin' to eat — I keep throwin' everything up. Nasty cafeteria food. All I had was a Long Island Iced tea. I know I should eat something. Just give me a second. I'll get it myself. I don't know, Trina. It mighta been in the weed — I ain't the weed expert. They was passin' it, it was free, I took just some. *(ABIGAIL sits at mirror — touches up makeup with tissue.)* I think it's somethin' else. Cuz nothin' taste the same, don't nothin' smell the same — I ain't old! Just cuz you popped outta yo' mama coochie yesterday don't make me *(Starts to throw up.)* — Trina, just pass me some tissue!

ABIGAIL. Ewe, wait, is there any shine here? Okay *(Dabs side of face, drops tissue to the floor, NIA picks it up.)*. Thanks. And, can I have the rest of the report please?! *(Perusing report.)* Hey, it's getting harder and harder to even say this crap man. I can't believe — Huh? No I wasn't saying anything. But, Evermore, have you gotten your pay check? Ah, NO I haven't, its been six weeks now, how am I supposed to pay school fees with air? Right now I am near penniless. This is what we get for working for the government, ini I want to move into the private sector, South Africa man! SABC! Real money, shamwari! Ah, I am just as good as them, probably better! Then from there CNN!!! Why not, I bet I am just as good as them, probably better. *(NIA flushes the toilet and exits the stall.)* Where is my tea by the way, Evermore, can you please, please bring me my tea BEFORE we start, I need to calm my nerves. Four sugars.

(ABIGAIL sits — jots notes on her tasks for the day on news report.)

NIA. My breath smell like raw fish and old tacos. No, I don't wanna go. *(Looking into an imagined full-length mirror.)* I got all dressed up so I could celebrate with Darnell, so that's what I'ma do. 'Cause, I don't see him everyday no more, so when he get here I wanna look good. *(Fixing her hair.)* No, he just be out, doin' his college thang, but in two more days, all this scholarship stuff will be done. We been together ten months and three weeks, I can wait two more days. Huh? Yep, it's almost been a year. He practically my husband. *(Fishing out lipgloss.)* 'Cause we been through so much! Like last summer, when he got jumped by them Piru niggas; girl, I was so scared! But I was the first one to visit when he got home. And when everything went down with my mom's I would run away from the foster homes and Darnell would let me sneak and stay with him 'til I got my spot at Good Shepard. And if that ain't love, — He even came to see when I won that poetry contest. *(Applying lipgloss.)* Girl, yes! They gave us a big banquet; I got \$500 — and a plaque. And the judges said I was — what they call it? — “full of potential”. I know, I didn't have no potential before, but now that I can talk they poetry language, I'm “full of potential”. *(Closing lipgloss.)* It ain't hard, all they have you do is follow a pattern and write it out — A pattern! — Okay, like: *(Using the lipgloss to count the syllables on her fingers.)* Bright ass sun-ny day – 5 syllables. Burn-in' the shit out-ta me – 7. I wish it was cold – 5. See. No, I think about them all the time. It just come to me. It's easy. It's just like flowin'. Try one. Just try one. Alright, I'ma start you, okay? Okay. Dir-ty ass, skank...hummm? — *(Waiting for TRINA to fill in the blank.)* Hoe! Good! Wit yo' crun-chy hair — *(To TRINA.)* wit yo' fake

weave? — no, no, wait I got it. Wit yo' crun-chy ba-by hair - 7.
Leave Dar-nell a-lone -5.

(Begins fishing mascara out of her purse.)

ABIGAIL. By the way, before I forget, I next time I want to be dressed by Truworths — because Edgars keeps bringing these clothes that make me look like I have grandchildren or something. Thank you for that Evermore, I know I am a married woman, that doesn't mean I have to look like I am selling vegetables paroadside. Next time they bring such things I am just going to say no, they must know I am their model, saka they're supposed to make me look good.

NIA. *(Applying mascara.)* Shut up, Trina! I always look good. Please! I look better than those groupies! Did you see that girl that had on the — So. *(Putting mascara away.)* So what! So, Darnell looks at them, so what! Girls walking around with they titties hangin' out tryin'ta get looked at. *(Fixing her clothes.)* He might look at them but he goin' home with me. Don't worry, tonight, I'ma just let him celebrate. But Saturday night, after his scholarship ceremony, *(Imitating female video dancers in hip-hop music videos.)* I'ma give him somethin' to look at. *(She laughs.)* Huh? What, my new purse? Yeah, it was a gift — courtesy of Nordstrom. *(Fishing for and applying perfume purse.)* Girl, please. A playa like me don't pay fo' nothin'. *(Pretending to steal the purse.)* Everything I got on was a five finger discount. Wait! No! Cuz the way I see it, it only cost fifty cents for these companies to make; they only pay Javier and them ten cent to put it together; they pay me five wack ass dollars an hour, then they go sell it for a hundred and fifty? Do I look like a dummy? Please, me takin' this purse is

part of my community service. I wish I would pay a hundred and fifty!

ABIGAIL. Mmm, mmm, Evermore, forget about that tea. I am not feeling well. Ahh, we better do this thing quickly guys. Where's the cameraman? Oh oh oh, is Gibson not here yet? Finish. But shame — he told me he has no transport, hanzi he has to wake up at 3 am to reach here by 7! (*NIA returns to the bathroom stall.*) Ahh, times are hard suwa. MunomuZimbabwe sha. Oh, is he still feeling sick? He wasn't looking very well. Shame...But Evermore, you are looking plumper these days, where are you finding sadza munomuZimbabwe? Please can you direct us all there? No, no tea please, I'm not feeling well...

NIA. I never get sick. No, never! When have you seen me — ? I don't be sick for real at school. No! I be fakin'! Yeah. I guess I'm a good actress — liar, actress, whatever. Like you ain't never lied about havin' cramps to get outta sex ed. Shoot, when I realized that worked, I would be havin' my period like two, three times a month. I mean, it's not like they gon' check! What they gonna do, look? — Oooh! Hay! Shh! Be quiet. You hear that?

ABIGAIL. Ahh, I think I hear Gibson out there.

NIA. That's my jam. Me and Darnell always dance to that. They would play our song when I'm on the toilet.

*ABIGAIL. (*Gets up.*) Yes Gibson, muri right? / Are you feeling better — good good. / Evermore checkai for lint! / Let's go. (*Looking in the mirror.*) / Yes I am ready! / Wait where is my special ballpoint?! / (*Finds it in her hand.*) Oh, it's right here. / Totanga ka! / Let's go!

*NIA. Trina...? / Trina, why you so quiet? / You takin' a dump? / You don't take a dump in a public bathroom! / You

nasty! / (*Looking in the mirror.*) Yeah, I guess I feel a little better. / Do me a favor: go get me a breath mint or somethin. / Hurry up!

(*Gunshots. NIA runs out.*)

BLACKOUT in BOTH WORLDS

ABIGAIL. Oh, no tell me your joking, another powercut!! This is the third one today! We won't be finished till night time! Twenty minutes? Okay please, ndapota. AND can we get some sort of lights here please! (*Sits back down.*) Better be twenty minutes, last time it was three hours. Ha, its bad enough we had to work so late all last week, you know ma in-laws they start to say marara — “hey hey that is why she only has one child” — imagine! “We want more children here, Simbi is getting lonely! You mustn't work so much!” This coming from inlaws who have never given me a bubble gum or a fork at my wedding. But, (*Looks around.*) they can shut up now Evermore, baby number 2 is on the way!! Ya! Pururudza! Tofara tese! Hmmm? I just found out on Monday! Stamford doesn't even know yet, I am going to tell him and that family of his at Simbi's birthday party on Sunday. Ya, he's turning seven, he's a big boy now - time for another, one that looks like the mother. Simbi? He looks just like his father man, with that big nose — shame. Stanford? He's fine...he just keeps doing too much of those late nights I told you about — I don't like it man! These men, they want to play away and have us at home at the same time — he's got to stop that. But, you know, I think another baby will make him act better; Auntie always said showing the husband you are a good and fertile wife will keep him indoors.

Oh, by the way Evermore — you chased your man out when you caught him with the other woman? Ah, no, that's not the answer man — no its not, because then that other woman, hure that she is, will get everything you have been working for! Ah no me, I realized the solution: men are like bulls searching for pastureland, you show them greener grass and they stay put, and this baby is greener grass. He's going to stay put now. Hey, Stamford, he wants to forget how hard he had to work for me! ME? I was known as the Ice Queen! Hmmmhmm! No one could get near me — I was very, very picky. I used to go to those house parties and I was the best dancer — EH HE, suwa, (*Gets up, begins to dance.*) Wonai, wonai — ha, I've still got it! Ah, Evermore! Do you remember this one? This one? It was big around '92, '93 — I hated it but it was so popular I had to know how to do it — WELL. Do you remember what it was called — ABORTION!! Imagine! So nasty hey! And the men wanted to come from behind! Ha, no me I would say "Just look hey, don't touch!" But then along came Stamford Murambe — ah, with him I was like (*Bending over.*), "You can touch, please touch!" (*Laughing*) Ya, ya he won me over, fair and square, but he had to persevere! With maletters, flowers! Me I didn't come easy ka! (*Sits back down.*). He wants to forget all of that. He'll come around, he just needs another boy. A girl?! What am I going to do with a girl in this world? No, two boys that's perfect. And they're going to grow up in Chisipiti or Glen Lorne, — no we can't stay in Hatfield anymore, ahh, it's too filled with strong rural types, too many muboi! I am sick and tired of living next door to people who keep chickens and goats in their backyard, I want to be around the poshy!! Those who know how to eat with a knife and fork. And our new house will have a swimming pool, DSTV, maybe a tennis court. Stamford can drive the

Pajero because I'll drive the benz. And the kids will go to St John's prep or Hartman House and learn the best these whites can teach, and I have a good feeling about this one (*Points at stomach.*) he could become the next Kofi Anan, or Bill Gates — why not! And Stamford will love this one so much; hmmhmm, he will take one look at him and never forget where home is again. (*Phone rings.*) Oh, that's mine! I thought I turn it off! Oh, let me take this Evermore it's the clinic...Hello.....yes...this is Mrs Abigail Murambe... (*Exiting.*)

TWO: NIA'S DREAM

NIA. (*Looking behind emergency room curtains.*) Trina...? Trina...oh, sorry! (*Sucking her teeth.*) My bad. Trina? Hey. (*Entering into TRINA'S space.*) How you doin'? Good. Did you do what I told you? Lemme see your wrist — Why not? I said don't give them your real information! You did give them your real name! You such a scaredy cat. What they gon' do, spank you? Cuz! Now they gonna call Good Shepherd and then everybody gon' be all up in our business. Has the doctor even come in here yet? Be right back? Please, if we was dyin' we'd already be dead. Lemme see it. (*She looks at TRINA'S wound.*) At least it not bleedin' no more. (*Sitting*) Me? I think I got to get some stitches. Yeah. No, wait, the doctor was like, 'How did you get glass stuck in your side?' I was like, "Duh! They was shootin'", people was goin' crazy! You get knocked over and stomped on you while you lyin' on a floor full-a shot-up glass and see what happen to you!" Yeah, you laughin' now, (*Beat*) but you looked fucked up then. I ain't gon' lie — all I saw was blood, you know, and I got scared. I was like, (*Like an exaggerated mother crying over a child's coffin a la BOYZ IN THE HOOD.*) Oh,

Lawd! (*In a Baptist Church breakdown.*) Don't let Trina die! Please don't let Trina die!!! Lawd no! (*Laughing*) You shhh! You silly! Okay, lemme see it again. At least it's gonna make a cute scar. I'm just glad you okay. Nothin'. Okay. But if I tell you somethin' Trina, you promise not to go tellin' everybody? Okay. No, the doctor wanted to give me this x-ray to see if I like broke a rib or somethin', but she made me pee in this cup to see if I was pregnant first, and...I am. I know I'ma get kicked out. I don't know what — She just gave me all these pamphlets, and did all these tests. Now I'm supposed to come back tomorrow but — Of course, I'm gonna tell Darnell! Yes, I am! I'ma go right up to his practice...and I'm gonna take his hand and put it on my stomach, look up at him and say, "Darnell, I'm pregnant." And he gon' look down at me and say, "For real?" and I'ma say, "ummm, humm." (*Laughing*) Then, he gon' get on his knees and put his ear against my belly and listen. Umm, humm! And then he gon' look up at me and say, "My son in there?" and I'ma say, "ummm-humm." Then, we're gonna get married. Umm-humm. And move into a big-ass house cuz he gon' play for the Lakers and I'll just be — Oooh, shut up! Oh, I'll be rich doin' somethin'. Watch! (*Getting her cell phone out of her purse.*) I'll call him right now. I will tell him! Just watch and learn. (*She dials.*) Voicemail? 'Darnell! Where are you? It's Nia. We was at the club waitin' for you — you will not believe what happened. I'll tell you all about it when you come pick us up — me and Trina at the hospital. We need a ride. And, uh...(*To TRINA.*) Shut up, I am! (*Into the phone again.*) I...I got somethin' to tell you. Just call me back. No! Why haven't you called me? That's what's more important! It's been like four hours — !

THREE: THE DIAGNOSIS

NURSE MUGOBO. (*Steps out banging clip board.*) Please, this is a clinic.

NIA. (*As if the nurse has chastised her for her cell phone usage.*) My bad. I just —

NURSE. Please, Can you control your children, they can't run around like eh...monkeys!

NIA. I'm comin' back! Dag! I got to go, this lady trippin' talkin' 'bout I can't be on my cell phone. Call me when you get this message. I love you. (*Putting away her cell phone.*)

NURSE. (*Looks at clipboard, talking to ABIGAIL.*) Right, Mrs Choto? You are not Mrs Choto. Mrs Choto, Mrs Choto!!!!

NIA. That is my real name. Why would I — Can I go!

NURSE. Ha, and vanhu vatema vanonetsa. (*Flips to next chart.*) Mrs Murindi? Murambe, ya, sorry, Abigail? Right. (*Looks through chart.*) I have your chart here...

NIA: My chart? Ya'll gon' call — ? (*Sucking her teeth.*)

NURSE. Everything looks fi- oh.

NIA. What?

NURSE. You have tested HIV positive. This means you have the virus that causes the Acquired Immune Deficiency syndrome...

NIA. I'm sorry what?

NURSE. ...there is no cure for Aids, it is generally transmitted through unprotected penetrative sex, anal or vaginal //with a person infected with HIV. And unprotected sex means sex without a condom, male or female to protect the sexual organs and in Africa that is generally through heterosexual contact.

NIA. //You trying say I'ma hoe? Do I look like a junkie?

Do it look like I'm gay? Do I look like I'm from Africa? No! Every time we come in here ya'll try to make us feel like we're dirty or stupid or something. (*Pulling out her cell phone.*) You don't know what the fuck you're talkin' about — s'cuse you — no, S'CUSE YOU! (*She EXITS.*)

NURSE. We therefore recommend that from now on (*Eyes follow NIA – to passing orderly.*) Ewe what are you doing? Yes I can see that — but can't you see those are dripping on the floor? Take them to the back, those are contaminated. Yes they are! You barance wemunhu. (*Eyes follow him out. Back to ABIGAIL.*) We therefore strongly recommend your practice abstinence from now on; but if you must, please can you protect others, there are three condoms, sorry we have run out. If you want we can show you how to use them on a banana in the next room. (*Eyes wander.*) But then you will only have two. Excuse me. Eh, Sisi Getty, are you going to the shops? Please Sisi help me sha, I am so hungry can you just buy me a sweet bun ne a coke? Thank you Sisi. Aiwa, I have the money, mirai. (*Looks over at ABIGAIL.*) Ah Miss, Miss — (*Looks at chart.*) Miss Abigail, why are you crying? No, aiwa, you must think clearly mange. I see here you have a son? Bring him in, we can test him also. (*Finds no money in bra.*) Ahh, sorry Sisi I forgot my money — Oh...thank you Sisi you are a life saver — surely, every time! (*Looks after SISI GETTY smiling, returns to ABIGAIL, smile fades.*) Right, so, we must see your husband in the next few days — he must be formally informed and tested. Ah, AH Miss, Miss Abigail — there are no exceptions for that — I know it can be dangerous to tell him, many women are scared he will beat them and take the children — what, what, even though usually its coming from him, but, sorry you tested first. SO — you must tell him and bring him for testing. Even

with the risky business of it. And we must see him as soon as possible, nhasi riri Friday saka on Monday, latest; we can make the appointment right now. (*Looks down at chart.*) Ah, (*Stops, puts down pen.*) you are pregnant? Ah...you women. You go and get this HIV then you want to have a baby or two? It's not good, munoziwa, its not good. (*Goes back to chart.*) Drugs? Ah we don't have them here, if you have money you can try to find them, they are very, very expensive. Otherwise, change your diet — eat greens, negrains, nemeat. And don't breastfeed. We will test the baby soon after it is born. So we will see you and Mr Stamford Mirindi, sorry Murambe, on Monday, 10am. Please amai, if you don't come I will be forced to call him. Right. (*Flips to next chart.*) Mrs Choto, Mrs Cho — (*NIA rushes in — referring to her as though she is MRS CHOTO.*) there you are, you are late, can you sit down. Ha, and vanhu vatemala vanonetsa.

FOUR: NIA'S DENIAL

NIA. Trina, get your stuff. Let's go. Just get your stuff! I called Patti, she gon' give us a ride, but leavin' right — Yes, I called Probation Patti — to get us a ride, Trina. Who else was I gonna call? My mama? What for? She don't care about me. Why don't you call yo' mama? — forget Darnell. He not comin' — Whatchu yellin' at me for? How is any of this my fault? You the one said you could hang. You the one begged me to come — If you didn't go — get yourself shot we wouldn't have this problem. Did I stutter? You was the only idiot walkin' around when people shootin'. Ain't you ever heard gunshots before? You supposta get down. Duck, stupid! *You* messed everything up! We was supposed to sneak out, go to the Club,

have some fun, sneak back in — nobody was gon' know. Now I gotta listen to Patti's bougie mouth, all for what? Yo' bullet scratch and a couple-a stitches that you won't even see after two months with some cocoa butter!? I'm the one brought you here and made sure you got taken care of. I shoulda left yo' stank ass there. And just went back by myself. Then I wouldn't be here. I ain't even supposed to be here — ! Nothin's wrong!

I'm pregnant stupid. Whatchu think?

I don't see what you so worried about, Trina. All they gon' tell you is not to sneak out no more. I'm the one who can't go back to Good Shepard. If anybody should be mad, it should be me. And I figured Patti was gon' find out anyway cuz you used your real name — So if we gon' get caught, we might as well have a ride! Just get your stuff. Let's go.

FIVE: HAVE MERCY

(ABIGAIL on the street, trying to flag down a ride.)

ABIGAIL. *(To street kids.)* Fotsek! You kids get away. NO I don't have any money. Don't touch me! I'll beat you like your mother should have. *(Pause)*. Just go away. Please *(Phone rings. ABIGAIL starts, petrified, she pulls the phone out of her purse.)* Hello Stamfo —. Simbi *(Laughs, cries — relieved.)*. Hello my big boy. How are you — no mummy is just happy to hear from you that's all — but what did mama say to you about calling her cell phone from the landline? NO, I said it's very expensive so you mustn't. What's wrong my beby, why are you calling me? Is daddy home? No don't put him on. No no, no, no, mummy doesn't need to speak to him right now, just don't

put him on. Don't. Okay. (*Trying to flag down omnibus taxi.*) No, I am catching a commuter omnibus, so let mummy go so that I can catch one okay. (*To street kids.*) Ewe fotsek, I said I don't have any money. No, no not you baby. What? What did you put in my handbag? Simbi, I don't have time for this — okay, okay, okay (*Finds folded paper in handbag.*) what is this Simbi? This is beautiful, did you draw it yourself? Okay, So who is the first person? Quickly, quickly. That's deddy, okay. And who is this one in the middle?! That's mummy? Okay! And who is the last one? That's you? Simbi you are funny! Why are you bigger than everyone else Simbi? But Simbi this is beautiful, we will to put it on the fridge when I get home. But Simbi, next time you draw mummy don't draw her with hair that's going all over the place like that! Mummy's hair doesn't do that beby. Just draw me with simple hair, one, two, three, four, five neat little strokes that's all. But beby this is beautiful. (*To pestering street kids.*) Fotsek, go away, you kids, where are your parents...(*Slowly turns back around to streetkids.*) Fotsek, go away, please, get away, just go. (*Flagging down ride.*) Simbi, Mama has to go now, okay, now you go to eat; see I just stopped one, I have to go. Mommy's coming.

SIX: CHATTER HEADS

PATTI. Gosh! I cannot believe, at the peak of rush hour I had to — Nia!

PETRONELLA. (*More British than the British.*) Abigail!

PATTI. Not you Trina, you wait inside!

PETRONELLA. Abigail Moyo!

PATTI. Nia, you get in!

PETRONELLA. Get in, get in! It's me, Petronella Siyanyarambazinyika!

PATTI. *(To driver.)* The 105 *(One o five.)* to the 110 *(One ten.)* 405 *(Four o five.)* to Beach Avenue and Centinela, please. Yeah.

PETRONELLA. How are you my dear??? I haven't seen you since — is it high school? Oh, my gosh its been too long! AH, but your looking well, kept that figure. Just tell Lovemore where you want to go. The city centre? Is that safe Lovemore? Okay. Good.

PATTI. I am not angry, Nia. Did you think I was angry? 'Cause I'm not. I'm dumfounded, I'm worried, I'm completely devastated! We've been through Independent Living Classes, Life Skills Assessment, Job Readiness Training — we were getting somewhere, Nia! What was so important at this club that it was worth giving up everything we've worked for? And I tell you, if I miss my flight to Milwaukee for the second part of the Journey toward Self Discovery Conference I'll —

PETRONELLA. And did I hear correctly that you married Stamford Murambe? HAA, well done my dear, he was gorgeous!! What a bloody catch! Oh, you still have him right? Whew! But good work my dear everyone wanted a piece of him!!! I too have officially joined the married club! Mmmhmm, just two years ago, do you remember Farai Mungoshi? Prince Edward, headboy, captain of the rugby team, a real feast for the eyes? No, I married his younger brother Richard.

PATTI. ...Yes, but you tell the universe exactly what you want to experience by the choices you make every moment. And I know we don't always make the best choices, but — Yes, even me, I don't always — Okay. Like yesterday, I was having lunch in the cafeteria and I had not one, but two helpings of

macaroni and cheese. Not the best choice, no, but not going to drastically change my life. You take the good job I found you at Nordstrom and chose to get fired by stealing — again. I've given you the easiest course curriculum developed for continuing education yet you throw away your chance at a diploma by ditching. You take the free housing in Westwood I gave you, and was asked to leave because you wouldn't keep curfew. I've even violated the state's abstinence only policy and given you condoms! Now you're telling me that one night of hangin' wit the homies, rockin' your phat gear and sportin' your big chain with the medallion of the mother land and shakin' your booty with some boy at some club is worth getting shot at? *(Beat)* Okay. Good answer. So: With my choices, I'm telling the universe that I...want....to be fat. But, so what, big deal, we're talking about you!. You're telling the universe that you want to be an uneducated, unemployed, homeless, kleptomaniac, soul train dancer. Is that what you want? If you were in my shoes, what would you do?

PETRONELLA. ... oh you got those here? They look just look just like my Stella McCartney pumps. I know her personally actually, she gave me a pair — she couldn't give them to her step mum — she's only got one leg! Did you say you worked ZBC? Oh, *(Laughs)* no, I am sorry, I just got back home so I am still adjusting to all the lingo, and someone the other day called it Dead BC. Good for you though hey! You were always a great public speaker! Me, oh, well...I went abroad soon after high school, to study at London School of Economics, I was there for both my undergrad and my masters, International Relations with a focus on Human Rights and Gender Development, and I am still there mostly, I work as a consultant for big organizations, the UN, OXFAM, stuff like that. Right now, I have been really

focused on HIV and Southern African women and of course all the big organizations abroad are going to hire me right? I am like this perfect poster child — but I can't complain, I've been working with DATA — oh come on you know — Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa — Bono — he's a rock star — he has an organization. (*Car swerves.*) Careful Lovemore!

PATTI. Ah, pardon, sir —

PETRONELLA. God, the way people drive in this country!

PATTI. Yes, but that clearly said, 'no left turn' —

PETRONELLA. In England he would have been arrested on the spot!

PATTI. It is illegal! — I should write down your number and report — It's just that it's a very risky turn, sir, and we have precious cargo. Yeah! Thanks. (*To NIA.*) Perfect example: There are many ways to get to Inglewood, but making an illegal short cut turn here is not one of them. There are no shortcuts in life, Nia! The laws are designed to keep us safe. And I hate to burst your bubble, but, no matter where you go there will be rules. On this road there are rules, gangs have rules, even in the wilderness there are rules. And there are consequences in choosing to violate the rules. Are you listening to me? Nia!

PETRONELLA. ...there's not even any bloody petrol! This is not the country we grew up in. How do you survive? Anyway, concerning the whole AIDS issue — I was actually trying to get some statistics — that's why I was at the clinic — naturally the head nurse was on a two hour lunch or something! Zimboes! And of course you have to get the highest statistics possible in order to get them to do anything. That's when they get all aghast and say, 'Oh those poor Africans who can't help themselves — let's bring them our great answers' — which are WHAT?

Okay — they are manufacturing some drugs here, but believe me they aren't the best kind and how is anyone supposed to be able to afford them long term in this economy? It's a bloody mess! And you want to know why? You want to know why? I'll tell you why. It's because we've been programmed. Yes! Because we look to them as our source of hope and redemption. Meanwhile we have the answers and we don't know it. I have been thinking a lot about our own traditional AFRICAN healing and I — No! I am not saying have the cure or whatever, but there is something in it, you can't argue that. Do you remember Sisi Thembi?

PATTI. ...the value is not in material things. Nia, I don't know what I can give you that's more important than the opportunity to lift yourself up. That's what I did. Yeah. It may not look like it, but I'm from the 'hood — well, Ladera Heights — but I drove down Crenshaw every day — It doesn't matter! It doesn't matter your race or your gender or where you're from, it's where you're going. But I think you want to stay in the ghetto because no matter what I show you, no matter where I put you, you carry it with you in your mind. Now, you can either take that Emergency Services number, call, and stay in a shelter tonight; or you can pick yourself up, march yourself in there and patch things up with your mother. A girl needs her mother, Nia. You know, my mother and I never got along either — well...it's 'cause she never really cultivated my garden of talents, it was either her way or no way, and I know you and your mother are experiencing a rift, that's the connection — okay, okay! I know, I know! I'm all in the "kool-aid" —

PETRONELLA. ...remember when we caught her talking to trees?

PATTI. — my bad...

PETRONELLA. And she used to roast grasshoppers!
PATTI. ...I learned that yesterday. //Did I say it right?
BOTH. //hahahahahhahahahahahaha.....hheee....heee..
PATTI. Nia?
PETRONELLA. Abi?
PATTI. Are you alright? Okay.

You know, I was online yesterday, surfing the web, and I saw that the city is looking for poetry to display on the new eco-efficient trains. I think you're work is perfect. Go online, download an application and submit some of your work. If you win, it's more scholarship money for when you — when you decide to go to community college. And your poems won at the Success is Our Future Ceremony, now that's something! Believe you me there are plenty of opportunities out there for a girl like you!! You can still be anything you want to be!!! (*Light bulb.*) Change the course of history. Don't let yesterday's bad choices keep you from making good choices today. Huh!?! But I know you. I can tell, you're gonna do the right thing! Hey, there's no place for you to go but up, HUH!!?? – Huh? Well, you could go down and spiral...

PETRONELLA. ...she was such a mad, mad, MAD, woman — Sisi Thembi! I can't believe she is in the church now! Like every day that sort of thing? Oh what a shame, hey — remember how she swore by witchdoctors? Remember how her...daughter, her daughter — had some sickness no one could figure out — she said her witchdoctor — sorry — traditional healer-fixed it! She had to do some strange things but it worked and nothing else did. There is something to it I tell you. What? You want to get out here? Abi there is nothing — ABIGAIL — What are you doing the car is still moving. Lovemore stop the

car! (*Getting out of car, yelling.*)

PATTI. Bye, Nia!

PETRONELLA. Abigail, wait!!!!

PATTI. (*Getting out of car, yelling.*) Nia, wait!

PETRONELLA. You work for ZBC — do you host that show Breaking New Ground?

PATTI. Tell you mother I said hello!

PETRONELLA. No...well I really want to be on it, I think I have a lot to say this the country needs to hear, I am breaking new bloody ground...

PATTI. I'm an Audi.

PETRONELLA. How do you say "bye" again Lovemore? Oh — CHISARAI!!!

PATTI. Five Thousand!

PETRONELLA. NO, what's the other one — TICH-AMBOONA!!!

PATTI. No, Audi, like the car, but 'out of here'! (*Makes the sound of a car speeding by.*) Nevermind...just go, go, go...

(*Her laughing at herself turns into...*)

SEVEN: MAMA

(*Friday morning. MAMA'S porch. She's calming her crying baby throughout the scene.*)

MAMA. (**IMANI, a six-month old baby, crying. Sound is made by actress.*) *Hey! Hey!! Get offa my grass! Get offa my grass and take your Funyion bag with you. (*To herself.*) Bad ass kids. (*Beat*) * Well, well, well. I knew you'd come back. Lemme guess: They didn't believe your lies at the Good Shepard

either, huh? You thought it was gon' be easy as that. Well, life is not easy, guess you got to learn the hard way. And now you wanna come back. I'm still goin' to family court off of the shit you pulled; anger management, freakin' parenting classes like I don't know what the hell I'm doin', and you wanna come back just like that? No apology, no nothin'? And then you got the nerve to ask me for \$400! I tell you — how you gon' pay me back? You got a job? You lookin' like a damn prostitute, what are you wearin'? It's nine o'clock in the morning, walkin' 'round like you been walkin' the streets. (*Baby talk to IMANI.*) She walkin' the streets, ain't she? Ain't she? (*Seriously*) Is you walkin' the streets, Nia? Don't get smart with me! Then what you need \$400 for, huh? Probably some Guess jeans. What happened to the money from that poetry contest? Ain't nobody payin' you to put 'ch'a little rhymes together no more? Ain't got no job, no place to live, but spend all yo' time writin' poetry and shoppin' — for \$400 Guess jeans. Are they self-cleaning? Do they pay rent? If anybody's getting \$400 'round here, 'guess' who it's gonna be — ME. I'm tired of comin' second to ya'll. I can't remember the last time I had me some lotion or some new panties. Besides, you grown, remember? And us grown folk, we pay for our own shit. You old enough. Hell, when I was 19 I was * — And don't think you slick goin' behind my back askin' Marvin for the money. I thought you didn't like him. He ain'tchya daddy, so stop askin' him fo' shit. (*To IMANI.*) Huh? He's yo' daddy, huh? Yo' daddy! Who's yo' daddy? That's yo' daddy! (*To NIA.*) I don't know. You should ask that lil' boyfriend of yours, Darnell, for \$400. He'll buy them pants for you...since he the one like to get in 'em so often. Don't think I didn't usta hear your little narrow behind climbin' out the window to go oochie coochie with that boy. Like you the

first one discovered how to sneak out the house? I invented that shit. I already been everywhere you been, Nia. I was just tryin' to keep your fast ass from goin' to half of them places. OH! But you 'grown'! Well, I'ma tell yo' grown ass this: I know you like him, and he look like he goin' places,* but don't you end up pregnant, Nia. Cuz once you turn this switch on, you can't turn it off, and I'ma be damned if I end up raisin' your kids cuz you couldn't use a condom. Oh, OH! (*To IMANI.*) She woman enough to do the do, but she can't talk the talk. (*To NIA.*) What would you rather I say, Ms. Nia? Look at me. Strap on the jimmy? Pull the balloon over the sausage? I wish somebody had told me about this shit, half-a ya'll wouldn't be here. And now days, you can catch all kinda stuff. Stuff you can't get rid of cuz it gets in your blood. Trust me: three minutes of slappin' bellies ain't worth death. And that's what it is, death. * Because it's a government experiment, it was designed — They've done it before and will do it again. You think it's consequential that we the ones got it the most out of everybody. They been tryin' to get rid of us since the Emancipation Proclamation. First they lynched us, then they got us high so they could put us in prison. Then they got the ones that ain't incarcerated to shoot up each other and now they brought this hopin' that we fuck ourselves to death. And you know they got a cure. What you think the whole civilian rights was about? That's why they really assassinated Martin: to distract us from the monkey fuckers that brought it back from Africa to kill us. And they killed Malcolm cuz, on his pilgrimage, he found out who the monkey fuckers were. You got to know your history. That's what's wrong with ya'll — I know, I know, you love Darnell. Darnell love you. Ya'll invincible in love. Yes, I know. I was in love too, okay. Five times. Remember that. All I had to worry about was getting'

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