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SF PERUSALS

LITTLE MISS BURDEN

by Matilda Ibini

SAMUEL FRENCH

samuelfrench.co.uk

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ISBN 978-0-573-13017-5

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matilda Ibini is an award-winning playwright, screenwriter (and occasional dramaturg) from London. She was awarded a scholarship from BAFTA and Warner Brothers to study a Masters in Playwriting & Screenwriting. She was part of the Royal Court Writers Program and was a member of Soho Theatre's Writers' Alumni Group. She has had residencies at Soho Theatre, BBC Writersroom, was Graeae Theatre's Artist-in-Residence and completed an attachment at the National Theatre Studio.

Her debut play *Muscovado* was produced by BurntOut Theatre, premiered in 2014 and toured the UK in 2015 starting with a run at Theatre503. *Muscovado* subsequently co-won the Alfred Fagon Audience Award. Her radio play *The Grape that Rolled Under the Fridge* was broadcast on BBC Radio 3. Her work has been staged at the Old Vic Theatre, Bush Theatre, Hampstead Theatre Downstairs, National Theatre Shed, St James Theatre, Royal Exchange Manchester, Birmingham Rep, Soho Theatre, Arcola Theatre, Bunker Theatre, Hackney Showroom and Vaults Festival.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is my first (of hopefully many more to come) full length play to be published. To help give you some context about the state of the industry when this was published:

Little Miss Burden is my second produced play in a now nine-year career.

Little Miss Burden is in fact the eighth full-length play I've written in those nine years (not including one feature film, one radio play, over twenty short plays and two unproduced TV spec scripts). This information I'm sharing isn't to boast but a reminder to myself to help invalidate my imposter syndrome when it rears its doubting head and to illustrate that taking up writing as a career, you have to be in it for the long haul. And the level of patience it requires you to exercise for many reasons, some for artistic reasons but most for institutional BS reasons. So have a backup plan, keep the job that pays the bills because writing probably won't for some time.

Some hopefully helpful reflections that I've had over the course of writing this play:

1. You will write more plays/scripts that won't get produced than do. And that is ok. The more you write, the more you give yourself the opportunity for your work to be produced.

2. Your career will never be immune from rejection so find your tribe of peers, collaborators or family of artists to support you when you may need picking up from particularly difficult rejections (not all of them will hurt but some will knock you for six).

3. When you're a disabled writer, your career will not follow the same trajectory as your non-disabled peers. So don't compare your journey to anyone else's when it's not a level playing field to begin with.

4. Your health (mental and physical) should always be your priority. Don't beat yourself up when you're not able to or well enough to write (I'm still practising this). You can always come back to your writing (there's no expiry date).

5. Make taking regular breaks and resting a part of your process. Learn about your needs and demand for them to be met (I know, easier said than done).

Little Miss Burden, I hope, is about giving visibility to the historical and institutional erasure of disabled people's experiences and, let's be honest, existence in society.

When society tries to label you as just one thing or trait, it's important to write as much of you onto the page as possible. So when the dark days come (because they will) and I start to feel like I'm fading, parts of me can be found in this story. Writing this play has been difficult to say the least but incredibly rewarding to finally lay a lot of crap to rest about growing up a black, disabled woman in the UK.

Even though this play is autobiographical please feel free to explore multi-rolling and staging this story in accessible spaces/venues and inventive ways. This play is an invitation to collaborate, so the performer who plays Little Miss must be played by someone who has the lived experience of growing up with a physical impairment and/or disability. But also consider inviting and working with not only disabled performers but disabled directors, producers, set designers, production managers, sound designers, lighting designers, stage managers (trust me, they are out there!) The music mentioned in the script is suggestive rather than prescriptive.

If you're reading this, I hope the story of Little Miss Burden is a cautionary tale and a reminder of our shared humanity.

Oh and one last thing...

#SavetheNHS

Matilda Ibini, 2019

LITTLE MISS BURDEN

Little Miss Burden was first performed at the Bunker Theatre, on 4th December 2019 with the following:

CAST

LITTLE MISS	Saida Ahmed
LITTLE SIS	Ani Nelson
BIG SIS	Michelle Tiwo

CREATIVE LIST

DIRECTOR	Debbie Hannan
DESIGNER	Helen Hebert
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	Phao May
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Pete Rickards
SOUND DESIGNER	Benjamin Grant
LIGHTING DESIGNER	Pete Rickards
SET DESIGNER	Helen Hebert
MOVEMENT DIRECTOR	Phao May
STAGE MANAGER	Ella Dixon
DRAMATURG	Jules Haworth
PRODUCER	Harts Theatre Company and Bunker Theatre

CAST

MICHELLE TIWO | BIG SIS

Michelle Tiwo is a non-binary actor, poet, poet educator and founder of Sistren podcast. Michelle's work is reflective of their identity and their communities, Nigeria & Togo via South East London.
Recent acting credits include: *Parakeet* (Boundless/Boom Shakalaka Productions); *And The Rest of Me Floats* (Bush Theatre); *Ackee and Saltfish* (BBC 3); *Faces* (dir. Joseph Adesunloye); *We Love Moses* (dir. Dionne Edwards); *The Ting* (Channel 4 Random Acts) and upcoming *Parakeet* (Boundless/Roundabout).
Other collaborations and work includes: Barbican x Boy Blue; BFI x Galdem; Eastside Education x Armed Forces Service Children; Lemonade Money Productions; The Royal College of Art, Writerz n Scribez.

ANI NELSON | LITTLE SIS

Ani trained at the Academy of Live and Recorded Arts (ALRA). Theatre credits include: *The Trick* (Bush); *Abigail's Party* (Hull Truck); *Gastronomic* (Curious Directive); *A Cratchit Christmas* (Theatre503). Screen credits include: *Roadkill* (Channel 4); *Crooked House* (Brilliant Films).

SAIDA AHMED | LITTLE MISS

Is a wheelchair using, twenty-four-year-old University Graduate. She believes that being a wheelchair user doesn't restrict her from achieving anything but encourages her to be more determined to achieve more than the average person.
Credits include: *My Favourite* (AppleCart Theatre) and working alongside Site Productions and RFL Media. Her one-woman show *Hadithi Yangu/My Story* about her disability, feminism and other people's perceptions on disability played at Camden People's Theatre.

CREATIVE

MATILDA IBINI | WRITER

Matilda Ibini is an award-winning playwright and screenwriter from London. She was awarded a scholarship from BAFTA and Warner Brothers to study a Masters in Playwriting & Screenwriting at City University and gained a Distinction. She graduated with a second upper class degree in English Literature and Creative Writing from London Metropolitan University. Her work has been shortlisted for awards such as the Soho Young Writers Award and the Alfred Fagon Award. She was part of the Royal Court Writers Program 2012/13 and was a member of Soho Theatre's Writers' Alumni Group. She was also Soho Theatre's writer-in-residence for the BBC Writersroom 10 scheme 2014/15, was Graeae Theatre's Artist-in-Residence 2017/18 and completed an attachment at the National Theatre Studio.

Her debut play *Muscovado* about slavery and the sugar trade was produced by BurntOut Theatre, premiered in October 2014 and toured the UK in 2015 starting with a run at Theatre503. *Muscovado* subsequently co-won the Alfred Fagon Audience Award 2015. She has had short plays staged at the Old Vic Theatre, Bush Theatre, Hampstead Theatre Downstairs, National Theatre Shed, St James Theatre, Royal Exchange Manchester, Birmingham Rep, Soho Theatre, Arcola Theatre, Bunker Theatre, Hackney Showroom and Vaults Festival. Matilda is currently under commission to Bush Theatre and has two film projects in development with BBC Films and a TV series in development with Wall to Wall Productions.

DEBBIE HANNAN | DIRECTOR

Debbie Hannan trained at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and as Trainee Director at the Royal Court. She directs new writing and makes devised theatre.

Recent credits include: *Pah-La* (Royal Court); *The Panopticon* (National Theatre of Scotland & Traverse Theatre); *Cuckoo, The Session* (Soho Theatre); *Girl Meets Boy* (developed with National Theatre of Scotland and The Yard); *Latir* (Compañia Nacional de Teatro, Mexico); *SHAME* (Bang Bang Bang Gorup); *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*, *The Angry Brigade* (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland); *Pandora* (Etch, Pleasance); *What We Know*, *Killer Joe*, *Conspiracy* (Royal Welsh College, the Gate); *The Five Steps*, *Primetime*, *Who Cares*, *Spaghetti Ocean* (Royal Court); *Lot and His God*, *Notes from the Underground* (Citizens Theatre); *Recreation*

(Arcola); *CauseWay*, *Woman of the Year* (Oran Mor); *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (Tron/Traverse); *Sucker* (Old Vic New Voices); *PANORAMA*, *Roses Are Dead* (Arches).
Credits as assistant include: *How to Hold Your Breath*, *Birdland*, *The Internet is Serious Business*, *God Bless the Child*, *The Mistress Contract* (Royal Court); *The Maids*, *Sleeping Beauty* (Citizens); *A Doll's House*, *Enquirer* (National Theatre of Scotland).
As associate, credits include: *Our Ladies of Perpetual Succour* (National Theatre of Scotland); *A Pacifist's Guide to the War on Cancer* (Complicité); *Constellations* (Royal Court - UK Tour); *Little on the Inside* (Clean Break).
As writer, credits include: *SHAME* (Bang Bang Bang Group); *Vinyl Idol* (Oran Mor); *Suffrajets* (Tron Theatre Lab).

JULES HAWORTH | DRAMATURG

JulesHaworth is Education Producer at Soho Theatre and looks after Soho's Writers' Lab, Comedy Lab, Cabaret & Drag Lab and outreach programmes for artists. Jules is part of Soho Theatre's Artistic team, considering and developing new work for the stages. She has read for playwriting competitions including the Verity Bargate Award, Tony Craze Award and Muslim Writers' Award. Jules has run playwriting workshops and talks for emerging artists with Soho Theatre, Talawa Theatre, Rich Mix, LGBTQ+ Arts, Sour Lemons, Gendered Intelligence, Traverse Theatre, Live Theatre, Somerset House and in schools and colleges in London.
As a dramaturg, Jules has worked on shows including: *Brute* by Izzy Tennyson (Ideas Tap Underbelly Award 2015, Underbelly); *Muscovado* by Matilda Ibini (Alfred Fagon Award 2015, Theatre 503); *Villain* by Martin Murphy (Offie Nominated 2018, Kings Head Theatre); *On the Edge of Me* by Yolanda Mercy (Soho Theatre and Tour); *Quarter Life Crisis* by Yolanda Mercy (Soho Theatre and Tour); *Wonderboy* by Ross Willis (Bristol Old Vic); *Dust* by Milly Thomas (Whatsonstage nominated 2019, Trafalgar Studios) and *Algorithms* by Sadie Clark (Pleasance).
Jules has also appeared as a panellist for Sphinx Theatre's *Women Centre Stage*, *The Listening Project* for BBC Radio 4 and as a judge for Funny Women Awards and Directors Cut.
Her play *Pigeon Steps* was longlisted for the Adrian Pagan Award 2014.

PHAO MAY | ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Phao May trained in Acting at RADA and has since gone on to pursue a career in direction and movement. This year she worked as an assistant director for a year long programme for National Youth Theatre and is now an Associate Artist for them. Recent credits include 'Summerfest' at The Bunker, written by Yolanda Mercy, directed by Lakesha Arie-Angelo and 'Genesis' by Miller & Salmon at The Soho Theatre.

PETE RICKARDS | PRODUCTION MANAGER and **LIGHTING DESIGNER**
Pete Rickards is a Production Manager and Lighting Designer. His professional experience has seen him not only working in London but around the world, touring with Theatre and Music as well as working on large scale and immersive events. He has production management and tour management experience throughout Europe and the UK including Thorpe Park, and consulting for The Taussauds Group for an attraction in San Francisco. His lighting designs have been showcased in the UK, Germany and Ireland, and will soon be touring to Australia and the USA. He has designed for Sh!t Theatre, Thorpe Park, La John Joseph, The Outbound Project in the past, at venues such as Schaubüne, Soho Theatre, Lattitude Festival and Battersea Arts Centre.

BENJAMIN GRANT | SOUND DESIGNER
Benjamin Grant studied at Central School of Speech and Drama and has experience designing for Theatre, Dance and Installation, specialising in devised work and new writing. Recent sound design credits include: *Maggot Moon* (Unicorn Theatre); *I'll Take You To Mrs Cole* (Pleasance Beyond); *The Last of the Pelican Daughters* (Pleasance Beyond); *Education Education Education* (Trafalgar Studios); *The War of The Worlds* (New Diorama Theatre); *Prurience* (Southbank Centre/Guggenheim Museum NYC); *The Road Awaits Us* (Sadler's Wells) and other credits include: Associate Sound Designer for *Beware of Pity* (Schaubühne) and Associate Sound Designer for *The Kid Stays In The Picture* (Royal Court). Benjamin is an Associate Artist of The Wardrobe Ensemble.

HELEN HEBERT | SET DESIGNER

Helen Hebert is a set designer based in London. She trained at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama graduating with First Class Honours. Her work focuses on performance design and installations.

She has worked as an assistant designer in the design studio Curious Space creating immersive spaces for museums, galleries, public spaces and performance.

The creative team of her last project *Sh*t Happens* received an Offie nomination for Best Show in the short run category. Recent Credits: *Little Miss Burden* (The Bunker); *Shit Happens* (Camden People Theatre – Offie nomination); *The Decline of a Distant Memory* (RADA); T*he Way of the World Suffragette City* (assistant designer)

ELLA DIXON | STAGE MANAGER

Ella Dixon has worked as a technical stage manager on a wide range of projects. Last year touring the UK with one man show *Love, Bombs and Apples* (2018 UK tour) and Soho Theatre's *Half Breed* (2018 UK tour). When not on the road, Ella works as a more traditional stage manager in a variety of London venues, last year working with Jessie Cave on *Sunrise* and award winning comedian Natalie Palamedie's new show *Nate* (2018 Soho theatre) which also received a run at the Edinburgh fringe festival. Ella has just returned to London from nine months in Australia, working at as venue manager at the Adelaide Fringe, as well as stage manager at one of Sydney's best independent venues The Hayes Theatre. Ella is thrilled to be working on *Little Miss Burden*.

HARTS THEATRE COMPANY

Harts Theatre Company founded by Artistic Director, Ann Akin, in 2013 aims to produce entertaining and inspiring artistic work with outstanding artists in London.

From its inception we have also produced high quality opportunities with young and emerging talent that pushes the boundaries to shine a spotlight on unearthed talent in different areas of London.

We produce two annual festival; Young Harts Writing Festival, which has a strong vision to break down boundaries by merging the worlds of young creatives with the professional industry and Sound Of Mind, an audio and visual arts mental wellbeing festival. We are committed to developing the arts community: developing young performers and artists in their chosen fields through professional training and support.

BUNKER THEATRE

The Bunker believes in artists. We give ambitious artists a home in which to share their work with adventurous audiences. We are champions of each company that we programme, and we want to ensure our stage is filled with exhilarating and contemporary theatre featuring artists that represent the world that we live in. The Bunker was opened in October 2016 by founding directors Joshua McTaggart and Joel Fisher. The theatre's first year of work included the award-winning sell-out show *Skin A Cat*, Cardboard Citizen's 25th Anniversary epic *Home Truths*, and the world premiere of *31 Hours*. In-house productions have included *Abigail*, *Eyes Closed*, *Ears Covered* and *Devil With The Blue Dress*.
In September 2018, Artistic Director Chris Sonnex joined Executive Director David Ralf to lead the theatre's small, dedicated team, several of whom were involved in the original conversion of an underground car park into The Bunker space. Bunker Theatre Productions CIC is a not-for-profit theatre, which currently receives no public subsidy.

HARTS THEATRE COMPANY

THE BUNKER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Little Miss Burden is definitely without a doubt the product of a community of supporters and loved ones. I have so much love and respect for my support network both professionally and personally who enabled and believed in me to tell this story.

First thanks goes to my family: Mummy, Big Sis, Lil' Sis and Lil' Bro

Soho Writers' Alumni Group of 2013–2018 (special big ups to Amelia Sutherland, Natasha Sutton-Williams, Tom Powell, Phoebe Eclair-Powell, Iskandar Sharazuddin, Amy Bethan-Evans and Ross Willis).

p.s. Amelia Sutherland (is an AMAZING reader and dramaturg – hire her!)

Huge thanks and love to everyone who read drafts and helped with readings and supported me at different stages throughout this process.

Bryony Kimmings, Jules Haworth, Stewart Pringle, Deirdre O'Halloran, Arts Council England, Madani Younis, Omar Elerian, Vilma Jackson, Jacqui Adeniji-Williams, Lilly Burton, Tom Parkinson, Robert Bertrand, Nicole Latchana, Carol Ellis, Oladipo Agboluaje, Ola Animashawun, Gabriel Bisset-Smith, Jen Tan, Amelia Stubberfield, Rebecca Yeo, Gabriella Schmidt, Sarah Stevens, Sarah Baiden, Melanie Rendall, Liz, Alice and Rhys.

My secondary school teacher Mrs Gallagher for whom I may not have ever embarked on this wild journey, were it not for her gentle encouragement

Thank you to the incredibly supportive theatre companies: Graeae Theatre Company, Tamasha Theatre Company and Talawa Theatre Company.

Isobel Mascarenhas-Whitman and Alex Tennyson at Type One (Creative Technology) for their brilliant projections and captioning during the very first initial R&D for Little Miss Burden.

Bryony Kimmings Summer Workshop Group of July 2016: Beth, Victoria, Pippa, Michelle, Sarah, Lisa, Imogen, Gareth,

Marina, Ellie, Melissa, Kate (you are all incredibly generous and supportive artists).

My wonderful champion and agent Ikenna Obiekwe.

To the incredibly kind and uber talented cast: Michelle Tiwo, Saida Ahmed & Ani Nelson

All the lovely and generous team at the Bunker Theatre and the brilliant creative team behind the production: Phao, Ella, Pete, Ben, Helen, Holly, Hannah, Ed – thank you all so much for your hard work and belief in the story. (Big ups to Gabriel Ajala for the wicked poster!)

Big love and thanks to Chris Sonnex and David Ralf for their unwavering support and kindness. Long live the Bunker!

Debbie Hannan – a directing don and generous collaborator.

Harts Theatre Company – headed by Ann Akin – a phenomenal woman of indomitable spirit.

My Avengers a.k.a team of carers: Christine, Alice, Kate, Georgina, Rebecca, Jean, Anya, Mona, Emma and Ola.

I could probably fill all these pages with more names of people to thank but I'll end here and say thank you to the rest of you in the next one.

"There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard." – Arundhati Roy

For Mummy, Ayo, Jide, Tolu, Grandma and Adebayo

CHARACTERS

BIG SIS – *female, black, eldest sibling*
LITTLE MISS (L.M) – *female, black, physical impairment or wheelchair user, middle sibling*
LIL' SIS – *female, black, youngest sibling*

Suggestions for multi-rolling

BIG SIS *plays* **DOCTOR/HERBALIST/PASTOR/CJ/JEN/CONTROL/F1/JESSIE/GRANDMA/TEACHER/FADE**
LIL' SIS *plays* **MUM/INTERPRETER/NURSE/SELIN/JANE/F2/JOSIE/ETTY/JEAN**
LITTLE MISS *plays* **LGMD**

A suggestion for performers:
All wear denim dungarees in the spirit of the nineties era.
BIG SIS *wears a red T-shirt.*
LITTLE MISS *wears a yellow T-shirt.*
LIL' SIS *wears a green T-shirt.*

PROLOGUE

Present day in an accessible space.

This is a welcoming space. Who you are and where you are from or how you got here is irrelevant. What is important is that you are here or you are reading this and that's what matters.

LIL' SIS *places a large book on top of an empty stool in the centre of the spotlight.*

BIG SIS *wearing a colourful jumper like those 90's children's TV presenters (you know the ones, with their sleeves rolled up to the elbow and an optimism beaming from the jumper). She picks up a thick, colourful, tattered storybook. On the cover it reads Little Miss Burden. She perches on the stool.*

BIG SIS Shall we have a look at what book is in today's story corner?

Waits for audience's response.

LIL' SIS We can't hear you.

Waits for audience's response.

BIG SIS *responds to audience's response.*

BIG SIS That's more like it. Today we're going to read the story of Little Miss Burden.

LIL' SIS Oooooooooooooooooooooo.

BIG SIS Little Miss Burden was born with her right foot on her left and her left foot on her right, which made walking in a straight line oh so confusing.

Her arms were the shape of bows but she couldn't shoot arrows.

LIL' SIS *chuckles like a child in on the joke, think drunken-woodpecker type laugh.*

LIL' SIS Because they're her arms.

BIG SIS Exactly but she could shoot dirty looks because that's how you survived the mean streets of Hackney in the nineties.

BIG SIS *hands the book to* **LIL' SIS.**

LIL' SIS Yes. My turn. Little Miss Burden worked as the spokesperson for all disabled people in the whole wide world –

BIG SIS – and whole wide galaxies –

LIL' SIS – and whole wide universes –

BIG SIS – in any and all alternate realities –

LIL' SIS – in all time continuums till kingdom come.

BIG SIS Every disabled person?

LIL' SIS Yes. Every. Single. One. She won her title by a landslide of votes, beating her rival Little Miss Busy-Body, or as she likes to call her Little Miss Bitchy-Body. Booooooo – we don't like Little Miss Bitchy-Body.

LIL' SIS/BIG SIS Booooooo!

LIL' SIS *hands the book back to* **BIG SIS.**

BIG SIS Little Miss Burden lived behind a menstrual red door in a cold, miserable, frowny place called London. But a famous celebrity lived a few doors down from her. Anyone care to take a guess. I bet you won't –

LIL' SIS – Spice Girls? –

BIG SIS – no but –

LIL' SIS – Dale Winton? –

BIG SIS – no –

LIL' SIS – I've got it! Cilla Black –

BIG SIS – it was Mr Bean! Mr Bean.

LIL' SIS *makes a shocked face. We think she is disappointed, it is in fact the face of an excited child who's just been told the best secret in the world.*

For legality, I should mention it wasn't in fact the actor Rowan Atkinson but merely a Poundland version all the children on her street called Mr Bean, but she doesn't need to know that.

In her excitement **LIL' SIS** *snatches the book from* **BIG SIS***'s clutches.*

LIL' SIS Right. Little Miss Burden lived with her family because she didn't believe in paying bills like council tax. What's council tax?

BIG SIS It's basically a monthly fine for existing on a planet that we didn't ask to be put on.

LIL' SIS *slams book shut.*

What?

LIL' SIS You didn't think we were going to tell Little Miss Burden's story without her.

BIG SIS This isn't Hollywood –

LIL' SIS – or the West End –

BIG SIS – or most fringe venues.

L.M Shade!

They high five.

BIG SIS In this pocket of time and space–

L.M – we trust people to tell their own stories.

The book is yanked out of **BIG SIS***'s hands by an unseen force and sucked under a door.*

LIL' SIS But trust us – we didn't plan that.

The performer playing **BIG SIS** *introduces themselves and describes their appearance and gives an embarrassing detail about themselves (doesn't have to be related to their appearance or too personal). And all the characters they will be playing.*

BIG SIS And as Big Sis it means I'm charge of everyone and everything.

The performer playing **LIL' SIS** *introduces themselves and describes their appearance and gives an embarrassing detail about themselves (doesn't have to be related to their appearance or too personal). And all the characters they will be playing.*

LIL' SIS And as Lil' Sis I'm in charge of all you youngsters. If you're ninety or less, you're a youngster.

The performer playing **LITTLE MISS** *introduces themselves and describes their appearance and gives an embarrassing detail about themselves (doesn't have to be related to heir appearance or too personal). And all the characters they will be playing.*

L.M And as Little Miss, I'm in charge of informing everyone that this show is taking a laid-back approach. Meaning you don't need our permission to move, make noise, sing along, leave, take a break from the show and feel welcome to return at any point. Latecomers always welcomed never turfed.

BIG SIS The only thing we do ask.

LIL' SIS Is that mobile phones are on silent.

L.M Yes and that you enjoy the show, in whatever way that feels comfortable to you. So we're going back in time but as I don't have a Tardis, you're going to imagine that I could still walk.

BIG SIS Let's do this.

WORLD 1 – BIRTH CANAL

The sound of a song in the style of En Vogue – ***"FREE YOUR MIND"***[1] *floods the stage as* **BIG SIS**, **LITTLE MISS** *and* **LIL' SIS** *take their starting positions. They do a very practiced choreography.* **LIL' SIS** *looks to* **BIG SIS** *when she forgets a move. When they finish they strike a pose.*

Music abruptly stops.

BIG SIS We are the coolest –

L.M – living –

BIG SIS – coolest, living, fiercest –

LIL' SIS – coolest, living, fiercest, super talented –

L.M – girl band history's ever assembled.

BIG SIS We're bigger than the Spice Girls, All Saints, B*Witched and S Club 7 put together –

L.M – you've probably heard of us –

LIL' SIS *(mutters)* We haven't come up with a name yet?

BIG SIS Don't tell them that! Or they won't think we're legit.

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1 A license to produce LITTLE MISS BURDEN does not include a performance license for "Free Your Mind" The publisher and author suggest that the licensee contact PRS to ascertain the music publisher and contact such music publisher to license or acquire permission for performance of the song. If a license or permission is unattainable for "Free Your Mind", the licensee may not use the song in LITTLE MISS BURDEN but should create an original composition in a similar style or use a similar song in the public domain. For further information, please see Music Use Note on page iii.

BIG SIS *looks away embarrassed. She has to change the subject.*

We know why you're here.

LIL' SIS 'Cos you bought tickets.

L.M And you want a show. But not just any show.

BIG SIS You definitely wouldn't have seen this one before. Ok so, let me set the scene. It's the autumn of nineteen ninety-one, and I'm an intelligent, gorgeously dark skinned, five-year-old girl about to have her perfect life with Mum disrupted by –

LIL' SIS – and I'm not here yet. I don't arrive till ninety-five. The blessing Mum was really waiting for.

BIG SIS *and* **LITTLE MISS** *roll their eyes.*

BIG SIS Right, it's eight a.m. and we're at Homerton hospital, East London.

LIL' SIS The midwife is readying herself to deliver her two hundred and forty fifth-baby. She assures Mum that her body is doing exactly what it's meant to.

LIL' SIS *hyperventilates as if in labour, she makes exaggerated expressions of pain on her face.*

BIG SIS Trust it to push, remind it to breathe. You can do this.

BIG SIS *begins hyperventilating.*

Mum's this calm twenty-nine-year-old Nigerian.

LIL' SIS This wasn't the first time she'd evicted tenants from her body.

BIG SIS That's Mum you're talking about like some corrupt landlord.

LIL' SIS I'm just trying to make it interesting. It's boring the way you tell it.

BIG SIS Stick to the facts.

LIL' SIS *(mimicking)* Stick to the facts.

BIG SIS *(trying to get the story back on track)* The smiling, inquisitive faces of the student doctors trying to suppress their uneasiness as Mum delivered this wriggling, ticking sack of blood, hair and fluids. A nurse dabs the build-up of sweat across the midwife's brow as she uses pliers to cut the cord and defuse the bomb of cries from this bouncing baby girl.

BIG SIS *cradles her arms pretending to carry a baby and passes it to* **LIL' SIS**, *who pretends to drop the baby.*

LITTLE MISS *is born, like a pageant winner winning first prize. She whips out a bouquet of flowers and crowns herself.*

L.M Isn't she lovely?

Isn't she wonderful?

Isn't she precious?

Less than one minute old.

Mum sung to me as I was handed to her.

LIL' SIS See. She's not sticking to the facts! And she was there.

BIG SIS You're doing too Much.

L.M Fine. I was –

LIL' SIS – carefully handed to mum –

L.M – that's not exactly how I remember it.

BIG SIS And how do you remember it? Enlighten us.

L.M I came shooting out of Mum like a bullet. Taking out a doctor, the nurses and four of the six student doctors. No time to lose, I shake off the gunk and bits off my body, chew through the umbilical cord and tell Mum laters. I had a date with the mandem. Mum stops me in my tracks, begging for a cuddle. I look at her outstretched arms and something

in me can't resist. I nestle into her warm chest and listen to the hypnotic beat of her heart.

The sound of two heartbeats beating out of sync like they are communicating. The two heartbeats merge into one funky rhythmic beat of...

A song plays in the style of Cleopatra ***"COMIN' ATCHA"***[1] *plays.*

The **THREE SISTERS** *dance to the song.*

Music lowers but the melody plays under the next scene.

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1 A license to produce LITTLE MISS BURDEN does not include a performance license for "Comin' Atcha" The publisher and author suggest that the licensee contact PRS to ascertain the music publisher and contact such music publisher to license or acquire permission for performance of the song. If a license or permission is unattainable for "Comin' Atcha", the licensee may not use the song in LITTLE MISS BURDEN but should create an original composition in a similar style or use a similar song in the public domain. For further information, please see Music Use Note on page iii.

WORLD 2 – WOMB 2.0

BIG SIS, LIL' SIS *and* **LITTLE MISS** *deliver their lines with more energy than a music video, it's like they are bursting to get the story out before it explodes inside of them. Think children fizzing on sherbet and cola whilst trying to act "cool".*

BIG SIS Stamford Hill–

LIL' SIS Council house number four–

L.M Age five–

BIG SIS We lived with Mum at nineteen Cylinder Road–

LIL' SIS In a slender two bed, terraced house between a Chinese family and a Jamaican family.

L.M Behind the liquorice red front door was a living room, a kitchen, garden and guest room which was haunted.

LIL' SIS It was, always cold.

BIG SIS That's because it was the only room in the house without central heating. Up a flight of stairs was the bathroom, my bedroom that I shared with Little Miss.

LIL' SIS And then my room that I shared with Mum –

L.M – shared?

LIL' SIS Fine. I slept in her bed.

L.M Anyway our house was infested –

LGMD – Boo.

L.M Who said that? Did you not hear that?

LIL' SIS Hear what?

BIG SIS That's not the line...

LIL' SIS Just give her a moment. Our house was infested with...

L.M ...rats, snails and slugs. This is where rats came to die, fed up of life on the streets, in the shadows, hiding from stray cats and preying foxes –

BIG SIS – alright, alright Attenborough. I think they get it.

L.M Snails and slugs slipped in from the jungle that was our garden and left tracks all over the kitchen, like dried glue.

BIG SIS Our house wasn't by any means perfect –

LIL' SIS – or even pretty –

BIG SIS – but it was a home.

L.M Full of delicious smells of jollof rice, pounded yam and egusi, fried plantain and egg –

All three do a chef's kiss.

LIL' SIS Fried plan-tain.

BIG SIS Like Olu Main-tain.

L.M Mum's the secret ingredient in everything she makes.

LIL' SIS Lazy lie-in Saturdays, fights, spats, tears, songs, birthdays –

L.M – fire brigade when I accidentally blew up the microwave –

BIG SIS – calling the police round to pretend we were in *The Bill* –

L.M – Christmas days –

BIG SIS – the Christmas without electricity –

L.M – Easter egg hunts –

LIL' SIS – the morning rat caught in the trap –

L.M – New Year's Resolutions –

BIG SIS – wearing winter clothes around the house so we didn't have to turn on the heating –

L.M – and lots and lots of warmth and love. We were passionate about making Mum proud.

They salute to **MUM**.

LGMD *(First speaks)* Some facts you should know about Mum.

LIL' SIS Mum came to the UK in the summer of nineteen ninety –

BIG SIS – with my then four-year-old butt.

L.M Before I descended from heaven.

LIL' SIS *(laughs a little too hard)* More like saved the best till last. Me!

BIG SIS Well not exactly last, three years after the *(coughs)* the hiccup –

LIL' SIS – you're not even trying to be subtle –

BIG SIS – our Lil' Bro was born –

L.M – AKA Mr Okele –

BIG SIS – but his narrative kinda disrupts our dynamic –

LIL' SIS – our flow –

BIG SIS – exactly! Our flow and we won't pass the Bechdel test if we talk about him any longer.

LIL' SIS Sorry bro. Nuff love though.

BIG SIS *and* **LITTLE MISS** *roll their eyes.*

L.M Mum was the second oldest – like moi – of six siblings. We have a lot in common. She was really close with her dad who died on her twenty ninth birthday – so celebrating is often bittersweet for her.

BIG SIS Mum's always been very spiritual. With her Yoruba tongue, Muslim name and Christian heart, she has exercised endless patience and love to helping others.

LIL' SIS She has the best hair. We have lots more in common.

BIG SIS Mum's a creative soul, loves music, parties, would braid and style all our hair in different styles and colours because we could never afford to go to a salon.

LIL' SIS The top five styles Mum could braid.

Chart countdown music plays. [1]

L.M In at number five.

LIL' SIS *Ko l'ese*

BIG SIS No legs.

LIL' SIS Braids that go straight from the front to the back like a race track. Great for sewing in weaves or wearing wigs. The reverse of this is called *Ipako elede*.

BIG SIS Pigs head. Don't ask.

L.M In at number four.

BIG SIS *Suku*.

LIL' SIS Closely weaved gourd.

BIG SIS Braids weaved like the mouth of a bottle. Can be decorated with coloured beads or cowrie shells.

L.M Making a surprise entry at number three.

LIL' SIS *Pa nu mo*.

BIG SIS Closed mouth.

LIL' SIS Braids that start in the front and back that meet in the middle. Not to be confused with *suku*. Think the way, the mouth of a Venus fly trap opens and closes. *(Goes to touch* **LITTLE MISS***'s hair)* Oh my God. I love your – ow – your hair just bit me.

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L.M She does that when people don't get my permission first… Didn't quite make it to number one this time but a childhood favourite at number two.

BIG SIS *Suku ologede*

LIL' SIS Closely weaved like a banana.

BIG SIS The more extravagant sibling of the *suku* except braids aren't straight, they are curved like a banana with a tight bun on top. Really accentuates one's egg-shaped head.

L.M Not surprisingly, in at number one, as seen on Beyoncé, Brandy, Alicia Keys and Cleopatra. Drum roll please.

The opening beats of a song in the style of Magic System ***"PREMIER GAOU"***[1] *plays. Then abruptly cuts out.*

LIL' SIS *Biba.*

BIG SIS Single plaits.

LIL' SIS The versatile single plait, the box braid, the pick and drop, twist, micro braids, Ghana braids. Mum's hands weaved magic in our hair.

L.M Mum's also our stylist.

LIL' SIS And a style icon.

BIG SIS Mum couldn't afford to dress her world famous girl band on a single salary…of several part-time jobs.

LIL' SIS So we'd go with her to Dalston market and pick out fabrics we liked the colour of –

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L.M – and she'd sew us new outfits for any occasion –

BIG SIS – birthdays, school discos, church anniversaries, Christmas, sold-out concerts –

LIL' SIS An unsung fashion designer to this day.

L.M Shame none of us inherited her wicked fashion sense.

LIL' SIS Speak for yourself.

BIG SIS Yeah. We don't dress like a rainbow vomited on us.

LIL' SIS *chuckles and high fives* **BIG SIS.**

L.M Anyway Mum won the Guinness World Record for biggest heart in the universe. Worked in McDonalds, as a school dinner lady, care homes, domestic violence organisation and sheltered housing. It's in her DNA.

LIL' SIS Always serving others any chance she got.

L.M Anytime we were upset about anything, Mum would embrace us in her comforting arms and sing:

A song plays in the style of Bob Marley's – ***"THREE LITTLE BIRDS"***[2] .

LGMD It won't.

LITTLE MISS *looks around worried and misses her cue to salute with her* **SISTERS.**

An alarm rings loudly.

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2 A license to produce LITTLE MISS BURDEN does not include a performance license for "Three Little Birds" The publisher and author suggest that the licensee contact PRS to ascertain the music publisher and contact such music publisher to license or acquire permission for performance of the song. If a license or permission is unattainable for "Three Little Birds", the licensee may not use the song in LITTLE MISS BURDEN but should create an original composition in a similar style or use a similar song in the public domain. For further information, please see Music Use Note on page iii.

L.M What's going on? We didn't rehearse this.

LIL' SIS We interrupt the scheduled show for breaking news.

BIG SIS A mysterious grey door has appeared on the outskirts of the Story Sanctuary.

LIL' SIS No one knows the origins of this door, but the public is being warned to keep a wider than wide berth.

BIG SIS The door which does in fact have a handle as incorrectly reported earlier, seems to defy the laws of gravity and door craftsmanship. It stands on its own and one can seemingly walk around it, so where it leads to is unknowable.

LIL' SIS There have been several attempts to open the door and even dismantle it, but all attempts have failed. It seems the material the door is made from is impenetrable and the door is solidly locked. Tourists are discouraged from taking selfies with the door.

BIG SIS Witnesses report hearing a low whistle emanating from the door, but official reports debunk this.

LIL' SIS *and* **BIG SIS** *point at the door.*

In the event of an emergency, no one is permitted to open that door, particularly you Little Miss.

L.M Why? What's the doors deal?

LIL' SIS Under no circumstance must it ever be opened. Some doors just shouldn't be doors.

BIG SIS Don't think about the door.

LIL' SIS Don't look at the door.

BIG SIS Don't draw attention to the door.

LIL' SIS Sometimes doors keep danger out –

BIG SIS – and other times doors keep danger in –

LIL' SIS – and sometimes doors themselves –

BIG SIS/LIL' SIS – are the danger.

L.M Don't say it like that.

LITTLE MISS *trying not to scratch her itch of curiosity.*

LIL' SIS As far as we're concerned, that door doesn't exist. *(As* **MUM***)* You have to promise me, no matter whoever it is, even if they say they know me. You must never open this door for anyone.

L.M It's just a door.

BIG SIS No matter how hard things get. You won't be tempted to even touch its handle.

L.M You can't be serious –

BIG SIS/LIL' SIS Promise us!

L.M Ok-ok, I promise. Can we continue now?

BIG SIS The scheduled story will now resume shortly.

Long TV beep.

WORLD 3 – PLAYGROUND JUNGLE

School bell rings.

The laughter of children playing in a primary school playground. **LITTLE MISS** *is sat with her friends* **F1** *and* **F2.**

BIG SIS Primary school–

LIL' SIS School gates–

L.M Age nine-and-a-half–

BIG SIS The three pillars that held up Little Miss's life were school, hospitals, and church.

L.M School was by far my favourite.

LIL' SIS You were Little Miss Popular back then.

L.M I don't like to brag. I had a particular pasttime for anyone who'd listen.

BIG SIS An unlikely storyteller was developing her skills shall we say.

LIL' SIS To all the kids whose parents didn't sign their permission slip so they couldn't be taught Sex Ed in primary school. This one's for you.

F1 Soooo. What did you see? What did the video show?

F2 What exactly is *(whispers)* S-E-X?

L.M Well, when a man and a woman love each other. They take off all their clothes, turn invisible and run around a bed. The man chases the woman, but sometimes the woman can chase the man, if he's short.

The woman runs around so fast that she trips on the corner of the bed and falls onto her back. Women always fall onto their backs.

F2 Onto the bed?

L.M Yeah. I'm gonna practise it when I get home.

F1 Then what happened?

L.M Then the man continues running, he runs around and around until he's tired but the woman is taking up all the space on the bed, so he falls on top of her. Because they've both been running so much they're really sweaty and so they're sliding and wriggling on each other. Then the man's *(Whispers)* willy turns pink.

F1 It's so ugly.

F2 I've seen one in real life. My baby brothers's when my mum was bathing him. His is cute though.

L.M Anyway the man is wriggling and then he slides it inside the woman's…pink hole. They're still hot and sweaty and in order to cool down they keep wiggling and sliding on each other. But it's not working. The man's the first to get tired. Men are always the first to get tired. He stretches his arms out and he does this big loud yawn and then… (*Mumbles*) Something comes out.

F1 What?

L.M *(whispers)* Something comes out of his willy.

F2 What comes out? Wee-wee?

L.M No, it's different. I don't know. It looks like…remember at the school fête when you ate that whole bag of candy floss by yourself, and then you drank that whole can of Sprite and then you threw up.

F1 Yeah.

L.M It looks like that but not pink.

F2 Ewwwww.

F1 Into the woman's...

F2 Pink hole?

F1 Don't say that.

F2 Sex is disgusting. Is it even legal?

F1 *(gasps)* I can't believe you said it. Well my mum told me you can only have *sex* if you have a marriage certificate.

L.M I never want to get married.

F1 *becomes* **TEACHER** *and* **F2** *becomes* **MUM. LITTLE MISS** *continues chatting with her friends.*

TEACHER *(to* **MUM***)* She's very bright.

MUM Thank you.

TEACHER She's been falling down a lot more lately. We've had to tell her to stop running. It's becoming quite challenging on our staff.

MUM Right. She's not said anything –

TEACHER – we have to put out a chair for her in assembly because she can't get off the floor without support. We can't have teachers picking her up like a baby.

L.M I'm not sure how they make babies.

MUM She's fine, there's nothing wrong with her. You said so yourself, she's a bright girl.

L.M Umm, I think you can just take one you like from the hospital.

TEACHER Yes she is, but we don't want her brightness dimming and thus becoming a problem for her teachers.

MUM She's not a problem.

TEACHER I know that, sorry I just mean that we are doing everything we can but her – the situation doesn't seem to be improving.

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