

A Debt To PoorChoice

by  
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Name  
Address  
Phone Number

Agency Information

CHARACTER NAME

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

AGE

GENDER

SCENE ONE.

\* “A RAISIN IN THE SUN” BY LANGSTON  
HUGHES, ADAPTED BY DESTINY TOMPKINS\*

*DAE sits at a metal school desk, in uniform, as a single  
spotlight shines on her.*

DAE

What happens to a Black student deferred?  
Do they dry up?  
Like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore --  
And then run?  
Do they stink like rotten meat?  
End up sitting on a subway seat?  
Remindin' everybody  
Of what they could be  
They just waitin on  
A chance to be offered  
Or do they  
crust and sugar over --  
Like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe they just sag  
Like a heavy load.

(pause.)

Or do they explode?

*LIGHTS UP.*

*AT RISE: Poorchoice College classroom. Dae is  
surrounded by white students dressed in “edgy art  
school” attire. There are three other uniformed Black  
students in the classroom. MS. MOORE writes and  
underlines “Intro to Theatre and Performance Studies”  
on the board.*

DAE

*(to audience)*

Poorchoice College. Sophomore Year, Fall 2017. After a year of realizing how boringly  
easy and mediocre my screenwriting/playwriting major is, I decide to pick up another.

MS. MOORE

Welcome to theatre and performance. My name is Ms. Moore and I'll be teaching this course for the semester --

DAE

*(to audience)*

I hate first day of classes because they're always the same. We do a corny "icebreaker" to introduce ourselves, discuss this boring ass syllabus that goes over the same expectations we've already read over in our other classes and then we don't even get to the real lesson, I'm paying for, til next week. Shit feels like a tutorial mode I can't skip.

MS. MOORE

Well, let's go around and introduce ourselves and then we'll go over the syllabus. How about we say our names, pronouns, where we're from and our theatre experience. Who wants to start?

*Everyone in the classroom pauses but Dae and the other few Black students sitting in the room.*

DAE

*(to audience)*

Only good thing about intros is that you get to scope out the room without looking like you all up in somebody face.

*Dae looks at BLACK STUDENT #1 and they nod at her as a ding goes off. She nods back. Dae looks at BLACK STUDENT #2 and they shyly smile at her. She smiles back. Another ding goes off. Dae looks at BLACK STUDENT #3 and they exchange a look. Another Ding. The rest of the classroom unfreezes as Dae goes back to staring in a daze.*

MS. MOORE

Why don't we start with you?

*Dae stays stuck in her daze until Ms. Moore waves it away with her hands.*

DAE

Oh, you mean me?

*Ms. Moore nods and everyone in the classroom freezes again with the exception of the Black students.*

DAE

*(to audience)*

My name is D-A-E  
 Like what u live to see  
 A Harlem World seed  
 And I go by she  
 And what I think  
 Theater means  
 To me  
 Is that  
 Every day is a scene  
 That is reckoned  
 By a writer that questions  
 A society that's set in  
 How well we're pretendin

*The classroom unfreezes.*

DAE

Dae from Harlem. She/her/hers. Playwright.

*Ms. Moore smiles, nods and moves onto the next person - she repeats this as each student introduces themselves as time fast forwards.*

MS. MOORE

Okay, pleasure to meet all of you. Shall we move onto the syllabus?

*Ms. Moore continues on as Dae flips through the syllabus packet on her own.*

DAE

*(to the audience)*

Time for my next scope. Onto readings and assignments, let's see who we got... Elinor Fuchs (BORING), Endgame by Samuel Beckett (BORING), A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen (I guess), Susan Glaspell (Okay), Aristotle's Poetics (Boring), Antigone by Sophocles (Eh), Bretolt Brecht (sounds boring), The Crucible by Arthur Miller (I like the message better than the story) and... An Octoroon by Brandon Jacob Jenkins.

*Pause. Dae raises her hand.*

MS. MOORE

Yes?

DAE

Just a quick question about the reading list, I -

MS. MOORE

Oh, we're not there yet.

DAE

I know but I have concerns that I would like to address before the class is over. I'm sure we've all covered the first pages of ground rules in the rest of our classes and can look over them on our own, right?

*Dae looks back at the class as the Black students are the only ones nodding along with her. Ms. Moore crosses her arms uncomfortably.*

MS. MOORE

Well, I suppose since we're running low on time, we could skip ahead. What's up?

DAE

Okay so I was wondering if An Octoroon was the only...

*Dae looks around at her Black peers as they watch her intently.*

The only *Black* play we'll be reading this semester?

*The classroom freezes along with Dae as the Black students gasp. Black Student #1 holds their breath as they stand from their seat and, painfully, rip a sleeve off of Dae's uniform. They return back to their seat and let go of their breath in unison as the classroom and Dae resumes.*

MS. MOORE

Well, uh, yes. The only reason for that though is because since this is an introduction to theater and performance, I'm required to introduce you to texts that have not only had an historical impact on theater but will also be heavily referenced throughout your time in this major.

DAE

Yes but wouldn't aligning a syllabus under a curriculum centering the work of white men only make it seem as if theater and performance was exclusive to them?

MS. MOORE

Well, unfortunately, that's how it was.

DAE

As far as this curriculum knows it to be, you mean.

MS. MOORE

Excuse me?

DAE

I just find it hard to believe that white men were the only ones creating theater and performance pieces in the world during that time. It's kind of like how the theater world is predominantly white now but that doesn't mean they're the only ones creating - there are plenty more marginalized people being overlooked and erased presently. And if it's happening now, whose to say it didn't happen then too? And maybe our piece of history is just missing or not being looked for hard enough.

MS. MOORE

And that's exactly why Brandon Jacob Jenkins is included in the syllabus as well.

DAE

As the only Black play that centers teaching white people about Black oppression through comical skits of slavery, all while being named after a white passing character that only bears an eighth of Blackness in her?

MS. MOORE

Well, if *YOU* feel so strongly about it - why don't we discuss it after class?

DAE

I don't think it's just a *ME* thing, though. I -

MS. MOORE

Well, it looks like it's time to wrap up soon and I just want to make sure we're able to go over the homework assignment.

DAE

Okay.

MS. MOORE

But I really like what you have to say! Please feel free to discuss more with me after class.

*Everyone begins to pack up their belongings. Black Student #2 taps Dae on the shoulder.*

BLACK STUDENT #2

*(whispering)*

Everything that you were saying was facts.

*Everyone begins to file outside of the classroom. Ms. Moore cleans the board as Dae stands patiently. After a moment, Dae leaves and Ms. Moore turns around to see that the classroom is empty.*

**END OF SCENE ONE.**

SCENE TWO.

\*“WRONG BITCH” LYRICS BY TEYANA TAYLOR\*

*Spotlight shines on Dae as she sits on a couch.*

DAE

Hol’ Up

Ain’t no more insecure Issa Rae shit (Nope)

Know you’re probably used to dealin’ with them hoes who be scared to say shit

So they let you run ‘round while they sit there and take it

But I ain’t that crazy, no I ain’t that patient

No, no that ain’t the arrangement

You got the wrong, wrong bitch

*LIGHTS UP.*

*A cardboard Banana is showcased above the entrance of a retail store. Dae folds a shirt on one of the display tables. The Black Employees work around the store as well as rich zombie shoppers. BLACK EMPLOYEE #3 rings a zombie shopper up at the register.*



BLACK EMPLOYEE #3

That'll be \$2000. Would you like to pay with card or Banana credits?

DAE

(to audience)

Banana Retail. Sophomore Year, Fall 2017. Going through some financial hardships right now so I gotta do whatever it takes to stay in school because I don't want to risk losing what feels like my only chance of feeling motivated to graduate college.

*MANAGER and BOSS walk around, surveying the floor.  
Dae makes her way towards the fitting room but BLACK  
EMPLOYEE #2 stops her.*

BLACK EMPLOYEE #2

Where you going?

DAE

To hide in the dressing room for a few. My feet hurt.

BLACK EMPLOYEE #2

Nuh-uh, you see that lady walking next to Manager over there?

*Dae turns to look at Manager.*

BLACK EMPLOYEE #2

Don't make it obvious!

*Dae pretends to look elsewhere.*

BLACK EMPLOYEE #2

Here. Act like you cleaning this rack.

*Dae pretends to remove clothes on a rack as they pretend  
to work while talking at the same time.*

DAE

What about her?

BLACK EMPLOYEE #2

She owns this store! That's the boss - the one who oversees Manager. She real tough, too so don't let her catch you slippin'.

DAE

Oh damn, okay. Good lookin' out.

*Black Employee #2 nods and they continue to act extremely serious about their jobs. The Boss inaudibly gives an order to Manager and Manager nods. After a moment, the Boss exits and the Manager walks over to Dae.*

MANAGER

Dae, can I see you in my office, please?

DAE

Sure, is something wrong?

MANAGER

You got the dress code pamphlet that came in your Banana professionalism packet, right?

DAE

Yeah, I think so. Is there something wrong with my outfit, again?

MANAGER

Why don't we just talk more about it in my office?

*Manager walks into office. Dae and Black Employee #2 exchange a look as Dae follows Manager inside. Manager shuts the door behind them.*

DAE

I'm really sorry about the rip on my shirt, I -

MANAGER

Oh, no. This isn't really about your outfit. I just wanted to make sure you knew that your hair is part of dress code as well.

DAE

My hair? What about it?

MANAGER

Well, you saw that little lady I was walking with just a few moments ago, right? That's my boss and I just finished talking to her about it -- and we just feel it's a little too urban and unkempt for the store's image.

DAE

The store image?

MANAGER

Yeah, it just doesn't match up with the image we're trying to align with Banana and what we represent. It's more of an Urban Outfitters kind of look, y'know. So is there any way you can take them out before your next shift?

DAE

No, I don't think I can. I spent a lot of money getting my hair done because I expected it to be in my hair for the month.

MANAGER

Hm, that's kind of unfortunate because if you can't take them out then I'm afraid I won't be able to schedule you for shifts. Only because it's simply protocol, you're not allowed to work if you aren't adhering to the dress code.

*Manager freezes as Dae takes a moment to wrap her head around what's happening.*

DAE

I don't recall subjecting my hair to conversation  
 Surrounding its maintenance  
 What coils on my head is liberation  
 Nobody gets to play wit'  
 Nobody gets a say in  
 Yet i'm still waitin  
 To see if he even know  
 What he sayin  
 Cuz sometimes they really be that dumb  
 & expect u to school 'em  
 But nah this one seem deliberate  
 Only playin dumb to hide his  
 Willful ig'nance  
 But still ima give him a chance  
 Before I go off like the  
 "Crazy, angry" Black girl  
 They think I am

*Manager unfreezes.*

DAE

You know, Manager. I actually wear braids in my hair because it's a protective style for when it gets cold in the Winter, to prevent my hair from breaking.

MANAGER

Oh, there's a solution for that! Have you ever tried shea butter?

*Dae looks at the audience.*

DAE

Y'know, it's okay because I was planning on quitting anyway.

MANAGER

Oh, really?

DAE

Yup, so I'll just put in my two week notice and we -

MANAGER

Or you could even quit today, if you want!

DAE

Really? Well, I'll guess I'll do that then.

MANAGER

Okay, great! Well, I wish you the best of luck in moving on!

DAE

Yup, okay.

*Dae stands up and exits the office. Black Employee #2 approaches Dae.*

BLACK EMPLOYEE #2

What happened? What'd Manager say?

DAE

He told me my hair was too unkempt for the Banana image.

BLACK EMPLOYEE #2

Ooof. I don't even wanna hear about that.

*Dae angrily walks up to the register. Black Employee #2 follows to eavesdrop.*

DAE

Hey, can you tell me if I'm bugging because I'm not exactly sure.

BLACK EMPLOYEE #3

Yeah, wassup?

DAE

Manager just told me that I had to take out my braids because it's too "urban" and "unkempt" for their look.

BLACK EMPLOYEE #3

(whispers)

What? That's crazy!

DAE

Right! Is there a rule saying that we're not allowed to wear braids?

BLACK EMPLOYEE #3

(whispers)

No, not at all. You know how many times I had braids in my hair while working here? As long as it's a natural color, it shouldn't be a problem and yours is so I don't see why he would even say that.

DAE

I don't even know what to do. Like I'm so mad, I'm not sure if I should keep working or just leave because he told me he wasn't scheduling me for shifts until I took them out.

BLACK EMPLOYEE #2

(whispers)

Mhm hm. If that was me, I woulda just stormed right out.

*Manager walks out of his office and Black Employee #1 & 2 go back to pretending their working. Manager turns to assist one of the customers and after a moment, Dae rushes to the bathroom. She locks herself in as she looks at herself in the mirror and cries. The room is drowning in echoes of offbeat breathing with an occasional weep here and there. LADY GIRAFFE appears and hugs Dae as she catches her breath.*

LADY GIRAFFE

Your self-respect is worth more than this. We're leaving.

DAE

But what will I do? I can't just --

LADY GIRAFFE

You can and you will. We will.

*Lady Giraffe offers her hand and Dae takes it as they storm out of the retail store together. The store, Dae and Lady Giraffe freeze as the Black Employees gasp, hold their breath, make their way over to Dae, rip off another sleeve of her uniform and release their breath back into their positions. Dae and Lady Giraffe unfreeze and leave.*

*Blackout. TRANSITION INTO --*

*LIGHTS UP.*

*Dae sits on a couch in the middle of the Resident Community Center as fellow resident assistants hang around the office. RESIDENT COORDINATOR#1, RESIDENT COORDINATOR#2 and RC CORA sit in the office.*

DAE

Poorchoice College. Junior year, Christmas Break Move-Out Day. Personally, I never really liked the ideas of RA's because they just felt like mini cop patrols but I'm also not one to deny free housing. Only thing I get annoyed about at this job is how fake the big bosses expect everyone to be and my assigned resident coordinator, Cora. She's only a year older than me and expects all of us to adhere to her work ethic because she thinks it's better than what we already got going on for ourselves. She gives me "I grew up in Bubblefuck, New York and I'm really tone deaf about social issues because I'm a privileged white girl from suburbia" vibes heavy. Anyway, since it's move out day, all RA's are required to stay on campus until 5pm today because that's when our contract ends even though we've already finished our jobs. We're just sitting around, waiting to go home until -

RC CORA

Dae?

DAE

Yes?

*RC Cora looks around the room for something.*

RC CORA

Sweep the office!

DAE

Excuse me?

Sweep the office.  
RC CORA

Isn't that maintenance's job?  
DAE

No, it's our job to keep it tidy.  
RC CORA

*Dae looks around.*

Well, it looks pretty tidy to me so why do I have to do it?  
DAE

*The Black RA's look at Cora, nervously.*

Because I said so and it's in your contract to do what your RC tells you to.  
RC CORA

*The Black RA's look at Dae, fearfully.*

But there's other RA's here, so why me, specifically?  
DAE

I don't want to argue, just please clean the office.  
RC CORA

No.  
DAE

I'm sorry, what was that?  
RC CORA

I said no, Cora.  
DAE

Hm. Okay. Before you clock out, please speak to me.  
RC CORA

No, problem.  
DAE

*After a moment, all of the RA's exit and Dae and RC Cora are left alone.*

RC CORA

Okay, so what's up?

DAE

I don't know. You tell me.

RC CORA

I wanna know what you refused an order from your RC.

DAE

Because last time I checked, it wasn't in my job description to sweep offices. That's not what I'm getting paid for.

RC CORA

Right but it is in your contract to listen to your RC.

DAE

And while I understand that, I also believe that we can have disagreements on the orders you give me because I do feel like the way you ordered me to sweep this office was incredibly demaning and you have a habit of picking me out like that.

RC CORA

Well, your contract doesn't end til 5 so that means you're still working yet you're sitting on the couch as if you aren't.

DAE

But Cora, everyone else wasn't doing anything either. We all finished everything before our contracted time was even up so there's not much for us to do but sit around and wait. And on top of that, we all went to bed late trying to get these room checks done all while waking up at 7am to do it all over again. It just feels like you're intentionally trying to claim your superiority over me and it makes me uncomfortable.

RC CORA

Hmmm. I see what you're saying but you still refused an order from your RC.

DAE

An order that was insulting to my job title.

RC CORA

Hm, well I guess this is just something we'll have to agree to disagree on.

DAE

I guess it is, then.



RC CORA

Well, I don't want there to be any bad blood or anything between us.

DAE

There isn't. We just don't see it the same way and that's fine.

RC CORA

Hm, okay. Well, have a nice break then.

DAE

You, too.

Dae unbuttons her uniform shirt as she leaves, revealing a red undershirt. RC Cora remains puzzled about their encounter.

**END OF SCENE TWO.**

SCENE THREE.

\* "UNCLE JIM" POEM BY COUNTTEE CULLEN\*

*Spotlight shines on Dae as she sits in another metal desk.*

DAE

"White folks is white," says Uncle Jim;  
 "A platitude," I sneer;  
 And then I tell him so is milk,  
 And the froth upon his beer.  
 His heart walled up with bitterness,  
 He smokes his pungent pipe,  
 And nods at me as if to say,  
 "Young fool, you'll soon be ripe!"  
 I have a friend who eats his heart  
 Always with grief of mine,  
 Who drinks my joy as tipplers drain  
 Deep goblets filled with wine.  
 I wonder why here at his side,  
 Face-in-the-grass with him,  
 My mind should stray the Grecian urn  
 To muse on uncle Jim.

*LIGHTS UP.*

*A Poorchoice classroom. DAE, AGENT L, AGENT D, AGENT K, AGENT T, AGENT Y and AGENT C all sit in classroom surrounded by zombie students. PARRY and ZANORA occupy seats as well. HANNE stands in front of her lecture.*

DAE

I have no desire to continue on with this piece because I truly do not think Poorchoice deserves work from me. I have had to fight for support from faculty when all they've done is treated my work like some kind of witch hunt and discouraged me from making it all together, without even bothering to ask me what it was about. This isn't even the project I was going to submit but I decided to put that one off for an environment that genuinely takes me and the message I am trying to convey seriously and with respect, without it being promoted as some kind of diversity initiative. This school has caused me a great deal of racial trauma that I am not getting reimbursed for. I don't understand how we're taught to utilize performance as a means of activism against oppressive systems yet y'all oppressed me in sharing this story because I threatened to expose Poorchoice to be one of those systems. I have no motivation to prove anything to y'all. Fail me if u want but I deserve more and so does every Black student that has to compromise their comfortability for the ignorance and inconsideration of their faculty. If it weren't for the students that hold the campus up and provide peer support overall, Poorchoice would be nothing. Your opinion means nothing to me when y'all can barely come politically correct. Get y'all shit together, deadass. And stop being scared of a greedy ass Provost that lacks common sense and basic emotional logic. I will go on to do great things because of the ideas and skills I have to offer and you will never know the extent of that and I could live with that. This degree not worth my self-respect and I can make peace with that. Fuck y'all, forreal. I'm off this.

**THE END.**