TORIA

Seein' them ropes danglin' from that tree like…. (beat) If I was you it'd make me feel some kinda way. I know that much.

JUSTIN

You got somethin' you tryin' to say to me Toria?

TORIA

I'm just askin'.

JUSTIN

Well don't ask. In fact, I'm right and tired of alla your questionin'. You question everything I damn say. And 'less you forget, I'm in charge. I'm the one to do the questionin'. So take the story or back off. But don't ask me another gotdamn thing, Toria. I swear.

Pause. Toria and Justin glare at each other.

TORIA

Yessir, boss.

JUSTIN

That's right. That's exactly right. And don't fuckin' forget it.

Shift.

START

The Pot Callin' The Kettle

Lights up on Asha.

ASHA

People don't know this 'bout me but I used to have a lotta anger. You might not think it by lookin' at me, but I could really throw down. When I was nine, my Mama and Daddy got a divorce. Was fightin' and fightin' all the time and couldn't never get on the same page. So they split. I went to stay with Mama in Florida for awhile 'fore she moved here to Louisiana. But when I was 'bout ten, I started gettin' in all this trouble at school. Fights and everything. Just mad all the time and didn't know why. So my Mama sent me over to live with Daddy in Georgia for a coupla years. He had himself a new wife and everythang. Livin' good in Hotlanta with a new house and all that. Wife was a black woman. Her name Sharon and she was cool as hell. I liked her out the gate, and that's sayin' a whole lot cuz I ain't like nobody out the gate who be datin' my Daddy. But she was somethin' special. Treated me like a daughter. Didn't try to replace my mama or nothin' like that, or even act like she could. I think that's what I liked about her. She was just real easy with me. Ain't had her own kids, but had a bunch of nieces and nephews and she told 'em to call me cousin. So

they did. Used to hang with 'em whenever it be a family get together. They say "whaddup cuz" like that, and I remember feelin' for the first time like I belonged somewhere. Like finally I ain't need to fight no more cuz I was in company that felt like home. And I stopped being so angry all the time. Angry at Mama and Daddy. Angry at myself, even. Angry at the world. (beat) After while, Mama called fo' me to come move with her here. I was like twelve. But I wunn't the same no mo'. Ain't feel as comfortable back here. Not til' I started hangin' out again with… ---- (beat) They used to call me "black by association". Alla my friends and play cousins in Hotlanta. But here they just call me "fake" or "wannabe" or "actin' black". But you know what I thank? If actin' black mean bein' like Sharon… Mean findin' family and love in places you wunn't expectin'. If it mean not bein' angry unless you got good reason…. Then maybe we should all be "actin' black" mo' often. That's all I got to say 'bout that.

Shift

Music.

Movement.

Lights illuminate Ray and Asha.

RAYLYNN

It happened the next day. After seein' those three nooses hangin' like…vines. Somethin' had to be done. Somethin' just had to be.

ASHA

So D come around . He say---

Lights up on De'Andre. The world becomes naturalistic.

DE'ANDRE

Ya'll see that shit??? How they just hung them shits on them branches like….like what was that? A threat or somethin'?

ASHA

A prank- Principle Miller callin' it.

DE'ANDRE

Thas bullshit. Wouldn't be no prank if shoes was reversed.

RAYLYNN

You mean if roles was reversed. How shoes gon' be reversed?!

DE'ANDRE

Whatever. You know what I'm meanin'.

RAYLYNN

Be walkin' 'round backwards.

DE'ANDRE

What they gonna do 'bout it? Thas what I wanna know.

ASHA

One of them Jesus freaks in my fourth period class. Bet that's who hung 'em. They was lookin' at me funny when Ray sat under that tree.

RAYLYNN

Or if the shoe was on the other foot. Maybe if you said that.

DE'ANDRE

Who cares what I said!

ASHA

Or maybe it was that hash gang that be sittin' up under there gettin' higher than a bluebird most of the time and don't never get in trouble for puffin' on school grounds- talkin' 'bout it's medicinal. Medicinal my ass.

RAYLYNN

Principle ain't say who it was. Just say they gonna deal with it private and the students be punished.

ASHA

Heard whoever they is gettin' detention.

DE'ANDRE

That's it? Detention? What kinda punishment is that???

RAYLYNN

Give detention for misbehavin' in class. Missin' homework assignments. Not for no noose.

DE'ANDRE

Not for no threats.

ASHA

Detention with Mr. Snodder and all that fartin' he be doin' be more like prison. Gas chamber.

RAYLYNN

Still. It like a slap on the wrist. Ain't really justice. Ain't really fair.

DE'ANDRE

What we gon' do about it, hunh? Talk about it while we straight gettin' disrespected! We gon' just take it, hunh?!

RAYLYNN

Ain't gon' just take it.

ASHA

What you meanin'?

RAYLYNN

I thank it time to revisit that tree.

DE'ANDRE

Thas what I'm talkin' 'bout.

ASHA

Revisit it….for what?

RAYLYNN

For defiance.

ASHA

Defiance?

DE'ANDRE

Start a rally!

RAYLYNN

A demonstration.

ASHA

For who? For what? Why we gotta do anythang else? Already sat under it and made yo' point. Now just gotta let them fools get in trouble by theyselves.

RAYLYNN

Ain't about trouble. It's about principle. 'Bout who belong where. 'Bout who got the freedom to be somewhere and who don't. I ain't tryin' to back down from no noose hangin'---

DE'ANDRE

Racist ass nooses hangin'---

ASHA

Maybe it wunn't racist.

De'Andre and Raylynn look at Asha incredulously.

DE'ANDRE
How it's not gon' be racist? What else it gon' be?

ASHA
Be just….stupid.

DE'ANDRE
Aight then. It's stupid AND racist. They usually go hand in hand, ain't it?

RAYLYNN
Wasn't right.

ASHA
I know it wunn't right, but it was what it was. Stupid fa sho…but that don't mean we got to get involved with it. What you got to go causin' more issue 'bout it for?

RAYLYNN
Causin' more issue?

ASHA
I 'ont mean it like that.

RAYLYNN
You thank it's somethin' wrong with what I done?

ASHA
Naw. I ain't said that. I just thank maybe…. …. …..

RAYLYNN
Maybe what?

ASHA
Maybe we ain't got to get all wired up 'bout the whole thang. It just a tree.

DE'ANDRE
Awwww shit.

RAYLYNN
Ain't just a tree to me.

ASHA
I'm just sayin'….

RAYLYNN

I don't know what you sayin'.

ASHA

…
…
…

DE'ANDRE

Ay look--- it's time to make ourselves seen and heard, y'know? We gon' do somethin'?

RAYLYNN

I'm goin'. ---- You comin'?

ASHA

I can't afford to get in no trouble. Promised my mama I wunn't gon' have no issues this semester.

RAYLYNN

Fine then.

ASHA

That don't mean I ain't…. … …. I'm still ya girl.

RAYLYNN

Yeah. Sho. Of course.

ASHA

We still good, right?

RAYYLNN

…
…
…
Sho.
…
…
…
Let's go D.

Ray and De'Andre head for the tree.
Music increases.

Shift.