

HELENA. You been savin de cassava like I tell you?
BESSIE. YA! Tell me whot happening. What you keeping keeping
de cassava for?
HELENA. I gon cook it all in de morning.
BESSIE. WHO COMIN?
HELENA. Neva matta. No one you gon find interstin. Number Tree?
BESSIE. Ya?
HELENA. Sleep.
BESSIE. Fine. (*The Girl enters, goes and wipes between her legs, and
curls up on the mat. Helena blows out torch.*)

Scene 6

Next day. At camp, by the compound, Rita, a member of Liberian Women's Initiative, an upper-class, well educated woman; throughout she occasionally speaks "Liberian English" like the women in the camp but her proper English often takes over. She is relatively new to the struggle for peace and functions awkwardly in this rough terrain. She approaches Helena, who is pounding cassava with a mortar and pestle.

RITA. How tings?

HELENA. (*Surprised.*) How tings? How you come follow me out ere?
I got to finish dis. (*Indicates cassava.*) You need sometin?

RITA. No, ah. I just... I... I wanted to see how things going out here.

HELENA. Whot?

RITA. And to tank you for de cooking it was very good so tank you.

HELENA. You off oh?

RITA. Whot you mean?

HELENA. How you go tank me for cookin? Dat whot I do, dat
whot we do ere, how you tank for dat, you off oh.

RITA. That not all you can do—dere much more you could do—
no one should expect that from you. (*Beat.*) I know I am not really
meant to be out here. (*Looks around cautiously.*) My colleagues like
to follow some rigid protocol when we meet with the COs. But I
believe we should take every opportunity to meet you gals. Rita—

(Rita looks around the compound, intrigued, horrified. She has obviously never been in a place like this before.)

HELENA. Well, you betta go. *(Beat.)* How you come here? How it okay for you to come here? Why he let you in, treat you good, give you our cassava, not mek you a wife like us? *(Beat.)*

RITA. Okay. *(Beat.)* Well, we are a part of a large network of women peacemakers, it is our mission to end dis war. Right now we are negotiating with the factions to immediately obey the ceasefire, to put down their guns. The only way to do that is to come to these different warlords and talk them down. *(Beat.)* They have been doing this for a long time, they—ah—we have quite a reputation in de country now, it allows us to come and go like how you see.

HELENA. Why he so scare of you?

RITA. He isn't scared of us.

HELENA. He is! He told no one do notin to de Peace women when dey come, he no treat no one else like dat. And he been using his juju a lot just now. Dat how I know he scare de most, when he using dat stuff. It mek his spirit go quiet. So ya, he scare of you.

RITA. Well good. GOOD. They scare of us, maybe we can actually get them to the point where things change and they stop acting like BEASTS, trying to treat us like we village girls they rob from de bush.

HELENA. *(Coldly.)* Is dat right. *(An awkward pause ensues for a few beats.)* Why you do all dat stuff?

RITA. Why? Why you tink? You happy with Liberia as it going? You tink dis a nice place? Look at de tings going on my dear! Look at where YOU are! You tink it normal you wifing some dirty self proclaimed general in de bush? You tink it normal a boy carrying a gun killing and raping? You think it okay dere no more schools, no more NOTIN! I had to WALK my son from Kakata to the Ivory Coast just so he could stay in school!

HELENA. Okay, you don have to get vex.

RITA. Sorry... I... *(A few beats pass, Helena stores ground cassavas, Rita starts to look around curiously.)* So... do ah... any new gals comin around lately?

HELENA. *(Suspiciously.)* Why you asking me dat?

RITA. If I... if I could get you out of ere—would you go—would you go with me?

HELENA. Go where?

RITA. You can go to school, you can—

HELENA. Where I gon go to school
RITA. I can get you in a camp in Côte d'Ivoire or—
HELENA. Where dat?
RITA. Ivory Coast.
HELENA. Oh. So why you calling it sometin else?
RITA. No mind. Why would you not go?
HELENA. I don know.
RITA. Would it be a hard choice? If I could get him to agree,
would it be so hard to leave this?
HELENA. No... but...
RITA. You happy ere?
HELENA. No, but dis is war and I whot else I gon do?
RITA. You know all the things you can do if you go to school, the
ways you can improve your life! You can get your own business,
own your own house, take care of your children—
HELENA. I no have children.
RITA. But you might have them! Things could be over soon, you
have to think about whot your life can be.
HELENA. I no know, I wife Number One, I been wit him for
long, long time. I tek care o him, I—
RITA. The war ends—are you still wife Number One?
HELENA. I... I no know who I is out of war—dat not whot I get
to tink about.
RITA. I am going to hep you—it is going to end.
HELENA. I got tings to do ere, tings no gon happen propa I go. I
tek care o CO. I have rank ere now. I can tell de small small boys
whot to do. I care for de oda women. And dere lots o tings we doin
ere now—we even reading book in de compound.
RITA. Whot book?
HELENA. It about de big man of America, Clinto.
RITA. Clinton?
HELENA. Ya. And his government. And Monica his Number Two
and how de Judiciary and Senate and Starr trying to stress him.
(*Rita laughs.*) We no know if he stop being big man because of his
Number Two or not—we no get dat far yet. You know whot happen?
If you know don't tell me notin.
RITA. I no gon tell you. But you know that happen long time ago
oh. Five years or so.
HELENA. We no mind, it still good story, don tell me whot happen.
(*Beat.*) But, you know, when I look at you, you know all dese book

tings—I do wan to learn—I neva go to school—I do want dat. It just... I just don know if I can learn now—I getting old to be sometin different. (*Helena walks out, taking the cassava with her. Rita watches her for a bit, thinking... She grabs a stick, and starts to write in the dust. Helena reenters.*) Whot you doin?

RITA. Writing my name. Whot's yours? (*Helena stares at Rita for a long beat.*)

HELENA. My nem? Numba One.

RITA. The one your ma and pa give you!

HELENA. NO. I wife Numba One to the Commanding Officer of LURD Army—I—

RITA. WHAT DID YOUR MOTHER CALL YOU?

HELENA. I—I neva use it—I—

RITA. You MUST know it. Tell it to me—now.

HELENA. It... it... I can't.

RITA. (*Seeing Helena is shaken.*) Okay, it's okay, just whisper it to me, try. (*Rita holds Helena close, putting her ear to her.*) Come on gal. (*Helena whispers something inaudible into Rita's ear.*) That's beautiful! Here let me show you whot that look like— (*Rita writes Helena's name in the dirt.*) There—you do it— (*Hesitantly, Helena takes the stick and writes out the same letters.*) Good... good... very good. (*Helena finishes writing her name.*) That your name. You just do it.

HELENA. No lie?

RITA. No lie.

HELENA. It not that hard!

RITA. No, it not! Now let me show you what each letter it is—

HELENA. I can't believe OH! I do book ting! (*Rita laughs.*) I gon tell de new gal! (*Rita stops dead, stands up.*)

RITA. Whot? Whot new gal? (*Lights.*)

Scene 7

The Girl enters, humming a tune, she picks firewood and places it in a wheelbarrow. After a moment she picks up a stick, starts writing something in the dirt with it. Maima enters, unseen by The Girl, she watches her for a beat and then:

MAIMA. So you city girl eh?

THE GIRL. *(Startled.)* Yah.

MAIMA. I know Kakata well well. I get supplies from dere all de time. You run for long time?

THE GIRL. *(Cautiously.)* Some... some days.

MAIMA. Ya, dat hard eh. But you look strong oh. Like you got a lotta powa!

THE GIRL. Powa?

MAIMA. Ya. I can see your eyes, dey got fire! And your arms and legs—dey strong oh.

THE GIRL. *(Giggling, embarrassed.)* No!

MAIMA. Yes! You got to tap dat powa oh. You tink God give all dat to you for notin? You tink God let you survive for notin? You got to do de tings you called to do oh. Is dis it? Picking firewood in de bush? Dis whot your powa for?

THE GIRL. I... I don know. *(Giggles again.)*

MAIMA. Whot? Whot so funny oh?

THE GIRL. It just... it just... Number One say you devil, but you talking like you prophet.

MAIMA. Number One say dat eh?

THE GIRL. Hmmhmm! *(She continues to giggle. Maima laughs too, though in a different tone.)*

MAIMA. Ya... ya dat funny oh. *(Beat.)* How you like Numba One?

THE GIRL. She fine.

MAIMA. *(Lighting a cigarette.)* She kick me out oh. Ya... Some stupid gal was lovin on anoda soldier who beat ha. Den she gone tell Numba One dat it my fault she get trown out—Numba One believe ha and not me—She crazy oh.

THE GIRL. What about de sabou?

MAIMA. HA! So dey tell you already. Dey not gon tell you how dey getting all dose tings de CO bring from war eh? How he getting dem— (*Taking a long drag on her cigarette. Then vexed.*) He giving WORSE den a sabou! HA! But dey wann act like dey clean o all sin or sometin. You trust who you want. Like Tupac say, Only God can judge me. (*Putting out her cigarette.*)

THE GIRL. So where you get dis den? (*Tugging on jeans.*)

MAIMA. Kakata.

THE GIRL. And dis. (*Indicating earrings.*)

MAIMA. Dis... dis from de big city.

THE GIRL. You get tings from de big city!

MAIMA. Ya. (*Laughs.*) Plenty tings. Didn't you like de dress?

THE GIRL. Whot dress?

MAIMA. What? Dat STUPID gal. I go fuck ha up good. (*She sucks her teeth.*) I brin you dress. So you can look betta dan dis. So you can look good like me. Don worry, let ha have it. Whot you wont? Tell me whot you like.

THE GIRL. Nail varnish.

MAIMA. Ah, which color—you look like you like de red one, or de purple.

THE GIRL. Pink.

MAIMA. (*Laughing.*) Okay. Dat good! You have to decide whot you wont. Dis is war, how you gon survive? Dis is how (*Indicating gun.*)—den you can prosa—you can get every color of de rainbow nail varnish, it no matter whot happening. And most important—no man gon touch you. (*Examines her closely.*) So de CO he like you, ha? He jump on you a lot? You like dat? Look at me. Is dat whot you want? Hmmmhmm? Did you like dat?

THE GIRL. No.

MAIMA. (*Militarily.*) Whot?

THE GIRL. NO.

MAIMA. So whot you gon do? Let me tell you de last time a man jump on me. In fact, I can't remember, all I know is he not know I have gun. He dead now. No one gon jump me again. Now, I choose who I lovin on. Because of dis. Whotever you wan, it's yours. Just go get gun.

THE GIRL. I can't... no...

MAIMA. It easy right now—dey need soldier—dey so desperate for fighter now, dey tek baboon if dey could teach it who to fire. Ere, (*Hands her gun.*) try it—hold it.

THE GIRL. I don—

MAIMA. TRY.

THE GIRL. (*Takes gun.*) It heavy oh.

MAIMA. Now hold it like dis and you point it forward—Now fire.

THE GIRL. No, I scare.

MAIMA. Scare of whot? FIRE! GIRL FIRE!! (*The Girl fires the gun. She gasps, panting. Adrenaline flooding her system. Maima, pleased, affectionately strokes her head.*)

Scene 8

At camp. Next day. Helena is cooking and intermittently changing the channels on the temperamental radio. The Girl is painting her nails. Bessie is leaning against a crate, eyes shut, breathing hard.

BESSIE. (*To Helena as Helena changes radio channels.*) Wait—dat good song—WAIT—Dat music oh! Whot your problem? Let de songs play oh!

HELENA. I not looking for music.

BESSIE. Whot you want den?

HELENA. Neva matta. (*Beat.*) I want to know whot happenin.

BESSIE. Where? What happenin wit whot?

HELENA. Wit de WAR.

BESSIE. You got a spirit dat too strong oh. So you want to hear dose people just talkin and talkin?

HELENA. Yes. It called *news*.

BESSIE. Who—

HELENA. SHHHH your mout oh!

RADIO. ... As fighting intensifies approximately one hundred women all dressed in white marched to the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia calling for immediate and direct intervention by the U.S. government, leading to... (*Radio crackles and dies. Helena sucks her teeth.*)

BESSIE. And we coulda be listening to music all dat time oh! (*Changing position with discomfort.*) Was dat one a de Peace women I saw you talking to?