

BLACK GIRLS ARE DIFFERENT

by

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FADE IN:

EXT - EAST SIDE HIGH RISE - LATE DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT of an affluent Riverside address on the east side of Manhattan.

JACKIE (V.O.)
...You and Nancy broke up? Oh,
that's too bad.

EXT - EAST SIDE HIGH RISE BALCONY - SAME

The open air deck of one of the top floor apartments. It is spacious enough for there to be a table and chairs, some chaise lounges, and potted plants.

Five eastsiders -- BILL, JACKIE, DAVID, SHERYL and JARED, all in their late twenties/early thirties -- are enjoying a view overlooking the East River as the afternoon light wanes.

They're all white, except for Jackie, who is a light-skinned African-American.

Bill and Jackie are a couple, as are David and Sheryl.

Jared is the currently unattached fifth wheel of the group.

Sheryl is moving around the table, pouring white wine.

JARED
Too bad for her maybe, not me. I had to get out of that. She was just too wishy-washy.

DAVID
Man, Jared, you've got the worst luck when it comes to women.

SHERYL
It's not bad luck, he's just too demanding. If he perceives any little flaw in a girl, he backs off. It happens every time.

JARED
That's not true. I mean, sure, I've got standards. But who doesn't?

SHERYL

You call them standards, I call them excuses. You're just afraid to commit.

JARED

I'm afraid of committing to the wrong person, that's all.

BILL

So is there anyone new on the horizon?

JARED

Not yet. I was hoping maybe you guys had someone in mind.

JACKIE

I know someone. She's just in from out of town. But she's black.

Jared looks at her questioningly.

JARED

What do you mean, she's black?

JACKIE

I mean, she's black. As in, not white.

JARED

Yeah, but you say it as if you think I might have a problem with that.

JACKIE

Well, have you ever dated a black girl?

JARED

No. But not because I've got any problem with it.

JACKIE

Yeah, right. Come on, Jared. You're almost thirty. You've never been married. You've been dating in Manhattan since you were a teenager. Yet you've never once dated a black woman.

BILL

She's right, Jar. You've dated Asian girls, Latinas...

JARED

Are you insinuating I've got some prejudice against dating black women? Because you couldn't be more off the mark there. It just hasn't happened, that's all. The opportunity's never presented itself.

CHERYL

Or maybe it has and you backed off from it, like you always do. You just couldn't handle it.

JARED

You think I'm prejudiced!

SHERYL

Now I didn't say that.

JARED

It's what you mean, though, isn't it? I can't believe this!

DAVID

Take it easy, Jared. Nobody thinks you're prejudiced.

JARED

You're damn right I'm not.

BILL

Look, it's no big deal, you know. It's not your fault. Black girls are different.

Jackie and Bill share a smile as he strokes her arm.

JARED

Oh, that is just so much...!
(cuts himself off and
turns to Jackie)
Fix me up with her.

JACKIE

This girl's a real princess, Jared. You sure you can handle it?

JARED

Jackie, please. I'm Jewish. I know all about handling princesses. Okay? Just set it up for me.

CUT TO

EXT - BROWNSTONE IN THE EAST NINETIES - NIGHT

Reading the house number from a small slip of paper, Jared mounts the steps, a bouquet of flowers in his other hand. He presses the button for the doorbell and waits. Checks himself a last time. Smooths his shirt, straightens his collar, etc.

The door opens to reveal SHWA. She is tall, very dark skinned, and dressed in African tribal attire which leaves much of her body exposed. There are paintings and markings on her face and abdomen, a metal hoop in her nose, and long bizarre ornaments hanging from her over-stretched earlobes. At her side she holds a spear. Her expression betrays nothing.

Jared stares at her for a long beat. Glances at the house number again, rechecks the paper. Looks back at Shwa.

JARED

Shwa?

SHWA

Shwa.

He's not sure if she's answering affirmatively or merely repeating.

JARED

Shwa Mikumbo?

SHWA

Shwa.

She taps her chest, as if to say, "Yes, that's me."

Another beat as he absorbs this. He starts to laugh, uncomfortably, then cuts it short when she doesn't move or blink or smile.

JARED

This is a joke, right?

He looks around, expecting -- or more accurately, desperately hoping -- his friends are going to emerge from their hiding places and let him in on the gag. But no one appears, and he turns back to Shwa, who taps her chest again.

SHWA

Shwa.

It hits him now: it's not a joke. This is his date.

He offers her the flowers.

JARED

These are for you.

CUT TO

INT - TAXI CAB - NIGHT

Jared and Shwa seated in the back of a moving taxi.

Jared watches without a word as Shwa eats the flowers.

He then notices the CAB DRIVER staring at them in the rear view mirror, his brow wrinkled.

JARED

She missed lunch.

CUT TO

EXT - SUPPER AND DANCE CLUB - NIGHT

Establishing.

JARED (V.O.)

I have a reservation for two...

INT - SUPPER AND DANCE CLUB - NIGHT

Jared and Shwa face the tuxedoed MAITRE 'D.

JARED (CONT'D)

The name is Ort.

The Maitre 'D, his countenance completely deadpan, checks the book and affirms the reservation.

MAITRE 'D

Yes, sir. Your table will be ready
in just a moment. Would your
friend like to check her spear?

Jared looks to Shwa, who remains immutable.

JARED

Um, well...

He reaches hesitantly for the spear, taking hold of it in an attempt to pass it off, but Shwa's grip tightens on the implement, and she refuses to let it go.

JARED (CONT'D)

You know...I don't think so.

MAITRE 'D

Very good, sir. This way.

CUT TO

INT - SAME - AT THE TABLE

Seated now, Jared and Shwa are studying their menus.

JARED

Um...you need to...uh...

Jared hesitates, then reaches across the table and turns Shwa's menu over. She was looking at it upside down.

JARED (CONTD.)

It's nothing to be embarrassed
about. I have a touch of dyslexia
myself.

The WAITER arrives.

WAITER

Good evening. Would you like to
hear our specials?

JARED

(considering Shwa)
Do you have anything in the way
of...wild game, perhaps?

WAITER

Well, we do have a marvelous roast
venison for forty-two dollars.

(MORE)

WAITER (cont'd)
 And there's the pheasant under
 glass, which is a beautiful
 presentation...

JARED
 But nothing in the way of, say...a
 zebra steak, or anything like that.

WAITER
 No, sir.

JARED
 I see. Okay. Well. I think
 we'll just skip the salad course.
 My friend already had a rather
 large serving of greens on the way
 over here.

WAITER
 As you wish, sir.

JARED
 Maybe the pheasant is a good idea.
 A bottle of white wine, of course.
 Something full bodied in a
 chardonnay. Oh, and a scotch for
 me, as well. A very...very large
 scotch.

WAITER
 Yes, sir. Right away, sir.

JARED
 I wonder if you understand just how
 large a scotch I'm talking about.

WAITER
 I believe I do, sir. It won't be a
 moment.

JARED
 Thank you.

The Waiter takes the menus and leaves.

Jared studies Shwa, who is scrutinizing her own reflection in
 the polished surface of a bread knife.

JARED (CONT'D)
 I'll be right back.

CUT TO

INT - BILL'S AND JACKIE'S APT - NIGHT

The phone RINGS. Jackie picks it up.

JACKIE

Hello?

INT - SUPPER CLUB - ALCOVE NEAR MENS ROOM - NIGHT

Jared is on his cell phone.

JARED

You fixed me up with a bush woman?!

(INTERCUT between Jackie and Jared on the phone.)

JACKIE

Jared? Is that you?

JARED

Of course it's me! What, did you fix somebody else up with a bush woman?

JACKIE

Oh, that's right, your date with Shwa was tonight. How's it going?

JARED

How's it going? How's it going? If National Geographic had a centerfold, she'd be Miss April!

JACKIE

I told you she was a princess.

JARED

Yeah, but I was expecting a black American princess -- you know, a B.A.P., like you! Not the queen of the Zulus!

JACKIE

Well, she's a very culturally proud person.

JARED

Culturally proud? She's Tarzan's fucking mate!

JACKIE

Hey, you were the one who insisted
he could handle dating a black
woman.

JARED

She's got a spear, Jackie. A
spear!

JACKIE

Okay, so, she has a unique way of
accessorizing. Just chill out.
Black girls are different, but
they're not that different.

Bill's voice is heard OFF SCREEN:

BILL (O.S.)

Jackie, come on! It's starting!

JACKIE

Oh, hey, gotta go. Kiss-kiss.

She hangs up.

JARED

But...!

He slowly lowers the phone. Stands there hopelessly.

CUT TO

THE TABLE - LATER

Jared finishes a large scotch, clearly not his first.

He looks across the table at Shwa, who is eating her food
with her fingers. Matter-of-factly, almost delicately. But
most definitely with her fingers.

He smiles, starts to laugh. She pauses in her eating to look
at him. His laughter subsides. He studies her for a beat.

JARED

Would you care to dance?

CUT TO

THE DANCE FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Couples are slow dancing to CLASSIC AMERICAN POPULAR BAND MUSIC. They stare curiously at...

Shwa, who is leaping about in the more traditional manner of her tribe. It's very physical and expressive. And jarringly out of place. Not that she's picking up on that, or would care at all if she were.

Jared stands moving slightly in front of her. Looks to one of the staring couples.

JARED
She's with Alvin Ailey.

CUT TO

EXT - STREET OUTSIDE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Jared and Shwa exit the club.

JARED
Well, it's been a slice of heaven.
Or, given your aversion to cutlery,
a handful of it. I'll see if I
can get us a cab.

She remains on the sidewalk while Jared goes out onto the street and tries to hail a taxi.

JARED (CONT'D)
Yo! Taxi!

A cab blows by him. He groans in frustration. Looks up and down the block, which is a cross street and relatively empty and quiet. He turns back to Shwa.

JARED (CONT'D)
We might have better luck on Second
Avenue.
(then, spotting
headlights)
Wait. Here comes one, I think.

He waves, calls out, but it goes past him.

JARED (CONT'D)
There was somebody in the back.
Damn...wait. He's stopping.

Further up the block, we see the cab has pulled over to let the passenger off.

JARED (CONT'D)
Maybe I can catch him before he
pulls away.

Jared begins striding hurriedly up the street.

JARED (CONT'D)
Hey! Hold that cab!

Just then, a MUGGER steps out from behind a parked van and presses a pistol to his ear.

MUGGER
Gimme your wallet!

JARED
Oh God! Don't shoot me, please!

Jared looks fearfully up the street. Sees the cab pulling away and driving off.

MUGGER
Shut the fuck up!

JARED
Okay, okay...just...take it...

Jared reaches into his pocket and takes out his wallet. Hands it back over his shoulder with trembling fingers, as...

Shwa moves up stealthily along the parked cars as if stalking prey in the bush.

The Mugger grabs the wallet, shoves Jared to the ground, turns and takes off down the street.

JARED
He's got my wallet!

As the Mugger runs past where Shwa is crouching out of sight, she rises up and lifts her spear. As she hurls it out of frame, we WHIP PAN to...

the fleeing Mugger, with the spear embedded deep in his back. He staggers forward a few steps, gurgles and falls to the sidewalk, dead.

Jared rises from the pavement, stunned.

JARED

Oh my God!

Shwa is already standing over the fallen mugger prying the spear from his back as if from a lifeless gazelle, as Jared approaches.

JARED

Is he...is he dead? Oh man...he was...he had a gun...

Jared spies his wallet lying on the ground next to the dead Mugger's hand. He reaches down and gingerly picks it up. Looks around nervously.

JARED (CONT'D)

This could be a tad difficult to explain. Especially if that's an unlicensed spear. You know, the whole Bernhard Goetz thing, so...I think we should just...I think we should just get out of here.

She wipes the blood from the head of the spear onto the dead Mugger's pants. Then she calmly follows Jared out of frame.

CUT TO

EXT - CENTRAL PARK - NIGHT

The CLIP-CLOP OF HOOVES ON PAVEMENT as our VIEW MOVES PAST trees and lampposts. OFF SCREEN we hear:

JARED (O.S.)

Wow...I'm totally...I'm just completely overwhelmed...

ANOTHER ANGLE -- ON A HANSOM CARRIAGE

...as it moves slowly along, with Jared and Shwa sitting close together in the back.

JARED (CONT'D)

...I mean, I don't mind telling you, I was scared to death. But you -- you were just spectacular. So in command. So secure within yourself. I mean, you were confronted with a situation, and you didn't hesitate, you just responded.

(MORE)

JARED (CONT'D)

No second guessing, no torturing yourself about it afterwards. I respect that, I really do. I can't tell you how long my therapist and I have worked on my fear of confrontation. Of course, it's understandable, since I'm the child of an alcoholic parent who's lived his entire life in a bottomless pit of denial. But, you know, I have to learn, that's my father's problem, not mine...

(takes her hand in his)

Anyway, what I'm trying to say is...I think you could be really good for me. That is, if you have any positive feelings for me at all. But how could you, after that cowardly display I put on earlier? Though, you know, he did have a gun to my head, which, if you could give me any consideration at all, I'd be...

She unabashedly climbs up on top of him as the hansom cab moves off out of frame.

CUT TO

EXT - JARED'S APT BUILDING - NIGHT

Establishing. Looking up at his window.

SOUNDS OF VIOLENT LOVEMAKING are heard.

CUT TO

INT - JARED'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A completely spent and blissful Jared lies next to Shwa.

JARED

...And to think, all these years I've only used chicken fat as a condiment. Wow...

(then)

You know, I've never known passion like I felt with you tonight. It was transcendent. Transformative. I literally feel transformed. Like I've been reborn into a new life.

(MORE)

JARED (cont'd)
And I don't want to waste any of
it, not a single second. Not like
I've done before. I want to seize
the moment. I know, maybe it's too
soon, but I feel it in my gut that
this is right.

CUT TO

EXT - BALCONY - DAY

Another party at David and Sheryl's, same setting as the
earlier scene.

Sheryl wraps her arm in Jared's and leads him aside.

SHERYL
We haven't seen you in weeks. What
have you been up to?

JARED
Well, Shwa and I have been spending
a lot of time together.

SHERYL
You mean you haven't found
something wrong with her yet?

JARED
This is different. I'm worried
she's going to find something wrong
with me.

SHERYL
My, my, my. This sounds serious.
Do I hear wedding bells?

JARED
Well, I wouldn't like to jinx
anything, but...

CUT TO

EXT - A CLEAR BLUE SKY - DAY

An Air Africa jet airliner, heading for Shwa's homeland.

JARED (CONT'D)
...we are flying out next week so I
can meet her family.
(MORE)

JARED (CONT'D)
What do you think? Do you think
they'll like me?

CUT TO

EXT - AFRICAN GRASSLAND - DAY

Piercing WAR CRIES are heard as Jared comes running nude toward us a'la Cornell Wilde in *The Naked Prey*, pursued across the veldt by A NUMBER OF WARRIORS FROM SHWA'S TRIBE, some brandishing and hurling spears at him while others fire arrows in his direction.

CUT TO

EXT - A CLEAR BLUE SKY - DAY

An Air Africa jet airliner, heading the opposite direction in the frame than previously.

JARED (V.O.)
Alright, I admit, that might have
gone better...

INT - AIRLINER - JUST THEN

Jared and Shwa are sitting together in first class.

JARED (CONT'D)
...but we knew going in there were
bound to be a few speed bumps along
the way. And you know, after I
drank the blood of that wild boar,
your father really seemed to warm
up to me, don't you think? At
least he let me have my clothes
back.

(off Shwa's silence)
Hey, what's wrong, huh? What's the
matter? You've hardly touched your
antelope jerky, and your mother
made it special for you. Is it
meeting my parents? Is that what
you're worried about? Don't be.
When it comes right down to it,
they're very liberal, tolerant
people. You know, they both
supported Dr. King in the sixties.

(MORE)

JARED (CONT'D)
 I think they're going to like you
 very much. They want me to be
 happy. You'll see.

CUT TO

INT - JARED'S PARENTS' HOME - DAY

Jared's father MYRON clutches at his shirt and violently
 TEARS a piece off.

MYRON
 I have no son!

Jared sits on the couch next to Shwa, surrounded by Myron,
 Jared's mother LINDA, and Jared's sister ELAINE.

ELAINE
 Look at that. You happy now? You
 made your father tear his shirt.
 That's how heartbroken he is.

JARED
 Oh, please. He tears his shirt at
 the deli if the soup isn't hot
 enough.

ELAINE
 Selfish, that's what you are. You
 were always selfish. Even when we
 were kids.

JARED
 Dad, please. Why can't you just be
 happy for me? For us?

MYRON
 What's there to be happy about?
 I have no son!

Myron TEARS another piece of his shirt off, and Jared's
 mother gets annoyed.

LINDA
 Again with the shirt! Always with
 the shirt! I wish I never heard of
The Jazz Singer! This one, he goes
 through shirts like other guys go
 through Kleenex!

Myron goes to the liquor cabinet and pours himself a stiff
 drink as Linda turns uncomfortably back to Jared and Shwa.

LINDA (CONT'D)
So, tell me...is she Jewish?

ELAINE
Does she look Jewish? Please!

LINDA
What? They don't have Ethiopian
Jews?

JARED
Yes, Mom, they do. But Shwa's not
Ethiopian.

LINDA
Sammy Davis was Jewish, and he
wasn't Ethiopian. At least, I
don't think he was. Was he...?

JARED
Mom, stop it. She's not Jewish.

ELAINE
You always had to have all the
attention. That's all this is.
Look at me! Look at me!

JARED
Listen, Shwa and I love each other.
And all your complaining and finger
pointing, and Dad, all your
drinking and shirt tearing, isn't
going to change that.

MYRON
This is New York! We got more Jews
per capita than Tel A'Viv! You
can't throw a matzoh ball in this
town, you don't hit a single Jewish
girl wouldn't give her eye teeth to
marry a boy like my son. What am I
saying? I have no son!

LINDA
Myron, would you stop it? You've
got a son, and he's marrying a
shwartzel
(then; to Shwa)
No offense.

Shwa, as always, remains utterly implacable.

MYRON

Yeah, right. And where does he put the wedding ring? In her nose?

JARED

As a matter of fact, yes.

We hear more SHIRT TEARING off screen.

ELAINE

Where are you gonna live, have you thought about that? Huh? Just try getting in one of the better east side co-ops like you've always talked about. Go on. See what they tell you.

CUT TO

INT - CO-OP BOARD MEETING ROOM - DAY

Jared and Shwa sit before the board, TWO MEN and TWO WOMEN. Real tight-assed looking older eastsiders.

JARED

We have no pets, but we do plan on having children someday. Soon, I hope.

(smiles nervously; pats Shwa's hand)

Well, I think that's everything. You've got all our financial information. Unless you have any other questions...

The board members look at each other. Shift uncomfortably.

A FEMALE BOARD MEMBER clears her throat as a preface to speaking.

FEMALE BOARD MEMBER

Um, Mr. Ort...your fiance's style of dress, it's very...provocative. Is she in show business?

JARED

No, she's not.

CUT TO

SAME - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE on Jared's and Shwa's co-op application form as a rubber stamp SMACKS DOWN FORCEFULLY, marking it "APPROVED".

CUT TO

INT - RECEPTION HALL - DAY

Jared and Shwa stand facing each other under the huppah (the wedding canopy). A RABBI stands before them.

RABBI

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God,
King of the Universe...

Observing in grim silence on one side of the hall are Jared's parents, Mryon and Linda, his sister Elaine and her HUSBAND, and all their RELATIVES - cousins, uncles, aunts, etc.

On the opposite side, in equally grim silence, is Shwa's father, the CHIEF, wearing an expansive headdress, his WIFE, and ALL THE REST OF THEIR TRIBE, attired in revealing native garb.

RABBI (CONT'D)

...who has created joy and gladness,
bridegroom and bride, mirth and
exultation, pleasure and delight,
love, brotherhood, peace and
fellowship...

Jared's parents and Shwa's parents glance at each other with enmity. The Chief almost seems to growl through clenched teeth. All during the remainder of the Rabbi's recitation they and the other guests are all exchanging looks of dubiousness and hostility. The tension in the air is palpable.

RABBI (CONT'D)

Soon may there be heard in the
cities of Judah and in the streets
of Jerusalem, the voice of joy and
gladness, the voice of the
bridegroom and the voice of the
bride, the jubilant voice of the
bridegrooms from the canopies, and
of youths from their feasts of
song. Blessed art Thou, O Lord who
makest the bridgroom to rejoice
with the bride.

The Rabbi places a napkin wrapped glass on the floor, and Jared SMASHES it with his foot.

At this, the SHAMAN OF SHWA'S TRIBE leaps into view beside them, holding a live chicken above his head. He lifts a knife to the chicken's throat, and as he slashes...

we see Myron and Linda, sitting up front, as they are splashed with the bird's blood.

Myron rises in a rage, pointing at Shwa's father.

MYRON

Black bastard!

The Chief rises and BELLOWS back at Myron in his native tongue, and our sense is it must be an equally offensive epithet.

The two patriarchs attack each other, and as they grapple all the rest of their families rise up from their seats and begin to do battle.

FOUR OF JARED'S MALE COUSINS, who have been holding the poles that support the huppah, rip the columns free and wade into the melee, swinging wildly. The velvet canopy collapses, blocking Jared and Shwa from our view.

The Chief and his followers fight with spears and clubs and animal hide shields.

Some of the Jewish men are using canes and walking sticks as weapons, while others have grabbed carving knives and other utensils from the tisch (the festive table).

The Jewish women whip their handbags around like bolos and stab at their tribal counterparts with long and deadly sharp hat pins.

A BARTENDER huddled behind the bar is speaking frantically into a cell phone:

BARTENDER

911? We need the police here as quickly as possible! What manner of disturbance? Listen for yourself!

He holds the phone up over the bar counter, as...

WILD CRIES IN YIDDISH are heard, as well as TRIBAL WAR CRIES. It's like the third act of *Zulu*. And like the preacher in that film, the Rabbi pleads for an end to the violence.

RABBI

Please, please! I beg of you!
Adonai has made us all in his
image, to love and respect each
other!

The Shaman stabs him in the back, and the Rabbi arches forward, dead.

An instant later, the Shaman is viciously clubbed with an aluminum cane. He crumbles out of sight. And as he does, we MOVE IN on the velvet canopy as it falls away...

to reveal Jared and Shwa, still locked in their first kiss as man and wife, oblivious to the mayhem around them, as we...

FADE TO BLACK

THE END