

Perfect Vision
A Ten Minute Play

By Joan McCarty

**AREL 830-Staging the Nation: Contemporary American Drama, Its Protestations,
Portrayals and Proclamations**

Caspersen School of Graduate Studies

Summer, 2020

Characters:

Misha, 17 year old “big girl”

Anita, her mother

YeMa, grandmother to Misha, mother of Anita

All the characters are Black

Southside of Chicago, June, 2020

At Rise: Pomp and Circumstance plays. “Congratulations to the Harlan High School graduating class of 2020” is projected on the screen US. Misha enters dressed in graduation cap and gown and crosses DC—applause, cheers. Pomp and Circumstance fades slowly during her speech.

MISHA

Family members, faculty, staff, and guests, as class president, it is my duty to give the charge for the future to our honored graduates. Well class, we made it! (*Applause and cheers*) These past two weeks have been filled with activities we will never forget—the senior luncheon, the prom, the class picnic, and here we are holding our diplomas! Where do we go from here? A job, the military, trade school or college? I am here to say to everyone -- follow your wildest dreams.

But you must have faith. I had a dream school that I wanted to attend, but I almost didn’t apply because I thought I wouldn’t be accepted. My grandmother—I call her YeMa, because I couldn’t say Grandma when I was a baby, she stood over me and made me fill out the application.

(YeMa appears onstage in robe, head-tie and slippers)

YeMa

Michael Jordan said, “You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.” (*Misha and Yema say the quote in unison.*)

MISHA

And when I received my acceptance letter from Spelman College last month, (*pulls out blue envelope from inside her robe and holds it up*) I knew she was right. Dreams can come true! Thank you YeMa !

(Cheers—YeMa exits)

Your charge is to keep on marching towards your dreams! Don’t let nothing or nobody get in your way. It’s not always gonna be easy, but keep moving! Take your shot! We are the class of 2020, the class of perfect vision. Keep your eyes on the prize!

(Piano accompaniment begins)

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And now class, please stand and turn to your supporters-- your parents, your teachers, your own YeMas and join me in singing the class song for the last time we will all be together—*Oh Lovely Hour!* And after the song, turn your tassels! You are a graduate!

“Our sadness swells, as we bid our last farewell

But gladly, our cherished thoughts we will keep”

(During the singing of the song, Anita, Misha’s mother enters from upstage dressed in a robe, hair in curlers, carrying a clothes basket full of laundry. Lights dimly reveal a simple kitchen with a table, chairs, sideboard and cupboard.)

ANITA

Misha! *(music screeches to an abrupt end, screen disappears and lights full up on the kitchen)*
What the hell are you doing?

MISHA

Oh! Nothing! Just looking out the window. *(she quickly removes her cap and gown and hangs it on a clothes rack.)*

ANITA

If I catch you in that cap and gown holding that letter from Spelman one more time I’m gonna throw them and you in that garbage can over there! I mean it—snap out of it young lady!
(Notices groceries on the table) I thought I told you to put those groceries away!

MISHA

Oh, sorry! I’ll do it right now! *(begins to unpack groceries—she wipes down each item with Lysol wipes)*

ANITA

I don’t mean to be hard. I know these past months have been really tough on you—no honors assembly, no graduation, no prom, and then YeMa...

MISHA

I didn’t have a date anyway. And I don’t dance.

ANITA

You didn’t have to have a date —you kids just go and everybody just dances together. I think that’s nice. It was different in my day. Well, once you lose a few pounds, you’ll have plenty of dates. Glad we hadn’t started letting that prom dress out. We couldn’t have returned it if YeMa had done the alterations. That dress was expensive!

MISHA

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At least the school sent us our cap and gown.

ANITA

Well, we paid for it. Not much we can do with it now. Maybe your cousin can use it next year—naw, Carla's petite.

MISHA

Hey! You hit the jackpot—paper towels and toilet paper!

ANITA

I went to every *Dollar Store* on the southside to find those. (*Gently*) Misha, your grandmother loved you something fierce. She sho was looking forward to seeing you walk across that stage. Class president and the first one to go on to college! She bought that white dress when it was on sale from *Ross*—planned on being sharp that day. Instead, we ended up burying her in it.

MISHA

One day she just had a little cough...

ANITA

The next day a little fever—told us not to worry. The next thing I knew, it was the emergency room, then the ventilator--

MISHA

Couldn't go see her—had to depend on calling the nurses for updates. We couldn't even have the funeral at the church.

ANITA

Everybody would have come, but they couldn't—just ten people at a time in the funeral parlor. *Leak's and Sons* did a good job-- she looked just like herself didn't she? I liked that hat I bought for her.

MISHA

YeMa wasn't fancy.

ANITA

Well, I wanted my mother to have something special on her homegoing—that hat cost a pretty penny, and she looked beautiful in it. You wanted her to have something special too. I saw you sneaking that Tootsie Pop in the coffin before they closed it. Sixty-seven year old woman still eating candy. I guess that's where you got your sweet tooth from. (*Pause*)

MISHA

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Mama, you know the first is next week—the deadline to send in my commitment letter and deposit for Spelman.

ANITA

Misha, that issue is settled! I told you me and your daddy can't take that financial risk.

MISHA

You the one who told me I should apply!

ANITA

That was before this virus mess! I don't know if I'll even have a job next week, the way they laying folks off. Even with your scholarship *and* the loan we would have to take, we still would owe more money that we just don't have. You can go to one of the state colleges right here in Chicago that we can afford! Ain't nothing wrong with those schools. You have to stop being so selfish. *(Softer)* You don't get everything you want in this world, and the sooner you realize that, the better. Finish folding those clothes. I gotta get ready to go to work.

(Misha looks at the letter longingly; she throws it in the trash can. She begins to fold clothes. YeMa appears with Tootsie Roll Pop, fan, purse. She is in her burial outfit. Misha sees her and screams.)

MISHA

YeMa!

YeMa

Shush! You act like you just saw a ghost!

MISHA

YeMa, is that you?

YeMa

Who else would be wearing this crazy-ass hat? Imma get yo mama for this! *(removes hat)*

Misha hugs her.

Now I can't stay long. What you been up to 'sides moping?

MISHA

Nothing.

YeMa

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You young, girl! You should be having some fun! Teach me the latest dance—what yawl call it—the Rebel?

MISHA

The Renegade?

YeMa

Yes—that’s it (*YeMa makes a bad attempt at it. Misha just looks, amused.*) What about that house dancing? Or stepping? (*They begin a weak stepping routine*) Oh chile, you ain’t no fun! But like I say—can’t stay long. I got to get back to my classes.

MISHA

They got classes in heaven?

YeMa

Yep—lots of ‘em. You ain’t the only one who wanna get educated! (*Phone buzzes in her purse. She quickly reads a message and starts texting.*)

MISHA

You texting now?

YeMa

Yep—"How to Text" was my first class. Just gotta tell ‘em to start the spin class without me. I’ll be back up there in a minute.

MISHA

What kinda classes you taking?

YeMa

Oh you don’t wanna know—it ain’t none of them ACT SAT prep classes. You wouldn’t be interested. Girl, ask too many questions—you get answers you don’t wanna hear.

MISHA

Yes, I would. Come on! What’s the name of your class?

YeMa

“All the Technical Things You Always Wanted to Know that Your Grandchildren Were Too Busy to Teach You-101” *Pause*—Section 2; the first one filled up like that! (*snaps fingers*)

MISHA

Aw, YeMa, I’m sorry. I just got so busy with my classes, homework, applications...

YeMa

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Girl, I know! I didn't come down here to fuss! I come to find out about this Spelman business.

MISHA

Oh, I'm not going there. I'm gonna go to one of the local colleges here in Chicago.

YeMa

That what you want to do?

MISHA

Well, we can't afford Spelman, and I don't want to be selfish.

YeMa

Misha, you too nice. What you know about that school?

MISHA

Well, it's a Historically Black school for women, founded in 1881.

(Slides begin—photos of Spelman College—buildings, older graduation photos, students from the 1920's 30, etc. The school song plays softly—"Spelman Thy Name We Praise")

YeMa

Oh yes, child. A school built to help educate Black women coming out of slavery right down there in Atlanta. It wasn't easy, but the school continued to grow, and the women kept coming, kept serving the community. Today it turns out teachers, doctors, lawyers, artists-

MISHA

Oh, I love the arts!

YeMa

Well, they got a wonderful glee club, and they got a great theater department-you gotta see their plays, they produce all kinds of visual art work , they even making films, they have a dance major now...

MISHA

Oh, I can't dance

YeMa

You can and you should—celebrate your body, the world and your spirit in dance. *(Pulls tambourine from her purse and shakes it)* Make a joyful noise! There is a time and season for everything--didn't you learn that in Sunday school?

MISHA

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Ecclesiastics.

YeMa

That's right. Oh, I almost forgot. Here's today's mail.

MISHA

What, you moonlighting at the Post Office now?

YeMa

I have all my needs and wants met. I don't have to work. Just look at the mail, smarty pants!

MISHA

Just bills.

Commented [jfm1]:

YeMa

Look closer.

MISHA

A letter from Supreme Life Insurance. What is this?

YeMa

I did two important things on the day you were born. I prayed to God that you would be a healthy, kind, beautiful girl who cared about her family, people and her community. God granted me that! Then I went to the insurance company and opened up a college fund to be paid to you upon my death. That's the first installment. You'll get that amount every year for four years. Now let me make this clear—this money is for school. Don't be spending it on no red bottoms, foot long eyelashes, or fake hair down your back—school—do you hear me?

MISHA

Yes mam. YeMa, thank you so much—I love you so much!

Mama say I should major in something practical so that I can get a job. She say graduate in May, be sitting at your desk in June.

YeMa

Well, when your mama get accepted into the Number One Black College in America, let her do that. This is *your* shot. Oh, and the graduations are the best. (*Slides of the graduations*) On graduation weekend, the current grads gather on the oval on campus dressed in their caps and gowns. And the alums, they come back all dressed in white. And they march under this arch according to the oldest class first—they be walking with canes, walkers and wheel chairs, but

they be there. Then after all the alums march through, the graduates, two at a time, hand- in-hand walk under the arch into the arms of their Spelman sisters. Oh, it's a beautiful school. 8

MISHA

Do they have a class in heaven about Spelman?

YeMa

Yeah, but I ain't have a chance to take it yet.

MISHA

How you know so much?

YeMa

Google. *(pulls out phone, scrolls through Spelman images; we see them on the screen)*

MISHA

What does that pose mean—the one with the arm and the hand up?

YeMa

I don't know—couldn't find anything about that on Twitter. *(Anita enters wearing work clothes)*
(To Misha) Don't worry, only you can see and hear me.

ANITA

Well, I gotta get going! We just got a shipment in of water, bread and hand sanitizer, so it's gonna be a madhouse in the store today. Oh, I forgot to tell you—I made your favorite stew today—yep, YeMa's recipe. I think I did pretty good for my first time.

(YeMa smiles and walks to the stove and lifts the pot top to taste.)

I know you disappointed about Spelman, but your grandmother said you gotta be smart about money. She taught me everything I know. *(YeMa grimaces at the taste of the stew)*

YeMa

I taught you everything you know, but I ain't teach you everything I know. *(Pulls out seasonings from her purse, salt, prepper, hot sauce, etc.—stirs stew)*

ANITA

Yeah, I been thinking about you and college. If you go to Chicago State—that's just a few blocks from here—you could walk there and back. You could get your exercise and your education at the same time! No freshman fifteen for you! *(Looks at bills)*

YeMa

Jesus, be a fence!

MISHA

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Mama, if somehow I got the money to pay the extra fees and stuff at Spelman, could I go?

ANITA

You plan on robbing a bank? If so, we could use some of that money to pay these bills.

MISHA

No...

ANITA

Well if we win the lottery or some miracle from heaven drops down to earth, sure you can go. You got As in math, what are the odds of that? *(YeMa and Misha smile at each other.)*

MISHA

Don't forget your mask, mama.

ANITA

Oh yes, thanks sweetie. *(Anita exits)*

YeMa

You know she love you. She just crazy—takes after her daddy's side of the family.

Well, baby girl, it's up to you. Go to any college you want—just bring me a diploma in 2024! Oh, I can't wait—I'm pulling my outfit together right now! It's gonna be the best graduation ever! Just remember the rules I taught you.

MISHA

Oh, I got 'em wrote down in my journal. *(she retrieves a small bound journal)*

1. Remember the Golden Rule.
2. Keep your dress down and your panties up.
3. Don't never let a man know about all the money you have—keep you a stash, cuz you never know...

YeMa

Alright, alright, but what's the most important rule?

MISHA and YeMa

Lift as you climb! We only rise as high as the lowest among us! *(Misha laughs)* Gotcha! *(YeMa smiles and begins to exit.)*

MISHA

YeMa! Will I see you again? Can't you stay a little longer?

YeMa

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I'm always here—just call my name. (*Misha begins to tear up*) Or you can just follow me— (*extends her arms beckoning; Misha stiffens*) On Instagram! Got you!

MISHA

YeMa, you wrong! (pause) That graduation in 2024 won't be the best. This one—2020 is the best. (*They hug*) But I still don't know what to do—should I spend this money for Spelman or stay here and help with bills? That money could pay the mortgage for a while. Then Mama and Daddy wouldn't have to work so hard. I don't know—some of those girls down there are brilliant—maybe I won't make it at Spelman. Those girls been everywhere--Paris, London, places in Africa for vacations—I ain't never even been on a plane! (*YeMa places graduation cap on Misha's head.*)

YeMa

The class of 2020—perfect vision—you'll figure it out—you smart! Now you not gonna make me miss my next class—I gotta go!

MISHA

What's your next class?

YeMa

It's on social meddling!

MISHA

You mean social media!

YeMa

That's what I said! Yes, I gotta go work on my *Don't Rush Challenge!*

YeMa throws kiss and exits; Misha looks at garbage can, takes letter out and sits at table thinking. YeMa appears on the screen looking. Misha takes pen from the table and pauses, then signs the letter. She turns her tassel.

*Don't Rush Challenge music begins; Misha looks at check—YeMa begins the transformative dance morphing into **Yemaya**, the African Queen Mother.*

Misha does the Renegade across the floor—a dance of celebration with YeMa looking and dancing together. Misha finishes with the special Spelman pose and freezes.

YeMa sucks on the Tootsie Pop and smiles while dancing and winks to audience, breaking the fourth wall.

Lights fade to black.