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Losing Isaiah

By Naomi Foner

You ain't leaving
that baby here...
not hollering like
that, you ain't.
Yo, girl! Hey, baby!
Come on over here
and get warm.
Come on, now.
We gonna trade you
some good shit!
Come on, you can have
a little bit of this.
Come on, now.
You know, we know
what you need.
Come on, baby.
Okay, Isaiah.
There you go, okay? Shh.
I'll be right back, okay?
That's right.
Okay, okay.
Okay, there you go.
Okay.
Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.
I'm telling you, man,
the Bulls are going to repeat.
Yeah, yeah, you said the same
thing after the '85 Bears.
Ain't gonna happen.
The Knicks have got Pat Riley,
and he's going to make
Patrick Ewing play some ball.
Hey, you got
B.J. coming off
the bench, shooting a three.
I'm thinking about coming out of
retirement and playing myself.
Yeah, I heard that.
I know one thing...
I can stop Ewing.
I just have to deal
with Oakley's muscle
underneath the board.
I-I used to play

some great defense.
They used to call me "The Wall."
Yeah... wall-eyed Wally.
Yeah, Oakley under the boards,
my butt.
M.J. and Scottie'll
take care of the Knicks.
Pippen's bad.
The Knicks are playing
some mean D.
Hey, did you see what Jordan did
to that defense last night?
That's what
I'm talking about!
- Swoosh!
- I wouldn't trade defense...
Hey, hey, you got B.J.
Coming off...
Holy shit!
Stop the blade!
Stop the blade! Stop it!
What's he been given?
Two cc's epinephrine, I.M.
- Let's get him to the warmer.
- It's over there!
Let's roll! Get out of the way...
baby coming!
All right.
Okay, let's get
some new vitals on him.
What do we got here?
I need a half-normal saline
with glucose drip,
and get me a respirator.
- Hold it, hold it.
- Wait.
Where's the IV?
- No IV established?
- No.
- Why not?
- Not ready to get a line in.
Okay, 24-gauge ampule.
I'll do it myself.
Go ahead, hold that, yeah.

Let me have a blood gas.
He's a subdermal hematoma,
Mrs. Lanelli.
He's five months old.
You didn't think he might
roll off that top bunk?
He never did it before.
Well, now you know
it's possible.
He's not Peter Pan.
He can't fly.
We need you.
You're going to have
to wait here
until the x rays get back.
At least she didn't dump him
in a pot of boiling water, huh?
Yeah, she did that last month...
said his bath was too hot.
What have we got?
This one was found
in a dumpster.
Jesus.
- Social Services?
- Mm-hmm?
He's not breathing on his own.
Can you sign off?
Sign off?
Yeah. No extraordinary measures.
Why don't we just dump him back
in the garbage?
All right, lady...
play God.
Anyone got the paperwork
on Mr. Romano?
It's tachycardia.
BP's down.
Respiratory's erratic.
- BP up.
- It looks like a brain bleed.
Keep the oxygen up.
This infant's having a seizure.
Uh, doctor!
Phenobarbital, stat.

Let's get him up to NICU.
What'd I tell you?
Hold the elevator!
Damn it,
hold that elevator!
Oh, my God!
Oh, my God, my baby! My baby!
- Shut up, ho!
- Where's my baby!
Had enough racket around here!
Police! Dead babies!
Get out of here!
I said get out my alley!
Get!
My baby...
I know all the tubes and wires
are frightening,
but you can hold him.
Okay.
Ain't this
a cute baby?
Oh, there you go.
- Excuse me, Margaret.
- Shh. What?
That baby you asked about
last round?
- Yeah?
- He's in NICU.
- Oh. Excuse me.
- Thank you.
Just talk to him.
He'll be all right.
His prints
were on the computer.
He was born at Cook County
three days ago.
Mother and baby
both crack-addicted.

He's over there:

Isaiah Richards.
Huh.
Nurse Forgen to East Wing Two.
Isaiah.

"And he shall be called
wonderful."

Dr. Parks, 6214.

Dr. Parks, 6214.

- Look at her.

- Yeah.

- Just asking for it.

- Yeah.

Arrest her. The little thief.

Where's the party?

Hey...

Come on.

Pay the nice man.

Get off me.

One, two, three.

Crazy. Beautiful. Maybe.

Come on...

Oh, look what we got here.

Now, see what you
made me do?

You have to use every dish in
the house, Charick Lewin-sky?

Ja, I do, but I'll clean up.

I know you will.

Is she home?

Yeah, she's in her room,
on the phone, door closed,
waiting for you to tell her
she has a French quiz
and a history paper
due tomorrow.

You have a French quiz
and a history paper
due tomorrow.

Just a minute.

I'm on the phone.

That's easy to fix.

Get off it.

Will you please get
out of my room
so I can study?

Oh, I think you might
want to phrase that
a little differently, honey.

Can I call you back?
My mother's being a jerk.
Mom, sit down,
make yourself comfortable.
Thank you.
This is gone if you don't
do well on the exam tomorrow.
...and hairline fractures
of the clavicle and cranium.
Burns and old scarring.
Maggie, what are you,
a social worker
or a war correspondent?
War correspondent.
Recommend foster care to avoid
further trauma to this child.
The old scar tissue
indicates...
Uh, would you say
"multiple lacerations
to the upper torso"
one more time, please?
No.
Patient continues
to have trauma...
"Hairline fracture."
- No. No.
- Hmm?
"Burns and old scarring"?
No.
We continue to explore...
Charlie... would you
scratch my back?
No.
Next case, B-14-20.
Child shows signs
of forced responsiveness
to his environment...
Yeah?
Cranial contusion.
How did you get this number?
I could meet you somewhere...
anywhere.
Show you the x rays.

Uh, oh, d-don't you have
a st-staff meeting tonight?
It's canceled.
Uh, Margaret, I can't, um...
I got a whole pile
of screwed-up wirings
got to be worked out
by tomorrow.
Oh, well.
There's a surgeon here
who's just dying to show me
some new suture-tying
techniques.
Let's go!
Take all your belongings!
Let's go!
Come on, come on!
Get off me!
Move it, move it!
Get out the way!
Move!
Get off me!
Move it! Move it!
Your names are on your beds.
You'll be expected to keep
your area clean at all times.
Now, there are those of you
who elected this program
to cut your time.
Well, if that's why you're here,
you better turn around
and get back on that bus,
because you won't last a day.
This is work... hard work.
One mistake... one...
and you're out on your
base-head, pill-popping,
alcoholic asses,
back in the general population
quicker than you can
blink your eyes.
Understand?
I don't know.
What do you want me to say, hmm?

I mean,
I've only been recommending
permanent foster care
for that child
for four years now.
No, no, go ahead...
send her back if that's
what the courts want.
But listen, you tell that
son-of-a-bitch judge...
that if her father
finally kills her,
not to come weeping to me.
... nothing says
I would wish it to be.
That's my grandma's song.
Yeah, she would've liked you.
You're a little fighter,
aren't you, huh?
Beans, beets, rice.
Hey, Ethel.
- There you go.
- Oh, let's see.
Give me just some rice
and veggies.
- Rice and veggies.
- Thanks.
You've been a social worker
for what, 15 years?
Mm-hmm.
Let's say a nice,
well-meaning white lady
came into your office
and told you
she was thinking of taking
a black crack baby home,
thinking she could save it.
What would you say?
Not to.
It's insane, Margaret.
A black crack baby...
it's insane.
There's nothing wrong with him.
Well, he could have problems

that won't show up for years.
So could we.
Look, Charlie,
you haven't seen him.
I mean, there's something
so great about him.
He has... he has this spirit.
You can see it in his eyes.
And he has nothing.
He's so all alone.
You're lying,
you know you're lying.
Is you for real?
Bullshit.
You-you really think your kids
don't know
that you turning tricks?
What are they, retarded?
Is anybody talking to you?
Where your kids think
you is right now...
on a Carnival cruise
or some shit?
Shut up, okay?
Like your kids
don't know
what you be doing
late at night?
Shut up, okay? Just shut up.
She just trying to help
your lying butt... that's all.
Yeah, I'm just trying to help
your lying ass.
Shh, shh.
Whoa, yo!
It don't do no good
to beat on each other
about shit we did when we was
bugging and drugging.
Huh?
Now, come on,
let's look at this thing
from a positive place.
What kind of mother

would you like to be?
One your kids can
depend on coming up?
Sade?
I don't have nothing to say.
See?
Khaila, what about your kids?
I ain't got no kids.
Here, look where you are.
- I'll park the car.
- Okay.
That always happens, though.
Look.
Oh, my God, Mom.
Here he is.
He's so small.
Mm-hmm.
C-Can I call you back? Bye.
Oh...
How do you get clothes
that small?
Leprechauns.
This is your sister,
little guy.
Shh, shh...
Can I hold him?
Yes.
Watch his head.
What do I do?
Just rock him a little bit,
but-but don't look
right in his face, okay?
Crack babies sometimes
have trouble with that.
Hey there, small stuff.
That's what your daddy
used to call you.
Oh... coochie coochie coo.
He doesn't like me.
It's not that, Hannah.
Of course he likes you.
It's not that.
Where are you going?
I told Jenny I'd come over.

You're not upset,
are you, Hannah?

No.

Well, why don't you bring
her back to see the baby?

I don't think so.

Why not?

Well, be home by 5:00.

Bye.

Oh, I forgot the formula.

Shh, shh, shh.

Shh...

What'd we learn today, buddy?

You keep your...

- Eye... eye on the ball!

- That's right, and then,
when you swing the bat,
you got to swing...

- Level!

- Level, level, right.

- Level!

- And then what do you do
when you hit the ball?

What do you got to do?

You got to...

- Run like crazy!

- Run like crazy!

You run to first base, and
then he goes to second base.

- Second base!

- Then he goes to third base.

- Then he goes to third base.

- Then he slides
all the way home!

And then he goes
all the way home!

Right.

Ooh, you giving your daddy's
hair a cream rinse?

- I hit a home run! Wham!

- Where are you going?

To Carrie's.

No, no, no, no,
wait a minute now.

Mom...

No, listen,

I got this letter,
and I want to read it
to you... listen.

"It is accordingly
"therefore ordered
that Isaiah Richards,
- a minor..."

- That's me!

"Shall be, to all
"legal intents and purposes,
the child of Charles
and Margaret Lewin."

Poor kid... you're stuck
with them now.

Very funny.

No, wait, Hannah, don't go.

Don't go. We want to celebrate.

Mom, I can't.

- Yes, you...

- Not tonight.

Bye, kiddo.

Kiddo! Kiddo! Kiddo! Kiddo!

Hannah...

I'll call.

Kiddo, kiddo! Kiddo!

You know, just because
she's a teenager...

Kiddo, kiddo, kiddo, kiddo...

Ooh.

Do you want to go out?

Oh, you know he can't sit still
in a restaurant.

Take this. Ugh!

All right, let's call out
for a pizza.

Pizza, pizza, pizza.

We'll get him to bed early,
then, uh, you and I can...

- What shape is a pizza?

- A big bowl like this!

What's that called?

- Mommy.

- Excuse me.
Sorry.
Glad you made it.
You see who it is up there?
It's Hannah.
Mommy, look!
Isaiah, shh.
Hannah! Hannah!
Boo!
No!
No! No!
Just stop it.
Yeah!
Why did you even bring him?
It was my play.
You knew he would do
something like this.
He always does.
Yes, and you know
he cannot help it.
Hey!
Hannah, he's...
he ju... Oh...
You know he adores you.
Just try not to be so angry.
I'm not angry!
Yes, you are,
and it's okay.
Oh, please.
He was so proud of you...
jumping up and down,
calling out your name.
Yeah, I know.
I heard him.
And so did everybody else.
I just wanted Mom to see it.
Hannah?
What?
Can I tell you something?
Yeah, whatever, Mom.
When I heard you sing tonight...
I thought, "There's Hannah,
doing something
I can't begin to do."

Right.

It gave me such pleasure.

Good morning!

Good morning.

What you doing?

Jumping.

Boy, your mama ain't teach you
to knock

before you just come
barging in somebody's room?

This is my room.

Aunt Joe said.

We just lending it to you.

No, you just renting it.

You better get your little
skinny self dressed

if you're going to
go to school today.

Daycare.

Well, you got to be dressed
for daycare, too.

They ain't gonna take you
in no pajamas.

Josette's in the bathroom.

Don't I know it.

Josie, let's go.

You better wake up Mama, Amir.

I ain't taking you
to no daycare.

Come on, Amir.

I'll take you.

Amir!

Where's my sugar?

Thank you. Go.

- Khaila.

- Hey.

Excuse me.

Got your living situation
straightened out?

Mm-hmm.

Job?

I'd appreciate an answer.

I got a room.

You ever had a room

to yourself before?
Then stop complaining.
Let's get to work.
You been reading?
Some.
Some ain't good enough.
Well, the book is dumb.
How you know
if you ain't been reading it?
'Cause I am reading it.
Good.
So, tell me...
what's been happening with
George...
and Katherine?
Kath-er-ine done gone
and got herself knocked up.
She happy?
Don't say.
Why you doing this, Khaila?
Oh, we're gonna share now?
You're wasting our time here.
Let's just forget about it,
'cause it's useless
unless you want to do it.
I already know how to read.
Well, I don't want
to read this bullshit.
Then why you busting my ass?
Look, I have my lunch
sitting at home waiting on me.
"Kath-er-ine visits the clinic.
"The doctor tells her
"to be careful
about what she eat.
"It can help...
"her...
"baby... grow strong.
"She must drink lots of milk
and eat green
"ve-ge-ta-bles if she want
to be a good mother.
The doctor..."
Khaila, what's the matter?

"...tells her
not to drink any
"al-co-hol
or take any me-di-cine.
"It could harm her...
"baby.
She should get lots of sleep."
Khaila?
Look at me.
What's wrong?
I threw him away.
My baby.
Threw him in the garbage can.
I killed him.
Killed him.
Oh, God.
Oh, my God.
You got a book about that?
Hey, how you doing?
Hi.
Oh.
Hello?!
Amir?!
Josie?!
Oh, my...
What happened?
They gone in the ambulance.
She was bleeding
all over the bed.
She wouldn't move.
I cooked supper,
and I went to call her,
but she wouldn't move.
Doctor say she lost a baby.
What baby?
Hey, little man.
You okay?
Y'all hungry?
- Yeah.
- Yeah.
Whoo! Whoo, yeah.
Can I give you
a hand there?
No, I got it.

You sure? I got a little cousin
about that age.
You know, they can do damage
to your back.
I said I got it.
Okay.
Lord, boy, you heavy.
Mama...
It's okay. Go back to sleep.
I'm going to stay
with you tonight.
Pizza.
You gonna have your pizza.
I'm sor...
Eddie Hughes.
You know, I didn't
meet you before.
I got to get back inside.
To your kids?
They ain't my kids,
and why you got to be lurking
up here on my floor?
I'm not lurking.
I'm just having a smoke.
Well, smoke somewhere else,
goddamn it.
I'm a working man on vacation...
up from Tampa.
You ever been to Tampa?
Oh, this look like
a vacation spot to you?
Actually, my brother lives here.
Yeah, you know,
he don't like to smoke, so...
I'm just visiting him.
We're, uh...
we're in the music business.
Mm-hmm.
I was just, uh...
working on a song about, uh...
concrete.
Check it out.
I got to work
on the melody a little bit.

I hope you good
at something else.
- Hello, Mama.
- Uh, Khaila.
Uh, there's some leftover pasta
in the fridge...
Bye, Khaila. So long, sweetpea.
And, uh, laundry needs
to go in the dryer.
I'm out the door, honey.
Okay.
Give me a kiss. Mwa!
Oh, I might be
a few minutes late tonight,
but you can stay, huh?
Bye, girls.
The Fredericks residence.
Khaila?
Yeah?
It's Gussie.
Can we meet somewhere?
He ain't dead?
My baby ain't dead?
Well, now, where is he?
In the city,
living with a family in DePaul.
Well...
Well, I got to see him.
Slow down, Khaila.
There are a lot of issues
involved here.
He's been legally adopted.
So? I got to see my baby,
Gussie.
Where is he?
Okay, we're going to work
on that,
but it's going
to take some time.
- No. Come on, let's go.
- I'm on your side.
I'm going to help you,
but it's going
- No, no, no, no, no.

- To take some time,
and you're going to have
to be patient, Khaila.
I can't be patient.

- Listen.

- I need to see my baby.
Listen to me,
listen to me, Khaila.
Don't let
everything you worked
so hard for fall apart.
Hey,
what are you doing in here?
Nothing.
Looking for Gussie.
Oh, she's in the hall.
Thanks.

- I'll call you tonight.

- Yeah.

Pop the hood.
See you, buddy.

- Bye.

- I'll call you tonight.

- Bye, Daddy, bye, Daddy.

- Have a good trip.
Take your ticket.
Take me, please.
You wouldn't like it, sweetie.
It's in a big city with...
it smells,
in a big room
with men with no hair.
Bye, Daddy.
Bye, Daddy.
Sorry.
Oh, don't be sad.
Daddy will be back
in two days.
Look who's here.
Aw... two days.
You know what two is?
One, two... that's not long.
Besides, Heidi's going
to take you to the park now.

Then after the park,
you're going to take a nap,
and drink your apple juice.
Use your sipper cup.
And Mama's going
to come home
right after work like
I always do, okay?
Good night.
Uh-huh, and you're going
to draw me a picture?
Yes.
- Of what? Of an airplane?
- Yes.
With two wings,
flying up in the sky.
- Up in the sky!
- Up in the sky, yeah.
How many wings
does an airplane have?
Two.
Two! How many hands
does Isaiah have?
Two.
And how many eyes
does Isaiah have?
Two.
And how many kisses
is Mama going to get?
Two.
Oh, you're my boy.
Okay, have fun at the park.
I want to race.
Okay. Bye-bye, honey.
Bye, Mommy.
W-W-W-W-Whee!
Okay, now, guess
where we're going?
Where?
To the park.
What are you going to go on
when you go in there first, huh?
The slide?
Ah, push.

Ready? One, two, three, up.
Good boy. Okay.
Heidi, over here.
How you doing?
Good.
So, can you come?
I don't know.
I'm pretty tired.
So, can you get off?
I don't know.
They're supposed to go out.
Hello, Isaiah.
I get so nervous.
Hi.
Hello?
Hello?
Miss Richards.
You're late.
I'm sorry.
Gussie said
you was a real good lawyer.
Yeah. Now, she's explained
some of this to me,
but there's still
a lot of holes here.
She tells me you'd like to
reinstate your parental rights.
You gave your child
up for adoption.
Now you want him back.
No, I never gave my child up
for no adoption.
You left him in an alley.
You abandoned him
and made no effort
to find him again.
Legally, that's the same thing.
Well, that's 'cause
I thought he was dead.
No one ever sent you any letters
informing you
of his whereabouts?
Nope.
Or of the Lewins'

intent to adopt him?

Mm-mmm.

Now, Miss Richards,

you know

you couldn't read very well

before you went into

the rehab program.

You sure you didn't throw

away any official papers?

No. I ain't never got no papers.

Not even in jail?

If I would've got some papers

like that,

don't you think

I would've remembered?

You don't like me all that much,

do you?

I don't like what put you in

this situation, Miss Richards.

How do I know that when

I help you get your boy back,

you're not going to go back

to smoking rock

and leave him again?

'Cause I'm telling you

I'm through with all that.

Oh, well,

that's what you all say.

You ain't got

to talk down to me.

I can pay.

There's no fee involved here.

We take on cases

that are socially relevant.

If we win them,

they set legal precedent.

Your case fits that profile.

The fee's taken care of

by donations.

It's going to be tough.

The family he's with is white,

they treated him well.

They'll fight this.

But I'm his mother.

Well, I'm sure that white woman
feels fairly strongly
that she is,
and there are a lot of people
who'll agree with her.
Mommy, pussycat.
The owl and the pussycat...
Went to sea.
In a beautiful pea-green...
Boat.
They took some...
Honey.
And plenty of...
Money.
Wrapped up
in a five-pound... note.
Night-night, sweet boy.
Charlie?
Margaret, hello.
She wants him back.
What?
Who? Who wants him back?
I don't know.
We got a letter
from some legal service.
She never signed away
her rights.
She's going to challenge
the adoption.
Where did she come from?
What are we going to do?
Listen, sweetheart,
it-it's going to be all right.
No, it's not.
Mommy, I want Daddy.
Oh...
Mommy, I want Daddy.
Daddy's not home.
I want Daddy.
So do I.
I want him to be here.
I want Daddy.
She's claiming she never
received any notice

to terminate
parental rights.
That can't be.
You handled that yourself,
right?
Look, this is what I do
for a living.
I followed every procedure...
the newspaper notifications,
computer checks of prisons,
the welfare rolls...
I mean, we even hired
a-a private detective
with our own money
to look for relatives,
but you can't find
somebody on the street
if they don't want to be found.
And what does it matter, anyway?
The adoption is final...
it can't be reversed.
Oh, I'm afraid it can.
The court can vacate a judgment
if it was entered
into by default,
and it will vacate
if there's a child involved.
She's going to have a right
to be heard.
We're talking about a woman
who is a junkie,
who put her kid
in a garbage can.
Someone who should be arrested,
not given back
her parental rights.
Well, that's what
you'll have to prove.
Look, I know you came to me
because you thought
it would help
to have a black attorney,
but understand this is
a difficult situation.

Is that a polite way
of saying no?
I said I'd think
about it, and I will.
This isn't a simple issue.
You might raise a black child
with the best intentions
in the world, colorblind,
but in the end,
the world is still out there.
He needs to know who he is.
A child should be
with his parents.
We agree there.
Whoo... pretty.
Again. More bubbles.
More bubbles, Hannah.
More!
More, more!
Come on, Isaiah,
we've been doing this all day.
More bubbles, Hannah!
Bubbles!
Isaiah.
- Give me that.
- Isaiah.
Isaiah, look at our hands.
What's different about them?
My hand's smaller.
Bubbles, bubbles!
Hannah, come set the table
for dinner.
Stop switching channels.
I want to see some cartoons.
Give me that thing, boy.
Oh, hey.
Where's your mama?
Out.
Girl, is you crazy?
You don't just let some strange
man come walking up in here.
He gave us all this TV stuff.
Hey, little man, help me
put all these tools away

and clean this mess up,
and I'll show you
how to work
the video games, okay?
Yeah.
Help him put
all them tools away,
so he can get on out of here.
Look, I didn't mean nothing
by all this.
I just thought the kids
would like it.
Mmm.
Hey, there's a Scooby- Doo
marathon on tonight.
Yeah...!
Well, you can Scooby-Doo
your butt on out of here.
Let's go.
Here.
No, no, you keep that,
all right?
Remember what I said:
Honorary cable man.
See you later.
Don't wait up for me.
Why are you
so mean to him?
He act kind of stupid,
but he's nice.
Yeah, real stupid...
and a little too nice.
Hey, pretty lady, how you doing?
Why don't you let me
carry that for you?
I'm doing just
fine by myself.
Oh, come on, I got it.
Now, see, look, now,
was that so hard? Come on.
There you go.
Let me ask you something.
What did I do
that was so bad?

You ain't had no business
walking in on them kids
like that.
You didn't like my singing
much either, right?
What's happening?
So, what kind of
music do you like?
None of your business.
Bet you like rap, right?
Dr. Dre, Salt & Pepa, right?
See, that's why
I can't get no gigs.
These youngsters today...
they don't even know
what a bass guitar
sounds like.
You know what the key
to playing bass is?
Nope... and I really don't care.
Thank you.
Big hands.
See that?
That's pitiful.
I like you.
You don't know nothing about me.
Well, do me a favor...
tell me something.
I don't like
fast-talking brothers
who get up in my face.
Well, there you go.
I like pretty ladies
that don't like
fast-talking brothers
who get up in their face.
Later.
All right.
Sorry. Had to bring her.
Miss Fredericks is going to
kill me if she find out.
I don't think the child
will tell her.
How much does this place cost?

It's \$300 a month.
You crazy? I can't
afford no \$300 a month.
Well, how much
can you afford?
I don't know. Maybe \$150.
That way.
If I stop saving.
Well, we'll get the rest
taken care of
by Aid to Dependent Children.
I ain't got no
dependent children.
Oh, you will.
All right, get it cleaned up,
find some furniture,
and fix the window.
For what?
It's just gonna get broke again.
Somebody gonna look in here
and see what I got and take it.
Fix it so the sun can shine in,
so you can look out,
watch your boy play
in the courtyard.
And get rid of your boyfriend.
I ain't got no boyfriend.
Eddie Hughes?
Oh, so, you spying on me now?
It's part of my job.
They're going to try
and make you look
like the Devil in court.
There can't be anything
you do to help them.
He's married.
He ain't married.
You asked him?
You jealous?
Don't flatter yourself.
This goes way beyond you.
Black babies belong
with black mothers.
I'm not going to let you

do anything to mess that up.
Now, you break it off
with this guy,
or I drop the case.
This is your first place,
isn't it?
Yeah.
Welcome home.
I'm leaving.
Not without paying
for the rest of the time
you owe, you ain't.
Why Khaila gotta go, Mom?
Shut up, boy. My head hurts.
I don't want her to go.
Don't nobody care
what you want!
Now go on out of here!
Tell Josette to comb the naps
out your head!
Do something. Go!
What you looking at?
It ain't right for you
to talk to him like that.
Well, when you get your own kid,
you talk to him the way
you want to talk to him.
This kid here is mine... mine!
Just take your funky ass
outta here if you going!
Bye.
Go on. Leave!
Hello, sweetheart.
How'd you find me?
Ah. Shorty Big-head.
Gave him a pack
of Now & Laters...
he gave you up like that.
Hi, Khaila.
Hi.
Come on, guys.
Ooh, your place is nice.
Yeah. All this furniture.
Why didn't you tell me

you were moving?
You know, I would've helped
or something.
This your boy's?
Mm-hmm.
Where he at?
I told you that
a hundred times already.
Put that stuff down.
That ain't yours.
Check it out.
I got four tickets
to the James Brown concert
tonight.
I know you think my music
is older than dirt,
but I'm going
to show you that
it can still be funky.
Hey!
Dirt... that's something
you should know a lot about.
Kids, sit tight.
Would you...
outside, please?
Humor me.
Give me that.
You want to tell me
something?
Uh-uh. Maybe you ought
to tell me something.
Okay. What do you
want to know?
Huh?
Maybe about... your wife?
Okay.
We're separated... all right?
We don't even talk.
Oh, you on vacation
from that, too?
Khaila...
you know,
it's a whole big mess, and...
I didn't want to get into...

But you still married.
It don't mean nothing.
Oh, it don't?
Don't mean nothing?
Don't mean nothing
at all, huh?
I'm not trying to run a game
on you, Khaila.
Somebody is always
trying to run a game on me.
You ain't no different.
Walking around here
carrying groceries,
singing little silly songs
and shit.
You ain't nothing.
You just like every other
sorry ass man I ever knew...
bullshit!
Stay the hell away from me,
and stay away from them kids!
Shit.
You're letting me wear
these pearls?
Your pearls.
Just stay calm.
He's going to try his best
to get a rise out of you
any way he can.
That will only work
to his advantage.
Who's that?
Khaila.
So...
don't worry about it.
Just... stay with it, okay?
All right?
And how long have you
been clean, Miss Richards?
Two years and one month.
And what made you stop?
Isaiah.
Could you please speak up,
Miss Richards?

Isaiah.
What about Isaiah?
How I left him.
Left him where, Miss Richards?
I just needed to get me a hit...
so bad.
He was crying.
He was screaming.
Like he was calling my name.
And that's what made you stop?
Yes.
I wanted to hear my baby.
I didn't want no drugs
taking me out of my head.
I wanted to fe...
feel that pain.
I didn't want nothing
to ease that for me.
Do you have a higher power,
Miss Richards?
Objection!
Relevance?
I'll allow it.
Please answer
the question.
Yes, ma'am, I do.
It's because of Him
that I'm here today.
Could you explain
what you mean, please?
Because...
it's because of Him...
that I have this second chance
to make it up to Isaiah.
- Oh, shit!
- Mama, I'm thirsty!
- Watch it.
- Wait-wait-wait, oh, okay.
There's broken glass everywhere.
I want apple juice.
I don't have apple,
I just have orange.
- I told him that this morning.
- Can I have apple juice?

- I can get you some lemonade.
- I want apple juice.
Sit down, Isaiah,
you're going to fall.
- I want apple juice!
- I don't have apple.
I want apple juice!
- Sit down!
- I want apple...
Sit down! Sit down! Sit down!
I'm going for apple juice.
Hannah, don't go near this.
I'll be right back.
Sweetie, it's okay.
She's a crack addict
who left her newborn baby
in a garbage heap
in the dead of winter,
and that damn lawyer
makes her look
like Mother Teresa.
Shh.
Higher powers!
Tell me he was
calling her name.
He was screaming from all
the crack she pumped into him!
Charlie, how can they think
about giving him back to her?
They're not going to.
I mean, she's
not a mother.
She doesn't even know how
to take care of him.
I mean, what,
what if he got sick?
What if he got hurt
or something?
She wouldn't know
what to do.
I'm just so afraid we're
going to lose him.
- What if we lose him?
- We're not going to lose him.

- I couldn't bear to lose him.
- We're not going to lose him.
No, but what if we do?
Margaret, we're not,
we're not going to lose him.
Charlie, did you see
how beautiful she was?
She was so beautiful.
I was never no prostitute.
You never took money for sex?
That was for drugs.
Well, that makes it okay, then.
Objection.
Sustained.
Who's Isaiah's father?
I don't know.
So I assume that he won't be
helping you with child care.
Who will you turn to, Khaila?
Is there any kind
of support system
that you can depend on
to help you with Isaiah?
My counselor, Gussie Chestnut,
my sponsor,
my friends.
These people
you've just mentioned,
aren't they all reformed
drug addicts themselves?
They all been clean
for at least five years.
Just answer the question,
please, yes or no?
Yes.
Couldn't they relapse
at any time?
I mean, there's no
real assurance
that you yourself
won't relapse,
is there?
That's not going to happen.
"That's not going to happen."

The pledge
of a drug-addicted prostitute.
Seizures, inter-cranial bleeds,
malformed kidneys.
And all these can be
the result of drug use
while the child is in utero?
Yes, and they're almost always
low-birth-weight babies,
frequently premature,
higher incidence of crib death.
And later?
They're usually
highly irritable.
Some have severe
learning disabilities,
moodiness, poor coordination.
Stress usually aggravates
these symptoms.
Can anything be done
to alleviate these problems?
We don't know for sure,
but calm, steady,
dependable parenting
is certainly in the
child's best interest.
The kind he's receiving
from the Lewins.
I would say so.
Amir?
You going to let me in?
Hey.
Why are you here?
Came to see you.
That ain't no reason.
Yes, it is.
And I brought you something.
That's his.
Yeah...
but I brought it for you.
Hey, boy,
who you talking to?
Well, well, well, if it ain't
Miss High-and-Mighty.

The rent gone way up,
all right?
Now, wait, wait,
hold on, wait up.
What, what, what, what you think
I should charge her?
What you think
I should charge her, huh?
Something high, right?
\$200?
- \$250!
- Mm-hmm.
- \$250.
- Make it \$300.
You staying?
No, baby, I can't stay,
but I know you want me to,
but I can't.
Hey, hey! You holding up
the program, now, boy.
Come on, now,
and show your Uncle Tyrone
that dance you done for me
last week.
Come on, now.
Amir...
I know things
right now seem like
it don't make sense to you,
and you don't understand,
but I've been just where you are
and it ain't gonna be easy,
but it don't mean
you can't make it.
Come on, boy, I'm waiting now.
Come on, boy, do it.
That's my boy.
Who combs his hair?
What?
Who combs his hair?
Margaret.
Uh... we all do.
Who taught you how?
Or did you read that in a book?

Our black pediatrician.
So you know
an African-American.
One with a professional degree.
Have you ever had
your black pediatrician
over to dinner, Mr. Lewin?
Do you have your pediatrician
over to dinner?
Answer my question, yes or no?
No.
When's the last time
you and your wife had dinner
with anyone of color, Mr. Lewin?
Please answer
the question, Mr. Lewin.
I'm sorry, I can't remember
the last time.
You love your wife, Mr. Lewin?
Oh, yes, very much.
How long you been married?
And you love your daughter?
- Of course.
- So this is a nice,
stable environment to bring
Isaiah into, wouldn't you say?
Yes, I would say.
Yes.
Who's Suzanna Polaski,
Mr. Lewin?
Uh, she's an architect
who works in my office.
You having an affair
with Suzanna Polaski?
No.
No?
Be careful, Mr. Lewin,
you're under oath.
I'm not having an affair.
Have you ever had an affair
with Suzanna Polaski?
Yes or no?
Yes.
I spent one evening with her.

I'm sorry.
What exactly are you sorry for?
That you threw your baby
in the trash?
That you dragged my family
through hell?
No, I just want my son back.
Your son?
What makes him your son?
That you fucked some junkie
in an alley
three years ago to get high?
Well, if you were
all of that,
your husband wouldn't have
fucked somebody else,
and maybe you'd have
a baby of your own,
and you wouldn't be trying
to take mine.
Look in the mirror.
Look at my face.
I'm his mother.
God says so.
Take yours?
I didn't have to take him.
You threw him away, remember?
Any animal can give birth.
That doesn't make it a mother.
Oh, so you calling me an animal?
If you think
you just gonna walk
up in this court
and take my baby
like you take some
puppy from a pound,
you got another
thing coming, lady,
'cause you ain't gonna
take my baby from me.
He's not a baby.
You don't even know him.
You don't know
anything about him.

Wait!
Don't do this.
Don't do this to Isaiah.
Don't do what?
Tell him the truth...
that his real mama is as black
as he is?
Black?
All you people
think about is color.
You people?
You people?
Well, me and Isaiah...
we the same kind of people...
or didn't you notice?
Margaret?
I'm not going to talk
about this right now.
Hi, honey.
Hi, Mom.
Mom?
Hmm?
Are they going to take Isaiah?
Are you going to be okay?
Oh, honey.
I love you, Mommy.
Oh, Hannah, Hannah,
Hannah, Hannah.
There's never been
anybody like you.
Is this policy
unique to your agency?
No.
Most if not all
agencies prefer
to place a child with a family
of the same racial background.
Hmm.
Given the facts in this case
as you understand them,
what would be
your recommendation?
That the child
should be returned

to his birth mother.

Thank you.

No further questions.

Dr. Goldfein, you've stated

that your organization

is opposed

to interracial adoptions.

Does that mean you never

place black infants

with white couples?

Oh, no. We do this all the time,

but these are temporary.

These children stay temporarily

in the white home

until a suitable black family

comes along?

That's right.

How long does that take?

It can take years.

And the child is then

wrenched from the only family

they've ever known...

and turned over to strangers

because of the color

of their skin?

It's the long-term

interest of the child

we are trying to protect.

Well, wouldn't

you say

you were putting

political policy

above the emotional

health of these children?

No.

All things being equal,

the black child is better off

with black parents.

All things being equal.

Well, what if all things

are not equal?

Miss Jones, I am sick and tired

of the attitude that says

that taking poor

black children out
of their environment
and placing them
in an affluent household
is better for the child.
What kind of values
does that suggest?
- How much time do you got?
- Not much.
How about lunch?
No.
Look, no strings
or nothing.
Would you leave me alone?
I can't give them nothing
to use against me in there,
or I'll lose my boy.
I don't want to do nothing
to hurt your chances.
Why didn't you
answer my letters?
'Cause I didn't open them.
I cannot talk to you.
I want you to know something.
I filed for a divorce...
and I'm coming back
when I get it.
Okay, I just wanted to say that.
You said it.
Mrs. Lewin,
does Isaiah play with dolls?
Sometimes.
Any of them black?
Yes.
And some of them are green,
and some of them are purple,
and some of them are orange.
It doesn't seem
to matter to him.
He plays with all of them.
As you know, Mrs. Lewin,
people don't have green
or purple or orange faces.
When you and Isaiah read

together,
do any of the books you read
have African-American characters
or pertain to African-American
history or culture?

We read Isaiah all sorts
of books in our home.

Oh, I'm sure you do,
but is there a black face
in any of them?

For instance,
have you read
The Planet of Junior Brown,
or The People Could Fly,
or Many Thousand Gone
by Virginia Hamilton?

Not yet.

Well, how about The Red
Dancing Shoes by Denise Patrick
or Faith Ringgold's Aunt
Harriet's Underground Railroad
in the Sky?

Not yet.

Or maybe your husband
has read him Fathers and Sons,
or Uncle Jed's Barbershop
by Margeree King Mitchell.

No, I don't think so.

Well, who do you think
he identifies with, Mrs. Lewin?

The orange-faced muppet?

Does he share
its muppet history?

You ever stop to think
how Isaiah must feel
living in a world
where he never sees
anyone like himself?

Might be kind of troubling,
don't you think?

Well, what's your point,
Mr. Lewis?

That our skin isn't
the right color?

That we're incapable
of teaching this child
what he needs to learn?
That I can't raise Isaiah up
to be an honorable man
because my skin is white?
What about love?
You haven't even spoken
that word here.
Or doesn't that fit
into your equation
of black and white?
And what about Isaiah?
How does he fit
into all of this?
Or is it more important
that we be
politically correct?
What we should be thinking
about here...
is what is going to happen...
to the spirit
of this little boy...
if he's...
taken away from us.
So, what you're saying is,
you're his only hope.
What I'm saying is,
we are all he knows,
and if you take him away
from us, it'll kill him.
Oh.
So only you can save him.
You're the great white hope.
No.
But I am his mother.
Are you?
Shit.
Thank you.
You're welcome.
Higher, higher up. Faster.
Vroom, vroom!
- Vroom!
- I'm going to tickle you.

I'm going to tickle you!
BI-bl-bl-bleah!
Make it go really high.
Mom, is that you?
Hi, honey.
Mommy, Mommy!
Mommy, Mommy, Mommy!
Mommy!
Oh... there's my boy!
There's my boy.
Oh, little boy-o.
Mmm...
Mommy!
See you later, Mom.
Gonna tickle you!
Gotcha.
Hello?
Khaila, the judge has asked us
to be at the court at 11:00.
Okay. Bye.
All rise.
This branch of the Circuit Court
of Cook County
is now in session,
the Honorable Renata Silbowitz
presiding.
Be seated.
This was not an easy decision.
I have decided to return
the child, Isaiah,
to his biological mother.
When the mother is capable...
and I believe Miss Richards
is functioning well enough
to parent this child...
it is usually
in the child's best interest
to be with his natural mother,
especially when there
is a racial issue involved.
This may cause
some initial trauma,
but Isaiah is young...
We're just going

to take him away.
...and should be able
to deal with this...
Out of the state,
out of the country.
...if the adults conduct
themselves thoughtfully.
- No.
- Oh, why not?
Our jobs can move.
We'll go to California.
You always wanted
to go there.
No, Charles.
Well, we're going
to appeal.
No!
It's over!
What you doing?
I said, "Nothing."
You a dinosaur?
I'm coming.
What you doing?
Nothing.
Isaiah?
Come on, honey, it's time to go.
Let's get your jacket on, okay?
You're going to see
Khaila now... remember?
I told you about her.
You're going to live
with her, Isaiah.
And then I'm coming back.
No, honey, you're
not coming back.
I coming back.
No, Isaiah, wait, wait!
Wait a minute.
Here.
Look.
This is Mama's.
I want you to keep it, okay?
No matter what happens.
I want you to know that

we're always together...
that I'm always with you...
inside you, in here...
just like you're
always with me...
in here, all right?
And nobody...
can ever change that.
You promise you won't forget?
Hey, kiddo.
Hannah?
Kiddo?
Isaiah.
Isaiah, this is the lady
that's going to take you
to Khaila's house, okay?
Hi, Isaiah, you want
to come with me?
It's going to be all right,
Isaiah.
Let me just take
him, all right?
I swear it'll be all right.
- It's going to be all right.
- No.
Why don't you just
let me take him?
It'll be better,
and you'll get used to it.
Why don't you just let me
take him, Mrs. Lewin, okay?
I promise you
it'll be all right.
- Let me just take him.
- No!
Mr. Lewin, this isn't helping.
And you are?!
Let me have him.
- Just a minute.
- Mommy!
Just a minute!
Just a minute!
Just a minute!
Well, what about his things?

They're not his things now.
Tell her he has to have
a light on to sleep.
Hi, Isaiah.
You scared? Don't be scared.
I'm your mama...
and I ain't gonna hurt you.
I know what it's like
to be scared.
That's why I'm gonna give you
all the time you need.
All the time in the world.
This is where
you gonna live, you and me.
I fixed this whole place up
just for you.
And your toys that
you brought with you
are right over there in a box.
That your boy?
Yeah.
What's his name?
Isaiah.
Hey, Isaiah.
He's deaf.
Nah, he ain't deaf.
Just a little tired right now.
Come back tomorrow.
He'll play with you then.
Something's wrong with him.
Hi. Who's this?
Isaiah.
Oh, hi.
You know where class 3B is?
I think...
Do you know where 3B is?
Up the stairs and to your left.
So, you're new here, huh?
Yep. First day.
Welcome.
Come on, sweetie,
don't be slow.
Come on.
Everyone pick up a piece

of paper when you come in.
Okay, I got to go to work,
so I'm gonna leave
you here, okay?
Now, all these kids here,
you can play with them...
and have fun, okay?
I'll be back
to get you later.
Go on and play.
Bye-bye.
Leave it there.
Okay.
Yeah, let's just
leave everything
exactly the way it
is, shall we?
You can just sit right
there, and I'll, uh...
I'll sit...
right here.
And Hannah can lock herself
in her room,
and we don't ever have
to talk to her again, do we?
Remember her? Hannah?
Your daughter!?
Let go of me.
I'm not going to,
Margaret. I can't.
- Get out of my way!
- Margaret,
what happened here
is as bad as it gets,
but you got to get over it.
"Get over it"?
Oh, oh, I'm sorry.
Oh, I forgot, we're supposed
to feel sorry
for poor Margaret
because she lives
in an unjust world,
and she's just going
to have to live there.

Hmm? What's the matter?
Can't you fix
this one, Maggie?
You son of a bitch!
No! No! No, no!
No, no, no, no, no,
no, no, no, no, no!
Margaret,
Margaret, maybe he's better off
where he is.
Maybe, just maybe,
that lawyer was right.
I know he isn't ours.
I just...
didn't know
I'd miss him this much.
Neither did I.
I didn't know.
Thought you might
like to read to him.
He don't even talk to me.
It's only been two weeks.
It's a tough thing for a child
to understand all at once.
He'll come around.
And if he don't?
It happened to me.
I remember I used to sit
under a chair
when they used
to come try to get me...
take me from one
foster place to another.
I know what it's like...
to want to get
inside yourself...
and just disappear.
But you didn't.
Okay, got you a hamburger
and some French fries.
Look, they gave you
a car. Look.
Vroom, vroom, vroom, vroom.
Okay. Want a French fry?

Here, try a French fry.
Go ahead.
Okay, wait a minute.
Here, here, try another one.
Come on, it's good.
Come on, Isaiah, please?
Come on, look,
now you going to have
to eat something,
'cause if you don't eat,
you're going to get sick.
Now, look-look at Mama,
I'm gonna eat.
Mmm, good. Good.
Come on, try your hamburger.
- Isaiah.
- No. No.
Take a bite of your hamburger.
- No. No!
- Come on, please?
- Isaiah.
- No, go away!
Isaiah!
Please, come on, turn around.
- No, no, no, no.
- Eat the hamburger.
Come on, please?
Isaiah, eat the...
Ouch!
I want my mommy!
Isaiah! Isaiah, no!
I want my mommy!
Isaiah, not the chair.
No, Isaiah!
Please, Isaiah, come here.
Isaiah, no!
Oh, don't do this.
Don't do this.
No. Don't do this.
Isaiah.
Isaiah?
Isaiah! Isaiah!
Stop playing games!
Isaiah!

Shit.

Isaiah! Isaiah!

Isaiah!

Shit. Isaiah!

Isaiah!

Isaiah!

Isaiah, are you in here?

Isaiah! Isaiah!

Isaiah!

Okay.

Hannah.

Why do I always have

to get the phone?

'Cause it's always for you.

Hello.

Mom.

Thank you for coming.

Is he all right?

No.

I guess I just wanted him so bad
that I wasn't thinking.

Maybe I was just hoping.

I wanted him to know who he was
and where he came from,
and that I never

would've given him up
if I'd have been clean and
hadn't been all messed up,
and that I was going to
always be there for him.

And I want him to stay
in school, right here,
with these kids just like him.

Khaila, what are you talking
about?

I want you to go in there,
and hold him till he
ain't scared no more.

I'm not saying I'm
giving him back to you.

I'm just saying he's going
to come live with you
for a little while
till he can understand

all this.

Now, some people
are going to think
that I'm crazy,
but I don't care.

All that matters
to me is Isaiah.

And you may not like me,
but you're going to
have to deal with me.

I'm doing this
because I love him.

I really, really love him.

I love him, too.

Isaiah?

- Mommy! Mommy! Mommy!

- Oh, Isaiah!

Mommy! Mommy!

Mommy!

Oh, my boy!

Oh, Isaiah!

Oh...

Oh, I've missed you,

I've missed you.

Mommy.

Thank you.

Isaiah, this is a nice
school you have here, hmm?

Can you show me and Khaila
what you like to do?

Huh?

He likes to play with blocks.

Do you want to play
with some blocks?

Do you want to build something?

Oh, look.

Khaila's got the blocks.

Show me, Isaiah.

Put that... oop...

put that big one there.

A house?

Is that a house?

Which house

is Khaila's house?

This one and this is yours.

Isaiah's tower.

You can have that room
at the very top, huh?

All right.