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Good Hair

By Lance Crouther

Those are my daughters,
Lola and Zahra,
the most beautiful girls
in the world.
And even though I tell them
that they're beautiful every single day,
sometimes
it's just not good enough.
Just yesterday,
Lola came into the house crying
and said, ''Daddy, how come
I don't have good hair?''
I wonder
how she came up with that idea?
Well, there's always this sort of pressure
within the black community,
like, ''Oh, if you have good hair,
''you're prettier or better
than the brown-skinned girl
''that wears the Afro or the dreads
or the natural hairstyle.''
I mean,
have I gone around thinking it,
and have I said it to myself,
''I got good hair''?
Do I say it to my daughter,
like, and not even
thinking what I'm saying?
I'm like,
''Honey, you have such good hair.
''You have such beautiful hair.''
Growing up, I considered
anybody's hair but mine good hair.
Like, my mom is white.
I'm half Russian and Norwegian
on my mother's side,
so my mom's hair is silky and blonde,
and I was like, ''Why?
''Just why didn't I get your genetics?''
That was what I looked at as,
you know,
good hair was white hair.
The lighter, the brighter,
the better.

And that's a thing
that causes great dissension
within the black community
and with black women.
You know,
I look in the black hair books,
and it's like all the hair
is straight.
It was a hard,
like, decision in the beginning.
I said, 'No, I'm going to be strong
against all the forces
'that are going to try to get me
to straighten my hair.'
You know,
you look at the magazines
and you want to be that girl,
you know.
You want to be that girl,
and you have this fantasy
where you think,
'If they straighten it out,
'then all of a sudden
it's going to grow
'and it's going to really move
and it's going to really flow
'and I'm going to have this hair.'
Well, you never had the hair
to begin with,
but you don't know that,
you know.
When you look at a woman's hair,
it's a fantasy come true
if they can really pull that off.
So, for me,
yeah, hair's real important.
Well, I would say
that hair is a woman's glory,
and that you share
that glory with your family.
And they get to see you braiding it,
and they get to see you washing it,
and they get to--It's a glory.
But it is not a bad thing

or a good thing. It's hair.
If you have it on your head,
it's good.
If you have it growing
between your toes,
it probably isn't so good.
So what feeds
this hair machine?
How do we decide
what good hair is?
Well, at least for some people,
that decision is made
where all major
black decisions are made...
in Atlanta
at the Bronner Brothers Hair Show.
That's right,
the Bronner Brothers Hair Show.
Twice a year,
for over sixty years,
the Bronner Brothers
have hosted this massive hair show
with over 120,000 hair professionals
in attendance,
over twenty-eight major hotels
booked exclusively,
and over \$60 million pumped
into the Atlanta economy.
Good hair is good business.
My father started it
sixty years ago,
and the show was
actually a seminar
to teach the people
buying the products
how to use the products.
And sixty years later,
the number-one purpose
of the hair show,
to come learn
how to use new products.
Certain products, we index triple
what the white market does.
We're at 12/ of the population,

but we buy 80% of the hair.
Wow!
I got in the wrong business.
All I know is, we spend
a ton of money on our hair.
No matter what,
we going to look good.
We going to look good.
You know,
that's the bottom line.
We're going
to look good regardless.
While the main purpose
of the show
is to promote products
and make tons of money,
the three-day event
culminates in a hair contest
where stylists
from around the world
come to compete
and show off their skills
in front of an arena
of cheering hair fans.
The winner
not only takes home \$20,000,
but also receives
lucrative endorsement deals
and establishes themselves
as the leading voice in black hair.
Now, can you tell me,
how are the hairstylists chosen
to compete in this competition?
We try and select
the best of the best.
If we see someone
that's exciting on stages,
we invite them in
to do our Battle.
Tanya, I really
can't say her strength,
'cause this is
her first time doing the Battle.
Her weakness

is that she's sort of new.
Well, I'm happy to be nappy.
How about that?
Oh, Lord.
See, Tanya, don't take it there.
She don't want to be nappy.
No, I'm not saying--
I know my hair
can get very coarse, but...
Ooh, and then they try
to find a better word for it.
Yes!
Dress it up, baby. It's okay.
That's a stigma.
Chris, are you listening?
It's not called bad.
Nappy's not bad.
Well, actually--
It can still be good.
It's just nappy.
I changed it around.
'Cause people
with that soft, natural, curly hair,
I call that bad hair now.
Okay, 'cause it's hard to curl?
'Cause nappy hair holds curls.
Tanya's new to this,
but she's also business partners
with former Bronner Brothers
champion Kevin Kirk.
Kevin won twenty grand
back in 2005,
when twenty grand
really meant something.
If that belt could talk,
what do you think it would say?
It'd say, ''Bring home
my brother August 18th.''
So the brother's held captive?
It's held captive.
Bronner Brothers
got it on lock right now.
I picture myself being David
and all the other contestants

being Goliath.
Derek is a very exciting person.
He's a unique person.
His performance
is always at the top.
Styling, he might be
a little bit weak on that,
but exciting, very exciting.
Derek competed last year
and many people, mostly Derek,
felt he should have won.
But he ended up losing
on two technicalities:
nudity and too many people
on stage at one time.
My biggest scare was me
trying to find a pair of boots
to wear for the show.
A guy hit me up on MySpace,
and he ends up
being a boot designer.
Jayda, Tyree.
Terrence, Tyree.
And he basically
takes boots that you--
a boot
that you already have,
and redesigns it
and customizes it
and, hopefully, you guys will see
a phat pair of boots.
I can't wait.
I'm so excited about this right now.
Freddie...
very smart.
That's her strength.
Smart, can do hair.
Her weakness
is that she over-thinks it.
She goes
over the audience's head.
Last year's theme
was Broke Front Mountain.
So that was based

- on the movie Brokeback Mountain.

- It was, kind of.

When we did the...

We did a video clip

that was in the beginning

that was about thirty seconds.

I'm going to work on her

with all these.

I might have to hide

from them to get them, though.

I'm going to be hiding

more than Harriet Tubman was hiding.

You know,

I liked Broke Front Mountain.

I think I just shouldn't have

cut the hair in the boxes.

I put this 'FJ,'

my logo on there,

and people thought

it was something Asian.

They just couldn't keep up.

Now, which of the other stylists

are you most worried about?

Probably Jason.

Jason Griggers.

Me and Jason

know of each other.

Do you have

any enemies in hair?

No.

Jason's strength

is his incredible hairstyles.

I, actually, am

from the same hometown as Jason.

He's been doing my hair

since about 2000,

and my hair was her length

when I started coming,

and this is mine.

No tracks in this.

So he has what we used to call

'the growing hand.'

I never said that.

So, Jason, you seem to be able

to get women off the weaves.
You're kind of like
the Betty Ford of black hair.
I refer to it
as the Rosa Parks of hair.
Jason...
where does a white man
learn how to do black hair?
In school,
they teach you everything.
This one teacher that I had,
she would always give me
a pair of these
to walk around school with,
and she'd say,
'I don't hear you
clicking and twisting.
'I don't hear you
clicking and twisting.'
Was she a black woman?
She was a black woman.
She was
the only black teacher at school.
And she was determined
to teach you--
She was determined to teach me
how to work those Marcel irons.
So she's like Branch Rickey
and you're the Jackie Robinson.
That's 'The Jackie Robinson Story'
starring Jackie Robinson as himself.
It's big league all the way.
There are some white people
that are good at doing black hair.
But there are very few
that I've met.
There are very few.
So what happens is,
you walk in
and the first thing you say is,
'Do you have a pressing comb?
'Do you have a flat iron?'
And it's like, 'Oh, yeah!
'You know, we have everything.

'I can do whatever you need.'
And then the process starts.
The process starts,
and it's a little tragic.
If you don't
understand black hair,
you're afraid of it
if you see it in its natural state.
And you can't really see around it.
They don't understand
that it can change.
'Give me two days, baby.'
'What you want?
Long, short, black, blue, green?
'Little fan on the side?
What hair do you look--
'Give me a picture, give me
two days, I got you.'
Is this your hair?
Yes. All mine.
- All your hair?
- All mine.
Shake it for me.
I mean, how does this happen?
What did you put in it?
If you went under the counter
in a black woman's bathroom,
she's got about thirty
or forty bottles of different things.
She's always constantly
trying out something,
trying to perfect
the solution, if you will.
The antidote.
The antidote. Yeah.
Relaxer.
The closest thing we have
to a nap antidote.
For all you white people out there
that don't know what it is,
you name a black woman,
any black woman,
no matter how famous
or infamous,

they've either
had their hair relaxed,
or they're having
their hair relaxed right now.
And a lot of black men, too.
If your hair's relaxed,
white people are relaxed.
If your hair is nappy,
they're not happy.
So what's
your definition of good hair?
Something that looks
relaxed and nice.
Yeah, relaxed and straight.
Wow, what do you have there?
Is that a bucket of relaxer?
No doubt, baby.
Relaxer.
Also known by its government name,
sodium hydroxide.
Relaxer's the chemical that will
take a black woman's hair from this...
and change it into this.
Wow.
Look at it.
My ring is still there.
My fingers all there.
I think I'm going to marry you.
In fact,
as far as hair products go,
relaxer's the cash cow
for the Bronner Brothers Hair Show.
It's how black women have been
getting their hair straight for decades.
Vigoro Liquid Hair Relaxer.
You're going to love your hair
like you've never loved it,
come rain or come shine.
The first time I got a relaxer,
I remember thinking,
'Wow, now I'm pretty.'
'Now, I'm beautiful...'
'or closer to it, at least.'

Dark and Lovely

Permanent Creme Relaxer.
A beautiful way
to relax your kind of hair.
Mentally,
I think a lot of black women,
they're on this quest for
attaining the straightest hair possible,
trying to conform
to a more European look.
The straighter hair, the better.
And we've been coached
with that mentality since childhood.
With Vigorol Hair Relaxer
and a hot comb,
you'll have your hands full.
I remember seeing ads like this
when I was a little kid
watching ''Soul Train.''
What the hell
is relaxer anyway?
Where does it come from?
Well, some of it comes
from Greensboro, North Carolina.
This medium-size town
was once the capital
of the Confederacy.
White will fight desegregation!
But now it's the home
of Dudley Products,
a \$35-million black-owned
hair empire
that employs thousands
of people worldwide.
Greensboro is the home
of the Dudley Mansion,
the Dudley Beauty School,
Mr. Dudley himself,
and, of course,
Dudley Manufacturing.
Dudley Products have been valued
at up to \$100 million.
The plant itself is worth over ten.
It employs hundreds of people
and is situated

on over 47,000 acres
of prime North Carolina real estate.
In short,
Mr. Dudley is a nap impresario.
Bad hair has been very good
for Mr. Dudley.
What's he doin'?
Joe is making relaxer.
This is how they make relaxer?
This is a portion
of a 7,000-pound batch of relaxer.
7,000 pounds
is worth how much?
7,000 pounds,
you're talking about \$18,000.
This would last Prince
about a month.
Exactly.
The slightest
little bit of these chemicals
can really cause harm
to the body.
A splash of sodium hydroxide
in your eye
can potentially lead to blindness.
It may not happen right away,
but it can lead to blindness
later on in life.
But you'll eventually
have a dog.
Yes, you will eventually have one.
And the more
of these chemicals you inhale
as you continue to work in it,
it can have
an adverse affect on your body.
Let me read some of these.
'The rate of change
is controlled by what factors?
Temperature, concentration,
time, and pH.'
Wow, what's that word?
What? Ammonium thioglycolate?
Wait. Say that again

to the camera.
Ammonium thioglycolate.
You're smart.
Enrollment at
the Dudley School of Beauty

means one thing:

long nights poring over scalp theory.
These budding hair scholars
master the chemistry
of Dudley products
and how to use them
on mannequins,
even white mannequins.
They are
also tested on the finer points
of how not to put relaxer
in the eyes,
how not to burn ears
with hot combs,
but most importantly,
they learn
that if you can make
enough black women happy,
you can live like a king.
When you go back home,
I want you to tell the world,
we manufacture
our own product,
we sell our own product
to our own, through our own.
That's the reason why we will
never sell our company.
Because if I asked you
to take off the clothes
that you didn't buy
from your race,
it would be a nudist camp
in here right now.
The nudity thing
was a little weird,
but if you sniff
enough chemicals,
you just might say anything.

But I've got to admit,
looking at these
proud black women
just made me think
about my daughters.
So the next day,
I got on a plane
and went to meet the Dalai Lama
of hair himself.
Tell me, when was the first time
you had relaxer in your hair?
Late seventies.
James Brown, who was like
the father I've never had,
was in his office one evening
in Augusta, Georgia,
and he said to me
that he was real tight
with the Republicans.
And I said,
'Well, if you so tight,
'why don't you get us
Martin Luther King's birthday
'a federal holiday?''
He said, ''Get the White House
on the phone.''
I said, ''Oh, yeah, right.''
But I told his secretary,
'Get the White House on the phone.''
They left a message.
Three hours later,
to my surprise,
the White House called back.
He got on the phone
and told them he wanted
to come see President Reagan.
So they agreed to meet
on January 15th, '82.
And I'll never forget, he said,
'When you go to the White House,
I want you to look like me,
''cause when people see you,
I want 'em to see me.
'You're a reflection of me.''

He took me to a lady
in Augusta named Mary.
He said, 'I want you to style
Rev's hair like mine.'
But that's the day we went
to the White House, right there.
When was the first time
you had a relaxer?
I was nine.
I remember the exact day.
And I was, like, 'Mama,
I want to get my hair done.
'I want a relaxer.'
And she was, like,
'What do you know about relaxers?'
And I was, like,
'I want a relaxer.'
At nine years old,
I got my first relaxer
and I remember it just being...
it was like a miracle.
I think you're trying to blend in.
I think you're trying to make
everybody comfortable.
Relaxed.
Relaxed and not, like,
'Oh, my God, what is that?'
you know?
That's what the relaxer does.
It relaxes people.
How old were you
the first time you got a relaxer?
Oh, God.
I was about seventy.
Seventy?
You went your whole life?
Not my whole life.
I'm still alive.
I relaxed my hair
when I was in the tenth grade.
And I'll tell you,
when you was really gangster,
you could show up in homeroom
with rollers in your hair.

And you had rank
by how big the rollers were.
Like, the yellow rollers
were smaller,
and they get bigger
and bigger.
The orange rollers
meant you had more hair,
so it was like,
I actually got a mug shot
some-damn-where
with rollers in my hair.
I have a relaxer.
I am on the creamy crack.
You call it ''creamy crack''?
Because once you're on it,
unfortunately, people tend to have
a difficult time getting off of it.
Creamy crack.
So you're saying
your hair's addicted to relaxer?
It was. For a time, I was
the first one at the beauty shop.
I was like, ''I feel roots.
''Hook it up.''
I don't know.
I was taught by
a lot of old hustlers.
They said that the only way
you could have
an upper hand on a woman
is to be flyer than her.
Tell us about the first time
you ever got...
the process.
- The cook-up?
Yeah, the cook-up.
You got to
wash that out immediately.
Soon as it starts to burn,
you got to get
to the sink immediately,
or else you lose your hair.
The burn of a perm is, I think,

the most excruciating burn.
I think it's hotter than fire.
Especially the first time.
I mean, the first time,
you've never felt like
your whole skull is on fire,
and why are you doing this?
If you have maybe like a pimple
or something in your scalp,
and that stuff gets in,
it'll start to burn.
But usually if you're
really trying to relax your hair,
it's kind of like a torture session.
It's like you want it to get
as straight as possible,
so you feel it burning,
but you be like,
'Just a little longer.
'Just a little longer.
A little bit longer.
'Wash it out!'
Anybody here ever been shot?
So what felt worse,
the bullet or the relaxer?
Anybody here have a baby?
What's more pain,
a chemical burn or childbirth?
Childbirth.
But what if you had to have
a bad perm for eight hours?
I don't know.
Where were you shot?
In the face.
You got shot in the face?
That's a pretty bad shot.
I was the first 50 Cent.
Somebody just thought
you was ugly?
Could be.
What's it feel like,
the chemical burn?
Can you explain it?
Just like, you know,

you're on fire, literally.
You know,
my head was just burning.
The sensation was just horrible.
Immediately,
I just began to cry.
It was horrible.
The burning of the skin,
the stripping,
you know,
the oozing, the weeping,
all the things
that go along with stripping
that superficial epidermis
off the skin.
You can get a burn,
like scabs around your head,
in the middle of your head.
It's supposed to take
the knottiness of your hair
down to some thin, laid-back,
Suave Bolla Dominica hair.
But if you leave it in too long,
you just get Negro nappy scab,
left the Concolean too long,
and you just are
walking around twisted
with scabs
on the front of your head.
That's how
my asymmetrical thing came in.
Oh, yeah?
Remember when my sister
did my hair?
And then this whole side
was burnt off.
And then that's how the style
of the asymmetrical look
came in with Salt-n-Pepa.
And I had to shave off
one side of my hair,
and that's how my hair fell out.
I remember that.
That was devastating.

I was really hurt for you.
In the ''Push It'' video.
Right before that.
'Cause in the ''Push it'' video,
it's kind of--
And then you were
coloring it in with...
With pencil.
With brown pencil.
I was coloring
in those spots for you.
I remember that.
Can you imagine that?
And she's coloring my hair
with pencil,
trying to cover the bald spots.
So, I'm here with Professor Berry,
well-renowned.
Now, could you tell us
exactly how dangerous
sodium hydroxide is?
Sodium hydroxide
will burn through your skin.
The chicken is your skin.
Okay. So it'll go from my brown skin
down to the white meat.
- Right.
- Wow.
Now, you realize
this goes on people's heads, right?
Sodium hydroxide?
Yeah, black people,
black women, some men--
You know,
Morris Day, Prince--
put sodium hydroxide in their hair
to straighten it out.
Why would they do that?
To look white.
Probably what
the sodium hydroxide is doing
is actually breaking down
the protein in their hair.
If it gets down into the scalp,

it'll kill it at the root,
and you'll actually have
bald spots there.

If you're
a beautician or something,
and you deal
in sodium hydroxide all day,
- I mean...

- I wouldn't do it.

If you breathe just the fumes
from sodium hydroxide,
those fumes
will ruin your lungs.
They'll damage
your lungs permanently.

Wow.

Now, this is
an aluminum soft drink can,
and it's been in sodium hydroxide
for just over an hour.

Another aluminum soft drink can
that's been
in for about three hours.

And then this one
has been in
for out four hours.

It has disintegrated.

So that can's got a good perm.

That can's got a good perm.

Wow, you're a good girl.

How old are you?

Six.

Six. Getting that perm.

What's the youngest kid
you ever done?

Three.

Three?

How long you been getting
your hair permed?

This is your second perm, huh?

No.

How many have you gotten?

I had the texturizer,
and some of my hair fell out,

and my mama started
giving me some Kidee Perms.
So your mama
gave you Kidee Perms?
I didn't even know
they had Kidee Perms.
Of course,
they go to the drugstore
and they see Kidee Perm.
Well, a kidee perm is really
the same as any adult perm.
It's just milder.
But it's still that same chemical,
that hydroxide chemical
that can be very damaging.
It would be like a kiddie beer.
Right.
Does your hair
blow in the wind?
Is it cuter than
the other girls at school?
Really?
Sometimes their hair be hanging
down longer than mine.
The other girls
at school got perms, too?
I mean, I have had mothers
that are starting to give their girls,
their little girls perms,
and they're
not even two years old yet.
They're calling
regarding consultation
on, ''Dr. Maclin, what do
you think that I should do?
''My daughter is one and a half,
''and it's tough
for me to comb her hair.
''I'd really like to put a perm in.
What do you think?''
Under a certain age,
the child is still growing,
the scalp is still maturing,
the follicles are still maturing.

And if you're putting
this chemical on too early,
you're damaging
your child's follicles almost for life.

When was the first time
you got a perm in Jaylin's hair?

It was back in July, I think.

How old was she?

Three.

She had turned three in June.

Do you like gettin' perms?

I got a little
three-year-old, Zahra.

She don't have a perm, though.

Not yet.

Should I get one for her?

- Yes.

- Okay.

Why should Zahra get a perm?

'Cause...

she's supposed to get a perm.

'Cause everybody's
supposed to get a perm?

- Yes.

- Okay.

When the time's right,
I'm going to tell my daughters,
'Don't drink, don't smoke,
'and don't have babies
till you're married.'

Now I got to add,

'If you do have a baby,
'make sure you don't get her
a Kidee Perm.'

Wow.

Now, it's five days till the show.

What do you think you need
to work on the most?

Upside-down cuttin'.

I'm hanging upside down
from a bar,

and I'm cutting one of
my models' hair upside down.

It's really hard.

Oh, jeez.
I'm scared.
So are you going to try
to cut in front of her face?
Uh-uh. She going
to have a spiked bob.
Okay, so you ain't--
That'll make it easy.
That's what I was tellin' you.
It takes you so long
to catch on here.
In order to do great things,
you know,
you have to have
greatness inside you.
I believe
the greatness is Jesus Christ.
Our talent level
might be right there,
but it's that favor
and anointing that we have
that take us over the top.
Now...sacrifice.
If you ain't never been there,
you're about to go there.
So let's get ready, okay?
Sacrifice.
We're going to start a fast
starting midnight tonight,
no sodas...all right?
No juice. Water only.
We're purifying ourselves, okay?
No snacks. Water only.
No food?
Okay, first of all, hold on.
You're not going to stand here
and tell me
what you are
or not going to do, all right?
Winners do one thing. Hold on.
Winners do one thing--
that's win. All right?
And we're going to make
some sacrifices.

I've sacrificed
a lot for this show.
That's something
I really don't believe in.
You're not a Christian?
No.
Wow, she's gettin'
debris out your nose.
You went to school for this?
Yes.
Now, what does the feet
washin' do for you, Derek?
I'm wearing
a four-inch boot for the show.
- A four-inch boot?
- Correct.
And so I need to make sure
that my feet is right
so they won't be all hurtin'
after I get off that stage.
'Cause people don't want
to see me nasty,
so this is just my ''me'' time.
So can you
describe your show?
It's a real high-energy show.
I chose the theme
'Battle of the Bands,''
'cause it's a big thing
here in Atlanta.
It basically shows rivalry
throughout the first part of the show.
Then everyone that's
in the show come together
to do this whole number
at the end of the show.
A lot of people
are on point this year.
I just like glamorous, sexy hair.
That's what people want.
That's what men want to see.
Now, what do you have to say
to the competition right now?
Just come correct.

You know, that's all
I can really say to them.
Just come correct.
That's why they got me at the end.
'Cause they know
what's about to happen.
You the headliner?
Yep. They just my openers.
Can you tell us
about this year's competition
and what you have planned?
Basically,
I have planned a bar scene
called the ''Aqua Bar.''
My theme is,
I play the owner of a bar,
and I'm the hairstylist that works
at the bar sometimes, so...
two other ladies
come in the bar
and they have
these hideous ponytails
that somebody
put on their heads.
I talk her
into getting a haircut.
And I tell her I have to wet it,
and she says, ''Water?''
So then there's
an aquarium at the back,
so basically
I throw her in the aquarium,
and I jump in and cut her hair.
So you're going to make it
a little simpler this year by...
I'm trying to make it simpler.
By going underwater?
How much time do you spend
rehearsing for this show?
I haven't rehearsed
at all for this show.
What I'm trying to do this year is
a bit of an experiment.
My theory is, if I can get

into what makes women feel pretty
or what makes women feel good,
I can expand on that.
So I'm trying
something different this year
for the hair competition.
What are we seeing you
for today, Jason?
A little Restylane
and a little Botox.
A little bit of this
and a little bit of that.
- Fill this up.
- Fill it up?
Okay, we'll fill it up.
Let's get you
over here on the table.
I got to psych myself up.
You're going to do great.
I can do this.
I can do it.
Good. Excellent.
I wish we had a Botox
with something similar
to the python venom.
It's actually botulism toxin.
What is the main ingredient
in this Restylane?
Hyaluronic acid.
Like I know that that is.
I don't want to be
too aggressive
since this is
your first treatment, okay?
Some of the girls that come
into the salon say they get this done,
so I'm excited to--
I think you will end up
loving it.
I'm pleased with the way
everything is looking now.
The redness
and the swelling are normal.
That will dissipate over

the next several hours to 48 hours.
I don't feel as beautiful
as I had anticipated.
I see the face
over the next thirty minutes.
I feel like I've been attacked
by a thousand killer bees.
We came up with a test,
'cause human hair actually--
usually has a little weight to it,
so it bounces.
So if you ladies mind
jumping up for me,
you can kind of see
which one's real and which one's not.
Bounces. Bounces.
Just sitting there.
Not doing anything.
They always say,
' 'Diamonds are a girl's best friend.' '
But diamonds better watch out,
because there's
a new friend in town,
and its name is weave.
I don't remember
the world without weaves.
Back in your mother's day,
there was wigs, right?
The weave is like
a graduation from the wig.
At least a weave is
like an extension of reality.
Maybe her mother's mother
was an Indian or something.
It's about big hair today.
I can't keep up.
I'm like, ' 'Peps, you got to get
this hair bigger, you know?' '
They just want
a little fullness, a little thickness.
They want their own hair,
but with some drama.
Like, they want to go like this.
Like in the movies

in the 1970s or something.
Like Farrah Fawcett.
Those images are stuck
in everybody's head,
and they ain't lettin' them go.
Chicks be wantin' to be
blonde or something.
When I first started going
to Extensions Plus,
which is where
I get my hair from in L.A.,
they used to have
a back entrance,
and going in Extensions Plus
was like a scene
from a James Bond movie.
You have dark glasses,
and you pull up to the door
and you run in,
and it's like,
'Did anybody see me? Okay.'
You know,
when I started doing it,
women weren't
as free to discuss,
'No, this is really my hair.'
No, it's not. It's really not.
So in the early days,
everyone was lying?
For the most part, yeah.
Back in the day,
a weave was kind of like
you was in a secret weavy society,
and it was like,
we vow to weave together,
and we have
little special weave sayings.
I don't know.
It was like a special little world
that literally I had white friends
who were like,
'Your hair grew overnight!
'A foot!
How did you do that?'

I mean, like, you know,
they used to have these dolls
in the Toys 'R' Us
that you could make their hair grow
by pushing a button.
I swear to God,
they think black people
had a little button
at the small of our back
where you just pressed
the button and the hair grows.
Hair that grows,
hair that goes
To here, to there
You know, it was considered
our beauty secrets
that we just don't discuss.
And now it's like,
women stop other women
on the street,
like, 'What kind of hair
is that that you got?'
And we share our secrets.
The weave words
and the weave culture,
I wasn't in it for very long,
but you have
to get indoctrinated quick.
So they teach you a lot.
You know
how you're in the desert,
and you see, like,
the tumbleweed going by,
the scene in the movie?
Well, if you're
on 125th Street in Harlem,
or Hillside Avenue
in Jamaica, Queens, where I was,
or any number of places
in Brooklyn
or Crenshaw or wherever
you are in this country
in a black neighborhood,
occasionally you will see

the tumbling tumbleweave
blow down the street.
It's a ball of hair
that's flying out of a door
after they have done the weave
and swept up the hair.
They sweep it outside,
and it goes tumbling
down the street.
And I call it
the tumbling tumbleweave.
I love it.
Every time I see it, I'm, like,
there goes the tumbleweave.
The tumbling tumbleweave.
I think the horrific part
of the hair
was when I really started
to find out, you know,
what they was doing.
You know, because
it was a mystery early,
and then I was like, ''Okay,
if it's a wig, do they take it off?''
They're like, ''No.''
How's it stay on? Glue?
Sometimes, and they sew it.
They sew it to what?
Then I was getting
more and more information and stuff.
It was like a secret society,
a hair society of what's
really going on and stuff.
It's very interesting.
Do they have classes?
I don't know, but I'm starting it.
So you're like a weave scientist?
Yeah, I'll note myself
as a weave scientist.
You're a weaveologist.
So what's in your hair now?
A few things.
This hair, underneath the other hair,
is thick hair.

This is a weave right now.
This is a weave.
It's my edges and everything.
I have pieces that are...
...kind of, like,
you know, like, extensions.
Right now,
I have clips in my hair.
- I've attached...
- ...two pieces here because...
- I want a little more...
- ...fullness.
Mine is all one unit.
Like that.
Oh, God.
It's like Dr. Frankenstein.
'It lives! It lives!'
There are a couple
different ways of doing it.
You could do tracks,
where you just take a cornrow,
and you attach the track
onto the braid and sew.
If you have a full weave
like myself,
my entire hair is braided up,
and then there's a very thin net
that protects my hair,
and then the tracks
are actually braided onto the net.
The thing
about a successful weave,
and as we say in our industry,
'You got to know your weaver.'
Know your weaver, baby,
'cause you got to be able
to do it and cut it.
She's got to know
what she's doing, right?
I'm from New York,
but I live in Colorado.
You flew from Colorado
to New York?
Yep, to get my hair done.

Yes, I did.

How long is the flight?

The flight is 3 1/2 hours.

There should be
a weave airline.

Sometimes you got

a long flight,

and you want to pass the time.

If you could get your hair done
on the flight...

Would you take that airline?

Yes, I would.

Every black woman in the country
would take that airline.

And when you land,

your hair's done.

Depending

on who your hairdresser is,

I mean, I've been in the chair

for six to eight hours.

Black men have to become

very, very patient.

It's like jail.

And I remember it took

a good five hours.

It was a very intricate piece,

and I was very particular.

I don't like weaves

that you can see the tracks.

I don't like weaves

where it looks like weaves.

I don't like hair

that looks like that waxy hair.

If it looks waxy,

it needs to look shiny,

'cause you put grease in it,

not because there's

extra pieces of plastic in it.

I'm very particular

about my hair.

Okay.

I get serious, right?

You're really serious

about your weave.

I love my weave.
I do. I love it.
I embrace it, yes.
Do you have a pet name
for your weave?
No! Money.
Bitch costs money.
I paid a lot of money for this,
but this is an investment.
The black hair business
is a \$9 billion business.
Sixty percent to seventy percent
of the business is the weave hair alone.
The margin is 125/, 150/.
How much is this hair?
\$1,000.
\$1,000. For just the weave
or the weave--
Just the weave, not the hair.
The hair was more.
Let me tell you,
them prices can go up.
One of these
can run you \$5,000.
I'm famous
for switching out my weaves
once every month
'cause I get bored.
Is that \$18,000 for the year?
Yeah, about that.
- Throughout her whole life?
- Oh, my God!
Probably about 150,000.
Over. Oh, yeah, about that.
I change my mind a lot.
So some people
have a wine cellar.
You have a weave cellar.
1998, this was
a good year for weaves.
How much does this cost?
That's \$1,000.
This is \$1,000?
Yes, it is.

You come in--
It's a maintenance.
You got to come in
every two weeks or once a week
for wash and condition
and every six weeks,
you have to get it retightened.
Wow. This is amazing.
\$1,000.
Yes. It starts at \$1,000.
It starts?
So, how high--
You can go as far as 3,500.
- \$3,500?
- Yes, yes.
And who's payin' for this?
Ladies, workin' people.
Black women?
Black women,
everyday people that are working
and want to look good
and look as natural as possible.
She's wearing
a hair unit over there.
You? How much did you pay?
1,000.
You paid \$1,000?
And those two ladies
in the back over there.
A question.
Where do you work?
I have my own business.
Child care.
Child care, okay.
And you spent \$1,000?
And it's worth it.
She's wearing one.
Yours cost \$1,000, too?
Where do you work?
I'm a schoolteacher,
and I'm a grad student.
Wait a minute. Schoolteachers
don't make no money.
And this lady, she's getting hers

for the first time today.
You're getting
your first \$1,000 weave today?
- I am.
- Wow.
But I raised the kids already,
so it's my turn now.
- It's your turn for the weave.
- That's right.
Good for you. \$1,000.
People don't realize
how much money is in this.
It just seems
that your clientele
is more hooked to this than,
say, cocaine because...
Well, I'll tell you,
once they start,
they won't go back.
They won't go back.
She's been gettin'
weaves for ten years.
If she had a drug habit,
she would've went to rehab by now.
You know, even a bad drug addict
got periods of sobriety.
The weave is going to
put you in situations
that you don't want to be in.
Yes.
You going to have to date men
you don't want to date
just 'cause you hungry.
'Cause our hair's
got to be weaved.
'Cause you got to pay
the money on this weave.
The problem is
when it becomes something
that's beyond your means,
and we buy what we want
rather than what we need.
And I tell women all the time,
'What do you have

a \$1,000 weave on for
'and don't have food
in the house for the kids?''
It just doesn't make sense.
How does the average girl
pay for this?
I have no idea.
I think about that all the time.
Like, what would I do
if I didn't make
the money that I have?
I guess I'd--I have no idea.
Are you payin' for this?
I'm paying for it right now.
Okay. Right now?
You've had a man handle
this expense before?
Yes.
Any of you guys
ever been pressured into,
you know, giving
a woman some money
because of an expensive weave?
My mother and daughter.
Mother and daughter?
So you're spend on weaves--
These weaves
are hurtin' your pocket?
A woman wants to look good,
and a man is going to
find money up under a rock
so that she can be pleased
by getting her hair done.
Now, those are the facts.
Well, I have a layaway plan
on my hair units.
So you can layaway
the weave?
That's right.
I have a layaway plan.
This lady right now,
in about another month or so,
she's gettin' a new one.
She already start payin'

for her next weave.
The price of maintaining a woman
is like real estate
in New York City.
It's skyrocketing.
It's beyond out of hand.
One trip to the hairdresser,
or the weaveologist,
could leave you bankrupt.
Do you think some of the men
are being asked to subsidize
this weave habit,
and it's creating
an animosity
in the community?
Oh, it definitely
can create animosity.
I mean, it's one thing for me
to subsidize your living,
or subsidize your education
if you're young and I'm young
and you're in school,
or I'm going to help you
with your kids even.
But to subsidize your weave?
I mean, hard enough
for me to get a job,
hard enough to go
through school and get something,
and you don't want me to help you
with education, children, Mama,
401K, none of that.
Your weave.
You want me to go to work
and invest
in you puttin' some hair
on the back of your head
that ain't yours.
I mean, I can't even write it off
on my income tax.
Maybe I should have, as part
of my dependents, your weave.
'Cause your weave costs
as much as some children.

That's ridiculous.
As you can see, the hair business
can be cutthroat.
So far I've learned
that good hair
could put you
in the poorhouse,
and if you're not careful,
it could burn down your house.
Back in Atlanta, the hair show battle
was coming together,
and I was wondering
how our contestants were holding up.
Okay...we're going to see
your first rehearsal on this stage.
We have a problem.
What's the problem?
This stage is double the size
it was last year.
This is some bullshit.
This really is, though.
There's no way that y'all
going to be able to make it
all the way
down this damn stage.
I can't work with this.
This stage is double
the fuckin' size it was last year.
This is some bullshit.
Whose job was it to get you
the measurements of the stage?
Bronner Brothers. I don't
have the right measurements.
I don't have rules.
I don't have shit.
Derek, he said he didn't
get the dimensions of the stage.
Oh, really?
Did you know
the dimensions of the stage?
Yes, I got it in my packet.
Are you nervous?
No, just anxious.
- Just anxious?

- Yeah.

Like 'anxious,' you getting ready
to kick somebody's ass?

- Well, yeah.

- Okay.

How was it, Tanya?

It was fine.

Leah, pay attention. Shit.

It's plugged up.

He already did.

It's plugged up.

It's on the cord.

We kind of ran

into every...mishap

you can possibly have.

It all had something

to do with the show.

What we got,

ten minutes left now?

Guys, come on!

You name it, it happened.

Lord Jesus, help me.

I just know this is our destiny.

You know what I'm saying?

Through my prayers,

through the vision that God gave me.

And I said,

'The next time it would be you.'

Did I not say that?

Jason, everybody's rehearsin'.

Everybody's rehearsin'.

That's right.

Except you.

You're the only one.

Yet, you're the favorite.

I just can't see

why I'm the favorite.

I mean...

Are you worried?

- No.

- You're not worried?

Like I said,

I would love to win,

but, you know,

whatever happens happens,
and I'm excited either way.
And no rehearsal?
And no rehearsal.
But we're going to look good.
Okay.
Lookin' good
is half of the battle.
It may be all about
looking good for Jason
and the other hair show
contestants,
but it's all about cash
for the 1,800 hair booth vendors.
You guys are heads of the Black Owned
Beauty Supplier Association.
Most of the black manufacturers
have sold their companies
to the various companies
like Revlon and L'Oral.
Do black people
own anything in this room?
We have a cluster
of black manufacturers.
And these two rows
and this row here
and this row here
are all black entrepreneurs,
black manufacturers.
So of this whole convention,
only two rows are
owned by black people,
but most of this is white?
Most of it is, I think, Asian.
- Asian?
- Right.
Most of the black hair money
is made by Asians.
Right, correct.
Is it hard for black people
to get in the black hair business?
Yes, it is very hard
for African Americans
to get into the hair business.

The Koreans have dominated
the manufacturing,
and they also dominate
the retail level.
Koreans only sell
to Korean retailers,
but because
the profit margin is so large,
they will not sell
to other African Americans.
Are you Korean?
No, I am Chinese.
Chinese, sorry.
That's okay.
Are Chinese people in China
buying any black hair?
We would like to.
And second,
we're not Chinese.
We are Korean.
Korean. Sorry.
Imagine if I went
into another community
and just set up shop selling them
what only they use.
The question would be
whether they'd call the cops
or whether
they'd just shoot me.
But in our community,
anything goes.
And I think that a lot of that,
we got to blame on ourselves.
I mean, it's not like anybody else
needs black hair products,
so if we can't control
what nobody uses but us,
that is
real economic retardation.
How many
other black hair companies
do you know of
that are black-owned?
That manufacture

their own products?
That manufacture
their own products.
About four.
Out of hundreds.
So did the white man just buy up
everybody else's company?
Yeah. Yep.
In 1987, Revlon's president,
he said, ''Eventually
there are not going to be
''any black-owned
hair care companies.''
And then you could see
the gradual takeover
through the late eighties
into the nineties,
and now
very few of the companies
that market to African Americans
are black-owned.
No wonder the schools
and everything else is out of control.
I mean, you get up
and comb your oppression
and exploitation every morning.
Or you attach
your economic exploitation
to the back of your head
every morning.
Or you shove it down
or you put it on the nightstand.
''Here's my symbol
of economic exploitation.''
Lights out, go to sleep,
wake up,
and cover it back up.
How are you going to think right
when you're wearing
exploitation all the time?
That is a real grassroots need,
to recapture the fact
that we can't control something
as close to us

as the hair on our head.
People are complaining
that black people aren't making
any money off this hair,
but the truth is,
it's not our hair.
When and if my daughters
ever decide to buy hair,
it can come
from anyplace in the world.
What kind of hair
is the ponytail?
I guess it
would be considered--
It's called ''human'' on the pack.
What kind of hair is in there?
Oh, my God. I didn't know
you were going to ask
all these questions.
I would've called the lady
that I bought it from.
This is 100/ human hair.
Meaning that you can curl it,
do whatever,
and it won't melt.
This is 100/ real, baby.
So do you have any idea
what nationality
these humans were?
What part of the world
these humans come from?
Yes, Indian humans.
Janet Jackson's hair
is Indian hair?
It's Indian hair.
Who else got Indian hair?
Right now, I have Indian hair.
It's human hair, though,
and it's prayed upon.
Are you thinking--
Are you considering--
I see Jessica Simpson
has her own weave line.
Have you looked into having

your own weave line?
So there's a chance
you may join the weave empire?
I don't know.
It depends on if I can get
a straight connection to India.
Then I will, yeah.
You heard what Raven said.
'A straight connection
to India.'
Well, I guess
that's where I got to go.
This is India,
a land with a population
of over one billion people.
A quarter of the population
lives below the poverty line,
making about forty cents a day.
Good thing
they don't need weaves.
Overpopulation is at the root
of much of India's problems,
but there would be
even less room
if the Indians didn't
ship out most of their hair.
After software and statues
with eighty pairs of hands,
human hair
is India's biggest export.
My cab driver, Sanji, said
if I wanted to find good hair,
this was the place to go.
All right.
Mr. Murali!
Hello, how are you?
All right. Chris Rock here.
- All the way from America.
- Yeah, very good.
You are welcome to all this.
Now, I hear you the man
with the hair.
Yes.
You got

more hair than anybody.

Yes.

If I want some Indian hair,
you're the man to see.

Yes.

This is daily,
we are getting like this.
Collected from the temple.

Well, show me some more.

- Let's see some more.

- Yes. Come.

What are they doing right now?

Now, this is the hair
we have bought from the temple,
and they're

just segregating this thing.

And this is before washing,
we do like this.

Then we go for a washing.

Because there'll be some bugs.

It is all dead bugs

but some people,

they don't like to have

lice and bugs in their hair.

Yeah, I don't.

Whenever I buy hair,

I don't want no bugs in it.

This is the place

where we process human hair.

Weave paradise.

Yes.

So this is where

the magic happens, huh?

And everyone's got

a perfect weave on their head.

What are they doing right there?

See, this is what I mean.

I show you

that after washing,

they'll just put the hair

on the hackle,

there to remove this tangle,

and they'll remove

the top-side of the hair.

So then it will be bundled,
and it will be sold as bulk hair.

Okay.

Approximately

how many heads of hair
are processed every day?

- Not that, weight.

- Kilos?

So you don't even
care about the head.

You measure by the kilo.

We measure by kilo only.

You like Scarface. ''Keys.''

Kind of like cocaine.

The hair business is probably
an easier business to be in.

- Yes, it is a legal one.

- It's legal.

Are there hair farms?

Are there just places
where just a bunch of women
are sitting there growing hair?

No.

Everything's from sacrifice.

Tonsure.

Everything's from the sacrifice.

Do your other friends
sacrifice their hair, too?

Yeah. Everybody does.

Everybody does it.

I guess nobody in India
buys hair.

Why? We already have
our own hair.

It's like fish buyin' water.

Has anybody ever tried
to steal your hair?

No. Not yet.

If you see some black women,
just run the other way.

Okay.

Now, there seems to be
a great demand
for the hair all over the world.

Can the temple satisfy
all the demand,
or do people find other ways
to get the hair?
So let me get this straight.
Women fall asleep,
and while they're asleep,
someone...
Trimming their hair.
Takes their hair.
Does this happen a lot?
Somebody is cutting hair.
So you go see 'I Am Legend,'
and when you leave,
you go, 'I am bald.'
Hair is worth more than gold?
Yes.
And women are being scalped
to get this hair.
Ten inches and better?
It's like porno.
Tell me.
I'd learned that this good hair
came from a religious ceremony
called 'tonsure.'
And that's what I needed to see,
the tonsure ceremony.
If my daughters were going
to eventually wear this hair,
I needed to see what kind of
person's head it had been on first.
Over ten million people
tonsure their hair every year.
They tonsure their hair in exchange
for the gods' blessings.
Why do you tonsure your hair?
You ever think about your hair?
Thinkin' about seeing it again
on somebody else?
- God likes hair?
- Yeah.
Tonsure.
That's the word
we keep hearin'. Tonsure.

Eighty-five percent
of India's population
have had their hair shaved
at least twice in a lifetime
in a religious ceremony
known as tonsure.

In India,
hair is considered a vanity
and removing hair is considered
an act of self-sacrifice.

By the end of the night,
these pretty young girls
will be baldheaded.

And in a few weeks,
their hair will be
on the heads of doctors,
lawyers, and even strippers
swinging off of poles.

These people have no idea
where their hair's going
or how much it's worth.

The money made at this temple
is second only to the Vatican.

The hair collected here
is auctioned off to exporters
who distribute it
around the planet.

But its chief destination
is the weave capital
of the world, Los Angeles.

- Vijay!

- Hey.

How's it goin', man?

Good. How are you?

- Can't wait to see what you got.

- Oh, yes.

All right, let's go in.

Now, Vijay.

How much money worth of hair
do you have

in that bag right now?

Roughly about

\$10,000 to \$15,000.

- \$15,000 worth of hair?

- Yeah.

Have you ever been robbed?

No. Luckily, no.

Touch wood.

All right.

Do you have security?

No. The security
is it's a suitcase,
and they think it's clothes,
and I'm a tourist.

I need, uh...

the auburn shades

or the natural black?

The natural black.

And I need, like, 14 to 16 inch.

Now, what are you lookin' for
when you go through the hair?

Well, one, I look to make sure
that the ends are not so frayed.

You know what I mean?

I look to make sure that when I run
my hands through it that it's silky.

Okay. Now,

is this your first stop today?

Yes.

Today, it's my first shop.

So you get it first?

Beverly Hills gets it first?

So you start here

and then you go to Compton?

It's not quite like that, Rock.

Everything else works like that.

Okay, so you got

this big-ass suitcase full of hair.

And this is your first shop?

Will you make it

through the day with that?

How long

before all that hair is gone?

It could be gone in a few hours.

A few hours?

Once the ladies get it,

they want more.

And they won't pay their rent

to get their hair done.
Yeah, there's a lot
of that goin' on in America.
A lot of foreclosures.
But they got hair.
There's no hair-closures
goin' on.
So if you not
in the weave business,
you not in the hair business.
It's true, because
you can't make the money.
The weavin'
is where the money is.
It takes you up there.
It puts you up there
with the doctors, you know?
It's that kind of income
because you're finding something
that you can really promote.
It's like surgery.
Non-surgical hair replacement.
It's the real deal.
You ever say, like,
'Hey, this hair is
from a Hindu princess'?'
Charge a little extra?
No. Why should I say that?
Well, I've put it on some celebrities
and said, 'This was on so-and-so.
'I'll sell it to you if you want it.'
They'll buy it.
'Ooh, I got so-and-so's hair.'
Really? So you can sell, like,
a used weave
if Angela Bassett had it?
Yeah, she brings it back,
then I resell it.
I say, 'Angela
had it on her head.'
And they like, 'Really?'
'This is Vivica Fox hair.'
Yeah, and they'll buy.
You know,

she like Malaysian hair.
Vivica likes Malaysian hair.
She's not really
into the Indian hair.
I knew there was a market
for selling Indian hair,
but what I really wanted to know
is if I could make any money
at all selling black hair.
Black hair!
Black hair!
How you doin', sir?
Okay, sir. How are you?
Pretty good.
So you sell a lot of hair here?
Yes.
What kind of hair?
We have Malaysian.
We have the Indian hair.
We have synthetic hair.
We have so many different hair.
Wow. Do you have
any hair from Africa?
Really?
Can I see the African hair?
Where is that?
This is--
That's not African hair.
That's Indian hair.
It says ''Indian.''
India is Africa from Indians.
That's Indian hair?
For African women?
See, I was tryin' to sell--
I had Indian hair,
and I sold it easy,
but the black hair, nobody--
Would you like to buy
some black hair?
I have all sorts
of black hair here.
Some of this hair is from Cleveland
and Cincinnati.
This hair is from Detroit.

Well, you might want
to take it back.
So this is not good hair?
Uh-uh.
Is that off of someone else's...
This hair was
cut off at a Baptist temple.
Uh, well, I couldn't--
It wouldn't be healthful
for me to sell that hair here.
You think somebody's
going to get sickle-cell
or something
from wearing black hair?
Oh, yes.
The hair's no good.
But it's black hair
for black people.
But black people
don't wear that no more.
So my nappy hair's
not worth anything?
They don't want to look like,
you know...
like, you know, Africa, like this.
They want to look the style.
You know, right now,
you look at all the magazines,
all the style,
what kind of styles they have.
They want sexy-looking.
So this is sexy?
Nobody walks around
with nappy hair no more.
No more. You see,
how many people, they do it?
No. You make sure
the hair's straight.
Look more natural.
As far as black women
wearing hair from other nationalities
or the hairstyles
of other ethnicities and races,
you know, I would just say

that European and Asian hair,
the texture
seems to be the style
that all women seem
to be trying to achieve.
I always
was bothered by women
that had it
and used it as a power thing.
It's kind of like, if I'm wearing
somebody else's jewelry,
but I'm flexin' it on you,
that's kind of fake.
So if you got a wig on,
but you flexin' your hair
like I'm supposed to give
you points for that hair,
I'm not giving you those points.
I'll give you points for your ass.
I'll give you points
for your legs or your skin,
but you don't get points for that.
But you whippin' it at me like--
And a real pimp can always
look at a girl
and know what she
looks like baldheaded. Be like...
You could see through the cap.
I have alopecia,
which causes hair loss
on your head or on your body.
I chose not to wear a wig
for a number of reasons.
There's this feeling
about somehow hiding,
and I never wanted to feel
like I was hiding something.
I wanted to deal with sort of
accepting who you are
and look in the mirror
and feeling
as though
you're beautiful and legitimate.
So I think the reason

hair is so important
is because our self-esteem
is wrapped up in it.
It's like a type of currency for us,
even though those standards
are completely unrealistic
and unattainable,
especially for black women.
You know, you're going to
be graduating soon,
going out into the real world.
You might have
to pay your parents back
for the weaves at some point.
Do you think...
you have a chance of getting
a good job with natural hair,
or are you going to need a weave
to get a good job?
Even though I think
your Afro is kind of cute,
if somebody came into my office
with an Afro way out here
and a suit,
that just seems really out of place.
It's like a contradiction.
So I would
kind of second-guess.
And I agree with you.
If I was going to,
say, some new law firm,
and you wanted to,
you know, join,
and I'm like,
'Okay, you look really nice,
'and I'm understanding
what you're saying,
'but I can't get past the fact
'that you're going to be sitting
with big executives and all that,
'and it's, like, they're not going
to really take you seriously
'for the fact that you just don't look
too put together.'

You have to kind of really
have conviction with it.
'Cause there's
so many pressures
to straighten your hair
all the time.
But the result is
a beautiful thing, you know.
And it's funny,
because I always think it's interesting
that to keep my hair
the same texture
as it grows out of my head
is looked at as revolutionary.
Why is that?
I seek them out
with the natural hair.
Now, do you seek out women
with natural hair
'cause it's more affordable?
Absolutely.
How old are you?
Nineteen.
Nineteen. God.
Have you ever seen a woman,
seen her hair, and thought,
'I can't afford her'?'
Sometimes.
Okay.
I know how you feel.
Does this have an effect
on the relationships
between black men
and black women?
Is there a pressure
on a black man...
Right.
that's dating a black woman
that a white man doesn't
have dating a white woman?
A black man
automatically knows,
out the gate,
especially if his mama's black,

so he's already grown up
in a household with a black woman.
So he kind of understands
the importance
of getting the hair done
and of the woman looking good,
and he wants his woman
to look good.
Yeah, he probably has to make
a bit of an investment in that area
and just know
that's part of being a black woman,
and I'm going to embrace that.
I'm just sayin',
your woman has a head of hair,
it's like a condo, and you
got to pay the maintenance.
When your woman's hair
is jacked,
it's a reflection on you.
And when you date a chick,
as a single guy,
when I go out with a girl
and I look at her,
and I'm looking at her hair,
first thing I know,
whether we could go
to the bathhouse,
steaming, swimming,
or a beach trip,
and is it going to be
a big to-do?
When you have natural hair,
you can do stuff. More stuff.
If I get caught in the rain,
it's not the end of the day.
She will be, like,
'I don't want a massage,'
or, 'I don't want
to go to the steam room.'
And you say, 'Why not?'
'I'm not tense.'
You know she's tense.
She's tense at the idea

of the weave she just paid for
just fallin' to pieces.
Do you swim?
I have a pool.
That doesn't answer the question.
I do have a pool.
I can definitely get in the water.
I definitely get in the water,
from about here down.
You don't swim?
No. We don't play those games.
He's got to be really special
for me to get my hair wet.
Taking a shower together
could be more intimate
than having sex.
Wow.
That's damn near like,
'You're my nigga for real.'
All my white classmates,
whenever I'd get out of the pool
and my hair went
from straight to curly,
they were like, 'Wow!'
And they'd pull on it.
And I'm like...
But they're curious.
They're curious white people.
It's okay.
It's okay. You can touch it.
But just be gentle,
and if it's me.
Don't just go walking up to a random
black chick on the street
and reach out to touch her hair,
'cause you might get hurt,
your fingers broken,
sawed off, something.
Of course,
a random white stranger
shouldn't walk up
and touch a black woman's hair,
but what about her husband,
her boyfriend?

You'd be surprised.
You guys, anybody
ever been with a woman
that you couldn't touch her hair?
You know, when you can't
put your hands
through a woman's hair,
there's a lack of intimacy.
Have you ever put your hand
through a black woman's hair?
Not that I can remember.
You can't touch
a black woman's hair.
You just don't touch it.
Just leave it alone.
Don't tell me
I can't touch your head.
It's decoration. Leave it alone.
It's like plastic fruit?
Kind of.
Just leave it alone.
I don't care
if you got fake titties,
I want to at least
be able to squeeze 'em.
There just can't be no off-limits
to no parts of your body.
If it's fake, cool,
but I want to touch anyway.
Like, really. Don't do that.
'Cause I'll have to fight you.
So you can't touch
your woman's hair?
Hell, no! Not a black woman,
right after she get it done.
'Nigga, I just got this done.
'Now let me wrap this up
before we do anything.'
The weave,
yeah, it does matter.
It definitely matters
if a girl got natural or weave.
I like real hair.
I mean, if you baldheaded,

I'm cool with that, too.
You can't run
your fingers through,
'cause your fingers get stuck.
Like a deejay!
I don't want to run
into the tracks
and get caught up
and got to reset the fingers,
like, you know what I'm saying?
It's like gettin' your fingernail
stuck in a sweater or something,
and you don't want that happening.
That's just nasty.
So weave-touching is off-limits?
Do not touch my weave, no.
I don't even touch
the inside of my weave, barely.
But how close
can you get with somebody
if you can't touch their hair?
I mean, at the right time,
the right place,
I might be in another zone,
but if I'm in my right mind,
get out my weave.
So what, you got to be high
for somebody to touch your weave?
Maybe.
Weave sex
is a little awkward.
What do you do?
I guess stay on top.
So if you're makin' love
to one of these women
and you want to roll
your hands through their hair,
you just got
to really put all the...
Put all your effort in the bangs.
My advice for men
when they're making love
to a woman who has a weave
is keep your hands

on the titties.
That's probably the safest bet.
On the titties.
You can only touch
up to here,
but if you get here,
that's the forbidden zone?
Exactly.
You grab it during sex,
it's going to tear
the relationship's ass up.
It's going to hurt
the relationship, definitely,
if you grab it during sex,
'cause it's going to go
here, there.
They don't want you
pulling that tail!
Maybe we stayed together
back in the old days
'cause Kunta Kinte could
put his hands through Kizzy's hair,
thus bringing them
closer together.
Kizzy was his daughter.
Oh, Kizzy was his daughter.
I messed up.
Does your wife
let you touch her hair?
The question is,
do I let her touch mine?
So I hung out with her
a couple of times.
You know,
we went from partying
to, like, maybe
we should do something.
You know, been over
to my house a couple times,
laid up
in the bed a couple times.
I ain't get at it yet,
but I'm close.
But I haven't ran

my fingers through her hair
because I'm not sure,
is she really...
Is that all her hair?
And I don't want to ask her
is that all her hair.
And I don't want to fool around
and rub my fingers through it,
and say, ''Wait, wait, wait, wait.''
That ''wait, don't do that.''
I don't want to ruin the rhythm,
so I've been
waiting for a period
where I ask her,
what are the rules and regulations
of messing with your hair
and making you feel sexy?
But I haven't got there yet.
I'm still waiting
for that moment.
Hold up there.
Hold a minute.
I was making love
to this woman one time, right?
And I was, you know,
gettin' it from the back.
You know what I mean, right?
You was getting it
from the back?
Doggy-style!
And she told me--
She told me
to pull her hair.
And when I pulled her hair...
it came off.
I said, ''Uh-oh.
''I think it looks like a man.''
- Oh, no!
- But it wasn't.
- We ain't talkin' about that.
- But it wasn't.
Baldheaded as could be.
So you cannot touch
a black woman's hair.

You can't. Wrong.
You can't do it.
Understandably so.
If you paid \$150 for a haircut,
you wouldn't want people
touchin' your head.
You can't touch the weave?
When was the last time
you touched a woman's hair?
1986, before the market crash.
The market crashed
in '87, October 19th.
The last time I was allowed
to touch a broad's hair was...
'86, somewhere in there.
White women love you
to touch their hair.
Pull it, yank it.
Twirlin' 'em around by it.
Jump off the ceiling with it.
Jump off the cliff
and hang-glide with it.
Is this why black men--
some black men favor white women?
- Yes.
- No!
I don't favor them, though.
But some black men--
not you--
some black men do favor--
- White women.
- Yes.
Do you feel a level
of intimacy with a white woman
that you cannot feel
with a black woman?
- Yes, I do!
- I'm not going to say that.
I'll speak up myself!
Hell, yeah!
Because there's no rules.
I can do things with a white broad
that I can't do with a black, yes!
Not true. You got to find

the right black woman.
It's no secret that some
of the best conversations
happen in barbershops
and hair salons.
While the big hair business,
like manufacturing and distribution
isn't in black hands,
these barbershops
and hair salons
employ thousands of black men
and women all over the country,
feed black babies,
and send thousands
of black kids to college.
And they continue to act
as social centers
in their communities.
As the barber,
what is your role in the community?
I'm the doctor.
I'm the psychiatrist.
Whatever it is you need,
if I can help you,
I'll try to help you.
It's still an industry
where somebody
can go into business,
make a lot of money,
not have a college education,
be able to do something wonderful
for themselves
and for their families
and maybe even
their communities.
But there's this expression,
this creative expression
of black people
that I think is shown
when we see
all of these amazing
individual hairstyles.
But what's the definition
of style?

Right there, that's style.
See that?
It's like a sculpture.
Hairdressers are superstars.
Barbers are superstars
that are bigger
than doctors, lawyers.
What are your hair dreams?
I want to own
a whole chain of salons.
- Like LHOPs.
- Right.
What's your hair dream?
What's my hair dream?
To own my own salon
and be a platform artist.
Platform artist?
At the Bronner Brothers Show?
Right. Like
at the Bronner Brothers Show.
So here we are in Atlanta.
After months of rehearsals
in the heat,
fish tanks, Botox clinics,
churches, and day spas,
we finally made it to the
Bronner Brothers hair competition,
all in the pursuit of good hair.
Now let's break it down.
We have Jason,
the self-proclaimed
Rosa Parks of good hair,
the favorite to win
even though
no one has seen him practice.
I told everybody
to be here around 3:00.

It's 3:

We've got Tanya and Kevin,
who have some
beautiful models...
Oh, God!
And the heavenly Father

in their corner.
Victory, Lord,
in the name of Jesus
and the Father,
let Your will be done.
And then there's Freddie,
the old pro with the tragic history
of elaborate themes gone wrong.
Are they connected,
they set up okay?
And then there's Derek,
a guy who's
all about the hair.
Have you seen the boots?
Wow! That is some boot.
All of them as representative
of the black hair industry
as anything the Bronner Brothers
put on their shelves.
Yes, folks,
this is the alpha and omega,
where it all begins
and some of it ends,
where the weave monster sleeps
and the world of curl leaks.
It's the Bronner Brothers
Hair Battle Royale.
Now let's get ready
to do some really good hair.
Hair is a woman's glory.
And that you share
that glory with your family.
Okay, before we start,
let's meet our judges.
First up, the beauty surgeon,
Dr. Dave Ray,
internationally known
weaveologist, Sammy Jones,
hot comb expert
Britannica Stewart,
and, of course,
former champion,
the legendary
Patrick Antonio Bradley.

Welcome to
the Hair Battle Royale.
Here are the basic rules.
There are four categories
that each contestant
will be judged on:
originality, creativity,
hairstyles,
and audience participation.
There's a mandatory three-cut.
Three heads of hair
must be combed and styled.
They have fifteen minutes
to complete a look--
a fantasy look
or an avant-garde look.
And finally, they must present
a central theme on stage with music.
Tanya Crumel
was born in New York
and raised
in Birmingham, Alabama.
Tanya has been doing hair
for twelve years
under the instruction
of Kevin Kirk.
She gives total thanks
to the Lord every single day.
Ladies and gentlemen, give
Tanya a great big round of applause.
Can you feel the flows?
Tanya came to hit hard!
Don't hurt her.
She don't want
no split decision.
She wants a knockout.
Tanya Crumel.
How'd you feel?
I feel good!
Is there anything
you would change?
Just when we were all certain
that Tanya couldn't be topped,
Jason's models arrived...

with 700 carats of diamonds.
Even our own camera crew
was taken by surprise.
Would this be
the deciding factor
in the 60th Annual Bronner Brothers
Hair Battle Royale?
Let's see.
I was having
the most amazing dream.
Oh, well,
it's time to go to work!
Time to get that work done.
Exercise.
Getting in shape.
Now we know
why Jason didn't rehearse.
No one needs to choreograph
hot women with no clothes on.
If you like what you see,
let me hear some noise
out there.
Jason Griggers.
Will it be a knockout?
You're the best, Papa.
Thank you.
We'll see who's best, Mama.
With such a hard act to follow,
I could see that Freddie
was cracking down on her team
and internalizing the pressure.
Make sure when I cut you or curl,
you work the judges.
Work the judges.
Smile.
Seductive. Smile.
There's no question that Freddie
is a brilliant mind
in the hair world,
but after the failure
of Broke Front Mountain,
her success will depend
on her ability
to translate her concept

into good hair.
It's obvious at this point
that Jason's styling ability
is a thorn in Freddie's side.
Freddie will have to harness
her amateur models
and rely on a complicated concept
to earn the belt.
All right, make some noise
for Freddie J.,
ladies and gentlemen.
Freddie had her whole camp
out there exercising.
The judges have
no idea what's goin' on.
Freddie really
made it simple this time.
Freddie knows how to handle it.
Oh, my goodness,
what are they doin'?
She tryin' to cut her hair
in there.
She's cutting
that hair underwater.
I think they threw her in.
What's goin' on?
I need some help.
Get the lights on.
Freddie had a secret move.
Freddie J.
Come on, Atlanta,
give it up for Freddie J.
Aquarium, aquarium!
Freddie!
You did great.
How'd you think it went?
I didn't even
know what was going on.
While Freddie and her team
were still catching their breath,
scores of dancers and models
began to amass around Derek J.
He is Bronner Brothers'
current Male Hairstylist of the Year.

He will radiate
his greatest potential to the world.
So you're closin' the show?
Yeah. They opened for me,
Now it's time
to have the all-time headliner.
So you going to take this
to the next level.
Yes.
Good luck.
Ladies and gentlemen,
I know you are ready
to see the Battle continue.
He is Derek J.
He's in the house.
Oh, my goodness!
Remember,
the maximum number of people
allowed on stage is ten.
Anything more should result
in an automatic disqualification.
Uh-oh.
I think...
he wants...
to knock out.
Ladies and gentlemen...
Derek J.
That was way more
than ten people.
- And nude.
- But they was not on the stage.
You know what I'm sayin'?
So he found a loophole.
You can have twenty dancers
on the side of the stage,
but they can't be
on the stage.
Yeah, but if I get two plane tickets
to go to New York,
and I show up with ten people
and go,
'Well, they're not going to sit,'
they don't let me on the plane.
I understand

what you're sayin', but--
So this man
brought seventy people?
It's a band.
Earth, Wind, and Fire
don't got seventy people.
Even though the judges
have not deliberated yet,
Heavenly Father,
we're going to stand in our faith
and claim victory
right now, Lord.
Who do you think won?
We did! Of course.
All right. Take care.
- Okay.
- Stay off the pipe.
You guys still think
you're going to win?
Of course.
There's no question.
We're more about
the substance than the show.
They need to bring it back
where it's about hair.
Jason's assistant was right.
At the end of the day,
it's all about hair.
And even though none of them
cut that much hair,
one of them was
about to win this contest.
Ladies and gentlemen,
we've got a champion.
Our winner is...
Derek J.
Did you all have Derek winning?
Yes.
Bringing out the marching band
actually used more
than ten people at one time.
But they were not on the stage.
To be honest with you,
he was brilliant.

Everything tied in for him.
Jason was number two,
but he was actually first
in the hairstyles.
But just like in basketball,
you have to play
offense and defense.
Freddie's I didn't quite get it.
I was like, ''Well, where
is the connection here?''
You know,
these people are in the club.
Is there, you know,
a fish tank in the club?
It didn't congeal.
So, Tanya lost.
What advice
would you have for her?
Originality.
Now, if she
had did her homework
and realized
that cutting upside-down--
some of the other competitors
have done that years before.
She's new to this,
but maybe by the third time,
she'll be all right.
This is our Hollywood.
Competing has literally
become a profession in itself.
In trying to understand
the world of black hair,
I've been all over the world,
and I've talked
to all sorts of people.
I've seen sodium hydroxide
in its rawest form
and in the heads
of four-year-old girls.
I've seen some people pay
thousands for hair
and others
give it away to God.

I've learned
that the black hair industry
generates billions of dollars...
mostly for white people
and Asians.
I've hung out with the best hairdressers
in the country
and watched a thrilling
hair competition.
I've seen black women
work hard in their own businesses
to give other black women
straight hair.
So what do I tell my daughters?
I tell them that the stuff
on top of their heads
is nowhere near as important
as the stuff
inside their heads.
Once we realized
and identified who we were,
then it became personal.
Now I am also free to be
who I want to be no matter what.
So my relaxed hair
is just, to me,
as African-based as an Afro,
because all of that
came out of black culture.
But I don't think it should be--
I don't think this is--
I'm not my hair.
You know, it's just
like putting on clothes.
It changes,
it alters your appearance.
And it also alters the way
that you are perceived
to the world.
Hair's very strong.
There is no good hair.
Hair is hair.
You have to embrace
what God's given you naturally

and keep it moving.
You got to work
with what you got.
Or weave in
what you don't got.
Or weave in
what you don't got. Hey.
This is like soul music
crossing over, this weave thing.
We don't even know
how many white girls
really got weaves.
We should look at that, Chris.
We should find out
which of these girls
that we think got long, wavy hair
really got a weave?
Black hair care manufacturers
have turned
the black hair care industry
into a chemical waste dump.
Who cares?
Not one piece of research
have gone on in America,
while we have gone
to the moon
and walked on the moon,
when our scientists
have not even walked
on a black woman's head.
Natural hair is freedom.
Black women, yes,
we are high-maintenance.
But with us,
you get so much.
I just think that women
shouldn't point fingers
at other women
for whatever they're doing
to enhance their bodies.
Other than that,
do whatever makes you feel good,
because, trust me,
if a woman ain't happy with herself,

she going to bring
nothing but pain