

AUNT CHLOE

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PERIOD.

A Play in One Act

Cast of Characters

ISIS, a still bleeding womb that will never yield, trying to control her life through drinking, smoking, and socializing; mother of one adopted child.

AMAZON, a hysterectomy, a medical violence to counter the violence wrought by disease, trying to control her life through measurements and science; mother of two children.

NEFERTITI, a womb at menopause, having out lived its usefulness, trying to control her life through art and thinking; mother of three children.

Scene

The play is set on a resort in the Caribbean, the kind of place middle-aged African American women go to retreat from their regular lives. They spend their time on stage inside, but the ocean is moving just out of view.

Time

Following a pandemic.

AT RISE: A remote beach house on a Caribbean island. The three friends are getting ready to go out into the world on the morning after their arrival. The women are haggard, as if emerging from an extended battle. They are the long-married women.

NEFERTITI:

(standing in front of a full length mirror)

I can't accept this.

AMAZON:

Accept what?

NEFERTITI:

This. This waistline. I remember when it was 24 inches.

ISIS:

You were a bean pole. But you still look good.

NEFERTITI:

Seems like a million babies ago.

ISIS:

You measuring time in babies?

AMAZON:

NEFERTITI, you can't afford to measure time in babies. You have to pay to raise kids. You are not on welfare!

ISIS:

Honestly NEFERTITI! You only have three children. That's not enough to count much by.

NEFERTITI:

(to ISIS)

More'n the one you have.

AMAZON:

And more than the two that I have.

NEFERTITI:

Glad you can acknowledge that. Neither of you wants to have another child.

(ISIS and AMAZON make sounds that affirm the truth of NEFERTITI's statement.)

Nevermind the one, two, and three. At least a million babies have been born since my waistline was 24 inches.

ISIS:

(beginning a familiar story)

I remember seeing you for the first time. AMAZON you remember.

(to NEFERTITI)

You were wearing white stirrup pants and a halter top with gold military buttons except no one in the military ever got to wear a halter top.

AMAZON:

Not to mention that gleaming white wrap she had on her head.

ISIS:

It was the night before orientation when we were first year graduate students. We had been invited as new students to the Dean's house for cocktails. I was terrified that I would get there and someone would point at me and holler imposter. I was scared that I wasn't smart enough, you know, like someone in admissions had made a mistake letting me in. I thought I'd be the only chocolate chip in a bowl of vanilla ice cream. I kept asking myself why I had even wanted to go to graduate school. Those kinds of thoughts swirling around in my head. Then I get to the Dean's place and BOOM! You were the first thing I noticed when I walked in the room.

AMAZON:

I was the first to arrive. ISIS, you came in later. I watched the room fill with polite nervous people. I fit right in. But NEFERTITI floated in with that getup doing the opposite of fitting in! There weren't but three Black people admitted that year.

(AMAZON points at each of them to count the three.)

Those white folks didn't bother you. Girl, you were like "This room belongs to ME!"

ISIS:

I know that's the truth! I thought, who is that woman? I took one look at NEFERTITI and said to myself she and I are going to be friends.

AMAZON:

Of course you did! You had to make friends with a woman like that, because if she could turn out a room just by standing in it, who knows what she could do as your enemy!

NEFERTITI:

...

I saw that outfit in a Spiegel catalog on a model and thought it would look good on me.

...

I was a young woman with room to grow into myself.

...

...

AMAZON:

Back then could you imagine 50?

ISIS:

50? Hell no! We were immortal.

AMAZON:

Goddesses.

(Music starts. The women begin to dance the dance of goddesses in honor of their youthful selves. Following the dance, they collapse onto a sofa laughing.)

NEFERTITI:

(Returning to the mirror to continue dressing)

50 might as well have been 100. My mama'nem was 50. I would never be 50.

ISIS:

I am still not 50.

AMAZON:

I know. You're 53!

NEFERTITI:

But look at her. Look n like she could still do back flips on the sidelines of a football game.

AMAZON:

That's because ISIS's never had a baby.

(ISIS grows cold. AMAZON doesn't notice the shift in temperature.)

You don't know what that does to your body. Isn't that right NEFERTITI? Is your body the same as it was before you had three pregnancies? ISIS never had to deal with the stretch marks, varicose veins, swollen feet. I put on 28 pounds with the first pregnancy and 35 pounds with the second pregnancy. My blood pressure was elevated. Blood sugar rose.

NEFERTITI:

Don't hate on ISIS for having the good sense to adopt.

AMAZON:

Of course, there's nothing wrong with adopting a child. It's very honorable, providing a loving home to a child whose parents aren't able to care for him. And Micah is brilliant, smart, handsome—all the qualities anyone could ever want in a son.

ISIS:

(distant)

I might not have carried Micah in my belly, but I have carried him in my heart.

AMAZON:

Of course you have! I'm just saying carrying a baby in your heart isn't the same as carrying one in your uterus.

ISIS:

(lighting a cigarette)

What's the difference AMAZON?

AMAZON:

Tons. There are like a thousand differences. Look at NEFERTITI! And she didn't have 10 children. Just 3.

...

NEFERTITI:

...

...

Who in the world has 10 babies these days?

AMAZON:

Exactly my point. Women don't get married so young these days. They don't start having children at 17 like in the olden days. We have birth control.

ISIS:

(Taking a drag on her cigarette.)

Praise the Lord

AMAZON:

We don't have so many babies because we grew up with our mothers telling us to keep our legs closed and our head in books. They wanted us to be somebody.

ISIS:

I'm somebody regardless of whether my legs are open or closed. Furthermore, my head doesn't have to be in a book to make me somebody.

NEFERTITI:

Preach!

ISIS:

NEFERTITI, you don't need your waistline to be 24 inches. You're a woman! Literally every other person is a woman. Used to be that you only had two choices: a woman or a man. You got more choices now.

NEFERTITI:

Wait, wait. Gender's not a choice. People are born

ISIS:

(interrupting NEFERTITI and continuing unperturbed)

Even with all the new options, I'd still choose woman—bleeding womb, swollen titties, hot flashes, and all that shit.

I'm a wo_man. W-O-M-A-N

AMAZON:

Say it again!

ISIS:

(ISIS triumphantly lifts her breasts.)

W-O-M-A-N. I choose woman every time! Wouldn't you AMAZON?

AMAZON:

I never met a person who didn't love ISIS. Always had the most friends. Not to mention how popular she was walking on the beach yesterday evening. The men couldn't lift their eyes above her breasts.

ISIS:

AMAZON!

AMAZON:

You know it's true.

...

NEFERTITI:

Seriously! It ain't breasts that make a woman. Anyone can buy some of those.

ISIS:

Tell me about it. I have an aunt who kept misplacing hers. She had a nice set. She was heavy chested, you know. But she got breast cancer when she was still a young woman. 33. Had a double mastectomy. She chose prosthetics rather than reconstructive surgery. They looked really nice. Natural, you know. But then she had to keep up with those things. Whenever it was time to go out the house, she'd be running around for an hour hollering, anyone seen my titties? She was disorganized.

NEFERTITI:

Why does anyone need either of those things?

AMAZON:

What things?

NEFERTITI:

A prosthesis or reconstructive surgery.

...

...

They don't erase what happened to her. She had cancer and the doctors cut off her breasts. It saved her life. But she isn't the same as before is she?

ISIS:

She doesn't bother wearing them anymore. The fake breasts. She's older now, of course. Maybe she misplaced them and doesn't want to buy another pair. Maybe she ain't worried what people think about her not having breasts.

NEFERTITI:

She should take off her shirt in the summer time when's it's too hot for clothes. Walk around bare-chested like men do. Shit.

AMAZON:

The police would arrest her.

NEFERTITI:

For what? Walking around without breasts? Appearing in public places without nipples?

ISIS:

For failing to offer men a place to rest their eyes.

NEFERTITI:

For exposing that which society demands go unseen. You have a right to get sick. You have a right to recover from sickness. You have the right to hide the evidence of your disease.

ISIS:

I demand that you hide the evidence of your disease.

...

...

NEFERTITI:

Listen to that ocean.

...

AMAZON:

It's better than a doctor. I wonder what the life expectancy is for residents here. I bet people live longer just by being close enough to hear the ocean every day. Can you imagine getting to live here?

...

(Taking a turn at the mirror, singing a more soulful version of [Irving Berlin's "Lazy"](#))

Lazy, I just want to be lazy

I long to be out in the sun, with no work to be done.

Under that awning, they call a sky

(AMAZON's phone starts ringing)

Stretching and yawning and let the world go drifting by

(sound of the phone ringing. ISIS and NEFERTITI check their phones.)

...

(AMAZON answers her phone)

Hello

...

No. It's alright honey. What do you need?

...

The wrong color?

...

Can you wear the other one?

...

...

I didn't mean anything by it. I'm just asking if you have another option.

...

I put it in the top left drawer.

...

It should be there honey.

...

Well I don't know what happened to it. Can you ask your father to help you? I'm rather far away right now.

...

I'm not trying to blow you off dear.

...

I don't have a tone.

...

...

What would you like for me to do?

...

Maybe your sister has something you can use?

...

Screaming at me won't help solve this problem. Particularly since I'm in another country right now.

...

I care. It's just__

...

I know he doesn't get your style, but if you can't find the one I bought for you, and your sister doesn't have one, you are going to have to ask your daddy to take you to the store.

...

I'm sorry you feel that way.

...

(to ISIS and NEFERTITI)

She hung up on me.

(NEFERTITI's phone rings. She answers.)

NEFERTITI:

Hello

...

Hi kid, what's the matter?

...

Your brother did what?! Your sister__

...

No. You're absolutely right. They shouldn't have done that. But why are you calling me? Where's your father?

...

You don't want to bother your father, who's in the house with you, because he's sleeping.

...

You need to wake him up.

...

Why do you think it's alright to call me? I can't even get a nap in the house. Y'all calling my name all hours of the night and day. I had to fly to another country just to get some rest and you still calling me.

...

I'm not busy!!! Boy, what do you know about it?

...

That's right I am on vacation. Listen, I'm off duty for three days. You're going to have to wake your father from his nap.

...

Nope.

...

Still no

...

Not doing it.

...

Seriously.

...

Tell your brother and your sister too.

...

Love you. Bye bye.

(NEFERTITI and AMAZON look at ISIS's phone.
It doesn't ring.)

...

...

AMAZON:

It's the womb. Birth happened and they feel abandoned. So they spend their lives trying to get back there.

...

NEFERTITI:

The ancients compared women's bellies to a calabash that held all the stories that ever were and would ever be in the world. They wished they could smash the calabash open to find the secrets it contained.

...

AMAZON:

Breasts wouldn't be more than a warm pillow if it wasn't for the uterus. Of course, men don't see it that way. Always looking for a big breasted woman to dance on his lap. Maybe they are recalling their earliest days nursing at their mother's breasts.

ISIS:

That's a disturbing thought.

AMAZON:

Really though. Think about the way they obsess over breasts. They be feeming for them like they will starve if they don't get at them.

ISIS:

Girl! You are telling the truth! Besides that, I think anyone who has not had to figure out what to do when there's blood running down your legs, your clothes are stained, and you're caught without a sanitary napkin in a public bathroom don't know nothing about being a woman. An essential fact: every woman has had to wash blood out of her panties.

NEFERTITI:

You can't say that, ISIS. Some women don't bleed.

AMAZON:

I don't. I had surgery a year after Angel was born.

...

...

NEFERTITI:

One month I was regular. The next month nothing. Just called it quits with no advance notice.

ISIS:

A riddle: what animal bleeds for a week and doesn't die?

...

Every month, without fail. Since I was twelve.

...

AMAZON:

Oh the not-so-subtle tricks we came up with: tying a jacket around your waist, putting a wad of toilet paper in your panties, sending up smoke signals to complete strangers asking anyone around for help—as long as she is a woman.

ISIS:

Maybe we should elevate a class of midwives to hand out belts based upon the number of cramps someone has endured.

NEFERTITI:

Or based upon the number of days her period lasted in a month.

AMAZON:

Or for the number of iron supplements she had to take.

ISIS:

The belts can be ranked like credit cards and encrusted with a new jewel or precious stone for each month. September sapphire. October opal. November topaz. And so on. By the time a woman got to be 50, her belt would have to increase in length to hold all the gems. The larger her waistline, the more her belt would sparkle.

(to NEFERTITI)

You wouldn't miss your 24 inch waistline then.

AMAZON:

I remember one time I was in the mall shopping with my sister and my daughter. My period came like a tsunami. I rushed to the restroom so fast they thought I had to pee. I called my sister on the phone to tell her what had happened. Of course, I had a pad in my purse, but my clothes were a complete mess. My sister'nem went around finding me a new pair of pants and underwear. I just threw my clothes away. Right there in the mall bathroom.

...

I don't miss that.

...

NEFERTITI:

Every blessed baby who ever breathed air—from Jesus Christ to Charles Manson—a woman pushed out of her womb. Every single goddamn baby. Wouldn't be no man on the moon without his mother! And it's like that shit don't count for nothing.

...

...

...

When I was 7 months pregnant with my first child, my husband took me to Mackinac Island. You can't bring cars there, you know. So you have to walk everywhere or ride bicycles. I was young and healthy. The walking didn't bother me. It was summer, even in Michigan, and the heat was a thing, but it was way up north so I managed alright. A large convention was happening—for doctors, you know. Whole families had come, the doctor's and their spouses and their children. They hired my husband to work with the children. Jacob had to keep the kids entertained while their parents did whatever. They gave him a small room in the big hotel where the convention was held. And I slept there with him on a little bed. But we were young. After he had finished his part of the camp for the day, he and I would go out. Find food. Eat fudge. He had Sunday off and Jacob decided that we should ride bicycles. Jacob said it would be fun. I looked at him sideways, of course, I didn't want to get on no bike. I didn't mind all the walking but a bicycle was a different matter. I carried small and so I always thought there was something wrong if I called

attention to my pregnancy since I saw so many other women whose bellies protruded and it all seemed so much more difficult for them just by looking at the size of their stomachs but me here I was seven months pregnant and no one could tell that I was pregnant at all. That was the script that ran constantly through my mind. I remember sitting down in church one Sunday when the congregation was supposed to be standing and feeling shame because there was another pregnant woman in the pew in front of me whose belly was far more pronounced than mine standing there clapping and singing. You know, worshipping God. And here I was sitting. I sat down because I was hurting. I thought she must be hurting too because her belly was so much bigger than mine. I felt like a bitch, you know, for sitting when I should be standing. Like my foremothers were looking at me and shaking their heads because I had so little reverence for the Lord when they worked in the fields. My great great grandmother Sarah lived to be a hundred and six and she worked in the fields the year she died. So even though I didn't want to ride a bike since I was seven months pregnant with my first child, Jacob insisted. He told me that we would get a tandem and I didn't have to do anything but ride. You know how playful he is. So much fun and that smile. We got the bike and went here and there. But I kept feeling pain, like I did some time. And Jacob said I couldn't be in a better place in the world since we were right in the middle of a medical convention and there were doctors everywhere you turned. The contractions started that night, and some spotting. I went to the doctors when we got home and had to finish out the pregnancy on bedrest.

...

Spent the next two months lying down.

...

(ocean begins to swell)

But that baby held on. She waited and came here healthy. They all did. They all came here healthy.

(continue listening to the ocean)

(Black out)

(End of play)

Screaming at me won't help solve
this problem. Particularly
since I'm in another country right
now.

...

I care. It's just__

...

I know he doesn't get your style,
but if you can't find the
one I bought for you, and your
sister doesn't have one, you
are going to have to ask your
daddy to take you to the store.

...

I'm sorry you feel that way.

...

(to Isis and Nefertiti)

She hung up on me.

(Nefertiti's phone rings. She answers.)