

GRACE

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SCENE 1

Grace Jackson, Black, mid 20's, sits at her home desk typing on a laptop. She is wearing a comfy tee and some sweats. Her hair is in a bonnet-it's protected.

Grace is in her zone. Her head is bopping and she is frantically typing. She pauses to read something back to herself while she eats something yummy with a spoon... yogurt? water ice? Ben & Jerrys new PECAN RESIST? Either way she's enjoying both her writing and this treat.

GRACE

(reading her words back under her breath)

"He wrapped his arms around her and whispered in her ear: I love you. I am here for you and I will keep you safe. She looked down and saw the chocolate of his forearm melt into the dark coffee of her own - I have a home here she thought-

The chime of an incoming FaceTime call interrupts her.

Grace's entire demeanor subtly changes. Where she was comfortable just seconds before - now she is tense. Her shoulders have stiffened, she stops eating her treat and she adjusts her clothes.

She sits up, takes her head wrap off, exhales a deep sigh and answers the call on her laptop.

A screen pops up- it's PENELOPE.- Grace wrote a play that Penelope acted in a few years ago. She is a White Woman in her late 20' or late 30's... we can't tell.

PENELOPE

Hi Grace. How are you?

GRACE

(gives a small smile)

Hi Penelope. I... well.. (smiles) -

PENELOPE

(interrupting her)

Oh my GOD! Im such a dummy. I know that is a loaded question right now.

Grace lets out a relieved sigh and a smile. She is shocked but visibly glad that Penelope gets it.

Penelope sits looks at Grace with a pained look.

Grace just looks at Penelope.

Penelope continues to look at her.

Grace goes from smiling- to confused- and then she finally gets it -

Penelope is actually going to make her answer that question.

GRACE

Oh. Ok. Ummm yea. I'm ..ok I guess.

PENELOPE

Yeah. (She fiddles with her hair - or some other outward show of her discomfort)

I.. I'm so sorry. I just wanted to reach out.

Penelope grimaces.

Grace takes a deep breath that ends on a smile.

GRACE

Thank you. I appreciate you reaching out and checking up on me. The world is crazy right now and I am just happy people are waking up to it.

PENELOPE

YES! I just feel so sick with what is going on and I am so so sorry.

GRACE

No need to be sorry Penelope, you didn't do it.

PENELOPE

I know. I know. But I just...White people! (does the strangle motion with her hands) I just hate them! Arrgh.

Grace blinks. She smiles.

PENELOPE

...I don't want to add more stress to you. I am here *for* you. I just- am not sure what to do.

GRACE

Thank you. I honestly can't tell you where exactly you can start but- reading is always a safe bet. You could begin with "White Fragility" by -

PENELOPE

(interrupting Grace)

I was thinking that I could buy you breakfast! (she makes little jazz hands in excitement)

Grace reacts to both being cut off and being offered breakfast.

It's not what she expected or asked for but...ok.

GRACE

Oh! That's not at all what I expected you to say but...ok! Who turns down a free breakfast?

PENELOPE

Not me! (laughs)

GRACE

Not me either! (she laughs too)

Their laughter trails off into a awkward silence.

Penelope clears her throat.

PENELOPE

Well I know the puuurfect place! I eat here all the time! I thank GOD they are doing delivery during this pandemic - and don't worry I always make sure to get delivery from the restaurant! Because fuck Grubhub! Right?

GRACE

(smiles... is it still a smile or a noticeable grimace?)

Right. (laughs to diffuse the potential “forwardness” of the next moment) And umm Penelope, if you don’t mind could you maybe order from this spot around my way? I love this place and the food is bangin. Super fresh and great variety. (clears her throat) They do free restaurant delivery too.

PENELOPE

Oh. (She pauses) Well of course we could... if that’s what you prefer we absolutely could. I was just hoping you could get a new treat maybe? Like I think it would be so comforting to get a surprise new flavor burst. You know?

GRACE

(not feeling it)

Oh! Yea I can see that.

PENELOPE

Great! Because the food from here is slammin! I was thinking of getting a salmon avocado and egg sandwich on a bagel. And all the bagels are made in house. It also comes with spring mix- you were saying you like fresh - and it is soooo fresh!

GRACE

Ok. Well- thank you. I guess I’ll just text you my address?

PENELOPE

Yes! This is just great! I’ll add a fresh squeezed ginger and honey lemonade! It really is the perfect spicy refreshment! Ok thank you Grace - I’m so glad I could bring you some comfort in this moment.

Grace smiles/grimaces.

PENELOPE

Great! We will talk soon! And I will look out for that text! Try and take some time for yourself ok?

Ok.

GRACE

Penelopes screen goes away and Grace is left

Alone.

She can't go back to the peace she had before the call.

She can't go back to her writing so...

She looks around ... grabs her phone and starts scrolling through her social media.

Until she is interrupted by an incoming call.

GRACE

(whimpers/ whines as she sees the incoming number. It is Grace's grad school classmate -BETHANY.)

GRACE

Come oooooon.

She plasters a smile on her face and answers.

This is a voice call - we hear the caller but cannot see her.

We can still see Grace.

BETHANY

Hi Grace! I know it's been a long time and I normally would start off with "hope you're well" but of course - I know you're not.

Silence.

GRACE

Hey Bethany...long time no talk.

BETHANY

I know, I know - it's awful. Just awful. I can't believe it's been so long!

GRACE

About five years....

BETHANY

I know! It's crazy. But honestly Grace, I see your facebook, and think about you alllll the time, so it doesn't even feel like that long!

GRACE

(laughing/but we see she is really forcing it...)

BETHANY

Yea, it's so sad that it took this recent MADDNESS for us to be in touch again! But like I said - I see your facebook feeds and I can't help but worry about you. I wanted to reach out and just...check in on you in this crazy time.

Grace shows her true feelings.

Since she's on the phone Bethany can't see her.

She has freedom in this moment. Her face at least. She manages to keep her voice in check.

GRACE

Facebook is crazy like that right? (makes face) but yea, I'm ok. Just trying to take my mind off of everything, just trying to stay centered.

BETHANY

I completely understand. I completely understand. I just can't even imagine the stress you are under. How sick you must feel.

GRACE

(making a face)

Yea I hear you Bethany. Unfortunately I have a lot of practice with this kind of shit.

The Facetime chime rings.

Grace looks at her phone startled. She sees it is Bethany. She lets out a sigh of frustration - fixes her face- and answers

BETHANY

I'm so sorry I called - I just had to see your face. (she inhales shakily) I just can't even begin- (she gets choked up) Excuse me. I am just so shaken by the world right now. I just feel so damn helpless with it all.

GRACE

(stifling a sigh)

Yea. (at a loss for words) Honestly Bethany.... I'm at a loss for words.

BETHANY

Oh my God I understand! I'm so sorry! I am such an asshole - I can't believe I am centering myself in this moment! How much of a asshole am I?

GRACE

(rolls her eyes and makes a "oh here we go with the self flogging routine" face)

Bethany- It's all good. I don't think you're a asshole or centering yourself.

BETHANY

(sniffling)

Thank you for saying that- I'm really trying to do better. BE better. (slight pause) Ok - Well, I don't want to take up your time. I just wanted to thank you. Honestly thank you. I admire your strength and the way you always stand up for yourself.

GRACE

OH - thank you.

BETHANY

You're welcome. (you can hear her smile thru the phone)

OK - I wont take up anymore of your time!

GRACE

Ok Bethany - thanks for checking in!

BETHANY

ANYtime Grace. I am only a phone call away. Seriously - anytime.

GRACE

Ok! I'll keep that in mind!

BETHANY

Ok. Bye bye!

Bye!

GRACE

Grace ends the calls and sees she has a new text message.

It is from her fuck buddy from that time she was a artist in residence in Oregon.

He is White.

We see her remember... Then: clicks on it.

We see the message on the screen as Grace reads it out loud: every sentence is the new line that pops on screen.

GRACE

(reading text out loud)

“SO sorry about this racist shit. I know it’s been a while but I wanted to reach out. I don’t know if you know but, I’m back in the city. My Uncle bought a new property in Harlem and he is letting stay in one of the one bedrooms. Anyways, I feel like during these times, I should come over and give you whatever you want. sexually. Please use my dick.

Grace deletes text in disgust. She then blocks his number.

She is worked up now. She attempts to resettle herself while she calls her best friend.

It doesn't work.

BEA answers.

She is a Black woman in her mid to late 30’s.

BEA

(she has a big smile on her face and is a ray of sunshine)

Heeeeeey Baby what’s up!

Bea sees Graces face and is instantly on alert - she's got those spidey instincts and can sense distress immediately.

BEA

What's wrong boo?

GRACE

Bea I feel like a crazy person!

BEA

BEA

(understanding - knowing instantly what she is talking about.)

Yea. I hear you.

GRACE

I've been trying to cultivate joy, lose myself in my writing but I can't seem to escape the all the bullshit.

BEA

I know boo. I been dealing with the same thing. My body is literally in knots. I have to get my man to give me deep massages every night.

Grace looks at Bea with a soft longing.

GRACE

See? I need that. Not the knotty ass back - I need the man.

Grace pouts.

BEA

(with empathy and understanding for her friend)

I know baby.

GRACE

I'm already going through this pandemic single and now I've got random ass white people calling me. Seriously Bea I got three calls in the last ten minutes! And it would be one thing if I actually had relationships with these people but no -these are people I haven't talked to in *years*.

BEA

(nodding)

I believe you! I've been having guilt calls from white people all week.

GRACE

I didn't ask for this! I don't need random check ins from white people I have NO relationship with! I want policy reform, new legislation, defunding of police, more money for the community, PROTECTION. I don't want pity breakfast.

BEA

Huh?

GRACE

One of the calls I got today. A White woman is buying me guilt breakfast.

BEA

(with raised eyebrows)

Well now... that don't sound too bad.

GRACE

No girl. She ain't even buying what I want. She basically said " you gonna take the gift I want to give...no matter what you want."

BEA

(rolling her eyes)

Shit is exhausting.

Grace lets out a large sigh. With it she deflates a little.

BEA

No! Enh Enh. Don't do that. Do let them take anything else from you.

GRACE

(deadpan)

Sis, a white boy I used to fuck told me to use his dick as reparations.

BEA

(in full shock. she doesn't know whether to laugh or cry.)

No he didn't.

GRACE

(again : deadpan. she's dead ass serious)

Gurl. 40 acres and some dick.

Bea is stuck. Like " i know she lying cause I couldn't have just her her" kinda stuck.

Chile. (pause) Just triffin.

BEA

40 acres and some DICK.

GRACE

They both bust out laughing at the absurdity of it all.

I... I am tired...and SAD...and scared. I'm not sleeping well and ... i
I just can't seem to settle into comfort.-

GRACE

Grace pauses and thinks for a second.

And I think the worst part is - I can't complain about it. It's another trap. I can't talk about how this constant state of being asked "how I feel" *actually* feels. Cause I will sound ungrateful. I will sound like a brat.

GRACE

Bea just listens and nods.

You know what I mean Bea? All I want to be able to say is "can you treat me like a person?" Can you just text me and ask me about my day like a fuckin normal person? And if we haven't talked in FIVE YEARS... don't reach the fuck out!! Like damn! Is that too hard of a concept to grasp? This shit is false. And it's exhausting. AND who is it helping?

GRACE

Not me

BEA

Damn sure ain't me.

GRACE

Pause

Honestly I just want it to end. But since racism and racist hate crimes just began three weeks ago... it wont be over anytime soon.

BEA

(sighs)

They both give a dry, tired ass chuckle.

GRACE

Ok girl. I just wanted to vent to someone with some damn sense. I'm gonna let you go.

BEA

Ok baby. Try and unwind some. Get your head out of this mess and relax.

GRACE

(listening and nodding her head)

I will boo. I love you! Try and get you a quick nap before the damn fireworks show begins .

BEA

(rolling her eyes and sucking her teeth)

Gurl!! I can't take much more of this mess! I swear this is some damn psychological warfare!!

GRACE

You right tho.

BEA

(sighs)

Aiggght baby I love you.

GRACE

Me too. Bye boo.

Grace hangs up the phone. She sighs.

We can see her body has relaxed slightly.

She reaches for her spoon and scoops some of her treat out.

As she puts the spoon in her mouth, she clicks on her laptop.

The sounds of " Hip Hop Harry" can be heard

"... go go go go WHO'S NEXT?"

Grace lets her head fall back - she lets out a
deeeep belly laugh.

BLACKOUT.