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USA

SO FAR AS A CENTURY'S REACH

By Kirsten Greenidge

CHARACTERS

Chloe/Heather/Hillie/Kate

Michelle/Simone/Anne/Susan

Lillian/Mira

Amae/Staci

Jim/Robert/Scott/Ford/Gerald

African American

White American

African American

African American

African American

SETTING

1916 through to 2016, the United States

So Far As A Century's Reach was commissioned for the BIRTH festival and first performed in October 2016 at the Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester UK with the following cast:

Chloe/Heather/Hillie/Kate
Michelle/Simone/Anne/Susan
Lillian/Mira
Amae/Staci
Jim/Robert/Scott/Ford/Gerald

Elizabeth Chan
Katie West
Carla Henry
Danielle Henry
Abdul Salis

Directed by Emma Callander

2016.

Darkness.

The sound of water, waves.

The sound of a woman, a moan.

Lights up on MICHELLE and KATE.

The present.

MICHELLE rests in front of KATE, as if she were in water in front of KATE's chest and knees. MICHELLE'S forehead is damp.

The following is calm:

MICHELLE:

I can't do this. I don't think I want to do this. I think I just want a caramel mocha frappuccino. With anchovies. Do you think they'd do that for me? Put anchovies on the cream on top for me?

KATE:

Shhhh. Sh. Michelle. You're doing it. Reach down. Feel—

MICHELLE:

How about you do that, you reach down. You're good at all this—

KATE:

Michelle, reach down.

MICHELLE:

I don't think so. I want that caramel—

KATE:

It's your baby.

MICHELLE:

Who knows *what* it is. I haven't seen it. Who's seen it? Who knows for sure? It could be an alien. Uuuuhhhhh.

KATE:

It's your baby.

MICHELLE:

I don't think so. You're lying to me. I'd just like anchovies and whipped cream.

KATE:

Michelle.

MICHELLE:

I. Ohhhh.....

Water rippling: the sound of KATE's arms in the water, working.

Darkness. Sudden.

Shift.

1916.

LILLIAN and GERALD.

LILLIAN is about eight months pregnant. She is dressed fashionably.

reads the evening paper.

Elsewhere there is humming.

LILLIAN stands surrounded by boxes wrapped with parcel paper.

GERALD:

I think that's three packages just in the last week.

LILLIAN:

Mm?

GERALD:

I said, I think that's three packages—

looks over the paper at LILLIAN. She doesn't respond.

GERALD:

Stuck in here like a caged bird. It won't be long now. That's what Dr. Mitchell says. A few weeks?

LILLIAN:

One month.

GERALD:

Yes.

LILLIAN:

One month more.

GERALD:

Well, make the best of it, Mrs. Sutter, yes?

LILLIAN:

You call me that when you want something.

GERALD:

Want something? What do I want? Yes, of course. I do want something. For you to be happy.

LILLIAN:

Three boxes a week makes me happy.

GERALD:

Three packages a week can't keep arriving from New York, darling. I'll have to cut those purse strings.

LILLIAN:

I'm going to open it. You'll see it's worth every penny.

goes back behind his evening paper.

LILLIAN unwraps the package.

As she is doing so, she gives pause.

She rubs her side.

LILLIAN:

Oo.

GERALD:

It's an indulgence, Lilly, and I can't say I approve. You carry on this much before the baby arrives imagine. We've been through this. Indulgence is, indulgence is—

LILLIAN moans.

LILLIAN:

OOO.

GERALD looks over the corner of his evening paper.

GERALD:

Lilly?

LILLIAN:

I'm sure I'm fine.

GERALD:

You exert yourself. There. Lie down.

LILLIAN:

My mother had six of us and she never had to lie down.

GERALD starts to stand.

GERALD:

I'll have Hillie call for Dr.--

LILLIAN:

No.

GERALD:

Well clearly something is—

LILLIAN:

I am fine. I just. I just...

GERALD:

Well see now this is why I am insisting we, insisting the moment anything looks like it is “beginning”, we, we go straight to the hospital. These are modern times. There’s no need to go losing ourselves in times like these. You’re not well, Lillian. I will have Dr. Mitchell come. And when it is time, we are having all the conveniences of modernity. I will not have you, have you.

LILLIAN:

It’s this corset.

GERALD:

I’ll have Hillie tuck you into bed.

LILLIAN:

It’s too tight I think. I saw it in the catalog--. but it’s very *tight*.

GERALD:

Let’s have Hillie tuck you into bed.

LILLIAN:

Under the picture it said, it said: “For your own sake, and for the sake of the baby to come you *must* be correctly corseted during the maternity period”. I bought five. Keeping up with the rich white ladies like I don’t know what, buying all of Miss Lena Bryant’s fashions from New York City like I’m the bees knees.

GERALD:

You’re speaking like when I met you, darling. Reverting back to—

LILLIAN:

Mama had all of us in the back room. If another one of us was on the way, she’d just let her dress out some.

GERALD:

You’re slipping into dementia because your mother didn’t have maternal clothes?

LILLIAN:

Maternity. Maternity clothes. That is what the Lena Bryant store is calling them.

GERALD:

You just do not seem well my dear, you seem wild. A bit wild or. Go rest.

LILLIAN:

I’m not *sick*.

GERALD:

Well than act *well*. You're acting *strange*. Moaning about. I heard that this morning.

LILLIAN:

Well isn't that why we had a bathroom put *in*? To *use* it?

GERALD:

Well yes, now I am *aware* and I can *insist* that Dr. Mitchell absolutely attend—

LILLIAN:

It's just this corset.

GERALD:

Well who said buy five?

LILLIAN:

Ooo.

GERALD:

A doctor should tend to that. This is nineteen hundred and sixteen. I thought we agreed we'd be modern about this.

LILLIAN:

Some things can be modern—

GERALD:

Modern medicine is a *gift*.

LILLIAN:

I think I am disagreeing. I think I am disagreeing to what we agreed because. Because.

GERALD:

This is the city. -I saw you last night at supper. *Act* well, my dear, and perhaps I won't be so consumed with the *idea* of a doctor, *act* well so you don't worry me so.

LILLIAN:

I think those things, the moaning, the eating of whatever I want, are fine. Are part of it.

GERALD:

I never saw my own mother do any of those things.

LILLIAN:

I do not think Dr. Mitchell should be in full charge of this birth.

GERALD looks at LILLIAN.

LILLIAN:

I'm twenty-three and I feel I know myself. (Pause) I don't want to go to some colored hospital to prove we can afford it.

GERALD:

But Dr. Mitchell is highly respected—

LILLIAN:

I don't want that Dr. Mitchell to come here and tend to me like some rich white lady. I think. I think. Hillie—

GERALD:

Hillie?

LILLIAN:

Could—

GERALD:

The old lady who cooks our stew and sews the holes in my socks.

LILLIAN:

You know exactly who she is so that is cruel. Hillie delivered me, my brothers and sisters, nearly everyone back home. She knows exactly what to do. In all those years she's never lost one. Never. We're lucky she came when we asked. I feel comfortable—

GERALD:

That corset *is* too tight.

LILLIAN:

Some of those doctors, I have heard. I have heard. Ladies, women, new mothers, talk about this new Twilight method. And I don't. I do not—

GERALD: Method?

LILLIAN:

Twilight Method, yes. They. They put you to sleep, or half sleep. They cover your eyes, your head. You don't feel a thing. But I heard, I heard that the ladies thrash and kick and the poor fathers come pick them up days later. "What's this?" They ask, because the ladies can't be let to thrash and kick, they have to be tied to their beds with rope, so they've got marks here and here (she rubs her wrists). Like prisoners. You're in a haze, from the medicines they give you. The idea is, the idea you don't feel a thing so you don't feel any pain. Most women don't even remember *having* the baby, is what I've

heard. Medicine, birth, then it's all over. But all that doesn't always stop the woman from reacting, from, well, I've heard the nurses sometimes have quite a time trying to calm the patients down. It's, it's—

GERALD:

Don't think so much about how it happens. Think about - about being a mother.

LILLIAN:

A mother.

GERALD:

Who would give birth if they thought over and over about that part? No one. Absolutely nobody. This teeny tiny part of it is terrible but afterwards you've got a beautiful gift from God. Who cares how it happens? What matters is afterwards, the little life you get to bring home, and love...

LILLIAN:

I care. I think I do. I think I mind.

GERALD:

I don't think Hillie's to my liking. And I don't understand how she can be to *your* liking, Lillian. Honestly.

LILLIAN:

I.

GERALD: When we met we spoke a similar language.

LILLIAN:

I...Yes.

GERALD:

We wanted the same types of. The same kind of. Life.

LILLIAN:

Yes.

GERALD:

And. It's the kind of life. That does not go backwards.

LILLIAN:

I know that.

GERALD:
We move forwards.

LILLIAN:
I just think that corset was too tight and that made me think that things are not moving *towards* a place that is very *right*, towards a place that is a place I want to—

GERALD:
I think Hillie is to be invited to take her leave.

LILLIAN:
No. No,

GERALD:
I trust you can break it to her gently.

LILLIAN:
—

GERALD folds his paper.

GERALD:
We've come too far, Lillian, to bring Hillie along with us.

GERALD looks at LILLIAN.

Darkness.

Recollection Number One.

ANNE:
My birth experience? *My birth experience?* I guess. We never. Well people didn't talk about it. If people gave you presents before the birth, they gave you yellow and if people gave you presents after it was pink or blue. My mother didn't tell me anything until the day before I got married, which was June the First, 1966. The bridesmaid's dresses were robin's egg blue with white ruffles and every girl had a bouffant. I made them or they couldn't be in the wedding. Hair up up up or no wedding, no way. My mother did not tell me one single thing about anything about anything about where anything went or what to do. For my wedding night she bought me a new nightgown champagne colored chiffon with ivory trim and little kitten heels to match- and she said "you'll see why". To this day, I still don't know exactly what she meant. I changed into that thing and then was too afraid to come out of the bathroom in it. But. Nine months later. Nine months almost to the day, I had Michael Junior and I was knocked out the whole time. I was so drugged up, I don't remember anything for the first bit of it. I

don't remember holding him, seeing him. They bound up my tatas and taught me to feed him with a bottle. Formula was modern. Only hippies did the breastmilk was what they told me. President Johnson was on his way out. Vietnam had everyone angry. And Nixon was beginning to make everyone very straight and tight about a lot of things, so I let them. I was twenty two. You did what you were told. What the other mothers were doing. I do think, I do think I remember the hospital but that might have been for my other two, they all blend together. But so do all those years. Eleven months apart, all of them. I don't know. We just weren't taught to think about whether life could be different. If we had been, who knows, I may not have had any at all. I love them. But I may not have had three of them the way I did. If I'd had the chance to think about it.

Shift.

Recollection Number Two.

MIRA.

MIRA:

Experience? I did not want a birth "experience", I wanted it done so he could make the cut off for Kindergarten. If we're going for Belmont Country Day that's thirty five thousand dollars a year. And one extra year of that? No, no, no, no. I mean, is it really worth a discussion? So I needed an induction before August thirty first and I explained that. I was explicit Country Day is our first choice. I think it would have been down hill from there if we didn't get it. So. "Experience"? No. It's not about my needs, it's about his future. College, business school. Mid September could ruin all that. We have this technology for a reason, I am not speaking Greek, here. Well, I *can* speak Greek. But. You understand my meaning. It's a bit like this. I see it like this. I am the steward of this child. I am responsible for this child. And as a black child, he must have every advantage because there are so many advantages he will not have. So, the ones I *can* give him, I, I. Well, it is my responsibility to give them to him. I was at spin class with this other mother and she'd gone "natural" and her jaw just dropped when told her about my induction although, although I said to her all birth is natural is my son an *alien* if I could have choked her with her ponytail I swear to anyway it's like with fur coats. For years no one else but white people rich white people had fur coats. Then the rest of us get them, get to be able to decide if we want them because now we can get them too, and then they start throwing paint all over people wearing them and if you have one you're satan and *no one* can have them and now that more people can have choices that maybe give them a fair chance in this world people want to go start *judging* and my son is just fine thank you very much it was only a few weeks you know what? We put him in a blanket he was as warm as in the fucking womb and it was *AUGUST* he was FINE. It's choices and I have them.

Shift.

AMAE AND FORD.

2016.

AMAE is almost 8 months pregnant.

AMAE holds a tablet

FORD:
It's up to you.

AMAE:
C'mon, Ford.

FORD: Really.

AMAE:
Well choose something and we can have a *discussion*.

FORD: Amae—

AMAE:
You're the expert.

FORD: But I want you to—

AMAE:
We should be making this choice *together*.

FORD:
You're right.

AMAE holds up the tablet.

AMAE:
I'm right. Your verdict, sir.

FORD:
Well that sounds patriarchal and heteronormative—

AMAE (*laughs*):
Yeah, I know. See what I did, there.

FORD:
Maybe talk to Gayle.

AMAE (*Sighs*):
I love Gayle.

FORD:
I know. You do. Let's talk to her.

AMAE:
Just say what you think we should do. As my husband and the father of our child to be born in one month's time. Given your expertise as one of the leading researchers on childbirth and fertility *in the country*.

FORD:
Give it up give it up.

AMAE:
For months it's been wait and see. Well. Now. We should fucking *decide*.

FORD:
Where is your maternal glow and serenity?

AMAE:
Up your ass. That is where my maternal glow went.

FORD looks at AMAE.

FORD:
Really.

AMAE:
Um. Yeah. Really. Why would I want you to stand here and *lie* to me.

FORD:
No interventions.

AMAE:
Same page. Okay. We're on the same page. Good. It's not a *surprise*. I mean. Your research, all your studies, the lab. How can you be one of the leading proponents of natural childbirth and have your wife wacked out of her mind to give birth?

FORD:
A perfectly health woman checks into a hospital in labor, perfectly healthy, everything is

normal, fine, and then things take maybe half an hour, an hour longer than some doctor decided is right and they go filling that woman up with drugs. The popular drug of choice these days being—

AMAE:

Pitocin. See. I take breaks from legal briefs to catch up what you are up to once in a while.

FORD:

So yeah. That Pitocin makes all those contractions go out of control, haywire and they say, hey, we have something to help with that, let's give you an epidural to help with that, and then you can't feel anything so you can't do what your body says to do and so now you're in distress, and now your baby is in distress, and oh, now we've got to save you *and* your baby thank God for C sections, here let's open you up and charge you for that and who is collecting on that? Oh right, insurance companies and oh my God do not get me started on the mind warp of telling women their bodies can't do a job it was built, was built to do. It's madness, insane, insane—

AMAE:

It is.

FORD:

And after we force those c section we kick those women out after what three, four days. In Germany, they keep you a week, they make sure you're okay. It's major surgery—

AMAE: I am agreeing. And there is no need to worry, we have Gayle: super human midwife able to leap tall buildings and birth babies with her bare teeth extraordinaire. Baby born here at home, no drugs: we're agreed: birth plan.

FORD: Birth plan.

AMAE:

Because we didn't really have before.

FORD:

It's not like we wouldn't.

AMAE:

No. Right. I know.

FORD:

How could I *not*?

AMAE:

No. Right. I know.

Beat.

AMAE:
But we didn't.

FORD:
It's been a busy few months.

AMAE:
Yeah.

FORD:
And you seemed—

AMAE:
Don't blame me.

FORD:
Who's blaming--?

AMAE:
Don't—

FORD:
Aim—

AMAE:
I know how you feel about hospitals.

FORD:
See, this should be your decision.

AMAE:
No. No, no, no, do not do this.

FORD:
What? What am I--?

AMAE:
Ford, you have built a career based on hating hospitals.

FORD:

That does not mean you cannot—

AMAE:
So this decision—

FORD:
If you want to have this baby in a hospital—

AMAE:
You have built a—

FORD:
Hospitals are, are, are intrinsically, most of them, many of them, linked to the military industrial complex that has irreparably damaged African American life livelihood in this country—

AMAE:
Right, so—

FORD:
Our maternal death ratios are through the *roof* Aim—

AMAE:
Right, so—

FORD:
That it's not considered a tragedy, I just don't, I just...other countries don't behave this way—

AMAE:
I think I will want an epidural.

FORD looks at AMAE.

AMAE:
We haven't discussed. Discussed. Any. Very much. But I was going through Amazon for the baby shower which was a bit disgusting, asking for things for people. I mean we didn't even have a wedding. I don't even have a wedding ring because *diamonds* but so. I saw your wish list and the birthing tub and my throat closed up and it's not that you made that decision without me it's that I, that I. I mean I know, I already know the women in my online group are going to skewer me. I may as well be a cube of sirloin on a metal stake in a fire. And I don't want to be doped up, like out my mind like a fifties housewife, I just. Do not want.

FORD:
Um.

AMAE:
It's important to me Ford.

FORD:
I don't think you've thought this through.

AMAE:
Ford.

FORD: Amae, I am trying to wrap me head—

AMAE:
Try faster.

FORD: The house, the baby, the new car.

AMAE:
This is what adulting is, Ford.

FORD:
I am. I am. Having. A. I am overwhelmed.

AMAE:
Ford.

FORD:
It's all coming so fast. And. My work. What I know—

AMAE:
What I know is. I want an epidural. There are edges to childbirth and I want those edges? Sawed the f off.

FORD:
I just think. There's too many. Too many. Studies and research show that. That. Black women have the highest. Mortality. This is not good, babe. We have fought. To be better, smarter than what the system has dictated that we, that we. We know so much more, so we can *do* so much more.

AMAE:
Yes, choices.

FORD:
Yes. Choices.

Beat.

AMAE:
I need you in this, Ford.

FORD:
I know.

AMAE:
I need your support.

FORD: We just -

AMAE:
Do I have it, Ford?

Recollection Number Three.

CHLOE.

CHLOE:
Progress: progress isn't linear. To me it's. To me it's jagged and fits together the way all the continents fit together on this map I remember from second grade. You begin to see how everything slides and rubs up against each other other, how everything relates and can't be completed disconnected. I remember standing. I remember standing in rounds during residency. I stood there and I asked this question on rounds and, I knew, I knew it was not going to go over very, go over very. I mean this is what my grandparents wanted for me. To be this. To be a doctor. And I did it. I made it. And so I knew, when I asked, that this was kind of me stepping onto the slope. I said "Why the Pitocin?" And she said, the chief of obstetrics and one of the best, one of the best labor and delivery hospitals in the country, she just blinks at me. I mean I know the answer. I am not a nitwit. She knows I'm not a nitwit. So she knows I know the answer. But I asked it. And she blinked. And she says, "What?" And I say "Why the Pitocin? It's only been five hours. She's not stalled out. Why drugs to move things along if things *are* moving along?" I mean at Thanksgiving, my left wing crazy uncle asked me the same thing, and went on and on about beds and insurance companies and the revolving door of the healthcare industry but I don't think. I don't know. It can't be to free up beds. If we pit someone, which then usually will mean an epidural, which then usually means a c section which is why the rate is so high, then we have to keep those women *around* for five more days. So it's not to free up beds. It could be to drive up costs. I could see

that. But then who's getting paid? I'm not getting paid. I just don't. I just don't. I mean am I going to pit up five women a night so some insurance exec can buy a million dollar house in the Cayman Islands? Is that what I'm doing? So some woman has more of a chance of dying in a U.S. hospital than a dirt hut like where my grandmother was born? This is insane. And then I became a midwife. Birth is so beautiful and wonderful and if I can just help a women open and open I can help her bring forth *life* and I never learned that in medical school. The same grandmother who stood at my med school graduation with the biggest smile in the world on her face? She's got like, half a smile now.

CHLOE half smiles.

But it's still a smile. And my crazy uncle's through the moon. Like about to piss himself he's so happy. Family dinner goes great. And to me this is progress.

Recollection Number Four.

SIMONE.

SIMONE:

I think I might. Want to have gone into labor. With all three I just. I had the c-sections, you know. I joked could they do the tummy tuck while they were in there but they made me go for those after. Greedy. I wonder if I should have gone into labor but. Poof. They were out and that was okay with me. My sister went into labor at home depot, can you imagine? We never so much as broke a nail growing up, never so much as scuffed a shoe, but she really took that nesting thing a little far, I mean her hormones really got the best of her, poor thing, and there she was in home depot, pricing power saws, when she went into labor. Well. She told her husband and he tried to get her to the hospital but she said she had one last idea about the blinds in their half bath off their foyer so they bought one saw, a drill, and a can of paint but by the time they made it to their front steps, my sister was really having a time, or so she said. She carries on. I hear it's like cramps. In which case I'm sure she was fine. We're good stock. Anyway. By the time her husband got her to their bedroom the baby's head was out and by the time he got off the phone from calling the ambulance she was already born and wrapped in a towel. I do wonder how long each of mine would have taken, good stock not withstanding. I'm not one for cramps.

It took them three months to get to painting that half bath.

Shift.

Recollection Number Five.

SCOTT.

SCOTT:

Well it was supposed to be Martha but Mrs. Odney's baby come early so she headed on over there so when I sent my oldest on over to call on Martha, *her* oldest said Martha couldn't come, and to go on over to the Oldney's place and get her, if we really needed her. This was my wife's sixth. And for a little bit, I thought, maybe we didn't really need Martha none at all. But something. Something. There was a way my wife looked, didn't look like the way she looked with the others. And the Odney's baby was early, so that was going to be taking up Martha's time in a way that wasn't expected. It's only been a few years since they gone and built the hospital a few miles down the road. We're fit as fiddles most times, never bee inside, none of us, but, my wife just didn't look right, not like she did with the others. Without anyone helping with my wife, I didn't think I could get her there myself, so I sent my oldest. I taught him how to drive the pick up last year when he turned twelve. Mostly 'cause it tickles me to see him stretching his neck to see over the wheel, keeping his eyes over the wheel. Still does. We don't have a telephone, so he I told him to head on down the road to the hospital to send them out to us and he did. They sent one ambulance but the Wilson boy come back in the truck with my son. The Wilson's got a son gone to school, college. Last class to graduate before the war and most of his class had gone off to fight but one of their boys had gone off to school. Studied to be a doctor. I'd near twisted every finger off my hands waiting for that truck to come back. Never was so happy to see a doctor in my life, the way my wife was lookin'. And I know in my heart, in my heart of heart's God was working that day. God sent Martha to the Odney's. God had Uncle Sam build that hospital and sent the Wilson boy to school and then brought him back again. No way that baby would have made it otherwise. I know that. I know that. Glad to say we have number six and seven's now on the way. Modern medicine is a miracle. It seems to me nothing is as good as a doctor when you need one. Nothing at all. Can't tell me otherwise.

Shift.

1916.

Humming.

LILLIAN,HILLIE.

HILLIE hums.

LILLIAN:

It's that I think, Mr. and I think—

HILLIE:

You not lookin so well, Miss Lilly.

LILLIAN:
I'm well, Hillie.

HILLIE:
You go rest. I bring up a tray.

HILLIE goes to leave.

LILLIAN:
No. Hillie.

HILLIE stops.

LILLIAN:
I. It's that Mr. . I mean Mr. Sutter. And I—

HILLIE:
You can barely get the words out, you so tired. That happens towards the end, when the time's about to come. You get tired. Go up and rest.

LILLIAN:
Listen—

HILLIE:
I have the thing, I have just the thing. You go upstairs, I make tea with nettles.

LILLIAN:
No, see, Hillie, that is what I am trying to talk to you about. Mr. Sutter does not want any tea with nettles coming in here. "Nettles" sounds. Sounds a little but like an *older* way. Do you know what I mean?

HILLIE: I am the best for when the babies come.

LILLIAN:
Baby.

HILLIE:
There will be more. There can be many more. Now I go make the tea.

LILLIAN:
No, no nettles this is not Mississippi, this is not the jungle—

HILLIE:

You want me here. You do.

LILLIAN looks at HILLIE.

HILLIE looks at LILLIAN.

Shift.

Recollection Number Six.

SUSAN.

SUSAN:

What they do not understand. These birthing centers. Is we are libel. Who is libel? We are libel. If they don't know what they are doing? If one of their people is just doing this because they like babies or they didn't like med school but like herbs and berries and running free naked in the fields or whatever and someone dies? A mother, a baby? We are *responsible*. The insurance companies. Us. So. So. Yes. Maybe there should not be so many of them. Maybe we make it a little harder for them to operate and I do not think that is a bad thing. It's lives, human lives we are talking about and when someone dies it's the insurance companies who not only pay—it's not about the money, really, it's insurance companies you will see sitting up there answering questions in Congress getting pounded. It is not going to be the parents. It is not going to be people asking: hey, you who have absolutely no training, no medical *ex-per-tise* whatsoever what makes you think you can make these decisions? What makes you think you can read three books on having a baby, a couple articles on Wikipedia, then pop out a kid in your living room and think it's going to be okay *and* expect us to pay some woman to oversee the whole thing? I don't think so. Not on my watch. I don't trust that. This is modern times? This crazy talk. Common sense is out the window, I am telling you.

Shift.

Recollection Number Seven.

HEATHER.

HEATHER:

I don't even trust aspirin. I don't even take Tylenol. So no. I don't. I don't know why I. I just got in there and I had thought I'd read everything. I thought I'd exposed myself to every--. And Shayla had no idea what was going on with me. We've been together so long she thought she knew me like her own skin and here I was itching her as if I was a fresh case of shingles I was completely freaking her out but I took one step in that birthing center and I was like get me out, get me drugs—every single drug that I can

have--, this is not right. And I was tubed up and strapped down in a whirlwind. No regrets. Absolutely no regrets. I have no idea why.

Shift.

Recollection Number Eight.

ROBERT.

ROBERT wears a white doctor's coat.

ROBERT:

I do. I do know why. Because there is trust there. There is the feeling there is a doctor in charge. At the helm. Interesting word: Obstetrics. To stand before. Which I suppose could mean to stand before the woman. The one in labor. It could also mean in more of a metaphorical sense. To stand before, to come before, to take precedence, to take the place, to assume the role, assert ourselves over the role of the midwife. Midwives attended all births and doctors stayed out of it. Doctor's steered clear. We like to get in there, we like interventions because there's not much doing for us otherwise, is there? And what kind of profession would it be if we admitted things could carry on, most times, without us? So I admit I like a good intervention...a little pitocin here, a good old epidural there...get things moving, liven things up. But in all seriousness. We bring. We bring a sense that things will be fine, no matter what happens. And that is worth something. Obstetrics.

The present.

AMAE and FORD.

FORD:

I'm *with* you, I just.

AMAE:

You are not.

FORD: I don't understand what this *means*.

AMAE:

I don't think it means anything. This is one decision.

FORD:

How our baby comes into this world matters.

AMAE:

How our baby *lives* in this world matters—

FORD:

I am talking about the first breath our child will take. I am talking about a moment we can give our child that we can only give once, *once*.

AMAE:

So, so, so, if our kid was a foster kid or adopted—

FORD:

What does that have to do with anything?

AMAE:

The quality of our kid's life will have to do with how we love it each and every day.

FORD:

Do not give me that. You know what I am talking about. My life's work is not a fucking *sham*, Amae.

AMAE:

Delete that birthing tub.

Recollection Number Nine.

STACI.

STACI:

To me, I just wonder if. Because. I'm. Not in the best shape. They told me that right off the bat. At the clinic when I went in and had the test and they told me how far along I was. Which was a surprise. Me and Sammy was just messin' around. And I didn't think nothin' was really gonna ever happen cause well yeah, I wasn't in the best of shape. And so the whole nine months was rough. Was real rough. The whole nine months felt like people telling me all the things I'd already done wrong to her before she even took her first breath, before she even opened her eyes. So having her, I think I, looking back I would've asked more questions. People in them hospitals don't like questions. I'd ask some, they act like they smellin' cheese turned bad. So if I could go back in time, change things, I would've asked more questions: like: like with the way my voice would come out my mouth just shapin the question would make them realize: this is meant to be: I'm meant to be her mother so get over what that scale say, get over what my sugar is, and maybe I could still do this a healthy way. But it's all just talk, looking back on it. And I don't have her now so. So. So I can only wonder what if...which is a weird thing to wonder now. I can get a hamburger in 2 minutes in the drive through. I can talk to my grandma on a video. My baby cousin has a ipad in his Kindergarden. But I went in to have a baby girl and came home with empty hands. That's like something you read in a

old times book. Like something you see in a black an white movie. Right? You know?

1916.

LILLIAN and HILLIE.

LILLIAN:

I want this home to be happy. And Mr. --. Mr. Sutter. Has asked.

HILLIE: What he know about these things?

LILLIAN:

This is 1916. We want a modern—

AMAE:

So you're going to order that thing, fill it with water, make Gayle make me have our baby in it.

LILLIAN:

I...I...

FORD:

How can you *choose* to be *complicit* in a conspiracy--?

LILLIAN:

Mr. Sutter does not feel—

HILLIE:

No, no, what do *you* feel?

AMAE:

It is not a conspiracy it is a chemical to make me not feel like my body is splitting in two.

LILLIAN:

Mr. Sutter does not feel—

HILLIE:

You know. You know what you feel. You are not sick.

AMAE steps away from FORD.

AMAE:

Sit in fear and pain to prove what?

LILLIAN:

I'm a modern girl, woman, Hillie. A modern *American* woman.

LILLIAN rubs her stomach.

LILLIAN:

Oo.

HILLIE:

It too tight—

AMAE:

I won't.

LILLIAN attempts to straighten herself.

LILLIAN holds her stomach.

LILLIAN:

Maybe so.

Beat.

FORD:

You're just scared—

HILLIE: You 'bout to have that baby you 'bout to need to use your own voice to say what you think is what. Better start in your house.

AMAE:

I am making a choice, Ford. Me. *I* am.

HILLIE smiles at LILLIAN.

LILLIAN smiles at HILLIE.

AMAE and FORD regard each other.

A moan.

The sound of water.

KATE and MICHELLE as before.

MICHELLE:
Shouldn't he be—

A baby's wail.

KATE:
There he is. There's your baby.

MICHELLE smiles widely.

End of play.