

The New Englanders

by Jeff Augustin

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Characters

Eisa – 17-Year-Old Mixed Race Young Woman

Aaron –Late 40s Black Man

Raul – Late 40s Cuban-American Man

Samuel– Late 40s White Jewish American Man

Atlas – 17-Year-Old White American Young Man

Laura – Anywhere in her 30s or 40s White American Woman

Setting

Present. A New England Town. Various locations.

Notes:

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A silent moment when a character reveals or holds back a truth. A time when language is too much or not enough. Though it is silent, there is a sort of exchange that happens between the characters.

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Words in parentheses are not to be said, but implied.

Overlapping Dialogue:

Aaron's line begins on Raul's "name"

RAUL

What's her
name –

AARON

They'll be back soon. So you
should –

*You asked me blind once
If I was a child once
And I said, I'm really not sure
How can you know, how can you know
What it is, you don't know*

*We were a pair once
Of oh such despair oh
We were a child then I'm sure
If we were a child then
We are children no more*

-Laura Marling

For Scott Cummings who made me feel seen in New England

1.

(Night. Porch. We're in one of those small New England towns where there's nothing to see but trees and nothing to do but contemplate silence. A car drives by revealing AARON twisting his daughter EISA'S hair for bed. Father and daughter are comfortable in silence together – they prefer it. But whatever they've just experienced has them looking severely ill. Out of the silence.)

EISA

That movie was so...

AARON

Yeah.

(A beat)

EISA

So much silence

AARON

Yeah, white people love to watch other sad white people silently live their lives. They find it moving.

(A beat)

EISA

Do we ever get to be sad?

AARON

No. We can only to teach lessons on race and class. Be victims who overcome. We never get to just live.

EISA

Why?

AARON

Cause white people can't imagine our lives beyond the color of our skin. They can't imagine that we bake cakes and have daddy issues.

(A slight beat)

Oh, I forgot to tell you, I joined a book club

EISA

Book club?

AARON
Yeah, a classics book club.

EISA

AARON
We read only the classics

EISA
I get that, I just don't understand why? It's so mundane.

AARON
In school I hated reading stuff by dead old white people

EISA
Like *The Odyssey*?

AARON
No, like *The Bell Jar*. It'll be good, it'll help pass the time now that you're leaving me

EISA
I thought you said empty nest was a white woman disease?

AARON
Guess I was wrong.

(A beat)

EISA
Dad?

AARON
Yeah?

EISA
Are you living the life you envisioned?

AARON
What?

EISA
Like when you were my age, are you living the life you wanted?

AARON
Why?

EISA

For school we have to create a vision board. Where we see ourselves in ten years.

AARON

You have a vision don't you?

EISA

I just been thinking – like I've been listening to a lot of oldies – 2Pac, En Vogue –

AARON

Do you realize how depressing that is, that you think the 90s is the oldies?

EISA

It was like nearly two decades ago.

AARON

That's not old

EISA

Whatever, not the point. Have you heard *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*?

AARON

Yeah, a while ago

EISA

Well you remember how she missed that important day of school

AARON

No.

EISA

Yes you do. The interludes on the album take place in a classroom and in the opening one the teacher is taking roll, saying all these ghetto names, but when he gets to Lauryn there's silence, cause she's not there and they just continue without her. And it's like supposed to be a metaphor for how she missed all these lessons on love and life and that's why she's all ignorant and stuff

AARON

Okay...

EISA

But actually, I think it's the best thing that happened to her. Missing all that. Cause she was able to become something bigger you know?

AARON

I'm not following

EISA

By missing that day of school, she didn't limit herself to the ideas of what people told her life should be.

AARON

Sweetie, you know you're going to achieve greatness

EISA

Cause I'm going to college and I have goals

AARON

Yeah

EISA

Did you?

AARON

What?

EISA

Achieve greatness. No offense dad, but like, you had goals, you went to a good college did all the things and now you're *here*

AARON

I got all I wanted

EISA

And are you happy?

AARON

I have you don't I

EISA

Dad that's....(pathetic)

AARON

What?

EISA

Like not the question

AARON

Don't I seem happy?

EISA

I don't know. Do children really know how their parents are feeling?

AARON

I think so. Do you think I'm happy?

EISA

I don't know. Are you?

AARON

I am.

EISA

Okay.

EISA

AARON

(A silence falls between them for the first time in their relationship, it's an uncomfortable one. A car drives by, taking the light with it.)

2.

(Porch. Night. Crickets and other pleasant nighttime beasts quietly chirp. A street lamp flickers on, casting a low light on AARON and RAUL who is holding a bottle of rose.)

RAUL

Sorry about the rosé

AARON

No, no, I like rosé. I mean it's not exactly rosé season.

RAUL

Rosé has a season? I thought it was an all year long thing, you know it being half red and half white.

AARON

No, no it has season. There's a rosé season.

RAUL

Well that's stupid. It should be celebrated 365 days a year.

AARON

Amen.

(AARON smiles)

You look great.

RAUL

So do you

AARON

No, I'm –

RAUL

Beautiful. You have the exact same face, but like –

AARON

(Feeling a little self-conscious)

Wrinkled?

RAUL

There's nothing wrong with being wrinkled. The only people I respect are wrinkled.

(They share a laugh or a smile or they split the difference)

AARON

I'm glad you were still nearby.

RAUL

Me too. To be honest, Air, I didn't think you were going to message me back

AARON

Oh, yeah, sorry. I'm really bad at communication. Will read a text then respond two weeks later. The only reason I remembered your Facebook message was cause I had to delete some photos of my daughter. She didn't want her life reduced to false images.

RAUL

So you raised a mini you.

AARON

An old version of me, I guess.

RAUL

Once a radical, always a radical.

AARON

I guess you're not a parent.

RAUL

I am. I mean, I have a kid. A daughter, Celia. She's a little young genius. Sixteen and already a senior in high school.

AARON

My daughter Eisa is also a senior. Teenagers are are...(complicated)

RAUL

Hard as shit.

AARON

I always thought it would be easier raising a girl, but at least she'll be off to college soon and I'll have some freedom again.

RAUL

Feeling trapped?

AARON

No

RAUL

Air?

AARON

I'm just...taking inventory of my life.

RAUL

I feel you.

AARON

So being a nomad isn't...

RAUL

What two dumbass teenagers thought it would be?

AARON

Yeah...

RAUL

It has its ups and downs. I take the greyhound, if I'm feeling fancy, the Amtrak. I take it from little town to little town like these, where everyone knows your name. I'm never in one place for too long. I wash dishes or pick strawberries, landscape, do whatever odd jobs are available. Sometimes I put on a Cuban accent to...I don't know, have to speak to white people less. Which feels nice. Sometimes I find a cheap motel or some too trusting old lady to give me a room. But I'm never in one place long enough to you know make any real connections. And isn't that what life's about. Connection. Intimacy.

RAUL

AARON

AARON

Do you want to come in?

RAUL

Yeah.

(A slight beat)

But before we...continue catching up. I have to ask you something

AARON

Alright....I figured it would come up, my marriage is –

RAUL

No, not that. Though I would love to hear more about it and you know...but um, I'm just going to say it straight up and I wouldn't be asking if it weren't important. But can I borrow some money?

AARON

Are you in trouble?

RAUL

No, no, it's just....time sensitive and I have no one else to turn to.

(A beat)

AARON

How much do you need to borrow?

RAUL

Think of it less of a loan and more as reparations for leaving me. I'm not going to lie, it took me a real long time to forgive you. And maybe it wasn't until seeing you tonight, being in your (presence)....that I've finally...I don't know....I waited at the bus station all weekend for you, slept there hoping you'd come and even when I left I thought maybe I'd hear from you. That you'd page my beeper or something. Come join me. I hoped for months and if I'm being real years.

AARON

How much?

RAUL

5,000.

AARON

Oh.

RAUL

It's not for anything criminal. If it weren't important, I wouldn't ask.

AARON

Sorry, I don't think I can....

RAUL

I get it.

(A beat)

RAUL

Sorry, I hope I didn't... this thing sort of came up after I...

AARON

No, no I...I get it.

RAUL

I'd still like to catch up, if you....

AARON

I think this was a mistake. I was in my feelings when I reached out

RAUL

I get it.

AARON

Sorry.

RAUL

I really did just want to see you. I even booked a room for a few days thinking we had more than a nights worth of catching up to do...so if you...I'll be around.

(The men look at each other. A beat. RAUL leaves. The streetlight flickers off.)