

I Am Somebody: A Rewrite of The Merchant of Venice

Act II: Scene I

Mr. St. Claire, who'd become the president of The Lit Magazine after inheriting it from his father, was sitting at his desk, trying to decide what he'd order for lunch today. It'd been a hectic morning, and all he'd grabbed for breakfast was a protein bar. Now his stomach was growling, at that moment Yvonne, one of the two candidates for the role of Senior Editor knocked on the door.

Mr. St. Claire (*muttering to himself before telling Yvonne to come in*): Great.

Yvonne (*Walking in as she carried her suggestions for the cover of the magazine.*): Good morning, Mr. St. Claire. I just wanted to get your opinion on these prints. I chose a darker theme, but the colors are still bold enough to attract the eye.

She handed him the prints as she described her choices. Noting Mr. St. Claire's facial expression, she became apprehensive. Yvonne was a dark-skinned woman and felt that this opportunity to become Senior Editor was not just for her, but for all black women who'd been dismissed or overlooked. Which made her that much more determined to beat her competition: Beverly. Bev was a light-skinned woman, and while she was also Black, Yvonne knew she couldn't possibly understand the true struggles of the black community.

Yvonne: I didn't want anything too loud that would clash with my complexion. I know that the bright colors are what we would typically use, but I can speak directly to our target audience: black women who are seeking to be empowered.

Mr. St. Claire (*inwardly praying that his stomach growls couldn't be overheard.*): I think this would make a great front page.

Yvonne: Thank you, Sir.

Yvonne exits feeling more confident. Mr. St. Claire orders his lunch.

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Mr. St. Claire makes his way out of the meeting room and is approached by Beverly.

Beverly: Hello, Mr. St. Claire. Do you have a moment to give your opinion on my proposal?

Mr. St. Claire: Sure. Come into my office.

As the two of them stepped into the office together, Beverly became increasingly nervous. As first woman in her family to go to an Ivy league school and obtain a graduate degree, and the first born, she always took pride in her accomplishments. They weren't just her own, they were for every generation that preceded her and endured brutality just so that she could get to this moment.

Beverly (*nervously handing over her proposal for the cover*): I chose a photo of the three generations of women in my family to show that strength and empowerment come from community.

Mr. St. Claire: I think that would be a wonderful message to send.

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The day of the determination, Mr. St. Claire finished his cup of coffee as he sat in the large glass meeting room. Yvonne, dressed in a chic, white jumpsuit, entered, followed by her assistant, who was similarly dressed. They're followed by Beverly, wearing a bright yellow

summer dress, and her assistant Nerissa. Both Yvonne and Claire are too nervous to offer long, or genuine pleasantries. They want to know who the new Lead-Editor will be.

Mr. St Claire: Ladies, I won't keep you on pins and needles any longer. Here is our next cover with a photo of our new Editor.

Beverly: Thank you, Sir!

Yvonne: What was it?

Mr. St Claire: I don't understand.

Yvonne: I just want to know that you can look me in the eyes and tell me the truth. In my five years of working here, I can count on one hand the number of dark-skinned people who have graced the cover of this magazine. I want you to tell me that is why I didn't get it.

Mr. St Claire: Don't give me that bullshit!

Yvonne: Bullshit! Of course. My reality, because you don't experience it every single day, is bullshit to you. Let me enlighten you, Mr. St. Claire, slavery may have ended years ago, but if you ask any honest black woman—any black woman that looks darker than the color of honey—she'll tell you that we are still rejected. If Miss Beverly wears an African head scarf in public, people will stop her just to say how beautiful she is. But if I wear the same damn thing, I'm just being lazy and ghetto!

Beverly: Listen, I can't discredit your experience, I won't deny that we are still judged based on our skin, but I would ask the same thing of you. You want to sit here and have your little temper tantrum, flailing your arms, and spewing your pain at me like I'm not black myself. I know it hurts when people discriminate against you, but try having other races, and your own people discriminate against you too. Then you can come talk to me.

Yvonne: Girl, please! You really believe this is one-sided? I see you every day, spending extra time with people who look just like you: relaxed hair, bright colors, light skin. When was the last time you stayed even two minutes late to talk to your own assistant— not about work, but about her? You don't! You don't care about your people, as you call them. I won't dare say "us" because you don't know what it means to be us. You're too busy floating on your little perfect cloud of privilege.

Yvonne leaves the office, her assistant following close behind.

Beverly turns to her assistant, Brielle, her gaze simultaneously questioning and defiant.

Beverly: I don't ask you personal things because it's not my business. I don't want to cross any boundaries.

She waited, incredulously, for Brielle to console and defend her. Brielle simply stood there, a mix of shock and confusion overwhelming her. Beverly leaves.

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Months later, after much consideration, and the absence of both Yvonne and Beverly, Mr. St. Claire revoked his decision, split the position into two, and gave them to the assistants. He'd been struck by the fact that Beverly and Yvonne had great vision—all good leaders must—but it was too clouded allow them to achieve success. Instead, they were enslaved by an ideology stablished hundreds of years before they were even born. He couldn't allow that to destroy his company.