

JADE. Not quite a crab in a barrel.

SANDRA. Not quite???

JADE. I don't like what I heard. Like I said, I think it's fucked up. If it's true. I don't want this divide and conquer thing going on between the only two of us in this department. But if you felt that way, I want to know why.

SANDRA. I don't know what to say to you Jade. I'm sort of speechless.

JADE. Do you deny it?

SANDRA. I can't even... I don't know where to begin.

**Start** JADE. You can begin with a yes or no.

SANDRA. I don't like this interrogation.

JADE. It's not an interrogation. It's just a question. Colleague to colleague. Sister to sister.

(SANDRA snorts in spite of herself.)

SANDRA. Sister to sister?

JADE. Oh I'm sorry. Should I not call you that?

SANDRA. You said yourself we barely spend time with one another. It's just, loosely used, perhaps.

JADE. I'm speaking beyond the interpersonal.

SANDRA. Yeah, I get that.

JADE. That's not your deal though, hunh?

SANDRA. Now you're questioning something else.

JADE. It's my job to question everything and encourage the same in my students. Just like you.

SANDRA. We have very different ways of engaging the students, actually.

JADE. See, now what does that mean?

SANDRA. It means your methods are different than mine. We're different educators.

JADE. Meaning you're superior and I'm inferior?

SANDRA. I would never say that.

JADE. But you're using the word different like a divider. I can hear it in your context. You have a judgment about the way that I teach.

SANDRA. It's not my style. That's not a judgment. It's just a difference.

JADE. What is *my* style, exactly?

SANDRA. You're a lot more coddling than I am.

JADE. Coddling?

SANDRA. It's a stylistic choice.

JADE. Who do I coddle?

SANDRA. Malik Powers, for one.

JADE. Malik Powers? The one Black male student in our department? You've got to be kidding me.

SANDRA. He always seems to be in your office. It seems he gets a lot of extra time from you.

JADE. I could say the same about you.

SANDRA. I engage his critical thinking. But no more than the other students.

JADE. Are you sure this isn't because Malik actually likes my class? That he and I have a close relationship? That perhaps your distance from him is a case of... *(Pause.)*

SANDRA. Well don't stop there. Please finish the / statement -

JADE. Jealousy.

SANDRA. And what would I be jealous of exactly?

JADE. That the Black students here seem to feel more nurtured by me than by you.

SANDRA. You're speaking for all of the Black students? Because there are six here. Malik isn't the only one.

JADE. All of the others have expressed a sense of being polarized here. And that I'm the only one who gets them.

SANDRA. I get them.

JADE. It's not a competition, Sandra.

SANDRA. No it isn't, Jade.

*(A beat. The women politely fume at each other.)*

JADE. Sandra, I'm disappointed in the direction of our conversation. I was hoping for a window into understanding you more interpersonally.

SANDRA. That why you started with accusations?

JADE. Again, not accusing. Just questioning.

SANDRA. Okay. Questioning.

JADE. I know we come from different backgrounds.

SANDRA. You make sure to keep bringing that up.

JADE. It has some meaning.

SANDRA. It also has judgment.

JADE. That's just how you're hearing it.

SANDRA. No, it's also how you're saying it. You keep making the distinction between your side of the tracks and mine. That I'm from this elitism and you're from the people. That somehow the Black students connect more with you because you spent seven years in community college and you come from their world and therefore you're more down and I'm just another "tolerant negro" professor that's absorbed in the system of institutional

racism. That's what you're saying in those distinctions. If we really want to get real, let's get all the way real.

*(Pause.)*

JADE. There are a lot of things that I want to say to that but I'm trying to remain professional.

SANDRA. We're past professional.

JADE. Well then, you know what sister? Let's be all the way real. When I first came to this university, many teachers opened up their homes to me, took me to lunch, invited me to dinners with their families. You? Nothing. Ever. You don't think that *you're* the one drawing lines? What kind of sister doesn't look out for her own?

SANDRA. Look out for you how?! Invite you to my home? My home that was falling apart for years before my divorce settled in? You want to have dinner with me and my husband? Talk about our problems with intimacy and our different career tracks and the fact that we couldn't conceive? That the dinner you were missing out on? If I unraveled to you and ripped out what was barely left of my dignity would that have made you feel more connected to me? God forbid we both be Black and I don't unravel in front of you. Because maybe, just maybe, I wouldn't be able to thread myself back together again. And while you're feeling good about us both having some sense of kinship, what the hell am I supposed to do with scattered fucking threads of myself???

*(Silence. JADE is speechless. Unable to figure out the next appropriate move. SANDRA tries to breathe.)*

*(Then, finally:)*

JADE. I overstepped. I see that.

*(SANDRA lets out an audible sigh in response. Almost a bitter laugh.)*

**End**