

BITTER/SWEET

Cast List (for this episode)

Jolie Hendricks: 26 years old, Black St. Thomian. Jolie is pensive, thoughtful, and optimistic.

Cyrus “Cy” Hendricks: Jolie’s older brother. Mid-thirties, Black St. Thomian. Cyrus’ voice is crisp and strong. He’s been very frustrated and a bit gruff lately.

Alana Hill: 26 years old, Black St. Thomian. Alana’s voice is more refined, with an accent that she switches on when she feels it’s beneficial. Alana is fiercely ambitious, a bit entitled, and...at times...snide and condescending.

Mekhi Berry: 26 years old, mixed (“Frenchie” and Black) St. Thomian. Mekhi believes very strongly in his purpose and goal of self-sustainability, and has a very precise and clear cadence.

Vashti Vega: 40+, Hispanic; originally from Miami. Vashti is a TV star and the owner of a huge baking franchise, so she’s used to being in control of everything and everyone around her. Her voice is strong and loud.

Gerald Trombeau: 50+, White; originally from somewhere in the southern US (gentle accent), but living in New York now. Gerald is kinder and more soft-spoken than Vashti.

Episode Specific Characters:

Geralda Foy: 70+, Black St. Thomian. Former teacher; she has the pleasant but firm cadence of someone who has wrangled classes of rowdy 11-year-olds for decades.

Annette Callwood: 50+; Jolie’s boss. Shrill, loud; Eastern Caribbean accent.

Diego de los Santos: 19, originally from the DR

Bitter/Sweet

SCENE ONE

Narrator Jolie:

So...one thing about me that you should know from the start is that my worldview tends to be a little too...sugary, let's say, for mos' people to handle. The things I believe in are fluffy and saccharine; they're glazed and dusted with sweet powder, and then dyed some color on the pastel spectrum. (SFX: something understated but twinkly) I like glitter in my nail polish an' a fresh hibiscus behind my ear. I'll never turn down an extra spoon of brown sugar in my bush tea. I'm the one lookin' out east for a rainbow as the clouds drift off over the west end. I jump headfirst into waves. And--close to the top of this list, you have to understand--close to the top of this list is my fervent belief that there aren't too many problems in life that a slice of cake won't solve.

I have a thing wid cake, see. I'm willing to bet you can't think back too far in yuh life without comin' 'cross a memory that involves cake. I know I can't. Birthday parties? Cake. Yuh auntie's wedding? Cake--an' good cake, too; pretty cake that they soak in rum an' keep in the freezer for years on end, just to eat a nibble on anniversaries. St. Thomas Food Fair? Lawd! (SFX:in the background, typical noises of the fair--voices, laughter, calypso music) Carnival time, mos' people head down to the fair for the coconut and guava tarts, for the tamarind (pronounce: tah-mon) balls an' the coconut sugar candies, but I...I was only there for the Vienna cake. Daddy would give me an' Cyrus ten dollars and turn us loose at the fair, knowing there were plenty of watchful eyes on us in the thick crowd down there in the Emancipation Gardens. Cy was a li'l ol' man even from then. He always spent his on a plate of roas' pork or whelks and rice. I would jus' bolt straight over to the dessert tables for those Vienna cakes...fresh guava preserves between layer after layer of soft, fluffy, crumbs; deh scent of almond essence, the stiff, crunchy icing that melted on your tongue...you bes' believe I spent my whole ten dollars on cake each year. I would sit down under the big bell in de southwest corner of the park an' eat the three or four slices my money could buy, stuffing layer after sweet layer in my mouth. An' as I ate, I could forget for a few moments that I didn't have a mommy to braid my hair in all the cute styles the other little girls wore for Carnival time. I could forget how hard Daddy had to work in order to spare that \$20 for me and Cy. When I had my cake...I didn't have my problems.

Not like I didn't have cake in the bad times, too. We ate cake after Daddy's funeral, me and Cy, a simple pound cake from the freezer section at Plaza Extra because that was the kind of thing Daddy liked. We ate cake the day the hotel closed. Yeah. Picture us, fifteen, sixteen strong, used to spending the entire day cooking the most luxurious dishes for tourists and yacht guests and locals who just wanted to treat themselves for the day--picture us being told that we were the latest victims of the pandemic, not because we were sick but because our economy was; that our industry had been fighting and rallying but couldn't hold on for us any longer. The ships and the planes weren't coming. The rooms and the restaurants were empty. I baked the cake we ate that day. It was a three-tier strawberry cake, vanilla buttercream icing with fresh passionfruit preserves, prepared for a bride and groom whose destination wedding had also

been a casualty of the whole collapse. Picture it. (SFX: forks clinking on plates, seagulls...?) All of us, deh restaurant staff, sitting outside on the dining terrace in the lush chairs and set tables reserved for our guests, eating wedding cake off of our hotel's signature ocean blue plates. We all sat out there, looking out over the beach, watching the sunlight glittering the water down by the empty cruise ship pier off in the distance; and we stuffed our mouths full of sugary icing roses and soft pink fluff. Picture us, filling ourselves up with sweetness and light; knowing the next moment meant goodbye. Knowing the next moment meant insecurity, and not just about when we would ever be able to feed others again. We lef' the hotel that day not knowing how we...without the hotel, without our jobs...would feed ourselves.

That was eight months ago. Hotel still closed, whole island still tryin' to figure out how to move forward. I ain' gon' lie, things were lookin' kind of bleak for us for a while, an' then...in the way that I believe it always has, and always will...cake came to save us. Remember what Ah tell yuh earlier? Cake fixes everything.

(SCENE 2--Cy's restaurant. It's a small place, humble but clean; with scuffed linoleum tiles and chairs that saw their best days a decade ago. SFX- dishware clinking, the sizzle of frying food, muffled voices with Caribbean accents in the background. In this scene: Cy, Jolie, Alana, Mrs. Foy. At open--just Cy Jolie, Mrs. Foy.)

Scene 2A

Narrator Jolie:

My brother Cy's restaurant. He been runnin' de place for years, from back when I was in high school an' all. Maybe not exactly the kind of place you go to if you want luxury and fanciness. You won't find salad forks and napkins folded into 3D sculptures here. What you **will** find? A menu full of Caribbean dishes and delicacies, comfort food to the extreme; all cooked fresh daily by Chef Cyrus himself. Oxtail, stew chicken, fry fish, Johnny Cake...and a heaping side order of people with nothing better to do than to mind yuh business.

Mrs. Foy:

I'll take another piece of dumbread for now. And what time can I expect the oxtail to be ready, Cyrus?

Cy:(*jokingly exasperated*)

I swear we do this every Monday, Ms. Foy. You know I always have lunch in the pans by 11:30.

Mrs. Foy:

You always do, dahlin', but **you** know I have to ask. I like to plan my day almos' down to the minute.

Jolie:

You could set your watch by Cyrus, Mrs. Foy. When it comes to schedules, dis man don't play.

(SFX: spoons, dishes clanging)

Cy:

Ain' no lies there...

Narrator Jolie:

If Cy were a cake, he'd be a lemon cake with pristine and flawless whipped cream icing. Cool, crisp; zesty. And this morning, I know Mrs. Foy agrees with me too...even if she doesn't use those exact words. In her day--back when she taught me, or Cy 6 years before me, or even when she taught her first class of kids a good 50 odd years ago--Mrs. Foy was probably a lemon cake, too.

Mrs. Foy: *(laughing)*

From when he was a child in my class, Jolie. Always ready, always timely, always prepared. A role model for everyone who saw him. You, on the other hand...

(Cy chuckles.)

Jolie:

That's not fair!

Mrs. Foy:

Now, if he was only on schedule for finding himself a wife, settlin' down...he's well late on **that** track.

Jolie:

Mmm-hmmm!

Cy: *(good-naturedly)*

Oh God, not this again. Mrs. Foy, here's your dumbread an' yuh bush tea, and I'll see you at noon for the oxtail.

Mrs. Foy: *(embarrassed)*

Oh. I...Cyrus, I thought I had a ten here in meh wallet, but I--it looks like I might have put jus' a couple ones in here instead--

Cy:

Don't worry about it.

Mrs. Foy:

I can bring it when I come back for lunch...?

Cy:

For real, don't worry about it. Please. It's on the house.

Mrs. Foy:

Thank you, dahlin. You've made an ol' woman's day.

(SFX: footsteps as she walks away)

Scene 2B

Jolie:

You can't keep doing that, Cy. Giving everyone a break like that. Not when you're--

Cy:

I don't do it for everyone. I'll do it for her, though. You, of all people, should understand that. You know how much she's done for us. *(Cy clears his throat.)* What about you? You need something to eat before you leave?

Jolie:

No, I'm good. I told Alana to come for me at 7:30. She should be here like...now.

Cy: *(pause)*

I...don't like this, Jolie. I know it's too late for you to back out, but iss like I told you before, I really, **really** don't like the idea of you-- *(abruptly switching, speaking to a customer)* Ay, you ready to check out, big man? 'Das it fuh you, jus' deh cake?

Male Customer:

Jus' deh cake fuh now, dread. Yeah.

Cy:

Okay, boss. \$1.50. (SFX: cash register) You know iss she make dis cake, right?

Male Customer:

For true?

Narrator Jolie:

It's been eight months, and this is how I've been sustaining myself. I bake cakes in my closet-sized kitchen, in my ancient oven, and Cy sells my slices. I make just enough to almost pay my rent and buy groceries. Cy...and the li'l piece of change in my unemployment checks...have been helping with the rest, along with Mekhi if his farm makes a little extra at the market on Saturdays. Cake has been keepin' me afloat these past few months, keepin' my head jus' above those waves; fightin' deh current trying to drag me under. But today...today, I'm starting something new, something with my best friend Alana, that should bring me jus' enough to cover all of my own bills, and maybe just a little bit more than that. And once again, it involves baking cake. *(pause)* In a way.

Cy:

She have a gift, eh? (SFX: Cy putting the container of cake in a plastic bag)

Male Customer:

Yeah, yeah, 'das a real gift! You know I come in here for dis all deh time! Sayin' I need to be eatin' clean an' savin' meh money an' all, but...days like dese, we all need a li'l sugar to get through dem, right? Ay, look, nuh...I work down by deh airport, an' you know who jus' came--deh people dem for the cake show dey say gon' be filmin' here...

Jolie (*excitedly*) and Cy (*not as enthused*):

The Masterpiece Baker.

Male Customer:

Right. Yes. 'Das deh name. Dem man jus' arrived couple days past. Dey gon' start filmin' soon. Showed me pictures an' all. Cakes big as me an' designed like--like paintings on a **wall**, de man.

Cy:

Oh, yes. Jolie...knows all about that.

Male Customer:

Yeah? Well. The cakes they make may be pretty an' all, but I bet nuttin' dey make could touch your cake in terms of flavor, Miss.

Jolie:

That's so kind. Thank you.

(SFX: Footsteps as the customer walks off)

Jolie:

You could've told him I was starting my job with The Masterpiece Baker today.

Cy:

I could've told him you were cleaning the damn set? I'll pass. (*Chuckles dryly*) Jo. I could always use more help here. You could bake, and serve, and--look, if you have to clean, then clean **here**, for me, for...**us**, not for some--

Jolie:

You can barely afford to pay the staff you do have, Cy. I can't take anything away from them--or anything more away from *you*. There's no shame in what I'm doing. Besides, Alana got me this job, and--like you said--I can't back out on her, not when she's flying so high with this. I don't show up, it makes both of us look bad...oh, look, see she comin' now.

Cy:

Flyin' high. Right. Not so hard when you have piles of your family's money and influence for fuel.

Jolie: (*playful whisper*)

Stop it, nuh, man! She comin' through deh door all now, she could hear you... (*louder*) Hey, 'Lana!

(SFX: Restaurant door swinging open, heels on the tile floor)

Alana:

Hey, love! You ready for this?

Scene 2C

Narrator Jolie:

Alana Hill has been my best friend since we were tiny, from when my mother was her grandfather's caretaker and nurse. And no matter what Cyrus may say out loud, he knows just as well as I do that the Hill family's 'money and influence' did plenty for us, too. Not only did we get to go to school with Alana, but I got to run around the grounds of the Hill estate and play with her bins and bins of toys, and Cyrus learned half of what he knows how to do in the kitchen from Alana's grandmother. Her cookbook, 'A Culinary Tour of the Virgin Isles', is still talked about to this day as **the** preeminent cookbook these islands have to offer. If Alana were a cake, she'd be one of those old, grand, three-tier masterpieces from the 1800s...something made with freshly laid eggs, imported Danish butter, and sugar from the sunniest cane fields on earth. Fine ingredients? Yes. Alana comes from those.

Cy:

Morning, Alana. Yuh look nice, man. Lookin' real professional.

Alana:

You think so, Cy? I was thinking the heels were a little too high, especially because Vashti Vega--she's one of the judges--she's kind of tiny.

Jolie:

So? That means she should be used to people towering over her by now.

Alana:

Yes, gyul, but you've watched the show. She's the mean one. You know how she doesn't like bein' upstaged. And especially not by her...geez, what's my exact title? 'Local Contracting Liaison'.

Cyrus:

What exactly does that mean?

Alana:

I maintain relationships between the show's talent--mainly Vashti Vega, the head judge--and the hired local help.

Cyrus:

So you're like...a glorified personal assistant?

Alana (a bit superiorly):

Something like that, except my pay reflects the 'glorified' part rather than the 'assistant' part.

Jolie (trying to avoid a tense situation):

The shoes look good, Alana. They're not too high at all.

Alana:

I don't know. I have another pair in the car. (*sigh. And then, nervously*) I...don't want to rush, especially when everything in here smells so good, but...we really should get going, Jolie. I'm terrified we're going to get stuck in that traffic on Mafolie Hill heading out to the villa. She said not to show up until 8, but...

Jolie:

Then we should go. I'm supposed to meet my...you know, the supervisor of the custodial staff at 8:30.

Cy:

Hey, I'm just going to say it. This really isn't what she was made for, Alana.

Jolie:

Cy--

Alana: (*diplomatically*)

No--no, of course not, Cyrus. I agree. Jolie should be back at the Marriott, making wedding cakes and pastries and all of those things she's so good at. I know. I wish we were recovering faster than we seem to be.

Jolie:

Cyrus. This show filming its whole season here. And...I mean, it's not 8 ships in the harbor every day, but if it gets us some publicity, if it can give some of us jobs...if it can help me and Mekhi in the tiniest way...then I have to take advantage of that.

Alana:

I'm just glad I was able to help. Jobs with the show are kind of tight, and they're so choosy about who they hire...

Cyrus:

I hate the idea of you cleaning the set of a show **you** could easily be the star of, Jolie.

Jolie:

I know you do. But look around, Cyrus. It's...it's coming down to having my pride or having a paycheck. And you know what I have to choose.

(SFX: footsteps approaching)

Scene 2D

Mrs. Foy:

Cyrus? Can you jus' fill up my tea one more time before I leave? I jus' want to--oh! Alana Hill, you're here, too?

Alana:

Mrs. Foy! Yes, yes, I came to pick up Jolie. We're starting our new jobs with The Masterpiece Baker today.

Mrs. Foy:

Really? I had no idea! Cyrus, Jolie, you didn't say anything about that earlier. Jolie, are you--what, a local consultant? Teaching those people a thing or two about the way we bake cake?

Jolie:

No...not exactly. But Alana is the...uh...the 'Local Consulting'...'Contracting'... uh...she's like the main judge's personal assistant. It's a big deal. She'll be making us all proud.

Mrs. Foy:

Wow. That does seem impressive. You've been wanting something like this for years. I'm happy to see you're finally getting a second chance to shine.

Alana:

Thank you. That means a lot. *(In her most charming tones)* Oh! Mrs. Foy! And--happy birthday! *(Mrs. Foy laughs demurely,)*

Jolie:

It's your birthday today?

Cy:

I didn't know that!

Alana:

Yes! (*accent stronger, switching completely*) I had the radio on in the car comin' over, listenin' in for what the community had to say about 'The Masterpiece Baker'. 'Morning Show' had their Birthday Shout-Out segment, and--look, deh whole show was (*imitating a flamboyant caller*) 'Happy Birthday to MY former teacher, Mrs. Gerald Foy!' over and over and over again. Caller after caller. 'S like nobody else was born on this day! All for you.

Mrs. Foy: (*humbly*)

I appreciate that, Alana. It's just...another regular day for me, but hearing so many of my former students callin' in to the Birthday Shout-Out segment was a real treat.

Alana:

So you're not doing anything special?

Mrs. Foy:

...No. (*pause*) I have a book from the library to read, and I'll come back at noon for some of Cy's oxtail...if I can get over to the bank in time--

Cy:

None of that, Mrs. Foy. Everything today is on the house for you.

Alana:

I have an even better idea. (SFX: wallet opening, crunching of bills being taken out) How about I give Cyrus a little something from my wallet, and...all of your meals for the week are my treat?

Narrator Jolie:

That's the kind of person Alana is. Her goal is to try to make people happy, and the best way she knows how to do this is with money. Cy--and Mekhi, my...fiance--both think she only does this to show off. But I know she does it for the same reason that I bake cakes--she needs to see that moment of joy in someone's face when they get their first 'bite' of that sweet surprise. For Mrs. Foy--who always manages to look sharp even though her shoes are worn and scuffed; who drives a car that was old when she taught me in sixth grade almost 16 years ago--Alana's gift was more of a lifeline than a treat; the way a piece of cake would be for someone who is literally starving. And...I have to say, because Cyrus *never* would; that Alana's money was an unexpected gift for him too. She'd given him twice what he normally has in his register by early afternoon these days. Yes. She does it for those moments, see; for the joy. Except this time, this

far into the struggle, what she got from both of them when she'd handed Cy those bills wasn't joy--it was relief. And I wonder if she even noticed the difference.

I'm still thinking about that in Alana's car, as she drives me out to the villa where the show is going to be filmed. I'm thinking about Cyrus looking at that cash and rejoicing about paying his light bill, and Mrs. Foy thinking about not having to budget a \$7 plate of food every day this week, and I'm trying not to choke up. I believe in sugary things. I'm trying to ice that moment in my mind, coat it with frosting--to think of the sweetness on top instead of the hollow truth at its center.

SCENE THREE

(SFX: car driving, muffled radio in the background)

Alana:

You're so quiet this morning, Jo.

Jolie: *(forcing a laugh)*

I'm not quiet, you're just being extra...Lord, what's the word Mrs. Foy liked to use back in school?...*loquacious*.

Alana: *(giggling)*

That's a Mrs. Foy word for sure!

Jolie:

I didn't even self know it was her birthday today, mehn...

Alana:

Yeah, I wouldn't have known if I hadn't turned on the radio this morning. Just to hear what they were saying about *Masterpiece*. I usually don't listen to...*(derisively)*AM radio. *(pause)* She's looking kind of rough these days, though. You see her shoes?

Jolie:

This whole...pandemic fallout's been rough, A.

Alana:

Right. Of course. No one's saying it's not. But...I mean...there are \$5 pairs of shoes at KMart last time I checked.

Jolie: *(half-jokingly)*

When **was** the last time you checked? When las' you shopped for shoes...or anything else...at KMart?

Alana:

Fair point. I don't go in there unless I really need to. Kinda feel like stopping there now and trading these out for some flats, though. *(pause)* It's just that--Vashti Vega is so mean, Jo! It's not just an act she puts on for the camera. That's her real life personality. Walking through the villa with her and the producers the other day...she's going to give everyone hell, from the contestants right on down. But it's that attitude that keeps people watching, I guess. Like Mommy was saying the other day--it's hard to build a business empire by being sweet and kind.

Jolie:

But...then there's Gerald Trombeau. He's so much nicer to all the contestants than she is. And he bakes cakes for all those millionaires in the Hamptons.

Alana: *(a bit patronizingly)*

Well, they need him there to balance her out a little bit. Working in TV like I have, you realize that even reality shows have a kind of..."casting order".

Jolie:

They're master bakers, though. And the way they decorate--I'm just going to try to watch them and learn. ...While I'm cleaning, of course.

Alana:

About that. *(pause)* We all know that you should be holding a mixing bowl and an icing pipe instead of a mop and some disinfectant. But--

Jolie:

You're still thinking about what Cyrus said back at the restaurant. Don't min' him, okay? Please? I'm so thankful that you found me this job. It's not baking. No. But it will pay my rent until I can bake again. Until the hotels reopen. Cy...and Mekhi...are real skeptical about that happening anytime soon. But I have to believe it will. I have to believe in second chances.

Alana: *(A bit self-consciously)*

Yeah. I mean. Here I am, living proof that they do exist.

Jolie: *(interrupting)*

I wasn't trying to bring any of that up.

Alana:

Right. Yeah. I know. *(pause)* I just...**can't**...fail this time.

Jolie: *(laughing, but reassuringly)*

Gyul, you're a Hill. Iss like yuh grandmother used to say when she'd make you practice that damn piano every afternoon instead of comin' outside to play Barbies on the porch--'success is woven--'

Alana (*finishing with her*):

--'into our very DNA'. That's right, that was Clementina Hill's line right there, for real.

Jolie:

See? So you're set. Your Granny done tell you.

Alana (*a bit shakily...it's clear she's trying to be positive, but still nervous.*):

Right. You're right. (*pause, and then with confidence, since she's changing the conversation*) So. I told myself I wasn't going to say anything, but you brought him up, not me.

Jolie:

(*pause*) You mean Mekhi? (*deep breath*) Yes. I'm supposed to be going out there to the farm to see him later. After--you know, after I'm done for the day out at the villa.

Alana:

Did you two decide on anything?

Jolie:

I haven't talked to him since Friday. So I...guess we'll find out this afternoon.

Alana:

I'm sure it will all be fine. I mean, I know he's happy you've got work, even if it's with the show...

Jolie:

Right, but you know how he feels about the show. He has this thing about us being reliant on...you know, on anything that's not 'from us'. Left to Mekhi we'd all be growing our own crops, living off the land and shooting arrows at anyone gettin' too close to the damn shore. (*pause*) I dunno. There are things I worry I might not get right, too.

Narrator Jolie:

Alana's the one who turns the radio on, but I'm the one who turns it up. (*SFX: muffled radio, soca music*) We both want to be in a good head space for our first day of a new job. I don't want to talk about Mekhi any more than she wants to talk about what had happened with her a couple years back on the set of a completely different TV show over on St. Croix. So we turn up the music, (*SFX: Jolie and Alana singing along with the music*) we sing our way out to the Atlantic side of the island, which has jus' as many fancy villas as it does spectacular views and vistas. It's not that our failures aren't there making noise in our minds, sitting heavily in the car with us. We're jus' singing loud enough to drown them out for a while.

(End of scenes produced for FFT)

SCENE FOUR

Narrator Jolie:

The villa that was chosen for *The Masterpiece Baker* is equal measures classic and spectacular, like the wedding cakes I used to make for our hotel guests. It's a bright yellow house built at the edge of a dramatic cliff--deh kin'a place that could easily fit my entire living space, Cy's restaurant, and maybe even Mekhi's farm in the front yard alone. I would never mention it to Alana, but it looks like there's enough off-island money poured into this place to build a home with more room than even her family estate could boast.

Alana pulls her car into the driveway once we get pas' the neighborhood gate and the huge wrought-iron one that protects the house from...from what, any local riff-raff happening to be drivin' along the road outside? Perhaps. It's *that* kind of place. The driveway is full of cars and trucks and **people**, everyone from caterers to a production crew. Alana and I step out of the car (SFX: car door slamming, people milling around in the background) and I have jus' seconds to take in the grandeur of the property in front of me. Enormous, yes, but luxurious, too--cool breezes on the wrap-round porch; tall shady trees in the front yard, the ocean sparkling way down below...(SFX: gentle breeze, ocean waves)

It's so easy to get pulled in, sucked up by the beauty of this part of the island we rarely get to see--and then, I'm hit with a stark reminder of what my place is in all of this.

Annette Callwood: (*shrilly*)

You're Jonelle?

Jolie:

I'm Jolie...?

Alana:

Yes, yes, Ms. Callwood, this is her, my friend. Jo--this is Ms. Callwood, she's in charge of custodial. She's your direct supervisor.

Jolie:

Oh! I--

Alana: (*interrupting*)

Shit. We're early, but I'm later than I wanted to be. I need to find Ms. Vega.

Annette Callwood:

She inside deh main kitchen, dahlin'.

Alana:

Thank you. And--also--thanks, Ms. Callwood, for taking on Jolie; she'll be an excellent worker for you. Jo, we'll catch up later, okay, love?

Jolie:

Good luck, Alana. (SFX: receding footsteps, Alana's heels on cobblestone)

Annette:

So. Welcome to the custodial team. Mind, I usually work only with staff from my agency, but Ms. Hill asked me if I could do her the favor of bringing you on...

Jolie:

...and I appreciate that, so much...

Annette:

...so I know you'll repay that favor by working hard and doing exactly as you're told. These people pay big money an' expect big results. What is it you've been doing up to this point?

Jolie:

I've been--I'm a baker. I used to work at the Marriott, making cakes for the--

Annette:

Good! So you know the importance of a clean kitchen. One thing these people **demand** is spotlessness at all times. Not a crumb on the floor. We have a team of six people dedicated to this, and I expect to see your dedication showing through as well. Come, I was jus' going back inside. You can help me unload this truck. (SFX: truck door opening, buckets and bottles and mops rattling around as they're handed to Jolie) Come no, child, you can hol' more than jus' that!

(SFX: Grand door opening, hustle and bustle of the production being set up inside)

Narrator Jolie:

To Ms. Callwood, this place is--I don't know, one giant messy canvas she gets to beautify with her Fabuloso an' Lysol every hour, but when I walk through those solid mahogany doors, laden down wid four mops, three (*pronounce "tree"*) buckets an' a pile of bottles full of chemicals whose names look like alphabet soup, all I can see is the kitchen of my wildest and guiltiest dreams. Deh place has two pairs of double ovens, plus a gas range that Cy could probably use to cook his entire Monday menu one time. It's all cherry wood and marble and stainless steel. It's all golden cabinet handles and oversized appliances. There's a window over one of the sinks, an enormous one that looks out 'cross the ocean to St. John and the BVI, an'...an' all I can think is, who the hell lives here?

Diego:

From what I hear--nobody.

Narrator Jolie:

I guess the words had jumped out of my mouth without me even realizing it. And Diego de los Santos, whose mother Carolina worked as a dishwasher at the hotel with me, is the one who answers them.

Jolie:

Diego? That's you? How you been? Are you...working?

Diego:

Yeah, I'm here for custodial, too. Been working for Miss Callwood for a couple years now, tryin' to do college down UVI at night, but...yeah. Can't pay fuh dem deh classes no more. Me an' Mami jus' tryin' to eat an' pay rent at this point.

Jolie:

It's not going to be like this forever. We have to believe it's going to get better.

Diego: *(unconvinced)*

All right. Iss you say so. *(pause)* But yeah, Jolie--nobody lives here. It's like a--like a vacation home, you know? From what I hear, it rents out for like, \$10,000 a week. And you know they're probably charging the show twice that amount.

Jolie:

It's like...a palace in here.

Diego:

Yeah, I bet twenty people could live here...in luxury. Mus' be nice. I mean, that kind of money, this kind of space; it's--

Jolie:

--unnecessary?

Diego: *(chuckling, but surprised)*

Okay, that was not the word I was plannin' to use.

(SFX: footsteps stomping toward them, Annette loudly sucking her teeth)

Annette: *(yelling)*

The two of you just' standin' there talkin'? Get to work!

Narrator Jolie:

And so Diego and I do--we get to work. We strap on our masks and gloves and along with the rest of our team, we polish and mop and shine the already pristine kitchen, and wipe down after the production team set up lights and microphones and cameras all around the enormous room. (SFX "behind" Jolie as she describes the cleaning frenzy...equipment being set up, voices frantically trying to coordinate cleaning and set-up, etc.) I've just finished polishing the last cabinet handle when a tall man in a blue hat--Diego whispers that he's one of the producers--starts yelling [something about the set being ready, it's time to bring out the talent]

Annette: (*sharply*)

Out of de way, Joanna (*sucks teeth in annoyance over her own error*)--Jolie! Dey comin' up to the kitchen now!

Jolie:

Oh--the--the bakers, you mean? Where should I stand?

Annette:

Jus'--look, come stand on the side here with the rest of us. Your job right now is to just stay out of the way unless you're needed.

Producer:

Okay, here they come...let's welcome Vashti Vega and Gerald Trombeau to the set, y'all!

(SFX: crew and production staff clapping and cheering)

Narrator Jolie:

Everyone around me starts clapping and cheering, welcoming the two stars of the show as they walk into the kitchen, but me--I'm frozen. I can't even move. To everyone who enjoys the art of making cakes, these two are the goal, the dream; the gospel. My eyes are the only thing that can move right now. They follow Vashti Vega as she rises up from a swirling marble staircase that leads up from the bottom floor. She moves into the kitchen on 5-inch heels like a model walkin' down a catwalk, waving an' grinning at everyone in the room. She's followed by Gerald Trombeau, who's wearing boat shoes an' a guayabera shirt that some stylist probably tell him would len' him a quiet island vibe. He only needs a tan an' a more laid-back expression to fit in with some of the ol' men who like to play dominoes on the porch outside of Cy's restaurant. Alana's there, too, trailing behind them both. I don't know when she had time to do it, but her heels from earlier are gone. Instead, she's wearing a pair of ballerina flats. She's moving quietly, and Vashti's shoes are the only ones making noise.

Vashti:

He-LLO, *Masterpiece Baker* team! (SFX: whoops, cheers, whistles from production staff) We made it, y'all! We're here, filming this season in PARADISE!(SFX: cheers, whistles) Maybe we might want to...I dunno, run into some "production delays" so we can stay here a little longer than three weeks...? Am I right? Am I RIGHT? (SFX: chuckles, whoops) No, but all jokes aside, people, we've got three weeks to make this the best season ever, and we WILL. And then maybe next year they'll send us to the French Riviera or Santorini, right? God, or--like--where's that spot you like in the Pacific, Nic?...Pella--Palau? Palau. Right. Whatever. My point is--let's *get this done RIGHT!*

(SFX: more claps, cheers, and whoops from the production staff)

Gerald:

Right. Um. (*clears throat*) I second everything Vashti just said. And--and thank you, all of you, as well. We--we really appreciate everything you do to make this show a success. And to those of you who are, uh, joining our team here in St. Thomas, I'm Gerald Trombeau, the, uh, the other host. Thanks for letting us visit your incredible--

Vashti:(*interrupting*)

Oh, YES, how could I forget? Thank you, everyone, for all of your contributions toward the success of this show. It's because of YOU that we--(SFX: Vashti's foot bumping into a plastic bottle. liquid spilling on the floor) (*mumble*) Shit--what was--what did I--what is this?

Narrator Jolie:

I think we all realize it at the same time. Vashti's accidentally kicked over an open bottle of [wood polish] that one of us left on the floor.

(SFX: Someone muttering "It's some kind of cleanser". "We need this cleaned up, please...")

Annette: (*to Vashti*)

I'm--we're terribly sorry, Mrs. Vega. We'll get that taken care of--(*to Jolie, hissing*) Jolie, get that cleaned up!

Vashti:

It's *Ms.*, and these--shit. These shoes are brand new. Brand new!

Gerald:

Camera's not going to get your shoes, Vashti. I think it's okay if you wear something else.

Vashti:

That's not the point, Gerald! Shoes determine the way I move, the way I walk, my presence on the set. They add a whole five inches. How'm I supposed to appear formidable if I'm the size of a--

Alana: (*interrupting*)

Ms. Vega--it's me, Alana Hill. I can--I can run down and get another pair from your wardrobe guys.

Vashti:

Yes--yes, Alana, run downstairs and tell Raffi I'll need the red pair like these. It's the only thing that will... (*irritated sigh*) And these, these are ruined. They'll just have to go in the fucking trash.

Jolie: (SFX: cleaning up the mess)

We're so sorry, Ms. Vega.

Vashti:

(sigh) See to it that nothing like this ever happens again, all right?

Narrator Jolie:

Have you ever bitten into a piece of cake--something eye-catching, fluffy; maybe iced with your favorite design or character--an' that very first bite completely let you down? Maybe it was too dry, or the butter was a little rancid, or the gorgeous colors in the icing tasted like bitter dye. It's the kind of disappointment that makes you learn to question beautiful things.

This is the way it was for the entire day with Vashti Vega. This is why deh ol' people dem say iss best not to meet your heroes.

(SFX: Vashti Vega yelling and screaming in the background, berating people, pans falling, etc.)

If you've never watched *The Masterpiece Baker*, the show kin'a goes like this. Vashti and Gerald are master cake bakers, I mean--the grand artists of spectacular, over-the-top, grand cake decoration. They go head-to-head over ten episodes, trying to create the most magnificent masterpiece cake. Vashti an' Gerald actually create the challenges for each other...so watching them try to rise to the other one's [challenge], that's where most of the fun comes in. The network also puts out two shows at a time deh same week they're filmed...so people actually have a chance to vote fuh Vashti's cakes or Gerald's cakes. Each one of them also has two...I guess you'd call them "apprentice" bakers; people who love to bake, who want to learn magic from the magicians themselves, and at the en' of each season, the baker that wins...Vashti or Gerald...picks one of their apprentices to mentor. Ay, I won't lie. I've been watching the show for three years, and there were days I had dream of being one of those apprentice bakers, mehson. But after watching Vashti and the two women she has for this season--Lord sen' help. She had dem two gyul rag up from deh time the camera started rolling.

Gerald's challenged Vashti to create a cake that *(can Gerald's voice say the words in quotes along with Narrator Jolie? Or is that too confusing?)* "evokes all the sunshine, salt, and splashy fun of a day at the beach". Easy enough, right? And Vashti was *on it*. She had ideas from deh start an' her two apprentice bakers were there to help her carry them out. Except...well...maybe she was still upset about her shoes, but she could'a baked that batter into cake just with the fire in her voice alone.

Vashti:

What's taking you so long with that meringue, Marlene?

Marlene: (SFX: soft whirring of a mixer)

It's...I mean, it's almost ready, Ms. Vega. The peaks aren't quite--

Vashti:

I don't want to hear 'almost'. We have a deadline! This thing's got to be ready within six hours, and if it's not, then--

Marlene:

They're--they're--okay, here they are, Ms. Vega. Got them. The meringue has perfect peaks now.

Vashti: (*impatient yelling*)

Well, bring it over here!

Narrator Jolie:

I'm busy washing used pans and baking utensils in what Annette Callwood called the 'butler's pantry' off the side of the kitchen, but I stop to watch this go down. I'm curious to see what would happen if the tall, gangly girl, Marlene, brought Vashti her lumpy meringue and Vashti hated it. But as she crosses the kitchen...

(SFX: trip, thud, metal bowl hitting tile)

Marlene:

Oh--geez, I just tripped over my own...I'm sorry, did it all spill?

Vashti:(*furious*)

My goodness, Marlene, you dropped the whole bowl?

Marlene:

Did all of it spill?

Narrator Jolie:

Vashti Vega literally steps right over the woman sprawled out on the floor an' goes straight for the meringue.

Vashti:

Come--you, Pearl, I think we can salvage most of this. Most of it stayed in the bowl. We gotta get it in the cake. Come on, Marlene, get up, we don't have the time to--Alana! Can you get someone from custodial to come over here and clean this up?

Narrator Jolie:

It's a whole day of this. A whole day of stopping and starting that six hour timer, a whole day of constantly cleaning up after the bakers so that they could do all dey work in an unbelievably pristine kitchen; a whole day of listening to Vashti Vega yell an' scream an' order everyone in the building around. Alana's not even immune to it. Lawd. It's a rough day fuh all of us, but...by the end of it, Vashti an' her two apprentice bakers, Marlene and Pearl, put together a cake that could sit in any museum with the finest artistic creations in the world. I'm supposed to be

cleaning pans...preparing to pack them up in the truck so that Annette Callwood, my new boss, can run them through her industrial dishwasher before bringing them back out to the villa before the next taping. But instead of rinsing them, like I should be, I'm watching Vashti--with dem two apprentice bakers well behin' her--as she's looking into Camera 2 and discussing her cake. I've seen her cakes on TV before, but seeing one up close...that's a totally different experience. It's got...

(leads into Vashti speaking) Vashti: ...five layers, each with a different filling--I'll get to that in a moment--but as you can see, each layer is covered with a base of thick buttercream icing, which we dyed lighter shades of blue until we got to the top, which is almost white. Maybe a tidal wave? Or maybe, perhaps, showing the link that our gorgeous azure water has to the clear blue skies above. Now, yesterday, when our team went down to Magens Bay, we saw plenty of gentle waves with a tiny crest of bubbly foam at the top, and I thought to myself, how can we recreate something that *looked* foamy for the top of my cake? The answer, as it turned out, came to me from ...

(SFX: Vashti's voice fades into the background at any point during this description, but it's clear she's still describing her cake in detail)

Narrator Jolie:

Listen, I know I heard her apprentice bakers come up with plenty of the ideas she's claimin' as her own in front of the camera, but all in all? Lord. Iss a spectacular cake. It's colorful, playful, and immense. An' detailed to the extreme. They used crushed cocoa powder to make the outside of a hairy coconut, and chocolate strings to build a sea urchin. And the tropical flavors of her layers...coconut almond, beach banana creme; key lime...everyone *should* want a piece, but after the bite she takes for the cameras; after the slices that are cut for her, Gerald...and Marlene and Pearl too, I guess...no one is offered a piece or even a little taste. An' after smelling it all day, I know I can't be the only one wanting to try a li'l bite.

Cameraperson:

Hold up your plates to the camera...okay, everyone, now--take a bite...got it, Camera 3, you got it too, right?

Camera 3 operator:

Yeah, got the shot. Marlene, step back just a little bit...got it, perfect.

Vashti:

Did you get everything? Are we done? Still shots from all angles taken and everything?

Cameraperson:

I think so, Ms. Vega. I think we're good.

Vashti:

Fantastic. I need a couple hours. That was intense.

Narrator Jolie:

Alana nods her head at Annette Callwood, my boss; and Ms. Callwood wastes no time snapping her fingers an' her voice at us. (SFX: Annette Callwood barking orders at the custodial crew, background) Time to clean up again. We gather trash and scrub and polish countertops. I'm about to start dealing with the ovens when I hear Diego speak up from the left of the kitchen island--which is so big, it might as well be called the kitchen continent.

Diego:

So...this cake, is--is someone from Catering going to come through to cut it up? Or should I--can someone please let me know what to do about it? I can't really...you know...get to cleaning the countertops if it's still there.

Narrator Jolie:

Vashti Vega is almost gone from the kitchen, she's almost on the steps to head back downstairs, but when Diego asks his question, she completely stops. (SFX: Vashti's heels on the tile, abrupt stop)

Vashti:

I'm sorry--hasn't someone from the production team spoken to your director about that? Alana, who is the local head of janitorial here?

Alana:

Yes--my apologies, Ms. Vega. You shouldn't have to be bothered with this. I'll take care of it right away. (*in an almost theatrical, authoritative voice*) Jolie. Can I speak to you over here about the procedures for disposing of the cake?

Jolie:

Sure, Alana...I mean, Ms. Hill. (SFX: Alana and Jolie's footsteps walking towards a corner) (*quietly*) What's up?

Alana: (also quiet, but panicky, almost at the point of falling apart)

I--listen, there are all these rules Vashti has about how she wants the cake dealt with at the end of the show, and I never--there was so, so much I had to do, and I never got to talk about those rules with your boss or with anyone in custodial at all. God, and Vashti's already all frig' up today over tiny mistakes I've made, and--

Jolie:

Calm down, Alana. It's fine. Just tell me what I need to do.

Alana:

Okay. (*Exhale.*) All right, sure, but listen closely, because there are a lot of specific rules about how to dispose of each layer of the cake, and if they're not followed, then--

Jolie:

Wait...we're disposing of the cake? Like...throwing it away?

Alana: (*a little louder now, as if she knows others are listening*)

Yes, we are, and there are some very...um...very special procedures. First, all the icing must be scraped off and put into one garbage bag. Then, each cake layer goes into a separate garbage bag. You'll use only the thick heavy duty trash bags for this. Nothing should be visible through the bag. Also, these won't go in the large bin outside; you'll have to transport them to the landfill yourself. And Mrs. Callwood, I know I've got this all in writing for you somewhere, I just need to find it. Questions?

Diego:

Okay, so...just to be clear, it's all going in the trash?

Jolie:

They're not saving...any of it?

Alana (*almost as if she's pleading with Jolie to just DROP IT*):

No. They're not.

Vashti (*butting in*):

I don't mind sharing that I'm very protective of my art, dear. There are so many people out there who are looking for an original to imitate or a brand to appropriate. Or those just looking to make a quick splash by posting photos on the internet a few days before the show airs. We can't have that. The designs--*my* designs--they have to remain top secret, for the integrity of the show and for my own peace of mind. The cakes must be disposed of according to the guidelines I've set.

Alana: (*trying to smooth things over*)

Agreed. I can't see why that should be a problem for any of us.

Narrator Jolie:

How couldn't she?

No, honestly, mehn--how couldn't she? How couldn't **they**?

I believe in sugary things. I spend my days constantly chasing sweetness and light. The unspoken part of this is that the occasional sweet morsel is so much easier to appreciate when so much of what surrounds it is [tasteless]. And this gorgeous cake and the sweetness of the beautiful day that produced it...(sigh) they've been surrounded by entire months full of days that were unappetizing as they come.

She used 24 eggs to bake that cake. She used 12 cups of sugar for the batter alone. She used stick after stick of fresh butter--the kind that costs almost \$10 a pack at the grocery stores; the kind Daddy could never afford to buy as often as he could buy the cheap margarine

spreads. She rolled fondant and poured cocoa powder and spilled full bags of confectioners sugar into those bowls. I think about that, about all of that being dumped into trash bags destined for the landfill...and then, I think about other things.

...I think of what Diego told me that morning, when we stood in the sunbeams streaming in through the enormous kitchen window.

Clip of Diego's voice from earlier: ...can't pay fuh dem classes no more. Me and Mami jus' tryin' eat and pay rent at this point.

...I think of Cy down in town at his restaurant, struggling over those bills every night, but distinctly aware of the fact that he's got more than so many other people do right now.

Clip of Cy's voice from earlier: For real, don't worry about it. Please. It's on the house.

...and I think of all of those other people, all of us, who can no longer do the jobs we love or live the way we used to, or--or even celebrate our birthdays with a simple plate of food from a restaurant we love.

Clip of Mrs. Foy's voice from earlier: ...No, nothing special. I have a book from the library to read, and I'll come back at noon for some of Cy's oxtail...if I can get over to the bank in time--

...I think about all of that want, and then all of that waste. All of that sugar, being tossed and trashed by people with endless stores of it. All of that sweetness, thrown out like so much garbage, when so many of us have been clamoring for a little taste of hope for months. And when the words come out of my mouth, words that I couldn't stop even if I wanted to; the bitterness is cut only a little, I believe; by the very last traces of sweetness I have left in me to give.

Jolie:

But it's a cake.

Vashti:

Beg your pardon?

Jolie (*a little more firmly*):

It's a cake. It doesn't go in the trash, uneaten.

Alana:

Jolie--

Vashti:

I don't understand what you're trying to--are you--(*confusion turning to anger, as the meaning of Jolie's words settle in on her*) are you...trying to lecture **me**...about the way I choose to protect my art?

Jolie:

I'm just saying that it--

Vashti (*cutting her off*):

Ohhhh, no, ma'am. NO, ma'am. I don't do this. I don't negotiate when it comes to the rules I set for protecting my work. I don't explain--I don't have to--how fiercely I guard my creations. And I--I don't put up with this kind of nonsense from anyone without the qualifications that I have to deliver this unique art form and to produce a hit TV show. There's plenty about my process that you couldn't know or even begin to understand. But I'm sure you know plenty about what you need to do your job, so please just get back to *that*, and let me do mine, all right?

Narrator Jolie:

There's nothing left--sugary, spicy, bitter, or sour--nothing at all left in me to answer her. Nothing around me, either. No voices, no cheers, nothing but the squeak of Diego's cloth on the countertops behind me and the soft whir of one of the cameras. I can't look at Alana's eyes...I don't even want to imagine what I'd see in them. I nod at her, at Vashti, I mean; and then I grab a garbage bag from Ms.Callwood's cart and a butter knife from the edge of the countertop. I'm about to start scraping the icing from the top layer. An' then--

Gerald Trombeau:

You were just saying that it **what**, dear?

Vashti (*totally misinterpreting; thinking the question is for her*):

Hmm? Oh, I didn't say anything, Gerald.

Gerald:

Wasn't talking to you, Vashti. I was talking to the--our--our custodian friend here. She didn't get to finish her thought.

Vashti:

It wasn't a thought that needed to be finished.

Gerald: (*calmly*)

Not sure how you'd determine that without hearing all of it. I've got producer status with this show too. I'd like to hear the rest of what she had to say.

Alana:

I think she was finished, though, Mr. Trombeau. Weren't you, Jolie?

Vashti:

I definitely think the matter is closed.

Gerald (*smooth and self-assured*):

It didn't sound that way...to me. Go ahead, dear.

Narrator Jolie:

The silence in the room is heavy an' still, but this time, everyone's eyes are on me. I want to jus'...I dunno, jus' shake my head, shrug my shoulders, an' dump Vashti's cake like she wanted me to. But the voice that comes to me, in my head, is one I don't expect. It's the man from earlier, from back in Cy's store--the one who'd bought a slice of my carrot cake. What was it he'd said?

Jolie, along with clip of Male Customer's voice from earlier: "Days like dese, we all need a li'l sugar to get through dem, right?"

We've been struggling through "days like dese" for months now. We're way past the point where only a li'l bit of sugar would help.

Gerald Trombeau runs a han' through his graying hair and nods at me. So I try again.

Jolie:

I...bake. I bake cakes, too. They're nothing as fancy as yours, but up until last year, before the pandemic, I made wedding cakes over at the Marriott. And it doesn't matter how much work you put in to making them beautiful, because at the end of the day, it's still cake. We don't make it to be looked at. It's supposed to be eaten. And not jus'--not jus' eaten, but enjoyed. Cakes are supposed to bring joy. We bake them to make people happy.

Vashti:

So--that's your objection? That no one's eating this cake? Ma'am--what's your name?

Jolie:

It's Jolie.

Vashti:

Jolie. Lovely name. So, Jolie, this team has been--we've been doing this show for three years. Gerald and I have been baking cakes for decades. (*condescending chuckle*) We've all certainly eaten our fair share of cake. I don't think anyone here would object to--**not** having a piece right now. I mean, if we all consumed every single piece of every single cake we bake for this show, I think our blood sugar readings would look more like good credit scores, and we'd be--well, we'd be giant bakers baking giant cakes. I mean, there's no realistic way that would be good for us.

Jolie:

I wasn't thinking about the cake being...for the people here in this room.

Gerald:

Are you proposing we give it to someone else, then?

Jolie:

Yes. (*pause*) We got hit hard here, by the pandemic. People couldn't travel. The ships and tourists couldn't come. Many of us can't do the things we love anymore. Jobs and businesses...so much of it's gone.

Vashti:

Well, that's why our show being here for this season is such a good thing for the island. Every time an episode airs and we include clips of the views, the beaches, the sunsets...it's instant publicity for St. Thomas. And contracting with local servicepeople such as yourself, that's a boost for your economy, and--

Jolie:

It helps. I'm not denying that. Everything you're doing helps us get a little bit closer to what we need. You're helping us to find our way back. *(pause)* My...fiance, I guess...he's a farmer. He feels real strongly about us being so dependent on tourism and vacationers. He's big on us being able to provide for ourselves, to be able to survive on our own. Everyone here has been working hard to survive this past year. *(pause)* It's just...maybe we want more than jus' bare survival. Maybe we want a little bit of joy, too.

Gerald:

So...what you're saying is...?

Jolie:

I'm saying that you have an opportunity, right, an opportunity to lif' spirits in a place that really needs it right now. You can give back to the place that inspired your...art. You have the perfect gift right here.

Diego:

Damn. She ain' wrong.

Other (local) voices:

For real, nuh.

Gerald *(holding back a chuckle; he's humoring Jolie and sticking it to Vashti one time)*:
I think Jolie here's making a very compelling point. What do you think, Vashti?

Vashti:

I have rules about my art for a reason. Valid rules. I think I'm being made to look selfish.

Gerald:

Well, you're advocating for a cake that can feed about a hundred people to be destroyed and sent to a landfill.

Vashti:

Dammit, Gerald, how can you even fix your mouth to say that when **you** have also--

Gerald *(interrupting)*:

Miss Jolie--tell me, dear. If we were to use this cake to...'lift some spirits', like you said...did you have in mind a particular person or group of people whose spirits are in need of a jolt?

Narrator Jolie:

They're all looking at me...Diego with a surprised grin on he face, Ms. Callwood with a kin' of grumpy respect, Gerald Trombeau with a powerful little smile; and Vashti--and Alana--sending me the kind of twisted-up expression one gives to food that doesn't taste the way it's expected to. I think for a moment, an' then I tell him--

Jolie:

Actually, I do.

SCENE FIVE

Narrator Jolie:

It takes another 45 minutes to carefully move all the fragile, perfect pieces of that enormous cake into the back of one of the catering vans, but 45 minutes is more than enough time for it all to come together. A call to Cy, a tip on a couple of the late afternoon radio shows; a post or two from Diego on all the social media platforms...and by the time the cake arrives in front of Mrs. Foy's little yellow house down in Bournefield, it's literally the last thing to arrive at that party. (SFX: people laughing, celebrating, Mrs. Foy greeting people happily, music, people singing 'happy birthday')

They say it was one of deh mos' epic celebrations of the year, know. They say dozens--maybe over a hundred--of Mrs. Foy's family members an' friends an' former students filled deh whole street outside of her house, dancing an' liming. Catching up wid people they hadn't seen in rolling years. Hugging Mrs. Foy. Singing and remembering. And all of this, while eating decadent slices of that beautiful, luxurious cake. Lord. They say every piece of that cake tasted like a heavenly beach. Like a gentle wave kissed by a sugary sun--whatever that means.

I didn't taste it, though. While I swore I could hear the music miles away, I wasn't at Mrs. Foy's party. No. That evening finds me watching the sunset from a small, rusty chair at the very edge of one of the vegetable plots at Homegrown Hope. It's Mekhi's farm. Mekhi's next to me, too, in his own beat-up li'l chair. It's decidedly more quiet here than I imagine it is at the party. But...there is one thing in common.

Jolie:

I brought you a slice.

Mekhi:

Slice of what? Mrs. Foy's cake?

Jolie:

No--no. I didn't get any of that. This is one I made early this morning. For you. For...us.

Mekhi: (*dry, hurt laugh*)

We thinking of this as a celebration, Jo?

Jolie:

Cake's not just for celebrating, Mekhi. (*pause*) Sometimes it's more important to have it when we're not.

(*pause*)

Mekhi:

I got about four bags of okra (*pronounce: oak-roe*) an' scotch bonnet peppers to bring down for Cy. Tomatoes, too, but they're not really--

Jolie:

Four whole bags? Seriously? Las' time I was here, the peppers were nowhere near ready! Dem tings were still green an' tiny. Damn, that happened fast.

Mekhi:

It didn't. Not really. Las' time you were here was li'l over a week ago. Las' time we talked was four days ago. (*pause*) I'm not trying to back away from my part in all of that. I--I needed some space, you know, and--thank you, for that. (*deep breath*) It had give me some time to think about...you know, about shit I said that I didn't really mean.

Jolie:

But you did mean it, love. And...you weren't wrong.

Mekhi: (*painfully*)

So you--you want to cancel it too?

Jolie:

Not cancel. Never cancel. Um. Postpone. You know. Move it to a later date. Mekhi. We're not--this isn't the best time for us to get married, and you know it. How can we plan a wedding if we're barely making enough to cover rent and groceries right now? You **been** needin' a truck, or a bigger car, at least, and--

Mekhi:

We'll have **one** place. My car has problems, yeah, but we're working them out. I think we've got a year, maybe two, lef' of life in that thing. And with the groceries? Don't geh me started, Jolie. I'll say it as many times as you need to hear it. We could grow enough here to...to sustain us while we try to build and expand the farm. It's nice, and all, to get things from the store, but everything

we **need**, we can grow from here or get from deh other farms. You know I'll marry you down at the courthouse. On the beach. Here on the damn farm, if that's what it takes. Any ol' day, in any ol' clothes. We don't need anything fancy.

Jolie:

And I'll say my piece again, too--why not? Don't you think something as special as what we have deserves something more than ordinary? I don't want a three-thousand dollar dress and a wedding at the Ritz Carlton, but I want our day to feel like something more than "any ol' day".

Mekhi: *(annoyed, under his breath)*

Jesus, Lord have mercy. *(louder)* It's always 'something more'. A bigger car. An extra helping. Sweeter tea. Cake instead of bread. It's always been--

Jolie:

Yes, because I want to do more than jus' live this life. I want to enjoy it, too. And I want that for you, too, Mekhi. I believe you're worth it, that **we** are. *(pause)* We won't have to postpone for too much longer. I'm making enough to stay afloat for now. By the time this month is over, I might be able to get back to baking full time. Maybe the hotel will reopen, or--I mean, I've been hearing rumors about a couple of places on St. John reopening for jus' a few guests at a time...

Mekhi:

Or you could forget about having to depend on that, on **them**, on everyone else's whims for an income and jus'...work full-time here at Homegrown with me. Build this empire together.

Jolie:

I'm always here to support your dreams, Mekhi. But you have to understand that I'm dreaming, too. And I think the difference between us is that if now isn't the right time for me to make that dream come true, I'm okay with waiting for it.

Mekhi:

That's the difference? Huh. All right. *(pause)* Maybe waiting...is...the best thing we could do right now.

Jolie:

Yes. I think so.

Narrator Jolie:

If Mekhi were a cake, he'd be a deep, rich, dark chocolate torte, one without flour or fluff to dilute the intensity of all of that flavor inside. There's sugar, of course, there's plenty of it, but...it's understated, it's hidden somewhat by the unapologetic boldness of the cocoa. That's Mekhi. That's what I've baked for him, too. I pull two cake boxes from my bag, along with some plastic forks, and han' him one.

Mekhi:

(SFX: plastic fork scraping against a plastic cake container) Mmm. You baked my favorite. Damn. Master bakers or not, I know dem two people for the show can't make anything that tastes like this.

Jolie: *(a bit coyly)*

Bet I can think of something that would make it taste even better.

Mekhi:

What's that?

Jolie:

If the cacao was actually grown right here, at Homegrown Hope.

Mekhi: *(chuckling)*

Yes! Yes! Now you talkin'! An' deh vanilla, too! We done have the sugar cane growing in the next plot all now. Look--we could make both our dreams come true at the same time. (SFX: Mekhi and Jolie laughing together, kissing.)

Narrator Jolie:

It's the sweet moments like these--welcoming the dusk with Mekhi--that make all the bitter moments of the day worth it. I scoop the chocolate torte into my mouth and lean into Mekhi, and together we look through pictures of Mrs. Foy's party that Cy texts to my phone. We're jus' talking about maybe heading down there ourselves when...(SFX: cell phone ringing)

Mekhi:

That's your phone, Jo?

Jolie:

Yeah, look, It's Alana. Wonder what that's all about.

Mekhi:

Is she at the party?

Jolie:

I have no idea, actually. I think so. *(answering the phone)*_Hello? Alana?

Alana:

Hey. You got a minute? Are you at that party?

Jolie:

I'm at Homegrown with Mekhi. And yeah...of course I have a minute. You all right?

Alana:

Honestly? I don't know. (*a beat*) Jolie, I know how easy it is to get caught up in a moment. I know how hard it is to see food wasted, especially in times like these, but--you're a chef, you bake; you should know all about balance. You should know when to hold back. You should know how too much of something can ruin a good dish.

Jolie:

Slow down, Alana. You're not making any sense. What are you talking about?

Alana:

I'm talking about the way you spoke to Vashti today. God, Jolie, I know she's a--I mean, yes, she **needed** to hear every word you had sen' her way, but--but Jo, you gotta think of who **you** are an' who **she** is, and--the vast amount of power you don't have.

Jolie:

I still don't understand.

Alana:

I bet you didn't even know that one of the cameras was on the whole time. They filmed everything that went down. Everything that you said. Reality shows are always looking for drama, and you just delivered it right to them.

Jolie:

I wasn't trying to create drama. I just wanted--I wanted **us** to have a chance to enjoy something, too. We deserve it. All the people feasting on that cake right now down by Mrs. Foy deserve it.

Alana:

Well, I hope it was worth it.

Jolie:

Jus' tell me straight out. Did Vashti Vega say something to you?

Alana:

Not exactly. But she didn't have to. (*pause*) I'm not at that party and I didn't get to enjoy any of that cake. I was one of the people who had to stay behind [and prep for the next day of filming]. Everyone could hear Vashti going on and on about what happened. She doesn't like having her image messed with, and she **really** doesn't like being told what to do. Any situation where she loses--where she doesn't have control. Oh, and she hated having to give away that cake. She went on about that for at least 45 minutes. She's angry. And powerful. And when you've got power, it's really easy to overlook your own faults. (*pause*) Jo...no one's said anything to me

directly, but I...listen, don't be surprised if you show up to work on Wednesday and you're told you don't have a job anymore.

Narrator Jolie:

That's the thing about those sweet moments, though. There's always that last scoop of icing you can scrape off your plate, that tiny cream-filled tip at the end of an ice cream cone, that final good-bye hug before your last friends leave and your house is silent and empty once again; the laugh and the cuddle you were having before the phone rings with bad news. The very nature of sweet moments is that they never last long enough. We're always left savoring the final taste on our tongues, wondering how long it's going to be before we can get a taste of sugar once again.

End of Episode 1