

OpenLearn narrative

Good Hair

**Thema, Ama, Nicole, Sam, Mrs Cross, Miss Woodward, Mr. Hyatt, Ajay, Issa, Richard,
Speaker 2 :**

THEMA: Let's not be late on the first day.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Now you're embarrassed. I've seen you in front of the mirror.

AMA: OK, that's enough.

THEMA: I can touch. I gave you good hair.

AMA: And Dad didn't contribute?

THEMA: Not to your hair, or the mortgage.

[CHUCKLES]

Give me a kiss.

[FAUCET RUNNING]

NICOLE: In a rush?

SAM: Want a good seat.

NICOLE: It's GDPR, not Adele.

SAM: Yeah, I know. It's Thema's first presentation since she made partner.

NICOLE: I'm not sure how I'd feel if I were her.

SAM: Meaning what, exactly?

NICOLE: Well, she's the only Black woman in the department and she just got the job.

SAM: So?

NICOLE: So, if I were her, I'd be wondering why.

SAM: That could say more about you.

NICOLE: The entire firm are thinking the same thing.

SAM: Nicole, she's more than qualified.

NICOLE: Qualified is a given. But nobody gets partnership just because they're qualified.

They get the position because they've a quality the partners think they're missing.

SAM: Would you be saying this if she were a white man?

[DOOR SQUEAKS]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

THEMA: And so we've seen a huge spike in consumer claims against corporates, use of biometrics, the--
[PHONE BUZZING]

Excuse me. Can I just take a moment?
[DOOR OPENS]

[DOOR CLOSSES]

What's wrong with your clothes?

AMA: Nothing.

THEMA: Why did they call me then?

MRS. CROSS: Mrs. Ossie?

THEMA: Yes. It's Mrs. Assay.

MRS. CROSS: Mrs. Cross, geography.

THEMA: So what's happened?

MRS. CROSS: Please don't look so worried.

THEMA: It's just that they said there was an issue with her uniform.

MRS. CROSS: It's not specifically her uniform. It's her hair.

THEMA: Her hair?

MRS. CROSS: It doesn't comply with the school's uniform and appearance policy. All hair needs to be of a reasonable size and length.

THEMA: Oh. OK. Sorry. It's actually a relief.

MRS. CROSS: I know it's her first day and--

THEMA: No, it's fine. We'll sort it.

MRS. CROSS: Thank you. And sorry again.

[CAR DOOR SHUTS]

[CAR DOOR OPENS]

[SIGHS]

[CAR DOOR SHUTS]

[SIGHS]

AMA: My hair.

THEMA: Shhh.

AMA: It's ridiculous.

THEMA: It's life.

[SIGHS]

AMA: What are we going to do?

THEMA: Well, I'm going to back to work after dropping you in town so that you can figure out a way to flatten this.

AMA: I don't want to flatten it.

THEMA: Ama, I'm giving you the day off school so you can go shopping. Take the win.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

SAM: You're not going out for lunch?

THEMA: I just need to get on with my work after cutting the presentation short.

NICOLE: Sam, we have a reservation.

SAM: Which means they'll hold our place.

THEMA: What restaurant around here needs a reservation for lunch?

SAM: Not food. Tanning booth. Topping up before holiday.

THEMA: Oh, OK.

[CHUCKLES]

SAM: Don't laugh. We're not all born with a tan.

THEMA: It's not actually a tan.

SAM: I just mean I'm the one who needs more color. You're already brown enough.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

MISS WOODWARD: Nina, in future I'd appreciate it if you inform me before sending one of my pupil's home.

MRS. CROSS: I wasn't aware I needed your permission.

MISS WOODWARD: It's a courtesy.

MRS. CROSS: If one of my form does something wrong in your class, I wouldn't need you to alert me in advance of following school policy.

MISS WOODWARD: I wasn't aware that you could do hair wrong.

MRS. CROSS: It's too long.

MISS WOODWARD: For who?

MRS. CROSS: Some of the students can't see the whiteboard.

MISS WOODWARD: Have they actually complained?

MRS. CROSS: April, we have sent a number of children home in the past for a variety of reasons, and you haven't objected on those occasions.

MISS WOODWARD: I didn't have a reason to before. This is different.

MRS. CROSS: Don't make this about something it isn't.

MISS WOODWARD: I'm not convinced it isn't about that.

MRS. CROSS: What do you think, Ajay?

AJAY: I didn't realize I was part of this conversation.

MISS WOODWARD: You're not. I don't know why she asked you.

MRS. CROSS: I'm just saying, if anyone would have an opinion we should listen to, it could be Ajay.

MISS WOODWARD: Because he's Asian?

MRS. CROSS: I didn't say that.

MR. HYATT: We've had a number of Black students over the years. It's never been a concern in the past.

MISS WOODWARD: It doesn't mean we shouldn't review regularly. Norms change.

MR. HYATT: Miss Woodward, the reason we have an 80-person waitlist for this school is that we have an excellent reputation. No one's forced to be here. I don't think expecting students to stick to our school uniform policy it's too much to ask for.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

AJAY: Hey, Issa. I'm well, thanks. Listen-- I reckon I've got something you'd be interested in.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[FAUCET RUNNING]

KERRY: I'm Kerry.

AMA: Ama.

KERRY: Yeah. The whole year knows who you are. Not many people get sent home first day.

[CHUCKLES]

AMA: Not sure that was the reputation I was looking for.

KERRY: Yeah. Well, everyone knows that policy is bull.

AMA: Not Mrs. Cross. And I've got geography next.

KERRY: Nina Cross is a dictator. You know, she has a tape measure for our skirts.

AMA: Seriously?

KERRY: Yeah. Three inches below the knee. Windsor.

[CHUCKLES]

AMA: At least I know I'm not being singled out then.

KERRY: You don't think?

AMA: Sounds like she's just anal.

KERRY: My hair's longer than yours and the school doesn't say anything to me.

AMA: Well, my hair's bigger.

KERRY: So, what? You can't help the way your hair grows. And who decided that hair that grows like yours is less presentable than hair that grows like mine? I'm following you.

[CHUCKLES]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

MRS. CROSS: Ama.

AMA: Yes, Mrs. Cross?

MRS. CROSS: Would you like to go back to the ladies to tend to your hair?

AMA: But there's nothing to tend to, miss.

SPEAKER 1: The end of year accounts because the results have been rather good this year.

We are able, again, to have a summer--

[PHONE BUZZING]

--party.

THEMA: Twice in two days.

AMA: Apparently a record.

THEMA: Do you know how lucky you are not to have been suspended?

AMA: I don't care if they suspend me.

THEMA: Oh, you don't care, do you? I'm glad that we've cleared that up. We discussed this.

AMA: We didn't discuss anything. You decided.

THEMA: But you didn't have a problem with it this morning.

AMA: Now I do.

THEMA: Why?

AMA: Because I know they're not treating me like the others.

THEMA: Be grateful that you got through life this far without noticing before.

AMA: It wasn't a problem before because my old school didn't care how I wore my hair.

THEMA: They also didn't care if you turned up.

AMA: You know, I never missed a single lesson. I always played by the rules. I had a good life.

THEMA: You haven't even started your life, baby girl. You want a good life, then you need to get a good job. In order to get a good job, you've got to go to a good university. To get into a good uni, you've got to go to a good school. St. Mary's is a good school.

AMA: You never went to a good school.

THEMA: That's why it's taken me this long to make junior partner.

AMA: Even Kerry knows it's racist.

THEMA: Who's Kerry?

AMA: She's just one of the students who agrees with me.

THEMA: And what colour is Kerry?

AMA: Irrelevant.

THEMA: White people have lots of ideas of how to tackle issues that affect us.

AMA: She's just a student. There's nothing she can do.

THEMA: It's so easy to be a social justice warrior when you've got no skin in the game. You think she's going to pressure her parents into helping change the rules? It's one thing posting "Black Lives Matter," but it's another when you've got genuine risk.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

AMA: Sometimes you need to push back.

THEMA: And sometimes you need to pick your battles.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Ama, it gets harder than just hair. It goes to the root of who you are, how you dress, how you talk, what you wear, what you eat. Please, baby girl. Don't fall at the first hurdle.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[SIGHS]

[PHONE BUZZING]

Hello?

AJAY: Evening. Is this Mrs. Assay?

THEMA: Mrs. Assay. Yes. Speaking.

AJAY: My name is Ajay. I'm a teacher at St. Mary's.

THEMA: What's Ama do now? I spoke to one of your colleagues and said that she'll turn up tomorrow with policy appropriate hair.

AJAY: Well, I don't think she should have to.

THEMA: Are you speaking as a representative of the school?

AJAY: I'm not.

THEMA: So, what's this about then? Or have you just broken GDPR?

AJAY: I hope you'll forgive the intrusion once you hear why we're contacting you.

THEMA: We?

ISSA: Hi, Thema. I'm Issa from the Herald.

THEMA: To what do I owe this pleasure?

ISSA: I'm wanting to write a story about--

THEMA: No, thank you.

ISSA: Decisive. May I ask why?

THEMA: I'm not looking to be a martyr for a cause.

ISSA: This is not an altruistic request.

THEMA: No?

ISSA: Black women spend six times more than they have than white women. Between hair pieces and wigs and braids, I'm spending 2,500 a year.

THEMA: Only 2,500?

ISSA: This would be the perfect entry point to write an article deconstructing the narrative that European hair is an aspirational, should be the standard.

THEMA: It's still a pass. I suspect the school won't appreciate being portrayed in this way.

ISSA: That's the idea.

THEMA: And their displeasure might manifest in a way that would not be advantageous to my daughter.

ISSA: They wouldn't dare.

THEMA: Not a risk I'm keen on taking. She's the only Black person in the whole of her year and I'm not looking to find another way for her to stand out. And to be honest, I've already got an affirmative action question mark hanging over my recent promotion. I don't want to compound that by being the Black family in the paper because of insert racist incident.

ISSA: Have you asked why you were hired?

THEMA: Well, I hadn't planned to.

ISSA: You should. But I'm a journalist. Questions are my occupational hazard. Can I use the article as a threat, just to push hard enough that they back off Ama?

[SIGHS]

THEMA: And what if they don't concede?

ISSA: I won't write it. The threat of the article should suffice. Look. Think about it. You have Ajay's number. And I won't write anything until you sign off.

THEMA: OK.

ISSA: Thank you for your time.

RICHARD: It's honestly not a concern of mine. It's nothing to apologize for.

THEMA: Thank you. It's just I don't want you to think I was fully committed, especially after just being promoted.

RICHARD: I have two children of my own. I completely understand. One of the benefits of being my partner is a degree of flexibility in your working schedule.

[CHUCKLES]

THEMA: Richard.

RICHARD: Mm-hmm?

THEMA: Why me?

RICHARD: What do you mean?

THEMA: Why did you promote me?

RICHARD: You're more than qualified.

THEMA: Qualified is a given. No one gets partnership just because they're qualified. They get the position because they have a quality that the partners think they're missing.

RICHARD: What kind of answer are you looking for?

THEMA: An honest one.

RICHARD: OK.

[SIGHS]

I hired you because you are more than qualified, but also because you're a woman, a single parent. You've been on scholarship and, if it makes you happy, because you're Black.

THEMA: I'm not sure it does.

RICHARD: Does me making new partner for those reasons invalidate your promotion?

THEMA: Well, it doesn't undermine the assumption that identity politics were at play.

RICHARD: Senior partners own the firm. We're not going to risk our reputation to appear woke.

THEMA: Still, I'd prefer it if I just got the job purely on merit.

RICHARD: No one gets hired purely on merit, Thema. There are two types of people in this world-- those that know why they hire white middle class men and those that hire them because they think that they're the best possible candidates on every single occasion. I'm not the latter.

THEMA: No?

RICHARD: No. I know why I hire white middle class men and I know why I hire single Black mothers. There are times when it's going to be more effective to leverage the appearance and lived experience of somebody like me, but increasingly, there are times when it's going to be more effective to leverage the appearance and lived experience of somebody like you.

THEMA: So that's why I've got the job.

RICHARD: I got this job because my uncle is an MP. Do you think I've ever given it a second thought?

[MUSIC PLAYING]

My son has a job at a BAFTA award-winning production company because we represent them. Do you think I feel guilty about being able to give him that opportunity?

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Do you think a white middle class man has ever walked through that door and questioned my motivation for promoting him?

THEMA: I doubt it.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

RICHARD: You've lived your entire life knowing that the deck is stacked against you and yet, still you question your right to be here. Who cares why you were promoted? What matters is that you were promoted. It's up to you how you decide to use it and whom you decide to hire after you. Your feelings are noted, with it based on the assumption that the rules are fair. You should know by now the game is rigged. In this life, you take your shot wherever you get it.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[DOOR OPENS]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[PHONE LINE RINGING]

[PHONE RINGING]

AJAY: Hi, Thema.

THEMA: Do it.

[PHONE RINGING]

SPEAKER 2: I have the Herald on the line.

MR. HYATT: Who is on the line?

SPEAKER 2: The Herald.

MR. HYATT: The who?

SPEAKER 2: The newspaper.

MR. HYATT: Oh, the newspaper. Yes, of course. Put them through.

[CLEARS THROAT]

Good morning.

ISSA: Morning, Mr. Hyatt. My name is Issa and I'm a features writer at The Herald.

MR. HYATT: Good morning to you as well. And how may I be of service?

ISSA: I was hoping to get a quote.

MR. HYATT: Regard to our A-level results?

ISSA: Actually, hair discrimination.

MR. HYATT: Hair discrimination?

ISSA: Yes. Is it true that you're not allowing a female Black student to wear hair in natural state?

MR. HYATT: It's not that we're not letting her have her hair out because of her race. It's just school policy to present your hair in a particular way, regardless of your background.

ISSA: But to just confirm, she is Black?

MR. HYATT: She is.

ISSA: And you're not allowing her to wear a hair in a natural state?

MR. HYATT: Just so you're all aware, we're currently reviewing our uniform policy, in relation to hairstyles and ethnicity. So, until further notice, students from an African Caribbean background will not be sent home for that reason.

MRS. CROSS: What?

MR. HYATT: I received a call from the Herald.

MRS. CROSS: The newspaper?

MR. HYATT: They were planning on writing a story until I assured them there was no story to write about.

MRS. CROSS: Paul, we should be applying the same rules to all our students.

MISS WOODWARD: Unless all our students aren't the same.

MRS. CROSS: So instead, we just pander to the PC brigade?

MR. HYATT: This isn't a fight. Anyone in this school has the energy nor time to indulge.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

THEMA: Don't gloat.

AMA: We won, did we?

THEMA: I don't know if that's the moral of the story.

AMA: Well, what do you know?

THEMA: That I'm proud of you for being proud of being yourself.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Go on then.

[CHUCKLES]

[MUSIC PLAYING]