

GLITTERBOMB

Written by

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EXT. ROOF TOP, CLEO'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAYTIME, PRESENT DAY

CLEOPATRA "CLEO", an 11 year old black girl dressed in All Star Chucks, high rainbow striped socks, and a school uniform, walks, head down, through the chaos of her school's recess. All around her, children play. She avoids them with practiced ease.

A soccer ball zooms by her nearly hitting her in the head. She looks up to see its source and sees a group of boys giggling. One of the boys sticks his tongue out at her. She ignores him and continues her walk to a row of single story classrooms away from other children. She walks around back following a familiar route. She jumps from overturned plastic milk CRATE up onto a closed DUMPSTER. Standing on the dumpster, she whips out a GRABBER TOY and uses it to grab a ladder attached to the top of the building. She pulls it down and climbs up to the roof.

She crouches on the roof in a pose reminiscent of Spiderman. Next to her lies a toy stuffed whale, NIKOLA, pulled from her backpack. Beyond her, children play care-free. Cleo regards them for a moment before frowning towards her whale.

CLEO
Who needs 'em?

She returns her attention to the contents of her backpack carefully arranged in front of her.

We see a POLAROID CAMERA, a notebook and pen, an old school RECORDER, some spare batteries, a tape measurer, a roll of tape, and a complex mechanism held together with duct tape and pipe cleaners. She picks up the recorder and draws it to her lips.

CLEO (CONT'D)
Thursday, April 22nd, 12:15 PM.
Conditions are sunny with an
estimated wind velocity of under 5
mph. Today's prototype is the
Glitterbomb Rev 3.0. My hope is
with the modifications I have made,
the field of dispersion should
improve both in range and coverage.
Standby for results.

Cleo takes the contraption, gingerly holding it out before her over the parapet. She drops it... just as a MALE TEACHER, balding with glasses, walks by underneath. The GLITTERBOMB hits him square on the head painting him and the surrounding area in a circle of bright, hot pink glitter.

The male teacher rips off his glasses from his pink dusted face and squints up at Cleo.

MR. RYAN (MALE TEACHER)
Principal's Office! Now!

Cleo is startled but composes herself enough to draw her RECORDER once more to her lips.

CLEO
Test Successful. Field of
dispersion greatly improved-

MR. RYAN
Now Cleo!

Cleo drops the RECORDER.

INT. ARCHITECTURE FIRM - DAYTIME, PRESENT DAY

Pan in on a large conference room dominated by a scaled Architecture model of a Transportation Hub where a conference table would be. Natural light floods in from large windows. One wall is made entirely of glass. The other walls are covered in post-it-notes of many colors (green, purple, pink, yellow and blue, but no red.) Nineties R&B plays in the background as RASHIDA, a beautiful Black woman with navy coveralls and a red bandana tying back her natural curls, dances around the room. She stops mid-dance move to regard something on the model more closely and then draws a red pen to her lips. She pirouettes to pick up a green post-it-note and then writes as she talks to herself.

RASHIDA
Re-engage Landscape Firm about
exterior flowerbeds.

She slams the post-it-note on the wall with style and then continues dancing. The ringing of a PHONE interrupts her groove. She stops her dance, frowns, and moves to a chair where a JACKET is draped. She fishes in its pocket for her CELLPHONE. CLOSE in on the cell phone's screen. The Caller ID shows "Cleo's School".

RASHIDA (CONT'D)
Again?

As she draws her cellphone to her ear to answer, she is already putting the jacket on and heading out the door. KEYS jangling in her pockets.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAYTIME, PRESENT DAY

Cleo shuffles around nervously in a chair too big for her. Her legs swing back and forth, but do not touch the ground. In front of her is a large wooden desk where PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY, a man with constantly puckered lips wearing a suit above his means, sits. On one side of him is Mr. Ryan, still partially covered in glitter and holding Cleo's BACKPACK in one hand and a folder tucked under his armpit in the other. On the opposite side of the desk, is MS. HARLOW, a young teacher with kind eyes who could easily be mistaken for a student. She is wearing a cool science t-shirt that says "Think like a proton always positive."

Cleo slumps into her chair.

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY

Cleo, this is the third time this month.

Cleo starts to open her mouth and then shuts it.

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY (CONT'D)

Do you have anything to say?

CLEO

Can I see my backpack?

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY

What?

CLEO

Can I see my backpack? There's an experiment in there I've been running for two weeks. It's on micro-algae and its ability to function as a nutrient removal system.

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY

Micro-what?

CLEO

(slowly and exasperated)

Micro-algae. Any one with brains would know-

MS. HARLOW

Cleo, that's enough.

CLEO

But-

Ms. Harlow shakes her head "No," and Cleo sighs folding back into her chair. Mr. Ryan drops Cleo's BACKPACK brusquely and Cleo sucks in air, barely containing her alarm. He grabs the FOLDER from his underarm and opens it up taking out five sheets of paper and purposefully placing each, one at a time, on the Principal's desk, sliding it towards Cleo.

MR. RYAN

Five tests. These are five of your spelling tests with perfect scores. I even put an SAT word in there. And, yet, you're failing my class Cleo. Perfect tests but you're failing English. How does that happen?

CLEO

English is stupid.

MS. HARLOW

Cleo!

Rashida comes in through the door. She looks around, smiles at Ms. Harlow and then fades a bit when she sees Mr. Ryan.

RASHIDA

Hi Mr. Cafferey, Mr. Ryan, Ms. Harlow. Cleo.

She takes the seat next to Cleo. Cleo automatically sits up straighter at the sight of her mom.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)

What did I miss?

With the entrance of Rashida, Mr. Ryan and Principal Cafferey shift their attention to her rather than Cleo.

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY

Mrs. Davis, it's always a pleasure to see you, although I wish we didn't have to see you so soon,
(beat)
Or so often.

Rashida cuts eyes at Cleo. Cleo drops her head.

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY (CONT'D)

Today, Cleo was testing her Glitterbomb when Mr. Ryan happened to be walking by-

RASHIDA
Glitterbomb? Cleo, we had an
agreement -

CLEO
I made some modifications and I
just wanted to see if -

Rashida smacks her lips and Cleo instantly goes quiet.

RASHIDA
I apologize that this behavior has
continued. We will, of course,
happily pay for your dry cleaning.

MR. RYAN
That's not necessary. Cleo is
highly gifted, but this latest
incident is just another sign that
her behavior is escalating. She
needs friends.

RASHIDA
She has friends. You have friends,
don't you?

Cleo looks down, embarrassed.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)
We are the only family from our
neighborhood that attends this
school. I don't think you
understand how hard it can be to
relate-

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY
This school is very diverse-

Ms. Harlow cuts off his statement by dropping down to get eye
level with Cleo.

MS. HARLOW
Cleo, I know it's hard to fit in
some times, but if you dedicated
just a fraction of that amazing
brain to connecting with others,
well...

MR. RYAN
Then she would have been playing
Red Rover rather than dropping
objects off of roofs.

RASHIDA

She was on the roof?!

Rashida turns towards Cleo with the disciplinarian strength of a Black Mother. She exudes that, "Wait till we get home," energy. Sensing it, and feeling uncomfortable with it, Ms. Harlow tries to throw a block for Cleo.

MS. HARLOW

What we're trying to say is that
you can accomplish so much more
with others than you can alone.

Cleo carefully avoids making eye contact with anyone.

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY

I have talked the matter over with
her teachers, some who have pleaded
passionately on her behalf, and I
am willing to let this go.

Rashida mouths "Thank you" to Ms. Harlow.

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY (CONT'D)

But this is her last warning. We
all know Cleo is bright, but a
smart student doesn't make a good
one. If there is one more incident
before the school year ends, she
will be suspended. You have one
more chance young lady.

Rashida and Cleo both nod like mirror images of each other.

RASHIDA

Yes, of course. Thank you Mr.
Cafferey.

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY

This is her last warning. Do you
understand?

Cleo nods.

INT. OFFICE SUPPLY STORE - DAYTIME, PRESENT DAY

Rashida walks down the aisles pushing a cart with Cleo walking dejectedly behind her, pointedly trying to keep a gap between herself and her mom to avoid any further conversation. Rashida talks to herself as she shops.

RASHIDA
Push pins, check. Markers, check.
And, here they are!

She stops at the section where an assortment of sticky notes are.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)
I have been going through these
like crazy! Cleo, come help me
restock. Grab as many colors as you
can.

Cleo slumps closer and begins to load the cart with different color sticky notes. When she goes to grab some RED STICKY NOTES, Rashida stops her.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)
No! Not the red ones.

CLEO
You said, "as many colors..."

RASHIDA
Except red. It's just so
triggering, don't you think?

Cleo puts the red sticky notes back and continues to avoid eye contact as she loads the cart up with different colors. She keeps loading waiting for her mother to tell her she's grabbed enough, but when she doesn't, she finally sneaks a quick look into her mom's face.

CLEO
Is that it?

Rashida leans forward and grabs Cleo's chin, gently maintaining the eye contact.

RASHIDA
Is it?

Cleo squirms to look away.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)
(softly)
Cleopatra Simone Davis, is that it?

Words and tears come gushing out of Cleo all at once.

CLEO
I was just testing my Glitterbomb,
Mom.
(MORE)

CLEO (CONT'D)

I didn't know Mr. Ryan was there.
It was an accident. It was an
accident!

RASHIDA

Cleo, I believe you.

Rashida grabs Cleo and pulls her in for a tight hug. She
consoles Cleo until she calms down enough to stop crying.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)

But we can still find trouble even
when we're not looking for it.

Rashida resumes walking, this time with her arm around Cleo
and the other pushing their shopping cart.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)

Your teachers are right. You need
friends.

CLEO

None of the other kids like me.
They whisper when I walk by.

RASHIDA

Why do they whisper?

CLEO

I don't know...

RASHIDA

Could it be because instead of
playing you're too busy trying to
conduct biopsies on cockroaches or
catapult eggs.

(beat)

Maybe this is my fault. I've been
so busy with work I haven't given
you enough time. Ms. Harlow had a
point, if you stopped inventing and
started socializing-

Cleo grounds to a halt, planting her feet as tears once more
pour from her eyes.

CLEO

You don't want me to invent
anymore? But, it's my life!

RASHIDA

Shh, child. Is something bleeding
or broken?

CLEO

No.

RASHIDA

Then dry those pretty brown eyes.
And don't you make a scene because
you know I *hate* scenes.

Rashida starts them walking again. She stops to pick up some envelopes.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)

Of course I love your inventor's
spirit. But you've been spending
more time in your Principal's
office than in your classroom. And
school aside, having no friends, is
no way to live. These are your peak
sleepover years. We're going to
find you some friends.

CLEO

I have friends. I have Nikola!

Cleo pulls out her STUFFED WHALE from her backpack. Rashida raises an eyebrow and then tickles Nikola.

RASHIDA

A stuffed animal doesn't count.

They keep walking.

CLEO

Did you have lots of friends when
you were my age?

RASHIDA

Me? Well I had your Auntie Deja, so
it was different.

CLEO

How come I've never met her then?

RASHIDA

This is not about me and my sister.
It's about you and your juvenile
delinquency.

Rashida kneels down so Cleo and her are eye to eye.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)

So listen now, if you don't stop hanging out on rooftops and getting in trouble with teachers, all your science and inventions will be off limits.

Cleo sticks her chin out in defiance. Rashida extends one pinky to her.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)

Understood?

Cleo takes Rashida's pinky in her own completing the pinky promise agreement. Rashida gets up and points them to the check out.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)

I do wish I could've seen you nail Mr. Ryan though.

Rashida giggles and pushes off the floor, riding the shopping cart to the line, leaving Cleo to chase after her giggling.

EXT. OUTDOOR HALLWAY, ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAYTIME, PRESENT DAY

Cleo walks the hallways alone, head down, focused on her feet. As she walks, she passes by a group of classmates. Trying, Cleo forces her head up and tries out a little wave. They see Cleo, whisper something to each other, and giggle. Cleo blushes and walks faster. She gets to her classroom's door and Ms. Harlow is waiting there, greeting students.

MS. HARLOW

Good Morning Cleo.

CLEO

Good morning Ms. Harlow.

MS. HARLOW

I have an interesting class planned today, I think you'll enjoy it.

Inside, the classroom is arranged in clusters of four desks. Cleo heads inside and takes her seat as the bell rings. Ms. Harlow closes the door and the classmates that avoided Cleo rush in at the last minute. Ms. Harlow gives them her best disapproving scowl as they take their seats.

MS. HARLOW (CONT'D)

Good morning class!

CLASS IN UNISON
Good morning.

MS. HARLOW
Wow, did everyone have their hot
chocolate this morning?

The class giggles.

MS. HARLOW (CONT'D)
Today's class is very special
because today, we're going to talk
about the dark side of science.

Ms. Harlow makes a spooky sound and Cleo, interest piqued,
sits up in her chair.

MS. HARLOW (CONT'D)
Science can be complicated and
sometimes we have to ask ourselves,
not *can* we do something, but *should*
we. Is it right? We call this
Ethics. Now, if everyone can get
out their iPads, I've put a
worksheet in your Class Materials
folder.

The class shuffles as each child pulls out their iPad.

MS. HARLOW (CONT'D)
Behold, Doctor James Marion Sims!

Cleo opens up the worksheet and is greeted with a black and
white image of James Marion Sims.

MS. HARLOW (CONT'D)
Dr. Sims is considered by many the
"Father of Gynecology." Does anyone
know what gynecology is?

SKYLER BENSEN, a blonde boy dressed in expensive, preppy
clothing in Cleo's desk cluster, raises his hand.

MS. HARLOW (CONT'D)
Skyler?

SKYLER
My dad is a doctor and he told me
that "ginologist" are doctors for
girls.

BOY 1
Ew.

MS. HARLOW

Quiet. Very good Skyler.
Gynecologists are the doctors that
 addresses the specific medical
 needs of women and girls. But, not
 that long ago, they did not exist
 because doctors did not think it
 was cool to treat women and girls.
 Imagine: Mom gets sick and there
 are no doctors capable of caring
 for her because none of them
 bothered to study or learn how to.
 That would be very bad, right?

Heads nod around the class.

MS. HARLOW (CONT'D)

That all started to change with
 Doctor Sims.

Ms. Harlow clicks on the projector and the portrait of James
 Marion Sims lights up the front whiteboard.

MS. HARLOW (CONT'D)

He developed some of the first ever
 procedures to treat and care for
 women. So, he's a hero right?
 Everyone agree? You would have done
 the same thing?

Once again children around the class nod.

GIRL 1

I would!

MS. HARLOW

Ok, so, what if I told you, in
 order to develop those practices,
 Doctor Sims had to test them out on
 women who couldn't consent.

Ms. Harlow clicks her clicker and a new slide pops up showing
 antiquated medical instruments.

MS. HARLOW (CONT'D)

He practiced on slaves. And even
 though he had pain medication, he
 chose not to give them any. Not all
 survived. So, is he still a hero?

The class looks around unsure.

MS. HARLOW (CONT'D)

Today, we discuss it! Break into your clusters and decide for yourself: is Doctor Sims a hero? A villain? Or both?

The kids break into groups determined by their desk clusters. The classroom becomes full of children's voices, discussing their assignment. In Cleo's group is Skyler and two girls. All of them are White.

GIRL 1

So what do you guys think? Hero? Villain? Or both?

CLEO

He experimented on humans-

SKYLER

Come on Cleo, they were just slaves.

CLEO

What?

SKYLER

It's not cool that they died, but every surgery has to start somewhere. Besides, my dad's a doctor and he told me that bl-, African Americans have a higher pain tolerance than White people, so they could take it.

GIRL 1

I didn't know that.

SKYLER

I mean, would you rather us not have those cures? Now *that* would be wrong.

While Skyler talks, Cleo's anger rises. She slams her fist down on her desk.

CLEO

That's not true.

SKYLER

What isn't?

CLEO
Black people do not have higher
pain tolerances than White people.
We're all the same.

SKYLER
(offended)
My dad's a doctor!

CLEO
Your dad's a bad doctor!

SKYLER
He is a good doctor, and he
definitely knows more than you,
you, you stupid, little bla-

Before he can finish his sentence, Cleo launches across the table, throwing herself on Skyler. She throws her punches wildly. Desks fall over as the other children try to get out the way.

MS. HARLOW
Cleo!

Cleo doesn't hear. Everything else seems to fade away except for Cleo as she hits Skyler.

INT. WAITING ROOM OUTSIDE OF PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY'S OFFICE -
DAYTIME, PRESENT DAY

Cleo sits outside of the Principal's Office on a hard wooden bench. The setting is dismal; Cold, linoleum floors and pale walls frame Cleo's sadness. Her knuckles are scraped and bruised, her hair undone, and she sits there sorrowfully. Behind her, a wooden door is marked as PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE. Muffled shouting is heard inside.

SKYLER'S DAD
(muffled)
We pay good money to make sure our
children are safe, not for you to
expose them to fill some diversity
quota!

Cleo closes her eyes tightly trying to drown out the noise. She places her hands over her ears. Rashida enters out of breath and not fully put together. She heads straight to Cleo.

RASHIDA
Oh baby, are you ok?

She checks over Cleo carefully examining each scrape and mark. Cleo nods but starts to cry.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)

What happened?

CLEO

I'm sorry Mom. We were in Ms. Harlow's class and they started talking about experimenting on slaves.

RASHIDA

What?

CLEO

It's not true, right? Black people don't have a higher pain tolerance than white people, do they?

Rashida's face clouds over.

RASHIDA

Cleo, what did that boy say to you?

CLEO

You're not going to let me invent anymore, are you?

Rashida jumps up, adrenaline pumping. The door to the Principal's Office bangs open and the doorway frames SKYLER'S DAD, an athletic, tall, good-looking White man dressed for golfing. Next to him, Skyler stands victoriously. Skyler's Dad barrels past Rashida, purposefully slighting her. Rashida shrugs it off and goes to enter the door he just vacated, but he releases it so that it almost slams shut on her face. Rashida stops herself and takes a breath to compose herself.

RASHIDA

(muttered)

Ass.

Rashida opens the door and Cleo follows her into the Principal's Office. Ms. Harlow is already inside and stands dejectedly out of the way as Principal Cafferey paces. There are no pleasantries anymore.

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY

Mrs. Davis.

RASHIDA

Hello, Mr. Cafferey, Cleo was just telling me what hap-

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY

I'm afraid we've had enough. We've been more than patient, but threatening the safety of a fellow student? There is no place for that here. I have no choice but to expel Cleo.

RASHIDA

Hold on a second.

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY

Listen-

RASHIDA

No! You listen. You talk about safety? What about the mental and emotional safety of the children of color that go here? Do their lives carry as much value in that checkbook of yours?

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY

How dare you!

RASHIDA

How dare you put my child, one of two Black students in her entire grade, in a situation where she had to defend her own humanity against racist assertions. What did you think would happen? Did you do anything to protect Cleo?

Principal Cafferey sputters.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)

Ms. Harlow, I am normally a big fan of yours but this situation...

Rashida shakes her head in fury.

MS. HARLOW

Mrs. Davis, I am so sorry. I didn't realize-

RASHIDA

How could you?

All energy leaves Principal Cafferey.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)

So, no. Cleo will not be expelled.
In fact, I am sure the School Board
will be very interested to hear the
details of this case.

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY

(stammers)

I didn't realize the entirety of
the situation. But you must
understand that Cleo initiated the
fight.

RASHIDA

We disagree on that too.

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY

Well, physical fight. So,
considering the full circumstance,
it might have been rash to rush to
expulsion, but Cleo will need to
face consequences. I think it only
fair to suspend Cleo for three-

Rashida shakes her head.

PRINCIPAL CAFFEREY (CONT'D)

-two weeks?

**To request the rest of this feature film, please
contact me.**