

ERIC

"Always Be My A.P."

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INT. NELSON HOUSE - ERIC'S ROOM - NIGHT

ERIC NELSON, 17, black, lays at the end of his bed. He stares at a pair of tennis shoes and outfit laid out on top of his dresser.

ERIC

First day of school tomorrow, and I'll be a senior! New kicks and an outfit? Man, I'm gon' be stylin' on 'em tomorrow!

He continues to stare at them.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I can't be the only person that does this!

INT. FRISKERS' APARTMENT - SAME

FRISKERS, a mouse that wears a green bowtie, sits at the edge of his bed and stares at a bright, red bowtie with white polka dots, on his dresser. His roommate, CHARLIE, a parakeet, enters, drinking from a can of soda.

FRISKERS

First day back on the set! Man, they ain't gonna know what hit 'em!

CHARLIE

Bet you miss filming, huh?

FRISKERS

Yeah, Charlie! All summer, we couldn't air nothing but reruns and...

(groans)

...a visualizer!

MONTAGE - WHISKERS & FRISKERS VISUALIZER

-- A still shot of WHISKERS the mouse, wearing a jacket, and Friskers, being chased by EDDIE THE CAT, appears.

-- Somber music PLAYS in the background.

-- Landscape of moving swirls and lines paints the backdrop.

-- Sound effects PLAY as each word appears on the screen.

-- BOOM!

-- SCREECH!

-- SMASH!

-- Eddie YELPS!

-- The mice LAUGH.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Eric walks down the hallway with his best friend, DENNIS "DIMMEY" ROBERTS, 17, white.

ERIC

I can't believe it, Dimmey! Back in Mil-Town and a senior in high school!

DIMMEY

We've been waiting our whole lives for this!

ERIC

Things kinda look different around here, though.

DIMMEY

That's because you've been in Madison all last year!

ERIC

No, it feels different.

DIMMEY

Well, half the people we knew graduated, so yeah, there's been some changes.

Dimmey's girlfriend, CONNIE McDOWELL, 17, white, stuffs her pig, FRANKFURT, in her locker with her backpack.

FRANKFURT

Why do you keep bringing me here, Connie?

CONNIE

I needed company walking to school! You know that!

FRANKFURT

Fine, just slip me some mock chicken leg in here during lunch.

CONNIE

That's tomorrow. It's meatloaf today.

FRANKFURT

Aw, man!

CONNIE

Shh! Dimmey's coming!

Eric and Dimmey approach Connie. Frankfurt becomes a plush pig.

DIMMEY

(curiously)

Who are you talking to, Connie?

Connie SLAMS the locker door.

CONNIE

Nobody!

DIMMEY

(to Eric)

And the more things change, the more they stay the same.

CONNIE

Hey, Eric, how's your nephew, Will?

ERIC

He's good. He's grown a lot, too!

DIMMEY

Hey, isn't that Will over there?

ERIC

Yep!

The three spot a tall MAN, 18, black, wearing a letter jacket, and walking down the hall. He approaches them.

CONNIE

Huh?

DIMMEY

Connie, this is my guy, Willard. He transferred here and already made the team!

MAN/WILLARD

'Sup?

CONNIE

(sighs in relief)

Thank God!

SFX: The school bell RINGS.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - ENGLISH CLASS - MOMENTS LATER

Eric and Dimmey sit next to each other.

ERIC

Let's get this class over with.

DIMMEY

I know, right?

MRS. SIMPSON, 50's, white, approaches Eric.

MRS. SIMPSON

Mr. Nelson, what are you doing here?

ERIC

What do you mean? This is English class, right?

MRS. SIMPSON

But you're not supposed to be here.

ERIC

Uh, Mrs. Simpson, you're not supposed to start a sentence with "but". Are you supposed to be here?

Eric and Dimmey SLAP hands and LAUGH.

MRS. SIMPSON

(dryly)

As much as I would miss your presence, Mr. Nelson, I think you're in the wrong class. I've seen your grades from Madison.

ERIC

Wow, I'm already failing. Okay, so where am I supposed to be, then?

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Eric approaches a classroom.

ERIC

Great. Fail one class, and you can't even move forward. Okay, now, let's get this over with.

He opens the door and enters. The students look at him and CHATTER with each other. Eric's girlfriend, BERNIECE WILLIAMS, 17, black, shoots out of her seat.

BERNIECE
 (shockingly)
 Eric? You're in A.P. English??

Eric looks at her, curiously.

BERNIECE (CONT'D)
 (excitedly)
 You're in A.P. English! Hey, ya'll, my
 boyfriend's in A.P. English with us!

ARNOLD ALLEN, 17, black, wearing nerdy gear, rolls his
 eyes.

ARNOLD
 (dull voice)
 Yay.

The teacher, MR. FELLOWS, 60's, white, speaks to Eric.

MR. FELLOWS
 Are you sure you're in the right place,
 son?

ERIC
 That's where Mrs. Simpson told me I
 should go. Somewhere else, too, but
 that's another story.

MR. FELLOWS
 I'll look into it later. Have a seat for
 now.

Eric and Berniece sit.

MR. FELLOWS (CONT'D)
 We were going over the beginning of "War
 and Peace".

ERIC
 "War and Peace"? Man, I read that book
 cover to cover!

MR. FELLOWS
 You did?

ERIC
 Yeah, up in Madison!

Arnold GASPS and stares at Eric.

ARNOLD
 I love you!

Eric frowns at him.

INT. BILLY AND RON'S APARTMENT - BILLY'S ROOM - DAY

Eric's brother, BILLY, 20's, black, wakes up to his cell phone RINGING. He answers it.

BILLY
(groggy)
Hello?

His mother, Professor RHONDA NELSON-JAMES, 40's, black, speaks from the other end.

RHONDA (O.C.)
Billy, whatchu still doin' in bed, boy?

BILLY
I don't have class right now, Mom.

RHONDA (O.C.)
It doesn't matter, Billy! You could be looking into some education courses right now! The early bird gets the worm!

BILLY
Mom, I had a rough night. I just wanna rest.

RHONDA (O.C.)
Mmm hmm, probably drinking, smoking, or whatever! I knew you moving back in with Ron would make you like that!

BILLY
As soon as I get up, I'll do my research.

RHONDA (O.C.)
Yeah right. You always come up with a great idea, then you chicken out or just don't follow through.

BILLY
Mom, I'm a grown man. You don't need to remind me like this anymore!

RHONDA (O.C.)
(sighs)
I guess you're right. Go back to sleep.

Billy hangs up.

INT. BILLY AND RON'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

RON TYSON, 20's, black, sits on the couch and reads a book. The doorbell RINGS. He gets up and opens the door. Rhonda stands there.

RHONDA

I stayed overnight at a motel.

RON

(points to Billy's room)

He's in there.

Rhonda marches to his room.

SECONDS LATER

Rhonda pulls Billy out by his ear.

BILLY

See ya later, Ron.

RON

Later.

Rhonda and Billy exit.

INT. NELSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Eric and Berniece sit on the couch. Rhonda and her husband, MATT JAMES, 40's, black, approach the front door.

MATT

Alright, kids, we're gonna go grocery shopping.

RHONDA

Do we really have to go this late?

MATT

(hushed tone)

Yeah, while there's still money on my card! You know the gas bill auto-debits tomorrow!

RHONDA

Later, guys.

Matt and Rhonda exit.

ERIC
 Okay, we got the house to ourselves!
 Let's get down to some homework!

He advances towards Berniece.

BERNIECE
 (lustfully)
 Yeah!

Eric pulls out his backpack and takes out a book.

ERIC
 So you ready? The test on "Beloved" is a
 week away.

BERNIECE
 We're literally doing homework??

ERIC
 Yeah, problem?

BERNIECE
 No, it's good to see you take such a
 liking to A.P. English.

ERIC
 Well, you know, it was just considered
 "English" at my old school.

BERNIECE
 Yeah, yeah. You know, I was pretty much
 the head of the class last year.

ERIC
 Well, see? That's another thing we have
 in common! We both speak English! Now,
 let's get started.

BERNIECE
 Hmmph. I didn't even have to shave my
 legs.

ERIC
 Shouldn't you always shave?

BERNIECE
 Shouldn't you always shower?

ERIC
 Touché.

INT. COLLEGE - HALLWAY - DAY

Billy, wearing a shirt and tie, stands in the hall and talks to Rhonda on the phone.

BILLY

Yes, Mom, I'm here. I'm all dressed up and everything.

(pause)

Yeah, I ironed!

He smooths out his outfit with his hands.

BILLY (CONT'D)

I'll talk to you later.

Billy enters a class full of students.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Okay, class. Good morning. Professor Nelson-James is out today, so filling in is me, William P. Nelson III, her good-looking son.

MAUREEN WALKER, 20's, black, dressed provocatively, stands up.

MAUREEN

You're aight!

The students CHUCKLE.

BILLY

Maureen? What are you doing here?

MAUREEN

I go here now. What are you doing here?

BILLY

Like I said, I'm the guest professor.

STEVE, 19, black, chimes in.

STEVE

You're not a professor! If anything, you're just a guest TA!

Some students CLAMOR in agreement.

BILLY

Okay, whatever, let's get to the lesson.

GINA RICHARDS, 20's, black, wearing a cheerleader uniform, stands up.

GINA

Hey, I remember you! How you doin'?

BILLY

Uh, fine, Gina.

MAUREEN

How do you two know each other?

GINA

Oh, he knows!

The class OOHS.

BILLY

Hey, knock it off!

MAUREEN

Really? We never got that far! He got this girl I know pregnant!

GINA

Neither did we! Same reason! But hey, my man's in the NFL now. He's more man than Billy will ever be!

They GIGGLE.

BILLY

(sotto voce)

Who else is in here, my baby mama?

His son's mother, SHARON ROSS, 20's, black, enters.

SHARON

Sorry, did you already start class?

Billy GRUNTS.

BILLY

(to class)

Excuse me, I gotta run to the bathroom!

STEVE

In the middle of class?

BILLY

When you gotta go, you gotta go!

He runs out.

SHARON

I was just dropping off a jacket he left. What's with him?

GINA
 (folds her arms)
 Hmmph. As if you don't know!

MAUREEN
 (to Gina)
 Girl, I like you!

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - ENGLISH CLASS - DAY

Mr. Fellows passes a sheet of paper to each student.

MR. FELLOWS
 Okay, kiddos, time for my favorite part
 of the day.

He hands a sheet to Eric.

MR. FELLOWS (CONT'D)
 Quiz time!

Mr. Fellows continues passing papers out. Eric follows
 him.

ERIC
 Excuse me, Mr. Fellows. Here.

Eric hands his paper to him.

MR. FELLOWS
 What's wrong with it?

ERIC
 Nothin'. I'm done.

MR. FELLOWS
 Really??

BERNIECE
 Oh brother.

ERIC
 By the way, there was a typo in one of
 the questions. I one-lined it. Also, one
 of the multiple choice questions was a
 little vague, but I answered it anyway.

MR. FELLOWS
 Why don't you on outside, Eric? You're
 kinda getting on my nerves.

ERIC
 Whatever.

Eric exits.

BERNIECE
 (to Arnold)
 Can you believe him?

ARNOLD
 I know! Especially after Eric taught our
 class yesterday. He made this material
 easier to learn!

He frantically writes on his sheet.

ARNOLD (CONT'D)
 Boy, I'm gonna get over this A-minus hump
 if it kills me!

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - LATER

Eric sits on the steps. Berniece exits from the building.

ERIC
 How'd you think you did on the test?

BERNIECE
 You tell me! You raced through it!

ERIC
 Why you walkin' away so fast? Let's go
 get lunch!

BERNIECE
 Actually, I think I'll bite the bullet
 and eat at school. I'll see ya.

Berniece turns back around and enters the building.

ERIC
 But...
 (pause)
 Dang, who'd have thought being at the top
 of the class would make you unpopular?

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - LATER

Berniece and Connie walk, carrying trays of food.

CONNIE
 Look, Berniece, if you're mad at Eric
 stealing your joy, steal some of his! You
 be the bad guy, while he's the good one!

Connie continues walking. Berniece stops.

BERNIECE

Why not? Nobody's thinkin' about me,
anyway.

(exclaims)

Food fight!!

The cafeteria turns to her and throws food at her. She PLOPS to the ground.

BERNIECE (CONT'D)

Maybe I didn't say it right.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - SAME

Mrs. Simpson hands PRINCIPAL PETERS, black, a folder.

MRS. SIMPSON

Here are Eric's transcripts, Harvey. I
knew something was up!

Peters opens the folder and GASPS.

PRINCIPAL PETERS

This kind of mistake is unacceptable,
Morgan! Even for a public school!

INT. BILLY AND RON'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Billy sulks in his chair. Rhonda, Matt, and Eric barge in.

RHONDA

What the hell, Billy?

BILLY

The one time I don't lock the door.

RHONDA

The Dean said you told the students that
you took a bathroom break and never came
back!

MATT

Yeah, she went out on a limb for you, and
this is how you repay her?

BILLY

Look, guys, there's a good explanation
for it.

RHONDA

Yeah, what?

BILLY

They were clownin' me, man!

RHONDA

Oh my god!

ERIC

Billy, from one teacher to another,
running away isn't the way to go.

BILLY

Whatever, man.

RHONDA

(sighs)

Yeah, whatever. I'm done!

She heads for the exit.

BILLY

Wait, what?

RHONDA

I can't coddle you no more, Billy!

BILLY

Yes you can!

RHONDA

You're a grown man. You have a kid! You
have to start facing this stuff like a
man! Hell, like an adult!

BILLY

Okay, gimme another chance, Mom! I'll go
back there tomorrow!

RHONDA

The Dean doesn't want you back. He ain't
too fond of quitters.

MATT

I'm not that crazy about them, either.

Matt and Eric follow Rhonda out.

ERIC

What are we gonna do with that child?

MATT

Shut up, Eric.

ERIC

Okay.

Billy SIGHS.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - ENGLISH CLASS - THE NEXT DAY

Eric faces the front of the class.

ERIC

Alright, ya'll. I'm the lecturer for today, too, since Mr. Fellows is out sick again. Those days are happening more and more each week.

Arnold raises his hand.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Yes, Mr. Allen?

ARNOLD

I thought you'd want to know that there's a note on Berniece's desk.

Eric walks to her desk, picks up the note, and reads it aloud.

ERIC

"Dear 'Mr. Nelson'." I don't know why she put that in quotations. "Have fun being the head of the class. I'm running away from school!"

(scoffs)

What? Is she 17 or 7?

(continues reading)

"That's why I said, 'school', and not, 'home'! Dang, for someone so book-smart in English, you can be so dense at times! Love, Berniece."

(to class)

Guys, I gotta go look for her. Arnold, take over.

Eric exits. Arnold walks up to the front of the room.

ARNOLD

Okay, students, guess what? I am your superior again!

The class throws trays of food at him. He PLOPS to the floor.

ARNOLD (CONT'D)

Funny. I didn't see them bring their food in here.

INT. COLLEGE - OFFICE - DAY

Billy talks with his student advisor, PADMA.

BILLY

Come on, Padma, isn't there anything you can do?

PADMA

I told you, William, the registrar is closing, and all of the education classes are filled!

BILLY

But I gotta show my parents that I don't run away from nothing!

PADMA

Show them or show yourself?

BILLY

Show them! They're paying!

PADMA

Well, there is one independent-type course, but it's off-campus, and it's a little tough.

BILLY

I'm game, what is it?

INT. PRISON - CAFETERIA - DAY

Billy is escorted in the cafeteria by a female WARDEN. Female PRISONERS SQUABBLE with each other and LAND PUNCHES. Billy GULPS.

BILLY

This is the class?

WARDEN

A new education program for prisoners who want a second chance on life, instead of facing life.

BILLY
(confused)
Yeah, they look like the kind that wanna
change their ways!

WARDEN
Incoming!

They both duck. A chair ZOOMS past their heads and
CRASHES into a wall.

WARDEN (CONT'D)
They're all yours.

Billy steps up to the front.

BILLY
(calls out)
Can I have your attention, please?

SFX: GUSHING sound!

Billy looks disgusted.

WARDEN
(calls out)
Hey, you! No more slicing!

BILLY
Screw this!

He turns around and prepares to exit. He sees an faded,
ghostly image of Rhonda standing in the doorway.

"RHONDA"
I wonder what's on TV tonight.

BILLY
Huh?

"RHONDA"
Don't look at me that way. It's your
brain! But remember, handle your problems
like a man!

Her image disappears. Billy pauses.

BILLY
There's no worse feeling than a woman
telling you to be a man.

He TAKES A DEEP BREATH and turns back around.

BILLY (CONT'D)
 (bellows)
 Hey! All ya'll shut the hell up and sit
 down!

The commotion STOPS, and the prisoners grab their seats.

BILLY (CONT'D)
 I'm Billy Nelson, and I'll be your
 instructor for Communications 101.

PRISONER #1
 What is this crap? I'm outta here.

BILLY
 Fine! You can leave, if you wish!

The prisoner heads for the exit. A big, tall warden
 stares her down. She returns to her seat.

BILLY (CONT'D)
 Now then. Communication can go a long
 way.

(pause)
 Just think. When you girls have your
 conjugal visits, you need to tell us
 guys, or each other, how you want it,
 right?

The prisoners CLAMOR in agreement.

BILLY (CONT'D)
 So you need communication for that!

PRISONER #2
 He really breakin' it down for us!

GRETCHEN "GRETCH" JACKSON, 20's, white, replies.

GRETCH
I used to rob him and his family back in
 the day!

Other prisoners CLAMOR in amazement. Billy points to
 Gretch and acknowledges her.

INT. NELSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Eric walks while on his cell phone. ELEANOR DUMBECK, 18,
 white, enters the house.

ELEANOR
 Eric! I found somebody for you!

Eric hangs up his phone. Eleanor reaches her hand out the door and drags Berniece inside.

BERNIECE

Alright, already!

ERIC

Well, look at Miss Runaway!

ELEANOR

You think she looks like a fashion model, Eric? I mean, she's cute and all, but...

ERIC

Where did you find her, Eleanor?

ELEANOR

I was at the park, playing with my nieces and nephews, and I spotted Berniece hiding behind the tree! She told me not to tell anybody, so of course, I brought her butt right over here!

BERNIECE

Uh huh. And where are your nieces and nephews, anyway?

ELEANOR

I'm gonna need you to focus on the situation at hand, Berniece.

ERIC

(to Berniece)

What is the meaning of all of this? You're mad that I'm doing well in English?

BERNIECE

No! Well, maybe.

ELEANOR

(to Berniece)

Make up your mind!

ERIC

Eleanor!

(to Berniece)

Well, make up your mind!

BERNIECE

Why couldn't you be a good long-distance boyfriend like other dudes, and stay away?

ERIC

Look, just because I'm great in that class doesn't mean you're not! Can't you just be happy for me?

BERNIECE

Can't you just let me be right?

ERIC

Berniece...

BERNIECE

Fine. I'll let you have this.

Principal Peters and Rhonda enter from the kitchen.

PRINCIPAL PETERS

Good, Berniece, keep that same energy.

BERNIECE

What?

ELEANOR

(gasps)

Prince Peters, what are you doing in the kitchen with Mrs. Nelson-Jamisez, while her husband isn't home?

Matt comes down the stairs.

MATT

What's goin' on?

ELEANOR

(gasps)

Good question! What kinda mess are ya'll into?

(pause)

And can I watch?

PRINCIPAL PETERS

(to Eleanor)

I see that high school diploma is paying off.

RHONDA

Kids, have a seat.

Eric, Berniece, and Eleanor sit.

PRINCIPAL PETERS

This isn't easy for me to say, but it appears that there has been a mistake.

(MORE)

PRINCIPAL PETERS (CONT'D)

Eric is not supposed to be in A.P.
English.

ERIC

Hmmph. I knew it. Oh well, it was good
while it lasted.

RHONDA

But honey, there's more!

PRINCIPAL PETERS

According to your transcripts from your
previous school, it appears you had
enough credits to graduate!

Everyone else GASPS.

MATT

Really? Him?

Rhonda looks at him.

MATT (CONT'D)

I didn't mean it like that, Eric, sorry.

ERIC

Don't be! Really, me??

PRINCIPAL PETERS

Yeah, I scrubbed it up and down, and even
called the school.

MATT

But it was a charter school!

PRINCIPAL PETERS

No, it was the charter school! St. Paul
Charter School and Baptist Church is the
highest in the country!

RHONDA

Yeah, Eric! Didn't you notice the
advanced courses that you were taking up
there?

ERIC

No, I thought they were all hard!

ELEANOR

You didn't know you graduated? No
offense, but that's really dumb.

Berniece hits Eleanor on the arm.

ELEANOR (CONT'D)
I said, "no offense"!

Eric stands up.

ERIC
Wait a minute! So I graduated early?
Dang! I don't get to do any of the fun
stuff! Go to senior prom, T.P. the
school, run Senior Skip Day, go naked
under my cap and gown!

MATT
Son, be more happy that this has happened
to you!

PAUSE.

ERIC
I guess I am! Cool!

PRINCIPAL PETERS
Congratulations, Mr. Nelson!

He shakes Eric's hand. The others crowd around him and
CLAMOR with excitement.

BERNIECE
I'm so proud of you, Eric! Now that
you've graduated, what are you gonna do
next?

Eric smiles, then stops.

ERIC
(confused)
I don't know!

ELEANOR
(to Berniece)
You don't know when to quit, do you?

Berniece frowns at Eleanor. Eric continues staring in a
distance.

THE END