“Pray, Hope, and Don’t Worry!” by Elaine Gabay

_Dramatis Personae_

**Miss:** A young, beautiful mixed race English teacher, dressed to impress.

**Vanessa:** A curvy, vivacious young Latina woman.

**Yessenia:** A slender African-American teenager.

**Cal:** An African-American male who dresses “gangsta,” thus knowing the codes, but does not act like it.

**Jordan:** A European-American teenager who likes to wear artsy baseball caps. Slouches in his chair, not out of boredom or anger, but because he is comfortable.

**Gigi:** A Young Native teenager who is rough around the edges.

**Key:** A mixed Mexican and Native teenager with a little bit of sass

**Tash:** A quiet African-American girl who should not be underestimated.

(A stage, lit up, focused on eight chairs set up two by two in four rows. The woman at in the middle of the room, **Miss,** is a young teacher in an inner-city school.)

**Miss:** Alright gang. Let’s make a complete Talking Circle. (**Students Gigi, Tash, Cal, Vanessa, Yessenia, Key, and Jordan** come in, intermittently, drag a chair into a half-circle and sit down. Some of the kids are conversing while they take their seats.)

**Gigi:** Ahhhhh, Miss? What’re we talkin’ about today?

**Miss:** Well, Gigi, that’s a good question. Yesterday, we read “Black Elk Speaks: High Horse’s Courting.” I would like to extend our discussion by talking about the topic of love and belonging and see if we can develop a thematic statement out of it. **Sir Loin** here is going to be our Talking Piece today. Remember, you have to have the talking piece in order to speak.

**Tash:** (**Tentatively raises hand up from the elbow. **Miss** tosses her the cow**). Ummm, what’s “courtship”?

**Miss:** Courtship. You know, when a man and a woman are dating. In several cultures, there are certain rituals that a man engages in order to win over the woman he wants.

(Blank stares.)

Like, _gifts_, for example. What did High Horse give his father-in-law for his wife’s hand?

**Cal:** (**Timidly**) Hosses…

**Miss:** Yeah! A whole herd! _That’s a courtship ritual._ (Pause) Why did he have to give his father-in-law horses?

**Cal:** T’prove that he was MAN enuff t’provide fo’ his wife.
Miss: Exactly! Now, as I was saying—

**Key:**-Wait! Wait, wait, wait, wait! *(Pause)* Is you *serious*? He had t’get a whole herd of horses in order to marry her?

**Miss:** *(Pause)* Yes. The hard work he put into winning her hand was considered romantic at that time. Plus, you have to remember—well, you tell me. This happened in about, oh 150 years ago. What was the status of women at the time?

**Vanessa:** Pssh, I don’ know.

**Miss:** What were they expected to do?

**Vanessa:** Cooking, cleaning, having babies.

**Miss:** Were they expected to do anything else at the time?

**Tash:** No.

**Miss:** Good Tash! Why? Why weren’t they expected to do anything else?

**Tash:** Umm, becuz the man wuz in charge.

**Miss:** *(Nodding slowly)* Yes. There were different expectations for men than there were for women. Does anyone know what we call that? Cal? *(Shakes head).* Jordan? *(Shakes head and shrugs).* Tash? *(Shakes head).* Titi? *(Shakes head)* Anyone? *(Pause)* We call it a double standard because the standard for men is different than the standard for women. Oftentimes, it made women a second-class citizen in their societies. For example, what can you all tell me about High Horse’s wife?

**Mimi:** Nuthin’. I mean, we don’ even know her name. She didn’ even get t’meet him before they married.

**Miss:** Nope. He tried to kidnap her, but that was the only time they met. *(Pause)* What else? Does she speak at all in the story? *(They shake their heads).* She is literally silent, voiceless. She had no say. Who *said* she wanted to be married to High Horse?? We just don’t know. *(Pause)* So, tell me. Are your parents strict about dating?

*(The students laugh, snicker, giggle.)*

**Tash:** Miss, look. They tell us to make sure he treats you well.

**Miss:** What do you mean by “treats you well”?

**Gigi:** He treats you well by picking you upon time, calls you, texts with you several times a day. Show that he *likes* you. Respects you.

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Miss: So Gigi, how do your parents enforce that respect?

Gigi: They don’t. The only thing they tell us is “Nevah, evah, lemme fin’ out the nigga laid a han’ on you!”

(All the girls nod in agreement while Miss glances around, looking at each one in turn. The boys sit there, accepting of this response.)

Miss: (Deep breath) Wow.

Miss: What about those of you with children? How do you handle that?

Vanessa: I make sure he treat her well, cuz if he ain’t treatin’ my baby well, he ain’t getting’ near me!

Cal: What abou’ chu, Miss? What’re Mama ‘n’ Papa Miss like?

Miss: (Pause, thinking) I wasn’t allowed to date until I was 16, not that it mattered much anyway since I didn’t start dating until college.

Vanessa: Really?! (chuckles, shakes head) Damn!

Miss: (shrugs) It happens. Not everyone has to date and be in a long-term relationship by the time they are in high school. (Pause) But enough about me. What’s your dating experience like? (Yessenia raises her hand.) Yes, Yessenia?

Yessenia: They point at us and say, “You my girl.” And if we like ‘em, we go wit ‘em.

Miss: You don’t make him take you out to dinner or anything like that? Bowling? Mini-golf?

(The students look at Miss like she has spoken an entirely different language.)

Ok, I guess not.

Jordan: Miss? Who does that?! (Miss silently points at herself.) Oh. Well, not us! (laughingly).

Miss: Why not?

(Pause, as if she has said something unnerving).

Why wouldn’t you go out on a date in order to get to know somebody before you commit yourself to a relationship?

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**Yessenia:** Because that’s not us. That’s stuff that white people do. We ghetto. We go to clubs, parties. None of that shit.

**Cal:** *(interject)* Yeah! We rockin’ it, we rockin’ it!

**Miss:** Cal…

**Cal:** Oop! Sorry Miss!

**Yessenia:** Why should we do it any differently?

**Miss:** So, you buy into the stereotype. What makes you different than High Horse’s wife? Do you have a voice?

**Yessenia:** Hell yeah! I wouldn’ sleep wit ‘im if it ain’t mah choice!

**Vanessa:** *(digs through bg)* I brough inna poem I wrote about ‘er. Can I read it?

**Miss:** Yeah, absolutely!

**Vanessa:**

I sat in my father’s teepee

Waiting for a man

One worthy to prove his worth.

Here he comes,

High on his horse.

I cook, clean, tend the fire,

But I miss the wind in my face,

Warm muscle under my legs.

I cross them instead and

Remember I have to find a woman to cook

For I am on my moon cycle.

My medicine is strong.

Why can’t it heal me now?

**Cal:** *(in awe)* Dat’s beautiful Nessie. *(The others agree.)*

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**Yessenia:** Ya know, dat’s why I nevah wanna get married. Dere’s no forevah, no guarantee dey’ll be dere for yah. Dey’ll juss cheat on yah anyway. Marriage is a fairy tale.

**Gigi:** Mmmhmm.

**Key:** Ya know, I am sick of lookin’ at the TV, like Flavor of Love, seein’ all dem ghetto people, no teef, cussin’ up a storm, cheatin’ on each otha, beatin’ each otha, moving from one girl to de nex’. We all ain’t like dat!

**Cal:** But dat’s de way it is for a lotta folks. “Real talk,” knamean? I ain’t like dat, but dere’s plenny ah guys who is.

**Key:** Well, I ain’t. Hell, he’s gonna bring me flowas and choc’late cake. An’ I still ain’t gonna be his girl unless I say so. He ain’t gonna lay a han’ on me eithah. (Beat). Fool-ass.

**Jordan:** You know, I respect that. I mean, what guy doesn’t wanna get it in, know whatta I mean? Me? I like a challenge.

**Vanessa:** Man, I don’ have time for romance. I gotta baby I gotta raise and I still wanna have a good time.

**Gigi:** My boyfriend takes care ah me. We’s on our own, livin’ in a house wit his mom and cousins in an attic, but we got each otha. I mean, yeah, I gotta change mah clothes cuz he don’ like what I wear, but I’s cool.

**Tash:** I’m sick ah men. I’m sick ah heart break and not bein’ able t’have someone t’rely on. I got one baby. I don’ need anotha one anytime soon.

**Miss:** Which brings us back to High Horse, who, as Cal noted, had to prove that he was man enough to provide for his wife.

**Gigi:** That’s the key though, ain’t it? He’s a man. Dese boys ain’t. Dey think they is, but dey ain’t. Dey hustlin’, pimpin’, doin’ whatdey can to get money. I don’ blame ‘em, since dey can’t get no job, but I wouldna be messin’ wit ‘em eitha.

**Vanessa:** I grown. I can take care ah mahself. Like Key says, marriage is a fairy tale. It ain’t fah me. Dere ain’t anybody here who ain’t grown.

**Tash:** It’s cuz we mothas now. Dere ain’t no way we (indicating herself and Vanessa) ain’t grown. We ain’t gotta lotta options anymore.

**Miss:** Who says?! Yeah, you’re moms, but that doesn’t mean you gave up your dignity and your self-respect. The fathers sure didn’t. Life is going to be tougher, but not impossible. It’ll just take a little longer for you to achieve your goals. But that’s what being part of a community is all about. And if you don’t have community leaders, become one! Take your life into your hands and decide what it’s going to be. We had a

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teacher here who was a single mom, and she described getting her education as her “hustle.” Whatever you decide, it’s going to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Why don’t you make it a positive one!

(The students sit straight up, looking at her, stunned.)

(The bell rings.)

Miss: Sigh. Well, please think about what we discussed today.

(The students get up slowly. Cal and Jordan walk out, a little oblivious. Tash and Yessenia also get up, and walk out infront of Gigi. Key and Vanessa stay behind.)

Key: Miss, d’yah really believe whatchu said?

(Miss nods.)


(Miss and Vanessa exchange a look for several beats. At that moment, they innately understand each other.)

Miss: See you both tomorrow?

Key: Yep! See ya tomorrow!

Vanessa: See ya!

(They leave.)

Miss nods: (quietly): See ya tomorrow.

Lights go out.

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