

CAN'T SAY MOTHER

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An original screenplay

Note: The Story is set in Accra, Ghana.

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1 MONTAGE

2 EXT TRAIN TRACKS - MORNING

A railroad crossing sign is up. It's alarm blaring.

CUT TO:

3 B. EXT. COMPOUND - MORNING

A woman, DZIFA, 30s, walks hurriedly towards her car. Her hands are full, this causes her to stumble.

CUT TO:

4 C. EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - MORNING

A train speeds past.

CUT TO:

5 D. I/E COMPOUND/CAR - MORNING

She opens the car door, an envelope drops. She sits and drops the other items and her handbag on the passenger seat.

She picks up the envelope and tosses it on the dash board.

She checks her face in the mirror and then her watch. Her eyes open as she starts the engine and drives off.

6 E. EXT. CITYSCAPE

Cars driving on the freeway.

7 MONTAGE ENDS

8 TITLE COMES ON SCREEN

9 EXT. TRAIN STATION - PLATFORM - DAY

AFUA, 50 something year old woman, stands on the platform watching the train disappear into the distance. She then turns to leave, dragging her suitcase behind her.

CUT TO:

10 EXT. TRAIN STATION - PARKING LOT - DAY

Dzifa pulls up between two cars. Wearing her anxiety like a garment, she squeezes out of her car.

She notices her skirt is caught in the door. She re-opens the door, then sees she has left her handbag, she grabs it and shuts the door again.

CUT TO:

11 EXT. TRAIN STATION - PLATFORM - DAY

Afua ignores the taxi men calling to her. She walks on.

12 EXT. TRAIN STATION - PARKING LOT - DAY

Dzifa, still shaking with anxiety is unaware of an incoming vehicle.

The loud HONKING from the car causes her to jump back. THE DRIVER curses at her.

She flushes with embarrassment; she hugs herself and continues walking.

13 EXT. TRAIN STATION - PARKING LOT - DAY

The HONKING sound draws Afua's attention to Dzifa. Afua watches her with much irritation.

Dzifa spots Afua. She approaches her with a huge grin.

DZIFA

(in twi)

Welcome. How was your ---

Afua cringes as Dzifa struggles with the language.

AFUA

(in twi)

Why isn't my son here?

DZIFA
 (in twi)
 He is very busy ---

Afua starts walking towards the car while Dzifa is still talking.

Dzifa, humiliated, drags the suitcase after her.

14 EXT. TRAIN STATION/CAR - PARKING LOT - DAY

Dzifa catches up with Afua. She unlocks the car and hurriedly goes to clear her things from the passenger's seat.

She is clumsy moving the things, Afua is irritated. She glances at Afua. Embarrassed.

She then puts the suitcase in the boot. She struggles with it before finally getting it in.

All the while Afua watches her with contempt.

AFUA
 (in twi)
 So it's just me and you?

Dzifa gives a nervous chuckle.

Afua eyes her.

AFUA (CONT'D)
 And Nyamekye thought you were the best person to pick me up?

DZIFA
 Oh mummy but I can take you.

AFUA
 I am not your mother!

DZIFA
 Please I am sorry.

Afua hisses and goes to sit in the car.

Dzifa finishes loading the boot. She shuts the boot too loud, she jumps.

15 INT. CAR - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Afua gets into the car. Still clumsy, she misses the ignition a few times before finally getting the key in and starting the car.

Afua, with a pitiful look, claps her hands together and lets out a deep sigh.

Dzifa glances at her briefly, backs up and drives off.

16 INT. CAR - DAY

Pregnant silence.

Dzifa glances at Afua who is looking out the window.

DZIFA

Mummy, would you like me to show you Dubai?

AFUA

(puzzled)
Dubai?!

DZIFA

(chuckles)
That's what they call the new bridge at Circle.

AFUA

How many times have I told you not to call me "mummy?" You know where to find yours!

Dzifa looks at her. Shocked.

She holds Afua's stern gaze for a moment.

AFUA (CONT'D)

Eyes on the road!

Dzifa obeys.

They resume the silence.

17 EXT. CAR - FREEWAY - DAY

The blue sedan drives past other cars.

18 INT. CAR - DAY

Afua is talking on the phone.

Dzifa takes a turn off the main road, Afua raises an eyebrow.

AFUA
 (putting her hand over the
 phone)
 Where are you taking me to?

DZIFA
 I am going to pick some things at
 the caterer's.

Afua says her goodbyes to the caller as Dzifa replies her.

AFUA
 Ah! You were sent to pick me from
 the station and take me home, so
 why the merry go ride?

DZIFA
 Please ma, they are things for the
 funeral. I wont take long.

Afua eyes her and hisses.

19 EXT. CAR - OUTSIDE CATERER'S HOUSE - DAY

The car is parked in front of a house.

Dzifa comes out of the house with two MEN carrying chaffing
 dishes, plates and other items.

Dzifa opens the boot and they place the items in it. She
 closes the boot and her phone starts ringing.

She pulls out her phone. "NYAMEKYE" is on the screen.

She holds her breath briefly before answering the call.

DZIFA
 Hello.

NYAMEKYE
 Have you picked her up?

DZIFA
 Yes. We are just about to leave the
 caterer's.

A brief pause.

NYAMEKYE
 Why haven't you sent the pictures
 to the printers? Is there anything
 you can do right?

Dzifa tries to speak.

NYAMEKYE (CONT'D)

Just give the phone to my mother.

She takes the phone to Afua quickly.

Afua notices Dzifa's shaky hands.

Dzifa, overwhelmed with fear, stares into space while Afua speaks on the phone. She then gently wraps her arm round her waist.

Afua hangs up and hands the phone back to Dzifa.

AFUA

What are you standing there for?
(in twi). Get into the car.

Afua kisses her teeth.

Dzifa walks slowly to the driver's side.

20 EXT. CAR - DAY

They are driving past a busy street.

21 INT. CAR - DAY

Sweat breaks out on Dzifa's face despite the air conditioning in the car. She tugs at the neck of her blouse.

She fiddles with the buttons of the air conditioning. She gives up and returns her focus to driving.

Afua is watching all along.

AFUA

I don't understand this your
dressing. In this heat!!

Dzifa doesn't respond.

AFUA (CONT'D)

It is a pity that my son could not
do any better than you. Dressing,
you can't. Common sense, empty.
Children, (she puts her hands out
and makes a sound). So what are you
good for? ---

Dzifa inhales deeply and bites her lip at the mention of 'children.' She tightens her grip on the steering wheel as she holds herself from looking at Afua.

She blinks rapidly fighting back the tears. Finally, she gives in and looks at Afua.

She opens her mouth to speak but the tears stop her.

Afua is still talking and doesn't notice Dzifa.

Dzifa turns quickly and wipes the tears with her palm. A car comes up beside them, Dzifa panics and swerves off the road.

Dzifa's hands trembles, Afua is frightened.

AFUA (CONT'D)

(alarmed)

So you want to kill me?! (in twi).

DZIFA

(sniffs)

I am sorry, I didn't see the car.

AFUA

Herh! So you want Nyamekye to be an orphan like you?

Dzifa doesn't respond. She gets them back on the road and they continue driving.

22

INT. CAR - DAY

After a while.

Afua is still ranting; Dzifa relaxes her shoulders and rest into the seat. She spots the brown envelope on the dashboard; she lets out a sigh of relief.

She reaches for it.

AFUA

You are still not watching the road? This is why I didn't want to enter the car with you in the first place. What kind of trouble has Nyamekye put me into?!

DZIFA

(handing her the envelope)

Ma...we made three samples of the funeral card; can you select the one you like best?

Afua reluctantly collects the envelope.

Dzifa then reaches to the back of her seat and pulls out the photo album.

DZIFA (CONT'D)

And ma, can you select the photo
for the funeral card and souvenirs?

Afua eyes her and yanks the album from her.

Dzifa returns her focus to the road while Afua flips through
the photo album.

She passes her hand through some pictures of her son. She
sees a picture with her husband. She pulls it out and looks
intensely at it.

FADE IN:

23 AUDIO FLASHBACK

Afua is sobbing and pleading as her husband pounds and beats
her.

AFUA (V.O)

(sobbing)

Nii, this is not good o! I beg you,
please. Awurade! This man will kill
me today.

He grunts. She screams.

FADE OUT.

24 PRESENT

Afua shakes it off; realizing she has been squeezing the
photo.

She releases her grip and puts the picture back in the album.
She flips the page to a picture of her carrying her baby.

AFUA

I guess you and my son will never
have a picture like this.

Dzifa glances quickly at the photo.

AFUA (CONT'D)

From the onset, I knew you were no
good for my son. And ten years
later, I am still right.

Dzifa flashes a forced smile.

DZIFA

Have you selected the funeral card?

Dzifa glances at Afua, she then spots a lone picture of Nyamekye's dad.

DZIFA (CONT'D)

What about this one? He looks very handsome.

AFUA

Will you keep quiet! What do you know?

Dzifa returns her eyes to the road.

Afua flips through the album quickly and then shuts it angrily.

She gathers the funeral cards and the album and drops them on the dashboard.

AFUA (CONT'D)

(Upset)

What kind of nonsense is this? Why couldn't you people just select one picture? Do whatever you want.

DZIFA

I am sorry. I thought ---

AFUA

You thought what?

Dzifa keeps quiet.

25

INT. CAR - DAY

Pregnant pause. Both women are focused on the road.

Dzifa's phone starts ringing.

Dzifa steals a glance at Afua before reaching for the phone. She answers the call and puts it on speaker.

DZIFA

Hello Dr. Ashong.

DR. ASHONG

Hello Dzifa. How do you do?

DZIFA

How do you do?

DR. ASHONG

I will like you to come in today.
By 4pm. It's concerning the tests
we did ---

DZIFA

(interrupting)
You are on speaker. Can we
reschedule for some other time?

DR. ASHONG

I must insist you come in today.

DZIFA

(hesitant)
Okay. I will be there in a few
minutes.

She hangs up.

DZIFA (CONT'D)

Please I need to stop at the
clinic. It is not far from the
house. I promise it won't take
long.

Afua looks at her watch.

AFUA

Just get me home in one piece.

DZIFA

Thank you.

26 EXT. CLINIC/INT. CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

Dzifa drives into the parking lot.

She turns to Afua who is staring blankly ahead.

She opens her mouth to speak but advises herself against it.
She picks up her handbag and exits the car.

27 EXT. CLINIC/INT. CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

After a while.

Afua looks at the clock on the dashboard. She looks at her
watch for confirmation.

She rummages through her handbag and pulls out a pack of
pocket tissue. She exits the car; locking it behind her.

28 INT. CLINIC - LATE AFTERNOON

Afua approaches THE RECEPTIONIST, asks for directions. The receptionist directs her and she follows the way to the bathroom.

She struts the corridor. She approaches a slightly opened door but doesn't pay much attention. Then she hears people talking in muffled tones. She looks again and sees Dzifa being bandaged.

She stops, noticing the bruises on Dzifa's back. Her jaw drops.

Dr. Ashong starts to speak and Afua dodges out of sight but within earshot.

DR. ASHONG

Your wounds are healing fine. And the fetus is doing well...for now.

CUT TO:

29 EXT. DR. ASHONG'S OFFICE

Afua gasps at the mention of 'fetus'. She puts her hand over her mouth.

CUT TO:

30 INT. DR. ASHONG'S OFFICE

Dr. Ashong goes to close the door, while Dzifa passes her top over her head. Then he and Dzifa move to take their seats at his desk.

CUT TO:

31 EXT. DR. ASHONG'S OFFICE

Afua moves closer, pressing her ear to the door. Unbothered about being seen eavesdropping.

CUT TO:

32 INT. DR. ASHONG'S OFFICE

They seat at his desk. He searches Dzifa's face. She shifts uncomfortable.

He leans in.

DR. ASHONG

I must be honest with you. I am worried about this one. About you.

DZIFA

Oh! I just fell down the stairs. Clumsy me.

Dzifa flashes a weak smile.

DR. ASHONG

You have lost four pregnancies from falling down the stairs and other "accidents". The last one could have been fatal.

DZIFA

(chuckles)
It wasn't that bad.

DR. ASHONG

You could have died, Dzifa! Do you need me to remind you the state you were in when you were brought in? This has got to stop.

Dzifa is quiet.

He reaches for her hands; taking her hand in his, he holds her gaze.

DR. ASHONG (CONT'D)

Dzifa, let me help you. You don't have to go through this. What do you think will happen should you fall down the stairs again?

Dzifa looks away, removing her hand from his hold.

He fixes his gaze on her even as she avoids his eyes.

DZIFA

(through the tears)
I didn't really fall down the stairs.

She sniffs.

DR. ASHONG

I know. Do you want to tell me what's been happening?

Dzifa rolls her eyes, considering his question.

DZIFA

What should I do? What if we took it out?

DR. ASHONG

That takes care of the baby but what about you? Who takes care of you?

He looks at her intensely then she reaches for her handbag, avoiding his eyes.

DZIFA

(standing)

I have to go.

DR. ASHONG

Okay. But you should come back after the funeral for a full check up.

She nods rapidly, holding back the tears.

33 EXT. DR. ASHONG'S OFFICE - CORRIDOR

Afua walks hurriedly down the corridor once she hears Dzifa talk about leaving.

She rounds a corner. She is in a daze and in need of support, she sits on a bench.

She clutches her chest but the tears don't come.

Her eyes scrunch close as the memories flood in.

34 AUDIO FLASHBACK

Afua pleads with her husband, her voice shaky.

AFUA (V.O.)

Nii, not in front of Nyamekye.
Please. Agyei! Nyamekye go into the room. Go into the room...

She starts screaming for help. Her husband grunts as he punches her.

35 PRESENT

Afua exhales a heavily burdened breath.

Footsteps interrupt her thoughts.

36 EXT. DR. ASHONG'S OFFICE - CORRIDOR

Dzifa walks like one in a trance, tears flowing down her cheeks. She clutches her bag to her chest, squeezing it. She reaches to the wall for support. She leans against the wall and slides down to the floor. She breaks down and sobs; she tries to scream but no sound comes out.

Unknown to her Afua has spotted her.

After a brief moment, Afua approaches Dzifa; takes her hand and helps her up. She hold Dzifa's teary eyes for a brief moment, then they exit the clinic.

37 INT. CAR - EVENING

Afua is driving and Dzifa looks out the window.

Dzifa's phone starts ringing. They both stare at the name on the screen before Dzifa answers the call, putting it on speaker.

NYAMEKYE

(angrily)

Why is it taking you so long to get home? Where are you now?

DZIFA

(quietly)

We are just pulling up to the gate.

He cuts the call.

Afua parks at the gate. Both women sit in awkward silence.

Dzifa gets out the car, goes to the boot. She carries the dishes and heads towards the house.

NYAMEKYE, 30 something year old man, in a polo shirt and well ironed khaki pants comes out the gate.

Dzifa holds her breath for a second on seeing him but he walks right past her.

Afua exhales deeply on seeing her son. She gets out the car.

Nyamekye walks past Dzifa without acknowledging her. Heads to his mother with a huge grin on his face.

When he gets close to his mother, he notices the sad look on her face. He attempts to hug her but she lands him a resounding SLAP.

He stares at her, shocked. She holds his gaze with teary eyes.

Dzifa stops in her steps on hearing the slap. She holds herself from turning back as the tears flow down her cheeks. She continues walking into the house.