

START HERE

NILENE

Oh, you do, do you? Doubt that. Listen, I ain't askin' for no hand-out. I'll pay for this operation. Over time if I got to. All I know is one more mouth gonna' put us down. My people got a farm out in Halifax County, family of 10 kids. Everyone a' us hard workin'. Out there, one more mouth was two more helpin' hands. That ain't so here in town. I know you, you Board folks decide who gets one. So I'm askin'. Please. I can be ready—

TEMPERANCE

Ms. Cooper, even if I had that authority, I couldn't do it. You have no petitioner.

NILENE

Where do I get one?

TEMPERANCE

That's just it. The request has to come from an institution—like a training center or institution for the mentally impaired, or Social Services. You can't just waltz in here and ask for a tubal ligation. We aren't a birth control clinic.

NILENE

You see me dancing?

TEMPERANCE

I beg your pardon?

NILENE (Getting on her knees.)

This what you want? Okay, I'm on my knees. I'm beggin' you, one strong black woman to another. I need this. My kids need this. I don't ask nobody for nothin', but I'm askin' you now for this help. Please, lady.

TEMPERANCE

Oh, for heaven's sake, get up. I told you, I don't have this authority. I. I can't help you. You. You don't qualify. You're obviously not mentally or physically impaired. There. There's nothing I can do. I'm sorry.

NILENE (Standing up.)

So let me get this straight, if I was a blubbering idiot-or some palsied up retard, you could help me?

TEMPERANCE

Probably.

NILENE

But I ain't. I'm just a able-bodied, hard workin' momma who knows one more baby's going to pull my whole family down.

TEMPERANCE

I'm sorry. Here. (She fumbles for some brochures.) If you can get to Raleigh, there are free medical trials for, for contraceptive sponges. You can get them free if you make the monthly appoint—

NILENE

Raleigh? (Laughs.) Shoot. Might as well be Paris. You know how long it took me to get it set up so I could come in here this mornin' fore work?

TEMPERANCE

There's always other means. The men. Your, your partners. They can use—

NILENE

Yeah. Like I ain't tried that.

TEMPERANCE

I'm sorry. Really. There's nothing—

NILENE

Yeah, well. Can't say I didn't try. Nobody can't ever say Nilene Cooper didn't do everything she could for her family.

TEMPERANCE

I'm really very sorry.

NILENE

I think we both know there's other ways.

TEMPERANCE

Please, Ms. Cooper, no. Don't, don't do that. Those men usually aren't trained physicians and even if they—

NILENE

Tried everythin' else, believe me, all the potions, them stickin' herbs. No other place to turn.

TEMPERANCE

We. We *must* maintain control, all of us. All the time. We—

NILENE

We all do what we gotta' do. You do what you gotta' do, I do what I gotta' do. Choices is mighty scarce where I come from. Good day, ma'm. Thanks for your time.

END

(NILENE leaves the office. TEMPERENCE sits watching her.)

TEMPERENCE

Even if they are real doctors, they just hack away on us. Leave us with scars. (She grabs her own belly as if in pain.) Scars that won't heal. Years, decades later. Nilene? Please, please. Ms. Cooper?

(CHORUS steps forward.)

CHORUS 1

You wouldn't want the state to grant driver's licenses to mental defectives.

CHORUS 2

Nor expect such defectives to handle money wisely.

CHORUS (All.)

You wouldn't expect. YOU WOULD'NT EXPECT.

(Lights out.)