

Blending In

Pilot Episode

"B Is for Blackness & Box Braids"

written by

Shenell Lewinson

INT. GABY'S BEDROOM - DAY (DAY 1)

GABRIELLE "GABY" LEVINGTON, 16 - Black, is stood in front of her bedroom mirror, looking at her naturally kinky hair. She is dissatisfied with what she sees.

GABY (V.O.)
When I was five, I thought one day
my hair would be like Rapunzel's. I
was wrong.

Gaby walks over to her bed and opens her laptop. She searches "prom hairstyles" and scrolls through Google Images - all search results are of White women.

GABY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
You're probably wondering, why am I
looking at White women's
hairstyles? You see, I'm not your
typical sixteen-year-old Black
girl. Sometimes I listen to shit
like "Fireflies." Up until last
month, I thought Destiny's Child
was one person. And I don't have
the usual Black girl name. My
parents named me Gabrielle.
Gabrielle Levington. Gaby for
short. Yeah, I knew there wasn't
much hope for me from the start.

Gaby opens a new tab and searches "Met Gala 2021" and numerous CELEBRITIES wearing extravagant outfits and various hairstyles pop up. One particular image stands out, her favourite singer, RASHEEDA, late 20s - Black. Gaby clicks on the photo to enlarge it, showing Rasheeda wearing a dress with her hair styled in box braids.

GABY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
People are always asking me
questions I don't know the answers
to. Like, if you're Black, why do
you sound so White? Why is your
hair kinky? Is Africa a continent
or a country? Like how am I
supposed to know?

She clicks on the website link under the image, the article headline reads, "Rasheeda stuns with knee-length box braids in custom-made Givenchy dress." Gaby takes a picture of the laptop screen with her phone. She searches "what are box braids" in a third tab. She browses the images then searches "how to do box braids" on YouTube.

GABY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I know what you're thinking, how do
I not know what box braids are and
I'm Black? In my defence, my mum
usually straightens my hair, but I
want something different for my
prom.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Sat watching *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* is Gaby's adoptive
mum, KAREN LEVINGTON, 40s - White, whilst on the phone.

KAREN
Rach, I honestly don't know why
Cynthia didn't say something to
him.

RACHEL (O.S.)
I know exactly what you'd do if you
were her, Karen.

GABY (V.O.)
Minor detail, but did I mention
that my mum is White?
(beat)
Just to stop any confusion, no,
she's not my biological mum. I'm
adopted.

Gaby stands in front of Karen, blocking her view, and clears
her throat.

KAREN
Do you think I can see through you?

Gaby moves aside.

KAREN (CONT'D)
Rachel, I'm gonna have to call ya
back.

Karen ends the call.

GABY
I found it! I finally found the
hairstyle I wanna have for prom!

KAREN
About time, Gaby! I do have a few
ideas mi self though.
(MORE)

KAREN (CONT'D)

I'm thinking we could do a half-up,
half-down style. Maybe we could do
a nice French braid or curl your
hair.

GABY (V.O.)

Yeah, you heard that right. My
White Mum just told me to curl my
naturally curly hair.

GABY

I want this.

Gaby hands her phone over to Karen showing a picture of
Rasheeda's box braids. Karen smiles nervously.

KAREN

Or maybe we could do a bun instead
and get a nice gold headband to
match ya dress.

GABY

Mum! What d'you think about the
hairstyle in the picture? It's
nice, right?! I could even add the
gold clips in like Rasheeda's.

KAREN

Yeah, it's nice. But maybe we could
straighten ya hair and do a nice
bob or something instead.

GABY

You don't like it?

KAREN

It's not that I don't like it,
love, it's just...

Karen notices Gaby's smile fade.

KAREN (CONT'D)

You know what, yeah, this style
would go great with your dress.

GABY

(smiles)

So, I did a bit of research, and we
need to buy braiding hair for it.

KAREN

What now?

GABY

Yeah, I was watching a hair tutorial on YouTube, and the woman added in extensions.

KAREN

Okay, we can go to Sainsbury's now and get some.

GABY

Mum, you can't buy it at a supermarket.

KAREN

Where d'you buy it then?

CUT TO:

EXT. AFRO-CARIBBEAN HAIR AND COSMETICS STORE - LATER

In the middle of a busy High Street, in a predominantly South Asian area, is the hair shop. Karen and Gaby stand outside the shop, both hesitant to enter.

KAREN

This ain't what I was picturing, love.

Karen and Gaby enter the shop.

INT. AFRO-CARIBBEAN HAIR AND COSMETICS STORE - CONTINUOUS

The shop is filled with BLACK WOMEN and GIRLS. THE CASHIER, Asian, is stood behind the till. There are other SHOP ASSISTANTS, Asian, stood around the shop. Karen walks over to a shop assistant.

KAREN

Where's the braiding hair, please?

The shop assistant points to another aisle.

SHOP ASSISTANT

Down there, at the end.

Karen and Gaby head down the aisle; a BLACK WOMAN is browsing the different packs of weaves. There are dozens of different colour braiding hair packs.

GABY

I dunno which one to pick.

The Black Woman smiles at Gaby. Karen begins browsing through the packs of braiding hair and picks out a pack of red hair.

KAREN

How 'bout this for your box braids?

GABY

Oh God no!

Karen picks up multiple packs of bright coloured hair and Gaby shakes her head. The Black Woman looks over.

GABY (V.O.)

How do I tell her that I don't like any of her suggestions? I mean, I may be new to this hair thing, but won't wearing green braids make me look... You know, ghetto?

BLACK WOMAN

D'you need help? I'd go with about five packs of black, personally.

GABY

Thank you so much.

BLACK WOMAN

No problem bab.

Karen seems slightly bothered by Gaby's decision. Gaby picks up five packs of black braiding hair and hands them to Karen who takes them to the till. Gaby lingers in the aisle.

BLACK WOMAN (CONT'D)

Who's doing ya hair?

GABY

My mum.

BLACK WOMAN

The White woman?

(beat)

Lemme give you my hairdresser's number. She specialises in Black hair. She's the best in Birmingham.

Gaby discreetly hands her phone over to the Black woman, trying to prevent Karen from seeing. The Black woman types in the number then hands it back.

GABY

Thank you.

GABY (V.O.)
My mum's always done my hair for
me. Surely it can't go that wrong,
can it? But maybe I'll keep the
number just in case.

Karen is waiting by the door for Gaby.

KAREN
Gaby, c'mon! I ain't got all day.

INT. LOGAN'S BEDROOM - EVENING

LOGAN LEVINGTON, 16 - White, is by the window smoking
Cannabis and listening to drill music. He notices Karen's car
pulling up on the driveway.

LOGAN
Shit!

Logan puts out the joint and hides it in a box under his
bed. He grabs a can of spray and frantically starts spraying
his room.

KAREN (O.S.)
Logan! Come downstairs!

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Gaby is sat around the kitchen island scrolling on her phone.
Karen is washing her hands. Logan enters, still lethargic
from smoking. Karen begins to sniff the air.

KAREN
Does it smell like weed in 'ere to
you?

LOGAN
Dunno. What does weed smell like?

GABY
Is Dad home?

LOGAN
He said he's popping out to buy
milk or suen. That was about two
hours ago though.

Karen opens the fridge, which is packed full of groceries,
including two big bottles of milk.

KAREN
Go wash your hair then, Gaby. Then
I'll do it after dinner.

LOGAN
You gonna straighten it again?

KAREN
No, I'm gonna do box braids for
her.

Logan laughs hysterically.

GABY
Why are you laughing so hard?

LOGAN
I'm deeping how mad your hair's
gonna look when Mum messes up.

KAREN
Ahh, shut up, Logan. I'm a pro. You
won't be laughing when this turns
out good.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Logan is sat watching TV on the sofa. Gaby is sat on a chair, holding a few packs of braiding hair with Karen stood behind her. Karen struggles to part Gaby's hair into six equally large sections due to the thickness of it.

GABY
Ouch! You're pulling too hard.

KAREN
Do you want it done or not?
(beat)
Right! Hand me a pack.

Gaby hands Karen one of the packs. Karen cuts it open and takes the hair out. She holds the long bundle of hair confused by what to do next.

GABY
Mum, are you sure you know what
you're doing?

KAREN

Of course! I watched that video you sent. The hair's longer than I thought it would be though.

GABY

You're supposed to cut it in half. I have a number for a hairdresser if -

KAREN

I knew that. Just keep your head still. I know what I'm doing.

Karen takes a chunk of the braiding hair and tries to plait it with Gaby's natural hair. Karen fails miserably - the extensions are not blended with Gaby's hair, the plaits are too loose, and the partings are uneven.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Gaby is stood in front of a mirror with her eyes closed. Karen is pleased with how Gaby's hair turned out.

KAREN

Okay, now open!

Gaby's new hairstyle is revealed. She opens her eyes and is appalled by how it looks. Logan laughs uncontrollably.

LOGAN

Oh my days fam! You look clapped!
(to Karen)
What was that about turning out good, Mum?

KAREN

Ignore Logan. I like it! It's like Brandy's.

GABY

Mum! You said you knew what you were doing! This doesn't look anything like the picture!

Logan erupts with laughter again.

GABY (CONT'D)

Thanks for trying, Mum, but I can't go to prom with my hair looking like this.

Gaby takes her phone out and dials the hairdresser's number.

KAREN
Who ya calling?

GABY
A professional!

INT. KEISHA'S HAIR STUDIO - DAY (DAY 2)

The salon has MULTIPLE BLACK WOMEN, various ages, all sat getting different styles done: weaves, cornrows, box braids, and wig fittings, by BLACK HAIRDRESSERS. Gaby takes it all in as she is sat getting her hair braided. The hairdresser, KEISHA, 30s - Black, is doing the final touches.

GABY (V.O.)
Can you believe this is my first
time setting foot in a Black hair
salon? This is nothing like in the
movies.

KEISHA
Janet, grab me them gold hair cuffs
off the shelf, please.

JANET, Black, hands them over. Keisha puts them on some of the plaits. When she is finished, she swivels Gaby's chair facing the mirror. Gaby is pleasantly surprised.

GABY
Woah! Thanks, Keisha. I didn't know
my hair could look so nice.

KEISHA
That's Black excellence, honey.
Listen, girl, whenever you need
your hair done you come here,
alright? Don't let your mum in
your hair again, please. That mess
you came in with this morning...
You can't go out looking like
that. It's a good job I had those
leftover hair packs from
yesterday.

Gaby smiles, and fiddles with her hair as she walks over to the till with Keisha. Karen is asleep on a sofa in the waiting area - Gaby wakes her up.

GABY
Mum! So, what do you think?!

KAREN
You look gorgeous, love. I really
like it.

Karen notices the time on the clock whilst walking over to the till.

KAREN (CONT'D)
Damn, it's been five hours! How much do I owe you?

KEISHA
Eighty.

Karen hands Keisha a twenty-pound note.

KEISHA (CONT'D)
No, eighty.

KAREN
Eighty?! Eighty quid?!

Karen reaches into her purse and takes out another sixty pounds.

KAREN (CONT'D)
(to Gaby)
Them braids better last 'til ya get married.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Logan, with his hair freshly cut, is sat on a bench. His friend, DAVE, 18 - White, walks over; they do a short handshake.

DAVE
Jeez! Is that you wid the fresh trim yeah?!

Dave sits down.

LOGAN
Don't gas me, don't gas me. I've got prom tomorrow init.

DAVE
Say nuffin, say nuffin.

Dave slides a package over to Logan.

DAVE (CONT'D)
D'you reckon you can make at least two bills on this?

LOGAN
Light work. I'll shout ya when I
sell it all.

DAVE
Calm, G. You can sell at your prom.
Sure bare of dem man at your school
will be on it blud.

LOGAN
Nah, Dave, that's gonna be too
bait.

DAVE
Only sell to man that you trust
init.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Gaby and Karen are both watching *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* on
TV whilst snacking. Logan arrives home.

LOGAN (O.S.)
I'm home!

Logan enters the living room and collapses onto a sofa.

KAREN
Er, where 'ave you been? It's late.

LOGAN
I was out init fam.

KAREN
Fam?! Who d'you think you're
calling fam?

LOGAN
Sorry, Mum. It won't happen again.

KAREN
It better not! You ain't comin'
home whenever ya feel like it,
okay?! Your curfew is seven.

Logan notices Gaby's hair.

LOGAN
Ay! It rah looks sick y'know! How
much?

GABY
Eighty.

LOGAN

Eighty?!

(to Karen)

Mum, you paid eighty pounds for Gaby to get braids, but you were moving bare tight when I asked for a tenner to get my trim.

KAREN

It was a treat for your sister.

LOGAN

You don't wanna spend money on your own flesh and blood. I see.

KAREN

Logan! You know that's not true. Besides, we've had Gaby since she's a baby. She's basically blood.

GABY

Stop being so salty. You're just pressed 'cause I'll look better in the pictures tomorrow.

LOGAN

As if! Pree the trim! Mum, I would've asked you to do it, but after Gaby's hair yesterday...

Gaby and Logan both laugh; Karen is not amused.

KAREN

Just for that, ya curfew's now five.

Karen starts laughing.

LOGAN

Wait! What?! Nah, nah, it was a joke. Don't do dat.

Gaby begins to fiddle with her braids.

GABY (V.O.)

Hair? Check. Dress? Check. Mum as a chauffeur? Check. Logan as my escort? Ew, check. I'm actually excited about prom tomorrow. I may not have a date or a fancy limousine, but at least I can show off my eighty-pound braids.

INT. FUNCTION ROOM - EVENING (DAY 3)

A colour-coordinated, nicely decorated function room. EVERYONE is wearing either a suit or a dress. YEAR ELEVEN STUDENTS are dancing to mostly contemporary popular and chart music. Some of the TEACHERS are on the dance floor, whilst others are taking pictures with other students. Everyone is having a good time.

Gaby is sat with her friend, JESSICA "JESS", 16 - White, both watching everyone dance.

GABY

Why don't we go and dance now?

JESS

I want someone to ask me to dance.

GABY

Jess, look around, we're the only ones still sat down.

JESS

Just go and dance. Theo keeps staring at you, think he wants you to join him.

THEO MELLOR, 16 - Mixed (Black & White), is dancing with his FRIENDS.

GABY

He's not looking at me.

JESS

Girl, please, he hasn't stopped staring at you since you walked in. You know he fancies you. Go talk to him.

GABY

I don't wanna go by myself.

JESS

Ugh, fine! I'm doing this for you.

Gaby and Jess head to the dance floor and start dancing near Theo; he moves closer to Gaby and dances behind her.

THEO

You look really beautiful tonight.

Gaby grins at Jess, then turns around to face Theo. She tries to hide her excitement whilst talking to him.

GABY

Thank you.

THEO

I heard you're going to the King
Henry College in Southbridge.

GABY

Yeah, why?

THEO

I'm going there too.

GABY

Oh, really?!

THEO

Yeah. Oh, and I'm having a party at
my house next weekend. You should
come.

GABY

I'll see if I'm free.

THEO

(laughs)

Add me on Snap and let me know if
you're free then.

Theo hands Gaby his phone with the Snapchat app open. Gaby enters her username and hands it back. CLARISSA, 16 - White, and SIMRAN, 16 - Asian, both snobbish, rudely interrupt the conversation.

GABY (V.O.)

Ugh, these bitches.

CLARISSA

Mind if I interrupt?

Clarissa shoves herself between Gaby and Theo.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)

Hi Gabs.

GABY

It's Gaby.

THEO

I'll catch you later, Gaby.

GABY

Oh, see ya.

Theo returns to his table.

CLARISSA
I love your new hair, Gabs.

Clarissa stretches her hand towards Gaby's hair; Gaby quickly pulls away.

CLARISSA (CONT'D)
It's so... Different.

SIMRAN
Yeah, so different.

CLARISSA
Can I touch it?

GABY
(with an attitude)
No. I'm not a pet.

CLARISSA
I just wanna see what it feels like. No big deal.

SIMRAN
Yeah, it's no big deal.

CLARISSA
(to Simran)
Stop repeating what I say, Simran.

SIMRAN
I was just agreeing with you.

The DJ stops the music.

DJ
Right, boys and girls, ladies and gentlemen, we're about to crown the prom king and queen!

CLARISSA
(screams)
Ah! I've got a crown to claim. Come on, Sim.

Clarissa struts to her table and Simran quickly follows behind. Jess and Gaby head back to their table, along with the other students and teachers.

JESS
Ugh! Can't stand her. Love her dress though.

GABY
Forget her, the Theo Mellor asked
for my Snap!

JESS
Yeah, yeah, alright Cinderella.

MR DAVIS, early 50s - White, walks on stage holding an envelope. Everyone applauds and cheers.

MR DAVIS
Good evening everyone. Firstly, I
must say you all look amazing
tonight.

RANDOM STUDENT (O.S.)
Just tell us who won!

MR DAVIS
Alright, alright. The moment you've
all been waiting for.

Clarissa hands her phone to Simran, who is holding a compact mirror up for her whilst she fixes her hair.

CLARISSA
Make sure you get a clear video of
me walking up there, okay?!

SIMRAN
Yeah.

Mr Davis opens the envelope. Simran begins recording Clarissa as she stands up.

MR DAVIS
Your prom king and queen of 2021
are...
(beat)
Logan Levington and Brittany Evans!

Everyone cheers. Clarissa sits back down, frustrated that she did not win. BRITTANY EVANS, 16 - White, walks onto the stage.

MR DAVIS (CONT'D)
Logan Levington. Has anyone seen
Logan?

INT. FUNCTION ROOM BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Logan is dealing Cannabis with a STUDENT.

LOGAN

Make sure you tell your friends,
but keep it on the low yeah.

The student nods and leaves the bathroom. Logan counts dozens of ten and twenty-pound notes. A TEENAGE BOY bursts into the bathroom.

TEENAGE BOY

Dude, they want you on stage. You
won prom king.

Logan stuffs the money and Cannabis into his suit pocket and rushes out of the bathroom.

INT. FUNCTION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Logan walks on stage flustered and stands next to Brittany. Mr Davis places a crown on Logan's head and a tiara on Brittany's. He then places a sash over both of them and hands Brittany a bouquet. Simran is still recording Clarissa.

CLARISSA

Stop the video idiot!

Clarissa grabs her phone out of Simran's hand.

MR DAVIS

Year elevens, before I present your
king and queen, I want to
congratulate you. You've had an
amazing year, and you've all grown
into confident young people who I
know will go on to do great things.
Now it's time to go off and show
the world who you are. I wish you
all good luck, and I now present
your prom king and queen.

Everyone claps and cheers and the DJ turns the music back on. The students return to the dance floor.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Gaby and Logan collapse on the sofa, still in their prom outfits.

KAREN

How on earth did your dumb ass win
prom king?!

Logan laughs at Karen as she puts on the crown and struts around the living room.

GABY (V.O.)

Watching my mum model the crown as if she's the next Cindy Crawford, reminds me of Mr Davis' speech about showing the world who we are. How can I show the world who I am when I don't even know? But that's gonna change. This summer, I'm going to find out who I am. Starting with learning about my culture and embracing my Blackness.

(beat)

First, I'm gonna learn Beyoncé's dance in Single Women.

EZRA LEVINGTON, 40s - White, walks into the living room formally dressed, holding a briefcase and a bottle of milk. Karen, Gaby and Logan stare at him.

GABY

Dad!

EZRA

What have you done to your hair?!

GABY

Do you like it? Mum took me to the hairdressers. Think I'm gonna go there from now on.

EZRA

It's certainly...

GABY (V.O.)

Don't say it, don't say it.

EZRA

Different.

GABY (V.O.)

That word again.

KAREN

Ezra! Where the hell have you been for the past two days?!

EZRA

Would you believe me if I said I was at the store?

Ezra laughs, but no one else is amused.