

Rhapsodist

Episode 1: "Foolish. Poet."

BLACK.

Electric silence. A nervous inhale. A child's voice:

CHILD (V.O.)

Returning home I find that every
thing that I have ever owned has
been removed and then replaced with
a matching replica.

Muted giggling. Murmurs.

CHILD (V.O.)

Each item (I discover) is identical
/ In shape / And colour / To its
original / But -here's the
inexplicable- / Everything's two
millimetres smaller!

Unexpected laughter. LEXI (11), afro hair twisted into
multicoloured clips, opens her eyes.

INT. SCHOOL ASSEMBLY HALL - DAY

Diverse school-uniformed children and families are packed
into a primary school hall. Lexi stands on a raised platform;
everybody watches her:

LITTLE LEXI

On hands and knees locating an
metre ruler / My shrinking world a
clamp of disbelief / I practice my
techniques / Deep breathe / Deep
breathe / And in an illuminating
gap between an outbreath and an in -
/ I remember, with a grin / It's me
again! I've gone and gotten taller!

Spontaneous applause. PUNEET (11) in a school sports kit,
balancing a spinning football on his finger, scowls.

Lexi's family: CHARLES (40s, steadfast), BB (4, intense) and
JOE (9, gentle), start a standing ovation. Lexi's mother,
AFIA (27, radiant), stays seated, but claps.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

Golden light shimmers on Lexi's cheek as she hugs a plastic
trophy to her chest. The Arthur family stride proudly through
the playground-come-car-park towards an ancient Volkswagen
Beetle. Charles touches a FOUNTAIN PEN clipped inside the top
pocket of his shirt, the word "Afia" is engraved on it.

BB

Why is Mum's name on your pen?

AFIA

It's very hard to become Poet Laureate; you have to be personally appointed by the Royal Family, and there have only been twenty-one Poet Laureates in the UK since 1668, and twenty-one out of twenty-one of them were white, and twenty out of twenty-one of them were men.

Charles re-starts the engine.

CHARLES

Yeah, but Lexi could do it, easy-peasy; she's already a better poet at eleven than I am at forty-two.

The children laugh at a funny face Charles pulls in the rear view mirror. Afia twists in her seat to address Lexi, her Ghanaian flag earrings swing against her jaw.

AFIA

Aiming for something almost impossible to reach, like Poet Laureateship, might not be a smart choice, sweetie.

Charles attempts to start the engine again.

AFIA (CONT'D)

There are so many options with a great brain like yours, there are hundreds of other fulfilling careers that pay good money, careers that can change the world, careers that mean you can go on holidays and have nice things -

Charles, irritated, hits the dash and turns the key again.

LEXI

Why would I need holidays if I'm doing what I love?

The car finally starts. Charles begins to reverse.

AFIA

Okay, not holidays, then; food-you'll need money to eat food, won't you? You have no idea what the realities of living on a poet's salary are -

LEXI

-You think I'm gunna fail!

CHARLES

Sausage, your Mum can't help this,
she's a statistician; she
compulsively analyses data and
makes predictions.

Charles side-glances at Afia in gentle warning. Lexi opens the car door.

AFIA

Alexis! What are you -

Lexi jumps out of the car and sprints across the playground. BB and Joe press their faces to the windows. They watch Lexi arrive at Puneet's Dad's Mercedes and hand Puneet her plastic trophy. Lexi walks back to the car with folded arms.

The car door closes behind her and she fastens her seatbelt.

LEXI

Predict my future then, Mum.

The car pulls away. Lexi glares out of the window. She glances longingly at the trophy in Puneet's hands as the car passes by him. An acorn lands in Lexi's lap. BB has thrown it over as consolation. Lexi looks down at it, then up at BB and Joe, who both smile lovingly.

LEXI (CONT'D)

(Whispered, to BB and Joe)
Don't worry, I'm gunna get a real
solid gold trophy when I'm poet
laureate. Just watch.

Charles's hand clasps the engraved FOUNTAIN PEN his pocket. The battered, rusty car rattles off into the distance.

INT. KWIK SAVE SUPERSTORE, BAKERY - DAY

Hands in thin plastic gloves knead dough in a grocery-store bakery. We speed past one pair of hands, two, three - each pounds the dough, rolls it, folds - until we reach LEXI (31, energetic) - whose plastic-gloved fingers hold the FOUNTAIN PEN with 'Afia' engraved on it.

Lexi's writes in a notebook sprinkled with flour. She wears a maroon tabard reading: 'Kwik Save'.

UNDER THE WORKTOP

HUNTER (5, male, non-verbal), face smeared with butter-icing and jam, crawls past the standing legs of BAKERS at adjacent trays, and taps Lexi's knee.

ABOVE THE WORKTOP

Lexi startles at the tapping and ducks under the station.

UNDER THE WORKTOP

On her knees, holding her notebook, Lexi faces Hunter:

LEXI

You're not meant to be here.

Lexi lets Hunter touch the notebook.

LEXI (CONT'D)

It's a poem about 'Romeo and Juliet', do you remember the story?

Hunter nods.

LEXI (CONT'D)

Romeo and Juliet are so in love with each other that they literally make the ultimate sacrifice. It's... wow.

Lexi uses her tabard to wipe jam off his cheek.

LEXI (CONT'D)

Just 'cuz you haven't started using words don't mean nothing, okay? Don't let anyone make you feel small for stuff you can't do, only show people what you can do; like how amazing you are at putting things in order.

Hunter attempts to stop Lexi cleaning him. She playfully hits his hands away. He loves it. So does she. Crumbs fall.

LEXI (CONT'D)

Is this...oh no - is this cake?

Hunter nods. Lexi snaps her face out to:

INT. CAKE AISLE - CONTINUOUS

The cake aisle ends in a glass wall beneath the bakery hatch. Lexi's face squishes to the glass and gawks at cakes everywhere. Toppled. Smearred. A cake-pocalypse.

LEXI

Donna's gunna murder you.

INT. BAKERY, UNDER THE COUNTER - CONTINUOUS.

Lexi grabs Hunter's hand and they crawl out from under the worktop. They surface next to the bakery trays where a sad-looking dough ball lies, untouched, on Lexi's tray.

BAKER #1
He can't be in here.

Lexi looks for somewhere to hide Hunter, when the door swings open, violently. It's MICHAEL (35, neck tattoos).

MICHAEL
Here you are. Sorry, sorry, Lex,
his Mum was rushed to the psych-
ward again over the weekend and the
babysitter cancelled this morning -
- it's, it's just. Come here, son.

Hunter hides behind Lexi, playful, while she tries to wipe a blob of icing off his sleeve.

LEXI
We've been chatting about
Shakespeare, haven't we, matey?

Michael reaches for Hunter's hand.

MICHAEL
He don't understand that stuff.

BAKER #2 shushes them from her workstation.

LEXI
What?! This kid knows iambic
pentameter!

MICHAEL
Iamb...i- what?

An EMPLOYEE brushes past them, passive-aggressive.

LEXI
Iambic. Show him, Hunt?

Hunter takes a flat palm and beats a rhythm out on his chest:
Di-dum, di-dum, di-dum, di-dum, di-dum.

LEXI (CONT'D)
Ten syllables a line, in pairs of
five, with the stress on the second
syllable, okay? Like - Di-dum, di-
dum, di-dum, di-dum, di-dum!

Michael, impressed, takes Hunter and leads him to the door.

LEXI (CONT'D)
 (To Hunter, stressing the
 iambic)
 Oh, Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art
 thou Romeo?

Hunter beats the rhythm back to Lexi on his chest, as Michael ushers him out. Michael glances affectionately at Lexi as the door shuts. Lexi peers through the bakery hatch and something makes her smile drop...

INT. CAKE AISLE

DONNA (50s, joyless) towers over cake-pocalypse.

INT. CAKE AISLE

Lexi marches beside Donna who picks her way through the mess.

LEXI
 I go mad for vanilla sponge, Donna.

DONNA
 You want me to believe this was
 you, and not that retarded boy.

LEXI
 You can't- he's not - you're not
 allowed to say that!

DONNA
 So you pulled this off the shelf
 and ate it off the floor?

Enraged, Lexi calmly kneels down, reaches out a hand and scoops up a fistful of cake from the floor. She eats it.

DONNA (CONT'D)
 Okay. Hand over your tabard and
 name badge.

LEXI
 I'll clean it up now. I'm sorry.

Donna shakes her head and holds out her hand for the tabard.

LEXI (CONT'D)
 Donna. Serious though, I'm messing.

DONNA
 Now you can see where protecting
 Michael gets you.

LEXI
 His ex-wife is having a nervous
 breakdown;

(MORE)

LEXI (CONT'D)
 social services said she can't look
 after Hunter, so Michael's his sole
 carer and his babysitter keeps
 cancelling. Give him a break!

DONNA
 So it was his little boy who made
 this mess?

A beat. Lexi softens.

LEXI
 In a couple of days I'll probably
 have to quit anyways, so if you can
 find it in your heart-

DONNA
 -You'd better win that thing now,
 hadn't you? You spend half your
 shifts running to the bogs with
 your notebook and pen. Management
 'aint daft. Tabard.

Lexi removes her NOTEBOOK, FOUNTAIN PEN, and a FLYER from the
 front pocket of her tabard, then hands the tabard to Donna.

LEXI
 I think you should get your heart
 checked.

Lexi storms out, hugging her belongings.

EXT. KWIK SAVE CAR PARK - MORNING.

Michael rushes through the automatic glass doors in pursuit
 of Lexi, who's already passed the shopping trolleys outside.

MICHAEL
 You can't take the hit for me.
 You've got no money, man.

LEXI
 Nor have you, man! But I've got
 this, THIS tomorrow night-

She shows Michael the FLYER; it reads: "National Poetry Slam
 Quarterfinals".

MICHAEL
 We're all coming, I can't wait.

Lexi beams, jubilant. He goes to hug her but stops himself
 and jumps on the spot instead.

LEXI

And Hunter's done me a favour 'cuz
now I've got more time to practice
with my sis.

MICHAEL

I thought your poems were
improvised?

LEXI

Ha! Never improvised in my life.

Lexi notices Hunter leaning on the glass wall inside the
superstore, watching. Lexi blows Hunter a kiss.

MICHAEL

I'll miss you. A bit. Not a lot.

LEXI

Oh, stop it, you knob.

Michael laughs. LOUD BANGING interrupts - Hunter's fist
pounds the window inside the store, then points, animated.
Lexi and Michael follow his finger; it's Donna...

MICHAEL

The Ice-Queen's seen us.

LEXI

Jeez, I hope she pays me for this
morning.

Michael runs back towards the store.

MICHAEL

You're gunna win a hundred grand!

Lexi runs in the opposite direction.

LEXI

I'm not in the Finals - yet!

EXT. LEXI'S BEDSIT, FRONT DOOR - DAY

Lexi's hand lifts a key to the front door, which has a LETTER
pinned to it: "Section 8 - Eviction Notice". Lexi ignores it -
presumably not for the first time.

INT. LEXI'S BEDSIT - DAY

Inside the squalid bedsit, she plugs her phone in to charge,
lights a candle, and sits with her notebook and the FOUNTAIN
PEN, staring into space, as if waiting...

She narrows her eyes and searches the room.

Nothing. She focuses on the bookshelf now, half closing her eyes, and the room seems to blur with her distorted vision...

Words from the spines of the books seem to leap into the foreground: the word 'ECLIPSE' from the spine of a book called '*Solar Eclipses*' jumps out. Lexi scribbles it down.

Another word, from a book called '*Into The Darkness*' sticks out suddenly: 'DARKNESS'. Lexi writes it, squints again...

She re-reads the words she's collected so far: 'Eclipse, Darkness', and taps her pen... she goes to write BUT -

LOUD BANGING at the door interrupts. She closes her eyes and tries to re-focus, but the BANGING is too much. She covers her head in a blanket.

VOICE (O.S.)

Sis?! LEXI!

Lexi pulls the blanket off and runs to the door.

EXT. LEXI'S FLAT, DOORSTEP - DAY

BB (female, 26, macho), breathless, at the door:

BB

Your phone's off?!

LEXI

Battery keeps dying-

BB

-Get a new phone for God's sake,
Lex! Get in the car.

BB gestures along the street to a terribly parked banger.

LEXI

I need to finish the last line of
my poem, now, right now-

BB covers her emotion with a simmering rage:

BB

Found mum collapsed on floor. Went
to drop off lasagne - get in car.
Hospital. Now.

Lexi freezes. BB stares, impatient.

BB (CONT'D)

C'mon!