

NEXT DOOR - Opening Family Scene

In play, not film script format

From Series Pilot Episode: 'BORN IN A BOX'

written by

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TIME PERIOD & LOCATION: RICHMOND, CA (1972)

CHARACTERS:

MAX (8) – a light-skinned Black girl with a slight figure buzzing with uncontainable energy. She wears faded, too-short Scooby-Doo pajamas. Her multiple braids with colorful barrettes are frizzy at the roots where the straightening's grown out.

MOTHER (30s) – a light-skinned Black woman with a slight, graceful build. She exudes effortless elegance, even in her bargain-rack conservative attire: a fancy blouse with a loosely hanging bowtie and a long skirt.

CHARLIE (13) – a tall, big-boned, dark-skinned Black girl, physically years ahead of her age. Her innocent face clashes with a body she doesn't know how to live in yet. She wears faded, too-short jeans and a T-shirt. Her frizzing, straightened hair is yanked into a tight bun. She is constantly pushing up the heavy black-rimmed glasses that are too big for her face. Max refers to the glasses when she calls Charlie 'four eyes'.

SPOILER: Towards the end of the season, when the girls are being chased, Charlie's glasses get shatter. Max learns then that the glasses were not real -- just something Charlie found and chose to wear as a kind of disguise. They made her feel a little wiser, more protected, than she actually is.

SETTING: A narrow, bare-bones kitchen in a modest, aging townhouse. In the corner is a small nook with a folding table and mismatched chairs.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Max and her mother are in the room.

Spanking new black and white saddle shoes gleam like trophies on Max's bare feet. She kicks them up proudly for her mother to see. A shoe box sits open on the floor.

MAX

COOL BEANS!

(jumping up and down)

Wait till the other girls see!

Mine are brand new -- better than theirs!

MOTHER

(smiling, speaking primly)

I'm happy Maxine to make you happy!

(solemnly leaning in)

(MORE)

MOTHER (CONT'D)

But remember this -- worldly things can be worn down or lost. But beauty of thought, the richness of the spirit, and creativity that bows to **no one** -- that's what we must strive for. Promise?

(defiant)

Being born without the privileges of others should motivate us -- not hold us back.

(matter-of-fact)

Now we know what a reward means, don't we? It means we must do the work. Are you going to do the work Maxine? Are you going to improve your grades?

MAX

(grinning, singing in a sweet, clear voice)

"ABC -- It's as easy as 1 2 3, as simple as do re mi ---"

Max tugs at her mother's hand to coax her to join into the Jackson Five-like dance steps she's improvising.

MOTHER & MAX (CONT'D)

(singing and dancing)

"ABC, 1 2 3, baby you and me girl. Come on and love me just a little bit. I'm gonna teach you how to sing it out, come on, come on, come on. Let me tell you what it's all about. Reading, writing, arithmetic..."

From 'ABC' by Jackson Five

Mother and Max giggle and perform in the middle of the kitchen, which is a narrow strip -- more hallway than room.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

(awkwardly interrupting)

Uh...I--I need to make dinner. It's late.

Charlie stands in the doorway watching her mother and sister as they laugh and embrace.

MAX

(excitedly)

Look Charlie! Look! Look what Mom did!

(sticking her shoe out)

I can't wait to go to school!

Charlie frowns but doesn't say anything.

MOTHER

Charlie -- I have something for you
too!

Mother lifts a big white **Doggie Diner** bag, its logo a giant cartoon dachshund's head, with a super long snout, wearing a chef's hat and bowtie.

MAX

(jumping up and down)
"Doggie diner, nothin' finer.
Doggie Diner, it's doggone good!"
(looking at mom)
WOOF-WOOF!

MOTHER

(looking shyly at Charlie)
Ruff! Ruff!

CHARLIE

(reluctantly)
Bark...Bark.
(turning angry)
BARK! BARK!

Mother suddenly pulls her daughters to her. The three of them relax into the hug. She squeezes them tight.

MOTHER

(whispering)
Remember this.

MAX

(breaking free to grab
bag)
Is it chili dogs?!

MOTHER

Two each! Fries and cokes!

Charlie just stands there for a moment, watching her laughing mother and younger sister unwrap their food.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe the personality of the Mother? The personality of Max? The personality of Charlie?

2. When Max says about her new shoes, "*Wait till the other girls see! Mine are brand new -- better than theirs!*" - What does that tell you?

3. When the Mother says she has something for Charlie too --- what is it? What do you think of that as a gift?

4. What is the Mother's relationship like with Max? With Charlie?

5. Did the interaction between the family members remind you of anything in your own life or what you've witnessed with others?

6. NEXT DOOR takes place in 1972. What made the Jackson 5 a cultural breakthrough group during that era?

7. Name two or more major ways life was different for a working-class family in 1972 compared with today.