

THE FRESH PRINCE OF BEL-AIR

"The Big Four-Oh"

Story Outline

by

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ACT ONE

SCENE 1

INT. PHILIP AND VIVIAN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Vivian is looking at herself in the mirror. She is wearing a moderately short skirt and a knit top, and, no matter in which direction she turns, she doesn't like what she sees. She feels old and unattractive. She bemoans her sags and bags. Philip, also getting ready for work, tries to make her feel better. However, everything he says just gets her more upset. He insists she looks just as good as she did when they met in college and she was a dancer. Off her look, he goes on to say that we can't stay the way we look when we're eighteen, but she still looks great. She takes this as an admission that she does look old. He says she's the best-looking forty year old woman he knows. She feels even worse. Philip is digging himself in deeper and deeper. Vivian says not to rush her, that she won't be forty until 3:00 that afternoon. Philip starts talking about the party he'll be throwing for her birthday that night. He gets more and more excited as he outlines the details of the party, but he won't reveal the big surprise. Vivian, seeing how much he wants to please her, attempts to act more cheerful. He says she has a lot in her life to be happy about -- great kids, good job, and the promotion she's up for to head of the English department. He emphasizes that forty isn't old -- it can be a new beginning. A lot of people start new hobbies, new careers, new families. Vivian is starting to be convinced that she was over-reacting. She's not getting older. She's getting better. She vows to concentrate on the important things in life. As she turns and walks away from the mirror, her resolve crumbles as she catches a back view of herself. The distressing thought of control top pantyhose occurs.

SCENE 2

EXT. PATIO - CONTINUOUS

As Geoffrey is serving Will his breakfast on the patio, Ashley enters, ready for school. She's obviously got something on her mind, but is hesitant about getting to the point. She asks Will what he thinks of cheerleaders.

He expounds on the virtues of the Laker girls. As he moves on to the Dallas Cowgirls, Ashley interrupts. She wonders what he thinks of younger cheerleaders. Will gets it now. "Anyone I know?", he asks. Ashley admits that they're having cheerleader tryouts at school, but wonders if it's silly. Will assures her that being a cheerleader's cool, and encourages her to go for it. Ashley, still nervous about the prospect, decides to give it a try.

Carlton enters, and Will and he discuss what they'll be wearing to Vivian's party that night. Hilary enters, excited about the gift she's gotten for all of them to give Vivian. She's shopped her feet off, but it's been worth the sacrifice. After pulling out several things she bought for herself, she finally gets to Vivian's gift -- a cute miniskirt. Will can't believe that that little thing is all they got for their money, but Hilary insists Vivian will love it.

They hear Vivian coming downstairs, and quickly hide the gift and try to act "natural". Vivian enters with a pile of all her short skirts to give to Hilary. She's decided they're just not appropriate anymore at her age. She exits. The kids are distraught that their gift is a bomb, and they'll have to get a new one by that night. Hilary is thrilled at her new wardrobe.

SCENE 3

INT. PRIVATE ROOM IN RESTAURANT - THAT NIGHT

The kids arrive at the party before Vivian and Philip. They are excited about the new gift -- a conservative mid-calf wool skirt. They think that by all trying to focus on what Vivian really feels, they've picked the perfect thing.

Philip and Vivian enter. She's wearing a short, sequined tank dress. The kids feel shot down again. Vivian, in the midst of getting excited about the party, has talked herself into thinking everything is great, including how she looks. She says she decided that just because she's forty doesn't mean she's old, and she's not going to be one of those women who bundle up in dowdy, matronly clothes that cover every inch of their bodies and look about as good as wool blankets. She insists, more to convince herself than her kids, that she looks good and doesn't mind showing it. The kids go off, upset that gift number two has struck out.

Vivian, in a moment of doubt, asks Philip, "I do look good, don't I?" He assures her she does. She continues to try to convince herself that being forty is fabulous. She goes on about how good she looks and feels, how good it is to be in the prime of her life, and how good it is to have everything all set. Yes sir, with this promotion in the

works, her life is right on track. We can see that she's depressed and desperate behind her happy facade, but Philip doesn't notice. He takes her words at face value and is glad to see her so up. He says that she's a wonderful woman, that she deserves to have good things in her life, and that he just wants her to be happy, whatever that takes. She assures him she is.

The party progresses. Vivian starts out actually having a good time. The friends and festivities get her spirits up. But gradually all the references to age -- from the "Lordy, Lordy, Viv is Forty" banner to the cards with the basic "over the hill" theme to the remembrances of friends about her college days, acceptance into Alvin Ailey, etc. that end with "but that was a long time ago, a lot of water under the bridge" -- make Vivian more and more depressed. Then comes Philip's big surprise -- a roast, with Will as MC. Through a series of dissolves, family and friends do some good-natured kidding of Vivian, which gets her back into a good mood until they return to the "you're so old" theme again, ending with a good zinger from Will. As the coup de grace, a giant cake is wheeled out, topped with forty blazing candles. Philip, through all this, has been beside himself with pride at his gala celebration. He beams as the cake is moved slowly across the room toward Vivian. Vivian has never felt worse about her age, but, still trying to put on a good face, especially for Philip, she makes a last-ditch attempt at a smile. It's quickly doused when the heat from the candles sets off the fire sprinklers.

SCENE 4

INT. KITCHEN - THE NEXT EVENING

Will and Geoffrey are discussing the disaster ending the previous night's party. Will is confused. What's the big deal about turning forty? He tries to get Geoffrey to explain, but then cracks that G. probably doesn't remember that far back.

Ashley enters. She reveals that she signed up to try out for cheerleader. She's having second thoughts, but Will says he knows she's great. He prompts her to show him the cheer she's going to do. She does a really lame, conventional cheer, just barely moving her arms and legs. Will doesn't want to say how bad it was, so he compliments her smile. She sees through it and says she knows it was lame. Will insists it's a start and offers to help her. Ashley is thrilled. Geoffrey is suspicious. He liked the old cheer. Will says it would have gone over big in Geoffrey's day -- after the knights had an especially good jousting match.

Hilary and Carlton enter. They hope that now that Vivian's back at work, everything will settle down. They're excited about their new gift -- an elegant briefcase, which she can use every day. Will thinks this is the most boring gift he's ever heard of. Hilary is insulted since she shopped all day to find just the right thing at just the right price. By the way, they all owe her another week's allowance. And argument ensues.

Philip enters from work and tells them to quiet down. We see that he's still upset from the party and Vivian's reaction to it. He says Vivian should be home any minute, and if she's in the mood she was in that morning, the best place for them in out in the pool. Or a pool in another state. He hopes the flowers and candy he got her will make things a little better. "Oh, that old trick," says Will. "And for God's sake, don't say 'old'!", says Philip. He admonishes them to have some understanding for Vivian, who's obviously going through a rough time. However, we can see that Philip doesn't have a handle himself on what to do.

Vivian enters and, amazingly, she's in a really good mood. She asks if they'd like something special for dinner, and compliments Philip's suit. "Ooo, that's rough," comments Will. Philip is confused. He's also afraid of saying the wrong thing again and getting her back in a bad mood. He tentatively asks if she had a good day. Vivian says it was the best. She's made some decisions. Does Philip remember what he said to her about her deserving good things in her life, and that he wants her to be happy, whatever it takes? And how he said that at forty lots of people start new hobbies or careers or families? For a moment, Philip thinks Vivian is trying to tell him she's pregnant, although he's not sure how she could have made that decision and carried it out since last night. Especially considering the kind of mood she was in last night. Vivian assures him it isn't that. He says that he still agrees with what he said. Vivian is glad, because she's done just what he was talking about. She's not only turned down the promotion, she's quit her job. Vivian seems resolute and confident as she explains her reasons. In college, she had dreams that were put aside when everyone told her to get her teaching degree to fall back on. Then she got married. Then ... she looks at Hilary. "What?", she responds. Anyway, Vivian continues, the party last night made her realize that she's halfway through her life, and that she doesn't see the second half being taken up with anything that doesn't make her happy. She's going to try the road not taken. Philip is surprised but supportive. He says that whatever makes her happy, whether it's be the president of a university or stay home and be a housewife (his expression shows which he's pulling for), he's behind her all the way. Vivian is so glad. What she's decided to do, she says, pulling out a leotard, is dance. Hilary throws away the briefcase in disgust.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWOSCENE ONEINT. FAMILY ROOM - NEXT AFTERNOON

It's after school. The kids are eating snacks, doing homework, and trying to come to terms with Vivian's new career. She's on her way to her first dance class. Will is very supportive. He thinks it's great to just pick something out of the blue and go for it. Hilary explains to him that Vivian was going to be a dancer in college, even got accepted into the Alvin Ailey dance troupe. Will thinks that would be a great stepping stone to becoming a Solid Gold dancer. Maybe they'd bring the show back and Vivian could get on it and he could meet that dancer who was always looking right at him. Or she could dance with Hammer... Ashley interrupts to say that Vivian wants to do musicals, like "Cats". Will thinks for a minute, then says this is great too. He could meet one of those cat girls in the bodysuits. He really loves dance, he decides. Both Ashley and Will are supportive and excited about Vivian's decision. Carlton and Hilary, on the other hand, are mortified by the whole idea. Perhaps Vivian will choose a stage name, or do a European tour, and they'll save face. Ashley wonders how Vivian is doing in her first day of dance class. She sure was excited.

SCENE TWOINT. DANCE STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

Vivian is nervous about starting back dancing after all these years, but she's also excited. She's got herself hyped up that this is something she's going to carry through this time. She enters the class. The room is filled with twenty-year-olds in midriff tops and bicycle pants, stretching out. Vivian feels out of place in her traditional leotard, tights and little dance skirt. She tries to befriend a group of girls. They are cool to her. Even though they're half her age, this is their seventh season of shows. One girl recognizes Vivian as the mother of Hilary, who used to babysit for her. Vivian starts to feel isolated and unsure of herself. - - -

The teacher enters and says they'll start in a few minutes. Everyone starts to warm up furiously. The girl next to Vivian lifts her leg up next to her ear, all while still talking. Vivian tries to casually do the same thing and almost kills herself. The girl smirks and whispers to some other girls, who giggle. The girls talk about dancers, shows, etc. Vivian realizes she's not going to fit in socially with these brats, but, as the teacher calls the

class together, she becomes resolved to at least do her best dance-wise. The teacher gives the first combination, which is fast and complicated. He tells the first four girls to take it. We can see Vivian's panic as the girls move swiftly and surely through the steps.

SCENE THREE

INT. FAMILY ROOM - THAT EVENING

Will and Ashley are working on her cheerleading tryout routine. Will has come up with some hipper words to adapt her original cheer. Hilary thinks it's cute. Carlton wonders if there's some kind of mortification gene on his mother's side of the family.

Vivian enters, sore and discouraged. She tells them about the awful dance class. Maybe she was fooling herself thinking she could start this again. She's not as limber as she used to be, she gets all confused about the steps, and she doesn't like people laughing at her, even if she did fall down. She made it through the class, but she thinks maybe she should just quit.

Philip enters from work. He sees that Vivian is tired and sore and depressed. He thinks she's doing an admirable thing, going for her dream, but maybe she jumped into it too fast. We can see that he really feels for Vivian and her struggle. He wants to make her feel better. Suddenly, he has the perfect idea. They'll go to Hawaii! That's it, he'll take a few days off and get first class tickets and reservations at a fabulous hotel right on the beach and Vivian can just relax. Philip is proud of his idea. But, again, it's the wrong one. Vivian, outraged, asks how he could suggest such a thing. "You really know women, Uncle Phil," observes Will. Philip can't get straight why tickets to Hawaii are bad. Vivian says that he's just trying to sabotage her efforts. He insists that he's just thinking of her. He hates to see her so tired, sore and grumpy. It makes him feel bad to see her feel so bad. And for what? She certainly doesn't need to do it. They don't need the money. Why doesn't she just take it easy for a while?

Vivian insists that she doesn't want to take it easy. She starts to get fired up. Philip's words have helped her focus again on what she really wants. She says she took it easy twenty years ago when she got the teaching certificate. Now she's at that same crossroads again, and she's not making the same mistake -- choosing what's easy and comfortable. Philip asks if having an easy, comfortable life isn't what they've been working for. Vivian says no, she doesn't want to take the comfortable road. Then why, questions Philip, did I just buy you a new BMW?

Vivian chides him for throwing that in her face. She starts mapping out her plan of attack to prepare for her first audition -- classes every day, warm-ups at home, reading "Dance" magazine, eating right, etc. She's going to show them she can do it. Maybe she can't do it, but she's got to know she gave it all she got. She storms out, her resolution at an all-time high. Philip is glad he didn't bring up the diamond necklace he had planned, or she probably would have asked for a divorce.

SCENE FOUR

INT. KITCHEN - SEVERAL WEEKS LATER

Vivian is grabbing a piece of fruit on her way to her first audition. Philip is forlornly eating donuts from a box. Vivian comments on how unhealthy these are for him. He doesn't seem to care. Vivian stops her rush out the door to talk to him. She says she realizes she hasn't been able to spend much time with him the last three weeks because of her heavy dance class schedule. Philip, hurt but making a weak attempt to cover, says he hasn't noticed. She says she knows it's been hard on him having her be sore and preoccupied. Again, he pretends he hasn't noticed. She apologizes for being too tired to feel romantic. Philip admits he's noticed this. Vivian says that these weeks have been hard on her too. She's had many moments of insecurity and indecision. Several times she almost quit. However, she knows she'd never forgive herself if she didn't try. She tells Philip how much it would mean to her for him to wish her luck. Philip says that he's afraid to say anything since there's a pretty good chance she'll get angry. But he'll risk it. He tells her that he wishes her the best in everything she does. He admires how she's stuck to this, and he knows she'll do great. "So good luck," says Philip. "You're never supposed to say 'good luck' in show business!" exclaims Vivian. "That's bad luck. You're supposed to say 'break a leg'" But we see by Vivian's hugging of Philip before she exits that what he said gave her the extra bit of courage she needed to go on.

SCENE FIVE

INT. DANCE STUDIO - LATER

Vivian enters tentatively. She's still uncomfortable and scared. Some of the same girls from the first dance class are here for the audition. The leg-stretching girl says she hasn't seen Vivian since that first dance class three weeks ago. She makes a snide remark about Vivian going back to baking cakes. Vivian says she's been taking some private lessons with an ex-dancer they've all heard of. Vivian can now also converse about dancers and shows. The girls are surprised, and Vivian's starting to be a little less nervous.

The girls start stretching out. When the girl puts her leg up next to her ear, Vivian duplicates the motion, then brings hers around to the back in an arabesque. The choreographer calls the group together to start. He gives a fast, complicated combination. The girls look at Vivian and just about start to laugh. Vivian takes off her bulky sweatshirt. She has on a really cute, stylish dance outfit. While they stare, she starts in on the combination. The girls have to rush to catch up. Vivian, strong and confident, executes the steps flawlessly, lands in a perfect fifth position, and looks around, full of pride. The girls are gawking. The choreographer calls for the next group. Vivian walks self-assuredly out the door... and collapses from exhaustion and out of relief that she finally did it.

SCENE SIX

INT. PHILIP AND VIVIAN'S BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Vivian is sitting on the bed, holding a heating pad to her hip. She looks tired. Philip enters. He's torn between wanting Vivian to succeed and not wanting this torture to go on. He asks how the audition went. Vivian tells him how great it went, how she blew all those other girls away, how they asked her to stay after to try some other dance combinations. She won't be able to walk for a month, but she feels great. Philip congratulates her on getting in the show. He starts making plans for the household while she's in rehearsals. He asks how long the show's going to run. Vivian says she isn't going to be in the show. Philip tells her to not be negative. She was obviously great, and they'll be sure to pick her. Vivian says that won't happen because she just called them and told them she's not interested. Philip doesn't understand. Vivian says that these three weeks have been the hardest of her life. Every muscle is sore. Plus she's tired of being around people who can only talk about who's going with who and who got in what show and who's less talented and deserving than you. And she doesn't want to miss being with her family. (She does wonder if she would have been chosen. Philip assures her that she was the best dancer they've ever seen. He's just lucky no one from Broadway was there.) Vivian hugs Philip over this sweet lie. She says she realizes you can't go back. Philip points out that you can go forward and that she's so smart and creative that he's sure she'll find the right career. She says she feels like a fool -- she's forty and she has no job and no idea of what she wants to do or who she is. Philip says that it's not the fool, it's the wise person who keeps searching, and that he's sure that whatever she chooses, she'll be the best.

Vivian is grateful and snuggles up to Philip. After a beat, she asks if he thinks she's old. He says of course not. Then she pauses again and asks if he thinks she's pretty. He makes her get up and go over to the mirror, which isn't easy, considering how sore she is. Once there, he says, "Look how pretty you are. Why do you think I'm home by six every night?" He starts to point out all the things he likes about her -- her hair, the color of her skin, her lips, her legs... By the time he gets to this point, they're both pretty turned on. Philip switches on the stereo with his remote control, and Marvin Gaye starts in on "Let's Get It On". They start dancing. As Philip squeezes her, she yelps in pain. She asks if they can sit this one out. As Philip agrees enthusiastically and they move toward the bed, Vivian says that there are some really good things about getting older -- more wisdom, a better perspective and you don't have to worry about your parents coming in.

END OF ACT TWO

TAG

INT. FAMILY ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

Vivian and Philip are both in great moods. They take turns humming "What's Going On?". Carlton and Hilary enter in a huff. They throw down a box in front of Vivian, and before she can unwrap it, they say it's a stupid leotard, which they know she doesn't want, but if they exchange it, she'll probably just change into a car mechanic or something, so here's the receipt and happy birthday. Vivian is confused. Hilary says she never thought she'd say this, but she hopes she never sees another store again in her life.

Ashley enters, ecstatic. With the help of Will's routine, she made the cheerleading squad. Will prompts her to do the routine for the family. She says that he'll have to substitute for little Bobby Greenspan. We see the routine, complete with rap words, "fly girl" dance steps and big ending flip. Except for the horrified Philip, the family cheers at the fantastic performance.

THE END