# Lupita Nyongo Speech Video Transcript

I received a letter from a girl, and I'd like to share it out, just a small part of it with you. "Dear Lupita," it reads, "I think you- you're really lucky to be this black but yet this successful in Hollywood over night. I was just about to buy Dencia's Whitelicious cream to lighten my skin when you appeared on the world map and saved me."

My heart bled a little when I read those words. I could never have guessed that my first job out of school would be so powerful in and of itself and that it would propel me to be such an image of hope in the same way that the women of The Color Purple were to me. I remember a time when I too felt un-beautiful. I put on the TV and only saw pale skin. I got teased and taunted about my night-shaded skin and my one prayer to God, the miracle worker, was that I would wake up lighter skinned. The morning would come and I would be so excited about seeing my new skin that I would refuse to look down at myself until I was in front of a mirror because I wanted to see my fair face first. And every day I experienced the same disappointment of being just as dark as I had been the day before. I tried to negotiate with God. I told him I would stop stealing sugar cubes at night if he gave me what I wanted. I would listen to my mother's every word, sitting right there, and never lose my school sweater again, if he just made me a little lighter. But, I guess God was unimpressed with my bargaining chips because he never listened.

And when I was a teenager, my self-hate grew worse, as you can imagine happens with adolescents. My mother reminded me often that she thought I was beautiful. But that was no consolation, she's my mother. Of course she's supposed to think I'm beautiful. And then… Alek Wek came on the international scene.

[Audience cheers and claps]

A celebrated model. She was dark as night. She was on all the runways and in every magazine and everyone was talking about how beautiful she was, even Oprah called her beautiful and that made it a fact.

[Audience laughs]

[Lupita laughs]

I couldn't believe that people were embracing a woman who looked so much like me as beautiful. My complexion had always been an obstacle to overcome, and all of a sudden Oprah was telling me it wasn't. It was perplexing and I wanted to reject it because I had begun to enjoy the seduction of inadequacy. But, a flower couldn't help but bloom inside me. When I saw Alek, I inadvertently saw a reflection of myself that I could not deny. Now, I had a spring in my step because I felt more seen. More appreciated by the far-away gatekeepers of beauty. But around me, the preference for light skin prevailed.

To the beholders that I thought mattered, I was still unbeautiful. And my mother, again, would say to me, "You can't eat beauty. It doesn't feed you." And these words played and bothered me. I really didn't understand them until finally I realized that beauty was not a thing that I could acquire or, or consume. It was something that I just had to be. And what my mother meant when she said you can't eat beauty was that you can't rely on how you look to sustain you.

[Audience claps]

What actually sustains us, what is fundamentally beautiful, is compassion. For yourself, and for those around you. That kind of beauty-

[Lupita coughs]

Excuse me.

That kind of beauty inflames the heart and enchants the soul. It is what got Pastey in so much trouble with her master. But it is also what has kept her story alive to this day. We remember the beauty of her spirit, even after the beauty of her body has faded away.

And so, I hope that my presence on your screens and in magazines may lead you, young girl on a similar journey. That you will feel the validation of your external beauty, but also, get to the deeper business of being beautiful inside. That-

[Audience claps]

There is no shade in that beauty. Thank you.