

THE GRACE OF GOD
&
THE MAN MACHINE

A Play in Two Acts

by

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Cast of Characters in Order of Appearance:

SARAH CLAGGETT: Dan's wife. A black woman in her early 50s. She is dressed in work clothes that are informal, but clean and neat.

DAN CLAGGETT: Sarah's husband. A black man in his mid 50s. He is a solid Chesapeake Bay waterman and factory worker dressed in work clothes and work boots. He is the patriarch of his family.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR: Richard's father. A white man in his mid 50s. An alcoholic Chesapeake Bay waterman dressed in working clothes and work boots.

BELLE O'BRIEN: A white woman in her late 20s who is sassy, street-savvy, and attractive. She is dressed as a Reno truck stop waitress.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, JR. (RICHARD): A white man in his late 20s. He is overdressed in completely new cowboy clothes.

ONAJE (WILLIAM)CLAGGETT: A black man in his mid-30s. He is dressed in an old bomber jacket, work pants and work boots, all extremely dusty and worn. He carries a duffle bag and sextant for navigation.

HENDERSON: A white ex-policeman in his early 50s. He is dressed in a work shirt and work pants but wears a policeman's hat.

ANDREW: A white boy in his late teens or early 20s. He is an affable, naïve, hitchhiker in a faded madras shirt, khaki pants and work boots. He is a civil rights worker of the 60s vintage.

The Set:

The single set is made up of three locations that merge in the last scenes. Downstage center there is a picnic table. Stage right there is an old convertible with working headlights, horn and radio, front and back seats and a Maryland license tag. Stage left is the kitchen of a waterman's house on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. The kitchen has an inside door that leads to the rest of the

house and a screen door that leads outside to the rest of the stage. There is an old stove next to a sink and a very old icebox with an internal light. There is, at the center of the kitchen, a small table and a few cheap metal chairs and a light bulb with a shade hanging from the ceiling over the table. The kitchen doubles as the battered kitchen of RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.'S home and the clean and tidy kitchen of DAN and SARAH'S home.

During the time that the space represents RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.'S kitchen, it is bathed in the flickering blue of the light from a small TV that is on the kitchen table. The removal of the T.V and a few loose beer cans on the floor, transforms it into DAN and SARAH'S kitchen. In front of the house, upstage left are two wooden removable folding chairs that act as the front seats of a pickup truck when needed.

Author's Notes, Time and Place:

The play takes place in July of 1980 on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and at several of the rest stops along Western Interstate Routes 80, 29 and Eastern Interstate 70.

All flashbacks take place in July of 1967 during the Rap Brown demonstrations and resulting burning of Cambridge, Maryland.

ACT I SCENE 1

SETTING: The lights raise on the picnic table, downstage center, and DAN and SARAH's house, stage left. DAN is at the picnic table outside of his house. He is quietly working but seething with anger. He has been mending his trot lines. There are several bushel baskets and crab nets on the table as he works. He is sharpening a Bowie knife. As Sarah enters from her work at the grocery store in Easton, Dan stabs the knife into the picnic table top. It is late afternoon.

SARAH

Why aren't you out on the boat?

DAN

I think they are try'n to blame it on me. Henderson started asking me questions today down at the docks. He was asking what did I know about the two thousand dollars that is missing from the marina for the crab catch two weeks ago.

SARAH

One of the women who was picking crabs was saying that Middleman's boy was working on his father's boat the day the money went missing.

DAN

Yeah. His boy is back from prison. I saw him.

SARAH

Middleman's boy hasn't been around since that money has gone missing. They say his Daddy bought him a car and told him to go out West.

DAN

Doesn't matter Sarah, they are coming after me. Has Middleman been trying to talk to you again?

SARAH

He tried to but I turned my back on him.

DAN

Good, turn your back on him. He's scared of me.

SARAH

He said he had to talk to you.

DAN

He is nothing to us now.

SARAH

I think he wants to talk now because his boy came back.

DAN

...But our son is still gone!

SARAH

Why do you think they are going to blame it on you?

DAN

They are going one by one to make sure I got no alibi. I've been watching Henderson down on the docks.

SARAH

You just waiting Dan?

DAN

What else can I do?

SARAH

The packers need your catch.

DAN

(Beat)

So he tried to talk to you again?

SARAH

Yes. It is worse now that his boy is back from prison.

DAN

He comes to you saying he is feeling bad about our boy but he never says what happened to him. He knows.

SARAH

But you won't let me ask him, will you? He would tell us now.

DAN

He won't tell us.

SARAH

We never asked him. He is falling all over himself saying he's sorry. I could ask him. He's the only one who would tell us...

DAN

You think our boy is dead?

SARAH

I didn't say that.

(Beat.)

You don't want me to ask him because you don't want to know.

DAN

Our boy is not dead, Sarah. I know he did what I told him: "Pick a star out over this house." He will be coming home some day.

SARAH

It will be thirteen years come July 27th, Dan. Thirteen years in less than a week. He has been gone a long time.

DAN

We can't talk about it. We never could.

DAN gathers his trotline, baskets and nets, gets up from the picnic table and goes inside.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

(RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. enters and cautiously approaches SARAH who is still at the picnic table.)

Excuse me, Sarah, is Dan here?

SARAH

You can't be here! What are you doing here?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I have to talk to Dan!

DAN sees RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. through the screen door and he lunges through the screen door and down the steps. DAN violently grabs RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. from behind and turns him around to face him and then slugs him hard. RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. falls and struggles to get up. DAN slugs him again.

DAN

(As he stands over RICHARD
MIDDLEMAN, SR.)

You are looking for me Middleman? I can't take no more!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I know you can't, Dan.

DAN

Get off my land! Stay out of my life!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I just want to take some pressure off of you.

DAN

You can't. I get it everyday! Everyday! And now your boy comes back and you send him away? Why have I got to live with that right now? Now they are waiting on me down at the docks!

DAN slugs RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
again while he is still on the
ground.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

(Still on his back.)

Henderson stops me down at the dock. He wants to know where you were a week ago after noon last Tuesday... I told him you were still out on your boat.

DAN

But I wasn't. Why'd you tell him that?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

You didn't steal that money!

DAN

No, I didn't steal nothing!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I told Henderson that you weren't around when it went missing.

DAN

I came in early. I had my crabs.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Anybody see you come in?

DAN

I don't know who saw me. I don't care.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

You better care. Henderson is looking for you all the time.

DAN

You didn't see me. Why'd you say you did?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

He was looking to blame you. You know he's got people saying you were there. You need an alibi.

DAN

You weren't there when I came in. If they find out you are lying, you telling a lie to protect me, won't do me no good.

DAN starts to throw another punch.

SARAH

(Breaks up the fight.)

Dan, you can't do this. You can't be hitting him! Ask him Dan! Ask him. Ask him what happened to our boy.

At the last second DAN pulls the punch and RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. struggles to his feet and exits.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE

ACT I SCENE 2

THE HEADLIGHTS OF THE CAR FLASH ON
AND BEAM OVER THE AUDIENCE.

RICHARD, behind the wheel, is driving fast, with BELLE banging on him from the backseat and screaming at him at the top of her voice. The car radio is very loud.

BELLE

(Reaching again and again over the front seat as she keeps trying to turn the radio down.)

I am asking you ... I am asking you ...I am begging you...turn the radio down! And slow down.

RICHARD bats her back into the back seat.

RICHARD

And that's another thing I play my music as loud as I want whenever I want!...

(he lowers volume)

...But because I love you, I'll turn the radio down.

BELLE

And-slow-down!

RICHARD

...Because I love you. I will slow down.

BELLE

(leans over front seat)

Thank God... And can I come back up to the front seat yet? Pleeese?

RICHARD

No.

BELLE

You already told me you loved my cooking about a million times and I told you I wouldn't work no more and I told you, you would get laid regular and I don't want no other conditions... and I wanna get back in the goddamn front seat!

RICHARD

No.

BELLE

No? No, what? No, there's gonna be more conditions? Or no, I can't get back in the front seat? For Christ sake Jesus!

RICHARD

Just no! No, Belle. No!

BELLE

Well, ain't you the goddamn cat's ass! Well okay, ...I'll just have to have some of my own fun back here.

She pouts for a moment, then lifts herself up to sit on top of the back seat and begins enjoying the rushing wind.

BELLE (CONT'D)

...I'm having fun now...Goddamn it! I'm having fun now!

BELLE lets her hands catch the
wind.

AAAAAH - Weeeoo!

She spits in the wind to the left,
dodges its return. Spits again to
the right but fails to dodge it and
disgusted she brushes spit off of
her shoulder.

BELLE (CONT'D)

Alright, tell me about the goddamn state of Maryland. I don't
want to hear about goddamn where you been. I don't want to
hear about Nicaragua or wherever it was and I don't want to
hear about the damn Wyoming ranch no more. I want to know
where the hell I'm going.

RICHARD

(beat)

Maryland is great.

BELLE

That's not what I heard. I heard it was the pits... Can I get
back in the front seat yet?

RICHARD

No! You are staying in the backseat until you -

BELLE

For the rest of my life? Hey, I can make the best of this.

Mock aristocracy waving from the
top of the back seat

Drive on, Richard! Take me to a restaurant, Richard! Don't be
late, you asshole! Everybody in Maryland is going to think
you're my driver, not my husband. If we get married!

RICHARD

You are never going to find a guy as good as me and you know
it. Get down or I'll roll the car. You wanna see me?

He jerks the steering wheel left
then right. She weaves dangerously.

BELLE

I said I would marry you but I swear to God the way you were back in Reno I was the first woman you'd ever been with, shaking all over and all.

RICHARD

That's a goddamn lie. I had women in South America. I had women all the time when I was working on that ranch and two nights before I met you in Reno I had four girls in the back seat of this car and I still got more money than God!

BELLE

(laughs)

Hey, keep your eyes on the road or you'll be humping your horn forever, honey. For Christ sake, Jesus!

RICHARD

(turns focus back to road)

I'm telling you that's the bullshit that got you into the backseat to begin with! Keep it up!

BELLE

So why the hell did you want me so bad? ...just call it women's intuition. The only thing that saved me was them old mattress springs. You must be part kangaroo.

RICHARD

(explodes)

Goddamn it! You're in the backseat forever and ever. I swear it!

BELLE suddenly points.

BELLE

Richard, look! Watch out! Watch out!

RICHARD quickly veers left. There is a LOUD THUD. Belle looks back.

RICHARD

Christ, did I hit it? What was it?

BELLE

I don't know. I swear it brushed the car. Pull over.

RICHARD pulls over and stops.

RICHARD

What was it?

BELLE

Geez. He is weird looking! He was kneeling, like praying beside the road. He did a swan dive into the ditch... Hey, he's getting up.

RICHARD

You think I hit him?

BELLE

No. He's not hurt. He's starting to run toward us! Are you gonna pick him up?

RICHARD

Well if I do, he's gonna sit in the front seat. You gonna apologize? You better decide quick.

BELLE

No, I'm not gonna apologize. What have I got to apologize about, you prick.

RICHARD

Everything!

BELLE

No! Go ahead pick him up. You wanna pick up some hobo hitchhiker go ahead and do it.

RICHARD

Apologize or I pick him up.

BELLE

Maybe I won't.

RICHARD

Goddamned women!

BELLE

My goddamned women's intuition tells me that you don't know nothing about goddamned women and all that stuff you told me weren't exactly true, that's what I think.

ONAJE runs toward the car. He throws the duffle bag into the back next to BELLE, acknowledging neither of them. He gets into the passenger seat.

BELLE (CONT'D)

Holy shit...

RICHARD does a double-take, looks at Belle, then turns to ONAJE.

RICHARD

You okay? Do you need...

ONAJE

Go. Go. Go!

ONAJE urgently motions to go forward. RICHARD pulls back onto the road. ONAJE stands up in the passenger seat, gripping the windshield for support. He inhales deeply, then pulls the sextant out of his bag.

RICHARD

What? Hey, what the...

ONAJE

(aims sextant)

Ninety degrees off the North Star. Let's go. Speed man! Speed! Let's go!

He sits on top of the passenger seat and sits there throughout the scene.

ONAJE (CONT'D)

Let's go! AAAAAAAAh..... I am Onaje!

(Lowers the sextant.)

Faster! Faster! Faster!

RICHARD

Hey check this out! But no you won't apologize.

ONAJE

Faster! Speed! Speed man! Faster!

RICHARD

(looks back at BELLE)

You hear that? Faster?

(to ONAJE)

Wanna hear some loud radio?...

ONAJE

Yeah!

RICHARD

What the hell ya doin'?

ONAJE

Recharging... I stayed in that place for too long!

(Lets the air flow over him.)

Aaaah...

RICHARD

Hey, don't get weird buddy. You better behave or I'll put you in the backseat.

BELLE

(Reaches over the seat and hits the back of RICHARD's head.)

The hell you will!

ONAJE

Speed man! Speed!

RICHARD

(turns radio way up)

Alright! This is the way the damn front seat ought to be.

BELLE

Turn that goddamned thing down! And slow down!

RICHARD

Hey man, what the hell are you doing?

ONAJE

(Still from the top of the front seat of the car.)

Observing the change of this earth at a high rate of speed.

BELLE

Yeah. Okay? Just remember this. He killed people for the CIA. In Nicaragua!

RICHARD

Yeah!

ONAJE

(studies RICHARD)

Bullshit!...

BELLE

He don't buy it Richard. Look at him!

RICHARD

Hey. I got everything under control, Belle.

BELLE

Sure you do! You think you're some cowboy on steroids and now you got an astrologer hobo riding shotgun! This is great! Both of you turn the radio down and slow down!

RICHARD

Hey man, I been out west and I've been in jail! You ever been in jail?

ONAJE

Yes.

RICHARD

Well okay.

BELLE

You never damn told me that you'd been in jail!

RICHARD

You never asked. Sweet cakes!

BELLE sits on the back of her seat.

BELLE

(screams at ONAJE)

Will you tell him to turn the goddamn radio down!

RICHARD

You all like it up there?

RICHARD stands up on the seat, one hand on the wheel, then sits on top of his seat, steering with his feet, heroically lifts his hands in the air.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Top this! Look at me! Wanna see me make a left foot signal?

(over his shoulder)

Or are you gonna tell me to keep my feet on the wheel?

He stamps at the radio with his foot and it goes off.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Look! Rest stop!

He steers to the right, then realizes he can't stop the car.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ! We got no brakes!

He laughs, slides back into the driver's seat and pulls the car over to the rest stop.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Everybody out for a piss.

RICHARD gets out unzipping. ONAJE gets out and goes over to the picnic table. BELLE watches him from the backseat.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE

ACT I SCENE 3

The LIGHTS RISE on the kitchen in the house, where RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. sits drinking a beer and WATCHING TV. There is a hand gun on the table which is present in all future scenes.

HENDERSON enters and BANGS on the kitchen door several times.

HENDERSON

(bangs on door)

Hey, let me in. I want to talk to you. Come on let me in.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

What do you want?

HENDERSON

I want to come in. Why do you think I'm banging on the door?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Why do you want to come in?

HENDERSON

Maybe I want to take a leak.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Pick a tree.

HENDERSON

Why do you talk to me that way?

(gets no response)

It's about your son. The boys down at the Sunoco station on St. Michael's Road says your boy gassed up that car real good and it was packed like he was gone? You know anything about that? They said he had new tags on the car. You know about that?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

No.

HENDERSON

I was down at the Court Street Pub yesterday and the prosecutor's office is talking. They don't know whether you got the money or your son. If it ain't you just tell me. You're running out of time! Running out of time!

HENDERSON bangs the door again.

(beat)

If you don't let me in, the cops will come when I go back, come on! I don't think your boy took that money. I'm here to help you. Come on let me in.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. opens the door. HENDERSON enters, takes a beer from the ice box.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Then why are you in such a hurry to get everybody blaming my boy?

HENDERSON

I'm not in a hurry. I've been waiting for a week and a half. But now I want my money for saving your sorry ass before it is too late for your boy and you.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Too late?

HENDERSON

Yeah, you know that black man, Dan took that money. Now you got to help me catch him before it is too late for you and your boy!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

No.

HENDERSON

We lock up old Dan and his Sarah she will find two thousand dollars to get him out. They ain't like you Middleman. I think they got money saved up.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

No.

HENDERSON

Come on! You are messing up my investigation. You are his only alibi. Nobody else will say nothing. Come on! I'm getting my money one way or the other, Middleman.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

No.

HENDERSON

I'm trying to help you. What is this about? Were you friends with that black man and his son back then.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

He came down to march that's all...

HENDERSON

No. That's not all. We heard all about that black boy and him studying the stars and universe and stuff like that... He thought he was "black" and "was somebody" on the Eastern Shore.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

That black man loved his son. That boy was smart in school down here. He got a job in Baltimore. He got outta here.

HENDERSON

The "black science kid" is what we called him. Looking at the stars and all the boys at the Sunoco Station drinking coffee was watching him.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Henderson you and the Klan set out to get him from the start, didn't you? You just were waiting on it.

HENDERSON

Yeah...

(laughs)

We fixed him real good. He be gone for like more than ten years now...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

His daddy's still an oysterman out on the Bay like me, except he don't have a son no more. I knew the boy.

HENDERSON

Well he's a black one.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

So now what? They talking about my son?

HENDERSON

Well, like I said, the marina down in Easton has been missing two thousand dollars and it's common knowledge you been late on some payments...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

So what's that got to do with my son?

HENDERSON

I don't know, but your boy just came back and nobody seen him around here the last two weeks or so.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

So?

HENDERSON

So people in Easton been saying you bought him a used convertible as soon as he got back to town... And nobody's seen him since...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

What do you like to say: "He's free, white and twenty-one."

HENDERSON

Yeah, he's "free" now and people are wondering...That's all. You know anything about any of that?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

No.

HENDERSON

They say you was around that money after you brought in your catch of crabs. And the same day, your boy was down there working on your boat...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I didn't offer you that beer, Henderson.

HENDERSON

(takes a swig)

You're not going to deny me a phlegm cutter, are you?

HENDERSON kicks a beer can.

HENDERSON (CONT'D)

Looks like you been doing more drinking than working. They think it's either you or your boy... People noticed you've been missing for talk over these last few weeks. You've been back here alone, they say... And nobody seen you out on the boat either. We were worried about you.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

So what's in it for you?

HENDERSON

(crushes can with bare hand)

I told you I want my money one way or the other. Where do you want it? In the trash or on the floor? Why don't you do a little thinking about my investigation. I'm trying to help you.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Get out of here!

HENDERSON

Don't be like this. Why you got your gun on the table?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Get out of here Henderson.

HENDERSON

The marina will give me half of what I get back...People pay top dollars for ex-cops.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

You never should have been a cop!

HENDERSON

The Klan was like the cops back then. That black guy you gave the alibi left early today. You not going to help me with my investigation?

He stands and starts for the door
to the rest of the house.

You mind if I look around?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Stops HENDERSON and pushes him out
the screen door.

I knew they would send you first. If you got anything, tell
the cops. They know where I live... But you come back here
and I'll kill you! I will!

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE

ACT I, SCENE 4

The LIGHTS go out and BACK UP on
ONAJE who has taken the red
bandanna of food and sits at the
picnic table. He puts his hands
together and silently prays. BELLE
remains on top of the back seat.

BELLE

Hey, if you're praying to save us from sudden death I'll be
right over.

ONAJE

I am feeling that it is the grace of God that you two pulled
over and picked me up.

BELLE

I love you religious types. You almost get run over and you
think it's a gift from Jesus.

ONAJE

I'm grateful. I took you for angels. Now that I'm moving
I'm praying William will disappear again. I've got to keep
focused.

BELLE

William? Who is William?

ONAJE

In July every year William gets into my head.

BELLE
Is William dead?

ONAJE
Worse than dead.

BELLE
Worse than dead? What's worse than dead?

ONAJE
He became part of the "man machine".

BELLE
He is an accountant?

ONAJE
I should be dead for what he did.

BELLE
Okay, he is not dead and he is not an accountant. How many guesses do I get?

ONAJE
He put me out on this highway.

BELLE
(yells)
Richard, come here. Listen to this!

ONAJE
Nothing can save William.

BELLE
Are you William?

ONAJE
No. I am "the traveler alone." I am "the witness of truth."
I am "the seeker of salvation for mankind and myself." I am Onaje.

ONAJE brings his sextant to his eye, finds his mark.

RICHARD
(zips up his fly)
Aah. Hey, I feel better.

BELLE
What the hell are you doing?

ONAJE

Charting the stars; making sure of my course.

BELLE

Christ, all you have to do is follow the highway, don't you?

ONAJE

I don't acknowledge the highway.

BELLE

What do you mean you don't acknowledge it, you were just on it.

ONAJE

No, I don't recognize its importance.

BELLE

You just were on it. What do ya mean? It's there.

ONAJE

It's just evidence of formless logic. It's just the way people get places.

BELLE

What do you mean exactly?

ONAJE

I go due east for ninety days in the summer, due south for ninety days in the fall and in the winter due west and in the spring north. Little boxes, within or without themselves and I keep notes of the changes. Nobody cares about this planet and its people like I do.

RICHARD

You people better piss cause I'm not stopping for another three hundred miles. I got self-discipline. I practice bladder control! I got peaches under the seat. If anybody wants peaches, I got peaches in cans under the seat.

BELLE

(Ignores RICHARD)

Changes? What are you talking about?

ONAJE

I see things. I'm recording the final moments as the living generation becomes Mother Nature. One way or the other we're making the earth into our own consciousness.

BELLE

What?

ONAJE

And you don't even know that the Amazon is the lungs of the planet or that the zoos are the sanctuaries for the soon to be extinct... do you?

BELLE

(to Richard)

Lungs of the planet? This is wild shit.

RICHARD

Forget him, you better think about your bladder. It's gonna be painful about an hour from now. You know how your hair blows forward in the convertible. Well I ain't got no windshield wipers for the inside of this car.

He rummages under the front seat,
pulls out a can opener and a can of
peaches, which he opens.

BELLE

(indicates to RICHARD)

Well, what do you know about him?

ONAJE

I know more than you do. That's my business. How long you known him?

BELLE

About forty-eight hours.

ONAJE

Why are you traveling with him now?

BELLE

Because we're getting married. Look at my ring!

BELLE shows ONAJE the gaudy costume
jewelry wedding ring on her finger.

ONAJE

You didn't get that new.

BELLE

You are good! How did you know that?

ONAJE

I recognize the ring.

BELLE

(very pleased)

You do? Richard bought it at a pawnshop. The guy who sold it said Elvis wore it.

ONAJE

I recognize it. New it comes with a crown and a cape.

BELLE

Yeah. Elvis must have kept the other stuff.

ONAJE

What happens if it don't work out?

BELLE

No problem. I got bus money in my boot.

ONAJE

You've been married before?

BELLE

Sure. I may still be. I don't know. Don't matter, I'm a resident of Nevada.

ONAJE

You were a stripper once, weren't you?

BELLE

How did you know that?

ONAJE

You look at him that way.

BELLE

What do you mean?... What way?

ONAJE

You don't trust the man.

BELLE

It's my fault. I hope for too much and then I get disappointed.

ONAJE

You wanted a husband and some kids and a backyard?

BELLE

How did you know that?

ONAJE

I wanted a family once. You running from people back home?

BELLE

Richard thinks I'm running from a couple of bad husbands and some bad boyfriends and a repo man, but I'm not. Or at least not all of them.

(beat)

I can't believe a word he says... But he says he wants a family... I always thought I'd be at my best as a partner but I never found somebody to be my partner. Maybe I'm hoping for too much again... Tell me about William.

ONAJE

No angels for William. I got to transcend the loneliness...

(beat)

Where did he tell you he'd been?

BELLE

Been foreman at a ranch and before that South America.

ONAJE

He never worked on no western ranch.

BELLE

How do you know that?

ONAJE

You were a waitress you should have picked it up.

BELLE

(surprised)

How'd you know I was a waitress?

ONAJE

You got mustard on your waitress uniform.

BELLE

Oh.

(a little embarrassed)

But how about the western ranch?

ONAJE

Look at his hands and look at his boots. The boots are new, the hands are soft and he ain't got no western weather on his face.

BELLE

Well, where has he been?

ONAJE

He ain't been a soldier either.

BELLE

How do you know that?

ONAJE

Cause he's got a different kind of cold about him.

BELLE

(to RICHARD)

You better come over here. This man don't know you, but he says you ain't been to the west and you don't know shit about the CIA.

RICHARD

(eats from can of peaches)

Forget him. What does he know?

ONAJE

He's been in jail.

BELLE

How do you know that?

ONAJE

He told you that in the car.

BELLE

Oh, that's right! The one thing he tells me about that's the truth is he has been in jail.

ONAJE

What do you know about his family?

BELLE

I don't know. Something about him being scared that some Maryland ex-cop will be banging on his daddy's door. He says he's got money for his daddy he won in the slots and that his daddy's got all of these books, picture books about Wyoming. I think he's going back to see his daddy 'n I'm kinda here cause he's gonna show me off. I think it's a little weird!

RICHARD

Hey, I got peaches here - you don't want no peaches?

ONAJE

I got chicken here. Day old fast food chicken and orange juice if you want it... And breath mints.

BELLE

Ask him about his daddy.

RICHARD

(explodes with anger)

He don't know nothing about my daddy. That's my business!

BELLE

Ask him about why he talks about those picture books of Wyoming his daddy has...

ONAJE

No.

BELLE

He told me all about himself being a war hero in Nicaragua in this truck stop in Reno and then he said after work I'll show you this town "like you never seen it before." You know what else...he says his daddy stole some money. And he used to hang out with people in the Klan!

ONAJE

(totally retreats)

The Klan? Oh, that's real nice!!! Woman you're on your own. You figure it out.

He points at the license plate of
the car.

ONAJE (CONT'D)

They come flying down the highway like letters through the post office... addressed, stamped and return addressed. Every letter's got a message. You don't want to read it that's okay but I ain't reading it for you.

BELLE

(to RICHARD)

He don't think you were in Nicaragua and he don't think you were in... in Wyoming.

RICHARD

(to ONAJE)

What's that thing you were saying that you got to transcend the loneliness?

ONAJE

I got to keep moving or I'll get sucked into the man machine.

RICHARD

Like standing in cement that's drying?

ONAJE

Yeah. It's like that.

RICHARD

...And then you start thinking "formless logic?"

ONAJE

Yeah. But it's okay if I just keep moving...

RICHARD

If you're lonely, why don't you just go home?

ONAJE

I can't do that.

RICHARD

Why can't you do that?

ONAJE

That's where William lives.

RICHARD

(to BELLE)

I don't care what he thinks. He don't know nothing. Eat these peaches if you want 'em, but we gotta get back on the road.

He hands the can and fork to BELLE.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

The juice is good. Don't cut your lips.

(to BELLE)

This is just some hobo who looks at the stars, Belle!

BELLE

I was just asking?

RICHARD

Well, after you eat the peaches and the chicken, get back into the car because we're going, we're going home. I'm going to let him off at the interstate.

BELLE and ONAJE eat. RICHARD struts nervously back to the car and sits.

BELLE

Hey, you ain't getting out are you? He takes me out all night and then he takes me to work and then next night he comes with flowers and takes me out again. He had money. Lots of money that he won in the slots...He wasn't like most men. He would ask about me. And he wanted me to talk. We drove into the desert and watched the stars...He was nice to me. Maybe he is telling it all true. And the peaches for both of us. He don't know us really. What do you mean the car tells it all?

(Beat)

Hey, I don't wanna get back in that car if you're not...

RICHARD HONKS the horn impatiently.

BELLE (CONT'D)

Hey, take a nap! You been driving since Reno.

(to ONAJE)

I don't want him to be like those other men. You know?

ONAJE

Don't worry about it. I'm just along for the ride. You believe what you want.

RICHARD gets in the backseat and sticks his feet out.

RICHARD

Alright I don't care. I could use a nap. Wake me after you all have peed.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE

ACT I, SCENE 5

The lights comes up on DAN'S house. SARAH enters and goes to the screen door. She is holding some carefully wrapped food. DAN sits at the table.

SARAH

Why aren't you down at the docks?

(She puts the food on the table.)

You've got to go to work. What are they going to be thinking down at the docks?

DAN

Yesterday and the day before they step aside when they see me. They don't talk to me. They step aside and Henderson is talking to them one by one. It is just a matter of time.

SARAH

They don't matter. The packing company buys your crabs and they know that you don't steal. Your bushel baskets are always heavy and packed full.

(Beat)

You didn't break no rules!

DAN

The rules are black and white.

SARAH

Dan, if you're not down on the docks working they are going to say you stole the money!

DAN

That won't work anymore.

(Beat)

We've got to pray to keep our family together.

SARAH

No Dan! Don't be doing this!

DAN

After they took William I learned to turn my back on them and keep working. Ever since Middleman's boy got out of prison and came home and Middleman buys him a car and sends him away to be free... it won't work anymore. I can't go down to the docks and be with those people anymore.

SARAH

No Dan, don't quit on me.

DAN

No! We've got to pray to keep what is left of our family together.

SARAH

Dan, you are all I have left of family.

DAN

Sarah, come here with me and pray that our boy will come home safe to us. When they take me you will have William.

SARAH

No Dan. I will pray with you that they don't come here like they did to William, but you've got to go down to the docks and keep working or they will, for sure, be blaming you.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE

ACT 1, SCENE 6

LIGHTS RISE on RICHARD in the backseat. ONAJE and BELLE are still at the picnic table. RICHARD HONKS the horn.

RICHARD

Come on, pee will ya? You got fifteen minutes.

BELLE

Hey, dig a grave and take a dirt nap, honey! Christ, the guy won't give me any peace. He's Don Juan in Reno and a scuzz ball by Cheyenne. Men are like that.

ONAJE

You're gonna marry him? Good luck.

BELLE

You notice things about him. What am I suppose to notice about you?

ONAJE

What's that about some "Maryland ex-cop banging on his daddy's door?"

BELLE

He's going back to his daddy's place in Maryland...

ONAJE

Make sure he lets me off when he turns up to his place in Maryland. I don't want to go back to Maryland. I don't want to see the end of this.

BELLE

Just talk to me, will you. You could drive while he sleeps, maybe.

ONAJE

I can't drive. I don't know how to anymore. I forgot.

BELLE

Christ Jesus, no, that's like forgetting how to cook eggs!

ONAJE

No, all that's done. William did that. I don't do that.

BELLE

And what do you mean about not wanting to go back to Maryland?

ONAJE

What part of Maryland's he going to?

BELLE

The Eastern Shore. Is there such a place?

ONAJE

What part of the Eastern Shore?

BELLE

St. Michael's or Royal Oak or some place.

ONAJE

Jesus Christ!

BELLE

You know them places.

ONAJE

Yes.

BELLE

Come on. I don't want to go back to the car right now. Just talk to me, will you?

ONAJE

I grew up there. My Daddy always picked up hitchhikers...

DUSK-COLORED LIGHTS RISE on the cab of an old pickup truck. There is the SOUND of TRUCK BRAKES and ANDREW jumps in next to DAN. ANDREW arranges his duffle bag on his lap. In the darkened kitchen behind them, the TV is now gone and Dan's wife, SARAH moves around the stove, BARELY VISIBLE.

ANDREW

Oh, thank you very much. For a while there I didn't think I was going to get a ride before dark.

DAN

Yeah. ...Afraid nobody was going to see you out there.

(Beat)

What part of the North you from?

ANDREW

How did you know I lived in the North?

DAN

Just standing on the road I knew you was from the North. You got that look about you.

(laughs)

People from the South who look like you don't live too long... I used to work up North. Where you from?

ANDREW

Just outside of Boston. A place called Watertown.

DAN

Oh yeah, Watertown? About a year I lived up in Central Square.

ANDREW

Sure! Lived right near there. Porter Square for a while.

DAN

Ya do a lotta hitchhiking?

ANDREW

Sure. If I can get my hands on fifty bucks. I hit the road. Got all the way to California and back last summer on fifty-four bucks.

DAN

Yeah, that's a good life. I've done my rambling.

ANDREW

What made you stop?

DAN

Oh man. I met my little woman outside Baltimore. Got a fine kid too. My boy is about your age. William. Yeah, I'm a happy man. I'm going to my little woman and be happy all night long. Man, that's the life. You be careful, man. The rambling's only good for a while.

ANDREW

(laughs)

I believe you.

DAN

You know the south ain't like no other part of the country. It ain't like going to California. How far south you going?

ANDREW

Atlanta. I haven't been in the south much before, but I plan to be careful, real careful.

DAN

You do that man. The Klan is down here. Hate to see someone like you get hurt. Why you going to Atlanta?

ANDREW

About a week ago, my friend sent me a letter. He told me about what he was doing, Civil Rights work and voter registration. I thought maybe I could help somebody because I've had it pretty easy and all and I know that. So here I am.

DAN

You doing civil rights work? William told us last night he got a friend in Baltimore where he works who is from Africa. He says he didn't know he was black until he got to America.

(DAN laughs)

William came down from Baltimore 'cause he wants to be part of the march today in Cambridge.

ANDREW

My brother! Good for him. We will turn this world around.

DAN

You shouldn't go further down tonight on account of the march in Cambridge.

ANDREW

It's alright, I got a sleeping bag and I normally find a bridge for cover and curl up by the side of the road.

DAN

Well listen man. We ain't got much. We ain't got much at all, but if you'd like a roof over your head, you're welcome at my place, if you want.

ANDREW

Yeah. Yeah, that would be very nice. Thank you very much.

DAN

We ain't got much but if that don't bother you, you're welcome. Besides that man I got a bottle on the kitchen shelf and it is Saturday so we can have ourselves a good time. All right? I want you to meet my William when he gets home tonight.

DAN offers his outstretched hand.

DAN (CONT'D)

I'm Dan.

ANDREW

(he shakes Dan's hand)

I'm Andrew.

Both laugh. RICHARD'S voice interrupts. DAN and ANDREW exit and the lights remain on the car and the picnic table.

RICHARD

Come on damn it! Come on get into the car. I can't wait no more. We gotta go.

ONAJE and BELLE get into the car.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I've been thinking about my daddy. You all sleep. Sleep now. Sleep. We got to get back on the highway again.

The lights stay on the car as RICHARD drives.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE

ACT I, SCENE 7

The LIGHTS RISE on RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. who is standing next to the kitchen table. HENDERSON knocks on the door. He is holding a folding chair which he props against the house.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I told you - you can't come in here.

HENDERSON

You better let me in. You are running out of time Middleman. I got some papers for you to sign. When was the last time you talked to that black man, Dan?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

He hasn't talked to me in years.

HENDERSON

I don't know about that Middleman. You better let me in. I'm gathering evidence now. You sure about that?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

They just turn their backs on me.

HENDERSON

I don't know about that Middleman. His Sarah was working down at the market and she was telling some of the ladies that you was up at their house in Unionville last night. I got papers signed on that. What if I see you both together? Is it a conspiracy I'm investigating or did that black man alone steal that two thousand dollars?

(HENDERSON lets himself in
and MIDDLEMAN does not
object.)

I've got the papers all ready for you.

(He puts the papers and a pen
in front of RICHARD
MIDDLEMAN, SR.)

You sign it and I'll be gone. You come down to the docks and start catching crabs again. No more questions about your boy and that convertible car you bought him. Just sign the papers.

(RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
stares at HENDERSON and then
the papers and but does not
move.)

...No? On the other hand people say you two were friends once. I got people who say you been on the wrong side of the things since that boy left town. People say you and that black man both taught his boy how to navigate the Bay by the stars when that boy was a child. They say before all that, he showed you good coves to lay your crab traps and where his oyster beds were in the winter time. Maybe he felt sorry or you, or ...maybe you were friends?

(Beat)

The papers say Sarah was lying. Lying to take the blame off old Dan. Sign the papers Middleman.

(Beat)

What happens when your boy comes back? You know he's coming back. What happens then? You don't want people asking him questions, do you? He finds you locked up when he comes home? Or if its not resolved the State's Attorney files against the both of you.

They be selling tickets at the courthouse to see the father and son holding cell when they call the case for trial. Sign the papers Middleman.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. reaches over the table and puts the cap back on the pen and hands the papers to HENDERSON.

Get out of here Henderson!

HENDERSON

(He leaves the pen and papers and exits out the door.)

You're running out of time. Running out of time.

He picks up his lawn chair and opens it and sits by the kitchen door.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE

ACT I SCENE 8

SETTING: LIGHTS STAY on the car. It is mid-afternoon. RICHARD drives in silence. ONAJE is in the passenger's seat, BELLE in the back, both asleep.

RICHARD

(nudges ONAJE)

I can't stand it, you been asleep for six hours. I've done my three hundred miles and more. Now wake up and talk to me. I want to know something from you.

ONAJE

(wakes with a start)

Where are we? What time is it?

RICHARD

We're heading in the goddamn right direction. I'm making better time than you normally make in a month. We're going east. I'm pulling over. Don't you ever have to piss?

ONAJE

Don't you ever sleep man?

RICHARD

(pulls car over)

No. I'm going home. Go ahead and take your leak, but don't wake up my bride. I pulled over and got sandwiches. Real quick though.

They get out. ONAJE goes to a trash can and unzips. RICHARD heads to the picnic table.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Piss in the can. Take some risks. Piss through all the bumble bees. I've been thinking. I wanna know why you interfere. It don't mean a damn to you what I've told her in Reno. It don't mean a damn what my intentions are. You listening? I lived it man.

(ascends picnic table)

It's in my brain. Crouched in the belly of the bird. Flying low at a couple of thousand feet with that chute on my back and lined up like a caterpillar before the open door with Nicaragua below me. And then shuffling forward. Bunny hopping forward. Up toward the door. With the clouds and earth in a picture frame in front and the man you're holding onto falling out into the picture. I hold onto the edges of the door. My voice has no sound in the turbulence. I look down...and then falling forward...Spread eagled in open space. The helicopter's thump, thump, thump, disappears into the clouds and I'm falling in open air with the horizon on all four sides. Falling forward into a distant map. Flocks of circling birds below me throw shadows across a little village of red metal roof tops. And then I am floating. Floating. It's peaceful and I am not part of anything. I remember that and POP the chute opens and, in that instant, I cross that line in mid-air and the trees become real and the gun fire becomes real and I can see the shimmer of the light off the waterways and the little paths and truck lanes with puddles in 'um and I see the earth coming up at me and the shock on my feet brings me to it and the canopy collapsing above my head. I almost forget that moment in mid-air. I almost forget. I don't know why you wanna fuck with me?

ONAJE

(Urinate in a roadside trash
can.)

Cause it ain't as real as these bees.

RICHARD

(mounts table like a horse)

Real? You don't know nothing about bees until you've seen them around horses. A hot day around the cattle and a bee sting will send a horse off careening over the desert.

(stands on table)

I stood on them bareback with reins in my hands, barefoot on the sweaty backs. I mended the fences, rail after rail, and rode the cattle in, and built little campfires out on the plains and made sure my men were rested and were full of coffee. I take care of people. That's what I do. It's in my brain man. I had to live it there. So where do you come off telling me? Look at me. Where you come off telling her that that ain't so?

ONAJE

(approaches RICHARD)

How long were you in jail man?

RICHARD

I...I was there a while. Long enough to read all the magazines again and again.

ONAJE

I read too. I know every public library from San Francisco to New York. Maybe we ain't that different man. You read the magazines like I read encyclopedias just to touch the worlds. The worlds within the words; like dreaming in another man's mind? You dream the life of your soldier and your cowboy.

RICHARD

Yeah, well... I wanna take that woman back to Maryland and get married... And have a couple of kids. I wanna leave everything behind.

ONAJE

...And I understand your moment in mid-air. The idea when you ain't part of nothing. Watch the interstate come to us, close and go away from us...far away. We could be sitting anywhere up or down this highway and have the same view. Don't matter where we are. That is my exile. Prison was yours? Wasn't it?

RICHARD

(sits next to ONAJE)

Yeah, I got so lonely in that prison cell.

ONAJE

...But you lived it in your brain... It's like you said. It's like being part of nothing... High above it, the stars in their constellations overhead and along this highway the breezes and the truck traffic changing the thoughts of the universe. It's beautiful. It's peaceful. It's the brain of Mother Nature. We'll be preaching "love and justice" here. You are not a convict anymore...and there won't be no more whippings in the world... We have transcended who we were.

RICHARD

You've been out here for years and years out here all alone?

ONAJE

What part of the Eastern Shore are you from?

RICHARD

How'd you know about the Eastern Shore?

ONAJE

The girl told me.

RICHARD

What really made you think I ain't been on a western ranch these last five years?

ONAJE

(points at car)

The tags are this year's and they're State of Maryland.

RICHARD

Jesus. You must have had your face right up to 'em. No wonder I hit you.

ONAJE

And you ain't never been to Nicaragua, right?

RICHARD

You threatening me, man? 'Cause nothing is getting in my way. I got to get her to Maryland. My daddy ain't nothing but a drunk, but he raised me. I got some debts to pay for my past. If I can get him to see her. This is important to me. Don't mess it up for me.

ONAJE

You're a lucky man, you are... I ain't going to hurt you.

RICHARD

Why? Why am I so lucky?

ONAJE

...You got someone to travel with...

RICHARD looks at ONAJE but says nothing.

BLACK OUT

END OF SCENE

ACT 1, SCENE 9

LIGHTS RISE on HENDERSON; he has his gun out and in his hand. He stands up from the folding chair and bangs again on the door. RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. is still at the kitchen table drinking.

HENDERSON

Your boy's gone for eight years and you steal for him? He'll just come home when the money runs out. Sign the papers on him. What is he to you? The marina needs the crabs. Come on!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

My boy is out in Wyoming by now. Pumping gas and fixing semis... He's free by now. I know it. What are you protecting man? The rich people own the land and the Bay is dead. Get away from me Henderson! I'm just waiting on a call.

HENDERSON

(Shoves RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. back into his chair.)

We seem to have a lack of communication here. I want my money and I am going to get it. Nobody cares about you down here and nobody's going to miss you going missing or maybe they find you here with the T.V. on all bloody on the floor with one of those bullets from your gun in your head. Nobody thinks much of alibis for black people on the Eastern Shore.

HENDERSON turns and slams the screen door behind him as he exits.

You are running out of time, Middleman.

HENDERSON returns to his chair and takes a seat and continues to handle his gun.

HENDERSON

Alright. I'll wait.

The lights go out on HENDERSON and the house.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE

ACT I SCENE 10

SETTING: It is now NIGHTTIME and COMPLETELY DARK except for the SPARKS OF A CIGARETTE LIGHTER being lit. DIM LIGHTS RISE on the picnic table. BELLE, RICHARD and ONAJE sit side-by-side. RICHARD has a FLASHLIGHT. One of BELLE's boots is off.

BELLE

Everything important is kept in my boot.

BELLE lights a joint, takes a big hit then passes it to RICHARD. She puts her boot back on.

RICHARD

I shouldn't do this. The last time I did I got into a world of trouble...

He takes a hit, passes it to ONAJE.

ONAJE

I don't mind if I do...

He takes a big hit and all three hold their breath together.

They look at each other and begin to snicker, finally exhaling together laughing.

BELLE

Nevada truck stop weed is always the best.

ONAJE

With rare exceptions basically all truck stop weed is the best.

RICHARD

(beat)

I'm getting horny...

BELLE flees to the top of the picnic table and RICHARD starts circling it, pointing his FLASHLIGHT at her inappropriately.

BELLE

(to RICHARD.)

Absolutely not! Not again until we're married! That was the deal in Reno.

RICHARD

I can't wait no longer.

RICHARD lunges at her and she kicks him away.

ONAJE

Hey, send her a candy gram... blow kisses at her.

RICHARD

I'm warning you! I'll take care of you!

He now chases ONAJE around the picnic table.

ONAJE

(laughs, taunts him)

Hey - you're going to have to wait! "Not again until we're married."

RICHARD

(to BELLE)

Why you doing this to me?

BELLE

And I got a right to know about the other stuff. Don't I?
Don't I? Don't I? Don't I?

RICHARD

Sure you do, honey. Just come on down, I'll marry you.

ONAJE

She's got a point...

BELLE

He's got a point and I'll bet when we been sleeping he grinds
it.

(bursts out laughing)

RICHARD

Come on down. He can marry us now.

BELLE

I thought it was only priests, judges and sea captains in
late movies...?

RICHARD

Belle...? Pleeeeease?

He gets down on one knee.

BELLE

Now - I like that.

ONAJE

Come on, I'll do it. Put your hands together..

(to RICHARD)

Just cause I'm a nice guy.

RICHARD

(holds his hand out to BELLE)

Say "I do."

BELLE

So what if I say "I do"? Are there any more conditions?

RICHARD

Come on!

BELLE

No radio. And no backseat stuff. I don't want no intimidation
and do something about this bathroom problem you got, will
you?

RICHARD

Belle, I'm talking married. Come on down.

BELLE

But by my terms.

RICHARD

Yeah, married.

(to ONAJE)

Do it.

RICHARD and BELLE hold hands.

ONAJE

Hey, let's make it cosmic. Come on.

(to RICHARD)

What's your name?

BELLE

Wait a minute. I don't know.

RICHARD

What do you mean, you don't know?

BELLE

I'm saying I don't know.

(Beat)

I mean I imagined something different for Christ sake, Jesus. I'm not talking big wedding in a church here. But what do you call this place? "Our Lady of the Picnic Table by the Highway?" Say we have kids what do I tell them: "It was real romantic but I don't know what state I was in?" "It was the most meaningful moment in my life, but he kept the car running." A girl can have dreams you know!

RICHARD

Come on do it, goddamn it. I'm telling you that I love you. No further questions. Any man ever told you that before?

BELLE

Well... Maybe...

RICHARD

Belle...?

BELLE

...Alright let's get on with it.

ONAJE

What's your name?

BELLE

I'm not sure this is legal.

RICHARD

Oh Jesus!

BELLE

Can't I ask?

RICHARD

(grabs and kisses her)

I love you.

ONAJE

You're both crazy!

BELLE

Oh-ho-ho... Look at mister perfect over here. You who thinks you're Christopher Columbus in a convertible. You who looks like you got dressed in a hurricane at K-Mart. Being legal married ain't important? You're the crazy one!

ONAJE

If you want me to do it you both got to tell me your names.

BELLE

I just got one question... How does anybody else know I'm married. I got no papers. I'm from Nevada, this shit's important!

ONAJE

She's right you know. You both need married people faces!

RICHARD

What?

BELLE

Does that make it legal?

ONAJE

Of course! Go over there. Hold hands.

He pretends to take their picture
with the FLASHLIGHT.

Say "Cheese."

They both smile as if for a picture
but at different times.

ONAJE (CONT'D)

No, no you don't understand. You better have your face ready. It's the same smile for fifty years. You better practice to each other.

They practice smiling at each other, each correcting the other's face with small talk until they start to laugh.

"Okay. Ready?" "Cheese."

ONAJE flicks the flashlight on and off, mimicking a flash like a camera, illuminating their faces.

RICHARD AND BELLE

Cheese.

They both laugh and relax.

ONAJE

Now you're ready to be married. What are your names?

BELLE

Belle O'Brien. Or at least that was my last married name. I may not never had a maiden name. For Christ sake.

ONAJE

Alright, I pronounce you Belle O'Brien married to...

RICHARD

Richard Middleman, Jr.

ONAJE

(recoils)

Oh God. From Royal Oak? Junior is it?

RICHARD

Mr. & Mrs. Richard Middleman! Man and wife!

BELLE

Is it official?

RICHARD

Not yet! What did you think this was all about sweet cakes!

He laughs, picks her up and carries her to the backseat.

BELLE

Oh, Gawd!

ONAJE

(ONAJE'S in shock)

Richard Middleman, Jr.?

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE

ACT 1, SCENE 11

DAN sits at his kitchen table going through a box of photographs which the family keeps on the table. Dusk is coming and the light is bleeding out of the kitchen. SARAH stands next to the door to the rest of the house and is waiting for DAN.

DAN

What happened to all the pictures that we had?

SARAH

Get ready for bed, Dan.

(Beat)

Put the pictures back in the box. The sun is almost down...

DAN

Well turn on the light... Wonder what Middleman's doing as the sun goes down? Waiting for a phone call? Going to get a beer and waiting for a phone call? At least he knows... At least he knows his boy is alive Sarah. You say don't even know that? Or maybe he is gone Sarah?

SARAH

...Or maybe he is gone?

DAN

(Beat)

He ain't gone... He's too smart to be gone. Do you think he's gone?

SARAH

What difference does it make what I think?

DAN

...Sarah, I have a plan.

DAN picks up the Bowie knife from the table and stabs it into the table.

I am not taking this anymore.

DAN stays at the table. SARAH waits for him and then slowly turns and leaves the room.

Alright Dan, you turn on the light. I'm not waiting for you anymore.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE

ACT I SCENE 12

SETTING: Very LATE that same night. DIM LIGHTS COME UP. Legs protrude from the backseat as RICHARD and BELLE sleep.

ONAJE suddenly jumps up, frightened, then sits down again.

BELLE sits up in the backseat, then slowly and painfully gets out.

BELLE

That is probably the worst wedding night that any woman has ever had in recorded history.

(beat)

His idea of foreplay is a stuck zipper...You okay?

ONAJE

...I heard it from him every time he had a little liquor in his belly and my mother was around. You people bringing William back into me. "William, there ain't no use in rambling. William, you find yourself a good woman." "William", Christ, I haven't been that name in so long... You people put the loneliness in me...

BELLE

You okay? You want me to tell you a story? I can't sleep.

She puts her arms around him.

BELLE (CONT'D)

Don't worry, honey, at least you ain't just married a pogo stick.

She rocks him back and forth as she starts her story.

BELLE (CONT'D)

I don't know nothing about Maryland, never been that far east. I'm north Texas, born and bred, just south of where old Route 66 crosses the top of the state...

ONAJE

You people bringing William back into me. We all laughing and then you people leave me out here all alone with William? You people aren't angels, are you? No, you're not. I can see the fires. I can smell the smoke. I don't want to go back to those riots down in Cambridge. No, I am Onaje. I'm right there at the edge of hell with Cambridge burning in front of me. And I'm running and one of the protestors is saying to me: "Take this gun out of here and run! Run away from here and throw this gun into the Choptank River when you cross the bridge!" And then I see Henderson...

ONAJE screams, jumps up and runs behind the car. He stands in the darkness for a moment, then a LIGHT FALLS ON HIM. He is hiding a gun behind his back. Across the stage HENDERSON is coming to him. We hear NOISE from the riots several blocks away.

ONAJE (CONT'D)

Why is it you?

HENDERSON

(points his gun at ONAJE)

Hey, is that you? Freeze Mother Fucker!

ONAJE

(conceals the gun)

I'm going. I'm gone man...

HENDERSON

You one of them from downtown? At the riots?

ONAJE

I am going home, Officer...

HENDERSON

Four fucking blocks away. I've been watching it on TV, national TV and I can see the fires from the window. You one of them?

ONAJE

(backs away, hiding the gun)

No sir I'm gone.

HENDERSON

No, you're here boy. You must have done something wrong. Put your hands on your head. Do it right now! Don't think about running cause I'll take you down!

ONAJE

What have I done wrong?

HENDERSON

You smell like Baltimore...

ONAJE

I haven't done anything wrong.

HENDERSON

Hands on your head!

ONAJE turns to run and HENDERSON fires a shot in the air. ONAJE thinking that HENDERSON has shot at him, pulls out the gun.

HENDERSON (CONT'D)

Get down on your knees! You're dead!

ONAJE

No more! No. No. No more!

ONAJE points his gun and FIRES.

HENDERSON grabs his shoulder, grazed by ONAJE'S shot. The LIGHTS GO OUT.

BELLE goes over to ONAJE, leads him back to the picnic table. LIGHTS RISE on the house – minus the TV now, clean and neat but impoverished. In front of the house, DAN and ANDREW sit in the pickup truck, frozen in DARKNESS. A HANGING LIGHT, previously unused, goes on in the kitchen. SARAH saves an uneaten dinner and clears the table.

BELLE

Tell me. Finish the story for me. He's still sleeping.

As SARAH turns back to the stove, we hear the PICKUP TRUCK ENGINE. LIGHTS RISE on DAN and ANDREW exiting the truck. DAN walks through the screen door. He is followed by ANDREW who enters carefully.

DAN

Life is good woman!

(Kisses SARAH)

How's my beautiful wife?

DAN pulls a bottle from a high shelf. DAN gets glasses.

Andrew, like you to meet Sarah, my misses.

ANDREW goes to shake hands, but SARAH turns away.

ANDREW

Nice to meet you.

DAN

Andrew was hitching down the Federalsburg Road so I told him that in my house company's always welcome as long as they ain't afraid of sleeping on the floor. Where is William?

SARAH

SARAH looks at Dan. She is displeased with him.

You picked the wrong night for this. You heard on the radio? It has gotten bad in Cambridge. They say a police officer has been shot.

DAN

So William is still in Cambridge?

SARAH

He has been there since morning.

DAN

Andrew here lives up in Boston, right near where I used to stay.

SARAH

(To ANDREW)

What you doing coming down here now?

ANDREW

I'm going down to Atlanta to meet a friend of mine.

(SARAH doesn't respond.)

My friend is helping with voter registration. I am going down to help him.

SARAH

What makes you do that?

DAN

Now you hush, Sarah. This boy's our guest.

(To Andrew)

She's just testing you. She don't mean no harm.

SARAH

Am I Dan?

(To Andrew)

You don't find too many whites down here who are willing to treat a black man decent.

A ROAR of an OLD CAR outside stops the conversation.

ANDREW

There must be some good whites in the towns around here.

SARAH

(SARAH looks at DAN.)

Maybe, but there aren't many.

ANDREW

If you don't want me here I can go.

SARAH

(to ANDREW)

You got a long way to go tomorrow.

(SARAH offers him a chair.)

ANDREW

I guess I do. Thank you.

CAR DOOR SLAMS outside.

BELLE watches as ONAJE leaves the picnic table and slowly approaches the house. He is now a participant in his past. He SHEDS his outer jacket and now moves in a tee shirt, younger, muscular. He surveys the scene in silence.

ONAJE enters the house. He is younger, edgy, frightened.

DAN

Well come on in, William.

ONAJE

I've got to go!

DAN

We were worried for you.

(ONAJE sees ANDREW.)

ONAJE

(To ANDREW)

What are you doing here?

(To DAN)

What is a white boy doing in this house?

DAN

William, don't bother him. He ain't done nothing.

ONAJE

What's he doing here? He may know too much. What do you know boy? What do you know about Cambridge, tonight?

DAN

(To ONAJE)

You ain't got nothing to be afraid of William.

ONAJE

How did you get here, boy?

ANDREW

I was hitching. Your father picked me up.

ONAJE

You been to Cambridge?

ANDREW

No.

DAN

He's hitching down to Georgia. Down to Atlanta to help a friend of his who's working with blacks down there.

ONAJE

Sure, I know. You going to save the blacks, white boy?

(To Dan)

You brought him here? You think Sarah is safe now?

DAN

William, what are you talking about?

ONAJE

The white people set the black neighborhoods on fire!

DAN

William, what has happened with you?

ONAJE

The fire trucks are letting them burn. The cops are just watching. They blocked the Choptank Bridge. They are sniping across Route 50. There are people trapped in there...

DAN

That's 20 miles south of here, William. We are safe here.

ONAJE

Henderson, that cop from Easton is down there. They are all down there.

DAN

Henderson was down there?

ONAJE

The white people are killing us.

ANDREW

I think you've got enough trouble without me here.

SARAH

What you running away from? This is the black man's world.
You scared? You sure you're cut out for this?

ANDREW

I just hope...

ONAJE

You don't know? You had the radio on? You been listening to
the radio?

SARAH

Yes.

ONAJE

But you don't know, do you? Everybody knows but you don't.
Alright then, I'll tell you. They are looking for a "black
man" on the Eastern Shore tonight because down in Cambridge a
white cop was shot.

SARAH

Don't say this!

ONAJE

That's right. I shot a cop.

DAN and SARAH react in horror.

SARAH

No, William?

DAN

What are you saying William?

ONAJE

I shot Henderson. That black man they are looking for is
your son.

(pulls out gun)

So white boy, you're staying right here.

DAN

(furious)

You put that gun on that table!

ONAJE complies. DAN grabs him
violently.

DAN (CONT'D)

You fool! William, you ain't never going be free now. You
damn fool. You ain't never going be free.

ONAJE

I went down to march! The white people start burning down the houses and I'm trying to get home across the Choptank Bridge and Henderson stops me. He was going to kill me. I've got to get back to Baltimore.

SARAH

You ain't free, William.

ONAJE

I don't think Henderson recognized me... But white boy, you're coming up to Baltimore. You ain't leaving tonight.

DAN

I thought you were something more than a child but you're not. When you get to Baltimore, you take a bus north. You can't take care of yourself...

SARAH

(SARAH comes over to DAN.

She is distraught.)

The Grace of God? If nobody saw him, like he says, maybe William will be free. Oh Lord, I hope so.

ANDREW

Did he shoot at you first?

ONAJE

That don't make no difference down here.

ANDREW

If it's in self-defense, you ought to get yourself free. Otherwise, you'll be running for the rest of your life.

DAN

William's right. It don't make no difference down here. William's right. Now, William, get yourself some clean clothes in that old suitcase - just you take what you need. But hurry now.

ONAJE exits into the bedroom.

ANDREW

Can I help?

DAN

No.

ANDREW picks up the gun and holds it as a person would who had never held a gun before.

An ENGINE ROARS outside.

HENDERSON

Alright Nigger! Come out of there, before we blow you out.

ONAJE

(Runs back in terrified.)

There are police all around the back of the house!

DAN

(goes to door, looks out)

It ain't just cops out there. It's the Klan. They ain't just cops. They're coming in.

(to SARAH)

Get back into the bedroom now!

ONAJE

(screams at ANDREW)

Give me the gun. Give me the gun.

ANDREW

No. Turn yourself in. You can get off.

ONAJE

They're the Klan! Give me the gun.

The screen door bursts open and RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR., Dressed in a KKK white hood and holding a baseball bat, and HENDERSON, holding a shot gun force themselves in. ANDREW wrestles with WILLIAM for the gun and it falls to the floor.

HENDERSON

Don't pick up that gun! I'll blow your fucking head off!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

(To DAN as he pulls off the KKK hood.)

Dan, is that you? Dan?

DAN tries to intercede, but HENDERSON drives the butt of his shotgun into DAN'S head.

DAN falls to the floor, bleeding.
The GUN GOES OFF, but HENDERSON
recovers, aims it at ONAJE.

Is it your boy William?

DAN

(To HENDERSON)

Get outta here - leave my boy alone!

HENDERSON

(to ONAJE as ONAJE reaches
for the gun)

Don't you pick it up!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

(to DAN)

I thought William was in Baltimore!

ONAJE

(reaches for the gun)

Damn you!

HENDERSON

(points gun calmly at ONAJE)

I'll wipe out your fucking family.

ANDREW

No! No! You can't do that! Don't do this!

HENDERSON now notices ANDREW.

HENDERSON

Well look what we have here... Well look what we got here.
Just you look and see what we got here. You "white"? You
ain't black and you sure ain't white. There ain't nothin'
worse than a "white nigger"!

(to the others outside)

Hey, look who we got here! Hey, white nigger, you going to
save us?

He starts to chant: "Hey, white
nigger, you going to save us?"

HENDERSON points his gun at DAN'S
Family and forces them to join the
CHANT as it gets louder.

HENDERSON (CONT'D)

Hey, you gonna save us?

It gets LOUDER. HENDERSON holds up his hand and points at ANDREW.

HENDERSON (CONT'D)

No wait. I got an idea. Boy, you—

(to ONAJE)

Get that "white nigger" and you take him outside...

DAN looks over at RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. and calls out MIDDLEMAN, SR.'s name begging for help as the chant raises again.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

No, Henderson, no, don't do this.

HENDERSON with his gun prods ONAJE to grab and drag ANDREW toward the screen door.

ONAJE

(TO HENDERSON)

No.

HENDERSON

(Addressing the family.)

I warned you!

(Pointing his gun at SARAH.)

Get on your knees woman!

ONAJE

(To Henderson)

No! No!

HENDERSON

(To ONAJE)

Come on boy! You take that white nigger outside!

(ONAJE grabs ANDREW and starts to take him outside.)

ANDREW

Oh God no - What are you doing?

As ANDREW struggles, the house is trashed.

HENDERSON

Come on boy.

(to RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. and the others outside)

Get the whip!

(to ONAJE)

Whip him boy. Like your people got it. Whip him boy!

The stage goes BLACK. The encouragement of the CROWD outside GROWS LOUDER. Then a DIM SPOTLIGHT falls on ANDREW. He is hanging by his hands facing the audience. His shirt gets torn off his back and his knees almost touch the ground. ONAJE rocks and pivots to deliver the first blow and there is a loud SNAP and ANDREW'S body jolts from the shock of it.

ANDREW

(screams)

No. No. No more, please. No more.

ONAJE looks over at HENDERSON and tries to return the whip but HENDERSON demands more. Another SNAP of the whip and corresponding lurch from ANDREW.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

(in tears)

God help me! No more! No more! No more! No more!

HENDERSON signals to ONAJE to whip the boy again and ONAJE does. The cheering gets louder and ONAJE starts to increase the intensity and speed of the delivery, again and again. The LIGHTS GO OUT on the entire stage, then UP ON BELLE, standing by the picnic table and screaming at RICHARD who is in the car. She is pointing past the picnic table.

BELLE

Richard, Jesus Christ! He's running toward the highway!
Richard wake up! Don't let him go!

BLACKOUT.

END OF ACT I

ACT II SCENE 13

SETTING: The LIGHTS come up.
ONAJE sits at the picnic table
bundled in a blanket. BELLE stands
further off and RICHARD roams
nervously.

BELLE

(explodes at RICHARD)

For Christ sake Jesus! Compared to Maryland, Reno's looking
civilized! A bull whip? Are you kidding me?

RICHARD

(to ONAJE)

My daddy... He wasn't a part of it...

BELLE

Richard? What's it got to do with you?

RICHARD

(to BELLE)

My daddy's a decent working man. He's worked every day of his
life out on that Bay. He gave me money when I needed it and
the car! He ain't like that!

ONAJE

He was there...

RICHARD

But he... stood far off.

BELLE

Christ, Richard, give it a rest!

ONAJE

...The hell he did!

RICHARD

I can prove it to you! I was in the truck. I swear.

ONAJE

Your daddy's truck?

RICHARD

Yeah, in the back. My Daddy was standing far off from the others... He didn't approve of what was going on!

ONAJE

Man he didn't drive no truck... Tell the truth from your heart!

(explodes)

In that one moment we were all the same... The slow moving mob, humankind, the brush fire that consumes everything, and leaves its garbage and plastic bags behind. We were earth's violent creature, mankind... We were cruel and laughing in the moonlight. We were the machine at work.

BELLE

You're afraid you're just like your daddy, aren't you? Violent and mean... Why'd I think you was different?

RICHARD

I am different.

BELLE

Hey, the first I hear about your old man he stole some money and some ex-cop is waiting on him. The next I hear is he's at a whipping. The man ain't no eagle scout!

RICHARD

I never lied to you!

BELLE

The hell you didn't. Tell me one thing you said that was the truth! You ain't been a soldier. You ain't been a cowboy. Oh. I'm sorry. You did. You told me you been in jail for Christ sake Jesus!

RICHARD

I said I loved you and I want our family! I didn't tell you no lie from my heart, Belle.

BELLE

(to ONAJE)

You tell me! You think he's okay? He's been kind to us... I don't know. The peaches and all...?

ONAJE

No. He's okay. He didn't lie to you from his heart.

BELLE

(to Richard)

What you've been telling me. Is it the truth?

RICHARD

Yes!

ONAJE

Not the cowboy and the soldier.

RICHARD

I said it. I ought to know.

ONAJE

No. Tell her man. Tell her the truth from your heart.

RICHARD

It's what I wanted to be, Belle. I don't know...

ONAJE

But you never were a cowboy or a soldier. In your exile you was just dreaming in another man's mind and understood the suffering. You became different from your past. You can love her now. You can care for her. Tell her the truth from your heart!

RICHARD

Don't mess this up for me!

ONAJE

(pleading)

What? ...We've been there man. ...We shared our exile together looking up and down the highway, didn't we? And high above us all the stars of Mother Nature in her perfect order? We have transcended who we were. We have found the kindness in ourselves. There won't be no more whippings in the world!... You understand? All the rest just gets mopped up in paper towels... and thrown away. Tell it to her from your heart?

ONAJE looks deep into RICHARD'S eyes, painfully realizing he does not understand.

ONAJE (CON'T)

No...? No...? ...Or were you, all along, just another one of them that just wander the roads, boy?...

The slow moving mob trapped in the circular logic till you die? You don't remember? No?... No? Fuck your flags! Go salute the paper towels!

RICHARD

Belle? Belle, I don't know what he's saying. Honest.

BELLE

(confronts ONAJE to defend
RICHARD)

Hey leave him alone! Get off of him with this cosmic bullshit. You want to know the truth? I'll tell you.

RICHARD

Belle...

BELLE

Shut up, I'm not through with him yet! What is this stuff about paper towels? Forget it, I say. I don't give a good goddamn!

RICHARD

Belle?

BELLE

(to RICHARD)

And you can shut up too!

RICHARD

People can be different, Belle...

BELLE

If your Daddy did it just say it. That's all I'm asking. I'll tell you the truth. My mother had two other kids, with a different daddy. When I was ten she gave me a picture. I use to dream about him. I dreamed I'd ride in the semis with him. Later I dreamed he'd stopped at my truck stop. But he is years and years long gone. I lost the picture in a motel room in Waco six years ago... Now I don't like talking about that but it's the goddamn truth...

BELLE, RICHARD and ONAJE freezing in place and the light falls on the action, already in motion, happening in DAN'S house. DAN pushes open the screen door and stands on the steps looking up at the stars.

SARAH is in the kitchen standing on a chair fixing the light hanging above the kitchen table.

SARAH

I'm giving you things to do at home for two days. This light bulb has been burned out all day and it was your job all day to fix it.

DAN

(DAN reenters the house.)

The white man gets his son back. We don't get our boy back? You know Sarah, there is no person who deserves it less. He's nothing but a drunk.

SARAH

That is not the problem Dan.

DAN

Yes, it is. Even the white people laugh at him behind his back. He can't catch enough to get himself out of debt. He even drove his wife away and then he never took care of his boy. He'll admit it to you.

(DAN goes over to the table and begins to go through the wooden box of pictures on the table.)

SARAH

The man was just a follower. You had what he wanted. Before he had his boy he taught William how to read the stars when he was still a boy...

DAN

You saying "You are what you do, Sarah?" Then where is our boy? That is what he did. You can't see that?

SARAH

Middleman's not the problem, Dan. You never brought him up here. Why did you never invite him up here? Because you looked down on him?

DAN

No. I never looked down on any man.

SARAH

What am I trying to tell you Dan?

DAN

That all this is fair? That it is okay that he gets his boy back and then he is so stupid he sends him away? I'm not listening to that.

SARAH

That is not what I am telling you.

DAN

You taking sides against me Sarah? William was your son, Sarah!

SARAH

"Was?"

DAN

I didn't say "was".

SARAH

Yes you did!

DAN

I care about justice and William is coming back to us. It is just a matter of when!

SARAH

This ain't a "just" world. You always said that and then you bring that white boy to this house! You broke the rule.

DAN

You telling me I've got to let my boy go!

SARAH

You invited that little white boy into our house.

DAN

What are you saying to me?

SARAH

It is not that white man's son being sent away! It is what you did to us when you brought that white boy into our home! You put us in harm's way.

DAN

That boy was going to Atlanta to do voter registration. William was down marching. William would have been his friend. Don't be managing me Sarah!

SARAH

You won't hear me? "Manage you?" Damn you! Manage yourself! That man is not the problem Dan! You are! I'm leaving this house. Come home to your senses! Your boy is dead and you know you killed him. Say it out loud until you confess it. We can't say it together and you can't say it to yourself!

DAN

Lifting the picture of WILLIAM out of the box on the table and holds it up for both of them to see.

You aren't leaving this house! There is your boy! I told him to "pick a star." There is your son. Look! But all it is, is just a picture in my hand.

The lights go out on them and DAN'S house and return to BELLE, RICHARD and ONAJE and back to BELLE who is in mid-speech.

BELLE

Richard listen to me ...I can take all the backseat bullshit and bad sex but I can't take nothing less than the truth and be married to you. I'm just telling you we ain't married if we're living in difference stories. I can take it, whatever it is and forgive you. Forgive you everything. Sloppy drunks and you chasing flat ass women when you get old. But I don't want to love some picture of a man a million miles away living in the same house with me.

(beat)

You don't need to be like this. You don't Richard.

RICHARD

What do you mean? Belle?

BELLE

I mean don't lie to me no more. Don't box me out. Don't talk to him about your father... Talk to me!

RICHARD

He ain't got nobody. It scares me what he says.

ONAJE

(Dejected. To RICHARD)

I thought you understood... I thought we were kinfolk sorta...

RICHARD

Belle, I'll take care of you.

BELLE

I don't want promises. I've heard them all my life.

RICHARD

I want to take care...

BELLE

I don't want no promises. I just want the truth.

RICHARD

Listen to me Belle. ...Some years back I got in trouble. My daddy said "He ain't my son..." He said that to the judge. The judge just didn't understand what he meant. He saw him saying "no." He saw him pointing at a criminal and saying: "No, he ain't my son". And the judge didn't understand. The judge looked at the newspaper people in the courtroom and saw my old man as a decent man with a bad seed that broke his heart and he said "Let this be an example to all you young people in Talbot County who take drugs. Eight years, hard time." Daddy thinks it was his fault. It wasn't daddy's fault! He thought he was saying both of us is decent... He's tried to make it up to me... The money, the car. He is gentle, Belle, gentle. That's the truth Belle. From my heart.

(to ONAJE)

I've been with my daddy when he told me he was scared of what he saw. My daddy is just like you... ...Because you're afraid of who you are!

ONAJE

(explodes)

Boy, I'm just afraid of mankind!

RICHARD

No. You're just like my daddy. You gave up. You're always running away.

ONAJE

Just like your daddy?

RICHARD

I'm not letting my daddy give up. I'm not!

ONAJE

I'm sorry for you. You had it man. It was beautiful and you lost it. I ain't crazy, man! All you people are crazy to live in the man machine: It is single-minded, violent and does not know what it destroys each day. Laugh at it.

It laughs back 'cause you are the hero in your mirror. The master of more and more and less and less and...

RICHARD leaves BELLE and goes over to comfort ONAJE.

ONAJE (CON'T)

(to RICHARD)

For a moment, I thought us meeting, the improbable, the impossible - it was the hand of God. My mother believed in that. "The Grace of God." I thought we became friends ...on a path to love and justice. The three of us. From the "Grace of God"...? No?

(beat)

There ain't no point in being with you all no more. I'll get out here.

(ONAJE takes his bag out of the car but RICHARD stops him.)

RICHARD

No wait. You are real tired. Where you going to sleep out here? Under some bridge?

BELLE

Hey why you leaving us? You don't have to go.

ONAJE

I got to go. I've been here too long.

BELLE

(To RICHARD)

Don't let him go Richard. Don't let him go.

ONAJE

No. No. It was my mistake. It was my mistake.

BELLE

(To RICHARD)

Don't let him go Richard!

(To ONAJE)

Are you going to remember us?

RICHARD

You can sleep in the car a little bit. Get in. I'll let you off a little into Pennsylvania.

ONAJE

For a little while I was thinking you two were angels? No? No? No?

(beat)

But okay... The both of you. Thank you for the ride. I never get long rides like this. Yeah, I'll remember both of you... I'll remember you Belle. Just remember me. We laughed together. I married you two. I thank you. The both of you. Thank you.

ONAJE gets into the passenger seat
and prepares to sleep.

I'm just real tired... I'll sleep a little now. Just let me off in Pennsylvania... You hear?

ONAJE tucks his coat under his head
and goes to sleep.

RICHARD

RICHARD directs BELLE to go away
from the car so ONAJE can't hear
him.

We ain't far from being there Belle. We'll be there by morning. I don't care what he says Belle. He's got to get to Unionville. He'll be alright. He's just got to go home...

BELLE

Richard, he don't want to go home.

RICHARD

...Because he's just real lonely, Belle, he don't have nobody. He is the same as us.

RICHARD and BELLE go back to the car and get in. The LIGHTS goes out and the HEADLIGHTS BEAM out over the audience as the car's ENGINE picks up and they run down the highway.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE

ACT II SCENE 14

SETTING: HEADLIGHTS continue to beam out from the darkness of the stage. It is about an hour before DAWN. RICHARD turns off the LIGHTS as he parks in front of his father's house. ONAJE and BELLE are asleep as he gets out of the car quietly.

The LIGHTS RISE to reveal the trashed kitchen where RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. sits drinking a beer. The TV LIGHT FLICKERS on his face as he stares into space, drunk and desperate. RICHARD watches his father drink then turns away and puts his head in his hands as he watches HENDERSON and listens.

HENDERSON bangs on the door.

HENDERSON

It came across the radio. They spotted the car. He's come home old man. It won't do no good no more to hold out in here.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

You're stupid Henderson. He ain't coming home.

HENDERSON

I just got it over the radio. They saw him driving in north of town.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

You lie, Henderson. He's out west. He's in Wyoming by now workin' in the open air.

(Throws the crushed beer can
against the wall.)

This place ain't his home no more. He's got a good job out there.

HENDERSON

You steal for him and he comes back. You're the stupid one.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Fifteen years ago you ran out the blacks and now you run out the poor. What are you protecting?

Years ago you dumped a black man's son out on the highway and told him never to come home again cause you was "the law" and then eight years ago your people sent my son to prison for smoking dope and he never hurt nobody at all. Who are you people? This ain't my America no more.

HENDERSON

What you got for that old black man?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

He's a crabber just like me. You lose the hate when you work side by side and you share the suffering of another. He had a nice family 'til we busted it apart.

HENDERSON

His boy shot at me with a gun!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Everybody's got a gun down here and everybody smokes dope. But only the poor people get punished!

HENDERSON

Talk nice to me. I could have come in earlier but I knew it'd be easy when you saw he'd come back... I'm going to arrest him in town. I'll be back with the papers for you after I get some breakfast. It's over Middleman. ...It's over.

HENDERSON picks up his chair and exits. RICHARD lifts his head out of his hands and gently wakes up BELLE.

RICHARD

Belle... Belle... wake up... wake up.

BELLE

Where are we?

RICHARD

We're home.

BELLE

(half asleep)

Yeah, well that's all well and good, but where the hell am I?

RICHARD

Royal Oak. Eastern Shore of Maryland.

BELLE

Hey, the honeymoon capital of the world, right?

RICHARD

Come on get outta the car.

BELLE

I can get out of the backseat? Hey, you're a real peach.

RICHARD

My father probably ain't up yet. The place'll be pretty messy.

(RICHARD helps her out and she stares at the house.)

BELLE

Pretty messy? That dump don't even look like its got toilet paper.

RICHARD

Be quiet, I don't want to wake him up.

BELLE

(looks at ONAJE)

Why didn't you let him out?

RICHARD

...It's his home, too.

BELLE

Hey, he don't want to be here.

RICHARD

He's got to see my Daddy...

BELLE

Richard! He sure don't want to see your Daddy!

RICHARD

It'll be okay. ...And for sure my Daddy needs to see him.

BELLE

This is the end of the road he was talk'n about.

(looks at the house)

Christ, I went three thousand miles for this?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. staggers to the ice box for another beer, screams out of frustration.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

You better fuckin' not come home! I waited. I locked the door and waited till you were clear.

Goddamn Henderson's been outside all week and you come back.
My life is worthless now. I was waiting to hear you was free.
Go. Go. Go. I said.

(swings around, drinks again)
I'll beat the shit out of you if you did!

He exits to the bedroom and slams
the door.

ONAJE
(wakes with a start)
Why are we stopped?

ONAJE gropes around and finds his
sextant and starts measuring and
charting the stars in the EARLY
MORNING SKY.

ONAJE (CONT'D)
I'm way off course. Didn't you listen to me!
(looks around)
Jesus Christ this is the Eastern Shore.

RICHARD
Quiet man. My father's asleep in there. If you don't like it
drive around!

RICHARD throws ONAJE the keys and
ONAJE catches the keys.

BELLE
Hey, just maybe, just maybe I'll want to get out of here.

RICHARD
You think I gave him the car?
(leads her toward house)
You're safe. He can't move.

ONAJE
(holds keys)
What do you want me to use these things for? I'm trapped!
Is that what you're telling me?

RICHARD
No man... It's up to you.
(to BELLE)
Come on in.

(RICHARD and BELLE enter the
house.)
Sorry about this. My old man was never much of a housekeeper.

ONAJE puts the sextant down on the dashboard of the car where it is out of the way but visible to the audience.

BELLE

(Looks around the inside of the house.)

You're kidding. If you can find a mop in this dump in the next two minutes, I'll cancel my bus tickets. You pigs had to go three thousand miles to find a domestic? Hey, fuck this, I'm out of here.

RICHARD restrains her.

BELLE (CONT'D)

Hey, I'm not cleaning this place. Light a fire and get some marshmallows!

ONAJE

(Gets out of car.)

I can't stand being in the car if it's not moving.

He does a few orbits around the car and toys with the idea of driving it. He tests the HORN.

ONAJE (CONT'D)

The horn works.

Gets back in the car and sits on the top of the driver's seat, fiddles with the RADIO unsuccessfully, starts kicking it and then gets out of the car.

BELLE

(Looking out the screen door at ONAJE.)

Why you leaving him out there...?

RICHARD

Just let him be.

ONAJE

Move - move! Damn this!

(kicks car)

Damn this!

(screams at the house)

ONAJE (CON'T)

You fuckin' with me, man? Stopping don't mean a thing? Hey, you two listening?

RICHARD

(Holds her hand and turns her away from looking at ONAJE.)

Belle?

BELLE

What?

RICHARD

I wanna talk to you...

BELLE

Yeah, you sure as hell look like you wanna talk to me... 'N we got some stuff to talk about.

RICHARD

Belle, I'll tell you the truth now. I was in prison... I just dreamed about the Western Ranch... I read about it in the magazines...

BELLE

...Yeah, I know and that James Bond stuff must have been a wet dream.

RICHARD

Belle, listen... I was afraid you wouldn't like me...

BELLE

Men are born liars. What do you think I was born yesterday?
(hugs him gently)
Shh. Now don't worry about it no more.

RICHARD

Belle, I lived eight years cold in that prison cell. I read the magazines and dreamed of what I could have been 'n what I wanted to be. It put a fear in my heart of being lonely for always...

BELLE

Yeah, well you lying to me won't do nothing to change that.

RICHARD

It was what I wanted to be.

BELLE

But it's what you ain't. Besides I don't want some stinky cowboy, that don't matter.

RICHARD

Belle, then I got scared of wanting you too much...

BELLE

Shh, don't worry. I won't leave. With all the other men I never did the leaving.

(kisses him)

I've been looking for you for a long time. I'll take care of you.

(comforts him)

The truth is all I want. There ain't no love that comes from lies. Are you goin' to leave me?

RICHARD

No... Never Belle ...Never! Not even for a minute!

BELLE

(nods, kisses him)

Richard, that's all I need...

ONAJE starts pacing around the car.

ONAJE

Christ, it is dark when you stop.

(screams at the house)

It's hard enough as it is. I don't need this!

He violently attacks the car, kicks it wildly, then throws everything but his bag out of the car.

ONAJE (CONT'D)

Let's go! Let's go!

He jumps onto the car and spreads his arms, but there is no speed, no wind.

BELLE

(watches ONAJE)

Richard?

RICHARD

He can come in here if he wants...

ONAJE

I need to go! Let's go! Damn you people!

DAN enters his imagination. ONAJE sees him and freaks out. SARAH follows DAN into ONAJE'S imagination.

ONAJE (CONT'D)

What is this? Get away from me. You were just my father once. Listen it's like this. Listen to me! You listen to me and then go away...

DAN

You were gifted boy! Education came easy to you, William. Now you can't even remember how to drive a car?

ONAJE

Leave me alone.

SARAH enters his imagination.

SARAH

(to DAN)

What is that, Dan? Who is that?

ONAJE

(To SARAH Pointing at DAN.)

Leave me alone! I am Onaje! Tell him to go away! Tell him. Get away from me! I'll be back on the road soon... Moving! Moving!...

DAN

Why you need a new name, William? "O-Na-Jay"?

(ONAJE laughs)

What are you laughing for?

ONAJE

...I can shut my eyes and concentrate and get it back. I get back into the highway lights. The slip, slip, slip of highway lights on white lines.

He gets out of the car. He kicks the car then HONKS THE HORN and shouts at the house.

ONAJE (CONT'D)

Come on, let's go! Come on!

BELLE

Look at him out by the car. The poor man is shaking. He's terrified. Why didn't you let him out like... I'm going out to...

RICHARD

No stay here. Wait! He'll be alright.

ONAJE

(to DAN and SARAH)

I don't need you all. I can get out of here.

ONAJE gets in the car.

SARAH

Don't you remember what you did?

ONAJE

Leave me alone!

DAN

Don't you remember what you did William?

ONAJE

Leave me alone! I'm sick of your speeches, speeches, speeches...

(screams, jumps out of car)

SARAH

I can still hear the white boy screaming. You were cruel...

DAN

You even scared the white cops the way you did it. I saw them pull you away and cut him down... Your mother is right. You were cruel...

DAN and SARAH encircle ONAJE.

ONAJE

(Deep in his own imagination -
he breaks.)

Oh, God ...Halfway through it I saw the ropes pull on his wrists as his knees gave when they said "Again... Again like your people got it... again." I felt each one coming. His face pushed against the tree as he was hanging there. I laid it back on the ground behind me and rolled back my shoulder and the elbow and my wrists jerked like a speed ball pitcher rocks and pivots all his weight behind the pitch and SNAP against his back, and SNAP, I saw it cut lines like power lines across the sky, SNAP like the strings in the meat at the butcher shop... and it bled.

I swear I was cutting into his lungs and SNAP, it splattered on the tree and the white faces laughing 'n cheering me on and it cut through white flesh like water. Splash. Splash red on the blue faces in the moonlight. It was past midnight when they cut him down. I can't reconcile it in my mind.. I was just doing the white man's bidding..

SARAH

(Interrupting ONAJE.)

Look at you!...

(beat)

Look at you, William!

(beat)

You can't come home.

One by one, SARAH and DAN slowly starts to turn their backs on ONAJE as he speaks to them...

ONAJE

(to SARAH and DAN)

A long time ago I was a child of yours.

I had everything back then, but I ain't like you all no more...

(Deep in his imagination.)

...The first few mornings with the sun behind me and the crows rising in front of me out of the dark fields, I was running west as fast as I could go, fearing cops and down on one knee before the semi's as they'd pass. I moved only to move. I felt no future. My past fell off of me like the abandoned clothes you see on the roads. My heart stopped and then started with a different rhythm. The rhythm of the passing lines and trip, trip, trip of neon highway lights at fifty-five or, ...windshield wipers clearing away the rain. My eyes opened and I was so lonely... I kept you all in my thoughts those Christmas days when the highways are strangely empty and newspapers would blow, flip-flopping slowly, under the bridge before me and out of the other side... I thought I'd stop some day. Come home and all but after all this time you don't want me. This is all I am. I have nothing. I have nothing to give in return. I got nothing. I just want to go! Go!

ONAJE reaches out to SARAH and DAN but they only glance back at him and exit as RICHARD, in the house bangs on the inside door of his father's house.

RICHARD

Come on out. I'm back home.

ONAJE

(Deep in his imagination to himself.)

I just want to find "understanding..." All these miles. All these boxes within boxes, every year after year, every year in the heart of this country, on the back of this planet, under these stars. I am with the truckers who share their cigarettes. With a woman in the boxcar who shares her food as we pass through orange groves in the spring time. With the Bible bus singing Christmas songs and they never once stopped singing when they pulled over and picked me up. No. Riding free on the back of a farm boy's motorcycle all the way across Nebraska. I know these people. They are kind. They are good. They have fed me. I have slept beneath their bridges. I am their witness to the suffering and to the kindness. I am the traveler. The witness to love and justice and deep forgiveness... I know you don't want me anymore... I just need to go. Go! Go! I am Onaje!

The LIGHTS GO DOWN on ONAJE standing alone on stage, and RISE again slightly on RICHARD and BELLE in the house.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. opens the door violently. He is drunk.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Two weeks out and you come back. I give you freedom and you don't want it. That's all I ever wanted.

RICHARD

(tries to hug him)

I came back. I got married. We are going to survive. I couldn't leave you like this. I was only back from prison for a week and you sent me off. We don't have to be afraid of nobody. Look.

(reaches in his pocket)

I got money! You can go. Like in the picture books...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

How we gonna survive? I gave you money and a car, and what did I tell you?

He throws RICHARD to the ground.

RICHARD

You told me to go.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I told you to "disappear."

RICHARD

I went. But I came back. I got lots of money.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

You came back. The dirt ball, Henderson, has been banging at the door ever since I got you that money. Saying you'd come back. And I lived here and didn't answer the door and prayed that you would not come back. There's nothing for you here. You could have been free!

RICHARD

(hugs his father)

Daddy, there's no reason to get excited. You helped me. I got money.

(Shows his father the money.)

Look here at me! We are going to clean the house now. Look I got more than we need!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

You could have been in Wyoming! Prison life is what you wanted. You could've been free by now! Where'd you think I got the money?

RICHARD

I got all the money we need!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Where'd you think I got the money?

(looks around)

...From returning Pepsi bottles or something? You know where I got it!

RICHARD

I'll pay the two thousand dollars. Look at all the money I got. You can go...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

You got money and you came back to me?

RICHARD

I couldn't leave you like that. I just got outta prison. I knew what they'd do to you...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
Do you really have money? Let me see it.

RICHARD gives him the money and he
spreads it out in front of him.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. (CONT'D)
Oh my God, it's real too...

RICHARD
Take some.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
Take some?

RICHARD
Go on.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
(scoops up some money)
And I can go?

RICHARD
..And come back when you're ready..

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
'N there's enough left over?... Hallelujah! I'm gone! All
right!

He starts for the door, but RICHARD
stops him and gestures to BELLE.

RICHARD
Daddy, this is my bride... This is Belle.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
Not bad... and she's in white too!

BELLE
(fiercely)
I'm a waitress. Can I smack 'um?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
May I kiss the bride?

RICHARD
I guess so, but only on the...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. kisses BELLE
sloppily.

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 ...Daddy. That's enough!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
 I'm sorry, I'm so drunk.

BELLE
 (wipes her mouth)
 Ick. Like father, like son. Where'd you guys learn to kiss like that... From a basset hound?

RICHARD
 (To RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.)
 See the car outside? I met a guy out on the road, outside of Cheyenne. Just get him to Unionville. You know who he is...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
 Who is he?

RICHARD
 You'll recognize him.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
 I can just go? I can take the car?

HENDERSON
 HENDERSON enters and begins banging on the door. ONAJE sees HENDERSON but HENDERSON does not see ONAJE. ONAJE hides behind the car.
 Hey! What's going on?
 (HENDERSON draws gun and bangs on the door.)
 Open up in there!

BELLE
 Jesus! Who is that?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
 It's Henderson!

BELLE
 The cops?

RICHARD
 Yeah... Jesus!

BELLE
 Richard don't let him hurt...

HENDERSON

(More aggressively banging on the door.)

Middleman open up in there!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

You got the money for Henderson too? For sure?

(RICHARD nods yes and RICHARD MIDDLEMAN SR. Aggressively starts toward the door.)

Then lets fuck with the damn bastard.

RICHARD aggressively blocks his father's efforts to get at the door.

HENDERSON

(More aggressively banging on the door.)

Open up in there, it's over!

(RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. more aggressively fights to get at the door.)

RICHARD

No! No! Dad you don't want to...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

(Yells at HENDERSON over RICHARD and through the door.)

Not by the hair on my chinney chin chin, you pig!

RICHARD aggressively blocks his father's efforts to get at the door.

RICHARD

Jesus Christ daddy! Stop this!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

...I'm here, you bill collecting limp dicked son of a bitch!

(To RICHARD)

We got the money right, don't we? I'm loving this.

RICHARD

(Continues to aggressively try to stop his father and block the door.)

Daddy! Daddy! This is not good!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
(Yells at HENDERSON over
RICHARD as he tries to get
to the door.)

Hey, did you see the book out about you, your wife and you're
kid? It's called the three little pigs!

RICHARD
(forcefully blocking the
door)

Hey, shut up, Daddy!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
...And one more thing Henderson... your family tree is a
bush...

(as an aside to RICHARD)
I don't know what that means, but its a good one!

HENDERSON
Okay, I'm coming in.

HENDERSON barges in with his gun
drawn.

RICHARD
Put the gun away. I got the money!

HENDERSON
The hell you do!

He hits RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. who
falls. RICHARD pushes HENDERSON
away and keeps HENDERSON and his
father separated.

RICHARD
Wait a minute! I've got the money!

BELLE
(to HENDERSON)
What the hell are you doing?

HENDERSON
(pointing at RICHARD
MIDDLEMAN, SR.)
I'm taking this man in.

BELLE
(BELLE jumps in front of
HENDERSON.)

Richard, I can't stand pricks like this!

(to HENDERSON)

You behave! You're a cop or something, right? He's got the money! You hear me? He's got the money! Look here! I'm showing you my this here little finger.

She aggressively shoves her little finger and fingernail up into HENDERSON'S face. It is a weapon arising from her fist.

...You act right or I reorganize your mind with this here fingernail up your nose!... You small town cops never messed with a waitress from Reno!

RICHARD

Look, I've got the money. Look.

(holds up the money)

Look two thousand dollars.

BELLE

(still threatening HENDERSON with her little finger)

...And if we need loose change, I'll take it out of your brain!.. And from the looks of you I'll still come up short!

HENDERSON

You got the money?

HENDERSON takes the money and begins to count it. In the car, ONAJE starts moving his arms in the same way he moved them in the first scene.

ONAJE

Oh please! I got to go. Go. Go... I feel the air of the earth, hot and cold in turbulence falling off of me. Faster! Faster! Faster! Am I moving?

BELLE

(To RICHARD)

Don't let no one hurt him!

ONAJE pulls in his arms, giving up his spirit momentarily.

HENDERSON

What's going on out there?

HENDERSON raises to look, but
RICHARD restrains him. HENDERSON
draws his gun.

I'm going out there...

RICHARD

(points at the money)

Okay time's up. I'm taking the money back.

HENDERSON

I'm not done counting it yet.

HENDERSON sits down again and keeps
counting the money.

ONAJE

...No, no, I'm not... How many years has it been...?

ONAJE drops his arms and sits
dejectedly.

RICHARD

(Pulls RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
to one side)

Get him out of here! He's got the keys. It's William...

HENDERSON

What's going on out there?

Stands up again with his gun.

RICHARD

(to HENDERSON)

You finished counting the money?

(HENDERSON indicates no and
sits down again to count the
money.)

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. grabs the
remnants of a six pack off the
table and stumbles out the kitchen
door and approaches ONAJE. RICHARD,
BELLE and HENDERSON freeze in place
and the lights go down on them and
raise dimly on RICHARD MIDDLEMAN,
SR. and ONAJE.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

William is that you? William? Are you William? You are, ain't
you? Let me take a look!

(He points at the house.)

Hey! You know who is in there? You gotta get out of here!

ONAJE

(beat)

Yeah. I saw him. You remember me?

ONAJE defensively climbs on top of the picnic table and looks down on RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Get away from me Middleman...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Yeah, I remember you! You was smart! We laughed together. You was "the science kid"...

(beat)

William I'm so goddamn glad to see you I may kiss you. So give me the keys!

ONAJE

Where you going?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Wyoming.

ONAJE realizes that RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. is too drunk to drive.

ONAJE

(beat)

Wyoming? You can't drive. That's in your picture books. You don't need a car for that.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

It's a dream I've had...

ONAJE

You know the roads all circle back on themselves... What you got planned for the loneliness that comes down on you? How come you want to do what I have done?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Looks up at ONAJE as ONAJE stands above him on the picnic table.

I'm sick of this shit! The Bay is polluted. The eels are steep. A bushel of crabs is hard 'n I got old. I don't understand. I want to go to Wyoming.

ONAJE

You're crazy. Where you come off wanting to be in my exile?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Why am I old and I got nothing? Why is the oyster beds and the bay birds gone? Why am I out in a boat at dawn and it breaks haze and everything is still gray? I don't understand what happened.

ONAJE

You been locked in the man machine! At home you just got your TV on tapping into the engine's brain!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

... What the hell does that mean?

ONAJE

It means there ain't no Wyoming no more... It is changed from the picture books.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

It is you? I remember...

ONAJE

What happened to the boy?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I took him up to the hospital when they dumped you on Route 50.

ONAJE

I didn't kill him?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

They put about two hundred stitches in his back. They shipped him back to Boston. You thought you killed him?

ONAJE

(Descends from the picnic table.)

Henderson's in there with you?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Yeah, but look at me William. What have I got to protect?

ONAJE

You got an acre of ground.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

A home? It don't mean shit, believe me.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. moves over
to the car, and gestures to the
road.

What's it like?

ONAJE

It's beautiful.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

It'll be beautiful?

ONAJE

Yeah. The country is beautiful. The people are great.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

After what you said?

ONAJE

I wanted a home...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

...And a boat that leaks and you don't know why you do it every
day?

ONAJE

My daddy told me some day I'd settle down. I'd understand.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Well my daddy said the same damn thing and I did it and I
still don't understand.

ONAJE

You know the people on the road who'll pick you up. They feed
you. They give you everything, like they been long'n to their
whole lives 'n they tell you beautiful long and lonely
stories on the ride about themselves. Things they wouldn't
even tell their loved ones...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I never been off the Eastern Shore... 'n I've been drinking for
two weeks. Come on, William. Henderson will be coming out.
They told you never come back!

ONAJE pins RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
against the car. He does not
resist.

ONAJE

Why did you do that to me?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

...I don't know... It's different now. It was a long time ago. It should never have happened like that...

He pushes ONAJE away and pins him against the picnic table. ONAJE does not resist.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. (CONT'D)

You want to fight? I got nothing... nothin'... nothin'. William look at me...

(beat)

They broke me too... It was different... But it was the same.

ONAJE

It's not the same. ...You got that car?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

You want a car? I got it for my boy so he could get out of here. And he came back!

ONAJE

Is it your car?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

This Goddamn car is like a boomerang. You throw it away and it Goddamn comes back.

ONAJE

I want your car.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I sure enough don't want this car!... I drive it to Wyoming and it would probably drive me back and I'd be married... Jesus Christ I couldn't take that again!

ONAJE

Give me the car.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

(searches glove compartment)

I'm sure the paperwork is in here somewhere. I'm never coming back to this place!

ONAJE

Then give me the car!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Hold on. I'm try'n to find the papers.

ONAJE

No conditions!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I bought the Goddamn thing with stolen money and its been punishing me ever since. I can't even get rid of it! It hates me! Here they are...

Hands ONAJE paperwork and ONAJE
gets in the driver's seat.

Wait! There's one condition.

ONAJE

There are no conditions!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Now hold on. Hold on. My boy says I must get you to Unionville. The only condition is you drive it first to Unionville.

ONAJE

Unionville?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Your daddy's back to crabbing. The canning factory closed last year.

ONAJE

And my momma?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

They got the same house in Unionville. I'm gonna tell him "Look who I brought home to his daddy!" Look at this! Your daddy won't mind see'n me a little drunk. He's gonna kiss me on the lips!

ONAJE

I don't think so...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

(explodes in joyous laughter)

I'm gonna knock on his door and I'm gonna say "Look who I brought home to you! Look! Look! Look!

(gets into passenger seat)

Get in the driver's seat... We're going to Unionville.

ONAJE

You going to Unionville?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Yeah, you remember the way, don't ya? I'll show you the way.
Come on!

ONAJE

Well damn, I'll be driving a car... We're gonna pick up
hitchhikers ya know.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Yeah, and we be tell'n them cosmic shit like you like!

ONAJE

And we'll give to them until the gas money runs out. Okay?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Hey, I got money. My boy brought back money.

ONAJE

I ain't done this in like, thirteen years. You ready to go?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

(grabs ONAJE by his shirt.)

Tomorrow when I've slept it off you goin' to dump me out on
that highway?

ONAJE

You don't think you'd get lost try'n to get home?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Yeah!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. sees the
sextant which has been left on the
dash board of the car.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. (CONT'D)

Hey, wait a minute... Is this yours?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. picks up the
sextant, looks at it carefully and
slides up to sit on the top of the
seat.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. (CONT'D)

A sextant? They have these things at the Maritime Museum in
St. Michaels now?

ONAJE slides up to the top of his own seat to sit next to RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. as he focuses the sextant on the sky.

ONAJE

You got to find your "true Zenith" from ninety degrees...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. adjusts the sextant and searches the sky.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I know... You don't remember?

ONAJE

(ONAJE does a double take.)

You know how to use one of these things?

(beat)

You know the sun and stars from being on the Bay?

(Beat)

I remember... Of course you do.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

(Holding the sextant. He looks away from ONAJE. Tears come to his eyes.)

This is how you been traveling?... All these years alone?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. still holding the sextant. Tears gather in his eyes.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry. Maybe I could have stopped it.

(beat)

I'm so sorry William. I was so scared I didn't even try.

(beat)

ONAJE

(ONAJE puts his arm around him to comfort him.)

It's going to be alright Old Man.

(ONAJE hugs RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. and then pulls his head into his shoulder and comforts him.)

We are going to be alright Old Man.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Are we going to Wyoming?

ONAJE

Let me look at you, old man. You think you are Wyoming? Look at you. You don't look like Wyoming to me.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Yeah, I want to go to Wyoming!

ONAJE

You are a lucky man. Your boy, he came all the way back here for you.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I want to go to Wyoming. I dreamed about it my whole life.

ONAJE

You serious about Wyoming?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

First we are going to Unionville. Come on you got to take me to Wyoming.

ONAJE

Yeah... You think Wyoming is where you want to go? ...Well, suit yourself Old Man.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

We are going to Wyoming? I'll have someone to travel with?

ONAJE

Yeah... On the way we'll be preaching a little "love and justice."

(beat)

You just lived it man! It just happened to you. You're different now.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Wait a minute! Maybe we got a problem. ...Nobody is going to get in this car with us! We're too Goddamn crazy!

ONAJE

...We got a big problem... No, you got a big problem...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

What?

ONAJE

I don't acknowledge the highway!

(beat)

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

That's okay. I don't acknowledge the cops!

(Both burst out laughing and
slide down into their seats
and ONAJE turns on the
lights and starts the
engine.)

Come on we're going to Unionville to find your daddy!

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE

ACT II, SCENE 15

It is now just fifteen minutes before dawn. As the stage lights go out on the car the headlights stay on. At Dan's house the stage lights raise over the kitchen table and the light over the kitchen table is on. DAN lifts his head off the table. He is at the end of his rope. He has been trying to fall asleep on and off all night, after going through the little wooden box on the kitchen table. The Bowie knife is on the table in front of him. He stands up from the table, picks up the Bowie knife, stabs it into the table, kicks over the chair in his frustration, goes to the ice box and gets a drink of water and turns out the light over the table, sits back down at the table and puts his head in his hands.

The car lights which have been on get turned off and ONAJE slowly gets out of the car as does RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. They stand with their backs to the car and look at the house.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
 (Now remarkably sober from
 the ride to Unionville and
 the story he has heard from
 ONAJE.)

Just tell your father what you told me.

ONAJE

No. I don't think so...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
 They have been waiting for you William.

ONAJE

If Henderson finds out I'm back...?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
 Tell them about "living in another man's mind". How "people
 can be different." Tell them what you told me coming up
 here.

ONAJE

(Looking around at the land
 and grounds.)

Listen to this place. It is quiet like a graveyard.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
 (Looking around at the land
 and grounds.)

Is it always quiet like this in the mornings?

ONAJE

Yeah, it's quiet here... Why am I stopping here?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
 So much happened here. So fast. And so long ago. But it's
 over now William. You came back.

ONAJE

...It is still the same. Maybe a different picnic table but
 the table is in the same place. The house is the same. You
 recognize the smell of the Bay...? I can't be here.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
 You've got to go in. I'm not going in.

ONAJE

I thought you wanted to see Dan.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

No, I'm staying in the car.

ONAJE

It's not the place. It's the people I'm scared of.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

They've been waiting for you William.

ONAJE

I'm different than I was.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

We all are William.

ONAJE

William is gone. He can't come home.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

You go knock on your door. Once you walk in there you all will change together. That is what your family always did.

From upstage RICHARD and BELLE
enter as ONAJE turns away to
consider RICHARD MIDDLEMAN'S SR.'s
last comment.

RICHARD

(To BELLE)

Look there is the car. They got here.

BELLE

Richard, you think you are a little bit pig headed? He told you he didn't want to go to Royal Oak. He sure as hell don't want to be here...

ONAJE

(To RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.)

...My mother will be saying: "How can you be looking like that now?" And Dan's "Speeches, speeches, speeches...?" ...He will be looking at me and saying "William you never going to be free."

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

It is different now. You are Onaje.

RICHARD

(To RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.)

He hasn't been in to see him yet?

BELLE

For Christ sake Jesus, Richard, what did I tell you? Why are we here Richard? ...Never mind, don't answer. What happened to Wyoming?

ONAJE

We still going to Wyoming?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

You've got the keys.

DAN stands up from the kitchen table and turns on the kitchen light over the table and goes to the stove to boil water for his coffee and to start cooking breakfast. ONAJE, RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR., RICHARD and BELLE stop in their tracks as they see the kitchen light go on.

ONAJE

Somebody is up and in the kitchen.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Go on William. Go to the door.

DAN

Picks up the picture of William from the box and carries it to the door and steps outside.

(Beat)

Sarah? Where are you? Come home!

I can't sleep without you here... Find a star...

(DAN stares at the stars.)

Sarah... That's what I told him. "Find a star above your house and go away from it, if you want, but you always know where it is so you can come back. You just follow that star." I'm sure I told him that. Maybe I didn't say it exactly... but he knows. He knows that already. Did you pick a star? Sarah?

(DAN re-enters the house and starts cooking breakfast and making the coffee.)

ONAJE

I am not William anymore.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

William. You've got to go in there!

RICHARD

You've got to go in there. Your father needs you.

ONAJE

No.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

You can't run away anymore. No matter what happens you got to go in there!

ONAJE

(To RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.)

Get back in the car. I'm not going in there.

ONAJE gets in the driver's seat.
RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. gets back in
the passenger seat. DAN returns to
the kitchen table in silence as his
breakfast cooks and the coffee
water boils.

(From upstage SARAH enters
holding a flashlight.)

SARAH sees the car and points her
light at it. The others duck down
beside or inside the car when they
see the light get turned on. They
can't see the person holding the
light and only recognize Sarah when
they hear her voice.

SARAH

(Speaking to herself.)

Who is this? They coming for you, Dan? Henderson finally...

(She starts toward the house
but ONAJE calls to her.)

ONAJE

Momma?

(ONAJE gets out of the
driver's seat of the car.)

Momma?

SARAH

Where is that voice coming from..?

ONAJE

...Far away?

SARAH

Far away?

(She spins and shines her
light on ONAJE' face.)

It's not you?

ONAJE

I'm so sorry.

SARAH

It's not you? ...William?

ONAJE

I'm so sorry, Momma. I never meant to cause all that trouble
for you both.

SARAH

Let me touch you... Are you alive?

ONAJE

I'm alright. I've just been so lonely...

SARAH

(SARAH touches his face.)

Are you alive? William?

ONAJE

I've got to go. I don't want to cause more trouble for you
now.

SARAH

...I gave up. After awhile I gave up. I gave up on you
being alive.

ONAJE

I am so sorry. I couldn't come back after what I did to you
and Dan. To that boy.

SARAH

Dan has been falling apart since you been gone...

ONAJE

I'll be going now.

SARAH

No. He will want to see you. Just stay a while.

ONAJE

No.

SARAH

He has been waiting for you all these years. All these years William.

ONAJE

He has been waiting on me?

SARAH

Both of us.

ONAJE

If you will take me back...? Will Dan take me back?

SARAH

I left this house last night. Your father, his mind's not right with that boy coming back. I couldn't stand to see him falling apart anymore... Then I couldn't stand to be without him.

ONAJE

(Pointing over at RICHARD
MIDDLEMAN, SR.)

He brought me here.

SARAH

Who brought you back home?

ONAJE

(Pointing over at RICHARD
MIDDLEMAN, SR.)

Yes, I want you to meet...

SARAH

No. You got to come see your father.

ONAJE

No. I don't want to see Dan. I can't...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

(To ONAJE)

Yes, you can... William... Yes you can.

(Coming from the car to meet
SARAH.)

Sarah? I brought William home... Dan's not right? I want to see Dan!

SARAH

(To RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.)

No. Dan told you to stay away.

DAN stands and goes over to pour a cup of coffee from the coffee pot on the stove but before he drinks from it he puts it in front of him on the table and folds his hands to say grace.

DAN

Lord Bless this food...

SARAH

(To RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.)

I'm coming home from leaving him last night. I don't want Dan to see you being here. You leave us now. Dan is not right.

DAN

(DAN puts his head in his hands. He can't finish saying grace.)

...And our lives to your service?

(DAN stands up from the table and points at the coffee)

Take it! Take what's left in the name of "my service" to you. You are a "just" God? So "just" take what's left. You take my son? I wait thirteen years and that ain't "just" enough? You take my Sarah. Why did you need to take her? Why? She walks out on me because she is tired of hearing me beg for justice? But that ain't "just" enough?

(Beat)

Now you take my sleep? All night the windows open in the heat and the Bay out there. That coffee it won't keep me awake all day while the crabs are running and Henderson watching me as I go out in my motor boat to empty my crab traps and motor back to have him waiting on me as I walk the dock. ...Or maybe I don't even get there.

He gets his Bowie knife and pulls it out of the table and he goes to the door and opens it, goes down the steps, looks around and addresses the world outside.

Henderson? My door is open! You don't have to be bust'n in this time.

DAN (CON'T)

I got no locks keeping you out, but it is not going to be like last time.

(Beat)

Sarah took our money. You can't find her? She said she don't know where she is going. We never stole nothing. There is no money now even if we did.

(laughs)

I don't even have "just" enough. Take the coffee off the stove or out of my cup. It's cold by now. I can't say it... "Grace?" Maybe you can "give me your grace?" That's what Sarah says I need. But I've learned your justice. No white man will ever come in my house again! I give you that! I will promise you that!

(DAN sits down on the steps, stabs the Bowie knife into the steps next to him and puts his head in his hands.)

I pray to you just let me sleep?

ONAJE

(Slowing approaches DAN and speaks to him.)

Dan?

DAN

(Lifts his head out of his hands.)

...And now you playing tricks on me? I beg for "grace" and you send me nightmares? From the last picture I got to the shadows in the morning - the ghosts of what I love?

ONAJE

I'm home.

DAN

(Begging)

Let me sleep?

ONAJE

Will you let me come home?

DAN

Go away! Just let me sleep. Just for a little while...

(He sees SARAH.)

Sarah? You two gone now? Just for awhile?

SARAH

Dan? Dan just touch him.

DAN

Oh to touch him.

SARAH

Dan? I am back and William is too.

(SARAH kisses his hands.)

Come here William. Come here. Touch your father's hand.

DAN

(To them both.)

Are you here...? Will you stay?

(ONAJE touches DAN'S open hand.)

William, I have always been your father. I am your father now.

(ONAJE is reunited with his father.)

DAN (CON'T)

(Pointing at RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.)

Why is that man here? Sarah? That man can't be coming on our land again!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I didn't break this time, Dan. Dan, I didn't break this time! I wasn't going to sign no papers on you, Dan. My boy, he brought me money... He didn't have to do that. Your boy he came back too. I paid off Henderson for the money that I stole. Dan, you don't have to worry about down at the docks.

DAN

That don't matter.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

You don't need no alibi.

DAN

That doesn't matter!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Let William tell you! About what happened...!

DAN

No Middleman!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

...They traveled together. William was afraid to come home but my boy and Belle...

DAN

(To SARAH and ONAJE.)

Get him off this land! I want us safe as a family!

SARAH

We are safe Dan. Why don't you see that? Henderson has got his money Dan. He's not coming after you.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

(Pointing at RICHARD and BELLE who are standing over next to the car.)

...And Dan! William, he married my boy and Belle while they were coming home to me.

DAN

Married them? How can he do that?

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

They did it from their heart Dan.

DAN

No! Middleman, I am thankful to you for my son... but...

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I didn't do it.

DAN

No. Middleman, get in your car.

SARAH

Dan?

DAN

Get in your car Middleman!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I can't...

DAN

Middleman, I'm telling you get in your car and drive out of here!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

I can't. I gave the car to William.

ONAJE

(To DAN)

Daddy you are with friends now. We are safe with him.

DAN

No! What is the matter with you?

ONAJE

Richard and Belle drove me across this country to bring me here. Let's go in and get breakfast together...

DAN

(Violently blocking the steps
to the kitchen.)

No! No! You hear!

DAN grabs the Bowie knife from out
of the stairs and holds it ready to
defend his house.

(To RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.)

Middleman, I hit you before! But I was gentle on you then.
I'll hurt you this time!

SARAH

No Dan! What's the matter with you? Put that knife down!

DAN

That white man is not going into my house.

SARAH

It's your anger Dan? Is it going to live forever? God gives
you everything you ever prayed for but you can't give up your
hate?

DAN

Why should I?

SARAH

Dan! I'm not going into that house until that man goes in
first!

ONAJE

(To the others.)

Everybody wait!

(To his father.)

Nobody is going into the house until you say so.

DAN

Then send him home! You don't think I justifiably hate that
white man? Get him off this land!

ONAJE

(Exploding)

He has been loyal to you. He has sacrificed for you. He has given to you from his heart! Dan, "Do unto others," this man is family to us now!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Alright Dan, I'll leave if you want. I apologize for what I did to you and this family. I have always loved your boy like he was a son. Remember before I had my boy how we would go down to the docks and we taught William the stars? I heard you tell him "Pick out a star over your house..."

ONAJE

Maybe we both heard that together for the first time back down on the docks. We both looked up to you. We looked up to a loving man. I always thought you meant "home."

DAN

I did.

ONAJE

(Pointing at RICHARD
MIDDLEMAN, SR.)

Why did he come back here with me? He's never lived in anything but a house, Dan.

DAN

...I know.

ONAJE

ONAJE comforts his father and puts his arms around him.

It is going to be alright Old Man. It is going to be alright. We are talking "love" and "grace" and "forgiveness" Daddy. Right here. Right now.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

...Dan. We are good now. Dan look at me. I'm like you Dan... I'm like you now Dan. My boy came home. Now Dan you listen to this: William? Tell the story that you told me... about "living in another man's mind."

DAN

No Middleman! Go home.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

(Starts laughing.)

I can't. I've only got a house in Royal Oak, Dan. ...And I gave that away back when I wanted to go to Wyoming...

DAN

What has happened to you, William? What have you forgotten? What can't you remember?

RICHARD

(Goes over to take his father
back to the car.)

Daddy come on. They want us to go.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Okay, I'll go now.

(RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR. turns
to go back to the car.)

BELLE

For Christ sake Jesus, you people are so mixed up!
(to ONAJE)

Onaje, you want us to go?

ONAJE

No.

DAN

No? He is never going into my house again! Never! Send him home!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

It is okay, Onaje. I'll go now. I understand.

ONAJE

(Grabs RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.
and turns him around and
points at the sky.)

Pick a star!

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

Pick a star?

ONAJE

Yes! Pick a star above this house...

(ONAJE hugs RICHARD
MIDDLEMAN, SR.)

Thank you old man. Thank you for who you are.

DAN

(DAN still holding the
knife.)

No! No! No! No! No!

...Sarah, I will make breakfast.

DAN turns to go into the house to
make breakfast.

(DAN quietly starts to cry.)

...We can eat at the picnic table. We can eat at the picnic
table...

SARAH

I'll make us breakfast, Dan. This is your land. Now you go
sit down at the picnic table.

DAN goes over to the picnic table
and stabs the knife into the table,
sits and puts his head in his
hands.

RICHARD MIDDLEMAN, SR.

No wait? Sarah wait! Onaje, you tell your father your
story. Tell them about "living in another man's mind."

ONAJE

ONAJE stands behind DAN and as DAN
sits at the picnic table facing the
audience. ONAJE lays his hands on
DAN'S shoulders as he begins to
speak and the others gather around
to listen.

Daddy, you can leave that knife right here. Nobody is going
into your house until you say so. Listen to me... We are
good now. We are all good now. ...Listen to me... A few
days ago I was kneeling and begging for "love and
forgiveness" and a boy in a cowboy hat and a woman in a
waitress uniform picked me up outside of Cheyenne...

As ONAJE tells his story a blanket of stars illuminates the upstage and the ceiling of the theater and the characters stop moving and slowly turn into silhouettes as the dawn begins.

BLACKOUT.

END OF PLAY