

TEARS OF THE SOUL

A Play in Two Acts

By Angela Wilson

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A Play in Two Acts

By Angela Wilson

SYNOPSIS: 1968. The most turbulent year in America. Racial unrest and violent protests in the streets. Social division and a nation on the verge of collapse. Internal family and external community tensions fueled by differing political perspectives. *Tears of the Soul* is set for two months and four days during the sanitation workers strike in Memphis, TN. There is a war raging in Vietnam. Black soldiers dying on the battlefield are still being buried in segregated cemeteries back home. The Black Power movement questions whether nonviolent protest makes any sense. The leader of the Civil Rights Movement, a messianic preacher of nonviolence, dies a violent death on the balcony of a Memphis hotel.

Fred Barnes, a striking Memphis sanitation worker and protester tries to claim his manhood in a society that has long denied it. He's head of a strong Black family that is being challenged from internal generational family tensions and external social injustice and chaos. Vivian Barnes, Fred's wife, tries to hold onto sense and sensibility in the family while three young adult children struggle for clarity about their own identities. Meet the Barnes family, a family that is seemingly coming apart at the seams.

DURATION: 120-140 minutes.

SETTING: Memphis, TN.

TIME: 1968

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 females, 7 males)

VIVIAN BARNES (f).....Staunch and solid wife of Fred; devoted mother of three. Early 40s. Unwavering in her dedication to family values. Selfless and considerate, she struggles with the changing family dynamics.
(205 lines)

- FRED BARNES (m).....Hardworking blue-collar sanitation worker husband of Vivian. Frustrated by unfair and unsafe working conditions, Fred joins the strike to stand up for his rights. He gets caught up in the struggle and sometimes loses touch with what's important in life. *(87 lines)*
- DEXTER BARNES (m)Coming of age in a troubled world, Dexter is confused about the best way to handle the challenges of being a young black man. He has become involved with a black power militant group. *(41 lines)*
- IDA MAE BRADLEY (f).....The 60-something widowed mother of Vivian who is living with them. Ida Mae is witty and wise, and she has seen life at its best and worse. *(102 lines)*
- GINA BARNES (f).....Studious high school freshman who reads a lot about history, civil rights, and the black power movement and finds it difficult to come to grips with the hatred in the world. *(31 lines)*
- JAMES BARNES (m)Recently back from Vietnam where he sustained an injury from a mortar attack and has shrapnel in his left leg. Drafted into the United States Marine Corps two years prior, James has come back a changed man. *(31 lines)*
- TURNER DAVIS (m).....Blue-collar worker, sanitation worker, close friend of Fred and husband of Maxine. Turner is a sanitation worker along with Fred who is on strike. Turner is affable and more laid back than Fred, he and Maxine have struggled through the years. *(33 lines)*
- MAXINE DAVIS (f)Vivian's oldest and best friend and wife of Turner. Maxine is stressed out about the strike and how they are going to make ends meet. She confides in Vivian about

her fears concerning their financial condition and other struggles that are having a negative effect on their marriage. *(54 lines)*

SONNY (m).....Leader of the Intruders, he is educated and militant. *(9 lines)*

BRANDON (m).....Member of the Intruders, educated and militant. *(5 lines)*

EILEEN BRIDGEWATER (f).....Caucasian Civil Rights Activist and community organizer with a passion for justice and equality. *(19 lines)*

PASTOR THOMPSON (m).....Pastor of local church who is friends with the Barnes family and a special friend of Ida Mae. *(18 lines)*

SET

BARNES HOME: 1968 in Memphis, TN. Modest home, but nice and tidy home, including living room and kitchen. The front door is situated stage right and enters the living room. The kitchen is stage left with exit off stage to implies other areas of the home such as bedrooms. There is a large projection screen where images will be projected at various times throughout the show.

Living Room: Couch (preferably 6-8 feet from the front door) with crocheted blanket across the back. There is an end table on the right of the couch. The end table has a rotary dial phone and a lamp on it. To the right of that is an a large chair or recliner for Fred and behind the chair upstage right is a coat rack. There is a coffee table in front of the couch with a floral centerpiece. Upstage right behind and to the left of the couch is a rocking chair for Ida Mae. To the left of the rocking chair would be the kitchen. Television may be real or implied and is located downstage right.

Kitchen: A kitchen table with 3 chairs, none with back of chair facing the audience. There is a fruit bowl in the middle of the table. Behind the table, stage left are appliances: a stove and refrigerator with a counter/cabinet (or table in between for dishes.) Boxes of cereal or boxed food is visible on top of refrigerator. A coffee pot and tea kettle are seen regularly. A cupboard for dishes is optional.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES**ACT ONE**

- SCENE 1: Us Women
- SCENE 2: Family Woes
- SCENE 3: Manhood
- SCENE 4: The Foiled March
- SCENE 5: Power and Pride
- SCENE 6: Identity & 'Nam
- SCENE 7: Having Company
- SCENE 8: Homecoming

ACT TWO

- SCENE 1: Can't Take it No More
- SCENE 2: Man's World
- SCENE 3: Hope & Hate
- SCENE 4: Disruption
- SCENE 5: Just Don't Get No Better

PRODUCTION NOTES

Although not written in straight dialect, some of the phrases are in broken English or grammatically incorrect. This is intentionally done to help convey a southern drawl or accent.

Pace is upbeat and rhythmic with feisty characterizations of ordinary men and women and soulful humor. Great balance of seriousness and levity. Video clips and music are suggested and stylized to 1960s R&B soul music. Note: Video images and music may have to be licensed due to copyright laws. Comparable music and videos will work just as well. Directors and producers are free to use their own interpretative music and video images.

This play contains suggestions for the performance of a musical work (either in part or in whole) and video/photo images. Heuer Publishing LLC has not obtained performing rights for these music, video, or photographic works. The direction of such works is only a playwright's suggestion, and the play producer should obtain such permissions on their own.

COSTUMES

- VIVIAN** – House Dress, Floral Dress, House slippers, Solid Dress, Yellow housedress, Floral apron, Hosiery, Hair curlers, Hair clips, Pearl Necklace, Pearl earrings, Wristwatch, Black or brown low heel shows, Black pumps or stage shoes, Short curly wig (pin curls)
- FRED** – Coveralls (may have an extra pair for lipstick stain or hide initially), Flannel Shirt, Blue jeans, Work boots, Newsboy hat, Sports coat, Golf shirt, Dress pants, Oxford shoes or loafer, Black socks, Lumberman’s jacket
- DEXTER** – High School Jacket, Newsboy Hat, Button Down Plaid Shirt, Button Down Cardigan, Jeans, Dress Pants, Black Leather Jacket, Black Turtleneck, Black Slacks, Black Beret, Black Sunglasses, Black Socks
- IDA MAE** – Floral Housedress, Skirt and Blouse, Black Dress (Dressy), Low Heel Shoes, Small Pearls Necklace, Apron, House Slippers, Clips for Wig, Short Grey Wig, Dressy Costume Jewelry, Hosiery, Loafer Or Oxford Shoe
- GINA** – Button Shirt & Knee Length Skirt, Knee Socks, Mary Jane Flats, Plain Black Pumps, Jumper Dress with Button Down Underneath, Nice Dress for Party, Outer Trench Coat, Hosiery, Socks
- JAMES** – Camouflage Uniform/Hat, Green Undershirt, Dog Tag, Military Boots, Striped Sweater or Daddy O Shirt, Dress Pants, Loafers
- TURNER** – Coveralls, Flannel Shirt, Jeans Or Khakis, Loafers and oxford shoe, Button Down Shirt, Argyle Sweater Vest, Dress Pants, Black Loafers
- MAXINE** – Overcoat, 3 Skirts and 3 Blouses or Sweaters, Hosiery, Chiffon Head Scarves, Black And Brown Pumps, Bob Wig, Pocketbook, Gloves
- EILEEN** – Black Jumper Dress, White Button-Down, Trench Coat, Black Mary Jane Shoes, Cardigan, Skirt, Hosiery
- SONNY** – Daddy O Shirt, Black Pants, Black Leather Jacket, Black Beret, Black Sunglasses, Black Shoes, Black Socks
- BRANDON** – Dashiki, Black Pants, Black Leather Jacket, Black Beret, Black Sunglasses, Black Shoes, Black Socks
- PASTOR THOMPSON** – Clergy Collar, Dress Pants, Overcoat, Black Shoes, Black Fedora Hat

HAND PROPS

- rotary telephone
- ironing board
- iron
- metal lunch boxes
- brown bag lunches
- photo album
- mail
- eyeglasses (Fred)
- magazines
- place settings for 4
- fruit bowl
- water pitcher
- glasses for water
- 2 coffee cups
- 2 teacups with tea bags
- cream and sugar dishes
- two pots
- coffee pot
- tea kettle
- baking/serving dishes for meatloaf, sides, and rolls
- cane or crutch
- small handgun
- small plates and cups for party
- serving trays for party
- pillow
- blanket
- briefcase
- 1950s radio
- 1950s television set (optional)
- qty 2 - 24 x 20 printed signs "I AM A MAN"
- aluminum foil

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

TEARS OF THE SOUL premiered at the Chesapeake Arts Center in Brooklyn Park, MD. This production included the following cast:

VIVIAN BARNES	Joelle Denise
FRED BARNES	Pierre Walters
DEXTER	Devin Jerome King
IDA MAE	Regina Gail Malloy
GINA	Leah Mallory -
JAMES	Craig Simms
TURNER	Robert Freemon
MAXINE	Michal R. Johnson
EILEEN	Sharon Goldner
SONNY	Michael "Hoochiman" Dandridge
BRANDON	Faith Ore
PASTOR THOMPSON	Dr. Gregory Branch

DO NOT COPY

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

TIME: 1968

SETTING: Memphis, TN. Barnes living room. VIVIAN is ironing laundry and IDA MAE is in the kitchen drinking tea or coffee and reading the newspaper. We hear the organ music from the fictitious soap opera, "The Edges of Midnight."

AT START: VIVIAN is ironing clothes; an ironing board is upstage center behind the couch and there is a basket on the floor adjacent to ironing board. VIVIAN is trying to focus on the television. She is watching her favorite soap opera, "The Edges of Midnight," and IDA MAE is sitting at the kitchen table with coffee and a magazine and tries to start a conversation with her.

VIDEO: Black screen with white letters: In February 1968, about 1300 African American sanitation workers went on strike.

SOUND: Soap Opera Organ Opening Music and image of the opening graphic with fake soap opera name (i.e. The Edges of Midnight) shows on screen.

Lights up on Barnes house.

IDA MAE: I think I may be catching something, my throat is feeling kind of scratchy and I ain't been sleeping well.

VIVIAN: (*Trying to watch the television.*) Uh huh.

IDA MAE: I think I'm going to make me up some chicken soup, the spicy kind.

VIVIAN: (*Distracted.*) Uh huh, that's good Mama.

IDA MAE: (*Realizing VIVIAN is not paying attention.*) I think I'm going to throw some chicken's feet and duck's head in there too.

VIVIAN: Good Mama, that's real nice.

IDA MAE: You haven't heard a word I've said, have you?

VIVIAN: Huh? Mama, I thought we agreed we would talk during commercials when the stories are on. You know I been waitin' since Friday to see this one. (*Animated as if sharing good gossip.*) I think Orin and Julie are gettin' married and Ernie might find out about Ruth's affair with Harry, it's gettin' good.

IDA MAE: Them ain't even real people and you gettin' all wrapped up in their lives like you know 'em or something.

VIVIAN: Mother dear, that's why they called stories, I know it ain't real. Shhhhhhhh okay, it's back on.

IDA MAE: So, you like stories, I mean we got enough stories and drama down at my church, put them folks to shame....

VIVIAN: Mama... shhh (*Someone knocks on the door.*) (*Exasperated.*) Oh I can't believe this. (*Goes to door and opens it.*)

MAXINE: (*Enters.*) Oooo chile it is cold out there! Hi Miss Ida. Girl when is this strike gonna be over? (*Notices VIVIAN'S expression.*) What's wrong with you?

VIVIAN: Nothing.

IDA MAE: She tryna' watch them stories, the Edges of night, about a bunch of rich, crazy white folks.

MAXINE: Oh girl, I'm sorry, I didn't pay no attention to the time.

VIVIAN: (*To herself.*) 30 minutes, all I ask for is 30 minutes a day just to do something I want to do but nooo...

MAXINE: Vivian I can come back later, I didn't mean...

VIVIAN: It's okay, it's halfway over now... so what is it you talking about today child?

MAXINE: (*Clearly agitated.*) I'm so sick of this strike. It's been over a month now. Now they was already paying wages so low, we barely makin' it, and now with no money coming in... it's awful hard Vivian.

VIVIAN: (*Trying to be somewhat comforting.*) I know how you feel Max but these men have to stand up for what's right you know? I hate it's happening this way, but I do understand what they doin' and why they doin' it.

MAXINE: Oh I understand it too. After Cole and Walker was killed by that raggedy truck, somebody had to stand up for them. They lost their lives because this city, and this mayor—and that man STILL won't do the right thing. It's so awful what happened to them men.

VIVIAN: It is awful, but I truly think things are about to change since Dr. Martin Luther King and the rest of them done came to town. I hear they trying to get things organized and they know how to speak to them folks down at City Hall. Said he's going to come back and lead a march. Help them men get they union recognized. So all is not lost Maxine, these things take time that's all.

MAXINE: Seems to be taking an awful long time. *(Beat.)* Vivian, well you know me and Turner didn't do things like you and Fred and we ain't got no money saved. Matter of fact I even had to borrow some money from my mama. Turner did not like that at all, but I didn't know what else to do. I couldn't let our lights get turned off... but you know he's a proud man.

VIVIAN: Yes, he is and so is my Fred and that's why they carryin' them signs, "I AM a MAN." They feelin' real frustrated right now and they got good cause because these folks in power treating them like they ain't nothin'. I'm hoping this will be over soon. You know they giving out food down at Clayburn Temple trying to help the families out but Maxine, now you let me know if you need something. I got a little something tucked away. Now you and me go way back girl, you better let me know, you hear?

MAXINE: I know Vivian but I am not going to impose on you and Fred.

VIVIAN: Who said anything about Fred? I said let me know, now do you hear me?

MAXINE: Yes, girl I hear you. I better be getting' on. I just stopped by on the way to the beauty parlor. Gonna see if Miss Thelma will let me shampoo some of the ladies. *(Pause.)* You know you got a heart of pure gold Vivian.

VIVIAN: Oh girl...

MAXINE: I mean it, you always thinking about others.

VIVIAN: Okay Maxine, *(Modestly.)* I hear you and thank you, go on now, bye.

MAXINE: Bye girl. *(Hugs VIVIAN.)*

VIVIAN: *(Chuckles to herself as she closes the door, starts walking toward the kitchen.)* That Maxine is something else.

IDA MAE: So, you got a little something tucked away, do you?

VIVIAN: Mama, that conversation was between me and Maxine. *(Walks over to counter, pours herself a cup of coffee and joins her mother at the table.)*

IDA MAE: Well ain't nobody asked me if I need anything.

VIVIAN: Mama you get a nice check every month and it takes care of you, you are living here not paying any rent. We pay all the bills. What is it that you could possible need?

IDA MAE: Don't worry about it; you can't afford what I need.

VIVIAN: So what does that mean? You don't drive, so it can't be no car. You said you don't want to live alone, so that ain't it.

IDA MAE: Well I didn't say that exactly...

VIVIAN: Oh, so you do want to live alone?

IDA MAE: Well no, that ain't exactly it either...

VIVIAN: Lord, Mama what are you talking about? *(Beat.)* You still thinking about a man ain't you?

IDA MAE: I just said you can't afford what I need. Furthermore, if I was talking about a man, what's wrong with that? Your daddy died, I didn't.

VIVIAN: Mama... I really can't stand it when you talk like that.

IDA MAE: *(Stands up, puts her cup in sink or on counter.)* Like what? Like a warm blooded middle aged *(VIVIAN gives her a look.)* well, mature woman who likes to do more than cook and clean and go to church. When you get older, that don't mean you just dry up and die, shoot my mind is sharp honey, got some aches and pains but I've still got the activities of my limbs... *(Starts making funny dance movements.)*

VIVIAN: Okay Mama, I get it, I get it, please stop. You are so improper. *(Beat.)* Seriously though I had something I wanted to talk to you about. Have you noticed that Dexter been acting strange lately?

IDA MAE: *(Sits back down.)* Lately? He been strange ever since he was born far as I can tell. When you brought him home, he had that oversized head, remember? I told you then, I'm a little concerned about this one.

VIVIAN: See, you tell me I don't come and talk to you about much and then when I try....

IDA MAE: Oh Vivian quit being so stuffy. Sure, he's acting strange. That's what children his age do. He about to graduate high school, he's thinking about possibly going away to college. He ain't never been away from Memphis.

VIVIAN: Well I don't even know about college with this strike going on. It don't seem to be no end in sight. You know Fred has just been so proud, telling everybody his son is going to college, first one in the family hopefully to finish; I think it would kill him for Dexter not to be able to go; but everything is so uncertain right now.

IDA MAE: Well why don't you ask him what's his problem?

VIVIAN: I've tried, he just says nothing, and I noticed he's making it in here right at curfew, I mean cuttin' it close. He didn't use to do that.

IDA MAE: Well you ain't gonna understand everything they do. You just have to trust that you raised them right.

VIVIAN: He just seems so different.

IDA MAE: Well Vivian remember when him and Irma's boy got followed and harassed by the police on their way home from the library? He was really upset about that.

VIVIAN: Mama, you know what?—You might be right. Even though it was some months back, I would say it was after that happened that his behavior began to change. I'll try to talk to him again.

IDA MAE: That's probably all it is. Don't worry yourself too much about it. He's alright Vivian.

VIVIAN: I hope so. With James over there in Vietnam fighting for God knows what; and he hasn't even written in a while, and now Dexter acting out, it's a lot to deal with Mama.

IDA MAE: You stop worrying about them boys, they are going to be alright. *(Changing subjects, trying to get VIVIAN'S mind off her worries.)* Shoot, you need to be worrying about what I need. *(Starts doing her dance moves again.)*

VIVIAN: *(Gets up, laughs as she observes her mother's movements.)* Lord help her Jesus.

Lights fade IDA MAE walks offstage, VIVIAN is standing there looking after her, shaking her head.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

SETTING: *Barnes family home. FRED has come home from work. His picket sign is visible hanging on the coat rack. He is sitting at the kitchen table looking at mail.*

AT START: *VIVIAN is preparing him a plate in the kitchen.*

Lights up on Barnes home.

FRED: *(Sitting at the kitchen table.)* I'm really frustrated right now, Viv. The Mayor is just dead set on ignoring our union. Even though Dr. King is helping us now, he still won't budge. *(Picking up the mail.)* Things are getting tighter and tighter around here.

VIVIAN: We're doin' okay honey. We still got some of the money left we been savin' and if we watch what we do it's gonna last us for a little while. *(Knows FRED won't be pleased with her ironing for other people, she tries to slip it in.)* Plus, I've started taking in some ironing, so I can help out.

FRED: Now Viv, I know you mean well and I don't mean no harm, but I don't think you really understand what's going on.

VIVIAN: *(Puts his plate on the table and sits down.)* How can you say that Fred? I've been keeping up with everything. I'm part of this too.

FRED: Now Viv, these people don't mean to help us in any way at all. After Cole and Walker got crushed to death in that truck, you know what they did? They gave their families a month's wages and \$500. \$500! Now how is that supposed to take care of they families? What are they supposed to do now, huh? All they was trying to do was to get some shelter from the rain cause we ain't got nowhere proper to go to take a break and what happens? They get crushed to death 'cause the equipment is so old and barely maintained. I swear these people, they cut us down on every turn and it just don't make no sense. I been trying to save money so my kids could go to college and not have to break they backs emptying garbage cans like I do every day. I work all these hours so you can stay home, and take care of our home, and take care our children, not for you to be taking in no ironing.

VIVIAN: Fred, it's just temporary since ain't nothing coming in. Now I know how hard you work and that's why I just don't mind helping some. I'm sure this will be over soon.

FRED: *(Standing up.)* We go through hell everyday just so we can provide for our families, keep a roof over our heads, keep food on the table and let our children know that they can be somebody someday. I'm supposed to show them that, be that example for them—I'm their father. Where are they anyway?

VIVIAN: They'll be coming along shortly, they stopped off at the library. Now Fred, you are a wonderful father and really, I don't mind, I...

FRED: *(Interrupting VIVIAN and not to anyone in particular.)* They don't want us to have nothing Vivian! I swear if God put any strength inside me—I need it right now because I can't let them take everythang I got. See people can take things, money, clothes, houses, cars, but when they trying to take away the very core of who I am, my manhood, when they try to cut me down so I can't stand anymore or worse, I give up, then they truly done destroyed me and I can't let them do that. I can't let them take my dignity, my mind. *(Sits back down.)*

VIVIAN: Fred, I understand, I really do. *(Goes and tries to comfort him.)*

FRED: *(Pulls away.)* I'm not so sure you understand this thing, Vivian. *(A little patronizing.)* You ain't no man. Now we tryna have this union and that means we got rights, but that mayor won't listen to a thing we has to say. We go out there into these people's yards and empty them 50-gallon drums, getting all dirty and smelly and then a little white boy thinks he has the right to call a grown man a boy just 'cause he's white. How is that right, Vivian?

VIVIAN: Umph. That's a shame. *(Gently leads him back to the table to finish his dinner.)*

FRED: *(Walking back to table and talking, sits back down.)* And now our brothers done gone and lost they lives. We done had enough! We had to walk out, we gotta fight back sometimes, Vivian. *(Beat.)* Anyway, word has it that when our stewards Beryl and Warren went to see old Loeb to talk about our working conditions, that ole Mayor kept addressing them as boys. They say steward Warren cussed him good and told him, "I am not a boy, I am a man!"

VIVIAN: Good for him!

FRED: You see my manhood is all I got, Viv. Why they trying to not let me be that, huh? We out here marching and all we want is fair pay and safe and decent working conditions, just like the white workers, but we treated like the very garbage we empty every day.

VIVIAN: I'm so sorry, Fred.

FRED: I'm glad Reverend Lawson and some of the other preachers got us more help and support and got Dr. King to come and speak. Boy, did he encourage us. He said we deserve to be treated with dignity and he's teaching us how to do this peaceful like. But Viv, it's hard to feel peace when they got guns pointed at you and they stand there ready to spray mace in your face. *(Beat.)* But that Dr. King is something special and he's coming back here to lead a march right here in Memphis. If that don't make City Hall take notice, I don't know what will.

VIVIAN: Oh, Fred, that's a blessing from God himself. Dr. King is helping so many people, he done been to the White House—he's a Godly man and he's educated and smart and understands these laws for himself. Fred, you watch; this is going to be over soon, you'll see.

GINA and DEXTER come in the door, they are talking non-stop.

VIVIAN: *(Gets up from her seat, moves stage center to greet children, DEXTER sits on couch and starts reading his book and GINA moves toward kitchen area.)* Well, welcome home. What are y'all jibber-jabbing about?

GINA: Well, you know, everybody is all excited about Dr. King coming back to lead a march in Memphis. *(Hugs both parents and then sits at the table. VIVIAN brings her something to drink.)*

VIVIAN: Well yes, that is very exciting. Dr. King is like, like, well, he gives people hope. He's out there on the front lines fighting for us. *(Walks toward the living room and notices DEXTER'S blank expression.)* What you think about that, Dexter?

DEXTER: *(Sitting on the couch with a book in his hand.)* Well I'm not excited about it like everyone else. People say his name and people act like he's a god or something. I don't get it.

VIVIAN: *(Stands behind him a little, upstage, right.)* Dexter, what are you talking about? Dr. King has helped lots of people get certain rights, President Johnson signed that Civil Rights Act and there he was, standin' right there.

DEXTER: *(Addressing the whole family.)* I just believe we need to be self-sufficient. We need to stop depending on the white man to give us our rights and our fair share. We need to create our own, take care of our own, and do what we have to do to make that happen.

FRED: *(From the kitchen table, amused.)* So what you sayin' Mr. Black Pride?

DEXTER: You're making a joke Dad, but we do need more pride, to be honest. What's marching gonna do? We can't be groveling asking these white folks, *(Sarcastically in a mocking voice.)* 'please Mr. White Man, can I eat at your restaurant? Or please Mr. White Man, can I shop at your store? I'll be sure not to dirty up none of yo merchandise suh.' *(Pause.)* I say we depend on one another. They want to keep us out, I say we don't work for them and we don't support their businesses or anything they own.

IDA MAE walks in just as he is finishing his last sentence and goes to her rocking chair.

IDA MAE: *(As she enters the scene and sits down in the rocking chair.)* That's going to be kind of hard, since they own pretty much everythang and they runnin' the country.

VIVIAN: Dexter, your father is a proud man and that's why he's out there marching on that picket line, this is his way of demanding that he is treated fairly.

DEXTER: Well, don't hold your breath because it's not gonna happen. Them men out there striking are the ones not getting paid, not most of them white workers, so it's probably all right with them. They ain't going to treat us fair, they will never treat us as equals. Plus, they got us over there fighting a war and our colored brothers are dying every day for a country that won't even acknowledge them as full human beings. How is Dr. King going to change that?

GINA: (*Getting up from kitchen table and sits on the couch with DEXTER.*) Now, I finally agree with you on something. We ain't never going to get equal treatment so why bother with all this marching thinking we going to have this sudden kum bah yah moment and poof, just like magic, we are now all equal. That's just not realistic.

FRED: (*Gets up and starts talking while crossing to his chair.*) Listen, this is a fight that's been going on long before either one of you came into this world and it's going to continue until things change. Y'all think you have it hard? Both of our great grandparents were slaves, our grandparents was born into it and became share croppers. We enjoy things now they could only dream of. People have been giving their lives standing up for freedom since time began. Now I've seen lots of freedom fighters in my day and that Dr. King... now he is the real deal.

IDA MAE: And I've lived long enough to see the difference. Y'all couldn't have survived in my day. The way we made it was because we believed in God and we had our faith. Now that's what y'all need. You need to read the Bible more. Fred, you need to make your children read the Bible. When I was a child, my parents made me read the Bible—they couldn't read so I had to read it to them, and I had to go to church. It was not my choice whether I knew Jesus or not.

GINA: Grandma Ida, I love you like the dickens, I really do and there's nothing wrong with going to church, but all this religion and the Bible and the church stuff ain't working for us. We are not better off because we go to church and learn about how much God loves us and how His son walked the earth loving and healing and what they do to him? They crucified him, Grandma! How is that right? (*Beat.*) I believe Christianity is the white man's religion anyway. That's just another trick of our oppressors. You don't see them inviting us to their churches.

VIVIAN: Gina, now you need to watch your mouth. You don't seem to know what you're sayin' right now.

IDA MAE: Vivian, your children are teenagers. They supposed to think a little foolish right now.

GINA: Grandma... we're not foolish... (*Looks at brother.*) well, I'm not. There's just other ways of looking at things, other points of view, you know?

IDA MAE: Hmmph, ain't but one way. God's way and he loves babies and fools. Give your grandmother a kiss, I'm turning in. Us old folks need a little extra beauty sleep.

GINA: Good night, Grandma.

DEXTER: Night Grandma.

IDA MAE exits.

VIVIAN: (*Moves to sit in IDA MAE'S chair.*) You two sure have some interesting ideas. I don't understand where all of this is coming from and Dexter, you seem really agitated lately.

DEXTER: Like she said, there are different points of view and I'm interested in the one that works, because all this non-violent, peaceful, holding hands and marching in the street stuff is backwards. They don't mind being violent with us. I don't see why we can't take our fate into our own hands.

VIVIAN: You ain't making sense to me Dexter. (*Gets up and goes to finish tidying up the kitchen.*)

FRED: So tell me my son and daughter, what is your suggestion for taking our fate—that is what you said right?—our fate into our own hands?

GINA: (*Stands up and pumps her fist in the air as she says last four words.*) Well, in the words of Brother Malcolm... by any means necessary.

Blackout.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

SETTING: *Barnes living room.*

AT START: *We hear a knock on the door. The person keeps knocking as if anxious to get in the door. FRED lets TURNER into the living room. TURNER is carrying his sign. FRED'S sign is visible on the coat rack.*

MUSIC: *"Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around", screen shows sanitation workers marching in protest—as song fades, light come up in Barnes home.*

TURNER: *(Excited.)* Today's the day Fred, today's the day... Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. himself is coming to lead a march right here in Memphis, Tennessee. I think I'm excited, Fred, I know we already heard him speak but there's just something about him, like, like 'lectricity or something.

FRED: Yeah, Turner, you know I'm feeling a little jittery myself. When he spoke to us, I got chills, honestly. Shoot, I guess we see him on the television so much, then he's standing right in front of us. He's the first famous person I ever even seen in real life. Everybody knows who he is.

TURNER: We gonna know him too. But you know what, Fred, I sure hope he can do something soon because I don't think I can miss too many more paychecks.

FRED: You need some money, Turner? You know I told you that if you need anything, we got a little saved up and I know you'll pay it back when you can...

TURNER: No, no, Fred, man, that's not why I'm saying this. Well it's... it's just hard seeing Maxine's worried look every time I walk out that door to go march. She look so worried, it just does something to me on the inside. She don't complain much, but I know she concerned. *(Beat.)* I'm getting behind on my car note. I know we all trying to help each other but it ain't enough you know. Ain't much else I can do, Fred. You know I can barely read. Ain't a lot of places hiring folks like me. I don't want to go back to my old ways but I gotta be honest Fred, that's where my mind goes sometimes and I ain't proud of it.

FRED: I understand what you sayin' Turner, but you stay away from that pool hall. You almost lost Maxine on account of your gambling habit. Now that sure ain't the answer. Don't do nothing crazy, Turner. But you know Maxine can probably help you with the reading. Vivian helps me with my readin' and Gina makes sure I spell my words right. *(Beat.)* But shoot, I don't care how much reading we can or can't do, can't nobody out-work us. I see these young men comin' on board; they may be able to read but hard work seem like something they don't understand. Humph, man, I try to explain to Vivian what this is like for us and I think she tries to understand, but if you ain't a man, you can't understand another man's pain. Everythang is depending on us.

TURNER: You got that right! I just hate feelin' like I'm lettin' my wife down. Ever since those doctors told her she probably can't have any babies, it's like we not connected no more. *(Pause.)* That ain't my call, Fred, that's God's call. If I could change it, I surely would. I just hate when my wife is lookin' at me and I ain't got no answers. I'm supposed to be a man you know.

FRED: God got a funny way of doing thangs don't he? Maxine would be a great mother too. You got folks who won't work if a job walked right up to 'em and here we out here fightin' just so we can work in decent conditions. You got folks don't take care of the children they got and then somebody who want 'em can't have 'em. What they say, God works in mysterious ways? That is sho nuff true.

TURNER: But Fred, how are we supposed to handle it? I mean how you supposed to come home every night with nothing but bad news, but you gotta pretend like you got everythang under control? Your head is spinning because you trying to figure everythang out. You just glad when you make it to the next day, but you don't know how many more next days is ahead. *(Pause.)* You know Maxine always used to looked up to me, she trusted me you know, she used to call me *(Lowers his voice.)* her chocolate superman.

FRED: *(Laughing.)* Say what? Her what? I didn't hear you...

TURNER: Her... choc... cause I'm brown and I'm like a hero to her....
Shut up Fred.

FRED: Man get out of here! Now that's funny!

TURNER: See man, I was trying to be serious here, we were having a brotherly bonding moment and you had to go ruin it. Are you coming or not?

FRED: Her chocolate superman—milk chocolate, huh?

TURNER: Ah, come on, Fred. There's going to be a lot of folks out there today and I want to be able to walk right up to Dr. King and shake his hand and let him know how much we appreciate his help.

FRED: You're right, let's get out of here, man—okay, I'm done. It's time to get serious now (*Pause.*) by the way... do you wear a chocolate cape? (*They walk out the door laughing.*)

MUSIC: "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around" plays as TURNER and FRED exit.

Lights down.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

SETTING: *Day of the March. Dr. King has come to town, but the march was unsuccessful because of violence. Everyone is upset.*

AT START: *VIVIAN is doing business in the kitchen, looking at the TV news coverage, she keeps checking her watch, waiting for DEXTER and FRED to get home.*

VIDEO/MUSIC: *Video plays with music and images of violence at protest.*

Music fades, lights come up in Barnes Living Room, DEXTER enters the house through the door. He is disheveled and upset.

VIVIAN: What in the world? Dexter, what happened to you!?!

DEXTER: (*Breathing heavy.*) Well, I went down to the march, I guess I was curious like everyone else, but it didn't do no good, Mama.

VIVIAN: (*Catching what he was trying to say.*) Were you involved in what happened today, people breaking windows and carrying on? You know they're saying somebody got killed out there?

DEXTER: No, Ma, I wasn't involved in no trouble, that's just it... when it started, they started pointing at us, people started running so I was trying to get out of there. Some coppers grabbed me and threw me to the ground.

VIVIAN: Oh my goodness! Are you okay, let me look at you? Did they hurt you?

DEXTER: I'm okay, Ma. I kept yelling, 'I didn't do nothing, I didn't do nothing!' and then they finally let me go. It wasn't us, I swear.

VIVIAN: (*Trying to calm down.*) Lord have mercy! (*Beat as she realized what she just heard.*) So, "us". Who is "us"? Are you hanging out with that Intruder gang? I heard they was out there when all this violence happened.

DEXTER: The Intruders is not a gang. Why does everyone think when young black men are together we got to be a gang up to no good? The leaders of the group are educated. Ma, we in this fight too and we ain't no thugs, but we need to stand up for our people. We can't always wait for someone else to do it.

VIVIAN: Stand up, how? So you been going down to those meetings? That's where all these, these ridiculous ideas are coming from. I don't want you down there at those meetings. Now you know where your father and I stand on this and violence is not the answer. I don't know what those boys are all about.

DEXTER: We are a black pride, black power militant group.

VIVIAN: Dexter, explain this.

DEXTER: What are we supposed to do?—Be sitting ducks for the next time they want to spray mace in our eyes, or hose us down, or sic their dogs on us, or beat us with their billy clubs?—What's the answer? The Intruders is a movement. Yeah, we are militant, yes, we are angry, and we just want what's rightfully ours; we are trying to bring about change and make a better life for our people.

VIVIAN: Dexter, I don't want you involved in these activities, it doesn't sound good. The police are always watching groups like that.

DEXTER: Ma, we are not thugs like they are saying, that violence today wasn't us. I'm about to graduate high school, some of them already been to college. We're not being dumb, Ma, but we got to take a stand. I promise you, we not trying to start no trouble, (*Pause.*) what we are trying to start is a revolution. I'm not a coward, Mother, I believe in fighting.

VIVIAN: Do you think non-violence means being a coward? Your father is standing up for what's right too, son, but in a deliberate, peaceful way; it takes a lot of strength not to give what you get, to hold your peace, to not sink to another man's level. Do you think your father is a coward, Dexter?

DEXTER: I didn't say he was a coward... but, but (*Lowers his voice.*) they ain't been able to change nothing... they just out there holding them signs.

VIVIAN: I think this conversation is over.

DEXTER: See, when it gets tough, nobody has answers, but I'm supposed to sit around and wait to be arrested and harassed for no good reason.

VIVIAN: No, that's not why this conversation is over. It's over because the tone you are taking with me right now—if it continues, I'm going to start a movement... right upside your head. So, for your safety and so that this house will continue to be non-violent—this conversation is over, do you understand?

DEXTER: (*After a beat.*) I can't win, I thought it was hard being a black man in America, but I don't know what's harder—being a black man in America or a black man in this house. (*Exits, VIVIAN looks after him shocked by his tone.*)

FRED enters, visibly upset, hangs up hat, coat and sign.

VIVIAN: (*Hurrying over to him.*) Fred, what happened? I've been worried sick. I saw on the news that violence had broken out at the protest. I don't understand it—Dr. King is all about non-violent protest. How did this happen, Fred, what's going on? Dexter came in here with his clothes all torn, I don't understand, Fred.

FRED: (*Sits in his chair.*) Calm down Vivian. It didn't go well at all. One minute we was locking arms and then some hoodlums started using signs to break windows, then all hell broke loose. People started running everywhere. Dr. King was right here in our city again and we couldn't even have a peaceful march. Thank God they got him out of there safely. It was, it was, it was... scary.

VIVIAN: Oh, Fred... this is terrible. Dexter said some coppers threw him down on the ground!

FRED: *(Standing up suddenly starts to walk towards kitchen, stops when VIVIAN starts talking.)* What? Where's Dexter? Is he okay?

VIVIAN: He's in his room, and I don't know if he's gonna be okay, Fred.

FRED: This isn't good, Vivian... I know the mayor ain't gonna listen to us now. Probably still won't meet our demands. He said as long as he is mayor, Memphis will not be unionized. *(Beat.)* They say it was our own people who started breaking windows too. Why do we do this? I don't understand why we hurt our own selves.

VIVIAN: People are just so angry, Fred. I mean people are sick and tired. I know I am and I see what it's doing to Dexter and even Gina, but especially Dexter. I feel like I'm losing him sometimes, God knows I do. He's got so much anger, it's as if he's going to break apart and all that anger's going to spill out and spread all over the place. I hate the look I see in his eyes sometimes. *(Starts to get emotional.)*

FRED: *(Goes over and comforts her by hugging her and then begins to speak, both are downstage center.)* I've seen that look. I see it every day on the picket lines. There was a time in my life when I even had that look. It's a look of disappointment and frustration like your soul is crying out and ain't nothing you can do about it.

VIVIAN: I can't believe this! If we couldn't even have a peaceful March with Dr. King, then what are we going to do? How are we going to change things?

FRED: *(Getting tired of the questions.)* Vivian, we just have to figure out how to keep going, we can't give up now.

VIVIAN: But, Fred, if he's not here, who's going to talk to that Mayor? He was our last hope, he was going to...

FRED: *(Gets stern.)* Vivian, Vivian... *(Surprised at his tone, she gets quiet.)* I don't need this right now.

VIVIAN: Well, Fred, I was just...

FRED: Viv, I said not now. I don't have the answers! All I know is I'm the one out there every day. I'm the one fighting. I'm the one out there in the cold, I'm the one taking the threats. *(Beat.)* Can I just get some peace in my own house?

They stand there looking at each other, VIVIAN is hurt by his tone, FRED is upset that he's lost control, they stay in place until lights go down to end scene.

ACT ONE, SCENE 5

SETTING: *The Intruders Meeting at Sonny's house*

AT START: *SONNY, BRANDON are talking, DEXTER enters the scene and is still upset.*

VIDEO: *Images collage of Black Power movement on screen.*

MUSIC: *In the style of "Ball of Confusion" by The Temptations.*

Music fades as the Intruders are walking in from stage right. They walk to downstage center to give the appearance of being in another location. DEXTER enters from stage right.

SONNY: What's happening young blood, gimme some skin. *(They do a handshake, DEXTER shakes hands with both.)*

BRANDON: Man, you look like you out here on a serious bum trip, what's your bag, man?

DEXTER: Man, my mom is just tripped up right now, you know? She's all unglued about what happened at the march. I told her it wasn't us.

SONNY: Let me clue you in, son. It's the mass media's job and the man to portray a brother as an inhumane, violent thug. They look at us and they don't see college educated, intelligent, and knowledgeable, you dig? They only see a threat to their privileged existence. The man hates us because the man fears us.

BRANDON: Let me educate you, my young brother. You see "most men today cannot conceive of a freedom that does not involve somebody's slavery." My man W.E.B. Dubois said that, you dig? He was right too, my brother, because the white man can't imagine a place where we can co-exist as equals. His fear is that we will begin to dominate the culture with our blackness, our idealism, our creativity, and our beauty. To exist for them is to oppress you, dig? And it won't stop until people like us stand up to it. But we gotta be smart, man.

DEXTER: What about Dr. King and this whole freedom movement with the sit-ins and the boycotts? What difference is it really making, man? I'm not seeing no changes around here. Everybody was so worked up because he was coming back and look what happened. I wouldn't be surprised if some of these white folks started the violence just so they can blame us.

SONNY: Patience, my man, you gotta have patience.

DEXTER: Man, I'm runnin' out of patience. I look at my father. Man, this dude done worked hard and gets no respect, none at all. They won't give him decent wages or working conditions, after all the time he done gave them over there. My father is one of the most decent men I've ever seen. He believes in all this non-violent, peaceful protest stuff and here we are getting stepped on over and over. Look at my brother James! Getting drafted to fight in a war he doesn't even understand. You talkin' about patience. I ain't got no more patience, man.

BRANDON: Listen, man, I know it hurts. This thing is real and we all feel this pain and that's why the longer you stay in this fight, the more you will realize that it ain't about winning and losin, you dig? The man may THINK he's winnin' because that's how his mind is fixed. But he ain't winnin' neither. I like what Brother Booker T. said, "To hold a man down, you have to stay down with him." So as long as they trying to hold us down, they can't truly rise.

SONNY: That's real, Brandon—that's some knowledge right there. Dex, you better listen, man.

SONNY: We think the white man is our enemy or to be feared, but he's the weaker one in reality, you dig? His power is not real. It doesn't come from struggle, you dig, it doesn't come from overcoming obstacles, you dig, it doesn't come from years of forced migration and fighting to be free. It doesn't come from making much out of a little. His dominance comes from money, greed and hate. Hell, they forced the Indians out, the Spanish and enslaved several races. Our brothers is over in 'Nam right now getting shot at and dying because we got in something we had no business getting into. They fightin' a so-called enemy over there, then they gotta come back and fight the enemy here. *(Pause.)* So, I don't want to be nothing like them, don't want nothing they have except for what the law says I should

have. I ain't no less than anybody. Matter of fact, I'm proud to be a black man because black... is... beautiful.

BRANDON: Sonny, man, you is deep, deep, deep my brother. It's a beautiful thing, ain't it? Remember this, they hate us because they hate themselves. Hatred towards another is always self-hatred. Let no man pull you low enough to hate him. Now... that's Brother Martin right there.

SONNY: Oooooohweeee, we droppin' knowledge like atomic bombs in here.

BRANDON: *(Makes an explosion with his hands.)* Boom!

SONNY: Right on, right on, but man, we bout to shake this loose, start again tomorrow. You cool, Dex man?

DEXTER: Yeah, I hear you man, I hear you. I know y'all know where I'm coming from. At least somebody understands, cuz my mom and dad sure don't. *(Beat.)* I better cut out soon too because my mom is real uptight right now with all that's going on. Y'all go ahead.

SONNY: Alright, young blood. We can meet up tomorrow, do some strategizing. In the meantime, it's all copasetic.... *(Beat.)* Dex, I been meaning to tell you man... you gotta do somethin' bout them threads, dig? ...Let yourself out. *(SONNY and BRANDON exit stage right.)*

DEXTER stands there alone, looks at his clothes, stands there from a moment contemplating and then exits stage left.

Music fades back in from opening of the scene and then out after exit.

ACT ONE, SCENE 6

SETTING: *Barnes kitchen. IDA MAE is sitting, VIVIAN is making breakfast. Two brown lunch bags are visible on the table and FRED'S lunchbox.*

AT START: *VIVIAN is pouring coffee*

Lights up on Barnes home.

VIVIAN: Mama, you want some coffee?

DEXTER and GINA enter from stage left, pick up their lunch bags and head toward the door at stage right, GINA'S hair is now in an afro.

VIVIAN: Y'all gonna have some breakfast?

DEXTER: Nah, I need to meet Sonny and Brandon. *(Exits.)*

GINA: *(Now in full view trying to act like she doesn't notice her mother and grandmother staring at her.)* I think I'm going to go ahead and leave too—I'm not too hungry. *(Tries to hurry out the door.)*

VIVIAN: *(Slowly.)* Gina. *(GINA stops right before she gets to the door without turning around.)* Your hair is different. Your hair pressing wasn't until Saturday. You went ahead and washed it, I see.

GINA: *(Turning around walking to center, trying to act like it's nothing.)* Yes, do you like it?

VIVIAN: *(Meeting GINA at center.)* Well, usually you show me your new styles, were you just going to run out and not let me and Mama see your hair? Please talk to us.

GINA: It's an afro, Mama. It's just the natural texture of....

VIVIAN: Yes, I know what an afro is, child, just wondered why you changed your hair all of a sudden.

IDA MAE: Yes, why? You kind of remind me of a little poodle.

GINA: Grandma...

IDA MAE: I'm kidding you, child, I don't mind it... it's just a little shocking that's all.

VIVIAN: Are you trying to make some sort of point, Gina?

GINA: Well, Mother times are changing, and actually, it is a statement *(Trying to sound confident.)*. It's about us being black.

IDA MAE: *(Acting shocked.)* Vivian, did you know we was black?

GINA: I'm serious, *(Gets very animated.)* I no longer want to be referred to as colored or negro, those are terms used by our oppressors. I'm black. And furthermore, I'm sick of these European standards of what it means to be beautiful; straight hair, light skin. Well I don't need the white man's validation. I have my own identity, I'm black and I make no apologies.

They all stand in silence, VIVIAN and IDA MAE are slightly amused, GINA is not sure what to expect, since she's never spoken to her mother this way, so she is slightly nervous.

VIVIAN: Well... I hope you have a nice day at school honey.

IDA MAE: Yeah, I do too, and enjoy your afro... and your identity.

GINA: *(Expecting them to be upset but surprised and pleased by their calm reaction and with herself.)* Goodbye then. *(Exits.)*

VIVIAN and IDA MAE: Bye. *(After she closes the door, they both start laughing.)*

VIVIAN: *(Sits down.)* Mama, I don't know what I'm going to do with these children. What is going on? I don't know who these children are. They're both changing up their clothes and their language and their friends. And Fred is just so agitated right now, I'm afraid to bring up anything without him biting my head off. Don't seem like nobody want to hear nothing I got to say. And nobody else has brought it up but James hasn't written to me in weeks, which isn't like him. I just feel very uneasy about it. I just feel like everybody is all caught up in something that I'm not a part of. It's like I am a stranger in my own home.

IDA MAE: Just make sure you keep up with who's black and who's proud.

FRED enters while putting on his coat.

VIVIAN: *(Jumps up, hands him his lunchbox.)* Fred, I was gonna ask you...

FRED: We'll have to discuss it later. I'm running behind. *(Rushes past her.)*

VIVIAN: *(Bothered but trying not to show it.)* Okay, well, have a nice day.

FRED: *(Stopping at the door.)* Oh! I forgot to tell you. Dr. King is coming back next month, and we are all going to the march *(Closes the door.)*.

VIVIAN: What? Really? That's wonderful news—Mama, did you hear that? He's coming back to Memphis.

IDA MAE: That is good news. Dr. King may be non-violent but they ain't just gonna run him off. He ain't no punk now.

VIVIAN: Oh my goodness, Mama. Ooooo I'm so excited. We all get to go march and hear Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speak. (*Hugs her mama.*)

MAXINE enters.

MAXINE: (*Sarcastic, hangs up her coat.*) Well, Fred seemed like he's in an awful rush to get down to that picket line. (*Excitedly.*) Anyway, did you hear? (*Comes over to kitchen.*)

VIVIAN: (*VIVIAN pours her a cup of coffee, MAXINE sits down at the table.*) I did, we needed some good news around here, I tell you. And the best part is that we are all going on the march. That's what I'm excited about.

MAXINE: I hope folks don't act a fool this time and I hope this strike is over soon. I don't know how much longer this can go on. It's been almost two months.

IDA MAE: Lord Jesus, I do too. What if Dr. King can't change that ole Mayor Loeb's mind? You know that man is very racist.

VIVIAN: Oh, I hate that word.

IDA MAE: Well, it don't make it no less true. Now he is very clear that he wants people segregated and he won't recognize them men's union. Now he's said these things right out of his own mouth.

MAXINE: Yeah Vivian, if he was a decent man, we wouldn't be having this conversation.

VIVIAN: I'll just be glad to have my old Fred back; this is taking a toll on him.

MAXINE: Tell me about it, child. (*Imitates TURNER as she goes into the living room and sits on the couch.*) Turner comes home (*Walking slow supposedly like TURNER.*) and just sits there (*Plops down on couch.*)—seem to be feeling sorry for hisself if you ask me. I told him, next week you need to bring some money in this house, strike or no strike.

VIVIAN and IDA MAE follow her into the living room amused by her imitation.

VIVIAN: Maxine, you didn't!

MAXINE: I did, and I don't care where he gets it from, neither. Go sell something, play some numbers, I don't care.

VIVIAN: Now why would you tell that man something like that? You are pushing him right back down to that pool hall. You know how hard it was to get him to stop gambling. You don't mean that.

MAXINE: Well, all I know right now is these bills gotta get paid and if they don't go back to work soon, I'm going to stay with my mama. Now I do mean that. I'm not going to be borrowing no money from nobody neither because I ain't got it to pay back and don't know when I'll have it.

VIVIAN: Well you took a vow and it's supposed to be for better or worse.

MAXINE: Okay, well I done got pretty good at the worse part so I'ma need some better really quick. *(Beat.)* I sometimes think he's punishing me because of our problem having kids.

VIVIAN: Maxine that's ridiculous, now you don't need to take all of this that far. You know how these men are. They just so caught up with what they goin' through and you know they can't concentrate on too many things at once. But Turner wouldn't hold that against you, that ain't none of your fault.

MAXINE: I just wonder sometimes if we can ever go back to how we used to be, *(Pause.)* but the man coming into my house each evening, I barely recognize. I used to think we could face anything together, no matter what it was. Now I'm just not that hopeful.

VIVIAN: Oh, Max, sometimes they just don't know how to fix it. Fred is not himself either but I gotta believe he'll come around.

MAXINE: *(Gathering herself.)* I'm sorry, I didn't mean to lay this on y'all right now. I wish I was as hopeful as you Vivian, but see you got the perfect little set up here, husband, children. All you missin' is the picket fence.

VIVIAN: Humph. Don't fool yourself. Life ain't no bed of roses in the Barnes household either. *(Pauses, sighs.)* What I'm really concerned about is James.

MAXINE: What? What done happened to James? What's going on, Vivian?

VIVIAN: I haven't heard from him in about eight weeks and I can't shake the feeling that something is wrong. Nobody else seems too concerned, I've been really worried since I heard that last week Linda Tinsley got the visit about her boy.... Every time somebody knocks on that door, I just... I know I couldn't bear if someone came to my door telling me... (*Voice trails off.*)

MAXINE: Wait, you mean her boy done got killed over there?

VIVIAN: Yes, and the worst part is—there ain't even a body. Said he was blown apart. (*Emotional, stands up.*) Max, why haven't I heard from my son?

MAXINE: Wait now hold on a minute, Vivian. You can't keep thinking this way. James is coming home when this is over, and I know he would want you to be strong.

VIVIAN: (*Pacing, begins to unload her thoughts.*) I look at the news and I keep hearing about them boys they sent into that village and killed all them women and innocent children. How can they make them do that? They talkin' about surprise attacks, and then they are sayin' the government is hiding information from the public. How do I not worry?

IDA MAE: I try to keep her encouraged but it's one of her babies, you know? But Maxine is right, you've got to replace those thoughts with good ones or else you will drive yourself crazy.

VIVIAN: (*Emotional.*) Everything is crazy right now, everybody seems to done gone a little crazy! We all seemed to be off in all kinds of different directions. I don't understand what's going on in my own home; I was getting a letter once a week. I been writing, but for eight weeks now my letters have gone unanswered. There's something wrong about that.

MAXINE: (*Stands up and goes to her.*) Viv, there ain't no way you can know that. We have to wait until we hear from him. Come on, sit down.

IDA MAE: (*Getting up.*) Yeah, let me make you some tea. You done got yourself all worked up. That's not helping matters none.

VIVIAN: I'm sorry, I know I, I just get so scared when I see these images on the television, the whole thing just frightens me, ain't no other way to describe it. And Fred barely mentions it.

IDA MAE: But he's thinking about it too, Viv, I guarantee you that. We going to keep on praying like we been doing. It's going to be all right, baby. You'll see. *(Hands her the tea.)*

VIVIAN: You don't know how much I want to believe that, Mama.

MAXINE: It is Vivian, I believe that, I really do *(They embrace.)*. *(Pause.)* Girl, I'm gonna get out of here, got to go to the market and make these few dollars stretch. You gonna be okay, Vivian?

VIVIAN: Yes, Mama's right. Nothing we can do but pray.

MAXINE: That is absolutely right. Try not to worry so much Vivian. *(Beat.)* I'd better get out of here. Miss Ida, you need me to pick you up anything?

IDA MAE: *(Gets up and walks to the kitchen.)* No, you're married, I don't think you can pick up what I need.

VIVIAN: *(Shaking her head in exasperation.)* Oh my goodness Mama, can you watch your mouth really?

MAXINE: *(Chuckles.)* Girl, your mama is a mess. It's going to be okay, Vivian, you hear?

VIVIAN: See you later, girl, and thank you. *(Walks her to the door.)* Mama, you are a mess with a capital M. Why do you behave that way?

IDA MAE: What way? My goodness Vivian, don't you think I get tired of sitting up in this house under you and Fred? *(Beat.)* I think I may have some male company soon.

VIVIAN: Male company? Mama, when are you going to start doing that?

IDA MAE: Maybe sooner than you think. Pastor Thompson is coming over for dinner tomorrow.

VIVIAN: Lord have mercy, that's not right. Y'all get a single Pastor and all you women down there chasing after him, that's shameful. Besides, Mama, he is much younger than you are.

IDA MAE: And??? I know he loves my meatloaf... and my buns... *(Starts doing her dance moves.) (Lights start to dim.)*

VIVIAN: Mama, I can't take it. I really can't.

Lights down sound and images of Vietnam War on the screen.

ACT ONE, SCENE 7

SETTING: *Barnes Home*

AT START: *IDA MAE is setting the table and she is dressed up and ready for dinner and humming while she is setting the table.*

Lights up on Barnes house.

VIVIAN: *(Standing back looking at her mother, amused.)* I don't know why you are all dressed up to serve dinner in your own kitchen.

IDA MAE: Jealousy will get you nowhere.

VIVIAN: Well, Miss Eileen Bridgewater is coming over today. She is helping with the organization of the march, so we can have a plan to keep the families safe in case anything happens. She should be here any minute, actually.

IDA MAE: That white lady who calls herself a civil rights activist?

VIVIAN: That's not what she calls herself, that's what she is, and she is a community organizer. She has done a lot for the cause, sometimes to her own detriment. And what difference does it make what color she is really? You sound like the children, Mama.

IDA MAE: It don't make me no difference at all. It's just these days everybody finding their identity.

VIVIAN: *(Knock on door.)* Be nice please. *(Opens door.)*

EILEEN: *(Enters.)* Hello Vivian, it's so wonderful to see you again.

VIVIAN: *(Takes her coat.)* Please Eileen, come on in. Have a seat, it's nice to see you too.

EILEEN: Hello, Miss Ida. It smells absolutely heavenly in here.

IDA MAE: Hello Miss Eileen. Thank you, *(Extra proper, because they are in front of company and because of the way her generation was taught to behave when a white person is visiting.)* I'm having a dinner guest tonight.

EILEEN: Oh, how wonderful. *(Sits on couch.)*

IDA MAE: *(Fake smiling.)* Yes, it is.

VIVIAN: *(Joins her on the couch.)* I'm real excited about the march.

EILEEN: Oh Vivian, it's really good news. We have got ourselves another chance. Now we must make sure all families are safe in case something happens. We don't want things to go the way they did last time. All eyes will be on Memphis and we do not want to embarrass ourselves. *(Takes papers out of briefcase or satchel to show to VIVIAN.)* This here is a map of the route and all the safety stations along the way. If anything goes wrong, we want everyone to be able to get to safety soon.

VIVIAN: Okay, I see. That's a wonderful plan. We all have to do our part if things are going to change. You are so right; all eyes will be on Memphis. So, what else do we need to do, Ms. Bridgewater?

Knock on door.

IDA MAE: *(Over-excited and anxious and tries to be proper and gather herself, takes off her apron as she rushes to the door.)* Ooo, I'll get it, I'll get it.

VIVIAN and EILEEN exchange looks, VIVIAN shakes her head and her and EILEEN continue discussing the plan.

IDA MAE: Well, Pastor Thompson, do come in.

PASTOR THOMPSON: Thank you so much, Sister Ida. Sister Ida, that sure is a pretty outfit you're wearing.

IDA MAE: *(Trying to be coy.)* Oh, this ole' thing? Why thank you, Pastor *(Giggles.)*

PASTOR THOMPSON: *(Stops to greet ladies, IDA MAE takes coat and hat.)* How are you this evening, Sister Vivian and ma'am?

VIVIAN: *(They stand up.)* I'm fine, Pastor, and this is Eileen Bridgewater, she is helping with the march.

PASTOR THOMPSON: The King March?

EILEEN: That's right, we want to make sure everyone is safe. We're taking extra precautions because we don't want anyone getting hurt. I was telling Vivian, all eyes will be on Memphis and we really want this to be successful.

PASTOR THOMPSON: Well, that's real fine of you and, boy, are we excited that he's coming back. We do want to do this right.

EILEEN: Yes we do... it's very important that these workers are heard and....

IDA MAE: (*Impatient by all the small talk, cuts her off by taking his arm.*) Pastor, are you hungry?

PASTOR THOMPSON: Am I hungry? Is the pope Catholic? Oh yes, I brought my appetite with me. Smells mouthwatering. Don't get many home cooked meals these days.

IDA MAE: Well, come on in the kitchen, I don't want anything to get cold.

PASTOR THOMPSON: Will the ladies be joining us?

VIVIAN: Well... not right now we...

IDA MAE: (*Interrupting.*) (*A little too loud.*) No! (*Calmly.*) Well, they need to take care of their business. I like to eat a little earlier than they do, sometimes. She's going to wait for Fred to get home. By then we'll be finished, and we can... uh... study or something.

PASTOR THOMPSON: (*As he surveys the table.*) Sister Ida, I know that is not meatloaf I see.

IDA MAE: (*Coquettish.*) Why yes, Pastor—I hope you are pleased. You do like meatloaf, don't you?

PASTOR THOMPSON: Sister Ida, from my lips to God's ears, I believe you make the best meatloaf on this side of the Mississippi.

IDA MAE: (*Blushing.*) Pastor, you are too kind. (*She starts fixing plates and VIVIAN and EILEEN are deep in conversation.*)

GINA walks in, looks at everybody and starts walking to her room.

VIVIAN: (*Confused.*) Gina, where are your manners? Do you see we have company?

GINA: Yeah, I see.

VIVIAN: Excuse me, what has gotten in to you?

GINA: What is SHE doing here?

VIVIAN: Gina Barnes, what do you mean? You apologize this instant.

EILEEN: It's okay Vivian, I think I've shown you everything. (*Beat.*) I'm going to just get going, I don't mean to make anyone feel... uncomfortable. That's not why I'm here at all.

VIVIAN: Wait a minute, Miss Eileen. Gina, I'm going to deal with you later but you have five seconds to apologize or else you are going to experience something like never before. How dare you come in here and behave so rudely?

GINA: *(Barely audible.)* I'm sorry.

VIVIAN: You go to your room this instant. Miss Eileen, I don't know what this is about, I have never seen her do anything like this before. I sincerely apologize.

EILEEN: Vivian, don't apologize. I understand. This isn't the first time I've gotten this reaction. Please, I think we are good and I'm going to get going, just read over this. *(Hands her the papers.)* And I'll see you at the march!

VIVIAN: Thank you so much, Eileen. I really appreciate all the work you are doing.

EILEEN: Oh, I appreciate your help. We're in this fight together you know. Bye now.

VIVIAN walks her to the door, helps with coat.

PASTOR THOMPSON: Well, Sister Ida, do you think you could wrap me up a plate?

IDA MAE: *(Shocked.)* You're leaving? You don't have to leave, don't pay them no mind.

PASTOR THOMPSON: *(Standing.)* Well I feel like there may be some family business that needs to be discussed so I think I probably better get going but I'd love to come back, if that's okay.

IDA MAE: *(Hesitantly, mad at them for ruining her evening.)* Yes, of course it is, Pastor. As long as I know you will enjoy it. *(Goes to wrap up a plate.)*

PASTOR THOMPSON: *(Walks into living room.)* I can guarantee you that. You alright, Sister Vivian?

VIVIAN: Pastor, I don't know what's going on with Gina right now. I'm so mad I don't even want to go and talk to her. I'm so sorry.

IDA MAE: *(Rushes over to them trying to get rid of VIVIAN.)* Well, you probably should go on ahead and talk to her right now.

PASTOR THOMPSON: I'm sure you will handle everything just fine. I was hoping to see Brother Fred tonight.

VIVIAN: He's late actually; I was expecting him a little while ago.

PASTOR THOMPSON: Please give him my regards and tell him I would love to see him at Sunday service.

VIVIAN: Oh I will Pastor... (*Door flings open.*) Well, here he is now.

FRED and TURNER come in the door apparently drunk.

FRED: Honey, I'm home! (*They both start laughing.*)

TURNER: It's chocolate superman!

VIVIAN: (*Realizing he is drunk.*) Fred, we have company.

PASTOR THOMPSON: How are you doing Fred? (*Extends his hand.*)

FRED: (*Slaps his hand like giving him five, also comes quite close so PASTOR smells the alcohol on his breath and visibly reacts.*) Well I couldn't get any better if I won a million dollars, well that's not true, that would be a whole lot better. (*Walks to kitchen.*)

TURNER: Who you telling? What you know, good Pastor?

TURNER slaps PASTOR'S hand and follows FRED into the kitchen, MAXINE enters.

MAXINE: Turner, there you are, had me looking all over for you (*Standing in front of the couch.*)

FRED and TURNER: (*Start singing loudly.*) We shall overcome, we shall overcome...

VIVIAN: Fred, you have been drinking? (*Walks to the kitchen to confront him.*)

FRED: Well aren't you just a genius? That's brilliant. Turner, see she's brilliant. Yes, I had a few drinks... maybe two or three or... maybe four... (*He and TURNER start laughing.*)

PASTOR THOMPSON: I really need to get going, I think you've got your hands full tonight Vivian. Sister Ida, thank you again.

FRED: Oh, you don't have to go, Reverend. We just got here.

TURNER: Yeah, we just got here. You gonna miss all the fun.

MAXINE: I think the fun is over.

PASTOR THOMPSON: (*Walks towards the door to exit, gets his hat and coat.*) Well, uh.... Good night everybody.... And uh, I'll be sure to pray for all of you.

IDA MAE: (*Brings his plate.*) Don't forget this. Goodnight Pastor, I truly apologize for the behavior of my family members. (*Showing her disappointment as she looks at each of them.*)

MAXINE: (*Walks over to TURNER in the kitchen.*) Turner, I can't believe this, what money you got to be going out drinking?

TURNER: Awwww please stop all that fussin' woman! That's all you worryin' about is money, money, money. You stay on my back; the man is on my back. I'm getting sick and tired of hearing about it. Get off my back! (*TURNER plops down on the couch and it gets real quiet for a few moments, everyone is shocked at his outburst. VIVIAN moves down to center.*)

MAXINE: (*Calm but seething.*) Well, thanks for letting me know what you don't want to hear about. Trust me, you don't have to worry about hearing about it anymore. (*Turns to leave.*)

VIVIAN: (*Stops her from walking out.*) Maxine, wait, I think we want to hear what they have to say for themselves. Fred, you need to start talking... NOW (*Walks right up to FRED.*)

FRED: (*Slurring a little.*) Viv, what's the big deal, we just went out for a few drinks with the fellows, I just had a couple or three or maybe four... but what's the big deal, I'm a grown man! Why are you treating me like a child? (*Starts taking off his coat.*)

VIVIAN: Why are you acting like one? (*Noticing his shirt.*) Fred! Is that makeup on your shirt? Have you been with a woman?

FRED: What? No? Vivian, I ain't been with no woman. That uh, that uh bar we... we went to, it had dancers and stuff.

VIVIAN: (*Beside herself.*) Fred! you went to a stripper bar!?! Oh, Fred. (*MAXINE and IDA MAE react too.*)

FRED: I didn't know that's where we were going, the guys said you wanna go have a drink down on Beale street and I said, I said yes but I didn't ask where, I just...

MAXINE: Oh, that's it, y'all done taken leave of your senses!

TURNER: (*Trying to help but making it worse.*) Vivian, Fred ain't been with no woman, now he may be a little drunk but he ain't, he ain't been with no woman, Fred wouldn't do that, women just kept coming up to him, they was so friendly, but he wouldn't do that... no, no, not Fred.

VIVIAN: Turner, I think you need to go.

MAXINE: *(To TURNER.)* And you need to shut your mouth. I'll talk to you later, Viv.

TURNER: *(Knows he is in trouble.)* Here I come, sweetie...

MAXINE: Sweetie? Oh no, I don't think so. I've never been so embarrassed in my life! Chocolate Superman, you're more like a chocolate super fool. *(They exit.)*

VIVIAN: *(To her mother who is standing there taking everything in.)* Mama, I need you to excuse us please.

IDA MAE: *(Wanting to hear more.)* Oh, I'll just clean up these dishes and...

VIVIAN: Mama, please!

IDA MAE: *(Realizing how angry VIVIAN is.)* But I'm tired, I can go to bed now. *(Showing her displeasure.)* They all need Jesus, that's the problem. *(Exits.)*

VIVIAN: Fred, I need you to start talking to me.

FRED: What's the big deal, Vivian? I have been going through things.

VIVIAN: What's the big deal? Are you serious? You been going through things, well, welcome to the going through things club! I've tried to support you in this Fred, I really have. But you act like I don't go through anything. Like I'm not even a part of this whole struggle. You are on strike from your job, we don't know when you're going back, but that doesn't affect me? We got two kids in this household to raise who are struggling with this whole situation, but it doesn't affect me, right? I lost my father two years ago and I'm taking care of my mama, trying to make sure she's okay. My children acting like they ain't got the good sense God gave them, I don't know if our son is dead or alive because I haven't heard from him in weeks, but you haven't even asked about that because you going through things. So since you are going through things that gives you the right to come home late, drunk and embarrass me in front of guests, family and friends and you ask me what's the big deal? My family is falling apart right before my eyes and I haven't the faintest idea what to do about it and I'm growing mighty tired of people acting like I'm some kind of hired help who don't have no feelings. I happen to be affected by everything that everybody is going through. So, you need to come up with something better than that because you sure ain't the only one going though things! Now I need you to tell me what's really going on!

FRED: (*Nervously.*) Can I sit? (*She doesn't answer and he sits on the couch and VIVIAN sits in the rocking chair.*) Well... what happened, Viv, was I was about to leave the line after a long day of picketing, you know, and me and the fellas, we was walking to the cars and a couple of fellas came over and said, hey we going to have a couple of drinks why don't y'all come along.

VIVIAN: (*With unsettling calmness.*) Um hum, I'm listening.

FRED: Well, when we got there, I noticed the waitresses had on skimpy clothes and I, I said to myself, this ain't the kind of bar I'm used to, 'course I don't really go to bars but if I did, it wouldn't be like this one... But I didn't really want to seem like, you know, like I didn't know what's going on, like a square or something you know?

VIVIAN: Hummm, I see, keep going.

FRED: Well anyway we got to talking about the job and everythang and these women just kept bringing us new drinks time we finished the old ones. I lost track of how many I had Vivian, and then women was asking me if I wanted a dance, but I said no, I said I'm married, I got a BEAUTIFUL wife at home, you should see her, so beautiful...

VIVIAN: Oh, you told them that, I see.

FRED: Sure did, Viv, I promise I did. But, well, this one women came up beside me and she whispered something in my ear and I jumped because it shocked me. I never seen no women so, so friendly but she came up so close and when I jumped up, she kind of fell forward like this. (*Demonstrates.*) Spilled her drinks and everythang. I said it's time to go. That may be when the makeup got there, but Viv, I know I may not be myself but you know I love you and I would never do anything to hurt you.

VIVIAN: (*Still with unsettling calmness and sarcasm.*) Oh, really. Well, that's some interesting story. I mean I see now how it happened. What's the big deal, right? Silly Vivian. So I just wanna thank you for telling me, Fred. I heard you out and I only have one thing to say. You just stay right here, I'll be right back, okay?

FRED: Not going anywhere... sweetie. (*VIVIAN exits.*)

Lighting changes.

MUSIC: In the style of "Ain't no Way" by Aretha Franklin.

VIVIAN returns with a blanket and pillow, gives it to FRED.

FRED: Oh, come on Viv, I'm sorry.

VIVIAN: Good night, Fred!

FRED: Viv, I said... I.... *(Slowly passes out on the couch.)*

VIVIAN sits on a kitchen chair and weeps silently, then she gets up and starts doing business in the kitchen. She goes to her husband and removes his shoes and puts a blanket over him. As the song ends, VIVIAN gets ready to exit but there is a knock on the door. VIVIAN walks to door, light changes to door as VIVIAN opens the door and almost faints when she sees JAMES standing there. JAMES is in uniform, he is on crutches or a cane.

Fade Music.

Blackout.

END OF ACT ONE

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