

One Drop of Blood

by Ian Walker

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The Cast of Characters

- Dick: African-American. A somewhat heavy-set man in his mid thirties. He tends towards compassion, reason, quietude, helplessness. Like his wife and friends, he has lived a somewhat secluded, privileged life. He is married to Kayla.
- Kayla: African-American. An attractive woman in her mid-thirties. An anxious, frustrated quality has replaced her usual sweetness. She feels caged by her life. She is married to Dick.
- Jordan: African-American. An attractive woman in her mid-thirties, she has a slightly sexual air about her. Unlike her friends, she reveals a slightly rougher nature. She is feisty, confrontational, and ultimately happy in her situation. She is married to Tyrie.
- Tyrie: African-American. He is a man in his late thirties. Often arrogant, typically serious, he makes no effort to blunt his directness. He has been raised in rougher surroundings, and lived a less sheltered life. He is married to Jordan.
- Bennie: African-American. Also in his mid thirties. He is a timid fellow, charming in his harmlessness, not inept-- only inexperienced. He is omnigullible in his thinking.
- J.D.: White. Also in his mid-thirties. He is a mild-mannered, but keen-sighted individual, eminently qualified for his position, even if he appears ineffective. A dark cloud follows him currently, but it will be conquered.
- Duncan: African-American. Also in his thirties. He is deliberate, laid back-- filled with congested anger and a self-rage that propels him. He is unmarried.

Bennie, J.D., Dick, Jordan, and Kayla all grew up in the mid-sized city referred to as “The Flats.”

The Scene

Baldwyn Heights, a small bedroom community somewhere in the East. Located above “The Flats,” it is an upper-middle class African-American neighborhood. A single house serves as the homes for all the characters. At times they appear simultaneously in their own houses; when this happens, they do not notice the other characters inhabiting their space.

The Time

SPRING 2014

Act I takes place from six to 8pm on a Friday evening; then from 11:50pm to 12:15am the following day.

Act 2 takes place at 1, 3, and 9am in the morning of the following day.

Running Time

Act I: 65 minutes

Act II: 45 minutes

A Note about Language: At times the characters slip into Black idiom, a phenomenon called code-switching. This is intentional and should be carefully observed.

Language, like culture, is a weapon.

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THE SETTING: The house is slightly elevated from the stage, providing a small playing area in front that will be used at different times as the front yard and the street. The audience can see the entire front interior of the house, including the living room and kitchen. There is a staircase leading upstairs, and a hall that disappears to the back rooms and the cellar. Stage right is the porch area. The front door opens into the living room. The decor is simple, elegant, slightly modern. There is a couch with a television in front of it, a stereo, and a small dining room table that is partially set for a poker game. Upstage left the kitchen area is elevated from the living room on an eighteen inch platform. It contains a sink, refrigerator, small stereo, and table with chairs. There is a rear exit from the kitchen.

AT RISE: The house is empty. A beautiful bouquet of flowers is on the kitchen counter; a child's "Bigwheel" sits in the yard outside. Dick runs up the stairs to the kitchen with dry cleaning over his shoulder. An unathletic man, running seems entirely incongruous with his character.

DICK

Hey Babe, I'm home. Kayla?

(HE drapes the dry-cleaning and peers into the fridge. There's not much to his liking. Eventually, he gets a couple of pieces of broccoli as KAYLA enters the living room and crosses directly to the kitchen. She is dressed in black slacks and a bra.)

Sorry I'm late. Things got gummed up at the off—... you're not dressed.

KAYLA

I was waiting for my top.

(She takes a sheer silk blouse from the dry cleaning. It is sexy and elegant.)

DICK

You're wearing that?

KAYLA

We're going to be late.

DICK

I had to wait for a courier. The Kincade account— the growth is off the charts. Who'd've thought bottled water....

(Something about this embarrasses Dick.)

What did you do today?

KAYLA

(not meanly)

What do I do every Friday?

DICK

(quietly)

Nothing.

KAYLA

(quietly)

That's what I did then.

(beat, softening)

Did you have a good day?

(Dick nods, yes.)

Everyone's buying bottled water?

DICK

It's only one account.

KAYLA

I guess you can't trust anything anymore. I better let them know we're running late.

(KAYLA picks up the phone in the kitchen and hits automatic dial.)

DICK

You bought flowers again.

KAYLA

Yes.

DICK

They must love you at work.

(The phone RINGS in the living room. LIGHTS brighten there: TYRIE is lounging on the couch, watching television. On his wrist he wears a woven bracelet in African colors.)

Why? KAYLA

That's three times this week. DICK

Can you get it? JORDAN
(offstage)

I'm busy. TYRIE
(from the couch)

There's plenty of patients. KAYLA

What? JORDAN

Baby, it's the play-offs. TYRIE

(JORDAN enters from the back.)

Well God forbid you should pause the tape. JORDAN

Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! TYRIE
(to the TV)

(JORDAN picks up the cordless phone.)

Yeah? JORDAN

It's Kayla. Dick just got here. KAYLA

(JORDAN enters the kitchen to collect a plate of broccoli, a bowl of chips, and napkins. For a moment they speak to each other through the phone as JORDAN crosses back and forth in the same room.)

JORDAN

That's alright. I'm still trying to get food ready for "The Council".

KAYLA

We'll be there in about five?

JORDAN

What are you wearing?

KAYLA

My blue top—I told you the one.

JORDAN

Oh, damn. Now I gotta change.

KAYLA

Why?

JORDAN

(exiting the kitchen with the food)

My jeans are ripped.

KAYLA

Don't worry about it.

JORDAN

And watch while you pick-up all the guys?

KAYLA

Be there in five.

JORDAN

Make it ten.

(JORDAN hangs up the phone.)

TYRIE

(from the couch)

What guys?

JORDAN

You know. All the big young honey bees who buzz around the salon window lookin' for their queen....

TYRIE

What bees?

JORDAN

Just waiting for Poker Night. You ought to see all the pokers I've got waiting for me....

TYRIE

What pokers?

(TYRIE grabs her quickly and pulls her onto his lap.)

JORDAN

Inching towards the fire....

TYRIE

Yeah, what fire?

(LIGHTS BRIGHTEN in the kitchen as KAYLA finishes buttoning her blouse.)

DICK

You cut your hair.

KAYLA

I had it styled.

DICK

I thought you were going bowling.

KAYLA

Dick....

DICK

It's just that you don't usually go to so much trouble for girl's night—

KAYLA

I wanted to look nice.

DICK

You do. You always look nice.

KAYLA

I want to feel pretty, alright? Maybe you should write your name in lipstick on my forehead.

(KAYLA exits outside.)

DICK

(quietly)

I was hoping for something a little more permanent.

(HE follows Kayla outside, the lights dimming on that section of the stage as they rise on the porch. BENNIE exits the house onto the landing. In his hands he holds a ridiculous porcelain clown. It is a child's piggy-bank. HE crosses to the Bigwheel and picks it up.)

BENNIE

(calling into the house)

The Bigwheel and what?

VOICE

Cynthia's wagon.

(BENNIE looks around the yard. There is no wagon.)

BENNIE

The wagon isn't out here, honey.

VOICE

Bring it inside.

BENNIE

Honey, there's no....

(then, brightly)

Alright.

(BENNIE runs the Bigwheel up onto the porch.)

They're on the porch. I'm off, alright? Honey?

VOICE

Be home by twelve.

BENNIE

I will. Bye?

(After a moment waiting for a reply, BENNIE hurries off-stage right with his porcelain clown. LIGHTS DOWN on the yard area, up in the living room where TYRIE and JORDAN are still on the couch.)

TYRIE

What's to eat?

JORDAN

You've got some hot wings, chips, brocolli with ranch dress—

TYRIE

Brocolli? You trying to poison me?

(JORDAN extricates herself from Tyrie's arms and returns to fixing the table.)

JORDAN

They're not for you. They're for Dick. I think he's worried about his weight.

TYRIE

I might as well be playing with women.

JORDAN

You should be giving that some thought, too, Tyrie.

TYRIE

(with his eyes on the T.V.)

Did you tell Brianna she could get her ears pierced?

JORDAN

You told her she could.

TYRIE

(contentiously)

When?

JORDAN

You said when she turned twelve.

TYRIE

No, I didn't.

JORDAN

You been saying that since she was eight.

TYRIE
I said in twelve more years.

JORDAN
When she's twenty, Tyrie?

TYRIE
Yeah, that's a little young.

JORDAN
Well then tell her she can't.

TYRIE
I don't like it-- you know I don't like it. I don't like those push-up bras you been buying her, either.

JORDAN
Tell her she can't.

TYRIE
I will. Is she coming home tonight?

JORDAN
No. She's staying at Aleesha's.

TYRIE
That's alright with Nikki?

JORDAN
I guess.

TYRIE
You dropped her off without talking to Nikki?

JORDAN
You picked her up from school.
(beat)
You didn't pick her up?

TYRIE
You was gonna.

JORDAN
It's Friday, Tyrie. I told you I had to cover for Ellen.

TYRIE
Son-of-a...!

(TYRIE bounds up and crosses to the phone.)

JORDAN

No, wait. I'm sorry. Nikki was going to pick them up.

TYRIE

Why you do this to me?

JORDAN

I didn't mean to.

TYRIE

Jesus.

JORDAN

(still anxious)

Did she call?

TYRIE

If she was grown enough to call, I'd let her pierce her ears.

JORDAN

No, I meant Nikki.

TYRIE

(beat)

No.

JORDAN

(beat)

Do you think I should call?

TYRIE

No.

JORDAN

What if she—

TYRIE

Nikki'd call if Brianna wasn't there.

JORDAN

She might think we picked her up.

TYRIE

Jordie, you can't always expect the worst.

JORDAN

(beat)

I hate having to worry all the time.

TYRIE

(comfortingly)

I know, Babe. It'll get better.

JORDAN

I don't see how.

TYRIE

It will.

(BENNIE enters onto the front porch. HE RINGS the bell.)

JORDAN

(with a little yelp)

It's Kayla and Dick. I gotta get changed. Tell her to come upstairs.

(SHE runs upstairs. TYRIE answers the door.)

BENNIE

Hey, Tyrie.

TYRIE

(calling up)

It's Bennie.

(to Bennie)

Come on in. You're the first one.

BENNIE

(whispering)

Jordan's still here?

TYRIE

(normal voice)

She and Kayla are going bowling or something. What's that?

BENNIE

It's my piggy-bank.

(TYRIE stares at him.)

BENNIE (cont)
(sheepishly)

Well, Gail only gave me twenty dollars, and I thought—

TYRIE

We're not even playing tonight.

BENNIE

I know, but I thought maybe after....

TYRIE

After?

BENNIE
(deflating)

I was feeling lucky.

TYRIE
(laughing)

You was feeling lucky....

BENNIE
Yeah, I thought we could still play a few hands....

(KAYLA and DICK enter over Tyrie's line. They step onto the porch and RING the bell. TYRIE answers the door.)

KAYLA

Hey, Tyrie.

TYRIE

Hey, lookit you.

KAYLA

Hi, Bennie.

BENNIE

Hi.

TYRIE

You better watch out, D, she's looking mighty fine for the bowling alley.

BENNIE

Hi, Dick.

JORDAN
(from upstairs)

Is that Kayla?

TYRIE

Yeah.

JORDAN

Come on up.

KAYLA

Gentlemen.

(KAYLA exits upstairs.)

DICK

Dave here?

BENNIE

Not yet.

TYRIE

You guys want a brew? Some whiskey?

BENNIE

I'll have a beer.

DICK

Sure. Thanks.

(TYRIE crosses to the kitchen. A moment of slightly awkward silence between Bennie and Dick.)

What's that?

BENNIE
(a little defensively)

It's my bank.

DICK

Your bank?

BENNIE

Yeah, in case we played.

DICK

Why didn't you just bring the money?

BENNIE

It's one of those you have to break open. I didn't want to break it unless we were going to play.

DICK

Oh.

BENNIE

I've had it since I was ten— it was a gift from the bank.

DICK

From the bank?

BENNIE

When I opened my account.

(TYRIE returns with three beers.)

TYRIE

Now were talking.

(HE holds his up for a toast.)

To Love and Cherish, through the Ups and Downs, the Good Times and the Bad.

BENNIE

(simultaneously with Dick)

May the NCAA live forever.

DICK

(simultaneously with Bennie)

May the NCAA live forever.

TYRIE

I do.

DICK

Did you see the Kentucky-UConn game?

TYRIE

Napier was on *fire*— that nigger grew *wings* out there.

DICK

Twenty-two points--

Naw, I missed it. BENNIE

You missed it?? TYRIE

Gail has her soaps. BENNIE

On a Monday night? DICK

BENNIE
She tapes them. That's all she does anymore. She comes home from work and crawls into bed with a box of chocolate and Kleenex and watches soaps. Then Matthew gets into the bed and starts bunting her like crazy—

DICK
Wait—what-- whoa, who does what?

BENNIE
Matthew. The cat. That's what they call it when they rub themselves against something. He does this bunting thing where he rubs himself all over her. And then he gets up on my pillow and stares at me like he knows something I don't. It's weird.

TYRIE
They're territorial.

BENNIE
It's my pillow.

TYRIE
He probably senses what's going on.

BENNIE
The cat senses?

TYRIE
Next door.

DICK
Dave's coming, isn't he?

TYRIE
(to Dick)
I think he's getting cold feet.

BENNIE

How can he get cold feet? We don't even know what—

DICK

What did you tell him?

TYRIE

I didn't tell him anything. I stopped by the store on my way home. I asked if he was coming.

DICK

And?

TYRIE

There's no "and," Bro, he said—

(KAYLA enters from upstairs. Her appearance halts the conversation abruptly.)

KAYLA

(beat)

Jordan said she'll be right down. Did Dick ask you about the car?

TYRIE

Sure, but he bought it anyway.

KAYLA

I meant about the noise it's making.

DICK

It's making this high-pitched sound.

TYRIE

A squeal when you start up?

DICK

More of a constant whine.

TYRIE

Yeah, I get that too.

DICK

Really?

TYRIE

Right after you pull out of the driveway?

DICK

Yeah.

TYRIE

The noise gets louder the faster you go?

(JORDAN enters from upstairs.)

DICK

I think so....

TYRIE

When that happens in the Chevy, there's really only one thing you can do.

DICK

What?

TYRIE

Leave the wife at home.

KAYLA

Oh, Tyrie....

TYRIE

In a pinch, there's this knob on the radio....

JORDAN

Now you know the secret to our success. It's like the Apollo Theater down at the garage. When I want a laugh I just check our bank balance.

BENNIE

Aw, you guys aren't that bad off.

JORDAN

No, you boys can go on home, cuz Tyrie doesn't even have two cents for *this* conversation.

TYRIE

Baby, you know I wanna support you in the manner "to which you are accustomed," but you won't move back with your momma.

(off her baleful look)

She's the reason were here, anyway.

JORDAN

Maybe if you got paid for turning beer into piss you wouldn't have needed my mother in the first place.

DICK

Okay, alright everybody remain calm. Nobody panic. I'm an accountant.

(Some laughter at this.)

TYRIE

Ain't you leaving, Sweetie? I thought you were gonna spend some of that money we don't have.

JORDAN

No, I'm gonna call Brianna is what I'm gonna do.

TYRIE

Brianna's fine. You're trippin' over—

(JORDAN has already taken Kayla by the arm and led her into the kitchen. TYRIE growls in frustration.)

I'm telling you, *that* woman spends money like it's got an expiration date on it.

(The LIGHTS RISE to accommodate the women in the kitchen. KAYLA smells the flowers on the table as JORDAN dials.)

JORDAN

Augh! I can't believe I married that imbecile.

KAYLA

He's just acting up for the guys. He doesn't mean it.

JORDAN

Acting uppidity, you mean, and he can take that act on the road.

(re phone)

Voicemail? Girl, you better not be ignoring me.

KAYLA

(re the flowers)

These smell incredible.

JORDAN

Aren't they gorgeous? I got them from that florist on 2nd street.

KAYLA

I've been getting these wild urges for flowers. I think I'm addicted.

JORDAN

(dialing the number again)

I buy 'em just to piss Tyrie off. Whenever I buy flowers he thinks he's done something wrong.

KAYLA

I love the smell of them right after they've been cut. I keep telling myself that I'm buying them for the patients. I bring 'em in after a day or so, then buy some more for the house. I don't want to watch them die.

JORDAN

(to the receiver)

You're going to get an ear fungus, Brianna. I swear, ever since we moved from Arizona, she spends half her life on the phone.

KAYLA

At least you went to Arizona.

JORDAN

Another one of Tyrie's brilliant ideas.

KAYLA

I went straight from college to middle-age.

JORDAN

Tuscan isn't any place special. I'd have gone anywhere after L.A. Nine months of him lying around the house... Arizona seemed like paradise.

KAYLA

What was it like?

(Jordan retrieves a bottle of wine from the fridge and two glasses.)

JORDAN

You're crazy. Stay here. You've got a great house and a husband who works. Where we were, everyone thought the world was going to end if we weren't exactly the same.

KAYLA

Prejudiced?

JORDAN

No. Not exactly... at least—I mean people would smile at you and say hello, but you had to watch yourself. Keep yourself in check, you know? You didn't want to be too different, too loud, too

JORDAN (cont)

flashy. I don't know if I took a deep breath the whole time I was there. Wasn't anything like here. Besides, you've got the most exciting job in the Heights.

KAYLA

You've been watching too much T.V.

JORDAN

Why don't you go full-time again?

KAYLA

After I cut back, it's like I don't exist. Daniel was just *waitin'* for me to give him an excuse. He's grooming Trish to be Charge Nurse. Can you believe that?

JORDAN

Honey, she's been after your job from the giddyup. That girl is a Judas. And Danny's been trying to get in her pants for years. Don't give me that look, you know it's true.

KAYLA

Daniel's married.

JORDAN

From the way she tells it, he likes just a drop of coffee in his cream.

KAYLA

Where'd you hear that?

JORDAN

Trisha comes into the shop—those weaves don't grow themselves. I don't know why people think the moment you answer the phone everybody else's ears turn off. She's in a beauty shop for Christ's sake. She might as well be posting it on her Facebook page. *I* did, anyway.

KAYLA

You're too much.

JORDAN

She sits up in that chair, gossiping away while she slathers herself in cocoa butter. Trust me, she knows. Treats that skin like it's a mink coat. One thing I'll say about Tyrie, he didn't need me to be anything but me. That was the thing about UCLA. All the Black men wanted you to be lighter—not white, just lighter than them. Course, Tyrie wasn't at UCLA.

KAYLA

All I know is she never fills in her charts right.

JORDAN

Always taking the high road... that's what I like about you.

KAYLA

It feels like it's lost its point, anyway.

JORDAN

The Emergency Room?

KAYLA

After eight years, everybody looks the same. The people look the same, the despair looks the same, even the blood looks the same.

JORDAN

What about a different department?

KAYLA

Pediatrics?

JORDAN

I didn't say that.

KAYLA

The whole point of working part-time was so we could start a family.

JORDAN

I know.

KAYLA

From the time we bought the house: A year to get settled. A year to waddle around pregnant. The rest of our lives to... whatever.

JORDAN

Are you still going to the clinic?

KAYLA

We stopped months ago.

JORDAN

Did they figure out what was wrong?

KAYLA

Turns out "Dick" was an unfortunate choice of names.

(laughing)

Oh my God, did I just say that out loud? I'm losing my mind.

JORDAN

Oh, let it all out.

KAYLA

That was so childish.

JORDAN

And they're not? Give em five minutes and they'll be picking scabs and talking about Doctor Doom and the Black Panther. It's like the Boy Scouts without adult supervision.

KAYLA

Sometimes I just need out these four walls, you know? The worst part is I don't know what I'd do if I got pregnant. Dick thinks that's the reason I'm so restless, but.... Everything I wanted, everything that meant something, I detest. Everything I detested seems so much better than what I have now.

JORDAN

Oh, Kayla.

(TYRIE has crossed closer to the kitchen door.)

TYRIE

(loudly)

When the hell are you two leaving?

JORDAN

(dialing again)

J.D. and Dave aren't even here.

TYRIE

J.D.'s working.

JORDAN

You're playing without J.D.?

(to Kayla)

It's ringing.

(turning upstage)

Hello Nikki? Hi, it's Jordan.... Hi.

(The LIGHTS DIM on Jordan and Kayla, rising in the living room.)

BENNIE

So wait-- I could do that, too?

TYRIE

You'd be stupid not to.

DICK

Bennie, trust me: they're gonna nail your ass to the wall.

TYRIE

(to Bennie, re: Dick)

Behold the Worker, sold to the Machine! Your tax dollars coming back to get some more of your hard earned cash.

DICK

How many times do I have to tell you I don't work for the IRS. I'm a *business* accountant—

TYRIE

Hey, if it quacks like a duck....

BENNIE

So I could write-off my spare bedroom? But don't you, like, have to have your own business?

TYRIE

Put a computer in there, it's a home office.

DICK

Not if you use it for other things. It's gotta be *only* an office.

TYRIE

How they gonna know if you're using it for other things? I don't do my book keeping at the garage; I do it at home. Therefore, it's a home office.

BENNIE

Makes sense.

DICK

No, it doesn't. It really doesn't.

BENNIE

But I'm always taking work home.

DICK

The room can *only* be used as an office.

TYRIE

You gonna trust a man who wakes up every morning and ties a little noose around his neck? He's practically doing it for The Man himself.

DICK

We're going to start that again?

TYRIE

Hell, we shouldn't be paying taxes at all. We should be "tax exempt."

BENNIE

Who?

TYRIE

Black people. Until reparations are made.

DICK

Oh hell.

TYRIE

The Japanese got reparations.

BENNIE

They did?

TYRIE

Internment victims got twenty-grand each after World War Two. And they was right to. But four years in-na camp versus a-hundred in chains? Where's ours? Jews got a whole damn country.

DICK

You want a whole country now?

TYRIE

Yeah, I want a whole country. Go on, pull the noose tighter, Tax Man, you almost dead.

DICK

Bennie, just remember all the conspiracy theories.

TYRIE

You're gonna tell me there's not a war on Black people in this country?

DICK

(somewhat placating)

Tyrie, we live in one of the best neighborhoods in the country. Eighty percent African-American, practically no crime—

TYRIE

And that's the game their running on you.

DICK

What? The good life?

TYRIE

Making you believe ‘everything’s fine.’ That noose you tying around your neck every morning is ignorance, brother. Brianna came home from school yesterday telling me about Kent State. Tellin’ *me*. Who’s tellin’ her ‘bout Jackson State? You think if those students were white they wouldn’t be teaching it in Brianna’s school?

BENNIE

Jackson State, you mean the Tigers?

TYRIE

You see that?

DICK

The shooting. During the Vietnam war—

TYRIE

(firm, not strident)

Ten days after Kent State, state troopers opened fire on a 100 black students protesting the war. Four hundred and eighty rounds in 30 seconds— they machine-gunned those kids down.

BENNIE

Did anyone die?

DICK

Two kids.

TYRIE

Two *black* kids. If I want Brianna to know about our history, I have to teach it myself.

DICK

Yeah, but not the assassination stuff, right?

BENNIE

Hey, I read about that.

TYRIE

You hear that?

DICK

Wait, what did you read?

BENNIE

About the bodyguards.

TYRIE

Bennie’s about to be droppin’ some science on you.

BENNIE

Malcolm's bodyguard was a spy.

TYRIE

Gene Roberts. The man who knelt over him as he lay dying.

DICK

Malcolm X's bodyguard was FBI?

TYRIE

Undercover NYPD.

DICK

Okay, *spying*, maybe. But that's not the same--

TYRIE

Keeping watch so it went down the way they wanted it to. Where were the cops? I'll tell you-- they were ordered away from the meeting to make sure the shooters got away.

DICK

But--

BENNIE

The killer was caught by an off-duty cop who just happened to be passing by.

TYRIE

Nobody gave him the memo, is why--

DICK

Yeah, okay, but they *did* catch him and Hayer confessed. He was Nation of Islam—it had nothing to do with the FBI.

TYRIE

You want to destroy a race of people? Teach them to put their hands in each other's pockets. You don't need the FBI or the KKK if you can get Blacks to lynch each other.

DICK

The Nation of Islam hated the government even more than they hated Malcolm X. They would never have worked together.

TYRIE

Hayer met with an FBI informant the night before he shot Malcolm. It wasn't the Five Percent that killed Malcolm, it was the One Percent.

DICK

Where did you hear that?

TYRIE

Dial 411, fool, the Operator will tell you what is.

BENNIE

And the other two Nation of Islam people said they didn't do it.

TYRIE

That's right.

BENNIE

They were fall guys.

TYRIE

For the real shooters. Just like James Earl Ray.

DICK

Oh come on.

TYRIE

Martin Luther King Jr. was exactly the same.

DICK

Please, stop, please. One crazy conspiracy theory at a time.

TYRIE

(an edge)

What you say?

BENNIE

The police were ordered away from the motel that night, too.

DICK

From King's hotel?

BENNIE

That's right.

TYRIE

Don't bother, Bennie, Dick just likes his history white-washed.

DICK

James Earl Ray checked into the hotel room. They found his gun.

TYRIE

Yeah, he checked in *under his own name*. Who the hell would do that if they were about to commit a crime? The cops claimed he shot King from the second story window, calmly wrapped his gun in a bundle with everything that could identify him, walked out of the flop house without a single person seeing him—like the Invisible Man-- then conveniently *dropped* his bundle-- oops-- in a doorway when he wasn't even five feet from his car.

BENNIE

But the shop owner said the bundle was put there ten minutes before the shooting.

TYRIE

And the bullet that killed King never matched Ray's gun.

DICK

Wait— Bennie, hold on... you really believe that the FBI shot Martin Luther King Jr.?

TYRIE

How can any self-respecting Black man look at that picture of MLK bleeding to death on the balcony as McCollough—that race traitor—held Martin's head... knowing-- *knowing* he's a FBI spook. King breathed his last breath looking into the eyes of a traitor, and you don't think they're turning your own people against you? That this isn't a war?

DICK

(helplessly)

Aw, Tyrie....

TYRIE

This ain't a war?

DICK

That was fifty years ago.

TYRIE

The Rodney King riots wasn't a war? That was My-Lai-Viet-Cong shit and I was on the front lines.

DICK

You were nine.

BENNIE

I dunno....

TYRIE

(overpowering Bennie)

I was there—I know what happened.

DICK

Wait—what, Bennie?

TYRIE

I've got a scar right here from being trampled on.

DICK

Hold up a sec. What was that, Bennie?

BENNIE

I don't know of it's a war, exactly... more like we're scapegoats.

DICK

Scapegoats?

BENNIE

I think people need to feel like they're better than someone else. The Haves and the Have Nots, you know. Like India has its Untouchables, only we're easier cuz they have to act a certain way, but with us you can just *see* us, you know?

(Beat. Tyrie shifts his stance to clock Bennie.)

I mean, it doesn't have to be "organized," does it? Like a conspiracy. It doesn't have to be the government—I mean it *could* be—but what if the government wasn't the government? I read about these secret societies that have infiltrated everything, and sometimes it *looks* like the government is doing it, but really it's the secret society. Isn't that right, Dick?

DICK

You on your own, Brother.

BENNIE

I don't think it's so unreasonable. I don't know. It's just interesting to think about.

TYRIE

People *died*, Bennie!

BENNIE

Well, yeah, but—

TYRIE

Have you ever seen someone die? You ever seen someone beaten to death by a mob in the street? Nine years old, I'm walking to the store with my sister. Second day of the riots. And out of nowhere this crowd starts swarming around a man. I just froze. Couldn't think, couldn't move. Standing there clutching my sista with one hand and two dollars for milk with the other. And they're at him like jackals, tearing at his clothes, punching at his face... he's just trying to keep on his feet cuz he knows if he falls down he's dead. Til this nigger comes at him with a brick. You

TYRIE (Cont)

know what that sounds like? Brick on a skull? You think they stopped after he was dead? Twenty thousand cops in the city and you know what they did? They surrounded my neighborhood and watched it burn. People shot in their cars, stores set on fire-- they *wanted* us to kill each other. And right then I knew; that was my first clue: this is a war. Jackson State, the Tuskegee experiments, a 140-year drug war, Malcolm and Martin, Hampton and Clark, CIA drug smuggling, Peltier, Evans and Huey--

JORDAN

(entering from the kitchen)

It's the Great List again!

(JORDAN and KAYLA enter from the kitchen.)

I swear, if I had a quarter for every time I had to listen to the Great List I'd put them in a pillow and beat him to death with it.

TYRIE

You sure you'd recognize a pillow?

JORDAN

I'm a damn good house keeper.

TYRIE

(putting his feet on the coffee table)

Sure you are.

JORDAN

When I've got a house to keep.

TYRIE

Yeah, ask my mother.

JORDAN

(beat, coldly)

Your mother—

KAYLA

Jordan—

JORDAN

--can take that squinty eye—

KAYLA

Jordan—

JORDAN

--of hers and—

KAYLA

(sweetly)

Jordie—Jordie, Jordie, we'll be late, don't you think?

JORDAN

(beat, unwilling to back down)

Get your feet off the table.

TYRIE

Bring me a coaster.

JORDAN

You're not putting your feet on a coaster.

(TYRIE doesn't reply, doesn't move his feet from the coffee table. Beat. JORDAN kisses Bennie and Dick on their cheeks as she speaks—)

(sweetly)

Boys, I love you both. Please, please kill my husband while I'm out. Something slow and painful. Put us on a talk show.

(JORDAN exits. Just before KAYLA turns to follow, there is a moment when her and Dick's eyes meet, acknowledging, however briefly, that they have not kissed goodbye. SHE exits. TYRIE crosses quickly to the door after them and peers through the window.)

TYRIE

I thought they'd never get out of here. This meeting is hereby called to order.

BENNIE

But Dave isn't here—

TYRIE

To Hell with Dave if he's chicken. The Council doesn't need him.

DICK

I wish you wouldn't call it that.

TYRIE

(coldly)

You can call it whatever you want, Dick.

DICK

We're not a council. That's just what you call Poker Night.

TYRIE

What do you want to call it, then?

DICK

We don't have to call it anything.

TYRIE

Fine.

DICK

Calling it something doesn't make it something it's not.

TYRIE

Are we gonna talk about Duncan or not?

BENNIE

Maybe we should wait if Dave can't make it.

TYRIE

Dave can make it, he's just too much of a chicken-shit to be here.

BENNIE

Why?

TYRIE

Why? You're right. Duncan ain't so bad. Hell, you live next to him— you should know.

BENNIE

I didn't say that.

TYRIE

I mean, it's not so hard to pick up after him when he dumps trash in your yard, is it?

BENNIE

I never said that!

DICK

I knew from the beginning this was a bad idea. I tried to tell them.

TYRIE

Who? Duncan?

DICK

The Home Owner's Association.

TYRIE

(mockingly)

And what did you think they'd do?

DICK

I thought they'd reconsider. It doesn't make sense. We're a neighborhood. Not everyone can live together.

BENNIE

You've got no right to tell me what I said. I'm the one who lives next to him.

TYRIE

So what do you want to do about it?

BENNIE

I wrote a letter to the Association.

TYRIE

Ooh, ouch.

BENNIE

I gave them a piece of my mind over this raffle thing.

TYRIE

You sure you can spare it?

DICK

(interceding quickly)

We've all complained to the Association. It hasn't done any of us much good.

TYRIE

Buncha crooks.

DICK

They're not crooks, they just don't want any publicity.

TYRIE

This whole thing is about publicity. And money— getting their hands on as much of our dough as they can. It's like all those damn fees.

DICK

Let's not get into fees again.

BENNIE

He's been parking his truck on his lawn. That's against the rules. I looked it up.

TYRIE

I don't give a damn what he does with that hunk of junk.

BENNIE

It lowers your property value. That's what the booklet says. I put every penny I had into our house.

DICK

I think what Tyrie's trying to say is that there's more at issue here than property values.

BENNIE

I know— I know that.

TYRIE

(overlapping slightly)

I think what Tyrie is trying to say is Tyrie doesn't give a Tyrie-sized shit about what he does with his truck.

DICK

Quit riling him up.

BENNIE

This is supposed to be a decent neighborhood, and then they go and raffle off a house to the first degenerate that can spell his name. You don't give a house to a man like that! I've got him smoking pot in front of my daughter. Do you know that? He's lighting up in front of my eight year-old daughter.

(The LIGHTS come up front center stage: the lawn area.
DUNCAN is standing with a marijuana joint and a can of
Colt 45. Three weeks earlier.)

DUNCAN

You think she knows what this is? Shit, if she knows what this is you've got more trouble than me, man. What do you teach 'em around here?

(BENNIE enters the lawn area.)

BENNIE

Please, she's only eight. Could you not... would you please not speak that way in front of her?

DUNCAN

What way?

BENNIE

My wife and I don't curse around our kids.

DUNCAN

Curse?

BENNIE

Yeah. They repeat *everything*—

DUNCAN

I didn't say nothin' around your kid.

BENNIE

Would you— please... the joint...?

DUNCAN

Yeah, whatever, man. And “Good Morning.”

(DUNCAN drops the joint into the beer can.)

BENNIE

Just... Thank you.

(DUNCAN turns to leave.)

DUNCAN

(muttering)

Crazy motherfucker.

BENNIE

Mr. Duncan, I— when I came home last night, there were beer cans strewn in our yard. I'm not saying— I don't know maybe the wind blew them over—I don't know, but—

DUNCAN

What are you saying?

BENNIE

I just— I thought— it's just.... uh, I'd appreciate it—

DUNCAN

You appreciated it?

BENNIE

Yeah-- no. I—uh... I just, uh—

DUNCAN
(aping)

Uh— uh....

BENNIE
You're throwing your trash in my yard!

DUNCAN
Where the fuck do you get off accusing me?

BENNIE
It's the same brand. It's Colt 45— right there!

DUNCAN
Don't be tellin' me what I drink.

BENNIE
They're your beer cans!

DUNCAN
You're pissed because you got a bunch of empty cans? Is that it?

BENNIE
And don't use profanity around my daughter—

DUNCAN
You lookin' for the beer?

(DUNCAN unbuckles his belt.)

BENNIE
(overlapping)
What?! What are you doing? Wait! Cynthia, go inside.

DUNCAN
You want the beer?

(DUNCAN unbuttons his fly.)

BENNIE
Stop that!

DUNCAN
I'll get you some.

BENNIE

Cynthia! Cynthia... I couldn't believe it... my daughter.

(The LIGHTS FADE on DUNCAN as he steps back into the darkness.)

She'd... she was so scared, she wet her pants... right there in the yard, she peed in her pants.

(tears welling in his eyes)

I could've... I could've killed him. If he'd been there when I turned around, I could've killed him with my bare hands....

(The LIGHTS RISE on the lawn area. DICK and TYRIE are standing outside on the lawn with BENNIE. It is night.)

TYRIE

And did he throw cans in your yard again?

(Silence from Bennie.)

The very next day? And what did you do?

BENNIE

I didn't want to provoke him.

TYRIE

You gave him the power.

DICK

What would've been the point, Ty?

BENNIE

And it wasn't the next day. It was a week later.

TYRIE

Oh, well, a *week*.

BENNIE

I thought he'd get bored with it.

TYRIE

You gave him permission.

DICK

Like he needed permission.

TYRIE

To do worse.

BENNIE

It was supposed to be different. I moved up here to get away from all that crap.

TYRIE

It's different if we make it different.

BENNIE

I've been thinking about buying a dog. A Rottweiler maybe.

TYRIE

Don't buy a dog. Buy a gun.

DICK

Please, let's be realistic.

TYRIE

I am being realistic; a dog's not going to solve anything.

DICK

Neither is a gun.

TYRIE

Putting a cap in his ass would.

DICK

Tyrie.

TYRIE

Why not? A white guy pop him, they be calling it self-defense. "Stand your ground" or some "Twinkie" shit. That's their justice.

BENNIE

Wasn't that a gay thing?

TYRIE

What? No, man, it wasn't a gay thing.

BENNIE

But twinkie is a word for gay people, isn't it?

TYRIE

It's a sugar thing. Eating sugar and going crazy. Alright?

DICK

Brown sugar doesn't do that, you know.

Really? BENNIE

It metabolizes slower. It's really a white sugar thing. DICK

Yo, Tambo and Bones— TYRIE

I heard that, too. BENNIE

Brown sugar's more stable. DICK

It's a stupid fucking made-up thing! A'right? Now can we you get back to Duncan? TYRIE

Well, maybe we could take him to court? Press charges. DICK

Over what? BENNIE
(with alarm)

Exposing himself. DICK

Cynthia didn't see anything. BENNIE

She peed her pants. DICK

She didn't see anything. BENNIE

You could still file charges. DICK

And have her testify? In front of everybody? BENNIE

If she didn't see anything— DICK

BENNIE

She'd still have to testify. There were only three of us in the yard.

DICK

(gently)

Bennie, what if you're not there next time?

BENNIE

There won't be a next time. I told Cynthia not to play in the front yard.

DICK

She's got to go to school.

BENNIE

I take her to school.

DICK

She's gotta come home. She can't—

BENNIE

(flaring)

She didn't see anything!

(beat)

I don't want to make it anymore real for her than it already is.

DICK

Well, we could still sue over property values.

TYRIE

Oh for Christ's sake.

DICK

It's something.

TYRIE

Every time I turn around somebody's suing over hot coffee or a pinched ass.

DICK

This is legitimate.

BENNIE

My property's gone down, I'm sure of that.

TYRIE

How are you gonna sue him for trashing his own house? You can't get your best friend to write him a parking ticket.

DICK

This is different. J.D. could show us how to file a suit.

TYRIE

Look, I know he's your friend, but lets face it, he's Don Knotts with a badge.

DICK

He going through a rough time right now.

TYRIE

He's supposed to be the Law. I'm not going to sit here and listen to him lecture me about "tolerance."

BENNIE

There's got to be something J.D. can do.

TYRIE

Man, we tried. We all tried. And he always says the same thing....

(LIGHTS RISE down stage left: it is now the middle of the street. Daytime.)

J.D.

It's not that I don't believe you. Course I believe you. But that ain't the law works that way—

(HE closes his eyes, wincing.)

I mean, that's not the *way* the law works. It's just one person's word against the other's.

TYRIE

(pointing to the ground)

Look at this. Look at it! He was all over the sidewalk!

J.D.

I see that.

TYRIE

He came around the corner at fifty miles an hour.

J.D.

He'll say someone else left the marks.

I saw him!

TYRIE

I know, Tyrie.

J.D.

What if Brianna had been playing here?

TYRIE

I can talk to him, Tyrie.

J.D.

We've all got kids here. Look around. Look! Do you see one kid playing in his yard? It's a ghost town.

TYRIE

I'll talk to him.

J.D.

Oh to hell with this.

TYRIE

What do you want me to do?

J.D.

Slap a restraining order on the son-of-a-bitch.

TYRIE

I can't restrain him from driving his truck.

J.D.

He's a menace—

TYRIE

Tyrie, a restraining order applies to people. He hasn't assaulted anyone, or destroyed any property.

J.D.

Have you seen his house? He's turned it into a junkyard!

TYRIE

That's *his* house.

J.D.

In other words you can't do shit.

TYRIE

J.D.

Tyrie, I never used to come out this way. Baldwin Heights? When I drove my rounds, I didn't even *think* about coming here except maybe when I wanted to get away. Sit in Coffle Park with my sandwich and have a quiet lunch. Now I drive through here three times a day, hoping to see something. I'll talk to him. Real slow so he understands.

TYRIE

(deflated)

It was supposed to be different here. In two months he's ruined this neighborhood.

J.D.

He'll adjust.

TYRIE

I might as well be back in L.A.

J.D.

How's Brianna? How's she doing?

TYRIE

I can't talk to her. I don't now what she's thinking. For some reason she seems to get along with her grandmother. I picked her up the other day and the old woman was showing her how to work a *loom*, for Christ's sake. Can you believe that? Making quilts.

J.D.

That's a good thing.

TYRIE

(playing with the woven bracelet)

Yeah, she made this for me... supposed be some sort of good luck symbol. I can't help thinking that if it wasn't for the old woman, we wouldn't be here at all.

J.D.

Old people are fragile.

TYRIE

She sure got better in a hurry after we moved.

J.D.

Yeah, well, that's fragile. One week a puff of air'll break 'em in two, the next they're tough as shoe leather. Better safe than sorry.

TYRIE

If it wasn't for her we wouldn't have got the loan for the house; we wouldn't have moved here at all. I got the house on one hand, and all this static on the other.

J.D.

I don't like this any better than you do, Tyrie. This has got "train wreck" written all over it. If I could just get one step ahead of it, I could plan... figure something out.

(The LIGHTS FADE on Tyrie as HE steps back into darkness. J.D. becomes isolated on the stage.)

I usta think the Heights was going to do some good. When they sold the farmland... I thought, "finally some growth in this town." We need more homes. More families, businesses. Jennie and I even talked about moving up here, but....

(J.D. shrugs)

I guess we had other problems. I'll talk to him. Real slow. I'll make sure he understands.

(The LIGHTS RISE on DICK, BENNIE, and TYRIE in the living room as they fade on J.D. in the yard.)

BENNIE

Did he?

TYRIE

What does it matter? Nothing changed.

DICK

So what do you suggest?

TYRIE

I suggest we go over there and remind him what is.

BENNIE

Just walk over there and, what? Talk to him?

TYRIE

No, walk over there and show him.

DICK

Show him what?

TYRIE

You trouble me, I'll trouble you back. This ain't happening in my neighborhood.

DICK

Wait, Tyrie--

BENNIE

How do we do that?

TYRIE

Tell me, who makes the law?

BENNIE

The government.

TYRIE

No. We the people. Who decides if a law has been broken? Who interprets it?

DICK

The police. Or the DA.

TYRIE

Juries. We the people. That's how it's supposed to be. The law is supposed to be reflection of community's values. Alcohol is good; drugs are bad. Stealing is illegal, interest on a loan is legal—don't matter how much.

DICK

So you want to go over there give him a high interest loan?

TYRIE

I'm saying, the law is supposed to make us responsible. When my father was a kid he couldn't steal an apple on his way home from school without everyone jumping on him. Grannies would be twisting his ear, and every brother on the block stopped to lecture him. That's how we did it back then.

DICK

Things have changed.

TYRIE

Not everywhere.

DICK

What do you mean?

TYRIE

(earnestly)

I heard about these crack dealers who took over a neighborhood in Denver— they were Polish or Russian or something.

BENNIE

Polish crack dealers?

TYRIE

No. The neighborhood. The neighborhood was Polish. Or Russian. Anyway, the dealers set up a crack house. They had people going in and out all night— addicts sleeping it off on the sidewalk. Kids had to step over them just to get to school. So they went to the police, and then they went to City Council; nothing worked. Finally, the men got together. They talked it over and showed up on the dealer's front door at two in the morning, and you can be sure that house was empty the next day.

DICK

That worked?

TYRIE

And not just in Denver. It's worked in Detroit, Minneapolis, L.A.... wherever people were united.

DICK

A bunch of middle-aged men?

TYRIE

A bunch of middle-aged men packing some serious heat.

DICK

Are you out of your mind?

TYRIE

You wanna get your life back?

DICK

You want to go over there with a gun?

TYRIE

What did you think we were gonna up show with? A smile? How's he gonna know you're fer real? You gonna wave your ball-point pen at him?

DICK

It's against the law.

TYRIE

It's how it's done.

BENNIE

We don't even have guns.

TYRIE

Yeah, we do.

DICK

What?

TYRIE

I've got everything we need.

DICK

(realizing he's serious)

You've got a gun?

BENNIE

How many?

TYRIE

Enough.

BENNIE

For all of us?

TYRIE

Wait.

(TYRIE exits to the back room.)

DICK

Tell me you're not taking this seriously....

BENNIE

Well we've got to do something, don't we? I mean nothing violent, of course, but what can we do?

DICK

Not this.

(TYRIE re-enters carrying two rifles and a pistol. He sets them down on the poker table.)

TYRIE

Twenty-two caliber pump— a classic. A three-oh-six: little more kick, but well worth it.

DICK

Where did you get these?

TYRIE

Oh there's plenty I ain't tellin' ya.

(holding up the pistol)

Nine millimeter. Easily transported, inconspicuous, and can stop a buck in its tracks.

DICK

What else do you keep down there?

TYRIE

You gotta be prepared.

DICK

For what? Armageddon?

TYRIE

What do you think people do in Arizona? The three-oh-six and twenty-two are standard hunting gear. You should know that from when you were a kid. The nine millimeter is home protection.

DICK

I'm speechless.

TYRIE

So we don't have any excuses.

DICK

I think we could be a little more diplomatic.

TYRIE

This isn't Parliament, Dick. You're not going to "debate" him. You need a whip-- it's gotta be primal. Something he understands.

DICK

Tyrie, this is extreme. It'll just escalate everything—

TYRIE

It's him now. What are you gonna do when his friends start showing up? And their friends. You gonna wait until he turns it into a crack house?

DICK

You don't pull a gun.

TYRIE

I'm not going to be the victim here. He's preying on us, don't you see that? I'm not waiting until he runs someone over or molests someone.

DICK

We don't know that's going to happen!

TYRIE

He's pushing us. Don't you see that? He's testing us. Trying to see how far he can go. Everyday just a little bit more— a little bit harder. No, he ain't halfway done. He's circling over us, like a vulture. Waiting.

(LIGHTS FADE on the living room and RISE in front on JORDAN and DUNCAN. Two months earlier. She is sitting on a park bench reading a magazine. DUNCAN watches her until she senses his gaze; then he crosses to her, puts his foot on the bench, and re-ties his shoe. JORDAN closes her magazine and starts to leave.)

DUNCAN

I did your house on King Street.

JORDAN

Excuse me?

DUNCAN

The corner of Main and King? I did the landscaping. Forsythia bushes out front, right? That's a nice house.

JORDAN

We love it, thanks.

DUNCAN

All them is, up on Tobacco Hill. Never thought I'd be living up there.

JORDAN

You live in Baldwin Heights?

DUNCAN

2525 Stanford.

JORDAN

You're... you won the house?

DUNCAN

That's right.

JORDAN

Well, congratulations. I thought you owned a... uh....

DUNCAN

Tattoo Shop. That's right. I do a little bizness on the side.

Landscaping? JORDAN

When I wanna get my hands dirty. DUNCAN

(An awkward moment of silence.)

You've got a daughter, dontcha? JORDAN

That's right. DUNCAN

She takes after you. JORDAN

Thanks. DUNCAN

She's got your nose and chin. JORDAN

(flattered)

They're her grandmother's really. DUNCAN

I always thought the chin is where the beauty is, don't you think? JORDAN

I never thought about it. DUNCAN

The line of the jaw. It defines the whole face. JORDAN

An artist's sensibility. DUNCAN

(Duncan smiles for the first time.)

Yeah, when she smiles, I see you ten years ago. JORDAN

I wish it were ten.

DUNCAN
I see her in ten years. You meet half-way, the two of you.

JORDAN
(a little embarrassed)
Do you like the house?

DUNCAN
The house?

JORDAN
Yeah.

DUNCAN
Got no complaints.

JORDAN
Must be so different.

DUNCAN
(beat)
Looks the same as yours.

JORDAN
I meant winning a house. I can't imagine what it would be like.

DUNCAN
(growing slowly cold)
Why's that?

JORDAN
A home is very... I don't know. It's not just a building, it's personal. To suddenly be somewhere else, like that? Like waking up in another world.

DUNCAN
I was always curious.

JORDAN
About what?

DUNCAN
Bedroom communities. What it'd be like to live in a bedroom community. Why they call them bedrooms.

JORDAN

Because they're next to larger cities. Besides, Baldwyn isn't a... satellite community. It's just a neighborhood, like any other.

DUNCAN

More like a cell block. Big front gate. Everybody locked in their little houses.

JORDAN

I wouldn't— why—

DUNCAN

It's not very honest, is it?

JORDAN

What isn't?

DUNCAN

It's not honest. In your bedroom with your door locked. Your house that looks like everyone else's. Behind your chains and your alarms. Curtains drawn. It's not really honest.

JORDAN

And you are?

DUNCAN

I try to be.

JORDAN

By tattooing gang signs on fifteen year-old girls?

DUNCAN

Have you ever gotten a tattoo?

JORDAN

No.

DUNCAN

Then you don't know. It's freeing. It's 100 percent honest. I take whatever is on inside, under the skin, and lift it up on the surface. I unlock whatever it is they're feeling. And then everyone can see it. Everyone knows who you are.

JORDAN

Yeah, whatever they happen to be feeling at that moment. When they're fifteen. *Next year—*

DUNCAN

They'll be a year older, but that don't change who they are. You don't erase yo-self, you keep writin'. A tattoo is history. It'll hold you, your passion, your desire... like a scar on your skin.

You write it, what's inside you. Ain't nobody tellin' you who you are. You get to write it. If you know. What's you? A Rebel Mama? An African Queen? A rose.

JORDAN

It was nice to meet you Mr....

DUNCAN

Duncan. Bobbie Duncan.

JORDAN

I hope you enjoy your new house.

DUNCAN

Home.

JORDAN

Home.

(JORDAN starts to exit.)

DUNCAN

You say hello to that lovely daughter of yours for me.

(JORDAN turns to stare at him. The LIGHTS FADE on the front of the stage, RISE again in the living room.)

TYRIE

(brooding)

I ain't waiting for him to land. I'm not waiting until it's too late.

DICK

I keep thinking maybe this is a money thing, you know?

TYRIE

A money thing?

DICK

It's just that he hasn't had the same opportunities as us.

TYRIE

We're hostages in our own homes.

DICK

But maybe we should be reaching out to him. Show him how we do things here.

TYRIE

You wanna learn him how to keep his dick in his pants in front of Bennie's daughter? You got a picture book or something?

DICK

No. I just don't want to sink to....

TYRIE

He wants to extend his hand? I'll shake it.

DICK

It's just so undignified. This isn't *me*. I don't want to look in the mirror and see--

TYRIE

Undignified? You tell me where's the dignity in hiding in your own house? In pissing everything you built down the drain?

DICK

We're not animals.

TYRIE

He's unpacking the ghetto in your front yard. The trash, the noise, the drugs. When are you gonna say, "enough is enough," Dick?

DICK

If we start down this road—

TYRIE

He started it. Listen to me-- listen. If a man comes into your house, you've got a right to defend yourself. He comes into your house and puts a knife to Kayla's throat.

(TYRIE grabs the pistol and puts it into Dick's hand.)

You've got a gun— he's gonna kill her if you don't shoot him. What do you do?

(For a moment, DICK is almost drawn into the hypothesis, the power in his hand.)

DICK

It's not as simple as that.

TYRIE

It'll never be simpler.

DICK

I just couldn't threaten him.

TYRIE

Goddamn it!

DICK

Because I couldn't go through with it. He'd know. He'd see it in my eyes.

TYRIE

He almost killed you. Didn't he almost kill you?

DICK

Yes, but....

TYRIE

You want it to be Kayla next time? Or Bennie?

BENNIE

You didn't tell me he tried to kill you.

DICK

He didn't. It was a....

TYRIE

Don't you dare say it was an accident.

BENNIE

Dick?

DICK

I didn't want to worry anyone. I was driving home. Around noon time. I came up over the hill and there he was, driving down the wrong side of the street. He must have been going sixty miles an hour. I thought... at first I thought he hadn't seen me. Then he sped up. He saw my car, he saw it and he didn't care, he didn't turn back into his lane. He sped up. I froze. I couldn't think. I froze. And then all of a sudden the car turned; it ran up onto the curb and I hit Ted Johnson's mailbox. I just sat there thinking, he didn't even know it was me. The bastard sped up and he didn't even know it was me. It could've been Kayla; he didn't know.

TYRIE

And you're calling me hardcore? You wanna know why Dave isn't here? He filed a complaint.

BENNIE

For what?

TYRIE

Duncan ran over his fence. When he heard about the complaint he went to Dave's house and threatened to break his legs. Inside his own house.

BENNIE

Did he tell J.D.?

TYRIE

What's J.D. gonna say? Where's your witness? Do you have any pictures? Dave's talking about withdrawing his complaint. He's sitting at home like a scared rabbit.

BENNIE

At least he filed one.

TYRIE

So it can be dismissed in a year? We can't wait that long. We've got to do something now.

DICK

I'm not threatening his life.

(Beat.)

BENNIE

We could say we'll run him out of town. We don't have to say how.

TYRIE

No. We go over there and tell him he crosses us one more time and we're going to burn his house down. And we mean it.

BENNIE

Do we wear masks?

TYRIE

He's got to know it's us— I want him to be afraid of us.

(to Dick)

You in, or you pulling a Dave?

DICK

I don't know.

TYRIE

You tell me— would you feel the same if Kayla had been with you when he ran you off the road? If Kayla had been pregnant with your child, would you be sitting on your hands? I've got a kid. Bennie's got two. How long do you expect us to just sit here? Until he runs one of them over? Until it's Kayla?

(J.D. steps onto the front porch and crosses to the door.
HE listens first.)

BENNIE

Someone's outside.

TYRIE

Shh.

(J.D. KNOCKS. TYRIE picks up the guns and stuffs them under the couch. HE crosses to the door and looks through the blinds.)

Great, it's Andy Griffith.

(TYRIE opens the door. J.D. smiles sheepishly.)

J.D.

Hey, Tyrie.

TYRIE

Hi, Sarge.

J.D.

Dick. Ben.

(An awkward moment as they all stand waiting for someone to speak.)

I ran Kayla and Jordan at the mall—

(wincing—)

I mean, I ran *into* Kayla and Jordan. They said you were playing tonight.

BENNIE

It was just an impromptu game. We thought of it all of a sudden.

TYRIE

We figured you were too dedicated to play on duty.

J.D.

(seeing the clean poker table)

Just getting started, I see.

TYRIE

Sure. You wanna sit in a couple hands?

DICK

We thought if the women were out bowling, why not? You really cleaned up last time.

J.D.

Seems to me Tyrie is the one who cleaned up last time.

TYRIE

Barely broke even.

J.D.

No, you always slip your money under the table so no one can see how you're doing.

TYRIE

You gonna play or what?

J.D.

I just thought I'd swing by. I know how it is. You play a few hands; drink a couple of beers. Start talking about how things are. Suddenly everything feels a little closer in, a little warm around the collar.

TYRIE

Sorry Charlie, simple game of poker, tonight.

J.D.

Texas Hold em?

TYRIE

How long you been comin' here? Low Chicago with a split-- you know 'at's the only game I play.

J.D.

(strangely pointed)

A leopard don't change his spots, huh?

TYRIE

(after a beat, deadpan)

Why would he want to? He's a bad ass cat.

J.D.

I don't want to beat around the bush with you guys.

(to Dick)

I've known you and Bennie since we were in elementary school. Even though we haven't known each other that long, I feel like we're friends, Tyrie. You guys would tell me if you were thinking about anything? Having to do with Duncan?

TYRIE

Of course we would, J.D.

J.D.

Bennie?

BENNIE
(uncomfortably)

You know... we wouldn't actually do—

TYRIE

I said we would. Of course we'd tell you if we were going to lynch a man. You're like an Uncle to us.

J.D.

Have you thought about setting up a surveillance camera? Maybe on Bennie's porch?

TYRIE

We didn't really plan on talking about it tonight.

J.D.

A hundred-dollar investment might really pay off. I'd be willing to chip in—

TYRIE

You mean in addition to the salary we're paying you?

DICK

We're all friends here. We know you're doing the best you can—

TYRIE

So you can lecture us 'bout "tolerance".

J.D.

In hindsight I realize that was the wrong take to tack— tactic to take—

TYRIE

By "hindsight" you must mean "staring outta your ass," cuz I know you ain't been thinking about nothing.

DICK

Come on, Tyrie—

TYRIE

A video camera? What are we gonna do, catch him littering?

J.D.

It's a start—

TYRIE

No putting a cap in his ass would be a "start."

J.D.

Tyrie—

TYRIE

Hey, you shoot black people all the time—what’s wrong with that nigga?

DICK

Whoa--

TYRIE

Hands up!

DICK

There’s no point in jumping down each other’s throats—

TYRIE

Hands up!

J.D.

(cold)

Ain’t nobody been shot in Baldwin Heights for twenty years, Tyrie, black or white.

TYRIE

I’m talking about Devon County—

J.D.

Oh, you mean down in The Flats— where *I* live. *You* live in the Heights.

TYRIE

What’re you saying?

J.D.

I’m saying watch who you’re calling “you,” Sharpton.

DICK

Okay, now, this isn’t getting us anywhere. We’re all friends here.

BENNIE

Dick’s right.

DICK

We’re not mad at each other.

TYRIE

You’re right. It’s Poker Night. Who’s in? You playing or folding, J.D.?

J.D.

I can't stay.

TYRIE

Yeah, well you need any help out there you just holler.

J.D.

Have a good game. Can I speak to you outside, D?

(Beat. Dick nods his head, yes. THEY cross to the door, Dick taking one last look over his shoulder at Tyrie before closing the door behind them. THEY stand on the porch together.)

J.D.

(visibly shaken)

Man, Tyrie is off the hook.

DICK

Everybody's just tense right now. You know how he gets.

J.D.

I get so tongue tied around him. My mouth turns to mush.

DICK

Actually, I think he respects you more than he does me.

J.D.

Dick, we practically grew up in the same house. I ate at your house almost every night; your mom was practically my mom.

DICK

I know.

J.D.

Bennie, he'll follow anyone who tells a good story. You're the one with the head on his shoulders.

(beat)

Do I have anything to worry about?

DICK

You shouldn't worry.

J.D.

Did you talk about Duncan?

DICK

How couldn't we? You can't get two words into a conversation without him coming up.

J.D.

You make any plans?

DICK

Just a lot of talk.

J.D.

Yeah, but plans...?

DICK

We covered a lot of ground.

J.D.

The video camera might work.

DICK

Yeah. It might.

(Several moments pass. J.D. looks up at the night sky.)

J.D.

You used to be able to see the woods from here. We used to play on the hill behind the old plantation fields.

DICK

I know.

J.D.

Funny how things change. Sometimes I feel as if I'm paid to just stand around and watch everything change. That's what I do. Drive around and watch everything fall apart, and if I'm lucky, every so often I pick up the pieces. Do you know I caught a couple of girls tagging the First Presbyterian the other day? I asked them if their parents ever took them to church. You know what they said? "Not this one." Same God, but different church. I'm looking at these two girls and one of them is sucking her thumb like a five-year old. I wanted to throw myself in front of a bus.

DICK

I drove by Eddie's yesterday, you know where it used to be on 101st?

J.D.

Eddie's Barbershop?

DICK

Dollar Store now. It reminded me of our first date, you and Jennie and me and Kayla.

J.D.

Yeah, you took me to Eddie's to get my hair cut.

DICK

I don't think he'd ever cut a white boy's hair before.

J.D.

You tellin' me. Looked like he was about to grab a bowl.

DICK

He was cool, though. Didn't even blink, just brushed down the chair.

J.D.

Yeah, he didn't *smile*, either. I can't believe you talked me into going there.

DICK

I can't believe I let you talked me into getting a two inch fade.

J.D.

Yeah, that... wasn't a good look for you. You shouldn't do that.

DICK

Kayla's dad opened the door and gave me a look that coulda melted a polar ice cap. Global warming started right here. 1998.

J.D.

Kayla dug it though.

DICK

Jennie liked it. It took two months to get Kayla to go out with me again.

J.D.

That's cuz you kept cracking stupid jokes. "A piece of string walks into a bar...."

DICK

Jesus, cuz you wouldn't say nothin.' The whole way there I couldn't get you to shut up, but the moment they came down the stairs, you wouldn't say a word.

J.D.

I was looking at her. Just her, you know. Every lash, every smile, looking for the smallest sign... a hint. Just being with her was enough. I still remember walking over there. The light in the trees. Everything, the air, the light, was brilliant. Alive.

DICK

The Moment.

J.D.

(beat; the loss sinks in)

Yeah. I guess it was.

DICK

Bartender throws him out, says, “we don’t serve string here.”

J.D.

Don’t start.

DICK

You remember it, though. Twenty years later.

J.D.

Man, you are so stupid....

DICK

“We don’t serve your kind.”

J.D.

Have you seen her?

DICK

I think Kayla ran into her the other day.

J.D.

She came by yesterday to get some things from the attic. I told her she could have whatever she wanted. The first thing she pulled out was this stuffed monkey. I won it at the boardwalk. You remember that?

DICK

First summer back from college.

J.D.

My heart just flopped when I saw it. Of all the damn things you forget. And then I couldn't stop thinking about it. It was like there was this part of me I'd forgotten, never thought about, like breathing. Like she'd stolen the breath from my lungs. I woke up at four this morning. I smelled smoke— I thought the house was on fire. I could *see* the smoke in the air, but I couldn't find Jennie. She wasn't beside me. And I panicked, my heart started racing, and then, all of a sudden, the smoke was gone— just... gone... and there was just this haze from the streetlight. But my heart, it wouldn't stop pounding. I lay there, waiting for the house to catch fire again, staring at the ceiling. Waiting. That's how I know it's real. It's that moment again when everything is... brilliant. I'm still watching her, looking for a sign— waiting.

J.D. (cont)

(pause, with deep emotion)

We're friends still, aren't we? Christ, we used to sit outside your dad's garage and listen to him and my old man play cards and listen to Marvin Gaye and Bill Withers. Always complaining 'bout something or somebody. You remember that?

DICK

Course, J.D.

J.D.

Useta talk about when *we'd* be on the other side of that door.

DICK

I remember.

J.D.

We're still friends, aren't we?

DICK

Of course.

J.D.

We were best friends.

DICK

We still are.

(J.D. hears this. Nods. Without speaking, HE turns and leaves. After a moment the door behind Dick opens, and BENNIE steps onto the porch.)

BENNIE

J.D. left?

(Dick nods, yes.)

Did you tell him?

DICK

No.

BENNIE

What did he want?

DICK

To talk about Jennie.

BENNIE

Oh. It's too bad....

DICK

A Positive times a Negative.

BENNIE

A positive what?

DICK

Multiplication. A positive number times a negative number always equals a negative number. Doesn't matter how big the positive number is.

BENNIE

He loved her, but she didn't...?

(Dick nods again.)

I think she used to. She used to be crazy about him. Not like Tyrie and Jordan. I don't know if they were ever in love.

DICK

Oh, they're alright. A Negative times a Negative. Still equals a Positive.

BENNIE

Really?

DICK

That's the math.

BENNIE

And me? Me and Gail?

DICK

A Positive times a Positive. I think you're both crazy in love... though maybe she's a little more crazy.

BENNIE

(earnestly)

She's not really crazy.

DICK

About you, that's what counts.

BENNIE

It's funny, I guess.

DICK

Yeah.

(beat)

When I was fifteen, my uncle took me to visit a monastery. He used to go there every year and spend a week with the monks. There was this little monk who stood in the back. It was god-awful early in the morning, their five o'clock mass, and the monks were chanting, and standing and kneeling, standing and kneeling. Except for this one little monk in back. When everyone would kneel, he would keep standing, rocking back and forth like he was about to fall over. I couldn't figure out why he never sat down, what made him special. Then I realized he was afraid of falling asleep. He was terrified of sitting down... falling asleep and failing his church or his God— this outside thing, this idea. Every day like that. Musta been torture.

(with deep sadness)

I don't know why I said that. I don't know why everything has to fall apart.

(DICK abruptly turns and re-enters the house. BENNIE follows. TYRIE is sitting at the card table, playing solitaire.)

TYRIE

So did Barney Fife set you straight?

DICK

No.

TYRIE

Then you'll do it?

(Dick nods, yes.)

Hot damn! Bennie— you ain't chickened out yet, have you?

(Bennie shakes his head, no.)

TYRIE (cont)

Damn-straight. Tonight we take back our lives.

DICK

When do we go?

TYRIE

It's gotta be late. Midnight.

BENNIE

I have to be home by twelve.

TYRIE

Well Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, make it 11:50 then. Can't take more'n ten minutes.

DICK

We're not going to threaten his life.

TYRIE

We say the house.

DICK

Not his life.

TYRIE

His house. His house.

BENNIE

Well, what do we do until then?

TYRIE

Break open that piggy. Let's play some cards. Come on, break that puppy open. I'm feeling lucky.

(BENNIE picks up his porcelain clown.)

BENNIE

(beat)

I don't think so.

TYRIE

Suit yourself. Low Chicago. One chance only, suckers. Duece's wild.

(TYRIE starts to deal as the lights fade to BLACK.)

(Lights rise on DUNCAN alone in his house. He is watching T.V. Outside, the THREE MEN appear, guns in hand. Tyrie and Dick have the rifles. They stand for a moment, staring at the house. Then, TYRIE leads them onto the porch. He KNOCKS on the door. Inside, Duncan sits sullenly. For a moment we suspect that he knows what is about to happen, that he would avoid it if possible. After a long moment, he moves to the door. He opens it and surveys the trio for several beats.)

DUNCAN

Girl's night out?

TYRIE

You're getting one warning. One. You dump trash in Ben's yard—

DUNCAN

(overlapping)

Or are you on the way to the "country club"—

TYRIE

You speed through this neighborhood, you drive down the middle of the street—

DUNCAN

For a little lemon-drop spritzer and some Perrier?

TYRIE

(overlapping)

We're coming here and we're burning this house down.

DUNCAN

Oh, Rastus doan wan' no trouble, suh—

TYRIE

(growing louder)

And I don't care if you're here or not.

(Dick looks at Tyrie in alarm; this is not what they agreed.)

DICK

Tyrie.

DUNCAN

Well, come on in. You guys look so cute in your gangsta threads.

TYRIE

Did you hear what I said?

DUNCAN

(overlapping on "hear")

Let me get a picture of you guys.

(DUNCAN retrieves his phone and switches it to camera.)

TYRIE

Put that down!

DUNCAN

Smile, Bennie. Smile, Dick.

TYRIE

Put it down, damnit!

(TYRIE goes for the phone; DUNCAN evades him, still trying to get a picture.)

DUNCAN

Let's see you cock that thing, Dick.

TYRIE

Goddamn it!

(TYRIE grabs the phone out of his hands, and checks it to see if there are any pictures. Frustrated he shoves it in his pocket.)

DUNCAN

Come on, Blood. Cock that thing. Get it up, Dick. Show me what you got.

(to Bennie)

What about you, Erkle?

TYRIE

Listen you little fuck. You mess with us— you mess with our kids—our wives, and we're burning this house down around your ears.

DUNCAN

Oh, you're looking for your wives. You should have said that from the jump, Blood. Check the bedroom, they've all been here.

TYRIE

Son-of-a-bitch!

DUNCAN

Bennie, you oughta tattoo your name on that girl's forehead, she's 360 freaky.

(BENNIE lunges toward Duncan with his bare hands.
DICK stands paralyzed.)

BENNIE

Son-of-a-bitch!

(TYRIE grabs Bennie, getting between them.)

TYRIE

Bennie! Bennie, take it easy!

DUNCAN

She be slippin' over here every chance she gets.

BENNIE

Take that back, damnit!

(TYRIE restrains Bennie.)

DUNCAN

Dick, you lookin a little pale. Maybe I can get you some chitlins?

DICK

(beat)

Let's go, Tyrie.

TYRIE

What?

DUNCAN

Some thing for the ride home, case you ain't packing none?

DICK

We made our point, let's go.

DUNCAN

Oh, there was a point?

TYRIE

We're not leaving until this son-of-a-bitch understands.

DUNCAN

(to Tyrie)

Maybe ya' shoulda brung dat sweet daughta of yours wid ya. Now she could sure convince me uh sump'n—

(Now TYRIE is the one who lunges— thrusting his gun into Duncan's face.)

TYRIE

(shouting)

Shut the fuck up! I'll stick this down your throat and blow your fucking head off.

DICK

Tyrie!

TYRIE

(screaming in his face)

You hear me? You hear me? Yeah, I got your nose open now, don't I?

DICK

Stop it, Tyrie.

TYRIE

You even look at her—

(to Dick)

Gimme your gun. Gimme it.

DICK

No.

(TYRIE grabs Dick's rifle and tries to wrestle it from him.)

TYRIE

Give it to me, goddamn it!

(TYRIE wrenches the gun from Dick and thrusts it towards Duncan.)

Take it, you stupid fuck.

(TYRIE forces the rifle into Duncan's hands and he holds it loosely, without pointing. The smile is gone. Tyrie looks down the barrel of his rifle at Duncan's chest.)

Come on, cock it. Cock it, you candy-ass-motherfucker. Frontin' like you ain't no bitch. Yeah, you learnin' now, ain't you-- you learnin.'

(TYRIE spreads his arms wide, gun to one side, spread-eagle.)

TYRIE (cont)

Go for it, big mouth. An equal chance, you stupid-fucking-chicken-shit. You better do it-- you play pussy you gonna fucked. *Cock that thing*. You want me to count to three? One... Two....

DICK

Tyrie.

(At the sound of his name, TYRIE viciously cocks his rifle and jams it against Duncan's chest.)

No!

TYRIE

Then you keep step... *Blood*. Cuz next time you leave a stain.

(TYRIE takes the rifle from Duncan, turns heel and strides for the door. But before he is half-way, DUNCAN begins to laugh— a dry, ridiculing, desperate laugh. TYRIE turns to face him.)

Laugh all you want, nigger, I'm watching you.

(TYRIE exits out. DICK and BENNIE hurry after him, BENNIE hiding his pistol in his pants as he exits. TYRIE descends the steps, then paces across the lawn in front of the house. The other two catch up with him there.)

DICK

Tyrie. Tyrie!

TYRIE

(to no one in particular)

Son-of-a-bitch, son-of-a-bitch....

DICK

What were you thinking in there?

TYRIE

We're in this til the end, you hear me?

DICK

We agreed, damn it.

TYRIE

You hear me? We in this together.

DICK

We said we weren't going to threaten him.

TYRIE

Yeah— well, it's too late now, ain't it.

DICK

And look at where it's gotten us.

TYRIE

He's laughing at us in there.

DICK

He could go to the cops with this!

TYRIE

He ain't going to the cops.

BENNIE

(agitated)

You don't believe him, do you?

DICK

What?

BENNIE

Gail never went there. You don't believe him, do you?

TYRIE

He was just saying that, you idiot.

BENNIE

(indignant)

Of course he was— Gail would never— she wouldn't....

DICK

How do you know he's not going to the cops?

TYRIE

Believe me, *he* ain't. And we weren't here tonight. We played poker til midnight and then you went home.

(TYRIE grabs Dick's gun from him.)

You didn't see nobody, you didn't talk to nobody.

BENNIE

Oh God, I'm late.

TYRIE

Whatever happens, you don't know shit. Agreed?

BENNIE

Gail's gonna kill me. She's gonna—

TYRIE
(pulling Bennie to face him)

Did you hear me?

BENNIE

Yeah.

(beat)

Yeah.

TYRIE

We're in this together.

BENNIE

Okay.

DICK

(after a beat, hurt)

Yeah.

TYRIE

Go home.

(TYRIE takes the two rifles and exits quickly. BENNIE follows after him. HE stops abruptly and looks back at Dick.)

BENNIE

You don't believe him, do you?

(DICK shakes his head, no. BENNIE exits out. DICK turns exits the stage in the opposite direction. LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)

(LIGHTS RISE on DUNCAN standing in the yard. He stretches his arms luxuriously towards the stars.)

DUNCAN

I love that smell.

(His arms fall to his side, smile still on his face. Abruptly, his face changes expression. HE turns towards the shadows as if he is suddenly aware of someone. Beat.)

Ain't no going back, Blood.

(A single GUN SHOT, with a spark of light, rings out. The bullet catches Duncan in the chest, and he staggers to one knee. A second SHOT knocks him down. A third shot rings out. Two

beats pass before the LIGHTS begin to FADE on his still body. Before it reaches black, a fourth SHOT is heard. Then, in total blackness, a fifth, and a sixth, each one coming quicker than the last.)

INTERMISSION

ACT II

AT RISE: The house is dimly lit. DICK sits alone in the kitchen with the light off. TYRIE enters through the front door carrying both guns. He sets them on the table, then realizes for the first time that he has only two of the three guns in his possession. Annoyed, he takes them into the back room. He returns empty handed, and enters the kitchen. Without turning on the light he crosses to the kitchen sink and washes his hands vigorously.

JORDAN
(simultaneously, off-stage)

Is that you?

KAYLA
(simultaneously, off-stage)

Is that you?

DICK
Yeah.

TYRIE
(with annoyance)
No, it's a thief washing his hands. I'mma clean freak.

(JORDAN appears, dressed for bed, in the living room. SHE crosses to the front door and locks it. As she does, KAYLA enters, also dressed for bed, and enters the kitchen just as TYRIE exits the kitchen. Kayla stands just inside the kitchen door, looking at Dick; Tyrie stands on the other side, looking at Jordan.)

JORDAN
What time is it?

TYRIE
About one.

JORDAN
Where did you go?

TYRIE

The guys and I went for a beer.

JORDAN

Did you have fun?

(TYRIE shrugs.)

Are you coming to bed?

TYRIE

Yeah.

(JORDAN holds out her hand. After a moment, Tyrie takes it.
They exit to the bedroom.)

KAYLA

Did you lose at poker?

(Dick nods, yes.)

A lot of money?

(Dick nods, yes.)

What time is it?

DICK

Three-thirty, I think.

KAYLA

Can I turn on the light?

DICK

Go ahead.

(Kayla switches on the light.)

KAYLA

I thought I heard you come in a couple of hours ago. I fell back to sleep.

DICK

I wasn't feeling sleepy.

KAYLA

You've been sitting here the whole time?

DICK

No I... I needed some air. From the street, the house looks just like it did when we bought it.

KAYLA

(wryly)

Yeah, that aluminum siding was a real find. I can watch it for hours.

DICK

(not budging from his emotion)

Five years, and it looks exactly the same. Like a museum. Me, my hair is falling out, my back hurts all the time, I'm fatter, I've got bags under my eyes, but this house....

KAYLA

This house what?

DICK

A piece of string walks into a bar.

KAYLA

What?

DICK

You remember. A piece of string walks into a bar.

KAYLA

I have no idea what you're talking about.

DICK

Bartender throws him out, says, "we don't serve your kind here." The String ties himself into a knot, runs his fingers through his hair so it's sticking out every which way, and walks back in. Bartender says, "hey, ain't you that piece of string I just threw out?" String says, "no, sir, I'm a frayed knot."

KAYLA

You're tired. You should come to bed.

DICK

You don't remember?

KAYLA

Why should I remember?

DICK

(shrugs, sullen)

When did you get home?

Why didn't you come in? KAYLA

I thought I'd forgotten my wallet. DICK

At noon? KAYLA

It was a while before I noticed. DICK

Dick.... KAYLA

It was in my coat. DICK

Stop this. KAYLA

I was going to lunch and I couldn't find it. DICK

Stop lying. KAYLA

Then, in the car, there it was. DICK

You came by to check on me. KAYLA

Well, I don't know where you go. DICK

I walk. It doesn't matter where. KAYLA

It does to me. DICK

I meant, I don't care where I walk, as long as I get out of the house. KAYLA

DICK

I come home and your car's here but you're not.

KAYLA

You don't "come home", you sneak home.

DICK

I don't understand why we can't be accountable. To each other. Everybody thinks they can do whatever they want. They cheat and steal and shoot each other and everybody gets off scott-free. Politicians. Murderers. Everybody gets off scott-free. Why can't we be accountable?

KAYLA

I don't want to hurt you, Dick....

DICK

(desperately)

I know I've hurt you. I know I have— I'm sorry.

KAYLA

No, you haven't. I just— I can't live like this.

DICK

If we could be true to what we had.

KAYLA

Dick, I've hurt you. I know—

DICK

No! We're okay.

KAYLA

We're not okay.

DICK

We are.

KAYLA

We're the exact opposite of okay.

DICK

There's no such thing. Nothing's the opposite "okay". It's in the middle. It's safe.

KAYLA

Dick....

DICK

We can be okay.

KAYLA

Without trust?

DICK

I see how unhappy you are. I don't want you to be so unhappy.

KAYLA

You can't help that.

DICK

If we... if *I*... We could keep trying.

KAYLA

Dick—

DICK

The doctors don't know everything.

KAYLA

You can't put a down payment on the future, Dick. We can only pay for each day until there's no money left.

DICK

I just want to go back to how it was before. Subtract all the bad days we've had—subtract all these thoughts from my head, and get back to what we had before.

KAYLA

I would subtract even farther than that.

(They sit in silence for a moment before Kayla gets up to leave.)

DICK

Kayla? Is there any money left?

KAYLA

I don't think so.

(KAYLA leaves. Several beats pass. Then reality hits Dick so hard that a sob wracks his body—but there are no tears. His body hunches, his arm shrivels into a curl, his face contracts in pain, but the tears won't come. Awkwardly, he moves to the kitchen radio and turns it on. A song from his dad's era plays, and for moment he closes his eyes, then he sinks to the floor, his

back to the wall, and listens. The lights cross fade into morning as the PHONE begins to RING.)

JORDAN
(from off-stage)

Can you get it, Tyrie?

TYRIE
(from off-stage)

I'm busy.

JORDAN

I'm in the bathroom.

TYRIE

Never stopped you before.

JORDAN
(indignantly)

I don't talk to people on the phone when I'm in the bathroom.

TYRIE

Are you kidding me?

JORDAN

Tyrie....

TYRIE

When I call from work, I hear you flush smack in the middle of our conversation.

JORDAN

Tyrie!

(TYRIE enters from the back room, hunts down the phone.)

TYRIE

Jesus, alright.

(into phone)

What?

(beat)

Wait—what?

(He switches the music off on the living room set. As Tyrie speaks, Dick gets up and exits out the kitchen door.)

TYRIE (cont)

Bennie. When? Slow down— calm down, Bennie. Have they talked to you?

(two beats)

Well, get out of the bathroom. No, don't talk to me in there, I don't know what you're doing.

(cutting him off)

I don't want to know, Bennie.

(He listens for several moments.)

No, come here. Yes. They'll be back. Tell her... tell her— Jesus, she's your wife. Tell her you're going for tampons.

(The TOILET FLUSHES off-stage.)

Alright. Alright. Alright.

(JORDAN enters from the back room as Tyrie hangs up the phone.)

JORDAN

Who was it?

TYRIE

(avoiding her eyes)

Bennie.

(Jordan sees his uneasiness.)

JORDAN

(after a beat)

What is it?

TYRIE

Somebody shot Duncan.

JORDAN

Is he... is he?

TYRIE

Dead.

JORDAN

What happened?

TYRIE

How should I know?

JORDAN
When did it happen?

TYRIE
Last night, this morning, I guess.

JORDAN
Do they know who shot him?

TYRIE
I don't know.

JORDAN
What happened?

TYRIE
I said I don't know.

JORDAN
My God. Tyrie?

TYRIE
(quickly)
Bennie's coming over. He's pretty shook up.

JORDAN
Oh my God.

TYRIE
Jordan—

(TYRIE tries to take Jordan's hand but she pulls away.)

(trying to make light of it)
Well, I guess we don't have to worry about Brianna walking home from school anymore.

JORDAN
I'm supposed to drive her to softball.

TYRIE
The police are all around Duncan's place.

(JORDAN hears what is implied, nods thoughtfully. She crosses part way to the door before turning.)

JORDAN

Tyrie—

TYRIE

We can talk when you get back.

(beat)

She's got practice in five minutes— come on, we're not dead.

(JORDAN exits. TYRIE stands for a moment, thinking hard. He crosses to the kitchen, opens the refrigerator door, and takes out a jug of purified water. He pours himself a glass. Drinks. Then he picks up the phone in the kitchen and dials. The PHONE RINGS in the living room. DICK enters from the back room to answer it.)

DICK

Hello?

TYRIE

Dick, it's Tyrie.

DICK

What's up?

TYRIE

Duncan's been shot.

(Several beats pass.)

Dick?

DICK

Yeah?

TYRIE

We've got to get our story straight.

DICK

Why?

TYRIE

Why? J.D.'s gonna be on your doorstep any minute. We've gotta get right on this. Bennie's on his way here now.

(BENNIE hurriedly climbs the steps to Tyrie's house.)

DICK

I don't think we should make anything up.

(BENNIE knocks.)

TYRIE

Damn it, he's must have run the whole way. Get here as soon as you can.

(TYRIE hangs up the phone. He crosses into the living room, past where Dick is standing with the phone still in his hand. Tyrie opens the front door.)

DICK

Tyrie?

BENNIE

(extremely nervous)

I had to sneak out of my own house. I piled some boxes against the back fence.

DICK

Tyrie?

(TYRIE checks outside, then takes Bennie by the arm and leads him towards the back room.)

BENNIE

I kept thinking, "What am I gonna say? How am I gonna explain climbing over my own fence?"

TYRIE

You climbed over...? Never mind. Come on.

(TYRIE leads him into the back room. During this time, DICK has slowly put the phone down. He stands for a moment, sighs, then crosses through the kitchen and out the back door. There is a moment when the house is empty, devoid of life. Then Dick appears outside, walks around to the front of the house, climbs the stairs, and knocks on the door. TYRIE and BENNIE enter the living room from the back; TYRIE opens the door.)

TYRIE

Did anyone see you?

DICK
(surprised by the question)

I... I don't think so.

BENNIE
The police are everywhere.

DICK
Are Pete and Cythnia okay?

BENNIE
Gail sent them to her sister's. She's completely gone on valium. She thinks there's a murderer running around the neighborhood.

(Beat.)

TYRIE
There is.

BENNIE
Well, it's not such a bad thing, is it? Is it? I mean, we wanted him gone, and... well....

DICK
What are you saying?

BENNIE
I'm saying he was a bastard, wasn't he? To say those things? Wasn't he?

DICK
(incredulously)
He's *dead*, Bennie. Do you think he deserved to—

BENNIE
(exploding)
I know! I know he's dead. I saw him. I came out and saw his body lying right there in the front yard. I can't stop seeing him—the blood.

DICK
You found him?

BENNIE
Gail said the paper boy found him. He was riding his bike and saw all these cats in his yard. They were lying on their stomachs, looking at his dead body. Just lying there, staring at his body. Four or five of them. Why would they do that?

DICK

Matthew?

BENNIE

Don't be sick. Gail never lets him out. They live longer if you keep them indoors.

TYRIE

Bennie's right.

BENNIE

Yeah, they get strange diseases or run-over or something.

TYRIE

No, ass clown, I mean you're right about Duncan.

BENNIE

I am?

TYRIE

He deserved to die.

BENNIE

Are you serious?

TYRIE

He was a menace; somebody was gonna get killed.

DICK

(shaking his head)

This isn't right.

TYRIE

Listen to me. This was self-defense.

DICK

Come on, Tyrie—

TYRIE

No, man, it was just a matter of time.

DICK

No judge is going to buy that.

TYRIE

Sooner or later, someone was going to get hurt or killed. It was either him or us.

DICK

That makes no sense.

TYRIE

Luck saved you on the street before. Instinct saved you. It wouldn't have saved Kayla or my daughter. It was us or him. Right, Bennie?

BENNIE

I... I guess.

TYRIE

Then I don't want to hear any more about it. The only thing we have to worry about right now is J.D.

DICK

We should tell the truth about what happened.

TYRIE

We keep our mouths shut.

DICK

But—

TYRIE

What we did last night was against the law.

DICK

I know, but—

TYRIE

You want to go to jail? What would happen to Kayla then?

DICK

Stop using Kayla.

TYRIE

I'm trying to make you understand what's at stake.

DICK

She's not a part of this.

TYRIE

The hell she isn't. So's Gail, Bennie. So are Pete and Cynthia. How would Gail feel about you going over there last night?

DICK

Bennie, you didn't do anything you can't explain.

TYRIE

(threateningly to Dick)

We're in this together.

DICK

They're going to find our fingerprints, don't you know that?

TYRIE

It won't matter.

DICK

We were in his house.

TYRIE

They don't have ours on file. And they can't ask for them unless they have a reason to charge us with murder.

DICK

(beat)

When you bought the guns you must have.... They didn't take your fingerprints?

TYRIE

I'm not on file.

DICK

What do you mean you're not on file?

TYRIE

My fingerprints aren't on file.

BENNIE

Tyrie's right, Dick. We can't tell anybody about last night.

DICK

They don't care if we went over there last night. They only care who shot him.

TYRIE

Going over there makes it premeditated. It's the difference between twenty years and the chair.

BENNIE

Oh my God....

TYRIE

You wanna risk that?

BENNIE

He's dead, Duncan's dead....

TYRIE

That's the gist of it, Bennie.

BENNIE

But we were there. We *threatened* him.

DICK

Bennie—

BENNIE

They could arrest us— they could give us the chair—I

DICK

(to Bennie)

You didn't kill him—

TYRIE

Shut the fuck up! I don't care who did it. I don't want to know. None of that changes what we have to do now. We take last night to our graves, do you understand me?

DICK

(helplessly)

Tyrie—

TYRIE

What did I say? He got what he deserved, understand? That's exactly what you said, Bennie. He got exactly what he fucking deserved. Nobody needs to know anything more than that. Everything else just fucks it up. Last night is between us. Agreed?

(beat)

Bennie, you said it.

BENNIE

(defeated)

Walking over there last night... for once I felt like I belonged. Like I was part of a group. And then one word out of his mouth, one word....

TYRIE

We are a group. We're the Council.

DICK

Oh, would you stop it with this council—

TYRIE

(overlapping)

It doesn't matter who we are! We're in this together. Right, Bennie?

BENNIE

Yeah. Okay.

TYRIE

(to Dick)

You've got to agree.

DICK

Or what?

BENNIE

This is best— this is for the best.

(J.D. enters stage right. He stands for a moment in the exact spot where the three of them stood the night before looking at Duncan's house.)

DICK

No, I want to know. Or what?

TYRIE

Or other people get hurt. Gail. Kayla. You, me, Jordan.

DICK

All of this is so unnecessary.

BENNIE

If Gail ever found out about last night....

(J.D. knocks on the front door. There is a moment as Tyrie waits for Dick to agree. Dick looks uncertain. TYRIE opens the door. J.D. enters.)

J.D.

Tyrie. Bennie. Dick. It's a full house.

TYRIE

Is now.

J.D.

I guess by now everyone knows Duncan was shot last night.

DICK

Dead?

J.D.

Yeah, pretty dead by the looks of it.

TYRIE

When?

J.D.

Last night.

TYRIE

I meant, what time?

J.D.

That's a strange question to ask. What time?

TYRIE

I don't think so. We had someone running around our neighborhood with a gun. I think it's normal to ask when.

J.D.

I don't know for sure. The coroner is on vacation. I had to send over to the next county. But I figure it was sometime between eleven forty-two and two am.

TYRIE

(mocking)

Eleven forty-two? And how many seconds, Barney?

J.D.

Well, eleven forty-two is what I wrote in my log. After I swung by his house, so I happen to know he was watching T.V. then.

BENNIE

You went by his house?

J.D.

Uh-huh.

TYRIE

Our game broke up a little after midnight, didn't it?

(Several beats pass. Bennie and Dick wondering if they should buy into this lie. JORDAN enters the kitchen from the outside as J.D. begins his next line. She hears voices in the living room and crosses to the swinging door to listen. After a moment, she begins to pace anxiously in the kitchen. After several turns, she sits at the kitchen table and listens from that vantage point.)

J.D.

Maybe we should start this again. Okay? I don't want... I'm going to pretend that nothing's been said so far. Okay? Let's agree on that. Let's agree that I got half way back to the station last night— after I went to see Duncan— and I thought maybe I should talk with you guys again. Last night.

TYRIE

You mean spy through the window?

DICK

We stopped playing poker just before twelve and we—

TYRIE

He didn't come back last night. If you had, you would've found us right here, playing poker.

J.D.

(to Dick)

You finished just before twelve and what?

TYRIE

And everybody went home. Except for me. I took a walk.

J.D.

Where?

TYRIE

Up to Baldwyn House. Thought I'd conversate with my ancestors.

J.D.

When'd you get back?

TYRIE

What the hell is this? An inquisition? I got back around one o'clock. You can interrogate my wife if you want.

J.D.

I was just yoaping you'd... *hoping* that you would tell me what happened last night.

TYRIE

Bennie cleaned-up at poker.

J.D.

(tiredly)

Really? How much did you win?

BENNIE

(sheepishly)

Tyrie's just joking, J.D..

J.D.

Yeah, I play here too, Bennie.

(A pause.)

I need to take your guns into the station, Tyrie.

TYRIE

You got a warrant?

DICK

Tyrie, this isn't helping.

TYRIE

He can't come in here and take anything he wants—

DICK

Just let him have the guns.

TYRIE

What caliber was it?

J.D.

I told you, the coroner, hasn't seen him yet.

TYRIE

(derisive)

You have no idea?

J.D.

A small caliber. Maybe a twenty-two.

TYRIE

Rifle or handgun?

DICK

Tyrie....

TYRIE

I just wanna know! You want me to give them to him? You want 'em? Fine.

(TYRIE disappears into the backroom and reappears
immediately with the two rifles.)

Here.

J.D.

Where's the nine millimeter?

TYRIE

I sold it.

J.D.

You sold it?

TYRIE

Yeah.

J.D.

When?

TYRIE

Last fall. Traveling salesman just passing through.

J.D.

I'd like to look in the basement.

TYRIE

Get a warrant.

J.D.

It'd be easier on everybody if—

BENNIE
(overlapping)

Tyrie—

TYRIE

No! I brought you the guns. You want to see the cellar, get a warrant. Who do you think you are?
Coming in here, calling me a liar?

J.D.

I didn't call anyone a liar.

BENNIE

(interjecting)

Tyrie, why—

TYRIE

(to Bennie)

Shut up! You my friend? Why you wanna check the cellar?

J.D.

I'd just feel more comfortable if I could take a look—

TYRIE

If you're sure I'm not lying. To hell with you.

J.D.

I know you three didn't go straight home last night. You're just complicating things.

TYRIE

You don't know shit.

J.D.

You don't know how long I sat in my car last night. Outside his house. Down the block. Did you check the street before you went in? Did you make sure you weren't being watched? Look at you. Trying to stick together. Watching each other.

TYRIE

Are we done here?

J.D.

I'm not finished.

TYRIE

As far as I'm concerned this is harassment.

J.D.

(re: Tyrie)

You don't know who he is.

TYRIE

(exploding)

If you'd done your job none of this would've happened.

J.D.

You can't follow him blindly—

TYRIE

Duncan would be alive right now!

J.D.

You don't know what he did in LA.

TYRIE

(rapidly to Bennie)

This is exactly the kind of government bullshit I was telling you about--

J.D.

You don't know him, Bennie!

TYRIE

I know going through somebody else's mail is a federal offense.

J.D.

The FBI brought it to me. They came to my office, Tyrie.

DICK

What the hell?

J.D.

They showed me your letters.

TYRIE

Whatever you say.

J.D.

Who here knew Tyrie was a part of a vigilante group in LA?

BENNIE

Vigilante?

TYRIE

You got it wrong. We were a Neighborhood... Council.

J.D.

Some sort of self-proclaimed "security" group.

TYRIE

A group of concerned citizens—

J.D.

Who took it upon themselves—

TYRIE

To do what the police couldn't.

J.D.

To break the law.

TYRIE

To protect ourselves! To keep our neighborhood free from drug dealers and sex offenders.

J.D.

Not just your neighborhood, from what I hear.

TYRIE

You think a drug dealer respects boundaries? County lines?

J.D.

How far did you go?

TYRIE

You know how many houses got robbed in my neighborhood? It was enough to make you sick. Incompetent police and incompetent parole officers, sticking that trash back into my neighborhood so they can prey on my kids. People were afraid to walk the streets at night. And the next day you'd see all those niggers shooting hoops at the park. I useta watch 'em from my living room. People like that are a cancer. They feed on good people. No, you turn against your people, you get corrected.

J.D.

How?

TYRIE

How what?

J.D.

How do they get "corrected." How do you do it? A little sjambok? African Justice, isn't that how they do it? A whip to the back.

BENNIE

What?

TYRIE

That's not how it works.

J.D.

What is it, then? “The Leopard with the Brown Spots?”

TYRIE

(to Bennie)

This is exactly what I was telling you about—

J.D.

You wrote to those people—

TYRIE

(to Bennie)

I wrote to a legitimate *business* in South Africa—

J.D.

They’re murderers, Tyrie. They kill their own people, cutting off their hands and burning them alive. Other blacks—*your* people.

TYRIE

(vehement)

Not mine. My people are here—in this house, *this* neighborhood. Every time some nigger shoots somebody or gets arrested doesn’t mean he’s “my people.”

BENNIE

I don’t know what’s going on.

J.D.

Tyrie’s been writing to a vigilante group in South Africa called Mapogo, the “Leopard with the Brown Spots” or something like that.

TYRIE

(to Bennie)

It’s a legitimate business—

J.D.

An *illegal* organization—

TYRIE

With 70,000 paying customers, Black *and* White. Magolego is a legitimate businessman—he’s got offices all over South Africa.

J.D.

(quietly)

You praised him. In your letter. You called him an inspiration. He takes people out into the desert, without trial or jury, without evidence, and he beats them with sjamboks until they confess... and then he inflicts his “African justice.” “The only thing these people understand.”

TYRIE

You didn't read my first letter—

J.D.

The FBI have you on a watch list.

TYRIE

I challenged him on the confessions.

J.D.

You started your own group. I talked to the lieutenant in LA.

TYRIE

Oh, some fat desk-jockey with a tiny dick trying to sound important—

J.D.

He said you used to try and catch criminals by setting up a car or house as an easy target and then lying in wait for them.

TYRIE

And did your little dick policeman ever say we got one? Anyone file a complaint?

J.D.

Did you get one last night?

TYRIE

(beat, cold, firm)

We're done here unless you have a warrant.

J.D.

(becoming more aware
of Bennie and Dick)

Whatever you did last night--

TYRIE

Go police your own people.

J.D.

It only makes it worse if you withhold information now.

TYRIE

You gave Duncan more rights than you gave us.

J.D.

I worked within the law.

TYRIE

You're law protected him. *Your* law let him destroy our neighborhood. Where were you? When we needed you? Where were you?

J.D.

(beat)

Ben, can I see you outside?

(J.D. crosses to the door as Bennie looks helplessly between J.D., Tyrie, and Dick.)

BENNIE

I....

J.D.

Now, Bennie.

(BENNIE follows behind J.D.. THEY exit onto the porch.)

BENNIE

(nervously)

What is it?

J.D.

I want you to go home.

BENNIE

Right now?

J.D.

Yes.

BENNIE

You're going to follow me?

(J.D. shakes his head, no.)

You think maybe I..

J.D.

I just want you to go home now.

(BENNIE begins to cross out. He gets almost off-stage before turning to J.D.)

BENNIE

You know it could have been anybody— not just one of us. Everyone hated him.

J.D.

I know.

(BENNIE exits. J.D. descends the stairs as the LIGHTS
BRIGHTEN in the living room. DICK is sitting morosely.)

DICK

Why didn't you give him the gun?

TYRIE

It's mine.

DICK

Bennie'll tell him. He can't keep a secret.

TYRIE

Bennie won't say anything.

DICK

Why do you have to make everything so difficult?

TYRIE

What was I supposed to do? Bennie comes running in here, shaking like a leaf. What the hell was I supposed to do?

DICK

He's terrified. He's probably scared out of his wits now.

TYRIE

Don't you understand what I'm telling you? I didn't get the gun back until this morning. Bennie had it all night.

DICK

(beat)

J.D. said it was a small caliber, a twenty-two.

TYRIE

He'll say anything he wants just to get his hands on it.

DICK

(beat)

Tyrie, I—

TYRIE

We're in this together— I told you that last night. Whatever happens, you keep your mouth shut— you hear me? Duncan got what he deserved. He got what was coming to him. And everything that needs saying has already been said.

(beat)

Go home.

(DICK exits. TYRIE follows him part way to the door. As the door closes behind Dick, JORDAN appears in the kitchen doorway. TYRIE sees her and freezes.)

JORDAN

(emotionally)

You're not leaving. You're not tearing this family apart.

(TYRIE crosses to her, trying to take her in his arms.)

TYRIE

Baby—

JORDAN

No! I kept us together. I was the one who worked when you couldn't find a job. When you were drinking all the time. I took care of Brianna— let go of me! I changed her diapers and fed her and took her to work with me! I even held your head when you were sick.

(SHE slaps him hard on the face.)

I kept us together! I did that!

(striking his chest)

You're not leaving! I'm not losing you, you hear me? I'm not. I'm not.

(HE has her in his arms now, clutching her to his chest.)

(mournfully)

Whatever it is, you take it back. You hear me? Whatever it is, you fix it.

TYRIE

(holding her tightly)

It's fixed. It's all fixed.

(Lights fade to BLACK. They rise on KAYLA, pacing anxiously in the living room. DICK enters through the front door.)

KAYLA

What's wrong? What's happening, Richard? J.D. came by— he wouldn't tell me. He said he needed to see you.

DICK

Kayla, we need to talk.

KAYLA

No, we don't need to talk! You need to tell me what's happening.

DICK

Last night—

KAYLA

I don't want to talk about last night! I want to know what's happening.

DICK

I feel as if everything good about me has turned to dirt—

KAYLA

Richard, please....

DICK

As if everything I've done means nothing.

(KAYLA sits, bent over, clutching her stomach. DICK kneels beside her.)

KAYLA

My stomach hurts—

DICK

Look at me— no, look at me.

KAYLA

No, Richard, please—

DICK

If we moved away....

KAYLA

We can't—

DICK

We can— we can start over.

KAYLA

(taking his head in her hands)

Stop, Richard. Listen to me—listen to me. J.D.... he couldn't look at me—

DICK

We could buy a little house somewhere, something small, not like this. We'll sell the house—

KAYLA

No! And have it all be the same? To be living here in this— this trench? I'm not living with this fear anymore.

DICK

(suddenly)

You can't see him.

KAYLA

(beat)

What?

DICK

You wanted me to do something, and I'm *telling* you, you can't see him.

KAYLA

See who?

DICK

No! You can't make me hurt us. Don't you see? Our love— it was better than us. It was this... this-- it was....

KAYLA

It was. Dick. *Was*.

DICK

(beat)

What was it for you? What was it?

KAYLA

You know what it was.

DICK

A jail?

KAYLA

No.

A prison? DICK

No. KAYLA

It was like air to me. Like water. DICK

I drowned. KAYLA

Why? DICK

I went someplace where there was no air, no light, no feeling. Someplace cold. And numb. I didn't mean to. It just happened. KAYLA

(J.D. has entered slowly; he enters the house without knocking. Both Dick and Kayla look at him in surprise.)

J.D...?

I got all the way to the station before I remembered. J.D.

Remembered what? DICK

Richard? KAYLA

The fields. Pepsi and Seven-up. We use to bike to that little candy shop on the corner of Franklin. When we were in Junior High. You'd get Seven-Up so we could tell them apart. J.D.

What's happening, J.D.? KAYLA

Then we'd take them into the old tobacco fields. It was a twenty-two, wasn't it? J.D.

Do you want it? DICK

(J.D. nods, yes. DICK gets a pistol from the cupboard.
He crosses towards J.D. as TYRIE enters, almost running.
He has the nine millimeter handgun in his hands.)

TYRIE

No! Here it is. Put that away, Dick. Here's the Nine. I lied about selling it. Here. Take it.

DICK

You don't have to do this.

TYRIE

No, you check it. It hasn't been fired.

DICK

You don't have to do this, Tyrie.

TYRIE

Put that away!

DICK

I went to Duncan's last night.

TYRIE

Oh goddamn it.

KAYLA

Oh my God.

J.D.

With Tyrie and Bennie?

DICK

No. We went to scare him. To try and get him to back down. And then he said... he said we should tattoo our names....

(DICK puts his hand to his forehead.)

(to Kayla)

It was what you said about the lipstick. I couldn't stop thinking.... thinking, what if— what if—

TYRIE

(quietly)

Dick....

DICK

Imagining....

KAYLA

It was nothing. It didn't have anything... Richard....

(We hear the pre-recorded sound of a SCREEN DOOR swinging shut as the LIGHTS FADE on the living room. They rise on the yard area, as DUNCAN steps into the yard. Without raising his hands, he inhales the night air. Slowly, in a much different manner than before, he recognizes that he is not alone in his yard. He turns to face DICK as he enters from off-stage.)

DUNCAN

She already left.

DICK

Stop lying.

DUNCAN

She's gone, Blood.

DICK

Stop it. Stop it with the—

DUNCAN

Check the crib if you want.

DICK

No! That's a lie! You wouldn't say it so easy if you weren't lying. You're lying.

DUNCAN

(amiably)

Sure—

DICK

(overlapping)

Say it!

DUNCAN

I lie all the time.

DICK

You're lying about this.

I lied with your wife.

DUNCAN

Stop it!

DICK

Or is that, "lay"?

DUNCAN

I should... I could....

DICK
(pointing the gun at him)

Naw, man. . .

DUNCAN

You come here and spew your filth all over everything.

DICK

You ain't got the guts.

DUNCAN

I have!

DICK

You want me to make it easy? Huh? Pussy?

DUNCAN

(DUNCAN proceeds to push Dick and threaten to strike him.)

Huh? Can you do it now? Huh? Can you?

DICK

(DICK stumbles as he tries to evade Duncan, and falls to his knees.)

You don't have the guts.

DUNCAN

God, I hate you.

DICK

That's right! Hate! Hate me, motherfucker.

DUNCAN

I do.

DICK

DUNCAN

I'm dirt to you, ain't I?

DICK

Yes!

DUNCAN

(overlapping, vehemently)

That's right! I am dirt. I got dirt all over my hands. I got rock and stone— that's real! You think you're fucking Emperor Jones just cuz you got a Gold Card in your pocket? Fuckin' wigga. You ain't even an oreo, man, you a white man pretendin' to be black. You think you betta than me?

DICK

No.

DUNCAN

You think you betta? I had it better than you'll ever will.

DICK

Then go back. Crawl back under your rock.

DUNCAN

(beat)

Fuck you.

DICK

You had it better.

DUNCAN

Fuck you.

DICK

You do whatever you want. Go back.

DUNCAN

The house....

DICK

Sell it.

DUNCAN

(struggling)

I...

DICK

You'll get more than you'd make in ten years.

DUNCAN

And leave you here smirking?

DICK

Nobody wants you here.

DUNCAN

Laughin' in your Brook Brother's suits, with your frigid beauty queen wives—

DICK

(hysterically)

Just sell it!

DUNCAN

(overlapping)

Thinking I'm dirt you caught under your nails. I am dirt!

DICK

I'll buy it! I'll buy it from you. How much do you want?-- I'll buy it.

DUNCAN

You can keep all the shit you think is important.

DICK

Let me! Please. Let me keep it.

(A stalemate. DUNCAN laughs suddenly, painfully.)

DUNCAN

(realizing a painful irony)

You know, I useta think "Thou Shall Not Covet" was the only commandment worth a damn. I mean, it says it all, don't it? Don't want for nobody else's money, for nobody's wife, nobody's business, and you'll be a happy man.... When they told me about the house, I was at a job across the tracks. Foreman comes up and says I got a call, something important. And I'd been cussing up a storm cuz I scraped my knuckles on some bricks. I picked up the phone and this voice said, Mr. Robert Duncan, you are the winner of a brand new dream house. Couldn't even remember what contest it was. I hopped in my truck and raced up here at ninety miles an hour, the damn thing rattling like it was gonna bust into a million pieces. I just stood here, staring up at this house thinking, "Goddamn, that's beautiful. It's so... fucking... beautiful." This is a brand new me. I ain't *in* the house, man, I own it. I was a winner. I ain't gonna bust my back hauling bricks anymore. Never worry about having the cash, paying rent, people looking at me sideways. Then I turned around.... I turned and saw everybody standing in their windows. Not coming over, not saying, "congratulations," just *staring* at me.

(A small, pained laugh)

DUNCAN (cont)

And then I saw myself. Standing in my dirty jeans and my bloody knuckles. Just some ashy nigger with nothin' but crumbs in my pocket.

(beat)

Next day the Suits came over, all oily in shit, like theys my friend. Talkin' 'bout "terms." Six G a year in taxes. Plus garbage on top-a-that. Water. Sewer. Insurance. More'n what I was layin' out in rent. They never meant for me to keep it—ain't no moving on up... it's just a publicity stunt. They was just giving me a taste 'fore they send me back... so I thought... I'mma take it. I'mma have me a little taste.

(With growing intensity)

To hell wid all-a you. Bougie fuckin' niggas. You want to know what really got her wet? I said, "Maybe you wanna leave that old skin behind". That really got her. She was all over me after that, trying to shed you like a snake skin.

DICK

No....

DUNCAN

She went wild, Dick. Whispering, "I ain't never done that before."

DICK

You're lying....

DUNCAN

I can still smell her. She's all over me.

DICK

(crumbling)

You're lying....

(DUNCAN turns away just as DICK raises the gun. DUNCAN stretches his arms luxuriously towards the stars. It is the exact movement from the end of Act I. DICK aims the gun at him, shaking.)

DUNCAN

(luxuriously)

I love that smell.

(His arms fall to his side, smile still on his face. Behind him, we clearly hear the sound of the GUN COCKING. Abruptly, his face changes expression. HE turns towards Dick, and Dick's

hand steadies itself, becomes calm. A moment... then Dick slowly lowers the gun.)

DUNCAN (cont)

Ain't no going back, Blood.

(Beat. Without warning, or emotion, or hesitation, DICK raises the gun and fires. It is a gesture as passionless and deliberate as blowing out a candle; it solves nothing. This time, DUNCAN doesn't fall; he remains standing. The lights fade on Duncan and Dick frozen in the act of firing. The stage goes to BLACK. The LIGHT RISES, first with a spot on Kayla in her grief, then on Dick and J.D. in the living room. Dick faces her.)

KAYLA

It wasn't love. It wasn't even sex. It was lava stone. I just wanted to scrub away this life, to feel new. Fresh cut. I was so unhappy, Dick.

DICK

(sadly)

I know, honey.

KAYLA

He was just there, something rough and strange. I wanted to scrape away as much of me as I could.

DICK

(quietly in protest)

I love you....

KAYLA

I know.

TYRIE

(quietly)

Why didn't you tell me?

DICK

(dully)

I didn't... I couldn't remember... I kept forgetting. Little things would make me remember— the smell of grass, or the sound of leaves. And then I'd be looking at myself ... like from the outside. Like there was two of me. The one who did it, and the one who hadn't.

(to Tyrie)

I kept waiting for you to see the other me. I couldn't believe you didn't see me. I kept waiting for you to say, "Surprise" and then I thought, why not me? Why should I have to pay?

DICK (cont)
(plaintively)
Why not me, J.D.? Why should I have to pay?

J.D.
(pause)
I don't know what to do, Dick.

TYRIE
(to J.D.)
Let me have the gun. Take mine.

J.D.
I can't do that.

TYRIE
You're his friend. Be a friend.

(KAYLA stands and slowly moves to Dick. During the following dialogue she takes his hand, rests her head upon his arm.)

J.D.
It's against the law.

TYRIE
He got what he deserved. It's justice.

J.D.
It's not the law.

TYRIE
The son-of-a-bitch was a menace.

J.D.
He was supposed to be judged in a court, by his peers.

TYRIE
We're his peers, J.D. Not a bunch of strangers in a box. We lived with him. We can judge him.

J.D.
I have to, Dick.

DICK
I know.

TYRIE

He'll never be convicted. They'll never convict you.

J.D.

Dick.

TYRIE

J.D....

(quietly)

... don't.

DICK

It's okay.

(J.D. has gotten his handcuffs out. He stands almost helpless before Dick. J.D. crosses slowly behind Dick and begins to cuff him.)

J.D.

You've got the right to an attorney, if you want one. You don't have to say anything now...

DICK

I know, J.D. I know all that.

J.D.

(faltering)

If there was any other way--

DICK

I know, J.D. I know.

J.D.

You were always there for me.

DICK

You were my friend; we were best friends. Still are.

J.D.

Still are.

(J.D. begins to lead Dick towards the door.)

TYRIE

We'll get you a lawyer, Dick. This is bullshit— it's bullshit and everyone'll see—

J.D.

(with quiet fury)

Shut up, just.... You did this to him. You did. If I can get the D.A., I'll arrest you for going over there last night and instigating this.

TYRIE

And Bennie, too?

(A beat as J.D. realizes this is not what he wants to do.)

Is that your idea of justice? That it's "just" when you get to decide?

J.D.

(beat, to Dick)

Can we go?

(DICK nods his head, yes. J.D. opens the door as DICK turns to face Kayla.)

DICK

I won't fail us, no matter what happens. You know that, don't you? I won't. I won't sit down. I won't.

(DICK and J.D. exit onto the front porch, leaving Tyrie and Kayla standing at a distance from each other. The LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)

THE END