

THE LETTER

A full-length play

Written by

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THE CAST

(In order of appearance)

Janis Montgomery: Will play ages 17 - 20

Raymond Bryant: Will play ages 12 - 20

William P. Bryant (Dad)

Stevie Bryant: Age 10

Helen Bryant (Mom)

James Bryant: Will play ages 17 to 23

PRODUCTION NOTES

All Family Character Roles in THE LETTER are African-American. VOICE-OVERS will be represented for OFF-STAGE CHARACTERS.

The Letter can and has been produced with or without film clips.

The Letter can be produced as a non-African American cast with changes to dialogue.

The set is made up of inter-lacing platforms set at different levels. A ramp connects the stage-right platforms. A ladder connects the stage-left platform to the stage.

AT CENTER-STAGE is large playing area that will used for various scenes.

DOWN-STAGE LEFT is Raymond's prison cell consisting of a window that light and darkness can be seen out of, a cot, a sink, a toilet, a desk and chair. On the desk is a small transistor radio and an uneaten meal. Next to the meal is a pad and pencil.

DOWN-STAGE RIGHT is Janis' apartment environment, consisting of an end table, lamp and a large chair and a waste basket.

The passage of time is illustrated by the light coming through Raymond's cell window and Janis' activities in her apartment environment.

ACT I

The set is made up of several platforms set at different levels, a ramp stage-right connects the stage to the upper platform stage-right. Beneath the Center platform is an area for entrances and exits.

DOWNSTAGE-LEFT is Raymond's prison cell consisting of a window, a cot, a sink, a toilet, a desk and chair and a small radio.

DOWNSTAGE-RIGHT is JANIS' apartment environment, consisting of an end table, a standing lamp, a large chair and a waste basket.

The period is the 1950's, innocence and hope are the order of the day.

AT RISE: Nat King Cole's, "Unforgettable" filters in.

(Lights come up on Raymond, age, 21 in his prison cell sitting at his desk smoking a cigarette and writing. Beside him is an uneaten meal. Writing a letter, Raymond smiles)

Lights come up center-stage on Janis, 16 (African American) pacing hard. The music filters out as she speaks.

JANIS

Five minutes, I'm going to wait just five more minutes, no, just four more minutes.

(Raymond dashes from his cell to become -- Raymond, 16, bright eyed and full of energy)

RAYMOND

I'm sorry I'm late. I missed my bus, it pulled off right when I... did you just get here?

JANIS

No Raymond, I was here at the time we agreed on.

RAYMOND

I'm sorry, it was because I missed the... you're mad huh?

JANIS

I'm not mad Raymond... but if keeping your dates with me doesn't mean enough to you to be on time...

RAYMOND

They do. I told you it was the bus, why don't you believe me?

JANIS

I do Raymond... *(she pauses as an idea comes to her)* ...but just to make amends, let's have "the oath". If I'm to be sure you love me, then we have to have "the oath of love".

RAYMOND

Oooooohhhhhh, do I have to? Out here where everybody can see?

JANIS

No, you don't have to... you don't have to do anything you don't want to. I just thought after being late and all that you would want to as a gesture of...

RAYMOND

Okay, okay. Gee whiz!

(Raymond checks for passersby's before getting on his knees. A warm smile appears on Janis face as they speak the oath)

RAYMOND / JANIS

"I swear an oath of love from you to me, from lips that speak and eyes that see the eternal love, from me to thee".

*(Raymond leans in for a kiss, Janis closes her eyes in anticipation. **A clock tower 12:00 MIDNIGHT BELLS ring out)***

RAYMOND

Nnnnnooooooooooooooooo...

*(Center-stage lights snap to black. Lights come up on Raymond in his cell. **SCREAMS** are heard. The screams dies out followed by a **SHRILL SIREN** and metal cell doors **SLAMMING** shut.)*

*Raymond looks in the direction of the screams. **The clock tower booms out the last of it's 12:00 AM BELLS.** Raymond begins writing)*

(Lights up on Janis, age 21, entering her apartment dressed in a bathrobe sorting the mail, an envelope falls to the floor. She picks it up. An odd, sad smile slips on to her face. She tenderly opens the letter. Janis reads as Raymond writes)

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

DECEMBER 24, 1963. Dear Janis, I guess this is a shock hearing from me after all this time. I'm sorry I never wrote back. *(Raymond erases the last line then continues)* I was just reading a letter from my mother, she asked if I'd heard from you. Mom tells me you're the greatest executive secretary to walk the face of the earth. "The Woman behind The Man that runs the World".

JANIS

"Plan your work and work your plan."

RAYMOND

I guess you're working you're plan.

JANIS

Can you believe this, I'm writing you a formal letter? I took that creative writing class like you said I should.

RAYMOND

It'll give you something constructive to do with your time while you're in there. You said it'll take my mind off things.

JANIS

So how am I doing? Do I pass? Am I as good as those clowns you work for-- writing letters instead of dealing with people face to face, isn't that how you all do things in the world of business and finance?

RAYMOND

How am I supposed to feel? Maybe someone is supposed to slap me on the back and say, "Sorry ole man, better luck next time".

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Who the hell do you think I am, DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS or somebody? *(Raymond looks to Janis)* I'm sorry. I guess I'll never change.

(Raymond erases the last line as Janis turns the page)

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

I was wondering if you might come up and see me. You always said you would.

(Raymond looks over to Janis, she reflects on Raymond's last comment, she reads on as Raymond writes)

JANIS/ RAYMOND

The hardest things about... **Maybe if had** ... being in here are that I wouldn't see you, couldn't be with you. **Maybe if had...** I miss the way you knew what I wanted before I knew myself.

JANIS

The other thing is time. It's not time like other people feel. In here it's different. In here, it's a dry, dead time.

RAYMOND

It's that feeling when you walk into a room and you know there's someone in there, you can't see them, but you know they're in there all the same. Or when you walk down a street and you keep turning around because you feel something's gaining on you--

JANIS

-- Then when you turn around there's nothing there, but you walk a little faster anyway because, well you just walk a little faster.

RAYMOND

My time is something like that, you always feel like something's gaining on you. I still can't get the idea out of my head that I can't go home, that there is no place called home for me anymore.

JANIS

I know there's no escaping from here, escaping from what I did.

(The CLOCK TOWER BOOM OUT 12:30 A.M. Bells. The SOUND of showers and MEN talking filter in. Film clips of JAMES CAGNEY and HUMPHREY BOGART in prison movies are shown)

PRISONER (VO)

"Boy, there's two kinds of time here, there's "white time" and there's "colored time", and colored is worst. You best stop thinkin' of this place like you are or you ain't gonna last. Do yo' time easy, nice and easy."

RAYMOND

Ain't gonna last, now there's a news flash. Everyday I pray that some dumb, half-blind bastard on that parole board is gonna' make a mistake and let me out of here, because it's that or wings.

MIMMS (VO) (PA)

Okay ladies, let's hit the showers, we don't have all day for your little beauty treatments. I said, move your asses!

*(Raymond stops writing. He walks toward the top platform (the showers) **The sound of showers coming on and WHIMPERING IS HEARD.** Raymond stops, he runs back and slams his cell door then sits on his bunk and writes)*

RAYMOND

When the doors slam open, the echo is all you hear. In that echo I hear my heart beating, I hear myself asking, who's turn is it?

*(Sound of MEN'S SHOWER'S grows louder. **A SHRILL SCREAM is heard.** Raymond grabs a shiv from under the bunk's mattress and turns on his invisible attackers)*

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Shut up... shut up!!!

*(TWO SHRILL SCREAMS. Raymond puts his hands over his ears, the SCREAMS die out. **The Clock Tower booms out 1:30 AM.**)*

Lights come up on Janis in her apartment. Raymond looks to her)

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Janis I have a knife now.

JANIS

Everyone does, you need it in here more than out on the streets. There's only one rule in here..."Taker or Taken..."

RAYMOND

...there ain't nothing else... "Taker or Taken". *(pause)*
Janis, I need to tell you about something, something I did...

(Raymond is about to speak but writes instead)

RAYMOND

You have to learn to survive here. I curse and fight now. I do whatever I need to do to get through this. I don't know how long I can last until I become one of them, until the memories are not worth the pain and all that's left is an animal with nothing but an instinct to survive. Kill or be killed. How long...?

JANIS

I've been here four years and I can't think, I don't want to.

RAYMOND

Fuck it...

JANIS

Forget I mentioned it. Who cares now anyway, right?

RAYMOND

Right.

(Raymond moves to the cell's door to watch Janis fighting with herself to continue reading. Lights go to black on Janis)

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

I miss you. A hundred times a day I say I'm not going to say it or even think, that I'm not going to think about you, but I do and I can't stop, I wish I could.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

I know it was my fault. I know I drove you away. Why couldn't I understand you better.

(Lights up center-stage on Janis 16, walking quickly across the stage with a large smile on her face. Raymond moves to the front of his cell, eager to escape into the past)

JANIS

Raymond come down, I have the most wonderful news to tell you.

Raymond, 16, bursts from his cell)

JANIS / RAYMOND

I have something to tell you too... I'm sorry, you go first. No, you go...

JANIS

Okay, I'll go. Raymond, it's just the most wonderfulest, most marvelously, glorious thing that's ever happened to me. You can't imagine what I feel like. This is the most perfectest moment of my life, of my existence.

RAYMOND

What? What is the most perfect moment of your existence?

JANIS

If I live a million-trillion years, this will be the most everest, everest moment.

RAYMOND

What will be the most... whatever it was that you said?

JANIS

Guess, I bet you can't guess. Try to guess. I bet you'll never guess.

RAYMOND

Ah... you won the Irish Sweepstakes!

JANIS

The Irish Sweepstakes, don't be silly this is important.

(Raymond tries to think of something)

JANIS (CONT'D)

Okay, I guess I'll have to tell you. But your willingness to participate leaves one to think...

RAYMOND

Janis, what is it?

JANIS

I have just been picked to be the Queen of the annual "Links Cotillion".

RAYMOND

The what?

JANIS

The Links Cotillion!

RAYMOND

Links Cotillion, it sounds like something to do with sausages to me. *(He laughs)*

JANIS

Don't be silly. The Links Cotillion, or the "The Links" as it known, is only the biggest, most-important event of the year and I'm going to be the next Queen. Can you imagine, me, the next Queen of the biggest event of the year. There's going to be a ball and a parade, and I get to wear this lovely a tee...

(Raymond starts acting out one of his movie fantasies)

RAYMOND

That's awesome. I'll swing in and pluck you from the hands of the evil Links Cotillion Board like in ROBIN HOOD and we'll ride off into the sunset on my...

JANIS

Raymond.... The Links Board isn't evil.

RAYMOND

Janis, you're going to be a wonderful Queen, the best they ever had.

JANIS

Thank you. Honey, what was it that you wanted to tell me?

RAYMOND

Right.

(Raymond pulls a scape of paper from his pocket. He reads)

RAYMOND

"I was thinking about you all night" *(He very clumsily starts to act it out)* "I dreamt of you, and I saw you as a sacred cloud that passes by that mere mortal eyes can scarcely see the vision afore them of your cloudy loveliness..."

JANIS

Mere mortal eyes, afore... cloudy loveliness? Raymond, what are you talking about?

RAYMOND

It's a poem I wrote.

JANIS

A poem you wrote...

RAYMOND

Yeah. *(a beat passes, Raymond is crushed by Janis' reaction)*
You don't like it.

(Raymond lowers his head. Janis lifts his chin)

JANIS

Honey, that is the most beautiful poem I ever heard. Thank you for thinking about me, I'm always thinking about you too. I especially loved the part about the cloud. *(Janis leans in to kiss Raymond)* A cloud, that's it!!! I'll wear the sky-blue dress. I saw the perfect one down at Peterson's department store. Oh Raymond wait until you see it, it's the most dreamiest thing... oh, and I have the perfect shoes to with it, and this cute little bag with a gold clasp that...

RAYMOND

Janis...

JANIS

Yes...

RAYMOND

I'm still reading my poem.

JANIS

Oh, I'm sorry honey.

RAYMOND

Now where was I..?

JANIS

You saw a vision of cloudy loveliness...

RAYMOND

Oh yeah... "As the vision passed my eyes, my thoughts of love ran rampant like wild horses frolicking with abandonment on a hillside...

JANIS

Raymond...

RAYMOND

Yes.

JANIS

Wild horses frolicking, clouds and hillsides... that is so lovely.

RAYMOND

It's about... about how I feel about you.

(Raymond pulls a ring from his pocket and places it on her finger)

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

This belonged to my grandmother... Janis, I love you.

JANIS

Raymond I love you too with all my heart. *(Janis kisses Raymond)* Thank you so much but honey, I really have to go... my dress and the Cotillion and all, my goodness there's so much to do. I'll call you later. *(she runs off)*

RAYMOND

But I haven't finished my poem yet...*(Janis re-enters)*

JANIS

Thank you again for the ring and the poem Raymond. Honey, I really have to go. I love you. I'll call you later, Bye.

(Janis runs off)

RAYMOND

Hey, what about the rest of my poem...?

(Lights fade up on Dad on a upstage platform)

DAD

Raaarrrrrryyyyyyyymmmmooonnnndddddd...

(Raymond snaps to attention)

RAYMOND

Sir?

(Lights on Dad fade. Raymond is paralyzed with fear. He forces himself to move to his desk and writes. Lights up on Janis in her apartment reading)

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Janis, I just saw my father. He looked just like he used to. He was standing right in front of me, all tall and proud, like he was one of those Greek Gods or something. I think he thought he was.

JANIS

We all did now that I think about it, me, Stevie and James. This is so out, I haven't thought about him in years, and now... *(a film clip of "FATHER KNOWS BEST" plays)*

RAYMOND

My father...

JANIS

...why does that sound so strange to me...

RAYMOND

...man, I remember how he'd stride into a room.

(Lights come up on Dad on the top platform as the film clip fades)

DAD

William P. Bryant at your service.

JANIS

Man, you'd think he was some big Baron of Industry the way he'd say it.

RAYMOND

And boy, if anybody made the mistake of askin' what the "P" in his name stood for...

DAD

I'm glad you asked. The P. is after my great, great grand-Daddy, Preston Bryant. He was one of the first Blacks to ride shotgun for the Wells Fargo. The history books have yet to recount the event properly of how my renowned ancestor saved the life of Bill Cody. Yep, that's right, he's right up there with Bill Cody, Bat Masterson, and Wild Bill Hickcock. Wait, I'll show you the newspaper clipping recounting the Pawnee Indian attack where Preston saved an entire town single handed?

RAYMOND

He never could find the thing. *(Raymond smiles at the memory)*

JANIS

After dinner Dad would tell us stories of his renowned ancestor. The way my Dad told those stories, Preston must have saved the lives of nearly every Cowboy in the Old West, twice. We must have heard those stories a thousand times. We all used to act out the stories as Dad told them. One day Stevie would be an Indian and I'd be Hickcock, the next time I'd be Preston Bryant and he'd be Bat Masterson.

(The lights come up on Dad, Stevie, James and Mom in the family living room as the lights dim on Janis reading. Raymond watches as Dad sits)

STEVIE

Dad, tell us a story, tell us a story.

DAD

Son, I thought you'd never ask. (Dad positions himself)
Where's Raymond? Raymond...! (*Raymond, 16, happily enters
the scene*) Ah, there you are son.

STEVIE

Tell the stagecoach one Dad. Tell the stagecoach one, and I
want to be Bill Cody, but this time I want to kill me some
injuns too.

DAD

Okay son, you're Bill Cody and you'll get to kill some injuns
too. Now does anyone else have any additions to make to an
already illustrious slice of American history?

STEVIE

Can I have two pearl-handled revolvers...

DAD

Yes son, you can have two pearl-handled revolvers...

STEVIE

...and a rifle that gets shot out of my hands.

DAD

...and a rifle that gets shot out of your hands. Now may we
begin? (*Dad looks around the group setting the mood*) It's a
dark night and...

JAMES

I want to be an Injun. I want to be a bloodthirsty, hatchet-
carrying, burn down the Fort, liquored-up, scalping Injun.
(*James jumps up and bursts into Indian war yelps*)

(*Everyone except Dad bursts into
laughter*)

DAD

Ah, son... don't you think you might want to be Hickcock this
time, you haven't been Hickcock in awhile or maybe Bat
Master, you'd be a good Bat...

JAMES

I want to be an Injun, I want to be an Injun! I want to be a
bloodthirsty, hatchet-carrying, liquored-up Injun.

(*James does war yelps again. Dad
is about to speak to James, Mom
stops him, then turn to James*)

MOM

That's Indian James, and William, if James wants to be an Indian, let him be an Indian.

DAD

But Mother this is Bryant history not some pulp novelette that...

(Mom flashes her winning smile, in this we see their relationship and love)

MOM

Bill...

(Dad looks into Mom's eyes, he decides to let it go)

DAD

Okay, we have Jamerson and Raymond as our bloodthirsty, hatchet-carrying, liquored-up Indians who have gone on the warpath because...

RAYMOND

Why do I have to be an Injun. Let James be the Injun, he likes being an Injun. *(James yelps)* Why can't I be a swashbuckler like Errol Flynn in "Captain Blood"?

DAD

Because there were no swashbucklers in the Wild West Raymond.

MOM

And if Raymond wants to be a swashbuckler in the Wild West, let him be a swashbuckler in the Wild West.

DAD

But mother, they need to learn to...

MOM

Bill...*(Mother motions for Dad to come closer. She tenderly kisses him. the kiss works it magic)*

DAD

Well oh-kee-dook-kee. So we have Raymond, the Wild West swashbuckler who is on a secret mission for the Queen...

DAD (CONT'D)

disguised as an Indian, and Jamerson will be our ole regular run of the mill, traditional hatchet carrying Indian, Stevie's Bill Cody and Mother will be... Mother, what will you be?

MOM

I will be patiently standing on the side lines ready to administer medical attention to all parties enlisted in this historical conflict.

(Everyone laughs)

FAMILY

AND WHO WILL BE PRESTON BRYANT?

DAD

(Dad looks to everyone) Well, me of course. Now, it is a dark night, and all that can be seen is seen by a strange eerie full moon. Now Preston is on top riding shot-gun with Bill Cody, when up from nowhere comes this raidin' party of Comanches. Well, before anyone knows what's what, there's flaming arrows and tomahawks flying all over the place. So quicker than snot I pulls out my trusty Browning and "BANG", I gets one ridin' along side, then "BANG", BANG, BANG", three more bite the dust. Then I turns to see another climbin' up towards the back of the couch so I reels around and I hits him with the butt of my rifle. By this time Bill Cody's sort of holding his own, but out of nowhere comes another one of them red devils trying to jump onto the coach. But did I panic?

FAMILY

No you didn't!

DAD

No I didn't! As calm as black molasses I reaches down and plucks my Bowie knife from my boot and I gets that Injun right in the heart.

(James lets out a yelp and roles on the ground flopping like a fish. Dad looks at James shaking his head)

DAD

By this time, I done killed oh, ten or fifteen all by myself and I'm startin' to get a might tuckered out so I let's Cody kill the other twenty or so.

MOM

The last time you told this story it was ten or so.

(Everyone laughs. Mom snuggles up to Dad)

STEVIE

Dad, tell us another one, tell us another one about the time Preston...

DAD

(Smiling with Mom, Dad, turns to Stevie) Ah, not now Stevie.

(The lights come to a glow on the family scene. Raymond exits to his cell)

RAYMOND

We must have heard those stories a thousand times. James always wanted to be somebody weird, so he was always the livery man or the blacksmith. Dad always thought James was kinda' off center.

(James lets out a War yelp. Dad stares at him then turns to Mom, his look says "You see." Mom kisses Dad, she and Stevie exit.)

RAYMOND

I wanted to be closer to James, but he never let anyone in.

(Dad stares at James now doing a War Dance. James stops and starts to exit)

DAD

Jamerson, a word.

JAMES

Yes Dad.

DAD

Son, I know in the past we haven't been as close as we should, and I'd like to correct that. Is there something I can do, someway we can bridge the gap that has developed between us? *(James doesn't answer)* Jamerson I got you a job at the plant in good faith and you quit without any provocation and seemingly for no reason.

(James sloshes back and forth with his hands in his pockets)

DAD

Son, I don't know why you consistently go out of your way to disobey me with your.... Son, don't you have anything to say in your behalf?

(Raymond tries to enter the scene. He can't)

JAMES

No sir.

RAYMOND

Dad, leave him alone!

DAD

Can you tell me why you feel the need to reject every principal I have built my life on?

(James looks to the floor)

DAD

Boy, stand up straight and look at me when I'm talking to you! *(James looks at Dad)* I've worked my butt off to give you everything I never... Son, I don't want us to drift further... *(James sways in place)* Stop that damn rocking! Jamerson go to your room until you're called for supper.

RAYMOND

(yelling) James, tell him to go fuck himself. James! James!

MOM

(Mom enters) Hi baby. *(James exits past her)* What's the matter with him?

DAD

Who knows! Helen, I try to give him everything I can now that we have the money and I have the time, but he rebukes me at every turn.

MOM

Bill, you can't expect a young boy to understand you, you have to understand him.

DAD

Understand him! Why do I need to understand him!

MOM

James is a sensitive boy. He wants you, not what you can give him.

DAD

I don't understand that. When I was a boy we didn't have squat! My father worked 16 hour days, seven days a week just to put food on the table. When he came home too tired to think, we weren't waitin' around sayin', "Dad you don't spend enough time with us, Dad give us a hug". It was the depression and I understood damn it, I understood!

MOM

Bill...

DAD

I know before I got this promotion I didn't spend enough time with him, but now, what about now? He's got the music lessons I always wanted and never got, and he's getting opportunities I would have died for. He and his brothers get everything money can buy. No! He's going to college in a year, and he has to be prepared. This is 1957, (Dad snatches up a news paper) Damn it Helen, colored kids are being guarded by the National guard for the right to get an education and he's squandering away opportunities that are right in front of him. A colored man in this United States must have an education if he is to get his fair share of the American Dream and amount to something. Isn't that what it's all about; slicing out your own piece of the American pie? All the Bryant's before me, clear back to after the Civil War have gotten an education, some have even gone to College.

MOM

Bill, all I'm saying is...

DAD

There is no reason that in the future a colored man can't become President.

MOM

A colored President, who's gonna be his Vice President, Steppin' Fetchit?

DAD

You can laugh, but one day it'll happen.

(Mom gently reaches to Dad's shoulder. He moves off)

MOM

Bill, you need to stop gettin' yourself all riled up about colored President's, let's see if we can get a seat on the front of the bus then we can talk about colored President's.

DAD

Everything is being handed to him on a silver platter and he's throwing it away like so much garbage. Helen, this is important to me, this is Bryant tradition, and I will not have it ruined. You work to build something, something to pass on, and for what, for nothing, that's what! James and Raymond don't care. The way he's going what will be his options; a day laborer or a stock boy somewhere? No, not for my sons! I thank the Lord we have Stevie, at least we still have a chance with him.

MOM

William Bryant don't you dare say such a thing again, you take it back, you take it back right now!

DAD

I wish I could.

MOM

Well until you do, you know where you'll be sleeping tonight.

(Mom exits. Dad is left on stage. Raymond sits and frantically writes. Lights come up on Janis)

RAYMOND

Everything always had to be his way. He never asked us what we wanted, he just told us what he wanted. It always had to be "The Bryant Way". "The Bryant's have always done this, or "The Bryant's have always done that". Oddly enough, I didn't mind. I wanted Dad to say something to me, anything. But he never did. He never tried to... Dad gave up on James and me. He wanted us to keep our feet on the ground and our heads out of the clouds.

(Raymond wipes a tear from his eyes. A Jazz riff is heard. Raymond smiles)

RAYMOND

I remember when...

JANIS

(James enters)...James started playing the horn. James was supposed to be taking the violin, that was Dad's idea. Dad said that if James didn't have a mind for business he could possibly make his mark in the arts. First Dad wanted James to be a singer, because Dad loved Paul Robeson. I remember the Sunday that Reverend Samuels came over for dinner...

(Lights come up on The Family seated to hear James sing)

RAYMOND

Dad, wanting to impress the Reverend insisted that James sing a collection of songs by Paul Robeson. *(James stands and prepares to sing)*

JAMES

"Old man river, that old man river. He just keeps rollin', he just keeps rollinalonnnngggg aaaaalllllooonnnngggggg..."
(Lights fade on family cringing)

RAYMOND

Well, it turned out James was tone deaf so Dad had to settle for James playing the violin. James hated the violin and switched to the trumpet but didn't tell Dad.

(Lights come up on James playing the trumpet. Dad enters carrying a violin, he snatches the trumpet from James and thrust the violin at James until he takes it)

DAD

Jamerson, you will play this violin and play it well, and that is that.

(Dad storms off. James, tears welling up in his eyes, stares hard at the violin)

JAMES

I want to be Gabriel...

(Dad stops as James speaks, he turns to listen. Dad heart breaks hearing his son)

JAMES

I want to be the guy that blows the horn that ends the world, that's who I want to be. *(Dad takes a step toward James. The lights go to black on Dad and James)*

RAYMOND

I now know what James meant by that.

(A riff by Miles Davis is heard. James enters down-stage right wearing a beret and round rimmed glasses and carrying a trumpet case. He bops down the street to his own internal rhythm)

RAYMOND

James!!! *(impersonating Dad)* Jamerson Wilson Bryant, where do you think you are going??? *(James freezes and snatches off the beret and glasses and turns around to face his father)*

JAMES

Nowhere sir. *(James sees it's Raymond)* Man are you crazy? You almost gave me a major heart attack.

RAYMOND

Where you goin' all dressed up like that? You look like an escaped Nazi or something.

JAMES

Man, you don't know nothin'. *(He puts on his glasses and beret)* This is what all the cats down at "Ruben's" wear. I am what is referred to by those in the Inner Circle as one of the "hip cats".

RAYMOND

Hip cat. If Dad finds out, he's gonna "hip your cat" for you alright.

JAMES

He won't find out unless you tell him.

RAYMOND

(James and Raymond exchange a look of understanding) I would never do that. What you got in the case?

JAMES

In here, I got my piece.

(James opens the case, he takes out an old dented trumpet and triumphantly shows it off)

JAMES

Isn't she a beauty? I paid for it all by myself with the money from my newspaper route.

RAYMOND

You paid good money for that beat up piece of junk? What you gonna do with it, become the Pied Piper of 3rd Street and have little beret wearing mice follow you around?

JAMES

(James puts his horn away) Obviously you do not understand the vibe or dig the scene. Me and some of the other cats are going downtown and listen to BIRD and DIZZY and dig the sounds. Then we who are aware of the vibe will then go down to "Shorty's" and wail for awhile. *(James turns to bop off.)*

RAYMOND

Boy, Dad's gonna bust a gut when he finds out what you've been...

JAMES

(James wheels back on Raymond) Don't you get it! Why do you think I'm doing this... I'm tired of him trying to... never mind. If you want to run back and get a gold star from Dad, you go right on ahead. Me, I'm going down to Shorty's and work on becoming Gabriel. *(James turns to leave, he stops)* Hey man listen, I'm sorry. You go on and do whatever you need to do... "always follow you", you dig? Me, I got a date on becoming Gabriel.

(James hugs his brother then steps back, adjusts his glasses and beret)

JAMES

I would take you with me, but you are so uncool Daddy-0. I'll dig you later, "cat of the uncool".

(James bops off accompanied by a jazz riff)

RAYMOND

(imitating James) Dizzy, Daddy-0. So un-cool, so un-hip.

(Raymond laughs, then looks in the direction James went. Lights up on Janis)

RAYMOND

Me and James were never to speak or even refer to that day again, but I'll always remember it. I've never loved my brother more than on that day. Mom sent me a letter from him.

(A jazz riff is heard, lights come up on James center-stage wearing green hospital scrubs)

JAMES

I'm in sunny Cally. Things were rocky there for me for a minute, but it's all cool now. I got myself into this drug program out here. Folks say Bird was in here once too. Anyway, they promise a complete cure if I joins this church thing. Well, it's kinda' like church but it ain't. You sorta' worship your inner temple instead of God. I'm still tryin' to figure it out. I figure, what the hell, if they don't cure me I can still get a great tan. Say hello to Janis for me. Hey, I got to sit in on a session with Miles. Man, it was the most. I went to this party with some cats that played with Diz. Man the set was hot. Cats was playing riffs that were out of this world. Soon after we got there Miles shows up and starts laying down licks with us. After the set, Miles said, "You got the touch man". Miles Davis said, "I had the touch", that I had the gift. He said when I get back East I should look him up. I guess if I ever get out of this country home for the wayward I will. Think of it, me, playing with Miles. Maybe I'll change my name to Pump, no, Skitter... no, Slide, na' somebody already has that. I'll think of something.... Shakky. Yeah that's it... I'll be Shakky Bryant... it has a certain ring to it don't you think?. Take care of yourself "Cat of the Uncool". *(a jazz riff, then lights go to black on James)*

RAYMOND

James was quite a nut, but considering how things turned out maybe he had the right idea.

(The Clock Tower booms out 2:00 AM bells)

RAYMOND / JANIS

I'm here and that's all I get for the rest of it.

JANIS

It's hard for me to say it even now...

(Raymond and Janis speak certain emphasized phrases)

RAYMOND / JANIS

I'm a con... It's like, this was some twisted story book dream and I'm going to... ***wake up screaming your name, your arms wrapped around me telling me sayin'...***

JANIS

It'll be alright Raymond.

RAYMOND

Some alright. This shit's all wrong. It's not supposed to be like this. I'm stuck up here, and you're...

RAYMOND/JANIS

...dead end again.

(The sound of a small boys laughter filters in)

RAYMOND

(Raymond rushes to his cell door) Stevie...

(Stevie, excited runs in wearing a baseball cap and carrying a bat. Dad follows wearing a baseball cap and a camera around his neck. Dad takes a picture of Stevie. Raymond envious, watches)

STEVIE

That was my best game ever.

DAD

Son, the way you walloped that ball over that fence, I thought you knocked it into next neveruary.

(Stevie reenacts the moment. Dad snaps pictures of him)

STEVIE

I'm standing there and I'm thinking about all the things you told me. My heads up, my bats back. I'm eyein' the pitcher and he's eyein' me. "Bring me that slider! Just bring me that slider."

DAD

You're standing there, just as calm as calm can be.

STEVIE

The pitcher winds up... here it comes... the biggest, fattest slider you ever did see. I wait...

DAD

You wait...

STEVIE

I wait, then BLAMO...!

DAD

Off she goes, up, up and away. Son, that was the best shot I ever saw.

STEVIE / DAD

Just BLAMO and it was outta here!

STEVIE

That was my very first home run. I did everything just like Raymond told me to.

DAD

Raymond...?

STEVIE

Yeah. Raymond said if I did everything just like he showed me to, I'd hit it out of the park today. And I did.

DAD

Raymond said?

STEVIE

Yes Dad. Raymond helped me with my power swing. He...

DAD

That's nonsense. It was the collective work that you and I put in after school everyday that enabled you to improve your swing, besides you already had a power swing. All the Bryant men have had power swings. I remember back when I was a small tike my father helped me with my power swing. Your grandfather had one too, he was a lead off hitter on a team in the Negro League, some say he was even better than Josh Gibson. Now as I recall, it was a fine spring day when my father and I...

STEVIE

No Dad, it was Raymond that showed me how to...

DAD

Nonsense, utter nonsense! It was our combined efforts each weekend in the backyard that produced...

STEVIE

No Dad, it was Raymond that...

DAD

Steven! *(Dad reins in his emotions)* Son, you're all the world to me. You understand what I'm saying don't you?

STEVIE

I think so. But it was Raymond that helped with...

DAD

(Dad grabs Stevie by the shoulders) Steven, what Raymond said is of no consequence!

STEVIE

Oowww Dad, you're hurting me.

DAD

(Dad releases Stevie) I'm sorry son. Stevie, I'm very proud of you. You know that don't you. You know I love you, don't you son?

STEVIE

Yes Dad I do and I love you too.

(They hug. Dad takes another picture of Stevie batting. They pantomime hitting a home run)

STEVIE/DAD

Just BLAMO and it was outta here.

(Lights go to black on Dad and Stevie)

RAYMOND

It was always like that. Dad never gave me...

(The sound of wheels SCREECHING is heard. Raymond covers his ears. Lights come up on Janis)

JANIS

I know to him Stevie was...

RAYMOND

...fuck him!

(Janis looks to Raymond)

RAYMOND

I do miss Stevie though...

(The sound of Stevie's laughter is heard, but it is twisted and macabre. Stevie runs in on the upper platform carrying a space helmet, he tries to hand it to Raymond. Raymond backs away. Stevie runs off)

JANIS

(Looking over to Raymond) Raymond, what's wrong?

(The sound of Stevie's laughter is heard again, this time it is pleasant and friendly. Stevie runs in on the upper platform, wearing a trench coat tied around his neck as a cape. He fights off a dragon with his sword. (an umbrella)

STEVIE

Ha, ha, ha... take that and that. You'll never take me alive Mr. Dreaded Old Dragon.

RAYMOND

(eager to enter this memory) It's club time!

(Raymond, 16, dashes out of his cell to join Stevie. Stevie runs up and grabs Raymond by the arm. They run off to their secret club house. They use the entire stage fighting off dragons and warriors)

RAYMOND

Me and Stevie had this secret way to get into our club house in the old Miller place. James didn't want to be member of our club, he wanted to be the janitor. Do you remember-- that was the place we first...

JANIS

(looking up from the letter, Janis blushes) Raymond...

(In the clubhouse, Stevie walks around as KING ARTHUR. Lights dim to a glow on Janis)

STEVIE

I hereby call to order "The Downtown Chapter of The Knights of the Roundtable". Now the first order of this here meeting is to knight this warrior for valor of the highest order. But first, let the serving wenches bring more grog! More grog I say!

(Stevie pounds his fist on the table. He and Raymond pick up imaginary mugs, drink then wipe their mouths of the beer suds)

STEVIE

Now to the business before us. You fair sir, have upheld the honor of the Roundtable, and thus you shall be one of us. *(Stevie looks around to the imaginary knights)* So say we all? Aye, so it is, so it shall be. Now gallant sir, you have saved the life of the princess who was turned into a cat by her wicked stepmother. But you sir, have saved her and restored her to her rightful self, and for this act of bravery... *(Stevie knights Raymond)* you shall be a knight. Arise, sir Knight. Let it be known throughout the Realm, that you are now, "Sir Raymond of Bryant, Knight of the Roundtable, Downtown Chapter." Now, we will drink until we drop, and chase the wenches all.

(Stevie fighting dragons runs off across the top platform, Raymond starts to follow--The CLOCK TOWER booms 2:30 AM bells. The lights fade on Stevie)

RAYMOND

No... just a little longer... please...

(Raymond runs to his cell and frantically begins writing.)

He glances back at his cell's window. It is still dark outside. Janis looks up at Raymond. Raymond continues to write-- Stevie doesn't appear)

RAYMOND

Stevie was always doing and saying stuff like that.

(Raymond looks around, he waits for Stevie to appear, NOTHING! Raymond continues to write)

JANIS

Stevie made the world smile.

RAYMOND

(Raymond looks up again still nothing) I remember all those movies me and Stevie used to go to. I loved the Cops and Robbers, Stevie loved John "DUKE" Wayne. Dad loved The Duke too, so I guess that's why Stevie did.

JANIS

Me, I always wanted to be...

RAYMOND

...Gary Cooper or James Stewart or one of those guys.

(Stevie's laughter is faintly heard. Relieved, Raymond continues writing. Stevie laughter builds as he enters down-stage left wearing a cowboy hat and two six guns doing his best John Wayne walk)

JANIS

We used to sneak into the Fenway Theater.

(Stevie looking at Raymond, tips his hat back)

STEVIE

Let's hit the road pilgrim.

(Raymond, 16, runs to join Stevie.)

They use the entire stage to sneak into the theater. Raymond starts throwing popcorn at Stevie, their popcorn fight faces them to the audience)

JANIS

We'd hide out in the upper balcony and see the triple feature two maybe three times... *(Stevie stands up making monster noises)*...then Stevie would start up.

(The sound of moans and groans filter in)

RAYMOND

To tell you the truth, we watched the people in the theater more than the films. *(whispering)* Stevie... look at those people.

STEVIE

(screaming and laughing) They're naked!!!

(Raymond clamps his hand over Stevie's mouth)

RAYMOND

Stevie be quiet.

STEVIE

They're butt naked!!! *(He laughs again)*

JANIS

About this time the picture starts, it's the Alamo.

STEVIE

Remember, I'm the Duke.

(Stevie looks from the screen to the couple back to the screen. Every time Stevie whips his head, popcorn flies onto the couple)

JANIS

Stevie would catch the "Duke spearin' one of those Mexican cats and make it back in time to catch this dude on the down stroke.

JANIS (CONT'D)

This went on for a couple of minutes, the couple—the Duke—the couple—the Duke and Stevie. Now Stevie's getting excited because...

STEVIE

The Duke's big scene is coming up!

JANIS

(looking at the couple) The couple's likewise...

RAYMOND/STEVIE

oooohhhh...

JANIS

Raymond!

(The moans and groans grow louder. Raymond becomes more excited watching them)

STEVIE

Duke... *(Stevie stands guns drawn)* ...watch out for that lousy Mex cat creepin' up behind you!

RAYMOND

(Raymond's head whips back and forth from the couple to the screen) Yeah... oh yeah.

JANIS

Raymond Bryant...! Now the Duke gets his, the couple gets theirs and Stevie gets his.

(Stevie acts out getting shot, he throws his popcorn in the air)

RAYMOND

Popcorn's flying all over the place, screams are coming from the couple trying to get their clothes on, and Stevie's rollin down the aisles laughing. He looks up at me and say's...

STEVIE

"Well, that's that kid".

(Stevie draws his guns and runs off.)

STEVIE

Remember I'm the Duke, remember I'm the Duke...

(Raymond and Janis laugh in their separate worlds)

RAYMOND

Man, Stevie was he crazy... I miss him, God how I miss him.

(The sounds of a HOSPITAL Waiting Room filter in. Lights come up stage-left on a hospital waiting room with Dad, Mom and James)

RAYMOND

(backing away) **No!**

(Janis and Raymond turn to each other. Lights go to black on the Waiting Room then restore)

RAYMOND

NO!!!!

(Lights to black on the waiting room. Raymond sits in his cell and starts writing)

RAYMOND

Stevie and I would...

(The lights and sounds in the Waiting Room come up. Sounds get louder. Raymond writes faster)

RAYMOND

No!!!!!!!

(Raymond paces and writes, his pacing mirrors Dad pacing in the Waiting Room. Raymond stops to look to the Waiting Room)

RAYMOND

(backing away) Please, I don't want to!

(Dad jumps every time a door opens. James sits with comforting Mom. They all look tired and worn out. Raymond stops writing, he turns his back on the scene. Hospital sounds grow louder.)

*Raymond looks to Janis as fades
into blackness)*

RAYMOND

Janis...

*(The Family face front listening
to someone speak. Raymond
reluctantly turns toward his
Mother)*

MOM

Oh God no...!

*(Dad takes Mom in his arms. Mom
pulls away)*

MOM

No, no, no... not my baby, not my baby.

DAD

Jamerson, take your mother home.

JAMES

Yes Dad.

MOM

I'm not going anywhere. I want to see my baby. Steven
needs...

*(Mom faints, Dad catches her and
takes her off, James follows)*

RAYMOND

Stevie was in a coma for 5 weeks. After two or three visits
of her crying and fainting, the Doctor said it was better if
Mom didn't come anymore. The doctor said it was just a
matter of a couple of days anyway. Mom stayed sedated that
whole time.

*(Dad enters, he sees Raymond.
Raymond crosses to him)*

RAYMOND

Dad, I...

DAD

We have to be strong now Raymond. Mother is counting on all of us to be strong.

(Dad starts to pat Raymond on his shoulder, his hand stops mid-air. Dad walks away)

RAYMOND

Dad, I'm sorry...

(Dad directs his lines to the audience as though they were a nurse)

DAD

Miss... I want you to do everything possible to make things comfortable for my boy... money is no object.

RAYMOND

My father stayed at the hospital every night of that last week.

DAD

This is my boy understand! I'll be here day and night until... I'm right here son, Dad's right here. *(Dad moves past Raymond to Stevie's bedside)*

(Raymond moves to another part of the room and watches Dad)

RAYMOND

I was there every day too but Dad never paid any attention to me.

(Dad takes a flask from his pocket and takes two quick drinks, then goes back to Stevie)

DAD

You're going to get better any day now Stevie. Those doctors, they don't know nothin'.

(A film clip of "FATHER KNOW'S BEST" is shown)

DAD

When you get better they'll all remember I said, "My Stevie will be back on his feet in no time... My Stevie's a trooper he is. That's right, he'll be back on his feet in no time, no time at all... they'll see... they'll all see.

(Lights fade on Dad)

RAYMOND

Stevie never did. Until that day I never thought my father cried, never. The cat on, "Father Knows Best" didn't cry so my Dad didn't cry right, wrong! That shit was so wrong it could never be right. But that's how I thought about my Dad. He was just like Robert Young. Dad's kicked ass, but they didn't cry. My Dad, cried that day.

(A pool of light fade up on Dad on his knees drunk and crying)

RAYMOND

Dad cried for a long time. He was all huddled up in a corner like someone had scooped out all the shit that was him and just dumped the rest.

(Raymond crosses to Dad. The rest of the stage fades to black. Dad grabs Raymond and pulls him down next to him)

DAD

Boy, you get down on your knees just like I am. You get down on your knees and you ask the Lord to give us back our Stevie. You pray for your brother hear?

(Dad forces Raymond's hands into a praying position. Raymond starts to cry)

DAD

You ask the lord to give us back our Stevie. You pray... you pray hard for us to get back our Stevie.

(Dad's prayers are searing as he reaches out to God)

DAD

Dear God... *(Dad's head whips to Raymond)*

RAYMOND

Dear God...

DAD

Dear God, my boy's being taken from me and I want him back...
It's not fair... it's not fair...

*(Dad freezes in a contorted
fervent praying position. The
film "FATHER KNOW'S BEST" burns)*

RAYMOND

I felt like my whole world had flipped over and broke. What
the hell happened to "Father Knows Best" and all that shit?

*(Sobs escape Dad. Raymond crawls
close to him)*

RAYMOND

Dad, it's going to be alright, we're Bryant's and we'll...(as
*Raymond is about to put his arm around his father he turns
and stares through Raymond)*

DAD

What the hell do you think you are doing?

RAYMOND

I... I was... you said we had to be strong... that we were
was supposed to be for...

*(The sound of a door opening is
heard. Dad pretending he was
looking for something quickly
stands, fixes his clothes and
exits into a dim pool of light
center-stage leaving Raymond on
the floor)*

RAYMOND

I was the only one there. I was the only one to see him.
Dad must have thought I was going to tell someone that he was
down on his knees crying and praying for Stevie. I wouldn't
have done that. I never would have told on Dad. I wanted to
tell him how much I... how much I loved him. I loved him
more than he loved Stevie. Lord forgive me, but I hoped it
was gonna be me now, now that I was the youngest... now Dad
was gonna have to love me like he did Stevie. Well that
didn't happen. From that day on my father hated me.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

He wished it was me that had died in that hospital instead of Stevie, he never said it, but I knew it all the same. He loved Stevie that much but he hated me more.

(Lights come up on Janis)

JANIS

Raymond, that's not true. Your father loved you, he just couldn't show it the way you...

RAYMOND

I hate that mother-fucker! It wasn't my fault I wasn't Stevie... No one could have been, not to him, not for him. Stevie was his... it hurts. I know he hated me. I said I was sorry and he still hated me... well fuck him, I hate him too! I lied, I loved Dad, I still do. *(pause)* God forgive me, but deep down sometimes I think I might have hated Stevie. Stevie had everything, I had nothing. *(Lights fade to black on Dad as Raymond moves towards him)* Dad it wasn't my fault.

(Lights come up on Dad stage-right, pissed reading Raymond's report card. He takes a flask from his pocket and takes a quick wig. The more he reads the angrier he gets. Dad mutters to himself, takes another swig and puts the flask away)

DAD

Raymond!!!

(Raymond, 16, runs into his past)

RAYMOND

Yes Dad?

DAD

May have a word with you?

RAYMOND

Yes sir.

DAD

I believe there is a little matter of this report card to discuss.

RAYMOND

Sir?

DAD

What can you tell me about this? I see a "B+", where there was once an "A". Son, having a "B+" is tantamount to almost failing. I will not have one of what is left of my children failing. Bryant's do not fail. What do you have to say for yourself?

RAYMOND

Dad, that was those two weeks that I had the flu and I had to stay home. I tried to make up the class, but my teacher said I had missed two crucial tests. He said I could make up them up during the winter break so that...

DAD

And just why was it that you could go to school when all you had was a minor cold is still beyond me. Steven was never sick a day in his life until the lord took him away from us.

RAYMOND

But Dad, the doctor said I couldn't go to school because I had the pneumonia ... I wanted to go, but he wouldn't...

DAD

Are disputing what I said about the severity of your cold?

RAYMOND

No sir... it's just that...

DAD

That... that what?

RAYMOND

Nothing sir. I will try to replace the "B+" with the "A" that was once there.

DAD

You will do better than that young man. To assure that you do replace it, you will attend summer school instead of joining the family on vacation in August.

RAYMOND

That's not fair. Mr. Ross said that I could make up that grade and that it would replace the B+ with an A and my grade point average would remain an A... having to go to summer school is just not fair.

DAD

Fair...? We Bryant's are not accustomed to having to rely on others to help us make up our grade point averages or anything else for that matter. You will go to summer school and that is that. You are dismissed Steven.

(Dad continues reading the report card)

RAYMOND

Dad...

DAD

What is it now?

RAYMOND

You called me Steven.

DAD

That is ridiculous... Raymond. Are you insinuating that I, your father, no longer knows the difference between my children-- that I am no longer in control of my faculties. I am the head of this family and I will not brook any disrespect. Now Raymond, you go up to your room and think about all that has transpired here.

RAYMOND

Yes sir.

(Raymond stares at his father. The look infuriates Dad, he slaps Raymond)

DAD

Don't you dare ever look at me that way again!

RAYMOND

Yes sir...

DAD

Don't you ever talk back or question me again, are we clear?

RAYMOND

(holding his face Raymond backs out of the scene) Yes sir, yes sir, yeeeeess siiiiirr...

*(Lights go to black on Dad as
Raymond backs out of the scene)*

RAYMOND

I want to be a hero, I want to be a....

*(A pool of light come up on
Janis, 16, downstage-right)*

JANIS

Raymond, my Raymond. A ferocious dragon has captured my families castle. Only you can save us.

*(Raymond, 21, smiles eager for
the escape. He starts towards
Janis. Lights come up on Stevie
running on the upper platform)*

STEVIE

Come on Flash, come on!

*(Raymond backs away from Stevie.
Raymond is trapped in a pool of
light. He can't enter Janis'
world or escape Stevie's. **The
THREE scenes, Raymond's, Janis'
and Stevie's** build toward a
crescendo)*

JANIS

Raymond, my Raymond...

STEVIE

Come on Flash, come on...

JANIS

A ferocious dragon has captured my families castle.

STEVIE

Come on Flash, come on!

JANIS

Raymond, only you can save usssssss.....

RAYMOND

Noooooooooooooooooo...

(The CLOCK TOWER booms 3:00 AM bells. All lights snap to black. As the last bell sounds, a pool of light comes up on an exhausted Raymond in his cell. Lights slowly come up center-stage on Dad and Janis in the living room mid conversation)

DAD

And your parents don't mind you coming to a boys home unaccompanied?

JANIS

No sir, they don't. I always call to let them know where I am. Is Raymond coming down down soon?

DAD

In a moment. Mrs. B. tells me your father is an engineer, is that right?

JANIS

Yes, sir, he's the custodial engineer at our high school.

(Raymond, 16, exits his cell to listen outside the doorway)

DAD

I see. You said your name was Montgomery, is that right?

JANIS

Yes sir, that is correct.

DAD

Then you must be related to the Montgomery's on Hilldale.

JANIS

No sir, I'm not. We live in Sumpton, near the train station.

DAD

Sumpton, near the train station did you say?

JANIS

Yes, that's correct. Is Raymond coming down soon?

DAD

All in good time. Now Janet, there are a few more questions I'd like to...

JANIS

Janis.

DAD

Pardon?

JANIS

My name is Janis. You said JANET.

DAD

Did I? I'm very sorry, please forgive me... Now JANIS, as to my son-- Mrs. B informs me that Raymond and you have been spending a great deal of time together and are discussing plans for a future together next year after high school. Raymond is a very impressionable young man, and he seems, from what Mrs. B. tells me, to be very smitten with you, well, as smitten as a young boy his age can be that is.

JANIS

Mr. Bryant we...

DAD

As to Raymond's future, we have already chosen a college for him, and as I understand it, you will be attending the domestic-vocational school here in town next fall. Let me say, and I want to speak with the strictest candor if I may and our decision by no means is a reflection on you or your family, but, under these circumstances I don't think it's prudent for the two of you to continue this relationship.

JANIS

I see. Well thank you for being courteous enough to tell me to my face, at least now I know where I stand.

DAD

I'm glad that we...

*(Janis takes a step toward Dad,
he is surprised)*

JANIS

Mr. Bryant... since we are speaking with such candor, may I ask you a question?

DAD

Of course, by all means.

JANIS

Why is it that you feel you have the right to meddle in Raymond and my lives, you have no right!

(Raymond bursts into the room)

RAYMOND

Janis! *(She looks to Raymond then continues)*

JANIS

Forgive me for being so blunt. I love Raymond unequivocally, and without knowing anything about me or my family, who you've chosen to denigrate not once but twice after a two minute conversation and have come to a conclusion about my and Raymond's future that has absolutely nothing to do with you!

DAD

I see. *(Dad turns to Raymond)* Raymond, what can you tell me of the plans you and Miss Montgomery are making?

RAYMOND

Well we, we...

DAD

Plans that I might add have a direct effect on this family and your future. Do you not think your mother and I should be privy to this information?

RAYMOND

Yes sir I do, it's just that we haven't really...

DAD

So, there is something for us to discuss. I just assumed this was idle prattle since you didn't think it important enough to inform me, your father.

JANIS

Sir, it wasn't that, we just hadn't really...

DAD

I was addressing my son, young lady. I do not presume to know how your father runs his household, but in the Bryant household, when we are addressed, we respond to each other in the polite manner to which all in this household are accustomed. We do not allow our lives to disintegrate into anarchy and...

RAYMOND

Dad, she didn't mean anything. She was just trying to...

DAD

Raymond are you interrupting me? Well are you? I'll assume you must have thought I was finished speaking, and if so, you then thought you'd rush in with whatever you were trying to say. Is that what has just transpired? Answer me!

RAYMOND

No sir.

JANIS

Mr. Bryant, as I am a guest in your house, I will give you the respect you deserve, more respect I might add than you have shown me, but as I am not your child and have my own mind I will speak it. You sir, are a tyrant and a bully having no consideration for the wishes or feelings of others, and since as you say, Raymond is your son, with plans for the future, made by you, for you, and as I do not figure into the grand scheme of things; I will take my leave of your house... but know this, I love Raymond... *(she looks over to Raymond, a smile is shared between them)*...and he me and there is nothing you can do about that. Good day Mr. Bryant. *(Janis turns to exit)*

DAD

Wait just a moment young lady!

(Janis stops but stands her ground, ready for anything)

DAD

You needn't apologize.

JANIS

I wasn't going to.

(Dad chuckles. Raymond is shocked)

DAD

I like your spunk. Mrs. B, says I occasionally need a good kick in the rump. These are trying times, and we have to be vigilant least we fall. We Bryant's come from a very proud family. My ancestor, Preston Bryant, who by the way I am the name sake...

JANIS

...was one of the first Blacks to ride shotgun for the Wells Fargo Company, though the historic recounting of his life has yet to be adequately documented, he saved the lives of Bill Cody and Wild Bill Hickcock on numerous occasions-- everyone knows that.

DAD

(Dad smiles) Why yes, that's correct.

JANIS

Raymond told me all about him... Sir.

DAD

A little spitfire. Raymond, your mother was much the same when I met her, full of fight and her own opinions. Son, in the future it will be a world of such people. The times are calling for them, and I for one am glad that I will have such fire in my grandchildren. *(He reaches into his pocket takes out money and hands it to Raymond. Raymond is shocked.)* Raymond, why don't you take Miss Montgomery down to the soda shop and have a treat on me. *(Dad turns to exit. He stops and turns back to them)* A little spitfire.

(Dad exits. Raymond counts the money, Janis glowers at him)

RAYMOND

What? Why are you looking at me like that?

JANIS

Why didn't you say something? You just stood there and let him treat you like a child, like you had no say in your life.

RAYMOND

I tried to. You don't know how he is now.

JANIS

You just stood there and let him humiliate you, humiliate us. Raymond how could you just stand there?

(Raymond starts to speak, he stops. They stare at each other. The stage goes to black for a beat. Lights come up on Janis in her apartment, Raymond in his cell. Janis takes a step out of her apartment towards Raymond)

JANIS

Raymond I never meant it that way. I meant...

(Raymond steps out of his cell,
he takes a step toward Janis)

RAYMOND

You were right. I should have said something. I should have stood up to him. I wanted to, I really did. You don't know how things were after Stevie died.

JANIS

You never said anything. I didn't know how things were. You should have said something. I was there, I was always there for you Raymond.

RAYMOND

You're all that's left.

JANIS

Damm it, I was there for you! Why didn't you tell me?

*(The **CLOCK TOWER booms out 3:30 AM bells. The sounds of men YELLING and FIGHTING filters in. Raymond pulls out his shiv and raises it to strike)***

*(Raymond looks to Janis, then to the to the shiv. **The sound of CAR BREAKS SCREECHING to are heard.** Raymond covers his ears and shuts his eyes. Lights fade on Janis, and come up to a faint glow on Dad, Mom, James and Stevie playing in the yard. The Families lines are spoken several times, overlapping each other and building in intensity in a dream sequence)*

James: I'm Ming the Merciless / Dad: Yes my Master / Mom: Run flash / Stevie: I'm Dr. Zarkoff. / James: Up my Ogre / Dad: Yes my Master. / Mom: Raymond, you mind don't cross the street by..... / Stevie: I'm Dr. Zarkoff. / James: I'm Ming the Merciless. / Dad: Yes my Master. / Mom: Run flash! / Stevie: I'm Dr. Zarkoff. / James: Up my Ogre. / Mom: Raymond, mind Stevie don't...

RAYMOND

Nooooooooooooo!

(Raymond shuts his eyes and fervently whispers a prayer. The lights flicker. The family scene is repeated. Raymond continues to pray)

James: I'm Ming the Merciless / Dad: Yes my Master / Mom: Run flash / Stevie: I'm Dr. Zarkoff. / James: Up my Ogre / Dad: Yes my Master. / Mom: Raymond, you mind don't cross the street by..... / Stevie: I'm Dr. Zarkoff. / James: I'm Ming the Merciless. / Dad: Yes my Master. / Mom: Run flash! / Stevie: I'm Dr. Zarkoff. / James: Up my Ogre. / Mom: Raymond, mind Stevie don't...

RAYMOND

Stttoooooppppppp iiiittttttttttt!!!!!!!!!!

(Lights on the family snap to black. Lights slowly come up on Janis. A pool of light comes up on Dad on the up-stage platform)

DAD

You better pray boy. You better pray.

RAYMOND

(As lights fade to black on Dad) Dad it wasn't my fault...

(Extremely upset, Janis throws the letter in the waste basket as lights fade to black on her)

RAYMOND

I have nothing left.

(Lights fade to black on Raymond)

END OF ACT I

ACT II

AT RISE: The stage is dark. Billie Holiday's, "Lover Man" plays.

(Lights come up on Janis, age 21, in her apartment and Raymond, age 21, in his cell, both are pacing. The music creates a bond between them. Raymond moves to the edge of his cell, he looks in Janis' direction. Janis moves to edge of her apartment environment to look in Raymond's direction. A smile appears on their faces.)

*(The **CLOCK TOWER** strikes 4:00 AM bells. Raymond's smile fade. Clock Tower drowns out music. Lights fade to black on Janis as the **LAST BELL SOUNDS**. Raymond turns off his radio. He begins writing. Janis looks to the waste basket, she retrieves Raymond's letter, she begins reading. As Raymond speaks, lights fade to black on Janis)*

RAYMOND

It surprises me that after all this time, after all that's happened I can still see your face so clearly. I can still see those deep dark searching eyes...

(Lights come up on Janis stage-right, age 17, reading a love letter from Raymond)

RAYMOND

...two black pieces of the purest coal. Your face has that look on it...

JANIS

...you know the one, it makes you look like a cocker-spaniel.

(Raymond chuckles. Janis takes a deep breath then continues)

JANIS

I can't never figure out how you managed not to get picked up. Every dogcatcher in the city must've been on the look out for you. I bet you were on the National, "One That Got Away" list. (Janis crosses to center-stage) Raymond Bryant, get down here right now!

(Raymond, 17, runs into the scene, eager for any moment with Janis)

JANIS

You call this a love letter? And when did I start looking like a cocker-spaniel?

RAYMOND

I didn't mean like a real cocker-spaniel, I meant more like, like...

JANIS

Like what, a bowser? All the girls at school said you Bryant boys were odd, but I thought after us dating for six months you would have changed.

RAYMOND

(Raymond falls to his knees) Please forgive me fair maiden. I shall slay a dragon for my indiscretions if you will but forgive me.

(Janis isn't smiling. Raymond walks on his knees kissing her hand, no reaction from her)

RAYMOND

I will slay two dragons, no, three, four, if you would but forgive me.

(Raymond kisses her hand up to her elbow. Janis softens. Raymond places her hand over his heart)

RAYMOND

...then we shall ride into the sunset atop my steed to my mountain fortress and live happily ever-after.

(Janis smiles)

JANIS

I guess it's okay this time, but no more letters comparing me to mammals of any kind?

RAYMOND

Oh-kee-dook-kee - no comparisons to mammals of any kind.

(Music from a distant radio filters in. A film clip of a Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers is shown. Raymond spins, then dips and kisses Janis)

JANIS

That was nice.

(Raymond bows and presents his arm to her. They start walking)

OLDMAN (VO)

That's one of them Bryant boys.

FIRST OLD WOMAN (VO)

I hear his old man's hittin' the sauce pretty good these days.

SECOND OLD WOMAN (VO)

Child, I don't know what Helen's gonna do. One boy dead, the other two turnin' out to be no good.

RAYMOND

I know what you're thinking.

JANIS

I wasn't thinking anything.

RAYMOND

I don't need anybody feeling sorry for me or my family.

JANIS

I wasn't going to say anything like...

RAYMOND

I'm sick of people talking about how sorry they are for my Mother and how sorry they are about Stevie and how sorry they are about my Dad, and how with prayer James might be alright. I'm tired of all that shit!

JANIS

Raymond don't speak to me like that! *(a beat)* Raymond... do you want to talk about what you're feeling?

*(Raymond is about to speak,
instead he pulls out an imaginary
sword)*

RAYMOND

Let's pretend I'm a valiant knight and you're...

JANIS

No Raymond, let's not! Just for today; let's not fight any dragons or slay any dark knights... just for today let's just sit and talk. Let's talk about things that are real. Let's you and me for once just sit and talk about you and me, the real you and me... can we do that?

RAYMOND

(Raymond turns away from her) Forget it. You don't understand.

JANIS

What did I do? Why are you taking it out on me? All I asked is if we could talk.

RAYMOND

What difference is it going make?

JANIS

Because maybe it might help you to act like an adult for once, instead of like a child and not retreat into one of your fantasy's when something requiring some maturity happens and then you might be able to deal with it instead of play acting. Raymond I'm getting to old to keep play acting my life. I want a real life like other kids have. I want to hold hands and walk in the park, sit by the lake or maybe go down to the malt shop for hamburgers and a coke every once and awhile instead of fighting dragons and wizards every other minute. I want us to do things like regular kids do. Why can't we do that for once?

*(Janis moves to take Raymond's
hand, he moves it away)*

RAYMOND

Honey, all I'm saying is that I have needs too, there are things I want too.

*(For the first time they are
isolated from each other. The
silence is deafening. Janis'
eyes reflect her breaking heart)*

JANIS

Raymond...

RAYMOND

I gotta go, I got chores and stuff...

JANIS

...yeah me too. My Mom's waiting for me.

*(The rift between them widens.
They exchange an awkward kiss.
Raymond backs away)*

RAYMOND

I'll call you later. Maybe we'll go to a movie or something.

JANIS

Okay... *(Janis can only manage a frail thin whisper)* Good-bye my knight.

RAYMOND

Janis...

JANIS

(Janis stops, she turns) Yes Raymond...

RAYMOND

I was thinking... *(hope renewed, she steps closer)*

JANIS

Me too. Raymond... do you believe in second chances?

RAYMOND

Second chances...?

JANIS

Yes... *(she takes another step forward)* ...a second chance to fix things that's gone terribly wrong and make them right.

RAYMOND

I don't know if I...

JANIS

Well I do! *(another step closer)* I believe we all get a second chance... *(stepping closer)* ...to fix those things that have gone terribly wrong.

(A small smile appears on Raymond's face)

RAYMOND

I think I understand...

(Janis smile propels her forward)

RAYMOND

... then I could fix what's happened with me and Dad and everything will be alright.

(Crest fallen, Janis stops)

JANIS

That's right Raymond... then you could fix things between you and your father.

(Crushed, Janis turns to exit)

RAYMOND

Janis, where are you...

*(The **CLOCK TOWER booms out 4:30 AM bells.** Lights come up on Dad on the up-stage platform drunk, fighting to put on his jacket. Mom enters to help)*

RAYMOND

NO!!!

(Lights go to black on Dad and Mom. Raymond begins writing. Lights come up on Janis, 21, reading the letter. Lights fade up on Dad fighting with his jacket. Raymond writes faster)

RAYMOND

Janis, a month ago I...

MOM

William, can I help you with your...

*(Defeated, Raymond stops writing,
he turns away from the scene)*

DAD

Damn it woman, I can take care of myself. I supervise 135 men everyday without your assistance, I think I can manage to put on my own goddamned jacket.

MOM

Bill, we talked about the drinking, and you promised you would stop drinking during the day.

DAD

I just need a little something to get me going in the morning.

MOM

Bill it's 2:35 in the afternoon.

DAD

I guess now it's a crime for a grown man to have a drink when he wants to unless he asks permission of his wife-mother?

MOM

Don't you dare speak to me like that. Baby, I know it's hard. It's been six months since it happened and you've been drinking for the last five. First you needed it to get you through the day; then it was to pep you up in the morning then to bring you down at night. Bill, do you know how you're treating the boys? You barely speak or spend time with them anymore and when you do, you're angry and critical at the least little thing.

*(Frustrated, Dad throws the
jacket to the floor)*

DAD

Jesus woman, leave me the hell alone about your damn kids!

MOM

My kids...?

DAD

You heard me... now leave me the hell alone!

MOM

No Bill, I will not leave you alone, and I will not let you dismiss me. You will listen me and what I have to say!

MOM (CONT'D)

(Mom stops to gather her strength) We have been married for some twenty odd years and I believe I've earned the right, no I'm sure I have. In all the years we've been married I let you do what you thought was right even if I didn't always agree with you and I never said a word, maybe all that's happened since Stevie passed is partly my fault I don't know, but I can't let you, let us...

DAD

...let you, let us... damn it, if you got something to say, then spit it out!

MOM

You're killing me! Killing us. I watch you drink yourself to death day in and day out and... and I refuse to climb into a bottle you. Do you know your sons hate you. Imagine, our boys, my sons hating their father.

(The blow knocks Dad back)

MOM

I'm sorry, I had to say that but it's way past time that I did and it's time you heard it. Baby I loved Stevie too, he was my child too, but he's gone, he's gone and we're here and nothing's going bring him back. We have two boys who need their father. Bill, please come back to your family, come back to me.

(Mom reaches to place her hand on Dad's shoulder, he walks away)

DAD

You don't understand.

MOM

I guess I don't.

(Fighting back her tears, Mom picks up Dad's jacket and exits. Dad takes a picture of out of his wallet and stares at it)

DAD

Nobody understands. Steven was the best part of me. I hate you God. I hate you for robbing me of my last, my best. My boy's gone, and all I got is these.

RAYMOND

After that it became anything he could think of to get another drink. Some days he'd be puttin' away whole fifths before work, most times he didn't even go to work. Dad didn't go to work more and more, so they fired him. That broke Mom's heart. Dad stayed in his den day and night drinking and looking at pictures of Stevie.

DAD

My boy's gone, and all I got is these. *(Dad hears something, he shoots to his feet)* Now I told you men to make those adjustments two days ago. We have a quota to maintain. It's paying attention to details that keeps this plant running at it's optimum level of efficiency, and I will not... *(he sees the pictures in his hand)* I will not... It is a dark night, and all that can be seen is seen by a... a....

(Pained by the memory, Raymond calls out to help his father)

RAYMOND

...a strange eerie full moon.

DAD

That's right... that's right... now Preston is on top riding shot-gun when up comes this raidin' party of Comanches...

(Dad looks around waiting for James to do his war yelp)

DAD

...when up from nowhere comes this raidin' party of Comanches... *Jaaammmeeeesss...*

RAYMOND

(Raymond imitates James) ...ooooohhhh... *(the sound dies in his throat)*

DAD

But did I panic...?

RAYMOND

(Raymond's words die in mid flight) ...no you didn't...

DAD

...no I didn't... no I didn't...

(Bebop/Jazz music filters in as lights fade to black on Dad looking at pictures of Stevie.)

Lights come up on James entering down-stage right dressed as a beatnik carrying a set of Bongos he will play intermittently throughout the scene. Raymond decides to leave Dad's memory for James')

RAYMOND

James in the search for himself became... (*Raymond chuckles*)
...a beatnik. James almost killed a guy once because of Dad.

JAMES

He/I, almost beat a cat to death, that eternal resting place. Dad out on an outing, now that him have no place to go. Don Quixotic tilting at windmills, as well as tilting elbows.

RAYMOND

Mom told us to go out and find Dad. We found him.

JAMES

...betwixt and between two/three formidable opponents. Pushing, shoving him to extremes not available to men of semi-conscious inebriation.

RAYMOND

They said, "Hey W.P. do you want..."

JAMES

...another drink, nectar of the Gods. Crawl like a baby for it he did. Wee, wee, wee, whimpering and crying, crying and whimpering, not unlike those who are dying, and die yet again and again in the home of him who is Dante's.

RAYMOND

One of the guys grabbed Dad, "Hey wine-packin', you want another..."

(James assumes a stylized performance fighting stance)

RAYMOND

Shit that cat never got a chance to finish.

JAMES

I said no words, not a one. Kicking, scratching, biting I. I now in touch with my primitive inner beat... wild man was I. I/Me fighting for him, who no longer fights for himself.

*(James does his Indian war yelp
as he defeats his opponents)*

RAYMOND

I had to pull James off those cats. Man one cat...

JAMES

...had no teeth in head, blood aplenty abounds, he the one, the offender/infidel, there lie he, not unlike a fallen broken soldier of disgrace... teeth scattered there and about. His face now a pulpin' mashed thing... I am Cinema Verete - Au Verete Du Cinema. Blood red running, blood running redder than black. Reality will never be real, but unreality... ah, now this be food for thought.

*(Lights and music fade on James
as they come up on Dad pulling
himself off the ground. James
without his beatnik outfit runs
in to help Dad up)*

JAMES

Dad...

DAD

Why thank you...

RAYMOND

No!!! *(Raymond turns away frantically writing)* Janis, remember the time we...

*(Lights snap to black on Dad and
James then restore. They repeat
the scene, James helps Dad up)*

DAD

Why thank you...

(Dad pulls away seeing James)

DAD

Take your damn hands off me!

*(Dad embarrassed and angry pushes
James away. Raymond runs in)*

RAYMOND

Dad, what are you doing?

DAD

I don't need your goddamned help. I don't need either of you! Go on, get outta' my sight!

(James and Dad eyes lock. James walks away. He stops at the edge)

JAMES

Raymond, take him home and make sure he stays there.

(James and Dad lock eyes before James exits)

DAD

Jamerson... son...

(The lights fade to black on Dad. Lights up on Janis)

RAYMOND

After that, James wouldn't look at Dad. James ran away a few days later, I never saw him again. It all happened like in one of those Hollywood movies. A cat loses someone in his family and then he goes to the booze to try and forget them, he tries to deal but he can't.

(Lights come up on Dad on the in his study looking at pictures of Stevie)

RAYMOND

Those movies usually starred someone like Spencer Tracy or Glenn Ford. In those flicks it was usually a girlfriend, the mother or someone like that, for Dad it was Stevie. I kept waiting for Dad to snap out of it the way those dudes always did in the movies. He was supposed to snap out of it when he saw his family was falling apart.

(Dad straightens his jacket and tie, puts on a birthday hat, lights a candle and carefully places it on top of a cup cake then blows a toot on a party favor. An odd smile creeps onto Dad's face. Dad sings in whispered voice to Stevie's picture)

DAD

...happy birthday to you... happy birthday to you... happy birthday dear Steven, Happy Birthday to you.

RAYMOND

...he was supposed to snap out of it...

DAD

I love you son.

(Lights fade to black on Dad. A single GUNSHOT is heard)

RAYMOND

My father killed himself on Stevie's eleventh birthday. I guess Dad and I didn't see the same movies. I guess the jokes on him huh?

JANIS

Oh my god. Raymond, I'm so sorry. I didn't know. You told me he had a heart attack. I didn't know... damn you Raymond!

(Raymond stares at Janis until she continues reading)

RAYMOND

I guess Dad wasn't the only one who saw the wrong movie, shit, I'm in the wrong theater. I came to see the love story but I'm getting the monster flick. I figured you and I would be married by now. I guess things never turn out the way you plan them huh? I figured by now we'd... God, when am I gonna wake up? We were never gonna do any more than we're doing right now. I'm up here in this hole tryin' to remember what day it is and tryin' to forget it at the same time, and you, who the fuck knows what you're up to. *(He pauses)* Hey, forget all that I just said, I do... *(The sound of the prison filters in)* ...at least I try to. Janis, the shit in here gets real intense sometimes.

(Lights fade to black on Janis. A shaft of eerie light pours through the window of Raymond's cell window as sounds of night life in the prison filters in)

RAYMOND

It was one of those nights when everyone is trying to fuck with everyone's last nerve.

(The sound of cell doors clanging close and reverberating is heard)

RAYMOND

The dudes on the block were talking back and forth...

(The conversations becomes HUSHED guarded WHISPERS)

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

...then it got real quiet.

(Lights on Raymond fade to a glow. Lights come up to a glow on Janis)

JANIS

Sometimes it gets so quiet you can hear your heart pumping your blood. Now that's real out, because it never gets that quiet.

RAYMOND

There's always some other kind of sound, something, anything, so it never gets that quiet. Well, that's the quiet that happens here. When it comes, somebody dies.

JANIS

The quiet has a life of its own. You can feel it coming. It moves up and down the cells. The quiet starts creeping and all you just sit and wait.

RAYMOND

There ain't nothing else you can do. It ain't like a sickness or nothing like that. That's something you could somehow avoid. But this... all you can do is sit and wait.

(All sounds on the cell block stop)

RAYMOND

Silence. In it you can hear your blood rushing in your ears, burning your brain. The rushing's so loud you want to scream. Last night it was just like that. You sit in the dark wonderin' who's turn it'll be. Who's gonna go in the quiet.

JANIS

Who's turn is it? Is it mine?

RAYMOND

Once I thought I wouldn't be able to take it anymore, take being here take not being with you.

(The ECHO of cell doors SLAMMING close and lights sequentially SNAPPING off is heard)

RAYMOND

Suddenly it started movin'... the silence I mean. It started comin' up the first level, then down that row of cells creeping closer ever closer. It's like someone pushed a button and everyone reacts to. It's just like you was in one of those monster flicks like "The Curse of Dracula". First, there's this group of people who get stranded at an Inn, and before you know it, it's dark outside and no one can leave, then from nowhere here comes ole Drac risin' up out of a shadow or some cloud of smoke tryin' to put the bite on the girl. All the time we in the audience is tryin' to help, we tryin' to scream out a warning. But it does no good, ole Drac always gets them in the end. Well that's how it is in here... you know it's gonna happen, you just don't know to who or when.

JANIS

All you can do is wait.

(Lights in Raymond's cell are moonbeams from the window. Shadows of the cell's bars fall across Raymond and the floor)

RAYMOND

I see a big, full moon... The moonlight's pouring into my cell making little dances on the wall. Nothing's happened. I feel my hand slipping under my mattress for my knife... I feel myself slipping away. I close my eyes and I see a puddle of blood... my wrists open... It's hot, Africa hot... I need air, I can't breathe. My head feels like someone's workin' a mojo on me. Air, I need air. My fingers touch the blade and run down its sharp edge, little droplets of blood trickle down into my palm. I feel my hand close around the handle. I feel myself slipping away, and I can't stop myself. It's going to be me, I know it, I can feel it. I still can't breath it's too hot. I walk to the window. I see the moon and the moon and it sees me. I feel myself outside myself. I take my blade out and rest it on my wrist, the blade feels so cool. The blood in my head pounds, it's hot, it's still too hot.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

(Lights fade to a glow on Raymond) My fingers tighten on the blade... I press down, the skin on my wrists breaks, ah... That's better. I close my eyes and move the blade back and forth gently, ever so gently... The blood feels warm, I tighten my grip to...

(A SHRILL SCREAM, whistles and cell doors slamming open assault the silence)

RAYMOND

Three cells down a cat pushed a shiv through his heart... just three cells down from me... Janis, I... I almost...

(Lights snap up on Janis)

JANIS

Stop it Raymond! Don't do this to me! Raymond I tried. I don't want to feel guilty about us. I have nothing to feel guilty about... I have nothing to feel guilty about.

(Raymond stares at Janis until she continues to read)

JANIS

Until that night I never thought I'd be one of those cats that would be scared to die.

(Music from an adventure film filters in)

RAYMOND

I always thought I'd face death like Errol Flynn or one of those dudes. That I'd laugh in the face of death and have some pithy remarks ready as I faced down death.

(Raymond, 16, takes out his imaginary sword as Stevie enters stage-right. He runs to Raymond, they start sword fighting)

STEVIE

So Black Knight, we shall settle this once and for all.

,RAYMOND

So we shall... ha... ha ha.

STEVIE

Your, ha, ha's need a little work.

RAYMOND

Let's see how you feel about that when my sword is sticking out of you gizzard.

(The boys continue their battle. as Mom enters stage-left carrying a basket of laundry)

MOM

(smiling) You boys are never gonna amount to anything unless you get your head out of those clouds. You both always acting and acting and pretending you're somebody else. You are who you are, that's it.

(Mom starts off, Raymond saddens. Mom looks over at him then pulls her imaginary sword and assumes a swashbuckling stance twirling an imaginary mustache)

MOM

Well Sirs, I believe there is a matter of the bill.

(Raymond face brightens. Raymond and Stevie swagger toward Mom)

RAYMOND

We believe the matter of the bill has been settled to our satisfaction.

STEVIE

Yeah, what he said.

MOM

Well it hasn't... ON-GUARD! *(Mom jumps into a stance)*

RAYMOND

Mom, it's not on-guard, it's "enguard"!

MOM

Well, enguard then!

(Raymond, Stevie and Mom do their mock battle. Mom conceding victory to them. She smiles and kisses both boys on the forehead.)

MOM

Stevie, you got homework.

STEVIE

But Mom, me and Raymond need to finish our sword fight.

MOM

You've been sword fighting all day... it's homework time.

(Stevie trudges off with Mom. Raymond, 21, does several thrust with his sword)

RAYMOND

I was wrong about how me and Stevie thought it would be facing death, the shit ain't nothing like that. When death comes a knocking there ain't no pithy anythings, death don't give a fuck weather you pithy or not. I do miss Mother. She loved us all the same. To her we were all like Stevie.

(Mom, wearing a black shawl carrying a single rose enters, Raymond rushes to her)

RAYMOND

Mom...

MOM

It was a nice service don't you think? Your father would have been so happy that so many people came... and the flowers, oh my goodness, there were so many flowers and the Reverend; he sure out did himself today.

RAYMOND

Yes Mom, he did.

MOM

I'm a little tired. I'm going to rest for awhile.

RAYMOND

Okay.

(Mom exits stage right)

RAYMOND

I never saw my mother like that, she looked like her whole self had just dried up and blew away. I wish you could have seen us before, instead of the way we were, a bunch of people looking for the quickest way to die. Before, we were just like everybody else.

(The music of an old movie serial filters in. Stevie wearing a space helmet and making "laser blaster" sounds runs past Raymond and hands him his space helmet)

STEVIE

Come on Flash, it's our last chance to get to the decompression chamber.

RAYMOND

No Stevie, I don't want to.

(Stevie grabs Raymond and pulls him along. Raymond pulls away)

STEVIE

Come on Flash before it's too late.

RAYMOND

No... *(backing away)*

(Stevie runs around Raymond shooting. Swept up in Stevie's energy, Raymond, 16, fires his ray gun following Stevie)

RAYMOND

...Me and Stevie...

JANIS

...we was playing Flash Gordon in "Lords of the Lost Civilization, and of course James wanted to be...

(James runs in wearing a rain coat tied around his neck as a cape and a stocking cap over his head to make him bald)

JAMES

I am MING the MERCILESS. Ha hahahahahahaha... I shall make you're deaths a thing of beauty. Get them my storm giant.

(Stevie shoots at James as he and Raymond enter the decompression chamber. (under the upstage platform) Dad enters as Ming's Storm Giant)

DAD

Master, I will crush your foes beneath my mighty feet.

JAMES

Now I have you Earth-Man. Hahahahah. Destroy them my Giant.

(Raymond and Stevie laugh and fire their ray guns while dodging James and Dad)

STEVIE

Flash come on Flash, we have to save earth. This way.

(Suddenly Raymond's smile fades. Raymond runs in the opposite direction to escape the memory)

RAYMOND

No, I won't do it again. Please don't make me do it again.

(All but Raymond freeze. Stevie unfreezes. He crosses to Raymond)

STEVIE

It's ok Raymond. *(Stevie smiles and walks back to his frozen position)*

(Stevie un-freezes, he grabs Raymond's hand and pulls him along. The Family un-freeze as Stevie and raymond run past shooting his ray guns at Dad)

MOM

Run Flash, save the earth from total destruction.

STEVIE

Follow me Flash!

RAYMOND

No Stevie...

STEVIE

Come on Flash, come on... I know a secret escape route.

(Stevie darts between the Giant and Ming. Raymond runs after him trying to catch him)

RAYMOND

(yelling) Come back! Dr. Zarkoff, I order you to come back!

(Raymond grabs Stevie's arm, Stevie pulls away)

STEVIE

Come on Flash, we'll go out the back and across the Green sea to our ship. *(Mom is held captive by Ming and the Storm Giant)*

MOM

Raymond, mind Stevie don't cross the street. *(Dad, the Storm Giant tickles Mom)*

RAYMOND

Stevie come back!!!

(Stevie heads for the edge of the stage, Raymond runs after him. Dad grabs and holds Raymond)

RAYMOND

(yelling) Dr. Zarkoff, I order you to come back!!!

STEVIE

Come on Flash. *(Stevie runs off)*

(THE SOUND OF A CAR ROARING DOWN THE STREET THEN CAR BRAKES SCREECHING THEN A THUD IS HEARD)

(Dad, Mom and James snap to face front. Dad, horrified steps forward, they all freeze)

RAYMOND

...oh Stevie...

(Lights fade on the family except for Dad. Dad stares at Raymond)

RAYMOND

I was supposed to look out for him... I was suppose to keep Stevie safe. I'm sorry Dad.

(Lights on Dad fade to black on Dad then to black on Raymond. Lights up on Janis, 17, and Raymond 17, walking, Raymond is counting money)

RAYMOND

It's still not enough.

JANIS

Raymond, I don't think your mother would want you to cash in your college bonds?

RAYMOND

I had to. Mom didn't get anything from the insurance because of what Dad did, we need the money.

JANIS

I still don't thing she would have wanted you to...

RAYMOND

I'm going to stay in town and go to Midland next year and not go away to school, that way I can get a job and help out with the bills.

JANIS

That wasn't what your parents planned for you and that's not what we talked about.

RAYMOND

Things change.

JANIS

Raymond, since we're both going to Midland, maybe we should think about...

RAYMOND

About what...?

JANIS

Well... think about us liv...

RAYMOND

(looking at the money he holds) I... I have to go. I have somethings to figure out. Can we talk about this later?

JANIS

Of course.

(A half-hearted smile appears then quickly vanishes on Janis' face, she exits. Raymond looks at the money again. Lights come up on Dad on the upper platform)

RAYMOND

(Raymond screams at Dad) I'LL HATE YOU FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE. DO YOU HEAR ME, FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.

(Lights fade on Dad as Raymond stuffs the money into his pocket and starts to exit. The stage goes to black. Lights snap up abruptly on Janis, 21, in her apartment)

JANIS

Raymond, no one asked you to do what you did, how do you think you could save your family by doing what you did. Raymond, life is not some Cops and Robbers Hollywood movie.

*(The **CLOCK TOWER** strikes 5:00 AM bells. Lights fade to black on Dad and Janis. A **SIREN** is heard. The pool of light comes up on Raymond then turns blood red. The sounds of a cash register opening, cans and bottles **CRASHING** to the floor are heard. A montage of film clips from old gangster films of robberies and shoot-outs are shown)*

JANIS

I should have told you that day.

(Lights go to a glow on Janis watching Raymond, 16, tugging at a bag)

RAYMOND

Mister just give me the bag, and everything will be alright... *(Raymond hits the Old Man)* Just let go of the bag and I won't hurt you again. Please, just let go of the bag. What the fuck do you think you're doing? You trying to be a fucking hero or somethin'... let go you dumb shit. *(Raymond hits the "Old Man" repeatedly)* Let go! Let go! I don't want somebody to come in here and see me beatin' the shit out of you. Come on man, my mother needs this money, let it go! *(Raymond strikes the Old Man again)* Let it go, let it go!!!

(Raymond yanks the bag out of the Old Man's hand. He starts counting the money. He starts to exit, he stops)

RAYMOND

Hey mister, you alright? Hey, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to...

(Raymond's face reflects his deed, the man is dead. Semaphore lights flash across Raymond's face. Raymond begins crying as the money slips through his fingers. His actions are mirrored by a film clip of James Dean dropping the money offered to him by his father in, "East of Eden". Raymond and James Dean sink to the ground crying. The film clip stops)

RAYMOND

I couldn't even run, I just sat down and cried, not because I hurt that Old Man, but because he wouldn't let go of the bag. When the cops came, I was just sitting on the ground crying, "He wouldn't let go of the bag, in the movies they always let go of the bag... it's really his fault, he should have let it go, they always let go in the movies." Look Dad, I'm playing Cagney and I'm going to the big house. *(Raymond looks over to Janis)* Janis, I didn't mean to hurt that old man. I needed to look out for my mother.

(Lights fade to black on Raymond. A pool of light comes up down-stage center. Raymond, 21, steps into it)

RAYMOND

I knew what you wanted to say that day about us living together, I didn't want to hear it. I think deep down I knew it was all just a lie, you and me, our plans, all of it. I was still trying to please Dad, to show him I was a man, I was still trying to get him so he would love... I know none of this makes any sense. He's dead, and I'm still trying to prove myself to him. Now ain't that a kicker, I'm trying to compete with my dead brother for the love of my dead father. I wonder if God does really does forgive all.

JANIS

Stop it Raymond!!!

RAYMOND

Janis why didn't I listen to...

JANIS

Stop it!!!

RAYMOND

I needed you, I depended on you. I'm here and you're there and I don't know how it all went so wrong.

JANIS

Raymond, I loved you. I loved you more than anybody should.

RAYMOND

Liar! You never loved me or you would have come.

JANIS

You're the one that's a liar! I didn't come because you never wanted me, never wanted us. You built all these walls around yourself. You walled yourself off from your father and then from me. You never let anyone in, never let me in. All you ever cared about was your movies and your fantasies. The real world never had a chance, we never had a chance. What about me Raymond, I was real. You never gave us a chance. I didn't come because I had to try to make something out of what was left of my life, stop blaming me for your life, it was your life.

*(The **CLOCK TOWER** strikes 6:00 AM bells, the dawn's light seeps through Raymond's cell window)*

RAYMOND

I guess I just learned something. You're right, I don't need the lies, or the girl or all those half-baked movies we use to go to anymore. You helped me pretend, but I don't want to pretend anymore. You and Mom were right, I am who am and that's all. I realize that now; as usual my timings perfect. I guess I'm trying to say, I turned out the way I turned out. I did what I did... what I did, I did, no one else. There was only one person in that store, only one person killed that man... me! So Dad, I fucked up again. Janis, I really did believe all the things I told you. *(A film clip from Wuthering Heights is shown)* I believed we were like Merle Oberon and Lawrence Oliver in Wuthering Heights and we'd find a way to be together. I guess that was just more stories kids tell each other.

(The film clip stops)

RAYMOND

This ones not going to have a happy ending either. I know now what W.P. must have felt when he lost Stevie. It's funny how things are nice and neatly tucked away so you don't have to feel then all of a sudden they come busting' out all over the place, like they were just sitting' there waiting for a chance to come pouring' out. *(Lights up on Stevie fighting dragons)* You want to hear something crazy? No one in my family ever said "dead" when we were talking about Stevie. We all said "he went away" like he was on some cruise and he'd be back at the end of the summer. For Christ sake, he was dead! Dead is dead! Good-bye Stevie. *(Stevie turns. He has a warm gentle smile on his face)*

STEVIE

Good-bye Flash. *(Stevie exits fighting off dragons)*

RAYMOND

Went away, that's pretty funny now that I think about it.

(Lights come up on Dad in silhouette. Raymond looks to him)

RAYMOND

Dad, I didn't mind your love for Stevie...*(Dad turns his back to Raymond)* ...you son-of-a-bitch, I'm trying to tell you that... *(lights fade on Dad)*

(Janis turns the page she's reading, there is nothing on the other side, she frantically looks through the other pages)

JANIS

Raymond where's the rest of it? *(Raymond looks to her)*

(Janis look through the pages again then in the waste basket. Raymond crosses to her, takes the letter from her, finds the page and hands the letter back to her)

RAYMOND

Janis, I've been trying to tell you what happened to me. Let's try this on for size.

(Raymond backs up to center-stage. Light on Janis dim to a glow)

RAYMOND

Remember when I told you I carry a knife to the showers.

(Raymond lowers his head. Lights on Raymond fade to black. Sounds of men YELLING filter in. Films clips of prison riots are shown. Dark somber lights with shadows of prison cell bars snap up on Raymond)

RAYMOND

Aaahhhhhhhhhh... These two guys got jumped in there. I didn't know them so I don't know why I did it. Maybe I couldn't stand it anymore, stand being here anymore. **(shrill screams are heard)** I heard these two guys screamin' for someone to help them. No one moved, not one fuckin' soul! I didn't, and I wasn't going to either. They held the first guy up and two dudes started punching him over and over then they threw him to the ground and started raping him.

JANIS

Then the other cat, Derek, got away from the ones that were holdin' him and he made a break for the door, then from nowhere a guy steps out from behind a wall and stabs him with a finger nail file. **(Another SHRILL SCREAM)**

RAYMOND

A fucking nail file for Christ's sake. Derek's friend was lying on the floor with blood running out of his ass from being raped and Derek was on his knees with a finger nail sticking out of his chest.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Then the guy that stabbed Derek walks over to him and kisses him on the mouth then cuts both their throats. Derek died, they died right there in front of me and no one tried to help them, no one cared. (*The sounds of men YELLING stops*)

JANIS

At first I couldn't move, I wouldn't move. Everyone started backing away, no one looked at the two cats lying on the floor. They all backed away like they didn't see them, they didn't want to.

RAYMOND

I still couldn't move. I watched all these people shift and shuffle, all movin' and I still couldn't move. It felt like when Stevie died.

JANIS

I was gettin' scared and started shakin'. I felt like my hands was swelling and my fingers were on fire. I wanted to cry out...

RAYMOND

...make it stop, lord make it stop! The more it wouldn't, the more scared I got, the more scared I got, the more it wouldn't stop.

JANIS

...I wanted to...

(Janis SCREAMS as Raymond. Lights come up on Dad and James in silhouettes. Raymond runs to each as though they were oracles)

RAYMOND

All these things were running around in my head about you, my Dad... shit!!! All I could do was sweat... I don't know...

DAD

What to do...? Raymond go to your room!

RAYMOND

What was I supposed to do? Dad, I don't know what I'm supposed to...

DAD

Are you interrupting me Raymond, are you?

RAYMOND

No sir... I just don't know what I'm supposed to do.

JAMES (AS MING)

I will destroy you, I will destroy your miserable lives.

RAYMOND

Then I saw the dude that started all this shit. (*Raymond pulls out his knife*) These two cats was lying with their life's guts all over the floor I wanted to move to run away but I couldn't, I just stood there staring at them... then the guy that stabbed Derek looked at me.

DAD

Pray boy, you better pray...

RAYMOND

Dad...

DAD

Raymond... where's Raymond?

RAYMOND

I heard my father calling.... he was calling for me, then that fuck started shit starts walking towards me. When I saw him I got so scared I pissed my pants! Then he stopped in front me, he looked down and saw I had pissed my pants and he started laughing... he was laughing at me for pissing my pants.

DAD

RRRRRAAAAAYYYYYMMMMMOOOOOONNNNNNDDDDDDDD!!!

RAYMOND

I heard my father calling for me and this fuck was laughing at me...!

(A film clip of Ronald Coleman going to the guillotine in "A Tale of Two Cities" is shown. Raymond closes his eyes and recites Ronald Coleman's lines)

RAYMOND

"It is a far far better thing I do than I have ever done before . It is a far better place I go to than I have ever known."

*(The film clip ends. Raymond grabs his imaginary foe. **The sounds of men YELLING grows louder and frenzied**)*

RAYMOND

You mother-fucker!!! I took my knife and I stabbed that son-of-a-bitch.

(Raymond hysterical alternates between stabbing, crying and laughing)

RAYMOND

All this shit was running in and out of my head... my Dad calling for me, me cryin', those cats doin' a back strokes in their own blood and SHIT-- I PISSED MY PANTS. YOU FUCK, YOU MADE ME PISS MY PANTS! I threw that cat up against the wall and I stabbed him over and over and over and over... I knew he was dead by the second or third time, but I kept on. The blade broke off in him and I still didn't stop... I couldn't, I didn't want to! I was going to make him pay for laughing at my father, for laughing at me.

(The sounds of YELLING filter out)

RAYMOND

Dad, I don't blame you-- I don't blame you at all.

(Lights fade on Dad reaching out for Raymond. Lights on Raymond slowly change to normal)

RAYMOND

They had to beat me off that cat. They said I was hysterical and kept yelling all this shit about you and my father.

JANIS

They put me in the prisons psycho ward. They said I had a psychotic break. I was on these pills for a while.

RAYMOND

I had a second trial. I was found guilty of murder in the first degree. My Lawyer pleaded that I was temporarily insane due to I had witnessed an extreme act of violence.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

The Judge said, because my first sentencing was so lenient I'd be paying for both crimes with this sentence. He said, "God works in his own way"

(Raymond walks toward his cell)

JANIS

"You are to be remanded to the State Prison facility until December 24, 1963 at 7:00 am, at which time you will be hung by the neck until you are dead". Noooooooooo....!

(Raymond enters his cell. Lights in the cell fade to black for a beat then restore on Raymond, 21, sitting at his desk writing. He tamps out his cigarette)

RAYMOND

December 24, 6:55 AM. Now you know it all. I told them not to notify anyone until it was... By the time you get this I'll be... I didn't want my mother to have go through any more for me. I don't even know why I'm telling you. Maybe I'm not telling you at all, maybe I'm trying to tell God. Janis, I never meant for things to turn out this way. I never meant to hurt anyone. Janis, watch over my mother, you're all she has left.

(Raymond folds the letter and puts it on the desk. He looks over to Janis and re-opens the letter and writes)

RAYMOND

Janis, I never hated you, I always love you. *(a film clip of the good-bye scene between Bogart and Bergman in Casablanca is shown)* good...

JANIS

No, I won't let you say good-bye like this.

(Janis runs towards Raymond', he meets her center-stage. Janis tries to put her arms around Raymond, she can't)

JANIS

Raymond, I wrote you hundreds of letters, they all came back unanswered. I waited year after year to hear from and you but nothing ever came. I laid awake night after night wondering and worrying.

JANIS (CONT'D)

I know I should have come but I was scared, scared to death of knowing and more scared of not knowing. I lost hope. After awhile I became numb. I made myself numb. I didn't want to feel anymore.

RAYMOND / JANIS

"I swear an oath of love from you to me, from lips that speak and eyes that see the eternal love, from me to thee".

JANIS

Farewell my Prince.

(Janis tenderly kisses the space separating them. Janis slowly backs toward her apartment)

RAYMOND

Janis... I do believe in second chances. I'll always love you.

(She stops. A pained smile is seen on her face, she enters her apartment as Raymond enters his cell. Raymond puts the letter in the envelope, he kisses it and places it on his desk. Raymond walks to the front of the cell)

RAYMOND

Look at this, I'm playing Bogy right to the end.

(Raymond steps out of the cell, looks to Janis)

RAYMOND

You still look like a cocker-spaniel though.

*(Raymond looks front. The lights fade on Janis crying. **THE CLOCK TOWER BOOMS OUT SIX BELLS**)*

RAYMOND

I'm ready.

(Lights fade to black on Raymond)

Lights fade up on Janis, 21, dressed in street clothes

standing in front of the Bryant house. She considers her actions for a long beat. Janis turns to exit, Mom exits the house. Seeing Janis, Mom smiles.

MOM

Hello Janis.

*(Janis hands Mom Raymond's letter
and the ring he gave her)*

JANIS

I... I thought you should have these.

*(Mom looks at the ring and letter
for a moment)*

MOM

Raymond wanted you to have them, so do I.

*(Janis throws herself into Mom's
arms)*

JANIS

It's not fair.

MOM

No it's not... come inside and have some tea... how's your mother?

*(Janis and Mom enter the house as
Nat King Cole's, "Stardust"
filters in as stage lights fade
to black)*

THE END