

DYNAMITE BOB: LIBRETTO

- Subject:** The true family story behind the Birmingham church bombing of 1963, in which four black girls were killed, a key moment in the civil rights movement.
- Characters:**
- Robert Chambliss (baritone)
 - Klansman and ringleader; seen in his 60s and 70s; flashback to his 40s
 - Tee Chambliss (mezzo)
 - His longsuffering wife; seen in her 50s and 60s
 - Libby Cobbs (soprano)
 - Their niece; seen pregnant at 16, in her 30s, and in her 40s
 - Denise McNair (soprano)
 - African-American girl seen at age 11
 - Bill Baxley (baritone)
 - Attorney General of Alabama in 1977; 40s or 50s
 - Art Hanes (bass)
 - Defense counsel; 60s or 70s
 - Bobby Cherry (tenor)
 - Young Klansman, 20s
 - Tommy Blanton (tenor)
 - Young Klansman, 20s
- Other Voices:**
- Female Gospel soloist
 - Gospel Choir/Chorus
 - First Prisoner
 - Second Prisoner
- Structure:** Three Acts:
- Act One: 1963. Events leading up to and including the bombing.
 - Act Two: 1977. Prosecution of Chambliss fourteen years later.
 - Act Three: 1985. Death of Chambliss; climax of his conflict with Libby.
- Style:** Realistic in parts, surreal in other parts. At times Denise, Tee and Chambliss appear from beyond the grave; Libby influenced by spirits and by painful memories.
- Dynamic:** Tee is a mother figure to Libby. Chambliss, filled with rage, is abusive to both of them and plans the bombing as a way to impress Bull Connor, who has fired him. After her death, Denise appears to Libby and guides her actions. Ultimately Libby must confront the spirit of Chambliss in order to free herself from his psychological hold on her, the roots of which are finally revealed.
- Rights:** Based on historical characters of the same names; all now deceased other than Baxley, a public figure; and Blanton, in prison. Author has obtained rights from estate of Libby Cobbs to her life story and her memoir. *Dynamite Bob* is an adaptation of the author's play *Grace*, winner of Second Prize in the National History Play Contest.
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DYNAMITE BOB: SYNOPSIS

*Act One: 1963. Birmingham is on edge as the epicenter of the civil rights movement. (i) Libby Cobbs, pregnant at sixteen, helps her Aunt Tee sew Klan robes, though both are disgusted by the chore. (Tee: *The sad and sickening feeling*) Tee's husband Chambliss, on the lowest rung of white society, seethes with rage about blacks. Two young Klansmen, Blanton and Cherry, come to see him; something is afoot. (ii) Libby meets Denise McNair, a precocious black girl, on a church playground; Denise gives Libby a necklace with a cross. (Libby: *Alone again on this red moon*; Denise: *Each day the light of God's own sun*) (iii) Chambliss catches Tee and Libby watching King's Dream Speech (Chorus: *I have a dream*) live on television and erupts. (*If I ain't better than a damn black man*) (iv) Tee and Libby share a sense of dread, though neither is aware of the bombing plot. (v) Chambliss sits anxiously at the kitchen table as Tee prepares for church; Libby is having intense belly pain. Blanton and Cherry arrive in a panic and insist on trying to retrieve the bomb, which was intended to explode during the night. A surreal swirl of sounds and memories surrounds Libby as tension builds (Chorus: *He got the little bitty baby; Whole world watching*); when the bomb explodes, Libby has a miscarriage and collapses in physical and emotional agony.*

*Act Two: 1977. Alabama Attorney General Bill Baxley brings charges fourteen years later. (i) Baxley, a skilled attorney with political ambitions, vows to bring justice for the families of the four girls killed in the blast. (This stain upon our people) (ii) He pressures Libby, now an ordained minister, to testify in court despite the risks to her safety; Libby is torn. (Damn your time, Bill Baxley) The spirit of Denise tells Libby she must do it; Libby, fearful, prays for help. (Chorus: *Father take this cup from me*; Libby: *I am a worm*) (iii) Libby is subjected to a brutal cross-examination in court that focuses on her divorce, her homosexuality, her passion for civil rights, and the suggestion of a pathological obsession with Chambliss; Chambliss threatens her as she leaves the witness stand. (iv) The evening after her testimony, Tee tearfully explains to Libby that her life is in danger and insists that she leave town that night; in light of Tee's age and poor health, they realize they may never see each other again. (Duet: *I was alone until you came/You are my worldly mother*) Libby reluctantly boards an overnight bus, accompanied by the spirit of Denise and the apparition of a Klansman in pursuit.*

*Act Three: 1985. Chambliss dies in prison and Libby returns to Birmingham. (i) In prison, Chambliss rants insanely about revenge on Libby; he brings on a fatal heart attack. (Chambliss: *One long day*) (ii) In a flashback, Libby relives being molested and threatened by Chambliss when she was ten years old. (iii) Returning to Birmingham, Libby seeks the grave of Tee and is horrified to discover she is buried with Chambliss. (Libby: *The Lord is my shepherd*) A Klansman appears and is revealed to be the spirit of Chambliss, here for a final showdown. Libby says his violence and child molestation were rooted in sexual inadequacy; he says she is the sex pervert due to her homosexuality. Libby intuits that Chambliss was molested by his father and was devastated when his mother did not intervene to protect him. Chambliss cannot accept these truths and can only spew more rage; finally the spirit of Tee appears and tells him he must release his hold on Libby. With this final blow, Chambliss is defeated. The spirit of Denise joins Tee and Libby in a closing tableau.*

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