

Front Porch Society

A full-length play

By Melda Beaty

Contact:

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Previous Production:

The Ensemble Theatre
Houston, TX
May 11, 2017–June 4, 2017

CHARACTERS

CARRIE HONEY: Late 70s, African-American. Town cynic.

ALBERTA JOHNSON: Late 70s, African-American. Carrie's nemesis. Obama supporter.

SISTER STALLWORTH: Late 60s, African-American. Obama supporter. First lady of the church.

MS. MARTHA: 95, African-American. Obama supporter. One of Mark's oldest residents.

WINNIE: Early 70s, African-American. Carrie's gossiping neighbor.

TOWNER: Late 50s, African-American. Postman.

TERRANCE: 18, African-American. Respectful teen.

SETTING

Carrie's front porch in Marks, Mississippi.

TIME

Election Day: Tuesday morning November 4, 2008 - Wednesday morning November 5, 2008.

SYNOPSIS

November 4, 2008; Marks, Mississippi. America is on the eve of electing its first black president. Amidst the town's excitement over Barack Obama, Carrie Honey grieves her son's tragic 1967 death, a year to the day. After years of failed attempts to seek justice, Carrie has grown bitter and is no longer interested in life's celebrations but when a scandal at the town cemetery rocks this historic day, a past secret is revealed that restores her faded faith.

ACT I

SCENE I

MS. MARTHA sits quietly on CARRIE's front porch with her walker and eyes closed. She is wearing a baseball cap that says "Yes We Can," and a tattered shawl. CARRIE opens her front screen door that opens to the left blocking her view of MS. MARTHA. CARRIE wears a black head scarf that ties in the front, a black house coat, and house shoes. She places her spittoon on the first seat and begins her calisthenics routine. She haphazardly bends over several times, touching her feet first, then her waist, and then stretches her hands to the sky. Afterwards, she grabs her spittoon and tosses the contents over the railing. As she turns to take her seat, she notices MS. MARTHA and jumps. All dialogue is spoken with a southern dialect.

CARRIE

Ms. Martha? How long you been sitting here?

(Walks over and taps MS. MARTHA on the shoulder. Speaks louder.)

Ms. Martha, I say how long you been sitting here?

MS. MARTHA
(Awakes suddenly)

Carrie? When you get here?

CARRIE
I lives here Ms. Martha, remember? How long you been here?
Who brought you this time?

(Walks back toward her chair by the railing, plops down and feels under her seat for assurance. Next she reaches in her housecoat pocket and carefully opens her pouch of snuff. She pinches off a wad and puts it in her bottom lip.)

MS. MARTHA
JoAnn dropped me off about seven-thirty on her way to work.
You late this morning.

CARRIE
You know I watch Oprah in the morning.

MS. MARTHA
You cooking okra this morning?

CARRIE
(Loudly)
I say I watch Oprah in the morning.

MS. MARTHA
Oooh, Oprah. JoAnn say Oprah come on at four. Is it four?

CARRIE
No, Ms. Martha, it ain't four. I tapes it.

MS. MARTHA
Oooh. She and the other girls at the bank watch it before they get off work, but not today. She says she's coming to get me at four so we can go vote.
(Beat)

MS. MARTHA (CONT'D)

Thought maybe you were in there writing your letters like you used to do. I ain't want to disturb you.

CARRIE

(Bitter)

I ain't writing letters no more.

MS. MARTHA

Say you ain't? When you stop?

CARRIE

Just ain't doing it no more.

MS. MARTHA

I thought you said you was going to do it every year.

CARRIE

Well, I ain't.

MS. MARTHA

But ain't this around Ricky's-

CARRIE

(Interrupting)

Look Ms. Martha, don't nobody give a damn about them letters. It was a stupid idea anyway. I just want to get through this day in peace and I don't want to talk no more about any letters.

MS. MARTHA

(Beat)

That a new housecoat?

CARRIE

(Looks down at it slowly)

Nope. Same one I wear this day every year.

(Beat)

CARRIE (CONT'D)

I see you got that new hat on again. Don't match nothing.

MS. MARTHA

Huh?

CARRIE

(Loudly)

I say you wearing your new hat again.

MS. MARTHA

Yeah, I bought it from one of them men selling stuff outside the SuperValu. He say it look cute on me.

(Chuckles)

So, I been wearing it every day since, but today's the day I can sho-nuff wear it. You voting today, Carrie?

CARRIE

(Spits out)

Is that today?

MS. MARTHA

Yes Lord, it's today. In all my ninety-five years, I never thought I'd live to see the day when a black man run for president of the United States of America.

CARRIE

Ms. Martha, you were living when...what's that boy's name?

(Snaps her fingers)

Jesse Jackson ran.

MS. MARTHA

Who?

CARRIE
(Loudly)

Jesse Jackson.

MS. MARTHA
Ms. Jackson's oldest son down on Third Street? I used to
teach that boy school. Not too bright-

CARRIE
(Interrupting)

No, Ms. Martha. I'm talking about the Reverend Jesse Jackson
up in Chicago. He was the *first* black man who ran for
president back in eighty-four or eighty-eight, I think.

MS. MARTHA
Don't reckon I know him.

CARRIE
Reckon you don't.

(Beat)

Then that fat preacher who wears his hair like a woman said
something about he was going to run for president too. I
could've told him wasn't nobody going to vote for a man with
a bad perm.

(MS. MARTHA lets out a deep cough.)

You still got that cough? Thought you said it was getting
better. You been back to see Dr. Wilson, yet?

MS. MARTHA
(Pulls shawl around her
chest)

Doctors don't know nothing. Just a little cold in my chest
that's all. Happens every time the seasons change. I drink
some of this here toddie.

MS. MARTHA (CONT'D)
(Holds up water bottle of a
black mixture)

I'll be alright.

CARRIE
What in the world is that?

MS. MARTHA
Oh, just some Robitussin, couple spoonfuls of honey, and some
Jack Daniels.

(Takes a swig and coughs even
more)

CARRIE
Lord have mercy. How long you been drinking that stuff?

MS. MARTHA
Made it night before last. That goose grease Mother Dessie
gave me to rub on my chest ain't doing nothing but making my
clothes all oily. I drink enough of this here, and that cold
just going to melt away.

CARRIE
If'n you say so.

(Beat)

Weather man say it's going to be about seventy today. Expect,
I do some work in my yard when I get back from visiting
Ricky.

(CARRIE's dogs bark as TOWNER
enters stage with the mail, but
hesitates.)

CARRIE
(To dogs)

Hush up now. I say hush up now.

TOWNER
(Removes his hat)

Morning Ms. Martha. Morning Ms. Honey. Ms. Honey, them dogs behind that fence?

CARRIE
Don't worry Towner. Them dogs know who to bite and who not to bite, but I reckon you best not have a bunch of bills for me today.

(Hands CARRIE her mail. She looks through it eagerly, but quickly looks dejected. TOWNER holds out his hand to get something from her, but she ignores him.)

TOWNER
I shole hope not ma'am. Wasn't expecting you to be home today. Thought you might be up at the church voting. I heard folks been waiting for hours already.

MS. MARTHA
My daughter going to pick me up and take me to the church at four. Carrie say she going to work in her yard today.

CARRIE
(Spits out)

Good a day as any.

(Beat)

How your son, Towner?

TOWNER
Oh, real good ma'am. He's a senior this year.

CARRIE
Say he is? He's still at Alcorn?

TOWNER
Yes ma'am. Doing real good too. He's even training for the Olympic trials.

TOWNER (CONT'D)

Coach say he got the fastest feet in the state of Mississippi. Kind of remind me of me and Ricky when we was kids and we used to race from this here front porch to Krogers to get your groceries. You remember that, Ms. Honey?

CARRIE

(Beat)

I remember.

TOWNER

I would even take off before Ricky would say 'go' and no matter how fast I thought I was going or how far I thought I was ahead, he always past me.

(Chuckles and clears his throat)

Excuse me, been fighting a sore throat for a couple of days now.

MS. MARTHA

You want some of this here toddie? Carrie go and pour some of this in a cup for Towner.

TOWNER

Uh no ma'am. I'll be alright. Thank you kindly.

(Beat)

Seems like everybody either at work or at the polls. Me and Mrs. Towner voted weeks ago, and I'm glad we did. They expecting the largest voter turn-out in the history of voting today.

MS. MARTHA

Lord, I just pray they don't kill that man.

CARRIE

Kill him for what? He ain't the president.

TOWNER

No ma'am he ain't but you know how white folks can be. I believe they rather see a black woman, like Shirley Chisholm, in the White House before a black man. It's just something about a black man that brings out fear in folks. I don't know why because it ain't white folks we hurt. I remember when I was a little boy and my daddy used to go down there to Key West to pick fruit. He be gone sometimes for six months at a time. He say picking fruit was probably the most dangerous thing he ever done. Black men falling out of trees like rain falls from the sky. My daddy fell a couple times himself. Broke his collar bone once and didn't even know it. Just kept picking until he couldn't pick no more, but he say that's not what made it so dangerous. He always had to watch out for the other pickers who would step on their own mama to just make dime or two more. Crabs in a barrel is what he called them. Naw, it ain't white folks we hurt.

(Beat)

But you know, I been listening to all the debates and speeches and I tell you this Obama fella got folks attention...white, black, asian, hispanic, young, old. Albert said the students at Alcorn started an Obama club and even went door to door registering folks to vote all over Lorman.

CARRIE

Hope he got time to study while he out registering folks to vote.

TOWNER

(Laughs)

Oh yes ma'am. He's studying alright. Mrs. Towner makes sure of that.

MS. MARTHA

How your wife, Towner? Heard she was sick.

TOWNER

Had that hip replacement surgery this summer, but she's doing fine now.

TOWNER (CONT'D)

Oh, I'd forget my head if it wasn't attached to my body. She told me to be sure to tell you next time I saw you that she got that lemon meringue pie ready for you whenever you want it.

MS. MARTHA

Lemon what?

CARRIE

(Loudly)

Lemon meringue pie

MS. MARTHA

Oooh no. Last time I ate her pie, I had the runs for days.

CARRIE

(Spits out and shakes her
head)

Lord.

TOWNER

Sorry to hear that Ms. Martha. I'll be sure to tell her. Well, I best get going. Good to see you again Ms. Martha. Ms. Honey.

(Starts to walk away but turns back
around)

You know what I was thinking after I voted, Ms. Honey?

CARRIE

What's that Towner?

TOWNER

I'll never forget in the third grade, the teacher asked us to write an essay on what we wanted to be when we grew up and I wrote a policeman. Most of the other kids wrote teacher, nurse, preacher, but Ricky was the only one who wrote president of the United States. Everyone laughed when he read his essay out loud, even the teacher.

TOWNER (CONT'D)

Seemed like I was the only one who didn't laugh; not just because we was best friends but because deep down I believed he could've been the president if he put his mind to it. And today, fifty years later, we get to vote to see if a black man will be the next president of the United States of America.

(Beat)

Maybe he saw this day coming.

CARRIE

Well, we don't know what he saw, now do we?

TOWNER

No ma'am, I reckon we don't.

CARRIE

Alright now Towner, you best get going.

TOWNER

Yes ma'am. You sure you don't have nothing for me today?

CARRIE

No Towner, I don't.

TOWNER

Okay, you ladies have a good day.

(Exits porch)

MS. MARTHA

(Coughs)

That Towner got manners to spare, but I don't fool with his wife's cooking. Like to kill me last time I ate her pie.

CARRIE

Well, I don't think you have to worry about her pie no more after you told the man his wife's cooking gave you the *shits*.

(CARRIE's dogs bark louder as SIS. STALLWORTH's car pulls up. SIS. STALLWORTH is carrying a knitting bag with a partially made shawl in her hand. Her "I Voted" sticker is on the front of her shirt.)

SIS. STALLWORTH
(Cheerfully)

Morning Ms. Martha...Honey. Today is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it.

(Claps her hands and trots up the stairs to take her seat next to CARRIE.)

That shole is a nice hat Ms. Martha. You been to the polls yet?

MS. MARTHA
JoAnn taking me after work.

SIS. STALLWORTH
Rev and I been up since five this morning. We got to the church early to make sure everything was ready for the voting officials. Look like there were about a hundred people waiting outside for the polls to open. I mean Black, White, young, old, first time voters, you name it. It was more folks outside this morning than in church on Sunday.

(Takes her glasses and knitting materials out of her bag)

We missed y'all at the prayer vigil last night.

MS. MARTHA
That was last night?

SIS. STALLWORTH

Yes, and you two missed a glorious time. The choir sang 'We Shall Overcome,' and 'Oh Happy Day.' I remember when you used to lead 'Oh Happy Day,' Honey. The pews were packed when you sang that song.

CARRIE

(Spits out)

I didn't think the church cared about politics no more.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Wasn't politics, Honey. It was prayer. You remember prayer don't you? Anyway, Ms. Martha I wish you had told me that you needed a ride to the polls. Me and Rev would've been more than happy to pick you up. We could've picked you up too, Honey.

CARRIE

My car run fine.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Well, I tell you, Marks is alive today. It's been ten years since Rev and I moved here from Pine Bluff and I ain't never seen this much excitement about nothing round here. Well, maybe when McDonalds opened on King Drive, but you would've thought Obama was from Mississippi the way folks round here smiling so. We're making history in Marks today.

CARRIE

Seeing how it's only been ten years since you and Rev moved here don't see how you would know much about history in Marks no way.

SIS. STALLWORTH

I beg your pardon.

CARRIE

The Poor People's Campaign in sixty-eight. The March on Washington started right here in Quitman County. *That's* when Marks made history. I know you remember that Ms. Martha.

MS. MARTHA

Eh?

CARRIE

(Loudly)

The Poor People's Campaign in sixty-three.

MS. MARTHA

Yaaaah, the mule train. My sister Bertha and I loaded up one of them mules. That's when that King boy came down here. Said he stood on Main Street and cried. Shole was a handsome man.

(Laughs)

Bertha and I walked as far as Selma, but we didn't make it to Washington though. Course that was the year my third husband took ill. You marched too, Carrie.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Honey, you marched?

CARRIE

Yes Sister Stallworth, I marched. Course that was real change for real people not this stuff y'all round here putting on bumper stickers and hats and carrying on like Obama is Jesus Christ.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Ooooo Honey. You had your coffee this morning? I ain't heard nobody call Obama Jesus Christ, and I believe everybody round here is real people too. Shoot, we could all use some change after eight years of Bush and all his hot mess or did you vote for Bush?

CARRIE

I ain't got to tell nobody who I voted for.

SIS. STALLWORTH

You right...you right. Well, I'm just glad to know there was a time when you weren't anti-everything. You vote yet?

(CARRIE spits out)

SIS. STALLWORTH (CONT'D)

Just remember the polls close at seven. Oh, you know this year they got that special election too.

MS. MARTHA

Special what?

SIS. STALLWORTH

(Loudly)

The special election for the state senate. You remember when Trent Lott resigned last year? Well, we got to vote for a new state senator today too.

MS. MARTHA

Lott? Don't believe I know him.

SIS. STALLWORTH

(Loudly)

You remember Strom Thurmond down in South Carolina always shouting about segregation? With his old self. Well, Trent Lott got into some trouble making some racist comments at a birthday party for Thurmond.

MS. MARTHA

What did he say?

SIS. STALLWORTH

Oh something about the United States would be better off now if we had elected Thurmond president in nineteen forty-eight. I don't know how he figured a known segregationist would make anything better for anybody except for white folks. Just foolishness.

CARRIE

Thurmond doing all that hollering against colored folks and got a daughter by a colored woman. Damn hypocrite.

MS. MARTHA

That all he done? Shoot, all us done bore some children for some white man one way or another.

(CARRIE and SIS. STALLWORTH stare at MS. MARTHA at the same time.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

(Beat)

Well, I told Rev I would come back to the church early to help close and clean everything up.

(MS. MARTHA lets out another deep cough.)

Ms. Martha, I thought about you when it rained last night. Has JoAnn taken you back to Clarksdale yet to see Dr. Wilson?

MS. MARTHA

Doctors don't know nothing.

CARRIE

(Loudly)

Show Sister Stallworth what you taking for your cough.

(MS. MARTHA holds up the black mixture.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

That's what the doctor gave you?

CARRIE

Hell, that's what she moon-shined herself. Claim it got some Robitussin and honey in it, but I can smell the Jack Daniels all the way over here.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Ms. Martha, you can't cure no cough with alcohol. You got to let the doctor prescribe something for you. Honey, why you let her drink that stuff?

CARRIE

Let her? Last time I checked, Ms. Martha was older than all of us. Claim she even changed my diaper a time or two. I can't tell her what to do.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Next time I see JoAnn, I'm going to talk to her about taking you back to see Dr. Wilson and that alcohol mess you drinking.

(CARRIE's dogs bark again.)

Honey, you feed those dogs this morning?

CARRIE

(Spits out)

Not yet. I'll get around to it.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Why they always sound so angry? I don't know what in the world possess you to get such big and mean dogs.

MS. MARTHA

One of my great-grand babies got one them Spanish speaking dogs.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Spanish speaking?

CARRIE

What you talking about, Ms. Martha?

SIS. STALLWORTH

(Laughs and speaks loudly)

Oh, you mean a Chihuahua. They just named after a state in Mexico. They don't speak Spanish, Ms. Martha.

MS. MARTHA

Dog so small. I stepped on his tail with my walker one day and he got to barking so, sound like he was cussing me out.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Well at least he's a small dog. Honey keeps the nastiest barking dogs I ever heard. I'm just glad you got rid of them pit bulls.

CARRIE

I ain't get rid of nothing. Somebody poison my dogs. Winnie saw them.

SIS. STALLWORTH

So you say. That was right round the time that child got mauled by a pit bull in Clarksdale. They had to shoot that dog just to get him to turn that child loose. They just ain't safe round children.

CARRIE

I ain't got no children.

SIS. STALLWORTH

But there are some across the street.

CARRIE

They ain't got no business being in my yard.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Children run and play, Honey.

CARRIE

Not on my property they don't.

SIS. STALLWORTH

What if a ball they playing with land on your grass or over your fence or-

CARRIE

(Interrupting)

Well, then they going get some teeth in their ass or a bullet one. I have a right to protect my property how I see fit like everybody else. Nobody ever come on my property again less I say so.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Alright...alright. No need to get so worked up this morning.

(Beat)

SIS. STALLWORTH (CONT'D)

I read recently that dogs ain't suppose to eat raw meat on account it makes them vicious.

CARRIE

That's what y'all studying at Bible study on Wednesday nights? The type of foods dogs eat?

SIS. STALLWORTH

I'm just saying Honey.

(Starts knitting again)

What you so mad about anyway? Got your black on on the most historic day of the year, like somebody done died-

(Looks up terrified)

Sweet Jesus, I'm so sorry Honey. I forgot today's Ricky's anniversary. You been to Leopold this morning?

CARRIE

I'm fixing to go directly.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Have you written your letter today? You ain't said nothing about them lately.

MS. MARTHA

Said she stopped writing them.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Why Honey?

MS. MARTHA

Said it was a stupid idea.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Who said it was a stupid idea?

MS. MARTHA

She did. She said she don't want to talk about it no more.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Honey, these things take time. Look how long it took Mamie to-

CARRIE

(Interrupting)

I said I ain't writing any more letters, y'hear? It's a waste of paper, stamps, and my time. Now I said I don't want to talk about it no more and that means I don't want to hear nothing else about it.

(Stands to leave)

Now I got things to do today.

(Exits porch into house and slams door.)

END OF SCENE.

SCENE II

TERRANCE leaps in front of CARRIE'S porch trying to catch a football that comes very close to the porch and lands in CARRIE'S yard behind her fence. Her dogs begin to bark. TERRANCE isn't wearing a shirt.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Whoa....good morning Terrance.

TERRANCE

Uh, good morning Sister Stallworth. I'm real sorry for throwing the ball over here. Oh, good morning Ms. Martha. It didn't hit anyone did it?

MS. MARTHA

Good morning, Terrance.

SIS. STALLWORTH

No it didn't, but you came mighty close.

TERRANCE

(Nervous)

I'm real sorry about that, Sister Stallworth. Uh, where's Ms. Honey?

SIS. STALLWORTH

In the house. She'll be out in a minute. You gone have to wait on her if you want your ball back.

(CARRIE re-enters the porch carrying her pocketbook, shoes, and flowers. She walks back over to her seat and begins putting her shoes on.)

TERRANCE

Good morning, Ms. Honey.

CARRIE

Good morning, Terrance. What you doing out here in front of my house with your shirt off?

MS. MARTHA

I think he look alright.

(TERRANCE takes his shirt out of his back pocket and begins putting it on.)

TERRANCE

Uh, no disrespect ma'am. Me and my best friend Charles were just playing a little football before school. He's going to Ole Miss on a football scholarship next year.

SIS. STALLWORTH

What time does school start these days? It's almost ten o'clock.

TERRANCE

It's a late day for seniors today.

CARRIE

A late day? I think you lying.

TERRANCE

No ma'am, I'm not. We get late days a couple of times a year like for testing or special events.

CARRIE

Uh huh. I'll be sure to ask your mama next time I see her about these late days. Now what you want, Terrance?

TERRANCE

Well ma'am, my ball landed behind your fence and I was wondering if the dogs were chained up, and if it would be alright if I went to get it?

CARRIE
(Spits out)

Terrance, you say you a senior down at that high school,
right?

TERRANCE
Yes ma'am.

CARRIE
That mean you been in high school for four years now, right?

TERRANCE
Yes ma'am.

CARRIE
Then how come you still can't read my sign that says *No
Trespassing?*

SIS. STALLWORTH
Oh, Honey. Terrance wasn't trespassing. I told you kids run
and play. Let the boy get his ball so he can get to school.

CARRIE
Why? It's my yard. Ain't nobody suppose to be throwing
nothing over in it. Terrance knows better.

TERRANCE
It won't happen again. I promise, Ms. Honey. If the dogs are
chained up, I can get it real quick and be on my way.

CARRIE
And step all over my vegetables? Go on back there and see if
they chained up or not.

(TERRANCE starts to move closer to
the fence, but dogs bark louder.)

TERRANCE
Uh, that's alright.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Terrance, I'll buy you another football. I mean *really*, Honey.

TERRANCE

That's okay, Sister Stallworth. I got another one at home.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Before you go, tell Ms. Honey how you played that piano in church on Sunday. Wasn't a dry eye in the entire congregation. Rev so proud of you. He talks about you all the time. Ms. Martha, remember how Terrance played the piano in church on Sunday?

(MS. MARTHA snores)

TERRANCE

Thank you, ma'am. I just thank God for the gift.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Yes, indeed. You play like your mama. Rev told me you're graduating next year.

TERRANCE

Yes, ma'am, in June. Going to the Marines.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Now why you want to join the military in the midst of a war, Terrance?

TERRANCE

Well, my daddy was a Marine and my older brother is over in Iraq now. It's in my blood, I guess. Plus when Obama gets in office, I don't think there will be a war for too much longer.

SIS. STALLWORTH

I shole hope not. Too many innocent people have died already in that war. Lord knows we don't need any more.

MS. MARTHA

(Wakes suddenly coughing)

That's right. I heard it too. Obama said on the TV one of the first things he's going to do when he gets in there is to stop that war, sho' nuff.

CARRIE

(Spits out)

Boy y'all about as backwards as they come if you believe for one minute that one man is going to stop a war. That war in Iraq ain't going nowhere, and while y'all busy hoping and wishing, they already planning the next one.

MS. MARTHA

If it's one thing I hate in this life, it's war.

SIS. STALLWORTH

The Bible says there will be wars and rumors of wars.

CARRIE

Rumor? Ain't no rumor. It's the truth.

TERRANCE

I talked to my brother the other day and he says everybody over there real excited about Obama, but they try not to focus too much on coming home just yet.

CARRIE

They better not. They better focus on them Iraqis blowing themselves up every five minutes and killing everybody in sight.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Ain't you scared Terrance of what could happen if you go over there?

TERRANCE

Ma'am, I don't focus on the dying part so much. I just want to be a soldier and fight for my country alongside my brother and the other Marines.

CARRIE
(Angry)

I don't know why they study sending black boys to the other side of the world to get killed no way. Got y'all believing it's for your country. Ain't y'all reading the paper? Don't you live in Mississippi? In Marks? They been killing black boys here in the United States for free and Obama can't do a damn thing about it.

SIS. STALLWORTH
(Pleading)

Honey.

CARRIE
What? Terrance needs to know the truth. A black boy's life doesn't mean spit on a sidewalk. It didn't mean nothing in sixty-seven and it shole' don't mean nothing in two thousand eight.

TERRANCE
(Beat)

Well, I best get going. School starts at ten today. Nice to see you again Ms. Martha, Ms. Honey, Sister Stallworth.

SIS. STALLWORTH
See you Thursday night at choir rehearsal, Terrance.

TERRANCE
Yes ma'am.

(TERRANCE exits. SISTER STALLWORTH
resumes knitting.)

SIS. STALLWORTH
Terrance is *such* a polite young man. Comes to choir rehearsal every Thursday and church every Sunday. You shouldn't have been so hard on him, Honey.

CARRIE

(Continues putting on her shoes)

You can't be soft on these kids today. These kids crazier than a run over dog. Look at Ernestine's grand-daughter around here dressing like a man. Willie Mae's son going with men and Marks got more pregnant girls running round here than the law allows.

MS. MARTHA

You say Willie Mae's son pregnant?

CARRIE

Lord have mercy.

SIS. STALLWORTH

(Loudly)

No ma'am. She's talking about all the pregnant teenage girls in Marks.

MS. MARTHA

Oh yeah. I see them walking around here, but you know I had my first child at seventeen. Seem like they just kept coming after that. Married my first husband at sixteen, ole sap sucker. Carrie, you weren't nothing but a child yourself when you had Ricky.

CARRIE

We ain't talking about me, Ms. Martha. That was a different day and time.

SIS. STALLWORTH

(Embarrassed)

Well, quiet as it's kept. I had my first child four months after Rev and I got married.

(CARRIE stares at SIS. STALLWORTH)

He wasn't a reverend then and I wasn't a first lady. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God.

CARRIE
(Prepares to leave)

Yeah, right, well, I don't mean to rush nobody but I best get going.

MS. MARTHA
You fixing to work in your yard?

SIS. STALLWORTH
(Loudly)

No ma'am. She is heading over to Leopold.

MS. MARTHA
Leopold cemetery? My last husband is buried over there. My boys, James Earl Jr. and Samuel go over there every Father's Day to visit his grave. I went out there with them...when was that? Two Father's Day ago, I reckon. That place so run down now. Don't seem like nobody hardly working there any more. It took the girl at the front desk almost an hour to find his grave on the map. I tell you, ain't nothing in Marks like it used to be.

SIS. STALLWORTH
You want some company, Honey? I ain't got to be back at the church for awhile. I could drive you over there.

CARRIE
(Spits out)

My car run fine.

(CARRIE's dogs begin barking again as WINNIE enters the porch from the side carrying some apples in the front of her housecoat with her house shoes on. She talks while puffing on a cigarette.)

WINNIE
Carrie, I ain't feel like making no pie this time, so I just brought you some apples from my tree.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

(Beat)

Oh, I didn't know you had company.

SIS. STALLWORTH

We're here every morning, Winnie.

WINNIE

Shole is. Hi do Ms. Martha. Sister Stallworth? Want me to bring y'all some apples too? Come straight off my apple tree.

SIS. STALLWORTH

No thank you.

MS. MARTHA

I better not with these dentures.

CARRIE

Winnie these apples ain't got no worms in them? That tree looking kind of pitiful these days.

WINNIE

No, them the good ones. Raccoons ate the ones with worms in them. Shoot, them apples a dollar sixty nine a pound at the Piggly Wiggly. Johnny say we need to start selling these and put Piggly Wiggly out of business.

(Laughs)

Everything so dog-gone high these days. Girl, I heard up in Jackson milk four dollars a gallon.

CARRIE

Sho' nuff? Four dollars?

SIS. STALLWORTH

That sounds a little steep. You sure that's right?

WINNIE

Yeah, Johnny's people live up there and they told me. I heard they might even close Piggly Wiggly because folks ain't shopping like they used to. That just means milk is going to be four dollars a gallon down here directly.

MS. MARTHA

Be cheaper to buy your own cow.

WINNIE

You're right, Ms. Martha, and things just going to get higher. Ain't nothing going to change. White folks do whatever they want to do and when McCain get in there you ain't gone be able to wipe your behind without paying for permission.

(WINNIE and CARRIE chuckle together)

SIS. STALLWORTH

What makes you think McCain is going to win?

WINNIE

Cause white folks going to vote for him and that silly woman, that's why.

SIS. STALLWORTH

You voting today?

CARRIE

(to WINNIE)

Here it come.

WINNIE

I ain't going to no polling places today, not with the Klan out there blowing them up.

MS. MARTHA

Blowing what up?

WINNIE
(Loudly)

I heard the Klu Klux Klan bombing polling places all over the south cause they know more of us going to be voting in the south.

SIS. STALLWORTH
Winnie, I declare, where do you get your information?

WINNIE
On the TV and the radio. Henrietta over on Tenth Street got a sister in North Carolina and she say they done already bombed the church where they vote. She says they do it the night before, but they're likely to do it in broad daylight in Marks.

SIS. STALLWORTH
Well, I assure you ain't no Klan blown up our church. So, you're safe.

WINNIE
I still ain't going. Plus, I heard they're turning folks away left and right.

CARRIE
For what?

WINNIE
For traffic tickets and if they find out you got previous arrests, they taking you straight to jail.

(SIS. STALLWORTH shakes her head.)

And Carrie, you know that boot been on my car for three weeks now. No Lordie, I ain't going nowhere near it.

(Loudly)

WINNIE (CONT'D)

Ms. Martha, you better take that hat off cause they ain't gone let you vote with nothing that says Obama on it.

(MS. MARTHA takes off her hat and squints as she reads it.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

Ms. Martha put your hat back on. You just can't wear paraphernalia within two hundred feet of the polling place.

CARRIE

I reckon they really *don't* want folks to vote.

WINNIE

I'm telling you they don't. They don't want no Black Moo-salum running this country.

SIS. STALLWORTH

(Agitated)

Muslim? Obama is not a Muslim, Winnie.

WINNIE

How come he ain't? His daddy was a Moo-salum. His name is Husane Obama. That's Moo-salum.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Just because his daddy *might* have been a Muslim doesn't mean he is. His daddy didn't raise him. His mama and grandparents did. Obama is a Christian just like you and me.

WINNIE

I don't know about all that. I heard-

SIS. STALLWORTH

(Interrupting)

You don't know if *you're* a Christian?

CARRIE
(to WINNIE)

You in trouble now.

WINNIE
Oh yes, I'ma Christian. I go to Holy Zion Missionary Baptist church in Batesville every Sunday.

MS. MARTHA
And smoke and drank Monday through Saturday.

(WINNIE puts the cigarette out.)

WINNIE
I'm just telling you what I heard on the news. Obama's daddy's people are Moo-sa-lum and that's what white folks afraid of because Moo-sa-lums killed all them peoples up there in New York. The other day, I ran into Mr. Paris and his wife at the laundromat and they told me somebody called them and said the voting place had up and moved.

SIS. STALLWORTH
(Without looking up)

Nope, still at the church.

WINNIE
That's what I figured, but see what I mean? Somebody doesn't want us to vote. Don't matter no way. Johnny's still in the bed. He says the lines too long anyway. Chile, I can't be standing in them long lines with these bunions.

SIS. STALLWORTH
They are providing chairs to sit for those who need it.

WINNIE
Well, I reckon that's good. You voting, Carrie?

CARRIE
I got more important things to do today.

WINNIE

Yeah me too, but you know, I do hope Obama wins.

CARRIE

Really?

WINNIE

Sho'. He seems pretty smart. I think he might just do something good for the people if they don't kill him first. Remember I told you Carrie, I heard a group down in Tennessee planning to do it right now. If I were-

(MS. MARTHA begins coughing almost choking.)

WINNIE

(Loudly)

You're alright, Ms. Martha?

MS. MARTHA

A little water if you please.

(SIS. STALLWORTH stands to go into CARRIE's house.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

Honey, you mind?

CARRIE

Gone in there. Cold water in the ice box.

(SIS. STALLWORTH exits into CARRIE'S house.)

WINNIE

Well, I best get going before I miss my stories. Johnny will be up soon wanting his lunch. Let me know if you want some more apples, Carrie. Good talking to y'all. Y'all take care.

(WINNIE exits stage. SIS.
STALLWORTH returns and hands MS.
MARTHA a glass of water and pulls
MS. MARTHA's shawl around her.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

Here you go, Ms. Martha.

(Sits down and resumes her knitting
again)

MS. MARTHA

Lord, that's one talking woman. I had to do something to make
her leave or shut up. Carrie, I don't know how you live next
door to Winnie all these years.

SIS. STALLWORTH

She certainly is full of imagination.

CARRIE

Winnie's harmless.

MS. MARTHA

Good thing her husband stay drunk all the time so he don't
have to listen to her. I picked cotton with her mama but she
talked more than she picked. Poor chile can't help it, I
guess.

SIS. STALLWORTH

I just wish she wouldn't spread all those rumors about things
she doesn't know.

CARRIE

She said she heard. She ain't said she knew for sure.

SIS. STALLWORTH

That's all the more reason she shouldn't go around telling
folks things she doesn't know for sure. Bombing polling
places and arresting folks for traffic tickets, ridiculous.
Some people just say anything.

(Beat)

SIS. STALLWORTH (CONT'D)

Honey, what you cooking in there?

CARRIE

Chicken livers and cabbage.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Sho' smells good.

(Beat)

Anybody heard from Berta today?

MS. MARTHA

You know she walks all over Marks every morning. She'll be here directly.

SIS. STALLWORTH

I saw her down at Lipsons the other day trying on some pretty dresses. Say she getting ready for the big event. Wouldn't say anything else after that. I told her we miss her here on Honey's porch.

(CARRIE gathers her apples
preparing to leave.)

CARRIE

Humph. What she say?

SIS. STALLWORTH

Just that she been busy, that's all. You know Berta. I think Rev told me she is one of the volunteers for the election today. Oh, that reminds me. I was suppose to call Rev by now to see what time he wanted me to come back to the church.

(She pulls out her cell phone and
raises her eye glasses over her
eyes to press the buttons on the
phone.)

Lord, these numbers so small, can't see nothing. Honey, can I use your phone?

CARRIE

Mmm..hmmm

(SIS. STALLWORTH exits into the house. CARRIE gathers her things. After a beat, TOWNER returns.)

TOWNER

Ms. Martha. Ms. Honey, I was on my way back to the post office, when I looked in my truck and saw this here package with your name on it. It must have fallen out of my bag. I swear I'd forget my head if it wasn't attached. So, I hurried back to drop it off. It must be pretty important cause they want you to sign for it.

(Hands package to CARRIE and pen to sign. CARRIE reads package and looks like she's seen a ghost.)

Everything alright, Ms. Honey?

CARRIE

(Nervously)

Fine, Towner.

TOWNER

Well, I better get going. Have a good day, now.

(SIS. STALLWORTH returns to the porch. CARRIE hides the package.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

Rev. said everything is-

(WINNIE returns in a panic.)

WINNIE

Carrie...Carrie...hurry up and turn on the TV. Hurry up. They're talking about Leopold.

CARRIE

What you talking about, Winnie?

WINNIE

I was watching my stories on channel seven and they interrupted in the middle talking about folks been arrested down there for digging up graves and dumping the bodies in the fields.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Today?

WINNIE

I just heard it on the news before I come back over here. I got a piece of paper and wrote everything down.

(Reaches in her bra and pulls out a piece of paper.)

They say 'about one thousand grave sites need to be inspected at Leopold Cemetery after four people tried to resell the plots. This summer someone visiting the cemetery found some human bones all over the ground.' You know we talked about how bad it was over there when you went to visit Ricky last year. The lady on the news say Leopold is broke too. They can't find any records of the money or nothing. She said they been dumping the remains in empty lots behind the cemetery and that if you or someone you know got relatives over there to call the Sheriff's office right away. I ran back over here as fast as I could.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Lord help us.

(CARRIE faints. All three women scream CARRIE's name. MS. MARTHA stands while holding onto her walker.)

Winnie, go in the house and get me two pillows and a cold towel, now!

(WINNIE exits into CARRIE's house.
SIS. STALLWORTH unbuttons CARRIE's
housecoat.)

Honey? Honey? Can you hear me? Honey?

MS. MARTHA

Carrie? Carrie? It's Ms. Martha. Sister Stallworth, I got
some smelling salt in my pocketbook.

(WINNIE returns)

WINNIE

Here you go.

SIS. STALLWORTH

(Places towel on CARRIE's
neck and pats CARRIE's hand)

Put the pillows under her legs. Honey? Wake up, Honey. Come
on. Wake up. Honey.

(CARRIE begins to mumble.)

Honey, it's me, Sister Stallworth.

(CARRIE tries to sit-up.)

Hold on now, you just fainted. You need to be still. We're
going to take you to the hospital to make sure you're
alright.

CARRIE

(Groggy)

Ain't going to no hospital. I got...I got to get over to
Leopold. Help me up.

WINNIE

Carrie don't be silly. You got to get checked out first.

CARRIE

For what? She just said I fainted that's all. Ain't got time for no hospital. Now help me up.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Honey, you ain't in no position to drive nowhere.

CARRIE

I'll be damn if I sit around in some hospital waiting on some doctor to tell me that I fainted and Ricky's body could be thrown over in some field somewhere. I'm going to Leopold *now*.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Then I'm going with you.

(CARRIE and SIS. STALLWORTH exit the porch in a hurry. The package falls onto the porch steps. A car is heard pulling off. WINNIE picks up the package and looks at it oddly and tries to get CARRIE's attention.)

WINNIE

(Yells)

Carrie, Carrie yo' package? You forgot ya package.

MS. MARTHA

Well, I reckon you better put it in her mailbox. I'll tell her when she gets back.

(WINNIE places the envelope in the mailbox on CARRIE's porch, but leaves it sticking out.)

WINNIE

You want to sit at my house?

MS. MARTHA

No.

WINNIE

Okay, I'll come back and check on you. Lord only knows what they going to find.

END OF SCENE.

SCENE III

Sound of car doors closing and dogs barking. SIS. STALLWORTH is holding onto CARRIE's arm as they walk towards the porch. MS. MARTHA is still sitting in her chair with her head back and mouth open asleep on the porch. SIS. STALLWORTH runs toward MS. MARTHA in a panic.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Oh Lord, Ms. Martha? Ms. Martha?

MS. MARTHA

(Wakes up coughing)

Is it four yet?

SIS. STALLWORTH

No ma'am, but it's almost two-thirty. You been sitting out here all this time? We've been gone for over four hours.

MS. MARTHA

Sat right here.

SIS. STALLWORTH

I thought surely Joann come get you by now. Have you had anything to eat?

MS. MARTHA

Winnie brought me some hog head cheese, crackers, and a Coca-Cola.

SIS. STALLWORTH

What about using the bathroom?

MS. MARTHA

She came back for that too, but she talk so much, I finally told her I would just use it in my Depends. Carrie, you okay?

(CARRIE walks quietly to her chair, sits in her seat and feels underneath her chair for assurance. She pauses before taking out her snuff and pinching off a wad and placing it in her bottom lip. SIS. STALLWORTH picks up her knitting bag and starts knitting.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

It's a sin and a shame what they have done over there. People from all over Marks, Batesville, Lambert, Crowder, at that cemetery trying to find their people. The police done blocked off all of Main Street on account of so many people coming. Folks walking on canes and in wheelchairs crying and pleading for the police to just let them in to see if their relatives are still there. Some people were waving pictures of grave sites, obituaries, death certificates, whatever they could find to show that someone in their family is buried in Leopold, but the sheriff and the police ain't talking. They keep saying it's under investigation. My Lord, one of the most joyous days in the history of America has turned into the saddest.

(Beat)

Oh, I almost forgot, Ms. Martha. I ran into your boys, James Earl Jr. and Samuel. They were looking for their daddy's grave.

MS. MARTHA

Yeah, they were always crazy about their daddy, but I didn't care for him much.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Why not, Ms. Martha?

MS. MARTHA

Well, first time he just raised his hand in the air like he wanted to hit me. I looked him square in his face and he put his hand down real quick, but then one day when my back was turned he hauled off and hit me.

MS. MARTHA (CONT'D)

I waited until he got good and sleep and I poured some boiling hot water all over his naked body. He didn't hit me no more after that, but I was tired of him by then anyway.

(Beat)

They ain't burying me at Leopold. I bought my burial plot back down in Yazoo City where my mama and daddy buried.

SIS. STALLWORTH

I think that was a smart idea. I heard that there are so many missing gravestones and holes in the ground that the only way folks might be able to find their relatives is through D-N-A and that could take months or even years.

CARRIE

(Talks to herself)

Forty-one years. I've been waiting forty-one years. I ain't got another forty-one to wait.

(Spits out)

SIS. STALLWORTH

Don't worry, Honey. They're going to find Ricky's grave. I just know it. You still got all your papers, don't you? When I called Rev, he say he and the other preachers meeting with the mayor tomorrow to see if they can't get Jesse Jackson to come down here to help.

MS. MARTHA

(Coughs and swallows some of her toddie)

Ms. Jackson's oldest son down on Third Street?

SIS. STALLWORTH

(Loudly)

No ma'am. The Reverend Jesse Jackson from Chicago. The one who-

CARRIE
(Interrupting)

Ain't going to do any good.

SIS. STALLWORTH
Course it will, Honey. He'll help bring some national attention down here and help us get some answers and maybe even some justice.

CARRIE
This nation ain't concerned about a bunch of small town black folks in Marks, Mississippi. You just said yourself; this is the most joyous day in the history of America. All those people down there at Leopold got a death certificate in one hand and an *I Voted Sticker* in the other. All this nation care about is this election and making themselves look good to the world. They ain't studying about some dead colored bones.

SIS. STALLWORTH
Honey, I know it look bad, but you got to have faith. Faith is knowing everything gone be alright when everything don't look alright.

CARRIE
Really? Cause I lost faith in this world a long time ago.

SIS. STALLWORTH
I'm not talking about faith in man. I'm talking about having faith in God.

CARRIE
To do what? Faith in God to do what, Sister Stallworth? To stop some devilish folks from digging up the dead; from killing innocent black boys; from laughing at me for the last forty-one years, every time I sat at my kitchen table to write a letter for some help. Now, you want me to have faith?

(Beat)

God don't even know where Marks, Mississippi is.

MS. MARTHA
(Stern)

Carrie

CARRIE
Look Sister Stallworth, I just ain't in the mood for no sermon today.

SIS. STALLWORTH
I understand, Honey. I understand.

(Beat)

You want me to check on your dinner for you?

MS. MARTHA
Winnie turned it off. I think she fixed her a plate too.

CARRIE
Ain't hungry. Think I'm just going to go on back up there.

SIS. STALLWORTH
For what, Honey? They got the streets all blocked off and I'm sure it's hundreds of people up there by now. Besides the police ain't letting anybody in. I think it's just best to wait until tomorrow morning. I'll go with you again if you want.

MS. MARTHA
She's right, Carrie.

SIS. STALLWORTH
(Excited)

But you know what I just thought of? The chair of our deacon ministry at the church is a police officer. Maybe I can call Rev and get his number and ask him if he knows anything about what's going on at Leopold. Honey, you know exactly where Ricky's buried?

CARRIE

On the east side of the cemetery, right under the second oak tree near the fence.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Did you get a tombstone?

CARRIE

(Slowly)

Worked twelve hours a day, six days a week cleaning the Simon's place just so I could afford it.

MS. MARTHA

Mayor Simon and his wife? That no good rascal was as crooked as the day is long. Now his wife was sweet as sugar, but she could hardly open her mouth to speak unless he told her to. I know they moved some years back after blacks got the right to vote because he knew none of us was gone to vote for him anyway. I wonder what happened to them? Probably dead like everybody else.

CARRIE

Old man Simon died about ten or fifteen years ago, but Mrs. Simon...

(Pauses and remembers package. Looks around for it until she notices it in the mailbox. She becomes tense.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

Mrs. Simon what?

CARRIE

She knew I was working my fingers to the bone to buy Ricky a proper headstone, and she did all she could to help. She was a decent woman, just married a fool.

SIS. STALLWORTH

You said he was the mayor of Marks? Did he know anything about Ricky's death?

CARRIE

Plenty.

SIS. STALLWORTH

And?

CARRIE

(Angry)

And nothing. I couldn't prove anything and I needed the work.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Did you ever try talking to his wife?

CARRIE

I don't know how they did things in Arkansas, Sister Stallworth, but in Mississippi, mayors, mayor's wives, sheriffs, whoever, they all thicken as thieves and that's all there is to it.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Well, I'll just go and call Rev now.

(Exits into CARRIE's house. Dogs bark. ALBERTA walks up in a pink jogging suit with her "I Voted" sticker and an Obama button on the front. She whistles as she sits down on the porch steps.)

ALBERTA

Hey everybody. How y'all feel today?

MS. MARTHA

(Coughs)

There she is. Sister Stallworth talked about you earlier. Been missing you round here, Alberta.

ALBERTA

Ain't been that long has it?

CARRIE
(Spits out)

Ain't know you was gone.

ALBERTA
Where is Sister Stallworth anyway?

MS. MARTHA
She inside making a phone call.

(SIS. STALLWORTH re-enters porch
carrying a cordless phone.)

SIS. STALLWORTH
Berta, good to see you. Where you been?

(Hugs ALBERTA)

ALBERTA
I went up to Chicago again for a spell to visit my nieces.
You know that's where Obama lived. They took me to his
neighborhood up there. Can't get close to his house no more,
but I was close enough to take a few pictures.

SIS. STALLWORTH
Oh, Honey, I talked to Rev and he was still at the cemetery.
He said he would find Deacon Robinson and give him the
message. I gave him your number to call back, and I brought
your phone out here so you don't miss the call.

ALBERTA
What's going on?

SIS. STALLWORTH
You ain't heard about what happened at Leopold today?

ALBERTA
I've been at the church helping with the voting since seven
o'clock this morning. What's happening at Leopold?

SIS. STALLWORTH

They arrested four people down there for digging up the graves and reselling the plots.

ALBERTA

What you say?

SIS. STALLWORTH

Honey and I not too long got back from there before you came.

ALBERTA

Now that you mention it, I did over hear some of the other volunteers talking about a cemetery, but I was too busy to get the whole story. Lord, I'm so thankful my husband was cremated. He didn't want to be in no ground decomposing. I'm going to be cremated too.

MS. MARTHA

Cremated? That's when they burn your body? That's too much like going to hell for me.

ALBERTA

(Loudly)

No, Ms. Martha. Your body dead anyhow. Your heart ain't pumping. Your brain ain't functioning, so who cares? It's your soul that matters, ain't that right Sister Stallworth?

SIS. STALLWORTH

Yes, but if you do choose to be buried, you have a right to rest in peace.

ALBERTA

Whose rights are we talking about? I didn't think dead people had rights.

CARRIE

(Annoyed)

Can we change the subject, please?

SIS. STALLWORTH

Yes, of course. So, what else you do up in Chicago, Berta?

(Starts knitting again)

ALBERTA

Well, I went to service at Obama's church.

MS. MARTHA

(Coughs)

With that crazy preacher talking on TV?

SIS. STALLWORTH

Rev says he ain't the preacher there no more. Say he's retired.

CARRIE

(Spits out)

Well, he sho' nuff was the preacher when Obama was there, so he must not have been too crazy.

ALBERTA

(Angry)

Jeremiah Wright is his *own* man with his *own* opinions. That doesn't mean Obama agrees with everything he says.

CARRIE

Then what he join his church for?

ALBERTA

You would have to ask him that, Carrie. I don't agree with everything Rev. Stallworth says, no offense Sister Stallworth.

SIS. STALLWORTH

None taken, but Berta is right. No one agrees with their pastor a hundred percent of the time. I been married to Rev forty-five years and I don't always agree with him.

MS. MARTHA

I didn't agree with none of my husbands, so I just kept getting a new one.

CARRIE

I ain't said I disagreed with Rev. Wright. He just telling it like it is. Y'all know America ain't never done right by us. Then Obama sit up there and talk against his pastor in front of the world. I'd like to see one of y'all do that to Rev. Stallworth one Sunday morning.

ALBERTA

No one said Americas been fair. We ain't forgot about slavery, lynching, segregation. Every single one of us on this porch picked cotton, but times are different today, Carrie. Tomorrow a black man could be the next president of the United States. I can't believe it.

(Laughs and slaps her knee)

Y'all vote yet?

MS. MARTHA

JoAnn's picking me up at four so I can vote.

ALBERTA

Aw Ms. Martha, I wish you had voted earlier. The polls are packed. I've been there since seven this morning and people are still coming. I didn't even get a lunch break.

MS. MARTHA

Carrie got some chicken livers and cabbage in there.

(CARRIE cuts her eyes at MS. MARTHA.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

Ms. Martha, you know Berta is a vegetarian.

MS. MARTHA

A what?

SIS. STALLWORTH

(Loudly)

A veg-a-tar-ian. She don't eat meat.

MS. MARTHA

What meat ever done to you, Alberta?

ALBERTA

First of all beef contains harmful levels of dioxin which is linked to cancer, heart attacks, and blood disorders. Not to mention what its production has done to the rainforest, local economies, and all these fat kids running around here. All the mercury levels in fish these days and the mycoproteins in chicken...

(Everyone looks at ALBERTA
confused.)

CARRIE

(Spits out)

Good, more chicken livers for me.

ALBERTA

I'm just trying to live as long as I can, especially with a black president coming.

SIS. STALLWORTH

We stop eating meat at the church at the beginning of every year. We call it the Daniel Fast. Nothing but fruits, vegetables, and water for thirty days.

CARRIE

That in the Bible?

SIS. STALLWORTH

Yes, the story of Daniel *is* in the Bible, Honey. Maybe if you come back to church you can join us the next time we fast.

CARRIE

I'm alright with meat and plenty of it.

ALBERTA

To each its own. Bernie is a vegetarian now.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Is that your gentleman friend?

MS. MARTHA

Where his people from? I declare I know him.

CARRIE

(Loudly)

You might have taught his mama and daddy in school since he's about twenty years younger than Alberta.

ALBERTA

His people are from Natchez, Ms. Martha, but he lives in Clarksdale, and he's not twenty years younger than me, Carrie. Age ain't nothing but a number no way. Plus, I can't help it if younger men find me attractive.

MS. MARTHA

Two of my husbands were younger than me, but I reckon it don't matter no way. Sometimes the older ones more trouble than the younger ones.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Berta, you going back to the church to help out?

ALBERTA

For a little while. A bunch of us from my aerobics class getting together later tonight to watch the election results. I started to stay up in Chicago. One of my nieces got tickets to the big rally they having up there in the park when they announce the winner, but I decided to stay home in Marks and celebrate with my friends and Bernie. But it would be nice to see Barack and Michelle and them cute little girls in person.

SIS. STALLWORTH

I still can't believe the White House is going to have a black family running around in it.

CARRIE

They ain't going to let them kids tear up that White House.

ALBERTA
(Annoyed)

Who is *they*, Carrie? You are always hollering about 'they.'
You been to the polls yet?

CARRIE
Ain't sure if I'm going.

MS. MARTHA
(Coughs)

Say she was going to work in her yard today before she heard
about Leopold.

ALBERTA
In your yard? Your yard can wait. You need a ride?

CARRIE
My car run fine.

ALBERTA
So why you not going to vote?

CARRIE
Got other things on my mind today, so I ain't decided yet.

ALBERTA
About who you're going to vote for or if you're going to vote
at all?

CARRIE
I said I ain't made up my mind yet.

ALBERTA
Well you better hurry 'cause today is it. You miss this
chance and I don't think we're going to live to see another.

SIS. STALLWORTH
That's what I've been trying to tell her all day. *Today* is
the day that the Lord has made; we need to rejoice and be
glad in it.

CARRIE

I ain't better do nothing. Whether I vote or not ain't going to make a bit of difference.

ALBERTA

What if everybody thought like you, Carrie? Then nothing would ever change. Blacks finally got the right to vote and you won't even use it.

CARRIE

Seems like that is my choice.

ALBERTA

Well at least think about all the black people all over the south, who got sprayed with hoses and attacked by dogs so you could even have a choice. It ain't been nothing but forty-three years since we been able to vote at all and in every one of those elections it has been some white man running for president.

CARRIE

So now *you're* telling me who to vote for?

SIS. STALLWORTH

I don't think that's what she's saying, Honey. It's just important that we exercise our right to vote, and it does help that a black man is running.

CARRIE

And if he was purple, should I still vote for him?

ALBERTA

Just vote, Carrie. Ain't you ready for a change? Mississippi the poorest state in the union and it's going to stay that way unless we do something about it.

CARRIE

What makes you think Obama is going to do something about it? Huh? He don't know nothing about being poor. He don't know nothing about Mississippi or me or you. That man got y'all fooled thinking he's going to change the way white folks think about us and the way they treat us-

ALBERTA
(Interrupting)

Here you go with that *they* again. You know what you need, Carrie? You need to stop worrying so much about what white folks think and think for yourself sometimes. White folks ain't the ones dug up them graves in Leopold.

SIS. STALLWORTH
Oh Lord. Don't y'all start today.

ALBERTA
Ever since we were young girls up on Cotton Street, you always complained about something, Carrie, and if you ain't complaining, you blaming someone for something. You complain about the prices of food. You complain about the gas prices. You complain about the heat. You complain about the schools. You complain about the church. You complain about Rev. Stall-

CARRIE
(Interrupting)

Watch yourself, Alberta.

ALBERTA
And you blame everyone for everything. You blame the new mayor, the teachers, the neighbors, the police. You blamed God when Rick-

CARRIE
(Interrupting)

I said watch yourself, Alberta

ALBERTA
(Standing)

No, you need to watch yourself, Carrie. Watch what you say and who you blame. This little society you done created in your head ain't nothing more than a front porch society. God done finally sent a man to right some of these wrongs Bush put us in.

ALBERTA (CONT'D)

In all my seventy-eight years, life has been a struggle and maybe just maybe Obama can make life a little better for everyone, including you. If you could just put the past behind you and stop complaining about what you don't have and be grateful for the things you do have. Now I suppose you're going to blame Obama for what happened down at the cemetery. And another thing, you need to stop blaming the world for Ricky's death-

(CARRIE reaches under her seat and pulls out a hand gun, stands and points it in Alberta's direction, but fires a shot in the air. The dogs go wild.)

END OF SCENE.

INTERMISSION

ACT II

SCENE I

CARRIE is still holding the gun never taking her eyes off ALBERTA. ALBERTA falls to the ground. SIS. STALLWORTH jumps in her seat and tosses her knitting materials in the air. MS. MARTHA doesn't move.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

(Yells)

Shit, Honey...I mean Lord Jesus. You can't be shooting guns off round here. I thought you said you only use that thing for protection. You're going to give Ms. Martha a heart attack.

MS. MARTHA

Somebody better take me to the bathroom.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Come on, Ms. Martha.

(SIS. STALLWORTH helps MS. MARTHA to the bathroom. They exit the porch into CARRIE's house.)

WINNIE

(Runs to the porch)

They shooting, Carrie. They shooting. I heard it all from my front window.

(WINNIE sees CARRIE holding the gun and ALBERTA down on the ground. WINNIE drops on the ground spread out like a suspect. CARRIE lowers the gun by her side and addresses ALBERTA as if in a trance. There is a long pause.)

CARRIE

Alberta Mae Johnson as long as you squat to pee, don't you ever use blaming and Ricky's name in the same sentence. You don't know nothing about Ricky's death, cause you were too busy running back and forth to Chicago with your fake furs and your men folk. You weren't here when they came on this here porch at two in the morning. You weren't here when they kicked my door down with their mangy dogs looking for Ricky. Wouldn't even let me open my own door and invite them in proper. They pushed past me with them dogs and their guns pointed right at my face. Those police dragged my son out of his bed in nothing but his draws. I kept telling them 'Sir he ain't done nothing. He ain't done nothing, sir.' Ricky screamed 'mama...mama,' but they just kept pushing and kicking him down these steps, and when he was too weak to stand they drug him by his arms along the concrete. They threw my boy in the back of that police car like they was taking out the trash. I called every police station in Quitman County, but I couldn't find Ricky for three days. For three days, he sat in a cold jail cell with no clothes, no lawyer, wouldn't even let him make a phone call. Nothing, and for three days nobody had the sense enough to call me.

(Beat)

When I finally got to see him, they had kicked him in his ribs so many times; he couldn't even sit up straight. His eyes were swollen to the size of plums. Lips bigger than his whole face. Police say somebody saw Ricky robbing a white woman's house in Clarksdale. That's what *they* said, Alberta. *They* said.

(Beat)

I sat through all those trails. Nobody there but me and a sea of white folks and their fancy lawyers and all white jury.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

So that judge gave him twenty five years to life. The lawyer they gave Ricky was as crooked as a dog's hind leg. Couldn't afford no good one, so I wrote letters to everyone I could think of to help get my boy out of that jail 'cause God as my witness, he ain't robbed nobody. He wasn't raised that way. I wrote letters everyday and not one response. Then I wrote every week, and then every month, and finally every year and no one, not the mayor, the pastor, the governor of Mississippi, not even the president of the United States even bothered to help me.

(Beat)

But November 4, 1967, Sheriff Turner banged on my door to tell me that they found Ricky's body hanging in his cell wearing nothing but his draws. Said he committed suicide, but he didn't. They killed him, Alberta. They killed my seventeen-year-old son for a crime he didn't do. So excuse me, if I ain't ready to dance a jig about Obama or anything this world has to offer.

ALBERTA

(Shaken)

I didn't know, Carrie. I-

CARRIE

You don't know a lot of things, Alberta. You don't know what it's like to bury a child; your child and nobody giving a damn. When his death certificate say suicide and you know in your bones he was murdered. You don't know what it's like when the bastards that killed him go free and get to ride around Quitman County in the name of the law. They killed my boy and ain't a damn thing nobody can do about it.

ALBERTA

You don't know that Carrie. It's not nineteen sixty-seven no more. They got ways today to figure out what happened in the past. It's still not too late. Listen, Bernie used to be a lawyer. He had his own practice for years before he retired. I'm going to ask him to help you out to see what he can do.

CARRIE

You ain't listening, Alberta. Folks who killed my boy dead or moved on way from Marks years ago. Don't nobody care about a black boy dying in Marks, Mississippi. And if his bones been dug up and thrown-

(CARRIE gets choked up. She puts her hand over her mouth and drops the gun on the porch. SIS. STALLWORTH and MS. MARTHA return. SIS. STALLWORTH slowly sticks her head out the door first before entering.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

I'm going to drive Ms. Martha home. Jo Ann gets off work in a half an hour. She can wait for her there.

(She starts gathering up her knitting materials and bag, grabs MS. MARTHA's walker and helps her down the stairs. MS. MARTHA stops and looks over her shoulder at CARRIE before slowly turning her walker around in CARRIE'S direction. She raises her finger and points in the direction of CARRIE'S belly as she begins to speak. MS. MARTHA'S words are emotional but not full of tears. She speaks with a wise resolve.)

MS. MARTHA

Belly.

(Beat)

This thing that got you is still in yo' belly. You carried it in there for nine months and forty one years later, it's still in there, Carrie. Lord knows, I know what I'm talking about.

MS. MARTHA (CONT'D)

(Coughs but fights through it
to quickly regain her
composure)

You know I raised nine children, but I gave birth to ten and only eight still on this earth today. After Mr. John found out the child I was carrying was his, he struck me in my belly so hard that Ella Mae came into this world dead. I still got the scar on my belly where he hit me. But long before Ella Mae stopped moving inside of me, I felt her death in my belly.

(Beat)

They sent two of my boys, Clarence and Lee Jerry, over to that war. None of us ever heard of no Viet-nam before then. Carried them both in my belly at the same time and I could tell them apart just by how they moved inside of me. Seems like Lee Jerry just stayed up here up under my left breast while Clarence swim all around. The whole time they were over there, I listened to that radio about that war day and night. So when they finally made it back from that war a year later, I threw the biggest party Marks ever seen. I hugged them so tight, Clarence said I was going suffocate him on his first day back.

(Chuckles but quickly turns
serious again)

But when I put my arms around Lee Jerry, felt like I was hugging someone else's child. He just stood there like he didn't know what to do with his arms, like he didn't recognize me or his family and friends. Something wasn't right about Lee Jerry. I could feel it in my belly, right under my left breast. He just kept to himself never leaving the house. Finally, he took a notion to go out and hunt some rabbits for dinner. Took his daddy's shot gun, but I...I...guess he changed his mind and went out to the back of the house and put that shot gun in his mouth.

(Beat)

MS. MARTHA (CONT'D)

What they call it? P...P...

SIS. STALLWORTH

P-T-S-D.

MS. MARTHA

Whatever it was, I felt Lee Jerry's death right here.

(Rubs her belly)

And that's where you feeling Ricky. Ain't nothing fair about it, Carrie, but Ricky, Ella Mae, and Lee Jerry gone on now and whether they find Ricky's body over there in Leopold or not, you got to get him out of yo' belly. Release it, now. Worry about the things you can change cause we ain't got no time for the things we can't. And another thing, don't you give up on God, because He never gives up on you. Y'all take care, y'here?

ALBERTA

I think it's time for me to go back to the church.

SIS. STALLWORTH

(Notices WINNIE on ground)

Winnie, what in the world are you doing on the ground?

WINNIE

(Rises slowly)

Well, I was minding my business when I heard some shots from my front window and I came over to see 'bout Carrie. When I saw her holding that gun up in the air and Ms. Alberta on the ground, I guess my knees just buckled and I stayed down.

(Beat)

Carrie, I'm so sorry bout what you going through.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Well, you can ride with us, Berta. I'm going back to the church after I drop Ms. Martha off. I'll check on you later, Honey.

(They exit the front porch and the sounds of car doors slamming and a car driving off is heard.)

WINNIE

Carrie, I shole hate you had to pull a gun on Ms. Alberta, but sometimes I guess that's what it takes. I know you said Ms. Alberta gets on your nerves sometimes. Chile, I'm just glad it wasn't me. When, I heard them shots so close to the house, I like to jump out of my skin trying to get over here and-

CARRIE

(Interrupting)

Winnie, not right now.

WINNIE

Oh okay. I checked on your dinner for ya. Do you need me to do anything else?

(CARRIE shakes her head.)

WINNIE

I'ma go on back to the house now. Oh, there was a package on your front porch and I put it in your mailbox. Okay, if you need me, just holler.

(WINNIE exits. CARRIE picks up the gun and puts it in her housecoat pocket and sits back in her chair. She begins to cry. After a pause, a car horn blows. TERRANCE enters)

TERRANCE

Good evening, Ms. Honey.

CARRIE
(Composes herself)

Hi-do, Terrance. What you doing over here?

TERRANCE
Mama asked me to drive around to see if anybody still needs a ride to the polls.

CARRIE
My car run fine.

TERRANCE
Yes ma'am.

(Comes up onto the porch)

You okay, Ms. Honey?

CARRIE
(Beat)

I'm fine, Terrance. You ain't still trying to get that football are you?

TERRANCE
Uh, no ma'am. I got another one at home.

CARRIE
Don't you have some homework you need to be doing instead of riding round on a school night?

TERRANCE
I did mine already; because I wanted to make sure I had time to vote.

(Proudly shows CARRIE his *I Voted* sticker)

CARRIE
How you vote, Terrance? You only seventeen ain't you?

TERRANCE

Turned eighteen September twenty-six. That was the same day Obama and McCain had that debate at Ole Miss. I registered to vote the next day. Me and my best friend, Charles, he's eighteen too, went to register together. We even had a mock election at school last week, since most of the kids at Quitman High can't vote yet. Obama won by a landslide. Shoot, even if he don't win at least I can say I was *alive* and voted in my very first election when a black man ran for president.

(CARRIE tears up)

Did I say something wrong, Ms. Honey?

CARRIE

No, Ricky...

(Beat)

I mean Terrance. You better get going now.

TERRANCE

Yes ma'am. I'm going to drive around some more in case someone still needs a ride. Just remember, Ms. Honey, the polls close in three hours. Mama said we may never get another opportunity like this again.

(CARRIE nods her head and watches the car drive off. She spits out for the last time before grabbing her spittoon and phone. Before she goes inside she tosses the contents over the side railing. The dogs begin to bark.)

CARRIE

Hush up now. Hush up.

(She walks toward the door and pauses in front of the package sticking out the mailbox. She slowly removes it and sits down to open it and starts to read it silently.)

Her hands shake begin to shake
uncontrollably and she clutches her
heart.)

END OF SCENE.

LIGHTS UP ON:
THE NEXT DAY
DIRECTOR MAY
ELECT TO PLAY
ACTUAL ELECTION
RESULTS

SCENE II

It's Wednesday morning November 5, 2008. Obama has won the election. CARRIE wears a different colored head scarf and house coat. She's carrying her spittoon. She places the jar on the first seat and begins her calisthenics routine. This time she quickly goes through the motions of her exercise by pretending to bend over several times touching her feet, then her waist, and then stretching her hands to the sky. She turns around suddenly to see if MS. MARTHA is sitting behind her. When she doesn't see her, she grabs her spittoon and tosses the contents over the railing. She takes her seat and reaches under her seat to feel for the gun, before reaching into her housecoat pocket for her pouch of snuff. She pinches a wad and stuffs it in her bottom lip. She nervously shakes her leg while cars drive by blowing their horns and yelling "Obama...Obama." CARRIE watches and shakes her head at the noise.

Soon the dogs begin to bark as WINNIE approaches from the side of the stage puffing on a cigarette while reading a news paper.

WINNIE

Moanin' Carrie.

CARRIE

Winnie.

WINNIE

Where everybody?

CARRIE

(Dryly)

Just me right now.

WINNIE

Well, they probably didn't get much sleep. How you sleep last night, Carrie?

(CARRIE shrugs her shoulders.)

Chile, I could hardly get any sleep with all that hooping and hollerin' and carrying on folks doing all night. I finally got up and turned on the TV. Johnny sleep through anything. You know I like to watch my reruns of Matlock late at night, but look like they had the election results on every channel.

(Beat)

Well, I guess you know by now, Obama won. I'm sure Sister Stallworth be happy to know that, but be sure to tell her, it wasn't cause of Mississippi that he won.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

It says right here, 'Despite strong black voter turnout for Obama, fifty-six percent of Mississippi voted for McCain and only forty-two percent voted for Obama.' Chile, Mississippi been voting Republican for every president since 1980. I told Sister Stallworth white folks going do whatever they want to do.

(CARRIE spits out and starts shaking her leg.)

You alright, Carrie? You ain't said more than two words since I been here.

CARRIE

Can't. You talking.

WINNIE

Well, I just come by to tell you the news. I'ma gone back to the house. Johnny be wanting his breakfast soon. Talk to you later.

(WINNIE exits the porch. Soon the dogs began to bark as SIS. STALLWORTH pulls up onto CARRIE's drive way. She is wearing an Obama T-shirt. She sings CARRIE's name as she skips up onto the porch and takes her seat next to CARRIE.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

Hoooooney. We did it, Honey. We elected the first black president of the United States of America. I was on the phone all night with my sisters and brothers in Pine Bluff. After we talked about Arkansas so bad. You know majority of the states in the south went to McCain. I tell you the south wouldn't know change if it slapped it straight in the face. Oh well, it still didn't stop us from rejoicing and praising God. It was wonderful night.

(Leans toward CARRIE and talks low)

SIS. STALLWORTH (CONT'D)

Don't tell nobody, but Rev and I had a little toast of champagne to celebrate.

(Laughs)

Mmmm...mmm...mmm. God sho' does answer prayer.

(Takes out her knitting materials
and starts to knit)

What you do last night, Honey? I tried to call you but I kept getting a busy signal. Then when I tried again, it just rang and rang. I know you can't be screening calls because you're the only person I know that doesn't use three-way calling or caller ID.

CARRIE

(Spits out)

I ain't heard no phone ringing.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Was it noisy over this way too? Look like every house on our block was lit up like a Christmas tree last night. I heard folks were all down on Main Street celebrating. We stayed up to watch that rally in Chicago that Berta talked about. Look like there were a million people out there. I saw Oprah Winfrey and Jesse Jackson listening to Obama give his victory speech. I liked to cried when Obama came out there holding Michelle's hand with them two little precious girls. I figured you'd be up watching since you like Oprah so much.

CARRIE

Uh-huh.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Some of the church members talked about getting a bus so they can go to the inauguration. My daughter and her husband are going and some of my cousins too. Rev and I are not sure if we can go. Not sure where folks are going to stay when they get there. They say all the hotels been sold out for months.

SIS. STALLWORTH (CONT'D)

(Beat)

Honey, why you so quiet this morning? And what's got your leg shaking so? Oh Lord Honey, here I am carrying on and on. Did Deacon Robinson call you back? Did he find Ricky's grave site?

CARRIE

Nope.

SIS. STALLWORTH

He didn't call you back or he didn't find Ricky's grave site?

CARRIE

I ain't heard no phone ringing.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Well, I'm sure he's just busy with the investigation and all. Next to Rev, Deacon Robinson is the most honest man I know. He'll call back when he knows something. Try not to worry. You sure that's all on your mind, Honey? You ain't still mad about what Berta said yesterday? Berta don't mean any harm.

CARRIE

I ain't studying about Alberta.

SIS. STALLWORTH

I shole hope not. Life is too short and we are too blessed to be worried about what someone-

CARRIE

(Interrupting)

I said I ain't studying about Alberta

SIS. STALLWORTH

Fair enough.

(Looks over at the empty chair)

Where Ms. Martha? She's usually here by now.

CARRIE

JoAnn ain't brought her yet. She'll be here directly.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Probably tried to stay up all night watching the election. They said people were still standing in line when the polls closed, but they had to let them vote on account the lines were so long. I hope Ms. Martha didn't have to wait too long.

(Dogs bark as TOWNER approaches with the mail. He hesitates as he removes his hat.)

CARRIE

Come on, Towner. They're chained behind the fence.

TOWNER

Morning Ms. Honey. Sis. Stallworth. How y'all feel this morning?

(Hands CARRIE her mail)

SIS. STALLWORTH

Mighty fine Towner, and you?

TOWNER

Real good ma'am. Didn't get much sleep last night cause we were up all night watching the election results and talking to Albert on the phone. We just kept pinching each other to make sure we wasn't dreaming, but it was also a bittersweet night for me and Mrs. Towner.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Why's that Towner?

TOWNER

Well, right after I came back to drop off that package to you Ms. Honey, Mrs. Towner called me crying about that mess down at Leopold. All our relatives buried over in Leopold; my mother, daddy, sister and practically all of Mrs. Towner's relatives. We both born and raised in Marks.

TOWNER (CONT'D)

Just can't understand what would make someone want to mess with the dead.

(CARRIE's leg starts to shake uncontrollably again. SIS. STALLWORTH looks at CARRIE curiously.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

Greed. It's still one of the seven deadly sins.

TOWNER

Yes ma'am, you're right. They say its going to take some time before we know anything. I just pray the folks responsible never see the light of day again.

(Beat)

Ms. Honey, I know you buried Ricky there and I just want you to know that I asked about him when I was there yesterday and I'm praying that they find his grave site. Ricky was like a brother to me.

CARRIE

Thank you, Towner.

TOWNER

Oh, I almost forgot. Mrs. Towner wants to have a celebration dinner tonight at the house. After hearing about Leopold, she started to cancel it, but then she figured folks need to come together now more than ever. She wanted me to be sure to invite y'all. Mrs. Towner feels real bad about her pie making Ms. Martha sick. Say she wants to make it up to her.

SIS. STALLWORTH

That's mighty nice of her.

CARRIE

(Sarcastic)

I'm sure she'll be *real* happy to know that.

TOWNER

Albert says the students at Alcorn so excited they are thinking about not going to class today. You know Mrs. Towner ain't having any of that.

(Laughs)

They're just having a little fun that's all and they deserve it after all the volunteering they did for Obama's campaign. He say today should be a national holiday. Lot of folks at the post office didn't come to work today.

CARRIE

Well, I'm glad you had sense enough to go to work and bring me my mail.

TOWNER

Oh yes ma'am, I can't afford to lose my job. Alcorn ain't cheap.

(Beat)

Well, I best get going. Be sure to tell Ms. Martha about the dinner tonight, and Ms. Johnson, oh, and Rev. Stallworth too. You ladies have a good day.

(Exits the porch)

SIS. STALLWORTH

You going to the dinner, Honey?

CARRIE

(Spits out)

Towner wife ain't fixin' to kill me. Y'all go right ahead.

SIS. STALLWORTH

(Laughs)

Well, tonight is bible study and prayer meeting at the church so we probably won't make it either, but it sure was nice of her to invite all of us and to try to do something to lift everybody's spirits.

(Beat)

SIS. STALLWORTH (CONT'D)

Honey? That package Towner talked about wasn't a response to one of your letters, was it?

CARRIE

I told you I wasn't writing no mo' letters.

SIS. STALLWORTH

I know what you told me, but I'm asking if that package had something to do with the letters you *used* to write?

(CARRIE appears angry)

Why won't you talk to me, Honey? You're quiet and your leg keeps shaking. Something ain't right. I can feel it in my spirit. What did the package say? Was it about Ricky-

CARRIE

(Stands to leave)

Why doesn't everybody just leave me alone? Get off my porch and just leave me and Ricky alone.

(SIS. STALLWORTH stands too and grabs CARRIE'S hand. CARRIE resists and the package falls out of her housecoat. Both women bend down to grab it. CARRIE gets it first.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

Honey, I didn't come here this morning to upset you. You going through enough already. That package *is* your business, so if you want to talk about anything, I'll be right here minding my *own* business, but I ain't leaving.

(SIS. STALLWORTH sits back down and starts knitting. CARRIE slowly returns to her seat.)

CARRIE

(Beat)

Something came for me, but it wasn't from my letters. It was from Mrs. Simon.

SIS. STALLWORTH

The woman you worked for? The mayor's wife you and Ms. Martha talked about yesterday? What did she say?

CARRIE

She dying, but she sent me some papers about Ricky's death.

SIS. STALLWORTH

What papers, Honey?

CARRIE

Notes and stuff. It's so much stuff. I was too nervous to read it all, thought I was going to have a heart attack right on my kitchen table.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Oh my God. What did she say?

CARRIE

(Hands shake as she opens the package and reads)

Dear Carrie. I pray you are the one reading this letter. Forgive me for foregoing the pleasantries as I don't have much time or energy these days. The truth is I will probably be dead by the time you get this for my heart is very weak. But what the doctors don't know is that it has suffered under the weight of so many secrets. Carrie, we've known each other for years, and for years, I've known and felt your pain for Ricky-

(CARRIE chokes up. SIS. STALLWORTH takes letter from CARRIE and finishes reading it.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

What you didn't know was that I knew the truth about what happened to Ricky in that jail and more importantly who did it. I knew that my husband, Richard W. Simon, ordered your boys murder.

(Beat)

My husband kept notes of everything while he was mayor, locked away, but when he died, it all became my property. Today, I'm sending everything to you with this letter and my signature verifying the truth. Carrie, I know this won't bring Ricky back, but as God is my witness, I pray it will bring you some peace and hope. It's too late for me, but as long as you're living, I pray you never give up on hope. Forgive me. Sincerely, Clara Simon.

(Beat)

Honey, you got to go to the police with this.

CARRIE

The police in Marks? You crazy? I don't trust the police as far as I can throw them. They're the ones who killed Ricky in the first place.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Not *these* police. You need to get a lawyer right away.

CARRIE

I don't know. Old man Simon dead anyway and Turner could be dead too for all I know-

SIS. STALLWORTH

(Interrupting sternly)

But you don't know, Honey. Look, you been carrying this hole in your heart for forty-one years. Forty-one years. Now, you heard what Ms. Martha said. It's time to release it. It's time to stop doubting God and do something. Get a lawyer.

(CARRIE opens her mouth to respond as more cars drive by honking their horns and shouting "We won" and "Yes we can." SIS. STALLWORTH waves to them. ALBERTA walks up wearing an Obama T-shirt, hat, sweatpants, and gym shoes. SIS. STALLWORTH immediately greets her. CARRIE's leg stops shaking as she sits back in her seat, puts the letter away, folds her arms across her chest, and stares at ALBERTA.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

Hey Berta. I declare you bought the Obama store out. Good to see you today.

ALBERTA

Sis. Stallworth. Carrie. Good to see you both too.

(Beat)

Carrie, I...I been thinking and I owe you an apology for the things I said to you yesterday. I had no business telling you how to feel about Ricky. Now, I may not have been in Marks when Ricky died, but I remember him and how much you loved that little boy. I wish to God I had been here cause ain't no way I would have let you go through all of that hurt by yourself. We've known each other too long and I know we don't always get along, but I do respect you Carrie, and I love you, and I'm sorry.

(Beat)

And I shouldn't have been so quick to talk about what's happening at Leopold. I know you buried Ricky there, and Sister Stallworth is right. However people want to be buried after they die is their choice, and nobody has a right to disrespect that choice. I shole hope they find his grave, Carrie.

CARRIE
(Spits out)

Alberta since we was little girls you always been fast and Lord knows you got a mouth on you, but I accepts your apology cause I know you mean it.

ALBERTA
Thanks Carrie, that means a lot to me. I remember you telling me about those letters and how you only write them once a year now. I talked to Bernie like I promised about Ricky's death and how you've been trying for years to get someone to look into the case so you can get some closure. He still knows a lot of people, and he said he's willing to help you anyway he can.

CARRIE
Well, thank you.

(ALBERTA flashes a big smile,
before taking her seat on the porch
in the empty chair next to the one
MS. MARTHA sits in.)

ALBERTA
Chile, me and my friends from my aerobics class partied till midnight. I was so tired this morning, I decided to sleep in instead of doing my early morning walk. I ain't stayed up that late since I was running around with the Elks up in Chicago.

(Beat)

Bernie surprised me this morning.

SIS. STALLWORTH
He proposed?

ALBERTA
No Lordie. I already been married to the best husband anyone could ever have. God rest his soul. No, something better. Bernie got us two plane tickets to Washington D.C. for the inauguration. He said he bought them three months ago 'cause he just knew Obama was going to win.

SIS. STALLWORTH

I declare, Berta. That's great. Where y'all going to stay? They say the hotel rooms booked all over D.C.

ALBERTA

He booked that too when he bought the plane tickets. He always thinks ahead.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Sounds like you got a good man.

ALBERTA

We just tickled pink. As I was coming over here, everybody just a smiling with their Obama T-shirts and hats on. I talked to my nieces up in Chicago last night. They called me from the big rally they had downtown. Everybody was screaming and shouting so, I could barely hear them. C-N-N said there were over two hundred fifty thousand people in that park. Chile, I do love Chicago, and Lord knows, I did my share of partying when I lived there, but today it's just not the same. It's too many people, cold as hell, and I could buy two houses in Marks for the price of renting one apartment up there. Marks ain't perfect, but I guess now that I'm older, it suits me just fine.

SIS. STALLWORTH

Oh, before I forget, Berta. Towner stopped by to deliver Honey's mail and he said Mrs. Towner's cooking a big dinner tonight to celebrate Obama's victory.

ALBERTA

Say he did?

SIS. STALLWORTH

Yes and he wanted to make sure I told everybody, including you.

ALBERTA

Well, did you tell him that I don't eat meat?

SIS. STALLWORTH

No, I didn't think about that Berta. I'm sure Mrs. Towner will have other things there that you can eat.

CARRIE
(Spits out)

It don't matter no way. Whatever she's cooking may look like meat, but I declare, it won't taste like it.

(CARRIE and ALBERTA laugh)

SIS. STALLWORTH
(Chuckles)

That ain't nice. Stop it you two.

(The dogs start to bark. TOWNER slowly approaches the porch, and removes his hat.)

Towner? Shh, y'all hush up now. Come on, Towner. I'm sure the dogs chained up.

(Beat)

Towner, something wrong?

TOWNER
(Sadly removes his hat)

I just ran into JoAnn delivering mail on Ms. Martha's block. Ms. Martha died sometime in the night after JoAnn brought her back from the polls.

(SIS. STALLWORTH and CARRIE stand at the same time. CARRIE begins shaking her head in disbelief.)

JoAnn said they waited to vote for over three hours. She kept asking Ms. Martha if she was tired and wanted to go home, but she said she waited ninety-five years for this day and she wasn't leaving until she voted. When JoAnn came by this morning to bring her to Ms. Honey's porch, she was gone.

SIS. STALLWORTH
Oh Lord Jesus

(CARRIE continues to shake her head and begins pounding her fist on the porch railing.)

CARRIE

(Screams)

No...no...no...

(ALBERTA goes over to comfort CARRIE.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

I'll go call Rev.

(SIS. STALLWORTH exits into the CARRIE's house.)

TOWNER

I'm real sorry ma'am I had to bring this news today.

ALBERTA

Thank you, Towner.

TOWNER

Take care.

(Exits porch)

CARRIE

Every day for one year after Ricky died; Ms. Martha came over to see about me. When I wouldn't get out of bed, she pulled a chair next to my bed and talked to me. When I wouldn't eat, she still cooked all my meals. When I couldn't pray, she brought her bible and prayed for me. She had children of her own to tend to, but everyday for one year she came to see about me, and she been coming ever since.

(Beat)

CARRIE (CONT'D)

Never married Ricky's daddy. One of my brothers gone on and the other one somewhere down in Georgia. Ms. Martha was the closest family I ever had, after Ricky, and now she gone too. Lord, no.

ALBERTA

(Puts arm around CARRIE)

It's going to be alright, Carrie. Ms. Martha lived a good long life. Shoot, she was the oldest person in Marks next to old man Thomas. Out lived all her husbands, taught school, picked cotton, raised all those children, including some of us.

(Beat)

Remember how when we were little and she used to bring us all those books from Miss Helen's house? She'd say 'White folks use something once and throw it away,' or how she used to make bologna sandwiches and tea-cakes for all the kids in the neighborhood. Yes, she lived a good life and she was good to everyone. I believe Ms. Martha died when she was good and ready.

(SIS. STALLWORTH re-enters the porch. She is holding CARRIE's phone.)

SIS. STALLWORTH

Rev was on his way to the funeral home when I called. I'm going to meet him there. I brought your phone Honey case Deacon Robinson calls.

(She goes over to CARRIE and ALBERTA and all three share a long hug. SIS. STALLWORTH, in tears, bends to pick up her knitting bag.)

Oh Lord, I almost forgot. I've been knitting this shawl for Ms. Martha for the past two weeks. I was going to give it to her today.

(She holds it up. "Obama 2008 Yes We Can" is embroidered on the front. She folds it and places it back in her bag.)

Ninety-five years still don't seem long enough. Honey, remember what I said. I'll call you later.

(SIS. STALLWORTH exits porch.)

ALBERTA

You want me to get you anything, Carrie?

CARRIE

No Alberta. You go on home now.

ALBERTA

You sure? I ain't got nothing to do right now no way. I could stay and keep you company.

CARRIE

No, I just want to be alone.

ALBERTA

Alright, if you say so. I'll come back by later on to check on you. You know how to find me if you need me.

(Stands to leave)

CARRIE

Berta?

ALBERTA

Yes, Carrie?

CARRIE

(Beat)

I...I..tell Bernie I'm going to need his help looking over some papers for me.

ALBERTA

I sure will, Carrie. I sure will.

(Exits porch. CARRIE sits back in her chair for awhile. The phone rings.)

CARRIE

Hello?...This Honey, who this? Oh yes, Deacon Robinson. Yes, I can hear you...yes sir...that's okay. I know you busy. Did you find anything?

(Beat)

Under the second oak tree on the east side, yes sir. Ricky Cleveland Honey 1950-1967.

(Beat)

You say it's still there. It ain't never been touched. Thank you Jesus...thank you Jesus.

(Beat)

Oh, Ms. Martha's husband? Oh Lord, I...I don't know which one. I expect it could be any of them. Tell her what? Well, you see, Ms. Martha...

(Beat)

Never mind. Okay, yes sir. Thank you Deacon Robinson. Thank you.

(TERRANCE runs past CARRIE's porch.)

TERRANCE

(Excited)

Ms. Honey, we did it. We did it. We elected our first black president. Can you believe it? I ain't been to sleep yet.

CARRIE

Terrance, hold on a second.

(CARRIE opens the screen door and steps inside briefly. Comes out holding a chewed up football.)

Here's your ball.

TERRANCE

Thank you ma'am.

CARRIE

Terrance

TERRANCE

Yes ma'am.

CARRIE

(Holds TERRANCE's hands)

You be careful over there, okay?

TERRANCE

I will.

(Beat)

It's a new day, Ms. Honey; a new day.

CARRIE

Yes, it is.

(TERRENCE exits porch. CARRIE spits out for the last time, before walking over to MS. MARTHA's chair. She slowly runs her hand over the top of the chair and reaches into her house coat pocket and pulls out her *I Voted* sticker and places it on MS. MARTHA's chair before exiting into the house. The song 'O Happy Day' plays.)

END OF PLAY.

