

ON GOD

A play with music
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*"I don't go to church anymore. **I know He still loves me.**"*

- Brittany Howard

*"If you tear down the people's landmarks, if you tear down the people's memorials, **there will come a time when there will be generations that will never know how great the people were.**"*

- Rev. Malcolm J. Byrd

*For my grandfather, **Rev. John D. Thomas.***

*For **Dr. H. T. Rhim**, who told me I would “write it down”.*

*For **Allison, Alicia, Gwendolyn, and Patricia.***

*For **New Galilee Missionary Baptist Church & St. Joseph Missionary Baptist Church.***

“Ever so in Black Bottom”

Characters:

Mahalia (26, 16)- Black, She/Her

Rev. L. T. Jackson- Late 40's/early 50's, Black, He/Him

Roberta- Late 50's/early 60's, Black, She/Her

Walter- Late 30's, Black, He/Him

Stacy (26, 16)- Black, She/Her

Bishop- 28, Black, He/Him

Band Members/Congregation (see note)

Place:

Babylon, GA

Time:

The past and present

NOTE:

A slash (/) indicates overlapping dialogue

Mahalia (26) and Mahalia (16) should be played by different actors. The same goes for Stacy (26) and Stacy (16). The actor playing Mahalia (16) also plays Girl/Brittany

The size of the congregation is up to the producing theater's capabilities. I never want this play to feel impossible due to the size of the cast. That being said, the minimum total cast size is eight, to account for our main cohort of actors. Past that, I support the creative decision that works for you. There's a world in which the congregation is huge/sprawling/ "impressive" and there's a world in which there is no physical congregation onstage and Roberta addresses the audience as though they were the congregation. What's most important to me is that it feels like the community has gathered to protect this place and that you do what you can to get a nice choral sound during the hymns. Live is always the most exciting, but I'm not opposed to recorded voices.

Prologue

In darkness:

We hear an organ come to life.

The zills of tambourines jingle softly.

Light slowly creeps into the space

And we begin to see faint streaks of white fabric

Piercing through the darkness.

As the light grows,

We discover the bodies housed beneath the fabric.

A young woman stands before us:

STACEY at **sixteen years old,**

Dressed in a white, full-length leotard

With long, flowing trains of fabric spilling from each sleeve

Like wings.

She begins a worship dance.

She twirls, stomps, claps, and (most importantly) reaches.

To something beyond herself.

Beyond this world.

She reaches into the universe.

The heavens.

To the ancestors.

To God.

Out of the sea of white,

A small figure appears.

MAHALIA at **sixteen years old.**

She takes us all in,

Takes a breath

And sings to us.

MAHALIA (16)

Why should I feel discouraged?

Why should the shadows come?

Why should my heart be lonely

And long for heaven and home,

When Jesus is my portion?

My constant friend is He:

His eye is on the sparrow,

And I know He watches me.

I sing because I'm happy,

I sing because I'm free,

MAHALIA (16)
His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know He watches me.

REV. L.T. JACKSON appears.
As does his **CONGREGATION**.

*L.T. stands in the pulpit,
Looking out over his flock.*

MAHALIA (16)
I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free,
For his eye is on the sparrow,
And I know he watches me.

*Another MAHALIA appears.
This one at twenty-six years old.*

She tunes a guitar.

MAHALIA (16)
I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free,
For his eye is on the sparrow,
And I know he watches me.

*The congregation claps and gives praise.
L.T. gestures for them to settle.
As they do, L.T. speaks.*

L.T.
May the church say "amen"?

CONGREGATION
Amen.

L.T.
I said, may the church say "amen"??

CONGREGATION
Amen!!

L.T.
Amen, amen.

L.T. (cont...)

(beat)

I wanna tell ya'll a story.
A story about the land we find ourselves on this morning.
Is that alright?
This story begins as so many stories of Black people in America do,
With fear, confusion, brutality, blood, and money.
With a group of kidnapped Black men and Black women
Chained together,
Stacked on top of each other
At the bottom of some ship,
Being transported like livestock.
But respected less.
With Black bodies hurling themselves into the abyss.
With tears for the deception that brought them there.
And with hearts beating so loud it shook the sea floor
As they approached the Southern maw that would become their home.

(beat)

This is how our story *begins*.
But bear with me.
It is not how it *ends*.
After many years of the most inhuman existence imaginable,
The country went to war with itself.
And, one fine morning, it was declared
“That all persons held as slaves are
And henceforward shall be free.”
My great-grandfather was a child then
And by the time he was a young man with a wife and child of his own
Freedom was still a far off dream in the South.
And the North was a cruel joke to a colored man with no money in his pockets.
My great-grandfather became determined to make a new life.
To wade through the heat and the swamp and carve out a little space.
Some tiny, unclaimed spot onto which he might build a paradise.
And, after a long search, he found it.
He surveyed the land and was reminded of a place he'd read about.
Oh yes, my great-grandfather could read.
A place some called “the gate of the Gods”.
He saw the way the sun shone through the trees,
And how the light would sometimes dance off the ripples of the creek,
And he thought to himself, “God really has passed through here”.
He called the place “Babylon”.
A fallen place from which he hoped to make a community rise.
He took his two hands, dug them into the earth, and claimed it for his own.
He sent word to every person he'd ever loved
And told them of a secret oasis he'd discovered.
He told them that if they were looking for a home in this world
This was it and they were welcome any time.

L.T. (cont...)

And the people came.

And a community was formed.

And a life was made.

The community tended to, built upon, and defended that land by any means.

All these years later, here we are.

(beat)

He built this church shortly after discovering Babylon.

It served not only as a place of worship,

But as a resting place for weary travelers,

[Some come to stay, others passing through].

He called it “The Heritage of Babylon.”

He planned to have it passed down from generation to generation.

It would be his legacy,

The legacy of his children,

And the legacy of all the children who came after.

For it says in the bible:

“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,

The fruit of the womb, a reward.

As arrows in the hand of a mighty man, so are the children of one’s youth.”

He takes a moment to let the words sink in.

L.T.

“As arrows in the hand of a mighty man,

So are the children of one’s youth.”

*Mahalia (26) is approached by her drummer, **BISHOP**.*

BISHOP

Mahalia, it’s time.

She nods to him and he exits.

She gets down on her knees and prays.

L.T.

I was not given sons,

As so many Fathers pray for.

I was different.

I hoped and prayed for a daughter.

Just one.

Meeting my wife was blessing enough, so I didn’t wanna be greedy.

I prayed for just one.

One daughter into whom I might pour all my hopes and dreams.

With whom I may equip all the tools to stand mighty in this hard world.

Who might hold my hand and walk with me as I approach my reward.

And she was given to me.

L.T. (cont...)

By the grace of God, Mahalia was given to me.
And I was pleased...for a time.
But, you see, it works both ways.
Children are a heritage and reward to us.
But only if they accept that we are a reward to them, as well.

*Mahalia (26) finishes her prayer and stands.
Her **BAND** is revealed.
They tune their instruments,
The air around them, electric.*

L.T. (cont...)

For the word also says:
“Honor thy Father and thy Mother,
That thy days may be long upon the land
Which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”
We can never let that commandment be lost.
(beat)
I try not to ask too much for myself in this place.
I was called to serve, not to beg.
But I must ask you to pray for my daughter, Mahalia.
As you’ve probably noticed, she hasn’t been here the last few Sundays.
I don’t know what else to say except to tell you that she is lost.
In body, in mind, and in spirit.
I don’t know exactly where she is, or exactly when she will return.
But I know she will.
I *know* it.
I know because I have faith that my God will bring her home.
I have prayed for it every night since she’s left.
And, if I’ve learned anything in this life, it’s to pray and trust.
So, pray not for her return.
But for her safety as she navigates the rough sea and the thousand temptations.
(beat)
We must all return to the place we are from.
Or we will be forever lost.
Our spirits will flee and we will be but flesh.
Wandering this Earth with an insatiable thirst, all the days of our lives.
We must return to our heritage.
However big or small.
We must return because it is ours.
It is ours and it will be forevermore.
In Jesus name,
Amen.

*Everything fades away
Save for Mahalia (26) and her band.
They launch into their first song: “FEAR”*

*It rips us from the elegance of the church world
And launches us into a smoke-filled room with a sticky floor.*

MAHALIA

(sung)

Run from the things that keep you awake (you're afraid! you're afraid!)
Hide it inside so it don't break (your shame! Your shame!)
The monster's alive it's threatening the life (you've made! You've made!)
Buried six feet in eternal sleep (your grave! Your grave! Your grave, your grave your grave
your grave!)

Confess your sins and find your bliss (you're saved! You're saved!)
You listen to voices inside your head but (you're sane! You're sane)
You're weakened still you need a pill (no pain! No pain!)

Taste the mud in the hole you dug (your waste! Your waste! Your waste your waste your
waste your waste!)
Run from the things that keep you awake (you're afraid! You're afraid!)
Hide it inside so it don't break (your shame! Your shame!)
The monster's alive it's threatening the life (you've made! You've made)
Buried six feet in eternal sleep (your grave! Your grave! Your grave your grave your grave
your grave!)

I'm burning alive!!!
I'm burning alive!!!
I'm burning alive!!!
I'm burning alive!!!

The song comes to an end.

MAHALIA

Thank you, Winston Salem!
We've been Mahalia and the Jacksons!
Stay blessed and good night!

*Mahalia stands covered in sweat.
A huge smile on her face.*

*Far behind her,
A funeral procession appears.
A looming casket, hoisted into the air.*

*In the distance,
The faint sound of a phone ringing.
It grows and grows until it dominates the space.*

*Mahalia is aware of none of this,
Her gaze fixed on the adoring crowd before her.*

The ringing comes to an end.

MAHALIA'S VOICEMAIL

What up, it's ya girl.
Sorry I missed you.
Leave a message after the beep and I'll hit you back soon.
Much love.

Beep!

ROBERTA (VO)

Hey sweet girl.
It's your Aunt Roberta.
Been a long time...

*A moment of suspension.
And then...
Blackout.*

1.

*Heritage of Babylon Missionary Baptist Church.
The Sanctuary.*

*The church is buzzing with activity.
Some members create protest signs.
Others bring in boxes and suitcases from outside.*

SISTER ROBERTA enters.

ROBERTA

(to a sign maker)

Be sure you make it big, alright?
We want EVERYBODY to see!
You hear me?

WALTER enters and approaches Roberta.

WALTER

Basement's almost set up.
Plenty of cots and sleeping bags.
We got more blankets and pillows than I think we need.

ROBERTA

We can never have too much warmth and comfort.

WALTER

Amen.
What do you need me to do now?

ROBERTA

Stay with me for a minute.

ROBERTA goes into the pulpit.

ROBERTA

Listen up, Saints!
Listen up!
I don't wanna slow ya'll down,
But I got something to say.
I wanna thank everybody for their hard work
And their willingness to show up and show out for our church.
Our home.
Our place of refuge.
Everyone is doing incredible work,

ROBERTA (cont...)

But I want to remind you all that the work is far from over.
Once we get everything set up in here, we surround the building.
I want every single body out there.
We are small but mighty!
Like David approaching Goliath, we will not yield.
Let's show these people that our heritage can't be taken from us!
They will try to intimidate us.
They will try to scare us.
But remember...
We serve a God of Love.
And Fear cannot exist where Love resides.
Can I get a witness up in here??

The members cheer, clap their hands, and stomp their feet.

ROBERTA

I said, CAN I GET A WITNESS UP IN HERE??

They cheer, clap, and stomp even louder.

ROBERTA

Yes sir!!
Now let's keep going until the work is done!

*Everyone goes back to their tasks,
Buzzing,
Energized.
Roberta sings.*

*As she does,
Mahalia(26) and Bishop enter unseen.*

ROBERTA

**What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!**

**O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!**

Roberta turns and sees Mahalia (26).

The world stops for a moment.

*Roberta slowly approaches.
They take each other in.*

ROBERTA

Hey stranger.

MAHALIA (26)

Hey Auntie.

ROBERTA

You got my voicemail.

MAHALIA (26)

I did.

ROBERTA

You didn't have to come.

MAHALIA (26)

I know I didn't *have* to.
But I'm here.

ROBERTA

(smiling wide)

Yes.

Yes, you are.

Well, alright.

MAHALIA (26)

This is Bishop.
He's my drummer.

Bishop extends his hand.

Roberta doesn't take it.

BISHOP

Afternoon, ma'am.

I don't know if you remember me, but-

ROBERTA

Oh, I remember you.

A tense beat.

Bishop lowers his hand.

ROBERTA

How's your Mama?

BISHOP

(beat)

I don't know.

ROBERTA

(beat)

Ya'll have any bags we can bring in?

MAHALIA (26)

They're in the car.

We didn't bring much.

Just a change of clothes and some essentials.

ROBERTA

How long ya'll plan on staying?

MAHALIA (26)

Just until tomorrow.

We got a hotel for the night.

Back on the road tomorrow.

ROBERTA

Oh.

I see.

MAHALIA (26)

Yeah.

It was lucky we had the next few nights off from tour.

ROBERTA

You still believe in luck, huh?

A beat.

ROBERTA

Well, then.

There's plenty to do.

We can get ya'll set up making signs or-

MAHALIA (26)

Actually,

I came because...

I came because I, uh...

I wanted to tell you to stop.

ROBERTA

(beat)

Excuse me?

MAHALIA (26)

You gotta stop.
You can't...
The city made their decision.
This land don't belong to us.
It's over.
It's been over for a while now.

ROBERTA

They can't take what ain't theirs.
I tried to be nice about it.
I tried to explain the history.
They didn't want to hear me.
I brought them the deed.
The deed what got your Daddy's name on it.
Not the city's name.
They didn't want to hear me.
I offered to pay them./
Give them everything I had.
They didn't want to hear me.

MAHALIA (26)

Pay them?
You don't have any money.

ROBERTA

How you know/ what I got?

MAHALIA (26)

Am I wrong?
Then why am I still sending you a check every month?

A beat.

*The question hangs in the air,
Making a bittersweet reunion into, simply, a bitter one.*

MAHALIA (26)

Auntie, look, I just...
It's a losing game.
They don't care about the history or whose name is on the deed.
They don't want your money.
There is no winning with these people.
I don't want to see you get hurt.

ROBERTA

So, now you're concerned about me?
Ten years, you don't come home.
Ten years, you barely pick up the phone.

ROBERTA (cont...)

Ten years, I can't get nothin' from you but a check.
Now you wanna come in here and act like you concerned about me?

MAHALIA (26)

Auntie-

ROBERTA

No, *I'm* talking.

(beat)

I called you as a courtesy.
Because I thought you might like to know
That your Daddy's legacy is about to be wiped off the face of the Earth.
I thought, maybe, that might mean something to you.
But I see I was wrong.

A beat.

ROBERTA

(to Bishop)

Nice to see you again, young man.
I hope you have a safe trip back.
Many blessings for the rest of your tour.
Check on your Mama while you're here.
I'm sure she'd love to see you.

*She starts to walk away.
Mahalia's voice stops her.*

MAHALIA (26)

Auntie, please, you gotta stop.
Tell me you'll stop and I'll go.
You'll never have to see or think about me ever again.
Just tell me you'll stop.

A beat.

ROBERTA

If you'd like to make a sign,
There's plenty of materials lying around.
We'll be heading outside in a little bit.
This train ain't stopping.
So...
Get on board...
Or leave.

She walks away.

MAHALIA (26)

Is Stacy around?

ROBERTA

(without stopping)

You'll see.

She exits.

Church members hum and work all around.

BISHOP

You alright?

MAHALIA (26)

No.

You?

BISHOP

No.

(beat)

I'm gonna step out for a smoke.

You want one?

MAHALIA (26)

Nah, I'm good.

Bishop exits.

Mahalia stands alone and takes in the space.

CONGREGATION

What a friend we have in Jesus,

All our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry

Everything to God in prayer!

We hear spirits in the distance.

Voices.

A confrontation hurtling closer and closer.

L.T. (O/S)

DON'T YOU WALK AWAY FROM ME WHEN I'M TALKING TO YOU!

MAHALIA!

We hear a door slam.

Mahalia (16) storms in.

Followed by LT.

L.T.

Little girl, I don't know what your problem is
But you don't walk away while I'm talking to you.

MAHALIA (16)

I'm sixteen years old, Daddy.

L.T.

I don't care how old you are.
Sixteen don't make you grown.
Sixteen don't make you old enough to drop out of school.

MAHALIA (16)

The law say-

L.T.

I DON'T CARE WHAT THE LAW SAY!

A beat.

L.T. takes a breath.

This little girl is about to give him a heart attack.

L.T.

I don't care what the law say.
Law don't pay no bills 'round here.
Law don't make no rules in my house.

I do.

I'm your Father

And I'm telling you, in no uncertain terms,
That you *will* finish school.

They will call your name,

You will walk across that stage,

And you will be handed a diploma.

Something nobody in our family has ever had.

But you will.

I don't care if I got to drag you up to that schoolhouse myself.

You *will* finish.

A beat.

MAHALIA (16)

Georgia law states

That the minimum age to leave high school is sixteen.

All that's required is written permission from a legal guardian.

Now, you can choose to provide that permission or not.

But my decision has been made.

The school year ends next week.

The last day of the year will also be my last day ever going to school.

MAHALIA (16, cont...)

That's not an idea, or a wish, or even a prayer.
It's a fact.

L.T.

Long as you live in my house,
You will abide by my rules.
That is a fact.
It is the *only* fact.

MAHALIA (16)

Then I guess I won't be living in your house.

They are eye to eye.
Both filled to the brim with pain.

A standoff.

LT opens his mouth to speak...
But he's got no more words left.

He breathes in his daughter,
A stranger,
And exits.

Once he's gone,
Mahalia (16)'s strong façade breaks.
She crumples onto the pulpit steps
And buries her head in her hands.

After a moment, Stacy (16) enters.
She slowly approaches.

STACY (16)

Hey.

MAHALIA (16)

Hey.

STACY (16)

You weren't at choir practice.

MAHALIA (16)

I quit the choir, Stace.
I told you that already.

STACY (16)

Oh, right.

STACY (16, cont...)

I didn't think it would stick.

MAHALIA (16)

Why not??

You don't take me seriously either?

STACY (16)

It's not that.

It's just...

You *always* talkin' bout leavin' the choir.

You been talkin' bout leavin' the choir since we was twelve years old.

So, it's not that I don't take you seriously.

It just got to be a little "boy who cried wolf" after a while.

MAHALIA (16)

Yeah, well, the wolf is here.

STACY (16)

I can see.

(beat)

How'd the Reverend take it?

MAHALIA (16)

Take a wild guess.

I'm sure you could hear him from downstairs.

STACY (16)

I could.

We ended early on account of all the screamin'.

But I'd like to hear it from you, please.

A beat.

They make eye contact for the first time.

Stacy (16)'s eyes make Mahalia (16) soften.

MAHALIA (16)

He took me quitting the choir better than expected.

He wasn't thrilled, but he saw it coming.

My step touches and tambourine banging skills ain't what they used to be.

Now, the dropping out part...

He didn't like that so much.

STACY (16)

Dropping out?

Dropping out of what?

MAHALIA (16)

School, Stace.
I'm dropping out of school.

STACY (16)

Seriously?

MAHALIA (16)

Dead serious.
I'm finishing up the year and then I'm done.
I might try to get my GED at some point.
But, after the year is over, I'm never stepping foot in that place again.
(reading the look on Stacy's face)
I just...
I can't do it.
I can't breathe when I'm there.
I already know what I want to do with my life
And none of it includes any of the shit they wanna teach me.
I don't like it there, I don't learn anything, I don't have any friends.

STACY (16)

I'm your friend.

A beat.

MAHALIA (16)

I know.

STACY (16)

What are you gonna do instead?

MAHALIA (16)

You remember Bishop?
Couple years ahead of us?
He's got a band up in Atlanta.
Before he left, he told me to call him if I was ever there.
He thinks I might be a good addition.

STACY (16)

So, you're just gonna go?

MAHALIA (16)

I think so.

A beat.

MAHALIA (16)

You mad at me?

STACY (16)

No.
I'm not mad.

MAHALIA (16)

You could come with me.

STACY (16)

And leave my Mama?
I don't...
I don't think she could survive that.

A beat.

MAHALIA (16)

I know this is a lot to ask...
But can I have your approval?
I just...
Nobody's gonna be on my side.
It would be easier knowing that *you* were.

STACY (16)

I don't know that approval is mine to give.
But you should go.
You should go because you want to.
Not because someone else says that you can.

(beat)

I can't tell you how I'm gon' to feel about it day to day.
But I can guarantee I'll miss you.

Stacy (16) takes Mahalia (16)'s hand.

STACY (16)

Will you just promise to call me?
And will you pick up when I call you?

Mahalia (16) looks deep into her eyes.

MAHALIA (16)

"Call to me
And I will answer you
And tell you great and unsearchable things
Which you do not know."
-Jeremiah 33:3

STACY (16)

Such a preacher's kid.

They laugh.

STACY (16)

Now, I gotta deal with Calvin all by my damn self.
Choir practice, church, school.
I'm never gonna get a break from that fool.

MAHALIA (16)

(laughing)

Oh my God!
I hadn't even thought about him.
Girl, I'm sorry, but I'll be glad to be away from him.

STACY (16)

I'm sure you will!

MAHALIA (16)

How was he at practice today?

STACY (16)

Creepy!
As usual.
Just STARING!
Like his eyes were glued to my ass.

MAHALIA (16)

I mean...
You do have a very watchable ass.

STACY (16)

What, you be lookin'?

MAHALIA (16)

Sometimes.

STACY (16)

Sometimes?

MAHALIA (16)

All the time.

They kiss.

A kiss for now and a kiss for the future, too

STACY (16)

Play me something.

MAHALIA (16)

Old or new?

STACY (16)

New.

Mahalia picks up her guitar.

MAHALIA (16)

Been working on this for a while.
Put this on the list of angsty acoustic ballads I've written.

STACY (16)

That's a pretty long list.

MAHALIA (16)

I'd argue with you, but you ain't wrong.

Mahalia (16) tunes her guitar and begins to play: ["PART OF IT ALL"](#).

MAHALIA (16)

**I got hurt, I got lost
Burned, double crossed
They say it's just a part of life**

**When they found I could bleed
They cut off my knees
And they didn't even know my name**

**You might think they care
They don't even know you're there
You've got a heart of gold
And they leave you in the cold**

**It's just a part of it all
Part of it all
Part of it all**

Mahalia (16) leans in and they kiss.

STACY (16)

You're very good at that, Mahalia.

MAHALIA (16)

I love the way you say my name.

STACY (16)

(softly)

Mahalia.

MAHALIA (16)

Again.

STACY (16)

(softer)

Mahalia.

MAHALIA (16)

Again.

Stacy cups her hand over Mahalia's ear as if to tell a secret.

STACY (26)

Mahalia.

The memory is broken.

The young spirits disappear

And we snap back to the present.

*Another **Stacy**, this one at **twenty-six years old**, has entered the sanctuary.*

MAHALIA (26)

Stacy?

A beat.

STACY (26)

Hey.

MAHALIA

Hey.

They take each other in.

The tension is thick and the room has become airless.

STACY (26)

Is your Aunt around?

MAHALIA (26)

She's downstairs.

Stacy starts to brush past her.

MAHALIA (26)

What are you doing here?

STACY (26)
Handling business.

MAHALIA (26)
What does that mean?

STACY (26)
You really don't know?

MAHALIA (26)
Know what?

A beat.

STACY (26)
I'm here in a professional capacity as the Community Liason for Davenport Realty.

MAHALIA (26)
I'm sorry, what?
You work for them?

STACY (26)
For five years now.
Started as an intern and worked my way up.
They finally trusted me to handle a job alone.
She's downstairs, you said?

MAHALIA (26)
Are you really gonna do this?

A beat.

STACY (26)
I'm gonna do my job.
What they write me a check to do.
You can understand that, can't you?

A beat.

MAHALIA (26)
I...
I uh...
I been wanting to talk to you about-

STACY (26)
Let's not.
Soon this will all be over.
And we can go back to pretending the other doesn't exist.

MAHALIA (26)

I don't pretend you don't exist.

STACY (26)

Yeah, well, I do.

I pretend I never knew you.

Bishop enters with two backpacks and a guitar case.

BISHOP

Yo, Stacy Anderson??

It's been a minute!

He puts down the guitar and extends his hand.

BISHOP

I don't know if you remember me, but-

She blows past him without a word.

BISHOP

(lowering his hand)

I think I'm just gonna give up on shaking hands today.

Roberta and Walter enter.

Roberta goes directly to Stacy.

ROBERTA

Where's Theresa?

STACY (26)

Just me today.

I'll be the lead on this project going forward.

ROBERTA

They're sending you to do their dirty work now?

STACY (26)

They sent me to help you.

ROBERTA

They sent you to be a Black face they can blame when things go left.

You're a smart girl, Stacy.

Act like it.

A beat.

STACY (26)

This is happening whether you like it or not.
This building and the land it sits on belongs to us.
Davenport Realty.
This place needs to be boarded up, fenced off, and wired for demolition by end of day.
I'm here to ensure that that happens.

ROBERTA

I don't really care what you're here to do.

A stand off.

STACY (26)

The trucks will be on their way soon.
And, because this could be deemed a hostile situation,
It's possible that the police might be on their way with them.
That doesn't have to be the case.
It's up to me to decide whether or not that course of action is necessary.
And I really don't want it to be.
I have absolutely no interest in working with the police.
But, if you refuse to cooperate...
They're on call, Ms. Jackson.
Ready and waiting.
For my request.
Now, I would love nothing more than tell them I've got it handled.
And that they're services won't be needed.
If you clear out right now, that's exactly what I'll do.
But, if you don't...
I will not hesitate to utilize all the power I have at my disposal.

ROBERTA

I'm not afraid of the police.
Or you.
Or whatever power you think you have.
I have power of my own.
I walk in it every minute, of every hour, of every day.
I'm not naïve.
I know I can't guarantee victory.
To do that, I'd have to pretend to know God's plan.
And I gave that up a long time ago.
But I can guarantee that I will fight until the very end.
I know what they want.
They want this to be easy.
They want me to just give it to them.
That will never happen.
This is my family's legacy.
I'll be long cold and dead before I let it go.
If you want it, you'll have to take it.

STACY (26)

You do understand we're prepared to do just that?
Don't you?

ROBERTA

I do.

A beat.

STACY (26)

Have it your way.

She begins to exit.

She stops short and turns back to them.

STACY (26)

You're Walter, right?

WALTER

What?

STACY (26)

Walter Green.

That's you, right?

WALTER

Yes ma'am.

STACY (26)

How's the habit?

WALTER

(beat)

Kicked it.

STACY (26)

Good for you.

I'll be sure to tell the boys in blue that you're here.

I'm sure they'll be thrilled to see you.

Been a long time.

She exits.

Roberta goes to a visibly shaken Walter.

She takes his hand.

ROBERTA

It's okay.

You're okay.

ROBERTA (cont...)

Don't you worry about nothin'.

I got you.

You trust me?

Walter nods nervously.

ROBERTA

I need to hear you, baby.

WALTER

I trust you.

ROBERTA

Have I let you down yet?

WALTER

No.

Never.

ROBERTA

Never, not once.

And I'm not about to start now.

(beat)

Don't be scared.

They want you to be scared.

(to the rest of the room)

They want us all to be scared!

We're not gonna give them that!

We do not know fear!

We do not open our hearts or our minds to fear!

(to Walter)

For our God is a God of what?

WALTER

(softly)

Love.

ROBERTA

I SAID OUR GOD IS A GOD OF WHAT???

WALTER

(strong)

LOVE!

ROBERTA

YES SUH!

AND FEAR CANNOT EXIST

WALTER
WHERE LOVE RESIDES!

ROBERTA
FEAR CANNOT EXIST

WALTER
WHERE LOVE RESIDES!

ROBERTA
I'm not gonna let anything happen to you.
(to the room)
I'm not gonna let anything happen to any of you!
Change of plans.
No more standing outside.
Tape the signs to the windows.
Walter, go down to the basement and into the storage closet.
I want you to grab the biggest chains we got.
I want every entrance chained shut.
If anyone wants to leave, you'd better do it now.
We're Joe Clark-ing it.

*Walter and the congregation goes to work.
Mahalia (26) approaches her aunt.*

MAHALIA (26)
Auntie, what are you doing?

ROBERTA
(to Bishop)
Young man.
Make yourself useful and help Walter.

Bishop hesitates and looks to Mahalia.

ROBERTA
Boy.
Either go help or get out.

BISHOP
Yes ma'am.

He goes.

MAHALIA (26)
You can't do this.

ROBERTA

Child please.

I'm grown.

Don't you come up in here telling me what I can and can't do.

MAHALIA (26)

You can't just hold people hostage in here.

ROBERTA

Ain't nobody being held hostage.

Everybody here because they wanna be here.

MAHALIA (26)

You're not thinking this through.

You're not thinking straight.

ROBERTA

Little girl,

I'm as sharp as I ever been.

Believe that.

Now, you wanna stay or go?

Cos you gettin' on my last nerve.

MAHALIA (26)

I don't know what you think you're doing.

Whether you think this is some kind of sit-in or peaceful protest or whatever.

But it *will not* work.

None of this belongs to us anymore.

Demolition is set.

We can't be here.

That's the law.

ROBERTA

When did you become an expert on the law?

MAHALIA (26)

Auntie, you gotta face it.

You can't keep holding on to this place.

It ain't yours.

You can't hold on to what ain't yours.

A beat.

ROBERTA

You really are lost.

You're not wrong...

It ain't mine.

It's *yours*.

ROBERTA (cont...)

Or have you forgotten?
Your Daddy left this place to you.
Had it in his will since the day you were born.
Nobody in this family ever had a will before.
But he did.
Because he *knew* he wanted you to have it.
And he wanted to make sure nothing got in the way of that.
But look at you.
Ain't stepped foot in here once since he died,
And you wanna be mad at me for trying to protect it?
Have you forgotten the hands that built this place?
The blood in your veins?
Does legacy mean nothing to you?

Mahalia has no answer.

ROBERTA

How 'bout I let you think on that for a minute?
In the meantime, I got work to do.

MAHALIA (26)

This is insane.
People could get hurt.

ROBERTA

You scared?
Where's your *luck* now?

A beat.

ROBERTA

If you're scared, there's the door.
We can't do nothin' with that in here.

MAHALIA (26)

Auntie-

ROBERTA

Stop whining!
You ain't a little girl no more.
You a grown woman.
Act like it.
Stay or go.
Make no difference to me.
But, if you stay, you need to be all in.
Ain't no half steppin' with this.
Make a decision and stick to it.

ROBERTA (cont...)

You've done it before.

Do it again.

Now, you stayin' or goin'?

A beat.

MAHALIA (26)

Why didn't you tell me she was working for them?

A beat.

ROBERTA

Ain't that some shit?

A moment of suspension.

And then...

Something magical happens...

The space transforms...

Until...

A Testimony

“The first time I knew God was real” #1- Walter

An intimate space.

A confessional space.

Walter stands before us.

WALTER

My name is Walter Green,

And I'm an addict.

(beat)

I know this isn't a meeting,

But that's how I've grown accustomed to introducing myself.

I hope that's okay.

I've been sober for eight years now.

It would be ten,

But...

There were some bumps in the beginning.

(beat)

When I was using,

The church was just a place I could go to get a free meal every once in a while.

During the week,

I'd find a way to scrape together just enough food to keep me standing.

Then, on Saturday or Sunday afternoons,

I'd find a church offering a hot meal.

Or one with a box of non-perishables out front.

The food was free,

But it came with a cost.

You had to sit there and listen to people try to save your soul the whole time.

Lead you to Christ.

Share the “good news” with you.

I hated that shit.

Excuse my language.

It just...

My life was hell.

It had always been hell.

It was always going to be.

So, why try and save myself from a place I'd already been?

I just didn't see the use.

One day, a Saturday morning,

A friend told me there was a place doing a free pancake breakfast.

I couldn't remember the last time I had pancakes.

So, we went.

I was sitting alone,

WALTER (cont...)

(My friend was very social, I was not)
Eating my pancakes, drinking a coffee, and reading the newspaper.
All of a sudden, this woman sat across from me
And I already knew what I was in for.

Roberta appears

WALTER

She asked me,

ROBERTA

Do you know about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

WALTER

Yes, but we aren't really friends.

ROBERTA

Would you like to be?
Friends with Jesus, I mean.

WALTER

No, I'm good on friends.
Don't need anymore.
(beat)
She looked at me for a moment,
Then she said,

ROBERTA

Okay, sweetheart.
Enjoy your meal.
Get seconds if you want.
Or a to-go plate.
There's plenty to go around.

WALTER

Then, she got up and left.

She disappears.

WALTER

I thought "Damn, that was easy."
The easiest it had ever been to get one of those people to leave me alone.
I enjoyed the rest of my food in peace.
Later, when I was leaving, I ran into her outside.

She reappears, smoking a cigarette.

WALTER

She was smoking a cigarette and asked if I wanted to join her.
I've never been one to turn down a free smoke,
And I wasn't gonna start then.
We stood there in silence the whole time.
I ashed my cigarette and said thank you and goodbye.
As I was walking away, she said,

ROBERTA

Hey.
Tomorrow's Youth Sunday.
The kids run the show.
They sing, they dance, we're done before one o'clock.
Most importantly, we have fun.
And there's food after.
Service starts at eleven.
It'd be great to have you there.

WALTER

I told her I'd think about it.

ROBERTA

That's all I can ask.

WALTER

And she went inside.

She disappears.

WALTER

I hadn't planned on going,
But...
I don't know.
I couldn't stop thinking about it.
The rest of the day and all night.
I thought about it.
The next morning, I said,
And excuse my language again,
"Fuck it. Why not?"
So, I went.
I got there late, but I went.
I sat in the way back.
Closest to the door, in case I needed to escape.
When I sat down, the first thing I saw was a young boy.
Couldn't have been older than twelve or thirteen.
He was dressed in black.
With white gloves and white face paint.

WALTER (cont...)

Like a mime.

*A young boy is revealed
With white gloves
And white face paint.*

WALTER

I, honestly, wanted to laugh, at first.
“Is this what church folk be getting up to?”
Then, the music started.

An organ begins to play

WALTER

The choir began,
And the boy started to act out every word they sang.
Every syllable, really.
It was almost a dance, but not quite.
It was...
Looking back on it,
I wasn't that much older than that boy.
I was in my twenties.
But inside,
I felt like I'd been around forever.
And that no one,
Especially not some twelve-year-old,
Could possibly understand the hell I lived in.
But somehow, in that moment,
This young boy was able to capture my entire life experience
And reflect it back to me in a matter of minutes.

*A voice comes out of thin air.
The boy begins to move,
Acting out every syllable.*

SOLO VOICE

**I need Thee every hour,
Most gracious Lord;
No tender voice like Thine,
Can peace afford.
I need Thee, O I need Thee,
Every hour I need Thee!
O bless me now, Savior,
I come to Thee.**

*A choir of voices join.
The boy continues to move.
His body a vessel for something unspeakable.
Unknowable.
Each movement,
Each gesture,
Each expression,
A miracle.
Eventually, the song comes to an end.
And the boy disappears.*

WALTER

That moment saved my life.
Roberta saved my life.
I love her.
I would walk through fire for her.
I'd never felt that way about anyone before.
Recognizing that feeling...
That's when I knew God was real.

Blackout.

2.

Lights up.

Back in the present.

The Sanctuary.

Signs cover the windows,

Dulling the sunlight coming through.

Bishop finishes chaining up the front door.

He shakes the door to make sure it's secure.

Mahalia enters.

BISHOP

Yo, this is crazy.

MAHALIA (26)

I know.

BISHOP

Are we really gonna lock ourselves in here?

MAHALIA (26)

You tell me.

You're the one chaining doors.

BISHOP

Only because your Auntie told me to!

That woman is scary.

MAHALIA (26)

Yeah.

I came here all ready to be grown.

One look from her and I'm a teenager again.

BISHOP

When are you gonna tell her?

A beat.

MAHALIA (26)

Soon.

BISHOP

If you tell her, maybe she'll call this whole thing off.

MAHALIA (26)

Yeah, maybe.

BISHOP

Just tell her the deal was too good to pass up, you know?
We needed the money.
She'll understand.

MAHALIA (26)

I admire your optimism, but I doubt that.

BISHOP

Okay, maybe she won't.
But she'll get over it, right?
Time heals all.
But if you don't tell her,
This could get bad.

MAHALIA (26)

I KNOW!
Alright?!
I know that!
Just...

A beat.

Mahalia composes herself.

MAHALIA (26)

Just give me some space.
Okay?
I'm gonna figure this out.

A beat.

Walter enters.

Bishop and Mahalia try to act natural.

WALTER

How we looking out here?

BISHOP

Got the door chained up.
Nobody's getting in without a struggle.

WALTER

Good.
I think we're all set.
I appreciate the help, youngblood.

He extends his hand.

Bishop looks at the hand,

Looks back to Walter,

*And takes it.
Finally!
They shake.*

*Roberta stands in the pulpit.
She looks out at the congregation.*

ROBERTA

I just wanna look at you all for a moment.
Here in this place.
It is a beautiful sight.

(beat)

God said, "For where two or three are gathered in my name,
There I am in the middle of them."
Those words have never been truer than they are today.
We may be few
But we come in the name of God.
And, in that name, we will flourish.

(beat)

As I stand here, I'm reminded of so much.
Those four little girls in Alabama.
Addie Mae Collins,
Cynthia Wesley,
Carole Robertson,
Carol Denise McNair.
Whose lives and futures were stolen from them all those years ago.
Four vulgar white men,
Men with whose names I wouldn't dare taint the air we breathe,
Took the lives of four innocent Black girls.
I was a little girl myself then,
And all I could think was "That could've been me."

(beat)

I'm reminded of what happened in South Carolina.
At Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church.
When a young white man entered that holy space
And stole eight lives.
Clementa C. Pinckney,
Cynthia Marie Graham Hurd,
Susie Jackson,
Ethel Lee Lance,
Depayne Middleton-Doctor,
Tywanza Sanders,
Daniel L. Simmons,
Sharonda Coleman-Singleton,
Myra Thompson.
I was far from being a little girl when I heard that news.

ROBERTA (cont...)

But it took me back to the time when I was.
And, again, all I could think was “That could’ve been me.”

(beat)

Both events took place in churches.
A place where we were meant to feel safe.
One of the few small spaces,
In the midst of this huge country,
Where Black people can join together in fellowship
And thank God for another day.
Another week.
Another year.
They took a place of peace,
And turned it into a battlefield.
That is what they mean to do today.

*Mahalia (16) and Stacy (16) appear, hand in hand.
They stare directly at Mahalia (26)*

ROBERTA

We come today in the name of God.
As well as in the names of my ancestors.
My great-grandfather, Rev. Leonard Jackson, built this place.
My grandfather, Rev. Lucas Jackson,
And my father, Rev. Lester Bernard Jackson, put air in its lungs.
My brother, Rev L.T. Jackson, made it sing.
And God has kept it standing this long.
It’s up to us to fight for it now.
Our opposers wish to steal from us.
To destroy us.
And call it “progress”.
But we ain’t gon’ let them do it!

The congregation reacts.

ROBERTA

I said WE AIN’T GON’ LET THEM DO IT!

They react again.

ROBERTA

THEY TRY TO BURN US DOWN,
BUT WE STILL HERE!
THEY SHOOT AT US,
BUT WE STILL HERE!
THERE AIN’T A BOMB IN EXISTENCE
THAT CAN KILL MY FAITH!

ROBERTA (cont...)

AIN'T A GUN THEY CAN MANUFACTURE
THAT CAN KILL MY SOUL!

WE HERE!

AND HERE WE WILL REMAIN!

CAN I GET AN AMEN!

WALTER

AMEN!

L.T. appears, staring directly at Mahalia (26)

*Mahalia (26) looks back at her former self and her long-deceased father.
The walls seem to be closing in around her.*

ROBERTA

AMEN AGAIN!

WALTER

AMEN!

A moment of suspension.

And then—

Something magical happens.

A Testimony

“The first time I knew God was real” #2- Bishop

BISHOP

I don't really go in for all the God stuff.
I apologize if me saying that offends you in any way.
That's, truly, not my intention.
I'm not a person who finds religion silly or stupid.
Or one of those people who thinks being an atheist makes me cool.
(Or, at least, cooler than anyone else.)
It just doesn't...
Do it for me.
Religion, I mean.
I have plenty of religious friends.
Mahalia, my best friend, included.
And I know that sounds eerily similar to when people say,
“I have plenty of Black friends”.
And, believe me, I hate clichés as much as the next person.
But...it's the truth.
I was raised religious.
Both of my parents were Baptists.
God fearing people.
People who really tried to put God first.
But they were also addicts.
So...
People contain multitudes, I guess.
(beat)
My Dad died when I was three years old.
I don't remember him at all, really.
But I'm told I look just like him.
So, there's that.
My Mom got clean after he died.
But it didn't last.
Some people can do the single parent thing.
Some people excel at it.
My Mom is not one of those people.
She was good at the day to day.
She went to work,
She walked me home from school most days,
I had all my meals,
She even showed me a decent amount of affection.
I could've used more, I think.

BISHOP (cont...)

But I certainly didn't go without.
By all accounts she was a good Mom for a certain amount of time.
Then...
After a while...
I think she just got hit with a crushing loneliness.
She had me pretty young.
I'm not sure if she'd ever been with anyone besides my Dad.
And, compared to the decent amount of affection that I received,
She received almost none.
So, she started bringing men home.
Some just for a night,
Others for longer.
Out of all of them, I can't name one I care to remember.
I can name a few that are hard for me to forget.
Not for lack of trying.
I could definitely name a few of those...
But I won't.
I'll save that for my therapist.
What I will say is...
Those men did things to me and my mother that I will never forget.
Nor will I forgive.
And, for a long time, I was mad at God.
Furious that he would allow this shit to happen to me.
I, who had done nothing to deserve it.
I was a child.
I hadn't done much to deserve *anything*.

A beat.
He collects himself.
Finds his peace.

BISHOP

I was bad in school.
I got in trouble a lot.
But I liked school more than home.
So, I never did anything bad enough to get suspended or anything.
I joined the school band because it allowed me to stay in school until five.
Instead of the usual three.
Those extra two hours were everything to me.
I learned to play anything they'd let me try.
But the drums...
Drums were my favorite.
They required skill, focus, and control.
AND you could really clang and bang and make some noise.
Best of both worlds.
One day, after practice,
I was packing up my kit and I heard a voice from down the hall.

BISHOP (cont...)

The choir rehearsed down there.

So, it wasn't uncommon to hear singing from time to time.

They never sang anything worth mentioning.

The same bullshit songs in latin that nobody understood over and over again.

But, this time...

(And here I go again with the clichés)

This time was different.

We hear a distant voice singing "Ave Maria"

I walked down the hall and peeked through the door.

And that's the first time I saw Mahalia.

Mahalia (16) appears, singing

She had the most amazing voice I'd ever heard in my life.

Power, control, range.

She blew my mind that day.

Irreversibly.

(beat, he listens to her sing for a moment)

I ran into her outside afterwards.

(The truth is, I waited for her to finish and come out.

But I like to say it was a coincidence.

Sounds cooler.

And I am both indifferent to being cool and totally obsessed with being cool.)

I ran into her.

And I said "Hey!"

MAHALIA (16)

(confused as to why this person is talking to her)

Hey.

BISHOP

I heard you singing in there.

MAHALIA (16)

Oh yeah?

BISHOP

Yeah.

It was amazing.

MAHALIA (16)

It was "Ave Maria".

Been sung a million times.

Nothing special.

BISHOP

Is that what that song's called?
Well, I like it.
It sounded pretty special to me.
(beat)

Ya know...
I'm putting a band together pretty soon with some friends of mine in Atlanta.
If you ever find yourself there, you should hit me up.

Mahalia just stares at him.

BISHOP

I can give you my number, if you want it.
(to us)
And then she just stared at me for a while.
Longer than felt comfortable.
And said...

MAHALIA (16)
I'm gay.

BISHOP

(the truth)
Yeah, me too.
Don't flatter yourself.
(to us)
She handed me her shitty flip phone and I put my number in.
I didn't hear from her for a few days.
Then, eventually, I get a text at two in the morning on a school night.
It read:

MAHALIA (16)
Hey Sugar,
You know who it is.
Thanks 4 the compliment the other day.
I like that song too.
xo,
Mahalia

BISHOP

I knew we were gonna be best friends after that.

Mahalia (16) disappears.

BISHOP

I'm at a point now where I'm no longer mad at God.
I can't pinpoint the exact moment it happened.
I think I just got tired of blaming God for things *people* did.

BISHOP (cont...)

My Mom called me a year or two ago and told me she was clean.
She went to a program and found God again.
I'm happy for her.
She deserves some peace in her life.
Some forgiveness.
And I'm glad God can be the one to give it to her.
Because it can't be me.
Which is why when Mahalia and I were in the car on our way here,
And she asked:

Mahalia (26) appears.

MAHALIA (26)

Do you think you'll visit your Mom while we're there?

BISHOP

The only response I could muster was...
(to Mahalia)
No, I don't think I will.

*Mahalia takes his hand.
They share a smile.*

3.

Outside.

The back entrance of the church.

Tucked away from everyone else.

STACY (26)

How long are we expected to play this game?

You have to understand just how unusual this is.

MAHALIA (26)

I understand.

STACY (26)

Do I need to remind you that you signed a contract?

A contract that states very clearly that your final payment is contingent upon a successful demolition.

MAHALIA (26)

You don't need to remind me.

STACY (26)

Great.

So, what are we doing?

What is this?

You said you had it handled.

MAHALIA (26)

I do.

It's just...

My auntie's having a hard time letting go.

STACY (26)

I can see that.

A beat.

STACY (26)

Do you know what might aid the process?

Telling her the truth.

If you won't, maybe we should.

MAHALIA (26)

You can't do that.

Davenport Realty made a deal.

That deal dictates that the particulars of the sale not be disclosed to outside parties.

STACY (26)

I'm well aware of that.

And we've done everything we can possibly do on our part to honor that deal.

When your aunt came demanding answers, we gave her every reason we had.

We pointed to the many outstanding loans, the missed payments, the building violations.

We got the mayor to write a letter reinforcing our authority to go through with the project.

We did everything short of telling her the ultimate truth.

Everything short of handing her the contract with your signature on it.

Because, like you said, we have a deal.

And we, myself and all of us at Davenport realty, try to conduct ourselves as professionals who honor the deals we make.

But you have to understand, professionalism can only last so long before it is replaced by a kind of brutality.

In this case, that brutality comes in the form of honesty.

And, honestly, Mahalia, we really don't care about the deal anymore.

We're exhausted by it.

It's holding us back.

Making us slow.

It's time to move on.

MAHALIA (26)

Look, I just need a little more time.

STACY (26)

We've given you all the time we can spare.

In fact, we've given you more.

MAHALIA (26)

Please, just...

STACY (26)

The police will be here soon and we can put this whole thing to bed.

MAHALIA (26)

You don't have to do that!

Just let me-

STACY (26)

It's already done.

A beat.

MAHALIA (26)

If I'd known you were working for them.

That you'd be here...

That it would be like this...

STACY (26)

You wouldn't have taken the money and run?

Let's be serious.

No need to play the morality game now.

Once this is all over, your final payment will come via mail.

Is the PO Box we have on file still good?

A beat.

STACY (26)

I'll take that as a yes.

She exits.

Mahalia is left alone.

4.

The sanctuary.

Walter peeks out a window.

ROBERTA

What do you see?

WALTER

Demo crew's here.

No police.

(beat)

What do we do now?

ROBERTA

Nothin' to do but wait.

Find some stillness, while we can.

But, before that, come help me double check all the locks.

Then, we can rest.

WALTER

Yes, ma'am.

They exit.

The group chatters quietly amongst themselves.

Bishop and Mahalia (26) sit next to each other.

BISHOP

You alright?

MAHALIA (26)

No.

You?

BISHOP

No.

What's the plan?

MAHALIA (26)

I don't know.

BISHOP

We play The Tabernacle tomorrow.

MAHALIA (26)

I know that.

BISHOP

It's Friday.
We go to jail tonight, we ain't gettin' out until Monday.
If they let us out.

MAHALIA (26)

(beat)
I know that, too.
Just give me a minute to think.
I just need...

A beat.

She can't get her thoughts in order.

*She picks up the thing that makes the most sense to her:
Her guitar.
She softly plucks some strings.
She starts playing a few chords from "Part of it All"*

A small girl around the age of twelve or thirteen approaches.

GIRL

Hi.

MAHALIA (26)

Hey.

GIRL

I like your guitar.

MAHALIA (26)

Well, thank you, sweetness.
I like your hair.

GIRL

Thank you.
I know who you are.

MAHALIA (26)

Oh, yeah?

GIRL

I listen to your music.
Mahalia and the Jacksons.
I listen to it all the time.

MAHALIA (26)

That's the nicest thing anyone's said to me all day.

Do you like it?

My music, I mean.

GIRL

I love it.

My Mom didn't used to let me play it in the house.

She said it was "noisy".

MAHALIA (26)

(a small laugh)

I've been told that before.

GIRL

I saved up and bought a really nice pair of headphones.

Now, I can listen to it whenever I want.

MAHALIA (26)

Nice.

I did the same thing when I was your age.

BISHOP

Me too.

GIRL

(to Bishop)

Who are you?

BISHOP

I'm Bishop.

I'm in the band, too.

I'm the drummer.

GIRL

Oh, cool!

BISHOP

Did you like the new album?

GIRL

I did!

But, if I can be honest, the first album is my favorite.

BISHOP

That's not an unfair opinion.

We've heard that before.

GIRL

The new album is great!
But...
Nevermind.

BISHOP

No, no, say it.

GIRL

It's not important.

BISHOP

Of course, it is!
Fan opinions are always important.
You can say absolutely anything you want to say to me.

GIRL

(beat)
I thought the song selection was amazing.
It had a really clear, solid arc.
But...
I felt like the drums were a bit...
Busy...
On a few tracks.

BISHOP

(beat)
Oh.

GIRL

I just felt like you could do more with less.

BISHOP

(at a loss for words)
Yeah, totally...
That's...
That's great feedback.
Thank you.
(looks to Mahalia)
What a day.

GIRL

(to Mahalia)
But I love all the bonus acoustic stuff!
It was nice to hear things paired down.
It made the songwriting shine through.
That song you were playing...
It's my favorite.

MAHALIA (26)

“Part of it All”?

How do you know that song?

GIRL

It’s on SoundCloud.

MAHALIA (26)

I uploaded that when I was sixteen years old.

It wasn’t even under my real name.

It was my old AOL Instant Messenger name/BLACK-

GIRL

BLACKPARADEGIRL93.

MAHALIA (26)

How did you...

GIRL

Some fans did some digging and figured out it was you.

There’s a Reddit thread about it.

MAHALIA (26)

The fucking internet, man.

You hearing this, Bishop?

BISHOP

I am.

Apparently, we have fans.

MAHALIA (26)

Apparently.

Hey, what’s your name?

GIRL

Brittany.

MAHALIA (26)

It’s nice to meet you, Brittany.

BRITTANY

It’s nice to meet you too, Mahalia.

MAHALIA (26)

Do you play?

BRITTANY

Only a little bit.

BRITTANY (cont...)

I'm still working on it.

MAHALIA (26)

(holding out the guitar)

You know how to play "Part of it All"?

BRITTANY

I do, but...

MAHALIA (26)

Play it for me.

BRITTANY

Oh, I don't think I can do that.

MAHALIA (26)

Why not?

BRITTANY

I'm too...nervous.

I can't play in front of you.

You're...

MAHALIA (26)

Just a person, stuck in here like everybody else.

Look, I don't wanna make you do something you don't wanna do.

I just...

The first time I played that song was in this room.

Sitting in almost this exact spot.

I stopped playing it a long time ago.

It's one of those songs that sounds best when sung by a teenager.

Some songs are just like that.

If you'd do me the honor of letting me hear it the way it was meant to be heard...

That would truly mean the world to me, right now.

Mahalia holds out the guitar to Brittany.

A moment.

She takes it.

BRITTANY

Sorry if I mess up.

MAHALIA (26)

You won't.

Brittany begins to play.

It starts soft and shy

*But gains confidence with every note.
She sings.*

BRITTANY

**I got hurt, I got lost
Burned, double crossed
They say it's just a part of life**

**When I turned to run
They found my place in the sun
And they didn't even know my name**

**You might think they care
They don't even know you're there
You've got a heart of gold
And they leave you in the cold**

**It's just a part of it all
Part of it all
Part of it all**

MAHALIA (26)

Beautiful.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

A loud knocking at the main entrance interrupts.

Everyone looks toward it.

Silence.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

*It grows and grows.
Echoing through the space.
Something magical happens and...*

A Testimony

“The first time I knew God was real” #3- Mahalia

MAHALIA (26)

The thing I remember most,
Growing up in the church,
Is Fourth Sunday.
First Sunday was communion.
My Father would preach the sermon.
Second Sunday was, honestly, a bit of a throw away.
Minister Scott would preach.
He was much older than my Dad.
It was always a pretty boring day.
Unless Mother's Day rolled around and there was dinner after.
Other than that, I could take it or leave it.
Third Sunday was "Youth Sunday".
Which was, basically, a full-scale takeover.
Youth choir, youth ushers, youth pastor.
It was, low-key, just a talent show.
A whole lotta dancing and gospel rap.
Me playing my guitar and singing some angsty song I'd written
To a crowd of very confused old black people.
And us trying to see what we could get away with in front of the adults.
Little did we know, they didn't care even a little bit.
They just knew we were gonna get out of there well before one o'clock.
Which everybody needed after two Sunday's of skipping lunch.
Fourth Sunday, the best Sunday, was Testimony Sunday.
Instead of a sermon,
My Dad would invite anyone from the congregation to stand and give testimony.
It was an incredible thing to bear witness to.
People would stand in front of the church,
People who were not public speakers in any right.
In front of people they see every Sunday.
And share their greatest fears, shames, and accomplishments.
Thanking God for seeing them through
And calling on us to keep them in prayer.
It's the greatest community experience I've ever been a part of.
Even live music doesn't quite compare.

*Mahalia (16) appears.
She tunes her guitar.*

MAHALIA (26)

Sometimes, if there was any reluctance or hesitancy from people to share,
My Dad would invite people to come up and answer this question:
“When was the first time you knew God was real?”
Some heard a voice.
Or voices.
Some just felt Him in the room.
Or in their spirit.
Some knew when they were children.
Some didn’t know until much later in life.
Others were still trying to figure it out.
No one judged or commented.
We all just listened.
Because we understood that bearing witness
Was as important as the testimony itself.
I never got up and told my story.
Mostly because it hadn’t happened yet.
I believed in God because I was told he existed.
Because God was my Dad’s job.
And I couldn’t just get up there and make something up.
I was not gifted in the art of improvisation and I was a terrible liar.
So, I just sat and listened to everyone else.
Even some of my closest friends.
I could tell my Dad was a little disappointed every time.
But he never said anything about it.
My Dad had his flaws,
But he never rushed me into anything.
He let me figure things out in my own time.
Even when it was painful for him.

*Bishop appears.
He sits behind his drum kit.*

MAHALIA (26)

I didn’t have my moment until I’d already left home.
I’d gone to Atlanta and met up with Bishop.
He already knew I could sing, but he wanted to know if I could play.
I was just okay at the time.
I thought I was hot shit, but I was just okay.
I can see that now.
He took me to this house he shared with his band mates in Stone Mountain.
We stood in the garage and he told me to play something.
Anything.
So, I played one of my angsty tunes from Youth Sunday.
Eventually, he sat behind his kit and started to improvise around me.
Just sort of responding to what I was giving him.
It was magic.

Mahalia (16) and Bishop play: "OH MY GOD"

MAHALIA

(sung)

*Somewhere someone told me
That you were just a fake
And somewhere someone told me
That you won't be there for the end of days*

So please, please believe oh, oh how I need

Oh my God

Oh my God where'd you go? where'd you go? x2

*Somewhere someone told me
That you might show your face
And somewhere someone told me
That you won't be there for the end of days*

So please, please believe oh, and oh don't you say

Oh my God

Oh my God where'd you go? where'd you go? x2

MAHALIA (26)

When we finished, I checked the time
And realized we'd been playing for an hour and a half.
In that time, I felt like I'd known him my whole life.
Like we were born at the exact same time.
That's when I knew God was real.

*Police lights pour into the space,,
Bleeding through the covered windows.
She looks toward them.
Blackout.*

5.

*We snap back to the present.
At that back entrance again.
Revealing Mahalia (26) and Stacy (26).
A beat.*

STACY (26)

What's your plan?

*A beat.
Mahalia doesn't respond.*

STACY (26)

This isn't a fucking video game, Mahalia.
Or a sitcom.
There is no winning.
There is no beating these people.
And this certainly isn't gonna get wrapped up neatly in the end.

MAHALIA (26)

I'm aware of that.

STACY (26)

Then what do you plan to do?

MAHALIA (26)

I don't have a plan, Stace.
My only plan was to come here,
Tell my Auntie to let it go,
And continue on with the rest of my tour.

STACY (26)

And you thought that would work?

MAHALIA (26)

I thought there might be an argument.
Maybe some raising of voices.
But I certainly didn't think it would go like this.
I thought, after all this time, if I just showed up...
She would see me and...

STACY (26)

And what?
You thought your mere presence would save the day?
Because everyone's just been sitting around here waiting on you, huh?

MAHALIA (26)

That's not what I thought.

STACY (26)

Isn't it though?

A beat.

MAHALIA (26)

What's *your* plan?

STACY (26)

My plan is their plan.

MAHALIA (26)

So, they speak for you now?

STACY (26)

They're my employers.

MAHALIA (26)

And that means you don't have a mind of your own anymore?

STACY (26)

It means I'm loyal to those who are loyal to me.

MAHALIA (26)

You spent, almost, eighteen years of your life in this church-

STACY (26)

And, in all that time, they took more than they gave.

MAHALIA (26)

If I had been here, I would've-

STACY (26)

But you weren't.

So, it doesn't really matter does it?

A beat.

MAHALIA (26)

I don't know what you want me to say.

STACY (26)

I don't want you to say anything to me.

I want you to go to your Auntie and tell her the truth.

Stop being a coward and tell her about the deal.

STACY (26, cont...)

She's gonna find out sooner or later.
It's only a matter of time.
Tell her to gather any important or sentimental effects,
Open these doors,
And tell everybody to go home.

MAHALIA (26)

I can't do that.

STACY (26)

Why not?
Too scared?

MAHALIA (26)

I'm having second thoughts.

STACY (26)

Second thoughts?
We don't have time for second thoughts.

MAHALIA (26)

I just...
I thought I was done with it.
All of it.
This town, this church, all of it.
But...
Being here...
I don't know if I can do this.
I don't know if I can let them take it.

STACY (26)

You already did.
And let's be clear, nobody's *taking* anything.
You gave it away.
An offer was made.
And you accepted.
A check was cut.
And you cashed it.
There'll be another check after this.
Don't make yourself out to be the victim.

MAHALIA (26)

I'm not.
I just-

STACY (26)

You just what?

STACY (26)

All of a sudden you care??
You haven't stepped foot in this neighborhood,
Let alone this church in ten years.

MAHALIA (26)

I'M HERE NOW!

STACY (26)

TOO LATE!

Stacy (16) appears.

STACY (26, cont...)

(beat)

You weren't here then
And you're too late now.

MAHALIA (26)

(exhausted)

Look, I'm sorry.
I'm sorry for everything.
I'm sorry for leaving.
And I'm sorry for what happened to you.

STACY (26)

Ain't enough "Sorry" in the world to fix what they did to me.

MAHALIA (26)

What *Calvin* did.

STACY (26)

WHAT *EVERYBODY* DID!

What every single person in this place,
You're Father and Roberta included,
Did to me.
Calvin took my body.
And everybody else took my mind.

L.T. & Roberta appear.

STACY (26, cont...)

It took every ounce of my strength to tell someone about it.
But I did.
I sat there and told Roberta and the Reverend everything.
Every detail of what he did to me.
And do you know what the first thing they said to me was?

ROBERTA
Are you sure?

STACY (16)
What?

ROBERTA
I just...
What you're saying is a serious accusation.
It could ruin the boy's life.
Him and his mama's.
So, before we go any further, I just need to ask if you're sure.

A beat.

STACY (16)
I'm sure.

A beat.

L.T.
Well...
Thank you for bringing this to us, Sister Stacy.
We know it ain't easy.
This is a house of God,
A holy place,
A place where we take care of each other.
To know that you've been...hurt by one of our flock...
I'm seldom speechless, but this is one of those times.

ROBERTA
Me and the reverend will talk and figure out what needs to happen next.
In the meantime,
I'm gonna ask that you not to attend Wednesday bible study or Youth choir practice.

STACY (16)
What?

ROBERTA
It's just until we can figure out how to approach Calvin and his mother.
This is a very...sensitive situation.
We need to be thoughtful about how we handle it.

STACY (16)
But I love being in the choir.

ROBERTA
I know you do, sweetheart.

ROBERTA (cont...)

This is only temporary.
It's just until we have a plan in place.

STACY (16)

Is Calvin still allowed in the choir?

A beat.

L.T.

Like Sister Roberta said, this is only temporary.
Just until we can decide what our next move is.
Okay?

A beat.

STACY (16)

...okay.

Stacy (16) starts to exit.

L.T.

Have you spoken to anybody else about this?

STACY (16)

Not yet.

L.T.

Your mother?

STACY (16)

No.

L.T.

Okay.

Listen...I need you to help me to help you.
For now, we need to keep this here, in this room.

Between the three of us.

Sister Roberta is right; this is a very sensitive situation.

We need to be in control of it.

If it gets out before we have a plan,

It could cause some serious trouble.

I don't want you to have to go through more than you already have.

So, can you promise me we'll keep this here?

Just for the moment?

A beat.

STACY (16)

I promise.

L.T.

Good.

Thank you, Sister Stacy.

We're a family under God.

We're gonna handle this like one.

Roberta takes Stacy (16)'s hand.

ROBERTA

Don't worry, sweetheart.

We'll handle this.

They disappear, leaving Stacy (16) alone.

STACY (26)

And, I guess, they did.

In a way.

Calvin didn't speak to me or look at me ever again.

Not at school.

Not at choir practice, after I was allowed to come back.

Never.

And, at first, that was enough.

Until I realized...

Neither did anyone else.

Nobody wanted to talk to me.

Nobody wanted to hang out with me.

The kids my age looked at me, when they would, like a slut.

And the adults didn't look at me at all.

I was a ghost.

And all I could think was,

"I wish Mahalia was here.

Everything would be better if Mahalia was here.

Mahalia. Mahalia. Mahalia."

Day and night.

All I wanted was you.

MAHALIA (26)

Why didn't you call me?

STACY (26)

I'd tried to call you so many times after you left.

Before everything happened.

You barely ever picked up.

And when you did, you didn't wanna talk about me.

STACY (26)

You just wanted me to listen to your stories.
Story after story about your new life.
Without once asking about mine.
I came to realize that you didn't care.

MAHALIA (26)

I did care.

STACY (26)

Not enough.

MAHALIA (26)

I cared about you more than...
When I left, I wasn't sad to leave my home...
Or my Dad...
I was only sad to leave you.
I'm sorry I made you feel like I didn't care.
Like your life didn't matter to me.
I think I just...
I needed to prove to myself that I made the right decision.
I'm sure, at the time, I thought I was proving it to you.
But it was never about anyone else.
It was always about me.

Mahalia (16) appears.

Mahalia (26) approaches Stacy (26).

Mahalia (16) approaches Stacy (16)

MAHALIA (26)

I'm sorry.

Stacy (26) stiffens up

But does not move.

Mahalia (26) gently takes Stacy (26)'s hand.

Mahalia (16) gently takes Stacy (16)'s hand.

MAHALIA (26)

I would never have let that happen to you.
Never.

Mahalia (26) pulls Stacy (26) into a tight embrace.

Mahalia (16) pulls Stacy (16) into a tight embrace.

Stacy (26) sobs into Mahalia (26)'s chest.

MAHALIA (26)

I'm sorry.

I'm here now.

I'm sorry.

I'm here now.

I'm sorry.

I'm here now.

Stacy (26)'s sobs fade.

She looks into Mahalia (26)'s eyes.

MAHALIA (26)

I'm here now.

They kiss.

Stiff at first

But they melt into it.

Suddenly, Stacy pulls away

And heads for the door.

MAHALIA (26)

Stacy, wait!

Stacy (26) turns to her

STACY (26)

You have thirty minutes to clear out.

She exits.

Mahalia (26) stares after her.

Stacy (16) and Mahalia (16) kiss.

Blackout.

A Testimony

“The first time I knew God was real” #4-

Stacy

STACY (26)

I don't love talking.

So, I won't be long.

I was ten years old the first time I knew God was real.

My Mom and I had just moved here so she could start a new job.

I was pissed about having to move.

Having to leave all of my friends and the teachers I liked.

I was a real bitch to my Mom about it.

Not in the way of getting into trouble or behaving badly.

I just stopped talking to her.

Not even one-word responses,

Just a series of grunts and nods.

Until one night,

I came downstairs in the middle of the night for a glass of water.

I was in the threshold of the kitchen

And I saw my Mom crying at the kitchen island.

In that moment, I understood that she was as lonely as I was.

That I wasn't the only one missing something.

I started talking to her again after that.

So, we'd at least have each other.

(beat)

We started going to church a few months later.

My Mom thought it could give us some community.

The first time we went, the choir sang “His Eye Is On The Sparrow”.

Mahalia was the soloist and blew the doors off the place.

As the song was ending, I looked over at my Mom.

She had these huge tears hanging in the corners of her eyes

And the biggest smile on her face I'd ever seen.

Seeing her like that sent a shiver down my spine.

I was struck with a feeling deep in the pit of my stomach.

And, right then, I knew God was real.

(beat)

I've only had that feeling one other time in my life.

Oddly enough, it was after I was...

It was after I was sexually assaulted at a party.

I was sixteen.

I was assaulted by a boy I went to school and church with.

The fact that I was at the party in the first place was a miracle.

My Mom never let me go to those kinds of things.
Not that she didn't trust me.

STACY (26, cont...)

She just didn't trust any of the other kids.
But I begged and begged
And eventually she gave in.

(a long beat, she gathers her thoughts)

I'll spare everyone the details of what happened.
I don't really feel the need to go back there.
I'll just say this:
After it was over, he left the room and I just lay there.
Staring at the ceiling.
Trying to comprehend how this could happen to me.
And why.
I lay there for a long time.
Numb.
And all of a sudden
The feeling came back to me.
A shiver down my spine.
A feeling deep in the pit of my stomach.
And...
I knew...
Even in that Godless place,
God was all around me.
And for the first time, I didn't know if that was a good thing or a bad thing.
Didn't really matter, either way.
It was simply a fact.
Like the color of the sky or needing air to breathe.
God was all around me.
A simple truth.

6.

*The sanctuary.
Mahalia (26) and Roberta stand on opposite sides.
A standoff.*

MAHALIA (26)

Why didn't you tell me?

ROBERTA

I did tell you.

MAHALIA (26)

Not everything.
You told me you and Dad handled it.
You didn't tell me that you let Calvin stick around.
She already had to see him at school,
She shouldn't have had to see him here.
You didn't tell me you all iced her out.
To the point where she and her Mom had to leave.

ROBERTA

Nobody forced them to leave.

MAHALIA (26)

You didn't make a good case for them to stay either!

ROBERTA

Don't you raise your voice at me in here.

MAHALIA (26)

I WILL!
I WILL!
You lied to me!

ROBERTA

I didn't lie to you.

MAHALIA (26)

Yes, you did.

ROBERTA

No, I didn't.
I told you we handled it
And we did.

Did I tell you every single detail?

ROBERTA (cont...)

No.

Did I withhold information?

Yes.

But I never lied to you.

MAHALIA (26)

Are you fucking kidding me?

ROBERTA

Little girl!

MAHALIA (26)

Are you seriously trying to get technical with me
About what lying entails?

ROBERTA

It's not about technicalities.
I simply won't participate in a conversation
Where I'm accused of being something I'm not.
Remember who you're talking to.
I'm not a liar.

MAHALIA (26)

What are you then?

ROBERTA

I'm your Auntie.
I'm your elder.
I'm a fighter.
I'm a survivor.
A survivor of any and everything you can imagine.
She ain't the only one been hurt inside this place.
This church been around for a long time.
Since 1898, if you wanna be "technical".
It has seen all kinds of people coming in and out.
Leaving all manner of beauty and destruction in their wake.

(beat)

You think growing up here was easy for me?
No matter how hard I tried to hide it,
I could never pretend good enough.
My whole life...
I could never be the kind of girl they wanted me to be.
The kind of woman they wanted me to be.
I did everything I could and could never really...
Measure up.

They all knew.

Probably before I did.

ROBERTA (cont...)

They would all whisper about me.

Got tired of trying to get them to stop.

So, I stood up in it.

I was an out lesbian running around this place

Before anyone of us knew what being “out” meant.

Before anyone in this church, hell, in this *neighborhood*

Would even admit lesbians existed.

You think I made it to this point without wounds too deep to ever heal?

The preacher’s daughter out here “dyking”.

You think it all went smooth for me?

MAHALIA (26)

That’s not an excuse for what happened to her.

She came to you.

She trusted you.

And you did nothing.

ROBERTA

Nothing?

We struck the fear of God into that little boy’s heart.

We never had a problem with him again.

If he ever hurt anyone else, it wasn’t under our watch.

MAHALIA (26)

Do you really think that was enough?

ROBERTA

What else would you have liked us to do?

MAHALIA (26)

Call the police??

ROBERTA

And what do you think they would’ve done?

Helped us?

Listened to us?

I don’t know all the places you’ve been since you left here,

But please come back to reality for a minute.

MAHALIA (26)

You could’ve at least tried.

ROBERTA

Yes.

Maybe we could have.

But we didn't.

MAHALIA (26)

And you feel okay about that?

ROBERTA

It doesn't matter how I *feel*.
What happened, *happened*.
Ain't no goin' back.

MAHALIA (26)

You failed her, Auntie.
Do you understand that?
You failed her.
How can you just...
(beat)
I need to sit down.

She does.

A beat.

ROBERTA

Look, I...
Maybe we could've done it differently.
Maybe we did do it all wrong.
But we did what we did.
We did the thing we thought was best.
We did what we always did when bad things happened.
And calling the police was not a part of the plan.
Have them show up and put the boy in jail?
Or worse?
I'm sorry, but...
That's just not the way we did things.

MAHALIA (26)

He committed a crime.

ROBERTA

Yes. He did.
A horrible, ungodly crime.
And still...
It's not how we did things.
There was a problem.
And we handled it in a way that protected everyone.

MAHALIA (26)

Well, not everyone.
And ten years later the problem is back.

This time with bulldozers.
You may have bought yourself a little time.

MAHALIA (26, cont...)

But you only prolonged the inevitable.

A beat.

ROBERTA

Yeah, maybe.

Maybe.

But I'm not gonna stop fighting until it's over.

MAHALIA (26)

It's too late, Auntie.

ROBERTA

It ain't never too late.

MAHALIA (26)

I sold the church.

A massive beat.

MAHALIA (26)

They came to me four months ago.

Music isn't as glamorous as people think it is.

Not as lucrative either.

People think about touring and they see giant tour buses.

Private jets.

Groupies.

Sex.

Drugs.

What they don't understand is that you gotta spend money to make money.

And touring is expensive.

We exhausted our budget.

Checks were bouncing.

We were losing people left and right.

Me and Bishop were sleeping in the car.

We were gonna have to cancel the back half of our dates.

I couldn't...

We worked so hard.

We're just gaining traction.

People know who we are now.

I've wanted this my whole life.

I can't just...

They called me.

They made an offer.

And I accepted.

This place belongs to them now.
There's no going back.
MAHALIA (26, cont...)
It's over.
You have to tell everyone to go home.

A beat.
Roberta is too stunned to speak.
She starts to exit, but Mahalia's words stop her.

MAHALIA (26)
I know this place means a lot to you.
It may not seem like it
But it means a lot to me, too.
You asked me earlier if legacy meant anything to me.
To answer your question, it means the world.
It factors into everything I do,
Every song I write,
Every performance I give.
Legacy is sometimes the only thing that keeps my faith from crumbling.
But neither legacy nor faith live in *things*.
They live in people and in memory.
We carry them around with us wherever we go.
Every show I play is a call to worship.
Every venue I step foot into is a holy space.
And every breath I take is filled with you, Daddy, and this place.
That will never change.
Whether this building remains standing or not.
It's like God said, "For where two or three are gathered in my name,
There I am in the middle of them."
That's true anywhere.

A beat.
Roberta starts to exit again.

MAHALIA (26)
Auntie.
When was the first time you knew God was real?

A beat.

ROBERTA
Wouldn't you like to know.

7.

The Sanctuary.

Stacy (26) and Roberta standoff.

STACY (26)

So,

What's it gonna be?

Are we going quietly and safely?

Or are we just...

Or are we just going?

ROBERTA

The easy way or the hard way.

STACY (26)

Correct.

A beat.

ROBERTA

I think we can both agree

The easy way ain't never lead us to nothin' good.

STACY (26)

I can't disagree with you on that.

But there have certainly been times

When the hard way has brought me to my knees

And I wished I'd chosen differently.

I'm sure you've experienced that, too.

Do you want today to be one of those times?

ROBERTA

Can't predict the future.

We'll have to wait and see.

STACY (26)

Okay.

(beat)

See you on the other side, Ms. Jackson.

She begins to exit.

ROBERTA

Stacy...

Stacy turns to face her.
Silence.

Roberta wants to say something.

But can't.

Or won't.

STACY

Don't worry, sweetheart.
We'll handle it.

She exits..

Silence.

Walter moves to Roberta.

WALTER

What now?

ROBERTA

I don't know.

I uh...

I don't know.

He takes her hand.

Silence.

Mahalia moves to pulpit.

She sings.

For forgiveness.

For mercy.

For her eternal soul.

MAHALIA (26)

**Why should I feel discouraged?
Why should the shadows come?
Why should my heart be lonely
And long for heaven and home,
When Jesus is my portion?
My constant friend is he:
His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know he watches me.**

MAHALIA (26, cont...)
I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free,
His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know he watches me.

We hear voices outside.
We hear banging on the door.

Bishop goes to the drums and begins to play.
Clanging and banging.
Conjuring even.

LT, Mahalia (16), and Stacy (16) appear.
Something beyond this world starts to take over the space.

The walls begin to crumble.
The roof caves in.
Light fills the space to bursting.
Bishop keeps playing.
Blackout.

END OF PLAY