

WE THE VILLAGE

By

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DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

First Light Reading Series, Working Title Playwrights, Horizon Theatre, Atlanta, Georgia
(October, 2018)

Unexpected Play Festival, Staged Reading, Theatrical Outfit, Atlanta, Georgia (February, 2020)

Made in Atlanta Development Workshop, Theatrical Outfit, Atlanta, Georgia (January, 2021)

CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
ACT I			
FRANKIE	African American, feminine, flamboyant, and witty	30s	M
REDD	African American, caring, and observant	12	M
VIOLET	African American, impulsive, and emotionally unhealthy	30s	F
ACT II			
FRANKIE	+10 years	40s	M
REDD	+10 years, grounded, physically fit	20s	M
ROOSEVELT (MALE VOICE)	African American, alpha, and virile	50s	M
JULES	African American, feminine , and worldly	30s	M

ACT I

TIME

Late 1990s

PLACE

Atlanta, Georgia; fictional housing projects

(A 10-year span between Acts I and II)

ACT II

TIME

2007

PLACE

Atlanta, Georgia; Belle's Bar & Lounge

ACT I

SCENE ONE.

SETTING: A split stage with a wall divider forms the shape of a “T” to establish two separate 90s-style living rooms. The back wall, positioned upstage, has an entry door for each apartment. There is an interior doorway stage left and stage right. One living room is impeccably decorated with a faux leather sofa, a plush area rug, a cocktail table, an end table, a plant, artwork, and a television with a cable box and VCR/DVD player inside of an entertainment center. The other living room is slightly unkempt, furnished with a worn sofa that duplicates as a bed with a pillow and blanket on it. There’s a shabby coffee table, a wall mirror, a small TV with a cable box on a TV stand.

AT RISE: LIGHTS UP on FRANKIE’S well-decorated living room. A boombox RADIO PLAYS a MELODY. FRANKIE is wearing a doo rag, a satin house robe, and fancy slippers, looking through a handful of photographs on the sofa while sipping from a coffee cup. There’s a relentless KNOCK on the apartment door, startling FRANKIE. FRANKIE turns the RADIO OFF and crosses to the door.

FRANKIE

Who is it?

(KNOCKING continues.)

REDD (OFFSTAGE)

Redd.

FRANKIE

Well I don’t know a Redd. And I don’t need notha’ candle or candy bar just in case you tryna’ sell me somethin’.

REDD

Can you let me in, please? It’s a emergency.

FRANKIE
Are you dyin'?

REDD
No.

FRANKIE
Are you hurt?

REDD
No.

FRANKIE
Is the buildin' on fire?

REDD
No.

FRANKIE
Well then it ain't no emergency--

REDD
Please. You gotta' help me.

(FRANKIE unlatches the chain and opens the door.
REDD, out of breath, bursts in and slams the door shut.
A bookbag is strapped to his back. He's wearing jeans,
a T-shirt, and old, holey tennis shoes.)

FRANKIE
What in the hell-- Hold on now, lil' boy. Just slow down and tell me what's goin' on.

REDD

(catching his breath)
They chasin' me.

FRANKIE
Who?

(FRANKIE barely opens the door.)

REDD

No! Don't open it.

(FRANKIE slams the door shut and latches the chain bolt.)

FRANKIE

Who's all 'em kids comin' down the hall--

REDD

They tryna' catch me.

FRANKIE

For what?

REDD

'Cause they gon' jump me.

FRANKIE

Why? Whatchu' do?

REDD

Nothin'.

(REDD attempts to cross into the living room.)

FRANKIE

Nuh-uh. Hold it right there. Take ya' shoes off.

REDD

Why?

FRANKIE

'Cause I said so. That's why.

(REDD removes his bookbag and shoes.)

Now put 'em ova' there by the door. And don't move. I'll be right back.

(FRANKIE EXITS interior doorway. REDD sits his shoes and bag by the door before inching up to the door, listening for voices. FRANKIE ENTERS with water. REDD trails FRANKIE.)

FRANKIE

Now come here, sit down, and tell me what's goin' on. (*Handing Redd water*) And be careful with that.

(REDD sits down and gulps water.)

And slow down before you mess around and choke.

(There's a KNOCK. FRANKIE crosses to the door, gestures silence to REDD. KNOCKING continues. KNOCKING STOPS. Silence. FRANKIE puts his ear to the door. A moment.)

Okay. Sounds like they done left. Whatchu' say yo' name is again?

REDD

Redd.

FRANKIE

Well, Redd, I'm Ms. Frankie--

*

REDD

Huh?

FRANKIE

My name is Ms. Frankie.

REDD

I'm confused.

FRANKIE

I am, too. 'Cause I don't know why the hell you sittin' up in my damn apartment.

REDD

You cuss just like my mama.

FRANKIE

Well, I'll try to refrain, but I can't promise you.

REDD

So, if you a man, then how you a Miss? And why you got on a lady's--

FRANKIE

Look, lil' boy. I'm the one askin' questions right now. Now haven't I seen you around here before?

REDD

I live next door.

(KICKING/BANGING on the door. FRANKIE crosses to the door.)

FRANKIE

(unlatching the chain bolt)

Aw hell naw--

REDD

No! Don't! Please.

FRANKIE

(at the door)

I know y'all betta' get the hell away from my damn door before I whoop all y'all lil' asses.

(KICKING STOPS. Silence.)

Why they so determined to get you? What'd you do?

REDD

Nothin'. (Beat.) You got somethin' to eat?

FRANKIE

I got plenty to eat *for me*. You need to hurry up and start talkin'.

REDD

But I'm so hungry.

FRANKIE

I guess you ain't gon' answer no questions 'til you get somethin' to eat, huh? You like peanut butta' and jelly?

REDD

Yeah--

FRANKIE

Hold it right there. Ain't gon' be no *yeah*. Now I don't know how old you are--

REDD

Twelve.

FRANKIE

Well, I'm... I'm much older than you. And around here, it's *yes, ma'am* and *no, ma'am*.

REDD

But you ain't no ma'am--

FRANKIE

Look... never mind. Sit right there, and don't move.

(FRANKIE EXITS. REDD scans his surroundings and then picks up the photo album and flips a few pages. FRANKIE ENTERS with sandwich.)

FRANKIE

Normally, I don't allow eatin' on my sofa, so you be real careful. And hand me that.

(REDD exchanges the photo album for the sandwich.)

REDD

Thank you. (*Beat.*) So are you a man or a lady?

FRANKIE

Right now I'm pissed. 'Cause I gotta' feed Curious George so he'll tell me what the hell is goin' on. Anyway... to answer ya' question, I consider myself a lil' bit of both.

REDD

Like a hermaphrodite?

FRANKIE

No, I ain't no damn-- Darn hermaphrodite. And how you know a big word like that anyway?

REDD

I saw it in a book about snails and worms at school.

FRANKIE

Well, for the record, I'm a man.

REDD

But you act like a lady.

FRANKIE

This ain't no act, honey. It's a lil' more complicated than that. But apparently, I'ma have to make an exception for you. So for now, just call me Frankie.

REDD

I rememba' seein' some people like you on a talk show once. I actually thought it was pretty interestin'--

FRANKIE

Quit stallin'. Why 'em kids tryna' jump you?

REDD

'Cause I don't wanna be in they stupid gang.

FRANKIE

So they done turned on you, huh?

REDD

Yeah. I mean, yes, sir.

FRANKIE

Well, if you live next door, then why you come knockin' on my door?

REDD

'Cause I couldn't reach my key in my bookbag. Plus, they know I be home by myself--

FRANKIE

So they live here, too?

REDD

Yes, sir. But not in this buildin'.

FRANKIE

Well that's ya' mama I see comin' outta' the apartment sometimes, ain't it?

REDD

Yes, sir.

FRANKIE

So where's she at?

REDD

I don't know. Workin', I guess. And I ain't got no daddy-- Well, I ain't neva' met him.

FRANKIE

So it's just you and ya' mama.

REDD

(licking his fingers)

Yes, sir.

FRANKIE

You was hungry, huh?

REDD

I didn't get to eat lunch today.

FRANKIE

And why not?

REDD

I left school early.

FRANKIE

What for?

REDD

'Cause they said afta' school they was gon' beat me up, so I left. I guess they saw me leavin' 'cause the next thing I know, they was followin' me. So I took off runnin'.

FRANKIE

Ya' mama know they botherin' you?

REDD

No.

FRANKIE

Well don't you think she should?

REDD

She just gon' get mad and say I need to stop bein' a punk.

FRANKIE

Then maybe I should tell her--

REDD

No, please don't. You can't let her know. Promise me you won't say nothin'.

FRANKIE

Okay. Okay. I won't. I just don't want you to end up gettin' hurt. *(Beat.)* So what time she get home?

REDD

I don't know.

FRANKIE

You don't know what time ya' mama gets home?

REDD

She's been gone for a few days--

FRANKIE

A few days?

(There's a KNOCK. FRANKIE crosses to the door.)

(Deeper tone voice) Who is it? *(Waits)* I said, Who is it?

REDD

(chuckling)

You sound hilarious.

FRANKIE

So you think this is funny?

REDD

No, sir.

FRANKIE

So let me get this straight. Ya' mama done left you home by ya'self and you ain't seen her in a few days?

(REDD nods affirmatively.)

She can get in a whole lot of trouble leavin' you home by ya'self like that.

REDD

I don't want her to get in trouble.

FRANKIE

Well neither do I. But if somethin' happens to you, and she ain't no where around, they can take you away from her.

REDD

Who?

FRANKIE

Child Protective Services.

REDD

Where they gon' take me?

FRANKIE

Just forget I even said that, honey, okay. Now I just moved in a coupla' months ago, so I'm still tryna' figure out who folks are around here. But if I'da known you was ova' there by ya'self, I coulda' at least been checkin' on you. Ain't no twelve-year-old got no business bein' at home for days by they self.

REDD

Sometimes I kinda like it when she ain't there. She's always just fussin' anyway.

FRANKIE

Well, look here, honey. Outta' all the doors in the hallway, I don't know why you come knockin' on mine. But like my grandmama used to always say--God rest her soul--*Everythang happens for a reason.*

REDD

So where she at? She live here, too?

FRANKIE

No, honey. She's in heaven. Right up there next to my mama and my daddy.

REDD

They all dead?

FRANKIE

They have all *transitioned*. Well, except for my granddaddy. He's rottin' in hell. Well, maybe I shouldn't say that. Let's just say, chances are, he ain't in heaven.

REDD

Then he's probably in hell. My granny and granddaddy live in Detroit.

FRANKIE

The Motor City. I love Detroit. You get to go visit 'em?

REDD

We used to. But they mad at my mama right now.

FRANKIE

Unfortunately, that happens sometimes. Family...

REDD

So, why ya' granddaddy in hell?

FRANKIE

You sure do ask a lot of questions. (*Beat.*) Anyway, my granddaddy, the *Reverend Eddie Dale Leonard*, he called himself a pastor but he wasn't nothin' but a wolf in sheep's clothin'.

REDD

Like a bad person pretendin' to be good--

FRANKIE

Exactly. But me, my sista', and my baby brotha' had to go live with my grandparents after my mama and daddy was killed in a car accident, actually a drunk driver.

REDD

That's so sad.

FRANKIE

It is. I rememba' I couldn't stop cryin' for sever days.

REDD

So what about ya' brotha' and sista'? Where they at?

FRANKIE

They live in South Carolina. That's where I'm from.

REDD

It sounds far away like Detroit.

FRANKIE

It's just a few hours away. *(Beat.)* You look like you like cookies.

REDD

I *love* cookies.

(FRANKIE retrieves cookies from a bag on the end table.)

FRANKIE

I grabbed some double chocolate chip cookies from work.

REDD

Where you work at?

FRANKIE

(handing Redd a cookie)

A lil' greasy spoon ova' on MLK.

REDD

What kinda spoon?

FRANKIE

A greasy spoon. It's just a restaurant that serves a lot of unhealthy food. But it's good, and it's cheap.

REDD

(surveying the living room)

You got some really nice stuff.

FRANKIE

Well thank you. I take after my grandmotha', *Ernestine Leonard*. She had real good taste. I mean, you name it. Furniture, clothes, jewelry, hats... I learned from the best.

REDD

So can I stay here with you?

FRANKIE

I beg ya' pardon?

REDD

I like it ova' here.

FRANKIE

Well, if you talkin' about stayin' for a coupla' hours or so, I don't see any problem with that. I'd love the company.

REDD

No, I meant, can I live here with you?

FRANKIE

Now I know ya' mama would have a real problem with that, don't you think?

REDD

She don't care.

FRANKIE

Sure she does. Not to mention, we just met. We barely know each other.

REDD

So what. We can get to know each other. I really like you.

FRANKIE

Well, Redd, I like you, too. And you are certainly welcome to come over and visit.

REDD

Like when?

FRANKIE

Well, whenever you can catch me at home. But I work a lot.

REDD

My mama works a lot, too.

FRANKIE

I also work at night, not at the restaurant though, at a nightclub.

REDD

Doin' what?

FRANKIE

How about we save that discussion for another time? (*Beat.*) So, look. Here's what we gon' do. You got a door key, right?

REDD

Yes, sir.

FRANKIE

You can hang out here for now. We'll wait and see if ya' mama comes home. If she don't, then you can go next door, grab some pajamas, and spend the night. I can go with you if you scared.

REDD

Okay. And I'll grab my Gameboy.

FRANKIE

Grab ya' what?

REDD

Gameboy. It's a video game.

FRANKIE

Okay, well... I get up early for work. When I leave out in the mornin', you'll have to go home and get ready for school.

REDD

I ain't goin' to school tomorrow.

FRANKIE

You can't be skippin' school now.

REDD

So what if they try to jump me?

FRANKIE

Then we gon' kick they lil' asses-- Well, no. Forget I said that. You ride the bus?

REDD

No, I walk. It's just up the street.

FRANKIE

At King?

REDD

Yes, sir.

FRANKIE

Okay, well, I'm not sure what we gon' do. But right now, my TV show is about to come on. So whatchu' gon' do?

REDD

Well, if I gotta' go to school tomorrow, then I probably should do my homework. But I'ma need help with math though.

FRANKIE

So where's this homework? Let me take a look at it.

(REDD crosses, grabs a folder and a pencil from his backpack, pulls out a math worksheet, and shows FRANKIE. FRANKIE scans the worksheet, visibly clueless.)

What grade you in?

REDD

Seventh.

FRANKIE

Well we didn't have this kind a math when I was yo' age.

REDD

It's geometry.

FRANKIE

(overlooking the worksheet)

Polygons? That don't sound like somethin' you need to be learnin' about to me. I tell you what. How about we figure this out *after* we watch TV?

REDD

Okay.

(FRANKIE turns on the TV with the remote.)

FRANKIE

Speakin' of talk shows, I hope you like Ricki Lake--

REDD

I actually do.

FRANKIE

Now we talkin'... a boy after my own heart. I just loved her in Hairspray...

(LIGHTS FADE on FRANKIE'S LIVING ROOM.)

SCENE TWO. LATER.

(LIGHTS UP on VIOLET'S LIVING ROOM.
VIOLET is sitting on the sofa, talking on a cordless
telephone.)

VIOLET

When y'all rollin' out? ... *Now?* I just got home. How long it take to get there? ... Well, if he's just talkin' 'bout a coupla' days... he got a place for us to stay? And I don't mean in one of 'em shitty motels we stayed at in Mobile. Okay. Let me get off this phone and throw some clothes in this bag and find out where this damn boy is at... alright, girl. I see you in a minute.

(VIOLET ends call and reacts to a NOISE at the door.
She crosses, unlatches the chain, and opens the door.
REDD ENTERS, carrying his bookbag.)

Boy, get in here. Where the hell you been?

REDD

Next door at Frankie's.

VIOLET

Who?

REDD

Frankie.

VIOLET

Well I don't know no damn Frankie. Who's that?

(FRANKIE, dressed in a pink jogging suit, appears in
the doorway. REDD crosses into the living room.)

And just who the hell are you?

FRANKIE

I'm Frankie, ya' neighba'.

VIOLET

Well I'm Redd's motha'. And why is my son ova' at yo' place and not at home where he's supposed to be?

FRANKIE

I don't exactly think he likes bein' home by his self.

VIOLET

What makes you think he's *by his self*? You see I'm standin' right here. (*Beat.*) You one of 'em *sissies*, huh?

FRANKIE

(noticing Redd watching and listening)

Like I said, my name is Frankie. And that's what I prefer to be called.

VIOLET

Well, *Frankie*, Redd is not home by his self. Now goodbye.

REDD

Bye, Frankie.

(VIOLET closes the door.)

VIOLET

Listen at you. What in the hell was you doin' ova' there?

REDD

Nothin'. I was just--

VIOLET

Did he touch you?

REDD

No.

VIOLET

Boy, you betta' tell me if he touched you.

REDD

Mama, he didn't touch me. He's really nice.

VIOLET

Well that's how they get you. Before you know it, he gon' start buyin' you all kinds of shit, groomin' you and then expectin' somethin' in return.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

And you know exactly what I'm talkin' about. You betta' stay away from ova' there, you hear me? I *said*, do you hear me?

REDD

Yeah.

VIOLET

You ain't got no business up in no sissy's apartment doin' nothin'. Folks gon' start callin' you a sissy. Is that what you want?

REDD

No.

VIOLET

Then you stay away from him, her, whatever' *it* is. Now I'm gettin' ready to leave in a minute--

REDD

Where you goin' at now?

VIOLET

Boy, I gotta' go outta' town for work.

REDD

But you just got home--

VIOLET

Well I gotta' work. And you bet' not be tellin' folks I ain't been here. 'Cause it ain't nobody's business. You been sayin' somethin'?

REDD

No.

VIOLET

Then why the hell that Frank, Frankie, whatever' his damn name is-- Why he say somethin' about you bein' home by ya'self?

REDD

I don't know.

VIOLET

Yeah, well, I don't believe you. And you keep runnin' ya' mouth, you gon' end up in somebody's foster home. Is that what you want?

REDD

No.

VIOLET

Now I picked up some cereal and milk and some ramen noodles, a loaf of bread and some bologna. You betta' make it last while I'm gone.

(VIOLET abruptly EXITS through the interior doorway. REDD picks from an open bag of potato chips and eats. VIOLET ENTERS with a couple of mini-dresses and tucks them in her overnight bag. REDD crosses and sits on the sofa.)

Anybody come by here lookin' for me while I was gone?

REDD

No.

(REDD smacks the coffee table, killing a cockroach.)

VIOLET

So you just gon' leave the roach on the table?

(REDD disposes of the cockroach in a wastebasket.)

If you quit droppin' crumbs everywhere, we wouldn't have no roaches. Now I want this floor swept and this place straightened up by the time I get back.

REDD

When you comin' back?

VIOLET

Boy, don't ask me that. I'll be back when I get back.

REDD

But I ain't got no clean clothes.

VIOLET

Well I don't know what to tell you 'cause I ain't got time to do no laundry right now. Just wash some stuff out in the sink, and let it air dry.

REDD

Ain't no washin' powder.

VIOLET

Then use dish detergent or soap or somethin'. Hell, I don't know. I gotta' get ready. My ride is comin'.

(REDD attempts to turn the TV on with the remote control. He crosses and checks the TV.)

REDD

TV ain't workin'.

VIOLET

I know 'cause I gotta' pay the cable bill. That's why I need to get outta' here and go make this money. Try hookin' up the antennae to get the regula' channels. If that don't work, then do ya' homework. I know you got some.

REDD

I already done it.

(CAR HORN BLOWS in the distance. VIOLET zips bag.)

VIOLET

That's my ride. I gotta' go. Keep the door locked and the chain on. And don't forget to set the alarm clock so you can be on time for school. And make sure you cut off everythang before you leave. I'll be back in a coupla' days. I left my pager at Niecy's but Kenny's number is on the refrigerator. And don't use it unless it's an emergency. He gets upset if I gotta' stop workin' to make a phone call. And make sure you in this house at a decent hour. And that means before dark. And stay away from that damn sissy next door. I mean it. Bye.

(VIOLET EXITS. A moment. LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE THREE. NEXT DAY.

(LIGHTS UP on FRANKIE'S LIVING ROOM. FRANKIE ENTERS, wearing black pants, a white button-down shirt that's knotted at the bottom for style. A small satchel purse is strapped diagonally over his body. He's carrying a waiter's apron and a retail bag. He pulls a wig from the retail bag, inspects it, puts it back in the bag, and sits it on the cocktail table. There's a KNOCK at the door.)

FRANKIE

Who is it?

REDD (OFFSTAGE)

Me.

FRANKIE

Who's *me*?

REDD

Redd.

(FRANKIE crosses and opens the door. REDD ENTERS, out of breath, slightly disheveled, cradling his right arm. He's wearing jeans, a ripped, soiled T-shirt, and one shoe, carrying his backpack.)

FRANKIE

Oh my God. What happened to you?

REDD

I got away again.

(REDD kicks off his shoe at the door.)

FRANKIE

Where's ya' other shoe?

REDD

It came off.

FRANKIE

What on earth is that god-awful smell? And why you holdin' ya' arm like that?

REDD

I hurt my elbow.

FRANKIE

(grabbing Redd's elbow)

Let me see.

REDD

Ouch.

FRANKIE

That hurt?

REDD

Yes, sir.

FRANKIE

Can you move it?

(REDD gently moves his right arm.)

Now bend it.

(REDD bends his arm.)

Well, at least it ain't broken. It's just a lil' bruisin' and swellin'. Hold it just like that. Don't move it. I'ma go grab an icepack.

(FRANKIE EXIT. REDD crosses into the living room.
FRANKE ENTERS with an icepack and places it
against REDD'S arm.)

I used this when I bruised my ankle practicin' a dance routine. It'll help with the swellin'.
Now what happened?

REDD

I left afta' the bell for gym class. Next thing I know, the twins, Eric and Derrick--they in the gang--they just appeared outta' nowhere and wouldn't let me get by. Then Derrick started callin' me names. So I said, *Ya' mama*. And that's when Eric pushed me, so I pushed him back and took off runnin' down the alley. But then this big dog ran up to the fence and started barkin', and I fell ova' a garbage can. So I just hurried up and crawled inside so they couldn't see me--

FRANKIE

That explains the smell.

REDD

And they just ran on down the alley.

FRANKIE

So wait a minute. Is ya' mama home?

REDD

She's outta' town.

FRANKIE

Outta' town? So she left you by ya'self again?

(REDD nods affirmatively.)

REDD

That means I can stay here with you, right?

FRANKIE

I guess it does, at least for the time bein'. But first things first. We gon' get rid of that smell and get you cleaned up. Now go on back there and wash up. Wash cloths are in the cabinet next to the sink. There's a clothes basket in the hallway with clean clothes in it. Pull out one of those T-shirts in there. You can wear that for now.

REDD

Can you help me with my shirt, please?

(FRANKIE helps REDD remove his shirt.)

Ouch.

FRANKIE

Keep that icepack on ya' elbow, at least until the swellin' goes down a little.
And hand me that shirt. We gon' toss that thing.

(REDD hands FRANKIE his shirt and EXITS.)

PHONE RINGS. FRANKIE answers.)

Hello ... Whatchu' mean *where I been?* I been workin' ... When? ... Why? Who dropped out? ... Triflin' heffa'. She's always a no-show, givin' all us queens a bad name ... Anyway, I don't know about tomorrow night. I ain't supposed to perform 'til Sunday ... Pinky, yo' ass is crazy ... No, wait a minute. I just remembered somethin'. I might be babysittin'-- Well, technically, he's not a baby. He's twelve ... Shut up. I do like kids, at least this one.

(REDD ENTERS, wearing an oversized T-shirt.)

Girl, let me call you back. Bye.

(FRANKIE ends call.)

All done?

REDD

Yes, sir.

FRANKIE

You know I used to skip school and leave early, too, when I was yo' age, not because I was afraid. I was just tired of bein' teased and called names.

REDD

They be callin' me names.

FRANKIE

Like what?

REDD

I can't repeat 'em.

FRANKIE

That bad, huh?

(REDD nods affirmatively.)

So what's the name of this lil' gang?

REDD

Killa' Krew.

FRANKIE

You mean to tell me some lil' kids goin' around callin' themselves *Killa' Krew*?

REDD

They said if I join 'em, they would protect me... like a family. You think I should join 'em--

FRANKIE

Absolutely not. Ain't nothin' good gon' come outta' that. And that ain't the kinda protection you want *or* need. You'll just end up in a juvenile detention center somewhere or even worse... dead.

REDD

But they just gon' keep on tryna' jump me.

FRANKIE

No they ain't either 'cause we gon' put a stop to that.

REDD

My mama got a knife.

FRANKIE

No, honey. You leave that knife alone.

REDD

(noticing the bag)

What's in the bag?

FRANKIE

My new wig.

(FRANKIE pulls the wig out and puts it on.)

I bought it today. You like it?

REDD

Not really. My mama wears those things. But you look funny.

FRANKIE

Well, I'll have you know I paid good money for this wig. And I'ma be lookin' fierce when I put it on with my cat suit.

(FRANKIE playfully improvises a vogue dance.)

REDD

Fierce?

FRANKIE

(in between vogue poses)

Gorgeous, honey. Fabulous. Fly. All of that.

REDD

You goin' somewhere?

FRANKIE

I'm performin' Sunday night. Oh, and I might be performin' tomorrow tonight, too. It's a lil' last minute, but I could use the extra money.

REDD

(eyeing the wig)

You gonna wear that thang?

FRANKIE

I sure am.

REDD

It looks weird on you... like a hairy hat.

FRANKIE

I'ma just pretend like I didn't hear that because I love it. (*Beat.*) But now, look. If I end up performin' tomorrow night, you'll have to go back over to yo' place for the night.

REDD

Can I just stay here 'til you get back? Or, maybe I can just go with you.

FRANKIE

Ain't you just a bundle of fresh ideas. First of all, you can't go with me because ya' too young.

REDD

How old I gotta' be?

FRANKIE

Twenty-one.

REDD

Well I'm twelve, so we can just reverse the number.

FRANKIE

That's cute, Einstein. But you are not of age. Not to mention, I'm sure you don't wanna be seen with me wearin' my *funny* lookin' wig.

REDD

I don't care. And I'll just sit there and be quiet. I promise. Nobody will even notice me.

FRANKIE

I really wish I could take you with me but I can't. Now how's ya' arm feel?

REDD

It's still a lil' sore. *(Beat.)* But I got my Gameboy. You wanna play?

FRANKIE

What about ya' arm?

REDD

I'll be okay.

(REDD crosses, grabs his Gameboy from his backpack, and crosses back to FRANKIE.)

FRANKIE

(apprehensively)

I'm really not all that good at, you know... games, especially video games.

REDD

It's actually pretty easy. I'll show you.

(REDD and FRANKIE sit on the sofa.)

I never really have anybody to play against, so this is cool.

(FRANKIE warms up to the idea. VIDEO GAME SOUNDS RISES as LIGHT DIMS. FRANKIE and REDD laugh and compete. SOUND ENDS. LIGHT RISES.)

You beat me.

FRANKIE

You think you slick. I know you let me win.

(We hear VOICES ARGUING OFFSTAGE.)

Oh, Lord Jesus. It's that man and his crazy girlfriend fussin' again. They just get to drinkin' and carryin' on...

REDD

You talkin' about Grover?

FRANKIE

I guess that's his name. Why, you know him?

REDD

Not really. But he called the police on my mama one time. They didn't do nothin' though. She told him to mind his own business.

FRANKIE

Somebody need to call the police on him. Seems like *Grover* ain't got nothin' betta' to do except stand around in the hallway, drinkin' and meddlin' in folks' business. And right now, I don't feel like hearin' all that, so I'ma go take my shower. You gon' be alright out here?

(REDD nods affirmatively.)

Before it gets too late, I want you to go home and grab some more clothes. You got another pair of shoes?

REDD

I do but they hurt my feet. And I don't have no clean clothes.

FRANKIE

Well, I guess you and me gonna be goin' down to do laundry later. (*Beat.*) Now if the phone rings, just let the answerin' machine pick it up.

REDD

Okay.

(FRANKIE EXITS. A moment. REDD picks up the wig, slips it on, and playfully prances around, imitating Frankie.)

I am *all of that*. I am *fierce, honey*.

(REDD removes the wig, curiously inspects it, and puts it back in the bag. LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE FOUR. LATER.

(LIGHTS UP on VIOLET'S LIVING ROOM. REDD ENTERS front door. He picks up his dirty clothes around the living room and puts them inside a bag. He EXITS through the interior doorway. A moment. The front doorknob turns and VIOLET ENTERS, disheveled, limping, wearing a wig, sunglasses, a partially ripped blouse, a mini skirt, a light weight jacket, and one shoe. She's carrying the other shoe with a broken heel in one hand and her purse in the other.)

VIOLET

(calling out)

Redd.

(VIOLET collapses onto the sofa.)

Redd, you back there?

(REDD ENTERS with a small bag of groceries that he attempts to put down out of Violet's sight.)

Come here and help ya' mama.

(REDD crosses and helps VIOLET remove her jacket and shoe.)

REDD

What happened?

VIOLET

Just take it easy. I'm alright. I just got into a lil' fight with Kenny.

REDD

He hit you?

VIOLET

(removing her wig)

No, I hit his fist with my face. He didn't pay me some money he owes me, so I hopped my ass on the first Greyhound back home.

REDD

What he hit you for? And why he owe you money--

VIOLET

Because I work for him, boy. Damn.

REDD

Well why you ain't workin' at the gas station no more?

VIOLET

Well when a crazy ass thug comes in and sticks a gun in ya' face and demands money from the register, you suddenly realize a lil' part-time, minimum wage job ain't worth ya' damn life. That's why I don't work at the gas station no more. Kenny got his own business.

REDD

What kinda business?

VIOLET

One with employees. And I'm one of 'em. He got clients, and I help him with his clients.

REDD

But why you always goin' outta' town?

VIOLET

'Cause that's the business we do. And when Kenny gets paid, he pays me. He promised to pay me what he owed me but he didn't.

REDD

Well I'll go get ya' money for you. Where's he at?

VIOLET

Now that's funny. How you gon' do that, huh? He wouldn't do nothin' but laugh in yo' face. I ain't worried though. I'll get my money. That's money I planned on savin' up so we can move outta' this dump. (*Beat.*) Whose big ass T-shirt you got on?

REDD

Uh... I found it in the gym.

VIOLET

Why you holdin' ya' arm like that?

REDD

Oh, uh... I fell. I fell at school.

(VIOLET inspects REDD'S arm.)

VIOLET

It hurt?

REDD

A lil' bit.

VIOLET

Well then go bring me a beer outta' the refrigerator. On second thought, hand me my flask in my purse.

(REDD grabs the flask from her purse and hands it to VIOLET.)

And what's in that bag?

REDD

What bag?

VIOLET

Boy, don't act stupid. I see that bag ova' there.

REDD

Oh, this bag. Just some food.

VIOLET

Food? Food for what?

REDD

Uh... my friend don't have no food.

Who ain't got no food?
VIOLET

Bobby.
REDD

Bobby who?
VIOLET

Down the hall--
REDD

Boy, you betta' take that shit outta' that damn bag and put it back up. We ain't got no food to be givin' away to nobody. What's in that otha' bag?
VIOLET

Dirty clothes.
REDD

You takin' them to Bobby, too?
VIOLET

No. I was gon' wash 'em--
REDD

You know what? You actin' real suspicious. You been back ova' that sissy's house?
VIOLET

Stop callin' him that--
REDD

What difference does it make what I call him? Trust me. I'm bein' nice. 'Cause I can call him a whole lot worse--
VIOLET

He's got a name.
REDD

What is it, huh? You like him or somethin'? You got a lil' crush on him--
VIOLET

That's not funny. At least he likes havin' me around.
REDD

VIOLET

I'm sure he does. But I don't know why you gettin' so upset with me. He's the freak.

REDD

He's not a freak.

(A moment.)

VIOLET

You hate me, don't you?

REDD

Sometimes.

VIOLET

Well damn. That hurts, ya' know. You could at least lie. I mean, I know I ain't been the world's best motha'. But hell, it ain't easy raisin' a child by ya'self.

(A moment.)

REDD

Did my daddy hurt you?

VIOLET

Why you ask me somethin' like that?

REDD

'Cause I wanna know--

VIOLET

Hell yeah he hurt me, okay. Now what?

(VIOLET takes a swig from the flask. A moment.)

We had plans to get married and travel the world togetha', just me and him. But all that changed when I told him I was three months pregnant. *(Pause.)* He disappeared.

REDD

You didn't try to find him?

VIOLET

When they disappear like that, they don't wanna be found.

(VIOLET crosses purposeless.)

VIOLET (CONT'D)

I waited a few months, thinkin' maybe he just needed some time and space. Eventually, I called his family but they wasn't talkin'. But I did let 'em know I was havin' his baby. A few weeks later, I got a phone call from his mama sayin' he enlisted in the Marines, and that he was stationed somewhere ova' in the Philippines or some place like that. *(Reluctantly)* His name is Redmond. His nickname was Red though.

REDD

So you named me afta' him?

VIOLET

Yes and no. I figured I'd add a extra "d" at the end of yours just so it'd be a lil' different. But red was also his favorite color. I even thought our names was some kinda sign when we first met-- *Red and Violet.* *(Beat.)* You look just like him.

REDD

You got a picture of him?

VIOLET

I don't. And the ones I had, I ripped 'em up and threw 'em in the garbage. *(Pause.)* He was the love of my life. I dropped outta' nursin' school just to be with him... just young, dumb, and stupid, thinkin' he would take care of me. My parents thought I was crazy... saved up all that money for me to go to school. But when it was all said and done, I knew I couldn't hold down a job, go back to school, and raise a child all by myself.

(A moment.)

REDD

So is he the reason why you hate me?

VIOLET

I don't hate you. You my son. I just don't like you bein' so damn soft. These lil' boys around here gon' start kickin' ya' ass if you don't toughen up.

REDD

I ain't soft.

VIOLET

You are, too. You been that way since you was little... so sensitive. I thought you woulda' grown out of it by now. If you ain't careful, you gon' end up actin' like that sissy next door.

REDD

His name is Frankie, mama.

VIOLET

Whateva'. Niecy said she saw some kids chasin' you the otha' day. When was you gon' tell me?

REDD

You ain't been here.

VIOLET

I'm here now. So who's these kids? And why you runnin' from 'em?

REDD

They been tryna jump me. They chased me home, and that's how I ended up at Frankie's. I couldn't reach my key.

VIOLET

So why they tryna jump you?

REDD

'Cause I won't be in they gang.

VIOLET

Well I certainly don't want you in no gang. And I don't want you gettin' hurt either. But if one of 'em hit you, you hit 'em back. I ain't gon' have no weak ass son.

REDD

You sayin' you want me to fight?

VIOLET

I'm sayin' you need to toughen up. Learn to stand up for ya'self and stop bein' a lil' punk. This is a mean world, boy. And you betta' grow some damn balls if you plan on survivin'.

(A moment. REDD crosses toward interior exit.)

Where you goin'?

REDD

I gotta' pee.

(REDD EXITS. A moment. There's a KNOCK. VIOLET crosses and opens the door. FRANKIE stands in the doorway with detergent inside a basket.)

FRANKIE

Oh, I'm sorry. I uh--

VIOLET

What the hell you want?

FRANKIE

I was just headed down to the laundry room and--

VIOLET

You washin' my son's clothes now? Look here. I don't know what yo' intentions are with my child but--

FRANKIE

I don't have any intentions except to show him how to wash his clothes. A child needs clean clothes.

VIOLET

How the hell you know what he needs?

FRANKIE

I was just tryin' to help.

VIOLET

Yeah, well, he don't need no help. You need to stay away from my damn son.

(VIOLET slams the door, crosses, grabs a cigarette, attempts to light it but the lighter clicks empty. A moment. She gets cordless phone and makes a call.)

Hey, Ramon. You busy? Listen. I need you to do me a favor.

(LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE FIVE. NEXT DAY. PREDAWN.

(LIGHTS UP on FRANKIE'S LIVING ROOM. FRANKIE ENTERS through the front door in full drag makeup, wearing a catsuit and tennis shoes, carrying a pair of stilettos in one hand and an oversized tote bag in the other. He's humming an upbeat tune. The SOUND OF ARGUING VOICES can be heard OFFSTAGE.)

FRANKIE

(sticking his head outside of the door)

Will y'all shut the hell up?!

MAN'S VOICE (OFFSTAGE)

You shut the hell up, ya' damn faggot!

FRANKIE

Kiss my natural black ass, old man!

(FRANKIE slams the door and sits items down. VOICES STOP. There's a KNOCK.)

You betta' get ya' drunk ass away from my damn door.

(KNOCKING continues. FRANKIE crosses and opens the door.)

Look hear, ya'-- Oh, hey, honey.

(REDD stands in the doorway, wearing pajama bottoms, an undershirt, and socks.)

REDD

Who are you? And where's Frankie?

FRANKIE

Redd, honey, it is me. And whatchu' doin' up this late? It's almost four o'clock in the mornin'. Ya' mama gon' kill you.

REDD

She ain't home. She's with Kenny.

(REDD ENTERS.)

FRANKIE

Who?

REDD

Kenny. I wish she would stay away from him.

FRANKIE

Is that her boyfriend?

REDD

She works for him. *(Beat.)* Anyway, why you look like that? Did you get a sex change?

FRANKIE

No, I didn't get no sex change. I performed tonight.

REDD

But you don't look like ya'self. You look pretty.

FRANKIE

Well, I don't know if that's an insult or a compliment, but thank you. I teased the wig out. It actually looks nice, huh?

REDD

It does. But how you get ya' face to look like a lady's?

FRANKIE

It's called technique.

REDD

It's looks more like a disguise. Like you could be a spy.

FRANKIE

That's not exactly the look I was goin' for.

REDD

But it's actually pretty cool though. It's different. People gonna think you a lady.

FRANKIE

Well, in my field, that's considered a successful transformation. The nightclub where I perform-- Well, men dress up like women and sing songs on stage.

REDD

Why?

FRANKIE

Entertainment. Or, we also like to think of it as art.

REDD

So is it just for fun?

FRANKIE

You could say that. Personally, I love dressin' the way I feel on the inside, which is beautiful and elegant. And I love performin'. It's like I come alive on stage, you know. Sometimes it feels like a family reunion, too... all eyes on me, everybody wantin' to see me. And we all just havin' a good time bein' exactly who we are.

REDD

So, are you like gay?

FRANKIE

I am not about to have this conversation with you. *(Beat.)* I see ya' elbow is doin' betta'.

REDD

Yeah, it feels a lot betta'.

FRANKIE

Good.

(A moment.)

REDD

You know if you are, I don't care.

FRANKIE

Well, that's nice to know, Redd. And that's probably one of the kindest things somebody has said to me in a very long time.

REDD

I know my mama might care though but I don't.

FRANKIE

Well, she's just like a whole lot of other people, honey. She feels like she has to protect you from people like me. And as much as I enjoy ya' company, I don't want you gettin' in trouble for bein' over here.

REDD

I'ma run away.

FRANKIE

Run away? Where?

REDD

Ova' here.

FRANKIE

So you gon' run away next door?

REDD

Yes. I hate her.

FRANKIE

No, you don't. You just sayin' that. Look. She may not be perfect but none of us are. And she's still ya' mama.

REDD

Didn't you hate ya' granddaddy?

FRANKIE

I did for a while. But that's because he tried to force me to be somebody I wasn't. He wanted me to be more *strong* and *manly*. Called me all kinds of mean things, thinkin' that was gon' change me, I guess. But I just couldn't be who he wanted me to be.

REDD

But ain't it hard tryna' be a lady?

FRANKIE

That's just it. I ain't *tryna'* be a lady. I'm simply bein' me. And that's very easy. Does that make sense?

REDD

Sorta'. So ya' granddaddy didn't like that, huh?

FRANKIE

Not at all. So he call himself puttin' me around the so-called *real men* at the church, 'til he messed up and put me around one of his deacons who had his own demons. Some things happened, and I tried to tell my granddaddy but he didn't believe me. And the deacon said I was lyin', of course. So, one Sunday, me and my sista' was headed to Sunday School class when my granddaddy stopped us. He told my sista' to go onto class but he told me to get outta' his church and not to come back until I learned how to stop lyin' on *men of God*. But what he said was just an excuse. I was an embarrassment to him. But, in a way, somethin' good came out of it. I decided it was time for me to be on my own. I had to take care of myself from that day on. I learned how to survive.

REDD

So then you ran away, too.

FRANKIE

No, I left. And I was eighteen. You twelve, and that's a big difference.

REDD

My mama finally told me about my daddy.

FRANKIE

What did she say?

REDD

He left, too. I don't think he really wanted a kid.

FRANKIE

I ain't never understood how a man can walk out on his own child.

REDD

All I know is when I have a kid, I ain't gon' do that.

FRANKIE

I know you won't. (*Beat.*) Come on. We both need to get some sleep before the sun comes up. I'd offer you a pillow and a blanket to sleep on the sofa, but I ain't takin' no more chances with ya' mama. You go on home.

(FRANKIE and REDD cross to the door.)

Oh, wait a second. I got somethin' for you.

(FRANKIE pulls a coin purse out of his bag and retrieves an angel charm.)

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Here. My grandmotha' gave me this right after my parents died. It's a lil' angel she used to wear around her neck. She accidentally broke the necklace workin' out in the garden one day. The chain was hangin' around her neck but the angel fell off. She couldn't find it, so she come callin' me outta' the house to help her look for it. I ended up findin' it. It was right there in front of her the whole time. Guess she just couldn't see it. Or, maybe it was just her way of tryna' get me outta' the house. Anyway, I handed it to her, she cleaned it off a lil' bit, and then gave it back to me. Told me to keep it. I think it was God's way of lettin' me know that I have an angel watchin' out for me even if I can't see it.

(FRANKIE hands REDD the charm.)

And whenever I felt really sad, I'd just pull it out and say a lil' prayer. That's exactly what I want you to do.

REDD

Thanks.

FRANKIE

Oh, and I almost forgot. I got somethin' else for you.

(FRANKIE crosses and pulls out a pair of tennis shoes from his tote bag.)

Now I know they ain't brand new. They what I like to call *gently used*. But they almost look new, don't they?

REDD

Yes, sir.

FRANKIE

(handing Redd the shoes)

Go ahead. Try 'em on. They should fit. I took ya' other shoe with me.

(REDD tries on the shoes.)

So how they feel?

REDD

They feel good.

FRANKIE

You like 'em?

REDD

Yes, sir. They nice.

FRANKIE

Good. But I didn't get those so you can run away. And if ya' mama asks you where you got 'em.

REDD

I'ma just say that my friend didn't want 'em so he gave to me.

FRANKIE

Well, I am ya' friend. And those shoes are way too butch for me, honey. So you wouldn't be lyin'.

REDD

Butch?

FRANKIE

They look good on yo' feet.

(REDD hugs FRANKIE and EXITS. A moment. FRANKIE starts to undress. There's a KNOCK. FRANKIE crosses, opens the door, removes a handwritten note taped to his door, closes the door, and reads aloud.)

Get yo' faggot ass outta' here or else.

(FRANKIE balls up the note. LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE SIX. LATER. MORNING.

(LIGHTS UP on VIOLET'S LIVING ROOM. REDD is sitting on the sofa playing his Gameboy. VIOLET ENTERS, scantily clad in a short party dress and stilettos, moderately intoxicated.)

VIOLET

You up awfully early. Hope you wasn't worryin' 'bout me 'cause I was just fine. Had myself a good time last night.

(VIOLET crosses, turns the RADIO ON, takes a swig from her flask and dances. REDD crosses and turns the RADIO OFF.)

REDD

It's Sunday. Why you even drinkin'?

VIOLET

'Cause I'm grown and I can.

(VIOLET crosses and turns RADIO ON. She tunes into a gospel station. GOSPEL MUSIC PLAYS.)

There. How's that? Even Jesus turned water into wine.

(VIOLET resumes to drinking. REDD crosses and turns the RADIO OFF.)

Will you leave my damn radio alone, boy?

(VIOLET finally relents and settles herself.)

Guess what I heard last night. Heard Ramon cussin' out ya' lil' sissy friend. I was sittin' in the parkin' lot talkin' to Kenny. Apparently, Ramon caught the sissy talkin' to Marcus and the twins. And why you ain't tell me they was the ones botherin' you?

REDD

I don't know.

VIOLET

Anyway, guess the sissy told them to leave you alone.

(VIOLET sits down and removes her wig, jewelry, and shoes.)

VIOLET (CONT'D)

Ramon told him the next time he threaten one of those boys, he was gon' kick his faggot ass. Guess that homo call his self tryna' protect you. But he gon' mess around and get hurt. And Ramon knows exactly where he lives. 'Cause I told him--

REDD

Whatchu' do that for?

VIOLET

'Cause we don't need his kind livin' up in here.

(PHONE RINGS. REDD answers.)

REDD

Hello.

(REDD hands VIOLET the cordless phone.)

VIOLET

Hello ... You still down there? Don't play with me, Kenny. Ya' ass betta' be down there ... Who? And he asked for me? ... Alright ... I'll be down there in a minute.

(VIOLET ends call.)

I gotta' run out for a minute.

(VIOLET slips on some flip flops and a ball cap, grabs her wallet from her purse, checks her appearance in the mirror, and EXITS. A moment. REDD starts tidying up the living room, where Violet's clothes are sprawled around. He picks up her high heel shoes, briefly studies them before slipping them on. He struggles to walk in them as he unsteadily crosses, picks up the wig, and slips it on. He puts on some clip-on earrings that are on the table. He grabs lipstick from the purse, crosses to the mirror, and smears it on. He looks at himself and begins to imitate feminine gestures. A moment. VIOLET ENTERS, startling REDD.)

VIOLET

I forgot to grab my-- Boy, what in the hell are you doin'?

(VIOLET crosses to REDD, grabs his arm, and snatches the wig off.)

REDD

Ouch. You hurtin' me--

VIOLET

What are doin' in my shit?

(REDD snatches his arm out of VIOLET'S grip and faces her toe-to-toe with his fist balled up.)

Oh, what? You gon' hit me now? Take this shit off.

(VIOLET snatches off the items.)

You tryna' be a girl now? Huh? You wanna be just as mixed up and confused as that sissy next door? You hear me talkin' to you? I done told you he's a bad person--

REDD

He's not! You are!

(REDD grabs his shoes and quickly EXITS. A moment. VIOLET collapses onto the sofa, makes an effort to drink but bursts into tears. LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE SEVEN. THREE WEEKS LATER. MORNING.

(LIGHTS UP on FRANKIE'S LIVING ROOM. Some of REDD'S belongings are in the living room. FRANKIE is wearing a robe, a doorag, and slippers, folding a blanket on the sofa. REDD ENTERS wearing pajamas.)

FRANKIE

Well good mornin'.

REDD

Good mornin'.

FRANKIE

You wash ya' face and brush ya' teeth?

REDD

Yes, sir.

FRANKIE

Still no word from ya' motha'. I went ova' and knocked on the door again this mornin'. It's goin' on three weeks--

REDD

I don't wanna go back home.

FRANKIE

I'm still waitin' for you to tell me why. You know it's okay to talk to me, right?

(A moment.)

REDD

She said bad things about you.

FRANKIE

Do you believe it?

REDD

No.

FRANKIE

Well then that's all that matters. But I'm surprised you been ova' here this long and she ain't come lookin' for you.

REDD

I ain't. Besides, I like bein' here with you anyway.

FRANKIE

And I enjoy havin' you here. I'm tryna' prepare myself for when you do have to leave, but--

REDD

Frankie, I don't wanna leave.

FRANKIE

Well honey, I'm not ya' guardian. Eventually, ya' mama is comin' back home.

(A moment.)

REDD

Killa Krew don't mess with me no more. You told 'em to leave me alone, huh?

FRANKIE

I did.

REDD

Marcus... that guy is crazy. You gotta' be careful.

FRANKIE

You know what? How about I play some music to get our minds off of all that?

(FRANKIE crosses, grabs remote, clicks on MUSIC and begins to dance. He crosses to REDD, encouraging him to dance. REDD dances. There's a persistent KNOCK. FRANKIE clicks MUSIC OFF and crosses to the door.)

FRANKIE

Who is it?

VIOLET (OFFSTAGE)

It's Violet. Redd's motha'.

(FRANKIE opens the door. VIOLET, dressed in a fancy jumpsuit, storms pass FRANKIE.)

You lucky I don't call the police on yo' ass.

FRANKIE

Call the police? For what? I been lookin' for you.

VIOLET

Yeah, well, I was outta' town takin' care of business. But I'm back now. (*At Redd*) And it's time for you to come home. So get ya' stuff and come on. Leave all ya' lil' dresses and heels' and shit here with Ms. Thang.

REDD

I don't wanna go with you.

VIOLET

You betta' come on here, boy. I ain't got all day.

FRANKIE

Redd, listen to ya' mama. It's okay.

(REDD gathers his belongings, crosses to the door, and hugs FRANKIE before VIOLET snatches him away.

REDD EXITS.)

He's a good kid, and he deserves a lot betta'.

VIOLET

Oh yeah? He tell you I caught him dressed up in my clothes, prancin' around, actin' like a lil' girl? Where he get that from, huh?

FRANKIE

No, he didn't tell me but--

VIOLET

Oh, don't act surprised.

FRANKIE

Well I'm sorry if you think I had somethin' to do with that. But if you really believe, then why would leave him for three weeks?

VIOLET

I don't owe an explanation. You ain't no damn betta' than me.

FRANKIE

Look here. Ever since that boy stepped foot in my apartment, I ain't done nothin' but care for him. Over the past couple of weeks, I've left work early, and I've gone in late just so he wouldn't be alone. And I'd do it all over again if I had to. You don't just run off and leave a child alone for days--

VIOLET

Don't you dare try and tell me how to raise my son. I'm out here workin' and makin' money so he can eat.

FRANKIE

You so busy workin' you don't even realize he's hungry for somethin' else.

VIOLET

You ain't got the message yet?

FRANKIE

Excuse me? Wait. Are you the one leavin' notes on my door?

VIOLET

I don't know nothin' about no damn notes. But...

(VIOLET draws her large pocket knife, waving it in FRANKIE'S face. FRANKIE steps back.)

What I do know is that if I was you, I'd watch my back.

(VIOLET EXITS. FRANKIE slams the door. A moment. FRANKIE, fighting back tears, crosses and collapses onto the sofa. A few stubborn tears roll down FRANKIE'S cheeks. BLACKOUT.)

END OF ACT I

INTERMISSION

ACT II - TEN YEARS LATER.

SCENE ONE.

SETTING: The split stage with a wall divider forms the shape of a “T,” establishing two separate sections. Frankie’s living has been converted to a nightclub dressing room, furnished with a vanity table with a lighted mirror and the faux leather sofa. A wig on a mannequin head, a whisky bottle, a cocktail drink, makeup, and hair items cover the vanity table. There’s a clothing rack where several shimmery dresses hang. A few pictures of famous drag queens are on the wall. Stage Right remains dim but, periodically, it serves as a performance space and partial bar area, where there’s a pub table with a few stools.

AT RISE: We hear KNOCKING over LOW-PLAYING HOUSE MUSIC. FRANKIE, dressed in a long shimmery, strapless dress, wearing stilettos, and a big wig, sits at the vanity, applying the finishing touches to his makeup.

ROOSEVELT (OFF STAGE)

Frankie, it’s me, Roosevelt. You about done in there? You’re up.

(LIGHT FADES on DRESSING ROOM. MUSIC RISES as SPOTLIGHT SHINES on performance space. We see a thirty-something REDD sitting alone at the pub table. FRANKIE crosses out of the dressing room and sashays to his mark in the SPOTLIGHT. MUSIC FADES.)

FRANKIE

Good evening. Welcome to Belle’s Bar & Lounge. That’s *belle* as in Southern Belle, and that I am. I’m so excited tonight. Y’all are in for a treat. Not only is ya’ famed Southern Belle, *yours truly*, in the house, but consider ya’selves lucky ‘cause we got ya’ *beloved queens* and *divas* also here tonight. I am ya’ host, *Ms. Frankie Lee*.

(APPLAUSE/CHEERS.)

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Now unfortunately, that means I won't be performin' tonight-- I know, I know. I already see some of ya' lil' happy faces turnin' sad. But don't slit ya' wrist 'cause then we'll have to clean up the mess. *But*, I *will* be performin' next Wednesday night. Do I need to repeat that? Well then y'all asses betta' show me some love up in here.

(APPLAUSE/CHEERS.)

Hell, that's hump day-- Well, for some of y'all, every day is hump day but that ain't none of my business. Anyway, guess who we got in the house tonight, y'all. All the way from Chi-town, honey ... the *Windy City*, where you gotta' sew ya' wig to ya' scalp. We got *Ms. Pinky LaTrelle*.

(APPLAUSE/CHEERS.)

Guess who else is here tonight, representin' *the Lou*. We got St. Louis's very own, the lovely *Ebony Diamond*.

(APPLAUSE/CHEERS.)

Alright, now listen. I know y'all been waitin' for this heffa' for a minute. She's been temporarily helpin' out at the bar. But finally, comin' back to the stage, let's give it up for Atlanta's very own, *Jules Forever*. (APPLAUSE/CHEERS.) Last but certainly not least, we got my two sexy proteges all the way from sizzlin' hot *Miami*. Come on and show some love for the oh-so talented twins, *Cinnamon and Sugar*.

(APPLAUSE/CHEERS.)

Alright, children. Let me get my ass on outta' the way so we can get this show *started*.

(APPLAUSE/WHISTLES/CHEERS. MUSIC RISES.
SPOTLIGHT shifts to club LIGHT EFFECTS.
FRANKIE EXITS. MUSIC FADES. LIGHT
EFFECTS END.)

SCENE TWO. MOMENTS LATER.

(LIGHTS UP on DRESSING ROOM. FRANKIE ENTERS. MUSIC OFF. JULES is scantily clad in a show-girl type costume, sitting at the vanity, applying makeup.)

FRANKIE

Jules, you got about ten seconds to get yo' silicone ass outta' my damn chair. Ten, nine, eight, seven---

JULES

Okay, okay, okay.

FRANKIE

Why you ain't back there in the other dressin' room with everybody else?

(FRANKIE crosses and grabs his drink off the vanity.)

JULES

(patting face with a makeup sponge)

'Cause tonight I need my mug beat for the gods, honey. That means I need to concentrate. And Pinky's back there runnin' her damn mouth, distractin' everybody. I wanted to slap her ass, talkin' about *all the queens down South are just restin' on pretty, and y'all ain't got no real talent down here*. I was about to read her fake ass--

FRANKIE

You know Pinky is always tryna' start some shit--

JULES

Well if she come for me, I'ma gut that fish. You hear me? She need to hurry up and take her ass on back to the South Side of Chicago.

FRANKIE

Pinky's got a loyal fanbase down here and, right now, we need some asses in those seats.

JULES

Speakin' of... what's it look like out there?

FRANKIE

Half empty.

JULES

Damn. That's three nights in a row.

FRANKIE

I told Ronnie it's thinnin' out in here.

JULES

What he say?

FRANKIE

Hell, it ain't nothin' he can say. It's his damn fault, fightin' and carryin' on. Folks are afraid to come back.

JULES

What about him? He comin' back anytime soon?

FRANKIE

I don't know. She cut him pretty deep.

JULES

I told Ronnie needed to rein in his temper messin' around with those t-girls. Honey, they'll stab ya' ass, make a drink, light a joint, and sashay right on off into the sunset.

FRANKIE

Well he claims some dude was harrassin' her while she was on her way in here, and he was just tryna' stop him--

JULES

No, that girl said Ronnie slapped her-- And a guy comin' outta' the liquor store next door said he *saw* Ronnie manhandlin' her in the parkin' lot.

FRANKIE

All I know is between that and the couple of fights that broke out last month, Belle's is startin' to get a bad reputation.

JULES

We didn't have this problem when we had a bouncer. Why Ronnie draggin' his feet on gettin' anotha' bouncer in here?

FRANKIE

Roosevelt said he can handle it for now--

JULES

(looking at Frankie)

Roosevelt is here for one thing, and I'm lookin' at it... *you*.

(There's a KNOCK.)

FRANKIE

Who is it?

ROOSEVELT (OFFSTAGE)

Roosevelt.

FRANKIE

(primping in the mirror)

Come in.

(ROOSEVELT ENTERS, dressed in slacks, an untucked dress shirt, a blazer, and dress shoes.)

ROOSEVELT

Hey, baby. There's some young dude out here wantin' to talk to you.

FRANKIE

Who?

ROOSEVELT

Hell, I don't know. What do you want me to tell him?

FRANKIE

Did he give you a name?

ROOSEVELT

Sound like he said Fred or Redd, somethin' like that. I think it was Redd. But I could barely hear over the music.

FRANKIE

Redd? (*Apprehensively*) Uh... yeah, just tell him that uh... tell him I'm in the bathroom.

ROOSEVELT

(suspiciously)

Alright, Frankie.

(ROOSEVELT EXITS. JULES notices FRANKIE'S uneasiness.)

JULES

You okay?

FRANKIE

Yeah, I'm fine--

JULES

Now you know I know betta' than that. Who you runnin' from?

(FRANKIE drinks.)

FRANKIE

Nobody.

JULES

Well it look like you done seen a damn ghost. If I didn't know no betta', I'd think you was dodgin' somebody to keep Roosevelt from actin' a jealous fool.

FRANKIE

This ain't got nothin' to do with Roosevelt. And it ain't no reason for him to get jealous 'cause we ain't nothin' goin' on.

JULES

Coulda' fooled me, especially after that raunchy lap dance you gave him last night.

FRANKIE

What lap dance?

JULES

I knew you wouldn't rememba'. That's why you don't need to get shit-faced again like you did last night. Yo' ass was so damn drunk, you didn't even realize one of ya' fake ass titties had slid up to ya' shoulder--

FRANKIE

Heffa, quit lyin'.

(There's a KNOCK.)

Who is it?

REDD (OFFSTAGE)

My name is Redd. I'm lookin' for Frankie.

(FRANKIE anxiously gestures for JULES to cover for her.)

JULES

Uh... uh... she left.

REDD (OFFSTAGE)

Do you know when he'll be back?

JULES

(to Frankie, faintly)

I just wanna see who it is.

(JULES defiantly crosses to the door.)

FRANKIE

(faintly)

Damn it, Jules. Don't you open--

(JULES opens the dressing room door. FRANKIE braces himself for the moment.)

JULES

(plainly blocking view into dressing room)

Well Lord, *have mercy*. You are beautiful. You said you lookin' for Frankie, honey?

REDD

I am. I was just wonderin' if you knew when he might be back.

JULES

You mean *her*.

REDD

Uh...

JULES

In here, we prefer *she and her*, especially when in drag. So anybody in makeup, heels and a wig or a weave, no matter how bad it is, is *she or her*, okay.

FRANKIE

(conceding to conscience)

Jules, let him in.

JULES

Oh, look here. She's back. What a surprise.

(JULES steps aside, sizing up REDD as he ENTERS. He's strikingly fit, dressed in jeans, a V-neck shirt, and casual shoes. FRANKIE is frozen. A moment.)

REDD

Frankie?

FRANKIE

Redd. (*Pause*.) What are you doin' here? And how on earth did you find me?

REDD

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to just show up. But I saw a video online about a stabbin' here recently. It said, *Popular drag performer Frank Leonard also known as Ms. Frankie Lee*. And I... well, I couldn't believe it. I never knew ya' real name, but I definitely recognized ya' face. I can leave if you want me to, but I--

FRANKIE

No. No, it's okay. It's... it's good to see you after all these years.

JULES

(interrupting)

Well, I'm Jules.

REDD

(extending his arm)

Nice to meet you, Jules.

JULES

Oh, no, honey. We don't shake hands around here. We grind--

FRANKIE

Will you stop?

JULES

But he's so cute. So, what's the connection?

FRANKIE

Redd used to live next door to me in Village Heights. (*To Redd*) It's been what like ten years--

REDD

Yeah.

FRANKIE

One day he just showed up at my door all outta' breath, runnin' from these bad ass kids in the projects. So, I just let him in and locked the door.

REDD

I remember you saved me from gettin' my butt kicked.

FRANKIE

I was just doin' what any good neighbor would do... makin' sure you stayed outta' harm's way. If that meant lettin' you in and feedin' you, then that's the least I could do.

JULES

Well it sounds like y'all got some catchin' up to do.

FRANKIE

Yeah, so go find somethin' to do.

JULES

Well, I was tryin' to but you cockblockin' so--

FRANKIE

Get outta' here and get ready to perform.

(JULES crosses, blows REDD a kiss, and EXITS.)

FRANKIE

She's a mess. All that flirtin' she was doin', most straight men woulda' cussed her out. You are still straight, aren't you?

REDD

Ain't nothin' changed.

FRANKIE

So then you do realize this is a gay bar that hosts drag shows.

REDD

(eyes surveying the dressing room)

Between the drag performance, the video online, and the rainbow flag out front, Frankie, I'm pretty clear on what kinda bar this is.

FRANKIE

That didn't stop you from comin'?

REDD

I'm here, ain't I?

FRANKIE

Well then come here and give me a hug.

(FRANKIE and REDD hug)

Would you like a drink?

REDD

No, thank you.

FRANKIE

Well, how you been? It's been so long.

REDD

It has. But I been doin' okay.

FRANKIE

What about ya' motha'? How is she doin'?

(A moment.)

REDD

She passed away a couple of months ago.

FRANKIE

Oh, honey... I'm so sorry to hear that.

REDD

Well, I'm still processin' it. I didn't get to go to her funeral-- Not that I didn't want to. It's just that I found out after the fact.

FRANKIE

What?

REDD

It's my fault. She was livin' with some dude down in Florida. We didn't talk that often. Anyway, the guy calls and leaves a voice message with funeral details, but he called from her phone. Honestly, I thought it was just her callin' me again half drunk, so I didn't even bother listenin' to the message. But I did get a chance to go down and visit her gravesite.

FRANKIE

I can't imagine what that must feel like.

REDD

I really don't know what I'm supposed to feel. That probably sounds bad but... she was the who left.

FRANKIE

What do you mean she left?

REDD

I came home from school one day, and there was this note on the table. It said she just couldn't do it anymore, and that she didn't think she was meant to be a parent, and that she hoped I don't turn out gay. She gave her friend Niecy some money to come pick me up and take me to the Greyhound station so I could go live with my grandparents in Detroit.

FRANKIE

Redd, I... I don't know what to say I--

REDD

You don't have to say anything, Frankie. I mean, after all, people abandon people all the time, right?

(An awkward moment. There's a KNOCK.)

FRANKIE

(at door)

I'm comin'. Listen, I'm hostin' the show tonight, so I gotta' get back out there.

REDD

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hold you up. I probably should've reached out and tried to contact you before just showin' up--

FRANKIE

No, it's... it's really good to see you again and all grown up.

REDD

You mind if I stick around?

FRANKIE

Uh... well... it's just that I'm workin', you know and I... well, of course I don't mind.

(MUSIC RISES. FRANKIE gathers himself, grabs his drink, and THEY EXIT. LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE THREE. MOMENTS LATER.

(SPOTLIGHT UP on FRANKIE in the PERFORMANCE SPACE with his drink in hand. REDD and ROOSEVELT look on from the DIMLY LIT bar space. ROOSEVELT cradles a drink.)

FRANKIE

Come on and let's give up again for *Ms. Pinky LaTrelle*.

(APPLAUSE/CHEERS.)

Guess what just happened backstage, y'all. Someone very dear to me, who I haven't seen since he was a lil' boy, showed up tonight and surprised the hell outta' me. So y'all do me a favor and wave at my very handsome friend standin' right ova' there. Go ahead and wave at everybody, Redd.

(REDD waves. ROOSEVELT surveys the moment unfavorably.)

But now, boys, he is straight. And you know it ain't that often we get a *heterosexual* in our midst, so y'all don't do nothin' to scare him off. Alright? Now I'ma get on outta' y'all way 'cause y'all know Jules... her ass is just itchin' to get up here. Well, I'm sure it's itchin' for anotha' reason but *no tea, no shade*. Come on and give it up for *Jules Forever*.

(APPLAUSE/CHEERS. MUSIC UP. SPOTLIGHT transitions to SPECIAL LIGHT EFFECTS. FRANKIE crosses to REDD. JULES takes his mark and starts performing a high energy vogue routine. ROOSEVELT closely heeds FRANKIE'S interaction with REDD while JULES performs. We begin to hear MUMBLING MALE VOICES ESCALATE and SCUFFLING SOUNDS inside the club.)

FRANKIE

(interrupting, to nearby area)

Aye!

(JULES halts performance. MUSIC DOWN.)

Hey, y'all cut that shit out. We tryna' have a show up in here.

(We hear GLASS BREAK.)

JULES

What in the hell--

FRANKIE

Damn it, y'all stop!

(ROOSEVELT races toward the action. FRANKIE trails him.)

BLACKOUT.

SCENE FOUR. LATER.

(LIGHTS RISE on dressing room. FRANKE paces.
JULES smokes a cigarette. ROOSEVELT drinks a beer.
REDD keeps an eye on FRANKIE.)

FRANKIE

This shit gotta' stop. I mean it.

ROOSEVELT

That's the third time this month they done come in here startin' shit.

JULES

We need a damn bouncer--

ROOSEVELT

The hell we do. (*Brandishing a gun in his ankle holster*) I got all the security we need right here. And I ain't afraid to use it.

FRANKIE

Will you cover that thing up? You know I hate guns. And Jules is right--

ROOSEVELT

Belle's don't even have the crowd no more, Frankie.

FRANKIE

But we still got some damn fools comin' up in here.

ROOSEVELT

It's a waste of money if you ask me. It ain't nothin' but some young cats that I can handle.

JULES

Well nobody did.

REDD

Let me do it.

ROOSEVELT

Hell no.

REDD

Excuse me?

ROOSEVELT

We ain't hiring--

JULES

We? That ain't yo' call. I think he'd be perfect, if you ask me. Lord knows we could use some *real* eye candy around here--

ROOSEVELT

Forget about some damn eye candy. *(To Redd)* Man, whatchu' gon' do when one 'em bears get drunk and start fightin', huh?

REDD

Bears?

ROOSEVELT

See. This ain't for you--

REDD

Well, I'd try to de-escalate the situation--

ROOSEVELT

Nah, man, ain't none of that. You can't be a counselor in the middle of chaos. That's the quickest way to get ya' ass kicked--

REDD

I can handle them and you--

FRANKIE

Will y'all just stop? Please. *(To Jules and Roosevelt)* Give us a minute--

ROOSEVELT

You gotta' be kiddin' me--

FRANKIE

Roosevelt, please.

(ROOSEVELT reluctantly EXITS. JULES trails and EXITS.)

REDD

What's with him?

FRANKIE

Just ignore him, honey. Listen. I appreciate you offerin' but I can't let you work here.

REDD

Why not? It ain't like I can't do it.

FRANKIE

Because you didn't come here lookin' for a job, at least I hope not.

REDD

Well, I didn't but...

(Silence. FRANKIE drinks.)

What happened, Frankie? Why'd you disappear?

FRANKIE

I can't do this right now.

REDD

Oh, my bad. I don't wanna keep you from drinkin'--

FRANKIE

Don't do that. (*Beat.*) Listen. I'm so sorry you loss ya' motha' and that you had to go through that, but whateva' answers you come here lookin' for, I don't have 'em.

REDD

Is that all you think I came here lookin' for? (*Beat.*) I guess me comin' here was a mistake--

FRANKIE

No, it wasn't. It's just that I've worked really hard to forget about my experience in Village Heights.

REDD

But I was a part of that experience. Does that mean you forgot about me?

FRANKIE

I *never* forgot about you. And it was painful for me to leave--

REDD

Then why did you? It felt like you just abandoned me--

FRANKIE

I didn't abandon you.

REDD

Then what do you call it, Frankie? I knocked on ya' door *every day* for two weeks straight. I didn't have anybody else--

FRANKIE

That ain't my fault.

REDD

Wow.

FRANKIE

Look. What I did back then, you was just too young to understand.

REDD

I understood rejection.

FRANKIE

I never rejected you.

REDD

And I never rejected you.

FRANKIE

That's because you didn't know no betta'.

REDD

What's that supposed to mean--

FRANKIE

My damn life was threatened, okay. Ya' own motha' pulled a knife on me.

REDD

What?

FRANKIE

Yes. And all I know is that I had to respect what she asked of me, and that was to leave her son alone. But it wasn't just her. Somebody was stickin' notes on my door, threatenin' to hurt me if I didn't leave you alone. So, I decided that it was best for me to just pack up and leave to protect you and me both.

REDD

You couldn't at least say bye?

FRANKIE

It was too damn hard, okay.

(There's a KNOCK.)

ROOSEVELT (OFFSTAGE)

Frankie, you alright in there?

FRANKIE

(at door)

I'm fine.

REDD

I should probably get goin'--

FRANKIE

Yeah...

(A moment.)

REDD

So that's it?

(A moment. ROOSEVELT ENTERS.)

Alright then. Guess I'll head out.

FRANKIE

Good night.

(REDD crosses, avoiding ROOSEVELT'S threatening gaze and EXITS.)

ROOSEVELT

You ain't seriously thinkin' about makin' him bein' a bouncer, are you?

FRANKIE

Look, Roosevelt. It's been a long night. I'm tired. I wanna get this place locked up so I go home.

ROOSEVELT

Can I spend the night?

FRANKIE

No.

ROOSEVELT

Why not?

FRANKIE

Because you have a wife and kids, and I told you that bothers me.

ROOSEVELT

You know I been workin' on tryna' get a divorce, and I ain't touched my wife in years. I sleep in the damn guest room, Frankie, and you know that. So, where's all this comin' from? (*Beat.*) What? Does this got somethin' to do with this Fred guy?

FRANKIE

It's Redd, and it ain't got nothin' to do with him.

ROOSEVELT

So then what is it? Because I've been takin' damn good care of you--

FRANKIE

I'm focused on repairin' this place's image, okay. I just wanna get Belle's back to what it used to be ... a safe place where folks can come and have a good time without worry about a damn fight breakin' out and somebody gettin' hurt.

ROOSEVELT

So you can't do that and have a man?

(A moment. ROOSEVELT crosses to FRANKIE and displays affection in ways that weakens FRANKIE'S resistance.)

ROOSEVELT (CONT'D)

I'm a good man and you know it.

(ROOSEVELT steals a kiss from FRANKIE.
FRANKIE momentarily surrenders.)

FRANKIE

(abruptly)

Stop. No. This needs to stop.

(ROOSEVELT pauses but THEY eventually resume
kissing. LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE FIVE. NEXT DAY.

(LIGHTS UP in BAR SPACE. JULES, dressed in cut-off, denim booty shorts and a T-shirt sits at the table, drinking wine, and flipping through a magazine. REDD ENTERS, wearing jeans and a polo-style shirt.)

JULES

(startled)

You scared the shit outta' me.

REDD

My bad.

JULES

You stalkin' me?

REDD

How'd you know?

JULES

Boy, don't play with me now 'cause I been known to turn a straight man curious.

REDD

I can believe that. Frankie here?

JULES

She's out runnin' errands but she should be back soon. You welcome to wait if you like.

REDD

Thanks.

(REDD settles.)

I enjoyed ya' performance-- Well, you know, until it was interrupted.

JULES

Well, the house rule is: when you like a performance, then you tip the performa'. And of course, for the sexy ones like ya'self, I let them tuck it in my special place.

REDD

Got it.

JULES

I know you straight and all but that's completely irrelevant around here.

REDD

Duly noted. So, how long you been performin'?

JULES

Since I was about twenty-one. But really I was 18 with a fake ID. (*Beat.*) But yeah, if it wasn't for Ms. Frankie takin' me under her wing and rescuin' me from the mean streets, I'd be either in prison or the grave. Been homeless since I was fifteen. Messed around and came out to my daddy, and he kicked my ass outta' the house the same night, talkin' about, *I raise men and not faggots. And I will not have a homo livin' under my roof.*

REDD

He actually put you out?

JULES

In the rain, honey. But I found a way to survive though, pullin' stunts and doin' whatever I could to make money. Anyway, enough about me. I'm curious about you. What's a young man like you doin' affectionately drawn to a drag queen twice ya' age?

REDD

Frankie feels more like family, you know. She made me feel seen and safe.

JULES

I feel like when I'm on stage. Although, here lately, I don't feel all that safe. (*Sizing up Redd*) We could use somebody like you around here... somebody who can handle the rough trade that's been comin' in here lately causin' problems.

REDD

Rough trade?

JULES

Oh, honey, never mind.

(FRANKIE ENTERS, wearing leggings, a blouse, heels, and carrying a handbag.)

There she is.

REDD

Hey, Frankie.

FRANKIE

(slightly surprised)

Hey--

JULES

Me and Redd here was just havin' a nice lil' kiki.

REDD

Well, I don't really know what a kiki is but I didn't consent to it.

FRANKIE

Gossipin' and runnin' off at the mouth, somethin' Jules loves to do.

JULES

I like to think of it as keepin' folks *well-informed*.

FRANKIE

(to Redd)

I wasn't expectin' to see you back in here, at least not any time soon.

REDD

I just wanted to apologize for last night.

JULES

Uh-oh. What did I miss?

(FRANKIE shoots JULES a look.)

Never mind. I got a nail appointment anyway. Y'all can just fill me in later.

(JULES coyly waves bye to REDD and EXITS. A moment.)

FRANKIE

I'm glad you came back. I really am. But you don't owe me an apology.

REDD

No, I do, especially for tryna' make you feel like you owed me somethin'. I went home and talked to my fiancée about it and--

FRANKIE

Fiancée?

(REDD nods affirmatively, pulls out his phone, and shows FRANKIE a picture.)

That's her?

REDD

Yeah, that's Imani.

FRANKIE

She's gorgeous, honey. Wait. That looks like a baby bump.

REDD

It is. I'ma be a father, Frankie.

FRANKIE

Oh, my God, honey. I'm so happy for you.

REDD

I'm like scared to death though.

FRANKIE

Why?

REDD

A kid, a wife... it's a huge responsibility. But that's part of the reason why the whole bouncer thing sounded good. I was recently laid off, and I'm just workin' part-time as a personal trainer right now, so I could use the extra money.

FRANKIE

I'ma be honest. Part of me thinks it might be a good idea, but I don't know. I get concerned--

REDD

Concerned about what?

FRANKIE

Well there's Roosevelt. He's a good friend of Ronnie's.

REDD

Ronnie? Is that the owner?

FRANKIE

Yeah, the one who was stabbed. Roosevelt's been helpin' out around here since Ronnie's been out. But he has a tendency to wanna control things around here. And while we are not exactly in a relationship, he does help out financially and you know.

REDD

So, what? Is he like ya' sugar daddy?

FRANKIE

Hell no. More like a Sweet N' Low Uncle.

REDD

So then what does that have to do with me?

FRANKIE

I'm just afraid.

REDD

Afraid of what?

(Silence.)

FRANKIE

Why didn't you tell me?

REDD

Tell you what? What are you talkin' about?

FRANKIE

Why didn't you tell me that ya' motha' had caught you dressed up in her clothes?

REDD

Wait. You knew about that?

FRANKIE

She certainly didn't hesitate to blame me.

(A moment.)

REDD

I don't know. I was embarrassed. Not to mention I was just bein' silly when I put on all that stuff. I knew I wasn't gay, and I didn't wanna be a woman. I was just amazed at how you was able to transform ya'self, and I wanted to see if I could, too. That was the first and the last time I ever did that.

FRANKIE

I just feel like it was my fault. I blamed myself for a long time. And maybe the more I expose you to this--

REDD

To what? Frankie, just stop. You bein' gay, a drag queen, and this whole world of yours and ya' friends ... it doesn't bother me. I'm not threatened or tempted by it. I actually get it. I'm not one of those guys who thinks bein' around gay men puts a question mark over my own sexuality. And I don't give a damn about anybody who thinks it does.

FRANKIE

I just can't believe you would try to imitate me. I ain't exactly no role model--

REDD

That's not true. Look, Frankie. I can't pretend like it didn't hurt when you left. I don't know which felt worse, you leavin' or my mama--

FRANKIE

And that really bothers me.

REDD

I thought maybe you had moved backed to South Carolina or somethin'.

FRANKIE

No. It certainly wasn't nothin' back there for me, especially since my brotha' became a precha' and my sista' married one. The most I can do now is make a quick phone call just to let 'em know I'm still alive 'cause they don't want nothin' to do with they lil' homosexual brotha' who dresses up like a woman.

REDD

Well, my motha' only called on special occasions. You know birthdays, holidays. Most of the time, she was drunk. At one point, she tried to give some lame, half-hearted apology about her not bein' a betta' parent, but I didn't wanna hear it.

(A moment.)

FRANKIE

You know I did come back lookin' for you.

REDD

You did?

(FRANKIE nods affirmatively.)

Why didn't you tell me that last night?

FRANKIE

Would it have made any difference? (*Pause.*) I came back because I wanted to give you my phone number and my new address. I showed up one day and knocked on the door. Finally, Grover's nosey ass come peepin' out his apartment tellin' me y'all had moved. But then he had the nerve to say, *You should be ashamed of yo'self, teachin' boys how to be fags like you. You a poor excuse for a Black man.*

REDD

And I hope you cussed his ass out.

FRANKIE

You know I did. Even made up some new cuss words.

(They laugh. A moment.)

REDD

So is this the same spot you used to work at before? You know the one you said I was too young to come to.

FRANKIE

Oh no, that place closed down years ago. Belle's is my home, honey. Been here almost twelve years. Came in one night... me and *Sasha Vee Love*, the grand drag motha' of all the Black queens down South, honey. Wasn't nobody in here but a handful of silva' foxes, drinkin' whiskey and smokin' cigars. We sauntered our asses up on stage and broke out in song-- I believe it was Phyllis Hyman's "Livin' All Alone"... a capella, honey. We didn't believe in lip syncin' shit, you hear me?

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Next thing I know, this place was packed, and then Ronnie asked if I wanted to help manage the place for him. (*Beat.*) I just want folks to be able to enjoy themselves without havin' to worry about bein' harassed or a fight breakin' out. It's like one minute we all singin' and dancin' and the next minute somebody is cussin' out an ex and tryna' fight.

REDD

Well I don't want you to worry about me. I can hold my own--

FRANKIE

So what exactly is ya' fiancée gon' think about you bein' a bouncer at a gay club? I mean really--

REDD

It's a job. And it was Imani who actually encouraged me to come here in the first place. She stayed on me about it after I told her about you. So, I look at it like this. You was there for me, and this is my chance to be here for you. That's if you want me to.

(A moment.)

FRANKIE

Okay. How about we do somethin' on a trial basis? And I'll let Ronnie know. But he gon' wanna pay you under the table.

REDD

I can work with that.

FRANKIE

Well, in that case, allow me to give you the *grand tour*.

(LIGHTS FADE as FRANKIE and REDD EXIT.)

SCENE SIX. LATER.

(LIGHT EFFECTS UP as HOUSE MUSIC CONTINUES. We see JULES wearing tight booty shorts, a silk blouse, and heels, dancing in the performance space. MUSIC FADES. LIGHT EFFECTS END. JULES crosses into bar space. LIGHTS UP on bar table where ROOSEVELT sits, taking shots. He is wearing a dress shirt and jeans. REDD ENTERS, wearing jeans, a black V-neck shirt, and black, steel-toe boots.)

REDD

(to Jules)

Frankie in the dressin' room?

JULES

Yeah. What's up?

REDD

So I'm standin' at the door, right? And this dude reaches out and just grabs my damn crotch.

JULES

Welcome to Belle's.

ROOSEVELT

(to Redd)

You mean you didn't like it?

REDD

(deliberately ignoring Roosevelt)

And that ain't all. This other dude gon' smack me on the ass while another guy, wearin' leather motorcycle pants with the ass cut out, called me daddy and begged me to spank him.

JULES

I warned you. Get use to it.

ROOSEVELT

Or, I can always tell Frankie you out here havin' a meltdown.

JULES

He's fine. They just messin' with you 'cause you straight and paranoid.

REDD

I ain't paranoid.

ROOSEVELT

So what's the matter then?

JULES

(to Redd)

Just take a deep breath and relax. I gotta' go check on the girls.

(JULES EXITS. ROOSEVELT lights a cigar. REDD coughs.)

ROOSEVELT

Three days.

REDD

Excuse me?

ROOSEVELT

I give you three days before you call it quits. This ain't yo' world, man.

REDD

Maybe it ain't. But I ain't gon' quit on Frankie.

(REDD and ROOSEVELT face off.)

ROOSEVELT

Just who the hell you think you are, huh? You think you gon' just come up in here and be the great savior of Belle's to impress Frankie? (*Beat.*) You want her, don't you?

REDD

Whatever, man--

ROOSEVELT

Look, son--

REDD

I ain't ya' damn son--

ROOSEVELT

Yo' ass is only here 'cause of Frankie. She may like you, but I don't.

(A moment. REDD pulls back, crosses, and EXITS. ROOSEVELT fumes and resigns to taking shots of alcohol. MUSIC RISES. LIGHTS FADE.)

SCENE SEVEN. MOMENTS LATER.

(LIGHTS UP on DRESSING ROOM. FRANKIE, dressed in a sequined mini-dress is sitting at the vanity, applying makeup. MUSIC FADES. There's a KNOCK.)

FRANKIE

Come in.

(REDD ENTERS.)

Hey, honey, how's it goin' out there?

REDD

It's a lil' more *hands on* than I expected.

FRANKIE

I meant to tell you not to pat nobody down 'cause that leads to other things--

REDD

Oh, I ain't pattin' nobody down. They tryna' pat me down, and I'm sorry, but I got my limits.

FRANKIE

I can put a stop to that tonight. But is everything else okay?

REDD

Other than Roosevelt accusin' me wantin' of you--

FRANKIE

Look. Ignore him. I don't know if Jules has already spilled the tea or not, but Roosevelt is also trapped in a marriage with a super religious wife that he never wanted. And in spite of knowin' about his proclivities, she refuses to divorce him and set him free.

REDD

He's married?

FRANKIE

Yes. Apparently, she thinks it's important for him to stay in the house for the sake of the kids and her reputation at church.

REDD

Well he keep talkin' shit, we gon' have a problem.

FRANKIE

Now see. That's exactly what I was afraid of.

(ROOSEVELT abruptly ENTERS.)

ROOSEVELT

(to Frankie)

We need to talk.

FRANKIE

What the hell happened to knockin' first?

ROOSEVELT

(to Redd)

Do you mind? I mean, you do know you supposed to be workin' the door, right?

FRANKIE

(to Redd)

Did you need anything else, honey?

REDD

It can wait.

FRANKIE

You sure?

REDD

Yeah.

(REDD cuts ROOSEVELT a sharp look and EXITS.)

FRANKIE

Will you lay off of him? And what's so damn important that it can't wait?

ROOSEVELT

Me.

(ROOSEVELT crosses to FRANKIE, attempting to kiss him.)

FRANKIE

(blocking his attempt)

I ain't got time for this right now.

ROOSEVELT

But you got time for him--

FRANKIE

Look, damn it. He ain't done nothin' to you. So whateva' issue you got with him, you need to let it go.

ROOSEVELT

You need to let him go. 'Cause obviously, there's somethin' there.

FRANKIE

You drunk, Roosevelt. Get out of my dressin' room if you don't want nothin'.

ROOSEVELT

I know exactly what I want.

(ROOSEVELT kisses FRANKIE. FRANKIE slaps him.)

ROOSEVELT

(grabbing Frankie's arm)

Damn it, Frankie! What the hell you slap me for?

FRANKIE

Let go of me.

(ROOSEVELT forcibly tugs at FRANKIE clothes, groping him. They struggle. FRANKIE knees ROOSEVELT in the groin.)

ROOSEVELT

Bitch!

(FRANKIE breaks loose, crosses, and opens the door.)

FRANKIE

Jules!

(ROOSEVELT crosses, grabs FRANKIE, and raises his fist to hit him. JULES quickly ENTERS.)

JULES

Stop it!

(JULES races back to the door.)

Redd, help!

(REDD ENTERS and charges ROOSEVELT. They scuffle before REDD pins ROOSEVELT down.)

ROOSEVELT

I'll kill yo' punk ass.

(REDD lands a punch. ROOSEVELT wrestles himself free and draws his gun from his ankle holster.)

JULES

Roosevelt, calm down. Put the gun away. Come on now. Think about what you doin'.

(FRANKIE moves in front of REDD.)

ROOSEVELT

Get yo' ass outta' the way, Frankie.

REDD

(to Frankie)

What are you doin'?

FRANKIE

I ain't movin'.

JULES

Shit, Frankie.

(JULES attempts to move in front of FRANKIE.)

ROOSEVELT

Move outta' the damn way.

(ROOSEVELT lowers the gun as if conceding. As FRANKIE and JULES move, ROOSEVELT abruptly lifts the gun and fires. We hear ONE GUNSHOT.)

JULES

Frankie!

REDD

Frankie!

(FRANKIE collapses.)

BLACKOUT.

SCENE EIGHT. NEXT DAY. MORNING.

(LIGHTS UP in BAR SPACE. FRANKIE, JULES,
and REDD ENTER, wearing the same clothes.
FRANKIE'S right shoulder has gauze wrapping on it.)

JULES

I know you lucky that bullet just grazed ya' shoulder.

REDD

(to Frankie)

We really need to get you home.

JULES

Yeah, I don't know why you wanted to come back here.

FRANKIE

I just needed to check on the place.

JULES

As you can see, everything is fine. Now let us get you home so you can get some rest.

FRANKIE

Well, everything ain't fine either.

REDD

But you don't need to worry about that right now, Frankie.

JULES

All I'd be worried about right now is that pain medicine wearin' off. 'Cause when it does, honey, you gon' need a strong drink. I know I do right now. Hell, I'm traumatized. I ain't even into golden showers, but I nearly pissed all ova' myself when he had that damn gun pointed at me.

FRANKIE

Y'all just don't get it. Belle's ain't just my livelihood. This is my life.

JULES

Ain't nothin' gon' happen to Belle's. We gon' make sure this place is still a refuge--

FRANKIE

Well it's done turned into a damn war zone. And can you believe Roosevelt had the nerve to call and ask Ronnie to bail him out?

JULES

I know one thing. You betta' press charges.

(JULES' CELLPHONE RINGS.)

Hold on. I need to take this. (*Answering the phone*) Hey... No, we just got back from the hospital... So you heard? Yes, honey. I practically saved Ms. Frankie's life. Thought I was gon' have to take a bullet for her, too...

(JULES EXITS. A moment.)

FRANKIE

You surprised me.

REDD

I did?

FRANKIE

But you scared me, too.

REDD

Scared you? Why?

FRANKIE

It's like, for a minute, you turned into somebody else I didn't recognize.

REDD

Yeah, well, honestly, it didn't even really feel like I was fightin' Roosevelt. It felt like I was fightin' that gang of kids in Village Heights, or maybe even my daddy or Kenny.

FRANKIE

Kenny? You talkin' about--

REDD

My mother's former pimp. I guess she thought I was too young to figure it out.

FRANKIE

You know I did kind of suspected that. But how do you discuss that with a twelve-year old?

REDD

I can't believe I'm even thinkin' this but ... maybe I was fightin' my motha', too.

FRANKIE

Or protectin' her.

(A moment.)

REDD

What's crazy is that I actually feel good right now. Don't get me wrong. I never liked violence. But last night, I guess I realized that a man will protect and defend who he loves and cares about.

FRANKIE

We both did that.

REDD

You right. We did. But I have to disagree with Jules. I don't think that lil' minor wound was just luck.

FRANKIE

Why you say that?

(REDD takes his wallet out, pulls the angel charm out, and hands it to FRANKIE.)

You gotta' be kiddin' me. You still have the charm I gave you?

REDD

Why wouldn't I? I kept it in my wallet all this time.

(A moment.)

FRANKIE

You know back in the 80s, when I first came here, I came here as Frank Leonard, fierce, flamboyant with a knack for style and an itch for the spotlight. Didn't have much of nothin'. Then I got that apartment in Village Heights, and that's where I met the most adorable lil' boy. He had no idea I was feelin' a lil' lonely at the time.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

I mean, yes, I was workin' and performin', doin' what I loved, and I could find men to temporarily fill the space and keep me company but that lil' boy came along and just wanted to know who I was. He wanted to be wanted, and I wanted to be needed. *(Pause.)* It really means a lot that you held onto this.

REDD

You know what would mean a lot to me?

FRANKIE

What?

REDD

If you'd be my special guest at our weddin'.

FRANKIE

Are you serious?

REDD

Yes, I'm serious.

FRANKIE

When is it?

REDD

The last weekend in July.

FRANKIE

Well, I guess that's enough time for me to plan my outfit. 'Cause you know, honey, a true Southern Belle must always upstage the bride.

REDD

You got plenty of time. And I want you to sit on the front row where the parents of the groom usually sit.

FRANKIE

Can Jules be my plus one?

REDD

Of course. But, there is one more thing.

FRANKIE

You need me to sing?

REDD

No, I think we good on that. But when you feelin' up to it, I want you to sit down with me and Imani. I'll talk it over with her first, but I'd really like you to consider bein' the godfather of our child--

FRANKIE

Oh, no. No, honey, I can't do that.

REDD

Why not?

FRANKIE

I can't be that baby's godfatha'. But I most certainly can be the *godmotha'*.

(They laugh.)

BLACKOUT.

END OF PLAY