

The Tree of the Methodists

by

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ACT I

Darkness.

A long moment's pause then a tight soft light comes up downstage right. MELLY sits there, dangling her legs over the lip of the stage.

MELLY

This is a play of memory. My memories. Although I'm not personally what you would call important to the story, my memories are. So if you become upset or disagreeable about something you see here, you have only me to blame.

(Pause)

And because this is a play of memory, the me you see is not the real me. Well not the real me now. This is me as a recollection, as a memory dream. In reality, I'm almost forty six, have twin fourteen year old daughters, a thriving career in banking and a somewhat loving husband.

(Pause)

But that's in the future, of course and isn't something we need to concern ourselves with today. Because today...I want to share a memory with you. Have you ever had something happen to you, big or little, good or bad, that in hindsight you realized was a turning point? Some incident that drove home the point that things happen in the world that aren't fair? Things happen that can't be rationally explained? That bad stuff can happen to you just because you are in the wrong place at the wrong time?

(Pause)

But, by the same token, by being there sometimes a sweet luck just floats down and covers you. And whether it makes you wiser or richer or just happier, it's always welcome.

(Pause)

Probably because it's so rare. We had a little bit of that luck this day but not much.

(Pause)

Anyway to get started, its spring time here...

The lights warm on MELLY.

MELLY (cont'd)

It's one of those the Earth is coming back to life sort of days. The grey skies we've had for the last couple of days have changed into the vaguest promise of sunshine. There's a feeling, just a feeling mind you, that winter's departure is near.

(Pause)

But its a special day for me regardless. Because...it's my birthday.

Voices are heard singing Happy Birthday.

MELLY (cont'd)

And on this my natal day, I got the dream present every thirteen year old wanted in 1979...

MELLY whips open her backpack, removes a headset and puts it on.

VOICE (Male)

There you go pumpkin, I hope you like it. Happy Birthday, Melly...

MELLY

Thank you Daddy...

(Pause)

So that's what Daddy got me. A Walkman. I know he scrounged and saved for it and I know he looked everywhere for it, because in 1979 it was the honest to goodness hippest thing a teenager could own. The dream present. And of course, he didn't forget the music.

MELLY hits play on the Walkman.

SONG: Staying Alive

MELLY (cont'd)

(dancing)

The Bee Gees!

(singing)

Staying alive, staying alive...uh, uh, uh, uh...staying alive...

MELLY suddenly notices the audience again.

MELLY (cont'd)

Oooo, sorry.

(She stops the tape)

I just love to dance.

(Pause)

Anyway so the day is starting very very well. Sunshine and an incredible birthday present.

(Pause)

It wasn't as promising the night before...

VOICE(Female)

Melly dear...

MELLY

Yes Mother?

VOICE(Female)

You're thirteen. I can hardly believe it...

MELLY (cont'd)

I really had to bite my tongue on that one. What did she think came after twelve?

VOICE (FEMALE)

You're at a very special, amazing time in a girl's...no...what am I saying, a young woman's life...

MELLY

(To audience)

You know what's coming, huh? Wait for it...

VOICE (FEMALE)

Special things are happening to you, to your body...

MELLY

Oh God...

VOICE (FEMALE)

But first, before we talk, I want you to have this. A very special present on your very special day, for so many reasons...

MELLY

Ah yes, Mother's present.

(Pause)

Present please...

A small gift wrapped present is tossed from the DSR wing.

MELLY (cont'd)

Thanks. So...here it is.

MELLY quickly unwraps the present. It is a bright pink tampon container.

MELLY (cont'd)

I knew what it was, of course. But I couldn't help myself wondering what else it could be used for. A case for your joints? A pool raft for your hamster? The mind boggles that any girl in her right mind would be using one of these things. It just screams HAVING MY PERIOD.

VOICE(Female)

So this time every month...well dear...its like a little reminder from Mother Nature about what blessed creatures we women are...

MELLY

So we're sitting there, knee to knee, and I'm getting the speech. She's all big eyed and unblinking, which was sort of scary in and of itself. And the information is just, well, gushing out of her.

Like she had practiced and practiced and didn't want to stop in case she got something wrong or, God forbid, she's have to answer a question or two.

(Pause)

I had to bite the insides of my cheeks to keep from bursting out laughing. She looked like a chipmunk having an epileptic seizure. I just wanted to shake her and yell, blink, damn it, blink!

(Pause)

I didn't have the heart to tell her that the big first visit from my special red friend happened last year at summer camp. My cabin counselor, who was Swiss for some reason, just laid out the facts, bing bang boom. A quick demo of the practical business and it was done.

(Pause)

And she wasn't very romantic about the matter, which suited me fine. No special day or red friend talk. She just said it was simply another pain in the behind that one had to put up with for the glory of being female.

(Pause)

Boy she was right about that.

MELLY looks off SR.

MELLY (cont'd)

Incoming boys...

She tosses the tampon case offstage.

MELLY (cont'd)

Whew!

(Pause)

Well that was the start of the day. A little good, a little well..just the usual. Then I went to get the bus to get to school. Wait...wait am I ahead of myself here? I think I am. Of course I am. Just all the birthday excitement I guess.

(Pause)

You have to be patient with me for a bit, this is the first time I've ever told this story. But I do think about it a lot.

(Pause)

Anyway, first you have to know about my neighborhood...

MELLY moves to center stage.

MELLY (cont'd)

This...is Oakdale.

MELLY gestures gently and stage left lights up, revealing the suggestion of a working class neighbourhood, economical houses built tightly together.

MELLY (cont'd)

I live here and have all my life. We are one of the oldest neighborhoods in the city and are fairly close to the city center...

(Pause)

But, frankly, Oakdale has seen better days. Now its called working class. I guess thats because all the rich people left so, somehow, that meant it became a worse place. I don't know how they figured that but rich flight or rich fright or whatever the name for it was meant we all just have to get along. Remember during this time that there were still a lot of racial problems all over the country...

(Pause)

But not here. Not here in Oakdale. Here we just, well, got along. Maybe it was because everyone here was working so hard just to stay alive.

(Pause)

But it was a wonderful place to grow up. Sure the houses are small and really close together and everyone knew everyone else's business. But for a kid in 1979, the streets in the summer time were great, cause everyone was in them. The adults having drinks on their front porches, us little runarounds, well, running around. This place was happy. This place was alive.

(Pause)

Now I know you are wondering...

MELLY looks stage right.

MELLY (cont'd)

What's over here? This...

MELLY gestures gently with her left hand and stage right lights up. The outline in profile of a handsome well kept church is revealed.

In front of it is a little strip of grass leading downstage to a curb. Mid stage right, on the grass, just a few feet from the curb is a tree. A young tree in the process of getting bigger. It can offer shade from the sunshine or some protection from a storm, but just barely.

MELLY

This is the Larchmont Street Methodist Church. This is the only thing left behind when the rich people took flight or fright or whatever it was they called their running away. This pretty old church.

(Pause)

However once a week, they like to come back to visit it.

SOUND CUE: A hymn being sung atonally by the congregation.

MELLY

They come back every Sunday and have their service and then a social. Then they all come out and run across the street to where they parked their cars. See they never park on this side of Larchmont Street. And I have no idea why. Some people say that they lock the doors during the service but I don't know about that. Nobody I know goes there. But here it is, the church.

MELLY moves down stage center.

MELLY

Here is Larchmont Street. But you can't see that. Now we have to have a little make believe here. If the street were really here it would be practically in your laps. And the bus, when it came, would mow you down. That's not good.

(Pause)

Here's the bus stop sign.

MELLY taps the sign.

MELLY

The sign is real. Hear it?

(Pause)

But the bus, well...the bus is going to have to be another imagining, OK? Let's just agree on that right now.

(Pause)

And that leaves just one thing here that needs our attention.

MELLY waves her hand and the tree is illuminated.

MELLY

The tree.

(Pause)

Now these people, these Methodists, they really like their grass and they take amazing care of it.

A DEACON appears carrying small hedge clippers. He scans the small strip of grass quickly but carefully, then makes a small trim with the clippers.

MELLY

Hello.

DEACON

Good day.

He looks at MELLY suspiciously.

DEACON (cont'd)

Now young lady you weren't planning to...

MELLY

Oh no sir.

DEACON

Good.

The DEACON exits slowly, casting a wary eye back on MELLY.

MELLY

(To audience)

Like I was saying, they are very particular about their little patch of grass.

The DEACON enters with a sign that reads DO NOT STEP ON THE GRASS and pounds it into the turf.

He catches MELLY watching him as he exits and returns her look.

MELLY starts to play a game with him, approaching the grass and beginning to step on it, then moving away as the DEACON approaches.

Finally the DEACON exits quickly, obviously flustered.

MELLY

Sorry, I know it's wrong to tease him like that, but still its sorta fun, huh?

The DEACON enters again with another sign. It reads PLEASE DO NOT STEP ON THE GRASS. The word "please" is in bold italics and is bright red.

DEACON

Please...please.

MELLY

Sure.

DEACON

Thank you.

The DEACON exits with several backward glances.

MELLY

But their pride and joy, their most fiercely guarded treasure, was...you guessed it...this sorry little tree.

The DEACON reappears with plastic netting and stakes and starts to surround the tree with it.

MELLY watches for a moment as the DEACON finishes his chore.

MELLY

That tree and this little, I don't know what you would call it, strip of grass or island or whatever, seemed to me to be better protected than most banks. But...

MELLY makes a gentle motion with her hand and the lights fade around her, leaving her in a soft pool.

MELLY

It was really just another odd thing that we didn't really think that much about.

(Pause)

Until the morning of my birthday, when I went to catch the bus that takes me cross town to school...

MELLY motions and the lights on her dim.

Blackout.

Pause.

SOUND CUE: Morning, birds are singing. Cars can be heard moving along Larchmont Street.

The lights rise on MRS. WILBANKS, a middle aged African American woman, waiting impatiently at the bus stop.

She peers up the street looking for the bus, then shakes her head and blows out a breath of air.

ROSALINDE, a young Hispanic woman enters stage left and walks to the bus stop.

MRS. WILBANKS

Rosalinde...good morning girl.

ROSALINDE

Yes, good morning Ma'am...

MRS. WILBANKS

Now don't you be ma'aming me. I do believe you get Ma'amed you got yourself an upcoming appointment with Jesus.

They laugh.

ROSALINDE

Yes ma'am...sorry...Ms. Wilbanks I mean...ma'am...

MRS. WILBANKS

Delilah baby, call me Delilah. You're a momma now, you can call me by my first name.

(Pause)

How is that sweet baby girl, Rosa?

Pause. MRS WILBANKS peers at ROSALINDE.

MRS. WILBANKS (cont'd)

Rosalinde?

(Pause)

You look tired girl.

ROSALINDE

I am, I am. She's teething and she's hating it. I can't sleep at all. I'm so filled up with fears and imaginings...

ROSALINDE is starting to tear up.

MRS. WILBANKS

Uh-uh. No you don't girl. You turn that water off right now. You be strong now through this cause there's plenty more strife where that's coming from. I raised four of them so I know.

(Pause)

And where is that boyfriend of yours in all this?

ROSALINDE

Lalo? He is helping, he is trying to help...

MRS. WILBANKS

He better well be. He best be giving you some money. And more...he best be giving you some time. Help with little Magdalene. That's his baby too and he needs to be there.

(Pause)

My Harold was there right by my side for those whole on 37 years. The Lord may have made men as good as my Ox but he didn't make any better.

ROSALINDE

(Quietly)

Yes ma'am.

MRS. WILBANKS

Delilah, honey, call me Delilah...

(Pause)

Oh goodness I'm sorry. Here I am just rattling on. You age up you get that way, you'll see. We got to think about poor baby Magdalene's little teeth.

(Pause)

Try to get you some sleep, girl, huh?

ROSALINDE

God I'd like that.

MRS. WILBANKS

Sure you would baby.

(Pause)

So here it is. What are you using on her gums? That Orajel?

ROSALINDE

That's sounds right, comes in a little tube.

MRS. WILBANKS

Yes but here's the problem...

MR. O'DONNELL enters. He's a large middle aged florid looking man. He is carrying a beat up lunch pail.

MR. O'DONNELL

What's the problem?

MRS. WILBANKS

Owen O'Donnell, what are you doing down here with the working folks?

MR. O'DONNELL

Getting to work like you. What's the problem?

ROSALINDE

Good morning Mr. O'Donnell.

MR. O'DONNELL

Morning Rosalinde.

(Pause)

That bus must be due soon huh?

MRS. WILBANKS

Where's that big old truck of yours, Owen?

MR. O'DONNELL

It's...well...

MR. O'DONNELL looks away.

ROSALINDE

Delilah, what were you going to say about the baby? About the teething?

MRS. WILBANKS

Right...well this isn't out of Good Parent magazine or anything but we used cherry brandy on them gums when the children were having their pains.

ROSALINDE

Brandy?

MRS. WILBANKS

Um-hmmm

Mr O'DONNELL shakes his head disapprovingly

MRS. WILBANKS (cont'd)

(Glancing at MR. O'DONNELL)

You tell me if I'm wrong now, Rosa but I imagine you've been up every half an hour with Magdalene. Am I right now?

ROSALINDE

Yes, yes you are.

MRS. WILBANKS

That because that pain gel wears off so quick baby. Now you take jest a little capful of brandy, put your finger in it and rub it on those gums...

ROSALINDE

That works?

MRS. WILBANKS

Sure does.

(Pause)

The baby gets a little bit tiddled and both of you gets some sleep.

MR. O'DONNELL

(To ROSALINDE, somberly)

Don't do that...

MRS. WILBANKS

Excuse me? And you've been a mother for how long now?

ROSALINDE shrinks back a bit as MRS. WILBANKS and MR. O'DONNELL square off.

MR. O'DONNELL

Delilah Wilbanks, you have spent your entire life in the whole worlds business.

MRS. WILBANKS eyes him closely for a moment then steps forward.

MRS. WILBANKS

(Quietly)

What did you do, Owen? Why you down here? Where's that truck of yours?

(Pause)

You in trouble again?

ROSALINDE

It feels like it could rain to me...

Pause.

MRS. WILBANKS makes a drinking sign with her hand.

MR. O'DONNELL

Yeah.

MRS. WILBANKS

How long they gonna take your license for this time?

MR. O'DONNELL

Dunno. Awhile. Gotta go to court in three weeks.

MRS. WILBANKS

Owen, you could go to jail.

MR. O'DONNELL shrugs.

ROSALINDE

Where can that bus be? Is it late? It seems late to me...

As they MRS WILBANKS and MR. O'DONNELL bicker quietly and ROSALINDE frets after the bus, MELLY enters stage right. She is carrying a book bag and wearing her Walkman headphones.

MELLY

(To audience)

So these are my morning people. With the exception of Mr O'Donnell I was with them everyday. Because, and I'm not bragging here, I had to ride crosstown everyday to go to smart kids school. Most everyone else in Oakdale goes to...well..they go to school right here.

(Pause)

Sorry...that was pretty full of myself huh?

(Pause)

Its funny how when you are younger, and by younger I mean like a child, that adults seem like...well...perfect. Like they have no problems or just by the nature of being big nothing can bother them or hurt them. It's like you think of them as one big group. Adults. Like a pod of adults or a pride of adults. I wonder if they have a special name for a group of adults. Like they do polar bears. Maybe its a mark of getting older that you start to see people, no matter what the age, as individuals. And later still you start to see their flaws...

(Pause)

And even later still, if you're lucky, you can start to see your own.

(Pause)

But not today. Not today. Cause it's my birthday.

MELLY

(approaching the group)

Good morning.

MRS. WILBANKS

There she is! Come and get a birthday kiss baby.

They hug.

MR. O'DONNELL

Congratulations Mel. Happy Birthday.

MELLY

Thanks. Why are you down here, Mr. O'Donnell?

MRS. WILBANKS

(quickly)

You must be so excited. Look at you, you're practically all growed up.

MELLY

I feel bigger.

ROSALINDE

But not too big, those boys, they don't like you if you're too big.

MRS. WILBANKS

Hush Rosa. The world doesn't revolve around men.

(Pause)

So what did you get for your special day?

MELLY presents the Walkman with a dramatic flourish.

MELLY

This.

MRS. WILBANKS
What the devil?

The group gathers around to examine the Walkman

MR. O'DONNELL
What is it?

ROSALINDE
I've seen pictures of it, I think. In a magazine...

MRS. WILBANKS
What does it do?

MELLY
It plays music.

MR. O'DONNELL
That small thing?

MELLY
(Holding up the headphones)
Yup. But just for you.

MELLY places the headphones on ROSALINDE and hits play. As the music plays ROSALINDE's face lights up in a cross between amazement and happiness.

As everyone starts to take turns listening to the Walkman, The STRANGER enters. The STRANGER watches the group for a moment with a look of gentle acceptance then looks at the bus stop.

The STRANGER moves to stand next to the sign.

MELLY sees the STRANGER enter. She stares at the STRANGER for a moment then moves away from the group.

MELLY
(To audience)
I had never, in my life, seen someone like that. Someone so... different. I thought he...wait...not a he. Maybe a she. Maybe not. I just didn't know what to make of him. Her... Anyway I was amazed.
(Pause)
So I do what I do whenever I'm amazed or I'm wondering. I dive right in and find out what's going on...

MELLY walks up to the STRANGER.

Hi.

MELLY

The STRANGER looks directly at MELLY and smiles. MELLY looks back.

Pause.

MELLY
(To audience)
OK, definitely a female. But someone you had to get right close up with to find out.
(Beat)
What can I say? I'm young...

MELLY turns to the STRANGER and offers her hand. The STRANGER looks at her curiously for a moment then grasps it and they shake.

The STRANGER smiles warmly.

MELLY
Hello. I'm pleased to meet you.

MRS. WILBANKS looks at them.

MRS. WILBANKS
Well who's this?

MRS. WILBANKS approaches the STRANGER.

MRS. WILBANKS
Now who might you be dear? I thought I knew everyone in this neighborhood...

ROSALINDE
(Still listening to the Walkman)
Hi, I'm Rosa.

The STRANGER nods.

MRS. WILBANKS
(To the STRANGER)
Didn't you heard me? I was asking...

MR. O'DONNELL
Maybe she did. Could be she's just ignoring you.
(muttering)
Wouldn't blame her if she was.

MRS. WILBANKS
Excuse me?

MR. O'DONNELL
I said she could be ignoring you.

MRS. WILBANKS
No that ain't it.
(To the STRANGER)
You ignoring me, baby?

The STRANGER looks at MRS WILBANKS
curiously.

ROSALINDE watches for a second.

MR. O'DONNELL
Now the bus is offically late. By my watch.

MELLY
Seems that way huh?

MRS. WILBANKS
I'm just wondering who you might be baby. I'm not prying or
nothing.

MR. O'DONNELL snorts.

MRS. WILBANKS (cont'd)
Something you need to say Owen?

MR. O'DONNELL
No.

MRS. WILBANKS
Good.
(To the STRANGER)
Now...where you from girl?

ROSALINDE watches for a moment, then
removes the Walkman and hands it back
to MELLY. She approaches MRS WILBANKS.

ROSALINDE
Delilah...

MRS. WILBANKS
Hush now, I'm talking to this girl here...

ROSALINDE
Delilah...

MRS. WILBANKS
(Impatiently)
Rosalinde?

ROSALINDE

I'm thinking that she might be...not right maybe?

MRS. WILBANKS

She's sick?

(To the STRANGER)

You sick honey?

MR. O'DONNELL

She's not sick. She's not answering.

(To MRS WILBANKS)

Right? She's not answering you, right?

(Pause)

She's deaf.

MRS. WILBANKS

No.

ROSALINDE

(looking at the STRANGER)

Well...maybe.

MR. O'DONNELL

It's obvious. You've been talking to her for the past 10 minutes and she hasn't said word one. She's a deaf mute.

(Pause)

Now just let her be. Leave her alone.

(Pause)

She's just here to catch a bus.

The STRANGER watches all of this with an interested bemusement.

ROSALINDE

Me too. Where is it?

MRS. WILBANKS

(To MR O'DONNELL)

I am just asking after my fellow human being here like any good Christian would. Unlike you I am interested in other people...

MELLY walks behind the STRANGER then leans in close.

MELLY

Hey...

The STRANGER turns to her, a smile crossing her face. MELLY returns the smile then steps away from the group.

MELLY

(To the audience)

I'm not sure what she was but I knew one thing. She wasn't deaf. Maybe she just wasn't very talkative. Maybe she just didn't want to talk to us especially. Not that I could really blame her.

Pause. A soft light glows on the STRANGER. She is listening to the soft conversation of the others.

MELLY (cont'd)

But still, there was something about her...I guess she just...just looked interested in people. Her face was just so open.

(Pause)

And she did something so odd but so sweet...when you looked at her, she reflected not what you were but what you most dearly wanted to be. I didn't know what to make of her.

(Pause)

And then...and then...

The sound of rain can be heard.

MR. O'DONNELL

Goddam it.

MELLY

(To the audience)

It started to rain.

ROSALINDE

Where is that bus?

MRS. WILBANKS

Another trial, another trial...

They scramble to protect their belongings. The STRANGER watches curiously, then steps under the tree.

MRS. WILBANKS

(To the STRANGER)

Uh-uh, no baby.

The STRANGER gazes at her.

MRS. WILBANKS (cont'd)

Honey...read the sign.

ROSALINDE

She's deaf, Delilah, remember.

MR. O'DONNELL
Deaf people can read, for god's sake...

MRS. WILBANKS
Well she don't appear to be doing no reading now.

MRS. WILBANKS attempts to guide the STRANGER's attention to the sign. The STRANGER takes a graceful step backwards.

MRS. WILBANKS (cont'd)
Girl, you got some sass in you.
(Pause)
I just don't want trouble here.

MR. O'DONNELL
Seems to me she's the only person here with a damn lick of sense.

ROSALINDE
Where is that bus? This is crazy. I am getting soaked.

MELLY
Me too.

The DEACON appears. He watches the STRANGER balefully for a moment then approaches.

DEACON
(To STRANGER)
Excuse me...
(Pause)
Miss? Excuse me...

The STRANGER looks at the Deacon.

DEACON (cont'd)
Miss, you can't be under there. You can't be on our lawn.

The STRANGER looks at the Deacon.

ROSALINDE
It's raining.

MRS. WILBANKS
(To the STRANGER)
C'mon baby, lets not make any more fuss here with this fellow.

ROSALINDE
(To the DEACON, plaintively)
It's raining.

DEACON

(To ROSALINDE)

Thank you. I understand it's raining, I can see that. But you can't stand on church property.

MR. O'DONNELL

Why not?

DEACON

Because we're trying to make the sure the tree stays healthy.

ROSALINDE

How about helping us stay dry?

DEACON

Perhaps you should speak to the city about building a shelter here.

MRS. WILBANKS

Oh good luck with that.

MELLY

I wish that bus would get here...

DEACON

(To the STRANGER)

Please...

The STRANGER looks at the DEACON with calm interest.

DEACON (cont'd)

Please miss...

The DEACON reaches out to grasp the STRANGER's arm.

MRS. WILBANKS

You did not just touch that child! Where do you think you get off manhandling peoples? Female people? You think you are a big man doing that?

(She shakes her finger at the DEACON.)

If my Ox were here today he'd lay you out flat as a board.

(She advances on the DEACON)

But he ain't. So...I guess I just have to do it myself...

ROSALINDE

No!

MR. O'DONNELL steps between MRS. WILBANKS and the DEACON.

MR. O'DONNELL
Delilah...

(Pause)
No.

MRS. WILBANKS
Owen, you move now.

MR. O'DONNELL
No.

MRS. WILBANKS
Where does he get off treating us like trash?
(To the DEACON)
I work for a living, you. I get up everyday and do my
business. And I have for forty years.

DEACON
Look I'm not...

MRS. WILBANKS
You're not what? You're not treating us with respect, that's
what. You and your fancy parishioners coming in here every
Sunday then running away after like we are a war zone or
something. We see that. You don't think we see that? We're
not blind.

(Beat)
I am sick of it, I am so sick of it.

(Beat)
And you feeling you can just be putting your hands on a poor
girl. My Ox would have shown you what's what...

(Beat)
I am so sick of it...

ROSALINDE's moves to comfort MRS
WILBANKS.

ROSALINDE
Delilah...baby...

MELLY
(To audience)
Seeing Mrs Wilbanks so angry frightened me. I had never seen
an adult get so...mad? Sad? Sort of out of control? I don't
know. But it was shocking. To me her tears were like the
rain, I couldn't help but think that they too would bring
trouble.

MR. O'DONNELL
(To the DEACON)
Look sir...

DEACON
I'm sorry.

MR. O'DONNELL

Look, we're just waiting for the bus. As soon as it come we're gone. It's late now but I'm sure it will be here soon. Why not just let this go a few minutes then we'll be gone.

DEACON

Sir...

MR. O'DONNELL

Please.

DEACON

Ok first...

(To the STRANGER)

I'm sorry if I offended you, I was just trying to help you off the curb.

(To MRS WILBANKS)

And I am sorry if you are upset, Ma'am. I didn't mean that to happen.

(To MR. O'DONNELL)

But, if I may speak frankly here, this is our property. This is private property. And regardless of how you feel about us or our church or our presence in your neighborhood, we do not want people on the property.

(Beat)

Period.

MRS. WILBANKS

Period? Period? You threatening this girl? You threatening us?

DEACON

(To the STRANGER)

You are trespassing and I am asking you to leave. Now.

The STRANGER looks at the DEACON.

MR. O'DONNELL

And if she doesn't?

DEACON

(Beat)

I'll be forced to call the police.

ROSALINDE

(To MR. O'DONNELL)

He is going to call the police.

MR. O'DONNELL

Over this? Over this little thing?

ROSALINDE

I don't want no trouble with the police Mr. O'Donnell...

(Beat)

Please...

MR. O'DONNELL

There isn't going to be any trouble Rosa...

DEACON

(To the STRANGER)

Will you move?

The STRANGER does not reply.

MR. O'DONNELL

Just let it go.

DEACON

I don't want to let it go.

MR. O'DONNELL moved close to the DEACON. They are toe to toe.

MR. O'DONNELL

(Quietly)

I said let it go.

(Pause)

What's the matter with you? It's raining and the girl doesn't want to get wet. Seems pretty sensible to me. The bus will be here in a minute and we'll be gone.

(Pause)

Let it go...

DEACON

Or?

MR. O'DONNELL

Or?

DEACON

Or what? Or you'll do what?

MR. O'DONNELL

Excuse me?

DEACON

Will you hit me?

(Pause)

That's it isn't it? You are going to hit me...

(Pause)

You are threatening me...

ROSALINDE

What?

MRS. WILBANKS

You sissy man you. I can't believe it...

DEACON

You threatened me.

(To the others)

You heard him...

ROSALINDE

No!

(Pause)

I didn't hear nothing like that.

MRS. WILBANKS

That is a lie. You are a damn liar. He didn't do nuthin to you.

MR. O'DONNELL

Delilah...

The DEACON glares at MRS. WILBANKS for a moment.

DEACON

You know what? I pray....

ROSALINDE

What?

DEACON

I pray to the Lord that we leave this place. I hate being here. I hate coming to work here...in this place. You people here don't respect private property, you don't respect other people's rights, you respect nothing.

(Pause)

I hate it.

(Pause)

I hate being here. In this place, this neighborhood...if you can call it that. I wouldn't call it that. It's more like a cesspool to me.

(Pause)

It really is. I hate to sit in judgement but there you have it.

(Pause)

Your teenagers sit and smoke and do God knows what on our stairs and when I try to chase them off they laugh at me. They laugh at me.

(Pause)

They mock me. I am sixty five years old and they mock me. Don't you people teach your children to respect their elders?

MRS. WILBANKS

Of course we do.

ROSALINDE

You got bad apples everywhere, not just here...

DEACON

One of them shook his fist at me yesterday.

(Pause)

Do you know what he said to me? He said that...that...

MELLY

What?

(Gently)

What did he say?

DEACON

He said he would...that he would...

The DEACON's voice trails off. MR O'DONNELL looks at MELLY questioningly.

MELLY

I know what they said. Most of the time they're kidding...

(Pause)

I think...

MRS. WILBANKS

(To the DEACON)

What did the boy say?

DEACON

He said, he said...that...

The DEACON is unable to answer.

MELLY

He said he would "Fuck you up." Didn't he?

MRS. WILBANKS

Oh my...

DEACON

Yes.

ROSALINDE

I'm sorry to hear that...

MRS. WILBANKS

That's not us.

MELLY

Teenagers aren't all like that, I go to a special school. We don't act trashy like that.

DEACON

(Not hearing)

I'm 65 years old. And I can't even sweep the stairs of the church I love without being threatened by your hoodlums.

MR. O'DONNELL

Now wait a minute...

DEACON

No, no...

(Pause)

No.

(Pause)

I'm tired of being afraid. Do you understand me? I'm tired of it. I hate getting up in the morning. I feel...weak. I feel beat down.

(Pause)

I do...

The DEACON looks at the tree for a moment.

DEACON (cont'd)

That thing... I have been trying to get something to grow here for a long time. Like I guess, four years. Maybe five years. Yeah....five years...

The DEACON stares at the tree. As he does so, The STRANGER steps forward towards him. The others fall silent and listen as the DEACON speaks.

DEACON (cont'd)

I wanted to plant something pretty here. Something substantial. Because it would look nice. And...because...I really don't have any thing else to do. I'm sort of alone now. And its important to keep busy...

MRS. WILBANKS

(Nodding)

Yes , yes it is...

DEACON

But every time I'd try, something would happen. People would trample it. They walk through here, its a shortcut around the corner. But its ours...its ours and people have no right to do that...

With a small gesture, The STRANGER offers her hand to the DEACON.

DEACON (cont'd)

So I started to put up signs, just little signs at first. They got torn down. They got destroyed. So I put up a fence.

And that stayed for awhile and the tree...my tree...started to grow. Your little neighborhood thugs destroyed my signs and my fencing but they left the tree alone...

The DEACON is becoming quietly emotional. He takes the STRANGER's hand almost in spite of himself.

DEACON (cont'd)

So its been like war. At least for me. I've been like a soldier I guess, fighting for my territory. This is our property, this is our place. This is our home. But you know what?

ROSALINDE

What?

DEACON

Nobody cares. None of the parishioners care. They worship here from habit. Because their parents and grandparents did. They only have services here now, all the other activities are held elsewhere.

(Pause)

I only see the other parishioners on Sundays.

(Long pause)

I feel so alone now....

The STRANGER gently envelops the DEACON in her arms, quietly comforting him. MR. O'DONNELL turns away, embarrassed. The others watch. Gradually the DEACON pulls away from the STRANGER and backs away from the group.

The STRANGER returns to stand under the tree.

Pause.

DEACON (cont'd)

(formally, to the STRANGER)

You are trespassing on private property. If you remain here I will call the police.

MR. O'DONNELL moves aggressively toward the DEACON only to be intercepted by MRS. WILBANKS and ROSALINDE. The STRANGER watches impassively.

MR. O'DONNELL

You got some nerve on you...

MR O'DONNELL glares at the DEACON for an instant, then turns to look at the tree then back at the DEACON. Finally he walks determinately under the tree to stand next to the STRANGER.

MR. O'DONNELL (cont'd)
Tell you what, call your goddam cops, sir, and tell them to send more than one, cause you're gonna be needing them.

The DEACON turns on his heel and exits.

Pause

MRS. WILBANKS
Now what?

ROSALINDE
Do the buses not run today? Where is it?

MELLY
I don't know...

MELLY leaves the group.

MELLY (cont'd)
(To audience)
And that was the truth of the matter. I didn't know. Nobody did. The whole day had become very very strange. Where was the bus? I was already late for school, everyone was late for work. It was like God was having a little experiment right here.

And now...now the police were coming.
(Pause)
It's so exciting!

MRS. WILBANKS
Lord God, I sure don't need no police...

ROSALINDE
Who does?

MRS. WILBANKS
Not me.

MELLY
(To MR. O'DONNELL)
So, what happens now, Mr. O'Donnell?

Pause.

MR. O'DONNELL
I guess we'll find out soon enough, Mel.

ROSALINDE

My papa said never get police notice...it only means trouble.

MRS. WILBANKS

(To the STRANGER)

What have you done girl?

MR. O'DONNELL

She didn't do anything Delilah. I did. You need someone to blame? Blame me.

MRS. WILBANKS

I just wanted to get to work. That's all...

ROSALINDE

Me too.

MRS. WILBANKS

Is that too much to ask? Can't a churched, God fearing woman jest expect a bus to arrive in good time and take her to work?

MR. O'DONNELL

(drolly)

Apparently not.

MELLY giggles and ROSALINDE joins her.

MRS. WILBANKS

Hush you...and you too

(To MR O'DONNELL)

OK, alright. Now seriously Owen....what are you doing here?

MR. O'DONNELL

Standing under a tree.

(Pause)

You?

MRS. WILBANKS

You know what I mean now...don't play funny with me. You let her...

(Indicates the STRANGER)

...start mess with that white man about this tree and now you got me and these two girls about to get a big steaming pile of trouble. You're the man here. So what are you planning to do, big man?

MR. O'DONNELL

Well...?

MRS. WILBANKS

Well?

MR. O'DONNELL

When the bus comes I intend to get on it.

MRS. WILBANKS

There isn't no bus! There is only....

MR. O'DONNELL

There's only rain Delilah. It's raining.

(To MELLY and ROSALINDE)

In for a penny in for a pound. Ladies get under here and get dry.

MELLY and ROSALINDE do so.

MR. O'DONNELL (cont'd)

Delilah?

MRS. WILBANKS

There is a whole world of trouble coming...

MR. O'DONNELL

Come get dry.

Pause.

MRS WILBANKS makes short steps and ends up under the tree with the others.

Pause.

ROSALINDE

Well here we are.

MRS. WILBANKS

(To the STRANGER)

Where you from, trouble girl?

MR. O'DONNELL

Leave it go now.

ROSALINDE

She's a deaf mute Delilah, remember?

MRS. WILBANKS

I don't know if she's a mute or not. I don't know that. Maybe she's just quiet. That could be it.

(Pause)

Too damn quiet...

MELLY

(To audience)

So I woke up this morning a birthday girl with a terrific present and now....now I'm an outlaw.

A couple of quick choices...and I didn't even make one of them...and now my heart is pounding and I've got a lump in my throat and the police are coming.

(Pause)

This is sooooo cool...

A POLICEMAN enters down right. After a moment he is joined by the DEACON who is speaking intensely to him.

MRS. WILBANKS

(grimly)

Here we go...

MR. O'DONNELL

You know Delilah, you're a real pessimist for a churched woman. Aren't you people supposed to be leaving your troubles to God or something?

MRS. WILBANKS

I am praying now mister, believe it...

The POLICEMAN approaches with the DEACON several paces behind.

He takes a moment to assess the situation.

POLICEMAN

Morning.

MR. O'DONNELL

Good morning officer.

MRS. WILBANKS

Morning sir.

POLICEMAN

(To the STRANGER and ROSALINDE)

Ladies...

MELLY

(brightly)

Hi.

POLICEMAN

There's a happy face this morning. How are you, Missy?

MELLY

Good, thank you sir.

(Beat)

And you?

POLICEMAN
I'd be better without this rain.

MELLY
Yeah...

MR. O'DONNELL
Us too.

POLICEMAN
No doubt.

DEACON
(Loudly, to the POLICEMAN)
Those are the people.

POLICEMAN
No. Really?
(Archly)
Thanks for the help.
(Pause. Then to MR. O'DONNELL)
So...

MR. O'DONNELL
So?

POLICEMAN
Can you help me with this? Fill me in on what's going on here?

MR. O'DONNELL
Sure.
(Pause)
We're waiting for the bus, it starts to rain, we get under the tree...
(Pause)
Then this guy here, he goes crazy.

POLICEMAN
Crazy?

MRS. WILBANKS
He was sobbing and crying and stuff then when we try to help him and listen to his business he up and calls the damn cops.
(Beat)
I mean...you...officer...

POLICEMAN
I understand.

MRS. WILBANKS
Sorry.

POLICEMAN

It's fine. I've heard worse.

MRS. WILBANKS

That man, officer, that man ain't right.

ROSALINDE

Sir...

POLICEMAN

Yes miss?

ROSALINDE

I was wondering...do you know what happened to the bus?

POLICEMAN

It hasn't been by?

MELLY

No sir.

POLICEMAN

I don't know.

(Beat)

There was a water main break on Vesper street. Maybe that's snarling traffic?

ROSALINDE

Oh.

MELLY

Could be huh?

POLICEMAN

Yup.

DEACON

(Impatiently)

Excuse me...

POLICEMAN

What?

DEACON

These people, these people are trespassing...

POLICEMAN

I'll tell you what, Karl, if I were you I'd be worried about my own situation. You are this close to going to jail.

(Beat)

This close.

DEACON

What?

ROSALINDE

(To MELLY)

Karl? His name is Karl?

MELLY

Karl the deacon?

POLICEMAN

(To the DEACON)

You know what I mean. Don't play dumb.

MRS. WILBANKS

(To MR O'DONNELL)

Ooooo what's all this about?

DEACON

(To the POLICEMAN)

Excuse me, Officer?

POLICEMAN

You're the number one complainant in the city, Karl. Numero uno. You. Some of your 911 tapes are hilarious...

DEACON

I beg your pardon?

POLICEMAN

Beg away...

(Beat)

On those tapes...on those tapes Karl you sound like you are single-handedly holding down Fort Apache, you really do. And we get to hear this about 3, 4 5 times or more a day. So...the possibility that you are going to jail for abusing department resources are very very good.

(Beat)

In fact, I'd say excellent.

DEACON

Then arrest me. Go right ahead. But arrest them first.

(Beat)

They are trespassing. They are trespassing on private property. So threaten me all you like but you know, and I know, that they are trespassing.

The POLICEMAN glares at the DEACON for a moment then turns away and moves to Mr. O'DONNELL.

POLICEMAN

As much as he irritates me...he has a point.

MR. O'DONNELL

Yes.

POLICEMAN

What can we do about this thing here?

MR. O'DONNELL

(Beat)

It's raining...

POLICEMAN

Yeah. Yeah it is.

DEACON

Remove them or arrest them.

Pause.

The POLICEMAN approaches the DEACON.

POLICEMAN

Karl...

(Beat)

It's raining.

DEACON

I am aware of that.

POLICEMAN

It's raining...

(Beat)

Ok now, lets start at the beginning Karl, shall we? This is your church which borders the sidewalk. And on the sidewalk, right here, is a bus stop.

(Beat)

And these are the good people, the honest citizens, Karl, not criminals or hoodlums, waiting for the bus. Waiting for the public transportation that will take them to their schools and work. Wave to our friend Karl, good people.

They wave at the DEACON.

POLICEMAN (cont'd)

Now, sometimes, when the heavens open up, they, quite naturally, want to stay dry. So they move under your tree here. And, if I may say so, its a lovely tree. It's a natural reaction to being rained on, Karl. And since your tree is...what....3 feet from the sidewalk, a very logical one too.

(Beat)

There's no property damage here, Karl. Just good citizens waiting for a bus. So..why don't you relax and we'll let this one go?

Pause.

No. DEACON

No? POLICEMAN

I have instructions that I have to follow. DEACON

Ok tell me then. POLICEMAN

My instructions? DEACON

Yes, Karl, your instructions. POLICEMAN

To do everything possible to help the tree grow. DEACON

That's nice. ROSALINDE

Thank you. DEACON

Why? MRS. WILBANKS

Why what? DEACON

Why is it that this big and fine church is so concerned about a tree? MR. O'DONNELL

Yeah... ROSALINDE

Shouldn't you be saving souls... MR. O'DONNELL

Or, like, making peoples lives better... MELLY

Or working to help good people find some sort of justice and peace in this world? Isn't that what you people are supposed to be doing? MRS. WILBANKS

Helping... MELLY

MRS. WILBANKS

Thats what my church tries to do. Helping people not be out
in the street picking fights about the plant life.

POLICEMAN

All good questions.

(Beat)

Good questions all.

(Beat. Then to the DEACON)

So...

DEACON

So...

MRS. WILBANKS

Don't be a funny man. Tell us the truth.

MR. O'DONNELL

Now.

Long pause.

The STRANGER looks at the DEACON
intently.

DEACON

What do you think a tree is for?

(Beat)

It's for shade.

MELLY

And protection?

ROSALINDE

Like from the rain?

MR. O'DONNELL

Like for people waiting for the damn bus?

DEACON

No.

(Beat)

Shade. Really just shade.

POLICEMAN

(Beat)

For...

(Beat)

....who?

The DEACON points at the stained glass
window.

DEACON
For the pastor.

MRS. WILBANKS
Huh?

MR. O'DONNELL
Not following this one...

DEACON
The pastor wants protection from the sun...

The group looks at each other, not understanding.

POLICEMAN
What?

DEACON
During services. The sun comes right through the stained glass window and it gets hot during the summer.

POLICEMAN
And?

DEACON
When the tree has grown...

MRS. WILBANKS
It will block the sun.

DEACON
Correct.

MR. O'DONNELL
That's what all this is about?

MELLY
The pastor's comfort?

DEACON
Yes.

POLICEMAN
Now Karl...

(Beat)
Doesn't this all seem a bit silly? It's gonna be years before that tree is big enough to block the sunlight.

DEACON
No.

(Beat)
I have my instructions.

MRS. WILBANKS

Tell me something, Mr. Deacon.. your pastor ever heard of a window shade or a damn curtain? Is he some sort of idiot?

The DEACON ignores her and turns to the POLICEMAN.

DEACON

(Rigidly)

I am done speaking about this matter. I have to insist that you remove these people from our property.

(Beat)

Immediately.

The POLICEMAN scowls at the DEACON for a moment as if he might challenge him. He then turns to MR. O'DONNELL.

POLICEMAN

He's an asshole.

(Beat)

But he's also within his rights to ask you guys to step off to the curb.

(Beat. Then to the group)

I'm sorry but I have you to ask you to move forward to the curb.

(Beat)

I'm sorry.

(Beat. Then to the DEACON)

Happy?

DEACON

Thank you.

MRS. WILBANKS

And if we don't?

DEACON

Well then...

POLICEMAN

Shut up Karl.

(Beat. Then to MRS WILBANKS)

Ma'am if you don't move off the church's property after being asked to then I will be forced to arrest you for criminal trespass.

(Beat)

Please don't make me do that.

(Beat)

Please...

Pause.

The POLICEMAN and the DEACON wait expectantly.

MR. O'DONNELL steps to the curb and summons the others with a move of his head.

MR. O'DONNELL
(To MELLY and ROSALINDE)

Girls...

MELLY and ROSALINDE step forward somewhat reluctantly.

ROSALINDE
(To MELLY)

Maybe...

MELLY

What?

ROSALINDE
Maybe there just isn't a bus anymore...

MELLY
That does seem odd doesn't it...

ROSALINDE
Yeah...

MR. O'DONNELL looks at MRS WILBANKS. She stares back.

MRS. WILBANKS
(Archly)

What?

MR. O'DONNELL
Delilah...

MRS. WILBANKS
What now?

MR. O'DONNELL
Please...

Long pause.

MRS. WILBANKS
Sad state of affairs where a widow is made to stand in the rain. It really is.

(Beat. Then to the DEACON)
Your church is having a fine proud day now, isn't it?

DEACON

I really don't need...

POLICEMAN

(Sharply)

What part of shut up do you not understand, Karl?

(Beat. Then in a whisper)

One more word, one more sound, one more fucking grunt out of you and you're headed to jail with a black eye as a lovely parting gift.

(Beat)

Believe it.

(Beat. Then to MRS WILBANKS)

Ma'am...please...

MRS. WILBANKS

I ain't...

MR. O'DONNELL

(Sharply)

Delilah please.

MRS. WILBANKS

Used to be a woman, a widow, could count on being treated with a little dignity.

(Beat)

I wonder what happened to that? I truly do... Now it seems we are just the targets for little bully men...

(Beat. Then to the DEACON)

Yes, I mean you, little man...

(Beat)

If my Harold, my Ox were...

MRS WILBANKS starts to tear up as she steps to the curb. She is hugged there by ROSALINDE and MELLY.

Pause.

The DEACON makes a head movement toward the STRANGER to catch the POLICEMAN's attention.

POLICEMAN

(To the STRANGER)

Miss? Please step forward off the property.

The STRANGER looks at the POLICEMAN curiously. Gradually the others turn to watch her. She is not moving.

MR. O'DONNELL

C'mon now girl, off you go.

(Beat)

Come here.

MRS. WILBANKS

Baby, come to me.

ROSALINDE

You don't want to go to jail now do you?

(Beat)

I don't want you to go to jail, baby...

ROSALINDE holds out her hand. The STRANGER takes a step forward and takes her hand. But instead of coming off that grass, THE STRANGER give ROSALINDE a soft hug, then cups her face in her hands. ROSALINDE is transfixed for an instant by the gesture, frozen. They gaze at one another for an instant. It is an intimate moment, a silent blessing.

Pause.

The STRANGER take a step backward under the tree.

ROSALINDE watches her intently.

POLICEMAN

Please...you must come off the property now, miss.

(Beat)

Please...

Long pause.

All eyes are on the STRANGER now except ROSALINDE's. She seems changed somehow.

POLICEMAN (cont'd)

Please...

MRS. WILBANKS

Well girl?

Pause.

Then, gracefully, the STRANGER sits down, her back against the tree.

Pause.

MELLY turns to the audience.

MELLY

It was the first time I had ever experienced something like this. Someone, a woman, a female like me, saying...no. Saying no and then like No I will not so what are you going to do about it? It was a time stopping moment. As she started to sit down it was as if she went into slow motion and then, it stopped. Time just sorta up and left.

(Beat)

I didn't know what to think. I was so nerved up I was all goose bumpy and the little hairs on my arms were standing straight up.

(Beat)

And in the back of my mind I'm thinking, well, looks like I'm not going to be going to make school today.

(Beat. She laughs.)

Yay! Happy Birthday to me!

MELLY returns to the group.

The DEACON tugs at the POLICEMAN's arm.

DEACON

That's the one that started it all.

(Beat)

Her.

The POLICEMAN pulls away from the DEACON and turns to MR. O'DONNELL, who is watching the STRANGER closely.

POLICEMAN

(Nodding at the STRANGER)

Friend of yours?

MR. O'DONNELL

Nope.

POLICEMAN

Any idea who she is?

MR. O'DONNELL

Not a one.

MRS. WILBANKS

She was just waiting on the bus like the rest of us.

MR. O'DONNELL

But she hasn't said a peep. I think, maybe, she's deaf.

POLICEMAN

OK.

(Beat.)

Then to the STRANGER, loudly)
Miss...MISS. You must come out now. You must come out. You-
must-come-out-now.

MELLY
She's not deaf.

ROSALINDE
(Quietly but firmly)
No, no she's not.

MR. O'DONNELL
Why are you talking like that? Even if she is deaf, I don't
think she's a simpleton.

POLICEMAN
I'm just trying to...

The STRANGER looks at ROSALINDE and
smiles then extends her hand. Without
hesitation ROSALINDE takes it. She
quickly sits down under the tree next
to the STRANGER.

MRS. WILBANKS
Rosa?

POLICEMAN
Oh for Christ's sake...

MR. O'DONNELL
Girls, will you come out here now? This is enough and I'm
putting my foot down, right here, right now.
(Beat)
We'll call...we'll get cabs or something. OK?

ROSALINDE
Thank you, Mr. O'Donnell, but no.

MR. O'DONNELL
What?

ROSALINDE
We will be staying here.

MR. O'DONNELL
Did you hear what the officer said, girl? You are going to
jail if you don't move off of there.

ROSALINDE
Thank you Mr. O'Donnell, we understand completely.

MRS. WILBANKS

Rosalinde Perez!

(Beat)

What in the world are you doing? Who's going to take care of little Magdalene if you're hauled off and become a jailbird?

ROSALINDE

I understand.

Pause.

MRS. WILBANKS

But you ain't moving now are you Rosa?

ROSALINDE

No ma'am, I'm not.

MRS. WILBANKS

Poor little Magdalene, all alone, Mama off in jail.

ROSALINDE

Maybe so.

(Beat)

But what will she think of a mama who is always cringing, one who is always afraid? I can't be that person anymore. I'm always worried and that worry makes me tired.

(Beat)

And I am tired of being tired. And afraid. I am better than that. I know I am.

(Beat)

I want to be different, you know? I want to be better. That's OK right? Wanting to be better? I don't know how but I think that maybe not letting myself be bullied and standing up for myself is a good way to start.

Pause.

MRS WILBANKS is thinking. She looks sideways at MR. O'DONNELL.

MR. O'DONNELL

Delilah...don't you...

Suddenly MRS WILBANKS darts under the tree and sits down heavily next to ROSALINDE.

ROSALINDE grins and hugs her.

MRS. WILBANKS

So there.

MR. O'DONNELL

Who's supposed to be the adults here, Delilah? You and me, that's who.

MRS. WILBANKS

The woman was speaking the truth, Owen. She spoke to my heart. She really did.

(Beat)

And my heart is answering.

(Beat)

So here I am.

MR. O'DONNELL

Good Lord.

MRS. WILBANKS

Yes indeed he is.

MELLY is watching the scene unfold quietly. After a moment she moves toward the women under the tree. MR. O'DONNELL catches her by the arm.

MR. O'DONNELL

No, no, no.

MELLY

What?

MR. O'DONNELL

I forbid it.

MELLY

OK.

MR. O'DONNELL

Don't want to see you involved in this young lady. I think you are smarter than that.

(Beat)

This thing is getting out of hand. You just go home and play with your new music toy and celebrate your birthday.

(Beat)

OK?

MELLY

Sure.

MR. O'DONNELL lets MELLY's arm go.

MR. O'DONNELL

Promise?

MELLY dashes away from MR. O'DONNELL and toward the women under the tree. She lands in a tumble next to the STRANGER. They grasp hands.

MELLY

No.

(Beat.)

Sorry.

MR. O'DONNELL

(Quietly)

That was...unfair, Melly.

(Beat)

Unkind really.

(Beat)

I'm just trying to help here.

MELLY

I know, Mr. O'Donnell...

(Beat)

I'm sorry...

(Beat)

But my heart was answering too.

MR. O'DONNELL

Lot of that going around today.

MELLY

And I had to listen.

Pause.

MR. O'DONNELL

Of course you did.

Long pause.

The POLICEMAN steps toward MR. O'DONNELL.

POLICEMAN

You are right.

MR. O'DONNELL

Hmmm?

DEACON

This is clearly illegal now.

The POLICEMAN silences the DEACON with a glance.

MR. O'DONNELL

Right about?

POLICEMAN

This. It's out of hand. And really soon now it will be beyond our control. Yours or mine. And I don't want that to happen. If this idiot calls my supervisor, they'll just grab them up, toss them in the paddy wagon and haul them off to jail.

MR. O'DONNELL

Great...

DEACON

(Bitterly)

Thank you so much for all your help, Officer.

(Beat)

For your information, just so you know, this idiot is going to phone your supervisor. Right now.

The DEACON exits.

The POLICEMAN shrugs and shakes his head.

MR. O'DONNELL

Now what?

POLICEMAN

Now we wait until my supervisor gets here. He'll yell at me for a few minutes then have your women here hauled off.

MR. O'DONNELL

Um...what's the crime here exactly? What would they be charged with?

POLICEMAN

Criminal trespass.

MR. O'DONNELL

And the penalty for that is?

POLICEMAN

Two hundred and fifty dollars for the first offense. A hundred dollars bail maybe.

(Beat)

Not a lot really.

MR. O'DONNELL

(Archly)

Really? Not a lot?

(Beat)

Except if you don't have it. Then its a damn fortune.

Pause.

But...

POLICEMAN

But?

MR. O'DONNELL

POLICEMAN

If it's like a civil disobedience thing, a protest situation, its usually community service, like paint a homeless shelter or something. Depends on the judge.

Thank you.

MR. O'DONNELL

Mr. O'DONNELL walks over to the women under the tree.

Pause.

Well, Owen?

MRS. WILBANKS

Well...

MR. O'DONNELL

Will you be joining us?

MRS. WILBANKS

No.

MR. O'DONNELL

That's too bad.

MRS. WILBANKS

Ok enough now.

MR. O'DONNELL

(Beat)

Look here's the situation. Right now you good ladies are committing criminal trespass. That means a trip to the jail and a \$250 fine plus bail money.

(Beat)

You got that money in your cookie jar, Delilah?

No I sure don't.

MRS. WILBANKS

Rosa?

MR. O'DONNELL

No, Mr. O'Donnell. I barely have bus fare...

ROSALINDE

Mel?

MR. O'DONNELL

MELLY shakes her head.

MR. O'DONNELL (cont'd)

OK so lets just come on out from under that tree and head out on our way. Take three steps to the sidewalk and it's over.

No one moves. The women grasp hands.

MRS. WILBANKS

Doesn't seem to me like it's about the rain now, Owen.

MR. O'DONNELL

No?

ROSALINDE

Something more maybe I guess huh?

(Beat)

Like, like we shouldn't be treated like we're criminals in our own neighborhood.

(Beat)

I just wanted to stay dry.

MELLY

We want respect, right? That's what we want.

(Beat)

And we're going to protest here until we get it.

MR. O'DONNELL

So you're a protester now, Melly?

Pause.

MELLY

(with conviction)

Yes, yes I am.

MR. O'DONNELL

Well that's good...

MR. O'DONNELL sits down slowly and heavily next to her.

MR. O'DONNELL (cont'd)

I hear that the judge goes easier on us protesters.

MRS. WILBANKS

(Beaming)

Owen O'Donnell!

(Beat)

Look at you.

ROSALINDE smiles broadly and MELLY gives him a hug.

MELLY

(softly)

Thank you.

MR. O'DONNELL

Ah, I gotta look after you women. My wife would kill me if I didn't.

Pause.

MRS. WILBANKS

Now what?

MR. O'DONNELL

Well, our friend the Deacon man called the officer's supervisor. And when he shows up...

ROSALINDE

Yes?

MR. O'DONNELL

We either leave or go to jail.

(Beat)

It's that simple.

MELLY

In my history class they showed movies of the protesters in the Sixties being taken to jail. They held their bodies like this...

MELLY lies down on her back and goes limp.

MELLY (cont'd)

So the police had to carry them.

ROSALINDE

Melly, I could carry you on my pinky finger, girl.

MELLY giggles.

MRS. WILBANKS

Those lawmen are not touching me. I will give him such a smack, it'll hurt his momma.

MR. O'DONNELL

Now you're an outlaw too, Delilah? Beating up the police and such?

The others laugh.

ROSALINDE

Gosh, we are protesting aren't we?

MRS. WILBANKS

Yeah. Yeah we are.

(Beat)

Really now I gotta wonder how did it come to this? My big butt sitting under a protest tree.

(Beat)

But...you gotta stand for something right? Sometimes. Sometimes you have to say...I'm not taking that from you. I am drawing the line with you. And if you come over it, that'll be nothing but trouble.

(Beat)

That's what my Harold, my Ox always said...

(Beat)

That man...

(Beat)

He was like a storm, that man. A big old hurricane. The front door would fly open with a bang he'd be yelling my name. Yelling like it was in three parts. Dee-li-lah. De-li-lah! That voice, that voice so deep and rumbly it made the pottery shake, His laugh sounded like a cannon shot...

(Beat)

He'd pretend yell at me. "Woman, where's my dinner!" Then he laugh like a damn fool and give me the biggest kiss. Everyday of our married life. "Woman, where's my dinner..."

MRS WILBANKS voice trails off.
ROSALINDE puts her arm around her. The STRANGER gazes at MRS WILBANKS, her face a picture of quiet compassion.

ROSALINDE

It's hard huh?

MRS. WILBANKS

Yes it is.

MR. O'DONNELL

(Gently)

But you see the boys right?

MRS. WILBANKS

Oh of course. Of course I do. But...they have their own lives now. I go visiting, I make the circuit...

MELLY

That's good, right?

MRS. WILBANKS

Sure it is baby. Sure it is...

(Beat)

But sometimes I feel like I got cheated. I'm a God fearing woman but it just seems wrong to me. The boys were getting ready to leave to start their own lives, we had enough saved up money, everything was fine, fine, fine.

(Beat)
Then...

(Beat)
Then one fall day, he was gone.

(Beat)
He was there then...he was not. That massive, loud, brave, good, strong man here, in my arms...then in an instant, taken home. It was like my life ended right at that instant and a new one began. Well that took a while really...

(Beat)
It was hard getting out of bed for the longest time.

Pause.

MRS WILBANKS is holding back tears.

MRS. WILBANKS (cont'd)
You know something, you know what? Sometimes I have my doubts. I hate to say it but I do. They say that thing, that "the Lord doesn't bring you any pain you cannot bear" thing? Well I have me some first hand experience and that is bull crap, excuse my language. It hurts. I miss him so much and it hurts. It hurt the day he was taken and it damn well hurts now. It hurts everyday. Everyday.

(Beat)
I want my old life back. I want my old life back...

MRS WILBANKS starts to sob. The STRANGER puts her arm around and pulls her close, kissing her cheek tenderly. MRS. WILBANKS pulls away and as she does she looks at the STRANGER. Their eyes lock.

They gaze at each other for a long moment. It is, again, a silent blessing, a gift given and received.

MRS WILBANKS breaks the gaze. Although her eyes are tearing a smile crosses her face.

ROSALINDE
(Concerned)
Delilah?

Pause.

MRS. WILBANKS
(To the STRANGER in a whisper)
Thank you baby...thank you...

MELLY

(Confused)

For?

A siren is heard approaching rapidly. Then revolving blue lights can be seen off right.

MR. O'DONNELL

Here comes trouble...

A police LIEUTENANT enters, followed closely by the POLICEMAN. They huddle together stage right.

MR. O'DONNELL (cont'd)

Well here it is ladies. We get up or go to jail. What's your pleasure?

Pause.

MR. O'DONNELL (cont'd)

Well...

ROSALINDE

(Calmly)

Neither really, Mr. O'Donnell. I...

MRS. WILBANKS

You know what? I am sitting pretty here and its a lovely day. I ain't moving.

ROSALINDE

I have an idea.

MR. O'DONNELL

Good timing Rosa. We need one.

ROSALINDE leans toward MRS WILBANKS and whispers intently. MRS WILBANKS listens then grins.

ROSALINDE

...if we're gonna protest, lets protest...

(Beat)

Right?

MRS. WILBANKS

Yes indeed.

(To MELLY)

C'mere birthday girl...

MELLY bounces over.

MELLY

Yes ma'am.

MRS. WILBANKS

I heard you a fast track running woman.

MELLY

Second fastest on the team.

MRS. WILBANKS

You feel fast today baby?

MELLY

Yes ma'am.

ROSALINDE

Good.

MRS. WILBANKS

OK here's what I want you to do...

MRS. WILBANKS whispers to MELLY. MELLY grins.

MRS. WILBANKS (cont'd)

You got that baby?

MELLY

(happily)

Aye aye captain.

MELLY gets up and approaches the audience.

MELLY

Well I have my marching orders now. I'm off to get the calvary. Just like in the movies. I'm the brave messenger, going through enemy lines.

(Beat)

Wish me luck.

MELLY walks casually toward the LIEUTENANT's group as if to pass them

LIEUTENANT

You girl. Stay where you are. I want to speak with you.

MELLY backs up a few paces.

MELLY

No thank you.

LIEUTENANT

What? What did you say to...

MELLY feigns left then right then dashes past them to exit. The POLICEMAN starts as if to give chase.

LIEUTENANT (cont'd)

No. Don't bother.

POLICEMAN

Yes sir.

LIEUTENANT

OK Wilcox, explain to me how this simple little situation got away from you again? It's such a fine story. It needs another retelling. It's really starting to grow on me. And standing out here in the rain makes it all the more touching.

POLICEMAN

Sir, I just wanted to be fair to the community, you know, be involved? Settle this amicably...

LIEUTENANT

It's a simple case of criminal trespass not the cold war, Dr. Kissinger.

DEACON

That's what I was saying, that's what I was trying...

LIEUTENANT

Shut up you old fool.

(Beat)

Frankly I am standing here busily trying to find a way to arrest you too. Just for sport, just for general principles. I wander into the station with you in cuffs and the place would explode in cheers. That's how sick of your goddam constant phone calls we are.

(Beat)

I wouldn't have to buy my own beer for a month. It's tempting.

(Beat)

Really tempting...

The DEACON looks away, humiliated.

POLICEMAN

Sir, they're just waiting for a bus...

LIEUTENANT

I couldn't care less. Try to get your head around this. You're a cop, not a judge, not a mediator, not a dispenser of justice. A cop.

(Beat)

It's a simple case of criminal trespass. Shove off or go to jail. How hard is this?

POLICEMAN

Sir...

LIEUTENANT

Not looking for a debate here, Wilcox. I have a lunch date with the district commander and I don't want to be late. Let's do this.

The LIEUTENANT strides forward, with the OFFICER and the DEACON in tow, to the group under the tree.

AUDIO: Odd voices can be heard in the background, a mix of sounds as if people on the street are starting to comment unfavorably on the situation.

The rain continues.

POLICEMAN

Sir, we...

LIEUTENANT

(quickly glancing about)

I came from the streets, Wilcox. I can hear them. Lets just do this boom, boom boom...

(to the group)

OK listen up people, you are currently committing...

MR. O'DONNELL

Excuse me sir, I'd like to explain what...

LIEUTENANT

Not interested big guy.

(Beat)

Heres the situation. You and your pals here remove yourself from this property where you are unwelcome...

DEACON

Completely...

The LIEUTENANT glares at the DEACON for an instant.

LIEUTENANT

Or you will be arrested and sent to Central Jail.

(Beat)

Your call. You have ten seconds to decide. Starting now.

MR. O'DONNELL struggles to his feet.

MR. O'DONNELL

Now look here...

LIEUTENANT

Feeling brave today are we? Care to add resisting arrest to criminal trespass?

(Beat)

Fine, you can be a hero. You're coming first, big guy.

As the LIEUTENANT reaches out for MR. O'DONNELL, MRS. WILBANKS steps in front of him.

MRS. WILBANKS

What is the matter with you? You just a bully with a uniform. We are just tryin' to catch a bus here!

LIEUTENANT

Lady, I don't care. You are going to jail.

The LIEUTENANT reaches for her and MRS WILBANKS pulls back, avoiding him.

The STRANGER points and waves her hand gently in the direction of the sounds of the gathering crowd.

ROSALINDE

(To the STRANGER)

Yes...yes...

(Shouting to the crowd
downstage)

We didn't do anything! They are trying to arrest us for waiting for a bus!

AUDIO: The crowd noise become louder and more aggressive. Individual comments directed toward the police can be heard.

LIEUTENANT

(To POLICEMAN)

Call for back up and a wagon.

(Beat)

Now...

MELLY enters stage right and runs toward the group. She is out of breath.

MRS. WILBANKS

(To MELLY)

Baby...?

MELLY

I found him...

(Beat. Deep breath)

He's coming...

(Beat. Deep breath)

He was teaching a men's group, they're all coming...

ROSALINDE

Good. Good running baby.

MRS. WILBANKS steps forward, glaring at the LIEUTENANT.

MRS. WILBANKS

(to the LIEUTENANT)

Your hear that? You hear that tough man? The Reverend Doctor Pilius from the Abyssinian Church is coming here and he's bringing the men's group with him.

(Beat)

You answering to a whole group of strong men now, bully boy.

ROSALINDE

(Hugging a gasping MELLY)

And women too.

The LIEUTENANT glares back at Mrs. WILBANKS.

LIEUTENANT

Really? Really now?

(Beat)

Well he'd better be quick about it lady, cause your butt's gonna be in Central Jail.

The LIEUTENANT grasps MRS. WILBANKS wrist and pulls her forward, there is a pair of handcuffs in his other hand. MR O'DONNELL pushes him back.

The crowd noises intensify and grow angrier. Objects are being thrown at the LIEUTENANT, the POLICEMAN and the DEACON.

The POLICEMAN grabs ROSALINDE. MELLY steps forward and starts to hit him. MR. O'DONNELL continues to struggle with the LIEUTENANT.

Suddenly the STRANGER steps between the men, holding her arms out open palmed as if to protect MR. O'DONNELL.

The fighting stops as all eyes fall on the STRANGER. She brings her out stretched arms forward, balling them up, holding them in front of herself as if waiting to be handcuffed.

LIEUTENANT

(Beat)

Good. Smart move, lady.

The LIEUTENANT steps forward with the handcuffs. The STRANGER's and the LIEUTENANT's eyes lock. For a long moment he hesitates.

Suddenly the STRANGER opens her fists. She is bleeding from the palms.

LIEUTENANT (cont'd)

Sweet...Jesus...

As the crowd instantly falls silent the STRANGER slowly lower her hands to her sides, palms out, blood flowing from them.

Long pause.

She swoons. MR. O'DONNELL and ROSALINDE catch her as she falls.

MRS. WILBANKS

Baby!

Blackout

Curtain

END ACT ONE

ACT II

An hour later.

A scrim has been lowered in front of the set. Projected on it a film leader counts off from 5. The camera's shot is raw news footage, a shaky pan on the cast sitting under the tree.

The shot comes to rest on MELLY.

MELLY (ON SCREEN)

It was weird how it all just sort of happened suddenly. Too suddenly really. I've never ever hit anyone one in my life. I didn't even think about it. It just happened.

(Beat)

Maybe Mr. O'Donnell is right. Maybe I'm becoming a protesting outlaw. Now I'm beating on police officers. And of course you know what happens when a birthday girl hits a policeman...

(Beat, then with a loud whisper)

They put you on TV...

Blackout. The scrim flies out.

It is still raining.

The protesters are huddled under the tree. The STRANGER is between MRS. WILBANKS and ROSALINDE who hover protectively. Her hands are wrapped in handkerchiefs. There are blood stains on them.

They are lit by TV lights on a stand. A TV camera crew is focusing on the REVEREND PILIUS who is giving a passionate interview.

The POLICEMAN, The LIEUTENANT and the DEACON watch balefully.

Under it all is the noise of an angry crowd.

REVEREND PILIUS

...what has happened here is that the God fearing hard working people of Oakdale are being oppressed, yes, beaten down in fact, by the police...

MELLY

(To MRS. WILBANKS)

We're beaten down? I thought Mr. O'Donnell hit the...

MRS. WILBANKS
Hush. The Reverend is just expounding.

MR. O'DONNELL
More like showboating.

MRS. WILBANKS
Well, he came down here, Owen. Came down to help us in this mess. We could be in jail now 'cept for him.

MR. O'DONNELL
Woman, how many times did I ask you to come out from under this tree?

ROSALINDE
But then you joined us here...

MR. O'DONNELL
(Shaking his head)
Yes, yes I did...

MELLY
So now we're official-on-TV protesters?

ROSALINDE
Maybe celebrities?

MR. O'DONNELL
More like public criminals.

MRS. WILBANKS
More like upright citizens standing firm and not taking any guff, that's what.

The STRANGER leans forward and smiles.

MRS. WILBANKS
(To the STRANGER)
And you girl, what are you about?

ROSALINDE
I don't know, Mrs. Wilbanks, but whatever it is, it's ok by me. I've never felt better in my life...

MR. O'DONNELL
Just all the excitement, that's all.

MELLY gazes at ROSALINDE.

MELLY
I don't think so...

REVEREND PILIUS

...And would some good person, some good citizen, explain to me how we can afford six figures salaries for public employees and police officials...

LIEUTENANT

(Muttering)

No, goddam it, no!

REVEREND PILIUS

...yet we cannot have a covered bus stop, a simple accommodation, for the fine citizens who live here...

LIEUTENANT

You greasy bastard...

POLICEMAN

You alright sir?

REVEREND PILIUS

Tell me how that works? Tell me how that can be?

Pause.

REPORTER

Cut.

(Beat)

Reverend, thank you very much. I think we have enough.

REVEREND PILIUS

The pleasure's all mine. Anytime. Anytime at all.

The TV crew moves toward the LIEUTENANT and the POLICEMAN.

REPORTER

(To the LIEUTENANT)

Sir, any comment about this situation?

LIEUTENANT

No.

REPORTER

Anything you or your department could have done differently?

LIEUTENANT

No comment.

REPORTER

Is the Reverend Pilius correct? Was this situation preventable? Was the situation caused by your...

LIEUTENANT

(Angrily)

God...

POLICEMAN

(Quickly)

No, we just responded to a trespassing complainant. We are working hard to resolve this as quickly and as peaceably as possible.

REPORTER

How did this happen?

DEACON

If I may, this situation, young miss, was caused by these peoples disrespect of private property.

REPORTER

And you are?

DEACON

The complainant. I am the deacon here.

REPORTER

How were they trespassing?

DEACON

They were on our property and failed to leave when asked.

POLICEMAN

Karl...

The REVEREND PILIUS approaches the tree.

REVEREND PILIUS

My, my, my. Look at you strong brave brothers and sisters standing tall.

MR. O'DONNELL

Or sitting, as the case may be.

MRS. WILBANKS

Reverend, thank you. Thank you so much...

ROSALINDE

Riding right in to our rescue. Thank you...

REVEREND PILIUS

We do not let our brave people down.

(Beat. Then to MR. O'DONNELL)

Don't believe I've had the pleasure.

Owen O'Donnell. MR. O'DONNELL

William Pilius. Call me Bill. REVEREND PILIUS

They shake hands.

Reverend... MR. O'DONNELL

REVEREND PILIUS
(Beat. Then quietly.)
Between you and I, man to man, What do you think of me taking charge of this matter?

Taking charge? MR. O'DONNELL

REVEREND PILIUS
Yes sir, you've handled it very well up until now. I know you must be tired.

MR. O'DONNELL
Reverend, I didn't handle nothing. I came to catch the bus...

MELLY
Me too.

ROSALINDE
And me.

MRS. WILBANKS
That's the honest god story. Reverend. We didn't do no planning. I have no idea...
(Beat. She steals a quick glance at the STRANGER.)
...how this came to be.

MELLY gazes at the STRANGER.

REVEREND PILIUS
You, all of you good brothers and sisters, are instruments of our divine Father's will. Please allow me to...

MR. O'DONNELL
Fine. Don't matter to me. But I tell you something, that goddam bus comes, I'm getting on it.

They laugh.

REVEREND PILIUS moves away and approaches the camera crew.

MRS. WILBANKS

Owen, I do believe that horse done left the barn.

MR. O'DONNELL

Maybe. But I'm still pretty spry. I played football. I can move when I have to.

(Beat)

Your Reverend seems pretty eager to get into the game...

MRS. WILBANKS

He's a good proud man. He's a vessel of the Lord. That church of mine has been grown' by leaps since he arrived.

(Beat)

You should come one Sunday. You should come to men's group. You've got friends there, Owen.

MR. O'DONNELL says nothing.

MRS. WILBANKS (cont'd)

Course, it's my own feeling that you could damn well use some strong churching.

They look at each other then burst out laughing.

MR. O'DONNELL

Tell you what Delilah, we don't go to jail tonight, I'll think about it.

MRS. WILBANKS

Heathen...

The LIEUTENANT angrily closes the antenna of a two way radio and fixes the POLICEMAN with a scowl.

POLICEMAN

Sir?

LIEUTENANT

Don't you do that. Don't you sir me. It was your incompetence that got us here in the first place.

POLICEMAN

I was only trying...

LIEUTENANT

Trying to do what? Make the peace, serve justice? What the hell are they teaching you people at the academy? This is a job. A job with rules. And if you had followed the rules, this trash under the tree would be cooling their heels at Central Jail now.

(Beat)

But now, now we have a situation.

(Beat)

I hate situations. They never end well for us. Did you ever notice that? No, of course not. You're too busy dispensing peace and justice.

POLICEMAN

Sir, I don't happen to believe that police work is all cuff and stuff.

LIEUTENANT

Really? Do you know who that was on the radio?

POLICEMAN

The District Commander?

LIEUTENANT

Yes indeed. And do you know what he said?

POLICEMAN

No sir.

LIEUTENANT

He said if this "situation" wasn't resolved by dinner time it was quote "my ass" unquote.

POLICEMAN

I'm sorry.

LIEUTENANT

Oh you should be, because my ass isn't going alone. You will be right next to me. These people may be on the noon news but they aren't going to make the six o'clock broadcast.

(Beat)

Tell you what, you started this, Pope John Paul, you fix it...

(Beat)

If this is not resolved in an hour, I'm calling in tactical. The tree people and the rest of this street trash are going.

POLICEMAN

Sir...

LIEUTENANT

Easy or hard they are going.

The DEACON has been listening.

DEACON

Sir, I am so sorry.

LIEUTENANT

Ah, the sweet voice of reason...

DEACON

If I had known it would come to this, I would have never...

LIEUTENANT

Never done what? Never made our lives a misery with your constant whining?

DEACON

I did...what I felt was my duty. This is private property.

POLICEMAN

I thought it was a house of the Lord, Karl. Meaning that it is public property.

DEACON

If you are a member of our church.

LIEUTENANT

Tell you what Karl, let's get you involved. Let's make this more interesting, shall we? See our little band of protesters over there under your tree?

(Beat)

Here's the deal. In one hour, one hour, if they don't disperse they go to jail. And I don't give a shit if we have to get Tactical down here and march them out at gunpoint.

(Beat)

But, and here's the good part, If they go, you go.

DEACON

I beg your pardon...

LIEUTENANT

Beg away. If they go, you go.

POLICEMAN

Sir...

LIEUTENANT

(Glaring at the DEACON)

Shut up Wilcox...

DEACON

On what charge?

LIEUTENANT

I'll think of something. Harassment of a police officer, misuse of public resources. I'm clever. That how I got to be a police lieutenant.

POLICEMAN

Sir, may I speak to you privately?

LIEUTENANT

No.

POLICEMAN

I insist.

LIEUTENANT

Oh for Christsakes, come here then...

From under the tree, MELLY addresses the audience.

MELLY

So I'm watching everything and everybody, trying to figure what's going on. It seems like no one knows what to do. It's a waiting game.

(Beat)

So this is me waiting. But something was niggling me. And finally I realize what it was...

MELLY moves next to MR. O'DONNELL.

MELLY

Hey...

MR. O'DONNELL

Hey birthday girl. This is a fine celebration, eh?

MELLY

I never expected...

MR. O'DONNELL

Me neither, Mel, Me neither.

MELLY

It just sort of happened.

MR. O'DONNELL

Yeah, you'll get that sometimes.

Pause.

MELLY

I was wondering if you could explain something for me.

MR. O'DONNELL

Probably not.

MELLY

No really...

MR. O'DONNELL

Ok birthday. But no promises.

MELLY

(Indicating the STRANGER)

Her...

Pause.

MR. O'DONNELL
Mel, I honestly have no idea.

MELLY
What happened to her hands? Did someone hit her or something?

MR. O'DONNELL
(Quickly)
I don't know...

MELLY
I didn't see anything...

ROSALINDE
I'm not sure what you saw. But I know what I saw.
(Beat)
And what I believe.

MRS. WILBANKS
(To ROSALINDE)
Hush girl. She don't need to hear no voodoo.

ROSALINDE
No ma'am. No. I will not be hushed. You do not hush me.

MRS. WILBANKS
Excuse me?

ROSALINDE
You heard me.

MRS WILBANKS stares at ROSALINDE for a long moment.

MRS. WILBANKS
I'm...sorry, Rosa.

MR. O'DONNELL
Did I just hear you say you were sorry? Are you feeling alright Delilah?

(Beat)
Don't believe I've ever heard that before.

MRS. WILBANKS
Rosa is right. I was full of disrespect...
(Beat)

It's a new day for everything, I'm a public spectacle. I'm a protest woman sitting under a tree all damn wet, I'm on the television. Next my picture will be in the post office.

ROSALINDE
Maybe it can be a group portrait.

They laugh.

MRS. WILBANKS
But you know what?

MR. O'DONNELL
I'm afraid to ask.
(Beat)
Ok, what?

MRS. WILBANKS
I feel fine. As a matter of fact I feel great. I feel like...like...something important and good and true is gonna happen to me. I really do.

ROSALINDE
So do I...
(Beat)
So do I.

MR. O'DONNELL
If by that you mean jail time. You just might be right.

MELLY
(To ROSALINDE)
So tell me...

ROSALINDE
About?

MELLY
Her hands. What happened there? Why were they bleeding like that?

ROSALINDE
(Quietly)
I don't know what everyone else thinks happened but I know what I believe.

MELLY
Which is?

ROSALINDE
Stigmata.

MELLY
What?

ROSALINDE
The wounds of Christ. Some people believe that those who experience the stigmata are blessed, are holy or have some sort of connection to the divine.

Pause.

MELLY

Really? What do you think?

ROSALINDE

I don't know what to think.

(Beat)

But I know what I believe.

MELLY

Yes?

ROSALINDE

Since the instant she held me, I have felt different. I've felt, well, the only way I can describe it is as more...somehow. Better, I guess.

(Beat)

I feel like that faith I've had all these years has been rewarded somehow.

(Beat)

I feel blessed.

The REPORTER approaches the POLICEMAN.

REPORTER

Hey Officer...

POLICEMAN

Yes, ma'am?

REPORTER

Off the record?

POLICEMAN

Off the record...

REPORTER

Was one of the protesters injured in that little fracas you had with them before we arrived?

The LIEUTENANT butts in.

LIEUTENANT

No that's not so.

POLICEMAN

Actually one of the protesters did experience a cut of some sort.

LIEUTENANT

It was nothing, something on her hand...

POLICEMAN

She refused medical treatment.

LIEUTENANT

It didn't even look real to me. Probably ketchup or something...

REPORTER

Ketchup?

LIEUTENANT

Or something.

REPORTER

Something like what?

LIEUTENANT

Frankly I don't know and furthermore I don't care.

(Beat. Then grimly.)

You know what lady? I've had it. I have fucking had it. This has gone far enough.

REPORTER

Excuse me?

POLICEMAN

(Touching the LIEUTENANT's
elbow)

Sir, please...

LIEUTENANT

Get your hands off me, Wilcox.

(Beat)

I'll deal with you later. Get me the bullhorn. I'll show you how we used to do things downtown.

POLICEMAN

Sir...

LIEUTENANT

Get the goddam bullhorn. Now.

The REVEREND PILIUS approaches as the
LIEUTENANT moves to the tree.

REVEREND PILIUS

(To the LIEUTENANT)

We should discuss this before you make the mistake of your life.

LIEUTENANT

And who put you in charge?

MR. O'DONNELL

Well, here we go now.

He's taking a stand.
MRS. WILBANKS

Like us, huh?
MELLY

Just like us.
ROSALINDE

You mean for us...
MRS. WILBANKS

Maybe. But I can take a stand for me. And I am. Right now.
ROSALINDE

And me too.
MELLY

Oooo, girls look at your riotious selves.
ROSALINDE

Please ladies... Let's just watch the show now.
MR. O'DONNELL

REVEREND PILIUS
(To the LIEUTENANT)
Tell me how you think this is gonna end well for you sir.

LIEUTENANT
Don't start. They're aren't any cameras aimed at you just this minute so you get off your high horse with me young man, got that?

REVEREND PILIUS
I can fix that fast enough.

LIEUTENANT
What's your business here?
(Beat)
You organize this pain in the ass protest?

MRS. WILBANKS
Didn't nobody organize nothing here. The bus company organized it.

The POLICEMAN returns with the bullhorn.

POLICEMAN
And our buddy Karl here helped.

Pause. The LIEUTENANT glares at the DEACON for an instant the lifts the bullhorn to speak to the crowd.

LIEUTENANT

This is the police. You are now part of an unlawful, unpermitted assembly. You are ordered to immediately disperse from this location. If you do not disperse from this location you will be subject to arrest.

The crowd noise rises. Shouted threats can be heard. The REPORTER approaches taking notes and the camera crew films.

REVEREND PILIUS

Good strong men empowered by the Lord are not moved by threats. We have heard them for two hundred years and they no longer work. We will not be moved.

(Beat)

Hear me?

(Beat)

We will not be moved.

The LIEUTENANT stalks off.

ROSALINDE

(To MELLY)

Gosh, that went well.

ROSALINDE and MELLY giggle. The STRANGER watches the entire scene with calm interest.

MR. O'DONNELL

Girls, please.

ROSALINDE

(whispering to MELLY)

Doesn't it seem like no one here knows what to do?

Pause. The STRANGER smiles gently. MELLY turns to the audience.

MELLY

That's exactly what it felt like. It was like everyone here was backed into a corner and no one was gonna budge the slightest bit at all.

(Beat)

And then I had a thought...

MELLY sits next to MRS WILBANKS.

MRS. WILBANKS

How you bearin' up, baby?

MELLY

I'm wet all over.

MRS. WILBANKS

That's the Lord's truth.

MR. O'DONNELL

So's everyone one else too.

ROSALINDE

True.

Pause.

MELLY

I was wondering something...

The REVEREND PILIUS approaches the
POLICEMAN.

REVEREND PILIUS

Officer...

POLICEMAN

Yes, sir?

REVEREND PILIUS

Can we speak to each other?

POLICEMAN

Can we?

REVEREND PILIUS

I hope so.

POLICEMAN

I do too.

REVEREND PILIUS

You seem like a reasonable man to me.

POLICEMAN

I try.

REVEREND PILIUS

I think we, you and I, need to find a solution here.

POLICEMAN

I agree.

(Beat)

But your loud friends in the street over there aren't helping
the matter any.

REVEREND PILIUS

They're just helping me maintain the balance of power.
Without them our citizen protesters here would have been in
jail three hours ago.

POLICEMAN

True.

REVEREND PILIUS

And they don't deserve to be in jail.

POLICEMAN

They are trespassing on private property.

REVEREND PILIUS

They were waiting for a bus.

POLICEMAN

Still...

Pause.

REVEREND PILIUS

Trespassing...trespassing...

(Beat)

And the church is bringing that charge?

POLICEMAN

It is.

REVEREND PILIUS

Who in the church would be doing that?

POLICEMAN

Karl the Deacon. Skinny nervous looking runt over there.

REVEREND PILIUS

He's in charge?

POLICEMAN

I guess, sorta of like a caretaker. We've got history with him...

REVEREND PILIUS

Oh?

POLICEMAN

He's on the horn to us all the time, kids are sitting on his steps, kids are back sassing him, kids are looking at him cross eyed.

Pause.

REVEREND PILIUS

This whole thing seems a little over his pay grade doesn't it? Does The Right Reverend Doctor McCall know about this?

POLICEMAN

Right Reverend Doctor?

REVEREND PILIUS

Yeah. Went to Yale Divinity School.

POLICEMAN

You somehow closer to God if you went to Yale?

REVEREND PILIUS

(Laughs)

Maybe. Maybe its a different god. Anyway never met the fellow but I understand he is a proud man.

POLICEMAN

Let me talk to my boss then we can chat with Karl. Sure would like to close this down.

REVEREND PILIUS

Peaceably.

POLICEMAN

Yup.

MELLY addresses the others.

MELLY

I believe we need something.

MRS. WILBANKS

Some hot chamomile tea would be nice...

MR. O'DONNELL

A fat hoagie sandwich.

MELLY

No. No. I mean, we're protestors now right?

ROSALINDE

(Firmly)

Yes we are.

MELLY

Then we need demands.

ROSALINDE

Yes we do, don't we?

MR. O'DONNELL

Well...

MRS. WILBANKS

By the sweet Lord, yes we do!

MR. O'DONNELL

Oh now Deliliah, don't be...

MRS. WILBANKS

Owen, than why else are we under this tree?

Pause.

MR. O'DONNELL

Hmmm...I hate to admit it but you have a point.

(Beat)

So...

MELLY

Well those protesters on TV always started out with like a general statement. Sorta of like "We the people demand our rights and to be treated with respect and..."

MR. O'DONNELL

Mel, that sounds like some sort of Communist propaganda.

MRS. WILBANKS

Not its not Owen, I think demanding we be treated with dignity is a fine way to start.

(Beat)

My Ox would have him some trouble with someone rude. He'd say, "I ain't having this disrespect from you." I feel the same way.

ROSALINDE

Respect is good but...

MRS. WILBANKS

But?

ROSALINDE

What about being dry?

(Beat)

That's what this is all about right? Being dry.

MRS. WILBANKS

Yeah, yeah it is. My bottom is soaking up a puddle.

MR. O'DONNELL

Rosa, I think you're right. That's it. No offense Mel, but this is something concrete.

MELLY

No Mr Wilbanks, that's fine. But we need to say something to them. We need to make a stand.

MR. O'DONNELL

Wouldn't hurt to give them chance to respond.

ROSALINDE

So we want...dignity...

And respect.

MELLY

And towels.

MRS. WILBANKS

And a goddam bus shelter.

MR. O'DONNELL

MRS. WILBANKS
(Laughing in spite of herself)
Owen O' Donnell!

MR. O'DONNELL
Delilah Wilbanks!

MRS. WILBANKS
You're a..baddddd...man.

They laugh.

MR. O'DONNELL
So it's settled then. That top cop gets over here again we
tell him.

MELLY
No.

MR. O'DONNELL
What?

MRS. WILBANKS
Girl, you just said...

MELLY
No.
(Points at the REPORTER)
Tell her. She can tell the police. And the public at the same
time.

MRS WILBANKS hugs MELLY.

MRS. WILBANKS
You, baby, are a little shining star, you know that?

THE STRANGER gazes at MELLY and smiles.
MELLY smiles in return.

MRS. WILBANKS
Something good is happening here. Something good and special
and precious is happening to us this day.
(Beat)
Can you feel it?

MELLY and THE STRANGER's eyes are locked.

ROSALINDE

Yes, yes I do.

MR. O'DONNELL

Delilah, you in some sort of state?

MRS. WILBANKS

I am. I'm in a state of grace because...because...

ROSALINDE

...we are right.

ROSALINDE beckons the REPORTER while MELLY moves to sit next to the STRANGER.

She gently reaches out and takes one of her bandaged hands.

MELLY

Does it hurt?

The POLICEMAN approaches the LIEUTENANT.

POLICEMAN

Sir, I have an idea I'd like to discuss with you.

LIEUTENANT

So talk.

POLICEMAN

This complainant, this Deacon fellow is just a caretaker here.

LIEUTENANT

And?

POLICEMAN

Well I was thinking...

LIEUTENANT

He can file a complainant, Wilcox, he's an employee of the church. You know that, this is first week academy stuff.

(Beat)

I'm going to send you into station. I've always thought you were too squishy soft with these damn street people. This just proves it. You can go.

Pause.

POLICEMAN

Permission to speak freely sir?

LIEUTENANT

I just dismissed you.

(Beat)

Oh for Christsakes alright. Make it snappy.

POLICEMAN

(Quickly)

This isn't a winning situation for anyone here, sir.

LIEUTENANT

No kidding? Really?

POLICEMAN

The press is here. One wrong move and we could look like fools or worse.

(Beat)

Remember the riots in 77? An officer knocks a grocery bag out of an elderly black woman's hands and two days later there's thirty million dollars damage and 114 people in the hospital.

LIEUTENANT

I know that. I was there. I personally put more than my share of them there. So will your point be arriving soon or should I make some popcorn and settle in for the long haul?

POLICEMAN

We need to find the Reverend McCall. Maybe he's a clearer head. Maybe he doesn't want to press charges, maybe he doesn't even know what's going on?

Pause.

LIEUTENANT

Go on.

POLICEMAN

We find him, we talk to him. He's not invested in this. But I'll bet he's invested in not having his church be in the center of what could be a very ugly incident.

Pause.

LIEUTENANT

Fine Wilcox, fine. Get this preacher found. But remember I gave you an hour about, what, thirty minutes ago? You've got half an hour left. End of that time, we do it my way.

POLICEMAN

Yes sir.

(Beat)

Sir...

LIEUTENANT

What?

POLICEMAN

I'm just saying, remember what happened in 77.

LIEUTENANT

I don't need any history lessons from you. In fact you seem to have forgotten one thing. We won. We beat them back and we beat them down and a great many of those little lovers went to jail.

(Beat)

Now get moving.

The POLICEMAN moves toward the REVEREND PILIUS as the LIEUTENANT reaches for his radio.

LIEUTENANT (cont'd)

This is Supervisor 2. Situation here is now orange. We require Special Tactical unit mobilized. They are to park two blocks to the north of our immediate location and await further orders. Full riot gear. Supervisor 2 out.

(Pause)

One half hour.

MELLY examines the STRANGER's bandaged hand. She look at the STRANGER then back at her hand. Gently she starts to unwrap the bandage. Suddenly she stops, peering at the hand, then back to the STRANGER's face, then returns to the hand.

MELLY's expression is a mix of amazement and concern. The STRANGER's hand is unmarked.

MELLY

What...what happened?

The REPORTER launches into a standup in front of her crew.

REPORTER

I'm reporting live from Larchmont Street Methodist Church where a large crowd has gathered in support of a group of neighborhood residents who are staging a protest.

Police have so far responded in a measured fashion although there are reports of one of the protestors being injured.

(Beat)

With me now is the church's head Deacon, who witnessed the start of the protest. Can you tell us what happened?

DEACON

What happened is that the people you see here decided to trespass on the church's property.

MRS. WILBANKS

That is a lie.

DEACON

And they were asked politely and repeatedly to leave.

ROSALINDE

You threatened us with arrest.

REPORTER

You did that?

MRS. WILBANKS

Yes he did, didn't you little man?

DEACON

I did.

REPORTER

They were waiting for the bus, correct?

DEACON

Apparently.

MRS. WILBANKS

We just wanted to stay dry...

ROSALINDE

Look up. It is raining. It was raining then and it's raining still.

DEACON

And this is private property. And it was posted. Do you people not respect anything?

MRS. WILBANKS rises angrily to her feet and moves toward the DEACON. The camera crew is filming.

MR. O'DONNELL

Delilah, no!

MRS. WILBANKS

Don't you talk to me about respect, no sir. Cause you people don't respect a damn thing. You don't respect this neighborhood and you don't respect us. This thing, this big barn of yours is a plantation house. That's what it is. Our master's house...

DEACON

That is so unfair...

The crowd noises are getting louder and increasing ominous.

MR. WILBANKS, MELLY and ROSALINDE get up and stand close to MRS. WILBANKS.

MRS. WILBANKS

Is it? Is it? How is that? No one who lives here is a member there.

DEACON

To my knowledge, no one has ever applied.

MRS. WILBANKS

(Angrily)

Applied? You have to apply to worship the Lord?

The POLICEMAN and REVEREND PILIUS rush forward while the LIEUTENANT watches with a tight smile on his face.

POLICEMAN

Ladies and gentlemen, please...

REVEREND PILIUS

My great and good sister, this is not the way...

MRS. WILBANKS

Then what is the way? I am sick of it.

(To the DEACON)

You afraid of this?

(She stick her hand out toward his face.)

You are, aren't you? You think the brown's gonna rub off on you? That's what your parishioners think, isn't it? Rosa, show him.

ROSALINDE extends her hands then rubs them together.

ROSALINDE

Doesn't rub off.

POLICEMAN

Let's just all take a deep breath and three steps backwards.

(Beat)

Please...

MR. O'DONNELL, MELLY and ROSALINDE
gently pull MRS. WILBANKS back to the
tree.

The REPORTER comes forward with her
microphone.

REPORTER

(To MRS WILBANKS)

How does this end, ma'am? What are your demands?

Pause.

MRS. WILBANKS

Dignity. That's my demand.

REPORTER

Dignity.

MRS. WILBANKS

That's right.

The STRANGER joins the group and
embraces MRS. WILBANKS.

ROSALINDE

And respect.

MR. O'DONNELL

That would be a good start.

MELLY

And a bus shelter would be nice. I'm cold now.

REPORTER

It would, wouldn't it?

MELLY

Yes ma'am.

MR. O'DONNELL

Here birthday girl, take my jacket.

(Beat)

This can't be much of a birthday for you.

MELLY

Mr. O'Donnell, it's an incredible birthday.

(Beat)

So what do we do now?

MR. O'DONNELL

I guess we get back under the tree and wait.

MELLY

Ok.

(Beat. The quietly)

How do you think this will end up? Are we going to jail?

MR. O'DONNELL

I really don't know, Mel. But I think we've all come too far now to back down.

MELLY

You do?

MR. O'DONNELL

Yup.

MELLY

So do I.

The LIEUTENANT eyes the entire scene balefully. Then he starts to smile.

After a pause he talks into his radio for a moment then waves the POLICEMAN over.

LIEUTENANT

Wilcox, they found your guy.

POLICEMAN

Huh?

LIEUTENANT

The head church guy here. Your reverend...

POLICEMAN

Where?

LIEUTENANT

He's in Princess Anne parish playing golf.

POLICEMAN

In the rain?

LIEUTENANT

Sunny there I guess. Maybe the guy is so sweet and holy he farts sunshine, I dunno. Anyway...

POLICEMAN

Sir?

LIEUTENANT

Go get him.

POLICEMAN

We're a little short handed here, sir, can't we sent a detail to...

LIEUTENANT

Believe it or not, there is an entire city out there that needs policing.

POLICEMAN

But...

LIEUTENANT

That's an order. Remember those? I give them and you take them.

POLICEMAN

But the crowd.

LIEUTENANT

Nothing's going to happen here in 20 minutes. Go get your guy and lets try to fix this. Go. Now.

POLICEMAN

(Beat. Then warily)

Yes sir.

The POLICEMAN exits. The LIEUTENANT walks over to the cast under the tree.

LIEUTENANT

We may have gotten of on the wrong foot here.

MR. O'DONNELL

May?

LIEUTENANT

Trying to be gracious, trying to extend an olive branch here, big man.

MRS. WILBANKS

Why now? Before the press and the people showed up you were all about carting us off to the hoosegow.

LIEUTENANT

True but like I said I might have been hasty.

ROSALINDE

So what's going on?

LIEUTENANT

Well...

The REVEREND PILIUS approaches.

REVEREND PILIUS

We have a list of demands that need to be met before we are willing to consider anything you might have to say.

LIEUTENANT

Oh?

(Beat)

Demands?

REVEREND PILIUS

Yes.

LIEUTENANT

Tell you what then, just give me the concrete ones. Like new shoes or matching rain smocks. Save the world peace and daily rainbows...

(He indicates the camera crew)

For them...

Pause. The STRANGER stares at the LIEUTENANT with a very serious expression on her face. MELLY notices.

MELLY

(To ROSALINDE)

Look Rosa, she doesn't like him at all.

ROSALINDE

No she doesn't, does she?

MELLY

(To the STRANGER)

What do you know? Tell me what you know.

The STRANGER shares a concerned expression with MELLY and ROSALINDE.

ROSALINDE

He's...he's a little creepy, huh?

MELLY

Yeah and a liar besides, I bet...

REVEREND PILIUS

It's simple. We want a bus shelter. A place to sit and stay dry.

LIEUTENANT

Alright. Seems logical under the circumstances.

MRS. WILBANKS

How you planning to do that? How do we know that's gonna happen?

MR. O'DONNELL

Paper. I want to see it on paper. Written. A public promise.

MELLY

Like a contract?

MR. O'DONNELL

Exactly.

Pause.

MRS. WILBANKS

So how do we know that this is for real?

REVEREND PILIUS

It's a fair question. So?

LIEUTENANT

(Smoothly)

This entire neighborhood is slated for public works this spring. I'm sure that a shelter would be a very small affair. That's what I've got for you. You'll get your bus shelter. Anything else?

Pause.

MR. O'DONNELL

Ummmm, no I don't think so.

LIEUTENANT

Good. Let's do some business huh?

(Beat)

Reverend, a word?

The LIEUTENANT and the REVEREND PILIUS
move away from the tree.

REVEREND PILIUS

Yes?

LIEUTENANT

Look I think I've come a long way here...

REVEREND PILIUS

You have been reasonable, yes.

LIEUTENANT

So, do you think it might be possible to dispense with the shock troops over there?

REVEREND PILIUS

(Eyeing the LIEUTENANT warily.)

So really, man to man, how do these good people know your promises are real?

LIEUTENANT

I gave them my word.

REVEREND PILIUS

That's it?

LIEUTENANT

Excuse me?

The LIEUTENANT summons the DEACON with a crooked finger.

LIEUTENANT

You know we're grabbing up your boss out of his golf game and bringing him here right?

DEACON

No. No I didn't

LIEUTENANT

We figured you were making decisions above your pay grade, frankly.

DEACON

I...

LIEUTENANT

Reverend McCall gets here and if he won't press charges then it's over, right?

Pause. The DEACON does not speak.

LIEUTENANT (cont'd)

Right?

REVEREND PILIUS

(to the DEACON)

Sir?

DEACON

(Quietly)

Yes.

LIEUTENANT

Excuse me?

DEACON

I just said yes.

Pause.

LIEUTENANT

Well Reverend, there you have it. Game over. Pretty sure this McCall preacher isn't going to want to see this get any worse.

(Beat)

Send your people home, we can send our protestors home. We can call it a day.

REVEREND PILIUS

(Beat)

Let me speak to them.

LIEUTENANT

Speak to them? Be forceful. Tell them...

The REVEREND PILIUS shoots him a hard look.

Right, of course. Sorry...

The REVEREND PILIUS approaches the protestors.

REVEREND PILIUS

Well, my brave brothers and sisters, it's over.

Pause.

MR. O'DONNELL

Oh?

(Beat)

How's that?

REVEREND PILIUS

We don't think that the Right Reverend McCall is going to be as gung ho about pressing charges as your friend Karl is.

MRS. WILBANKS

How do we know that?

REVEREND PILIUS

Deliliah...

(Beat)

He doesn't press charges, we all go home, you, me, the men's group. We go home. We go home proud on this day. We stood up, we made a difference.

MRS. WILBANKS

Owen?

MR. O'DONNELL

He's your guy Deliliah. Don't think he'd lead you wrong.

(Beat)

Do you?

The STRANGER touches MELLY's shoulder,
her face a picture of concern.

MELLY

Wait...wait everyone...

ROSALINDE

She doesn't...agree...

REVEREND PILIUS

What?

(Beat)

Who is this? Who are you?

ROSALINDE

(Simply)

We don't know.

MELLY

She was waiting for the bus with us.

REVEREND PILIUS

Where did she come from?

(To the STRANGER)

Who are your people woman?

Pause.

MRS. WILBANKS

I guess we're her people.

ROSALINDE

Yup.

MRS. WILBANKS

(To the STRANGER)

What is it baby?

They follow her gaze. She is staring at
the LIEUTENANT.

MELLY

It's him.

MRS. WILBANKS

Why yes it is.

ROSALINDE

Really can't say I disagree.

MRS. WILBANKS

Owen?

MR. O'DONNELL

I dunno. When he first showed up here he was Mr. Tough Guy. He started the fight.

(Beat)

So...if I have to chose between the two of them, I'm going with the girl.

(To REVEREND PILIUS)

We're staying here til that head preacher gets back.

REVEREND PILIUS

Nothings gonna come of this. Everything is fine. Delilah, please...

MRS. WILBANKS

(Glancing at MR. O'DONNELL)

We're here til the big man says we're not...

REVEREND PILIUS

Fine...

(Beat)

Fine...

(Beat. Then to MRS WILBANKS)

But I have to tell you, sister, my heart is aggrieved from your lack of trust.

MRS. WILBANKS

Maybe, Reverend, you do trust too much.

Pause.

REVEREND PILIUS

You realize that I cannot keep these good brothers out here in the rain like this with the crisis come and gone.

MR. O'DONNELL

Do what you gotta do.

REVEREND PILIUS moves forward to address the crowd.

REVEREND PILIUS

My friends, my brave and true brothers, my fellow soldiers in this army of truth and faith. Our mission here has ended. Their will be no charges against our friends and neighbors here.

(Beat. A cheer rings out)

Very soon now, they shall depart for their homes. Now it is time for you to depart to. Your strength, courage and self sacrifice has brought justice here today. Go home now in peace and we will gather together on the morrow to worship. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you.

Another cheer rings out and the sounds of people departing can be heard. The LIEUTENANT watches quietly then, with the DEACON in tow, approaches the protestors.

LIEUTENANT
(To MR. O'DONNELL)

Big man...

MR. O'DONNELL

Lieutenant...

(Beat)

You got a piece of paper for us?

LIEUTENANT
(Slowly)

A piece of paper...

MR. O'DONNELL

I thought we was pretty clear about what it would take to settle this.

MRS. WILBANKS

An agreement.

ROSALINDE

Like we talked about.

LIEUTENANT

Indeed.

REVEREND PILIUS

So where is it?

LIEUTENANT

Well, my friends there has been a slight change of plans...

The LIEUTENANT speaks into his radio.

LIEUTENANT

Supervisor 2 to Special Tactical Unit. Advance immediately to my location. Five for transport to...

REVEREND PILIUS

We had a deal, you gave me your word!

The LIEUTENANT pauses for an instant while staring at REVEREND PILIUS.

LIEUTENANT

...six for forcible transport to Central Jail. Supervisor 2 out.

MR. O'DONNELL

You son of a bitch.

MELLY

What does this mean?

ROSALINDE

It means...

LIEUTENANT

Please, allow me...

(Beat)

Miss, it means you're about to be arrested and taken to jail where you will be booked and held until you make bail. And, frankly this is something that should have happened hours ago.

MRS. WILBANKS

And forcible transport? Tell us what that means, you brave public servant you.

LIEUTENANT

By any means necessary is what it means.

REVEREND PILIUS

And who decides that?

LIEUTENANT

Well Reverend, I guess you people do...

Three armed SWAT OFFICERS appear in riot gear and cluster behind the LIEUTENANT.

LIEUTENANT (cont'd)

It sort of like that old movie line: Come quietly or else there'll be trouble.

(Beat)

I love saying that.

DEACON

Maybe, maybe this is a little much...

LIEUTENANT

Shut up, Karl. You started this. It's only fitting that you be here for the end.

REVEREND PILIUS

We had an agreement, we had a deal...

LIEUTENANT

Really? Is that what you thought?

(Beat)

These people behave completely lawlessly, create a public spectacle of themselves and you think that gives you some sort of negotiating position that I have to respect?

(Beat)

Your little chums are gone, the press is gone, the story is over and all that's left is the reckoning.

MRS. WILBANKS

What the hell is the matter with you?

LIEUTENANT

The matter with me, ma'am? There's not a damn thing the matter with me. I enforce the law. That's it, that's all I do. That's all I've ever really wanted to do. I try my damndest to keep citizens like yourself safe. I don't have any trouble with that. I don't deal in shades of grey. I see black and white. And no, not skin color. Right and wrong.

(Beat)

Can you understand that? Right and wrong. And in my eyes when you refused the command of lawful authority you willfully chose to be a criminal.

(Beat, then slowly)

You, all of you, are under arrest. And frankly you can come out from under there willingly or by force. But choose now.

MR. O'DONNELL

Ladies, we have to go. We have to go now.

REVEREND PILIUS

My brave sisters, come out now. This point has been made and we will join the battle again. But now, please, we're done.

The women huddle together as MR. O'DONNELL starts to rise. MELLY is gazing at the STRANGER, they appear to be sharing a moment or a thought. Suddenly MELLY jumps to her feet.

MELLY

No.

MR. O'DONNELL

Mel? It's over.

The STRANGER is standing close behind MELLY as she speaks.

MELLY

I'm not moving. I didn't do anything but try to stay dry. I am not a criminal, I didn't do anything wrong.

(Beat)

I will not move and if you want me out of here, you will have to hurt me to do it.

The STRANGER moves to MELLY's side and grasps her hand.

Mrs. WILBANKS and ROSALINDE get to their feet and clasp hands with the others.

And me...

MRS. WILBANKS

And me..

ROSALINDE

Oh Good God...

MR. O'DONNELL

(Beat)

Me too.

MRS. WILBANKS
(To MR O'DONNELL)

You're a big old brave man, you know that?

The group ring themselves around the tree, holding hands, facing outwards.

LIEUTENANT

Touching.

(Beat)

I assume this means you're not coming out?

ROSALINDE

What was your first clue?

MELLY looks past the LIEUTENANT and addresses the SWAT OFFICERS.

MELLY

You guys do whatever you need to do.

(Beat)

But I'm not moving...

(Beat.)

I'm not moving...

(Beat. She starts to weep quietly.)

I am NOT moving...

LIEUTENANT
(To the SWAT OFFICERS)

Do it.

MELLY closes her eyes and pulls forward in order to offer herself up first to the officers.

A SWAT OFFICER lunges forward in order to grab her but is grabbed and pulled back by the SWAT SERGEANT.

MELLY collapses into the arms of the others under the tree.

SWAT SERGEANT
Stand down.

SWAT OFFICER 1
Sir?!

SWAT SERGEANT
I said stand down! Are you deaf?

SWAT OFFICER 1
No sir.

LIEUTENANT
What the hell is going on here? I gave an order.

SWAT SERGEANT
That's a really good question and one you'd best be preparing to answer back at HQ.

LIEUTENANT
Excuse me?

SWAT SERGEANT
You heard me. What is this, some personal thing you got going here?

LIEUTENANT
You're disobeying orders, Sergeant.

SWAT SERGEANT
Orders?

(Beat)
Let me remind you, Lieutenant, that Tactical doesn't take orders from Patrol. Furthermore you called us out for...this? For an old guy and some women standing under a tree in the rain? You violated command protocol for this?

As the SWAT SERGEANT speaks intensely into his radio, the POLICEMEN and the RIGHT REVEREND enter.

SWAT SERGEANT (cont'd)
(To the LIEUTENANT)
Frankly, sir, these people appear to be the only ones with a damn lick of sense out here, just trying to stay dry.

POLICEMAN

What is happening here?

RIGHT REVEREND

(To the DEACON)

Karl...is this your doing?

SWAT SERGEANT

(To the POLICEMAN)

Your lieutenant appears to have had a major lapse in judgement.

(Beat)

One that I just fixed.

(Beat. Then to the SWAT OFFICERS)

We're clear here. Let's roll.

The SWAT SERGEANT and OFFICERS exit.

POLICEMAN

(To the LIEUTENANT)

What did you do?

MR. O'DONNELL

He tried to have those riot cops bust our heads.

LIEUTENANT

I tried to do my job. Enforcing the law. Not community outreaching, not shoulder rubbing, not encounter groups. Law enforcement. Law enforcement, remember that?

POLICEMAN

I do.

LIEUTENANT

You should, you took an oath to do just that.

The POLICEMAN listens to his radio for a moment.

MRS. WILBANKS

Now did that oath give you permission to abuse innocent people waiting for a bus?

The LIEUTENANT shakes his head then looks toward the POLICEMAN.

LIEUTENANT

Well?

POLICEMAN

I think you know, sir.

LIEUTENANT

Humor me.

POLICEMAN

Sir, the district commander is ordering you to report immediately to station.

LIEUTENANT

No doubt.

(Beat)

I'd like to thank all of you for this fine uplifting experience today.

The LIEUTENANT looks around at the others for a moment then starts to exit.

MRS. WILBANKS

You reap what you sow, little man.

LIEUTENANT

(Pause)

You can hate me ma'am. Feel free. But you know what? I don't hate you. I hate criminals. I hate those people who feel they can impose their wants over the needs and rights of others. Like you people have done today. Furthermore, if I had to do it as all over again the only thing I would have done differently is to arrest you sooner.

(Beat)

A lot sooner.

(Beat Then to the POLICEMAN)

It's all yours Wilcox, Go give them some of that community based touchy feely policing you're so proud of.

The LIEUTENANT exits. Under the tree, the protesters hug one another.

ROSALINDE

Is that's it?

MELLY

Is it over?

POLICEMAN

Not so fast, there's still the matter of the pending charges.

RIGHT REVEREND

Excuse me Officer...

POLICEMAN

Sir?

RIGHT REVEREND

I think everyone here has had a very hard day. So, speaking for the church and congregation, I can assure you that this is not something we would want to pursue.

DEACON

Reverend, I respectfully disagree. I have...

RIGHT REVEREND

We must speak, you and I...

(Beat)

But first, it is my hope that all of you would accept my sincere apologies. Clearly this situation simply got out of hand.

POLICEMAN

So you aren't pressing charges, Reverend?

RIGHT REVEREND

No.

POLICEMAN

Well then, ladies and gentlemen. That's it. You're free to go.

DEACON

(To the RIGHT REVEREND)

Sir, this is not right, I don't see how you can...

RIGHT REVEREND

Karl...

(Beat)

Please, walk with me a moment, won't you?

MRS. WILBANKS

Well well well. Wasn't that something?

MELLY

I feel so strange. All of that and suddenly...poof...it's over. But, you know what, I feel...

ROSALINDE

Like something important happened here, huh?

MELLY

Yes...

(Beat)

But not here exactly...more like...

ROSALINDE

To us?

MELLY

Yes.

MRS. WILBANKS

Owen, never in my 63 years did I think you and I would have an adventure like this.

MR. O'DONNELL

It was, it was, something...

MRS. WILBANKS

Don't think you're off the hook. You still need some serious churching. But you know that right? You sinner you.

MR. O'DONNELL

We'll see, Delilah.

(Pause. Then quietly)

I gotta head on home.

The women go to embrace him but he gently avoids them.

MR. O'DONNELL

You ladies take good care of yourselves. I'll see you around.

Mr. O'DONNELL exits.

MRS. WILBANKS

Just don't know what to make of that man. Somedays he reminds me of my Ox, Other days he's a real pain in my...

MELLY

Oh my God. My parents...my parents are going to kill me...

MRS. WILBANKS

I'll give them a call when I get home, baby. I do believe this counts as an unforeseen circumstance.

ROSALINDE

Hey...

MELLY

Hey what, Rosa?

ROSALINDE

She's gone...

Beat. They look about.

MRS. WILBANKS

That girl...she just up and vanished...

MELLY steps away from the group.

MELLY

(To audience)

Up and vanished. That's exactly what happened.

I felt...sorta empty and very cheated.

(Beat)

I had things I wanted to say to her. I wanted answers, I wanted a big explanation so I wouldn't be up nights sleepless in my bed trying to get this day out of my mind.

(Beat)

Then I understood. There would be no explanations. It was supposed to be there, in my mind...

MELLY is lost in thought.

RIGHT REVEREND

I want you to understand, Karl, that I have been considering what I'm about to say to you for a long time. I have given it long and prayerful thought.

DEACON

And?

RIGHT REVEREND

And I believe your time as the guardian of this old building is done.

Pause.

DEACON

I don't understand.

RIGHT REVEREND

Perhaps we have become too focused on the building here and not what it was meant to house.

DEACON

It's our building. It's our home.

RIGHT REVEREND

No Karl, we are our home, the congregation is our home. This is simply a shell.

DEACON

I have spent 12 years caring for this place.

RIGHT REVEREND

I know. We are grateful.

DEACON

But then what becomes of me...

RIGHT REVEREND

Becomes of you? You are a deacon and valued member of this congregation. You will have more time for worship and to take your rightful place among us. We can now enjoy your fellowship full time. This is as it should be.

DEACON

I dont want that...

(beat)

I don't want that. I want to stay here.

(Beat)

I'll fight you. I'll fight you in front of the deaconate on this.

Pause.

RIGHT REVEREND

(Gently)

The matter has been decided.

The DEACON glares at the RIGHT REVEREND, he is shaking with anger.

DEACON

We'll see about that. I grew up in this church!

The DEACON exits.

RIGHT REVEREND

Karl...

As REVEREND PILIUS starts to walk toward the RIGHT REVEREND. MRS WILBANKS and ROSALINDE approach MELLY.

MRS. WILBANKS

Hey baby girl...

ROSALINDE

You OK?

MELLY

I think so. I hope so.

(Beat)

But first she was here and then...

ROSALINDE

She started all this trouble. She did, now that I think back on it.

MRS. WILBANKS

She's a trouble girl. I said that from the beginning. I knew it to look at her.

ROSALINDE

But...

MRS. WILBANKS

Yes?

ROSALINDE

She made me feel...I dunno...better somehow?

MELLY

Yeah.

MRS. WILBANKS

I don't know either, least ways not about her. But I do know this. I feel, I feel like a burden has lifted off my shoulders. Maybe its just from all the day's excitements but I feel new.

(Beat)

I feel redeemed. As if our blessed Saviour had just lifted the burden off my shoulders with His strong hands.

(Beat)

I feel a terrible good thing will happen today. Maybe it already has...

MELLY

Maybe, maybe we were all meant to be here, to do this together. For some reason...I feel different now. Changed.

MRS. WILBANKS

Well of course baby. It's your birthday.

They hug.

REVEREND PILIUS

Excuse me, Reverend...

RIGHT REVEREND

John McCall. Call me John. Please...

REVEREND PILIUS

Just wanted to pay my respects. I'm Bill...

RIGHT REVEREND

The Reverend William Pilius if I'm not mistaken.

REVEREND PILIUS

Do we know each other?

RIGHT REVEREND

I don't believe we've met but we know of each other.

REVEREND PILIUS

Apparently so.

RIGHT REVEREND

I admire your work, Reverend.

REVEREND PILIUS

Bill...

RIGHT REVEREND

Thank you Bill. I admire what you've done with your young church.

REVEREND PILIUS

Thank you.

RIGHT REVEREND

I remember those days, when everything was important and new.

(Beat)

Now I do my best work on the golf course.

REVEREND PILIUS

Excuse me?

RIGHT REVEREND

Fund raising. For this program and that mission. I miss the pastoral.

REVEREND PILIUS

Of course.

RIGHT REVEREND

And now I...we...have to figure out what to do with this old barn.

REVEREND PILIUS

Old barn?

RIGHT REVEREND

We will never be back here, we're a suburban congregation now.

REVEREND PILIUS

Really?

(Beat)

I happen to know of a congregation rapidly outgrowing its space...

RIGHT REVEREND

Indeed.

(Beat)

I thought you might.

(Beat)

Come walk with me.

They exit.

ROSALINDE

That's right, I forgot about the birthday girl...

The POLICEMAN approaches.

POLICEMAN

Well ladies, I just came to say...

MELLY

I am so sorry for hitting you. I don't know where that came from. I'm not a tough girl.

POLICEMAN

Couldn't have told that from your punch, that's for sure.

MELLY

I'm so sorry.

POLICEMAN

Don't be. Heat of the moment.

(Beat)

Now what's this I hear about a birthday?

MRS. WILBANKS

Your sparring partner. Right here. Thirteen.

POLICEMAN

(Extends his hand)

Happy birthday, missy. You sure had one heck of a birthday didn't you?

MELLY

Yes I did!

MELLY moves past his extended hand and hugs him.

POLICEMAN

Whoa!

MELLY

Sorry.

POLICEMAN

It's fine.

(Pause)

Ladies, be well.

The POLICEMAN exits.

Pause.

MRS. WILBANKS

Well, girls it's time huh?

ROSALINDE

I guess, huh? Time to go get back into normal life.

MELLY

Not sure if I can. I have a lot to think about.

ROSALINDE

I know. Me too.

(She hugs MELLY)

Happy birthday, baby. I love you.

MELLY

I love you too.

ROSALINDE exits.

MRS. WILBANKS

Well...

MELLY

I know. I'm still shaking from all the excitement. I can't believe its all over like that. Bang! So quick.

MRS. WILBANKS

Yes, yes it was. Bang! Just like that. That's how life happens to you sometimes, you're just standing there and a second later, you get set down on your ear or pushed down on your bottom. Just left there to say, what the hell just happened to me?

MELLY

Yes...

MRS. WILBANKS

But you know what?

(Beat)

It's all we got.

MRS WILBANKS hold out her arms and
MELLY falls into them.

MRS. WILBANKS (cont'd)

I'm so proud of you, what a brave strong woman you are becoming.

(Beat)

Well, thirteen. Almost.

MELLY

Almost.

MRS. WILBANKS

It's time to be on our way. I gotta go fix up some supper. And I won't forget to call your Momma.

MELLY

Thank you.

MRS. WILBANKS

I'll see you soon, big girl.

They hug again. MRS. WILBANKS exits.
MELLY watches her leave. Then she walks
downstage and addresses the audience.

MELLY

(Quietly)

No. No she wouldn't.

(Pause)

Now if this were the movies, we'd have all the loose ends
tied up and pretty pictures for you to see and this darn rain
would have stopped on cue.

(Beat)

It didn't. The rain lasted three days. And the bus? No one
knew what happened to the bus or at least no one ever told me
about it.

(Beat)

And Mrs. Wilbanks did call Mom. Didn't help much. She was
mad. I got sent to my room and grounded for a week. But Daddy
got my sentence reduced to 3 days and snuck me some birthday
cake later that night after Mom went to bed. He was thrilled
I was on TV. He called me "the famous Melly" the rest of his
life, always with a smile and a twinkle in his eye.

MELLY makes a gentle gesture with her
hand and the lights focus on her in
small pools.

MELLY (CONT'D)

My story, the little memory play that I wanted to tell you is
over now. But I feel I owe you all something for your good
and loving patience as I told you my tale. And I do have
something for you. A peek, a brief peek into the future...

MELLY gestures and the lights come up
in a pool mid stage right. MRS WILBANKS
sits in her rocking chair, comforter in
her lap, holding a cup of tea and a
picture of her husband.

MELLY (cont'd)

She left us the night of our protest...

MRS WILBANKS is gazing at the picture
when she suddenly grimaces. She
clutches the picture to her chest as
the tea cup falls to the floor and
shatters. Her head slumps sideways and
with a large sigh, she dies. A gentle
smile is left on her lips.

Pause.

MELLY (cont'd)

I cried when Daddy told me. She was the first person I ever knew that died. I was in my room, sitting in the dark at the bottom of my closet covered with tears when...suddenly...I understood.

(Beat)

Her terrible good thing had come. And when the light dawned over me I was so excited, I was so happy for her I had to run, I leapt out of the closet, climbed out the window, and ran down the street, jumping and leaping for joy like I was trying to catapult myself into Heaven. She had received her blessing, her pain had ended, she was with the man she loved and everything was right in her world.

(Beat)

No matter where her world was now...

MELLY gestures and the lights fade on MRS. WILBANKS. At the same moment, the scrim flies in and a picture of an older ROSALINDE, surrounded by young adults in front of a beauty shop fades up.

MELLY (cont'd)

From that protest day forward, Rosalinde and I have been the best of friends. It's been 25 years and we're closer than ever. She married a wonderful, funny man and together they opened a beauty shop. And, of course, they had lots of gorgeous children. I'm a godmother seven times over. And that one shop became a chain, thanks to Rosa's confidence and hard work.

(Beat. MELLY smiles.)

I get a discount when I go there since I know the owner and all. And, yes, we talk about that day all the time...

The picture of ROSALINDE fades as a single harsh light pointed straight down reveals MR. O'DONNELL standing there, back to the audience. He is carrying his lunch pail.

MELLY (cont'd)

So one was lost, one was saved and I guess, in the end, one was damned. Anyway that's the way it felt to me. You know when you have a really intense experience with people and sometimes they stay in your life forever but sometimes... people just drift away? Mr. O'Donnell drifted away. I'd see him sometimes walking to the bus stop, when they took his driver's license they never gave it back. I tried to visit and I called. Sometimes I'd be over at his house knocking on the door and no one would answer but I'd get the feeling he was there.

(Beat)

And I let him go. I'm not proud of it but that's what I did.

(Pause. The lights on Mr.
O'DONNELL fade)

MELLY (cont'd)

And finally the last one, that trouble girl, that stranger
who spend those few hours with us...

(Beat)

There isn't a day that goes by that she doesn't enter my
mind. And there I turn her this way and that and try to find
a solution. I try to glean an understanding of her how and
why. And you know what? I've never been able to.

(Pause)

I wish that I could say I received some major life changing
lesson but I didn't. There were no thunderbolts, no giant
flashes of intellectual lightening. But I did learn. What I
learned came in little inklings, tiny revealed truths. And
not all at once, but gradually through my journey to here and
now.

(Beat)

What have I learned? I didn't learn understanding. The world
and all of the things in it are much too complex for that.
What I learned was acceptance. I learned openness. I learned
to be open and ready for the all the experiences of the
world, good and bad. And through that...I learned compassion.

(Beat)

I took me awhile to come to this realization but I guess in
the end it all boils to one thing. I learned that given the
choice between despair and hope, I will choose hope every
time.

(Beat)

And I believe in my heart of hearts that she set me on that
path.

(Pause)

A path of joy. Which is what, my friends, is what I would
wish for you.

(Beat)

Take care and be well...

MUSIC UP: Sam Baker: Pretty World

MELLY gestures and the lights close in
on her again, making a small pool as in
the opening of Act I.

MELLY (cont'd)

Good night.

She gestures, the lights fade out
quickly on her and she is gone. At the
same time, thunderclaps ring out and
the sound of the rain intensifies.

Suddenly the DEACON enters. He is in extremis, seething with rage. In his hands he carries an axe. After a brief hesitation, he walks slowly towards the tree. He is trembling and about to strike when the STRANGER steps from the shadows behind him.

She embraces him gently from behind, her face a mirror of concern. The DEACON struggles for the briefest of moments, then starts to break down into tears.

He turns to face her, the axe dropping from his hands. She holds him tightly as he is racked by sobs.

Lights fade on a 3 count.

Curtain.

End Act II