

CLAY'S PLACE: Inside My Blue Mind

A Play in Two Acts

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SYNOPSIS

How far away can you run from your secrets? It is 1956 in Memphis, TN. Blacks were still reeling from the tragic murder of a 14-year-old young man by the name of Emmett Till, just a year earlier in neighboring Mississippi. The perversities of Jim Crow, lynching, segregation, disenfranchisement had deep roots in the Cotton Capital. Memphis was full of working poor blacks, highly skilled, but without education, who were relegated to working the most dangerous, dirtiest, and hazardous jobs. These activities were set against the backdrop of the renown and popular downtown Beale Street, the Soul of Memphis, complete with its black-owned shops, stores and carnival atmosphere coupled with an indulgent nightlife that seduced many to engage in their clandestine vices. Lounges, clubs, gambling, prostitution, and incredible music; boogie-woogie and especially the blues; Beale Street had an allure that was hard to resist. Clay Carter and Turner Davis are first cousins. Born in the lower Mississippi Delta, as young men they hopped a train aiming to leave the deceptive, one-sided sharecropping system in search of a better life. Chicago was the goal but 240 miles from Greenville, MS was as far as they made it. Shelby County, TN. Hustlers by nature, Beale St. became second nature to their enterprising personalities. But after narrowly escaping death or imprisonment enough times and as relationships became a part of their lives, the desire to 'go legit' set in. But how can they resist the lure and enticement of the life they have known for so long? Could they really achieve success in a society that despised them solely based on the color of their skin? The outward appearance of a man otherwise with the same nature, both with beating hearts in their inmost being. Clay and Turner were willing to give their best effort to their cause, except with limited choices and a past blemished by harrowing secrets. Secrets that threatened to invade and interrupt their chances at realizing their dreams. Could they even rationally fathom real and true righteousness? Clay and Turner will be tested, tempted, and tormented; both with their own individual secrets that will either destroy them or deliver them.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CLAYTON CARTER:

Clayton (Clay) Carter is the husband of Edna; he is in his 30s. He is a former hustler with a huge heart who is committed to turning his life around by opening a legitimate and legal business. He is a self-made man who made his way to Memphis by hopping a train from Greenville, MS along with his cousin Turner. Hustling became his survival, but the hard life had taken its toll and he promised himself and wife that he would change his life for the better.

TURNER DAVIS:

Turner Davis (mid 30's), cousin of Clay Carter is a compelling personality who has lived the life of a hustler. He is uneducated, yet he is an excellent pool shark and poker player, he relies on these skills to supplement his meager income as a laborer to survive. Turner is married to Maxine and desires to clean up his life and make an honest living. However, memories of the past threaten his ability to leave that life.

MAXINE DAVIS:

Maxine Davis (early 30s) is the wife of Turner Davis. She clearly loves her husband but has grown weary of his unpredictable lifestyle and threatens to end the marriage.

EDNA CARTER:

Humble and dedicated, she stands by her husband Clay through thick and thin. Reserved and sweet; but observant and smart. Her humility can sometimes be mistaken for weakness; however, she is a very formidable woman of sacrifice, great strength, and deep spiritual wisdom.

VIVIAN BARNES:

Maxine's oldest and best friend. She is married and supports Maxine throughout her struggles. She understands Maxine in a very personal way and has been there in her darkest moments.

LORNE GRANT:

Maxine's brother who has been in her care. Lorne is very bright, a high school senior and talented musician. Maxine is determined that he gets a college education while Lorne dreams of becoming a famous musician like those he has encountered on Beale Street.

GEORGIA:

A 20-something flirtatious hostess who works at Clay's Place. She was recruited by Edna who is trying to help her to stay off the streets. Orphaned by her parents, with a checkered past, Edna has become a mother-figure to her.

MR. WHYMAN:

A gangster trying to present himself as a businessman; however, he is involved in organized crime and becomes an investor in Clay's Place.

DEACON SID:

Frequent patron and friend of Clay and Turner. He enjoys imparting wisdom thru quoting proverbs. Sid is a skillful poker player on Saturday nights and a dedicated deacon on Sunday morning.

LUCKY MO:

Frequent patron and friend of Clay and Turner, patron of Clay's Place and poker player. Lucky is a womanizer, he is very braggadocious.

RONNIE:

Frequent patron and friend of Clay and Turner. Ronnie is loud and fun and likes to tell tall tales of entertainers he claims to know.

WILBUR: Frequent patron and younger friend and fellow poker player. Wilbur is educated and intelligent and sometimes clashes with his fellow poker players over some of their views.

EXTRAS: Patrons of Clay's Place.

SETTING:

The play takes place in Memphis, TN in 1956. Memphis is a city on the Mississippi River in southwest Tennessee, famous for the influential strains of blues, soul and rock 'n' roll that originated there.

Clay's Place is a bar lounge evocative of a Southern Juke Joint. Entrance is stage right.

The Davis' small apartment includes a small living room and kitchen which also serves as Maxine's workspace. It is furnished with a small table on which sits a sewing machine and a mannequin for dress making. Small couch/chair, side table with lamp, door is upstage left.

ACT I
SCENE I - TURNER'S BLUES

SETTING: We see Turner in a a small living room lying on a couch.

AT RISE: Turner is dreaming but is in an obvious struggle. He is tossing and turning and crying out.

(Loud crowd laughter is heard)

TURNER

No, no, please - he didn' do it. Please stop, no, please...

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I
SCENE II - WELCOME TO CLAY'S PLACE

SETTING: Clay's Place.

AT RISE: Clay and Edna enter. Clay's hands are over Edna's which are over her eyes.

Clay: You ready?

Edna: Yes Clay.

Clay: You sho?

Edna: Yes Clay, hurry up, I wanna see.

Clay: Drum roll please.

Edna: Clay you better take your hands off my face now. I aint playin' witchoo.

(Clay takes hands off her face, Edna gasps, looking around the room taking it all in and then she begins to walk through the room touching the chairs, the bar, etc. They look at each other, silence, then Edna begins to squeal.)

EDNA

Ooooh Clay! I 'on't even know what ta'say. It's beautiful. Clay's Place. Clay, this yo place! It's, it's...Oh Clay, I'm so proud'a you. You really done it.

CLAY

Say that last part again.

EDNA

Wha...? You really done it?

CLAY

No before that.

EDNA

I'm so proud'a you? I am really proud of you Clayton Carter, you done gon' and did sumthin good here, jes' like you said you was gon' do and I am soooooo very, very proud of you.

(They hug)

CLAY

An' this is only the beginnin' baby, I promise you. I got sum big plans for you an' me.

EDNA

Well this sho is a mighty good start. An' I'ma be right here by your side sellin' my chicken and pies.

CLAY

You got that right woman! I wanna show you sumthin.'

(Clay has Edna sit at a table. He goes to the bar and turns on the hanging lights. He grabs a bottle of wine and two glasses and brings it back to the table. He pours Edna a glass and then himself and they toast to Clay's Place. Then he stands and pulls her to her feet and pulls her into an embrace)

Jes' keep b'lievin' in me Edna, like you always has and I'ma give you the moon an' the stars. Tell me which stars you like and I'ma get 'em for you.

(They stand in silence again, still a little in disbelief but takin' it all in)

EDNA

If I'm bein' honest, I didn' thank they was gonna even give you the loan, even down at the colored bank. That's where you went?

CLAY

(Hesitates for a moment)

Uh..well ya'know. I found a um business investor. Yeah and uh they help you, they help you get your business going. I was able to meet wit 'em and uh he, they, well they agreed to help me.

EDNA

Oh, investors, that's nice (looks a little puzzled. My Clay is a business owner. (giggles) If that don't take the cake. Oh, and you remember I been helpin' out that y'ung lady Georgia, well she been helpin' me clean folks houses and she would make a good hostess. Can I get her to come and help us out? You do gotta to pay her, not much, jes' so she can keep up her boardin'. That's okay, ain't it?

CLAY

Whateva' you want. No more cleanin' folk's houses for you. You gon' be my right hand. 'Sides Turner, you gon' be right here. My business pa'tner.

EDNA

Now I can handle that.

CLAY

You know I jes wanted to have a place where folks could come and you know...fin' a friend, have some fun, forget about they worries...you get what I'm tryna say?

EDNA

That's my Clay, wantin' everbody to be happy. I thank you done it this time Clay, and I wouldn't be anywhere else than right by your side. (Beat) Matter fact Ima be the best business pa'tner you ever seen...(looks around)jes as soon as I figure out where the lady's room is.

CLAY

(proudly)

Now we only got one indoor toilet but I got a sign to hang on the door so customers know when sumbody inside. Go on 'round the otha' side of that bar. You'll see it.

EDNA

Be right back...partner (flashes a big smile).

CLAY

(breathes a sigh of relief and puts his hands in his pockets as he proudly looks around.)

Wait 'til the fellas see this! I been tellin' them about it but they ain't gonna b'lieve it. My own business. Yep. Me. Clay Carter.

(to imaginary guests)

Welcome to Clay's Place.

END OF SCENE

ACT I
SCENE III - YOU GOTTA GO

SETTING: Turner and Maxine's apartment

AT RISE: Maxine is pacing the floor,
visibly upset. Vivian rushes in.

VIVIAN

(Goes over to Maxine to stop her from pacing)
I got over here as fast as I could, had to find a sitter for
Gina. You sounded terrible chile, what on earth is goin' on?

MAXINE

Turner ain't been home in two days!

VIVIAN

What? What you mean he ain't been home? Have you heard from
'em? Do you know where he been? Is he, is he...(can't finish
sentence)

MAXINE

He okay now but he won't be when I see 'em. Girl he don' really
gone an' messed up this time.

VIVIAN

Chile what is you sayin'?
(Sits down, Maxine is still standing)

MAXINE

You know his cousin Clay? Well he don' gone and opened up a bar.
He callin' it a lounge, same thang, down on Beale right?

VIVIAN

I heard about that.

MAXINE

Well, I got Clay on the telephone, an' he knew I was not
playin'. I made him tell me where Turner was. Of course, he
stayin' ova there with Clay and Edna cuz where else he gon' go?

VIVIAN

Maxine hurry up girl. You takin' too long now.

MAXINE

But anyway, he tol' me Turner lost all our money in a damn poker game!

VIVIAN

NO!

MAXINE

Yep an' I know his ass was too scared to come home.

VIVIAN

As he should be.

MAXINE

Well, when he do decide to show up, I got sumthin' for 'em, he may as well turn right around and go right back where he came from. I'm sick of this and I'm sick of him!

VIVIAN

Well as your oldest and dearest friend, I'm really hatin' to hear this girl, I thought thangs were fin'ly good between you two.

MAXINE

(sits down)

Well, jes' seem like it cain't be good for too long with a man like him now can it? These days I be too afraid to even get my hopes up cuz Turner will turn aroun' and do sumthin' foolish an' then here we go. I'm tired of the apologies. (Pause) I ain't gon' keep livin' like this. (pause) But that ain't even the worse part.

VIVIAN

Girl don't tell me there's more.

MAXINE

You know what else he done gon' and done? This is jes' unforgiveable in my eyes. I don' see no makin' up this time, I don't.

VIVIAN

(growing a little impatient)

Chile, what else?

MAXINE

Vivian, you know my grandmama's ring that I wear sumtimes?

VIVIAN

(slowly as if anticipating something bad)

Yeeesssss..

MAXINE

It's gone! I took it off when I was washin' Mrs. Jenkins' hair. You know that's the only real thing of value that I own. I always put it in the 'xact same place, I done that since I had it and now it's gone! I cain't even b'lieve he would hurt me like that, he know what that ring means to me!

(Stands up again because she cannot contain her frustration)

VIVIAN

Girl you really think he would do that?

MAXINE

Where is it then? I don' turned this tiny ass 'partment upside down lookin' for it and it ain't nowhere to be found. He lost our bill money - now my ring. How can I take him back Viv?

(Doorbell or knock then Turner walks in, followed by his cousin Clay. Maxine and Vivian stand up, long pause, they all stand there awkwardly)

MAXINE

Well look who 'cided to show up.

CLAY

Hey Maxine, now I know this ain't none of my business but...

MAXINE

(interrupts Clay but looking at Turner)

You sho are right about that Clay.

CLAY

I jes' don want you to be too hard on Turner cuz he's...

MAXINE

(interrupts Clay again but still glaring at Turner)

Why is you speaking for Turner, what cat don' got his tongue?

TURNER

Clay it's okay man, you can go. Thanks, but I...I can speak to my wife and uh, how you doin' Vivian?

VIVIAN
(Disapproval is apparent)

Turner.

TURNER
Um, if you don't mind, I would like to speak to my wife alone.

VIVIAN
Maxine you all right?

MAXINE
It's okay Vivian, I'll be fine.

VIVIAN
You sure?

MAXINE
Yes, I'm sure chile, go on ahead, it's okay.

VIVIAN
(walks past Turner and rolls eye as Clay and Vivian exit)
Call me if you need me.

MAXINE
(waits until Clay and Vivian exit)
I'm gonna make this real easy for your Turner. Keep it to y'self.

TURNER
You mean you ain't even gon' let me explain.

MAXINE
Ain't nothin' to explain. I'm done with this raggedy ass, sorry, joke that s'posed to be a marriage. You ain't done nothin' but humiliate me ova and ova. You cain't be trusted Turner. I ain't gon' let you keep doing this to me.

TURNER
Baby please listen, let me explain.

MAXINE
What you gon' explain huh? What you gon' explain? How you won't go out there and get a real job? How as soon as you do make a little money, you go out and blow it on a poker or pool game? How you keep telling me, this is the last time and then you get a little corn liquor in ya and you lose your damn mind? What you gon' explain? How the night I miscarried our baby you

was nowhere to be found? (pause) Oh yeah yes you was, you was at the pool hall. (Beat) What? Huh? I cain't hear you? That's what I thought. Ain't nothing to explain and let's not even mention my grandmama's ring. How you gon' explain that?

TURNER

What is you talkin' about? What about yo' grandmama's ring? What about it?

MAXINE

Oh, I guess it magically up and walked away. Wonder if it walked into a 7-card stud game somewhere.

TURNER

Now listen here, I ain't stole no ring. I understan' you is angry and upset wit' me but don't blame me for no takin' nobody's ring. Now I ain't stole nothing from you or nobody else.

MAXINE

You know what? Why is I standin' here arguin' with you? I'm done with it.

(Turns her back to him)

TURNER

Wait, wait, wait. Baby please, cain't we jes' calm down, go on to bed and discuss it in the mornin'?

MAXINE

(Turning back to face him)

Mornin'? You ain't stayin' here tonight Turner. You ain't been here for two nights straight. You need to go on back where you was at.

TURNER

But Max...Baby...let's talk about it...please.

MAXINE

I'm tired of hearing you talk; I jes' need you to go on, you gotta go.

(Silence)

TURNER

Can I get sum-a-my clothes then please?

MAXINE

Yep. Sure can. Wait right here.

(Turner looks puzzled as Maxine starts to walk towards the another room. She retrieves an already packed bag and drops it on the floor.. Turner picks it up and slowly walks toward the door.

Maxine sits on the couch with her face buried in her hands. Turner starts to say something to Maxine but decides against it. He quietly leaves.)

END OF SCENE

SAMPLE

ACT I
SCENE IV - THE CROWD

SETTING: Clay's Place

AT RISE: Lively poker game is going on; Clay and Edna are behind the bar. Georgia is taking drinks to customers. Wilbur, Deacon Sid and Turner are at the poker table, Lucky Mo enters, goes to the table greets everyone, Ronnie enters last, greets everyone. The place is smoky with blues music playing in the background. Patrons are milling around.

LUCKY MO

(as music dies down)

So she gon' ask me, "how come they call you Lucky?" I said, have you looked at me baby? First of all, I'm damn lucky to be this hansum. Second, you lucky to be here wit Mo. Mo stands for Monroe but everybody always called me Mo. When it come to the ladies, that speaks for isself. I tol' her I 'spect we both gonna be lucky tonight.

(Group starts laughing)

DEACON SID

(dealing the cards)

A man's pride shall bring him low, but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit. Ante up.

(they all put chips in)

LUCKY MO

See there you go with your bible verses. Deac. Why you come up in here quotin' the Bible all the time? This ain't no place for no Sunday School lesson. I ain't never seen nobody else talkin' 'bout the Bible at a poker table. Bet

DEACON SID

I'll talk about it whenever I get ready. Everybody need to hear from the Lawd.

RONNIE

Yeah but DEAC, it jes' sumthin' about hearin' 'bout the Lawd when folks is gamblin' and talkin' 'bout women an sex. It ain't right. 'Sides how you gon' talk to us about the Bible when you

sittin' here gamblin' wit us. Don' the Bible say sumthin' 'bout gamblin' bein a sin? Raise (add chips)

WILBUR

Actually, it doesn't. It does not explicitly come out and say that it is a sin but it is the love of money that is the root of all evil. So gambling in itself is not immoral, but the love of money can lead you down a road of destruction if you are not wise. Raise you two. (adds more chips)

LUCKY MO

Who don't love money? Or else yall's asses wouldn't be sitting here. So I guess we all goin' to hell. Anyway, who asked yo' educated ass? Raise you three. (adds more chips)

WILBUR

I didn't know the question was directed at anyone exclusively, so I took the liberty to respond. Call.

TURNER

Check.

RONNIE

Why you so quiet tonight? (looks at others knowingly) I know you and Maxine ain't fightin' again is ya?

TURNER

Shut the hell up.

RONNIE

Don' be sore at me cuz you cain't keep your woman.

DEACON SID

Ronnie, that's enuf. Why you messin' wit 'em. Leas' he got a woman, what you got?

RONNIE

Deac, you don' know nuthin' 'bout me, you don' know what I got or don' got. Call

WILBUR

I know I don't believe I've heard any news of a relationship Ronnie. Has that status changed? Perhaps you've met someone since um, a week ago. We'd be more than happy to discuss another struggling relationship.

(laughter)

RONNIE

Y'all don't know nothin'!

LUCKY MO

I b'live that's cuz there ain't to much to know Ron. You ought to hang out wit Lucky more. Then you would have more to talk about.

RONNIE

I don' need no help from you or nobody else, y'all don' even know what y'all talkin' 'bout.

DEACON SID

I know you got a big mouth; I know that. I know you may as well fold cuz you ain't got shit in that hand of yours.

LUCKY

Now why you cussin' deacon? I know that's a sin.

DEACON

But it ain't a sin to beat y'all's asses. Bam! How this flush look to you?

(dramatically lays cards on the table. Wins the pot)
What you sayin' Lucky? Huh, speak up, cain't hear you man, this money so loud. (everyone laughs) Now that I'm don' taken up the collection, the doors of the church are open.

(Everyone laughs, except Turner, after Deacon gathers his winnings, he pats Turner on the shoulder before exiting)

Be seein' you Clay.

CLAY

Okay Deac, take it easy. (Deacon Sid exits)

GEORGIA

(Georgia walks over to the table)

Y'all gen'lemen need anything?

TURNER

Yeah, bring me a beer.

GEORGIA

Not if you don' ask me nicely.

TURNER

Bring me a beer...please.

GEORGIA

I'll thank about it.

LUCKY MO

Georgia, bring the man a beer, cain't you see he heartbroken.

GEORGIA

Awww Turner, what can I do? Ya' need me to cheer you up.

(Ignoring everyone, **Turner gets up from the table and goes to the bar**, Clay hands him a beer. He sits down and drinks it)

RONNIE

Georgia, just lost my money...I could use some cheerin' up.

WILBUR

Yes, because he definitely is not in a relationship, this we do know.

RONNIE

Wilbur, why you always got something to say? Ain't nobody even talkin' to you.

LUCKY MO

If she gon' cheer anybody up, I'm sure she want it to be sumbody hansum.

GEORGIA

I was just kiddin' around wit Turner, but you two ain't non' a my type.

RONNIE

What you mean? I didn' know you had no type.

GEORGIA

That's cuz you don't know nuthin' 'bout me. Your problem is you jes talkin' loud 'bout nuthin and Lucky ain't nothin' but a skirt chaser. 'Sides I'm looking for real love like Mr. Clay and Ms. Edna got. That's what I want. Say what you wanna say 'bout me. I'm changin' for the better every day and you two...don't see nuthin better 'bout that.

WILBUR

(laughing hysterically)

Oh how the mighty have fallen. I guess she tol' y'all. I gotta leave after that. (gets up) Clay, I'll see you around! (Exits)

CLAY

Alright now Wilbur. Have a good one now.

TURNER

Clay where you get that girl from? She ain't right for this place. Why you hire her?

CLAY

Edna wanted her, said she tryin' to help her out. You know how Edna is. Always tryna' save sumbody. She fine, she a nice gal.

TURNER

Well I heard that she used to be a

CLAY

(interrupting)

I said she good Turner. All that in the past, we all got a past, you know that. (Beat) You talk to Maxine yet?

TURNER

Man, I think she may be don' wit me this time.

CLAY

Naw, you know Maxine gotta cool off. She hot blooded like my mama. You give 'em a few days and they back to they old sweet selves.

TURNER

It's diff'rent this time Clay. Plus, she done accused me of stealin' from her.

CLAY

Stealin'? What she say you stole?

TURNER

She cain't find her grandmama's ring. Thanks I took it and gambled wit it. Clay I woodn't do no shit like that. (Beat) Shows me she don' think too much of me no more.

CLAY

Now Maxine know better.

TURNER

That's what I thought but she really thank I did it.
(Lorne enters)

LORNE

Hey everybody!

(Everybody speaks, walks over to Clay and Turner)

LORNE

(jokingly)

Cousin' Clay, why don't you go ahead and hand me a beer from behind there.

CLAY

Boy you crazy, yo sister ain't comin' down here cussin me out. Edna, brang Lorne a soda pop. Leg'ly you shouldn't even be in here. That be all I need is to hear Maxine's mouth.

(They start laughing)

TURNER

(lowers voice)

How is she man?; she gotta be missin' me by now.

LORNE

Oh hell yeah she is, jes' too proud to say it. But I know her and I know she do. I sho hope y'all get back together. Shoot, I'm tired of her fussin' at me. Least when you was there she had sumbody else 'sides me to fuss with. (pause) But yeah, I know she do man - she like a mule tho - stubborn and mean.

(Georgia walks by Clay and Turner to speak Lorne)

GEORGIA

(coyly)

Hey Lorne.

LORNE

(humoring her)

Hey Georgia, what's goin' on?

GEORGIA

You gonna sing us a song tonight?

LORNE

Nope, I'ma sing one jes' for you. Cousin Clay?

CLAY

Have at it.

(Lorne walks over to makeshift stage, takes out his guitar and begins to sing. Patrons begin to sway, Georgia starts dancing as lights go down)

END OF SCENE

ACT I
SCENE V - MEET MR. WHYMAN

SETTING: Clay's Place

AT RISE: Clay and Edna are behind the bar. Georgia is cleaning up. No customers are present. Clay brings in box of bottles. Mr. Whyman enters. Georgia reacts to seeing him.

CLAY

(surprised to see him, rushes over to him, almost like he is trying to block him from coming all the way in.)
Hey, hello Mr. Whyman. How are... I mean what, what brings you in here today?

MR. WHYMAN

Clay, so good to see you. I just wanted to stop by and look at the place. Looks like you got it fixed up quite nice.

CLAY

Oh yes, well thanks for stopping by. (trying to push him out of earshot of Edna). Yeah, we been working real hard, opened up a couple of months ago. Business is, it's pickin' up as, as word get out.

MY WHYMAN

I'm glad to hear that, Clay. I like to see my investments doing well. That is what we like to see so I'm...

EDNA

(Interrupting and sticking out her hand)

Uh, Hello, Welcome to Clay's Place. I'm Edna, Clay's wife (glancing at him) and business partner.

MR WHYMAN

Whyman, Thad Whyman and what a pleasure it is to make your acquaintance, uh Edna is it? Clay, you never told me you had such a beautiful wife, no wonder business is picking up. I'm an investor in this here fine establishment.

EDNA

Oh? You don't look like, well, I mean, I thought all the people workin' down at the colored bank was uh, well...

CLAY

(interrupting Edna, she is looking confused)
Edna, now this ain't nuthin' for you to be worryin' y'self about. Jes' men talkin' business. Mr Whyman jes' came by to see everthang, and we doin' fine so I'm sure he's got other uh clients he needs to check on. Ain't that right sir?

EDNA

Are you sure you wouldn't like a piece of pie or sumthin'? We 'bout to open up soon, I already got some ready.

CLAY

Now Edna, I know he got more important thangs to do than to be eatin' pie right now.

MR WHYMAN

Well, it smells so good in here; I think I can be tempted with a small piece.

EDNA

Comin' right up. (Exaggerated sweetness) Clay honey, can you give me a hand.

CLAY

(Obviously frustrated, but trying to keep his voice down)
What are you doing woman? Why didn' you let him go on 'bout his business?

EDNA

I thought you said you got a loan from the colored bank. Who is this, this investor? What comp'ny he work for Clay?

CLAY

I never told you that, you said that, not me. I tol' you I had an investor.

EDNA

What company he work for? Clay, something you ain't tellin' me and sumthin' ain't right about that man. You know I know when sumthin' ain't right. I feel it in my spirit.

CLAY

Everythang is fine. **(Clay takes the pie over to the table, Edna and Clay watch Mr. Whyman eat the pie)**

MR WHYMAN

(takes a bite) Um, um, um! If this isn't about the finest piece of pie I have tasted since I was a kid at my grandmother's farm. Fresh cherries. Delish. (Kisses fingers) Clay, not only is she beautiful, but she sure does know how to bake a cherry pie.

CLAY

Yessir, she sure does. Oh, it's a top seller too.

MR WHYMAN

Excellent! Well, I'm sorry to take up so much of your time Clay. I need to make some more stops. Got some folks coming due and as a businessman I believe in keeping everything up do date if you know what I mean. (pause) You keep that woman; she is a good one. (Starts to exit but turns back) Edna! It sure was a pleasure meeting you, and that pie. (Kisses fingers again.)

EDNA

(fake sweetness)

You have a fine day sir. Thank you for stoppin' by, glad you enjoyed the pie.

MR WHYMAN

Clay, we'll be in touch real soon.

CLAY

Yep, sure will.

EDNA

We'll talk later (exits)

(Mr. Whyman exits)

(Edna gives Clay an unpleasant look. Clay nervously starts back to work)

END OF SCENE

ACT I
SCENE VI - FIX IT JES'US

SETTING: Maxine and Turner's apartment kitchen.

AT RISE: Maxine at sewing table, Vivian enters.

VIVIAN

So how you feeling girl?

MAXINE

I don' even know for sure. I mean one minute I'm okay, the next minute, I'm cryin' my eyes out.

VIVIAN

Well, we know what that means.

MAXINE

Please tell me cuz I'm feelin' like a crazy woman up in here.

VIVIAN

Maxine you jes' don't stop loving somebody even if you realize you gotta do it from a distance. Love ain't no faucet you can jes' turn on and off. Don't forget how long I don' known you chile. You still love Turner.

MAXINE

Don't remind me.

VIVIAN

How long has it been anyway?

MAXINE

Ummm, I don' know. 4 weeks, 3 days and 4 and a half hours...I guess. (Pause) He calls everyday but I'm havin' such a hard time even talkin' to him.

VIVIAN

But why?

MAXINE

Becuz it's the same ole thang over an' over. (imitating her husband) I'm sorry, Ima do right, I luv you more than life issself. Do you know how many times I don' heard that? I'm jes' confused chile. How many chances do you give somebody to make a fool of themself or make a fool outta you?

VIVIAN

Ain't no number that's right or wrong and ain't no sense in tryin' to keep count with these menfolk honey. It's what you can put up with. I jes' hate seein' you like this.

MAXINE

You hate it, hell, I hate it cuz... I know I love em. But love jes' don seem to be enough to make him do the right thangs.

VIVIAN

So, what do you want Maxine? What would make it right between you? You gotta talk to him sumtime. 'fore too long.

MAXINE

I want my husband to act like he got some damn sense. Stop gambling our money away. (getting more emotional) Stop makin' excuses jes' cuz he come up the hard way. Hell, what colored person you know got it easy? Ain't everthang hard on colored folk unless you lucky enuf to get a good education and make sum money?

VIVIAN

(trying to lighten the conversation)

Well now, that's the truth. (Beat) So how you and Lorne doin' over here?

MAXINE

(gathers herself)

We doin' okay I guess. 'Tween my sewin', hair appointments, and what my Mama give me for his room and board, I guess we gettin' by. No thanks to Turner's ass. Chile, I'm getting' more sewin' and mendin' these days than I can handle.

VIVIAN

That's cuz you so good at it. I always wished I had your sense of style. How you learn to sew like this anyway girl? (touching the dress on the mannequin)

MAXINE

My Mama... well I use to go with her to clean white folks houses. I always used to admire the pretty clothes them white ladies be wearin' ,all dressed up in their fine dresses with nowhere to go, jes' sippin' tea and talkin' about folks they don't like. (laughs) I'd jes' come home and try to make me a dress like I seen them wearin'. Got in so much trouble - I was makin' dresses out of anythang I could find chile, a sheet, a tablecloth. But

'ventually, I started mendin' they dresses, mos'ly takin' em out when they gained a few pounds. Then I went from mendin' to makin' whole dresses and my pay was leftover fabric. (Beat) But even back then I wanted to do for m'self you know? I didn' want to do what my mama had to do or her mama. An' I jes' didn' like the way they treated my mama. Some of 'em was nice, like a fake nice. (imitating) "Oh Jesse Mae, that was so delicious, can you make sure the silver is put away properly? One of the knives was out of place last week." That kinda shit. I hated that feeling like we wasn't good enough for nuthin' but working for them, takin' care of they chirren and cleanin' up after they asses. That was not for me hunny. Uh uh. I don' see how my mama still do it. (Beat) But my mama is another story. Seem like me and her never seen thangs the same way. She don' mind other folks tellin' her what to do and I can hardly stand it. (Pause) So, since Lorne gotta stay here, I make sure his ass is in school. He need to go to college. Folks say education is the ticket for colored folk. I tell 'em that every day.

VIVIAN

He really seem to be a smart boy. Got good manners. He 'bout to graduate right?

MAXINE

He is. So I tell him all the time, lil' brother, you goin' far in life, you jes' gotta keep your head on straight, stay in them books and out of trouble. We don't want no run-ins with the law. We don' need that.

VIVIAN

Well he seem fine and I hear he sing pretty good too.

MAXINE

Yeah, well - less'n he sang like B.B. King, he need to get his education.

VIVIAN

You ever heard 'em sing?

MAXINE

I hear him tryna do somethin' 'round here from time to time. I guess he do got a voice on 'em. Hell, he can sing much as he want long as he keep fillin' out them college papers.

VIVIAN

(laughing)Well I don' see why he cain't do both.

MAXINE

Shhh, chile don' let him hear you say that.

VIVIAN

Why not? I hear he's singin' in some clubs down on Beale Street, 'cludin' Clay's Place.

MAXINE

I know, but that'll be over once he go off to college. I don't want him gettin' caught up down there, hangin' out at all hours with a bunch-a gamblers, winos and loose women.

VIVIAN

Well he seem to be alright from what I've seen. You worry too much.

MAXINE

You know how hard it is for us. I want him to go up north to school where they got more chances for a colored man to make sumthin' of his life. Down here seem like if they even walk funny, they gettin' thrown in jail or worse, and you know 'xactly what I'm talkin' 'bout. (beat) I can't stop thankin' 'bout that boy they threw in the river last year down there in Money.

VIVIAN

Emmett Till... that was a shameful act, just shameful. I can't imagine being that boy's mama.

MAXINE

Exactly. (beat) He jes need to get away from this place. Hell, he can sing all day if he want, jes' do it while he studyin' to be a doctor or sumthin'.

VIVIAN

Well I don' b'lieve white folks like us any better up North than they do down here, but you right, education would be good for 'em. Fred say that all the time 'bout ours. Says they all goin' to college somewhere. He says that's why he works so hard.

MAXINE

See that Fred got the right idea. He's a hardworkin', job havin' kind of man. (Beat, mood changes) I jes' don' really know what's goin' to happen to me and Turner tho. He been callin' but he been actin' so strange, said he ain't been getting much rest. Says he cain't sleep good away from me but whose fault is that?

(Gets up from table and starts pinning her dress that is on the mannequin)

VIVIAN

Well I'ma pray on that cuz God got some more work to do on that one.

(they laugh)

MAXINE

Now ain't that the truth. Girl you don' said a mouthful. It's outta my hands, ain't it?

VIVIAN

I'm afraid so. Some people you cain't do nuthin' with.
(stands up and starts acting like she's preaching)
How my mama used to say...You see only Gooooodddd can fix 'em!

MAXINE

Fix it Jes'us!

VIVIAN

(still preaching)

Sometimes we get all up in God's business! Trying to help him do his job!

MAXINE

Help us Lawd!

VIVIAN

But only God can be God and he is God all by himself!

MAXINE

Hallelujah!

VIVIAN

God, now Turner Davis need some fixin' down here today Lawd. He need yo' mighty hand to swoop down and take away that gamblin' spirit. Can I get a witness today.

MAXINE

Fix it today Lawd!

VIVIAN

Amen and Amen. Let's pass the plate.

(both laughing)

END OF SCENE

ACT I
SCENE VII - THE CROWD HAS NO FACES

SETTING: **CLAY'S PLACE**

AT RISE: **Clay is putting chairs on the floor;
Georgia is finishing sweeping.**

EDNA

You sure you got under all them tables Georgia?

GEORGIA

Yes Ma'am.

EDNA

You doin' a good job Georgia, I want you to know that.

GEORGIA

Thanks to you Ms. Edna and I'm mighty grateful to you too Mr. Clay. I really like workin' here.

CLAY

Well like Edna say, you doin' a good job.

GEORGIA

I don't know what I'd be doin' if it wasn't for Ms Edna. Sum folks wouldn' give me the time-a-day becuz of my past and who they thank I am. But Ms Edna dif'rent tho. She been so kind and honestly, I jes' ain't used to folks bein' nice to me for no reason. Only time folks ever been nice to me was if they wanted sumthin' if you know what I mean.

EDNA

You ain't got to worry 'bout that no more. We decent folk in here and we jes' want everybody to come in and enjoy themselves. All we want from you is hard work. Ain't that right Clay?

CLAY

That's right, you do honest work, you get honest pay. That's how it works at Clay's Place. We all don' sumthin' we ain't proud of. You a good lookin' gal but we don't expect you to do nuthin' that ain't right. Only thing we sellin' is liquor and some of Edna's good cookin' You got that?

GEORGIA

Yes sir, I sho' do. And I appreciate y'all givin' me this chance.

(Turner frantically rushes in)

TURNER

Hey Clay, I need to talk to you.

CLAY

What's goin' on man? I'm about to open up.

TURNER

I gotta talk to you Clay, you the only one I can talk to 'bout this.

CLAY

What's wrong with you?

TURNER

(realizing Edna and Georgia are in the room)

Oh, sorry ladies, How y'all doin? Lookin' lovely, I mus say.

(pulling Clay away from them)

They come back Clay. I'm having them dreams again!

(Edna and Georgia exit)

CLAY

What?

TURNER

The dreams, the nightmares!

CLAY

Say what... you mean the dreams that almost drove you crazy? When? I thought they had stopped for good.

TURNER

Been the last few weeks. I know they mean sumthin' Clay. They always the same thang. They never finish but they are so real that I wakes up in a cold sweat. I feel like sumbody tryna choke me to death. I can't start goin' through this again.

(Clay quickly goes to the bar and grabs something to pour Turner a drink)

CLAY

Calm down, tell me what you be seein' in these dreams man.

TURNER

You remember last time I went thru this, I was drinkin' all the time and actin' all crazy. (Clay moves the glass out of Turner's reach) We thought I was goin' mad remember?

CLAY

Turner, Turner, listen... who do you see in the dream?

TURNER

Caint make it out. I see a crowd standin' around laughin' but I can't see no faces but they pointin' and laughin'. I can hear 'em laughin' but I can't see what they pointin' at. They, they come closer but they faces is gone and they laughin' and I'm beggin' them to stop but I don't know what I'm beggin' them to stop doin'. Then I wake up. It makes me think I'm crazy man. I swear.

CLAY

Let me ask you sumthin', do you thank it's a dream or a memory? I know you don' seen sum awful thangs when we was down in Mississippi. Do you thank it has sumthin to do with your daddy?

TURNER

I tol' you I don' ever wanna talk about that Clay.

CLAY

But it could be connected to these dreams. Have you ever told Maxine?

TURNER

No! I tol' you, you the only one who know.

CLAY

And I ain't never tol' no one about yo dreams but I'm thankin' that maybe you, me and Maxine and Edna should sit down and talk. We should tell 'em about what we went through back in Mississippi. I ain't tryna stir up no ghosts or nuthin' but it seem when you get down like you are, you start having these dreams, memories, whatever they are. You gon' have to figure out where they come from Turner 'else they will never go away. Maybe you should tell her, tell her about the dreams...about your daddy.

TURNER

Ain't no need to talk about the past. I don't see my daddy in my dreams. Maxine already thank I stole from her now you want her to thank I'm crazy. Like I need to be in a nut house.

CLAY

You ain't crazy Turner, you ain't. But you got sumthin' hauntin' you and all I'm tryna say is maybe...

TURNER

You ain't no head doctor Clay, why you sayin' all this quack head doctor shit? (Pause)

CLAY

(annoyed)

Why you tell me then Turner? You don' really even wanna hear the truth. Why you come to me if you ain't wanna hear what I think you should do?

TURNER

(Beat) Cuz you the only one I can talk to 'bout it Clay. I don't know - I guess you jes ain't sayin' what I wanna hear?

CLAY

(shaking his head)

Well I caint help that now can I? Look, I need to finish openin' up. You gon' help me out?

(They start working together in silence) END OF SCENE

ACT I
SCENE VIII - DREAMS OR FANTASIES?

SETTING: Maxine and Turner's apartment kitchen.

AT RISE: Maxine is on the phone, busy working on a dress when Lorne comes in.

MAXINE

Yes! I got 3 more orders! I jes' need you to stop by and help me pin some patterns really quick. Okay, see you soon, bye.

LORNE

Beautiful Sistah!

MAXINE

Oh Lord, you mus' want sumthin', why you come in her wit all that beautiful sistah nonsense. What is it Lorne?

LORNE

Why you so suspicious sister? I can't come in here and call my sister beautiful? You are beautiful, this is a beautiful day, I got me a beautiful gig, you makin' beautiful garments, I like making beautiful music, my new gal is beautiful, I'm 'bout to..

MAXINE

Um, hol' on a second, don't try to slick talk me now. What you talkin' 'bout, you got a beautiful gig? You said you was looking for a job Lorne, not no gig.

LORNE

What you thank a gig is? That's another word for job. I got me a job playing at Mr. Maurices' joint right down the way from Clay's Place.

MAXINE

One night?

LORNE:

It's two...

MAXINE

See that ain't no job to me. A job is every day, it's reg'lar. How you gonna save any money working gigs? What happens after the two nights is up?

LORNE

I'm always looking for new ones.

MAXINE

Why cain't you jes' get a job that last for a little while. You don't even be knowin' where your next pay is comin' from let alone next gig.

LORNE

That's the life of a musician. Anyway, look who's talkin'. You ain't got no reg'lar job.

MAXINE

Oh but see now that's where you wrong. I got what's called "clientele." I got more work than I got time for.

LORNE

Oh, excuse me wit yo' fancy clientele. But it ain't come overnight. Success don't come overnight.

MAXINE

Now you right 'bout that, but I jes' want you to have yo thoughts in order, concentratin' on the right thangs; now we been plannin' this college thang for a while and me, you, and Mama agreed so you need to stick to that.

LORNE

Who said I ain't thankin' 'bout it jes' cuz I'm a strugglin' musician, and I'm not talking about college every damm minute of the day.

MAXINE

How many college applications has you filled out? I need to see sumthin' comin' back in the mail.

LORNE

I filled out a few ... but what if I tol' you I don't wanna to go college? Would that be so bad? You never know, I may get my big break soon.

MAXINE

Now look, I ain't gonna keep havin' this conversation. Do you know how many musicians down on Beale been waitin' on they big break? They cain't do nothin' else but hang out cuz they didn' get no ...

LORNE

Calm down I get it. They didn' get they education. (Pause) I know you don' get it Max but when you gotta do music, you gotta do it. You can't help it, it ain't sumthin' you jes' wake up decide in your mind you wanna do. It is who you are. (Beat) I'm applyin' to college. (Pause) Ima do both and if you came and seen me sometime, you would understand. Musicians is born wit it. (Beat) You know what? you should come see me at Maurice's Sis, you really should.

MAXINE

You know that ain't my scene. Beale ain't like it used to be back in the day. Now it jes' seem like drunks, gamblers, prostitutes and a bunch of strugglin' musicians waitin' for they big break.

LORNE

Ow, that hurts. (Pause) Why don't you support my dreams Max? I don' understand why you can't support me? Have you ever even heard me sing?

MAXINE

I hear you 'round here, I know you got a nice voice, but I jes' don't thank about fantasies too much. Ain't too many-colored folks I know livin' no dreams.

LORNE

Ain't you ever had none? Or was this your dream, making clothes for white folks so they can go sit up in places you ain't even allowed to go to?

MAXINE

These clothes I'm makin' have helped keep a roof over your head and food in your greedy-ass mouth. So, I do not appreciate you puttin' down what I do.

LORNE

Like you put down what I do? You jes' act like it's impossible for me to do anythang with my music, but you don't even know how good I am. You don't even know.

MAXINE

Okay well show me then. Show me how good you is. Ima be your audience right now, come on show me, sang sumthin.

LORNE

Nevermind, jes' forget it okay.

MAXINE

(sarcastic)

I'm jes' tryin' to help you get ahead in life an' you sayin' I don't support your dreams, c'mon, show me what you got, I'm list'nin.'

LORNE

(loud and angry)

Who asked you to help me get ahead? You and Mama jes' makin' all the decisions 'bout my life like I'm still a little kid. I'm 18 years old, don't I get a say in the matter? Does anyone even care about what I want to do? Have you ever even asked me? I caint even b'lieve that as long as I been performin' you ain't even come to see me, not even once. 'Stead you always got some excuse. Mama always got some excuse. You think I'm jes' out here wastin' my time havin' fantasies? It may be a fantasy to you but it's a real dream to me. (Beat) Jes' cuz you and Mama ain't got no dreams don't mean I don't get to have none. Don't come, I been workin' at this on my own anyway. Don't come then!

(Lorne goes to the door to leave just as Vivian was about to enter, they almost run into each other)

VIVIAN

Whoa; well hi Lorne. Where you off too?
(Looks at them both.)

Is everthang okay?

LORNE

Ask her.

MAXINE

Lorne and I was havin' a discussion and seems he feels like I don't support his dreams.

VIVIAN

Do you?

MAXINE

You jes' gonna take his side?

Vivian

I ain't takin' nobody's side Max, I was simply askin' a question. Now I saw both of you when I walked in here and it

wasn't lookin' too good. Lorne come on back in and sit down for a second.

LORNE

I'd really rather be goin'. I'm sorry Ms. Vivian.

VIVIAN

Okay, well I'll see you around baby. (sitting down) Maxine, do you support Lorne's dreams?

MAXINE

Well... I didn' know he was feelin' so strongly about this, he never said...

VIVIAN

Ain't you never had no dream?

MAXINE

I never said I ain't had none, I said I don't see many colored folks livin' they dreams or even havin' none for that matter. (Beat) I had dream a long time ago.

VIVIAN

What was it? I would like to know.

MAXINE

Well I ain't never tol' nobody this but I wanted to own a boutique, you know one of them fancy stores where rich ladies come to get fancy, one-of-a-kind clothing. I wanted the sign outside to say Maxine's Elegance and I wanted to sew a label in all the dresses that said M.E. in those fancy letters and when people would ask my customers about their clothes; they would say I'm wearing an ME original. That sound so silly now. Plus, I never got to even finish high school. I made it all the way to the 12th grade and Mama took me out to help her out and to look after Lorne.

VIVIAN

It ain't too late for your dreams.

MAXINE

Yeah, it is. But I ain't mad about it, it's my life. I got married... and I had dreams of havin' my own family and...humph, yeah, well... most of my dreams is gone now. (Beat) That's why I push him so hard, I jes' want him to have a better chance at life. Ain't that a good thang?

VIVIAN

I think you may need to go a little easier on Lorne. You need to listen to him.

MAXINE

Humph, well I think maybe I may need to change some of my ways, I guess I can be a little stubborn.

(noticing Vivian's facial expressions)

What!?

VIVIAN

A little?

MAXINE

Ok, well I guess I'm more than a little. Sometimes I jes' don' know what to do wit 'em, he growin' up so fast, talkin' all this music stuff.

VIVIAN

Seem like that's all kids do is grow, (chuckle) that's what it seem like to me sumtimes. (Beat) But you can start by trustin' him some...'til he give you reason not to.

MAXINE

(Beat) I hate it when you are right. C'mon over here and help me with this pattern.

(starts diggin' around in her sewing kit)

Oh my Goodness!

VIVIAN

What?!? What is it?!

MAXINE

I think I may be losin' my mind.

VIVIAN

What's goin' on now?

MAXINE

I don' gone stone crazy I b'lieve. I'm losin' it, that's all it is to it.

VIVIAN

Girl, if you don't tell me what's going on.

MAXINE

(slowly holding up a ring)

Is that what I think it is?

VIVIAN

Yes!

MAXINE

Your grandmama's ring?

VIVIAN

Yes.

MAXINE

So Turner didn't take it...after all

VIVIAN

No.

MAXINE

You misplaced it in your sewing kit.

VIVIAN

MAXINE
(Nodding sheepishly)

So what are you gonna do now?

VIVIAN

Put it back in a safe place?

MAXINE

And?

VIVIAN

MAXINE

Remember where I put it this time?

And?

Vivian

What do you want me to do?

MAXINE

You owe Turner an apology.

VIVIAN

MAXINE

Why should I apologize to him? It's his fault we are in this mess. (Pause) I can tell him when I see him.

VIVIAN

Ooh chile, you so stubborn. Now as your oldest and dearest friend, I'm tellin' you that you need to do the right thing Maxine. You accused him of sumthin' he did not do. He needs to know you know he didn't steal that ring.

MAXINE

How am I supposed to do that?

VIVIAN

I thank you know exactly where to find him.

MAXINE

Yeah, I guess I do.

Together

Clay's Place.

END OF SCENE

END OF ACT I

INTERMISSION

SAMPLE