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“Lord, make me so uncomfortable that  
I will do the very thing I fear.”

*Ruby Dee*

## **Cast of Characters**

RITA MAE, a thirty-three-year-old woman with a vulnerable, childlike quality. She is bisexual, with a greater preference for women than men.

MAMA, a mother to the universe. Confined to a bed for the duration of the play. A stroke victim. Wants to be put in a rest home.

WENDELL, RITA MAE's older brother. A forty-one-year-old struggling musician. A saxophone player who cannot stand up without the use of a crutch. He uses a table leg for a crutch.

BILLY MARS, a man possessed by nervous energy. Driven to pursue RITA MAE to the ends of the earth. A musician with the soul of a poet. An orphan in his early thirties.

All of the characters are African-American.

## **Setting**

The play is set in the present. In a lower middle-class neighborhood in St. Louis that is a little too close to the highway. The sound of cars on the highway in the background is a constant reminder of where we are.

## Acknowledgments

*The Last Orbit of Billy Mars* premiered at Woolly Mammoth on January 11, 1999. The cast and creative contributors were:

WENDELL ..... Doug Brown  
RITA MAE.....Taunya Martin  
MAMA..... Beverly Cosham  
BILLY MARS..... Craig Wallace

Director ..... Timothy Douglas  
Set design ..... Tony Cisek  
Costume design..... Raye Leith  
Lighting design..... Lisa Ogonowski  
Sound design ..... Mark Anduss  
Properties ..... Elsie Jones  
Stage manager .....John “Scooter” Krattenmaker

Show Sponsors .. Imani Drayton-Hill & Robert Hill  
Rick Gore  
Peter Miller and Sara Cormeny

# THE LAST ORBIT OF BILLY MARS

by Robert Alexander

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*(At rise: lights come up on the Megan home. WENDELL is seated downstage right, taking apart and cleaning his saxophone; the table leg he uses for a cane lies next to him on the floor. We hear the roar of the highway in the background throughout the entirety of the play.)*

**WENDELL.** Rita Mae—close that window. How can a man think with all that highway noise?!!

**RITA MAE.** No.

**WENDELL.** Come on, Rita Mae.

**RITA MAE.** I'm not closing it. It's burning up in here.

**MAMA.** Rita Mae, baby—when you gonna change my diaper? I asked you thirty minutes ago to change my diaper. I'm gonna get a rash if you don't—

**RITA MAE.** I got to go to the store, Mama—to get some more Depends.

**MAMA.** I told you to go last night—I told you to go last night.

**RITA MAE.** If Wendell would stay home somet—

**WENDELL.** I'm home right now. You can go to the store right now—but shut that window 'fore you go!

**RITA MAE.** Why can't you watch Mama, just one night? So I can have some fun—

**WENDELL.** You know my band gigs seven nights a week—seven nights a week.

**RITA MAE.** It ain't fair.

**WENDELL.** Fair? Fair? Whoever said life was fair. Now close that window! Don't make me have to get up.

**RITA MAE.** Get your Rusty Dusty butt up out of that chair. The exercise might just do your ass some good.

**MAMA.** Don't you be cussing up in my—

**RITA MAE.** Shut up, Mama—

**MAMA.** Who you telling to shut up?

**RITA MAE.** I'm telling you to shut up!

**MAMA.** You went out to California and came back a heathen with a demon in you. Your soul is cursed—your soul is cursed. Cursing in my house. Disrespecting my house.

**RITA MAE.** My house! My house!

**WENDELL.** Mama, make her shut the window.

**MAMA.** You stay out of it, Boo Boo.

**WENDELL.** Don't be calling me Boo Boo. I'm forty-one years old. Don't be calling me Boo Boo.

**RITA MAE.** Boo Boo—Boo Boo—

**WENDELL.** Don't be calling me that—

**RITA MAE.** *(Overlap:)* Boo Boo—Boo Boo!

**WENDELL.** *(Overlap:)* Don't be calling me—

**MAMA.** *(Overlap:)* Shut up!

**RITA MAE.** *(Overlap:)* Boo Boo—Boo Boo!

**WENDELL.** *(Overlap:)* Don't be—

**MAMA.** I curse the day you both were born—SHUT UP!

*(Silence.)*

**WENDELL.** *(After a beat:)* Come on, Rita Mae—close that window.

**RITA MAE.** You want that window closed. Get up and close it yourself.

*(WENDELL puts his horn down and fumbles around, searching for his cane. He finds it, struggles up from his chair, and goes toward the window with a severe limp, leaning heavily on his cane.)*

**WENDELL.** *(As he struggles to the window:)* How can a musician of my status concentrate with all that highway noise competing for my ear? Daddy was a fool to buy this house.

**MAMA.** Your daddy was not a fool. A little crazy—but he was not a fool.

**RITA MAE.** He was a fool for letting white folks drive him crazy.

**WENDELL.** He had to be a fool to buy this house. *(Slams the window shut and slowly returns to his chair.)*

**MAMA.** This was the only house they'd let a colored man buy back then—

**WENDELL.** A house with a freeway for a fucking front yard.

**MAMA.** Boy—if I could get up—

**WENDELL.** But you can't, can ya?— Look at this house. It's a joke. We ain't never gonna sell it. Who'd want it? What was Daddy thinking? He sho wasn't thinking 'bout my future. The future never entered his mind.

**MAMA.** Quit trashing your daddy and go and get something of your own. Everything you got came from him, and now you think you so high and mighty you can criticize. You ain't perfect.

**WENDELL.** Never said I was perfect. I've got a gimp leg that reminds me I ain't perfect. You think I'd be hanging around this here town if my leg had been normal? I'd left this place long time ago.

**MAMA.** What's stopping you from going now? Ain't nobody stopping you.

**WENDELL.** The ladies won't let me go.

**MAMA.** What ladies you got?

**WENDELL.** Plenty, Mama—more than I can handle—

**MAMA.** Say what? How come your ladies don't be calling here?

**WENDELL.** 'Cause they know to find me at the club.

**MAMA.** Find you at the club.

**WENDELL.** That's what I said.

**MAMA.** Rita Mae—do you believe this nigger?

**RITA MAE.** Mama—watch your mouth.

**MAMA.** Why?

**RITA MAE.** You said “nigger,” Mama—

**MAMA.** “Nigger” ain't no bad word—

**RITA MAE.** I never heard you say that word—

**MAMA.** That's because I never felt like saying it before—until now! When I look at that fool son of mine, hobbling 'round here without a woman—I see a nigger...a nigger without a woman.

**WENDELL.** I got's plenty women, Mama...

**MAMA.** Stop lying, boy—

**WENDELL.** You don't know what I be having. You ain't with me 24-7. At the club...I've got plenty women. They be waiting for me to get there. When I'm done playing—they be waiting on me hand and foot. It be a whole room full of women just waiting on me.

**MAMA.** How come you never brought none home to see your mama?

**WENDELL.** I don't bring none of them 'round here, because it might depress them if I brought them 'round here. It might scare them off—if they really saw how I was living. They just wouldn't understand why a grown man would stay here. They wouldn't understand—my loyalty to you...my devotion to you. How could I explain to them that I could never forsake my mama by leaving my mama.

**MAMA.** Oh, so you ashamed of us. Is that it? This broke-leg negro think he better than us. Ain't that nothing?

**RITA MAE.** Mama! Why you always picking on him?

**MAMA.** Rita Mae—if you don't shut up! I swear I'm gonna do something to shut you up.

**RITA MAE.** And what you gonna do, laying there looking like last week's passed-over leftovers?

**MAMA.** I wouldn't be looking so bad if you'd hurry and change my diaper.

**RITA MAE.** How am I gonna change you if I'm out of diapers? Huh? Can you tell me that?

**MAMA.** You ain't gotta get salty about it. Just go on to the store and get some—

**RITA MAE.** And leave you with him?

**MAMA.** Well now, I done told you whatchu need to do with me.

**RITA MAE.** I'm not listening to you, Mama.

**MAMA.** Your life is passing you by.

**RITA MAE.** My life is fine, Mama.

**MAMA.** You need to put me in a rest home so you can rest your mind.

**RITA MAE.** You wouldn't last three months—

**MAMA.** Try me. I'm a lot stronger than you give me credit for. Your life is passing you by, Rita Mae...passing you by like like all dem cars flying down the highway—never looking back, not even slowing down to give this place a second thought. Why did you come back here?

**RITA MAE.** You know why I came back—

**MAMA.** Coming back here was the dumbest thing you ever did.

**RITA MAE.** *(Crosses to the window:)* I made a promise to myself a long time ago, that I would never abandon you, Mama. You're too good for anybody's rest home.

*(RITA MAE opens the window at the same time WENDELL plops back down in his chair.)*

**WENDELL.** Damn it—Rita Mae—whatchu go and do that for?

**RITA MAE.** You got this place feeling like an oven. I can't breathe...no one can breathe—

**WENDELL.** I can't think for all that traffic.

**RITA MAE.** Ain't you got used to it by now?

**WENDELL.** No!

**RITA MAE.** *(Screams:)* Well, get used to it— 'cause the fucking window is staying open!

**WENDELL.** *(Struggling to get up:)* That's what you think.

**RITA MAE.** Stop wasting your time, boy. I'm just gonna open it again.

**WENDELL.** So. I'll just close it again.

**RITA MAE.** I hate you, Wendell...you're so repetitive.

**WENDELL.** Why did you come back?

**RITA MAE.** You already know why I came back.

**WENDELL.** I can imagine—it got a little hectic.

**RITA MAE.** A little hectic?

**WENDELL.** —when you're keeping so many secrets—

**RITA MAE.** I got tired of them spying on me...

**WENDELL.** —bottled up inside—

**RITA MAE.** always spying on me...

**WENDELL.** —waiting to explode—

**RITA MAE.** Watching my every move. Monitoring all my friends. They would not leave me alone.

**WENDELL.** Must've been hard to keep from cracking up...

**RITA MAE.** They kept on prying and prying until they got the nerve to start lying on me. They out and out lied on me. And I thought she was my friend.

**WENDELL.** Even harder to know who to trust.

**RITA MAE.** I thought she was my friend. *(A beat.)*

**WENDELL.** *(Slowly crosses to the window:)* Too much traffic noise—can drive a man crazy. Can't recall the last time I slept a full night. Some say they can't tell the difference between the purr of the ocean and the random abstract release of muffler sounds, and crying transmissions. I hear the sickness under the hood of every car that passes by here. Traffic noise is man-made chaos that goes against nature—the way God intended. When crickets chirp at night...their singing is a testament to nature...the universal order of things. Everyone, everything has its place in this world. Chaos is born from one not knowing one's place. And I only need to take half a sideways glance at you to know you in a place where you don't belong—

**RITA MAE.** But I was born here...

**WENDELL.** 'Cause you from here, don't make it home.

**RITA MAE.** If this don't feel like home and that didn't feel like home—then where is home?

**MAMA.** Home is where you can fart and not have to apologize to no one.

**WENDELL.** Please—Rita Mae...don't make me walk all the way over there. Please close the window for me.

**RITA MAE.** No!

**WENDELL.** I'll watch Mama for ya. I promise to do my fair share. Is that what you want? Do you want me to watch Mama so you can skip on down to the local lesbo bar—

**RITA MAE.** I'm warning you—

**WENDELL.** Throw away your bra at the door. Give a flip to the doorman—or whatever that thing was standing at the door carding people.

**RITA MAE.** I'm warning you, Wendell—

**WENDELL.** Is that what they learned ya in L A? How to be rude to people. How to be deceitful? How to lie to God?!

**RITA MAE.** Growing up so close to the freeway—I was programmed for freeway living. See—when you got a freeway for a front yard—there’s no sense of community...I mean—you can’t cross the street and say hello to your neighbor. You can’t wave or talk idly about the weather or compliment him on the roses in his rose garden. You can’t talk—say hello to the mailman without shouting, your voice trailing off with the traffic blowing by. If someone says something you didn’t quite hear, you smile politely, pretend you heard it, and change the subject to something else. L.A. was a place to go if you a had a fear of intimacy...a fear of getting to know your neighbor—marking time alone in your car, sitting on the freeway, breathing in the fumes of civilization. You turn off your air conditioner, roll down your window. Suddenly—you don’t feel so cut off. And so you start to sing a little tune to yourself at first, but then you start singing louder and louder to anyone and everyone. So what if you only know half the words and can’t decide what key you’re in. You’re just glad to be alive and be in L.A. in the middle of this mass of humanity and machinery clogging up the freeway. And so you sing. You sing and sing, until the little white men in little white coats come and take you away—or you sing until the traffic starts to move—whichever happens first.

**WENDELL.** You didn’t miss me none—did you?

**RITA MAE.** I did think about you. In fact—I thought about you and Ma a lot.

**WENDELL.** You never thought about Pops?

**RITA MAE.** Never thought about him. Well—I take that back—maybe I did think about him a bit. There was this guy I was seeing once—

**WENDELL.** You had a feller—

**RITA MAE.** For a hot minute—he reminded me of Pops—

**MAMA.** How come you never told no one?!

**RITA MAE.** You still wake, Mama?

**MAMA.** And I'm still waiting on you to change my diaper too.

**WENDELL.** So this feller you were seeing—what was he like?

**RITA MAE.** Billy Mars—Billy was the kind of fellow who made a girl feel all gooey inside. He kinda had Daddy's way of standing with his feet set wide apart. I can't say for sure, what got my skirt to blow up. Never felt that way about a man before—plenty women did that to me—but no man. I mean—he was kinda plain to look at. But he had a way of looking at you—that made you feel like you were all alone in the universe with just him—and that you—were the center of his universe—that you were the sun, the moon, every star in the sky and that life began and ended with you. He would say,

**BILLY MARS.** *(VO:)* In the beginning—there was Rita Mae—

**RITA MAE.** In the beginning there was Rita Mae—oh—he would send shivers up my spine every time he came near, whispering those words, proclaiming his love for me in a way I knew I could trust it.

**WENDELL.** *(At the window:)* You don't want me to close this window—getting me all hot and bothered.

**MAMA.** A fly on your arm can get you off—

**RITA MAE.** Billy Mars understood the need for human touch.

**MAMA.** Now dat do sound like yo' daddy.

**RITA MAE.** He was never in a hurry. Such a patient man. Never rushing his advances. He was just polite that way. Never in a hurry to jump yo' bones and never in a hurry to leave your side when he was done. Never met a more generous and grateful lover. Never met a man who loved afterplay as much as he loved foreplay. But Billy said laying there afterward was really the best part—

**MAMA.** Your heart is racing fast. You just want to slow your heart down—so you can catch your breath—

**RITA MAE.** A fan is blowing inside your mind—

**MAMA.** His sweet smell is all over you.

**RITA MAE.** Your woman-juice scent is all over him...

**MAMA.** Yo' skin is clingin' to his skin—oily, sweaty—

**RITA MAE.** Goosebumps rise on your back—

**MAMA.** You bury your head in his chest...

**RITA MAE.** Everything you touch comes alive.

**MAMA.** He has nailed you to the bed and you can't get up.

**RITA MAE.** He lays on top of you fast asleep. Breathing hard, like a newborn baby, put to sleep after a feeding. He sleeps so innocently. You cannot believe that this is the same man who just a few minutes ago was playing with a handful of your breast, while thrusting his way inside of you...boring a hole into you...seeing right through you to the deepest parts of your being. But in your mind a fan is blowing. Cooling you off, when your engine is running hot. It comes on JUST TO FUCK WITH YOU. Do I dare stick my finger in the fan? Do I dare stick my finger in the fan! What's wrong, honey! Nothing's wrong! No, everything's wrong! Who has time to fake an orgasm when you're busy faking like nothing's wrong! As you tell yourself, please don't stick my hand in the fan! Please don't stick my hand in the fan, and you cry inside yourself hoping, these unhappy thoughts flee your head. But the fan comes back on—keeping you from giving all of yourself to the man laying inside of you.

**MAMA.** His taste is on your lips. His smell lives on you.

**RITA MAE.** He lives in you.

**MAMA.** You can never let him go.

**RITA MAE.** But he will go. It's his nature to come and go.

**MAMA.** And it's your nature to make him stay—

**RITA MAE.** No! It's my nature to let him go!

**MAMA.** There you go, committing another crime against nature—

**RITA MAE.** My way of living ain't hurtin' nobody. I'm not committing crimes against nature—I'm expanding it. I think deep down inside every woman is looking for a man who can make love to her like he was a lesbian.

**WENDELL.** What's that suppose to mean?

**RITA MAE.** My darling brother Wendell—please use your imagination.

**MAMA.** He ain't got none—

**RITA MAE.** No imagination. Po' chile.

**WENDELL.** When I dream—it's always in black and white—like an old B movie or a gangster flick.

**RITA MAE.** Ever any romance?

**WENDELL.** Never any romance.

**RITA MAE.** How boring.

**WENDELL.** No, no—my dreams be slamming—action packed and all that. They just be in black and white, and they always end the same way.

**RITA MAE.** How?

**WENDELL.** With somebody getting killed.

**RITA MAE.** So you're just as hostile in your sleep—

**WENDELL.** I'm a gentle giant—

**MAMA.** Without a woman—

**WENDELL.** I got's plenty women—

**MAMA.** In your dreams—

**RITA MAE.** Not even in his dreams...didn't you hear? He dreams in black and white. Now what kinda girl is going to show up in those kinda low-budget dreams.

**WENDELL.** I know one thing—my women will testify—I make love like a real man—not nobody's lesbo!

**RITA MAE.** And how does a *real* man make love?

**WENDELL.** You know—I be licking it like a stamp—then sticking it like a champ. I don't be playin' 'round. My ladies get the real-deal Holyfield full-service treatment when they come to me.

**RITA MAE.** Do you ever talk to your women—

**WENDELL.** They got “talk shows” for talking. If you’re looking for sensitivity, then go somewhere else. But if you come to me—you won’t be asking, “Where’s the beef?” You gonna leave here walking different from how you walked in.

**RITA MAE.** You think you all that—

**WENDELL.** Baby girl—I’m all that and a six-pack of beer. You see—I know how it’s hanging.

**MAMA.** Too bad God didn’t give you a little less dick and a little more sense—maybe you would’ve settled by now.

**WENDELL.** Maybe I ain’t no settler—Ma! (*Slams the window shut.*) Whatchu saying—I shoulda settled like you and Pops? Is this the shit? Is this the American dream—everybody’s searching for—a wife—two kids and a fucked-up house by the freeway?

**MAMA.** At least it’s something—

**WENDELL.** This ain’t nothing. You think it’s something ’cause you ain’t been nowhere—

**MAMA.** And where have you been? At least your sister left here and been out there on her own. But you—you like that tree in the backyard. Diseased...and never going nowhere.

**WENDELL.** Whatchu want from me, Mama? Grandchildren? Is that what this is about?

**MAMA.** I just want you to act like you motivated to do something with your life. That’s all. I mean I look at you and I wonder what did I do to fail my children? What did I do to make them so afraid to face life—

**WENDELL.** Ain’t nobody ’fraid of nothing—

**MAMA.** Then how come you don’t go anywhere—

**WENDELL.** ’Cause there’s nothing out there, Mama. I don’t have to go far to see there’s nothing out there in this world for me. I ain’t got to go through all the changes you and Pops went through.

**MAMA.** Yep. You just like that tree. You stopped growing a long time ago. And you've got the nerve to call yourself a *real* man.

**RITA MAE.** Leave him alone, Ma.

**WENDELL.** Don't be taking up for me.

**RITA MAE.** Both of y'all need to chill.

**MAMA.** Maybe I failed ya—when I stopped making y'all go to church.

**RITA MAE.** Give it a rest—Ma!

**MAMA.** Or maybe it was that idiot box that killed your imagination!

**RITA MAE.** Ma!!!

**MAMA.** Yeah. That's how I failed you—by letting you watch too much TV? I know—I shoulda breast fed you longer—

**RITA MAE.** Wendell—will you watch Ma for me—I need to go to the store— (*Grabbing her purse and car keys:*) Please, Wendell—watch Ma for me—I gotta get Ma some diapers—so I'm leaving you in charge now, Wendell—you're the man of the house. Now don't let no one in. Okay? (*After a beat—slowly exits.*)

**WENDELL.** (*To himself:*) No. You're the man of the house—Rita Mae—

*(Slow fade to black.)*

*(End of scene.)*

## Scene 2

*(At rise: RITA MAE is standing next to MAMA, near the end of completing her sponge bath. A big bunk-size bag of generic-brand disposable diapers sits on the floor, in view, near the bed. WENDELL is finishing putting together his horn during his first few lines.)*

**WENDELL.** The highway never sleeps. You'd think in a place like St. Louis—people wouldn't have so many places to go. But some-

one is always on that highway. Day and night. Don't make a difference. Yeah—it slows down at night—but one car is always out there—going somewhere, and just as soon as that one car drives out of the picture, here comes another car's headlights...here comes the noise of another car, then another car, and I want to scream for the moving picture to stop moving, and I want to stop the soundtrack. I want to stop it all, so I can hear the crickets singing and I know they are singing we shall overcome all this mess.

*(WENDELL starts playing the scale, terribly off-key. It is clear from the way he holds the horn and moves his fingers, he is arthritic.)*

**MAMA.** Mothers, hide your children—Wendell is playing again.

**RITA MAE.** Don't be so mean, Ma—he's just a little tone-deaf.

**MAMA.** A little tone-deaf? He's the worst horn player God put breath in. He couldn't carry a tune if you put it in a knapsack and flung it over his back.

**RITA MAE.** Ma—you got to hold still—so I can fasten this diaper. It keeps coming loose—

**MAMA.** I told you not to ever get those cheap generic kind again. They leak! Depends never leak!

**RITA MAE.** Ma—I got to economize—

*(WENDELL stops playing and puts his horn in its case, then he realizes the table leg he uses for a cane is on the other side of the room.)*

**WENDELL.** Hey! Who moved my crutch?

**RITA MAE.** You mean that table leg—

**MAMA.** Perfect piece of firewood—gone to waste—

**WENDELL.** Rita Mae—fetch it for me.

**RITA MAE.** You just gonna have to wait 'til I'm done with Mama.

**WENDELL.** *(Crawling toward the table leg:)* Damn it, Rita Mae—you're making me late. You just like fucking with me. Don't you? You like making me late.

**RITA MAE.** And where you going?

**WENDELL.** I'm going to the club. Where you think? My band gigs seven nights a week—seven nights a week. *(Reaches the cane and stands. Moves his horn by the front door and puts on his winter coat.)*

**RITA MAE.** Yeah, whatever.

**WENDELL.** Why did you move my crutch?

**RITA MAE.** Why you accusing me?

**WENDELL.** I know Mama didn't move it.

**RITA MAE.** Keep it off the floor and out of the way— 'cause the next time I trip over it—I will turn it into firewood!

**WENDELL.** You ain't doing jack.

**RITA MAE.** Come on and double dare me.

**WENDELL.** Butch!

**RITA MAE.** Punk!

**WENDELL.** Bitch!

**RITA MAE.** Faggot!

**MAMA.** Hey!

**WENDELL.** Don't make me have to use this cane!

**RITA MAE.** Come on—bring it! You couldn't whup me when we was kids, and you can't whup me now!

**WENDELL.** You're lucky my public is awaiting me. I don't have any time to waste on some sexually confused baddilac like you. Ma—if anybody calls—tell them to call down to the club. You got that?

**MAMA.** Do I look like I'll be answering any phones?

**WENDELL.** Peace. I'm out of here—

**RITA MAE.** See ya later, Boo Boo!

*(WENDELL starts to leave but stops.)*

**WENDELL.** I am forty-one years old—

**RITA MAE.** But you act like you're fifteen. (*Mocking him:*) Yo, Ma—Peace...and I'm out! (*Scratches her crotch and limps around trying to be cool.*)

**WENDELL.** Fuck you, Rita Mae!

**MAMA.** (*Overlap:*) Whatd'I—

**RITA MAE.** (*Overlap:*) Fuck you too, Boo Boo!

**WENDELL.** My name is Wendell Megan. The name means something 'round here. I'm the top horn blower 'round these parts—the highest-paid session man around. So don't fuck with me. Don't try to downgrade my status by calling me Boo Boo or anything else. You refer to me by my given name or don't refer to me at all. Is that clear?

**RITA MAE.** Nigger—I ain't 'fraid of you.

**WENDELL.** I ain't asking you to be 'fraid of me. I'm asking you to respect me.

**RITA MAE.** Well, I don't—and I don't think there's anything you can do to win my respect either.

**WENDELL.** (*Raises the table leg:*) God-dammit!!!

**MAMA.** Thought you had somewhere to go, boy. I guess you best be on yo' way!

**WENDELL.** This ain't over! (*He exits.*)

**MAMA.** I told you 'bout aggravating him.

**RITA MAE.** He don't scare me none. He's barking loud just to hear himself bark. He ain't ever gonna do shit, 'cause he's cowardly that way. Ain't in his nature to do nothing but talk. Just like most men—full of talk. No backbone whatsoever. Where do you suppose he goes each night, Ma?

**MAMA.** I don't know and I don't care. Just as long as it's away from here.

**RITA MAE.** I think he's goin' to a fag bar, Ma—

**MAMA.** You just saying that— 'cause you that way.

**RITA MAE.** Boo Boo's in the closet, and I'm gonna out him if it's the last thing I do.

**MAMA.** I don't want you stirring up trouble—

**RITA MAE.** Oh, it's no trouble at all, Ma.

**MAMA.** You're evil, Rita Mae—

**RITA MAE.** Boo needs to be brought down off his high horse. And it's my job to bring him down a peg or two.

**MAMA.** Why is it your job?

**RITA MAE.** The nigger needs to know his place.

**MAMA.** But why is it your job to teach him?

**RITA MAE.** Somebody's got to do it. It might as well be me!

**MAMA.** But why?

**RITA MAE.** 'Cause he's a creep and he needs to know it!!

**MAMA.** But you'll destroy him and he ain't worth it. Besides, he ain't the enemy.

**RITA MAE.** He ain't on our side either—

**MAMA.** He's harmless. He's lost—in a world of his own.

**RITA MAE.** He's sick, Ma—and his sickness is contagious. It needs to be eliminated before it spreads.

*(Pause / a beat.)*

**MAMA.** Rita Mae—

**RITA MAE.** What, Mama?

**MAMA.** What's it like to be with another woman? I mean—how do y'all do it?!

**RITA MAE.** What?!

**MAMA.** Don't you miss penetration? I know I miss it—

**RITA MAE.** Ma—why are we having this conversation?

**MAMA.** We're two grown-up gals—we can talk—

**RITA MAE.** Well—I don't want to talk about this—with you!

**MAMA.** But I'm yo' ma—

**RITA MAE.** That's why we can't talk—not about this.

**MAMA.** I miss your daddy—

**RITA MAE.** I miss him too.

**MAMA.** You know we was all set to come out to visit ya.

**RITA MAE.** I know, Ma—I remember.

**MAMA.** Then you know—he suddenly took sick. One week in the hospital and he's gone. Never been sick a day in his life. Your father's heart was set on seeing you.

**RITA MAE.** Guess it wasn't meant to be—

*(BILLY MARS enters, he peers through the window for several beats. MAMA and RITA MAE just watch him, watching them.)*

**MAMA.** You hear that...somebody out there. Who dat coming up on my porch?

**RITA MAE.** *(Going to the window:)* It's a man.

**MAMA.** Go fetch my shotgun, so I can pump some fear in him.

**RITA MAE.** How you gonna shoot somebody when you can't even give yourself a bath...

**MAMA.** But I can still shoot a nigger. My senses tell me where to aim. You know I got your daddy to marry me with a shotgun. Guess you can say it was a shotgun wedding—

**RITA MAE.** How many times you gonna tell me?

**MAMA.** 'Til I get tired of telling it.

**BILLY.** *(Hollers:)* Rita Mae!

**MAMA.** Do you know this boy, Rita Mae? He sho seems to know you.

**BILLY.** Rita Mae, you come out here now! I have come for you.

**MAMA.** Hey, stop all that yapping—fool!

**RITA MAE.** Shhhhh—mama—don't say nothing. Maybe he'll just go away.

**MAMA.** What's he doing out there?

**RITA MAE.** He's just looking—

**MAMA.** What's he looking at?

**RITA MAE.** He's looking at us.

**MAMA.** Why?

**RITA MAE.** I guess 'cause he's got nothing better to do.

**MAMA.** Whatchu say his name is?

**RITA MAE.** Billy Mars, mama...Billy Mars.

**MAMA.** You mean the one you was in love with—

**RITA MAE.** I never said that—

**MAMA.** Don't leave him out there shivering in the cold. Invite him in.

**RITA MAE.** Are you crazy?! That's the last thing I intend to do.

**BILLY.** Rita Mae! Come out here! I know you're in there!

*(RITA MAE turns off the lamp next to MAMA and all other lights.)*

**MAMA.** Whatchu doing?!

**RITA MAE.** I don't want him to see us.

**MAMA.** Are you in some kind of trouble?!

**RITA MAE.** No.

**MAMA.** Is he some kind of stalker weirdo?

**RITA MAE.** There's nothing wrong with him. I just don't want to see him. *(She latches the window closed.)*

**MAMA.** But why not, sugar?

**RITA MAE.** I got my reasons.

**MAMA.** He didn't beat you—did he?

**RITA MAE.** No, Ma—he was very kind to me—too kind to me.

**MAMA.** Then why don't you let him in?

**RITA MAE.** 'Cause I don't deserve him—

**BILLY.** (*Overlap:*) Rita Mae!!!

**MAMA.** I don't know who's more foolish—you...or your brother.

**BILLY.** Please—Rita Mae—I just wanna talk.

*(Several beats of quiet.)*

**MAMA.** What's he doing now?

**RITA MAE.** He's just standing there—Mama.

**MAMA.** What's he doing standing there?

**RITA MAE.** He's just looking—

**MAMA.** What's he looking at?

**RITA MAE.** He's looking at us—Mama!

**BILLY.** This is the last time I'm coming for ya, Rita Mae. Now either you come with me this time or just forget about seeing me again.

**MAMA.** Sounds like true love to me.

**RITA MAE.** Or pure hell.

**MAMA.** Whatchu so 'fraid of, girl?

**RITA MAE.** I'm afraid of breaking that fool's heart.

**MAMA.** Evidently—he ain't afraid of getting it broke. Now—why don't you at least show some appreciation for his long journey by going out and talking to him.

**RITA MAE.** And what'chu gonna do?

**MAMA.** I'm gonna go to sleep if you put my bed back in place.

*(RITA MAE lowers the head of the bed.)*

**RITA MAE.** You call for me if you need anything.

**MAMA.** You tellin' me somethin' I already know!

*(RITA MAE pulls a blanket up over her mother. Then crosses over to the front door. The lights fade on MAMA and get brighter on BILLY. RITA MAE opens the front door but keeps the screen door latched.)*

**BILLY.** Rita Mae— Why didn't you answer my letters?

**RITA MAE.** I knew you was coming—

**BILLY.** Then you know why I'm here.

**RITA MAE.** Why do you torture yourself, Billy?

**BILLY.** I guess it's my burden. So what's your answer?

**RITA MAE.** You know my answer. Same as it was in L A. Nothing's changed—so why don'tchu hop in yo' pickup and turn right on around.

**BILLY.** Ain't nothing there to go back to—Rita Mae—

**RITA MAE.** Billy Mars—

**BILLY.** Rita Mae—what's stopping you? Don't you wanna be happy? I know I do.

**RITA MAE.** Billy Mars. I don't know a thang about you. I don't know your mama—I don't know your daddy. I don't know where you're from or how you came to be or why you love me. And I sure don't know why on Earth I should go back to L.A. with you. Nor do I know why I should stay here. All I do know is that I'm staying. Now—go away, Billy Mars.

**BILLY.** Look—your mother can stay with us in L.A. if you'd just come back.

**RITA MAE.** My staying here—has got nothing to do with my mama. I just don't want to be in L.A. anymore. Now—Billy—you're a good man...a sweet man...a special man. You'll find the right girl. A girl you can depend on, as much as she can depend on you. You know—in a pinch—you cannot depend on me. I cannot marry you and promise to be faithful. I cannot promise you—I won't leave you for another girl—

**BILLY.** I know that, Rita—

**RITA MAE.** (*Overlap:*) Nor can I promise to honor and worship and all that other bullshit—

**BILLY.** (*Overlap:*) I already know that and I ain't asking for none of that. I'm just asking you to come back to L.A. Things are empty there—without you.

**RITA MAE.** No. I can't come back—

**BILLY.** I don't care if you have a dozen female lovers—just as long as I'm your only man—

**RITA MAE.** That's what you say now—

**BILLY.** I mean it, Rita—

**RITA MAE.** I don't trust you. I don't believe you—And if you are telling the truth—

**BILLY.** I am—

**RITA MAE.** Then that's no good either. Every time I had an indiscretion and you looked the other way—my debt to you would mount up. Your holier-than-thou sacrifices, which would seem small at first—would just grow and grow—like a mountain of debt in front of me. Now you and I both know, this doesn't sound like the makings of a healthy relationship. Does it?

**BILLY.** No—it doesn't, Rita Mae—

**RITA MAE.** So then—there's nothing else to talk about, is there.

**BILLY.** I guess there isn't. Guess—I better go then.

**RITA MAE.** (*Beat.*) You want some coffee before you go?

**BILLY.** No. But I would like to use the bathroom.

**RITA MAE.** Sure.

*(She unlatches the screen door, and BILLY enters the living room.)*

**BILLY.** Sure is cozy in here. Didn't realize how cold it was.

**RITA MAE.** The bathroom's this way.

**BILLY.** I've made a fool of myself—haven't I?

**RITA MAE.** I wouldn't say that—

**BILLY.** My coming here was stupid—

**RITA MAE.** No, Billy. It was sweet. It's just that—I was the wrong girl.

**BILLY.** You sure seemed like the right one—when we were together.

**RITA MAE.** What we had was special. But it's over.

**BILLY.** I guess that's been the hardest thing for me to accept. I never had a family. You were the only person I ever considered family. I guess that's why I wanted to marry you. I wish there was a way we could be together without one feeling they owed the other one something. I mean, I just want to love you.

**RITA MAE.** The bathroom's this way, Billy—

**BILLY.** See—I ain't one of those men—who needs to be in CONTROL—so—you having a thing for—something I can't control—it don't bother me none. I won't trip—'cause I don't need control—the way others do.

**RITA MAE.** I thought you had to go to the bathroom, but here you are trying to smooth talk—fast talk me.

**BILLY.** Uh-unh...I won't try to fast talk you. I wanna slow talk some sense into you. Now, I came here to tell you I love you—Rita Mae.

**RITA MAE.** I know you do—

**BILLY.** Now, before I met you—I thought I'd never settle down. Or want to. But you don't know the power you have over me. You took me out there to the outer limits, with all those hot-oil massages and feeding me mangos while giving me a bath. You pampered me when we made love—

**RITA MAE.** You pampered me too—

**BILLY.** After being with you—I ain't no good for no other woman. Not after trying to fill your hunger. You have a hunger worse than

my own. I never encountered a more insatiable woman than you—in this life. The things you thought of—the things you got me to do—the things you made me do. Sometimes I felt out of control—

**RITA MAE.** You were out of control.

**BILLY.** We were out of control.

**RITA MAE.** That's why it was no good.

**BILLY.** You remember that walk-up flat you had in Silverlake?

**RITA MAE.** God—did I hate taking groceries up those steps.

**BILLY.** I remember waking up there in your bed one morning, after we had did it about five times the night before—and I woke up—still hard—still erect. So we did it again. And then you showered and left for work—leaving me there in a daze...in a stupor...I laid there like I was on drugs. The room was still spinning in your wake. So I stumbled out of bed, washed up quick and tumbled into my clothes, split yo' pad and hopped in my car—ready to make it on back to Venice Beach. But that day, when I got in the car—still in a stupor from making love to you—I could not find my way home. I drove around the city in circles...lost for hours, like I was tripping on Magic Mushrooms—but I was just tripping on you. Now I knew every back road—every short cut there was from my pad to yours—I mean, I used to drive a cab in L.A. But that day—I could not find my way home. The streets I thought I owned, didn't look familiar—you changed how I looked at it, and every street I drove down led back to your place. I stopped trying to get home that day. I made myself park under a tree, 'cross the street from where you lived, and I went to sleep. I just slept there, until you reappeared—to show me my way back home.

**RITA MAE.** I remember that. You cried in my arms that day.

**BILLY.** That day—I never wanted to leave your side again. You took a part of me with you when you left. A part of me I'm dying to get back.

**RITA MAE.** Yeah—sometimes I miss the sex too—

**BILLY.** The sex ain't the only thing I'm missing. It's you, Rita Mae—it's you.

**RITA MAE.** Billy—you'll find another.

**BILLY.** But I'll never find another like you. There's a stone in my heart with your name on it.

**RITA MAE.** Billy—you'se the corniest mo'fucka I've ever met.

**BILLY.** You know who made me that way.

**RITA MAE.** I guess that's why I love you. You cool and all that—but you ain't too cool to be corny sometimes. Most guys stay clear of them cornfields—but you go straight there.

*(RITA MAE sits, centerstage, as BILLY begins to slowly walk circles around her for the remainder of the play. He starts walking very loose, very wide orbits around her at first, but the more he talks, the tighter and tighter the circles around her become.)*

**BILLY.** You see—I have been hungry—for a long time—for a long time—I have been hungry. And you fed me—the first time you said hello to me...you fed me...you were so kind. L A is not a kind city—and I took to you—like bees to honey, I took to you—you were the brightest constellation to ever come into my orbit. The minute you came into my orbit—I knew you had been sent to me. You see, Rita Mae—you and I, we have history between us. We have enough history for several lifetimes. My spirit is incomplete without you in my orbit. *(Puts his hand on her shoulder:)* You knew...I would come for you. Tell me that's not true.

**RITA MAE.** I knew you would come disguised as a gentleman caller.

**BILLY.** And you know I ain't no gentleman.

*(BILLY moves his hands across her shoulders. She relaxes for a moment then tenses back up.)*

**BILLY.** Don't be so uptight. I'm not here to hurt you.

**RITA MAE.** You just want to tie me down.

**BILLY.** I already said—I don't want to possess you. I just wanna live within your reach. *(He aggressively begins to kiss the back of her neck and slowly unzips the back of her dress—whereupon he begins kissing her shoulder blades.)* I am chasing you through a forest of desire—

a passion forest—a burning forest with trees all aflame. I'm a wolf—nipping at your heels. You wanna run—

**RITA MAE.** I wanna run—

**BILLY.** But you can't git away. You run—but each blade of grass sings out your name—giving you away—

**RITA MAE.** I keep running. I see a big fan in front of me and I wanna run through that fan. I wanna be sliced and diced.

*(RITA MAE's dress falls to the floor. She is in a sheer slip, with nothing else underneath, as BILLY fondles her.)*

**RITA MAE.** I wanna turn that fan off—but I can't. It looks so inviting to all my fingers. I wanna stick my hand in the fan—I wanna donate a limb. Maybe you'll stop loving me if I had a nub for a hand. Maybe then you'll crawl back to where you crawled from and you'll leave me the fuck alone.

**BILLY.** Never.

*(BILLY turns her around and kisses her passionately. Just as RITA MAE begins to swoon, she breaks away from BILLY and crosses the stage.)*

**RITA MAE.** I awaken—and find myself on the twenty-ninth floor of some empty building. All the windows are broken out and it is freezing. Birds of every kind flock all around me. The birds keep telling me to jump. First they try to con me into thinking I am BIG BIRD...I am one of them...they try to convince me I can fly. But I know—they want to see me splatter on the ground below—so I jump—from the twenty-ninth floor—just for the sport of it—just for the entertainment and humor of all the birds who were ever kind to me, and I know they get a big kick out of my free fall and an even bigger kick out of seeing me splatter on the ground. Splatt!!

**BILLY.** What's it gonna be, Rita Mae? You coming with me?

**RITA MAE.** You know I can't leave my mother.

**BILLY.** So bring her—

**RITA MAE.** You don't even know why I left.

**BILLY.** Yo' ma had a stroke—

**RITA MAE.** This ain't about my mama either.

**BILLY.** Then why did you leave?

**RITA MAE.** You remember the last job I had?

**BILLY.** At the studio?

**RITA MAE.** No. At the law firm.

**BILLY.** You mean—the one out in Burbank?

**RITA MAE.** That's the one.

**BILLY.** Yeah. I remember. You weren't there that long.

**RITA MAE.** The attorney I was working for started coming on to me the second day on the job. I told him I was involved, I couldn't go out with him—but he wouldn't stop fucking with me...so I complained to all the other partners.

**BILLY.** So what happened?

**RITA MAE.** You wanna know what happened? They started fucking with me—that's what happened. I mean—I couldn't tell they was fucking with me at first. You see—a week after I filed my complaint—they sent me an assistant. Jill—a sweet, fresh-faced girl from Ohio. So, Jill and I are real cool—covering for each other—bringing each other lunch. And then she did something that totally blew my mind. She had the office throw me a surprise party for my birthday. I mean, after getting off to a shaky start—I was actually feeling accepted. And Jill was like the little sister I never had. I mean—we were so tight—she even crashed at my pad once—after a night of drinking. It was then that the bottom fell out.

**BILLY.** What happened? Did you sleep with her?

**RITA MAE.** No. I never slept with her. She wasn't my type—and I never—I never told her about that part of me. Yet she seemed to know. They all seemed to know.

**BILLY.** What happened?

**RITA MAE.** What happened next was straight out of Kafka. Just two days after my birthday party I got this memo from one of the junior partners, about a charge being brought against me. That little bitch Jill had accused me of sexual harassment, and the same committee of partners I had gone to previously with complaints of my own—was set to convene the next day to hear Jill’s complaint against me. Well, fate would have it that Jill didn’t come to work on the day I got the memo. So I tried to call her—but her phone was disconnected. So on my lunch break—I drove over to where the bitch lived. I buzzed her apartment. Nothing. I just wanted to ask her to her face—how could she do such a thing to me? It was then that I realized, I had been set up.

**BILLY.** Did you hit on her?

**RITA MAE.** Billy—I just told you she wasn’t my type.

**BILLY.** Rita Mae—tell me the truth—

**RITA MAE.** I am telling you the truth—

**BILLY.** Did anything happen—that could’ve been interpreted as you hitting on her—LIKE AN INAPPROPRIATE TOUCH.

**RITA MAE.** Are you listening to me? I just told you it was a setup!! The birthday party! Everything! A setup!!

**BILLY.** So what happened at the hearing?

**RITA MAE.** There never was any hearing—

**BILLY.** Why not?

**RITA MAE.** I was unable to find my way back to the office after leaving her apartment.

**BILLY.** Why not?

**RITA MAE.** I had a nervous breakdown right there on the streets. I mean—I had forgotten where I had parked my car. I mean—I went back to where I thought I had parked my car—but it wasn’t there—and I knew it wasn’t stolen. You remember the piece of shit I drove—

**BILLY.** Yeah. Who in their right mind would steal that.

**RITA MAE.** I was out there for hours—looking for my car, covering the same two blocks over and over again. I mean, it was probably right under my nose, but my mind prevented me from seeing it. So, I went back to Jill’s building and rang her bell again. Nothing. So, I sat on the steps of her building—hoping maybe she’d show up. But she never did. Hours went by and she never showed. The next thing I know, it’s nighttime. It’s dark and I still can’t find my car. But I’m hearing this little voice in my head. And the voice tells me to go over the overpass down on my hands and knees and suddenly, a car was right behind me, honking at me. I froze. A woman tried to help me, but I tore away from her and ran, upright, to the end of the overpass. Then this voice told me—I was a cheetah. So I returned to all fours and crawled over to a puddle of water. And I drank, the way a wild animal would drink. I was drinking from the puddle as I heard the sound of people approaching. So once again I jumped to my feet, running, the way a person would run. And I kept running ’til a voice—a little irritating voice told me...this bright shiny BMW was my car. So, I took my old car keys and tried to stick them into this shiny BMW, as the voice in my head started screaming, “Bob Marley and the Wailers, Bob Marley and the Wailers...BMW...over and over again...Bob Marley and the Wailers.” But then—the Beemer started talking to me, “You’re standing too close. Please stand back from the vehicle, please stand back from the vehicle.” I stood there, mesmerized by the talking car. I was still standing there, when the police came and found me.

**BILLY.** How come you never told me any of this?

**RITA MAE.** How could I? As soon as they let me out of the hospital I was on a plane to St Louis.

**BILLY.** How come I never knew about Jill or none of this?

**RITA MAE.** I wasn’t at the firm that long.

**BILLY.** You were there long enough to have mentioned Jill—if you two were as tight as you say you were.

**RITA MAE.** Your band was gigging all the time then. I mean, your schedule was so crowded—that we didn’t hang as much—

**BILLY.** We talked on the phone every day. You were my woman. You showed up at the club a lot and at rehearsals. We were hangin'. What are you talkin' about?

**RITA MAE.** I don't recall it the way you do—

**BILLY.** How come I'm just hearing 'bout Jill for the first time?

**RITA MAE.** I just told you why—

**BILLY.** I think you slept with her.

**RITA MAE.** Fuck you, Billy!

**BILLY.** YEAH—you slept with her. Or at least tried to.

**RITA MAE.** I thought it didn't matter to you. I don't need the same accusations from you—I got from them. Fuck you, Billy. You can leave right now.

**BILLY.** Yeah. That night y'all got drunk. I'll bet you went for it then.

**RITA MAE.** I thought you said it didn't matter?!

**BILLY.** The truth matters—the truth always matters. And I think you had a little crush on Jill—that's what I think. That's why you went over the edge. The girl broke your heart—didn't she?

**RITA MAE.** Fuck you! You can leave, Billy—leave—

**BILLY.** I ain't going nowhere. You think I drove all this way to leave without the truth? You had a crush on her. Didn't you?

**RITA MAE.** Please, Billy—

**BILLY.** You had a crush on her—didn't you?

**RITA MAE.** *(A beat.)* Yes.

**BILLY.** That's all I wanted to know—was the truth. Which way is your bathroom?

**RITA MAE.** *(Points offstage right:)* That way.

**BILLY.** Mind if I use it?

**RITA MAE.** Go ahead.

**BILLY.** Thank you.

*(BILLY exits in the direction of the bathroom.)*

*(Sound cue: several beats pass, then we hear a toilet flushing. BILLY reenters.)*

**RITA MAE.** Go back there and wash your hands—

**BILLY.** How do you know I didn't?

**RITA MAE.** I didn't hear you run any water. I ain't gonna let you touch me unless you wash your hands.

*(BILLY runs back off. We hear water running. He returns, wiping his hands with a paper towel.)*

**RITA MAE.** That still don't mean I'm gonna let you touch me.

**BILLY.** The Jill thing broke your heart—didn't it?

**RITA MAE.** I just wanna know—how did you know?

**BILLY.** 'Cause you had kept Jill a secret—the way a man would've—

**RITA MAE.** The way you would've?

**BILLY.** Yeah—the way I would've.

**RITA MAE.** There's no fooling you, huh.

**BILLY.** Nope. You see the truth—I can handle. As long as everything is up front...nobody's keeping secrets from nobody, then—I can handle it. I don't mind playing second fiddle sometimes, as long as everybody's up front and out in the open.

**RITA MAE.** But sometimes there's a need for secrets.

**BILLY.** I never saw much difference between keeping secrets and telling lies—that's why I don't have much use for 'em.

**RITA MAE.** Sometimes secrets can get the best of ya.

**BILLY.** Did you hit on her?

**RITA MAE.** I thought we were done with this?

**BILLY.** Not until you tell me—

**RITA MAE.** Yes! I hit on her! Yes! She was gorgeous...the second comin' of Marilyn Monroe. What the fuck do you think? Shit! You woulda wanted some too!

**BILLY.** That's all I wanted to know.

**RITA MAE.** Are you happy now? Are you satisfied?

**BILLY.** I just wanted the truth.

**RITA MAE.** You just wanted to humiliate me.

**BILLY.** Do you feel humiliated?

**RITA MAE.** Yes.

**BILLY.** Well—you shouldn't. You should feel cleansed. Unburdened by that little secret that stood between us.

**RITA MAE.** You've got a lot of nerve, telling me how I should feel.

**BILLY.** You know what yo' problem is? You're too fucking literal.

**RITA MAE.** (*Sits:*) What else is wrong with me? Go ahead and tell me.

**BILLY.** Well—your hair. That ain't the way I remember your hair.

**RITA MAE.** (*Screams:*) And I'm too fucking literal?!

**MAMA.** (*In darkness:*) What's all dat commotion?!

**RITA MAE.** Sorry, Ma— We better keep it down.

**BILLY.** She don't sound sick.

**BILLY.** So where is brother Boo Boo?

**RITA MAE.** If Boo hears you calling him that—he's gonna go off—I swear. Billy, there's something I never told you about my brother—

**BILLY.** As many stories as you told me about Boo Boo, I feel I already know your brother.

**RITA MAE.** Yeah, but there's something I haven't told you.

**BILLY.** What?

**RITA MAE.** There's a lot of pain in this house. A deep pain that hurts like a restless ache. When I first left here, I thought I'd never see this place again. I thought I was gone from here forever. You hear that highway—that angry restless highway.

**BILLY.** Yeah. I hear it.

**RITA MAE.** I lost my virginity to that highway. Lost all my innocence. I lost something—right here—I can never get back.

**BILLY.** Do you want me to hold you?

**RITA MAE.** Do you wanna hold me?

**BILLY.** I'm dying to hold you.

**RITA MAE.** Do you think your holding me can make me forget all the things I need to forget?

**BILLY.** No. But I can keep you warm—if you come over here.

**RITA MAE.** No. You come over here.

*(BILLY goes to RITA MAE and puts his arms around her.)*

**BILLY.** You look good.

**RITA MAE.** And so do you.

**BILLY.** You wanna jump my bones—don't you?

**RITA MAE.** You would not believe how horny I am. I haven't been laid since I left L.A.

**BILLY.** I recall passing a Motel Six not far from here.

**RITA MAE.** You don't have to take me to a cheap motel. We can do it right here.

**BILLY.** In your mother's house?

**RITA MAE.** A lot worse things have been done here. Besides, we're two consenting adults—

**BILLY.** But still—this is your mother's house. And where's your brother?

**RITA MAE.** *(As she unbuckles BILLY's belt:)* Who knows and who cares.

*(Lights begin a slow fade.)*

**BILLY.** *(Taking off his shirt:)* I ain't never got none in Missouri before.

**RITA MAE.** Well, Mr. Mars—welcome to the “show me state.”

*(Black out.)*

*End of Act I*

## ACT II

### Scene 1

*(At rise: the following morning. We hear rush hour traffic and other highway noise. We find RITA MAE fast asleep in BILLY's arms, on the living room sofa, snuggled under a blanket. WENDELL is sitting in a chair, close to them, staring at them as they sleep. His mood is somewhere between nonchalance and outright disgust. RITA MAE shifts in BILLY's arms, trying to get more comfortable and trying to snuggle closer, with a big smile on her face. Her movement causes BILLY to stir. They kiss without opening their eyes, for several long beats, getting more passionate with each beat. WENDELL just observes, not letting on that he's there.)*

**RITA MAE.** Billy...last night I started to tell you something.

**BILLY.** Shhhh—I got something for you first—

**RITA MAE.** See—this is why I can't go back to L.A. with you. I'm trying to tell you something and all you can think about is your erection.

**BILLY.** Please—

**RITA MAE.** *(Almost mocking:)* Mmmmmmm—amazing—

**BILLY.** My Billy Mars' bar is still hard—even after last night.

**RITA MAE.** *(Fondling him under cover/teasing:)* It's the eighth wonder of the world. I've got just the place for that, Mr. Mars.

**BILLY.** Yeah—well, you know me—I always want to be in the place to be.

*(RITA MAE gets on top of BILLY, simulating intercourse, for a few beats. WENDELL lets them get into a groove before he finally speaks.)*

**WENDELL.** How long are y'all gonna do that? 'Cause I'ma go rustle me up some grits and eggs and I don't want to miss the climax. Y'all want anything?

**RITA MAE.** *(Startled:)* Wendell—how long have you been sitting there?

*(Pulls the covers tight over her and BILLY.)*

**WENDELL.** Long enough. You got a lot of nerve, Rita Mae!! A lot of nerve! Polluting this house with yo' lust.

**RITA MAE.** Are you tellin' me if you had somebody to bring home—you wouldn't bring 'em home?

**WENDELL.** Not to my Mama's house. You been in L.A. so long—you've lost all sense of what lines not to cross—'round here. At least you didn't bring no white boy in here. That is a man you're with? I really can't tell—from here—

*(BILLY rises from under the covers and stands in front of WENDELL naked.)*

**BILLY.** Let me introduce myself—

**RITA MAE.** Billy—put your pants back on.

**WENDELL.** *(Chuckles:)* No—keep 'em off.

**RITA MAE.** Put yo' pants on, Billy!

**WENDELL.** If he wants to give me a floor show, let him do it. I love a good show. I got a front row seat and all the time in the world.

**RITA MAE.** That's enough, Billy!

*(BILLY is taking his sweet time looking for his pants in the heap of clothes on the floor. He is very proud of his body. WENDELL is aroused and agitated all at once.)*

**WENDELL.** I can't believe this man—disrespecting my mama's house like this.

**BILLY.** And you must be Boo Boo. Well, Boo Boo—I must say say, I've really been looking forward to meeting you.

**RITA MAE.** Billy—I mean it—put your pants back on!!

*(RITA MAE moves and stands between BILLY and WENDELL. BILLY finds his pants and finally slips them back on.)*

**WENDELL.** You've been talkin' to this nigga about me—haven't you, Rita Mae? You told him my name is Boo Boo?! My name is Wendell—do you understand that? You and Ma started that Boo

Boo shit. You never heard Pops call me Boo Boo. He always called me Wendell or he called me “Handsome.”

**RITA MAE.** Well, he was lying to you. And you’re just as sick as he was if you believed him.

**WENDELL.** Let’s get one thing straight right now, Billy Boy. You can call me Wendell or you can call me “Handsome.” But whatever you do—don’t ever call me Boo Boo again. Do you hear me?!

*(MAMA is ringing a dinner bell, as a dim light comes up on her in her bed.)*

**MAMA.** What all dat commotion in there?

**RITA MAE.** See there—y’all done woke up Mama. She never wakes up this early.

**MAMA.** Come on, Rita Mae. I need you to change me and feed me—change me and feed me.

**RITA MAE.** *(Putting on her clothes fast:)* I’m coming, Mama. Hold your water. *(Under her breath:)* That’s right, you can’t hold your water.

*(As RITA MAE crosses to MAMA, WENDELL and BILLY keep staring at each other. RITA MAE parts MAMA’s curtains, letting some light through the blinds. Although the lights get brighter on RITA MAE and MAMA, BILLY and WENDELL will remain the main focus.)*

**BILLY.** Like—I apologize for calling you Boo Boo. Rita Mae never told me you didn’t like being called Boo Boo.

**WENDELL.** Oh...after you gone—I’m a have a real serious talk with the girl about that.

**BILLY.** Look, Wendell—Handsome Wendell—just so there are no hard feelings between me and you—let me even out the score by telling you something about me—since you seem upset that I know things about you and you know nothing about me. My name is Billy Mars. A name I gave myself, because I didn’t like the John Doe the state of California gave me. John Taylor. Now what could be more plain than John Taylor?

**WENDELL.** I could tell you was an orphan—

**BILLY.** How could you tell?

**WENDELL.** You just look like the kinda nigger left on somebody's doorstep.

**BILLY.** I was left in a garbage bin.

**WENDELL.** Disposable...just like my mama's diapers. *(Laughs/beat.)* I feel yo' pain, brother man. I see yo' scars and that defeated, downtrodden look in yo' eyes. The look of a born loser. Life has done ya wrong.

**BILLY.** Man—why you fucking with me?! What's up with that?

**WENDELL.** You had no business—disrespecting my Mama's house.

**BILLY.** I thought I already apologized for that.

**WENDELL.** Oh. You done gone way past the point of all apologies. I'm sorry, just don't cut the mustard—for what you did. I mean—did my sister invite you here? Did she pick up the phone and tell you to—

**BILLY.** *(Overlap:)* I came here on my own. Something just pulled me here.

**WENDELL.** Something just pulled you here?

**BILLY.** I just had to see her.

**WENDELL.** But did you have to fuck her—right here in the front room? *(Beat.)* Free will. Yesiree. Free will is a mighty dangerous thing. A mighty dangerous thing, indeed. You came all this way—uninvited. Something pulled you here—so you say. Let me give you some free advice.

**BILLY.** I don't want your advice.

**WENDELL.** I'ma give it to you anyway. Get away from here while you can. You seen my sister—now go. Go while you can, 'cause there ain't nothing for you here. Do you hear that highway? You hear it? It's calling to you. You hear it calling to you? Billy! Billy! Well, I hear it even if you don't. Billy boy, brother man—it's telling

you to turn around and go back. Go back to where you came from. 'Cause there ain't nothing for you here.

**BILLY.** I'm not leaving without your sister.

**WENDELL.** Then you're even dumber than you look.

**BILLY.** If you want me to be on my way, I'll be on my way, but I was hoping I could hang around, because I love your sister, and who knows, maybe I will be a part of your family one day.

**WENDELL.** It'll never happen. There's some things 'bout my sister—you'll never understand.

**BILLY.** Your sister and I don't have no secrets standing between us—the way most couples do.

**WENDELL.** Y'all a couple? A couple what? A couple lesbos? Yeah—I could tell you was that orphan type, when you was kissing my sister like a lesbo instead of kissing her like a man—a real man. All men gotta little bitch in them out there in Cali, with all that faggot ass sunshine weather. Sissy weather. Grow a lot of fruit in that kinda weather. You ain't got no manhood left—chasing my sister. Dancing to her music. You're having severe fantasies if you think my sister will marry a California raisin fruit salad like you. Shit! She don't even like you—leaving you here with me. Now what you gonna do? You wanna jump bad? Then jump bad! Butchu gotta bring some to get some!

**BILLY.** I don't want to fight you, Wendell. Now, I've been dying to meet you for a long time. Ever since your sister and I started dating—I was looking forward to coming into your orbit, 'specially after Rita told me you were a musician—a sax player. Well—I'm a musician too. I play the guitar. Rhythm, lead—jazz, funk, rock, the blues—makes me no never mind. So where's the gig?! Rita Mae says you gotta regular spot you're gigging at—down on the riverfront. Let me go with you tonight. Let me sit in. I got my ax out in my ride. What d'ya say? Let me tag along for just tonight. I hear the spot you're gigging at is really hot.

**WENDELL.** It's a small club and it's always sold out—

**BILLY.** I'll just hang with you backstage.

**WENDELL.** Bad idea, Billy Boy. See...there really ain't much of a backstage, therefore—there aren't any backstage passes—and even if they did let you in—they'd dock it from my cut of the door.

**BILLY.** Then I'll pay—I'll pay to play with you.

**WENDELL.** No. That's a bad idea, Billy Boy—

**BILLY.** Come on, man—we may never get this chance again. I taught Keb' Mo' everything he knows about the guitar.

**WENDELL.** I said no.

**BILLY.** Come on, man—don't be so uptight.

**WENDELL.** I'm not being uptight. I just don't need you hanging 'round—ruining things for me.

**BILLY.** What—you think I wanna squeeze in on your gig? I'm not that kinda cat. I just wanna play, man. Keep my chops tight—ya know what I'm saying? Come on.

**WENDELL.** You really like pushing yo' luck—don't you? I told you—you don't fit into tonight's plans. It's already sold out—like I said. So, you gonna have to catch me on the rebound—next time you're in town.

**BILLY.** Damn, that's too bad, man.

**WENDELL.** Yeah. That's too bad.

**BILLY.** I was really looking forward to playing with you, man...it really would've been something.

**WENDELL.** Yeah. It really would've been something.

**BILLY.** Hey. Why don't I go out to the ride and grab my ax and you and I—we can jam right here.

**WENDELL.** Oh. Bad idea. We can't jam here—on account of Ma. She can't handle the racket.

**BILLY.** We could play soft.

**WENDELL.** What's the point in jamming if you can't play all out? It's just not meant to be—Billy Boy.

**BILLY.** Guess it's just not meant to be.

**WENDELL.** So—how long you staying?

**BILLY.** Maybe a few days. I might go further east or further south from here—before I head back to L.A. You ever been out there?

**WENDELL.** I ain't never been nowhere but here.

**BILLY.** You've never left St. Louis?

**WENDELL.** Never.

**BILLY.** If you play as good as Rita Mae says, you'd have an easy time if you'd came to L.A. getting work as a session man.

**WENDELL.** I do fine here—

**BILLY.** But are ya making any money? Can you make any money playing what you play—here?

**WENDELL.** Boy—don't try to git all up in my Kool Aid, when you don't know the flavor. Now I said—I do just fine here. Billy Boy.

*(Lights get a little brighter in MAMA's room.)*

**RITA MAE.** Billy—I want you to come in here for a minute.

**BILLY.** Excuse me, Wendell.

*(BILLY tries to cross over to MAMA's room, but WENDELL grabs his arm, stopping him.)*

**WENDELL.** Leave now, Billy. Don't go in there. Mama's just gonna wrap you 'round her finger—and then what?

*(BILLY pulls away from WENDELL and shrugs. He enters MAMA's room as the lights fade on WENDELL.)*

**RITA MAE.** Billy—I want you to meet my mother.

**BILLY.** Hello—Mrs. Megan—

**MAMA.** You call me Mama Megan—

**RITA MAE.** She's mama to the universe. Every Mother's Day, she gets dozens of Mother's Day cards from people she touched, one way or another—

**MAMA.** I was a school cook for forty years—fed a lot of chillen who remember me. Step aside, Rita Mae—let me talk to your feller. Come a little closer, son. Let me get a better look at you.

*(BILLY moves closer.)*

**MAMA.** Grrreeeaaaattt Day! My, my, my, you’s a nice looking feller—a lot easier on the eyes than Rita Mae made you out to be. This is the same feller you said you were seeing?

**RITA MAE.** Yeah, Ma—this is Billy.

**BILLY.** Yep—the notorious Billy Mars—

**MAMA.** Now what have you gone and done to call yourself notorious? You haven’t robbed or killed nobody—now have ya?

**BILLY.** I’m notoriously stubborn.

**MAMA.** So, you kinda sweet on my Rita Mae?

**BILLY.** Oh I’m way past being sweet on her. I want to marry her and I was hoping to receive your blessing—

**MAMA.** Well, what did my Rita Mae—tell ya—

**BILLY.** She told me she’d think about it.

**RITA MAE.** I told you no!!

**BILLY.** You said you’d think about it.

**RITA MAE.** Don’t be putting words in my mouth—

**MAMA.** Well—did you think about it?

**RITA MAE.** I don’t need to think about it. The answer is already no.

**MAMA.** Now, don’t be so hasty. It’s not like we’ve been overwhelmed by gentlemen callers since you came home. Look—Rita Mae—since Billy is here, why don’t you run over to the grocery store and pick up a few thangs to fix a nice big breakfast for our guest—

**RITA MAE.** I’ll go to the store, Ma—but I want Billy to go with me—

**MAMA.** Hush yo' mouth—don't be silly girl. Billy here can keep me company—if you don't mind, Billy—

**BILLY.** Oh no—I don't mind.

**MAMA.** Good then—you come on and sit here on the edge of my bed a spell.

**RITA MAE.** Billy—there's something about my brother that you need to know—

**MAMA.** Would you hush up with that foolishness and git on to the store?

**RITA MAE.** Billy—whatever you do—promise me this, don't agitate my brother. Sometimes he has a short fuse.

**MAMA.** Would you hurry along, girl? Take some money from the cookie jar—

**RITA MAE.** I know, Mama—

**MAMA.** Make sho you dress warm now—

**RITA MAE.** I know, Mama—God, you act like I can't think for myself sometimes. *(Leaves MAMA's room and crosses in front of WENDELL.)* Who you looking at? *(Goes to money/cookie jar.)*

**WENDELL.** You've got a lot of nerve, you old cow.

**RITA MAE.** *(Putting on her coat:)* You better be nice to my guest.

**WENDELL.** Why should I be nice to him? You ain't being nice to him. Letting him do you in the front room—was that being nice? Naw. That was being hateful. Slut.

**RITA MAE.** I'm warning you.

**WENDELL.** You're always warning me. Don't worry. I'm kinda taking a liking to Billy. He asked to sit in with me tonight at the club and I think I'm gonna let him.

**RITA MAE.** You're kidding, right?

**WENDELL.** Nope. I'm really warming up to Billy Boy. Who knows—maybe I'll even let you tag along.

**RITA MAE.** How come you never asked me to come hear you play before?

**WENDELL.** Never thought you had no appreciation for my kinda music. You know I be playing that outside shit.

**RITA MAE.** Yeah. Like you belong outside in the woods somewhere.

**WENDELL.** Billy Boy told me he wants to marry ya. Does he know about you—being funny and all?

**RITA MAE.** We don't have no secrets.

**WENDELL.** Not like me and you. You ever tell him about our little secret? You were about to tell him this morning. But you chickened out.

**RITA MAE.** That's enough, Wendell.

**WENDELL.** I want you to tell him I got to you first.

**RITA MAE.** I'm warning you—leave it alone, Wendell. Back up off me! Don't start no mess with me.

**WENDELL.** You don't start no mess and there won't be no mess. *(Beat.)* Do you love him, Rita Mae?

**RITA MAE.** That's none of your concern.

**WENDELL.** Oh, everything around here is my concern, darling.

**RITA MAE.** Why can't I have something of my own—without you always messing with it?

**WENDELL.** Do you love that boy?

**RITA MAE.** Don't make me answer that.

**WENDELL.** Then don't answer. I already know the answer. If you loved that boy—you wouldn't have let him in here last night. If you love him—make him leave now. Otherwise, it's open season and he's up for grabs. Go ahead. Here's your chance. Make him leave. Tell him to go—now.

*(RITA MAE starts toward her MAMA's room but hesitates. She stops herself as WENDELL grabs RITA MAE's hand.)*

**WENDELL.** Just like I thought. You could never love him. How could you love him, *(Points to RITA MAE's head:)* when ain't no other man been inside there besides me. Am I lying? Your thoughts belong to me. Even when you sleep—your dreams are mine. *(Beat.)* Now, since you going to the store, why don't you bring me a quart of buttermilk? Don't come back here with no sissified low-fat shit. You got that?! *(Beat.)* And by the way, Rita Mae, I wanna thank you for bringing Billy Boy—to me.

*(WENDELL slowly lets go of RITA MAE's hand. After a beat, she exits.)*

*(WENDELL goes into a freeze, as the focus shifts to MAMA and BILLY.)*

**BILLY.** All my life—I've wanted a family. A family that Norman Rockwell would've painted if Norman Rockwell had been black.

**MAMA.** You believe in that cliché—the American Dream?

**BILLY.** Yes.

**MAMA.** I believe in people doing the best they can. Rita Mae is special to me. I had three miscarriages between having Wendell and having Rita Mae. So, when she finally came along—I felt blessed. I wasn't bitter about the babies I didn't have—I felt lucky that two of my children survived. My husband and I put all our energy into providing for them. We wanted more for them—than we wanted for ourselves. We wanted their lives to be better than ours. I think most parents wish that for their children.

**BILLY.** You did a good job, Mama Megan—

**MAMA.** Sometimes I wonder...sometimes I look at how my children's lives turned out and I wonder if their lives have been cursed...instead of blessed. If they are cursed, I'd make a deal with the devil to lift that curse off of them. Take Rita Mae—for example—she's got a pretty woman's face—but an ugly woman's disposition—

**BILLY.** She's beautiful inside and out—

**MAMA.** But she don't believe it—she don't see it—just like she don't see herself being married to you, or any man. You seem like the sensitive type. Am I right?

**BILLY.** I guess so, Mam—

**MAMA.** Rita Mae might be incapable of giving you everything you want. I mean—I used to go to bed at night and try to imagine what her big day would be like. I'd try to imagine how she'd look coming down the aisle of the church she grew up in, wearing the same wedding gown I wore. As hard as I tried—I kept turning up nothing. Well, one day I was up there in the attic cleaning it out—Rita Mae was helping me. So I got her to try on my wedding dress. She was 'bout the same size I was the day I got married... built a lot like me. She put on the dress and it fit her to a T. Yet, something was missing. That glow—a woman gets—from putting on a special dress—was missing from her face. It was then that she told me she was gay. I cried, “Lawd—tell me it ain't so—tell me it ain't so.” Rita Mae said, “I'm sorry, Mama.” I said, “What you got to be sorry about? God is the one who should be sorry. He's the one who made you that way.” It was that day that I realized that I could no longer dream my children's dreams for them. They came here with dreams of their own. And I had stop trying to force my dreams onto them. Marrying Rita Mae is your dream. But your dream and her dream might not be the same. Will you still love her if she says no?

**BILLY.** I'd try to. I'd be hurt—but I'd try to.

**MAMA.** Then do me this one small favor. Try to love her, even if things don't go your way. Try to love her, anyway. That's how a real man—loves a woman.

**BILLY.** Thank you, Mama Megan. *(He gently holds her hand for several beats.)*

**MAMA.** My husband—he wasn't perfect either. He was the type to stray from the house every now and then. But when he came home—oh—he really knew how to stir my coffee. So, I would just try to block it from my mind—that my coffee wasn't the only coffee he was stirring. Otherwise, it woulda never lasted. But it lasted. We were married 38 years before he died. Thirty-eight good years. They weren't perfect, but they were good. And that was enough for me.

Life ain't a fairy tale. You learn that fast. Ain't nobody ever comin' on a white horse or any horse. Life is about working hard—you even have to work hard to find a little bit of happiness. But it is out there. Happiness is out there, you just can't give up looking for it.

**BILLY.** Well, thank you, Mama Megan—for sharing your wisdom with me.

**MAMA.** When you got two chillen as different as Rita Mae and Wendell—life gives you a little wisdom. Neither one of them could wait to leave this town...one went to L.A....the other went to New York. Now how more opposite can you git?

**BILLY.** Wait—you mean—Wendell went away to New York—

**MAMA.** The boy studied music at Juilliard—though you could never tell it by his playing.

**BILLY.** He? Went to Juilliard?

**MAMA.** Sho did...didn't stay there long. But he was there.

**BILLY.** But he told me he'd never left St. Louis.

**MAMA.** Well—he lied to you. Probably wasn't the only lie he told ya—either. Look—you can't pay no attention to Wendell—besides—there's a little half-truth in every lie. It's not like he means to lie to ya—he just can't help it. Now Rita Mae—she left here and stayed away for a long time. But Wendell—it was almost like he never left. I know one thing—the Wendell who came back here from New York was not the same Wendell who left here.

**BILLY.** Thank you for sharing that with me, Mama Megan.

**MAMA.** Now do me a favor, Billy, and send Wendell in here. I got an itch I can't get to.

**BILLY.** Let me—

**MAMA.** Boy—you better get on out of here—as cute as you are, I ain't letting you put your hands on me—'cause you might start something—neither one of us can finish.

**BILLY.** You are something else, Mama Megan. (*Gently kisses her hand.*)

**MAMA.** And so are you, Billy Mars—so are you.

*(BILLY holds her hand for a beat then rises and crosses back over to the living room area. Lights get dim on MAMA, brighter on WENDELL.)*

**WENDELL.** Hey there, boy...my mama is something else. Ain't she? So what's the deal? Are you as smitten with my mama as you are with my Rita Mae?

**BILLY.** Your mother wants to see you.

**WENDELL.** You was in there with my mama a mighty long time, boy. What was y'all talkin' 'bout? Was ya talkin' 'bout me?

**BILLY.** A little bit—

**WENDELL.** She tell you what a big star I am 'round here? I'm the biggest star out there, boy. My shit is way out. And you gotta be way out to catch up to the shit I'm playing.

**BILLY.** Your mother wants you...now.

**WENDELL.** Well, she gonna have to wait. So what all else did she tell you 'bout me?

**BILLY.** She told me you've been to New York.

**WENDELL.** I ain't never been to New York. I ain't been nowhere. Why she want to tell you that lie?

**BILLY.** She said you went to Juilliard—

**WENDELL.** Juilliard? What's that—

**BILLY.** The college you went to. The music school—

**WENDELL.** Never went to college. Never heard of no Ju-Ju-Juilliard.

**BILLY.** Well—I think you did.

**WENDELL.** You know—Billy Boy. I was just beginning to take a liking to you—but now—you're wearing on my last nerve—wearing out yo' welcome. I think it's time for you to leave.

**BILLY.** I can't leave without saying goodbye to Rita Mae.

**WENDELL.** Boy—your skull is so thick. You—you say something pulled you here. Well, I just wish it would pull you back, pull you right on back to wherever it was you came from. 'Cause you—you're in a place where you don't belong, boy. You're lost. You're a lost boy. Driving your car through a desert of confusion. Driving round and round and round in a circle. Driving all around the truth about the woman you think you love. She don't care no more about you, than a mangy mutt, laying dead on the side of the road somewhere.

**BILLY.** See—that's where you're wrong. You're dead wrong.

**WENDELL.** Read my lips. My sister hates men.

**BILLY.** You don't know Rita Mae like I know Rita Mae.

**WENDELL.** Oh? I beg to differ.

**BILLY.** Butchu don't know nothing about her heart. Her capacity for love.

**WENDELL.** Love is overrated. And what is a heart—but a piece of meat—a muscle—a piece of flesh to be devoured? Do you bake it? Boil it? Season it with pepper? Or do you smoke it—until it's blackened? And to think you came all this way—you drove 'cross country for a lesbian—a card-carrying, Indigo Girls/Ani DiFranco-listening, certified lesbian. That ain't love, man. That's stupid. What the hell were you thinking? Coming here, looking like a wounded animal. A stray dog hit by a car. Do you think my sister can heal you?

**BILLY.** *(Beat.)* She...in L.A. When I was with her—who I was...where I came from...it didn't hurt as much.

**WENDELL.** She can't heal ya. She got wounds of her own—injuries of her own—scars far worse than yours. How do I know? I know everything. Besides—I can smell your blood and hear your blues. And what I hear sounds pathetic.

**BILLY.** I'm not pathetic.

**WENDELL.** You're beyond pathetic. Lost in a desert of delusion. Your mouth is dry. And my sister is just a long tall drink you wanna swallow. But you're confused. You don't know vinegar from

water, water from wine or wine from sweat. All you know is you're thirsty and you think my lipstick lesbian sister is all you need to quench your thirst. Do you think that fountain between her legs gushes just for you? You don't even have a clue about where she's been or where she's going. Nor do you have a clue about this place—you've come to. Trying to get all up in my Kool Aid.

**BILLY.** Well, let me take a stab at it and try to guess the flavor. Something pretty fucked up must've happened to you in New York for you to feel the need to tell me a lie. Yeah—let's change the subject back to you and your pain, Wendell. Handsome Wendell. It was your daddy that called you handsome, right? When was that? Was that before or after the bedtime story. Or right before he tucked you in?

**WENDELL.** You really want to start some shit now. Don'tchu?

*(As WENDELL talks, he slowly walks circles around BILLY, limping badly, moving clumsily with his table-leg crutch. But as the scene progresses, at some point his limp will disappear.)*

**WENDELL.** And why should I have to lie to you? You ain't nobody. Now I said I ain't been to no New York, no Juilliard. Never been nowhere. Never no need to go. I'm the biggest star there is 'round these parts. Why should I leave here where I'm somebody—and go somewhere, where I'm nobody? Does that make any kinda sense to you? I mean in California you could be somebody or you could be nobody. I don't know what you are out there, 'cause I don't know ya. But I know one thing for sure—you're a big nobody here. Don't nobody here know ya, but my sister. So that makes you a nobody—'cause she's nobody. See—if—you die around here, nobody would miss you. My sister will miss ya. Maybe. But she ain't nobody—so nobody will miss ya. And seeing how you'se an orphan—your parents won't miss ya—'cause you ain't got none!!! So nobody will miss you—'cause you ain't nobody and you came from nowhere.

**MAMA.** Wendell Megan, what's taking you so long to come see about me?

**BILLY.** Your mama's calling you—

**WENDELL.** Mama's always callin' me. I don't pay her no mind and neither should you. 'Specially when she's talkin' 'bout me. Don't believe a word she tells you about me. She's nobody to listen to. She hasn't been playing with a full deck since her stroke—maybe even before that—she wouldn't know the truth from a lie if the truth hit her in the eye.

**BILLY.** And what about you?

**WENDELL.** What about me?

**BILLY.** Would you know the truth if it was staring you in the face?

**WENDELL.** Would you?

**BILLY.** Let me go out on a limb here and speculate that something happened in New York that you ashamed of. Am I right? Something dark—so dark—you feel compelled to block it from your mind—delete it from your memory. Tell me if I'm getting warm or not.

**WENDELL.** If you think that's true—then you way off the mark.

**BILLY.** Then how about the truth between us? The truth between you and I—is that you hate my guts—and I don't understand why?

**WENDELL.** You talk down to me like you know me—

**BILLY.** You talk down to me—

**WENDELL.** But you don't know me.

**BILLY.** (*Overlap:*) You talk down to me—

**WENDELL.** (*Overlap:*) You don't have a clue about who I am.

**BILLY.** (*Overlap:*) You're the one who's clueless—

**WENDELL.** (*Overlap:*) Sticking your fucking nose in places you don't belong. Because you're fucking my sister—it don't mean you can fuck with me. You got a lotta nerve, Billy Boy—a lot of fucking nerve.

**BILLY.** Maybe I was fucking with you earlier—in my own little way—

**WENDELL.** See, see—there you go—

**BILLY.** But there was no malice behind my fuckin' with you. My fuckin' with you was for my entertainment—which meant my intentions were harmless.

**WENDELL.** See, see, see—you gotta lotta nerve. New in town and you gonna come to my house and start fucking with me—in my house—

**BILLY.** Your mama's house—

**WENDELL.** See? There you go again. Fucking with me!

**BILLY.** I'm sorry, man—

**WENDELL.** You sure are sorry—

**BILLY.** Look, Wendell—man—I just want to be your friend, man. You're my lover's brother and I just want to be close. That's why I asked if I could sit in with you at the club. And I still wanna sit in—if you'd let me.

**WENDELL.** It's time for you to go, man—time for you to go.

**BILLY.** Get it thru your thick skull. I ain't going nowhere without saying goodbye to your sister!

**WENDELL.** That's whatchu think? That's where you're wrong.

*(WENDELL, suddenly, without warning, raises the table leg and brings it down on BILLY's head with all his might. BILLY slumps to the floor, dazed and confused, but still conscious. WENDELL drops the crutch and grabs BILLY by the head, smashing BILLY's head against the floor, once.)*

**BILLY.** *(Groggy:)* Whatchu doing, man?

**WENDELL.** *(In a trance:)* The same damn thing—somebody did to me. New York is where it started—but this is where it ends.

**BILLY.** Hey, man—don't—hey, man—what—hey, Wend—why? What—hey, don't! Don't!

*(WENDELL gets behind BILLY and rips his pants down. He sticks his tongue in BILLY's ear. WENDELL slowly simulates raping BILLY, sodomizing him.)*

WENDELL. Do you like that? You like that?

BILLY. *(Gasping:)* No! No!

WENDELL. How's that?

BILLY. Stop.

WENDELL. Is this whatchu wanted?

BILLY. Stop it!

WENDELL. Is that whatchu wanted? Or is this whatchu wanted?

BILLY. Please stop!

WENDELL. *(Humping:)* Do you feel me?! Do you feel me?!

BILLY. Please—stop.

WENDELL. *(Humping:)* Too late now. You didn't see this coming. Or did ya? You wanted this right—right? You wanted this.

*(As WENDELL becomes more crazed, more demented, his violence grows, and grows, as he slowly bangs BILLY's head against the floor, rendering him unconscious. BILLY dies at some point while WENDELL continues to sodomize him.)*

WENDELL. You only wanted to sit in with me to show me up! To embarrass me—make me look bad in my hometown. You wanna come into my club, and blow me off the stage with your playing. You think—I'm gonna let a nobody like you walk into my club and show me up? Fuck you! Suppose I told you there is no club? What would you say then? *(He hovers over BILLY, raping BILLY, in a stylized manner. He is killing BILLY and raping him at the same time.)* Huh?! What would you say then?! There is no club! Is that what you wanted to hear? Is that the truth you were looking for? Yeah, nigger—I'm doing you—I'm fucking you—the way somebody fucked me. Is this the kinda of sitting in you had in mind? You nosey-ass motherfucker. I tried to warn you. But you just wouldn't—you couldn't leave it alone. I told you once—you couldn't play—you couldn't sit in—but naw— You couldn't take no for an answer—now look at you—

MAMA. Wendell! Billy!! What's going on in there?!

**WENDELL.** Do you like sitting in? Huh, boy? See—I can't control that highway noise out there! But I control everything in here. This was never about you and my sister...this was about you and me from the git, Billy Boy! Yeah—you and me—and my need to control— My sister was just a pawn in the game—thrown in to bring you to me. You see, you and I—we are two old spirits who have a history! I have been in the belly of the beast for so long, I have become the beast. Look at me, Billy Boy—I too am a keeper of secrets—oh, you just don't know what deeds I have done. You see Billy—there's this little bar—this little fag bar down on 13th Street, near St. Charles...I go there sometimes—looking for orphans—looking for you, Billy Boy—I go there looking for you. I can always spot the orphans, the throw-away boys—the ones no one will miss. They are the ones that are always just a little too eager to please—they are the ones with the trusting eyes—with they hearts on they sleeves. They—the orphan boys—they always—they always act a little too desperate for love to be normal. Their air of desperation gives them away to me. They are just so fucking stupid—they'll leave with almost anyone. Aw—it's so easy. And having money—just a little bit of money—enough to buy a kid a meal—only makes it easier. They're so hungry. Starved. So, I feed them. Then I fuck them. Then I kill them. Then I dispose of them. Under the highway. *(A beat.)* Sometimes my playing—gets a bit off-key. It sounds off-key to most people, but it don't sound off-key to me. Discord. Modulation. Minor-chord progression. Do you know what I'm saying—Billy Boy? I tried to warn ya—but you knew this moment was coming, when we first laid eyes on each other, when you got up and strutted your stuff for me. You knew, what you were doing, swinging your stuff for me to see.

*(RITA MAE enters with an armful of groceries. She drops the groceries, splattering them all over the floor.)*

**RITA MAE.** Whatchu doing, Wendell?! Whatchu doing?!

*(WENDELL is still in a trance, humping BILLY, oblivious to RITA MAE as she retrieves the table leg, and brings it down on her brother, repeatedly, until he falls to the floor.)*

**MAMA.** Rita Mae—what's going on in there?! What's going on?!

*(RITA MAE grabs BILLY and holds his body in her arms.)*

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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