

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

by

Denise O'Neal

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

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FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD received its world premiere on August 1st, 2013 at Midtown Art Center in Houston, TX. It was produced by Shabach Enterprise and directed by S. Denise O'Neal. Lighting and sound were designed by Mike McDermott. Stage manager was Arianna Day. Production assistants were Nate Jones, Tonyai Palmer and Jacqueline Wright. The cast was as followed:

PASTOR RAYMOND GREER ----- Byron Jacquet
CECIL BROWN-----Dave Osbie Shepard
RUSSELL HICKS.----- Gregory White
CLYDE PERKINS -----Brandon Morgan
NEIL SUMPTNER----- Todd Greenfield
VINCENT BOWERS----- Omar J Lewis
RICKIE DUNBAR----- .J R Marshall
BRUCE JENKINS ----- Tom Mosley

Special Note:

Opening song “He Brought Me In” (*reprised in Act II, Scene 8.*) was originally composed by the Freedom Institute for Recovery Management (The F.I.R.M). This song may be substituted with an alternative spiritual song of the director's choosing.

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

This play was set before me to remind me of the strength of the human spirit and the ability we all have to conquer adversity. I dedicate “Fly In The Windshield” to God, The O'Neal Family, Timothy and Yolanda Pender, Pastor Mitchell B. Stewart, Sr. and his wife, Mrs. Stewart, the brave men from the Freedom Institute for Recovery Management (The F.I.R.M) who trusted me in sharing their personal journey of freedom from drugs with the world, and all the simply amazing, utterly extraordinary people that inspired, encouraged and supported me in the completion of this work.

I hope I've made you proud...

And my deepest special thanks to my friend, Mike McDermott. Thank you for letting me know...I got it right!

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

ACT I

SCENE 1

At rise. Unknown man walks across stage smoking a cigarette, shaking from drugs or depicting his inner struggle to break free of his addiction. Lights fade as he exits stage. Lights rise again to reveal PASTOR GREER walking into his office.

PASTOR GREER. *(Sings to himself.)* He brought me in, from fields of sin. I thank God he brought me in. Just look out yonder where I had been, ohhh, I thank God he brought me in. *(Phone rings.)* *(Answering his phone.)* Pastor Greer speakin'! *(Chuckles.)* ... Yeah, it's really me! ... Well, who else you 'spect gone answer?...Hahahaha! Yeah, we still growin' brother. For now I answer my own phone... So tell me what brought ya' to make this call?... I see. Uhhh-hmmm... Well, look like our reputation gettin' 'round pretty good... YesSur! That is true. We done dealt with every drug addition under the sun, and one thing I know for sure, ain't no addiction in this world the good Lord can't help ya' get free from. It's by the Power of Gawd we have helped men just like you turn they lives around!...Uhhh-hmmm. Yes, I know...Ohhh, no need to explain nothin' to me. I know it get rough out there sometime. Understand exactly whatcha' goin' through...Well, that's why we here! Ever since we opened them doors the Lord has delivered the lost every time! And not one-uh my men done gone astray...Uhhh-humm. Ohhh, YesSur, I hear ya'! This old preacher know about "hard days", but it's alright we gone...*(With concern.)* Well, now you'on need to worry 'bout none-uh that. All you got to do is...Son? ... Well, I...*(With compassion.)* Look, I know ya' tried and failed before but, but see you got to... Just listen, son! Listen to me! Now, hear me when I tell ya' all that you been sayin', I done already heard before and I'm tellin' ya', I understand! But the question still remains Sir: Are ya' ready to change? And if you ain't ready by now,

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

when? (*Slightly irritated.*) Stop apologizin'! Ain't no need! And ain't no need-uh you feelin' *that* bad so just stop that too! Even the strongest man get weak sometime... Well, I suppose you right about that, but remember, nothin' in this life happens without purpose. (*A moment.*) Yeah. Well?... Can ya' get here?... Well, just come on in, son. Just bring ya'self and come on... We got room for ya' here. (*Lights fade.*)

SCENE 2

A small country church. Marching drum music fades in and continues softly. CECIL, whose loud footsteps and noisy key chains precede him, marches into the sanctuary. The room is furnished with six chairs and a podium. Once on stage Cecil ushers in five men that begin walking single file in a circle. RUSSELL is standing inconspicuously side stage.

CECIL. (*Forceful.*) A'ight, a'ight! That's enough for now! Grab-uh chair. (*Men stop walking and take their seats. Cecil sees Russell.*) Well, whatcha' standin' over there for? Come on in! We ain't gone bite. Gone take-uh seat. (*Motioning to an empty seat.*) There go one right there. (*After Men are seated Cecil stands before them to speak. Authoritatively.*) For those of you that are new here, welcome! For those of you that have already been welcomed and have had of sudden lapse in memory, let me take this opportunity once again to remind you if you wantin' to stay “welcomed” you gone have to follow house rules, it's that simple! (*Pacing back and forth like a Drill Sargent.*) For the next ninety days when I tell you to talk, *you talk*. When I tell you to walk, *you walk*. I'm the one tell you when to eat, and when to sleep. Everything you need for liveliness is freely provided. Ain't no need for you to feel like you gotta take nothin', just come straight on out and ask for whatcha' need. Everything here is done on a strict time schedule. Every morning, at 7am you will rise and shine and will be given fifteen minutes to shower, shave and brush any teeth you have left in your mouth, then you will commence to cleanin' up your sleepin' areas until every inch of your room is spotless and in pristine order. If them floors ain't clean enough

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

for sweet Mother Theresa to eat-uh chicken wang dinner off of, well you better know to Cecil, that floor ain't clean! After you eat breakfast and in between your lunch and dinner, you will maintain a sixteen hour daily regimen of bible studies, CD lessons, scripture readings, church meetings, meditation prayer on your feet and on your knees until it is time for you to retire at 11pm. *(With sinister tone.)* Once you are here *(Pausing to glare at the men.)* there will be no physical contact with others. Your only communication outside of me and the good Pastor is with Gawd and the Word of Gawd which has the Power to renew your mind. You are highly encouraged to “Stay The Course”. That means if you leave this ninety day program before servin' your full term, you will not, and I repeat, will not, under any circumstances, be allowed to return. If you are found using drugs, you gone be removed from this here program right then and there! Ain't gone be no second chances, so you really need to think good and hard before you call yourself “actin' a fool” 'round here. Ain't no fightin', cussin' and fussin' allowed in this fine facility. Ain't no TV or cell phones allowed 'round here neither. Refusal to carry out an “immediate and direct” order will result in an “immediate and direct” discipline. *(Shouting.)* You will...

ALL MEN. *(Shouting.)* Go no where alone!

CECIL. *(Shouting.)* You will...

ALL MEN. *(Shouting.)* Handle no money!

CECIL. *(Shouting.)* You will...

ALL MEN. *(Shouting.)* Be accountable for your time!

CECIL. *(Shouting.)* And you will...

ALL MEN. *(Shouting.)* Attend church!

CECIL. Are there any question? I say any questions?

VINCENT. *(Shyly.)* Uhhh? I gotta question.

CECIL. *(Stopping his pacing to spin around.)* YesSur?

VINCENT. Well? Ain't been here but three days, and uhhh, the first two of them days been kinda cloudy. I hear your rules and all, but why we can't watch no TV? You talkin' ninety days! How I'm gone relax, man? *(Pastor Greer enters stage upon hearing VINCENT'S protest.)*

PASTOR GREER. Relax?!! *(Chuckles.)* Whatcha' think this is? Some

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

kinda vacation? You heard him straight! Ain't no TV! Rules here is hard 'cause we want ya' to make it! I tell ya', I'm pullin' for ya', but I'll be damned if I let some trifling, no-count junkie come up in this house thinkin' this some kinda free ride! Boy, you need to remember, ain't no hustle around this old preacher ain't already run, so if you runnin' game, you best be movin' on.

VINCENT. (*Rolling his eyes.*) Awwwghhh, here we go.

PASTOR GREER. Look-uh-here, boy! I didn't come here lookin' for no drug rehab, you did! It's already gone take-uh mess-uh Sundays to straighten you out! Now as far as you got to go, with all you got to deal with, you whinin' 'bout-uh TV? You gone let-uh "TV" stand the way of your victory? Is that what ya' sayin'?

VINCENT. (*Shocked.*) Pastor.

PASTOR GREER. All that cryin' you did to get into this program, now it look like you was just lyin' to my face? Was that ya' game?!!!

VINCENT. Awwwghhh, no Pastor, ain't no game about me! You got it all twisted!

PASTOR GREER. Ain't nobody twisted 'round here but you.

VINCENT. (*Grumbling under his breath.*) A'ight. If you say so.

PASTOR GREER. (*Washing his hand of him. Pointing towards the door.*) Gone pack your bags, boy! I'll pay your ticket home.

VINCENT. No!!! Now hold on now! You takin' this the wrong way.

PASTOR GREER. Well, now what "way" should I take it, Vincent? You's the only one in here back-talkin' 'cause ya' gone miss-uh few soap operas!

VINCENT. It's not that, it's just. Never mind, Rev. Everything's fine. I'll just serve my time here and get on back home.

PASTOR GREER. Ain't nobody holdin' ya' here against ya' will! You wanna quit? (*Moving himself aside.*) I'll move right on out ya' way!

VINCENT. (*Holding his chin up with pride.*) Ain't gone quit, Sur. I...I'm fine. I'mo be just fine without no TV.

PASTOR GREER. Well, that's good, Vince. Real good! Shol' glad we reached an understandin'! (*Making his way behind podium.*) Brothers, I need to be headin' out for an appointment. Gotta go outta town for a

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

minute, but I'll be back before your 4 o'clock bible study on Friday.
(*Dusting off his garment.*) Uhhh, I want ya'll to meet our newest member Russell. (*Motioning to Russell.*) Stand on up, boy! (*Russell stands up cautiously.*) Ya'll be sure to make him feel at home, ya' hear? (*Turning to Cecil.*) Cecil, come with me to Sister Davis office, I need to go over this itinerary one more time.

CECIL. Right behind ya', Pastor! (*Pastor Greer and Cecil exit stage. Men curiously turn their attention to Russell and wait for him to speak.*)

RUSSELL. Uhhh, Good morning. I'm uhhh, Russell...Russell Hicks.

CLYDE. (*Staring Russell down.*) Clyde Perkins. Crack head!

NEIL. (*Speaking immediately after CLYDE.*) Neil Sumptner. Meth head!

RICKIE. (*Enthusiastically.*) Name's Rickie, Rickie Dunbar. Friends call me "Hooch" 'cause my kinfolk raised me on moonshine since I was knee high to a grasshopper. We made the best moonshine this side-uh daylight, YesSur! My cousin Bubba let me taste-uh sample right on my granddaddy's back porch over fifty-five years ago and I tell ya' I been the family's number one spokesperson ever since! (*Optimistically.*) Six days sober though!

VINCENT. Vincent Bower. (*Shyly.*) Been usin' crack for five years.

RICKIE. (*Reminiscing.*) Ya' know my granddaddy used to tell me *alllll* the time: "Ain't no trouble in the world-uh good bottle-uh Hooch can't fix."

BRUCE. (*Proudly.*) Bruce Franklin. Cocaine user. Clean twenty-two days.

RICKIE. (*Still reminiscing.*) Funny about "fixin' things". From the drinkin' to the sellin' I was fixin' things all year long!!! Hehehehe!

CLYDE. (*Addressing Russell.*) So, uhhh? What you in here for?

RUSSELL. Oh, well, ya'll know how them streets is.

BRUCE. "*Ya'll know how them streets is*"? So what kinda drug is that?

RUSSELL. (*Conceding.*) They call 'em cigarettes.

BRUCE. Cigarettes?! Awwwgh them ain't no drugs! (*All Men burst out in laughter.*)

RICKIE. Hehehehe! Pre-school's down the street, Russ.

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

RUSSELL. Well, sometimes it's reefer!

NEIL. *(Jesting Russell.)* Wheeew Nelly! You smokin' reefer too? *(NEIL simulates smoking a joint and passing it over.)* Awwghhh, now that's really bad, man! *(Men continuing to tease Russell and simulate passing imaginary joint around.)*

CLYDE. Bad as bubble gum.

BRUCE. Bad as coco-pops!

RICKIE. Bad as... *(A realization.)* Well, hell, that's as bad as Tinker Belle! *(All Men laugh at an embarrassed Russell.)*

RUSSELL. It ain't funny!

NEIL. Look, I'm sorry, dude, but I can't see how you can fool yourself into thinkin' smokin' weed and smokin' meth is the same devil.

RUSSELL. I ain't never said that.

NEIL. Good! 'Cause it ain't! Meth'll make you so high you start prayin' to the good Lord above He won't never let ya' come down!

VINCENT. Make it so your feet don't touch the ground! *(Men laugh.)*

NEIL. Seein' flowers made-uh stars and stripes and hearin' tweetie birds flyin' all 'round your head.

CLYDE. And there you go just-uh flyin' right along with 'em!

NEIL. Weed don't make ya' do none of that stuff man. *(With malice as if offended.)* I can't even figure out why you showed up here! *(Cecil stomps in. The jingling of his keys can be heard before he enters.)*

CECIL. A'ight!!! Ya'll get up off ya' asses! Pastor want this whole place cleaned up by the time he get back! *(Addressing Vincent.)* OK, you sweep up over there. *(Addressing BRUCE and Clyde.)* You two start on them windows. *(Addressing Neil.)* Uhhh, you clean up the pews, throw out all them old programs from Sunday morning. Rickie, you can straighten up the pulpit. Clean them water glasses. Look right there. *(Directing RICKIE'S attention to the Pastor's chair.)* Brush off that lint under Pastor's chair. Russell, gone get some rags and wipe them air vents down, got dust buildin' up on 'em. Vince can show ya' where to find whatcha' need. Since he wanna watch TV so bad maybe he can do like "Survivor" and *fiind* where we hid the cleanin' supplies! *(A pause.)* Ya'll push these chairs back outta the way! *(Men stand and move their*

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

chairs around. Russell and Vincent exit briefly. Once all of the chairs are moved, Russell and Vincent re-enter with cleaning supplies for all and pass them out.) A'ight, everybody know what they gotta do. I want it clean, ya' hear? And when ya'll finish ya'll can do ya'll's walkin' meditation. *(Cecil exits. Men begin singing "I'm Building Me A Home" as they are cleaning.)*

BRUCE. OK, felluhs! Let's get to it!

ALL MEN. *(Sing.)* I'm building me a home. I'm building me a home. I'm building me a home, I'm building me a home. This earthly house. Is gonna soon decay. And my soul's gotta have somewhere to stay. *(While they are singing Men haze Russell and have him do their cleaning for them. Russell's frustration builds. Singing stops abruptly as Russell protests.)*

RUSSELL. *(Protesting. Throwing his cleaning rag down in disgust.)* Ain't they got no women 'round here to do all this cleanin'?

BRUCE. *(Bending down to pick up the rag and handing it back to Russell.)* We is the women, Russ!

RUSSELL. Awwwghhh, get away from me with that, man!

CLYDE. Hey, you gettin' mad over some cleanin'? Look, I'll clean every inch-uh of this place! All I know is if I serve my ninety days in here, I'on have to worry 'bout servin' no time at county. *(Boastfully. Standing at attention like a soldier.)* Clyde gone be reformed just long enough to clean up that dirty record. Hahahaha!!! Yeah, gone be a "model student" graduatin' with honors, ya' heard me?!!! Hahahaha!!! Soon as I get the first free breath of fresh air I'm up outta this place. Oh, you know where "Crack Head Clyde" headin'!

VINCENT. Back home huh?

CLYDE. YesSur! Back to Virginia!!!

BRUCE. I thought you and yo' wife was livin' down in New Orleans?

CLYDE. We is!!! *(With sinister tone.)* But I'mo take the scenic route through Virginia on my way home know what'uh mean? Sleep over-uh few nights, *(Grinding his hips seductively.)* ride up and down them hills and mountains, drink me some-uh that sweet water to quench my thirst!!!

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

NEIL. Ain't never remember that kind-uh Virginia. What part you talkin' about?

CLYDE. Uhhh??? Well? Hehehehe!!!

BRUCE. (*Sarcastically.*) Hehehehe...Yeah? What part, Clyde?

CLYDE. (*Proudly.*) Uhhh...I'm goin' to the "southern" part of 'Ginia!

NEIL. Oh yeeeah, out there by Shenandoah Valley. Real nice out there man, real nice!

VINCENT. Shol' is! You know, I'm sure I got some kinfolks out there! What town it's by? Ohhh, it don't matter, got 'em spread out all over! They ain't gone mind ya' stayin' with 'em.

CLYDE. Awwwgh, noaw! Don't worry 'bout it.

VINCENT. (*Undeterred.*) It ain't nothin', I can give 'em a call and tell 'em when you gone be headin' that way. Ohhh, they'll make everything real nice for ya'!

CLYDE. (*Nervously.*) Th...th...that's OK, Vince. I done made my own travel arrangements.

VINCENT. Ohhh, it ain't no problem, Clyde.

CLYDE. (*Increasingly annoyed.*) I said, don't worry 'bout it, Vince. Really!

VINCENT. (*Naively persisting.*) Well, my cousin Pete got plenty room in that old pig farm right cross the way from...

CLYDE. (*Exploding.*) Awwwghhh Good Lawd, boy!!! Look, I ain't goin' to the *State* of Virginia! I'm going to *see* Virginia! (*Speaking discreetly.*) As in Virginia Mae Frounce'! [Fron-SAY]

NEIL. Why you sly dog!!!

CLYDE. Hehehehe! Yeeeah, just bidin' my time 'til the coast is clear! Been plannin' this for-uh while. (*Semi-beat.*) Now is good-uh time as any.

RUSSELL. Time for what?

RICKIE. Uh-Oh! I can hear the dogs barkin'.

CLYDE. For me to be movin' on. (*Semi-beat.*) I'm leavin' my wife, man. (*Regretful.*) Far as I'm concerned, it's over!

NEIL. Well, I ain't leavin' my woman, no Sir! After I lost everything, on top-uh half the teeth in my head, Daisy still saw fit to stick with me. I

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

put that woman through hell and she never bailed out on me.

BRUCE. They don't make 'em like they used to do they?

NEIL. Damn straight they don't! That's why there ain't nothin' in this world I wouldn't do for her.

BRUCE. Well, me and my old lady ain't never had it good as you. All we did was fight! And I don't mean argue, I mean fight!

RUSSELL. So them fights land you in here?

BRUCE. Yep! Shol' did. But any judge in a court room could see: She had it comin'!

VINCENT. What she do?

BRUCE. Flushed my cocaine down the toilet! *(Men cringe at his comment.)*

BRUCE. I ain't lyin'! Flushed it all! She knew that was the only's thang I would half way pay attention to! I had my little bags stashed all 'round my house! When my supply got short, all I had to do was run errands for them dealers and I'd have me some more. "*Lemme cut that grass for ya' Sur!*". "*Oh, I'll load the truck for ya', Sur!*". Get on they good side and yo' daily habit be paid in full!

NEIL. So what happened after she flushed it down?

BRUCE. *(Painfully remembering.)* Well I, I beat her.

NEIL. Awwwghhh, I ain't gonna believe that! You just tapped her a little right?

BRUCE. Noaw, Neil. C'mon now. You know how them drugs do. *(With great remorse.)* I beat her. Like I was goin' in for a knock-out. *(Embarrassed.)* I beat her 'til she was half dead.

CLYDE. Well, I say for every *action*, there's a *re-action*. Hell, most of us would-uh done the same!

RICKIE. *(Emphatically.)* Not me!

VINCENT. Yeah right! I bet you'd whip-uh woman for pouring all your liquor down the drain!

RICKIE. Heck no! Why would I do that when I all I had to do was make some more! *(Facetiously.)* See?...That's another thing, *(Pointing at the Men.)* ya'll get to fightin' with your women and carryin' on. Knockin' doors off the hinges and smackin' 'em around. Hooch ain't never been

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

about no fightin'. See I fills my women's lives up with loooooove. I tell ya', ask any girl back in my home town 'bout Hooch! Betcha' a shiny new nickel she'll tell ya'. Hooch is the "man"!!!

VINCENT. Is that right?

RICKIE. (*Confidently.*) Oh yeah! And don't no woman tell Hooch what to do neither. I wear the pants, I run things and I always have the final say!

VINCENT. So if you got it all together, what brought you here?

RICKIE. (*Embarrassed. Rolling his eyes with a long sigh.*) My Maaama!!! (*Men explode in laughter.*)

BRUCE. Yo' mama?!!!

RICKIE. You heard me! Told me she got ninety-nine problems but a drunk ain't one!

NEIL. Rickie, you are some kinda special, man!

RICKIE. I'm just saying. I may be different from other alcoholics, but moonshine ain't never made me act that-uh way towards no woman.

CLYDE. 'Cause yo' maaama'll tan yo' hide if you did!

RICKIE. Whatever! Look, I just think if you gone get hooked on somethin' at worse it oughta just be "Devil Water"! I mean it's cheaper for one! It's legal! You can serve it in a cup at ya' parties! Heck, even if you ain't got no cups at ya' party, you can still pass the bottle 'round so's everybody get-uh swig!

CLYDE. Well, I don't give-uh good billy goat why none-uh ya'll up in here, and that goes double for this here "Whino from Hick'em County"! (*Pointing aimlessly.*) I think all ya' touched in the head!

RUSSELL. (*Addressing Clyde.*) So what about ya' kids?

CLYDE. (*Insulted.*) What about 'em? My kids is fine. They got they mama's to raise 'em, so they already know not to ask me for no money!

RUSSELL. (*Looking at Clyde in disgust.*) You gotta lotta nerve, man.

CLYDE. Humf, 'Scuse me? Who is you talkin' to?

RICKIE. (*Moving close to Russell.*) Hey, new blood, you might just wanna leave well enough alone. When all his women find out they'll make 'em see things clear! Might only be with one eye hangin' from the socket, but he will!

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

CLYDE. *(Looking directly at Russell.)* You know Hooch ain't the sharpest tool in the shed, but he was on to somethin' when he told you to leave well enough alone. What I do, the choices I make, ain't none-uh yo' damn business! Sho' wish the "Welcomin' Committee" would-uh warned me 'bout this uppity niggah rollin' up in here runnin' his mouth about things he don't know-uh damn thing about!

VINCENT. *(Shocked.)* Clyde?

CLYDE. Noaw! He don't even know me and gone stand there and try to judge me?!!!

RUSSELL. Well, I know some bull when I hear it!

BRUCE. *(Appealing to Russell.)* Just leave it alone, man!

CLYDE. Keep talkin', Russ! I'll stomp-uh mud hole in yo' face, boy!

NEIL. *(Shouting out to Clyde.)* Clyde!

RUSSELL. So I'm suppose to be afraid of you? You ain't worth the spit under my shoes! You better move around, man or you gone wish you had!

CLYDE. Hahahaha!!! *(Charging for Russell.)* Whhhheew! Ohhh, forget yo' face, I'm finna put my foot square up in yo'... *(Bruce and Neil rush in to stop Clyde before he can finish speaking.)*

BRUCE/NEIL. *(Shouting out to Clyde.)* Whoa! No!

CLYDE. *(Ready to fight.)* He don't know, man! I'll take it outside! *(Bruce desperately tries to calm Clyde down and hold him back.)*

BRUCE. *(Nervously appealing to Clyde.)* Clyde? You-you always did know how to tell-uh good joke, man! *(Chuckling.)* "Take it outside?" Now how you gone do that, huh? We in rehab remember?!!! You know they don't let us go play Tic-Tac-Toe! C'mon now, don't be gettin' yo' pressure up, OK? Just drop it, man!

VINCENT. Russ, you just got here. Chill out!

CLYDE. *(Addressing Russell.)* Come on, boy!

RUSSELL. *(Addressing Clyde.)* Let's go, chump! Punk ass! *(Clyde bolts toward Russell. Vincent rushes in to hold Russell back while Bruce and Neil retrain Clyde. Rickie charges in and forcefully centers himself between the two groups.)*

RICKIE. *(So furious he is shaking.)* Man, what the blazes gotten into

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

you two?!!! If you knuckle heads don't shut up all this noise!!! Cecil right next door! Now pipe down I tell ya' or he'll be on our backs all day!
(Cecil calmly enters. Men attempt to compose themselves.)

CECIL. On who back all day?!!! What's goin' on 'round here? I heard ya'll all the way down the hall! What's the problem, gentlemen?

CLYDE. *(Struggling to compose himself.)* Ahhh...Ain't no problem, no problem at all.

CECIL. *(Walking up to Rickie.)* Rickie?

RICKIE. YesSur?

CECIL. Look like ya' need-uh drank!

RICKIE. Noaw, I'm good.

CECIL. Neil? What's goin' on?

NEIL. *(Nervously.)* Cec, you-you know how we get. Just got stirred up talkin' 'bout...uh, Jesus! Yeah, thinkin' 'bout the goodness of the Lawd Amen! Russ just new, that's all. Everything's good!!!

CECIL. *(Walking up to Bruce.)* Bruce? I'm sure you would tell me if things wasn't straight in here wouldn't ya'?

BRUCE. Oh yeah, Brother Cecil! Yeah! Everybody a'ight! We good!

CECIL. Uhhh-hmmm. A'ight then! Well, I suppose since everybody in such-uh good mood, why don't ya'll take-uh break and walk around for a little while? How 'bout ya'll do *(A realization.)* an hour before ya' get back to cleanin' the church. That oughta be plenty time for ya'll to relax.

(Addressing Russell.) Uh Russ, since you new here just walk along with everybody else, you'll catch on. *(Addressing the Men like a Drill Sargent.)* BROTHERS! IN FORMATION! *(Men get into a circle and begin walking. Cecil stands watch.)*

RICKIE. I am a child of God.

CECIL. *(Shouting out to Rickie.)* Can't hear ya', Dunbar!

RICKIE. *(Much louder.)* I am a child of God!

NEIL. I am redeemed from the hand of the enemy.

CLYDE. I am forgiven.

BRUCE. I am saved by grace through faith.

VINCENT. I am justified.

RICKIE. I am sanctified.

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

NEIL. I am a new creature.

CLYDE. I am a partaker of His divine nature.

BRUCE. I am redeemed from the curse of the law.

VINCENT. *(Struggling with his words.)* Uhhh...I am delivered from the Powers of darkness.

RICKIE. I am led by the Spirit of God.

NEIL. I am a son of God. *(Cecil exits inconspicuously.)*

CLYDE. I am kept in safety wherever I go.

BRUCE. I am getting all my needs met by Jesus.

VINCENT. I am casting all my cares on Jesus. *(Lights fade.)*

RICKIE. *(Yawning.)* I am sleepy.

SCENE 3

Sanctuary. Men are quietly seated listening to Pastor Greer as he concludes bible study. Chairs are positioned facing the podium.

PASTOR GREER. Every head bowed. Every eye closed. *(A pause.)* Father, thank ya' for lettin' us be a hearer of ya' Word today. We praise ya' and proclaim you as King of Kings and Lord of Lord! We believe that every man within the sound of my voice has received revelation from ya', Father! We thank ya' for these things Oh Gawd, in the Mighty Name of Jesus! Amen!

ALL MEN. Amen! *(Pastor Greer closes his bible and takes out a stack of letters from the podium.)*

PASTOR GREER. A'ight, brothers, I got ya' letters in from ya' families. I'm sure ya'll been waitin' on 'em all week. *(Addressing Vincent.)* Uh, Vincent, why don't you gone pass these out. *(Vincent becomes nervous and hesitates.)*

PASTOR GREER. You a'ight, son? I said why don't ya' pass these here letters out.

VINCENT. *(Standing up. Carefully leans in towards Pastor Greer.)* Pastor, can I tell you somethin', privately?

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

PASTOR GREER. 'Course, brother, what's on ya' mind? (*Addressing the other Men.*) Uh, ya'll talk amongst ya'selves.

(*While Men are talking, Vincent whispers to Pastor Greer.*)

PASTOR GREER. (*Speaking softly between Vincent's jesters.*)...A'ight, a'ight...I understand.

VINCENT. Was hopin' you could kinda keep it, you know, between you and me, ya' feel me?

PASTOR GREER. (*Patronizing Vincent.*) Ohhh, yeaah.

VINCENT. I mean, in my opinion, they don't even need to know.

PASTOR GREER. (*Patting Vincent on the back.*) 'Course not! Well, I tell ya' what, don't you even worry 'bout it, brother. I gotcha covered on this one. Gone have-uh seat. (*Vincent sits down feeling relieved.*)

PASTOR GREER. (*Boldly.*) A'ight, men! Listen up! Uhhh, I had asked Vincent to pass out ya' letters; reckoned that was easy enough thing to do, but Vincent just pulled me over to the side, whispered in my ear, and told me he can't read! No Sur, not one blessed word of the English language! So he ain't gone be able to do that today! (*Men are shocked. Vincent is devastated and sinks into his chair. Pastor sadly looks at Vincent.*)

There are no secrets here. (*Beat. Boldly proclaiming.*) Vincent Bowers, as Gawd is my witness, before you leave this program, you *will* learn how to read. (*With tenderness.*) Everybody got-uh dark road they gotta travel. We just here to help you on your way. (*Pastor Greer continues passes out mail to the Men.*) Sumptner. Got mail. Franklin. Perkins. Clyde? (*Lightly smelling the letter.*) This the third perfumed letter you done got from this woman. Who is she?

CLYDE. Who is she? (*Men purposely look away.*)

PASTOR GREER. I ain't stutter.

CLYDE. Hummpf, hehe, she, uhhh, she ain't nobody, Pastor. Just kinfolk.

PASTOR GREER. Really? Well, I ain't never got no letter like this! Not from no kinfolk, anyway. You think maybe when uhhh (*Looks at letter for sender's name.*) Cousin Virginia writes you a letter she be gettin' confused? Maybe she spraying these letters down 'cause she under the impression that she sending these letters to her lover instead of

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

her kinfolk?

CLYDE. I...I don't know! Probably so, Rev! Ain't never professed to understandin' what foolish things women folk do. But one thing I *do* know! Even if Vincent can't, I sho'nuff know how to read! So if you'd be so kind as to hand me that letter I'll be able to find out exactly what all this confusion is about.

PASTOR GREER. Ohhh, now it wouldn't be right for me as the shepherd of this flock to leave the burden of readin' a suspicious letter all to ya'self now would it? *(Semi-beat.)* Most of us here can read too, some of us, better than others. *(Beat.)* Brothers, why don't we all enjoy the readin' of Clyde's letter together!

CLYDE. What?

PASTOR GREER. *(Passing the letter to Russell.)* Russell, read this here letter out loud so everybody can hear. *(Russell stands to take the letter.)*

CLYDE. *(Protesting.)* Awwwghhh, Pastor! Now wait-uh minute! This ain't necessary!!! It's just-uh little perfume sprayed on it! Ain't no reason to go gettin' all concerned and things!

PASTOR GREER. Well, son, if it ain't nothin' to it, whatcha' nervous for?

CLYDE. Ain't nervous Pastor! It's just that. Well? *(A pause.)(Emphatically.)* Letters 'spose to be private!

PASTOR GREER. *(Boldly.)* Sit down, Clyde!

CLYDE. Well, can I at least go to the bathroom first? My stomach churnin' awful bad right now!

PASTOR GREER. *(Stoically.)* Hold it in! *(Nods head towards Russell.)* Read! *(Pastor Greer sits in his chair next to the podium. Clyde is seething and reluctantly sits back down along with the others. Russell opens the letter and begins to read.)*

RUSSELL. Dear Clyde...

CLYDE. *(Bowing then shaking his head.)* Awwwghhh, Lawd! No, Lawd!!!

RUSSELL. Dear Clyde. *(Watching Clyde's reaction.)* You've been on my mind constantly since you left.

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

CLYDE. (*Quietly pleading.*) Fix it, Jesus!!!

RUSSELL. And I just wanted to send you this letter to let you know...

CLYDE. (*Earnestly pleading.*) Right now, Lawd...

RUSSELL. (*Hesitating to antagonize Clyde.*) That you, *my dear cousin*, and your darling family, are in my prayers. (*Clyde realizes Russell is not reading the actual words of the letter.*)

CLYDE. (*Lifting up his head. Astonished.*) Jesus?

RUSSELL. I know that God is doing a miraculous work in your recovery. All of us are so proud of you back home. I'm sure by now you might have noticed the fragrance I've been spraying on your letters. I hope you don't mind. If you remember, it was the one mama used to wear all the time. Of all the perfumes mama had, this one was her favorite. She was wearing it the last time you saw her before she passed. I just thought it would be nice for you to have a piece of her to comfort you while you're there. Anyway, the town is having it's first annual wild chicken fair...

PASTOR GREER. (*Interrupting Russell.*) A'ight! You can stop now. That's enough! Thank ya', Brother Russell. (*Standing up to leave.*) My apologizes to ya', Brother Clyde. Appears you have-uh very caring family.

CLYDE. (*Phony.*) Awwwghhh, don't mention it, Pastor! Wasn't even worried! I knew the truth was gone prevail! Hehehehe!

PASTOR GREER. Well, now, men! Look like Sistah Velma's got lunch smellin' mighty good! Let us adjourn from here to the dining hall and set the table for the meal she prepared. Russell, pass that letter to Clyde. (*Men stand up to leave. Russell and Clyde wait for them to pass. Russell gives the letter to Clyde and leaves. Clyde quickly opens the letter.*)

CLYDE. (*Making sure he is alone.*) Dear Clyde, you've been on my mind constantly since you left...I miss the warmth of your body pressed against mine...I long for your sweet caress and passionate kisses on my thighs...I can't wait for you to leave that nagging wife so the two of us can finally be together...I love you, Clyde Perkins and I wanna have allll your crack babies...Come home soon, my love. Yours Always, Virginia.

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

Kiss, little kiss, big hug, hug, big kiss. (*Lights fade.*)

SCENE 4

Dining Room. The Men are relaxing after their meal. For a brief moment, the sounds effects of a woman humming happily and cleaning the kitchen can be heard in the background. Background noise fades shortly after Neil begins to speak. Rickie is reclining and stretching his back as he reminisces about a memory that makes him blush.

RICKIE. (*Proudly.*) Ya' know, I think Sister Velma is honeysuckle sweet on me! (*Men break into laughter.*)

RUSSELL. Rickie? Sister Velma is old enough to be yo' grandmother. Now what make you think she done took-uh shining to you?

RICKIE. Well, my granddaddy told me: Age ain't nothin' but a number! And anybody with two eyes in their head oughta be able to see: Sister Velma want some Hooch.

NEIL. Man, that white lightning has fried your brain!

RICKIE. Oh c'mon, just think about it!!! It makes perfect sense! Listen to me now, I'mo tell ya' how I know!

NEIL. Well, you most certainly have my ear.

RICKIE. OK. How 'bout this: Sister Velma always gives me the biggest piece-uh chicken! Now that's as clear a sign as a sunny day!!!

BRUCE. Noaw, that's as clear a sign as mud!

RUSSELL. So that's really all you got? A big piece-uh chicken?

CLYDE. Yeah, Rickie, chicken don't seal no deal!

RICKIE. (*Matter of factly.*) Well, I been watchin'. (*A moment.*) And sometimes it's a few extra meatballs, or a bigger scoop-uh 'tater salad!

NEIL. Velma just tryin' to fatten you up!

CLYDE. Yeah, so she can put you out on that barbecue pit!

BRUCE. And buuurn off some of that rum. (*Men laugh at Rickie.*)

RICKIE. (*Mockingly.*) Well, Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha!!! Just hold on now, there's more! Now hear me out on this! (*With serious tone.*) 'Case ya'll haven't noticed, Sister Velma winks at me *allll* the time!!! (*Men laugh*

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

even harder at Rickie.)

BRUCE. Hahahaha!!! Oh my Gawd!!! Rickie? I hate to be the one to tell you this, but Sister Velma got-uh twitch!

VINCENT. Yeah, Hooch! She winks at everybody!

RICKIE. Awwwghhh whatever, man!! Laugh it up if ya' want to! Sister Velma wink "special" at Old Rickie! If you youngsters knew what passion looked like when it came over-uh woman, you'd keep your fool cacklin' to ya'self!

RUSSELL. Well, I guess we can't argue with-uh man sure as you!

RICKIE. Sure? Oh, I'm more than sure, brother. I bet my grandmama's farm on it. That woman's fallen head first in looove I know it! Gawd done showed it to me in a dream!

BRUCE. Gawd ain't showed you nothin', old fool! You better be glad you ain't had no dream like the one I had last night! I dreamed some mangy dawg ran off with my last bag of weed!

RICKIE. You just dreamed that 'cause ya' girl flushed your cocaine down the toilet!

BRUCE. Well, all I know is I almost fell out the bed screamin' and hollerin'! Ya'll didn't hear me?

NEIL. (*Irritated.*) Noaw! I couldn't hear-uh bless-ed thing on a count of Vincent snorin' the paint off the walls.

RUSSELL. Ohhh, now he right! You do snore pretty bad man!

CLYDE. Yeah, that's spelled S.N.O.R.E! (*Men laugh at Vincent.*)

NEIL. I hate to admit it man, you my brother and all, but I couldn't sleep through a coma with you in the room! (*Men laugh at Vincent.*)

VINCENT. (*Striking back.*) Well, I can't help it, man! Snored like that since I was little.

CLYDE. (*Extremely shocked.*) You snore like you done rot out half ya' nose since you was little?!!!

VINCENT. Ohhh, OK? You got jokes! (*Dramatic yawn.*) I feel-uh good long nap comin' on!

RICKIE. Take-uh nap then! Fine with me! But hold your head to the side or somethin'. Ain't fair for us to have to build-uh new roof for the one you cave in!

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

CLYDE. Yeah, roof!

ALL MEN. R.O.O.F. ROOF! (*Men laugh at Vincent.*)

RICKIE. Awwwghhh man, we just kiddin' with ya'! Don't pay us no mind.

BRUCE. Say Vince, I did wanna ask you somethin'. I'on mean no disrespect, but really man, I thought you could read! You keep up with us when we say them scriptures. I would-uh never known no different.

VINCENT. Well, that's 'cause I learned to memorize reeal good what people say. That's why I watch TV so much. I can memorize-uh whole show.

RUSSELL. Really?

VINCENT. Yep!

CLYDE. The whole show?

VINCENT. Just about!

NEIL. So which show you like the most?

VINCENT. Ohhh? Well, any of 'em do me just fine, but uh, well, them soap operas do make for good practice.

RICKIE. Hehehehe. So Pastor was right!

CLYDE. Memorize 'em, huh? (*Intrigued.*) Show us whatcha' got!

VINCENT. A'ight! How 'bout I give you a little taste! Gentlemen, I present to you the cliffhangin' scene from Eagle's Crest recited by your very own, Vincent Bowers.

CLYDE. (*Mumbling to Bruce.*) This better be good!

BRUCE. You got that right! (*Vincent stands tall, clears his throat and goes through the motions of preparing for a cheesy acting scene.*)

VINCENT. (*Depicting "Mother".*) John, how did you get this letter? Answer me! (*Depicting "John".*) After father's was killed a mysterious woman by the name of Genevieve delivered it to me. I wanted to talk to you about before I opened it. (*Depicting "Mother".*) Genevieve? Oh John, I have prayed that this day would never come. If you read this letter it will reveal the one terrible secret your father and I have tried to hide all these years. (*Depicting "John".*) What secret? (*Depicting "Mother".*) I BEG OF YOU! Don't open this Pandora's box! It will tear our family apart beyond repair. (*Depicting "John".*) I am a grown man

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

now, mother! You can't keep treating me like a child! (*Depicting "Mother".*) My darling John, it's best that you never know. Give me her letter, John! *GIVE IT TO ME NOW!* (*Depicting "John".*) NO, MOTHER! My father is in his grave! It's time I knew the truth! Now you can either tell me with your own mouth or watch me read this letter right before your own eyes. (*Depicting "Mother".*) *Alright! Alright!* I'll tell you! (*Semi-beat.*) John, I am NOT your birth mother!

(*Men gasp watching Vincent.*)

VINCENT. (*Depicting "John".*) *Mother? What are you saying?* (*Depicting "Mother".*) *It's true!* You are NOT my son. You are the product of a TORRID affair your father carried on with...THE MAID! And her name was GENEVIEVE. (*Men gasp even louder. Depicting "John".*) NO! This can't be true! (*Depicting "Mother".*) It's true, John! We chose to never to tell you the truth! The truth that would bring shame upon your father's name! He wanted to banish you forever, never to be seen of again, but I threw myself at his feet and begged him to keep you here so I could raise you as my very own. (*Depicting "John".*) NO, MOTHER! NO! (*Depicting "Mother".*) YES, JOHN! YES! You hold the EVIL truth in your hands! Her plans to destroy our family and the reason she killed your father are ALL. IN. THAT. LETTER! (*Depicting "John".*) NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO! (*Vincent takes a dramatic bow.*)

VINCENT. *Aaaand scene!* (*Men cheer and clap in amusement.*)

CLYDE. (*Proud.*) Vincent, you a'ight boy! Look like we gone be watchin' TV after all!

RICKIE. (*Utterly amazed.*) Now that right there is a gift straight from the Hand-uh Gawd!

VINCENT. (*Sitting down.*) It's a gift long as they don't ask me to write nothin' down! Shol' would be nice though.

NEIL. Well, don't go kickin' yourself. Everybody here's fixin' somethin' they broke. Don't worry 'bout it, brother, we're all gonna help ya'!

CLYDE. Yeah! All of us! Ain't that right, Brother Russ?

RUSSELL. (*Distracted.*) Yeah, man! Yeah! (*Russell has pulled out a small leather bound pocket diary and pen and is gently turning away*)

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

from the other Men for space to write.)

CLYDE. *(Antagonizing Russell.)* Say, Russ? Why you always writin' in that book?

RUSSELL. Oh, I'on know. Just like to write stories, that's all. Kinda like your "cousin" Virginia did.

CLYDE. Very funny! Let me see that book! You might be writin' somethin' you ain't got no business. *(Clyde reaches over and snatches the book from Russell.)*

RUSSELL. *(Protesting.)* Say, man! *(Russell stands up and tries to retrieve his book from Clyde. Clyde blocks Russell's reach.)* Hey! Give it back! I said give it back!!! *(Clyde reads a few words, laughs and then throws the book back at Russell.)*

CLYDE. Lawd! You ain't 'bout to cry is ya'? Fine! Take It! Ain't nothin' but some dumb poetry no way! Ain't nobody got time for that! *(Russell sits back down after retrieving his book and continues to write.)*

BRUCE. *(Trying to change the subject.)* Well, that was one fine meal wasn't it? Fellahs?

NEIL. Oh yeah! Real Good! Good meal!!!

RICKIE. Yeah! Yeah! Nice meatballs!

VINCENT. Very good meal! Delicious!

BRUCE. Well, c'mon ya'll, let's get on up. Clean this here table off. *(All Men (except Russell) prepare to leave. Russell stays behind and continues to write in his book.)*

NEIL. Yeah, we got another class in fifteen minutes.

RICKIE. I think I'mo go in and check on Velma.

VINCENT. Why don't I go with ya', you gone need some back-up with her.

RICKIE. *(Stopping in his tracks. Very seriously.)* I most certainly do not! This is one slice-uh baloney I can fry alllll by myself! *(As Men leave out with playful banter, Clyde doubles back to the dining room table where Russell is seated.)*

CLYDE. *(Sipping his drink.)* So. Why'd you do it?

RUSSELL. Do what?

CLYDE. The thing with the letter. If anybody was hell-bent on sellin'

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

me out it was gone be you.

RUSSELL. Oh that? Yeah, that was some serious talent wasn't it?
(Semi-beat.) But that wasn't for you man! First of all, I ain't no snitch!
And second, why would I do somethin' that's gone add another hour
walkin' of meditation to the time we already got?

CLYDE. Well, they tell me walkin' is good exercise.

RUSSELL. We walk so much 'round here if they didn't feed us so good,
I'd be more thin in the face now than I was when I came up in here!
Don't get it twisted, man, I still think-uh dog treat his bone better than
you treat your own flesh and blood.

CLYDE. Now there you go again! Judgin' me!

RUSSELL. *(Focusing on the pages of his book.)* Just callin' it like I see
it.

CLYDE. HaHa!!! You really think you is so much damn better than me
don't ya'? Well, let me tell you somethin', boy! You and me cut from the
same cloth, brother! You might have everybody else 'round here fooled
but you ain't got nobody fooled up in here! Gone tell the truth, boy! You
got all ya' friends believin' you came up in here just 'cause ya' smoke-uh
little weed! Well, Clyde know after-uh while weed from the street ain't
strong enough to come to the party all by itself ain't it? Yeah, "Po'-Man
weed" gotta show up with one or two partners just so it can have-uh
good time!

RUSSELL. I'on know what you talkin' about, man.

CLYDE. Oh, you know alright! The average Joe Blow don't come up in
here! Neil, Rickie-nem, Bruce and Vince, all us at the bottom, man! You
here 'cause you been mixin' that weed so long you need rehab just to get
that monkey off yo' back! Look at ya'! You can't even tell yo' own self
the truth!

RUSSELL. Believe what you want, man.

CLYDE. C'mon Russ, whatcha' stir it with? White horse? Coke? PCP!!!

RUSSELL. That crack got you talkin' crazy!

CLYDE. Noaw, that crack got *you* talkin' crazy! Don't try to pull no
wool over Crackhead Clyde! You tryin' to tell me you cooked up that
meal and ain't put not one pinch-uh salt on it? Hell, crack is cheap!

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

(Walking slowly behind Russell.) Is that what you used? Crack?

(Speaking discreetly behind Russell.) All you needed was a nickel bag to smoke that reefer with and BAM! You in business!

RUSSELL. *(Standing up from his chair.)* I gotta class to attend, Mr. Crackhead. *(Russell attempts to leave. Clyde stops him.)*

CLYDE. Say, what is it exactly you tryin' to prove, man? That you ain't hooked bad as us? I mean if you was really all that much better, well, you wouldn't be in here *with us* now would ya'? But oh, I forgot, you hills and mountains ahead-uh everybody ain't ya'?

RUSSELL. What makes me different is that I wanna get clean so somebody can depend on me for once in my life!

CLYDE. And I don't?

RUSSELL. I seriously don't know, Clyde! But I ain't worried 'bout nobody else's intentions no more! I'm here to get my life straight, not yours! *(Regretfully.)* I feel bad for you but I feel worse for myself.

CLYDE. *(Mockingly, Overly dramatic.)* Awwwghhh. You feel bad? What's that, what they call it? "Remorse"! You feel remorse! *(Taking a serious tone.)* Well, all the remorse in the world ain't gone keep yo' kinfolks, yo' boss man, yo' woman, and yo' kids from lookin' you straight in yo' face and callin' you: "JUNKIE"! We in rehab together! They damn sho' can't tell the difference 'tween me and you while we in here, so I can't figure out what make you think you can?

RUSSELL. *(Emphatically.)* We ain't the same, Clyde!

CLYDE. Oh no?

RUSSELL. No. We. Ain't!!!

CLYDE. Well, I got news for ya', "Smokie"! You can deny it all ya' want, but we is!

RUSSELL. Look, we both got our own separate problems, man!

CLYDE. Noaw. Now see that's where ya' wrong! We both got chil'en that ain't seen no child support! Both us had the money and still let the lights get turnt off. Let them babies go hungry just 'cause we tryin' to get another hit! Both us been stepped over 'cause we sleepin' in the street! both us know what-uh jail cell feel like! *Both us black!*

RUSSELL. Well, I give ya' that one!

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

CLYDE. A'ight, well, here go one mo'! We both done lost control over everything we had! And we both standin' in this same room tryin' to get it back! So don't you tell me I ain't worth the spit under yo' shoes, boy! 'Cause if you didn't have yo' head so far stuck up in yo'...*(Calming himself from cursing.)*...If you didn't have yo' head so far stuck up in the air, maybe you'd look in the mirror and see, maybe you'd realize. *(A pause.)* I am exactly like you! And you is exactly like me! *(Lights fade.)*

SCENE 5

Sanctuary. The men are walking in a circle in daily meditation. Vincent is holding up a colorful small children's book at eye level. Six chairs are scattered upstage away from their circle. Cecil stands watch.

RICKIE. I am strong in the Lord and in the Power of His Might.

NEIL. I am doing all things through Christ that strengthens me.

CLYDE. I am an heir of God and a joint heir with Jesus.

BRUCE. I am an heir to the blessings of Abraham.

RUSSELL. I am observing and doing the Lord's commandments.

VINCENT. *(Slowly reading from a children's book.)* See Jane. See Jane Run.

RICKIE. I am blessed coming in and blessed going out.

NEIL. I am an heir of eternal life.

CLYDE. I am blessed with all spiritual blessings.

BRUCE. I am healed by His stripes.

RUSSELL. I am exercising my authority over the enemy.

VINCENT. *(Turning a page of the children's book.)* See Spot. See Spot run. Run Spot run. *(Cecil moves closer towards the Men to instruct them.)*

CECIL. *(Authoritatively.)* A'ight, men! Ya' been on ya' feet for a while. Why'on ya' finish the next few minutes prayin on ya' knees. *(Cecil exits. Each man selects a chair at random. The Men set their chairs down beside each other facing downstage. They kneel down before their chairs to pray. Bruce (who walks with a cane) sits upright in his chair. Vincent*

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

opens his book in the seat of his chair to continue reading. Dialog is spoken just above a whisper.)

BRUCE. Hey, Neil? You believe we hung in this long? You 'bout to finish ninety days, man! And after that you'll be graduatin' and goin' back home! I'm prayin' Gawd'll bless ya' real good when ya' get back home! *(Bruce pats Neil on the back.)*

NEIL. Bless ya', brother! Hey you just three weeks behind me. man. I'm prayin' the same for you!

RICKIE. Yeah! We all proud of ya'! *(Overly enthused.)* Hey, hey! I wrote my mama 'bout you just the other day! You come-uh long ways, man! I just wanna tell ya' I'm rootin' for ya'!

CLYDE. That's right, Neil! You almost through, man! First to leave the pound. Keep trustin' the Lord, brother!

RUSSELL. And when ya' get out you can watch football all day if ya' want to!

NEIL. *(Blissfully reminiscent.)* Awwwgghhh, football! And watchin' it next to Daisy! Makes it all worth it, man! *(Pausing reflectively.)* Thank you, guys! That meant a lot! *(Calling out to Vincent.)* Hey, Vince. How's ya' readin' comin'? *(Vincent has fallen asleep on the seat of his chair and is snoring thunderously. His face is resting on top of his opened book.)*
(All Men begin speaking in layers.)

BRUCE. Lord, this boy done fell asleep!

CLYDE. Awwwghhh man, look at this fool here!

RUSSELL. Hahahaha! Oh My Gawd! Vince?...*Vince!*

RICKIE. Now that's a cryin' shame! Wake the dead snorin' like that!
(All Men speaking in layers ends.)

RUSSELL. *(Still laughing.)* Ya'll don't laugh! Ya'll know Pastor on his back about his readin'. *(Men bow their heads briefly and attempt to pray, but Vincent's snoring is still too loud.)*

RICKIE. Ya'll, *(Semi-beat.)* Jesus can't even hear us breathin' right now.

CLYDE. Rickie?

RICKIE. *(Feed up.)* Well, we ain't gettin' no prayers through in all this noise! One-uh ya'll go wake him up!!!

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

NEIL. I'll wake him up. *(Neil quietly gets up, tips over to Vincent and, as a prank, stands over him and violently startles him awake.)*

NEIL. *(Barking loudly.)* ROOF, ROOF, ROOF, ROOF, ROOF!!! *(As Vincent jolts awake the Men explode in laughter.)*

VINCENT. *(Waking up.)* I'm up! I'm Up!!! *(Neil, still laughing, returns to his seat and sits down.)*

BRUCE. *(Still laughing hysterically.)* Vince man, gotta be somethin' wrong with you! You need to get that checked out! *(Men remaining rise from their knees to sit in their chairs.)*

VINCENT. Bruce, I be tired!!! When ya'll be sleep I'm up readin' "Fun with Dick and Jane"! Why'on ya'll cut-uh brother some slack!

RICKIE. Why'on *you* cut *us* some slack! Sleep somewhere outside, man! When you fall off can't none-uh us 'cept Clyde even get no sleep! If we *do* it's 'cause we done passed out from torture! Just fell out from fatigue! *(Closing his eyes tightly and stretching his hand out towards Vincent. Shouting out.)* Jesus! Be a "muzzle"! Right now, Lord! Do it in Jesus name! *(All Men (except Vincent) laugh.)*

VINCENT. *(Getting comfortable in his chair and preparing to go back to sleep.)* Ain't nobody thinkin' about ya'll!!!

CLYDE. Hey ain't today Tuesday?

BRUCE. Yeah, why?

CLYDE. Mail come on Tuesdays. Kinda waitin' on a letter. *(Cecil clanging keys are heard off stage signaling his coming. The Men hear this and quickly return to a kneeling position before their chairs. They pretend to be in meditation and keep their heads bowed. Vincent doesn't return to kneeling because he has fallen back to sleep while sitting in his chair. Cecil enters pacing back and forth. Cecil is on his cell phone. He unsuccessfully tries to keep his voice down while he tries to comfort his girlfriend.)*

CECIL. *(Sweetly appealing.)* Awwwghhh, baby?...Don't be that way!...I told ya' before, baby, I like ya' big! *(Semi-beat.)* Now Pearlina, baby don't say that! You just "big boned" that's all!

BRUCE. Clyde, you waitin' on another perfumed letter? You ain't learned nothin' from last time?

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

CLYDE. I ain't lookin' for no letter from Virginia. My mind on somethin' else. I'm waitin' to hear from...*(The loudness of Cecil's conversation interrupts him.)*

CECIL. Baby! Once-uh man go "big" he don't never go "twig"!

NEIL. Oh, Daisy! Her letter oughta be here today. Last time she wrote she said she got somethin' real important to tell me! *(Leaning over to Bruce.)* I can't wait to read that letter, man! I think she's gonna say yes! *(Pastor Greer enters and, to Cecil's surprise, runs into him while he is on the cell phone.)*

CECIL. *(Startled.)* Pastor? You back early!

PASTOR GREER. Is that a'right with you?*(Vincent begins snoring again.)*

CECIL. *(Looking over to Vincent, trying to ignore his snoring.)* Oh, mighty fine, Sur! I was just, uh, counselin' Sister Pearline.

PASTOR GREER. *(Very irritated.)* Cecil? We got women folk all 'round this church to counsel that girl!

CECIL. YesSur, I know.

PASTOR GREER. It don't need to be *you* all the time!

CECIL. You right, Sur.

PASTOR GREER. She always comin' 'round here to see you when she oughta be home takin' care of them chil'ren.

CECIL. YesSur.

PASTOR GREER. Then she always... *(Pastor Greer is finally distracted by Vincent's snoring. He slowly walks downstage behind Vincent.)*

PASTOR GREER. *(Shouting out.)* Wake up, Vincent! *(Vincent is startled awake from sleeping.)*

PASTOR GREER. *(With long sigh. Shaking his head at Vincent.)* Lawd! *(Beat.)* A'ight, ya'll get up! Got some real good news I wanna tell ya'! *(Men rise from their knees then attentively move their chairs around Pastor Greer to sit down. Cecil stands by.)*

PASTOR GREER. Brothers, you never know how Gawd is gonna bless ya'. Even through tragedy He still smilin' down on us! *(A pause.)* When I left ya'll on Wednesday, it was because I had gotten a call to meet with-

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

uh man by the name of Stubblefield.

RICKIE. Jethro Stubblefield?

PASTOR GREER. That's the one. Very important man in the community, owns a line of trucking companies, real estate investments here and there.

BRUCE. Yeah, I remember him. His son was on drugs. Got killed in that hit and run.

PASTOR GREER. Yeah, *(Remorsefully.)* I know everybody got they time to go, but that shol' was a sad day. Willie hadn't too long graduated from this here program.

CLYDE. So what's the blessin'?

PASTOR GREER. We were the only program to get Willie off heroin, so Jethro set up a memorial and named us as the beneficiary. Every month for the next ten years a truckload of supplies, food, clothin', money for the light bill, whatever we run short on will be made to our humble assembly. Now ain't that good news?

ALL MEN. *(Clapping and enthused.)* Amen!

PASTOR GREER. Now in a few days the first shipment of supplies will be here. I'mo need ya'll's help in unloadin' them trucks.

CECIL. *(Kissing up.)* Anything you need, Pastor! We ready!

PASTOR GREER. Cecil, tell Deacon Jones to get on the phone to Stubblefield's secretary and find out the exact time we oughta be expectin' 'em to come through. I want everything in place so they won't have to wait.

CECIL. You got it!

PASTOR GREER. Thank ya', Brother Cecil. *(Cecil exits.)*

PASTOR GREER. A'ight, now that that's squared away, let me gone pass out ya' mail. *(Pastor Greer retrieves a small stack of letters and one children's book from his podium and passes them out.)* Sumptner.

Perkins. Franklin. Dunbar. Hicks...*(Proudly handing Vincent a new book to read.)*...Bowers. *(Beat.)* A'ight now, Pastor Lincoln and his fellowship gone be joinin' us for bible study tonight, so we gone need to get the church ready to accommodate about fifty more people. *(Semi-beat.)* I need to go prepare myself to bring the Word so I will see you in service

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

tonight. Ya'll carry on. *(Pastor Greer exits. All Men get their mail and prepare to leave but Neil stays behind so he can read his letter in private. When Neil hears Cecil coming he hides in a corner.)*

CECIL. *(Yelling out jokingly offstage. Phony.)* "Main Man" Jones! You a'ight with me, Deek! *(Patting the large collection of keys clipped to his belt.)* That's right! Got the Keys to the Kingdom! I'm tight with Jesus so let me know when ya' wanna go in! He He He He! *(Once Cecil is on stage he carefully looks around to make sure he is alone. Seeing that the coast is clear, Cecil quietly plants drugs in the sanctuary and exits the stage. Neil briefly comes out reading his letter and becomes very troubled. Neil exits again moments before Russell enters stage.)*

RUSSELL. *(Looking for Neil.)* Hey, Neil? You in here, man? Neil? *(Exiting stage, calling for Neil.)* Neil! Say, Neil! *(After Russell has gone offstage, Neil slowly comes out from hiding. Russell enters again and sees Neil.)*

RUSSELL. What you hangin' 'round here for, man? You know we need to put these extra chairs down for service. Come on now.

NEIL. *(Troubled.)* I ain't got time to worry about that right now, Russ. I gotta leave, man.

RUSSELL. What?

NEIL. You heard me! I gotta get home! I can't stay here no more!

RUSSELL. Wait-uh minute! What's wrong?!!!

NEIL. *(Annoyed.)* I can't talk about it right now, Russ. I gotta talk to Pastor; tell him I gotta leave right now!

RUSSELL. Neil man, calm down! Was it somethin' you read in the letter?

NEIL. *(Growing irritated.)* It's personal, man! I don't wanna talk about it!

RUSSELL. Man, we ain't got no secrets here! Why'on you just tell me what's wrong?

NEIL. *(Annoyed.)* Russ, I said I don't wanna talk about it, dude! Ain't nothin' for you to be concerned about. All I know is I gotta find a way to get back home as fast as I can! *(A pause.)* By any means necessary!

RUSSELL. Any means necessary? OK, you startin' to scare me, man. If

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

ya' just let me know what's goin' on maybe I can help ya'!

NEIL. (*Exploding.*) I just told you, you can't help me! (*Semi beat.*) None of you can help me right now! Now just go back in the other room, man!

RUSSELL. Look, I ain't goin' nowhere! What the hell is goin' on with you?!!!

NEIL. (*With anguish.*) It's Daisy!

RUSSELL. Well, what's wrong with Daisy?

NEIL. Daisy's leavin' me for another man! I gotta leave tonight! Ain't no two ways about it. (*Firmly.*) And you better not tell no body I'm leavin' neither, you hear!!! I swear to God if you try to stand in my way I'll hunt you down and kill you dead!

RUSSELL. (*Trying not to be offended.*) Hey! Watch how ya' talk to me. (*With compassion.*) You ain't ya'self right now, but Gawd is with ya', man! Everything is gone be a'ight!

NEIL. Don't you give me that religious...(*Pointing at Russell, stopping himself from cursing.*) ain't in the mood.

RUSSELL. (*Firmly.*) OK, so you just gone leave? You ain't got no food, no car let alone money. You gone walk a thousand miles 'til you get home?

NEIL. (*Attacking.*) Maybe! Maybe "Sweet Baby Jesus'll" fix my feet so I can walk that road faster, but that ain't for you to be worryin' about is it?

RUSSELL. I ain't worried. It's just that women come and go, ain't no call for all of this.

NEIL. Just like that? That's how you believe?

RUSSELL. Well, they do!

NEIL. Well, I don't know how you "Black dudes from the hood" handle your women but I...I can't lose my Daisy!

RUSSELL. I'ma do you-uh favor and let that roll off my back.

NEIL. (*Beat.*) I'm sorry. Just can't believe she doin' me like this...

RUSSELL. Neil...

NEIL. (*Pacing. Becoming Irrational.*) I'm just gonna have to hitch a ride back. Shouldn't take me more than two days...

RUSSELL. Neil?

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

NEIL. I'll make one of those cardboard signs and beg for food.

RUSSELL. Say, man...

NEIL. I'll steal if I need to.

RUSSELL. Neil!!!

NEIL. What?!!!

RUSSELL. Dude, can I just tell you somethin'? Now you ain't gone like this, in fact this might even hurt, but Neil, she already gone.

NEIL. (*Yelling back at Russell.*) No she ain't! Nope! Ain't gonna accept that!

RUSSELL. Well, you gone have to! And you kickin' up all this sand tryin' to stop her from doin' somethin' she done already made up in her mind to do ain't gone fix nothin' now.

NEIL. I can try!

RUSSELL. You can *try* to pull ya'self together that's what you can try.

NEIL. What kinda man just stands by and let another man run off with his woman? No Sir! Daisy say she was gonna stick with me for life!

RUSSELL. Well, apparently she not!

NEIL. You can't tell me we wasn't makin' things work!

RUSSELL. Well, apparently ya'll wasn't!

NEIL. I thought we was doin' so good?

RUSSELL. Well, apparently ya'll ain't! But that don't mean you need to leave, not now, you too close to the prize!

NEIL. (*Shouting at Russell.*) None of this is worth it if she ain't by my side!!!

RUSSELL. It *is* worth it, Neil. It's all in how you lookin' at things. You know everything happens for a reason. It's just a test!

NEIL. Yeah, well, I'm gettin' feed up with all these test. (*Irrational.*) If I just had a little somethin', *just a little somethin' to calm my nerves*, maybe I could...

RUSSELL. You don't need no pipe man.

NEIL. (*Coldly. Looking directly at Russell.*) I'm a meth addict, Russ. I know *exactly* what I need!

RUSSELL. Neil, you tryin' to get home to a woman that's already givin' it up to another man.

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

NEIL. (*Exploding.*) You shut your mouth, ya' hear! You don't know her like I do!

RUSSELL. OK. OK. I apologize. Maybe life tellin' you, you ain't done payin' ya' dues.

NEIL. Well, who do I talk to about that, Russ? 'Cause I'll pay life whatever price it wants, but if its askin' me to figure out a way to live without Daisy, the air I breathe, well, noaw, I can't do that.

RUSSELL. You'll live through it, man.

NEIL. That's the thing, Russ! Livin' without her ain't livin' at all, it's just dead!

RUSSELL. (*Firmly. Growing impatient with Neil's weakness.*) Square ya' shoulders, Neil. Straighten ya' back, and let whatever's gone happen just happen.

NEIL. I guess you're right. (*Hopelessness deepens.*) Leavin' ain't gonna fix nothin'. (*Chuckles.*) Just don't know what I'm gonna do.

RUSSELL. You gone stay here! You gone graduate! You gone sit down and write her a letter and tell her if she gone leave you now, when you needed her the most, well, (*With arrogance.*) she can just kiss off! (*Russell, trying to cheer Neil, nudges him until he laughs.*)

NEIL. (*Faint laughter turns to sadness.*) Awwwghhh, man, I can't say that!

RUSSELL. Sure ya' can! Try it! Kiss off!!!

NEIL. (*Weak.*) Alright...Kiss off!

RUSSELL. Try it again.

(*Discouraged. Neil lets out a pitiful sign.*)

RUSSELL. Look, can you picture Daisy in yo' mind right now?

NEIL. Yeah...

RUSSELL. A'ight, stand up. (*Russell stands next to Neil as to egg him on.*) OK. Picture her on a nice warm sunny day with one-uh them fancy sundresses on. Ya see her?

NEIL. Yeah...

RUSSELL. Wind flowin' through her hair.

NEIL. Ummm-hmmm.

RUSSELL. She smilin'?

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

NEIL. *(With longing.)* Oh yeah! She smilin'!

RUSSELL. A'ight, keep holdin' that picture, OK?

NEIL. Alright...

RUSSELL. Now picture Daisy turnin' around.

NEIL. Yeah!

RUSSELL. And throwin' her arms around another man!

NEIL. *(Startled.)* Huh?!!!

RUSSELL. Awwwghhh, she rubbin' his back!

NEIL. *(Quickly looks at Russell.)* What?!!!

RUSSELL. *(Barking. Shaking Neil and pointing his attention outward.)*

Don't look at me, man, look at her!!!

NEIL. *(Jolted back to attention.)* Oh! Right!!! At her!

RUSSELL. OK, now picture her just-uh laughin'!!! Ya' see her laughin'?

NEIL. *(Perplexed.)* Why yes, I do?

RUSSELL. *(Egging Neil on.)* What else ya' see, huh?

NEIL. Uh, uh. She's kissin' him!

RUSSELL. *(Throwing a phony tantrum.)* Awwwghhh noaw!!! She kissin' 'em too?!!!

NEIL. *(Livid.)* Yeah! She's kissin' 'em! Right on the lips!!!

RUSSELL. *(Facetiously. Still throwing a fit.)* What?!!!

NEIL. *(Furious.)* Like I ain't even standin' here!

RUSSELL. *(Syking Neil up even more.)* Now that ain't right! You gone let her get away with that?!!!

NEIL. *(Growing more enraged.)* Noaw!

RUSSELL. You gonna let her disrespect you like that?

NEIL. *Hell noaw!*

RUSSELL. Well, whatcha' gone tell her, Neil?!!!

NEIL. *(Striking out.)* I'mo tell that two-timin' woman to kiss off!!! Kiss off!!! *(Sticking his chest out and standing tall.)* Kiss off!!!

RUSSELL. *(Pounding his chest.)* Yeah! There ya' go!!! Stand up tall with it!

NEIL. *(Pointing outward.)* Yeah, Daisy, Kiss off!!! *(Slapping his backside to the audience and dancing a jig.)* Kiss it, Kiss it, Kiss off!!!

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

(Gives high-five to Russell.)

RUSSELL. That's it, brother! Right to her face!

NEIL. *(Weakened. Out of breath. Breaking into tears.)* You just kiss off, ya' hear! I'ma pray for you, Daisy so just ksssss off!!! *(Neil breaks down wailing on the floor.)*

RUSSELL. *(Facetiously.)* See there? That wasn't so hard after all! *(Neil slowly begins to laughs at himself. Then Neil and Russell laugh together.)*

NEIL. Ya' think?

RUSSELL. *(Sarcastically.)* Piece-uh cake!

NEIL. Yeah, I know...

RUSSELL. Neil, all you can do is pray for her! Ya' only got-uh few more days to go! Ya' gotta see this thing through 'til the end, man! I know it wasn't right what she did, but ya' too close to throw in the towel now. She'll come around. Now you cool?

NEIL. Yeah. *(Embarrassed.)* Lost it for a minute there, didn't I?

RUSSELL. Uhhh? I'm gonna go with, yes! *(Russell and Neil laugh.)*

RUSSELL. You ready to go?

NEIL. Just give me a minute alone, huh?

RUSSELL. Nope! Leave you in here by yo'self somebody come up dead! Let's go! *(Neil composes himself. Neil and Russell begin their exit but run into Cecil as he enters the sanctuary.)*

CECIL. Whoa! Hold on here now! What ya'll doin' in here? Pastor told me he told ya'll to be gettin' them chairs ready!

RUSSELL. We are.

CECIL. *(Demanding.)* Well, where ya' chairs at then?

RUSSELL. We ain't left to go get 'em yet, we're on our way now.

CECIL. *(Attacking.)* Hicks you wasn't even supposed to be in here after Pastor left! And you neither, Sumptner! Ain't got no business hangin' 'round here! What ya' snoopin' 'round here for, huh? Answer me!

NEIL. Ain't nobody "snoopin' around". I was in here by myself when...

CECIL. *(Standing over Neil.)* What's First Rule, Sumptner?

NEIL. Go no where alone.

CECIL. So you gone break First Rule?

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

NEIL. I was reading my letter.

CECIL. If you gotta job to do, letter readin' come last! (*Pointing to Russell.*) Same for you, pot head!!! You really think you can just go where ever you wanna go don't ya'? I tell ya', you been on my last nerve every since you came up in here!

RUSSELL. Why you say that?

CECIL. (*Snapping back.*) 'Cause I always gotta tell you *two times* when to jump when it oughta be *one!* I'm gettin' reeeal sick-uh tellin' you to stay yo' ass in line, boy!

RUSSELL. Boy?

CECIL. You heard me!

RUSSELL. Look man, I always do what you ask me to do!

CECIL. Ahhhhh, no ya' don't no ya' don't just quit lyin'!!! You always flippin' yo' fingers up to house rules!

NEIL. Dude, I think you need to calm down!!!

CECIL. (*Walking right up to Neil's face.*) You better watch yo' tone, boy! You ain't earned no speakin' rights 'round here! You think I got some kinda respect for you? Truth is I can't stand you! You gone fool 'round and say somethin' on a day I don't feel like hearin' yo' mouth and before you can count to three, I'll be done fixed things so bad on you Pastor'll put yo' raggedy ass out! One high yellow word from me and you history!!!

NEIL. I'm just saying ain't no need-uh you yellin' at us like that!!!

CECIL. (*Snapping back.*) Shut yo' face, Sumptner!!! Not one mo' word! I know one thing, ya'll up in here without my say-so. Ya'll better not had touched nothin'! Not-uh damn thing better be outta it's rightful place you hear me?!!! Not one damn thang!!! Now both of ya' get in there and get them chairs ready for church! And you can forget about dinner 'cause we ain't fryin' nan piece-uh chicken for ya'll ass! (*Neil and Russell leave. Cecil checks to see if the coast is clear. Mysterious segue music mounts. Cecil goes back to check on the drugs he planted in the sanctuary. Just then Clyde, who had been ease dropping, quietly sneaks into the audience's view. Cecil does not see him. Clyde sees what Cecil does then exits inconspicuously before he is noticed. Lights fade.*)

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

SCENE 6

Sanctuary (or a small side room.) Vincent is privately reading one of his children's book.

VINCENT. *(Proudly.)* “I do not like green eggs and ham...” *(Clyde enters.)*

CLYDE. “...I do not like them Sam I am!”

VINCENT. *(Naively impressed.)* You read this book too?

CLYDE. Uh yeah, Vince. It's been-uh good while back, but yeah, I read it too. *(Semi-beat.)* So? How ya' readin' comin' along?

VINCENT. Oh, I'm doin' a'ight! Slow, but I'm readin'. *(Seeing that Clyde is uncomfortable.)* You a'ight?

CLYDE. Yeah, I'm good! Tired from settin' out them chairs.

VINCENT. Workin' always give me plenty time to think.

CLYDE. Oh yeah! Whole lotta thinkin' goin' on 'round here. Funny what God let-uh man see.

VINCENT. The kind-uh things you can see even with ya' eyes plucked out!

CLYDE. *(Reflecting.)* Yeah, them be the ones.

VINCENT. *(Examining the pages of his book.)* Mmm-hmmm. So *(A pause.)* You still think about her?

CLYDE. Huh? Uh. Well? Yeah! I'd be lyin' to ya' if I said I didn't.

VINCENT. Well, I can understand that! Good lovin' don't come 'round every day do it?

CLYDE. Ain't that the truth!

VINCENT. Sorry things ain't work out with you and ya' wife, man.

CLYDE. Awwwghhh, man. That's just how things go sometimes. But I'm-I'm good! Shoot, we did have-uh few good times, wasn't all bad. Just uh, well, you know, *like you said*, good love hard to find.

VINCENT. *(Gently.)* Noaw. I ain't say it was hard to find, I said it don't

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

come 'round every day. *(Beat.)* Ain't nothin' hard about love at all. Now I can quote just about anything word for word, but this is how it made sense to me: Love, *my brother*, is patient. Love is kind. It don't envy. It don't boast. It ain't proud. It don't disrespect nobody. It ain't seekin' for self, or flyin' off the handle. It don't keep no record of wrong. Love don't enjoy evil. It's excited about truth. It always got yo' back, always trusts, always hopes, always keep on keepin' on! *(Looking down towards his book.)* Love, don't never fail.

CLYDE. Well, there ya' have it! I suppose that woman really do love me!

VINCENT. *(Looking up from his book towards Clyde.)* I guess so, but Clyde? *(A pause.)* Which “woman” is we talkin' 'bout? *(Lights fade briefly.)*

SCENE 7

In the Pastor's office. Light splits for scene with Neil and Cecil. Cecil is seated behind Pastor Greer's desk relaxing with his feet up on the desk. Cecil is smoking a pipe while reading a magazine. Neil cautiously enters stage.

NEIL. *(Cautiously.)* Pastor gone?

CECIL. *(Nonchalantly.)* Yep. Til tomorrow.

NEIL. *(With great humility.)* Cecil, Look I gotta talk to ya'.

CECIL. *(Still peering at his magazine.)* Sure, Sumptner, talk!

NEIL. Well...uh.

CECIL. *(Impatiently.)* Spit it out!

NEIL. *(Gaining courage.)* Cecil, I need to leave here. Now. I'm askin', well, I'm askin' you to unlock the door tonight and let me walk.

(Cecil turns his full attention to Neil.)

NEIL. Cecil, I thought I was gonna be able to let it go, but I can't!

(Semi-beat.) Now I know you and Pastor is the only ones that's got a key to the doors, and I know that's the only way I can leave outta here,

(Carefully.) but I don't want Pastor to know about this so I'm comin' to

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

you.

CECIL. (*Exploding in laughter. Throwing his magazine on his desk.*) Hahahaha! Wheeeew! Now that's funny! (*Abruptly stopping his laughter.*) Boy, is you crazy? How many ways I gotta tell you? I ain't yo' friend! And you still gone sashay yo' ass in here askin' me for a favor? Ohhh, and it can't be no small favor neither! You want me to just let you tip outta here without tellin' Pastor? You might as well tuck yo' tail and run on up outta here!

NEIL. Cecil, please.

CECIL. Answers no, Sumptner! Ain't nobody tryin' to get fired from this cushy job over no "Meth Head" with eleven teeth in his mouth! Just quit like a man! Gone face up to 'em so you can be on yo' way! And when Pastor find out, ohhh, he'll let ya' leave a'ight! Right before I let my foot kick you square in yo' behind!

NEIL. Cecil, I don't wanna leave this way, but I need to get outta here man!

CECIL. (*Snapping back.*) And people in hell need water!

NEIL. Brother Cecil, listen to me.

CECIL. No!

NEIL. But Cecil...

CECIL. (*Firmly.*) I said no! Not without Pastor's say-so!

NEIL. (*With courage.*) Well...Then I ain't leaving this spot 'til you do!

CECIL. What?

NEIL. That's right! I'll tear this whole office apart, Cecil, you'll have to call the police to get me to stop! Then what's it gonna look like for you when Pastor comes back and sees you can't keep one of your men in line.

CECIL. Is that a threat?

NEIL. No. No Sir! I'm far past making threats; I ain't never been more serious. I'll do it, I swear! (*Relenting, not wanting to fight.*) I just need you hear me out. Now it's bad enough I'm lettin' everybody down. But I can't waste no more time.

CECIL. You soundin' reeeeeeally desperate right about now...

NEIL. I am.

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

CECIL. (*Long sigh.*) What's on ya' mind, Sumptner?

NEIL. Well...things gettin' bad at home. All I know is I'm the only one that can fix it and I'll do anything to get back home.

CECIL. Anything, huh?

NEIL. Just about.

CECIL. Where you tryin' to go?

NEIL. Out there by Groverton.

CECIL. Right outside Waynes' county?

NEIL. Yeah, last time I checked!

CECIL. (*A sharp realization to himself.*) Hot damn!

NEIL. Huh?

CECIL. Uh...Nothin', Sumptner. Listen, I might just let you out! How's that sound!

NEIL. (*Overjoyed.*) Oh my God, that's sounds like music to my ears! Cecil! Thank you!!!

CECIL. (*Phony. With motive.*) I mean when you gotta go handle somethin' important you'on need nothin' standin' in yo' way, right?

NEIL. Right! That's the last thing I need right now.

CECIL. Well, I suppose Pastor could “hear” you found-uh way to pick the lock and break out on ya' own, 'cept everybody know you ain't smart enough to pull that off while I'm 'round.

NEIL. (*With humility.*) Well, maybe you could say I must-uh owed a dealer some money 'cause his boys broke in, held you up at gun point and kidnapped me.

CECIL. Noaw, man! That don't even make no sense!

NEIL. Sorry.

CECIL. I'll just tell him you must-uh owed a dealer some money 'cause his boys broke in, held me at gun point and kidnapped you.

NEIL. OK? Sounds like-uh plan, *brother*.

CECIL. (*Slightly irritated.*) Neil, I done told you! I ain't ya' brother! Now I notice you keep throwin' that word 'round like it's the truth, but let's get one thing straight! I'm only talkin' to you 'cause I got this “errand” I need run! And it's somethin' I don't need my hands gettin' dirty on. (*A moment.*) I was gone try to pull this off myself, but since it

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

look like I done got me a little help things just got-uh lot easier. (*Semi-beat.*) You might not have to walk as far as you think if ya' play ya' cards right. (*A pause.*) So what's it worth to ya'?

NEIL. I ain't got nothin', Cecil, well, nothin' but my word, but you got my word!

CECIL. Yeah, I got the word of a dope head is what I got!

NEIL. Cecil, what is it you need done? I promise, I'll do it, man!

CECIL. You sho'? 'Cause I shol' ain't gone be the only one with some skin in the game!

NEIL. Skin in what game, Cecil?

CECIL. Look you sure you wanna get outta here or not?

NEIL. I'm sure, Cecil! I'm sure!

CECIL. (*Reluctantly.*) A'ight, Sumptner! Look here, I got some friends movin' some stuff around for me, about five miles outside-uh Waynes, but they givin' me a hard time about the move! But if you cooperate they'll finally get off my back 'cause this time I'll have somebody else steppin' in.

NEIL. A'ight! What's the plan?

CECIL. OK, I'll fix it so you can slip out. My boys'll meet you right on that corner, right there where I can see ya'. All you gotta do is get a package to a friend of mine.

NEIL. A'ight! Done! (*Pauses with curiosity.*) Hey, what's in the package?

CECIL. Well, now that really ain't none-uh yo' concern is it? But if you gotta know, why don't we just say it's yo' favorite "after school snack"!

NEIL. Meth?

CECIL. (*Proudly.*) YesSur! Made with eleven herbs and spices, hot and fresh outta meth house kitchen! Hehehehe. But don't you be gettin' no ideas! You ain't gettin' no free samples I don't care how long it's been! All you got comin' is a free ride, that's it! So if you plannin' on doin' this, you might as well get ya' mind off what's in my little bag.

NEIL. OK...

CECIL. And don't act so surprised, Sumptner. What you think? I'mo work *in* a drug rehab and not figure out how to make-uh drug rehab

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

work for me?

NEIL. Wow. This is heavy, man...

CECIL. (*Antagonizing Neil.*) Awwwwgh, I thought you was so determined! Don't tell me you runnin' scared!

NEIL. Cecil, I didn't have no problem delivering a package, but *that* ain't no regular package. I don't wanna get caught up in nothin' like that.

CECIL. Kinda late now.

NEIL. What? What you mean, Cecil?

CECIL. What I mean is changin' yo' mind ain't no option no mo'.

NEIL. Well, what if I ain't thought all this through. Maybe I shouldn't leave after all. Maybe we should just forget this whole thing. (*Neil moves to walk away.*)

CECIL. Ohhh, now you know I can't let ya' go back on ya' word! (*Neil stops in his tracks.*) Not after you talked to me like you done lost yo' mind.

NEIL. I can't do it, man. I mean what if something goes wrong, and I get arrested, or killed even? Then I'll never get back home to fix things with Daisy!

CECIL. Daisy? Is this what this is about? Some girl?

NEIL. She ain't "some girl"! She's my girl! The light of my life! The icing on my cake! The cherry on top of my hot fudge sundae! She's the...

CECIL. (*Forcefully interrupting Neil.*) Will you shut up! Look, whatever she is you outta be thankin' me for lettin' you go get her.

NEIL. It's not that I ain't thankful. It's just that, well, I just think that it might not be a bad idea to just stay here. Settle things up with her when I get out. (*Semi-beat.*) I can't be around a box full-uh drugs. Too risky gettin' hooked again!

CECIL. Well, that's just the risk you gone have to take, 'cause I already know from ya' letters where that pretty woman live. I'm sure she get lonely sometimes! Wouldn't be no trouble for me and my friends to go pay her a visit.

NEIL. (*Alarmed.*) You wouldn't!...

CECIL. You know what? On second thought it would be kinda rude-uh me to just show up with all that company, but I don't see nothin' wrong

FLY IN THE WINDSHIELD

with me droppin' by all by myself for a spell. We could talk over a fresh cup-uh coffee, nice slice-uh pie, I might even flash her-uh smile or two.

NEIL. Stop it, Cecil!

CECIL. (*Antagonizing Neil.*) Hahahaha! Give her-uh little "love tap"!

NEIL. (*Angry.*) That's enough, ya' hear!

CECIL. Hahahaha! Wheeeew! (*Abrupt sharpness.*) I'm just tryin' to paint a picture for ya'! Help you see things clear. (*Semi-beat.*) Doors of the church is opened. You just need to decide if you gone walk on through.

NEIL. (*A realization. Defeated.*) Picture's clear, Cec. When? (*Lights fade.*)

INTERMISSION

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