

America: Dreams and Nightmares
The Life and Death of Martin Luther King
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(A black Kid playing among the audience as they enter – he is cheeky but jovial - on stage two impoverished black men at a table, playing dominos and drinking ice tea – it is hot – it is Mississippi. The dominoes clack clack. The sound of crickets, maybe music from a tinny radio. As the audience is seated the black kid chooses an audience member in the front row, (white) and cheekily asks her for a date – he is not serious and explodes with laughter then runs away to the stage where he is welcomed by the older domino player).

Older Man: Hey where you bin, young feller? Gittin' late, now git to bed to bed.

Kid: Aw uncle, it ain't nine – I always stays up past nine in Chicago.

Older M: Well we does things diffrint down in Missussipeh; (Ruffles kid's hair). Take a glass o col' tea and git on in the back an' tomorrow we'll take you fishin for the biggest catfish you ever did see. Don't have no catfish in Chicago.

KID: Gee, I love to fish!

Other man: Then git to bed and mind you say your prayers!

KID: Yes sir. I gonna pray for a big catfish on my line – whoa-ho gottya gottya (mimes fishin and exits).

Other Man: (Resuming dominoes) Bright boy, how old's he?

Older Man: Fourteen, goin'on twen'y five. Them coloured folk from up north sure got a mouth on'em. Still ma sister's raised 'im well. Writes to me and says he gonna go to college. Hey ain't that a wonder? College for a black boy!!

Other man: Sure is. (Crickets, clacking dominos – the crickets fall silent – the two domino players look up, sensing something, a sense of menace. Two men in shadows pull on white hoods with eye slits. One has a cosh the other a rifle, the man with the cosh knocks at the door.

Older man: Who cud that be at this time? (Goes to door).

Cosh man: (Pushes Older man in chest with cosh and enters – the rifle man stays in shadows unseen).

Older M: Lawd help us!

Other M: Klan!

Older Man: We ain't dun nothin'!

Cosh man: Maybe you ain't. But you got a kid from Chicago in this shack right?

Older man: Nah, we ain't got no kids here. My two boys 's in Noo Orleans.

(Cosh man hits him, he falls across the table sending dominoes flying – the man with rifle appears at the door, levels gun at Older Man – pause – finally the other man falls to his knees and speaks).

Cosh Man: Don't lie to me, boy!

Other Man; Kid's in the back – come out boy. Come on out. These fine gentlmin won't do you no harm cos Jesus is watchin' over you and over them too, his eyes is upon them. (Rifle man hits Other man with rifle butt and drags out terrifies Kid when he appears).

KID: I ain't done nuffin, Sir.

Rifle Man; That's him, that's the little nigguh that asked ma daughter for a date. Git 'im over here.

Older Man: He's a child!

(The masked men take the Kid into the audience, they improvise and play cat and mouse with him – the two bruised black men on stage stand and hold each others hands with heads bowed in the spotlight so audience hear the violence but only those close by see it. Then a single shot).

Cosh man: You killed im!

Rifle: Yeah, din't mean to, but he were lippy I could not control my righteous anger.

Cosh: Well one less nigguh. Now what?

Rifle man: Tie a weight round his neck and toss him in the Mississippi.

Cosh man: Catfish can eat 'im.

(Song starts on stage – it may have started quietly earlier as cast assemble and enter a black church – Martin Luther King goes to the pulpit).

MLK: Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love triumphs! Corinthians 13 – That's the word of God. (Waves Bible) And I have tried to listen to his voice, ever since I was a child. I grew up here in Mississippi. An many of you wise folk might say I am not grown up enough to be your preacher, it is indeed a grave callin' for so young a man as I. But here in my Daddy's church I feel I have been called, called by a greater power that speaks to me and through me. And young as I am, I look upon this world and this state of Mississippi and I see hatred, fear, and injustice. But in the face of this evil I look for love as I look for God. And I pray that we may find love together. Amen.

(Song, MLK gets down from the pulpit and his Father DADDY KING puts him arm around him).

D KING: Fine words, son. You began with justice, but you ended with Love.

MLK: They are two peas in a pod. I never thought to mention justice was to do down Love.

DKING: (Laughs) And nor did you do it down , son. But you are some talker, Martin, and you leave some of us behind, we're not always sure where you are leading us - always talk the Lord's talk, son, and the people will follow.

MLK: I hear you, Pa.

DKING: (Ironic) Hallelujah!

MLK: Now I need a beer.

DKING: That's the son I brought up! (Punches him in fun.)

(Music morphs into work song – black share croppers hoeing).

(Newsman appears – and addresses TV cameras).

JACK: This week the spotlight falls on the South from where reports of rising tensions between negroes and their white neighbours have been reaching our newsroom. We're here to find out the truth behind stories of violence and harassment and to ask the questions that matter most. This is Jack Nader on the Network you know you can trust. Now, I am talking here to Mr Tom Stanley, a cotton farmer from here outside of Montgomery Alabama.

White Farmer (masked): Pleased to meet you Jack, means somthin' when you TV folks up North come down and recall that there is a South that ain't some beach in Miami!

JACK: Well, it's too darn' sticky to sunbathe in an Alabamma august.

WF: Too right, Jack, Best you and I keep out of the sun. These folks (waves to share croppers), they got Africa in 'em and can take a good

day's work in this here heat. An that's what they do git. A fair day's pay for a fair day's work an' I won't have no fancy folk say that ain't a fact.

JACK: Well there are indeed some folk who don't hold with that view, Tom. They're saying loud and clear that colored citizens in Alabama are facing discrimination and that their lot is not much better than it was a hundred years ago when they were in chains in these same fields.

WF: Now who would be saying that? Communists?

JACK: Preachers?

WF: I go to church, Jack, I know what the bible says. God has his chosen people and he keeps them separate.

JACK: Yes the Ku Klux Klan hold the cross on high. But by all reports they do not have much love for their colored neighbours.

WF: Jack, Jack. This ain't like you. Quit spoutin' Boston babble.

JACK: But are the Klan active round Montgomery?

WF: Hey fellas! (To share croppers) You seen any Klansmen on my farm? You seen any guys with white sheets runnin' roun town? Come on, Joe, answer me. Answer Jack Nader.

CROPPER: No, suh, I ain't never seen no Klan man.

WF: You happy to be workin' here for me?

CROPPER: Yes suh. Mighty happy. Twelve years, suh.

WF: You're a good boy. Now git on back to them fields and git yourself a few more greenbacks hey?

CROPPER: Thank you, suh.

WF: Now, Jack, there's not bin a lynchin' round here since that black boy winked at a white lady and that was years ago... many years... no call for Klan here... we like things settled, steady as you go, it suits everybody...

they says there's two boys over Greenboro get up in sheets, but that's for Halloween! Negroes here are sweet folk, like children I reckon, you treat em OK and they work, everybody's happy... no need for anybody getting uppity, you treat me fair and I'll treat you ... you know what I am saying...

JACK: I do, Tom. Looks like I got a fair view from you and your ...

TOM: Boys.

JACK: OK, OK. That's Jack Nader. Reporting from the deep South. Here on the ground there's maybe less tension and wild radicalism than in the newspaper reports. An that's what TV's got, a camera and a voice not an opinion crafted by some Ivy league know it all who thinks the South stops, as Tom says, at a Miami beachfront. So time for a break and word from our sponsors: Woolworths - the store for your every need.

TOM: Thanks Jack, you throw questions like a Yankee pitcher but I know your heart's clean. (Smacks his back). Pure white. (Jack shakes his head, treating it as a joke.) Come on down to my stoop. I got me a fine bottle o' rye.

JACK: Soon as we're packed up here, I'll be with you. (Then holds Tom back as he is about to go) Hey, Tom, glad to see you ain't sour at me askin' some tough ones. Folks on air need a bit of battle.

TOM: You're one of us, pal! Life's a battle! See yer on the porch.

Jack: (As if to team) OK that's a wrap. (As he bends to put away his gear a black woman approaches him).

WOMAN R.P: Excuse me Mr Nader, Sir. I'm no share cropper.

JACK : I can see that by your dress, Ma'am.

R.P: I'm jus' here to see my cousin. But I couldn't help overhearin' you and the -boys - I mean men here. For these are not boys, Mr Nader, any more than you are.

JACK: It's just a country expression, Ma'am, a custom to call coloured folk boys. I mean it is the way, it's the South, ain't it?

R.P: It's a wrong way, Mr Nader. An' I wonder if you would like to hear the opinions of myself and these men now that their owner, their slave owner, has crept back to his mansion to toast the Ku Klux Klan and Scarlett O'Hara.

Jack: Mrs...?

RP: Parkes, Rosa Parkes .

JACK: Mrs Parkes, now listen - we are here to give voice to the ordinary folk, not the agitators and activists. You are surely an educated woman and I respect that, but you are not the voice of these people and I wouldn't be doing my job if I pretended you were. So if you are as smart as your dress says you are, quit talking about slavery, it's gone with the wind. And when you've got a real story, a now story, something that's happening, then we'll be pleased to cover it. Until then, good day, M'am. I'm sorry I can't oblige you. (As if being waved to) Yeah, Tom - on my way and woah do I have a thirst! (Exits)

(Rosa Parkes sighs and watches as Jack exits - then walks off the plantation - meanwhile to music the cast assemble and set up elements)

R.P. Excuse me, Sir, what time's the next bus back to Montgomery?

MAN: One every hour on the hour.

R.P: Is there a bathroom I can use?

MAN: There's a bathroom, but you can't use it, lady. It's for lilly white ass to perch their fine cheeks on not for nigguh shit.

R.P: (Trying to control herself) I wonder, Sir, if you could point me in the direction of a coloured bathroom.

MAN: I think they used to have one but not no more. Maybe them niggus trashed it, stole the chain. Niguh's like chains. You better cross your legs and pray.

RP: Thank you, Sir. It's a pleasure to meet a southern gentleman.

MAN: (Confused and angry) You smart—you damn – aw – why we teach 'em to read? (exits).

(Cast create a bus – Rosa gets on and buys ticket)

DRIVER: Not so fast girl. Coloured folk git on at the rear door. You know that! So git off the bus, my bus, and walk back to the door where you folks are welcome to climb aboard. (To himself.) Too smart for her own good.

RP: Yes, Sir. (she descends, holding her ticket – but as she walks back the bus pulls away). Hay, hay !

DRIVER: (Shouts) Too slow lady, too slow! (Roars off)

ROSA: I paid for my ticket! I paid for my ticket. (She collapses head in hands, kneels and prays). I gotta love, as the preachers say. I gotta love but I gotta love justice too.

Song? (Rosa paces up and down, looks at her watch another bus pulls up – she climbs aboard – the driver yanks his thumb to the back she obeys - this time manages to get on the bus. She walks to the front and sits down. A white man boards the bus from the front.

DRIVER: Get out of that seat woman. There's a white man wants it.

RP: Sir, I am sitting here.

DRIVER: I told you once, now shift it, nigguh.

RP: I have paid for my bus ticket, sir, and I have paid the same sum as this gentleman. And I am a citizen of the same country as this gentleman.

PASSENGER: Lady, don't make trouble for yourself. There is a law in this state. And you know it.

RP: There may be a law, Sir, but there is no justice. And where a law is unjust the bible teaches us to disobey it and obey the constitution of the United States which states that we are all created equal.

DRIVER: I am givin' you one more chance. Up or I call for the law.

(RP shakes her head).

Black passenger: Your heard the driver, M'am, you don't want no trouble. You don't want the law comin' down hard on yer. Git up M'am.

Passenger: You just a shit stirrer. We all of us want this bus to move.

DRIVER: Sherriff, Sherrif (shouts) over here!

(Sheriff boards bus – fat can hardly mount steps).

Passenger: This is the trouble maker, Sheriff. I 've bin mighty civil but she jus sits in the white folks seats an won't shift her thin ass.

Sheriff: I blame the TV myself. Shoudn't let no nigguh have no Television - puts ideas into 'em. Now, what is your name, gal?

R.P: I am Rosa Parkes and a citizen of the USA.

SHERIFF: You're a damn fool. An, Rosey, you got two seconds to jump out this seat or I gonna arrest you. One, two – OK, if that's how you want it. You're under arrest for breakin' the segregation laws of the state of Alabama. (Handcuffs her). You gonna love my jailhouse - I got some sweaty black holes for uppity niggus like you, oh yeah.

(A respectable young black clergyman (MLK) approaches.)

MLK: Excuse me, Sheriff, is there a problem here?

SHERIFF: There ain't for you yet, reverend, unless you wants one. And I don't think you do.... So you get back to your prayers, boy, and you leave law enforcement to other folk, huh? And we'll leave the gospel singing and holy-rolling to you? Do we have an understanding?

(MLK backs away and exits. The passenger and DRIVER applaud as Rosa Parkes is led away) – the black passenger puts his head in his hands).

Stage fills with placard waving people BOYCOTT!

JACK: Montgomery Alabama is suddenly propelled into the front line of a struggle - some say it is an assault on the way of life, civilization and separate identity of the South. Others say it is a fight for equality and civil rights for the coloured people of the nation. At this time, there is no greater symbol of this divide than segregated passengers on the buses that work these streets. Now members of the negro community have been calling on their neighbours to walk to work, or to pool cars or stay home, but, whatever they do, not to take a segregated bus. The coloured leaders vow they never will until any man may ride and sit where he wills. Who will win here in Montgomery - the boycotters or the boycotted? This is Jack Nader first with this breaking story, reporting direct from Montgomery. And now back to our sponsors - Greyhound transportation!

(A phone rings... insistently. Enter the young clergyman (MLK) reading to the offstage Coretta, from a small mimeographed leaflet that calls for a boycott of Montgomery's bus lines.)

MLK: "...call on our neighbours to walk to work, pool cars or stay home, until any man may ride or sit where he wills and on whatever bus he wishes..."

(MLK answers the phone. Coretta enters, baby in arms.)

MLK: Yes...This is Reverend King.... O, yes, good evening.... Yes, yes, I have your leaflet here in fact.... (He puts his hand over the phone. To Coretta:) It's the bus boycotters... (He listens.) I see... yes, I understand.... (Hand over the phone again. To Coretta:) They want me to let them use the church, think I should? (Coretta nods, but he turns away from her.) Well, I'm not sure, yet... But thank you for ringing me on this important matter. Let me think on it awhile and then I will call you back.. Until then, then. Good evening to you. (Puts down the phone.) I have to say "yes".

Coretta: Do you want to say yes, Martin?

MLK: That's the second question.

Coretta: What's the first?

MLK: "What's right?"

(There begins an urgent knocking at the door. Coretta exiting to answer the door. MLK shouting after her.)

MLK: Coretta, they said they want me to meet with them...the organizers of this bus boycott... I don't know... I think they want me to....

(Coretta enters, still with the baby, but now leading in the imposing figure of Ralph Abernathy, also in dog collar.)

RALPH: You 'don't know'? You ain't asked God yet, Reverend King! If you did He'd tell you this is the most important thing ever happened in this town since he created it!

Coretta: Martin, this is Reverend Abernathy from the ...

RALPH: 'Ralph', I'm 'Ralph' to my friends, and especially my friends in the Lord.

MLK: Ralph, yes. We met at the Conference of Churches, but I was not ordained then... (They shake hands.) Coretta, could you fetch a coffee for Reverend Abernathy, please?

RALPH: (to Coretta) "Ralph"!

Coretta: Of course, Martin... Ralph....

(She backs away and exits.)

RALPH: Nice place.

MLK: This is not a social call, is it? I heard you are deep in the bus boycott.

RALPH: Only place to be.

MLK: I don't know about that, Ralph. I am new here. (Ralph shakes his head with disbelief) OK, not as my father's son, but as a minister, in my own right. In my own way. A black preacher people can take seriously – forgive me, Ralph – I haven't followed my father. I want people to hear and understand as well as feel.... And if I were to get mixed up with this, well, will anyone listen to me ever again? Some Boston big head jumping on the first issue that comes along, speaking out on issues that a politician or local leader should speak out upon.

RALPH: The more you speak, Martin, the more I know you are our man. I've got five ministers back there who want to lead this, just to stop each other from being the leader! (MLK laughs.) They're running about down there like headless chickens.... Ringing you up before I can even get here!! Runnin' around.... puckpuck puck puck! (Starts beating arms like a chicken – MLK laughs). Our chicken needs a head, Martin Luther. Like the man you got your name from. Knockin his nails in the door of injustice. (Throws himself on the floor and starts knocking as if it is a door). That's history calling! (He gets up and takes MLK by the shoulders.) Now listen up, Martin. You are the local boy, your Daddy's son. Montgomery's one and only bright star, Ivy League educated - in a league of your own. You're the only one they'll follow. (Very serious.) Satan is sowing discord in the ranks of the righteous...

MLK: I don't know, Ralph. I feel the justice of the cause, of course I do, brother! But am I am called to this?

RALPH: Is there anyone who ain't? If God could send his own Son to fight suffering, then Daddy King could spare us his Martin for a while!!! We'll never build heaven on earth unless we change the earth.... Listen to me!! I ain't gonna talk theology to a college boy, you'd whup me at that! I am talking buses. And I ain't offering you anything except trouble!!! I know that! But we need you and we need your chapel. You got that fine Dexter Road Church right next to the city hall! Where else better to meet? – so they city hall people they'll know we're meeting.

MLK: You know I won't deny you use of my church. And you know you can't let you meet at my church without me speaking. You are as cunning a rattlesnake.

RALPH : All you need to do is give some fancy sermon on justice and love. Love. That's the most powerful thing we have on our side! Loud or quiet, Martin, simple or college, the people will feel your love... you strike me as a man who speaks gently, but loves more loudly!! Hahaha! Yes? Yes? (He glances to where Coretta has exited. MLK embarrassed but amused too. Abernathy punches him in fun. MLK giving in, holding up his hands).

MLK: You do mean to win this, don't you? If we say God is on our side and we lose then we hand the Devil a victory.

RALPH: I promise you that we may and will suffer but we will win. (RALPH holds out hand, MLK pauses then shakes it) Hey, Coretta, forget the coffee - you got two beers? We need to celebrate!

(MLK walks towards the pulpit - while lines of marchers hold boycott placards and walk in perpetual motion towards the audience).

(MLK with RALPH.)

MLK: The buses, Ralph, I saw them this morning.... There's no one on them...

(MLK mounts pupit.)

MLK: (Beginning quietly and building to emotional crescendo) This is serious business. There comes a time, my friends, when people get tired of being thrown across the abyss of humiliation, where they experience the bleakness of nagging despair. There comes a time when people get tired of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life's July and left standing amidst the piercing chill of an Alpine November. There comes a time when a man must assert his dignity and say "No! No! I am not an animal or a slave but a free citizen of the greatest country on God's earth!" And that time has arrived. That time has come!

(The marchers fall down now, beaten by truncheons that are not seen their banners snap and fall they writhe in agony).

I call out to Montgomery's white officials and policemen as you wield your nightsticks and clench your fists to beat unarmed and innocent

marchers: We will meet your physical force with soul force. We will not hate you, but we will not obey your evil laws. We will wear you down by our capacity to suffer.

(Now the marchers rise and gather round as if at a church or meeting they sing gospel underscore).

This is not a battle between two forces, this is not a challenge to see which of two violences will prevail. It is a struggle that is as old and wide as the universe itself, it is a struggle between the darkness and the light! And the sun is rising. I see it I see it! The sun is rising and flooding this state of Alabama. Because the arc of the moral universe is long and it bends towards justice!

(Music rises to crescendo – MLK almost collapses with exhaustion into the arms of Ralph. Others rush forward to touch him –as if his body were magical).

RALPH: You are chosen, Martin. You are a chosen one.

MLK: (Almost in tears) I don't know where that came from, Ralph. It didn't come from me, did it? What if... You know.... like those crazy women in the boondock chapels spouting in tongues that no one understands....

RALPH: But the congregation did understand you, preacher. More than that – look at them - they are going to follow you! To wherever you lead them!

MLK: No, no I don't know if it's right.... I don't know if I can carry the burden of that.... Ralph, I am not a good enough man.... do you understand?

WOMAN: (Pushing forward breaking up the intimate moment before Ralph can reply). Let me touch you, Preacher. (Presses handkerchief to his face and takes his sweat – this will be horribly echoed at his death as others now move forward to wipe his brow, perhaps the poses of the final tableau are prefigured here.)

MLK: Hey Lady, lady that just my sweat. Folks sweat - this is Alabama!

(But he is laughing, enjoying the celebrity and the woman's ambiguous touch).

WOMAN: (cupping MLK's face in her hands) You know, s'almost a sin for a preacher to be so pretty!

(Laughs exits kissing handkerchief. MLK getting to his feet.)

RALPH: Hey, brother Martin, Jesus was a joyful man. There was wine at the Last Supper and at the wedding in Canaan he made good wine...So?

MLK & Ralph: Let's get a beer! (exit).

JACK: (Enters with microphone). The eyes of the nation and the cameras of the national news focus again on Montgomery Alabama where tensions are rising once again as the colored population boycott bus travel until such time as they can sit where they want when they want. I have Sheriff Watson here with me to answer a few questions. Sheriff, thank you for spending time with us on what must be a busy day.

SHERIFF: Too darn busy. This boycott is too nice a name for the orgy of law breakin' and violence that is difigurin' the whole county.

JACK: Some say the violence is very one sided, coming form White citizens organisations that may be a front for the Ku Klux Klan.

SHERIFF: You been watchin' too many movies, Jack, listenin' to too many New York Jew Lawyers and Chicago communists. We got a decent town here and we had no trouble until outside folk came and stirred things up.

JACK: But I thought the leader of the boycott committee was a local born preacher, Martin Luther King?

SHERIFF: He's as local as a polar bear. Maybe he be born here but he was at some smart college in Boston. They messed up his mind. Just as they mess up the coloured folks heads here with their fancy talk. Do you think these nig- oh coloured folk (looks nervously towards the TV camera) wanna walk every day in this here heat, no Sir, they do not, they are under duress. That's the legal word, Jack, under duress and it's gonna end in trouble.

JACK: Some say it could end in racial equality.

SHERIFF: What the hell is that? Would you want that, Jack? Would you want a coloured man to marry your daughter?

(Pause as Jack tries to evade question.)

JACK: Well... hey, now... I'm asking the questions here.

SHERIFF: It's got to stop, white is white and black is black.

WHITE PASSER BY: I tell you, Sir, this boycott will fall apart. Them Niggah's is lazy, they ain't gona walk for long - you seen their shoes? Loose!!! They ain't made for walkin' just sittin' in the sun like they always done.

JACK: Well tensions are rising here in Montgomery. But who is the young preacher who is accused of heightening those tensions and preaching confrontation rather than the message of the Prince of Peace. Martin Luther King has agreed to appear on this show and explain himself. Reverend King, thank you for speaking to us all today.

MLK: My pleasure, Jack. We want to reach out to the nation, white, colored, redskin and green if need be. And television is just the way to do that.

JACK: Can you do that? Does not your support divide on color lines?

MLK: It is my firm belief that in every human being, black or white, there exists, however dimly, a certain natural identification with every other human being, so that we feel that what happens to a fellow human being also in some way happens to us.

SHERIFF: Martin Luther King?

MLK: You know my name.

SHERIFF: I arrest you for violating the state ordinances of Alabama by intimidating and threatening the trade of a lawful business.

JACK: This is sensational!

SHERIFF: Turn off that camera!

JACK: But – (Waves to cameraman to keep filming.)

SHERIFF: Turn that damn thing off, (kicks over camera – then kicks MLK behind the knees – Jack is horrified).

MLK: I demand to see a lawyer.

SHERIFF: You won't see anythin' where you are goin'. I gotta dark hole for you. You can't even see your nigguh skin there. (To Jack as MLK led off by Deputy). We ain't here to entertain you folks up North. You better watch your John Wayne movies. Now git!

(Exits).

JACK: Shit! My microphone is bust. (Pretends to be holding one). This is Jack Nader, not on air, not speaking what he is supposed to speak on air, not saying that he is shocked, not telling his loyal viewers that the Reverend Martin Luther King is a great American and the bus boycott must succeed. Goddam.

(Black out. In the darkness, voices – audience makes out figure of MLK kneeling in prayer his hands chained – a banging of wood on metal).

Voices: Lynch him, lynch him, lynch him!

VOICE: String him up on a tree.

(Sudden light – MLK blinded).

SHERIFF: (Takes off his chains) Your Yankee Commie friends paid up and you is free.

MLK: Praise the Lord. And thank you, officer, for your hospitality.

SHERIFF: I don't know if I were you if I would be so happy to leave the safety of this jailhouse. I can protect you here, boy. But out there – whew – you're a sittin' duck. (Pops imaginary gun at MLK's head - but MLK just shakes his head and walks off feeling his wrists – Sheriff calls after him): Your family too.

MLK: Moses came out of the desert, Moses came out of the dry place of death, Moses came out of Sinai and saw before him the Promised Land. My people, our people, I see before me the promised land shining and we will bathe in the river of justice. I see it! Do you see it? (Cries of Yes! I see! I see!).
God bless you Alabama, you will become the Promised Land of racial equality!

ALL: Amen!

CORETTA (In dressing gown) : Come on dear, come into bed. Those folk is good folk but they had you for long enough now. Your kids wanna say good night to their Daddy and I wanna say hello. Hello, husband.

(They kiss. Coretta leads MLK back inside the house.)

MLK: If I could shut this door and put my feet up and say it's all over now... Why, in God's name I would.

CORETTA: I got you steak – I know you like it.

MLK: You know what I like -

(Huge explosion – flash of red light then blackout then screams. Sirens – Coretta emerges in torn and blackened robe with child in her arms – she stands there swaying as in shock MLK sits with head in his hands – then two black rioters are knocking the Sheriff about – they tread on his glasses, they kick him when he is down).

RIOTER: White trash, lawless lawman why you stand by when the Klan bombs our preacher?

RIOTER 2: 'Cos you is the Klan!

RIOTER 1: Kill the Klan, (others join in) Kill the Klan, kill the Klan!

(MLK snaps out of his shock, kisses Coretta and with her on his shoulder speaks):

MLK: Wait! Wait! Stop that! Stay your hands! Brothers! Brothers! If you have weapons, take them home; if you do not have them, please do not seek to get them. We cannot solve this problem through retaliatory violence. We must meet violence with nonviolence. (MLK helps the astounded Sheriff to his feet.) Remember the words of Jesus: 'He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword'. We must love our white brothers, no matter what they do to us. We must make them know that we love them. Jesus still cries out in words that echo across the centuries: 'Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; pray for them that despitefully use you'. This is what we must live by. We must meet hate with love. And remember, if I am stopped, this movement will not stop, because God is with the movement. Go home with this glowing faith and this radiant assurance. Bless you.

(The Rioters throw down their sticks, they run to embrace MLK and Coretta so it is a scrum of devotion. They exit. The Sheriff is left , bruised, alone).

SHERIFF: That there Niggah preacher saved ma life.

MLK: (returning, shouting off) I'm coming back! (To Sheriff.) How you doin, Sir?

SHERIFF: Give me your hand, Reverend King. (Shakes it).

MLK: Sometimes the Lord moves in mysterious ways.

SHERIFF: Sure does. Shit my ribs... (waddles off. Coretta enters and sees the Sheriff goes. MLK laughs gently.)

(Abernathy enters).

RALPH: Martin, Martin you gotta come with me! They are waitin' for you at the Dexter Road Church. That congregation is spillin' out onto the streets, and it's rainin' but no one cares, they dancin' in the rain!

CORETTA: Can't you leave him alone, Ralph, can't you see they bin trying to kill him, kill us all?

RALPH: I got eyes Coretta, I got love for this man more than any man I know -...but Coretta , the supreme court has spoken. We just got it! We got the - (Waves paper) The Supreme Court of the United States of America rules that the racial segregation of transport within the state of Alabama is unconstitutional. So help me God!

MLK: (amazed) Is that it?

RALPH: That's it!

MLK: Yeah-hay! (Leaps and hugs Ralph). Praise God!!

RALPH: I told you we would win.

CORETTA: But will he live, Ralph, will he stay alive?

RALPH: I believe God has a plan for your husband, M'am. To fulfill that plan God needs Martin to live.

CORETTA: (Shaking her head) Amen. Amen to that.

MLK: I got to go, Coretta. My congregation....

CORETTA: Like that ? (Meaning torn blacked clothes and face almost white with powder from the debris).

RALPH: Oh yeah - just like that - speshully like that.

MLK: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil. (Exits forcefully)

Blackout.

JACK NADER: Ever since the extraordinary success of the campaign to desegregate bus transportation in Montgomery, Martin Luther King has become the face of negro America.

(Audience see frame freeze flashes of MLK – smiling waving presidentially, shaking hands - orating etc to sung music).

And that face has been seen on the cover of Time magazine, in the highest councils of the land, on the international stage and in the White House itself. It may only be now that this young preacher is finding his place, but where might that place be? How far will he go? Wherever he does, it will not be a place achieved by violence, for this man is the greatest apostle of non-violence since Mahatma Gandhi freed India from British colonial rule.

(As music rises we lose the soundtrack of an interview between Jack and MLK – but it clear that MLK is humble and candid. The music and interview ends – Jack and MLK sit down maybe on edge of stage – MLK offers Jack a cigarette which he takes).

Jack: I didn't realise you smoke.

MLK: I don't. Not in public. It's hard you know, being what they want you to be.

JACK: But I think you are what they want. I meet a lot of people, Mister King, some of them famous leaders and idealists and opinion formers – you might be surprised to know how many of them are frauds. I don't like frauds, I don't like hypocrites, but I think I like you.

MLK: Why, thank you...

Jack: I think you're a moderate at heart forced to take extraordinary action to right a terrible injustice...

MLK: All injustices are terrible....

Jack: Is that why you have been saying you want to take your campaign to other cities? That could be dangerous for you. It was your time here, but maybe you should leave other towns to decide when it's time for them? Your new campaign is ill-timed...

MLK: Mister Nader, I have yet to engage in a direct action that was 'well-timed', at least not in the view of those who have not suffered from the diseases of injustice. It is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say "wait", but when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at a tip-toe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer frustrations at every turn, then maybe you would understand why we find it so obnoxious to "wait". Indeed, I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's greatest stumbling block to freedom is not the race hate White Citizens Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to business as usual and peace and quiet than to justice. Now, I have to go... the work really starts now. (exiting)

JACK: Wow... hey! Will you say that on air? (But he has gone - Jack shouts) Will you say that on air - shit, what a scoop and I missed it. But no..I heard it. (Touches his heart) I heard it and it... hurts. (Suddenly a large sack is thrown over him and he is dragged off - trussed and placed under a spotlight stage centre. A voice speaks to him either through a bullhorn or a microphone).

VOICE/HOOVER: This is what they did to your brother in Korea.

JACK: (Muffled) How do you know about my brother?

VOICE: We know everything there is to know about you, your family and most other folk too.

JACK: Let me out, I am a well known personality. Are you Klan?

VOICE: Hell no, not that white trash but let us do the talking Mr Jack Nader. And we are talkin' about your brother.

JACK: He's dead.

VOICE: We know that.

JACK: (Broken) Why don't you let me go?

VOICE: We jus want remind you of your brother. A good man, you would agree?

JACK: Yes, yes the best.

VOICE: Killed by the Communists. Murdered in a prison camp. Beaten in a sack (a shadowy Agent with a night stick prods Jack so he jumps with fear). Beaten like they beat puppies to death so the fear tenderizes the meat. Half human them Korean commies. Eatin' a dog - that's not the American way - you'd agree with that?

JACK: Yes, yes. Whatever you want...

VOICE: Good, so there is an American way?

JACK: Yes, yes.

VOICE: You ain't just sayin' that cos you're in a sack are you, Jack, Jack in a sack!

Jack: No, no.

VOCE: Your brother must have stood up to them brainwashers or else they would not have murdered him, in cold blood - very cold blood. Do you know how cold it gets there in North Korea?

Jack: No, no. Yes.... I suppose....

VOICE: And you admire your brother for that. For sticking up for the American way even if he might die , did die, for that.

Jack: Yes, yes.

VOICE: Say it.

JACK: Yes!! I admire my brother!

VOICE: Good. We are almost done. So if you were offered the opportunittee to emulate him, you would jump at that chance.

Jack: I'm not a soldier. I don't want to go to Korea.

VOICE: The Commies ain't just in Korea, Jack. They are right here.

Jack: Are you communists? Is this why you are doing this?

VOICE: Hahahaha! No, we're not the Commies, Jack. That's the funniest thing you ever said. You're a funny man, Jack. But are you reliable? Can we rely on you to take a stand against the party that murdered your only brother.

Jack: Yes, yes. I will do that if that is what you want.

VOICE: Cut him loose. (They do – sit him down give him a drink and a cigarette then snatch it away from him).

I do apologise for roughing you over a little but you had to know we were serious and it helps to remind folk like you of what goes on away from the comfy livin' rooms your TV industry so successfully dominates. 'Cos that's what you do, Jack Nader, you dominate the livin' rooms of America. (the silent agent in now giving Jack his cigarette and water back). You like a little Bourbon?

JACK: No, I'd like a little respect.

VOICE: Respect is something you have to earn; by serving your country. I am goin' now, Mr Nader but I will be listening to you and watching you. Federal agent Smith will outline the service you may do the FBI, your country and the memory of your brother. I know you will not let us down. Until we meet again. I'll be watching out for you....

Jack: (amazed) You're the Feds!

AGENT: Who the hell did you think? Alexander's Ragtime Band? I am your contact with the Bureau. My name is Smith. While you're working for us I'm the nearest thing you got to a friend. I am the one and only person you may trust.

Jack: For what? How am I gonna infiltrate the Communist party of America? I got a Chevrolet and a condo in Miami!

AGENT: You are trusted and respected by the Communist Martin Luther King. You also form the opinions of the Nation about that particular Communist in your reports upon him and his organization. Unless you say it on TV, Mister Nader, it ain't true or it didn't happen.

JACK: (Laughs) You're kidding? You're crazy!!!! Martin Luther King is not and never was a Communist – he's a preacher!

AGENT: Best cover there is. Here is a list of the known Communists in his entourage. You may know Levinson (shows photo).

Jack: I do.

AGENT: Senior member of the Communist Party of the USA since 1941.

Jack: He writes speeches for the Reverend King, he ...

AGENT: Yes..

JAK: He...organizes all the things that King hates to organize...transport, logistics, finances.

AGENT: Finances from Cuba, from Russia..hmm?

JACK: I don't know... but they don't spend much....

AGENT: You don't want to know. But we do. And you, Jack Nader, your brother's brother, you are gonna find out.

JACK: I am a journalist, impartial and...

AGENT: Don't give me that bull. No one's impartial when the country's at stake. Do I have to ask you again? O, and yes, in case you're wondering - this is a free country, you can turn us down, turn your country down, turn your brother down and maybe nothing at all will happen to you. (Holds out hand). As a result of your decision. So what is it?

JACK: (Finding courage) If I see any evidence of Communist infiltration in the Civil rights movement I will report it to you. But if I find dignity, principles, courage and an adherence to our constitution and declaration

of independence then I will tell you that too. And I don't think that you will like that truth much because you guys trade in lies and you live off the fears they breed. Good night and God bless my brother who died for freedom not fear.

AGENT: (Applauds sarcastically) Nice speech. I can see where you got it from.... This is my number. Call me any time. And don't forget to watch your back.

(Blackout).

(MLK is eating steak at table in his pajamas. Abernathy is outside speaking with AIDE/Sonny at his side.)

RALPH: We are here in Birmingham because Birmingham Alabama is the most segregated city in the United States of America. We are here in Birmingham not to challenge that segregation but to end it. And to end it by refusing our custom, the custom of the black majority in this city of Birmingham, to every store, counter or restaurant that refuses to allow citizens of any colour to purchase, consume or simply be on its premises. All men are created equal - (a stone - blood) Christ -

AIDE: Get him inside - get him in!

RALPH: Christ it could have been a bullet.

MLK: Hey hey, Ralph are you OK?

AIDE: Hey sorry to spoil your dinner, Mr King.

Ralph: Now don't do that - he's a right to eat.

AIDE/Sonny: Yeah he's sitting there in his fancy pant pajamas while we take the heat. He talks to the President and Time Magazine while we march and bleed. Bleed. Christ, look at all this blood! Well that's just what we get, Christ's blood. And we shedding real blood and we had enough Mr Pajama Gandhi. I wanna kill those white fuckers! (Waves fist outside)

MLK: (Quietly, without anger.) Sometimes when the phone rings and they say they'll kill my children, rape my wife, I want to kill them too.

Because we are only human we live with the temptation to take an eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth but if we ever did.... then that day we all end up blind and toothless.

Sonny ranting: We're letting them kill us, man! We're standing there and they're arresting and beating five hundred of our school children every day...

RALPH: I want to keep to our path...

Sonny: We don't have a path, they just smashed us off it! They just smashed your head!

MLK: We have a spiritual path, I have faith in ordinary decent white Americans, when they see the terrible things that have happened in Birmingham here on their TV sets, they will rise up on our behalf...

Sonny: But where are they? The TV isn't covering the black churches the Klan are bombing five miles out of here! The Kennedys won't even answer your calls! (Fishing out a letter from his pocket and handing to MLK.) And have you seen the letter the ten white preachers sent you... 'it's not time'... they don't want you in their city, brother!

(MLK studying the letter, concerned.)

RALPH: Our friends in Washington can't do this alone, Martin. And we're running out of troops here. The jails are full... that bastard Chief Pritchard is politely throwing 500 of our children into jail every day - where they can beat them out of sight... They've got our children locked up in barns! We can't keep replacing them every day! We're sacrificing our children!

MLK: I know, I know...

Sonny: You know what the young radicals are saying about you: they keep asking - where is his body? They want YOU there! Put yourself on the line! They're getting killed...

MLK: I think I should have some say in the place and time of my Golgotha!

Sonny: You're crazy!!! You think you're Jesus , as if Christ ate steak in his pajamas while the disciples were cut down.

Ralph: Crazy? – you're the loon, Sonny!

Sonny: (to RALPH) You just follow every self-destructive idea that Martin has, Ralph!!! In love with the Kennedys! You're an Uncle Tom... you were probably planted by the FBI!

Ralph: Let me at him...

(Punches are swung and people are restrained by force).

MLK (calm): Brothers, brothers... we are doing their work for them. They beat us today and then you want to beat each other again tonight! We should be praying together, not fighting... (He falls to his knees - they all pause).

RALPH: We should be drinking together!!! I ordered a crate!! You pray, Martin, while I get the beer. (Exits. MLK prays.)

Sonny: I want to admire you, I want you to lead us. Lead us now. Don't wait for those lilly whites to get off their asses and vote in Congress because they don't like their TV dinners spoilt by bleedin' blacks. I want us to be the tide, the force and I want you to lead us, the negro nation. And if you need to feel like Moses to do that then go ahead. But I want us to smite them as David did Goliath, (crying now) I want to put a stone clean through their heads.

MLK: (Taking Sonny in his arms). I know, I know , Lord, that I am the least here ready to answer the call, the last in the march of the brave, the least able to think our way to victory, but Lord I am prepared to feel and suffer my way, to love and forgive my way, to cry and bleed my way... and if that is not enough, then, Lord, you must do the rest for I am offering my all... make us strong, make us wise, make us generous. Amen. (He takes out a cigarette and lights it.)

Ralph: (Entering mid way thru speech with beer crate, transfixed)
Amen!

Sonny: Amen (sniffing).

(RALPH opening the bottles and handing them round. Stripping down to underpants and vests.)

MLK : Now, if we could plan everything like Ralph plans the beer... I never seen him move so fast as fetching that crate - faster than he is dodging rocks...

Sonny : (Laughing) Faster even than when he went running up the street with a mad church member after him... waving a knife at him... remember, Ralph, I thought you were one hell of a preacher then.

Ralph: Well I had to forgive that member of my congregation on account of my...falling to the charms ...

Sonny and MLK: Of his wife! (MLK whistles).

MLK: Hush now, don't you know Sonny that Reverend Abernathy is an FBI plant and will have to inform on himself! (Cracks open a beer).

(Enter Jack Nader)

JACK: I am sorry if am I disturbing you gentlemen? But I believe we had an appointment so I let myself in.

RALPH: Let's clear these things away. (He and Sonny get out but not before Sonny gives Jack the finger behind his back which MLK sees).

Jack: How's it going, Reverend King? Not so easy as Montgomery?

MLK: No it ain't. Which is why we need you and your cameras to show the nation the truth.

Jack: That depends.

MLK: On what?

Jack: On whether you're straight or not.

MLK: What do you mean, Mister Nader.

Jack: I want you to be plain with me, Reverend King.

MLK: I don't believe I'm in the habit of lying.

Jack: Good. Then you won't mind me straight talking. I have to know this. It is very important to me. (he takes out a photo from his jacket) See that.

MLK: I see it... is that you?

Jack: That's my brother. Was my brother...

MLK: He's in uniform.

Jack: Korea. He fought and died so people he didn't know could be free. Reverend, if I report that you are struggling for the same freedom, tell me that I am not betraying his memory. You're not working for communism are you? Or the people around you. Are they Communists?

MLK: (pauses) Mister Nader, I am sorry for your loss. You can rest assured that our aim is not communism. It is the American Way. All that we ask is that all the people - all-the-people - of the United States can share in our American Dream. I have studied many thinkers, I have studied the works of Karl Marx, you will no find no mention there of sacrifice. No mention of peace or non-violence. No mention of the power of suffering nor the wealth of forgiveness. These are the means by which we will find our path to the American Dream, but we will not travel the communist path of insurrection. Is that enough? Or do you doubt the word I give you, on the bible. (He takes out a bible rests his hand upon it).

JACK: That is more than enough, Reverend.

MLK: Now. Can I be frank with you, Mr Nader.

Jack: Jack.

MLK: Martin.

Jack: (nods) Martin.

MLK: Jack, I am not *naturally* humble, I am not *naturally* self-sacrificing, I am not a *natural* man of God, I have to work at what I do. I much prefer listening to a Mozart symphony, eating a steak, wearing a good suit - or pajamas! - I much prefer those things to suffering the hell of the jail. In Montgomery they kept me for twenty four hours in darkness and silence, while the demons of fear chattered in my head. Twenty four hours is a long time, Jack, when every minute fills up with fear. But I have decided

to go back there –I am going to get myself arrested. I have an injunction that forbids me to march. I know - pretty much - what faces me in jail - Hell. But it would give that Hell meaning if you were to cover it and cover it with ... understanding.

JACK: I can only report what is.

MLK: I think you can do a little more than that, Jack, but that's enough. Show it like it is and that will be enough to move men's hearts. God bless you.

(Jack shakes his hand and backs off – but impulsively opens the bible and passes a pen to MLK to sign it – he smiles and does so).

MLK: To Jack for telling it like it is. But this ain't an author's dedication, you know that?

JACK: I don't think I do...Good night...Martin (reading the Martin – he exits – MLK pulls on his jacket Sonny comes in with two beers for him then sees him going out).

SONNY: Where you goin'?

MLK: Jail.

(Blackout – the sound a of a huge metal door being swung shut) – does cast sing Go Down Moses? – MLK Stage right in shaft of Blue light kneeling and chained. Lights up on stage left as Jack in shaft of white light speaks as song continues as underscore):

JACK : I'm here in Birmingham, Alabama, and tonight behind these walls of a feared and hated jailhouse is the most talked about man in America. Yes, the Reverend Martin Luther King is back in prison. Defying a court order to prevent him leading his people in further marches against segregation and racial discrimination. Bravely, but not enthusiastically, without show or defiance, but humbly and meekly, the educated Martin Luther King , was led away like a sacrifice to the ugly laws of this state of which surely many Americans now feel deeply ashamed. Daniel, John, Paul, Jesus himself – these great figures from the Holy Bible - themselves spent time in jail, suffering for what was right, and, like Reverend King, none of them went gladly, but instead obediently, not to the laws of their time, but to the eternal laws of God. Tonight in Birmingham, Alabama, America itself is being asked to make just such a

choice – between a quiet life with a lawbook filled with injustices and the hard work of drafting new laws which will treat all its citizens with equal dignity and rights. Jack Nader, for the evening news. Good night.

(During this speech MLK has been writing on toilet paper with a stub of pencil – the lights fade on Jack as Coretta enters the jail and hugs her husband, the letter is passed secretly to her – we do not hear their speech – then a Voice).

VOICE: Alright now, that's quite enough. This visit is at an end.

(Coretta leaves – she goes to Jack – again we do not hear their words and hands him the letter – exits then lights rise on Jack as if on air...).

JACK: This letter was passed to me, smuggled from Birmingham Jail. It is political dynamite.

MLK: (Starts letter on knees in chains – this is a stylised sequence to be worked on in rehearsal – perhaps started by JACK, the letter moves from one chained man to one triumphant man via a sequence where first he throws off his chains and then his speech is taken up by Coretta then the other actors until it is being spoken by everyone and MLK – free – is carried high on their shoulders).

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. (CUT? Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation.) For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied". We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black

brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six year old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park because the answer is: Child you are a negro. And worse , you, you yourself, are a nobody.

To struggle against that wrong I am imprisoned with thousands of my fellow protesters. But if the road to freedom leads through the jailhouse, then, turnkey, swing wide the gates! (Preach, doctor, preach!) Some of you are afraid. (That's right, that's right.) I know fear. But we must overcome fear. We shall march nonviolently. We shall force this nation, this city, this world, to face its own conscience. We will make the God of love in the white man triumphant over the Satan of segregation that is in him. The struggle is not between black and white— (No, no!) - but between good and evil! (That's it, that's it!) And whenever good and evil have a confrontation, good will win!

WHITE BUSINESSMAN: (Approaching MLK and holding out his hand). Reverend King, I have a downtown store. First the black folk stopped comin', then the white folk stopped comin' cos they feared the black protests and the police gittin' mean, so now the only customers we're likely to get is green folk and there aren't too many of them in Birmingham. So I need you to stop this protest - my bank needs it! - and in return I and my fellow store owners are prepared to allow colored and white folk equal footin' in Birmingham's shops, lunch counters and downtown facilities.

MLK: And the Mayor and the police will back this?

W B: The Mayor does what we say cos' we pay the Mayor's bills, sir. And ain't you heard?

MLK: What?

WB: Same attorney general that set you free... he just fired the danged police chief, boy!! Hell, you might even be the next one!!!

ALL Hallelujah! (Sing? Set my people free!).

MLK: We have truly overcome.

Jack: Congratulations ..Reverend.

MLK: Martin – why can't you call me Martin?

(They embrace – then the lights change, MLK disappears, Jack is pulled aside.)

AGENT: I need to thank you, Jack. Twenty five per cent of Soviet Russian news reports is devoted to these Birmingham protests. And most of that beamed to Africa too. So thank you Jack Nader, your footage is the best thing that ever happened to Communist Television.

JACK: So that makes the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, a Communist?

AGENT: No he's just a fool. Your brother must be turning in his grave.

(Jack swings at Agent who side steps and floors him then reaches down to pick him up as MLK comes over).

MLK: Hey, hey, what's going on?

AGENT: Just an outbreak of non- non violence, Reverend. That's the way this is going to go. Blood, so much blood.

(Blackout).

(A lone gunman climbs up above the stage – or perhaps appears in a spotlight on the theatre balcony – a shot).

JACK: Jack Kennedy was shot this morning in Dallas Texas by an unknown assassin. It is with great regret that I announce that the President of the United States is dead.

SONNY: Hell, they gonna kill everyone of us and every one of the whites that raise a finger to help us. Who we gonna get next in the White House?

RALPH: Barry Goldwater. Makes Hitler look like a pink pussy cat.
I mean would you want Barry Goldwater to marry your daughter?

MLK: Goldwater ain't got a hope in Hell. Johnson's a shoo in.

SONNY: What's the difference? Another Redneck, blocked every civil rights bill he could .

MLK: I think you're wrong, Sonny, he eats fried chicken, but his Daddy fought against the Klan and he wants to be the President that changes America. We going to give him that - on a plate.

Sonny: Giving, giving, giving - what about taking? Four little black girls blown to pretty pieces in Birmingham and all you can do is give? What was it for if we can't protect little black girls from bombs?

(PERHAPS AN IMAGE OF FOUR BLOOD-STAINED WHITE GIRL'S CHURCH DRESSES BEING CARRIED ACROSS THE STAGE.)

All: Amen!

MK: I grieve for those little girls.

Sonny: We need to do something not just grieve... our own people are laughing at us - all this blood so a colored man can use some washstand? Or sit up front in a bus!

All: Amen!

Sonny: People are saying 'OK, so now we have the right to eat in restaurants we can't afford to eat in, where the waiters would spit in the food if we could'!

Ralph: Martin, you got to do something or the hoteads will take over . You gotta lead again. Or they will start a race war.

MLK: Hearts will change, I have faith it will be so....

All: Amen!

RALPH: The heart is a muscle, Martin, it don't think...

Sonny: You know how we won in Birmingham, Martin? Violence – yes, violence. Sure, it wasn't ours, but it was violence that got us the victory...

RALPH: We got it by power, Sonny. Not violence. State power that rules for us, Union power that paid our bail.

Sonny: What about our own power! (Smacks fist in palm.) Black power. You know what Malcolm X is saying.

RALPH: And I don't like it, he ain't even a Christian.

SONNY: But he speaks and the brothers hear him.

MLK: I will not raise a knife, a gun, a fist... nothing... we will suffer and that will be our weapon...

Sonny: Then why aren't we even going after votes? Our votes, our rights which we do not exercise!

RALPH: Amen! This is what I've been sayin'...

Sonny: How many black voters are there... potentially... millions! How many mayors could we have? Listen, Selma County has the biggest percentage Negro population in the country and do you know what percent is registered to vote?

RALPH: Five per cent? If that?

Sonny: It's not enough for *one* per cent!! Two Negro voters in that whole county!! They've concocted a test that no Negro voter can pass and that's if they haven't battered your head trying to get into their building to take it! It's always shut! But if you could get them all registered, you could elect a negro to any post you like!

MLK: Sonny I bow to your wisdom. Votes! It's gotta be votes!

ALL: Amen!

(SELMA

Work song blues. Lighting change. Two male sharecroppers working in the fields. A white Farmer patrolling the field. He is furious and agitated. He keeps looking about him as if he is expecting someone. One of the sharecroppers takes a momentary rest and the Farmer nudges him violently back to work with his stick and then resumes his looking about. Mrs Hamer enters – she is a sharecropper, a large woman, and she has clearly travelled far. When the Farmer sees her he marches over, furious).

Farmer: Where the goddam hell do you think you've been, Fannie Lou!!!

Mrs Hamer: Indianola court house.

Farmer: I know where you been! – tryin' a damn register – what the hell business is that of yours!!! If you don't go the hell back to Indianola and withdraw your vote you're gonna have to leave! Jeez! (Deeply troubled.) We ain't ready for this in Mississippi!

Mrs Hamer: You may not be ready, sir, but I am. I didn't register for you, sir.

Farmer: That's enough. You be off this plantation by tonight. You take Pap and your children and you go!

Mrs Harmer: I been working for you since I was married nearly twenty year, sir, I been pickin' cotton since I was six year old...

Farmer: Then you should have learned by now... things don't change... now if you ain't leaving of your own free will... Billy Bob!

Mrs Hamer: I don't want any more trouble, sir, I been harassed all day...

Farmer: You should have thought of that...

Cop: (entering) Another damn voter? What is the matter with you people! Why can't you leave things to people who understand best. You want the vote, I got a little vote here for yah... (takes out blackjack stick) – you still wanna taste of Mississippi democracy, now then? (She pushes him away.) Damn, nigga! (He grabs Mrs Hamer.)

Mrs Hamer: Aaah! Aaah!

(Cop wrestles Mrs Hamer to the ground. Tries to pin her arms to the ground, but Mrs Hamer gets an arm free and slugs the cop in the head with her fist.)

Cop: Ah, you goddam spitfire! Uppity...

(They wrestle some more until the Cop has her pinned to the ground.)

Farmer: I said this would come, I said, I said. This is democracy right here! This is what you get by democracy!

Cop: Help me, you damn fool!

Farmer: (Flustered and wacky) I ain't no democratic! I'm a farmer... I don't understand...

Cop: Jeez! Call your other niggahs over!!!

Farmer: They're workin'... (In fact they have stopped to watch.)

Cop: Get em here! (Cop barely able to restrain the struggling Mrs Hamer, who is strong.)

Farmer: Lemon! Moses! Get the hell here, you lazy nogood niggahs...

(The two sharecroppers walk nervously over.)

Cop: (to one of the sharecroppers) Here, take this. Boy, and give her a few licks, calm her down...

Lemon: Fanni Lou, sir?

Cop: Ain't yah never whipped a woman before, boy! Get down to it!

Lemon: (uneasily approaching): Licks, sir?

Mrs Hamer: Help me! Help me!

(Cop covers her mouth and she tries to scream.)

Cop: Get down to it!

(Lemon reluctantly begins to club Mrs Hamer with the stick. Mrs Hamer screaming and writhing, the Cop restraining her, the other sharecropper staring on, the Farmer shifting agitatedly.)

Cop: That's it - show her the vote! And again! You like our democracy, girl!

Farmer: I don't like this democracy! I don't like it! I don't want it! I don't want it! We ain't ready in Mississippi! We ain't ready!!

(They kick Mrs Hamer and throw her tattered suitcase off the stage, then exit. MLK enters - music - this is another stylized scene. MLK lifts Mrs Hamer up, washes her wounds and takes her up onto the stage. Behind them banners are planted demanding the right to vote - MLK marches forward arm in arm with Mrs Hamer - the rest of cast form a cordon of white police/vigilantes and they tear up the banners violently as if kicking or hurting the unseen figures who hold those banners. MLK and Hamer must work their way through this enduring blows that we do not see landing upon them. MLK leads her to the top of steps, MLK stands respectfully beside her his head bowed in prayer).

Mrs Hamer: Is this America the land of the free and the home of the brave where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hooks because our lives be threatened daily because we want to live as decent human beings in America? Because we ask only for the same rights as any other citizen in this democracy: the right to vote. So I stand here and ask - no, demand - that I and the people of colour who stand in line behind me be placed on the electoral register of the state of Alabama.

WHITE OFFICIAL: The President has spoken, Congress acted and the Supreme Court have ruled in your favour. Mrs Hamer I hereby accept your registration. (She signs his book).

MRS HAMER: Look who I am, I am somebody!

(A great swell of sound as all sing We shall overcome! – lights fade and then up again on Jack).

JACK: It is a truly incredible sight – here in Washington the entire open space from the Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol is taken up by a huge and peaceful gathering of marchers, black and white, old and young, rich and poor. And on their faces is a smile, the smile of peace, the smile of victory for whatever the legislative result of this march the case is already won in the hearts and minds of their fellow Americans – they will and must overcome.

Ralph: My fellow Americans, the moral leader of the Nation: Dr Martin Luther King!

(MLK takes the stand).

MLK: Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. And some of you have come from areas where your quest - quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends. And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a *dream* today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a *dream* today!

And this will be the day -- this will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning:

My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.

Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim's pride,

From every mountainside, let freedom ring!

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true. And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when *all* of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

Free at last! Free at last!

Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!

(They are all singing FREE AT LAST – Jack is central now below MLK – no longer a reporter but a participant a marcher – a man transformed).

Blackout end of Act 1.

ACT TWO

(A radically different urban northern landscape – screens flash across the stage revealing competing and overlapping scenes – they begin in a black nightclub – with electric funk – this soundtrack runs over all the sequences that flash by even if the actual place is not seen often again in the filmic sequence that flashes by of street hustle, drugs, busts, urban poverty and urban energy – there is celebration here as well as urban nightmares. Snippets of Jack Nader can illuminate and comment on the sequences but this is not a coherent text or interview – just an indication

that these scenes are not just happening but also happening on TV. America shifts its gaze north into its own troubled heartlands).

Text fragments:

Jack: ..the Harlem Renaissance and the extraordinary music of Ike and Tina.....Detroit motor town Motown Black women have a new voice in Aretha Franklin and what a voice she...black beauty salons are going out of business as the Afro arrives big time from Watts to the South Side of Chicago from Harlem to Baltimore young black women are throwing out the peroxide and the gels and going natural its spreading to...Drugs were always a release from the grinding misery of the ghetto, but where hooch, moonshine and the reefer rules now there are new and crueller narcotics: Junk, Acid, Snow and Speed. Drugs that do violence to the abuser and even more violence to the communities..... ... citizens ask if the Bronx is even safe for its own residents, let alone one of a different complexion who dares to enter these drab and dilapidated streets....the few Police that are seen around these parts of town are hunkered down in patrol cars, fingers on their trigger, little more than an occupying army of a soon to be defeated ...so many of these kids playing basketball in parking lots have older brothers in Vietnam, fighting for the country that denies them.....black sports stars too, role models for a new breed of.....

Street kid punching I imaginary opponent in the ring: Float like a butterfly sting like a bee! What's my name, what's my name?

Jack: It is Muhammed Ali, no longer Cassius Clay.

KID: Slave name, don't take no slave name no more! What's my name, what's my name! I am the greatest!

Jack: Heavy weight champion of the world but more than that champion of the black nation of America and that is the new phrase that is heard on these stifling summer streets: the black nation.
(Now the music is reaching a climax or maybe changing to something threatening and through smoke which may be nightclub effect or burning buildings - Malcolm X slowly walks downstage)

Jack: (As if mid way through an interview with a black woman) – a separatist, a prophet of violence and in the words of Martin Luther King: a racist.

WOMAN: Malcolm is the man that we needed to see in the North and in the South. He has become the man that most African-American women want their men to be: strong. “See, I want to take you on, America. Here I is. Look at me. I’m going to say the things that you’ve wanted people to say.” That’s why the men and women love him. That’s why we all love him so very much. Because he makes us feel holy. And he makes us feel strong and proud. A nation.

(More music – Malcolm X has reached the front of the stage now backlit dramatic- he may have toted a gun in the smoke – so its not clear if he is a symbol or a person but by the time he comes downstage the gun is gone and he is sharply dressed. He does not acknowledge Jack – he addresses the audience -

MALCOLM: We are asked by fools to love the white man as if anybody could love someone who has treated them as the white man has treated us. This blue-eyed white devil genetically beyond any moral appeal, really only a bleached parody of a human, an ole pale sickly-looking thing but a killer; a killer of black ,red and yellow men. They want me to integrate with THAT! I don’t want to integrate with no race of two legged dogs that sets their four legged dogs on your mother and mine!!

Jack: Excuse me, Mr X , Mr X! (it is not clear that Malcolm will acknowledge that this is an interview – he talks to the audience and gives asides to Jack). You have talked about the Serpent in the Garden of Eden, I think the snake has a particular symbolism for you...

MX: (uncertainly) ...yes... the symbol represents something that is hidden...

Jack: I believe you think the Serpent is the white race...

MX: Yes. Yes... that is correct...

Jack: Do you believe that the white race is evil.

MX: I believe that the black race was created divine. The white race was created... not divine.

Jack: Evil?

MX: Yeh.... It's evil for anyone who is being brutalized to continue to accept that brutality without doing something to defend himself. . . . You might see these Negroes who believe in nonviolence and mistake us for one of them and put your hands on us thinking that we're going to turn the other cheek— but we'll put you to death just like that!

JACK: (Shouts) And non violence, the creed of Martin Luther King?

MALCOLM X: (Looking out as if not sure who has spoken). Uncle Tom, traitor to the Negro people.

WOMAN: (AS Malcolm walks down through the audience - perhaps with spotlight on him): Malcolm is our manhood, our living black manhood! This is his meaning to his people. And in honoring him we honor the best in ourselves and know him for what he was and is - a prince - our own black shining Prince! Who did not hesitate to die because he loved us so -

(A Hail of bullets- the woman screams and reaches out into the darkness)- Malcolm! Our prince...our prince.

(Blackout now - fading into hotel room - Martin Luther King is watching TV - the images are not seen but the soundtrack of Jack recorded and the howl of sirens - MLK munches popcorn and smokes - Ralph and Sonny enter exhausted and haggard and flop down in front of the TV).

JACK'S VOICE: So Detroit burns for the fourth night in a row, the looters control the streets and the only question is: when will President Johnson send in the army? Will we see tanks on the streets of an American City? Is this where the civil rights movement has taken us: civil war?

RALPH: Why now? After what we achieved, after what the President gave us?

MLK: We shall overcome, the President himself: we shall overcome on his lips.

SONNY: President this and President that – that don't mean a thing to these brothers on the streets. What do they know of Alabama? Jus' some place their stupid grandpa came from.

MLK: Switch it over. (Sonny flicks switch).

(But more violence – this time Vietnam – huge impact of B52 bombers).

TV: Massive bombardment of Communist positions around Hanoi continues with Vietnamese sources...

MLK: Switch it off! (Throws popcorn at TV).

SONNY: What you want to do Reverend? Go to the opera?

MLK: (Switching off TV) No I want to switch it off. Switch off all the violence, in Detroit and Vietnam.

RALPH: How you gonna do that?

MLK: God knows.

SONNY: Well Malcolm X thought Allah has the answer.

MLK: God, the one God, knows that the only thing that will fight great evil is great good. So we must be great, we must go to the root of the violence and the poverty. That's what we got to do. Dig out the root.

(A knock – Ralph goes to door).

RALPH: It's that white chick. Says she's a reporter but looks more like a movie star.

MLK: (Adjusts tie) Gentlemen, I might ask you to leave my office for a while.

SONNY: Again?

RALPH: Easy Sonny, you don't know the pressure, the death threats..
(Pushing him aside so MLK can't hear). Sure, Martin.

SONNY: The moral compass of the nation! (Exits).

MLK: (Grabbing Ralph) IT's got to be a big one: no to Vietnam and no to poverty. Everything - not small things but the whole big big thing.

RALPH: (Tired) Sure, Martin, we can pull down the whole USA - or you can. (Sighs) I better get out of here.

MLK: But you'll back me, yeah?

RALPH: You'll need me, cos your President will move heaven and earth to bring you down.

MLK: I know. Now take Sonny for a beer.

RALPH: He stopped drinking. He got religion.

MLK: Sonny? You'd better drink one for him! (Ralph smiles and leaves).

RALPH: (To unseen woman) Miss, he's waiting for you (exits)

MLK: (Grabbing two glasses and a bottle of Bourbon from the minibar then as if opening room door). My oh my, honey you are looking good!

(Blackout)

(Jack sitting in a chair - whisky in hand - sleeping - phone rings) Christ - (wakes - picks up phone):

Jack: Hello, Martin, is that you....hello? Martin? What? Martin, I recognize your.... what do you mean? Who you callin' "honey"? is this a ... White trash? What is this? Martin, Martin.... Is that you? Can you hear me? - Reverend King.... Is that.... You? (Listens.) Oh my God. (Slams down phone) It's a damn recording.... Damn me to hell! No.... (Phone rings again - picks it up, listens with horror and fascination - slams it down - phone rings again).

JACK: I don't know who you are or why you are doing this – or what you think gives you the right, but anyone who is creepy enough to record another man having... making love to woman... is some kind of a worm. You hear me? I know there's someone there... So you listen to me, you phone me one more time and I will get the cops to trace the call. Do you hear me?

AGENT: (Enters) O, yeah, we hear you. We hear you all the time, Jack. All the time. You wanna call some cops? Well here we are. That quick. Nice Scotch. I know it's not very patriotic, but sure as Hell beats Bourbon, eh? (Pours himself a drink). Nostrovial!

JACK: I should throw you out but I'd end up in a heap again.

AGENT: Here's to the moral leader of the nation, the moral compass of America. (Raises glass – Jack shakes his head and does nothing). Maybe the Communists's are too smart for you, fooled you, but this hypocrite – this fornicating preacher...what sort of journalist are you?

JACK: How do I know it's him, how do I know it's not just a pack of lies like you serve up in Vietnam? (Pointing to the phone.) That could be an actor...

AGENT: Maybe you *are* a Communist. I reckon I should inform your employers. But until then here is a dossier – photographs like this one – he likes the white trash. And here is the testimony of a hooker in Vegas. She was treated real rough by your Prince of Peace. I mean I don't go to Vegas but if I did I wouldn't rough up a whore there. Would you? I mean we got standards you and I? We might have different even conflicting politics but we know right from wrong, Jack, don't we. And we know that a journalist has the obligation to broadcast the truth. After all, you said so.

JACK: I think this is a scam, a slur and a dirt digging exercise. The Reverend King is a married man I know his wife.

AGENT: Well you have me convinced there, jack, after all married men are always faithful. Why, look at Jack Kennedy!

JACK: I suppose he was a Communist too?

AGENT: Might as well have been. The damage he inflicted on this country. (Hands Jack a sheaf of papers/tapes.) Now... Names of the Reverend's women. Hotels, motels, room numbers, transcripts of conversations, well grunts and slaps and "Oh Martin's..." - not much theology in there. Your King has the morals of an alley cat..... he has lied and cheated all the way!

Jack: No... (Revolted and fascinated).

AGENT: It's all here - tapes, photographs, sworn statements. Your precious King is nothing special. I've got the dirt on most of Washington! Same for your business. Same for Hollywood. Time to cash these cheques, clean up America. We would have brought down Kennedy if that nut Oswald hadn't got to him first.

Jack: You don't get it, do you!!! You just don't get it... because we're never going to run these stories, and you're never gonna bring down anyone... Martin Luther King is only up on his pedestal because people join his marches, I'm only on TV because people watch my show, Johnson won't be in the White House unless folk vote for him, and those businessmen in Birmingham desegregate their washstands to get their customers back.... But who elects you, who checks you, who pays for you, who do you report to? ... You're not like us, you're not a part of the American Way, you're in some nasty bunker that you've managed to build up under our noses, a little haven for Nazis inside our democracy.... why should anyone take moral lessons from the Gestapo! Well, I won't do your dirty work. Like you said, if I don't say it, it ain't true and at the moment I think it's best for America if this (brandishing the tape recorder) is not true.

AGENT: It's the truth, asshole.

Jack: (Waving the mini-tape recorder) This isn't truth... this is a fire hose, this is a billy club, this is a burning cross! Jack Nader will find the truth...

AGENT: You a faggot? You wanna fuck King or what? (Jack throws scotch in agent's face - but agent just shakes his head as Jack storms out.

- Agent shouts after him). 'Cos we're going to fuck that fucker and we gonna fuck you over too!

JACK: (In spotlight) Put me through to Doctor King please. It's urgent. What do you mean he is no longer in Washington? I thought he was here for the Poor People's March - what? He's where? Memphis? (Puts phone down) What's he in Memphis for?

Ralph: Why are you going to Memphis?

MLK: Because the strikers asked me to go.

RALPH: You call the biggest demonstration in American history and then dump it for a few hundred Garbage workers?

MLK: I am not dumping the Poor People's March, I'm taking a break.

RALPH: To march with a few hundred guys who want a few bucks more instead of march with a million who want a life.

MLK: I'm no good at organising, Ralph. You do that. You and Sonny, he's sharp. Me I am mud. I am bad, (breathes deeply) bad at that, I'm just not - I need something clear. Like Selma. Memphis has that. We gotta get them reinstated... not fired for asking for justice.

RALPH: Sonny says they are not Church led, that they got Black Power kids there looking for trouble. It could get nasty...

MLK: All the more reason to go. I will lead them on the path of non-violence.

RALPH: You're crazy.

MLK: Yeah, I am. (Phone rings) Pick that up for me will you.

RALPH: Don't you answer the phone no more?

MLK: No, they keep saying they're gonna kill me. I can't pray for them no more.

RALPH: It's Coretta.

MLK: Tell her I love her, will you? Gotta go, Ralph.

RALPH: Hi, Coretta!

MLK: You come down with Sonny soon as you can.

RALPH: Martin left for Memphis an hour ago but he told me to tell you he loves you. (Pause - puts down phone). And me a minister.

(Blackout.)

JACK: Memphis, I ought to be doing a story but I am the story - or at least the story that is not going to happen. (At reception of motel), can I call the Reverend King please. Why's he not taking calls? Too much abuse. Of course. Which room - first floor, one o one. Thank you Ma'am. (Knocks)

SONNY: (Door opens) Where you goin', Sir.

JACK: It's me, Jack. I need to see Martin. Urgent.

SONNY: He's not seeing no one.

JACK: Is he resting?

SONNY: Look, pal, just get off his back will yer. He's under strain. It's not easy.

JACK: Yeah, but it might get a whole lot messier. That's why I need to help him out. (He holds package out).

SONNY: I'll pass it on.

JACK: This is personal. Confidential.

SONNY: Look here, "brother," you presuming that Martin has things that he keeps confidential from me but not from you, you...

JACK: Honky? Yeah you're right. I am just another white guy but you can't see this...(he's starting to break). The FBI...

SONNY: What do you know about the FBI?

JACK: What do I know? Well I know that once they got to me to spy on you all, to break you on National TV, and when that did not work out they put this on my table and I know it's a pack of lies. Tell me it's a pack of lies (almost weeping now).

(SONNY leaves through package).

SONNY (Turns to room): Martin, looks like you best talk to this FBI agent here.

JACK: I didn't say I was now, I just said....

SONNY: Martin, Martin open the door. Aw shit - (It's not Martin but a tipsy woman - is she a hooker? Woman comes out of room laughing).

Woman: I'll be next door, Martin - Hey! You're Jack that Nader - I watch your show - I like your message...

JACK: Really.

Woman: (To MLK) Hey, we didn't do anything bad! (To Jack) We're just doing what everyone is doing - except that you ain't allowed to say so on the evening news, are you? I love your programme!

Jack: I don't do the evening news.

WOMAN: (Going to next room then popping out) Here's my room key Jack. Any time, just give me an hour to freshen up! (Falls back I into room - Jack looks with horror at the key but something makes him keep it - he turns to go when MLK runs into the corridor).

MLK: Honey baby, where you goin'... we could be fucking for Go....

(MLK stops. Sees Jack. Both men are paralysed with shock.)

MLK: Jack, you... (he looks about himself) ... this isn't... what it seems...

Jack: What is it then?

MLK: Jack, please... I mean to change, I do... I'm on the road every day, I never see Coretta, the death threats keep comin'...

Jack: Don't you understand what this would mean for your civil rights? Don't you get how this would play to white moderates?

MLK: Don't hurt the people, Jack... Don't rat on me.

Jack: Shut up, Martin... this isn't you! I saw you! You were God's words on earth – yes God on earth! I saw your fear too but ..but I didn't see this... I'm going now, Martin. But understand, Martin, you are playing a dumb game and the table is stacked against you – (stops himself leaving) ... you ought to know that every word you say goes straight to the FBI...

MLK: You don't know that.

Jack: I do, Martin. I'm sorry. I do. I was asked by the Bureau to keep an eye on you... I told them what they did not want to hear, though... I told them you were a moral man... a good man and a good husband – but they were right you are not better than a... (stops himself)... they have everything, Martin, everything... (starts to go).

MLK:, Jack... wait, Jack, wait....

Jack: "Wait"? "Wait"? For the love of God, Martin, you could have been President!

MLK: Not me...

Jack: Why not?

MLK: Look at me... Don't turn on me.

Jack: I thought you were something new... I'm sorry.... (Turns and goes)

SONNY (who has had head in hands in despair suddenly stands): You don't have the right to judge him Mr FBI. He's a man and everyday he could be dead meat. Now get out and get back to your masters. Git!

JACK: (Almost to himself as he staggers away as if hit by a truck) The moral compass of the Nation...

JOURNALIST: Hey Jack, you got five - we're going live on the Garbage guys march!

JACK: You take it, you're good. I'm sick. I'm real sick (Hands him the microphone and leaves.)

JOURNALIST: Hey, Jack, get well - hey, wow, a break - OK, OK on air! Memphis Tennessee. City garbage and sanitation workers have been on strike now for four weeks, protesting for better pay and conditions -

BLACK WORKER: That's a lie - why do you always lie, whiteman? We protestin' the killin' of Robert Walker and Echol Cole, crushed to death in the back of their garbage truck - an' why- do you know why?

JOURNALIST: No, I do not know why, Sir.

BLACK W: 'Cos your shiny white mayor says that no black garbage worker can shelter from the rain anyplace 'cept inside the crusher. Do you get that - *inside* the crusher! So they died. Dead. (To camera.) Now stick that on your fuckin' news!

JOURNALIST: (Horrified) Cut, cut!

BLACK W: Yeah! Cut all truth, you honky liars! (Smashes camera and swings at Journalist).

JOURNALIST: Police! Police (Sirens - B.W kicks Journalist then exits - sound of smashing glass - cross fade to MLK sitting alone with SONNY).

SONNY: You gotta dream, Martin, we know you got a dream. But do you have a plan?

MLK: Dunno. (He's in pajamas or vest etc sitting on floor looking glum).

SONNY: I mean I dream every night, but I wake up and got to face real waking life out there.

MLK: I just dunno (left on knees , sings old gospel hymn): You can't find the one to blame, It's too smart to have a name, It's not flesh and blood we fight with, It's powers and principalities.... (MLK reaches his hands up heavenwards - as if grasping handfuls of thin air.)

SONNY: C'mon, git up git dressed. They're waitin' for you. Because you are the greatest. (Punches him on shoulder playfully - MLK gives wry smile, then dresses as he speaks).

MLK: Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize, that isn't important. Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred other awards, that's not important. Tell them not to mention where I went to school in Boston. I'd like somebody to mention that day, that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that day, that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody. I want you to say that day, that I tried to be right on the war question. I want you to be able to say that day, that I did try to feed the hungry. I want you to be able to say that day, that I did try, in my life, to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say, on that day, that I did try to visit those in prison. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity. Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice; say that I was a drum major for peace; I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind.

(The lights have changed and the speech gradually switches from personal to public and is answered by cheers and applause).

JOURNALIST (bruised): And today the Reverend Martin Luther King has electrified this confrontation in Memphis. He has drawn the battle lines but asked his followers to cross them with love and non-violence.

MLK: Now God's preacher may talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God's preacher must talk about the new New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, and new Memphis! And we

will build that new Memphis as we build that new Jerusalem, by tearing down ignorance, racism and poverty and building the beloved community!

JOURNALIST: Once again Martin Luther King has revealed himself as the moral leader of the Nation. This is Jim Porter for Breaking News Live in Tennessee. OK. cut and – hey has anyone seen Jack yet?

(Music, a bar – Jack seated drunk talking too loud to bored barman):

JACK: Martin was such a good man... such a good man... an ordinary man... he wasn't a communist then... I asked him... but you should see him now... you wouldn't believe it! She went into the room next to his... she was a hooker or maybe just what do they call them: a groupie – you know like the Rolling Stones do – these women they just – she gave me her room key..she' been with him ..you could tell she was a tramp and he was with her, the Reverend Doctor King....they want me to spy... I don't care who hears it... I won't spy on a good man!! ... well, I thought he was...

(A big white thug in the bar comes over.)

Thug: Excuse me there, friend, but I couldn't help overhearing – you talkin' about that brave preacher Martin Luther King, by any chance?

Jack: Who wants to know?

Thug: An interested citizen... we wouldn't want anything happening to Dr King here in our town – we have a good name to preserve, traditions, decency, hospitality... etcetera...

Jack: Sure... it's a great town... where am I? Etcetera?

Thug: In the best bar in downtown Memphis. Me and a few of the boys were thinking we should go down that hotel he's staying and make sure no bad types get in there, threaten him, mean types from the country you understand, folks who hide their faces, those types....

Jack: He's a brave man... such a goddam shame...

Thug: What room should we be protecting?

Jack: What?

Thug: What room is Dr King in... so we can look after him...

Jack: (Standing, staggering) You! You – I know... you, you, you... that man up there is a hero, a Gandhi, our Gandhi... Your days are coming to an end.... It's over, Bub, it's over.... Time when white confederate trash like you c....

(Thug knocks Jack to the ground. The thug searches through Jack's pockets and finds a room key. He takes it away. Thug whispers in the ear of the supine Jack, lifting him up by his shirt front.)

Thug: You won't have to worry about the reputation of your dear Dr Martin Lunatic Coon, no one cares about reputations where he's going.... Six feet under....

(Jack passes out. The Thug lowers him to the floor and exits.)

MLK: And that is why we carry these banners – because although we are treated like beasts we are men!

(Cast step forward carrying I AM A MAN banners – but in a replay of Selma etc they are beaten down as racist abuse rings out on the sound system – the banners break – the torn shards flap into the audience).

Sonny: They're killing people!!! Who do we phone now... Johnson sent those troops!!

MLK: We must offer them our bodies.... Love is our weapon...

Sonny: Martin, they're National Guard... look at their weapons...

MLK: We are fighting a mighty beast....

Sonny: But even you can't skin it one claw at a time!

MLK: Believe!

SONNY: You're trying to make half a revolution....

MLK: That's right - the loving half, the peaceful half.... Everyone must come together.... I have a strategy, I have a timetable!! ... (getting up on a wall to address the crowds) love is our weapon, unity is our weapon, the strike is our weapon, the march is our weapon... but the weapon is never our weapon - our dignity is our weapon...

Garbage workers: (taunt MLK) O de lawd! De lawd now!!

MLK: They have beaten you here today in Memphis, they have killed a young man... they have fired upon you...

Garbage workers: Black power! Black power!!!

MLK: Now, now... they may have treated you like things instead of persons! But you must not allow anybody to make you feel that you are not powerful, that you are not important, that you are not a child of god! You are somebody!! You are somebody! Say it out loud! You are somebody!! Say: "I am somebody! I am somebody!"

Garbage workers: Oh, de Lawd!! De Lawd, now!! (Laughter.)

(MLK is thrown, but persists, gaining confidence again.)

MLK: We...we.... we have a power that's greater than all the guns in Memphis or the state of Tennessee, a power... a power.... greater than all the guns and bombs of all the armies in the world!

Woman marcher: Your dick!

(Huge laughter. Workers laughing at MLK and chanting Black Power slogans - singing "we shall overrun" to the tune of "We Shall Overcome").

MLK: ... we have to change this society... not just the laws, but the whole way everything... everything is subject to the power of money... we must fight money... we must take power....

Worker: You ain't Mister Big! You're Mister Shit!

(RALPH appears and starts to escort MLK away.)

MLK: (being ushered away by RALPH) Our souls. We shall win by the power of our souls..."

Worker: Asshole!

THE BAR:

(Jack regains consciousness. Still lying on the bar room floor).

Jack: What the... what time is it? I have to warn Martin... they're gonna kill King... Is there a payphone here... where? What block are we on here? How did I get here? (Finds coins and calls). You told me to call you. Well here I am calling you Agent..Smith. Yes, yes, No! Listen, they're going to kill King. I know it. They got his room number. From me, damn it! Me! I let them take it! NO, no! Listen...(Then drops phone). 'For operational reasons, and for the safety of our agents, the FBI does not to inform Dr King of threats to life and person...' (starts to run) Martin! Martin!

(The Memphis motel. MLK and Abernathy chatting and having a pillow fight and a scotch. MLK turns serious.)

MLK: (Slugging Ralph with pillow) What do they get from this! Why do they want this - ouch - more than love - shit that hurt! (AS Ralph whacks his head with pillow - they laugh then MLK sits and sighs).

MLK: I'm tired, Ralph. I'm not a sharecropper, I'm not a worker, I'm not a real preacher... I want to go back to being an ordinary person....

RALPH: You never were that, Martin, you were always an exception...

MLK: You know what Stokely and those black power types say - "O, King, all he wants to do is eat steak dinners in his pajamas and make fine speeches" well, you can tell them, not the speeches anymore, I just want the dinners and the pajamas... I want to be out of this...

RALPH: But no one else is speaking up for non-violence, Martin....

MLK: Speaking, speaking, my words fall on stony ground. And they pick up the stones, Ralph, my o my, today did they pick up those stones!!

RALPH: (Sad) Yeah, pal.

(MLK starts to sing a hymn, drinking scotch as he does so. Split scene as Jack races to hotel).

Jack: (To Sonny) You gotta let me in. He's gotta move rooms, they know he is here.

SONNY: Oh Mr FBI – get the hell outta here.

JACK: I am not FBI.

SONNY: OH but you were yesterday – who you now – CIA? Shift it.

JACK: They're gonna kill him.

SONNY: Yeah, they're gonna do that every damned day. (Jack tries to push past).

JACK: Out of my way! Martin! (Sonny swings punch and floors him).

SONNY: Aw shit. (Shakes his fist. Split scene shifts – hymn continuing).

MLK: Each of us has two selves. How can I keep my higher self in command? Maybe I can't no more. I am tired of demonstrating. I am tired of the threat of death. I want to live. I don't want to be a martyr. Give me a cigarette.

RALPH: Here pal. Best light up on the porch. Don't want those cameras poppin ' you.

MLK: No, sir, They gotta believe I am the man that I am not.

(MLK goes out the balcony for a cigarette. A shot. Jack, outside, hears it shouts.)

Jack: No!

(But it is too late. MLK dies in the arms of his friends and a tearful RALPH checks that MLK is dead, then removes the cigarette packet from MLK's hand and throws it away.

Sonny and Ralph pointing to where they think the shots came from.

Sonny dips his hands in MLK's blood and rubs it on his body – sees Jack and allows him to come forward and do the same – they all raise their hands towards the audience – black and white with Martin Luther's King's blood on their hands.

PERHAPS as this image is held the recorded voice one more time.)

MLK: Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will.

And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

END

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