

THE JAMES LOGAN COURIER HIGH SCHOOL

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In honor of Mr. Lindsey's award from the Angel Network of Oprah Winfrey's show, *The Courier* decided to publish a special edition highlighting some of the pieces students are currently working on. Mr. Lindsey was flown to Chicago under the pretense that he was being interviewed for the Use Your Life Award. Little did he know he had already been selected for the \$100,000 award, which will be divided into \$33,000 for each of the next three years. The program will use some of the money for its immense transportation expenses.

Included in the following pages are pieces that will be performed this weekend at the State Qualifications competition at Alvarado Middle School.

SISTER'S KEEPER

CHARACTERS

RUTH

ADAMSON.....African-American Female, 25

SARAH

ADAMSON.....African-American Female, 22

SETTING & TIME PERIOD

Chicago, 1950's

Scene 1

[RUTH is on stage in the sanctuary of the South Side Baptist Church. She is practicing her solo for the upcoming Sunday service. SARAH enters behind her. She listens in as Ruth begins singing.]

Ruth: [eyes closed, singing]:

In you Oh Lord, I find my ground
When time is cold and gray
I once was lost, but now I'm found
With You, sweet Lord, I'll stay

In you Oh Lord, I lay my life
My spirit does rejoice
Through restless nights of wretched strife
Sweet Lord, I hear your voice

[Sarah begins singing with Ruth on the third verse. Upon hearing Sarah's voice, Ruth opens her eyes. Their voices harmonize perfectly.]

Ruth/Sarah: [singing]

For you Oh Lord, I'm going to fight
The Devil and The Sin
Crushing darkness with rays of light
Through Faith Oh Lord, I'll win

Sarah: That was the best song that Mama ever wrote.

[A beat. Ruth meets Sarah eyes coldly.]

Ruth: Get out.

Sarah: Ruth. I'm sorry.

Ruth: No, no. *I'm* sorry. I don't have a sister anymore.

Scene 2

Sarah: Why can't we talk about this—

Ruth: There's nothing to say.

Sarah: You haven't even given me a chance.

Ruth: There is *nothing* for us to talk about. [Ruth turns her back on Sarah.]

Sarah: Ruth it's been what—five years! Didn't Jesus say—

Ruth: [suddenly angry] And how would you know what Jesus says!

[A beat.]

Sarah: I thought—I thought forgiveness was part of the deal.

[Another beat. Ruth is holding on to her stoicism.]

Sarah: Hmm. So it's like that, huh? Five years and you can't even forgive and forget—

[Ruth turns back to face her.]

Ruth: [angry] Forgive and forget! You leave me, you leave Mama, you leave the CHURCH. And for who, huh, for WHO?

Sarah: I found my way back.

Ruth: Right. I will *never* believe that.

[Ruth turns away from Sarah again. This time, she picks up a stack of hymnal books and begins placing them on the choir members' chairs.]

Ruth: Listen, Sarah—I've got to get things ready for tomorrow's service. We don't have a church secretary right now, so I've got to go type out the bulletin. *Then* I've got stuff to do at home. I don't have a minute to waste, especially for you. I'm sorry. That's just the way it is.

Sarah: Please. Give me a few minutes.

Ruth: No.

Sarah: Let me help you out then—

Ruth: [frustrated] Arrgh!

[A beat. Ruth turns to look at Sarah.]

Ruth: [sighs] You never know when to stop, do you? Just like when we were kids.

Scene 3

[Flashback—twelve years. Ruth is thirteen years old and Sarah is ten. The two sisters are in their room at home. Ruth is drawing on a large piece of butcher paper taped to the wall of their bedroom. Sarah is watching.]

Sarah: Let me help you out!

Ruth: No!

Sarah: I can color the disciples for you!

Ruth: They're called "disciples." And no, you can't.

Sarah: I'll tell Mama!

[Ruth turns to face Sarah.]

Ruth: No you won't.

Sarah: Oh yeah? Watch me.
MAM—

[Ruth rushes over and cups Sarah's mouth.]

Ruth: [annoyed] Okay! You can color in Simon and John the Baptist.

Sarah: Yeah!

[Sarah reaches down and picks up a few crayons. She begins to happily color in Simon and John.]

[A beat. Sarah starts humming. Ruth is visibly annoyed.]

Ruth: Be quiet. I'm trying to color!

[Sarah continues to hum.]

Ruth: Auugh! Sarah! Stop it! I can't concentrate. Miss Marshall said that the best mural in Sunday school gets a prize, and I'm gonna get it!

[Sarah continues humming. Sarah starts to sing the lyrics.]

Sarah: [singing]

In you Oh Lord, I find my ground
When time is cold and gray
I once was lost, but now I'm found
With You, sweet Lord, I'll stay

[Ruth smiles, then chimes in with Sarah on the second and third verse.]

Sarah/Ruth:

In you Oh Lord, I lay my life
My spirit does rejoice
Through restless nights of wretched strife
Sweet Lord, I hear your voice

For you Oh Lord, I'm going to fight
The Devil and The Sin
Crushing darkness with rays of light
Through Faith Oh Lord, I'll win

[Ruth is smiling by the song's end—she's no longer annoyed by Sarah.]

Sarah: That's my favoritest song.

Ruth: Yeah. Mama wrote a great one.

Sarah: The best!

[Silence as the two continue coloring Ruth's Last Supper Drawing.]

Sarah: Ruth?

Ruth: Yes.

Sarah: Do you think Jesus listens to us when we sing?

Ruth: Oh, definitely. Without a doubt.

Sarah: Do you think he likes the songs we sing? The ones Mama writes?

Ruth: He loves 'em. He probably even sings 'em himself.

[Sarah smiles, content with Ruth's perspective.]

Scene 4

[Present, back in the church's sanctuary]

Ruth: I know Jesus would want me to forget the past, but I can't do that Sarah.

Sarah: [frustrated] You used to watch over me. Protect me. Scold me when I strayed from the path—

Ruth: [still livid, overlapping] Well, those days of rescuing you are gone! I tried to teach you, I tried to keep you away from the damn devil, but I failed.

Sarah: It wasn't you! It was me.

Ruth: [silent] Yeah. Why couldn't you've told me that five years ago.

Scene 5

[Flashback—five years ago. Ruth is twenty; Sarah is seventeen.]

[Ruth is in her room. She looks in a mirror and is putting on mascara. She's singing to herself.]

Ruth: [hums first, then sings]

O Jesus, let me find the river
guide me to that sea
O Jesus, let me find that river
and guide me to Galilee
O Jesus...

[Sarah enters, upset.]

Sarah: I hate her!

[Ruth is startled. She abruptly stops singing. Sarah stands near the window and stares out at their neighborhood. Sarah wipes away tears.]

Ruth: What's wrong with you?

Sarah: Mama. She's impossible.

Ruth: Come on now.

Sarah: I hate her!

Ruth: No you don't.

Sarah: How do you know?

Ruth: It's about that boy Andre, right?

Sarah: Mama don't understand.

Ruth: Yes she does. That boy is bad news.

Sarah: She don't even know him! She hasn't even tried to know him! And how do you know anything about boys, anyway? You only been on ONE date.

Ruth: All I know is that Andre plays the saxophone. And Mama knows what that means. And so do I.

Sarah: Oh yeah, what?

[Ruth stops applying mascara. She turns and addresses Sarah.]

Ruth: What do you think? What is a saxophone?

Sarah: [sarcastic] Oh, I dunno—you make music with it?

Ruth: What kind of music?

Sarah: Saxophone music. Whatever!

Ruth: No, Sarah. Jazz. Only jazz players play saxophones.

Sarah: And what is that supposed to mean?

Ruth: It means that this boy is probably only interested in two things: girls and reefer. And maybe not even in that order.

Sarah: [upset again] How do you know! And goddammit—how the hell does mama know?!

Ruth: [surprised, angry] Hey! Watch your mouth!

Sarah: Or what?

Ruth: I may be a lady, but I will hit you for blasphemy. And disobeying mama!

Sarah: Come on, I dare you!

[Both girls are fired up. They circle each other like boxers.]

Ruth: You always disrespect Mama!

Sarah: Well you always kiss up!

Ruth: You got NO sense at all.

Sarah: You watch—I'm gonna run away!

Ruth: [starts to laugh] Oh yeah! I dare you too. I would LOVE to see that! You wouldn't last an afternoon all by yourself!

Sarah: You'll see. When I'm eighteen, I'm getting the hell out of here. You can stay with Mama 'till she's all shriveled up for all I care! Both of you can sing her songs in church every Sunday! I don't even like church OR her songs no more! I'm gonna be a blues singer, like, like Billie Holiday! I don't need you!

[Sarah storms off. Ruth is taken aback by Sarah's outburst.]

Ruth: Wait, Sarah, hold on.

[A beat. She watches Sarah angrily rush off.]

Ruth: Sarah?

Scene 5

[Present time. Sanctuary of the South Side Baptist Church.]

Ruth: So, where have you been?

Sarah: You actually want to know?

Ruth: Yes.

Sarah: I did just like I said. After I turned eighteen, I took off. I went to New Orleans.

Ruth: With Andre?

Sarah: Yes.

Ruth: Did you get to sing like Billie Holiday?

Sarah: Oh yes. [smiles] I did.

[Sarah steps out and pantomimes being on stage in a souther

nightclub. Ruth underscores as Sarah narrates.]

Sarah: It was like, an adventure. Traveling from town to town. Nightclub to nightclub. Andre would join up on some make-shift jazz band. He would play gigs here and there, earn a little cash. I sang blues and jazz standards. We made enough money to stay in dirty motels. We drank a lot of cheap wine. It was a musician's life. It wasn't like I thought it would be. I imagined Andre in a famous band, cutting sides, selling records, playing his saxophone on the radio. Those things never came.

[Ruth takes a step up next to Sarah. Sarah underscores an old spiritual as Ruth narrates.]

Ruth: Mama and I prayed for you every day. We were scared out of our minds. We could only imagine the kind of sin and evil that Andre pulled you in to. We thought the worst; that you had sold your body for money. That you were popping pills or shooting up. Or that you had been robbed and left for dead. Every Sunday, at the end of each service, we sang a song for you. Remember Mama's song? The one that was your favorite?

[Ruth and Sarah sing in unison.]

Ruth/Sarah: [singing]

In you Oh Lord, I find my ground
When time is cold and gray
I once was lost, but now I'm found
With You, sweet Lord, I'll stay

[Sarah suddenly steps away.]

Ruth: We sang that for you.

Sarah: Every Sunday?

Ruth: Every Sunday.

Sarah: For real?

Ruth: Yes! [upset. She turns away.]

[A beat. Ruth starts to cry quietly.]

Sarah: I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Ruth: Mama would stay up every night, waiting for you. Praying. Praying for you to come home.

Sarah: Oh my God.

Ruth: And I hated you for that. Hated the way Mama was always sad. Except for Sundays of course. But even sometimes the church couldn't help. There weren't enough sermons or hymns to give her hope.

[A beat.]

Sarah: I know—I know I can never make that up to her. Maybe not even to you.

[Another beat. Ruth lets out a sigh. She closes her eyes. She turns to face Sarah.]

Ruth: I. I won't hate you forever.

Sarah: I know.

Ruth: It's gonna take a long, long time for all of this to pass.

Sarah: Yes. [cries; she buries her face in her hands.]

Ruth: You know something?

Sarah: [still upset] Wh-what?

Ruth: We're like Cain and Abel in reverse.

[Sarah starts to laugh quietly.]

Sarah: What are you talking about?

Ruth: Cain killed Abel, right?

Sarah: I didn't kill nobody!

Ruth: I know! I know...but remember after he did the deed, God asked him where Abel was, right?

Sarah: Yeah...

Ruth: And Cain said, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Sarah: I remember.

Ruth: Well we're kind of like that. Except for, I'm not asking God. I know.

Sarah: Know what?

Ruth: That I'm my sister's keeper.

[Sarah lets out a smile.]

Ruth: We have to do something. Something for Mama.

Sarah: Yes. Anything.

Scene 6

[Ruth and Sarah stand before a packed congregation at the South Side Baptist Church. It's their mother's funeral.]

Ruth: Today we honor the life of our dear mother, Annabelle Adamson.

Sarah: Some of you knew her as Ms. Adamson. Others as Ms. A.

Ruth: And some of y'all knew her as Annie. Of course she would yell at ya if you called her that.

[Both girls smile.]

Ruth: Our mother's passion was music. In the end, she wrote a hundred songs about her love for the Lord. My sister and I would like to share her favorite with you.

Sarah: It's my favorite too. It's called, *In You Oh Lord*.

Ruth: [to Sarah, whispering.] Ready?

Sarah: Yes.

Ruth: You remember the words?

Sarah: [smiles] YES!

Ruth: I know. I'm just messing with you.

[A beat. They sing together, harmonizing.]

Ruth/Sarah:

In you Oh Lord, I find my ground
When time is cold and gray
I once was lost, but now I'm found
With You, sweet Lord, I'll stay

In you Oh Lord, I lay my life
My spirit does rejoice
Through restless nights of wretched strife
Sweet Lord, I hear your voice...

THE END

THE CAT UPSTAIRS

CHARACTERS

CALVIN: African American Male, sixteen years old.

SONNY: African American Male in his mid-seventies. Calvin's tap teacher.

RHODA: African American Female, early forties. Calvin's mother.

WILLIAM 'DOLLAH BILL': African American Male, seventeen years old.

Calvin's best friend.

SETTING

Inglewood, California. Present Day.

Scene 1

[CALVIN is with SONNY in a small basement dance studio. It's day one of Calvin's formal tap training. Sonny is laying down the rules.]

SONNY: Okay, son. Tap dance is a combination of two things, okay, two things—sweat and poetry. You gonna sweat something awful, every afternoon, until you get it. And the sounds

those feet are gonna make—it's gonna sound like poetry. Now I taught lotsa of folks, son, lotsa folks. [Leans in and whispers] You know, I taught ol' Sammy Davis Jr. everything he knows! [Louder, smiling] Hmm-mmm. That's right. Me. I found him right before them Will Matsin Trio days, with his daddy and his uncle. Lotsa raw talent that Sammy had—and I shaped him up. Turned that coal into a diamond, yes I did! [Laughs to himself. A beat. Back to business] Now son—you do everything I tell you, you let your feet think, ya hear? Don't let that noggin creep into the conversation, dig? I seen what them feet of yours can do. You feel the music like electricity, you let that sink right there in your feet, and you follow your heart. That's it. That's all it is. [Pause] You ready to roll son?

CALVIN: [Smiles] Yes sir. I'm ready. I'm ready to roll!

Scene 2

CALVIN: [to audience] Have you ever had a secret hobby? You know, something that you're into that your friends or parents don't know you do? Well...I do. No, it's not like drugs or anything that.

[Pause]

I tap dance. It all started when I discovered my Uncle Mike's record collection. Big Mike—that's what we called him—had this big 'ol collection of Motown, Blues, Gospel, and Soul records.

After he died, they all became mine. Otis Redding. The Temptations. Ray Charles. James Brown. Muddy Waters. Big Mike liked it all. He had a soft spot for one singer in particular, though. Sammy Davis Jr.

At first, I didn't get it. I mean, wasn't he that old guy who hung around Frank Sinatra or something? But as I started listening to the records...I got it. I understood why Big Mike liked Sammy so much.

Sammy was a showman. The best that there ever was.

Scene 3

[Calvin's home. It's morning on a school day, and Calvin's mother RHODA is rushing to finish his sack lunch. Rhoda is about to be late to work, and Calvin is about to be late for school.]

RHODA: [to herself] Oh! We are gonna be late. Where is that boy? **CALVIIN!**

[Calvin is listening to his Uncle's Sammy Davis Jr. Records. He is doing some makeshift tap moves, trying to teach himself.]

CALVIN: One, two, three, and—shoot! Keep messin' up.

RHODA: **CALVIN! BABY, WE'RE GONNA BE LATE!**

CALVIN: [to himself] Ughh! Man! [Loud, to Rhoda] **AWRIGHT MOM!**

[Calvin takes the needle off of his turntable and turns it off. He goes into the kitchen.]

RHODA: Baby, are you playing with your uncle Mike's turntable again? [She hands him his lunch]

CALVIN: Yeah—Sammy Davis Jr!

RHODA: [annoyed] You be careful with those records! Your uncle Mike willed that stuff to you.

CALVIN: Yes mom.

RHODA: What time are you comin' home?

CALVIN: Uhhh—about six?

RHODA: Six? You better not be getting into trouble with that William kid—

CALVIN: Naw—no Mama, I got this project for school.

[Rhoda looks at him skeptically]

RHODA: School project, huh? Okay—you better not be late.

Scene 4

[Sonny walks Calvin through some basic moves.]

SONNY: Watch me, son. Do what I do. Single cramp rolls—

CALVIN: Okay—like this?

SONNY: Naw! No, no, no! This first, then that one—

CALVIN: Oh—okay.

[Calvin mimics the single cramp roll perfectly the second time around]

SONNY: Good! Now, double cramp rolls! Like this!

[Faster combination of moves. Calvin mimics it perfectly.]

SONNY: Rush it son! There ya go! Okay! Keep doing it! Watch me, now. Paddles and rolls, paddles and rolls

CALVIN: Okay Mr. Jenkins—whew! [working up a sweat]

SONNY: Yeah son! There ya go! You're doing it! Now—cut over, double roll, double roll!

[Calvin follows his orders. He stops.]

CALVIN: [out of breath] Whew—Mist—Uh—Mister Jenkins—Whoa! Man, that was fun!

SONNY: Isn't it though? And call me Sonny.

CALVIN: Whew. Mister Sonny, that was—man! That was fun—

SONNY: Sonny. Just Sonny. [an evil grin creeps onto his face] And we ain't done yet.

CALVIN: We're not?

Scene 5

[Calvin is leaning against a wall during lunch period at school. He's reading a biography of Sammy Davis, Jr. WILLIAM enters and walks over to him.]

WILLIAM: Heeeeey! Cal-Vin. What up!

[Calvin looks up from his book. A beat. He quickly closes it and calmly starts putting it in his backpack.]

WILLIAM: What you reading, man?

CALVIN: Ahh—nothin'.

WILLIAM: If it's nothin' then lemme see—

[William takes the book from him]

WILLIAM: Huh! Sammy Davis Junior! Ain't he the one with that messed up eye! [Laughs and does a caricature of Sammy—hunches over, points to an imaginary audience with one eye squinted.]

CALVIN: Come on, give it to me.

WILLIAM: Man—why you readin' this?

CALVIN: It's...for a project—

WILLIAM: Right, right. Hey—where you been man? We been wonderin' about you. [Grins] You gotta a girl now, or somethin'?

Scene 6

[Calvin is in Sonny's basement studio. This is Lesson #2]

SONNY: Oh, son, the girls loooove a tap dancer! Remember what I said, it's sweat and poetry, sweat and poetry. Sweat—you movin', you tappin', you makin' a joyful noise. And...it's also poetry—each click and clack and tap and bap—oh! Drives the girls crazy. When you done with your routine, you so sweaty and dizzy you think you just made some sweet love to—oh—uh—nevermind, nevermind. Sorry about that. Story for another time.

CALVIN: [Smiles] No problem, Sonny.

[Pause]

CALVIN: Sonny?

SONNY: Yes son?

CALVIN: What was Sammy like?

SONNY: Oh. Sammy was—Sammy was a class act, you know? The consummate professional. He was a master—he practically invented the variety show. He could do it all—sing, dance, tell jokes, act.

CALVIN: I heard this one record—it was Sammy, and Frank Sinatra, and Dean Martin and—

SONNY: —Bah! Them white boys—buncha drunks. No class at all!

CALVIN: And they're—and they're making fun of him, huh? I heard it on the record. It was live somewhere—Las Vegas, I think. Sammy would try and sing a song and those other guys—they would interrupt him, or make jokes about him.

SONNY: Son—lemme tell you something. Back then, when a black man was onstage, entertaining—he was the inbetween guy. He was window dressing. A prop. He played the punchline to the headliner's gags, you know. Those—hell, I can't even call 'em men. Shoot! Those clowns—they never had any real respect for Sammy. They can have there skinny kid from Hoboken, their Dino. Sammy was the real star.

CALVIN: Why—if someone calls themselves your friend. Why would they do that? Why would they make fun of you?

SONNY: I dunno, son. I dunno. What do your friends think about all of this—tap, Sammy, you know?

CALVIN: Uhhhh. Well. They uh—they don't get it. I don't talk about it with them.

SONNY: Hmm. Too busy with that rappity rap, not enough of that sweet tappity tap! [Laughs] That's okay, son. You get it. You know. That's what's important. Come on, get them shoes off. We're done for today.

Scene 7

[Calvin bursts into his mother's apartment]

CALVIN: Ma—I'm—

RHODA: Calvin James Washington! Where have you been! It's SEVEN o'clock!

CALVIN: Mama, I was working on my project—

RHODA: [Louder, angry] Your WHAT? PROJECT? Don't you lie to me now!

CALVIN: For real, Mama! I'm not lying!

[Rhoda grabs at Calvin's backpack]

RHODA: What you got in here, huh? School books or drugs, huh? Pssht. Hangin' with that William kid, it's probably drugs—gimme that—

CALVIN: Mama, come on—

[Rhoda snatches up his backpack and opens it. She peers inside and takes out his tap shoes]

RHODA: Where'd you get these?

CALVIN: A friend of mine gave 'em to me.

RHODA: DON'T LIE! WHERE DID YOU GET THESE! They're brand new!

CALVIN: For real, mama! My friend Sonny!

Scene 8

RHODA: Who the hell is that?

CALVIN: My tap dance teacher!

RHODA: Tap dance. When?
[pause. She's calming down]
When did you start tap dancing?

CALVIN: A couple of weeks ago.
That's why I play uncle Mike's old
records all the time. Sammy...

RHODA: Sammy Davis, Jr.
Hmm. So that's why. I don't...

[Pause. She's confused, but
delighted at the same time]

RHODA: Why tap dancing?

CALVIN: 'Cause it's—it's fun. I
like the swinging music. I like the
way the shoes sound against the
floor. I dunno. I just like it.

RHODA: Baby—that's great. I-
I—I was fearing the worst, you
know—

CALVIN: It's alright mama.

Rhoda: Hmm. My little Sammy.
[Smiles] This friend—Sonny? He
charging you?

CALVIN: No. He's retired. He
saw me one day, trying to tap over
in the park. I had my little radio.

RHODA: Is William or any of
your friends tapping too?

CALVIN: No. Just me. They uh
don't even—no. Just me, Mama.
Just me.

CALVIN: [to audience] And that
was true. It was only me...and
well, Sonny too, of course. I knew
that none of my friends would
understand.

One day, it all came down. I was
hangin' out with my boys, goofin'
off and all of that. I was rough
housing with DB, and my
backpack fell on the ground.
Boom. Out came my tap shoes
and my Sammy Davis, Jr. book.
DB took the opportunity to taunt
me.

WILLIAM: Damn kid! You still
hung up on this old dude with a
glass eye? [Picks up the book.]
Hey...what are these? [William
eyes the tap shoes.]

CALVIN: Those—those are only
shoes, man.

WILLIAM: They look all fancy
and stuff...what are they?

CALVIN: Their shoes, man. Tap
dancing shoes, okay!

[William starts to laugh. Calvin
keeps his composure.]

WILLIAM: What, you some kind
of fag, or something?

CALVIN: Stop it, all right?!

WILLIAM: What, you some kind
of tap dancer? Gonna be on
Showtime at the Apollo, or
something! [laughs]

CALVIN: DB, just—just shut up
man. You don't know nothin'
about that, okay? Shut up.

[Pause]

CALVIN: [to audience]

It got reeeeeeal quiet all of the
sudden. DB looked me up and
down. He scrunched his face up,
like he was Master P or something.
I knew it was gonna happen. DB
wanted to fight me.

We had a stare-down for a few
minutes. We walked around each
other in circles like feather weight
boxers. You know. All the stupid
things kids do to make it look like
they're all tough and hard.

DB moved in towards me, and I
told him to back off, and Eff you,
and all of that. DB started to walk
away. Then—he turned around
real quick and puts his fist square in
my face. I hit the ground. Blood
gushed out of my right eye. A small
crowd had gathered, and they all
leaned in closer to look at the
stupid kid bleedin' on the ground.

Everybody scattered before any of
the teachers got there. Nobody
said a word, including me. The
Assistant Principal escorted me to
the Nurse's office. They asked me
who had done this to me, but I
kept my mouth shut.

CALVIN: All I could think about
was my afternoon lesson with
Sonny. Only three more hours.

Scene 9

[Calvin and Sonny in the basement dance studio.]

SONNY: What happened, son!

CALVIN: Nothin'.

SONNY: Nothin'?! Looked like somebody cleaned your clock!

CALVIN: I'll be all right.

SONNY: Who did this to you?

CALVIN: I don't wanna talk about it.

SONNY: Come on, now son. You can't fool me with the tough guy act.

[Pause]

CALVIN: William. "Dollah Bill," or whatever. My best friend. Ex-best friend.

SONNY: Why did he hit you?

CALVIN: 'Cause of my tap shoes. And my Sammy book.

SONNY: [unders his breath] Damn. Kids these days.

CALVIN: It's okay, Sonny. I don't need him or anybody.

SONNY: Did this happen at school?

CALVIN: Yeah.

SONNY: At least tell me that he got busted!

CALVIN: Naw. Everybody ran. No one said anything. Including me.

SONNY: Oh, son. That was the wrong choice.

CALVIN: Sonny, you don't understand. If I tell the Principal that DB—

SONNY: But you have to. It's the right thing to do.

CALVIN: I don't know if I can do that, Sonny.

SONNY: Sure you can. This fool, this so-called best friend or whoever. You don't have to be afraid of him. You got choices. You got allies. Your teachers, your principal—

CALVIN: Naw. I can't be a punk like that. I snitch on 'em and then I'll get my ass beat even worse.

SONNY: How big is your school?

CALVIN: Pretty big, I guess.

SONNY: You can avoid 'em you know. Forget about those people, son! I've seen all of 'em in my life. I see 'em everyday now. Young men, aimless, stupid, don't know they ass from a hole in the ground. But you're different from them, Calvin. You have somethin' here. This music. This artform. I see you dance, I see you follow my lead. You just light up. Even if you don't go nowhere with this—you're gonna get outta here. You're gonna be something.

CALVIN: I sure hope so. Dolla Bill, my boys—they all talk like there's nothing out there for us. They think—they think it's all a joke, like we've been, I dunno, wired to fail from the get-go, you know?

SONNY: I'll tell ya—the cat upstairs, he got a plan for you. He's blessed you—those feet. You can work the sweat and the poetry like nobody's business. But you also got a good heart and a sharp mind, you dig? They strong. No one's fist can take that away, I don't care how big he is.

CALVIN: Thanks Sonny. Thanks.

Scene 10

CALVIN: [to audience] Well—it got bad at school for awhile. I got beat up everyday for two weeks. We all got the first degree from teachers and stuff—who started it, what's going on, blah blah blah. I didn't snitch, thought. Mama eventually transferred me to another school across town. And DB? Ol' "Dollah Bill?" I never saw him or the boys again, and that was fine by me.

[pause]

CALVIN: I still went to Sonny for tap lessons. We got through all of the basic steps, and he moved me up quick to the advanced stuff. We stole a little bit of Sammy's old moves you know

[CALVIN taps a bit]

CALVIN: Some of that magic,
that sweat, that poetry. We
danced for hours, laughing and
talking.

[pause]

CALVIN: Sonny—he died a few
months ago. That fool was OLD.
I was—man, I was tore up for a
long time. I knew that he had gone
one to a better place. Gone on to
heaven, to dance and hang out with
Sammy again. To cut it up with
The Cat Upstairs. I never forgot
any of Sonny’s lessons, not one. I
kept dancing. Kept finding those
lines, those sonnets. Just like
Sonny said:

SONNY: It’s poetry, son, poetry.
Every click, clack, whap, bam,
slide, slip, jump, and bang. It’s the
most beautiful thing in the world.

THE END

OLIVE JUICE

CHARACTERS

MARCUS
Male, seventeen years old

BRETT.....
Male, ten years old

TIME PERIOD

Present Day

Scene 1

[MARCUS is reading a book. A beat. BRETT enters, playing with a toy airplane. Brett makes loud engine noises. Another beat. Marcus looks up from his book.]

MARCUS: Brett.

[Brett continues playing in his own world.]

MARCUS: [Louder.] Brett!

[Brett is oblivious.]

MARCUS: Brett, shut the fuck up dude! Brett!

[A beat. Marcus stomps on the ground. Brett looks at him, confused. Another beat. Marcus puts Brett into a headlock.]

MARCUS: Knock it off!

BRETT: [Startled, a little perturbed at Marcus. He starts to get slightly upset.] Huh? What? What's wrong, I—?

MARCUS: Shhhh. Shhh. Hey, hey! Olive Juice!

[Pause. Brett reads his lips.]

BRETT: I love you too. [Sighs.]

Scene 2

[Brett plays, makes noises. Marcus reads. A beat. Marcus speaks to the audience.]

MARCUS: Brett is my younger brother. I was so excited the day he was born. I wanted a brother very badly. In fact, I talked about it so much, Dad told me: "You're gonna jinx it son... watch, it'll be a girl!" But I just knew that it would be a boy.

[Brett laughs at a joke in his play world. Marcus turns to look at him. Pause.]

MARCUS: When they brought him home from the hospital... something was wrong. Mom and Dad seemed happy, but there was something in the air. Dad held Brett and Mom excused herself to their bedroom. I walked by to go to the bathroom and I heard her crying. I asked Daddy, and he said that Mom was crying tears of joy. I didn't know what was going on.

[Pause.]

MARCUS: As Brett grew up from a little baby into a toddler, I slowly caught on. He wasn't normal.

Scene 3

[Marcus freezes. Brett signs to the audience.]

BRETT: In my world, I am a famous pilot.

[Brett is conscious of his signing. He drops his hands and speaks.]

BRETT: In my world, I am a famous pilot. A World War II flying ace, like Snoopy on the television. I can fly high in the air, swooping above the cruel world. I take myself to the edge of the atmosphere, where all you hear is nothing. Silence.

[Pause.]

BRETT: My first memories are of my brother Marcus. We would play games and I would try to guess what he was saying. We would play the word of the day. He taught me so much. Then, one day, he grew so tall, almost overnight. And he stopped playing with me. He kept to himself, always looking at magazines with naked girls in them. Or reading books. We still played the word of the day though.

Scene 4

MARCUS: Okay, today's word is Superman.

BRETT: Uh, uh. [Brett tries to follow Marcus's lips. He starts to sign.]

MARCUS: No, no. No hands. SAY IT. SU-PER-MAN.

BRETT: Suuu...

MARCUS: Come on, retard. It's easy. SU-PER-MAN.

BRETT: Suu-suuu...

MARCUS: Like the comic book? The dude in tights on TV? Superman. Come on, SU-PER-MAN.

BRETT: Stuper. Stu. Stuperma?

MARCUS: Jesus! Superman! Come on!

BRETT: Stupamah?

MARCUS: [Lets out a loud sigh.] Yeah, yeah. Close enough. Wait. [Points.] Phone's ringing.

[Marcus walks a few steps and picks up the phone. Brett watches him. Brett is curious about the identity of the caller.]

BRETT: Who? Who is it?

MARCUS: Hey! [He turns away so Brett can't read his lips.] Grandma! Yeah, we're good. No they're not home yet. Huh? Oh, yeah he's here. Hold on.

[Marcus looks at Brett.]

MARCUS: Brett, hey. [Mouths.] Grand-Ma!

BRETT: Oh, Grandma!

[Brett rushes over to take the phone from Marcus. Marcus strong arms him. Brett struggles against Marcus's block.]

MARCUS: [Into the phone.] Yeah! Grandma! [Struggling with Brett as he holds him back.] Brett says he loves you and that he hopes you visit soon. I'll have mom call you when she gets in. Okay, love you too. Bye!

[Marcus hangs up the phone. He laughs at Brett.]

MARCUS: Ha-haa!

[Brett gets flush with anger and begins yelling at Marcus.]

BRETT: Stupid, Marcus, why—

MARCUS: [Mocking.] Stupid Marcus, why—

[Brett is fuming; he shuts up. He breathes through his nose.]

MARCUS: Ah-ah! Olive Juice.

[Pause.]

[Brett is still upset, but he obliges.]

BRETT: [Signs.] I love you too Marcus—Hmm!

[Brett turns and leaves.]

MARCUS: Psst. Retard.

Scene 5

BRETT: Marcus.

[Marcus is reading.]

BRETT: Marcus!

MARCUS: Yeah?

BRETT: I'll be able to hear you soon. [Smiles.]

[Brett freezes. Marcus speaks to the audience.]

MARCUS: There's been a breakthrough in hearing technology. One of our Dad's friends told us about it, and of course the folks are ecstatic. It's a digital hearing device—and implant. Brett will be going in for surgery in a few days. I'm—hopeful. Maybe. Just maybe I'll have a normal brother.

[Marcus freezes. Brett unfreezes and speaks to the audience.]

BRETT: I am so excited. This flying ace will be able to climb higher and higher. I'll be able to hear the wind against my face, the roar of the engine. I'll be able to hear those things, finally. Now, I can only feel noise...like the beating of my own heart.

Scene 6

[Brett is lying in a hospital bed. Marcus enters, all smiles. Brett looks up at him.]

MARCUS: Hey buddy!

BRETT: Marcus.

MARCUS: How are you feeling?

BRETT: Hmm. Okay. Good.
Where Mom and Dad?

MARCUS: Oh, they're talking
with the surgeons. Sorry I couldn't
be here when you came out of the
O.R.

BRETT: Hmm. Okay. It's okay.

MARCUS: So. How does it feel?
Is it working?

[Brett reads his lips.]

MARCUS: Dude, why are you
still reading my lips? Turn it on!

[Brett switches the device on.]

MARCUS: There there ther you
you you go go go go!

[Brett cups his ears and grimaces.]

MARCUS: So so so how how
how how does does it it it feel feel
to to to hear hear hear hear?

BRETT: Uhh. Good.
It's...uh...good.

MARCUS: Hey hey hey is
everything everything okay okay?

BRETT: Ugggh it huuuurrrrrttts!

Scene 7

[Brett speaks to the audience.]

BRETT: The implant wasn't
working. It amplified not only
human speech, but every
conceivable sound around me. It
hurt my head. I couldn't think, the
sounds were so loud. I mean, all I

had ever known was silence, and
this thing—this thing was supposed
to help. To cure me. To break the
silence.

[Pause.]

BRETT: I couldn't change that. At
least one thing that didn't change
was my brother.

Scene 8

MARCUS: Okay, moron. Word
of the day. Word the day is.

[Pause.] Ah, screw it.

BRETT: Screw it!

MARCUS: No, no, not screw it!
What's the use! That fucking
surgery is a failure, that goddamn
implant doesn't work properly—

[Brett turns the implant off and on
during Marcus's rant.]

MARCUS: Dammit, all I wanted
was a normal brother! A hearing
brother! I can't even play catch
with you! If you're not paying
attention, I toss the baseball at you
and it'll bean you in the head! You
can't hold a normal conversation,
and Jesus Christ if I take you outta
the house I cringe when you try to
talk to my friends, it takes you a
fucking hour to try and get a
sentence out—that's why I tried to
teach you to practice talking. You
know. TALKING. No signs.
Using your mouth. Understand
retard? [Beat.] What are you
doing? You trying to tune me out.
Huh?

[Brett shakes his head in denial.
Marcus is livid. A beat.]

MARCUS: Oh yeah—well get
this. OL-IVE JUUUUICE.

[Stresses each syllable. A beat.
Brett realizes that Marcus was
saying Olive Juice all along and not
I Love You.]

BRETT: Screw you.

MARCUS: Excuse me? What
was that? [Cups his ear.]

BRETT: [Signs.] Screw you.
Jerk!

MARCUS: [Laughs.] Now we're
getting somewhere. Come on,
insult me. Give it to me!

BRETT: [Signs.] Screw you!
Screw you, screw you!

MARCUS: No, no, not that ASL
b.s., come on!

[Brett flips Marcus double middle
fingers.]

MARCUS: Finally! [Beat.] A
sign that I can understand!

[Brett is fuming. Marcus smiles.]

MARCUS: Oh come on! I was
only—

[Brett holds up a finger and
Marcus shuts up. Pause. Brett
glares at Marcus then turns and
leaves.]

MARCUS: Kidding. I was only
kidding. Shh. [To himself.] Jerk.
Damn!

Scene 9

[Brett is playing with his airplanes again. Marcus enters.]

MARCUS: Brett.

[Brett is in his own world. He makes airplane noises.]

MARCUS: Brett. Do you have it switched off? Hey Brett. [Marcus taps Brett. They lock eyes. Brett looks for a beat, then goes back playing.]

MARCUS: No Brett. I want to talk. [Taps Brett again.]

[Brett stares at him blankly with a hint of indignation.]

MARCUS: Look, Brett. I. I've been a real shitty brother. And. I should be. I should've been? Christ this is harder than I thought. Why do things sound easier in your head then when you try to speak— anyway. I wanted a normal brother. And—I have a normal brother. You're just like me, just like anybody. Except you can't hear. I get that. I understand.

[Brett frowns then shrugs.]

MARCUS: [Lets out a sigh.]
What. What I'm trying to say is.

[Pause.]

MARCUS: [Signs.] You are my brother and—I love you. I love you.

[Brett smiles.]

[Beat.]

BRETT: What was that? I didn't hear you?

[Pause. Brett is genuinely happy that Marcus has let down his guard. Brett forgives him.]

BRETT: Hey Marcus. Olive.

[Pause.]

BRETT: Olive Juice. [Signs "I Love You."]

THE END