

OH WHEN THE SAINTS

A Drama in Two Acts

By

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SYNOPSIS

James Wright wakes up to a knock at the door and quickly realizes that his wife's birthday celebration is not going to go as planned. He is in the fight of his life against all his sons, his former lover, and a deeply held secret that all come bursting into his living room and suddenly his life-long dreams are dashed in mere seconds but James refuses to go down without a fight.

Cast of Characters

- Dad: 67- year old black man, average build but his voice carries the weight of God.
- Mom: 66 -years young black woman. Emily is fierce and powerful in the fight against cancer and for peace in her home.
- Junior: 35, A son in his father's image and his faults. A peace maker and secret keeper.
- Amiri Babatunde: 39, A former Marine Corporal. He is built for quick reaction. Home to see his mother in her illness. He is a real warrior but tired of the price of war.
- Derick: 31, A true hip hop icon in the making and fighting to get out of his father's shadow.
- Iris: 35-year-old black woman. On her second marriage. She loves her husband, James (Junior), but hates that he allows his father to dominate his life.
- JoAnn: A 35-year-old black woman. Beautiful and curvaceous. A southern black man's dream but has been jilted by life. Her mother is dying and family secrets are not dying with her.

Deacon Smitty:

65-year-old black man. He is the side kick of Jim for 40 years but struggles with the decisions that affect his life and the life of the church he loves.

Margret:

65- She is a former lover of James/Jim Senior. They always found their way back to each other but time has run out on their love affair.

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING:

Houston, Texas.

Modest 3-bedroom single story

house. 3 small rooms all with separate doors.

A guest bathroom and a shared bathroom

with multiple entrances. It's early and quiet.

Summer time is just breaking but a storm could pass by at any time.

AT RISE:

We open with a sermon in the style of call and response. (The southern Black church of the 1980's. Where the crowd speaks, please feel free to repeat and assign lines to individual actors from the given text)

DAD (Voice over as lights fade up as the day is dawning)

(preaching) I can't see ...I said I can't see any way but the way of the cross. This word is too powerful to be put away. I will never turn my back on it. I will never turn from that which is true. Amen goes there, church. I don't care, Deacon Smith, if people walk out of this church in mass right now...I will preach the truth to a valley of dry bones...Folks running around talking about who is fit to lead, and who's not... but God has the final say, God has the final say! As long as I am pastor the truth will be preached, and roll down like a mighty river. You can put me out but you can't put God out!!! Amen...Church...Amen!

Crowd:

Amen, Pastor...Say it...Preach...We are with you Pastor Wright!!!

MARGRET (Voice Over)

We knew this day would come when the first would be the last and the last SHALL be the first and that day is now... right now. We know that people here object to a female taking over leadership of this church but Anna was a prophet, Phoebe was deacon, Junia was an apostle. You see, God is not a male chauvinist. And GOD will have the final say on who pastors NEW FOCUS after tonight. Please turn in ballots to the deacons.

(A few applaud and SMITTY screams "Pastor Wright is still the Pastor of this church" He is met with a few boos and several applause)

ACT I

SCENE ONE

(We see IRIS and JUNIOR outside on the porch. Junior is holding his cellphone but hugging Iris around the waist. She is holding groceries in her hand, they have just returned from the corner market in PJ's and slide on slippers.)

JUNIOR (to IRIS)

No we were the PK kids. That crazy preacher's sons, son number one, two or three. Dad use to say this is my number two son James Junior.

IRIS

Did you ever ask why he named you Junior and not Amiri?

JUNIOR

Never crossed my mind (into the cell phone) Yep Nigga. I'm still here, what time? Oh shit, you guys have already landed, cool. No, fool, Mom is still sleep...I'm outside. They don't know. Yeah Iris is right here. Just get here! Pop is Pop, this is Mom's day. Yes... bet, Holla.

IRIS

Derick don't forget the flowers. Oh, was I too loud?

JUNIOR

Now she said...Oh you heard, Cool, peace out. (hangs up) My brothers are going to be here soon. You good? You didn't sleep well.

IRIS

I never sleep well here but it saves us money. Everybody not rich like Derick. He does not expect me to call him Big D?

JUNIOR

Big Dangerous D will always be little Derick or son number three. Don't worry my pop will cut him down to size. We haven't all been together since our wedding. That's over seven years. It's going to be a good day.

IRIS

Does Daddy know how much we know? I mean about tonight. Honey, he can lose the church tonight. Babe, your mom sounded scared. I could hear her crying this morning.

JUNIOR

Sister Margret has already split the church. That's all I know. Doubt she has the votes to get Pop out but Mom said the congregation ain't happy with Pops, he is old school. Look, it would be nice to come home and preach here every Sunday.

IRIS

I thought home was in Dallas, babe you don't need to keep fighting your daddy's battles. Things are going good for us. I am almost done with school. Keisha is about to graduate. She will be off to college next year and we will finally have some us time. You notice she just calls you dad now.

JUNIOR

Only when she wants some money or flunking another quiz, but she's my baby. Hey let's get a quick shower in before my pops uses up all the hot water.

IRIS

You are the only daddy she has ever known. Our church needs you. Plus, you need to keep teaching. You seem to like teaching. You could work your way up to vice principal in a year or two. We are coming into our own time, babe. Now let me get this breakfast started while you shower. (Pulls out the key)

JUNIOR

I thought we could shower together. My parents are probably trying to get a quickie in themselves.

IRIS

No, that's how I burnt the biscuits yesterday (mocking him) "It won't take ten minutes, babe, just put the oven on warm."

JUNIOR

Come on now, I can run out and get Shipley's before Pops even makes coffee...

IRIS

You want doughnuts over my pancakes? Wow.

JUNIOR

I never asked you to be great cook but us cooking in the bedroom is what I love the most (they kiss)

IRIS

You're a good kisser for a preacher's kid but the answer is still no. I am making your mother blueberry pancakes and your father fresh honey butter biscuits if I have to die trying.

JUNIOR

(she blocks a second kiss) It smells like rain. Damn, it's Houston, hot, muggy, even this time of the morning.

(Lights up in master bedroom.)

MOM

I'm sorry, Jimmy. I tried. This chemo.

DAD

It's alright, Emily. We ain't got nothing but time. Now just try and rest. I'm going to go make some coffee. I heard them going out the house a little while ago. I need to get my coffee before Iris smokes us out of the kitchen. I don't know how James Junior married a black woman from the south who can't boil water. Sweet girl but, Lord, those biscuits were hard as a rock yesterday.

MOM

Now stop it. She takes care of Junior. Everybody can't cook. You spent too many years used to me cooking for all my men. You're spoiled rotten. You only married me for my looks and my cooking skills.

DAD

Nobody else could make pound cake better than my grandmother except you. Where else was I supposed to go.

MOM

You chased me long before you knew I could cook. Chased all my boyfriends away, all of them. Who roommates with my boyfriend just to keep tabs on me?

DAD

And if I hadn't been drafted to NAM he would not have stayed your boyfriend.

MOM

Yes, my first love but you scared him, uhm this chemo...Does things to the mind.

DAD

Time for your meds young lady.

(JUNIOR and IRIS enter the kitchen)

JUNIOR

Pop isn't up yet. It's going to be a perfect birthday. You are still the sexiest woman I've ever seen.

IRIS

Daddy has not even started his coffee. Good. Just leave the bags on the counter.

JUNIOR

D is buying three dozen roses. You know Derick, big is too small if extra-large is available. We still have time for a quickie, flower shop is 20 minutes away (as she smacks his hand)

IRIS

Babe, not now. Serious.

JUNIOR

I am sorry about your biscuits. Just 10 minutes, soft and quiet.

IRIS

I mean ten and no moaning, I swear you are relentless sometimes.

(They exit to the guest bedroom)

DAD

I keep hearing them march in and out that front door. Junior must have gone to get Shipley's, at least I hope he got doughnuts over the alternative. We can just go out for a light birthday breakfast if you're feeling well enough.

MOM

Maybe, we will see, medicine has been easy on my stomach the past few days. You talked with Junior and Iris yet, about the church? Junior is putting his whole life on hold trying to see if he needs to come home to help you with the church. I think they should stay in Dallas myself. Until all this mess here is settled. Iris is about to graduate seminary herself.

DAD

Junior is ready to come home. This is his church now. We have talked. I know my number two son. (starts to put on a robe and slippers over his PJ's)

MOM

Water for my pills. I'm going to lay back down.

DAD

Alright. Get some rest...

MOM

We will talk to them before they go, Keisha is graduating this year so you should at least think about her. No ice, please. That is our only grandchild so far.

DAD

We will talk about it tonight. Just rest. We can have a nice birthday lunch at The Patio Bar-B-Q in Downtown. We can talk about taking over the church in the morning before they go, water with no ice.

(knock at the front door as DAD enters from his bedroom)

DAD

At this hour, who is it, I know I gave Iris the extra key...

(doorbell rings)

MOM

(from bedroom) Who's that this early? Jim, who is it???

DAD

(pulls out his mask from his robe pocket) Just rest. Probably a delivery. You know the boys always send something on your birthday, especially that Derick. (looks out the peep hole in the door) WHO IS IT? (looks through the peep hole) Smitty? (opens the door as SMITTY starts to knock)

SMITTY

Morning, Pastor. Now I know it's early, but hear me out, it's important. Anybody else in here?

DAD

What on Earth are you doing here this early? Man, it's not even 8am. And you up to something calling me Pastor before noon, Smitty. Hurry up, letting all my cool air out the house. (SMITTY enters)

SMITTY

We need to talk and Pastor, I needed to see you. You didn't answer the emails and phone calls of the deacon board. I went by your office yesterday. James, Jimmmmmmy!!! Man you should have called me back.

DAD

What in the Hell has you so worked up? Stop pacing and spit it out before you wake up may whole house, Nigga!!!

SMITTY

Fire and brimstone, Pastor.

DAD

Stop and all this Biblical mumbo jumbo SMITTY ...!!!

SMITTY

As your friend, Jim, not as your deacon, as your friend. Have you gotten a lawyer, Jimmy? That bitch has the votes. We lost 2 more votes last night. We are not tied anymore. She can get us voted out tonight. Nigga we lost, you won't be Pastor. New Focus Baptist Church is over.

DAD

Say what!!! Two more votes, how, who??? Which one of those bastards flipped...

SMITTY

Lawyer for yourself, Jim. Look man, this is not some little old lady suing us for tripping or falling. Man, they can get hold of the records Jim. All the records! All that money we spent on the Family Center without the Board's approval. She got hold of the court transcripts on everything, read it out loud in the minutes. She knows about the choir director. All the damn accusations. Everything but those girls' names.

DAD

We settled every single case Smitty. We sent every girl to counseling. (SMITTY cuts him off)

SMITTY

40 years of friendship man. We can go to jail, James! Get a lawyer. I just got off the phone with this law firm (hands him a card) We can stall but the board can ask for the bank records and witness statements. Junior taking over ain't going to cover that up!!!

DAD

(as SMITTY starts to exit) Look, the vote hasn't happened yet! They don't know shit without the bank statements or the girls' transcripts, those are sealed! You are still the treasurer. They can't get to it without me or you. Nigga!!! (pause) Have I ever failed you? We are doing good for this community, Junior will be pastor soon and we will get everything straight!

SMITTY

Call the damn law firm JAMES!

DAD

WE ARE GOING TO BE ALRIGHT!!! I...

SMITTY

Get a hold of this attempted take-over or Junior will be starting a new prison ministry.

DAD

I won't waste my time. We can stop talking about it. I am not stepping down. To hell with a vote. I founded this church, we did!

SMITTY

Margret! Margret not like the rest of the folks who have tried to split the church. They take a few hundred people and split. She is out for blood. I swear I would kiss the devil himself before being locked in a room with that woman for five minutes. What in the hell has anyone in this church ever done to her to cause her to just grind us into the ground? She ain't been a member but 10 years but hardly even come to service.

DAD

She is not turning my church into a dance hall for pride week and women's book clubs. She wants a woman to be head of the Deacon Board.

SMITTY

Plenty of women run good churches here in Houston, plenty. She could get on staff anywhere. Why New Focus, Jim? What happened with you two? This shit seems mighty personal. She wasn't around for all that mess with them girls. It's been 20 years. We buried it all! Why now man? You are not telling me something!

DAD

No sir! I have never stepped out of line with Emily. Margret is after power. Hell, we are just an afterthought. Margret will never preach at New Focus. I don't allow women to preach, they can teach and lead, even become a minister but 1 Timothy 2:12 says what? I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over man but be in silence!!!

(JUNIOR enters)

JUNIOR

Hey Pop! Everything alright? Hey Deacon Smith, morning! Got my daddy in here fired up first thing in the morning! Ya'll good, Pop?

DAD

Son...we are fine, FINE. Smitty was just leaving.

SMITTY

Tell him James. He needs to know

DAD

Nigga...

JUNIOR

Dad! What the hell is up Deacon Smith? (IRIS enters)

SMITTY

Junior get your dad a lawyer! TODAY Jimbo, for his own good.

IRIS

Daddy James, we alright? Honey, what's...

DAD

Daughter take this glass of water to your mother in law, please, it is way past her time to take her medicine. (IRIS grabs the water from DAD)

IRIS

Is this the part where I am supposed to stay silent. I do have ears Daddy. Never knew that's how you felt about women preachers.

JUNIOR

Babe, please! Lawyer for what? What's Smitty talkin' about Pop?

DAD

Son you are in my house. Smitty knows no woman, including my daughter in law, will step in that pulpit, God wrote it not me.

SMITTY

We need a praying legal counsel. Saints and sinners all get locked up every day. Junior talk some sense into your father.

DAD

SMITTY leave my house in peace. I survived Vietnam, and three other takeover attempts. We are fine! Junior show the Deacon the other side of my door!

(Iris re-enters)

IRIS

Didn't know you were even in Vietnam Daddy. Sorry if I spoke out of line Deacon, just bothers me that my own father in law is stuck in the 18th century

SMITTY

You are the smartest man I have ever known, use your brain and get a lawyer

JUNIOR

I will talk to him Smitty (MOM enters) Happy Birthday Momma!!!

MOM

Morning! Donald, what in the hell are you doing here on my birthday of all days. Iris are you alright? What's going on this early James?

DAD

We are all perfectly fine! Junior did you get some doughnuts this morning?

MOM

Donald heard me. Why are you here yelling about lawyers and waking the dead? Who is pissed off now? City hall, or that fool Margret still on her computer yelling about that old town car we drive, I heard we were millionaires last week.

SMITTY

Your husband is head of New Focus Baptist Church, Senior Pastor. 40 years this month.

MOM

Donald, you have done your job, James will get a lawyer, now understand I am not fond of people running in my house all times of the morning. James, show Donald out!

SMITTY

Are we done Jim?

DAD

Don't come back by here until the vote is finished. I only need one to win. I think I know who God is voting for.

(knock at the door)

JOANN

Pastor Wright!!! (knocking) Pastor Wright! Pastor I know it's early. Reverend!!!

JUNIOR

I'll get it

JOANN

Pastor Wright, thank God! Oh, Junior, I'm sorry I thought you were your Dad. Is he home? I mean it's nice to see you anytime Jimmy...

DAD

Yes, Sister JoAnn. Good morning. Show her in son. Come on in.

JOANN

May I come in, Pastor? I won't be long.

DAD

We weren't expecting company at this time. Is it about your mother?

JOANN

Yes, sir. She wants to be taken off her breathing tube. The doctors said she would die within the hour. Can you speak to her today? Sorry, First Lady Wright, for barging in. Momma won't do anything until she hears from you. I tried to call, but I knew the house was on my way to work and therapy.

MOM

It's alright, seems like old times with people running up to the door all times of day and night, Smitty are you staying for breakfast or more church gossip before coffee and pancakes? You hungry JoAnn? You are welcome to stay.

IRIS

I got it mother. Please rest. We will be gone tomorrow. Besides, it's your day. I am making blueberry pancakes, your favorite.

DAD

What room is she in, Houston Memorial right?

JOANN

ICU, Room 18. She was moved back into ICU. Another COVID patient died. Freed up a ventilator.

DAD

ICU 18 please, yes, Clergy call, ICU 18, Hello, Nurse, Yes, this is Pastor James Wright of New Focus Church. You are attending to one of my members, Is Sister JoLin awake? Just put me on ... Oh, I'm on speaker...Sister, we are going to spend today in prayer for you... Yes, your daughter is here with me. JoAnn is here, yes! We are going to allow one more day for God to work a miracle so rest. Just write down what she is trying to say. Thank you nurse! God bless! (Hangs up) She was doing so well.

JOANN

She was good and was clear of COVID. She was vaccinated back in February but this is from that walking pneumonia. Thank you Pastor, First Lady. Momma wanted you to have this. Said it belonged to you in the first place. I don't know what it is. (turns to leave) Glad to see you Deacon, Junior and Mrs. Iris.

DAD

I will be there first thing in the morning. I am glad your mother kept this. She said she liked it one day when she was in my office. It's just the Lord's prayer written on this small stone. I always held it in my hand when things were going wrong.

JOANN

I saw on social media Derick has a concert in town tonight. Or is it, "Big D"? Crazy that little Derick has turned into such a big rap artist... right, Junior? Crazy. Big Dangerous D!

DAD

No he won't be joining us. He is making money and sometimes that's all a parent can ask for. Meet you at the hospital in the morning. Be there around 7. Every day is chance for a miracle. Don't lose hope.

MOM

God has the final say.

JOANN

Thank you. I keep my temper nowadays for Momma's sake. I take my meds and go to work and church. Sorry for barging in again. (starts to leave) 20 years ago I was almost you. I wish my dad hadn't called off the wedding, Junior, but that's all water under the bridge. Sorry, Sister Iris.

IRIS

Sorry, what wedding, is there something I should know?

JUNIOR

I told you about her. We had to call it off, our dads said after college. Take care JoAnn. Hate to hear about your mom.

IRIS

No you didn't. I never heard about you nearly getting married babe...

SMITTY

Her daddy threatened to sue us if we let them get married. He was a tough lawyer! We could use a good tough one right now.

DAD

You can walk sister JoAnn out Smitty.

JOANN

I didn't mean to start nothin'. Thank you Daddy Wright.

SMITTY

Excuse my bluntness, Sister Iris, it is just strange to see those two together for that brief moment, JoAnn and Junior.

IRIS

Daddy, I will call to check on her mother tomorrow after we get back to Dallas. We need to get our daughter to her college prep meeting.

MOM

Go with God JoAnn. Iris you can just get dressed, we can go out for brunch. I feel a burst of energy coming on (JOANN exits) Donald, what couldn't wait until 9am? I ain't got the crust out the corners of my eyes good yet. Why we need a lawyer so bad James?

DEACON

Discuss that with Pastor!

MOM

Iris, you think the child would wait until I am dead before trying to become first lady of the church. She has been after your father-in-love over ten years.

IRIS

Daddy is sister Margret sweet on you?

MOM

Yes, Margret is still hot and bothered for Jim senior. Now she just causing strife because he won't give in to her. Is that the big secret Donald?!

DAD

Emily don't get started with Smitty. Margret is trying to have a special vote tonight. That's all!

SMITTY

No sir, that's not all of it, EMILY (Cut off)

DAD

Damn it Smitty, don't start that insanity ...

JUNIOR

Deacon, you were just leaving, right? Like, now man.

(doorbell)

SMITTY

(Looks out the peephole) Speak of the devil and he will appear. It's Margret, Jim!

DAD (pushes SMITTY back and looks)

(DAD opens the door)

You are living dangerously woman! This is Texas! You need to get away from my home before I forget I'm a Christian!

SMITTY

You just need to call the police James. You are out of line, Margret. Wait for the damn vote.

MOM

DONALD! Didn't I warn you and the whole deacon board once before? Y'all could burn down New Focus Baptist Church as far as I give a damn, but if you come for my family I will end you! Margret! My husband has warned you, I will not be so nice.

MARGRET

I am the new pastor and that will be finalized tonight! I came for the files James, all of them that I requested.

DAD

You have lost your damn mind. You really believe you can delete a lifetime of my work? Junior has already signed the paperwork. You might have the votes to put me out but it only takes one Deacon to put another name on the ballot and Smitty has already signed that petition! Now get out!

MARGRET

You both are being brought up on charges of theft. I will find out the names of every woman that sued you and every charge will be put on social media. Your sins will be brought to light.

MOM

Margret! If I haven't made myself clear my husband is not the church. James, I'm done. She has three seconds to walk out my house or we will all need a lawyer after all, child you are some piece of work!

MARGRET

We are live streaming James. Explain to the people all the missing funds from the unfinished Youth Center. And your former choir director, how many girls did you know about him molesting? Emily, Donald, How many?

JUNIOR

That's enough, I have no idea what on earth you are talking about but you are on private property, my parents said leave.

DAD

JUNIOR ENOUGH. Donald we are going to walk Margret out of this house. Junior take your momma to the back (MOM walks right up to MARGRET) Emily!!!

MOM

You know better than to try me heffa'.

MARGRET

Our former first lady coming out here to protect her husband. The dying lioness is still on the prowl, take one more step!

MOM

Turn off the phone or I will snatch you bald! It's one thing to try this mess at church but I am not dead Margret.

DAD

Junior, call the police, I've had enough. (SMITTY grabs him)

SMITTY

That's what she wants, she is live streaming. We already have a law firm. You are starting a war you can't win.

MARGRET

I am being attacked by the whole family! You all can see this for yourselves. Came to ask this fool for the files, sealed files for the victims he helped (cut off)

MOM

Get out my house! (MOM starts to tussle for the phone.)

JUNIOR

Woman if you touch my mother, I swear to God!

MOM

Alright since we live streaming let's have it all out, Pearl! You think I don't know who you are or what this mess is all about? Pearl Margret Brooks, that's your birth name. Let's have it all live streamed so folk can know who you really are. (MARGRET puts the phone down) You still want to sleep with my man again. It's been almost 40 years but you can't have him, ain't that right, Pearl!

DAD

Get away from my wife (breaks free and grabs EMILY who snatches away from him and holds out one finger)

MOM

My husband will never be yours.

MARGRET

I live for my husband, Jesus Christ. I am married to his gospel. Call me Pastor Margret!

MOM

Pearl, you wouldn't know Jesus if he slapped you, which I see I am about to have to do. Turn off the live stream or the world will know the truth behind why you are here on my birthday!!! Trying to claim what you willingly gave up. Pearl Brooks or was it Pearl Gold the last time you went to jail!

IRIS

(MOM snatches the phone) Momma! NOOO!!!

MOM

How do I stop the stream Iris? (MARGRET reaches for the phone) Ok have it your way. In 1973, on the campus of Southern University a young woman named Pearl was arrested for (IRIS grabs the phone) Gal you 'bout to die a slow painful death playing with me. In my home! My altar of peace.

MARGRET

Send the police they are attacking me. Get here if you are nearby 1580... (MOM snatches the phone and throws it) You will be prosecuted for destruction of property.

MOM

I'll be dead by the time the trial starts. You are so much of a Christian you should have been praying for me instead of trying to come by and worry me to death, but God has given me enough strength to deal with you.

JUNIOR

This bullshit ain't about the church. Why you keep callin' her Pearl? Daddy I have had enough, who is this Pearl Margret? Why are you here, Sister? What files, Pop?

MARGRET

He's not even man enough to face me. You have to send your dying wife out here to do your dirty work, James. You have never been man enough. Never.

MOM

One more word against my husband and you will find out I can throw more than a phone.

MARGRET

Your husband is finished, this family is done, I got all the proof I need and the vote will happen. Junior couldn't beat me with a small army. You better have a damn good lawyer James because your wife won't be here much longer. Iris, if you are smart you will get out of this family or go down with them.

MOM

You can win the church but James and my children, all of them, they are mine!!! Now show yourself out or be carried out, Pearl. Iris, don't let another woman hang around sniffing at your man's heels too long. My sister told me to shoot Pearl first time that we saw her, had a loaded gun too.

IRIS

Mrs. Pearl, you should really go now this has carried on far too long. It's not becoming of a pastor. I honestly don't want to find out if my mother law is serious about murder.

MARGRET

My name is Pastor Margret Gold. Get used to it James, Donald, Junior. Pearl was like Paul being changed to Saul, I have met the master and been made new, new Pastor with a New Focus. Donald have your office cleaned out by tomorrow or it will be cleaned out for you with the rest of James' trash.

(DERICK knocks and then unlocks the door)

DERICK

Happy Birthday Momma!!!

MOM

My baby! Derick, what on earth are you doing here? James!! (hugs her youngest son and IRIS takes the flowers)

DAD

Well, GOD does work in mysterious ways. Hey, Son, no bodyguards this time?

SMITTY

What do the kids call you, "BIG D from H.T."? Houston's biggest star! H-TOWN's legend. Looking good! Looking mo' like your damn daddy every time I see you.

JUNIOR

Surprise!!! Mom, I told we had a big day planned for you. (the two brothers hug)

DERICK

Hey, Momma! I know you didn't think I was going to miss your birthday while I was in town, COVID or no COVID. Is this a sunrise service Daddy? Deacon Smith! Sorry, I don't know your name...

IRIS

Mrs. Margret Pearl!

MOM

Pearl and Smitty were just leaving. They came by early with church business and it's all been handled. Right, Donald?

SMITTY

Yes, it's all being dealt with, Sister Emily. Have a good birthday. I will see you tonight James with the lawyers. Good seeing you Derick. Nice flowers, son, real nice. Come on Margret.

MARGRET

I am not moving from this spot!!! Get your hands off me!

MOM

Jesus, woman, don't you ever quit? You are heaping coals onto your head playing with me.

DERICK

Are you bothering my family? What's going on, Junior? Oh, Oh, I see, there is some foolishness going down. Woman, I know you are not standing in my parent's house startin' no shit! Momma

just said you need to GO! I see I'm about to catch a case with the black Karen! (DAD and JUNIOR grab DERICK)

SMITTY

Margret let's go. You are fooling with fire! Just leave damn it!!!

(SMITTY gets in front of MARGRET)

MARGRET

Don't touch me. You better not come near me, Donald Smith. I am going to find my phone and record everything and livestream this family until this confrontation goes viral. That boy does not know who he is dealing with!

SMITTY

How crazy are you?

DERICK

You a marked woman!!!

(A knock at the door and AMIRI enters)

Hey Amiri, man, shit! Surprise, Momma!

IRIS

Happy Birthday Momma Emily!

JUNIOR

SURPRISE!!! All the way from Japan!

(MOM runs to him)

MOM

Amiri. You are supposed to be stuck in Japan. All my sons are home!!!

IRIS

Took us months to plan it, but all your men under the same roof!

AMIRI

Momma, I can't breathe.

MOM

My first born, my preacher, and my baby boy all home! Well it only took me nearly dying but look at how good God is to me! Halfway around the world but back here where you belong. Today is a special day. Yes, sir! All my sons are here. It's a good day.

SMITTY

Lawyer up Jim. Amiri, good to have you home.

MARGRET

Amiri Babatunde. It's good to see you home, son. So good.

DERICK

Now you all warm and fuzzy, get to steppin'.

MARGRET

Your father use to dress like that, in his ROTC days.

JUNIOR

SMITTY PLEASE!

MOM

Amiri, I want to go to our restaurant in Downtown. Let's get dressed, Daddy. Lord it's a special day. Get the Hell out, Margret Pearl! DONALD! My sons are home, feel my second wind coming on. What are you wearing James?

MARGRET

Amiri be sure to come by the church before you leave. It's going to be a glorious new day.

AMIRI

Junior, what in the hell is going on up in here? Momma you alright? Sorry, Sis Margret? D, what's really going on?

DERICK

We are about to throw momma one hell of a party, that's all big bro!

IRIS

I ain't barely started on this breakfast, Daddy. (IRIS opens the door and throws Margret phone out the door!)

MARGRET

We'll be waiting at the church tonight James, the whole Board.

(exits with SMITTY)

MOM

Come on Jim, I think we can catch an early brunch. (MOM exits)

DERICK

I told you she would be all smiles, Junior. All smiles. She ain't been that happy since I moved out.

AMIRI

Why are you all having a Board meeting in the middle of the week? I know I have been go a long time but Junior (DAD cuts him off)

DAD

Derick and Junior, I appreciate what you all are trying to do. For your mother's sake,

JUNIOR

What's wrong, Pop? Margret and Smitty are gone. Mom is the happiest I have seen her the whole time I have been here. We can talk about that storm that just blew out of here later.

DAD

Junior! I was speaking thank you. That storm is your future. Derick, I wish you had checked with me before you decided to go against what I have said for nearly 15 years now.

AMIRI

Don't embarrass yourself, Pop. Derick, I warned you. Sorry, Junior, to drag you and Iris into this again. Hello, Dad, how are you? (Pause) ... I am fine, thank you.

DERICK

Pop, it's one day and it's for Mom. Why start in with Amiri? We are here for Mom. She is happy.

DAD

I make the final say around here. Nothing has changed about that part. Everything in here is under my name and all that occupy it are here at my request, not yours. You might be the king of hip-hop but I wear the crown around here. Matthew, you know you are not welcome under my roof and you know why. Nothing about what day it is, is going to change that part.

JUNIOR

We went through this at my wedding. You are impossible...

DAD

What did you say? Let me rephrase this in the King's English, I don't care how old you are, hell I might be crazy. In fact, I might be blind, cripple and crazy but whatever foolishness I say goes! And you better pretend I can whoop you before we find out and test the theory.

AMIRI

I can fight my own battles, Jimbo! Pop can call me anything he wants; he has the crazy act down. Hi Dad, how are you?

DAD

I told you to never step foot in this house or the church again. You made your choice now live with it. It's called consequences for a sinful life, a sinful choice. You can't twist what God made, that's all there is to it. You can't build a new world just because you don't like the one you were born into.

DERICK

I swear to God to be a genius you are fuckin' stupid.

JUNIOR

D! Shit, Dad we need to think here about Mom...

DAD

You can't possibly understand anything about serving God, you're a foul mouthed heathen. We have had enough drama this morning. You can say goodbye to your mother after she gets dressed but you are not staying in my house, Matthew.

AMIRI

Mom, Momma... Pop if you are putting me out then do it in the open. Mom can you come here right quick!

DAD

Leave your momma out of this. This is between us, DON'T CAUSE A SCENE.

AMIRI

Momma! No sir, I am not running off in the middle of the night anymore

DAD

I said my peace. Junior, get your brother, leave. You started this, Derick!

JUNIOR

Mom! Naw, Amiri is right, Iris get my mother please!

AMIRI

We are going to bury this foolishness right here today, Pop. You want to hate then do it to my face. I am not leaving, these are my brothers and my mother is in that room expecting to see me, alive. I love another human being! That's my crime, love? Loving someone? I have allowed you to carry this insane game on for too long. If God wants me dead, then he needs to strike me down right now or I am going to walk over and hug my father.

DAD

Don't you touch me, you are dead to me, dead, Matthew Terrence Wright is dead. I buried him...back to the earth. That fight is lost! I don't know who you are! My son, Matthew, he dated more girls than I could count! He was smart, good looking, great athlete, then suddenly he came home from the military talking about he lost a stripe and lead of a platoon fighting for his name to be changed from a slave name to something he feels is historically accurate! You don't know the first thing about Africa but now you are Kunta Kinte or Justin Biko. Well they cut that nigga's foot off and shot the other! That wasn't the worst... you brought your behind home and got in front of the whole church talkin' about don't ask don't tell, in front of the whole church. I had hundreds of members walk out!

JUNIOR

Mom is dying with stage 3 cancer and you still stuck in the past. I am his brother don't I get a say? And Derick should get a say. Hell, Iris should be able to vote, too, and Momma should have the ultimate say. You can't do this again.

DAD

AGAIN? This is not a democracy. You don't get a vote! Junior. You will heap coals on your own life. Don't let a dead man drag your soul down with him, that is Matthew's cross. He crucified himself.

DERICK

Are you our father, really, or are we adopted? Seriously, man cause if you are Junior's father and my father then you are AMIRI'S dad! Man I swear to God I can't stand you (DAD starts to slap him, AMIRI grabs his hand) Man I wish you would, come on hit me!

DAD

Get out, all of you. Put your mouth against God in my house, swearing in my presence, my sons have turned into a brood of vipers! I can get your bags for you Junior!

(MOM and IRIS enter)

MOM

What is all this carrying on about? Who is getting out? They just got here. I don't need a babysitter, Iris! Derick why are you and your daddy looking like you are ready to throw down?
JAMES WRIGHT!

DAD

You heard what I said, I have never been more serious in all my days on this Earth.

MOM

James, what is going on here?

DERICK

Tell her, tell her why, explain yourself ole' man.

AMIRI

He wants me to leave, Junior and D were just defending me.

MOM

Now, James, you can't be serious. James Andrew Wright, you hear me? You better go calm yourself. My sons just got here. Don't listen to your daddy.

DERICK

Momma is talking to you! She is not talking to us

DAD

Nigga, that gangster act don't work around here. I said my peace and bring your posse back through tonight if you want, you might catch more than a case! This is Texas, an open carry state!

MOM

Did you hear what you just said, You talkin' about shooting your son, my baby! You best blow your own brains out first, and Amiri is welcome in my house, that's all there is to it.

AMIRI

I am use to violence when it comes to people I love reacting to my life, but stop saying that it's a choice! I am who I am and the only choice is I am not afraid of the violence anymore. I don't seek it. I was born a boy, you accepted me. I was born a sinner and you accepted me, you taught me how to forgive and be forgiven. But I was born gay and for that you put me out? You hate me. I can murder and be held a hero, I can steal and be forgiven but if I kiss another man, that's the undesirable, horrible, unthinkable, unforgivable. Dad, this is too heavy. Pop, I don't hate you. Put down this hate for me. This is a bucket of hate stones. Remember that lesson, Pop? You taught it to me, the bucket of stones. You told me to stop trying to carry a bucket of stones up a mountain, just take a few stones for protection. That's all I have left, Pop, a few stones to protect myself.

DAD

I don't care about what burden you carry around, it's nothing in comparison to the shame I feel when I see you. (goes over to the closet and looks for something)

AMIRI

You said just one stone at a time, remember Pop? This bucket is too heavy to carry. Just a couple of stones for protection, but don't carry the bucket (DAD grabs a baseball bat and everyone reacts) of hate...

JUNIOR

What are you doing? God damn it!!!

DAD

(points the bat at AMIRI) I am not going up this hill with you, OUT!

MOM

James, you better not!!! Put it down!

IRIS

Daddy James...Pastor, he didn't do anyth'...

(DAD swings the bat)