

MABEL. My pa's garden ran along the side of the house. He grew sweet potatoes, okra, corn, tomatoes, squash, peppers, turnip greens, string beans. My father was a laborer, and he also spent twenty-something years pastoring two rural churches.

My younger sister, Shirley, and I loved to meet him at the bus stop. I would see this brown figure in overalls coming up the dirt road. We'd run and catch him by the hand and say, "Hey, Daddy."

MAN. (*As Dad.*) Hey, you boys. What you been doing today?

MABEL. It never bothered me. He had two daughters. He wanted two sons. So he called us boys. I used to rely on Daddy to feel safe, and I think he knew that intuitively. If he got back from church after dark, he would sing his way to the door so not to frighten us. (*Man, as Dad, sings work song.*) Daddy liked singing. He also liked to tell me stories and point out things I might not have noticed.

MAN. (*As Dad.*) Hear that train? That's the five-thirty to Kalamazoo.

MABEL. He'd show me things in the sky.

MAN. (*As Dad.*) See the crescent moon?

MABEL. He'd tell me when it was time to bank the potatoes and kill the hogs.

My dad died on June twentieth. It was a Monday. He was eighty-nine years old. He was unconscious during his last days. I used to talk to him when we were alone.

I told him one day — and I think he could hear me — I said, "Daddy, do you remember how you raised butter beans and corn and okra and tomatoes, and how you would sing and tell me about the moon, and how you called Shirley and me boys because you wanted boys, but you loved us just the same?"

I didn't intend to wear a hat to my father's funeral; I intended to get my hair done, but there was no time. My daughters brought this hat with an African motif. It was black with a bit of gold on it. It wasn't really the look I wanted for my dad's funeral, but I needed something on my head.

Daddy would have laughed at this hat. He'd see me with some hat on and just start laughing.

MAN. (*As Dad.*) Lordy, where'd you get that hat?

MABEL. He wasn't the kind to express his emotions, but I never questioned my daddy's love. (*Man hands Mabel the straw hat. All look at Yolanda expectantly —*)

YOLANDA. (*Yolanda takes a breath and stands —*) Back when my brother died, I asked my mom what she thought about me wearing this hat to Teddy's funeral, because it is a whole lot of hat. She said, "I think it's too fussy." One of my aunts came to my defense. Auntie Henny is also my godmother, so I call her Nanny. Nanny said, "Well, Yolanda fussed over her brother, so I think a fussy hat is completely appropriate." So I wore it.

When we reached my brother's cemetery, an elderly man, who was one of the limo drivers, dashed to open my door. He had to be every bit of eighty years old, but he ran to that door to help me. He gave me his hand and said, "I always help a lady in a hat first." My mom was in the car, and other older women, but he wasn't worried about age or anything else except helping the lady in the hat. It was like a throwback to the

days of chivalry. (*Light changes as Man puts on the baseball cap — becoming Teddy. He sings to Yolanda — Boyz to Men version of “Oh Mary Don’t You Weep.” Mother Shaw joins in. Then everyone. Yolanda puts on her baseball cap.*)

MAN.

I’M SINGIN’ MARY

TELL MARTHA NOT TO MOAN

I’M SINGIN’ MARY

TELL MARTHA NOT TO MOAN

YOU KNOW PHAROAH’S ARMY

DROWNED IN THE RED SEA

I’M SINGIN’ MARY

TELL MARTHA NOT TO MOAN

WOMEN.

MARY DON’T YOU WEEP

TELL MARTHA NOT TO MOAN

MARY DON’T YOU WEEP

TELL MARTHA NOT TO MOAN

PHAROAH’S ARMY

DROWNING IN THE RED SEA

MARY DON’T YOU WEEP

TELL MARTHA NOT TO MOAN

YOLANDA. It was during the Thanksgiving holiday, my brother Teddy was murdered. He was eighteen. He had an argument with a friend and the friend shot him in the head.

When we were growing up, everyone thought Teddy and I were twins, even though he was older than me. We had a strong bond. We were the youngest of five. Our other siblings were five years older than us and more. Teddy and I called ourselves “the little people” because we could crawl between the legs of all the giants in the house.

As we grew up, we had dreams for each other. But when he left to go to college, I started to choose some different friends. That took me down a rough road. Then he dropped out and followed —

I was at my mother’s house one night, making deviled eggs, when I heard a knock at the door. It was one of Teddy’s friends. He told me Teddy had been shot. We went to the hospital, but Teddy died before I could see him.

Then mama sent me away to live with Grandma Shaw —

— I was looking for answers — Looking for myself — (*She moves towards Man as Teddy. He recedes — Jeanette leads song — as women surround a keening Yolanda — laying on of hands —*)

SCENE SIX

BAPTISM

In this sequence — throughout this scene — the women’s words/songs/dancel movement are about baptizing Yolanda in history.

ALL.

WADE IN THE WATER
WADE IN THE WATER CHILD —
WADE IN THE WATER
GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER
GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER
GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE

MABEL. In 1958 my daddy gave me a choice between two colleges for young women — Bennett in Greensboro or Spelman in Atlanta. I chose Bennett because it was three hundred miles away. Bennett sent me a letter that explained the dress code. We had to wear hats, gloves, heels and stockings to chapel and whenever we went off campus. Students had to look like young ladies in public. My roommate, Patsy Ruth, was a rebel. (*Jeanette becomes Patsy Ruth taking off her shoes and smoking a cigarette.*)

She didn't like the rules. Patsy Ruth and I went shopping one day. Whenever freshmen went off campus, we had to go in groups of two or more. Patsy Ruth decided that she was going to go bare-legged and no hat. She might have worn flip-flops, horror of horrors. But I was correct: I had on my hat, heels and my stockings. I followed rules.

Patsy Ruth and I were walking down Elm Street, and this car pulled up beside us. We heard this voice:

WANDA. (*As Dr. Player.*) Young lady — where are your stockings?

MABEL. It was Bennett's president, Dr. Player. She was a firm woman, soft-spoken but firm.

WANDA. (*As Dr. Player.*) Get in this car before you disgrace this school. Aren't you ashamed? You have to be taken back to campus like a child?

MABEL. There was only one time when Dr. Player said we didn't have to wear hats off campus — (*Everyone sings off of Wanda's lead: "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around."*)

ALL. (*Marching and circling around Mabel and Yolanda.*)

AIN'T GONNA LET NOBODY TURN ME AROUND
TURN ME AROUND
TURN ME AROUND
AINT GONNA LET NOBODY TURN ME AROUND
KEEP ON WALKIN'
KEEP ON TALKIN'
MARCHIN' UP FREEDOM WAY

(*Tune continues underneath dialogue —*)

MABEL. — when we were picketing Woolworth's because they wouldn't serve blacks. Some students would go in and sit at the "Whites Only" lunch counter and some like me, would march outside with picket signs. That protest helped desegregate lunch counters throughout the South. It's kind of funny: It took a civil rights movement to get those hats off our heads. (*Yolanda takes the baseball cap off her head.*)

ALL.

GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER