SELMA '65

A DRAMA BY

Catherine Filloux

CONCEIVED BY CATHERINE FILLOUX & MARIETTA HEDGES

Playscripts Inc.

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The play is dedicated to Brian Richard Mori.

Cast of Characters

VIOLA LIUZZO

TOMMY ROWE

Casting Notes

One actress plays Viola Liuzzo, a white woman, as well as Tommy Rowe, a white man. Viola and Tommy sometimes imitate other characters while reminiscing.

Production Notes

Disclaimer: The stories of Viola Liuzzo and Gary Thomas Rowe are part of the historical record. This play is a work of dramatic fiction created as a one-person play. *Selma '65* is a creation of my imagination, and liberties have been taken. Suggested links for footage accompanying the play can be found in the Appendix.

We move fluidly between locales with lights and sound. Locales are suggested.

The play is performed without an intermission.

Acknowledgments

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Selma '65 premiered at La MaMa's First Floor Theatre in New York City, New York, September 26–October 12, 2014. This play was commissioned by Marietta Hedges and directed by Eleanor Holdridge with the following cast and crew:

VIOLA/TOMMY . . . . . Marietta Hedges

Set/Projection Design. . . . . Kris Stone
Lighting Design. . . . . Andrew F. Griffin
Costume Design . . . . . Suttirat Larlarb
Sound Design. . . . . Tim Schellenbaum
Music. . . . . Jim Hedges
Production Stage Manager . . . . . Deidre Works
Assistant Stage Manager . . . . . Eloise Sherrid
Assistant Director . . . . . Rachel Levens
Associate Set Designer . . . . . Dan Geggatt
Assistant Set Designer . . . . . Amanda Stephens
Studio Manager . . . . . Emily Tabachuk
Assistant Costume Designer . . . . . Elizabeth Donelan
Video Programmer . . . . . Jose Estrella
Voice and Speech Coach . . . . . BettyAnn Leeseberg-Lange
Movement Coach. . . . . Karen Bradley
Violence Consultant . . . . . Galway McCullough
Production Assistant . . . . . Bruce Louis
Press Representation . . . . . Sam Rudy Media Relations
Social Media Consultant . . . . . Jarrett Lyons
Graphic Design . . . . . Shehzad Ghias

All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credits in every program:

> "This play was commissioned by Marietta Hedges. It premiered at La MaMa in New York City, September–October 2014."
>
> A biography of the author shall appear where any other artist receives a biography.

Marietta Hedges in *Selma '65,* La MaMa, New York, New York (2014). Photo: Steven Schreiber.

SELMA '65
by Catherine Filloux

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Prologue

*(*VIOLA *is at a tree. She wears 1960s-style cat glasses, talking directly to the audience. She smokes a cigarette.)*

VIOLA. I am always walking past *this* tree. I'm barefoot, holding my father's hand. He only has one. He lost his hand in the coal mines. I love that hand of his, cracked and soft at the same time. He tugs mine suddenly. *(She sees something.)* Darkness. The lights go out. I don't know where I am. My heart leaves my body. *(Her accent becomes more Southern as she reminisces.)* What happened, Daddy? No, I want to look. Wait, I can't see. What was that in the tree, Daddy? Why? I don't understand. I want to see. *(Her Southern accent is gone as the woman.)* I always wanted to see—just that kind of person. But the mind is like a clean piece of paper and certain things they're like ink on a press, they leave their mark. The mind is innocent until it's not. Memory's written like a dark black message. There are things I need to erase. What I did to Leroy.

This road in the Lowndes Swamp is *lined* with trees. As I'm driving the nightmare of the first tree seems to go on forever—I see an explosion of trees. Tree, tree, tree, tree. *(Singing slowly:)* "We shall overcome, we shall o…"

(She finds a rock.)

My daddy was a coal miner. He knew rocks that light themselves on fire.

"Make a trail of rocks if you get lost," my daddy told me. Make a trail of rocks if you get lost. Coal.

(She sets down the coal and finds another rock, holding it up to the light.)

Have you ever seen smoke trapped in a rock? Smoky quartz from the Lowndes Swamp earth.

(She sets down the quartz, trying to make a trail of rocks.)

I'm lost in limbo.

That march was the most beautiful day of my life.

(The Prologue ends.)

(We see images and hear Martin Luther King, Jr. at the end of the Selma Voting March: "Now it is not an accident that one of the great marches of American history should terminate in Montgomery, Alabama." It is 1965, as VIOLA *puts away her cigarette and drives her car at night, talking to a passenger.)*

VIOLA. To see Martin Luther King speak today, Leroy. "It is normalcy all over Alabama that prevents the Negro from becoming a registered voter." First, Bloody Sunday, then Turnaround Tuesday, and finally today, the Selma Voting March made it to Montgomery. Three times a charm. All of us marching together today, singing—the children lining the road, the American flags. What will *your* dreams be tonight, Leroy?

(Laughing:) Voting, yes. Please, I said, call me Viola.

Don't worry—I want to make one more trip to Montgomery to get the last of the marchers. Everyone's so tired but I won't sleep tonight. You know those times you feel you're being called? I know what it means, Leroy, a white lady like me and a young black man like you, but we have to live by our actions. What an action, when you think of it, just two people sitting driving in a car. I've never been happier than tonight.

You're not a big talker but the way you dedicated yourself to the marchers these past few days. What makes you so brave?

When I was eighteen I didn't have half your integrity—to see that in someone your age, it cheers your spirits. I hope my sons grow up to be like you. I'm sorry *I* talk so much.

There's nothing to be afraid of. After we get back to Selma, I'll have another cup of coffee and start the long trip home. Drive straight through. I got down here in two days and four packs of cigarettes. I never smoke in the car, unless I'm alone. I want to respect your air rights. You'll come visit me and my family in Detroit? You need to meet my best friend Sarah. I'm not black, but I consider you and Sarah my people, Leroy. I'm volunteering with her at the NAACP when I get back. What about you?

People love pizza. My husband's Italian.

(She stops at a red light.)

Do you see what that lady's doing? *(To the lady in the other car:)* You want me to play your little game?

*(*VIOLA *sticks out her tongue.)*

You happy now, lady? See, she drove away, Leroy. Not giving us any more trouble. I'm sorry—you don't deserve to live like this every

day. I want a better world for you. There's really just a fine line that divides us, that's why I'm here. This morning after finishing work at the first-aid station I climbed to the top of St. Jude's to see the crowds of marchers. You feel on top of the world. I had a premonition that Martin Luther King was going to die. I ran back down and I prayed— I became a Catholic for my husband, but I left the church because my baby couldn't go to heaven—he wasn't baptized. I still prayed. Then I took off my shoes and marched barefoot the last four miles to Montgomery. I'm originally from the South…

(She puts on a cotton hood, similar to a Ku Klux Klan hood, but without the pointy top.)

TOMMY. I'm originally from the South. Gary Thomas Rowe, Tommy.

I'm wearin' this 'cause I'm in witness protection, Senator. I want to tell the intelligence committee I was a big starred-and-striped American flag, flyin' at full mast for the FBI.

The FBI recruited me to infiltrate the Ku Klux Klan. I thought the Klan was nuts. I never thought a guy had to disguise himself in a stupid bed sheet to have a good fight. My handlers told me I'd been known from the start as a kind of rowdy, wild type—I'd worked as a bouncer at certain clubs—let's just say I had a kind of standin' as a man who thrives on adventure. The FBI did some background checks on me and considered that in a situation of pressure I'd deliver to them what they were lookin' for. It all started with the "Freedom Riders," Senator. I would do *anythin' in the world* for my handlers. My first handler was Barry.

(He takes off the hood and speaks to his handler, lighting a cigarette.)

Barry, I tell ya, the police is givin' the Ku Klux Klan *Fifteen Minutes* to beat 'em up when they arrive at the Greyhound Station. Why don't you take off your hat and relax, Barry? Have a cigarette. At the Klavern meetin' the Exalted Cyclops is talkin' about how many blacks and civil rights workers they can kill in *Fifteen Minutes*. There's about sixty KKK men ready to meet the bus. It's a "Fiery Summons"—the biggest call to action in their *so-called* Klan rules. Everybody's obliged to go. It'll be Sunday in the mornin' at the Greyhound Station. It's Mother's Day and most of the police are *supposedly* at home with their mothers.

Yeah, you better order some flowers, Barry. The cops on duty will stay out of the bus station for *Fifteen Minutes*. The Ku Klux Klan has free reign to beat 'n' pummel as many of the people comin' off the bus as we can. They'll be equipped with guns, bats, pipes. After *Fifteen Minutes* we disperse or get arrested…

I said, Sunday at ten o'clock, Barry. I've been told to wait at a phone booth in the Greyhound Station for Police Sergeant Cook to call and let me know exactly when the bus is arrivin'. Cook's assigned a pay phone at the station for me. You want me to go?

(A pay phone rings. TOMMY *picks up the phone.)*

Why the hell not? *(Listening and putting down the phone:)* The Greyhound's not comin', guys, we need to get the hell over to the Trailways Station. Haul fuckin' ass.

(In the Trailways Station.)

Okay, they're comin' out of the bus. Just in time.
(Bending down:) He's in his Sunday best, poor thing, like he's goin' somewhere special.
Get him. Hold down that nigger. Beat the fuck out of him.

(The flash of a camera starts going off.)

Fuckin' photographer. Grab that camera. Smash it. GET THAT FILM!

*(*TOMMY *is now looking at a photo in a newspaper, talking to his handler again.)*

Barry, yeah it's *me* in the photo, but my back's to the camera, no one's gonna know.
I don't care if the old man has a shit fit, I'm here because I love the FBI and my country. I told you 'bout the *Fifteen Minutes* more 'n once—the police was givin' the Klan free rein. Y'all allowed it to happen.

I know the police was part of it. You wanted me to stand off to the side, twiddle my thumbs and *watch?* This was my first big test with the Klan. Who do you take me for, a moron?

(He touches his throat.)

Went in deep. We went back out to beat up more people comin' off the buses, didn't know the black man had a knife. Found a "doctor," stitched me up, no anesthesia.

(He looks at the photo again.)

We broke the camera, Barry. I don't know how the photo got out.
It's not Cagle. I told you, it's *me!*
Oh, right… It *could* be Cagle.
Okay, it is Cagle.
It's Cagle— I got it, Barry.
Oh, Jesus, "to the day I die," it's Arnie Cagle in the photo.
You told me to go through with it. I was *leadin'* it, for god's sake.
(Referring to the photo:) This other guy with the lead pipe? He's part of Fields's group.

Yep, those Nazis were there, we tried to get Dr. Fields and his guys to leave.
Yeah…sure, that's right, it was all *their* fault. They planned the whole thing.
Yeah, I wasn't even in the bus station.
Right, I was outside with some others doin' a peaceful demonstration.
(Laughing:) It was Dr. Fields and his men who caused it.
Relax, Barry, I wasn't even part of the fightin' at the Trailways Station.
(Referring to his throat, laughing:) And this is a shavin' cut.
125-dollar bonus?
Hey, how'd your mother like the flowers?
For your *wife,* that's elegant, Barry—a dozen.
Nothin', I moved out.
I know the rules, I was gonna tell you I left her. Look, Barry, the FBI is my life. I'm married to *you*. Fighting communism. I'll buy you two dozen red roses.

*(*VIOLA *is driving, speaking to the passenger Leroy.)*

VIOLA. It *is* quiet, Leroy. I didn't think the road would be so deserted. Just this afternoon the march seemed like a celebration that would never end. So many more marchers than expected.

No, it's too late to turn around. Montgomery isn't far. Those marchers are waiting to get picked up—we can't abandon them. We're fine. You'll be back home in Selma very soon and I'll be on my way back home to Detroit. Just two weeks ago I was home watching *Judgment at Nuremberg* with my husband and oldest daughter when a live report interrupted the program. My younger kids heard the screaming on the TV and came out of their rooms.

*(*VIOLA *is watching TV.)*

They were just trying to walk peacefully across the bridge, darling.
You three need to go back to bed.
People are being beaten, honey.
Yes, black people. Like Sarah.
You can ask her tomorrow, she's probably watching it too.
Jim, it's terrible what's happening.
They're asking for the right to vote, darling.
It's *tear gas,* honey.
Right, because it makes you cry.
The police are spraying it so people can't see—and move forward.
This is important, Jim, the right to vote belongs to all of us.
They're chasing them away on the horses.
It's late sweetie, I don't want you to have bad dreams.
It does look like war.

This is not my fault, Jim. It's on national news. Writing a check isn't enough. "The appalling silence of the good people."
I will not turn it off. She's a grown-up, she can finish watching. *I'm* the one who is saying she can stay up. It's up to me, okay?
You're not her father. *I'm* making the decisions.
I don't know if the movie will come back on.
Okay, it's a commercial, sweetie, I'll bring you some milk.

> *(We see footage of a Lifebuoy soap commercial. A man in a suit at breakfast reads the paper as a woman in a nightgown pours him coffee. The woman smells the man.* VIOLA *mouths the commercial voiceover as she moves back behind the steering wheel, driving her car, staring out at the night, and the footage continues.*
>
> *"This man just showered with a new kind of soap, new Lifebuoy Mint Refresher, a soap so loaded with mint, so tangy, so frosty it drives wives…'wicked.'"*
>
> *Music plays as the image ripples, devil horns appear on the woman's head and on* VIOLA's *head. The woman in the commercial murmurs seductively, slinking down the man's body.*
>
> *"Every bar of new Lifebuoy Mint Refresher contains the essence of 125 mint leaves. Soap has never smelled this good before and neither have you. New Lifebuoy Mint Refresher drives wives… 'wicked.'"*
>
> VIOLA *speaks in the car as she drives and the footage fades.)*

I *am* wicked, Leroy. Horns grow out of my head regularly. My house is always a mess. That's why I hired Sarah when I started college. Do you think a white woman hiring a black woman as a housekeeper is wrong?

Sarah didn't want to come to the march. And she didn't want me to postpone my finals, she thought I was crazy. My mind, I get wound up too tight, she says I go in a million directions. Once when I was working in a lab, I stole a microscope on purpose so they would arrest me. I wanted to make a statement that women don't get overtime, or severance. It backfired—the police just made me return it. Sarah says I need to relax, take it easy.

> *(We see images and hear Lyndon Johnson endorsing the Voting Rights Bill saying, "The time for waiting is gone.")*

When I heard Martin Luther King and President Johnson were organizing a peaceful march after Bloody Sunday, I knew I had to come.

> *(*VIOLA *argues with her husband, on the phone.)*

This march *is* my business, Jim. I'm a mother and that's why I'm going. This is not another Lucille Ball episode. It's good they fired me because now I'm in college.

You're right, taking them out of school was a bad mistake. You want me to kneel down and say *mea culpa* a thousand times? *(Starting to kneel:)* I'm not kneeling, I'm not a Catholic anymore, Jim— *I* get to decide what heaven is, a mother knows, it's a safe place, not limbo. We're not living in Dante's *Inferno.* I won't be able to live with myself if I don't go, people from all over the country are going.

I went AWOL because I had to clear my mind, something in my body felt wrong, the medicine. And you know I've been doing much better after the hospital. I don't want to go against your wishes, but Sarah has promised me she will take care of the children. You go against my wishes sometimes. Do *I* gamble away our money?

I don't smoke as much as you drink.

Sweetheart, I love you. Why are we fighting? You get to do your work at the union, why can't I do this?

A special surprise? Okay, my love, you can trust me. I'll wait for you to get home to decide.

*(*VIOLA *goes back to driving the car.)*

I didn't wait, Leroy. I threw clothes in a brown paper bag and drove a thousand miles alone. I like to drive fast. Don't worry. I was supposed to come with a group of students from Wayne State, but everyone canceled. I completed the Selma Voting March today against everyone's will. *(Looking in rearview mirror:)* Finally, another car on the road.

My birthday's next month. Jim gave me a rock-polishing machine last year. It makes it look like the rocks are under water, permanently. He says he has something even better this year. You know there's something about rocks.

Yes, rocks.

Well, I don't know. It's hard to explain. I wish I were a poet. But I'm not.

I'm a realist. Actually, I don't know what I am. I'm also a dreamer. You have the eyes of a dreamer, Leroy. I bet people tell you that all the time. I have a sixth sense about things like that. I fall in love with people. Not romantically. Well with Jim it was romantic. He's the love of my life. My husband. This is his old car. It's easy to drive. You barely have to put your foot on the gas. But there's a place where you think you should be, and you try to get there, a world that you want, that's all you can do, keep trying. You'll see when you get older.

(She drives in silence for a moment. She looks in the rearview mirror.)

Wait… Is that Chevy following us? The road is so dark.

*(*TOMMY *puts the hood over his head.)*

TOMMY. Darkness. The lights go out. I don't know where I am.
Ohhh my god!
I'm watchin'
Through the window of the car.
In my soul that's what she's sayin'
Her mouth is completely open,
She's seen you, you better stop.
Holy shit, that lady is crazy goin' ninety, more 'n that.
Bullets poppin' into the asphalt like bubbles.
(Catching himself:) Sorry, I'm fine, Senator. This hood. Brings back memories I need to erase.
Well, you see, the way it worked is the FBI asked me to infiltrate the weekly Ku Klux Klan meetin's.

*(*TOMMY *takes off the hood as we see footage from the silent film* The Birth of a Nation, *where a "black man" is chasing a white woman.* TOMMY *speaks to a Klansman.)*

Yeah, it's a good film, man. A classic. I love the part where the nigger is chasin' the white woman and she jumps off the cliff. *(Laughing:)* Lands like a sack of potatoes.
Oh, I can't wait to see it again.
Each time? Better? Thanks for gettin' me the bridal silk. That was nice of your wife to stitch it up. And this patch with the drop of blood…
"Give your life for the Klan." I'll thank her myself.
Fine, you thank her.
The silk feels good. On.
Crossburnin'? I work at the dairy till five.
Yeah, pick me up at five— I'll pack my robe in my trunk.
A gun?
Yeah okay, I'll tell him the Wizard sent me. It's not exactly huntin' season.
(Laughing:) Always huntin' season, sure. Okay, the gun—and the bats too.
Karate? The men want it now, really? Well, tell 'em to gather 'round.
(Showing him his hand:) Broke my hand so many fuckin' times choppin' up bricks, doctor told me to stop comin' back.

*(*TOMMY *begins his karate demonstration.)*

All right guys, you wanna learn to break a neck? On your right leg. "Sidekick to throat." Any volunteers?

What, you men scared? Palm strike to throat. Grab and crush. Crack to skull. Attacker dies unless given immediate medical attention. Okay, come on up. Go slow learnin' this…

(He speaks to his handler.)

Barry, I had to teach 'em somethin', they keep askin' me. Don't worry, these guys are the biggest sissies. You know what it's like to watch the most horrific three-hour film you've ever seen in your entire life? Over and over. And pretend you like it? I swear to god I feel like I'm goin' crazy there in the dark—I try to fantasize 'bout other stuff. Don't ask.
(Laughing:) What all guys fantasize 'bout, Barry— I'm rescuin'…
No, not a kitten in a tree, Barry, I hate cats.
Different kind of pussy. I'm rescuin' damsels in distress—"well-endowed and unholstered," if you know what I mean.
Anyway these *Birth of a Nation* filmmakers are psychos. Didn't even use real black people…

(He takes a paper from his pocket.)

Here's the receipt for the robe. It's like little boys playin' dress-up. BOO.
I'm savin' the best news for last, I was just elected Klokan Chief. To be honest, I was the only one runnin'. I'm joinin' the inner circle.
They're talkin' 'bout the blacks who ride at the front of the bus. We'll be takin' a couple cars, boardin' the buses and beatin' 'em up.
That's it.
You sound disappointed. You think I'm holdin' somethin' back? THERE JUST ISN'T A LOT GOIN' ON AT THESE MEETIN'S. If you don't believe me, go fuck yourself, Barry.
Yeah, I'm all right, my daughter dropped by the dairy. She said, "I want you in my life." Such a pretty girl, smart.

(He speaks to his daughter.)

I love you, baby, but I got a job to do. Now, I grew up in the South and *I* know the Southern Way is here for a reason. Integration of schools, interracial marriage, they're never gonna work. You see, me and the U.S. we're together fightin' communism—Martin Luther King's a communist, honey, 'n' a sexual pervert. Someday you're gonna know what I done and you'll be proud of me. How's school? You haven't lost the honor roll?
Good.

(He takes out some money and gives it to her.)

Buy somethin' new. Don't tell her, she'll want all five of you to get the same. Here, honey. Get your hair done… Please, look at me. Take it.

(He speaks to Barry.)

I walked her to the bus, Barry… *I* never got past junior high, my daddy dropped out when he was twelve.
Protectin' our country, keepin' it safe, that's what's important to me.

(A beat.)

You think you could help me move up, Barry? Somethin' in law enforcement? Police?

(A beat.)

Well, maybe someday… Okay.

What do you mean? You're leavin'?
Why didn't you say anythin'? Shit, is it because of my picture in the paper? Did I put you through hell gettin' caught in that photo? You had to lie. I know that took a toll, but I di'n't have a choice, I told ya. You're my handler. If you din't want me to go to the bus station y'all should've stopped me.
What am I gonna do without you, Barry?
Mac? He's even more nervous than you. I don't wanna work for Mac. His bowties, forget it.
I don't want to switch handlers, why didn't you tell me anythin'? If you go, I go. This is for you, Barry, I do it for you. We have somethin'. Shit.
I'm not cryin'.

(He takes something from Barry:) What is this, Barry?
For me? What did you get me, Barry, two dozen red roses?
(He looks at a ring in the palm of his own hand:) Ruby red rock in it, color of blood.

*(*VIOLA *holds out a ring.)*

VIOLA. Here, honey, your birthstone. You got married—a mother wants to know. On my way home from Selma I want to stop by and meet your new husband. I know I had no right to take you out of school. Please, look at me. Take it.

(She adds the ring to the trail of rocks. Bright headlights are behind her as she drives.)

I can't wait to get back to my kids, Leroy. One of my daughters moved out. Such a pretty girl, smart. I yanked my kids out of school to fight a law allowing children to drop out at sixteen.

Now I see I overreacted, I was taking some medicine. *I* never got past junior high, my daddy dropped out when he was twelve—he lost his hand in the coal mines.

A rock fell from the pit roof and crushed it—they removed it at the wrist. There were no unions like Jim's then, my daddy had no rights. I had to leave school, help my mom, he never forgave me, my daddy was a good man—I loved him. You hear how my Southern accent comes back? My children were out of school for forty days, my daughter lost the honor roll. She didn't even tell me where she was going, she told Sarah.

Oh. Those headlights *are* really bright.
They warned us, the National Guard and the Army were going to be pulling out. *(Changing the subject to calm herself:)* You know, the woman I'm staying with in Selma, I told her I'd take in her daughter Frances so she could finish school. Frances just had a baby, the cutest little girl. Sarah says, "Viola, you are always taking in strays." I loved Sarah right away. During the war they were rationing and I went into a store to get some pepper—the owner tells me they haven't had any pepper for months, Sarah's at the cashier, she says, "Yes we do have pepper, Miss, my boss keeps it right here behind the counter for the special people," and gives me some! We picketed the tear gas at the Sojourner Truth…

Yes, in Detroit. I had her over for coffee—we started talking about everything. We were both from the South. She took care of Jim and my babies when I went back to work. Jim's my third husband—three times a charm. Then I hired her full-time as my housekeeper. We're like sisters, we went to New York last year for a civil rights conference—she wanted to see the Statue of Liberty. I almost fell off a cliff.

*(*VIOLA *walks down a cliff finding a rock, calling to Sarah.)*

Sarah, it's a black rock with bubbles. I went too far down the ledge—I can't get back up.
Yes you can.
Sarah, don't be mean.
It's the first time this has happened. Don't tell Jim, please.
You're right, it's happened before. Where are you going?

*(*VIOLA *examines the rock.)*

It comes in on the Gulf Stream with drift seeds. At least I didn't fall off the ferry. I never thought New York was like this. You feel on top of the world…

(She calls out.)

Yoo, hoo. Thank you, gentlemen, I'm sorry to inconvenience you.
Collecting rocks.
Yes, rocks.

(She holds out her arms, as they help her up.)

I lost track of how far down I went.
Thank you so much, Sir.
May I give you one as a…?
Okay, goodbye.
This pumice is for you, Sarah. You always get me off the ledge.

(She places the pumice rock down in the trail, as the headlights behind her get even brighter.)

Those headlights! What are those people doing?

*(*TOMMY *puts on the hood, showing a ring.)*

TOMMY. Senator, my first handler, Barry, gave me his college ring for a present when he left the FBI. Barry knew I admired it and he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Barry's college ring is the closest I ever got to high school. My handlers *loved* me—that's just the way it was. We had a bond. Mac was next after Barry. Mac wore prissy little bowties. All different colors. And patterns. But it's easy to fall out of favor, a tightrope to walk, really. My handlers were always pushin' me to get in deeper with the Klan and by the same token, spittin' out warnin's like "don't get caught."

Well, you see, Senator, I was never givin' the FBI *enough* information, or the information they *wanted.* And they were always goin' out of their way to say, don't you *ever* call yourself an "agent," you're just an informant.

*(*TOMMY *reports to his handler, Mac, taking off the hood. He is smoking.)*

The cops found the guns in our cars 'n' arrested us, but there's something else…
Machine guns, bazookas, boxes of buckshot…
Relax, your ulcer actin' up or somethin'?
The police gave us the thumbs up later, erased it all. No record whatsoever. Come on, loosen that tie. That is quite the tie, Mac. Are those little golf clubs on it? Cute.
Well, the Klan is planning to stab Reverend Shuttlesworth when he's at the Dobbs House restaurant.
Yeah Dobbs House at the airport, I'm supposed to shoot one of Reverend Shuttlesworth's bodyguards.
I tried to tell 'em it was too risky, but the guys are friggin' out of control. If I don't show up I'm dead meat, Mac, it's givin' me nightmares.

(He is having a nightmare.)

Imperial Wizard, I'm writin' your FBI report real nice 'n' makin' my handwritin' better. Mac, I swear I'm gonna kill Reverend Shuttlesworth's bodyguard. Fuck, I don't know if I'm the guy behind the sheet or the guy reportin' to my handler…

My girlfriend says, "Tommy, you're havin' a nightmare. You look possessed starin' into the dark like that. Did you fall off a cliff in your dream?"

I say, "Shit, Muffin, I'm keepin' too many secrets, one of these days I'm gonna fuck up and disappear in the swamp."

(Imitating his girlfriend:) "Oohh, let me kiss you, baby, let's take a shower. I'll soap you up with that mint soap that makes me 'wicked'—just like in the commercial!" *(Laughing.)*

(To the committee. Laughing:) Senator, I had lots of girlfriends to talk me off the ledge. After three marriages I knew I liked the more temporary approach, if you know what I mean?

Yes, Mr. Senator, I alone saved the life of Reverend Shuttlesworth. My handler, Mac, warned the police chief and the mayor, so the integration at Dobbs House went off peacefully with no deaths. I'm the reason he's still alive. But then the Klan drags me up to face the Wizard. Jesus Christ, you'd laugh if it wasn't so goddamn dangerous…

*(*TOMMY *faces the Wizard.)*

There I am, the Wizard's blue fuckin' eyes starin' me down, gun in his hand. Just a wiry psychopath piece of shit who likes to stuff bats with lead. A little cottage industry he has goin' in his garage. My heart leaves my body. So I grab him by the neck, his Adam's apple is throbbin' under my palm.

*(*TOMMY *grabs the Wizard by the neck.)*

"I am not FB-fuckin'-I and if you don't believe me, go screw yourself, asshole. How dare you question me after everythin' I've done for you. You two-faced motherfucker, I'm a far goddamn better Klansman than you are!" We are watchin' each other, eye to eye, man to man. The big test. I'm chokin' him to death. "I—I know you're loyal, Baby Brother," he finally whispers. I let the Wizard go. My stomach was about to explode, lost my dinner in the car. Beef stroganoff. After that the Wizard was always my biggest fan. Well, okay, I'm gettin' there, Senator, 'round that time, the Klan wanted to kidnap and lynch some negro students who got into the university. And we were bringin' back Dynamite Bob into the Klan. A guy called Sister White was teachin' us how to make bombs at the meetin's, keepin' our stash in the swamp.

I am not avoidin' the question about the Sixteenth Street Church deaths, Senator, I just can't tell you anythin'. I wasn't there. And I believe you want me to get to the point: On the last day of the Selma Votin' March I told my new handler, Neil, the Klan was goin' to Montgomery. *(Ironic:)* Three times a charm, Senator. My third handler, Neil, was so finicky he had me callin' in all the time. The Klan wanted me to do a little missionary work, harass the marchers, "break up some of those sex orgies goin' on in the churches." Honestly, I do not know how many actual *orgies* were truly occurrin'…

My handler, Neil, told me to go, Senator, I put on my holster and gave him the description of Gene's car—'63 red-white Chevy. We were four in the car. The temperature that day was very high. I was on guard—Neil knew that—the place was *crawlin'* with clergy. And with a certain type of *white person,* Senator, who was attracted to these kinds of civil rights demonstrations, as if this was an occasion for them to let their hair down, sleep outside, go barefoot, play the guitar, expose their "hippie side" if you will, "white kooks"…

*(*VIOLA *looks in the rearview mirror at the bright headlights.)*

VIOLA. Yes, that Chevy is pushing its luck now, Leroy, I'm going to try to get a little distance, we'll be fine. Once we make it over the hill, we'll see the lights of Montgomery. It's the trees lining the road that make it darker**.** *(To herself:)* Sarah, if something happens, you'll take care of the kids for me, right? *(Looking in the rearview mirror:)* They will not let us go. *(To herself:)* I am a white woman and I won't allow Sheriff Clark and his officers to beat down those protestors, Sarah. *(To Leroy:)* The Air Force base is too dark, there's no one there. It's more dangerous to pull off. *(To herself:)* I am not looking in the wrong place, I'm looking for justice. *(To Leroy:)* The Lowndes Swamp. It's starting to rain. I'll turn on the windshield wipers… There. *(To herself:)* You should have come with me, Sarah. I wish you and the kids could have come. Jim would never allow it. *(To Leroy:)* They are just not giving up. What is wrong with these people? *(To herself:)* What's wrong with leading with your heart, Sarah? I don't think a heart can ever be too big.

(She picks up speed, concentrating.)

It's okay, Leroy. I'm going to have to outrun them. *(Beginning to sing:)* "We shall overcome…*(Following Leroy, singing more slowly:)* We shall overcome…"

Who sang it real slow?

Lucille Simmons? I never knew it's her song.

*(*TOMMY *crouches down in the backseat of a car, holding a gun, looking at the car next to him.)*

TOMMY. Gene, the guy sittin' next to her in the front seat doesn't look like one of Martin Luther King's top leaders to me. You been drinkin', Gene. Cop just gave you the ticket for the muffler, there's a record you're on this road, don't be stupid! This place is crawlin' with Army, National Guard, we'll get caught. Let's go back to town, find someone else.

I *got* my gun out, kid. Headlights behind us, lay off, Gene. It's over—lost our chance, waste of time. If you have to skin a head tonight, let's go back to Selma. Slow the fuckin' car down, you're gonna kill us. Gonna get pulled over for speedin'. She's seen you, you better stop. Holy shit, that lady is crazy goin' ninety, more 'n that.

*(*VIOLA *is on the tree-lined road with the trail of rocks.)*

VIOLA. My daddy told me, "Make a trail of rocks if you get lost."

*(*TOMMY *at a phone in the dark.)*

TOMMY. I'm at a pay phone, Highway 11. It's rainin'. Need to talk to Neil right away. Have him call me here and make it fast.

(He hangs up. TOMMY *takes out a flask and drinks as he waits at the pay phone in the dark.)*

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.
Oh god, I was shooting at the road.
Did they see?
What am I going to say?

(He lights a cigarette. He smokes. The phone rings. TOMMY *picks up.)*

We got to talk. I was in the Chevy with Gene, and the other guys.
Okay, yeah, the parking lot.

*(*TOMMY *talks to his handler in a dark place.)*

I'm fine, Neil. No, we just had some beers in the afternoon. Sorry I got you out of bed. Are those your pajamas? Mac always wore bowties even in the middle of the night.
He did.

Long, long day.
Yeah, I can tell ya now. There were three others in the car: Gene, Wilkins: a kid, baby-face. Eaton: bald, problem with his heart, they call him "Curly."
You do know these guys.
Come on, you've seen 'em around, I know you have.

Okay, I know my nerves are shot.

(He takes out his gun and shows it.)

No, I didn't use it, I swear.

(He waits a moment to see if his handler is going to inspect it. TOMMY *puts it back in his holster.)*

Wilkins is on probation, he didn't have a gun. He used Gene's.
The Pettus Bridge. That's where we first saw 'em.

*(*VIOLA *is on the tree-lined road with the trail of rocks.)*

VIOLA. My daddy told me, "Make a trail of rocks if you get lost."
Coal that lights itself on fire.
Smoky quartz from the Lowndes Swamp earth.
Ruby birthstone for the one you loved who left.
Sarah's pumice, with bubbles, drifting in on the Gulf Stream.
(Finding a rock:) Galena, the rock they pack tight into bullets.

(She feels bright lights overpower her and hears static as we see dreamlike footage of a contemporary, blonde Fox News spokeswoman, Martha, watching her.)

What are you doing, trying to conjure the dead?

(Martha announces: "There is a voting controversy that's going on now in South Carolina that's catching a bit of attention. The Palmetto State's Attorney General saying more than 900 of the voters in the recent elections were actually dead people. *And you might wonder, 'How do those* dead people *find their way to the polls?' That's what we're wondering." The caption below Martha reads: "MORE THAN 900 'DEAD' VOTED IN RECENT ELECTIONS" as* VIOLA *faces Martha and the bright lights.)*

Well, I'm the patron saint of dead voters—you've come to the right place. Fox News?

(She pulls some bullets from her back.)

I'm sorry, I had a few bullets shot through my spinal cord, why were there more than 900 dead people…?

*(*VIOLA *looks down at her dirty bare feet.)*

Oh, we walked barefoot the last four miles. The greatest march ever.
Alabama, Selma.
Your name is…Martha? Here's a rock.

(She tries to hand her a bullet. Shoes are offered to VIOLA *from somewhere.)*

Maybe not good to dirty your pretty shoes, I never had time to clean up. After their autopsy I actually never got my underwear back.

Oh, this is *national news?* Then let me tell you what really happened. They checked my body for semen because there was a young black civil rights worker sitting in the front seat with me. His name was Leroy. They lied and said I was braless, and without underwear. *(Looking at her arms:)* Said I had needle marks in my arm. You can find it in the FBI report. *(Taking out a cigarette:)* I *am* a smoker, but I wouldn't even know how to shoot up with a hypodermic needle. Poor Jim he did start drinking too much after. That was partly because my FBI report was thicker than four phone books. Most of the report was redacted. The FBI tarnished my reputation to save theirs and they turned Jim into a "communist" because he worked for the Teamsters. They only gave him my wedding ring back eleven years later. He was going to surprise me with a cabin in Grayhill for my birthday. Waking up to the dark black branches, the fog—dawn sitting on the mountains and the yellow grass.

(The Fox News TV light begins to go out on VIOLA, *with static.* VIOLA *looks at her empty ring finger, talking to herself.)*

I meant to put on the pearl necklace sitting on my dresser before I left.
I left the bottle of holy water there too.
Nine births, four babies didn't make it, one exiled from the Catholic church because he died before the baptism, baby in limbo.
Is he still rotating around the planets like an unwanted shame?
Housewives take trips to my *grave,* to kick the tombstone.

(We hear a voiceover of a series of housewives, quickly overlapping.)

VOICEOVER (HOUSEWIVES). I'm here because I wanted to see the tomb of a woman who abandons her children and husband for the right to vote. Demonstrations are nothing but publicity and the urge to get in with the mob. I turned on the TV but I became so disgusted with the way things were going I turned it off. Marching up and down a backwoods road for some stupid cause, how could she? There are enough causes in our backyard to fight for. Each guy looking after his own keeps everybody safe. I'd march for my children but not for some… If we were invaded then I think we'd fight. It would mean getting killed for protecting our families, not for someone to vote or things like that.

VIOLA. Dead people can't vote. Why would anyone make up that story?

Who needs an ID to vote? In Georgia, I saw a black man hanging from a tree. I was a little girl, holding my father's hand. We were walking past the tree and my father tugged. His hand was cracked and soft. Comforting. My heart left my body. What happened, Daddy? No, I want to look. Wait, I can't see. What's that in the tree, Daddy? Why? I don't understand. I want to see.

I saw the man hanging. People circled 'round. My daddy told me the man had talked to a white woman. "What was wrong with that?" I asked. My daddy didn't answer. Serious. I walked *past* that tree! I thought about him, that man, his last moments, what happened to his body? He had a family, probably a daughter just like me. I put Leroy's life in jeopardy driving with him in Lowndes, but he survived! He was all bloody from *my* blood but he laid his head on the lap of my dead body and pretended to be dead until they drove off. He got out of the car, ran down the road and got away. Then they actually accused him over and over of having sex with me. He was eighteen years old. I was just another white woman who put a black man in jeopardy.

See I'm lost in limbo like my own unbaptized child, trying to find my way out.

The last person I saw was Tommy Rowe. Didn't know him from Adam. When he looked in my eyes…Tommy Rowe… When he looked…

*(*TOMMY *speaks to his handler, smoking.)*

TOMMY. A white woman drivin' a blue Oldsmobile, Neil, with a Negro sittin' next to her in the front seat. Gene tells us to "Crouch down. Let's burn a whore. They're goin' somewhere to have sex." We follow 'em across the bridge. It's about eight. Gene gets his gun, hands it to Wilkins. The chase goes into the Lowndes Swamp. Bullets poppin' into the asphalt like bubbles. She stares over at us. Her mouth opens. Wilkins fires at her head. His second shot goes through the glass, straight in and gets her in the face.

(Suddenly a bright light floods the stage, as if an angel is appearing. TOMMY *stares in surprise as a phone is ringing.)*

Yes, I'm Tommy Rowe.
Wait, a minute, Mr. Director, am I dreamin'? You put the fear of god in people, but it is a great privilege for *me* to talk to you, Sir. How are you doin' tonight?
I am glad to hear it.
No, you didn't interrupt, I couldn't sleep, I was watchin'…

VIOLA. Tommy Rowe was watching me. And he was watching them, the guys in the car.

*(*TOMMY *talking on phone.)*

TOMMY. You are welcome, Mr. Director. It has been my great honor to serve you. I can't tell you how much your phone call means to me.
Witness protection, I understand, Sir. I haven't been with my family for a while now. I've dedicated myself to you. Still my children need to be safe.
Thank you, Sir. I appreciate that. It will be hard to leave.

VIOLA. I grew up in the South. Tommy Rowe grew up in the South.

*(*TOMMY *talking on the phone.)*

TOMMY. Everythin' I know is here, Mr. Director, but I'll do anythin' to further the cause.
Good night, Mr. Hoover.
(To himself:) Did he call me or was it just the CC and Seven? Does it even matter since it all gets redacted?

*(*VIOLA *is speeding, talking to Leroy.)*

VIOLA. Leroy, crouch down.

(She thinks to herself, as she drives.)

The premonition I had at the top of St. Jude's Church, it's *me* who is going to die.
Sarah, you'll take care of my littlest…?

(In surreal light she finds a rock and shows it to her youngest child.)

Granite is my favorite, sweetie. Speckled like a spotted animal.
(Laughing:) Good! Like a leopard. It makes monuments, strong like you.
(Suddenly defensive:) Who said that, sweetie? You're normal. When you were born I was taking medicine.
Remember how I said I lost your baby brothers?
Yes, in the cemetery. I needed more strength in my body. Like granite, to have you. You needed a little extra-special care—you were such a cute baby. You're always better when you come through a storm, sweetie.

(She sings her a song, which she makes up for her as she goes.)

A mother will find you, wherever you are
She'll hold you within her, no matter how far
You cannot lose her, you're her star.

*(*VIOLA *puts the granite in the trail of rocks.)*

They're pullin' up to us. This is one ledge you can't rescue me from, Sarah. There's just a very fine line that divides us…

TOMMY. I'm a very good actor, Senator, an informant needs that more 'n anythin'—I should've gone straight to Hollywood, but who cares who I am, right, Senator? I was just their *snitch* and they swallowed me right up for their machine, just like you're using me to clean up your tarnished FBI, Senator. They put me and my family in witness protection…

The more I testified at the various murder trials for Viola Liuzzo, the less I could please anybody, and after Gene and Wilkins got out of jail, they turned 'round because they could and accused *me*—they were celebrities after they killed her. It's free rein in the South, it's the white man's word and she was a "white nigger" which is probably worse than a black man.

(We hear a rapid series of bullets being fired.)

VIOLA. This road in the Lowndes Swamp is *lined* with trees. As I'm driving the nightmare of the first tree seems to go on forever with the bullets.
As I go down that's what I see, an explosion of trees.
Tree,
Tree,
Tree,
Tree.
(Singing slowly:) "We shall overcome…"

TOMMY. I don't feel sorry for the white woman, Senator, she got what she deserved. Big fancy ceremony with all the famous people at her funeral, her kids bawlin', her Hoffa-lovin' husband, eyes red from what I'd call shame. He was a crook for the Teamsters, he had *that reputation*. And she was a drug addict. Why'd he let her out of the house, leavin' five children alone? When I saw her drivin' on the Pettus Bridge with that black buck next to her, I thought to myself, she will not survive the night. The Lowndes Swamp was a very long dark strip of road, Senator, she knew that. And the cameras were off by then, everyone had gone home. No one was watchin'…

VIOLA. Crouch down, Leroy. It will be okay. Crouch down. "We Shall Ohhh…"
I am looking at him.
Tommy Rowe.

TOMMY. Ohhh my god!
I'm watchin'
Viola Liuzzo turns to look at me
Through the window of the car.
In my soul that's what she's sayin'

Her mouth is completely open,
Ohhh…

VIOLA. I am looking at him
His gun is down, he is shooting at the road.
Bullets poppin' into the asphalt like bubbles.
His eyes meet mine,
Through the window of the car
He is saying, "Ohhh my god."
He wasn't *that* good an actor.
His mouth is moving, "Ohhh my god!"
I am singing
"O-ver-come…"

TOMMY. I just never wanted to worry you with my undercover work, Momma.
I'm sorry, all I ever wanted was to be a police officer.
Wear the uniform.

(She finds more bullets.)

VIOLA. "Now it is not an accident that one of the great marches of American history should terminate…"
Lowndes.
I am not lost.

(She lays the bullets in the trail of rocks, which extends into the audience.)

The trail ends here.

End of Play

APPENDIX

Suggested Footage for the Play

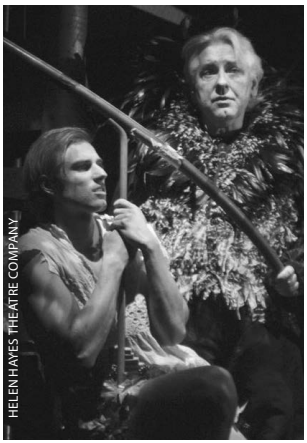
Soap TV Commercial:
• http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjZFli_tny0

The Birth of a Nation Footage:
• http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYCaob7MDA8&feature=related

"Fox News New Voter Fraud—Dead People Voting SC":
• https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMcgtRKpfuU

The voiceover of the housewives is inspired by an article in *Ladies' Home Journal,* 82 (July 1965): 42–44.

Also available at Playscripts, Inc.


HELEN HAYES THEATRE COMPANY.

The Lost Boy
by Ronald Gabriel Paolillo

Drama
110–120 minutes
3 females, 4 males
(7-18 actors possible)

Despite finding success and fame as a writer, James M. Barrie is dissatisfied with his work and his life. He returns to his hometown in Scotland to visit his mother, who still blames him for the long-ago death of his older brother in a skating pond. Haunted by the tragic accident and his mother's harsh words, James slowly begins to confront his family's tragic past with the help of an unexpected friendship and his own gift for storytelling. This fictionalized account of the birth of Peter Pan will warm the hearts of audiences everywhere who remember the magic and mystery of The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up.

Good Kids
by Naomi Iizuka

PETER SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

Drama
80–85 minutes
8 female, 4 male

Something happened to Chloe after that party last Saturday night. Something she says she can't remember. Something everybody is talking about. Set at a Midwestern high school, in a world of Facebook and Twitter, smartphones and YouTube, *Good Kids* explores a casual sexual encounter gone wrong and its very public aftermath. Who's telling the truth? Whose version of the story do you believe? And what does that say about you?

Order online at: *www.playscripts.com*

Also available at Playscripts, Inc.

I and You
by Lauren Gunderson

Drama
90–100 minutes
1 female, 1 male

One afternoon, Anthony arrives unexpectedly at classmate Caroline's door bearing a beat-up copy of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass,* an urgent assignment from their English teacher. Homebound due to illness, Caroline hasn't been to school in months, but she is as quick and sardonic as Anthony is athletic, sensitive, and popular. As these two let down their guards and share their secrets, this seemingly mundane poetry project unlocks a much deeper mystery that has brought them together. *I and You* is an ode to youth, life, love, and the strange beauty of human connectedness.

By the Waters of Babylon
by Robert Schenkkan

Drama
100–120 minutes
1 female, 1 male

On a hot afternoon in Austin, Texas, the widowed Catherine hires Arturo, a Cuban writer turned gardener, to tame her overgrown backyard. What begins as a cordial interaction between employer and employee quickly turns into a cautiously intimate encounter between two exiles freighted by pasts they cannot forget. Over the course of several hours Catherine and Arturo swap lies and tell stories. Laugh. Argue politics and music. Make Mojitos and get a little drunk. Fight and make up. And together —warily, clumsily—they begin to dance the oldest dance in the world.

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