

DREAMGIRL DEFERRED

By Vincent Victoria

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DREAMGIRL DEFERRED:

The Fictional Ballad of Florence Ballard

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SYNOPSIS: This classic show business dramatization tells the tragic story of Florence Ballard, original lead singer of the legendary Motown singing group The Supremes. Mired in a deep depressive episode as the action begins, Ballard is a patient at a mental health and alcoholism recovery center in Detroit, trying to recover and attempt a successful comeback in the cut throat world of the recording industry.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(10 female, 10 male, 6 either)

LURLEE BALLARD (f).....	66 years old fair skinned AA female. <i>(70 lines)</i>
REHAB NURSE (m/f).....	Caring Female/Any Age. <i>(23 lines)</i>
DIANA ROSS (f).....	Age 16-24. <i>(38 lines)</i>
MARY WILSON (f).....	Age 16-24. <i>(28 lines)</i>
FLO (f).....	Age 16-24. <i>(130 lines)</i>
FLORENCE (f).....	Florence Ballard Age 32. <i>(167 lines)</i>
BERRY GORDY (m).....	Charismatic/Ruthless record mogul. <i>(44 lines)</i>
TOMMY CHAPMAN (m).....	Slick Hustler husband of Florence Age 40. <i>(53 lines)</i>
YOUNG TOMMY CHAPMAN (m).....	Age 25 <i>(48 lines)</i>
MARVIN GAYE (m).....	Suave singer Age 25. <i>(5 lines)</i>
DAVID RUFFIN (m).....	Charismatic singer Age 24. <i>(4 lines)</i>
MARTHA REEVES (f).....	Age 20-22. <i>(4 lines)</i>
BOBBY HARDING (m).....	Cocky star football player Age 20. <i>(16 lines)</i>
PAMELA (f).....	Eccentric Folk singer. Age 30/Caucasian. <i>(5 lines)</i>

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JONATHAN JENKINS (m).....	Age 25/British Accent. (56 lines)
ESTHER GORDY (f)	Age 40/Very Grand sister of Berry Gordy. (14 lines)
MAXINE POWELL (f)	Age 45/Head of Motown Artist Development. (19 lines)
CONNIE (f)	Plain Jane Real Estate Agent. (17 lines)
LARRY NEWTON (m)	Powerful but kind record executive. (20 lines)
LEONARD BAUN (m).....	Smooth talking attorney. (11 lines)
BARBARA (f)	Cute 17 year old aspiring singer. Team player. (9 lines)
JOE LOUIS (m).....	Fatherly former Heavyweight Boxing Champ. (5 lines)
WALT "BABY LOVE" SHAW (m).....	Velvet voiced radio announcer. (3 lines)

VARIOUS REPORTERS (m/f)

VARIOUS NURSES

VARIOUS ANNOUNCERS (m/f)

VARIOUS STAGE MANAGERS (m/f)

VARIOUS FANS (m/f)

DURATION: 120 minutes

SETTING: Henry Ford Hospital Detroit, Michigan; Various suggested locations

DIRECTOR NOTES

As the play is told utilizing cinematic like flashback scenes, simple items such as a chair, hat rack, or a bench may be used to suggest a different setting on the stage. The scenes should overlap seamlessly into one another during the transitions as not to interrupt the flow of the story.

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COSTUME NOTES

In the flashback scenes the fashion should heavily reflect the hip styles of the swinging sixties and the high fashion glamor of the Supremes. In the 1970's scenes the colorful fashion of the early disco years should be evident.

PROPS

- Reporter's Cameras
- Transistor Radio
- Old Microphone
- Coffee Cups
- Magazines
- Champagne Glasses
- Birthday Cake
- Wheelchair
- Powder Puff
- Washboard
- Notepads
- Pencils

PRODUCTION HISTORY

The play made its World Premiere in Houston, Texas on February 21, 2020 at the Midtown Art Center with the following cast:

FLORENCE BALLARD (older) Melissa Leon
FLORENCE BALLARD (younger) Maya Flowers
LURLEE BALLARD Agnes Balka
NURSE CarrieLee Sparks
DIANA ROSS Shavon Majoi
MARY WILSON Tabitha Lee
BARBARA Monica Martin
MAXINE POWELL Jacqueline Harrison
TOMMY CHAPMAN (Older) Kenneth Grissom
TOMMY CHAPMAN (Younger) Maurice Price
MARTHA REEVES DeAndra Virgil
LEONARD BAUN Todd Greenfield
JONATHAN JENKINS Michael Venable
LARRY NEWTON Carlos Sanchez
BOBBY HARDING Patrick Collier
MARVIN GAYE Travis Madison
JOE LOUIS Drew Johnson
PAMELA CarrieLee Sparks
BERRY GORDY Harold Jay Trotter
CONNIE Jasmine Renee Thomas
ESTHER GORDY Wykesha King

ENSEMBLE: Drew Johnson, Monica Martin, DeAndra Virgil,
Todd Greenfield

UNDERSTUDY: Jasmin Roland

DIRECTOR: Vincent Victoria

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: Cherita Judson

COSTUMER: Daniel Brown

STAGE MANAGER: Christopher Young

PRODUCTION MANAGER: Veronica Bolen

DEDICATION

This play is dedicated to the memory of the talented
Florence (Flo) Glenda Ballard Chapman

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT START: *Detroit Michigan June 30 1974, Henry Ford Rehab Center common room. The room is not fancy but is warm and comfortable. Enter LURLEE BALLARD mother of FLORENCE. Fair skinned African American female 66. Full of airs and false optimism 66 years old. She enters with a REHAB NURSE. There is a small transistor radio turned on left by one of the patients. The radio announcer is heard as the women converse.*

BABY LOVE SHAW: *(Voice over, offstage.)* Good Morning Detroit. It's June 30 1974. This is your morning drive host Walt Baby Love. We have a high of 84 today in the motor city so it's going to be nice. Get outside and play if you can.

NURSE turns off radio.

NURSE: Your daughter is feeling a little down today Ms. Ballard. It's funny she was doing OK until she realized it was her birthday.

LURLEE: My daughter will be fine. She's not really sick, you know.

NURSE: I'm glad you're so positive. She really needs good energy around her. We like the light to overcome the darkness at Henry Ford.

LURLEE: Humph. That's pretty. Do they tell you to say that?

NURSE: I'm sorry?

LURLEE: Never mind. I brought her a present. She likes to get gifts. It ain't nothing expensive like she's used to though.

NURSE: I'm sure she'll appreciate it. Is this your first time visiting her here?

LURLEE: Yes it is. Truth be told I don't like places like this. That's why I never come. I only came because it's her birthday.

NURSE: Oh. *(Beat.)* This is a place for healing. You shouldn't worry. Your daughter checked herself in on her own. She knows that she needs help. But she's been making a lot of progress though. Her dark days seemed to have been lifting until today.

LURLEE: When will she be released?

NURSE: It's up to her. She can stay as long as she needs to.

LURLEE: Oh no ma'am! She doesn't have time to play the sick and shut in here. It's time for her to leave. I mean Florence has obligations. She needs to come home. *(Beat.)* Has the press been coming around yet?

NURSE: I haven't seen any *press*. No one knows she's here. I don't know if she's ready for a press conference though.

LURLEE: Of course she is. My daughter is a big star. She's used to reporters and photographers around her.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

FLASHBACK: 1966

AT START: *Enter the Supremes singing group with reporters. MARY beautiful calm 22, DIANA 22 star all over, FLO 23 outspoken no nonsense.*

REPORTER 1: Flo!

REPORTER 2: Mary!

REPORTER 3: A few more questions please Miss Ross!

DIANA: OK fellas. Just a few now. Girls?

FLO: Sure honey.

MARY: Ok.

REPORTER 1: Thanks a lot.

REPORTER 2: You're girls are the best.

REPORTER 3: What do the Supremes think of the Beatles?

FLO: Well we...

DIANA: *(Enthusiastically.)* We think they're awfully cute; especially Paul. We met them a while back and they were really nice.

REPORTER 2: Will the Supremes be doing any movies soon?

MARY: We...

DIANA: *(Interrupting.)* She knows that our manager Berry Gordy has lots of plans for us to do something in movies. We're just so busy touring and recording right now. But being a leading lady like Lena Horne or Eartha Kitt in the movies is something that I hope to be one day.

REPORTER 1: What do you girls think of Sidney Poitier?

FLO: I think....

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DIANA: He's a very good actor. I saw him in "A Patch of Blue" with Shelley Winters and he was really "outta sight"!

REPORTER 3: Miss Ross, who chooses the gowns that the Supremes wear.

DIANA: Well we all have a vote on what we wear for each performance. It 's really very democratic. Right girls?

MARY and FLO: (*Sarcastically.*) Right.

REPORTER 2: Do any of the Supremes want to get married?

MARY and FLO look at DIANA.

DIANA: Yes we all do. Don't we girls. I want lots and lots of kids and so do Mary and Florence.

FLO and MARY: Right.

REPORTER 1: When is your new album coming out Miss Ross?

DIANA: A greatest hits record is coming out later this year and I have another one being released at the beginning of January.

REPORTER 3: That's really groovy.

REPORTER 2: Yeah, we can't wait to hear it. (*All begin to exit except Mary and Flo.*) Oh Miss Ross, can I get an autograph for my little brother? He really digs you.

DIANA: I don't see why not. I love all of my fans.

REPORTER 2: Thanks. He likes you as much as he does Barbra Streisand.

REPORTER 1: (*To Flo and Mary.*) Oh... Bye girls.

FLO and MARY: (*Faux sincerity.*) Bye.

FLO: Her new album. Honey she ain't singing all them parts alone.

MARY: I know.

FLO: We used to be a group. There used to be three of us squarely in the picture, now you barely even see our wigs in the frame. It ain't right. I can't play this Helen Keller routine too much longer Mary. We've got voices too and Berry Gordy and *Miss Ross* are getting ready to hear mine.

MARY: They won't listen to you girl and you know it. The music is too loud. *Just leave it alone Flo.*

Exit MARY and FLO.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3*PRESENT*

LURLEE: *“Just leave it alone Florence”* that's what I told her one day when she was a little girl; right after someone stole her favorite doll. I tried to tell her that I could get her another one but she wasn't having it; not my Florence. She wanted *that* one and she knocked on every door in the projects to find it. Cancer's hold on tight you know. She always said I'm never gonna let anyone take what belongs to me. Kinda funny ain't it since she let Motown take her group. *(Beat.)* You know she's going to be recording a new album soon.

NURSE: Really? I didn't know....

LURLEE: Oh yes ma'am. I'll get you an autographed copy when it's released.

NURSE: Well, OK. Sure. I used to love when she was in the Shirelles.

LURLEE: *(Insulted.)* *The Shirelles?!* You don't know much do you. *(Beat.)* Will you let my daughter know that her mother is here please.

NURSE: Of course.

NURSE exits. LURLEE does business as she waits for FLORENCE BALLARD. Re-enter NURSE and FLORENCE BALLARD 31 years old. Pale, slightly overweight. Depressed.

NURSE: She's right over there. I'll be close by if you need anything.

FLORENCE remains silent.

LURLEE: *Happy Birthday Baby!* You're looking so good today. Oh here's your present. It's one of those flowered print dresses that you like wearing. They make you look so small. Smile baby. *(To NURSE.)* This *is* the happy place ain't it where they're supposed to make you feel good again. It's foolishness to me. The stage makes you happy. That's all you need. Can you give us some breathing room please? *(NURSE exits.)* I can't wait for you to get out of here. The twins are missing you and the baby is wearing me out. I ain't a young girl no more to be taking care of a two year old. Walking up

and down those stairs to the apartment is bad on my knees and my heart. By the way, Tommy's outside in the car. He wanted me to tell you that. He's got another Cadillac; an Eldorado just like that red one y'all used to have remember? I think he has a new job. He wants to see you real bad Florence. Now don't be mad at me for telling him that you're here.

FLORENCE: What do you want Mama?

LURLEE: Well, what I've always wanted; to see my baby healthy and happy.

FLORENCE: We both may be dead by that time.

LURLEE: Stop talking like that. It's your birthday.

FLORENCE: Whoop de damn do. I hate my birthday.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

FLASHBACK: June 30 1967 Frontier Hotel Presidential Suite

***AT START:** Young FLO entering with DIANA ROSS, MARY WILSON, BERRY GORDY, ESTHER GORDY, MARVIN GAYE and JOE LOUIS with a birthday cake singing Happy Birthday.*

MARY: Blow out your candles Flo.

DIANA: Yeah, make a wish Blondie.

FLORENCE: Not so fast Diane. I want to hold onto 23 as long as I can.

BERRY: Your grip is loosening pretty fast. You're getting old there Blondie.

FLORENCE: Well that makes you Methuselah then Berry Gordy.

JOE LOUIS: I guess she told you BG.

MARVIN: Yeah, Blondie's up 1 to nothing.

DIANA: Wait a minute now. Berry's not old.

FLORENCE: And neither is Flo honey.

ESTHER: All of you are still pissing in diapers compared to me, so just eat some cake and relax.

MARY: Yeah cut your cake girl.

FLORENCE: I'm getting ready to Mary. It looks so good don't it.

ESTHER: I made it for you myself.

FLORENCE: Thank you so much Esther. That's so sweet. Are you sure you're Berry's sister?

ESTHER: I wonder sometimes. But yeah that's my baby brother, the maestro of Motown.

BERRY: That is a nice looking cake sis but Blondie really shouldn't be eating any of it.

FLORENCE: It's my cake ain't it?

MARY: What's wrong with a little cake?

BERRY: Nothing, but would you tell a junkie *"Go ahead and take a hit man. What's wrong with a little coke?"*

MARVIN: Ain't nothing wrong with it.

BERRY: My point is Marvin and the rest of you is that Blondie needs to really watch her weight now. The girls are getting all new form fitting gowns soon. Less chiffon and more sequins. Those styles won't hide Blondie's fat.

FLORENCE: This ain't fat honey this is fine. I can wear anything you put me in.

ESTHER: Tell him girl. Men don't know anything. Don't let my little brother get in your head. Don't let anyone get in your head that don't make you happy. I love you Florence. Now I can't stay for the rest of the party. I'll see you at the show tonight.

FLORENCE: OK Esther. *(Exit ESTHER.)*

BERRY: Alright, go ahead and be Mama Cass in a mu-mu if you want. I can't stop you.

JOE LOUIS: You're getting a little too serious now BG. Let the girl enjoy her birthday.

BERRY: You're right champ. OK. I'm sorry. Happy Birthday to you Blondie.

FLO: Sure Berry. *(Beat.)* I want to thank everybody for the cake and presents. Even though I am away from my family a lot and I miss 'em, I'm glad Motown is my family too.

MARVIN: We all love you Blondie!

Awws, cheers/support.

JOE LOUIS: What I want to know now is when are you gonna sing lead on some songs Flo. What's happening with that BG? You're wonderful Diana baby but Flo's killing it in the background. I was sitting 10 rows back at the show last night and I still heard your part penetrating in my ear young lady.

FLO: Thank you Mr. Louis. At least somebody heard it.

BERRY: I'm not one to argue with the great Joe Louis, but too many leads flatten the note. She's good on some things champ but Diane's on a roll as the front woman and we can't argue with success. When you have two heavyweights standing at the podium, someone is going to get knocked off. I know you understand that. Actually, I'm thinking Blondie might want to retire from the group soon. A boxer is almost past his prime when he gets to be Flo's age.

JOE LOUIS: That's bullshit man and you know it. I could go 20 rounds with Max Schmeling at 24 and not break a sweat.

FLO: I ain't retiring nothing Berry Gordy.

JOE LOUIS: Of course you're not honey. Actually the girl needs her own act BG; away from the group. She's got a nice Pearl Bailey thing going on: big boned, big voice, big personality. You've got another solo star on your hands.

BERRY: Good idea champ but I don't need another solo star right now. I have Diana. *(Beat.)* See you at the show tonight Blondie. Don't hit the bottle too hard before curtain. *(All exit except FLO.)*

FLO: Yeah I'll see you at the show tonight Berry Gordy. Don't fuck Diane too hard before curtain.

Scene transitions as everyone parties and dances while FLO drinks more and more until she is all alone on stage, then she exits as ANNOUNCER enters.

ANNOUNCER: And now ladies and gentlemen the Frontier Hotel Presents for the first time Diana Ross and the Supremes.

The Supremes do a stylized pantomime performance under music with FLORENCE obviously drunk. After the performances the Supremes are frozen.

BERRY: Get her ass back to Detroit. Now!! Did you see that intoxicated bitch onstage.

YOUNG TOMMY: She was just a little tipsy boss. Today was her birthday. Let her sleep it off. She still has shows to do.

BERRY: The hell she does. I can't let her destroy the dream man. She just made a fool of me, Motown, and The Supremes. Mary and Diana almost had to prop her fat ass up onstage.

YOUNG TOMMY: She just needs to sober up again. She'll be ready for the next show.

BERRY: It's not gonna be the next show for her. Not in my group there's not. *She ain't a Supreme no more.*

ACT ONE, SCENE 5

PRESENT

FLORENCE: *I ain't a Supreme no more mama.* I was fired from the group on my birthday, remember. Bad things happen on my birthday.

LURLEE: That didn't happen on your birthday. That wouldn't have been nice. *(Beat.)* I see you've lost a little weight. You must be back on your diet pills. *That's good, a Supreme can't be f...* *(Beat.)* You'll always be a Supreme Florence. You started that group and picked out the name. Where would Motown be without you. Berry Gordy and *Miss Diana Ross* should worship the day you were born.

FLORENCE: I don't want to talk about no Supremes today. And I definitely don't want to talk about Diane and Berry.

LURLEE: Alright. I won't bring them up again.

FLORENCE: Thank you.

FLORENCE begins to open her present.

LURLEE: *(Hums the song Baby Love before she speaks.)* You know baby, since Jean Terrell left The Supremes, maybe you can come back and become the lead singer again. That new girl Scherrie Payne is pretty but she's *shorter* than Diane. She'll never fit into those old gowns.

- FLORENCE:** Goddam mama. I don't sing no more. I am barely breathing. Don't you understand that.
- LURLEE:** No I don't Florence Glenda Ballard. What is the matter with you? You are my great number 8. I had 7 children born before you and 7 born after you. That makes you lucky.
- FLORENCE:** I ain't lucky mama. I'm tired and I want a drink.
- LURLEE:** You shouldn't be drinking. You know that. The family is counting on you.
- FLORENCE:** Tell them to stop counting on me and start praying for me. *(Beat.)* I just want everything to be right again like it used to be: my voice, my life, my career.
- LURLEE:** It's not too late baby. You just need to get out of here and start singing. Do you want to listen to the radio?
- FLORENCE:** Ain't no radio out here Mama.
- LURLEE:** Yes there is baby. There's one right over there. You know that I used to always carry one of these transistors with me so that I can listen to my baby's latest hit.
- FLORENCE:** I ain't had no hit song in awhile remember. Why don't you just go.
- LURLEE:** I'm not going anywhere until I know you're coming with me. The nurse says you've been doing better.
- FLORENCE:** The nurse ain't in my head. YOU ain't in my head. Some days I hear angels, the other days I hear the devil. Sometimes I hear both at the same time. Why can't my days be right anymore.
- LURLEE:** You just need to come home with me to the girls.
- FLORENCE:** I can't let them see me like this. I just want to look at Erica Kane on my stories right now mama. Nurse? Where's the Nurse? I want to go back to my room.
- LURLEE:** That's not reality, baby.
- FLORENCE:** I can't take reality right now.
- LURLEE:** You don't need to be looking at that spoiled rich girl on no Soap Opera. C'mon now, let's listen to some music *(Turns on her transistor radio.)* You know I like that new dance that the young people are dancing to these days. The rump or something.
- FLORENCE:** That's the bump Mama.
- LURLEE:** Yeah that's it. *The Bump!!* It's kind of nasty when they do it right but I like it. Come on and dance with your mama.
- FLORENCE:** I don't feel like dancing.

LURLEE: Come on baby. When you get back onstage you don't want to still be doing the Twist. Get up and Bumpwith your mama. Come on now.

FLORENCE: Damn momma alright. I see the twins doing it. I kinda like it.

FLORENCE begins to dance with LURLEE/OTHER PATIENTS.

LURLEE: That's it baby. You still move pretty good.

FLORENCE: I'm shaking what you gave me I guess.

LURLEE: Well, I gave you too much.

NURSE: Is everything OK out here?

FLORENCE: Yes we're fine. Oomph. Oomph. Come on and do the bump with us girl.

NURSE: The Bump?

FLORENCE: Yes ma'am.

NURSE: What's that?

FLORENCE: It's a dance honey.

LURLEE: You gotta move your hips girl.

NURSE: I don't know if...

FLORENCE: Sure you can. (*Demonstrates.*) Like this. Ain't that right momma.

LURLEE: Yes that's it. See what I told you. She's not sick. My baby is ready to go home. Bump baby. Bump.

NURSE: You know how to bump too?

LURLEE: I was bumping before it was called the bump.

FLORENCE: I feel like I'm on Soul Train. Eat your heart out Diane.

The song on the radio begins to fade.

BABY LOVE SHAW: This is your host Walt Baby Love back with you. That was George McCrae with his hit song *Rock you Baby*.

FLORENCE: OK Mr. McCrae. I like that.

BABY LOVE SHAW: Now when we come back Detroit, we're going to go back a few years with a big hit song by Diana Ross and the Supremes. *Just that name alone will have the people on their feet!*

ACT ONE, SCENE 6

FLASHBACK: Detroit /Motown Studios 1967

BERRY: Diana Ross and the Supremes. *Just that name alone will have the people on their feet.* Isn't that exciting girls.

FLO: We already have people on their feet.

BERRY: You're right but we want them to stay standing. Starting with our engagement in Las Vegas at the Frontier Hotel at the end of June, we will be going live with the new name change.

FLO: *(Sarcastically.)* Well Whoop de damn do. What a great birthday present for me.

BERRY: That's right, it is your birthday in June Blondie. How old are you going to be? 31 or 32?

FLO: You know how old I am Berry.

BERRY: Yeah but that extra weight you've put on makes you look older than Diana and Mary. Anyway while we're in Vegas I guess we're going to have a double celebration. Diana Ross and the Supremes' coming out day and Blondie's 35th birthday. I know the name change is just gonna shake things up a bit but I don't want the group to get stale.

FLO: Just like that nasty Supremes bread that we're promoting.

BERRY: No Blondie. *Unlike* bread that has an expiration date, I want the Supremes to always be fresh. Fresh in the recording studio, fresh on stage, and fresh in people's minds.

DIANA: Sounds like a good idea to me.

BERRY: What do you think Mary?

MARY: I think....well if it's good for the group.

BERRY: Of course it is. Let Diane carry the load and the lead as she always has. You girls just shake your tambourines in the background and come along for the ride.

FLO: While letting Diane shake her padded ass upfront. No thank you Sir.

DIANA: I don't know what you're so mad about. We get paid the same don't we?

BERRY: That's my girl. See Blondie if anyone should be mad it's Diane but she's taking everything in stride. Besides it will give you and Mary a rest. You won't have to be in the studio as much. You won't need to give interviews and all of that boring press stuff. How does that sound?

MARY: I would like more time off.

FLO: When was this momentous decision made.

BERRY: I've been thinking about it awhile now.

FLO: Yeah ever since Diane bucked her eyes on Ed Sullivan.

DIANA: I don't do that anymore Blondie. Miss Powell says protruding one's eyes and buttocks is not ladylike onstage.

FLO: Neither is hogging and hamming onstage but you're still doing that.

DIANA: Look, I'm just doing my job. I can't let my audience down.

FLO: It ain't just your audience sister.

BERRY: Now Blondie play nice. It's only right that Diane gets top billing now. She's the lead singer.

FLO: I was the lead singer once did you forget that. I brought Diane's ass here to Motown. We all used to share the lead. Remember Mary? Mary!!

MARY: That was so long ago Flo.

FLO: *It ain't been that long!*

ACT ONE, SCENE 7

PRESENT

FLORENCE: *It ain't been that long!* It's too much for me right now mama. It's too damn much. I can't do it.

LURLEE: Can't do what baby?

FLORENCE: Sing Flo! Dance Flo! Kiss everybody's ass Flo!

NURSE: I think maybe we should take a little break from the Bump.

LURLEE: That's a good idea.

NURSE: I'll go get you some coffee.

LURLEE: That sounds nice.

FLORENCE: You can stick that coffee up your ass honey.

LURLEE: She didn't mean that.

FLORENCE: The hell I didn't.

NURSE: It's OK Ms. Ballard. I understand. I'll be right back.

LURLEE: Sure baby. Now Florence...

FLORENCE: I don't want you here today mama. Just leave me alone.

LURLEE: You were doing so good a few minutes ago.

FLORENCE: I ain't doing good mama.

LURLEE: Let's think about getting better then. Just think about the good times. That's all *I* remember. Yesma'am. (*LURLEE comforts FLORENCE in arms.*) Your hair is looking so healthy these days. That's a good sign. I like this Afro. I have good hair, you know. It's too fine for an Afro. It came from the Irish blood in me.

FLORENCE: I thought your *good* hair came from the Indian in the family.

LURLEE: Who remembers the details. Your red hair didn't come from Africa that's all I can tell you. Now when you get home, I found someone in the neighborhood who's willing to give you some voice coaching real cheap so you can get ready to start recording and doing shows again. I have her card someplace in my purse.

FLORENCE: We live in a cheap run down apartment. I don't have a *real home* no more. They took it from me, remember.

LURLEE: It's just temporary until you sign another record deal with somebody. They give you advances on that don't they? You'll have a brand new contract and a new home soon. Just wait.

ACT ONE, SCENE 8

FLASHBACK: Detroit 1965 Flo's new house

CONNIE: Here are the keys and deed to your new home Miss Ballard.

FLO: 3767 Buena Vista Avenue. Honey this is terrific. I hope it has enough bedrooms. My momma is coming to live with me you know.

CONNIE: There is plenty of room. You can move in anytime, it's all yours.

FLO: You know I ain't never had nothing that belonged to me except a doll and my voice. But this house is mine and nobody is gonna take it away from me.

CONNIE: I hope you like it here. All the Motown acts are buying houses around here.

FLO: Honey I love it and it sits on a corner. I only have to worry about nosy neighbors on the left taking a peep at Flo's fabulousness. Now where is the bar? I want to celebrate.

CONNIE: It's over by the kitchen.

FLO: That's good. Flo likes to have a few drinks every now and then. Drinking keeps me calm during a storm.

CONNIE: I can't imagine a big star like you even getting wet. You know I saw you on *The Hollywood Palace* last week. You were so pretty and The Supremes were so glamorous. You all really know how to dress in style.

FLO: Yes ma'am. It's mandated that we must be coordinated. We ain't them plain Jane Shirelles. We should go shopping one day girl and get you some mini skirts.

CONNIE: Really?

FLO: Flo don't lie honey. We get a lot of our clothes right off the rack.

CONNIE: I would love that. Me shopping with a Supreme!! Granny pinch me. My mother says I should take voice lessons.

FLO: You don't need no lessons if you're good. Look at me. I just open my mouth and sing as loud as I can. They have to pull me away from the microphone in the studio so I won't drown out Mary and Diane. I don't care though. I was born to sing.

BERRY: *(Offstage voice.)* Blondie you in here?

FLO: Uh oh. Here comes a storm. Yeah Berry.

Enter BERRY GORDY.

BERRY: C'mon Blondie. We gotta get a move on. We have a recording session in an hour. The girls are outside waiting.

FLO: Berry this is my realtor Connie.

CONNIE: Hi Mr. Gordy. I'm going to be taking voice lessons soon.

BERRY: Oh yeah. Good luck to you. *(Beat.)* Come on now Blondie.

FLO: Hold on Berry. I just wanted to enjoy my house for awhile. I can be a few minutes late. Tell Mary and Diane to come in. I want them to meet Connie.

BERRY: Your house is going to be here but my musicians are going to leave if we don't hurry. I told you to let Motown handle this for you.

FLO: Motown can't handle where I lay my head. .

BERRY: I wouldn't worry too much about that right now. The Supremes are on the road most of the year. You're not going to be sleeping here much. *(Exit.)*

ACT ONE, SCENE 9

PRESENT

FLORENCE: I'm not sleeping much anymore Mama. I'm afraid to close my eyes. You're not supposed to see while your eyes are closed but I see everything. I see all the hurt and all the pain that I've ever experienced. Even when I'm asleep.

LURLEE: You know what I see. I see my talented daughter back onstage at the Copacabana bringing down the house with her big voice and big smile making the audience happy.

FLASHBACK: Copacabana Nightclub 1965.

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and Gentlemen Jules Podell and the Copacabana Present The Supremes

The Supremes walk on stage, do a signature pose and smile.

PRESENT.

FLORENCE: I just barely remember those days mama. Everyday that passes, I forget another note to *Baby Love*, I lose another step in the Choreography to *Stop in the Name of Love* and the sound of the applause at The Copa seems so much softer now. Everything that was beautiful in my life is gone.

Enter TOMMY CHAPMAN, Nicely dressed. Slick.

TOMMY: Hey Birthday girl. How's my big baby doll feeling?

LURLEE: She's doing so much better Tommy. She was dancing around here like Tina Turner a few minutes ago.

TOMMY: That's what I want to hear about my lady.

FLORENCE: Well look what the recession blew in. The man with the master plan.

LURLEE: We were just talking about you Tommy. I told Florence you were here like you said. She's so glad to see you.

FLORENCE: I ain't glad to see nobody.

TOMMY: Sure she is Lurlee. Will you let me speak to my wife alone for a minute.

FLORENCE: Don't you mean your estranged wife.

LURLEE: No he doesn't. Tommy is here to wish his beautiful wife a Happy Birthday.

TOMMY: That's right Baby Doll.

LURLEE: Don't let him get away Florence. *(Exits.)*

FLORENCE: Why are you here Tommy?

TOMMY: I've got some good news Baby Doll. No wait a minute, I've got some GREAT news. But first I want to give you this. *(Gives FLORENCE a ring box.)*

FLORENCE: What is it?

TOMMY: It's your birthday present.

FLORENCE: Another one? Whoop de damn do. *(FLORENCE slaps box away.)*

TOMMY: You still have that bad temper don't you. Now you're not going to know what's in the box until you open it.

FLORENCE picks up box.

FLORENCE: It ain't nothing in here.

TOMMY: That's right. The new diamond ring that came out of that box, goes on your finger after you've checked yourself out of here and come back to me.

FLORENCE: You gave me another ring to put on my finger once, remember? I think it rotted off. We ain't getting back together Tommy.

TOMMY: Sure we are.

TOMMY/YOUNG TOMMY: Just let me drive and tell me where we're going.

ACT ONE, SCENE 10

FLASHBACK: New York City inside Berry Gordy's Cadillac 1966

FLO: Just follow that limousine in front of you. *(Flo takes out her flask.)*

Who are you anyway? You must be new.

TOMMY: The name is Chapman. I'll let you call me Tommy if I like you.

FLO: What if I don't like YOU?

TOMMY: Well then you're going to be ejected out of the back seat of this car in about 5 seconds. 5.4,3,2

FLO: Knowing this is Berry Gordy's car. I ain't taking no chances. All right Mr. Chapman. I like your cocky ass I guess.

TOMMY: That's better. You can hang on to your back seat for now. And you can call me Tommy.

FLO: I'm Flo.

TOMMY: I know who you are. You're one of my boss' pet Supremes. I'm supposed to drive you to the show tonight Why aren't you in the limousine with the other two Princesses?

FLO: Is that your business Mr. Chapman?

YOUNG TOMMY: Well excuse me, I didn't mean to sting your stilettos this evening.

FLO: It ain't you Honey. It's Berry and...

BOTH: Miss Ross!

YOUNG TOMMY: I know. I had to pick her up from the dentist office last week. My first assignment for Motown. Whatever she told Gordy after-wards, it was made clear to me in no uncertain terms that I was never to pick her up again.

FLO: Were you late?

YOUNG TOMMY: Nope.

FLO: Were you speeding?

YOUNG TOMMY: No way.

FLO: Did you call her Diana?

YOUNG TOMMY: Well...

FLO: Yep, that was why.

YOUNG TOMMY: I thought that was her name.

FLO: It is honey, but nowadays unless you came out of the womb with her you're a stranger and you must address her as her serene highness *Miss Ross*. I don't care. She's still Diane to me. Listen Tommy, Diane's all right when she feels like it. She's like my sister. The sister that gets on your nerves....all the damn time. My main thing is that she's just got this razzle dazzle button that she turns on onstage and she can't turn it off. It's hard for me to compete with that and it drives me to shit.

YOUNG TOMMY: Why are you trying to compete with her anyway? Use your own artillery baby doll to combat the war of the Ross's.

FLO: You don't know nothing about my *artillery* Mr. Chapman.

YOUNG TOMMY: Not yet I don't. Well anyway I'm glad it's you that I'm picking up and not her. I'd have to put *Miss Ross* in her place.

FLO: And you'd be looking for another job after that. You'd better be glad Berry didn't already fire you.

YOUNG TOMMY: I don't care about that baby doll. I can always find a job. I'm a Jack of...

FLO: All asses. But I still like your ass Mr Chapman. Just keep driving.

YOUNG TOMMY: Well alright then!

ACT ONE, SCENE 11

PRESENT

FLORENCE: Where are you working now Tommy?

TOMMY: I got a good new job in... uh... sales. I make enough now to take care of you and our three girls. I had to get another job after you put that child support on me.

FLORENCE: Funny, I haven't received a payment in months.

TOMMY: It's coming. I just wasn't working for a while until I found something suitable. You want a drink? I know you're not supposed to have anything in here, but it's your birthday.

Gives FLO a flask.

FLORENCE: Always breaking some kind of rule. (*Beat/Drinks.*) Ahh that tastes so good.

TOMMY: Listen baby doll. I have a plan.

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FLORENCE: I hope it don't include me.

TOMMY: It won't work without you. Remember that jive attorney you hired Leonard Baun when you left Motown.

FLORENCE: Yes he embezzled most of my settlement money.

TOMMY: Well a letter came to our old P.O. Box the other day addressed to you in care of Talent Management Inc which was my company that managed you if you remember..

FLORENCE: Yes, I was there.

TOMMY: Well Baun's lawyers are going to settle with you in the sum of 100,00.00 for the money he stole. All you have to do is go down to their office sign and collect.

FLORENCE: So this big plan of yours includes my money.

TOMMY: No baby doll. It's our money just like before.

ACT ONE, SCENE 12

FLASHBACK: Fall 1967

New York City/Attorney Leonard Baun's Office

YOUNG TOMMY: OK Baun when do we get our money.

BAUN: Well Mr Ballard.

YOUNG TOMMY: Look man, the name is *Chapman* and my wife is Mrs Chapman not Ballard.

BAUN: Well Mr. and Mrs. *Chapman*, Motown and Berry Gordy tried to play hardball but we threw the ball right back at them. We let them know that Florence was a big part of the Supremes success and that she created the group.

YOUNG TOMMY: That's not *new* news man.

BAUN: We told them that Florence could really make Motown look bad if she went to the press and released some of Motown's dirty little secrets.

FLO: Yes I could. That's good.

YOUNG TOMMY: She has a lot of shit on Gordy. I do too for that matter.

BAUN: Nothing really substantial though and nothing that a lot of Motown's green leaves can't flush down the toilet.

YOUNG TOMMY: All right man, cut to the chase. How much is Motown gonna give us?

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BAUN: \$160,000.00. All you have to do is sign right here.

YOUNG TOMMY and FLO: That's it!

FLO: Wait a minute Mr Baun. Berry always said we were rich. We had 10 number 1 tunes. The Supremes sold millions of records every year. All of our shows sold out.

YOUNG TOMMY: \$160,000.00 is barely going to cover a big super star like Florence's living expenses not to mention your retainer fees.

BAUN: Don't worry about my fees. It's all about Florence right now and making sure she gets a fair deal out of this.

YOUNG TOMMY: Do you think this deal is a fair man?

BAUN: It's a good deal. Consider it a down payment on Florence's road to the Grammy's. Once you get a good manager Florence and you sign another record deal you're going to make 10 times this amount and you won't have to split it three ways.

YOUNG TOMMY: Wait a minute Baun, she already has a good manager.

BAUN: Who?

YOUNG TOMMY: Me. I'm going to handle all of her deals and contracts from now on.

BAUN: In addition to your duties as her *chauffeur*?

YOUNG TOMMY: I don't drive anymore Mr. Whitebaun. My primary job now is to protect my wife in sickness and in health.

BAUN: And in wealth too I presume.

YOUNG TOMMY: What?

BAUN: Never mind. I didn't know the exact situation. Look Florence doesn't have anything to worry about from either one of us. Just sign right here.

YOUNG TOMMY: Wait a minute Baun we need to read over this.

FLO: No we don't honey. *I trust the man.*

ACT ONE, SCENE 13*PRESENT*

FLORENCE: *I should never have trusted his ass.*

TOMMY: It's OK baby we both were young. I know you have every reason not to trust me too. But you don't have to worry Florence. I'm the new TC. Can't you see that I've changed.

FLORENCE: Maybe, but I still smell that same TC bullshit.

Re-enter LURLEE.

LURLEE: How are you two doing here? Have you made up yet?

TOMMY: Almost Lurlee. I was just getting ready to kiss the bride.

FLORENCE: No mamma. Tommy is just leaving.

LURLEE: He can't leave. He's my ride.

TOMMY: Don't worry Lurlee. I'll be out in the car but I'm not leaving. I'll see you later baby doll. *(Exits.)*

FLORENCE: Um hum.

LURLEE: I don't know why you won't give that man another chance. He loves you Florence.

FLORENCE: Yeah, he used to love me real good mamma.

ACT ONE, SCENE 14*FLASHBACK: 1970 Florence Ballard's Foyer*

FLO: Get your ass out of my house Tommy!

YOUNG TOMMY: Bitch I ain't leaving here. I got all my shit here.

FLO: Yeah all the shit that I bought.

YOUNG TOMMY: You ain't bought nothing for me. I had stuff before I met you.

FLO: I should never have let you handle my career.

YOUNG TOMMY: What career hoe? You ain't had no career since you left the Supremes.

FLO: I did have a career mutha fucka. I was on top.

TOMMY slaps FLO to the floor.

YOUNG TOMMY: But look at you nowyou're on the bottom.

ACT ONE, SCENE 15

PRESENT

LURLEE: Sometimes love is *bad* baby. It's part of the marriage pact.

Me and your late father understood that pact.

FLORENCE: Hmm. Who made that rule. Tommy still is fine though ain't he.

NURSE: Here's your coffee ladies.

LURLEE: Thank you.

FLORENCE: I'll pass.

NURSE: I'll just leave it here in case you change your mind. Oh, Florence there is someone here to see you.

FLORENCE: I just saw Tommy.

NURSE: No it's someone else. He says he recognized you from TV and wanted to say hello. He's very charming.

ACT ONE, SCENE 16

FLASHBACK: 1960 Inside the Motown office

DIANA: He's very charming, Flo. I've seen him walking through the neighborhood like he's always going someplace.

FLO: What's the name of this record company again?

MARY: Motown!

BARBARA: All the other groups are coming here to sign.

FLO: We ain't other groups.

Enter MARTHA REEVES.

MARTHA: Would you girls like something to drink while you wait?

FLO: No thank you. We're not going to be here that long.

MARTHA: Ok girl. I was just asking.

BARBARA: Do you work here?

MARTHA: I answer the phones part time. But mostly I'm a singer.

DIANA: What's your name?

MARTHA: Martha Reeves. Well maybe I'll see you around. (*Exits.*)

MARY: She's not much older than we are.

DIANA: Maybe we can get jobs here too.

FLO: I thought we came here to sing.

MARY: We did Flo. This is where they recorded "*Shop Around*" by the Miracles. .

DIANA: Smokey Robinson is the lead singer.

FLO: Yeah I've seen that little yella boy. He ain't that cute to me. Look this Motown don't look like much from the outside and it looks like less from the inside. I'm not impressed. What's Prince Charming's name anyway that runs this place.

DIANA: Berry Gordy.

Enter BERRY GORDY.

BERRY: You girls looking for me?

ALL: Yessir!

BERRY: What can I do for you?

FLO: You can make me and my group some stars.

BERRY: So you four are a group. What's the name of your star group?

ALL: The Primettes.

FLO: And I'm the leader.

BERRY: I could tell that. What kind of songs do you sing?

BARBARA: All kind mister.

DIANA: I sing high.

MARY: I sing low.

BARBARA: I sing in the middle.

FLO: And then Flo takes over.

BERRY: Well sing me something.

MARY: But we don't have anyone to play for us.

BARBARA: Yeah Mister we need some music.

BERRY: If you're singers, the music is in your voice. Sing acapella.

MARY: Aca who la?

BERRY: You know without instrumentation. Just sing for me girls.

BARBARA: I don't know if we can do that.

DIANA: Sure we can.

BERRY: What songs do you know?

MARY: We know all the songs by Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers.



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