

WHITESVILLE

By
Eric Mansfield

WHITESVILLE

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WHITESVILLE

*For my future grandchildren.
May they grow up in a world never to see such violence.*

WHITESVILLE

WHITESVILLE received its world premiere by Millennial Theatre Project (Francine Parr, Executive Artistic Director) on the Knight Stage at the Akron Civic Theatre in Akron, Ohio, March 31-April 2, 2022.

Director: Francine Parr
Stage Manager: Ivy Johnson
Costume Design: Kaya Sandel
Set & Lighting Design: Lisa Brosovich
Sound Design: John Russell

The original cast was:

MAX. Kevin Lambes
MEREDITH. Michelle McNeal
JASON......DeAndre Karim
ISABELLE......Kellie Ann Hughes
LARRY......Tyron Hoisten
TERRANCE......Jamal Singleton

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Playwright's Note: Most people remember where they were the first time they saw the video from Minneapolis and heard the name George Floyd. While some turned the channel quickly, others were frozen in time. In the days that followed, the world watched as Americans went toe-to-toe about what they saw, who to blame, and whether this was an isolated incident or an example of racism caught on camera. This play is the product of an ongoing collaboration between the playwright and multiple community members, including many men and women of color, who offered their insights and experiences in helping to craft authentic characters and language. Thanks to those who gave their time and talents to examine real issues about race in America with the hope of inspiring difficult conversations after the final curtain.

The Clayton family has always closed ranks when it comes to emotional challenges, including facing off with those who would confront their mixed-race family. This time they are struggling to see eye-to-eye in real time to the news of a Black man who died under the knee of a white cop while also coming to grips with the family secret of how Isabelle and Jason were adopted.

Winesville, or "Whitesville" as it's known across rural Indiana, quickly becomes a powder keg as the town's small population of Black residents, including Jason and Isabelle can remain silent no longer. They begin marching for reform in opposition of Max and the town's mostly white police force creating a scenario none of them ever thought possible -- children facing off with their police officer father during violent protests while their mother is caught in the middle.

When a curfew and other measures only lead to growing unrest, outside protestors and state police converge on Whitesville for one final, massive protest that most fear will turn deadly, leaving the Clayton family with a night of personal choices that will change each of them forever.

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Cast

Max Clayton: 45-55, white male, police captain in Winesville, Indiana. A life-long resident of this tiny midwestern town, he takes his job and his family seriously. Max is not completely oblivious to racism in his community, but he is clearly unaware of his own biases.

Meredith Clayton: 45-55, white female, Max's wife and homemaker. Meredith would follow Max to the ends of the earth and supports him as a cop's wife, but she would also lay down on the tracks to save her children from danger. Meredith sees Winesville as a perfect snapshot of Americana to raise her adopted kids, but she has often been blissfully ignorant to how her Black children are treated elsewhere.

Jason Clayton: 19, black male, adopted as a toddler by Max and Meredith. Recently Jason has felt an awakened view of America, specifically White America vs. Black America, after leaving Winesville for the first time to attend a state university.

Isabelle Clayton: 17, black female, adopted as an infant with Jason. A high-achieving high school senior hoping to go to medical school, Isabelle craves both the truth about the world beyond Winesville and about her town's *real* history.

Larry Johnson: 40-50, black male, veteran police officer and Max's best friend on the force. A pseudo uncle to Jason and Isabelle, Larry is one of the most respected persons of color in Winesville and takes his role as police officer seriously.

Terrance Garrett: 19, black male, high school teammate of Jason. Terrance stayed in Winesville when Jason left for college and has been growing more frustrated by the day with the systemic racism he feels has prevented him from seeking a future beyond the borders of Whitesville.

(Beat.) should be at least as long as it takes to say the word
/ Indicates overlapping dialogue and the next line should begin
... indicates non-verbal reaction
Side-by-side dialogue is meant to be spoken simultaneously.

Note: When possible, sound cues should include authentic George Floyd audio clips released to the public.

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OPENING: The cast is introduced against some fireside American guitar music. Meredith enters first and starts the morning coffee. Jason and Isabelle follow and take breakfast bowls to the kitchen table. Max enters and is fixing his tie for the day. The family is following its morning routine as Larry stops by for a welcome cup of coffee. Terrance shows up at the back porch, and Jason steps outside to toss the football with him. The family is happy in its routine. As the final two verses play, Terrance and Larry wave goodbye while leaving for their respective jobs. Max hugs Isabelle and Jason before departing for another day on the force. Jason shares a final long hug with Meredith before taking one last look at the family home and then departing for college with a suitcase and a large bag of laundry.

SETTING: May 25, 2020. Common Midwest family home in Southern Indiana with a living room center stage that has an opening to a staircase up to the second floor. There is a front porch on stage left and a kitchen leading to a small back porch on stage right. There are lots of family photos on display along with kids' school and athletic awards and patriotic photos of a police officer rising through the ranks.

ACT 1
SCENE 1

AT RISE: MEREDITH is cooking dinner as MAX enters from the back porch having finished his shift as a police captain. Tired, he stops when the dinner aroma reaches him. (Note: the first few minutes of the play are meant to feel almost like a campy, family sitcom where all is right with the world leading up to the inciting incident of George Floyd's murder.)

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MAX. Oh. Wow.

MEREDITH. Hi Max.

MAX. Don't tell me.

MEREDITH. Max.

MAX. I'm following the clues.

MEREDITH. You're getting all worked up.

MAX. Ah. Piccata chicken .. with spaghetti ... tossed salad ... and your homemade sauce. *(Meredith smacks Max's hand trying to taste the sauce.)*

And oh ... the smoking gun.

MEREDITH. Not a crime scene.

MAX. A-ha. Sweet red from Paula's. Mmmmm. Your honor I rest my case. *(Max drinks straight from the wine bottle.)*

MEREDITH. C-S-I Winesville. Solving family dinner capers since 2002. *(Meredith takes the bottle from Max.)* Will you stop tampering with the evidence? *(Takes her own sip of wine.)*

MAX. Well now that you've ruined the chain of custody. *(They laugh and have a quick kiss.)*

MAX. Why aren't you saving this?

MEREDITH. You turning down piccata chicken?

MAX. Jay's not home till Saturday. *(Chews garlic bread; talks with his mouth full.)* He's gonna find leftovers, and then he's gonna be mad at his momma that he missed his favorite / meal.

MEREDITH. Oh I think he'll be ok with it.

MAX. You do? *(JASON and ISABELLE come through the front porch into the living room. Jason is carrying an overnight bag. Isabelle has her backpack and is wearing her high school jacket. She's also dragging Jason's dirty laundry bag.)*

JASON. Ding Dong Clayton family.

ISABELLE. I could use a little help, Jay.

JASON. Wait.

ISABELLE. What?

JASON. Take it in.

ISABELLE. Here we go.

JASON. The sauce. The sauce. The. sauce.

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ISABELLE. Oh Lord, you're just like --

(Max and Meredith enter and the family embraces.)

MAX. Jason, my son. When did you decide to come home / early?

ISABELLE. When I decided to skip 7th period and drive to campus to pick up his tired / butt.

JASON. And I'm grateful for it.

MAX. Look at you. My God you look great.

MEREDITH. You look skinny.

JASON. Better than *adding* the freshman 15, right?

ISABELLE. I suppose.

JASON. They don't cook like you, mom.

ISABELLE. Suck up.

MAX. No one cooks like mom.

ISABELLE. *struggles with Jason's laundry bag.*

ISABELLE. The un-loved child in this family could use a hand here.

JASON. Got it. *(Taking the laundry bag.)*

MEREDITH. Come set the table. I don't want the spaghetti to boil over.
(Meredith and Jason, go into kitchen.)

MAX. That was really nice of you Izzy to get your brother. I thought you were donating blood after school.

ISABELLE. That was my cover so I could sneak off to get Jay.

MAX. I see. Let's not make a habit out of blowing off appointments. Seriously, don't put it off. O negative blood is --

ISABELLE. The *most* in demand.

MAX. And you and Jason are both blessed with / it.

ISABELLE. We know dad.

MAX. And with O-Neg, you both save lives.

MAX.

ISABELLE.

Every time you donate.

Every time we donate.

MAX. Right. So you know what to do.

ISABELLE. Love that you're always trying to save everyone else.

MAX. Well we need to.

ISABELLE. *(Unpacking her backpack.)* You *need* to let me finish my A-P science classes so I can get on to college and then med / school.

MAX. Where *you* will eventually become a chief surgeon. calling for blood

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.. and saving others.

ISABELLE. Can Mark and I first just go to prom? Just ... maybe?

MAX. Sorry. You need money?

ISABELLE. He bought the tickets like a gentleman, but I'll always take gas money. *(Max gives her some cash as Meredith calls everyone to dinner.)*

MAX. *(to Jason.)* Dare I ask. How was your trigonometry exam?

JASON. Aced it.

MEREDITH. And your other classes?

JASON. ...

MAX. Trouble?

JASON. *(sighs)* Don't get mad. I'm not really feeling criminal justice.

MEREDITH. It's only your second / semester.

JASON. I know. I just need to explore something else.

ISABELLE. 's phone buzzes with a text. She reads it.

ISABELLE. Jesus.

MEREDITH. Izzy.

MAX. No phones at the table guys. You know the rules.

ISABELLE. Something's happening.

MAX. What? What is it?

JASON. 's phone buzzes with a text, and he reads it.

MEREDITH. Jason, you too. You heard your father. *(Jason and Isabelle make eye contact and quickly head into the living room.)*

MAX. Where are you guys going? *(To Meredith.)* I don't get it. You worked hard on this meal. *(Meredith looks at the text on Jason's phone.)* What's it say?

MEREDITH. *(Reading text.)* Find a TV. Now. *(Max and Meredith stare at each other and then quickly join Jason and Isabelle in the living room in front of the television.)*

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O) Here now is footage from the second cell phone camera. This angle shows not one but four officers restraining the man on the ground. Again, these are recordings just released today from Minneapolis where this man -- we now know his name is George Floyd -- was involved in a struggle with police. *(Home phone rings, and Max grabs it.)*

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MAX. Hello? Yeah, I'm watching it now.

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.) Floyd is handcuffed and on his stomach. You can see the officer with a knee on his neck. The officer's hands are in his pockets.

FLOYD AUDIO (V.O.) "I can't breathe. I can't breathe."

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.) Again, if you're just joining us, just hours ago the coroner confirmed that the man you see there -- George Floyd -- is dead. *(Jason and Isabelle gasp. Meredith turns down the audio as Max ends his call.)*

JASON. Dad?

MAX. Everyone take a breath.

JASON. Take a breath?

MAX. Yes.

ISABELLE. Jesus.

JASON. Did you see that shit?

MEREDITH. Honey.

JASON. That's murder.

MAX. Whoa. Whoa. Whoa.

ISABELLE. It was. It *is* dad. Look at it.

MAX. Whoa. Slow down, Izzy. Everyone slow / down.

JASON. What the fuck else could it be?

MEREDITH. Jason. Language. And we don't know anything yet.

ISABELLE. We know what we saw. You saw / it too.

MAX. Izzy, we don't know why they stopped him. We don't know what he did, and we don't know what happened before that video / was shot.

JASON. What's to know? Look at it.

MAX. I am, and I know how internal police reviews work.

JASON. So?

MAX. So, we need to let that department review this. These officers deserve the benefit of the / doubt.

ISABELLE. *Do not* say the benefit of the doubt.

MEREDITH. Izzy.

ISABELLE. Dad, you can't justify that.

JASON. Don't defend that. Those cops should be / arrested.

MAX. Hey. Officers take an oath. We're professionals. We put our lives on

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the line / every day.

ISABELLE. We know dad.

MAX. That's not just public relations. That's / reality.

ISABELLE. I know this is personal for you dad but / c'mon.

MAX. Police officers don't just kill people.

MEREDITH. That's right. They don't.

JASON. You left something out.

MAX. What?

JASON. You left out black.

MAX. JASON.

JASON. You left out black. 'Police officers don't just kill *black* people' is what you / meant.

MAX. Now hold on a damn / minute

MEREDITH. Don't attack your father.

JASON. I'm not. I am telling him and you what's right in front of your faces. And Jesus Christ you just saw it in living / color.

MEREDITH. Stop that right now. We don't take the Lord's name / in vain.

MAX. Fine. White police officers don't just go around killing *black* people. Is that what you need to hear?

ISABELLE. Dad.

MAX. We don't. *(Beat.)* We. Don't.

JASON. Then explain what we just witnessed? My God, Dad.

ISABELLE. They took his life. A black man handcuffed face down and those racist white cops took his last breath. *(The phone rings again creating a full pause in all conversation. Max answers it and steps away. Jason and Isabelle clearly want to say more but instead, they retrieve their phones and head to the front porch with their phones.)*

MEREDITH. *(To Jason and Isabelle.)* Wait a minute.

MAX. *(Hanging up call.)* Where'd they go?

MEREDITH. To cool off. Who was on the / phone?

MAX. LARRY. says the evening lieutenant needs help. Says we already have protestors outside the courthouse and the police station.

MEREDITH. Here? In Winesville?

MAX. *(Gathering police gear.)* Yep.

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MEREDITH. But why? Minneapolis is 6, 7, 800 miles from / here?

MAX. You saw it for yourself. I gotta get down there. Larry's headed over to pick me up. Keep them here. I know they're pissed off. I get it. I can only imagine how upsetting / this is.

MEREDITH. No, actually we can't, Max. They're terrified.

MAX. I gotta get going.

MEREDITH. Hey? Did you hear me? *Terrified.*

MAX. Yes. I heard you.

MEREDITH. I've never seen that look on their / faces.

MAX. I get it, but I need to go be a cop right now.

MEREDITH. Just be careful.

MAX. Steal Izzy's keys if you have to, but Meredith, do whatever it takes to keep them here. We don't know what's about to happen. *(Reacts to honk outside)* There's Larry. I'll call you when I know more. Meredith ... *whatever it takes. (Max leaves out the back door as Jason and Isabelle come in from the porch.)*

MEREDITH. Dad had to go in. Looks like there are protestors.

JASON. Yeah. On Second Street. Izzy and I just got invited to go.

MEREDITH. You .. you can't.

ISABELLE. Why not?

MEREDITH. You don't know what's going to happen down there.

ISABELLE. I know we're black. So we can't just do / nothing.

MEREDITH. Sit down for a minute.

JASON. After what we saw? *(To himself.)* God damn it. *(To Meredith.)* We need to *do* something --

MEREDITH. Jason Alexander Clayton. Sit. You too Isabelle. *(All three slowly take seats.)* You both are the most important things in our lives. And you know that. You know your dad and I would jump in front of a train for / you.

ISABELLE. What's that got to do with this?

MEREDITH. Izzy. We're a bit in no man's land. I've never seen anything like that.

JASON. That's why we need to go.

ISABELLE. Come with us. You protested when you were our age.

MEREDITH. Oh ... a different time.

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ISABELLE. How? I've seen the pictures of you and your sister in college standing up to the campus police.

MEREDITH. Not the / same.

JASON. You had signs, and you marched. Why can't we?

MEREDITH. Another time. For a war, and that was years ago.

JASON. And this is now. This is real mom. Maybe white officers killed black suspects when you were our age but you just didn't see it / on TV.

MEREDITH. No. They didn't do that.

ISABELLE. This history book begs to differ.

MEREDITH. They. Didn't.

ISABELLE.: Do you know we live in a town that once had an open chapter of the Klan? Just blocks from here with an office on Main Street?

MEREDITH. What?

ISABELLE. It's just that *now* we all have *these* (*Holds smart phone.*) so we can record these racist attacks. *By* racist cops.

MEREDITH. Izzy.

ISABELLE. It's real mom. What we all saw on *that* television really happened.

MEREDITH. Those aren't the cops I know, and I've known a lot of them longer than you two have been / alive.

JASON. You can't expect us to watch a black man killed by white cops and not be pissed off. And you should be too.

MEREDITH. Your dad made me promise not to let you leave the house.

ISABELLE. Of *course* he did. Dad is dad. Always trying keep the world / safe.

JASON. And that's what we're going to do by protesting.

ISABELLE. Exactly.

JASON. So the next black man the cops kill in broad daylight isn't me ... or Izzy --

MEREDITH. Fine. Fine. Fine. Go.

ISABELLE. Mom. We'll be ok. (*Meredith stands and looks at family photos on the wall before finally speaking with her back turned towards her kids.*)

MEREDITH. Just go. I'll think up something if your dad comes home. (*Spins towards Jason.*) Jay look at me and hear me. Are you listening?

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She's never more than three feet from you.

ISABELLE. Hey. Mark will be there, and I can take care of myself.

MEREDITH. Jason. Look me in the eye. Three feet. Non-negotiable.

JASON. Got it mom. Three feet. *(He kisses Meredith on the cheek.*

Isabelle and Jason exit out the front door. Meredith collects her thoughts and returns to looking at a family photo when the phone rings.)

MEREDITH. Hello? Yeah. What's happening? Already? Jeez. I'll put your dinner in the microwave. Um .. we talked and they're both tired. Try not to wake them. Ok. Be careful, Max. Love you too. Bye. *(Meredith picks up Max's police windbreaker and Izzy's high school jacket. She sits on the couch and looks at both items before hugging them tightly. Lights fade to cues and sounds signifying first night of unrest in the distance.)*

SCENE 2

It's midnight when Jason and Isabelle are led on to the front porch and into the living room by Larry, who is still in his police uniform.

LARRY. All the way in.

ISABELLE. We know how to go into our own / house.

JASON. This is some shit.

LARRY. In. And let's not wake your mom. I'd like to be invited to dinner / again.

ISABELLE. We weren't doing anything.

LARRY. You *weren't* where you were supposed to be.

ISABELLE. We were *supposed* to be with the crowd. Exercising our rights.

JASON. It's guaranteed in the Constitution.

LARRY. Oh how we cops love it when people explain the law to us. Continue your honor and let me drink from your cup of knowledge.

JASON. It *is* and you know it.

MEREDITH. *(Entering.)* Oh, Thank God. You have no idea how worried I was. Let me look at you. *(Meredith examines them like toddlers missing in a hurricane.)*

JASON. Mom. Mom. Stop. We're ok. We're just fine.

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ISABELLE. But we should have been able to stay.

MEREDITH. Thank you, Larry. (*Kisses him on the cheek.*) Thank you.

LARRY. It's one more Max can owe me.

MEREDITH. Have you talked to him?

LARRY. Not since he radioed that he could see you kids approaching the protest.

ISABELLE. So he *told* you to arrest us?

LARRY. Didn't have to.

JASON. Oh, you just snatched us up on your own?

ISABELLE. Don't know what you're trying to / prove.

LARRY. We went over this in the car. A: You weren't under arrest.

JASON. Two hours in the back of your cruiser? Shittttt . could have fooled me.

LARRY. And B: When your friend of 20 years tells you that his *kids* -- whom I've known since the day he adopted you -- are approaching danger, the rest is kind of implied.

ISABELLE. Uncle Larry ... you're not really our uncle --

MEREDITH. Isabelle.

LARRY. It's ok. That hurts Izzy but go on counselor. The courtroom is yours.

ISABELLE. You know what I mean. You know we love you. But ordering us into a cruiser. in your *police* uniform in front of a crowd of black people like us mind you .. was an arrest.

LARRY. Well, cross it off your bucket list.

JASON. We're black. Pretty easy box to check.

LARRY. Jay, I love you like a son. And you know that. And I love you enough -- both of you -- to tell you the truth about attending a protest.

ISABELLE. And what's that?

LARRY. The goal isn't to send a giant F-U to the man.

JASON. What is it then?

MAX. (*Entering.*) Getting home alive. Do you kids have any idea how lucky you are? What could have happened?

JASON. Were we supposed to just sit here after what happened to George Floyd?

ISABELLE. Larry busted us so quickly. I never even got to look for Mark.

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MEREDITH. Is he ok?

ISABELLE. I have no idea, but I'm sure my *boyfriend* didn't end up in a cruiser.

MAX. How do you know?

ISABELLE. ...

MAX. Oh cuz your boyfriend's white? So you're sure *he* wasn't arrested? Right, cuz Larry and I only arrested the black folks?

ISABELLE. Tell me I'm wrong. Tell me I'm wrong.

MEREDITH. Izzy.

MAX. Fine. Be pissed.

ISABELLE. I am.

MAX. Well at least you'll be doing it here -- alive -- in this house.

JASON. This is some shit.

MAX. Do you know what happens when a crowd of people come together quickly all fired up and emotional? Do you?

LARRY. Your dad's right.

MAX. There's a reason they call it a 'mob mentality.'

ISABELLE. Well, having Uncle Larry do everything but tase us means we'll never know.

MAX. (*Cop humor.*) Wait. You didn't tase them?

LARRY. Saving it for a special occasion.

ISABELLE.

Stop it.

MEREDITH.

Not the time guys

MAX. Sorry. I'm a dad. Humor is my nature. You see this? (*Points to spot on his uniform*)

ISABELLE. Is that blood?

MAX. Yeah. It is. Ken Jones got hit with a rock.

MEREDITH. Is he going to be ok?

LARRY. 10 stitches and a concussion.

MAX. Lucky he didn't lose an eye.

LARRY. MAX. did first aid.

JASON. Cops took shots at the crowd too.

ISABELLE. I saw a guy with what I'm sure are broken ribs from a police baton.

LARRY. The crowd was warned.

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ISABELLE. *(To Larry.)* Wait, you justifying this? *You?*

LARRY. *(To Isabelle.)* Legally warned.

MAX. Yes they were.

JASON. Oh bullshit.

MEREDITH. Jason. Stop / that.

JASON. We could see 'em from the cruiser. They were peaceful.

ISABELLE. And we could hear it too, and you should have let them / protest.

LARRY. They *were* allowed to protest, but then they crossed the line.

JASON. *(To Larry.)* And *you* were there to stop them. You of all people. *(Larry stands his ground while biting his tongue. Max steps in front of Jason.)*

MAX. Hey. Hey! HEYYYYYYY!!!! *(Beat.)* The only thing keeping me from completely losing it right now is that while one of my officers got hurt tonight, you and your sister didn't.

JASON. No thanks to Larry.

MEREDITH. That's enough Jason.

MAX. And forgive me if I'm not completely on board with what you all think of these whatever- they-are protests for whatever-his-name-is.

ISABELLE. & JASON. George Floyd.

MAX. Fine. George Floyd.

JASON. This shit ain't gonna stop.

MAX. And that's what scares me *(beat)* .. it's what *should* scare all of us.

ISABELLE. Which is why our voices shouldn't be silenced. *(beat)* This can't stand.

It can't Dad. We are black.

MAX. Black? Oh my God, Meredith. Did you know that?

MEREDITH. MAX., I don't think that's the point she's / making --

MAX. Don't you think I know that Izzy? That your mom and I are fairly *aware* of the color of your skin?

ISABELLE. Dad, this isn't funny --

MAX. Well I'm not having our difference in skin color thrown in my face in my own --

MEREDITH. Max.

MAX. I'm not, Meredith. C'mon Clayton family. We're better than that.

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Jesus, it was my idea we go as a family to see the Color Purple.

Remember? *(Jason and Isabelle react in disbelief.)*

JASON. There is so much shit here. I don't know where to begin.

MAX. Fine. Let's just be / calm.

JASON. Be calm? When there's a man whose dead just for being black?

ISABELLE. And he was like you.

MAX. I *assure* you, George Floyd was nothing like me.

ISABELLE. I was going to say he was a father. *(beat)* With a daughter.

MAX. ..

ISABELLE. A little girl .. who doesn't have her daddy anymore.

MAX. Ok. Ok. I'm sorry. I don't have all the info. And I don't have all the answers. But this family is not gonna bounce off the walls from something none of us even knew existed until six hours ago.

MEREDITH. Max, now you calm down.

MAX. You're right. You're right. *(deep breath)* We're all running a bit hot right now. Me Included. Let's go to bed and talk in the morning. Please.

Jason. Izzy. That's all I'm asking for. Please? *(Max hugs a defiant Isabelle but Jason resists.)* In the morning, I promise you'll both have my full attention. I promise I won't lose my temper.

MEREDITH. Just head up guys. I'll come up and check on you in a few minutes.

JASON. What am I? Five? *(Jason departs upstairs. Isabelle struggles to keep quiet, but she relents and follows.)*

LARRY. Just give them some time. They're in a tough spot.

MAX. I know. I know.

MEREDITH. Is Ken gonna be ok?

LARRY. Should be fine.

MAX. Thankfully. But for the love of all that is holy, how did they get out of the house? I told you to keep them here, Meredith. I *told* you.

MEREDITH. They're growing up, and they can make their own decisions. And if you keep trying to live their lives for / them --

MAX. That's not what this is. There's gonna be another one of these protests tomorrow.

MEREDITH. Oh no.

LARRY. Probably bigger. And then maybe another. Happening all over

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the country.

MEREDITH. Are you serious?

MAX. Yes. So Larry and I are gonna have our hands full keeping Winesville -- or 'Whitesville' as everyone around here *loves* to call it -- from burning to the ground.

MEREDITH. I can't believe that.

MAX. Believe it. That means I won't have an extra eye to keep on them.

MEREDITH. Then *tell* them that. They're old enough to hear it. But stop with the dad jokes. Someone died here.

MAX. Meredith, listen to me --

MEREDITH. No, wait a minute. You -- make that *we* -- had better make sure we are *hearing* them because I'm telling you -- trust me a mother knows -- those kids are shook up right now in ways you and I can't imagine.

MAX. But / Meredith.

MEREDITH. But nothing. I don't know how we fix that, Max. I don't know if we can. (*Beat.*) I'm going up. Don't stay up too much longer. Thanks again, Larry. For everything. (*Meredith exits to bed.*)

LARRY. You ok?

MAX. God I don't know. That crowd tonight. Ken getting hurt. The kids in the middle of it. How can I be a good dad and a good cop?

LARRY. By doing what you're doing. Your kids know you're one of the good guys, Max, but right now -- in their eyes -- those of us wearing these outfits, *aren't*. Especially the ones who look like you.

MAX. Now *that* sounds racist.

LARRY. (*Laughing.*) Max, my brother. You better get some thick skin and get used to hearing a lot more than that.

MAX. Yeah. That crowd tonight? It's gonna get worse. (*Beat.*) Guess we'll deal with tomorrow, tomorrow.

LARRY. It's *already* tomorrow. (*Beat.*)

MAX. Hey. How *you* with all this?

LARRY. Me?

MAX. Yeah..

LARRY. When I figure *that* out, I'll let you know. (*beat*)

MAX. Thanks for getting the kids outta there for me. They need to know

WHITESVILLE

cops aren't the enemy.

LARRY. That what you think?

MAX. You know what I mean.

LARRY. I know what I saw in Minneapolis --

MAX. -- Well that ain't / us --

LARRY. -- And what I've seen with my own eyes. So I'll ask you again brother **MAX.** We're *not* the enemy? That what you think?

MAX. We're supposed to be role / models.

LARRY. We're *supposed* to be a lot of things. But even if *we* are, Jay and Izzy aren't gonna see us that way.

MAX. Really?

LARRY. (*Snickers.*) You *know* the first time I was ever in a Whitesville police cruiser *wasn't* when you and I were the academy.

MAX. What? You sign up for a community ride-along or something?

LARRY. (*Not surprised Max missed the point.*) No Max. Why no, I didn't. (*Beat.*)

MAX. What then? Hey? What?

LARRY. Another time. (*Beat.*) But seriously with what just / happened --

MAX. Oh don't --

LARRY. With what *just* happened, it's one more reason that it's / time.

MAX. Don't --

LARRY. You need to level with these kids, Max.

MAX. C'mon. Not again. I'm not ready.

LARRY. Jason's in college, and Isabelle is almost 18. They *need* to know how they ended up in this house.

MAX. Meredith's not ready to tell them. I can't put her through / that.

LARRY. Your wife married a cop right? Goes to bed each night not knowing if her husband will come home alive? Trust me. She's strong enough.

MAX. What if we *do* tell then, and it changes everything?

LARRY. You won't know till you try, but I know this much. White folks have kept far too many secrets in this town already. Maybe it's time you just tried the truth.

WHITESVILLE

ACT 2
SCENE 1

Next morning. Jason and Isabelle are sitting on the front porch.

ISABELLE. We're going tonight.

JASON. Izzy.

ISABELLE. Well I'm going. With or without you.

JASON. Think it will be safe?

ISABELLE. Safe? People *filmed* George Floyd dying and those cops didn't give a damn. Don't tell me about safe.

TERRANCE. *Safe* done left America long ago. *(Terrance talks while walking up to the porch. He, Isabelle and Jason embrace.)*

TERRANCE. 'Safe' on the first train outta Whitesville ... like you off to college. Must be nice to be able to afford it.

JASON. What's up T? Thought you's in Atlanta?

TERRANCE. Didn't work out, and mom needed my help. So back I came. Forever in chains in Whitesville.

JASON. Sorry man.

TERRANCE. Saw you in the cop car last night. Was coming by to see if you needed bail.

JASON. Ha. Ha. Ha. It's a long story.

ISABELLE. No charges, so at least there's that.

TERRANCE. Dope. Either way, this bullshit from Minneapolis. We should be going up there to kick some ass.

JASON. Ain't got to. 'Nother rally here tonight.

TERRANCE. In Whitesville?

ISABELLE. Yep. And bigger than last night's. *(To Terrance.)* Roll with us?.

TERRANCE. I'm in.

JASON. *(To Isabelle.)* What's the Tea?

ISABELLE. *(Reading her phone.)* 8 p.m. Main Street and 2nd.

JASON. We need more intel than that.

TERRANCE. Why? So white cops can know everyone's business? Naw.

WHITESVILLE

Keep it simple. Stay alive.

ISABELLE. I gotta let Mark know. Didn't even get to see him last / night.

TERRANCE. You still hanging with that white boy with the geeky glasses?

ISABELLE. Hey.

JASON. He's cool. Treats her nice cuz he knows I'd bust his ass.

ISABELLE. Who I date is none of your / business.

JASON. Alright. I'll stop.

TERRANCE. Sure he was *there*? I was there all night and never saw him.

ISABELLE. Said he was. We didn't meet up though.

TERRANCE. Unless he was 5-0, he wasn't there.

JASON. Tonight gonna be different.

TERRANCE. Yessir. There ain't a lot of us still in Whitesville, but the days of being black-and-quiet are over.

JASON. Fine. Aight.

TERRANCE. Where's your ball?

JASON. Closet. C'mon. *(All three enter the house. Terrance notices the Clayton family photos.)*

TERRANCE. Damnnnnnnnn.

ISABELLE. What?

TERRANCE. Your middle name Clorox?

JASON. Worst kept secret in town.

TERRANCE. Yeah, but when you actually *see* it. Damn. Your white dad in that cop uniform?

ISABELLE. What's your deal?

TERRANCE. White cop family with black kids? You guys are like a unicorn or big foot. I heard the legend, but I've never actually seen one in person.

JASON. You're hilarious.

TERRANCE. Ya'll should be an Oprah special.

JASON. *(Tosses football to Terrance.)* Let's go. *(To Isabelle.)* We ain't letting Uncle Larry lock us down tonight. Let's go.

ISABELLE. K. Later.

TERRANCE. Be prepared for battle Izzy.

JASON. I said, let's go. *(Jason and Terrance exit to the front porch only to*

WHITESVILLE

encounter Larry who is just arriving. They pause briefly to make eye contact as if to acknowledge the history Larry has had with Terrance.)

LARRY. Not even a good morning? *(Jason and Terrance stop and turn around.)*

JASON. *(Defiant.)* Good morning.

TERRANCE. *(Under his breath.)* Coon.

LARRY. What's that?

TERRANCE. What?

LARRY. You got the balls to say something, then *say* it.

TERRANCE. Well sorry Officer Johnson. Not used to hearing your voice from the front. ya know, without the steel sensation of your cuffs behind me. 'Click-click.'

JASON. *(To Terrance.)* Knock that shit off.

LARRY. Glad you remember what that felt like. I'd hoped it would keep you from ever feeling it / again.

TERRANCE. If I want a sermon, I'll go to church with my momma. Know what I'm saying?

LARRY. It doesn't have to be like this Mr. Brown.

TERRANCE. *(Under his breath.)* Fuckin coon.

JASON. steps between Larry and Terrance and then gets in Terrance's face.

JASON. What I tell you? Get your ass to the park. *(He gives Terrance the football.)* Now. I'll catch up. *(Terrance hesitates but then departs with the football.)*

LARRY. The company you keep, Jay.

JASON. I don't need preaching either.

LARRY. Not at the pulpit, but maybe some church would do you -- and him -- some good.

JASON. That what you were doing last night? Praying?

LARRY. What are you talking about?

JASON. I seen your face. *(steps closer)* I seen your eyes too.

LARRY. You see what you want to see.

JASON. Mmm hmm. *(He stares down Larry for a moment before following after Terrance. Larry knocks at the front door and Isabelle answers.)*

LARRY. Morning.

WHITESVILLE

ISABELLE. *(Turning away)* Morning.

MEREDITH. *(Entering from kitchen.)* Oh good morning Larry.

LARRY. Morning. Max up yet?

MEREDITH. In the shower, but he'll be down in a / few.

LARRY. Just let him know that Ken's got a concussion.

MEREDITH. *Nooooo...*

LARRY. So we'll be short-staffed tonight.

MEREDITH. Darn it. I'll have to call Missy.

LARRY. She'll be glad to hear from you. Let Max know that the chief wants me to activate the reserves from the county for tonight.

MEREDITH. *More officers?*

LARRY. Bigger crowd. Bigger force. Just let him know I'll take care of it.

MEREDITH. I will. Be safe out there, ok?

LARRY. Thanks. I will. *(He makes eye contact with Isabelle as he heads out the front door.)*

MEREDITH. Jay leave?

ISABELLE. Yep. Terrance came by. They went to catch up.

MEREDITH. Terrence? From their high school team?

ISABELLE. That's him.

MEREDITH. Nice kid, but he was always really aggressive as I recall.

ISABELLE. It was football mom.

MEREDITH. I just don't want him getting Jason in trouble.

ISABELLE. They'll be fine. We're all going to the rally tonight. So now there will be *three* of us looking out for each / other.

MEREDITH. Again? You really think you need to go? You already went last night.

ISABELLE. And I'll go to the one tomorrow night too. And the night after / that.

MEREDITH. Dad said there will be even more protestors tonight.

ISABELLE. Good.

MEREDITH. Good.

ISABELLE. Good. The more people who come out, the more they'll hear us.

MEREDITH. Hear what? What's the message?

ISABELLE. That we're tired mom. We're tired of seeing this over and

WHITESVILLE

over / again.

MEREDITH. Of what happened in Minnesota? That's an anomaly.

ISABELLE. No, it wasn't.

MEREDITH. Those officers were wrong. They clearly got carried away.

ISABELLE. Carried away? Then how do you explain Stephon Clark?

Atatiana Jefferson? or Freddy Gray?

MEREDITH. I thought we were talking about George Floyd.

ISABELLE. There are others.

MEREDITH. In Minneapolis?

ISABELLE. No. Look.. (*Showing pictures on her phone.*) Stephon Clark was holding a cell phone, but the cops in Sacramento thought it was a gun. Shot at him 20 times and killed him. A phone mom. No charges against the officers. Atatiana Jefferson was shot by cops who got a call about an open door. Saw a black woman inside, so they killed her through the window. It was her *own* home.

MEREDITH. Izzy --

ISABELLE. And Baltimore cops put Freddy Gray in the back of a van with no seatbelt, and you know what they did next?

MEREDITH. What?

ISABELLE. They drove the streets bouncing him around like a pinball machine around until he was dead. (*Meredith gasps.*) *None* of those cops -- those *white* cops -- were convicted. What can't you see?

MEREDITH. I don't know those names.

ISABELLE. Those are just in the last few years. And there's more.

MEREDITH. Izzy, I know that your father and the officers in this town are good people. Whitesville Police are / good.

ISABELLE. That's not what I'm trying to / say.

MEREDITH. No, I listened to you. Now you listen to me. Yeah, the cops in this town are almost all white, but every one of them would protect *you* from danger ... and your brother .. and every other person in this town.. no matter if they are white, black or green.

ISABELLE. Let me know when the green people get / here.

MEREDITH. You know what I mean.

ISABELLE. We live in a city that used to lynch people in a spot just 8 blocks from our house.

WHITESVILLE

MEREDITH. No.

ISABELLE. Including runaway slaves.

MEREDITH. That can't be true.

ISABELLE. But it *is* mom.

MEREDITH. Isabelle Elizabeth. I grew up in this town. I've lived here all my life, and I've helped teach history in the elementary school. (*Getting history books from bookcase.*) Here. (*Reads book titles.*) "The path to Winesville, City of Hope" and "City by The River - Winesville since 1820". I've read these cover-to-cover, and trust me, *none* of *that* is in there.

ISABELLE. That's right. *None* of it is in there. (*Beat.*) I talked Mrs. Hayes.

MEREDITH. From the historical society?

ISABELLE. Asked her if the underground railroad ever came through this part of Indiana.

MEREDITH. It did. I know it did. It's here in this / book.

ISABELLE. Correct. But it's what's *not* in there that's important. Black people were kept in their place or they were killed in this town. Sometimes *by* the police.

MEREDITH. That's not the Winesville I know. That's not my / city.

ISABELLE. But it *is* our history. And what happened back then in *this* town is happening right now in America.

MEREDITH. You can't believe everything you hear. (*Isabelle opens her phone and plays short video clip of people yelling at the officers to get off of George Floyd.*)

MEREDITH. My God.

ISABELLE. Not some third world country with a dictator. That's our country. This week.

MEREDITH. *That* shouldn't have happened. and those officers will be found guilty I'm sure.

ISABELLE. (*Scoffs.*) Mom, they can't be found guilty if they're not / charged.

MEREDITH. Why wouldn't they be?

ISABELLE. Because this is America. And white cops kill black people and get away with it.

MEREDITH. Damn it Izzy. Will you stop painting all police officers with

WHITESVILLE

the same broad brush? (*Beat.*) Your father and the other officers in this town aren't *those* officers. And we need them. We *need* them, Isabelle. To protect us. Don't you get that?

ISABELLE. Mom. Please. (*Calming.*) Please, just try to open your mind that the America you've read about all your life might not be the America you think it is.

MEREDITH. Izzy. I don't know what's happening in America, but I know when it comes to me and my house, I see love. That's what I see.

Everywhere I look. *Love.* Don't you see that? I don't see color.

ISABELLE. (*Whispering through tears*) Then you don't see me. (*Beat.*) Then you don't see me, mom. (*She moves away quickly.*)

MEREDITH. Honey. Oh honey. I see you. Please don't think I don't.

ISABELLE. (*Sad but resigned.*) I love you mom. (*Begins to leave.*)

MEREDITH. I .. I love you too. I didn't mean to hurt you.

ISABELLE. I need some fresh air. I'll be back before the protest tonight.

MEREDITH. Wait. Can I ask you something? How'd you get to be so smart?

ISABELLE. Good genes. (*Isabelle taps her heart and then blows a kiss to her mom before she exits the front door. Max enters from kitchen.*)

MAX. Sorry I was on the phone. What were you two talking about?

MEREDITH. I thought I knew, but .. whatever it was, I failed.

MAX. Oh that can't be true.

MEREDITH. It is, but .. hey, we talked about the history of Winesville. Did you know there were once hangings in this town? And that the police supported it?

MAX. That was a century ago.

MEREDITH. Wait. You knew?

MAX. We don't talk about it. Water under the .. that's not who we are today.

MEREDITH. Again, you *knew* that?

MAX. Jesus, Meredith. I didn't take part in it.

MEREDITH. Well that's a relief.

MAX. Come on.

MEREDITH. Well our daughter knows about it. And I don't think she's gonna be ok hearing "those hangings. yeah .. well. that was a century ago.

WHITESVILLE

But white people in 2020, we're not like that anymore."

MAX. You done?

MEREDITH. Please tell me you won't say it like that to them.

MAX. You know me better than that. I'm sensitive to race with them. C'mon.

MEREDITH. Fine. Oh, and Larry says he's calling the county because you're gonna need more officers tonight.

MAX. I know. Just talked to the chief. Look. We need to talk about something else. *(Isabelle has returned to the front porch but stops herself from entering when she hears her parents talking. She listens through the door.)*

MEREDITH. What?

MAX. Larry and I got to talking, and I ended up laying there all night thinking that maybe it's time to tell the kids. About the adoption.

MEREDITH. Oh Lord, Max. I thought we had a few more years.

MAX. Larry thinks they're ready.

MEREDITH. How would Larry know?

MAX. Well our kids aren't the *only* black people in town.

MEREDITH. Again. Enough with the 'dad' jokes.

MAX. He says he thinks they can handle it.

MEREDITH. Izzy's almost ready to graduate, and Jason's still finding himself in college. You really want to drop this on them right now?

MAX. If not now, then when? We always said we would tell them the truth.

MEREDITH. God I remember when Izzy was learning genetics, and she talked about finding her biological mom. She wanted to know her health history. And Jason wanted to see if he and his father actually looked alike.

MAX. Wouldn't you?

MEREDITH. They haven't mentioned it in a while, but I'm sure they still think about it.

MAX. How do I tell these kids the real story? That there was *no* adoption agency? *(Isabelle reacts in disbelief and leaves the porch.)*

MEREDITH. I don't know. I really don't. I think we just have to level with them.

MAX. Meredith, how do I look our son and daughter in the eyes and say I

WHITESVILLE

was there in uniform when the woman / holding them --

MEREDITH. Stop. Stop right there. *(beat)* It wasn't your fault.

MAX. But --

MEREDITH. It wasn't. Don't do this to yourself.

MAX. ...

MEREDITH. Look, we just have to ask God to give us the right words and put it his hands after that. *(Max and Meredith embrace and then head upstairs. Jason enters from the front porch in a hurry.)*

JASON. *(Talking softly as he texts)* Ok. I'm home. Where are you? *(Jason receives a text response and heads to the front porch. Isabelle approaches him.)*

ISABELLE. Hey.

JASON. Hey what? What's with the 9-1-1?

ISABELLE. Keep your voice down.

JASON. Why? What's happened?

ISABELLE. There was no adoption agency.

JASON. What? What are you --

ISABELLE. I heard them. They were talking about it.

JASON. Slow down. Talking about what?

ISABELLE. Our adoption. I heard mom and dad in the living room, and they were talking about telling us the *real* story of how we ended up here.

JASON. And?

ISABELLE. And dad said he didn't know how to tell us that there was *no* adoption agency.

JASON. What the fu .. Sure that's what he said?

ISABELLE. Yeah.

JASON. That makes no sense. They've always told us they couldn't have kids ... and there was an agency, and that you and I were brother and sister ...and it was --

JASON

Love at first sight.

ISABELLE

Love at first sight.

JASON. Right.

ISABELLE. Right. But was that all a lie?

JASON. We got birth certificates. It's gotta be legit.

ISABELLE. Does it though?

WHITESVILLE

JASON. Well I guess --

ISABELLE. Either way, sounds like we're about to find out.

JASON. How you know?

ISABELLE. Dad said Larry is pushing him to tell us the truth, and mom was debating going along with it.

JASON. Now? They wait til there's literal protests and blood in the streets to tell us how the stork ended up in Whitesville? Actually that is *sooo* on par for the Clayton family.

ISABELLE. Right? I'm just .. If there was no adoption agency, how did we end up becoming a family .. with *them*?

JASON. Look. Let them bring it up. We play it cool. Dad has a terrible poker face, and mom can't keep a secret to save her life.

ISABELLE. Ain't that the truth.

JASON. So we'll know whether they're telling us the truth. Ok?

ISABELLE. K. I just can't take this right now. Not with everything else going on.

JASON. We'll be alright.

ISABELLE. Why can't things be easy for once? I mean, seriously. Why can't our lives *ever* just be the way they're supposed to be?

JASON. I don't know. A black quarterback takes a knee during the national anthem and the country calls him a son-of-bitch .. but a white cop takes a knee and uses it to kill someone just because he can.

ISABELLE. Makes no sense. But why?

JASON. Cuz when you're black in America, you're always asking why.

SCENE 2

It's late afternoon as Max is having a cup of coffee in the kitchen while Isabelle is having a drink in the living room. Both are deep in thought. Audience members begin to hear a snare drum as the scenes in the two rooms unfold in unison. Meredith enters kitchen and hugs Max; Jason enters living room and hugs Isabelle. Meredith helps Max put on his police uniform top; Isabelle and Jason put on Black Lives Matter shirts. Larry enters from back porch; Terrance enters from front porch.

WHITESVILLE

LARRY & TERRANCE. Can you believe this all started over a fake \$20 bill?

MAX & JASON. Are you serious?

LARRY & TERRANCE. Yep.

MEREDITH & ISABELLE. Oh My God. *(Larry hands gas mask to Max; Terrance hands helmets to Isabelle and Jason. Larry and Max inspect riot batons; Jason and Terrance inspect wooden sticks. Larry and Max lay batons against plastic shields that read "Police"; Jason and Terrance fix sticks to signs that read "No Justice, No Peace.")*

MAX & JASON. I hope they get the message.

MEREDITH & ISABELLE. They probably won't.

LARRY & TERRANCE. We'll have backup. *(Everyone gathers their things preparing to leave for the march.)*

LARRY & TERRANCE. It's time brother.

MAX & JASON. Ok. Let's go.

MEREDITH & ISABELLE. I can't believe it's come to this.

Snare drum stops. Normal ambient noise as Max and Larry leave out the back door.

MEREDITH. I love you.

MAX. Love you too. *(Saying goodbye from the back porch, Meredith runs through the house to the front porch as Jason, Isabelle, and Terrance are almost gone.)*

MEREDITH. I love you.

JASON & ISABELLE. Love you too. *(Meredith returns alone to the living room as the snare drum returns. Conflicted, Meredith grabs her coat to follow Max, but then stops herself and heads to the front door to follow her kids, but then stops again. Unable to decide, Meredith finds her bible and curls up on the couch to pray.)*

MEREDITH. God, I really need you right now. Our town and country do too. My family is about to go to war .. with each other .. And I just don't know what to do. Please, please God. Just help us.

(Blackout as snare drum sound dissolves to light cues and sounds of night two of protests in the distance.)

WHITESVILLE

SCENE 3

It's midnight. Isabelle, Jason and Terrance enter the front porch coughing and clearly exhausted from the protest. Terrance has a water bottle.

JASON. My eyes. God Damn it.

TERRANCE. Here. Use the water. Flush them out.

JASON. Damn it. Damn it.

ISABELLE. God everything I'm wearing reeks of tear gas.

JASON. There was no reason for that. *No* reason. There was two, three times as many cops as / us.

ISABELLE. And we were being peaceful. How could they not see that?

TERRANCE. Fuckin white boys with badges. Afraid of a bunch of pissed off brothers with a cause.

JASON. Are you ok?

ISABELLE. Bruises to my knee and elbows. You?

JASON. Just want to be able to see. God, I'm pissed.

TERRANCE. White cops are racist sons-a-bitches. All of them.

JASON. Alright I get it Terrance. So knock it off.

TERRANCE. What more proof do you need?

ISABELLE. Say what you want about the cops, but our dad was on that side somewhere. And he's not a racist, ok?

TERRANCE. He puts on that uniform and look what happened? His people did this. To us. Your dad's complicit. Plain and simple.

JASON. I said --

TERRANCE. No different than those mother fucking cops in Minneapolis.

ISABELLE.

Terrance.

JASON.

I said knock it off.

ISABELLE. Back off for a minute.

JASON. We gotta keep our mom from freaking the hell out.

TERRANCE. Alright. But I'm telling you, this won't stand. I'm calling my cousin in Atlanta because no shit, he and his friends know how to really march. And tomorrow night, we are gonna respond. Big. Big enough so the Whitesville pigs get the message.

WHITESVILLE

JASON. Fine. Fine Terrance. We'll deal with tomorrow, tomorrow.

TERRANCE. It's *already* tomorrow. *(Beat. He shoots a look as he departs. Jason and Isabelle enter the living room. Isabelle continues to the kitchen to get a wet towel for Jason. Meredith enters.)*

MEREDITH. God I can smell that tear gas upstairs. Are you both alright?

JASON. Fine mom.

ISABELLE. He got gassed.

MEREDITH. That much I figured out. Let me look at you. Keep the towel on your eyes.

ISABELLE. We actually should be using milk.

JASON. They're almost clear. I'll be ok.

MEREDITH. Izzy, you're bleeding.

ISABELLE. It's just my elbow. Got knocked down.

MEREDITH. You need a bandage and some ice. How did this happen?
(To Jason.) I told you three feet.

ISABELLE. Don't blame him. We got split up and I got run over .. but just before the storm troopers were gonna stomp on me, Jason picked me up. He couldn't even see me but he found me.

JASON. We're ok mom.

ISABELLE. I looked, and there he was.

MEREDITH. Who? Jason?

ISABELLE. Dad. He had his gas mask on, but I could tell it was him.

MEREDITH. Do you know if your father is ok? Was he hurt?

JASON. Look at us mom. Do you think the *cops* are the ones who got hurt tonight?

MEREDITH. So, you don't know. You don't know what happened to your father?

JASON. I know there were bunch of racist cops knocking us around when all we were doing was walking.

ISABELLE. They gassed us before we even got going.

MEREDITH. That doesn't sound like your dad.

ISABELLE. Well that's what happened. We never got a chance to even hear the speaker. And it was peaceful mom. It was *peaceful*.

MAX. *(Entering still in riot gear.)* Well it wasn't going to stay that way.

MEREDITH. Honey are you / ok?

WHITESVILLE

MAX. Ah, I'm fine. Izzy? Jason? Let me see you. You ok?

ISABELLE. Get back. (*She steps in front of Jason.*) I said get back, dad.

MEREDITH. Izzy.

MAX. I'm just trying to see if he's ok.

ISABELLE. You gassed us and pushed us, and *now* you care if we're ok?

JASON. Izzy, I got this.

MAX. You don't know what you're talking about.

ISABELLE. We were there, dad. Look at us. This happened because of you and your police.

MAX. No, this happened because you and the rest of the crowd didn't disperse when you were told to do so.

JASON. We had a right to be there. We had a right to assemble.

MAX. For a certain size and area, yes, but it didn't stay that way. The crowd was larger than what was on the permit, and everyone was told what would happen if they didn't move. We legally ordered you to disperse until we had no / choice.

ISABELLE. Dad, where are you?

MEREDITH. Izzy, you said you saw him at the march with his mask on.

ISABELLE. No. Not where was he *earlier*.

MEREDITH. Then what do you mean?

JASON. She means where *are* you? Dad? Right now. Where *are* you?

ISABELLE. Where is our *father*? Huh? Are you in there?

JASON. I recognize the face and the eyes looking back at me, but right now I don't know this man.

MAX. You're out of line.

JASON. Am I? Am I dad?

MAX. You're upset, and I get that. But I was doing my job tonight.

ISABELLE. Cracking down on black folks? That's your job now?

MAX. We had intelligence from protests in New York, Detroit and Chicago. Outsiders joining the protests to create serious violence. *Deadly* violence. They are instigators who want to see both the police and demonstrators get hurt.

JASON. The crowd we were in was peaceful.

MAX. And we wanted it to end that way. That's why we ordered everyone to disperse. But the crowd kept growing.

WHITESVILLE

ISABELLE. It was our right to / be there.

MAX. Izzy, stop for a second. While your first speaker was finishing up, do you know what happened? Do you? 10 cars full of people pulled up along the edge of town. All with Detroit license plates.

JASON. So?

MAX. So what were those people going to do? Do either of you know? No. You don't. Already we're seeing protests getting out of hand in Memphis and Louisville .. and part of Los Angeles had to be shut down. Six people have been shot so far in Chicago and one man blocking the road in St. Louis -- just 150 miles from that front door -- died at a rally.

JASON. You can't blame that on us.

MAX. Not trying to blame anyone. I'm trying to tell you that America is a tinderbox right now, and the worst that is happening across the country could easily happen here in Whitesville too.

JASON. You mean Whitesville.

MEREDITH. Jason. Listen to your father.

JASON. Race *is* a big part of this mom.

ISABELLE. But the cops just don't want to admit it.

MAX. Race wasn't behind the decision to end the rally tonight. We ended it to make sure everyone went home safe *before* it got out of hand.

ISABELLE. So you gassed us? Teenagers? Women? Didn't matter did it --

MAX. There were legal, verbal commands first. But yeah, we gassed the crowd so you would get the hint: go, Go, GO. And thank God you finally did.

ISABELLE. So it was for our own good? Seriously?

MAX. I'd rather you be crying over tear gas in this house .. than being viewed in the morgue. So, yeah.

ISABELLE. You're being dramatic.

JASON. And we're supposed to live with that? Do you know what it's like to see all of you advancing with those batons in your storm trooper masks?

MEREDITH. That's unfair. They're not storm troopers.

ISABELLE. Could have fooled us.

MAX. I can't believe I even have to explain this.

JASON. Well, we don't get it.

MAX. Police *need* to be intimidating to get a crowd to move. For your own

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safety.

ISABELLE. Here we go. We were being peaceful, but *we're* getting blamed.

JASON. Do you even hear yourself?

MAX. So where were *you* Jay? Huh? Rocks and bottles flying. Why didn't you get your sister and get the hell out of there? What the hell were you waiting / for?

JASON. God Damn dad. You don't get it. You don't fucking get it.

MAX. Then say it Jason. It's all over your face. Just say it.

JASON. I don't want to be the next nigger dead in a cell phone video!
(*beat*)

MEREDITH. Jason, that wouldn't happen to you.

JASON. Why? Because I'm Max Clayton's son? Because everyone knows that my dad is a big shot cop? That because you're both white means they won't touch me? Or Izzy? (*Beat.*) God Damn It. News flash: While you're playing Captain America, we're living in *real* America.

MAX. Ok. Ok. Son just let / me.

Max steps forward to hug Jason and calm the room but Jason resists.

JASON. Don't 'son' me. Don't even touch me. You couldn't understand. You're my dad, but you're not my real / father.

MAX. You don't get to talk to me like that.

ISABELLE. Well he's right.

MAX. Right? We're gonna argue about what's *right* now? Is it *right* that there are serious crimes in black neighborhoods all across this state, but when we respond, no one will help us?

JASON. Dad.

MAX. Is it?

JASON. ...

MAX. Seriously, I'd like to know. For all the criticism of white cops, it's not *us* saying "no snitching." How is *that* supposed to help black and white relationships?

MEREDITH. Enough. Eeee-nough. God damn it. Enough. (*beat*) Sit down. All of you. Right now. (*All four are silent and glare. Tension is thick. They take seats. Meredith grabs a folder from a cabinet, closes her eye in a momentary prayer, and puts the folder on the table.*)

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MAX. Now? You sure you want to do this now?

Meredith hesitates and then slides a folder to Jason and Isabelle.

ISABELLE. What's this? *(She opens the folder and starts handing papers and photos to Jason.)*

JASON. Indiana Department of Children's Services. Certificate of Adoption. 2003.

ISABELLE. So these are the documents about our .. wait who is this?

JASON. Is that our mother?

ISABELLE. Let me see. Oh my God. She's so young. Is this when she gave us up for adoption? What's her name?

JASON. Why haven't you taken us to meet her?

MAX. Her name is Eboni Mason. She was 16 in that photo, and we believe 18 when you kids came to live with us.

ISABELLE. So that would make her what, 35 now?

JASON. Does the agency know where she is?

MEREDITH. Let your father finish. *(Isabelle and Jason lock eyes like they know what's coming.)*

MAX. We didn't meet through an agency.

ISABELLE. So you lied to us?

MAX. Look I'm gonna try to find the right words.

JASON. Fine.

MAX. I'd only been on the job a few years, and they needed volunteers for a task force in Indianapolis. So I went. We raided the home of this organized crime leader. We got to the porch and shots were fired at us and we had to return fire. Thankfully, the bullets missed me, but a few of the officers were grazed. We took down the bad guys, and when I was clearing a back room, I found Eboni.

ISABELLE. So you rescued her?

JASON. Was she ok?

MAX. No. She was bleeding from her abdomen. I applied pressure and called for a paramedic, but ... we loaded her in the ambulance, and she was looking me in the eyes when she took her last breath.

JASON. Oh Jesus.

MAX. I'm sorry.

ISABELLE. No. No. Daddy no.

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MAX. There was a playpen behind her. I think she was protecting it. Jay, you had a pacifier in your mouth. You were holding Isabelle, who was only about 3 months old. You wouldn't let go of her. I was on my cell with your mom when the social workers showed up. They weren't sure they had a place for you that night. So your mom said --

MEREDITH. Bring them home, Max. *(Beat.)* Right now. Just bring them home.

MAX. I borrowed some diapers and car seats, loaded you in my cruiser and drove you straight back to Whitesville.

MEREDITH. We brought you inside that front door. God, it feels like yesterday. I tried to hold you Izzy, but Jason wouldn't let go of you. Your dad took off work for a week, and the four of us just sat here. I don't think any of us knew what to do.

JASON. Why didn't our family come for us?

MAX. After a week, the state called and said they had reached Eboni's family in Tennessee. She'd run away a few years earlier, and they wanted to come get you kids and take you home.

ISABELLE. So what happened?

JASON. Yeah, why didn't we go to live with them?

MAX. Because of this. *(He slides papers to Jason and Isabelle.)*

ISABELLE. The police report? *(Reading report.)* 1900 Hours. Police force entry. 1910. Home secure. 1912, Ambulance called.

JASON. I see the paramedics are working on Eboni. 1922 -- they're giving her AB-negative blood to try and save her. And then they --

ISABELLE. Jason.

JASON. I'm reading it. It's right here.

ISABELLE. Jason? *Jason??* Her blood type. You said she's AB-negative.

JASON. So? They were doing first aid to .. Oh my God.

ISABELLE. Yeah. We're both type O.

JASON. So ... so she *wasn't* our mother? She was watching us, but she wasn't our mom?

MAX. No. She wasn't. And an autopsy showed she'd never had a child of her own. So her family stayed in Tennessee.

MEREDITH. And the state told us that with no family coming forward to claim you -- and now no proof of who you were, let alone if you were even

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siblings -- they would have to place you in foster care homes.

ISABELLE. Homes?

MAX. You two were going to be separated.

MEREDITH. We looked at you. The way you clung to each other. We just knew that we couldn't let that happen.

JASON. So?

MAX. So the state adoption office called and said unusual cases like these usually involve a long review process unless ..

ISABELLE. Unless what?

MEREDITH. Unless we were willing to take both of you, right then. And adopt you.

JASON. Wait. Wait a God Damn minute. Why would the state of Indiana take two kids -- a toddler and an infant who might not even be related -- and let them be formally adopted by a couple who'd only cared for them for a week? And they did it, over the *phone*?

MAX. Son, you know why. (*Beat.*)

JASON. Because we were black, and you were white.

ISABELLE. I can't believe this. I can't believe what I'm hearing.

MAX. We had to make a choice right on the spot. And we'd do it all over again.

ISABELLE. Oh my God.

MEREDITH. We *knew* that we loved you, and that's all that mattered.

JASON. Yeah? Well between George Floyd and what's happening right here, we *know* something too.

MAX. What's that?

JASON. (*Powerful*) The whole God Damn system is rigged.

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