Welcome to the Branch

Turia R. Pope
Virginia Commonwealth University

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WELCOME TO THE BRANCH

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

WELCOME TO THE BRANCH

By Turia R. Pope, MFA

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2006

Major Director: Laura Browder
Associate Professor, Department of English

Welcome to the Branch is a two-act play that investigates issues of cultural differences in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (or LDS church), more commonly known as the Mormon Church. Set in modern-day, downtown Richmond, Welcome to the Branch follows two very different members of the LDS church as they examine and try to understand both their religion, in the context of its cultural and social history, and their place in it. One is Molly, a Caucasian, middle-class young woman from Utah, in Richmond temporarily for her husband’s graduate school; the other is Aina, an African American, single mother living in Mosby Court who has recently joined the LDS
church. While Aina struggles for survival and looks for meaning in a church where, historically, she would not have felt welcome, Molly slowly comes to terms with the limitations of her own sheltered background.

This document was created in Microsoft Office Word 2003.
List of Characters

Molly Young: white mid-twenties Utahn, living outside Utah for the first time in her life, newly wed to Jack.
Jack Young: white late-twenties Californian, new Ad Center student

Kimball Hansen: white mid-twenties Utahn, medical student.
Ashley Hansen: white mid-twenties wife to Kimball.
Derek Granger: white late-twenties Oregonian, dental student, married with children.

Aina Cox: 30's, black single mother, living in Mosby Court.
Davis: black late teens, son of Aina.
Kai: black middle teens, daughter of Aina.
La Trelle: black early teens, daughter of Aina.
3 Friends of La Trelle: black early teens, one carries a baby.

Elder Smith: barely 19, white “greenie” missionary fresh from the Provo, Utah Missionary Training Center (MTC)
Elder Whittaker: white, Elder Smith’s senior companion, from Ogden, Utah

Contact 1: black, first contact the elders make while tracting; one person can play all the doors in different disguises and/or costume.
Contact 2
Contact 3

Brother Madsen (voice)
Brother Colin Blake (voice)
Brother North: White resident of the methadone clinic located across the parking lot from the Branch building; regular visitor of church meetings.

Welcome to the Branch is set in Richmond, Virginia, in the year 2004.


Act One

Scene One

At Rise: Molly sits on a camp chair, surrounded by moving boxes labeled by room and function—“Kitchen, dishes;” “Living Room, Books,” etc. She is dressed in full wedding regalia, including modest dress, veil and gloves.

MOLLY: On my wedding day the line between heaven and earth blurred past all recognition. Six years of accumulated Young Women lessons, firesides and temple trips made me think, somehow, it was Satan trying to stop me from getting to the temple. What a show he put on. The wind blew so hard it uprooted seven of the ten new trees Daddy planted in our backyard for the reception. When Mom asked him what we were going to do with seven uprooted apple trees, he just said

During Molly’s last sentence, her father, GABE BRUCKNER, walks across stage, hoisting two small fruit trees. Just before he reaches the other side of the stage, he turns and calls, as if to someone off the other side. Molly watches him with longing.

GABE: President Hinckley planted trees at every house he lived in—

MOLLY: They looked pathetic, all white and slender and wet in the yard Daddy’d spent all summer getting ready for my special day. But it didn’t matter. He had Brenner and Phoebe re-plant them the next day, after Jack and I left for Hawaii. They’re doing fine now.

GABE: We’re following the prophet to the tee. Or to the tree, I should say.

He walks offstage, whistling, “Follow the Prophet.”

MOLLY: By the time Phoebe gets married, they’ll probably be bearing fruit. Daddy’s already prepping her: “Okay, Phoebe’s, so when’s the optimum blossom time?”

Nine year old Phoebe walks across the stage, playing a handheld Gameboy.
PHOEBE (bored and singsong): May, Daddy. April’s too tempestuous and June’s too predictable.

MOLLY (to the audience): And August’s too hot, usually, which is why thunderstorms weren’t on the list of concerns when Jack and I picked the 19th as The Day. Well, that and Jack had to be out in Virginia by August 27th for classes. Which is also why we ended up with a cliché cultural hall reception, because who thought about reserving a reception hall as a backup? This is Utah we’re talking about, not Louisiana. But the important thing, Mom said, was that we made it to the temple. And we did. We were sealed in the Salt Lake City Temple for time and all eternity on August 19th, 2004. After years of Young Women lessons, firesides, morality chats and warnings, I made it. (correcting herself) We made it. And even though we just met in April, here we are, in our first apartment, ready to start our lives together.

She looks around the boxes.

MOLLY: In Richmond, Virginia.

Molly gets out of the chair, walks to a box marked “Pictures,” pulls out an enormous family photo of her wedding day. Footsteps are heard offstage, climbing stairs to the apartment’s front door. Molly sets the picture on the mantel.

MOLLY: This is exactly what I’ve always wanted.

As ASHLEY HANSEN walks in, wearing newborn Brynn strapped to her chest, Molly pulls off the wedding clothes to reveal jeans and a tee shirt. She walks to Ashley, who carries a large basket with food in one hand and a bag of cleaning supplies in the other.

MOLLY: Oh, Sister—
(trying to remember)

ASHLEY: Ashley.

MOLLY: Ashley?

ASHLEY: Just call me by my first name. Whenever anyone calls me Sister Hansen I look for my mother-in-law.

They both laugh.

MOLLY: Well, Ashley, are you sure you’re okay to be here? I heard your husband saying your baby’s only a week old...
ASHLEY: Five days. But she mostly just sleeps anyway, and when Kimball said a new couple was moving into the branch I figured I could at least help clean. Oh, here—

She hands Molly the basket, then unpacks the bag of cleaning bottles.

ASHLEY: Dinner. I hope you don’t mind, I just split what the Relief Society brought me. We still haven’t finished the first meal they brought when she was born, and they keep coming—in army portions!

Molly picks up a corner of the decorative towel overlaying the food and looks surprised—it’s a lot of food. She sets it down near a microwave on the floor.

MOLLY: That’s a half-portion?

Ashley laughs

ASHLEY: Half a Richmond Branch Relief Society portion.

MOLLY: Maybe you could tell the Relief Society President to stop the meals, if you’ve got enough.

ASHLEY (laughing): I am the Relief Society President!

At this news Molly looks surprised. While they talk, they clean—sweeping the floor, wiping surfaces, walls, etc.

MOLLY: You’re the Relief Society President?

ASHLEY: I know, trust me, I didn’t think you could get that kind of calling in your twenties... but...welcome to the branch. Small numbers, sparse pickings for callings. That’s why we always get so excited when a new couple moves in. You guys moved here from Provo, right?

Molly nods.

ASHLEY: Ah, good ol’ Brigham Young University.

MOLLY: Miss it?

ASHLEY: Are you kidding? Best time of our lives, but you couldn’t pay either of us to go back.

MOLLY: Really?
ASHLEY: Sure. We like the excitement... and the missionary opportunities... and the fun of living outside of Utah. Especially downtown. A lot of members move out to the wards in the suburbs—you know, because they feel more comfortable out there. But living here, in the branch... you'll feel much more useful and needed.

MOLLY: I guess so.

ASHLEY: First time living outside of Utah?

Molly nods.

ASHLEY: You'll get used to it. Then you'll love it and won't ever want to go back. It's an experience totally unlike anything you've ever had, I promise.

Molly looks unconvinced.

ASHLEY: The Branch makes a traditional ward seem almost... boring. You'll see.

Noises of men grunting and moving a large object offstage. Both women turn to see JACK YOUNG, KIMBALL HANSEN and DEREK GRANGER manipulate a baby grand piano into the apartment. Jack wears black jeans and a button-down shirt with Japanese characters on the front; Kimball and Derek wear blue jeans and tee shirts. Molly rushes over to them, getting in the way with her concern that they treat it gently—“careful,” “watch that corner,” etc.

JACK: Molly, I don't think we could possibly do any more damage to your baby than we did getting it around that banister downstairs.

The other men laugh, while Molly looks horror struck.

JACK: Relax, honey, I'm sure a nice solid hit now and then only improves the sound quality... now, if you please.

Jack indicates with his head for her to get out of the way.

JACK: Over by the window?

Jack nods at a spot just a few feet from where they stand with the piano.

MOLLY: No, she can't be near an outside wall, especially in this humidity. How about here, by the fireplace?
Molly points across the stage, where the majority of boxes are stacked. Kimball and Derek exchange exhausted looks. Jack turns back with an apologetic expression.

JACK: Right, mates, we can’t have her exposed to the elements, can we? Then we might have to replace her with a full-size grand, and I don’t think any of us would be able to get that through the lobby.

The men start moving the boxes out of the way, clearing a path for the piano.

ASHLEY: Molly, is there some place I could nurse her?

MOLLY: Sure, let me show you the bedroom.

Molly and Ashley exit on the opposite side of the stage.

KIMBALL: So, Jack, did I hear you’re an ad student?

Jack grunts in response, straining with his side of the piano.

KIMBALL (to Derek): Don’t get many of those around here, do we? Mostly just med and dental students.

DEREK: Yup.

KIMBALL (to Jack): How long’s the program?

JACK: Two years.

KIMBALL (exchanging glances with Derek): That’d be nice, huh? Two years and then bam! Out making money in the real world!

JACK: Something like that.

They fall into silence as they continue moving and rearranging boxes.

KIMBALL: Hey, you play ball?

JACK: Basketball?

Kimball nods.

JACK: Sometimes. I’m not really good.
KIMBALL: You should come out and play some time. We’re just getting ready to start up the season and we’re short a few men...knee surgeries, you know how it goes. Last year we almost won the stake championship.

DEREK: Yeah, we were robbed.

KIMBALL: Totally robbed.

Jack nods, but it’s clear he has no intention of meeting them for ball. They start moving the piano, which is difficult and heavy. Periodically they take breaks to rest.

Molly returns during one of their breaks with a box of popsicles.

MOLLY: How about a little refreshment?

She hands each man a popsicle. Kimball and Derek share the piano bench, eating their popsicles. Jack stands off a ways. Molly sets the empty box down, then begins organizing the boxes in the room while the men talk.

KIMBALL: Man, this is just like the mission. Moving heavy objects in the blistering heat.

JACK: This heat’s something else—

DEREK: Seemed like I spent half my mission moving investigators or members in and out of apartments.

KIMBALL: My mission president finally made it a rule that missionaries couldn’t help move members, but by then I only had a month left.

DEREK: Where’d you serve again?

KIMBALL: Argentina. You were in Denmark, right?

Kimball emphasizes the Spanish pronunciation of “Argentina,” large quantities of spit included.

DEREK: No, Mexico, man.

Derek, too, emphasizes the Spanish pronunciation of “Mexico.” Molly perks up, keeping an eye on Jack during this conversation.
KIMBALL: That’s right, Mitchell went to Denmark. *(turning to Jack)* Where’d you serve?

JACK (clearing his throat): Actually, I didn’t serve a mission.

*Both Derek and Kimball react with surprise, then try to cover it up with forced nonchalance. Molly, behind Kimball and Derek at this point, glares at Jack and throws her hands up, as if to say, what are you doing? Jack ignores her and eats his popsicle.*

DEREK: Oh. Yeah, I had a cousin who couldn’t go on a mission—he had health problems.

KIMBALL: Me too.

*They look at Jack, who neither confirms nor denies whether he had health problems. The silence lengthens. Molly rolls her eyes, walks over to the other side of the room and begins organizing boxes there—forcefully. They begin moving the piano again, finally getting it to the spot Molly picked out. They stand around, wiping foreheads, etc. Kimball lifts the cover and touches the keys lightly.*

KIMBALL: Hey Molly, you any good?

*Molly looks up, about to answer, but Jack breaks in before she has a chance.*

JACK: Yeah. She got her Master’s in piano performance.

*Molly sets a box down with particular force and glares at Jack.*

JACK: Well, almost.

*Molly folds her arms. A beat. Jack looks at Molly, then at Derek and Kimball.*

JACK: Technically, she still has a semester to go, but she’s basically done.

KIMBALL: Sweet, we need a piano player in the branch. Right now we’re just singing along to a Mormon Tabernacle Choir cd on Sundays, and it’s kinda depressing.

JACK (to Molly): Maybe you’ll get called to play the piano for sacrament.

KIMBALL: Oh, she’ll get called to more than that.

DEREK: Yeah, more like three or four callings. Sacrament, primary, Relief Society… *(to Molly)* You’ll be playing piano all three hours of church.
MOLLY: I haven’t really played in awhile—

KIMBALL: Well that shouldn’t stop you from playing for the Branch!

MOLLY: We’ll see, I guess… (pointedly, to Jack) How’s the moving going?

JACK (annoyed): Just one more load to go…

The men exit. Sound of footsteps descending a staircase.

MOLLY (to the audience): What’s a girl supposed to do when she graduates from BYU without her MRS Degree?

Molly’s mother, SOPHIA BRUCKNER, walks across the floor carrying an infant on one hip, a bag of basketballs in one hand and talking on the phone.

SOPHIA: Honey, don’t worry, you’ll be fine. You could serve a mission—

MOLLY (to the audience): And gain twenty pounds—

SOPHIA: Or you could get your master’s! Why don’t you do that, honey? Stay there, stretch out, enjoy your education as long as you can!

Offstage, Molly’s brother FREDDY’s voice is heard.

FREDDY: Put it out, put it out, quick! Mom’s coming!

SOPHIA: Oh, gotta go—I think Freddy found the matches again! I swear, that child can figure out every lock known to man—

Sophia rushes offstage.

MOLLY: So why not put fifteen years of piano lessons to good use? It was just a farce, really—a stalling tactic to elongate the marriage eligibility quotient. When I met Jack, there was no question of finishing. And yet…

She walks over the piano, lifts the lid, sits and plays Mozart’s Rondo Alla Turka from K331, fast and furious.

Ashley moves quietly onstage, burping her baby on one shoulder. She watches Molly unseen, patting her baby’s back softly now and then.

ASHLEY: You’re really good.
Molly stops immediately.

ASHLEY: Was that Beethoven?

Molly answers without looking up.

MOLLY: Mozart.

ASHLEY (to the baby): There you go, darling. That was a good one. (to Molly) it’s funny how we praise them for doing everything we discourage our husbands doing—farting and burping in public.

MOLLY: Probably because our husbands need so little encouragement.

Ashley laughs.

Loud noises identify the men moving up the staircase with another heavy object. Jack walks onstage carrying a box spring. Kimball and Derek follow behind with a mattress.

JACK: Mol, does it matter whether the bed’s near an outside wall?

MOLLY (dryly): I think in this heat it has to be near an outside wall—that’s where the window unit is.

The men take the box spring and mattress offstage.

MOLLY: Looks like that’s everything. Are there any places close by I can order pizza for everyone?

ASHLEY: You’re sweet, but we’ve got to get going. I still have a few sisters to visit… In fact, I should probably see who’s next on my list…

Ashley pulls out an enormous Relief Society binder decorated with stickers and colored papers from her purse diaper bag and consults a page.

ASHLEY: Let’s see…oh, hey, you live just a few blocks from Aina Bridges.

The boys return. Jack walks over to Molly as he talks, slinging an arm around her.

MOLLY (to Jack): How nice, we live near some members—
ASHLEY: Almost-member. She’s getting baptized tonight. The missionaries tracted into her a few months ago, but it’s taken her awhile to follow the Word of Wisdom—you know, those habits can be pretty hard to kick—

KIMBALL (rolling his eyes): Especially crack.

Ashley glares at Kimball; Molly looks surprised.

MOLLY: As in, crack cocaine?

ASHLEY (trying to do damage control): Well, it’s not uncommon for investigators to have dabbled in various drugs...all in the search for happiness, right?

KIMBALL: She ran a crack house, Ash.

ASHLEY: And gave it up to join the Church! MOLLY: A what? Doesn’t that show amazing faith? I mean, that was her family’s main source of income!

Ashley looks to Molly and Jack for support. Jack looks wary, Molly looks horrified

ASHLEY (to Molly): So... do you think maybe we could visit her together sometime? It’d be just great for you two to get to know each other. You could be a real support to her.

MOLLY: Um... well... I guess. How close to us does she live?

KIMBALL: Don’t even bother. Ashley’s just kidding herself, thinking that this woman’s even going to show up to church.

ASHLEY (warningly): Kimball...

KIMBALL: Well, how long have you been Relief Society President? C’mon, Ash, these people don’t change. They either do the revolving door thing—baptized into the Church and never back another Sunday—or they’re just in it for the welfare and get all bent out of shape when we suggest they have to actually work for the food they get from us. They’re just used to living off the government, having everything handed to them, and they’ll continue doing that until the day they die. (to Jack) Our tax money at work, man.

Jack looks in disgust at Kimball, while Derek nods in agreement. Molly looks from Kimball to Ashley, not sure who to believe.
ASHLEY (to Kimball): Finished? (to Molly) Don’t let Mr. Sourpuss get to you. He’s just bitter because he invested a lot of time and effort into a convert a few months back and feels like it was a waste of time.

MOLLY (to Kimball): Why?

ASHLEY: Oh, the convert’s not attending church anymore.

KIMBALL: Because he’s in prison, Ashley.

ASHLEY (in a sing-song way) You never know the difference you make by sharing the light of the gospel with someone. Even if they don’t seem to embrace it at first.

*Jack, tired of listening to them, checks his watch.*

JACK: Right, well...we better get unpacking.

ASHLEY: Yeah, I guess I better get going. Sister Jackson broke her hip last week, and I promised to drop by. (to Molly) I’ll give you a call, then, about visiting Aina. Maybe next week?

MOLLY: I guess so...I’ll be applying for jobs, so can we do it in the evening?

ASHLEY: Well...it’s better if we visit during the day.

MOLLY: Why?

ASHLEY: Aina lives in Mosby Court.

*Molly shrugs, not knowing what that means. Kimball and Derek exchange looks.*

ASHLEY: Mosby Court—the projects.

*Molly shakes her head and looks at Jack, who shrugs noncommitally, though he doesn’t necessarily know what it is either.*

KIMBALL (laughing): Whew, you are fresh off the boat, aren’t you?

ASHLEY: Knock it off, I didn’t know what they were either, when we first moved here.

KIMBALL: Well honey, you’re from Wyoming. They don’t even have houses there, let alone housing projects...just log cabins, right?
ASHLEY (to Kimball): Very funny. Like you knew what they were either. (to Molly) Anything ending with “Court” — Mosby Court, Gilpin Court, Whitcomb Court — is a government assisted housing project —

KIMBALL: More commonly known as The Ghetto.

ASHLEY (glaring at Kimball): Our local church leaders have asked that women not go there, at night, without priesthood holders.

MOLLY (uncomfortably digesting this news): Oh... okay... 

ASHLEY: But we’re still safe to go there, especially during the day.

The silence stretches as Molly casts doubtful looks at Jack. Ashley tucks her binder back into her bag, then begins the lengthy process of putting the baby carrier back on, then wrapping and strapping the baby onto her chest.

MOLLY (to Derek and Kimball): Well, hey... do you two want some pizza? You did most of the heavy lifting anyway.

KIMBALL: Oh, thanks, but I’ve got a big test Monday morning and (checking his watch) just a few hours left to study for it.

JACK (blankly): But today’s Saturday.

Molly elbows Jack, who looks at her with a “what?” expression.

KIMBALL (slowly): Right, which means tomorrow’s Sunday...

JACK (understanding): Oh, you mean you don’t —

KIMBALL: We don’t study on Sundays... that whole, keeping the Sabbath day holy thing.

MOLLY: We try not to. But sometimes, especially with advertising... well, Jack has to do it sometimes. (to Jack) But we try not to, don’t we, honey?

Jack shrugs his shoulders. Silence for a long few seconds.

KIMBALL (to Ashley): You ready?
Ashley nods. Derek and Kimball move quickly towards the door. Molly nudges Jack, who ignores her. She elbows him again harder; finally he steps forward, reaching a hand out.

JACK: Hey, thanks again. Sure appreciate your lending us your brawn for awhile...

Kimball and Derek each shake hands with Jack.

DEREK (mumbling): No problem, no problem...

KIMBALL: Yeah, happy to do it...

Ashley gives Molly a one-armed hug.

MOLLY: Well, it was nice to meet all of you.

ASHLEY: Molly, you’re in the South now. It’s y’all.

Everyone laughs, but not sincerely.

ASHLEY: Let’s get together soon. We’ll have you over for dinner.

JACK (too exuberantly): Looking forward to it!

Jack and Molly wave as the three exit. Steps heard as they descend downstairs. As the footsteps fade, Molly turns to Jack.

MOLLY: I can’t believe you.

JACK: What?

MOLLY: You know.

JACK (imitating Kimball): “We don’t study on Sundays. That whole keeping the Sabbath day holy thing.” That right there is the number one reason I’m glad we left Utah. Puh-lease! What a bunch of Peter Priesthoods.

MOLLY: They were nice. There was no reason for you to—

JACK: Of course they were nice. They’re Mormon! It’s part of the Mormon code, right up there with “thou shalt consume large quantities of green jell-O” and “thou shalt own a wheat grinder.”
Molly tries to interrupt but soon realizes he’s on a roll and begins unpacking the “Unpack First” box.

JACK: And “thou shalt not watch Rated-R movies.”

Molly proceeds to place a number of large frames wrapped in towels out of the box, ignoring him.

JACK: Or drink caffeinated beverages. Or wear two-piece bathing suits.

Molly rolls her eyes but continues unpacking.

JACK: And apparently Kimball’s favorite, “thou shalt talk about your mission on a daily basis.” Even if you served over a decade ago.

MOLLY: You’re being ridiculous.

JACK: What? I’m the ridiculous one? Can’t you see it’s all just a ridiculous game they play, a game all Mormons play…”where were you married?” is code for, “Did you get married in the temple?” “Where’d you serve your mission?” is code for, “Did you serve a mission?” It’s all just a verbal dance to find out who’s more righteous than whom, so everyone knows where we all fit on the ladder to the celestial kingdom—

MOLLY: But these people are our friends, or would be, maybe—

JACK: Molly. We’re in sad shape if those are the kind of people we look to for friendship. We’d die of boredom!

MOLLY: Okay, so they’re a little…stiff.

JACK (immediately): Then what does it matter if they think I didn’t serve a mission?

MOLLY: We’re not in Utah anymore. You heard them, we’re in a branch—not even a ward.

JACK: So?

MOLLY: So, they might be the best we’re going to get. At least for now, while we’re here.

JACK: Trust me, even in these desperate times, compatibility will out. Friendship is not in our future with them. And even if it was, whether I served a mission or not
should be of no concern to them.

MOLLY: But you did. Why pretend you didn’t?

JACK: Think of it as a human study. We can see how open they are to unorthodox Mormons. Do they dance around the topic of missions? Do they give me a courtesy calling, like “assistant to the greeter,” or do they give me a calling to inspire leadership and commitment, like elders’ quorum president? Do they try to “fellowship” me in the elder’s quorum? Do they try to worm why I didn’t serve out of me? Their minds have to be racing right now, trying to figure out why I didn’t serve a mission when it’s commanded that all males serve a full-time mission at 19—worthiness? Health reasons? Lack of a testimony? C’mon, Mol, you thought it was hilarious back at BYU.

MOLLY: Yeah, well that was different.

JACK: How?

MOLLY: I don’t know, it just—seemed funny then. Now it’s just...(she searches for the right word and fails) not funny.

JACK: Oh, please. I served the mission, didn’t I? I wore the tag, I did the tracting, I obeyed the commandment. I did my time.

They study each other for a long moment. Molly finally breaks the stare by trying to suppress a smile.

JACK: A-ha. See, you still think it’s funny.

MOLLY: I do not.

She presses her lips tight together, in an effort to stifle a laugh.

JACK: What was that, then?

MOLLY: I had…chapped lips.

Jack gives her a “yeah, right” look, then stops; he has a mischievous idea. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out, slowly, a tube of Vaseline chap stick.

JACK: Oh, really? Because I happen to have some of your favorite chap stick, right here, you know…

As he uncaps the chap stick Molly gets a look of feigned horror on her face.
MOLLY: No, no, I’m okay, I licked my lips. They’re fine.

*Jack applies the chap stick to his lips, around and around, putting way too much on. Molly gives a playful yelp, and begins running away. He chases her around the room, scrambling around boxes and dodging the pillows rags etc. that Molly throws at him. They laugh, shriek, threaten, and so forth during the chase. Finally he catches her, holds her down and kisses her hard, smearing his lips all over his face. Then, for good measure, he takes out the tube, uncaps it and squirts a line all around her lips.*

JACK: Now *that* was funny.

*He gets off her and she sits, slowly wiping the Vaseline off her face, disgusted and delighted.*

MOLLY: I beg to differ.

*She rubs the accumulated Vaseline in her hand onto his head, smearing it throughout his hair.*

MOLLY: *That*, however, was hilarious.

*Jack reaches for his hair in mock horror as Molly giggles.*

JACK: You’ll notice, of course, that I’m not laughing…

*He reaches for her, pulling her in for a long kiss. They break, then kiss again. Jack pulls back, wigging his eyebrows at her, then indicating the bedroom side of the stage with his head. Molly folds her arms, a small but serious smile on her face.*

MOLLY: How about we apply that energy to unpacking?

JACK: What?

MOLLY: So we have somewhere to sleep tonight? We’ve got church tomorrow, and it’s earlier than we’re used to.

JACK: What? How could you possibly know that already?

MOLLY: Ashley says sacrament starts at 10 am.

JACK: You already asked about church?
Molly gives him an, "of course," expression.

MOLLY: How were we supposed to know when and where to go if I didn’t ask?

JACK: But we just got here. Don’t we get a week off, or something?

MOLLY: Ha, ha.

She stands up, stretches, then looks around for a box to unpack. She finally sees the one marked “unpack first” and begins pulling out towel-wrapped frames. Soon a large stack stands next to her. Jack, meanwhile, lays down on the floor and groans periodically. Molly ignores him, and takes the towel off the first frame. It is a picture of the First Presidency of the Church—the current LDS prophet and his two counselors. Molly grabs a hammer and nail from the box, then begins looking for a place to hang the picture, stepping over Jack in the process. Jack grabs her leg.

JACK: How about just sacrament?

MOLLY: Jack!

JACK: I don’t even know where my church clothes are. I’ll probably have to go in shorts and sandals!

MOLLY: Then why don’t you start unpacking?

She pulls her leg out of his grasp and steps onto the other side of him. She begins hammering the nail into the wall directly facing the audience.

JACK: Do we have to hang that in our front room? It looks so...Mormon.

MOLLY (with nail in her mouth): Last time I checked, we were Mormon.

JACK: Yeah, but we don’t need that to be the first thought that comes into people’s heads when they come into our apartment.

Molly pulls the nail out of her mouth and looks at Jack, smiling.

MOLLY: Would you rather the bedroom?

JACK: Ew, no, I don’t need the prophet overseeing our bedroom, thank you.

MOLLY (smiling deeper): The bathroom?
When Jack only grimaces in reply, Molly finishes hammering the nail. Meanwhile Jack looks around and, spotting the basket of food, walks towards it. He finds a plug for the microwave and begins heating the food. Molly hangs the picture. She admires her work for a few seconds, then turns back to Jack.

The microwave beeps; the food is done.

JACK: Do you really want me to tell them the truth?

Molly considers, rolls her eyes, then shrugs. She walks back to the pile of frames and begins unwrapping the next one on top. Lights fade except on Molly, who speaks to the audience.

MOLLY: He was the catch of my singles ward, the guy every girl hoped would be assigned as her home teacher. He stood out because he removed himself from the silly things we all do that don’t matter. He didn’t play the singles game. You know? He just sat back and laughed at everyone else racing to the altar. And when we went on our first date I thought, “Wow, I’m being enlightened!” He seemed so wise, so witty, so magical, the way he put everything I thought I was supposed to be doing into perspective. And when we got engaged? Everyone in our singles ward was shocked. They thought I was too goody goody for Jack to stand for an eternity. Or that Jack’s subversive streak was too wide for me to handle.

Molly holds the picture up. It’s a large photo of Jack and Molly on their wedding day, posing in front of the Salt Lake Temple.

MOLLY: I thought they were jealous. The girls, at least.

She puts the frame down and looks at Jack, then at the audience.

MOLLY: This is exactly what I’ve always wanted.

Lights down.

Scene Two

The next Sunday

Richmond Branch Fast and Testimony meeting, Grace Street Chapel.

The stage is set as the congregation, with rows of metal fold-up chairs facing the audience, which is where the “podium” of this church is. Elders Whittaker and Smith
stand in the entry alcove to one side. They greet and shake hands as people enter the chapel. People mill around, conversing, finding seats and waving to friends. They are from all walks of life—some dressed in their Sunday best, some in workout sweats and sneakers, some in casual clothes.

_The hymn “The Spirit of God” plays softly in the background._

_Jack and Molly enter the chapel by way of the foyer, a small space to one side of the stage bound on either end by glass doors. It is removed from the congregation. Jack wears a pink shirt with loud tie and gray suit. Elder Smith reaches for Molly’s hand._

ELDER SMITH: Hi, I’m Elder Smith, I’m new!

MOLLY: Molly and Jack Young. We just moved here from Utah.

ELDER SMITH: Utah, huh? What part?

MOLLY: Provo.

_Elder Smith moves to shake Jack’s hand._

ELDER SMITH: My aunt lives in Provo. Do you know Leslie Wilcox?

JACK: I’m actually from California. She’s the one from Utah.

ELDER SMITH (turning to Molly): Oh, well do you know her?

MOLLY (rolling her eyes at Jack): We both lived in Provo for awhile, but Jack doesn’t want anyone to think he’s from Utah. And no, we don’t know her. Sorry.

ELDER SMITH: How about the Nelson family? I knew an Elder Nelson in the MTC, he was from Provo.

MOLLY (shaking her head): Sorry.

ELDER SMITH: Oh, well, I guess there are lots of members in Provo, huh?

_Molly nods sympathetically, but Jack seems annoyed. Elder Whittaker reaches out to shake Molly’s hand._

ELDER WHITTAKER: Elder Whittaker. Welcome to the Branch. Where did you folks move to?
MOLLY: Church Hill.

ELDER SMITH: Oh, you must be the new couple Sister Hansen was talking about. Are you on (checking day planner) 21st Street?


ELDER SMITH: Great, because we just baptized a woman that lives near you, on Mosby Street...

MOLLY (remembering): I think Ashley mentioned something like that—

ELDER SMITH: Perfect, Sister Hansen already talked to you about it. When’s best for you?

MOLLY: Sorry—when’s best for what?

_Elder Whittaker glares at Elder Smith._

ELDER WHITTAKER: We usually try to teach new member discussions with members, preferably ones that live close by. We wondered if you would be willing to sit in on the discussions when we teach her.

ELDER SMITH (hurrying to explain, looking at Jack): You don’t have to do any teaching or anything, just be there—you know, a friendly support system.

MOLLY (worried): In our house or hers? JACK: Guys, I’m going to be super busy with school—

ELDER WHITTAKER (to Molly): Well, usually we’d prefer to teach in your home, if possible, but we’ve been teaching Aina in her home for a few weeks now and I think she might feel more comfortable if we—

ELDER SMITH (to Jack): But you could spare an hour or so, couldn’t you?

MOLLY: Is it...safe?

JACK (to Molly): Of course you’d be safe, Molly, you’d be with the missionaries. _to the missionaries_ Doesn’t the Lord protect His servants with a super bionic shield when they’re set apart?

_Elder Whittaker laughs._
ELDER SMITH: But Brother Young, we’d need you to go too. We can’t teach single women without a member present.

Molly and Jack exchange guilty looks. For different reasons, neither of them look too excited at the prospect of sitting in on the discussions with someone they’ve never met.

MOLLY (to Jack): Well, maybe we could do one…your classes don’t start for another couple weeks.

Jack begins shaking his head until Kimball walks up, wearing a bowtie. He carries his baby in one arm and an enormous scripture bag in the other. Kimball slaps Jack on the back.

KIMBALL: Hey, you crazy kids, good to see you here! (noticing Elder Smith) Hey, new elder! (reaches for Elder Smith).

ELDER SMITH: Elder Smith.

KIMBALL: Kimball Hansen. Welcome to the branch. Talk to my wife, we’ll have you two over for dinner some time this week…

ELDER WHITTAKER: Oh, we saw her at branch council this morning. She already invited us for this Wednesday.

KIMBALL: Great! (slapping forehead). Wait, Wednesday—basketball! We’ll have to make it an early dinner, is that okay?

ELDER SMITH: She mentioned you’d need to leave by seven, so she asked us to come at 5.

KIMBALL: She’s always one step ahead of me. (turning to Jack) Hey man, you coming this Wednesday? I can pick you up, if you need a ride.

Jack looks between the elders and Kimball, weighing his options.

JACK: Actually, I think I’m going to be sitting in on a new member discussion, (turning to the elders) right, elders?

ELDER SMITH (blankly): But you said—

ELDER WHITTAKER (getting it): Right, Brother Young. We’ll be at your house at 7 pm?
KIMBALL: Yeah, okay. Get some missionary experience in there, huh?

He elbows Jack knowingly, who nods uncomfortably.

JACK: Right.

KIMBALL: Cool. We’ll catch you later, then.

Kimball catches sigh of someone else, waves and walks away.

ELDER SMITH: Great, Brother and Sister Young—we’ll see you Wednesday!

Jack and Molly nod, then make their way to some seats near the middle.

MOLLY: Jack, are you sure we should go with the missionaries?

JACK: Are you crazy? No way.

MOLLY (confused, looking back at the missionaries): But you said—

JACK: I know what I said, but trust me—something will come up.

He elbows her knowingly at “something.”

MOLLY (laughing): But what about that woman, her discussions?

JACK: Do you want to go?

Molly considers, then shakes her head.

JACK: Of course not. We don’t even know her. We’ll call the missionaries, later.

Molly nods, relieved. She looks around the congregation as they settle into their seats.

MOLLY: Does the congregation seem... different here?

JACK: What do you mean?

MOLLY: There just seem to be a lot of... different kinds of people here.

JACK: Such as?

MOLLY: Well, I’ve never seen anyone wear sweats to church before, for one.
JACK: Ah, I see. So “different” is your new euphemism for “not Utah”?

Molly looks angry, but as she leans over to respond the prelude music fades and she, along with the rest of the congregation, sits at attention. Brother Madsen’s voice comes over a loud speaker and everyone watches the “podium” as he speaks.

BROTHER MADSEN: Welcome to the Richmond Branch sacrament meeting of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. We will open today’s meeting by singing hymn number 2, *The Spirit of God*, after which Brother Collin Blake will offer us an opening prayer.

*The congregation opens their hymn books and sings the hymn, but very softly so that the ensuing dialogue is the main focus.*

Molly leans over to Jack, flipping through the hymn book to find the correct page while whispering.

MOLLY: I didn’t say anything was wrong with it, I just said it was different.

JACK: Well then. Point taken. A congregation in Richmond, Virginia is different than a Provo, Utah one. A very true observation.

*Molly glares at him, holds up the hymn book and begins singing. Jack laughs, puts his arm around her and joins in. A moment passes, then Molly leans in.*

MOLLY: I guess I just thought that when we came to church, maybe we’d see more people like us...

JACK: You mean like us, or the Jell-O molds over there?

*Jack indicates the Hansen’s with his head, who are sitting on the front row. Ashley wears a neat, prim dress. She waves at Molly, mouthing, “Dinner tonight?” She holds the baby in one arm and the hymn book with the other. Molly giggles, then elbows him.*

MOLLY: Stop being so judgmental.

*BROTHER NORTH, dressed in an old army shirt and green beret, stumbles down the aisle and sprawls into the seat next to Molly, causing her to trail off in discomfort. She edges closer to Jack.*

JACK (laughing): Oh, I’m the judgmental one?
Molly ignores him and rejoins the singing. Jack joins in after a moment.

Brother North leans over to Molly. He makes no effort to whisper, or lower his tone.

BROTHER NORTH: Nice day, isn’t it?

Molly gives a quick jerk of the head but continues singing.

Brother North pulls another cigarette out from his pack and tries again.

BROTHER NORTH: Hey, gotta light?

Molly looks at the cigarette pack in disbelief, then shakes her head with a “are you crazy?” look on her face.

Brother North rummages in his pocket and finally produces a lighter.

BROTHER NORTH: That’s okay, I found one—my trusty Vietnam torch.

Brother North places the cigarette in his mouth and holds up the lighter. Molly nudges Jack.

MOLLY (to Jack): Do something!

As Brother North lifts the lighter to his cigarette, Jack reaches over and touches his shoulder.

JACK: Hey, not here, okay? You can go outside if you need to smoke.

BROTHER NORTH: Ah, lighten up. (laughs and nudges Molly) Get it? Lighten up?

Brother North continues laughing, loud and unrestrained, but puts the lighter away. Molly forces an uncomfortable smile and scoots even closer to Jack.

The hymn finishes. After a brief silence, the congregation watches the “podium” again. Everyone folds their arms and COLLIN BLAKE can be heard over the loud speaker clearing his throat and then praying.

COLLIN BLAKE: Our father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Head bowed and arms still folded, Molly tilts her head, as if to hear better.

COLLIN BLAKE: Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, in earth, as it is in heaven.
Molly cracks one eye open and peeks at the “podium.”

COLLIN BLAKE: Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

Molly opens both eyes in dismay and confusion. She nudges Jack.

MOLLY: Jack, is this the—

JACK: Shh!

Molly looks at Jack, then folds her arms and bows her head again, obviously disgruntled.

COLLIN BLAKE: And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen.

The congregation murmurs an amen. Molly looks around at everyone, as if to see what their reaction is, then leans in to Jack.

MOLLY: Was that the Lord’s prayer? Did he just say the Lord’s prayer for the invocation?

JACK: Shh, not so loud.

MOLLY: That’s not how we pray. Is that even allowed? Why didn’t somebody stop him?

JACK: Molly, you can’t stop someone in the middle of a prayer, can you? Maybe he’s a new convert and didn’t know how to pray, so he just did what felt most comfortable—

MOLLY: If he didn’t know how to pray, why did he get asked to do the opening prayer?

Jack looks up at the “podium” and hushes Molly, who settles down but unwillingly. Over the speaker, Jim Tyler speaks.

BROTHER MADSEN: Before we begin preparing for the sacrament, we have a few announcements. First, we’d like to remind everyone about our Branch Fish Fry to be held this Saturday, here at the branch building, at 2 pm. Remember to bring a side dish and an appetite. The fish will be provided, as always, by Brother Adam Chambliss.
The congregation rustles in excitement.

BROTHER MADSEN: Next, I’m happy to report that we had a beautiful baptismal service last night for Aina Bridges, whom many of you have gotten to know over the past month or so that she’s been investigating the church. We’d now like to invite Aina up to the front of the congregation so that we can confirm her a member of the church...

Brother Madsen’s voice dies down and the missionaries, looking around, finally look towards the podium in puzzlement, heads shaking.

BROTHER MADSEN: Well, looks like Aina wasn’t able to come to Church this Sunday. Hopefully, we can confirm her next week...

Elder Smith continues to scan the congregation hopefully, but Elder Whittaker looks at the ground, dejected.

BROTHER MADSEN: Lastly, President Bridges has asked that I report on the progress of one of our young women, Danean McGriff, who is still in the hospital recovering from a gunshot wound sustained at a birthday party last week. She will be having surgery tomorrow morning, and has asked to receive a priesthood blessing beforehand. Any two priesthood holders that are able to help with the blessing tonight, please contact me or President Bridges for her room number and information.

Molly looks in horror at the podium, then around at the congregation, as if gauging their reaction to this announcement. The congregation doesn’t respond much; Ashley leans over and whispers to Kimball, who nods and raises his hand.

BROTHER MADSEN: As Brother Kimball Hansen has just volunteered to help, we need only one more volunteer. We will now prepare for the sacrament by singing hymn number 194, “There is a Green Hill Far Away,” after which the priesthood will bless and pass the sacrament.

The congregation opens their hymn books and begins singing. Molly turns to Jack, who also looks surprised.

MOLLY: Gunshot wound?

Jack shrugs.

MOLLY: Someone got shot?

JACK: Molly, keep it down.
MOLLY: Someone in the branch that we just moved into got shot with a gun and all you can say is, 'keep it down?'

*Brother North leans over and pats Molly on the shoulder.*

BROTHER NORTH: It's okay, my buddy, he got shot in Vietnam. They're doing miracles now, really. Like, he's got this leg that's all metal, it's far-out—

*Molly flinches and turns on Brother North.*

MOLLY: Don't touch me!

JACK: Molly! Calm down!

MOLLY: No, you calm down. I can't—

*She looks around the congregation, at Brother North, then to Jack.*

MOLLY: I just can't do this.

*Molly places the hymn book on her seat, steps over Brother North and walks towards the exit.*

JACK (loud whisper): Molly? Where do you think you're—

*Jack looks around the congregation, then settles down into his seat, embarrassed.*

*Molly enters the foyer as the hymn dies down. She stops, upset that Jack hasn't followed her. Lights should focus on the foyer and dim on the congregation as the door shuts behind her. During the following interchange, the congregation will go through the motions of passing partaking of the sacrament; first bread, then water, passed in silver trays by men in suits.*

*Molly waits, watching the congregation through the door. She makes a movement like she's about to open the foyer door to re-enter the chapel, but stops when the outside door to the foyer opens.*

AINA COX walks into the foyer through the outside doors, harried and dressed in neat but worn dress pants and blouse. She clutches a box of Krispy Kremes in one hand.

AINA: Did I miss it?

MOLLY: Miss what?
AINA: The confirming thing, did I miss it?

MOLLY: The what?

_Molly scans Aina up and down, looks out at the congregation, then back to Aina with understanding._

MOLLY: Oh, wait, you must be—

AINA (nodding at the door): ‘Scuse me?

_Aina gestures at the door, of which Molly still stands in front._

MOLLY: Wait a minute, you can’t go in right now. They’re passing the sacrament!

AINA: They are? I didn’t miss it?

_Aina moves to open the door. Molly rushes to block her._

MOLLY: You’ve got to wait until they’re done!

_Aina studies Molly, as if for the first time._

AINA: Who are you?

MOLLY: I’m... I’m Molly. Young.

AINA: And don’t you look it.

MOLLY: Excuse me? (understanding) Oh, no, Young—that’s my last name.

_Aina looks unimpressed. She looks over Molly’s shoulder, folds her arms, shows impatience as Molly speaks._

MOLLY: So, I heard you just got baptized... congratulations. How—how was it?

AINA: Good.

MOLLY: I remember when I got baptized, I felt so special. My mom made me a beautiful white dress to wear after I changed from the font. I felt so clean... and... and pure...
Molly falters as Aina makes no effort to “share” the memory with her. Molly glances out the door at the congregation. The men are now passing trays filled with water in tiny cups.

MOLLY: Well anyway, it looks like they’re passing the water now, so you should be able to go in soon.

AINA: And who are you to say when I can go in?

MOLLY: Don’t you know you’re not supposed to go in when they’re passing the sacrament?

AINA: Why not?

MOLLY: Because you’re supposed to wait until they’ve finished before you go in, if you’re late. Hey, weren’t you supposed to be confirmed today? Why are you late, anyway?

AINA: None of your business.

Aina clutches the Krispy Kreme box and moves around Molly.

AINA: Now can you move so I can get in there?

MOLLY: Wait, they’re not finished—

The women struggle for a minute, until finally the Krispy Kreme box tumbles to the ground and a few doughnuts fall out. The women step apart.

AINA: Now look what you did! And they were fresh, too!

MOLLY: I’m sorry, here, let me…

Molly shakes herself, and begins picking up the doughnuts and putting them back into the box.

AINA: Don’t bother putting them back, I don’t want nobody eating the dirty ones.

MOLLY (at first distracted, embarrassed, then abruptly disbelieving): I really am sorry, I don’t know what got into me—wait, did you say these are fresh? Did you…did you buy these today?

AINA: Yeah.
Molly looks confused, like she wants to ask more, but then decides to refrain. Aina notices her reaction.

AINA: Why?

MOLLY: Well, it’s Sunday.

AINA: So?

MOLLY: You’re not supposed to buy anything on Sunday. It’s part of keeping the Sabbath day holy.

*Molly stands up holding the box. Aina takes it out of her hands.*

AINA: How about you worry over your Sabbath, and I’ll do the worryin’ for mines.

*Aina pushes past Molly and walks into the sacrament room.*

*Scene Three*

*A few months later*

*Young Living Room, early evening*

*Molly sits on the floor, back against the sofa, surrounded by binders, piles of papers, pens and high lighters. A huge map of the City of Richmond on a bulletin rests next to Molly, also against the sofa. Blue and red push pins dot the map. Ashley paces the floor, baby on shoulder, consulting another binder. Both women look tired—it’s been a long meeting. Other than the meeting paraphernalia, the apartment is immaculate—neat, clean and tidy in every way possible.*

ASHLEY: Okay, so we’ve got how many sisters left?

*Molly flips through some papers, pulls one out and glances over it.*

MOLLY: Three actives, two inactives. But I just don’t think we can assign any more out, Ash—we’re already averaging 6 sisters a visiting teacher. And almost nobody has a visiting teaching partner.

ASHLEY: I know, I know. But we’ve got to get our visiting teaching percentages up. I was mortified at our last branch council—even the elders’ quorum had better numbers than we did!
MOLLY (joking): Yeah, but they count passing the person in a church hallway as a visit.

ASHLEY: Molly, I can’t remember a time when my visiting teaching numbers have been below fifty percent.

MOLLY: We’re doing the best we can. But the issues we’re dealing with—I mean, half the sisters don’t have reliable transportation, and more than half live in neighborhoods we’re not supposed to visit alone.

ASHLEY (shrugging and sighing, as in, “what can you do?”): Welcome to the Branch. So, who do we have left to assign?

MOLLY (consulting a binder): Tyasia Smith, Eunice Tann and Siban Kilpatrick... (laughs to herself)

ASHLEY (looking up): What?

MOLLY: Just thinking of our last testimony meeting.

ASHLEY: Siban’s? I know, I thought I was going to die—

MOLLY: I think it was the first time I’ve heard somebody use “doobies” and “sex” in a testimony—

ASHLEY: And then Brother Brown, with the clapping?

*Ashley imitates the man in question, pointing and clapping, muttering, “Right on, that’s right on,” as she does so. Both women laugh and nod.*


ASHLEY: What’d I tell you? Can you imagine going back to a traditional ward now, with their travelogue testi-story meetings?

MOLLY: It’s a trip, alright. (looking down at the binder) These women we have left to assign are all crack-ups. You know, I can take all three of them. They don’t live too far away from here.

ASHLEY: But you’ve already got at least twenty sisters to visit already...

MOLLY (checking another sheet): No different than you, right?
Ashley takes the sheet Molly’s looking at, handing the baby to Molly.

ASHLEY: Siban Kilpatrick’s closer to me. I’ll take her, and Frances Johnson. And Eunice. That means you would just have to add Tyasia and... (consults sheet again) Aina Bridges.

While she speaks, Ashley adds push pins to the map—red pins for Siban, Frances and Eunice; blue for Tyasia and Aina. As Ashley finishes, Molly looks unsure.

MOLLY: How about I take Siban? She works near where I work, and I see her pretty regularly.

ASHLEY: Okay, great. Then you take Siban and Aina. (takes down a red push pin, replaces it with a blue) I’ll do the others.

Molly nods until Ashley finishes her sentence. She looks uncomfortable, searching for a way to say what she wants to say.

MOLLY: You know, Tyasia and I really connected at the last branch fish fry. I could do her, if you want.

Ashley studies the map.

ASHLEY: You sure?

Molly nods. Ashley trades another red push pin for a blue one.

ASHLEY: There. Yours are all fairly centrally located. Let me know if it gets to be too much for you.

Molly smiles and nods, reluctant. They start to gather their things, then—

MOLLY: Don’t you think Aina might be more comfortable if you visit taught her?

ASHLEY: Why do you say that?

MOLLY: I don’t know. You spoke at her baptism, right?

ASHLEY: Only because I’m Relief Society President—

MOLLY: But you’ve, you know, known her since she first started investigating the church. I just think she’s more... familiar with you.
ASHLEY: Not really. I’ve been so busy since having Bryn that I’ve hardly had a chance to keep up with much. I’ve felt badly about it, actually—I’m not sure how her adjustment to the church is going. Do you?

Molly laughs.

MOLLY: No, we don’t really talk. That’s why I thought—

ASHLEY: But you both live so close to each other. And you both started going to the Branch about the same time. That’s why I think you’ll do well together.

Ashley stops, looks at Molly.

ASHLEY: Do you not want to visit teach Aina?

MOLLY: No, no, I’m fine. That’s fine, sure. I mean, if you think she’d be better with me as her visiting teacher—

ASHLEY: I do.

MOLLY: Then great! I’ll... visit teach her.

Ashley gathers binders and papers, stuffing them into a diaper bag. Molly helps slowly, then walks her to the door.

ASHLEY: You know, I’ve really seen you grow and develop these past few months. I mean, remember when you didn’t even know what a project was? And now you go into them on a regular basis, visiting sisters!

MOLLY: Only during the day.

ASHLEY: And I know you’re going to do great with Aina. Remember, visiting teaching is the—

MOLLY: Heart and soul of Relief Society. (pause) I know.

Ashley takes the baby and begins settling her into the baby carrier.

ASHLEY: Call me if you need anything.

Molly nods. Ashley exits. Molly returns to her pile of papers and binders. She shuffles them around, marks notes, consults a map, marks more notes, etc. Lighting suggests
time passing through to night. Finally, she stops, thoroughly exhausted. She moves to the piano, flips through a hymn book, and begins playing “As Sisters in Zion,” slow and ballad-like.

After a few moments, steps are heard and Jack enters.

JACK: Still up?

Molly stops playing.

MOLLY: Oh, you know how these meetings go... how was dodge ball?

Jack turns a light on. A bright red, circular bruise takes up half his face. Molly looks at him in sympathy.

MOLLY: Again?

She walks out the other door. Jack sets some things down, then settles into the couch and flips on the television. Molly returns with an ice pack, which Jack places on his face.

MOLLY: Maybe you could suggest another activity idea. You guys have played dodge ball, what, three times already this month?

JACK: Hey, I’m just the second counselor. My job is to support the young men’s president.

MOLLY: Well maybe you could suggest doing something different to Kimball.

JACK: I find the best way I can support Kimball is to talk to him as little as possible.

MOLLY: Ja-ack.

Jack just shrugs.

JACK: So how was your meeting? Has the Relief Society successfully mapped out its route to saving the world, one visiting teacher at a time?

Now Molly shrugs.

JACK: Oh come on, no lecture about the monumental blessings that visiting teaching accomplishes? No philosophical sentiments about bringing the love of the Lord to every home in the branch? No emotional tirade about how monthly visits from visiting
teachers yields much more than just smartly packaged cookie plates and scrapbooked thoughts of love and friendship?

*When she doesn’t respond, Jack turns to her, shifting the ice pack so he can see her.*

JACK: What’s up?

MOLLY: Nothing. The meeting was fine.

JACK: Right. I would’ve believed that the *first* month of our marriage. Now, however, I realize it’s a blazing neon sign to pester you until you bear your emotional heart out.

*Molly rolls her eyes and watches the television in silence.*

JACK: Okay, suit yourself.

*He turns to the television also.*

MOLLY: It’s just that…

JACK: A-ha!

MOLLY (giving him a dirty look): Well, Ashley wants me to visit teach Aina.

JACK (voice dropping): Oh.

MOLLY: Yeah.

JACK: So does this mean I have to devote one night a month to going to the projects with you and feeling really awkward while you share a womanly message about charity, hope and faith?

MOLLY: No, it’s not that…I’ll try and get to her on the weekends, during the day—

JACK: Excellent.

MOLLLY: And why is it always about you, anyway?

JACK: It’s not. But now that I know I will have nothing to do with this new development, I’m much more able to offer objective emotional support.

MOLLY: I don’t need emotional support, I need a miracle meeting of the minds.
JACK: Come on, Molly, what’s the big deal? You said yourself that hardly anyone does their visiting teaching.

MOLLY: But I’m the 1st counselor in the Relief Society!

JACK: Oh how you love to lord your superior calling over me.

MOLLY: Oh stop. I just mean that I’m in charge of visiting teaching in the branch. And Ashley and I just redid the routes, and we’re planning this huge lesson and presentation on visiting teaching, how it’s the heart and soul of Relief Society—

JACK: And all this time I thought it was casseroles and funeral potatoes!

MOLLY: Can’t you take me seriously for just one minute?

*Jack takes the ice pack off his face, licks a finger and sticks it in the air, as if checking for the direction of the wind. He ponders his finger a moment.*

JACK: Yes, I suppose I can. But I’m timing you.

*He indicates his wristwatch.*

MOLLY: Seriously?

*Jack taps his watch again—time is counting down. Molly gives in.*

MOLLY: So basically, I have to set the example! We’re trying to get our visiting teaching percentages up, we’re trying to inspire the sisters in the branch to get their visiting teaching done, and to do it with the right heart and spirit. I mean, not only is visiting teaching not getting done in the Branch, it’s not even understood. Most of the think it’s something that’s only done to them, not something they also have to do.

JACK: And?

*Jack replaces the ice pack to his face.*

MOLLY: So not visiting her doesn’t really translate to doing my visiting teaching with the right heart and spirit!

JACK: So visit her.

MOLLY: I don’t know if Aina will even let me into her apartment!
JACK: I see.

He looks at his watch.

JACK: Finished?

Molly shrugs.

JACK: Because you’ve got about 30 seconds left of me treating this like a serious problem. Do you want me to spend it dispensing advice or listening?

MOLLY (in a “for what it’s worth” tone): Advice, I guess.

JACK: Okay, here it is: Relax. This is just the Branch. You can’t expect it to function like a ward in Utah—

MOLLY: I know that!

JACK: No, you don’t. You walk around attached to your copy of the Church handbook like it holds the secret to transforming everyone in the branch into stalwart, reliable members. I know you think it’s a big deal to be in the Relief Society presidency—

MOLLY: I do not!

JACK (pointing to watch): I’ve still got 10 seconds here. Do you want them?

MOLLY: Fine.

While Jack speaks, various white, middle-class women file onstage enacting the tasks Jack describes—pulling wagons of food, lugging quilting frames and fabric, perfecting lesson centerpieces, decorating birthday cakes, etc. One or two pick up around the apartment. Molly watches them, waving at a few.

JACK: Every Relief Society Presidency you’ve ever known has been filled with unbelievable women who have brought the art of multitasking to an Olympic level—they feed the homeless, clothe the naked, hand quilt for their posterity, home school their children and maintain perfectly clean homes, all while going through some significant personal trial like chemo therapy or early menopause. It’s natural to feel like you’ve got some big shoes to fill.

The women look down at their shoes. Molly looks at Jack.

MOLLY (dryly): You’re going over on your time.
As Jack speaks, the Relief Society women exit the stage.

JACK: And yet—Utah has the highest Prozac consumption in the nation.

Molly throws her hands up in the air in a “not again” attitude.

MOLLY: So what’s your point?

JACK: My point is this: stop trying so hard. You’re wasting energy, spinning your wheels and you’re going to burn out. Are those the kind of women you want to be? Come on, Molly, Utah has the highest Prozac consumption in the nation!

MOLLY: But—

JACK: It’s just the Branch. The rules you’re used to—the rules you grew up with—don’t apply here. Do you think visiting teaching numbers even matter?

MOLLY: Yes! They tell us what percentage of sisters have been visited! And we report them to the Stake!

JACK: And what does the Stake do with them?

MOLLY (thinking): They—I don’t know, actually.

JACK: Exactly. Why do you care what the stake does with them anyway?

MOLLY: Jack, that’s not the point! What about Aina?

JACK: Visit her.

MOLLY: But I don’t think she’ll let me!

JACK: Then don’t visit her.

MOLLY: Thanks a lot.

JACK (indicating watch): Hey, I went over!

He turns to the television. Molly watches, but not really. She’s thinking. After a moment she turns to the audience.
MOLLY: All the women I admired while growing up—Young Women leaders, Sunday School teachers, seminary instructors—they were all my mothers. In a family of nine children, you have to get your mothering where ever you can get it. But with all the mothers in my life, there was a through-line, a thread that connected all of them, and that was service. Listening ears, helping hands, heartfelt prayers and warm bread—these were the hallmarks of womanhood I grew to expect to embrace some day.

She walks back to the pushpin map of Richmond, touching some of the pins.

MOLLY: Maybe this isn’t exactly where I thought I’d be doing it, but who can say? They’re the tools I know. Hopefully they’re the ones that are needed.

Lights out.

Scene Four

One month later
Aina’s Living Room

Molly sits on the edge of an old, worn chair. She looks uncomfortable and wary, her gaze flicking between Aina and the roaches crawling on the floor and walls. Aina reclines in a chair opposite Molly, a picture of an African American Jesus hanging on the wall behind her. A couch piled with blankets sits between them. The apartment is a mess—dirty clothes, old plates of food, hair pieces, brushes, and piles of garbage fill the stage. A television blares in the corner, and a neighbor’s radio can be heard through the walls.

MOLLY: Well, thanks for letting me come visit you, ’Aina!

AINA: I guessed you wouldn’t stop bothering me at church until I did.

MOLLY (over the noise): What was that?

AINA: I said, didn’t seem you’d let up if I didn’t—

MOLLY: Sorry, do you mind if I—

She points at the television. Aina shrugs, shakes her head. Molly walks to the television, turns it off. The neighbor’s music—something with a regular, deep beat—can still be heard. Molly sits back down, faces Aina.

MOLLY: Well, you’re really hard to get a hold of, you know...I kept calling, trying to leave messages, but nobody ever picked up.
AINA: Phone gets turned off sometimes.

MOLLY (suddenly solicitous): Right, I remember you mentioned something like that. How terrible... does it get turned off often?

AINA (indifferent): Often enough to pluck my nerves, but not enough for *them* to do anything about it.

*She nods at the front door, as if "they" are standing on the porch.*

MOLLY: Oh. Well... good, then. I guess.

*Molly reaches down into a bag at her side and pulls out two pieces of paper and pencils.*

MOLLY: I thought since... since we don't really know each other that well, we could use today to do that. *(pause)* To get to know each other, I mean.

*Aina just looks at her.*

MOLLY: So I made up a list here—you know, of questions—for both of us. I thought maybe we could go through them together.

*She reaches out to hand one to Aina, who just stares at it.*

AINA: Why?

MOLLY: Well, to get to know each other better. I thought it would be fun if—

AINA: I think I know enough about you.

*The papers slip from Molly's hand. She squats gingerly to pick them up, talking to the floor, which is very dirty, dirtier than any floor she's ever seen.*

MOLLY (distracted): You do? I mean—

*She sits on the edge of the chair again, ordering the papers in her lap. She tries to discreetly wipe her fingers on her pants.*

MOLLY: Why do you say that?

AINA: I see you at church.
MOLLY: Of course, yes—but there’s more to me than what you see at church. Same for you, I’m sure. We should—we should try to get to know each other. As your visiting teacher, I’ll visit you every month with a spiritual message, but I’ll also be here to help with anything you need.

AINA: Like what?

MOLLY: Well—that depends on what you need, I guess.

*Aina just stares at her. Molly thinks, then—*

MOLLY: Like when you’re sick, I’ll make sure your family gets meals. Maybe help clean your house. Babysitting, if you need a night to yourself. You have children, right?

AINA: Three. But they almost grown now.

MOLLY: Oh. *(thinks a moment)* Or if you move, I can help you pack. Get the elders’ quorum to move your stuff, things like that. You know?

*Aina laughs in a mean way.*

MOLLY: What?

AINA: Ain’t nobody move outta here.

MOLLY: Do you... do you want to move out of here?

*Aina shrugs.*

*The blankets on the couch suddenly rustle and shift. A hand drops out, startling Molly; a man sleeps on the couch underneath the blankets.*

MOLLY: Is that—is someone sleeping there?

AINA (without looking at the couch): My brother.

MOLLY: I didn’t see... I’m sorry, should we—should I whisper?

*Aina shrugs.*

AINA: It don’t matter.
Molly looks at the couch, her discomfort almost tangible.

MOLLY (not whispering, but softer): Why didn’t you say something?

AINA: Why should I? He sleeps all day, whether we here or not. He won’t stir none.

MOLLY: Usually visiting teaching is just between women…sisters…should we visit somewhere else in the house?

AINA: Ain’t no where else to visit.

Molly looks again at the couch. The blankets shift again, revealing a foot at the end of the couch.

MOLLY: Does he—is he living with you?

AINA: For now.

Molly waits for more. Nothing. She looks from the couch to Aina, looking for the appropriate reaction.

MOLLY: Well, how nice to have your brother staying with you, especially for your kids. They must love having him around, especially since they don’t—that is, I think Ashley told me…you don’t have a lot to do with their, er, fathers, do you?

AINA: No.

MOLLY: So they probably like having a man around, to do…things…with.

Aina just stares at Molly. Molly looks down at the papers in her lap, then back to Aina. She starts to say something, stops, looks at the couch, then reaches into her bag and pulls out a magazine.

MOLLY: Well, I don’t want to keep you. Maybe I should just share the spiritual message for this month so I can—can let you get on with your day. How’s that?

Aina shrugs.

MOLLY: Have you ever seen the Ensign before?

She holds the church magazine up for Aina to see the cover. Aina shakes her head.
MOLLY: That’s okay, you’re still pretty new. You’ve only been baptized now for, what, three months?

AINA: Five this Saturday.

MOLLY: Five, that’s right—you got baptized just when we moved into the Branch. Time flies, huh? Well anyway, the church publishes three monthly magazines: The *Ensign*, for adults, *The New Era*, for the youth, and *The Friend*, for children. They have articles about living the gospel, messages from the First Presidency and other Church leaders, the visiting teaching message and the home teaching message in *The Ensign*. They’re great, and pretty cheap, too—I think *The Ensign*’s only, maybe ten or twelve dollars a year? I’m not sure, but anyway, it’s a lot cheaper than other magazines. You should see how much we pay for my husband’s advertising magazines that he gets for school!

*Molly laughs*. *Aina doesn’t*.

MOLLY: So...

*Molly flips through the magazine to an article marked with a sticky tab.*

MOLLY: Anyway, this month’s visiting teaching message is on the divine worth of each sister in the gospel.

*She holds the magazine up again, this time to the selected article.*

MOLLY: See, it’s made up of different quotes from authorities in our church and scriptures on that month’s message. I thought maybe we could each read from it, and then we can talk about it. Okay?

*Aina shrugs.*

MOLLY: Okay, I’ll go first. This is from President Hinckley. (*reading*)

"There is something of divinity within each of you. You have such tremendous potential with that quality as a part of your inherited nature. Every one of you was endowed by your Father in Heaven with a tremendous capacity to do good in the world. Train your minds and your hands that you may be equipped to serve well in the society of which you are a part. Cultivate the art of being kind, of being thoughtful, of being helpful. Refine within you the quality of mercy which comes as a part of the divine attributes you have inherited."

Now your turn.
She hands the magazine to Aina. As Aina reads, she struggles over a few of the larger words.

AINA (reading): “A con—con…viction that you are a… daughter of God gives you a feeling of… comfort in your self-worth.”

She studies the magazine, putting it close and then far from her face before stopping.

AINA: I don’t read good without my glasses.

MOLLY: That’s okay. I can wait while you get them.

AINA: They broke.

MOLLY: Oh. Oh, I’m sorry. Would you (reaching for the magazine) would you like me to read the rest of the message to you?

AINA: No, I guess that was enough.

MOLLY: Okay. (pause) Did you have any questions, about what we read?

Aina shakes her head.

MOLLY: Well is there anything I can do for you?

AINA: Like what?

MOLLY (exasperated): You know, like we talked about earlier—is there anything you need?

Aina just looks at her. Molly waits. Finally, she shrugs, reaches into her bag and pulls out a plate of cookies wrapped in saran wrap with a little scrap booked note tied to it with ribbon.

MOLLY: Well, if you think of anything, just give me a call.

She hands the plate to Aina, who sets the magazine down to take it.

MOLLY: I hope you like snicker doodles.

AINA: Snicker what?

MOLLY: Snicker doodles. They’re cookies.
Aina looks at the plate, dubious.

MOLLY: I called my mom for the recipe.

AINA: This your mama’s recipe?

Molly nods.

MOLLY: I put my name, telephone and email address on a little card for you. See—

She reaches for the note and flips it over.

MOLLY: I put magnets on the back, so you can stick it on your fridge.

Aina looks at the card.

MOLLY: By the way, when’s the best time to visit teach you?

AINA: What?

MOLLY: Mornings? Afternoons? Evenings? I like to set up a regular visiting teaching schedule—like, every third Tuesday at 3, or something. That way we both know when we’re meeting, and we don’t have to scramble every month to get together. You don’t work, do you?

Aina continues studying the card.

AINA: No.

MOLLY: Well, I work at the school, just near here. I could come by any weekday during lunch? Or the weekends…during the day.

She waits. Aina doesn’t respond.

MOLLY: Think about it. Let me know what works best. For you.

Molly begins gathering her things. She reaches for the Ensign.

MOLLY: Thanks again for letting me visit, Aina.

AINA: Seems I didn’t have no choice.
She looks again at the card. Molly finishes getting her things together and stands up.

MOLLY: Yes, well—I’m looking forward to getting to know you better.

They both know she’s lying. She leans in for a tentative hug, thinks better of it, and just pats Aina’s hand. She walks to the door.

MOLLY: And remember, call me if you need anything.

Molly exits.

AINA: Like the tooth fairy.

Lights out.

Scene Five

Six months later
Young’s living room.

The room is decorated for a birthday party—cake on the table, candles next to it, paper plates and napkins, a “Happy Birthday Aina!” sign draped over the wall. Molly bustles around the room, organizing and preparing.

Stairs heard climbing up the stairs leading to the front door of the apartment; Jack enters the living room, backpack in tow.

JACK: What on earth—

Taking in the state of his living room, he drops his backpack.

MOLLY: Hey, I thought you were going to be gone all night!

JACK: The computer lab was closed, so I thought I’d get some work done here... (looking around) What’s going on?

MOLLY: My visiting teaching thing, remember?

Jack stares at her, clearly not remembering.

MOLLY: The birthday party... for Aina? Remember? I told you about it weeks ago.
JACK (uncertainly): I remember you said you wanted to do something for Aina... did she actually agree to come over here for a birthday party?

MOLLY: No, silly, it's a surprise: She thinks she's coming here for a combined visiting teaching meeting.

JACK: I see. (pause) Walk me again through the process you went through, to end up with this as a good idea?

MOLLY: Well, you know I've been struggling to figure out why it's so hard with Aina. I thought that maybe, after a few visits, we'd break through the ice, get a little comfortable, but... it's been months now, and I'm no closer to her than the first time I tried to visit teach her—

JACK: When she wouldn't open the door?

MOLLY: Exactly. I just can't seem to break through to her. I'm in her house, but it's still like that first attempt, me outside the door holding onto a plate of cookies, knowing she's on the other side—but not being able to do anything. Or not knowing what to do about it. I mean, it's so terrible—I can't even tell you. Every month, I sit there and try to share the visiting teaching message, but it's like she's not even there. She just stares at me—not nodding, not shaking her head, not hardly present, you know? I don't know if she's agreeing with me, or if she thinks I'm some loony, I don't know anything. So last month I came home and thought, there has got to be a better way. And then it came to me, my problem, the reason it was so hard to visit teach Aina!

JACK: What, a birthday party?

MOLLY: No, I was going about it the entirely wrong way. I mean, in the Book of Mormon, when Ammon was trying to convert the Lamanites... he didn't just jump in and start preaching to the Lamanites, right?

JACK: I don't remember anything about him throwing a party for the Lamanites, either.

MOLLY: No, he served them. We're supposed to love the people we serve, but you can't love them unless you serve them.

JACK: I don't think that means serve them birthday cake.

MOLLY (over, "birthday cake"): And I thought, well, I'm always going over to Aina's house and preaching, basically. Maybe she needs to see that I care about her as a person, that I want her to have fun, that I want to have fun with her. That I want to celebrate her life! And it was perfect, because then I looked on the Relief Society roster
(indicates some stapled papers on the coffee table) and her birthday was coming up anyway, and it all just sort of came together after that. You know?

JACK: No, I don’t know. How is this going to help?

MOLLY (over “How is this..”): I have games and cake and music and everything. I’ve had a great response already—everyone I invited said they would come!

JACK: And how do you know Aina wants to spend her birthday hanging out with all of your friends from church?

MOLLY (offended): I didn’t invite my friends. I invited her friends—the ones she sits with, at Relief Society!

*Jack looks longingly at the television.*

JACK: How long is this supposed to last?

MOLLY (looking at her watch): Only an hour or so. I’ve got to leave in a few minutes to pick everyone up.

JACK: A few minutes? Wait a second, how’s that going to work—Aina gets in your car and, whoops, all her friends are there too? Don’t you think that’s a little—

MOLLY (impatient): No, no, her brother’s back in prison, so she’s got his car.

JACK: Does she even have a license?

MOLLY (shrugging): Do any of them?

*Molly makes a quick circle around the room, picking up purse, keys, sunglasses, etc. Jack picks up his bag and walks towards the front door, then stops and turns.*

JACK: Molly, I’m not sure this is—

MOLLY (checking her purse): Do you know where my city map went?

JACK: At least call everyone, beforehand, to make sure they’re still there.

MOLLY (indicating her purse): I thought it was in here. You didn’t use it, for your last young men’s activity, or anything?
JACK: Remember how mad you were when you spent four hours trying to visit teach, and nobody was home?

MOLLY: What about that picnic thing you went to, for school—that was over the river, wasn’t it? Did you use the map for that?

*Jack waits without answering while Molly continues searching through her purse until, finally, she pulls out a piece of what is used to be a map—worn, torn and falling apart. She looks up.*

JACK: Please? (when Molly doesn’t answer) To at least save wear and tear on the car?

Molly glances at her watch.

MOLLY: As of one hour ago, they were all waiting and ready at their houses.

JACK: You know that doesn’t make a difference.

*Molly puts the map back into her purse*

MOLLY: I’m already late!

*Jack shrugs. Molly looks around the room one more time, then walks out the door with Jack. Steps heard descending stairs, a pause, then hurried steps back up. Molly bursts into the apartment.*

MOLLY (calling downstairs): No, go ahead—I just need my roster so I have their addresses.

*She makes a quick circle around the room, searching for the roster, then spots it on the coffee table. She picks it up, races to the door and stops. Looks at the phone, then her watch. She walks back to the couch, sits. Ruffles through the roster, picks up the phone and dials. After a moment—*

MOLLY: Hello; Deja? Oh, I’m sorry, could I please speak to Deja? This is Molly Young. *(pause)* What do you mean she’s not there? I’m sorry, no, it’s just—I was supposed to pick her up a few minutes ago, for a party. I just wanted to let her know that I’d be late... Do you know how I might reach her? *(pause)* Oh, okay. Well. Could you tell her I called? Thanks.

*Molly hangs up the phone, discouraged. She checks the roster, then dials again. A pause, during which she glances at the roster, waits, then hangs up. She consults the roster, dials again. After a few moments, she hangs up. Consults the roster, dials*
again—and nothing. Frustrated, she shuffles through the roster, finds another number and dials. After a few moments—

MOLLY: Hello, may I please speak to Keisha? (pause) Hi, Keisha, it’s Molly Young, from church? I just wanted to let you know that I’m running a little late, but I’m leaving right now, so I should be at your house in (checking her watch) about ten minutes. (pause) The party, remember? For Aina. No—it’s tonight. I just—we just spoke, awhile ago…oh. Really? (pause) That’s, that’s too bad, I’m—I’m sorry to hear that. Sure, sure, just…okay, well, I hope everything works out.

Molly hangs up the phone, looks at it. Picks it up, then hangs it up with force. Ruffles through the roster again, over and over, shaking her head, then puts it down and picks up the phone. Dials, waits, and then—

MOLLY (speaking rapidly): Aina, hi, it’s Molly Young from church. I just wanted to make sure you were still okay to come to that visiting teaching meeting we talked about, for tonight. (checks her watch) In about a half hour. Can you still make it? (pause) Great! Great, that’s awesome…well, a couple other people can’t make it, but we can definitely still do it. Yeah, great, okay, I’ll see you here. You know how to get here, right? It’s only a few blocks from your house—yeah, turn left on Broad. You got it. Great! See you soon!

She hangs up. Sits back into the couch. Excited.

Lighting suggests the passing of time.

Molly sits, checking watch, fidgeting, waiting. She stands up and paces, then looks at the audience and stops. As she begins talking, Gabe Bruckner walks onstage in suit and tie, carrying his scriptures and a small church bag, like a briefcase.

MOLLY: For as long as I can remember, Daddy’s been in some kind of leadership position in the church. Bishops, stake presidencies—first counselor, second counselor, bishop, whatever—if the calling entails meetings, he’s had it. In fact, he has this little paperweight on his desk—Mom calls it his apostate paperweight, because it’s a knockoff of the thirteen articles of faith that outline our church’s beliefs. You’ve probably already heard it, but it says—

GABE (to Sophia): We believe in meetings, all that have been scheduled, all that are now scheduled, and we believe that there will yet be many great and important meetings scheduled.

While speaking Gabe adjusts his tie, checks his watch, and walks towards the door, where a pregnant Sophia, waits with a Tupperware dinner.
SOPHIA (dryly): We have endured many meetings and hope to be able to endure all meetings.

MOLLY: Indeed, we may say that if there is a meeting, or anything that resembles a meeting, or anything that we may possibly turn into a meeting, we seek after these things.

Sophia hands the dinner to Gabe, who kisses her and walks out the door.

MOLLY: The 14th Article of Faith. (beat) It's a big paperweight.

Offstage, we hear Molly's sister, Phoebe, calling.

PHOEBE (offstage): Mom, when's Daddy coming home?

SOPHIA: After bed time, kiddo.

A chorus of groans and whining greets her answer. Sophia rubs her neck, forces a smile. Molly watches her, then turns back to the audience.

MOLLY: She never complained. (Beat) One time I went to pick up my friend Amanda for a young women volleyball practice and her mom answered the door. Said Amanda didn't feel like going. (beat) I didn't know you could do that. I tried telling my Mom that, at the next practice—that I didn't feel like going that week. I mean, I'm not even good at volleyball. Seven years of young women volleyball and I still can't do an overhand serve. (shakes her head) So one practice, right? If you think about it, that's not really missing a lot in terms of church activities. I still had Young Women's every week, and youth dances every month, all the volleyball games, plus all the other sports we did—basketball, softball, we even did ultimate Frisbee for awhile—and then Family Home Evening every Monday, church on Sunday... it was just one practice. I thought, Amanda didn't feel like going, why should I?

She turns to Sophia, who folds her arms and speaks with measured sterness.

SOPHIA: We are active members of this church, young lady. Active.

MOLLY: And that means not attending—just not showing up, for whatever reason—is not an option.

Sophia walks offstage.
Molly looks at the birthday cake, then walks back to it. She dips a finger in and tastes. Looks at her watch, then out the window, then back at the cake that took her hours to make and frost. She picks it up and walks towards the kitchen. She stops at the doorway, looks back at the phone, then throws the cake on the floor.

Lights down.

END ACT I
Act Two

Scene One

A few weeks later
Aina’s Living Room

The furniture has changed, though it is still worn. Aina sits on a chair, Molly on another chair. The apartment is still a mess.

MOLLY (looking at the bean bag): What happened to your couch?

AINA: What couch?

MOLLY: The couch that used to be there—

Molly points to the space where the couch used to be.

MOLLY: You know, where your brother slept, before he—when he lived here, I mean.

AINA: That couch? It ain’t been here for months.

MOLLY: What happened to it?

AINA (shrugging): Furniture don’t last long here. Kids wreck it. Or the cockroaches.

Molly scoots even further out of her armchair, somehow managing to hold a precarious and uncomfortable looking position.

MOLLY: Do you need another couch?

Aina just looks at her. Molly waits, looks around, then tries again.

MOLLY: Because I’m sure we could find something...I mean, people are always getting rid of couches...
Molly suddenly swats at her leg, then stomps on the floor, almost losing her balance. She catches herself, readjusting her position. She tries to find a more comfortable position on the chair while touching as little of the chair as possible. She looks back at Aina.

AINA: We got enough furniture.

MOLLY: Okay, well, let me know if you change your mind.

*Molly pulls an Ensign out of her bag.*

MOLLY: Since this month’s Ensign is the Conference edition, visiting teachers are supposed to share the message they feel will best help the sisters they visit teach. I made a copy of the talk I’m using as my message this month.

She pulls out a photocopy of the message, stapled together and highlighted, from the Ensign. She glances at the television, then back to Aina.

MOLLY: Maybe I’ll just share one thought from it, then leave the rest for you to read on your own time; okay?

Aina nods.

MOLLY: This is from Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, an apostle of the Quorum of the Twelve. *(reading, loudly)*

“Integrity, a firm adherence to the highest moral and ethical standards, is essential to the life of a true Latter-day Saint. Let us live true to the trust the Lord has placed in us. Let us strive for personal, practical integrity in every endeavor, regardless of how mundane or inconsequential it may seem. The small matters accumulate to shape the direction of our lives.”

*Molly folds the Ensign back together and looks at Aina.*

MOLLY: Aina, tell me, what does integrity mean to you?

AINA (shrugging): I guess I’d need to think about that.

*Molly nods. She hands the photocopy to Aina, who sets it on the floor. They sit in silence for another moment.*

MOLLY: Aina, I really missed you at the visiting teaching meeting.
AINA: The what?

MOLLY: The visiting teaching meeting, at my house, a few weeks ago?

*AINA: looks at her, nothing registering.*

MOLLY: Remember, I called you? You said you were coming? And then... you didn’t.

*AINA: thinks about it for a moment, then shrugs.*

AINA: Something came up.

MOLLY: Oh. *(pause)* But you didn’t—you could have, I mean... you could have called.

AINA: I forgot.

*Molly keeps waiting for an apology. Nothing.*

MOLLY: Well, I thought you were coming... and I waited... a phone call would have let me know to just, you know, move on with my night.

*AINA: doesn’t respond.*

MOLLY: I mean, I spoke to you right before, and you said—

*She looks at Aina, who has shifted and looks bored.*

MOLLY: Well, anyway, I was doing a surprise party for you.

AINA: A what?

MOLLY: A surprise party, for your birthday. I had cake and presents and everything.

AINA: Oh for real?

*Molly nods, thinking now she’ll get her apology. But—*

AINA: You eat the cake?

MOLLY: Jack had some...

AINA: Why you didn’t bring it over with you?
Molly looks at Aina in disbelief.

MOLLY: It's old now, Aina. It's stale.

AINA: You always be bringing things over, why you didn't bring my birthday cake?

MOLLY: Why should I? You didn't even show up for the party!

AINA: I didn't know it was a party, did I?

MOLLY: But that's not the point!

Aincr doesn't sq a word, just looks at Molly. Molly looks back for a moment.

MOLLY: What do you have against me? Is it that first Sunday I came to church? Look, I'm sorry, okay? I was flustered, I was adjusting to the Branch, and I'm sorry if I offended you.

Lights down on Molly. Aina addresses her, but Molly for all intents and purposes is a blank.

AINA: You're not sorry. You just are.

She looks at Molly another moment, then stands and addresses the audience.

AINA: Something not go her way and she gotta pout about it.

Aina laughs.

AINA: Scared of her own shadow. Look at her. Six months she been visiting me, and she still ain't able to swallow the chill them cockroaches give her. She ain't never knewed people lived like this here, and don't it show. Like this right here be her worst nightmare. She shoulda seen where we lived before we moved here.

I see her at church. Talkin' with her friends that be just like her, having Super Bowl parties and book clubs and scrapbooks. She works at some job she calls lame making more money in a week than I can make in a month and still keep my disability check. And she says they poor, starving students. But that don't seem to matter—she still buyin' new clothes and still goin' out to eat and drivin' nice cars and livin' on East Broad. East Broad, where they a trash can on every corner so's you don't be droppin' your trash everywhere's.
While she talks, Aina circles Molly—studying her, getting close with her face and hands, but never touching her. She stops directly in front of her, nose to nose, for a beat, then backs into the couch and sits.

AINA: You go around doing your thing and it never crosses your mind to think about the people who live here, who always been and always will be in the Branch after your husband graduates and you move into some lily white suburb. Girl, you move around the branch like you already there.

Lights resume on both of them.

MOLLY: I mean, if you had known about the surprise party, would you still have come?

Aina just looks at her. Molly waits. A moment passes. Molly looks down at the Ensign in her lap.

MOLLY (checking her watch): Well anyway, I guess I’d better go.

Molly gathers her things and moves to the door. Aina doesn’t stop her. At the door, she turns around.

MOLLY: You don’t know me nearly as well as you think you do, Aina. If you just give me a chance, you might even like me.

Molly waits. Aina says nothing. Molly leaves. Aina looks at the door, then to the audience.

AINA: It ain’t about chance, it about what is, and I’m here to tell you what is. I hear how she talk about herself, when she get up there on testimony days. Born and raised in the gospel. Born into the covenant, she called it last week. And she’s so grateful she can trace her family’s church membership back to them barefoot pioneers. She talk about God and she talk about faith and she talk about love and then she sit down with her friends that be just like her and she live her life without no chance for nothin’ else. She make fun of us who don’t maybe talk as good as she do, maybe don’t read as good as she do—I bet you heard her. Whenever anything don’t go the way she used to it going back home, she and all your friends just laugh and say, “Welcome to the Branch.” Like we a circus for them to write home about. She don’t think that maybe the people’s she makin’ fun of at church, the one’s just barely joined or maybe having a harder time of life than she be havin’, maybe they might have a harder time being a member than she do. Mobs and tar and feathers—what’s new about that? What about what we blacks go through? It ain’t easy bein’ in no white man’s church.
As she finishes, "white man’s church," DAVIS COX, Aina’s teenage son, walks in the front door, bouncing a basketball.

DAVIS: Mama, where my basketball shoes at?

Aina crosses her arms and gives him a look that says, "Why should I know?" Davis just smiles and keeps dribbling.

DAVIS: C’mon, Mama, where they at? I need them for my activity—we playin’ ball, Mama, at the stake center. Where they at?

She looks at him again. She points to the shoes on his feet.

DAVIS: I can’t wear these shoes, they got black on the bottom. They skid, mark up the floor.

Lights down on Davis. Aina turns to the audience.

AINA: Them missionaries. They knock on my door, I think, what these white boys doin’ on my stoop?

She turns to Davis, then back to the audience.

AINA (indicating Davis): That right there why they on my stoop. They play ball with him, he thinks they walk on water. He want to get baptized. I say fine, good. My children? They need religion, they need all the help they can get, but especially that one—he ain’t meant to be no baby daddy. He joins. We all join. He plays ball every Tuesday night, we go to church every Sunday, and then this summer? Her husband (indicating the front door, meaning Molly) tells me they’re doing a youth trip—youth conference.

While she talks, a group of white teenagers dressed in pioneer clothing, pulling a wooden handcart, file onstage. Davis pulls on a pair of suspenders and hat and joins the group in a circle at the foot of the handcart.

AINA: A handcart trek. My boy in suspenders, khakis, hiking boots and hat. A black pioneer. All the youth in the stake goin’. And my son, he in a group with some redneck boy that ain’t never talked to a black man in his life. Never. And he asking my son questions like he the encyclopedia of black people—what do they eat, and what do they say, and what do this mean, and what about that? And don’t you know that by the end of the night he ask for my son’s pillow because he didn’t think black people used them?
Sound of rain. The white youth pull on rain jackets; Davis has nothing. One teenage boy offers him a garbage bag, which Davis doesn’t know what to do with. The boy shows him how to tear a hole out of the bottom and put it on as protection.

AINA: And that night? When it started raining? They had to pick two boys to go get firewood, for the morning, so they could keep it dry that night. They doin’ the eenie meenie minie moe thing, you know the one?

She turns to look at the group of youth. They kneel in a circle, each with one foot in and one foot out. A teenage boy counts around the circle, touching each teenager’s foot with his finger as he recites from memory. He speaks quickly, without actually thinking of the individual words of what he’s saying—

TEENAGE BOY: Eenie, Meenie, Minie, Moe. Catch a nigger by the toe. If he hollers let him go...

Realizing what he’s just said, he slows down, but doesn’t stop


The teenagers look at each other, avoiding Davis, who looks at the teenage boy with disbelief. A crack of lightning.

AINA: It ain’t easy bein’ in no white man’s church.

Lights down.

Scene Two

Six Months Later
Aina’s Living Room

Molly sits on the edge of a worn arm chair, Ensign in hand and reading. Aina sits on another. Aina’s teenage daughters, LA TRELLE and KAI, sit on a torn and leaking bean bag that has replaced the couch from previous scenes. The girls are braiding hair and watching television, which is blaring a hip hop music video station.

MOLLY (reading loud, over the television): “Each of us has problems that we cannot solve and weaknesses that we cannot conquer without reaching out through prayer to a higher source of strength.”
While she speaks, the girls point and giggle loudly at something on the television. Molly glances at them, then at Aina, who does nothing. Molly squares her shoulders and continues—

MOLLY: “That source is the God of heaven to whom we pray in the name of Jesus Christ.”

During “That source...” the front door opens and three of La Trelle’s friends walk in, one carrying a baby on her hip. They stare at Molly, then walk over and pile with the other girls on the bean bag. One points to the television and laughs. Molly stops during their interchange, uncomfortable and unsure if she should continue.

FRIEND: Oh no he is not wearin’ that—

LA TRELLE: I know, see that right there is why—

FRIEND: Where you remote at?

La Trelle shrugs, kicks Kai.

KAI: Ow. What’s wrong with you?

She pushes La Trelle off the bean bag. A pile of bean bag innards gushes out as she falls to the floor. She swings back and hits Kai on the back of the head.

LA TRELLE: Give her the remote, Kai—

KAI: Why you be hittin’ me? You give her the remote—

Exasperated, Aina finally stands up and speaks, loud and mean.

AINA: Stop that yellin’, you hear? You have been at each other all morning. Go upstairs, you have to yell.

Molly jumps at the tone of Aina’s voice. The girls just laugh and tumble off the bean bag. La Trelle and her friends whisper together, then La Trelle walks to Aina.

LA TRELLE: Mama, can we go to the store?

AINA: I don’t know why, you ain’t got no money.

LA TRELLE (whining): Just to do something. C’mon, it’s borin’ here.
AINA: Fine. Be back in an hour. You hear?

LA TRELLE: Two.

AINA: Two.

*Aina throws her hands out as if to say, “whatever.”*

LA TRELLE: You watch Monique’s baby for us?

AINA: What’s wrong with Monique’s mama?

LA TRELLE: She out.

AINA: Not my problem.

LA TRELLE: C’mon, Mama, just for an hour.

AINA: I thought you said two.

LA TRELLE: You watch her baby, we be back in an hour.

*Aina folds her arms.*

AINA: Don’t you play with me, La Trelle. I ain’t got no diapers or nothin’.

LA TRELLE: She a good baby, she ain’t give you no problem—

AINA (giving in): One hour.

*La Trelle’s friend jumps up, as if to give Aina the baby.*

FRIEND: Thank you, Ms. Cox—

AINA (indicating the bean bag): Put her over there.

KAI: Oo, yeah, she take a nap quick on that, don’t she.

*Molly watches, concerned, as the girls put the baby on the bean bag.*

MOLLY: Are you sure that’s…
When everyone ignores her, Molly trails off. Shrugs. Laughing, the girls file out the door. Molly waves; they ignore her.

MOLLY: Bye girls, have fun…

The door shuts. Molly looks at Aina, then the Ensign in her lap. She laughs.

MOLLY: I don’t have much left, just a line or so—you want me to share it still?

Aina shrugs.

MOLLY: “As we pray we should think of our Father in Heaven as possessing all knowledge, understanding, love, and compassion.”

She folds the magazine and sets it onto her lap.

MOLLY: Aina, do you pray?

AINA: Of course I do.

MOLLY: How do you pray?

AINA: Same as you, I guess. How do you pray?

MOLLY: I thank Him for my blessings—healthy body, good family—

AINA: Letting me wake up every morning—

MOLLY: Yeah, that, I guess. Then I ask for the things I stand in need of—help with my problems—

Aina makes a soft noise—like a laugh, but not quite. Molly notices.

MOLLY: What?

AINA: And what kind of problems you got?

MOLLY: I’ve got problems, Aina. You think I don’t?

Aina shrugs. Molly, self conscious, begins.

MOLLY: I get discouraged, depressed, sad—
AINA: Over what?

MOLLY: Over life! Getting along with my husband, trying to do my calling, hurting and getting hurt by people I love—don’t these things happen to all of us?

AINA: You pray for all those things?

MOLLY: Not every day, no, but yeah, I pray for them.

AINA: That it? Those your problems?

MOLLY: Well, that’s not all of them—I mean, I didn’t bring a list or anything—

AINA: But that it? That’s what worryin’ you the most? Your marriage and your friends?

MOLLY: There’s more to it than that, I mean, I can’t just dump everything on you right here, can I—

AINA: What’s your worry? What’s stoppin’ you from being’ happy?

MOLLY: I’m happy, I didn’t say I wasn’t—

The baby on the bean bag begins to fuss. Molly looks at Aina, who doesn’t move or look in the baby’s direction. Molly looks at the baby, who works into a fit. Molly steps over and picks the baby up, shushing and patting her. She turns to Aina. She’s crying.

Aina sees the tears and understands.

AINA: My grandmama used to say, once you pray for something, there’s no need to worry the good Lord about it all day. Just pray to do His bidding and the rest will take care of itself.

Molly nods, wipes a tear. She sits back down, holding the baby. A moment passes, during which Molly composes herself.

MOLLY: What do you pray for?

AINA: Good health.

Molly nods again. She leans forward, really listening.

AINA: I pray for my childrens, that they get out of here.
Molly nods again.

MOLLY: You mention that a lot. Do you think that they want to get out of here?

AINA: They’re comfortable. It’s all they know. Comfort’s a mighty strong thing.

A beat.

MOLLY: I noticed you haven’t been to church the past couple weeks. Anything wrong?

AINA: Asthma actin’ up.

MOLLY: Oh, I’m sorry. My brother has asthma, it’s really hard. I bet all this pollen doesn’t help. Do you have medication?

Aina nods.

MOLLY: Well, if you ever need—a ride, or something, to the doctor. Let me know.

Aina nods again. Molly leans forward, takes a deep breath, then—

MOLLY: Actually, Aina, when’s the next time you’re supposed to go to the doctor?

AINA: Next week.

MOLLY: I know that your car’s been acting up—

AINA: It’s dead.

MOLLY: Really? What happened?

AINA: It’s just dead.

MOLLY: Oh. Well, then how are you getting to your doctor’s appointment?

AINA: Bus, probably.

Pause.

MOLLY: Could I—can I give you a ride?
Aina looks at her, shrugs.

MOLLY: Because your doctor’s right by where I work, and it would be the simplest thing for me to just swing by.

AINA: Yeah. I guess.

MOLLY: Great. That’ll be great. When and what time should I be here?


Molly smiles at the baby, then at Aina. Aina laughs and shakes her head.

Lights down.

Scene Three

A Few Days Later
Richmond Branch Relief Society, Grace Street Chapel

A half-podium stands on a card table, which is covered in a neat white cloth. Off the podium are three chairs facing the rows of women; seated in them are Ashley and her two (white) counselors. Rows of fold-up chairs face the podium; the first row or two are completely empty. Several women in the room hold babies. Although there is some intermingling, for the most part the African American sisters cluster together in the back rows, whereas the white sisters sit more to the middle front.

At rise: the women are singing the last verse of “As Sisters in Zion,” led by DEJA LITTLE, the chorister, and accompanied by Molly on the piano.

Ashley walks to the podium and greets the women with a blinding grin as Molly joins the white seated sisters, one of whom leans over and gives her an encouraging half-hug. Deja walks to the back, reaching for her baby from Aina before sitting down.

ASHLEY: That was lovely, sisters. What a beautiful hymn. We truly are sisters in Zion, aren’t we? Our Zion is right here in Richmond, Virginia, isn’t it?

She looks out over the women, beaming.

DEJA: Amen, sister, amen!
The other black sisters nod, a few more give verbal “amen’s.” The white sisters exchange knowing but amused looks; they understand that Ashley’s question was rhetorical.

ASHLEY: Now for those of you who are new or investigating our church, welcome to Relief Society! We’re always so sad to see investigators leave after sacrament, because all the women in our church know that the best hour is the last hour of our meetings, when the men go off to priesthood and we get to meet as sisters here in Relief Society.

The women sit in various stages of listening—some (the white sisters) giggle in whispered conversations, some tend to their babies while trying to listen and some (the African American sisters) hold louder conversations, with no attempt made to whisper. Ashley addresses these sisters.

ASHLEY: Sisters, sisters—indulge me for just a moment. Before we move on to today’s lesson, President Bridges has asked that I share a letter from the First Presidency.

She sets a letter onto the podium and reads from it, never looking up. While she reads, the white sisters nod thoughtfully in agreement. The African American sisters pay more attention as the letter continues.

ASHLEY: “Priesthood and auxiliary leaders are again encouraged to teach members the importance of living chaste and virtuous lives. We reiterate our concern over the decline of moral values in society and the resultant number of children born out of wedlock and reared by unwed parents. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by parents who provide love, support, and all the blessings of the gospel.

“Every effort should be made in helping those who conceive out of wedlock to establish an eternal family relationship. When the probability of a successful marriage is unlikely, unwed parents should be encouraged to place the child for adoption, preferably through LDS Social Services. Adoption through LDS Social Services helps ensure that the baby will be reared by a mother and father in a faithful Latter-day Saint family.

“Unwed parents who do not marry should not be counseled to keep the infant as a condition of repentance or out of an obligation to care for one’s own. Generally, unwed parents are not able to provide the stable, nurturing environment so essential for the baby’s well-being.

“When deciding to place the baby for adoption, the best interests of the child should be the paramount consideration. Placing the infant for adoption enables unwed parents to do what is best for the child and enhances the prospect for the blessings of the gospel in the lives of all concerned.”
After finishing, Ashley tucks the letter away and looks out over the women. She speaks quickly, hardly giving time for anyone to answer her question.

ASHLEY: Any questions about what I just read? No? Okay, well—let’s move on, then. Today we’re very lucky to have a lesson from Sister Molly Young, 2nd counselor in our Relief Society presidency.

The white sisters have clearly put the letter behind them; many of the African American sisters, however, talk in questioning tones to one another.

ASHLEY: Now, let’s give our full attention to Sister Young, as I know she has a very special lesson prepared for us today.

Ashley returns to her seat. Molly approaches the podium, nervous and clutching a basket from which she sets the following on the table: the wedding picture of her and Jack in front of the Salt Lake City Temple, the Book of Remembrance and a bottle of Super Glue. She arranges her notes on the podium for a long moment before beginning.

MOLLY: Good afternoon, sisters.

She looks down and adjusts her notes, her hands shaking, then looks out again at the women.

MOLLY: I haven’t gotten used to teaching in Relief Society yet, and I must admit I’m still a little nervous.

She laughs. The white women nod, encouragingly. Molly looks at them, heartened, and looks over the African American women, who are still talking. Her gaze trails back to the white women—they make eye contact, they nod, they engage with her as she talks.

MOLLY: It seems like everyone’s really far away today.

She points at the front rows.

MOLLY: I know, why doesn’t everyone scoot up a few rows? That way I can tell myself I’m just talking to you, instead of at you.

Molly laughs again. Nobody moves. She motions to the white women, who rustle around for a few seconds and move forward, semi-willingly. A few African American sisters move up and take the white sister’s seats. Molly gestures at the others, resulting in a few more moving up. Aina and Deja stay in the back row. Molly smiles at them.
MOLLY: Come on, you two, no reason to sequester yourselves back in the corner!

_Aina and Deja say nothing, just staring back at Molly._

MOLLY: Wouldn’t you like to join everyone else?

AINA: I ain’t movin’. I’m comfortable here.

MOLLY: Oh... oh, well, okay. Then. Ah, is everyone else comfortable, then?

_She looks out at the rest of the room, embarrassed, then shifts her notes again, trying to gather herself._

MOLLY: Well, okay. Um, well, like Ash—uh, Sister Hansen said, I’ve worked really hard on our lesson today, and I...

_She shifts her notes again, then stops and takes a deep breath. Deja raises her hand, but Molly continues without seeing her._

MOLLY: I hope that as we get into it we can all feel the Spirit. So. Today’s lesson is on temples, and I’d like to start off by—

DEJA: ‘Scuse me?

_Molly looks around until she spots Deja._

MOLLY: Ah, yes?

DEJA: Yeah, can I axe you a question?

MOLLY: Uh... sure, but I haven’t really gotten started—

DEJA: I mean about what that lady over there just read?

_Deja points at Ashley. Molly looks uncertainly to Ashley, then back to Deja. She’s nervous enough about giving her prepared lesson, and does not want to answer any questions about that letter._

MOLLY (doubtful): Oh, um, I guess. What’s your question?

DEJA: What that lady read, well, who wrote it?

MOLLY: That letter was from the First Presidency.
DEJA: The what?

MOLLY: The First Presidency of our church—our prophet and his two counselors. They’re the leaders of our church.

*Deja nods slowly. Molly waits just a second, then, relieved Deja doesn’t push it further, continues with her lesson.*

MOLLY: Okay? Great, so what I was saying earlier, I’d like for us to start off the lesson with—

*Deja raises her hand again.*

DEJA: ’Scuse me.

MOLLY (in dread): Ye-es?

DEJA: And that letter she read, from the prophet, what exactly did it say?

*While Molly speaks, the white sisters nod in agreement; the African American sisters listen in confusion.*

MOLLY: The letter? *(looks over to Ashley, who gives an encouraging nod)* Well, it just said…it, uh, talked about the…the sanctity of chastity. And, well, the importance of…of families, which actually relates to what we’ll be talking about in our lesson today—

LYDIA: I thought it said that if a woman gets pregnant and she ain’t married, then she should get married.

DEJA (to Molly): Is that true?

MOLLY: Ye-es, generally speaking. If that’s a possibility.

DEJA: But what if it ain’t?

MOLLY: Well, in that case, our church leaders have counseled that it’s best to put that baby up for adoption, so that it can have a family with two parents—

DEJA: But what they need a daddy for? I think my babies a lot better off without any of they daddies, tell you the truth.
The African American sisters nod and murmur in agreement. One pipes up, “Yeah, you don’t need no man.” Another, “That’s right, I’m my babies’ mama and daddy.”

MOLLY: Yes, exactly! If a child’s going to be born into a situation where it won’t be able to have two loving parents, then it should go to a home where—

DEJA: So I’m supposed to give my babies away, just because their daddies are no good?

MOLLY: No, no! That’s not what the letter said, it—

DEJA: What did it say, then? I heard it say if the parents ain’t gettin’ married, then they need to give the baby up.

MOLLY: Well, that’s true—

DEJA (rising): Then that’s what this church believes? That I need to go give my babies up for adoption?

MOLLY (at her wit’s end): No! Hold on, maybe we should read it again—

AINA (to Molly): Child, ain’t you listen to it when it was read? (to Deja) That letter didn’t say nothin’ about the kids you already got—that’s in the past. My three babies, they in my past, and you know I ain’t givin’ them up to nobody. I’m their mama, and that’s how it be.

The African American sisters nod and let out a few hearty “amen, sister’s.”

AINA: This letter talking about now. Now, and in the future. Like your daughter there. Aina points to the baby Deja holds.

AINA: If she were to get pregnant—

DEJA: Oh you know that ain’t happenin,’”cause as soon as she starts flowin,’ I’m takin’ her to get on the shot.

A few African American sisters nod; the white sisters react with raised eyebrows and shaking heads. Molly looks horrified. She glances at Ashley before breaking in.

MOLLY (looking over to Ashley): Well, actually, um, I don’t think the Church really supports teenagers going on birth control—
DEJA: They what? You outta your mind? Kids these days, they start havin' sex at 10, 12 years old!

The white sisters react in shock; the African American sisters nod their heads, muttering things like, “Ain’t that a shame,” “Uh-huh, you know that right.”

MOLLY (stunned): Ten! That’s...wow, that’s really young.

*Molly turns to Ashley for help.*

MOLLY: I think maybe we should—

*Putting the pieces together, Deja continues over Molly, directing her comments at the African American sisters in the back.*

DEJA: So they not supposed to go on birth control, but then when they get pregnant, they supposed to give they baby up? *(to Molly)* To who, you?

MOLLY: No, see, they’re not supposed to be having...er, sexual relations. That’s the point of chastity.

*Deja—and many of the African American sisters—look at her, blank.*

MOLLY: You know, waiting until you’re married before you...before you have sexual relations.

The white sisters agree. After a pause, Deja laughs and is joined by many of the African American sisters.

DEJA: You outta your mind! Nobody waiting ‘til they married before they do the deed. Not today, no how.

MOLLY: Yes, yes they do!

*More laughter.*

MOLLY: I did!

The other white sisters nod, some saying, “Yeah, I did,” “Me too,” and so on. The African American sisters look at them in various states of disbelief, skepticism and incredulity. Deja stops laughing and studies Molly for a moment.
DEJA: Yeah. I guess that’s the difference between you and me. That letter ain’t got nothin’ to do with me. I don’t know nobody that waits until they married.

*Molly starts to answer, then stops, not knowing what to say. Aina looks from Molly to Deja.*

AINA: That ain’t true, D.

DEJA: Yeah it is!

AINA: No it ain’t. Look at me.

DEJA (laughing again): You, Aina? You ain’t married when you had any of them babies of yours.

AINA: No, I wasn’t. I wasn’t doing any of the stuff we talk about here. Me and Lydia, we was smoking crack every day. Every day. And when the missionaries got to that Word of Wisdom discussion, I looked at her (points at Lydia) and said, “You know we gotta stop doing this, right?”

*Lydia nods.*

LYDIA: She sure did.

AINA: I did. And we both stopped. Had me a no good man stinkin’ up my house, told him to get out. Gettin’ rid of the man was easier than getting rid of all the rest. But I did it, all of it. Threw out my drugs, threw out my liquor. Stopped smoking.

LYDIA: Most of the time

AINA: Long enough to get baptized.

*They laugh. The white sisters look concerned.*

ASHLEY: But you’re trying to stop again, Aina.

AINA: Yeah, I’m givin’ that last vice up for good. Again.

DEJA: But Aina, you still wasn’t married when you had them babies.

AINA: That’s what I’m sayin,’ Deja. Those babies, those drugs, those everything—all them choices, they in our pasts. We can’t do nothin’ about them now, we got to make do.
Agreement from both white and African American sisters.

AINA: But what we do now, what we do in the future—that’s what that letter talkin’ about. Ain’t nobody in this room gonna deny that a good father would sure be nice to have around, for all our babies. We ain’t got that. But we can try to teach our babies to want that. To demand that. For their babies.

Some African American sisters nod. A few look unconvinced. All white sisters agree.

DEJA: They don’t stand a chance.

AINA: Maybe they don’t, D. But then, maybe they do.

Molly studies both the women, thinking. Lights out.

Scene Four

Morning. Few months before the opening scene. A series of doors stretch across the stage. A street sign reads “Venable” on the corner.

Elder Smith and Elder Whittaker, dressed in dark suits, white shirts, ties and nametags approach the first door, scriptures in hand. Elder Smith wears a backpack. As Elder Smith talks, it becomes clear that Elder Whittaker’s had about all he can take of Elder Smith.

ELDER SMITH: Oh my heck, I can’t believe I’m really going tracting. This is it! I’ve spent my whole life preparing for this day, Elder, and now I’m really doing it! It’s almost unreal, isn’t it, Elder?

ELDER WHITTAKER: Uh-huh.

ELDER SMITH: Three weeks in the MTC, and now I’m finally here, I’m a missionary! Don’t get me wrong, the MTC was great, but they don’t call it the missionary training center for nothing, you know? All that talking and learning, and not any doing—just thousands of missionaries, learning how to spread the gospel. But now I’m here, and I’m going tracting! Can you feel the energy, Elder?

ELDER WHITTAKER: Uh-huh.

ELDER SMITH: ‘Course, it’s probably old hat to you by now, huh Elder? You’ve been out here, what, almost a year now, right? Tracting’s probably just part of your daily routine by now, huh?
ELDER WHITTAKER: Uh-huh.

ELDER SMITH: But you remember your first day out, though, right? Feeling like you’ve finally arrived, after all those primary songs, all those youth firesides, all those bishop’s interviews, all that saving and now, bam! Here you are, living what you’ve been looking forward to for nineteen years. You remember that day?

ELDER WHITTAKER: Uh-huh.

ELDER SMITH: It’s a great feeling, Elder, just awesome! I feel like I could convert the entire city of Richmond, right here, right now! Oh wait, hold on. Before we knock, do you think you could take a picture of me, standing in front of my very first door? My girlfriend, back home in Idaho—she scrapbooks.

_Elder Smith pulls out an enormous camera from his backpack and hands it to Elder Whittaker, who looks at him with an “are you kidding?” face but takes the camera. He unscrews the lens cap, which falls unnoticed to the ground. Elder Smith poses in front of the door, grinning and pointing._

ELDER SMITH: Just push the silver button, on top.

_Elder Whittaker takes the snapshot. Elder Smith takes the camera and puts it back in his bag._

ELDER SMITH: Great, just great, this is awesome! Thanks, Elder Whittaker!

ELDER WHITTAKER: Uh-huh.

ELDER SMITH: Okay, ready? Do you mind if I—you know, knock? I mean, you’re senior companion, so if you want to take charge, that’s cool. I can watch and learn…whatever you think is best.

ELDER WHITTAKER: No, go ahead, Elder. Be my guest.

ELDER SMITH: Aw, you’re the best, Elder! The absolute best! Okay, here I go…

_Elder Smith knocks three hard raps on the door. Rustling and footsteps sound from behind the door. The missionaries wait. Elder Smith grins at Elder Whittaker, jostling and fidgeting with excitement. Elder Whittaker just smiles, knowingly._

_They wait another moment._
Elder Smith begins tapping his foot, looks at his watch, then knocks again, louder. They wait, then Elder Whittaker turns to leave. Elder Smith looks hopefully at the door, then at Elder Whittaker, then back to the door before turning and following his companion.

ELDER SMITH: Well, they’re probably at work, right? I mean, it’s still morning. That makes sense.

ELDER WHITTAKER: Uh-huh.

They approach the second door. Elder Smith raises his hand to knock, looks over at Elder Whittaker with a “do you mind?” look. Elder Whittaker gestures for him to continue. Elder Smith knocks, a bit louder and faster than the last house.

The door finally cracks open.

CONTACT 1: Who there?

Elder Smith clears his throat, squares his shoulders, leans into the crack and begins what’s obviously a rehearsed introduction.

ELDER SMITH: Hi, we’re representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and we have a special message we’d—

CONTACT 1: You representin’ who?

ELDER SMITH: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and we’d like to—

CONTACT 1: What church is that?

ELDER SMITH: Well, we’re commonly known as the Mormons, but we—

CONTACT 1: Mormons? What you doin’ here, boy?

ELDER SMITH: We’d like to share a special message about the importance of families and—

CONTACT 1: You mean white families, don’t you?

ELDER SMITH: No, I—

Contact 1 opens the door all the way.

CONTACT 1: Ain’t you the ones that don’t let blacks be members of your church?
ELDER SMITH: Oh no, sir, they've always been able to be members of our church, they just couldn't hold the priesthood for awhile, but since 1978 they can and—

CONTACT 1: Sounds the same to me, don't it?

_Contact1 slams the door in the missionaries' faces. Elder Whittaker turns, unsurprised, and walks to the next door. Elder Smith stands staring at the door._

ELDER WHITTAKER: C'mon, Elder.

ELDER SMITH: But I didn't even get to share my message!

ELDER WHITTAKER: Uh-huh.

_Elder Smith hesitates, then turns and follows Elder Whittaker, trying to laugh it off._

ELDER SMITH: Well, nobody said missionary work was easy, did they?

ELDER WHITTAKER: Nope.

ELDER SMITH: We just need to endure to the end, right elder?

ELDER WHITTAKER: Uh-huh.

_Elder Whittaker steps back, indicating the door._

ELDER SMITH: _Uh, maybe I should watch you this time._

_Elder Whittaker shrugs, steps forward and knocks. The door flies open, revealing CONTACT 2, a woman with plenty of cleavage. Loud music plays in the background. She sizes the missionaries up and down, scowling, as the missionaries make a concerted effort to avoid looking at her chest._

ELDER WHITTAKER: Uh, hi, we’re missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of—

CONTACT 2: I know who you are. You’re Mormon missionaries, aren’t you?

ELDER WHITTAKER: Yes, ma’am, and we’d like to share a message about families—

CONTACT 2: Where all y’all’s wives?

ELDER WHITTAKER: Ha, well—
ELDER SMITH (eager to contribute): Oh no, see, polygamy was banned from our church in 1890. Now if you’re a polygamist, you get excommunicated—

CONTACT 2: Well I saw a thing on tv about a bunch of polygamists in Utah. Isn’t that where your church is?

ELDER WHITTAKER: Our church is headquartered in Utah, yes, but—

ELDER SMITH: But we’re a worldwide church now! We have over 12 million members spread around the world.

_Elder Whittaker gives up, annoyed._

CONTACT 2: Well no wonder, with all those wives—I seen a man that had himself six wives, and one of them didn’t look more than but fourteen!

ELDER SMITH: Yes, but they weren’t members of our church—

CONTACT 2: Well they said they was Mormons!

_She slams the door in their faces. Elder Whittaker makes his way to the next door. Elder Smith follows, somewhat discouraged._

ELDER SMITH: Man, two for two! Rough start, huh?

ELDER WHITTAKER: Uh-huh.

ELDER SMITH: That’s okay, this next one will be golden, I can feel it!

ELDER WHITTAKER: Uh-huh. Your turn.

_Elder Smith knocks on the door. It opens to reveal a sweet-looking old woman who takes in the nametags and smiles. Elder Smith smiles broadly back, thinking he can finally share his message._

CONTACT 3: People who are going to hell shouldn’t smile. Now how can I help you, young man?

ELDER SMITH: Sorry?

CONTACT 3: That’s right, you should be sorry—desecrating the Lord’s name with your angels and golden Bibles. You’re leading astray good Christian people!
ELDER SMITH: But we are Christians!

CONTACT 3: No you’re not, you’re Mormons! And you’ll burn in hell for it!

_Elder Smith frantically tries to pull out his scriptures._

ELDER SMITH: No, listen, really, we believe in Jesus Christ, see—

_She shuts the door quietly._

_Elder Smith looks in amazement at the shut door. Elder Whittaker shrugs and turns down the path, whistling “Called to Serve.” Elder Smith follows slowly, dejected. They walk offstage in the opposite direction they entered. Lighting suggests the passing of day, in a different neighborhood._

_The elders walk back onstage looking a little worn—sweaty, suit jacket slung over Elder Whittaker’s shoulder, Elder Smith struggling to maintain an upbeat attitude. He looks at the door in front of them, reaches to knock, then stops._

ELDER SMITH: Elder Whittaker?

ELDER WHITTAKER: Uh-huh?

ELDER SMITH: Tracting is a lot harder than I thought it would be.

ELDER WHITTAKER: Yup.

_Elder Whittaker gestures at the door, as if saying, “be my guest.” Elder Smith steps up to the door, nodding his head and muttering in preparation._

_He knocks on the door, continuing to mutter. The door opens slowly, revealing LA TRELLE, a tiny thirteen year-old. Elder Smith launches into his speech at eye level before realizing half-way through that he needs to lower his gaze._

ELDER SMITH: Hi, we’re missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and we have a special message on—

_He looks down to La Trelle, who giggles._

ELDER SMITH: Eternal families. Would you like to know more?

LA TRELLE (to the inside of the apartment): Mama!
La Trelle runs away, leaving the door gaping open. The missionaries wait, and pretty soon AINA COX fills the doorframe. She sizes them up with suspicion.

AINA: You cops?

ELDER SMITH: Who, us? No, no, we’re—

AINA: ‘Cause I already told you I don’t know where he at. He ain’t been around here for over a week now, and he took everything with him—even my last food stamps.

ELDER SMITH: Oh, uh, we’re not cops, so don’t worry about that, but we’d like to—

AINA: Who you to say don’t worry about it, you ever try to feed three teenagers on government assistance?

ELDER SMITH: No, I can’t say that I have, Mrs…

AINA: Ms.

ELDER SMITH: Ms…

AINA: Who’d you say you were again?

_Elder Smith extends a hand._

ELDER SMITH: Hi, we’re missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. My name’s Elder Smith.

_Aina stares at his hand, then folds her arms across her chest and leans against the doorframe. Elder Smith turns to Elder Whittaker._

ELDER SMITH: And this, this here is Elder Whittaker.

_Elder Whittaker nods. Aina looks at him._

AINA: Why you both got the same name?

ELDER WHITTAKER: Actually, that’s not our name, it’s a special calling in our church, for missionaries.

_Aina’s son DAVIS pushes past her through the doorway, notices the missionaries, and turns back to Aina._
DAVIS: They botherin’ you?

AINA: Not yet, they ain’t.

_Elder Smith reaches out to shake Davis’ hand, big grin on his face._

ELDER SMITH: Hi, we’re missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints! My name’s Elder Smith…

_While Elder Smith speaks, Davis looks him up and down, looks back at Aina, then turns back and walks down the street._

AINA: Where you goin’?

DAVIS: Out.

AINA: Out where?

DAVIS: Just out!

AINA: You come back before dark, you hear? You got all that school work to do!

_Davis nods his head, but it’s clear he has no intentions of returning._

AINA: I’m serious, Davis, you come back early—no hangin’ around that JJ tonight, okay? You hear me?

DAVIS: ‘Night, Mama.

_Aina turns back to the missionaries, clearly upset. She reaches for a cigarette and lights it._

AINA: So what do you want?

ELDER SMITH: We’d like to share a special message about families, if you have a minute…do you have a minute?

AINA: I got until the end of this cigarette.

ELDER SMITH: Oh, sure, okay. That’s great—let me just get my—hold on a second—
Nervous now that he's finally able to share his message, Elder Smith drops his scriptures. A number of book marks and papers flutter out of them. Elder Smith looks at Elder Whittaker in despair as he tries to gather them up. Elder Whittaker steps up and takes over. Aina smokes while he speaks, which causes Elder Smith to outdo himself trying to refrain from coughing audibly.

ELDER WHITTAKER: We believe that God is our loving Heavenly Father and that we are His children, a part of His family. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, God provided a way for us to live with Him again. The gospel of Jesus Christ helps families develop stronger relationships. Because families are ordained of God, they are the most important social unit in time and eternity. They can be a place of safety, peace and joy.

Aina laughs and shakes her head, rolling her eyes.

ELDER WHITTAKER: It's true! A family established on gospel principles will be a place where the Spirit of the Lord can—

Aina throws her cigarette on the ground and stubs it out with her foot.

AINA: I don't know where you boys are from, or why you're called "elders" when you look about my son's age, but you're both in need of a reality check. If there is a God, His spirit sure don't dwell here.

She turns to leave. Elder Smith looks at Elder Whittaker in desperation, who just shrugs—yet another rejection.

ELDER SMITH: Wait!

Aina turns back, irritated.

AINA: All I do is wait! Wait for the utilities man to come fix my gas leak, even though I already put in three work orders; wait for my lease to end so I can find a better neighborhood, wait for my welfare checks to come in so I can put food on the table; wait for my son's daddy to get out of prison so he can do his share of parenting for awhile; wait for my doctor to decide whether my asthma's bad enough I can get disability. Seems like all I do is wait and nothing comes of it, so tell me, Mr. Elder, what do you want me to wait for?

Elder Smith is completely overwhelmed by Aina's ranting—both by the tone of her voice and the content of her life. He turns to Elder Whittaker, stricken. Elder Whittaker looks at him with a "time to grow up" expression, then turns to Aina. There is a long pause as they size one another up.
ELDER WHITTAKER: Do you believe God loves you?

Aina looks at him for a few seconds, then turns and begins walking back to her door.

ELDER WHITTAKER: Do you?

AINA: Look around you, boy—does it look like He loves anyone here?

ELDER WHITTAKER: But do you believe God loves you?

Aina turns around again, angry.

AINA: Maybe I did once. Maybe I believed in the tooth fairy, the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus, too—

ELDER WHITTAKER: But you believed at one point in your life that God loves you?

AINA: What does it—

ELDER WHITTAKER: Did you ever pray that He would help you?

AINA (startled): What?

ELDER WHITTAKER: Did you ever, at some point in your life, pray that God would send you help?

AINA (laughing it off): Sure, but between you and me, I think the utilities man is more likely to—

ELDER WHITTAKER: Okay, so at some point in your life you believed God loves you. And you prayed that He would help you—maybe a long time ago, maybe more recent. Maybe even last night.

AINA: So?

ELDER WHITTAKER: So how do you know God didn’t send us?

AINA: What?

ELDER WHITTAKER (slowly): How do you know that we’re not God’s answer to your prayer?

Aina considers this idea skeptically, but considers it nonetheless.
ELDER WHITTAKER: You’ll never know unless you hear us out.

Aina deliberates in the doorway, looking at the two missionaries for a long moment. Finally she nods and opens the door, indicating with her head that they can enter.

Lights down.
End play.
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VITA

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