

AFTER THE DREAM

Written by

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Final Screenplay Draft

FADE IN:

EXT. LINCOLN MEMORIAL - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

A summer haze hangs over the National Mall.

The Reflecting Pool cuts a silver path through a sea of people. Signs rise above the crowd. Church fans wave. Children sit on shoulders. Veterans stand in uniform. Clergy, students, workers, mothers, fathers -- hundreds of thousands gathered under one brutal August sun.

SUPER: WASHINGTON, D.C. - AUGUST 28, 1963

At the top of the Lincoln Memorial steps, microphones crowd the podium.

Reporters check their notes. Photographers reload film. Television cameras hum.

Behind the podium, movement leaders stand shoulder to shoulder, tired but alert.

This is not just a speech.

This is a verdict waiting to be delivered.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., 34, steps to the microphones.

The crowd rises in waves of applause.

King waits.

Still.

Measured.

He places his papers on the podium. His fingers rest lightly on the pages. A bead of sweat slips down his temple.

From nearby, CORETTA SCOTT KING, 36, watches him.

Proud.

Afraid.

She knows the public face. She also knows the private cost.

The applause softens. Then fades.

A hush spreads across the Mall.

King looks out over the crowd.

Thousands of faces stare back at him. Hopeful. Wounded. Expectant.

He begins.

His words are not heard clearly. Only the rhythm. The cadence. The force of a preacher carrying a nation's contradiction in his chest.

In the crowd, an ELDERLY WOMAN closes her eyes.

A YOUNG GIRL grips her mother's dress.

A BLACK VETERAN lowers his head.

A WHITE COLLEGE STUDENT stops fanning himself and listens.

King's voice builds.

The crowd leans into it.

Coretta studies his face. She sees what others miss. This moment is lifting him and consuming him at the same time.

King glances down at his prepared pages.

Then he looks up.

Something changes.

The words no longer come from the paper.

They come from somewhere deeper.

The crowd feels it immediately.

A man near the front removes his hat.

A woman presses a hand to her mouth.

The Mall seems to hold its breath.

King speaks of a future only faith can see.

The applause rises, then settles, then rises again.

For one impossible moment, America appears capable of becoming what it promised.

The roar of the crowd swells --

And slowly becomes --

The low RUMBLE of a bus engine.

EXT. ATLANTA STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

A city bus rolls through segregated Atlanta.

INT. CITY BUS - ATLANTA - DAY - FLASHBACK

YOUNG MARTIN, 6, sits beside MARTIN LUTHER KING SR., 34, broad-shouldered, dignified, dressed in his Sunday suit despite the heat.

Young Martin's shoes barely touch the floor.

He tries to sit like his father.

Straight-backed.

Serious.

The bus is divided by more than rows.

Young Martin watches passengers board. White passengers move one way. Black passengers move another.

He notices the signs. The glances. The rules no one has explained but everyone obeys.

A WHITE BUS DRIVER eyes them in the mirror.

Young Martin looks to his father.

King Sr. sits upright. No apology in him. No shame.

Young Martin straightens a little more.

Outside the window, Atlanta passes in fragments.

A clean storefront.

A side entrance.

A public fountain marked WHITE.

Another marked COLORED.

A park where children play behind an invisible wall.

Young Martin studies it all.

YOUNG MARTIN

Daddy?

King Sr. looks down.

KING SR.

Yes, son?

Young Martin points toward the window.

YOUNG MARTIN

How come everything got two names?

King Sr. follows his son's gaze.

A long beat.

KING SR.

Because some folks were taught a
lie.

Young Martin thinks on that.

YOUNG MARTIN

What lie?

King Sr. leans closer, his voice low.

KING SR.

That God made some people worth
more than others.

Young Martin looks around the bus.

YOUNG MARTIN

Do they believe that?

King Sr. looks forward.

KING SR.

Some do.

YOUNG MARTIN

Is it true?

King Sr. turns to him.

Firm.

Certain.

KING SR.

No.

Young Martin absorbs that.

A small answer.

A lifelong foundation.

EXT. ATLANTA STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

King Sr. and Young Martin walk hand in hand down the
sidewalk.

Young Martin keeps glancing at his father's stride, trying
to match it.

They pass a SHOE STORE.

Young Martin slows.

In the window, a pair of polished boys' shoes catches his
eye.

KING SR.

You like those?

Young Martin nods.

YOUNG MARTIN

They look fast.

King Sr. smiles.

KING SR.

Shoes don't make a man fast.

YOUNG MARTIN

They might help.

King Sr. laughs and opens the door.

INT. SHOE STORE - DAY - FLASHBACK

A bell JINGLES.

Cool air. Polished floor. Rows of shoes.

A WHITE CLERK looks up from the counter.

His smile vanishes by inches.

King Sr. notices. Says nothing.

Young Martin climbs into a chair near the front.

The clerk approaches.

WHITE CLERK

You'll have to move to the back.

King Sr. turns.

KING SR.

We're here to buy shoes.

WHITE CLERK

I can help you in the back.

Young Martin looks from the clerk to his father.

He does not understand the rule.

He understands the insult.

KING SR.

My son can try them on right here.

The clerk stiffens.

WHITE CLERK

Not in this store.

Silence.

The shoes in the window no longer look fast.

They look distant.

King Sr. looks at Young Martin.

KING SR.

Stand up, son.

Young Martin slides down from the chair.

King Sr. takes his hand.

They start for the door.

WHITE CLERK

Suit yourself.

King Sr. stops.

He turns back.

KING SR.

That is exactly what I intend to
do.

The clerk has no answer.

King Sr. opens the door.

EXT. ATLANTA STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

Father and son step back into the heat.

The door shuts behind them.

Young Martin looks up at his father.

YOUNG MARTIN

Daddy?

King Sr. keeps walking.

YOUNG MARTIN

How come we left?

King Sr. stops. Kneels to his son's level.

The city moves around them, but Young Martin sees only his
father.

KING SR.

Because no pair of shoes is worth
your dignity.

Young Martin tries to understand the word.

Dignity.

King Sr. places a hand on his shoulder.

KING SR.

Don't ever let another man tell
you where your worth begins or
ends.

Young Martin nods.

Small.

Serious.

Permanent.

The distant sound of applause begins to rise.

Not from the street.

From the future.

EXT. LINCOLN MEMORIAL - DAY

King stands at the podium.

The crowd is thunderous now.

His hand rises.

His voice carries across the Mall, but the words remain
beneath the roar of history.

Coretta watches him.

For a brief moment, the man at the podium and the boy
outside the shoe store seem to exist in the same breath.

The boy who was told to move.

The father who refused.

The man who now stands before a nation and refuses for
millions.

King looks over the crowd.

The applause surges.

CUT TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD:

AFTER THE DREAM

EXT. LINCOLN MEMORIAL - REAR STAGING AREA - DAY

The roar of the crowd continues behind the memorial.

Muffled now.

Distant.

King steps away from the podium and into a narrow corridor
of bodies. AIDES, ORGANIZERS, CLERGY, SECURITY, REPORTERS.

Hands reach for him.

Congratulations.

Blessings.

Questions.

Too many voices at once.

REPORTER #1

Dr. King, do you believe today
changes the country?

REPORTER #2

Was this the turning point?

REPORTER #3

What comes next?

King keeps moving.

He offers nods. Small smiles. A hand on a shoulder. A quiet
thank you.

But his eyes are elsewhere.

RALPH ABERNATHY, 37, stays close, clearing space without
making a scene.

RALPH

Give him room. Give him room now.

BAYARD RUSTIN, 51, focused and sharp, watches the crowd
behind them with the mind of a man already solving the next
problem.

BAYARD

Cars are waiting. We need to move
before this breaks loose.

Coretta reaches King's side.

For a moment, the chaos softens.

She touches his arm.

CORETTA

Martin.

King looks at her.

The smile he gives her is different. Smaller. Realer.

KING

You all right?

CORETTA

I was going to ask you that.

He almost laughs.

Almost.

Another wave of applause swells from the Mall.

King looks back toward it.

For a second, all those people are invisible. Only the sound remains.

RALPH

You shook the earth today.

King turns back.

KING

The earth has been shaking a long time.

A young AIDE pushes through with a stack of telegrams and notes.

AIDE

Dr. King, these came in already.
Some from churches. Some from
newspapers. One from Atlanta.

Ralph takes them before they can be shoved into King's hands.

RALPH

Later.

The aide hesitates.

AIDE

There are some threats too.

That lands.

Not dramatically.

Normally.

As if the word belongs in the day.

Coretta's face tightens.

King notices.

He gives the aide a gentle nod.

KING

Thank you.

The aide backs away.

A group of SUPPORTERS breaks through the line.

SUPPORTER

Dr. King! Dr. King! God bless you!

King turns to them.

A small BLACK BOY, 8, stands with his mother. He holds a folded program to his chest.

The boy stares at King as if he has stepped out of a Bible story.

King kneels to him.

KING

What's your name, son?

The boy looks up at his mother, nervous.

BOY

David.

KING

David. That is a strong name.

The boy smiles.

BOY

My mama said you made history.

King looks at the mother, then back to David.

KING

Your mama brought you here so you
could help make it.

The boy does not know what to do with that.

King offers his hand.

David shakes it.

Tiny hand inside King's.

Flashbulbs POP.

Security moves in again.

RALPH

Martin.

King releases the boy's hand.

KING

You listen to your mother, David.

BOY

Yes, sir.

King stands.

As he turns away, David's mother calls after him.

DAVID'S MOTHER

Don't let them stop you, Reverend.

King stops.

He turns back.

The mother's eyes are wet but fierce.

KING

No, ma'am.

A beat.

KING

But don't you let them stop you
either.

She nods.

King moves on.

EXT. LINCOLN MEMORIAL - SERVICE DRIVE - DAY

A line of cars waits behind the memorial.

Engines idle.

Police motorcycles stand ready.

The distant crowd remains a living thunder.

King, Coretta, Ralph, and Bayard reach the car.

Ralph opens the rear door.

Before King gets in, a WHITE REPORTER steps forward,
recorder in hand.

WHITE REPORTER

Dr. King, one more question.

Ralph blocks him.

RALPH

Not now.

KING

It's all right.

Ralph steps aside, unhappy.

The reporter raises the recorder.

WHITE REPORTER

After today, do you honestly
believe white America is ready to
change?

The question hangs in the heat.

Bayard watches King carefully.

Coretta does too.

King studies the reporter.

KING

Ready?

A beat.

KING

No.

The reporter blinks, surprised.

KING

But readiness has never been the
measure of justice.

The reporter lowers the recorder slightly.

King leans closer, not angry, not loud.

KING

A child does not ask whether the
darkness is ready before he
strikes a match.

The reporter has no follow-up.

King gets into the car.

INT. CAR - MOVING - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

The car pulls away from the memorial.

Through the rear window, the crowd recedes.

King sits beside Coretta. Ralph rides in front. Bayard
scans a folder, already working.

For the first time all day, no one is touching King.

No one is shouting his name.

No one is asking him to carry them.

Silence fills the car.

Then—

The police escort SIREN begins.

Soft at first.

Then sharper.

King watches people through the window. Some wave as the
car passes. Some run alongside for a few steps. Some simply
stand and watch history drive away.

Coretta looks at him.

CORETTA

You left the page.

King keeps his eyes outside.

KING

I know.

CORETTA

When?

KING

When the page became too small.

She accepts that.

A beat.

CORETTA

They heard you.

KING

Hearing is not the same as
changing.

Ralph turns from the front seat.

RALPH

For today, we can let hearing be
enough.

King gives him a tired smile.

KING

You always were generous with
miracles.

Ralph smiles back.

Bayard closes the folder.

BAYARD

There will be meetings tonight.
Press tomorrow. The administration
will want language. Labor wants
follow-up. The churches want
direction. Everybody will want a
piece of what happened out there.

KING

They should.

BAYARD

And the opposition will want
blood.

No one responds.

The siren wails.

King looks out the window again.

A white family stands on a corner.
A little WHITE BOY waves.
King lifts a hand.
The boy smiles.
The car passes.
King keeps watching him until he disappears.
The siren stretches into a high mechanical WHINE.
The sound bends.
Changes.
Becomes—
A child's LAUGHTER.

EXT. ATLANTA STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

Two boys run down a sidewalk.
YOUNG MARTIN, 6, and a WHITE BOY, 6, race past storefronts,
laughing hard enough to lose breath.
Young Martin clutches a small wooden toy airplane.
The White Boy reaches for it.

WHITE BOY
Let me fly it now!

YOUNG MARTIN
You crashed it last time!

WHITE BOY
That was wind!

YOUNG MARTIN
There wasn't no wind!

They tear around the corner and skid to a stop outside a
small STORE.

The White Boy's FATHER, 40s, stands in the doorway.
He watches them.
His face does not share their joy.

WHITE BOY
Daddy, Martin's got a plane!

Young Martin smiles proudly and holds it up.

YOUNG MARTIN

We made it go all the way from the
porch to the street.

The White Boy's father does not look at the plane.
He looks at Young Martin.

WHITE BOY'S FATHER

Go inside.

The White Boy freezes.

WHITE BOY

But Daddy--

WHITE BOY'S FATHER

Inside.

The boy looks at Young Martin, embarrassed.
Young Martin's smile fades.

WHITE BOY

I'll be right back.

The White Boy goes inside.

The father remains in the doorway.

Young Martin waits.

Still holding the plane.

WHITE BOY'S FATHER

You need to go on home.

YOUNG MARTIN

Yes, sir.

Young Martin does not move.

He looks past the man into the store.

YOUNG MARTIN

Can he come play after supper?

The father steps out, blocking the doorway.

WHITE BOY'S FATHER

No.

Young Martin looks up at him.

YOUNG MARTIN

Tomorrow?

The father's jaw tightens.

WHITE BOY'S FATHER

Not tomorrow.

Young Martin grips the plane.

YOUNG MARTIN

Did I do something wrong?

The father looks down the street, uncomfortable now.

WHITE BOY'S FATHER

You boys are going to different
schools.

Young Martin waits for the explanation to continue.

It does not.

YOUNG MARTIN

We can still play.

WHITE BOY'S FATHER

No. You can't.

A silence.

The kind that teaches more than words.

Young Martin looks toward the store window.

Inside, the White Boy watches from behind the glass.

Neither boy understands the wall.

Only that it has appeared.

WHITE BOY'S FATHER

Go home now.

Young Martin nods.

He turns and walks away.

Not crying.

Not yet.

Behind him, the White Boy presses his hand against the
window.

Young Martin looks back once.

The White Boy does not wave.

The father pulls the shade down.

Young Martin stands alone on the sidewalk, the toy airplane
hanging at his side.

The laughter is gone.

EXT. KING FAMILY HOME - ATLANTA - LATER - FLASHBACK

Young Martin sits on the front steps.

The wooden airplane rests beside him.

ALBERTA KING, 29, opens the door and finds him there.
She knows immediately something is wrong.

ALBERTA

M.L.?

Young Martin does not look up.
She sits beside him.

ALBERTA

What happened?

A long beat.

YOUNG MARTIN

He can't play with me anymore.
Alberta takes that in.
She does not rush.

ALBERTA

Who said that?

YOUNG MARTIN

His daddy.
Alberta closes her eyes for a brief moment.
Pain.
Then control.

YOUNG MARTIN

Did I do something bad?

ALBERTA

No, baby.

YOUNG MARTIN

Then how come?

Alberta chooses the truth, but wraps it in love.

ALBERTA

Because some people have been
taught to see color before they
see God's children.

Young Martin stares at the sidewalk.

YOUNG MARTIN

He was my friend.

ALBERTA

I know.

YOUNG MARTIN

Am I supposed to hate him now?

Alberta turns to him.

Firm, tender.

ALBERTA

No.

Young Martin looks at her.

YOUNG MARTIN

Why not?

ALBERTA

Because hate is too heavy for a
child to carry.

Young Martin's eyes fill.

ALBERTA

And it is too small for the man
you are going to become.

He does not understand all of it.

But the words enter him.

Alberta pulls him close.

He finally cries.

She holds him on the steps as the afternoon light softens
around them.

INT. CAR - MOVING - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

King watches the city pass.

His eyes are moist but clear.

Coretta sees it.

CORETTA

Martin?

He returns to the present.

KING

I was thinking about an old
friend.

CORETTA

From Atlanta?

King nods.

KING

From before I knew the world had
rules for friendship.

Coretta takes his hand.

The car turns a corner.

Ahead, the city opens.

Behind them, the crowd is gone.

But the sound of it remains.

FADE OUT.

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - SUNDAY MORNING

Morning light fills the house.

A softer world than Washington.

Toys on the floor. C

Here is the next scene, moving into the first night after
the March, where public victory collides with private
danger.

INT. WILLARD HOTEL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

A brass elevator opens.

King steps out with Coretta, Ralph, Bayard, and two AIDES.

The hallway is elegant. Quiet. Too quiet after the Mall.

A few GUESTS recognize King.

They whisper.

One man nods respectfully.

A woman clasps her hands as if resisting the urge to speak.

King offers a tired smile and keeps walking.

Ralph carries a stack of papers. Bayard carries a notebook
already filled with names, numbers, next steps.

Coretta watches King's pace.

Slower now.

The day has taken its payment.

INT. WILLARD HOTEL - KING'S ROOM - NIGHT

The door opens.

King enters first.

A modest room made smaller by flowers, telegrams,
newspapers, and messages.

The March already lives in headlines.

AIDE

These came from churches, unions,
colleges. Some from overseas.

Ralph drops another bundle of telegrams on the desk.

RALPH

And these are from people who
suddenly discovered they supported
us all along.

Bayard moves to the window and parts the curtain slightly.
He checks the street below.

CORETTA

Bayard.

BAYARD

Habit.

He lets the curtain fall.

King removes his suit jacket. Hangs it carefully over a
chair.

The ordinary gesture of an exhausted man.

Ralph opens a newspaper.

RALPH

They got a picture of you from the
side. Makes you look taller.

KING

That will please my father.

Coretta smiles.

For the first time, the room breathes.

A small laugh.

A brief human thing.

Then the PHONE RINGS.

Everyone looks at it.

One ring.

Two.

Three.

No one moves.

Aide reaches for it.

KING

I'll take it.

Coretta turns to him.

CORETTA

Martin.

KING

It may be someone from home.

He lifts the receiver.

KING

Hello?

Silence.

Then a voice, faint and ugly.

King's expression does not change.

The room understands immediately.

Coretta looks away.

Ralph's jaw tightens.

The voice continues. We do not hear the words.

Only the poison in the tone.

King listens.

Still.

Composed.

He hangs up.

A heavy silence.

RALPH

Same kind?

KING

Same kind.

AIDE

We can ask the desk to screen the
calls.

KING

They will find another way.

Coretta crosses to him.

CORETTA

You should not have to hear that tonight.

KING

No one should have to hear it any night.

He sits on the edge of the bed.

His exhaustion is no longer hidden.

Bayard picks up the newspaper and sets it aside.

BAYARD

Tomorrow they will call today a triumph. By next week, they will call us impatient again.

RALPH

By breakfast.

Bayard almost smiles.

King stares at the phone.

KING

A man can stand before thousands and speak of a better country, then come back to a room and hear the old one waiting on the line.

Coretta sits beside him.

CORETTA

Then do not let that be the last voice you hear tonight.

She takes his hand.

A beat.

The phone RINGS again.

No one moves.

RING.

RING.

Ralph steps toward it.

KING

No.

Ralph stops.

KING

Let it ring.

The phone continues.

The sound grows unbearable.

Then stops.

Silence.

A knock at the door.

Everyone freezes.

Aide moves toward it.

RALPH

Wait.

He looks through the peephole.

RALPH

It's Andy.

He opens the door.

ANDREW YOUNG, 31, enters, carrying coffee cups and a paper bag.

ANDREW

I come bearing dinner. Or what
this hotel claims is dinner.

The tension breaks by inches.

RALPH

You brought food?

ANDREW

Food is a generous word.

He sets the bag on the table.

ANDREW

But it is warm, and at this hour
that makes it Christian.

Coretta smiles.

King stands, grateful for the interruption.

KING

Andy, you may have just saved the
movement.

ANDREW

Again?

They gather around the small table.

Sandwiches. Coffee. Pie in wax paper.

Not enough plates.

No ceremony.

Just tired people eating because bodies must continue even when history does not pause.

INT. WILLARD HOTEL - KING'S ROOM - LATER

The food is mostly gone.

Ralph has loosened his tie.

Bayard writes in his notebook.

Andrew sits on the floor against the wall, coffee in hand.

Coretta reads a telegram.

King stands by the window, looking out at Washington.

CORETTA

This one is from a school in Ohio.

King turns.

CORETTA

The children wrote it together.

She reads, moved despite herself.

CORETTA

They say they watched part of the
march in class. They say they hope
one day all children can go to
school together.

A long quiet.

Andrew lowers his eyes.

RALPH

Children always understand before
adults find reasons not to.

King walks back from the window.

KING

Read it again.

Coretta looks at him.

KING

Please.

She reads it again.

Not loudly.

Just enough for the room.

King listens as if the words are water.

When she finishes, he nods.

KING

Keep that one.

CORETTA

I was going to.

The phone RINGS again.

This time, King does not look at it.

No one does.

They let it ring.

RING.

RING.

RING.

Andrew reaches into the paper bag.

ANDREW

Anybody want the last piece of
pie?

RALPH

What kind?

ANDREW

Hotel kind.

RALPH

That is not a kind.

ANDREW

Tonight it is.

Ralph takes it.

The phone stops.

Bayard closes his notebook.

BAYARD

We need rest. All of us.

RALPH

Rest is what other people do
between crises.

BAYARD

Then pretend.

Andrew rises.

ANDREW

I'll check the hall.

He moves to the door.

Coretta stands.

CORETTA
Martin needs sleep.

KING
Martin is in the room.

CORETTA
And Martin needs sleep.

Ralph gathers papers.

RALPH
She outranks all of us.

KING
Always has.

The others begin moving toward the door.

Ralph pauses beside King.

RALPH
You did good today.

King looks at him.

RALPH
I know you do not like hearing it
that plain, but you did.

KING
We did.

RALPH
No. Today, you carried it.

A beat.

RALPH
Tomorrow we carry it together
again.

King nods.

KING
Tomorrow.

Ralph exits with Bayard and Andrew.

The door closes.

Silence.

INT. WILLARD HOTEL - KING'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Only King and Coretta now.

The room changes.

Less leader.

More husband.

Coretta removes her earrings and sets them on the dresser.

King loosens his tie.

For a while, neither speaks.

CORETTA

The children would have been
proud.

King sits.

That hits him harder than the praise.

KING

I thought about them today.

CORETTA

I know.

KING

Yolanda would have asked why so
many people came.

Coretta smiles softly.

CORETTA

And Marty would have tried to
climb the statue.

King laughs quietly.

The laugh fades.

KING

I stood there looking at all those
people, and all I could think was,
I want our children to inherit
less fear than we did.

Coretta sits across from him.

CORETTA

They will.

King looks at her.

He wants to believe it.

CORETTA

Not because the country gives it
freely.

A beat.

CORETTA

Because you keep pulling it toward
its own promise.

King lowers his eyes.

KING

Sometimes I wonder what I am
pulling my family through.

Coretta does not answer quickly.

CORETTA

So do I.

That honesty lands.

King looks at her.

CORETTA

But I never wonder why.

The phone RINGS again.

This one startles them.

Coretta stares at it.

King does too.

He reaches for the receiver.

Coretta places her hand over his.

CORETTA

No.

The phone rings.

CORETTA

Not this one.

King lets his hand fall.

They sit together as it rings.

The sound fills the room.

RING.

RING.

RING.

Then silence.

King exhales.

Coretta takes his hand.

CORETTA

Come to bed.

King nods.

He rises.

INT. WILLARD HOTEL - KING'S ROOM - LATER

The room is dark.

Coretta sleeps.

King does not.

He lies awake, staring at the ceiling.

The city hums beyond the curtains.

His eyes are open.

Thinking.

Listening.

Carrying.

A distant SIREN passes outside.

Its sound bends into another memory.

A high, sharp sound.

A WOMAN'S VOICE.

INT. ATLANTA DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Martin, 8, stands near a counter with Alberta.

The store is busy.

White shoppers move freely. Black shoppers move carefully.

Young Martin studies a display of small toys while Alberta speaks quietly with a CLERK.

A WHITE WOMAN, 40s, brushes past.

Her foot catches Young Martin's shoe.

She stumbles.

WHITE WOMAN

Watch yourself.

Young Martin freezes.

YOUNG MARTIN

I'm sorry, ma'am.

The woman turns on him, anger searching for a target.

WHITE WOMAN

You stepped on me.

YOUNG MARTIN

I didn't mean--

The SLAP is sudden.

Sharp.

The store seems to stop.

Young Martin's cheek burns red.

Alberta turns.

For a moment, the mother in her nearly overrules everything else.

She steps between the woman and her son.

ALBERTA

Do not touch my child.

The white woman looks startled by the firmness.

WHITE WOMAN

He needs to learn his place.

Alberta's voice is low.

Dangerously calm.

ALBERTA

He has a place.

A beat.

ALBERTA

And it is not beneath you.

The clerk looks around, nervous.

CLERK

Maybe everyone should just calm
down.

Alberta does not take her eyes off the woman.

ALBERTA

We are calm.

That is what frightens the clerk.

Alberta takes Young Martin's hand.

ALBERTA

Come, baby.

They walk away.

Young Martin does not cry.

He touches his cheek.

Trying to understand how apology did not protect him.

EXT. ATLANTA SIDEWALK - DAY - FLASHBACK

Alberta and Young Martin exit the store.

The street noise rushes back.

Alberta kneels in front of him.

She examines his cheek.

Her eyes shine with anger and grief.

ALBERTA

Look at me.

Young Martin looks at her.

ALBERTA

What happened in there was wrong.

Young Martin nods.

ALBERTA

You did nothing to deserve it.

His lip trembles.

YOUNG MARTIN

I said sorry.

ALBERTA

I know.

YOUNG MARTIN

She hit me anyway.

Alberta pulls him close.

He finally cries into her shoulder.

She holds him tightly, but her eyes remain open.

Watching the world around them.

ALBERTA

Listen to me, M.L.

He tries to quiet himself.

ALBERTA

There will be people who mistake
your kindness for weakness.

She gently lifts his chin.

ALBERTA

Do not help them by believing it.

Young Martin wipes his eyes.

YOUNG MARTIN

What if I wanted to hit her back?

Alberta absorbs the honesty.

ALBERTA

Then you are human.

A beat.

ALBERTA

But being human is not the end of
what God asks from us.

Young Martin looks down.

ALBERTA

One day, you will be angry enough
to strike back.

She turns his face toward hers.

ALBERTA

On that day, you must choose
whether your hand will make the
world smaller or your voice will
make it larger.

Young Martin stares at her.

The lesson is too large for him.

But it enters.

INT. WILLARD HOTEL - KING'S ROOM - NIGHT

King lies awake.

His hand rests near his cheek, as if the memory still lives
there.

Coretta stirs beside him.

CORETTA

Martin?

KING

I'm here.

CORETTA

Sleep.

A beat.

KING

I'm trying.

She reaches for his hand without opening her eyes.

He takes it.

Outside, Washington settles into night.

King closes his eyes.

The phone remains silent.

For now.

FADE OUT.

King sits at the kitchen table in shirtsleeves, tie loosened. A cup of coffee cools beside him.

He reads notes from the March. Names. Calls. Promises. Threats.

From the next room, children laugh.

YOLANDA, 7, performs some grand imaginary sermon to MARTIN III, 5, who is more interested in a toy truck.

YOLANDA

You have to say amen.

MARTIN III

Amen.

YOLANDA

You didn't mean it.

MARTIN III

Amen.

Coretta enters carrying laundry. She watches them a moment. Smiles.

Then looks at King.

CORETTA

You have been reading the same page for ten minutes.

King looks up.

KING

It is an important page.

CORETTA

It is upside down.

King checks.

It is.

A tired smile.

KING

That may explain why I disagreed
with it.

Coretta sets the laundry down.

For a second, they are just husband and wife.

The phone RINGS.

The children keep playing.

King looks at the phone.

A shadow crosses his face.

Coretta sees it.

CORETTA

Let it ring once more.

It rings again.

King answers.

KING

Hello?

He listens.

His face changes before his body does.

Stillness first.

Then the slow draining of warmth.

CORETTA

Martin?

King raises a hand gently. Not now.

He listens.

The children's laughter continues in the other room.

A terrible contrast.

KING

When?

A beat.

KING

How many?

Coretta grips the back of a chair.

King closes his eyes.

KING

Dear God.

The children stop playing.

They sense the shift.

Yolanda appears in the doorway.

YOLANDA

Daddy?

King turns away slightly, holding himself together.

KING

I understand.

He listens again.

KING

Call Ralph. Call Fred. Tell them I
am coming.

He hangs up.

Silence.

Coretta does not ask yet.

She already knows it is bad.

KING

Birmingham.

The word lands like smoke entering the room.

KING

Sixteenth Street Baptist.

Coretta's hand goes to her mouth.

KING

A bomb.

The children stare.

Too young for the words.

Old enough for the fear.

CORETTA

Children?

King nods.

He cannot say the number.

Not with his own children standing there.

Yolanda moves closer.

YOLANDA

What happened?

King looks at her.

There is no fatherly way to explain hatred.

CORETTA

Yoki, take your brother to the
living room.

YOLANDA

But--

CORETTA

Now, baby.

Yolanda takes Martin III by the hand.

They go.

King remains at the table.

The notes from Washington lie in front of him.

Dreams on paper.

Blood in Birmingham.

Coretta sits across from him.

CORETTA

Who called?

KING

Andy.

A beat.

KING

He could barely speak.

Coretta reaches for his hand.

He lets her take it.

KING

A church, Coretta.

His voice almost breaks there.

KING

They bombed a church.

Coretta's eyes fill.

KING

Little girls getting ready for
worship.

He stands abruptly.

The chair SCRAPES the floor.
He moves to the window.
Outside, Atlanta is quiet. Sunday ordinary.
A neighbor waters flowers.
A car passes slowly.
Somewhere far away, church bells ring.

KING

They tell us to wait.

Coretta watches him.

KING

They tell us not to push too hard.
Not to move too fast. Not to stir
anger.

He turns back.

KING

Anger was already there. It was
waiting in dynamite.

The church bells continue.
Their sound begins to change.
Deeper.
Older.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - ATLANTA - DAY - FLASHBACK

A packed sanctuary.
Sunlight through stained glass. Wooden pews. Hand fans.
Sunday hats. Children trying to sit still.
YOUNG MARTIN, 9, sits beside Alberta.
He watches his father at the pulpit.
KING SR. stands above the congregation, voice full, body
alive with conviction.
Not performing.
Believing.
The congregation answers him.
AMEN.
YES, LORD.

PREACH.

Young Martin studies the rhythm of
it.

The call.

The response.

The way words can move through people and make them sit
taller.

Alberta sings from the choir.

Her voice rises above the others, clear and warm.

Young Martin looks from his mother to his father.

The church is not just a building.

It is shelter.

It is school.

It is family.

It is power.

King Sr. grips the pulpit.

KING SR.

The world may tell you where to
sit. It may tell you where to
walk. It may tell you which door
to use.

Young Martin leans forward.

KING SR.

But when you stand before God, no
man can put a sign over your soul.

The congregation rises in agreement.

Young Martin watches faces around him.

Old faces.

Young faces.

Tired faces.

Faces made new by the sound of truth.

He looks at the stained glass.

Colored light falls across his hands.

He opens and closes his fingers in it.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - LATER - FLASHBACK

Service has ended.

The sanctuary empties slowly.

Young Martin stands near the pulpit, running his hand along the carved wood.

King Sr. approaches.

KING SR.

Careful with that.

Young Martin pulls his hand back.

YOUNG MARTIN

Yes, sir.

King Sr. sees the boy's curiosity.

KING SR.

You like it up here?

Young Martin looks out at the empty pews.

YOUNG MARTIN

Everybody listens when you stand here.

King Sr. smiles faintly.

KING SR.

Some listen.

YOUNG MARTIN

It feels strong.

King Sr. considers that.

KING SR.

The pulpit is not strong.

He taps the wood.

KING SR.

This is just oak.

Young Martin looks confused.

KING SR.

The strength comes from what a man is willing to tell the truth about.

Young Martin looks out again.

YOUNG MARTIN

Were you scared?

KING SR.

Today?

Young Martin nods.

King Sr. sits on the edge of the platform.

KING SR.

Sometimes.

That surprises Young Martin.

YOUNG MARTIN

You don't look scared.

KING SR.

A man can be scared and still
stand.

Young Martin absorbs that.

KING SR.

Courage is not the absence of
fear, M.L.

A beat.

KING SR.

It is deciding fear does not get
to preach the sermon.

Young Martin looks at the pulpit.

Then at his father.

The church bell RINGS.

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - SUNDAY MORNING

The church bell becomes the phone RINGING again.

King turns from the window.

Coretta answers this time.

CORETTA

Hello?

She listens.

Looks at King.

CORETTA

Yes. He knows.

She holds the receiver out.

CORETTA

Ralph.

King takes it.

KING

Ralph.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. RALPH ABERNATHY'S OFFICE - DAY

Ralph stands with a phone pressed to his ear. He looks shaken and angry.

RALPH

They are saying four girls.

King closes his eyes.

RALPH

Maybe more wounded. The whole city
is boiling.

KING

Fred?

RALPH

Alive. Furious. Calling everyone.

KING

We go.

RALPH

I figured.

KING

Not for cameras.

RALPH

No.

KING

For the families.

A beat.

RALPH

Martin.

King waits.

RALPH

This is going to tear people
apart.

KING

It should.

Ralph says nothing.

KING

Some wounds have to be seen before
they can be healed.

RALPH

And if people do not want healing?

King looks toward the living room, where his children sit
quietly now.

KING

Then we will have to want it for
them until they are ashamed of
refusing it.

Ralph breathes out.

RALPH

I will make the calls.

KING

Thank you.

King hangs up.

Coretta stands near him.

For a moment neither speaks.

Then Yolanda appears again in the doorway.

YOLANDA

Daddy?

King turns.

YOLANDA

Did bad people hurt children?

Coretta closes her eyes.

King crosses to his daughter and kneels.

KING

Yes.

Yolanda's eyes fill.

YOLANDA

Why?

King takes her small hands.

KING

Because hate makes people forget
what a child is.

Yolanda looks toward her brother.

YOLANDA

Can they hurt us?

The question strikes him.

He looks at Coretta.

Then back to his daughter.

He wants to promise safety.

He cannot.

KING

Your mother and I will do
everything we can to protect you.

YOLANDA

But can they?

A long beat.

KING

Yes.

Truth.

Gentle, but truth.

Yolanda starts to cry.

King pulls her close.

Coretta gathers Martin III into her arms.

The four of them hold together in the kitchen.

Outside, Sunday continues.

Inside, history has entered the house.

INT. KING BEDROOM - LATER

King changes into a dark suit.

Coretta stands near the bed.

A suitcase lies open.

CORETTA

How long?

KING

I do not know.

She folds a shirt and places it inside.

CORETTA

You need to eat before you go.

KING

I cannot.

CORETTA

Then take something with you and pretend.

He nods.

A beat.

CORETTA

Martin.

He looks at her.

CORETTA

When you stand in that church, do not carry this alone.

King looks down.

KING

It happened in the house of God.

CORETTA

Then let God carry some of it.

He nods, but the weight remains.

Coretta crosses to him.

CORETTA

They need the pastor today.

A beat.

CORETTA

Not the monument.

King looks at her.

She touches his face.

CORETTA

The pastor.

King leans into her hand.

KING

I know.

But he does not know if he can separate the two anymore.

EXT. KING HOME - DAY

A car waits at the curb.

Ralph sits in the passenger seat.

Andrew stands beside the open rear door.
King exits the house carrying his suitcase.
Coretta follows with the children.
Yolanda clings to King one last time.

YOLANDA
Come back soon.

KING
I will try.

YOLANDA
Promise?

King kneels.
He cannot lie to her.

KING
I promise I will try with
everything I have.

She accepts what she can.
King hugs Martin III, then Coretta.
For a moment, he does not let go.

CORETTA
Go.

He pulls back.
Gets into the car.
The door closes.

INT. CAR - MOVING - ATLANTA - DAY

King sits in the back.
Ralph turns to him.

RALPH
You ready?

King looks out the window.
Churches pass.
Families in Sunday clothes.
Children on sidewalks.

KING
No.

A beat.

KING

But readiness has never been the
requirement.

The car moves through Atlanta.

Toward Birmingham.

Toward smoke.

Toward mourning.

FADE OUT.

EXT. BIRMINGHAM STREET - DAY

A car moves through Birmingham.

Slow.

Not because of traffic.

Because the city itself feels wounded.

Black residents gather on sidewalks. Some stare. Some
whisper. Some simply watch the car pass.

White police officers stand near intersections, hands on
belts, faces unreadable.

A church bell tolls somewhere in the distance.

INT. CAR - MOVING - BIRMINGHAM - DAY

King sits in the back beside Ralph.

Andrew drives.

None of them speaks.

King looks through the window.

A little girl in a Sunday dress stands on a porch, holding
her mother's hand.

She is the age the dead girls were.

King looks away.

RALPH

Fred said the families are
waiting.

King nods.

ANDREW

Press is everywhere too.

King does not respond.

RALPH

Martin.

King looks at him.

RALPH

You do not owe the cameras
anything today.

KING

I know.

RALPH

I mean it.

KING

So do I.

The car turns.

EXT. SIXTEENTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

The church stands damaged but upright.

Windows blown out. Stone scarred. Debris swept into piles
that cannot hide what happened.

Police. Firemen. Reporters. Church members.

And grief.

Everywhere grief.

The car pulls up.

Andrew gets out first. Ralph follows.

King steps out.

The crowd quiets when they see him.

Not completely.

Grief has its own sound.

A woman sobs into a handkerchief. A man leans against a
wall, both fists pressed to the brick as if holding the
building up by force.

FRED SHUTTLESWORTH, 41, bruised by years of battle and
still standing, approaches King.

They embrace.

No words at first.

FRED

Thank you for coming.

KING

I wish there had been no reason.

Fred looks back at the church.

FRED

They hit the children this time.

King follows his gaze.

KING

They have always been hitting the children.

Fred looks at him.

King's eyes stay on the broken windows.

KING

This time the country may finally hear the glass.

A REPORTER moves closer.

REPORTER

Dr. King, can we get a statement?

Ralph steps in front of him.

RALPH

Not here.

REPORTER

The nation is watching.

Ralph's voice lowers.

RALPH

Then tell the nation to have some manners.

The reporter backs off.

Fred leads King toward the church entrance.

INT. SIXTEENTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

The sanctuary is dim.

Dust floats in shafts of light from broken windows.

Pews are damaged. Hymnals scattered. A woman kneels near the front, picking up torn pages as if they are pieces of a body.

King enters slowly.

Every step costs him.

He touches the back of a pew.

His fingers come away dusty.

A PASTOR stands near the pulpit, hollow-eyed.

PASTOR

Dr. King.

KING

Pastor.

They shake hands.

The pastor's grip trembles.

PASTOR

I keep thinking I should have
heard something.

KING

You were not meant to hear a man's
hatred before God did.

The pastor looks down, unable to hold himself together.

King places a hand on his shoulder.

Not as a leader.

As a fellow minister.

Across the room, a MOTHER, 30s, sits alone in a pew. Her
church hat rests in her lap. She stares at nothing.

Fred lowers his voice.

FRED

Her daughter was downstairs.

King looks at the mother.

A long beat.

Then he walks to her.

INT. SIXTEENTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH - PEW - CONTINUOUS

King sits beside the Mother.

He does not speak.

The Mother does not look at him.

For a while, they sit in the broken church together.

MOTHER

They said you spoke to all those
people in Washington.

KING

Yes, ma'am.

MOTHER

All those people.

KING

Yes, ma'am.

MOTHER

Did it help?

The question is not cruel.

It is worse.

It is honest.

King looks at the damaged sanctuary.

KING

Not enough.

The Mother nods slowly.

MOTHER

My baby had her Bible with her.

King closes his eyes.

MOTHER

She liked the red words best.

King swallows hard.

MOTHER

I told her to hurry. Told her she
was going to wrinkle her dress.

A small broken laugh escapes her.

MOTHER

That was the last thing I told
her.

King's hand tightens on the pew.

MOTHER

Not that I loved her.

King turns to her.

KING

She knew.

The Mother finally looks at him.

MOTHER

You don't know that.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

But I know children hear more love
than parents remember speaking.

The Mother stares at him.

Her face collapses.

She leans into him, sobbing.

King holds her.

Around them, the church remains broken.

INT. SIXTEENTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH - LATER

King stands near the pulpit with Ralph, Fred, Andrew, and the Pastor.

Several family members sit scattered through the sanctuary.

A few reporters linger at the back, respectful now or pretending to be.

The Pastor hands King a folded program.

PASTOR

The service is Wednesday.

King looks at the names.

Four names.

Four children.

The paper shakes almost imperceptibly in his hand.

RALPH

Martin.

King steadies it.

KING

I am all right.

FRED

No, you are not.

King looks up.

Fred does not soften it.

FRED

None of us are.

A beat.

KING

Then we will stand unsteady.

Fred nods.

The church bell TOLLS again.

The sound deepens.

Becomes the rhythmic CLACK of train tracks.

Then—

The GROAN of an old bus.

EXT. DUBLIN, GEORGIA - HIGH SCHOOL - DAY - FLASHBACK

A younger Martin, 14, exits a school building with his
TEACHER, MRS. BRADLEY, 40s, proud and composed.

Martin wears his best suit. He carries a small certificate.

He is trying not to smile too broadly.

Mrs. Bradley notices.

MRS. BRADLEY

You may smile, Martin. You earned
it.

TEEN MARTIN

I do not want to appear prideful.

MRS. BRADLEY

There is a difference between
pride and joy.

He allows himself a smile.

MRS. BRADLEY

There it is.

They walk toward a waiting bus.

MRS. BRADLEY

You spoke with conviction today.

TEEN MARTIN

I meant every word.

MRS. BRADLEY

That is why they believed you.

Teen Martin looks at the certificate.

TEEN MARTIN

The Constitution sounds beautiful
when you say it out loud.

Mrs. Bradley studies him.

MRS. BRADLEY

It does.

A beat.

MRS. BRADLEY

One day, this country will have to
decide if it only likes the sound
of its promises.

Teen Martin looks at her.

MRS. BRADLEY

Or if it means to keep them.

INT. BUS - GEORGIA ROAD - DAY - FLASHBACK

Teen Martin and Mrs. Bradley sit near the middle of the
bus.

The road hums beneath them.

Martin looks out the window, still glowing from the
contest.

He mouths a line from his speech silently, testing it
again.

The bus stops.

WHITE PASSENGERS board.

The DRIVER looks in the mirror.

Then back at Martin and Mrs. Bradley.

DRIVER

You two. Up.

Mrs. Bradley stiffens.

MRS. BRADLEY

We have seats.

DRIVER

Not anymore.

Teen Martin looks at the empty aisle.

Then at the new passengers.

TEEN MARTIN

Sir, we paid our fare.

The Driver turns in his seat.

DRIVER

Boy, I said get up.

The word hits harder than the order.

Teen Martin's face burns.

Mrs. Bradley touches his arm.

MRS. BRADLEY

Martin.

TEEN MARTIN

No, ma'am.

The bus goes silent.

DRIVER

What did you say?

Teen Martin stands, but not to move.

TEEN MARTIN

I said no, sir.

Mrs. Bradley rises quickly, trying to protect him.

MRS. BRADLEY

Martin, stand with me.

TEEN MARTIN

We should not have to.

MRS. BRADLEY

I know.

TEEN MARTIN

Then why are we moving?

Mrs. Bradley's eyes hold a lifetime of bitter calculation.

MRS. BRADLEY

Because I need to get you home
alive.

That silences him.

The Driver points to the aisle.

DRIVER

Stand in the back.

Mrs. Bradley gently takes Martin's certificate from his
hand and places it inside her purse.

MRS. BRADLEY

Come.

Teen Martin steps into the aisle.

A white man takes his seat without looking at him.

The bus lurches forward.

Teen Martin grabs the rail.

Mrs. Bradley stands beside him.

INT. BUS - LATER - FLASHBACK

The bus rattles down the road.

Teen Martin and Mrs. Bradley still stand.

His legs ache.

Sweat rolls down his neck.

White passengers sleep in the seats around them.

Teen Martin stares forward, jaw tight.

TEEN MARTIN

I spoke about freedom today.

Mrs. Bradley looks at him.

TEEN MARTIN

They applauded.

MRS. BRADLEY

Yes.

TEEN MARTIN

Then I had to stand.

MRS. BRADLEY

Yes.

His anger rises.

TEEN MARTIN

I have never been this angry.

Mrs. Bradley does not correct him.

MRS. BRADLEY

Remember it.

He looks at her, surprised.

MRS. BRADLEY

But do not worship it.

The bus hits a bump. They both steady themselves.

MRS. BRADLEY

Anger can wake a man up.

A beat.

MRS. BRADLEY

But it cannot be allowed to drive
him.

Teen Martin looks out the window.

Georgia passes by, beautiful and cruel.

TEEN MARTIN

Then what should drive him?

Mrs. Bradley considers him.

MRS. BRADLEY

Purpose.

Teen Martin grips the rail.

His knuckles pale.

The engine RUMBLES louder.

The sound becomes the church bell again.

INT. SIXTEENTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

King stands in the damaged sanctuary.

His hand rests on the pulpit.

Ralph watches him.

RALPH

Where did you go?

KING

Back to a bus.

Ralph understands without needing more.

King looks at the four names on the program.

KING

I thought anger was heavy then.

A beat.

KING

I was wrong.

Fred steps closer.

FRED

What do we say to them?

King looks toward the pew where the grieving Mother sits.

KING

We say their daughters mattered
before the nation paid attention.

The Pastor bows his head.

KING

We say the bomb did not make them
symbols. God already made them
sacred.

Ralph's eyes fill.

KING

And we say that if America is
going to mourn them, then America
must also answer for the world
that killed them.

Fred nods.

FRED

That will make people
uncomfortable.

King looks at the broken windows.

KING

Good.

He folds the program carefully and places it inside his
jacket pocket.

EXT. SIXTEENTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

King exits the church.

Reporters surge again, but more cautiously.

REPORTER

Dr. King, will you call for calm?

King stops.

Turns.

The street quiets.

KING

I will call for courage.

Pens rise.

KING

Calm without justice is only
silence with a better reputation.

The reporters scribble.

KING

This city does not need quiet
today. It needs conscience.

He moves past them.

Ralph and Andrew follow.

Fred remains near the church door, watching King go.

INT. CAR - BIRMINGHAM - DAY

King gets into the back seat.
Ralph beside him.
Andrew starts the engine.
No one speaks as the car pulls away.
King looks back at the church through the rear window.
Four little girls.
A broken sanctuary.
A country still asking for patience.

RALPH

Wednesday will be hard.

King watches the church shrink behind them.

KING

It should be.

The car turns the corner.

The church disappears.

FADE OUT.

INT. BIRMINGHAM CHURCH - DAY

A sanctuary filled beyond capacity.
People stand along the walls. In the aisles. Near the doors. Anywhere grief leaves room.
Women fan themselves with funeral programs.
Men stare forward, hats in their hands.
Children sit pressed against their mothers, too quiet for children.
At the front, FLOWERS surround small framed photographs of the girls.
The room carries a sound deeper than weeping.
A community trying not to break.
King sits near the pulpit with Ralph, Fred, Andrew, and local clergy.
His eyes move across the families.
Mothers.
Fathers.

Sisters.

Brothers.

Faces emptied by loss.

A CHOIR begins to sing.

Soft at first.

Then stronger.

The congregation joins, not because they feel strong, but because the song gives their pain somewhere to go.

King lowers his head.

His hands clasped.

His knuckles tense.

Beside him, Ralph watches the families.

RALPH

They should not have to be this
brave.

King does not look up.

KING

No.

The hymn ends.

A silence follows.

The PASTOR approaches the pulpit.

He grips both sides before speaking.

PASTOR

We are gathered today in sorrow,
but not in defeat.

His voice nearly fails.

He gathers himself.

PASTOR

We are gathered to honor children
who woke up for church and entered
eternity before the sermon began.

A wave of grief moves through the sanctuary.

The Pastor looks to King.

PASTOR

Dr. King.

King rises.

The movement is simple.

The room changes.

Not healed.

Focused.

King steps to the pulpit.

He places his notes before him.

Then looks at the families.

He does not speak right away.

He lets the silence remain human.

KING

There are days when words feel too
small for the work we ask of them.

A mother in the front row presses a handkerchief to her
mouth.

KING

There are wounds so deep that even
prayer must enter carefully.

King looks at the photographs.

KING

These children did not die because
they were in the wrong place.

A beat.

KING

They were in the house of God.

The congregation murmurs.

KING

They did not die because they were
careless. They did not die because
they were unprotected by love.
They were loved. They were
cherished. They were dressed for
worship by hands that expected to
see them again.

A father closes his eyes.

KING

They died because hatred found a
doorway and called itself courage.

Silence.

KING

But hatred is not courage. Hatred
is cowardice wearing a loud voice.

A few AMENS.

King's voice strengthens, but never becomes performance.
Not today.

KING

The bomb that shattered this city
was placed by men who believed
they could frighten a people back
into silence.

He scans the room.

KING

They do not know this people.

A low, wounded response rises.

KING

They do not know mothers who bury
daughters and still find the
strength to stand. They do not
know fathers who tremble with
grief and still refuse to
surrender their dignity. They do
not know children who will ask
tomorrow why the world is cruel
and who must be answered with
enough truth to make them strong,
but not so much bitterness that it
poisons them.

Ralph looks down.

King grips the pulpit.

KING

If America mourns these girls only
with flowers, then America has not
mourned them.

That lands.

KING

If America mourns them only with
headlines, then America has not
mourned them.

A beat.

KING

The only worthy memorial is
justice.

The congregation stirs.

KING

Justice in the schoolhouse.
Justice in the voting booth.
Justice in the courthouse. Justice
at the lunch counter. Justice in
the heart of every man who has
mistaken another child of God for
something less than himself.

The room answers now.

AMEN.

YES.

King looks back to the families.

KING

To the mothers and fathers, I will
not insult your pain by telling
you this is easy to understand.

His voice softens.

KING

It is not.

A mother breaks.

KING

I will not tell you not to grieve.

A beat.

KING

Grief is love with nowhere to
place its hands.

The sanctuary goes still.

KING

So let it weep. Let it speak. Let
it rise. But do not let anyone
tell you that grief makes you
weak.

King's own eyes shine.

KING

Today, this city sees your tears.

A beat.

KING

One day, this nation will have to
answer to them.

The congregation rises slowly.

Not in applause.

In witness.

King lowers his head.

The choir begins again.

INT. BIRMINGHAM CHURCH - SIDE ROOM - LATER

The sound of the congregation is muffled through the wall.

King stands alone near a small window.

Outside, police cars line the street.

Reporters wait beyond barricades.

Inside this room, only stillness.

King removes his glasses.

Wipes his eyes.

The door opens.

Fred enters.

He closes it behind him.

For a moment, neither man speaks.

FRED

They needed that.

KING

No.

King looks at him.

KING

They needed their children.

Fred accepts the correction.

He moves beside King.

FRED

The city is angry.

KING

It should be.

FRED

Angry people do not always wait
for instructions.

KING

I would not ask them to be un-
angry.

FRED

But you will ask them not to
strike back.

King turns from the window.

KING

I will ask them not to become what
struck them.

Fred looks at him, hard.

FRED

That is a heavy thing to ask a
father standing over his child's
grave.

KING

I know.

FRED

Do you?

The question is sharp.

King absorbs it.

Fred regrets it almost immediately, but does not take it
back.

King steps closer.

KING

Every time I leave my house, my
children watch me go as if they
are trying to memorize me.

Fred's face softens.

KING

Every phone call after midnight
teaches them fear. Every threat
teaches Coretta how to listen for
death in a man's voice.

A beat.

KING

So yes, Fred. I know something of
what hate asks from a family.

Fred looks away.

FRED

Forgive me.

KING

No need.

They stand in shared exhaustion.

FRED

Washington feels far away today.

KING

It was always far away from
Birmingham.

Fred nods.

FRED

What now?

King looks out at the reporters.

KING

Now they will ask for calm.

FRED

And?

KING

We will give them conscience.

INT. BIRMINGHAM CHURCH - HALLWAY - DAY

King and Fred step into the hallway.

Families move slowly past them.

A GRANDMOTHER, 60s, stops before King.

Her face is lined with grief and years.

GRANDMOTHER

Reverend King?

KING

Yes, ma'am.

She takes his hand with both of hers.

GRANDMOTHER

I heard you in Washington.

King lowers his head slightly.

GRANDMOTHER

I wanted to believe it.

A beat.

GRANDMOTHER

I still want to.

King looks at her.

KING

Then hold on to that want.

GRANDMOTHER

Wanting gets tired.

KING

I know.

GRANDMOTHER

What do we do when wanting gets
tired?

King considers her.

KING

We let somebody else carry it for
a while.

Her eyes fill.

KING

Today, let us carry it.

She nods.

The smallest relief.

She moves on.

King watches her go.

The hallway begins to blur.

The black dresses.

The white gloves.

The flowers.

The smell of old wood and perfume.

It becomes another hallway.

INT. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE - HALLWAY - DAY - FLASHBACK

TEEN MARTIN, 15, walks through a college hallway carrying
books.

He is young among older students.

Too young to hide it completely.

Laughter spills from a classroom.

Footsteps echo.

A poster on the wall announces a lecture by DR. BENJAMIN MAYS.

Teen Martin pauses outside an open door.

Inside, DR. BENJAMIN MAYS, 50s, speaks to a small group of students.

Commanding. Precise. Warm beneath the rigor.

MAYS

An educated man who only seeks
comfort is not educated. He is
decorated.

The students listen.

Teen Martin moves closer.

MAYS

The mind is not a trophy case. It
is a tool.

Mays sees Teen Martin standing in the doorway.

MAYS

Mr. King.

Teen Martin straightens.

TEEN MARTIN

Yes, sir?

MAYS

Are you joining us or merely
inspecting the architecture?

A few students laugh.

Teen Martin enters, embarrassed but curious.

INT. MOREHOUSE CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS - FLASHBACK

Teen Martin takes a seat.

Mays studies him.

MAYS

Tell me, Mr. King. What is the
purpose of a preacher?

Teen Martin hesitates.

TEEN MARTIN

To save souls.

MAYS

Only souls?

Teen Martin thinks.

TEEN MARTIN

To teach the Word.

MAYS

Only words?

The class watches.

Teen Martin feels tested.

TEEN MARTIN

To lead people toward God.

Mays steps closer.

MAYS

And if people are being crushed on
the road?

Teen Martin has no quick answer.

MAYS

Does the preacher step over them
to reach heaven?

The room is silent.

Mays turns to the class.

MAYS

Religion that cannot see suffering
has closed its eyes and called the
darkness holy.

Teen Martin absorbs every word.

Mays looks back to him.

MAYS

Faith must have a spine, Mr. King.

A beat.

MAYS

And intellect must have a
conscience.

Teen Martin writes that down.

INT. MOREHOUSE CLASSROOM - LATER - FLASHBACK

The class has ended.
Students leave.
Teen Martin gathers his books slowly.
Mays approaches.

MAYS
You are younger than most.

TEEN MARTIN
Yes, sir.

MAYS
That can make a young man eager to
sound older than he is.

Teen Martin looks down, caught.

MAYS
Do not chase the sound of
maturity.

Teen Martin looks up.

MAYS
Chase the burden of it.

That lands.

TEEN MARTIN
How do I know what my burden is?

Mays considers him.

MAYS
What makes you unable to sleep?

Teen Martin does not answer.

MAYS
Start there.

A bell RINGS.

The sound becomes the murmur of the Birmingham church.

INT. BIRMINGHAM CHURCH - HALLWAY - DAY

King stands still.

Fred watches him.

FRED
Martin?

King returns to the present.

KING

I'm here.

FRED

Cars are ready.

King nods.

They move toward the exit.

EXT. BIRMINGHAM CHURCH - DAY

King steps outside.

Reporters surge.

Flashbulbs pop.

Police hold the line.

REPORTER #1

Dr. King, will you call for peace?

REPORTER #2

Do you blame Governor Wallace?

REPORTER #3

What do you say to people who want
revenge?

King stops.

The questions keep coming.

He raises one hand.

The noise lowers.

KING

Do not confuse peace with the
absence of noise.

The reporters lean in.

KING

A graveyard is quiet. That does
not make it just.

Pens scratch furiously.

KING

We will not answer murder with
murder. We will not answer hatred
by surrendering our souls to it.

A beat.

KING

But let no one mistake nonviolence
for obedience to evil.

The crowd behind the barricade murmurs.

KING

The dead do not ask us to be
quiet.

He looks back at the church.

KING

They ask us to be worthy of
remembering them.

The questions erupt again.

King moves through them.

Ralph and Andrew flank him.

INT. CAR - MOVING - BIRMINGHAM - DAY

King sits in the back.

Ralph beside him.

Andrew drives.

Outside, Birmingham passes in fragments.

Churches.

Police.

Children.

Broken glass.

Ralph looks at King.

RALPH

You gave them conscience.

King stares ahead.

KING

Conscience is a seed.

RALPH

And Birmingham?

King looks out at the city.

KING

Birmingham is hard ground.

The car continues.

EXT. BIRMINGHAM STREET - DAY

The car disappears into traffic.
Behind it, the church bells toll.

FADE OUT.

INT. SCLC OFFICE - ATLANTA - DAY

A cramped office alive with work.

Phones ring. Typewriters hammer. Papers stack faster than anyone can file them.

A wall calendar reads:

NOVEMBER 22, 1963

King sits at a conference table
with Ralph, Andrew, and DOROTHY
COTTON, 33, sharp-eyed and
organized, a folder open before
her.

Maps. Lists. Church contacts. Legal updates. Civil rights
bill notes.

The March is three months old.

Birmingham is still fresh.

The work has not slowed.

DOROTHY

If we want turnout in Mississippi,
we need churches confirmed before
Christmas. Not after.

ANDREW

Half those pastors are under
pressure already.

DOROTHY

Then we call the half who are
still answering the phone.

Ralph rubs his eyes.

RALPH

You make pressure sound like a
scheduling problem.

DOROTHY

Sometimes scheduling is how we
survive pressure.

King smiles faintly.

KING
Dorothy may have just explained
the movement.

The room almost laughs.

Almost.

A YOUNG STAFFER appears in the doorway.

Pale.

YOUNG STAFFER
Dr. King?

The room turns.

YOUNG STAFFER
They're saying the President's
been shot.

Silence.

The phones keep ringing.

The typewriters keep hammering in the outer office.

Inside the room, time stops.

RALPH
What?

YOUNG STAFFER
In Dallas.

King stands.

INT. SCLC OFFICE - OUTER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Everyone gathers around a small RADIO on a desk.

A SECRETARY adjusts the dial with trembling fingers.

Static.

Voices.

Confusion.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
--reports from Dallas remain
unclear at this hour--

Static cuts through.

King stands near the back, arms folded, face unreadable.

Ralph is beside him.

Dorothy covers her mouth with one hand.

Andrew leans forward as if proximity can force clarity.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

--the President was riding in a
motorcade when shots were fired--

A woman in the office begins to cry quietly.

No one tells her to stop.

RALPH

Dear Lord.

King lowers his eyes.

The radio continues.

Fragments.

Parkland Hospital.

Motorcade.

Shots.

Texas.

Then another voice breaks in.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

We have a bulletin. President
Kennedy died at approximately one
o'clock Central Standard Time.

No one moves.

The office, so full of purpose a minute ago, becomes a room
full of people trying to understand that history has just
changed shape.

Dorothy sits slowly.

Andrew turns away.

Ralph closes his eyes.

King remains standing.

Still.

Too still.

INT. SCLC OFFICE - KING'S OFFICE - LATER

The door is half closed.

The office outside is hushed now.

King sits behind his desk.

The radio plays low in the background.
Ralph enters with two cups of coffee.
He sets one near King.

RALPH
You should drink something.
King looks at it but does not touch it.

RALPH
Coretta called. She is with the
children.
King nods.

RALPH
She said to tell you they are
safe.

KING
Safe.
The word sits between them.

Ralph lowers himself into a chair.

RALPH
The bill may die with him.
King looks up.
Not shocked by the thought.
Already there.

RALPH
Or Johnson may use it.

KING
Maybe.

RALPH
You think he will?

KING
I think power grieves quickly when
power must continue.
Ralph lets that sit.

RALPH
And the country?
King looks toward the radio.

KING
The country will mourn him.

RALPH

It should.

KING

Yes.

A beat.

KING

But I wonder if it will learn from him.

Ralph studies him.

KING

A President is murdered and the nation stops.

Ralph hears the rest before King says it.

KING

Four little girls are murdered in Birmingham, and half the nation asks if we are moving too fast.

Ralph looks down.

KING

Medgar is murdered in his driveway. Children are beaten in the street. Men are dragged from buses. Homes are bombed.

A beat.

KING

And still, we are told to be patient.

RALPH

Martin.

KING

I am not refusing grief.

King softens.

KING

I am asking why some deaths are allowed to become national mirrors while others are treated as local weather.

Ralph has no answer.

The phone RINGS.

Both men look at it.

King answers.

KING

Hello?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - DAY

Coretta stands in the kitchen, phone pressed to her ear.

Children's voices are faint in the background.

CORETTA

I did not want you to hear my
voice through someone else today.

KING

How are the children?

CORETTA

Confused.

A beat.

CORETTA

Yoki asked if someone can kill a
President, who can they not kill?

King closes his eyes.

KING

What did you tell her?

CORETTA

That fear is not a place to live.

King absorbs that.

KING

That sounds like her mother.

Coretta gives a sad smile.

CORETTA

And then I locked the door.

King looks toward the office window.

KING

I am coming home soon.

CORETTA

Do what you need to do there
first.

KING

What I need is to be with you.

CORETTA

Then come home.

A beat.

CORETTA

But do not come home carrying the
whole country in your chest.

King almost smiles.

KING

I do not know where else to put
it.

Coretta is silent a moment.

CORETTA

Give some of it to God.

KING

I keep trying.

CORETTA

Try harder.

That breaks through. A small, tired laugh from him.

KING

Yes, ma'am.

CORETTA

I love you.

KING

I love you too.

He hangs up.

Ralph watches him.

RALPH

She always did know how to preach
without a pulpit.

KING

Better than most of us.

Ralph stands.

RALPH

I'll give you a minute.

King nods.

Ralph exits.

INT. SCLC OFFICE - KING'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

King is alone.

The radio plays softly.

Newsmen speak in solemn tones.

A nation stunned.

King rises and moves to the window.

Outside, Atlanta traffic passes as if ordinary life has not received the news.

A horn BLARES.

The sound stretches.

Becomes a FARM TRUCK ENGINE.

**EXT. SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT - TOBACCO FIELD - DAY -
FLASHBACK**

A wide tobacco field under a bright northern sky.

TEEN MARTIN, 15, works alongside other BLACK STUDENTS.

They are sweaty, tired, young.

But freer than they are used to feeling.

A WHITE FARM SUPERVISOR walks past, nods.

FARM SUPERVISOR

Afternoon, boys.

TEEN MARTIN

Afternoon, sir.

The supervisor moves on.

No insult. No threat. No demand that they become smaller.

Teen Martin watches him go.

Another student, WALTER, 16, grins at Martin.

WALTER

You look like you just saw Moses
part the Red Sea.

TEEN MARTIN

He called us boys without making
it sound like a sentence.

Walter laughs.

WALTER

Up here, you can breathe between
words.

Teen Martin looks across the field.
The sky feels impossibly open.

EXT. SIMSBURY MAIN STREET - EVENING - FLASHBACK

Teen Martin and several students walk down a clean, quiet street.

Storefronts glow. Families pass. A church bell rings in the distance.

They approach a small DINER.

Teen Martin slows.

WALTER

Come on.

TEEN MARTIN

We can go in the front?

Walter looks at him.

WALTER

Where else would we go?

Teen Martin says nothing.

INT. DINER - EVENING - FLASHBACK

The boys sit at a counter.

A WAITRESS pours water.

WAITRESS

What'll you have?

Teen Martin looks at the menu.

Then at the room.

White customers eat nearby.

No one stares.

No one tells him to move.

TEEN MARTIN

A hamburger, please.

WAITRESS

Fries?

TEEN MARTIN

Yes, ma'am.

She writes it down and moves on.

Teen Martin sits very still.

Walter notices.

WALTER
You all right?

TEEN MARTIN
I am sitting at a counter.

WALTER
That is generally how eating
works.

Teen Martin almost laughs.

TEEN MARTIN
Not where I am from.

Walter's smile fades.

Teen Martin looks at his reflection in the chrome napkin
holder.

For the first time, he sees himself in a public place
without a sign telling him what he is allowed to be.

INT. CHURCH - SIMSBURY - SUNDAY - FLASHBACK

A congregation sings.

Black and white worshippers sit under the same roof.

Teen Martin stands among them.

Hymnal open.

He is not fully singing.

He is watching.

Listening.

A white child smiles at him from the next pew.

Teen Martin smiles back.

No parent pulls the child away.

The hymn rises.

Teen Martin's face changes.

Something painful and beautiful enters him.

America is not one thing.

Which means the cruel version is a choice.

INT. TRAIN - DINING CAR - DAY - FLASHBACK

Teen Martin, dressed for travel, enters the dining car with
Walter and other students.

They are headed south.

A PORTER stops them discreetly.

PORTER

Not here.

Teen Martin looks at him.

TEEN MARTIN

Sir?

The Porter's face carries apology and fatigue.

PORTER

You boys need to sit behind the
curtain.

Teen Martin sees it now.

A curtain stretched across the car.

A soft piece of fabric doing hard work.

Walter's jaw tightens.

WALTER

We're paying passengers.

PORTER

I know.

TEEN MARTIN

We ate in restaurants up there.

The Porter looks at him.

PORTER

You're not up there anymore.

That lands.

The boys move behind the curtain.

INT. TRAIN - BEHIND CURTAIN - DAY - FLASHBACK

A smaller space.

Less light.

Teen Martin sits.

The curtain sways with the motion of the train.

On the other side, silverware clinks. Laughter rises.
America eats in comfort.

On this side, the boys sit in silence.

Walter stares at the table.

WALTER

Almost forgot.

TEEN MARTIN

I did not.

A beat.

TEEN MARTIN

But I hoped.

Walter looks at him.

Teen Martin stares at the curtain.

TEEN MARTIN

That may be worse.

The train rattles south.

The curtain moves back and forth.

Back and forth.

Like a flag for a country divided against itself.

INT. SCLC OFFICE - KING'S OFFICE - DAY

King stands at the window.

The curtain memory fades into the blinds of his office.

The radio continues.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

--Vice President Lyndon Johnson
has taken the oath of office--

King turns from the window.

Ralph stands in the doorway.

RALPH

Johnson has been sworn in.

King nods.

RALPH

World changed in an afternoon.

KING

No.

King moves to his desk.

KING

The world revealed how quickly it
can change when it decides
something matters.

Ralph steps inside.

RALPH

What do you want to do?

King looks at the civil rights bill notes on his desk.

Then at the radio.

Then at a photograph of his children.

KING

We send condolences.

Ralph nods.

KING

We pray for Mrs. Kennedy. For
their children. For the nation.

A beat.

KING

And then we work.

RALPH

Today?

King looks up.

KING

Especially today.

Ralph studies him.

KING

There will be men who say this is
not the time to press.

RALPH

There are always men saying that.

KING

Then we answer them early.

King picks up a pen.

KING

The President is dead. Justice is
not.

Ralph nods slowly.

RALPH

I'll get Dorothy.

King sits.

He begins to write.

The radio speaks of death.
King writes toward life.

FADE OUT.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - NIGHT

A room dressed for history.

Chandeliers glow. Cameras crowd the rear. Reporters pack shoulder to shoulder. Senators, congressmen, cabinet officials, civil rights leaders, clergy, and guests fill every available space.

The air is formal.

Victorious.

Uneasy.

SUPER: WHITE HOUSE - JULY 2, 1964

King stands among the invited guests with Ralph, Andrew, and Dorothy.

He wears a dark suit. His expression is composed, but not celebratory in the way people expect.

Ralph leans near him.

RALPH

You look like a man at a funeral.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

A birth.

Ralph studies him.

KING

Birth is painful too.

Across the room, PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON sits at a desk arranged for the signing.

Large. Commanding. A man aware of the weight of the moment and the cameras recording it.

Flashbulbs POP.

Johnson looks out over the room.

JOHNSON

Today, the law catches up with the
promise.

Applause.

Strong.

Polite.

Hungry for release.

King watches Johnson lift a pen.

The pen touches paper.

SCRATCHES across the page.

One stroke.

Then another.

Ink becoming law.

The room erupts.

Applause. Cameras. Reporters calling out.

Johnson signs with several pens, handing them away one by
one.

King remains still.

Dorothy notices.

DOROTHY

Dr. King?

KING

I am all right.

DOROTHY

I did not ask if you were all
right.

He looks at her.

DOROTHY

I asked if you were here.

That almost makes him smile.

KING

I am trying to be.

Johnson stands.

An aide guides him through a line of leaders.

Johnson reaches King.

The two men shake hands.

JOHNSON

Dr. King.

KING

Mr. President.

Johnson places one of the signing pens in King's hand.

JOHNSON

You earned one of these.

King looks at the pen.

Small.

Ordinary.

Heavy.

KING

Many people earned it who are not
here to hold it.

Johnson absorbs that.

JOHNSON

I know.

A beat.

JOHNSON

And there will be more work.

KING

There is always more work after
the country does what it should
have done before.

Johnson studies him, then gives a rough nod.

JOHNSON

Keep pushing.

KING

I intend to.

Johnson moves on.

Reporters surge toward King.

REPORTER #1

Dr. King, does this complete the
dream?

REPORTER #2

Is the movement satisfied tonight?

REPORTER #3

What do you say to those who
believe this is enough?

Ralph steps closer, ready to shield him.

King raises the pen slightly.

KING

This pen has written a necessary
sentence.

The reporters quiet.

KING

But justice is not a sentence. It
is a book America has only begun
to read.

Pens scratch.

KING

Tonight we thank God for progress.
Tomorrow we ask why progress
required so much blood to become
acceptable.

A hush.

KING

And the day after that, we
continue.

The reporters shout again.

King turns away.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

King walks with Ralph, Andrew, and Dorothy.

The celebration remains behind them, muffled by closed
doors.

Ralph exhales.

RALPH

A law, Martin.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

A real law.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

You could smile for more than
three seconds.

King stops near a window.

Outside, Washington glows.

KING

A law can tell a man he must open
a door.

He looks at the pen in his hand.

KING

It cannot make him glad to see you
enter.

Andrew steps closer.

ANDREW

But it gets you inside.

King nods.

KING

That is why tonight matters.

A beat.

KING

And why it is not enough.

Dorothy looks down the hallway toward the East Room.

DOROTHY

There are people in there who will
spend tomorrow congratulating
themselves for discovering our
humanity.

RALPH

Let them congratulate themselves.

Dorothy looks at him.

RALPH

For one night.

A rare softness settles.

Andrew points to the pen.

ANDREW

What will you do with it?

King rolls it between his fingers.

KING

Remember the difference between
ink and transformation.

The pen catches the light.

The light becomes the pale glow of a desk lamp.

**INT. CROZER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - DORM ROOM - NIGHT -
FLASHBACK**

A young KING, early 20s, sits at a small desk crowded with books.

The room is spare. Neat. Cold.

Rain taps against the window.

Open books surround him. Theology. Philosophy. Ethics.
Social thought.

A notebook sits beneath his hand.

He writes, then stops.

The pen hovers over the page.

On the bed, a fellow student, SAMUEL, 23, reads from a worn book, restless and skeptical.

SAMUEL

You keep circling the same idea.

YOUNG KING

Maybe the idea is circling me.

Samuel lowers the book.

SAMUEL

Love as a social force?

Young King looks up.

SAMUEL

It sounds beautiful in a sermon. I
am not convinced it survives a
billy club.

Young King leans back.

YOUNG KING

Then perhaps we have made love too
sentimental.

SAMUEL

What else is it?

Young King considers the question carefully.

YOUNG KING

Discipline.

Samuel waits.

YOUNG KING

Not affection. Not softness. Not
pretending evil is less evil than
it is.

He searches for the words.

YOUNG KING

A refusal to let the enemy
determine the condition of your
soul.

Samuel sits with that.

SAMUEL

And if the enemy does not care
about your soul?

YOUNG KING

Then he will care about his own
power.

Samuel almost laughs.

SAMUEL

Now that sounds less like love.

YOUNG KING

No. That is where love must become
organized.

Samuel studies him.

SAMUEL

Organized love?

Young King returns to his notebook.

YOUNG KING

Without organization, love is a
sentiment.

He writes.

YOUNG KING

With organization, it can become a
movement.

Samuel rises and crosses to the window.

Outside, rain streaks the glass.

SAMUEL

I think anger organizes faster.

Young King turns to him.

YOUNG KING

Yes.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

That is why it must not lead.

Samuel looks back.

YOUNG KING

Anger can gather men in a hurry.
But it does not always know where
to take them.

Samuel folds his arms.

SAMUEL

And love does?

Young King looks at the books around him.

YOUNG KING

Not by itself.

He taps the page.

YOUNG KING

It needs a mind. It needs
strategy. It needs sacrifice.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

It needs people willing to suffer
without surrendering their claim
on the humanity of those causing
the suffering.

Samuel shakes his head, not dismissive now.

Troubled.

SAMUEL

That is asking too much.

Young King's face darkens with honesty.

YOUNG KING

I know.

SAMUEL

Then why ask it?

Young King looks down at his hands.

YOUNG KING
Because hate asks more.

Silence.

Only rain.

**INT. CROZER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - CLASSROOM - DAY -
FLASHBACK**

Young King sits among white and Black students.

A PROFESSOR, 50s, writes on the board:

POWER

JUSTICE

LOVE
The Professor turns.

PROFESSOR
Gentlemen, power without love is
tyranny.

He underlines POWER.

PROFESSOR
Love without power is often
ignored.

He underlines LOVE.

PROFESSOR
The question for any moral leader
is not whether he prefers love or
power.

He faces them.

PROFESSOR
The question is whether he can
bring them into right
relationship.

Young King writes quickly.

Across the room, a WHITE STUDENT watches him with
curiosity.

PROFESSOR
Mr. King.

Young King looks up.

PROFESSOR

You are quiet today.

YOUNG KING

I am listening, sir.

PROFESSOR

Listening is what a man says when
he does not yet wish to be
responsible for speaking.

A few students smile.

Young King accepts the challenge.

YOUNG KING

Then I would say justice may be
the bridge.

PROFESSOR

Between?

YOUNG KING

Love and power.

The Professor gestures for him to continue.

Young King stands slowly.

YOUNG KING

Love tells us every person has
worth.

He glances around the room.

YOUNG KING

Power decides whether that worth
will be protected in the world as
it exists.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

Justice is love refusing to remain
private.

The room stills.

The Professor studies him.

PROFESSOR

That, Mr. King, is almost an
answer.

The class chuckles softly.

Young King sits.

But the words remain with him.

**INT. CROZER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - DORM ROOM - NIGHT -
FLASHBACK**

Young King writes in his notebook.

The page reads:

JUSTICE IS LOVE MADE PUBLIC.

He stares at the sentence.

Not satisfied.

He crosses out "PUBLIC."

Writes:

JUSTICE IS LOVE ORGANIZED.

He considers it.

Rain continues.

The sound of the rain becomes applause.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

King stands by the window, signing pen in hand.

Ralph watches him.

RALPH

Where did you go?

King looks at the pen.

KING

School.

RALPH

Learn anything useful?

King slips the pen into his jacket pocket.

KING

Not enough.

Ralph smiles faintly.

Dorothy approaches with Andrew.

DOROTHY

The press wants more from you.

KING

They already have more than they
need.

ANDREW

That has never stopped them.

A WHITE HOUSE AIDE hurries over.

WHITE HOUSE AIDE
Dr. King, the President would like
a photograph with several of the
leaders.

King looks back toward the East Room.

The celebration continues.

KING
Of course.

The aide leaves.

Ralph adjusts his tie.

RALPH
Smile this time.

KING
I smiled.

RALPH
You suggested the nation was
morally delayed.

KING
With warmth.

Andrew laughs.

For one brief second, they are men among friends.

Then King turns back toward the East Room.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - NIGHT

King re-enters the room.

Flashbulbs burst.

Johnson stands with leaders gathered around him.

King takes his place.

The photographer raises his camera.

PHOTOGRAPHER
Hold still.

Everyone fixes themselves into history.

A law signed.

A struggle continuing.

The flash goes off.

CUT TO:

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

Guests exit into the humid Washington night.

Reporters wait behind ropes.

King steps outside with Ralph, Andrew, and Dorothy.

A BLACK HOTEL WORKER, 50s, stands near the entrance, holding the door.

His uniform is crisp. His face careful.

As King passes, the worker speaks quietly.

HOTEL WORKER

Dr. King.

King stops.

KING

Yes, sir?

The worker glances at the White House behind them.

HOTEL WORKER

My wife cried when she heard.

King nods.

HOTEL WORKER

She said maybe now our boy can
walk into places with his head up.

King looks at him.

KING

What did you say?

The man tries to smile.

HOTEL WORKER

I told her he already does.

A beat.

HOTEL WORKER

But maybe now fewer folks will try
to push it down.

King extends his hand.

The worker hesitates, then shakes it.

KING

That is worth tonight.

The worker's eyes shine.

HOTEL WORKER

Yes, sir.

King releases his hand.

The group moves toward the car.

INT. CAR - WASHINGTON, D.C. - NIGHT

King sits in back.

The White House recedes behind them.

Ralph looks out one window. Andrew out the other. Dorothy reads notes by passing streetlights.

King takes the pen from his pocket.

Holds it.

DOROTHY

You are thinking about tomorrow.

KING

Aren't you?

DOROTHY

I am thinking we should be allowed to have tonight.

King looks at her.

DOROTHY

Not forever.

A beat.

DOROTHY

Just the ride.

King hears her.

He looks back at the pen.

Then out at the city.

KING

All right.

The car moves through Washington.

For a few blocks, no one speaks.

Not because there is nothing to say.

Because, for once, silence is not fear.

FADE OUT.

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - EARLY MORNING

Darkness before dawn.

The house is quiet.
A clock reads 5:42 A.M.
The phone RINGS.
Once.
Twice.
King opens his eyes.
Coretta stirs beside him.
The phone RINGS again.
King reaches for it.

KING

Hello?

He listens.
Still half in sleep.
Then awake.

CORETTA

Martin?

King sits up slowly.

KING

Yes, this is he.

Coretta turns on the bedside lamp.
King listens.
His face does not change at first. Then something moves
through him.
Not joy.
Disbelief.
Burden.

KING

I am deeply honored.

Coretta sits up now.

KING

Yes. Thank you.

A beat.

KING

Thank you very much.

He hangs up.

Silence.

Coretta watches him.

CORETTA

What is it?

King looks at the phone as if it might explain itself.

KING

Norway.

CORETTA

Norway?

KING

The Nobel Committee.

Coretta goes still.

King turns to her.

KING

They are awarding me the Peace
Prize.

Coretta absorbs it.

Then smiles.

Not large.

Not for cameras.

For him.

CORETTA

Martin.

He looks almost embarrassed.

KING

I thought it was a wrong number.

She laughs softly and covers her mouth, trying not to wake
the children.

Coretta reaches for him.

He lets her hold him.

For one moment, there is no movement. No threat. No camera.
No committee meeting. No angry caller.

Just husband and wife in the blue quiet before morning.

CORETTA

You hear me?

KING

Yes.

CORETTA

This is good.

He nods, but his eyes are elsewhere.

CORETTA

Martin.

He looks at her.

CORETTA

Let it be good for at least one
minute.

He breathes.

Tries.

KING

One minute.

She holds his face in her hands.

CORETTA

You are allowed.

The words almost break him.

From down the hall, a child calls out.

YOLANDA (O.S.)

Mama?

Coretta closes her eyes.

The minute is over.

INT. KING HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

Breakfast chaos.

Yolanda sits at the table, alert and curious. Martin III
pushes cereal around a bowl. DEXTER, 3, plays with a spoon.
BERNICE, an infant, rests nearby.

Coretta moves between stove and table.

King stands near the counter, tie half-done, phone pressed
to his ear.

KING

Yes, Ralph. I know.

He listens.

KING

No, I do not know what one wears
to receive peace.

Coretta looks over.

CORETTA

A clean shirt would be a
beginning.

King smiles.

Into phone:

KING

Coretta says a clean shirt.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. RALPH ABERNATHY'S OFFICE - MORNING

Ralph sits at his desk, grinning despite himself.

RALPH

Tell Coretta I said she deserves
half that prize for keeping you
dressed and alive.

INT. KING HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

King looks at Coretta.

KING

Ralph says congratulations.

CORETTA

That is not what Ralph said.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

But it is what he meant.

Yolanda looks up.

YOLANDA

Daddy got a prize?

King lowers the phone.

KING

Something like that.

YOLANDA

For what?

King considers the question.

KING

For trying to help people solve
problems without hurting each
other.

Martin III looks up.

MARTIN III

Did you win?

King crouches near him.

KING

A prize like this is not about
winning.

MARTIN III

Then why give it?

King smiles faintly.

KING

That is a very good question.

Into phone:

KING

Ralph, I have to go. The children
have opened a theological inquiry.

Ralph laughs over the line.

RALPH (V.O.)

I'll be there in thirty.

King hangs up.

Coretta sets a plate before him.

CORETTA

Eat.

KING

The calls will start.

CORETTA

They already did.

She points to the plate.

CORETTA

Eat anyway.

King obeys.

The phone RINGS.

Everyone looks at it.

King starts to stand.

Coretta points back to the chair.

CORETTA

No.

Yolanda jumps up.

YOLANDA

I can answer.

KING AND CORETTA

No.

Yolanda freezes.

A beat.

King softens.

KING

Not today, baby.

The phone rings again.

Coretta answers.

CORETTA

King residence.

She listens.

Her face tightens slightly.

KING

Who is it?

Coretta keeps her voice calm.

CORETTA

No, he is not available.

A beat.

CORETTA

You have a blessed morning.

She hangs up.

The room knows.

Even the children feel it.

King looks down at his plate.

KING

Even today.

CORETTA

Especially today.

A silence.

Then Dorothy Cotton appears at the back door with a folder under one arm and two newspapers in hand.

DOROTHY

I knocked, but history was ringing
too loud.

Coretta lets her in.

DOROTHY

Congratulations, Dr. King.

KING

Thank you, Dorothy.

She sets the newspapers down.

DOROTHY

Now, before the world starts
calling you the Prince of Peace,
Alabama still has counties where a
Black man needs courage, luck, and
divine intervention to register to
vote.

That lands.

King looks at her.

DOROTHY

Too soon?

Coretta hides a smile.

KING

No.

He stands.

KING

Exactly on time.

INT. KING HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATER

The house has become an office.

Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, and two staffers gather with King and Coretta.

Newspapers on the coffee table. Phones ringing. Notes being taken.

The headline reads:

KING WINS NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

Andrew holds a legal pad.

ANDREW

The press wants a statement.

RALPH

Churches want services.

DOROTHY

Students want to know what this means for the work.

KING

It means the work has a larger audience.

RALPH

It also means the opposition has a larger target.

Coretta looks at him.

Ralph regrets the bluntness, but not the truth.

KING

They had a target before Oslo.

A staffer enters from the hallway.

STAFFER

Dr. King, there is a call from Dallas, another from New York, and one from Selma.

The room shifts at Selma.

King notices.

KING

Who in Selma?

STAFFER

Reverend James Bevel.

Andrew and Dorothy exchange a look.

RALPH

Voting rights.

DOROTHY

It was always voting rights.

King moves to the phone.

Coretta watches him go.

The public honor has lasted less than an hour.

INT. KING HOME - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

King picks up the phone.

KING

This is Martin.

He listens.

The living room noise lowers behind him.

KING

How many turned away?

A beat.

KING

Arrested?

He closes his eyes.

KING

No. You were right to call.

Coretta appears at the edge of the hallway.

KING

A man cannot eat a Nobel medal. He cannot use it to mark a ballot. He cannot show it at a courthouse window and be treated like a citizen.

Coretta listens.

KING

Yes. We will talk.

He hangs up.

Coretta steps closer.

CORETTA

Selma?

KING

Yes.

CORETTA

Today?

KING

In some places, today is just Wednesday.

She looks at him.

CORETTA

You have not even packed for Norway.

KING

I know.

CORETTA

And you are already walking to
Alabama.

King says nothing.

Coretta studies him.

Not angry.

Not surprised.

Simply measuring the cost again.

CORETTA

When I met you, I knew you were
going somewhere.

A beat.

CORETTA

I did not know the road would keep
getting longer.

King looks at her.

The hallway light softens.

Her face becomes younger.

The house noise fades.

A phone ring becomes a piano note.

**INT. NEW ENGLAND CONSERVATORY - PRACTICE ROOM - BOSTON -
DAY - FLASHBACK**

A piano chord hangs in the air.

CORETTA SCOTT, 25, sits at the piano, poised and focused.

She sings a classical phrase with precision and warmth.

At the door, YOUNG KING, 23, watches, holding his hat.

He is nervous in a way he does not often allow people to
see.

Coretta finishes.

She notices him in the doorway.

CORETTA

Can I help you?

Young King smiles.

YOUNG KING

I believe I was hoping you could.

CORETTA

That sounds rehearsed.

YOUNG KING

Only partially.

She rises from the piano.

CORETTA

You are Martin.

YOUNG KING

I am.

CORETTA

My friend said you were a
preacher.

YOUNG KING

I try not to lead with that.

CORETTA

Why not?

YOUNG KING

It can make people expect either
too much or too little.

Coretta studies him.

CORETTA

Which do you prefer?

YOUNG KING

Enough.

She smiles despite herself.

CORETTA

That was better.

He steps inside.

YOUNG KING

You have a beautiful voice.

CORETTA

I know.

That stops him.

Then he laughs.

YOUNG KING

Good.

CORETTA

A woman should not have to pretend
not to know what she has worked
for.

Young King nods, impressed.

YOUNG KING

No, she should not.

Coretta closes the piano lid.

CORETTA

So, Martin, what do you want?

He takes that in.

The directness.

The challenge.

YOUNG KING

Today?

CORETTA

Start there.

YOUNG KING

A conversation.

CORETTA

And tomorrow?

Young King looks at her.

YOUNG KING

A life that means something.

Coretta's smile fades into seriousness.

CORETTA

Meaning something can be
expensive.

YOUNG KING

I suspect so.

CORETTA

No. Suspecting is not enough.

She crosses to gather her sheet music.

CORETTA

If you are looking for a woman to
stand quietly behind a man while
he becomes important, you should
save us both some time.

Young King watches her.

YOUNG KING

And if I am looking for someone to
stand beside me?

Coretta turns back.

CORETTA

Beside is a difficult place.

YOUNG KING

I know.

CORETTA

Do you?

A beat.

YOUNG KING

I would like to learn.

Coretta considers him.

Then picks up her coat.

CORETTA

There is a coffee shop around the
corner.

Young King brightens.

YOUNG KING

Then you will talk with me?

CORETTA

I will drink coffee near you.

She moves past him.

CORETTA

What happens after that depends on
whether you listen as well as you
speak.

Young King follows, smiling.

YOUNG KING

I have been told I speak well.

CORETTA

That was not my question.

He opens the door for her.

They exit.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - BOSTON - LATER - FLASHBACK

A small table near the window.
Coretta and Young King sit across from each other.
Two cups of coffee between them.
Snow falls lightly outside.

YOUNG KING
You believe music can change
people?

CORETTA
Music reaches places argument
cannot.

YOUNG KING
And politics?

CORETTA
Politics decides whether people
can live long enough to sing.

Young King lets that sit.

CORETTA
My family saw enough in Alabama to
teach me that beauty without
justice is decoration.

He looks at her with growing admiration.

YOUNG KING
You speak like a preacher.

CORETTA
No.

A beat.

CORETTA
I speak like a woman who has been
paying attention.

He smiles.

YOUNG KING
That may be the better sermon.

Coretta looks out at the snow.

CORETTA
I want a life of purpose too,
Martin.

She looks back.

CORETTA

But I will not disappear inside
yours.

Young King nods.

YOUNG KING

I would not ask you to.

CORETTA

Men ask for many things without
using words.

That lands.

Young King sits back.

Challenged.

Changed.

YOUNG KING

Then I will have to become careful
with more than speech.

Coretta studies him.

For the first time, she truly smiles.

The coffee shop noise fades.

The snow outside becomes Atlanta morning light.

INT. KING HOME - HALLWAY - DAY

King and Coretta stand facing each other.

The sounds of the living room return.

Phones. Voices. Urgency.

KING

I have not always listened as well
as I promised.

CORETTA

No.

A beat.

CORETTA

But you keep trying.

King takes her hand.

KING

I cannot walk this without you.

CORETTA

I know.

KING

That is not a burden I want to
place on you.

CORETTA

Martin, the burden arrived years
ago.

She squeezes his hand.

CORETTA

I chose you anyway.

For a moment, he has no words.

From the living room:

DOROTHY (O.S.)

Dr. King?

The work calls again.

Coretta releases his hand.

CORETTA

Go.

KING

Norway first.

CORETTA

Selma after.

King looks at her.

CORETTA

I know the road now.

INT. KING HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

King enters.

The room quiets.

Ralph holds up a newspaper.

RALPH

The world says you are a man of
peace.

King looks at the headline.

Then at the Selma notes in Dorothy's hand.

KING

Then we should show the world that
peace and pressure can walk
together.

Dorothy hands him the notes.

DOROTHY

There are people in Alabama who
have been trying to register for
years.

King reads.

ANDREW

Some beaten. Some fired. Some
threatened.

RALPH

Some killed.

King looks up.

The Nobel headline lies on the table.

Selma waits in his hand.

KING

A prize can honor the road behind
us.

A beat.

KING

It cannot replace the road ahead.

He folds the Selma notes and places them inside his jacket.

EXT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - DAY

Reporters gather at the curb now.

Flashbulbs pop as King steps onto the porch.

Coretta stands behind him in the doorway, the children
peeking around her.

REPORTER #1

Dr. King, how does it feel to win
the Nobel Peace Prize?

REPORTER #2

What will you say in Oslo?

REPORTER #3

Does this prove nonviolence has
succeeded?

King pauses.

The cameras wait.

KING

It proves the world is watching.

A beat.

KING

Success will come when a man does
not need international recognition
to receive ordinary citizenship in
his own county courthouse.

The reporters scribble.

KING

I accept the honor with gratitude.

He glances back at Coretta.

KING

But I accept it on behalf of those
whose names will never be printed
in a headline.

A beat.

KING

They are the ones who have kept
faith when faith was dangerous.

The questions erupt again.

King turns back toward the house.

Coretta meets his eyes.

She knows.

Norway may be calling.

But Selma has already entered the room.

FADE OUT.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - OSLO, NORWAY - MORNING

Gray winter light fills the room.

Snow presses softly against the window.

A neat hotel suite. Flowers. Formal invitations. Newspapers
in languages King cannot read. A tuxedo jacket hangs from a
wardrobe door.

King stands at the window in shirtsleeves, looking out at
Oslo.

Quiet streets.

Clean snow.

A city that feels very far from Birmingham, Atlanta, Washington, and Selma.

Coretta enters from the bedroom, elegant in a robe, fastening an earring.

She stops when she sees him.

CORETTA

You have been standing there a while.

KING

It is quiet here.

CORETTA

That is allowed.

KING

I know.

A beat.

KING

It feels borrowed.

Coretta crosses to him.

Outside, a small CHILD pulls a sled down the sidewalk. His father follows, laughing.

King watches them.

KING

No police dogs. No barricades. No courthouse steps.

CORETTA

Not from this window.

King turns to her.

She holds his gaze.

CORETTA

But every country has its shadows.

King nods.

KING

Today they will speak of peace as if it is a beautiful thing.

CORETTA

It is.

KING

Yes.

A beat.

KING

But beautiful things can be made
harmless if people only admire
them.

Coretta adjusts his collar.

CORETTA

Then do not let them.

A knock at the door.

Coretta moves to answer.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ralph enters with Andrew and Dorothy. All bundled in winter coats, carrying folders and newspapers.

RALPH

I have learned two things about
Norway.

KING

Only two?

RALPH

One, the air hurts my face. Two,
every reporter in Europe wants to
know if peace has finally worked.

ANDREW

They ask it like peace is a
machine you plug into the wall.

DOROTHY

And some of them think the prize
means America has solved its
problem.

King turns from the window.

KING

Then we will have to disappoint
them.

Ralph removes his gloves.

RALPH

Martin, today is not a sermon in
Alabama. It is a world stage.

KING

That sounds like a larger pulpit.

Dorothy gives him a look.

DOROTHY

You are impossible.

CORETTA

He is consistent.

Andrew places a folded telegram on the desk.

ANDREW

This came from Selma.

The room changes.

King looks at it.

No one moves.

Finally, King picks it up.

He reads.

The snow outside continues falling.

KING

More arrests.

DOROTHY

Yes.

KING

Teachers?

ANDREW

Some.

KING

Church people?

ANDREW

Yes.

Ralph watches King absorb it.

RALPH

There will be time to plan when we
get back.

King folds the telegram carefully.

KING

People are being denied time at
the courthouse window.

A beat.

KING

We should be careful how much of
it we spend celebrating.

Coretta steps closer.

CORETTA

Martin.

He looks at her.

CORETTA

Receive the honor. Do not worship
it. There is a difference.

King lets that settle.

Ralph nods.

RALPH

Listen to your wife. The Nobel
Committee is not your enemy today.

KING

I know.

DOROTHY

And the people back home need to
see you receive this. Not for
pride.

A beat.

DOROTHY

For proof.

King looks at her.

DOROTHY

Proof that the world can see
dignity where America keeps seeing
trouble.

That lands.

King places the telegram in his jacket pocket.

KING

Then let us make sure they know
whose dignity they are honoring.

INT. OSLO CEREMONIAL HALL - DAY

A grand room filled with dignitaries, officials,
journalists, and guests.

Formal. Polished. European.

The ceremony carries itself with careful gravity.

King sits beside Coretta.

Ralph, Andrew, and Dorothy sit nearby.

The NOBEL OFFICIAL speaks from a podium.

His words are formal and reverent, but we hear them only as fragments under the room's weight.

NOBEL OFFICIAL

...moral courage...

...nonviolent struggle...

...human dignity...

King listens.

Not flattered.

Burdened.

Coretta watches him more than the podium.

The official gestures toward King.

Applause rises.

King stands.

For a moment, the room blurs.

All those hands clapping.

All those faces.

King steps forward.

INT. OSLO CEREMONIAL HALL - PODIUM - CONTINUOUS

King reaches the podium.

He places his hands on either side.

The room quiets.

He looks out.

A global audience.

He speaks carefully.

Not as performance.

As witness.

KING

I accept this honor with
gratitude.

A beat.

KING

But I cannot accept it as mine
alone.

Coretta listens.

KING

No movement is carried by one man.
No march advances on one pair of
feet. No jail cell is filled by
one conscience.

The room is still.

KING

This prize belongs to the men and
women whose names are not printed
on programs. To those who walk
into danger without photographers.
To those who lose jobs, homes,
safety, and sometimes life itself
because they believe citizenship
should not be a privilege handed
out by fear.

Ralph looks down, moved despite himself.

KING

I come from a nation capable of
great promise and great
contradiction.

A few dignitaries shift.

KING

A nation that can send its ideals
around the world while denying
them at home. A nation that can
honor freedom in speeches and
resist it at the courthouse door.

King softens.

KING

But I have seen enough courage to
believe contradiction need not
have the final word.

The room leans in.

KING

Peace is not the absence of
tension. Peace is the presence of

justice strong enough to heal what
hatred has broken.

A beat.

KING

And justice must be organized. It
must be marched toward. It must be
legislated, defended, taught to
children, demanded from power, and
practiced in the private chambers
of the human heart.

Coretta's eyes shine.

KING

So I receive this prize not as a
crown, but as a call.

A beat.

KING

A call to continue.

The applause rises.

King remains still a moment.

Then steps back.

INT. OSLO CEREMONIAL HALL - LATER

The ceremony has ended.

Dignitaries move toward King. Handshakes. Congratulations.
Flashbulbs.

A EUROPEAN JOURNALIST approaches, notebook ready.

EUROPEAN JOURNALIST

Dr. King, do you believe this
prize will make your work easier?

King looks at him.

KING

No.

The journalist is surprised.

KING

It may make the world more
attentive.

A beat.

KING

Attention is not the same as ease.

Another REPORTER joins.

REPORTER

Does international recognition
pressure the American government?

KING

Governments are pressured by
conscience, by people, and by
circumstances they can no longer
manage.

REPORTER

And which is this?

King glances toward Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, Coretta.

Then back.

KING

We are working on all three.

A flashbulb POPS.

INT. OSLO BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

A formal dinner.

Crystal glasses. White tablecloths. Silverware arranged
with military precision.

King sits beside Coretta.

Around them, guests speak politely in low tones.

A WAITER serves food.

King barely touches his.

Coretta notices.

CORETTA

You are going to offend Norway.

KING

I am sure Norway has survived
worse.

She gives him a look.

He picks up his fork.

CORETTA

Thank you.

Across the table, a NORWEGIAN WOMAN, 60s, kind and formal,
leans toward King.

NORWEGIAN WOMAN

Dr. King, your country must be
very proud tonight.

King sets his fork down.

He chooses the gentlest truth.

KING

Some of it is.

The woman understands more than he expects.

NORWEGIAN WOMAN

Then perhaps the rest will learn.

KING

That is my prayer.

RALPH

And our schedule.

The woman smiles.

King gives Ralph a warning look.

Ralph shrugs.

A SERVER brings a small stack of telegrams to Dorothy, who
quietly scans them.

Her face changes.

King sees it.

KING

Dorothy?

She hesitates.

Too long.

DOROTHY

This can wait.

KING

If it could wait, your face would
not look that way.

She hands him one telegram.

King reads.

His jaw tightens.

CORETTA

What is it?

KING

Selma again.

He looks at Dorothy.

KING
Another attempt to register?

DOROTHY
Turned away.

KING
Arrests?

DOROTHY
Yes.

King folds the telegram.
The banquet continues around them.
Laughter. Toasts. Soft music.
King's mind is no longer in the room.

INT. OSLO BANQUET HALL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

King steps out of the banquet hall.
The door closes behind him, muffling the music.
He walks to a quiet window.
Snow falls under streetlights.
Coretta enters behind him.

CORETTA
You disappeared.

KING
I am standing right here.

CORETTA
No.

A beat.

CORETTA
You left before you stood up.

He looks out at the snow.

KING
They are being arrested for asking
to be citizens.

CORETTA
I know.

KING
And I am sitting under chandeliers
being called a man of peace.

CORETTA

Both things are true.

He turns to her.

KING

That is what troubles me.

Coretta steps close.

CORETTA

Martin, refusing joy will not free
them.

KING

I am not refusing joy.

She waits.

He exhales.

KING

Maybe I am.

CORETTA

You think if you let yourself feel
one good thing, it will betray the
suffering.

He says nothing.

CORETTA

It will not.

A beat.

CORETTA

The work is not made holier by you
denying every human comfort.

King looks down.

KING

You sound like you have been
saving that.

CORETTA

For years.

He almost smiles.

She takes his hand.

CORETTA

You are not a machine built to
carry sorrow.

KING

Some days I fear the movement
needs one.

CORETTA

Then it will have to find someone
else.

That breaks through.

A small laugh.

Then the weight returns.

KING

When we go home, Selma will be
waiting.

CORETTA

Yes.

KING

Voting rights.

CORETTA

Yes.

KING

More jail. More violence. More
funerals.

Coretta does not look away.

CORETTA

Possibly.

KING

And you still stand here?

She takes that in.

CORETTA

Martin, I stood here before Norway
noticed you.

A beat.

CORETTA

I will stand when Norway is done
applauding.

He holds her hand tighter.

The banquet door opens.

Andrew appears.

ANDREW

They are about to toast you.

King nods.

ANDREW

And Ralph is trying to explain
Southern politics to a prince.

Coretta closes her eyes.

CORETTA

That cannot be good.

ANDREW

It is educational for one of them.

King smiles.

For one rare moment, the burden loosens.

INT. OSLO BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

King and Coretta return.

Applause rises as they enter.

King takes his seat.

A toast begins.

He looks across the room.

Faces from every nation.

Then he looks at the telegram beside his plate.

Selma.

He folds it once more.

Places it inside his jacket beside the prize program.

Honor and unfinished work.

Side by side.

EXT. OSLO STREET - NIGHT

Snow falls over the city.

Quiet.

Clean.

Temporary.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - OSLO - LATE NIGHT

The room is dark except for a desk lamp.

Coretta sleeps in the bedroom.
King sits alone at the desk.
The Nobel medal rests nearby in its case.
Beside it: the Selma telegram.
King writes in a notebook.
He stops.
Looks at the medal.
Then at the telegram.
He closes the medal case.
Leaves the telegram open.
The wind taps snow against the window.
The word SELMA seems to hold more weight than the medal
beside it.
King reaches for his pen.
Stops.
The quiet Oslo room begins to fade.
The tapping snow becomes rain against old glass.

**INT. CROZER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - LIBRARY - NIGHT -
FLASHBACK**

Rain lashes the windows.
YOUNG KING, early 20s, sits alone at a long wooden table
surrounded by books.
The library is nearly empty.
A green-shaded lamp throws light across his notebook.
On the page are words written and crossed out.
LOVE.
POWER.
JUSTICE.

NONVIOLENCE.

Young King rubs his eyes.

He is tired, but his mind will not rest.
Across from him sits SAMUEL, 23, another seminarian, sharp
and skeptical, a stack of books under one arm.

SAMUEL
You are still here?

YOUNG KING
Apparently.

Samuel looks at the open books.

SAMUEL
Theology, philosophy, ethics.

A beat.

SAMUEL
You planning to save the world
before breakfast?

Young King almost smiles.

YOUNG KING
I am trying to understand why the
world resists saving.

Samuel sits.

SAMUEL
That is easy. People love power.

YOUNG KING
People also love justice.

SAMUEL
Not when justice asks them to give
something back.

Young King considers that.

Samuel notices the word NONVIOLENCE on the page.

SAMUEL
That is what has you awake?

Young King looks down.

YOUNG KING
Partly.

SAMUEL
You believe it?

YOUNG KING
I want to.

SAMUEL
That is not the same thing.

YOUNG KING
No.

Samuel leans forward.

SAMUEL

What happens when a man swings a club at your head? What happens when they bomb your house? What happens when they hurt your children?

The questions land harder than Samuel knows.

YOUNG KING

Then the temptation is to answer in the language he has chosen.

SAMUEL

And maybe he understands that language.

Young King looks up.

YOUNG KING

Maybe.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

But if I let my enemy choose my language, has he not already shaped my soul?

Samuel sits with that.

SAMUEL

You are talking like a preacher.

YOUNG KING

I am trying to talk like a man.

Samuel softens.

YOUNG KING

I do not think nonviolence means refusing to fight.

He searches for the words.

YOUNG KING

I think it means refusing to let hatred command the fight.

Samuel studies him.

SAMUEL

That sounds noble in a library.

YOUNG KING

Yes.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

That is what troubles me.

Young King looks around the quiet room.

YOUNG KING

Books do not spit on you. Books do
not call you boy. Books do not
drag you from a seat you paid for.

Samuel says nothing now.

Young King taps the notebook.

YOUNG KING

If this is only beautiful here,
then it is useless.

He looks back to Samuel.

YOUNG KING

It must be strong enough for the
street.

Samuel leans back.

SAMUEL

And if it is not?

Young King looks toward the rain-streaked window.

YOUNG KING

Then we have mistaken comfort for
conviction.

The rain beats harder.

Young King writes:

PEACE MUST BE STRONG ENOUGH FOR THE STREET.

He stares at the line.

Not satisfied.

He crosses out PEACE.

Writes:

LOVE MUST BE STRONG ENOUGH FOR THE STREET.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - OSLO - LATE NIGHT

King sits at the desk, older now.

Snow taps the window.
 The Selma telegram lies open.
 The Nobel medal case remains closed.
 King writes in his notebook.
 We do not see the words at first.
 Then:

PEACE MUST BE STRONG ENOUGH FOR
 SELMA.

He sets the pen down.
 Looks toward the bedroom where Coretta sleeps.
 Then back at the telegram.
 The world has given him a prize for peace.
 America has given him another battlefield.
 The tapping snow becomes a hard KNOCK.
 Then another.

INT. SELMA CHURCH BASEMENT - NIGHT

A crowded basement.
 Men and women sit on folding chairs. Some elderly. Some young. All tired.
 A BLACK FARMER, 50s, stands near a chalkboard with his hat in both hands.
 At the front, JAMES BEVEL, 28, intense and restless, addresses the room.

BEVEL
 They can close the courthouse
 door. They can change the rules.
 They can arrest a man for standing
 in line.

A beat.

BEVEL
 But they cannot make us stop
 wanting the ballot.

The room murmurs.

A YOUNG WOMAN raises her hand.

YOUNG WOMAN
 Wanting it ain't the problem.
 Living long enough to get it is.

Silence.

Bevel nods.

BEVEL

That is why we organize.

An ELDERLY MAN stands.

ELDERLY MAN

I went down there three times.

All eyes turn to him.

ELDERLY MAN

First time, they said I needed to
recite part of the Constitution.
Second time, they said I got it
wrong. Third time, they said the
office was closed.

A bitter laugh from the room.

ELDERLY MAN

I asked when it would open.

He looks down at his hat.

ELDERLY MAN

Sheriff said it would open when I
stopped asking.

The room is quiet.

Bevel looks over the faces.

BEVEL

Then we ask louder.

The door opens.

A local ORGANIZER enters with a telegram in hand.

ORGANIZER

Word from Atlanta.

Bevel takes it.

Reads.

His face changes.

BEVEL

Dr. King knows.

A current moves through the room.

Hope.

Fear.

Expectation.

YOUNG WOMAN

Is he coming?

Bevel looks at the telegram again.

BEVEL

Not yet.

A beat.

BEVEL

But he is listening.

The Elderly Man nods slowly.

ELDERLY MAN

Then let us give him something to hear.

The room rises into murmured agreement.

EXT. SELMA COURTHOUSE - NIGHT

The courthouse stands under darkness.

Closed.

Silent.

Guarded by law.

Across the street, a single light burns in a church basement window.

FADE OUT.

EXT. SELMA COURTHOUSE - MORNING

Morning light falls hard on the Dallas County Courthouse.

Stone. Columns. Flags.

A building built to suggest justice.

A line of BLACK CITIZENS stretches along the sidewalk.

Elderly men in worn hats. Women in church gloves. Teachers.

Farmers. Veterans. Young people barely old enough to vote.

They stand quietly.

Too quietly.

Across the street, SHERIFF JIM CLARK, 42, watches with deputies. Helmeted. Armed. Restless.

A deputy chews gum like he is waiting for sport.

The courthouse doors remain closed.

SUPER: SELMA, ALABAMA - JANUARY 1965

At the back of the line, James Bevel speaks quietly with local organizers.

A car turns the corner.

The line sees it before the deputies do.

A ripple moves through the people.

The car stops.

Andrew Young steps out first.

Then Ralph Abernathy.

Then King.

The line changes.

Not louder.

Straighter.

People who were already standing find another inch of height.

King looks down the line.

Faces weathered by work and worry.

Hands holding registration forms.

A man with a cane.

A woman with a Bible.

A young mother holding a sleeping child.

King walks slowly along the line.

Not like a celebrity.

Like a pastor entering a sickroom.

A WOMAN IN LINE, 60s, reaches for him.

WOMAN IN LINE

Dr. King.

King takes her hand.

KING

Good morning, ma'am.

WOMAN IN LINE

I been here since before sunrise.

KING

Yes, ma'am.

WOMAN IN LINE

Third time this month.

King looks toward the courthouse.

KING

Then the courthouse should be
ashamed it has kept you waiting so
long.

She smiles, but only for a second.

WOMAN IN LINE

Shame don't seem to trouble them
much.

King has no easy answer.

KING

Then we will have to trouble them
with something stronger.

He moves on.

A BLACK VETERAN, 50s, stands in line wearing an old service
jacket.

King stops before him.

KING

You served?

VETERAN

Europe.

KING

And now here.

The Veteran nods toward the courthouse.

VETERAN

Fought over there wearing this
country's uniform. Came home and
had to ask permission to be a
citizen.

King looks at the jacket.

Then at the man.

KING

You are not asking permission.

A beat.

KING

You are demanding recognition.

The Veteran absorbs that.

Clark crosses the street with two deputies.

The line tightens.

Ralph steps closer to King.

CLARK

Morning, Reverend.

King turns.

KING

Sheriff.

Clark glances down the line.

CLARK

You brought a crowd.

KING

No, Sheriff. The Constitution did.

Clark smiles without warmth.

CLARK

Constitution don't process
applications. Registrar does. And
he ain't taking but a few today.

A murmur moves through the line.

CLARK

Maybe none if folks can't behave.

King looks at the people.

Then back to Clark.

KING

Standing in line is not
misbehavior.

CLARK

Depends on who's standing and why.

Ralph bristles.

RALPH

Careful.

Clark looks at Ralph.

CLARK

That advice for me or you?

King raises a subtle hand. Enough.

KING

These men and women are here
peacefully.

CLARK

Peaceful crowds become unlawful
crowds when they refuse lawful
orders.

KING

Lawful does not always mean moral.
Clark steps closer.

CLARK

You in my county now.
King holds his gaze.

KING

No, Sheriff.
A beat.

KING

We are all in God's country.
The line murmurs.
Clark's jaw tightens.

CLARK

We'll see how long your people
want to stand.
He turns and walks back toward his deputies.
Ralph watches him go.

RALPH

That man wants a spark.

KING

Then we will not hand him one.

BEVEL

He will make his own.
King looks at Bevel.

KING

Then we will make sure the nation
sees who struck it.

EXT. SELMA COURTHOUSE - LATER

The sun climbs.

The line barely moves.

A registrar opens the courthouse doors, calls a name, lets one person inside, then shuts the doors again.

One person.

A whole line waiting.

Deputies laugh among themselves.

A young woman in line shifts her weight, exhausted.

An old man wipes sweat from his forehead.

King stands with Ralph beneath the shadow of a tree.

Dorothy Cotton arrives with local women carrying water cups.

DOROTHY

They are letting in one at a time.
Slowly.

RALPH

Slow is the policy.

DOROTHY

Humiliation is the policy.

King watches the people accept water.

He sees their patience.

Their hunger.

Their discipline.

The line blurs.

The courthouse fades.

The waiting faces become younger.

Thinner.

The sound of the street becomes the hollow scrape of empty bowls.

EXT. ATLANTA STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

YOUNG MARTIN, 5, walks beside Alberta.

The Depression has left its mark on the city.

A BREADLINE stretches outside a church basement.

Men in worn coats. Women with tired eyes. Children clinging to sleeves.

No one speaks much.

Hunger has made them quiet.

Young Martin slows.

YOUNG MARTIN

Mama?

Alberta looks down.

ALBERTA

Come on, M.L.

He keeps looking.

YOUNG MARTIN

Why are they standing there?

Alberta follows his eyes.

A long beat.

ALBERTA

They are waiting for food.

Young Martin studies the line.

YOUNG MARTIN

Do they not have food at home?

ALBERTA

Some do not.

YOUNG MARTIN

How come?

Alberta takes his hand more firmly.

She searches for an answer small enough for a child and true enough for the world.

ALBERTA

Sometimes work disappears.
Sometimes money disappears.
Sometimes people who already have
enough forget the people who do
not.

Young Martin watches a man receive a small loaf of bread.

The man holds it like something sacred.

YOUNG MARTIN

Are they bad?

Alberta stops.

She kneels in front of him.

ALBERTA

No.

Firm.

Clear.

ALBERTA

Poverty is not a sin, baby.

A beat.

ALBERTA

But ignoring it can be.

Young Martin looks back at the line.

A little GIRL near his age stands beside her mother.

She looks at him.

He looks at her.

Neither smiles.

They are too young to understand the system.

Old enough to feel the shame adults have placed around need.

YOUNG MARTIN

Does God see them?

Alberta's face softens with sadness.

ALBERTA

Yes.

YOUNG MARTIN

Then why are they still hungry?

The question wounds her.

She has no answer that will not wound him too.

ALBERTA

Maybe God is waiting to see who
will help.

Young Martin turns back to the breadline.

The little girl receives a piece of bread.

She takes one bite.

Her eyes close.

Young Martin watches.

Something in him opens.

Something that will never fully close again.

INT. KING FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Young Martin sits at the table.

His dinner plate is in front of him.

He does not eat.

King Sr. reads a newspaper nearby.

Alberta notices.

ALBERTA

M.L., eat your supper.

Young Martin looks at the food.

YOUNG MARTIN

That girl was hungry.

King Sr. lowers the newspaper.

YOUNG MARTIN

From the line.

Alberta and King Sr. exchange a look.

KING SR.

Yes.

YOUNG MARTIN

I have food.

KING SR.

You do.

YOUNG MARTIN

Why?

King Sr. folds the newspaper.

KING SR.

Because your mother and I are able
to provide it.

YOUNG MARTIN

But her mother could not?

KING SR.

Maybe not today.

Young Martin looks back at his plate.

YOUNG MARTIN

That does not seem fair.

King Sr. studies his son.

KING SR.

It is not.

Young Martin looks up.

YOUNG MARTIN

Then why does everybody act
normal?

That one lands.

Alberta sits beside him.

ALBERTA

Because people learn to step
around suffering when it is not in
their own house.

King Sr. leans forward.

KING SR.

That is why you must not let your
heart get lazy.

Young Martin listens.

KING SR.

A lazy heart says, "That is not my
problem."

Alberta touches Young Martin's hand.

ALBERTA

A living heart asks, "What can I
do?"

Young Martin looks at his plate again.

Then pushes it slightly forward.

YOUNG MARTIN

Can she have some?

Alberta smiles through tears she refuses to shed.

ALBERTA

Not this plate.

Young Martin frowns.

ALBERTA

But tomorrow, we can help.

Young Martin nods.

Small.

Serious.

The line between his hunger and another child's hunger has
been erased.

EXT. SELMA COURTHOUSE - DAY

King stands watching the registration line.

The memory fades.

Ralph approaches with a cup of water.

RALPH

You need this.

King takes it.

KING

Thank you.

RALPH

You went somewhere.

KING

Atlanta.

Ralph looks at the line.

RALPH

This line?

KING

Another one.

A beat.

KING

Bread.

Ralph understands enough.

They watch a frail ELDERLY WOMAN step out of line.

Her knees buckle slightly.

Dorothy rushes to her.

King moves too.

EXT. SELMA COURTHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Dorothy and King help the woman to a low wall.

DOROTHY

Sit here, Mrs. Jackson.

MRS. JACKSON, 70s, dignified despite the heat, waves them off.

MRS. JACKSON

I am not leaving.

KING

No one is asking you to leave.

MRS. JACKSON
They want me to.

KING
Yes, ma'am.

MRS. JACKSON
I been paying taxes longer than
that sheriff been alive.

King kneels before her.

KING
Then let us get you some shade and
send you back stronger than you
left.

Mrs. Jackson studies him.

MRS. JACKSON
You think they will let me
register today?

King does not lie.

KING
I do not know.

She nods.

MRS. JACKSON
I figured.

A beat.

MRS. JACKSON
I still want them to look me in
the face while they deny me.

King looks at her with deep respect.

KING
Then they will.

Dorothy hands Mrs. Jackson water.

Clark watches from across the street.

He says something to a deputy.

The deputy laughs.

King sees it.

His face hardens.

EXT. SELMA COURTHOUSE - AFTERNOON

Hours have passed.

The line remains.

The courthouse doors open.

A REGISTRAR steps out with a paper.

REGISTRAR

Office is closed for the day.

A wave of frustration breaks through the line.

VOICES

Closed?

We been here all day.

You only took three people.

Three people?

Deputies move forward.

Clark smiles.

CLARK

Y'all heard the man. Go home.

No one moves.

Clark's smile fades.

CLARK

I said go home.

Bevel steps up.

BEVEL

They have a right to stand on a
public sidewalk.

CLARK

They had a chance.

DOROTHY

Three people had a chance.

CLARK

Lady, I would advise you not to
test my patience.

Dorothy steps closer.

DOROTHY

Sheriff, I did not come here
looking for your patience.

Ralph moves beside her.

King raises a hand again.

The line watches him.

King steps onto the low wall where Mrs. Jackson sat earlier.

Not high enough to dominate.

Just high enough to be seen.

KING

Friends.

The murmuring lowers.

KING

You have stood here today with
more dignity than this courthouse
has shown.

Clark shifts, irritated.

KING

You were told to wait. You waited.

A beat.

KING

You were told to prove yourselves.
You proved yourselves.

He looks toward the courthouse.

KING

And when the door closed, it did
not reveal your unworthiness.

A beat.

KING

It revealed theirs.

A low response.

AMEN.

THAT'S RIGHT.

KING

We will not give this sheriff the
disorder he desires.

Clark glares.

KING

And we will not give this
courthouse the disappearance it
expects.

The people listen.

KING

Tonight, we return to church.
Tomorrow, we return to the line.

The crowd murmurs with resolve.

KING

And if they close the door again,
we will stand again. If they open
it for one, we will send one. If
they open it for three, we will
send three. And if they think
patience means surrender, then
they have misunderstood both
patience and us.

The line answers now.

YES.

AMEN.

KING

We are not here because we hate
this county.

He looks at Clark.

KING

We are here because we are
citizens of it.

A beat.

KING

And citizenship does not become
real by hiding from the
courthouse.

The people begin to sing.

Soft at first.

A freedom song.

King steps down.

Clark approaches, angry.

CLARK

You trying to run my town?

KING

No, Sheriff.

King looks at the singing people.

KING

I am trying to help your town find
its soul.

Clark steps close.

CLARK

You keep pushing, somebody's gonna
get hurt.

King's eyes do not move.

KING

Somebody already has.

A beat.

KING

Many times.

Clark looks ready to strike him.

But cameras are present.

Not enough.

Still enough.

Clark backs away.

CLARK

Clear the sidewalk.

King turns to the people.

KING

To the church.

The line begins to move.

Not scattered.

Organized.

Singing.

EXT. SELMA STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

The marchers move away from the courthouse.

King walks with Ralph, Dorothy, Andrew, Bevel, Mrs.
Jackson, the Veteran, and the others.

Deputies follow at a distance.

The courthouse remains behind them.

Closed.

But less powerful than it was that morning.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - NIGHT

The church is packed.

The same people from the line now fill pews and aisles.

Tired feet. Sunburned faces. Bright eyes.

King stands near the pulpit, listening as they sing.

Ralph leans in.

RALPH

They will come back tomorrow.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

So will Clark.

KING

Yes.

Dorothy joins them.

DOROTHY

News crews are asking if this is
the beginning of a campaign.

King looks over the congregation.

Mrs. Jackson sits near the front, exhausted but upright.

The Veteran holds his service cap in both hands.

The young mother rocks her child.

KING

No.

Dorothy looks at him.

KING

The campaign began long before we
arrived.

A beat.

KING

We are just finally standing in
the line.

The singing swells.

King looks toward the church doors.

Outside, the courthouse waits.

Inside, the people do.

FADE OUT.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - NIGHT

The church is full past comfort.

People stand along the walls. Children sleep across laps.
Fans move slowly through warm air. The room smells of
sweat, old wood, perfume, and determination.

A freedom song fades.

King stands near the pulpit with Ralph, Dorothy, Andrew,
Bevel, and local organizers.

The people wait.

Not passively.

Expectantly.

King steps forward.

KING

Today, many of you stood outside
that courthouse for hours.

A few murmurs.

KING

You stood while they delayed. You
stood while they mocked. You stood
while they opened the door only
wide enough to pretend justice was
welcome inside.

The room answers.

AMEN.

YES, SIR.

KING

But I want you to understand
something.

He looks across the congregation.

KING

You did not fail today.

A beat.

KING

The courthouse failed.

The room stirs.

KING

You did not shame democracy.

A beat.

KING

You exposed the shame already
living inside it.

A stronger response.

King lets it settle.

KING

Tomorrow, we return.

A wave moves through the church.

Some nod. Some close their eyes. Some look frightened but
resolved.

A YOUNG MAN, 19, stands from the back.

YOUNG MAN

And if they close it again?

King looks at him.

KING

Then we return again.

YOUNG MAN

And if they beat us?

The room quiets.

King steps down from the pulpit area, closer to the people.

KING

Then the nation will see who came
to register and who came to rule
by fear.

The young man is not satisfied.

YOUNG MAN

Seeing ain't stopping.

A few people murmur agreement.

Ralph watches King carefully.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

Seeing is not stopping.

King moves closer to the young man.

KING

But hidden suffering is easy for a
country to ignore. Suffering
witnessed becomes a question no
decent soul can escape.

YOUNG MAN

What if they do escape it?

KING

Some will.

A hard honesty.

KING

But not all.

The young man sits.

Not convinced.

But listening.

Dorothy steps forward.

DOROTHY

Those returning tomorrow need to
be trained tonight. Not just
encouraged. Trained.

Bevel moves to the aisle.

BEVEL

If a deputy shoves you, what do
you do?

A few people answer unevenly.

VOICES

Stand.

Pray.

Don't hit back.

BEVEL

Again. If a deputy shoves you,
what do you do?

CONGREGATION

Stand.

BEVEL

If he curses you?

CONGREGATION

Stand.

BEVEL

If he spits?

A pause.

That one is harder.

BEVEL

If he spits?

CONGREGATION

Stand.

Bevel nods.

BEVEL

Standing is not doing nothing.

Standing is discipline.

Dorothy points toward the fellowship hall.

DOROTHY

Women and elders with medical
supplies, this way. Anyone with
cars, we need drivers listed.
Teachers, we need names of anyone
willing to help keep records.

The church becomes organized motion.

Clipboards. Pencils. Quiet instructions.

King watches the people transform fear into structure.

Ralph comes beside him.

RALPH

They are tired.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

So are you.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

That one usually matters less to
you.

King gives him a look.

RALPH

I said usually.

Andrew approaches with a folded note.

ANDREW

Sheriff's men are outside. More
than before.

King takes that in.

KING

Clark wants the church to feel
surrounded.

DOROTHY

It is surrounded.

KING

Then we make sure the people feel
held.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - LATER

The meeting breaks slowly.

Families exit into the night.

Deputies wait across the street near patrol cars.
Cigarettes glow in the dark. Shotguns visible. Smiles too
casual.

King stands on the church steps with Ralph and Andrew.

Dorothy helps an elderly woman down the stairs.

Bevel speaks quietly with local youth.

A BLACK SCHOOLTEACHER, 30s, walks past carrying
registration papers.

A DEPUTY steps into his path.

DEPUTY

Where you going, boy?

The word cuts through the night.

The schoolteacher stops.

Every Black person nearby hears it.

King hears it.

His face changes.

Not rage.

Recognition.

The deputy grins.

DEPUTY

I asked you a question.

The schoolteacher keeps his voice even.

SCHOOLTEACHER

Home.

DEPUTY

You sure you know where that is?

A few deputies laugh.

Ralph starts down the steps.

King stops him with a hand.

The schoolteacher holds himself still.

The deputy leans closer.

DEPUTY

You people keep lining up at that
courthouse, you might find
yourselves needing directions to
the jailhouse instead.

The schoolteacher says nothing.

The deputy pats the papers in his hand.

DEPUTY

What you got there?

SCHOOLTEACHER

Names.

DEPUTY

Names of who?

SCHOOLTEACHER

Citizens.

The deputy's smile fades.

DEPUTY

Boy, you better watch your mouth.

That word again.

King's eyes stay on the deputy.

The night air thickens.

The deputy's voice stretches.

Becomes another voice.

Another uniform.

EXT. ATLANTA STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

A POLICE OFFICER stands beside King Sr. near a parked car.
Young Martin, 8, sits in the passenger seat, watching
through the open window.

King Sr. stands outside the car.

Calm.

Dignified.

The officer is annoyed, ticket book in hand.

POLICE OFFICER

Listen here, boy--

King Sr. raises a hand.

Not loud.

Not frightened.

KING SR.

No.

The officer stops.

POLICE OFFICER

What did you say?

King Sr. gestures toward Young Martin.

KING SR.

That is a boy.

Young Martin freezes.

King Sr. looks the officer in the eye.

KING SR.

I am a man.

The officer stiffens.

Young Martin's breathing slows.

He watches his father stand inside danger without bowing to
it.

POLICE OFFICER

You trying to be smart?

KING SR.

No, sir.

A beat.

KING SR.

I am being accurate.

The officer looks around. People have begun to notice.
King Sr. does not step closer.
Does not step back.

KING SR.

You can write your ticket. You can
speak your law. But you will not
make me smaller to make yourself
feel tall.

Young Martin absorbs every word.

The officer tears the ticket from his book and shoves it
toward King Sr.

POLICE OFFICER

Move along.

King Sr. takes the ticket.

KING SR.

Gladly.

He gets into the car.

INT. KING SR.'S CAR - CONTINUOUS - FLASHBACK

King Sr. starts the engine.

Young Martin looks at him.

YOUNG MARTIN

Were you scared?

King Sr. keeps his eyes forward.

A long beat.

KING SR.

Yes.

Young Martin is surprised.

YOUNG MARTIN

But you talked back.

King Sr. turns to him.

KING SR.

A man can be afraid and still
refuse a lie.

Young Martin looks out the window as they pull away.

YOUNG MARTIN

What lie?

King Sr. drives.

KING SR.

That your dignity belongs to
whoever has power over you.

Young Martin sits with that.

KING SR.

Power can hurt you.

A beat.

KING SR.

It cannot name you unless you
answer to it.

Young Martin looks back through the rear window at the
officer growing smaller behind them.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - NIGHT

King stands on the church steps, back in Selma.

The deputy still blocks the schoolteacher.

DEPUTY

I asked what those papers are.

King descends the steps.

Ralph follows, close.

Andrew moves behind him.

The deputy sees King coming.

DEPUTY

Well. If it ain't the Nobel man.

King stops beside the schoolteacher.

KING

This gentleman is going home.

DEPUTY

Gentleman?

The deputy laughs.

KING

Yes.

A beat.

KING

A schoolteacher. A citizen. A
gentleman.

The deputy steps closer.

DEPUTY

You don't get to decide what he
is.

King holds his gaze.

KING

Neither do you.

The street falls silent.

The schoolteacher looks at King, not grateful exactly.
Seen.

The deputy's hand drifts near his baton.
Ralph notices.

RALPH

Martin.

King does not move.

KING

You may block a doorway. You may
close an office. You may delay a
ballot.

A beat.

KING

But you do not possess the
authority to reduce a man's
humanity.

The deputy's face hardens.

DEPUTY

You all think cameras make you
brave.

King glances to the few reporters across the street.
Then back.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

Cameras make you cautious.

That lands.

The deputy looks toward the reporters.
He steps aside.

DEPUTY

Go on then.

The schoolteacher moves past.

King turns with him.

DEPUTY

But I will see you tomorrow.

King stops.

Looks back.

KING

Yes.

A beat.

KING

You will.

EXT. SELMA STREET - MOMENTS LATER

King, Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, Bevel, and the schoolteacher walk away from the church.

The deputies watch them go.

No one speaks until they turn the corner.

SCHOOLTEACHER

You should not have done that.

KING

Done what?

SCHOOLTEACHER

Stood between me and him.

KING

I did not stand between you.

King looks at him.

KING

I stood beside you.

The schoolteacher looks down at the registration papers.

SCHOOLTEACHER

I teach history.

KING

Then you know tomorrow will need witnesses.

The schoolteacher nods.

SCHOOLTEACHER

I can bring students to help write names.

Dorothy steps in.

DOROTHY

Only if they are trained and only if their parents understand the risk.

SCHOOLTEACHER

They understand more than we wish they did.

That quiets them.

They continue walking.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - BASEMENT - LATER

A smaller group remains.

King, Ralph, Dorothy, Andrew, Bevel, the schoolteacher, Mrs. Jackson, the Veteran, and several local organizers sit around folding tables.

Coffee. Pencils. Lists. Maps.

A bare bulb hums overhead.

Dorothy writes names on a legal pad.

DOROTHY

Tomorrow we rotate the elders forward earlier. Heat took too much out of them today.

ANDREW

We need more water.

BEVEL

And more people.

RALPH

More people means more danger.

BEVEL

Danger is already here.

Ralph looks at him.

RALPH

Young man, danger has a habit of multiplying when invited.

BEVEL

So does courage.

The room tightens.

King watches both men.

KING

Both are true.

Bevel sits back.

King looks at the map.

KING

The courthouse line continues.

DOROTHY

And if Clark arrests everybody?

KING

Then the jail becomes the line.

Mrs. Jackson nods.

MRS. JACKSON

I can be arrested.

All eyes turn to her.

MRS. JACKSON

I am old, not fragile.

The Veteran smiles.

VETERAN

Yes, ma'am.

King looks at her with admiration and worry.

KING

No one should offer themselves
lightly.

MRS. JACKSON

I am not light.

A beat.

MRS. JACKSON

I have carried this county on my
back for seventy years. Jail does
not scare me as much as dying
without ever casting a ballot.

The room absorbs that.

King looks around the table.

KING

Then we proceed.

A beat.

KING

But we proceed with discipline.
Sheriff Clark wants disorder. He
wants one excuse to turn a line of
citizens into a mob in the
newspapers.

DOROTHY

Then we deny him the excuse.

KING

Yes.

BEVEL

And if he attacks anyway?

KING

Then the truth will be clean.

Bevel studies him.

BEVEL

Truth still bleeds.

King's face darkens.

KING

I know.

The room quiets.

Andrew points to the map.

ANDREW

There is another problem. Some of
the younger people want a night
march.

DOROTHY

Absolutely not.

BEVEL

They are tired of waiting.

DOROTHY

Everyone is tired of waiting. That
is not a strategy.

KING

No night march without training,
marshals, and a clear purpose.

BEVEL

They may not listen.

King looks at him.

KING

Then we must listen first.

Bevel takes that in.

KING

Anger unheard becomes anger
uncontrolled.

Ralph nods.

RALPH

And Clark is counting on
uncontrolled.

King reaches for a pencil and marks the map.

KING

Tomorrow morning, courthouse.
Tomorrow night, mass meeting.
Training every evening.

He looks to Dorothy.

KING

Medical and legal teams ready.

Dorothy nods.

KING

Ralph, coordinate clergy.

RALPH

I will.

KING

Andrew, press.

ANDREW

Press wants drama.

KING

Then give them facts and let Clark
provide the drama.

A weary laugh moves around the table.

For a moment, the burden becomes bearable because it is
shared.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - LATE NIGHT

The church lights burn against the Alabama dark.

Deputies remain across the street.

Waiting.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - LATE NIGHT

The sanctuary is nearly empty.

King stands alone near the pulpit.

The hymnals are stacked. The fans still. The pews worn by generations.

He runs his hand along the back of a pew.

Ralph enters quietly.

RALPH

You planning to sleep here?

KING

I was planning to stand here.

RALPH

That was not the question.

King smiles faintly.

Ralph joins him.

RALPH

You handled that deputy well.

KING

My father handled him first.

Ralph understands.

RALPH

Atlanta?

King nods.

KING

I learned early that a man can be
addressed falsely and still answer
truly.

Ralph looks toward the doors.

RALPH

Selma is going to test that
lesson.

KING

Yes.

A beat.

KING

And many others.

They stand in the quiet church.

RALPH

You think we can keep them
disciplined?

King looks at the pulpit.

KING

No.

Ralph turns to him.

KING

Not by instruction alone.

A beat.

KING

They must believe discipline is
not surrender. They must feel that
standing still can move history.

Ralph exhales.

RALPH

That is a hard thing to teach
people who have been pushed all
their lives.

KING

Then we teach it by standing with
them when the pushing starts.

Outside, a patrol car rolls past the church.

Its headlights sweep across the stained glass.

For a moment, colored light moves over King's face.

RALPH

Morning comes quick.

KING

So does trouble.

RALPH

Then we should sleep before both.

King nods.

He takes one last look at the sanctuary.

KING

Tomorrow, the line returns.

RALPH

And after tomorrow?

King looks toward the church doors.

KING

We keep returning until the
country understands that a closed
door can become a national crisis.

Ralph gives a tired smile.

RALPH

Only you could make standing in
line sound like revolution.

KING

That is because it is.

They exit together.

The sanctuary remains.

Empty.

Waiting.

FADE OUT.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - MORNING

The church doors open.

People pour into the morning.

Not a crowd.

A procession.

Elders in hats. Teachers with notebooks. Students with
armbands. Ministers in dark suits. Women carrying water.
Men carrying nothing but resolve.

King steps out with Ralph, Dorothy, Andrew, Bevel, Mrs.
Jackson, the Veteran, and the Schoolteacher.

Across the street, deputies wait beside patrol cars.

Sheriff Clark watches from the curb.

King looks at the people gathered behind him.

KING

Remember what we practiced.

A murmur of agreement.

KING

Walk together. Speak truth. Do not
give hatred a handle.

Dorothy moves through the group.

DOROTHY

If someone falls, two people help
them. Do not break formation
unless you are assigned. If you
are arrested, give your name
clearly.

Bevel gathers the younger marchers.

BEVEL

You are not here to prove you are
angry.

He looks them over.

BEVEL

They know you are angry. You are
here to prove you are disciplined.

The young people nod.

Some scared.

Some thrilled.

Some both.

Ralph steps beside King.

RALPH

Looks like Clark brought extra
hospitality.

King glances at the deputies.

KING

Then we should disappoint him with
manners.

Ralph almost smiles.

EXT. SELMA STREET - MORNING

The procession moves toward the courthouse.

No chanting at first.

Only footsteps.

Then a woman begins to sing.

Soft.

Others join.

The song gathers strength as they move through Selma.

White shopkeepers watch from doorways.

Black residents step onto porches.

Children peer through curtains.

Deputies follow in cars at walking speed.

Clark rides in front, eyes fixed on King.

EXT. SELMA COURTHOUSE - MORNING

The courthouse waits.

So do the deputies.

More than before.

A rope line blocks the steps.

The registrar is nowhere visible.

King leads the group to the sidewalk.

They stop in an orderly line.

Silence.

Then Clark steps forward.

CLARK

This is an unlawful assembly.

KING

Sheriff, these citizens are here
to register to vote.

CLARK

Registrar's office is not open.

DOROTHY

It is a weekday morning.

CLARK

Not for you.

A murmur ripples through the line.

King lifts one hand.

The people settle.

KING

Then we will wait until it opens.

CLARK

No, Reverend. You will disperse.

KING

We cannot disperse from our
citizenship.

Clark steps closer.

CLARK

I am giving you a lawful order.

KING

And I am giving witness to an
unlawful condition.

The deputies move in slightly.

Ralph sees it.

RALPH

Martin.

King keeps his eyes on Clark.

CLARK

You got one minute.

King turns to the line.

He does not raise his voice.

KING

Friends, stand still.

The line holds.

Clark checks his watch.

The minute passes.

CLARK

Arrest him.

Deputies move.

The line gasps but does not break.

A deputy grabs King's arm.

Ralph steps forward.

RALPH

Take your hands easy.

Another deputy seizes Ralph.

Dorothy moves toward Mrs. Jackson.

DOROTHY

Stay with the line.

Mrs. Jackson stands taller.

MRS. JACKSON

I am with the line.

Clark points.

CLARK

Take the leaders.

Deputies move through the front ranks.

Andrew is grabbed.

Bevel too.

The Schoolteacher raises his hands.

SCHOOLTEACHER

I am not resisting.

DEPUTY

Then walk.

A young marcher starts to shout.

YOUNG MARCHER

This ain't right!

Bevel turns sharply.

BEVEL

Discipline!

The young marcher swallows his rage.

Stands still.

King is led toward a patrol wagon.

He looks back at the line.

KING

Do not leave.

The people hold.

KING

Do not strike.

They hold.

KING

Do not disappear.

The wagon door opens.

King is pushed inside.

INT. PATROL WAGON - MORNING

King lands on the bench.

Ralph follows. Andrew. Bevel. The Schoolteacher. Several others.

The doors slam shut.

Darkness.

A sliver of light through the rear window.

The wagon lurches forward.

For a moment, no one speaks.

Then Ralph exhales.

RALPH

I do not recommend Selma for
vacation.

Andrew leans back, trying to steady his breathing.

ANDREW

You think the line stayed?

King looks through the narrow window.

The courthouse shrinks behind them.

The line remains.

KING

Yes.

Bevel smiles faintly.

BEVEL

Good.

The Schoolteacher sits across from King, still holding his registration papers.

A deputy missed them.

He looks down at the papers.

SCHOOLTEACHER

I suppose these are evidence now.

KING

Yes.

The Schoolteacher looks up.

KING

Of citizenship.

The wagon turns hard.

Everyone shifts.

The sound of the tires becomes the low RUMBLE of an organ.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY - FLASHBACK

A teenage Martin, 15, sits alone in a pew.

The sanctuary is empty except for him.

Sunlight filters through stained glass.

Dust floats in colored beams.

He holds a Bible in one hand and a college pamphlet in the other.

Morehouse.

Future.

Expectation.

Behind him, footsteps.

King Sr. enters from the side aisle.

He sees his son.

KING SR.

Hiding from chores or from God?

Teen Martin looks back.

TEEN MARTIN

I was thinking.

KING SR.

That can be worse.

King Sr. walks down the aisle and sits beside him.

For a moment, father and son look toward the pulpit.

TEEN MARTIN

Everybody expects me to preach.

KING SR.

Do they?

TEEN MARTIN

You do.

King Sr. considers that.

KING SR.

I expect you to listen for what
God asks. That may be preaching.
It may not.

Teen Martin studies the pulpit.

TEEN MARTIN

I do not want to just stir people
up on Sunday and send them back to
the same suffering on Monday.

King Sr. turns to him.

TEEN MARTIN

Some preachers shout like the
world is on fire, but they never
tell anybody where the water is.

King Sr. absorbs the criticism without defensiveness.

KING SR.

And you think the pulpit is too
small?

TEEN MARTIN

Sometimes.

A beat.

TEEN MARTIN

Sometimes I think it is only
words.

King Sr. smiles faintly.

KING SR.

Words built this country's
promises.

Teen Martin looks at him.

KING SR.

Words also built its excuses.

He gestures toward the pulpit.

KING SR.

The question is not whether words
have power.

A beat.

KING SR.

The question is who they serve.

Teen Martin looks down at the Bible.

TEEN MARTIN

I do not want to inherit a robe.
Or a title.

KING SR.

Then do not.

Teen Martin looks surprised.

KING SR.
Inherit a burden.

The words land.

KING SR.
A title can make a man proud. A
burden can make him useful.

Teen Martin looks toward the stained glass.

TEEN MARTIN
What if I am not sure I believe
everything the way people expect
me to?

King Sr. studies him.

No anger.

Only recognition.

KING SR.
Then tell the truth to God first.
He is hard to shock.

Teen Martin almost smiles.

KING SR.
Faith that has never wrestled is
only habit.

Teen Martin turns this over.

KING SR.
But do not confuse questions with
absence. Sometimes the question is
the doorway.

Teen Martin looks toward the pulpit again.

TEEN MARTIN
Can preaching change anything?

King Sr. leans back.

KING SR.
Preaching alone? No.

A beat.

KING SR.
But preaching that teaches a man
who he is can make him stand when
the world tells him to kneel.

Teen Martin listens.

KING SR.

And a standing man can trouble a
whole empire.

The organ RUMBLES again, deeper now.

INT. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE - DR. MAYS' OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Teen Martin sits across from Dr. Benjamin Mays.

Books line the walls.

Mays studies a paper Martin has written.

Teen Martin waits, trying to appear calm.

Mays sets the paper down.

MAYS

You are suspicious of emotional
religion.

TEEN MARTIN

Yes, sir.

MAYS

Good.

Teen Martin blinks.

MAYS

Suspicion can be useful if it
leads to depth instead of
arrogance.

Teen Martin takes that in.

MAYS

You want faith to think.

TEEN MARTIN

Yes, sir.

MAYS

And you want thought to matter
outside the classroom.

TEEN MARTIN

Yes, sir.

Mays leans forward.

MAYS

Then stop asking whether ministry
is large enough for your mind.

A beat.

MAYS

Ask whether your mind is brave
enough for ministry.

Teen Martin is caught by that.

MAYS

The pulpit is not an escape from
the world, Mr. King. Not if used
properly.

Mays taps Martin's paper.

MAYS

It is a place from which a man can
call the world to account.

Teen Martin looks down.

MAYS

But be careful.

He looks up.

MAYS

If you choose that road, people
will not only ask for your words.
They will ask for your life.

The room is quiet.

MAYS

And one day, you may have to
decide if you meant what you
preached when applause is gone and
danger is near.

Teen Martin absorbs it.

Not ready.

Listening.

MAYS

So do not choose ministry because
your father is a preacher.

A beat.

MAYS

Choose it only if silence would
make you dishonest.

INT. SELMA JAIL - HOLDING CELL - DAY

The cell door CLANGS shut.

King, Ralph, Andrew, Bevel, the Schoolteacher, and others are crowded inside.

Concrete walls.

Metal bench.

A barred window too high to see through.

A deputy locks the door and walks away.

Ralph sits.

RALPH

I have been in friendlier rooms.

BEVEL

I have preached in worse.

Andrew leans against the wall.

ANDREW

You have not preached in worse.

You have preached longer.

The men share a tired laugh.

King stands near the bars.

The Schoolteacher sits on the bench, registration papers still in hand.

He looks shaken now that the motion has stopped.

KING

What is your name?

SCHOOLTEACHER

Thomas.

KING

Mr. Thomas, how long have you taught?

SCHOOLTEACHER

Eleven years.

KING

Then you have been preparing witnesses for eleven years.

Thomas looks at him.

SCHOOLTEACHER

My students asked why voting matters so much.

KING

What did you tell them?

Thomas looks at the papers.

SCHOOLTEACHER

That a man without a vote is
always asking someone else to
protect his future.

King nods.

KING

That is a lesson worth being
arrested for.

Thomas tries to smile.

It fails.

SCHOOLTEACHER

I was brave outside.

KING

Were you?

Thomas looks up.

KING

Or were you disciplined?

Thomas considers it.

KING

Bravery comes and goes. Discipline
can remain when bravery is tired.

A beat.

KING

That is why we practice.

Footsteps approach.

A deputy appears outside the bars.

DEPUTY

King.

Everyone looks up.

DEPUTY

Phone.

INT. SELMA JAIL - BOOKING AREA - DAY

King stands at a desk with the phone.

A deputy remains close.

King dials.

Waits.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - DAY

Coretta answers.

CORETTA

Hello?

KING

Coretta.

She closes her eyes.

Relief first.

Then anger.

CORETTA

Where are you?

KING

Selma jail.

CORETTA

I assumed it was not a hotel.

King almost smiles.

KING

No.

CORETTA

Are you hurt?

KING

No.

CORETTA

Ralph?

KING

With me.

CORETTA

Andrew?

KING

With me.

A beat.

CORETTA

How many?

KING

Many.

Coretta sits slowly.

CORETTA

The children will ask.

KING

Tell them their father is all
right.

CORETTA

And when they ask why you were
arrested?

King looks at the deputy standing nearby.

KING

Tell them I was standing in line
with people who wanted to vote.

Coretta absorbs the simplicity and the madness of it.

CORETTA

That will make less sense to them
than you think.

KING

Good.

A beat.

KING

It should make no sense to a
child.

Coretta's voice softens.

CORETTA

How long will they hold you?

KING

I do not know.

CORETTA

Do you need anything?

King looks toward the holding cell.

KING

Keep calling people.

CORETTA

I have already started.

KING

Of course you have.

CORETTA

Martin.

He hears the weight in her voice.

CORETTA

Do not let them isolate you in there.

KING

They cannot.

A beat.

KING

I brought half the movement with me.

She laughs despite herself.

CORETTA

Only half?

KING

The other half is calling you.

CORETTA

Then I better get back to work.

KING

I love you.

CORETTA

I love you too.

He hangs up.

The deputy smirks.

DEPUTY

Sweet.

King turns to him.

KING

Yes.

A beat.

KING

It is.

The deputy has no answer.

INT. SELMA JAIL - HOLDING CELL - LATER

King returns.

Ralph looks up.

RALPH

Coretta?

KING

Already organizing.

RALPH

Naturally.

Bevel sits on the floor, knees up.

BEVEL

Word will get out.

ANDREW

It already has.

Thomas looks through the bars.

SCHOOLTEACHER

Do you think the line is still
there?

King sits beside him.

KING

Maybe not at the courthouse.

A beat.

KING

But it is still forming.

Thomas does not fully understand.

King looks around the cell.

At Ralph. Andrew. Bevel. The others.

KING

Every arrest asks the same
question.

Ralph leans back.

RALPH

And what question is that?

KING

How much dignity can fit in a
cage?

The cell goes quiet.

Outside, a key turns in a distant lock.

Metal echoes.

King looks toward the small barred window.

A shaft of light falls across the concrete floor.
He steps into it.

INT. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE - DR. MAYS' OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Teen Martin stands to leave.
Mays stops him.

MAYS

Mr. King.

Teen Martin turns.

MAYS

One more thing.

Teen Martin waits.

MAYS

The world does not need another
educated coward.

The words cut.

MAYS

Whatever you become, do not become
that.

Teen Martin nods slowly.

TEEN MARTIN

No, sir.

MAYS

Good.

Teen Martin exits.

Mays watches him go, seeing something the boy cannot yet
see in himself.

INT. SELMA JAIL - HOLDING CELL - DAY

King stands in the light.
Not free.
Not defeated.
Ralph watches him.

RALPH

You all right?

King looks at the barred window.

KING

A pulpit is only oak.

Ralph frowns.

KING

But a jail cell can preach too.

Ralph smiles faintly.

RALPH

Well then, Reverend, what is the sermon?

King looks at the men in the cell.

KING

That citizenship is worth the inconvenience of power.

Bevel grins.

BEVEL

That'll preach.

From somewhere down the hall, prisoners begin to sing.

Soft at first.

A freedom song.

One by one, the men in King's cell join.

King listens.

Then sings with them.

The sound fills the jail.

It passes through bars.

Through concrete.

Through the locked doors.

EXT. SELMA JAIL - DAY

Outside, supporters gather.

More arrive by the minute.

They hear the singing from inside.

A woman begins singing along.

Then another.

Soon the song is on both sides of the wall.

Inside and outside.

Caged and free.

One movement.

FADE OUT.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - BASEMENT - NIGHT

A folding table buried in paper.

Maps. Names. Arrest lists. Bail notes. Church contacts.
Medical volunteers. Press numbers.

King sits with Ralph, Dorothy, Andrew, Bevel, and local
organizers.

Everyone looks worn down to the bone.

A half-empty coffee pot sits near the center of the table.

Dorothy flips through a stack of handwritten notes.

DOROTHY

We need more drivers. More trained
marshals. More people willing to
document arrests.

ANDREW

Press from New York wants to know
if arrests are still the strategy.

BEVEL

Arrests were never the strategy.

He taps the courthouse map.

BEVEL

The vote is the strategy.

RALPH

Arrests are what happens when
democracy gets embarrassed.

King studies the map.

A route from Brown Chapel to the courthouse.

Marked and remarked.

The door opens.

A LOCAL ORGANIZER, 20s, enters quickly.

His face is wrong.

The room feels it before he speaks.

LOCAL ORGANIZER

There's trouble in Marion.

Everyone turns.

KING

What happened?

LOCAL ORGANIZER

Night march. State troopers. Local police.

A beat.

LOCAL ORGANIZER

They went after people in the street.

Dorothy closes her eyes.

RALPH

How bad?

The organizer looks at King.

LOCAL ORGANIZER

A young man was shot.

Silence.

KING

Who?

LOCAL ORGANIZER

Jimmie Lee Jackson.

Bevel stands.

BEVEL

Jimmie?

LOCAL ORGANIZER

He was trying to protect his mother. His grandfather too.

King's face tightens.

ANDREW

Is he alive?

LOCAL ORGANIZER

For now. They took him to the hospital.

The room is still.

Then everything moves at once.

Dorothy grabs her notebook.

DOROTHY

Which hospital?

ANDREW

Who saw it?

RALPH

Get names. Every witness.

BEVEL

I know people in Marion.

KING

Call them.

The room quiets at King's voice.

KING

No rumors. No speeches yet. Facts first.

The organizer nods.

KING

And find out what the family needs.

Bevel heads for the phone.

Ralph looks at King.

RALPH

This is going to break people.

King looks at the map.

KING

It already has.

EXT. GOOD SAMARITAN HOSPITAL - SELMA - NIGHT

Rain slicks the street.

Cars line the curb.

Black families gather beneath umbrellas and coats, waiting for word.

A police car sits across the street.

Watching.

King's car pulls up.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Fluorescent lights.

Wet shoes squeak on tile.

King walks with Ralph, Andrew, and Bevel.

A NURSE leads them quietly.

They pass injured marchers.

Bandaged heads. Bruised faces. Torn coats.

A woman sits with blood on her sleeve, staring ahead.

King slows.

She looks up at him.

WOMAN

They turned the street lights off.

King stops.

WOMAN

Then they came at us.

King kneels slightly.

KING

Were you there when Mr. Jackson
was shot?

She nods.

WOMAN

He was helping his mama.

A beat.

WOMAN

That's all.

King absorbs this.

KING

Thank you.

He stands.

Continues.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - NIGHT

A small waiting area crowded with family and supporters.

CAGER LEE, 80s, Jimmie Lee's grandfather, sits with one arm
bandaged, face swollen from being struck.

JIMMIE LEE'S MOTHER sits nearby, trembling but upright.

King enters.

The room turns.

No one needs introductions.

King approaches Cager Lee first.

KING

Mr. Lee.

Cager Lee tries to stand.

King stops him gently.

KING

Please.

CAGER LEE

Reverend King.

King sits beside him.

CAGER LEE

They beat me.

He says it plainly.

No self-pity.

Only fact.

CAGER LEE

Jimmie came to help.

King listens.

CAGER LEE

That boy was always coming to help
somebody.

King looks toward Jimmie Lee's mother.

She is holding a handkerchief so tightly her knuckles pale.

KING

May I sit with you?

She nods.

King moves to the chair beside her.

JIMMIE LEE'S MOTHER

He was not looking for trouble.

KING

I believe you.

JIMMIE LEE'S MOTHER

He was a good boy.

KING

Yes, ma'am.

JIMMIE LEE'S MOTHER

No.

She turns to him, fierce through shock.

JIMMIE LEE'S MOTHER

I need you to hear me. He was not perfect because he got shot. He was good before that.

King takes that in.

KING

Then that is how we will remember him.

Her eyes fill.

JIMMIE LEE'S MOTHER

They always make them saints after they kill them.

A beat.

JIMMIE LEE'S MOTHER

I want somebody to know he was a man first.

King's face carries the blow of that truth.

KING

I know it now.

She nods.

A doctor appears at the far end of the hall.

Everyone rises or tries to.

The doctor does not bring good news.

Not yet.

But not hope either.

DOCTOR

Family only for now.

Jimmie Lee's mother stands.

Cager Lee tries to stand too.

Andrew helps him.

King watches them go.

The waiting room becomes impossibly quiet.

RALPH

Martin.

King does not look away from the hallway.

KING

A man helps his mother and becomes
a target.

BEVEL

This cannot stay in Marion.

King turns to him.

BEVEL

They need to see this in
Montgomery.

Ralph hears the dangerous shape of it.

RALPH

Bevel.

BEVEL

No. I mean it. We carry him to the
capital. We carry this to
Wallace's door.

ANDREW

A march?

BEVEL

From Selma to Montgomery.

The idea enters the room like weather.

Everyone feels it.

Ralph looks to King.

RALPH

That is fifty miles.

BEVEL

Then they will have fifty miles to
decide who they are.

King says nothing.

The hospital lights hum.

The hallway seems to stretch.

A mother's muffled sob comes from beyond the doors.

The sound lands in King like a memory.

A child crying.

A house full of panic.

INT. KING FAMILY HOME - ATLANTA - DAY - FLASHBACK

YOUNG MARTIN, 12, bursts through the front door.

Breathless.

Dust on his shoes.

He has been outside when he should not have been.

The house feels wrong.

Too many adults.

Too quiet.

Alberta stands in the hallway, eyes red.

King Sr. is near the stairs.

Young Martin stops.

YOUNG MARTIN

Mama?

Alberta turns.

The look on her face answers before words do.

YOUNG MARTIN

What happened?

No one speaks.

Young Martin looks around.

YOUNG MARTIN

Where's Grandma?

Alberta's face breaks.

ALBERTA

Baby--

Young Martin steps back.

YOUNG MARTIN

No.

King Sr. moves toward him.

KING SR.

M.L.

YOUNG MARTIN

No.

The word is small.

Then not small.

YOUNG MARTIN

No!

He runs.

INT. KING FAMILY HOME - STAIRWAY - CONTINUOUS - FLASHBACK

Young Martin races up the stairs.

King Sr. follows.

KING SR.

Martin!

Young Martin reaches the upstairs hall, panicked, trapped inside a grief too large for his body.

He looks toward a bedroom window.

Alberta appears at the bottom of the stairs.

ALBERTA

M.L.!

Young Martin moves to the window.

King Sr. rushes forward.

Too late.

EXT. KING FAMILY HOME - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Martin hits the ground hard.

Adults scream.

Alberta runs to him.

King Sr. comes behind her.

Young Martin lies stunned, gasping.

Alive.

Alberta falls beside him.

ALBERTA

Baby! Baby, look at me!

Young Martin stares upward, tears spilling.

YOUNG MARTIN

I wasn't here.

Alberta freezes.

YOUNG MARTIN

I wasn't here when she died.

King Sr. kneels beside him, shaken.

KING SR.

That is not your fault.

YOUNG MARTIN

I went out.

KING SR.

Martin, listen to me.

YOUNG MARTIN

I went out.

Alberta holds his face.

ALBERTA

Her love for you was not measured
by where you were at the last
minute.

Young Martin sobs.

YOUNG MARTIN

I should have been here.

KING SR.

No.

King Sr.'s voice is firm, though his hands tremble.

KING SR.

Death is not a punishment God
sends because a child was not in
the room.

Young Martin looks at him, desperate to believe.

KING SR.

Grief will tell you lies when it
cannot find a place to put its
pain.

Alberta holds him tighter.

ALBERTA

You loved her.

YOUNG MARTIN

Yes.

ALBERTA

She knew.

YOUNG MARTIN

How?

Alberta presses his hand to her heart.

ALBERTA

Because love does not wait until
the final minute to become real.

Young Martin breaks again.

King Sr. looks toward the open window above.

Fear and gratitude war across his face.

**INT. KING FAMILY HOME - YOUNG MARTIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT -
FLASHBACK**

Young Martin lies in bed, bandaged and bruised.

Moonlight through the window.

He is awake.

King Sr. sits in a chair beside him.

Silent.

Young Martin turns his head.

YOUNG MARTIN

Daddy?

KING SR.

Yes.

YOUNG MARTIN

Does hurting ever stop?

King Sr. leans forward.

KING SR.

Some hurting changes.

YOUNG MARTIN

Into what?

King Sr. thinks.

KING SR.

If you let God touch it, sometimes
it changes into mercy.

Young Martin stares at him.

YOUNG MARTIN

What if it changes into anger?

KING SR.

Then you must decide what your
anger will serve.

A beat.

KING SR.

It can serve death.

Another beat.

KING SR.

Or it can serve the living.

Young Martin looks toward the window.

KING SR.

Your grandmother loved the living.

Young Martin closes his eyes.

The hospital hallway hum returns.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - NIGHT

King stands in the hospital waiting area.

His eyes wet but clear.

Ralph is watching him.

RALPH

Where did you go?

King looks toward the hall where Jimmie Lee's family disappeared.

KING

To a window I should not have
opened.

Ralph understands only part of it.

Enough.

BEVEL

Martin.

King turns.

BEVEL

Selma to Montgomery.

A beat.

BEVEL

That is how we answer.

Andrew watches King.

Dorothy has entered silently and heard enough.

DOROTHY

We do not answer tonight.

Bevel looks at her.

DOROTHY

Tonight a mother is in a hospital
hallway.

That lands.

King nods.

KING

Dorothy is right.

Bevel struggles with it.

KING

The movement must never step over
the person in order to reach the
symbol.

Bevel lowers his eyes.

KING

We pray. We gather facts. We stand
with the family.

A beat.

KING

Then, if the family permits it, we
carry the truth where power can no
longer pretend not to hear.

Bevel nods.

Not satisfied.

But guided.

INT. HOSPITAL CHAPEL - LATER

A small chapel.

King sits alone in a pew.

The room is nearly dark.

A plain wooden cross hangs on the wall.

His hands are clasped.

Not peacefully.

Tightly.

The door opens.

Dorothy enters.

She sits two pews behind him.

For a while, neither speaks.

DOROTHY

Mrs. Jackson asked if you would
pray with her when she comes back.

King nods.

DOROTHY
I told her you would.

KING
Thank you.
Dorothy studies him.

DOROTHY
You carry grief like it is
evidence.
King looks back at her.

DOROTHY
Sometimes grief is just grief.
King turns forward.

KING
I know.
DOROTHY
Do you?
He does not answer.

DOROTHY
That mother does not need history
tonight. She needs someone who can
sit beside her without turning her
son into a headline.
King closes his eyes.

KING
You are right.
DOROTHY
I usually am.
A small breath from King.
Almost a laugh.

DOROTHY
But tomorrow, Bevel may be right
too.
King opens his eyes.

DOROTHY
Montgomery.
The word waits in the room.

KING
Fifty miles.

DOROTHY

A long walk.

KING

A dangerous one.

DOROTHY

So was standing in line.

King nods.

The door opens again.

Jimmie Lee's mother stands there.

Hollow-eyed.

King rises.

He goes to her.

She does not ask for words.

Only prayer.

He takes her hands.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - LATER

The group gathers again.

Faces drawn.

The family has returned to the waiting area.

King stands with Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, Bevel.

Cager Lee sits nearby, eyes closed.

Jimmie Lee's mother stares at the floor.

King looks at the organizers.

KING

If he lives, we stand with him.

A beat.

KING

If he dies, we stand with his
mother.

Another beat.

KING

And if we march, we do it not
because death is useful.

He looks at Bevel.

KING

But because life must be defended
in public.

Bevel nods.

Ralph crosses his arms.

RALPH

Clark will not be the only one
waiting.

ANDREW

Wallace will be watching.

DOROTHY

The nation too.

KING

Then let them watch carefully.

He looks toward Jimmie Lee's mother.

KING

This began with a man protecting
his mother.

A beat.

KING

Let no one reduce it to politics.

EXT. GOOD SAMARITAN HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Rain continues.

Reporters wait under umbrellas now.

King steps outside with Ralph.

A REPORTER rushes forward.

REPORTER

Dr. King, is it true a protester
was shot?

RALPH

Not now.

REPORTER

Do you blame law enforcement?

King stops.

Turns.

KING

A young man is fighting for his
life.

The reporter quiets.

KING

His family is not a press
conference.

A beat.

KING

You want a statement? Say that a
citizen was shot after citizens
gathered against injustice. Say
that a mother sits tonight where
no mother should sit. Say that
this nation must decide how many
bodies it requires before it
recognizes the right to vote.

The reporter writes, shaken.

KING

That is enough for tonight.

King moves to the car.

INT. CAR - OUTSIDE HOSPITAL - NIGHT

King sits in the back with Ralph.

Andrew drives.

Dorothy sits in front, notebook closed for once.

No one speaks.

The hospital glows behind them.

Bevel remains at the entrance, talking with local
organizers.

Ralph looks out the window.

RALPH

He may be right.

KING

Bevel?

RALPH

Montgomery.

King watches rain slide down the glass.

KING

I know.

RALPH

You hate that he may be right.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

I hate what will make him right.

The car pulls away.

EXT. SELMA STREET - NIGHT

The car moves through wet streets.

Past closed shops.

Past police cars.

Past homes where lights burn late.

INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

King looks out at Selma.

KING

When my grandmother died, I
thought grief meant I had failed
to love her properly.

Ralph turns to him.

King keeps his eyes on the window.

KING

I was a child. I did not
understand that grief is not proof
of failure.

A beat.

KING

It is proof of connection.

Dorothy listens from the front seat.

KING

This county is grieving because it
is connected to something that
keeps being wounded.

RALPH

The vote.

KING

Dignity.

A beat.

KING

The vote is one way dignity speaks
in public.

Ralph nods slowly.

The car turns toward Brown Chapel.

KING

If we march to Montgomery, it
cannot be vengeance.

DOROTHY

No.

KING

It cannot be spectacle.

ANDREW

No.

KING

It must be a funeral procession
for fear.

The others absorb that.

RALPH

And a birth announcement for
voting rights.

King looks at him.

A tired smile.

KING

Now you sound like the preacher.

Ralph smiles back.

The car continues.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - NIGHT

The church lights glow ahead.

People wait on the steps.

News has traveled.

So has fear.

So has resolve.

King steps from the car.

The waiting crowd looks to him.
He does not speak immediately.
He looks at their faces.
Then toward the dark road beyond Selma.
The road to Montgomery.

FADE OUT.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

The church is packed.
Not with song this time.
With grief.
People fill the pews, aisles, walls, and back doors. Some
still wear work clothes. Some hold hats against their
 chests. Some hold children close as if the building itself
 might fail them.
A low murmur moves through the room.
Jimmie Lee Jackson is dead.
King stands near the pulpit with Ralph, Dorothy, Andrew,
 Bevel, local clergy, and Marion organizers.
No one rushes him.
The room does not need speed.
It needs somewhere to put its sorrow.
King steps forward.
The room quiets.

KING

A young man went into the street
to stand with his people.

A beat.

KING

He went into danger not because he
hated anyone, but because he loved
someone.

Jimmie Lee's mother sits near the front.
Her face is still.
Too still.

KING

He tried to protect his mother.

A murmur of pain moves through the congregation.

KING

He tried to protect his
grandfather.

King looks across the room.

KING

And for that, this county gave him
a bullet.

The congregation reacts.

Anger rises.

Not disorder.

Not yet.

A MAN IN THE BACK

How long we supposed to take this?

Several voices answer.

YEAH.

HOW LONG?

King lets it rise just enough to
be honest.

Then raises his hand.

KING

Do not be ashamed of your anger.

That quiets them.

KING

Anger tells us that something
sacred has been violated.

He steps down from the pulpit area.

Closer to the people.

KING

But anger must be given a holy
assignment, or it will accept an
unholy one.

The room settles.

KING

We will not waste Jimmie Lee
Jackson's life by turning grief
into revenge.

A beat.

KING

And we will not insult his death
by turning grief into silence.

Bevel watches him.

This is the opening he has waited for.

KING

The question before us is not
whether we hurt.

His voice grows stronger.

KING

The question is whether our hurt
will be allowed to speak where
power can hear it.

A low response.

AMEN.

YES.

King looks toward Bevel.

Then to the people.

KING

This did not begin in Marion. It
did not begin in Selma. It began
every time a citizen was told to
wait outside the promise of his
own country.

Dorothy's eyes sharpen.

She knows where he is going.

KING

So we will carry this demand
beyond the courthouse.

The room leans in.

KING

We will carry it beyond the jail.

A beat.

KING

We will carry it to Montgomery.

The church erupts.

Not applause.

Release.

Some stand. Some cry. Some shout. Some pray.

Ralph looks at King.

The decision has crossed from idea into history.

Bevel closes his eyes.

Yes.

Dorothy watches the crowd, already calculating danger.

Andrew scans the room, reading fear and fire together.

King raises his hand again.

KING

Listen to me.

The room takes time to quiet.

KING

A march to Montgomery cannot be a
parade of anger.

A beat.

KING

It must be a procession of
discipline.

The people listen.

KING

If we go, we go knowing the road
is long. We go knowing Governor
Wallace will resist. We go knowing
Sheriff Clark and men like him are
waiting for one moment they can
use against us.

A YOUNG MAN stands.

YOUNG MAN

They already using everything
against us.

KING

Yes.

The honesty lands.

KING

And that is why we must not help
them lie.

The young man sits.

KING

We will train. We will organize.
We will pray. We will document. We
will prepare medical aid. We will
prepare jail support. We will
prepare families for what this may
cost.

He looks at Jimmie Lee's mother.

KING

And we will ask permission from
grief before we use its name.

The room goes still.

Jimmie Lee's mother looks up at him.

For the first time, her face moves.

Not peace.

Recognition.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - BASEMENT - LATER

A strategy meeting in motion.

Maps spread over folding tables.

Selma to Montgomery.

Fifty miles of road.

Ralph, Dorothy, Andrew, Bevel, local clergy, student
leaders, and organizers crowd around.

Coffee cups. Pencils. Fear.

Bevel points to the map.

BEVEL

We start at Brown Chapel. Across
the bridge. Highway 80. All the
way to Montgomery.

RALPH

You say that like fifty miles is a
hymn verse.

BEVEL

It is a road.

RALPH

It is a road lined with state
troopers.

ANDREW

And cameras, if we do this right.

DOROTHY

Cameras will not stop a club.

ANDREW

No, but they can keep the lie from
traveling faster than the truth.

A LOCAL PASTOR shakes his head.

LOCAL PASTOR

Governor Wallace will never allow
it.

BEVEL

That is why we go.

DOROTHY

We do not send people onto that
road because Wallace is stubborn.

BEVEL

We send them because the vote is
worth walking for.

DOROTHY

And worth living for.

That lands.

King stands at the edge of the table, listening.

Not passive.

Weighing every word.

RALPH

We need permits.

BEVEL

Permits?

RALPH

Yes, permits. Lawyers. Federal
pressure. Church networks. Food.
Lodging. Medical volunteers.

BEVEL

People are dying while we file
paperwork.

RALPH

People will die faster if we
confuse courage with
improvisation.

Bevel bristles.

King finally speaks.

KING

Both of you are defending the
living.

The room settles.

KING

James is right. The road must be
taken.

Bevel looks at him.

KING

Ralph is right. The road must not
be taken carelessly.

Ralph nods.

KING

This march will not be merely from
Selma to Montgomery.

He touches the map.

KING

It will be from local suffering to
national conscience.

Dorothy studies him.

DOROTHY

Then national conscience needs
logistics.

KING

Yes.

She picks up a pencil.

DOROTHY

Good. I prefer conscience with a
clipboard.

A small laugh moves through the room.

Brief.

Needed.

Andrew points toward the river on the map.

ANDREW

The Edmund Pettus Bridge is the
first choke point.

The room looks.

The bridge.

A line on paper.

A trap in reality.

LOCAL ORGANIZER

They can stop people there before
anyone gets to the highway.

BEVEL

Then the bridge becomes the
witness.

Ralph looks at King.

RALPH

Martin.

King keeps his eyes on the bridge.

A distant sound begins.

A crowd.

Angry.

Gathering.

The map blurs beneath King's hand.

The basement lights become headlights.

The murmur becomes shouting.

EXT. KING HOME - MONTGOMERY - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A younger King, 27, rushes from a car.

Smoke hangs in the air.

Neighbors crowd the street.

Police lights flash.

People shout.

The front of King's house is damaged from a bomb blast.

YOUNG KING freezes at the sight.

For one awful second, he is not a leader.
He is a husband.
A father.

YOUNG KING

Coretta!
He runs toward the house.
Men try to stop him.

NEIGHBOR

Reverend, wait!

YOUNG KING

Coretta!

INT. KING HOME - MONTGOMERY - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

The house is chaos.
Broken glass. Splintered wood. Dust in the air.
Coretta stands in the hallway holding baby Yolanda.
Shaken.
Alive.
Young King enters.
He sees them.
The world returns to his body all at once.

YOUNG KING

Coretta.
He reaches them.
Holds them.
Careful because of the baby.
Desperate because of everything else.

CORETTA

We are all right.

YOUNG KING

Yoki?

CORETTA

She is all right.
He touches his daughter's face.
Yolanda cries softly.
Young King looks at Coretta.

CORETTA

I was in the back room.

He closes his eyes.

The almost of it hits him.

CORETTA

Martin.

He opens his eyes.

CORETTA

There are people outside.

He hears them now.

The crowd.

Angry.

Growing.

EXT. KING HOME - MONTGOMERY - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A Black crowd has gathered outside the damaged house.

Men with guns.

Men with bricks.

Men with rage that has waited too long for permission.

A POLICE OFFICER stands near his car, nervous now.

The balance of fear has shifted.

Young King steps onto the damaged porch.

The crowd surges toward him.

VOICES

We got guns too!

They can't keep doing this!

Say the word, Reverend!

Young King looks out at them.

People who love him.

People ready to kill for him.

That frightens him more than the bomb.

Ralph, younger, pushes through the crowd toward the porch.

YOUNG RALPH

Martin!

Young King raises both hands.

YOUNG KING

Please.

The crowd does not quiet.

YOUNG KING

Please!

Slowly, the voices lower.

Young King stands before his broken home.

His wife and child behind him.

His people before him.

His enemies nearby.

YOUNG KING

My family is safe.

A wave of relief.

Then renewed anger.

MAN IN CROWD

That ain't enough!

YOUNG KING

No.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

It is not enough.

The man lowers his brick slightly.

YOUNG KING

What happened here tonight is
evil.

The crowd responds.

YES.

THAT'S RIGHT.

YOUNG KING

But we must decide right now
whether evil will give the orders.

The crowd quiets further.

YOUNG KING

If we answer this bomb with
bullets, then the men who planted
it will have reached farther than
our house.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

They will have reached into our
souls.

A woman cries.

A man grips his pistol tighter, torn.

YOUNG KING

I am asking you to go home.

The crowd resists.

YOUNG KING

Not because you are weak.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

Because you are strong enough not
to be ruled by the worst thing
done to you.

Young Ralph watches him, amazed and afraid.

YOUNG KING

We will not stop walking.

He looks over the crowd.

YOUNG KING

We will not stop riding.

The crowd murmurs.

YOUNG KING

We will not stop demanding
justice.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

But tonight, we will not become
the excuse they are waiting for.

The man with the brick lowers it.

Another man lowers his gun.

Then another.

The crowd does not forgive.

But it obeys something higher than rage.

Young King exhales, barely.

Coretta appears in the doorway behind him, baby in her arms.

She sees what he has done.

She also sees what it cost.

INT. KING HOME - MONTGOMERY - LATER - FLASHBACK

The crowd has thinned.

The house remains damaged.

Young King sits at the kitchen table.

Coretta places a cup of coffee before him.

He does not drink it.

Yolanda sleeps in another room.

For a moment, only the sound of settling debris.

YOUNG KING

I almost lost you.

CORETTA

Almost is not what happened.

YOUNG KING

It is close enough to leave a mark.

Coretta sits across from him.

YOUNG KING

When I saw the house, I wanted--

He stops.

Coretta waits.

YOUNG KING

I wanted someone to pay.

Coretta does not flinch.

CORETTA

Of course you did.

He looks at her.

YOUNG KING

That is not what a preacher is supposed to want.

CORETTA

It is what a husband wants.

A beat.

CORETTA

It is what a father wants.

Young King looks toward the broken front room.

YOUNG KING

Then how do I stand before people
and ask them to do what I can
barely do myself?

Coretta reaches across the table.

CORETTA

By telling the truth.

He looks at her.

CORETTA

Not that you are never afraid. Not
that you never get angry.

A beat.

CORETTA

That you refuse to let fear and
anger become your gods.

Young King takes that in.

The damaged house creaks around them.

YOUNG KING

This road will ask more from us.

CORETTA

I know.

YOUNG KING

From you.

CORETTA

I know.

YOUNG KING

From our children.

That one hurts her.

CORETTA

I know.

Silence.

Young King lowers his head.

Coretta holds his hand across the table.

CORETTA

Then we had better make the road
mean something.

The sound of dripping water becomes pencil tapping on a
map.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - BASEMENT - DAY

King stands over the Selma-to-Montgomery map.

Everyone waits.

Ralph studies him.

RALPH

Martin?

King returns.

He looks at the bridge on the map.

KING

They will try to provoke us before
we reach the highway.

BEVEL

Then we train harder.

KING

Yes.

DOROTHY

And if the people are attacked?

The room holds its breath.

KING

Then the nation must see the
difference between a march and a
mob.

A beat.

KING

Between a badge and justice.

Another beat.

KING

Between order and peace.

Andrew writes that down.

RALPH

We need to decide the first march
date.

Bevel answers immediately.

BEVEL

Sunday.

Dorothy looks up.

DOROTHY

That soon?

BEVEL

Jimmie Lee should not have to wait
in the ground for us to become
brave.

Ralph looks ready to object.

King raises a hand.

He considers the room.

The road.

The bridge.

The mother.

The bombed house from memory.

KING

Sunday.

The word lands.

No one cheers.

They understand too much.

KING

But hear me clearly.

He looks at each organizer.

KING

No weapons. No retaliation. No
loose formation. No one goes who
has not been told what may happen.

A beat.

KING

No one walks that bridge thinking
faith is a shield against pain.

The room is silent.

KING

Faith is not a shield.

A beat.

KING

It is what tells you to keep
walking when the shield is gone.

Dorothy nods, moved despite herself.

DOROTHY

I will organize training tonight.

ANDREW

I will get word to the press.

RALPH

I will call the clergy.

BEVEL

I will speak to the students.

KING

And I will speak with Mrs.
Jackson.

The room quiets at that.

KING

No march in her son's name without
her knowing what we intend.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - SIDE ROOM - LATER

Jimmie Lee's mother sits in a plain chair.

King sits across from her.

No aides.

No cameras.

Just two people inside grief.

KING

Mrs. Jackson, there is talk of a
march.

She already knows.

JIMMIE LEE'S MOTHER

To Montgomery.

KING

Yes, ma'am.

She looks down at her hands.

JIMMIE LEE'S MOTHER

Because of my son.

KING

Because of what happened to your son.

A beat.

KING

But not only because of what happened to him.

She looks at him.

KING

Because of who he was before it happened.

Her eyes moisten.

KING

Because he was a citizen. Because he loved his family. Because he had a right to live. Because every person in that line has the same right.

She nods slowly.

JIMMIE LEE'S MOTHER

Will it bring him back?

KING

No, ma'am.

She studies him.

JIMMIE LEE'S MOTHER

Then do not talk to me like it will.

King lowers his eyes.

KING

I would not dare.

A long silence.

JIMMIE LEE'S MOTHER

Will it help somebody else's son?

King looks at her.

KING

That is our prayer.

She sits with that.

Then nods once.

JIMMIE LEE'S MOTHER

Then walk.

King's eyes fill.

JIMMIE LEE'S MOTHER

But do not let them make my boy
into a slogan.

KING

No, ma'am.

JIMMIE LEE'S MOTHER

Say his name like he had a mother.

King can barely answer.

KING

I will.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Training.

The pews have been pushed back in sections.

Marchers practice dropping to their knees.

Others practice linking arms.

Dorothy moves among the women and elders.

DOROTHY

Protect the head if you go down.
Do not pull someone up too fast.
Watch for breathing.

Bevel stands before a group of students.

BEVEL

If they curse you, you keep
moving. If they shove you, you
keep your hands open. If they
strike, you protect yourself
without striking back.

A STUDENT

What if I cannot?

Bevel stops.

The honest question quiets the group.

King, nearby, hears it.

He steps closer.

KING

Then step out before the march
begins.

The student looks ashamed.

KING

There is no shame in knowing the
truth about your limits.

A beat.

KING

The shame would be pretending,
then endangering the person beside
you.

The student nods.

KING

Courage is not proven by joining
every line.

He looks across the room.

KING

Sometimes courage is admitting
which line you are ready for.

The students take that in.

Ralph enters from the back, holding a note.

He approaches King.

RALPH

Clergy are coming. Some from
Atlanta. Some from across the
country.

KING

Good.

RALPH

Some think this march is too
dangerous.

King watches an elderly woman practice kneeling.

KING

They are right.

Ralph looks at him.

KING

It is also necessary.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - NIGHT

The church glows in the darkness.

Inside, voices count steps.

Practice songs.

Repeat instructions.

Across the street, deputies watch.

One writes something in a notebook.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - LATE NIGHT

The training has ended.

The sanctuary is nearly empty.

King stands alone at the center aisle.

He looks toward the doors.

Imagines the march beginning.

Ralph enters quietly.

RALPH

You should sleep.

KING

You have developed a very narrow
range of advice.

RALPH

And you have developed a
consistent refusal to take it.

Ralph joins him.

A beat.

RALPH

Sunday.

KING

Sunday.

RALPH

You think they will attack?

King looks toward the invisible bridge.

KING

Yes.

Ralph exhales.

RALPH

Then why do I feel like you are
sending them anyway?

King turns to him.

KING

Because we are not sending them.

A beat.

KING

We are going with them.

Ralph nods.

That is the answer he expected.

Not the one he wanted.

RALPH

Martin, one of these days, going
with them will not be enough to
keep them alive.

King looks down.

KING

I know.

RALPH

And it may not be enough to keep
you alive.

King looks at him.

No answer.

The silence is answer enough.

RALPH

I hate when you do that.

KING

Do what?

RALPH

Make peace with things the rest of
us are still arguing with God
about.

King almost smiles.

KING

I have not made peace.

A beat.

KING

I have only stopped pretending the
argument changes the assignment.

Ralph looks toward the pulpit.

RALPH

Your father ever tell you ministry
would come with this much
paperwork and danger?

KING

No.

RALPH

Mine either.

They stand in the quiet.

KING

When my house was bombed in
Montgomery, I saw men ready to
turn love for my family into
bloodshed.

A beat.

KING

I understood then that leadership
is not only moving people forward.

He looks toward the doors.

KING

Sometimes it is keeping their pain
from being stolen by the very evil
that caused it.

Ralph takes that in.

RALPH

Then Sunday, we guard their pain.

KING

Yes.

A beat.

KING

And carry it across the bridge.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - NIGHT

The bridge stands empty over the Alabama River.
Steel arches against the dark.

Silent.

Waiting.

FADE OUT.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - SELMA - SUNDAY MORNING

The church doors open.

A crowd spills into the daylight.

Men in suits. Women in Sunday hats. Students in coats too thin for the wind. Children held back by anxious parents. Clergy. Organizers. Reporters.

This is not a rally.

This is a decision made visible.

SUPER: SELMA, ALABAMA - MARCH 7, 1965

At the front of the crowd stand JOHN LEWIS, 25, steady and solemn, and HOSEA WILLIAMS, 39, sharp-eyed, restless, carrying the burden like a flame.

Bevel moves through the younger marchers.

BEVEL

Keep formation. No running. No retaliation. If you are afraid, say so now and step out with honor.

No one steps out.

Dorothy checks medical volunteers near the church steps.

DOROTHY

Bandages. Water. Names. If someone goes down, you write down who they are and who takes them.

Andrew stands with reporters.

ANDREW

You stay close enough to see the truth. Far enough not to become the story.

A reporter looks toward the front.

REPORTER

Where is Dr. King?

Andrew's face tightens.

ANDREW

He had to return to Atlanta. This
march belongs to the people who
have been standing in that line.

The reporter scribbles.

Andrew steps closer.

ANDREW

And you spell their names right.

Near the front, Ralph speaks quietly with Hosea and John.

RALPH

No improvising on that bridge.

HOSEA

The bridge may improvise on us.

JOHN

Then we keep walking until we
cannot.

Ralph looks at him.

Young.

Brave.

Too brave.

RALPH

If you see troopers, stop and
hold.

John nods.

JOHN

We know.

Ralph looks back toward Brown Chapel.

The people wait.

Ralph wishes King were here.

He does not say it.

Hosea turns to the crowd.

HOSEA

We march for Jimmie Lee Jackson.

The crowd answers with a low murmur.

HOSEA

We march for the ballot.

A stronger response.

HOSEA

We march because a closed
courthouse door has become a wound
in the body of this nation.

John steps forward.

JOHN

Walk in peace.

A beat.

JOHN

But walk.

The march begins.

EXT. SELMA STREET - MORNING

The marchers move two by two.

Six hundred bodies.

One purpose.

Feet against pavement.

A freedom song rises, low and steady.

People watch from porches.

Some wave.

Some cry.

Some close curtains, afraid of what courage may cost.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - MORNING

The bridge rises ahead.

Steel arches against the sky.

The marchers approach.

From below, the Alabama River moves slowly, indifferent to
history.

John and Hosea lead the front line onto the bridge.

The crowd follows.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - CREST - CONTINUOUS

As the marchers reach the top, the other side comes into
view.

Troopers.

Deputies.

Sheriff's posse.

Gas masks.

Clubs.

Horses.

A wall of state power waiting at the bottom.

The singing weakens.

Then steadies.

John looks at Hosea.

Hosea looks ahead.

Neither turns back.

EXT. ATLANTA STREET - SAME TIME

A car pulls up outside Ebenezer Baptist Church.

King steps out in a dark suit, carrying a folder.

Coretta is with him.

He pauses before entering.

Something unsettles him.

CORETTA

Martin?

KING

They should be near the bridge by
now.

CORETTA

Yes.

KING

I should be there.

Coretta holds his gaze.

CORETTA

You cannot be everywhere pain is
waiting.

He knows she is right.

That does not help.

They enter the church.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - SELMA SIDE - DAY

The marchers descend toward the line of troopers.

A STATE TROOPER COMMANDER steps forward with a bullhorn.

TROOPER COMMANDER

This is an unlawful assembly. You
are ordered to disperse.

The marchers stop.

John looks over the troopers.

Hosea raises his voice.

HOSEA

May we speak with you?

No answer.

HOSEA

May we pray?

The Trooper Commander looks at his watch.

TROOPER COMMANDER

You have two minutes to disperse.

The marchers stand still.

Behind John and Hosea, fear moves through the line.

A young woman reaches for the hand of the woman beside her.

An older man removes his hat.

Someone begins to pray under his breath.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - ATLANTA - DAY

King sits near the front before service.

The sanctuary is full.

The choir prepares.

People greet one another.

Ordinary Sunday tries to continue.

King opens his Bible.

He does not read.

Coretta watches him from the side.

An USHER approaches quietly and bends near King.

USHER

Dr. King, there's a call for you
in the office.

King looks up.

His body understands before his mind is told.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

King enters quickly.

The phone rests on the desk.

He picks it up.

KING

This is King.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - SELMA - DAY

Andrew stands by a phone in the church office.

The sound of distant shouting filters through the line.

ANDREW

Martin.

KING

Andy?

ANDREW

They reached the bridge.

King closes his eyes.

KING

What happened?

Andrew looks toward the church doors.

More shouting outside.

ANDREW

Troopers blocked them.

KING

Are they holding?

ANDREW

For now.

A beat.

ANDREW

Martin, it does not look good.

King grips the phone.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - DAY

The Trooper Commander lowers the bullhorn.

The two minutes have not passed.

He turns to his men.

A silent order.

The troopers put on gas masks.

John sees it.

HOSEA

Hold.

The line tightens.

JOHN

Do not run.

The troopers advance.

At first, a walk.

Then faster.

Then the wall breaks forward.

Clubs rise.

Horses move.

Gas canisters arc through the air.

Smoke blooms across the road.

The marchers do not understand the first second.

Then pain teaches them.

People scream.

Bodies fall.

Hands reach.

A woman drops to her knees.

A man shields his head.

John is struck and goes down.

Hosea disappears in the smoke.

The bridge becomes chaos.

Not disorder from the marchers.

Violence brought against discipline.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - OFFICE - DAY

King hears it through the phone.

Not clearly.

That is worse.

Screams.

Shouting.

Andrew's voice pulled away from the receiver.

ANDREW

No! Stay back! Stay back!

KING

Andy?

No answer.

KING

Andy!

The line crackles.

Then Andrew returns, breathless.

ANDREW

They attacked them.

King goes still.

ANDREW

Martin, they attacked them on the
bridge.

King's face empties.

KING

John?

ANDREW

I do not know.

KING

Hosea?

ANDREW

I do not know.

More shouting behind Andrew.

ANDREW

People are bleeding. They are
bringing them back to the church.

King lowers his head.

The phone in his hand feels suddenly too small for the
world.

INT. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE - DR. MAYS' OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young King, 18, sits across from Dr. Benjamin Mays.

Books line the office. Afternoon light slants across the
floor.

Mays reads a newspaper article, then sets it down.

MAYS

You believe leadership is speaking
well.

Young King is caught by the directness.

YOUNG KING

No, sir.

MAYS

Do you?

Young King hesitates.

Mays waits.

YOUNG KING

I believe words matter.

MAYS

They do.

A beat.

MAYS

But words are the lightest part of
leadership.

Young King listens.

MAYS

The heavier part comes after
people believe you.

That lands.

MAYS

Because then they may walk where
your words point.

Young King looks down.

MAYS

And some roads are dangerous.

YOUNG KING

Then should a leader not point
toward them?

MAYS

If the road leads to justice, he
may have no choice.

Young King looks back up.

MAYS

But he must never forget that when
people bleed on that road, their
blood is not an abstraction.

A beat.

MAYS

It is not proof of his courage.

Mays leans forward.

MAYS

It is a debt.

Young King absorbs this.

YOUNG KING

How does a man pay that debt?

Mays studies him.

MAYS

By telling the truth about the
blood.

A beat.

MAYS

By not wasting it.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - OFFICE - DAY

King stands with the phone pressed to his ear.

Older now.

The lesson has arrived with names attached.

KING

Andy, listen to me.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - SELMA - DAY

Andrew stands in the church office.

Behind him, injured marchers are carried through the
sanctuary.

Blood on shirts.

Gas in eyes.

People coughing.

Dorothy shouts instructions.

DOROTHY

Water here! Not too much. Tilt his head. Who has her name?

Andrew struggles to focus on the call.

ANDREW

I'm listening.

KING

Get every name you can. Every injury. Every witness. Every photograph. Every reporter.

ANDREW

They saw it.

KING

Make sure the country does.

Andrew looks out at the sanctuary.

ANDREW

Martin, they are hurt bad.

King closes his eyes.

KING

I know.

A beat.

KING

Tell them I am coming.

ANDREW

When?

KING

As fast as I can.

A moment.

KING

And Andy?

ANDREW

Yes?

KING

Tell them they did not fail.

Andrew looks toward the wounded.

ANDREW

I will.

The line clicks dead.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

King slowly lowers the receiver.

Coretta stands in the doorway.

She has heard enough.

CORETTA

How bad?

King looks at her.

KING

Bad.

She enters.

The office feels too small around him.

KING

John may be hurt.

CORETTA

Dear God.

King grips the edge of the desk.

KING

I told them the road was
necessary.

CORETTA

Martin.

KING

I told them discipline would
expose the truth.

CORETTA

It did.

KING

At what price?

Coretta steps closer.

CORETTA

That is not a question you get to
answer alone.

He looks at her.

CORETTA

They chose the road too.

KING

I know.

CORETTA

Do you?

He has no answer.

From the sanctuary, the choir begins to sing.

A Sunday hymn.

Soft.

Beautiful.

King looks toward the sound.

KING

They are singing in there.

CORETTA

Yes.

KING

And in Selma they are bleeding.

CORETTA

Then speak so both rooms can hear
you.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

The hymn ends.

King walks to the pulpit.

The congregation senses something has changed.

He places both hands on the pulpit.

For a moment, he cannot speak.

Then:

KING

My brothers and sisters, I must
ask your prayers for Selma.

The room stills.

KING

Men and women marched today for
the right to vote.

A beat.

KING

They marched peacefully.

The congregation listens.

KING

At the Edmund Pettus Bridge, they
were met not by justice, but by
clubs, horses, and gas.

A woman gasps.

A man bows his head.

KING

Some are injured. Some badly.

Coretta watches from the side.

KING

We cannot continue this service as
if the body has not been struck.

The congregation murmurs.

KING

When one part of the body suffers,
all of it must feel the pain.

He looks across the room.

KING

So I am asking every minister,
every rabbi, every priest, every
person of conscience who hears
this call: come to Selma.

The room shifts.

KING

Come not because it is safe.

A beat.

KING

Come because safety has become the
excuse of the silent.

The congregation rises slowly.

KING

The bridge has preached a sermon
today.

His voice strengthens.

KING

It has shown the nation the
difference between order and
justice. It has shown the
difference between law and
morality. It has shown what

happens when citizens ask for a
ballot and power answers with a
weapon.

He grips the pulpit.

KING

Now we must answer.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - SELMA - DAY

Chaos organized into care.

Dorothy moves through the injured like a commander of
mercy.

DOROTHY

Write his name. Get her mother. Do
not let him sleep yet.

John Lewis sits on a pew, blood on his head, dazed but
conscious.

Hosea sits nearby, coughing from gas.

Andrew enters from the office.

He goes to John.

ANDREW

Martin is coming.

John nods faintly.

JOHN

Good.

Andrew crouches.

ANDREW

He said to tell you, you did not
fail.

John looks at him.

A weak smile.

JOHN

We crossed the bridge.

Andrew takes that in.

JOHN

That has to count.

Andrew's eyes fill.

ANDREW

It does.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

King continues.

KING

Today, America saw peaceful
citizens beaten on a bridge.

A beat.

KING

Tomorrow, America must decide
whether it was horrified by the
violence or merely embarrassed
that it was televised.

The congregation answers.

AMEN.

KING

We will go to Selma.

The room rises with him now.

KING

We will go with prayer. We will go
with discipline. We will go with
love strong enough for the street.

Coretta hears the old phrase in his voice.

KING

And we will go until the right to
vote is no longer treated as a
favor to be granted, but as a
birthright to be protected.

The congregation stands.

The hymn begins again.

Not planned.

Necessary.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - LATE AFTERNOON

The bridge is empty now.

Gas lingers low over the road.

A hat lies abandoned.

A shoe.

A broken pair of glasses.

The Alabama River moves beneath it all.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - LATE AFTERNOON

People gather outside.

Some injured.

Some supporting the injured.

Some simply refusing to go home.

Reporters speak into cameras.

Deputies watch from a distance.

The church doors open.

Dorothy steps out, exhausted, stained with other people's blood.

She looks toward the bridge.

Andrew joins her.

ANDREW

He called for clergy to come.

DOROTHY

Good.

ANDREW

You think they will?

Dorothy looks at the wounded gathered around the church.

DOROTHY

They better.

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - EVENING

A suitcase lies open on the bed.

Coretta folds shirts quickly.

King stands at the dresser, tying his tie with mechanical precision.

His hands are steady.

Too steady.

Coretta notices.

CORETTA

Stop.

King looks at her.

CORETTA

Sit down for one minute.

KING

I need to leave.

CORETTA

One minute will not save or lose
Selma.

He resists.

Then sits on the bed.

The weight hits the moment he stops moving.

KING

I should have been there.

Coretta sits beside him.

CORETTA

Would your being there have
stopped them?

He says nothing.

CORETTA

Or would they have beaten you too?

KING

Perhaps.

CORETTA

And then someone else would be
sitting somewhere saying they
should have stopped you.

He looks at her.

CORETTA

Guilt is not guidance, Martin.

That lands.

KING

Then what is?

CORETTA

Responsibility.

A beat.

CORETTA

And you know the difference.

King lowers his head.

From down the hall, the children's voices drift in.

Laughing at something ordinary.

Pain crosses his face.

KING

I keep asking people to put their
bodies where hatred can reach
them.

CORETTA

You ask them to put their bodies
where the country can finally see
them.

A beat.

CORETTA

There is a difference.

King nods slowly.

CORETTA

But do not forget they are bodies.

He looks at her.

CORETTA

Not symbols. Not strategy. Bodies.

KING

I know.

CORETTA

Then go.

She closes the suitcase.

CORETTA

And make the nation look at what
it did.

EXT. ATLANTA AIRPORT - NIGHT

A plane waits on the tarmac.

King walks toward it with Ralph, who has arrived from
another route and now meets him at the steps.

RALPH

John is alive.

King stops.

Relief nearly buckles him.

KING

Thank God.

RALPH

Hurt. But alive.

King closes his eyes.

A prayer without words.

RALPH

Hosea too.

King nods.

RALPH

Martin, the footage is everywhere.

KING

Good.

Ralph looks at him.

KING

Not good that it happened.

A beat.

KING

Good that the lie cannot bury it.

They climb the stairs.

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

King takes a window seat.

Ralph sits beside him.

The engines begin to whine.

RALPH

Clergy are already calling.

KING

How many?

RALPH

Enough to scare Wallace.

KING

Not enough yet.

Ralph studies him.

RALPH

What happens when you get there?

King looks out the window.

KING

We walk again.

RALPH

Across the bridge?

A beat.

KING

Toward it.

Ralph hears the caution.

KING

We will not be reckless with
wounded people.

RALPH

And if people demand we cross?

King looks at him.

KING

Then leadership may mean stopping
before the place everyone expects
us to prove ourselves.

Ralph sits back.

RALPH

That will please no one.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

But pleasing people was never the
assignment.

The plane begins to move.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - NIGHT

The bridge stands in darkness.

Empty again.

But no longer silent.

The day's violence clings to it.

Headlights pass beneath the steel.

Somewhere far away, a plane lifts into the night.

FADE OUT.

EXT. SELMA AIRFIELD - MORNING

A small plane touches down.

The wheels hit hard.

The aircraft taxis beneath a pale Alabama sky.

King steps down onto the tarmac with Ralph. Both men look tired from travel and heavier from what waits ahead.

Andrew stands near a waiting car.

He has not slept.

King sees that immediately.

KING

Andy.

Andrew embraces him.

Not long.

Too much work for long embraces.

ANDREW

John is awake. Stitched up.
Stubborn as ever.

Relief passes through King.

KING

Good.

ANDREW

The church is full. Clergy started
arriving before dawn.

RALPH

How many?

ANDREW

Enough to make Selma look like
judgment day.

King looks toward the town.

KING

And Wallace?

ANDREW

Watching.

RALPH

Clark?

ANDREW

Waiting.

King nods.

None of this surprises him.

INT. CAR - MOVING - SELMA - MORNING

Andrew drives.

King sits in the back with Ralph.

They pass Black neighborhoods alive with activity. People walking toward Brown Chapel. Ministers carrying coats. Nuns. Rabbis. Students. Reporters.

The nation has begun arriving.

RALPH

There is a federal order against the march.

King looks at him.

RALPH

Judge wants a hearing first.

ANDREW

Some people say we should march anyway.

KING

Some people are bleeding because they marched before the nation was ready to protect them.

RALPH

And some will say turning back means fear.

KING

Then some will be wrong.

Andrew glances at him in the mirror.

ANDREW

You already know what you are going to do.

King looks out the window.

KING

I know what I cannot do.

RALPH

Which is?

KING

Offer wounded people to violence for the sake of a photograph.

A beat.

KING

But I also cannot tell them to
stay hidden.

The car rolls past the Edmund Pettus Bridge in the
distance.

Its steel arch rises over the town like a question.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - DAY

The sanctuary is packed beyond reason.

Black citizens from Selma and Marion. Students. Ministers
from across the country. White clergy. Nuns. Rabbis.
Reporters. Local organizers. Injured marchers with bandaged
heads and bruised faces.

John Lewis sits near the front, head bandaged.

The sight of him quiets anyone tempted to speak too easily
of courage.

King enters with Ralph and Andrew.

The church rises.

Applause.

Song.

Relief.

Pain.

King moves slowly down the aisle, touching hands, nodding,
receiving their hope with visible care.

Dorothy meets him near the front.

DOROTHY

We have medical teams on both
sides of the church. Cars ready.
Lawyers waiting. Press everywhere.

KING

How are the people?

Dorothy looks across the room.

DOROTHY

Angry.

A beat.

DOROTHY

Afraid.

Another beat.

DOROTHY

Ready.

King looks to John.

JOHN

Dr. King.

King sits beside him.

KING

John.

He studies the bandage.

KING

You look like you argued with
Pharaoh.

JOHN

Pharaoh had a club.

King almost smiles.

JOHN

We kept walking.

KING

I know.

JOHN

Until we couldn't.

King's smile fades.

KING

I know that too.

John takes his hand.

JOHN

You cannot let them make that
bridge the end of it.

KING

I will not.

John studies him.

JOHN

Are we crossing today?

King does not answer quickly.

John understands.

JOHN

People will not like turning
around.

KING

I know.

JOHN

Some will call it weakness.

KING

I know.

JOHN

Is it?

King looks toward the church doors.

KING

Not if we turn by choice.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - PULPIT - LATER

King stands before the congregation.

The room quiets.

Not fully.

Too much emotion for complete silence.

KING

Two days ago, this city showed the
nation a bridge.

A beat.

KING

Not merely steel over water. A
bridge between citizenship and
denial. Between dignity and
brutality. Between the promise of
America and the practice of
Alabama.

The congregation answers.

AMEN.

YES.

KING

Many came here today because they
saw what happened on that bridge
and could no longer remain
comfortable at a distance.

He looks at the visiting clergy.

KING

We welcome you.

A beat.

KING

But remember, the people of Selma
were walking this road before the
cameras arrived.

The local people respond.

KING

We will march today.

The room rises.

KING

We will march with discipline.

The room settles.

KING

We will march with prayer.

A beat.

KING

And we will march with the
knowledge that courage is not
proven by walking into every trap
set before us.

That lands unevenly.

Some understand.

Some do not.

KING

There is a federal order. There
are legal steps being taken. There
are wounded people in this room
whose bodies testify to what waits
beyond that bridge.

A YOUNG ACTIVIST stands.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

Then why march if we ain't
crossing?

The room murmurs.

King looks at him.

KING

Because the nation must see that
fear has not driven us from the
road.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

But if we turn back, they'll say
we scared.

KING

Let them say it.

The room quiets.

KING

We are not here to obey the
interpretation of cowards.

A beat.

KING

We are here to obey conscience.

The young activist remains standing.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

Jimmie Lee didn't turn back.

The room tightens.

King absorbs the blow.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

And we will not use his name
carelessly to demand from others
what he did not choose for them.

The young activist sits slowly.

KING

If we cross today without
protection, without preparation,
and without regard for the lives
entrusted to us, we may satisfy
anger for an hour and lose the
moral ground for a generation.

A hard silence.

KING

So we march. We pray. We witness.

A beat.

KING

And we live to keep marching.

INT. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE - DR. MAYS' OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young King, 19, sits across from Dr. Benjamin Mays.

Rain taps lightly against the windows.

A chessboard sits on a side table, mid-game.

Mays moves a piece.

Young King watches, distracted.

MAYS

You are troubled.

YOUNG KING

I am thinking about courage.

Mays does not look up from the board.

MAYS

Courage is a popular thing to
think about before it sends a
bill.

Young King leans forward.

YOUNG KING

Is there such a thing as too much
caution?

Mays finally looks at him.

MAYS

Yes.

A beat.

MAYS

There is also such a thing as
vanity disguised as courage.

Young King takes that in.

MAYS

Some men rush forward because
justice requires it.

He points to the chessboard.

MAYS

Some rush forward because they
cannot bear being thought afraid.

Young King looks at the board.

MAYS

A leader must learn the
difference.

YOUNG KING

How?

Mays studies him.

MAYS

Ask who pays the price.

Young King sits with that.

MAYS

If you alone pay it, you may
choose boldly.

A beat.

MAYS

If others pay it with you, courage
must consult responsibility.

Young King looks down.

YOUNG KING

And if people mistake
responsibility for fear?

Mays moves another piece.

MAYS

Let them.

Young King looks up.

MAYS

History is not moved by a leader's
need to look brave.

A beat.

MAYS

It is moved by his willingness to
be misunderstood while doing what
is necessary.

The rain continues.

Young King looks at the chessboard.

YOUNG KING

That sounds lonely.

Mays sits back.

MAYS

Leadership often is.

A beat.

MAYS

That is why a man had better know
what voice he is obeying before
the crowd starts shouting.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - DAY

The march forms.

Two by two.

King at the front with Ralph, Andrew, local leaders,
visiting clergy, and organizers.

John Lewis watches from the steps, too injured to march
again, but standing anyway.

Dorothy moves along the line.

DOROTHY

Stay close. Stay calm. Watch the
person beside you.

A white minister, JAMES REEB, 38, stands among other
clergy, nervous but determined.

He looks at the local people around him.

Not as symbols.

As teachers.

The march begins.

EXT. SELMA STREET - DAY

The procession moves through Selma.

Larger than before.

Quieter than expected.

Reporters walk backward, filming.

Residents watch from porches.

Some sing.

Some pray.

Some simply breathe in time with the march.

King walks at the front.

Every step measured.

Ralph beside him.

RALPH

You ready for what happens when we stop?

KING

No.

RALPH

Good. I was worried you had become optimistic.

King keeps his eyes on the bridge ahead.

KING

I am faithful, not optimistic.

RALPH

There is a difference?

KING

Optimism expects the road to get easier.

A beat.

KING

Faith walks it anyway.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - DAY

The march reaches the bridge.

The steel arch rises overhead.

The sound of footsteps changes on the bridge deck.

Hollow.

Louder.

King walks where the blood was.

He sees what is no longer visible.

A hat.

A shoe.

A body falling.

John's blood.

He keeps walking.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - CREST - DAY

The marchers reach the top.

Below, on the far side, state troopers wait again.

A line across the road.
 Less aggressive than before.
 Still present.
 Still armed.
 The crowd behind King tightens.
 A murmur moves through them.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

There they are.
 Someone begins to sing, but the song trembles.
 King descends toward the troopers.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - FAR SIDE - DAY

King stops a short distance from the trooper line.
 The march halts behind him.
 Thousands hold still.
 The Trooper Commander steps forward.
 No bullhorn now.
 Just the weight of Sunday's memory.
 King looks at the troopers.
 Then at the road beyond them.
 Montgomery lies somewhere past that line.
 Close enough to imagine.
 Too far to reach today.
 Ralph watches him carefully.
 Andrew does too.
 Dorothy stands several rows back, eyes scanning for danger.
 King turns slightly.

KING

Kneel.
 The word moves backward through the march.
 People kneel.
 Slowly.
 Carefully.

The front line kneels first. Then the rows behind. Clergy.
Students. Elders. Reporters left standing, uncertain what
to do with their cameras.

King kneels on the road.

Ralph kneels beside him.

Andrew kneels.

A hush falls.

King bows his head.

No microphone.

No speech.

Only prayer.

The troopers watch.

Some look away.

The wind moves across the bridge.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

The prayer ends.

King stands.

The marchers begin to stand with him.

Expectation rises.

This is the moment.

Forward or back.

King looks at the road beyond the troopers.

Then at the people behind him.

Wounded.

Angry.

Hopeful.

Entrusted.

He turns.

Back toward Selma.

A wave of confusion moves through the march.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

What?

Some voices rise.

We going back?

Why we stopping?

Montgomery that way!

King begins walking back across the bridge.

Ralph follows.

Andrew follows.

Dorothy exhales, half relief, half dread.

The march turns with them, not all at once, but by discipline.

Some weep with frustration.

Some curse under their breath.

Some understand.

Some will later.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - CREST - DAY

As King walks back over the crest, the young activist from the church catches up beside him.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

Dr. King.

King keeps walking.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

Why?

King looks at him.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

They was right there.

KING

Yes.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

The road was right there.

KING

So was the trap.

The young activist's eyes burn.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

People bled for us to come this far.

King stops.

The march flows around them for a moment.

Then slows.

KING
That is why I will not spend their
blood foolishly.

The young activist shakes his head.

YOUNG ACTIVIST
Feels like running.

KING
Sometimes.

A beat.

KING
Discipline often feels like
surrender to the part of us that
wants relief right now.

The young activist struggles with that.

KING
I am not asking you to like this.

A beat.

KING
I am asking you to live long
enough to win.

The young activist has no answer.

King resumes walking.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - LATE AFTERNOON

The march returns.

The crowd is divided.

Some solemn.

Some angry.

Some confused.

Reporters swarm.

REPORTER #1
Dr. King, why did you turn back?

REPORTER #2
Did the movement lose courage
today?

REPORTER #3
Was there a deal with authorities?

Ralph pushes through.

RALPH

Give him room.

King stops on the church steps.

The reporters quiet enough to catch every word.

KING

We did not come to the bridge
today to perform bravery for
cameras.

A beat.

KING

We came to show that Sunday's
violence did not drive us from the
road.

REPORTER #2

But you turned around.

KING

Yes.

KING

Because courage without discipline
can become another name for waste.

The reporters scribble.

KING

We will cross that bridge.

A beat.

KING

But we will cross it in a way that
carries the movement forward, not
merely our bodies into another
beating.

A murmur from the crowd.

Some still unhappy.

REPORTER #1

When?

King looks back toward the bridge.

KING

Soon.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - EVENING

The church is loud with argument.
Clusters of people debate in pews and aisles.
Some clergy defend King. Some activists are furious. Local
people sit quietly, worn by all of it.
The young activist stands near Bevel.

YOUNG ACTIVIST
We should have kept going.

BEVEL
Maybe.

The young man is surprised.

BEVEL
Or maybe we would all be in the
hospital.

YOUNG ACTIVIST
You agree with him?

Bevel looks toward King across the room.

BEVEL
I agree that I am still angry.

A beat.

BEVEL
I also agree that anger does not
get the only vote.

Across the sanctuary, King sits with Ralph and Andrew.

Ralph looks at the room.

RALPH
They are mad.

KING
Yes.

RALPH
Some think you betrayed the march.

KING
Yes.

RALPH
Does that bother you?

King looks at him.

KING
Of course it bothers me.

RALPH

Hard to tell sometimes.

KING

That is because I am trying not to
make their anger defend my pride.

Ralph sits with that.

Andrew approaches with a note.

ANDREW

Judge's hearing is moving. Lawyers
think we may get protection if we
hold.

RALPH

If we hold.

KING

Then we hold.

A shout rises from the back of the church.

MAN

We didn't come here to hold!

Another voice answers.

WOMAN

We came here to live!

The room erupts again.

Dorothy steps onto the pulpit platform.

DOROTHY

Enough.

The room quiets by inches.

Dorothy looks out over them.

DOROTHY

Some of you want to cross because
you are brave.

A beat.

DOROTHY

Some of you want to cross because
you are angry.

Another beat.

DOROTHY

Some of you want to cross because
you do not want anyone to think
you are afraid.

That stings.

DOROTHY

The road to Montgomery does not
care which feeling brought you.

She looks toward the doors.

DOROTHY

It will take your body either way.

The church goes silent.

DOROTHY

So before we walk again, each of
us better know the difference.

King watches her with quiet admiration.

RALPH

Dorothy has a way of sharpening
the room.

KING

Yes, she does.

EXT. SELMA STREET - NIGHT

Darkness settles.

Some visiting clergy walk from Brown Chapel toward a nearby
restaurant.

Among them: James Reeb and two other white ministers.

They speak quietly, still processing the day.

JAMES REEB

I thought we would cross.

MINISTER #2

So did half the church.

MINISTER #3

Maybe more.

Reeb looks back toward Brown Chapel.

JAMES REEB

Maybe restraint is harder to
understand when you did not bleed
here first.

They turn a corner.
 The street grows quieter.
 Too quiet.
 Three WHITE MEN step from the shadows.
 Reeb and the ministers stop.

WHITE MAN
 You boys lost?

The ministers tense.

JAMES REEB
 We are just walking back.

WHITE MAN
 Should've kept walking north.

The white men move closer.
 The ministers step back.
 Too late.
 A sudden blow.
 A shout.
 A body falls.
 The night swallows the sound.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - SIDE ROOM - NIGHT

King sits with Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, and Bevel.
 The argument in the sanctuary has finally settled into
 weary singing.
 A local organizer rushes in.
 Breathless.

LOCAL ORGANIZER
 Dr. King.

Everyone looks up.

LOCAL ORGANIZER
 Some ministers were attacked.

King stands.

RALPH
 Where?

LOCAL ORGANIZER
 Down the street.

ANDREW

Who?

The organizer's face is pale.

LOCAL ORGANIZER

One of them is bad.

King's eyes close briefly.

The cost has found them again.

DOROTHY

Hospital?

LOCAL ORGANIZER

They are taking him now.

King grabs his coat.

Bevel looks stricken.

BEVEL

After all that restraint.

King turns to him.

KING

Restraint does not make hatred
gentle.

A beat.

KING

It makes hatred visible.

They move quickly toward the door.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - NIGHT

King exits with Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, and Bevel.

The church behind them continues singing.

The street ahead is dark.

Sirens begin in the distance.

King looks toward the bridge.

Then toward the hospital road.

Another body.

Another decision.

Another debt.

FADE OUT.

EXT. UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - BIRMINGHAM - NIGHT

Rain falls hard.

The hospital entrance glows beneath harsh lights. Cars idle at the curb. Reporters gather under umbrellas, notebooks damp, cameras wrapped in plastic.

King steps from a car with Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, and Bevel.

No one speaks.

They move through the rain toward the doors.

INT. UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

A long white hallway.

Too bright.

Too clean.

Their wet shoes squeak against the floor.

A NURSE leads them quickly.

NURSE

He is in critical condition.

King nods.

RALPH

His wife?

NURSE

On her way.

A beat.

NURSE

The other ministers are being treated.

They pass a waiting area where several CLERGYMEN sit bruised and shaken. One has a bandage above his eye. Another stares at his hands.

A WHITE MINISTER, 40s, rises when he sees King.

WHITE MINISTER

Dr. King.

King stops.

The minister's face is pale with shock.

WHITE MINISTER

We were just walking.

KING

I know.

WHITE MINISTER

We thought if we came, if they saw
clergy--

He cannot finish.

KING

Hatred does not always pause for a
collar.

The minister lowers his eyes.

WHITE MINISTER

Jim was talking about his
children.

That lands.

KING

How many?

WHITE MINISTER

Four.

King absorbs the number.

Four children.

Another family now waiting beside a wound.

INT. UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

A small room.

Coffee gone cold. Ashtrays full. Vending machine humming.

King stands near the wall.

Ralph sits, elbows on knees.

Dorothy writes down every detail from one of the injured
ministers.

Andrew watches the hallway.

Bevel paces.

BEVEL

They attack children. They attack
old men. They attack marchers. Now
ministers.

RALPH

They have been attacking ministers
a long time.

BEVEL

You know what I mean.

Ralph does.

They all do.

ANDREW

The phones are already burning up.

DOROTHY

Because he is white.

The room stills.

Dorothy does not soften it.

DOROTHY

Jimmie Lee Jackson is dead. Four
girls are dead. Medgar is dead.
Herbert Lee is dead. Too many
names this country learned how not
to hear.

A beat.

DOROTHY

But a white minister gets beaten
and suddenly the nation discovers
violence has crossed a line.

No one speaks.

King looks toward the hallway.

KING

Then we must make sure the line
leads all the way back to every
body they ignored.

Dorothy studies him.

KING

We will not resent the attention
if it can serve the truth.

A beat.

KING

But we will not allow the nation
to pretend the truth began
tonight.

A DOCTOR appears in the doorway.

Everyone turns.

DOCTOR

Reverend Reeb has severe head
trauma. We have done what we can
for the moment.

KING

May we see him?

The doctor hesitates.

DOCTOR

Briefly.

INT. UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - ROOM - NIGHT

Dim light.

Machines.

Bandages.

JAMES REEB lies unconscious, his face swollen and bruised.

King enters alone.

He stops at the foot of the bed.

The sight wounds him.

Not because suffering is new.

Because it is familiar.

King moves beside the bed.

For a moment, he says nothing.

Then, quietly:

KING

You came when we called.

A beat.

KING

No.

He corrects himself.

KING

You came when conscience called.

He looks at Reeb's bandaged face.

KING

I am sorry this country made
decency so dangerous.

The monitor ticks.

King closes his eyes.

The steady medical sound becomes a classroom clock.

**INT. CROZER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - CLASSROOM - DAY -
FLASHBACK**

YOUNG KING, early 20s, sits among a mostly white class of seminarians.

A PROFESSOR writes on the board:

CONSCIENCE

Students pack books after a
lecture.

A WHITE STUDENT, EDWARD, 23, approaches Young King.

EDWARD

King.

Young King looks up.

EDWARD

A few of us are talking about
senior class president.

Young King closes his book.

YOUNG KING

Congratulations in advance to
whichever one of you has been
chosen.

Edward smiles awkwardly.

EDWARD

We were thinking of you.

Young King looks at him.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

Me?

EDWARD

You speak well. You listen better
than most of us. People respect
you.

Young King studies him, searching for the joke.

There is none.

YOUNG KING

This school is not the South.

EDWARD

No.

YOUNG KING

But it is not free of it either.

Edward takes that in.

EDWARD

No.

Young King stands.

YOUNG KING

Do you want me because you believe
I can lead?

A beat.

YOUNG KING

Or because electing me would make
you feel like better men?

Edward is struck by the honesty.

EDWARD

I do not know.

Young King appreciates the answer more than a lie.

EDWARD

Maybe both.

Young King holds his books.

YOUNG KING

Then make sure the first reason
becomes stronger than the second.

Edward nods.

EDWARD

I can try.

YOUNG KING

Trying is not the same as
changing.

EDWARD

No.

A beat.

EDWARD

But it may be where changing
begins.

Young King considers him.

The professor watches from the doorway, silent.

**INT. CROZER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - HALLWAY - DAY -
FLASHBACK**

Young King and Edward walk together.

White students pass.

Some nod. Some look away.

EDWARD

You do not trust us much.

YOUNG KING

Trust is not something owed to
politeness.

Edward accepts that.

EDWARD

What would earn it?

Young King stops near a window.

Outside, rain threatens.

YOUNG KING

When standing with me costs you
something.

Edward looks at him.

YOUNG KING

Not applause. Not admiration.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

Something.

Edward says nothing.

Young King softens slightly.

YOUNG KING

I do not wish you harm.

EDWARD

I know.

YOUNG KING

But I cannot measure friendship
only by who smiles in a safe room.

The words hang there.

Edward nods.

EDWARD

Then I suppose the test has not
come yet.

Young King looks out the window.

YOUNG KING

It always comes.

INT. UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - ROOM - NIGHT

King stands beside Reeb's bed.

Older now.

The test has come.

King lowers his head.

KING

You paid more than anyone had a
right to ask.

He places a hand gently on the bed rail.

KING

May God hold your family close.

INT. UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - LATER

King returns.

The others look up.

No one asks.

They can see the answer on his face.

A hospital chaplain enters with a tired expression.

CHAPLAIN

Mrs. Reeb has arrived.

King turns.

MRS. REEB, 30s, enters the room with a family friend. Her
coat is wet. Her face is rigid with the effort not to
collapse.

King walks to her.

KING

Mrs. Reeb.

She looks at him.

MRS. REEB

Dr. King.

They shake hands.

Her hand is cold.

MRS. REEB

He came because you asked.

The room tightens.

King absorbs the sentence.

KING

Yes.

A beat.

KING

And I will carry that for the rest
of my life.

She looks down.

MRS. REEB

I did not mean--

KING

I know.

MRS. REEB

He believed he had to come.

KING

Then he and I agreed.

Her eyes fill.

MRS. REEB

Our children do not understand.

King's face softens.

KING

No child should have to understand
this.

She nearly breaks.

MRS. REEB

Will it matter?

The question sits in the room with all the other dead.

King answers carefully.

KING

It will matter because we will
make it matter.

A beat.

KING

But I will not insult you by
saying that makes the cost fair.

Mrs. Reeb nods.

Not comforted.

But respected.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - SELMA - NIGHT

The church is full again.

News of Reeb's condition has traveled faster than sleep.

King stands before the people.

Some local Black citizens sit beside visiting white clergy.
Bandaged marchers beside newly arrived ministers. Selma
beside the nation.

KING

A man came here from far away
because he understood that justice
is not local.

The room is silent.

KING

He did not come because he was
Black.

A beat.

KING

He came because he was human.

A few heads bow.

KING

But let us be honest in this
house.

He scans the room.

KING

The nation is hearing his pain in
a way it refused to hear the pain
of many who were born here, worked
here, prayed here, bled here, and
died here.

The words land hard.

KING

We will not answer that with
bitterness.

A beat.

KING

We will answer it by widening the
nation's hearing.

Dorothy watches him.

KING

If America can hear James Reeb,
then America can hear Jimmie Lee
Jackson.

A low murmur.

KING

If America can hear a minister
from Boston, then America can hear
a mother in Marion.

The room strengthens.

KING

If America can mourn one man of
conscience, then America can no
longer excuse itself from seeing
every citizen denied the ballot as
a wound in the same body.

The congregation rises by inches.

KING

We do not ask the nation to choose
which suffering matters.

A beat.

KING

We ask it to finally understand
that all of it does.

INT. SULLIVAN JACKSON HOUSE - SELMA - NIGHT

A modest living room crowded with movement leaders.

King, Ralph, Dorothy, Andrew, Bevel, local organizers, and
visiting clergy gather around a television set.

Coffee cups. Cigarette smoke. Maps and legal papers.

A television anchor speaks in solemn tones.

The news shows images from Selma. The bridge. The injured.
Reeb's photograph.

No one sits comfortably.

RALPH

The phones have not stopped.

ANDREW

Clergy from all over are coming
now.

DOROTHY

More people means more bodies to
protect.

BEVEL

More people means Wallace cannot
hide.

King stands near the window.

Outside, Selma is dark.

Inside, the television flickers across his face.

A LOCAL ORGANIZER enters with a message.

LOCAL ORGANIZER

Judge's office says the hearing is
moving. Federal protection is
being discussed.

Ralph looks to King.

RALPH

The bridge may open.

KING

Not yet.

BEVEL

But soon.

KING

Soon.

A beat.

KING

If the country can be made to look
without turning away.

The television sound shifts.

The anchor reports that President Johnson will address
Congress on voting rights.

The room stills.

ANDREW

He is going to speak?

DOROTHY

To Congress.

Ralph looks at King.

RALPH

Selma reached Washington.

King keeps his eyes on the television.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

Selma forced Washington to admit
it was already involved.

INT. UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Mrs. Reeb sits alone outside her husband's room.

King approaches quietly.

She looks up.

KING

May I sit?

She nods.

He sits beside her.

For a long while, neither speaks.

MRS. REEB

I keep thinking about his shoes.

King turns slightly.

MRS. REEB

They called and said he had been
hurt, and I thought about his
shoes by the door at home. How
ordinary they looked when he left.

Her voice trembles.

MRS. REEB

Now everything ordinary feels
cruel.

King listens.

MRS. REEB

Did your wife feel that way when
you left for Selma?

King looks down.

KING

She has felt that way many times.

MRS. REEB

How does she bear it?

King thinks of Coretta.

KING

With more strength than anyone
asks men to notice.

Mrs. Reeb absorbs that.

MRS. REEB

I do not know if I can be strong.

KING

Then do not begin there.

She looks at him.

KING

Begin by breathing.

A beat.

KING

Strength can come later if it
must.

Mrs. Reeb's eyes fill.

She reaches for his hand.

He takes it.

INT. CROZER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - CHAPEL - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young King stands near the pulpit after a student service.

Edward approaches, holding a folded ballot sheet.

EDWARD

It is done.

Young King looks at him.

EDWARD

They elected you.

Young King takes that in.

Around them, white classmates gather awkwardly, warmly, uncertainly.

Young King steps to the small pulpit.

The room quiets.

YOUNG KING

Thank you.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

I am honored by your confidence.

He looks over the room.

YOUNG KING

But I hope we understand that
confidence is not proven by a vote
taken in comfort.

The classmates listen.

YOUNG KING

It is proven later.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

When friendship asks for more than
friendliness.

Edward hears himself in it.

YOUNG KING

When justice asks us to become
inconvenient to the world we
inherited.

A silence.

Young King looks at the cross behind the chapel.

YOUNG KING

If we are learning ministry only
to comfort the comfortable, then
we are studying the wrong faith.

The room is still.

YOUNG KING

If we are learning ministry to
stand with the wounded, then we
must understand that one day the
wound may reach us too.

Edward lowers his eyes.

Young King grips the pulpit.

YOUNG KING

On that day, may God find us
present.

INT. UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

King sits beside Mrs. Reeb.

The memory fades.

A doctor appears.

His face says enough.

Mrs. Reeb stands.

King stands with her.

The doctor speaks quietly.

We do not hear the words.

Only Mrs. Reeb's body folding under them.

King catches her before she falls.

INT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - DAY

The church is filled for a memorial service.

Black citizens. White clergy. Local organizers. National
press.

King stands at the pulpit.

A photograph of James Reeb rests near flowers.

He looks at Mrs. Reeb seated near the front.

Then at Jimmie Lee Jackson's mother seated nearby.

Two families.

One grief.

Different attention.

Same wound.

KING

Today we remember a man who came
to Selma not to save us, but to
stand with us.

The room is quiet.

KING

There is a difference.

A beat.

KING

Those who come to save often stand
above. Those who come to stand
with must take their place beside.

He looks at Reeb's photograph.

KING

James Reeb took his place beside.

A few clergy lower their heads.

KING

And because he did, hatred found
him.

King pauses.

KING

But hatred did not define him.
Death did not define him. The men
who struck him did not name him.

A beat.

KING

His conscience did.

The room breathes together.

KING

Let America mourn him. Let America
speak his name.

King looks toward the local families.

KING

But let America learn to speak
every name.

A low response.

KING

Let it speak the names of the
children killed in Birmingham.

A murmur.

KING

Let it speak the name of Jimmie
Lee Jackson.

Jimmie Lee's mother closes her eyes.

KING

Let it speak the names of the
unnamed men and women who have
lost jobs, homes, safety, and
blood for daring to ask that
democracy include them.

His voice strengthens.

KING

If the death of this good man
awakens a sleeping nation, then
let that nation not wake halfway.

A beat.

KING

Let it rise all the way.

INT. SULLIVAN JACKSON HOUSE - SELMA - NIGHT

The living room is packed again.

A television set glows.

President Johnson appears on screen, addressing Congress.

Everyone watches.

King stands near the back, arms folded.

The room is silent except for the television.

Johnson's words are not heard clearly at first.

Only fragments.

VOTING RIGHTS.

AMERICAN PROMISE.

EQUAL CITIZENSHIP.

The people in the room lean in.

Johnson speaks with urgency unusual for Washington.

Ralph looks at King.

Dorothy's eyes narrow, testing every sentence.

Andrew stands very still.

Bevel looks like a man hearing a door unlatch.

On the screen, Johnson adopts the moral language of the
movement without naming it as his own.

The room reacts.

Some gasp.

Some whisper.

Some begin to cry.

King's face changes.

Not triumph.

Not relief.

Something more complicated.

A president is finally saying what people in Selma have
bled for the nation to hear.

Ralph steps near him.

RALPH

Martin.

King wipes at his eyes before the tear can fall.

RALPH

You all right?

King does not look away from the screen.

KING

For the first time, a president
has spoken our pain in the
language of the republic.

A beat.

KING

Now we must make the republic live
up to its own voice.

Dorothy exhales.

DOROTHY

The bill still has to pass.

KING

Yes.

BEVEL

And the bridge?

King looks at him.

KING

We still cross.

Andrew looks toward the television.

ANDREW

After that speech, Wallace will be
under pressure.

RALPH

Pressure is not protection.

KING

Then we keep pressing.

On screen, Congress rises in applause.

In the room, no one applauds.

The people are too tired to confuse words with victory.

King turns away from the television and looks at the Selma-to-Montgomery map on the table.

The road remains.

EXT. SULLIVAN JACKSON HOUSE - NIGHT

The house glows in the dark.

Inside, the movement plans.

Outside, Selma watches.

INT. SULLIVAN JACKSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

The television is off.

The room has returned to work.

Maps. Calls. Lists. Clergy. Lawyers. Federal contacts.

Ralph points to the route.

RALPH

If the court clears it, we need
marchers capped for the highway
portion. Too many bodies to
protect otherwise.

DOROTHY

Food stations. Medical stops. Rest
points.

ANDREW

Press coordination.

BEVEL

And students who will not accept
being told to stay back.

KING

Then we tell them why.

BEVEL

They may not listen.

KING

Then we tell them again.

A local organizer enters with fresh coffee.

No one wants it.

Everyone needs it.

King picks up a pencil and marks the route beyond the bridge.

KING

Selma to Montgomery.

He looks at the others.

KING

Not as a reaction.

A beat.

KING

As a demand.

Ralph nods.

DOROTHY

And as a memorial.

King looks toward the photographs on the table.

Jimmie Lee Jackson.

James Reeb.

The four girls.

Others.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

As a promise to the living.

The room takes that in.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - NIGHT

The bridge stands silent beneath the moon.

The road beyond waits.

This time, not as a trap.

As a threshold.

FADE OUT.

INT. SULLIVAN JACKSON HOUSE - SELMA - EARLY MORNING

A house turned headquarters.

People sleep wherever exhaustion dropped them. On couches.
In chairs. On the floor beside stacks of paper.

A phone RINGS.

Dorothy wakes first.

Always first.

She reaches for the receiver.

DOROTHY

Yes?

She listens.

Her face changes.

She sits up.

DOROTHY

Say that again.

Across the room, King stirs in a chair. Ralph opens one
eye. Andrew lifts his head from a pile of notes.

Dorothy looks at them.

DOROTHY

The judge ruled.

The room wakes.

Ralph sits up.

RALPH

And?

Dorothy holds the receiver tighter.

DOROTHY

We march.

Silence.

Not disbelief.

Impact.

King stands slowly.

DOROTHY

Federal protection.

Andrew closes his eyes.

Ralph exhales the kind of breath a man has held for weeks.

RALPH
Across the bridge?

Dorothy nods.

DOROTHY
Across the bridge.

King looks toward the window.

Dawn has not yet broken.

The road is still dark.

KING
Then wake everybody.

Ralph stands, already moving.

RALPH
Everybody is a generous category.

DOROTHY
Everybody with a pulse and
assigned responsibility.

ANDREW
Press?

KING
Yes.

ANDREW
Clergy?

KING
Yes.

DOROTHY
Medical?

KING
First.

Dorothy nods, approving.

King moves toward the map on the table.

Selma to Montgomery.

A line drawn over and over until the paper is nearly worn through.

He rests his hand on it.

The road is no longer an idea.

It is an appointment.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - MORNING

The sun rises over Selma.

The church doors open.

People gather by the hundreds, then thousands.

Local citizens. Students. Clergy. Nuns. Rabbis. Ministers.

Labor leaders. Reporters. Federal marshals. National
Guardsmen under federal command.

A different kind of army.

At the front, King stands with Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy,
Bevel, Hosea Williams, John Lewis, local leaders, and
visiting clergy.

John's bandage is gone, but the wound has not vanished.

The Edmund Pettus Bridge waits in the distance.

King looks across the crowd.

Some faces are proud.

Some terrified.

Many both.

Dorothy moves along the front line.

DOROTHY

Remember the order. Only those
cleared for the highway portion
continue the full route. Others
return as instructed.

A YOUNG ACTIVIST hears this and scowls.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

We all bled for this.

Dorothy stops before him.

DOROTHY

Yes.

A beat.

DOROTHY

And that is why we are not wasting
bodies to prove commitment.

The young activist looks away.

She softens.

DOROTHY

Your turn will come.

He nods, still unhappy.

Ralph steps beside King.

RALPH

You ready?

King looks at the bridge.

KING

No.

Ralph waits.

KING

But the road is.

Ralph smiles faintly.

RALPH

That will have to do.

EXT. BROWN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH - STEPS - MOMENTS LATER

King steps onto the church steps.

The crowd quiets.

KING

My friends, today we walk not in
anger, though we have reason for
anger.

A beat.

KING

We walk not in pride, though
dignity has brought us here.

The crowd listens.

KING

We walk because citizenship has
been delayed, denied, beaten,
buried, and still it rises.

A murmur.

KING

We walk for those who stood in
line and were turned away.

A stronger response.

KING

We walk for Jimmie Lee Jackson.

Heads bow.

KING

For James Reeb.

White clergy lower their eyes.

KING

For the children of Birmingham.

A wounded silence.

KING

For every mother who has wondered
whether the promise of America
would ever learn her child's name.

The crowd is still.

KING

And we walk for the living.

He looks across the faces.

KING

So let us walk like people who
intend to arrive not only in
Montgomery, but in the conscience
of this nation.

A beat.

KING

No hatred. No weapons. No
retaliation.

He looks toward the bridge.

KING

We have crossed many bridges
before reaching this one.

A beat.

KING

Today, we cross this one together.

The crowd begins to sing.

Soft.

Then strong.

EXT. SELMA STREET - MORNING

The march begins.

Two by two at first.

Then a river of people.

Feet against pavement.
Hymns and freedom songs rising into morning air.
Residents line the street.
Some join.
Some wave.
Some watch from porches with hands over their mouths.
Federal troops stand along the route.
Their presence changes the air.
Not safety exactly.
But witness with authority.
King walks at the front.
Ralph beside him.
Andrew and Dorothy nearby.
The bridge grows larger.
Every step toward it carries memory.
Clubs.
Gas.
Blood.
A hat on the ground.
John falling.
The march does not slow.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - MORNING

The front line reaches the bridge.
King stops.
Only for a breath.
He looks up at the steel arch.
The same bridge.
A different day.
Ralph watches him.

RALPH

Martin?

King nods.
They step onto the bridge.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Footsteps echo across the bridge deck.
The sound is hollow and thunderous.
The marchers ascend.
Reporters film from the sides.
Federal marshals watch.
National Guardsmen hold their positions.
John Lewis walks several rows back, eyes fixed on the road where he was beaten.
Hosea walks near him.
Neither speaks.
At the crest, King sees the far side.
No wall of troopers blocking them now.
The road is open.
The sight almost stops him.
The open road.
A thing so simple it becomes holy.
His eyes moisten.
He takes the next step.
The sound of footsteps becomes the sound of shoes on an Atlanta sidewalk.

EXT. ATLANTA STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

TEEN MARTIN, 15, walks beside King Sr.
He carries a small suitcase.
Morehouse College waits ahead in the distance, not yet visible but present in the way his father walks.
Teen Martin is dressed carefully.
Trying to look older than he is.
King Sr. notices.

KING SR.

You keep pulling on that tie, you
will choke yourself before you get
educated.

Teen Martin drops his hand.

TEEN MARTIN

Yes, sir.

They walk.

A streetcar passes.

A group of white students laugh outside a storefront.

Teen Martin watches them.

Then looks away.

KING SR.

You nervous?

TEEN MARTIN

No, sir.

King Sr. stops.

Teen Martin stops too.

KING SR.

Try that answer again.

Teen Martin looks down.

TEEN MARTIN

Yes, sir.

King Sr. nods.

KING SR.

Good.

They continue.

TEEN MARTIN

Everybody there will be older.

KING SR.

Most likely.

TEEN MARTIN

Smarter too.

KING SR.

Maybe.

Teen Martin looks at him.

KING SR.

Age does not guarantee wisdom. It
only guarantees time.

Teen Martin considers that.

TEEN MARTIN

What if I am not ready?

King Sr. slows.

KING SR.
You think readiness comes before
the road?

Teen Martin does not answer.

KING SR.
Sometimes it does.

A beat.

KING SR.
Most times, the road makes you
ready while you are walking it.

Teen Martin looks ahead.

KING SR.
But you must decide what kind of
man is doing the walking.

Teen Martin grips the suitcase.

TEEN MARTIN
How do I know?

King Sr. looks at him.

KING SR.
By what you refuse to leave
behind.

Teen Martin frowns.

KING SR.
Do not leave your dignity behind
to be accepted.

A beat.

KING SR.
Do not leave your mind behind to
be comfortable.

Another beat.

KING SR.
And do not leave your people
behind to be praised by people who
never loved them.

Teen Martin absorbs that.

They reach a corner.

King Sr. places a hand on his shoulder.

KING SR.

Education can open doors.

A beat.

KING SR.

But if you walk through and forget
who is still outside, you have
only changed rooms.

Teen Martin looks at his father.

The words strike deep.

TEEN MARTIN

I will not forget.

King Sr. studies him.

KING SR.

See that you don't.

EXT. EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE - DAY

King steps down the far side of the bridge.

Older now.

He has not forgotten.

The march follows behind him.

A line of people crossing the place where violence tried to
stop memory.

At the bottom of the bridge, King looks back.

The crowd stretches over the steel arch.

Black and white.

Young and old.

Local and national.

Wounded and walking.

For a moment, the bridge looks less like a barrier than a
testimony.

EXT. HIGHWAY 80 - DAY

The march continues beyond Selma.

Open road.

Fields on either side.

Federal troops spaced along the route.

Only a limited group continues the full highway march.

The large crowd has thinned by necessity, not by lack of will.

Those remaining carry the weight of those who had to turn back.

Dorothy walks with a clipboard, checking names and conditions.

DOROTHY

Water at the next stop. Anyone
limping reports before pride makes
it worse.

A minister chuckles weakly.

DOROTHY

That was not a joke.

He straightens.

Ralph walks beside King.

RALPH

I never thought I would be
grateful to see soldiers.

KING

I am grateful for protection.

A beat.

KING

I remain troubled that citizens
require it to vote.

Ralph nods.

Andrew drops back from talking to reporters.

ANDREW

Press wants a comment on the
federal troops.

KING

Tell them the presence of
protection proves the absence of
justice.

Andrew writes it down.

ANDREW

You know, sometimes you could say,
"We are glad they are here."

KING

We are glad they are here.

Andrew waits.

KING

And their necessity condemns the
nation.

Andrew sighs.

ANDREW

There it is.

King almost smiles.

EXT. HIGHWAY 80 - LATER

The marchers walk under a hot sun.

Feet ache.

Songs come and go.

A woman's heel bleeds through her stocking.

A young man offers his arm to an older marcher.

A rabbi shares water with a farmer.

A nun wipes sweat from her brow and keeps moving.

King sees all of it.

The ordinary holiness of tired people continuing.

A LOCAL FARMER, 60s, stands near a fence watching the march
pass.

He removes his hat.

King notices and steps toward him.

KING

Good afternoon.

FARMER

Reverend.

The farmer looks at the line.

FARMER

Never seen nothing like this road
today.

KING

Neither have I.

The farmer nods toward Montgomery.

FARMER

You think they'll listen when you
get there?

King looks down the highway.

KING
They are already listening.

FARMER
That ain't what I asked.

King looks back at him.

A tired smile.

KING
No, sir. It was not.

A beat.

KING
I think some will listen. Some
will pretend. Some will hate us
more for making them hear.

The farmer considers that.

FARMER
Then why walk all that way?

King looks at the marchers.

KING
Because a voice travels farther
when feet carry it.

The farmer nods slowly.

FARMER
I would walk, but my knees got old
before my anger did.

King takes his hand.

KING
Then let us borrow your anger and
give it direction.

The farmer grips his hand.

FARMER
You bring it back with something
to show.

KING
We will try.

EXT. CAMPSITE - HIGHWAY 80 - NIGHT

Tents.

Lanterns.

Exhausted marchers.

Federal protection around the perimeter.

People rub sore feet, share food, write notes, sing softly.

The road has become a moving village.

King sits on a folding chair outside a tent, shoes off,
socks dusty.

Ralph drops into a chair beside him with a groan.

RALPH

My feet have filed a formal
complaint.

KING

Mine have joined the class action.

Ralph laughs, surprised by it.

Across the campsite, Dorothy directs medical volunteers.

DOROTHY

Blisters are not character-
building. They are medical issues.

Andrew sits nearby, sorting press notes.

ANDREW

The networks are calling it
historic.

RALPH

My feet are calling it unwise.

King looks toward the dark road ahead.

KING

How far tomorrow?

Andrew checks notes.

ANDREW

Farther than anyone wants. Less
than Montgomery.

Ralph closes his eyes.

RALPH

That is a cruel measurement.

A YOUNG MARCHER approaches, the same one who challenged
King before Turnaround Tuesday.

He stands awkwardly.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

Dr. King?

King looks up.

KING

Yes.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

I wanted to say...

He struggles.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

I was angry when you turned us
back.

KING

I remember.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

I'm still angry.

KING

Good.

The young man is surprised.

KING

Anger that survives discipline may
become courage.

The young activist nods.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

Today, when we got over the
bridge...

He looks back toward Selma.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

I understood a little.

King waits.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

Not all the way.

KING

A little is honest.

The young man nods.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

My feet hurt.

Ralph points at him.

RALPH

That makes three of us. We are
forming a committee.

The young activist laughs.

The tension breaks.

KING

Get some rest.

YOUNG ACTIVIST

Yes, sir.

He goes.

King watches him leave.

RALPH

He will be leading somebody one
day.

KING

He already is.

Ralph looks at him.

KING

He came back to speak honestly.

A beat.

KING

That is where leadership begins.

EXT. CAMPSITE - LATER NIGHT

Most marchers sleep.

A few sing softly near a lantern.

King walks alone to the edge of the camp.

Federal troops stand in silhouette.

Beyond them, darkness.

Beyond that, Montgomery.

Coretta approaches from behind.

She has arrived quietly with the support group.

CORETTA

You were not in your tent.

King turns, surprised.

KING

Coretta.

She smiles.

CORETTA
You sound like a man caught
misbehaving.

KING
Only mildly.

She joins him.

For a moment, they look out into the dark.

CORETTA
You crossed the bridge.

KING
Yes.

CORETTA
How did it feel?

King takes time with the answer.

KING
Like walking over a wound.

A beat.

KING
And finding it had not closed, but
had become strong enough to carry
us.

Coretta lets that sit.

CORETTA
The children asked if you were
safe.

KING
What did you say?

CORETTA
That you were surrounded by people
who loved justice.

King looks at her.

KING
That is not the same as safe.

CORETTA
It was the truest answer I had.

He nods.

Coretta takes his hand.

CORETTA
You look tired.

KING
I am.

CORETTA
Not just your body.
He looks out at the darkness.

KING
When we reach Montgomery, they
will expect words large enough for
the road.

CORETTA
Then speak words that fit the
people, not the expectation.
A beat.

CORETTA
The road is large because they
are.
King looks back toward the sleeping camp.

CORETTA
You do not have to make them
historic.
A beat.

CORETTA
They already are.
King holds her hand tighter.

EXT. HIGHWAY 80 - MORNING

The march resumes.
Feet bandaged.
Voices hoarse.
Spirits unbroken.
The line moves through Alabama.
Day after day.

EXT. HIGHWAY 80 - SERIES OF SHOTS

-- Marchers walk through rain.
-- Marchers walk under sun.

-- A child hands flowers from the roadside.
-- A white heckler shouts from a pickup. Marchers keep walking.
-- Dorothy treats a blistered foot.
-- Ralph leads a song when morale dips.
-- Andrew manages reporters while walking backward, nearly trips, recovers.
-- King walks in silence, then in song, then in prayer.
-- Coretta joins for stretches, walking beside him.
-- Federal troops watch the tree lines.
-- The road unspools.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF MONTGOMERY - DAY

The skyline of Montgomery appears.

Small at first.

Then undeniable.

The marchers see it.

A sound rises.

Not quite cheering.

Not yet.

Something deeper.

Recognition.

Ralph looks at King.

RALPH

There it is.

King looks ahead.

Montgomery.

The capital.

The place power has been waiting.

KING

Yes.

Dorothy steps beside them.

DOROTHY

Now comes the hard part.

Ralph looks at her.

RALPH

Dorothy, we have walked for days.

DOROTHY

Exactly.

A beat.

DOROTHY

Tired people still have to be
disciplined people.

King nods.

KING

She is right.

Andrew runs up with a press update.

ANDREW

Crowds are gathering at the
capitol. Big crowds. More
arriving.

RALPH

Friendly?

ANDREW

Some.

A beat.

ANDREW

Not all.

King looks toward Montgomery.

KING

Then we enter as we walked.

A beat.

KING

Together.

EXT. MONTGOMERY ROAD - DAY

The march grows.

People pour in from side streets.

Those who could not walk the whole road now join for the
final approach.

Thousands become tens of thousands.

Songs rise.

Banners lift.

The march swells toward Montgomery.

King walks at the front.

Coretta near him.

Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, Bevel, John, Hosea, clergy,
students, local citizens.

The living.

The wounded.

The remembered.

EXT. ALABAMA STATE CAPITOL - MONTGOMERY - DAY

The capitol dome rises ahead.

The marchers fill the street.

A massive crowd gathers below the steps.

King looks up at the building.

The seat of state power.

The end of the road.

Not the end of the struggle.

He steps toward the platform.

As he does, he glances back.

The road behind him is full of people.

For a moment, he sees all the roads inside this one.

The Atlanta sidewalk with his father.

The bus aisle.

The breadline.

The church steps.

The bombed house.

The Birmingham sanctuary.

The bridge.

All of it has arrived here.

King turns back toward the crowd.

The microphones wait.

FADE OUT.

EXT. ALABAMA STATE CAPITOL - MONTGOMERY - DAY

The crowd stretches across the capitol grounds and into the streets beyond.

Thousands upon thousands.

Black citizens from Alabama. White clergy from the North.
Students. Nuns. Rabbis. Ministers. Union workers.
Reporters. Federal officers. Local families who have
carried the weight before the nation came to watch.

The Alabama State Capitol rises above them.

White columns.

Hard steps.

A building pretending innocence.

King stands near the platform with Coretta, Ralph, Andrew,
Dorothy, Bevel, John Lewis, Hosea Williams, and other
leaders.

His shoes are dusty.

His face is tired.

His eyes are clear.

Ralph leans close.

RALPH

You ready?

King looks out at the crowd.

KING

No.

Ralph waits.

KING

But they are.

Andrew hurries over with a press aide.

ANDREW

Networks are live. Newspapers from
everywhere. Washington is
watching. Wallace is inside
somewhere pretending not to.

DOROTHY

He is watching.

BEVEL

Good.

Coretta steps close to King.

She straightens his tie, though it does not need straightening.

CORETTA

Speak to the people who walked.

KING

Not the ones watching?

CORETTA

If you speak truly to the ones who walked, the ones watching will hear what they need to.

King looks at her.

A quiet thank you passes between them.

A LOCAL ORGANIZER approaches.

LOCAL ORGANIZER

Dr. King, they are ready.

King nods.

He steps toward the microphones.

The crowd begins to rise.

Not physically.

Spiritually.

A sound moves through them.

Applause.

Song.

Relief.

Grief.

Expectation.

King reaches the podium.

The microphones wait like witnesses.

He looks out.

The road from Selma has arrived in Montgomery.

King places both hands on the podium.

He does not begin immediately.

He lets the people see that he sees them.

KING

My friends.

The crowd quiets.

KING

My brothers and sisters.

A deeper quiet.

KING

We have come to Montgomery with
tired feet and awakened hearts.

A murmur moves through the crowd.

KING

We have walked roads that were not
built to welcome us. We have
crossed a bridge where blood was
spilled for the simple request
that democracy keep its word.

John Lewis lowers his head.

KING

We have come not as beggars before
power, but as citizens before our
own government.

The crowd answers.

YES.

AMEN.

KING

No man should have to walk fifty
miles to prove he is entitled to a
vote.

A strong response.

KING

No woman should have to stand in
line beneath insult and threat to
prove she belongs to the country
that taxes her labor and sends her
sons to war.

The crowd grows louder.

KING

No child should have to ask why
his mother can clean a courthouse
but cannot enter it as a full
citizen.

A wave of emotion.

King lets it rise.

Then:

KING

But we did walk.

The crowd settles.

KING

We walked because the denial of
one citizen's voice weakens the
voice of the whole republic.

A beat.

KING

We walked because a ballot is more
than a piece of paper.

He looks toward the capitol.

KING

It is a key. It is a shield. It is
a witness. It is a man or woman
standing before the machinery of
government and saying, "I exist,
and you must count me."

The crowd roars.

King's voice strengthens.

KING

They told us to wait.

The crowd responds with bitter recognition.

KING

But waiting became another word
for never.

A beat.

KING

They told us to be patient.

Another response.

KING

But patience without progress is
only delay dressed in Sunday
clothes.

Ralph smiles faintly.

KING

They told us that order must be
preserved.

King looks back at the capitol.

KING

But order that preserves injustice
is disorder in uniform.

The crowd erupts.

King raises a hand.

KING

We do not come here to humiliate
Alabama.

A beat.

KING

We come here to call Alabama home
to itself.

That lands differently.

Deeper.

KING

We come here because we believe
even those who oppose us are not
beyond redemption. But redemption
does not begin with polite
silence. Redemption begins when
truth stands at the door and
refuses to leave.

Coretta watches him.

Proud.

Worried.

Moved.

KING

Jimmie Lee Jackson did not live to
see this day.

The crowd quiets.

KING

James Reeb did not live to see
this day.

A few heads bow.

KING

The children of Birmingham did not
live to see this day.

A wounded stillness.

KING

So we must see it for them.

A beat.

KING

And we must do more than see it.
We must make it worthy of them.

The crowd responds.

AMEN.

YES, LORD.

King leans closer to the
microphones.

KING

Some ask how much longer injustice
can last.

A hush.

King does not use the famous words.

He finds his own.

KING

I tell you that no lie is
immortal.

The crowd stirs.

KING

No chain is eternal.

Stronger.

KING

No courthouse door can stay closed
forever when a determined people
keep returning with truth in their
hands.

The crowd rises.

KING

The road is long.

A beat.

KING

But we have learned how to walk.

The crowd breaks open.

Applause. Cheers. Tears.

King holds the podium until the sound settles.

Then softer:

KING

When we leave this place, the work
will not be finished.

The crowd quiets again.

KING

A speech will not finish it. A
march will not finish it. A law,
even when it comes, will not
finish it by itself.

He looks across the faces.

KING

The work will continue in county
offices, in schoolhouses, in
churches, in union halls, in
kitchens, in jail cells, in voting
booths, and in the private
chambers of the human heart.

A beat.

KING

But today, let it be known: Selma
did not end at the bridge.

He looks toward the road behind them.

KING

Selma walked all the way to
Montgomery.

The crowd answers with thunder.

King stands in the roar.

And for a moment, the sound becomes younger.

A classroom.

A small audience.

A nervous breath.

INT. DUBLIN HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Teen Martin, 14, stands backstage in his best suit.

He holds a few pages in trembling hands.

From the auditorium, polite applause fades as another student finishes.

Mrs. Bradley stands beside him.

MRS. BRADLEY

You ready?

TEEN MARTIN

Yes, ma'am.

She looks at his shaking pages.

MRS. BRADLEY

Your hands disagree.

Teen Martin tries to still them.

TEEN MARTIN

There will be white judges.

MRS. BRADLEY

Yes.

TEEN MARTIN

White students.

MRS. BRADLEY

Yes.

TEEN MARTIN

What if they do not want to hear
what I have to say?

Mrs. Bradley steps closer.

MRS. BRADLEY

Then give them the burden of
having heard it anyway.

Teen Martin looks at her.

MRS. BRADLEY

You are not speaking to be liked.

A beat.

MRS. BRADLEY

You are speaking because truth
deserves a voice even in rooms
that did not invite it.

The EMCEE announces from the stage.

EMCEE (O.S.)
Martin Luther King Jr.

Teen Martin closes his eyes.
One breath.
Then he walks onto the stage.

**INT. DUBLIN HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - STAGE - CONTINUOUS -
FLASHBACK**

Teen Martin steps to the podium.
The audience watches.
White faces.
Black faces.
Judges with pencils.
Students waiting to be impressed or not.
Teen Martin places his pages down.
His hands still tremble.
He looks out.
For a second, he is only a boy.
Then he sees Mrs. Bradley standing in the wings.
She nods.
Teen Martin begins.

TEEN MARTIN
The Constitution is not weak
because its promises are too
large.

A few judges look up.

TEEN MARTIN
It is weakened when men make its
promises small enough to fit their
prejudice.

The room stills.

Teen Martin's voice grows steadier.

TEEN MARTIN
A nation cannot call itself free
while teaching some of its
children to enter through the back
door of citizenship.

Mrs. Bradley watches, proud.

TEEN MARTIN

If law is to be worthy of respect,
it must learn to respect the
people it governs.

The words surprise even him.

He feels their weight.

He continues.

INT. DUBLIN HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - LATER - FLASHBACK

Applause.

Teen Martin stands with a certificate in his hand.

He has won.

Mrs. Bradley meets him near the stage steps.

MRS. BRADLEY

You found your voice.

Teen Martin smiles.

TEEN MARTIN

It did not feel found.

MRS. BRADLEY

It never does the first time.

He looks at the certificate.

TEEN MARTIN

They applauded.

Mrs. Bradley's expression softens.

MRS. BRADLEY

Applause is pleasant.

A beat.

MRS. BRADLEY

Do not confuse it with change.

Teen Martin looks at her.

MRS. BRADLEY

The real test of words begins
after the room stops clapping.

The applause becomes the Montgomery crowd again.

EXT. ALABAMA STATE CAPITOL - DAY

King stands at the podium.

The crowd still applauds.

He seems to hear Mrs. Bradley's lesson across time.

The real test begins after the clapping.

King raises his hand.

The crowd quiets.

KING

Do not let this day become only a
memory.

A beat.

KING

Let it become an obligation.

The crowd listens.

KING

Go home and register. Go home and
organize. Go home and teach. Go
home and vote when the door opens.
And if the door does not open,
return to it with more witnesses
than before.

Dorothy watches the crowd, already seeing the work ahead.

KING

We have not walked this road to
become famous.

A beat.

KING

We have walked it so that one day
an ordinary citizen may walk into
a courthouse without fear and
leave with his dignity recognized
by law.

King looks over the crowd.

KING

That day is not fully here.

A beat.

KING

But it is closer because you
walked.

The crowd rises again.

Song begins somewhere in the middle of the people.

It spreads.

King steps back from the microphone.

Ralph embraces him.

RALPH

You gave them the road back.

KING

They gave it to me first.

Coretta reaches him.

For a moment, husband and wife stand amid history.

CORETTA

Mrs. Bradley would have approved.

King looks at her, surprised.

KING

You know about Mrs. Bradley?

CORETTA

Martin, I know about many things
you think you keep to yourself.

He smiles.

Small.

Tired.

Real.

EXT. ALABAMA STATE CAPITOL - LATER

The formal program has ended.

The crowd begins to break into clusters.

Some sing. Some pray. Some sit on the grass, too tired to
move. Reporters file dispatches. Organizers gather names.

King stands aside with Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, Bevel, and
several local leaders.

Andrew holds a stack of press notes.

ANDREW

The speech is moving everywhere.
Washington. New York. Chicago.
London.

DOROTHY

Good. Then tomorrow we ask who is
still unregistered.

Bevel looks toward the capitol.

BEVEL

Wallace stayed inside.

RALPH

Of course he did.

BEVEL

We came all this way and he hid
behind stone.

King looks up at the building.

KING

Stone is not strength.

A beat.

KING

Sometimes it is fear trying to
look permanent.

A local woman, MRS. JACKSON from Selma, approaches with the
Veteran and the Schoolteacher.

Mrs. Jackson carries herself with the same dignity as
before, though the road has taken something from her.

MRS. JACKSON

Dr. King.

KING

Mrs. Jackson.

She looks at the capitol.

MRS. JACKSON

I never thought I would stand
here.

KING

How does it feel?

She considers.

MRS. JACKSON

Like I still need to register.

King smiles softly.

KING

Yes, ma'am.

MRS. JACKSON

This was a mighty long way to walk
just to still have work to do.

Dorothy laughs quietly.

DOROTHY

That may be the truest thing said
all day.

The Veteran looks at King.

VETERAN

You think they will pass that law
now?

King does not answer too quickly.

KING

I think they have fewer places to
hide from it.

The Schoolteacher nods.

SCHOOLTEACHER

My students will ask what happened
here.

KING

Tell them the truth.

SCHOOLTEACHER

Which part?

King looks back at the crowd.

KING

That people walked until the
government had to remember they
were people.

The Schoolteacher absorbs that.

EXT. SIDE STREET NEAR CAPITOL - LATE AFTERNOON

The marchers begin loading into buses, cars, church vans.

Feet swollen.

Voices hoarse.

Faces sunburned.

Alive.

Dorothy supervises lists.

DOROTHY

Nobody leaves without a head
count. If you came on a church
bus, you leave on that church bus.
If you lost your shoes, report to
medical, not to your pride.

Andrew helps reporters find local voices to interview instead of only national leaders.

ANDREW

Talk to her. She stood in the
courthouse line before you could
spell Selma.

Ralph sits briefly on a low wall, removing one shoe.

RALPH

I may need a constitutional
amendment for my feet.

King sits beside him.

KING

Would it pass?

RALPH

Unanimously if Congress walked
from Selma.

They share a weary laugh.

For a moment, they are not icons or strategists.

Just two tired friends with aching feet.

Ralph looks toward the capitol.

RALPH

You know they will expect the next
thing now.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

You know the movement is never
satisfied.

KING

It should not be.

RALPH

You know neither are you.

King looks at him.

KING

Are you?

Ralph says nothing.

Then smiles.

RALPH
Not even close.

EXT. ALABAMA STATE CAPITOL - SUNSET

The crowd has thinned.
Paper cups. trampled grass. abandoned signs.
Workers begin taking down equipment.
The capitol glows in the low sun.
King stands alone for a moment at the edge of the platform.
Coretta approaches.

CORETTA
The buses are waiting.

KING
In a minute.
She stands beside him.
They look at the capitol together.

CORETTA
What are you thinking?

KING
That power buildings look smaller
after people stand in front of
them.

Coretta smiles faintly.

CORETTA
People look larger too.

A beat.

King looks toward the road they came in on.

KING
I keep seeing all the roads that
led here.

CORETTA
And the ones leaving?

He turns to her.

She knows him.

KING
Yes.

A beat.

KING

Voting rights is one door.

CORETTA

And beyond it?

King looks out at Montgomery.

KING

Poverty. Housing. Work. War.

Coretta absorbs the list.

The horizon already lengthening.

CORETTA

Then maybe tonight we only say
thank you for this door.

King nods.

He wants to.

He tries.

KING

Thank you.

A beat.

KING

For this door.

Coretta takes his hand.

EXT. MONTGOMERY ROAD - SUNSET

Buses pull away from the capitol.

Cars follow.

Marchers wave from windows.

King and Coretta stand near a waiting car.

Before getting in, King looks once more at the capitol.

The microphones are gone.

The crowd is gone.

The work remains.

INT. CAR - MOVING - MONTGOMERY - SUNSET

King sits beside Coretta.

Ralph rides in front, already half asleep.

Andrew reads wire reports.

Dorothy marks follow-up tasks on a legal pad.
King looks out the window.
Montgomery passes by.
A Black child on a sidewalk waves at the car.
King raises his hand.
The child smiles.
The car continues.
Coretta watches King.

CORETTA

You are already somewhere else.

King turns to her.
He does not deny it.

KING

The vote will open the door.

A beat.

KING

But what will people eat once they
walk through?

Dorothy looks up from her pad.
Ralph opens one eye.

RALPH

Can we get out of Montgomery
before you redesign the entire
nation?

King almost smiles.

KING

I am only asking the question.

RALPH

That is how it starts.

Coretta looks out the window now.

CORETTA

It is the right question.

King looks at her.
She nods.

CORETTA

Just not the only question
tonight.

He takes that in.

The car moves into the fading light.

EXT. HIGHWAY OUT OF MONTGOMERY - NIGHT

The road stretches ahead.

Dark.

Open.

Unfinished.

FADE OUT.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - PRESIDENTIAL ROOM - DAY

next scene

Here is the next scene, moving from the victory of the Voting Rights Act into the realization that voting rights are not the end of the struggle. The flashback shows young Martin learning that segregation does not only control where the body sits – it tries to control how far the mind is allowed to travel.

A bright room crowded with history.

Cameras. Reporters. Congressmen. Civil rights leaders. Clergy. Cabinet members. Aides pressed against the walls.

A signing desk sits at the center.

On it: the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

SUPER: WHITE HOUSE - AUGUST 6, 1965

King stands with Coretta, Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, John Lewis, Hosea Williams, and other leaders.

Not everyone who earned this day is in the room.

Everyone feels that.

President Johnson sits at the desk, large and deliberate, pen in hand.

He speaks to the room, but the weight of Selma stands behind every word.

JOHNSON

Today, the ballot becomes not a favor from the powerful, but a protected right of the citizen.

Applause fills the room.
King does not clap immediately.
He sees the courthouse line.
Mrs. Jackson.
The Veteran.
The Schoolteacher.
Jimmie Lee's mother.
John Lewis bleeding on the bridge.
James Reeb's wife in the hospital hallway.
Only then does King clap.
Johnson signs.
The pen scratches across the page.
Law.
Ink.
Memory.
The room erupts.
Flashbulbs burst.
Some people cheer.
Some cry.
John Lewis lowers his head.
Dorothy watches the signing with satisfaction and suspicion
in equal measure.
Johnson signs several copies and begins handing away pens.
He reaches King.

JOHNSON

Dr. King.

King steps forward.

They shake hands.

Johnson places a pen in King's hand.

JOHNSON

Selma came all the way here.

King looks at the pen.

KING

No, Mr. President.

A beat.

KING

Selma brought America with it.

Johnson studies him.

JOHNSON

You going to let me have one full
minute of celebration?

King almost smiles.

KING

One minute.

Johnson nods.

JOHNSON

I suppose I should be grateful.

KING

History usually gives less.

Johnson's smile fades into respect.

JOHNSON

You know this one matters.

KING

Yes, sir.

A beat.

KING

And you know it will have to be
enforced.

JOHNSON

It will be.

King looks at him.

KING

Every county. Every courthouse.
Every registrar who thinks paper
can hide prejudice.

Johnson nods.

JOHNSON

You keep your people organized.

KING

They have kept themselves
organized.

A beat.

KING

We are only learning to deserve
them.

Johnson has no answer for that.

Reporters move closer.

REPORTER #1

Dr. King, is this the greatest
victory of the movement?

REPORTER #2

Does this complete the work begun
in Selma?

REPORTER #3

What comes next?

King turns to them.

The room quiets.

KING

Today is a great victory.

Pens rise.

KING

But victory is not the same as
completion.

The reporters listen.

KING

The vote gives a man a voice in
government.

A beat.

KING

It does not by itself give him a
job, a safe home, a decent school,
or bread on his table.

Dorothy looks at him.

She hears the road extending again.

KING

So today we give thanks.

A beat.

KING

Tomorrow we ask what kind of
nation citizens are voting in.

INT. WHITE HOUSE - HALLWAY - LATER

The ceremony noise fades behind closed doors.

King walks with Coretta, Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, John, and Hosea.

The pen rests in King's hand.

Ralph is lighter than usual.

RALPH

A voting rights law, Martin.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

A real one.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

You know, it is possible to smile
without betraying the revolution.

King stops.

Looks at Ralph.

Then smiles.

A real smile.

Small but unmistakable.

RALPH

There it is. Somebody notify the
press.

Coretta laughs softly.

John Lewis steps closer.

JOHN

People in Selma will be proud.

KING

They should be.

JOHN

And ready to test it.

KING

They must.

Dorothy points at the pen.

DOROTHY

You should send that to Mrs.
Jackson.

King considers.

KING

Yes.

DOROTHY

Do not look so surprised. I have
good ideas daily.

ANDREW

Hourly, according to Dorothy.

DOROTHY

Do not diminish me, Andrew.

They walk on.

For once, the laughter does not feel stolen.
It feels earned.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

The group exits into bright sun.

Reporters wait beyond ropes.

A crowd of supporters cheers.

King pauses with Coretta beside him.

A YOUNG BLACK REPORTER, 20s, pushes forward.

YOUNG BLACK REPORTER

Dr. King, my father tried to
register in Mississippi three
times. What should I tell him
tonight?

King looks at her.

KING

Tell him the door has been forced
open.

A beat.

KING

Then tell him to gather witnesses
and walk through it.

The reporter nods, eyes shining.

Another reporter calls out.

WHITE REPORTER

Dr. King, are you concerned
expectations may become too high
now?

King turns to him.

KING

Expectations are not the danger.

A beat.

KING

The danger is asking people who
have waited centuries to become
polite about waiting longer.

The reporters scribble.

Coretta watches him.

Proud.

But she knows that look.

The next mountain has already appeared.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - WASHINGTON, D.C. - NIGHT

A modest hotel room.

The television glows.

Newspapers sit across the bed.

Headline after headline:

VOTING RIGHTS ACT SIGNED

King stands near the window.

Coretta sits on the edge of the bed, removing her earrings.

Ralph is in a chair with his shoes off. Andrew reads wire
reports. Dorothy sorts call sheets.

The room should feel victorious.

Instead it feels like a headquarters between storms.

On television, footage from the signing plays silently.

Johnson at the desk.

King nearby.

Applause without sound.

Ralph raises a glass of water.

RALPH

To the vote.

Andrew lifts his coffee.

ANDREW

To the people who made Washington
nervous enough to protect it.

Dorothy lifts nothing.

DOROTHY

To enforcement.

They all look at her.

DOROTHY

I am celebrating. This is my
celebratory face.

Coretta smiles.

King lifts the signing pen.

KING

To Selma.

That quiets them.

They drink.

The phone RINGS.

Everyone looks at it.

A familiar interruption.

Andrew answers.

ANDREW

Yes?

He listens.

His face changes.

KING

What is it?

Andrew raises a hand, listening harder.

ANDREW

When?

A beat.

ANDREW

How bad?

King turns fully from the window.

Andrew hangs up.

ANDREW

Los Angeles.

RALPH

What about it?

ANDREW

Watts.

Dorothy goes still.

ANDREW

A traffic stop. Arrest. Crowds
gathering. Police moving in. They
say it is getting ugly.

King looks toward the silent television.

The signing ceremony still plays.

Applause in silence.

A different America arriving by phone.

RALPH

Today of all days.

DOROTHY

That is the mistake.

Ralph looks at her.

DOROTHY

Thinking the day changes for
everyone because Washington signed
something.

King absorbs that.

KING

The vote has opened one door.

A beat.

KING

But many people are still living
in rooms without windows.

Coretta looks at him.

CORETTA

You are going to go there.

KING

Not tonight.

A beat.

KING

But yes.

Ralph leans back, eyes closed.

RALPH

I knew that smile in the hallway
was temporary.

King looks at the television.

Johnson signing.

Hands clapping.

Then he looks at the phone.

Watts burning somewhere beyond the frame.

The television glow becomes morning light through a bus
window.

INT. CITY BUS - ATLANTA - MORNING - FLASHBACK

Teen Martin, 13, rides a city bus to school.

He sits in the back.

A stack of books on his lap.

The bus rocks through Atlanta.

White passengers sit ahead.

Black passengers sit behind the line.

The rule is old enough that no one needs to announce it.

Teen Martin looks out the window.

They pass a white school.

Large.

Clean.

A yard with space to run.

Students spill through the front doors laughing.

The bus keeps moving.

Teen Martin watches until the school disappears.

Beside him, a BLACK CLASSMATE, 13, notices.

CLASSMATE

You staring like you trying to
move the building with your eyes.

TEEN MARTIN

Maybe I am.

The classmate laughs.

CLASSMATE

Let me know if it works.

Teen Martin looks down at his books.

TEEN MARTIN

They think because we sit back
here, our minds stay back here
too.

The classmate stops laughing.

CLASSMATE

What you mean?

Teen Martin looks toward the front of the bus.

TEEN MARTIN

They can tell my body where to
sit.

A beat.

TEEN MARTIN

They cannot tell my mind where to
go.

The classmate looks at him, impressed but cautious.

CLASSMATE

Better not say that too loud.

Teen Martin keeps his eyes forward.

TEEN MARTIN

One day someone will have to.

The bus hits a bump.

The books shift on his lap.

He grips them tighter.

**EXT. BOOKER T. WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL - ATLANTA - MORNING -
FLASHBACK**

The bus pulls up.

Black students step off and head toward the school.

The building is worn, crowded, alive.

Teachers greet students at the door.

Teen Martin steps down with his books.

He looks back down the street in the direction of the white
school.

Then turns toward his own.

**INT. BOOKER T. WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY -
FLASHBACK**

A classroom packed with students.

Desks close together.

A TEACHER writes on the board:

CITIZENSHIP

Teen Martin sits forward, alert.

The Teacher turns.

TEACHER

Citizenship is not merely where
you live.

A beat.

TEACHER

It is whether the law recognizes
your life as belonging to the
community.

Teen Martin listens.

The Teacher looks over the room.

TEACHER

There are people who will try to
teach you that citizenship is
something they give.

He walks between the desks.

TEACHER

Do not believe them.

The class is silent.

TEACHER

Rights may be denied. They may be
delayed. They may be violated.

A beat.

TEACHER

But they are not created by the
men who deny them.

Teen Martin writes every word.

TEACHER

That is why education matters.

He stops beside Teen Martin's desk.

TEACHER

A trained mind cannot be easily
evicted from its own dignity.

Teen Martin looks up.

The Teacher moves on.

Teen Martin glances at the word on the board.

CITIZENSHIP.

The chalk line blurs into the
white paper of the Voting Rights
Act.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - WASHINGTON, D.C. - NIGHT

King stands by the television.

Older now.

The signing ceremony has ended.

News footage shifts to Los Angeles.

Police cars.

Crowds.

Smoke in the distance.

Coretta rises and stands beside him.

CORETTA

What are you thinking?

KING

That a man may finally be allowed
to vote and still not be able to
breathe.

The room quiets.

KING

Not because the law says he is
less.

A beat.

KING

Because the city teaches it in
rent, wages, schools, and police
stops.

Dorothy nods slowly.

DOROTHY

Then the next work is larger.

RALPH

Larger than voting?

KING

Older than voting.

A beat.

KING

Voting gives people power to fight it. But we must name what they are fighting.

Andrew watches the footage.

ANDREW

The press will call it riots.

DOROTHY

Of course they will.

KING

Then we must ask what the country calls the conditions that made the fire.

Ralph looks at King.

RALPH

You know the movement may not follow easily into that.

KING

I know.

RALPH

Some will say civil rights is one thing, poverty is another.

KING

Then they have not stood in enough lines.

Dorothy looks at him.

She remembers the breadline story.

KING

The line outside the courthouse. The line outside the employment office. The line outside the landlord's door. The line outside the school with no books.

A beat.

KING

They are all asking the same
question.

Andrew lowers the volume on the television.

ANDREW

Which is?

King looks at the smoke on the screen.

KING

What is citizenship worth if a man
cannot live with dignity?

Silence.

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - HOTEL BALCONY - LATE NIGHT

King steps outside alone.

The city is quiet.

Monuments glow in the distance.

A capital at rest.

He holds the Voting Rights Act pen.

He turns it in his fingers.

Coretta appears behind him with his coat.

CORETTA

You will catch cold.

KING

I wondered where my mother went.

She drapes the coat over his shoulders.

CORETTA

Your mother would have made you
button it.

He smiles faintly.

They look out at the city.

KING

We keep winning doors.

CORETTA

Yes.

KING

And behind every door is another
room full of suffering.

CORETTA

Yes.

KING

Does that ever make victory feel
cruel to you?

Coretta considers.

CORETTA

No.

He looks at her.

CORETTA

It makes victory feel honest.

A beat.

CORETTA

Only false victory promises there
is no more work.

King nods.

CORETTA

Today was not false.

King looks at the pen.

KING

No.

CORETTA

Then let it be real.

He closes his hand around the pen.

CORETTA

And tomorrow, let tomorrow be real
too.

A long quiet.

KING

When I was a boy, I used to ride
in the back of the bus and tell
myself my mind was not back there.

Coretta listens.

KING

I believed if the mind stayed
free, one day the body would
follow.

He looks toward the city.

KING

But now I wonder how many bodies
have been freed by law and are
still trapped by hunger.

Coretta takes his hand.

CORETTA

Then say that.

KING

They will not like it.

CORETTA

They rarely do at first.

He looks at her.

She smiles gently.

CORETTA

That has not stopped you yet.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Ralph sleeps in the chair.

Andrew has finally stopped reading.

Dorothy still writes.

King and Coretta enter from the balcony.

Dorothy looks up.

DOROTHY

You all right?

KING

No.

DOROTHY

Good.

A beat.

DOROTHY

I distrust comfort in rooms like
this.

King sits at the desk.

He takes out a sheet of hotel stationery.

At the top, he writes:

VOTING RIGHTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

He stops.

Crosses out HUMAN RIGHTS.

Writes:

VOTING RIGHTS AND HUMAN DIGNITY
He looks at it.

Better.

Dorothy watches.

DOROTHY
That looks like tomorrow.

KING
Yes.

She caps her pen.

DOROTHY
Then I am going to sleep before
you turn it into next week.

King smiles.

Dorothy exits toward the adjoining room.

King looks at the television again.

The image from Watts has changed to smoke against night sky.

He sets the Voting Rights Act pen on the desk.

Beside the page.

Law beside unfinished work.

INT. CITY BUS - ATLANTA - DAY - FLASHBACK

Teen Martin sits in the back, books in his lap.

He looks toward the front of the bus.

The empty seats.

The line.

The driver's mirror.

Then he opens a book.

The bus keeps him in the back.

His mind moves forward.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - WASHINGTON, D.C. - NIGHT

King writes.

Outside, the capital sleeps.

On the television, Los Angeles burns silently.

FADE OUT.

EXT. WATTS - LOS ANGELES - DAY

Smoke stains the California sky.

Not thick now.

Lingering.

A neighborhood after fire.

Storefronts gutted. Windows boarded. Bricks scattered.

Burned cars at curbs. National Guardsmen posted on corners.

Police cruisers rolling slow.

The sun is bright.

Too bright for ruins.

SUPER: WATTS - LOS ANGELES - AUGUST 1965

King steps from a car with Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, and local ministers.

A few reporters follow at a distance.

King looks around.

This is not Selma.

No courthouse line.

No bridge.

No clear road from injustice to camera to legislation.

This is something wider.

Older.

Buried beneath asphalt.

A LOCAL MINISTER, REV. HARRIS, 40s, approaches.

REV. HARRIS

Dr. King.

They shake hands.

KING

Reverend.

Rev. Harris gestures toward the neighborhood.

REV. HARRIS

Welcome to the victory after the
victory.

The words land.

Ralph looks at the burned buildings.

RALPH
How many dead?

REV. HARRIS
Too many.

DOROTHY
How many arrested?

REV. HARRIS
More than too many.

A group of LOCAL RESIDENTS watch from across the street.
Some curious. Some angry. Some tired of leaders arriving
after the fire.

A young Black man, MARCUS, 22, steps forward.

MARCUS
You come to tell us to be
nonviolent?

The street quiets.

Reporters lift cameras.

King turns to him.

KING
I came to listen first.

Marcus laughs bitterly.

MARCUS
That right?

KING
Yes.

MARCUS
Everybody listens after something
burns.

A few residents murmur agreement.

MARCUS
Before that, they tell us to fill
out forms. Wait for meetings. Talk
to officials. Pray.

King takes a step toward him.

Ralph watches carefully.

MARCUS
We been peaceful poor for years.

A beat.

MARCUS

Nobody televised that.

King absorbs it.

KING

No.

Marcus is surprised by the answer.

KING

They did not.

The honesty slows him.

MARCUS

So what you got to say now?

King looks down the street.

At the burned stores.

At children standing near broken glass.

At a woman sweeping ash from a doorway that no longer has a door.

KING

That a riot is the language of
people who believe every other
language has been ignored.

The reporters react.

Pens rise.

Marcus studies King, wary.

KING

But I will also say that fire can
reveal a wound without healing it.

A beat.

KING

And if we do not organize the
pain, other men will organize the
response for us.

Marcus looks toward the National Guardsmen.

MARCUS

They already did.

KING

Then we have less time than we
thought.

EXT. WATTS STREET - LATER

King walks with Rev. Harris, Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, and Marcus.

Residents follow loosely.

Some listen.

Some heckle.

Some simply watch.

A burned grocery store stands open to the sky.

A woman, MRS. CARTER, 50s, sits on a crate outside what used to be a laundromat.

She holds a paper bag of salvaged belongings.

Rev. Harris kneels beside her.

REV. HARRIS

Mrs. Carter, this is Dr. King.

She looks up.

Not impressed.

MRS. CARTER

I know who he is.

King kneels too.

KING

Ma'am.

MRS. CARTER

You looking for a speech?

KING

No, ma'am.

She studies him.

MRS. CARTER

Good. I lost my washing machines.
Not my ears.

Dorothy almost smiles despite the pain.

KING

How long did you own this place?

MRS. CARTER

Eleven years.

She looks at the burned laundromat.

MRS. CARTER

Took me six years to get the loan.
Eleven years to build the
business. One night to lose it.

KING

I am sorry.

MRS. CARTER

Sorry don't rinse clothes.

King nods.

MRS. CARTER

But I know why it happened.

King listens.

MRS. CARTER

People were tired of being
invisible.

A beat.

MRS. CARTER

Problem is, when invisible people
start breaking things, everybody
sees the broken things first.

King looks at the ruined building.

KING

Then we must make them see the
people.

Mrs. Carter looks at him.

MRS. CARTER

Can you?

King does not answer quickly.

KING

Not alone.

Mrs. Carter nods, respecting the lack of false promise.

MRS. CARTER

Then don't come alone next time.

King takes that in.

KING

No, ma'am.

EXT. HOUSING BLOCK - WATTS - DAY

A row of crowded apartments.

Laundry hangs from windows. Children play near cracked pavement. A police car crawls by. Conversation stops until it passes.

King watches the children.

One boy pushes a toy car without wheels.

Another draws a house in the dirt with a stick.

The drawing is larger than any building on the block.

King steps closer.

KING

That is a fine house.

The boy looks up.

BOY

Ain't real.

KING

Not yet.

The boy studies him.

BOY

You the man from the march?

KING

One of them.

BOY

You gonna march here?

King looks around.

No bridge.

No courthouse.

Just blocks of accumulated neglect.

KING

Maybe.

BOY

To where?

King has no easy answer.

The boy waits.

KING

That is what we have to find out.

The boy goes back to drawing.

The dirt house grows.

King watches the stick carve windows into dust.
The scratching sound becomes chalk against a board.

INT. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE - CLASSROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young King, 17, sits in a classroom with other students.
Dr. Benjamin Mays stands at the front.
On the board:

FREEDOM

Mays turns to the class.

MAYS

Gentlemen, define freedom.

A student raises his hand.

STUDENT

The absence of restraint.

Mays writes it down.

MAYS

A common answer.

Another student.

SECOND STUDENT

Political rights.

Mays writes.

MAYS

A necessary answer.

Young King watches.

MAYS

Mr. King?

Young King sits forward.

YOUNG KING

The ability to become what God
intended without artificial
barriers.

Mays studies him.

MAYS

Better.

The class looks at Young King.

MAYS

But incomplete.

Young King absorbs the correction.

MAYS

A man may be told he is free and
still be trapped by hunger.

Mays writes HUNGER beneath FREEDOM.

MAYS

He may be told he is equal and
still be trapped by ignorance.

He writes IGNORANCE.

MAYS

He may be told the door is open
and still have no wages to travel
through it.

He writes WAGES.

Young King listens with growing intensity.

MAYS

Rights are essential. But rights
without conditions that allow
human flourishing can become a
cruel kind of poetry.

A beat.

MAYS

Beautiful words recited over empty
stomachs.

The room is silent.

Mays walks between the desks.

MAYS

Do not misunderstand me. The
ballot matters. The law matters.
Desegregation matters.

He stops beside Young King.

MAYS

But the soul of justice is larger
than access.

Young King looks up.

MAYS

It asks not only, "May a man
enter?"

A beat.

MAYS

It asks, "Can he live when he gets
inside?"

Young King writes that down.

Mays returns to the board.

MAYS

If your ministry ever becomes too
satisfied with partial freedom,
the suffering people will have to
correct your theology.

Young King looks at the board.

FREEDOM.

HUNGER.

IGNORANCE.

WAGES.

The chalk dust becomes ash in the
Los Angeles air.

EXT. HOUSING BLOCK - WATTS - DAY

King stands beside the boy drawing in the dirt.

Older now.

The lesson has followed him west.

Marcus watches King watching the child.

MARCUS

You see what I mean?

KING

Yes.

MARCUS

Do you?

King turns to him.

KING

I see part.

A beat.

KING

Enough to know I must see more.

Marcus studies him.

MARCUS

Most folks come here already
knowing everything.

KING

That is one of the ways blindness
introduces itself.

Marcus almost smiles.

A police car turns the corner.

Several young men stiffen.

The officers inside stare.

The street hardens.

King notices how quickly ordinary bodies prepare for
trouble.

EXT. COMMUNITY CENTER - WATTS - EVENING

A battered community center.

The room inside is packed.

Residents. Clergy. Young activists. Business owners.
Mothers. Police observers near the back. Reporters along
the wall.

A handmade sign reads:

COMMUNITY MEETING

King stands near the front with
Rev. Harris, Ralph, Dorothy,
Andrew, and local leaders.

Marcus sits in the back with other young men.

Mrs. Carter sits near the aisle.

The atmosphere is raw.

Not hostile.

Not safe.

Rev. Harris steps forward.

REV. HARRIS

We are here to speak honestly.

A man calls out.

MAN

Honest means no blaming everything
on the people who burned.

A woman answers.

WOMAN

Honest means no pretending burning
fixed anything.

The room erupts.

Voices overlap.

POLICE.

JOBS.

RENT.

SCHOOLS.

FOOD.

RESPECT.

Dorothy watches the room like a
map no one has drawn yet.

King steps forward.

He does not speak over them.

He waits.

The argument burns itself down enough for listening.

KING

I have heard many voices today.

A voice from the back:

MARCUS

You heard anger.

KING

Yes.

King looks at him.

KING

And anger is a voice.

The room quiets.

KING

But anger is not a plan.

A few murmurs.

KING

A plan must name what has been
done. It must name who benefits
from things remaining as they are.
It must name what must change. And
it must gather enough people to

make ignoring them more costly
than listening.

Mrs. Carter nods.

KING

I will not come here and tell you
that a man without work should be
satisfied because a law was signed
in Washington.

The room listens.

KING

I will not tell a mother in an
overcrowded apartment that voting
rights alone will keep rats from
her child's bed.

A few women murmur.

KING

I will not tell young men stopped
by police on their own streets
that dignity has arrived because a
president used good words.

The room strengthens around him.

KING

But I will tell you this.

A beat.

KING

If despair becomes the organizer,
it will spend your pain and leave
you with ashes.

Marcus shifts.

KING

We need power organized around
life.

A beat.

KING

Jobs. Housing. Schools. Protection
from police abuse. Political
representation. Economic dignity.

The words land differently than the old words.

Less poetic.

More dangerous.

KING

The South taught America to look
at segregation.

A beat.

KING

Watts is teaching America to look
at poverty.

A murmur rises.

KING

And many will resist that lesson
because poverty asks more
expensive questions.

Ralph watches King.

He knows this is a new road.

Or an old road finally named.

A LOCAL MOTHER stands.

LOCAL MOTHER

My son wants to know why he should
believe in nonviolence when police
can hit him and call it order.

King looks at her.

Then at the young men in the back.

KING

Tell him nonviolence is not trust
in the police.

That catches the room.

KING

It is not trust in the courts.

A beat.

KING

It is not trust in the goodwill of
men who profit from your
suffering.

The room is still.

KING

Nonviolence is trust that
disciplined truth, organized
publicly, can expose a system so
clearly that the system must

either change or reveal itself as
morally bankrupt before the world.

Marcus leans forward.

KING

But I will not lie to your son.

A beat.

KING

It is hard. It is costly. And it
will ask him to become stronger
than the men who mistreat him.

The mother nods slowly.

LOCAL MOTHER

That is a lot to ask.

KING

Yes, ma'am.

A beat.

KING

So we must ask it while standing
beside him, not from a safe
distance.

The room absorbs that.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - LATER

The meeting has broken into smaller groups.

Dorothy writes categories on butcher paper taped to the
wall.

JOBS.

HOUSING.

POLICE.

SCHOOLS.

VOTER REGISTRATION.

HEALTH.

She points with a marker.

DOROTHY

If you have a complaint, put it
under a category. If you have a
name, write it. If you have a
story, we need witnesses. If you

have a solution, do not keep it in
your pocket.

Andrew works with local youth.

ANDREW

Press will print fire faster than
facts. Give me facts they cannot
dodge.

Ralph speaks with local pastors.

RALPH

Churches cannot be open only on
Sunday if suffering is open all
week.

King stands with Marcus near a wall of handwritten notes.

Marcus reads one.

MARCUS

"Landlord will not fix heat."

He points to another.

MARCUS

"Police beat my brother."

Another.

MARCUS

"School got no books."

He looks at King.

MARCUS

That is a lot of marching.

KING

Yes.

MARCUS

Too much maybe.

KING

Maybe.

Marcus is surprised.

KING

But too much truth is not the same
as too much work.

A beat.

KING

It means the work has been
postponed too long.

Marcus looks back at the notes.

MARCUS

You really think church folks and
suits can fix this?

KING

No.

Marcus turns.

KING

Not without you.

That lands.

MARCUS

Me?

KING

You know the streets they pretend
to study.

Marcus looks away, uncomfortable.

KING

Anger has taught you something.

A beat.

KING

Now discipline must teach you what
to do with it.

Marcus studies him.

MARCUS

You always talk like that?

KING

I am told I am worse when tired.

Marcus laughs despite himself.

EXT. WATTS - NIGHT

King exits the community center with Ralph, Dorothy,
Andrew, and Rev. Harris.

The neighborhood is quieter now.

Not peaceful.

Tired.

The National Guard remains at intersections.
Smoke still curls from one ruined building.
Reporters wait outside.

REPORTER #1

Dr. King, do you condemn the
riots?

REPORTER #2

Do you believe outside agitators
caused this?

REPORTER #3

Is nonviolence failing in the
cities?

King stops.

The cameras close in.

KING

I condemn the conditions that
taught people to believe no one
would hear them unless something
burned.

The reporters scribble.

KING

I condemn the violence as
destructive.

A beat.

KING

But I also condemn the poverty,
unemployment, police abuse, and
political neglect that made
destruction seem to some like the
only remaining language.

REPORTER #1

Are you excusing lawlessness?

KING

No.

King turns to him.

KING

I am refusing the comfort of
pretending lawlessness began when
the first window broke.

A silence.

KING

There is a kind of lawlessness
that wears a uniform. There is a
kind that signs a lease. There is
a kind that denies a job. There is
a kind that lets children grow up
in neighborhoods of permanent
emergency and then expresses
surprise when emergency becomes
visible.

The reporters continue writing, some unsettled.

REPORTER #2

What is the answer?

King looks back at the community center.

Residents exit slowly, carrying notes, names, assignments.

KING

Organization equal to the
suffering.

A beat.

KING

And love strong enough to demand
more than token change.

INT. CAR - MOVING - LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

King sits in the back with Ralph.

Dorothy and Andrew sit in front.

Rev. Harris drives.

They pass block after block of damage.

Ralph looks out.

RALPH

This is not like Selma.

KING

No.

DOROTHY

It is less tidy.

Andrew turns slightly.

ANDREW

Tidy?

DOROTHY

Selma gave the nation villains it
could recognize. A sheriff. A
bridge. A courthouse. Dogs and
clubs.

She looks out the window.

DOROTHY

This asks the nation to recognize
itself in rent, wages, police,
schools, and neighborhoods.

King nods.

KING

That is why it will be harder.

RALPH

Harder than Selma?

KING

Yes.

Ralph lets that sit.

RALPH

You know people liked you better
when the enemy wore a badge in
Alabama.

KING

I know.

RALPH

They may not like you telling them
the enemy lives in their bank,
their zoning board, their hiring
office, their silence.

KING

I know.

Dorothy looks back at him.

DOROTHY

You keep saying that like it makes
the road shorter.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

It only keeps me from pretending I
am lost.

EXT. LOS ANGELES STREET - NIGHT

The car rolls past a burned corner store.
In the window, someone has painted:
WE LIVE HERE

INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

King sees the words.

WE LIVE HERE.

He leans back.

The city lights pass over his face.

INT. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE - CLASSROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young King stares at the chalkboard.
FREEDOM.
HUNGER.
IGNORANCE.

WAGES.

Dr. Mays erases the board.

MAYS

Gentlemen, freedom is not a
destination where struggle ends.

He turns.

MAYS

It is ground on which struggle
becomes honest.

Young King writes that down.

INT. CAR - MOVING - LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

King looks at the ruined neighborhood.
Older now.
The struggle has become more honest.
And larger.

FADE OUT.

INT. SCLC OFFICE - ATLANTA - DAY

The office is crowded with smoke, coffee, and disagreement.
Maps cover the table. Not Alabama maps this time.

Chicago. Cleveland. Los Angeles. New York. Washington, D.C.
Newspaper headlines from Watts lie scattered across reports
on poverty, housing, unemployment, police brutality, and
school segregation.

King stands near the window, looking out at Atlanta.

Ralph sits at the table with Andrew, Dorothy, and several
SCLC staffers.

No one looks rested.

A STAFF MEMBER, 40s, taps a newspaper.

STAFF MEMBER

The press is already saying Watts
proves nonviolence has no answer
for the cities.

DOROTHY

The press enjoys declaring things
dead before understanding whether
they were ever properly born.

ANDREW

They want a clean story. South
bad. Law passed. Problem solved.

RALPH

And now buildings are burning, so
they are confused.

King turns from the window.

KING

They are not confused.

The room looks to him.

KING

They are disappointed that
suffering has become harder to
sentimentalize.

A beat.

KING

A child facing a police dog in
Birmingham made the nation feel
pity. A young man throwing a brick

in Watts makes the nation feel
threatened.

STAFF MEMBER

That threat may cost us support.

DOROTHY

Support that disappears when poor
people get angry was never as deep
as people claimed.

Ralph leans back.

RALPH

Still, we cannot pretend this is
simple.

KING

No.

He walks to the table.

KING

The South gave us visible symbols.
A lunch counter. A bus seat. A
courthouse door. A bridge.

He touches the Chicago map.

KING

The North gives us systems.

A long silence.

KING

Rent. Jobs. Schools. Unions.
Banks. Police. Real estate boards.
Neighborhood lines no one admits
are walls.

ANDREW

Harder to march against a system.

KING

Then we must learn.

STAFF MEMBER

Where?

King looks at the maps.

His finger rests on Chicago.

KING

Chicago.

Ralph studies him.

RALPH

Chicago is not Birmingham.

KING

No.

RALPH

Mayor Daley is not Bull Connor.

KING

No.

RALPH

That may make him harder.

King nods.

KING

Yes.

Dorothy looks at the Chicago map.

DOROTHY

Housing?

KING

Housing first.

A beat.

KING

If a man cannot choose where to live, if his children are trapped in crowded buildings, poisoned schools, and streets without opportunity, then freedom has been fenced in by rent.

STAFF MEMBER

People will say we are leaving civil rights.

King's face hardens.

KING

Then they have defined civil rights too narrowly.

A beat.

KING

The right to sit at a lunch counter means little if a man cannot afford lunch.

Silence.

Ralph looks down.

He knows the sentence will travel.

RALPH
Chicago will fight differently.

KING
Yes.

RALPH
No dogs maybe. No fire hoses.

DOROTHY
Do not be so sure.

RALPH
I am saying the opposition may
smile more.

King looks at him.

KING
A smile can guard a locked door as
effectively as a snarl.

Andrew picks up a report.

ANDREW
If we go north, we need local
partners. Not a visit. A campaign.

DOROTHY
And not just speeches.

KING
No.

A beat.

KING
We live there.

The room changes.

Ralph sits forward.

RALPH
Live there?

KING
In the neighborhood.

STAFF MEMBER
Martin--

KING

If we speak about slums from hotel
rooms, we are visitors to
suffering.

A beat.

KING

If we live among the people, we
may become useful.

Dorothy studies him.

DOROTHY

Coretta?

King looks down.

KING

I will speak with her.

RALPH

That means you have not.

KING

It means I will.

Ralph rubs his face.

RALPH

You know, one day Coretta is going
to organize a movement against
your announcements.

King almost smiles.

KING

She may win.

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - NIGHT

The house is quiet.

Children sleep down the hall.

Coretta sits at the kitchen table with a cup of tea.

King stands at the sink, rinsing a glass that has been
clean for some time.

Coretta watches him.

CORETTA

You are washing that glass like it
confessed something.

King stops.

Sets it down.

A beat.

KING

Chicago.

Coretta says nothing.

She already knows the shape of the conversation.

KING

We are considering a campaign
there.

CORETTA

Considering?

He looks at her.

KING

Planning.

CORETTA

Better.

He sits across from her.

KING

Housing. Poverty. Schools. Jobs.

CORETTA

And you want to live there.

King looks at her, surprised.

CORETTA

Martin, I can hear a suitcase
forming in your voice.

He exhales.

KING

If we go, we cannot go as
observers.

CORETTA

No.

KING

The children--

CORETTA

Yes.

A long beat.

KING

I do not know how to ask this.

Coretta looks at him with both love and fatigue.

CORETTA

You do know.

A beat.

CORETTA

That is why you are afraid to.

King lowers his eyes.

KING

I have asked too much of you.

CORETTA

Yes.

No cruelty.

Just truth.

KING

And I am asking again.

CORETTA

Yes.

He looks at her.

She stands and moves to the window.

Outside, Atlanta is dark and still.

CORETTA

When the house was bombed in
Montgomery, I learned that walls
do not guarantee safety.

King listens.

CORETTA

When the phone rings at night, I
learn it again.

A beat.

CORETTA

So if you are asking whether I
believe Atlanta is safe and
Chicago is dangerous, no. I do not
have that luxury.

KING

Coretta--

CORETTA

But I need you to understand
something.

She turns back.

CORETTA

The movement may ask for your
life.

A beat.

CORETTA

It does not get to casually borrow
ours.

That lands hard.

KING

I know.

CORETTA

Do you?

He has no quick answer.

CORETTA

If we go, we go with our eyes
open. Not as symbols. Not as proof
of courage. As a family.

King nods.

KING

As a family.

Coretta returns to the table.

CORETTA

Then tell me why.

King takes a breath.

KING

Because Watts showed us what
happens when people are visible
only after despair becomes fire.

A beat.

KING

Chicago may let us show the wound
before it burns.

Coretta sits with that.

CORETTA

And if the city refuses to look?

KING

Then we make looking unavoidable.
Coretta reaches for her tea.

CORETTA

There it is.
A faint smile.
Sad.
Proud.

CORETTA

The suitcase is packed.
He almost smiles.
Then the room darkens in memory.
The hum of the kitchen light becomes street noise.

EXT. ATLANTA NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY - FLASHBACK

YOUNG MARTIN, 10, walks beside King Sr.
They move from Auburn Avenue toward a different part of the city.
The change happens gradually.
Then all at once.
The streets grow wider.
The houses larger.
Lawns trimmed.
Porches painted.
White children ride bicycles down clean sidewalks.
Young Martin slows.

YOUNG MARTIN

Daddy?

KING SR.

Yes?

YOUNG MARTIN

How come the houses look different
over here?

King Sr. follows his son's gaze.

KING SR.

Because the city does not treat
every neighborhood the same.

YOUNG MARTIN

Why not?

King Sr. keeps walking.

KING SR.

Because people with power often
decide comfort should live near
them and hardship should live
somewhere else.

Young Martin looks at a large white house with a swing on
the porch.

YOUNG MARTIN

Could we live in one like that?

King Sr. stops.

The question is innocent.

The answer is not.

KING SR.

We could afford better than some
folks think.

YOUNG MARTIN

Then why don't we?

King Sr. looks down the street.

A white woman watches them from her porch.

A man across the road stops trimming hedges.

The neighborhood has noticed them.

KING SR.

Because there are men who believe
they can draw lines around where
we belong.

Young Martin looks around.

He sees no fence.

YOUNG MARTIN

What lines?

King Sr. kneels to him.

KING SR.

Invisible ones.

Young Martin frowns.

KING SR.

Sometimes an invisible line is
more powerful than a wall because
people can pretend it is not
there.

Young Martin looks back at the houses.

YOUNG MARTIN

That is not fair.

KING SR.

No.

YOUNG MARTIN

Why does nobody say so?

King Sr. looks at him.

KING SR.

Some do.

A beat.

KING SR.

More must.

A POLICE CAR turns slowly onto the street.

King Sr. notices.

So does Young Martin.

The car rolls past them.

Slow.

Deliberate.

The officer inside watches.

Young Martin moves closer to his father.

YOUNG MARTIN

Are we doing something wrong?

King Sr. puts a steady hand on his shoulder.

KING SR.

No.

YOUNG MARTIN

Then why is he looking?

King Sr. looks after the police car.

KING SR.

Because some people think our
presence is a question.

He turns his son gently back toward home.

KING SR.

One day, you must help them answer
it correctly.

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - NIGHT

King sits at the kitchen table with Coretta.
Older now.

The childhood street still in his eyes.

CORETTA

Where did you go?

KING

A street with large houses.

Coretta understands.

KING

I asked my father why we did not
live there.

CORETTA

What did he say?

KING

That invisible lines can be
stronger than walls.

Coretta looks down at her tea.

KING

Chicago is full of invisible
lines.

A beat.

KING

I want to make them visible.

Coretta nods.

A long silence.

Then:

CORETTA

When?

KING

Soon.

CORETTA

How soon?

KING

January, perhaps.

Coretta takes that in.

CORETTA

Then we prepare the children.

KING

You are saying yes?

She looks at him.

CORETTA

I am saying the question is larger
than yes.

A beat.

CORETTA

But I am still standing beside
you.

King reaches for her hand.

She lets him take it.

INT. CHICAGO APARTMENT - DAY

A door opens into a small, worn apartment.

Cold air slips through cracks around the windows.

Bare walls. Radiator clanking. Peeling paint. A kitchen too
small for a family and a movement.

King enters with Coretta.

A landlord stands nearby, eager to leave.

Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, and local organizer AL RABY, 32,
follow.

SUPER: CHICAGO - JANUARY 1966

The children peer in behind Coretta.

Yolanda looks around.

YOLANDA

We are living here?

Coretta kneels to her.

CORETTA

For a while.

Martin III steps carefully over a warped floorboard.

MARTIN III

It is cold.

LANDLORD

Heat works when it wants to.

Dorothy shoots him a look.

DOROTHY

Does the rent work the same way?

The landlord has no answer.

King moves to the window.

Outside, children play in slush near overflowing trash cans.

A police car passes without slowing.

A woman carries groceries through snow with no gloves.

Al Raby stands beside King.

AL RABY

Welcome to the West Side.

King looks at the buildings.

KING

How many live like this?

AL RABY

Too many for the city to call it
an accident.

Ralph enters the kitchen and opens a cabinet.

A roach skitters across the shelf.

Ralph shuts it.

RALPH

The wildlife is welcoming.

Dorothy examines the walls.

DOROTHY

Peeling paint. Bad heat. Bad
wiring. Leaks?

AL RABY

When it rains.

ANDREW

Inside?

AL RABY

Yes.

Andrew writes that down.

Coretta watches the children explore the small rooms.

Her face remains composed.

Her eyes do not.

King sees her.

KING

Coretta.

She looks at him.

CORETTA

No.

A beat.

CORETTA

Do not apologize. That will make
me angry.

He nods.

CORETTA

Just make sure this means
something.

King looks around the apartment.

The walls.

The cold.

The children.

The movement now inside a slum.

KING

It will.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - DAY

King walks the neighborhood with Al Raby, Ralph, Dorothy,
Andrew, and local residents.

Snow turns gray at the curb.

Buildings lean under neglect.

Children watch from stoops.

A LOCAL MOTHER, 30s, holds a toddler on one hip.

LOCAL MOTHER

You really living over there?

KING

Yes, ma'am.

LOCAL MOTHER

For how long?

KING

Long enough to learn.

She studies him.

LOCAL MOTHER

Landlords know how to wait out
learners.

Dorothy writes that down.

LOCAL MOTHER

My boy coughs all night from the
damp. I call the office. They say
they will send somebody. Nobody
comes unless rent is late.

KING

How long?

LOCAL MOTHER

Three years.

King looks at the building.

KING

And the city?

She laughs.

LOCAL MOTHER

The city? The city comes when
somebody dies or don't pay taxes.

A group of young men linger near a corner.

One, EDDIE, 19, watches King with skepticism.

EDDIE

You gonna march against rats?

King turns.

KING

If the rats have political
protection.

The young men laugh despite themselves.

EDDIE

This ain't Alabama.

KING

No.

EDDIE

Ain't nobody here scared of hymns.

KING

Then we will need more than hymns.

Eddie studies him.

EDDIE

You know how things work up here?

King looks around.

KING

Not enough.

EDDIE

At least you know that.

Eddie starts away.

KING

Will you teach me?

Eddie stops.

His friends quiet.

EDDIE

Teach you?

KING

If I am wrong, correct me. If I
miss something, show me.

Eddie looks at the others, unsure whether this is a trick
or respect.

EDDIE

You really asking?

KING

Yes.

Eddie points down the block.

EDDIE

Start with that building.

King looks.

A large apartment building with broken windows and children
at nearly every one.

EDDIE

Half the people got heat.
Everybody pays like they do.

Dorothy writes.

EDDIE

Basement floods. Rats come up.
Landlord lives out in the suburbs.

KING

Name?

Eddie smiles slightly.
Now they are speaking his language.

EDDIE

I got it.

INT. CHICAGO APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment is full of people.
Local residents. SCLC staff. Chicago organizers.
Maps of neighborhoods are taped to the walls.
A chalkboard reads:

OPEN HOUSING

TENANT RIGHTS

SCHOOLS

JOBS

POLICE

Dorothy stands at the board.

DOROTHY

Complaints become cases. Cases
become patterns. Patterns become
demands. Demands become pressure.

A resident raises her hand.

RESIDENT

And pressure becomes what?

Dorothy looks to King.

King stands.

KING

Change, if we organize it well
enough.

Eddie stands near the back, arms folded.

EDDIE

That sounds like a long way of
saying maybe.

King nods.

KING

It is.

A few people react.

KING

There are no honest shortcuts.

Eddie respects that more than comfort.

RALPH

We start with housing.

AL RABY

Open housing marches. Meetings
with city officials. Pressure on
real estate offices. Tenant
organizing.

ANDREW

Press strategy.

DOROTHY

Local leadership first. National
attention second.

King nods.

KING

We are not here to import a
movement.

A beat.

KING

We are here to join one already
fighting.

The room receives that.

A KNOCK at the door.

Everyone turns.

Andrew opens it.

A WHITE REPORTER stands outside with a photographer.

WHITE REPORTER

Dr. King, can we get a picture of
you in the apartment?

Dorothy steps toward the door.

DOROTHY

No.

WHITE REPORTER

The public wants to see--

DOROTHY

The public can start by seeing the families who were here before he arrived.

She points down the hall.

DOROTHY

Mrs. Carter upstairs. Mr. Ellis next door. The Washington family on the first floor. Photograph their walls. Their heaters. Their rent receipts.

The reporter hesitates.

DOROTHY

Unless poverty only becomes interesting when Dr. King stands in front of it.

The reporter lowers his camera.

WHITE REPORTER

We can do that.

DOROTHY

Good. Then do that.

She shuts the door.

A beat.

Ralph looks at King.

RALPH

Remind me never to ask Dorothy for a photograph.

The room laughs.

The tension breaks.

King looks at Dorothy.

KING

Thank you.

DOROTHY

Do not thank me. Back me up when they complain.

KING

Always.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - LATE NIGHT

Snow falls lightly.
The apartment windows glow.
Inside, silhouettes move across walls.
Organizing.
Listening.
Planning.
Across the street, a city worker nails a notice to a pole.
Behind him, a police car rolls by.
Watching.

INT. CHICAGO APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

The meeting is over.
The children sleep in the bedroom.
Coretta folds blankets.
King stands near the window.
Outside, Chicago wind blows snow through the streetlights.
Coretta joins him.

CORETTA
This city feels different.

KING
Yes.

CORETTA
Colder.

KING
In more than weather.

A beat.

CORETTA
The people here do not look at you
like Selma did.

KING
No.

CORETTA
Some do not trust you.

KING
They should not trust too quickly.

Coretta looks at him.

KING

Trust should not be demanded from
people who have been studied,
promised, photographed, and
abandoned.

Coretta nods.

Outside, Eddie walks past under a streetlight.

Hands in pockets.

Head low against the wind.

KING

The South wounded people with
signs.

A beat.

KING

Chicago wounds them with silence.

Coretta rests her head lightly against his shoulder.

CORETTA

Then make it speak.

King looks out at the dark buildings.

KING

We will.

EXT. CHICAGO BLOCK - NIGHT

Snow falls over the West Side.

Rows of apartment buildings stand shoulder to shoulder.

Crowded.

Cold.

Alive.

INT. CHICAGO APARTMENT - NIGHT

King remains at the window.

Behind him, the apartment creaks and breathes around his
sleeping family.

He looks at the neighborhood.

No bridge.

No courthouse.

No single sheriff.

Only a city full of invisible lines.

FADE OUT.

INT. CHICAGO APARTMENT - MORNING

A cold gray morning presses against the windows.

The apartment is crowded again.

Maps of Chicago neighborhoods cover the walls. Red circles mark real estate offices. Blue lines mark proposed march routes. Black X's mark areas where organizers expect trouble.

At the table: King, Coretta, Ralph, Dorothy, Andrew, Al Raby, Eddie, local tenants, student organizers, and clergy.

Dorothy writes on a chalkboard.

MARQUETTE PARK

OPEN HOUSING MARCH

DISCIPLINE

MEDICAL

LEGAL

PRESS

Ralph studies the map.

RALPH

That route walks straight into the
hornet's nest.

AL RABY

That is where the wall is.

ANDREW

Police say they will provide a
corridor.

EDDIE

Police say a lot of things.

Dorothy looks at Eddie.

DOROTHY

That is why we prepare as if they
will do half of what they promise
and twice as much of what they
deny.

King stands near the window, watching children cross the street in heavy coats.

A little girl steps around a pile of garbage as if it has always belonged there.

KING

Housing is not merely shelter.

The room quiets.

KING

It decides which schools children attend. Which streets they play on. Which jobs are close enough to reach. Which dangers become normal.

He turns from the window.

KING

If a city can trap a family by address, it can preserve segregation without a single sign.

A tenant, MRS. WASHINGTON, 30s, sits with rent receipts in her lap.

MRS. WASHINGTON

They do not need signs here.

She holds up the receipts.

MRS. WASHINGTON

They got leases.

A hard silence.

King nods.

KING

Then today we march against the invisible sign.

Eddie stands at the back, arms crossed.

EDDIE

Invisible sign got bricks behind it.

King looks at him.

KING

Yes.

EDDIE

And bottles.

KING

Yes.

EDDIE

And men who do not care about your
Nobel Prize.

KING

No, they do not.

Eddie studies him.

EDDIE

You still going?

KING

Yes.

Eddie shakes his head, but not in disbelief.
In reluctant respect.

EDDIE

Then I am going too.

Dorothy steps forward immediately.

DOROTHY

Only if you are trained.

EDDIE

I been living here nineteen years.
That is training.

DOROTHY

That is experience. Training is
what keeps experience from
becoming reaction.

Eddie looks at her.

He wants to argue.

He does not.

EDDIE

Fine.

DOROTHY

Good. You start with me.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - DAY

Marchers gather in the cold.

Black residents from the West Side. White clergy. Students.
Local activists. SCLC staff. Reporters. Police officers.

Signs read:

OPEN HOUSING NOW

DECENT HOMES FOR ALL

CHICAGO BELONGS TO EVERYONE

King stands with Ralph, Andrew,
Dorothy, Al Raby, Eddie, and local
leaders.

Coretta watches from near the curb with several women
organizers.

She is not separate from the movement.

But she is watching the risk with a wife's eyes.

Dorothy moves down the line.

DOROTHY

Hands open. No rocks. No bottles.
No answering insults. If someone
goes down, two people help. If
police shove, do not shove back.
If you cannot do that, step out
now.

No one steps out.

A white priest crosses himself.

A teenage girl grips her sign until her knuckles pale.

Eddie looks toward the police line.

He breathes fast.

King notices.

KING

Eddie.

Eddie looks over.

KING

Walk near me.

EDDIE

I do not need watching.

KING

Neither do I.

A beat.

KING

Walk near me anyway.

Eddie accepts.

The march begins.

EXT. CHICAGO NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

The march moves out.

At first, only footsteps and signs.

Then song.

Not as strong as Selma.

Chicago does not lift songs the same way.

The buildings seem to listen suspiciously.

People watch from windows.

Some wave.

Some stare.

A white man in a work shirt spits into the street as they pass.

A police escort moves along the sides.

Too many officers looking at the marchers.

Not enough looking ahead.

Ralph notices.

RALPH

They are protecting the
neighborhood from us.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

That is not protection.

KING

No.

The march turns a corner.

The air changes.

EXT. MARQUETTE PARK AREA - DAY

A white crowd waits ahead.

Large.

Angry.

Men. Women. Teenagers. Families.

Some carry signs. Some carry flags. Some carry bricks
hidden until needed.

Police form a thin barrier.

The white crowd begins shouting as the march approaches.

VOICES

Go home!

Stay out!

We do not want you here!

A bottle hits the pavement and shatters.

The marchers flinch.

Dorothy raises her voice.

DOROTHY

Keep walking. Eyes forward.

A rock sails over the police line.

Then another.

A sign is torn from a marcher's hands.

The crowd roars.

Eddie's jaw locks.

King walks steadily.

EXT. MARQUETTE PARK - CONTINUOUS

The march enters the park area.

The mob surges.

Police shove them back, but not enough.

A woman in the white crowd screams at a Black mother
marching with a child.

The child begins to cry.

King sees it.

His face tightens.

A brick hits a priest in the shoulder.

He staggers.

Two marchers catch him.

DOROTHY

Medical!

A young white man breaks through the edge of the police line and swings a signpost toward the marchers.

Eddie steps forward, rage rising.

King catches his arm.

EDDIE

Let go.

KING

No.

EDDIE

You see what they doing?

KING

Yes.

EDDIE

Then let go.

King's grip remains firm.

KING

Do not let them turn your body
into their argument.

Eddie shakes with fury.

A rock flies.

It strikes King in the head.

A sharp crack.

King stumbles.

The march gasps.

Coretta, watching from behind the line, reacts before she can stop herself.

CORETTA

Martin!

Ralph catches King.

Andrew moves in.

RALPH

Martin!

Blood appears near King's temple.

The mob cheers.

The sound is worse than the rock.

Eddie stares at King's blood.

Something dangerous breaks loose in him.

EDDIE

No.

He turns toward the mob.

King grabs his sleeve.

KING

Eddie.

Eddie is breathing hard.

KING

Look at me.

Eddie cannot.

KING

Look at me.

Eddie turns.

King's face is bleeding.

His eyes are clear.

KING

Your anger is true.

A beat.

KING

Do not give it to them.

Eddie's fists remain clenched.

KING

Keep it.

A beat.

KING

We will need it alive.

Eddie slowly opens his hands.

Dorothy pushes through with a cloth.

DOROTHY

Sit down.

KING

I am all right.

DOROTHY

That was not a question.

She presses the cloth to his temple.

Ralph looks toward the police.

RALPH

This is madness.

A white teenager throws another rock. It hits the ground near Coretta.

King sees it.

For a flash, the park blurs.

The shouting becomes children laughing.

The grass becomes another field.

EXT. ATLANTA PUBLIC PARK - DAY - FLASHBACK

YOUNG MARTIN, 9, walks with Alberta along the edge of a public park.

It is a beautiful day.

White children run across clean grass. A boy flies a kite. Girls jump rope. Parents sit on blankets beneath trees.

Young Martin slows.

He watches the children play.

YOUNG MARTIN

Mama, can I go?

Alberta does not answer immediately.

Her hand tightens around his.

YOUNG MARTIN

Just for a minute?

A white mother on a nearby blanket notices them.

She pulls her child closer.

Young Martin sees it.

He does not understand why play has suddenly become guarded.

A PARK ATTENDANT approaches.

PARK ATTENDANT

You cannot be here.

Alberta turns to him.

ALBERTA

We are walking.

PARK ATTENDANT

Not through here.

Young Martin looks from the attendant to the children.

YOUNG MARTIN

It is a public park.

The attendant looks at him.

PARK ATTENDANT

Not for you.

The words land with quiet cruelty.

Alberta steps slightly in front of Young Martin.

ALBERTA

Come, M.L.

YOUNG MARTIN

But I did not do anything.

ALBERTA

I know.

YOUNG MARTIN

Then why do we have to leave?

The attendant watches.

The white mother gathers her picnic blanket.

As if Young Martin is danger.

As if his question has contaminated the grass.

Alberta leads him away.

EXT. ATLANTA SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS - FLASHBACK

They walk in silence.

Young Martin looks back at the park.

The kite rises above the trees.

Free in a sky that will not let him touch the grass beneath it.

YOUNG MARTIN

They were scared of me.

Alberta stops.

She kneels.

ALBERTA

No, baby.

YOUNG MARTIN

That lady took her little boy
away.

ALBERTA

She was not afraid of what you
did.

A beat.

ALBERTA

She was afraid of what she had
been taught to believe.

Young Martin looks back at the park.

YOUNG MARTIN

But it is just grass.

Alberta's eyes fill with pain and love.

ALBERTA

No.

A beat.

ALBERTA

To some people, even grass becomes
property if they think sharing it
makes them smaller.

Young Martin looks at her.

YOUNG MARTIN

Will they always be like that?

Alberta holds his face gently.

ALBERTA

Not if children grow up hearing a
better truth.

YOUNG MARTIN

What if they do not listen?

Alberta looks toward the park.

Then back to him.

ALBERTA

Then the truth will have to keep
walking through places where it is
not welcome.

EXT. MARQUETTE PARK - DAY

King stands in the hostile Chicago park.

Older now.

Bleeding.

The truth has kept walking.

Dorothy finishes pressing the cloth to his head.

DOROTHY

You need stitches.

KING

Later.

DOROTHY

I am developing a powerful dislike
for that word.

Ralph steps close.

RALPH

Martin, we need to pull back.

King looks at the mob.

Faces twisted.

Ordinary people made monstrous by the idea of shared
streets.

KING

No.

RALPH

They are going to kill somebody.

KING

Then we tighten formation and
continue to the end point.

Andrew steps in.

ANDREW

Press is getting everything.

KING

Good.

A rock bounces off the pavement.

KING

Let them see what open housing
threatens.

Eddie stands beside him now, hands open.

EDDIE

They this mad over where folks
live?

King looks at the mob.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

They are this afraid of what
happens if their children learn we
are neighbors.

Eddie absorbs that.

The march reforms.

Dorothy checks the front line.

DOROTHY

If you are hurt, step out. If you
are angry, breathe. If you are
both, stay close.

The march moves again.

EXT. MARQUETTE PARK - LATER

The march reaches its planned endpoint.

Barely.

Police are strained. Marchers are bruised. Several bleed.
Signs are torn. Voices are hoarse.

The white crowd continues screaming behind the police line.

King steps onto a low curb.

Reporters swarm.

REPORTER #1

Dr. King, are you injured?

REPORTER #2

Will you continue marching in
white neighborhoods?

REPORTER #3

Did you expect this kind of
violence in Chicago?

Ralph tries to clear space.

King keeps the cloth near his temple.

KING

Today we saw hatred defend a
property line as if it were holy
ground.

The reporters scribble.

KING

We saw people who would never call themselves violent throw stones at men, women, and children because those children might one day live beside them.

A beat.

KING

That is why we are here.

REPORTER #2

Are you saying Chicago is as bad as the South?

King looks at him.

KING

I am saying injustice does not lose its cruelty because it learns northern manners.

A murmur from the reporters.

KING

In the South, segregation often had a sign.

A beat.

KING

Here it has a price, a lease, a real estate office, a school boundary, and a neighborhood mob willing to enforce what the law pretends not to see.

Andrew watches the reporters.

They are writing fast now.

KING

So yes, we will continue.

A white man behind the police line shouts.

WHITE MAN

Stay out of our neighborhood!

King turns toward the voice.

KING

That is precisely the sentence we came to challenge.

INT. CHICAGO APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment has become an infirmary and war room.

Bandages. Ice. Coffee. Papers.

Dorothy tapes gauze over King's temple.

Coretta stands nearby, arms folded, watching both the wound and the man.

DOROTHY

Hold still.

KING

I am holding still.

DOROTHY

You are morally holding still.

Physically, you are moving.

Ralph sits with an ice pack against his shoulder.

RALPH

That is the most accurate
description of him I have ever
heard.

Andrew enters with newspapers and wire updates.

ANDREW

National coverage is strong. They
are shocked.

Eddie sits near the wall.

EDDIE

Shocked?

He laughs bitterly.

EDDIE

Folks been telling them.

AL RABY

People believe what cameras show
more than what residents know.

MRS. WASHINGTON

Then we should have carried
cameras in our rent envelopes.

King looks at her.

KING

Maybe now they will listen.

MRS. WASHINGTON

Maybe now they will visit, write a
story, and go home feeling
informed.

That lands.

KING

Then we make it harder to leave.

Dorothy finishes the bandage.

DOROTHY

How?

King looks at the map.

KING

More marches.

Coretta's face tightens.

RALPH

Martin.

KING

More negotiations. More tenant
organizing. More pressure on real
estate offices. More churches
involved. More proof.

ANDREW

Mayor Daley will want a meeting.

AL RABY

He will want control.

KING

Then we will bring demands.

Ralph stands, wincing.

RALPH

And if the marches keep turning
violent?

King looks around the room.

At bruised clergy.

At local mothers.

At Eddie.

At his own children asleep in the next room.

KING

Then Chicago will have to choose
whether it wants peace or merely
segregated quiet.

Coretta steps closer.

CORETTA

And your family?

The room quiets.

King turns to her.

She does not care who hears.

CORETTA

Where do we fit in the demands?

King absorbs it.

No defense.

No speech.

KING

At the center.

CORETTA

Then remember the center has
children sleeping in the next
room.

He nods.

KING

I will.

She studies him.

CORETTA

Do not say that like a line.

KING

I am not.

The room remains still.

Coretta looks at the bandage on his head.

CORETTA

The rock hit you.

A beat.

CORETTA

It scared them.

She nods toward the bedroom.

KING

Did they see?

CORETTA

Enough.

King closes his eyes.

INT. CHICAGO APARTMENT - CHILDREN'S ROOM - LATER

A small room.

The children sleep under heavy blankets.

King stands in the doorway.

Coretta behind him.

Yolanda is awake.

She looks at the bandage.

YOLANDA

Daddy?

King enters softly and sits beside her.

KING

I thought you were asleep.

YOLANDA

I was pretending.

KING

That is sometimes useful.

She touches the edge of the bandage gently.

YOLANDA

Did bad people hurt you?

King looks at Coretta.

Then back to his daughter.

KING

Yes.

YOLANDA

Why?

The oldest question.

Always new.

KING

Because we walked into a place
where some people did not want us
to be.

YOLANDA

Why not?

KING

Because they have been taught that
sharing a neighborhood means
losing something.

Yolanda frowns.

YOLANDA

That is silly.

King smiles sadly.

KING

Yes.

YOLANDA

Are you going back?

King does not answer quickly enough.

She understands.

YOLANDA

Why?

KING

Because if we stop every time
hatred throws something, hatred
gets to draw the map.

Yolanda looks at him.

YOLANDA

I do not like Chicago.

Coretta closes her eyes briefly.

King takes his daughter's hand.

KING

I know.

YOLANDA

I want to go home.

King looks at the small room.

The cracked paint.

The cold window.

The sleeping children.

KING

So do many children here.

That lands.

Yolanda says nothing.

KING

That is why we came.

She turns onto her side.

YOLANDA

Will they get to go home?

King brushes hair from her face.

KING

We are going to try to make their
homes better.

YOLANDA

Promise?

The word hurts.

KING

I promise we will try.

She accepts the answer she has learned he gives when truth
will not allow more.

INT. CHICAGO APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Most people have left.

Only King, Coretta, Ralph, Dorothy, Andrew, Al Raby, and
Eddie remain.

A quiet strategy meeting.

The map of Chicago lies open.

Ralph points to the next routes.

RALPH

If we march again, we need better
coordination with police.

EDDIE

Police are not there for us.

AL RABY

Still need to know where they will
stand.

DOROTHY

And where they will not.

Andrew writes.

ANDREW

Mayor's office sent word. Meeting tomorrow.

KING

Good.

RALPH

Do not sound pleased. Daley is not inviting us for fellowship.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

He wants the streets quiet.

DOROTHY

Then we ask what kind of quiet.

King nods.

KING

Quiet with open housing. Quiet with code enforcement. Quiet with fair lending. Quiet with schools that do not punish children by address.

Eddie looks at King.

EDDIE

You really think they will agree?

KING

Not because they want to.

EDDIE

Then why?

King taps the map.

KING

Because we will make the cost of refusal visible.

Eddie studies him.

EDDIE

That is what marching does?

KING

When joined to demands, yes.

Eddie looks at the map again.

EDDIE

Then put my building on there.

Everyone looks at him.

Eddie points.

EDDIE

Here. Landlord's name is Berman.
Lives out in Oak Park. Basement
floods. Heat out half the winter.
Rats in the walls.

Dorothy writes it down.

EDDIE

And the building across from Mrs.
Washington. Same thing.

Al Raby nods.

AL RABY

That gives us a tenant cluster.

Eddie sits back, surprised by his own contribution.

King watches him.

KING

Anger with an address.

Eddie looks at him.

KING

That is useful.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - LATE NIGHT

Snow begins to fall.

The neighborhood is quiet.

A police car rolls past the apartment and slows.

Then continues.

INT. CHICAGO APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

King stands alone at the window again.

The streetlights turn falling snow silver.

Coretta enters.

CORETTA

You should sleep.

KING

Ralph said that line is
copyrighted.

CORETTA

By common sense.

She stands beside him.

The bandage on his head is stark against his skin.

CORETTA

When that rock hit you, I thought
for one second--

She stops.

King turns to her.

CORETTA

I thought, this is how quickly it
can happen.

A beat.

CORETTA

In a park. In daylight. In front
of everyone.

King says nothing.

CORETTA

And everyone still might not be
enough to save you.

He takes her hand.

KING

I am sorry.

CORETTA

I do not want apology.

KING

What do you want?

She looks out at the city.

CORETTA

I want the work to be worthy of
what it takes.

King absorbs that.

CORETTA

Today, I am not sure.

That hurts him.

But he knows better than to defend too quickly.

KING

Then we must make it worthy.

She nods.

Outside, snow covers the street.

It softens everything without fixing anything.

EXT. MARQUETTE PARK - NIGHT

The park is empty now.

Grass.

Benches.

Trees.

The place where hate gathered beneath the appearance of neighborhood pride.

A rock lies near the curb.

Half-covered by snow.

FADE OUT.

INT. CHICAGO CITY HALL - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A long polished table.

Coffee cups. Legal pads. Ashtrays. Reporters waiting outside the closed doors.

On one side: King, Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, Al Raby, local tenant leaders, clergy, and community representatives.

On the other: MAYOR RICHARD J. DALEY, 64, controlled and practiced, surrounded by city officials, housing representatives, legal counsel, and political aides.

The room is warm.

Too warm.

The kind of room where discomfort is hidden beneath procedure.

Daley folds his hands.

DALEY

Dr. King, no one wants violence in the streets.

King sits across from him, the bandage still visible near his temple.

KING

Then we agree on the least important part.

The room tightens.

Daley's aides exchange glances.

DALEY

I would not call public safety unimportant.

KING

Neither would I.

A beat.

KING

But peace is not created by removing marchers from the street while leaving injustice in the buildings.

Dorothy watches Daley carefully.

Al Raby has a folder open before him, filled with tenant complaints.

DALEY

Chicago is not Birmingham.

RALPH

We have noticed.

A few city aides shift.

Daley ignores Ralph.

DALEY

This city has laws. Boards. Departments. Processes.

DOROTHY

And yet children are sleeping with rats.

Silence.

A city official clears his throat.

CITY OFFICIAL

Mrs. Cotton, the city has mechanisms for code enforcement.

Dorothy opens a folder.

DOROTHY

Then the mechanisms are tired.
She slides photographs across the table.
Peeling walls. Broken windows. Mold. Exposed wiring.
Children beside overflowing trash.

DOROTHY

Or selective.
The official looks at the photos, then away.

KING

We are asking for open housing.
Daley leans back.

KING

Real enforcement. Fair access. An
end to the machinery that traps
Negro families in overcrowded
neighborhoods while calling
segregation a matter of personal
choice.

DALEY

Housing patterns are complicated.

KING

So is injustice when it hires
lawyers.

Andrew writes that down.

Daley's jaw tightens.

DALEY

I am offering practical steps.

KING

We are listening.

DALEY

Statements from the real estate
boards. Expanded fair housing
discussions. Cooperation from
lenders. A city commitment to
review complaints. A joint
committee.

Al Raby looks at King.

A joint committee.

The graveyard of urgency.

AL RABY
Review complaints?

DALEY
You have to begin somewhere.

AL RABY
People began complaining years
ago.

A tenant leader, Mrs. Washington, sits stiffly beside
Dorothy.

MRS. WASHINGTON
My landlord gets my rent every
month without a committee.

Daley looks at her.

DALEY
Ma'am, we are trying to establish
a framework.

MRS. WASHINGTON
I got four children in two rooms.

A beat.

MRS. WASHINGTON
Framework does not keep them warm.

King watches Daley absorb the humanity he would rather keep
abstract.

DALEY
I understand your frustration.
Mrs. Washington looks at him.

MRS. WASHINGTON
No, sir.

A beat.

MRS. WASHINGTON
You understand that I have it.

The room goes still.

Daley turns back to King.

DALEY
Dr. King, if the marches continue,
someone may be killed.

KING

Someone may be killed because
hatred believes property lines are
sacred.

DALEY

Or because crowds become
impossible to control.

KING

Mayor, crowds are not the origin
of this problem.

Daley leans forward.

DALEY

I can give you movement.

KING

Can you give the people
enforcement?

Daley hesitates.

Small.

But King sees it.

DALEY

We can give commitments.

The word hangs.

Commitments.

Not guarantees.

Not transformation.

Commitments.

INT. CHICAGO CITY HALL - HALLWAY - LATER

The meeting breaks.

Reporters wait beyond a rope line, hungry.

King and his team step into the hallway.

Ralph walks beside him.

RALPH

That was a lot of furniture for
very little courage.

Andrew flips through notes.

ANDREW

He will move some. Not enough, but
some.

DOROTHY

Some is where movements go to be
praised and buried.

Al Raby stops.

AL RABY

The local people will not trust
this.

KING

They should not trust it blindly.

AL RABY

They may think we got tired.

King turns to him.

KING

Then we tell them the truth.

AL RABY

Which truth?

King looks back toward the closed conference room.

KING

That paper can open a door.

A beat.

KING

But people have to stand in it.

INT. CHICAGO APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment is packed.

Local residents crowd the walls. Tenants sit on the floor.
Young activists stand in the back. SCLC staffers move
through the room with notes.

The mood is suspicious.

Angry.

Eddie stands near the radiator, arms crossed.

King stands before the group with Ralph, Dorothy, Andrew,
Al Raby, and Mrs. Washington.

On the table: a draft agreement.

Not victory.

Not defeat.

Something harder to explain.

KING

The city has agreed to steps
toward fair housing.

A murmur.

EDDIE

Steps.

KING

Yes.

EDDIE

We marched through rocks for
steps?

The room murmurs louder.

KING

We marched so the city could no
longer pretend there was no wall.

EDDIE

And now they promise to look at
the wall.

A few residents agree.

Dorothy steps forward.

DOROTHY

Eddie is not wrong.

The room quiets.

King looks at her.

She continues.

DOROTHY

A promise is not a home. A
committee is not heat. A statement
from a real estate board is not a
family moving where it chooses.

The residents listen.

DOROTHY

But pressure made them put
something on paper.

A beat.

DOROTHY

Now pressure must make the paper
mean something.

Mrs. Washington picks up the draft agreement.

MRS. WASHINGTON

Can I take this to my landlord and
get my ceiling fixed?

No one answers.

That is the answer.

MRS. WASHINGTON

Then do not call it victory in
front of me.

King takes that.

KING

I will not.

The room settles slightly.

KING

I will call it a foothold.

EDDIE

Foothold where?

KING

On a wall they said was not there.

Eddie does not like it.

But he hears it.

KING

The danger now is not only that
the city may fail to keep its
word.

A beat.

KING

The danger is that newspapers will
declare the problem solved because
powerful men signed their names.

Al Raby nods.

KING

So we do not leave this agreement
to the men who needed pressure to
sign it.

He looks across the room.

KING

We organize tenants. We test real estate offices. We document every refusal. We expose every false promise. We press every church, every lender, every board, every official.

A beat.

KING

And if the city's word proves empty, we return to the streets with proof in our hands.

The room begins to shift.

Not satisfied.

Engaged.

Eddie steps forward.

EDDIE

So what do we do tomorrow?

That question matters.

King looks to Dorothy.

DOROTHY

Tomorrow, building captains.

She moves to the chalkboard.

DOROTHY

Every building needs a tenant contact. Every complaint needs a name, date, photograph if possible, rent amount, landlord name, and city response.

Andrew steps in.

ANDREW

Real estate testing teams.

Al Raby points to the map.

AL RABY

Church meetings by district. We start west, then south.

Ralph looks at Eddie.

RALPH

And young men who know the blocks
help us keep people informed
without letting the police or
landlords control the story.

Eddie looks around.

He nods.

EDDIE

I can do that.

King watches him.

KING

Good.

The draft agreement lies on the table.

Still thin.

Still fragile.

But no longer alone.

The room begins to organize around it.

INT. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE - DR. MAYS' OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young King, 19, sits across from Dr. Benjamin Mays.

A paper rests on the desk between them.

Young King looks frustrated.

Mays reads the paper with calm precision.

YOUNG KING

They agreed to form a student
committee.

MAYS

I see that.

YOUNG KING

But they did not agree to change
the policy.

MAYS

No.

YOUNG KING

Then what good is the committee?

Mays sets the paper down.

MAYS

That depends.

YOUNG KING

On what?

MAYS

Whether the students treat it as
an ending or an opening.

Young King sits with that.

MAYS

Power often offers process when it
fears change.

A beat.

MAYS

But process can be forced to carry
truth if disciplined people do not
leave the room.

Young King looks at the paper.

YOUNG KING

So we accept less than justice?

MAYS

No.

Mays leans forward.

MAYS

You accept a place from which to
keep demanding it.

Young King is not satisfied.

MAYS

Mr. King, there is a kind of pride
that refuses any step that is not
the whole staircase.

A beat.

MAYS

And there is a kind of cowardice
that accepts one step and calls
the climb finished.

Young King listens.

MAYS

The leader must avoid both.

YOUNG KING

How?

Mays taps the paper.

MAYS

By telling the truth about what
has been won.

A beat.

MAYS

And telling the truth about what
has not.

Young King looks down.

MAYS

Never let your people confuse a
signature with salvation.

INT. CHICAGO APARTMENT - NIGHT

King stands in the crowded room.

Older now.

The draft agreement on the table.

He hears Mays in the silence.

KING

This agreement is not salvation.

The room stills.

KING

It is not open housing.

A few people look surprised by the bluntness.

KING

It is not clean walls, fair rent,
honest lending, or a child
sleeping without rats in the
ceiling.

Mrs. Washington watches him.

KING

But it is a public admission that
this city has a housing wound it
can no longer hide.

A beat.

KING

And from this admission, we press.

The room responds.

Not with applause.

With movement.

Names written.

Assignments taken.

People stepping toward work.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - NIGHT

The meeting empties into the cold.

Residents walk home in small groups, carrying papers.

Eddie walks beside King.

EDDIE

You ever get tired of explaining
half-wins?

King looks at him.

KING

Yes.

EDDIE

What keeps you from calling them
losses?

King looks down the block.

Apartment windows glow above dark streets.

KING

The people who know how to use
them.

Eddie considers that.

EDDIE

My building captain should be Mrs.
Washington.

KING

I agree.

EDDIE

She scares landlords.

KING

And preachers.

Eddie laughs.

A real laugh.

Then grows serious.

EDDIE

You leaving soon?

King does not answer fast enough.

Eddie nods.

EDDIE

That is what I thought.

KING

The work here must belong to
Chicago.

EDDIE

That sounds like something a man
says before going back to Atlanta.

King takes the hit.

KING

Yes.

A beat.

KING

But it is also true.

Eddie looks toward the apartment building.

EDDIE

People here are used to folks
leaving.

KING

I know.

EDDIE

No, you know it up here.

He taps his head.

EDDIE

They know it in the walls.

King absorbs that.

EDDIE

So if you leave, leave something
that can stay.

King nods.

KING

That is the assignment now.

INT. CHICAGO APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

The apartment is quiet.

Boxes half-packed. Papers stacked. Children asleep.

Coretta folds clothes into a suitcase.

King enters from the living room.

He stops when he sees the suitcase.

KING

You started.

CORETTA

Someone had to.

He sits on the bed.

The room carries the fatigue of months.

CORETTA

How was Eddie?

KING

Angry.

CORETTA

At you?

KING

Partly.

CORETTA

Is he wrong?

King looks at her.

A long beat.

KING

No.

Coretta folds another shirt.

KING

We came here to expose invisible
lines.

CORETTA

And did you?

KING

Some.

CORETTA

There is that word again.

KING

Yes.

A beat.

KING

Some.

Coretta sits beside him.

KING

In the South, when a door opened,
you could see it.

He looks around the apartment.

KING

Here, the door opens on paper
while the lock remains in the
landlord's hand.

CORETTA

Then maybe the work taught you
something.

He looks at her.

CORETTA

Not every campaign gives the same
kind of victory.

King nods slowly.

KING

Chicago has humbled me.

CORETTA

Good.

He looks at her, surprised.

CORETTA

Humility may keep you honest for
what comes next.

KING

What comes next?

She gives him a look.

CORETTA

Martin.

A small smile.

Then he looks away.

KING

Poverty.

A beat.

KING

Nationally.

Coretta says nothing.

She already knew.

KING

Housing is one room in a much larger house.

CORETTA

And the house is burning?

KING

Not everywhere.

A beat.

KING

In some places it is simply cold enough to kill quietly.

Coretta takes that in.

KING

We need a campaign for the poor. Not only Negro poor. All poor.

CORETTA

That will frighten more people.

KING

Yes.

CORETTA

And confuse some who were comfortable when the issue was southern segregation.

KING

Yes.

CORETTA

And anger those who thought the vote was the finish line.

KING

Yes.

Coretta looks at the packed suitcase.

CORETTA

Then Chicago did teach you something.

King takes her hand.

KING

It taught me the dream cannot live
on rights alone.

A beat.

KING

It needs bread. Work. Shelter.
Peace.

The word PEACE hangs differently.

Coretta hears it.

CORETTA

Peace?

King looks down.

KING

Vietnam.

She studies him.

CORETTA

You are going to speak.

It is not a question.

KING

I cannot keep avoiding it.

CORETTA

People will say you are leaving
your lane.

KING

The poor are in that lane.

A beat.

KING

So are the soldiers.

Another beat.

KING

So are the children beneath the
bombs.

Coretta looks at him with deep concern.

CORETTA

That road will cost you.

KING

I know.

CORETTA

No.

A beat.

CORETTA

That road may cost you
differently.

He does not answer.

Outside, wind rattles the window.

INT. CHICAGO TENEMENT - STAIRWELL - MORNING

Mrs. Washington climbs the stairs with a clipboard.

Eddie follows, carrying folders.

She knocks on a door.

A tired TENANT opens.

MRS. WASHINGTON

We are organizing the building.

The tenant looks past her at Eddie.

TENANT

Organizing for what?

Eddie looks down at the papers.

Then back up.

EDDIE

Heat.

A beat.

EDDIE

Repairs.

Another beat.

EDDIE

And making them tired of ignoring
us.

Mrs. Washington smiles.

A leader has begun.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - DAY

King's car is packed.

Coretta and the children are inside.

Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, Al Raby, Mrs. Washington, Eddie,
and local organizers stand nearby.

No grand farewell.

Too much unfinished work for that.

King shakes Al Raby's hand.

KING

This belongs to Chicago.

AL RABY

It always did.

King nods.

He turns to Mrs. Washington.

KING

Building captain.

MRS. WASHINGTON

Do not make it sound ceremonial. I
have complaints to file.

KING

Yes, ma'am.

Eddie stands last.

KING

Eddie.

EDDIE

Dr. King.

A beat.

EDDIE

We will see what your paper does.

KING

No.

King looks at him.

KING

We will see what you make it do.

Eddie nods.

That lands.

KING

Write me.

EDDIE

You write back?

KING

I will try.

Eddie gives him a look.

KING

I will.

They shake hands.

Eddie does not let go immediately.

EDDIE

Do not forget the walls.

King holds his gaze.

KING

I will not.

Eddie releases him.

King gets into the car.

INT. CAR - CHICAGO STREET - DAY

Coretta sits beside him.

The children look out the windows.

The car pulls away.

King watches the apartment building recede.

Eddie, Mrs. Washington, Al Raby, and the others remain on the sidewalk.

Smaller.

Still standing.

Yolanda looks at the buildings.

YOLANDA

Are they going to be okay?

King looks at her.

No false promise.

KING

They are going to fight.

YOLANDA

Is that okay?

King looks back through the rear window.

Eddie and Mrs. Washington walk toward the tenement entrance with clipboards in hand.

KING

Sometimes fighting is how people
become okay.

Coretta takes his hand.

The car turns the corner.

Chicago disappears behind them.

EXT. CHICAGO TENEMENT - DAY

Eddie and Mrs. Washington enter the building.

The door closes.

A beat.

Then another tenant appears in a window.

Then another.

Then another.

The work remains.

INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY

King looks forward now.

Andrew sits in front, reading a newspaper.

Headline:

CHICAGO AGREEMENT REACHED

Beneath it, another headline:

WAR ESCALATES IN VIETNAM

King sees it.

His face changes.

Ralph notices.

RALPH

One road at a time, Martin.

King keeps looking at the headline.

KING

The roads are beginning to meet.

Ralph follows his gaze.

Vietnam.

Poverty.

Race.

Power.

A new storm.

The car moves through Chicago traffic.

FADE OUT.

INT. SCLC OFFICE - ATLANTA - DAY

Rain streaks the windows.

The office is crowded with newspapers, reports, and worry.

Headlines cover the table.

CHICAGO AGREEMENT REACHED

WAR ESCALATES IN VIETNAM

WATTS STILL REBUILDING

POVERTY PROGRAMS FACE CUTS

King stands at the window, looking
out at the rain.

Behind him, Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, and several SCLC
staffers sit around the table.

No one is eager to begin.

Ralph finally breaks the silence.

RALPH

We need to talk about the war.

King does not turn.

KING

Yes.

A STAFF MEMBER leans forward.

STAFF MEMBER

If you speak against Vietnam
directly, the backlash will be
fierce.

DOROTHY

The backlash has rarely needed an
invitation.

STAFF MEMBER

This will be different.

Andrew studies the headlines.

ANDREW

Labor allies may pull back. Some
foundations. Some newspapers.

People who stood with us on voting
rights may not follow us here.

RALPH

Some already think Chicago
stretched us too far.

King turns from the window.

KING

Too far from what?

No one answers.

KING

From buses? From lunch counters?
From courthouses?

A beat.

KING

Or from the comfort of believing
injustice stays inside one
category?

The room is quiet.

STAFF MEMBER

People understand civil rights.

DOROTHY

People understand the part of
civil rights that asks least from
them.

King moves to the table.

KING

Young men from poor neighborhoods
are being drafted to fight poor
people overseas while their
families live in poverty here.

A beat.

KING

The same nation that tells us it
cannot afford decent housing finds
money for bombs.

Andrew looks down.

KING

How do I speak about poverty and
remain silent about what consumes
the resources to fight it?

RALPH

I am not saying stay silent.

King looks at him.

RALPH

I am saying count the cost.

King softens.

KING

I have.

RALPH

Then count it again.

The friendship beneath the warning lands.

DOROTHY

The country likes you best when
your moral argument helps it look
better than Alabama.

A beat.

DOROTHY

This will ask the country to look
at itself.

STAFF MEMBER

And some will say you are
unpatriotic.

KING

No.

King's voice is calm.

KING

They will say I am unpatriotic
because they want patriotism to
mean silence before power.

He touches the Vietnam headline.

KING

But I cannot preach nonviolence in
Selma and bless violence in
Southeast Asia by omission.

A hard silence.

Andrew looks at him carefully.

ANDREW

Where?

KING

New York.

A beat.

KING

Riverside Church.

Ralph closes his eyes.

RALPH

A church.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

You are going to put the war in
the pulpit.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

The war is already there. Every
time a mother prays for a son in
uniform. Every time a poor family
loses a boy to a country that
would not educate him properly but
found him eligible to die.

Dorothy studies him.

DOROTHY

Then say it plainly.

King looks at her.

DOROTHY

Not beautifully. Plainly.

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - NIGHT

The children sleep.

The house is quiet except for rain.

King sits at the kitchen table with pages spread before
him.

Draft after draft.

Crossed-out sentences.

Notes about Vietnam. Poverty. Race. Militarism. Conscience.

Coretta enters in a robe.

She watches him for a moment.

CORETTA
How long have you been sitting
there?

KING
Long enough to make the page tired
of me.

She sits across from him.

CORETTA
May I?

He hands her a page.

She reads.

Her face remains still, but her eyes move with care.

CORETTA
You are holding back.

King looks at her.

KING
Am I?

CORETTA
Yes.

He leans back.

CORETTA
You are trying to make the truth
easier to survive.

KING
That is a practical instinct.

CORETTA
It is also not why people listen
to you.

A beat.

KING
Some people will stop listening.

CORETTA
Yes.

The bluntness lands.

CORETTA

Some already have. Some were only
listening as long as you spoke
against people they already
disliked.

King lowers his eyes.

CORETTA

But you have known for a long time
this was connected.

KING

Knowing and saying are different
burdens.

CORETTA

Yes.

A beat.

CORETTA

But silence is a burden too. It
just lets other people carry the
cost.

King looks at the pages.

KING

They will say I am hurting the
movement.

CORETTA

Which movement?

He looks up.

CORETTA

The one for dignity? The one for
peace? The one for the poor? The
one for the children sent to war
and the children beneath the
bombs?

A beat.

CORETTA

Or the one people prefer because
it asks only for laws and not a
conscience?

King absorbs this.

The rain taps harder on the window.

A memory begins to rise.

The kitchen light becomes a seminary lamp.

**INT. CROZER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - COMMON ROOM - NIGHT -
FLASHBACK**

Young King, early 20s, sits with several seminarians.
Books and newspapers are scattered across a low table.
A headline about war overseas lies open.
A small radio plays classical music in the corner.
SAMUEL sits across from Young King. EDWARD sits nearby.
Other students listen as the conversation grows serious.

SAMUEL

A minister has enough trouble
keeping peace in his own church.

EDWARD

Peace in the church may be the
smallest part of the calling.

Samuel looks at Young King.

SAMUEL

What do you think, King? Should a
preacher speak on every matter of
the world?

Young King considers.

YOUNG KING

Not every matter.

SAMUEL

Good. Some restraint.

YOUNG KING

But every moral matter that
touches the human soul.

Samuel shakes his head.

SAMUEL

That is how a man makes enemies he
did not need.

YOUNG KING

Maybe.

SAMUEL

You say that too easily.

Young King looks at the newspaper.

YOUNG KING

No. I say it from a room where no
one is threatening me.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

That is why I do not trust how
easy it sounds.

The room quiets.

Edward leans forward.

EDWARD

So where is the line?

YOUNG KING

Between prudence and cowardice?

Edward nods.

Young King does not answer quickly.

YOUNG KING

I think the line moves depending
on who pays for our silence.

The students sit with that.

SAMUEL

Explain.

YOUNG KING

If my silence protects only my
comfort, then I should distrust
it.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

If my speaking endangers only my
pride, then I should speak.

Samuel watches him.

SAMUEL

And if speaking endangers the
work?

YOUNG KING

Then I must ask whether the work
is protected by silence or
corrupted by it.

That lands.

The room goes still.

EDWARD

That sounds like a lonely
calculation.

Young King looks at the newspaper.

YOUNG KING

Conscience often does its
arithmetic alone.

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - NIGHT

King sits across from Coretta.

Older now.

The rain continues.

CORETTA

Where did you go?

KING

Crozer.

A faint smile.

CORETTA

You always come back from school
with homework.

King looks at the pages.

KING

Conscience often does its
arithmetic alone.

Coretta reaches across the table.

CORETTA

Not always.

She takes his hand.

CORETTA

Not this time.

He looks at her.

The loneliness eases, but does not leave.

KING

Will you read it again?

CORETTA

Yes.

A beat.

CORETTA

And this time, do not protect the
page from the truth.

INT. RIVERSIDE CHURCH - NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

A great sanctuary.

Tall stone. Stained glass. Vaulted ceiling.

The room is full.

Clergy. Students. Activists. Reporters. Peace advocates.
Skeptics. Supporters. People who came because they sensed
something irreversible might be said.

SUPER: RIVERSIDE CHURCH - NEW YORK CITY - APRIL 4, 1967

King stands in a side room with Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, and
Coretta.

He holds the speech pages.

The paper is marked heavily.

Reworked.

Wrestled with.

Ralph adjusts his tie in a small mirror.

RALPH

You know, there are easier ways to
lose friends.

KING

Name one.

RALPH

Borrow money.

Andrew almost smiles.

Dorothy looks through the slightly open door at the crowd.

DOROTHY

Press is heavy.

ANDREW

They smell trouble.

KING

They are not wrong.

Coretta steps close.

CORETTA

Remember what you are doing.

KING

I am trying to.

CORETTA

No.

A beat.

CORETTA

You are connecting what they keep
separate.

King looks at her.

CORETTA

That is why they will be angry.

A church aide appears.

CHURCH AIDE

Dr. King. They are ready.

King nods.

He looks once at Ralph.

RALPH

I am with you.

Andrew nods.

Dorothy too.

Coretta takes his hand.

Only for a second.

Then lets him go.

INT. RIVERSIDE CHURCH - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

King walks to the pulpit.

The room rises in applause.

He reaches the microphone.

Waits.

The applause fades.

A hush settles.

King looks out at the crowd.

This is not Montgomery.

Not Selma.

Not Oslo.

This is a room where support and suspicion sit beside each other.

KING

My friends, I come tonight because
silence has become too costly.

The room stills.

KING

There are moments when a nation
asks its citizens for loyalty, and
there are moments when conscience
must ask what that loyalty serves.

A few people shift.

KING

I love my country too much to
confuse love with flattery.

A murmur.

KING

Love tells the truth when the
beloved is in danger of losing its
soul.

Coretta watches from the front row.

KING

For years, we have spoken of
nonviolence in the streets of the
South. We have asked men and women
to face clubs without striking
back, to face jail without
surrendering dignity, to face
hatred without becoming hatred.

A beat.

KING

But we cannot ask the poor to
practice nonviolence at home while
their nation practices destruction
abroad.

The room tightens.

Some applause.

Some stillness.

KING

We cannot tell a young man in
Chicago to put down a brick and

remain silent when that same young man may be handed a rifle and sent across the world.

The applause grows, but not everywhere.

KING

We cannot build a beloved community with one hand while the other hand burns villages we will never have to pronounce correctly.

A wave of reaction.

King continues.

KING

The bombs that fall overseas do not explode only there.

A beat.

KING

They explode in the budgets of our cities. They explode in schools without books, homes without heat, hospitals without care, and dreams deferred until they become rage.

Dorothy watches the crowd absorb the connection.

KING

I am told this is not my place.

A beat.

KING

But if a minister's place is not with the wounded, then his place has become too small.

The room grows quieter.

KING

If the movement for civil rights is only a movement for access and not for life, then we have misunderstood the word civil and abandoned the word human.

Ralph lowers his head.

Not in disagreement.

In recognition of the cost.

KING

So tonight I speak not against
soldiers, but against a policy
that spends their bodies and the
bodies of the poor as if both were
cheaper than peace.

A few people rise.

KING

I speak not as an enemy of
America, but as a son unwilling to
watch his mother become cruel and
call it strength.

A deep hush.

KING

The time has come for this nation
to choose a different measure of
power.

A beat.

KING

Not how much it can destroy. But
how much suffering it can heal.

The room erupts.

Not unanimous.

But powerful.

King stands in it, knowing applause is the easiest part.

INT. RIVERSIDE CHURCH - SIDE ROOM - LATER

The speech is over.

The noise of the sanctuary is muffled beyond the door.

King enters with Ralph, Coretta, Andrew, and Dorothy.

He sets the pages on a table.

For a moment, no one speaks.

Andrew looks toward the hallway where reporters wait.

ANDREW

They are going to tear this apart
by morning.

RALPH

Some by midnight.

Dorothy picks up one of the pages.

DOROTHY

Good.

They look at her.

DOROTHY

If no one is angry, we did not
reach the protected nerve.

King sits.

The weight finally reaches him.

KING

I did not want to divide the
movement.

Coretta stands beside him.

CORETTA

You did not divide it.

A beat.

CORETTA

You revealed where it was already
divided.

Ralph sits across from King.

RALPH

There will be calls.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

Donors.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

Newspapers.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

Politicians who suddenly remember
they liked you better in jail than
in foreign policy.

King almost smiles.

RALPH

You sure?

King looks at the speech pages.

KING

No.

That surprises Ralph.

KING

But certainty was never promised.

A beat.

KING

Only conscience.

A KNOCK at the door.

Andrew opens it.

A REPORTER stands in the hallway.

REPORTER

Dr. King, critics are already
saying you have weakened the civil
rights movement by attacking the
war. Do you have a response?

King rises.

He moves to the doorway.

KING

A movement is weakened when it
becomes afraid of its own moral
logic.

The reporter writes quickly.

REPORTER

Are you prepared to lose support?

King looks back at Coretta, Ralph, Dorothy, Andrew.

Then to the reporter.

KING

No one is prepared for loneliness.

A beat.

KING

But some truths require it.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NEW YORK CITY - LATE NIGHT

Newspapers and notes already litter the room.

Ralph sleeps in a chair, one shoe off.

Andrew speaks quietly on the phone in the corner.

Dorothy writes responses at the desk.
Coretta sits on the bed reading a telegram.
King stands at the window.
New York glows below.
A city awake and indifferent.
Andrew hangs up.

ANDREW

That was Atlanta. Calls are coming
in fast. Some good. Some not.

DOROTHY

Define not.

ANDREW

A few allies are calling the
speech a mistake.

RALPH

From sleep, without opening his
eyes:

RALPH

Tell them to wait in line.

Dorothy smiles faintly.

Coretta looks at King.

CORETTA

The first wave is always loudest.

KING

Not always.

He looks down at the city.

KING

Sometimes the first wave is only
warning.

Coretta joins him at the window.

CORETTA

Do you regret it?

He takes a long time.

KING

I regret that truth requires so
many casualties before it becomes
speakable.

A beat.

KING

But no. I do not regret speaking.

She nods.

Outside, sirens move through the city.

The sound becomes the faint echo of seminary rain.

**INT. CROZER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - COMMON ROOM - NIGHT -
FLASHBACK**

Young King closes the newspaper.

Samuel watches him.

SAMUEL

You really believe conscience can
survive politics?

Young King looks at him.

YOUNG KING

I believe conscience must enter
politics knowing it may be
bruised.

Samuel shakes his head.

SAMUEL

And if it is broken?

Young King considers.

YOUNG KING

Then perhaps it was reputation we
were protecting, not conscience.

Samuel has no answer.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

King stands at the window.

Older now.

Bruised but not broken.

Dorothy approaches with a fresh newspaper mock-up from an
early edition.

She hands it to him.

Headline:

KING DENOUNCES WAR

Another below:

CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER FACES CRITICISM

King reads.

No surprise.

Coretta stands beside him.

Ralph opens his eyes.

RALPH

Bad?

King folds the paper.

KING

Necessary.

RALPH

That was not the question.

KING

It may be the answer we have.

Ralph sits up, exhausted.

RALPH

Then tomorrow?

King looks out at the city.

KING

Tomorrow we keep connecting what
they want separate.

Coretta takes his hand.

Outside, New York glows.

Inside, the room prepares for backlash.

The road has widened.

And narrowed.

FADE OUT.

INT. SCLC OFFICE - ATLANTA - MORNING

The phones will not stop ringing.

One call after another.

Newspapers cover every desk.

KING DENOUNCES VIETNAM WAR

CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER CRITICIZED

ALLIES QUESTION KING'S NEW DIRECTION

A secretary answers one phone
while another rings beside her.

SECRETARY

Southern Christian Leadership
Conference.

She listens.

Her face tightens.

SECRETARY

I will pass along your concern.

She hangs up.

The second phone rings.

Across the office, Andrew speaks into another receiver.

ANDREW

No, Reverend, Dr. King did not
abandon civil rights.

A beat.

ANDREW

No, Reverend, peace is not a
distraction from justice.

He closes his eyes.

ANDREW

Yes, I understand you disagree.

He hangs up.

Immediately, the phone rings again.

Ralph stands near a bulletin board, reading a newspaper
editorial.

Dorothy sits at a desk marking responses with a red pencil.

King enters quietly.

The room notices but does not greet him with its usual
warmth.

Not because affection is gone.

Because everyone knows the storm has arrived.

Ralph holds up the newspaper.

RALPH

They wasted no time.

KING

No.

ANDREW

Some of the donors are nervous.

DOROTHY

Nervous is polite for angry with stationery.

ANDREW

A few have already said they are reconsidering support.

King nods.

No surprise.

Still, it hurts.

RALPH

The White House is furious.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

Some civil rights leaders think you handed our enemies a weapon.

King takes off his coat.

KING

Perhaps I handed our friends a mirror.

The room quiets.

Andrew studies him.

ANDREW

That will not fit in a fundraising letter.

DOROTHY

It should.

King moves to the table.

Newspapers. Reports. Letters. Telegrams.

A pile of disappointment.

A pile of agreement.

A pile of confusion.

King picks up one telegram and reads silently.
His face gives nothing away.
Ralph watches him.

RALPH
Martin, I agree with the speech.

A beat.

RALPH
But agreement does not pay the
staff.

King looks at him.

RALPH
It does not rent buses. It does
not print leaflets. It does not
bail people out of jail.

KING
No.

RALPH
So we need to know the next step.

King looks down at the table.

Vietnam headline.

Chicago headline.

Poverty report.

Selma anniversary photo.

All the roads beginning to overlap.

KING
The next step is the poor.

The room stills.

ANDREW
The poor.

KING
Yes.

DOROTHY
Which poor?

King looks at her.

KING
All of them.

Ralph sits slowly.

KING

Negro poor. White poor. Mexican
American poor. Native poor. Puerto
Rican poor. Appalachian poor.
Rural poor. City poor.

The room absorbs the size of it.

KING

We have fought for the right to
sit at the counter. The right to
ride the bus. The right to enter
the school. The right to vote.

A beat.

KING

Now we must fight for the right to
live.

RALPH

That is not a campaign.

KING

It must become one.

ANDREW

Against who?

King looks at the papers.

KING

Against a national willingness to
tolerate poverty as long as it is
quiet.

Dorothy leans back.

DOROTHY

Quiet poverty has never made
Washington nervous.

KING

Then we bring it to Washington.

That lands.

Ralph stares at him.

RALPH

Bring what to Washington?

KING

The poor.

A beat.

KING

Not just a delegation. Not just
ministers. Not just statements.

He looks at them.

KING

The people themselves.

ANDREW

To lobby?

KING

To stay.

Silence.

RALPH

Stay where?

KING

Where the nation can see them.

Dorothy's eyes narrow, already calculating logistics.

DOROTHY

Housing?

KING

Temporary.

DOROTHY

Food?

KING

Organized.

DOROTHY

Sanitation?

KING

Necessary.

DOROTHY

Permits?

KING

Fought for.

DOROTHY

Weather?

KING

Endured.

Ralph looks from Dorothy to King.

RALPH

The man just proposed building a
city of poor people in Washington,
and Dorothy is already upset about
plumbing.

DOROTHY

Because revolutions fail when
nobody plans toilets.

A brief laugh breaks the tension.

Then it fades.

A YOUNG AIDE enters the doorway.

YOUNG AIDE

Dr. King, Miss Wright is here.

King turns.

KING

Send her in.

MARIAN WRIGHT, late 20s, sharp, focused, carrying folders
and the exhaustion of someone who has seen too much and
decided not to look away, enters.

King greets her.

KING

Marian.

MARIAN

Dr. King.

She shakes hands with Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy.

MARIAN

I brought what we discussed.

She places photographs and reports on the table.

Children in Mississippi.

Thin faces.

Bare feet.

Shacks.

Empty plates.

Schools with almost nothing inside them.

The room changes.

Not from politics.

From evidence.

Marian points to a photograph.

MARIAN
This is the Delta.

A beat.

MARIAN
But do not let the geography
comfort you. Hunger has cousins
everywhere.

King looks at the photographs.

A child sitting on a porch with eyes too old for his face.

MARIAN
These families are invisible until
election season, budget season, or
tragedy.

Dorothy picks up a report.

DOROTHY
How many children?

MARIAN
Too many for any moral nation to
explain.

No one speaks.

MARIAN
You want a poor people's campaign?

King looks up.

MARIAN
Then begin by seeing what the
country has trained itself not to
see.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI DELTA - DAY

Flat land.

Wide sky.

A road of dust and poverty.

A car moves slowly past fields, shacks, and children
watching from yards without grass.

SUPER: MISSISSIPPI DELTA - WEEKS LATER

King sits in the back seat with Marian.

Ralph rides in front. Andrew takes notes. Dorothy looks out the window, silent.

Not much silences Dorothy.

This does.

They pass a small house with boards for windows.

A child stands barefoot on the porch.

King watches the child as the car passes.

KING

How old?

MARIAN

Old enough to know hunger. Young
enough not to have words for
policy.

King closes his eyes briefly.

EXT. DELTA HOME - DAY

A weathered house.

The porch sags.

A MOTHER, 30s, stands in the doorway with three children behind her.

Marian leads King, Ralph, Dorothy, and Andrew up the steps.

MARIAN

Mrs. Hamer, this is Dr. King.

MRS. HAMER

I know who he is.

King removes his hat.

KING

Ma'am.

She looks him over.

MRS. HAMER

You here to see poor people or
talk about poor people?

The question is not rude.

It is earned.

KING

To see first.

She nods once and opens the door.

INT. DELTA HOME - DAY

The inside is spare.

A table.

A few chairs.

A stove.

A shelf with almost no food on it.

The children watch King with curiosity and caution.

Dorothy notices the floorboards, the walls, the thin blankets folded in the corner.

Andrew stops writing.

Some rooms do not allow easy notes.

Mrs. Hamer points to the shelf.

MRS. HAMER

That is dinner if I stretch it.

Ralph looks at the shelf.

A little cornmeal.

A few beans.

Not enough.

MRS. HAMER

Stretching food is a skill poor
folks learn because policy makers
call it character.

King absorbs the sentence.

KING

How many days like this?

She looks at him.

MRS. HAMER

You asking about this week or this
life?

King has no answer.

A small boy peeks from behind her skirt.

King kneels.

KING

What is your name?

BOY

Samuel.

KING

Samuel.

The boy nods.

KING

Do you go to school?

SAMUEL

Sometimes.

KING

Sometimes?

Samuel looks to his mother.

MRS. HAMER

When there is food enough for
walking.

The room goes still.

King looks at Samuel's bare feet.

KING

How far?

MRS. HAMER

Five miles there. Five miles back.

Dorothy turns away.

Not to hide emotion.

To contain anger.

MRS. HAMER

They say poor people do not care
about education.

A beat.

MRS. HAMER

My boy walks ten miles hungry for
a school with old books, and they
call him lazy if he stops.

King slowly stands.

MARIAN

This is one house.

A beat.

MARIAN

There are thousands of this house.

King looks around.

The Delta has entered him.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - BASEMENT - DAY - FLASHBACK

YOUNG MARTIN, 11, carries a box of canned goods across the church basement.

Tables are lined with food, blankets, and worn clothing.

Alberta organizes women from the church.

King Sr. lifts sacks of flour into boxes.

Young Martin sets his box down.

YOUNG MARTIN

Is all this for church members?

ALBERTA

Some.

YOUNG MARTIN

Who else?

ALBERTA

Whoever needs it.

Young Martin looks toward the door.

A POOR WHITE WOMAN stands there with a little girl.

She looks embarrassed.

Afraid to enter.

Some church volunteers glance over.

The room tightens slightly.

The woman turns to leave.

Alberta immediately moves toward her.

ALBERTA

Ma'am?

The woman stops.

ALBERTA

You looking for help?

The woman cannot quite meet her eyes.

POOR WHITE WOMAN

I heard there might be food.

Alberta opens the door wider.

ALBERTA

Then you heard right.

The woman hesitates.

POOR WHITE WOMAN

I do not want trouble.

Alberta's voice is gentle but firm.

ALBERTA

Hunger is trouble enough.

Young Martin watches.

King Sr. brings a box of food.

The little girl stares at Young Martin.

She is no older than he is.

Thin.

Ashamed without knowing the word.

King Sr. kneels and offers her an apple.

KING SR.

Here you go.

The girl looks to her mother, then takes it.

Young Martin watches her bite into the apple like it is treasure.

The sight unsettles him.

Later, Young Martin helps Alberta pack another box.

YOUNG MARTIN

Mama?

ALBERTA

Yes?

YOUNG MARTIN

She was white.

ALBERTA

Yes.

YOUNG MARTIN

But hungry like us.

Alberta pauses.

ALBERTA

Hunger does not ask a child's
color before it hurts.

Young Martin thinks about that.

YOUNG MARTIN

Does that mean poor white people
and poor colored people are the
same?

Alberta chooses carefully.

ALBERTA

It means pain may visit different
houses wearing the same face.

A beat.

ALBERTA

But some people are taught to
blame the other hungry house
instead of the men who keep the
table empty.

Young Martin looks toward the door where the woman left.

YOUNG MARTIN

Why would they do that?

King Sr. steps closer.

KING SR.

Because divided hungry people are
easier to ignore.

Young Martin absorbs it.

KING SR.

Remember that, M.L.

A beat.

KING SR.

A full table for one family is
kindness. A full table for every
family is justice.

Young Martin looks at the boxes.

Food as mercy.

Food as justice.

INT. DELTA HOME - DAY

King stands in Mrs. Hamer's house.

Older now.

The lesson has returned with a child named Samuel.

Mrs. Hamer watches him.

MRS. HAMER

You seen enough?

King looks at the empty shelf.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

But I have seen enough to know we
must do more than visit.

EXT. DELTA ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

King walks with Marian along the road.

Ralph, Andrew, and Dorothy follow at a distance, speaking
with local residents.

Children trail behind, curious.

The sun hangs low.

MARIAN

Washington knows these places
exist.

KING

Yes.

MARIAN

It has reports. Numbers. Hearings.
Photographs.

KING

Yes.

MARIAN

So information is not the missing
ingredient.

King looks over the fields.

KING

No.

MARIAN

Then what is?

King stops.

A dust cloud rises around his shoes.

KING

Disruption.

Marian studies him.

KING
Suffering that can be filed away
is too convenient.

A beat.

KING
We must make it inconvenient.

MARIAN
A campaign.

KING
A pilgrimage.

MARIAN
To Washington.

KING
Yes.

MARIAN
With poor people from everywhere?

KING
Yes.

MARIAN
They will call it chaos.

KING
They called Selma disorder.

MARIAN
This will be harder.

King looks back toward the children.

KING
It should be.

MARIAN
Why?

KING
Because this time, we are not
asking the nation to remove a
sign.

A beat.

KING
We are asking it to change what it
worships.

Marian absorbs that.

EXT. DELTA CHURCH - NIGHT

A small church glows in the darkness.

Inside, the room is packed.

Poor families. Field workers. Mothers with babies. Old men in work clothes. Children asleep on laps.

King stands at the front.

No grand pulpit.

Just a worn lectern and people who know the difference between promise and food.

KING

I came here today and saw children
who should never have had to teach
a minister what hunger looks like.

A murmur moves through the room.

KING

I saw mothers stretching meals
that were already too small. I saw
homes where winter enters like an
unwanted landlord. I saw children
walking miles to schools that have
been denied the dignity of
investment.

He looks across the faces.

KING

And I must tell you the truth.

The room quiets.

KING

This nation is not poor because it
lacks money.

A beat.

KING

It is poor because it has spent
its conscience poorly.

The room responds.

KING

We are going to Washington.

A ripple.

KING

Not to beg.

He lets that settle.

KING

To remind the government that
budgets are moral documents.

The room grows stronger.

KING

To say that a nation that can send
rockets into the sky and soldiers
across oceans can feed a child in
Mississippi.

AMEN.

KING

Can repair a home in Chicago.

YES.

KING

Can bring work to Appalachia.

YES.

KING

Can honor Native families, Mexican
families, Puerto Rican families,
and every forgotten family told to
wait outside prosperity.

The room rises with him.

KING

We will not go as separate wounds.

A beat.

KING

We will go as one body asking
whether America has the courage to
heal what it has learned to
tolerate.

EXT. DELTA CHURCH - LATER NIGHT

People spill out into the darkness.

Some hopeful.

Some skeptical.

Some too tired for either.

Dorothy stands with a group of local women, already
gathering names.

DOROTHY

How many families could send
someone?

LOCAL WOMAN

Depends on crops. Depends on
money. Depends on fear.

DOROTHY

Then we list all three.

Andrew speaks with young men near a truck.

ANDREW

We need stories, but not for pity.
For proof.

Ralph stands beside King near the church steps.

RALPH

You just promised poor people a
road to Washington.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

You know roads cost money.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

Food.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

Shelter.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

Sanitation.

King looks at him.

KING

Dorothy already covered
sanitation.

RALPH

That gives me limited comfort.

They watch children climb into the back of a truck.

RALPH
This is bigger than us.

KING
It has to be.

RALPH
That was not encouragement.

KING
I know.

A beat.

RALPH
Vietnam. Poverty. Washington.
Multiracial poor folks. Demands on
Congress.

He looks at King.

RALPH
You are stacking storms.
King watches Mrs. Hamer lift Samuel into the truck.

KING
No.

A beat.

KING
I am finally admitting they are
the same weather.

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - NIGHT

King returns late.
The house is quiet.
Coretta sits at the piano, playing softly.
Not performing.
Thinking through music.
King stands in the doorway and listens.
She stops without turning.

CORETTA
Mississippi?

KING
Yes.

She turns.
The look on his face answers before he does.

CORETTA

That bad?

KING

Worse than language.

Coretta rises.

He sits heavily on the couch.

KING

A boy named Samuel walks hungry to school.

A beat.

KING

When there is food enough for walking.

Coretta sits beside him.

KING

How can a nation speak of freedom to a child whose body is too empty to reach a classroom?

Coretta says nothing.

KING

We are going to Washington.

CORETTA

The poor people's campaign.

KING

Yes.

CORETTA

When?

KING

Soon.

She looks toward the children's rooms.

CORETTA

And the war?

KING

Still speaking.

CORETTA

And the backlash?

KING

Still coming.

CORETTA

And money?

KING

Not enough.

CORETTA

And your strength?

He looks at her.

The question he cannot organize around.

KING

Less than before.

Coretta takes that in.

CORETTA

Then you must let others carry
more.

KING

They are.

CORETTA

No.

A beat.

CORETTA

You must let them carry what you
think only you can hold.

That lands deeper.

KING

I do not know how.

CORETTA

Learn.

A beat.

CORETTA

Before the work teaches you by
breaking you.

King looks down.

A rare fear shows.

KING

What if we gather the poor in
Washington and the nation still
refuses to see them?

Coretta studies him.

CORETTA

Then the refusal becomes visible.

KING

That may not be enough.

CORETTA

It never is.

A beat.

CORETTA

But hidden suffering has no chance
at all.

King nods slowly.

She takes his hand.

CORETTA

Tell me about Samuel.

King looks at her.

The name hurts.

KING

He had no shoes.

Coretta closes her eyes.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - BASEMENT - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Martin watches the poor white girl bite into the
apple.

The apple is too large for her hand.

She holds it with both.

Young Martin looks at the boxes of food.

Then at the people waiting outside.

Black.

White.

Hungry.

Afraid.

Divided by a world that still lets their stomachs ache the
same way.

King Sr. puts a hand on Young Martin's shoulder.

KING SR.

A full table for every family.

Young Martin looks up.

YOUNG MARTIN

Justice.

King Sr. nods.

KING SR.

Justice.

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - NIGHT

King sits with Coretta.

Older now.

The word has grown heavier.

KING

A full table for every family.

Coretta looks at him.

KING

That is what we are asking.

CORETTA

Then ask it.

A beat.

CORETTA

But do not ask alone.

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAWN - IMAGINED

The National Mall in gray morning light.

Empty grass.

The Capitol in the distance.

Then, slowly, shapes appear.

Tents.

Wooden walkways.

People.

A city where there was none.

Poor people from everywhere.

Children.

Mothers.

Workers.

Elders.

A resurrection of the ignored.

King's vision.
 Not yet built.
 Not yet tested.
 Only imagined.

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - NIGHT

King sits forward.
 Something has settled.
 Not peace.
 Purpose.

KING
 We will build a city.

Coretta looks at him.

KING
 A poor people's city in the shadow
 of power.

A beat.

KING
 And we will ask the nation whether
 it can see its own citizens.

Coretta holds his hand tighter.
 Outside, Atlanta sleeps.
 Inside, another campaign is born.

FADE OUT.

INT. SCLC OFFICE - ATLANTA - DAY

The office has become a map of the nation's suffering.
 Routes pinned to walls. Washington, D.C. circled in red.
 Lines drawn from Mississippi, Alabama, Appalachia, Chicago,
 New York, New Mexico, California, and Puerto Rican
 neighborhoods in the Northeast.

Stacks of paper cover every table.

POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN

WASHINGTON MOBILIZATION

FOOD

TRANSPORTATION

HOUSING

PERMITS

MEDICAL

LEGAL

SANITATION

Dorothy stands before a chalkboard
with the last word underlined
twice.

SANITATION.

Ralph eyes it.

RALPH

Dorothy, you have underlined
sanitation like it personally
insulted you.

DOROTHY

It will if we ignore it.

Andrew sits with a phone pressed to his ear, scribbling
names.

ANDREW

Yes, Reverend. We need numbers,
not enthusiasm. Enthusiasm does
not tell us how many buses to
rent.

Across the room, Marian Wright sits with folders from
Mississippi.

Al Raby has Chicago tenant notes.

A WHITE APPALACHIAN ORGANIZER, CALVIN, 40s, worn by coal
dust even in a clean shirt, sits beside a MEXICAN AMERICAN
FARMWORKER, ELENA, 30s, and a NATIVE ORGANIZER, THOMAS,
50s, from the Southwest.

They are not symbolic.

They are tired.

King stands at the front of the room, listening more than
speaking.

The campaign is larger than the office can hold.

DOROTHY

We cannot bring people to
Washington and then improvise
survival.

RALPH

No one is arguing against survival.

DOROTHY

Good. Then toilets, water, kitchens, medical tents, weather plans, child care, and legal support are not secondary. They are the campaign.

Calvin nods.

CALVIN

Poor folks know promises. We do not need another one with a microphone.

Elena leans forward.

ELENA

Our people cannot leave the fields unless they believe something will come of it.

THOMAS

Our people have heard Washington speak in treaties before.

A silence.

Thomas does not raise his voice.

He does not have to.

THOMAS

Paper is not proof.

King absorbs that.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

Paper is only useful when people organize enough power to make it ashamed of being false.

The room listens.

MARIAN

Then the demands must be clear.

She places a sheet on the table.

MARIAN

Jobs. Income. Housing. Food.
Health. Education. Dignity.

RALPH

Dignity is hard to legislate.

DOROTHY

So is decency. People still notice
when it is missing.

Andrew hangs up the phone.

ANDREW

Press wants to know whether this
is still civil rights.

King turns.

KING

Tell them poverty has been
violating civil rights longer than
many of them have been covering
the subject.

Andrew writes it down.

ANDREW

You know they prefer shorter
answers.

KING

Then tell them yes.

A small laugh moves through the room.

Brief.

Needed.

Elena looks at King.

ELENA

If we come, will the cameras only
look for Negro faces?

The question lands.

King answers carefully.

KING

Not if we do our work well.

CALVIN

They will try.

KING

Yes.

THOMAS

And when poor white people stand
beside Black people, some will
call it betrayal.

CALVIN

They already do.

He looks at his hands.

CALVIN

Back home, they tell us colored
folks are the reason we are poor.

A beat.

CALVIN

Then I look around and cannot find
a colored man owning the mine.

The room quiets.

King studies him.

CALVIN

Took me too long to say that out
loud.

KING

But you said it.

Calvin nods.

KING

That is where coalition begins.

DOROTHY

Coalition begins with truth and
survives through logistics.

Ralph points to her.

RALPH

Put that on a poster.

Dorothy does not smile.

DOROTHY

Put it on a budget.

EXT. ATLANTA STREET - DAWN - FLASHBACK

A quiet street before the city wakes.

YOUNG MARTIN, 8, walks beside King Sr.

They are on their way to Ebenezer.

The sky is still gray.

A SANITATION WORKER, MR. JOHNSON, 50s, lifts a heavy metal trash can into a wagon. His gloves are worn through. His back bends with the weight.

A WHITE SHOP OWNER steps out of a storefront, tying his apron.

WHITE SHOP OWNER

Boy, you missed one.

Mr. Johnson stops.

Young Martin hears it.

Boy.

The word hits the morning like something thrown.

Mr. Johnson looks at the shop owner.

He says nothing.

He picks up the scattered trash near the curb.

The shop owner goes back inside.

Young Martin watches, angry and confused.

YOUNG MARTIN

Daddy?

King Sr. stops.

YOUNG MARTIN

Why did that man call him boy?

King Sr. looks at Mr. Johnson.

Then at his son.

KING SR.

Because some men use small words
to make themselves feel tall.

Young Martin looks back.

Mr. Johnson lifts another can. His hands shake from cold.

YOUNG MARTIN

Why did Mr. Johnson not say
anything?

King Sr. considers.

KING SR.

A man with children to feed must
sometimes swallow words that would
choke another man.

Young Martin does not like that answer.

KING SR.

Come.

They walk to Mr. Johnson.

KING SR.

Good morning, Mr. Johnson.

Mr. Johnson looks up.

The "Mr." matters.

MR. JOHNSON

Morning, Reverend.

King Sr. takes the other side of the heavy can.

Mr. Johnson tries to stop him.

MR. JOHNSON

Reverend, you do not need to do that.

KING SR.

I know.

Together they lift the can.

Young Martin hurries to pick up loose paper near the curb.

Mr. Johnson watches him.

MR. JOHNSON

Much obliged, young man.

Young Martin straightens at the words.

Young man.

Not boy.

Young man.

KING SR.

Hard morning?

MR. JOHNSON

Most mornings come heavy.

KING SR.

Yes, they do.

A beat.

MR. JOHNSON

City needs us before breakfast and forgets us before lunch.

King Sr. nods.

Young Martin listens.

MR. JOHNSON

Folks do not notice what gets
carried away unless it stays in
front of their house.

King Sr. looks at Young Martin.

The lesson is happening in real time.

KING SR.

A city shows its soul by how it
treats the people who keep it
clean.

Mr. Johnson looks at him, surprised by the dignity of the
sentence.

Young Martin studies Mr. Johnson's hands.

Cracked.

Cold.

Necessary.

YOUNG MARTIN

Do you like your work?

The question is innocent.

Mr. Johnson looks at him.

Then smiles sadly.

MR. JOHNSON

I like feeding my family.

A beat.

MR. JOHNSON

Work is not the shame, son.

He glances at the storefront.

MR. JOHNSON

The shame is when folks need your
work and despise your hands.

Young Martin absorbs it.

King Sr. places a hand on his shoulder.

KING SR.

Remember that.

A beat.

KING SR.

No honest work makes a man small.

Young Martin looks at Mr. Johnson.

KING SR.

Only a dishonest world does that.

INT. SCLC OFFICE - ATLANTA - DAY

King stands in the office.

Older now.

The memory still in his face.

Dorothy notices.

DOROTHY

Martin?

KING

Sanitation.

She looks at the chalkboard.

DOROTHY

Yes. That is what I have been
trying to explain.

A few people chuckle.

King shakes his head slightly.

KING

No. I was thinking about a man I
knew when I was a boy.

The room waits.

KING

He carried away what the city
wanted gone.

A beat.

KING

And the city treated him as if he
were part of what it discarded.

The room quiets.

KING

That is poverty too.

A phone RINGS.

Then another.

Then another.

The office answers them as a matter of reflex.
Andrew takes one call.

ANDREW

SCLC.

He listens.

His expression changes.

ANDREW

Hold on.

He covers the receiver.

ANDREW

Martin.

King turns.

ANDREW

Memphis.

The room shifts.

KING

Who?

ANDREW

Reverend Lawson.

King crosses to the phone.

ANDREW

Sanitation workers are on strike.

The word lands with eerie precision.

Sanitation.

King takes the receiver.

KING

Jim?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MEMPHIS CHURCH OFFICE - DAY

REV. JAMES LAWSON, 39, stands in a cramped church office,
phone to his ear.

Behind him, men move quickly, passing flyers and signs.

LAWSON

Martin.

His voice is controlled.

But urgent.

LAWSON

Two workers were crushed in a
garbage truck. Echol Cole and
Robert Walker.

King closes his eyes.

LAWSON

The men have walked out.

KING

How many?

LAWSON

Hundreds. Mostly Negro sanitation
workers. They are asking for
recognition, better wages, safer
conditions, basic respect.

A beat.

LAWSON

The city will not hear them.

King looks toward the chalkboard.

SANITATION.

LAWSON

They are carrying signs now.

KING

What do the signs say?

Lawson looks through the office window.

Outside, sanitation workers gather in the church lot.

Black men in work clothes.

Tired hands.

Straight backs.

Signs stacked against the wall.

LAWSON

I Am A Man.

King goes still.

The office around him fades.

INT. ATLANTA STREET - DAWN - FLASHBACK

Young Martin watches Mr. Johnson lift the heavy can.

MR. JOHNSON

The shame is when folks need your
work and despise your hands.

King Sr.'s voice follows.

KING SR.

No honest work makes a man small.

INT. SCLC OFFICE - ATLANTA - DAY

King grips the phone.

Older now.

The sentence has found its battlefield.

KING

I Am A Man.

The room is silent.

Lawson hears the weight in King's voice.

LAWSON

Yes.

KING

How are the men?

LAWSON

Tired. Angry. Disciplined so far.
But the city is hardening.

KING

Mayor?

LAWSON

Refusing recognition. Police
pressure. The men need help
keeping national attention.

A beat.

LAWSON

They need you.

King looks at Ralph.

Ralph already knows.

RALPH

Martin.

King keeps the phone to his ear.

LAWSON

I know you are building the
Washington campaign.

KING

This is the Washington campaign.

The room goes still.

KING

If a man can work full days for a
city and still be treated as
disposable, then Memphis is not a
side road.

A beat.

KING

It is the road.

Lawson exhales.

LAWSON

Can you come?

King looks at Dorothy.

Then Marian.

Then Calvin, Elena, Thomas.

The poor people of America gathered in one room.

The sanitation workers of Memphis on the line.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

Martin, timing--

KING

Yes.

Into the phone:

KING

We will come.

INT. SCLC OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

King hangs up.

No one speaks at first.

Then Dorothy moves to the chalkboard.

She adds beneath WASHINGTON:

MEMPHIS

RALPH

We do not have the staff.

DOROTHY

We never have the staff.

ANDREW

We do not have the money.

DOROTHY

We rarely have the money.

RALPH

We cannot build a national poor
people's mobilization and step
into a major labor fight without
stretching every seam.

King looks at him.

KING

Then the seams will show us what
must be reinforced.

Ralph is frustrated.

Not because King is wrong.

Because he may be right.

MARIAN

Memphis gives the campaign a face.

Elena shakes her head.

ELENA

Not a face.

She looks at King.

ELENA

Hands.

That lands.

CALVIN

Working hands.

THOMAS

Ignored hands.

Dorothy writes:

WORK

WAGES

DIGNITY

SAFETY

RECOGNITION

Andrew looks at King.

ANDREW

When?

KING

Soon.

RALPH

That word has become dangerous.

KING

I know.

Ralph steps closer.

RALPH

You are tired.

KING

So are they.

RALPH

That is not an answer.

KING

It is the only one I have right
now.

The room sits with that.

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - NIGHT

Coretta stands at the bedroom dresser, folding laundry.

King enters quietly.

She looks at him in the mirror.

CORETTA

Memphis.

Not a question.

King stops.

KING

How did you know?

CORETTA

You walked in carrying a city.

He sits on the edge of the bed.

KING

Sanitation workers.

CORETTA

I heard.

KING

Two men were killed in a truck.

Coretta closes her eyes.

KING

The others are on strike. They
carry signs.

A beat.

KING

I Am A Man.

Coretta turns.

The phrase fills the room.

CORETTA

That is the whole struggle in four
words.

King nods.

KING

Yes.

CORETTA

And you are going.

KING

Yes.

She sits beside him.

CORETTA

Before Washington.

KING

It is Washington.

She studies him.

KING

The Poor People's Campaign cannot
speak of dignity and pass by men
carrying that sign.

Coretta reaches for his hand.

CORETTA

I am not arguing the truth.

A beat.

CORETTA

I am asking about the man carrying
it.

He looks tired.

More tired than he wants to admit.

KING

The man is still here.

CORETTA

Barely, some days.

He looks down.

CORETTA

Martin.

He looks at her.

CORETTA

You are not required to spend
yourself so completely that others
only inherit your absence.

That lands painfully.

KING

I do not know how to do less when
the need is more.

CORETTA

Then do not do less.

A beat.

CORETTA

Do it with more people.

He nods.

But she knows he has not fully learned that lesson.

INT. MEMPHIS CHURCH - NIGHT

A packed sanctuary.

Sanitation workers fill the pews.

Most wear work jackets. Some hold caps in their hands. Many
carry signs:

I AM A MAN

Their wives sit beside them.

Children watch from laps and aisles.

The room hums with fatigue and resolve.

Lawson stands near the pulpit with local leaders.

The doors open.

King enters with Ralph and Andrew.

The room rises.

Not with celebrity excitement.

With recognition.

A man has come to say publicly what they have been carrying privately.

King walks down the aisle.

He passes worker after worker.

Hands roughened by labor.

Eyes wary from disappointment.

Backs straightened by necessity.

A sanitation worker, HENRY, 45, stands at the aisle.

King stops.

HENRY

Dr. King.

KING

Sir.

Henry holds up his sign.

I AM A MAN.

HENRY

They act like they need the sign
to remember.

King looks at it.

KING

Then we will make the whole nation
read it.

Henry nods once.

King moves to the pulpit.

The room settles.

INT. MEMPHIS CHURCH - PULPIT - CONTINUOUS

King looks out at the workers.

No grand opening.

No flourish.

He is too moved for flourish.

KING

There are signs in this room that
should never have needed to be
written.

The workers listen.

KING

A man should not have to declare
his manhood to the city that
depends upon his labor.

A murmur.

KING

A man should not have to prove his
dignity by withholding the work
that keeps other people
comfortable.

The room strengthens.

KING

But when a city refuses to
recognize the humanity of the
workers who lift its burdens, then
the workers must lift their
voices.

Applause.

KING

I have come here tonight because
your struggle is not separate from
the struggle in Mississippi, or
Chicago, or Watts, or Appalachia,
or Washington.

He looks across the room.

KING

This is the Poor People's Campaign
wearing work gloves.

The room responds.

YES.

KING

This is the demand for economic
justice standing in a sanitation
uniform.

Stronger.

KING

This is the ballot asking for
bread. This is civil rights asking
for wages. This is nonviolence
asking a city whether it can look
honest men in the face and still
deny them respect.

The workers rise now.

King raises a hand.

KING

But hear me clearly.

They settle.

KING

You have power.

A beat.

KING

Not because you can destroy.

Another beat.

KING

Because you can refuse to
cooperate with your own
humiliation.

The room erupts.

Henry grips his sign.

I AM A MAN.

KING

Do not let anyone tell you this is
only about garbage.

A beat.

KING

This is about whether a man who
serves a city is seen by that
city.

The room answers.

KING

This is about whether work will be
honored, whether wages will be
fair, whether safety will matter,
whether the death of two workers

will be treated as tragedy or
inconvenience.

The applause becomes thunder.

KING

If America is to become a just
nation, it must learn to respect
the hands that clean it, feed it,
build it, carry it, and bury its
dead.

A wave of emotion moves through the workers.

KING

So stand together.

A beat.

KING

Stand with discipline.

Another beat.

KING

Stand with the knowledge that you
are not begging for dignity.

He leans toward the microphone.

KING

You are reminding Memphis of what
God already gave you.

The church rises.

Not applause now.

Release.

Men who have been called less than men stand beneath their
own declaration.

I AM A MAN.

INT. MEMPHIS CHURCH - SIDE ROOM - LATER

King enters with Lawson, Ralph, Andrew, Henry, and several
worker leaders.

The sound of the church continues beyond the door.

Lawson closes it.

LAWSON

They needed that.

HENRY

We needed somebody outside Memphis
to say it.

KING

You said it first.

Henry looks down.

HENRY

City did not hear us.

KING

Then we will make them.

Ralph checks notes.

RALPH

March?

LAWSON

Yes. Peaceful. Disciplined. Large.

ANDREW

Press?

LAWSON

Local. Some national if Dr. King
leads.

King sits.

The fatigue returns quickly when he is out of public view.

Henry notices.

HENRY

You all right?

King looks up.

KING

Yes.

Henry does not fully believe him.

HENRY

You look like a man who needs
sleep.

RALPH

Henry, you have known him five
minutes and already understand him
better than some donors.

King smiles faintly.

HENRY

My wife says men confuse tired
with holy.

The room laughs.

King's smile fades into thought.

KING

Your wife is a theologian.

Henry grins.

HENRY

She would say she is tired too.

A beat.

LAWSON

Can you return for the march?

King looks at the men.

The signs in the sanctuary.

The campaign in Washington.

The children in Mississippi.

The workers in Memphis.

KING

Yes.

Ralph watches him carefully.

RALPH

Martin.

KING

Yes.

He turns to Lawson.

KING

We march with them.

EXT. MEMPHIS STREET - NIGHT

The church empties.

Workers step into the cool night carrying their signs.

I AM A MAN.

I AM A MAN.

I AM A MAN.

The signs move down the sidewalk
like a sentence the city can no
longer avoid.

King stands near the church steps with Ralph.

RALPH

You called this the Poor People's
Campaign wearing work gloves.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

That one will travel.

KING

It should.

Ralph studies the workers.

RALPH

You think Memphis understands what
is coming?

King watches Henry walk with his sign held high.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

But the men do.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MEMPHIS - LATE NIGHT

A modest hotel room.

King sits at a desk, writing notes.

Ralph sleeps in a chair.

Andrew is asleep on the bed fully clothed, papers on his
chest.

The television is off.

The room is quiet.

Too quiet.

King writes:

WORK

DIGNITY
POVERTY
WASHINGTON

MEMPHIS

He stops.

Adds:

I AM A MAN

He looks at the words.

They seem too small for what they carry.

INT. ATLANTA STREET - DAWN - FLASHBACK

Young Martin watches Mr. Johnson lift the heavy can.

MR. JOHNSON

Work is not the shame, son.

A beat.

MR. JOHNSON

The shame is when folks need your
work and despise your hands.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MEMPHIS - NIGHT

King sits at the desk.

Older now.

He underlines:

I AM A MAN

Once.

Twice.

Then he sets the pen down.

Outside, Memphis sleeps uneasily.

FADE OUT.

EXT. CLAYBORN TEMPLE - MEMPHIS - DAY

A restless crowd gathers outside the church.

Sanitation workers in dark coats. Ministers. Students.
Mothers. Children. Labor organizers. Local activists.
Reporters. Police. Onlookers.

Signs rise above the crowd.

I AM A MAN

I AM A MAN

I AM A MAN

SUPER: MEMPHIS - MARCH 28, 1968

The words move in the wind like a verdict.

King steps from a car with Ralph and Andrew.

The crowd surges with recognition.

Cheers.

Applause.

Relief.

Need.

King waves, but his eyes scan the edges.

Something feels different.

Too many young men moving in restless clusters.

Too many police with hands already near weapons.

Too much tension looking for a door.

Lawson meets King near the church steps.

LAWSON

Martin.

KING

Jim.

They embrace.

Lawson looks troubled.

KING

What is it?

LAWSON

The crowd is larger than expected.

RALPH

That is usually good news.

LAWSON

Not today.

Andrew looks across the street.

A group of young men laugh too loudly, shoving each other,
faces masked by anger and performance.

ANDREW

Who are they?

LAWSON

Some local youth. Some from groups
we do not fully know. Some just
angry enough to follow noise.

King watches them.

KING

Have they been trained?

Lawson does not answer.

That is the answer.

DOROTHY, arriving with clipboards and volunteers, pushes
through the crowd.

DOROTHY

We do not have enough marshals.

RALPH

How short?

DOROTHY

Short enough for me to dislike the
question.

King looks toward the sanitation workers.

They stand in disciplined lines, signs held steady.

Henry is among them.

He catches King's eye and nods.

HENRY

Dr. King.

KING

Henry.

Henry looks around.

HENRY

Feels hot out here.

The day is mild.

Everyone understands him.

KING

Stay near the front.

HENRY

Yes, sir.

Dorothy steps close to King.

DOROTHY

Martin, we may need to delay.

The crowd chants now.

I AM A MAN.

I AM A MAN.

I AM A MAN.

The chant is powerful.

But uneven.

Some voices are prayer.

Some are warning.

KING

If we delay, frustration may spill
right here.

DOROTHY

If we march, it may spill in
motion.

King looks at Lawson.

LAWSON

The workers came to march.

Ralph scans the street.

RALPH

Then we tighten the front and move
slowly.

Dorothy looks at King.

DOROTHY

Slowly does not make disorder
disciplined.

King knows.

A local marshal hurries over.

MARSHAL

Dr. King, people are pushing from
the rear. They want to move.

King looks at the crowd.

Thousands waiting.

The men with signs.

The families.

The workers.

The press.

The police.

The young anger at the edges.

KING

We march.

Dorothy's jaw tightens.

But she moves.

DOROTHY

Marshals to the sides! Keep
children away from the edges!
Signs up, hands open!

EXT. MEMPHIS STREET - MOMENTS LATER

The march begins.

King at the front with Lawson, Ralph, Andrew, Henry, union
leaders, clergy.

Behind them, a sea of signs.

I AM A MAN.

The chant continues.

I AM A MAN.

I AM A MAN.

The rhythm grows.

Feet strike pavement.

Police line the sidewalks.

Some white shop owners stand in doorways, arms folded.

Reporters move backward, cameras up.

King walks with measured focus.

Ralph beside him.

RALPH

You feel it?

KING

Yes.

RALPH

Can we hold it?

KING

We must.

Behind them, Dorothy moves along the side.

DOROTHY

Close the gaps! Stay in line! Do
not answer them!

A white man shouts from a doorway.

WHITE MAN

Go back to work!

A sanitation worker grips his sign tighter.

Henry leans toward the worker.

HENRY

Eyes forward.

The worker breathes.

Keeps walking.

EXT. MEMPHIS STREET - LATER

The march grows louder.

A group of young men near the rear chant out of rhythm.

Not I AM A MAN.

Something sharper.

Angrier.

A bottle flies.

It shatters against the street.

Several marchers turn.

Dorothy sees it.

DOROTHY

No! Keep moving!

Another bottle flies.

This one hits a storefront window.

Glass cracks.

The sound slices through the march.

King turns his head.

A second window breaks.

Then a third.

The crowd jolts.

Police surge.

A woman screams.

The disciplined line bends.
Then buckles.

RALPH

Martin.

King stops.

KING

Hold the line!

Lawson raises both hands.

LAWSON

Hold! Hold!

But the sound of breaking glass spreads faster than
instruction.

Young men run toward storefronts.

Some are laughing.

Some furious.

Some swept into motion by the permission chaos gives.

Sanitation workers try to stay together.

HENRY

Do not run! Stay with the signs!

A police whistle SHRIEKS.

Officers push into the crowd.

A club rises.

Someone falls.

The chant collapses into screams.

KING

No.

A brick crashes through another window.

Police charge.

Tear gas canisters bounce across pavement.

White smoke blooms.

People scatter.

Andrew grabs King's arm.

ANDREW

We have to move you.

KING

No.

RALPH

Martin, now.

KING

The workers--

RALPH

They cannot protect you in this.

King tries to look through the smoke.

He sees Henry holding his sign.

I AM A MAN.

Then smoke swallows him.

A young boy coughs violently near the curb.

Dorothy pulls him toward a doorway.

DOROTHY

Inside! Get him inside!

King steps toward her.

A police line surges between them.

Andrew and Ralph pull King back.

KING

Dorothy!

DOROTHY

Go!

She points hard.

DOROTHY

Go now!

A bottle breaks nearby.

A gunshot cracks somewhere in the distance.

Then another.

The march disintegrates.

EXT. SIDE STREET - CONTINUOUS

Ralph and Andrew rush King away from the chaos.

Lawson follows.

King resists every step.

KING

We cannot leave them.

RALPH

We are not leaving them. We are
keeping you alive.

KING

That was not the march.

ANDREW

I know.

KING

That was not the workers.

LAWSON

We know.

KING

The country will not know.

No one answers.

They push through a door into a nearby building.

INT. SAFE ROOM - MEMPHIS - DAY

A cramped back room.

Dusty shelves. Boxes. A single window covered with a shade.

King enters with Ralph, Andrew, and Lawson.

The muffled chaos continues outside.

Sirens.

Shouting.

Glass.

Running feet.

King stands in the center of the room, breathing hard.

Not from exertion.

From grief.

KING

We lost it.

RALPH

The march was broken.

KING

We lost it.

LAWSON

Martin, there were forces in that
crowd that were not under our
discipline.

KING

Then we were not ready to march.
The room goes silent.
Andrew wipes sweat and gas from his face.

ANDREW

News cameras got the windows.
King closes his eyes.

ANDREW

They got the looting.
A beat.

ANDREW

They got police swinging too, but
they will lead with the windows.
King opens his eyes.

KING

Of course they will.
A phone rings in another room.
Sirens pass outside.
Lawson looks toward the covered window.

LAWSON

I need to find the workers.
King moves toward the door.

RALPH

No.

KING

I am going.

RALPH

You are not walking back into that
street.
King's anger flashes.

KING

Those men trusted me.

RALPH

And they still need you alive.
A hard silence.
The sentence lands with too much familiarity.
King looks away.

The room begins to blur.

Sirens become shouts from another time.

**INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - FELLOWSHIP HALL - NIGHT -
FLASHBACK**

YOUNG MARTIN, 12, stands near a refreshment table after a church youth event.

Two older boys argue near the doorway.

The argument grows.

A shove.

Then another.

One boy grabs a chair.

Young Martin freezes.

King Sr. enters quickly from the hall.

KING SR.

Put it down.

The boy holds the chair, breathing hard.

KING SR.

Put it down now.

The boy lowers it.

The room is still.

King Sr. steps between the boys.

KING SR.

What happened?

OLDER BOY

He called me a name.

SECOND BOY

He pushed me first.

KING SR.

So you decided to prove your
dignity by losing control of it?

The boys lower their eyes.

Young Martin watches.

KING SR.

Anger is not the enemy.

A beat.

KING SR.

But anger without discipline
becomes an errand boy for the very
evil that provoked it.

Young Martin absorbs every word.

KING SR.

You let another man's insult
decide who you were going to
become for the next five minutes.

The boys say nothing.

KING SR.

That is too much power to give
away.

Later, Young Martin helps King Sr. stack chairs.

YOUNG MARTIN

Daddy?

KING SR.

Yes?

YOUNG MARTIN

What if the anger is right?

King Sr. sets a chair on the stack.

KING SR.

Then it deserves better than
foolishness.

Young Martin thinks about that.

KING SR.

Righteous anger is a strong horse.

A beat.

KING SR.

But a strong horse still needs
reins.

Young Martin looks toward the doorway where the boys left.

YOUNG MARTIN

What happens if it has none?

King Sr. looks at him.

KING SR.

It runs until someone gets
trampled.

INT. SAFE ROOM - MEMPHIS - DAY

King stands in the back room.

Older now.

The horse has broken loose.

Outside, chaos continues.

He turns to Lawson.

KING

Find Henry.

LAWSON

I will.

KING

Find the workers. Tell them this
is not over.

Lawson nods.

King looks at Ralph.

KING

We return.

RALPH

Martin--

KING

We return.

RALPH

Today?

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

Prepared. Disciplined. Stronger.

Andrew looks up.

ANDREW

The press will say nonviolence
failed.

KING

Then we demonstrate that failure
was not nonviolence.

A beat.

KING

It was the absence of discipline
where discipline was required.

The door opens.

Dorothy enters, coughing, eyes red from gas.

King moves to her.

KING

Dorothy.

DOROTHY

I am fine.

RALPH

You do not look fine.

DOROTHY

Then stop looking at me.

King sees blood on her sleeve.

KING

You are hurt.

DOROTHY

Not mine.

A beat.

DOROTHY

A boy was shot.

The room stills.

KING

Who?

DOROTHY

I do not know yet.

The sirens outside seem louder now.

DOROTHY

Police are everywhere. People are
running. Stores broken. Workers
scattered.

She looks at King.

DOROTHY

This is going to be used against
them.

KING

Yes.

DOROTHY
Against you too.

KING
Yes.

DOROTHY
Good. Then let us stop standing
here experiencing the obvious.
She moves to the table and starts clearing space.

DOROTHY
We need names. Arrests. Injuries.
Witnesses. Which windows broke
where. Which police units moved
where. Who saw the first bottle.
Who saw the first club.
Andrew joins her.

ANDREW
I will work press.

DOROTHY
You will work facts first. Press
second.
Andrew nods.
Ralph looks at King.
The machine of recovery has begun.
But King remains wounded in a place no bandage can reach.

INT. MEMPHIS CHURCH - NIGHT

A smaller crowd than before.
Sanitation workers sit in pews, exhausted and angry.
Some have torn clothes. Some bandages. Some stare at the
floor.
Henry sits near the front, his sign beside him.
I AM A MAN.
The sign is bent.
King enters from the side with Lawson, Ralph, Andrew, and
Dorothy.
No applause.
Only eyes.
Hard eyes.

Hurt eyes.

King walks to the pulpit.

The silence is worse than criticism.

KING

Brothers.

No response.

KING

Today did not honor your struggle.

Stillness.

KING

I will not pretend otherwise.

A murmur.

KING

The march broke down. Violence entered. The newspapers will say that was the story.

He looks across the workers.

KING

But that is not the whole truth.

Henry watches him.

KING

The truth is that you came to march for dignity. You came carrying signs that should shame this city into repentance. You came as workers, fathers, husbands, citizens, men.

A beat.

KING

And because disorder entered the street, the nation will try to forget why you were there.

The workers listen now.

KING

We cannot let that happen.

A worker stands.

WORKER

How?

His voice is not angry.
Just exhausted.

WORKER
How we stop them from saying we
just rioted?

King looks at him.

KING
We march again.

The room reacts.
Some disbelief.
Some fear.
Some anger.

WORKER
Again?

KING
Yes.

ANOTHER WORKER
So they can beat us again?

KING
So they can see you clearly.

A worker near the back stands.

THIRD WORKER
I got children. I cannot lose my
job and get my head cracked too.

KING
No man should be asked to risk
lightly.

Henry stands.

HENRY
But we already risked.

The room turns to him.

HENRY
Every day on them trucks. Every
day in the rain. Every day taking
home pay that disappears before
rent is done.

He lifts the bent sign.

HENRY

This sign ain't for a parade.

A beat.

HENRY

It is for a fight.

The room murmurs.

Henry looks at King.

HENRY

But if we march again, it has to
be ours.

King nods.

KING

Yes.

HENRY

Not young men breaking windows.
Not cameras chasing smoke. Not
police writing the story.

KING

Yes.

HENRY

Ours.

KING

Yes.

A beat.

KING

And disciplined enough that no one
can steal it.

Henry sits.

The room changes.

Not healed.

But no longer lost.

KING

I will return to Memphis.

Lawson looks at him.

Ralph too.

KING

And when I return, we will march
again.

A beat.

KING

Not because today was easy to
survive.

Another beat.

KING

Because today made tomorrow
necessary.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MEMPHIS - LATE NIGHT

King sits alone on the edge of the bed.

His tie loosened.

Jacket off.

The television is on.

No sound.

Footage shows the march breaking apart.

Glass.

Police.

Smoke.

People running.

Then King being rushed away.

He watches himself disappear from his own march.

A newspaper lies on the table with an early headline:

KING MARCH TURNS VIOLENT

Ralph enters quietly.

RALPH

You should not watch that.

KING

I need to.

Ralph sits.

For a long while, neither speaks.

KING

I have faced angry mobs.

A beat.

KING

Jails. Bombs. Dogs. Clubs.

He looks at the television.

KING
But this feels different.

RALPH
Because they will say it proves
you wrong.

KING
Because part of me fears it proves
I was not ready.

Ralph leans forward.

RALPH
Martin.

KING
I put those men in the street.

RALPH
Those men were already in the
struggle.

KING
I led them into a march we could
not hold.

Ralph cannot fully deny it.

So he does not.

RALPH
Then we learn.

King looks at him.

RALPH
Not every wound is a verdict.

A beat.

RALPH
Some are instruction.

King turns back to the television.

The footage loops again.

Smoke.

Running.

A bent sign.

I AM A MAN.

KING

A boy was shot.

RALPH

Yes.

KING

Name?

Ralph looks down.

RALPH

Larry Payne.

King closes his eyes.

The name enters him.

LARRY PAYNE.

RALPH

Sixteen.

King lowers his head.

No speech.

No strategy.

Just grief.

KING

Sixteen.

The word barely leaves him.

**INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - FELLOWSHIP HALL - NIGHT -
FLASHBACK**

Young Martin stands beside King Sr.

The chairs are stacked.

The hall is quiet after the fight.

KING SR.

When anger runs loose, son, it
does not always trample the guilty
first.

Young Martin looks at the empty room.

KING SR.

Sometimes it finds the nearest
child.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MEMPHIS - NIGHT

King sits with the name.

Larry Payne.

Sixteen.

Ralph watches him.

RALPH

We can cancel the next trip.

King looks up.

RALPH

No one would blame you for
regrouping.

KING

Yes, they would.

RALPH

I said no one. I did not say you.

King almost smiles.

It dies quickly.

KING

If we do not return, the last word
in Memphis will be chaos.

A beat.

KING

And Larry Payne becomes only
another casualty in a story the
city uses to blame the workers.

Ralph says nothing.

KING

We return.

RALPH

Then we return carefully.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

With training.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

With marshals.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

With a route we can hold.

KING

Yes.

RALPH

And if you are too tired, you let
someone else lead part of it.

King looks at him.

Ralph holds the stare.

RALPH

That is not a suggestion.

A long beat.

KING

I will try.

RALPH

That is not an answer.

KING

It is the one you are getting
tonight.

Ralph sighs.

RALPH

Progress, I suppose.

EXT. MEMPHIS STREET - NIGHT

The streets are under curfew.

Police cars move slowly.

Broken glass glitters beneath streetlights.

A sanitation sign lies near a curb.

Bent.

Mud-streaked.

I AM A MAN.

A pair of hands reaches down.

Henry picks it up.

He stands in the empty street.

A worker beside him looks at the damage.

WORKER

You think he comes back?

Henry looks at the sign.

Then toward the dark church.

HENRY

He said he would.

WORKER

Men say things.

Henry grips the sign.

HENRY

That one comes back.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MEMPHIS - NIGHT

King sits at the desk.

He writes three names on hotel stationery:

ECHOL COLE

ROBERT WALKER

LARRY PAYNE

He stares at them.

Then writes beneath:

RETURN.

He folds the paper and places it
in his Bible.

Outside, Memphis holds its breath.

FADE OUT.

INT. ATLANTA AIRPORT - TERMINAL - EVENING

Rain lashes the windows.

Travelers crowd the gate, restless beneath fluorescent
lights.

King sits apart from the others, Bible and notes in his
lap. Ralph stands nearby with Andrew, Jesse Jackson, and a
few aides.

SUPER: ATLANTA - APRIL 3, 1968

King looks older than forty.

Not in his face.

In the way he sits when no one is asking him to stand.
Andrew checks his watch.

ANDREW
We should have boarded twenty
minutes ago.

RALPH
Airlines are allergic to urgency.
Jesse looks toward the gate agents.

JESSE
Something is wrong.
A gate agent approaches, uneasy.

GATE AGENT
Dr. King?
King looks up.

GATE AGENT
There has been a security concern.
Ralph stiffens.

RALPH
What kind?
The agent lowers his voice.
GATE AGENT
A threat against the flight.
Travelers nearby begin to look over.
The usual ripple.
The King ripple.
Danger enters a room and everyone knows whose name it
followed.

KING
A bomb threat?
The agent hesitates.
That is answer enough.

GATE AGENT
They are checking the aircraft and
baggage again.
King nods.

GATE AGENT
I am sorry for the delay.

KING

So am I.

The agent leaves.

Ralph sits beside him.

RALPH

Do not do that.

KING

Do what?

RALPH

Apologize for someone else's
hatred.

King looks at the rain.

KING

Everybody on that plane has
somewhere to be.

RALPH

So do you.

A beat.

RALPH

That is why the threat was made.

King closes his Bible.

Jesse watches him.

JESSE

We can take another flight.

ANDREW

Or wait.

RALPH

Or not go tonight.

King looks at them.

The men know the answer before he says it.

KING

The workers are waiting.

RALPH

The workers would rather you
arrive alive.

KING

I intend to.

RALPH

That is not a travel plan.

King almost smiles.

Then thunder rolls outside.

The sound deepens into memory.

INT. HARLEM DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY - FLASHBACK

A line of people waits with books in hand.

Young King, 29, sits at a signing table. His first book stacked beside him. He smiles, signs, shakes hands, answers questions.

The room is warm.

Hopeful.

Busy.

A WOMAN approaches.

Quiet.

Tense.

She holds a book, but her eyes do not rest on it.

YOUNG KING

Good afternoon.

The woman does not answer.

She leans in as if to speak privately.

Then, sudden.

A flash of metal.

A gasp.

The room erupts.

Young King looks down.

A letter opener is buried in his chest.

For one suspended second, he does not understand what his body already knows.

Then voices explode around him.

AIDE

Do not move!

Someone grabs the woman.

People scream.

Young King's hand hovers near the handle.
A doctor in the crowd rushes forward.

DOCTOR
Do not touch it!

Young King looks at the doctor.
The world narrows.

DOCTOR
Do not sneeze. Do not cough. Do
not move.

Young King breathes as lightly as a man can breathe.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - HARLEM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Young King lies in bed after surgery.

Bandaged.

Pale.

Alive by a narrow margin.

Coretta sits beside him, holding his hand.

A doctor stands near the foot of the bed.

DOCTOR
The blade was very close to the
aorta.

Young King listens.

DOCTOR
Had you sneezed before surgery,
you may not have survived.

The doctor exits quietly.

Coretta does not move.

Young King looks at her.

YOUNG KING
I have never been so afraid to
sneeze.

It is almost a joke.

Almost.

Coretta grips his hand tighter.

CORETTA
Do not make me laugh tonight.

He nods.

A long silence.

YOUNG KING
It was that close.

CORETTA
Yes.

YOUNG KING
All this work.

A beat.

YOUNG KING
All this calling.

Another beat.

YOUNG KING
And a letter opener nearly ends it
in a department store.

Coretta looks at him.

CORETTA
Then maybe the work was never
yours alone to finish.

He turns to her.

CORETTA
Maybe none of us are promised the
ending.

A beat.

CORETTA
Only the faithfulness of the day
we are given.

Young King stares at the ceiling.

The words do not comfort him.

But they stay.

INT. ATLANTA AIRPORT - EVENING

King sits at the gate.

Older now.

The thunder fades.

Ralph watches him.

RALPH
Where did you go?

KING

Harlem.

Ralph understands.

RALPH

You came through that.

KING

Yes.

A beat.

KING

But I learned then that a man can
be alive and still be living on
borrowed time.

Ralph says nothing.

A boarding announcement crackles.

GATE AGENT

Flight to Memphis now boarding.

King stands.

He picks up his Bible and notes.

RALPH

Borrowed or not, let us not waste
the time on airport chairs.

King smiles faintly.

They move toward the gate.

EXT. MEMPHIS AIRPORT - NIGHT

The plane lands in rain.

The runway shines under storm lights.

Thunder rolls over Memphis.

INT. CAR - MOVING - MEMPHIS - NIGHT

King rides in the back with Ralph.

Andrew and Jesse sit up front.

Rain hammers the roof.

Memphis passes in wet streaks.

Jesse looks back.

JESSE

Crowd is still at Mason Temple.

RALPH
In this weather?

JESSE
Workers came. Families. Ministers.
Students.

Andrew checks notes.

ANDREW
They are expecting you.
King leans his head against the seat.
His eyes close.
For one moment, he is only exhausted.

RALPH
Martin.
King opens his eyes.

RALPH
I can speak tonight.

KING
You always speak, Ralph.

RALPH
I mean instead of you.

KING
I know what you mean.
Rain beats harder.

KING
Let us get to the motel first.

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - NIGHT

The neon sign glows through rain.

LORRAINE MOTEL
Cars pull in.

King and the others hurry from the vehicles beneath
umbrellas and newspapers.

A few people call his name from the balcony and parking
lot.

King waves briefly.

INT. LORRAINE MOTEL - ROOM 306 - NIGHT

A modest room.

Two beds. A small table. Lamps. Suitcases. Papers.

Rain lashes the window.

King removes his wet coat.

Ralph enters behind him, already loosening his tie.

Andrew carries food containers that no one seems hungry enough to open.

Jesse stands near the door.

JESSE

Mason Temple is packed.

King sits on the edge of the bed.

He coughs.

A deep, tired cough.

RALPH

That settles it. I will go.

KING

Ralph.

RALPH

No. You need rest. You need your voice. You need to stop treating your body like rented equipment.

Andrew sets the food down.

ANDREW

He is right.

King looks at Andrew.

ANDREW

I hate agreeing with him, but there it is.

Jesse nods.

JESSE

We can tell them you are preparing for the march.

King rubs his eyes.

For once, he does not argue quickly.

KING

All right.

Ralph pauses, surprised by victory.

RALPH

All right?

KING

You sound disappointed.

RALPH

I had prepared three more points.

KING

Save them. I will offend your
sense later.

Ralph smiles despite himself.

The phone RINGS.

Andrew answers.

ANDREW

Room 306.

He listens.

ANDREW

Yes, Mrs. King.

He covers the receiver.

ANDREW

Coretta.

King reaches for the phone.

KING

Hello.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - NIGHT

Coretta stands in the kitchen, phone to her ear.

The children's voices are faint down the hall.

CORETTA

You arrived?

KING

Yes.

CORETTA

And the bomb threat?

King closes his eyes.

KING

It delayed us. That is all.

CORETTA

That is not all.

A beat.

KING

No.

CORETTA

Are you going to speak tonight?

King looks at Ralph.

Ralph points to himself and mouths:

I AM.

KING

Ralph is going.

Coretta knows him too well to relax.

CORETTA

And you?

KING

I am resting.

CORETTA

Say that again like you believe
it.

King smiles faintly.

KING

I am sitting on a bed.

CORETTA

Closer.

A long silence.

CORETTA

You sound tired.

KING

I am.

CORETTA

Come home after this.

The words are simple.

Not small.

King looks toward the rain.

KING

After the march.

CORETTA

After this.

A beat.

CORETTA

Not after the next thing. Not
after Washington. Not after
another call. After this.

King takes that in.

KING

I will try.

CORETTA

Martin.

KING

I will come home.

She closes her eyes.

CORETTA

Good.

A child calls for her.

CORETTA

I have to go.

KING

Kiss them for me.

CORETTA

Always.

A beat.

CORETTA

And rest.

KING

Yes.

They hang up.

King holds the receiver a second longer before setting it
down.

Ralph watches.

RALPH

I will tell them you send your
love, your support, and your
common sense in my person.

KING

Do not claim too much.

RALPH

Common sense is my spiritual gift.

Jesse opens the door.

Rain and thunder rush in.

RALPH

Get some sleep.

King nods.

Ralph, Andrew, and Jesse exit.

The room quiets.

King sits alone.

Rain.

Thunder.

A crowd somewhere waiting.

He lies back on the bed.

Closes his eyes.

INT. MASON TEMPLE - NIGHT

A massive sanctuary.

Packed.

Raincoats dripping. Workers in dark jackets. Women with umbrellas at their feet. Children asleep against shoulders. Ministers fanning themselves despite the storm. The air is electric.

Signs lean against pews.

I AM A MAN

Ralph stands at the pulpit.

He is good.

Strong.

Warm.

But the crowd is restless.

They respect Ralph.

They came for King.

Ralph senses it.

He looks toward Jesse near the side.

Jesse shrugs.

Ralph leans into the microphone.

RALPH

You all came through this storm
tonight.

The crowd responds.

RALPH

And I know you expected to hear
from Dr. King.

Applause rises.

Ralph waits.

RALPH

He is tired from travel. He is
resting so he can stand with you
in the days ahead.

A disappointed murmur rolls through the room.

Ralph sees it.

Feels it.

The workers need the man who named their dignity.

Ralph looks at Jesse again.

This time, Jesse nods.

Ralph covers the microphone and turns.

RALPH

Go get him.

Jesse slips out.

INT. LORRAINE MOTEL - ROOM 306 - NIGHT

A knock at the door.

King opens his eyes.

Another knock.

KING

Yes?

Jesse enters, rain on his shoulders.

JESSE

They need you.

King sits up.

JESSE

Ralph is speaking, but the room is waiting.

KING

I thought we agreed.

JESSE

We did.

A beat.

JESSE

The people did not.

King looks at his notes on the table.

Then at the window.

The storm has not weakened.

JESSE

You do not have to go.

King stands.

Jesse knows that answer too.

INT. CAR - MOVING - MEMPHIS - NIGHT

King rides through heavy rain with Jesse.

No entourage now.

Just wet streets and headlights.

King coughs into a handkerchief.

Jesse watches him.

JESSE

You got anything prepared?

King looks at the soaked city.

KING

Enough.

JESSE

Enough for you means more than
most men's plenty.

King smiles faintly.

Then grows quiet.

KING

Jesse.

JESSE

Yes, sir?

KING

If fear becomes too familiar, a
man may mistake it for wisdom.

Jesse looks at him.

KING

Do not let me do that.

JESSE

You afraid tonight?

King keeps looking out the window.

KING

Yes.

The honesty fills the car.

Jesse does not know what to say.

King saves him from needing to.

KING

Fear is not failure.

A beat.

KING

It is only a voice. It does not
get the only vote.

EXT. MASON TEMPLE - NIGHT

Rain pours from the roof.

Cars line the street.

People huddle beneath umbrellas outside, trying to hear
through the walls.

King's car pulls up.

A murmur moves through those outside.

Dr. King.

Dr. King is here.

INT. MASON TEMPLE - SIDE ENTRANCE - NIGHT

King enters with Jesse.

The sound hits him immediately.

A room full of waiting.

Ralph turns from the pulpit and sees him.

Relief.

Concern.

Love.

The crowd sees King.

The sanctuary rises.

Thunder outside.

Thunder inside.

Applause washes over him.

King moves toward the pulpit slowly.

Not because of drama.

Because he is tired.

Ralph embraces him at the steps.

RALPH

I thought you were resting.

KING

So did I.

RALPH

That was a beautiful arrangement
while it lasted.

King steps to the pulpit.

The applause continues.

He looks out.

Workers.

Families.

Signs.

Rain-soaked faces.

People who have been told they are less than men asking to
be seen as men.

The applause fades.

King grips the pulpit.

KING

I was told there was a storm
outside.

The crowd responds.

KING

But I see that the storm did not
keep you from coming.

A murmur.

KING

That tells me something.

A beat.

KING

People who have walked through the
weather of poverty are not easily
frightened by rain.

The room answers.

KING

People who have labored in heat,
cold, filth, and insult are not
easily stopped by thunder.

The workers rise in spirit.

KING

And people who know their own
dignity do not wait for a city
hall to confirm what God has
already written into their being.

Applause.

King coughs lightly, takes a sip of water.

He continues.

KING

I have come here tonight to say
that the struggle of the
sanitation workers is not a small
local matter.

A beat.

KING

It is a national question wearing
the clothes of Memphis.

The room quiets.

KING

It asks whether work will be
honored when the worker is Black.

A murmur.

KING

It asks whether wages will be fair
when the hands are poor.

Another response.

KING

It asks whether a city can depend
on men every morning and deny
their humanity every afternoon.

The workers answer.

NO.

KING

You carry signs that say what no
man should have to prove.

He looks at the signs.

KING

But since the city has forgotten,
you have reminded it.

A beat.

KING

And now the whole nation must
read.

Applause.

King's voice grows stronger, even as his body weakens.

KING

We are preparing to go to
Washington with poor people from
every corner of this country.

A beat.

KING

But Memphis has already taught
Washington the first lesson.

The crowd listens.

KING

The poor are not silent.

The workers rise.

KING

The poor are not invisible.

Stronger.

KING

The poor are not disposable.

Thunder outside.

King leans closer.

KING

And when the poor stand together,
no city, no legislature, no bank,
no landlord, no mayor, no
president can pretend forever that
their suffering is natural.

The crowd erupts.

Ralph watches from behind him.

He has seen King speak hundreds of times.

This feels different.

Not bigger.

Closer to the edge.

KING

Now, we must be disciplined.

The room settles.

KING

The last march broke, and many
will try to make that broken march
the whole story.

A beat.

KING

But broken glass is not the story.

The workers listen.

KING

The story is broken wages.

A murmur.

KING

Broken promises.

Yes.

KING

Broken bodies on unsafe trucks.

Yes.

KING

Broken respect from a city that
must now be made whole through
justice.

The room rises again.

KING

We will march again.

Applause.

KING

But we will march with order. We
will march with purpose. We will
march so clearly that no one can
steal your message and replace it
with smoke.

Henry stands near the front, sign in hand.

I AM A MAN.

KING

Do not let hatred write your
autobiography.

A beat.

KING

Do not let anger spend your future
in one careless hour.

Another beat.

KING

Hold your dignity like a lamp in a
dark street.

The crowd quiets.

The image settles over them.

KING

There are threats.

A hush.

KING

I know that.

He looks over the room.

KING

There have been threats for many
years.

Ralph lowers his eyes.

KING

Some men believe that if they
threaten the body, they can
silence the truth.

A beat.

KING

But truth is older than the body.

The room is still.

KING

I do not know what days are
appointed to me.

A few people shift.

KING

No man does.

He looks toward the signs.

KING

But I know this: whatever days
remain must be given to the work
that makes men and women stand
taller than fear intended.

Coretta's words echo in him.

None of us are promised the ending.

Only the faithfulness of the day we are given.

KING

I have seen enough of this
movement to know that the people
are stronger than any one leader.

Ralph looks up.

KING

I have seen children face hatred
and refuse to become hateful.

A beat.

KING

I have seen workers stand in rain
with empty pockets and full
dignity.

Another beat.

KING

I have seen mothers bury sons and
still teach the nation how to
pray.

The sanctuary is silent now.

KING

So if any man believes that
stopping one voice will stop this
movement, he has not understood
what God has already planted in
the people.

A low, emotional sound moves through the room.

KING

Memphis will rise.

The workers respond.

KING

The poor will rise.

Stronger.

KING

Justice will rise.

The crowd stands.

KING

And we will keep walking until
every man who carries a burden is
seen, every worker who serves is
respected, every child who hungers
is fed, and every city that has
profited from humiliation learns
the cost of dignity denied.

The room erupts.

King grips the pulpit.

His strength is nearly spent.

But the words keep coming.

KING

I may not know the road's final
turn.

A hush beneath the thunder.

KING

But I know the road is right.

A beat.

KING

And I know we are not walking it
alone.

The sanctuary breaks open.

Applause.

Tears.

Song.

Workers lift their signs.

I AM A MAN.

I AM A MAN.

I AM A MAN.

King steps back from the pulpit.

Ralph catches his arm discreetly.

Not because the crowd should see weakness.

Because friendship sees it first.

RALPH

You all right?

King breathes hard.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

But I am glad I came.

Ralph holds his arm.

RALPH

So are they.

INT. MASON TEMPLE - SIDE ROOM - LATER

The speech is over.

The roar of the sanctuary fades behind closed doors.

King enters with Ralph, Jesse, Andrew, Lawson, and Henry.

He sits immediately.

No one jokes.

Henry stands before him, hat in hand.

HENRY

Dr. King.

King looks up.

HENRY

That was for us.

KING

Yes.

HENRY

Not about us.

King understands the distinction.

KING

Yes.

Henry nods.

HENRY

We will march right this time.

KING

I know.

HENRY

You coming with us?

King holds his gaze.

KING

Yes.

Henry accepts that like a covenant.

He exits.

Jesse watches King.

JESSE

You scared them a little.

KING

Who?

JESSE

Everybody who loves you.

King looks down.

RALPH

You spoke like a man saying
goodbye without admitting it.

King looks at him.

A long silence.

KING

I spoke like a man who knows hello
is not guaranteed either.

No one answers.

Lawson looks toward the sanctuary.

LAWSON

The workers are stronger now.

KING

Good.

ANDREW

The press will carry this
differently.

KING

Maybe.

RALPH

You should sleep.

King nods.

For once, no argument.

EXT. MASON TEMPLE - NIGHT

The rain has softened.

People exit the church slowly, changed by what they heard.

Workers walk into the wet night holding their signs.

I AM A MAN.

The signs reflect in puddles.

INT. CAR - MOVING - MEMPHIS - NIGHT

King sits in the back with Ralph.

Jesse drives. Andrew rides in front.

No one speaks for a while.

Memphis passes by in wet neon and darkness.

Ralph finally turns.

RALPH

You really scared me tonight.

King looks at him.

KING

I scared myself a little.

RALPH

That is not comforting.

King smiles faintly.

Then he looks out the window.

KING

When I was stabbed in Harlem, the
doctors said if I had sneezed, I
would have died.

Ralph watches him.

KING

I have been living with that
sentence for ten years.

A beat.

KING

Tonight it felt less like a
warning and more like a reminder.

RALPH

Of what?

KING

That borrowed time is still time.

A beat.

KING

And it must be spent.

Ralph looks away, fighting emotion.

RALPH

Spend some of it sleeping.

King smiles.

KING

Yes, Reverend.

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - NIGHT

The car pulls in.

The motel glows under rain.

Quiet.

Ordinary.

Too ordinary for what history knows and the men do not.

King steps out.

Looks up at the balcony.

Room 306.

The storm rumbles in the distance now.

Fading.

INT. LORRAINE MOTEL - ROOM 306 - LATE NIGHT

King enters with Ralph.

Andrew and Jesse linger at the door.

RALPH
Breakfast in the morning?

ANDREW
And planning for the march.

JESSE
And maybe one hour where nobody
asks Dr. King to save the world
before noon.

King loosens his tie.

KING
Make it eleven-thirty.

They smile.

The men begin to leave.

Ralph pauses at the door.

RALPH
Martin.

King looks at him.

RALPH
You did good tonight.

King nods.

Softly:

KING
They were worth it.

Ralph exits.

The door closes.

King stands alone in the room.

He removes the folded paper from his Bible.

The names:

ECHOL COLE

ROBERT WALKER

LARRY PAYNE

Beneath them:

RETURN.

He looks at the word.

Then adds:

TOMORROW.

He sets the paper on the
nightstand.

Rain taps lightly at the window.

King sits on the edge of the bed.

Exhausted.

Alive.

For now.

FADE OUT.

INT. LORRAINE MOTEL - ROOM 306 - MORNING

Morning light slips through the curtains.

Not bright.

Soft.

King sits at the small table in shirtsleeves, reading notes
from the night before.

On the nightstand, the folded paper remains:

ECHOL COLE

ROBERT WALKER

LARRY PAYNE

RETURN

TOMORROW

SUPER: MEMPHIS - APRIL 4, 1968

Ralph sleeps in the other bed, mouth slightly open, one arm
hanging off the side.

King watches him a moment.

A smile.

The kind history forgets.

A KNOCK.

King rises carefully, trying not
to wake Ralph.

He opens the door.

Andrew stands outside with newspapers and coffee.

ANDREW

Morning.

KING

That depends on what you are
carrying.

Andrew holds up the newspapers.

ANDREW

Coffee to strengthen you.
Headlines to test whether it
worked.

King lets him in.

Andrew sets everything on the table.

Ralph stirs.

RALPH

If that is coffee, bring it to the
dying.

ANDREW

Good morning, Reverend Abernathy.

RALPH

Do not good morning me until I
have proof.

Andrew hands him a cup.

Ralph takes one sip.

RALPH

The resurrection begins.

King laughs softly.

Andrew spreads the papers.

Headlines about Mason Temple.

About the sanitation strike.

About the planned march.

Some generous.

Some suspicious.

None large enough.

King reads silently.

ANDREW

National coverage is better this morning.

RALPH

Better than "King March Turns Violent" is not a high mountain.

ANDREW

Still better.

King nods.

KING

And the workers?

ANDREW

Encouraged. Lawson says the room held after you left. They are serious about discipline.

RALPH

Court?

ANDREW

Waiting on word.

King takes that in.

The next march still suspended between law and risk.

KING

The city?

ANDREW

Nervous.

RALPH

Good.

Andrew looks at King.

ANDREW

You gave them their story back last night.

King looks down at the paper on the nightstand.

KING

No.

A beat.

KING

They took it back. I only reminded
them where they left it.

INT. LORRAINE MOTEL - ROOM 306 - LATER

The room has become a casual headquarters.

Papers. Coffee cups. Coats. Shoes. Cigarette smoke from
visitors. Open Bibles. Legal notes.

Ralph sits on the edge of the bed in a robe.

Andrew stands by the dresser.

Jesse Jackson leans near the door with a half-eaten piece
of toast.

James Lawson speaks quietly with King.

LAWSON

The men are ready to march again.
They want it clean. Disciplined.
No one stealing their signs this
time.

KING

Marshals?

LAWSON

More than before. Local churches
are helping.

ANDREW

If the court lifts the injunction,
we can move quickly.

RALPH

If.

Jesse points with his toast.

JESSE

The word "if" has ruined many a
breakfast.

King sits at the table, tying his shoe.

KING

That may be the deepest thing you
have said all week.

Jesse places a hand over his heart.

JESSE

I am growing spiritually.

Ralph looks at him.

RALPH

You are growing something.

The room laughs.

Briefly, they are young men.

Not hunted men.

Not burdened men.

Just men in a motel room, teasing one another because laughter is cheaper than medicine and sometimes stronger.

The phone RINGS.

The room quiets too quickly.

King answers.

KING

Hello.

His face changes.

Softens.

KING

Hello, Coretta.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - MORNING

Coretta stands in the kitchen, phone cord stretched as she watches one of the children pass through the hall.

CORETTA

You sound better.

KING

That is because you cannot see me.

CORETTA

Ralph said you were powerful last night.

King looks toward Ralph.

KING

Ralph says many questionable things.

RALPH

Tell her that was slander.

KING

He says that was slander.

Coretta smiles faintly.

CORETTA

The children want to know when you
are coming home.

King closes his eyes.

The question is simple.

The answer never is.

KING

After the march.

CORETTA

You said that.

A beat.

CORETTA

Say a day.

King looks at the papers.

The strike.

The march.

Washington.

The poor.

Memphis.

KING

Soon.

Coretta is silent.

KING

I know.

CORETTA

Do you?

KING

I do.

Another beat.

CORETTA

Martin, I am not asking the
movement when it is finished.

A beat.

CORETTA

I am asking my husband when he is
coming home.

The room seems to drift away from him.

KING

I will come home after this.

Coretta hears the promise.

She also hears its fragile edges.

CORETTA

Then I will hold you to that.

KING

Please do.

A child calls from the hall.

CORETTA

They love you.

KING

Tell them I love them more than
words can carry.

CORETTA

I will.

A beat.

CORETTA

And Martin?

KING

Yes?

CORETTA

Eat something today.

He smiles.

KING

That instruction has been issued
by higher authority.

CORETTA

Good.

They hang up.

King holds the receiver a moment before setting it down.

Ralph watches him.

RALPH

She ordered food, didn't she?

KING

Yes.

RALPH

The movement advances.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY - FLASHBACK

YOUNG MARTIN, 11, helps King Sr. after service.

The sanctuary is nearly empty.

Sunlight cuts through stained glass and lands in colored pieces across the pews.

Young Martin gathers hymnals.

King Sr. straightens chairs near the front.

The room has that holy quiet that comes after song.

YOUNG MARTIN

Daddy?

KING SR.

Yes?

YOUNG MARTIN

How do you know if a sermon
worked?

King Sr. looks at him.

KING SR.

Worked?

YOUNG MARTIN

If people listened.

King Sr. smiles.

KING SR.

People listen many ways.

YOUNG MARTIN

But how do you know it changed
them?

King Sr. considers the question carefully.

He sits on the front pew.

KING SR.

You do not always get to know.

Young Martin frowns.

That answer is unsatisfying.

YOUNG MARTIN

Then why preach it?

King Sr. pats the pew beside him.

Young Martin sits.

KING SR.
Because truth is not a salesman
waiting to count receipts.

A beat.

KING SR.
A man tells it because it is true.

Young Martin looks toward the pulpit.

KING SR.
Sometimes the word falls on a
heart ready for it. Sometimes it
falls on stone. Sometimes it waits
in a man for years before it wakes
up and starts walking.

Young Martin listens.

KING SR.
You may never see the harvest.

A beat.

KING SR.
That does not excuse you from
planting.

Young Martin looks up at his father.

YOUNG MARTIN
What if you plant and nothing
grows?

King Sr. looks toward the pulpit.

KING SR.
Then you plant again.

A beat.

KING SR.
And trust that God keeps better
records than men.

INT. LORRAINE MOTEL - ROOM 306 - DAY

King sits at the table.

Older now.

The memory fades.

The phone rings again.

Andrew answers this time.

ANDREW

Room 306.

He listens.

His face changes.

ANDREW

Say that again.

Everyone looks at him.

Andrew covers the receiver.

ANDREW

Court ruled.

Ralph stands.

RALPH

And?

Andrew smiles.

ANDREW

We can march.

The room exhales.

Lawson closes his eyes.

LAWSON

Thank God.

King stands slowly.

KING

With conditions?

ANDREW

Yes. Route approval. Discipline
requirements. Coordination.

DOROTHY enters, already hearing the news from the hallway.

DOROTHY

Conditions we can meet?

ANDREW

Yes.

DOROTHY

Then stop smiling and start
listing them.

Ralph points at her.

RALPH

There she is. The angel of
practical deliverance.

DOROTHY

You will thank me when no one gets
lost, trampled, arrested by
accident, or dehydrated.

KING

We thank you now.

DOROTHY

Good. Then obey faster.

She begins distributing papers.

DOROTHY

We need marshal confirmations.
Worker formation at front. Clergy
behind. Youth groups assigned.
Medical at intervals. No loose
flank. No unscreened signs. No
sticks.

Jesse raises a hand.

JESSE

What about enthusiasm?

DOROTHY

Allowed if it follows
instructions.

The room returns to motion.

Organizing.

Calling.

Writing.

The machinery of disciplined hope.

INT. LORRAINE MOTEL - ROOM 306 - AFTERNOON

The pace has slowed.

Not stopped.

Slowed because the body eventually demands a vote.

King sits on the bed, shoes off, reading a note from a
local worker.

Ralph lies on the other bed, still dressed, eyes closed.

Andrew sleeps in a chair, head tilted back.

Jesse sits by the window, flipping through a magazine.

Dorothy works at the table because Dorothy does not believe in naps during civilization.

King looks at her.

KING

Dorothy.

DOROTHY

No.

KING

I have not asked anything yet.

DOROTHY

Your tone asks before your words.

KING

Rest.

She looks up.

DOROTHY

Are you speaking to me or
practicing self-deception aloud?

Ralph opens one eye.

RALPH

She has you there.

King smiles.

DOROTHY

I will rest when the marshal list
is done.

KING

And after that?

DOROTHY

Then I will discover another
reason not to.

King nods.

Respectful.

Familiar.

A KNOCK at the door.

Rev. Samuel Kyles enters, dressed neatly, warm and
insistent.

KYLES

Gentlemen, dinner is not a
theological abstraction. My wife
has cooked, and I intend to
deliver you alive and on time.

Ralph sits up.

RALPH

Finally, a minister with sound
doctrine.

Kyles looks at King.

KYLES

Martin, you ready?

King looks at his shirt, then at the room.

KING

I need to dress.

KYLES

You need to hurry.

Jesse points at King's open collar.

JESSE

He is trying to decide whether
punctuality is part of
righteousness.

KING

It is not.

KYLES

My wife disagrees.

That settles it.

King rises.

INT. LORRAINE MOTEL - ROOM 306 - EARLY EVENING

The room prepares to leave.

King stands before the mirror, fixing his collar.

Ralph adjusts his own tie.

Jesse stands nearby in a sweater, looking pleased with
himself.

King glances over.

KING

Jesse, are you attending dinner or
auditioning for a jazz club?

JESSE

This is style, Doctor.

RALPH

It is certainly a choice.

Andrew enters with last-minute notes.

ANDREW

Weather may clear for tomorrow.

KING

Good.

ANDREW

Workers are gathering tonight to
continue training.

KING

Better.

Kyles opens the door.

KYLES

Now. Before the food requires
resurrection.

King picks up his coat.

He pauses at the nightstand.

The folded paper.

He places it inside his Bible.

Ralph notices.

RALPH

You bringing them with you?

King looks at him.

KING

Yes.

No one asks who.

They know.

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - BALCONY - EARLY EVENING

The door to Room 306 opens.

King steps out onto the balcony.

The storm has passed.

The air is damp, cool, washed clean in the way evening
sometimes lies.

Below, cars idle.
People move in the courtyard.
A few aides call to one another.
The neon sign glows nearby.

LORRAINE MOTEL.

King leans lightly against the
railing.

For a moment, he breathes.
Just breathes.
No microphone.
No pulpit.
No crowd.
Ralph steps out behind him.

RALPH

You coming?

KING

In a minute.

Kyles appears in the doorway.

KYLES

I am going downstairs. If my wife
asks, I told you twice.

KING

Tell her I heard you once and
feared you both times.

Kyles laughs and heads down the stairs.

Across the courtyard, BEN BRANCH, musician, stands near a
car with others.

King spots him.

KING

Ben!

Ben looks up.

BEN BRANCH

Yes, sir?

KING

Tonight, when you play, give them
the hymn that carries tired souls.

Ben nods.

BEN BRANCH

I know the one.

KING

And play it with everything you
have.

BEN BRANCH

I will.

King smiles.

The courtyard moves in ordinary rhythms.

A car door closes.

Someone laughs.

Someone calls for keys.

Jesse steps below, looking up.

JESSE

Dr. King, we are waiting on you.

KING

I am told waiting builds
character.

JESSE

Then Memphis is about to become
holy.

Ralph laughs from behind King.

Andrew walks out of the room holding papers.

ANDREW

Martin, tomorrow's order of march-
-

KING

Tomorrow can wait until after
dinner.

Andrew looks pleasantly shocked.

ANDREW

I want witnesses. He said tomorrow
can wait.

King turns slightly toward him.

KING

Do not build a theology around one
sentence.

A flash of light catches King's eye.

Not a camera.

Not anything clear.

Just evening reflecting off something somewhere beyond the motel.

For half a second, he looks past the courtyard.

Across the street.

The world seems to hold its breath.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Martin sits beside King Sr. in the empty sanctuary.

KING SR.

You may never see the harvest.

A beat.

KING SR.

That does not excuse you from
planting.

Young Martin looks toward the pulpit.

YOUNG MARTIN

And if the road ends before you
finish?

King Sr. studies his son.

A question too large for a boy.

KING SR.

Then let them find you faithful on
the road.

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - BALCONY - EARLY EVENING

King stands on the balcony.

Older now.

Faithful on the road.

A single SHOT cracks through the evening.

The sound splits the world.

King falls.

Ralph turns.

Everything slows.

ANDREW

Martin!

Papers scatter from Andrew's hands.

Below, Jesse looks up, frozen.

Then chaos.

Ralph drops to King's side.

RALPH

Martin!

Kyles runs back up the stairs.

People scream from the courtyard.

BEN BRANCH

Oh God!

Andrew rushes to the railing, shouting for help.

ANDREW

Call an ambulance!

Jesse points, panicked, toward the direction of the shot.

Voices overlap.

Get down!

Call somebody!

Where did it come from?

Help him!

Ralph kneels beside King, shaking, desperate, gentle.

RALPH

Martin. Stay with me.

King does not answer.

His eyes are open.

The evening sky above him is pale and endless.

Ralph presses a towel near the wound with trembling hands.

RALPH

Stay with me.

Kyles reaches them, horrified.

KYLES

Dear Lord.

Andrew returns to King's side.

His hands hover, not knowing where to place themselves in a moment too large for hands.

Below, workers, aides, motel guests, and friends gather in panic.

The neon sign buzzes.

The world keeps making ordinary sounds.

That is the cruelty.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - SANCTUARY - FLASHBACK

Young Martin sits in the empty pew.

Sunlight through stained glass.

King Sr.'s hand on his shoulder.

KING SR.

Trust that God keeps better
records than men.

Young Martin looks toward the pulpit.

The colored light shifts across his face.

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - BALCONY - EARLY EVENING

Ralph bends over King.

RALPH

Martin.

A siren begins somewhere far away.

Too far.

Andrew stands, stunned, tears on his face.

Jesse grips the railing below.

Kyles prays under his breath.

Ben Branch stands in the courtyard, unable to move.

The folded paper has fallen from King's Bible.

It lies near the balcony door.

ECHOL COLE

ROBERT WALKER

LARRY PAYNE

RETURN

TOMORROW

The wind lifts one edge.

It does not blow away.

The siren grows louder.

Ralph holds King's hand.

RALPH

I am here.

The camera does not move to the gunman.

It stays with the men who loved him.

The men who cannot save him.

The motel balcony becomes a pulpit no one asked for.

The courtyard becomes a congregation of shock.

The road has turned.

But it has not ended.

FADE OUT.

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - BALCONY - EARLY EVENING

Chaos.

Not the loud kind at first.

The stunned kind.

The world has not yet learned how to scream.

Ralph kneels beside King, pressing a towel where no towel can do enough.

Andrew stands at the railing, pointing across the street with a shaking hand.

Jesse is below in the courtyard, frozen between rage and disbelief.

Kyles rushes back up the stairs.

KYLES

Ambulance is coming!

RALPH

Martin.

Ralph holds King's hand.

RALPH

Martin, hear me.

King does not answer.

His eyes are open, fixed upward.

Not afraid.

Not peaceful.

Beyond those simple words.
A motel guest weeps near the staircase.
Someone shouts from below.

VOICE

Where did it come from?

Another voice:

VOICE

Get down!

But no one near King gets down.
Love makes terrible decisions quickly.
Andrew drops beside Ralph.

ANDREW

Martin.

He does not know what else to say.
So he says the name again.

ANDREW

Martin.

The folded paper lies near the balcony door.
ECHOL COLE
ROBERT WALKER
LARRY PAYNE
RETURN

TOMORROW

The wind lifts one corner.

Ralph sees it.
For a split second, his eyes catch on the word:

TOMORROW.

Then the sirens grow louder.

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

An ambulance pulls in hard.
Paramedics rush out with a stretcher.
Police cars arrive behind them.
Too late to prevent.
Fast enough to crowd.

A PARAMEDIC reaches the balcony.

PARAMEDIC

Move back. Give us room.

No one wants to.

Everyone must.

Ralph releases King's hand only because a paramedic physically needs the space.

RALPH

Be careful with him.

The paramedic looks at him.

He knows who this is.

PARAMEDIC

Yes, sir.

They work quickly.

Efficiently.

Not coldly.

But the efficiency feels obscene against the size of the moment.

King is lifted onto the stretcher.

Ralph follows close.

ANDREW

I'm coming.

PARAMEDIC

Only one.

RALPH

I go.

No one challenges him.

Jesse stands in the courtyard as the stretcher is carried down.

His face is wet.

Rain from earlier.

Tears now.

Hard to tell.

King is loaded into the ambulance.

Ralph climbs in.

The doors slam shut.

The ambulance pulls away.
Sirens scream.

EXT. MEMPHIS STREET - MOVING - EVENING

The ambulance races through Memphis.
Lights flash against storefronts.
People stop on sidewalks.
Some do not yet know.
Some know only enough to fear.

INT. AMBULANCE - MOVING - EVENING

Paramedics work over King.
Ralph sits pressed against the side wall, watching.
Useless.
Prayerful.
Destroyed.
A paramedic speaks in clipped medical language.
The words are urgent but distant.
Ralph hears none of it.
He sees King's hand.
The hand that held microphones.
Pens.
Children.
Coretta.
Jail bars.
Pulpits.
He reaches for it.
A paramedic almost stops him.
Then does not.
Ralph holds King's hand.

RALPH

You remember Montgomery?

The paramedics continue working.
Ralph speaks through tears.

RALPH

You remember that first night? How
you looked like a boy wearing a
storm too large for him?

A beat.

RALPH

You carried it anyway.

He grips King's hand.

RALPH

You carried so much.

The siren wails.

RALPH

You hear me?

No answer.

RALPH

You carried enough, Martin.

The ambulance tears through the street.

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - EVENING

Coretta stands in the kitchen.

A pot simmers on the stove.

One of the children laughs down the hall.

Ordinary life, fragile as glass.

The phone RINGS.

Coretta looks at it.

Something in her body knows before her hand reaches the
receiver.

She answers.

CORETTA

Hello?

She listens.

Her face changes slowly.

Not shock.

Recognition of the thing she has feared for years finally
finding the door.

CORETTA

Where?

A beat.

CORETTA

How bad?

She grips the counter.

The kitchen seems to move beneath her.

CORETTA

Is he alive?

She closes her eyes.

The answer is not enough.

Or too much.

CORETTA

I am coming.

She hangs up.

For a moment, she stands perfectly still.

The children continue laughing down the hall.

That sound nearly breaks her.

She places both hands on the counter and breathes.

Once.

Twice.

Then she turns off the stove.

INT. KING HOME - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Coretta walks down the hall.

The children look up.

Yolanda senses something first.

YOLANDA

Mama?

Coretta kneels.

Not because she has strength.

Because the children are lower to the ground and truth must meet them there.

CORETTA

Your father has been hurt.

The laughter dies.

MARTIN III

Bad?

Coretta looks at him.

She refuses to lie.

CORETTA

Yes.

Yolanda's eyes fill.

YOLANDA

Is he coming home?

The question strikes the room.

Coretta gathers the children into her arms.

CORETTA

We are going to pray.

The children hold her.

Coretta closes her eyes.

But no words come.

Only breath.

Only the effort not to fall apart before they do.

INT. ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL - MEMPHIS - EVENING

Hospital doors burst open.

The stretcher rolls in fast.

Doctors and nurses converge.

Ralph hurries beside them until a nurse blocks him.

NURSE

Sir, you have to wait here.

RALPH

I am his brother.

Not by blood.

No one argues.

But they still hold him back.

The doors swing shut.

Ralph stands in the hallway.

Alone now.

Surrounded by people.

Andrew arrives moments later with Jesse, Kyles, and Lawson.

ANDREW

Where is he?

Ralph points to the doors.

He cannot speak.

Jesse paces.

JESSE

No. No, no, no.

Lawson stands still, eyes closed, lips moving in prayer.

Kyles sits in a chair because his legs have given him no choice.

Andrew looks down at his hands.

There is blood on his cuff.

He stares at it like it belongs to another man.

INT. ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL - WAITING AREA - LATER

Time has become cruel.

Every clock moves too slowly and too quickly.

Phones ring in distant offices.

Reporters gather outside the hospital entrance.

Police move through hallways.

Friends arrive.

Aides whisper.

No one has enough information.

Everyone has too much fear.

Ralph sits with his elbows on his knees.

Andrew stands against a wall.

Jesse stares through a window at nothing.

Lawson holds a Bible but does not open it.

Dorothy enters, breathless.

She looks at their faces.

DOROTHY

Where is he?

Andrew points.

Dorothy looks toward the closed doors.

She swallows.

Then immediately begins doing what grief has not yet permitted.

DOROTHY
Who called Coretta?

ANDREW
She knows.

DOROTHY
Atlanta staff?

ANDREW
Working it.

DOROTHY
Workers?

No answer.

Dorothy's voice breaks just slightly.

DOROTHY
The workers need to hear from us
before they hear from a radio.

Lawson nods.

LAWSON
I'll call the church.

Dorothy looks toward the doors.

For one second, she is not organizing.

She is only a woman who loves her friend.

Then she pulls herself back.

DOROTHY
No rumors. No speeches yet. No one
speaks for him by trying to sound
like him.

Andrew nods.

Jesse looks at her.

JESSE
How are you doing that?

DOROTHY
Badly.

A beat.

DOROTHY
But doing it.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Martin, 10, sits beside Alberta in an empty pew.

The church is quiet.

A funeral wreath rests near the pulpit from a service earlier that day.

Young Martin looks at it.

YOUNG MARTIN

Mama?

ALBERTA

Yes?

YOUNG MARTIN

Where does a voice go when someone dies?

Alberta looks at him.

The question stops her.

YOUNG MARTIN

Reverend Thomas preached every Sunday. Now he is gone.

A beat.

YOUNG MARTIN

So where did his voice go?

Alberta considers.

Then answers with care.

ALBERTA

Some of it goes back to God.

Young Martin listens.

ALBERTA

Some of it stays in the people who heard him.

YOUNG MARTIN

How?

ALBERTA

When they remember what he taught.

A beat.

ALBERTA

When they do what was right because his voice helped them know right from wrong.

Young Martin looks at the pulpit.

YOUNG MARTIN

So a voice can keep working?

Alberta smiles sadly.

ALBERTA

If it told the truth.

Young Martin looks at the wreath.

YOUNG MARTIN

And if people forget?

Alberta places her hand over his.

ALBERTA

Then those who remember must
become louder.

INT. ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL - WAITING AREA - EVENING

Dorothy stands in the hospital hallway.

Older now.

Remembering without knowing why.

The closed doors open.

A DOCTOR steps out.

The hallway goes still.

Every person stands.

The doctor looks at Ralph first.

Then the others.

His face has already delivered the news.

DOCTOR

I am sorry.

No one moves.

The words do not enter all at once.

They strike and wait.

DOCTOR

Dr. King is gone.

A wall clock reads shortly after seven.

Ralph's knees buckle.

Andrew catches him.

Jesse turns away, both hands over his head.

Lawson lowers his face into his Bible.

Kyles whispers something that may be a prayer or may be nothing language can hold.

Dorothy stands perfectly still.

Too still.

Her eyes fill.

But the tears do not fall yet.

Not because she is not broken.

Because there are still calls to make.

RALPH

No.

The word is small.

Childlike.

RALPH

No.

Andrew holds him.

Ralph begins to sob.

Not publicly.

Not privately.

Somewhere beyond both.

INT. ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL - SMALL OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Ralph sits beside a desk.

A phone is placed before him.

He cannot pick it up.

Andrew stands nearby.

ANDREW

Ralph.

Ralph shakes his head.

ANDREW

Coretta needs to hear from one of us.

Ralph closes his eyes.

Then reaches for the phone.

His hand trembles so badly he can barely dial.

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - EVENING

Coretta stands by the phone.

She has not moved far from it.

The children sit together in the next room, watched by a family friend.

The phone RINGS.

Coretta answers on the first ring.

CORETTA

Yes?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL - SMALL OFFICE - EVENING

Ralph holds the receiver.

He cannot speak.

Coretta hears his breathing.

That is enough.

CORETTA

Ralph?

Ralph breaks.

RALPH

Coretta.

Her face changes.

Everything inside her has been preparing.

Nothing is prepared.

RALPH

He is gone.

Coretta closes her eyes.

Her free hand reaches for the wall.

Not dramatically.

Simply because the world has tilted.

RALPH

I am sorry.

Coretta does not answer.

RALPH

Coretta?

She breathes in.

A sound of pain almost escapes.
She holds it back.
Not forever.
Only for the children.

CORETTA

Was he alone?

Ralph wipes his face.

RALPH

No.

A beat.

RALPH

I was with him.

Coretta nods through tears.

CORETTA

Thank you.

RALPH

I could not--

CORETTA

Ralph.

A beat.

CORETTA

Thank you.

Ralph cannot speak.

Coretta's voice becomes steadier.

Not healed.

Tasked.

CORETTA

I am coming to Memphis.

RALPH

Yes.

CORETTA

And Ralph?

RALPH

Yes?

CORETTA

Take care of him until I get
there.

Ralph closes his eyes.

RALPH

I will.

They hang up.

Coretta stands with the phone in her hand.

Then slowly places it back.

INT. KING HOME - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Coretta enters.

The children look up.

They see her face.

They know.

Yolanda starts crying before anyone speaks.

Coretta kneels before them.

CORETTA

Your father is gone.

The words enter the room and change every object in it.

The couch.

The lamps.

The toys.

The family photographs.

Nothing will ever be ordinary in the same way.

The children collapse into her.

Coretta holds them.

Now she lets the sound come.

Not all of it.

No human body could survive all of it at once.

But enough.

Enough for the children to know their mother is broken with them.

INT. MEMPHIS CHURCH - NIGHT

Sanitation workers sit in stunned silence.

Henry stands near the front, holding his sign.

I AM A MAN.

Lawson stands before them.

His voice is low.

LAWSON

Dr. King has died.

The room reacts like a body struck.

A woman cries out.

A worker drops his head into his hands.

Another man stands and walks toward the wall, unable to remain seated.

Henry grips his sign tighter.

LAWSON

He came here because he believed
your fight was the nation's fight.

A worker near the back speaks through tears.

WORKER

What we do now?

No one answers.

Then Henry turns.

His face is wet.

HENRY

We march.

The workers look at him.

HENRY

Not tonight.

A beat.

HENRY

Not wild. Not broken. Not giving
them what they expect.

He lifts the sign.

I AM A MAN.

HENRY

We march like men who know he died
standing with us.

The room absorbs it.

Pain begins to take shape.

Not peace.

Purpose.

INT. ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ralph, Andrew, Jesse, Dorothy, Lawson, and Kyles stand together.

No one knows where to put their hands.

Reporters wait outside.

America waits outside.

History waits outside.

Dorothy looks at the men.

DOROTHY

We need a statement.

Jesse stares at her.

JESSE

Now?

DOROTHY

Yes.

A beat.

DOROTHY

Before someone else gives the
world a smaller version of him.

Andrew nods weakly.

RALPH

I cannot.

DOROTHY

You do not have to yet.

She looks at Lawson.

DOROTHY

The workers first. Then Atlanta.
Then press.

Jesse wipes his face.

JESSE

What do we say?

Dorothy looks down the hall where King was taken.

Her voice is quiet.

DOROTHY

We say he came for workers who
deserved dignity.

A beat.

DOROTHY

We say hatred killed the man but
not the cause.

Another beat.

DOROTHY

We say the march continues.

Ralph looks at her.

RALPH

Can we say that?

Dorothy's face trembles now.

Just once.

DOROTHY

We have to.

EXT. ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Reporters crowd beneath harsh lights.

Police keep them back.

Cameras wait.

Microphones wait.

The hospital doors open.

Ralph steps out with Andrew, Jesse, Dorothy, Lawson, and
Kyles.

Ralph is shattered.

But standing.

The reporters surge.

REPORTER #1

Reverend Abernathy!

REPORTER #2

Is Dr. King dead?

REPORTER #3

Who shot him?

REPORTER #4

What happens now?

The questions hit like stones.

Ralph grips the podium someone has hastily placed near the
entrance.

For a moment, he cannot speak.

Andrew leans close.

ANDREW

Take your time.

Ralph looks at the cameras.

Then beyond them.

Somewhere out there, Coretta knows.

The children know.

Memphis knows.

Soon the world will.

RALPH

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has
been taken from us tonight.

The reporters still.

RALPH

He came to Memphis to stand with
working men who asked only to be
treated as men.

His voice breaks.

He steadies it.

RALPH

He gave his life in the service of
justice, peace, and human dignity.

A beat.

RALPH

We ask the nation not to answer
this evil with more evil.

The words cost him.

RALPH

We ask that those who loved him
continue the work he gave his life
to advance.

Dorothy closes her eyes.

RALPH

The movement does not end tonight.

A beat.

RALPH
The road continues.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - SANCTUARY - FLASHBACK

Young Martin sits beside Alberta.

YOUNG MARTIN
So a voice can keep working?

ALBERTA
If it told the truth.

EXT. ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Ralph stands before the cameras.

Broken.

Faithful.

RALPH
And his voice will keep working.
The cameras roll.
The words leave Memphis.

EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - NIGHT - MONTAGE

- A radio in a kitchen crackles with the news. A woman drops a dish into the sink.
- Men in a barbershop stand frozen around a small television.
- A church congregation falls to its knees.
- In Chicago, Eddie hears the news on a street corner. Mrs. Washington covers her mouth. Eddie looks toward the tenement walls.
- In Mississippi, Mrs. Hamer holds Samuel close as a battery radio plays.
- In Selma, Mrs. Jackson sits on her porch, eyes closed.
- In Atlanta, Ebenezer Baptist Church fills with people who do not know where else to take grief.
- In Memphis, sanitation workers lift their signs again.

I AM A MAN.
- At the Lorraine Motel, police
lights flash against the balcony.

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - BALCONY - NIGHT

The balcony is empty now.
A towel remains near the railing.
The neon sign buzzes.
Room 306 is still lit.
The folded paper is gone.
The road continues.

FADE OUT.

EXT. MEMPHIS AIRPORT - DAY

A plane taxis beneath a gray sky.
No rain now.
Just heaviness.
The aircraft door opens.
Coretta steps out.
She wears black.
Not ceremonial black.
New black.
The kind the body has not learned to carry yet.
Behind her are the children, surrounded by family, aides,
and protection.
Yolanda holds herself too still.
Martin III looks older than he did yesterday.
Dexter clings to a relative's hand.
Bernice is too young to understand the size of what has
happened, but old enough to feel the world around her
breaking.
Ralph waits on the tarmac with Andrew, Dorothy, Jesse,
Lawson, and Kyles.
Ralph looks as though he has not slept since the shot.
Coretta descends the stairs.
Ralph steps forward.
For one moment, neither of them speaks.
Then Coretta embraces him.
Ralph breaks in her arms.

RALPH

I'm sorry.

CORETTA

I know.

RALPH

I was with him.

CORETTA

I know.

She holds him tighter.

CORETTA

Thank you for not letting him be
alone.

Ralph cannot answer.

Dorothy stands nearby, eyes red, hands full of papers
because grief has not relieved her of duty.

Coretta sees her.

DOROTHY

Mrs. King.

Dorothy starts to say more.

Cannot.

Coretta takes her hand.

CORETTA

Dorothy.

That is enough.

INT. CAR - MOVING - MEMPHIS - DAY

Coretta rides in silence.

The children sit close.

Ralph sits in front beside the driver.

Andrew and Dorothy follow in another car.

Memphis passes by outside.

People stand on sidewalks as the car moves through the
city.

Some remove hats.

Some cry openly.

Some simply stare, ashamed that history has driven past
their street in mourning clothes.

Yolanda looks out the window.

YOLANDA

Are all those people sad for
Daddy?

Coretta turns to her.

CORETTA

Yes.

YOLANDA

Did they know him?

Coretta looks out at the faces.

CORETTA

Some did.

A beat.

CORETTA

Some knew what he stood for.

Martin III looks down at his hands.

MARTIN III

Is that the same?

Coretta takes time.

CORETTA

Not exactly.

A beat.

CORETTA

But today it may be all they have.

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - DAY

The motel is surrounded.

Police. Reporters. Onlookers. Mourners. Flowers already
gathering. Handwritten notes. People weeping quietly by the
curb.

The balcony outside Room 306 is visible above them.

Empty.

Too visible.

The car pulls in.

Reporters surge, then are held back.

Coretta steps out.

The crowd quiets.

Not because anyone tells them.
Because her presence demands it.
She looks up.
The balcony.
Room 306.
The railing.
The spot where yesterday still stands.
For a moment, her face reveals the private cost beneath
public dignity.
The children stand close.
Yolanda follows her mother's eyes upward.

YOLANDA

Is that where?

Coretta reaches for her hand.

CORETTA

Yes.

Yolanda looks away.
Coretta does not.
She walks slowly toward the stairs.
Ralph starts to follow.
Coretta turns slightly.

CORETTA

Alone first.

Ralph stops.
He nods.

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - STAIRS / BALCONY - DAY

Coretta climbs the stairs.
Each step is ordinary.
Each step is impossible.
She reaches the balcony.
The door to Room 306 is closed.
The railing is there.
The air is still.
She stands where he stood.

The city noise falls away.
She places one hand on the railing.
Her wedding ring catches the light.

INT. BOSTON APARTMENT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Young Coretta sits at a small piano in a modest apartment.
Young King sits nearby with books and papers spread around him.

They are younger.

Less tired.

But already serious.

Coretta finishes a piece of music.

The last note lingers.

YOUNG KING

You make sorrow sound disciplined.

She turns from the piano.

YOUNG CORETTA

That may be the strangest
compliment I have ever received.

YOUNG KING

It was intended as admiration.

YOUNG CORETTA

Then I will accept it as half
successful.

He smiles.

She joins him at the table.

YOUNG CORETTA

You are writing again?

YOUNG KING

Thinking.

YOUNG CORETTA

On paper?

YOUNG KING

It helps me believe I am making
progress.

She looks at the pages.

YOUNG CORETTA

You think too much for a man who
claims faith.

YOUNG KING

Faith gives a man better
questions.

She sits across from him.

YOUNG CORETTA

Then here is one.

He looks up.

YOUNG CORETTA

What happens to the work if
something happens to you?

The question unsettles him.

YOUNG KING

Coretta.

YOUNG CORETTA

No. Answer it.

He leans back.

YOUNG KING

The work is not mine alone.

YOUNG CORETTA

That is a sermon.

A beat.

YOUNG CORETTA

I asked a husband.

Young King looks at her.

The room grows quiet.

YOUNG KING

If something happened to me, I
would hope the work would
continue.

YOUNG CORETTA

Hope is not a plan.

He almost smiles.

She does not.

YOUNG CORETTA

People will look for someone to
tell them what your life meant.

A beat.

YOUNG CORETTA

And some will try to make it
smaller so they can survive it
more comfortably.

Young King studies her.

YOUNG CORETTA

Do not leave that to them.

YOUNG KING

To whom should I leave it?

She holds his gaze.

YOUNG CORETTA

To those who know the truth.

A beat.

YOUNG KING

And you?

YOUNG CORETTA

I intend to be one of them.

Young King reaches for her hand.

YOUNG KING

You are more than one of them.

She lets him take her hand.

YOUNG CORETTA

Then do not make me a widow to a
small dream.

He looks down.

The words strike deep.

YOUNG CORETTA

If this work costs us, let it at
least be large enough to deserve
the cost.

INT. LORRAINE MOTEL - BALCONY - DAY

Coretta stands at the railing.

Older now.

Widowed to a dream too large to bury.
A tear falls.
Only one.
Then she wipes it away.
Not because grief is gone.
Because others are waiting for it to become guidance.
Ralph appears at the top of the stairs but keeps distance.

RALPH

Coretta?

She turns.

RALPH

The workers are gathering at Mason
Temple.

A beat.

RALPH

They want to know what happens
now.

Coretta looks once more at the railing.
Then toward the city.

CORETTA

We go to them.

INT. MASON TEMPLE - DAY

The sanctuary is full again.
But it feels different now.
No thunder.
No roar.
Just grief sitting shoulder to shoulder with disbelief.
Sanitation workers fill the pews.
Their signs rest in their laps.

I AM A MAN.

Some signs are bent from the
broken march.

Some are new.
Henry sits near the front.
Lawson stands near the pulpit.

Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, Jesse, and other leaders enter quietly.

Then Coretta enters with the children.

The room rises.

Not in applause.

In respect.

A sound moves through them.

Soft crying.

Whispers.

Prayer.

Coretta walks to the front.

The children sit with family nearby.

Henry stands as she passes.

He cannot speak.

He lifts his sign slightly.

I AM A MAN.

Coretta stops before him.

CORETTA

He believed you.

Henry's face breaks.

HENRY

We believed him too.

Coretta nods.

She steps to the pulpit.

The room waits.

CORETTA

My husband came to Memphis because
he believed the struggle of the
sanitation workers was not
separate from the struggle for
justice.

Her voice is steady.

Not untouched.

Steady.

CORETTA

He came because men who work
should be respected. Because
families should not be asked to
live on wages that deny their
humanity. Because a city has no
right to depend on a worker's
hands while refusing to see his
face.

The workers listen.

CORETTA

He did not come here to die.

The room tightens.

CORETTA

He came here to stand with the
living.

A beat.

CORETTA

So we must not allow his death to
become an excuse for the nation to
stop looking at why he came.

Dorothy lowers her head.

Not in sorrow.

In recognition.

CORETTA

The march must continue.

A murmur rises.

CORETTA

Not in rage.

The room quiets.

CORETTA

Not in revenge.

A beat.

CORETTA

Not in a way that lets the city
forget the workers and speak only
of disorder.

She looks across the sanctuary.

CORETTA

It must continue in discipline, in
dignity, and in a silence so
strong that no one can misquote
it.

Henry stands taller.

CORETTA

If you will walk, I will walk with
you.

The room is still.

Then one worker stands.

Then another.

Then Henry.

Soon the sanctuary is on its feet.

Not cheering.

Committing.

EXT. MEMPHIS STREET - DAY

A line forms.

Thousands.

Sanitation workers at the front.

Coretta among them.

The children walk nearby, surrounded and protected.

Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, Jesse, Lawson, Kyles, clergy, local
leaders, and families take their places.

Signs rise.

I AM A MAN.

But no chanting.

No singing yet.

Only footsteps.

SUPER: MEMPHIS - APRIL 8, 1968

The march begins.

Silent.

The silence is not empty.

It is full of everything words cannot carry.

EXT. MEMPHIS STREET - CONTINUOUS

The march moves through the city.
People line the sidewalks.
Some weep.
Some remove hats.
Some kneel.
Police stand rigidly, uncertain what to do with grief that
refuses to become chaos.
Reporters walk backward, cameras up.
No one has to tell them this is history.
They are afraid to breathe too loudly.
Coretta walks with her head high.
Yolanda walks beside her, holding her hand.
Martin III walks on the other side, jaw tight.
Ralph walks just behind them.
His grief is visible, but he stays upright.
Dorothy moves along the edge of the march.
Even now.
Especially now.

DOROTHY

Keep the line close. Watch the
children. No pushing.

Andrew walks beside Henry.

Henry grips his sign.

ANDREW

You all right?

HENRY

No.

Andrew nods.

HENRY

But I am walking.

ANDREW

That counts.

Henry looks forward at Coretta.

HENRY

It better.

EXT. MEMPHIS STREET - LATER

The silent march continues.

A white woman watches from a storefront doorway, hand over her mouth.

A Black mother holds her son as the signs pass.

I AM A MAN.

The boy reads them.

BOY

Mama, why they keep saying that?

The mother looks at Coretta passing.

MOTHER

Because some people need reminding.

The boy watches the workers.

BOY

Do I have to say it too?

The mother kneels.

MOTHER

No, baby.

A beat.

MOTHER

But you may have to live like you know it.

The march passes.

EXT. MEMPHIS CITY HALL - DAY

The march gathers near the seat of city power.

Still silent.

The workers stand in rows.

Coretta steps forward.

Ralph and Lawson near her.

Henry stands behind them.

The signs rise again.

I AM A MAN.

Coretta looks at city hall.

Then at the workers.

CORETTA

This is why he came.

The words are quiet.

Only those closest hear.

But the cameras see her face.

The nation will understand enough.

Lawson steps forward to speak to local leaders, but Coretta remains still, looking at the workers.

Henry approaches her.

HENRY

Mrs. King.

She turns.

HENRY

We are going to keep going.

CORETTA

I know.

HENRY

Not just for him.

CORETTA

No.

A beat.

CORETTA

For you.

Henry nods.

HENRY

For us.

He looks down at his sign.

HENRY

And for the two men who got
crushed in that truck.

CORETTA

Say their names.

Henry looks up.

HENRY

Echol Cole.

A beat.

HENRY

Robert Walker.

Coretta nods.

CORETTA

Then carry them.

Henry grips the sign.

HENRY

Yes, ma'am.

INT. BOSTON APARTMENT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Young Coretta sits across from Young King.

YOUNG CORETTA

Do not make me a widow to a small dream.

Young King looks at her.

YOUNG KING

I would never ask that of you.

YOUNG CORETTA

You may not have to ask.

A beat.

YOUNG CORETTA

History may ask for you.

He takes that in.

YOUNG KING

And if it does?

Young Coretta looks toward the piano.

Then back to him.

YOUNG CORETTA

Then I will answer in my own voice.

EXT. MEMPHIS CITY HALL - DAY

Coretta stands before the workers.

Older now.

Answering.

The silent march has become her voice.

EXT. MEMPHIS STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

The march disperses slowly.
No riot.
No broken windows.
No stolen story.
Workers embrace one another.
Families gather signs.
Reporters file dispatches.
Police relax by inches.
Ralph stands with Coretta near the curb.

RALPH

He would have been proud.

Coretta looks at the workers.

CORETTA

Yes.

A beat.

CORETTA

But pride is not enough.

Ralph nods.

CORETTA

The strike still has to be won.

RALPH

It will be.

Coretta looks at him.

RALPH

We will make sure.

Dorothy approaches with papers.

DOROTHY

Arrangements are underway for
Atlanta.

Coretta absorbs the next impossible step.

CORETTA

The funeral.

Dorothy nods.

DOROTHY

Yes.

Coretta looks toward her children.

They are standing near Andrew, exhausted.
Too young for the day they have just lived.

CORETTA
Then we go home.

A beat.

CORETTA
And after we bury him, the work
continues.

Dorothy's eyes fill again.

DOROTHY
Yes.

CORETTA
No one gets to turn him into a
memory so quickly that they escape
his demands.

Dorothy nods.

DOROTHY
I will write that down.

Coretta almost smiles.

CORETTA
You write everything down.

DOROTHY
Someone has to keep the record
honest.

Coretta looks back at the street where the workers marched.

CORETTA
Yes.

A beat.

CORETTA
Someone does.

EXT. MEMPHIS STREET - SUNSET

The last workers leave.
A few signs remain visible in the distance.

I AM A MAN.
The street is quiet now.
But not defeated.

INT. CAR - MOVING - MEMPHIS - SUNSET

Coretta sits with the children.

Yolanda rests her head against her mother's shoulder.

MARTIN III

Mama?

CORETTA

Yes?

MARTIN III

Was Daddy there today?

Coretta looks out at Memphis.

The workers walking.

The signs.

The silence.

The dignity.

CORETTA

Yes.

The children look at her.

CORETTA

Not the way we wanted.

A beat.

CORETTA

But yes.

She holds them close.

The car moves toward the airport.

Toward Atlanta.

Toward burial.

Toward a nation that still has not understood what it has lost.

FADE OUT.

EXT. ATLANTA AIRPORT - DAY

A gray sky over Atlanta.

A plane taxis slowly.

The kind of slow that feels ceremonial even before anyone says so.

On the tarmac, a waiting crowd stands behind barriers.

Family.

Friends.

Clergy.

Reporters.

Police.

Citizens who came because staying home felt wrong.

The aircraft door opens.

Coretta appears first.

Black dress. Veil. Children close behind her.

Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, Jesse, Lawson, and others descend after them.

Then the casket.

The crowd's sound changes.

Not louder.

Lower.

A shared intake of breath.

Men remove hats.

Women cover mouths.

Some fall into prayer.

Some simply stare, as if refusing to believe death can be carried in a box.

Coretta watches the casket descend.

She does not move toward it.

Not yet.

Her children stand beside her.

Yolanda reaches for her hand.

Coretta takes it.

MARTIN III

Is this home?

Coretta looks toward Atlanta.

The city that raised him.

The city that will bury him.

CORETTA

Yes.

A beat.

CORETTA

This is home.

EXT. ATLANTA STREET - DAY

The motorcade moves through Atlanta.

People line the streets.

Black families in Sunday clothes. White students with flowers. Workers still in uniforms. Children perched on shoulders. Elderly women leaning on canes. Men who do not cry in public crying anyway.

Signs appear in windows.

THANK YOU DR. KING

WE SHALL CONTINUE

JUSTICE FOR THE POOR

A little boy holds a handmade
sign:

I AM A MAN TOO

Coretta sees it from the car.

Her face trembles.

She does not break.

Not because she is stone.

Because the children are watching.

INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY

Coretta sits with the children.

Ralph sits in front, silent.

Andrew rides behind in another car.

The city passes slowly.

Yolanda looks out.

YOLANDA

So many people.

Coretta nods.

YOLANDA

Daddy would have waved.

Coretta almost smiles.

CORETTA

Yes.

MARTIN III

Would he have liked all this?

Coretta looks at the crowds.

The cameras.

The police.

The flowers.

The grief.

CORETTA

He would have loved the people.

A beat.

CORETTA

He would have worried about the
attention.

YOLANDA

Why?

CORETTA

Because attention can make people
think they have done something
when all they have done is look.

The children absorb that as best they can.

Coretta keeps looking out.

CORETTA

Your father wanted people to move.

EXT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

Ebenezer stands surrounded by mourners.

The church is too small for the grief that has come home to
it.

Crowds fill the sidewalks, spill into the street, press
against police lines.

Inside, bells begin to toll.

Slow.

Heavy.

Each ring entering the city like a footstep.

Coretta steps from the car.

The children follow.

King Sr. stands at the church entrance.

MARTIN LUTHER KING SR., older, broad-shouldered, shattered but upright.

A father asked to bury a son.

He sees Coretta.

They move toward each other.

For a moment, neither is leader, widow, preacher, matriarch.

Only family.

King Sr. embraces her.

KING SR.

Daughter.

Coretta closes her eyes.

CORETTA

Daddy King.

He holds her carefully, as if both of them might break if held too tightly.

He looks at the children.

Tries to speak.

Cannot.

He kneels before them.

KING SR.

Come here.

They collapse into him.

His preacher's strength fails in the face of grandchildren.

He weeps.

No one interrupts.

No one should.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

The sanctuary is packed.

Family in the front pews.

Movement leaders. Clergy. Public officials. Friends. People who have earned a place by loving him before history learned his name.

The casket rests before the pulpit.

Flowers surround it.

The pulpit stands behind.
The same pulpit that shaped the boy.
The same pulpit that sent the man.
Coretta sits in the front pew with her children.
King Sr. sits nearby, Bible in hand.
His hands tremble.
Ralph sits close, hollow-eyed.
Dorothy sits near Andrew, holding a program but not reading it.
The service begins.
A hymn rises.
Not performed.
Offered.
The sound fills Ebenezer and escapes through open doors to the crowd outside.
Coretta looks at the pulpit.
The hymn carries her backward.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY - FLASHBACK

YOUNG MARTIN, 13, stands at the edge of the pulpit.
The sanctuary is empty except for King Sr., who adjusts papers after service.
Young Martin touches the pulpit gently.

KING SR.

Careful with that.

Young Martin pulls his hand back.

YOUNG MARTIN

I did not hurt it.

KING SR.

I am not worried about the wood.

Young Martin looks confused.

King Sr. steps beside him.

KING SR.

This pulpit has carried more than sermons.

He places his hand on it.

KING SR.

It has carried births, deaths,
debts, fears, weddings, funerals,
hunger, hope, and every question
people were too ashamed to ask out
loud.

Young Martin looks at the pulpit differently now.

YOUNG MARTIN

It is just wood.

KING SR.

So is a table until hungry people
gather around it.

A beat.

KING SR.

So is a coffin until love has to
stand beside it.

Young Martin absorbs that.

KING SR.

A pulpit becomes holy because of
what truth is asked to stand on
it.

Young Martin looks toward the pews.

YOUNG MARTIN

Do you ever get scared up there?

King Sr. laughs once.

Soft.

KING SR.

Every honest preacher does.

YOUNG MARTIN

Why?

KING SR.

Because people may believe you.

Young Martin looks at him.

KING SR.

And if they believe you, they may
follow the word into trouble.

A beat.

KING SR.

So you had better not put small
truth in a large voice.

Young Martin studies the pulpit.

YOUNG MARTIN

What if the truth is too large?

King Sr. looks at him.

KING SR.

Then grow.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

The hymn fades.

Older now, Coretta looks at the pulpit.

The truth became large.

He grew.

And it still cost him everything.

King Sr. slowly rises.

The room stills.

Some expect him to preach.

He walks to the pulpit.

For a moment, he simply holds it.

The father standing behind the son's casket.

The room is silent enough to hear breath.

KING SR.

My son loved this church.

His voice is rough.

KING SR.

He learned here that a voice does
not belong to itself once God puts
a burden in it.

A beat.

His eyes lower to the casket.

KING SR.

I gave him my name.

His voice breaks.

He steadies it.

KING SR.

But he gave that name to the world
in a way I could never have
imagined.

Coretta lowers her head.

KING SR.

I will not stand here and pretend
this old heart understands why a
father should have to look upon
his son this way.

A hard silence.

KING SR.

But I know what he believed.

A beat.

KING SR.

He believed that love must work.
That faith must stand up. That
justice must be more than a word
we admire in church and avoid in
the street.

The congregation answers softly.

AMEN.

KING SR.

So we will grieve him.

A beat.

KING SR.

We will bury him.

Another beat.

KING SR.

But we will not reduce him to
flowers and memory.

The room stirs.

KING SR.

If we loved him, we will continue
what he loved.

He grips the pulpit.

KING SR.

And if we admired his courage, we
will find some of our own.

Coretta looks up.

King Sr. steps back.

He returns to his seat, older than when he stood.

EXT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

The church doors open.

The casket is brought out.

The crowd outside reacts like a wave struck by wind.

The sound is grief.

Raw.

Human.

A mule-drawn farm wagon waits in the street.

Plain wood.

Simple.

Humble.

The contrast is unbearable.

A man who spoke before kings and presidents will travel
through Atlanta on a wagon fit for the poor he died
defending.

Dorothy sees it.

DOROTHY

Good.

Andrew looks at her.

ANDREW

Good?

DOROTHY

Yes.

A beat.

DOROTHY

Let power watch humility carry
him.

The casket is placed onto the wagon.

Coretta stands with the children.

Ralph beside them.

Jesse lowers his head.

Lawson whispers a prayer.

The mules shift gently.

The procession begins.

EXT. ATLANTA STREETS - FUNERAL PROCESSION - DAY

The wagon rolls slowly.

The casket rests high enough for the people to see.

Not as spectacle.

As witness.

Behind it walk Coretta, the children, King Sr., family,
movement leaders, clergy, workers, students, and thousands
upon thousands of mourners.

No one hurries.

The city slows to the pace of grief.

People line rooftops.

Windows.

Sidewalks.

Some sing.

Some pray.

Some stand in silence because silence is all they have
left.

A sanitation worker from Memphis walks among them, sign
held low:

I AM A MAN

Beside him, Henry walks with
others.

Eddie from Chicago stands in the crowd, cap in hand.

Mrs. Washington beside him.

In another section, Mrs. Jackson from Selma watches,
leaning on a cane.

Samuel from Mississippi stands with Marian Wright, holding
his mother's hand.

The road has gathered its witnesses.

EXT. ATLANTA STREET - CONTINUOUS

Coretta walks behind the wagon.

Yolanda grips her hand.

The heat rises from the pavement.

The crowd stretches beyond sight.

YOLANDA

Mama, are we walking for Daddy?

Coretta looks at the wagon.

Then at the people.

CORETTA

Yes.

A beat.

CORETTA

And for what Daddy walked for.

YOLANDA

Is that different?

Coretta's eyes stay forward.

CORETTA

It has to be.

Nearby, Ralph walks with Andrew.

Ralph watches the wagon.

RALPH

He would have hated all this
attention.

ANDREW

He would have liked the wagon.

Ralph looks at him.

ANDREW

Poor people leading the nation
through Atlanta.

Ralph looks back at the plain wood wagon.

RALPH

Yes.

A beat.

RALPH

He would have preached that.

Andrew wipes his face.

ANDREW

He did.

EXT. ATLANTA STREET - LATER

The procession continues.

A white man in a suit stands on the sidewalk, weeping quietly.

Beside him, a Black woman offers him a handkerchief.

He takes it, ashamed and grateful.

A little girl places flowers in the street after the wagon passes.

A group of students link arms.

A janitor removes his work cap.

A veteran salutes.

A mother lifts her baby to see the casket.

MOTHER

Remember this.

The baby cannot.

The mother will.

EXT. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE - DAY

The procession reaches Morehouse.

The campus is overflowing.

Students fill every available space.

Faculty stand in solemn rows.

The public memorial gathers under the open sky.

The wagon stops.

The casket is carried forward.

King has returned to the place that taught him the mind must serve the conscience.

INT. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE - HALLWAY - FLASHBACK

TEEN MARTIN, 15, walks the hallway on one of his first days at Morehouse.

Books clutched to his chest.

Trying to appear certain.

He passes older students laughing, debating, arguing about theology, politics, literature.

The world is larger here.

Dr. Benjamin Mays appears at the end of the hallway.

MAYS

Mr. King.

Teen Martin stops.

Surprised to be known.

TEEN MARTIN

Yes, sir.

Mays approaches.

MAYS

You look as though you are
carrying either books or anxiety.

Teen Martin looks down.

TEEN MARTIN

Mostly books, sir.

Mays smiles.

MAYS

Good. Anxiety is heavier and less
useful.

Teen Martin relaxes slightly.

MAYS

Do you know why you are here?

TEEN MARTIN

To study.

MAYS

That is what the catalog says.

A beat.

MAYS

Why are you here?

Teen Martin searches for the answer.

TEEN MARTIN

To become useful.

Mays studies him.

MAYS

To whom?

Teen Martin does not answer quickly.

Mays nods.

MAYS

Keep that question close.

A beat.

MAYS

Education becomes dangerous when a
man uses it only to escape the
people who needed him educated.

Teen Martin listens.

MAYS

Do not come here merely to rise.

A beat.

MAYS

Come here to return with something
worth bringing back.

Teen Martin looks down the hallway.

The future feels huge.

TEEN MARTIN

What if I do not know what that is
yet?

Mays places a hand on his shoulder.

MAYS

Then let the suffering of the
world continue your education.

EXT. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE - DAY

The casket is placed before the gathered crowd.

Older now, the world's suffering has completed the
education.

A speaker steps to the podium.

We do not hear the whole address.

Only fragments drifting over the crowd.

SPEAKER

A son of Morehouse...

A servant of justice...

A voice for the poor...

A witness for peace...

Coretta sits with the children.

King Sr. beside them.

Ralph close by.

Dorothy watches the crowd more than the podium.
Andrew notices.

ANDREW
Still organizing?

DOROTHY
Always.

ANDREW
Today?

DOROTHY
Especially today.

She looks at the massive crowd.

DOROTHY
Grief is energy without direction.

A beat.

DOROTHY
If we do not give it work, it will
become only memory.

Andrew nods.

ANDREW
Poor People's Campaign?

Dorothy looks toward Coretta.

DOROTHY
Yes.

A beat.

DOROTHY
And Memphis.

EXT. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE - LATER

The service continues.

A recording of King's voice begins to play.

Not quoted in detail.

Just his cadence.

His breath.

His rhythm.

The crowd hears the voice of a dead man filling the air of
the living.

Coretta closes her eyes.

The children look around, startled.

Yolanda whispers:

YOLANDA

Daddy?

Coretta pulls her close.

CORETTA

His voice.

The recording continues.

People weep harder now.

Not because they hear the words.

Because they hear the absence around them.

Ralph cannot bear it.

He steps away.

EXT. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE - SIDE WALKWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ralph stands alone, trying to breathe.

Andrew follows.

ANDREW

Ralph.

RALPH

I keep expecting him to come
around a corner and tell me we are
late.

Andrew says nothing.

RALPH

Or that we have to go somewhere
else. Some other city. Some other
jail. Some other crisis.

A beat.

RALPH

I would complain.

He laughs once through tears.

RALPH

Lord, I would complain.

Andrew stands beside him.

RALPH

I would give anything to complain
again.

Andrew's face breaks.
The two men stand together.
No speeches.
No strategy.
Just grief.

EXT. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE - MEMORIAL AREA - DAY

Coretta stands from her seat.
Those nearby rise with her, unsure if they should.
She steps toward the casket.
The crowd quiets.
She places one hand on it.
The children stand behind her.
King Sr. lowers his head.
Coretta does not speak into a microphone.
She speaks only to him.

CORETTA

You are home.

A beat.

CORETTA

But I will not let them leave you
here.

Her voice is barely audible.

CORETTA

I promise.

She steps back.

EXT. ATLANTA - FUNERAL PROCESSION - LATER

The final procession continues toward burial.
The wagon rolls.
The crowd follows.
The city walks.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - SANCTUARY - FLASHBACK

Young Martin stands beside the pulpit with King Sr.

YOUNG MARTIN

What if the truth is too large?

KING SR.

Then grow.

EXT. ATLANTA - FUNERAL PROCESSION - DAY

The nation walks behind a truth too large for one life.

Now others must grow.

EXT. CEMETERY - LATE AFTERNOON

The casket is lowered.

Family gathered close.

Friends nearby.

The public held at a respectful distance, though grief has made everyone kin for the day.

A minister prays.

The words are gentle.

The earth is not.

Coretta stands with the children.

King Sr. trembles.

Ralph holds him.

The casket descends.

Yolanda buries her face in Coretta's side.

MARTIN III watches, refusing to look away.

The ropes lower slowly.

Too slowly.

Then it is done.

A handful of earth.

The sound against the casket is small.

But it lands like thunder.

Coretta closes her eyes.

INT. BOSTON APARTMENT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Young Coretta looks at Young King across the table.

YOUNG CORETTA

Do not make me a widow to a small
dream.

Young King takes her hand.

YOUNG KING

Then help me keep it large.

EXT. CEMETERY - LATE AFTERNOON

Coretta opens her eyes.

Older now.

The dream has cost her the man.

But it will not be made small.

EXT. CEMETERY - LATER

People begin to leave.

Slowly.

Reluctantly.

As if leaving might make the death more final.

Coretta stands with Ralph, Andrew, Dorothy, Jesse, Lawson,
and King Sr.

No one wants to speak of work.

Work arrives anyway.

DOROTHY

Memphis settlement discussions are
moving.

Coretta nods.

RALPH

The workers still need pressure.

CORETTA

Then we keep pressure.

Andrew looks toward the road.

ANDREW

And Washington?

The Poor People's Campaign hangs in the air.

King Sr. looks at Coretta.

KING SR.

Daughter, you do not have to carry
all of this today.

Coretta turns to him.

CORETTA

No.

A beat.

CORETTA

But I do have to make sure it is
not dropped today.

King Sr. absorbs that.

Pain.

Pride.

Fear.

KING SR.

You are strong.

CORETTA

I am not.

A beat.

CORETTA

I am assigned.

Dorothy hears that.

Writes it down in her mind.

RALPH

We will carry it together.

Coretta looks at him.

Then at the others.

CORETTA

Then together.

EXT. ATLANTA STREET - SUNSET

The crowd thins.

Flowers remain along sidewalks.

Programs lie in the grass.

Candles flicker in daylight that has not fully surrendered.

A young Black boy stands with his mother near the route
where the wagon passed.

BOY

Mama?

MOTHER

Yes?

BOY

Was he a preacher?

She looks down the empty road.

MOTHER

Yes.

BOY

Was he a king?

The mother considers.

Then kneels.

MOTHER

He was a man who tried to make
people remember they were people.

The boy looks toward the road.

BOY

Did they remember?

The mother looks at the flowers.

The people leaving.

The city changed and unchanged.

MOTHER

Some did.

A beat.

MOTHER

Now more have to.

EXT. MOREHOUSE COLLEGE - SUNSET

The campus empties.

A program tumbles across the grass.

On it, King's photograph.

The wind catches it.

It flips once.

Then rests against the root of a tree.

EXT. ATLANTA SKYLINE - SUNSET

The sun lowers over the city.

Church bells begin again.

Slow.

Heavy.

But not final.

FADE OUT.

INT. KING HOME - ATLANTA - NIGHT

The house is full of people trying to be quiet.

Relatives. Friends. Ministers. Movement workers. Neighbors bringing food no one can taste.

Plates sit untouched on the kitchen counter.

Flowers cover tables.

Sympathy telegrams stack in baskets.

The funeral is over.

The grief is not.

Coretta stands alone in the hallway outside the children's rooms.

The children sleep inside.

Or pretend to.

A small lamp glows.

She holds Martin's dark tie in her hands.

Not the tie from history.

A husband's tie.

She presses it once between her fingers, then folds it carefully.

From the living room, muffled voices.

Ralph.

Andrew.

Dorothy.

Jesse.

Still working.

Still grieving.

Unable to tell which is which.

Coretta looks toward the children's door.

Then toward the voices.
 She walks to the living room.

INT. KING HOME - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ralph sits on the couch, exhausted beyond sleep.
 Andrew stands near a table covered with newspapers.
 Dorothy has papers in her lap and a legal pad beside her.
 Jesse leans against a wall, unusually quiet.
 Marian Wright sits near the window.
 The headlines are everywhere.

CITIES BURN AFTER KING ASSASSINATION
 NATIONAL GUARD DEPLOYED

MEMPHIS STRIKE CONTINUES

POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN UNCERTAIN
 Coretta enters.

Everyone starts to stand.

CORETTA
 Please don't.

They settle awkwardly.
 She notices the newspaper.

CORETTA
 Uncertain.

No one answers.

CORETTA
 That is the word they chose?

Andrew looks down.

ANDREW
 They are asking whether Washington
 is still happening.

RALPH
 They are not the only ones asking.

Coretta looks at him.

Not harshly.

Carefully.

RALPH
 Coretta, we are tired. The staff
 is broken. Cities are under

curfew. Money is uncertain.
Security is worse than ever.

A beat.

RALPH
And Martin is gone.

The sentence sits in the room like a second casket.
Dorothy lowers her eyes.
Coretta remains standing.

CORETTA
Yes.

A beat.

CORETTA
He is.

No one moves.

CORETTA
But hunger is not gone.
She looks at Marian.

CORETTA
Memphis is not settled.
She looks at Ralph.

CORETTA
The workers are still workers.
She looks at Dorothy.

CORETTA
The poor are still poor.
Dorothy nods once.

Small.

Fierce.

CORETTA
So the question is not whether
Martin is gone.

A beat.

CORETTA
The question is whether the work
needed him more than it needed
truth.

That lands.

Ralph looks shattered by it.

Not offended.

Convicted.

RALPH

He was the voice.

CORETTA

One voice.

A beat.

CORETTA

A great one.

Her own voice nearly breaks.

She steadies it.

CORETTA

But not the only one.

INT. KING HOME - STUDY - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

King stands near his desk, packing papers into a worn briefcase.

Coretta sits nearby, watching him.

This is before Memphis.

Not long before.

He is tired.

She sees it.

CORETTA

You keep packing like the paper
will hold you up.

KING

Paper has been kinder than some
chairs.

She does not smile.

He notices.

KING

What is it?

CORETTA

You are talking more about what
happens if you are not here.

King stops packing.

KING

Am I?

CORETTA

Yes.

A beat.

CORETTA

You think I do not hear it because
you dress it in theology.

He sits across from her.

KING

I do not want to leave you with
burdens that were mine to carry.

CORETTA

Martin, you never carried them
alone.

A beat.

CORETTA

You only felt alone because you
kept stepping where others could
not always follow fast enough.

He absorbs that.

KING

If something happens—

CORETTA

No.

He waits.

CORETTA

Say what you mean.

A long silence.

KING

If I am taken from the work.

The words cost him.

Coretta's face changes, but she holds steady.

KING

Do not let them make me safe.

She looks at him.

KING

They will try.

A beat.

KING

They will soften the demands. They
will praise the dream and forget
the poor. They will admire the
courage and avoid the cost.

Coretta listens.

KING

They will quote love if it lets
them ignore justice.

A deep silence.

KING

Do not let them bury the work with
me.

Coretta reaches for his hand.

CORETTA

Then do not leave me a small
dream.

He looks at her.

The echo of years between them.

KING

Never.

INT. KING HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Coretta stands before Ralph, Dorothy, Andrew, Jesse, and
Marian.

Older now.

The instruction still burning.

CORETTA

He asked that we not make him
safe.

Ralph closes his eyes.

Dorothy looks up sharply.

CORETTA

So we will not.

A beat.

CORETTA

Memphis continues.

Another beat.

CORETTA
Washington continues.

Andrew looks at Ralph.

RALPH
Then we have to decide who leads
it.

The room goes silent.

Ralph looks down at his hands.

RALPH
They will expect me to stand where
he stood.

Coretta steps closer.

CORETTA
No one can stand where Martin
stood.

A beat.

CORETTA
But you can stand where you are
assigned.

Ralph looks up.

That word again.

Assigned.

DOROTHY
And nobody leads alone.

She picks up her legal pad.

DOROTHY
If we are doing this, then
sentiment is not strategy. We need
permits, food, shelter,
sanitation, transportation,
medical, legal, security, press,
regional coordinators, and someone
with enough sense to tell
preachers when to stop talking and
start lifting lumber.

Jesse looks at her.

JESSE
You have someone in mind?

DOROTHY

Several. None of them you.
A thin laugh moves through the room.
It feels almost wrong.
Then necessary.
Marian rises.

MARIAN

The poor families are still
preparing. Mississippi.
Appalachia. Chicago. The
Southwest. They need to know the
campaign did not die in Memphis.

RALPH

Then we tell them.

ANDREW

Not just tell them.
He looks toward the newspapers.

ANDREW

Show them.
Coretta nods.

CORETTA

Start with Memphis.

EXT. MEMPHIS CHURCH - DAY

Sanitation workers gather outside.
The mood is tense.
Tired.
Expectant.
Henry stands with other workers near the steps. His sign
rests against his leg.

I AM A MAN.

Lawson exits the church with union
representatives and local leaders.
The workers quiet.
Lawson's face gives nothing away at first.
Then he looks at Henry.

LAWSON

The city has agreed.

A beat.

LAWSON

Recognition. Improvements. A path
forward.

The words take a second to become real.

Then the workers react.

Not wild celebration.

Something deeper.

Men embrace.

Some cry.

Some simply sit down on the curb, overwhelmed by the end of
a burden they had carried too long.

Henry lifts his sign slowly.

I AM A MAN.

A worker beside him laughs through
tears.

WORKER

They finally read it.

Henry looks at the sign.

HENRY

No.

A beat.

HENRY

They finally got tired of
pretending they couldn't.

Lawson steps closer.

LAWSON

Dr. King should have seen this.

Henry looks toward the street.

Where King once walked.

HENRY

Maybe he did.

Lawson says nothing.

Henry turns to the workers.

HENRY

This ain't the end.

The men look at him.

HENRY

He came here saying Memphis was
Washington wearing work gloves.

A beat.

HENRY

Then we carry Memphis to
Washington.

The workers absorb it.

One by one, signs rise.

I AM A MAN.

This time not as a plea.

As proof.

INT. SCLC OFFICE - ATLANTA - DAY

The office is alive again.

Not healed.

Alive.

Maps of Washington cover the walls.

The National Mall is circled.

Lists fill chalkboards.

POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN

RESURRECTION CITY

TRANSPORTATION

FOOD

SHELTER

MEDICAL

SANITATION

SECURITY

DEMANDS

Ralph stands at the head of the
table.

Coretta sits nearby.

Dorothy, Andrew, Jesse, Marian, Calvin, Elena, Thomas, Al
Raby, and other organizers fill the room.

There is an empty chair near the table.

No one says whose.

Everyone knows.

Ralph looks at it.

Then looks away.

RALPH

Martin believed this campaign had
to bring the poor to the doorstep
of power.

A beat.

RALPH

He believed the nation had learned
to ignore suffering when it stayed
scattered.

He looks across the room.

RALPH

So we will gather it.

Andrew writes.

Marian passes out documents.

MARIAN

The demands must be concrete.
Jobs. Income. Housing. Food.
Health care. Education. Economic
security.

CALVIN

Appalachia needs transportation
support.

ELENA

Farmworkers need protection. Some
are afraid employers will punish
families left behind.

THOMAS

Native delegations will not come
to be decoration.

RALPH

They will not be treated as
decoration.

Dorothy writes that down.

DOROTHY

Good. Because decoration does not
get a sleeping plan.

Jesse looks at the Washington map.

JESSE

Resurrection City.

The words enter the room.

RALPH

Yes.

A beat.

RALPH

A city of the poor in the capital
of the richest nation on earth.

Coretta looks at the map.

CORETTA

Not a camp.

The room turns to her.

CORETTA

A witness.

Dorothy nods.

DOROTHY

Witnesses need drainage.

Ralph almost smiles.

RALPH

And there she is again.

DOROTHY

If it rains, poetry will not keep
people dry.

Andrew points to the Mall.

ANDREW

We will need wood, tents,
platforms, kitchens, walkways.

JESSE

And marshals.

MARIAN

And child care.

CALVIN

And people who can handle mud.

DOROTHY

The poor have handled mud longer
than Washington has handled truth.

Ralph looks toward the empty chair.

For a moment, the room waits for King's voice.
It does not come.
Ralph breathes in.

RALPH
Then we build.

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - NATIONAL MALL - MORNING

Open grass beneath a pale sky.
The Capitol in the distance.
The Washington Monument behind.
A place designed for national memory.
Now about to become national confrontation.
Trucks arrive.
Workers unload lumber.
Volunteers carry tools.
Poor families step from buses, stiff from travel.
Black families from Mississippi.
White families from Appalachia.
Mexican American farmworkers.
Native organizers.
Puerto Rican families.
Chicago tenants.
Memphis sanitation workers.
A map of American neglect becoming a city.

SUPER: WASHINGTON, D.C. - MAY 1968

Ralph steps onto the grass.
He looks small against the Mall.
Then Dorothy steps beside him with a clipboard.

DOROTHY
Do not stare at the symbolism too
long. We have lumber arriving in
the wrong quadrant.

Ralph looks at her.

RALPH
I was praying.

DOROTHY

Pray while walking.

He follows.

EXT. NATIONAL MALL - LATER

Construction begins.

Hammers strike nails.

Wood frames rise.

Children carry small bundles.

Women organize kitchens.

Men dig drainage trenches.

Clergy unload blankets.

Students paint signs.

RESURRECTION CITY

A Memphis sanitation worker nails
a board into place.

Henry works beside Eddie from Chicago.

Eddie misses the nail, hits his thumb.

EDDIE

Lord!

Henry looks at him.

HENRY

You ever built anything?

EDDIE

Anger. Mostly.

Henry laughs.

HENRY

Then hold the board.

Nearby, Mrs. Washington directs a group of tenants
arranging bedding.

MRS. WASHINGTON

No, not there. If it rains, that
corner floods first. I know bad
housing when I see it.

Marian walks with Coretta through the rising city.

Coretta takes it in.

Wood.

Mud.

Signs.

Children.

Hunger.

Hope.

Not clean hope.

Working hope.

MARIAN

It is happening.

Coretta nods.

CORETTA

Yes.

MARIAN

Not the way he imagined, maybe.

Coretta looks at Ralph arguing gently with a truck driver,
Dorothy correcting him from six feet away.

CORETTA

No.

A beat.

CORETTA

But the work rarely asks
permission to arrive the way we
pictured it.

EXT. RESURRECTION CITY - AFTERNOON

Rain begins.

Light at first.

Then heavier.

People scramble to cover supplies.

Dorothy shouts orders.

DOROTHY

Tarps over food first! Bedding
second! Tools under cover!
Children to the dry tents!

Ralph slips in the mud and catches himself on a wooden
post.

RALPH

I meant to do that.

DOROTHY

Then stop intending things.

The rain turns the ground to mud quickly.

Too quickly.

A little girl from Mississippi stands ankle-deep in it,
holding a doll.

Coretta kneels before her.

CORETTA

What is your name?

GIRL

Sarah.

CORETTA

Sarah, are your feet wet?

Sarah nods.

CORETTA

Come with me.

She lifts the girl and carries her toward a shelter.

A photographer begins to raise his camera.

Coretta looks at him.

He lowers it.

Good choice.

INT. RESURRECTION CITY SHELTER - DAY

A rough wooden shelter.

Crowded.

Leaky.

Alive.

Families sit on blankets.

Children eat from paper bowls.

Organizers move through with lists.

Coretta sits Sarah down and wraps a blanket around her.

Sarah looks at her.

SARAH

Are you Dr. King's wife?

Coretta pauses.

CORETTA

Yes.

SARAH

My mama said he wanted us to come
here.

Coretta nods.

SARAH

Why?

Coretta looks around the shelter.

The poor of America gathered in the shadow of power.

CORETTA

So the country could not say it
did not see you.

Sarah thinks about that.

SARAH

Can it see us in the rain?

Coretta looks toward the leaking roof.

A small, sad smile.

CORETTA

Especially in the rain.

EXT. RESURRECTION CITY - EVENING

Rain continues.

The city is muddy, imperfect, determined.

Signs stand in the wet ground.

JOBS OR INCOME NOW

FEED THE HUNGRY

DECENT HOUSING

HONOR THE POOR

I AM A MAN

Ralph stands before a gathering of
residents beneath a makeshift
canopy.

Coretta, Dorothy, Andrew, Jesse, Marian, Henry, Eddie, Mrs.
Washington, Calvin, Elena, and Thomas stand nearby.

Ralph looks out.

The rain drips from the canopy edge.

RALPH

This city was born from a dream
too large to bury.

A beat.

RALPH

But we did not come here to dream
in public.

The crowd listens.

RALPH

We came to demand.

A murmur.

RALPH

We came to say that the poor are
not a problem to be studied, not a
statistic to be filed, not a
sermon illustration, not a
photograph for the conscience of
comfortable people.

Coretta watches him.

He is not Martin.

He is Ralph.

And that is what the moment needs.

RALPH

We are here because America must
decide whether democracy includes
the hungry after election day.

The crowd responds.

RALPH

We are here because a nation that
can organize war can organize
work.

A stronger response.

RALPH

We are here because Dr. King did
not give his life so that poverty
could receive better condolences.

The crowd rises.

Coretta lowers her head.

Not from sorrow only.

From recognition.

EXT. RESURRECTION CITY - NIGHT

The rain slows.

Lanterns glow inside wooden shelters.

People move through mud on planks.

Children sleep.

Adults talk quietly.

A city made of grief, lumber, and stubborn faith breathes
under the capital sky.

Coretta walks alone to the edge of the encampment.

The Capitol dome glows in the distance.

Ralph joins her.

RALPH

I did not sound like him.

CORETTA

No.

He looks down.

CORETTA

You sounded like you.

Ralph looks at her.

CORETTA

That is what we need now.

They stand together.

RALPH

Do you think he would have
approved?

Coretta looks over Resurrection City.

The mud.

The poor.

The signs.

The children.

The unfinished shelters.

The impossible demand.

CORETTA

He would have worried about the
drainage.

Ralph laughs once.

Then cries.

Coretta takes his hand.

CORETTA

And yes.

A beat.

CORETTA

He would have approved.

EXT. RESURRECTION CITY - LATER NIGHT

A small group gathers near a lantern.

Henry. Eddie. Mrs. Washington. Calvin. Elena. Thomas.
Marian.

Different roads.

Same mud.

Henry plants his sign in the ground beside the shelter.

I AM A MAN.

Eddie looks at it.

EDDIE

You think Washington can read?

Henry looks toward the Capitol.

HENRY

It can.

A beat.

HENRY

Question is whether it can
understand.

Mrs. Washington pulls her coat tighter.

MRS. WASHINGTON

Then we teach loud.

The lantern flickers.

EXT. NATIONAL MALL - NIGHT

Resurrection City glows in scattered light.

The Capitol stands beyond it.

Polished.

Distant.

Watched.

INT. KING HOME - STUDY - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

King sits across from Coretta.

KING

Do not let them bury the work with
me.

INT. RESURRECTION CITY - NIGHT

Coretta stands beneath the wet Washington sky.

Older now.

Widowed.

Assigned.

The work is not buried.

It is muddy.

Leaking.

Hungry.

Alive.

FADE OUT.

EXT. RESURRECTION CITY - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAWN

Gray morning.

The rain has stopped.

Mud remains.

Wooden shelters sit crooked across the National Mall. Tarps
sag with water. Footprints cut through the wet earth. Smoke
rises from a makeshift kitchen.

The Capitol stands in the distance.

Clean.

White.

Still.

Resurrection City wakes slowly.

A child coughs inside a shelter.

A woman wrings rainwater from a blanket.

A man carries firewood through the mud.

A volunteer ladles oatmeal into paper bowls.

Poor people from every corner of America begin another day
in the shadow of power.

Coretta stands near the edge of the camp, looking toward
the Capitol.

Ralph approaches, coat damp, eyes tired.

RALPH

You sleep?

CORETTA

Some.

RALPH

That means no.

She does not answer.

They watch the city wake.

A little girl, Sarah from Mississippi, steps from a shelter
holding her doll. Her shoes are caked in mud.

She looks toward the Capitol.

Then up at Coretta.

SARAH

Mrs. King?

Coretta kneels.

CORETTA

Good morning, Sarah.

SARAH

Is this the dream?

Coretta looks at the mud.

The leaking shelters.

The hungry people waiting for breakfast.

The signs nailed into wet ground.

JOBS OR INCOME NOW.

DECENT HOUSING.

FEED THE HUNGRY.

I AM A MAN.

She takes time with the answer.

CORETTA

No, baby.

A beat.

CORETTA

This is what happens when people
refuse to let the dream die.

Sarah looks toward the Capitol again.

SARAH

Does it get there?

Coretta follows her gaze.

The Capitol seems close.

And impossibly far.

CORETTA

Only if people keep walking.

Sarah thinks about this.

Then she takes Coretta's hand.

SARAH

Then we should walk.

Coretta looks at Ralph.

Ralph smiles through grief.

RALPH

Out of the mouths of children.

Coretta stands, still holding Sarah's hand.

Around them, people begin moving through the mud.

Not a march yet.

Just morning.

But every movement carries the echo of one.

EXT. RESURRECTION CITY - CONTINUOUS

Henry plants his I AM A MAN sign deeper into the wet earth.

Eddie helps Mrs. Washington hang a tarp over a shelter
entrance.

Marian Wright organizes children into a breakfast line.

Dorothy moves through the camp with a clipboard.

DOROTHY

Food line to the left. Medical
tent opens in ten. If your shelter

leaks, report it before your
bedding becomes a lake.

Ralph watches her.

RALPH

Dorothy.

She looks up.

RALPH

Do you ever stop?

DOROTHY

Does injustice?

She moves on.

Ralph almost laughs.

Almost.

Coretta watches the people.

Something quiet settles over her.

Not peace.

Continuance.

She looks toward the Capitol.

CORETTA

Martin.

Her voice is barely more than breath.

CORETTA

They are still walking.

The morning light brightens.

The mud glows.

The Capitol remains in the distance.

Then slowly —

The sound of HAMMERS becomes the sound of TYPEWRITERS.

The sound of FOOTSTEPS becomes the sound of NEWSREEL
PROJECTORS.

The image begins to shift.

ARCHIVAL MONTAGE - END CREDITS BEGIN

BLACK AND WHITE NEWS FOOTAGE STYLE:

— A Montgomery city bus rolls through morning traffic.

— A young minister, MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., steps through a crowd of reporters, serious and unprepared for the size of history approaching him.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

A young Baptist minister from Atlanta has emerged as one of the leaders of the Montgomery bus protest...

— Black citizens walk to work rather than ride segregated buses.

— Women in church hats organize carpools.

— Men gather at night in crowded sanctuaries.

— King speaks from a pulpit. We do not hear his exact words. Only the rhythm, the urgency, the lift of a voice calling people to stand without hatred.

TITLE CARD:

MONTGOMERY TAUGHT THE NATION THAT ORDINARY PEOPLE COULD MOVE HISTORY BY REFUSING TO COOPERATE WITH HUMILIATION.

— A bombed home in Montgomery.

— Coretta holding baby Yolanda.

— A crowd outside, angry and afraid.

— King stepping before them, asking them to hold their dignity.

CUT TO:

COLOR-TINTED ARCHIVAL STYLE:

— Sit-ins at lunch counters.

— Students in coats and ties sitting still while hatred screams inches from their faces.

— Freedom Riders boarding buses.

— Burning buses.

— Jail doors closing.

— Hands gripping bars.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

Across the South, the movement for civil rights continues to test the conscience of the nation...

TITLE CARD:

THE DREAM MOVED FROM BUSES TO LUNCH COUNTERS, FROM
COURTHOUSES TO JAIL CELLS, FROM CHURCH BASEMENTS TO THE
FRONT PAGE.

- Birmingham.
- Children marching.
- Fire hoses.
- Police dogs.
- Parents watching in terror and pride.
- King in jail, writing.
- A hand sliding papers through bars.
- A church shattered by bombing.
- Four empty Sunday dresses laid across a bed.

Silence overtakes the newsreel sound.

Then a church bell.

One ring.

Two.

Three.

Four.

TITLE CARD:

THE COST WAS NEVER ABSTRACT.

CUT TO:

EXT. LINCOLN MEMORIAL - DAY - ARCHIVAL STYLE

A vast crowd fills the National Mall.

The Reflecting Pool shines.

Signs rise.

Civil rights leaders stand together.

King approaches the microphones.

The sound drops away before any copyrighted speech is
heard.

Instead, we see faces.

A young Black girl on her father's shoulders.

A white nun wiping tears.

A veteran standing at attention.

Coretta watching from nearby.

King speaking.

The crowd receiving.

TITLE CARD:

ON AUGUST 28, 1963, THE DREAM BECAME A NATIONAL LANGUAGE.

A beat.

TITLE CARD:

BUT FOR KING, THE DREAM WAS NEVER ONLY A SPEECH.

CUT TO:

- President Johnson signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- King receiving a pen.
- People entering public spaces once denied to them.
- A Black family walking through the front door of a hotel.
- A child sitting in a classroom.

TITLE CARD:

THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964 OUTLAWED SEGREGATION IN PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS AND EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION.

CUT TO:

- Selma courthouse line.
- Elderly citizens waiting to register.
- Sheriff's deputies watching.
- Jimmie Lee Jackson's funeral procession.
- John Lewis and Hosea Williams leading marchers toward the Edmund Pettus Bridge.
- Troopers waiting.
- Smoke.
- Clubs.
- Bodies falling.

The footage flickers.

Then:

- King kneeling in prayer at the bridge.
- The final Selma-to-Montgomery march.
- Thousands crossing the bridge.

- Feet on pavement.
- Tired faces.
- Determined eyes.

TITLE CARD:

SELMA FORCED AMERICA TO LOOK AT THE BALLOT AS A MATTER OF
LIFE, DIGNITY, AND POWER.

CUT TO:

- President Johnson signing the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
- Black citizens registering to vote.
- A woman signing her name carefully.
- A man stepping out of a courthouse with tears in his eyes.

TITLE CARD:

THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965 HELPED OPEN THE POLITICAL
PROCESS TO MILLIONS WHO HAD BEEN SYSTEMATICALLY DENIED.

CUT TO:

- Watts after the fires.
- Burned storefronts.
- Children playing near rubble.
- King walking through the neighborhood.
- Residents speaking with him in doorways.
- A boy drawing a house in the dirt.

TITLE CARD:

THEN THE DREAM MOVED NORTH AND WEST, WHERE SEGREGATION
OFTEN HID BEHIND HOUSING, WAGES, POLICING, AND POVERTY.

CUT TO:

- Chicago tenements.
- King and Coretta entering a small apartment.
- Children in winter coats walking past trash.
- Open housing marches.
- Marquette Park.
- Rocks flying.
- King struck.
- Marchers holding formation.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

Dr. King's campaign in Chicago has
revealed deep resistance to open
housing in northern cities...

TITLE CARD:

KING TAUGHT THAT CIVIL RIGHTS WITHOUT ECONOMIC DIGNITY WAS
AN UNFINISHED PROMISE.

CUT TO:

- Riverside Church.
- King standing at a pulpit, pages in hand.
- Reporters writing.
- Some faces supportive.
- Some uneasy.
- Headlines spinning onto screen.

KING DENOUNCES WAR.

ALLIES DISTANCE THEMSELVES.

WHITE HOUSE CRITICIZES KING.

TITLE CARD:

WHEN HE SPOKE AGAINST THE VIETNAM WAR, KING CONNECTED
RACISM, POVERTY, AND MILITARISM - AND PAID A HEAVY PUBLIC
PRICE.

CUT TO:

- Mississippi Delta.
- Barefoot children.
- Empty shelves.
- Mothers stretching food.
- Appalachian families in coal country.
- Farmworkers in fields.
- Native families standing before weathered homes.
- Puerto Rican families in crowded city apartments.
- King listening.

Not speaking.

Listening.

TITLE CARD:

THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN CALLED AMERICA TO FACE THE
POVERTY IT HAD LEARNED TO IGNORE.

CUT TO:

- Memphis sanitation workers.
- Men lifting garbage cans in rain.
- The crushed truck doors.
- Workers gathering.
- Signs printed in bold black letters:

I AM A MAN.

- King in Mason Temple.

- Workers standing.
- Signs raised.

The audio becomes a low swell of gospel organ and crowd response, but no direct quotation.

TITLE CARD:

IN MEMPHIS, THE DREAM WORE WORK GLOVES.

CUT TO:

- Lorraine Motel.
- The balcony.
- Empty now.
- Room 306.
- A wreath on the railing.
- People gathered below.
- Coretta arriving.
- Workers marching silently with her.
- The mule-drawn wagon in Atlanta.
- Ebenezer Baptist Church.
- Morehouse College.
- The casket.
- Crowds lining the streets.

TITLE CARD:

APRIL 4, 1968, TOOK THE MAN.

A long beat.

TITLE CARD:

IT DID NOT TAKE THE MISSION.

CUT TO:

- President Johnson signing the Fair Housing Act of 1968.
- Families looking at homes.
- Real estate signs.
- A Black couple holding a house key.

TITLE CARD:

ONE WEEK AFTER KING'S DEATH, THE FAIR HOUSING ACT OF 1968 BECAME LAW, PROHIBITING DISCRIMINATION IN THE SALE, RENTAL, AND FINANCING OF HOUSING.

CUT TO:

- Memphis sanitation workers receiving news of settlement.
- Henry lowering his sign, then raising it again.
- Workers embracing.

TITLE CARD:

THE MEMPHIS SANITATION WORKERS WON RECOGNITION AND IMPROVEMENTS AFTER KING'S DEATH.

CUT TO:

- Resurrection City on the National Mall.
- Mud.
- Tents.
- Wooden shelters.
- Poor families from across America.
- Coretta walking among them.
- Ralph speaking beneath rain.
- Dorothy directing supplies.

TITLE CARD:

THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN CONTINUED, BRINGING THE NATION'S POOR TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

CUT TO:

YEARS PASSING - MONTAGE

- Children entering integrated schools.
- Black voters standing in long lines.
- Black mayors being sworn in.
- Civil rights leaders aging but still marching.
- Coretta Scott King speaking before crowds.

- Campaigns for the national King holiday.
- President Ronald Reagan signing the King holiday bill.
- Families celebrating Martin Luther King Jr. Day.
- The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in Washington, D.C.
- Visitors touching the stone.
- Schoolchildren reading about him.
- A young girl looking up at the statue.

TITLE CARD:

THE DREAM HELPED RESHAPE AMERICAN LAW, POLITICS, EDUCATION,
HOUSING, LABOR, AND PUBLIC MEMORY.

CUT TO:

MODERN-DAY IMAGES - FULL COLOR

- Voter registration volunteers at folding tables.
- Workers marching for fair wages.
- Families at food banks.
- Students walking into classrooms.
- People protesting peacefully in city streets.
- Clergy linking arms.
- Young activists holding signs for justice.
- Black, white, Latino, Asian, Native, and multiracial families standing together.
- A sanitation worker lifting a child onto his shoulders during a parade.
- A teacher writing on a classroom board:

DIGNITY

JUSTICE

COURAGE

LOVE

TITLE CARD:

THE DREAM IS NOT FINISHED.

CUT TO:

- A modern city bus stopping at a curb.
- Children of different races climb aboard.
- An elderly Black woman sits near the front.

— A young boy gives her his seat.

She smiles.

He smiles back.

TITLE CARD:

IT LIVES WHEN A PERSON REFUSES HUMILIATION.

CUT TO:

— A courthouse.

— A first-time voter steps into a booth.

TITLE CARD:

IT LIVES WHEN A CITIZEN CLAIMS A
VOICE.

CUT TO:

— A worker putting on gloves before dawn.

TITLE CARD:

IT LIVES WHEN WORK IS HONORED.

CUT TO:

— A family opening the door to a new home.

TITLE CARD:

IT LIVES WHEN A CHILD HAS A SAFE PLACE TO SLEEP.

CUT TO:

— A crowded classroom.

— A teacher hands a book to a student.

TITLE CARD:

IT LIVES WHEN EDUCATION IS TREATED AS A RIGHT, NOT A
PRIVILEGE.

CUT TO:

— A peaceful march moving through a modern city.

No violence.

No spectacle.

Just people walking.

TITLE CARD:

IT LIVES WHEN PEOPLE KEEP WALKING.

EXT. LINCOLN MEMORIAL - DAWN - PRESENT DAY

The same place where the film began.

But now empty.

Quiet.

The Reflecting Pool lies still.

The steps of the Lincoln Memorial wait in soft morning light.

A school bus pulls up.

Children step out with a TEACHER.

They are laughing, sleepy, carrying backpacks and phones.

One child, a Black boy around ten, lingers at the bottom of the steps.

He looks up.

The steps are large.

The memorial larger.

The past larger still.

His teacher approaches.

TEACHER

You coming?

The boy keeps looking up.

BOY

This is where he spoke?

The teacher nods.

TEACHER

Yes.

The boy thinks about that.

BOY

What did he want?

The teacher looks toward the steps.

Then back to the boy.

TEACHER

For us to become better than we were.

The boy considers this.

BOY

Did we?

The teacher does not answer too fast.

TEACHER

Some.

A beat.

TEACHER

And not enough.

The boy nods, as if that feels honest.

He looks up the steps again.

BOY

Then we still have work.

The teacher smiles.

TEACHER

Yes.

The boy starts climbing.

One step.

Then another.

The other children follow.

Their footsteps echo softly against the stone.

EXT. LINCOLN MEMORIAL STEPS - CONTINUOUS

The children climb.

The camera stays low, watching their feet.

Sneakers on stone.

Small steps on historic ground.

The sound becomes all the footsteps we have heard before.

Montgomery.

Birmingham.

Selma.

Chicago.

Memphis.

Washington.

The boy reaches the top and looks out over the Reflecting Pool.

The sun rises behind the Washington Monument.

Light spreads across the Mall.

For a moment, past and present stand together.

Then the boy opens his notebook.

On the first page, he writes:

THE DREAM IS STILL ALIVE.

He pauses.

Then adds:

BECAUSE WE ARE.

He closes the notebook.

The children look out at the long stretch of America before them.

FADE TO BLACK.

END CREDITS BEGIN OVER ARCHIVAL AND MODERN FOOTAGE.

- King laughing with children.
- King walking beside Coretta.
- King preaching.
- King being arrested.
- King receiving the Nobel Peace Prize.
- King crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge.
- King standing with sanitation workers.
- Coretta marching in Memphis.
- Resurrection City.
- Civil rights workers registering voters.
- Modern activists organizing peacefully.
- Workers raising signs.
- Children reading in classrooms.
- Families visiting the King memorial.
- Ordinary people walking.

FINAL TITLE CARD:

A DREAM SPOKEN CAN INSPIRE A NATION.

A beat.

FINAL TITLE CARD:

A DREAM LIVED CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.

FADE OUT.

AFTER THE DREAM

The fight for justice began with a dream.

