



*Lookout  
Baltimore*

A Play in Four Acts

by T.J. Speaks

# LOOKOUT BALTIMORE

(Dramedy)

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## SUMMARY

The day 16 year old C.J. becomes orphaned by the sudden death of his grandmother, the unforgiving social system of Baltimore steps in; but instead of finding 'love', he uncovers a dark family secret about his long lost mother. Against all odds, he reaches his goal of becoming a judge in '*The Greatest City in America*'. Poised to preside over his first court case, events begin to unfold that bring truth to his late grandmother's words ... "*It's not where you live, but what you're willing to forgive.*"

## Cast of Characters

JOY PALMER: 44 year old foster mother with self-imposed feelings of failure and guilt; forced to face a secret hidden in her heart for 16 years; contends with the suspicion of paternity when C.J. is suddenly placed in her home. When JOY is called to answer charges of child abuse and neglect - the prophesy of forgiveness (spoken by her late mother) - rings a bell of truth JOY never imagined.

C.J.: 16 year old (abandoned at birth); raised by his grandmother (BEULAH/JOY's mother). Survives the odds of rising above poverty to become a judge in the legal system of Baltimore; during proceedings for his first criminal case C.J. uncovers a painful secret that gives new meaning to the idea ... 'moment of truth'.

BEULAH: JOY's Mother - Grandmother to C.J.; Well-known civil rights activist in Baltimore; dies of a sudden stroke (At Rise); her wisdom emanates through C.J.'s actions.

REGGIE: 14 year old foster child - uses the guise of dyslexia and humor to conceal his brilliance and mask a temper that refuses to remain dormant. When he finds brotherhood with C.J. he finds hope; but unfortunately it isn't enough.

GLORIA PALMER: JOY's childhood friend; witness's years of neglect with the children entrusted to JOY's care. When GLORIA answers the 'Christian Call' - she must confess that she's kept enough secrets and told enough lies.

Cast of Characters (cont'd)

MR. JACKSON: 62 year old mailman; breaks through JOY's tough-as-nails exterior; adds a brief romance to JOY's otherwise boring life.

PASTOR HOWARD: Minister of the church in Carroll Park; eager to connect with the community; pays attention to more than he lets on.

OFFICER MONROE: Neighborhood Patrolman; 1<sup>st</sup> In Command; offers a salute when he's in the presence of a lady; appears to be more concerned with being 'well-known' in the community - rather than protecting it.

OFFICER PRATT: Patrolman - 2<sup>nd</sup> In Command; by the book, short on words (comedic in tone).

MRS. WATERS: Social worker - wears eye glasses - speaks with an air superiority and sophistication; openly turns a blind eye to the ills of the Baltimore foster system; prides herself on placing children quickly to reduce the homeless rate for the city she loves.

NILE: Food Service delivery driver (hired by Dept. of Social Services); uses his charm to distract JOY as he collects evidence that will be used against her in a court of law.

OMAR: Ambulance driver (former foster child of JOY); decides if he will allow his childhood to suspend his duty to preserve (JOY's) life.

ATTY MADDOX: Counsel - *Defendant* (JOY PALMER)

DISTRICT ATTY: Counsel - *State of Maryland*

SETTING:

Two bedroom home located at 6164 Russell Avenue - crime ridden community of Carroll Park. The Baltimore Dept. of Social Services randomly places children into JOY's home; *black screens cover window exteriors, sun-resistant drapes cover window interiors; living room door (left) on main wall (between buffet table and dining table); stairway (right) near dining area; bookshelf - to the right of stairway; swinging kitchen door on main (right) wall; Living room content: grey recliner (left center), blue sofa (center), wooden coffee table and oval rug (center room), wooden chair/brown (right center); TV (audience wall above window that looks out into neighborhood courtyard).*

AT RISE:

It's 4:30pm and REGGIE is relaxing on the sofa - watching a breaking news report on TV (**concerning the death of Lady B'More** ...); news program is audible to the audience; REGGIE hears a key jingle at the door (jumps to the dinner table - pretends to be busy with chores).

JOY:                   **(JOY - enters, intrigued by the news report - sudden death of Lady B'More)**  
Reginald, I know you not still doing homework after 4 o'clock? I told you Mrs. Waters is coming by for a visit today.

REGGIE:               **(REGGIE - antics visible to audience)**  
Oh, Ms. J, I finished my homework like two hours ago.  
**(REGGIE - lightly taps his fingers atop his school backpack)**  
You-know-me, I'm just sitting over here clipping these coupons, and counting my blessings.  
**(Character thought - audible)**  
*... And don't think I didn't count how many pairs of shoes you bought last month. J-Renee'! Now, ain't this about a ...*

JOY:                   **(JOY - shakes her head in disbelief of REGGIE's simple antics)**  
Reginald! Snap out of it, we ain't got time for none of your day dreaming; we got company coming! And, let me see that homework of yours; You're not embarrassing me again!

REGGIE:               **(REGGIE - gets up from the table, stands beside JOY - hands her the completed assignment.)**  
Here you go Ms. J ... all 100 math problems; finished and ready to be graded ... *just* like you asked.  
**(REGGIE - chants and dances while JOY examines his work)**  
Reggie gets an 'A' ... HEYYYYYYYYY!  
I said ... Reggie gets an 'A' ... OWWWWWWW!

JOY:                   Not so fast James Brown; what I asked is for you to do them right!

REGGIE:               I did! Right down to the last one!

JOY: Well, alright, I guess it looks ok. You know last time that woman came by here and collected your work - I couldn't show my face around Carroll Park for a whole month!

REGGIE: **(REGGIE - character thought - audible)**  
*Pffff! With a face like that, you should've been banned from 'The Park' foreverrrr! Around here scaring kids and killing dogs. Thanks to you ... there ain't one dog left in Carroll Park!*

JOY: **(JOY - snaps her finger to dissolve REGGIE's daydream)**  
REGINALD! ... REGINALD! Stop messing around, and help me get this place cleaned up before she gets here. We ain't got no maids and no butlers around here. You know my motto: *YOU MAKE A MESS, YOU CLEAN IT UP!*

REGGIE: **(REGGIE - tiptoes to the front door - stops short of turning the knob - turns to face JOY - whispers a comment that irritate her)**  
Tell you what, you go ahead and get started in here, and I'll go outside, to see if I see her pulling up.

JOY: **(JOY - wags her finger in disapproval)**  
Listen here boy ... don't test me today! You've been doing really good lately; you step one foot outside that door, and you'll be westbound so fast it'll make your head spin.

REGGIE: **(REGGIE - turns slowly - tiptoes slowly back to the table)**  
You know what, on second thought, maybe I'll just straighten up the mess I made over here.

JOY: No, on second thought, just leave everything like it is; it'll look good for the visit - when she arrives.

REGGIE: But you just said *help* you clean up.

JOY: **(JOY - defensive posture/hands on hips)**  
Boy, I *know* what I said!  
But, maybe if she you actually *learning* something around here, maybe my checks will start lookin' a little bit better.

REGGIE: Ummmm, excuse me Ms. J., but don't you mean '*my*' checks?

JOY: Alright now, don't get cute!

**(Doorbell rings)**

JOY: Ok. That's gotta be her! Stand up STRAIGHT! ... Tuck in that SHIRT! ... Chin UP! ... Shoulders BACK!

REGGIE: **(REGGIE - mocks JOY with a military salute)**

JOY: **(JOY - glances over her shoulder - chastises REGGIE - answers the door)**  
REGINALD! You embarrass me today ... and I swear to you ...

**(Doorbell rings again/JOY - preps hair and clothes/door opens to incidental music que - 'Lionel Richie - Hello ... is it me you're looking for')**

**(JOY - shakes her head side-to-side - sighs at the discovery of who's standing at the door).**

Oh great ... it's you! Mr. JACKSON ... well listen, I ain't got time for this *Mack-Daddy-Thing* you got going on right now; I've got an important meeting in about ... well ... actually right about now! So, make it quick; WHAT do you want?

MR. JACKSON: **(MR JACKSON - confident expression)**  
Ms. Palmer, Ms. Palmer, Ms. Palmer!  
WHAT DO I WANT? Woman ... do you know how  
*long* I've waited for you to ask me that  
question? Let's see, I've been waiting  
since ...

JOY: Ugggghhhhh! Sorry I asked. Look,  
you've been waiting just fine all this  
time ... a little while longer ain't  
gonna hurt nothing!

MR. JACKSON **(MR. JACKSON - extends hands outward to  
garner warmth and sympathy from JOY)**  
Ms. Palmer ... now, if you'd just let me  
get to know you a little bit better;  
you know ... maybe we could ...

JOY: **(JOY - pretends not to care - REGGIE  
takes note of the verbal exchange)**  
Look! You got three seconds to deliver  
my mail or I'm calling Monroe!

MR. JACKSON: Yes, that's what I like ... a woman  
passionate about her mail!

JOY: 1 ..., 2 ...

MR. JACKSON: **(MR. JACKSON - rattles off a list of  
mail items)**  
2 letters, 1 bill, and a postcard! I  
don't mean you no harm Ms. Palmer, I'm  
just a man trying to get to know you.  
Why you gotta be so mean and so ...

JOY: **(JOY - slams the door mid-sentence /  
MR. JACKSON - yells through the door  
un-phased by her rejection)**

MR. JACKSON: OHHHH, I SEE! THAAAAAAAT'S WHY! But  
You haven't seen the last of me. I'll  
be back!

JOY: Ooooh Lord! That man is about as  
desperate as the day is long.

REGGIE: Awe Ms. J, now that right there ... that was cold!

JOY: Keep it up, and what's gonna be cold around here is your dinner.

**(Second knock at the door)**

JOY: Pffff! What is it with these men who can't take 'NO' for an answer?

**(JOY - as she extends her hand to turn the knob expecting to see MR. JACKSON again/ MRS. WATERS - pounds her fist to the door - announces her arrival)**

MRS. WATERS: BALTIMORE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES! Hello ... anyone home? Hello ... Hello!

JOY: **(JOY - straightens her clothes with her palms, checks her teeth in a nearby mirror / admonishes REGGIE)**  
Reggie, I'm counting on you to be on your best behavior. Don't mess this up for me! I mean it ... *don't* do it!

REGGIE: Do what?

JOY: You know ... act a fool!  
**(JOY - opens the door)**  
Mrs. Waters, what a beautiful day for a visit. I see you're looking lovely as usual - please, come in.

REGGIE: **(REGGIE - exaggerates JOY's greeting with facial expressions and hand gestures / C.J. - enters in step with MRS. WATERS)**

MRS. WATERS: Ms. Palmer ... Reginald, so good to see you both again. Excuse me for having to do this on such short notice, but the young man I have with me today ... his name is C.J. ... and he's going to be staying with you all for a while.

JOY: Ahhh, yes, I think he's the one you told me about last week. But pardon me, had I known you were bringing him by today I would have ...

MRS. WATERS: Ohhhh, you can thank me later. You know my motto ... "AS LONG AS BALTIMORE HAS PRIDE ... NO CHILD ... WILL RUN WILD!" Baltimore is a city of action! A city of promise, and prestige ...  
**(REGGIE - character thought - audible)**

REGGIE: ... *HOODRATS ... ALLEY BATS, WILDCATS ... AND MUSK RATS!*

MRS. WATERS: ... a city of hope. That's why we are *The Greatest City in America!*

JOY: **(JOY - Taps REGGIE's shoulder for attention)**

MRS. WATERS: We put children first in 'Baltimore'. I'm proud to announce that the city is doing well with placement percentages; and we wouldn't want to mess that up.

JOY: Ohhh, but of course not.

REGGIE: **(REGGIE - character thought - audible)**  
 ... *Oh GREAT! Another knuckle head!*

MRS. WATERS: Ms. Palmer, I see you're still willing to help keep Baltimore clean and safe.

JOY: **(JOY - character thought - audible)**  
*Pfff! Girl, you know ain't nothing clean and safe about B'More!*

JOY: **(JOY - stifles REGGIE's antics with a phony embrace to prevent embarrassment)**

MRS. WATERS: **(MRS. WATERS - places her hand on her bosom)**  
 My, My, My, would you look at that. Now, that really just says it all!

REGGIE:                   **(REGGIE - plays up the moment - puts his thumb in his mouth)**

MRS. WATERS:            Ahhh! There's nothing I like to see better, than a 'true commitment' to this great city of ours!

REGGIE:                   **(REGGIE - nestles his head into JOY's shoulder with more pressure than she's comfortable receiving from him)**

JOY:                      **(JOY - gently lifts REGGIE's head with her hand)**  
You know I'm always willing to do my part. Besides, you know I don't mind the extra Mon' ... I mean ... the extra COMPANY; yes, extra company is nice.

REGGIE:                   **(REGGIE - turns to audience - audible interaction with audience)**  
*Now, y'all know she was about to say MONEY; right?*

JOY:                      C.J., this young man standing here beside me is Reginald. You two boys are gonna be sharing his room upstairs.

REGGIE:                   **(REGGIE - character thought - audible)**  
*So, Reginald, how do you feel about sharing your personal space with a perfect stranger? ... Well, Regg-man, I don't know ... ain't nobody really caring about what I think.*

JOY:                      **(JOY - grunts - admonishes REGGIE privately through her teeth)**  
I told you, not in front of company.

REGGIE:                   Listen big'dude, you're not exactly company; as soon as Mrs. Waters leaves you'll be part of the family.

JOY:                      C.J, I'm sorry, what Reginald was trying to say, is that we're glad to have you in our loving home.

REGGIE:                   **(REGGIE - character thought - audible)**  
*Loving? Pffff, now she knows good and hell-well there ain't no love in here!*

JOY:                       **(JOY - whispers to REGGIE)**  
Now, go over there, and make him feel welcome. Go'on!

REGGIE:                   Hey, you're already here, but check'it...  
Welcome, Welcome, Welcome!

JOY:                       Boy ... that's your Easter speech!

REGGIE:                   *You-know-me, crazy Reggie ... always trippin' ...*

C.J.:                      Hey, I hear you lil'dude, but check this out - I'm not trying to be here for too long anyway.

MRS. WATERS:           Excuse me Ms. Palmer, but it seems to me - that C.J. has already forgotten our little conversation in the car.

REGGIE:                   **(REGGIE - character thought - audible / REGGIE takes a seat in a nearby chair)**  
*Ohhh, yeah, this right here is starting to get GOOD!*

JOY:                       **(JOY - playfully pokes REGGIE's head)**

MRS. WATERS:           His grandmother, God rest her soul; she gave her life trying to bring change to this community; sure would be a *shame* if her little C.J. ended up on the other side of town. C.J., you realize there are some dark '*elements*' in other parts of the city that we don't have to worry about here in Carroll Park.

REGGIE:                   **(REGGIE - character action - silently jabs and kicks the air with hands and feet)**

JOY:                       REGINALD! Stop that!

REGGIE: Dude!?! Over there, you gotta know how to scrap! You get caught slippin' over there ... it's a wrap!

C.J.: Hey, it's cool ... I'm not trippin!

REGGIE: **(REGGIE - character thought - audible comment to audience)**  
*I bet y'all he can't even fight!*

C.J.: Mrs. Waters I don't mean you - Ms. Palmer here, or the city of Baltimore any disrespect, but conversation or no conversation, if I don't like it here - I'm telling you right now, I'm not staying.

REGGIE: Hear that ... the brotha says first sign of trouble ... he's out!

JOY: BOY!!!

REGGIE: **(REGGIE - gestures behind JOY's back in support of C.J.'s defiance)**

MRS. WATERS: Oh; well is that so?

C.J.: Look, you can threaten me with the WEST side, EAST side, NORTH and SOUTH side, but it's like **my grandmother used to always tell me "... don't stay nowhere you ain't happy."** So, I beg your pardon ... and yours ... and yours too lil-man, but like I said, if I'm not happy here ... I'm not staying.

JOY: Hey, let's start over. I think we got off on the wrong foot. C.J., you are gonna love it here! Ask Reginald, he loves it in Carroll Park; don't you? ?

REGGIE: **(REGGIE- character thought - audible)**  
*Don't keep putting all this love stuff on Reginald, I'm just a kid trying to maintain.*

JOY:                   **(JOY - places a sympathetic hand on REGGIE's shoulder - hushed sentiment)**  
You'll have to forgive him. You know how it is ... A.D.D. ...

REGGIE:               **(REGGIE - playfully swats JOY's hand away from his shoulder)**

JOY:                   You'll have to excuse him; he loves it here. Really, all the kids do; I mean what's *not* to love.  
**(JOY - gives REGGIE a shoulder nudge to encourage a proper introduction)**

REGGIE:               Hey man, I'm Reginald, but all the people in 'The Park' call me Reggie.

**(C.J. & REGGIE - share a fist bump)**

C.J.:                   Cool, I'm Charles, Dupree & 23<sup>rd</sup>, but you can just call me C.J.

REGGIE:               Dupree & 23<sup>rd</sup>? That's Riverside! How'd you end up all the way over *here*?

**(C.J. & REGGIE - synchronized head-turn with eyes resting on MRS. WATERS)**

REGGIE:               **(REGGIE - character thought - audible)**  
*Dang Mrs. Waters, you get around don't you girl!*  
Well C.J., looks like you're staying bro. C'mon, let me show you around.

**(REGGIE & C.J. - disappear through the swinging doors that lead to the kitchen)**

MRS. WATERS:        Ahhh! Would you look at that! I just love it when a situation works itself out. Well Ms. Palmer, my work here is done, I must be getting back. You know the city of Baltimore can't run itself!

JOY: Ohhh! Before I forget ... here's Reginald's homework assignment.

MRS. WATERS: **(MRS. WATERS - glances over the top of her eye glasses - silently questioning whether or not the work has been checked for accuracy)**

I trust he's improving, hmmm? You do realize part of his allotment *is* based on academics. These kids are the leaders of tomorrow Ms. Palmer; we have to make sure they are prepared.

JOY: Oh! He's improved so much in the past 6-weeks. He has good attendance, he's doing extra credit work; and of course - you know I spend as much time with him as I can ...

MRS. WATERS: But of course you do. Well, keep doing what you can, because we can NOT have another fiasco like the one we had last quarter. I can't get these kids ranked with the nations '*Best and Brightest*', with scores that say they're not learning.

JOY: No, this time it's different, I checked each math problem personally, and I'm sure that all of them are correct.

MRS. WATERS: Well, alright; I'll go ahead and submit it. If you don't hear from me by 3 o'clock tomorrow, you'll know that ...

**(MRS. WATERS & JOY - speak in unison)**  
... NO NEWS ... IS ... GOOD NEWS!

JOY: **(JOY - clears her throat - extends her hand to MRS. WATERS expectantly)**  
Ummmm ... Mrs. Waters, don't you think you're forgetting something?

MRS. WATERS:           **(MRS. WATERS - sighs - reluctantly removes an envelope from her purse - hands envelope to JOY)**  
Ah! Yes. With so much on my mind today, I *almost* forgot about your little check. Here you go!

JOY:                   **(JOY - character thought - audible)**  
*Little ...*

MRS. WATERS:           That's for your unwavering dedication.

JOY:                   Thank you Mrs. Waters.

**(MRS. WATERS - turns to walk toward the door - JOY examines the check)**

JOY:                   Ummm, MRS. WATERS ... C.J.'s coming in during the *middle* of the month; I trust we'll be making the *necessary* adjustments?

MRS. WATERS:           Why - Mrs. Palmer, I'm shocked! Don't I always make good on our agreements?

JOY:                   **(JOY - raises a doubtful eyebrow)**  
I mean - I'm not trying to rush you or anything, but it's just that ...

MRS. WATERS:           Ms. Palmer, I'll make the adjustment once I can confirm the accuracy of the homework. That's more than fair ... Hmmm? One thing I am, and that's *fair!*

JOY:                   You know something Mrs. Waters, people can say what they want about you, but you're really alright. You're direct, and firm, but yes ... you are 'fair'.

MRS. WATERS:           **(MRS. WATERS - takes a few steps towards the door - inflated ego)**  
Ms. Palmer, I'm just an example of what pride looks like when you care about your city. Of course, you *will* let me know how things turn out?

JOY: Oh, of course I will! I'm sure everything will be fine, he's just gotta get used to us, that's all. You know how they are the first day.

MRS. WATERS: **(MRS. WATERS - turns the door knob)**  
Yes, well, good day Ms. Palmer.

JOY: Ummm ... Mrs. Waters, one last thing before you leave ... it's about C.J.'s grandmother.

C.J.: **(C.J. - pushes the kitchen door ajar) - stops short of entering the living room - eavesdrops on the conversation)**

JOY: **(JOY - concerned that she may be getting in over her head)**  
Ummmm ... how did she pass away exactly ... I mean, was it expected? Was she sick for a long time?

MRS. WATERS: Oh that! Seems she had a sudden stroke. Maybe there was more to it ... who knows. Hey, you know how it is when it's your time to go ...

JOY: Well, yes, that's true ...

MRS. WATERS: Don't get me wrong, she was a good woman, but what she couldn't seem to understand - is that sometimes you have to allow a city to cure its own ills. She marched non-stop; she rallied and complained, and look where it landed her ... 6ft under! But this city surely did a fine job of putting her away real nice like ... yes, we did ... *real nice*.

JOY: Well, that must have been what the news report was about when I walked in.

MRS. WATERS: Yeah, it's been all over the news. *B'More Beulah!* May she and the rest of my good nerves ... REST IN PEACE!

JOY: Did you just say her name was Beulah?

MRS. WATERS: Yes, good old Beulah! She died yesterday at 6:00 am, and we had that woman in the ground by 2:00pm. Yeah, good old 'Lady B'More'... God bless her soul.

JOY: I guess I've been so busy lately I just didn't put 2 and 2 together. Yeah, come to think of it, I do remember her!  
**(JOY - privately dismisses the possibility of BEAULAH being her mother)**  
Hmmm, well, she sure knew how to get her point across. That woman knew how to stand in front of a building, didn't she Mrs. Waters?

MRS. WATERS: Mrs. Palmer, she practically lived in front of City Hall. Now, you didn't hear this from me ... but she didn't have two good words to say about the Mayor.

JOY: Noooo! ...

MRS. WATERS: And for some odd reason she didn't seem to care for me too much.

JOY: Well, I can't imagine that ... not liking you; I mean really ... what's not to like?

MRS. WATERS: You know, I said the same thing. I don't know. Her followers were a loyal bunch though, right up to the end. But who listens to a woman with 3<sup>rd</sup> degree burns all over face - who paces sidewalks, and camps out in parking lots all hours of the day and night?

JOY: What is it that she used to say ... **"If I've gotta B'more visible ... then y'all gotta B'more vocal ... these issues ain't just national, they're local."**

MRS. WATERS: Yes, that was her battle-cry alright!

JOY: Well, one thing's for certain, she stood for what she believed in.

MRS. WATERS: You know something; I never met a woman so committed to a cause; I mean, besides myself ... of course.

JOY: Well, I certainly have. And Lady B'More was just as strong-willed as she was.

MRS. WATERS: Whew! I can't imagine that. Who was she, your auntie, or your grandmother?

JOY: She was my mother.

MRS. WATERS: Oh, you poor thing!

JOY: She was one of those ladies, who had a way of seeing things ... you know. Almost like she could look into your soul ...

MRS. WATERS: You know, I think after a certain age, they all get a license for *WISDOM & UNFILTERED SPEECH*.

JOY: **(JOY - glances at MRS. WATERS as if she's one to talk)**

MRS. WATERS: Oh! But not me of course! I have an audience of loyal followers who love to see me coming. I love 'the people' and 'the people' love me. See, you have to learn to put the people first!

JOY: I hear you. But it's just so eerie you know; Lady B'More used to say some of the exact same things Mama used to say; always quoting scriptures and telling people what to do. Mmmm hmmm ... just like Mama used to. Hmmm ... I guess you're right, these old ladies certainly have some stubborn ways!

MRS. WATERS: But you know what they say ... wisdom without vision is a dangerous thing.

JOY: Tell me about it, my mother carried on so bad one day, I just up and told her how I felt. I told her ... *"Mention that bottom rail rising to the top one more time ... and I'm running away."*

MRS. WATERS: So, what happened?

JOY: Ohhh, of course she mentioned it, and ... of course I had to make good on my juvenile threat.

MRS. WATERS: Whoa! That must have been something to see. How old were you?

JOY: Yep, I was 15 years old. And, you know what; I did pretty good for a while. They say you gotta be careful how you leave home though, because you just might have to one day come *back*.

MRS. WATERS: What happened? Wait. Let me guess ... pregnant?

JOY: Yeah, about twelve years later; but I was young, and I didn't know what to do, and I wasn't ready to be a mother. I was still just a kid myself.

MS. WATERS: Yeah, babies raising babies ... that's a sad thing to see.

JOY: Yeah, ain't that the truth; but you know what; she didn't make me feel bad about it. No, she just told me ... ***"GO ON ... JUST GO ON JOYCE ANNE; I WANT YOU TO GO AND MAKE A LIFE FOR YOURSELF ... HE'LL BE JUST FINE. But listen ... you're not getting off Scott-free, you hear me? You might be old and in a wheelchair when this day comes, but one***

JOY (cont.): *day you will humble yourself and ask God for forgiveness for what you're doing. You gave him life, but one day - God is gonna fix it so that this boy saves your life. Don't worry about it right now; all I want you to do now is enjoy your youth. Don't beat yourself up about it, but don't forget about him either. You hear me JOYCE ANN PALMER ... I'm gonna pray for God to fix it so that you never forget about Charles. I'll raise him up alright, and be just fine, but remember ... he's not mine ... he's yours."*

MS. WATERS: What happened then?

JOY: Well, I kissed him on his little forehead, and I just walked away. I did like she said; I went and made a life for myself. I mean I often thought about him, and I prayed for him all the time, but I never looked back.

MS. WATERS: Wow, what was his name?

JOY: **(JOY - feels a lump in her throat)**  
His name was *Char'*... ummmm ... Charlton; yes, Charlton Michael Palmer.

MRS. WATERS: That had to be a tough thing for you both. Where was his father?

JOY: Oh! Now that's an even longer story ... and trust me, you don't have the time.

MRS. WATERS: I know it was hard, but look at you now; you've made up for it. You've seen what - 6 kids come through here; C.J. makes 7. I'm sure God is mighty proud of you, and I'm certain that Charlton is somewhere out in the world making a name for himself. I just know he is.

JOY: Yeah, I've prayed for him to make it, so I'm sure he's alright. But the thing I regret most, is that ... I never forgave myself. Mama always talked about that *damned* 'bottom rail rising', and I can't see where it ever did. But you know what, you're right, I have done pretty well for myself; so maybe it rose up ... halfway at least.

MRS. WATERS: Ohhhh, of course it did.

JOY: Ummmm, C.J. ... is he anything like his grandmother? You know - I run a tight ship around here; and the last thing I need right now is a bad influence on Reginald.

MRS. WATERS: Ms. Palmer, you have nothing to worry about ... C.J. is *nothing* like his Grandmother. THANK GOD!

C.J.: **(C.J. - winces at the insult)**

JOY: Ok, I'm taking your word for that!

MRS. WATERS: Ms. Palmer, I have been placing children for nearly thirty years now; I'm nearing retirement now; I can tell a bad seed and troublemaker when I see one. That one ... trust me, he's a good kid.

**(C.J. - favors MRS. WATERS' compliment with a smile)**

JOY: I don't know ... maybe it's just me, but there's something about him.

MRS. WATERS: Something ... like what?

JOY: I'm not saying he's a bad kid ... but there's just something different. I can't really say, but yeah, definitely something different.

MRS. WATERS: Shake that off Ms. Palmer; it's just the new-mom jitters getting the best of you. Am I not the one who placed Reginald with you? And look how well that turned out.

JOY: Yeah ... don't remind me!

**(MRS. WATERS and JOY - share a hearty laugh)**

MRS. WATERS: Listen, you have my word; C.J.'s a good kid.

JOY: Oh, I'm sure he is.

MRS. WATERS: Well, I hate to run, but I really do have to be getting back to the office.

JOY: Thanks for listening ...

MRS. WATERS: Don't mention it. If you need anything, call or come my office. Or if you want, just camp out on the sidewalk ... I hear there's a spot that just opened up.

**(C.J. - lowers his head and eases back into the kitchen / MRS. WATERS - exits the apartment in a burst of laughter)**

JOY: JOY - leans against the closed door / character thought - audible)  
*So, you're the grandson of Old Lady B'More ... Well, people say 'the apple doesn't fall far from the tree'. I'm gonna have to keep a good eye on you C.J. Mmmmm ... Hmmmm ... a real good eye.*

**(Knock at the door/ JOY - answers - assumes that MRS. WATERS forgot to offer the usual reminder)**

JOY: Don't worry Mrs. Waters; I won't cash the check before Tuesday.

NILE: No. Ms. Palmer it's me ... Nile, I have that delivery you ordered. I know you're not on my route until tomorrow, but I thought I'd stop by since I was in the area. If I can just get a quick signature from you, I'll be on my way.

JOY: **(JOY - character thoughts - audible / adjusts her bra - fingers her hair)**  
*Nile ... sweetheart, I think you need a little bit more than just a quick signature. I hear you come highly recommended. Let me see just how much you know about customer service ...*

JOY: **(JOY - smiles, opens the door)**  
Nile, please come in.

NILE: **(NILE - enters)**  
How are you today Mrs. Palmer?

JOY: **(JOY - wiggles the fingers on her left hand)**  
That's 'MS.'

NILE: Well you can't be too sure now-a-days. Ummm, MS. PALMER ... here's your order; if I can just get you to sign right here, I'll be on my way.  
**(NILE - backs away from JOY each time she leans into his personal space)**

JOY: Nile, you know I've been asking around town about you.

NILE: Who? Me?

JOY: Mmmmm Hmmmm ...

NILE: Oh, really!

JOY: Mmmmm, Hmmmm, and word on the street is ... you have the best-beef in all of Baltimore!  
**(JOY - pats NILE on the butt)**

NILE:                   **(NILE - at a loss for words, coughs and clears his throat)**  
Is that right? All of Baltimore?

JOY:                   Mmmmmmm, that's what I heard. Nothing like a juicy *sirloin-tip-steak*, or a nice *T-Bone* to satisfy a woman's hungry appetite.

NILE:                   **(NILE - suggestive remark as he casually inspects the home)**  
Me, I'm a Skirt Steak man myself.

JOY:                   **(JOY - raises her skirt above the knee)**  
Really? Now would that be short skirt, or long skirt?

NILE:                   **(NILE - blushes from discomfort)**  
Whoa! Ms. Palmer, I just need to get your signature. I'm not trying to ...

JOY:                   **(JOY - suggestively eases the pen through her fingers - hands the signed delivery slip back to NILE)**  
Here you go *Nice* ... I mean Nile.

NILE:                   **(NILE - feels uncomfortable by JOY's body language - starts a nervous rant about her pending delivery)**  
And that will be \$43.95, but you can pay me when I collect from you next week. You know, you should really consider order top sirloin, it's cheaper that way.

JOY:                   **(JOY - takes a seat on the sofa - motions with her fingers for NILE to join her)**  
Honey, no one else eats that particular cut of meat around here except for me. Tell you what; put the package over there on the table, and come on over here and sit down.

NILE:                   **(NILE - jumps to his feet at the touch of JOY's hand on his thigh)**  
Ms. Palmer? Did you hear that? I could have sworn I heard a noise.

JOY:                    Oh! That's just the boys upstairs goofing around. Relax Nile, they won't bother us if we don't bother them. Oh, come and sit back down for a minute; you'll be glad you did.

NILE:                   **(NILE - character thought audible)**  
*Yeah, that's what I'm afraid of!*

JOY:                    You know what would be nice; actually ... what would be ... helpful?

NILE:                    Ms. Palmer, I'm almost afraid to ask ...

JOY:                    Well, it would be nice if you offered customers samples of what you have; this way customers can make a decision about how much they need. Now, I'm not saying you're not a good delivery driver, but I think customers tend to be curious. We want to see what we're getting ... *before* we buy it.

NILE:                    Listen Ms. Palmer, I'm not a salesman, I just run the delivery route.

JOY:                    Nile, you seem like a man ... a little nosy at times, but you're smart. Mind if I ask you a question; you know, a personal question.

NILE:                    Sure!

JOY:                    Do you *like* your job?

NILE:                    Well, of course I do!

JOY:                    I know being on that delivery truck all day gets to be hard on you ...

NILE:                   **(NILE - gets temporarily caught up in JOY's feminine wilds - gets lured into her web of flirting)**  
Well, actually it is hard being out here all day; but it's nothing I can't handle; I take my work seriously ...  
**(NILE - against his desire to give in to JOY's advances, he surveys the living room and collects evidence)**

JOY:                    You ever thought about what you would do if something were to happen; you know something ... I don't ... know something silly; something that caused you to lose your job?

NILE:                    You know I never thought about it; something like what?

JOY:                    Well, I don't know, things tend to just happen sometimes; you know, *mistakes, mix ups, silly misunderstandings* ...

NILE:                    Hey, if this is about that ground chuck Mrs. Hayes ordered by mistake, the home office is handling that screw-up ...

JOY:                    No, it's not that. What I mean is - customers in general; they can be wishy-washy; happy one minute and demanding the next.

NILE:                    Well, in that case, I'd just have to make sure I didn't get caught in the middle of that kind of *mistake, mix up, or silly misunderstanding*.

JOY:                    Well, you could at least try.

NILE:                    See, I handle beef for my customers with special care; so I'm pretty confident the customers in Carroll Park are *completely* satisfied with the quality of my service.

JOY: You sound pretty sure of yourself Nile,  
I like that!

NILE: **(NILE - blushes/ eases away from JOY -  
eases his way to the front door)**  
Ms. Palmer, I still have a few more  
deliveries; maybe we can finish this  
little talk another time. I really  
should be getting back to work. I'll  
see you on the next delivery.

JOY: Oh, ok. Well, I'll be looking forward  
to next week.

NILE: I'll be here ...  
**(C.J. and REGGIE - lean into view from  
the stairway - careful not to be  
discovered - listen to the exchange  
between JOY and NILE)**

JOY: **(JOY - bites her lip gently)**  
And I'll be wearing a very short skirt.

NILE: Well ... until then, be satisfi' ... Oh,  
what I meant was I HOPE YOU'll BE  
SATISFIED WITH YOUR ORDER.

JOY: **(JOY - taps NILE on the butt as he  
walks out the door)**  
No, you had it right the first time.

NILE: OH, WOW! Bye Ms. Palmer.

JOY: **(JOY - closes the door - walks over to  
the table and picks up the delivery  
package - character thought audible)**  
*Hmmm ... sure would be nice to get a few  
samples of that.*  
**(C.J. and REGGIE - share a look of  
disgust - retreat up the stairway out  
of audience view /JOY - carries  
delivery package into the kitchen)**