

CONNECTIONS
A Play

CHARACTERS

Mendelsohn Ezell Reynolds: 68 yr old, black man, WW2 Vet Proud member of the historic 761st Tank battalion. Howard Univ. Legacy Alum

Lorraine Reynolds: 66 yr old black woman, Ezell's wife, Classically trained pianist

Paul Lawrence Reynolds: 36 yr old black male, son of Ezell & Lorraine; engineer

Menacham Chesler: 66 yr old Jewish holocaust survivor, Business owner

Francine Chesler: 36 yr old woman, daughter of Menachem, lawyer

SETTING

Home of Ezell and Lorraine Reynolds, a middleclass couple. A, lovely, 3 story brownstone, in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York, that was purchased with the GI bill. The action takes place in the parlor, and outside, in the couple's neighborhood.

TIME

8pm , Friday, August 19, 1991 – Sunday, August 21, 1991 – 3 days during a 4 day race riot between Jews and Black members of Crown Heights, Brooklyn.

ACT ONE

Scene One

Lights come up on home of the Reynolds', a lovely brownstone in Crown Heights Brooklyn— audience sees their parlor – which is Ezell's sanctuary – filled with black memorabilia collected by him, his father and grandfather - war photos, sheet music, photos of now famous people (Noble Sissle, Eubie Blake, James Reese) photo of him and Jackie Robinson, and a photo of him and Lt. Col. Paul Bates, other war momentos.

Ezell and Lorraine are heard offstage exchanging comments, as they are running late departing for a concert BB King is at Wingate Park, blocks from their home

Ezell speaks, coming down the stairs into parlor-

Ezell: Lorraine!! Lo -- girl, hurry up! You the one that wanted to see BB !! We gonna have a better view from here in a minute!!

Lorraine: Me!!? You the BB King, blues lover!! Laughs loudly-- I'da been on time if you hadn't wanted to get romantic—big daddy-- she calls from upstairs—talk'n bout I can make Lucille envious.” She races down the staircase – giddy, joining him in the parlor

Ezell:

(in front of mantel, holding a picture of him and Jackie Robinson. He puts it back and gives a salute then returns to their conversation he is wearing a teeshirt referencing 42 Jackie Robinson, as today is the anniversary of his acquittal -

He points to his shirt and says

Happy Anniversary Jack, you won. (he returns attention to Lorraine as she steps in)

Well, did I? (snickers grabbing her up in his arms and twirling her around)

Lorraine: Whoo- weee! Rock me baby , rock me all night long---{- she sings }

Ezell: (Joining in)- Rock me Baby , Rock me all night long------(they dance and sing the BB king song in unison)

Both: Rock me Baby, like my back aint got no bone! -(they collapse into each other laughing)

Lorraine: OOOOoo – you so frisky today!! What has gotten into you Mendelssoh Ezell Reynolds? I aint seen you like this in a long time-- I better play more BB King for you!

Ezell: I don't know, but you better get it while the getting's good girl! (he starts up again.

Reaching for her- excitedly.) You know today is Jackie's anniversary. one of the best victories ever for the brothers of the 761st Black panthers—he came out fighting and we won!!

Lorraine: Is that today, honey!?! His acquittal? (they continue hugging and dancing, humming)

Ezell: Yes, it is. Woo we! What a day that was for us! I'll never forget it- right Jackie?! (yells back over his shoulder.) I might be the only one that still celebrates it, me and Paul Laurence cuz he's been hearing about it all his life. (rocking and dancing – singing)

Lorraine: Yes, God. Paul Laurence knows all about the 761st, almost like he was there. Good thing we told him to meet us at the concert so we'll have someplace to sit. So, that's it -- you in a celebration mood, huh? I thought all that extra excitement was about me .

Ezell: Aaww girl, you know you do things to me. Jackie's anniversary is just a little something- something extra to your magic spell. What you say - we just stay here and I can ...

Lorraine: Man hush up... [She turns to face her hubby, lovingly.] I don't know if either of us can survive another round like we just had --- you tryin kill me...[half questioning, half stating. She kisses his face.] What time is it? The concert was to start at 8 --- we better hurry.

Ezell: (Starts singing sexy --) Rock me baby --(nuzzling up behind her)

Lorraine: [leans back for a moment, as if, then jumps away]-- Err- lets go --[grabs his hand from around her waist and pulls him towards the door]— Save some for later... she laughs

Ezell: Aw damn , The Thrill is gone!!! [He says looking at the audience-- They move towards the door and]

Then they hear the crash --- and screams ---- they open the door and stare out-- Lorraine runs down the stairs. It is chaotic, people are heard screaming, frantically in English and in Hebrew, and running. Sirens are heard far off then closer. People are yelling – the babies, the babies – oh my god the babies---

Lorraine: Oh my dear lord. [She says aloud.]

Ezell: What is going on Lo – it sounds like a WARZONE

Lorraine: A car- a car ran up on the curb ,hit one of those big pillars in the front of the building and has some children pinned under it and --- Ezell- OH my god - I don't think theyre moving - Do something!! OH my God!

Ezell runs out the door, into the action. noise and chaos is heard – people screaming, you killed them—you killed them. (if using a flashback screen show him in tanks etc.,, concentration camp images , etc.)

End of scene one. Lights go down- scene change .

SCENE TWO

Lights come up on Ezell and Lorraine, sitting in the parlor – clearly shaken. Only a few minutes have passed. Sounds of the impending riot are still heard off stage.....

Lorraine : Do you think those children are okay? Wasn't that Mr. Cato's boy – what's his name.

Ezell: Gavin. His name is Gavin. Nice kid, reminds me of Paul when he was that age. Was that his sister? I didn't know he had one.

Lorraine: He doesn't – his cousin maybe. He's an only child like Paul Laurence.
[They exchange glances. (a secret between them?)]

I suppose he's figured out we ain't coming by now – huh?

Ezell: Suppose so. The thrill is most definitely gone -- rubbing his shirt, looking down..
Something aint right Lo, ... [he starts.. nodding his head.] it Feels , it feels -
[he exchange glances with her]—

Lorraine: Strange – [she finishes] I know --- It feels heavy- and old — [shivers} you feel that?
(shivering, rubbing self)

Ezell: [nods slowly –looking off in agreement.) Yeah, I feel it all the time --- {locks eyes with her]

Lorraine: [struggles to meet his stare-looking off- then returns] Why didn't that 1st ambulance take those babies....

Ezell: They weren't gonna do that – that was a private ambulance for the Jews--- not for us.

Lorraine: An ambulance is an ambulance- those kids needed help first- them jewish folk were standing up and fine they weren't hurt at all--- those kids could've been taken first – they should've been taken first - private ambulance or not--- the damn police coul'nt make them take –

Ezell: (cuts her off) The police? The police? T]he damn police told them not too- I heard them

- said “ no need, the E MS will get them---“ shaking his head. Had it been some black folk that hit those kids – they wouldn’t have even come. The rabbi had a police escort as usual. That’s why they were here, in that private processional they have every month. Had somebody called them for help – we’d of never seen them at all.

You’re crazy if you think that jewish ambulance or the police give a rats ass about some black kids. The cops didn’t even try to help us move the pillar off em. Yeah the only reason police was and still is out there is because your cousins starting in on em’ —he snorts. They was about to drug them jews out of that car and whip they butts. This thing here is gonna be a problem... it’s just the beginning- I can feel --

Just then there is a loud outburst – women screams and wails in pain----- Lorraine runs to the door and peers out – then steps outside. Audience hears her talking to people offstage. Ezell stands in front of the fireplace mantel looking at photos - looking through them. He turns to face her standing in the door way.

Lorraine: The little girl is fine. She’s banged up badly, but okay. Gavin... [she starts]

Ezell: [turning back to the mantel speaks.) He’s dead – [matter of factly] - Of course he is. That old shiver that came over you – that’s the feeling you felt. That was it. Death. Black man’s death. Old and looming always waiting to strike. Heavy and ever present here in the good US of A. Funny I should be used to it by now. I can almost tell you what it taste like - [staring off then catches himself]
How old was that boy—7 ? 8?

Lorraine: (nods yes sadly – fighting back tears)

Ezell: Well at least he won’t be burdened with carrying the weight of his inheritance. He escaped that, being killed so young.

Lorraine: EZELL!!! What has gotta into you - what are you saying - -- I’ve never heard you speak such nonsense – stop it, stop it right now! [looks at him in wonder/confusion]

Ezell: It’s the truth, Lo. My truth as a black man in this country. And try as I might to escape it , and Ive tried,- that feeling you sensed –that shiver? It’s ever present for me. For us. It haunts us. (he looks at her and tries to tone it down) -- All IM saying is that little Gavin won’t have to battle with that.....the weight -- its Ive tried everthing I could to lift that weight offa me. Booker T and my daddy was wrong--- [he says looking at the photo wall, Dead wrong. (He snorts/laugh at his own inside joke)

Lorraine: Baby? Ezel?? What are you talking about? You’re scaring me honey. You - you’ve been slipping off to a place lately that I don’t understand.....

Ezell: Good, you shouldn’t understand—at Least I did that right. Been protecting you from that as best I can.