

GENIUS: ARETHA

Show number: 3WBA01

“RESPECT”

Written by
Suzan-Lori Parks

Directed by
Anthony Hemingway

OPENING

RAA1

INT. REGAL THEATRE, CHICAGO - ONSTAGE - NIGHT (1967)

RAA1

SMASH IN - FLASHBULBS POP! ARETHA, 25, joyful and glamorous wearing her silver lame gown and her brand-new CROWN.

Sisters ERMA and CAROLYN sing bgv, BAND MEMBERS lay it down, and the just-crowned Queen wails at the piano electrifying her AUDIENCE with "**Chain of Fools.**"

ARETHA

(singing)

*"You told me to leave you alone/My
father said, 'Come on home.'/My
doctor said, 'Take it easy'/Oh but
your lovin' is much too strong/I'm
added to your chain, chain, chain!"*

ERMA, CAROLYN

"Chain, Chain, Chain!"

ARETHA

"Chain of fools!"

Aretha steps away from the piano, heading back downstage,
getting closer to the audience.

ARETHA (CONT'D)

*"One of these mornings/The chain is
gonna break/But up until the day/
I'm gonna take all I can take, oh
hey/Chain, chain, chai-i-in/
Chain of fools!"*

(beat)

I love you, all! Thank you so much!

She brings the set to a close and the crowd goes wild with appreciation.

CROWD OF FANS

(rubato)

R-E-S-P-E-C-T! R-E-S-P-E-C-T!

ANGLE ON THE CROWD - loving her show.

The PIANIST gallantly returns her PURSE and RED ROSES.
Aretha, elated, waves to her loving crowd.

QUICK CUT TO -

Aretha, crowned, with purse and red roses, is surrounded by PAPARAZZI, as the DJ's stand by, enjoying the excitement. Armed with their still CAMERAS and even a SUPER 8 CAMERA, after the celebratory congratulations, reporters pelt the radiant new Queen with gossip questions.

FIRST REPORTER

You've just been crowned Queen of Soul! How does it feel?

ARETHA

I'm living in a fairy tale!

SECOND REPORTER

Are your children in the audience tonight?

ARETHA

(radiant)

It's past their bedtime!

WHITE REPORTER

But they're young kids, weren't you a mother at their age??

ARETHA

(sassy)

That's why they're home in bed!

Laughter from the reporters. They love her vibe.

THIRD REPORTER

Congratulations, Queen! Gorgeous dress!

ARETHA

You know I like looking good!

Cute response. They eat it up.

FIFTH REPORTER

Can't wait to hear your follow-up album!

ARETHA

Thanks! It's coming out in a couple of months.

SECOND REPORTER

We hope it does as well as your last one!

ARETHA
It's gonna do better! I ain't no
flash in the pan!

Laughter.

WHITE REPORTER
You think you're better than
Barbara Streisand or Judy Garland?

The White Reporter is baiting her, but she's not taking it.

ARETHA
(respectfully)
Those gals are such great singers!

FIFTH REPORTER
Your father, Reverend Franklin, is
he ok with you singing pop music?

ARETHA
(dazzling smile)
My Daddy loves and supports
everything I sing!

Aretha graciously manages to sign a few autographs.

SECOND REPORTER
But doesn't pop music mean you're
turning your back on the church?

Aretha answers in exactly the way she wants.

ARETHA
My voice is a gift from God!

Cheers from the Reporters. They love that.

THIRD REPORTER
Queen, where's your king tonight?

Instead of answering, Aretha gives a beautiful smile.

WHITE REPORTER
Yeah, with your father and your
husband in your life, who's calling
the shots?

ARETHA
(dazzling)
I'm calling the shots! No one's the
boss of Re!

The reporters machine-gun her with questions.

FIRST REPORTER

What do you think about what Dr.
King is trying to achieve for the
Negro?

WHITE REPORTER

When you sing "Respect," who are
you singing it to?

THIRD REPORTER

Come on, Queen, tell the truth!

FIFTH REPORTER

(jokester)

Give us a juicy story! We promise
not to tell!

SECOND REPORTER

Tell us your secrets!

WHITE REPORTER

Your life isn't always perfect, is
it?

ARETHA

Sounds like you've been reading too
many gossip magazines!

Laughter.

The edgy questions seem to help Aretha improve her game.
She's even more winning, more spirited. She's totally
charming them. She's got them in the palm of her hand.

THIRD REPORTER

Your sisters sing back up for you.
Do you ever sing back up for them?

ARETHA

In my family, we always support
each other!

With that, she heads upstage for another song. The press keep
taking photos as DJs usher them off stage.

THIRD REPORTER

We love you, Queen!

ALL REPORTERS

Give us another smile! One more
smile! Come on!

AA3 OMITTED

AA3

AA4 OMITTED

AA4

A1

EXT. RURAL ALABAMA - DAY (1954)

A1

CHYRON: 1954.

A well-used country dirt road. A pristine, late-model Cadillac Coupe de Ville swerves dangerously out of control, coming to a stop inches before hitting a tree. Dust clouds billowing around. The impact likely would have killed the father and daughter inside.

1

EXT. RURAL ALABAMA - DAY (1954)

1

LITTLE ARETHA ("LITTLE RE"), 12, standing nearby and watching as her father, CL FRANKLIN, 39, suit coat removed, works in the summer heat to change the front left tire.

CL FRANKLIN
(under his breath)
God damn it to hell.

LITTLE RE
Anything I can do to help?

CL loosens the lug nuts, cranks the jack, removes the tire.

CL FRANKLIN
My handkerchief.

She gets his handkerchief from his coat pocket, then she gently dabs his forehead. He smiles and keeps working.

A BEAT UP PICK-UP TRUCK driving by. Jams on the breaks.

TWO POOR YOUNG WHITE MEN - leering, not at all friendly.

Getting out of their truck, running their hands over CL's car, whistling, admiring.

CL on his feet now, watching, wary.

Little Re, sensing danger, watching her father.

JEFF

Not from around here, huh?

CL FRANKLIN
No, we are not.

White guys trade looks. The well-dressed negra is uppity.

CL FRANKLIN (CONT'D)
We're from Detroit
(clarifying)
Michigan.

ROB, chewing tobacco, spits, landing a wad on CL's trouser leg. CL glances at the mess but lets it be for now. JEFF eyes Little Re lasciviously.

CL FRANKLIN (CONT'D)
Get in the car, Re.

She does as she's told.

JEFF
(to Little Re)
My woman's about your size.
(to CL)
That your wife?

CL FRANKLIN
My daughter.

Rob flashes a BASEBALL BAT, breaking the passenger's side car window that's close to Little Re' head, startling them.

CL - TIRE IRON in one hand, other hand CURLING INTO A FIST.

It's about to go down.

LITTLE RE
(humming first then softly
singing)
*"I will trust in the Lord/I will
trust in the Lord."*

Her singing shifts the energy of the moment. Just a little.

LITTLE RE (CONT'D)
"I will trust in the Lord/until - "

CL's look stops her. He reaches into his pocket, pulling out -

WARY LOOKS - from the WHITE GUYS

-- HIS CAR KEYS.

CL FRANKLIN
You like my car?

The white men look at each other. Is this a trick?

ROB
Yeah --

CL FRANKLIN
(tossing the keys at him)
Then you can have it.

The keys land in the dirt. After a beat, Jeff retrieves them.

POV LITTLE RE: she sees glimmers of respect for CL in the eyes of the white men. And her father grows a foot taller in her eyes.

CL flicks the tobacco from his pants, gets their suitcases from the car and throws his jacket over his shoulder.

CL FRANKLIN (CONT'D)
C'mon now.

Little Re scrambles after him, tightly clutching her DOLL, which despite her age, is still precious.

ALL THE MEN WATCHING - moved underneath the surface.

CL and Little Re, hand in hand, head up the road towards town.

A ROAD SIGN: TUSCALOOSA -- 5 miles.

2

EXT. RURAL ALABAMA ROAD - LATER (1954)

2

Father and daughter walking in the summer heat.

LITTLE RE
That was scary, Daddy.

CL FRANKLIN
Sure was.

LITTLE RE
Why'd you give him your car?

CL takes a pause before answering, then,

CL FRANKLIN
Just to see the look on his face.
(beat)
I'm always going to protect you.
Remember that.

CL's brand of fatherly love will come to shape her taste in men and cast a shadow over her life forever.

They check out the brand new HUDSON HORNET CONVERTIBLE,
cherry red and ripe for picking.

A WHITE SALESMAN, his attention piqued, saunters over.

CL FRANKLIN

It's a beauty.

WHITE SALESMAN

I got some used models -

CL cuts him off by boldly kicking the tires.

WHITE SALESMAN (CONT'D)
(threatening)
Wait a minute now.

Little Re emulates her father's example:

LITTLE RE
(bold)
The car's for sale, isn't it?

CL takes a ROLL OF BILLS from his pants pocket. He counts out the asking price.

WHITE SALESMAN
Where'd you get money like this?

CL FRANKLIN
I'm a preacher. And I think we can
both agree that God is good.

He holds out the money. Little Re watches as the Salesman grudgingly takes the cash.

4 **INT./EXT. NEW CAR / CAR DEALERSHIP - MOMENTS LATER (1954)** 4

With Little Re riding shotgun, CL, behind the wheel, drives their new car off the lot.

Having narrowly escaped danger, they continue on in triumph.

LITTLE RE & CL FRANKLIN
(singing)
"I will trust in the Lord."

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

5

EXT. RURAL ALABAMA - DAY (1967)

5

CHYRON: 1967.

A FANCY RENTED CONVERTIBLE barreling down a pocked-marked lonesome two-lane highway. ARETHA, 25, riding shotgun. Her husband TED WHITE, 36, at the wheel.

Aretha, surfing her hand out the window as Ted drives.
They're heading down the road in a gorgeous rental car.
They've got an upbeat loving vibe. Everything to win.

ARETHA

(setting up for success)

Six years at Columbia and for all
that Mr. Hammond did he couldn't
get me on the charts cause he
didn't get me. But Mr. Wexler,
Jerry Wexler, he gets me.

(humored)

He's getting me to come all the way
down here.

TED WHITE

He says Fame Studios' got the vibe.

She looks at him, lovingly.

ARETHA

You're gonna be good, right?

TED

Yes, Ma'am.

They pass a LARGE CONFEDERATE FLAG.

TED WHITE

Don't worry. I'm here to protect
you.

ARETHA

Daddy used to say the same thing.

TED WHITE

I bet he did.

ARETHA

I'm gonna make a hit! And "find my
sound."

TED

We gotta get there first!

ARETHA

We'll get there!

(singing)

"I will trust. In the Lord..."

A converted tobacco warehouse with a big sign. Ted and Aretha get out of the car. JERRY WEXLER, 50s, greets them.

JERRY WEXLER
(respectfully)
Miss Franklin! Ted! Good trip?

An exchange of cordials.

ARETHA
(joking)
Itty bitty town. Sure they know
what they're doing?

JERRY WEXLER
We're in good hands here. Your
hotel's down the road. It's
integrated, so you'll be ok.

They appreciate his care, but are also like, "thanks for reminding us that we're black and not welcome everywhere."

JERRY WEXLER (CONT'D)
Rick Hall pulled some strings. Fame
Studios is a big fish.

ARETHA
I'm ready to sing!

JERRY WEXLER
Great!

Wexler holds the door for them and they head inside.

301-A8 **INT. FAME STUDIOS - JERRY'S MAKESHIFT OFFICE - DAY (1967)** 1-A8

Before heading into the studio, Jerry and Aretha touch base.

JERRY WEXLER
Flight ok?

ARETHA
It was fine. And the drive was safe
enough.

JERRY WEXLER
Good to hear.

Though this is only their first project together, Jerry's care for Aretha is already deep.

JERRY WEXLER (CONT'D)
(background info)
Rick Hall built this place from the
ground up. He's real salt of the
earth.

ARETHA
Nice of him to show Ted around.
(beat)
Who's on the session?

JERRY WEXLER
(gallantly)
You're gonna love them.

ARETHA
I got a great take on "Respect."

JERRY WEXLER
The Otis Redding song?

ARETHA
Yeah. It's gonna have a whole new
vibe. You know what I'm talking
about?

JERRY WEXLER
Whatever we record, if it sounds
good today, great, and if it sounds
good tomorrow, then we've really
got something.

ARETHA
I wanna make something strong.
(beat)
That they'll wanna play on the
radio.
(beat)
Is that asking for too much?

JERRY WEXLER
Not in my book.

ARETHA
Cause you're gonna help me get me
there.

JERRY WEXLER
I appreciate your trust.

ARETHA
Shit, if I can't trust Jerry Wexler-

They share a laugh. They're totally vibing. Aretha's ready to dive in.

8

INT. FAME STUDIOS - RECORDING ROOM - DAY (1967)

8

Studio Owner, RICK HALL, 30s, proudly shows them around.

RICK HALL

I love your work. Especially with
the Ray Bryant Combo. Your "Over
The Rainbow" was something else.

ARETHA

I'm trying for a funkier sound this
time.

RICK HALL

Yes, Ma'am.

(beat)

Just had the piano tuned. So that
you can sound your best.

Aretha plays a few chords.

ARETHA

Sounds great.

Ted makes a sweet show of dusting off the piano seat. Rick
proudly points to the various pieces of equipment.

RICK HALL
(gesturing)
And the control room's got state of
the art equipment.

Rick is respectful and enthusiastic. Aretha likes his vibe.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - Aretha waves to the Engineer, TOM DOWD.

TOM DOWD (ON TALK BACK)
Welcome to Muscle Shoals.

Seven WHITE GUYS enter the studio: SPOONER OLDHAM, PETE CARR,
ROGER HAWKINS, TOMMY COGBILL, and JIMMY JOHNSON. Plus, KEN
LAXTON and a SAXOPHONE PLAYER.

ARETHA
You've got a lot of engineers.

SPOONER OLDHAM
(friendly)
We're the Rhythm Section, Ma'am!

KEN LAXTON
And we're the horns!

Aretha and Ted trade looks. *White Guys?* Edgy pause. Ted's
trying to keep himself in check.

ROGER HAWKINS
You're surprised.

ARETHA
Yeah, and you're white.

Wexler, from the control room, over the talk back:

JERRY WEXLER (ON TALK BACK)
Miss Franklin, could you come on in
here for a minute?

Aretha leaves the recording room. Ted, after a beat, follows.

9

INT. FAME STUDIOS - CONTROL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

9

As Hall, Dowd, and the musicians wait in the recording room:

JERRY WEXLER
You said you wanted the guys who
played behind Wilson Pickett.

ARETHA
They're *white* guys and you're just
telling me now?

JERRY WEXLER
You liked their sound.

ARETHA
How was I supposed to know they
were white?

TED WHITE
(standing up for Aretha)
My wife's not just anybody.

JERRY WEXLER
I signed her, Ted, I know.

TED WHITE
She's deep soul, and blues, and
church. Like when you got a dime in
your pocket and then you hit the
numbers.

She gives Ted's hand a squeeze. He's her champion.

TED WHITE (CONT'D)
She's the jackpot. Who the hell are
they?

JERRY WEXLER
They're the best. Just like you
are, Miss Franklin.

A trust between them that will last almost forever.

ARETHA
Give me your word.

JERRY WEXLER
You've got it.

Aretha looks through the glass booth, looking the guys over.

TED WHITE
(to Aretha)
You going to be all right in there?

Another glance to the musicians.

ARETHA
Yeah, sure.

She heads back into the studio. Wexler's relieved. Dowd and Hall re-take their seats.

JERRY WEXLER (ON TALK BACK)
Ok guys. Let's give it a go.

Ted lingers on the sidelines.

A FRESH BOTTLE OF ALCOHOL - Rick Hall opens it. Offers Ted a drink, which he accepts. Rick takes a drink too.

JERRY WEXLER (CONT'D)
(inclusive)
Ted, what do you want to do first?

TED WHITE (ON TALK BACK)
Let's try "Never Loved A Man."

IN THE RECORDING ROOM - Aretha and the musicians nod.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM -

TED WHITE (CONT'D)
(to Wexler)
She's got a great take on this.

10

INT. FAME STUDIOS - RECORDING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

10

The musicians tuning up. Passing around a WHISKEY BOTTLE.

Aretha at the piano. Laying on the music desk in front of her, A LEAD SHEET with the chords of "Never Loved a Man."

RICK HALL (ON TALK BACK)
We're rolling!

ARETHA'S HANDS - playing the chords. Upbeat fun vibe.

THE MUSICIANS - falling into the groove.

ARETHA
(upbeat vibe, singing)
*"You're no good. Heartbreaker.
You're a liar and you're a cheat."*

The musicians are playing tasty licks but they're glancing at each other, wondering if they're hitting the mark. Aretha stops playing. She's not feeling it.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
What do you think, guys, maybe more like blues shuffle?

HAWKINS, the drummer, sets down a feel.

ROGER HAWKINS
This what you're thinking, Miss
Franklin?

ARETHA
Sounds good.

She starts again at the piano. OLDHAM dazzles on the
Wurlitzer. COGBILL is walking some nice bass lines, and
JOHNSON is playing fine guitar. Still, the groove -

ARETHA (CONT'D)
*"I ain't never ever loved a man the
way that I loved you."*

She stops. That's not quite right either.

A11 **INT. FAME STUDIO - RECORDING ROOM/CONTROL ROOM - LATER (1967)**

They've been at it for awhile. Still searching.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM -

JERRY WEXLER
We got the song, we got the talent,
all we need is a groove.

TED WHITE
You said these guys -

JERRY WEXLER
They'll get there. Before they find
it, they gotta get lost.

ANGLE ON ARETHA - darting glances at the musicians. There's
so much riding on this and she's getting nervous. The
musicians are nice, they're respectful, but she doesn't know
them and, except for Ted, it's a room full of white men.

TOMMY COGBILL
Maybe we could speed it up.

JIMMY JOHNSON
Yeah. Like a dance tune.

Too many cooks in the kitchen. Aretha steps away from the
piano to stand at a vocal mic.

JERRY WEXLER

(on the talk back)

Miss Franklin, go back to the piano. Let's keep you there.

(to Ted)

She's a completely different performer when she plays and sings. That's going to be the key.

Aretha back at the piano. Speeding up the song. Way up. The musicians trade doubtful looks. Aretha trying to feel it. Can't. Music dribbles out. Silence.

The musicians have all heard good things about Aretha and she's heard the same about them. But was it all just hype?

Laxton, the trumpet player, drinks, blows his horn. Musicians whisper to each other. Aretha can't hear what they're saying. She feels alone.

EXITING THE CONTROL ROOM - Wexler gives Aretha a pep talk.

JERRY WEXLER (CONT'D)
Let's try this, maybe. I hear your
sorrow. So sing from that place.
Let Aretha be Aretha.

Aretha gets it. Wexler wants her to go to a difficult place.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - Everyone's quiet. Ted, watches, shakes his head. Takes a drink. Then another. Jerry re-enters.

IN THE RECORDING ROOM - Aretha and musicians, avoiding eyes.

THE PIANO KEYS - a refuge. She touches them soundlessly.

ARETHA
(to herself)
I will trust in the Lord.

ON ARETHA - But for the few random notes she plays, the room is silent.

TRANSITION.

11

INT. NEW BETHEL CHURCH, DETROIT - DAY (1953)

11

CHYRON: DETROIT. 1953.

From the pulpit, Reverend CL Franklin enthalls the 1,500 member ALL BLACK CONGREGATION.

CL FRANKLIN
Some people only want to trust in
themselves. Some put all of their
trust into their *bank accounts*.
Some trust the *government*.

Laughter from the congregation.

CL FRANKLIN (CONT'D)
All of these things will ultimately
fail. So I will trust in the Lord!

The ORGANIST plays. Upbeat accompaniment swells underneath.
The CHOIR stands. Little Re, in her choir robe, lifting her
voice in song. CL joins in:

CL FRANKLIN (CONT'D)
*"I will trust in the Lord, I will
trust in the Lord, I will trust in
the Lord. Until I die."*

ALSO IN THE CHOIR - Little Re's siblings YOUNG ERMA, 15,
YOUNG CECIL, 13, YOUNG CAROLYN, 8.

IN THE CONGREGATION - Little Re catches the eye of her lovely
GRANDMOTHER RACHEL FRANKLIN ("BIG MAMA"), 60s and, sitting
right beside her, CL's pretty lady friend, MELBA PARKS, 30s.

Little Re winks at Melba, who returns the love with a smile.

12

EXT. NEW BETHEL CHURCH - LATER (1953)

12

The Franklin Family, including Melba, make a reception line
on the church front steps, greeting parishioners as they
exit.

CHURCH MATRON
Rev. Franklin, you and your family
make every Sunday a blessing.

Little Re, hearing the compliments, beams.

CL FRANKLIN
I'm serving the Lord.

CHURCH PATRON
And our sincere condolences for
your dear wife, Barbara.

CHURCH MATRON
Passed one year ago, bless her.

Little Re, hearing this, leans closer to Melba who gives her
shoulder a squeeze.

CL FRANKLIN
We're doing our best to carry on.

CHURCH MATRON

(to Grandmother Rachel)

Mother Franklin, all your
grandchildren are wonderful
singers, just like dear Barbara
was.

GRANDMOTHER RACHEL FRANKLIN

We miss her every day. But we rest
in our faith knowing that she's
with the Lord.

CHURCH PATRON
When are you going to solo in
church, child?

Little Re, too shy to answer.

CHURCH MATRON
You've got a remarkable voice.

LITTLE RE
(shy)
Thank you.

A13 **EXT. NEW BETHEL CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER**

A13

A PRIVATE MOMENT between Little Re and Melba.

LITTLE RE
Are you and Daddy going to get
married soon?

MELBA PARKS
I hope so. Your father is a
wonderful man.

Another parishioner approaches Melba, who extends her hand in
greeting. Little Re mimics Melba's elegant moves.

13 **EXT. FRANKLIN HOME - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING (1953)**

13

A fine home in a residential upper-middle class neighborhood.

14 **INT. FRANKLIN HOME - NIGHT (1953)**

14

It's Saturday night and CL hosts a party full of FASHIONABLE
GUESTS. A glittery mix of black socialites, black artists,
black entertainers, and black business people. The LIQUOR
flows and the PARTY FOOD is down home and plentiful. On the
sidelines, two HEP CATS smoke REEFER. As CL, drink in hand,
walks by, they offer him a toke. He firmly declines.

CL FRANKLIN
If I were to stumble on Saturday
night, the world would hear about
it by Sunday morning. Sunday
morning, Lord, I gotta preach!

The guys laugh - they get it. CL's powerful and intends to
stay that way. ART TATUM, 40s, and DINAH WASHINGTON, 30s,
take the floor.

CL FRANKLIN (CONT'D)
The King of the piano and The Queen
of the Blues!

Tatum plays an intro, then:

DINAH WASHINGTON
*"What a difference a day makes/
Twenty four little hours..."*

15 OMITTED

15

R16 INT. FRANKLIN HOME - TOP OF STAIRS/LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS 6
(1953)

At her perch, Little Re listens to the party, holding her
doll close.

DINAH WASHINGTON (O.S.)
*"... brought the sun and the
flowers./Where there used to be
rain."*

CL sees Little Re, and surprises her with:

CL FRANKLIN
Come down and join the party.

Little Re hesitates.

CL FRANKLIN (CONT'D)
Come on, now.

She slowly descends the stairs as Dinah continues to sing. CL
leads the way. As Little Re heads into the room, a NICE GUY,
20, introduces himself.

TED WHITE
Which one of CL's daughters - ?

LITTLE RE
I'm Aretha Louise.

TED WHITE
Nice to meet you. I'm Ted White.

Yeah, it's that Ted White.

DINAH WASHINGTON (O.S.)
*"Skies above can't be stormy./
Since that moment of bliss./That
thrilling kiss."*

Little Re enters the room, shyly standing with her father,
until Melba gestures and they sit together and watch Dinah.

DINAH WASHINGTON (CONT'D)

*"... What a difference a day makes
and the difference is you."*

Dinah's phrasing, posture, gestures, and the pleasure of the
audience - Little Re is studying everything. As the guests
applaud, Dinah retakes her seat beside Ted.

TED WHITE

Sounding good, girl.

DINAH WASHINGTON

Yeah. I'm gonna record that one.

CL's surveying the room, decides on the next event.

CL FRANKLIN

My daughter Aretha -

He holds his hand out to Little Re, who hangs back. She darts
a pleading glance to Melba.

MELBA PARKS

CL, don't make Re sing if -

CL FRANKLIN

(a little drunk)

Re listens to the radio; she can
hear any song and sing it back note
for note! We got a bonafide radio
star in our house, so how about a
little singalong call and response?

The encouraging applause and cheers from the guests pulls
Little Re out of her shyness. To Melba:

TED WHITE

Just a silly party trick, huh?

MELBA PARKS

No, Little Re's good.

From her seat, sipping her drink, Dinah belts:

DINAH WASHINGTON

*"Did you say I've got a lot to
learn?"*

LITTLE RE

(singing it back)

"Did you say I've got a lot to learn?"

DINAH WASHINGTON
*"Since this is the perfect spot to
learn."*

Dinah gestures to Little Re and they sing together.

DINAH & LITTLE RE
"Teach me tonight!"

The guests erupt in applause. Dinah leans over to CL:

DINAH WASHINGTON
Re's gonna be the next great one.

The compliment puffs up CL.

A17

INT. FRANKLIN HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (1953)

A17

LATER - Ted freshens Dinah's drink as she speaks with Re.

LITTLE RE
I want to be a singer.

Dinah looks closely at the girl, then glances over to CL, who's wildly cutting the rug with a PRETTY LADY other than Melba. Little Re glances at Melba, who forces a smile.

DINAH WASHINGTON
Do you want it? Or does your daddy
want it?

LITTLE RE
Both, I guess.

DINAH WASHINGTON
Well. You got what it takes. But
you got to promise Dinah Washington
that you'll be a good girl. Don't
grow up too fast. Don't go having
babies until you've found yourself
a nice sweet husband. And watch out
for them sumbitches, you hear?

LITTLE RE
Yes, Ma'am.

Little Re, doll in her lap, scans the raucous party. She's a little girl in an adult world.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

17

INT. FRANKLIN HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATER (1953)

17

AT THE DOOR - an intoxicated Dinah being escorted home by her beau Ted White. On the sofa, CL and Melba, sitting close, talking lovingly.

AT THE PIANO - Little Re sits beside Art Tatum, who gives her an impromptu piano lesson. He's brilliant and gentlemanly. He plays a complicated jazz passage and she plays it back. He ups the ante and Little Re keeps up.

ART TATUM

You have any idea how good you are?

LITTLE RE

My mamma played piano too.

ART TATUM

You're a *Wunderkind*. A "wonder-child."

LITTLE RE

Thank you, Mr. Tatum.

He plays a delicious bass rhythm with his left hand and Little Re plays it an octave above. Tatum can't believe it. He adds a sublime jazz chord.

ART TATUM

Try it in a different inversion.

She follows, copying Tatum's hands, playing the same chord in a different way. She's a quick study.

ANGLE ON: Little Re's small hands making brilliant sounds.

18

INT. FAME STUDIOS - RECORDING ROOM/CONTROL ROOM - DAY (1967)

Back to 1967. ARETHA'S HANDS, forming the same chords on the piano, then adding extensions, inversions.

The other musicians, discouraged, getting antsy.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - they're waiting. Hoping for the best, fearing for the worst.

ARETHA'S FACE - in blissful rapt attention. The only thing real for her right now is the music she's making.

She lands on a BEAUTIFUL GOSPEL/JAZZ CHORD. Maybe one she learned in church, maybe it's one that Tatum taught her.

She holds it and lets it thunder throughout the room. Wherever it came from, it's sparking something deep. The musicians glance up, her music lifting them out of their doubts, chasing the clouds away.

SPOONER OLDHAM
(much impressed)
That, Miss Franklin, is an unknown
chord.

Enthusiastically, they gather around Aretha and her piano.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - Ted, Wexler, Hall, Dowd, taking notice.

Aretha plays the chord again.

SPOONER OLDHAM (CONT'D)
It's a Bflat-7 sharp 11.

ARETHA
Nah, that would sound like this.

She plays the B flat chord.

JIMMY JOHNSON
(mystified)
Sounds like the second inversion of a
C 7th sharp 9. Like C7#9 over G.

ARETHA
Wouldn't that be more like this?

She plays the C 7th chord.

TOMMY COGBILL
Whatever it is, it's funky.

PETE CARR
It's celestial.

ARETHA
(matter of fact)
It's both at the same time.

ROGER HAWKINS
(respectful)
Yes, Ma'am.

Aretha gets her left hand going. Doing some stride.

ARETHA
(having fun)
How about this here?

The guys are digging the groove. Inspired by Aretha, Oldham returns to his Wurlitzer. Playing a kind of counterpoint to hers, he hits the first two chords of the song then Aretha rhythmically works her left hand.

ROGER HAWKINS
That's it! That's it!

19 INT. FAME STUDIOS - RECORDING ROOM/CONTROL ROOM - MOMENTS 19
LATER

Aretha and Oldham jam in a loop. The others fall in.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - Jerry Wexler nods to Tom Dowd.

TOM DOWD (ON TALK BACK)
We're rolling!

IN THE RECORDING ROOM - The groove is solid. The musicians catch fire. And, together, they dive into the first cut.

ARETHA
"You're no good/heartbreaker."

She glances at Ted. She's feeling the song.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - Ted's initially pleased...

ARETHA (CONT'D)
"You're a liar/and you're a cheat."

But Rick Hall feels something more pointed in her delivery and Ted, noticing Rick's look, feels exposed as she sings:

ARETHA (CONT'D)
*"I don't know why. I let you do
these things to me."*

IN THE RECORDING ROOM - Aretha's left hand pounding out the rhythm. The other musicians following her lead.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
*"The way you treat me is a shame.
How COULD you hurt me so bad?"*

Oldham throws a smile to Hawkins, who is grinning ear to ear.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
*"Baby, you don't know/you're the
best thing I ever had."*

Laxton on trumpet adds his line. It's perfect.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
*"Kiss me once again./Don't you
never never say that we're
through."*

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - the guys trading looks. They know they've struck gold. But Aretha's gold mine threatens Ted.

ON ARETHA - singing, feeling -- yeah, THIS is my SOUND!

ARETHA (CONT'D)
*"Cause I ain't never, I ain't
never, I ain't never, no no / Loved
a man, the way that I loved you."*

20

INT. FAME STUDIOS - RECORDING ROOM/CONTROL ROOM - LATER 20

In between takes. Liquor is flowing. Everybody's drinking but Aretha. She's enjoying herself, though. Smoking. Joking.

ARETHA
So, there was this chicken. And he
only had one foot -

SPOONER OLDHAM
We already heard that one.

ARETHA
You ain't heard it the way I'm
telling it.

The musicians, in mirthful anticipation, give her the floor.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
Here he go. One legged yardbird.
Walking across the road --

She demonstrates. She's a cut-up. They're laughing and she hasn't even gotten to the punchline yet.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - Dowd, Rick, and Jerry all business,
listening back to the recording.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
*"Some time ago I thought/You had
run out of fools/But I was so wrong
You got one that you'll never lose"*

Meanwhile, Ted is watching Aretha.

TED WHITE (ON TALK BACK)
Let's keep it on track, Re, no need
to play the clown.

IN THE RECORDING ROOM - Aretha defiantly chicken walks.

ARETHA
Everyone asks why this yard bird's
crossing the road -- he's looking
for his other leg.

TED WHITE
Quit acting the fool, I said.

Mood goes quiet. Aretha turns to the musicians:

ARETHA
He should lay off the bottle.

TED WHITE
What was that?

Aretha gives Ted a look but doesn't answer.

JERRY WEXLER
(peacemaker)
Miss Franklin, let's do another
take. Just your vocals on the
bridge.

Aretha takes her place at the mic. Puts the cans on.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - Dowd and Rick Hall start the playback.

IN THE RECORDING ROOM - She works the lyrics like knives.

ARETHA
*"I can't sleep at night./And I
can't eat a bite."*

QUICK CUTS OF DIFFERENT POV - as she aims the lyrics at Ted.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
"I guess I'll never be free."

IN THE ROOM - Musicians, see what she's up to, trade looks.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
"Since you got, your hooks, in me."

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - Rick Hall, leaning back in his chair,
eyes Ted. Wexler and Dowd keep their focus on the music.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
*"Woah, oh, oh, yeah! Yeah!/I ain't
never had a man hurt me so bad."*

ON TED - her song is putting their secrets in the street.

ON MUSICIANS and PRODUCERS - not wanting to look, not wanting to look away. This is brilliant music and juicy shit. She's singing the lyrics of the song as written and she's using the truth of her life to fuel it. But, as she's finding her sound, Ted's becoming more and more uncomfortable.

ON ARETHA - *this is my sound. The groove, the direction, the intensity, it's all coming together. And the song is letting me say something out loud in the only way I can.*

21

EXT. FAME STUDIOS - BACK LOT - LATER (1967)

21

A dirt-covered lot right behind the building. The spot.

Rick's passing around a mason jar filled with MOONSHINE. Ted, Laxton and Jerry partaking. The SAX PLAYER rolls a smoke. Spooner is balancing a spoon on his nose. Johnson and Hawkins are playing horseshoes.

ARETHA and MUSICIANS - hanging out.

SPOONER OLDHAM
Do they hit it like that at
Columbia Records?

ARETHA
They do not!

Laughter. Fun trash talking.

ROGER HAWKINS
Us Swampers can play as good as
them New York City cats!

TED, JERRY and RICK HALL -

JERRY WEXLER
You two grew up together?

TED WHITE
I met her at a party. In her
father's house.

RICK HALL
Thought he was a preacher.

TED WHITE
He loves Sunday morning and
Saturday night.

The guys laugh, enjoying that.

A22

EXT. FAME STUDIOS - BACK LOT - LATER (1967)

A22

Laxton whistles a catchy tune. Aretha dances.

Guys are watching Aretha move. Laxton, keeping a respectful distance, dances by himself.

Aretha reaches out her hand to Ted. She wants her marriage to work. TED JOINS HER. They share a kiss, their heat palpable.

Dancing together, they've got a sweet rhythm. Then Ted sees the other guys watching. So he stops Aretha from moving. This is their marriage in a nutshell.

B22

EXT. FAME STUDIOS - BACK LOT - LATER (1967)

B22

Jerry and Aretha talk.

ARETHA

I just gotta trust my voice, right?

JERRY WEXLER

Everybody gets floored by your voice. Me, I also want to hear what's underneath it. And then, we get the right material, and you'll carry the day.

Rueful smiles. Nothing to lose and everything to gain.

ARETHA

My singing's always been my guardian angel. It keeps me safe.

JERRY WEXLER

Safe from what?

ARETHA

I ain't telling you my secrets.

Gentle laughter. Artists connecting with each other. Aretha likes these guys. They're good people and great musicians. She lights a cigarette. Smokes.

C22

EXT. FAME STUDIOS - BACK LOT - DAY (1967)

C22

Laxton and Aretha chatting.

KEN LAXTON

I never been to New York. How about taking me back with you? I could curl up in your suitcase.

Aretha guffaws. The guys laugh. She and Laxton share a smile.

TED WHITE

(to Laxton)

What the hell did you say to her?

ARETHA
It wasn't nothing, honey.

TED WHITE
You defending him?
(to Laxton)
This is my wife you're talking to.

SPOONER OLDHAM
He didn't mean any disrespect -

TED WHITE
Are you in this conversation?

KEN LAXTON
Didn't mean nothing by it, brother -

TED WHITE
I am not your brother.

Ted's killed the good vibes. They all head back inside.

22

INT. FAME STUDIOS - RECORDING ROOM/CONTROL ROOM - LATER

22

As they all walk back inside:

TED WHITE
(to Wexler)
Fire him. The trumpet player.

Jerry reads Ted. Decides to try appeasement.

JERRY WEXLER
(delegating to Hall)
Fire him, Rick.

RICK HALL
You're kidding.

TED WHITE (ON TALK BACK)
(taking charge, to Laxton)
Trumpet. You can leave. Go. Now.

The musicians look at each other. Laxton looks through the glass to Rick. After a beat:

RICK HALL
(to Laxton)
You heard him. Go on.

KEN LAXTON
I wasn't saying nothing to her.

All the other guys just look at the floor.

ARETHA
(quietly)
Sorry, man.

KEN LAXTON
This is some bullshit!

ARETHA
I'm really sorry.

Laxton packs up his trumpet and heads out. Aretha looks at Ted. Here we go again with the crappy behavior.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - Ted has clocked Aretha's apologetic tone. Rick Hall's wanting to regain control. Wexler and Dowd trade looks. Say nothing.

IN THE RECORDING ROOM - The other musicians just look at their instruments. Looking at anything but Aretha.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
Wanna take it from the top?

Hawkins does a gentle paradiddle. Spooner adds a few chords. But we can tell their hearts aren't in it.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - Ted stands apart from the other guys.

TED WHITE
I don't got no tolerance for
disrespect.

The guys just keep working on the levels. Then, boldly, Rick gives Ted a look.

RICK HALL
I don't like to be disrespected
either.

IN THE RECORDING ROOM - Aretha watching the rising tension. Feeling angry and ashamed.

FROM THE CONTROL ROOM -

JERRY WEXLER (ON TALK BACK)
How about we call it a day? Miss
Franklin, let's all get some rest.
Meet back here in the morning.

IN THE RECORDING ROOM -

ARETHA
Mr. Wexler, I say we keep going.
We're starting to find something.
(to the musicians)
Come on, guys.

SPOONER OLDHAM
Let's let things cool down.

The musicians are packing up their instruments, leaving.

ANGLE ON THE DOOR - as Ted enters they walk past him without
a word.

ARETHA
What happened to "good as gold,"
Ted?

He just shrugs. Leaves.

Aretha alone in the studio. Jerry's still in the booth.

JERRY WEXLER
(over the talk back)
Rolling.

ARETHA
(a capella, singing
"Somewhere Over The
Rainbow")
*"Someday I'll wish upon a star /
and wake up where the clouds are
far / behind me..."*

She stops singing and angrily slams down the fallboard,
covering the piano keys.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

A23

EXT. ROADSIDE HOTEL - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING (1967)

A23

Outside of an integrated roadside hotel.

23

INT. ROADSIDE HOTEL - ARETHA AND TED'S SUITE - NIGHT (1967) 23

A COFFEE TABLE littered with take-out containers of HALF-EATEN FRIED FOOD and cigarette butts. Aretha and Ted both smoking and drinking. For now, she's keeping her anger down.

TED WHITE

Wexler better get another horn
player as good as that other guy.

This sets her off. She hurls her food at Ted.

ARETHA

Who knows who the hell we're going
to get stuck with tomorrow all
cause you had to act up!

TED WHITE

You want me to stand there while
some white man disrespects you?

ARETHA

We were talking, Ted.

TED WHITE

You were doing more than talking.

ARETHA

You can't tell the difference
between talking and screwing? Cause
I can. When you're out all night
with Miss Whoever, she's using her
mouth but not to talk to you.

A KNOCKING at the door. Neither of them move to get it.

TED WHITE

You were looking right at me while
you were singing! Putting our
business in the street!

ARETHA

I was singing the *god damn song*!

TED WHITE
You like them white boys, don't
you?

The KNOCKING on the door continues. A little louder now.

ARETHA
(sarcastic/edgy)
Tomorrow I won't talk with them! I
won't look at them! I'll just shut
up and sing!

Ted opens the door. Rick Hall, liquored up, barges in.

RICK HALL
Who the hell do you think you are,
firing my musicians?!

TED WHITE
Get the hell out of my room!

RICK HALL
Evening, Miss Franklin.

Aretha nods.

TED WHITE
I'm just a *nigger* to you.

RICK HALL
I didn't call you that.

TED WHITE
But you were thinking it.

RICK HALL
So what if I was?

ARETHA
(getting between them)
Both of you cut it out.

But they continue.

RICK HALL
She's the talent, not you!

TED WHITE
Nigger! Say it! Go on, say it!

ARETHA
This is bullshit.

As Ted and Rick take it up another notch, nothing Aretha can say or do will stop their foolishness.

Rick shoves Ted, who stays on his feet, then shoves Rick back. They've started their fight which will only escalate.

ARETHA - with her drink and smokes, goes into the other room.

A24

INT. ROADSIDE MOTEL - ADJOINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A24

She closes the door behind her. In the other room, Ted and Rick's fight gets LOUDER and MORE PHYSICAL. She leans against the closed door, trying to find peace.

CHYRON: 1953.

CL Franklin, Melba Parks, Grandmother Rachel, Little Re, and siblings Erma, Cecil, and Carolyn gathered at the dinner table. Eyes closed heads bowed.

ENTIRE FAMILY
(speak-singing)
Amen!

Little Re and Melba share a wink and smile. They've got a special bond. The family digs in, enjoys the delicious meal.

MELBA PARKS
Joe Von Battle called. When are you
heading back into the studio?

The family looks toward CL expectantly. This is a big deal.

CL FRANKLIN
Who can guess which sermon I'm
going to record this time?

YOUNG CAROLYN
"The Eagle Stirreth Her Nest!"

YOUNG ERMA
He already recorded that one.

Erma, the eldest, is always right.

YOUNG CAROLYN
He could record it again.

Carolyn, the eternal optimist, won't be shut down.

YOUNG CECIL
"Jacob Wrestling With The Angel!"

LITTLE RE
That would be like Joe Louis and
Sonny Liston!

She and Cecil play-box.

GRANDMOTHER RACHEL FRANKLIN
Your father can record whatever he
chooses.

CL FRANKLIN
Mama, you talk about me like I walk
on water.

GRANDMOTHER RACHEL FRANKLIN
Don't compare yourself to the
Savior, son.

Gentle laughter. Without a wife, CL is pleased that his
mother is the matriarch.

LITTLE RE
When I grow up I'm going to be on
the radio just like Daddy.

Erma rolls her eyes at Little Re's confidence. CL enjoys that
his kids want to follow in his footsteps.

LITTLE RE (CONT'D)
(to CL)
Can I go with you to Mr. Von
Battle's?

YOUNG ERMA
No you can't!

CL's thinking it over.

CL FRANKLIN
Actually, Re, yes you can.

Little Re's the chosen one again. The kids start to whine.
Cecil, the only son, feels especially slighted.

YOUNG CECIL
I always ask but you never let me!

YOUNG ERMA
And I'm the oldest.

YOUNG CAROLYN
And I'm the youngest!

GRANDMOTHER RACHEL FRANKLIN
(restoring order)
Erma, Cecil, Carolyn!

MELBA PARKS
You'll all get your chance.

CL FRANKLIN
But Re will get her chance first.

LITTLE RE
Thank you, Daddy.

Carolyn fights back tears. Cecil furrows his brows and Erma looks daggers at Re while she and her Dad share a smile.

25 **INT. FRANKLIN HOME - DINING ROOM / KITCHEN - LATER (1953)** 25

The womenfolk clear the table. Little Re hands Melba a plate.

LITTLE RE
(whispering)
Ms. Melba?

MELBA PARKS
Yes, baby.

LITTLE RE
What's a "sumbitch?"

The question stops Melba in her tracks.

LITTLE RE (CONT'D)
Miss Washington told me to watch
out for them. What are they?

MELBA PARKS
They're men. The kind that would do
a gal wrong.

LITTLE RE
What do they look like?

MELBA PARKS
They come in all shapes and sizes.
So you gotta keep watch.
(beat)
Now, you are way too young to be
worrying yourself about any of
that, you understand me?

LITTLE RE
Yes, Ms. Melba.

Melba envelops Little Re in a deep and loving hug.

MELBA PARKS
And if I hear you say that word
again, I'll wash your mouth out
with soap.

26

INT. VON BATTLE'S RECORD SHOP/RECORDING STUDIO - DAY (1953) 26

3530 Hastings Street, in the back room of a record store. JOE
VON BATTLE, 30s, the mindful recording engineer.

LITTLE RE - in rapt attention watching -

CL FRANKLIN - in the recording booth with headphones on. It's
a re-imagining of his famous sermon, "The Meaning of Black
Power."

CL FRANKLIN
Black power is an answer, a reply,
a rejoinder, a response, if you
will, to white power. It has sprung
up, emerged, materialized, arisen,
and will rise and rise again from
the failure of white power. I
appreciate you bringing my message
into your homes and into your
hearts.

He takes out his handkerchief.

REVEAL - CL's pretty black lady friend, CHARLECE. She's a
blonde, luxuriously dressed. As CL dabs his forehead, she
fans herself.

INT. VON BATTLE'S RECORD SHOP/RECORDING STUDIO - LATER (1953)

The recording session completed, Von Battle looks over BOXES OF CL's RECORDS.

JOE VON BATTLE

I'll press that new one right away.
How many you wanna take on the
road?

CHARLECE

You could take a whole truck full
and they'd all sell, cause you're
like thunder, lighting and dynamite
all rolled into one!

LITTLE RE WATCHES AS - CL takes Charlece's hand. Strokes it.

CL FRANKLIN
I try to reach people's minds as
well as their emotions.

Little Re, watching her Dad, noting the way that his
performance and energy attracts the ladies.

LITTLE RE
I'm going to make a record too.

CHARLECE
Can you sing?

CL FRANKLIN
My Little Re can sing!

JOE VON BATTLE
But she hasn't soloed in church yet.
(beat)
And there's no hurry, Re.

CL FRANKLIN
Tell you what. When I go back out on
the road I'll bring you with me.
We'll go this summer.

LITTLE RE
So I won't miss school.

JOE VON BATTLE
She ain't old enough to travel on
the Gospel Circuit.

ARETHA SEES - CL and Charlece standing too close. His hand
briefly brushing the lady's behind.

CHARLECE
She's cute. She'd be a hit. And
she'd make a joyful noise.

CL FRANKLIN
She's a real talent.

JOE VON BATTLE
(cautioning)
The road is a wild place, now.

LITTLE RE
I'll be with Daddy and the other
singers.

CHARLECE
(scripture)
"Let your light shine before men so
that they can see your good works,"
Matthew 5:16.

CL FRANKLIN
Well! It's settled then!

ALL EYES turn toward Little Re, who is suddenly shy.

27

INT. FRANKLIN HOME - LIVING ROOM - ANOTHER DAY (1953)

27

Children gathering in the doorway as Melba and CL argue.

MELBA PARKS
In the grocery store some hussy
tells me she's your side piece!

CL FRANKLIN
Who the hell would say that?!

MELBA PARKS
She had yellow hair all piled up!

CL FRANKLIN
I don't know anybody -

MELBA PARKS
Quit lying! You run around on me
like a dog and now your hussies cut
me in the street!

Little Re runs to stand between them.

LITTLE RE
Stop! Stop it!

CL FRANKLIN
Melba, honey, you're upsetting the
children.

Grandmother Rachel has come into the doorway.

GRANDMOTHER RACHEL FRANKLIN
Come on, Re. All of you, come on.

Little Re leaves the room to join her siblings. Grandmother
Rachel shepherds the children down the hall.

MELBA PARKS (O.S.)
It was like this with your wife!
Poor Barbara. Rest her soul.

CL FRANKLIN (O.S.)
Keep my wife out of your mouth.

MELBA PARKS (O.S.)
She left you and the children cause
she got tired of your "girlfriends!"

CL FRANKLIN (O.S.)
You ain't clean enough to be airing
my dirty laundry.

IN THE HALLWAY - Little Re, holding her doll for comfort,
separates herself from the others. She returns to witness:

MELBA PARKS
What was I thinking, being with you?

CL FRANKLIN
You were tired of being trash. Thinking
it'd be nice to be respectable.

CL's just given Melba a gut punch.

MELBA PARKS
Respectable? Years ago in Memphis -

CL FRANKLIN
My past does not concern you.

MELBA PARKS
You had relations -

CL FRANKLIN
Shut your mouth!

MELBA PARKS
With a twelve-year-old girl!

ON LITTLE RE - not understanding. Not wanting to understand.

CL FRANKLIN
You need to shut your mouth I said!

MELBA PARKS
You got with a *twelve year old*
girl. And you got her pregnant!

It's the first time Melba's spoken this aloud and speaking
the truth shatters any future she and CL could have had.

CL SLAPS MELBA ACROSS THE FACE, KNOCKING HER TO THE FLOOR. CL
stands over her, working to control his breath.

MELBA'S eyes, opening, seeing LITTLE RE in the doorway.

MELBA PARKS (CONT'D)
(to Little Re)
Go call a taxi-cab for me, baby.

Little Re hesitates, not wanting to. She looks at her father, his eyes are angry, so unlike the father she knows.

28

INT./EXT. TAXI CAB / FRANKLIN HOME - DAY

28

THE HALF-OPENED CAR WINDOW - Little Re, close to the glass.

LITTLE RE
Don't go.

ON THE PORCH - Grandmother Rachel, Erma, Cecil, and Carolyn.

FROM IN THE CAB - Melba takes Little Re's hand. Little Re with her doll.

MELBA PARKS
You take care, Re, you hear?
(beat)
You'll be all right, baby.

LITTLE RE
I'll tell Daddy to be nice to you.

This brings more tears to Melba's eyes. Her lip badly bruised.

MELBA PARKS
You be a good girl, honey. Don't
get into trouble. Be sweet, hear?

LITTLE RE
You can't go. I'll tell Daddy --

CAB DRIVER meets MELBA's EYES in the rearview. She nods.

29 **EXT. FRANKLIN HOME - STREET - CONTINUOUS (1953)** 29

The cab pulls away. Little Re runs after it.

LITTLE RE
(screaming)
Don't go! Don't go!

But it's no use. The cab continues on, leaving the child in the middle of the street, barely able to hold on to her doll, weeping her heart out. Little Re is inconsolable.

A30 **INT. FRANKLIN HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER (1953)** A30

CL, sits, remorsefully holding his head in his hands.

R30 **INT. NEW BETHEL CHURCH - ONLY DAYS LATER (1953)** R30

The SOUND of a WOODEN MILK CRATE pushed across the floor.

REVEAL: CL positioning the crate in front of a microphone. Then CL helps Little Re up onto the box. She stands --

IN FRONT OF THE 1,500 MEMBER CONGREGATION.

She's wearing a pretty new dress with a crinoline.

IN THE CONGREGATION - beside Grandmother Rachel, the spot where Melba used to sit is empty.

CL, stands beside her, nervous for her sake.

Little Re's eyes are weary, scared. It's her first solo. She fiddles with the hem on her dress.

CL FRANKLIN
(whispering)
Just sing like you do at home.

He gives a nod to the PIANIST. Little Re strains her neck to get nearer to the microphone. A musical intro then she sings:

LITTLE RE
*"Jesus, build a fence, all around
me, every day./ Jesus I want you to
protect me as I travel on the way."*

ELDERLY MALE PARISHIONER
(excitedly)
Listen at her! Listen at her!

LITTLE RE
(singing)
*"I know you can/ I know you will,
you'll fight my battles/If I just
keep still./Oh Jesus build a fence
all around me every day."*

The parishioners thunder their applause. Little Re, shy, her eyes brimming with tears.

A31

INT. ROADSIDE HOTEL - ARETHA AND TED'S SUITE - EARLY MORNING

The room is a wreck. Trashed from Ted's fight with Rick. Overturned table, broken chairs, a broken window. Ted long gone. Aretha, suitcase in hand, walks through the ruin.

An END-TABLE LAMP, with its dented shade. Aretha picks it up, resetting. But the room will need more repair than that.

Aretha, suitcase in hand, comes outside just as Ted walks up.

ARETHA
You wrecked the room.

TED WHITE
He started it. I settled the bill.

ARETHA
With my money.

Ted doesn't like to be reminded of that.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
Where the hell were you all night?

When Ted doesn't answer, Aretha flies into a rage, swatting his face and body, even though they're in a public place.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
I can smell it on you! Booze and
bitches! I was gonna make a hit!
This was my last chance, my last
chance, and you ruined it!

TED WHITE
Stop it!

ARETHA
You said that you loved me!

TED WHITE
You're acting crazy. Stop!

He holds her hands, forcing her still.

TED WHITE (CONT'D)
We'll head back to New York. Get
back in the studio. Start fresh.

ARETHA
I'm heading home to Detroit.

TED WHITE
So much for finding your sound.

Aretha looks at him until he looks away.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

A32 EXT. FRANKLIN HOME - DAY (1967)

A32

Clutching two shopping bags bearing the logos of a toy store and a camera shop, Aretha steps out of a cab on a residential street we'll recognize. Aretha has returned home. She waits as the driver collects her single suitcase from the trunk.

32 INT. FRANKLIN HOME - FOYER - DAY (1967)

32

Aretha enters the front door as family comes to meet her. Sisters Erma, 29, and Carolyn, 23, brother Cecil, 27 and --

ARETHA'S YOUNG CHILDREN: CLARENCE, 11, and EDWARD, 9, run to meet their mother. Clarence, the budding photographer, using his simple camera, takes his mommy's picture. Aretha sets down her suitcases to hug them warmly. Her children are her solace from the turmoil of her marriage and the uncertainty of her career.

She envelops them in a deep hug. Their love provides temporary relief from the weight of the world that's still on her shoulders. She'd hoped to come home in triumph. Her eyes rim with tears. Struggling to pull herself together, from the deep nest of the hug, she gives a look to Grandmother Rachel.

ARETHA

Tell me, Big Mama, that my precious babies have been behaving themselves.

GRANDMOTHER RACHEL FRANKLIN

They're no trouble, Re.

EDWARD

We've been very good!

CLARENCE

Did you bring us something, Mommy?

ARETHA

I brought myself.

(beat)

And, yes, Mommy's got presents.
Wait until you see. Sit in the
living room and I'll be in there
directly.

Grandmother Rachel takes the kids into the living room.

ERMA
You spoil them.

ARETHA
Lay off me, Erma.

ERMA
Where's Little Teddy?

ARETHA
In Chicago with Ted's folks.

ERMA
You and Ted calling it quits?

ARETHA

I only said we'd had a fight. Why
you got to make it worse?

ERMA

I'm just telling it like it is.
Which reminds me: you're not the
only talented one in this family,
remember that.

The well-worn bone of contention between the sisters. From
the living room comes the booming voice:

CL FRANKLIN (O.S.)

Re, get in here! You got company!

33

INT. FRANKLIN HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

33

ARETHA SEES: a basket with other children's toys, atop which
sits her well-loved doll from childhood, now so much older.
She used to play with this doll. Now, she has put away
childish things and has children of her own.

Cecil teaches Clarence how to use his new, SUPER-8 CAMERA,
while Edward plays with his two new GI JOE FIGURINES. CL, now
52, still handsome and charismatic, sits regally on the sofa
with his arm around his new lady-friend MARCIA, 40s.

Aretha gives her father a big hug and kiss on the cheek.

CL FRANKLIN

(introductions)

This here is Marcia.

ARETHA

I'm so happy to meet you.

Aretha turns to her sisters, replacing her polite facade with
a look that says "who is this bitch?" The sisters roll their
eyes in agreement.

CL FRANKLIN

Had another fight with Ted, didja?

ARETHA

I'm here to rest and relax, Daddy.

CECIL

If you need someone to take care of
Ted, just say the word, sis.

ARETHA

It's alright, Cecil.

Turning to leave the room, Aretha notices someone sitting in a corner chair: RUTH BOWEN, 30s.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
Ruth Bowen! What a surprise!

RUTH BOWEN
Girl, I know Ted from back when I
managed Dinah. She wouldn't marry
him cause he was a bull in a china
shop. Godzilla when he drank.

ARETHA
You're here to give me marriage
advice?

RUTH BOWEN
No. But I do want to sign you.

Aretha sizes Ruth up, liking what she sees. It could be great
to have a powerhouse black woman on her team.

CL FRANKLIN
It's time you had a real manager.
Instead of that pimp of a husband.

MARCIA
Ted sounds downright unsavory.

Aretha gives Marcia a look effectively shutting her down.

RUTH BOWEN
I can get you better bookings and
help you build on each success.

CL FRANKLIN
We don't want Muscle Shoals to be
the end of the line.

RUTH BOWEN
I've contained bigger disasters
than that.

ARETHA
(to Ruth)
Yeah, Dinah said you were the best.

RUTH BOWEN
I still am.

A34

EXT. FRANKLIN HOME - FRONT STEPS - LATER (1967)

A34

Aretha's sitting all alone, smoking on the front steps. She's
been through so much, a black woman trying to make it in a
business that's not as welcoming as it could be.

Maybe she doesn't have the right look, or the right sound. She has her genius, but it doesn't feel like that can save her.

Aretha weeps. Hard tears falling.

ARETHA
(unravelling)
They don't got nothing better to do
than talk how my thing ain't
happening. But's gotta come
through. It's gotta.

Ruth comes outside to check on her.

RUTH BOWEN
You ok?

Aretha quickly wipes her face, puts on the facade.

ARETHA
I'm fine.

34

INT. FRANKLIN HOME - KITCHEN - SEVERAL DAYS LATER (1967) 34

After unpacking groceries, Aretha fries up pork chops while Ruth peels carrots. Clarence and Edward run through the room, playing.

RUTH BOWEN
I've been here almost a whole week.
This is starting to feel like home.

ARETHA
Welcome to the family. Sure you
wanna join?

Ruth laughs.

RUTH BOWEN
I'll come clean: I didn't know you
had children. Two beautiful boys.
Is Ted the father?

ARETHA

No.

(beat)

But we do have a son. Little Teddy.

RUTH BOWEN

And the father of your older boys?

ARETHA

Every family's got their secrets and we don't air our "dirty laundry."

RUTH BOWEN

Understood. As your booking agent and publicist, I'll make sure the world only sees the Aretha Franklin you want them to.

(beat)

You've got all the talent in the world. No need for you to chase the charts. They should be chasing you.

Ruth could be a co-conspirator in the creation of her image.

ARETHA

For the record, Ted and I have a wonderful marriage. We're raising three lovely boys. I come from a remarkable family. I'm a princess in a fairy tale.

RUTH BOWEN

I can take that to the bank.

Erma adds her two cents.

ERMA

Some people would think twice about
going to work and leaving their
kids.

CL, passing through, freshening his drink, chimes in.

CL FRANKLIN

(to Erma)

It takes a genius to play the piano
and sing like Re does. It doesn't
take a genius to help with
homework.

ARETHA

But it does take mother-wit, which
Big Mama, Erma, and Carolyn have in
spades and for which I'm grateful.

Aretha's able to control the conversation, up to a point.

The phone rings. Carolyn answers.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
If it's Ted, tell him I ain't here!

CAROLYN
It's Mr. Wexler.

Aretha gives them a "*see, I told you so*" smile.

35 INT. FRANKLIN HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER (1967) 35

Aretha on the phone with Jerry Wexler.

A36 **CROSS CUT: JERRY AT ATLANTIC STUDIOS, NYC, and ARETHA IN A36
DETROIT.**

JERRY WEXLER
Forget Muscle Shoals, but let's get
you back in the studio.

ARETHA
I need to be home right now.

JERRY WEXLER
Ok, and, I did something. Hear me
out. With "Never Loved A Man," I
had a dozen sides pressed. What
should we do for the B side?

ARETHA
We don't need one. Just send it out.

JERRY WEXLER
(smiling)
I already did.

A big radiant smile floods Aretha's face.

JERRY WEXLER (CONT'D)
DJs love it and we need an album to
go with it.

ARETHA
I want to record in New York.

JERRY WEXLER
How soon can you and Ted get here?

ARETHA
I'm not inviting Ted.
(beat)
Get the rhythm section guys to come
up and I'll be there in a week.

JERRY WEXLER
You better cause you've got a
monster hit!

Aretha gently hangs up the phone then she exuberantly dances
around the room exploding in an unbridled joy.

ARETHA
I've got a hit!

B36 MOMENTS LATER - CL pops champagne. The family celebrates. B36

36 INT. FRANKLIN HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATER (1967) 36

Still riding the high, Aretha's back at the piano with her
sisters gathered around. She vamps on chords E-E-D-A and
improvises lyrics while Carolyn scribbles down words.

ARETHA
(singing)
"Save me! Somebody's gotta save me!"

CAROLYN
"Save me!"

ARETHA
"Somebody gotta save me!"

ERMA

It's almost sounding like something.

Keeping the vamp going, they improvise in the groove. Erma and Carolyn encourage her, as one would in church.

ERMA AND CAROLYN

Go, Re! Go, Re!

CAROLYN

And let's add that phrase that they
say on the street: "Sock it to me!
Sock it to me!"

CLARENCE and EDWARD - Watching their mom and aunts. Enjoying what could be the birth of a new song.

The sisters ad lib "sock it to me" in rhythm with the music. Then collapse into laughter.

CL FRANKLIN

Good that you're not inviting Ted
into the studio this time around.

CECIL

He's always hanging on somebody's
coattails, first Dinah Washington,
now you.

ARETHA

It ain't like that.

CECIL

Ok, I stand corrected.

CL FRANKLIN

Ted's a no-count who's derailing
the career that you and me worked
so hard to build. You thought Ted
would be a better manager than me,
but all he does is drag you down.

Ruth Bowen, stays silent. Not getting between CL and Aretha.

ARETHA

He wants me to be more than
Reverend Franklin's daughter.

CL FRANKLIN

And I want you to be more than Ted
White's meal ticket.

ARETHA

Ted is my husband and I will decide
when I've had enough of him! I'm
the only one in this house who gets
to have a say in my marriage!

She's never stood up to him like this. OFF CL'S SURPRISE -

37

INT. FRANKLIN HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATER (1967)

37

Aretha back at the piano. Her refuge is her music. She continues noodling with those chords, E-E-D-A.

CAROLYN
You need help with him?

ARETHA
Ted or Daddy?

The sisters share fun edgy laughter. Aretha grooves on the vamp and lyrics. Sisters encouraging, as one would in church.

ERMA AND CAROLYN
Go, Re! Go, Re!

ARETHA
Re-re-re-re. Save me!

CAROLYN
(chanting possible lyrics)
"Promised myself after your first dalliance/that I wouldn't give you/no kind of second chance."

ARETHA
"Dalliance?" There's gotta be a better word than that.

ERMA
Yeah, cause we don't want it to go over Ted's head!

The sisters crack up at that.

ARETHA
(chant/singing)
"Save me! Somebody gotta save me!"

38

INT. ATLANTIC RECORDS, NYC - DAY (A WEEK LATER, 1967)

38

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - Tom Dowd and Jerry Wexler.

IN THE RECORDING ROOM - Aretha at the piano and the musicians crowded around. Erma and Carolyn, the Muscle Shoals Rhythm section, and new horn players, one of them KING CURTIS, 30s.

Aretha's creating the arrangements right there in the studio.

ARETHA
You gotta follow me or we're lost.
(beat)
King, give me something.

KING CURTIS
Whatcha got in mind?

ARETHA
In the break I want you to hit it
like I'm beating someone's chest or
slapping someone's face. Like - "You
said that you loved me!"

KING CURTIS
That rhythm?

ARETHA
Yeah.

KING CURTIS
I got just the thing.

ARETHA
And Jimmy, play a blues lick with a
groove like "I was out/all night?"
That'll be the intro.

JIMMY JOHNSON
Can do.

KING CURTIS
We'll have a tasty pocket for you.

ARETHA
King Curtis, you are my kind of man!

A friendly glance between them. Their vibe is charged.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
After two for nothing, I'll come in
with everybody else.

JERRY WEXLER (ON TALK BACK)
You only got three chords?

ARETHA
I'm gonna make them sound like a
million bucks.

Everybody's feeling good. They like when Aretha's in control.

LATER - Instead of writing it out, Aretha sings the parts to
the musicians.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
Mr. Oldham you gotta punch it for
real cause our groove is urgent.

SPOONER OLDHAM
Yes, Ma'am.

ARETHA
Mr. Hawkins, this isn't "shave and
a haircut" it's more like four on
the floor.

ROGER HAWKINS
You got it.

THEN, A KNOCK at the DOOR. TED comes in, surprising
everybody. Aretha is thinking, What. The. Fuck. And Ted's
bearing gifts! RED ROSES and a BOX OF CHOCOLATES.

TED WHITE
(gifting to Aretha)
It's Valentine's Day, right? I
didn't forget!

ON ARETHA - not wanting to make a scene.

ARETHA
(gently kissing Ted)
Nice to see you, honey.

She graciously accepts Ted's gifts. She glances at her
sisters, Ruth, the producers, the musicians. Everybody knows
the deal. Ted has brought the signifiers of love on the
nationally agreed upon "Love-Day." He's desperate to make
good. Super Awkward.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
(reading the card)
"With love, from your husband."

He kisses her, holding her face to make the kiss last longer.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - Ted standing in the back near Ruth
Bowen. She's not thrilled to see him.

TED - Watching, through the glass, WEXLER and ARETHA. In a
CONVERSATION HE CAN'T HEAR.

ARETHA'S FACE - keeping her emotions in check, glancing at
Ted, hoping that it'll go better this time.

IN THE RECORDING ROOM -

TOMMY COGBILL

She "writes" all our parts even
though she can't write music.

KING CURTIS

Just like Charles Mingus!

Cogbill, nods, loving it.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM -

RUTH BOWEN

Nice touch. The flowers.

TED WHITE

You can manage her better than me?

RUTH BOWEN

We can both work with her, Ted.
She's going places.

IN THE RECORDING ROOM - Aretha's clapping her hands and tapping her feet, showing them a rhythm.

ARETHA

Pretend like you're in church.

JIMMY JOHNSON

My church don't clap like this!

Laughter. Erma, Carolyn, King Curtis, and Wexler can get the rhythm. The Muscle Shoals guys, Spooner, Hawkins, Johnson, and the others try to clap along with her but they're dorky.

It's stop and stutter syncopation. Totally new to pop music.
The best the guys can do is follow her lead.

JERRY WEXLER

"Stop and stutter." I haven't heard
that rhythm in pop music.

ARETHA

Wait till you hear the horn fills,
Jerry.

JERRY WEXLER

Standing by!

LATER - as Aretha tries out the impressive Telefunken U47
mic, she checks in with Carolyn.

CAROLYN

(additional lyrics)

The song's a call for help so
you're asking for all of the
superheroes like Batman, Superman,
Panther, Green Hornet -

ARETHA

I'll call on them and on all their
sidekicks. I need help, y'all!

While she didn't read music, and while the fusion of gospel and R&B was NOT new, Aretha's genius work with rhythm, lyrics, phrasing, and arrangements pushes the musicians into new territory and makes her original composition truly great.

ARETHA
(at piano and singing)
*"SAVE ME! Somebody SAVE ME!/SAVE
ME! Somebody SAVE ME!"*

Carolyn holds the lyric sheet. Erma does hand percussion. And, this time, Aretha is joyously and pointedly singing the lyrics directly at Ted.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
*"Promised myself after the first
romance/I wouldn't give you a
second chance./They say if you
seek, you're sure to find/but the
closer I get to you baby/you drive
me stone outta my mind."*

ON TED - He's in the hot seat.

ON ARETHA - the truth of her life is fueling her song and she doesn't care what Ted thinks.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
*"You lied and said you needed
me./You abused my love, set me
free./You don't need, you don't
want me/Somebody help me, this man
wants to taunt me!/I'm begging you
to SAVE ME! Mm-Yeah, SAVE ME!"*

MOMENTS LATER - IN THE CONTROL ROOM -

JERRY WEXLER
Here come the horns.

IN THE RECORDING ROOM -

When King Curtis and the OTHER HORNS stand and play their horn hits, Aretha punches the air, conducting them.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - they're loving it.

JERRY WEXLER (CONT'D)
She's a genius.

MOMENTS LATER - IN THE RECORDING ROOM -

ARETHA
*"Calling the Cape Crusader, Green
Hornet, Kado too/I'm in so much
trouble I don't know what to do!/
SAVE ME! SAVE ME!"*

ERMA AND CAROLYN
"Save me! Save me!"

IN THE CONTROL ROOM - Everybody's loving it. Except Ted. He exits the studio. This time, his mood doesn't slow Aretha down.

IN THE RECORDING STUDIO - it's electric and magical. Aretha has alchemized her pain into an iconic pop song.

ARETHA
*"Those who love always give the
most/We're crying together from
coast to coast -"*

MONTAGE: ARETHA'S SONGS CLIMB THE CHARTS

41

A) REGAL THEATRE, CHICAGO - ONSTAGE - NIGHT (1967)

41

ARETHA'S FIRST SET: on stage, her sisters Erma and Carolyn singing back up. She's got a black band holding it down behind her: King Curtis leads the horns (a TRUMPET and a BASS SAX PLAYER), plus BASS, GUITAR, PIANO and DRUMS.

ARETHA
(singing "Save Me")
*"Love leaves us cold and hurt
inside/Those tears of ours,
unjustified./Begging You to SAVE
ME! Need somebody to SAVE ME!"*

ERMA AND CAROLYN
"Save me! Save me!"

OFF A CROWD OF ADORING FANS, loving the song -

42

B) INT. PHOTO STUDIO - A FEW DAYS BEFORE (1967)

42

"SAVE ME" CONTINUES as underscoring. While the PHOTOGRAPHER snaps photos of Aretha:

RUTH BOWEN

You've got interviews scheduled
with Ebony and Jet.

ARETHA

And I want folks to know that I'm
not disrespecting gospel music by
singing pop.

RUTH BOWEN

Absolutely, of course.
(beat)

Will Ted do the interviews?

ARETHA

He wouldn't miss them for nothing.

43

C) OVERLAYED - STORIES IN MAGAZINES

43

Aretha is the cover girl and the articles tell stories about her prominent father, her church going family, her three adoring children, her husband Ted, and their happy marriage!

44

D) OVERLAYED - ARETHA'S SONGS CONTINUE TO CLIMB THE CHARTS 44

BILLBOARD MAGAZINES - April, May, June 1967 - "Respect" moves steadily up the charts. "Never Loved a Man" is also charting, climbing.

END MONTAGE.

45

INT. REGAL THEATRE - DRESSING ROOM - SAME NIGHT (1967)

45

Aretha preparing her second set. She changes into another outfit, puts on a fresh wig, and touches up her MAKEUP.

Ted nervously watches her. They've been on the rocks for months and Chicago is his hometown.

TED WHITE
Your first set went great.

ARETHA
Second sets gonna be better.

TED WHITE
My Mom and Dad are out there.
Front row seats! It's standing room
only. Our hard work is paying off!

ARETHA
Our hard work?
(beat)
I don't want to be married to you
any more.

TED WHITE
You got yourself some hits and now
you're through with me? Getting big
for your britches, aren't you? You
better watch out.

It's the end of them and the beginning of her.

ARETHA
You know what's wrong with you? You
play big, but you couldn't never
keep up with me, even if you tried.

TED WHITE
You ran off with me -

ARETHA
And we got married cause it was
time for me to leave my Daddy's
house.

TED WHITE
Now you're going crawling back to
him?

ARETHA
I'm never crawling back to no one.

TED WHITE
How's your storybook life going to
look without your happy husband?

ARETHA
I'm getting a divorce.

TED WHITE
Why, cause CL Franklin told you to
get one? Cause the Franklin family
thinks they're too good for a
regular man, a pimp, like myself.

Aretha keeps getting ready, looking in the mirror.

TED WHITE (CONT'D)
Look at me when I'm talking to you!

ARETHA
I got to get ready.

Ted grabs her roughly.

TED WHITE
I said look at me!

Aretha turns away. Ted grabs her and slaps her. Aretha slaps
him back. He hits her. She hits him back.

301-R46 **INT. REGAL THEATRE - ONSTAGE - LATER (1967)**

301-R46

ONSTAGE - ARETHA IS ENDING HER SECOND SET. Aretha's looking fabulous in her silver gown (wearing her iconic "Queen of Soul" look from head to toe, with NO CROWN.) Erma and Carolyn doing choreography as King Curtis and the same band vamps, improvising in the groove.

The AUDIENCE, on their feet, cheering. Aretha, purse on her arms, speaks to her adoring fans.

ARETHA

Look here, people, I've got my pocketbook right here on stage with me. I make sure I get paid before I sing a note!

The crowd goes wild for that. They cheer and holler.

CROWD OF FANS

Yeah! That's respect! That's right!
You tell 'em, Re! Get your respect!

Aretha's message is the rallying cry of the Movement.

301-R47 **INT. REGAL THEATRE - STAGE L & STAGE R WINGS - CONTINUOUS** R47

IN SR WINGS - Ruth and Jerry, exhilarated. (*Production note - this part already shot.*)

IN SL WINGS - Local DJs, PURVIS SPANN and RODNEY JONES, with PAPARAZZI in tow, approach Ted. Ted's curious.

PURVIS SPANN

(explaining)

We got something special for her.

RODNEY JONES

A big surprise.

TED WHITE

You gonna let me in on it?

Spann gives Ted a peek at a PRETTY TINSEL CROWN. Ted frowns, not understanding. But there's no time to explain. Aretha's show has ended. OFF TED'S CONFUSED LOOK, the DJ's and Paparazzi head onto the stage -

301-R48 **INT. REGAL THEATRE - ONSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER**

301-R48

Spann, Jones, and the Paparazzi have joined Aretha on stage.

PURVIS SPANN
In recognition of all you've done --

RODNEY JONES
For all kinds of music and for all
kinds of people --

PURVIS SPANN
But especially for soul music and
for soul people --

RODNEY JONES
The people of Chicago and the
people of the world hereby crown
you -

PURVIS SPANN & RODNEY JONES
THE QUEEN OF SOUL!

They give her a huge BOUQUET OF RED ROSES. They place that
CROWN on her head. It's better than being Miss America.

Aretha waves to the crowd, flashes a dazzling smile. She's
living her best life. The Paparazzi can't get enough of her.
They start to ask her quesiton, as we previously had seen in
Scene AA2.

TIME JUMP TO - The end of the press onslaught. The press
finally exits STAGE LEFT, as Aretha heads upstage to sing her
last song, as seen in the opening (Scene RAA1), "Chain of
Fools".

TIME JUMP TO: Now crowned, having answered all of the
paparazzi questions, and then thrilled her fans with her
encore, "Chain Of Fools", Aretha, crown atop her head, purse
and red roses in her arms, waves to the cheering crowd.

With her sisters and the DJs in the near background, and the
Paparazzi in the deep bg off stage left -

Aretha moves to exit the stage. The bright smile leaves her
face as she turns toward stage right, exiting.

LEAVING THE STAGE - dropping her smile, blowing past Ted, as
he follows behind.

TED WHITE
Hey, baby --

She keeps walking. Down the hallway. Ted trailing her.

301-B49 INT. REGAL THEATRE - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT (1967) - ~~ALREADY~~ 9
SHOT

Crown still on her head, her flowers and purse still in hand.
She leans against the door. Appreciating her moment alone.
She's troubled, but why?

WT301-49 INT. REGAL THEATRE - DRESSING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER (1967) 1-49

Aretha sits at her dressing room table.

Outside, Ted, knocking at the door, his voice getting heated.

Aretha lights herself a cigarette. Pours herself a drink.

Knocking at the door getting louder. Ted's more insistent.

TED WHITE (V.O.)

There's a lot of people out here
who want to talk with you. Get on
out here. This ain't no time to
hide, now. Come on. You think you
can ignore them? Don't be like
that. Get off your high horse. Who
the hell do you think you are?

WIPING THE MAKEUP FROM HER FACE -

Aretha reveals Ted's latest gift to her --

A BIG BLACK EYE.

Aretha has found her sound.

She's the Queen of Soul.

And she has so many secrets.

END OF EPISODE