

**TIRED OF GIVING IN -  
THE ROSA PARKS STORY**

**CAST** (2 MALE, 2 FEMALE) White characters are played by putting on generic 2-D photo-masks.

F1: Rosa Parks

F2: Actor 1, Passenger 1, Leona, Woman, Cornella Reeves, Claudette Colvin, Georgia Gilmore, Jo Ann Robinson, Old man, Blues Singer, ensemble

M1: Actor 2, Bus driver James F Blake, Customer, E D Nixon, Barber Shop Owner, White Man, Caller 1, Barman, ensemble

M2: Actor 3, Passenger 2, Dr Martin Luther King Jnr, Raymond Parks, Policeman, ensemble

*Original music by Elisa Le Cam (aka Ruby):*

*'I Sing For Me' (Rosa's theme)*

*"I don't know if my Boo's coming home"*

*"Boo come on home!"*

*"My Baby Boo"*

*'A Gospel' (working title)*

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**Caption : “NOVEMBER 1943. MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA”**

THE FOUR CAST MEMBERS STAND IN A LINE FACING THE AUDIENCE. EACH WITH A SIMPLE WOODEN CHAIR BESIDE THEM. ROSA STEPS FORWARD

ROSA (to the audience)

You know, back when I was working in a department store; before anyone had ever heard of me and I was just plain old Mrs Parks, I always knew that the bus segregation laws made people more angry than almost anything else.

ACTOR 1 (to the audience)

Black people made up most of the passengers yet we were treated the worst.

ACTOR 2 (to the audience)

The white bus drivers made us step in the front door to pay the fare, then get off and go round to the back door and get on there where the section for black folks was.

ACTOR 3 (to the audience)

Often before you got round to the back the bus would drive off without you!

ROSA (to the audience)

On this particular day everything was just the same as usual.

THE ACTOR PLAYING BLAKE PUTS ON A FLAT PHOTO MASK

GEORGIA GILMORE (to the audience)

There were 36 seats on a Montgomery Bus. The first ten were reserved for whites, even if there were no white passengers on the bus. The ten seats at the back were for black people. Once the black seats were filled we had to stand. Even if the white seats were empty. The drivers were all pretty frightening and they carried guns.

ROSA (to the audience)

The driver on this day was a mean one. I could see that right away. The bus was packed full at the back with black folks crowded even on the stairwell. But the front seats were all empty. I got on at the front. I paid my fare and I moved down towards the black folks.

GEORGIA GILMORE GETS ON THE BUS.

BLAKE

Hey!

BLAKE RISES AND MAKES HIS WAY DOWN THE BUS TOWARDS ROSA.

ROSA

What? I'm standing in the right section. With my own folk.

BLAKE

Get off the bus, walk around and get on the back door. You don't walk through the front of the bus. You know the rules.

ROSA

I'm already on the bus Sir. And I don't see the point in getting off again and getting on through the back door when folks are already crushed into the stepwell. How on earth can I squeeze through that way?

BLAKE

If you won't go through the back door then you need to get off my bus.

ROSA STANDS HER GROUND. ROSA IS LED TO THE FRONT OF THE BUS. BUT BEFORE HE CAN PUT HER OFF SHE DROPS HER HANDBAG, AND QUICKLY SITS DOWN. BLAKE IS FURIOUS.

BLAKE (shouting)

Get off my bus!

ROSA

I will get off. But I tell you one thing, you'd better not hit me.

GEORGA GILMORE

How come you don't just go round and get in the back lady? You're holding us all up.

PASSENGER 2

Yeah, we all need to get home.

BLAKE

You get off my bus or I'm getting the police.

ROSA (to the audience)

I looked up at that mean old driver, his mouth full of disgusting chewing tobacco. And I heard the angry voices of the other passengers. And do you know what I did? What would you have done? I thought long and hard and then..... I got off the damn bus!

And that bus drove away without me. I knew I never wanted to see that man again. And I didn't. Not for twelve more years anyway. But I'm getting ahead of myself. There's a lot to tell you before we meet bus driver Mr James F Blake again.

I should tell you that by the time I was thrown off the bus I had already ceased to be Rosa McCauley and was known by my married name: Rosa Parks. I first met Mr Raymond Parks when I was only 18, and he was working in a barbers shop in town.

**Barbers shop 1931** AN ACTOR MOVES A CHAIR TO SUGGEST FACING AN IMAGINARY MIRROR. PARKS STANDS BEHIND HIM AND SNIPS SCISSORS AS IF CUTTING HAIR.

PARKS

I tell you every black person in this country should be helping to raise money for The Scottsboro boys.

CUSTOMER

Oh Parks, I've come in here for a haircut. I don't need you asking for my hard earned money for another one of your lost causes. Those boys have got no chance. They've been found guilty and that's the end of it. That's white men's justice for you. And there ain't nothing you can do to change it.

PARKS

It's my belief that we can change things. If we make enough trouble.

CUSTOMER

Well you can leave me out of your trouble Raymond Parks. Thank you very much. Those boys have been found guilty of very serious crimes. You know how it works here in the South. I ain't saying it's right. But it's how things are.

PARKS

I'm not asking you to stand shoulder to shoulder with us. But every dollar helps us to get a proper lawyer for those boys. For the appeal. They don't stand a chance without that. They're on death row and they're nothing but kids really. The young one is only 14.

CUSTOMER

It's a sad story alright.

PARKS

Well there you go Sir. You think about what I said.

CUSTOMER

Oh good Lord. Look take your extra dollar. Here. And I only hope it does the trick.

PARKS

Why thank you Sir. It's people like you who are going to make the difference. One good dollar at a time. Good day now.

CUSTOMER

You take care Parks. This could get you in a heap of trouble . Be careful who you talk to about this.

PARKS

I will Sir.

PARKS SHOWS THE CUSTOMER OUT AND BUMPS INTO ROSA RUSHING BY OUTSIDE

PARKS

Excuse me Miss.

ROSA

Oh, that's no problem Sir. Excuse me.

PARKS

I've not seen you around before Miss.

ROSA

No, I don't usually pass this way, I was just looking for a little shelter from this rain.

PARKS

Well, step inside the barbershop for a moment.

CUSTOMER (walking away)

Watch out Miss. He'll be bending your ear about those Scottsboro Boys if you give him a chance!

PARKS USHERS ROSA INTO THE BARBER SHOP, AND HANDS HER A TOWEL

ROSA (as she rubs her hair)

The Scottsboro Boys?

PARKS

You not been following the case in the papers?

ROSA

I have heard people talking about them. They're the boys who were arrested just for fighting against some white men?

PARKS

Yes. Although that's not the half of it. Take a seat. I've got some literature you might be interested in.

PARKS PRESSES A PAMPHLET INTO ROSA'S HAND.

ROSA

You're raising money for these boys?

PARKS

We are.

ROSA

And who is "we"?

PARKS

I've got a little group of men who are working with me. You won't mind if I don't tell you their names? It isn't safe.

ROSA

Of course. I understand. I guess there's plenty of white folks who'd take a dim view of your campaign.

PARKS

That's right Miss. But you can rest assured that we're not too scared to fight for our rights. And we're doing everything we can.

ROSA

When you're not being a barber.

PARKS

Well we've all got to make ends meet. What do you do Miss?

ROSA

I've only just left school. I've been looking after my mother. And I take in some sewing to make ends meet.

PARKS

Of course, don't worry I'll not ask you for money.

ROSA

But I'd like to hear what you're doing for those Scottsboro boys. And what happened to them.

PARKS

Well, listen: those nine boys didn't even know each other when they were arrested. The oldest is 19. The youngest is only 14. Just a boy. They were all catching a free ride on the same freight train from Tennessee to Alabama.

ROSA

I heard plenty of people are hopping a free ride on those trains looking for work. These are hard times.

PARKS

At some point a group of whites on that train started some trouble. The blacks fought back and threw the white boys off the train. But next time the train stopped a white mob was waiting and they forced the black youths off the train. The police came to break up the mob. They put handcuffs on the young black men and took them to the nearest jail in Scottsboro Alabama.

ROSA

And that's why they call them the Scottsboro Boys! I never knew that before.

PARKS

Well the very next day the police lined up the boys in front of two white women: Ruby Bates and Victoria Price. Ruby Bates picked out six of the boys and said they had assaulted her. The police decided, well then, that must mean that the other three assaulted Victoria.

OLD DUDE

Although she had not picked them out.

PARKS

The Scottsboro boys went to trial in April. They were allowed to meet with a lawyer for just half an hour. The two women testified that the boys had beaten them and used guns and knives. But two doctors testified that the women had no wounds or bruises.

OLD DUDE

Says here the judge sentenced all but the youngest boy to die in the electric chair.

ROSA

Oh my Lord this is so unfair!

PARKS

It is. But there are plenty of people who are ready to fight this. We're raising money for a proper lawyer so that those boys can get a fair trial on appeal.

ROSA

That's a good cause indeed.....I'm sorry, you've been so kind and I haven't even asked your name.

PARKS

I'm Raymond Parks miss. But everyone just calls me Parks.

ROSA

Parks. I like that.

PARKS

And can I be so bold as to ask your name Miss?

ROSA

I'm Rosa McCauley.

PARKS

Rosa. That's a lovely name.

ROSA

I have to be getting home now Parks. But thank you for hospitality. And the pamphlet.

PARKS

Well the rain has stopped at least.

ROSA

Yes.

PARKS

Well goodbye Rosa.

ROSA

Goodbye Parks.

ROSA (to the audience)

Well, when I got home I couldn't stop talking about the handsome barber and how he told me all about the Scottsboro Boys.

ROSA AND HER MOTHER LEONA FOLD LAUNDRY. ROSA HAS THE PAMPHLET IN HER POCKET

ROSA

.....and the youngest boy is only 14 momma. And there they all are on death row. It isn't right. And Parks and the others are raising money to set things right.

LEONA

How d'you know so much about all this Rosa? No good can come of it.

ROSA SHOWS HER THE PAMPHLET

ROSA

Can we spare any money for the cause?

LEONA

This sort of thing is dangerous. It could get you in a lot of trouble. This Parks should know better than to get a young girl mixed up in it.

LEONA RIPS UP THE PAMPHLET

ROSA

I'm not going to get mixed up in anything.

LEONA

You make sure you don't. It's not for young girls like you to be fighting for civil rights. What are you ever going to achieve? Now come on, put this laundry away for me and let's get some supper on the stove.

ROSA (to the audience)

So I decided to take mamma's advice and try to forget all about Parks. Parks however had other ideas and it wasn't long before he presented himself at my front door. I was so shy that I told mamma to send him away and I thought that would be the end of it. But he was very determined.

ROSA PICKS UP A PILE OF MENDING AND BEGINS TO SEW

LEONA

Rosa! That Mr Parks is at the door again.

ROSA (whispering)

Oh no mamma. I don't want to see him. Can't you tell him I'm not here?

LEONA

This poor man has driven out here three times now to call on you. You don't want to see him then you should tell him yourself. It's the least you can do. I raised you to be kind Rosa.

SHE GOES TO THE DOOR

PARKS

Well hello Rosa. Third time lucky. I've finally caught you at home.

ROSA

Yes, it's nice to see you again Parks.

PARKS

Can I ask you to take a little drive with me? If you want to, of course.

ROSA (to the audience)

And I was sure I was going to say a polite no thank you. But then out of my mouth came: (she turns to PARKS) Yes please, I would like that very much.

(to the audience) And that's how I started stepping out with Mr Raymond Parks! He was fine company and a proud member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and I loved to hear about all the work they were doing. We might have gone on this way for some time but then one day Parks turned to me and said:

PARKS

I really think we ought to get married.

ROSA (to the audience)

And I found that I agreed with him. So he asked my momma when we were at church And the next thing I knew I was a married woman at the age of 19. We went to live on the east side of town on South Jackson Street. I was so happy with Parks but I never stopped worrying about him.

“MAN” PUTS TWO CHAIRS DOWN – LOOKING AT PARKS, LIKE ITS TIME TO LEAVE

PARKS

I'm going out tonight Rosa.

ROSA

Another night meeting? Why are they always so late?

MAN STANDS IN THE SHADOWS, WAITING FOR PARKS

PARKS

We have to be careful, it's so much safer to meet when everyone is asleep and there's less chance of people seeing us.

ROSA

Can I come with you?

PARKS

No, it's too dangerous; if there's trouble then we'll all have to run for it. And you can't run as fast as me.

ROSA

That's not the only reason is it? I've heard the other wives saying that all those men carry guns. Is that true?

PARKS

A lot of them do sure. But only for self defence Rosa, just in case.

ROSA

You be careful of the police, they're always trying to find out where these meetings are. Every time you go to one of these I think you're not going to come back.

PARKS

If you tell me not to go anymore then that's enough for me. I won't go. Not if it's too much for you to bear.

ROSA (to the audience)

And I wanted to say: don't go, it is too much for me to bear. But I never said it. I never said a thing about it. Because I knew that what Parks and those other men were doing was mightily important.

PARKS

Well?

ROSA

No, I understand. You go. But be careful. You make sure to come back to me because I won't rest until you're back in this house.

PARKS kisses ROSA and leaves.

PARKS

Good night Rosa.

BARMAN STANDS UPSTAGE WIPING A GLASS

ROSA (to the audience)

I guess I'm making it sound like these were terrible times. And in some ways they were. But remember that I was young, and I loved my husband and although there was terrible injustice in the world there was also music, and dancing and laughter. And sometimes we even got some good news.

PARKS

Rosa! Rosa!

ROSA

What on earth are you shouting about?

PARKS

The Scottsboro boys appeal. They're taking those boys off of death row!

ROSA

Are they going free?

PARKS

Well charges are dropped on four of them.

ROSA

And the others?

PARKS

They've been sentenced but at least they're not facing the death penalty any more. And we'll keep fighting for them of course; it goes to show what we can achieve when we pull together.

BARMAN (to the audience)

Now I know that this must all seem very strange to you people. How we lived in fear and how hard it was for black folks to get justice. I sure hope that things are different now. But back then we were denied all sorts of basic rights that the white folks took for granted.

ROSA (to audience)

Parks wanted me to register to vote. But it was not that easy.

WOMAN WEARS A WHITE FACE PHOTO 2-D MASK AND SITS BEHIND A DESK

WOMAN: Next please.

ROSA

I'm here to register to vote.

WOMAN

No. I don't think so.

ROSA

I was told that African Americans could register to vote here from 10am till 12 noon today.

WOMAN

I don't believe you qualify. Please step aside and let me deal with the next person in line.

ROSA

Can you tell me please how I can qualify to register?

WOMAN

It's perfectly simple. You need to own property. Do you own any property?

ROSA

No. I do not.

WOMAN

Well that's that then.

ROSA

And do white people need to own property in order to vote?

WOMAN

That's none of your business. Now step aside. There are other people in the queue.

ROSA

I believe that even without owning property that I am entitled to register to vote. There is a voter registration test isn't there? A written test that I can take.

WOMAN

You wanna sit the test?

ROSA

Yes, I do.

WOMAN

Well why didn't you say so? Wasting everyone's time like that. Here.

SHE PASSES ROSA A TEST PAPER

There are some tables in the room next door. Answer the questions on the test and drop it back to me at the desk when you're done.

ROSA

And then will I be registered to vote?

WOMAN

If you pass. *IF* you pass, then you will receive your voter registration in the mail.

ROSA (as she takes the test paper)

Thank you mam.

WOMAN

Yeah, good luck lady. Though if you ask me, you're wasting your time.

ROSA (in spotlight, to the audience)

Well. When I sat down and looked at the test paper I could see right away that it wasn't fair. It was supposed to be a test of whether you could read and write, but they had put in these very complicated questions about the constitution and all kinds of things. Lucky white folks didn't have to pass this test or there would be no registered voters in the whole state of Alabama! But I did my best and I went home to wait for my certificate in the mail. But no certificate ever came. So I went back to the office.

WOMAN

Next.

ROSA

Good afternoon.

WOMAN

Yes?

ROSA

You don't remember me?

WOMAN (stares at her)

No. Any reason why I should?

ROSA

I came in a few months back to take my voter registration test, you said I'd get a certificate in the mail. But I never did.

WOMAN

I said you'd get a certificate in the mail *IF* you passed.

ROSA

So I didn't pass?

WOMAN

You didn't get a certificate, you didn't pass. And I'm not surprised.

ROSA

Can I check the answers.

WOMAN

No.

ROSA

Can you check for me?

WOMAN

No. The system is the system. You pass, you get a certificate in the mail. That's all I know. Now move along.

ROSA

I'd like to take the test again please.

WOMAN

Really? It likely won't make any difference. You know that don't you?

ROSA

All the same, I believe it is my right to take the test again.

WOMAN

Very well. Here you are. If you don't have any place better to be, or anything better to do then please be my guest.

ROSA (to the audience)

So I took that test for the second time.

ROSA RETURNS TO THE WOMAN AND PRESENTS HER COMPLETED TEST

ROSA

There you are.

WOMAN

Right. You know how it works. If you pass then you'll get your voter registration certificate in the mail.

ROSA

Thank you. I took a little longer over the test this time.

WOMAN

Yeah, so?

ROSA

And I copied out all my answers. I have them right here. So if I don't pass this time then I'll be able to check won't I? See if your marking has been done fair and square.

WOMAN

You wrote it all out twice?

ROSA

I did. So good day to you mam. And I look forward to receiving my certificate in the mail.

ROSA (to the audience)

And do you know what? This time I did receive my registration in the post. And that is how I became a registered voter in the state of Alabama! It was one of the NAACP's big campaigns to get black voters registered so I knew Parks would be delighted.

ROSA

Parks! Look here in the paper, it's Johnnie Carr. I was at school with her. And here she is doing some work for the NAACP. I never knew there were roles for women down there. I might pay a call on her.

PARKS

Oh Rosa, don't go running down town to the NAACP. It's bad enough one of us risking our neck. The stuff we do..... that it isn't women's work.

ROSA

Well, it's good enough for Johnnie it seems. And I'm not risking anything. I'll just stop by. Catch up on old times. You don't begrudge me that do you?

PARKS

Well if you put it that way I guess I can't say anything about it. But you be careful Rosa. People see you going into that office they'll likely put two and two together and say you're involved with the organisation.

### **NAACP MONTGOMERY BRANCH**

ROSA

Excuse me? Is there anybody here?

MAN

Hello mam. Are you here for the annual election of officers?

ROSA

Well no. I was just stopping by to see if my friend Miss Johnnie Carr was here.

MAN

I'm afraid she's not today. But we're about to start the meeting. If you pay your membership dues you can go right on in.

ROSA

Oh no. I was just....well.....well yes, I think I will then.

ROSA PAYS OVER A FEW DOLLARS AND GOES IN TO THE MEETING. CAST ON CHAIRS.

E.D. NIXON

Ah come in. Come in. Who have we here?

ROSA

I'm Mrs Rosa Parks.

E.D. NIXON

Raymond Parks' wife?

ROSA

Indeed.

E.D.NIXON

I am Mr E.D.Nixon, the President of the Association.

ROSA

Pleased to meet you Mr Nixon.

E.D.NIXON

Welcome Mrs Parks, welcome indeed. And not a moment too soon for we need a secretary to take the minutes of the meeting,

ROSA

Oh, no, I couldn't. It's my first meeting; I'll just sit quietly and listen.

E.D.NIXON

Why that's perfect. What else would a good secretary do? I nominate Mrs Rosa Parks to be the new secretary of the Alabama Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People. All those in favour say aye.

ALL THE MEN RAISE THEIR HANDS

MEN

Aye.

E.D.NIXON

Excellent. I must tell you that the position comes with no pay. We are all volunteers here Mrs Parks.

ROSA

Call me Rosa please.

E.D.NIXON

Very well Rosa it is, now take up your pencil and let us begin. Item number one....

ROSA (to the audience)

Well before I knew it I was working hard for Mr Nixon every moment I could spare. He was a brave and dignified man. Carried himself straight as an arrow. But I have to tell you he was also a shocking male chauvinist.

E.D.NIXON

I always say, women don't need to be nowhere but the kitchen

ROSA

Well what about me? If I was at home in the kitchen who'd be typing your letters? Organising your lectures? Answering your mail? Perhaps I'd better quit Mr Nixon? See if you can find a good *man* to come in here and run this office for no pay.

E.D.NIXON

No Rosa you can't quit. You know I didn't mean it. I need a secretary. And it's plain to see that you are the best there is.

ROSA (to the audience)

And so I stayed. At first I was in the office sending out press releases, and answering the phones. But I took on more and more responsibility.

E.D.NIXON

We need someone to oversee the youth council, advise school kids and teach self esteem.

ROSA

I'd love to.

E.D.NIXON

Excellent Rosa. I can't think of a better example for the youth of today. Now, can you pass me that file?

ROSA (to the audience)

One of my main duties became to keep a record of cases of discrimination or unfair treatment or acts of violence against black people. And there were so many cases that I often worked late into the night. Some of the cases we dealt with were very upsetting.

**NAACP office**

ROSA

Come in, do sit down. How can we help you today?

CORNELLA

I've come to throw myself on your mercy. I don't know where else to turn. (she starts to cry) Can you help me? There's no one else who will even listen to me.

ROSA

We'll listen. What on earth has happened? Can you tell me your story Mrs ...?

CORNELLA

I am Cornella Reeves. Cornella.

ROSA

Tell me your trouble Cornella. And please don't mind but I will have to take some notes.

CORNELLA

I'm here to beg for help for my son. My eldest Jeremiah. He aint nothing but a kid, still in high school.

ROSA

How old exactly?

CORNELLA

He's sixteen, Rosa, just sixteen.

ROSA

And what has happened to him Cornella? Can you tell me?

CORNELLA

He's been arrested mam. The police came to the high school and took him away.

ROSA (writing busily)

On what charge?

CORNELLA

Rape. (she covers her face with her hands)

ROSA

I see. And I'm afraid I have to ask... did he.....is there any possibility that he could have done this?

CORNELLA (gathers herself and speaks with dignity)

There is none. A finer boy you never met.

ROSA

And who has accused him?

CORNELLA

A white lady.

ROSA

And the circumstances?

CORNELLA

He's been working as a grocery delivery boy, after school. And I don't deny that he's been mixed up with this woman. They've been carrying on for months now but she never made no complaint about Jeremiah's intentions till one of her neighbours saw them through the window getting undressed.

ROSA

And this neighbour reported her to the police for having relations with a black man?

CORNELLA

Yes, that's right. As soon as she realised that she was found out and that there would be trouble she told those policemen that Jeremiah forced himself on her.

ROSA

She lied to the police to protect herself.

CORNELLA

Yes mam she did. Although aint nobody believes her lies. Except the police! And now they've got Jeremiah in prison and I don't know where to turn. Can you help us?

ROSA

We'll do our best mam. We can try to get him a decent lawyer at least.

CORNELLA

I suppose this sort of thing is nothing to you. It happens all the time. But this is my son.

ROSA

Cornella, every black man wrongly imprisoned is a terrible thing. No matter how many times I hear stories like this my heart hurts just the same. I promise you we care about every one of our brothers and sisters unjustly accused. And we will do everything we can to help.

CORNELLA TAKES ROSA'S HANDS

CORNELLA

Thank you, thank you. I only hope it will be enough.

ROSA (to the audience)

Cornella was right to be worried about her son. The police hadn't just arrested him. They had strapped him into the electric chair and told him they would electrocute him if he didn't confess. So he did confess. The all white jury sentenced Jeremiah to die in the electric chair. Mr Nixon led the campaign to force a re-trial.

SPOTLIGHT UP ON NIXON AND CORNELLA

E.D.NIXON

And we won him a re-trial! We got that boy a national lawyer and the Supreme Court ruled that the jury should have heard that Jeremiah was tortured

CORNELLA

So what happens now Mr Nixon? Does my boy Jeremiah come home?

E.D.NIXON

I'm afraid not. The state of Alabama is putting Jeremiah through a second trial but this time the jury will hear the evidence of torture. We will do everything we can. We will not stop fighting for justice.

SPOTLIGHT GOES OUT

ROSA (to the audience)

During all this time I wrote to Jeremiah in jail. Just to keep his spirits up as much as I could. I even helped him get some of his poetry published in the newspapers. Sad poems about God and dreams and lost love and being in a prison cell. Such sad poems. So much for him to bear and he

was really only a child. But the state of Alabama would not give up. And so we did not give up either. Our campaign went on for years.

Now you might remember that I was put off the bus back in 1943. Well by the start of 1955 Mr Nixon was going down to the bus company more and more frequently to complain but the bus company would never give an inch. Even though black people were more than sixty percent of their passengers.

## **NAACP**

E.D.NIXON

We need to file suit against the bus company, and to do this we need a strong case. And a strong case will need a strong plaintiff.

ROSA

The best plaintiff would be a woman I think.

E.D.NIXON

You think so?

ROSA

Sure, a woman will get more public sympathy than a man.

E.D.NIXON

Yes, you may be right. But it would have to be a woman of good character. Someone who is above reproach. Someone with a good reputation who has never done anything wrong except refuse to give up her seat to a white person.

ROSA (to the audience)

We were still working out how to find such a person when we got news that someone had jumped the gun. A young lady called Claudette Colvin.

CLAUDETTE IS SEATED, A WHITE MAN (2-D FACE MASK) STANDS OVER HER

WHITE MAN

You shouldn't be sitting here.

CLAUDETTE

I paid my dime. I guess my dime is the same as yours Sir. And I was here first.

WHITE MAN

Do you want me to ask the driver to get the police.

CLAUDETTE

I don't want that. But I'm not giving up my seat Mister.

WHITE MAN

Who do you think you are? You're nothing but a schoolgirl.

CLAUDETTE

And do you know what we learned in school today? We learned about the constitution. And the constitution says it's the same rules for black folks and white.

WHITE MAN

Well young lady I think you're in for a tough lesson on your constitutional rights. Here are the police.

A POLICEMAN APPROACHES CLAUDETTE

POLICEMAN

Stand up please.

CLAUDETTE

I will not. You're going to have to drag me off this bus.

POLICEMAN

Put out your hands.

CLAUDETTE DOES NOT MOVE

POLICEMAN

I said put out your hands!

CLAUDETTE HOLDS OUT HER HANDS, THE POLICEMAN HANDCUFFS HER. THEN DRAGS HER TO HER FEET. HER SCHOOL BOOKS FALL TO THE FLOOR AS SHE IS DRAGGED FROM THE BUS

CLAUDETTE

My books!

POLICEMAN

Too late to be worrying about your school books now. I'll teach you a proper lesson. You're going to jail.

HE MARCHED CLAUDETTE AWAY

ROSA(to the audience)

Claudette seemed like a charming young girl. And a good student. So we met with her to see if she could be our test case to challenge the bus segregation.

**NAACP office**

E.D.NIXON

Welcome, welcome Claudette. And how are you?

CLAUDETTE

I'm fine Mr Nixon.

E.D.NIXON

You weren't hurt at the police station?

CLAUDETTE

I wasn't hurt. But I'll tell the truth Sir I was very much afraid.

E.D.NIXON

But you stood up for what's right didn't you?

CLAUDETTE

I did, although fat lot of good it's done me.

ROSA

Have they charged you?

CLAUDETTE

They have.

E.D. NIXON

What are the charges?

CLAUDETTE

Violating segregation laws, disturbing the peace and assaulting a police officer.

ROSA

My goodness! I knew your mother Mary Jane. And when I first got the news that they arrested you it hurt me so bad. I couldn't believe they carted you off to jail.

E.D.NIXON

But you made bail. So at least you weren't in prison long.

CLAUDETTE

And I'm grateful for it Sir. I don't mind telling you, when that cell door banged shut and I heard the big old key turn in the lock I was very much afraid. I got down on my knees and I prayed.

E.D.NIXON

Has Rosa told you that we are looking for someone to be our test case to fight the bus segregation?

CLAUDETTE

She mentioned it.

ROSA

Would you be interested Claudette? It might mean a lot of attention on you. How has it been at home since you got arrested?

CLAUDETTE

It's been hard Mrs. Parks. Seems like some parts of my community think I'm a bad apple. Those folks think: you've been in trouble with the police; you must have done something wrong.

E.D.NIXON

If we were to make you our test case then there would be a lot of scrutiny Claudette. And we'd need you to work with us to raise money for your defense. We'd want you to speak at public meetings and such.

CLAUDETTE

Well I guess I could. I mean for awhile anyway. The baby's not due for a little while yet.

ROSA

The baby? I didn't know you were pregnant Claudette.

CLAUDETTE

Well it's not something I've been running around telling people. I got enough people judging me for getting arrested.

E.D.NIXON

And you are not married?

CLAUDETTE

No Sir. I'm not.

E.D.NIXON (getting to his feet)

Ah. Then I am afraid we have wasted your time Miss Colvin. We cannot go forward with you as our test case.

ROSA

Are you sure Mr. Nixon? Claudette is a good girl.

E.D.NIXON

No, it's quite impossible. A young girl, having a child out of wedlock? The white press would have a field day. They would pour down disapproval upon her.

CLAUDETTE

Feels like you're giving me some disapproval of your own Mr. Nixon.

E.D.NIXON

I'm sorry Claudette. I truly am. But for us to have any chance of winning we'll need someone who is above reproach.

CLAUDETTE

Someone perfect. In every possible way. Right up until she's arrested for refusing to give up her seat on the bus!

E.D.NIXON

I'm afraid so. Thank you for coming Claudette. Rosa, will you show Miss Colvin out please.

ROSA (to Claudette)

Don't pay him any mind. And don't worry. We'll find someone else to be our test case for the buses. We'll win in the end.

ROSA

And if it all gets too much for you at home you know you can always come and stay with me for a while. Parks won't mind.

CLAUDETTE

Thank you Rosa. Before I go can I ask you something?

ROSA

Of course.

CLAUDETTE

Are you still working on the Jeremiah Reeves case? Is there any news?

ROSA

Did you know Jeremiah?

CLAUDETTE

He went to my school. I saw the police cars come to take him away. I know he's on death row. I think it was him who inspired me to take a stand and refuse to give up my seat on the bus. Does that make sense?

ROSA

Of course it does. It's all one thing and the same. It's all injustice. And we're doing everything we can for Jeremiah.

CLAUDETTE

Can you win? Can you get him home for his momma?

ROSA

I don't know Claudette. But I promise you this, we will keep fighting.

CLAUDETTE

Thank you Mrs Parks. Goodnight.

ROSA

Goodnight Claudette. You take care now.

ROSA (to the audience)

I thought about Claudette a lot that year. But I wasn't thinking about her on the 1<sup>st</sup> December when I boarded the Cleveland Avenue bus. My head was full of all kinds of things. And it was only when I had paid my fare that I looked up and recognised that mean old driver from all those years ago. Mr James F Blake. The man who put me off his bus and left me standing in the rain.

I took a seat at the front of the black section.

ROSA SITS DOWN

ROSA (to the audience)

At first I was just looking out of the window but then as we got to the Empire Theatre stop some more white people got on and filled up all the white seats. And one man was left standing. Next thing I knew Blake was standing over me.

BLAKE

Let me have those seats.

ROSA (to the audience)

I didn't get up.

BLAKE

You heard me. Let me have that seat.

ROSA (to the audience)

People always say that I didn't get up because I was tired. But that isn't true. I was not tired. And I was not old either. Although some people have an image of me being old. I was 42. No. The only tired I was, was tired of giving in.

BLAKE

Right. If you don't move I'm going to have you arrested.

ROSA

Well Sir, I suppose you may do that.

ROSA (to the audience)

And as I sat there waiting for the police I thought about my grandfather who always kept a gun right by his fireplace in case we were attacked. And I thought of poor Jeremiah Reeves, just a kid on death row. And the Scottsboro boys. And it seemed to me that the more we gave in, the more the white folks pushed us around. I had plenty of time. I could have got off the bus. But I didn't. I stayed and waited for the police.

POLICEMAN (WHITE 2-D MASK) APPROACHES ROSA

POLICEMAN

Right, what's this nonsense? You're coming with me.

ROSA

Why do you push us around?

POLICEMAN

I don't know, but the law is the law and you're under arrest.

ROSA (to the audience)

They didn't even handcuff me. They must have seen that I'd go quietly. And I started to smile a little bit because they always say : stand up for your rights don't they? But when my time came I sat down!

POLICEMAN (takes Rosa's arm)

Wipe that smile off your face lady. You're coming with me. Shows over folks. You can all get back to your business now.

ROSA (to the audience)

At the police station they finger printed me and took my photo.

ROSA (to the audience)

They put me in a jail cell. Just like they did with Claudette. They finally let me make a phone call and I called Parks of course. And he said he'd come straight down. But word was already out about my arrest. And Mr Nixon had paid my bail.

ROSA

Oh Mr Nixon, I am very glad to see you.

E.D.NIXON

Of course, Rosa. Don't you worry about a thing. Your bail is paid, Parks is outside in the car to take you home where you belong. Your trial date is set for Monday.

ROSA (to the audience)

I didn't realise how much the whole thing had upset me until I got home.

**Rosa's house**

LEONA

Oh Rosa, come and sit down, what a terrible terrible thing!

PARKS

She's alright Leona. Leave her be. She just needs to rest.

ROSA

I'm fine Momma.

LEONA

Did they hurt you? Did the police beat you Rosa? What ever possessed you to go and get yourself arrested?

ROSA

No. They didn't hurt me. Just locked me up. I was only in jail for two hours momma.

PARKS

Two hours too long! Mr Nixon, what can we do about this?

E.D.NIXON

The trial is a formality of course. Rosa will be found guilty and made to pay a fine.

ROSA

I tell you all this. Whatever happens I am never getting on a segregated bus again. I would rather walk to work and back every day. Even in the rain.

E.D.NIXON

Oh good Lord! Why did I not see it straight away? I have the perfect plaintiff! You Rosa, you shall be our test case to fight the bus company.

ROSA

Me?

E.D.NIXON

A woman of good character, happily married, honest, employed. A person of integrity with no police record. The press won't be able to dig up any dirt on Mrs Rosa Parks. You're a fine upstanding citizen.

PARKS

She is all those things. But let me remind you she is also my wife. I don't want her to be pushed into anything that's dangerous or is going to bring us trouble.

NIXON

Rosa? What do you say? It's up to you. But I don't see how we'll ever get a better chance. The white people can't point to you and say there's anything you ever did to deserve such treatment except to be born black.

LEONA

You be mindful Rosa. This is a big decision.

ROSA

I'll do it!

PARKS AND LEONA TOGETHER

Rosa!

ROSA

What choice is there really? Let's try and end the bus segregation. If Mr Nixon thinks we have a chance then who am I to say no?

NIXON

Bravo Rosa! Let's see what we can do.

ROSA (to the audience)

After that decision things moved very fast. By midnight Mrs Jo Ann Robinson, who was one of the leading woman activists in Montgomery, had got her students together at Montgomery State and they had run off 35,000 handbills calling for all black people to stay home on Monday and refuse to ride the buses.

## **Holy Baptist Church**

JO ANN ROBINSON READS ALOUD THE TEXT. THE CAST HAND OUT THE HANDBILLS TO THE AUDIENCE (IF COVID RULES PERMIT)

JO-ANN

Don't ride the bus to work, to town, to school, or any place on Monday, December 5.

Another black woman has been arrested and put in jail because she refused to give up her seat.

Don't ride the buses anywhere on Monday. If you work take a cab or share a ride, or walk.

Come to a mass meeting Monday at 7pm at the Holt Street Baptist Church

ROSA (to the audience)

On Sunday the Montgomery Advertiser ran the flyer on the front page. And then we nervously waited for Monday. Would black folks refuse to take the buses? Even though the weather forecast was for rain?! I didn't go to work on Monday of course. I went downtown for my trial. Mr Nixon was right there on the front steps when I arrived.

## **Town hall**

E.D.NIXON

Rosa! Over here.

ROSA

Oh my. I didn't know there would be a crowd outside! Do I look alright?

ROSA GESTURES TO HER OUTFIT: A BLACK DRESS WITH WHITE COLLAR AND CUFFS. AND A CHARCOAL GREY COAT, WITH WHITE GLOVES.

E.D.NIXON

You look perfect Rosa. Where's Parks?

PARKS (arriving, breathless)

I'm right here. I was parking the car and then they wouldn't let me through. Until I said I was Mr Rosa Parks!

ROSA

Oh Parks I'm sorry.

PARKS

Don't worry Rosa, we're here to support you. That's what's important. My pride can take a back seat today.

E.D.NIXON

Very well said Parks. Now shall we go in and face the trial? Are you ready Rosa?

ROSA

I am. Thank you Sir. I know what I have to do.

E.D.NIXON

Come along then.

ROSA (to the audience)

We knew I would be found guilty. The whole point of me being a test case was to allow me to be found guilty and then appeal to a higher court. Because only in the higher court could the segregation laws be challenged. I was fined ten dollars plus four dollars costs. It was all over pretty fast.

By the time the trial was over something even more important had happened. As we came out into the streets it was clear to see. The buses were empty! The black people had all stayed home. So I was pretty nervous to see what was going to happen at the meeting at The Holt Street Baptist Church that evening.

E.D.NIXON

Welcome everyone. Thank you for coming out to this most important meeting. For many years in Montgomery it has been impossible to get black people to stand together but today has been such an inspiring day. But I stand here to say: there is so much more we need to do. Any of you who are afraid you better get your hat and coat and go on home. This is going to be a long drawn out affair. I want to tell you something else too. For years and years I've been talking about how I don't want the children who come along behind me to suffer the indignities that I've suffered all these years. About how I want things to be better for them. Well I've changed my mind – I want to enjoy some of those better things myself. The time for change is now. I am done with waiting. I am now going to introduce you to the president of the newly formed Montgomery Improvement Association. Please welcome the Reverend Martin Luther King Junior.

**Holy Baptist Church**

DR KING

Injustice can only go on for so long. There comes a time when the people have had enough. And we are here this evening to say that we have had enough. Enough of being mistreated, enough of being segregated and humiliated. For too many years we have remained silent. But now it is time for us to make some noise. Perhaps our white brothers think because we have not cried out that we do not feel the pain that they inflict on us. But we do feel it. Our suffering is real. And now I want us all to join together to cry out for freedom and justice. Our great American democracy says that we have the right to protest. So let us join together to protest with dignity and with Christian love.

DR KING (to Rosa)

Step on up and say something Mrs Parks. You're the one who started all this.

ROSA

You want me to speak? I don't know what to say. I don't want to speak in front of all these people.

DR KING

Don't worry. You have done enough, you don't have to speak. There are plenty of people here to speak. (to the crowd) Here are the demands we make of the bus company: One. Courteous treatment on the buses. Two. First come first served seating. And three. Hiring of black drivers for black bus routes

Stand up if you want to continue the boycott.

ROSA STANDS, NIXON STANDS, WE URGE THE AUDIENCE TO STAND.

ROSA (to the audience)

And that is how the Montgomery bus boycott properly began. The people decided that one day of protest was not enough. No black person would ride the bus until we could ride as equals with the whites.

It was all very exciting at the meeting but there were difficult times ahead.

**Barber shop**

SHOP OWNER ENTERS (WHITE FACE MASK)

SHOP OWNER

Hello Parks.

PARKS

Hello Sir, is something wrong? We don't normally see you here at the shop.

SHOP OWNER

Well now that you mention it Parks there is something we need to discuss.

PARKS

Very well, take a seat then Sir.

SHOP OWNER

I'll come straight to the point.

PARKS

I would expect nothing less.

SHOP OWNER

You've always been a good barber for me Parks. This shop pays its way and the rent money comes in on time.

PARKS

Yes, Sir it does. You can depend on that.

SHOP OWNER

But I see that your wife is the one that has stirred up all this nonsense in the town.

PARKS

Nonsense?

SHOP OWNER

Yes, for nonsense is just what it is. Now there's some might say that a man should be able to keep his wife under control Mr Parks.

PARKS STARES AT HIM

SHOP OWNER (CONT)

But I say, sometimes a wife can be headstrong and why would I put a good barber out of work for one little mistake?

PARKS

What are you trying to say?

SHOP OWNER

But when I hear that customers of mine are sitting in this barber shop chatting about Mrs Rosa Parks and the bus boycott then that Sir is no kind of business that I want to be a part of.

PARKS

I don't see how I can tell the customers what to talk about. Barbering's my trade. Nothing more or less.

SHOP OWNER

Now you see here Parks. What I'm saying is plain and simple. No one in this establishment is ever to mention the bus boycott or the name Rosa Parks again.

PARKS BEGINS TO TAKE OFF HIS BARBERS APRON AND GOES TO GET HIS JACKET.

SHOP OWNER

What do you think you're doing?

PARKS

Why I'm leaving Sir. And I won't be coming back. I won't work anywhere that my wife's name can't be mentioned. And that's that. You can find someone else to do your barbering. And to pay your rent. Now if you'll move out of my way. Shop's closed!

ROSA (to the audience)

So Parks lost his job and then I was let go by Montgomery Fair department store where I had been working as a seamstress. They didn't say it was because of the bus boycott. At least I didn't have to worry about how to get to work anymore!

But it meant times were hard for me and Parks. And for plenty of other folks too.

That we were able to keep going was thanks to women like Georgia Gilmore.

### **Montgomery Improvement Association 1956**

GEORGIA

Mrs Rosa Parks?

ROSA

Yes, that's me.

GEORGIA (she dabs herself with a handkerchief against the heat)

It's an honour to meet you Mrs Parks. I'm Georgia Gilmore.

ROSA

Pleased to meet you Georgia. Have you come to volunteer for the Montgomery Improvement Association?

GEORGIA

No mam. Better than that. I've come to donate some money to the cause.

GEORGIA HANDS OVER A BROWN PAPER BAG

ROSA

Good Lord. This is a lot of money! We can do a great deal to help folks with this.

GEORGIA

I'm pleased to hear it. Because I reckon I can raise that money each week for you. To help out those families who need it during the boycott.

ROSA

But who has given you this money?

GEORGIA

We call ourselves "The Club From Nowhere".

ROSA

Well that's an extraordinary name.

GEORGIA (laughing)

Anyone asks me "where does this money come from?" I say – it comes from nowhere. Excepting to you of course Mrs Parks. I know that you're going to keep our secrets safe. We're just some ladies from Montgomery doing what we can to help. We bake pies and cakes and cookies and we sell them door-to-door. And to beauty parlours and black owned shops.

ROSA

That is so kind of you and your volunteers.

GEORGIA

We all want to help. We might not be able to do much but we can cook! And not just cakes. Sweet potato pies, fried fish, pork chops and stewed greens. We do 'em all.

ROSA

Well if you are raising this much money that food must be quite delicious.

GEORGIA

Second to none Mrs Parks. You can depend on it.

ROSA

Well thank you again for the donation.

GEORGIA

I'll see you next week Mrs Parks.

ROSA

I look forward to it.

GEORGIA STARTS TO LEAVE

ROSA

Oh and Georgia?

GEORGIA

Yes Mrs Parks.

ROSA

Next time, can you bring me one of those sweet potato pies?

GEORGIA

I surely will mam.

ROSA (to the audience)

And Georgia was not the only person who was determined to support the bus boycott. At the MIA offices I worked with Jo Ann Robinson. The lady who had started it all with her flyers Jo Ann and I were delighted to find that parcels were coming in from all over the country.

JO ANN ROBINSON ENTERS WITH AN ARMFUL OF PARCELS

JO ANN

And welcome they are too. If we're going to keep folks off the buses then we need to give them some support. There's people losing their jobs, having to pay cab fare to get to work, and not to mention wearing out their shoes walking so many miles a day on bad roads.

ROSA

Oh Jo Ann. Look here, this will help.

SHE SHOWS HER THE PAPER BAG FROM GEORGIA

ROSA (CONT)

The Club from Nowhere they call themselves. Raising money for the cause one cake at a time.

JO ANN

Well we've never needed support more. The police have started arresting cab drivers for not charging full fare. They say that it's illegal for them to try and help the folks boycott the buses.

ROSA

That's crazy. Can they do that?

JO ANN

Seems like they can. But they won't win with that nonsense! I've got a car. Let's see if they are going to start arresting people for giving folks free lifts in their cars. And if I'm happy to do it I bet there's plenty of other people we can get to volunteer.

ROSA

And we can get the churches to buy some cars and find some volunteers to drive them. I know Parks would be happy to help out.

JO-ANN

Good thinking Rosa. We're not going to be beaten on this one. The state of Alabama doesn't know what it's up against. You and I can organise one hell of a protest eh?

ROSA (to the audience)

It wasn't long before we got a good system going. I worked on the phones with lots of other volunteers and soon we were transporting about 30,000 people a day. All people who would have

been paying their fares to the bus companies. As the boycott went on the buses were losing more and more money and white people were getting angrier and angrier.

**Silhouette of a man on the phone (v/o) – Rosa’s house**

CALLER ONE (ON SCREEN) Voice over :

You’re the cause of this. You’re gonna get yourself killed. You watch yourself Rosa Parks!

ROSA AND LEONA SIT TOGETHER

ROSA

We had to board up the house mamma. Parks can’t take much more. We get the death threats every day. Dr King’s house has been bombed, Mr Nixon’s house has been bombed. I don’t know if it’s worth going on.

LEONA

And you’re spending all your time volunteering with the MIA and at the church, helping folks out on the telephone fixing up rides for them. You should pay some attention to Parks in all this Rosa. It can’t be easy for him. You’ve both lost your jobs over this. It doesn’t make a man feel much of a man when he can’t provide for his wife.

ROSA

Parks knows how important all this is.

LEONA

I dare say he does. But that doesn’t mean he has to like it. It can’t be easy for a man. Hearing his wife’s name all over town.

ROSA

One day soon this will all be over. Then he will never have to hear another stranger saying the name Rosa Parks again. The town will just forget me.

LEONA

Win or lose, Rosa, I’m not sure that’s going to be the case. This protest is national news now. And Mr Nixon has made you the face of it. Even more than Dr King and his association. The story they like is your story. One simple act of defiance against injustice.

ROSA

Oh, nonsense. It’ll all be forgotten soon enough. Now shush. Here’s Parks coming home. Let’s talk about something else.

MR NIXON

Well with all this help we kept that bus boycott running for nearly a year. There we were, walking in the streets, riding in volunteers' cars, getting lifts from the church drivers. And we could have gone on for another year if you ask me but then the most unexpected thing happened.

DR KING (to the audience)

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 1956 while the boycott was still going strong the US Supreme Court declared segregation on the buses unconstitutional.

ROSA (to the audience)

And just like that it was over. But we still wouldn't ride the bus. Not until we got it in writing.

DR KING (to the audience)

The written order from the US Supreme Court arrived on December 20. The Montgomery Improvement Association had won a great victory.

ROSA (to the audience)

And the very next day Dr Martin Luther King rode the bus. I didn't go because my mother wasn't feeling too well. And to be honest I had had about enough after more than a year of being stared at and spoken about. But some reporters came to the house and drove me downtown so they could take pictures of me getting on and off the bus.

ROSA IN THE SPOTLIGHT, LOOKS AT THE BUS

ROSA (to the audience)

And who was the driver of one of the first buses I got on?

THE DRIVER HAS HIS BACK TO ROSA. HER TURNS AROUND AND WE SEE THAT IT'S BLAKE

ROSA (to the audience)

Mr James F Blake! I never said a word to him. And he never spoke to me. Even though I know he recognised me. I sat right in the front. In what used to be the white section. And it seemed like all those reporters just wanted to take my picture over and over again. Sitting there on the bus that day it was hard not to think again about all the injustice that had brought us here. Poor Jeremiah was still on death row, and although we had won this fight it seemed to me that there was still so much to fight for.

DR KING

As time went on we began to hear of bus boycotts all over the south in Birmingham Alabama and in Tallahassee Florida. The direct action civil rights movement had begun.

ROSA

And I guess I was proud of my own small part in it. Just one woman who refused to give up her seat. Just one woman who had had enough of being treated as a second-class citizen. Just one woman who was tired of giving in.

THE CAST LINE UP AS THEY DID AT THE START OF THE PLAY, THEY DROP TO ONE KNEE.

**CAPTION ONE**

Within a year after the bus boycott, 42 other movements were organised in the South to combat racial segregation.

**CAPTION TWO**

Despite the efforts of Rosa and Dr King, Jeremiah Reeves was executed in the electric chair in 1958. He was 22 years old.

**CAPTION THREE**

Dr Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4 1968 in Memphis Tennessee. He was 39.

**CAPTION FIVE**

Claudette Colvin is retired and lives in New York City. She is 82 years old.

**CAPTION SIX**

Rosa Parks is remembered to this day as the mother of the Civil Rights Movement. She passed away in 2005 at the age of 92.

<http://theatre.anglais.free.fr>