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"My Mother" +0

"Aaaah!"

PRETTY FIRE

BIRTH

The stage is bare except for a simple wooden bench, large enough to seat two little girls but light enough for the actor to move easily. It is the only prop the actor uses. All other props are mimed.

"All Blues" by Miles Davis plays. Lights up on Charlayne, sitting center, on the bench, listening.

CHARLAYNE. You hear that? (*Music down.*)

It was December twenty-ninth... That magical time between the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ and the celebration of the birth of the brand new year. (*Music fades out.*)

It was seven o'clock on a Sunday evening in Albany, New York. A blanket of snow covered the whole town. It had snowed that entire Christmas week. You know, those fat, fluffy snowflakes. (*Standing.*) The kind that make you feel like you're in one of those glass snow bubbles that you just shake up... (*Shakes the snow bubble, then watches the snow fall all around her. She moves the bench down center.*)

My parents, Alfred and Dorothy, themselves not yet twenty years old, were relaxing in the living room of their small apartment. They had just spent their first Christmas together as husband and wife. (*Crossing down right.*) A small Christmas tree stood in the corner, slightly under-decorated — actually very under-decorated — with only a few bulbs and ornaments.

→ My mother... (*Crosses to bench and sits.*) She sat in an easy chair next to the window, watching the snow fall. She was crocheting a tiny white sweater for her firstborn, due in eight more weeks. Mommy chose white because she didn't know whether the baby would be a boy or a girl, these being those prehistoric days before amniocentesis.

My father ... (*Reclining on the sofa; "All Blues" up.*)
He was doing his "Sunday thang," on the couch, listening to the hi-fi as his beloved Miles Davis painted pictures with his horn. (*Smoking, grooving to the music.*)
DADDY. Yeah ... all right ... ah, look out! Look out! Look out! (*Music down.*)

CHARLAYNE. "All Blues" in the middle of a snowstorm was all right with Daddy.

Suddenly, (*Music out.*) my mother felt a very hot, tingy sensation all through her body. This was accompanied by a very major urge ... to pee. So she put down her needles and her yarn and (*Standing and making her way down hallway holding on to the walls.*) quickly walked down the hallway that led to the bathroom.
MOMMY. Aaah!

CHARLAYNE. A terrible pain gripped her body. Suddenly, with no warning at all, water gushed down her legs and all over the floor. Holding onto the wall for support, my mother walked on to the bathroom. She sat down on the toilet. (*Arriving back at the bench and sitting, she is racked by another sharp pain.*)
MOMMY. Aaach!

CHARLAYNE. Instinctively — to this day she doesn't know what made her do it, but my mother just (*Reaching one hand under her dress.*) put her hand between her legs ... (*She withdraws her cupped hand.*) (*Awestruck.*) She caught me. She caught ... me! Just before I would've hit the water in the toilet. My mother took in a deep breath to call for help, but she couldn't, so she swallowed that one and tried it again. And this time:
MOMMY. (*Calling.*) WOODY! (*"All Blues" up. Shifting to Daddy's reclining position on the bench.*)

DADDY. (*Irritated.*) Aw, come on, Dot. Can't I have one day, just one day, when I can kick back and listen to my music? (*Standing; music out.*)

CHARLAYNE. Reluctant, but obedient to the wishes of his pregnant wife, my father walked down that very same hallway, (*Slipping on the wet floor.*) slipping and sliding ...

DADDY. Dot, what is this mess? I suppose you want me to clean it up!? (*He listens.*)

CHARLAYNE. Getting no answer, he walked to the bathroom door. He saw us there, my mother, crouched down on the bathroom tiles, holding me in the palm of her hand.

I was black. Blue-black ... and fuzzy all over, still attached by

the umbilical cord. And looking closer, he could see that my fingers were still ... slightly webbed.

My father looked into my mother's eyes and saw his own panic staring back at him. Not a word was said.

Daddy ran to the bedroom. He ripped the blanket off the bed. He came back and gently wrapped us in this blanket. Then he found his car keys and he raced outside. It was deserted. Silent. My father's bare feet made the only footprints in that snow. Slipping, sliding, running, falling, he got into the car to turn it on to warm it up. Then he ran back inside. He found his boots, put on his heavy overcoat, found Mommy's pocketbook with all the important papers in it. Finally, he carefully picked us up, carried us down the front steps of 97 Second Street, put us into that car, and my father drove through my snow-covered town at Godspeed.

When Daddy got to the emergency room of Albany Medical Center Hospital, he came running in, holding us in his arms.

DADDY. (*Running back and forth across the stage; calling.*) My wife is having a baby! My wife is having a baby!

CHARLAYNE. A very officious nurse came from out of nowhere. She said:

NURSE. (*With West Indian accent.*) Young man, this is a hospital! You can't come screaming in here like that. There are lots of women having babies in this place tonight. Your wife is no different than anybody else.

CHARLAYNE. With that, my father placed us on the nearest chair. He opened up that blanket. The nurse saw me there in the palm of my mother's hand, blue-black, fuzzy, still attached by the umbilical cord ...

She took in the same breath that my mother took in, only she said:
NURSE. (*Screaming.*) Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhh!

~~CHARLAYNE. Doctors, nurses, orderlies, came from everywhere to help. My father was scooted off in one direction, and Mommy and I were scooped up and whisked away in another direction, as they went about the business of trying to save our lives.~~

~~In the waiting room, Daddy called his parents, Alfred Sr. and Leola, who lived in the country, five miles outside of Albany.~~

~~DADDY. (*On the phone, panicked.*) Mamal Mama, I'm at the hospital! Come quickly, Mamal! The baby is already here.~~

~~GRANDMAMA. (*Sweet, soft-spoken, rural Southern accent. In happy anticipation.*) What is it, Junior? How much it weigh?~~

~~DADDY. Mama, please! The baby is already here. (*He hangs up.*)~~