

# August Wilson Century Cycle Compendium

2011-2012

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## GEM OF THE OCEAN

### Synopsis

August Wilson's *Century Cycle* begins in 1904, where we meet Citizen Barlow, a bewildered newcomer to Pittsburgh from the agrarian deep South. Citizen Barlow arrives at Aunt Ester's house seeking her help and a safe place from Caesar, the local constable. Aunt Ester, now 285 years old, takes him on a journey of self-discovery to the City of Bones, a city in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Here he makes startling discoveries and his sense of duty leads to his redemption.

### Characters

**AUNT ESTER:** Her name sounds like the word "ancestor" and she is the connector between the African past and the African American present. Her name suggests both Easter, the holiest day of the Christian calendar, and the biblical character Esther, Ahasureus' queen and the heroine of Purim, a Jewish holiday, which celebrates the saving of the Hebrew people. She is both the physical and the mystical link between present and past. Her home is a sanctuary where troubled people come to be cleansed of guilt and sorrow. Aunt Ester's birth, approximately 285 years prior to when the play takes place, coincided with the arrival of the first shipment of African slaves in the English colonies. She is both the keeper and the transmitter of African-American memory.

**CAESAR WILKS:** Black Mary's brother, a policeman, baker and land-owner. He is the villainous constable and venal slumlord in the play. His name means dictator or autocrat, which originated from the original Roman emperor, Julius Caesar. He is reminiscent of the plantation overseers of slavery times and represents the black-face authority who acts and speaks for the white world.

**BLACK MARY:** The protégée of Aunt Ester, she is trying to learn the wisdom and ways of the old woman. While supervising Ester's house, she serves her and washes her feet in a ritual reminiscent of the self-abasement of Mary, sister of Martha, at Bethany during the last days of Christ.

**CITIZEN BARLOW:** The seeker and confessor in the play. A migrant from Alabama, his intent is to work in a factory, but he steals a bucket of nails which results in an innocent man drowning to avoid false arrest. He insists on seeing Aunt Ester to confess his sin of black-upon-black violence. His mother named him Citizen "after freedom came," but Solly Two Kings reminds him that to truly be a Citizen, he'll have to fight to uphold freedom when it becomes a heavy load.

**ELI:** Aunt Ester's companion, bears the name of an Old Testament priest and mentor to young Samuel. As such, he is steady, reliable and maintains peace and security in Aunt Ester's house. He was Solly's comrade in his efforts on the Underground Railroad and for The Union Army.

**SOLLY TWO KINGS:** A sixty-seven year old former slave and conductor on the Underground Railroad whose earlier name was Uncle Alfred. After slavery he changed his name to David and Solomon, two Biblical kings. A friend and suitor to Aunt Ester, he makes a career of gathering up dog excrement, which he calls "pure", for manure.

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-01  
Time: :46  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Premonition  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 1

AUNT ESTER

I dreamed you had a ship full of men and you was coming across the water. Had that stick and you was standing up in this boat full of men. You come and asked me what I was doing standing there. I told you I wanted to go back across the ocean. I asked you to take me. You said you had some work to do but that you would come back. Told me you had a magic stick and when you come back you would part the water so I could walk across. You come on back and all your men had drowned and the boat was sinking. You said you was going to get another boat and some more men. Said you would come back and smote the water. Then you walked off with that stick. Said you was going to Alabama.

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-02  
Time: 1:00  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Metaphorical  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 2

AUNT ESTER

That was like my Junebug. I lost my Junebug, Mr. Citizen. Oh that was a sad time. The darkest day I ever did see was the day I lost my Junebug. You ever looked at a piece of rope, Mr. Citizen? God made that rope. It come right out the ground. You twist and weave it all together and you get a rope. Rope can help you do a lot of things. You tie it around a bucket and you can get water out of a well. You can tie things together with a piece of rope. God made the rope. It's man who sometimes gets in the way of God's creation and turns it over to the devil. Did you ever have love, Mr. Citizen? I've seen people have love and didn't know it. I had love and didn't know it. It's like money you can't ever have enough. You ever had enough money, Mr. Citizen? Some people ain't never had enough.

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-03  
Time: 1:15  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Inspirational  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 2

AUNT ESTER

It all will come to stand in the light, Mr. Citizen. Everything and everybody got to stand in the light. Jesus Christ stood in the light. The people saw him standing there and they killed him. But the judgment ain't with the people. The judgment with God. He the Big Master. God don't never lie. The people liable to do anything. They lie and cheat. That's why God didn't leave the judgment with the people. Say, "I am the beginning and the end." The people can't say that. They know they gonna come to an earthy grave. The end is already writ for them.

(CITIZEN has fallen asleep in the chair. AUNT ESTER begins to sing a lullaby.)

Go to sleep, my child  
You don't know the world yet  
Go to sleep, my child  
The world is not easy  
Go to sleep, my child  
I am here watching over you  
The world is not easy

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-04  
Time: 2:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Value of Life  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 5

AUNT ESTER

You think you supposed to know everything. Life is a mystery. Don't you know life is a mystery? I see you still trying to figure it out. It ain't all for you to know. It's all an adventure. That's all life is. But you got to trust that adventure. I'm on an adventure. I been on one since I was nine years old. That's how old I was when my mama sent me to live with Miss Tyler. Miss Tyler gave me her name. Ester Tyler. I don't tell nobody what I was called before that. The only one know that is my mama. I stayed right on there with her till she died. Miss Tyler passed it on to me. If you ever make up your mind I'm gonna pass it on to you. People say it's too much to carry. But I told myself somebody got to carry it. Miss Ester carried it. Carried it right up till the day she died. I didn't run from it. I picked it up and walked with it. I got a strong memory. I got a long memory. People say you crazy to remember. But I ain't afraid to remember. I try to remember out loud. I keep my memories alive. I feed them. I got to feed them otherwise they'd eat me up. I got memories go way back. I'm carrying them for a lot of folk. All the old timey folks. I'm carrying their memories and I'm carrying my own. If you don't want it I got to find somebody else. I'm getting old. Going on three hundred years now. That's what Miss Tyler told me. Two hundred eighty five by my count.

I told myself Black Mary got to make up her mind. I don't know how much time I got left.

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-05  
Time: 2:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Value of Life  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 5

AUNT ESTER

I know a man used to raise pigs. Great big old pigs. To him the pig was the beginning of everything. And it was the end of everything. Wherever he looked he saw pigs. He saw pigs in the sky and he saw pigs in the ground. To him the pig was the center of his life. One day another man come along and killed all his pigs. He lost everything he had. He lost the center of his life cause it wasn't inside him. It wasn't something nobody could take away. See, Mr. Citizen, right now that bucket of nails is at the center of your life. You only have one life, Mr. Citizen. It's your life. Can't nobody else claim it. You ain't never gonna forget that man who jumped in the river. There are times when it will come and take hold of you and shake you. There ain't nothing you can do about that. It's them in-between times that you can do something about. You got to find something else to be at the center of your life. You got to find out why it was important for Garret Brown to die rather than to take his thirty days. Do you know why he didn't come out the water, Mr. Citizen? Do you know why he chose to die rather than to be branded a thief?

We know he didn't do it. But why, Mr. Citizen. That's what we trying to find out why he would rather die than to say he was a thief.

He didn't care if anybody else knew if he did it or not. He knew. He didn't do it for the people standing around watching. He did it for himself. He say I'd rather die in truth than to live a lie. That way he can say that his life is worth more than a bucket of nails. What is your life worth, Mr. Citizen? That what you go to find out. You got to find a way to live in truth. If you live right you die right. Like Garret Brown.

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-06  
Time: 1:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Inspirational  
Type 3: Metaphorical

Act 1; Scene 5

AUNT ESTER

Do you know the story of Peter from the Bible? Peter denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed. That's what the bible say. Say, "Verily verily I say unto you before the cock crow you will deny me thrice." They asked Peter, "Do you know this man?" And Peter said, "No, I don't know him." Not once, Mr. Citizen. Three times. He say it one time then he had a chance to think about it before he said it again. Right there he could have redeemed himself. What do you think, Mr. Citizen? Why did he deny him three times? Would you have denied him three times?

The Bible say, Peter denied Christ three times. I always wondered about that. He had his redemption handed to him on a silver platter but he didn't take it. I wonder will you take yours, Mr. Citizen.



GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-07

Time: 3:30

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Inspirational

Type 3: Metaphorical

Act 2; Scene 1

AUNT ESTER

I got something I want to show Mr. Citizen. Some people don't like adventure, Mr. Citizen. They stay home. Like me. I done seen all the adventure I want to see. I been across the water. I seen both sides of it. I know about the water. The water has its secrets the way the land has its secrets. Some know about the land. Some know about the water. But there is some that know about the land and the water. They got both sides of it. Then you got the fire. That's a special one. It's got lots of secrets. Fire will heal and kill. It's tricky like that. I can talk about the land and I can talk about the fire. But I don't talk about the water. There was a time, Mr. Citizen, when God moved on the water. And sometime he moves on the land. Is he moving now? We don't know. We can't all the time see it.

Take a look at this map, Mr. Citizen. See that right there...that's a city. It's only a half mile by a half mile but that's a city. It's made of bones. Pearly white bones. All the buildings and everything is made of bones. I seen it. I been there, Mr. Citizen. My mother live there. I got an aunt and three uncles live down there in that city made of bones. You want to go there, Mr. Citizen? I can take you there if you want to go. That's the center of the world. In time it will all come to light. The people made a kingdom out of nothing. They were the people that didn't make it across the water. They sat down right there. They say, "Let's make a kingdom. Let's make a city of bones." The people got a burning tongue, Mr. Citizen. Their mouths are on fire with song. That water can't put it out. That song is powerful. It rise up and come across the water. Ten thousand tongues and ten thousand chariots coming across the water. They on their way, Mr. Citizen. They coming across the water. Ten thousand hands and feet coming across the water. They on their way. I came across that ocean, Mr. Citizen. I cried. I had lost

everything. Everything I had ever known in this life I lost that. I cried a ocean of tears. Did you ever lose anything like that, Mr. Citizen? Where you so lost the only thing that can guide you is the stars. That's all I had left. Everything I had ever known was gone to me. The only thing I had was the stars. I say well I got something. I wanted to hold onto them so I started naming them. I named them after my children. I say there go Cephus and that's Jasper and that's Cecilia, and that big one over there that's Junebug. You ever look at the stars Mr. Citizen? I bet you seen my Junebug and didn't even know it. You come by here sometime when the stars are out and I'll show you my Junebug. You come by anytime you want. You got the stars but it's that wind what drive the boat, Mr. Citizen. Without the wind it would just sit there. But who drives the wind? What god drives the wind? That's what I asked myself but I didn't have no answer. So I just started singing. Just singing quietly to myself some song my mother had taught me. After that it was all right for a little while. But the wind did drive the boat right across the water. What it was driving me to I didn't know. That's what made it so hard. And I didn't have my mother to tell me. That made it harder.

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-08  
Time: 1:50  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Inspirational  
Type 3: Metaphorical

Act 2; Scene 1

AUNT ESTER

You see that, Mr. Citizen. That's a boat. You gonna take a ride on that boat.  
(She hands it to him.)

Do you believe you can take a ride on that old boat, Mr. Citizen? That not what you call your ordinary boat. Look at that boat, Mr. Citizen. That's a magic boat. There's a lot of power in that boat. Power is something. It's hard to control but it's hard to stand in the way of it. God sweep the stars aside, Mr. Citizen. He don't let nothing stand in his way. God don't know nothing but the truth. That boat can take you to that city, Mr. Citizen. Do you believe it can take you to that city?

If you believe it can take you. God got room for everybody. I don't know if you ever seen him but God wear all different kinds of clothes. He got all kinds of faces and he got a sword. It's a big sword. The Bible say it's a mean and terrible swift sword. And when he get to waving that sword around he can do anything. I can take you to that city, but you got to want to go. Do you want to go, Mr. Citizen? Do you want to get your soul washed?

Listen to what I tell you. We gonna go to the City of Bones tonight but first you got to get ready. I want you to go and take a bath. Get scrubbed real good. Then I want you to put on your best clothes then go into your room and pray. Even if you don't know how to pray I want you to try. Black Mary, heat up some water for Mr. Citizen and then go get things ready. I'm going to get myself ready. Do not disturb me.

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-09

Time: 1:45

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Conjuring

Type 3: Metaphorical

Act 2; Scene 2

AUNT ESTER

You ever seen a boat, Mr. Citizen? A boat is made out of a lot of things. Wood and rope. The sails look like bed sheets blowing in the wind. They make a snap when the winds catch them. Wood and rope and iron. The workmen with their hammers ringing. A boat is something. It takes a lot of men to make a boat. And it takes a lot of men to sail a boat. Them was some brave men. They left their family and didn't know if they was ever gonna see them again. They got on that boat and went out into the world. The world's a dangerous place, Mr. Citizen. It's got all kinds of harms in it. It take God to master the world. The world is a rough place. But there's gold out there in the world. There's good luck out there in the world. Them brave men went looking for it. Remember I told you you could take a ride on that boat? The wind catch up in them sails and you be off across the ocean. The wind will take you every which way. You need a strong arm to steer that boat. Don't you feel it, Mr. Citizen? Don't you feel that boat rocking? Just a rocking and a rocking. The wind blowing. Just a rocking and a rocking. The wind blowing and the birds following behind that boat. They follow whenever it go. What is they following for, Mr. Citizen? The wind snapping them sails and the birds following. The birds following and singing and the fish swimming and the wind blowing—

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-10  
Time: 1:10  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Money  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 3

CAESAR WILKS

Here...here go a quarter. I'm gonna see what you do with that. These niggers take and throw their money away in the saloon and get mad when it's gone. I give one fellow a quarter and he turn around and give it to the candy man. I say he could have did something with that quarter. It wasn't much but it was twenty-five cents more than he had. He took and threw it away. He can't see past his nose. He can't see it's all set up for him to do anything he want. See, he could have took and bought him a can of shoe polish and got him a rag. If he could see that far he'd look up and find twenty-five dollars in his pocket. Twenty-five dollars buys you an opportunity. You don't need but five dollars to get in the crap game. That's five opportunities he done threw away. The candy man gonna get him a bigger wagon and another five pound of sugar. He gonna be digging a ditch the rest of his life. I'm gonna see what you do. You turn that twenty-five cents into five dollars and you come and see me and I'll give you a job.

Code: 00-11  
Time: 2:25  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Crime

Act 1; Scene 3

CAESAR WILKS

I'd say I didn't do it too if the law was after me. You arrest somebody for loitering and they'll swear they ain't standing there. That don't mean nothing to me 'cause he say he didn't do it. I had witnesses. Five hundred people standing around watching the man drown. I tried to break it up. Get them to go home. But they wanna stand around and watch a damn fool drown himself in the river. I tried to save him but he ain't had enough sense to save himself. People wanna blame me but I got to keep order. Just like them niggers wanna riot over a bucket of nails. Talking about they ain't going to work. Talking about closing the mill down. They don't understand the mill is what hold everything together. If you close down the mill the city would be in chaos. The city needs that tin. They need that tin in Philadelphia. They need it in Detroit and Cincinnati. Industry is what drive the country. Without industry wouldn't nobody be working. That tin put people to work doing other things. These niggers can't see that. They ought to be glad the mill is there. If it wasn't for the mill these niggers wouldn't have no way to pay their rent. Close down the mill and wait and see what happen then. I'll tell you. A hundred niggers is going to jail for trying to steal something. That's what's gonna happen. A hundred niggers is going to jail for loitering. A hundred niggers is going to jail for disturbing the peace after they get mad and start fighting each other. Five hundred babies is gonna go hungry. You gonna have a hundred new prostitutes. People gonna be living on the streets begging for a dime. And all because some damn fool took it upon himself to steal a bucket of nails and run and jump in the goddamn river. You close down the mill you ain't got nothing. Them niggers can't see that. Want to blame me. You know whose fault it is. I'll tell you whose fault it is. It's Abraham Lincoln's fault. He ain't had no idea what he was doing. He didn't know like I know. Some of these niggers was better off in slavery. They don't

know how to act otherwise. You try and do something nice for niggers and it'll backfire on you every time. You try and give them an opportunity by giving them a job and they take and throw it away. Talking about they ain't going to work.

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-12  
Time: 1:00  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Money  
Type 3: Family

Act 1; Scene 3

CAESAR WILKS

I give good value for my services. I got clean rooms. Quite naturally if you don't pay the rent somebody else will. I try to tell these niggers this the city. This ain't the country. I can't wait till the crop come in. It's taking them awhile but they learning. Yeah, I sell magic bread. Got a big sign say you only have to eat half as much to get twice as full. And I charge one and a half times for it. You don't understand I give the people hope when they ain't got nothing else. They take that loaf of bread and make it last twice as long. They wouldn't do that if they didn't pay one and a half times for it. I'm helping the people.

Now ...see...I remember when you was part of it. You was selling hoecakes with me. You was running the bakery. Why can't it be like old times? I miss having you work with me. I remember when we was working together. It wasn't about Caesar or Black Mary. It was about the Wilks family.



Code: 00-13  
Time: 4:25  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Family

Act 1; Scene 3

CAESAR WILKS

I got to play the hand that was dealt to me. You look around and see you black. You look at the calendar. Slavery's over. I'm a free man. I can get up whatever time I want to in the morning. I can move all over and pick any woman I want. I can walk down the street to the store and buy anything my money will buy. There ain't nothing I can't have. I'm starting out with nothing so I got to get a little something. A little place to start. You look and see the race you got to run is different than somebody else's. Maybe it's got more hills. It's longer. But this is what I got. Now what to do with it?

I look around and see where niggers got to eat and niggers got to sleep. I say if I had some bread I'd be a rich man. I got some bread. In the valley of the blind the one-eyed man is king. I started selling hoe cakes off the back of a wagon. I'd cook them over the coals. I got me some beans. Selling them right out the pot. I even put a little pork in them. Police ran me off the corner. Say I needed a license. It took me awhile but I got me a license. I had to pay six or seven people but I got me a license.

Niggers say my bowls was too small. I got bigger bowls. Say I didn't put enough pork in the beans. I put in more pork. I got me some chickens. I charged extra for the big ones and the people got mad. One man told me the chickens had big feet but they didn't have big wings. I seen I was in the wrong business. Said I was gonna let niggers eat on their own and give them a place to sleep. Only I didn't have no money to buy no property.

Went down to the bank to borrow some money. They told me I needed some collateral. Say you need something to borrow money against. I say all right, I'll get me some collateral. I opened me up a gambling joint in the back of the barbershop. Sold whiskey. The police closed it down. I had to put some bullet holes in a couple of niggers and the police arrested me. Put me on the county farm. I had to bust a couple of niggers upside the head for trying to steal my food. A couple tried to escape. I caught them. That don't do nothing but make it harder on everybody. They out there enjoying their freedom ducking and dodging the law and everybody else on half rations and got to make up their work.

A fellow named John Hanson started a riot. I seen that wasn't gonna be nothing but bad news. I took him on one-to-one. Man-to-man. He busted my eye. That's why I can't see but so good out my one eye. He busted my eye but I put down the riot. They gave me a year. I did six months when the Mayor called me in to see him. Say he wanted to put me in charge of the Third Ward. Told me say you fry the little fish and send the big fish to me. They give me a gun and a badge. I took my badge and gun and went down to the bank and laid it on the counter. Told them I wanted to borrow some money on that. There was a fellow name Harry Bryant had a place on Colwell street he sold me. They ran him out of town. Charged me three times what it was worth. Took the money and ran. They tried to kill him for selling to a Negro. I say all right I got me a little start. Niggers got mad at me. Said I must have thought I was a white man 'cause I got hold to a little something. They been mad at me ever since. Everybody mad at me. You mad at me.

I ain't got but one sister and I try to do right by her and you push me away. Family is important. I know the value of family. Blood is thicker than water. It's been that way and always will be. You can't even water it down.

Your mother wanna turn blood into vinegar. When Uncle Jack was dying she wouldn't even go see him. Say he was fooling the people being a fake blind man. She was right. But that's her brother! He deserve better than that. You can't sit in judgment over people. That's God's job. God decide who done right or wrong. Uncle Jack dying and calling for his sister and she wouldn't even go and see him. That's the kind of mother you got. You let her run your life. Got you thinking like her. You thinking wrong and don't even know it. Many a time I tried to make up to

her but she wouldn't have it. Called me a scoundrel. But that didn't stop me from paying for her funeral. I paid for the funeral and even shed a few tears. If I had known any prayers I would have said them. Why? 'Cause she family. You give up on family and you ain't got nothing left.

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-14  
Time: :45  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Family

Act 1; Scene 1

BLACK MARY

Dear Solomon,

I am writing to let you know the times are terrible here the most anybody remember since bondage. The people are having a hard time with freedom. I can't hold on here anymore. The white peoples is gone crazy and won't let anybody leave. They beat one fellow on the road so bad his mama say, "Who is he?" They killed some more and say the colored can't buy any tickets on the train to get away. Say they will sink the ferry if any colored on it. I want to leave to come North but it is too bad. It is a hard time for everybody. Write and let me know what to do as I try to hold on but can't.

Your loving sister,

Eliza Jackson

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-15  
Time: 1:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Domestic Order  
Type 3: Family

Act 2; Scene 3

BLACK MARY

Here! You cook it! You turn it down! I can't do everything the way you want me to. I'm not you. You act like there ain't no other way to do nothing. I got my own way of doing things. I like the fire high. That's the way I cook. You like it down. That's the way you cook. If you ain't cooking you ain't got nothing to say about it. All you got to worry about is the eating.

It's been three years now I can't do nothing to satisfy you. I may as well lay down somewhere and forget about it. You got something to say about everything. Turn the fire down. Wash the greens in the other pot. Shake that flour off that chicken. Tuck in the corners of the sheets. That too much starch. That ain't enough salt. I'm tired of it! Your way ain't always the best way. I got my own way and that's the way I'm doing it. If I stay around here I'm doing it my own way.

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-16  
Time: 1:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Family  
Type 3: Value of Life

Act 2; Scene 5

BLACK MARY

Caesar, I gave you everything. Even when I didn't have to give you. I made every way for you. I turned my eyes away. I figured if I didn't see it I couldn't hold fault. If I held fault I couldn't hold on to my love for you.

But now you standing in the light and I can't turn away no more. I remember you when you was on the other side of the law. That's my brother. The one selling hoe cakes off the back of a wagon. The one that helped Mrs. Robinson and the kids when nobody else would. That's my brother. The one who used to get out of bed to take me to school. The one who believed everybody had the same right to life...the same right to whatever there was in life they could find useful. That's my brother. I don't know who you are. But you not my brother. You hear me, Caesar? You not my brother.

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-17

Time: 2:10

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Societal Order

Type 3: Money

Act 1; Scene 2

CITIZEN BARLOW

Alabama. I only been up here four weeks. When I left Alabama they had all the roads closed to the colored people. I had to sneak out. Say they didn't want anybody to leave. Say we had to stay there and work. I told my mama I was going and she say okay. Told me, "there a big world out there." I kissed her. She told me she loved me and I left. I almost got caught a couple of times. I had to go out the back way and find my own roads. Took me almost two weeks. There was some other people out on the road and we helped each other. Me and a fellow named Roper Lee went over to the mill. They say they was paying two dollars a day but when we got there they say a dollar fifty. Then they say we got to pay two dollars room and board. They sent us over to a place the man say we got to put two dollars on top of that. Then he put two men to a room with one bed. The fellow I was with want to fight about it. I'm just starting out I don't want no trouble. I told him I would sleep on the floor. I wasn't planning on sleeping there long. I'm just starting out sleeping there. I asked one fellow what board meant. He say they supposed to give you something to eat. They ain't give us nothing. I say okay. I can't make them give me nothing. What I'm gonna do? I got to eat. I bought a loaf of bread for a dime. A bowl of soup cost ten cents around the corner. I wasn't desperate. I had sixty five cents to make it to payday. I ate half the bread and say I would get a bowl of soup tomorrow. Come payday they give me three dollars say the rest go on my bill. I had to give the man what own the house two dollars. What I'm gonna do, Miss Tyler? I told the people at the mill I was gonna get another job. They said I couldn't do that 'cause I still owed them money and they was gonna get the police on me. I was gonna go to another city but then before I had a chance I killed a man. I don't know, Miss Tyler. I feel like I got a hole inside me. People say you can help

me. I don't want to go to hell, Miss Tyler. My mama cry every time something bad happen to me.



GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-18  
Time: 2:45  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Value of Life  
Type 3: Love

Act 2; Scene 3

CITIZEN BARLOW

You got on that blue dress. I met this gal at a dance one time had on a blue dress. She had on a blue dress and she had her hair slicked back. Her mouth made her face look pretty. She was dancing and she had tears in her eyes. I asked her why she was crying. She said she was lonesome. I told her I couldn't fix that but if she wanted somebody to walk her home after the dance I'd walk her. See that she got home safe. She thanked me and went on crying. Say she felt better, and after the dance I could walk her home since I was going that way. She had a good time dancing with some of the other men. I danced with her some more. She was smiling but she still had tears in her eyes. After the dance I walked her home. I seen at the dance that she had a nice way about her. When she was walking home she put her hand in mine. She asked me did I want to stay the night. I told her yes. I told her I was at the dance looking for a woman. She asked me why didn't I tell, her we could have saved each other some time. I woke up in the morning and she was laying there crying. I didn't ask her about it. I didn't try and stop her. I lay there awhile trying to figure out what to do. I ended up holding her in my arms. She started crying some more. I held her awhile and then I left. I said goodbye to her and started walking away. She was standing in the door. I looked back and she was standing so she fit right in the middle of the door. I couldn't see if she was crying. She kind of waved at me. I got a little further on and turned and looked back and she was still there. Look like she had got smaller like she might have sat down in the doorway. That's what it looked like to me. I can still see her standing there. Had a green door and I can see her standing in it. I don't know what happened to her. I'd like to look on her face again. Just to know that she all right and if she stopped crying. If I could see her face I believe that would be enough.

Sometimes I lay awake at night when I be lonely and ask myself what I would say to her. Sometimes I tell her to stop being lonely. I tell her it's something she doing to herself. But then I'm laying there lonely too and I have to ask myself was it something I was doing to myself? I don't know. I ain't lonely now. I ain't got no woman but I still don't feel lonely. I feel all filled up inside. That's something I done to myself. So maybe I did make myself lonely. That's what I'd tell her! I believe she was looking for somebody else to make her right with herself. That's why she was crying.

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-19  
Time: 1:10  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Value of Life  
Type 3: Death

Act 1; Scene 1

ELI

They had a man named Garret Brown who jumped into the river. Caesar chased him and he jumped in and wouldn't come out. They say he stole a bucket of nails. He said he didn't do it. They having his funeral today.

They gonna bury him this afternoon. They gonna bury him out of Reverend Tolliver's church. They was supposed to bury him yesterday out of Reverend Flowers' church but Caesar stopped them. He went up to Reverend Flowers and told him it was against the law. The Christian law. Man ain't set foot in a church for thirty years talking about the Christian law. Caesar's just mad at him 'cause he didn't get a chance at him.

Caesar told him he wasn't gonna arrest him. Told him he'd give him a bowl of soup and some dry clothes. He told Caesar to go to hell. Told his whole family to go to hell. He talking about you, Black Mary.

He just treading water. Holding on to the barge. Caesar see he wasn't gonna come out he tried to beat him over the head with a two by four. Talking about he wasn't gonna do nothing to him. I believe he would have killed him right on the spot if he came out.

Well, as it is he dead.

## GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-20  
Time: :50  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Slavery  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 3

SOLLY TWO KINGS

Your mama's trying to tell you something. She put a heavy load on you. It's hard to be a citizen. You gonna have to fight to get that. And time you get it you be surprised how heavy it is. I used to be called Uncle Alfred back in slavery. I ran into one fellow called me Uncle Alfred. I told him say, "Uncle Alfred dead." He say, "I'm looking at you." I told him, "You looking at Two Kings. That's David and Solomon." He must have had something in his ear 'cause all he heard is Solomon. He say, "I'm gonna call you Solly." The people been calling me Solly ever since. But my name is Two Kings. Some people call me Solomon and some people call me David. I answer to either one. I don't know which one God gonna call me. If he call me Uncle Alfred then we got a big fight.

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-21  
Time: 2:20  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Slavery  
Type 3: Value of Life

Act 2; Scene 2

SOLLY TWO KINGS

Ain't nothing worse than slavery! I know. I was there. Dark was the night and cold was the ground. Look at that...

(He hands CITIZEN a chain link.)

That's my good luck piece. That piece of chain used to be around my ankle. They tried to chain me down but I beat them on that one. I say, I'm gonna keep this to remember by. I been lucky ever since. I beat them on a lot of things. I beat them when I got away. I had some people who help me. They helped show me the way and looked out for me. I got all the way to Canada. There was eight of us. I was in Canada in 1857. I stood right there in Freedomland. That's what they called it. Freedomland. I asked myself, "What I'm gonna do?" I looked around. I didn't see nothing for me. I tried to feel different but I couldn't. I started crying. I hadn't cried since my daddy knocked me down for crying when I was ten years old. I breathed in real deep to taste the air. It didn't taste no different. The man what brought us over the border tried to talk with me. I just sat right down on the ground and started crying. I told him say, "I don't feel right." It didn't feel right being in freedom and my mama and all the other people still in bondage. Told him "I'm going back with you." I stopped crying soon as I said that. I joined the Underground Railroad. Look at that...

(Solly shows Citizen his stick)

That's sixty-two notches. That's sixty-two people I carried to Freedom. I was looking to make it sixty-three when Abraham Lincoln come along and changed all

that. Him and General Grant. I never did join the Union Army but I showed them where to go. I know all the routes. Me and Eli worked together many a time.

I was what we called the dragman. I'd guard the rear. You had to fight a lot of times. I done been bit nine times by dogs.

(Solly shows Citizen his battle scars)

Look here...see that? A dog tried to tear my leg off one time. I got a big part of my arm missing. Tore out the muscle and everything. He was going for my throat. I told myself I was lucky. It was a good thing I found that pure otherwise I'd have to kill every dog I see.

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-22  
Time: 1:10  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Slavery  
Type 3: Value of Life

Act 2; Scene 2

SOLLY TWO KINGS

They got civilized people up there. I seen them. White as cotton. Got smiles on their faces. Shake your hand and say, “Welcome.” I seen them. Don’t never let nobody tell you there ain’t no good white people. They got some good white people down here but they got to fight the law. In Canada they ain’t got to fight the law. Down here it’s a war. And the battlefield’s bloody! The field of battle is *always* bloody. It can’t be no other way.

Ain’t no sense in you getting mad ’cause it’s rough out here. It’s supposed to be rough. You ain’t supposed to complain when you see some blood. I found out you could bleed and you didn’t have to die. I said this is too good to be true! Since then I ain’t never been afraid of losing some blood. I said they gonna have to kill me. I can give up some blood all day long if it’ll keep coming back. Your blood is like a river it don’t never stop till you dead. Life’s got lots of comeback but death ain’t got no comeback. That’s the only way life have any meaning. Otherwise don’t nothing count.

## GEM OF THE OCEAN

Code: 00-23

Time: 1:10

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Societal Order

Type 3: Value of Life

Act 2; Scene 3

SOLLY TWO KINGS

They never made Emancipation what they say it was. People say, “Jesus turn the water into wine what you look like telling him it was the wrong kind?” Hell, maybe it is the wrong kind! If you gonna do it ... do it right! They wave the law on one end and hit you with a Billy club with the other. I told myself I can't just sit around and collect dog shit while the people drowning. The people drowning in sorrow and grief. That's a mighty big ocean. They got the law tied to their toe. Every time they try and swim the law pull them under. It's dangerous out here. People walking around hunting each other. If you ain't careful you could lose your eye or your arm. I seen that. I seen a man grab hold to a fellow and cut off his arm. Cut it off at the shoulder. He had to work at it a while ...but he cut it clean off. The man looked down saw his arm gone and started crying. After that he more dangerous with that one arm then the other man is with two. He got less to lose. There's a lot of one-arm men walking around.



## JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

### Synopsis

*Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, set in 1917, is the story of Harold Loomis who returns to a Pittsburgh in search of his wife. He is haunted by the memory of bounty hunter Joe Turner, the man who had illegally enslaved him. Loomis is unable to fully embrace or release the past. His search brings him to Seth and Bertha's boarding house with his young daughter, Zonia, where "conjure man" Bynum shows him that he really is searching for himself.

### Characters

**BERTHA HOLLY:** Seth's wife of 25 years and 5 years his junior. She knows her place in the hierarchy of the boardinghouse, yet still has some say in the decision making and will often voice her opinion. A very loving mother to the boardinghouse family. In the end, she tells Mattie that the only two things you need in your life are love and laughter; the things that she has had faith in and have helped her get by.

**HERALD LOOMIS:** A resident of the boardinghouse. Having been enslaved by Joe Turner for seven years, Loomis has completely lost his way in life. An odd man that dons an overcoat and hat in mid-August, Loomis is 32 years old and a displaced slave searching for his wife. In the end he finds his song, an independent, self-sufficient song that he can sing proudly.

**MARTHA LOOMIS PENTECOST:** Herald Loomis's wife. She is about 28, very religious and a member of the Evangelical church. She left the South and her daughter behind. She does what it takes to ensure her self-preservation and remains a strong, self-sufficient woman until the end.

**RUTHERFORD SELIG:** A peddler. Known as the "People Finder," he is the only white character in the play. Selig is from a family that first brought Africans across the Atlantic to become slaves, but now he unites people by recording the names and places of all the people he peddles to.

**JEREMY FURLOW:** A resident of the boardinghouse, he is 25 years old. He represents a younger generation seeking to find its identity as the first liberated slaves. Jeremy's "blues playing" character is classified as a suave, artist young man looking to make a quick buck and travel the nation. He is constantly seeking the attention of the women in his vicinity and tries to find the perfect girl for himself.

**SETH HOLLY:** Owner of the boardinghouse in his early fifties. Born of free African-American parents in the North, he is set in his ways; never losing his composure and always running a respectable house. He even condemns other African-Americans that do not follow this kind of lifestyle. He is economically very capitalistic and does whatever is necessary to stay afloat; including working night shifts and odd craftsman jobs he can pick up from Selig. He understands his world on a very literal level, and doesn't aspire to become more than he is.

**BYNUM WALKER:** A rootworker in his late sixties. A "conjure" man staying with the Holly's at the boardinghouse, Bynum is one of few characters that understands his own identity. Convinced of the fact that everyone has their own song, Bynum perpetuates the theme of identity and our constant search for it.

**ZONIA LOOMIS:** Herald's daughter, she is a tall and skinny 11-year-old. She represents the next innocent, malleable generation. There is a sense that history will repeat itself if the proceeding generation is not taught differently.

**REUBEN MERCER:** A boy who lives next door. Reuben represents the repetitiveness of history. Even as an adolescent, Reuben is aware of his place in society, notices the spiritual differences of people around him, and decides at a very early age that he needs a woman to settle down with and marry. Many of the ideals that are seen in the adult characters of this play are instilled in Reuben and will repeat, the good and the bad, as he grows into adulthood.

**MOLLY CUNNINGHAM:** A resident. She is a good looking young woman of 26 who is strong and independent. Unwilling to let herself be told what to do by anyone, Molly is convinced that she will never return to the South and refuses be associated with anything that her old life entailed.

JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

Code: 10-01  
Time: 1:40  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Relationships  
Type 3: Love

Act 2; Scene 3

BERTHA HOLLY

If I was you, Mattie, I wouldn't go getting all tied up with Bynum in that stuff. That kind of stuff, even if it do work for a awhile, it don't last. That just get people more mixed up than they is already. And I wouldn't waste my time fretting over Jeremy either. I seen it coming. I seen it when she first come here. She that kind of woman run off with the first man got a dollar to spend on her. Jeremy just young. He don't know what he getting into. That gal don't mean him no good. She's just using him to keep from being by herself. That's the worst use of a man you can have. You ought to be glad to wash him out of your hair. I done seen all kind of men. I done seen them come and go through here. Jeremy ain't had enough to him for you. You need a man who's got some understanding and who willing to work with that understanding to come to the best he can. You got your time coming. You just tries too hard and can't understand why it don't work for you. Trying to figure it out don't do nothing but give you a troubled mind. Don't know man want a woman with a troubled mind.

You get all that trouble off your mind and just when it look like you ain't never gonna find what you want...you look up and it's standing right there. That's how I met my Seth. You gonna look up one day and find everything you want standing right in front of you. Been twenty-seven years now since that happened to me. But life ain't no happy-go-lucky time where everything be just like you want it. You got your time coming. You watch what Bertha's saying.

JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

Code: 10-02  
Time: 2:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Separation  
Type 3: Value of Life

Act 2; Scene 2

HERALD LOOMIS

Had a whole mess of men he catched. Just go out hunting regular like you go out hunting possum. He catch you and go home to his wife and family. Ain't thought about you going home to yours. Joe Tuner catch me when my little girl was just born. Wasn't nothing but a little baby sucking on her mama's titty when he catch me. Joe Turner catched me in nineteen hundred and one. Kept me seven years until nineteen hundred and eight. Kept everybody seven years. He'd go out hunting and bring back forty men at a time. And keep them seven years.

I was walking down this road in this little town out side of Memphis. Come up on these fellows gambling. I was a deacon in the Abundant Life Church. I stopped to preach to these fellows to see if maybe I could turn some of them from their sinning when Joe Turner, brother of the Governor of the great sovereign state of Tennessee, swooped down on us and grabbed everybody there. Kept us all seven years.

My wife Martha gone from me after Joe Turner catched me. Got out from under Joe Turner on his birthday. Me and forty other men put in our seven years and he let us go on his birthday. I made it back to Henry Thompson's place where me and Martha were sharecropping and Martha's gone. She taken my little girl and left her with her mama and took off North. We been looking for her ever since. That's been going on four years now we been looking. That's the only think I know to do. I just wanna see her face so I can get me a starting place in the world. The world got to start somewhere. That's what I been looking for. I been wandering a long time in somebody else's world. When I find my wife that be the making of my own.

JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

Code: 10-03

Time: 1:20

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Separation

Type 3: Good-bye

Act 2; Scene 5

HERALD LOOMIS

I just been waiting to look on your face to say my good- bye. That good-bye got so big at times, seem like it was gonna swallow me up. Like Jonah in the whale's belly I sat up in that good-bye for three years. That good-bye kept me out on the road searching. Not looking on women in their houses. It kept me bound up on the road. All the time that good-bye swelling in my chest till I'm about to bust. Now that I see your face I can say my good-bye and make my own world.

*(LOOMIS takes ZONIA's hand and presents her to MARTHA.)*

Martha... here go your daughter. I tried to take care of her. See that she had something to eat. See that she was out of the elements. Whatever I know I tried to teach her. Now she need to learn from her mother whatever you got to teach her. That way she won't be no one-sided person.

*(LOOMIS stoops to ZONIA)*

Zonia, you go on live with your mama. She a good woman. You go on with her and listen to her good. You my daughter and I love you like a daughter. I hope to see you again in the world somewhere. I'll never forget you.

JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

Code: 10-04  
Time: 1:45  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Separation  
Type 3: Relationships

Act 2; Scene 5

MARTHA LOOMIS PENTECOST

I didn't leave her motherless, Herald. Reverend Tolliver wanted to move the church up North 'cause of all the trouble the colored folks was having down there. Nobody knew what was gonna happen traveling them roads. We didn't even know if was gonna make it up here or not. I left her with my mama so she be safe. That was better than dragging her out on the road having to duck and hide from people. Wasn't no telling what would happen to us. I didn't leave her motherless in the world. I been looking for you.

Herald, I didn't know if you was ever coming back. They told me Joe Turner had you and my whole world split half in two. My whole life shattered. It was like I had poured it into a cracked jar and it all leaked out the bottom. When it go like that there ain't nothing you can do put it back together. You talking about Henry Thompson's place like I'm still gonna work the land myself. How I'm gonna do that? You wasn't gone but two months and Henry Thompson kicked me off his land and I ain't had no place to go but to my mama's. I stayed and waited there for five years before I woke up one morning and decided that you was dead. Even if you weren't, you was dead to me. I wasn't gonna carry you with me no more. So I killed you in my heart. I buried you. I mourned you. And then I picked up what was left and made a life without you. I was a young woman with life at my beckon. I couldn't drag you behind me like a sack of cotton.

JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

Code: 10-05  
Time: 3:00  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Family  
Type 3: Separation

Act 1; Scene 2

RUTHERFORD SELIG

I'll tell you, mister... you better off without them. Now you take me...old Rutherford Selig could tell you a thing or two about these women. I ain't met one I could understand. Now, you take Sally out there. That's all a man needs is a good horse. I say giddup and she go. Say whoa and she stop. I feed her some oats and she carry me wherever I want to go. Ain't had a speck of trouble out of her since I had her. Now, I been married. A long time ago down in Kentucky. I got up one morning and I saw this look on my wife's face. Like way down deep inside her she was wishing I was dead. I walked around that morning and every time I looked at her she had that look on her face. It seem like she knew I could see it on her. Every time I looked at her I got smaller and smaller. Well, I wasn't gonna stay around there and just shrink away. I walked out on the front porch and closed the door behind me. When I closed the door she locked it. I went out and bought me a horse. And I ain't been without one since! Martha Loomis, huh? Well, now I'll do the best I can do.

Well, now it ain't no easy job like you think. You can't just go out there and find them like that. There's a lot of little tricks to it. It's not easy job keeping up with you Nigras the way you move about so. Now you take this woman you looking for... this Martha Loomis. She could be anywhere. Time I find her, if you don't keep your eye on her, she'll be gone off someplace else. You'll be thinking she over here and she'll be over there. But like I say there's a lot of little tricks to it.

I can't promise anything but we been finders in my family for a long time. Bringers and finders in my family for a long time. Bringers and finders. My great-granddaddy used to bring Nigras across the ocean in ships. That's wasn't no easy

job either. Sometimes the winds would blow so hard you'd think the hand of God was set against the sails. But it set him well in pay and he settle in this new land and found him a wife of good Christian charity with a mind for kids and the like and well... here, I am, Rutherford Selig. You're in good hands, mister. Me and my daddy have found plenty Nigras. My daddy, rest his soul, used to find runaway slaves for the plantation bosses. He was the best there was at it. Jonas B. Selig. Had him a reputation stretched clean across the country. After Abraham Lincoln give you all Nigras your freedom papers and with you all looking all over each other... we started finding Nigras for Nigras. Of course, it don't pay as much. But the People Finding business ain't so bad.



JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

Code: 10-06  
Time: 1:45  
Type 1: Comedic  
Type 2: Exploitation  
Type 3: Music

Act 1; Scene 1

JEREMY FURLLOW

I don't play no contest, Mr. Bynum. Had one of them white fellows cure me of that. I ain't been nowhere near a contest since.

I was sitting at home just fixing to sit down and eat when somebody come up to my house and got me. Told me there's a white fellow say he was gonna give a prize to the best guitar player he could find. I take up my guitar and go down there and somebody had gone up and got Bobo Smith and brought him down there. Him an another fellow called Hooter. Old Hooter couldn't play no guitar, he do more hollering than playing, but Bobo could go at it a while.

This fellow standing there say he the one that was gonna give the prize and me and Bobo started playing for him. Bobo play something and then I'd try to play something better than what he played. Old Hooter, he just holler and bang at that guitar. Man was the worst guitar player I ever seen. So me and Bobo played and after a while I seen where he was getting the attention of this white fellow. He'd play something and while he was playing it he be slapping on the side of the guitar, and that made it sound like he was playing more than he was. So I started doing it too. White fellow ain't knew no difference. He ain't knew as much about guitar playing as Hooter did. After we play awhile, the white fellow called us to him and he said he couldn't make up his mind, say all three of us was the best guitar player and we'd have to spilt the prize between us. Then he give us twenty-five cents. That's eight cents a piece and a penny on the side. That cured me of playing contest to this day.

JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

Code: 10-07  
Time: 1:00  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3:

Act 1, Scene 1

SETH HOLLY

These niggers coming up here with that old backward country style of living. It's hard enough now without all that ignorant kind of acting. Ever since slavery got over with there ain't been nothing but foolish-acting niggers. Word get out they need men to work in the mill and put in these roads... and niggers drop everything and head North looking for freedom. They don't know the white fellows looking too. White fellow coming from all over the world. White fellows come over and in six months got more than what I got. But these niggers keep coming. Walking... riding... carrying their Bibles. That boy done carried a guitar all the way from North Carolina. What he gonna find out? What he gonna do with that guitar? This the city.

*(There is a knock at the door.)*

Niggers coming up here from the back woods... coming up here from the country carrying Bibles and guitars looking for freedom. They got a rude awakenin.

Code: 10-08  
Time: 4:40  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Premonition  
Type 3: Value of Life

Act1; Scene 1

BYNUM WALKER

He's just a man I seen out on the road. He ain't had no special look. Just a man walking toward me on the road. He come up and asked me which way the road went. I told him everything I knew about the road, where it went and all, and he asked me did I have anything to eat 'cause he was hungry. Say he ain't had nothing to eat in three days. Well, I never be out there on the road without a piece of dried meat. Or an orange or an apple. So I give this fellow an orange. He take and eat that orange and told me to come and go along the road a little ways with him, that he had something he wanted to show me. He had a look about him made me wanna got with him, see what he gonna show me.

We walked on a bit and it's getting kind of far from where I met him when it come up on me all of a sudden, we wasn't going the way he had come from, we was going back my way. Since he said he ain't knew nothing about the road, I asked him about this. He say he had a voice inside him telling him which way to go and if I come and go along with him he was gonna show me the Secret of Life. Quite naturally I followed him. A fellow that's gonna show you the Secret of Life ain't to be taken lightly. We get near this bend in the road...

We get near this bend in the road and he told me to hold out my hands. Then he rubbed them together with his and I looked down and see they got blood on them. Told me to take and rub it all over me... say that was a way of cleaning myself. Then we around that bend in that road. Got around that bend and it seem like all of a sudden we ain't in the same place. Turn around that bend and everything look like it was twice as big as it was. The trees and everything bigger than life! Sparrows big as eagles! I turned around to look at this fellow and he had this light

coming out of him. I had to cover up my eyes to keep from being blinded. He shining like new money with that light. He shined until all the light seemed like it seeped out of him and then he was gone and I was by myself in this strange place where everything was bigger than life.

I wandered around there looking for that road, trying to find my way back from this big place... and I looked over and see my daddy standing there. He was the same size he always was, except for his hands and his mouth. He had a great big old mouth that look like it took up his whole face and his hands were as big as hams. Look like they was too big to carry around. My daddy called me to him. Said he had been thinking about me and it grieved him to see me in the world carrying other people's songs and not having one of my own. Told me he was gonna show me how to find my song. Then he carried me further into this big place until we come to this ocean. Then he showed me something I ain't got words to tell you. But if you stand to witness it, you done seen something there. I stayed in that place awhile and my daddy taught me the meaning of this thing that I had seen and showed me how to find my song. I asked him about the shiny man and he told me he was the One Who Goes Before and Shows the Way. Said there was lots of shiny men and if I ever saw one again before I died then I know my song had been accepted and worked its full power in the world and I could lay down and die a happy man. A man who done left his mark on life. On the way people cling to each other out of the truth they find in themselves. Then he showed me how to get back to the road. I came out to where everything was its own size and I had my song. I had the Binding Song. I choose that song because that's what I seen most when I was traveling ... people walking away and leaving one another. So I takes the power of my song and binds them together.

Been binding people ever since. That's why they call me Bynum. Just like glue I sticks people together.

JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

Code: 10-09  
Time: 1:20  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Conjuring  
Type 3: Relationships

Act 1; Scene 1

BYNUM WALKER

The roots is a powerful thing. I can fix it so one day he'll walk out his front door... won't be thinking of nothing. He won't know what it is. All he knows is that a power dissatisfaction done set in his bones and can't nothing he do make him feel satisfied. He'll set his foot down on the road and the wind in the trees be talking to him and everywhere he step on the road, that road'll give back your name and something will pull him right up to your doorstep. Now, I can do that. I can take my roots and fix that easy. But maybe he ain't supposed to come back. And if he ain't supposed to come back... then he'll be in your bed one morning and it'll come up on him that he's in the wrong place. That he's lost outside of time from his place that he's supposed to be in. Then both of you be lost and trapped outside of life and ain't no way for you to get back into it. 'Cause you lost from yourselves and where the places come together, where you're supposed to be alive, your heart kicking in your chest with a song worth singing.

Code: 10-10  
Time: 2:40  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Metaphorical  
Type 3: Relationships

Act 1; Scene 3

BYNUM WALKER

You just can't look at it like that. You got to look at the whole thing. Now, you take a fellow go out there, grab hold to a woman and think he got something 'cause she sweet and soft to the touch. All right. Touching's apart of life. It's in the world like everything else. Touching's nice. It feels good. But you can lay your hand upside a horse or a cat, and that feels good too. What's the difference? When you grab hold to a woman, you got something there. You got a whole world there. You got a way of life kicking up under your hand. That woman can take and make you feel like something. I ain't just talking about in the way of jumping off into bed together ad rolling around with each other. Anybody can do that. When you grab hold to that woman and look at the whole thing and see what you got... why, she can take and make something out of you. Your mother was a woman. That's enough right there to show you what a woman is. Enough to show you what she can do. She made something out of you. Taught you converse, and all about how to take care of yourself, how to see where you at and where you going tomorrow, how to look out and see what's coming in the way of eating, and what to do with yourself when you lonesome. That's a mighty thing she did. But you just can't just look at a woman to jump off in the bed with her. That's a foolish thing to ignore a woman like that.

All right. Let's try it this way. Now, you take a ship. Be out there on the water traveling about. You out there on that ship sailing to and from. And then you see some land. Just like you see a woman walking down the street. You see that land and it don't look like nothing but a line out there on the horizon. That's all it is when you first see it. A line that cross your path out there on the horizon. Now, a smart man when he see that land, it ain't just a line sitting out there. He know that

if you get off the water to take a look...why, there's a whole world right there. A whole world with everything imaginable under the sun. Anything you can think of you can find on that land. Same with a woman. A woman is everything a man need. To a smart man she water and berries. And that's all a man need. That's all he need to live on. You give me some water and berries and if there ain't nothing else I can live a hundred years. See, you just like a man looking at the horizon from a ship. You just seeing a part of it. But it's a blessing when you learn to look at a woman and see in maybe just a few strands of her hair, the way her cheeks curves...to see in that everything there is out of life to be gotten. It's a blessing to see that. You know you done right and proud by your mother to see that. But you got to learn it. My telling you ain't gonna mean nothing. You got to learn how to come to your own time and place with a woman.

JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

Code: 10-11  
Time: 2:20  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Value of Life  
Type 3: Metaphorical

Act 2; Scene 2

BYNUM WALKER

Mr. Loomis done picked some cotton. Ain't you, Herald Loomis? You done picked a bunch of cotton.

I can tell from looking at you. My daddy taught me how to do that. Say when you look at a fellow, if you taught yourself to look for it, you can see his song written on him. Tell you what kind of man he is in this world. Now, I can look at you, Mr. Loomis, and see you a man who done forgot his song. Forgot how to sing it. A fellow forget that and he forget who he is. Forget how he's supposed to mark down life. Now, I used to travel all up and down this road and that...looking here and there. Searching. Just like you, Mr. Loomis. I didn't know what I was searching for. The only thing I knew was something was keeping me dissatisfied. Something wasn't making my heart smooth and easy. Then one day my daddy gave me a song. That song had a weight to it that was hard to handle. That song was hard to carry. I fought against it. Didn't want to accept that song. I tried to find my daddy to give him back the song. But I found out it wasn't his song. It was my song. It had come from way deep inside me. I looked long back in memory and gathered up pieces and snatches of things to make that song. I was making it up out of myself. And that song helped me on that road. Made it smooth to where my footsteps didn't bite back at me. All the time that song getting bigger and bigger. That song growing with each step of the road. It got so I used all of myself up in the making of that song. Then I was the song in search of itself. That song rattling in my throat and I'm looking for it. See, Mr. Looms, when a man forgets his song he goes in search for it...till he find out he's got it with him all the time. That's why I can tell you one of Joe Turner's niggers. 'Cause you forgot how to sing your song.



JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

Code: 10-12  
Time: :45  
Type 1: Comedic  
Type 2: Play  
Type 3: Music

Act 1; Scene 1

ZONIA LOOMIS

I went downtown  
To get my grip  
I came back home  
Just a pullin' the skiff

I went upstairs  
To make my bed  
I made a mistake  
And bumped my head  
Just a pullin' the skiff

I went downstairs  
To milk the cow  
I made a mistake  
And milked the sow  
Just a pullin' the skiff

Tomorrow, tomorrow  
Tomorrow never comes  
The marrow the marrow  
The marrow in the bone.

JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

Code: 10-13  
Time: 1:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Death  
Type 3: Conjuring

Act 1; Scene 1

REUBEN MERCER

Ain't no kids hardly live around here. I had me a friend but he died. He was the best friend I ever had. Me and Eugene used to keep secrets. I still got his pigeons. He told me to let them go when he died. He say, "Reuben, promise me when I die you'll let my pigeons go." But I keep them to remember him by. I ain't never gonna let them go. Even when I get to be grown up. I'm just always gonna have Eugene's pigeons. (Pause) Mr. Bynum a conjure man. My grandpap scared of him. He don't like me to come over here too much. I'm scared of him too. My grandpap told me not to let him get close enough to where he can reach his hand out and touch me.

He buys pigeons from me . . . and if you get up early in the morning you can see him out in the yard doing something with them pigeons. My grandpap say he kill them. I sold him one yesterday. I don't know what he do with it. I just hope he don't spook them up.

I just do like Eugene do. He used to sell Mr. Bynum pigeons. That's how he got to collecting them to sell them to Mr. Bynum. Sometime he give me a nickel and sometimes he give me a whole dime.

JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE

Code: 10-14  
Time: 1:35  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Relationships  
Type 3: Family

Act 2; Scene 1

MOLLY CUNNINGHAM

I don't trust none of these men. Jack or nobody else. These men liable to do anything. They wait just until they get one woman tied and locked up with them . . . then they look around to see if they can get another one. Molly don't pay them no mind. One's just as good as the other if you ask me. I ain't never met no man that meant nobody no good.

These men make all these babies, then run off and leave you to take care of them. Talking about they wanna see what's on the other side of the hill. I make sure I don't get no babies. My mama taught me how to do that.

Molly Cunningham ain't gonna be tied down with no babies. Had me a man one time who I thought had some love in him. Come home one day and he was packing his trunk. Told me the time come when even the best of friends must part. Say he was gonna send me a Special Delivery some old day. I watched him out the window when he carried that trunk out and down to the train station. Said if he was gonna send me a Special Delivery I wasn't gonna be there to get it. I done found out the harder you try to hold onto them, the easier it is for some gal to pull them away. Molly done learned that. That's why I don't trust nobody but the good Lord above, and I don't love nobody but my mama.

## MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

### Synopsis

*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is set in a Chicago recording studio in early March 1927. Female blues singer Ma Rainey lives and works under the pressure of a music business that abuses and victimizes its black artists.

### Characters

**CUTLER:** Guitar and Trombone player in Ma Rainey's band, Cutler is also the leader of all the other instrumentalists. A loner type in his mid fifties, he plays his music without embellishment—the same can be said for how he feels about life: he believes in getting things done quickly.

**MA RAINEY:** Based on a real life Ma Rainey with a career in Blues Music in the 1920's, Wilson's character is praised as "Mother of the Blues." She has the final word in everything regarding the band, making all the decisions. Not one to be disillusioned, Ma Rainey was always aware that her manager and producer were set on simply making money off of her.

**SLOW DRAG:** As the slow-moving, yet talented bass player in Ma's band, Slow Drag is a professional in his mid-fifties who is focused on his music. His name is the result of an incident in which he slow-danced with women for hours in order to make some money. Critics have referred to the music that Slow Drag plays as being reminiscent of African music.

**LEEVEE:** The talented and temperamental trumpet player, Levee is the youngest member of the band, being in his thirties. He is a man who is confident with his appearance, especially when it comes to the expensive shoes he owns. Perhaps it's because of his age that Levee is also the band member who wants to go off on his own and will begrudgingly play Ma Rainey's music until he's got his own band to do with what he pleases. He is frustrated, bitter, and is usually picking a fight with someone in the band. When he was only eight years old, he saw his mother raped by a gang of white men.

**TOLEDO:** Toldeo, in addition to being the piano player for Ma Rainey, also acts as the band philosopher. Literate and reflective, he discusses abstract concepts like racial memory and the plight of the black man throughout the play despite his band-mates' misunderstanding of much of what he says. He believes that style and musicianship are important to a performance. Having been married with children, Toldeo lost his family in a divorce.

**STURDYVANT:** Overworked, penny-pinching, and obsessed with making money, he is the white owner of the Southside recording studio where Ma Rainey makes her music. Because he is uncomfortable dealing with black performers, he communicated mainly with Ma Rainey's white manager, Irvin. Because of these reasons, he represents white exploitation of black music.

MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

Code: 20-01  
Time: 2:00  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Dancing  
Type 3: Sexuality

Act 1; Scene 1

CUTLER

Slow Drag don't need you to find him no pussy. He can take care of his own self. Fact is . . . you better watch your gal when Slow Drag's around. They don't call him Slow Drag for nothing. (*Laughs*)

Slow Drag break a woman's back when he dance. They had this contest one time in this little town called Bolingbroke about a hundred miles outside of Macon. We was playing for this dance and they was giving twenty dollars to the best slow draggers. Slow Drag looked over the competition, got down off the bandstand, grabbed hold of one them gals, and stuck to her like a fly to jelly. Like wood to glue. Man had that gal whooping and hollering so . . . everybody stopped to watch. This fellow come in . . . this gal's fellow . . . and pulled a knife a foot long on Slow Drag. 'Member that, Slow Drag?

Slow Drag ain't missed a stroke. The gal, she just look at her man with that sweet dizzy look in her eye. She ain't about to stop! Folks was clearing out, ducking and hiding under tables, figuring there's gonna be a fight. Slow Drag just looked over the gal's shoulder at he man and said, "Mister, if you'd quit hollering and wait a minute . . . you'll see I'm doing you a favor. I'm helping this gal win ten dollars so she can buy you a gold watch." The man just stood there and looked at him, all the while stroking that knife. Told Slow Drag, say, "All right, then, nigger. You just better make damn sure you win." That's when folks started calling him Slow Drag. The women got to hanging around him so bad after that, them fellows in that town ran us out of there.

MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

Code: 20-02  
Time: 3:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Men's Status/Identity  
Type 3: Race

Act 2; Scene 1

CUTLER

Reverend Gates . . . you know Reverend Gates? Slow Drag know who I'm talking about. Reverend Gates... now I'm gonna show you how this go where the white man don't care a thing about who you is. Reverend Gates was coming from Tallahassee to Atlanta, going to see his sister, who was sick at that time with the consumption. The train come up through Thomasville, then past Moultrie, and stopped in a little town called Sigsbee.

Reverend Gates got off this train in Sigsbee. The train done stopped there and he figured he'd get off and check the schedule to be sure he arrive in time for somebody to pick him up. All right. While he's there checking the schedule, it come upon him that he had to go to the bathroom. Now, they ain't had no colored rest rooms at the station. The only colored rest room is an outhouse they got sitting way back two hundred yards or so from the station. All right. He in the outhouse and the train go off and leave him there. He don't know nothing about this town. Ain't never been there before — in fact, ain't never even heard of it before.

The man standing there, trying to figure out what he's gonna do. . . where this train done left him in this strange town. It started getting dark. He see where the sun's getting low in the sky and he's trying to figure out what he's gonna do, when he noticed a couple of white fellows standing across the street from this station. Just standing there, watching him. And then two or three more come up and joined the other ones. He look around, ain't seen no colored folks nowhere. He didn't know what was getting in these here fellow's minds, so he commence to walking. He ain't knowed where he was going. He just walking down the railroad tracks when he hear them call him. "Hey, nigger!" See, just like that. "Hey, nigger!" He kept on

walking. They called him some more and he just keep walking. Just going down the tracks. And then he heard a gunshot where somebody done fired a gun in the air. He stopped then, you know.

They crowded around him. These gang of men made a crowd around him. Now he's standing there, you understand . . . got his cross around his neck like them preachers wear. Had his little Bible with him what he carry all the time. So they crowd around him and one of them ask who he is. He told them he was Reverend Gates and that he was going to see his sister who was sick and the train left without him. And they said, "Yeah, nigger . . . but can you dance?" He looked at them and commenced to dancing. One of them reached up and tore the cross off his neck. Said he was committing heresy by dancing with a cross and a Bible. Took his Bible and tore it up and had him dancing till they got tired of watching him.

That's the only way he got out of there alive . . . was to dance. Ain't even had no respect for a man of God!

MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

Code: 20-03  
Time: 2:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Exploitation  
Type 3: Music

Act 2; Scene 1

MA RAINEY

I been doing this a long time. Ever since I was a little girl. I don't care what nobody else do. That's what get me so mad with Irvin. White folks try to be put out with you all the time. Too cheap to buy me Coca-Cola.

I lets them know it, though. Ma don't stand for no shit. Wanna take my voice and trap it in them fancy boxes with all them buttons and dials . . . and then too cheap to buy me a Coca-Cola. And it don't cost but a nickel a bottle.

They don't care nothing about me. All they want is my voice. Well, I done learned that, and they gonna treat me like I want to be treated no matter how much it hurt them. They back there now me all kinds of names . . . calling me everything but a child of God. But they can't do nothing else. They ain't got what they wanted yet. As soon as they get my voice down on them recording machines, then it's just like if I'd be some whore and they roll over and put their pants on. Ain't got no use for me then. I know what I'm talking about. You watch. Irvin right there with the rest of them. He don't care nothing about me either. He's been my manger for six years, always talking about sticking together, and the only time he had me in his house was to sing for some of his friends.

If you colored and can make them some money, then you all right with them. Otherwise, you just a dog in the ally. I done made this company more money from my records than all the other recording artists they got put together. And they wanna balk about how much this session is costing them.

I don't pay that kind of talk no mind.



MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

Code: 20-04

Time: 1:45

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Conjuring

Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 1

SLOW DRAG

Eliza Cotter is one of them. All right. The man living up in an old shack on Ben Foster's place, shoeing mules and horses, making them charms and things in secret. He done hooked up with the devil, showed up one day all fancied out with just the finest clothes you ever seen on a colored man . . . dressed just like me of them crackers . . . and carrying this bag with them papers and things. All right. Had a pocketful of money, just living the life of a rich man. Ain't done no more work or nothing. Just had him a string of women he run around with and throw his money away on. Bought him a big fine house . . . Well, it wasn't all that big, but it did have one of them white picket fences around it. Used to hire a man once a week just to paint that fence. Messed around there and one of the fellows of them gals he was messing with got fixed on him wrong and Eliza killed him. And he laughed about it. Sheriff come and arrest him, and then let him go. And he went around in that town laughing about killing this fellow. Trial come up, and the judge cut him loose. He must have been in converse with the devil too . . . 'cause he cut him loose and give him a bottle of whiskey! Folks ask what done happened to make him change, and he'd tell them straight out he done sold his soul to the devil and ask them if they wanted to sell theirs 'cause he could arrange it for them. Preacher see him coming, used to cross on there side of the road. He'd just stand there and laugh at the preacher and call him a fool to his face.

MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

Code: 20-05  
Time: 4:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Men's Status/Identity  
Type 3: Revenge

Act 1; Scene 1

LEVEE

Levee got to be Levee! And he don't need nobody messing with him about the white man — 'cause you don't know nothing about me. You don't know Levee. You don't know nothing about what kind of blood I got! What kind of heart I got beating here! (*Pounds his chest*) I was eight years old when I watched a gang of white mens come into my daddy's house and have to do with my mama any way they wanted. (*Pause*)

We was living in Jefferson County, about eighty miles outside of Natchez. My daddy's name was Memphis . . . Memphis Lee Green . . . had him near fifty acres of good farming land. I'm talking about good land! Grow anything you want! He done gone off of shares and bought this land from Mr. Hallie's widow woman after he done passed on. Folks called him an uppity nigger 'cause he done saved and borrowed to where he could buy this land and be independent. (*Pause*)

It was coming on planting time and my daddy went into Natchez to get him some seed fertilizer. Called me, say, "Levee, you the man of the house now. Take care of your mama while I'm gone." I wasn't but a little boy, eight years old. (*Pause*)

My mama was frying up some chicken when them mens come in that house. Must have been eight or nine of them. She standing there frying that chicken and them mens come and took hold of her just like you take hold of a mule and make him do what you want. (*Pause*)

There was my mama with a gang of white mens. She tried to fight them off, but I could see where it wasn't gonna do her any good. I didn't know what they were

doing to her . . . but I figured whatever it was they may as well do to me too. My daddy had a knife that he kept around there for hunting and working and whatnot. I knew where he kept it and I went and got it.

I'm gonna show you how spooked up I was by the white man. I tried my damndest to cut one of them's throat! I hit him in the shoulder with it. He reached back and grabbed hold of that knife and whacked me across the chest with it. (*Raises his shirt to show a long ugly scar.*) That's what made them stop. They was scared I was gonna bleed to death. My mama wrapped a sheet around me and carried me two miles down to the Furlow place and they drove me up to Doc Albans. He was waiting on a calf to be born, and say he ain't had time to see me. They carried me up to Miss Etta, the midwife, and she fixed me up.

My daddy came back and acted like he done accepted the facts of what happened. But he got the names of them mens from mama. He found out who they was and then we announced we was moving out of that county. Said good-bye to everybody . . . all the neighbors. My daddy went and smiled in the face of one of them crackers who had been with my mama. Smiled in his face and sold him our land. We moved over with relations I Caldwell. He got us settled in and then he took off one day. I ain't never seen him since. He sneaked back, hiding up in the woods, laying to get them eight or nine men. (*Pause*)

My daddy wasn't spooked up by the white man. Nosir! And that taught me how to handle them. I seen my daddy go up and grin in this cracker's face . . . smile in his face and sell him his land. All the while he's planning how he's gonna get him and what he's gonna do to him. That taught me how to handle them. So you all just back up and leave Levee alone about the white man. I can smile and say "yessir" to whoever I please. I got time coming to me. You all just leave Levee alone about the white man.

MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

Code: 20-06  
Time: 1:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Blasphemy  
Type 3: Despair

Act 2; Scene 1

LEVEE

What I care about burning in hell? You talk like a fool . . . burning in hell. Why didn't God strike some of them crackers down? Tell me that! That's the question! Don't come telling me this burning-in-hell shit! He a man of God . . . why didn't God strike some of them crackers down? I'll tell you why! I'll tell you the truth! It's sitting out there as plain as day! 'Cause he a white mans God. That's why! God ain't never listened to no nigger's prayers. God take a nigger's prayers and throw them in the garbage. God don't pay niggers no mind. In fact . . . God hate niggers! Hate them with all the fury in his heart. Jesus don't love you, nigger! Jesus hate your black ass! Come talking that shit to me. Talking about burning in hell! God can kiss my ass.

MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

Code: 20-07

Time: 1:20

Type 1: Comedic

Type 2: Gambling

Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 1

TOLEDO

There was these two fellows see. So, the one of them go up this church and commence to taking up the church learning. The other fellow see him out on the road and he say, "I done heard you taking up the church learning," say, "Is you learning anything up there?" The other one say, "Yeah, I done take up the church learning and I's learning all kinds of things about the Bible and what it say and all. Why you be asking?" The other say, "Well, do you know the Lord's Prayer?" And he say, "Why, sure I know the Lord's Prayer, I'm taking up learning at the church, ain't I? I know the Lord's Prayer backwards and forwards." And the other fellows says, "I bet you five dollars you don't know the Lord's Prayer, 'cause I don't think you knows it. I think you be going up to the church 'cause the Widow Jenkins be going up there and you just wanna be sitting in the same room with her when she cross them big, fine, pretty legs she got." And the other one say, "Well, I'm gonna prove you wrong and I'm gonna bet you that five dollars." So he say, "Well, go on and say it then." So he commenced to saying the Lord's Prayer. He say, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep." The other one say, "Here's your five dollars. I didn't think you knew it."

MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

Code: 20-08  
Time: 2:30  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Men's Status/Identity

Act 1; Scene 1

TOLEDO

Now, I'm gonna show you how this goes . . . where you just a leftover from history. Everybody come from different places in Africa, right? Come from different tribes and things. Soonawhile they began to make one big stew. You had the carrots, the peas, and potatoes and whatnot over here. And over there you had the meat, the nuts, the okra, corn . . . and then you mix it up and let it cook right through to get the flavors flowing together . . . then you got one thing. You got a stew.

Now you take and eat the stew. You take and make your history with that stew. All right. Now it's over. Your history's over and you done ate the stew. But you look around and see some carrots over here, some potatoes over there. That stew's still there. You done made your history and it's still there. You can't eat it all. So what you got? You got some leftovers. That's what it is. You got leftovers and you can't do nothing with it. You already making you another history. . . cooking you another meal, and you don't need them leftovers no more. What to do?

See, we's the leftovers. The colored man is the leftovers. Now, what's the colored man gonna do with himself? That's what we waiting to find out. But first we gotta know we the leftovers. Now, who knows that? You find me a nigger that knows that and I'll turn any whichaway you want me to. I'll bend over for you. You ain't gonna find that. And that's what the problem is. The problem ain't with the white man. The white man knows you just a leftover. 'Cause he the one who done the eating and he know what he done ate. But we don't know that we been took and made history out of. Done went and filled the white man's belly and now he's full and tired and wants you to get out the way and let him be by himself. Now, I know

what I'm talking about. And if you wanna find out, you just ask Mr. Irvin what he had for supper yesterday. And if he's an honest white man . . . which is asking for a whole heap of a lot . . . he'll tell you he done ate your black ass and if you please I'm full up with you . . . so go on and get off the plate and let me eat something else.

MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

Code: 20-09  
Time: 1:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Relationships  
Type 3: Separation/Loss

Act 2; Scene 1

TOLEDO

Now, I married a woman. A good woman. To this day I can't say she wasn't a good woman. I can't say nothing bad about her. I married that woman with all the good graces and intentions of being hooked up and bound to her for the rest of my life. I was looking for her to put me I my grave. But, you see . . . it ain't all the time what you intentions and wishes are. She went out and joined the church. All right. There ain't nothing wrong with that. A good Christian woman going to church and wanna do right by her God. There ain't nothing wrong with that. But she got up there, got to seeing them good Christian mens and wondering why I ain't like that. Soon she figure she got a heathen on her hands. She figured she couldn't live like that. The church was more important than I was. So she left. Packed up one day and moved out. To this day I ain't never said another word to her. Come home one day and my house was empty! And I sat down and figured out that I was a fool not to see that she needed something that I wasn't giving her. Else she wouldn't have been up there at the church in the first place. I ain't blaming her. I just said it wasn't gonna happen to me again. So, yeah, Toledo been a fool about a woman. That's part of making life.



MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

Code: 20-10  
Time: 1:10  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Exploitation  
Type 3: Money

Act 2; Scene 1

STURDYVANT

Mr. Irvin told me that you boys prefer cash, and that's what I have for you. (*Starts handing out the money*) That was a good session you boys put in . . . That's twenty-five for you. Yessir, you boys really know your business and we are going to . . . Twenty-five for you . . . We are going to get you back in here real soon . . . twenty-five . . . and have another session so you can make some more money . . . and twenty-five for you. Okay, thank you, boys. You can get your things together and Mr. Irvin will make sure you find your way out.

Oh, yes . . . uh . . . Levee. About them songs you gave me. I've thought about it and I just don't think the people will buy them. They're not the type of songs we're looking for.

I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you five dollars apiece for them. Now that's the best I can do.

There's nothing more I can do about that. Like I say, it's five dollars a piece. That's what I'll give you. I'm doing you a favor. Now, if you write any more, I'll help you out and take them off your hands. The price is five dollars apiece. Just like now.

## THE PIANO LESSON

### Synopsis

*The Piano Lesson* is set in Pittsburgh in 1936. Boy Willie has come to his uncle's house to retrieve a piano that holds significant historical and sentimental value to the family. A battle ensues over the possession of the piano, which carries the legacy and opportunities of the characters and determines the choices they must make.

### Characters

**AVERY:** Thirty-eight years old, Avery is a preacher who is trying to build up his congregation. He is honest and ambitious, finding himself opportunities in the city that were unavailable to him in rural areas of the South. While fervently religious, he manages to find the time to court Bernice after her husband's death.

**BOY WILLIE:** Brother to Bernice, Boy Willie is a thirty year old brash, impulsive, and fast-talking man. He has an infectious grin and a boyishness that is apt for his name. His story provides the central conflict for the play in that he plans to sell the family piano in order to buy land that his family worked on as slaves. He feels it's important he does this in order to avenge his father, who grew up property-less—but not everyone in the family agrees.

**LYMON:** Boy Willie's long time friend is a twenty-nine year old who speaks little, but when he does with a disarming straight-forwardness. As he flees the law, he makes a plan to begin anew in the North. Eliciting stories from the families past, Lymon proves a vehicle by which we learn about the family. He is also a big fan of women, and plays a part in helping Bernice move on from her husband's death.

**BERNIECE:** Bernice, Boy Willie's older sister, is a thirty-five year old widow who blames the death of her husband three years prior, on her brother. She resents her brother's bravado and chides him for his rebellious ways. She doesn't want to sell the piano, but also has no intention of playing it. She has an eleven-year-old daughter, Maretha.

**DOAKER:** Doaker is the tall, thin, forty-seven year old uncle to Bernice and Boy Willie. He has worked for the railroad his whole life—first laying rail and then as a cook. He functions as the family patriarch and the play's oral historian, recounting stories, many about the piano's history. The play takes place in the house that Doaker owns, and while he won't take a side on whether to sell the piano, he does step in when things begin to get out of hand.

**WINING BOY:** Doaker's wily, carefree brother who shows up in town and stays with the family whenever he is a bit down on his luck. He used to play the piano and made his livelihood making music, but quit that life when he decided he no longer wanted to be an entertainer. Despite this, he is protective of the piano.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-01

Time: 2:10

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Inspirational

Type 3: Metaphorical

Act 1; Scene 1

AVERY

Well, it come to me in a dream. See . . . I was sitting out in this railroad yard watching the trains go by. The train stopped and these three hoboes got off. They told me they had come form Nazareth and was on their way to Jerusalem. They had three candles. They gave me one and told me to light it . . . but to be careful that it didn't go out. Next thing I knew I was standing in front of this house. Something told me to go knock on the door. This old woman opened the door and said they had been waiting on me. Then she led me into this room. It was a big room and it was full of all kinds of different people. They looked like anybody else except they all had sheep heads and was making noise like sheep make. I heard somebody call me name. I looked around and there was these same three hoboes. They told me to take off my clothes and they give me a blue robe with gold thread. They washed my feet and combed my hair. Then they showed me these three doors and told me to pick one.

I went through one of them doors and that flame leapt off that candle and it seemed like my whole head caught fire. I looked around and there was four of five other men standing there with these same blue robes on. Then we heard a voice tell us to look across the valley. We looked out and saw the valley was full of wolves. The voice told us that these sheep people that I had seen in the other room had to go over to the other side of this valley and somebody had to take them. Then I heard another voice say, "Who shall I send?" Next thing I knew I said, "Here I am. Send me." That's when I met Jesus. He say, "If you go, I'll go with you." Something told me to say, "Come on. Let's go." That's when I woke up. My head still felt like it was on fire . . . but I had a peace about myself that was hard to explain. I knew right then that I had been filled with the Holy Ghost and called to be a servant of

the Lord. It took me a while before I could accept that. But then a lot of little ways God showed me that it was true. So I became a preacher.

THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-02  
Time: 2:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Inspirational  
Type 3: Exorcism

Act 2; Scene 5

AVERY

Seem like that piano's causing all the trouble. I can bless that. Berniece, put me some water in that bottle.

Hold this candle. Whatever you do make sure it don't go out.

O Holy Father we gather here this evening in the Holy Name to cast out the spirit of one James Sutter. May this vial of water be empowered with thy spirit. May each drop be a weapon and a shield against the presence of all evil and may it be a cleansing and blessing of this humble abode.

Just as Our Father taught us how to pray so He say, "I will prepare a table for you in the midst of mine enemies," and in His hands we place ourselves to come unto his presence. Where there is good so shall it cause Evil to scatter to the Four Winds.

(He throws water at the piano with each commandment.)

Get thee behind me, Satan! Get thee behind the face of Righteousness as we Glorify His Holy Name! Get thee behind the Hammer of Truth that breaketh down the Wall of Falsehood! Father. Father. Praise. Praise. We ask in Jesus' name and call forth the power of the Holy Spirit as it is written . . .

(He opens the Bible and reads from it)

I will sprinkle clean water upon thee and ye shall be clean.

I will sprinkle clean water upon thee and ye shall be clean: from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols, I will cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take out your flesh the heart of stone, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-03  
Time: 1:40  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Money  
Type 3: Commerce

Act 1; Scene 1

BOY WILLIE

Got a hundred acres. Good land. He done sold it piece by piece, he kept the good part for himself. Now he got to give that up. His brother come down from Chicago for the funeral . . . he up there in Chicago got some kind of business with soda fountain equipment. He anxious to sell the land, Doaker. He don't want to be bothered with it. He called me to him and said cause of how long our families done known each other and how we been good friends and all, say he wanted to sell the land to me. Say he'd rather see me with it than Jim Stovall. Told me he'd let me have it for two thousand dollars cash money. He don't know I found out the most Stovall would give him for it was fifteen hundred dollars. He trying to get that extra five hundred out of me telling me he doing me a favor. I thanked him just as nice. Told him what a good man Sutter was and how he had my sympathy and all. Told him to give me two weeks. He said he'd wait on me. That's why I come up here. Sell them watermelons. Get Berniece to sell that piano. Put them two parts with the part I done saved. Walk in there. Tip my hat. Lay my money down table. Get my deed and walk on out. This time I get to keep all the cotton. Hire me some men to work it for me. Gin my cotton. Get my seed. And I'll see you again next year. Might even plant some tobacco or some oats.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-04  
Time: 2:05  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Family  
Type 3: Socio-Economic  
Advancement

Act 1; Scene 2

BOY WILLIE

Now, I'm gonna tell you the way I see it. The only thing that make that piano worth something is them carvings Papa Willie Boy put on there. That's what make it worth something. That was my great-granddaddy. Papa Boy Charles brought that piano into the house. Now, I'm supposed to build on what they left for me. You can't do nothing with that piano sitting up her in the house. That's just like if I let them watermelons sit out there and rot. I'd be a fool. All right now, if you say to me, Boy Willie, I'm using that piano. I give out lessons on it and that help me make my rent or whatever. Then that be something else. I'd have to go on and say, well, Berniece using that piano. She building on it. Let her go on and use it. I got to find another way to get Sutter's land. But Doaker say you ain't touched that piano the whole time it's been up here. So why you wanna stand in my way? See, you just looking at the sentimental value. See, that's good. That's all right. I take my hat off whenever somebody say my daddy's name. But I ain't gonna be no fool about no sentimental value. You can sit up here and look at the piano for the next hundred years and it's just gonna be a piano. You can't make more than that. Now I want to get Sutter's land with that piano. I get Sutter's land and I can go down and cash in the crop and get my seed. As long as I got the land and the seed. Then I'm all right. I can always get me a little something else. Cause that land give back to you. I can make me another crop and cash that in. I still got the land and the seed. But that piano don't put out nothing else. You ain't got nothing working for you. Now, the kind of man my daddy was he would have understood that. I'm sorry you can't see it that way. But that's why I'm gonna take that piano out of here and sell it.



## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-05  
Time: 1:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Death  
Type 3: Value of Life

Act 2; Scene 5

BOY WILLIE

She trying to scare me. Hell, I ain't scared of dying. I look around and see people dying every day. You got to die to make room for somebody else. I had a dog that died. Wasn't nothing but a puppy. I picked it up and put it in a bag and carried it up there to Reverend C. L. Thompson's church. I carried it up there and prayed and asked Jesus to make it live like he did the man in the Bible. I prayed real hard. Knelt down and everything. Say ask in Jesus' name. Well, I must have called Jesus' name two hundred times. I called his name till mouth got sore. I got up and looked in the bag and the dog still dead. It ain't move a muscle! I say, "Well, ain't nothing precious." And then I went out and killed me a cat. That's when I discovered the power of death. See, a nigger that ain't afraid to die is the worse kind of nigger for the white man. He can't hold that power over you. That's what I learned when I killed that cat. I got the power of death too. I can command him. I can call him up. The white man don't like to see that. He don't like for you to stand up and look him square in the eye and say, "I got it too." Then he got to deal with you square up.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-06  
Time: 1:10  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Women's Status/Identity  
Type 3: Men's Status/Identity

Act 2; Scene 5

BOY WILLIE

You ain't got to worry about me. I'm gonna be here just as long as it takes Lymon to get back here with that truck. You ought to be talking to Berniece. Sitting up there telling Maretha she wished she was a boy. What kind of thing is that to tell a child? If you want to tell her something tell her about that piano. You ain't even told her about that piano. Like that's something to be ashamed of. Like she supposed to go off and hide somewhere about that piano. You ought to mark down on the calendar the day that Papa Boy Charles brought that piano into the house. You ought to mark that day down and draw a circle around it . . . and every year when it come up throw a party. Have a celebration. If you did that she wouldn't have no problem in life. She could walk around here with her head held high. I'm talking about a big party!

Invite everybody! Mark that day down with a special meaning. That way she know where she at in the world. You got her going out here thinking she wrong in the world. Like there ain't no part of it belong to her.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-07  
Time: 1:50  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Socio-Economic  
Advancement

Act 2; Scene 5

BOY WILLIE

What I want to bring a child into this world for? Why I wanna bring somebody else into all this for? I'll tell you this . . . If I was Rockefeller I'd have forty or fifty. I'd make one everyday. Cause they gonna start out in life with all the advantages. I ain't got no advantages to offer nobody. Many is the time I looked at my daddy and seen him staring off at his hands. I got a little older I know what he was thinking. He sitting there saying, "I got these big hands but what I'm gonna do with them? Best I can do is make a fifty-acre crop for Mr. Stovall. Got these big old hands capable of doing anything. I can take and build something with these hands. But where's the tools? All I got is these hands. Unless I go out here and kill me somebody and take what they got . . . it's a long row to hoe for me to get something of my own. So what I'm gonna do with these big old hands? What would you do?"

See now . . . if he had his own land he wouldn't have felt that way. If he had something under his feet that belonged to him he could stand up taller. That's what I'm talking about. Hell, the land is there for everybody. All you got to do is figure out how to get you a piece. Ain't no mystery to life. You just got to go out and meet it square on. If you got a piece of land you'll find everything else fall right into place. You stand right up next to the white man and talk about the price of cotton . . . the weather, and anything else you want to talk about. If you teach that girl that she is living at the bottom of life, she's gonna grow up and hate you.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-08  
Time: 1:50  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Value of Life  
Type 3: Socio-Economic  
Advancement

Act 2; Scene 5

BOY WILLIE

See now . . . I'll tell you something about me. I done strung along and strung along. Going this way and that. Whatever way would lead me to a moment of peace. That's all I want. To be as easy with everything. But I wasn't born with that. I was born to a time of fire.

The world ain't wanted no part of me. I could see that since I was about seven. The world say it's better off without me. See, Berniece accept that. She trying to come up to where she can prove something to the world. Hell, the world a better place cause of me. I don't see it like Berniece. I got a heart that beats here and it beats just as loud as the next fellow's. Don't care if he black or white. Sometimes it beats louder. When it beats louder, then everybody can hear it. Some people get scared of that. Like Berniece. Some people get scared to hear a nigger's heart beating. They think you ought to lay low with that heart. Make it beat quite and go along with everything the way it is. But my mama ain't birthed me for nothing. So what I got to do? I got to mark my passing on the road. Just like you write on a tree, "Boy Willie was here."

That's all I'm trying to do with that piano. Trying to put my mark on the road. Like my daddy done. My heart say for me to sell that piano and get me some land so I can make a life for myself to live in my own way. Other than that I ain't thinking about nothing Berniece got to say.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-09  
Time: 1:05  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Gift Giving  
Type 3:

Act 2; Scene 3

LYMON

. . . Grace. She real nice. Laugh a lot. Lot of fun to be with. She don't be trying to put on. Some of these women act like they the Queen of Sheba. I don't like them kind. Grace ain't like that. She real nice with herself.

She real nice. I seen her before he did. I was trying not to act like I seen her. I wanted to look at her a while before I said something. She seen me when I come into the saloon. I tried to act like I didn't see her. Time I looked around Boy Willie was talking to her. She was talking to him kept looking at me. That's when her friend Dolly came. I asked her if she wanted to go to the picture show. She told me to buy her a drink while she thought about it. Next thing I knew she done had three drinks talking about she too tired to go. I bought her another drink, then I left. Boy Willie was gone and I thought he might have come back here.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-10

Time: 2:00

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Relationships

Type 3: Women's Status/ Identity

Act 2; Scene 3

LYMON

Mostly they be lonely and looking for somebody to spend the night with them. Sometimes it matters who it is and sometime it don't. I use to be the same way. Now it got to matter. That's why I'm here now. Dolly liable not to even recognize me if sees me again. I don't like women like that. I like my woman to be with me in a nice easy way. That way we can both enjoy ourselves. The way I see it we the only two people like us in the world. We got to see how we fit together. A woman that don't want to take the time to do that I don't bother with. Used to. Used to bother with all of them. Then I woke up one time with this woman and I didn't know who she was. She was the prettiest woman I had ever seen in my life. I spent the whole night with her and didn't even know it. I had never taken the time to look at her. I guess she kinda knew I ain't never really looked at her. She must have known that cause she ain't wanted to see me no more. If she had wanted to see me I believe we might have got married. How come you ain't married? It seem like to me you would be married. I remember Avery from down home. I used to call him plain old Avery. Now he Reverend Avery. That's kinda funny about him becoming a preacher. I like when he told about how that come to him in a dream about them sheep people and them hoboos. Nothing ever come to me in a dream like that. I just dream about women. Can't never seem to find the right one.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-11  
Time: 1:20  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Family  
Type 3: Men's Status/Identity

Act 1; Scene 2

BERNIECE

You ain't taking that piano out of my house. (She crosses to the piano) Look at this piano. Look at it. Mama Ola polished this piano with her tears for seventeen years. For seventeen years she rubbed on it till her hands bled. Then she rubbed the blood in ... mixed it up with the rest of the blood on it. Every day that God breathed life into her body she rubbed and cleaned and polished and prayed over it. "Play something for me, Bernice. Play something for me, Bernice." Every day. "I cleaned it up for you, play something for me, Bernice." You always talking about your daddy but you ain't never stopped to look at what his foolishness cost your mama. Seventeen years' worth of cold nights and an empty bed. For what? For a piano? For a piece a wood? To get even with somebody? I look at you and you're all the same. You, Papa Boy Charles, Wining Boy, Doaker, Crawley . . . you're all alike. All this thieving and killing and thieving and killing. And what it ever lead to? More killing and thieving. I ain't never seen it come to nothing. People getting burned up. People getting shot. People falling down their wells. It don't never stop.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-12  
Time: :50  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Women's  
Status/Identity  
Type 3: Societal Order

Act 2; Scene 2

BERNIECE

You trying to tell me a woman can't be nothing without a man. But you all right, huh? You can just walk out here without me—without a woman—and still be a man. That's alright. Ain't nobody gonna ask you, "Avery, who you got to love you?" That's all right for you. But everybody be worried about Berniece. "How Bernice gonna take care of herself? How she gonna raise that child without a man? Wonder what she do with herself. How she gonna live like that?" Everybody got all kinds of questions for Berniece. Everybody telling me I can't be a woman unless I got a man. Well, you tell me, Avery--you know-- how much woman am I?



## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-13  
Time: 1:10  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Women's Status/Identity  
Type 3: Music

Act 2; Scene 2

BERNIECE

I done told you I don't play on that piano. Ain't no need in you to keep talking this choir stuff. When my Mama died I shut the top on that piano and I ain't never opened it since. I was only playing it for her. When my daddy died seem like all her life went into that piano. She used to have me playing it . . . had Miss Eula come in and teach me . . . say when I played it she could hear my daddy talking to her. I used to think them pictures came alive and walked through the house. Sometime late at night I could hear my mama talking to them. I said that wasn't gonna happen to me. I don't play that piano cause I don't want to wake them spirits. They never be walking around in this house.

I got Maretha playing on it. She don't know nothing about it. Let her go on and be a school teacher or something. She don't have to carry all that with her. She got a chance I didn't have. I ain't gonna burden her with that piano.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-14

Time: 2:00

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Transit

Type 3: Societal Order

Act 1; Scene 1

DOAKER

Now, I'll tell you something about the railroad. What I done learned after twenty-seven years. See, you got North. You got West. You look over here you got South. Over there you got East. Now, you can start from anywhere. Don't care where you at. You got to go one of them four ways. And whichever way you decide to go they got a railroad that will take you there. Now, that's something simple. You think anybody would be able to understand that. But you'd be surprised how many people trying to go North get on a train going West. They think the train's supposed to go where they going rather than where it's going.

Now, why people going? Their sister's sick. They leaving before they kill somebody . . . and they sitting across from somebody who's leaving to keep from getting killed. They leaving cause they can't get satisfied. They going to meet someone. I wish I had a dollar for every time that someone wasn't at the station to meet them. I done seen that a lot. In between the time they sent the telegram and the time the person get there. . . they done forgot all about them.

They got so may trains out there they have a hard time keeping them form running into each other. Got trains going every whichaway. Got people on all of them. Somebody going where somebody just left. If everybody stay in one place I believe this world would be a better world. Now what I done learned after twenty-seven years of railroading is this . . . if the train stays on the track . . . it's gong to get where it's going. It might not be where you going. If it ain't, then all you got to do is sit and wait cause the train's coming back to get you. The train don't never stop. It'll come back every time.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-15  
Time: 2:20  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Slaves  
Type 3: Lineage

Act 1; Scene 2

DOAKER

See, now. . . to understand why we say that . . . to understand about the piano. . . you go to go back to slavery time. See, our family was owned by a fellow named Robert Sutter. That was Sutter's grandfather. Alright. The piano was owned by a fellow named Joel Nolander. He was one of the Nolander brother from down in Georgia. It was coming up on Sutter's wedding anniversary and he was looking to but his wife . . . Miss Ophelia was her name . . . he was looking to buy her an anniversary present. Only thing with him . . . he ain't had no money. But he had some niggers. So he asked Mr. Nolander to see if maybe he could trade off some of his niggers for that piano. Told him he would give him one-and-a-half niggers for it. That's the way he told him. Say he could have one full grown and one half grown. Mr. Nolander agreed only he say he had to pick them. He didn't want Sutter to give him just any old nigger. He say he wanted to have the pick of the litter. So Sutter lined up his niggers and Mr. Nolander looked them over and out of the whole bunch picked my grandmother . . . her name was Berniece . . . same like Berniece . . . and he picked my daddy when he wasn't nothing but a little boy nine years old. They made the trade off and Miss Ophelia was so happy with that piano that it got to be just about all she would do was play that piano.

Alright. Time go along. Time go along. Miss Ophelia got to missing my grandmother . . . the way she would cook and clean the house and talk to her and what not. And she missed having my daddy around the house to fetch things for her. So she asked to see if maybe she could trade back that piano and get her niggers back. Mr. Nolander said no. Said a deal was a deal. Him and Sutter had a big falling-out about it and Miss Ophelia took sick to the bed. Wouldn't get out of bed in the morning. She just lay there. The doctor said she was wasting away.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-16  
Time: 2:20  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Slaves  
Type 3: Lineage

Act 1; Scene 2

DOAKER

Now, our granddaddy's name was Boy Willie. That's who Boy Willie's named after . . . only they called him Willie Boy. Now, he was a worker of wood. He could make you anything you wanted out of wood. He'd make you a desk. A table. A lamp. Anything you wanted. Them white fellows around there used to come up to Mr. Sutter and get him to make all kinds of things form them. Then they'd pay Mr. Sutter a nice price. See, everything my granddaddy made Mr. Sutter owned cause he owned him. That's why when Mr. Nolander offered to buy him to keep the family together Mr. Sutter wouldn't sell him. Told Mr. Nolander he didn't have enough money to buy him.

Sutter called him up to the house and told him to carve my grandmother and my daddy's picture on the piano for Miss Ophelia. And he took carved this...  
(*DOAKER crosses over to the Piano.*) See that right there? That's my grandmother, Berniece. She looked just like that. And he put a picture of my daddy when he wasn't nothing but a little boy the way he remembered him. He made them up out of his memory. Only thing . . . he didn't stop there. He carved all this. He got a picture of his mama . . . Mama Ester . . . and his daddy, Boy Charles.

Then he put on the side here all kinds of things. See that? That's when him and Mama Berniece got married. They called it jumping the broom. That's how you got married in them days. Then he got here when my daddy was born . . . and here he got Mama Ester's funeral . . . and down here he got Mr. Nolander taking Mama Berniece and my daddy away down to his place in Georgia. He got all kinds of things what happened with our family. When Mr. Sutter seen the piano with all them carvings on it he got mad. He didn't ask for all that. But see . . . there wasn't

nothing he could do about it. When Miss Ophelia seen it . . . she got excited. Now she had her piano and her niggers too. She took back to playing it and played on it right up till the day she died.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-17  
Time: 2:20  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Lineage  
Type 3: Slaves

Act 1; Scene 2

DOAKER

All right . . . now see, our brother Boy Charles ... that's Berniece and Boy Willie's daddy ... he was the oldest of us three boys. He's dead now. But he would have been fifty-seven if he had lived. He died in 1911 when he was thirty-one years old. Boy Charles used to talk about that piano all the time. He never could get it off his mind. Two or three months go by and he be talking about it again. He be talking about taking it out of Sutter's house. Say it was the story of our whole family and as long as Sutter had it . . . he had us. Say we was still in slavery. Me and Wining Boy tried to talk him out of it but it wouldn't do any good. Soon as he quiet down about it he'd start up again. We seen where he wasn't gonna get it off his mind . . . so, on the Fourth of July, 1911 . . . when Sutter was at the picnic what the county give every year . . . me and Wining Boy went on down there with him and took that piano out of Sutter's house. We put it on a wagon and me and Wining Boy carried it over into the next county with Mama Ola's people. Boy Charles decided to stay around there and wait until Sutter got home to make it look like business as usual.

Now, I don't know what happened when Sutter came home and found that piano gone. But somebody went up to Boy Charles's house and set it on fire. But he wasn't in there. He must have seen them coming cause he went down and caught the 3:57 Yellow Dog. He didn't know they was gonna come down and stop the train. Stopped the train and found Boy Charles in the boxcar with four of them hoboos. Must have got mad when they couldn't find the piano cause they set the boxcar afire and killed everybody. Now, nobody know who done that. Some people say it was Sutter cause it was his piano. Some people say it was Sheriff Carter. Some people say it was Robert Smith and Ed Saunders. But don't nobody

know for sure. It was about two months after that that Ed Saunders fell down his well. Just upped and fell down his well for no reason. People say it was the ghost of them men who burned up in the boxcar that pushed him in his well. They started calling them the Ghosts of the Yellow Dog.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-18  
Time: :55  
Type 1: Comedic  
Type 2: Blasphemy  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 2

### WINING BOY

They had that joker down in Spear walking around talking about he Jesus Christ. He gonna live the life of Christ. Went through the Last Supper and everything. Rented him a mule on Palm Sunday and rode through the town. Did everything . . . talking about he Christ. He did everything until they got up to that crucifixion part. Got up to that part and told everybody to go home and quit pretending. He got up to the crucifixion part and changed his mind. Had a whole bunch of folks come down there to see him get nailed to the cross. I don't know who's the worse fool. Him or them. Had all them folks come down there . . . even carried the cross up this little hill. People standing around waiting to see him get nailed to the cross and he stop everything and preach a little sermon and told everybody to go home. Had enough nerve to tell them to come to church on Easter Sunday to celebrate his resurrection.



## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-19

Time: 1:15

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Premonitions

Type 3: Inspirational

Act 1; Scene 2

### WINING BOY

Nineteen thirty. July of nineteen thirty I stood right there on that spot. It didn't look like nothing was going right in my life. I said everything can't go wrong all the time . . . let me go down there and call on the Ghosts of the Yellow Dog, see if they can help me. I went down there and right there where them two rail roads cross each other . . . I stood right there on that spot and called out their names. They talk back to you, too.

A lot of things you got to find out on your own. I can't say how they talked to nobody else. But to me it just filled me up in a strange sort of way to be standing there on that spot. I didn't want to leave. It felt like the longer I stood there the bigger I got. I seen the train coming and it seem like I was bigger than the train. I started not to move. But something told me to go ahead and get on out the way. The train passed and I started to go back up there and stand some more. But something told me not to do it. I walked away from there feeling like a king. Went on and had a stroke of luck that run on for three years.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-20  
Time: 1:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Judicial Process  
Type 3: Societal Order

Act 1; Scene 2

WINING BOY

Ain't no difference as far as how somebody suppose to treat you. I agree with that. But I'll tell you the difference between the colored man and the white man. Alright. Now you take and eat some berries. They taste real good to you. So you say I'm gonna go out and get me a whole pot of these berries and cook them up to make a pie or whatever. But you ain't looked to see them berries was sitting in the white fellow's yard. Ain't got no fence around them. You figure anybody want something they'd fence it in. Alright. Now the white man come along and say that's my land. Therefore everything that grow on it belong to me. He tell the sheriff, "I want you to put this nigger in jail as a warning to all the other niggers. Otherwise first thing you know these niggers have everything that belong to us."

Alright. Now Mr. So and So, he sell the land to you. And he come to you and say, "John, you own the land. It's all yours now. But them is my berries. And come time to pick them I'm gonna send my boys over. You got the land . . . but them berries, I'm gonna keep them. They mine." And he go and fix it with the law that them is his berries. Now that's the difference between the colored man and the white man. The colored man can't fix nothing with the law.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-21  
Time: 1:45  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Music  
Type 3: Men's Status/Identity

Act 1; Scene 2

WINING BOY

I give that piano up. That was the best thing that ever happened to me, getting rid of that piano. That piano got so big and I'm carrying it around on my back. I don't wish that on nobody. See, you think it's all fun being a recording star. Got to carrying that piano around and man did I get slow. Got just like molasses. The world just slipping by me and I'm walking around with that piano. Alright. Now, there ain't but so may places you can go. Only so many road wide enough for you and that piano. And that piano get heavier and heavier. Go to a place and they find out you play piano, the first thing they want to do is give you a rink, find you a piano, and sit you right down. And that's where you gonna be for the next eight hours. They ain't gonna let you get up! Now, the first three or four hours of that is fun. You can't get enough whiskey and you can't get enough women and you don't never get tired of playing that piano. But that only last so long. You look up one day and hate the whiskey, and you hate the women, and you hate the piano. But that's all you got. You can't do nothing else. All you know how to do is play that piano. Now, who am I? Am I me? Or am I the piano player? Sometime it seem like the only thing to do is shoot the piano player cause he the cause of all the trouble I'm having.

## THE PIANO LESSON

Code: 30-22

Time: 2:20

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Women's Status/Identity

Type 3: Sexuality

Act 2; Scene 1

WINING BOY

His daddy was the same way. I used to run around with him. I know his mama too. Two strokes back and I would have been his daddy! His daddy's dead now . . . but I got the nigger out of jail one time. They was fixing to name him Daniel and walk him through the Lion's Den. He got in a tussle with one of them white fellows and the sheriff lit on him like white on rice. That's how the whole thing came out between me and Lymon's mama. She knew me and his daddy used to run together and he got in jail and she went down there and took the sheriff a hundred dollars. Don't get me to lying about where she got it from. I don't know. The sheriff *looked at that hundred dollars and turned his nose up* Told her, say, "That ain't gonna do him no good. You got to put another hundred on top of that." She come up *there and got me where I was playing at this saloon* . . . said she had all but fifty dollars and asked me if I could help. Now the way I figured it . . . without that fifty dollars the sheriff was gonna turn him over to Parchman. The sheriff turn him over to Parchman it be three years before anybody see him again. Now I'm gonna say it right . . . I will give anybody fifty dollars to keep them out of jail for three years. I give her the fifty dollars and she told me to come over to the house. I ain't asked her. I figured if she was nice enough to invite me I ought to go. I ain't had to say a word. She invited me over just as nice. Say, "Why don't you come over to the house?" She ain't had to say nothing else. Them words rolled off her tongue just as nice. I went on down there and sat about three hours. Started to leave and change my mind. She grabbed hold to me and say, "Baby, it's all night long." That was one of the shortest nights I have ever spent on earth! I could have used another eight hours. Lymon's daddy didn't even say nothing to me when he got out. He just looked at me funny. He had a good notion something had happened between me an' her.

## SEVEN GUITARS

### Synopsis

*Seven Guitars* brings a post-war Pittsburgh and us into the world of the 1940s. We sort through the plight of the Black American men who fought and died in World War II, who now return home to find they must confront the same inequities they'd faced before they left. Blues singer Floyd "Schoolboy" Barton returns from a 90-day stretch in the county jail with a recording contract in his pocket and a plan to take his woman and his band to Chicago. Buoyed by the heroics of the great black boxer Joe Louis, Floyd is sure the world is finally ripe for black heroes. But the backyard that serves as his office, social club and romantic getaway seems haunted; and his eccentric neighbor, Hedley, who teeters between wisdom and madness, is destined to bring Floyd's dreams of success to an end.

### Characters

**CANEWELL:** He and Red Carter are Floyd's closest friends. He's an edgy, quick-tempered harmonica player, who's tired of playing back-up in life for Floyd. He made the trip with Floyd to Chicago the first time and regrets it. He loves Vera.

**FLOYD:** Blues singer Floyd "Schoolboy" returns to Pittsburgh at thirty-five years old with a hit song and an opportunity to record a record back in Chicago. In the time since he recorded the initial song, Floyd has squandered the flat fee he received for recording, left his girlfriend (Vera) for another woman, was then left by the other woman, pawned his guitar, and spent ninety days in jail after being arrested while walking home from his mother's funeral. After a year of trials and tribulations, Floyd wants to return to Chicago with Vera, his guitar, and a new sense of self. He is ready to "live with" not "live without" Unfortunately, the lengths he's willing to go to, to make his dreams happen, become his undoing

**RED CARTER:** He and Canewell are Floyd's closest friends. He's a drummer by profession, an expansive, laid-back fellow who can identify a rooster's birthplace by the sound of his crow

**VERA:** Floyd's ex-girlfriend and eight years his junior. She loves Floyd, but after he left her for another woman she is slow to trust him again. She may have had a relationship with Canewell in Floyd's absence. She is good friends with Louise.

**LOUISE:** Is a hearty, buxom woman who, years earlier, allowed her man to walk out peacefully in exchange for his pistol. Louise describes herself as, "forty-eight going on sixty." Although she claims to have no interest in love, she has an attachment to Hedley

**HEDLEY:** an old man, not altogether right in the head, who has turned his back on the white world he loathes. He's a believer in saints, spirits, prophets and the ghost of Charles (Buddy) Bolden, the legendary New Orleans trumpeter who died in an insane asylum. More than anything else, Hedley would like to sire a messiah.

## SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-01  
Time: 1:50  
Type 1: Comedic  
Type 2: Farm Animals  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 5

CANEWELL

That's one of them Alabama roosters. See, he fall in love with the way he sound and want to crow about everything. Every time the notion strike him. That don't do nothing but get people confused. That kind of rooster ain't no good for nobody. Best thing you can do is try and make a stew out of him. If you wanna take the time to fuss with it. Then you got your Georgia rooster. It don't know it's a rooster. It thinks it's a dog. It crow every time somebody come around. It don't do nothing but make the bulldog mad 'cause it's trying to put out of a job. Then you got your Mississippi rooster. He sit up on the roost and roost. The sun even act like it wanna come up, he be right there with it. The sun come up at five, he crow at five-oh-one. Seem like he say, "Let me do this and get it over with so I can get back to roosting." He take is job real serious, but he don't want to be working all day. He say, "I crow once in the morning and twice on Sunday. Let you know when it's time to go to church." That's the only time he crow other than if somebody disturb the hens in the barnyard. That's the way your Mississippi rooster is.

I'll tell you another thing about the rooster. The rooster didn't crow during slavery. He say, "Naw. I ain't gonna be apart of nothing like that. I ain't gonna wake nobody up." He didn't start crowing again until after the Emancipation Proclamation. The people got to whooping and hollering so, he say, "Naw, you all ain't gonna leave me out." That's why he crow so loud. If you think I'm lying, go and find you somebody from back in slavery time and ask them if they ever heard a rooster crow.

## SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-02  
Time: 1:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Love  
Type 3: Relationships

Act 2; Scene 7

CANEWELL

I always did believe in love. I felt like if you don't believe in love you may as well not believe in nothing. Even love that ain't but halfway is still love. And that don't make it no less 'cause it's only coming one way. If it was two ways it still be the same amount of love. Just like say I loved you and you didn't love me back. I can still say I'm filled up with love for Vera. I go walking down the street people can see that. They don't know what to call it but they can see something going on. Maybe they see a man who look like he satisfied with life and that make him walk more better. Make him walk like he got a million dollars in his pocket. If I loved you and this time you loved me back . . . I don't see where my love for you can get more bigger than it already was. Unless I walk like I got two million dollars. Sometime people don't count it if you ain't loved back. But I count it all the same.

Some women make their bed up so high don't nobody know how to get to it. I know you ain't like that. You know how to make your bed up high and turn your lamp down low. That's why Floyd don't want to lose you. I think you and Floyd ought to go ahead and see what you all can make of it.

## SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-03  
Time: 1:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Love  
Type 3: Relationships

Act 1; Scene 2

FLOYD

I had just got out the army. They give me forty-seven dollars. Adjustment allowance or something like that. I come on up Logan Street and I seen you. That's why I always say I had a pocketful of money when I met you. I seen you and said, "There go a woman." Whatever else you might say - a pretty woman, a nice woman, a not-so-nice woman - what ever else you might say, you got to put that "woman" part in there. I say, "Floyd, there go a woman." My hands got to itching and seem like I didn't know what to do with them. I put them in my pocket and felt them forty-seven dollars . . . that thirty-eight under my coat . . . and I got up my nerve to say something to you. You remember that? Seem like that was a long time ago.

I knew you was just getting started. But what you don't know, I was just getting started too. I was ready. You was just what I was looking for.

I said, "That's the kind of woman a man kill somebody over." Then I see you turn and walk toward the door. I said, "They just gonna have to kill me." That's when I went after you. I said you was just right for me and if I could get that I never would want nothing else. That's why you ought to try me one more time. If you try me one more time, you never carry no regrets.



## SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-04  
Time: 1:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Value of Life  
Type 3: Music

Act 2; Scene 3

FLOYD

*(Quietly)*: I had seven ways to go. They cut that down to six. I say, "Let me try one of them six." They cut it down to five. Every time I push . . . they pull. They cut it down to four. I say, "What's the matter? Everything can't go wrong all the time." They cut it down to three. I say, "Three is better than two-- I really don't need but one." They cut it down to two. See . . . I am going to Chicago. If I have to buy me a graveyard and kill everybody I see. I am going Chicago. I don't want to live my life without. Everybody I know live without. I don't want to do that. I want to live with. I don't know what you all think of yourself, but I think I'm supposed to have. Whatever it is. Have something. Have anything. My mama lived and died she ain't had nothing. If it aint nothing but peace if mind, then let me have that. My mama ain't had two dimes to rub together. And ain't had but one stick. She got to do without the fire. Some kind of warmth in her life. I don't want to live in a cold house. It a cold world, let me have a little shelter from it. That's all I want. Floyd Barton is gonna make his record. Floyd Barton is going to Chicago.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-05  
Time: 1:50  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Gambling  
Type 3: Marriage Proposal

Act 2; Scene 6

FLOYD

You know better than to ask me where you get anything from. I took a chance. Lots of times in life you taking a chance. Some people say that's all life is. Say, "I'm gonna take a chance on this . . . and I'm gonna take a chance on that . . . and I'm gonna take a chance on the other." And then sometime you be taking your last chance. If you taking your last chance then you done used up your life. I say I'm just getting started and I didn't want to take no chance of not getting back up to Chicago. So yeah, I took a chance. I went out there to pay the gravestone man the rest of the money. He had the gravestone already made up. It's gray marble. It say "Maude Avery Barton." Got two rose. One on each side. It looked so pretty. He say he have it on the grave by Mother's Day. We gonna got out there and see it. I left out of there and went down to the Greyhound bus station. Look here . . . (*Pulls some tickets out of his pocket*) What that say? "Pittsburg to Chicago." I told the man to write your name on it . . . he said they didn't do that. I took a pencil and wrote it on there myself. (*Shows her the ticket*) Then I made a long-distance phone call . . . cost me three dollars and ten cents. I called Mr. Wilbert H. Gardner, president of Savoy Records, and told him I would be there on the tenth of June. Then I called the Delaware Towers Hotel on State Street and told them to get ready their best room for Miss Vera Dotson . . . soon to be Mrs. Floyed Barton. That's is . . . if she say yeah.

## SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-06  
Time: 2:15  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Relationships  
Type 3: Music

Act 2; Scene 6

FLOYD

You was there too, Vera. You had a hand in whatever it was. Maybe all the times we don't know the effect of what we do. But we cause what happens to us. Sometimes even in little ways we can't see. I went up to Chicago with Pearl Brown 'cause she was willing to believe that I could take her someplace she wanted to go. That I could give her things that she wanted to have. She told me by that . . . it was possible. Even sometimes when you question yourself . . . when you wonder can you really make the music work for you . . . can you find a way to get it out into the world so it can burst in the air and have it mean something to somebody. She didn't know if I could do that. If I could have a hit record. But she was willing to believe it. Maybe it was selfish of her. Maybe she believed for all the wrong reasons. But that gave me a chance to try. So yeah . . . I took it. It wasn't easy. I was scared. But when them red lights came on in that recording studio it was like a bell ringing in the boxing match, and I did it! I reached down inside me and I pulled out whatever was there. I did like my mama told me. I did my best. And I figured nobody could fault me for that. Then when they didn't release the record, Pearl Brown left. She thought she had believed wrong. I don't fault her for that. But I never lost the belief in myself.

Then when they released the record I realized I didn't have nothing but a hit record. I come back to you figuring you couldn't say no to a man who got a hit record. But you did. And that made me see that you wanted more than Pearl Brown. I'm here saying I can give it to you. Try me one more time and I'll never jump back on you in life.

## SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-07  
Time: 1:10  
Type 1: Comedic  
Type 2: Relationships  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 4

RED CARTER

I know how to handle them. I used to have seven women. I tried to keep them separate and give them all a day of the week. But that didn't work. I told one of them, "I'll see you on Tuesday. I got something to do Monday." She say, "Naw, naw . . . I see you Friday night." I told the other one, "I'll see you on Thursday, I got something to do Tuesday." She say, "Naw, naw . . . I'll see you Friday." They all wanted to see me Friday 'cause I was working. There was a time I couldn't get a woman. I go anywhere near a woman they get up and run. Time I got me a job I couldn't get them off me. Women everywhere. All of a sudden I got right popular . . . except they all wanna see me on Friday. I tried to move my Friday woman over to Sunday, but she got mad. My Sunday woman quit me and my Monday woman wanted to see me on Saturday. I got so confused I say the best thing for me to do was quit my job.

## SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-08

Time: 1:30

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Societal Order

Type 3: Value of Life

Act 2; Scene 4

RED CARTER

That used to be enough. Get you five pound of cornmeal, a couple of eggs, and some milk - even if it wasn't nothing but powered milk - and make you a meal. Put that with some beans and rice and what more is there? That used to be enough. It used to be all right to have you a rooster. Once upon a time in America it used to be all right to have a rooster in your yard. Now that done changed. It used to be you could leave your door open. Now you got to bar the roof. Ain't nothing went right since I broke that mirror. That ain't but three years ago. That's what scares me. I got four more years of bad luck. I was down Seefus . . . lost all my money. I was going good too. At one time I had forty dollars. I started to get up and leave but then I was trying to get forty more. Seem like everything broke down. Look over there. You got . . . One. Two. Three. Look there. You got seven birds sitting on that fence. You can count them. They sitting all in a row. If that dog next door start to howling I know something. It sure hurt me to pawn my pistol. I don't feel right without it. There's too many people out there act crazy. Too many people with knives. Ice picks. Meat cleavers and everything else. They had one fellow got in a fight with somebody and pulled a hatchet out from under his coat.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-09  
Time: 2:45  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Women's Status/Identity  
Type 3: Relationships

Act 1; Scene 2

VERA

It wasn't nothing to you but it was something to me. To have you just up and walk out like that. What you think happened to me? Did you ever stop to ask yourself, "I wonder how Vera doing--I wonder how she feel?" I lay here every night in an empty bed. In an empty room. Where? Someplace special? Someplace where you had been? The same place you walked out of? The same place you turned your back on? You give it up and you want it? What kind of sense does that make?

You had what you wanted and I didn't. That makes you special. You one of them special people who supposed to have everything just the way they want it.

. . . Floyd. I wanted to know where you was bruised at. So I could be a woman for you. So I could touch you there. So I could spread myself all over you and know that I was a woman. That I could give a man only those things that a woman has to give. And he could be satisfied. How much woman you think it make you feel to know you can't satisfy a man?

So he could, "Yes, Vera a woman." That's what you say, but you never believed it. You never showed me all those places where you were a man. You went to Pearl Brown and showed her. I don't know what she did or didn't do, but I looked up and you was back here after I had given you up. After I had walked through an empty house for a year and a half looking for you. After I would lay myself out on that bed and search my body for your fingerprints. "He touched me here. Floyd touched me here and he touched me and he touched me here and he kissed me here and he gave me here and he took me here and he ain't here he ain't here he ain't here quite looking for him cause he ain't here he's there! there! there! there!

He's there. In Chicago with another woman, and all I have is a little bit of nothing, a little bit of touching, a little bit of myself left. It ain't even here no more, what you looking for. What you remember. It ain't even no more.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-10  
Time: 2:05  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Relationships

Act 2; Scene 7

LOUISE

I know it don't take all day to get dressed. I'm dressed. Seem like everybody should be dressed. My mother used to tell me I was gonna be late for my own funeral. She might be right. But then I won't have to worry about getting a seat. I don't know if I can take it no more. They about to drive me crazy. The House of Blues, the Blue Goose, the Red Carter, the dead rooster, the this-that-and-the-other, hurry up and sit down and lets dance and give me a drink and what I got? Who ain't don't know where the other one is or went or ain't going or is going and this one's dead and that one's dying and who shot who and who sung what song and give me another drink and her go a dollar and I ain't got a dime and what's the use and who to do and where ain't you been 'cause being all ain't not telling.

*(Vera enters)*

And don't you know her and Hedley went to church. I liked to fell out. She say, "Aunt Louise, I'm gong to church with Hedley." That child ain't set foot in a church since she was six years old on a Eastern Sunday past the time ten years after I had quite going! Then on Thursday they going to the sanitarium. She talked him into going. You know Hedley wouldn't listen to nobody. I tried to talk him into going. You tried to talk him into going. Ain't no telling who else tried to talk him into going. He sit out here with a butcher knife. Sit out there with a machete ranting and raving and carrying on. She come along and he's gonna up and run to the sanitarium. Act like he anxious to get there. I don't understand it.



## SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-11  
Time: 1:05  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Farm Animals  
Type 3: Value of Life

Act 1; Scene 5

HEDLEY

You want or you don't want, it don't matter. God ain't making no more roosters. It is a thing past. Soon you mark my words when God ain't making no more niggers. They too be a done thing. This here rooster born in the barnyard. He learn to cock his doodle-do. He seen see the sun, he cry out so the sun don't catch you with your hand up your ass or your dick stuck in your woman. You hear this rooster you know you alive. You be glad to see the sun 'cause there come a time sure enough when you see your last day and this rooster you don't hear no more. *(Takes out a knife and cuts the rooster's throat)* That be for the living. Your black ass be dead like the rooster now. You mark what Hedley say. *(Scatters the blood in a circle)* This rooster too good live for your black asses. *(Throws the rooster on the ground)* Now he good right for you.

## SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-12  
Time: 2:45  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Progeny  
Type 3: Value of Life

Act 2; Scene 1

HEDLEY

My father play the trumpet and for him Buddy Bolden was a god. He was in New Orleans with the boats when he make them run back and forth. The trumpet was his first love. He never forgot that night he heard Buddy Bolden play. Sometime he talked about it. He drink his rum, play his trumpet, and if you were lucky that night he would talk about Buddy Bolden. I say lucky 'cause you never see him like that with his face light up and something be driving him from inside and it was a thing he love more than my mother.

That is how he named me King . . . after King Buddy Bolden. It is not a good thing he named me that. *(pause)* I killed a man once. A black man. I am not sorry I killed him.

He would not call me King. He laughed to think a black man could be King. I did not want to lose my name, so I told him to call me the name my father gave me, and he laugh. He would not call me King, and I beat him hard with a stick. That is what cost me my time with a woman. After that I don't tell nobody my name is King. It is a bad thing.

Everybody say Hedley 'crazy cause he black. Because he know the place of the black man is not at the foot of the white man's boot. Maybe it is not all right in my head sometimes. Because I don't like the world. I don't like what I see from the people. The people is too small. I always want to be a big man. Like Jesus Christ was a big man. He was the Son of the Father. I too. I am the son of my father. Maybe Hedley never going to be like that. But for himself inside . . . that place where you live your own special life . . . I would be happy to be big there. And

maybe my child, if it be a boy, he would be big like Moses. I think about that. Somebody have to be the father of the man to lead the black man out of bondage. Marcus Garvey have a father. Maybe if I could not be like Marcus Garvey then I could be the father of someone who would not bow down to the white man. Maybe I could be the father of the Messiah. I am fifty-nine years old and my time is running out. Hedley is looking for a woman to lie own with and make his first baby. Maybe . . . maybe you be that woman for me. Maybe we both blessed.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-13  
Time: 1:10  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Men's Status/Identity  
Type 3: Value of Life

Act 2; Scene 2

HEDLEY

Hedley don't go nowhere!

*(He flings one of his baskets across the yard. He crosses to Louis and stands in front of her. He slowly balls up the letter and throws it down.)*

Hedley don't go nowhere!

My father . . . he take care of the horses. He take care of the horses for the shoemaker. He take care if the horses for the baker. He take care of the horses for the doctor! *(Flings the other basket across the yard)* He go hungry . . . with no bread from the baker. He walk with nothing but the tops of his shoes . . . nothing from the shoemaker. He die while he wait for the doctor to come! All his life he taking care for the shoemaker. He taking care for the baker. He taking care for the doctor. He get sick. My mother call for the doctor. Three days later the doctor come. She tell him, "I thought you was the undertaker. He died two days ago." He say, "Can I pray?" She tell him, "No." That's what I tell you: "No." The white man cannot help me! *(Stomp on the letter and grinds it into the sand with his foot)* It is a plot against the black man! Hedley don't go nowhere!

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-14  
Time: 2:05  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Men's Status/Identity  
Type 3: Death

Act 2; Scene 4

HEDLEY

When I was a little boy I learn about Toussaint-Louverture in the school. Miss Manning. She say, “Listen, you little black-as-sin niggers, you never each and none of you amount to nothing, you grow up to cut the white man cane and your whole life you never can be nothing as God is my witness, but I will tell you of a black boy who was a man and made the white man run from he blood in the street.” Like that, you know. Then she tell us about Toussaint-Louverture. I say I going to be just like that. Everybody say that, you know.

I go home and my daddy he sitting there and he big and black and tired taking care of the white man’s horses, and I say, “How come you not like Toussaint-Louverture, why you do nothing?” And he kick me with him boot in my mouth. I shut up that day, you know, and then when Marcus Garvey come he give me back my voice to speak. It was on my father’s deathbed, with Death standing there, I say to him, “Father, I sorry about Toussaint-Louverture, Miss Manning say nobody ever amount to nothing and I never did again try. Then Marcus Garvey come and say that it was not true and that she lied and I forgive you kick me and I hope as God is with us now but a short time more that you forgive me my tongue.” It was hard to say these things, but I confess my love for my father and Death standing there say, “I ready took him a half hour ago.” And he cold as a boot, cold as a stone and hard like iron. I cried a river of tears but he was too heavy to float on them. So I dragged him with me these years across an ocean. Then my father come to me in a dream and he say he was sorry he died without forgiving me my tongue and that he would send Buddy Bolden with some money for me to buy a plantation. Then I get the letter from the white man who come to take me away. So I say, “Hedley, be smart, go and see Joe Roberts.” We sat and talked man to man.

Joe Roberts is a nice man. I told him about Toussaint-Louverture and my father and Joe Roberts smile and he say he had something to give me. And he give to me this.

*(He take out a machete that is wrapped in his burlap apron, crosses over, and sits on his stool.)*

Now Hedley ready for the white man when he come to take him away.

SEVEN GUITARS

Code: 40-15  
Time: 2:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Men's Status/Identity  
Type 3:

Act 2; Scene 5

HEDLEY

Ain't no grave...can hold my body down  
Ain't no grave can hold my body down  
Ain't no grave...can hold my body down

*(He begins to walk around the yard in a circle)*

You think the black man a dog in the dust you can kick when you want? I am not a dog! You think you can throw a bone and I run after it. You think I fetch for you and wag my tail for you. The black man is not a dog! He is the Lion of Judah! He is the mud God make his image from. Ethiopia shall stretch forth her wings! The black man is not a dog! I will stir up the dust around me like the eagle stirreth its nest. Like a hurricane I will come through the house. I will make the roof fall! I will stir up the dust around me to let you know I talk this.... *(Shoves the machete up into the air)* Ain't no grave can hold my body down.

The black man is not a dog. You think I come when you call. I wag my tail. Look, I stirreth the nest. I am a hurricane to you, when you look at me you will see the house falling on your head. Its roof and its shutters and all the windows broken.

You think the black man is a dog that I will crawl to you? I am a man, woman. I am the man to father your children. I offer you a kingdom! What you say, I am a blind man? I cast my pearls before swine?

I am not a blind man! I will not crawl for you. I am a warrior. When I am in the dust, my knees buckle from war, not from a woman! I offer you a kingdom . . . the

flesh of my flesh, my seven generations . . . and you laugh at me! You laugh at Joe Louis' father! I offer you to be the Lily of the Valley. To be Queen of Sheba. Queen of the black man's kingdom. You think I am a clown. I am the Lion of Judah!

Satan! I will tear your kingdom down!  
Satan! I will tear your kingdom down!  
Satan! I will tear your kingdom down!



## FENCES

### Synopsis

Troy Maxson is a garbage collector who prides himself on his ability to provide for his family and keep it together. He is the patriarch and central character in *Fences*, (1950-1965), he continually places barriers between himself and the very people he loves the most. Troy's rebellion and frustration set the tone for this play as he struggles for a sense of fairness in a society that offers none. He and his son clash over their conflicting views of what it means to be a black man in mid-century America.

### Characters

**TROY MAXON:** The protagonist of *Fences*, Troy is a working class African-American man who lives with his wife Rose and their son Corey and. He works for the Sanitation Department as a trash collector. He is devoted to providing for his family and guaranteeing that his sons have better lives than he did. Having been a great player baseball play in the Negro leagues, Troy was too old to join the Major leagues when they were finally integrated. It's this experience, and several others from his past that color his outlook on life and his relationship with his sons.

**ROSE:** Rose is Troy's second wife who he married upon his release from prison. She is the mother of his youngest son, Corey. She is a 43-year-old housewife who makes time for her Church regularly. The compassionate matriarch of the play, Rose is a fair judge of character who hopes for a better future for herself, her husband, and her son. She has high hopes for Corey, and keeps on looking forward instead of romantically clinging to the past like her husband. She personifies the qualities of love, patience, and forgiveness—and has plenty of opportunities to exhibit all three.

**BONO:** Having served time together in prison, Troy and Bono became very close and remain best friends well out of their time spent in jail. Having seen Troy through thick and thin, Bono often serves as the voice of reason and perspective for Troy—especially when it comes to Rose Maxon. Despite having been friends with him for over thirty years, Bono's concern for Troy's marriage trumps his loyalty to the friendship. Bono himself is a devoted husband to his wife Lucille.

**GABRIEL:** Gabriel is Troy's brother who suffered a head injury during World War II. Part of the effect is his nonsensical ramblings that actually touch on quite a bit of truth. He is sometimes convinced that he is the Angel Gabriel waiting for St. Peter to open the gates of Heaven. He is the wise fool, often knowing more about those people surrounding him than they know about themselves. Gabriel receives money from the government because of his injury, some of which Troy used to pay for the house where the Play takes place.

FENCES

Code: 50-01  
Time: 3:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Death  
Type 3: Sports

Act 1; Scene 1

TROY MAXON

Death ain't nothing. I done seen him. Done wrassled with him. You can't tell me nothing about death. Death ain't nothing but a fastball on the outside corner. And you know what I'll do to that! Look here, Bono...Am I lying? You get one of them fastballs, about waist high over the outside corner of the plate where you can get the meat of the ball on it . . . and good God! You can kiss it good-bye. Now am I lying?

Look here Bono... I looked up one day and Death was marching straight at me. Like Soldiers on Parade! The Army of Death was marching straight at me. The middle of July, 1941. It got real cold just like it be winter. It seem like Death himself reached out and touched me on the shoulder. He touch me just like I touch you. I got cold as ice and Death standing there grinning at me.

I say... what you want, Mr. Death? You be wanting me? You done brought your army to be getting me? I looked him dead in the eye. I wasn't fearing nothing. I was ready to tangle. Just like I'm ready to tangle now. The Bible say be ever vigilant. That's why I don't get but so drunk. I got to keep watch.

Death standing there staring at me... carrying that sickle in his hand. Finally he say, "You want bound over for another year?" See, just like that... "You want bound over for another year?" I told him, "Bound over hell! Let's settle this now!"

It seem like he kinda fell back when I said that, and all the cold went out of me. I reached down and grabbed that sickle and threw it just as far as I could throw it... and me and him commenced to wrestling.

We wrestled for three days and three nights. I can't say where I found the strength from. Every time it seem like he was gonna get the best of me, I'd reach way down deep inside myself and find the strength to do him one better.

All right. At the end of the third night we done weakened each other to where we can't hardly move. Death stood up, throwed on his robe . . . had him a white robe with a hood on it. He throwed on that robe and went off to look for his sickle. Say, "I'll be back." Just like that. "I'll be back." I told him sat, "Yeah, but . . . you gonna have to find me!" I wasn't no fool. I wasn't going looking for him. Death ain't nothing to play with. And I know he's gonna get me. I know I got to join his army . . . his camp followers. But as long as I keep my strength and see him coming . . . as long as I keep my vigilance . . . he's gonna have to fight to get me. I ain't going easy.

## FENCES

Code: 50-02  
Time: 2:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Exploitation  
Type 3: Commerce

Act 1; Scene 1

TROY MAXON

Look here, Bono . . . I went down to see Hertzberger about some furniture. Got three rooms for two-ninety-eight. That what it say on the radio. “Three rooms . . . two-ninety-eight.” Even made up a little song about it. Go down there . . . man tell me I can’t get no credit. I’m working everyday and can’t get no credit. What to do? I got an empty house with some raggedy furniture in it. Cory ain’t got no bed. He’s sleeping on a pile of rags on the floor. Working every day and can’t get no credit. Come back here – Rose’ll tell you – madder than hell. Sit down . . . try to figure what I’m gonna do. Come a knock on the door. Ain’t been living here but three days. Who know I’m here? Open the door . . . devil standing there bigger than life. White fellow . . . got on good clothes and everything. Standing there with a clipboard in his hand. I ain’t had to say nothing. First words come out of his mouth was . . . “I understand you need some furniture and can’t get no credit.” I liked to fell over. He say, “I’ll give you all the credit you want, but you got to pay the interest on it.” I told him, “Give me three rooms’ worth and charge me whatever you want.” Next day a truck pulled up here and two men unloaded them three rooms. Man what drove the truck give me a book. Say send ten dollars, first of every month to the address in the book and everything will be all right. Say if I miss a payment the devil was coming back and it’ll be hell to pay. That was fifteen years ago. To this day . . . the first of the month come and I send my ten dollars, Rose’ll tell you.

I ain’t never seen him since. Now you tell me who else that could have been but the devil? I ain’t sold my soul or nothing like that, you understand. Naw, I wouldn’t have truck with the devil about nothing like that. I got my furniture and pays my ten dollars the first of the month just like clockwork.

FENCES

Code: 50-03  
Time: 3:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Men's Status/Identity  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 4

TROY MAXON

My Daddy ain't had them walking blues! What you talking about? He stayed right here with his family. But he was just as evil as he could be. My mama couldn't stand him. Couldn't stand that evilness. She run off when I was about eight. She sneaked out one night after he had gone to sleep. Told me she was coming back for me. I ain't never seen her no more. All his women run off and left him. He wasn't good for nobody.

When my turn come to head out, I was fourteen and got to sniffing around Joe Canewell's daughter. Had us an old mule we called Greyboy. My daddy sent me out to do some plowing and I tied up old Greyboy and went to fooling around with Joe Canewell's daughter. We found us a nice spot, got real cozy with each other. She about thirteen and we figured we was grown anyway . . . so we down there enjoying ourselves . . . ain't thinking about nothing. We didn't know Greyboy had got loose and wandered back to the house and my daddy was looking for me. We down there by the creek enjoying ourselves when my daddy come up on us. Surprised us. He had them leather straps off the mule and commenced to whipping me like there was no tomorrow. I jumped up, mad and embarrassed. I was scared of my daddy. When he commenced to whupping on me . . . quite naturally I run to get out of the way. *(Pause)* Now I thought he was mad 'cause I ain't done my work. But I see where he was chasing me off so he could have the gal for himself. When I seen what the matter of it was, I lost all fear of my daddy. Right there is where I become a man . . . at fourteen years of age. *(Pause)* Now it was my turn to run him off. I picked up the same reigns that he has used on me. I picked up them reins and commenced to whupping on him. The gal jumped up and run off . . . and when my daddy turned to face me, I could see why the devil had never come to get

him . . . 'cause he was the devil himself. I don't know what happened. When I woke up, I was laying there by the creek, and Blue . . . this old dog we had . . . was licking my face. I thought I was blind. I couldn't see nothing. Both my eyes were swollen shut. I laid there and cried. I didn't know what I was gonna do. The only thing I knew was the time had come for me to leave my daddy's house. And right there the world suddenly got big. And it was a long time before I could cut it down to where I could handle it.

## FENCES

Code: 50-04

Time: 2:20

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Men's Status/Identity

Type 3: Relationships

Act 1; Scene 4

TROY MAXON

I walked on down to Mobile and hitched up with some of them fellows that was heading this way. Got up here and found out . . . not only couldn't you get a job . . . you couldn't find no place to live. I thought I was in freedom. Shhh. Colored folks living down there on the riverbanks in whatever kind of shelter they could find for themselves. Right down there under Brandy Street Bridge. Living in shacks made of sticks and tarpaper. Messed around there and went from bad to worse. Started stealing. First it was food. Then I figured, hell, if I steal money I can buy me some food. Buy me some shoes too! One thing led to another. Met your mama. I was young and anxious to be a man. Met your mama and had you. What I do that for? Now I got to worry about feeding you and her. Got to steal three times as much. Went out one day looking for somebody to rob... that's what I was, a robber. I'll tell you the truth. I'm ashamed of it today. But it's the truth. Went to rob this fellow... pulled out my knife... and he pulled out a gun. Shot me in the chest. It felt like somebody had taken a hot branding iron and laid it on me. When he shot me I jumped at him with my knife. They told me I killed him and they put me in the penitentiary and locked me up for fifteen years. That's where I met Bono. That's where I learned how to play baseball. Got out that place and your mama had taken you and went to make a life without me. Fifteen years is a long time for her to wait. But that fifteen years cured me of that robbing stuff. Rose'll tell you. She asked me when I met her if I had gotten all that foolishness out my system. And I told her, "Baby, it's you and baseball all what count with me." You here me, Bono? I meant it too. She say, "Which one comes first?" I told her, "Baby, ain't no doubt it's baseball . . . but you stick and get old with me and we'll both outlive this baseball." Am I right, Rose? And it's true.

FENCES

Code: 50-05  
Time: 1:45  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Relationships  
Type 3: Sports

ACT 2; SCENE 1

TROY MAXON

Rose, I done tried all my life to live decent . . . to live a clean . . . hard . . . useful life. I tried to be a good husband to you. In every way I knew how. Maybe I come into the world backwards, I don't know. But . . . you born with two strikes on you before you come to the plate. You got to guard it closely . . . always looking for the curve-ball on the inside corner. You can't afford to let none get past you. You can't afford a call strike. If you going down . . . you going down swinging. Everything lined up against you. What you gonna do. I fooled them, Rose. I bunted. When I found you and Cory and a halfway decent job... I was safe. Couldn't nothing touch me, I wasn't gonna strike out no more. I wasn't going back to the penitentiary. I wasn't gonna lay in he streets with a bottle of wine. I was safe. I had me a family. A job. I wasn't gonna get that last strike. I was on first looking for one of them boys to knock me in. To get me home.

Then I saw that girl . . . she firmed up my backbone. And I got to thinking that if I tried . . . I just might be able to steal second. Do you understand, after eighteen years I wanted to steal second.



## FENCES

Code: 50-06  
Time: 1:05  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Death  
Type 3:

Act 2; Scene 2

TROY MAXON

All right . . . Mr. Death. See now . . . I'm gonna tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna take and build me a fence around this yard. See? I'm gonna build me a fence around what belongs to me. And then I want you to stay on the other side, see? You stay over there until you're ready for me. Then you come on. Bring your army. Bring your sickle. Bring your wrestling clothes. I ain't gonna fall down on my vigilance this time. You ain't gonna sneak up on me no more. When you ready for me . . . when the top of your list say "Troy Maxon" . . . that's when you come around here. You come up and knock on the front door. Ain't nobody else got nothing to do with this. This between you and me. Man to man. You stay on the other side of that fence until you ready for me. Then you come up and knock on the front door. Any time you want. I'll be ready for you.

FENCES

Code: 50-07  
Time: 1:40  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Family  
Type 3: Progeny

Act 2; Scene 3

TROY MAXON

Well... I guess we'll just sit out there on the porch.

*(He sits on the porch. There is an awkward indelicateness about the way he handles the baby. His largeness engulfs and seems to swallow it. He speaks loud enough for ROSE to hear.)*

A man's got to do what's right for him. I ain't sorry for nothing I done. It felt right in my heart.

*(to the baby)*

What you smiling at? Your daddy's a big man. Got these great big old hands. But sometimes he's scared. And right now your daddy's scared 'cause we sitting out here and ain't got not home. Oh, I been homeless before. I ain't had no little baby with me. But I been homeless. You just be out on the road by your lonesome and you see one of them trains coming and you just kinda go like this....

*(He sings a lullaby:)*

Please, Mr. Engineer let a man ride the line  
Please, Mr. Engineer let a man ride the line  
I ain't got no ticket please let me ride the blinds.

*(ROSE enters from the house. Troy hearing her steps behind him, stands and faces her)*

She's my daughter, Rose. My own flesh and blood. I can't deny her no more than I can deny them boys. (*Pause.*) You and them boys is my family. You and them and this child is all I got in the world. So I guess what I'm saying is . . . I'd appreciate it if you'd help me take care of her.

FENCES

Code: 50-08  
Time: 2:20  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Relationships  
Type 3: Love

ACT 2; SCENE 1

ROSE

I been standing with you! I been right here with you, Troy. I got a life too. I gave eighteen years of my life to stand in the same spot with you. Don't you think I ever wanted other things? Don't you think I had dreams and hopes? What about my life? What about me. Don't you think it ever crossed my mind to want to know other men? That I wanted to lay up somewhere and forget about my responsibilities? That I wanted someone to make me laugh so I could feel good? You not the only one who's got wants and need. But I held on to you, Troy. I took all my feelings, my wants and needs, my dreams . . . and I buried them inside you. I planted a seed and watched and prayed over it. I planted myself inside you and waited to bloom. And it didn't take me no eighteen years to find out the soil was hard and rocky and wasn't never gonna bloom.

But I held you, Troy. I held you tighter. You was my husband. I owed you everything I had. Every part of me I could find to give you. And upstairs in that room . . . with the darkness falling in on me . . . I gave everything I had to try and erase the doubt that you wasn't the finest man in the world. And wherever you was going . . . I wanted to be there with you. 'Cause you was my husband. 'Cause that's the only way I was gonna survive as your wife. You always talking about what you give . . . and what you don't have to give. But you take too. You take . . . and don't even know nobody's giving!

FENCES

Code: 50-09  
Time: 2:45  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Women's Status/Identity  
Type 3:

Act 2; Scene 5

ROSE

You can't be nobody but who you are, Cory. That shadow wasn't nothing but you growing into yourself. You either got to grow into it or cut it down to fit you. But that's all you got to make life with. That's all you got to measure yourself against that world out there. Your daddy wanted you to be everything he wasn't . . . and at the same time he tried to make you into everything he was. I don't know if he was right or wrong . . . but I do know he meant to do more good than he meant to do harm. He wasn't always right. Sometimes when he touched he bruised. And sometimes when he took me in his arms he cut.

When I first met your daddy I thought, "Here is a man I can lay down with and make a baby." That's the first thing I thought when I seen him. I was thirty years old and had done seen my share of men. But when he walked up to me and said, "I can dance a waltz that'll make you dizzy," I thought, "Rose Lee, here is a man that you can open yourself up to and be filled to bursting. Here is a man that can fill all them empty spaces you been tipping around the edges of." One of them empty spaces was being somebody's mother.

I married your daddy and settled down to cooking his supper and keeping clean sheets on the bed. When your Daddy walked through the house he was so big he filled it up. That was my first mistake. Not to make him leave some room for me. For my part in the matter. But at that time I wanted that. I wanted a house I could sing in. And that's what your daddy gave me. I didn't know to keep up his strength I had to give up little pieces of mine. I did that. I took on his life as mine and mixed up the pieces so that you couldn't hardly tell which was which anymore. It was my choice. It was my life and I didn't have to live it like that. But that's what

life offered me in the way of being a woman and I took it. I grabbed hold of it with both hands.

By the time Raynell came into the house, me and your daddy had done lost touch with one another. I didn't want to make my blessing off of nobody's misfortune... but I took on to Raynell like she was all them babies I had wanted and never had. *(The phone rings)* Like I'd been blessed to relive a part of my life. And if the Lord see fit to keep up my strength . . . I'm gonna do her just like your daddy did you . . . I'm gonna give her the best of what's in me.

## FENCES

Code: 50-10

Time: 1:10

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Friendship

Type 3:

### Act 2, Scene 1

BONO

Troy . . . I done known you seem like damn near my whole life. You and Rose both. I done know both of you all for a long time. I remember when you met Rose. When you was hitting them balls out the park. A lot of them old gals was after you then. You had the pick of the litter. When you picked Rose, I was happy for you. That was the first time I knew you had any sense. I said . . . My man Troy knows what he's doing . . . I'm gonna follow this nigger . . . he might take me somewhere. I been following you too. I done learned a whole heap of things about life watching you. I done learned how to tell where shit lies. How to tell it from the alfalfa. You done learned me a lot of things. You showed me how to not make the same mistakes . . . to take life as it comes along and keep putting one foot in front of the other.

FENCES

Code: 50-11  
Time: 1:40  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Metaphorical  
Type 3: Inspirational

Act 1; Scene 2

GABRIEL

Did you know when I was in Heaven . . . every morning me and Saint Peter would sit down by the Gate and eat some big fat biscuits? Oh, yeah! We had us a good time. We'd sit there and eat us them biscuits and then Saint Peter would go off to sleep and tell me to wake him up when it's time to open the Gates for the Judgment.

Troy . . . Saint Peter got your name in the book. I seen it. It say Troy Maxson. I say . . . I know him! He got the same name like what I got. That's my brother!

Ain't got my name in the book. Don't have to have my name. I done died and went to heaven. He got your name though. One morning Saint Peter was looking at his book . . . marking it up for the Judgment . . . and he let me see your name . . . got it in there under M. Got Rose's name . . . I ain't seen it like I seen yours . . . but I know it's in there. He got a great big book. Got everybody's name what was ever born. That's what he told me. But I seen your name. Seen it with my own eyes.

Better get ready for the Judgment  
Better get ready for the Judgment  
My Lord is coming down.

Better get ready for the Judgment  
Better get ready for the Judgment morning  
Better get ready for the Judgment  
My Lord is coming down.



## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

### Synopsis

*Two Trains Running* examines the possibilities of securing the American dream in a 1960s northern urban ghetto. Memphis Lee, his neighbors and his restaurant's patrons stand on the precipice of urban renewal. They consider the prospects for surviving this change with their history and cultural identity intact as the existence of their community is in jeopardy. Sterling, a young, politicized ex-con, has just been released from prison and insists on righting an injustice committed years earlier; a man not rewarded with what was promised him after completing a job.

### Characters

**MEMPHIS:** Memphis Lee is a self-made man whose values of hard work, diligence, persistence and honesty have been consistently challenged by the circumstances of his life. His greatest asset is his impeccable logic. He owns a restaurant that the city intends to demolish. He is determined to negotiate a fair price out of the demolition. He is confident in playing the White man's game as long as he knows the rules. With little patience for those who preach the "black is beautiful" mantra—he claims it sounds as if those black people are trying to convince themselves.

**STERLING:** A young man of thirty, he appears at times to be unbalanced, but it is a combination of his unorthodox logic and straightforward manner that makes him appear so. Only recently released from the penitentiary after serving some time for robbing a bank, Sterling is new to the scene of *Two Trains Running*. He is in search of work, and when he finds Memphis Lee's restaurant and the group that hangs there it gives him the chance to seek advice from a colorful group of characters.

**WOLF:** He is a Numbers Runner—someone who carries the money and betting slips between the betting parlors and the headquarters or "Numbers Bank." He enjoys the notoriety and popularity that comes with this work. While he manages to keep money in his pocket and a decent pair of shoes on his feet, his inability to find secure female companionship is the single failure that marks his life.

**HOLLOWAY:** A retired house-painter, who, in his retirement, has become a self-made philosopher of sorts. He is a man who all his life has voiced his outrage at injustice with little effect. His belief in the supernatural has enabled him to accept his inability to effect change and continue to pursue life with zest and vigor. He is equally enraged by white men who exploit black men, and any black men who try to fight back. If anyone happens to come to him with a problem, he will send them on over to the oldest woman in town—an Aunt Esther—to sort it out.

**WEST:** A widower in his early sixties, he is the owner of the wealthiest business on the block. West runs the funeral parlor across the street from the restaurant. His wife's death has allowed his love of money to overshadow the other possibilities of life. It is his practical view of death that has earned him the title of perhaps the sharpest social observer in the play.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-01  
Time: 1:20  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Men's Status/Identity  
Type 3: Domestic Order

Act 1; Scene 1

MEMPHIS

I treat a woman like she was a queen. Treat her like she made out of gold. Try to give her everything she want. She say, “Baby, I want a car,” she got a Cadillac. She want a TV. . . she got a color TV. It might take me a little while. Her wants might be too big for my pocket but I work it out and come up with something. I was working on the dishwasher when she walked out. I would have got her that but the plumbing got to be right. I’m talking to John D. about him fixing up the plumbing . . . and she got up and walked out the door. You talking about she tired of the way I treated her. I treated that woman like she was the Queen of Sheba.

I ain’t done nothing but ask her to get up and make me some bread. And she got up ad walked out the door. I know she don’t except me to make it myself. Got up and walked out the door! I went down there and saw her. Asked her what the matter was. She told me she was tired. Now, how you gonna get more tired than I am? I’m the one going out there wrestling with the world. She ain’t got to do nothing but stay home and take care of the house. She got it nice. Talking about she tired. She wasn’t too tired to make them four babies.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-02  
Time: 2:10  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Socio-Economic Advancement  
Type 3: Commerce

Act 1; Scene 1

MEMPHIS

Man living up over top of the funeral home – you’d think he’d have enough sense to buy him a house somewhere. He own every other building around here. Them that Hartzberger don’t own. I got lucky and got hold to this piece of building and West got mad. I got it right out from under his nose and he ain’t never forget that. All that property he own and had the nerve to get mad when I brought this. What make it so bad is he could have had it. He was talking to L.D. about buying the building from him. L.D. had his stroke and West figured he’d wait until he died and get it cheaper. I went over to the hospital to see him and we made a deal right there in the hospital about a week before he died. I got it for fifty-five hundred dollars. This is when I was walking around with four or five hundred dollars in my pocket every day. Used to carry a pistol and everything. Had me a forty-four. Had me one of them big forty-fours. Used to scare me to look at it. I give L.D. the fifty-five hundred in cash. I didn’t find out till after he died that he owed twelve hundred dollars in back taxes . . . but I didn’t care. I had seen a way for me to take off my pistol. I got my deed and went right home . . . took off my pistol and hung it up in the closet. West got mad when he found out L.D. sold me that building. He been trying to buy it form me ever since. He walked in the next day and offered me eight thousand dollars for it. That was a good price. But see . . . he didn’t know it had come to mean more to me than that. I had found a way to live the rest of my life.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-03  
Time: 2:10  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Socio-Economic Decline  
Type 3: Commerce

Act 1; Scene 1

MEMPHIS

Ain't nothing to do. Unless I do like West and go in the undertaking business. I can't go out there in Squirrel Hill and open up a restaurant. Ain't nothing gonna be left around here. Supermarket gone. Two drugstore. The five and ten. Doctor done moved out. Dentist done moved out. Shoe store gone. Ain't nothing gonna be left but these niggers killing one another. That don't never go out of style. West gonna get richer and everybody else gonna get poorer. At one time you couldn't get a seat in here. Had the jukebox working and everything. Time somebody get up somebody sit down before they could get out the door. People coming from everywhere. Everybody got to eat and everybody got to sleep. Some people don't have stoves. Some people don't have nobody to cook for them. Men whose wives done died and left them. Cook for them thirty year and lay down and die. Who's gonna cook for them now? Somebody got to do it. I order four cases of chicken on Friday and Sunday it's gone. Fry it up. Make a stew. Boil it. Add some dumplings. You couldn't charge more than a dollar. But then you didn't have to. It didn't cost you but a quarter. People used to come from all over. The man used to come twice a week to collect the jukebox. He making more money than I am. He pay seventy-five cents for the record and he make two hundred dollars off it. If it's a big hit he's liable to make four hundred. The record will take all the quarters you can give it. It don't never wear out. The chicken be gone by Sunday. It ain't nothing like that now. I'm lucky if I go through a case a chicken a week. That's all right. I'll take that. I ain't greedy. But if they wanna tear it down they gonna have to meet my price.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-04  
Time: 1:20  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Exploitation  
Type 3: Commerce

Act 1; Scene 1

### MEMPHIS

You go over there looking for a pine box and walk out with a five-thousand-dollar silver, satin-lined casket, guaranteed to be leak-proof. That's what get me. For an extra hundred dollar he give you a twenty-year guarantee that the casket ain't gonna leak and let the water seep in. Now how dumb can anybody get? You gonna dig up the casket twenty years later to see if it's leaking and go back and tell West and get your hundred dollars back? The first time it rain the waters liable to drown the corpse. You don't know. Yet you be surprised at the number of people come out of there talking about their twenty-year-guarantee. Then if that ain't enough he charge you another hundred dollars to get a casket that lock. Like somebody gonna go down there and steal the body if it ain't locked up. Yet they come out of there clutching this little key he give them. West the only nigger I know who can cheat and rob the people and they be happy to see him. Calling him "Mr. West." "How you doing, Mr. West?" "Have a nice day, Mr. West." "Good to see you, Mr. West." He done cheated them out of four or five hundred dollars and they talking about, "Have a nice day, Mr. West."

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-05  
Time: 1:15  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Transit  
Type 3: Revenge

Act 1; Scene 2

MEMPHIS

I been up here since '36. They ran me out of Jackson in '31. I hung around in Natchez for three or four years, then I come up here. I was born in Jackson. I used to farm down there. They ran me out in '31. Killed my mule and everything. One of these days I'm going back to get my land. I still got the deed.

When I left out of Jackson I said I was gonna buy me a V-8 Ford and drive by Mr. Henry Ford's house and honk the horn. If anybody come to the window I was gonna wave. Then I was going out and buy me a 30.06, come on back to Jackson and drive up to Mr. Stovall's house and honk the horn. Only this time I wasn't waving. Only thing was, it took me thirteen years to get the Ford. Six years later traded that in on a Cadillac. But I'm going back one of these days. I ain't even got to know the way. All I got to do is find my way down to the train depot. They got two trains running everyday. I used to know the schedule. They might have changed it . . . but if they did, they got it posted on the board.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-06  
Time: 2:20  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Men's Status/Identity

Act 1; Scene 2

MEMPHIS

That's what half the problem is . . . these Black Power niggers. They got people confused. They don't know what they doing themselves. These niggers talking about freedom, justice and equality and don't know what it mean. You born free. It's up to you to maintain it. You born with dignity and everything else. These niggers talking about freedom, but what you gonna do with it? Freedom is heavy. You got to put your shoulder to freedom. Put your shoulder to it and hope your back hold up. And if you around here looking for justice, you got a long wait. Aint no justice. That's why they got that statue of her and got her blindfolded. Common sense would tell you if anybody need to see she do. There ain't no justice. Jesus Christ didn't get justice. What makes you think you gonna get it? That's just the nature of the world. These niggers talking about they want freedom, justice and equality. Equal to what? Hell, I might be a better man than you. What I look like going around here talking about I want to be equal to you? I don't know how these niggers think sometimes. Talking about black power with their hands and their pockets empty. You can't do nothing without a gun. Not in this day and time. That's the only kind of power the white man understand. They think they gonna talk their way up on it. In order to talk your way you got to have something under the table. These niggers don't understand that. If I tell you to get out my yard and leave my apples alone, I can't talk you out. You sit up in the tree and laugh at me. But if you know I might come out with a shotgun . . . that be something different. You'd have to think twice about whether you wanted some apples. These niggers around here talking about black is beautiful. Sound like they trying to convince themselves. You got to think you ugly to run around shouting you beautiful. You don't hear me say that. Hell, I know I look nice. Got good manners and everything.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-07  
Time: 2:35  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Death  
Type 3: Men's Status/Identity

Act 1; Scene 3

MEMPHIS

See, they don't know. The half ain't never been told. I'm ready to walk through fire. I don't bother nobody. The last person I bothered is dead. My mama died in '54. I said then I wasn't going for no more draws. They don't know I feel just like I did when my mama died. She got old and gray and sat by the window till she died. She must have done that 'cause she ain't had nothing else to do. I was gone. My brother was gone. Sister gone. Everybody gone. My daddy was gone. She sat there till she died. I was staying down on Logan Street. Got the letter one day and telegram the next. They usually fall on top of one another . . . but not that close. I got the letter say, "If you wanna see your mother you better come home." Before I get out the door the telegram came saying, "It's too late . . . your mother gone." I was trying to borrow some money. Called the train station and found out the schedule and I'm trying to borrow some money. I can't go down there broke. I don't know how long I got to be there. I ain't even got the train fare. I got twelve dollars and sixty-three cents. I got the telegram and sat down and cried like a baby. I could beat any newborn baby in the world crying. I cried till the tears all run down in my ears. Got up and went out the door and everything looked different. Everything had changed. I felt like I had been cut loose. All them years something had a hold of me and I didn't know it. I didn't find out till it cut me loose. I walked out the door and everything had different colors to it. I felt great. I didn't owe nobody nothing. The last person I owed anything to was gone. I borrowed fifty dollars form West and went on down to her funeral. I come back and said, "Everybody better get out my way." You couldn't hold me down. It look like then I had somewhere to go fast. I didn't know where, but I damn sure was going there. That's the way I feel now. They don't know I got a clause of my own. I'll get up



off the canvas if I have to. They can carry me out feet first . . . but my clause say . .  
. they got to meet my price!

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-08  
Time: 1:50  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Judicial Process

### Act 2; Scene 1

(There has been a large cut made to this monologue due to length)

#### MEMPHIS

I understand it. That's why I'm going downtown to the city and get my twenty-five thousand dollars. Just like I'm going back to Jackson to get my land one of these days. I still got my deed. They ran me out of there but I'm going back. I got me a piece of farm down there. Everybody said I was crazy to but it 'cause it didn't have no water on it. They didn't know my grandaddy knew how to find water. If there was water anywhere under the ground he'd find it. He told me where to dig and I dug a well. Dug sixty feet down. You ain't got no idea how far that is. Took me six months hauling dirt out of this little hole. Found me some water and made me a nice little crop.

Jim Stovall, who I bought the land from, told me my deed say if I found any water the sale was null and void. Went down to the court to straighten it out and come to find out he had a bunch of these fellows get together to pick on me.

Went in there, saw the judge, and he say the deed was null and void. Now I got to walk home. I was looking for them to try something. But I didn't see nobody. Got home and they had set fire to my crop. To get to my house I'd have to walk through fire. I wasn't ready to do that. I turned around and walked up the hill to Natchez. Called it a draw. Said I was going back. Got up there and got tied up with one of them Mississippi gals and one year led to two led to five. Then I come on up here in '36. But I'm going back one of these days.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-09

Time: 2:00

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Farm Animals

Type 3: Societal Order

Act 2; Scene 1

MEMPHIS

They took and cut my mule's belly out while it was standing there. Just took a knife and sliced it open. I stood there and watched them. They was laughing about it. I look and see where they got me covered. There's too many of them to fool around with. I didn't want to die. But I loved that old mule. Me and him had been through a lot together. He was a good old mule. Remind me of myself. He only do so much amount of work and that was it. He didn't mind working. He liked to get out there and exercise. Do anything you ask him. He didn't like you to half-work him. If you gonna work him . . . he want you to work him. Or else let him lay. He didn't like no stop-and-start work. That wasn't to his suiting. Don't tell him you gonna do one thing and then do something else. He'd lay down and tell you, "Goddamn it, make up your mind!" I used to take him down there and let him mate with Jimmy Hollis's mule. I figure I get mine, let him get his. A man like him a woman after a hard day's work. I stood there and watched them cut his belly open. He kinda reared back, took a few steps, and fell over. One of them reached down, grabbed hold of his dick, and cut that off. I stood there and looking at them. I say, "Okay. I know the rules now. If you do that to something that ain't never done nothing to you . . . then I know what you would do to me. So I tell you what. You go on and get your laugh now. 'Cause if I get out of this alive I know how to play as good as anyone." Once I know the rules, whatever they are, I can play by them.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-10  
Time: 1:05  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3:

Act 2; Scene 2

MEMPHIS

What the hell this doing up here? (*Tears it down and crumples it up*) I don't want this up in my place. I ain't putting no sanction on nothing like that. That's what the problem is now. All them niggers wanna do is have a rally. Soon as they finish with one rally they start planning for the next. They forgot about what goes in between. You rally to spur you into action. When it comes time for action these niggers sit down and scratch their heads. They had that boy Begaboo. The police walked up and shot him in the head and them same niggers went down there to see the mayor. Raised all kind of hell. Trying to get the cop charged with murder. They raised hell for weeks. After that it was business as usual. The only thing anybody remember is the funeral. That's the Sterling boy bring that stuff in here. Something wrong with that boy. That boy ain't right. (*To Risa*) If I was you I'd stay away from him. He ain't gonna do nothing but end up right back down there in the penitentiary.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-11  
Time: 2:20  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Socio-Economic Decline  
Type 3: Value of life

Act 2; Scene 5

MEMPHIS

Holloway . . . I took that twenty dollars and threw it in the river . . . right down there in the Monongahela River . . . I went and stood on the Brady Street Bridge . . . I didn't just let it drop. I took and tied a rock around it and threw it . . . just like Aunt Ester say. She told me if I do that everything be all right. And she was right too. She told me, "If you can't fight the fire, don't mess with it." Only I'm ready to fight it now. Hey West . . . look here . . . I went down there to the courthouse ready to fight for that twenty-five thousand dollars I want for my property. I wasn't taking no fifteen. I wasn't taking no twenty. I want twenty-five thousand. They told me, "Well, Mr. Lee . . . we got a clause, and the city is prepared to put into motion"—that's the part I like, "prepared to put into motion"—"the securing of your property at 1621 Wylie Avenue"—they had the address right and everything — "for the sum of thirty-five-thousand dollars." I liked to fell over. The lawyer standing there, he know I'm mad and he ready to fight it. I told him, "Don't you say a word. Don't you open your mouth." Thirty-five thousand dollars! I started to go up and tell my wife. She up there. She up there at the house. She come back to get her things and ended up staying. I moved out. She moved back in and I moved out. Told her I had something to do and if she be there went I get back — if I get back—then we can sit down and talk. You know what I'm gonna do? Aunt Ester clued me on this one. I went up there and told her my whole life story. She say, "If you drop the ball, you got to go back and pick it up. Ain't no need in keeping running, 'cause if you get to the end zone it ain't gonna be a touchdown." She didn't say it in them words but that what she meant. Told me . . . "You got to go back and pick up the ball." That's what I'm gonna do. I'm going back to Jackson and see Stovall. If he ain't there, then I'm gonna see is son. He enjoying his

daddy's benefits he got to carry his daddy's weight. I'm going on back up to Jackson and pick up the ball.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-12  
Time: 1:00  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Gift Giving  
Type 3:

Act 2; Scene 1

STERLING

Them some flowers. I got them for you. I got them from across the street. I wasn't gonna buy them. I think that's silly to buy flowers. White folks do that. If I want to buy you something I buy you earrings or something. But I got them. And I got them for you. I saw them and I said, "I'm gonna take these to Risa. She a woman. Woman supposed to like nice things. Flowers and lace and all that kind of stuff." You better look at those flowers and see where they got your name on them.

I picked them four or five 'cause I was thinking of you and I looked and seen where they had your name on it. Now you talking about you don't want them. Hell, a flower's a flower. They gonna be dead in a minute if you don't put them in some water. They gonna be dead in two or three days even if you do. Go on and put them in a glass and enjoy them. People throwing all that money away buying flowers.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-13  
Time: 1:25  
Type 1: Comedic  
Type 2: Employment/  
Unemployment  
Type 3:

Act 2; Scene 1

STERLING

Say Mr. West, I was thinking, you know, I ain't never driven me no Cadillac. I figure everybody supposed to drive a Cadillac at least once before they die. A man got seven Cadillacs need somebody to drive them, right? You should see me drive. Can't nobody beat me driving. I drove a getaway car once. We got away, too. So, do you need any drivers?

If you ever need anybody just let me know. Okay? I done been in the penitentiary. I'll tell you that up front. I don't want to go back. I figure everybody should work at what they like to do. So I asked myself, "Sterling, what you like to do?" The closest I could come up with was I like to drive a Cadillac. So if you ever need anybody you think of me. Do you have to wash the cars if you drive them? I don't want to wash them without driving them. But if I could wash them seven at a time every day for about five dollars apiece I might do that. How long you reckon it take to do that? I don't reckon it take more than three hours. If you do a good job. I could do that for you.

Every time I see them they be clean. Except for the grille. I could clean the grille better than that. You ought to tell them to get a little brush to scrub in them little spots with. It won't hurt the chrome none.



## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-14

Time: 2:20

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Metaphorical

Type 3: Inspirational

Act 2; Scene 4

STERLING

I went up there to see Old Man Albert. He sitting up there with four or five bodyguards. They let me in to see him and I told him to give me back my two dollars. Said I was calling off the bet. He gave me the two dollars and asked me for his six hundred back. I told him no. Told him I was gonna keep that. That way I have something that belong to him for a change. He just looked at me funny and told me to leave the same way I had come in. Told one of his bodyguards to show me the door. I left out of there and was walking by Aunt Ester's. I saw the light on and I figure she might be up, so I stopped to see her. They led me into the hallway and then through some curtains into this room . . . and she was just sitting there. I talked to her a long while. Told her my whole life story. She real nice. Ain't nobody ever talk to me like that.

"I cannot swim does not walk by the lakeside." It took me a while to figure out what she meant. Told me, "Make better what you have and you have best." Then she wrote something down on a piece of paper, put it in a little envelope, told me to put it in my shoe and walk around on it for three days. I asked her how much I owed her. She told me to take twenty dollars and throw it in the river. Say she get it. She had this look about her real calm and sweet like. I asked her how old she was. She say she was three-hundred and forty-nine years old. Holloway had it wrong. I figured anybody that old know what she talking about. I took twenty dollars and carried it down there. Didn't even think about it. I just took and threw it in the river. I'm gonna wait them three days and see what happen. You ought to go up there and see her. She a real nice old lady. She say yeah, you the one God sent when he told me he couldn't send no angel.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-15  
Time: 1:20  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Employment/ Unemployment  
Type 3: Value of Life

Act 2; Scene 4

STERLING

When I was living with Mrs. Johnson before she died I used to watch her husband. He get up every morning at six o'clock. Sunday too. Six-thirty he out the door. Now . . . he ain't coming back till ten o'clock at night. He going down to J&L and lift hundred-pound slabs of steel till three o'clock. Then he going over after they close the fish market and clean up over there. Now what he got? He got six kids if his own, not to mention me. He got a raggedy house with some beat-up furniture. Can't buy no house 'cause he can't get a loan. Now that sound like a hardworking man. Good. Clean. Honest. Upright. He work thirty years at the mill and ain't even got a union card. You got to work six months straight. They lay him off for two weeks every five and a half months. He got to call the police after he clean up the fish market so they can let him out of the building. Make sure he don't steal anything. What they got? Two pound of catfish? There got to be something else. I ain't sure I want to do all that.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-16  
Time: 1:20  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Judicial Process  
Type 3: Freedom

Act 1; Scene 3

WOLF

You right about that. I know. You can walk down there . . . just walk down the street and ask people . . . every nigger you see done been to jail one time or another. The white man don't feel right unless he got a record on these niggers. Walk on down there . . . I'll give you a dollar for every nigger you find that ain't been to jail. Ain't that right, Sterling. I been to jail. Stayed down there three months. Tried to make bond and couldn't do it. They kept me down there in the county jail for three months. Ain't done nothing but walk down the street. I was walking down Centre Avenue . . . police was chasing somebody and wasn't looking where he was going, and I wasn't looking where I was going either . . . he ran into me so hard it knocked us both down. I stared to get up and there was two, three policemen with their guns pointed at my head. Told me not to move. They arrested me for obstruction of justice. Kept me down there for three moths before the judge had a chance to throw it out. But I learned a lot from that. I learned to watch where I was gong at all times. 'Cause you always under attack.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-17  
Time: 1:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Relationships  
Type 3: Revenge

Act 2; Scene 5

WOLF

Did you all hear where Petey Brown killed his old lady last night? Caught her in the Ellis Hotel with his best friend. Killed him too. That's why I don't have no one woman. When I die every woman in Pittsburgh gonna cry. They ain't gonna know what to do with themselves. My woman come and told me she had another man. I told her say, "All right, baby, but he can't hear and he can't see. He can't see like I do. You got to be able to pull a whole lot of boxcars to keep up with me." I'm like Prophet Samuel . . . if a man can get him seven women . . . if he can find seven women want to be with him . . . let him have them seven and one or two more. Seven women wanna lay down with him must see something they like. Hell, it's hard to get one, let alone seven. It's hard to get one you can trust that far. See, when you lay down with her, you trusting her with your life. You lay down you got to close your eyes. It wouldn't be nothing for somebody to walk up and slit your throat. That's why you lock the door at night. You lock the door and it be just you and her. That's a whole lot of trust there. If I had that I wouldn't give it up for nothing. Other than that when I die every woman in Pittsburgh gonna cry.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-18  
Time: 1:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Value of Life  
Type 3: Wealth

Act 1; Scene 2

HOLLOWAY

All right. I'll tell you. Now you take me or you. We ain't gonna do that. We gonna go ahead and forget about it. We might take a chicken. Then we gonna go home and cook that chicken. But how it gonna taste? It can't taste good to us. We gonna be eating just to be eating. How we gonna feel good about ourselves? Every time we even look at a chicken we gonna have a bad taste in our mouth. That chicken's gonna call up that taste. It's gonna make you feel ashamed. Even if it be walking around flapping its wings it's gonna remind us of that bad taste. We ain't gonna tell nobody about it. We don't want nobody to know. But you can't erase it. You got to carry it around with you. This fellow here . . . he say he don't want to carry it around with him. But he ain't willing to forget about it. He trying to put the shame on the other foot. He trying to shame Lutz into giving him his ham. And if Lutz ever break down and give it to him . . . he gonna have a big thing. He gonna have something he be proud to tell everybody. He gonna tell his grandkids if he have any. That's why I say he might have more sense than me and you. 'Cause he ain't willing to accept whatever the white man throw at him. It be easier. But he say he don't mind getting out of bed in the morning to go at what's right. I don't believe you and me got that much sense.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-19  
Time: 1:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Money  
Type 3: Gambling

Act 1; Scene 2

HOLLOWAY

I ain't talking about that. Hell, his great-granddaddy used to work for nothing, for all that matter. I'm talking about he can make two or three hundred dollars a day gambling . . . if he get lucky. If he don't, somebody else will get it. That's all you got around here is niggers with somebody else's money in their pocket. And they don't do nothing but trade it off on each other. I got it today and you got it tomorrow. Until sooner or later as sure as the sun shine . . . somebody gonna take it and give it to the white man. The money go from you to me to you and then – bingo – it's gone. From him to you to me, then – bingo – it's gone. You give it to the white man. Pay your rent, pay your telephone, buy your groceries, see the doctor – bingo – it's gone. Just circulate it around till it find that hole, then – bingo. Like trying to haul sand in a bucket with a hole in it. Time you get where you going the bucket empty. That's why them ten dollars a day ain't gonna do him no good. A nigger with five hundred dollars in his pocket around here is a big man. But you go out there and where they at . . . you go out to Squirrel Hill, they walking around there with five thousand dollars in their pocket trying to figure out how to make it into five hundred thousand.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-20  
Time: 2:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Commerce  
Type 3: Slavery

Act 1; Scene 2

HOLLOWAY

People kill me talking about niggers is lazy. Niggers is the most hardworking people in the world. Worked three hundred years for free. And didn't take no lunch hour. Now all of a sudden niggers is lazy. Don't know how to work. All of a sudden when they got to pay niggers, ain't no work for him to do. If it wasn't for you the white man would be poor. Every little bit he got he got standing on top of you. That's why he could reach so high. He give you three dollars a day for six months and he got him a railroad for he next hundred years. All you got is six months' worth of three dollars a day.

Now you can't even get that. Ain't no money in niggers working. Look out there on the street. If there was some money in it . . . if the white man could figure out a way to make some money by putting niggers to work . . . we'd all be working. He ain't building no more railroads. He got them. He ain't building no more highways. Somebody done already stuck the telephone pole in the ground. That's been done already. The white man ain't stacking no more niggers. You know what I'm talking about, stacking niggers, don't you? Well, here's how that go. If you ain't got nothing . . . you can go out here and get you a nigger. Then you got something, see. You got one nigger. If that one nigger get out there and plant something . . . get something out the ground . . . even if it ain't nothing but a bushel of potatoes . . . then you got one nigger and one bushel of potatoes. Then you take that bushel of potatoes and go get you another nigger. Then you got two niggers. Put them to work and you got two niggers and two bushels of potatoes. See, now you can go buy two more niggers. That's how you stack a nigger on top of a nigger. White folks got to stacking . . . and I'm talking about they stacked up some niggers! Stack up close to fifty million niggers. If you stacked them on top of one another they

make six or seven circles around the moon. It's lucky the boat didn't sink with all them niggers they had stacked up there. It take them two extra months to get here 'cause it ride so low in the water. They couldn't find you enough work back then. Now that they got to pay you they can't find you none. If this was different time wouldn't be nobody out there on the street. They'd all be in the cotton fields.



## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-21  
Time: 2:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Family  
Type 3:

Act 2; Scene 1

HOLLOWAY

Had two of them. One on my mother's side and one on my father's side. One of them I never knew. The other one wasn't no good for nobody. That was the worse Negro I ever known. He think if it wasn't for white people there wouldn't be no daylight. If you let him tell it, God was a white man who had a big plantation in the sky and sat around drinking mint juleps and smoking Havana cigars. He couldn't wait to die to get up in heaven to pick cotton. If he overheard you might wanna go down and get you some extra meat out the white man's smokehouse . . . he'd run and tell him. He see you put a rabbit in your sack to weigh up with the cotton, he'd run and tell. The white man would give him a couple pounds of bacon. He'd bring that home and my grandmother would throw it out with the garbage. That's the kind of woman she was. I don't know how she got tied up with him. She used to curse the day she laid down with him. That rubbed off on me. I got a little older to where I could see what kind of a man he was . . . I figure if he want to go to heaven to pick cotton, I'd help him. I got real serious about it. It stayed on me so didn't nobody want to be around me 'cause of the bad energy I was carrying. Couldn't keep me a woman. Seemed like nothing wouldn't work out for me. I went up to see Aunt Ester and got that bad energy off me. And it worked too. Ask West. He died in his sleep. Caught pneumonia and laid down and died. They wouldn't let him in the hospital 'cause he didn't have any insurance. He crawled up I the bed in my grandmother's house and laid there till he died. March 5, 1952. So can't nobody tell me nothing about Aunt Ester. I know what she can do for you.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-22  
Time: 1:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Judicial Process

Act 2; Scene 2

HOLLOWAY

Now he done got him a gun. What he gonna do with it? A nigger with a gun is bad news. You can't even use "nigger" and "gun" in the same sentence. You say the word "gun" in the same sentence with the word "nigger" and you in trouble. The white man panic. Unless you say, "The policeman shot the nigger with his gun" . . . then that be all right. Other than that he panic. He ain't had nothing but guns for the last five hundred years . . . got the atomic bomb and everything. But you say the word "nigger" and "gun" in the same sentence they'll try and arrest you. Accuse you of sabotage, disturbing the peace, inciting a riot, plotting to overthrow the government and anything else they can think of. You think I'm lying? You go down there and stand in front of the number two police station and say, "The niggers is tired of this mistreatment – they gonna get some guns," and see if they don't arrest you.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-23  
Time: 1:15  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Death  
Type 3: Family

Act 1; Scene 2

WEST

I'll bury anything with anybody. You be surprised what people want in the casket with them. I done buried people with Bibles, canes, crutches, guitars, radios, baby dolls . . . One lady brought some tomatoes from her sister's garden. She didn't just want me to put them in there. She wants to tell me where to put them. That wouldn't have been so bad, but she kept changing her mind. People's something. They don't understand about dead folks. Dead folks don't know nothing. They don't know them tomatoes is in there with them. But the family know. That's who it's important to. It took me a while to figure that out . . . But I don't mind putting anything in there with anybody as long as the casket close.

Most of the time the family come and get the money before you close the casket. Take off their rings and everything else. I hate to even lay people out with jewelry . . . 'cause the family come and remind you every day that it ain't supposed to be in the ground.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-24

Time: 1:00

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Responsibility

Type 3: Commerce

Act 2; Scene 1

WEST

Somebody done busted out my window. A great big old six-foot piece of glass! People ain't got since enough to walk through the door. Over there pushing and carrying on. Let me get some coffee, Risa. I don't care how many people lined up there to Prophet Samuel . . . he leaving my place tomorrow. I'm talking about a big old piece of glass! Ain't no telling how much it cost to replace that.

I ain't gonna put up no board. They better get out here with that piece of glass. I spent twelve years putting up board. I worked hard not to put up board. Let them cut a piece of glass and bring it out and bill me. There was a time when they wouldn't do that. When I was down there on Centre I couldn't get the windows fixed. The toilet break down it be two weeks before somebody come and fix it. When I built that over there I said that wasn't gonna happen. Something go wrong I call the man who built it and he come right out and take care of it. No, sweetheart, West ain't gonna put up on board.

## TWO TRAINS RUNNING

Code: 60-25  
Time: 1:45  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Death  
Type 3: Money

Act 2; Scene 1

WEST

I went up there to see if my wife was in heaven. I done buried a whole lot of people, but she the first one I ever wondered about. See, people don't understand about death, but if you ever hear one of them coffin sounds you'd know. There ain't nothing like it. That coffin get to talking and you know that this here . . . this what we call life ain't nothing. You can blow it away with a blink of an eye. But death . . . you can't blow away death. It lasts forever. I didn't understand about it till my wife died. Before that it was just a job. Then when she died I come to understand it. You can live to be a hundred and fifty and you'll never have a greater moment than when you breathe your last breath. Ain't nothing you can do in life compared to it. See, right then you done something. You became a part of everything that come before. And that's a great thing. Ain't nothing you can do in life compared to that. So I heard about Aunt Ester and went to see if my wife was in heaven. I figure if anybody know she would.

She told me to take and throw twenty five dollars in the river and come back and see her. I thought she was crazy, to tell you the truth. I didn't pay her no mind. I knew she was old, but I figured she had gotten too old.

I offered to give her twenty five dollars just for her time . . . but she wouldn't take it. Told me to throw it in the river. I'd rather see her with it than to see it at the bottom of the river. I just wasn't gonna do that with my money.

## JITNEY

### Synopsis

The 1970s are the background for *Jitney*. In this story, Pittsburgh's gypsy cab drivers fight to save their business and retain their livelihood and are pitted again against a world that wants to tear down the inner city for redevelopment. Becker, a well-respected man in his sixties is reunited with his son Booster, after Booster's release from jail. A difficult relationship between father and son again points out how each generation confronts the world in his own way rather than building on the struggles of those who came before him.

### Characters

**BECKER:** A well-respected man who runs the jitney station. Sixties.

**DOUB:** A longtime jitney driver and Korean War veteran.

**RENA:** Youngblood's girlfriend and mother of their young son.

**TURNBO:** A jitney driver who is always interested in the business of others.

**BOOSTER:** Becker's son, recently released from prison. Early forties.

**SHEALY:** A numbers taker who often uses the jitney station as his base.

**YOUNGBLOOD:** A jitney driver and Vietnam veteran in his mid to late twenties.

JITNEY

Code: 70-01  
Time: 1:45  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Family  
Type 3: Responsibility

Act 1; Scene 4

BECKER

I kept seeing your face at your mother's funeral. How you just stood there and never shed a tear. Stood there with a scowl on your face. And now you want to come in here and ridicule me 'cause I didn't knock Mr. Rand on his ass. You wanna know why? I'll tell you why. Because I had your black ass crying to be fed. Crying to have a roof over your head. To have clothes to wear to school and lunch money in your pocket. That's why! Because I had a family. I had responsibility. If I had knocked him on his ass you would have went hungry. You wouldn't have had clothes on your back or a roof over your head. I done what I had to do. I swallowed my pride and let them mess over me, all the time saying "You bastards got it coming. Look out! Becker's Boy's coming to straighten this shit out! You're not gonna fuck over him! He's gonna grow big and strong! Watch out for Becker's Boy! Becker's taking this ass whipping so his boy can stride through this shit like Daniel in the lion's den! Watch out for Becker's Boy!" *(He has worked himself into a frenzy and is now near tears.)* And what I get, huh? You tell me. What I get? Tell me what I get! Tell me! What I get? What I get, huh?

Stay away from me! What I get, huh? What I get? Tell me? *(BOOSTER is silent.)* I get a murderer, that's what. A murderer.

And the way your mama loved you. You killed her! You know that? You a double murderer!

That woman took sick the day that judge sentenced you and she ain't never walked or said another word or ate another thing for twenty three days. She just laid up in

that room until she died. Now you tell me that ain't killing her. Tell me that ain't killing her!



JITNEY

Code: 70-02  
Time: 1:25  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Family  
Type 3: Death

Act 1; Scene 4

BECKER

I was there! I was holding her hand when she died. Where was you? Locked up in a cage like some animal. That's what killed her. To hear the judge say that the life she brought in the world was unfit to live. That you be "remanded to the custody of the Commissioner of Corrections at Western State Penitentiary and there to be executed in the electric chair. This order to be carried out thirty days from today." Ain't that what the judge said? Ain't that what she heard? 'This order to be carried out thirty days from today.' That's what killed her. She didn't want to live them thirty days. She didn't want to be alive to hear on the eleven o'clock news that they had killed you. So don't you say nothing to me about turning my back when I nursed that woman, talked to her, held her hand, prayed over her and the last words to come out of her mouth was your name. I was there! Where were you Mr. Murderer? Mr. Unfit To Live Amongst Society. Where were you when your mama was dying and calling your name? *(Stops talking a moment to gather himself.)*

You are my son. I helped to bring you into this world. But from this moment on...I'm calling the deal off. You ain't nothing to me, boy. You just another nigger on the street.

JITNEY

Code: 70-03  
Time: 2:10  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Responsibility

Act 2; Scene 2

BECKER

All right. Since they boarding up the place we got to figure out what we gonna do. I talked to Tanenhill about renting that place down on Centre what used to be Siegal's egg store. We can do that. Or we can try to get on with another station. We can go on and play by their rules like we have been. When I first come along I tried to do everything right. I figured that was the best thing to do. Even when it didn't look like they was playing fair I told myself they would come around. Time it look like you got a little something going for you they would change the rules. Now you got to do something else. I told myself that's all right my boy's coming. He's gonna straighten it out. I put it on somebody else. I took it off of me and put it on somebody else. I told myself as long as I could do that then I could just keep going along and making excuses for everybody. But I'm through making excuses for anybody...including myself. I ain't gonna pass it on. I say we stay here. We already here. The people know we here. We been here for eighteen years... and I don't see no reason to move. City or no city. I look around and all I see is boarded up buildings. Some of them been boarded up for more than ten years. If they want to build some houses that's when they can tear it down. When they ready to build the houses. They board this place up the first of the month and let it sit boarded up for the next fifteen...twenty years.

And if we don't do something they'll put Clifford out of business. Put Hester out of business. Put us out of business. Let Clifford go on and sell his fish sandwich till they get ready to build something. Let Hester go on and sell her milk and butter. Cause we gonna run jitneys out of here till the day before the bulldozer come! Ain't gonna be no boarding up around here!

*(The men give cries of approval)*

We gonna fight them on that. Let them go board up somewhere else.

JITNEY

Code: 70-04  
Time: 2:15  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: War  
Type 3:

Act 2; Scene 1

DOUB

You ain't the only one been in the army. I went into the army in 1950. Looking to make something of myself. That was after the war. I didn't know they was gonna pull out a map stick a pin in it and say "Let's go kill some people over here." I wasn't in the Army but four months and they had me in Korea. Second Division. Company B. Fourth Battalion. It was a detail company. I think at that time the only dead body I had seen was my grandmama when Foster buried her. That's all I knew about a dead body. But I was meant to find out quick. The third day they put us on some trucks and drove out to the front lines. I was scared as I could get. The last words I remember my mama saying to me was how she was praying I didn't get sent to the front lines. I wasn't in Korea but three days and here I was on the front lines. Got out there and everything was quiet. The sergeant told us to get down off the trucks. We got down and started walking. Got near about two hundred yards when we saw our first body. Then another one. Then three more. The sergeants say "All right boys, we gonna clean up. I want you to stack the bodies six high." I never will forget that. "I want you to stack the bodies six high." Not five. Not seven. Six high. And that's what I did for the next nine months. Clean up the battlefield. It took me six months before I got to where I could keep my supper down. After that it didn't bother me no more. Never did learn how to do nothing else. They was supposed to teach me but they never did. They just never paid me no mind. There was a whole bunch of us they never paid no mind. What I'm trying to tell you is the white man ain't got no personal war against you cause you buying a house and they gonna tear down this block. You too young to be depending on driving jitneys. Is that what you want to do all your life?

JITNEY

Code: 70-05  
Time: 1:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Domestic Order  
Type 3: Family

Act 2; Scene 1

RENA

Naw, Darnell, you ain't bought no house without me. How many times in your life do you get to pick out a house?

You bought a den for Darnell...that's what you did. So you can sit down there and watch your football games. But what about the kitchen? The bathroom? How many windows does it have in the bedroom? Is there some place for Jesse to play? How much closet space does it have? You can't just surprise me with a house and I'm supposed to say, 'Oh, Darnell, that's nice.' At one time I would have. But I'm not seventeen no more. I have responsibilities. I want to know if it has a hookup for a washer and dryer 'cause I got to wash Jesse's clothes. I want to know if it has a yard and do it have a fence and how far Jesse has to go to school. I ain't thinking about where to put the TV. That's not what's important to me. And you supposed to know, Darnell. You supposed to know what's important to me like I'm supposed to know what's important to you. I'm not asking you to do it by yourself. I'm here with you. We in this together. See...house or no house we still ain't got the food money. But if you had come and told me...if you had shared that with me... we could have went to my mother and we could have got eighty dollars for the house and still had money for food. You just did it all wrong Darnell. I mean, you did the right thing but you did it wrong.

JITNEY

Code: 70-06  
Time: 2:40  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Respect  
Type 3: Responsibility

Act 1; Scene 2

TURNBO

Time just keep going. It don't wait on nobody. Everything change. I remember when you was wearing diapers. Your mother did a good job of raising you. You can tell that right off. Your mother can be proud of you. It ain't easy these days to raise a child. I don't know what's in these young boys' heads. Seem like they don't respect nobody. They don't even respect themselves. When I was coming along that was the first thing you learned. If you didn't respect yourself...quite naturally you couldn't respect nobody else. When I was coming along the more respect you had for other people...the more people respected you. Seem like it come back to you double. These young boys don't know nothing about that...and it's gonna take them a lifetime to find out. They disrespect everybody and don't think nothing about it. They steal their own grandmother's television. Get hold of one woman...time another one walk by they grab hold to her. Don't even care who it is. It could be anybody. I just try to live and let live. My grandmother was like that. She the one raised me. She didn't care what nobody else done as long as it didn't cross her path. She was a good woman. She taught me most everything I know. She wouldn't let you lie. That was just about the worst thing you could be. A liar didn't know the truth and wasn't never gonna find out. And everybody know it's the truth what set you free. Now I ain't trying to get in your business or nothing. Like I say I just live and let live. But some things just come up on you wrong and you have to say something about it otherwise it throw your whole life off balance.

I know you don't want to hear this...but you don't need no hot headed young boy like Youngblood. What you need is somebody level headed who know how to respect and appreciate a woman...I can see the kind of woman you is. You ain't

the kind of woman for Youngblood and he ain't the kind of man for you. You need a more mature...responsible man.

You just wait awhile. You'll see that I'm right. I done seen many a young girl wake up when it's too late. Don't you be like that. You go on and find yourself a man that know how to treat you. (*TURNBO sits in a chair at the table.*) You don't need nobody run the streets all hours of the day and night. You ain't that kind of woman.

JITNEY

Code: 70-07  
Time: 3:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Murder  
Type 3: Revenge

Act 1; Scene 3

TURNBO

See, Becker's boy...Clarence is his name but everybody call him Booster... See now, Booster he liked that science. You know the science fair that they have over at the Buhel Planetarium every year where they have all them science experiments, where they make the water run uphill and things like that? Booster won first place three years in a row. He the only one who ever did that. I can't even count how many times he had his picture in the paper. They let him in to the University of Pittsburgh. You know back then they didn't have too many colored out there, but they was trying to catch up to the Russians and they didn't care if he was colored or not. Gave him a scholarship and everything. Becker was just as proud as he could be. Him and Booster was always close. Becker used to take him hunting down around Wheeling, West Virginia. They go hunting and fishing. Becker didn't have but the one boy. After he was born the doctor told his wife that if she had another one it was liable to kill her. Say she was lucky to have the one. Anyway, Booster goes out to Pitt there and he meets this old white gal. Young gal...about eighteen she was. Of course Booster wasn't about nineteen himself. Now her old man was some kind of big shot down there at Gulf Oil. Had a lot of money and had done bought the gal a car for her birthday. Booster and that gal...they just go everywhere together. She ride him around like she was his chauffeur. Of course, she let him drive it too. I believe he drove it more than she did. That gal was crazy about Booster, and they was just sneaking around and sneaking around, you know. She didn't want her daddy to know she was fooling around with no colored boy. Well, one day see her father was up here in the neighborhood looking for one of them whores. He find one and she tell him to drive up the dead end street there by the school, so she can turn the trick in the car. Don't you know they pulled right up in back of this gal's car where her and Booster done went to fool around! Her



father recognizes the car and he goes over and looks inside and there's Booster just banging the hell out of his daughter! Well, that cracker went crazy. He just couldn't stand the sight of Booster screwing that gal and went to yanking open the car door. Booster didn't know who he was. All he knew was some crazy white man done opened the door and was screaming his head off. He proceeded to beat the man half to death. To get to the short of it...the police come and the gal said that she was driving downtown on her way home from a movie, and when she stopped for a red light, Booster jumped into her car and made her drive up there on the dead end street...where he raped her. They arrested Booster and Becker got him out on bail cause he knew the gal was lying. The first day he was out...the first day!...he went over to that gal's house and shot her dead right on the front porch.

JITNEY

Code: 70-08  
Time: 3:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Value of Life  
Type 3: Family

Act 1; Scene 4

BOOSTER

Yeah Pop, you taught me a lot of things. And a lot of things I had to learn on my own. Like that time Mr. Rand came to the house to collect the rent when we was two months behind. I don't remember what year it was. I just know it was Winter. Grandma Ada had just died and you got behind in the rent 'cause you had to help pay for her funeral.

I don't know if you knew it, Pop, but you were a big man. Everywhere you went people treated you like a big man. You used to take me to the barbershop with you. You'd walk in there and fill up the whole place. Everybody would stop cussing because Jim Becker had walked in. I would just look at you and wonder how you could be that big. I wanted to be like that. I would go to school and try to make myself feel big. But I never could. I told myself that's okay...when I get grown I'm gonna be big like that. Walk into the barbershop and have everybody stop and look at me.

That day when Mr. Rand came to the house it was snowing. You came out on the porch and he started shouting and cussing and threatening to put us out in the street where we belonged.

I was waiting for you to tell him to shut up...to get off your porch. But you just looked at him and promised you would have the money next month. Mama came to the door and Mr. Rand kept shouting and cussing. I looked at mama...she was trying to get me to go in the house...and I looked at you...and you had got smaller. The longer he shouted the smaller you got. When we went back to the barbershop you didn't seem so big no more. You was the same size as everybody else. You

was just another man in the barbershop. That's when I told myself if I ever got big I wouldn't let nothing make me small.

Then when I met Susan McKnight and found out her daddy was the Vice-president of Gulf Oil...that's when I got big. That made me a big man. I felt like I was somebody. I felt like I could walk in the barbershop and fill it up the way you did. Then when she told that lie on me that's when I woke up. That's when I realized that I wasn't big from the inside. I wasn't big on my own. When she told that lie it made me small. I wanted to do something that said I wasn't just another nigger... that I was Clarence Becker. I wanted to make them remember my name. And I thought about you standing there and getting small and Mr. Rand shouting and Susan McKnight shouting out that lie and I realized it was my chance to make the Beckers big again...my chance to show what I had learned on my own. I thought you would understand. I thought you would be proud of me.

JITNEY

Code: 70-09  
Time: 2:10  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Relationships  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 1

SHEALY

Naw she wasn't the one. I thought she was but then I believe Rosie done put a curse on me. She don't want me to have no other woman. But then she didn't want me. I told her baby, just tell me what kind of biscuits you want to make. I'm like the mill-man I can grind it up any way you want. She knew I was telling the truth too. She couldn't say nothing about that. She say you a poor man. What I need with a poor man? I told her say if I make a hundred I'll give you ninety-nine. She didn't trust me on that one but I went down to the crap game, I hit six quick licks, left with a hundred and sixty-three dollars. I went on back up there. She let me in. I lay a hundred dollars down on the table and told her, "Now, if I can just get one of them back I'd be satisfied." She reached down and handed me a dollar and I went on in the room and went to bed. Got up and she had my breakfast on the table. It wasn't soon long that ninety-nine dollars ran out and next thing I knew she had barred the door. I went on and left but I never could get her off my mind. I said I was gonna find me another woman. But every time I get hold to one... time I lay down with them... I see her face. I told myself the first time I lay down with a woman and don't see her face then that be the one I'm gonna marry. That be my little test. Now with that old yellow gal used to work down at Pope's I seen Rosie's face... but it was blurry. Like a cloud of something come over it. I say, "I got to try this again. Maybe next time I won't see nothing." She told me she didn't want to see me no more. She told me come back same time tomorrow and if she changed her mind she'd leave the key in the mailbox. I went up there and there was one man in the house and two others sitting on the doorstep. I don't know who had the key.

JITNEY

Code: 70-10  
Time: 2:10  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Relationships  
Type 3: Love

Act 2; Scene 1

YOUNGBLOOD

No, Rena...people believe what they want to believe...what they set up in their mind to believe. I know what it looked like when I was gone all the time and not bringing home any money. But you could have noticed that I was tired...you could have said, “ Darnell ain’t talking too much ‘cause he’s tired.” You could have noticed that I didn’t act like somebody running the streets...that I didn’t come home smelling like alcohol and perfume...that I didn’t dress like somebody running the streets. If you had thought it all the way through, you could have noticed how excited I was when I got the UPS job...how I asked you if I could take it...you would have noticed how I was planning things...that I wasn’t sitting around drinking beer and playing cards...how I would get up early on Sunday and go out to the airport to try to make a few extra dollars before the jitney station opened. But you ain’t seen all that. You ain’t seen the new Darnell. You still working off your memory. But the past is over and done with. I’m thinking about the future. You not the only one who thinks about Jesse. That’s why I’m trying to do something different. That’s why I’m trying to buy a house. Maybe I should have told you about the house. Maybe I did do it wrong. But I done it. I tried to show you I loved you but what I get for it?

But I know when you place your hand in mine you got to say, "Darnell’s not gonna let me down...he loves me." I don't want to make no more mistakes in life. I don't want to do nothing to mess this up. I don't want to get old and be talking about I had me this little old gal one time...but I ain’t seen her in twenty-two years.

I want you baby...I told you that. You already my pride. I want you to be my joy.  
Cause there ain't but one thing I done wrong...stay away from you one night too  
long.

## KING HEDLEY II

### Synopsis

*King Hedley II* takes place in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1985. In the backyard of a neighborhood now completely blasted by decay and urban blight, King Hedley II, with a warrior spirit but no education or prospects, daydreams with his friend Mister about opening a Kung Fu video rental store using the money they make selling stolen refrigerators. Aunt Ester has died, the Hill District is without commercial or spiritual resources, and King's dreams are doomed to a violent end in Wilson's darkest and most symbolic play.

### Characters

**KING HEDLEY II:** thirty-six years old, he is the spiritual son of King Hedley from *Seven Guitars*. He is engaged in life and death struggles with a scar to prove it. The slash down the left side of his face has left him with a glass eye. He looks like a bogeyman at the crossroads. He spent seven years in prison and strives to live by his own moral code.

**RUBY:** King's mother and blues singer, sixty-one.

**TONYA:** King's girlfriend who is pregnant and wants to have an abortion because she does not want to bring a baby into this corrupt, crazy world, thirty-five.

**ELMORE:** Sixty-six years old and an old hustler who has been carrying a torch for Ruby for more than 30 years. He exudes an air of elegance and confidence born of his many years wrestling with life. He knows the secret of King's true patrimony.

**STOOL PIGEON:** A sixty-five year old harmonica player also seen in *Seven Guitars*. He is now a newspaper-collecting history carrier.

KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-01  
Time: 1:30  
Type 1: Comedic  
Type 2: Commerce  
Type 3: Money

Act 1; Scene 3

KING HEDLEY II

Tonya's pictures. They ain't got the pictures. Told me they can't find them and they ain't got no record of them. I showed him the receipt and he told me that didn't count. I started to grab him by his throat. How in the hell the receipt not gonna count? That's like money. I told his dumb ass to get the manager. The manager come talking about their system. Say it's based on phone numbers. I told him I didn't care about his system. A receipt is a receipt all over the world. You can't have no system where a receipt don't count. You can't just go making up the rules. I don't care if you Sears and Roebuck, Kmart or anybody else. You can't make up no rule where a receipt don't count. I tried to tell him this politely like Mama Louise taught me. He wasn't listening. He trying to talk while I'm talking. I told him, "Motherfucker, shut up and listen to me!" He threatened to call the police. I told him he better call the United States Marines too. The police come and threatened to arrest me. They tried to take my receipt. I told them they have to kill me first. Without that receipt I'm going to jail. They gonna charge me with fraud, forgery, extortion, grand theft, larceny, second degree robbery and anything else they can think of. They took the number off the receipt and said they would track the pictures down.

They so busy talking about their system they got to prove to me the receipt don't count. See, they don't know but they gonna give me my goddamn pictures, I don't bother nobody. But I can turn that around real quick.



KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-02  
Time: 2:10  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Employment/Unemployment  
Type 3: Wealth

Act 1; Scene 3

KING HEDLEY II

My fifth grade teacher told me I was gonna make a good janitor. Say she can tell that by how good I erased the blackboards. Had me believing it. I come home and told mama Louise I wanted to be a janitor. She told me I could be anything I wanted. I say, "Okay, I'll be a janitor." I thought that was what I was supposed to be. I didn't know no better. That was the first job I got. Cleaning up that bar used to be down on Wylie. Got one job the man told me he was gonna shoot me if he caught me stealing anything. I ain't worked for him ten minutes. I quit right there. He calling me a thief before I start. Neesi told me I shouldn't have quit. But I'm a man. I don't bother nobody. And I know right from wrong. I know what's right for me. That's where me and the rest of the people part ways. Tonya ask me say, "When we gonna move?" She want a decent house. One the plaster ain't falling off the walls. I say, "Okay but I got to wait." What I'm waiting on? I don't know. I'm just waiting. I told myself I'm waiting for things to change. That mean I'm gonna be living here forever. Tonya deserve better than that. I go for a job and they say, "What can you do." I say, "I can do anything. If you give me the tanks and the airplanes I can go out there and win any war that's out there."

I can dance all night if the music's right. Ain't nothing I can't do. I could build a railroad if I had the steel and a gang of men to drive the spikes. I ain't limited to nothing. I can go down there and do Mellon's job. I know how to count money. I don't loan money to everybody who ask me. I know how to do business. I'm talking about mayor ... governor, I can do it all. I ain't got no limits. I know right from wrong. I know which way the wind blow too. It don't blow my way.

KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-03  
Time: 1:45  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Judicial Process  
Type 3: Societal Order

Act 1; Scene 3

KING HEDLEY II

I ain't sorry for nothing I done. And ain't gonna be sorry. I'm gonna see to that. 'Cause I'm gonna do the right thing. Always. It ain't in me to do nothing else. We might disagree about what that is. But I know what is right for me. As long as I draw a breath in my body I'm gonna do the right thing for me. What I got to be sorry for? People say, "Ain't you sorry you killed Pernell?" I ain't sorry I killed Pernell. The nigger deserve to die. He cut my face. I told the judge, "Not Guilty." They thought I was joking. I say, "The motherfucker cut me! How can I be wrong for killing him?" That's common sense. I don't care what the law say. The law don't understand this. It must not. They wanna take and lock me up. Where's the understanding? If a burglar break in a white man's house to steal his TV and the white man shoot him they don't say he wrong. The law understand that. They pat him on the back and tell him to go on home.

You see what I'm saying? The jury come back and say, "Guilty." They asked them one by one. They all said, "Guilty." Had nine white men and three white women. They all said, "Guilty." They wouldn't look at me. I told them to look at me. Look at that scar.

I got closer to where they could see my scar. The judge like to had a fit. They had six deputies come at me from all sides. They said I tried to attack the jury. I was just trying to get closer so they could see my face. They tried to run out the door. They took and put me in solitary confinement. Said I was unruly.

KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-04  
Time: 3:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Murder  
Type 3: Revenge

Act 2; Scene 2

KING HEDLEY II

. . . Pernell made me kill him. Pernell called me “champ”. I told him my name's King. He say, “Yeah, champ.” I go on. I don't say nothing. I told myself, “He don't know.” He don't know my daddy killed a man for calling him out of his name. He don't know he fucking with King Hedley II. I got the atomic bomb as far as he's concerned. And I got to use it. They say God looks after fools and drunks. I used to think that was true. But seeing as how he was both . . . I don't know anymore. He called me “champ” and I didn't say nothing. I put him on probation. Told myself he don't know but I'm gonna give him a chance to find out. If he find out and come and tell me he's sorry then I'll let him live. I'm gonna fuck him up. I'm gonna bust both his kneecaps. But I'm gonna let him live.

Saturday. I say, “I want to have some mashed potatoes.” I told Neesi, say, “You get the milk and butter and I'll get the potatoes.” I went right up there to Hester's on Wylie. I got halfway down there and I seen Pernell. First thing I tell myself is, “I ain't gonna be nobody's champ today.” I fix that hard in my head and I try to walk past him. I didn't want to ignore him so I say, “How you doing, Pernell?” No sooner than the words got out my mouth then I felt something hot on my face. A hot flash and then something warm and wet. This nigger done cut me! He hit me with that razor and I froze. I didn't know what happened. It was like somebody turned on a light and it seem like everything stood still and I could see him smiling. Then he ran. I didn't know which way he ran. I was still blinded by that light. It took the doctor four hours and a hundred and twelve stitches to sew me up. I say, “That's alright, the King is still here.” But I figure that scar got to mean something. I can't take it off. It's part of me now. As long as Pernell was still walking around it wasn't nothing but a scar. I had to give it some meaning.

I told myself, "It's me or him." even though I knew that was a lie. I saw his funeral. I heard the preacher. I saw the undertaker. I saw the gravediggers. I saw the flowers. And then I see his woman. That's the hardest part. It was hard but I told myself she got to suffer. She got to play the widow. She got to cry the tears.

About two weeks later I saw Pernell going into Irv's bar. He went straight back to the phone booth. I don't know who he was calling but that was the last call he made. I saw my scar in the window of the phone booth. I tapped on the glass. He turned and looked and froze right there. The first bullet hit him in the mouth. I don't know where the other fourteen went. The only regret is I didn't get away. I didn't get away with murder that time. But I done got smarter. The next one's gonna be self-defense. The next one ain't gonna cost me nothing.

KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-05  
Time: 2:55  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Value of Life  
Type 3: Progeny

Act 2; Scene 3

KING HEDLEY II

Tonya. Look here a minute. I seen Pernell's grave. I took me by surprise. He got a marker. It say, "Pernell Sims, 1949-1974. Father. Son. Brother." I didn't even know Pernell had no kids.

His daddy laying out in the cemetery. That's like me and my daddy. I wasn't but three years old when he died. I told myself Pernell fucked up. If he hadn't called me "champ," he'd still be alive. But then I had something to do with that too. I didn't expect to see his grave. I never thought about where Pernell was buried. I looked at it a long time. I tried to walk away but I couldn't. I found myself wondering what color his casket was. They say your hair keep growing. I wonder if that's true.

I tried to see Pernell laying up there with his old simple self.

Tonya. Look at that. I ain't never looked at no flower before. I ain't never tried to grow none. I was coming out the drugstore and they had them seeds on the counter. I say, "I'm gonna try this. Grow Tonya some flowers. I ain't got nothing to lose but a dollar. I'll pay a dollar to see how it turn out." Ruby told me they wasn't gonna grow. Made me feel like I should have left them there at the drugstore. But then they grew. Elmore stepped on them and they still growing. That's what made me think of Pernell. Pernell stepped on me and I pulled his life out by the root. What does that make me? It don't make me a big man. Most people see me coming and they go the other way. They wave from across the street. People look at their hands funny after they shake my hand. They try to pretend they don't see my scar when that's all they looking at. I used to think

Pernell did that to me. But I did it to myself. Pernell put that scar on my face, but I put the bigger mark on myself. That's why I need this baby, not 'cause I took something out the world but because I wanna put something in it. Let everybody know I was here. You got King Hedley II and then you got King Hedley III. Got rocky dirt. Got glass and bottles. But it still deserve to live. Even if you do have to call the undertaker. Even if somebody come along and pull it out by the root. It still deserve to live. It still deserve that chance. I'm here and I ain't going nowhere. I need to have that baby. Do you understand?

KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-06  
Time: 2:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Progeny  
Type 3: Love

Act 1; Scene 2

RUBY

I done tried everything I know. King don't believe I love him. It's a mother's love. It don't never go away. I love me but I love King more. Sometimes I might not love me but there don't never come a time I don't love him. He don't understand that.

King don't know he lucky to be here. I didn't want to have no baby. Seem to me like I got off to a bad start. I wanted to have an abortion. Somebody sent me up there to see Aunt Ester. I thought she did abortions. It didn't take me long to find out I was in the wrong place. She was sitting in a room with a red curtain. A little old woman wearing a stocking cap. I can't say if she had any teeth or not. She was just sitting there. Told me to come closer where she could put her hands on my head. I got real peaceful. Seem like all my problems went away. She told me man can plant the seed but only God can make it grow. Told me God was a good judge. I told her that's what scared me. She just laughed and told me, "God has three hands. Two for that baby and one for the rest of us." That's just the way she said it. "God got three hands. Two for that baby and one for the rest of us. You got your time coming." I never will forget that. I used to look at King and try and figure it out. But I ain't seen nothing to make her say that. I thought maybe she was just telling me that but she ain't supposed to lie about nothing like that. I just ain't never seen nothing that would make him that special. That's what I'm telling you about that baby you carrying. You never know what God have planned. You can't all the time see it. That's what Louise used to tell me. You can't all the time see it but God can see it good.

Life's got its own rhythm. It don't always go along with your rhythm. It don't always be what you think its gonna be.

*(Starts to exit into the house.)* That's all life is ...trying to match up them two rhythms. You ever match them up and you won't have to worry about nothing.



KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-07  
Time: 3:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Women's Status  
Type 3: Love Sexuality

Act 2; Scene 3

RUBY

Walter Kelly was a big man with jet black hair. Brown-skinned man played a trumpet and I sang in his band for awhile. He tried to make love to me but I didn't want no part of him 'cause he was too good-looking and he already had a gang of women. Everybody expected 'cause I sang in his band that he could have do with me like he wanted. He thought that at one time himself but I got him straight on that. We was sitting in his car. He had a car with a top you could put down. We was having a drink and just laughing and singing and fooling around when he put his hand under my dress. I had men put their hand under my dress before. They want to see what you got. They like to see how it fit in their hand. They say they can tell what kind of woman you is. Walter Kelly got his hand all the way up under my dress and he touched me there. I told him to stop. He just laughed. We was drinking from a pint bottle. I took the bottle and broke it on the car handle. I cut my hand pretty bad but I put the glass up to his throat. Blood was running all down my hand and everywhere. I told him to lick it. I told him I wanted him to taste my blood 'cause if he didn't move his hand from under my dress I was gonna taste his. I rubbed my hand all over his face. There was blood everywhere. My hand looked like it wasn't gonna stop bleeding. He moved his hand and I got out of the car. I found out later I was on my period and I got mad. I told myself I wished I had cut him 'cause there wasn't nobody's blood in the car but mine.

He never did mess with me no more. We became good friends. I stopped singing about two years after that night in the car. I just stopped for no reason. I did it to myself. Said I don't want to sing no more. It had done lost something. The melody or something I couldn't tell. I just know it stopped having any meaning for me. After I quit singing my hair turned gray. My hair turned gray and I didn't even

know it. I went upstairs to the bathroom and seen I had gray hair. Seem like I didn't have nothing to show for it. I said, "I'm gonna die and ain't nobody gonna miss me." I got dressed and said, "I'm going go find me a man...if nothing else he might miss me in the morning when I'm gone." We went to the Ellis hotel. He had a mustache and a big hat. It was that hat that made him look nice. He was a rough man. He turned me over his knee and spanked me. That was the first time anybody ever did that. He asked me did I like it. I told him I didn't know, he'd have to do it again. It had been a long time since anybody had touched me. It kinda felt good. Just to know I had been touched. We had a good time. Then it was time to go. I asked him if he was gonna miss me. He said he was, but I don't know if he was telling the truth. I went back and looked in the mirror and my hair was still gray. I told myself, "I'm still a woman. Gray hair and all."

KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-08  
Time: 2:05  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Death  
Type 3: Separation/ Loss

Act 2; Scene 4

RUBY

They showed me the body. They come up and got me. His sister had gone to Mobile and they asked me to come down and see if it was him. I didn't want to look. I grabbed hold my arm and just squeezed. He had his mouth open. That's what I always will remember. Wasn't much more there. He was shot five times in the head. I looked away and something told me to look back. One shot had hit him in the nose and it just wasn't there no more. I don't know where it was. It wasn't on his face. They asked me did I know him. I told them, naw, I didn't know him, I ain't had a chance to find out too much about him. I told them I knew who it was. "That's Leroy Slater. I was living with him at 131 Warren Street." They asked me to sign some papers. One man told me he was sorry. I left out of there and walked on back home. That was the saddest day.

I couldn't look at Elmore after I found out what he had done. Even though I loved him, it was a long time before I could look at him. I felt so sad. I said I was gonna quit living. I stole away and cried. I didn't want nobody to see me. I felt like I was about to lose my mind. I cried and then I dried my eyes. Then I'd cry again. Seem like the world had gone crazy. Then everything stopped. They carried him on out there and put him in the ground. Leroy Slater. A good man. I never will forget him. They say life have its own rhythm. I wish it didn't have none like that. That was the saddest I ever been.

KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-09  
Time: 2:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2:  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 2

TONYA

Why? Look at Natasha? I couldn't give her what she needed. Why I wanna go back and do it again? I ain't got nothing else to give. I can't give myself. How I'm gonna give her? I don't understand what to do...how to be a mother. You either love too much or don't love enough. Don't seem like there's no middle ground. I look up, she ten years old and I'm still trying to figure out life. Figure out what happened. Next thing I know she grown. Talking about she a woman. Just 'cause you can lay down and open your legs to a man don't make you a woman. I tried to tell her that. She's a baby! She don't know nothing about life. What she know? Who taught her? I'm trying to figure it out myself. Time I catch up, its moved on to something else. I got to watch her being thrown down a hole its gonna take her a lifetime to crawl out and I can't do nothing to help her. I got to stand by and watch her. Why I wanna go back through all that? I don't want to have a baby that younger than my grandchild. Who turned the world around like that? What sense that make? I'm thirty-five years old. Don't seem like there's nothing left. I'm through with babies. I ain't raising no more. Ain't raising no grandkids. I'm looking out for Tonya. I ain't raising no kid to have somebody shoot him. To have his friends shoot him. To have the police shoot him. Why I want to bring another life into this world that don't respect life? I don't want to raise no more babies when you got to fight to keep them alive.

KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-10  
Time: 2:40  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Despair  
Type 3: Motherhood

Act 1; Scene 2

TONYA

You take Little Buddy Will's mother up on Bryn Mawr Road. What she got? A heartache that don't never go away. She up there now sitting down in her living room. She got to sit down 'cause she can't stand up. She sitting down trying to figure it out. Trying to figure out what happened. One minute her house is full of life. The next minute it's full of death. She was waiting for him to come home and they bring her a corpse. Say, "Come down and make the identification. Is this your son?" Got a tag on his toe say "John Doe." They got to put a number on it. John Doe number four. She got the dinner on the table. Say, "Junior like fried chicken." She got some of that. Say, "Junior like string beans." She got some of that. She don't know Junior ain't eating no more. He got a pile of clothes she washing up. She don't know Junior don't need no more clothes. She look in the closet. Junior ain't got no suit. She got to go buy him a suit. He can't try it on. She got to guess the size. Somebody come up and tell her, "Miss So-and-So, your boy got shot." She know before they say it. Her knees start to get weak. She shaking her head. She don't want to hear it. Somebody call the police. They come and pick him up off the sidewalk. Dead nigger on Bryn Mawr Road. They got to quit playing cards and come and pick him up. They used to take pictures. They don't even take pictures no more. They pull him out of the freezer and she look at him. She don't want to look. They make her look. What to do now? The only thing to do is call the undertaker. The line is busy. She got to call back five times. The undertaker got so much business he don't know what to do. He losing sleep. He got to hire two more helpers to go with the two he already got. He don't even look at the bodies no more. He couldn't tell you what they look like. He only remember the problems he have with them. This one so big and fat if he fall off the table it take six men to pick him up. That one ain't got no cheek. That one

eyes won't stay closed. The other one been dead so long he got maggots coming out his nose. The family can't pay for that one. The coroner wants to see the other one again. That one's mother won't go home. The other one...

*(TONYA stops to catch her breath.)*

I ain't going through that. I ain't having this baby...and I ain't got to explain it to nobody.

KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-11  
Time: 2:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Money  
Type 3: Theft

Act 1; Scene 2

ELMORE

Money ain't nothing. I ain't had but a dollar sixty-seven cents when I met your mama. I had a hundred dollar Stetson hat, a pint of gin and a razor. That and a dollar sixty-seven cents. I'm walking around with a hundred-dollar hat and a dollar and sixty-seven cents in my pocket. I told myself, "Something wrong. This ain't working out right." The razor was my daddy's razor. He had cut him eleven niggers with that razor. Had good weight to it. Felt nice in your hands. Make you wanna cut somebody. The pint of gin I had just borrowed from the after hour joint. I stepped outside and saw her standing there. I asked her name and she told me. Told me say, "My name's Ruby." And somehow that fit her like she was a jewel or something precious. That's what I told her say, "You must be precious to somebody." She told me she ain't had nobody. We got to talking and one thing led to another. I took and spent a dollar sixty cents on her. Bought me a nickel cigar. Now I got a razor, a pint of gin, a hundred-dollar Stetson, a cigar, two cents and a woman. I was ready for whatever was out there. I woke up in the morning and felt lucky. Pawned my Stetson. Got seven dollars and went down the gambling joint. Playing dollar tonk. Left out of there broke. She back at my place waiting on me. I got to at least bring dinner. I looked up and seen a white fellow standing on the corner. He wasn't doing anything. Just standing there. Had on a gray hat. I told myself, "He got some money." I walked right on by. I didn't look at him. When I got even with him, I threw him up against the wall. I told myself I wasn't gonna use my razor unless I had to. He gave me his money and I started to run. I can't walk away. I'm running but I ain't running fast. I heard the bullet when it passed me. That's a sound I don't never want to hear again. You can hear the air move. When that bullet split the air it make a sound. If you don't know I will tell you. You can fly. I was running so fast my feet wasn't touching the

ground. Yet I moving through the air. What I'm doing? I'm flying. Ain't nothing else you can call it. I got away and told myself I was lucky. Then I knew why I had woke up feeling like that. When I got to where I could look in my hand to see what I had. I looked down and I had seven dollars. I told myself, hell, if I could get fifty cents I can go back and get my hat out of the pawn shop. Call it even. Start over again tomorrow.



KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-12  
Time: 2:10  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Murder  
Type 3: Redemption

Act 2; Scene 2

ELMORE

I'm sixty-six years old. I ain't never had to use my pistol but once. It was enough for most people just knowing I had it. It was enough for me. I had to cut me a couple of people but I ain't never had to use my pistol but once. I was playing a heavy game back then too. I was leaning so far I had to try to hold on. My game was like a knife jabbing at you. Sometime I thought I might go over the edge and hurt myself. I never did fall until that thing with Leroy. Until then I was one of the most righteous motherfuckers you could find. I had my game together and was playing it. I don't know how I ended up in that barbershop with a gun in my hand.

They give me them five years and I was laying in that jail with my face turned to the wall. I ain't never slept like that. But that Leroy thing just grabbed hold of me. I took away too much. I took away all his women. He ain't gonna have no more of them. I took away all his pleasure. I took away all his pain. And you need that, otherwise you living half of life.

I took that away. Everything he was gonna learn. I took away too much.

I laid with my face to the wall for two years before I could turn over. Ruby used to write me letters. Her and my mama. That's the only way I got to where I could turn my back to the wall. I was alright after that. I had made my peace with God but I found out later you got to make peace with yourself. See, when you pulled that trigger you done something. You done something more than most other people. You know more about life 'cause you done been to that part of it. Most people don't never get over on that side...that part of life. They live on the safe side. But see...you done been God. Death is something he do. God decide when somebody

ready. Not you. He decide when he want somebody. God don't like that, you thinking you him. He cut you loose.

KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-13  
Time: 2:35  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Gambling  
Type 3: Money

Act 2; Scene 4

ELMORE

It is about me! Who else it gonna be about? I got to live my life. I can't live it for nobody else. It is about me! How it gonna be otherwise? I look out from standing over here. You over there. We see different things. If we can't agree on what we see I got to find somebody who do. Leroy was looking to find anybody he can get. He hooked up with Ruby and that disposition got worse. He frown up every time he see me.

I ain't got no hard feeling about nothing. Ruby was grown and I didn't have no woman cause I didn't want one. All right now, there was a big crap game. The Mullin brothers...there was three of them but only two had showed up. They come on through with about ten thousand dollars. They figure they'd use that to clean everybody out and then move on to the next city. If you wasn't careful every nigger in Montgomery would be broke and it be hard times for the next three months.

The crap game had been going on for about four days and the Mullin brothers was losing. After three days they called Mobile and sent for the other brother. I had a little bit of money and a fellow named Ward Henry come and got me...asked me to come and go down to the crap game with him. He said, "Let's stop and get Leroy Slater." He say Leroy knew how to handle a gun and in case the Mullin brothers wanted to get nasty we could back one another up. I say all right, and we went on up there where he was staying with Ruby. Leroy say he ain't had no money. I told him I'd loan him fifty dollars but he'd have to split half his winnings with me. That's usually the way that work.

If you win you don't mind 'cause without that loan you wouldn't have nothing. This way you got something.

Leroy say okay and we go on down there. The Mullins brothers had a run of bad luck. It ain't had nothing to do with their skill as a gambler. It was just bad luck. We left out of there all three winners. Leroy had two hundred and fifty dollars. He took and give me a hundred. I didn't say nothing, I just kept my hand out. I asked him for my fifty dollars. He said it was in the hundred. I told him no. Win, lose or draw, he still owed me fifty dollars. I told him say if he didn't pay me the fifty dollars I was gonna tell everybody I know. We argued about it and he turned and walked off calling me a bunch of names.

KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-14  
Time: 2:15  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Value of Life  
Type 3: Money

Act 2; Scene 4

ELMORE

. . . You don't know. You need to shut up if you talking what you don't know. That ain't had nothing to do with my fifty dollars. I went around telling everybody Leroy owed me fifty dollars. I figured I'd shame him in to paying me. I told everybody I saw. All right. I was in this bar...Big Jake's Rendezvous Lounge. Leroy come and saw me. I thought he was gonna pay me my fifty dollars. I spoke to him and the next thing I knew he had pulled a gun on me telling me he was gonna kill me if I kept putting the bad mouth on him. Now I didn't see the pistol when he pulled it on me. It caught me by surprise. I wasn't looking for that. He shoved it in my face. Held it right between my eyes. I'm supposed to be a dead man 'cause he was supposed to pull the trigger. That's the first thing you learn about carrying a pistol. When you pull it, you better use it.

Now everybody looking at me trying to figure out what I'm gonna do. I went home and laid across the bed. I couldn't see where my life was going. I said I was gonna make a change. My life seem like it was empty. I got up and went and looked in the closet. I had seventeen suits and fourteen pair of shoes. Had eight or nine hats. I went and looked in the kitchen. I had a box of grits, a box of Morton's salt and two cans of pork and beans. I looked in my pocket. I had three hundred and forty-six dollars. I told my self that will get me anywhere Greyhound go. I took and pawned my hats. It was like putting them in storage. I was gonna come back for them. I went down to Greyhound and looked up on the board. I wanted to go to Cleveland but they had too many rough-house niggers down there. I didn't want all that, so I bought me a ticket to Cincinnati. That was on Tuesday. My rent was paid up till Friday and I figured I'd stay till then. I went around there and I ran into Ruby. I

almost didn't recognize her. She walking around with a new dress. New hairdo. New shoes. I asked her where Leroy was. She said he was at the barber shop. I went up there to tell him I was leaving and to forget about the fifty dollars. I figured I'd clean that up before I left. So there wouldn't be no hard feelings.

## KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-15  
Time: 3:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Murder  
Type 3: Value of Life

Act 2; Scene 4

ELMORE

When Leroy pulled that gun on me it gave me a headache. It wouldn't go away. Sometime it was all you could do to stand up. Gator was cutting his hair and Leroy was sitting in the chair laughing. I told myself something wrong. I'm walking around with a headache and he sitting up in the chair laughing. I started to walk away and Gator seen me and waved at me. That's when I walked in. I walked into the barbershop. Gator looked at me. He said, "Hey Elmore, what you got going?" Leroy was surprised to see me. My hand come out of my pocket. Gator told me later he thought I was gonna pay him some money I owed him. My hand come out with the gun. Gator took a step back. Leroy started to get out the chair. He was coming straight at me when I fired the gun. Gator said, "Damn, Elmore. Damn." The bullet hit him right smack in the middle of the forehead. That was the first bullet. I couldn't stop firing. Blood went everywhere. A piece of his skull bounced off the mirror and landed about ten feet away. I found myself wondering what that was. I didn't find out till later.

I didn't say anything, I just walked out. Got outside and said, "Now what? That's over. Now what?" The bottom had fallen out of everything. Everything I had ever done in my life seemed small. I stood there looking up and down the street trying to figure out which way to go. I started shaking. My whole body started shaking. I tried to stop it from shaking but I couldn't. I started crying. My whole body shaking and tears just running down my face. Somebody come up and asked me what had happened and if I was alright. I started walking home. I don't know what happened to the gun. They never did find it. I believe I must have dropped it when I was shaking. I got home and sat down. All of a sudden I got sleepy. I couldn't keep my eyes open. I fell asleep in the chair and the next thing I knew it was

morning of a brand-new day. I got up and started to cook my breakfast and it come up on me that something was wrong. The sun was coming through the kitchen window and it bounced off the handle of the frying pan, and that's what made me think something was wrong. I had seen that flash in the barbershop. When Leroy stood up he pulled out a gun as he was coming toward me. I stepped back and seen that flash and pulled the trigger. That's the first I remembered what had happened. I started crying again. I didn't know if it was a dream or not. I went and tried to find Gator but the barbershop was closed. I went up and saw Ruby. She say Leroy hadn't come home. She asked me what the matter was, and I told her I didn't know. I was on my way back up to see Gator when the police arrested me. I told them I didn't do nothing, I had just got out of bed. They told me they had witnesses say I killed Leroy Slater last night in the barbershop. I asked them where the body was. Show me the body. Told them I wanted proof I had killed somebody.



## KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-16  
Time: 1:45  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Murder  
Type 3: Value of Life

### Prologue

#### STOOL PIGEON

You stay out of the way of them dogs now. They gonna come for these bones. (The cat meows.) I'm gonna get you some fish heads tomorrow. I got to go down to the Strip District. Used to have the live fish market right down there on Center. Times ain't nothing like they used to be. Everything done got broke up. Pieces flying everywhere. Look like it's gonna be broke up some more before it get whole again. If it ever do. Ain't no telling. The half ain't never been told. The people don't know but God's gonna tell it. He gonna tell it in a loud voice. You ain't gonna be able to say you didn't hear it.

The people wandering all over the place. They got lost. They don't even know the story of how they got from tit to tat. Aunt Ester know. But the path to her house is all grown over with weeds, you can't hardly find the door no more. The people need to know that. The people need to know the story. See how they fit into it. See what part they play.

It's all been written down. We all have our hands in the soup and make the music play just so. But we can only make it play just so much. You can't play in the chord God ain't wrote. He wrote the beginning and the end. He let you play around in the middle but he got it all written down. It's his creation and he got more right in it than anybody else. He say, "Let him who have wisdom understand." Aunt Ester got the wisdom. She three hundred and sixty-six years old. She got the Book of Life. The story's been written. All that's left now is the playing out.

## KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-17

Time: 2:10

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Inspirational

Type 3: Metaphorical

Act 1; Scene 2

STOOL PIGEON

“And the people went out and made idols and graven images of gold and silver in blasphemy against the Lord, and the key was given unto the righteous that they might enter the kingdom for the scourge was upon the land and the wrath of the Lord God Jehovah was visited upon every house.” You see, the key belongs to the righteous. Aunt Ester gave you the key ring, that means you got to find the key.

Died with her hand stuck to her head. She ain’t seen nothing but grief. After three hundred and sixty-six years it ganged up on her. These niggers think it’s a joke. But they don’t know. The Spirit of God went out upon the waters and it commenced to rain. For forty days and forty nights. God already done that. He don’t have to do that no more. He say next time he gonna come with the fire. Say he will bring it down upon the earth with a vengeance. I had a preacher say that once. “God will bring down fire on the earth with a vengeance.” He say, “You know what that mean?” Everybody say, “Amen.” He kept asking so I figured he wanted to know. He say, “You know what that mean?” So I stood up and said, “Yeah, that mean He gonna fuck it up” They threw me out the church. For telling the truth!

God got a plan. That medicine can’t go against God. God do what He want to do. He don’t have to ask nobody nothing. Say, “I will call the righteous out of the land and raise up in thy midst a Messiah from amongst my people to redeem thy iniquities and He shall by the remission of blood make whole that which is torn asunder even though it be scattered to the four winds, for Great is My Name and ye shall know by these signs the coming of a new day.” See. He talking about the Messiah. He had to get Aunt Ester out of the way. God got a plan.

## KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-18

Time: 2:00

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Inspirational

Type 3: Metaphorical

Act 2; Scene 1

STOOL PIGEON

Hedley ain't had no money. He was waiting for the ghost of Buddy Bolden to bring him some. Say his father was gonna send it to him. After Floyd was killed Hedley showed me the money. Told me Buddy Bolden gave it to him. That's when I knew. I say, "I got to tell." What else could I do? Ruby called me "Stool Pigeon" and somehow or another it stuck. I'll tell anybody I'm a Truth Sayer. I think about Floyd sometimes but I know he in heaven. I saw him go up into heaven carried by angels dressed in black with black hats. Hedley saw them too. Him and Vera both. Time Foster laid his body in the ground, they opened the casket and snatched him straight up into the sky. I give that machete to you, and me and Hedley come full circle. That's yours. You can do with it what you want. If you find a way to wash that blood off you can go sit on top of the mountain. You be on top of the world. The Bible say, "Let him who knoweth duty redeem the house of his fathers from its iniquities against the Lord. And if he raise a cry and say he knoweth not the sins of his fathers then he knoweth not duty for even if the iniquities are great and his father's house be scattered to the numberless winds, if he shall gather it and raise it up then shall it stand even unto the end of time." Floyd was my friend. I give that to you and we can close the book on that chapter. I forgive. That's the Key to the mountain. God taught me how to do that. God can teach you a lot of things. He don't give you nothing you can't handle. God's a bad motherfucker!

KING HEDLEY II

Code: 80-19

Time: 1:45

Type 1: Dramatic

Type 2: Inspirational

Type 3: Conjuring

Act 2; Scene 2

Stool Pigeon

One of them kicked me in the head. Had to get six stitches. Right down there at Mercy Hospital. I had to wait while they sewed somebody else up. If it wasn't for the white man, what would I do? Nigger bust you up and the white man fix you up. If he wasn't there, what would I do? They kicked me in the side. It feel like it but the doctor say my ribs ain't broke. I'm gonna see if they put that in the paper. "Man Robbed of Sixty Three Dollars. Busted Head But Ribs Okay" I'm gonna see if they put that in there.

This my papers. What's left of them. What them kids gonna do now? They burned up their history. They ain't gonna know what happened. They ain't gonna know how they got from tit to tat. You got to know that. They ain't gonna know nothing. I ask myself, "Why they do that?" I have to tell myself the truth. I don't know. If somebody know and they tell me then I'll know. But the truth is I don't know. I can't figure it out. *(He takes some ashes out of the bag and sprinkles them on the cat's grave.)* "For whosoever believeth, then shall I cause him to be raised into Eternal Life and magnify the Glory of My Father, the Lord God who made the firmament. Then shall Death flee and hide his face in darkness. For My Father ruleth over all things in his creation." If she coming back that'll help her. All you need now is some blood. Blood is life. You sprinkle some blood on there and if she ain't used up her nine lives Aunt Ester's coming back.

## RADIO GOLF

### Synopsis

*Radio Golf*, August Wilson's last play, is also the last play chronologically in his famous Pittsburgh Cycle. In the play we find Harmond Wilks, a man who discovers both himself and the place that birthed him at a crossroads. On the verge of an almost-guaranteed win as a mayoral candidate, Wilks finds his identity shaken when his morals and ideals are questioned by those around him. Ultimately, he must recognize what the price of his success is and decide whether he is willing to pay it.

### Characters

**ELDER JOSEPH "OLD JOE" BARLOW:** Recently returned to the Hill District where he was born in 1918. Although ostensibly as harmless as he is homespun, his temperament belies a life checkered by run-ins with the law and a series of wives. He sees and calls things plainly, requires little and seeks only harmony.

**HARMOND WILKS:** Real-estate developer seeking mayoral candidacy. He grew up a privileged and responsible son of the Hill District and intends to bring the neighborhood back from urban blight through gentrification, while making a fortune in the process. He cares about the city of Pittsburgh, the neighborhood and its people, but is caught between what is politically expedient and what is morally and ethically just.

**ROOSEVELT HICKS:** Bank vice president and avid golfer, as well as Harmond's business partner and college roommate. Roosevelt is preoccupied with his financial status and getting green time. He values the end result of a transaction more than the practical or spiritual virtues of a job well done. Had he any time for self-reflection, he might describe himself favorably as a consummate materialist and conspicuous consumer.

**MAME WILKS:** Harmond's wife of more than twenty years and a professional public relations representative. She is focused on Harmond's success, as well as her own, and confident that she has the proper plan to achieve both. Firm, independent and ambitious, her love of and belief in her husband are tested by his struggle to stay focused and on message.

**STERLING JOHNSON:** Self-employed contractor and neighborhood handyman who robbed a bank thirty years ago. Sterling and Harmond attended the same parochial school as boys, but the economically disadvantaged Sterling chose in youthful recklessness to rob a bank rather than build one. Now an older, reformed pragmatist, Sterling finds pride in his work and in his independence.

## RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-01  
Time: 1:20  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Inspirational  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 3

OLD JOE

They supposed to have some Christians out at the Mission but they forgot how to call on God. I seen the people call God down. They don't do that too much no more. But I seen it happen. Over on the Northside. The fourteenth day of November 1937. The people called him down and God came in a blaze of Glory. I seen him. Had a pot of water say he could make it boil without fire. The people wanna bet against God. You can't bet against God and win. The people put up their money. God walked over and stuck his hand in the pot and stirred it around. Told one of the fellows, "Now you do it." Man walked over and tried to stick his hand in the pot and had to draw it back. The pot was boiling! If you had thrown some beans in there you could have cooked your supper. He asked the people if they wondered how he could do that. He said, "I am He." He didn't say he was God. He just say, "I am He." But who else could he have been. Made a pot boil without fire. Can you do it? If you can't do it you ain't got nothing to say.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-02  
Time: 2:15  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Patriotism  
Type 3: War

Act 1; Scene 4

OLD JOE

That's a nice pin you got there. That look like the flag.

Nice colors. The Red White and Blue. We had a flag during the war. Company B Fourth Battalion. Fellow named Joe Mott carried the flag. He got shot in the head on the second of November 1942. He was betting against it but he lost.

Lots of men died under that flag. That American flag was everywhere. Joe Mott carried it into battle but it was everywhere. In the mess hall. In the dance hall. We had a great big mess hall and they would bring the women in from the town and we'd have a great big old dance. You look up and there would be that flag hanging behind the bandstand. That flag was everywhere. You saw it in the morning when you woke up and you saw it at night before you went to bed. Sometimes you saw it in your sleep. When the time come and I saw Joe Mott fall with that flag...shot right through the head... bullet went in one end and come out the other...I don't know where it went after that. When I saw him fall I said, "No, I ain't gonna let you get away with nothing like that." That's what I said when I picked up that flag. This the flag on *this* side of the battle. That's what side I'm on. Joe Mott ain't died for nothing. If his life don't mean nothing then my life don't mean nothing. I had sense enough to see that. A lot of people can't see that. I can't let him die and let the flag lay there. I was the closest one to it. I didn't even think about it. I just picked it up. I picked it up and carried it right up to the day I got discharged. December 4, 1945. I got out the army and went and saw Joe Mott's mother. She live down in Georgia. I went down there and saw her. Walking down the street a white fellow stopped me. Reached up and tore my flag off my coat. Told me I ain't had no right to walk around with an American flag. I hope they let you keep yours.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-03  
Time: 1:20  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Relationships  
Type 3: Love

Act 1; Scene 3

HARMOND WILKS

You striking out in the dark and there's nobody there but yourself. You're all alone. I used to walk around in the dark complaining 'cause I couldn't find a woman. I didn't understand. I had everything a woman could want. I had money, I had confidence, I was doing something with my life. They all used to tell me I was too intense. Too serious. That I needed to enjoy life.

Shouldn't worry so much about the things I couldn't change. Then I met Mame. The first time I saw Mame it was raining. I thought she was gonna melt. The rain look like it hurt her. Like the two wasn't supposed to go together. You couldn't mix them up. That's what made her stand out. She had a frown on her face and the rain was beating on her. She hurt from the injustice of it. That's what made me like her. She could be strong and soft at the same time. I said I like that. I wished I had an umbrella but I didn't. I went and stood and blocked the rain. I told her she looked too pretty to be getting all wet. That's how we got talking. She called the rain some names I ain't gonna repeat.



## RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-04  
Time: 1:10  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Family  
Type 3: Relationships

Act 2; Scene 2

HARMOND WILKS

Not many speak well of my father. He was a hard businessman. You shook his hand on a deal knowing he always got the better end of it. But he was an honest man. My father talked a lot about family. He said that family was the most important thing. Yet when my brother got killed in Vietnam he didn't go to his funeral. He planned for Raymond and me to go to Cornell, then take over Wilks Realty. But Raymond didn't follow the plan. He wanted to go to Grambling and play football. My father said he wouldn't pay for it. Raymond joined the Army to pay for it himself. I followed the plan and went to Cornell. They sent Raymond to Vietnam and he got killed. My father turned blood into vinegar. He didn't even go to Raymond's funeral. I could never look at my father the same after that. Even though he betrayed those values I still clung to them. But what I can't figure out is why my family was paying the taxes on your house.

## RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-05  
Time: 2:00  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Race

Act 2; Scene 4

HARMOND WILKS

No. Common sense says that ain't right. We see it different. No matter what you always on the edge. If you go to the center you look up and find everything done shifted and the center is now the edge. The rules change every day. You got to change with them. After awhile the edge starts to get worn. You don't notice it at first but you're fraying with it. Oh, no, look... We got a black mayor. We got a black CEO. The head of our department is black. We couldn't possibly be prejudiced. Got two hundred and fourteen people work in the department and two blacks but we couldn't possibly be race-conscious. Look, we even got a black football coach. You guys can sing. You can run fast. Boy, I love Nat King Cole. I love Michael Jordan. I just love him. We got a black guy works in management. Twenty-four million blacks living in poverty but it's their fault. Look, we got a black astronaut. I just love Oprah. How do you guys dance like that? After awhile that center starts to give. They keep making up the rules as you go along. They keep changing the maps. Then you realize you're never going to get to that center. It's all a house of cards. Everything resting on a slim edge. Looking back you can see it all. Wasn't nothing solid about it. Everything was an *if* and a *when* and a *maybe*. Of course . . .but not really. Yes . . .but not really. I don't want to live my life like that, Roosevelt.

## RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-06  
Time: 1:40  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Sports  
Type 3: Freedom

Act 1; Scene 1

ROOSEVELT HICKS

I signed up two more kids last week. That makes eighteen. I just want these kids to know what it feels like to hit a golf ball. I hit my first golf ball I asked myself where have I been? How'd I miss this? I couldn't believe it. I felt free. Truly free. For the first time. I watched the ball soar down the driving range. I didn't think it could go so high. It just kept going higher and higher. I felt something lift off of me. Some weight I was carrying around and didn't know it. I felt like the world was open to me. Everything and everybody. I never did feel exactly like that anymore. I must have hit a hundred golf balls trying to get that feeling. But that first time was worth everything. I felt like I had my dick in my hand and was waving it around like a club. "I'm a man! Anybody want some of this come and get it!" That was the best feeling of my life.

That's why I keep my golf clubs in the trunk of my car just in case I drive by a golf course. I keep looking for that feeling. That's what I want these kids to have. That'll give them a chance at life. I wish somebody had come along and taught me how to play golf when I was ten. That'll set you on a path to life where everything is open to you. You don't have to hide and crawl under a rock just 'cause you black. Feel like you don't belong in the world.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-07  
Time: 2:00  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Crime  
Type 3: Judicial Process

Act 2; Scene 3

ROOSEVELT HICKS

Mr. Barlow? Let me tell you about that old crazy motherfucker. (*Rummages about his desk until he finds the set of papers.*) Here's your Mr. Barlow. I had Sergeant Griffin fax me this.

(*Roosevelt scans and reads from the rap sheet excerpts that strike his eye:*)

Fraud. Hijacking. Grand theft. Assault. Loitering. Drunkenness. Disturbing the peace. Vagrancy. He has a record go all the way back to 1937. Stole a crate of chickens in 1938. Burglary. First-degree assault. Born 1918. Highest grade completed: fourth. Married. Divorced. Married. Divorced. Defendant says he is the father of eight children, ages six to eighteen. This was in 1942. Probably didn't take care of any of them. He too busy stealing. Spent eight months on the county farm, 1939. Discharged from Army in 1945. Two years for assault of a police officer, 1948. Three years Western State Penitentiary for hijacking 1952. Thirty days loitering, 1957. Sixty days vagrancy, 1958. Spent four months in Mayview State Hospital. Sent for ninety-day observation. Was kept an additional thirty days for further observation. It wouldn't have taken me but thirty minutes to tell he's not all there. Defendant reports his address as 1839 Wylie. Was caught breaking and entering. Defendant claims to have lost key to said residence. Here you go! This what I'm talking about. This is how crazy that nigger is. Defendant claims to be a member of a lost tribe said to have migrated from the Arabian peninsula five hundred B.C. Defendant states he wants to bring charges against the United States Government for harboring kidnappers. Claims to have journeyed to a City of Bones sunken in the Atlantic Ocean. See? I told you. You can't get any crazier than that.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-08  
Time: 1:45  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Commerce

Act 2; Scene 4

ROOSEVELT HICKS

Each one crazier than the next. I always told myself niggers could be doing a little better than they was doing. I thought it was because they was lazy but I see now these niggers done let the white man drive them crazy. Now you take this man. He didn't grow up. He still playing cowboys and Indians. He hasn't stopped to think about how he's going to get that paint off of his face. Now why he do that? Why is he walking around with a can of paint? We haven't got to that part yet. That's the part which proves the equation. Here's a man who's painting a house that is going to be torn down. Now you think about that a minute. They are going to tear down the house and he declares war on me. He doesn't have enough sense to know who the enemy is. I'm not the enemy. The enemy is right in his mirror. I don't understand. There isn't much I understand anymore. I don't understand you. I stood by and watched you commit suicide. For what? A raggedy-ass house. I don't understand. And you don't have nothing to show for it. The judge threw out the injunction. He ordered the demolition. The bulldozers are up there now.

The judge dismissed the temporary injunction and ordered the demolition.

Bulldozers start at 10:15.

Harmond, did you really think the judge was going to let that raggedy-ass house stand in the way of a multimillion-dollar redevelopment project that's spearheaded by the city? Common sense would tell you otherwise.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-09  
Time: 1:40  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Women's Status/Identity  
Type 3: Relationships

Act 2; Scene 4

MAME WILKS

I got a call this morning from the governor's office. They cancelled my next interview and said they didn't want to reschedule any further interviews with me at this time.

You jumped but I'm falling too. I'm the wife of Harmond Wilks. That's all the governor sees. All any of the other board members see. What all our friends see. I tied myself so tight to you that there is no me. I don't know if I can carry this any further.

I have a center too. What happens when that caves in? I have questions too. You're acting like a kid who because things don't go his way takes his ball and goes home. That's what your problem is. You've always been the kid who had the ball. You're the one with the glove and the bat. You had the bike when nobody else had one. All your life you always had everything go your way.

I'm still standing here, Harmond. I still love you. But this is all you now. Your campaign, that old house, the Hill... You're on your own with all that. I can't live my life for you. And you can't live yours for me. But I'm still standing here.

*(Harmond takes Mame up in his arms for a long embrace. His cell phone begins to ring.)*

See you tonight.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-10  
Time: 2:15  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Men's Status/Identity  
Type 3: Employment/Unemployment

Act 1; Scene 4

STERLING JOHNSON

Naw...you don't understand. I'm my own union. I got my own everything. Except my own bank. But I got my own truck. I got my own tools. I got my own rules and I got my own union. I don't play no games. I have to have my own. That's the only way I got anything. I've been going through the back door all my life. See, people get confused about me. They did that ever since we was in school. But I know how to row the boat. I been on the water a long time. I know what it takes to plug the holes. I ain't dumb. Even though some people think I am. That give me an advantage. I found that out when I was in the orphanage. Mr. Redwood taught me that. He told me, "You ain't dumb, you just faster than everybody else." I was so fast it made me look slow. I was waiting for them to catch up... that made it look like I was standing around doing nothing. They kept me behind in the fourth grade 'cause I wouldn't add twelve and twelve. I thought it was stupid. Everybody know there's twelve to a dozen and twenty-four to two dozens. I don't care if it's donuts or oranges. They handed me the test and I turned it in blank. If you had seventeen dollars and you bought a parrot for twelve dollars how many dollars would you have left? Who the hell gonna spend twelve dollars on a parrot? What you gonna do with it? Do you know how many chickens you can buy for twelve dollars? They thought I didn't know the answer. Every time somebody come to adopt me they say, "Well, Sterling's a little slow." That stuck with me. I started to believe it myself. Maybe they knew something I didn't know. That's when Mr. Redwood told me, "You ain't dumb. You just faster than everybody else." I've been going in the back doors all my life 'cause they don't never let me in the front.

RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-11  
Time: 1:40  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Value of Life  
Type 3: Inspirational

Act 2; Scene 1

STERLING JOHNSON

“Come one, come all. Paint Party, 1839 Wylie Avenue. Thursday, ten A.M. Music, dancing, refreshments.” Put that up. I organized this. Let’s see you tear down the house now. I know that house. That’s Aunt Ester’s house. You should go up there. I bet you ain’t even been inside. Used to be a line to her door every Tuesday. I went up there to see Aunt Ester once. Had to go up to the red door three different times before she see me. She was sitting in this room. You had to go through some curtains into this room and she was just sitting there. Had this peacefulness about her. Aunt Ester told me I got good understanding. She say that before I could say anything to her. She just looked at me and said that. I talked to her a long while. Told her my whole life story. I asked her how old she was. She say she was three hundred and forty-nine years old. That was twenty-nine years ago. I was sorry to hear that she died. I went up to see Aunt Ester cause I was feeling sorry for myself for being an orphan and I was walking around carrying that. She told me set it down. “Make better what you have and you have best.” Told me if I wanted to carry something carry some tools. I’ve been carrying tools ever since and I’ve been at peace with myself. You should go up there.



RADIO GOLF

Code: 90-12  
Time: 2:20  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Race

Act 2; Scene 4

STERLING JOHNSON

You got too big too fast. They don't like that. If you hadn't did it to yourself they was laying for you. They don't mind you playing their game but you can't outplay them. If you score too many points they change the rules. That's what the problem was...you scored too many points. If things had kept on going like that you was gonna have to buy you a gun. Time this is over you ain't gonna be able to walk down the street without somebody pointing at you. If they point *and* whisper you in trouble. You'd have to move out the state. Start over again somewhere fresh. That is if you still wanna play the game. If you still wanna play the game you gonna have to relearn the rules. See...they done changed. If you relearn the rules they'll let you back on the playing field. But now you crippled. You ain't got but one leg. You be driving around looking for handicapped parking. Get back on the field and every time you walk by somebody they check their pockets. That's enough to kill anybody right there. If you had to take a little hit like that all day every day how long you think you can last? I give you six months.

But do you know when the game is over. When you in an argument the best thing to do is to stop arguing. I got in an argument with Buddy Will over Muhammad Ali. Buddy said Muhammad Ali won all his fights by out thinking everybody. Say he used psychology. I asked him what the hell his hands were doing while his mind was thinking. Told him to go ask Joe Frazier what they were doing. He ain't had enough sense to see what I was saying, so I say, "You right." And walked away. That's what you got to do. Like that man stole three hundred million dollars. He say, "You right." They fined him thirty million dollars and give him a year in jail. The way I figure that leave him two hundred seventy million dollars profit. Unless

my math is wrong. Giving in is good for your blood pressure too. Your heart and everything else.