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*For Michele, who on a daily basis gives me
the confidence to believe that I can do anything.*

Cast of Characters

SELMA BRADSHAW, Mama

LEON BRADSHAW, Daddy

Their Children:

LEON BRADSHAW JR., Sonny, 13 years old

LORETTA LIPSCOMB BRADSHAW, Retta, 15 years old

DEATON BRADSHAW, 7 years old

CANTALOUPE, the cat

MARTIN BONNER, Uncle Marty, owner of The Circle Of Life Café

VERNA PREECE, Mamby, the Bradshaw family maid

NISSA, her daughter

Selma's Parents and Family:

GRANDPA

GRANDMA

MYRTLE RUDINE CARLYLE, Aunt Roo

UNCLE SINCLAIR, Sink

PASTOR BIGGS, pastor of The One-Way Word Of Faith Tabernacle

MRS. PASTOR BIGGS

WESLEY ROWLETT, Loretta's Harley-riding boyfriend

WORKMAN #1

WORKMAN #2

Various TOWNSPEOPLE and CHURCH MEMBERS

Author Note

I would like to thank Katie Blackerby-Weible for making this play exist. Her love of George Ella Lyon's work and her sharp directorial eye inspired and guided me through the process of writing this play. Charlie Sexton and the staff of Walden Theatre for giving me a creative place to call home, and Marc Masterson of Actors Theatre of Louisville for pointing me in the right direction.

Acknowledgements

Sonny's House of Spies had its world premiere at Walden Theatre in Louisville, Kentucky on March 1, 2007. It was directed by Katie Blackerby-Weible and stage managed by Maggie Rogers. The cast was as follows:

SELMA BRADSHAW Laura Durham
LEON BRADSHAW Ben Park
LEON "SONNY" BRADSHAW Mitchell Martin
LORETTA BRADSHAW Alex Masterson
DEATON BRADSHAW Sebrand Warren
GRANDPA Eliot Zellers
GRANDMA Jordan Brown
AUNT ROO Holly Fisher
UNCLE SINCLAIR Gregg Webber
MAMBY Whitney Willoughby
NISSA Kyra Riley
UNCLE MARTY Adam Brown
PASTOR BIGGS JJ Beckman
MRS. PASTOR BIGGS Magnolia Hensley
WORKMAN #2 Amy Franz
WORKMAN #1 Mac Schneider
WESLEY ROWLETT Elliot Cornet

SONNY'S HOUSE OF SPIES

adapted by Alec Volz

BASED ON THE BOOK BY GEORGE ELLA LYON

ACT I

(This is a memory play. SONNY, our narrator, is looking back from the age of 15 at events that took place the previous summer, the summer of 1954. The stage will transform itself into all of the locales in the small Alabama town of Mozier where SONNY lives with his mother, sister, and brother.)

(The front porch of a small house is the only concrete set. The house is on the right side of the stage and fades into the shadows. On the porch is a glider on the stage left side. There is railing around the porch and a screen door leading inside.)

(Populating the set are all of the characters of the play—all of the people that were important to SONNY that hot summer of 1954. They are in various stages of repose and face the audience. Not ignoring them per se, but definitely not worried about some group of people hanging around the Bradshaw house at 8:30 on a Tuesday evening in August of 1955.)

(The lights rise and an evening mist hangs about the house. There are the sounds of a summer evening—crickets, frogs, cicadas, and children playing down the street trying to wring every ounce of fun from the day before their moms call them to come into the house, take a bath, go to bed.)

(SONNY steps off of the porch and crosses down center to speak, taking measure of these people in front of him.)

SONNY. Memory is a funny thing. Sometimes you can't remember what you had for lunch yesterday. What the name of your second grade teacher was. What clever comeback you were about to devastate your sister with.

Other memories are as strong as new rope—clear just like as if you were still washing those pots and pans, half listening to Scripture. Sitting on the porch and watching the sun weave in and out of the clouds passing by. The smell of wood—charred by fire and soaked by water. Or watching your father walk out of your life... This is the story of those memories.

(SONNY takes a deep breath and crosses down.)

In 1947 when I was six my daddy, Leon Bradshaw Sr., left us. But the night before Daddy left I was hiding at the top of the landing when he came in.

(DADDY tries to come home quietly, discovers MAMA with a covered plate of food.)

DADDY. Why, Selma.

(MAMA throws it at DADDY and hits him square in the chest. DADDY is stunned.)

MAMA. You missed your dinner, but it didn't miss you.

DADDY. God damn it!

MAMA. You think I don't know you're up to no good? This is humiliating, Leon. Even Roo's neighbor knew you weren't home. Why you want to throw away your plateful in this life I do not know.

(DADDY bends over, gets a glob of corn pudding on his finger, and wipes it on MAMA's face.)

DADDY. Because I don't like the food.

(She slaps him. They look at each other and then both bend down and pick up the broken dish and food. After picking up a few pieces of the dish, DADDY hands them to MAMA and walks off stage. MAMA is left alone watching DADDY leave and finishing cleaning up. While this is happening, SONNY watches and says to the audience:)

SONNY. I was only six at the time. But I remember it like it was yesterday. I'm not saying I understood what was going on—but I do remember.

(Lights change—DADDY is leaving. He has a packed suitcase. He yells for SONNY.)

DADDY. Hey, Son.

(SONNY enters the scene as his 6-year-old self and jumps on the back of his father.)

No time to play monkey. I said get down, Sonny. *(SONNY does but bites his father's hand as he does so.)* Why, you little hellion.

SONNY. Where are you going?

DADDY. Natchez.

SONNY. For how long?

DADDY. I don't know, Sonny. It's business.

SONNY. But Grandpa says—

DADDY. Forget what that old man says. You listen to me.

SONNY. (*Parroting MAMA:*) You think I don't know.

DADDY. Don't know what?

SONNY. That you're up to no good.

(*Beat.*)

DADDY. You see why I've got to go son. A man can't live in a house of spies. You remember that.

(*They look at each other and DADDY walks out with his suitcase. The sound of a car driving off is heard.*)

(*SONNY crosses down.*)

SONNY. So Daddy left us—me, my sister Loretta, and my baby brother Deaton—and it took a while for Mama to start acting like Mama again. But Mamby, our maid, was there part of every day except Sunday, so we got washed and fed. She didn't complain but that didn't mean she didn't comment on the situation.

(*MAMA with the baby DEATON, MAMBY, LORETTA, and SONNY are on stage.*)

MAMBY. Sure does rock the boat when the captain jumps ship.

SONNY. After a while, Daddy sent money to the bank. I was sure when a birthday came—or Christmas—that Daddy would come home. But he didn't. Didn't even send a card. Just money. I know now that Mama didn't even know where he was.

(*Lights change. MAMBY exits with the baby DEATON. UNCLE MARTY and MRS. PASTOR BIGGS enter with MAMA.*)

SONNY. A couple a months later we had what the One-Way Word Of Faith Tabernacle called "A Soul-Winning Visitation" or as Uncle Marty himself put it:

UNCLE MARTY. Extending the Right Hand of Fellowship to the Lapsed and the Lost.

LORETTA. But what if you're left-handed?

MAMA. (*Ignoring LORETTA:*) We must be lapsed because our names are still on the roll at First Methodist. We just haven't gone back since Daddy's transfer.

LORETTA. (*To SONNY:*) So that's what she's calling it now.

MRS. PASTOR BIGGS. I'm Mrs. Pastor Biggs and this is Martin Bonner.

UNCLE MARTY. (*As he rests his hand on SONNY's head:*) Leon's boy. You're Leon's boy.

LORETTA. You're the Donut Man!

UNCLE MARTY. (*Reaching to pat her head too:*) Praise God I am little Missy.

LORETTA. —And at your store you make people pray before they can have one bite.

(*UNCLE MARTY snatches his hand away.*)

MRS. PASTOR BIGGS. That's not true.

UNCLE MARTY. No, I just print the Word on the menu. "A lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path."

(*LORETTA starts to add something to this and MAMA jerks her head back by her hair ribbons.*)

MAMA. Won't you all sit awhile?

SONNY. And they did. And then Uncle Marty talked about—

UNCLE MARTY. The fire of God.

SONNY. And Mrs. Pastor Biggs talked about—

MRS. PASTOR BIGGS. The Light.

SONNY. And Uncle Marty talked about—

UNCLE MARTY. The need of saved souls to gather as a flock.

SONNY. And Mrs. Pastor Biggs talked about—

MRS. PASTOR BIGGS. Sunday school.

SONNY. And this went on long past all the different kinds of donuts I could think of to entertain myself with. Finally, Uncle Marty said—

UNCLE MARTY. Well Mrs. Bradshaw, do you think you might bring these fine children and worship with us soon?

MAMA. I just might.

MRS. PASTOR BIGGS. He supports us in our hour of darkness.

SONNY. (*Looking out the window:*) It was a while before I found out the One-Way folks didn't talk about things you could see.

(*Lights change. MAMA, LORETTA, and SONNY are down stage. Upstage the kitchen table is set with GRANDMA and AUNT ROO busy filling jars with honey from honeycombs.*)

MAMA. They've reached out to us.

LORETTA. Viruses reach out to you too.

MAMA. (*Crosses upstage to the table.*) What the Lord had in mind when he made your mouth, I do not know.

LORETTA. (*To SONNY:*) At least there'll be a show.

SONNY. What kind of show do they have?

LORETTA. Who?

SONNY. That church Mama wants to go to.

LORETTA. Oh, I'm not talking about *them*, though I hope they throw snakes and roll around like tumbleweed. I'm talking about Grandpa.

SONNY. Is he going?

LORETTA. Sonny, sometimes I think the rural electric hasn't got as far as your brain yet. Grandpa wouldn't go to One-Way if Jesus himself was preaching. But Mama's going to have to tell him *we're* going, and then there'll be fireworks for sure.

SONNY. Fire—?

LORETTA. (*Putting one hand on SONNY's head and hitting it with her other fist:*) See if that gets the lights on.

MAMA. (*From the table:*) Loretta, get over here and help us jar this honey. It's high time you learned how.

LORETTA. (*To herself as much as to SONNY:*) Useless information.

(They cross upstage and join the ladies. SONNY finds anything with honey on it he can lick. LORETTA busies herself with her notebook but never missing a thing going on around her.)

(A few moments of silent work by all. A time in which AUNT ROO and GRANDMA have corrected MAMA in some part of the procedure.)

MAMA. Mama, Roo, I've decided to take the children to the One-Way Word of Faith Tabernacle this Sunday.

AUNT ROO. Oh Selma, no!

MAMA. Yes.

LORETTA. It's a free country.

AUNT ROO. Not in this house. I'm afraid you have to pay.

SONNY. Why?

AUNT ROO. Is that wise?

GRANDMA. I worry about your daddy's heart.

MAMA. He's not going to have a heart attack just because I try out a new church!

AUNT ROO. You don't know that.

GRANDMA. The doctor told him anything could do it, any shock.

AUNT ROO. And Selma, you don't want to—

MAMA. (*Cutting her off:*) LIFE is shocking. He's just got to take his chances.

GRANDMA. Selma Estelle, I'm ashamed of you! (*The two stare each other down.*) You tell him yourself then. I bear no responsibility.

MAMA. All right. Where is he?

GRANDMA. He's resting after his constitutional.

LORETTA. (*To SONNY:*) She means his walk.

(*MAMA grabs a dishtowel and heads to GRANDPA.*)

GRANDMA. Come back and wash. You'll leave a trail of honey.

LORETTA. She's going to sweeten him up.

(*Nobody says a word. Nobody moves. All are waiting for the fireworks that surely will come.*)

GRANDPA. (*From offstage:*) Good God Almighty! Haven't you put this family through enough? You couldn't keep your husband and now—

(*MAMA comes rushing back on followed by GRANDPA.*)

MAMA. Daddy—

GRANDPA. —Now you want to go humiliate us at some Holy Roller church. Next thing we know you'll be foaming at the mouth. What kind of a fool are you?

(*MAMA is downstage facing away from the family. LORETTA just stares at her mother, mouth agape. SONNY is finding hidden bits of honey on his clothes. He is sucking these out. GRANDMA senses that nothing will be accomplished here and takes GRANDPA and AUNT ROO off.*)

MAMA. (*After they have left:*) I should have said "My own. My own kind of fool." (*Beat.*) I've got to lie down. Loretta, give Deaton a sponge bath and put him down...and Sonny, stop sucking your shirt. Take it off and put it in the hamper.

(*Lights change. SONNY crosses to the front porch.*)

SONNY. Time went along. We all got bigger and more like ourselves.

(UNCLE MARTY comes into the scene. MAMBY prepares dinner. The kids study.)

Uncle Marty spent a lot of time with us. Mama came to depend on him for advice. I don't know if he really helped her with stuff or she just needed somebody to talk to.

(MAMA and UNCLE MARTY talk on the glider. GRANDPA leaves GRANDMA and sits by himself.)

Like when Grandpa passed. Uncle Marty was there for all of us.

(The kids join MAMA and UNCLE MARTY on the porch as MAMA cries. MAMA goes to work.)

Mama said daddy still sent the same amount of money even though we were older and needed a lot more things.

Money stayed scarce, though Mama had a job by then at Boykin's Jewelry and Hardware and Loretta had a job three days a week at the Chat 'n' Chew café. And then last summer I decided I wanted a job too. I told Mama I would give her half my pay like Retta did. I started out mowing lawns. This was working well until one Wednesday in late June that was so hot and humid it felt like I was pushing the mower across the bottom of a drained aquarium. About halfway through a big yard, I felt a little jerk inside and all the color bleached out of the grass and the mock orange bush I was following the edge of. The next thing I knew the fence was sticking sideways through the clouds. That settled it for Mama.

(MAMA sits SONNY down on a chair and applies a wet rag to his forehead.)

MAMA. No more mowing. You start those spells again and you could cost us way more than you'll make.

SONNY. But this is the first one in more 'an two years. *(MAMA just looks him into saying:)* Yes, ma'am. But what can I do for work? I need the money for my model airplanes...and to help out the family.

MAMA. I'll ask Uncle Marty.

UNCLE MARTY. *(Crossing to MAMA and SONNY:)* Send Sonny to me. I could use some help in the afternoons, cleaning up from the morning and preparing for the morrow. What do you say, Sonny?

SONNY. Thanks, sir.

MAMA. *(Looking at SONNY:)* That's hot work, too.

UNCLE MARTY. But not much exertion, and there's work he could do in the evening, too.

SONNY & MAMA. What?

UNCLE MARTY. Well, I've been wanting to make a clean menu board for the front. What I've got now's been scratched out and written over and some of the Scripture's peeled off.

MAMA. Sonny's got a steady hand to paint.

LORETTA. If you want warplanes.

UNCLE MARTY. (*Ignoring her:*) That's what I know.

LORETTA. He's got a quick hand for the donuts you bring us.

UNCLE MARTY. I'll deduct them from his pay.

(Lights change. We are in the Circle of Life. MAMA and LORETTA cross back upstage.)

SONNY. So the very next day I got started working for Uncle Marty. I wasn't allowed to wait on people, either at the walk-up or at the six little tables inside.

UNCLE MARTY. It's not that you wouldn't do a good job of it, Sonny. *You* do a good job of everything. It's just that waiting on folks is part of my ministry.

SONNY. What he meant was he sized up the customers and greeted them with whatever Bible verse seemed appropriate. Local folks were used to it. They could take—

UNCLE MARTY. "Whither can I flee from Thy spirit?"

SONNY. With a half dozen plain glazed. Or—

UNCLE MARTY. "Thou knowest not the day nor the hour."

SONNY. With four éclairs and two fritters. Only strangers were likely to take offense, and Mozier didn't get many of those.

(Lights change. SONNY and UNCLE MARTY with the menu board.)

UNCLE MARTY. Make a sketch first so you can get the spacing right. Even if you don't have room for the whole verse on there, you need to get enough to catch the interest of the heathen and trigger the faithful's memory. Those who need to can look it up when they get home.

SONNY. (*Looking at the board which is covered with crude drawings of loaves of bread and fishes and the menu items in no particular order:*) You don't sell bread and fish.

UNCLE MARTY. Everybody knows about the feeding of the five thousand, Sonny.

SONNY. Sure, but they're coming here for *food*, not preaching, so when they see bread and fish, they think that's what you sell.

UNCLE MARTY. Oh, ummmm. I can't think what else to use.

SONNY. What about the vine and branches?

UNCLE MARTY. Praise the Lord, yes. "I am the vine and ye are the branches." Sonny, you are a genius! I do declare this is the work you were born for.

SONNY. *(To the audience:)* I hope not. *(To UNCLE MARTY:)* Thanks; I'll get to work. *(He starts to sketch on the board.)* Hey Uncle Marty, is it okay if I rearrange and sort out the menu items?

UNCLE MARTY. Sure, Just don't mix up the Scripture.

SONNY. Okay. *(He goes back to work and gets another idea.)* Hey Uncle Marty, How about I put at the top—"Ask and it shall be given." That would tie the menu notion and the scripture notion together.

UNCLE MARTY. *(Furious:)* It's one thing to mock **me**, Sonny Bradshaw. I am a man, fat and fallen, and that does not matter. But to mock the open arms of the Lord, to equate His Grace with donuts and fries is more than I will abide.

SONNY. But Uncle Marty, That's not what I—

UNCLE MARTY. Hush! I don't want to hear any more out of you!

(He leaves and SONNY is left by himself working on the board.)

SONNY. Where did that come from? *(Beat.)* "To equate His grace with *grease*." Now that's a better line.

(Lights change. MAMA comes down with a model airplane box.)

MAMA. Sonny, this looks much too complicated for you to build on your own. But I had an idea. *(She smiles.)* I have asked Uncle Sinclair to come over and help you.

SONNY. Honest Mama, I can do it on my own. I don't need Uncle Sink's help.

MAMA. Uncle Sinclair.

SONNY. Uncle Sinclair.

MAMA. I like to see my boy learning from my big brother... A man's guiding hands.

(SONNY *lays out the parts to the model on the kitchen table.*
UNCLE SINK *enters in greasy coveralls followed by DEATON*
and CANTALOUPE.)

UNCLE SINK. Hey, Sonny! What have we got here? Deaton take that damn cat back outside. You know I'm allergic.

SONNY. It's a B-17. Like Daddy—

UNCLE SINK. Yep, that's what he flew, all right. Let's see...

(He picks up the pieces of the fuselage and tries to fit them together.)

SONNY. Here are the directions.

UNCLE SINK. Oh, I know how to do this, don't worry.

SONNY. It goes step by step.

UNCLE SINK. That's for if you don't know how to do it. *(He very sloppily glues the two parts of the fuselage together.)* Better let that dry. That's the hard part. When that's done, we'll come back and do the wings. *(SONNY reaches over to try to wipe off some of the excess glue.)* Don't touch it till it sets! You'll ruin the alignment.

SONNY. I just want to wipe off the glue.

UNCLE SINK. Too late... It's okay Son. You can paint over it. *(He picks up the one-piece cockpit interior.)* What's this?

SONNY. It goes in the cockpit.

UNCLE SINK. Well, it's a fine time to be telling me.

SONNY. I tried to—

UNCLE SINK. You *what*?

SONNY. I tried to tell you.

UNCLE SINK. Like hell you did, you sat right there and watched me labor over this and never said a word.

SONNY. But I did—

UNCLE SINK. So don't try to make up some story now after you've wasted my weekend and your fool money building war toys. Why, I wasn't much older than you and your cousin Albion when I was *in* the war. Not playing. I jumped *out* of planes like this, Sonny, so don't tell me how they go together. You don't know a thing. Not a damn thing. *(He walks out.)*

DEATON. *(Following UNCLE SINK:)* You mean you had a parachute?

(SONNY takes the wing pieces and tries to break them. He is about to jump on them when DEATON returns, a red handprint blazed on the side of his face.)

SONNY. Did he hit you?

(DEATON nods yes. SONNY steps back to jump on the wings; DEATON steps in and grabs them away.)

DEATON. Don't bust it, Sonny! We'll get some *un*-glue and start over.

(Lights change. UNCLE SINK and MAMA disappear and the One-Way Word of Faith Tabernacle is set up during this next speech. SONNY seats himself between MAMA and LORETTA in the church. DEATON is next to MAMA. UNCLE MARTY is at the podium. The service is going on while SONNY speaks to the audience.)

SONNY. The One-Way Word of Faith Tabernacle was a cinder block building about a mile out Andalusia Road. The first Sunday we went there that summer after Leon left, I thought the folding chairs and general bareness were because One-Way was new and poor. I thought as soon as they could afford it, they'd do better—put in pews and carpets and a carved Lord's Supper table like the Methodists. But no, they *believed* in linoleum and metal chairs and a beat up podium. For communion, they had squished pellets of white bread and grape drink in paper cups. Anyway, I had got used to how the church looks and how sometimes people shout and fall down during the service. What I hadn't got used to is what happens to Uncle Marty at One-Way.

UNCLE MARTY. (Starting to preach:) Jesus...Jesus... JESUS.

SONNY. Uncle Marty got transformed. I don't know what else to call it. Watching him at our house during the week or down at the Circle of Life, I would think I must have imagined how he is on Sunday. But then the Lord's Day would roll around and it would happen again.

UNCLE MARTY. Son of David, Mary's boy, we know You're our brother. We know You walked roads just as crooked and dusty as ours. Alabama! Yes, Lord, and Galilee! And we know You're here among us, eating at our table, sweating in cotton fields and paper mills, feeding babies and hanging wash on the line. You walk with us, Jesus, and we praise You—

MAMA. Yes, Lord!

UNCLE MARTY. We thank you for every fish we catch and every tomato we break off the vine.

CHURCHGOER. Tell Him, Brother!

UNCLE MARTY. Jesus, Jesus, JEEESUS, we ask You to put Your hands in our hands. Reach out, Lord, through us right here in Mozier.

CHURCHGOER. Here, Lord!

UNCLE MARTY. Let the fire of Your Gospel shine in us.

CHURCHGOER. Shine!

UNCLE MARTY. Let it burn in us till the path before us is so clear we could no more stray from it than we could grow scales and fins and gills and live in the deep. Yet if we *did*, Lord,

CHURCHGOER. Even so!

CHURCHGOER. Even then!

UNCLE MARTY. We know You would find us. You went to Hell to get us, Lord, went to the Cross, and we know there is no place we can get into, however deep, however dark, that Your love won't bring us out. Blessed Savior, above the dust of Mozier, We hear redemption's wings.

CHURCHGOERS & MAMA. (*Bouncing all around the room:)* Amen! Amen! Amen! Amen!

SONNY. I always felt unsettled after Uncle Marty's prayers—like I'd been somewhere and didn't know how to get back. Other people besides Mama felt something like that too, I could tell; not Loretta—she's too prickly—and not Deaton—he's too young. But all those around us I could really look at without being rude, their mouths were wobbly, their eyes blinking fast. They must like this scooted up feeling or they wouldn't come back. Well, that's because they don't have spells, like me. Let this kind of thing happen to them when they didn't dress up and go looking for it, and they'd be singing a different tune.

(Piano music has been playing under the last few lines of SONNY's speech.)

CHURCHGOERS, UNCLE MARTY, FAMILY. (*Singing as the stage is cleared:)*

I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY
OF UNSEEN THINGS ABOVE
OF JESUS AND HIS GLORY,
OF JESUS AND HIS LOVE.
I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY
BECAUSE I KNOW IT'S TRUE.
IT SATISFIES MY LONGING
AS NOTHING ELSE CAN DO.

(Lights change. The Circle of Life. SONNY is sweeping up. UNCLE MARTY is getting the bank deposit ready.)

UNCLE MARTY. Sonny, you man the fort while I go put this in the bank.

SONNY. Yes, sir.

UNCLE MARTY. And your pay for the week is in the drawer.

SONNY. Thanks.

(UNCLE MARTY leaves. SONNY immediately puts down the broom and digs in a drawer to get his pay and finds a letter. He picks it up and looking around opens it. DADDY steps down to behind SONNY and says:)

DADDY. Tell me what kind of worker Sonny is.

(SONNY stops reading the letter and looks around again. Seeing no one about, he looks again at the letter and especially the return address.)

DADDY. 1621 Orbison Street, No. 9, Mobile, Alabama.

(SONNY copies down the address on a piece of paper and hands the letter to DADDY. SONNY starts to leave but returns to write another note on half of the paper, tears it off and sticks it between the screen door and doorframe. He starts to exit, stops and says:)

SONNY. "Dear All, Gone for a couple of days. Do not worry. Love, Sonny."

(The lights change and SONNY is back home. He walks into the kitchen. LORETTA and DEATON are eating graham crackers and milk for dinner.)

SONNY. I'm home!

LORETTA. Well, don't bust our eardrums about it. I *told* Mama we'd never get rid of you that easy.

SONNY. Where is Mama?

DEATON. At the *hospital*.

SONNY. What happened?

LORETTA. Oh, Mama's fine, Sonny, except you took ten years off her life by running away. She had the police out and everything. It's one of Mamby's kids who's in the doctor's clutches.

DEATON. She might *die*.

LORETTA. So where've you been?

SONNY. Give me a minute.

(He looks around at everything to make sure nothing has changed, then he looks at himself and realizes he is not the same person who left for Mobile yesterday.)

LORETTA. Sonny!

SONNY. Mobile. I took the bus from Andalusia.

DEATON. Why?

SONNY. To see what's there.

LORETTA. I don't believe you.

DEATON. Why?

LORETTA. Because he's lying. Sonny's about as adventuresome as moss. *(Sound of a car pulling up.)* Get ready for the show. Last words, Sonny? Or—do you want me to leave another helpful note?

(Sound of two car doors slamming shut.)

(MAMA comes in with UNCLE SINK behind her, staying in the doorway.)

MAMA. Sonny! Sonny, you're home! Oh Sonny, oh my boy. Let me look at you.

LORETTA. Ooooohhh, Sonny! Home from the wars!

MAMA. *(To LORETTA:)* If you'd seen what I've just seen, if you'd seen Nissa—

UNCLE SINK. Where have you been, boy?

MAMA. But I don't know, Loretta, I don't know what your heart's made of.

LORETTA. Muscle, thank God.

UNCLE SINK. Answer me, Sonny.

SONNY. Mobile.

UNCLE SINK. Mobile, what?

DEATON. Alabama?

(LORETTA hoots.)

SONNY. Mobile, Sir.

MAMA. Whatever made you—

UNCLE SINK. Doing what?

SONNY. (*Ponders what to tell the family, takes a deep breath, and says:*) Seeing a little of the world, sir. Sowing wild oats.

LORETTA. Like he had any!

UNCLE SINK. Come on outside, Sonny.

MAMA. Sinclair—

UNCLE SINK. A man's got to take what's coming to him, Selma.

MAMA. The police were out hunting for you all night. Sinclair, Hickman, and Marty too.

(*Lights change. UNCLE SINK leads SONNY to behind the garage.*)

MAMA. (*Offstage:*) Don't hurt him!

SONNY. (*Facing the audience with UNCLE SINK looming behind and over him. As he speaks he is lowering his pants and UNCLE SINK is taking off his belt.*) We went behind the garage like always so we were hidden from the kitchen windows and the neighbors. The smell of pine needles and motor oil is stapled in my mind to the thwack of that belt across my backside and the pain, like fire with a knife in it.

UNCLE SINK. No crying...and no bleeding. (*SONNY gives a look to the audience: "Like I can help it." UNCLE SINK hits him eight times.*) You're. (*Hits him.*) Thirteen. (*Hits him.*) I'll give. (*Hits him.*) You that. (*Hits him.*) And one. (*Hits him.*) To grow on! (*Hits him and puts his belt back on. SONNY pulls up his pants and turns to face him really trying hard to hold back his tears.*) Sonny, you might as well be my boy, for all the daddy you got in this world, so I've got to say to you what I said to your cousin Albion. (*SONNY can only nod to him. If he opens his mouth he will cry.*) That's a wild man you got down there. Keep him zipped as much as you can, and when you can't, keep him clean.

SONNY. Yes, sir.

UNCLE SINK. Don't forget this family's full of bad hearts.

SONNY. No, sir. (*His legs are shaking and he is about to have a spell and/or throw up.*) Can we go in?

UNCLE SINK. (*Putting his hands on SONNY's shoulders:*) Takes character to be a man, you need to know anything, you ask me.

SONNY. Yes, sir. (*To audience:*) I know I'm supposed to say 'thank you.' Thank you for doing your duty, Uncle Sink. Thank you for hitting me. For hating me. Thank you for thinking I'm just like you.

UNCLE SINK. Don't drop on me, soldier! Get in the house.

(*Lights change. The next morning. MAMA and SONNY.*)

MAMA. I'm going to the hospital to see Nissa and you're coming with me.

SONNY. She's Mamby's oldest.

MAMA. Yes, 17 like your sister.

SONNY. And what happened to her, again?

MAMA. She went fishing on Thursday—the day before you ran away—and somehow, I do not know, she stepped on a fishing hook in the bottom of the boat.

SONNY. Ouch.

MAMA. Yes, ouch. Well, on Friday morning her foot was puffy and by that afternoon she was feeling sick. Tuck in your shirt. By Saturday, her entire leg was swollen and they took her to the hospital. I was there to see her yesterday and I'm taking you with me today. *(Beat.)* Sinclair says not to ask you any questions. "Boys will be boys," he says. But I want you to promise me that you'll never, never take off like that again.

SONNY. I promise.

MAMA. It's bad enough what this world can do to your children—look at Nissa—in an instant, Sonny, in the batting of an eye when they're right beside you. But to think that you would run off to Mobile, offer yourself as bait to the horrors of this world—

SONNY. Mama—

MAMA. I'm not finished! You don't know a thing about life! What it takes to birth it, feed it, protect it. You have no right to throw yourself away! You hear me? No right!

SONNY. I'm sorry.

MAMA. You ought to be.

(Lights change. We are in the Colored Ward of the Andalusia Hospital. NISSA is in bed, eyes open, staring upward but seeing or hearing nothing, MAMBY in a hard chair next to her. MAMA and SONNY enter. MAMA going straight to MAMBY and hugging her, SONNY holding back at the edge of the scene.)

MAMBY. They gonna take it off. My baby's leg. At the knee.

MAMA. Oh, no Verna. I'm so sorry.

(NISSA turns her head back and forth on her pillow.)

SONNY. *(To audience:)* Verna? Mamby's name is Verna?

MAMBY. She's got the sugar, my baby has, and that fishhook done poisoned her blood before she even got home with the fish. Sonny! Come here to me. *(He does and she hugs him tight. Another of her children.)* I didn't see you, child. I didn't know you was here. *(To MAMA:)* I don't know. Nobody knows but the Lord.

MAMA. What can we do, Verna? Can I take food to your other children?

MAMBY. No, honey, no. My sister Sofia, she's feeding them. Looking after them, too.

MAMA. Have you had any supper?

MAMBY. Haven't wanted any.

MAMA. You've got to keep up your strength. How about Sonny and I sit with Nissa and you go home and get some rest?

MAMBY. *(She looks hard at MAMA and pointing at SONNY:)* You wouldn't leave *him*, Selma.

MAMA. No.

MAMBY. I'm no different.

MAMA. Of course, of course. I'll go home and fix some sandwiches and a thermos of coffee and send them back by Sonny. Then, when you can eat, you'll have something here.

MAMBY. I'd welcome the coffee. I would.

MAMA. We'll do that, then. If you think of something else, just tell Sonny. *(Starts to leave with SONNY. Stops and turns back to MAMBY.)* And Verna, Roo, and I we'll make up some money...

MAMBY. *(Neutral:)* You all go on.

(Lights change. SONNY is downstage center. As he starts talking, upstage MAMA is getting ready to go to work. DEATON is eating breakfast. Stage right is NISSA in bed with her leg gone. MAMBY is with her.)

SONNY. *(To audience:)* Nissa came through the surgery fine, but she had to be in the hospital for a while. Mamby stayed with her round the clock to begin with. Then she had to start working again. *(MAMBY leaves NISSA and crosses to the refrigerator, gets a plate of food, and hands it to SONNY.)* One time, Mamby couldn't bring Nissa her dinner cause she had work to do for us. So she sent me. *(SONNY crosses to NISSA. She is awake and staring at the ceiling.)* Nissa. Mamby—I mean, Verna—your *mama* sent you this. *(She slowly looks at the plate.)* I'm Sonny Bradshaw.

NISSA. Thanks.

(SONNY looks around as if trying to find a way to leave, but sits down. As SONNY talks, NISSA slowly looks at him.)

SONNY. It's awful about your leg, it's not fair. But...your...whole... life... it's still there. It's not cut off.

(Beat.)

NISSA. What're you *talking* about?

(Beat.)

SONNY. I don't know.

NISSA. *(Gives a little laugh.)* That's the truthfulest thing I've heard since I got here.

SONNY. But I—

NISSA. Everybody in this hospital, everybody in this *town* knows, Sonny Bradshaw. They know and they're every one telling me. Even my Mama. What did you call her—Mamby? Lord help us, Miss Scarlett! Even my mama has got the shoes of wisdom on her feet. Not a soul sees it's a different world with only one foot to stand on. Nobody but this idiot white boy. You *know* you don't know, Sonny. That's something.

(Major beat.)

SONNY. It's Swiss steak. You should eat some while it's hot.

NISSA. Oh, give it here.

(NISSA tries to sit up but can't quite get it right. Her pillow half-way falls off the bed.)

SONNY. I could fix that for you.

NISSA. Thanks.

(SONNY fixes her pillow and unwraps the plate for her.)

NISSA. Thanks. *(She starts to eat. It is the first food she has enjoyed since the accident.)* So what are you up to, Sonny?

SONNY. What do you mean?

NISSA. Everybody up to something. I was up to courting when I got hooked.

SONNY. I ran away.

NISSA. Where to?

SONNY. You're eating.

NISSA. You brought me food.

SONNY. But your Mama said you—

NISSA. This is my favorite. Where did you go?

SONNY. (*Looks around.*) I went to Mobile, but listen, Nissa. Don't tell anybody why. I went looking for my daddy.

NISSA. He skedadiddle?

SONNY. When I was little.

NISSA. You find him? (*SONNY nods.*) You see any water around here? (*SONNY gets her a glass of water.*) So what was *he* up to?

SONNY. I don't know.

NISSA. (*She gives that laugh again.*) I just about like you. Can't eat any more food, though. (*She hands the plate back to SONNY.*)

SONNY. You won't—

NISSA. No, no. Don't worry. Pretty soon, I'll have a hollow leg to keep all my secrets *in*. (*SONNY looks a little sick.*) I'm kidding.

SONNY. I know.

NISSA. That's something, then. Thanks for dinner.

(Lights change. SONNY crosses back to the kitchen. Behind and around this speech a few days pass. MAMA is seated at the table after dinner putting green stamps into a book while LORETTA has finished cleaning up after dinner. DEATON comes in in his P.J.s and gives MAMA a good night kiss and goes to bed.)

SONNY. Talking to Nissa really got me confused. First there was feeling like I'd lost something when I left the hospital. But I figured I was just shook up from seeing a young person in that kind of flux. Then later in the evening, I tried to go back to our talk in my mind. It wasn't finished somehow, but I didn't know what to do with it. What did "I just about like you" mean? What about the way she laughed? What about the damp heat of her back I hadn't meant to touch? What about her being there at all, Mamby's daughter, with *me*, and that awful emptiness that had been her leg? Why was I thinking like this? I was hoping Mama would go back to see Nissa and ask me to go with her, but she didn't. Once it looked like Nissa was doing okay, Mama slid back over the line. The line you can't see that cuts off Mamby and Nissa's life from ours. Mamby crosses that line to come here, but maybe it's okay to cross in that direction. Or maybe it's because she gets paid. (*To MAMA:*) Mama why is it that Mamby comes here but we never go to her house?

MAMA. Mamby is our employee. I'm Mr. Boykin's employee and we don't go to his house.

SONNY. But you work in his *store*, that's different. You don't know his family.

MAMA. I've known Mabel Boykin since I was a girl. She was our church organist.

SONNY. But she didn't fix your food and...

MAMA. Sonny, you're making me tired.

SONNY. *(To MAMA:)* I'm sorry. *(To audience:)* Half way down the "sorry" hill my feelings picked up speed and rolled right into mad. *(To MAMA but she doesn't hear it:)* You just *give up* is your problem, you don't have any gumption.

(GRANDPA crosses down to SONNY.)

SONNY. Gumption was Grandpa's favorite word.

GRANDPA. God gave us talents, Sonny. They're our tools. But the handle of every tool is *gumption*.

(And with that, he crosses back to the land of the dead, stopping for a moment to point out to SONNY.)

Your Mama does have gumption. Why else is she saving stamps for stuff you all don't have the money for? Sonny, this woman is holding the family together with a cereal bowl and a sponge.

(He almost touches his daughter's head, then turns and crosses out.)

SONNY. *(The anger gone:)* Can I ask you something?

MAMA. Ask away.

SONNY. Who's Miss Scarlett?

MAMA. In Mozier?

SONNY. I don't know. It's what Nissa said about us calling Mamby "Mamby." She said "Lord help us Miss Scarlett."

MAMA. Oh, that's Scarlett O'Hara.

SONNY. Who's she?

MAMA. A character in *Gone With The Wind*.

SONNY. What's that?

MAMA. A movie. Well, it was a book first. I wasn't much older than you when I saw it.

SONNY. What's it about?

MAMA. The Civil War. And hard times after. (*Finishing the stamp book:*) That's fourteen. Two more and we get a floor lamp.

(*LORETTA hangs on the edge of the scene listening. She is dressed to go out.*)

SONNY. What's the Civil War got to do with Mamby? (*MAMA looks at him.*) Oh. Oh, I see. Is Miss Scarlett colored?

LORETTA. Is Miss Scarlett colored? Sonny, we ought to keep you in a closet. Miss Scarlett is "the flower of southern womanhood watered by the sweat and tears of slaves."

MAMA. You hush your mouth, Loretta Bradshaw.

LORETTA. I'm just saying what I saw in the movie and read in the book.

MAMA. You better watch yourself.

SONNY. Why?

MAMA. And you too, there's Colored and there's White in this town and everywhere else. Mamby is a good and decent woman, but she has her kind and we have ours and that's the way God wanted it.

(*Beat.*)

LORETTA. See you later. Wesley and I are going to get a milkshake.

MAMA. Wesley? Wesley who?

LORETTA. (*As if speaking to a person of severely limited intelligence:*) Wes—ley...Row—lett.

MAMA. Will Rowlett's boy?

LORETTA. The selfsame.

MAMA. He's no good, Loretta, he's known for shady dealings.

LORETTA. That's not Wesley's fault. You can't blame boys for no-account daddies, and anyway, at least *his* daddy is here.

MAMA. (*Standing:*) I'd be ashamed of myself, Loretta Bradshaw.

LORETTA. Well, I'm not.

(*LORETTA clomps out to the porch. SONNY follows her out.*)

SONNY. Does Wesley have a car?

LORETTA. No, Sonny. He's coming in a surrey with the fringe on top.

SONNY. What's that?

LORETTA. You groundhog! It's a buggy. Pulled by a horsey.

SONNY. (*Ignoring the cut:*) Do you know Verna's last name?

LORETTA. Verna?

SONNY. Mamby, you groundhog.

LORETTA. (*Almost smiling but stopping it:*) Peak, I think. Or Preece.

SONNY. Where does she live?

LORETTA. Sonny, were you born in a bucket? She lives out Staniford Road like all the Colored people in this town.

(The sound of a motorcycle approaching. LORETTA starts to exit.)

Bye, Blind Boy. You tell Mama and I'll pinch your head off.

(She exits. The motorcycle takes off, loudly. SONNY goes back inside and MAMA is looking off at where LORETTA has left. SONNY starts to weave and falls over.)

MAMA. Sonny! (*She gets a wet rag and applies it to SONNY's forehead. SONNY gradually comes to.*) Oh, Sonny I thought we were done with this.

SONNY. Meem, ooh. (Me, too.)

(Blackout—Lights up on SONNY in the wingback with a wet towel across his forehead and MAMA on the settee. GRANDPA is standing behind them.)

GRANDPA. You call Burton? That's a bad lick on his forehead.

SONNY. Gosh, Grandpa, Dr. Burton couldn't save you when you had your heart attack.

GRANDPA. That doesn't make him a bad doctor. I was dead long before he ever got to me.

MAMA. (*To herself:*) You look like Leon when I hit him with that dinner tray.

GRANDPA. What?

SONNY. You threw his dinner at him. The night before he left. You let him have it. I remember.

MAMA. Never miss a thing, do you, son?

SONNY. (*To GRANDPA, no one else can hear it:*) I miss daddy. (*To MAMA:*) No ma'am.

GRANDPA. Well, keep it to yourself. There are some things a man would rather not know.

(LORETTA comes back from her date.)

MAMA. Dr. Burton says he should stay awake for eight hours. He wants to be sure Sonny didn't go unconscious when he fell and hit his head.

LORETTA. Could we tell?

MAMA. You have no room to talk, young lady. You appear to have lost what wits you were given.

LORETTA. Thanks.

MAMA. I just hope that's all you've lost.

LORETTA & GRANDPA. Selma, not in front of the children!

MAMA. I don't have to take this. Go to your room.

(LORETTA carries herself out like a queen. GRANDPA who truly was in shock exits the opposite way.)

MAMA sits, weary and defeated, scared and alone.)

SONNY. You have to go to work in the morning?

MAMA. Does the sun have to come up? Does the boll weevil have to eat cotton?

SONNY. You sound like Loretta. Why don't you get her to sit with me so you can go to sleep?

MAMA. After she stayed out till...?

SONNY. Loretta loves her sleep.

(They smile at each other.)

MAMA. I'll do it.

(MAMA rises and pulls LORETTA back on and sits her in the wingback.)

SONNY. (To audience:) After thirty minutes of wrangling and Mama's saying a threatening:

MAMA. Good Night.

(MAMA exits.)

SONNY. (To audience:) She went off to bed and left me in the care of my sympathetic big sister.

LORETTA. What a brother, just the pea brain I want to stay up with all night.

SONNY. Mama looks like a dishrag, Loretta, and she's got to go to work in the morning.

LORETTA. Oh, poor Mama. Poor St. Selma. (SONNY starts to fall asleep. LORETTA whacks him with the paper.) Don't close your eyes! (SONNY in reaction smacks LORETTA across the ear.) Jesus in a jumpsuit! Are you crazy, Sonny?

SONNY. Nobody likes to be hit in the face. (LORETTA leans over to pick up the newspaper she dropped when SONNY hit her. Two magazines drop out.) What have you got here?

(LORETTA holds up *True Confessions* and *Popular Mechanics*. SONNY points to *Popular Mechanics*.)

Why do you have *that*?

LORETTA. Wesley's teaching me to work on his motorcycle.

SONNY. And the other one?

LORETTA. I'm looking for lines.

SONNY. You're in a play?

LORETTA. Every day of this world. You too, little Leon. After supper you played the scene where you have the fit.

SONNY. It wasn't a *fit*, it was—

LORETTA. The spell, then. And now—

SONNY. Retta, I found out tonight that these spells are ABOUT something.

LORETTA. Faulty wiring.

SONNY. No.

LORETTA. Carbon buildup on the pistons.

SONNY. I mean they happen because I see something.

LORETTA. Yeah? Well, so do the folks who drop and roll at One-Way.

SONNY. I don't mean *visions*, Retta. I mean I see how things are. Tonight I saw that Mama—

LORETTA. Drinks.

SONNY. Drinks?

LORETTA. Oh, yes. That Get-Set bottle on her dresser is really full of gin.

SONNY. I don't believe that.

LORETTA. It's a free country. But next time you're here and Mama's not, why don't you spray a little Get-Set in your hand. See if it gives *you* style.

SONNY. She makes it all miniature.

LORETTA. Don't DO that!

SONNY. What?

LORETTA. Turn without a signal. Conversation is like *driving*. Sonny. If you're going to make a big move, you have to let other people know. Put on the blinker. Otherwise they lose you.

SONNY. Or run into you.

LORETTA. You got it. Now, what the hell were you talking about?

SONNY. (*He laughs.*) Well, Mama calls the chair you're sitting in Mertie's little wingback. (*He points to the coffee table.*) And that's her 'little cherry drop-leaf.' And I was just wondering if we live in Mama's miniature world.

LORETTA. I think you're on to something, after all, aren't we up at this hour because of "Sonny's little problem?"

SONNY. Definitely.

LORETTA. And didn't we move into this house because of "Leon's little absence?"

SONNY. Nobody said that.

LORETTA. Which makes it even smaller. (**SONNY** *nods in agreement.*) And now Mama's got her "little drinking."

SONNY. What about you, Retta? What have you got?

(**LORETTA** *smiles. She pulls the pins holding her hair up. She shakes her hair and it stands out in red curly points.*)

LORETTA. Wrenches, Loretta's little wrenches.

(*Lights change. MAMBY is in the kitchen cooking.*)

MAMBY. Afternoon, Sonny.

SONNY. Afternoon... Is Nissa out of the hospital?

MAMBY. She's home—but she ain't really with us yet.

SONNY. Why not?

MAMBY. We got legs.

(*Beat.*)

SONNY. Could I come see her?

(**DEATON** *comes in, goes right to MAMBY, gives her a big hug, and stays.*)

MAMBY. So how come you want to visit my girl?

SONNY. I've been thinking about her since I took her her dinner... If it was me that had...happened to, I'd need some company.

MAMBY. Nissa's friends are good to stop by.

(Beat.)

SONNY. I guess I want to be her friend.

MAMBY. You do, do you? (*SONNY nods yes.*) Whoooee!

(Beat.)

SONNY. I don't know what to call you anymore.

DEATON. He's going to have a spell.

SONNY. *(Blinking back tears:)* I *am* not. It's just that, well, "Mamby" seems disrespectful—Nissa thinks it is—and I can't call you by your first name, can I? And Mrs...

MAMBY. Preece. *(Beat.)* Sonny, honey, I been feeding and hugging you since the day you was born. Far as I'm concerned, you're a little light, but you're mine. You can't call me Mama—you got Selma. So Mamby suits me fine. It's a baby name came out of Loretta's mouth.

SONNY. Oh.

MAMBY. And I guess if you want to see Nissa—and if she will see you, *and* if Selma says you can, which I don't with one breath believe she will—that's possible. But I want you to think on something first.

SONNY. What?

MAMBY. It's not far from this house to mine, from Rhubarb to Staniford Road, but the ground is about as slippery as ground can get.

DEATON. Not now, it's dusty.

MAMBY. Sonny knows what I mean.

(Beat.)

SONNY. Thanks, Mamby. I'll come see her.

MAMBY. Maybe, maybe not.

(Lights change. A phone rings. DADDY is on down right with a phone. SONNY answers it.)

SONNY. *(On the phone:)* Hello. *(DADDY can't speak.)* This is Sonny... Hello?

DADDY. Sonny, I hear you've been looking for me.

SONNY. I did come to Mobile.

DADDY. So Raymond told me.

SONNY. Daddy—uh, Dad...I just wanted to talk to you.

DADDY. Talk away.

SONNY. But it's not...It's...well, I don't know. I guess I need to see you.

DADDY. Ah!

SONNY. I'm thirteen.

DADDY. I know.

SONNY. Loretta's getting wild.

DADDY. Loretta was *born* wild.

SONNY. Don't you care?

DADDY. (*He laughs.*) I do care. But caring about Loretta doesn't mean you can *do* anything about her. That was clear by the time she was six months old.

SONNY. You could be here.

DADDY. No I couldn't, Sonny.

SONNY. Why not?

DADDY. When you're older—

SONNY. When I'm older, it'll be too late to have a daddy. I won't want to talk to you by then!

DADDY. Son...

SONNY. And you wouldn't recognize me anyway!

(SONNY *slams down the phone*. DADDY *leaves...again.*)

(*Lights change. The front porch. LORETTA is lounging in the glider reading a magazine. SONNY comes up.*)

LORETTA. Who killed your dog?

SONNY. This is nothing.

LORETTA. Compared to what?

SONNY. The emptiness of life.

LORETTA. Sonny, the Philosopher! You over your spell? (SONNY *goes far away.*) Evidently, not.

SONNY. Not what?

LORETTA. Evidently you're not over your spell.

SONNY. No...I may never get over it.

LORETTA. Sonny...what kind of trouble are you looking for?

SONNY. I was looking for Daddy.

LORETTA. Sonny The Sleuth! Did you find him? (SONNY *shakes his head no.*) How did you know where to look?

SONNY. I had an address.

LORETTA. From?

(Beat.)

SONNY. Never mind. But I did find some men who knew him.

LORETTA. What did they tell you?

SONNY. Nothing. They—

(DEATON comes through the screen door. He is holding a soda cracker, which he seems to be licking instead of eating. He pushes back LORETTA's feet to make room for himself on the glider.)

DEATON. What are you talking about?

SONNY. *(Together:)* You.

LORETTA. *(Together:)* Daddy.

DEATON. What did he say?

LORETTA. Who?

SONNY. Daddy. He called here.

LORETTA. What did he want?

SONNY. He wants me to quit looking for him. At least till I'm older.

LORETTA. He's not worth the shoe leather.

DEATON. But he's our *daddy*.

SONNY. Hell of a lot of good that's done us.

LORETTA. Ooooohhh, Sonny talks MAN TALK! You're right, though.

DEATON. So are you going to?

LORETTA. Going to what?

DEATON. Stop looking for him.

SONNY. I don't know.

LORETTA. I do. You won't be happy till you find him, and then you'll be miserable.

(MAMA comes onto the porch as SONNY speaks his next line.)

SONNY. I don't know.

MAMA. Good Lord, my entire brood. (They all just look at her.) Wash up for dinner. (Nobody moves.) Come on, now. I don't want it to get cold.

LORETTA. Cold?

(Blackout. SONNY and DEATON are on the porch after dinner.)

DEATON. They're vampires.

SONNY. Deaton, where did you get that idea.

DEATON. Albion told me.

SONNY. Told you what?

DEATON. That that house is a vampire place. They drink Mr. Boatman's blood.

SONNY. Don't pay any attention to Albion. You know he makes things up to scare you.

DEATON. There aren't any vampires?

SONNY. No, Deaton.

DEATON. You're sure.

SONNY. Mmm-hmm.

DEATON. How about zombies?

SONNY. Nope.

DEATON. How about queers?

SONNY. What?

DEATON. Albion said the queers got Daddy.

SONNY. Oh, my God. Deaton, Albion is just *mean*, do you understand? He makes stuff up so he can hurt people. Don't listen to him. And if he tells you stuff anyway, come check it out with me. Don't go worrying about it.

DEATON. Okay. (Beat.) Sonny, what's a queer? Well? (SONNY shakes his head.) Don't you know?

SONNY. It's not that. (To audience:) Although it sort of is that. I mean, nobody ever *told* me what the word meant. When Uncle Sink gave me the birds and bees talk—or the pipes and fittings as he called it—he said, “never let a queer near you.” I asked how you recognize

one and he just said "Believe me, a man puts the moves on you, you'll know."

DEATON. If you don't tell me, I'll go ask Mama.

SONNY. That would be the world's *worst* idea.

DEATON. So, you tell me.

(*Beat.*)

SONNY. Okay, but Deaton, before I tell you what it means you've got to swear to two things.

DEATON. (*Holding his hand on his heart, solemnly:*) I swear—

SONNY. Not yet! You don't even know what they are.

DEATON. So tell me.

SONNY. The first one is do not tell anyone what I tell you. Not cousins, not aunts or uncles—that includes Marty—not Grandma, or Mamby, or Mama. *Especially* not Mama. You understand?

DEATON. Yes sir, but can I tell Cantaloupe?

SONNY. You can, but not out loud. And second, you must promise NOT to think that what this word means is true about Daddy. Al-bion is just—

DEATON. You already said that.

SONNY. Okay. Swear.

DEATON. I swear.

SONNY. On the Bible.

DEATON. I swear on the Bible.

SONNY. And the Holy Name of Jesus.

DEATON. Oh, come on, Sonny.

SONNY. Do it.

DEATON. I swear on the Holy Name of Jesus.

SONNY. No fingers crossed? (DEATON *shakes his head no.*) Toes?

DEATON. No!

SONNY. All right, calm down, this is important.

DEATON. You don't want to tell me.

SONNY. No, I don't, but I guess I've got to, so here it is. (*Beat.*) A man is called a queer when he loves men.

DEATON. Loves them?

SONNY. Loves them the way most men love women...you know... mates with them.

DEATON. Mates with them?

SONNY. Deaton, do you know where babies come from?

DEATON. Mama got me at the hospital, but Mamby said somebody brings hers to the house. Her granny, I think.

SONNY. Not exactly.

DEATON. How then?

(Beat.)

SONNY. You know the difference between boys and girls?

(Beat.)

DEATON. Girls don't have wieners.

SONNY. Right...they...don't have a wiener, but they have something that it fits in.

DEATON. A bun?

(SONNY starts laughing uncontrollably, DEATON doesn't understand why this is so funny and gets really angry at SONNY and starts hitting a doubled over SONNY in the back. LORETTA and WESLEY enter.)

LORETTA. Is he having a fit?

DEATON. No, he's supposed to tell me—

SONNY. I will Deaton, I will.

LORETTA. Will tell him what?

SONNY. We're trying to have a man-to-man talk here, Loretta, if you'll just excuse us.

LORETTA. Well, *we're* trying to have a little man-to-woman talk. You should go to your room.

DEATON. Are you going to mate?

WESLEY. Good God!

(LORETTA leans down to SONNY and pinches him on the arm. Hard.)

LORETTA. Scram.

(LORETTA and WESLEY sit on the glider and do some canoeing as SONNY and DEATON cross Downstage Left.)

SONNY. Just give me a chance here, Deaton. This isn't easy.

DEATON. Get to Daddy.

SONNY. It's *not* about Daddy.

DEATON. Okay. Queers.

(Beat.)

SONNY. Girls have a place inside where the boy's wiener fits, and when grownups do that it's called mating.

DEATON. Why?

SONNY. Because there are seeds that come out of the man into the woman.

DEATON. Girls are gardens?

SONNY. Sort of.

DEATON. I'd never get that close to one.

SONNY. Maybe not now, but someday.

DEATON. Men don't have that bun place.

SONNY. That's right. They do something else. I'm not sure what.

DEATON. So do they come and get people.

SONNY. Who?

DEATON. Queers.

SONNY. No, of course not. They...they find each other, I guess, like men and women do.

DEATON. So who found Daddy?

SONNY. Deaton! Didn't you hear me? Daddy is *not* a queer. *Nobody* got him. He left for his own reasons. None of us knows why. But I do know one thing: I'm going to beat the shit out of Albion.

DEATON. *(Doubting it:)* Can I watch?

(Lights change. We are back in the Circle of Life Cafe. DEATON leaves, UNCLE MARTY enters and hands SONNY a pan, which he cleans furiously. UNCLE MARTY watches for a moment. Sees that SONNY has caught him looking and says:)

UNCLE MARTY. Who lit a fire under you?

SONNY. Nobody. I just figure this needs a good going over.

UNCLE MARTY. Well, if you run out of dirt to attack here, you can always go over to my kitchen.

SONNY. Yes Sir. *(Beat.)* What the hell is going on here?

UNCLE MARTY. Sonny! What has come over you?

SONNY. I know you write to my Daddy. I know you know where he is.

(Beat.)

UNCLE MARTY. *(Exploding:)* Have you been TRESPASSING, Sonny Bradshaw? Do I have to tell your mama and your One-Way family that you are a boy who cannot be trusted?

SONNY. What's Mama going to say when she finds out Daddy writes to you? What would One-Way folks say? I bet you know why he left. I bet you've known all along—you may even have had something to do with it.

(UNCLE MARTY grabs SONNY and presses his thumbs into his neck.)

UNCLE MARTY. You ungrateful and conniving boy! If you attempt to defile my name, you'll have the whole church condemning you.

SONNY. Let go of me! *(He does.)* Tell me where Daddy is and why he left and I won't tell a soul how I found out.

UNCLE MARTY. You presume to *bribe* me, Sonny Boy? You think I have no more backbone than that?

SONNY. I think you have...*secrets*. I think you'd give a lot to keep it that way.

(Long beat.)

UNCLE MARTY. Go home. Keep your mouth shut. Tell Selma I need you to help with some things after I close. Then come back and we'll talk.

(Beat.)

SONNY. Okay.

UNCLE MARTY. Okay? What happened to "Yes sir"?

SONNY. I don't know what happened, sir. To you or to my daddy. That's what I'm trying to find out.

(As UNCLE MARTY and SONNY stare at each other, the lights slowly fade to black.)

End of Act I

ACT II

(Lights come up on MAMBY singing in the kitchen as she irons sheets. She sings beautifully, in full voice for she knows she is alone. At the same UNCLE MARTY is closing up at The Circle of Life Café. SONNY comes on and watches both for a while. He then enters the Bradshaw kitchen unnoticed by MAMBY and watches her.)

MAMBY. *(Singing:)*

DO LORD, OH DO LORD
OH, DO REMEMBER ME.
HALLELUJAH!
LOOK AWAY BEYOND THE BLUE.
I GOT A HOME IN GLORY LAND
THAT OUTSHINES THE SUN.

SONNY. *(Interrupting her:)* Mamby, are you miserable?

MAMBY. Lord have mercy, child. You scared a year off this old life.

SONNY. I'm sorry. I just have to know.

MAMBY. You're asking me if I'm miserable? *(SONNY nods yes. MAMBY motions him to sit and he does. She pours him some lemonade.)* Sometimes I'm a bit put out, but I'm not miserable. Not if Nissa will walk. If she'll welcome the life the Lord give her, I'll be fine...better than fine. Now what's got you to thinking on misery?

SONNY. I can't tell you.

(MAMBY puts the lemonade back into the fridge.)

MAMBY. Mmm-hmm, that'll make you sick.

SONNY. Lemonade?

MAMBY. No, honey. Secrets. *(SONNY puts his head down on the table and begins to cry.)* Good. If you can't get it out in words, get it out in water. *(He finishes.)* Better?

SONNY. Yes.

MAMBY. Your Mama won't let you see Nissa?

SONNY. It's not that. I haven't even talked to her yet. It's other stuff.

(MAMBY looks at him. Sees this is serious. She sees a SONNY that is no longer a child but a young man. She thinks a moment then says:)

MAMBY. Sometimes you got to make a mess to make something good. You know what I mean?

(They look at each other. They come to an understanding.)

SONNY. Yes, Mamby. Thank you.

MAMBY. Anytime.

SONNY. Would you tell Mama I might be late for dinner? Uncle Marty wants me to help with some extra stuff after he closes.

MAMBY. I'll tell Selma.

SONNY. I don't think I'll be too long.

MAMBY. Good.

SONNY. I'll see you later.

(SONNY steps out of the scene and hovers between home and The Circle of Life. He speaks to the audience.)

In the kitchen with Mamby I felt safe and solid, but once I left her I started shaking. I had no idea what I was doing, what a mess I'd gotten myself into.

(MAMBY speaks from the kitchen, looking at where SONNY was.)

MAMBY. To make something good?

SONNY. Oh, Mamby if you're right! There's an end to everything. One way or another I'll be home soon. One-Way.

(SONNY is jelly-legged. LORETTA from the front porch speaking to SONNY on the glider.)

LORETTA. Move it, Sonny. If you don't get on the road, you'll miss the car wreck.

SONNY. *(Screwing up his courage:)* With Mamby on one side and Loretta on the other, how can a man go wrong?

(LORETTA starts laughing.)

LORETTA. *(To MAMBY:)* A man? Not yet hefted a Gillette and thinks he's a man!

(Lights change. MAMBY and LORETTA disappear into the shadows, SONNY crosses to UNCLE MARTY who has been working the whole time. He notices SONNY and motions to a stool.)

UNCLE MARTY. Sit down, Sonny. *(SONNY does.)* Sometimes the Lord puts a lot on us and there's no way we can understand why. We know His grace is sufficient, but we don't always feel that way, Sonny. And we don't always stay on the path. *(SONNY nods.)* Your Daddy—Leon—is a good man. Beautiful in every way. A fine Daddy for a boy to take after, and you do. *(SONNY nods again. UNCLE MARTY acknowledges this and continues.)* My whole life I've been, well, allergic to women—

(SONNY lets out a single loud laugh.)

SONNY. Sorry.

(UNCLE MARTY is angry or ashamed or both. He presses those emotions down and continues.)

UNCLE MARTY. I was just about your age when I...fell in love with Leon. Of course, I never told him. Or anybody else for that matter. I watched him grow up, get a job, and marry Selma, and start the kind of life the Lord withheld from me. I had my faith and church and work. I gave up expecting more. Even in this small town, I never saw Leon much. He was busy with his job and family and worshiped with the Methodists. Kiwanis was about the only place we met and he didn't always attend. I should say here I've always been a person people confide in. I don't know why—maybe they can tell I'm no competition. Anyway, for whatever reason, Leon stopped me one Tuesday as we were going out of the Chat 'n' Chew—Kiwanis met there then, like it does now—and said he needed to talk to me.

(UNCLE MARTY now crosses into his apt. He is younger and more effeminate than before. He is straightening up the apartment and is very nervous.)

We met at my apartment. I was a nervous wreck. When the doorbell rang I couldn't breathe.

(DADDY enters, and sits.)

What is it, Leon?

DADDY. I need your help, and I need it to be a secret.

UNCLE MARTY. Are you in trouble?

DADDY. Not yet. But if I don't change my ways, I will be. (*Beat.*) You know I travel with my job?

UNCLE MARTY. I do.

DADDY. Well, I was in New Orleans and I met some—some very different sort of people, and I found...

UNCLE MARTY. You found what?

DADDY. I've been living the wrong life.

UNCLE MARTY. Wrong, how?

DADDY. I fell in love with someone else and it's not... Martin, you swear you'll never tell this?

UNCLE MARTY. I do.

DADDY. On the body of Jesus?

UNCLE MARTY. Well, I don't like to—

DADDY. Martin, *please*.

UNCLE MARTY. I swear.

DADDY. It's not a woman.

UNCLE MARTY. Lord have mercy.

DADDY. I hope so. Mozier won't. And I can't live like this, Martin, going there, being with him, returning here, pretending. But I have these children. And Selma. How can I leave them?

(As DADDY contemplates this situation UNCLE MARTY returns for a moment to SONNY.)

UNCLE MARTY. He was in anguish, Sonny. And I wasn't having an easy time myself. I prayed. I prayed hard to keep quiet. You haven't told him all these years, I said to myself, don't do it now.

DADDY. I'm sorry to burden you with this, but I have a huge favor to ask. You've always been kind to me.

UNCLE MARTY. *(To SONNY:)* My heart was starting to feel like a bruise.

DADDY. And you don't have family obligations of your own...If I find a way to leave, could you keep an eye out for Selma and my children?

UNCLE MARTY. *(To SONNY:)* For you, anything is what I thought. To him, I said: Of course.

DADDY. And could I stay in touch with you to find out how they are? *(UNCLE MARTY nods yes.)* I know it's a lot to ask. A lifework. But you're the only one I trust. You're so steady, and you have a good heart.

UNCLE MARTY. *(To SONNY:)* That was too much. *(To DADDY:)* I have loved you since we were boys.

DADDY. *(Startled:)* Our friendship does go back.

UNCLE MARTY. *(Taking his hand:)* I mean what you mean. *(They look at each other, then to SONNY:)* And that was it.

SONNY. *(Standing:)* What was it?

UNCLE MARTY. I said if he was going, he'd better go on. And he did.

(DADDY gets up and shakes UNCLE MARTY's hand. He leaves but stays on the edge of the scene to watch.)

(SONNY doesn't answer or look at UNCLE MARTY.)

UNCLE MARTY. I'm almost finished. (*He motions SONNY to sit back down, which he does.*) That's how I came to be your guardian, Sonny. Appointed by your father and accepted by your mother, even though she never knew why. That's how I came to your house, got you to One-Way, shepherded your family. To watch you for your daddy. To help you all for him. And writing letters is part of it.

SONNY. Where is he?

UNCLE MARTY. I don't know. I write to him through his friends.

SONNY. Would that be Raymond and Eddie?

UNCLE MARTY. How do you know about them?

SONNY. I *went* there. That weekend I was gone. I'd found your letter and I thought it would lead me to Daddy.

UNCLE MARTY. Well, I'll be. I wish you'd talked to me then.

SONNY. Why would I? You'd been hiding him and lying to us!

UNCLE MARTY. Now, Sonny, that's not fair.

SONNY. *You're* talking to me about fair?

UNCLE MARTY. But I've only *helped* you.

SONNY. The hell you have.

UNCLE MARTY. Sonny! Watch your language!

SONNY. My LANGUAGE? I don't care about the words, I want the truth!

UNCLE MARTY. I just gave it to you.

SONNY. No. The truth is you've had Daddy all these years and we haven't—

UNCLE MARTY. But that's what he—

SONNY. And you don't want me to tell. I'm supposed to go on working for you, knowing this lie.

UNCLE MARTY. What lie? This is the truth! The truth that your daddy loved you, and Deaton, and Loretta. That he appointed a caretaker. That all these years through me he's been watching over you.

SONNY. Spying, you mean! Seeing when he can't be seen. That's not love.

UNCLE MARTY. It's what God does.

SONNY. So God went to New Orleans and turned queer?

UNCLE MARTY. Sonny Bradshaw! That's blasphemy!

SONNY. So, what? This is not exactly a Sunday school lesson.

(Beat.)

UNCLE MARTY. No, it's not.

SONNY. And won't he go to Hell?

UNCLE MARTY. Who?

SONNY. My daddy, Leon, the beautiful man you say you love. According to One-Way isn't he damned to Hell?

UNCLE MARTY. Sonny—

SONNY. And what about you?

UNCLE MARTY. Stop, Sonny, please stop. I can't take this. Jesus.

(SONNY knows the damage he has done and leaves. UNCLE MARTY buries his face in the washrag SONNY had used and cries.)

(Lights change. LORETTA is sitting on the porch, smoking.)

SONNY. Retta!

LORETTA. Little Leon! What are you doing here?

SONNY. I've got to talk to you.

LORETTA. Then spill. Wesley will be here any minute.

SONNY. I don't care about Wesley. I—

LORETTA. Good.

SONNY. Loretta. I've just found out our daddy is...is...

LORETTA. Miss America!

SONNY. Loretta! *(He leans in to her and whispers:)* He's a queer.

LORETTA. You smell awful.

SONNY. Did you hear me?

LORETTA. Of course I heard you. You think that's news?

SONNY. How did you know?

LORETTA. I'm alive and I pay attention.

SONNY. So do I!

LORETTA. Yes, but you pay attention to what you're thinking and feeling. I pay attention to what's going on. And...I eavesdrop.

SONNY. You do?

LORETTA. How else am I going to survive in a family as tight-lipped as tombs?

SONNY. They talk all the time.

LORETTA. Sure, about butterbeans and bowel trouble and how we ought to behave, but about *real* stuff, like the fact that our daddy waltzed off one day and never came back, not a word. Not to us. So, I had to listen.

SONNY. Does Mama know?

LORETTA. Mama doesn't *want* to know. Being a cast off woman is bad enough, but being cast off for a man? She'd be dust in the road.

SONNY. How about Aunt Roo?

LORETTA. Don't know and don't care. It was Hickman and Sink I heard talking about it.

SONNY. But Uncle Sink's mean. How did you know he wasn't making it up?

LORETTA. Because I'd heard rumors, bits of things at school, only I hadn't known what they meant.

SONNY. Like what?

(The sound of the motorcycle approaching. LORETTA stands and stubs out her cigarette and starts walking off.)

LORETTA. Tell Mama I'm out with Wesley.

SONNY. But Loretta, I'm not—

(LORETTA turns back to SONNY, smiles and says:)

LORETTA. Welcome to the world, Sonny.

(Lights change. It is the next day. MAMBY is coming into the house. She has a moment alone. She sits and pulls her work shoes out of an old paper bag and slowly puts them on. She is far away when SONNY walks into the kitchen. Before she speaks, there is a transformation; the face for white people—even though these are ones she truly loves—comes into focus. Meanwhile on the other side of the stage, UNCLE MARTY returns to the Circle of Life and starts to work. He also, is one with two faces. At this time, we see the anguish he is going through. At the same time SONNY walks in on MAMBY, a customer walks into the Circle and we see the transformation of UNCLE MARTY simultaneously with MAMBY.)

MAMBY. Morning, Sonny.

UNCLE MARTY. Morning, Ma'am.

SONNY. Morning.

(SONNY looks at her feet. UNCLE MARTY waits while the woman looks over the donut selection behind him.)

MAMBY. Got stories, these feet.

SONNY. They do?

MAMBY. Read them in other people's shoes.

SONNY. *(Thinking first:)* You mean handed-down shoes like when I wear Albion's and then Deaton gets what's left?

MAMBY. No, My feet wear shoes that were broke in further back than that. And they don't know who did it. *(Chuckles mirthlessly.)* Might have been some white lady.

(MAMBY puts her shoes in the bag and puts it out of sight. She gets to work. UNCLE MARTY puts the woman's donuts in a bag and gives it to her.)

How's your mama this morning?

SONNY. I don't know. I haven't seen her.

UNCLE MARTY. *(Handing the woman her donuts:)* There you go.

MAMBY. Humph! Getting up late. She'll be down in the mouth.

SONNY. Yeah. I think I'll just go on to work.

MAMBY. Suit yourself.

UNCLE MARTY. *(As the woman leaves:)* "Thou knowest not the day nor the hour."

(The woman leaves and UNCLE MARTY looks inward.)

(SONNY looks at her back while she works. He crosses to the Circle of Life and sees UNCLE MARTY facing away from him. MAMBY keeps working. SONNY puts on an apron and UNCLE MARTY turns to him. UNCLE MARTY watches him. Finally, SONNY realizes this, turns and looks at him.)

SONNY. For Mama's sake I'm not going to tell.

UNCLE MARTY. Thank the Lord! The last thing I want is to hurt Selma. Oh, Sonny, you've got a real heart. You are Leon's boy.

(UNCLE MARTY reaches out to pat SONNY but stops a couple of inches away. They look at each other for a long moment. UNCLE MARTY leaves. MAMBY keeps working in the kitchen. UNCLE MARTY comes back.)

UNCLE MARTY. Sonny, you've worked nonstop since you got here. I'll bet you didn't even have lunch.

SONNY. No time.

UNCLE MARTY. Why don't you quit early then? Just take off now and go on home.

SONNY. But we need more chocolate icing. I've got chocolate melting on the stove.

UNCLE MARTY. I'll take care of it. This heat is merciless. (MAMBY turns on the radio. Searching through the dial. Finds some music.) And you know I promised your mother not to overwork you...

SONNY. Okay.

(SONNY starts to leave but looks at UNCLE MARTY who has turned away.)

UNCLE MARTY. Tell Selma I'll let her know if I'm coming to supper.

SONNY. Sure.

(SONNY turns and is outside his house. He hears the music. SONNY enters the kitchen. MAMBY puts down the iron and turns off the radio.)

MAMBY. Just hunting the news.

SONNY. News?

(UNCLE MARTY finds the chocolate but makes a decision not to stir it. Or turn it off. He sits.)

MAMBY. Lot going on.

SONNY. Like what?

(Beat.)

MAMBY. How about you? How come you're home so early?

SONNY. Uncle Marty thinks it's too hot.

(UNCLE MARTY pulls out his dog-eared copy of Scripture and reads. SONNY gets a glass of iced tea. Sits and drinks it while MAMBY irons and UNCLE MARTY reads.)

MAMBY. Yes, sir it's hot. Great day for ironing.

(SONNY nods and drinks down the tea as UNCLE MARTY stands, takes off his apron and hat, and looks again at the chocolate and walks out.)

MAMBY. Sonny, do me a favor, go bring in that last load off the line.

SONNY. Sure.

(SONNY goes out. MAMBY looks at the radio. UNCLE MARTY returns with two buckets of lard.)

(Blackout—In the blackout the sound of a fire grows louder and louder until it is only white noise and the white noise turns into the sound of steam—water on fire—this becomes the sound of a choir singing—which finally turns into the sound of a car pulling up.)

(Lights up on MAMA, DEATON, and SONNY around the kitchen table after dinner. In come UNCLE SINK and AUNT ROO. AUNT ROO comes up to MAMA and takes MAMA's hands in hers.)

UNCLE SINK. There's been a fire at the Donut shop.

MAMA. How bad is it.

AUNT ROO. Oh, Selma.

UNCLE SINK. Sit her down.

MAMA. Is it all gone? Poor Marty.

UNCLE SINK. Marty is—

AUNT ROO. Sinclair! Let me do this. It's Marty. The Circle of Life caught fire and either he was already in there or he ran in hoping to put it out.

MAMA. No!

(MAMA goes weak and AUNT ROO and UNCLE SINK sit her down to console her. SONNY steps down and UNCLE MARTY crosses to the opposite corner of the stage. There is the sound of more cars pulling up.)

SONNY. It was the copper bowl. The chocolate.

(Lights change. Everyone upstage disappears leaving SONNY and UNCLE MARTY on stage alone.)

SONNY. Uncle Marty—oh my God it couldn't, couldn't have happened. Last night was just a nightmare. In a minute I'll wake up and get dressed and eat biscuits and honey and before long, I'll be back at the Circle of Life.

(UNCLE MARTY looks at him. He slowly shakes his head and gives SONNY a sad smile.)

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death... No, I can't think like that...yes I can. Marty, what do you always tell me? Every day that I work for you. What?

UNCLE MARTY. "Thou knowest not the day nor the hour."

SONNY. Not that.

UNCLE MARTY. "I am the vine and ye are the branches."

SONNY. No. About work.

UNCLE MARTY. *(As if this were also scripture:)* "Straining the oil in the fryers is a dangerous job. Never let it spill. Oil on the floors can lead to falls, which can lead to burns or concussions."

SONNY. And.

UNCLE MARTY. *(As if this were also scripture:)* And... "Oil spilled on a burner or pilot light can burst into flame."

SONNY. And.

UNCLE MARTY. *(As if this were also scripture:)* And... "Never leave the burner on under the copper bowl."

SONNY. Was that what happened? Did you forget it Uncle Marty?

UNCLE MARTY. "Whither shall I go from thy spirit?"

SONNY. Tell me what happened. It was an accident. Right? Right?

(UNCLE MARTY leaves.)

SONNY. Tell me...

LORETTA. *(From off:)* Out of your holes, you muskrats. Mama's orders.

(DEATON comes down to SONNY.)

DEATON. Sonny, you all right?

(SONNY is looking for UNCLE MARTY with his eyes.)

SONNY. I'm fine.

(The three are at the table. MAMBY is setting down juice.)

MAMBY. Bless these poor hearts.

SONNY. Where's Mama?

LORETTA. With the undertaker.

DEATON. Undertaker?

SONNY. At the funeral home.

LORETTA. He's the guy who pumps the blood out of dead people and then pumps in other stuff to keep them nice and fresh till they're planted.

DEATON. Planted?

LORETTA. Buried. The undertaker takes them under.

DEATON. You mean Uncle Marty?

LORETTA. Well, if there's enough left of—

MAMBY. Hush now. You got to show the dead some respect.

LORETTA. I was just *educating*—

MAMBY. No, honey. That was mocking.

DEATON. Uncle Marty is dead like *that*?

(SONNY looks at LORETTA expecting her to say something. She just sits there.)

MAMBY. Your Uncle Marty's fine. He's gone to be with his Lord, and he's just fine. *(Beat:)* Now go clean up your rooms. A lot of folks going to be in and out.

DEATON. Who? What for?

MAMBY. Church folks bringing food and other Mozier folks who knew Mr. Bonner.

SONNY. But why are they coming here?

MAMBY. You're his family. Now run on.

DEATON. They're not coming in our room.

MAMBY. People get in a house, they might go anywhere.

(MAMBY crosses back upstage, irons a tablecloth and puts it on the table leaving DEATON and SONNY alone. LORETTA crosses off.)

DEATON. I want to put out my burnt match collection.

SONNY. Under the circumstances, Deaton I don't think that would be right.

DEATON. *We're* not Uncle Marty's family.

SONNY. We're what he had.

DEATON. What happened to his real people?

SONNY. I don't know. Maybe he didn't have many relatives and those died off.

(Beat.)

DEATON. *(Pulling out a mayonnaise jar filled with burnt matches:)* I don't think I want this anymore.

SONNY. Okay.

DEATON. Let's throw them in the creek.

SONNY. Okay.

DEATON. Right now.

SONNY. No. We'll get all dirty and snagged up if we go through the brambles, and those people are coming.

DEATON. Sonny, you are turning into a grownup.

SONNY. Sorry. How about we bury the jar.

DEATON. Right now?

SONNY. If that's what you want.

(They cross to the opposite side of the stage and place the jar in the ground.)

DEATON. Now pray.

SONNY. Come on, Deaton!

DEATON. When you bury something you pray.

SONNY. Oh, all right. *(They bow their heads.)* Good food, good meat, good God—

DEATON. Sonny!

SONNY. That's just what came into my mind.

DEATON. Well, look for something else.

(They bow their heads again.)

SONNY. Lord, let what we bury rest in peace...and help Mama. Amen.

DEATON. Amen. We got to sing.

SONNY. Enough is enough. I am not singing over a jar. *(DEATON is mad and about to cry. SONNY gives in.)* Something short.

(DEATON nods okay. SONNY starts to sing and DEATON joins him.)

HE'S THE LILY OF THE VALLEY
HE'S THE BRIGHT AND MORNING STAR.
HE'S THE FAIREST OF TEN THOUSAND.
EVERYBODY OUGHT TO KNOW.

(Lights change. DEATON goes out. SONNY steps into the kitchen. DEATON stays to dress up the grave.)

MAMA. The funeral will be at two tomorrow.

SONNY. You want some sweet tea? (MAMA *shakes her head.*) A sandwich?

MAMA. Coffee. (He *pours her a cup of coffee.*) Where's your sister?

SONNY. At work, I guess. She disappeared after breakfast.

MAMA. She shouldn't be at work. Not when the family's mourning. And there's supposed to be a wreath on the door. Where's the wreath? (SONNY *shrugs.*) What about Deaton?

SONNY. In the back yard.

(*Beat.*)

MAMA. Sonny, Mamby said you went back to help Uncle Marty late yesterday. Did he seem all right then?

SONNY. Yes.

MAMA. It's not like him to be careless. He knew his business, what was safe and what was not—

(MAMA *chokes up and come awfully close, but does not cry.*)

I can't see how this happened.

SONNY. A kitchen is a dangerous place. He told me that.

(*Beat.*)

MAMA. It's in all the papers—Mozier, Andalusia, Mobile.

SONNY. Mobile?

(MAMBY *comes into the kitchen with DEATON on her tail.*)

DEATON. Hey Sonny I just saw Mrs. Johnstone's cat catch a chipmunk and eat it! I think the chipmunk was still alive but... Mama. (MAMA *holds out her arm and DEATON runs to her. She hugs him tight.*) I'm hungry.

MAMBY. I made a plate of sandwiches. Sonny would you reach those to me? They're on the middle shelf.

(SONNY *gets the plate and hands it to MAMBY who sets it in the middle of the table. DEATON digs in.*)

SONNY. You want some milk?

DEATON. Yes, please.

MAMBY. Selma, you look like I feel.

(*Beat.*)

MAMA. Would you sit down and have some coffee?

(MAMBY sits down at the table. SONNY pours her a cup of coffee.)

MAMA. How is Nissa?

MAMBY. Not speaking. Not to me or her daddy or Freelan. So I don't know how she is except stubborn.

MAMA. Will she try the leg?

MAMBY. (*Shaking her head.*) Won't hardly use the crutches.

MAMA. Will she eat?

MAMBY. She only wants ice cream. And she can't have that.

DEATON. Why not?

MAMBY. Sugar. She's got too much sugar.

DEATON. Why—?

(MAMA gives him a look and shakes her head. MAMBY stares off. SONNY takes a bite of a sandwich and puts it back down.)

MAMBY. Last night, Mr. Bill said to Nissa—and that man hasn't put ten words together at a time in twenty years—he said "Nissa, God give you what He give you and you got to accept it. It's your life—ain't nothing more precious. But sometimes you got to fight for it." And he pulled up his shirt and showed her the scar where he got scalded when a boiler cap blew and the steam hit him. (*She holds up a plate.*) It's bigger than this. And he's always hid it from the children, afraid it might scare them. "Happened before you was born," he said. "I was on a run up to Baltimore. Wound up in a hospital in Virginia. Couldn't no kin get to me. Pain like hellfire. Doctors afraid some of my insides might be cooked. None of my plumbing worked either," he said. "And I thought, this is wrong. This is the awfulest thing. I didn't do nothing to deserve bein' scalded like a chicken but not yet killed. I got a wife and a baby coming. I can't work. Might never work. Lie around, be somebody's burden. I'm *useless*. God has throwed me away." "Then what?" Nissa asked. "I commenced to die," Mr. Bill told her. "Wouldn't open my mouth. Wouldn't swallow what water they could get in me. Course, they had their needles, but everything they shot in just leaked out the burns." "Then what?" Nissa asked again. "Then I looked at my hand." Mr. Bill said. "This big powerful hand"—he held it up—"that had got so poor and feeble. And in my mind—no it was in my heart; in my heart I saw my daddy's hand, work-wore and callused with a thick scar across the palm that I didn't even know where he got, and it went through me like lightning; I don't know what he suffered. And his daddy, Zekiel, he was born a *slave*, so what am I doing here, about to give up and die in a *hospital*? Their hands is in these hands."—he held his out, then

reached over and took ahold of Nissa's. "They held on to life—and it bitter, sweet, scalded, and maimed—they didn't let go. So I didn't. And you won't either. You got these *hands*." And you know what that girl said? She looked at her daddy, who'd just give her his heart on a plate, and she said, "But I can't walk." "You can, if you will," he told her.

(MAMA is crying and not quietly about it.)

DEATON. Can I see that scar?

(MAMA blots her face with a napkin and reaches over with her good arm and holds MAMBY's hand.)

MAMA. Thank you.

(Lights change. Through the first part of this next speech, MAMBY and MAMA remain seated sharing the moment and DEATON between them.)

SONNY. That night was the visitation, which is where the family has to go to the funeral home and stand by the coffin so other people can come and hug them or shake their hands and say how sorry they are that the person in the coffin died. Usually, at least in Mozier, the top of the coffin is open so you have to LOOK at the body and hear everybody say the person looks natural, just like they're asleep. I remember this from when Grandpa died. We were spared this because they didn't open Uncle Marty. After we got back from the visitation I had a nightmare. It involved a game of hide and seek with Deaton at the One-Way, and a flood, Loretta and Mama trying to swim to the stairs, and Cantaloupe, who I at one point thought was a snake. I woke up bathed in sweat and made a quick check of everybody to make sure they hadn't been carried away.

(MAMA crosses upstage to the kitchen and sees SONNY.)

MAMA. Sonny! What are you doing?

SONNY. I had a bad dream. I wanted to make sure everybody was all right. Why are you up?

MAMA. Can't sleep. I was just getting some water.

(MAMA gets some water and sits. It's obvious she has not slept at all.)

SONNY. Mama, if you had a really big secret and it had to do with people you knew and one of them found out about it and told you, how bad would that be?

MAMA. What are you talking about, Sonny?

SONNY. Nothing, it was just a dream.

MAMA. Oh, I know what you mean. They can be real as day. And then... *(Beat.)* sometimes you wish the day was a dream. You need to go back to bed. We have another hard day tomorrow.

SONNY. Okay, Mama.

(She turns to leave, then turns back.)

MAMA. Sonny...You're a good boy. And you've not had an easy time. I'm sorry for that.

SONNY. It's okay Mama.

MAMA. *(Not really hearing him:)* Your daddy said you were smart as two people and that alone would give you a rough road. And Marty... Marty said you were God's gift, after the trial of Loretta.

SONNY. We should both get some sleep. It'll be daylight soon.

MAMA. You never gave me any worry—oh, there was that trip to Mobile, but Sinclair says—

SONNY. Come on, Mama. You're almost asleep on your feet.

MAMA. That's true.

(MAMA goes off to bed leaving SONNY alone. She says from far, far away:)

Sweet dreams.

(Lights change to morning. SONNY cringes at the morning sun.)

SONNY. I didn't go back to sleep. I couldn't. If I couldn't tell Mama, that only left Loretta.

(LORETTA crosses to the porch.)

SONNY. You've got to help me.

LORETTA. With what?

SONNY. If I don't tell somebody what happened with Uncle Marty I'm going to bust.

LORETTA. Then spill. I've seen you pass out. I sure wouldn't want to see you bust.

SONNY. You won't tell anybody?

LORETTA. Who in this green hell would I tell?

SONNY. Wesley.

LORETTA. Sonny, Wesley hasn't got a brain to keep it in. Now go on before Selma gets up.

SONNY. Then why do you— (*SONNY is stopped by LORETTA's look.*) Okay. (*Beat.*) You know when I went to Mobile?

LORETTA. Yep. Summer Crises Number One.

SONNY. It was because I found a letter from Daddy to Uncle Marty.

LORETTA. You are kidding.

SONNY. No, I'm not. He wanted to know how we were and especially how I was doing at my job at the Circle of Life. Daddy knows all about us, Retta. He arraigned for Uncle Marty to be his spy before he left.

LORETTA. Holy Cow!

(*LORETTA thinks on this a moment then looks at SONNY.*)

SONNY. Then the other day Deaton wanted to know what a queer was because Albion told him that the queers got Daddy. Remember that night that you and Wesley came home and we were sitting out here?

(*LORETTA nods.*)

That's what we were talking about. Anyway, Deaton's question made me think about those men back in Mobile, those men who lived at the address on Daddy's envelope. And all of a sudden I knew that's what they were: queers. When I'd seen them I sort of knew but I didn't know. So what did that mean? What was the connection with Uncle Marty? If he'd been in touch with Daddy, and he was really our friend, why didn't he tell Mama, who would give anything to hear from Daddy? Why was he keeping him to himself?

LORETTA. Slow down, Sonny. You go to fast you'll spin out on a curve. (*SONNY takes a deep breath.*) Two more. (*He does.*)

SONNY. So two days before the fire I couldn't take it anymore. I told Uncle Marty I'd read Daddy's letter and been to Mobile and he had to tell me what was going on.

LORETTA. Jesus in a jukebox, Sonny! That was dumb!

SONNY. Well, what would you have done?

LORETTA. I don't know. But not that. Go on.

SONNY. He got really mad—

LORETTA. Burned up, so to speak.

SONNY. Retta!

LORETTA. Okay. Bad taste. I'm sorry.

SONNY. And he said to come back after closing and we'd talk about it.

LORETTA. And?

(Beat.)

SONNY. And when I did he said he'd loved Daddy since they were boys but Daddy didn't know it till he came to Uncle Marty and told him he'd...

LORETTA. He'd what?

(SONNY is too choked up to speak and points to his throat.)

LORETTA. Day's wasting.

SONNY. He'd gone to New Orleans and fallen in love with a man.

LORETTA. Well! So why was he confessing to Uncle Marty?

SONNY. Because he felt like he had to leave Mozier, and us, without a trace, and he wanted somebody to keep an eye on his family.

LORETTA. His family he was deserting.

SONNY. Right. And when Uncle Marty heard this he had to tell Daddy his feelings—

LORETTA. Throw up!

SONNY. So that settled it. Daddy left the very next day.

(LORETTA starts to laugh.)

LORETTA. That *slays* me. *(SONNY just looks at her, shaking his head.)* Well, what am I supposed to do? You're telling me our disappeared daddy is a queer and our fake uncle, who just got incinerated in a donut shop, was his spy and also a queer and I'm supposed to cry? Let me tell you something, Sonny. Life is a steamroller. Take a situation like this—you take it seriously and it will crush you in no time flat.

SONNY. But what if you don't think it's funny?

LORETTA. *(Leaning in and tapping his head:)* Change your mind.

SONNY. I'll try.

LORETTA. You'd better. It's a matter of...of laugh and death. *(She hoots and slaps her knee.)* So then what happened?

SONNY. I got really mad and told him he was a spy and a liar and that according to One-Way, our daddy was going to Hell—

LORETTA. Uh-oh.

SONNY. And I knew I ought to quit right there but I was furious, so I said he wasn't in such a great light himself, and he said, 'stop, please' and I should have but I didn't. I went on to say the worst thing.

LORETTA. Which was?

SONNY. I said 'Now that I know the truth, you expect me to keep quiet?'

LORETTA. (*Seriously.*) Oh, Sonny. You threatened him?

SONNY. Not exactly. I didn't say I *would* tell. But I brought up the possibility that I might.

LORETTA. Expose him.

SONNY. Yes.

LORETTA. Oh, brother.

SONNY. But the next day I went back and told him I *wouldn't* tell, on account of how it would hurt Mama.

LORETTA. That's good. (*Beat.*) Look, Sonny. The truth is not your fault. What you said wasn't great. In fact, that part about Leon and hell, that was rotten. But the lies were Leon's and Uncle Marty's. You just made him look at some of the consequences. And you tried to do the same with our old man.

SONNY. "A beautiful man," Uncle Marty called him.

LORETTA. Yeah? Well, let him show some of that beauty around here with a hug or a birthday card or some reliable information about engines.

SONNY. I thought Wesley—

LORETTA. Sonny, you weren't listening! Wesley's brain, his total capacity for intellectual comprehension or synthesis, or even rote memory, is the size of...of... (*She reaches behind her on the glider and grabs something.*) Of this sow bug.

SONNY. So if you know that, why do you go out with him?

LORETTA. First off, he thinks I'm as beautiful as his Harley, and he knows I've got more gears. Second, he doesn't live in this house or belong to this family. And third, if he took a notion to leave me, he'd be too dumb to find the door.

(Lights change. They go to the kitchen where MAMA is drinking coffee and DEATON has just finished a piece of pie for breakfast.)

LORETTA. I'll clean this up.

(The doorbell rings and DADDY is at the door with a small suitcase.)

MAMA. *(From offstage:)* Run get it Deaton.

(DEATON runs to the door, sees it is a man he does not know.)

DADDY. Hello Deaton.

(DEATON runs back to the kitchen.)

DEATON. It's a man.

LORETTA. Who?

DEATON. Somebody who said "hello Deaton."

(SONNY and LORETTA look at each other and turn to run to the front door when DADDY walks in.)

DADDY. I heard the news. I had to come home.

SONNY. It's not—

LORETTA. I'm afraid it is. Give me one good reason why I should let you stay.

DADDY. I'm your father.

LORETTA. You're pathetic.

MAMA. *(Coming into the kitchen:)* Leon?

DADDY. I read about Marty.

MAMA. You heard about Marty? And you're here?

(DADDY nods. MAMA begins to laugh. It grows to the hysterical with tears streaming down her face. Everyone just stares at her.)

LORETTA. Mama?

DADDY. Selma?

DEATON. Let him stay!

(MAMA's laughter flips into sobs. Huge gasps and moans come out of her. LORETTA helps her to a chair. SONNY, wondering if he should let DADDY stay, catches LORETTA's eye.)

SONNY. Should we?

LORETTA. Oh, okay. Maybe he can fetch water.

DADDY. *(To LORETTA:)* I'm sorry, I didn't—

LORETTA. Evidently not.

DADDY. Do you have any brandy? It might help.

LORETTA. *(To SONNY:)* There's the Get-Set bottle.

SONNY. I'll get it.

(SONNY goes to Mama's bedroom and gets the gin. DADDY goes to a kitchen cupboard and looks for a glass. He pulls out a teacup. LORETTA keeps one eye on MAMA who is starting to wear down and one eye on DADDY, apparently afraid he might steal something. DEATON is sitting by MAMA. SONNY returns.)

SONNY. Retta says Mama keeps gin in here.

DADDY. Let me see. *(He takes off the sprayer and sniffs the bottle.)* She could be right. *(He takes a taste and makes a face.)* God! Selma could kill herself with this. It's gin, but it tastes like whatever came in the bottle. Is there any orange juice?

(SONNY gets some and pours it in the teacup. DADDY takes it to MAMA.)

DADDY. *(To DEATON:)* If you'll move a minute, son—

(DEATON just glares at him.)

LORETTA. Give it to me. Come on, Mama. Sit up and drink this.

(MAMA sits up, takes the teacup in both hands and drinks it all down.)

MAMA. Thirsty.

LORETTA. In shock. *(To DADDY:)* Just what the hell do you think you're doing, busting in on us like that?

DADDY. May I sit down?

LORETTA. Yeah, but only because looking up at you hurts my neck.

(He does.)

DADDY. I read about Martin's death and I knew you all would be alone now.

MAMA. Spare me your kindness.

DADDY. Sonny had come looking for me. He knew I was in touch with Martin.

MAMA. Sonny?

SONNY. That's why I went to Mobile.

MAMA. Lord help us, Sonny. Why didn't you tell me?

SONNY. I didn't know how.

DADDY. I even talked to him. *And* Deaton. Twice. On the phone.

LORETTA. Well, la-dee-da!

DADDY. So I've been in touch.

(MAMA gives out a hoarse sound, not a laugh or a sob, just something left over from both.)

MAMA. How long has it been, Leon? Seven years? Almost seven and a half? And you call two phone calls being in touch?

DADDY. Selma, I *couldn't*. And, you see, I had Martin. I asked him to watch over you.

MAMA. Watch over us?

DADDY. He sent me pictures. And he let me know—

MAMA. *(Jumping up and grabbing DADDY by the shoulders;)* You think we're—some pack of dogs you can leave with the neighbors?

DADDY. *(Rising, more to keep her from falling;)* No, Selma, honey. It was the only way I knew—

MAMA. *(Shaking him off;)* Don't you dare! Martin Bonner was our friend, our deep friend in the Lord. And he would have been regardless of your...your cheap spying. So don't try to take that from me. You've taken more than you deserve all these years... Don't think you can take Marty, too.

(She walks out. DADDY stands there with his three children looking at him. CANTALOUPE saunters by.)

DADDY. Is that your cat?

DEATON. Don't you touch her!

(Beat.)

DADDY. You're a tough bunch.

(DADDY turns to walk out.)

LORETTA. See you at the funeral.

(Lights change. Sound of a motorcycle. DEATON and LORETTA pull five chairs downstage. SONNY helps MAMA take off her housecoat to reveal a black dress. As he does this, he asks;)

SONNY. Why isn't Mamby going to the funeral?

MAMA. You know good and well why.

SONNY. Which of course I did by then, but I just didn't get it.

(WESLEY comes on in a tie. WESLEY gestures to LORETTA to ride with him as everyone starts to get in the car.)

LORETTA. No, Wesley, I need to be with Mama.

MAMA. You can ride with us.

WESLEY. Can I drive?

MAMA. If you have a license.

(WESLEY drives. LORETTA is next to him, MAMA next to her. SONNY and DEATON are in the back seat.)

MAMA. Sinclair wanted to take us, but he rattles me sometimes, and I decided I didn't want any extra rattling today. Ha!

WESLEY. This Buick don't rattle at all.

(Beat.)

LORETTA. Mama? What did you get out of Daddy besides us?

MAMA. That's a thoughtful question.

(As MAMA thinks on this and LORETTA lets her, GRANDMA and AUNT ROO come into the church and sit. All except UNCLE SINK, who is waiting for MAMA, and DADDY who is standing around looking uncomfortable. LORETTA sighs. The car comes to a stop at the One-Way and PASTOR and MRS. BIGGS come up to the window on Mama's side.)

PASTOR BIGGS. Everything is set for the service, Sister Bradshaw, just the way we talked about. Sister Clemons has worked up the music and I've written my message, and—

MRS. PASTOR BIGGS. And I've arraigned the gladiolas.

(WORKMAN #1 and #2 cross the stage with tools.)

WORKMAN 2. Did that man in there commit sideways?

WORKMAN 1. Do what?

WORKMAN 2. Sideways. You know, like when you wet leather shoelaces and tie them tight around your neck so they can choke you to death in your sleep.

MAMA. Oh, God. *(LORETTA whips out some smelling salts and sticks them under MAMA's nose.)* Thank you, but I'm not feeling faint.

PASTOR BIGGS. *(Trying his best to ignore what has just occurred:)* So all is in readiness to send elder Bonner home.

MAMA. Thank you.

MRS. PASTOR BIGGS. My tears have been my food day and night.

MAMA. Yes.

PASTOR BIGGS. But, He shall wipe every tear from our eyes. (*Leaning in to help MAMA out of the car:*) You can lean on me Sister Bradshaw. I'll take you in.

MAMA. Thank you Pastor. But I've got Sonny.

(They all get out of the car and SONNY takes his mother's arm. DEATON holds his mother's hand and WESLEY and LORETTA hold hands. At that point the workers start hammering on the casket.)

PASTOR BIGGS. We need to delay a moment, Sister Bradshaw. There's been a slight problem and I don't think it's been corrected yet.

MAMA. What's that noise?

PASTOR BIGGS. There was a gentleman...a gentleman from out of town who couldn't make it to last night's visitation and requested to see the deceased—

WESLEY. Couldn't they get it open?

PASTOR BIGGS. Actually, that is not the problem. The problem is—

MAMA. Lord God Almighty! (*She rushes in and sees what is going on. She zeros in on DADDY, ignoring UNCLE SINK.*) Leon Bradshaw! Do you have to wreck funerals, too?

DADDY. I wanted to say goodbye.

LORETTA. Are you satisfied?

(MAMA looks around and spies MRS. PASTOR BIGGS.)

MAMA. For God's sake, sing something!

(She starts into "Are You Satisfied With Jesus?" as the workers keep banging on the coffin. They stop for a second as WORKMAN #2 jumps up on the casket lid to force it down.)

WORKMAN 1. Damnedest thing I ever saw. Fool thing just won't shut.

WORKMAN 2. Must be warped.

WESLEY. He wasn't that fat.

MAMA. (*To DADDY:*) If you weren't so selfish—

PASTOR BIGGS. I beg your pardon, but this lacks dignity.

(LORETTA lets out a laugh. The workmen start to bang again. MRS. PASTOR BIGGS tries to sing louder to cover up the banging and laughing and talking, and UNCLE SINK starts toward the workmen.)

PASTOR BIGGS. Could we—

UNCLE SINK. I'll fix it.

MAMA. YOU WON'T TOUCH IT. (*Everyone freezes.*) I've seen your handiwork. (*She turns to the workmen.*) We'll put the casket spray back on and have the service and then see what you...

LORETTA. Professionals.

MAMA. Professionals can do later.

(The workmen put the spray back on under the direction of PASTOR BIGGS and then leave. UNCLE SINK and DADDY find seats. MRS. PASTOR BIGGS is still frozen. DEATON finds a hammer they left behind.)

MAMA. Hand me that. (*She gives it to DADDY.*) Knock some sense into yourself.

(MAMA now turns her gaze on MRS. PASTOR BIGGS, still frozen. MAMA gestures "go on" and MRS. PASTOR BIGGS resumes the song. MAMA sits along with LORETTA, WESLEY, SONNY, and DEATON. PASTOR BIGGS comes in.)

PASTOR BIGGS. Many waters cannot quench love...

(PASTOR BIGGS continues on silently.)

SONNY. Pastor Biggs got through the scripture and went on to how we were there to remember our faithful brother, Martin William Bonner. I thought about the black-ribboned wreath of white roses on our door. Daddy had walked right past it. So, did he leave? Or is he sitting somewhere behind us.

PASTOR BIGGS. ...The loaves and the fishes. Brother Martin fed the five thousand just like Jesus did. Only he used donuts, French fries, and the Word of God. A faithful witness, he served up the opportunity for salvation in every bite.

What a blessing Elder Martin was to the Bradshaw family and them to he. Like his Lord, Martin Bonner ministered to the widows and orphans, the outcasts, the deserted ones.

(MAMA starts to tremble.)

And the Bradshaws gave him a personal family just as this church, this body of the Lord's faithful, gave him a family in the spirit. Truly all things work for good in them that love the Lord...

SONNY. Good? Uncle Marty was burned to death and Mama was deserted again and Pastor Biggs believes this was for the good? No, he doesn't. He's just saying that because he doesn't have the guts

to say the truth: That something stupid and horrible has happened and Uncle Marty's life is over. No words can touch that. He is gone. No words can be taken back, either. I'd said what I'd said, truth as far as I knew, and right or wrong I can never undo it. Never mind that I now knew Daddy wasn't worth looking for. Not because he's queer but because he has a heart the size of Wesley's brain. Where Marty's heart was as big as the dough bowl at the Circle of Life.

(He starts to cry. LORETTA hands him a Kleenex. He blows his nose.)

These aren't for Uncle Marty—not now, not yet—these are for the daddy I thought I had, the daddy I'd missed all these years, the daddy I thought was off loving us perfectly somewhere...the daddy who doesn't exist.

(MAMA takes hold of his hand and everyone else is starting to tear up.)

PASTOR BIGGS. ...Though Elder Bonner and the Circle of Life are gone from our midst; we know he's been welcomed into that greater feast in the Lord's house. Let us stand and sing number 131: "Will The Circle Be Unbroken?"

(All begin to sing:)

I WAS STANDING BY MY WINDOW
ON A COLD AND RAINY DAY
WHEN I SAW THE UNDERTAKER
COME TO CARRY MY FATHER AWAY
WELL, I TOLD THAT UNDERTAKER
FOR THAT BODY YOU ARE TAKING
LORD, I HATE TO SEE HIM GO.

(MAMA lets out a wail and rises flinging her hands above her head. All join her, the Methodists not so enthusiastically. There are many "Praise Jesus!" and "gone to glory's" shouted.)

WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN
BY AND BY, LORD BY AND BY?
THERE'S A BETTER HOME A-WAITING
IN THE SKY, LORD, IN THE SKY.

(The song ends and MAMA summons PASTOR BIGGS over. Everyone else is close behind her.)

MAMA. I want to know what those men were doing hammering that coffin. I don't know how you close them—

PASTOR BIGGS. Sister Bradshaw—

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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