

Hangman

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Hangman

Casting Breakdown for Hangman

The play requires nine actors and numerous voices.

Mama - 50's Caucasian female

Lendine - Early 20's Caucasian female

The Colonel - Late 50's Caucasian male

Top Cat - Mid 40's African American male

Bunny - Late 20's African American male

Guard 1 / Warden - 50's Caucasian male

Guard 2 - Mid 20's Caucasian male

Shooter 1 - African American male

Shooter 2 - African American male

2 Acts

Act 1: 7 scenes

Act 2: 7 scenes

Act I, Scene 1. An apartment in Ruleville, Mississippi

Darkness.

In the long pause, a baby is heard crying. Not a fussy cry but a borderline hysterical, neglected, hungry cry.

Lights fade up on a shabby kitchen in a run down rental apartment. Sitting at a table, smoking, is LENDINE, a young woman. Her face is tear stained and her gaze is far far away. She does not acknowledge the baby's cries.

Pause.

Suddenly a knock is heard at the door. LENDINE does not acknowledge it.

The knock is heard again, louder and more insistent.

Again, LENDINE does not acknowledge it.

MAMA

Lendine, girl, goddam it! Open this fuckin' door!

LENDINE's head turns slowly toward the door.

MAMA (cont'd)

I swear to Gawd, you make me use this key...where is that damn thing?

A bang and clatter is heard briefly. Suddenly MAMA enters, a grocery bag in her hands.

MAMA (cont'd)

What the hell is the matter with you?

LENDINE

Mama, I...

MAMA smacks LENDINE across the mouth.

LENDINE (cont'd)

Mama!

MAMA

You hear that baby? You hear that baby or what now?

MAMA smacks LENDINE across the mouth again.

LENDINE

I hear her!

MAMA

Goddam you!

(Beat)

You got bottles?

LENDINE

Yeah.

MAMA

Full bottles?

LENDINE

Full...

MAMA

Are they full?

LENDINE

Yeah...yes.

MAMA

Then why the hell ain't you feeding your baby?

LENDINE shakes her head slowly.

MAMA (cont'd)

Get that bottle. Now.

MAMA exits. LENDINE moves slowly to the refrigerator and gets the bottle.

MAMA enters with the baby.

MAMA (cont'd)

You can't be feedin' her with a cold bottle. Warm it up.

LENDINE stares at the bottle for a moment then bursts into tears.

MAMA watches.

Pause.

MAMA (cont'd)

Sit down.

(Beat)

Go on now, sit down.

MAMA warms the bottle in the sink and comforts the baby as LENDINE sits down heavily.

Presently MAMA starts to feed the baby. She comes to the table and sits. The crying stops.

Pause.

MAMA (cont'd)

Well?

LENDINE

I dunno.

MAMA

You better know. You better start knowing.

LENDINE

I got...I got too much on my mind.

MAMA

Yeah? What you got, little miss, is a baby. A baby that needs providing for. That trumps whatever you got going on up there in your damn empty little head. You need to be thinkin' about your responsibilities down here.

Pause. LENDINE starts to weep.

LENDINE

He...he...

MAMA

He what? He what, Lendine? He did exactly what I told you he was gonna do. He did what they all do. I tried to tell you. You didn't listen. Did you? Did you?

LENDINE

No.

MAMA

I had been there, I had been there with your daddy. Now here you are.

(Beat)

He hit you?

LENDINE

Yeah...sometimes.

MAMA

You hit him back?

LENDINE

Course. Sometimes I hit him first.

Long pause.

LENDINE

Mama, I don't know what I'm gonna do.

(Beat)

I can barely afford this shithole, you jest never know what the tips are gonna be like on any given night at the bar. You can't depend on nuthin' round here.

MAMA

But you been getting by? It had to be all you right? Cause I'm damn sure that Burl wasn't helping out none.

LENDINE

He helped.

MAMA

Bullshit.

(Beat)

How much?

LENDINE

A hundred and fourteen dollars.

MAMA

A week?

LENDINE

No. Once. Once he did.

MAMA snorts in derision.

MAMA

He's better off gone.

LENDINE

Still...

MAMA

You best grab the bull by the tail and face the situation, girl.

(Beat)

You gotta plan?

LENDINE

No.

MAMA

You need money.

LENDINE

Yeah I need money. Why you think I am sitting here all depressed? I need money and I ain't got the slightest idea how to get it.

MAMA

So what happened, you have this baby and your brains seep out your head? How does a god fearing Christian woman improve her station in life? You a smart girl Lendine, you know the answer to this.

LENDINE

(mechanically)

Hard honest work and a good fear of the Lord. Fear only God. Hate only sin.

MAMA

Yup. You gotta work harder girl.

LENDINE

I'm so tired now.

MAMA

Or maybe you just gotta work smarter. Waitressing ain't gonna take you nowheres. You can't advance waitressing.

LENDINE

No....

MAMA

I know what I'd do if I was a younger woman.

Pause.

LENDINE

Yeah, what?

MAMA

I'd go on and fetch me up to Parchman Plantation.

LENDINE

No, no. I don't wanna go there.

MAMA

Why not? They got work there, they the only place in the whole state hiring practically.
And they hiring women. That's good.

LENDINE

Don't wanna work at the penitentiary, Mama.

MAMA

Why not? Cause you got so many fine offers already?

LENDINE

I just...

MAMA

Uh-huh, Ruleville here just blossoming with good jobs, opportunity. Just blossoming.

MAMA takes a newspaper from the paper bag.

MAMA

They want people. They taking ads out they need people so much.

(Beat)

Want me to read it to you?

LENDINE

Well I can't stop you.

MAMA

No, no you can't.

(Reading)

The State of Mississippi is seeking qualified individuals for work in its correctional
department. You must have a high school diploma or equil...ah blah, blah, blah.

LENDINE

To be a jail guard?

MAMA

This writing don't say that. It says assistant. It says high school diploma.

LENDINE

I gotta GED.

MAMA

An assistant. Important people have assistants.

(Reading)

And...bless me...damn... it says salary for qualified individuals starts at sixteen hundred dollars a month. Sixteen hundred dollars a month. That real money.

LENDINE

I don't wanna do no guarding. I don't want to do that. My life is depressing enough.

MAMA

It says assistant! Assistanting.

(Beat)

Just go check it cause girl you can't go on like this.

LENDINE

No. No I sure can't.

MAMA

So?

LENDINE

Yeah, all right.

(Beat)

I can go Thursday.

MAMA

You can go today.

(Beat)

I'll take the baby.

LENDINE

Oh...I dunno, first I wanna...

MAMA

Girl, you gotta come to your senses. You gotta face reality. Burl ain't coming back, he's gone and that's that. And you, you're a mama now, your first priority for the rest of your life has to be this child. You ain't doing your job. And I can't help you much beyond watching the baby, I gotta support myself too.

Pause

LENDINE

I know, I know. Maybe...

MAMA

No maybes.

(Beat)

Don't start thinkin' some magic gonna happen for you, girl. You ain't gonna win no lottery. There isn't no magic for us. People like us don't get miracles. Rich people get miracles. Either you pull your own self up or you sink into the gumbo muck. Those are your choices girl, that's all you got.

Pause.

LENDINE

I know.

MAMA

So what's it gonna be?

LENDINE

OK.

MAMA

Then dry your eyes and pretty up. You gotta make a good impression. Be polite. You get yourself on up to Parchman. Cause you really really need this.

LENDINE

Yes ma'am.

Fade out

End Scene 1

Act I, Scene 2 The Church of the Penitent Thief.

The place where dreams and nightmares live.

A light fog is seen and beams of blue and silver light make a complex pattern of illumination of brief light then rich blue darkness across the stage

Against the upstage wall is an old and disturbing collection of cast off farm tools, prisoner's uniforms and old water/whiskey jugs. A thick black strap flecked with blood lays across the jugs. Just off upstage center, a large thick whipping post stands upright, festooned with chains and stained with old blood. A large decrepit banner that reads "The Church of the Penitent Thief." is hanging artlessly over the collected items.

The items and the lighting combine to create an ominous feeling, a dreamscape where cruelty meets unspeakable human misery.

TOP CAT is escorted downstage by two black trusty SHOOTERS. He is a wiry very tough looking black man, stripped to the waist and sweating. He is wearing a cotton bag.

SHOOTER 1 drags the butt of his rifle in a line in front of TOP CAT.

SHOOTER 1

Gunman, this be your gunline.

TOP CAT

Can't hardly see it tho.

SHOOTER 2

Still, you know it's there, Cat.

TOP CAT

I surely do.

SHOOTER 1

(Slowly brings his rifle up.)

And what gonna happen if you cross it.

TOP CAT

Indeed.

Pause.

SHOOTER 2

How long you in the hot box this time?

TOP CAT

Awhile.

SHOOTER 2

Heard you got kissed by Black Annie again. That true?

TOP CAT

Long and hard. I think they be putting pipmintane on that strap, for sure. It hurt like hell.

SHOOTER 1

I give it to you Cat, you are one stand proud steel headed nigger, my brother.

(Beat)

Gunman, find your gunline.

TOP CAT stares at the floor.

TOP CAT

Got it.

GUARD 2

Then go on now, say your piece, Top Cat.

The SHOOTERS move off stage right and left where they linger, eyes constantly on TOP CAT and the gunline.

Suddenly a shift in the lighting occurs.

VOICE

You up Top Cat. It be your turn. Tell them.

TOP CAT

Yeah, I'll tell em.

VOICE

Don't you leave nuthin out.

TOP CAT

I won't.

VOICE

Nuthin. Tell them what they need to know, don't you leave nuthin' out, you hear me Top Cat, nuthin!

TOP CAT

I hear you, man. I hear all y'all...

A single light comes up on TOP CAT.

TOP CAT

Evening y'all.

(Beat)

Welcome to the Mississippi State Penitentiary. That's our official name. We, meaning us guests, call it Parchman. Parchman Plantation. Well, actually, all of us from the inmates to the hacks call it that. Cause it is a plantation. It's a farm. It's a eighteen thousand acres farm. It's huge. From front gate to back gate is 5.4 miles.

(beat)

It's been a lot a other things, terrible things but they like to focus on the sunny side of life here now. Like lots of good facts. And numbers, cause calm good facts always have lots of numbers. On this day in such a month and such a such year Parchman did this and that. We have like 2,047 acres of vegetables, 118 acres of rice, 2,320 acres of soybeans and 1,229 acres of corn planted. And us, happy, whistle while you work inmates, worked and whistled for a total of 732,326 hours this year.

(Beat)

Approximately.

VOICE

Get on with it goddammit! Don't baby talk this!

TOP CAT

This is Unit 29, this is where alla farmhands sleep. And we do sleep. You come here, you work. You work all day every day. Heat, cold, no matter. Only thunder and hail give you some time off.

VOICE

Don't forget us!

TOP CAT

Nah, man, nah...

(Beat)

Back, way back in Unit 29 is the Maximum Security Unit. The MSU. Death row. Fifty seven people waiting there. They don't work, they wait. Parchman wasn't always so formal about death row. In 1901, when the state bought this here 18,000 acres a land, they were quite casual indeed. Jest you, a field away from the road and a hack with a bullet. The evidence is all round you. Like mosta life, you just gotta know what you looking at.

(Beat)

And I am aiming to show you. I promise you, when we're done here, you will see.

(Beat)

You will know.

The SHOOTERS approach TOP CAT.

(Beat)

We'll talk again soon.

Blackout.

End Scene 2

Act1, Scene 3. A waiting room/office in Unit 29 minimally rendered.

On stage right are a few folding chairs and a stand up ashtray. An imaginary doorway separates the office on stage left. In the office area is a large battered state issued wooden desk, a high backed worn leather chair is behind the desk and a rundown wooden office chair is in front of it.

On the desk is a small vase with several tulips in it

After a few moments, LENDINE enters, holding the newspaper, followed by TOP CAT. He points at the chairs.

LENDINE

Here?

TOP CAT nods. LENDINE sits cautiously.

LENDINE

Uhhhh, Sir, could you answer a few questions for me?

TOP CAT shrugs.

LENDINE

Please?

TOP CAT stands there.

LENDINE

Does he know I'm here?

TOP CAT nods.

LENDINE

The Colonel knows I'm here?

TOP CAT nods.

LENDINE
Is he around?

TOP CAT
Naw.

LENDINE
He's not here?

TOP CAT
He's here, just not here here. He's running the wire.

LENDINE
Huh?

TOP CAT
We got us some runaways. He's hunting them down.

Pause.

LENDINE
So we don't know when he's gonna be back.

TOP CAT
Sure we do.

LENDINE
We do?

TOP CAT
When he grabs them up.

LENDINE
But that's, I dunno. I gotta get that bus back to Ruleville. My momma got my baby and I...

TOP CAT
He's expectin' you.

LENDINE
But we don't know when he's gonna be back up here.

TOP CAT

Sure we do.

LENDINE

Yeah, when?

TOP CAT

When he grabs them jumpers up. Catches those runners. Course, there really ain't no wire and Parchman so big that you can run and run and run and never leave the plantation. Last seven runners never got off the farm, the Colonel says.

LENDINE

What about the walls?

TOP CAT

There ain't no walls.

Off stage a door slams and a voice is heard.

THE COLONEL (O.S.)

Gawd damn, them boys was in piss poor shape, Cat. They couldn't run for shit. Laying on the ground panting like old hounds in the August sunshine when I pulled up.

(Beat)

Cat, Cat, where the hell you gone off to?

TOP CAT

(Loudly)

Here sir.

THE COLONEL enters. He is a fleshy man in his mid fifties. He's dressed in too tight blue jeans, a white collared shirt and a cowboy hat.

THE COLONEL

Help me with these goddam boots, my gout is fixin' to kill...

(He sees LENDINE)

Miss, excuse me. I beg your pardon.

(Beat)

Cat, you didn't say we had a lady present.

TOP CAT

No sir, sorry sir.

THE COLONEL

Colonel Delmore Chloris Landsman at your service. This here is my boy Top Cat.

TOP CAT

Miss...

THE COLONEL kisses LENDINE's out stretched hand.

LENDINE

That's very fancy of you, Colonel.

(Beat)

I'm Lendine Blevins. I'm here about the...

THE COLONEL

They do that in France. Kiss hands. Just of ladies of course. I always liked that. Seems classy to me.

LENDINE

Yes, yes it does.

THE COLONEL

Ever had your hand kissed before?

LENDINE

Can't say I have.

THE COLONEL

Another first.

Beat.

THE COLONEL

So what do we owe the pleasure of this visit to, Miss Blevins?

LENDINE

The ad in the paper.

THE COLONEL

That's handled over to the administration building, at the north gate up in Front Camp where you come in.

TOP CAT

The assistant position, sir.

THE COLONEL

That ad?

The COLONEL gives LENDINE a long assessing look.

THE COLONEL

Naw...

(Beat)

You go apply up to the gate, miss. Maybe something's available that's nice.

TOP CAT

Nice? Here?

THE COLONEL

No mouth from you.

(Beat. Then to LENDINE)

You can go.

LENDINE

I don't want no guard job. I want to be an assistant, like it says here.

THE COLONEL

I need someone special for that.

LENDINE

How do you know I'm not special?

THE COLONEL

Excuse me?

LENDINE

I am special. I can do anything I set my mind to.

THE COLONEL

Your momma and daddy tell you that? Alla mommas and daddies tell their children that.

LENDINE

Well in my case they just happened to be right.

THE COLONEL

(To TOP CAT)

I have apparently lived beyond my own time. I can remember when a man could sit in his own office and not be subjected to female back sass.

(Beat)

Get her out of here.

TOP CAT

Sir...

THE COLONEL

(Suddenly in pain.)

Goddam it all to hell!

THE COLONEL sits down heavily next to LENDINE.

THE COLONEL

Boots.

TOP CAT

Yes sir.

TOP CAT kneels before the COLONEL and gingerly starts to remove a boot. The COLONEL watches suspiciously. Suddenly he shouts.

THE COLONEL

Are you trying to fucking kill me?! It feels like my toes are on fire. I got the gout, you know that! Goddam you, goddam you to hell!

The COLONEL moves to strike TOP CAT but he easily dodges the older man.

LENDINE

Them boots are too small.

THE COLONEL

What?

LENDINE

Them boots are too small. You need bigger. Try this, flex your toes out, make a little room in there.

LENDINE kneels in front of him and tugs gently on the boot until it comes off. She does the same to the other foot.

THE COLONEL

You did good, girl.

(Beat)

Cat, fetch your polish box and get to cleaning.

TOP CAT collects the boots and exits. The COLONEL starts to hobble toward his desk.

LENDINE

What about me?

THE COLONEL

You still here? Git on out.

LENDINE

I need me a job.

THE COLONEL

This ain't for you.

LENDINE

How would I know if you don't tell me what the job is all about?

THE COLONEL

Cause I think I gotta pretty good judgement about the matter, having been doing it for nigh on thirty years.

LENDINE

You don't want a female.

Pause.

THE COLONEL

No. No I don't.

LENDINE

Why not?

THE COLONEL

Cause it ain't a female type job. Go on now.

The COLONEL sits down at his desk.

Long pause.

LENDINE

I ain't got nowhere else to go.

THE COLONEL

What now?

LENDINE

Bus to Ruleville already left. I ain't got nowhere to go. Besides which I'm not leaving.

Pause.

THE COLONEL

C'mere girl.

LENDINE

Yes sir.

LENDINE walks into his office.

THE COLONEL

You got good hands. Rub my feet.

After a moments hesitation, LENDINE kneels.

THE COLONEL

What do you think I do here?

LENDINE

I dunno, sir, but you must be important.

THE COLONEL

Second in command under the warden.

(Beat)

Ah that's good. The gout and that arthritis play hell with me. What do you think I do here?

The COLONEL opens a drawer and takes out a bottle, pouring himself a shot.

LENDINE

So you sick?

THE COLONEL

I got diabetes, diverticulitis, depression, diarrhea and dropsy. I got it all. I got shit I can't even spell. Must be alla badness coming out.

The COLONEL takes another shot. He then pulls out a large .357 Magnum pistol and looks at it, turning the weapon this way and that.

THE COLONEL

(Softly)

What do you think I do here?

The COLONEL aims the pistol at LENDINE's head.

Pause.

You're the...

LENDINE

Blackout

End Scene 3.

Act I, Scene 4. The Church of the Penitent Thief.

A haze envelops the stage which is dappled by blue and silver light. Two GUARDS are upstage standing at attention, their backs to the audience. Between them is a large wooden chair on wheels.

Downstage the COLONEL and LENDINE sit facing each other on separate chairs. The COLONEL has what appears to be an official document stuck to his chest and is still pointing the gun at LENDINE.

LENDINE

You're the executioner.

Pause.

The COLONEL lowers the gun.

TOP CAT enters.

TOP CAT

That he is.

TOP CAT tears the document from the COLONEL's chest.

TOP CAT (cont'd)

(Reading)

This certificate recognizes the Honorable Colonel Delmore Chloris Landsman as the Official Executioner of the State of Mississippi who serves at the pleasure of the Governor.

THE COLONEL

(Snatching the paper back.)

Gimme that.

TOP CAT

Now why's that? Why are you the Official Executioner of the State of Mississippi who serves at the pleasure of the Governor, sir?

THE COLONEL

Cause I gotta paper that says so. It's got gold stars on it and everything. Big gold stars.

(Beat)

I worked mah way up the ladder. Cause I did every shitty job this prison had to offer. Cause I'm the only one who know how to run the fucking equipment. Ain't much difference working on a tractor or an electric chair. Hell, I go outta state to other prisons and show them how to use their gas chambers. I'm a goddam consultant I do this shit so good. Get paid cash fuckin' money too.

LENDINE

Is that how its always been?

THE COLONEL

Yes ma'am. The man who could make the gear work got the job.

TOP CAT

Yeah he did. The white man anyway. And even then the equipment didn't always work correct.

THE COLONEL

It never worked correct til I got here.

TOP CAT

This part is before your time.

THE COLONEL

Yeah, well I've heard 'bout it. Them old timers memoried about it alla time...

(Beat)

See, even though Parchman was home to thousands of prisoners, the good peoples of Sunflower County didn't want no executions there. So the politicians had a portable 'lectric chair made up in Memphis and carted it to wherever in the state the crime was done and the condemned was executed there.

TOP CAT

Ole Smoky.

Yup. Who could forget?

TOP CAT (cont'd)

The guards wheel the chair downstage. TOP CAT sits in it. The guards start to strap him in.

But Ole Smoke was a mite...

TOP CAT (cont'd)

Temperamental.

THE COLONEL

TOP CAT

And those good old boys who ran her...

THE COLONEL

They liked to drink some.

The COLONEL takes a swig from the bottle.

Cause it helped...

THE COLONEL (cont'd)

Helped?

LENDINE

When the ghosts came...

THE COLONEL

Tell them, tell them...

VOICE

(The VOICE rises to a shriek)

Tell them!

THE COLONEL

Stop!

VOICE

Tell them!

LENDINE

Stop what?

TOP CAT

Tell them. Confessions is supposed to be good for the soul.

THE COLONEL

You do it.

The GUARDS place a hood over TOP CAT's head.

TOP CAT

No you, I'm a mite busy.

TOP CAT is secured to the chair now. A GUARD brings out an electric knife switch.

THE COLONEL

(To LENDINE)

There ain't no way to execute someone humanely. It can't be done. I've done me 33 of them. Everyone all the time says "It's safe and they are unconscious instantly."

(He laughs)

My fat white ass they are. They suffer. Hell, they're supposed to suffer. You take your standard retard sex pervert. One who raped and sodomized a three year old girl then held her head under some catfish pond run off til she drowns, her lungs fulla mud. He ain't supposed to suffer? Oh he's gonna suffer. I want him to suffer. You want him to suffer. Hell, society wants him to suffer.

(Beat)

Problem is you ain't never sure exactly how they are gonna suffer cause Ole Smoke wasn't exactly regular dependable.

(Beat)

Ready Cat?

TOP CAT

Yes sir, hit it.

The COLONEL throws the switch. TOP CAT strains violently against his bonds. The COLONEL throws the switch again and TOP CAT sags back against the chair.

THE COLONEL

They said they had all the science figured out on this. Something like 1,825 volts at 7.5 amps for 30 seconds, then 240 volts at 1.5 amps for 60 seconds. Then all over again.

(Beat)

Course that was nonsense...

The COLONEL flicks the switch back and forth while TOP CAT twitches and thrashes. Suddenly smoke starts to rise from the back of the chair.

THE COLONEL (cont'd)

What with all the problems with the damn jenny and the drinking and all, they just decided that they'd juice them on and off til his head caught fire. You just couldn't count on nuthin with that damn chair, sometimes their eyeballs would pop, sometimes not. Sometimes they'd bleed like stuck pigs but not alla time. But...

(Beat)

...they always pissed themselves. It was the exception that proved the rule.

LENDINE

Why you tellin' me this?

THE COLONEL

Cause you want to know. Cause you want a job. That's why you here right?

LENDINE

I want to be an assistant. Like it says in the paper. Not this.

THE COLONEL

Well, about that...

GUARD 1

You done with him?

GUARD 2

You want that nigger sprung out?

TOP CAT

Please.

THE COLONEL

You boys mind your mouth. Cat works for me. That's my boy. He's my nigger.

(Beat. Then ominously)

And don't you ever forget it. Do not fuck with what's mine.

GUARD 1

I beg your pardon, sir.

GUARD 2

Been a long day out on the gunline, Colonel, keeping eyeballs on those gunman and them trusty shooters too.

THE COLONEL

I don't care. This ain't the gunline. Keep those trigger fingers calm now, y'all hear me? And get that nasty thing outta here.

The GUARDS take the chair upstage then exit.

LENDINE

About what?

The COLONEL sits down heavily and looks away into the middle distance.

THE COLONEL

Hmmm?

LENDINE

You said "well about that..." About what? The job?

TOP CAT

Don't pretend girl, you know what this place is, and you know what we be all about. Who is he?

LENDINE

He...is...the Official Executioner of the State of Mississippi who serves at the pleasure of the Governor.

TOP CAT

Yeah. He got a paper from Jackson with gold stars on it and everything.

THE COLONEL

Big gold stars.

TOP CAT

Figure on this now. Why would the Official Executioner of the State of Mississippi who serves at the pleasure of the Governor need an assistant?

LENDINE

To help him with his...

TOP CAT

Yup.

Blackout

End Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 5. A waiting room/office in Unit 29.

The COLONEL and LENDINE are revealed in the same poses as in the end of scene 3.

The COLONEL has a weak grip on the gun. It falls into his lap. LENDINE picks it up slowly.

LENDINE

This is a big gun.

THE COLONEL

Too big for you.

LENDINE

Is it loaded?

THE COLONEL

Its alla time loaded.

LENDINE

Why you carry it around?

THE COLONEL

So I got a fightin' chance when those screeching bastards finally catch me. I am going down hard when I go. They best come big or stay home.

Pause.

LENDINE

Who?

Pause.

THE COLONEL

(Ignoring her)

So now you know.

(Beat)

Still wanna job at Parchman?

LENDINE

Tell me again how this works?

THE COLONEL

Sir...

Beat.

LENDINE

Sir...

THE COLONEL

Sir or Colonel will do, Miss Blevins.

LENDINE

Yes sir.

THE COLONEL

If you working for me. Gotta show respect, 'specially in front of the prisoners. A man can't allow hisself to be disrespected in here. Could be fatal.

LENDINE

Am I workin' for you?

THE COLONEL

Are you?

(Beat)

I do believe you are. I ain't difficult, I just need me some help. Hell, Cat does most of my fetchin' and totin'. Boy does almost alla my stuff. But, there's some stuff he can't.

LENDINE

Why?

THE COLONEL

Cause he's a convict, a long line chained up Parchman farm gunman.

(Beat)

'Sides which, the boy's probably too decent in the end. I dunno. It ain't like we socialize.

(Best)

So I need me some help.

LENDINE

With what, sir?

Pause.

THE COLONEL

The killin'.

LENDINE

What?

THE COLONEL

You won't have to do no preparation. No work in the chemical room. You don't even have to see the condemned if you don't want to.

(Beat)

All you gotta do is push the button with me.

LENDINE

The button that...?

THE COLONEL

Used to. Now with this gas chamber refitted and this software stuff, there are two buttons. It's a new deal. Two people press the buttons together, the cyanide pellets drop into the acid, the gas does the job. Neither of them knows which button did the deed.

(Beat)

Guess it's supposed to help.

LENDINE

Help? With what?

THE COLONEL

(Beat)

Nuthin'.

Long pause.

LENDINE

I dunno...

THE COLONEL

You need a job, little missy, correct?

LENDINE

Yeah.

THE COLONEL

Yes sir.

LENDINE

Yes sir.

THE COLONEL

This is a salary job just like the paper said. Plus, you get \$250.00 each time.

LENDINE

Each time? Each time you...

THE COLONEL

Yup.

LENDINE

I need to think on it.

The COLONEL pours a stiff drink.

THE COLONEL

Well get on out and go think. But be quick on it. Gotta lotta applicants.

LENDINE

Where?

THE COLONEL

Get out.

LENDINE exits the office area and sits down heavily in the waiting room. She stares off into the distance.

Long pause.

TOP CAT enters. He is carrying the boots. LENDINE looks up at him.

LENDINE

I don't know what to call you.

TOP CAT

Cat's fine.

(Beat)

What's on your mind?

LENDINE

I need this job. I'm gonna take it.

TOP CAT

Yeah, that right?

(Beat)

Why?

LENDINE

Babies. I need that money, Cat. I need it real bad.

TOP CAT

I hear that. Alla you mommas sacrifice. May the good Lord bless and keep you mammas forever.

LENDINE

Thank you.

(Beat)

That's so sweet.

TOP CAT

He tell you what he want?

LENDINE

Yeah. Mostly he wants me to press the button.

Pause.

TOP CAT

He tell you what he really want?

LENDINE

Really want? No...

TOP CAT

Well, missy... he wants you to save his immortal soul.

LENDINE

What?

Blackout.

End Scene 5

Act 1, Scene 6. The Church of the Penitent Thief

The COLONEL sits in the electric chair downstage center, drinking from the bottle. His leg is thrown over one side of the chair and he is wearing the chair's electric cap on his head set at a jaunty angle.

The certificate is pasted to his chest.

TOP CAT and LENDINE are standing midstage right and left, watching him the way you would watch a rabid dog.

THE COLONEL

Now that I look back on it, I only wanted one thing. I realized that now. I truly do.

TOP CAT

Yeah, boss?

THE COLONEL

It was like, I dunno, a craving. And the longer I worked here, the more this feeling came over me. Soon I couldn't think 'bout anything else. Couldn't eat, drink, chase pussy...

LENDINE

Nice.

THE COLONEL

Cause that feeling, that craving, that need just seeped outta my pores. It really did. In the end I guess I just had to have it...

LENDINE

Well, go on now...get to it.

TOP CAT

Don't be teasing. Had to have what?

Pause.

THE COLONEL

(Quietly)

A killing. I had to do me a killing.

(Beat)

That's what I wanted.

TOP CAT

Like... like when you country cracker farm boy trash were helling around in your youth?
Plenty of you white trash Delta boys died.

LENDINE

Yeah, I had me a boyfriend died in a barfight. Man said his hat was sissified.

THE COLONEL

No, I was too scared about something like that.

(Beat)

I didn't wanna wind up in this here chair. I wanted to kill a man legally. I didn't want my fingerprints on it. I wanted to walk away clean.

(Beat)

That's what I wanted.

LENDINE

And... that's what you got, right? You a big man, you're important.

The COLONEL stares at his hands.

THE COLONEL

I ain't clean tho.

(Pause)

I ain't never gonna be clean.

(Beat)

Didn't know that then.

TOP CAT

Careful what you wish for, cause you just might...

LENDINE

...get...

THE COLONEL

Shut up you now.

LENDINE

Yes sir.

TOP CAT

Colonel sir...

The COLONEL gets out of the chair and starts to pace downstage.

THE COLONEL

I wanted...I wanted...I wanted to throw the switch. I wanted to light that bad bad mother fucker up.

TOP CAT

Who?

LENDINE

Which one of them?

THE COLONEL

Didn't matter to me. Any which one....

(Beat)

So, sooner than I expected, I got my chance. Got my chance. Actually, that day, Chance didn't get his chance. He was the certificate man then, Chance Lee McDemot by name. He had an unexpected meeting with the baby Jesus. Helped no doubt by his various ailments and a gallon of cheap ass vodka a day. No chaser, no mixer, just straight outta a water glass.

LENDINE

A gallon a day? How's that even possible?

THE COLONEL

It ain't for long.

TOP CAT

You would know, boss.

THE COLONEL

No.

LENDINE

No?

THE COLONEL

I drink whiskey, not communist fucking swill.

(Beat)

So...we're having a staff meeting around the issue of one Leroy Alan Wilcox, one convicted cop killin' high yellow little nigger. He's outta pardons, Jackson said no, Supremes in DC said leave us alone about this shit so he's going in five days. Chance is talkin' and as he says the word "execution" his face gets all funny sick, his eyes go two ways at once and he just lets go a this blood vomit spew that covered the table. Puked it up like a devil at final judgement. Then he pitched straight down, fell like a rag doll. His haid hit the table with a crack so loud you knew, just knew he was dead.

(Beat)

So the room is as silent as the grave. Dead fucking silence. Warden blinks twice, looks at Chance, looks at the table, looks at me and says "You're up Delly, doncha go fuckin this up now, hear?"

TOP CAT

Did you?

THE COLONEL

I didn't. Not me personally. But...

LENDINE

But what...?

THE COLONEL

Something alla time happens. Stuff you can't control. This Leroy Alan Wilcox decided he was going out hard.

(Beat)

He fought like a banshee. Little nigger not even 5 feet, maybe 120 pounds soaking wet. It took 8 men to just hold him down.

Guards weren't gonna have this for 100 feet to the chair and him acting all bold in front of the witnesses so they gave him enough horse trunk to stun the 5th Mississippi militia. So by the time he hits the chair, he's all bruised, his eyes are wide open and he's drooling. And he's as limp as Chance after the big spit.

TOP CAT

But you can't...

THE COLONEL

Right.

LENDINE

Can't?

THE COLONEL

Can't execute someone who don't know what is about to happen to em'. Federal law.

LENDINE

So what did you do?

THE COLONEL

Ah hell we did it anyway.

(Beat)

Boys whipped the electrode cap on him then the hood. They stood tween him and the witnesses til we were ready to commence. Warden read the warrant a death. Then we looked at the telephone for a bit like it might ring. Warden comes stands next to me, gives up the high sign and I hit the button. Gave him the official approved voltage for the official approved amount a time. Leroy did his dance in the chair and then I cut the voltage.

(Beat)

He slumped there for a second, then his haid tilts back up, he turns his blind hooded eyes to me and says "Cut it out."

LENDINE

Cut it out?

THE COLONEL

Yup. Cut it out.

(Beat)

No one could fuckin' believe it.

(Beat)

I sure didn't believe it. That motherfucker scared me outta my wits. I grabbed that dial, spun it alla way right and toasted that little fuck.

(Beat)

Two and a half minutes. That yellow bastard was as black as a nubian when I was done. Guards had to pry my hands off the switch. Couldn't see the witnesses the air was so thick with burnt Leroy smoke. Funeral director said I did bout half a cremation on him.

(Beat)

Then...

TOP CAT

Then boss?

THE COLONEL

I got me a couple a bottles of Kentucky's finest outta the guard room and went lookin' for a meal.

The COLONEL takes a huge swig from his bottle and slowly staggers upstage as the scene shifts. A sign flies in from upstage left that reads "Po' Andy's Joint"

MAN 1 pushes a small counter bar from stage left while MAN 2 comes from stage right, with a small cafe table and chair.

The COLONEL stands center stage, weaving drunkenly between the two MEN, who eye him narrowly.

Long pause.

The COLONEL staggers to the chair and sits down heavily. He makes a gesture to MAN 2, who ignores it.

THE COLONEL

I wanna eat.

MAN 1 approaches.

MAN 1

We got nuthin' left.

MAN 2

Fixing to close, boss. It's late.

MAN 1

We cleanin' up sir. Serving is done.

THE COLONEL

I wanna eat.

MAN 2

Sir, we...

THE COLONEL

You know me?

MAN 1

Yes sir.

(Beat)

Everyone know you.

THE COLONEL

What about you?

MAN 2

Yes, boss.

THE COLONEL

Good. Now that's settled why don't you niggers fix me up a sack o' chicken and be fuckin' quick about it!

The COLONEL kicks the chair back as he jumps to his feet only to be dropped by one punch from MAN 1.

MAN 1

Son of a bitch.

The two MEN give the COLONEL the bum's rush to downstage center where they deposit him in a heap.

Pause.

The COLONEL lifts his face, blood trickling from the corners of his mouth and murder in his eyes. He gets unsteadily to his feet and pulls his gun from his waistband. He marches upstage, waving the pistol.

MAN 1

We don't want no trouble here!

THE COLONEL

Me neither.

(Beat. The COLONEL fires the gun into the ceiling.)

So fix me up a sack of chicken and be fucking quick about it. Or else.

MAN 1

Yes sir, yes sir. Anything you...

MAN 2 steps out of the darkness and breaks a bottle over the COLONEL's head. The COLONEL collapses to the floor as the MEN start to kick him. MAN 2 grabs the gun and removes the bullets

MAN 2

Piece of cracker shit. Git the fuck out!

The MEN remove their belts and whip the COLONEL as he crawls downstage center. He collapses when he gets there.

MAN 1

You pasty ghost fat ass! Best part a you ran down the crack o' your mama's ass into the toilet.

The MEN stop beating the COLONEL. MAN 2 drops the gun and the bullets atop of him.

MAN 2

How many times has he pulled this shit?

MAN 1

Too many. I wanna kill him.

(Beat)

It be easy, off in a field quick, bang bang. Plant some flowers on his fat head and just shrug when the white men come looking for him. "I dunno where he be sirruh. Never seen the gentlemans. You wanna sack o chicken?"

They laugh. The COLONEL groans. MAN 1 bends down and pulls the COLONEL's head back.

MAN 1

Just so you know, the next time's gonna be the last time...

MAN 1 spits in the COLONEL's face and drops his head.

Pause. The MEN look down at the COLONEL.

MAN 2

Crazy goddam white man. Why the fuck does he keep doing this? Think he'd learn by now. A mule would have learned by now.

The MEN exit upstage. LENDINE and TOP CAT emerge from the shadows.

LENDINE

Sweet Jesus...

LENDINE takes a handkerchief and tries to clean the COLONEL's face.

TOP CAT

He's alive.

LENDINE

Yeah, barely.

Pause.

TOP CAT

Still wanna work at Parchman, missy?

LENDINE

I...

(Beat)

I ain't got a choice, Cat.

TOP CAT

Funny thing about that. Seems like no one here does.

(Pause. He shrugs.)

So be it.

Black out.

Act I, Scene 7. The waiting room / office in Unit 29.

The COLONEL, LENDINE and TOP CAT are revealed as they were in Scene 5.

LENDINE

His soul? His soul?

TOP CAT

The man is troubled.

LENDINE

No kidding..

(She looks toward the office.)

That new button. That new button business, huh?

TOP CAT

Yeah. Exactly.

LENDINE

He said that all I'd have to do. Nuthin' else.

TOP CAT

Which is the big thing, ain't it, little missy? The Colonel believes he can rub off some a his guilt on you. I believe he thinks you gonna help redeem him in the eyes of his savior. All with that little button pushing finger a yours.

LENDINE

Am I? Will it?

TOP CAT

Dunno. Stranger stuff has happened.

TOP CAT exits.

LENDINE stares at the COLONEL in his office. Finally she gets up and approaches the door.

THE COLONEL

Yeah?

LENDINE

I...

THE COLONEL

Say your piece woman. I got me a ton of work, getting this gas chamber ready and all.

LENDINE

OK.

THE COLONEL

Ok what?

LENDINE

I want the job. I'm your girl.

Pause.

THE COLONEL

(Relieved.)

Good.

LENDINE

I got me some conditions.

THE COLONEL

You got what?

LENDINE

Conditions.

THE COLONEL

How the fuck do you have conditions?!

Pause.

LENDINE

Well I do.

Long pause. The COLONEL glowers at LENDINE.

THE COLONEL

Alright, alright...what?

LENDINE

Show me everything.

THE COLONEL

Do what?

LENDINE

Show me everything. I'm gonna be here, I want to learn it all.

THE COLONEL

No, no...

LENDINE

Yes. You had best be takin' me seriously. I ain't doin' this just because you feel guilty and needs someone to share the blame...

THE COLONEL

What?

LENDINE

You know it, I know it, Cat knows it. You got your new gas toy coming in and you got two buttons so you don't have to take all the guilt? Git you a little piece of mind, huh? You want me to have some of that guilt, don't you? You want me to have exactly half, don't you? Two buttons. How much that worth to you, Colonel?

THE COLONEL

Cat say that? Cat tell you that? I will beat the black off that nigger, I swear to Jesus on high and all that's holy...

LENDINE

You leave him alone. You want an assistant, here I am. You wanna wallow in your guilt? You wanna keep foolin' yourself, you wanna die old and miserable alone, let me know. Let me know right now. This instant.

THE COLONEL

So what, you'll leave? Thought you didn't have no where to go?

LENDINE

I will walk back to Ruleville.

(Beat.)

I want more than to help a nasty old man pretend he ain't responsible for the killing that's part of the job that he freely took. I want me a job, I want me a career.

(beat)

I want me a life.

(beat)

So you show me, hear? You show me everything.

(Pause)

THE COLONEL

Or what?

LENDINE

Or you can go straight to hell.

Long pause. They glare at each other.

LENDINE (cont'd)

Good night.

LENDINE turns and exits. The COLONEL picks up the phone and speaks into it.

THE COLONEL

Thirty one.

An alarm starts to sound loudly. Bright lights are searching in the wings. The COLONEL looks expectantly toward the door.

TOP CAT bursts in.

TOP CAT

What? A thirty one?

THE COLONEL
Yup.

TOP CAT
Where? Which camp?

THE COLONEL
Right here.

(Beat)
The girl...

TOP CAT
Little missy?

(Beat)
You called a thirty one on little missy?

THE COLONEL
I did.

TOP CAT starts to reply but thinks better of it.
Suddenly the door bursts open, 2 SHOOTERS enter, frog
marching LENDINE, hands pinned over her head in front
of them.

THE COLONEL
Boys...

SHOOTER 1
Sir...

THE COLONEL
Believe you got something that belongs to me?

SHOOTER 1
Yes sir...

THE COLONEL
Give her up.

They release LENDINE, who is angry beyond words. She is rubbing her wrists and staring daggers at the COLONEL. He is coolly returning her gaze.

THE COLONEL

(To the SHOOTERS)

Git.

SHOOTER 1

Yes sir, thank yuh sir.

The SHOOTERS exit quickly.

LENDINE

I...you...you old...

THE COLONEL

Where are you?

LENDINE

What?

THE COLONEL

Where are you? Simple question. Answer it.

LENDINE

I'm...

THE COLONEL

You're in a goddam prison, little missy. A prison. A fuckin' penitentiary.

LENDINE

I know that.

THE COLONEL

You don't know a goddam thing.

(Beat)

She know anything Cat?

TOP CAT looks back and forth then shrugs.

THE COLONEL (cont'd)

And what we got on this farm? Old MacDonald? No. We got 4500 of the meanest people in Mississippi here. And they ain't gettin any nicer. They ain't improving their manners. This isn't fuckin' charm school. There ain't no saints here.

(To TOP CAT)

Tell her how you got here.

TOP CAT

On a bus with bars in the window.

THE COLONEL

Do not sass me, nigger. I'll put your ass in the hot box quick as a baby fart. I don't care. You know that.

Pause.

TOP CAT

Murder.

THE COLONEL

Not just murder, not a single murder, ain't that right? How many?

TOP CAT

Three. I killed three men durin' a dice game.

THE COLONEL

And how much money was on the ground that roll?

LENDINE

Why?

THE COLONEL

Shut up.

(Beat)

Well?

Pause.

TOP CAT

(Quietly)

About seven dollars maybe.

THE COLONEL

Seven whole dollars.

(Beat)

See my boy, here? Killed three men in a knife fight for seven dollars. Why that's almost three dollars each, rounded up.

(Beat. Then to LENDINE)

And guess what? This nigger here, he's the best a the lot. I got me thousands more a lot worse. And then you have yourself a baby girl fit and a go marching out into the night. A night full a trusty shooters with itchy trigger fingers, dogs roaming everywhere and not a soul know your face 'cept me and Cat.

(Beat)

Five square miles. Five square miles a hungry dogs and ruthless killers.

(Beat)

You're lucky you ain't a shot up, half eaten hunk o' meat.

Pause.

LENDINE

I'm...

THE COLONEL

You're what?

LENDINE

I'm sorry.

THE COLONEL

You're sorry? What are you, five years old? Sorry don't fix bullet holes. Sorry don't fix dead.

LENDINE

No.

THE COLONEL

No what?

LENDINE

Huh?

THE COLONEL

You hear me? No what?

LENDINE

No sir...

Pause.

THE COLONEL

Ok. Alright. Tell you what. You here tomorrow at 8 am, you got the job.

(Beat)

And just to prove to you my mind's still working at least. ..I remember your conditions. I will show you everything.

(Beat)

And you, little missy, are gonna wish you didn't. Cause there's some shit you can never forget.

LENDINE

Thank you.

The COLONEL moves to exit.

LENDINE (cont'd)

Sir, could I...

THE COLONEL

What?

LENDINE

Get a ride up the way. I missed the last bus to Ruleville and I...

THE COLONEL

No.

The COLONEL exits.

LENDINE sits down heavily and starts to cry. TOP CAT exits for a bit, then returns with a pillow and a blanket.

Pause.

TOP CAT

Thought you'd be needing these.

LENDINE

Why...why's he so goddam mean?

TOP CAT

I dunno. Maybe that's all he knows. Maybe that's all he ever got?

(Pause)

I do know that cruelty is the only thing we got plenty of here.

LENDINE

Yeah.

TOP CAT

Which you 'bout to find out if you stay.

(Beat)

So...you staying?

Pause.

LENDINE

I ain't about to let that old bastard get the best of me, so yeah, I'm staying.

TOP CAT

Good.

LENDINE moves to touch TOP CAT. He pulls away quickly.

TOP CAT

No, no, no. Don't you be seen touching or being touched by a nigger here, little missy. They don't lynch for it no more, but he'd be getting a beating from Black Annie for sure. And that strap will take the flesh off your tender bones.

LENDINE

More cruelty ...

TOP CAT

Yeah.

(Beat)

You best get your rest, things about to get really busy here.

LENDINE

(Starting to lie down across the chairs)

Huh...why?

TOP CAT

Cause we got one in five days.

LENDINE

One? You mean an...

TOP CAT

Execution. Yeah, he's getting the gas. Governor don't want no more burning heads. So it's the gas from now on. We gotta get that thing shaped up. Been seventeen years since the last execution.

LENDINE

God.

(Beat)

TOP CAT

Boy's headed to the death cell tonight in fact.

(Beat)

Good night.

TOP CAT exits as LENDINE reclines across the chairs and pulls the blanket over herself. She stares wide eyed into the distance as the lights fade on her.

Upstage the front of a jail cell is revealed, flanked by two GUARDS.

GUARD 1

(Shouting to off stage right)

Open seven.

A loud bell is heard followed by a brief buzzing.

VOICE

Seven open boss.

GUARD 1

C'mon. It's time to go son. Let's go.

A cacophony of angry desperate voices are heard.

VOICE (S)

Be strong Bunny! / Look at him, that little nigger didn't do shit to no one. / What the fuck is matter with you goddam animals! / Love you Bun-Bun! / You be brave, little brother...

The voices reach a fever pitch then suddenly stop.

BUNNY enters through the cell door. He is black and very small, with heavy rimmed glasses covering his eyes. He is carrying a dirty stuffed rabbit with a filthy ribbon around its neck.

BUNNY stops and looks around slowly, not comprehending.

Slowly he wraps the ribbon twice around his thumb. He brings the ribbon up to his face and sticks his thumb into his mouth.

The lights fade as a special remains focused tightly on BUNNY, sucking his thumb.

The special fades on a 10 count.

End Scene 7

End Act I

Act II, Scene 1. The Church of the Penitent Thief.

The gas chamber sits center stage flanked by two GUARDS. A light smoke covers the stage, which is lit by low green lights that flicker.

Slowly the GUARDS turn the chamber until the hatch faces the audience. Then they spin the wheel and pull the door open with a whoosh.

TOP CAT is revealed sitting in the chair. He is reading some papers. Eventually he notices the audience.

TOP CAT

Evening.

(Beat)

Here it is. Our gas toy. But it ain't a new toy, this beast is older than I am. Chamber and the chair been neck and neck in the killing game for years. There was a time, not so long back, where the dead man got a choice, you wanna fry quick or you wanna suffocate slow?

LENDINE is revealed stage right, sitting at a small table with flasks and beakers.

TOP CAT (cont'd)

You learned everything yet?

LENDINE

Naw.

(Beat)

Trying to understand this here thing, this process, that's all.

TOP CAT

It's all poison. Just a tank fulla poison.

LENDINE starts to manipulate the beakers.

LENDINE

A pound of sodium cyanide pellets is dropped into a small tank of sulfuric acid under the chair...

LENDINE pours the contents of one beaker into another.
The beaker starts to smoke.

LENDINE (cont'd)

Which makes cyanide gas, which kills the prisoner.

TOP CAT

In about 8 to 12 minutes.

LENDINE

Not fast?

TOP CAT

No.

(Beat)

It's quite a show.

LENDINE

Oh God...

TOP CAT

I guess its the way it was meant to be.

The lighting shifts to normal and The COLONEL is revealed working on the gas chamber with two guards. He is holding a large jar of petroleum jelly. He is inspecting the door gasket.

THE COLONEL

What the hell is this?

GUARD 1

I smeared it with that jelly jest like you...

THE COLONEL

You buy this shit yourself? You rationing it out?

THE COLONEL starts to spread jelly in thick gobs on the gasket.

THE COLONEL

What did I explain to you? The seal has to be perfect. Why do I sit in those goddam hot meetings and talk and instruct and try to learn you. You gotta head like a cinder block. This is a tank fulla poison. It's all poison. The ingredients are poison, the product is poison. Shit, man, the stuff we use to clean out the poison is poison. Whatta you want, a bunch of dead witnesses cause you been stupid and careless?

LENDINE

(Approaching)

Colonel...

THE COLONEL

(To the GUARDS)

You two...goddam...you two go flush me out three rabbits and bring them on in here.

LENDINE

Rabbits?

THE COLONEL

Yeah.

(Beat, then to the GUARDS)

You heard me. Git!

GUARD 2

But sir, what about...

THE COLONEL

I'll do it myself. Git out. Now.

The GUARDS exit quickly.

LENDINE

Rabbits, sir?

THE COLONEL returns to spreading the jelly.

TOP CAT

For the test.

LENDINE

On rabbits? That...that's terrible.

THE COLONEL

That's a state law. We gotta test the chamber. We use rabbits. Whatta want us to use? Orphans?

LENDINE

Um, no.

THE COLONEL

We gotta test all these systems.

(Beat)

This shit cannot be fucked up again. I will not have it.

LENDINE

I understand.

THE COLONEL

Now, now...

(Beat)

Cat...

TOP CAT

Sir?

THE COLONEL

I need you and little missy to go on over and have a visit with Willie Mae.

LENDINE

Willie Mae?

TOP CAT

Willie Mae Brown. The condemned. We call him Bunny.

LENDINE

Oh.

THE COLONEL

Suss out how he's doing and the like. Try to get him to understand what's gonna happen in the next few days.

TOP CAT

Where's the warden? Thought he did all this last mile stuff.

THE COLONEL

In Jackson with the governor. They planning all the press stuff. First gas execution in 17 years, shit like that. Gonna have press all up in our ass on this one. People coming from England and France for this one.

(Beat)

And Cat...

TOP CAT

Colonel?

THE COLONEL

Eyeball him really close, figure if we gonna have to trunk him out.

(Beat)

We can't have no trouble on this one. We can't have no trouble here. None at all, hear me?

TOP CAT

Yes sir.

(Beat. Then to LENDINE)

Let's go.

MUSIC UP: Little Richard: I Want Jesus To Walk With Me.

They stand in a harsh practical overhead light as the lights fade on the gas chamber and the COLONEL exits with it. The chamber rolls out as the lights shift to a table and chairs set downstage.

BUNNY and two GUARDS enter. BUNNY is shackled and holding his stuffed rabbit.

The music fades.

TOP CAT

How you doing, Bunny?

BUNNY

I know that voice, I do. Lean down on me.

TOP CAT leans down into BUNNY's face. BUNNY peers at him.

BUNNY

Cat! I knew it was you. I could tell.

TOP CAT

How you been?

BUNNY

I got me a new place, they took me to a new place, got new stuff and a TV. I got me a TV.

TOP CAT

That's good man. That's real good.

(Beat. Then to the GUARDS)

We can take those off.

GUARD 1

I don't take orders from no prisoners. I'm wearing the badge, see?

TOP CAT looks at the GUARD then to LENDINE.

Pause.

LENDINE steps forward.

LENDINE

Please...

GUARD 1

And who might you be?

LENDINE

Colonel Landsman's assistant.

(Beat. They look at each other in silence.)

So, take off those goddam cuffs right this instant, hear me?

GUARD 1

Or?

LENDINE

(Quietly)

Or the Colonel gonna put his pointy boot so far up your ass you'll be tasting shoe leather for a month and polishing the buckle with your tongue.

TOP CAT

Believe it.

The GUARD pauses for a moment, then releases
BUNNY.

LENDINE

(To the GUARDS)

Get out.

The GUARDS exit.

Pause.

LENDINE

Good morning, Mr. Brown.

Pause.

LENDINE (cont'd)

Mr. Brown?

BUNNY

Who?

TOP CAT

Yo, Bunny...

BUNNY

Yes? How you been Mr. Top Cat?

Beat.

TOP CAT

Good man. Listen up now, little brother, like you to meet a friend o' mine, Miss Blevins.

LENDINE

How do you do, Mr...Bunny?

BUNNY

Very well thank you ma'am.

(Beat. Then to TOP CAT)

Cat, I think she's a white lady. She a white lady? Seems so to me.

TOP CAT

Yup.

BUNNY

Never seen one up close. She smells good.

TOP CAT

Go on and listen now.

LENDINE

Mr. Bunny, we need to discuss certain arrangements and choices you will need to make as your date grows closer.

BUNNY

Ok.

LENDINE

Some of the topics might be a little difficult to talk about.

BUNNY

Ok.

LENDINE

I guess, first off, where do you want your remains sent?

Pause.

BUNNY

Remains?

LENDINE

Remains. Your body. After your...

BUNNY looks from LENDINE to TOP CAT and back.
He doesn't understand.

Pause.

TOP CAT

Wait now.

(Pause.)

Hey Bun-Bun, your Mama passed on awhile back, right? I seem to remember that.

BUNNY

Yeah. Yeah she did.

(Beat)

She always wanted that. She's very happy now, up with Jesus in heaven.
She tells me she like it.

LENDINE

She does?

BUNNY

She ain't never been on a trip before.

TOP CAT

Bunny, I gotta question.

BUNNY

Yeah?

TOP CAT

If you gotta chance to go see your mamma, you think you'd like that?

BUNNY

Yeah. Yeah!

(Beat)

I miss her some powerful fierce.

TOP CAT

Because that what's gonna happen. You gonna go up to visit with Jesus and see your momma.

BUNNY

I would like that.

(Beat. Then in a whisper)

Cause between you and me, Mr. Cat, I don't like this place too very much.

TOP CAT

Me neither, little brother, me neither.

(Beat)

So, before you go, you gonna get something special to eat.

BUNNY

Yeah, like what? Somethin' good?

TOP CAT

Anything you want.

BUNNY

Naw.

TOP CAT

Yeah. No foolin’

(Beat)

So what would that be?

Pause.

BUNNY

Well, some fried catfish in that cornmeal bread, smashed potatoes, some collards cooked in pig grease with those bacon pieces on the top...

TOP CAT

Your Mama make the greens like that?

BUNNY

Yeah. Yeah she did. It wuz so good...

(Beat)

And some hush puppies and dippin’ honey.

TOP CAT

That all?

BUNNY

Can I have more?

TOP CAT

Yeah.

BUNNY

Causes it’s a long trip to see Jesus, huh?

LENDINE

Yes. Yes it is.

BUNNY

So maybe some lemonade, fresh squeeze. And some dessert. Like pudding, that yellow pudding. Forgot what it’s called...

LENDINE

Butterscotch?

BUNNY

That's it, yeah, That's it. That stuff's good.

(Beat)

But I'm gonna need a lot. Cause I'm gonna save some for when I get back from my trip.

Pause. LENDINE looks away.

TOP CAT

(Quietly)

Good idea, man.

(Beat)

Well, we gotta get you on back to your cell now Bun-Bun. Thanks for all your help.

BUNNY

Ok.

Pause.

LENDINE

Bunny, do you know why you're here?

Pause.

BUNNY

Cause I was bad.

LENDINE

You were bad?

(Beat)

How were you bad?

Pause.

BUNNY

I rightly don't know...

(Beat)

Do you?

Lights fade on a 5 count.

Blackout.

Act II, Scene 2 . A waiting room/office in Unit 29

The COLONEL sits at his desk, staring balefully at a whiskey bottle. His desk is covered with papers.

LENDINE enters, takes one look at the COLONEL and waits silently in the doorway.

Long pause.

THE COLONEL

Well?

LENDINE

Cat and I, we...

THE COLONEL

You two got that boy to make some choices, right?

LENDINE

Sir, we...

THE COLONEL

Cause that's all I wanna hear. I wanna hear, yes sir, it's all set sir, everything has been taken care of, sir, everything is gonna be fine.

LENDINE

But...

THE COLONEL

Everything is gonna be fine!

LENDINE

Colonel...

THE COLONEL

That's all I wanna hear! Everything is gonna be fine, everything is gonna be fine, everything is gonna be fucking jim dandy fine.

(Pause. Then quietly.)

That's all I want.

Pause.

LENDINE

(Blurting)

Sir, he didn't do this thing, he didn't.

(Beat)

He's a poor little retarded fellow. He don't even know why he's here.

THE COLONEL

Murder. Of a highway patrolman.

LENDINE

But he didn't do it. He's simple, he's like a first grader. He didn't do this, he couldn't do this.

Pause.

THE COLONEL

So?

LENDINE

Sir?

THE COLONEL

(Taking a drink)

What's your point?

LENDINE

My point? My point is that he's didn't do this. Murder? How could he murder a police officer? The floor boss has to tie his shoes.

THE COLONEL

Yeah.

(Beat)

I know.

LENDINE

I just can't believe we are gonna do this.

THE COLONEL

Well, we are.

Pause.

LENDINE

So how do you feel?

THE COLONEL

Like hell, my joints are creaking. I'm on 12 different medications and I can't sleep for shit. I'm...

LENDINE

Sorry.

(Beat)

I meant, I meant about the execution.

THE COLONEL

I don't feel no ways about it. It's part of the job.

LENDINE

You're kidding right?

THE COLONEL

Yeah, I suppose. It's a pain in the ass what with all the press and victim's families and alla extra work. Plus getting the chamber ready. And it disrupts the routine. It's never a good thing when a prison's routine gets disrupted.

LENDINE

Colonel, sir... I mean the fact we are going to execute an innocent man. That doesn't trouble you?

Pause.

THE COLONEL

No.

LENDINE

How can that be?

THE COLONEL

Cause I didn't do this. I ain't responsible for this situation. And I'll tell you something else, I ain't fit to make this decision. You got smart people in Jackson and smart people in Washington and they don't give a shit about this. Those people can read Latin and shit and they just don't care. So why should I?

(Beat. He takes a drink.)

It helps... it helps to think about them as numbers. I'm just a dumb ass who works the chicken killing line. They come past me and I do what I'm paid to do. Jest like that.

LENDINE

Jest like that?

THE COLONEL

Yeah.

(Beat)

You ain't gonna last long if you get yerself all worked up.

(Beat)

Have a drink. Look I know its tough, it's your first. You'll get over it, you'll get hard. Or you'll get gone.

LENDINE

Hard huh? Hard like you?

THE COLONEL

Yeah.

(Beat)

Just like me.

LENDINE

You don't look so hard to me. You look beat up, you look tired and sick to me.

THE COLONEL

Girl, git your mouth offa me. Where the fuck did you go to medical school? Keep your low rent psychiatric opinions to your own damn self.

Long pause.

LENDINE

What's your number?

THE COLONEL

Huh? Oh, yeah. This boy here will be my thirty third.

LENDINE

No. I mean, what's your number? How long you think you got?

Pause.

THE COLONEL

Just shut up, OK?

Beat. The phone rings and THE COLONEL snatches up the receiver.

THE COLONEL (cont'd)

Yes.

(Beat)

You ready for the test? What...?

(Beat)

You fucking kidding me? Jesus H Christ a hangin' on the cross. What the fuck is the matter with you people? You can't follow the simplest instructions, can you?

Beat. THE COLONEL hangs up the phone.

THE COLONEL (cont'd)

It used to mean that a high school diploma meant sumthin'. Those bastard teachers must be gradin' on a curve nowadays.

LENDINE

What happened?

THE COLONEL

No rabbits. Said they couldn't find no rabbits. 18,000 acres of prison farm and those idiots can't find rabbits.

(Pause)

So they got turtles.

LENDINE

Turtles?

THE COLONEL

Yup. Box turtles. A couple a regular rumbling around turtles. Jesus...

The lights start to fade around the COLONEL as he sits in his chair. He pours himself a drink and stares blankly into the middle distance.

Long pause.

THE COLONEL (cont'd)

I got me... I got me a terrible, terrible feeling about this one. I really do.

Blackout.

END scene 2

Act II, Scene 3. The Church of the Penitent Thief

The COLONEL sits downstage on the stage floor, legs splayed wide, his bottle beside him. He is staring down at two large stuffed toy turtles between his legs.

Upstage, BUNNY is sitting on the top of the gas chamber back to the audience wearing a white robe and angel's wings with a tinsel halo over his head.

TOP CAT and LENDINE enter and slowly spin the gas chamber then roll it down stage. They too are wearing tinsel halos.

BUNNY is eating a bowl of butterscotch pudding.

TOP CAT

Evening, boss.

LENDINE

Good evening sir.

(Beat)

And how is this fine evening treating you?

The COLONEL looks up as if to say something, then shakes his head helplessly.

LENDINE

(Looking at the turtles)

Did you go to the fair?

TOP CAT

He sure did. And won himself some prizes too.

Pause.

THE COLONEL

You know those damn people who always saying "I wanna learn something new every day?"

TOP CAT

Sure.

LENDINE

I guess.

THE COLONEL

I was never one of them people. I don't wanna have all those ideas and facts and stuff floating around in my head.

TOP CAT

I can see that.

THE COLONEL

I learnt me sumthin' today however.

LENDINE

Which was?

THE COLONEL

You can't kill a turtle.

LENDINE

Well not those, sir.

TOP CAT

They're stuffed. Dead already sir.

BUNNY

You could maybe if you tried hard enough. Maybe shoot them or somethin'.

Beat.

THE COLONEL

You can't kill a turtle in a gas chamber is what I meant.

TOP CAT

Why did you try?

THE COLONEL

Cause my boys couldn't find no rabbits on this entire fucking farm so they came back with turtles. For the test.

(Beat)

And we discovered, we learnt today the fact that you can't gas a turtle.

(Beat)

We did a test like we were goin' live. Like it was the real deal.

BUNNY

Like it was me you were killin'?

THE COLONEL

Yup. Except you were a turtle.

(Beat)

We did it twice. I thought to Jesus God that there was a major fuck up all up in that. Yelled at my boys and everythin'. Made them run the decontamination procedure and we did the whole thing again. Those little bastards just fuckin' turtled up under them shells and waited us out.

LENDINE

What happened to them?

THE COLONEL

They're as fine as pie. We took em out the back door. Last I saw of them was their rear ends lumbering through the underbrush headed east. Didn't look no worse for the wear.

Pause.

BUNNY

I wish I wuz a turtle.

TOP CAT

Me too.

BUNNY

I'm gonna practice. Can't hurt none.

TOP CAT

You do that, little brother, you do that.

Pause.

The COLONEL slowly slumps forward.

LENDINE

Colonel, sir? You all right?

THE COLONEL

No.

TOP CAT

What's the matter, boss?

Pause.

THE COLONEL

I'm dying.

Beat.

TOP CAT

Join the club.

THE COLONEL

Since the moment I got here, the instant I arrived as a fuckin' peon goddam guard in the worst unit in this shithole, I've been dyin'. A little bit every day. You don't notice at first, cause you're young and vigorous and you think you own the world. But this place, it wears you down. No, no... it grinds you down. It fuckin' grinds you down. Forty years later, this is what you get.

TOP CAT

Well boss, that's a little hasty...

THE COLONEL

Yeah? How so?

TOP CAT

Cause you brought all this on yourself, that's how so.

THE COLONEL

The fuck you say. I got me 12 different prescription medications that don't do shit and...

TOP CAT

You know what ails you.

THE COLONEL

What?

TOP CAT points at BUNNY. BUNNY waves.

TOP CAT

Tell me I'm lyin'

THE COLONEL

I don't know nuthin' cept I know I can't sleep no more.

LENDINE

Ah, well...

TOP CAT

Course, all the boozing and brawling can't be helping none.

THE COLONEL

I got me, I got me a sick...

TOP CAT

Mind. That's what you got.

THE COLONEL

No. No. I jest work too hard. I'm run down...

TOP CAT

Then stop working.

THE COLONEL

And do what?

TOP CAT

I dunno. Stop suffering.

LENDINE

And stop bitching about your suffering. You got some nerve. You have doled out an enormous amount of suffering and pain since you been here, haven't you?

THE COLONEL

No...

LENDINE

I read the reports sir. Just the Commission reports concerning you are a foot and a half thick. You have done horrible things here...

THE COLONEL

No...

VOICE

Yes!

LENDINE

Savage things...

THE COLONEL

No...

VOICE

Yes!

LENDINE

Criminal things.

THE COLONEL

No...

VOICE

Yes!

THE COLONEL

Stop it! Shut up! Stop it!

The COLONEL places his hands over his ears and bends forward until his head touches the floor.

Long pause.

THE COLONEL

I... we...done what we needed to do to keep this prison under control. That's what I get paid to do.

TOP CAT

So boss, the beatings, the torture, the rapes and the murders? They were all part of that? All part of the job?

THE COLONEL

It was a different time.

LENDINE

Funny how all y'all say that.

TOP CAT

Like it excuses your sins.

LENDINE

Cause that's what we're talkin' about isn't it? Guilt... shame...

TOP CAT

Sin.

(Beat)

Ah wuz only following orders.

LENDINE

(Over her shoulder)

Bring it.

A GUARD rolls a panel downstage on which the two button switch is mounted.

TOP CAT

Here we are.

LENDINE

Better salvation through technology.

The COLONEL gets up and approaches the switch. He examines the panel, rubs his fingers over the button as if searching for something. Slowly, silently he slides back down to his crumpled sitting position on the floor.

THE COLONEL

I'll take all the help I can get.

LENDINE

Yeah. I know.

Pause.

THE COLONEL

I don't even bother to go to bed no more. I can't sleep. The best I can do is a sleepin' pill haze. A sort of mental snow storm. I lie on my couch and drift away. Whiskey with a barbiturate chaser.

Beat.

TOP CAT

That shit can kill you.

The COLONEL takes a swig from his bottle.

THE COLONEL

So?

(Beat)

One night...I dunno, maybe it wasn't night. Always seems dark now to me somehow.

(Beat)

I went out into the snow. Just a walk around in the snow in my head. I dunno how far I got but it was far, it was a good hike. Then, all of a sudden like, I started to rise. Up into the air. Not fast, not slow, just rising up at a good clip. And it get brighter and brighter and brighter. Everything is fallin' away, I'm rising and leaving all the shit behind. Suddenly I know. I feel His presence, way above me in the ether purple sky. I am headed upward, I'm going to the sky, I am going home. I'm getting closer and closer to Him as I rise faster and faster. Eventually I am in the Presence. It fills me, it saturates every pore of my being, every little bit, every secret thing. I am laid out flat prone in front of him and there is this moment where everything just... stops. I'm frozen. I am waiting.

(Beat)

Then, from every where, inside of me, outside of me, around me, this voice speaks to me. He speaks about me. He judges me. Fully. Completely. And there can be no room for argument. The voice says...

VOICE

No.

Long pause.

THE COLONEL

I fall.

(Pause)

But I fight. I claw at the light like a man drowning, I claw upward but the darkness is getting thicker and thicker and I'm getting weaker and weaker. It is entering my mouth and into my body and I can't breathe. I am falling, falling, falling and the dark is crushing me, squeezing me tighter and tighter.

Long pause.

LENDINE

And?

THE COLONEL

I woke up. Vomiting all that liquor poison outta me. Crawling around the ground like a reptile, belly dragging on the ground, crying like a baby torn from his mamma's arms.

(Pause)

I had a vision of my own judgement and I was found wanting. I dunno even much what I done wrong but I know, I know it's gonna consign me to hell.

(Beat)

And I am afraid.

LENDINE

So you think your two button box is gonna help you somehow?

THE COLONEL

Is it wrong to want to save yourself?

TOP CAT

You had yourself an alcoholic hallucination.

THE COLONEL

No.

(Beat)

It was real, it was as real as...

TOP CAT

Sin?

THE COLONEL

Yeah.

LENDINE

Well, sir, maybe your sin is sitting right there.

LENDINE points at BUNNY, still seated atop the gas chamber. BUNNY waves back.

LENDINE

You wanna do the right thing? You want to be right with heaven? Why don't you start here. Right here!

Long pause.

TOP CAT

It's bad, ain't it.

THE COLONEL

Yeah.

TOP CAT

He's going, ain't he?

(Beat)

And there ain't jack shit anybody here can do 'bout it.

THE COLONEL

Oh yeah, he's going.

(Beat. Then to LENDINE.)

So I suppose you're leaving now?

Long pause.

LENDINE

No.

THE COLONEL

No?

LENDINE

I wish to the Lord God on high I had never come to this place. I really do. But...I can't leave. The only thing worse than this is going home to my Mama and my baby as a failure. I chose this, I'm a gonna finish it.

(Beat)

I am gonna finish this.

(Pause)

But this shit here, this shit ain't right.

Pause.

THE COLONEL

I don't have any truck with right. All I got is official and proper. That's it.

A fog starts to envelop the gas chamber. Two GUARDS appear on either side of it.

TOP CAT

You got yourself a paper with big, big gold stars on it.

THE COLONEL

(Beat)

Yeah...

GUARD 1

Let's go, Bunny. It's time.

BUNNY slides down from the top of the gas chamber.

BUNNY

Time for mah trip?

GUARD 2

Uh...yeah.

BUNNY

I'm ready, let's go!

BUNNY waves goodbye. He exits flanked by the GUARDS, disappearing into the fog.

TOP CAT and LENDINE stand over the COLONEL as he takes a long pull from his bottle. He looks into the middle distance for a long time then slowly his head drops toward his chest.

A harsh practical light fades up in the gas chamber as the stage lights dim.

End Scene 3

Act II, Scene 4. The execution room

The lights come up on the gas chamber, center stage. On stage left in its own pool of light is the 2 button switch. On stage right, a telephone with a red light sits on a small metal hospital table.

The light in the gas chamber has remained on during the scene change.

Long pause.

Slowly TOP CAT is revealed downstage right. He is holding a tulip.

TOP CAT

And so it came to pass that at 12:02 am on the 4th of June in the year of our Lord 1987 AD prisoner TS -83b-114, one William Mae Brown by name, was executed by gas in the Maximum Security Unit at Parchman Farm in Sunflower County, Mississippi for the murder of a police officer.

(Pause)

And when that execution was finished, there would never be another one.

(Beat)

At least not by gas...

TOP CAT slowly sinks to the floor as the lights dim but do not go out on him.

SOUND CUE: A heartbeat, the rate and volume of which gradually increases throughout the scene

As the heartbeat grows louder, BUNNY enters, flanked by two GUARDS and the COLONEL. He is carrying his stuffed rabbit. The COLONEL is scanning the death chamber, absorbing every detail, hypervigilant.

The COLONEL turns to BUNNY and lowers his head to whisper into his ear. There is a brief conversation and finally BUNNY nods his head yes.

The COLONEL gently takes the stuffed rabbit from BUNNY.

The GUARDS escort BUNNY into the gas chamber and they can be seen fastening him to the chair. The COLONEL steps inside the chamber to double check their work. As he does so the WARDEN enters stage right with a folder full of papers, checking his watch.

BUNNY looks increasingly panicked as the COLONEL completes his work. As the COLONEL exits, he pauses and looks back at BUNNY. BUNNY looks at him searchingly.

The COLONEL exits the chamber and nods to the GUARDS who seal the door.

BUNNY is clearly visible through the window, panic stricken.

The COLONEL moves slowly, lumbering stage left. LENDINE enters and stands there awkwardly with him.

Pause.

The light on the telephone flashes. The WARDEN picks it up, listens for a second then replaces the receiver. He looks across the stage at the COLONEL and shakes his head. The WARDEN shuffles through his papers until he comes to the execution warrant.

Note: The following lines are heard over the sound system. They are recorded.

WARDEN

By the order of the 4th Circuit Court of the State of Mississippi, you William Mae Brown, having been found guilty of the murder of Randolph Dana Swift, a peace officer, are to be executed by the administration of poison gas to your person until death.

Pause. The WARDEN flips a switch for the intercom.

WARDEN (cont'd)

Son? Can you hear me?

(Beat)

You got anything you want to say?

A choked sobbing is heard.

WARDEN

Son?

A keening wail is heard.

BUNNY

I....I don't...I didn't....

More sobbing is heard. The WARDEN flips a switch and it is cut off.

Long pause.

People stand uncomfortably, looking around. Eventually everyone is gazing at the phone.

Pause.

The WARDEN crosses himself, then looks across the stage at the COLONEL. He nods his head. The COLONEL turns to LENDINE. They lock eyes. The COLONEL nods three times. On the third nod they both push their button.

Pause.

An ominous bubbling hissing sound is heard.

BUNNY looks down as the lights inside the chamber dim and he is lit from a single light on the floor pointed straight up.

The gas is rising now, a greenish deadly looking vapor that starts to swirl about the chamber. BUNNY looks about desperately. He attempts to hold his breath but soon fails, exhaling and then inhaling a huge gasp of the poison gas. He shakes his head violently as he strains upwards against the bonds that hold him in the chair.

Suddenly he stops. He sits motionless for a moment, his eyes growing wider and wider.

His eyes roll up into the back of his head as his head lashes back and forth, hitting the vent pipe behind the chair.

Sound effect: The repeated metallic ding of BUNNY's head hitting the pipe.

The dinging sound continues and grows louder as the prison staff watches in horror.

THE COLONEL

Oh Jesus, O sweet Jesus. We didn't strap his head. We didn't strap his fucking head!

(To The WARDEN)

Shut the curtain, shut the fucking curtain! Now!

The WARDEN stares dumbly at the COLONEL until he at last understands and motions to a GUARD. He whispers into the GUARD's ear. The GUARD rushes to the chamber and pulls the curtain over the window.

The dinging sound continues.

The WARDEN hurried goes downstage and addresses the audience.

WARDEN

Pursuant to the lawful order of execution, on this day at 12:02 am on the 4th of June in the year of our Lord 1987...

(Beat.

The WARDEN glances nervously over his
shoulder)

Willie Mae Brown was...executed... by poison gas in the Maximum Security Unit at the
Mississippi State Penitentiary ...

(Beat.)

The dinging grows louder as the COLONEL, who has
been watching in shocked horror suddenly staggers
sideways. A grimace crosses his face as his knees buckle
and he drops to the floor.

LENDINE screams soundlessly.

WARDEN (cont'd)

May god have mercy on his soul.

The GUARD directs the WARDEN's attention upstage
to the COLONEL's plight.

WARDEN (cont'd)

(Regarding the audience)

Get them out of here.

The GUARD steps downstage as pandemonium breaks
out upstage with the staff trying to attend the
COLONEL.

GUARD 1

That's it, you heard him. Time to leave, ladies and gentlemen. This way out please...

The dinging continues as the lights fade on the gas
chamber. Soon the lights fade upstage. TOP CAT remains
lit downstage right. As the light on him fades, he raises
his head. He is weeping.

The last to fade is the audio. The dinging stops first then
the heartbeat.

End Scene 4

Act II, Scene 5. A bare stage.

The stage is dark.

MUSIC UP: Mormon Tabernacle Choir: Nearer My
God to Thee

The stage stays dark through the first verse.

At the start of the second, a light comes up downstage
right to reveal BUNNY lying nude on a gurney.

A figure dressed in a haz mat suit and protective air mask
is attending to the body, sweeping away the cyanide dust
that has collected on BUNNY as part of the execution
process.

Pause.

The figure scans the body with a gas sniffer, then looks
at the display result. The airmask comes off. It is
LENDINE.

She places a cloth into a pail of water then starts to
slowly and reverently wash BUNNY's face.

She pauses for a moment, seemingly overcome with
emotion but then collects herself and continues to bathe
BUNNY's face.

Finally she opens a paper bag and takes out the stuffed
rabbit and places it next to BUNNY.

LENDINE exits.

The lights fade on a 4 count as the song ends.

Pause. A light comes up upstage left revealing the
COLONEL sitting in a wheelchair.

He has obviously had a stroke. His head is bowed. He is holding a tulip loosely in his hand.

A VOICE speaks.

VOICE

As tried by the 4th District Circuit Court in the State of Mississippi sitting in Jackson. This Court will now render a verdict in the matter of Landsman vs the State of Mississippi. Docket number blah blah blah blah blah...

As the VOICE's words turn to gibberish, the COLONEL looks up as if trying to glean meaning.

VOICE (cont'd)

Although there are some aggravating factors in regard to the stress the Plaintiff experienced in his work, This Court finds that those factors did not play a part in the events that lead to the stroke he experienced on June 4th blah blah blah blah blah blah...

Once again the COLONEL lifts his head, straining to gather meaning where there is none.

VOICE (cont'd)

...blah blah blah blah blah.

(Beat)

Furthermore the Court rules that the Plaintiff's personal habits were a contributing factor that led to the incident.

(Beat)

Therefore the Court finds that the Defendant is not entitled to additional compensation under the State Employees Act of...

The VOICE trails off as lights fade on a five count.

END Scene 5

Act II, Scene 6. The waiting room/office in Unit 29.

TOP CAT is tying on battered old work boots.

Noises off. TOPCAT looks off right expectantly.

LENDINE enters carrying some personal items.

Pause.

LENDINE

Hey.

TOP CAT

Hey your own self.

(Beat)

This is for the best. It really is.

(Beat)

This god forsaken place ain't for you. You're smart. You're better than this.

LENDINE

I dunno. I am alla time feeling I let people down. Mama, Bunny...

(Beat)

You...

TOP CAT

You gotta take care of yourself first. You gotta go when you gotta go. People wanna give you money to go to college, you're a damn fool if you don't take it.

LENDINE

I didn't know anything about all those programs, all the chances. No one told me nuthin'.

TOP CAT

What you gonna study?

LENDINE

I want to study everything. I want to cram my head fulla, I dunno, the world.

(Beat)

What about you?

TOP CAT

I'll be here. Ain't going nowhere.

LENDINE

You gonna work for the new guy?

TOP CAT

Ah, don't thinks so. The Colonel is gone and the new boss got his own nigger. That's jest the way it is.

(Beat)

I'll be fine.

LENDINE

You best be.

(Beat)

I ain't never gonna forget you.

TOP CAT

You best try. You go out that door and don't look back. This was a dream, a waking dream you had once. A long time ago. Far away.

(Beat)

And I don't wanna hear from you, little missy. No Christmas card, care packages or such not. Clean break. You can't forget if you keep tryin' to remember.

(Beat)

Go on now.

As a teary LENDINE moves to hug TOP CAT, he backs away from her.

TOP CAT (cont'd)

Uh-uh. What did I tell...

LENDINE wraps her arms around him.

There is movement upstage in the dark.

LENDINE

Just shut the fuck up.

They embrace.

Long pause.

LENDINE starts to speak then turns and exits. TOP CAT stands silently.

Long pause.

Out of the darkness two GUARDS appear.

GUARD 1

You ready, Cat?

TOP CAT

Yes, sir. I appreciate the respect you just showed me here.

GUARD 1

It's fine. I gotta put the bracelets on you tho.

GUARD 2

That was a touchin' little scene. Nice to see a smartass get his due. Back to the gunline for you.

(Beat.)

Not so important now, are ya, nigger?

GUARD 1

Boy, mind your fuckin mouth before you wind up sucking fist.

(Beat. Then to TOP CAT)

He's young.

GUARD 2

Why you holding this gunman's water?

GUARD 1

Cause I'm going to know the man a long time.

GUARD 2

Yeah you are. He's servin' life.

GUARD 1

Yup. And so am I.

TOP CAT

(To GUARD 2)

And so are you.

Pause.

The lights fades on a four count as TOP CAT and the two GUARDS exit.

END Scene 6

Act II, Scene 7. The Church of the Penitent Thief

TOP CAT appears as he did in Act I, Scene 2 dressed in prison stripes and wearing a cotton bag.

TOP CAT is escorted downstage by two black trusty SHOOTERS.

SHOOTER 1 drags the butt of his rifle in a line in front of TOP CAT.

SHOOTER 1

Gunman, this be your gunline.

TOP CAT

Yes, sir.

VOICE

It's time...

TOP CAT

Yes.

VOICE

Tell them.

(Beat. Louder)

Tell them.

(Beat. The VOICE rises to a shrieking fury.)

Tell them!

TOP CAT

No one who comes to this place ever leaves it. Mebbe you move your body far, far away but Parchman is with you always.

The COLONEL steps forward from the darkness. He is wearing prison stripes and a cotton bag.

THE COLONEL

Always.

LENDINE steps forward from the darkness. She is wearing prison stripes and a cotton bag.

LENDINE

Always.

BUNNY steps forward from the darkness. He is wearing prison stripes and a cotton bag.

BUNNY

Always.

TOP CAT

There are only two sentences here.

THE COLONEL

Life.

LENDINE

Life.

BUNNY

Life.

TOP CAT moves forward, crossing the gunline. The SHOOTERS instantly raise and cock their weapons.

TOP CAT

Or death.

VOICE

Tell them.

(Beat. Louder)

Tell them.

(Beat. The VOICE rises to a shrieking fury.)

Tell them!

TOP CAT

And back in the day, it wuz just you and a guard on a long walk outta camp. Just you, him, a shovel and a bullet.

And you got a little exercise in before you went to meet your maker, cause you had the honor of diggin' your own grave. And then...then...execution was immediate and without pity.

(Beat)

But nothing is ever completely hidden. Eventually all sin finds daylight. Here in the Delta, the sharecroppers bore silent witness. And they testified to the sin in the only way they could...

The cast reaches into their cotton bags and take out tulips.

TOP CAT (cont'd)

They planted flowers over the graves.

(Beat)

Perennials.

(Beat)

So while the winter keeps secrets, the spring screams it's witness to heaven year after year after year when new life burst open, all over the Delta, completely surrounding the farm in flowers.

(Pause)

But this place, this prison, this Parchman is not special. We are not unique. We are sadly common. Under flowers all over the world, lie the disappeared, the victims, the vanished. The flowers are silent memorials, planted by powerless witnesses in the soft hope of remembrance for the innocent and the damned ...

As The VOICE speaks a place, a cast member takes a flower from their cotton bag, raises it, then drops it by gently throwing it forward.

VOICE

Parchman...

VOICE

Mississippi...

America...	VOICE
Argentina...	VOICE
Germany...	VOICE
	MUSIC UP: Johnny Cash: Ain't No Grave
Japan...	VOICE
Belgian Congo...	VOICE
China...	VOICE
	The lights start to fade.
El Salvador...	VOICE
Chile...	VOICE
Russia...	VOICE
South Africa...	VOICE
Sudan...	VOICE
Sierra Leone...	VOICE

America...

VOICE

Mississippi...

VOICE

The cast throw their last flowers at the same time.

Parchman.

VOICE

Black out.

The music plays through to the end.

End Scene 7

End Act II

Curtain.