Prodigal

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Prodigal

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of New Orleans in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing Playwriting

by
Jonathan White

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Abstract:

Following a similar pattern of the classic Biblical story of “The Prodigal Son”, the play allows for a modernization of the characters and setting. Set in 1968, the playwright takes a look at what happened after the “Prodigal Son” returned home as well as the effect the return had upon the Son that stayed as well as the Father. How can family relationships survive in the midst of lies and turmoil of a time of great change in America’s history.

Play, Prodigal Son, Louisiana, 1968, Father, Son, Drama.
Cast of Characters:

Arvin The Patriarch.
Saul Arvin's Oldest Son, 29
Lucas Arvin's Youngest Son, 25
Pauline Arvin's cook and housekeeper
Olivia Pauline's daughter
Ray Olivia's husband
ACT I

Scene 1

Setting: Louisiana, 1968.

AT RISE: Dusk. The stage is divided into two distinct rooms, living and dining, with a visible hallway in the middle. The hallway contains a door leading outside and stairs that lead to the upstairs area, which we cannot see. In the living room there is a clean leather sofa and chair set with dark wood tables and lamps with large fabric shades. A fireplace with a mantle is on one side. Above the mantel is a portrait with an older man, and two young boys. One looks happy, the other boy does not. A single barrel shotgun is mounted beside the picture. A liquor cabinet filled with various types of alcohol is prominent on the wall. There is a small TV off to the side. The dining room is not yet dressed for dinner. There is a swinging door that leads to the kitchen beside a wood hutch filled with fine china. PAULINE, a heavyset African American woman in her late 50s is wiping down the table, humming a peppy song. SAUL enters flipping through a stack of mail. He is nicely dressed. PAULINE jumps when she sees SAUL. They exchange looks.

PAULINE
I didn't see you there.

SAUL
Dinner almost ready?

PAULINE
I know he doesn't like music in the house.

SAUL
I'm not going to tell on you.
PAULINE

I'll try to keep it down.

SAUL

What's on?

PAULINE

Gumbo. Just about ready.

SAUL

Smells good. Let me just take a little taste.

PAULINE

No, sir. You got to wait till it's done.

SAUL

It doesn't matter. I think it might just be me tonight.

PAULINE

Mr. Hebert not feeling good?

SAUL

Dr. Guidroz told him to rest.

PAULINE

I can take some up to him.

SAUL

That'll be fine. He probably won't eat much though.

PAULINE

Little bit will do him good. My mama always used to say Cajun food feeds you mind, body, and spirit.

SAUL

Especially yours, Pauline.

PAULINE

Thank you, Mr. Saul.

SAUL exits the dining room. ARVIN enters the hallway. He is dressed in a bathrobe. He carries a newspaper and some cigarettes. He looks pallid.

ARVIN

Get me some matches will you?

SAUL

Dr. Guidroz told you not to smoke.

ARVIN

He's a hack.
SAUL

That may be, but -

ARVIN

Are you going to get me the matches or aren't you?

He pushes SAUL aside, and goes to the living room. He digs around a drawer, and finds some matches. He plops into one of the chairs and lights a cigarette. He labors to smoke. After a few drags, he opens the paper and begins to read.

SAUL

Anything interesting?

ARVIN

Those coloreds up in Memphis causing all sorts of trouble.

SAUL

Pauline made gumbo for dinner. You want me to bring some in here?

I'm not hungry.

You need to eat.

ARVIN

I'll eat when I'm hungry.

How about a sandwich?

SAUL

You gone deaf?

PAULINE enters from the kitchen.

PAULINE

Mr. Saul? You smoking in this house? Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Hebert. I thought you was upstairs asleep.

ARVIN

Couldn't.

PAULINE

Mr. Hebert, you know you're not supposed to be smoking. Dr. Guidroz would throw a fit if he knew you were in here like this.
ARVIN
I'm a grown man. I don't need no good for nothing doctor coming, telling me what I can and can't do.

PAULINE
Yes, but -

ARVIN
It's one cigarette. This isn't going to hurt me.

PAULINE
Mr. Saul, you let him do this?

SAUL
He won't listen to me.

PAULINE
Shame on both of you. And the light in this room ain't no light for reading.

She begins to open the curtains and turn on all the lamps.

ARVIN
You trying to blind me? There's nothing in here anyway.

ARVIN struggles to get comfortable. In his effort, he has a coughing fit.

SAUL
You alright? You want a pillow or something?

PAULINE
I'll go pour some water.

ARVIN
I'm fine. Y'all stop fussing over me like I'm an infant. I don't need to be looked after.

SAUL
Pauline, go and get him some water.

PAULINE
Yes, sir.

PAULINE exits to the kitchen.

ARVIN
I told you I was fine.
It’s just water, Dad.

ARVIN

Turn on the TV will you?

SAUL

You should be resting.

ARVIN

Just turn on the TV.

SAUL

Sure.

He turns on the TV. WALTER CRONKITE is announcing the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It is heard, not seen. SAUL and ARVIN watch stoically. PAULINE enters and gives the glass of water to ARVIN. She is visibly shaken by the news.

PAULINE

Sweet Jesus.

ARVIN

Turn it off. What are you sitting there for? I said turn it off.

SAUL jumps up and turns off the TV as the news trails off. PAULINE sits dazed. Beat.

ARVIN

I’m sorry, Pauline. I know he was a real good man for your people.

PAULINE

He was a rabble-rouser. Getting everybody all stirred up with talk of hope and dreams. Still it’s a shame. The Good Lord don’t want nobody to have to die like that. Especially no preacher. I’m going to go look after dinner.

She exits, tearfully. SAUL gets up and goes to the liquor cabinet and
pours himself a glass of bourbon.

SAUL

She seemed upset.

ARVIN

Yeah.

SAUL

You think we should send her home?

ARVIN

What for?

SAUL

I don’t know –

ARVIN

You know, that’s your problem boy. You’re too soft. Life isn’t always a party. Look at me. You think this is easy?

SAUL

No, sir.

ARVIN

You can’t run a company, letting your feelings run everything.

SAUL

I understand. I think I’ve done a good job for you.

ARVIN

How’d we close first quarter?

SAUL

Up.

ARVIN

Good. We need to call a meeting with the Board of Directors for next Wednesday.

SAUL

Already did.

ARVIN

Did you make sure the plant managers got their bonus checks?

SAUL

Yes, sir.

ARVIN

We have to keep –
SAUL
The managers happy. Yes, sir. It's taken care of.

ARVIN
Well, I never know with you.

SAUL
I’m going to go check on Pauline.

ARVIN
Soft.

SAUL leaves ARVIN seated in the chair and goes to the dining room where he finds PAULINE setting the table. She is crying. When she sees SAUL, she quickly tries to hide her tears.

PAULINE
Mr. Saul, you’ve got to stop sneaking up on me.

SAUL
I’m sorry. Are you okay?

PAULINE
Fine. Just fine. Dinner’s ready. You want me to go and fetch Mr. Hebert?

SAUL
No, I’ll tell him, although he may not want anything. You sure you’re okay?

PAULINE
I said yes. Now don’t you say another word about it. Go get your Daddy.

SAUL goes back into the living room where he finds ARVIN pouring himself a drink.

SAUL
You shouldn’t be having that.

ARVIN
I can’t smoke, I can’t drink. You going to change my diaper too?
SAUL

Dad –

ARVIN

I’m not a child!

SAUL

Dinner’s ready. You coming?

ARVIN

I guess.

*SAUL exits to the dining room. He sits at the foot of the table and waits. PAULINE is bringing some bread and a pitcher of ice tea. ARVIN enters with his drink. He sits at the head of the table.*

ARVIN

Thank you, Pauline. Looks good.

PAULINE

Thank you. I’ll just be in the kitchen if you need me.

*PAULINE exits. SAUL and ARVIN eat in silence. ARVIN has a coughing fit. SAUL rushes to him.*

SAUL

Dad? Pauline? Call Dr. Guidroz.

ARVIN

(catching his breath)

I’m fine.

SAUL

Just in case.

ARVIN

No! He was just here poking and prodding me. I don’t want him here. Or does what I say not matter anymore?

SAUL

Dad –

ARVIN

Big man. Call the doctor every time his old man coughs. I’m dying.
SAUL
Stop talking like that.

ARVIN
Why shouldn’t I talk that way? I'm dying, and that's that.

PAULINE enters.

PAULINE
Dr. Guidroz wasn’t home yet. We need to go to the hospital?

No.

ARVIN
Mr. Hebert?

No.

SAUL

ARVIN
So, that’s how it is? You need his permission now?

PAULINE
No, sir. You just stubborn as an ox that’s all.

ARVIN
I’m fine. I’m going to bed.

SAUL
You barely ate.

ARVIN
Pack it up.

SAUL
Yes, sir.

ARVIN exits.

PAULINE
Lord help us, ain’t none of us going to make it if he keep acting like that.

SAUL
Do you mind putting this away?

PAULINE
Not at all.

PAULINE exits into the kitchen.

SAUL stands alone. He exits to the living room, where ARVIN is standing, drink in hand staring at
the picture on the wall. SAUL pours himself a drink.

SAUL
I thought you were going to bed.

ARVIN
Please, just leave me alone.

SAUL
Suit yourself.

SAUL starts to exit.

You know Lucas is not coming back, right?

ARVIN stiffens, but does not respond. He stares at the picture. SAUL exits. LIGHTS down as ARVIN sips his scotch, never taking his eyes off of the picture.

END SCENE 1.

Scene 2

The Next Morning. ARVIN is asleep in the chair. His glass sits empty on the table beside him. We hear the sound of keys unlocking the door. PAULINE enters with bags of groceries. She crosses into the hallway towards the dining room, but stops when she sees ARVIN in the chair.

PAULINE
Mr. Hebert? Mr. Hebert? Mr. Hebert, wake up!

ARVIN awakes.

PAULINE
Pauline? What time is it?

ARVIN
Nearly eight. Did you sleep in this chair?

PAULINE
I guess.

ARVIN
That isn't going to be good for your back. You want me to call Dr. Guidroz?
No. I'm fine.

PAULINE

(noticing the empty glass)
How many of those did you have?

ARVIN

Just the one.

PAULINE

Right. Just the one. I bet you didn't even eat the rest of your food either.

ARVIN

I wasn't hungry.

PAULINE

How could Mr. Saul let you sleep in that chair with no food and God knows how much liquor -

ARVIN

I asked him to leave.

PAULINE

The house?

ARVIN

No.

PAULINE

Good, cause we can't have both of them-

(realizing)

I'm so sorry.

ARVIN

It's fine.

PAULINE

No it's not. I've put my foot in my mouth so many times I can't keep up anymore, but that beats them all. I'm so sorry. I'll just go ahead into the kitchen.

She starts to exit.

ARVIN

Pauline?

PAULINE

Sir?

ARVIN

Do you think he'll come back?
That ain't none of my business.

Do you?

I used to. But, I guess the only one who knows that is Lucas. My Livy used to say that when they'd play hide and seek as kids, he'd always find the best hiding spot. And he'd stay there until somebody found him or until all the other kids got tired and quit. Then she'd say when you least expect it, he'd pop out and scare the living daylights out of everybody.

He always had a strong will.

That he did.

How is Olivia?

She's getting better. Ray's been real good for her.

starts to get up, but he seems like he's in a little pain.

No, I'm fine. I just need to stretch my legs.

I better get these vegetables to the kitchen. You want some breakfast?

Just coffee.

No, sir. You didn't have no dinner. You're at least having some toast. You want butter or no?

Just some jelly on the side.

Now that's more like it. You want me to bring it in here?

I think I'll take it on the porch.
PAULINE
Fresh air will do you good. Coming right up.

SAUL comes in from the other hallway and crosses into the dining room. ARVIN heads outside, and PAULINE enters the dining room. She sees SAUL and pops him in the head with a newspaper.

SAUL
Ow! What was that for?

PAULINE
What kind of a son lets his father sleep in a chair? I ought to tear you up!

SAUL
He asked me to leave. I didn't know he slept there.

PAULINE
You didn't even feed him!

SAUL
Pauline, he said he wasn't hungry. What was I supposed to do, force feed him?

PAULINE
Yes! I got to get him his toast so he don't starve!

SAUL
Are you making coffee?

PAULINE
Not for you!

PAULINE exits into the kitchen.

SAUL
(calling after her)
I'll take it with just a little cream, please.

SAUL sits and begins to read through the paper. Beat. From offstage we hear ARVIN calling for PAULINE. He is frantic. The sound becomes more distant as if ARVIN has left the porch running.

ARVIN (O.S.)
Pauline! Pauline! Oh Dear God! It's him! Lucas, my son!

PAULINE rushes in from the kitchen as SAUL stands up from the table.
She quickly moves to the outside door.

PAULINE

Oh my God! Mr. Saul, come quick! Your brother's come back! I saw him out the window!

SAUL

What?

PAULINE

Mr. Lucas is home!

SAUL does not go outside. His demeanor changes. Off stage we hear ARVIN and PAULINE both shouting unintelligible words of happiness and excitement. SAUL quickly leaves the dining room and hides in the living room. ARVIN and PAULINE enter ahead of LUCAS, a young man wearing old, ratty clothes. He is thin and his hair is long. They bring him into the dining room. LUCAS doesn't say anything. He stares at ARVIN. ARVIN, in turn doesn't say much either.

PAULINE

Mr. Lucas, it's so good to see you! Oh, you look so thin.

ARVIN

My son.

PAULINE

I can't believe my eyes. You look so thin.

ARVIN

Are you alright, son?

PAULINE

You look like you've been walking for days. Let me get you some water.

PAULINE exits.

ARVIN

Son?

No response.

PAULINE returns.
Here you go. You hungry? Let me fix you something.

LUCAS sips the water, but his hand shakes. He spills the water. ARVIN and PAULINE exchange looks while LUCAS tries to clean up the mess.

PAULINE
Don't you fool with that. I got it.

LUCAS
I'm sorry.

PAULINE
It ain't nothing. Just a little water that's all. It'll dry right up.

She takes a rag out of her apron and begins to clean up the spill.

PAULINE
See? That's better. Let me get you some more water.

LUCAS
I'm sorry.

PAULINE
Now don't you say another word. Lord knows that ain't the first time something's been spilled in this house.

ARVIN
Are you hungry?

He shakes his head "yes".

ARVIN
Good. Pauline, I suddenly feel like an omelet. We have eggs?

PAULINE
Yes sir.

ARVIN
Two omelets.

PAULINE
Yes, sir. It's good to have you home.

PAULINE exits.

ARVIN
Lucas? What's wrong boy? You hurt?
I'm so sorry.

It's just water.

Not about the water.

Now you listen to me. What's done is done. We're not talking about it any more. You understand?

You must have a lot of questions.

No.

I understand if you don't want to talk to me. I needed -

What is it?

I know that after everything that you wouldn't have me back in the house, but if I could stay in the guest house -

What?

Just for a few days.

I don't understand.

Just until I can find a job.

You're not staying?

Staying? I didn't think that you'd want me to.

Son, I didn't run to you outside because I'm angry with you. I ran to you because I have thought about you every moment of the last five years. I want you to stay. You know that I do.

You'd let me stay in the guest house?
ARVIN
You're not a guest. You're my son.

ARVIN kisses LUCAS on the cheek.
If you want to, I'd like you to stay. In your old room.

LUCAS
I can't. Not after all that I've done.

ARVIN
I said it's done. Enough moping around. This house has been like a funeral home for too long. I say it's time for a party. Pauline!

PAULINE enters.

PAULINE
Yes, sir?

ARVIN
What are we having for dinner?

PAULINE
I was going to make spaghetti. You want something else?

ARVIN
Yes. Go to the market and get the best cut of steak you can find. Steak dinner tonight. Invite some people over. We need a party. Where's Saul?

PAULINE
I don't know. He was in here just a minute ago.

LUCAS
Dad.

(Letting the word roll over his tongue)
Dad. May I wash up before breakfast?

ARVIN
Sure. You remember where everything is?

PAULINE
I kept your room nice and clean.

LUCAS
Thank you.

PAULINE
Now, you hurry up and get back down here. Don't want your breakfast to get cold. It sure is good to have you back.

LUCAS heads upstairs. SAUL does not let LUCAS see him. SAUL enters
Good morning.

Where have you been?

Taking care of things.

He's back.

Who?

What do you mean who? Your brother.

Is that what all the commotion was about?

You know you could be more excited.

I'm thrilled.

Sounds like it. How about you do something useful and see if Pauline needs help with breakfast?

I have things to do at the office.

We're taking the day off. I don't understand you. He's home! What's the matter with you?

Nothing.

We're having a big steak dinner tonight. Go help Pauline.

You're the boss.

Would it kill you to be happy?

ARVIN exits to the porch. His steps are a little lighter. SAUL stands rigid and alone. He seems
overwhelmed. He sinks into a chair. PAULINE enters with a stack of plates and silverware.

PAULINE

You alright?

SAUL

Never better.

PAULINE

Now don't you start lying. What did I tell you when you was a boy?

SAUL

I don't remember.

PAULINE

There you go lying again.

SAUL

You'd say telling lies is like running a race with bricks in your pockets.

PAULINE

They don't do nothing but slow you down. You still say you're alright?

SAUL

Yes.

PAULINE

Don't get weighed down. She looks at him seriously.

I know it's hard.

SAUL

No you don't.

PAULINE

Mr. Saul -

SAUL

I'll be in my room.

He exits upstairs. Lights down.

END SCENE 2.

Scene 3

Evening. ARVIN and PAULINE are in the dining room setting the table.
They're not in focus. SAUL stands in the living room with a half drunk glass of bourbon in his hand. LUCAS enters. He looks cleaner than before and his clothes are much nicer, although they are a bit big. This is their first encounter.

So, it's true?

Hi, Saul.

You're back.

Yes. I wondered if you'd heard.

I heard. Couldn't really miss it.

We missed you at breakfast. And lunch.

Yeah, well I was busy working. You remember working?

How are you?

You want to know how I am?

Obviously.

Just peachy.

Look, I know this isn't easy for you.

Do you think you can just apologize and wipe the slate clean?

No, I guess not.

You ran out of money, right?

Yes.
SAUL
You came back for more?

LUCAS
No.

SAUL
Right.

LUCAS
It's not like that.

SAUL
It's not?

LUCAS
No. Listen, I can see that you need your space, so I'll just go.

He starts to exit, but SAUL stops him.

SAUL
No. Sit down. Come on, you came all this way. Why don't you explain where you were for the past five years?

LUCAS
Get out of the way, Saul.

SAUL
Well, well. My little brother went away and became a big man.

LUCAS
One of us had to become a man.

SAUL
Ah, there’s the little brother I know.

LUCAS
Saul, don't do something you'll regret.

SAUL
Is that a threat?

LUCAS
No. I just want you to move. Can we not do this now? Please.

SAUL Moves to a liquor cabinet and gets out a bottle of Maker's Mark.

SAUL
LUCAS

Thanks.

SAUL

No, I mean really terrible. I'd have figured that all that money you stole, um I mean borrowed would have fed you well. You want a drink?

LUCAS

No. I'm good.

SAUL

You're good. So how was it?

LUCAS

How was what?

SAUL

The world, of course. Isn't that where you went?

LUCAS

Sure.

SAUL

Did you see a lot of interesting things? Meet interesting people? Spend a lot of interesting money?

LUCAS

Look, I'm sorry. I really am.

SAUL

You're not sorry.

LUCAS

You don't know anything about it, Saul.

SAUL

I guess not, little brother. I didn't get to leave.

LUCAS

How many of those have you had today?

SAUL

Don't. Don't judge me!

LUCAS

I'm not. Believe me, I'm not. You just were always a lousy drunk.

SAUL

We can't all be the life of the party.

He downs the drink, and goes to pour another. SAUL seems frozen.
Examining the bottle. LUCAS looks at him with a mixture of fear and irritation. Beat.

LUCAS

It's been a long day for both of us. Why don't we both go rest before dinner?

SAUL

Where were you?

LUCAS

I really don't want to do this.

SAUL

Why not? It'll be fun.

LUCAS

You've had enough to drink.

SAUL

I'm fine.

LUCAS

I really think you've had enough.

SAUL

Shut up!

LUCAS

It's true.

SAUL

I said shut up!

LUCAS

But -

SAUL

No! It doesn't matter. Nothing matters! I could find the cure for cancer and it wouldn't matter because he still wouldn't think it was enough! I'm the one who stayed! I'm the one that took care of him, and took care of the business and the house! Me! But he didn't care.

LUCAS

Saul, give me the drink!

LUCAS moves to take the drink from SAUL's hand. SAUL backs away.

SAUL

Don't touch me!
Saul, put the drink down.

Make me!

LUCAS moves to SAUL to get him to put the glass down. They struggle and the glass falls to the floor, shattering.

Now look what you did.

ARVIN enters from the dining room.

What was that?

LUCAS

Nothing, Dad. I just broke a glass. I was just getting something to clean it up.

Oh. Never mind that.

ARVIN takes a step back and clutches his chest.

Dad, are you okay?

ARVIN

I'm fine. I just wish your mother were here to see you. She'd be so proud of you.

I'm not so sure.

ARVIN

Enough of that. You're home now, that's what matters.

SAUL

Yes, that's what matters.

ARVIN

We'll have to get you some new clothes. Those don't seem to fit anymore.

LUCAS

These are fine, really.

ARVIN

Nonsense. I'll give you my check book. You can go shopping tomorrow.
SAUL
Do you really think that's such a good idea?

ARVIN
Of course. Those clothes are at least two sizes too big.

SAUL
No, I mean giving him your check book after -

ARVIN
He's home now. We're not speaking of the past.

LUCAS
Dad, you really don't have to do that. These clothes are fine.

ARVIN
You can go shopping tomorrow and that's the last I want to hear about it. Now, as if we haven't done enough eating, Pauline's almost done with the steaks and she's invited Olivia. Should be ready any minute. I'm going to go check on her.

LUCAS
Olivia's coming?

ARVIN
Yes. We invited more people, but on such short notice – I hope that's okay. But we're going to have a big banquet soon. The whole town will be there.

LUCAS
Fine.

ARVIN exits.

SAUL
That must make you feel great, knowing that after all you did to him, and he still loves you. Still trusts you.

LUCAS
Stop, please!

SAUL
Now, now. Don't get testy.

(sniffs)
Steak smells good.

PAULINE calls from the dining room.

PAULINE
Soups on! Come and get it while it's hot. I don't know what's taking Livy so long.
SAUL
Good to have you back little brother. Now how long are you in town for?

LUCAS
Like it or not, I'm here to stay.

SAUL
We'll see about that.

LUCAS
I wouldn't push me too hard, big brother.

SAUL
Why's that?

LUCAS
Because I know what you've been doing.

SAUL
I don't know what you're talking about.

LUCAS
I think that you do. I saw you.

SAUL
You were always one for wild stories.

LUCAS
This isn't a story and you know it.

SAUL
What do you want from me?

LUCAS
Believe it or not, I don't want anything. I just wanted to come home. I think we both can agree that I've hurt Dad enough for the both of us, so there's no reason that he needs to know about anything.

SAUL
Then why bring it up?

LUCAS
I want you to get off my back. Understood?

SAUL
Clearly.

There is a knock on the outside door. OLIVIA, a beautiful young woman enters carrying a basket of bread.
Knock knock!

OLIVIA

PAULINE hears her and calls out to her.

PAULINE

Livy, we're in here.

OLIVIA

Here, Mama, I brought some bread.

PAULINE

You think your Mama didn't make bread?

OLIVIA

Just a gesture.

PAULINE

Little girl, you don't have to make gestures here.

ARVIN enters from the kitchen.

ARVIN

Olivia! You look beautiful as always.

OLIVIA

Mr. Hebert? You were in the kitchen?

ARVIN

Yes, ma'am.

OLIVIA

Mama, you were right. This house has been turned on its ear. Is he here?

SAUL and LUCAS enter from the living room.

SAUL

Who? The boy wonder?

OLIVIA

Saul, it's good to see you.

She hugs him.

LUCAS

Olivia.

(beat)

ARVIN

Lucas, are you okay?

SAUL

You're staring.
LUCAS
Was I? I'm sorry.

OLIVIA
(to LUCAS)
You look different.

She gives him a short, cordial hug. There is an awkward air around OLIVIA and LUCAS. They both try to hide it.

PAULINE
Yes it has! Now, who wants steak?

ARVIN
Yes, let's eat.

OLIVIA
I'm starved.

PAULINE
Well, come on now. Don't nobody be shy. Dig in.

SAUL holds OLIVIA back.

SAUL
I hear congratulations are in order.

OLIVIA
What?

SAUL
I talked to Ray.

OLIVIA
Oh. Don't tell anybody. I haven't told Mama yet, and I don't think tonight's the best time.

SAUL
Oh, yeah sure. Mum's the word.

OLIVIA
Thanks.

PAULINE
Dig in, everybody.

ARVIN
Why don't you sit next to me Pauline?

PAULINE
Sir?
ARVIN
Olivia, you come eat with us too. I don't want you trying to sneak off to the kitchen.

PAULINE
Mr. Hebert, we can't do that.

ARVIN
I insist.

OLIVIA
Really, it's okay. I don't mind eating in the kitchen.

PAULINE
It's your night.

ARVIN
I insist.

PAULINE
But it’s not right.

ARVIN
Right and wrong don’t matter tonight. Now sit.

PAULINE
Yes, sir.

They all sit except ARVIN who stands with his glass ready to toast.

LUCAS
Dad, you don't have to do this again. The ones at breakfast and lunch were enough.

ARVIN
Olivia and Saul didn't get to hear it, so I'm doing it again. I'm a proud father, let me have my moment. I'd just like to say that for the past five years there's been a hole in this family. And for whatever reason, today it was filled. Son, it's good to have you back.

All except SAUL raise their glass and say "Cheers". They start to eat, passing bowls and plates of food around. The table is silent.

ARVIN
How come no one's talking? What kind of party is this? It's a special occasion! Talk. Pauline, Olivia, don't be shy.
LUCAS
Honestly I don't know if my stomach can handle any more of this special occasion food.

PAULINE
I've got to fatten you up again somehow.

LUCAS
Sure, but in one day?

OLIVIA
Mr. Hebert, do you mind passing me the bread?

ARVIN
Sure.

ARVIN passes her the plate of bread. Beat.

SAUL
So, Olivia. I hear you have news.

PAULINE
News?

OLIVIA
I thought we said we weren't going to talk about it.

SAUL
We did, but no one was saying anything. The old man doesn't want this to be awkward, so -

What's going on?

OLIVIA
It's nothing. Now's not the time.

SAUL
Don't be modest. It's wonderful news.

OLIVIA
Please -

ARVIN
Saul -

SAUL
What? I just think we should share with the table.

OLIVIA
Saul -

SAUL
Olivia and Ray are expecting! Isn't that great?
Is this true?  

PAULINE

Yes.  

OLIVIA

Why didn't you tell me?  

PAULINE

I didn't want to say anything just yet, but it seems Ray told Saul this morning at the factory. I'm sorry.  

OLIVIA

Sweet Jesus, I'm going to be a grandmother! Hallelujah!  

PAULINE

Congratulations!  

ARVIN

(stunned) You're expecting?  

OLIVIA

Yeah.  

LUCAS

Wow. Congratulations.  

OLIVIA

Thank you.  

LUCAS

Is Ray your -?  

OLIVIA

Ray's my husband. You knew him actually. He works for your father.  

LUCAS

Ray. Ray LaMond?  

OLIVIA

Two years in June.  

LUCAS

All the way Ray?  

PAULINE

All the way? That better not mean what I think it means.  

OLIVIA

It's nothing Mama. It's just an old joke from-
SAUL
Yeah, it means that he had sex with a lot of girls in school.
Can I have the bread too?

ARVIN
Saul, that's enough.

SAUL
What? Just filling Pauline here in on her son-in-law's past indiscretions.

OLIVIA
He's changed a lot. He works in one of your father's factories now. He's floor Manager.

ARVIN
Just for the coloreds of course. He's quite a good worker from what I hear.

LUCAS
I'd love to see him.

OLIVIA
He had to work tonight, but I'll tell him you're back in town. I'm sure he'd love to see you too.

(beat)
This is really good, Mama. Or should I say, Big Mama?

PAULINE
Big Mama?

OLIVIA
That's what Ray wants the baby to call you.

PAULINE
Makes me sound like Hattie McDaniel.

OLIVIA
I think it's cute.

SAUL
So, am I the only one who's going to address the elephant in the room?

ARVIN
Saul. You've added quite enough to this conversation.

SAUL
What? I mean, we're all sitting around talking about All the way Ray and Big Mama, but no one is going to ask the man of the hour where's he's been for the past five years? What he's been doing? I mean, aren't we all the least bit curious?
LUCAS

Saul.

SAUL

Oh come on, Luke! Tell us some fascinating stories of what you did.

OLIVIA

Actually, I'd like to know.

SAUL

See! Liv wants to know too!

ARVIN

You don't have to say anything, Son.

SAUL

Of course he doesn't.

LUCAS

It's fine. Um, when I left I went to San Francisco. I stayed there for about four years and then moved around a lot after that.

OLIVIA

Where to?

SAUL

Yes, where to exactly?

LUCAS

Just places.

PAULINE

Places?

OLIVIA

What were you doing that whole time?

SAUL

Yes, how much of Dad's money were you wasting in all those places?

LUCAS

I don’t think we want to talk money.

SAUL

Sure we do.

ARVIN

Enough!

SAUL

Come on, we all know that he was on your dime the whole time. What was it Dad? What was the grand total again?
ARVIN
I said enough! Now you can either sit and enjoy the meal with the rest of us, or you can leave, but you will not insult your brother or myself. Is that clear?

ARVIN has a coughing fit.

PAULINE
Mr. Hebert? Saul, call Dr. Guidroz.

SAUL
Let Lucas call.

ARVIN
I'm fine.

PAULINE
We should call just in case.

LUCAS
Dad, are you okay?

ARVIN
I'm fine. Saul, I think you should go upstairs.

SAUL
Are you sending me to my room?

ARVIN
Yes.

SAUL
I'm not a kid.

ARVIN
You're acting like one. And as long as you live here, you live by my rules.

SAUL
You know, the only reason I live here is so that I can take care of you.

ARVIN
Get upstairs!

SAUL
Fine. I'm calling your bluff, little brother. Tell him or don't. I don't care. Dinner was great, Pauline. Really special.

He exits outside. The rest sit.

LUCAS
Dad, are you okay?
ARVIN
Fine. Did you have something to tell me?

LUCAS
No sir.

ARVIN
Okay. Olivia, I'm sorry you had to be here for that. Please, everyone let's enjoy the rest of the meal.

They try to have a pleasant dinner, but it’s ruined. The lights go down on eating in awkward silence.

END SCENE 3.

Scene 4
Midnight. LUCAS and OLIVIA sit alone in the living room. LUCAS is drinking. Jazz music plays.

I love this old stuff.

LUCAS
Are you talking about the drink or the music?

OLIVIA
Both.

OLIVIA
Should we be worried that Saul hasn't come home yet?

LUCAS
I don't think so. He can take care of himself. It's late. Don't you have to be home?

OLIVIA
Ray doesn't get off work until 3:00.

LUCAS
AM? My father's rough!

OLIVIA
No. Every couple months he has to oversee the third shift crew and make sure they're behaving. Your father's been very gracious to Ray actually. Not many places for a colored man to be somebody's boss around here, even another colored man.

LUCAS
My Dad.

OLIVIA
Your Dad, what?
I thought he'd be so mad.  

He stares off into space.

Are you awake?

Yeah. I'm sorry.

It's fine.

Do you want some more water? Or something else?

I've barely touched this glass.

Oh. Sorry.

What are you thinking about?

It's weird being in this room with you.

I thought I wouldn't be able to be anywhere close to you again. Much less in the same room.

What’s the verdict?

It’s oddly comfortable. Familiar.

You look beautiful. She stiffens a bit.

I mean, you seem happy.

I think so. I didn't think I could be again, but I think I am.

I'm sorry.

Please don't do that.
LUCAS

But -

OLIVIA

My Mom would murder me if she knew I was here with you alone.

LUCAS

We've spent plenty of time alone together.

OLIVIA

She doesn't know any of that. Anything.

"The Very Thought of You" by Nat King Cole plays.

LUCAS

No way. I can't believe this. Do you hear this?

OLIVIA

It's been a long time.

LUCAS

We have to dance.

OLIVIA

No. It's late.

LUCAS

Come on. Dance with me. It's fate.

OLIVIA

Fate? Your fate's got a bad sense of timing.

LUCAS

Just one dance. For old time's sake.

He begins to sing.

OLIVIA

Don't sing.

He sings louder.

Shh! You'll wake your Dad up.

He sings louder.


LUCAS

I knew you'd say yes. You always did.

They dance. They are at first loosely holding each other, but as the song plays on, they begin to grip each other more passionately. As the song ends, he stops and
takes her face in his hands. He holds it for a long moment, looking into her eyes.

What are you doing?

OLIVIA

I never stopped loving you.

OLIVIA

What are you doing?

LUCAS

Do you think if I had stayed – I mean, would we? I mean would the baby -

OLIVIA

Shut up.

LUCAS

Would it?

OLIVIA

I said shut up! How dare you?

LUCAS

I didn't mean –

OLIVIA

I should have known we were doomed from the start. Even if nothing bad had ever happened, you're still white and I'm not. That's enough.

LUCAS

I'm sorry.

OLIVIA

This was a mistake. I shouldn't have come here.

LUCAS

Please stay.

OLIVIA

I've spent the last five years tortured by what we did. I'll never be able to let it go.

LUCAS

Please.

OLIVIA

No! I need to go.
As OLIVIA is leaving, LUCAS passionately embraces her. She pulls away.

Don't go.

OLIVIA

Please -

LUCAS kisses her. She resists, but then leans into it. She snaps out of it and exits the room. LUCAS is left alone. Suddenly, OLIVIA enters again. She's angry.

You think you just get to leave and everything's okay? I'm supposed to just welcome you back?

No. I -

OLIVIA

You will never understand what you've done to me.

LUCAS

You're not the only one with regrets.

OLIVIA

I don't believe you! Now I'm going home and I'm going to wait for my husband. I don't want to see you again.

LUCAS

Are you telling me you don't love me? Not even a little?

OLIVIA

Goodbye, Lucas.

LUCAS

Wait.

OLIVIA

No.

OLIVIA exits. LUCAS goes to the liquor cabinet and coolly makes another drink. SAUL enters from outside. He crosses into the living room. He's still drunk.

SAUL

Was that Olivia's car? She was here late.
LUCAS

Yeah.

SAUL

Did you sleep with her?

LUCAS

I don't know what you're talking about.

SAUL

Oh. Right. We don't know about you two.

LUCAS

What do you want, Saul?

SAUL

I want you to tell the truth.

LUCAS

Goodnight.

LUCAS turns to leave.

SAUL

What's it like to just waltz back into the house with your dignity intact? I mean he didn't even ask you where you'd been!

LUCAS

Saul -

SAUL

No, I mean I know I'm going to get grilled about my little tantrum tomorrow. One night and I get crucified, and you come home after five years, and nothing. Not one word about it. I just want him to ask you. That's all.

LUCAS

Saul, he's not asking because he knows.

SAUL

What?

LUCAS

Dad knows where I've been. He knows what I've been doing.

SAUL

You're lying.

LUCAS

I'm not.

SAUL

There's no way that Dad knows everything!
LUCAS
There's no way that he doesn't! Come on Saul, you don't get to be where Dad is without knowing a thing or two. He's a very powerful man.

SAUL
So you're telling me that Dad knows everything but hasn't said anything to anyone else about it?

LUCAS
I didn't know whether he'd said anything or not.

SAUL
How do you know all of this?

LUCAS
Because he found me.

SAUL
He found you?

LUCAS
He came to my apartment in San Francisco. He told me that he missed me. He told me the company needed me. He told me that he thought it was time I came home.

SAUL
When was this?

LUCAS
About a year ago.

SAUL
Is that why you started running?

LUCAS
Yes. I was running from him.

SAUL
Did he follow you?

LUCAS
I didn't see him again until this morning, but I know he knew where I was.

SAUL
How?

LUCAS
He'd send me letters. It didn't matter where I was, he'd somehow manage to find my address and I'd get a letter in the mail.

SAUL
That doesn't make any sense! I mean, why wouldn't he tell

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anyone? Me?

LUCAS
I don't know. I figured he would have.

SAUL
If it had been me that left, he wouldn't have cared at all.

LUCAS
That's not true.

SAUL
It is! He wouldn't have followed me around the country writing me letters.

LUCAS
He loves us both-

The phone rings. LUCAS answers.
Hello? No, I'm his Son. Yes that's our property. At the gate? Have you called the police? Did you call an ambulance? She's pregnant. Oh my God!

He hangs up the phone.

SAUL
What was that?

LUCAS
Liv's been in an accident.

Both men scramble to go outside.

SAUL
I'll call Pauline and Ray. Get Dad. Don’t just stand there! Go!

The lights go down on SAUL dialing, and LUCAS running upstairs. In the darkness we hear SAUL'S voice.

Pauline? It's Saul. You'd better get over here now.

END SCENE 4. END ACT I.
ACT II
Scene 1

Two months later. Morning. ARVIN is sitting in the dining room alone sipping coffee reading the paper. The house is not dirty, but there are items left lying around. There is a knock on the front door. ARVIN gets up and goes to the door. It is RAY. RAY is tall and thin with a handsome face. He appears sleep deprived.

ARVIN
Ray! My boy, come in. Come in.

RAY
Good morning, Mr. Hebert. I'm sorry to come by so early.

ARVIN
Not at all.

RAY
Pauline told me to tell you that she'd try to be back this afternoon.

ARVIN
I told her to take her time. We're just glad Olivia's okay.

RAY
Yes, sir. She's been acting a little funny, but it's probably just the pain medicine.

ARVIN
Gave us a little scare for a while.

RAY

ARVIN
Did they ever figure out how it happened?

RAY
Olivia just wasn't looking.

ARVIN
Scary, scary. Would you like some coffee? I'm afraid it isn't as good as Pauline's, but we've had to make do while she was helping Olivia. It's very stout.

RAY
Sure.
ARVIN
Fearless. That's a good quality!

RAY
Yes, sir.

ARVIN pours coffee.

ARVIN
Well, what brings you by? I'm sure you're not here to talk about coffee.

RAY
No, sir. That is stout. Actually I was hoping to talk to Luke.

ARVIN
I'm afraid he isn't here. He's gone to Jackson to see his grandmother. Should be back tomorrow.

RAY
Are you sure?

ARVIN
I see you and Saul think alike.

RAY
I'm sorry. I didn't mean anything by it.

ARVIN
It's fine. Truth is I've wondered the same thing secretly. But he's a big boy. He'll come back if he wants.

RAY
And if he doesn't?

ARVIN
Then I guess he doesn't.

RAY
You seem very confident in him.

ARVIN
Always have been. Even in the hard times.

RAY
I wish I had that type of confidence. Truth be told, most of the time I don't much know what in the world I'm doing.

ARVIN
Give yourself some more credit. Pauline says you're a great husband.

RAY
I try.
ARVIN
You're doing great things in the company too I hear.

RAY
I really like the work. I like the idea of building something that helps people.

ARVIN
Me too. I'm too old to do it though.

RAY
Hardly.

ARVIN
No, I think my days of building are over.

RAY
There's always management.

ARVIN talks.

That's good.

RAY
I should be going. Thank you, Mr. Hebert, for the coffee. No offense, but next time I'll wait for Pauline's.

ARVIN
Honesty with the boss. Brave. Yet another quality I like. Should I tell Lucas that you stopped by?

RAY
No. I'll come back later.

ARVIN
Good. I'm sure he wants to see you.

RAY
Yeah.

RAY
Ray?

RAY
Yes, sir?

ARVIN
I really was sorry to hear about the baby.

RAY
Thank you sir.

RAY exits out the front door. Beat.

ARVIN returns to the dining room,
as SAUL comes down the stairs.

SAUL

Who was that?

ARVIN

Ray LaMond.

SAUL

Everything okay with Olivia?

ARVIN

He said so.

SAUL

Is there breakfast?

ARVIN

I wasn't hungry. There's some food in the fridge. I made coffee.

SAUL

No thanks. Your coffee's like battery acid.

ARVIN

Are you going into the office today?

SAUL

No.

ARVIN

But we've got the meeting with the Board tomorrow.

SAUL

I know.

ARVIN

Well there's a lot to do to get ready, and -

SAUL

It's done.

ARVIN

The information packets are done?

SAUL

Yes.

ARVIN

The financial information? Including last quarter’s figures?

SAUL

It's done. It's all done, Dad! Why can't you just trust me?

ARVIN

I just want to make sure things are settled.
SAUL
I've watched you my whole life, Dad! I know what I'm doing.

ARVIN
I worked my whole life to build that company from nothing, and I just don't want to see-

SAUL
See what? See me screw it up?

Yes. But -

ARVIN
But what?

I don't want to fight with you, Son. I feel better than I've felt in years, and I don't want to waste my energy.

SAUL
Why don't you trust me? What did I do?

Nothing.

SAUL
No, tell me! You'd let Luke take your check book for a road trip to Grandma's, but I can't take care of a single meeting without you breathing fire down my neck!

ARVIN
Leave him out of this.

SAUL
It's always been like that! What is it about him that makes you love him so much more than me?

Is that what you think?

SAUL
Isn't it obvious?

ARVIN
Stop.

SAUL
Why shouldn't we talk about it? I want to talk about it! We've been putting off this conversation for five years!

ARVIN
Saul.
No, let's talk about it! Is it because he looks like Mom?

Enough! -

'Cause he always got the best grades?

No!

Then what? Why don't you trust me?

Saul, please.

Say it. I know you already know. Say it.

No!

Why not? Why don't you trust me?

It's because of the books! You're stealing from me!

You said it.

You've been stealing from me for six years.

Yeah.

You're not going to try to deny it?

Why bother? I knew that you knew.

You think I don't double check them? Just a little bit here, a little bit there.

Honestly I didn't. Until right after Lucas got back. He told me you'd known where he was the whole time. I started thinking if you knew that, you might know other things too.
ARVIN
I knew.

SAUL
Why didn't you say anything?

ARVIN
Why would I say something? It's my money. You're my Son. What's mine is yours.

SAUL
So you're okay with it?

ARVIN
(broken)
No. You lied to me. You lied to me about money. Why? There isn't enough for you now? There isn't enough set aside for your future? How much more do you need?

SAUL
I just wanted -

ARVIN
What?

SAUL
I wanted to know that it was there.

ARVIN
It's always been there. You didn't have to take it.

SAUL
No. Maybe for Luke. Not for me. I had to be sure that there would be some left for me.

ARVIN
Whatever gave you the idea that there wouldn't be enough?

SAUL
I saw him slowly edging me out and I -

ARVIN
You what?

SAUL
I just had to make sure.

ARVIN
You should have come to me.
SAUL
I couldn’t.

ARVIN
Why?  Fear of what I’d say?

SAUL
I don’t know.  It’s not like it is with you and Lucas –

ARVIN
Enough about your brother!  This is not about him, it’s about you! The choices that you’ve made.  You could have come to me, but you didn’t.  You know why?

SAUL
Why?

ARVIN
Because you’re soft.  You’re scared.  Of your own father.  (beat.) I'm giving your brother the company.

SAUL
What?

ARVIN
Saul, you disgraced me.

SAUL
Because of the money?  Lucas took the money too.

ARVIN
Lucas asked me for the money!  He came to me in private, he asked me for the portion that was coming to him anyway.  I've had to cover for you with the Board.  I'm humiliated.

SAUL
You're giving the company to him?  After everything?

ARVIN
Yes.  The Board is meeting about it, but it should be final next week.

SAUL
I won't work for him.

ARVIN
I don't expect you to.

SAUL
Are you telling me that I don't even have a job?
ARVIN
You can resign, or you can be fired.

SAUL
Does he know?

ARVIN
Not yet.

SAUL
You can't do this!

ARVIN
Saul, it's done. I've already had the papers drawn up. It's better this way. You need to move on. You're really a good boy. I know it. You love your Father. You stayed and took care of me.

SAUL
I stayed because I thought you needed me. But now, you have the one you wanted all along.

Son -

SAUL
Drop dead.

SAUL exits upstairs. Lights down on ARVIN alone in the hallway.

END SCENE 1.

Scene 2
Dusk. SAUL sits in the living room, drinking. A knock on the front door. SAUL gets up to answer it, it is RAY.

RAY
Ray. Come in.

SAUL
Sorry to bother you this late. I was hoping to talk to your brother.

RAY
He's not back yet. Maybe he did us all a favor.

RAY
I guess I'll come back then.

SAUL
No, please sit down. You want a drink?
RAY
It's late. Folks don't take too kindly to my kind being at a
white man's house this late.

SAUL
But you'd stay for Lucas?

RAY
I've got some business with him.

SAUL
What kind of business?

RAY
I'd rather not say.

SAUL
Does this have anything to do with your wife?

RAY
How'd you know?

SAUL
It's no secret, Ray.

RAY
Can I ask? Were they - ?

SAUL
Of course. Lovebirds from the start. Pauline's been with
our family for a long time. She's like a mother to us.
Olivia was a playmate when we were younger. People didn't
think too much about color when we were younger. They'd sneak off
during games. I found them kissing behind a tree when Lucas
was twelve.

RAY
And it didn't stop when they were grown?

SAUL
Not from what I could see. It just got more serious.

RAY
How serious?

SAUL
Well, I can't know for sure.

RAY
But you have a good idea?

SAUL
Fairly good.
RAY
And what do you say?

SAUL
To put it bluntly, you weren't her first.

RAY
It ain't right. That just ain't right.

SAUL
I don't mean to upset you. And you can't take it personally.

RAY
It's personal to me!

SAUL
My brother can be quite a charmer. He’s always had a knack for getting people to do what he wants them to do.

RAY
You saying she didn't want him?

SAUL
I'm saying she was deceived by a very good, manipulative liar.

RAY
I don't know what to do no more. She was fine, we were fine. Then after the accident, she -

SAUL
What?

RAY
She was out for a long time. The doctors put her on this medicine and she was so sleepy. But she would talk to him.

In her sleep?

SAUL

RAY
Imagine holding the woman you love while she's dreaming about another man, and there ain't nothing you can do about it but keep on holding. It's eating me up. I don't know what to do.

SAUL
You don’t have to just take this.

RAY
What?
SAUL
You have to put him in his place.

RAY
How you mean?

SAUL
She's your wife, not his. Let him know. Use force if necessary.

RAY
I don't know. I ain't looking to get lynched.

SAUL
You wouldn't have to worry about that. I'd protect you.

RAY
I don't know.

SAUL
You know the night of the accident she was here alone with him just before she left?

RAY
She told me y'all had dinner?

SAUL
Yes, but that was much earlier. Right before she left, it was just the two of them. Who knows what could have happened?

RAY
But -

SAUL
You said it yourself. What he's done, just isn't right. In his mind, she belongs to him. But that's not how it really is, is it?

RAY
No, sir.

SAUL
Then you have to show him.

RAY
How do I do that without getting myself strung up somewhere?

SAUL
There are ways. Listen, tomorrow meet me in the break room. We can talk there.

RAY
You're going to help me?
SAUL

Yes.

RAY

But he's your brother.

SAUL

He's no brother to me. Not anymore. Go on and get out of here. We'll talk tomorrow. 8 AM. It's best you don't talk to Lucas, understand?

RAY

Okay.

SAUL walks RAY to the door. PAULINE enters.

PAULINE

Hello? Mr. Hebert? Mr. Saul? I'm back! Just thought I'd check on you. Ray, baby what're you doing here?

RAY

Me and Mr. Saul was just talking business.

SAUL

I'll see you tomorrow. 8AM.

RAY

Yes, sir.

PAULINE

Livy okay?

RAY

She will be.

PAULINE

Well don't leave my baby girl alone for too long! It's getting late. You run on home.

RAY

Yes, ma'am.

SAUL

8AM.

RAY exits.

PAULINE

Where's everybody at?
SAUL
No idea. You cooking?

PAULINE
Of course. Should I cook big?

SAUL
Just cook as much as you want. We’ll eat it sometime. I’m going to go upstairs and freshen up if you don’t mind.

PAULINE
Yes, sir.

She goes into the kitchen. LUCAS enters from outside.

LUCAS
Hey, Dad! I’m back. Dad? Anybody home?

PAULINE
I don’t think he’s at home. How was Jackson, sugar?

LUCAS
Great. It was really good to see Grandma. She sends her love.

PAULINE
I haven’t seen her in ages.

LUCAS
How’s Olivia?

PAULINE
Just fine.

LUCAS
Good.

PAULINE
She’s been asking about you.

LUCAS
Oh. She thinks I took off again?

PAULINE
No.

LUCAS
Well, if I find some time, I’ll try to stop by and see her. I don’t want to crowd her though.

PAULINE
She’s married you know.
LUCAS
What?

PAULINE
My daughter's married to a good man. He may not be her dream man, but he's got a good heart, and he loves her.

LUCAS
I know that.

PAULINE
I don't want her to get hurt.

LUCAS
Neither do I.

PAULINE
Good. Glad we're on the same page. I just felt like I should say that. It's probably nothing.

LUCAS starts to head upstairs.
PAULINE begins to straighten things up. ARVIN enters. He looks disheveled.

Oh my God, Dad?

PAULINE
Mr. Hebert? You okay?

ARVIN
Just went for a walk.

LUCAS
Dad, it's almost dark out.

ARVIN
Just wanted to walk.

PAULINE
Are you hungry?

ARVIN
No.

LUCAS
Are you sure you're okay?

ARVIN
I'm fine.
LUCAS

Dad -

ARVIN

Make me a scotch.

LUCAS

Do you think that's a good idea?

ARVIN

I said, make me a scotch!

PAULINE

Make it. I'll get some food.

ARVIN

I said I'm not hungry.

LUCAS begins to make the drink.

PAULINE

You don't have to eat it. I'll just put it out in case you want it.

ARVIN

Don't bother.

PAULINE

It's no bother.

ARVIN goes to sit down. LUCAS brings him the scotch. As ARVIN drinks, he begins to cry.

ARVIN

I've failed, Pauline. I've failed them.

She runs to him, and holds him. He begins to cough, it is worse than before.

PAULINE

Mr. Hebert? Sweet Jesus. Mr. Lucas, you get on the phone right now with Dr. Guidroz. We got to get him to a hospital, quick. Mr. Lucas!

Lights down.

END SCENE 2.

Scene 3

The Next Evening. A knock on the door. It is loud and constant.
LUCAS enters from upstairs. It is OLIVIA. Her appearance is rougher than before. She is thin and pallid.

LUCAS

Liv? What are you doing here? It's getting late.

OLIVIA

I heard about your father.

LUCAS

Yeah. The doctors don't know how much longer.

OLIVIA

I'm sorry.

LUCAS

It's not your fault.

OLIVIA

Can I have a drink?

LUCAS

You sure?

OLIVIA

It don't make no difference now.

LUCAS

I guess not. Scotch or bourbon?

OLIVIA

Just pour.

LUCAS begins to pour both of them a drink. His hands are shaky.

LUCAS

Here. It's awfully late. Ray know you're gone?

OLIVIA

No.

She downs the drink.

OLIVIA

Give me another.

LUCAS

Slow down.

OLIVIA

I don't want to. I want to be drunk.

LUCAS

You sure that's a good idea?
I don't care.  

LUCAS pours her another.  She downs that one too.  

Another.  

LUCAS  
Okay, why don't we just talk for a minute?  

OLIVIA  
I don't want to talk.  I want to stop feeling like this.  

She cries.  
Can you do that?  Can you make me feel like you used to?  

LUCAS  
Liv-  

OLIVIA  
I just want this hole to go away.  

She tries to kiss him.  He pushes her off.  

LUCAS  
I don't want you like this.  

OLIVIA  
But you do want me?  

LUCAS  
I've thought about it, sure.  

OLIVIA  
How do you want me?  

(beat)  
Remember our first time?  You took me by that Old Miller's Crick.  Said we had to go somewhere secret, so no one would see a colored girl and a white boy together.  You spread a blanket on the ground and laid out a picnic.  We didn't do much eating.  You kissed me here.  And here.  I was scared, but you made me feel like it was going to be alright.  You stood up and took off your shirt, I touched your chest.  My hands were shaking.  I unbuttoned my dress, I knew what was about to happen.  I wanted it.  

LUCAS  
Stop.
OLIVIA
You told me you loved me. You told me you'd do anything so we could be together.

LUCAS
I said stop.

OLIVIA
You made me feel safe.

LUCAS
Stop it!

OLIVIA
You lied to me! You took them both from me!

LUCAS
Just go on home.

OLIVIA
No, I won't.

LUCAS
I said go home!

OLIVIA
No! I've had to live with it for five years, and I won't hold it in anymore!

LUCAS
Shut up!

OLIVIA
They ripped him from my body with a hook. I never felt such pain.

LUCAS
I said shut up!

OLIVIA
It was a boy, they could tell. You had a son. Look at me. You took me to that horrible place and let them take him from me! You let them take him from me. You made me do it. Could you hear me screaming?

LUCAS
If you don't shut up -

OLIVIA
Could you hear? Tell me! Look at me and say it!

LUCAS
Yes! I could hear you. Is that what you want? You think you're the only one who lost something that day?
OLIVIA

Yes.

LUCAS

It tore me up too. I had to leave; I just couldn't look at you anymore.

OLIVIA

You lied to me. You told me you loved me.

LUCAS

I did. I never lied to you.

You did!

OLIVIA

No.

LUCAS

It's all been lies, hasn't it? From the start?

Of course not.

LUCAS

You're a liar!

OLIVIA

I loved you!

LUCAS

Love doesn't make a person do that.

It's not that simple.

OLIVIA

Then why? Why?

LUCAS

Because my kid couldn't be a nigger! I hate that you had to do that, but you had to do it.

OLIVIA

Get away from me.

LUCAS

Liv -

OLIVIA

Don't! You took one baby from me, and now I lost another one
because of you.

(beat)
My whole life I wanted to be a Mother. I saw my Mama, and how good she was and I wanted to be just like her. And now I won't ever be a Mother. It's all your fault.

LUCAS
That was an accident. That wasn't my fault.

OLIVIA
I was trying to get out of here as fast as I could because of you.

LUCAS
You - you could still have another one. You and Ray.

OLIVIA
Doctor said I'd never have another baby. Said my womb's too messed up now. Said I was lucky to even be pregnant the second time.

LUCAS
I'm -

OLIVIA
Don't you tell me you're sorry. I don't believe anything you say. You ain't nothing but a low down liar.

LUCAS
Liv -

OLIVIA
You listen close to me, Lucas Hebert. I swear if it's the last thing I do, I will make you pay. You're going to pay for what you've done.

OLIVIA exits. LUCAS stands alone.
The phone rings in the hallway. LUCAS makes no attempt to answer it. It rings three times. SAUL enters looking angry.

SAUL
Don't move, I've got it.

He picks up the receiver.

Hello? This is his Son. What time? Thank you. We'll be right up.

SAUL hangs up the receiver and goes into the living room.

Let's go. That was the hospital. Dad's dead.
LUCAS looks at SAUL, and then looks front. Lights up on the dining room, where PAULINE has been for some time. Lights down.

END SCENE 3.

Scene 4

Two days later, Evening. SAUL and LUCAS enter from outside. They have just come from the funeral. LUCAS pours a drink.

SAUL
Little early, don't you think?

LUCAS
Do you want one?

SAUL
No.

LUCAS
It was a nice service.

SAUL
Sure.

LUCAS
Is Pauline here? I'm hungry.

SAUL
You know you could always make your own food.

LUCAS
I know that.

SAUL
She's grieving too.

LUCAS
I know.

SAUL
You don't act like it.

LUCAS
I'm going to go make a sandwich.

SAUL
You do that.

LUCAS
What do you want from me?
SAUL
I don't want anything from you.

LUCAS
Then why are you punishing me?

SAUL
I'm punishing you?

LUCAS
Yes.

LUCAS turns to go to the kitchen.
SAUL takes a deep breath.

SAUL
I'm sorry. It's hard to have you gone for so long, then suddenly back with no explanation. I'm sorry that you feel like that.

LUCAS
I know.

SAUL
But I am trying.

LUCAS
Okay.

SAUL
You mind making me a sandwich, while you're in there?

LUCAS
No.

SAUL
Just, whatever you're having.

LUCAS
Okay.

LUCAS goes into the kitchen. SAUL waits for a moment, walks to the mantle and looks at the picture. He takes the shotgun off the wall, opens it, and places a round inside. He cocks it quietly and places it back in its place. He walks to the liquor cabinet, takes out a bottle of Maker's Mark and pours a drink. He walks back to the mantle and looks at the picture. LUCAS returns with two sandwiches.
LUCAS
Here you go. Turkey okay?

SAUL
Great. Thanks. I decided to have a drink.

LUCAS
You know, I don't remember taking that picture? It feels like I do because I've seen it so many times, but I don't actually remember that happening.

SAUL
You were young. It was right after Mom died. You look like her.

LUCAS
So I've been told. I barely remember her either.

SAUL
She was a great woman. She told the best stories.

LUCAS
Really?

SAUL
You loved them.

(beat)
Can I ask you something?

LUCAS
Sure, I guess.

SAUL
What happened to the money?

LUCAS
The money?

SAUL
That Dad gave you five years ago?

LUCAS
Is that why you were being so nice to me all of a sudden?

SAUL
Just tell me the truth.

LUCAS
I don't want to talk about it.

SAUL
Well, I know it's gone. The question is where is it?
LUCAS
I don't know, maybe you took it.

SAUL
I took that money because I didn't trust Dad to save any for me. I knew if you wanted, he'd bail you out and it'd all be gone. I took it for protection. See, I always figured that you gambled it away. Did you?

LUCAS
None of your business.

SAUL
I think at this point, it's pretty much my business.

How so?

LUCAS
Because of the company.

SAUL
What about it?

LUCAS
He left it to you.

What?

SAUL
You didn't know?

LUCAS
Not officially.

SAUL
It's all yours. Everything. So you got your share five years ago, blew it, and now you're getting everything anyway. And I don't get a thing. Not a dime, except for what I've already put away.

LUCAS
I didn't ask him to do that.

SAUL
It doesn't matter. When you blew that money, you were losing my inheritance too! You don't get to have both! So I think I have a right to know where it is. Is it all gone?

LUCAS
Yes. All of it. I partied it away. After everything that happened with Liv, I snapped. I just couldn't handle it.
SAUL

Handle what?

LUCAS

I got her pregnant. I made her get rid of it.

SAUL

Did Dad know?

LUCAS

Yes. It was his idea. I came to him in a panic. I didn't know what to do. He told me that he knew a guy up near Memphis that would perform a procedure. Painless and quick. I told her that it was best. She didn't want to do it. She wanted to have the baby. I couldn't let her do that. I told her that if she just did this for me that we'd run away together somewhere we could be together in public, maybe up North. I could tell she didn't want to go, but she did it anyway. When we got to Memphis, it was nothing but a shack at the back of a bar. I could hear her screaming. The ride back was awful. She was bleeding everywhere. When I told Dad about it, he said that it would be best if I took off for a while. He agreed to go ahead and give me my share of the money so I took it and ran. I drank it all away. Three months ago, I was practically homeless, working as a cowhand on this farm. I got a letter from Dad saying he was dying and he wanted me to come home. I ignored it for a while, but after a few weeks, I just couldn't stand being away so I came home. I was so ashamed of myself. And I just wanted to be a part of a family again.

SAUL begins clapping.

SAUL

Bravo. A brilliant performance, little brother.

LUCAS

You don't believe me?

SAUL

You're a liar. Where's the money?

LUCAS

It's gone.

SAUL

I want the truth! Where is it?

SAUL moves to the mantle.

LUCAS

I told you.
SAUL
Liar!

SAUL rages back and tackles LUCAS, positioning his body so that he is restraining all movement. He is choking the life out of him.

LUCAS
You're choking me.

SAUL
The truth!

LUCAS
Saul!

SAUL
Tell me!

LUCAS
It's gone.

SAUL
Stop lying!

LUCAS
Saul!

SAUL
Tell me!

LUCAS
It's in a bank in San Francisco.

SAUL gets off of LUCAS, who stays on the floor coughing.

You're crazy.

SAUL
Why have you been lying?

LUCAS
You could have killed me.

SAUL
Answer the question, Luke. Has anything been true?

LUCAS
I got Liv pregnant. Dad helped me take care of it.

SAUL
Why tell me that?
LUCAS
It’s the story I’ve used.

SAUL
And it’s true?

LUCAS
Yes.

SAUL
How could you do that to her?

LUCAS
It wasn’t easy, but it had to be done.

SAUL
But the money –

LUCAS
Is that all you care about?

SAUL
It’s all I have.

LUCAS
Well don’t worry. It’s still there. I mean I used some of it. But I’m not stupid.

SAUL
So, this whole time?

LUCAS
I did get a letter saying Dad was dying. I knew if I came back, then I’d have an opportunity to squeeze you out and get the whole company. Funny thing is that I never actually had to. You did it for me. Ironic, huh? You steal to secure your position, but you actually end up securing mine. Amazing.

SAUL
So the whole “poor, Lucas” thing was an act?

LUCAS
I lost a few pounds, bought some cheap clothes, put a little dirt on my face and there you have it. Had to look the part. But it worked. It's all mine, now. Now if you'll excuse me, I have some packing to do.
SAUL
You’re leaving?

LUCAS
You going to miss me?

SAUL
Where are you going?

LUCAS
Calm down, big brother. I’m coming back. I just have to get back to San Francisco for a few days, secure some things there before I come back and start running Dad’s company. Oh, that reminds me, about your resignation.

SAUL
How could you do this?

LUCAS
It’s just business. Have your resignation on Dad’s, I mean my desk by tomorrow.

LUCAS exits. SAUL stands paralyzed. A knock at the door. SAUL stands frozen for a minute, then goes to the door and answers it. It is RAY.

RAY
Mr. Saul, I came by-

SAUL
It's all ready. He's upstairs. It has to be now.

RAY
That's why I came by. I don't think I can.

SAUL
What? We had a deal.

RAY
I know but Olivia -

SAUL
Did you tell her?

RAY
No, sir.

SAUL
If you only knew what he did to her.
RAY
That's just it. I do know. She told me. She's broke up something awful. I can't risk doing something that's going to get myself hurt. Who's going to take care of her then?

SAUL
I'm going to protect you! I promise. Nothing will happen, but it has to be now. He's leaving.

RAY
Good, let him leave.

SAUL
No! If he leaves I get nothing. You'll lose your job, Ray. He'll own it all, and he'll fire you first thing. How are you going to take care of Olivia then?

RAY
I'll find another job. I can't do this.

Please, I'm begging you.

SAUL
No, sir.

RAY turns to exit as PAULINE enters. SAUL tenses.

PAULINE
Ray? What are you doing here?

RAY
I was just leaving.

PAULINE
You hurry home to Olivia. She'll be needing you now. She glares at him. He understands.

RAY
Yes, ma'am. Good afternoon.

RAY exits.

PAULINE
Hello, Mr. Saul. It was a nice service. The flowers sure were nice.

SAUL
What?

PAULINE
The funeral. It was nice.
Oh. Yeah.

You alright?

Fine.

You hungry?

No.

Well, I'm going to cook a big dinner for you. Spaghetti for Mr. Lucas, and gumbo for you. You eat all the gumbo you like. I know you don't like pasta. Don't taste it. It ain't for you. It's for Mr. Lucas. Now you make sure he eats it. I don't want y'all wasting away.

Sure.

You going somewhere?

Back to California.

You can't do this!

It's done.

You leaving now?

I'm afraid so, Pauline. But I'll be back.

But I was just about to fix a big dinner. Your favorite.

I can't.
the shotgun. He runs outside, slamming the door behind him. Beat. A struggle is heard. SAUL screams.

SAUL (O.S.)

Pauline!

A shot is heard. Beat. PAULINE enters holding the shotgun. She seems calm. SAUL enters behind her, shocked. Both have blood on them. PAULINE collects her things and walks to the phone. She picks up the receiver and dials.

PAULINE

Hello, police? I'd like to report a murder.

SAUL

What are you doing?

PAULINE

Yes, sir. I'm at the Hebert place off route 61. Shotgun. I did it. I killed him. I'll be waiting. Now, I'm turning myself in, so y'all go easy on me. No need for force.

She calmly places the phone on the receiver and walks into the living room, sitting on the couch.

SAUL

What are you doing?

PAULINE

I wish he'd have stayed to eat.

SAUL

What?

PAULINE

I ain't fired a gun since I was a girl. I wish he would have eat up that poison instead.

SAUL

You mean you wanted this to happen?

PAULINE

He hurt my baby.
SAUL
Why'd you call the police?

PAULINE
I've done murder. No need in trying to hide from it. But you best get on out of here. They'll be here quick.

SAUL
Pauline.

PAULINE
Paper says somebody shot that young Kennedy boy last night. They just killing everybody.

SAUL
Pauline.

PAULINE
Go, now. I'll be fine. You get on out of here.

SAUL pauses for a moment, and then runs out the front door. Beat. Sirens are heard in the distance. PAULINE sits. Lights down.

END PLAY.
Vita:

The playwright was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He obtained his Bachelor’s Degree in Musical Theatre Performance from Ouachita Baptist University in 2004. He joined the University of New Orleans Low Residency Program in 2008, studying under Jim Winters, Henry Griffin, and Steve Bogart.