
George C. Wolfe

The Colored
Museum



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George C. Wolfe was awarded a CBS/Foundation of the Dramatist Guild Playwriting Award for *The Colored Museum*. He is the librettist for "Queenie Pie," Duke Ellington's opera, which had its world premiere at The American Music Theatre Festival, a subsequent production at The Kennedy Center, and is slated to appear on Broadway in Fall 1987. He has received grants from The Rockefeller Foundation, The National Endowment for the Arts, and The National Institute for Musical Theatre. Mr. Wolfe is a contributing author to *The Living Theatre*, published by McGraw-Hill. Originally from Frankfort, KY, he holds a B.A. in Directing from Pomona College and an M.F.A. in Dramatic Writing/Musical Theatre from NYU.

The Cast: An ensemble of five, two men and three women, all black, who perform all the characters that inhabit the exhibits.*

The Stage: White walls and recessed lighting. A starkness befitting a museum where the myths and madness of black/Negro/colored Americans are stored.

Built into the walls are a series of small panels, doors, revolving walls, and compartments from which actors can retrieve key props and make quick entrances.

A revolve is used, which allows for quick transitions from one exhibit to the next.

Music: All of the music for the show should be pre-recorded. Only the drummer, who is used in *Git on Board*, and then later in *Permutations* and *The Party*, is live.

THERE IS NO INTERMISSION

*A LITTLE GIRL, seven to twelve years old, is needed for a walk-on part in *Lala's Opening*.

The Exhibits

Git on Board
Cookin' with Aunt Ethel
The Photo Session
Soldier with a Secret
The Gospel According to Miss Roj
The Hairpiece
The Last Mama-on-the-Couch Play
Symbiosis
Lala's Opening
Permutations
The Party

Git on Board

(Blackness. Cut by drums pounding. Then slides, rapidly flashing before us. Images we've all seen before, of African slaves being captured, loaded onto ships, tortured. The images flash, flash, flash. The drums crescendo. Blackout. And then lights reveal MISS PAT, frozen. She is black, pert, and cute. She has a flip to her hair and wears a hot pink mini-skirt stewardess uniform.)

(She stands in front of a curtain which separates her from an offstage cockpit.)

(An electronic bell goes "ding" and MISS PAT comes to life, presenting herself in a friendly but rehearsed manner, smiling and speaking as she has done so many times before.)

MISS PAT: Welcome aboard Celebrity Slaveship, departing the Gold Coast and making short stops at Bahia, Port Au Prince, and Havana, before our final destination of Savannah.

Hi. I'm Miss Pat and I'll be serving you here in Cabin A. We will be crossing the Atlantic at an altitude that's pretty high, so you must wear your shackles at all times.

(She removes a shackle from the overhead compartment and demonstrates.)

To put on your shackle, take the right hand and close the metal ring around your left hand like so. Repeat the action using your left hand to secure the right. If you have any trouble bonding yourself, I'd be more than glad to assist.

Once we reach the desired altitude, the Captain will turn off the "Fasten Your Shackle" sign ... *(She*

efficiently points out the "FASTEN YOUR SHACKLE" signs on either side of her, which light up.) . . . allowing you a chance to stretch and dance in the aisles a bit. But otherwise, shackles must be worn at all times.

(The "Fasten Your Shackles" signs go off.)

MISS PAT: Also, we ask that you please refrain from call-and-response singing between cabins as that sort of thing can lead to rebellion. And, of course, no drums are allowed on board. Can you repeat after me, "No drums." *(She gets the audience to repeat.)* With a little more enthusiasm, please. "No drums." *(After the audience repeats it.)* That was great!

Once we're airborne, I'll be by with magazines, and earphones can be purchased for the price of your first-born male.

If there's anything I can do to make this middle passage more pleasant, press the little button overhead and I'll be with you faster than you can say, "Go down, Moses." *(She laughs at her "little joke.")* Thanks for flying Celebrity and here's hoping you have a pleasant takeoff.

(The engines surge, the "Fasten Your Shackle" signs go on, and over-articulate Muzak voices are heard singing as MISS PAT pulls down a bucket seat and "shackles-up" for takeoff.)

VOICES:

GET ON BOARD CELEBRITY SLAVESHIP
GET ON BOARD CELEBRITY SLAVESHIP
GET ON BOARD CELEBRITY SLAVESHIP
THERE'S ROOM FOR MANY A MORE

(The engines reach an even, steady hum. Just as MISS PAT rises and replaces the shackles in the overhead compartment, the faint sound of African drumming is heard.)

MISS PAT: Hi. Miss Pat again. I'm sorry to disturb you, but someone is playing drums. And what did we just say . . . "No drums." It must be someone in Coach. But we here in Cabin A are not going to respond to those drums. As a matter of fact, we don't even hear them. Repeat after me. "I don't hear any drums." *(The audience repeats.)* And "I will not rebel."

(The audience repeats. The drumming grows.)

MISS PAT: *(Placating)* OK, now I realize some of us are a bit edgy after hearing about the tragedy on board The Laughing Mary, but let me assure you Celebrity has no intention of throwing you overboard and collecting the insurance. We value you!

(She proceeds to single out individual passengers/audience members.)

Why the songs *you* are going to sing in the cotton fields, under the burning heat and stinging lash, will metamorphose and give birth to the likes of James Brown and the Fabulous Flames. And you, yes *you*, are going to come up with some of the best dances. The best dances! The Watusi! The Funky Chicken! And just think of what *you* are going to mean to William Faulkner.

All right, so you're gonna have to suffer for a few hundred years, but from your pain will come a culture so complex. *And*, with this little item here . . . *(She removes a basketball from the overhead compartment.)* . . . you'll become millionaires!

(There is a roar of thunder. The lights quiver and the "Fasten Your Shackle" signs begin to flash. MISS PAT quickly replaces the basketball in the overhead compartment and speaks very reassuringly.)

Miss Pat: No, don't panic. We're just caught in a little thunder storm. Now the only way you're going to

make it through is if you abandon your God and worship a new one. So, on the count of three, let's all sing. One, two, three . . .

NOBODY KNOWS DE TROUBLE I SEEN

Oh, I forgot to mention, when singing, omit the T-H sound. "The" becomes "de." "They" becomes "dey." Got it? Good!

NOBODY KNOWS . . .
NOBODY KNOWS . . .

Oh, so you don't like that one? Well then let's try another—

SUMMER TIME
AND DE LIVIN' IS EASY

Gershwin. He comes from another oppressed people so he understands.

FISH ARE JUMPIN' . . . come on.
AND DE COTTON IS HIGH.
AND DE COTTON IS' . . . Sing, damnit!

(Lights begin to flash, the engines surge, and there is wild drumming. MISS PAT sticks her head through the curtain and speaks with an offstage CAPTAIN.)

MISS PAT: What?

VOICE OF CAPTAIN (O.S.): Time warp!

MISS PAT: Time warp! *(She turns to the audience and puts on a pleasant face.)* The Captain has assured me everything is fine. We're just caught in a little time warp. *(Trying to fight her growing hysteria.)* On your right you will see the American Revolution, which will give the U.S. of A. exclusive rights to your life. And on your left, the Civil War, which means you will vote Republican until F.D.R. comes along. And now

we're passing over the Great Depression, which means everybody gets to live the way you've been living. *(There is a blinding flash of light, and an explosion. She screams.)* Ahhhhhhhh! That was World War I, which is not to be confused with World War II . . . *(There is a larger flash of light, and another explosion.)* . . . Ahhhhh! Which is not to be confused with the Korean War or the Vietnam War, all of which you will play a major role in.

Oh, look, now we're passing over the sixties. Martha and the Vandellas . . . "Julia" with Miss Diahann Carroll . . . Malcom X . . . those five little girls in Alabama . . . Martin Luther King . . . Oh no! The Supremes broke up! *(The drumming intensifies.)* Stop playing those drums! Those drums will be confiscated once we reach Savannah. You can't change history! You can't turn back the clock! *(To the audience.)* Repeat after me, I don't hear any drums! I will not rebel! I will not rebel! I will not re—

(The lights go out, she screams, and the sound of a plane landing and screeching to a halt is heard. After a beat, lights reveal a wasted, disheveled MISS PAT, but perky nonetheless.)

MISS PAT: Hi. Miss Pat here. Things got a bit jumpy back there, but the Captain has just informed me we have safely landed in Savannah. Please check the overhead before exiting as any baggage you don't claim, we trash.

It's been fun, and we hope the next time you consider travel, it's with Celebrity.

(Luggage begins to revolve onstage from offstage left, going past MISS PAT and revolving offstage right. Mixed in with the luggage are two male slaves and a woman slave, complete with luggage and I.D. tags around their necks.)

MISS PAT: (*With routine, rehearsed pleasantness.*)

Have a nice day. Bye bye.
 Button up that coat, it's kind of chilly.
 Have a nice day. Bye bye.
 You take care now.
 See you.
 Have a nice day.
 Have a nice day.
 Have a nice day.

Cookin' with Aunt Ethel

(*As the slaves begin to revolve off, a low-down gut-bucket blues is heard. AUNT ETHEL, a down-home black woman with a bandana on her head, revolves to center stage. She stands behind a big black pot and wears a reassuring grin.*)

AUNT ETHEL: Welcome to "Aunt Ethel's Down-Home Cookin' Show," where we explores the magic and mysteries of colored cuisine.

Today, we gonna be servin' ourselves up some . . .
 (*She laughs.*) I'm not gonna tell you. That's right! I'm not gonna tell you what it is till after you done cooked it. Child, on "The Aunt Ethel Show" we loves to have ourselves some fun. Well, are you ready? Here goes.

(*She belts out a hard-drivin' blues and throws invisible ingredients into the big, black pot.*)

FIRST YA ADD A PINCH OF STYLE
 AND THEN A DASH OF FLAIR
 NOW YA STIR IN SOME PREOCCUPATION
 WITH THE TEXTURE OF YOUR HAIR

NEXT YA ADD ALL KINDS OF RHYTHMS
 LOTS OF FEELINGS AND PIZAZZ
 THEN HUNNY THROW IN SOME RAGE
 TILL IT CONGEALS AND TURNS TO JAZZ

NOW YOU COOKIN'
 COOKIN' WITH AUNT ETHEL
 YOU REALLY COOKIN'
 COOKIN' WITH AUNT ETHEL, OH YEAH

NOW YA ADD A HEAP OF SURVIVAL
 AND HUMILITY, JUST A TOUCH
 ADD SOME ATTITUDE
 OOPS! I PUT TOO MUCH

AND NOW A WHOLE LOT OF HUMOR
SALTY LANGUAGE, MIXED WITH SADNESS
THEN THROW IN A BOX OF BLUES
AND SIMMER TO MADNESS

NOW YOU COOKIN'
COOKIN' WITH AUNT ETHEL, OH YEAH!

NOW YOU BEAT IT—REALLY WORK IT
DISCARD AND DISOWN
AND IN A FEW HUNDRED YEARS
ONCE IT'S AGED AND FULLY GROWN
YA PUT IT IN THE OVEN
TILL IT'S BLACK
AND HAS A SHEEN
OR TILL IT'S NICE AND YELLA
OR ANY SHADE IN BETWEEN

NEXT YA TAKE 'EM OUT AND COOL 'EM
'CAUSE THEY NO FUN WHEN THEY HOT
AND WON'T YOU BE SURPRISED
AT THE CONCOCTION YOU GOT

YOU HAVE BAKED
BAKED YOURSELF A BATCH OF NEGROES
YES YOU HAVE BAKED YOURSELF
BAKED YOURSELF A BATCH OF NEGROES

(She pulls from the pot a handful of Negroes, black dolls.)

But don't ask me what to do with 'em now that you got 'em, 'cause child, that's your problem. *(She throws the dolls back into the pot.)* But in any case, yaw be sure to join Aunt Ethel next week, when we gonna be servin' ourselves up some chitlin quiche ... some grits-under-glass,

AND A SWEET POTATO PIE
AND YOU'LL BE COOKIN'
COOKIN' WITH AUNT ETHEL
OH YEAH!

(On AUNT ETHEL'S final rift, lights reveal...)

The Photo Session

(... a very glamorous, gorgeous, black couple, wearing the best of everything and perfect smiles. The stage is bathed in color and bright white light. Disco music with the chant: "We're fabulous" plays in the background. As they pose, larger-than-life images of their perfection are projected on the museum walls. The music quiets and the images fade away as they begin to speak and pose.)

GIRL: The world was becoming too much for us.

GUY: We couldn't resolve the contradictions of our existence.

GIRL: And we couldn't resolve yesterday's pain.

GUY: So we gave away our life and we now live inside *Ebony Magazine*.

GIRL: Yes, we live inside a world where everyone is beautiful, and wears fabulous clothes.

GUY: And no one says anything profound.

GIRL: Or meaningful.

GUY: Or contradictory.

GIRL: Because no one talks. Everyone just smiles and shows off their cheekbones.

(They adopt a profile pose.)

GUY: Last month I was black and fabulous while holding up a bottle of vodka.

GIRL: This month we get to be black and fabulous together.

(They dance/pose. The "We're fabulous" chant builds and then fades as they start to speak again.)

GIRL: There are of course setbacks.

GUY: We have to smile like this for a whole month.

GIRL: And we have no social life.

GUY: And no sex.

GIRL: And at times it feels like we're suffocating, like we're not human anymore.

GUY: And everything is rehearsed, including this other kind of pain we're starting to feel.

GIRL: The kind of pain that comes from feeling no pain at all.

(They then speak and pose with a sudden burst of energy.)

GUY: But one can't have everything.

GIRL: Can one?

GUY: So if the world is becoming too much for you, do like we did.

GIRL: Give away your life and come be beautiful with us.

GUY: We guarantee, no contradictions.

GIRL/GUY: Smile/click, smile/click, smile/click.

GIRL: And no pain.

(They adopt a final pose and revolve off as the "We're fabulous" chant plays and fades into the background.)

A Soldier with a Secret

(Projected onto the museum walls are the faces of black soldiers—from the Spanish-American thru to the Vietnam War. Lights slowly reveal JUNIE ROBINSON, a black combat soldier, posed on an onyx plinth. He comes to life and smiles at the audience. Somewhat dim-witted, he has an easy-going charm about him.)

JUNIE: Pst. Pst. Guess what? I know the secret. The secret to your pain. 'Course, I didn't always know. First I had to die, then come back to life, 'fore I had the gift.

Ya see the Cappin sent me off up ahead to scout for screamin' yella bastards. 'Course, for the life of me I couldn't understand why they'd be screamin', seein' as how we was tryin' to kill them and they us.

But anyway, I'm off lookin', when all of a sudden I find myself caught smack dead in the middle of this explosion. This blindin', burnin', scaldin' explosion. Musta been a booby trap or something, 'cause all around me is fire. Hell, I'm on fire. Like a piece of chicken dropped in a skillet of cracklin' grease. Why, my flesh was justa peelin' off of my bones.

But then I says to myself, "Juniè, if yo' flesh is on fire, how come you don't feel no pain!" And I didn't. I swear as I'm standin' here, I felt nuthin'. That's when I sort of put two and two together and realized I didn't feel no whole lot of hurtin' cause I done died.

Well I just picked myself up and walked right on out of that explosion. Hell, once you know you dead, why keep on dyin', ya know?

So, like I say, I walk right outta that explosion, fully expectin' to see white clouds, Jesus, and my Mama, only all I saw was more war. Shootin' goin' on way

off in this direction and that direction. And there, standin' around, was all the guys. Hubert, J.F., the Cappin. I guess the sound of the explosion must of attracted 'em, and they all starin' at me like I'm some kind of ghost.

So I yells to 'em, "Hey there Hubert! Hey there Cappin!" But they just stare. So I tells 'em how I'd died and how I guess it wasn't my time 'cause here I am, "Fully in the flesh and not a scratch to my bones." And they still just stare. So I took to starin' back.

(The expression on JUNIE's face slowly turns to horror and disbelief.)

Only what I saw . . . well I can't exactly to this day describe it. But I swear, as sure as they was wearin' grèen and holdin' guns, they was each wearin' a piece of the future on their faces.

Yeah. All the hurt that was gonna get done to them and they was gonna do to folks was right there clear as day.

I saw how J.F., once he got back to Chicago, was gonna get shot dead by this po-lice, and I saw how Hubert was gonna start beatin' up on his old lady which I didn't understand, 'cause all he could do was talk on and on about how much he loved her. Each and every one of 'em had pain in his future and blood on his path. And God or the Devil one spoke to me and said, "Junie, these colored boys ain't gonna be the same after this war. They ain't gonna have no kind of happiness."

Well right then and there it come to me. The secret to their pain.

Late that night, after the medics done checked me over and found me fit for fightin', after everybody done settle down for the night, I sneaked over to where Hubert was sleepin', and with a needle I stole from the medics . . . pst, pst . . . I shot a little air into

his veins. The second he died, all the hurtin-to-come just left his face.

Two weeks later I got J.F. and after that Woodrow . . . Jimmy Joe . . . I even spent all night waitin' by the latrine 'cause I knew the Cappin always made a late night visit and pst . . . pst . . . I got him.

(Smiling, quite proud of himself.) That's how come I died and come back to life. 'Cause just like Jesus went around healin' the sick, I'm supposed to go around healin' the hurtin' all these colored boys wearin' from the war.

Pst, pst. I know the secret. The secret to your pain. The secret to yours, and yours. Pst. Pst. Pst. Pst.

(The lights slowly fade.)

The Gospel According to Miss Roj

(The darkness is cut by electronic music. Cold, pounding, unrelenting. A neon sign which spells out THE BOTTOMLESS PIT clicks on. There is a lone bar stool. Lights flash on and off, pulsating to the beat. There is a blast of smoke and, from the haze, Miss Roj appears. He is dressed in striped patio pants, white go-go boots, a halter, and cat-shaped sunglasses. What would seem ridiculous on anyone else, Miss Roj wears as if it were high fashion. He carries himself with total elegance and absolute arrogance.)

Miss Roj: God created black people and black people created style. The name's Miss Roj . . . that's R.O.J. thank you and you can find me every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday nights at "The Bottomless Pit," the watering hole for the wild and weary which asks the question, "Is there life after Jherri-curl?"

(A waiter enters, hands Miss Roj a drink, and then exits.)

Thanks, doll. Yes, if they be black and swish, the B.P. has seen them, which is not to suggest the Pit is lacking in cultural diversity. Oh no. There are your dinge queens, white men who like their chicken legs dark. *(He winks/flirts with a man in the audience.)* And let's not forget, "Los Muchachos de la Neighborhood." But the speciality of the house is The Snap Queens. *(He snaps his fingers.)* We are a rare breed.

For, you see, when something strikes our fancy, when the truth comes piercing through the dark, well you just can't let it pass unnoticed. No darling. You must pronounce it with a snap. *(He snaps.)*

Snapping comes from another galaxy, as do all snap queens. That's right. I ain't just your regular oppressed American Negro. No-no-no! I am an extra-

terrestrial. And I ain't talkin' none of that shit you seen in the movies! I have real power.

(The waiter enters. Miss Roj stops him.)

Speaking of no power, will you please tell Miss Stingy-with-the-rum, that if Miss Roj had wanted to remain sober, she could have stayed home and drank Kool-aid. *(He snaps.)* Thank you.

(The waiter exits. Miss Roj crosses and sits on bar stool.)

Yes, I was placed here on Earth to study the life habits of a deteriorating society, and child when we talkin' New York City, we are discussing the Queen of Deterioration. Miss New York is doing a slow dance with death, and I am here to warn you all, but before I do, I must know . . . don't you just love my patio pants? Annette Funicello immortalized them in "Beach Blanket Bingo," and I have continued the legacy. And my go-gos? I realize white after Labor Day is very gauche, but as the saying goes, if you've got it flaunt it, if you don't, front it and snap to death any bastard who dares to defy you. *(Laughing)* Oh ho! My demons are showing. Yes, my demons live at the bottom of my Bacardi and Coke.

Let's just hope for all concerned I dance my demons out before I drink them out 'cause child, dancing demons take you on a ride, but those drinkin' demons just take you, and you find yourself doing the strangest things. Like the time I locked my father in the broom closet. Seems the liquor made his tongue real liberal and he decided he was gonna baptize me with the word "faggot" over and over. Well, he's just going on and on with "faggot this" and "faggot that," all the while walking toward the broom closet to piss. So the demons just took hold of my wedges and forced me to kick the drunk son-of-a-bitch into the closet and lock the door. *(Laughter)* Three days later I remembered he was there. *(He snaps.)*

(The waiter enters. Miss ROJ takes a drink and downs it.)

Another!

(The waiter exits.)

(Dancing about.) Oh yes-yes-yes! Miss Roj is quintessential style. I corn row the hairs on my legs so that they spell out M.I.S.S. R.O.J. And I dare any bastard to fuck with me because I will snap your ass into oblivion.

I have the power, you know. Everytime I snap, I steal one beat of your heart. So if you find yourself gasping for air in the middle of the night, chances are you fucked with Miss Roj and she didn't like it.

Like the time this asshole at Jones Beach decided to take issue with my coulotte-sailor ensemble. This child, this muscle-bound Brooklyn thug in a skin-tight bikini, very skin-tight so the whole world can see that instead of a brain, God gave him an extra thick piece of sausage. You know the kind who beat up on their wives for breakfast. Snap your fingers if you know what I'm talking about . . . Come on and snap, child. *(He gets the audience to snap.)* Well, he decided to blurt out when I walked by, "Hey look at da monkey coon in da faggit suit." Well, I walked up to the poor dear, very calmly lifted my hand, and. . . *(He snaps in rapid succession.)* A heart attack, right there on the beach. *(He singles out someone in the audience.)* You don't believe it? Cross me! Come on! Come on!

(The waiter enters, hands Miss ROJ a drink. Miss ROJ downs it. The waiter exits.)

(Looking around.) If this place is the answer, we're asking all the wrong questions. The only reason I come here is to communicate with my origins. The flashing lights are signals from my planet way out there. Yes, girl, even further than Flatbush. We're talking another galaxy. The flashing lights tell me how much time is left before the end.

(Very drunk and loud by now.) I hate the people here. I hate the drinks. But most of all I hate this goddamned music. That ain't music. Give me Aretha Franklin any day. *(Singing)* "Just a little respect. R.E.Ş.P.E.C.T." Yeah! Yeah!

Come on and dance your last dance with Miss Roj. Last call is but a drink away and each snap puts you one step closer to the end.

A high-rise goes up. You can't get no job. Come on everybody and dance. A whole race of people gets trashed and debased. Snap those fingers and dance. Some sick bitch throws her baby out the window 'cause she thinks it's the Devil. Everybody snap! *The New York Post.* Snap!

Snap for every time you walk past someone lying in the street, smelling like frozen piss and shit and you don't see it. Snap for every crazed bastard who kills himself so as to get the jump on being killed. And snap for every sick muthafucker who, bored with carrying around his fear, takes to shooting up other people.

Yeah, snap your fingers and dance with Miss Roj. But don't be fooled by the banners and balloons 'cause, child, this ain't no party going on. Hell no! It's a wake. And the casket's made out of stone, steel, and glass and the people are racing all over the pavement like maggots on a dead piece of meat.

Yeah, dance! But don't be surprised if there ain't no beat holding you together 'cause we traded in our drums for respectability. So now it's just words. Words rappin'. Words screechin'. Words flowin' instead of blood 'cause you know that don't work. Words cracklin' instead of fire 'cause by the time a match is struck on 125th Street and you run to midtown, the flame has been blown away.

So come on and dance with Miss Roj and her demons. We don't ask for acceptance. We don't ask

for approval. We know who we are and we move on it!

I guarantee you will never hear two fingers put together in a snap and not think of Miss Roj. That's power, baby. Patio pants and all.

(The lights begin to flash in rapid succession.)

So let's dance! And snap! And dance! And snap!

(Miss Roj begins to dance as if driven by his demons. There is a blast of smoke and when the haze settles, Miss Roj has revolved off and in place of him is a recording of Aretha Franklin singing "Respect.")

The Hairpiece

(As "Respect" fades into the background, a vanity revolves to center stage. On this vanity are two wigs, an Afro wig, circa 1968, and a long, flowing wig, both resting on wig stands. A black WOMAN enters, her head and body wrapped in towels. She picks up a framed picture and after a few moments of hesitation, throws it into a small trash can. She then removes one of her towels to reveal a totally bald head. Looking into a mirror on the "fourth wall," she begins applying makeup.)

(The wig stand holding the Afro wig opens her eyes. Her name is JANINE. She stares in disbelief at the bald woman.)

JANINE: *(Calling to the other wig stand.)* LaWanda. LaWanda girl, wake up.

(The other wig stand, the one with the long, flowing wig, opens her eyes. Her name is LAWANDA.)

LAWANDA: What? What is it?

JANINE: Check out girlfriend.

LAWANDA: Oh, girl, I don't believe it.

JANINE: *(Laughing)* Just look at the poor thing, trying to paint some life onto that face of hers. You'd think by now she'd realize it's the hair. It's all about the hair.

LAWANDA: What hair! She ain't go no hair! She done fried, dyed, de-chemicalized her shit to death.

JANINE: And all that's left is that buck-naked scalp of hers, sittin' up there apologizin' for being odd-shaped and ugly.

LAWANDA: *(Laughing with JANINE.)* Girl, stop!

JANINE: I ain't sayin' nuthin' but the truth.

LAWANDA/JANINE: The bitch is bald! *(They laugh.)*

JANINE: And all over some man.

LAWANDA: I tell ya, girl, I just don't understand it. I mean, look at her. She's got a right nice face, a good head on her shoulders. A good job even. And she's got to go fall in love with that fool.

JANINE: That political quick-change artist. Everytime the nigga went and changed his ideology, she went and changed her hair to fit the occasion.

LAWANDA: Well at least she's breaking up with him.

JANINE: Hunny, no!

LAWANDA: Yes child.

JANINE: Oh, girl, dish me the dirt!

LAWANDA: Well, you see, I heard her on the phone, talking to one of her girlfriends, and she's meeting him for lunch today to give him the ax.

JANINE: Well it's about time.

LAWANDA: I hear ya. But don't you worry 'bout a thing, girlfriend. I'm gonna tell you all about it.

JANINE: Hunny, you won't have to tell me a damn thing 'cause I'm gonna be there, front row, center.

LAWANDA: You?

JANINE: Yes, child, she's wearing me to lunch.

LAWANDA: *(Outraged)* I don't think so!

JANINE: *(With an attitude)* What do you mean, you don't think so?

LAWANDA: Exactly what I said, "I don't think so." Damn, Janine, get real. How the hell she gonna wear both of us?

JANINE: She ain't wearing both of us. She's wearing me.

LAWANDA: Says who?

JANINE: Says me! Says her! Ain't that right, girlfriend?

(The WOMAN stops putting on makeup, looks around, sees no one, and goes back to her makeup.)

JANINE: I said, ain't that right!

(The WOMAN picks up the phone.)

WOMAN: Hello . . . hello . . .

JANINE: Did you hear the damn phone ring?

WOMAN: No.

JANINE: Then put the damn phone down and talk to me.

WOMAN: I ah . . . don't understand.

JANINE: It ain't deep so don't panic. Now, you're having lunch with your boyfriend, right?

WOMAN: *(Breaking into tears.)* I think I'm having a nervous breakdown.

JANINE: *(Impatient)* I said you're having lunch with your boyfriend, right!

WOMAN: *(Scared, pulling herself together.)* Yes, right . . . right.

JANINE: To break up with him.

WOMAN: How did you know that?

LAWANDA: I told her.

WOMAN: *(Stands and screams.)* Help! Help!

JANINE: Sit down. I said sit your ass down!

(The WOMAN does.)

JANINE: Now set her straight and tell her you're wearing me.

LAWANDA: She's the one that needs to be set straight, so go on and tell her you're wearing me.

JANINE: No, tell her you're wearing me.

(There is a pause.)

LAWANDA: Well?

JANINE: Well?

WOMAN: I ah . . . actually hadn't made up my mind.

JANINE: *(Going off)* What do you mean you ain't made up your mind! After all that fool has put you through, you gonna need all the attitude you can get and there is nothing like attitude and a healthy head of kinks to make his shit shrivel like it should!

That's right! When you wearin' me, you lettin' him know he ain't gonna get no sweet-talkin' comb through your love without some serious resistance. No-no! The kink of my head is like the kink of your heart and neither is about to be hot-pressed into surrender.

LAWANDA: That shit is so tired. The last time attitude worked on anybody was 1968. Janine girl, you need to get over it and get on with it. *(To the WOMAN.)* And you need to give the nigga a goodbye he will never forget.

I say give him hysteria! Give him emotion! Give him rage! And there is nothing like a toss of the tresses to make your emotional outburst shine with emotional flair.

You can toss me back, shake me from side to side, all the while screaming, "I want you out of my life forever!!!" And not only will I come bouncing back for more, but you just might win an Academy Award for best performance by a head of hair in a dramatic role.

JANINE: Miss hunny, please! She don't need no Barbie doll dipped in chocolate telling her what to do. She needs a head of hair that's coming from a fo' real place.

LAWANDA: Don't you dare talk about nobody coming from a "fo' real place," Miss Made-in-Taiwan!

JANINE: Hey! I ain't ashamed of where I come from. Besides, it don't matter where you come from as long as you end up in the right place.

LAWANDA: And it don't matter the grade as long as the point gets made. So go on and tell her you're wearing me.

JANINE: No, tell her you're wearing me.

(The WOMAN, unable to take it, begins to bite off her fake nails, as LAWANDA and JANINE go at each other.)

LAWANDA:

Set the bitch straight. Let her know there is no way she could even begin to compete with me. I am quality. She is kink. I am exotic. She is common. I am class and she is trash. That's right. T.R.A.S.H. We're talking three strikes and you're out. So go on and tell her you're wearing me. Go on, tell her! Tell her! Tell her!

JANINE:

Who you callin' a bitch? Why, if I had hands I'd knock you clear into next week. You think you cute. She thinks she's cute just 'cause that synthetic mop of hers blows in the wind. She looks like a fool and you look like an even bigger fool when you wear her, so go on and tell her you're wearing me. Go on, tell her! Tell her! Tell her!

(The WOMAN screams and pulls the two wigs off the wig stands as the lights go to black on three bald heads.)

The Last Mama-on-the-Couch Play

(A NARRATOR, dressed in a black tuxedo, enters through the audience and stands center stage. He is totally solemn.)

NARRATOR: We are pleased to bring you yet another Mama-on-the-Couch play. A searing domestic drama that tears at the very fabric of racist America. (He crosses upstage center and sits on a stool and reads from a playscript.) Act One. Scene One.

(MAMA revolves on stage left, sitting on a couch reading a large, oversized Bible. A window is placed stage right. MAMA's dress, the couch, and drapes are made from the same material. A doormat lays down center.)

NARRATOR: Lights up on a dreary, depressing, but with middle-class aspirations tenement slum. There is a couch, with a Mama on it. Both are well worn. There is a picture of Jesus on the wall . . . (A picture of Jesus is instantly revealed.) . . . and a window which looks onto an abandoned tenement. It is late spring.

Enter Walter-Lee-Beau-Willie-Jones (SON enters through the audience.) He is Mama's thirty-year-old son. His brow is heavy from three hundred years of oppression.

MAMA: (Looking up from her Bible, speaking in a slow manner.) Son, did you wipe your feet?

SON: (An ever-erupting volcano.) No, Mama, I didn't wipe me feet! Out there, every day, Mama is the Man. The Man Mama. Mr. Charlie! Mr. Bossman! And he's wipin' his feet on me. On me, Mama, every damn day of my life. Ain't that enough for me to deal with? Ain't that enough?

MAMA: Son, wipe your feet.

SON: I wanna dream. I wanna be somebody. I wanna take charge of my life.

MAMA: You can do all of that, but first you got to wipe your feet.

SON: (As he crosses to the mat, mumbling and wiping his feet.) Wipe my feet . . . wipe my feet . . . wipe my feet . . .

MAMA: That's a good boy.

SON: (Exploding) Boy! Boy! I don't wanna be nobody's good boy, Mama. I wanna be my own man!

MAMA: I know son, I know. God will show the way.

SON: God, Mama! Since when did your God ever do a damn thing for the black man. Huh, Mama, huh? You tell me. When did your God ever help me?

MAMA: (Removing her wire-rim glasses.) Son, come here.

(SON crosses to MAMA, who slowly stands and in a exaggerated stage slap, backhands SON clear across the stage. The NARRATOR claps his hands to create the sound for the slap. MAMA then lifts her clinched fists to the heavens.)

MAMA: Not in my house, my house, will you ever talk that way again!

(The NARRATOR, so moved by her performance, erupts in applause and encourages the audience to do so.)

NARRATOR: Beautiful. Just stunning.

(He reaches into one of the secret compartments of the set and gets an award which he ceremoniously gives to MAMA for her performance. She bows and then returns to the couch.)

NARRATOR: Enter Walter-Lee-Beau-Willie's wife, The Lady in Plaid.

(Music from nowhere is heard, a jazzy pseudo-abstract intro as the LADY IN PLAID dances in through the audience, wipes her feet, and then twirls about.)

LADY:

She was a creature of regal beauty
who in ancient time graced the temples of the Nile
with her womanliness
But here she was, stuck being colored
and a woman in a world that valued neither.

SON: You cooked my dinner?

LADY: *(Oblivious to SON.)*

Feet flat, back broke,
she looked at the man who, though he be thirty,
still ain't got his own apartment.
Yeah, he's still livin' with his Mama!
And she asked herself, was this the life
for a Princess Colored, who by the
translucence of her skin, knew the
universe was her sister.

(The LADY IN PLAID twirls and dances.)

SON: *(Becoming irate.)* I've had a hard day of dealin'
with the Man. Where's my damn dinner? Woman,
stand still when I'm talkin' to you!

LADY: And she cried for her sisters in Detroit
Who knew, as she, that their souls belonged
in ancient temples on the Nile.
And she cried for her sisters in Chicago
who, like her, their life has become
one colored hell.

SON: There's only one thing gonna get through to you.

LADY: And she cried for her sisters in New Orleans
And her sisters in Trenton and Birmingham,
and
Poughkeepsie and Orlando and Miami Beach
and
Las Vegas, Palm Springs.

(As she continues to call out cities, he crosses offstage and returns with two black dolls and then crosses to the window.)

SON: Now are you gonna cook me dinner?

LADY: Walter-Lee-Beau-Willie-Jones, no! Not my babies.

(SON throws them out the window. The LADY IN PLAID then lets out a primal scream.)

LADY: He dropped them!!!!

(The NARRATOR breaks into applause.)

NARRATOR: Just splendid. Shattering.

(He then crosses and after an intense struggle with MAMA, he takes the award from her and gives it to the LADY IN PLAID, who is still suffering primal pain.)

LADY: Not my babies . . . not my . . . *(Upon receiving the award, she instantly recovers.)* Help me up, sugar.
(She then bows and crosses and stands behind the couch.)

NARRATOR: Enter Medea Jones, Walter-Lee-Beau-Willie's sister.

(MEDEA moves very ceremoniously, wiping her feet and then speaking and gesturing as if she just escaped from a Greek tragedy.)

MEDEA:

Ah, see how the sun kneels to speak
her evening vespers, exalting all
in her vision, even lowly tenement
long abandoned.

Mother, wife of brother, I trust
the approaching darkness finds you
safe in Hestia's busom.

Brother, why wear the face of a man
in anguish. Can the garment of thine

feelings cause the shape of your countenance to disfigure so?

SON: *(At the end of his rope.)* Leave me alone, Medea.

MEDEA: *(To MAMA)*

Is good brother still going on and on and on about He and The Man.

MAMA/LADY: What else?

MEDEA: Ah brother, if with our thoughts and words we could cast thine oppressors into the lowest bowels of wretched hell, would that make us more like the gods or more like our oppressors.

No, brother, no, do not let thy rage choke the blood which anoints thy heart with love. Forgo thine darkened humor and let love shine on your soul, like a jewel on a young maiden's hand.

(Dropping to her knees.)

I beseech thee, forgo thine anger and leave wrath to the gods!

SON: Girl, what has gotten into you.

MEDEA: Juliard, good brother. For I am no longer bound by rhythms of race or region. Oh, no. My speech, like my pain and suffering, have become classical and therefore universal.

LADY: I didn't understand a damn thing she said, but girl you usin' them words.

(LADY IN PLAID crosses and gives MEDEA the award and everyone applauds.)

SON: *(Trying to stop the applause.)* Wait one damn minute! This my play. It's about me and the Man. It ain't got nuthin' to do with no ancient temples on the Nile and it ain't got nuthin' to do with Hestia's

busom. And it ain't got nuthin' to do with you slap-pin' me across no room. *(His gut-wrenching best.)* It's about me. Me and my pain! My pain!

THE VOICE OF THE MAN: Walter-Lee-Beau-Willie, this is the Man. You have been convicted of overacting. Come out with your hands up.

(SON starts to cross to the window.)

SON: Well now that does it.

MAMA: Son, no, don't go near that window. Son, no!

(Gun shots ring out and SON falls dead.)

MAMA: *(Crossing to the body, too emotional for words.)* My son, he was a good boy. Confused. Angry. Just like his father. And his father's father. And his father's father's father. And now he's dead.

(Seeing she's about to drop to her knees, the NARRATOR rushes and places a pillow underneath her just in time.)

If only he had been born into a world better than this. A world where there are no well-worn couches and no well-worn Mamas and nobody overremotes.

If only he had been born into an all-black musical.

(A song intro begins.)

Nobody ever dies in an all-black musical.

(MEDEA and LADY IN PLAID pull out church fans and begin to fan themselves.)

MAMA: *(Singing a soul-stirring gospel.)*

OH WHY COULDN'T HE
BE BORN

INTO A SHOW WITH LOTS OF SINGING
AND DANCING

I SAY WHY
COULDN'T HE
BE BORN

LADY: Go ahead hunny. Take your time.

MAMA:
INTO A SHOW WHERE EVERYBODY
IS HAPPY

NARRATOR/MEDEA: Preach! Preach!

MAMA:
OH WHY COULDN'T HE BE BORN WITH THE
CHANCE
TO SMILE A LOT AND SING AND DANCE
OH WHY
OH WHY

OH WHY
COULDN'T HE
BE BORN
INTO AN ALL-BLACK SHOW
WOAH-WOAH

*(The CAST joins in, singing do-wop gospel background
to MAMA's lament.)*

OH WHY
COULDN'T HE
BE BORN
(HE BE BORN)
INTO A SHOW WHERE EVERYBODY
IS HAPPY

WHY COULDN'T HE BE BORN WITH THE
CHANCE
TO SMILE A LOT AND SING AND DANCE
WANNA KNOW WHY
WANNA KNOW WHY

OH WHY
COULDN'T HE
BE BORN
INTO AN ALL-BLACK SHOW
A-MEN

(A singing/dancing, spirit-raising revival begins.)

OH, SON, GET UP
GET UP AND DANCE
WE SAY GET UP
THIS IS YOUR SECOND CHANCE

DON'T SHAKE A FIST
JUST SHAKE A LEG
AND DO THE TWIST
DON'T SCREAM AND BEG
SON SON SON
GET UP AND DANCE

GET
GET UP
GET UP AND
GET UP AND DANCE — ALL RIGHT!
GET UP AND DANCE — ALL RIGHT!
GET UP AND DANCE!

*(WALTER-LEE-BEAU-WILLIE springs to life and joins in
the dancing. A foot-stomping, hand-clapping produc-
tion number takes off, which encompasses a myriad
of black-Broadwayesque dancing styles—shifting
speeds and styles with exuberant abandonment.)*

MAMA: *(Bluesy)*
WHY COULDN'T HE BE BORN INTO AN ALL-
BLACK SHOW

CAST:
WITH SINGING AND DANCING

MAMA: BLACK SHOW

*(MAMA scats and the dancing becomes manic and just
a little too desperate to please.)*

CAST:
WE GOTTA DANCE
WE GOTTA DANCE
GET UP GET UP GET UP AND DANCE
WE GOTTA DANCE
WE GOTTA DANCE
GOTTA DANCE!

(Just at the point the dancing is about to become violent, the cast freezes and pointedly, simply sings:)

IF WE WANT TO LIVE
WE HAVE GOT TO
WE HAVE GOT TO
DANCE . . . AND DANCE . . . AND DANCE . . .

(As they continue to dance with zombie-like frozen smiles and faces, around them images of coon performers flash as the lights slowly fade.)

Symbiosis

(The Temptations singing "My Girl" are heard as lights reveal a BLACK MAN in corporate dress standing before a large trash can throwing objects from a Saks Fifth Avenue bag into it. Circling around him with his every emotion on his face is THE KID, who is dressed in a late-sixties street style. His moves are slightly heightened. As the scene begins the music fades.)

MAN: *(With contained emotions.)*

My first pair of Converse All-stars. Gone.

My first Afro-comb. Gone.

My first dashiki. Gone.

My autographed pictures of Stokley Carmichael,
Jomo Kenyatta and Donna Summer. Gone.

KID: *(Near tears, totally upset.)* This shit's not fair man.
Damn! Hell! Shit! Shit! It's not fair!

MAN:

My first jar of Murray's Pomade.

My first can of Afro-sheen.

My first box of curl relaxer. Gone! Gone! Gone!

Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*.

KID: Not *Soul on Ice*!

MAN: It's been replaced on my bookshelf by *The Color Purple*.

KID: *(Horried)* No!

MAN: Gone!

KID: But—

MAN:

Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze." Gone.

Sly Stone's "There's A Riot Goin' On." Gone.

The Jackson Five's "I Want You Back."

KID: Man, you can't throw that away. It's living proof Michael had a black nose.

MAN: It's all going. Anything and everything that connects me to you, to who I was, to what we were, is out of my life.

KID: You've got to give me another chance.

MAN: *Fingertips Part 2.*

KID: Man, how can you do that? That's vintage Stevie Wonder.

MAN: You want to know how, Kid? You want to know how? Because my survival depends on it. Whether you know it or not, the Ice Age is upon us.

KID: (*Jokingly*) Man, what the hell you talkin' about. It's 95 damn degrees.

MAN: The climate is changing, Kid, and either you adjust or you end up extinct. A sociological dinosaur. Do you understand what I'm trying to tell you? King Kong would have made it to the top if only he had taken the elevator. Instead he brought attention to his struggle and ended up dead.

KID: (*Pleading*) I'll change. I swear I'll change. I'll maintain a low profile. You won't even know I'm around.

MAN: If I'm to become what I'm to become then you've got to go. . . . I have no history. I have no past.

KID: Just like that?

MAN: (*Throwing away a series of buttons.*) Free Angela! Free Bobby! Free Huey, Duey, and Louie! U.S. out of Viet Nam. U.S. out of Cambodia. U.S. out of Harlem, Detroit, and Newark. Gone! . . . The Temptations Greatest Hits!

KID: (*Grabbing the album.*) No!!!

MAN: Give it back, Kid.

KID: No.

MAN: I said give it back!

KID: No. I can't let you trash this. Johnny man, it contains fourteen classic cuts by the tempting Temptations. We're talking, "Ain't Too Proud to Beg," "Papa Was a Rolling Stone," "My Girl."

MAN: (*Warning*) I don't have all day.

KID: For God's sake, Johnny man, "My Girl" is the jam to end all jams. It's what we are. Who we are. It's a way of life. Come on, man, for old times sake. (*Singing*)

I GOT SUNSHINE ON A CLOUDY DAY
BUM-DA-DUM-DA-DUM-DA-BUM
AND WHEN IT'S COLD OUTSIDE

Come on, Johnny man, you ain't "bummin'," man.

I GOT THE MONTH OF MAY

Here comes your favorite part. Come on, Johnny man, sing.

I GUESS YOU SAY
WHAT CAN MAKE ME FEEL THIS WAY
MY GIRL, MY GIRL, MY GIRL
TALKIN' 'BOUT

MAN: (*Exploding*) I said give it back!

KID: (*Angry*) I ain't givin' you a muthafuckin' thing!

MAN: Now you listen to me!

KID: No, you listen to me. This is the kid you're dealin' with, so don't fuck with me!

(*He hits his fist into his hand, and THE MAN grabs for his heart. THE KID repeats with two more hits, which causes the man to drop to the ground, grabbing his heart.*)

KID: Jai! Jai! Jai!

MAN: Kid, please.

KID: Yeah. Yeah. Now who's begging who. . . . Well, well, well, look at Mr. Cream-of-the-Crop, Mr. Colored-Man-on-Top. Now that he's making it, he no longer wants anything to do with the Kid. Well, you may put all kinds of silk ties 'round your neck and white lines up your nose, but the Kid is here to stay. You may change your women as often as you change your underwear, but the Kid is here to stay. And regardless of how much of your past that you trash, I ain't goin' no damn where. Is that clear? Is that clear?

MAN: *(Regaining his strength, beginning to stand.)*
Yeah.

KID: Good. *(After a beat.)* You all right man? You all right? I don't want to hurt you, but when you start all that talk about getting rid of me, well, it gets me kind of crazy. We need each other. We are one . . .

(Before THE KID can complete his sentence, THE MAN grabs him around his neck and starts to choke him violently.)

MAN: *(As he strangles him.)* The . . . Ice . . . Age . . . is . . . upon us . . . and either we adjust . . . or we end up . . . extinct.

(THE KID hangs limp in THE MAN's arms.)

MAN: *(Laughing)* Man kills his own rage. Film at eleven. *(He then dumps THE KID into the trash can, and closes the lid. He speaks in a contained voice.)* I have no history. I have no past. I can't. It's too much. It's much too much. I must be able to smile on cue. And watch the news with an impersonal eye. I have no stake in the madness.

Being black is too emotionally taxing; therefore I will be black only on weekends and holidays.

(He then turns to go, but sees the Temptations album lying on the ground. He picks it up and sings quietly to himself.)

I GUESS YOU SAY
WHAT CAN MAKE ME FEEL THIS WAY

(He pauses, but then crosses to the trash can, lifts the lid, and just as he is about to toss the album in, a hand reaches from inside the can and grabs hold of THE MAN's arm. THE KID then emerges from the can with a death grip on THE MAN's arm.)

KID: *(Smiling)* What's happenin'?

BLACKOUT

Lala's Opening

(Roving follow spots. A timpani drum roll. As we hear the voice of the ANNOUNCER, outrageously glamorous images of LALA are projected onto the museum walls.)

VOICE OF ANNOUNCER: From Rome to Rangoon! Paris to Prague! We are pleased to present the American debut of the one! The only! The breathtaking! The astounding! The stupendous! The incredible! The magnificent! Lala Lamazing Grace!

(Thunderous applause as LALA struts on, the definitive black diva. She has long, flowing hair, an outrageous lamé dress, and an affected French accent which she loses when she's upset.)

LALA:

EVERYBODY LOVES LALA
EVERYBODY LOVES ME
PARIS! BELIN! LONDON! ROME!
NO MATTER WHERE I GO
I ALWAYS FEEL AT HOME

OHHHH

EVERYBODY LOVES LALA
EVERYBODY LOVES ME
I'M TRES MAGNIFIQUE
AND OH SO UNIQUE
AND WHEN IT COMES TO GLAMOUR
I'M CHIC-ER THAN CHIC

(She giggles.)

THAT'S WHY EVERYBODY
EVERYBODY
EVERYBODY-EVERYBODY-EVERYBODY
LOVES ME

(She begins to vocally reach for higher and higher notes, until she has to point to her final note. She ends

the number with a grand flourish and bows to thunderous applause.)

LALA: Yes, it's me! Lala Lamazing Grace and I have come home. Home to the home I never knew as home. Home to you, my people, my blood, my guts.

My story is a simple one, full of fire, passion, magic. You may ask how did I, a humble girl from the backwoods of Mississippi, come to be the ninth wonder of the modern world. Well, I can't take all of the credit. Part of it goes to him. *(She points toward the heavens.)*

No, not the light man, darling, but God. For, you see, Lala is a star. A very big star. Let us not mince words, I'm a fucking meteorite. *(She laughs.)* But He is the universe and just like my sister, Aretha la Franklin, Lala's roots are in the black church. *(She sings in a showy gospel style:)*

THAT'S WHY EVERYBODY LOVES
SWING LOW SWEET CHARIOT
THAT'S WHY EVERYBODY LOVES
GO DOWN MOSES WAY DOWN IN EGYPT LAND
THAT'S WHY EVERYBODY EVERYBODY LOVES
ME!!!

(Once again she points to her final note and then basks in applause.)

I love that note. I just can't hit it.

Now, before I dazzle you with more of my limitless talent, tell me something, America. *(Musical underscoring)* Why has it taken you so long to recognize my artistry? Mother France opened her loving arms and Lala came running. All over the world Lala was embraced. But here, ha! You spat at Lala. Was I too exotic? Too much woman, or what?

Diana Ross you embrace. A two-bit nobody from Detroit, of all places. Now, I'm not knocking la Ross.

She does the best she can with the little she has. (*She laughs.*) But the Paul la Robesons, the James la Baldwins, the Josephine la Baker's, who was my god-mother you know. The Lala Lamazing Grace's you kick out. You drive . . .

AWAY
I AM GOING AWAY
HOPING TO FIND A BETTER DAY
WHAT DO YOU SAY
HEY HEY
I AM GOING AWAY
AWAY

(LALA, caught up in the drama of the song, doesn't see ADMONIA, her maid, stick her head out from offstage.)

(Once she is sure LALA isn't looking, she wheels onto stage right FLO'RANCE, LALA's lover, who wears a white mask/blonde hair. He is gagged and tied to a chair. ADMONIA places him on stage and then quickly exits.)

LALA:
AU REVOIR—JE VAIS PARTIR MAINTENANT
JE VEUX DIRE MAINTENANT
AU REVOIR
AU REVOIR
AU REVOIR
AU REVOIR
A-MA-VIE

(On her last note, she see FLO'RANCE and, in total shock, crosses to him.)

LALA: Flo'rance, what the hell are you doing out here. looking like that. I haven't seen you for three days and you decide to show up now?

(He mumbles.)

I don't want to hear it!

(He mumbles.)

I said shut up!

(ADMONIA enters from stage right and has a letter opener on a silver tray.)

ADMONIA: Pst!

(LALA, embarrassed by the presence of ADMONIA on stage, smiles apologetically at the audience.)

LALA: Un momento.

(She then pulls ADMONIA to the side.)

LALA: Darling, have you lost your mind coming on-stage while I'm performing. And what have you done to Flo'rance? When I asked you to keep him tied up, I didn't mean to tie him up.

(ADMONIA gives her the letter opener.)

LALA: Why are you giving me this? I have no letters to open. I'm in the middle of my American debut. Admonia, take Flo'rance off this stage with you! Admonia!

(ADMONIA is gone. LALA turns to the audience and tries to make the best of it.)

LALA: That was Admonia, my slightly overweight black maid, and this is Flo'rance, my amour. I remember how we met, don't you Flo'rance. I was sitting in a café on the Left Bank, when I looked up and saw the most beautiful man staring down at me.

"Who are you," he asked. I told him my name . . . whatever my name was back then. And he said, "No, that cannot be your name. Your name should fly, like Lala." And the rest is la history.

Flo'rance molded me into the woman I am today. He is my Svengali, my reality, my all. And I thought I was all to him, until we came here to America, and he

fucked that bitch. Yeah, you fucked 'em all. Anything black and breathing. And all this time, I thought you loved me for being me. *(She holds the letter opener to his neck.)*

You may think you made me, but I'll have you know I was who I was, whoever that was, long before you made me what I am. So there! *(She stabs him and breaks into song.)*

OH, LOVE CAN DRIVE A WOMAN TO MADNESS
TO PAIN AND SADNESS

I KNOW
BELIEVE ME I KNOW
I KNOW
I KNOW

(LALA sees what she's done and is about to scream but catches herself and tries to play it off.)

LALA: Moving right along.

(ADMONIA enters with a telegram on a tray.)

ADMONIA: Pst.

LALA: *(Anxious/hostile)* What is it now?

(ADMONIA hands LALA a telegram.)

LALA: *(Excited)* Oh, la telegram from one of my fans and the concert isn't even over yet. Get me the letter opener. It's in Flo'rance.

(ADMONIA hands LALA the letter opener.)

LALA: Next I am going to do for you my immortal hit song, "The Girl Inside." But first we open the telegram. *(She quickly reads it and is outraged.)* What! Which pig in la audience wrote this trash? *(Reading)* "Dear Sadie, I'm so proud. The show's wonderful, but talk less and sing more. Love, Mama."

First off, no one calls me Sadie. Sadie died the day Lala was born. And secondly, my Mama's dead.

Anyone who knows anything about Lala Lamazing Grace knows that my mother and Josephine Baker were French patriots together. They infiltrated a carnival rumored to be the center of Nazi intelligence, disguised as Hottentot Siamese twins. You may laugh but it's true. Mama died a heroine. It's all in my autobiography, "Voilà Lala!" So whoever sent this telegram is a liar!

(ADMONIA promptly presents her with another telegram.)

LALA: This had better be an apology. *(To ADMONIA.)* Back up, darling. *(Reading)* "Dear Sadie, I'm not dead. P.S. Your child misses you." What? *(She squares off at the audience.)* Well, now, that does it! If you are my mother, which you are not. And this alleged child is my child, then that would mean I am a mother and I have never given birth. I don't know nothin' 'bout birthin' no babies! *(She laughs.)* Lala made a funny.

So whoever sent this, show me the child! Show me!

(ADMONIA offers another telegram.)

LALA: *(To ADMONIA)* You know you're gonna get fired! *(She reluctantly opens it.)* "The child is in the closet." What closet?

ADMONIA: Pst.

(ADMONIA pushes a button and the center wall unit revolves around to reveal a large black door. ADMONIA exits, taking FLO'RANCE with her, leaving LALA alone.)

LALA: *(Laughing)* I get it. It's a plot, isn't it. A nasty little CIA, FBI kind of plot. Well let me tell you mutha-fuckers one thing, there is nothing in that closet, real or manufactured, that will be a dimmer to the glimmer of Lamé the star. You may have gotten Billie and Bessie and a little piece of everyone else who's come along since, but you won't get Lala. My clothes are too fabulous! My hair is too long! My accent too french. That's why I came home to America. To prove you ain't got nothing on me!

(The music for her next song starts, but LALA is caught up in her tirade, and talks/screams over the music.)

My mother and Josephine Baker were French patriots together! I've had brunch with the Pope! I've dined with the Queen! Everywhere I go I cause riots! Hunny, I am a star! I have transcended pain! So there! *(Yelling)* Stop the music! Stop that goddamn music.

(The music stops. LALA slowly walks downstage and singles out someone in the audience.)

Darling, you're not looking at me. You're staring at that damn door. Did you pay to stare at some fucking door or be mesmerized by my talent?

(To the whole audience:)

Very well! I guess I am going to have to go to the closet door, fling it open, in order to dispell all the nasty little thoughts these nasty little telegrams have planted in your nasty little minds. *(Speaking directly to someone in the audience.)* Do you want me to open the closet door? Speak up, darling, this is live. *(Once she gets the person to say "yes.")* I will open the door, but before I do, let me tell you bastards one last thing. To hell with coming home and to hell with lies and insinuations!

(LALA goes into the closet and after a short pause comes running out, ready to scream, and slams the door. Traumatized to the point of no return, she tells the following story as if it were a jazz solo of rushing, shifting emotions.)

LALA: I must tell you this dream I had last night. Simply magnifique. In this dream, I'm running naked in Sammy Davis Junior's hair. *(Crazed laughter)*

Yes! I'm caught in this larger than life, deep, dark forest of savage, nappy-nappy hair. The kinky-kinks are choking me, wrapped around my naked arms,

thighs, breast, face. I can't breath. And there was nothing in that closet!

And I'm thinking if only I had a machete, I could cut away the kinks. Remove once and for all the roughness. But then I look up and it's coming toward me. Flowing like lava. It's pomade! Ohhh, Sammy!

Yes, cakes and cakes of pomade. Making everything nice and white and smooth and shiny, like my black/white/black/white/black behiney.

Mama no!

And then spikes start cutting through the pomade. Combing the coated kink. Cutting through the kink, into me. There are bloodlines on my back. On my thighs.

It's all over. All over . . . all over me. All over for me.

(LALA accidentally pulls off her wig to reveal her real hair. Stripped of her "disguise" she recoils like a scared little girl and sings.)

MOMMY AND DADDY
MEET AND MATE
THE CHILD THAT'S BORN
IS TORN WITH LOVE AND WITH HATE
SHE RUNS AWAY TO FIND HER OWN
AND TRIES TO DENY
WHAT SHE'S ALWAYS KNOWN
THE GIRL INSIDE

(The closet door opens. LALA runs away, and a LITTLE BLACK GIRL emerges from the closet. Standing behind her is ADMONIA.)

(The LITTLE GIRL and LALA are in two isolated pools of light, and mirror each other's moves until LALA reaches past her reflection and the LITTLE GIRL comes to LALA and they hug. ADMONIA then joins them as LALA sings. Music underscored.)

LALA:
 WHAT'S LEFT IS THE GIRL INSIDE
 THE GIRL WHO DIED
 SO A NEW GIRL COULD BE BORN

SLOW FADE TO BLACK

Permutations

(Lights up on NORMAL JEAN REYNOLDS. She is very Southern/country and very young. She wears a simple faded print dress and her hair, slightly mussed, is in plaits. She sits, her dress covering a large oval object.)

NORMAL: My mama used to say, God made the exceptional, then God made the special and when God got bored, he made me. 'Course she don't say too much of nuthin' no more, not since I lay me this egg.

(She lifts her dress to uncover a large, white egg laying between her legs.)

Ya see it all got started when I had me sexual relations with the garbage man. Ooowee, did he smell.

No, not bad. No! He smelled of all the good things folks never shoulda thrown away. His sweat was like cantaloupe juice. His neck was like a ripe-red strawberry. And the water that fell from his eyes was like a deep, dark, juicy-juicy grape. I tell ya, it was like fuckin' a fruit salad, only I didn't spit out the seeds. I kept them here, deep inside. And three days later, my belly commence to swell, real big like.

Well my mama locked me off in some dark room, refusin' to let me see light of day 'cause, "What would the neighbors think." At first I cried a lot, but then I grew used to livin' my days in the dark, and my nights in the dark. . . . *(She hums.)* And then it wasn't but a week or so later, my mama off at church, that I got this hurtin' feelin' down here. Worse than anything I'd ever known. And then I started bleedin', real bad. I mean there was blood everywhere. And the pain had me howlin' like a near-dead dog. I tell ya, I was yellin' so loud, I couldn't even hear myself. Nooooooooo! Noooooooo! Carrying on something like that.

And I guess it was just too much for the body to take, 'cause the next thing I remember . . . is me coming to and there's this big white egg layin' 'tween my legs. First I thought somebody musta put it there as some kind of joke. But then I noticed that all 'round this egg were thin lines of blood that I could trace to back between my legs.

(Laughing) Well, when my mama come home from church she just about died. "Normal Jean, what's that thing 'tween your legs? Normal Jean, you answer me, girl!" It's-not a thing, Mama. It's an egg. And I laid it.

She tried separatin' me from it, but I wasn't havin' it. I stayed in that dark room, huggin', holdin' onto it.

And then I heard it. It wasn't anything that coulda been heard 'round the world, or even in the next room. It was kinda like layin' back in the bath tub, ya know, the water just coverin' your ears . . . and if you lay real still and listen real close, you can hear the sound of your heart movin' the water. You ever done that? Well that's what it sounded like. A heart movin' water. And it was happenin' inside here.

Why, I'm the only person I know who ever lay themselves an egg before so that makes me special. You hear that, Mama? I'm special and so's my egg! And special things supposed to be treated like they matter. That's why every night I count to it, so it knows nuthin' never really ends. And I sing it every song I know so that when it comes out, it's full of all kinds of feelings. And I tell it secrets and laugh with it and . . .

(She suddenly stops and puts her ear to the egg and listens intently.)

Oh! I don't believe it! I thought I heard . . . yes! *(Excited)* Can you hear it? Instead of one heart, there's two. Two little hearts just pattering away. Boom-boom-boom. Boom-boom-boom. Talkin to each other like old friends. Racin' toward the beginnin' of their lives.

(Listening) Oh, no, now there's three . . . four . . . five, six. More hearts than I can count. And they're all alive, beatin' out life inside my egg.

(We begin to hear the heartbeats, drums, alive inside NORMAL's egg.)

Any day now, this egg is gonna crack open and what's gonna come out a be the likes of which nobody has ever seen. My babies! And their skin is gonna turn all kinds of shades in the sun and their hair a be growin' every which-a-way. And it won't matter and they won't care 'cause they know they are so rare and so special 'cause it's not everyday a bunch of babies break outta a white egg and start to live.

And nobody better not try and hurt my babies 'cause if they do, they gonna have to deal with me.

Yes, any day now, this shell's gonna crack and my babies are gonna fly. Fly! Fly!

(She laughs at the thought, but then stops and says the word as if it's the most natural thing in the world.)

Fly.

BLACKOUT

The Party

(Before we know what's hit us, a hurricane of energy comes bounding into the space. It is TOPSY WASHINGTON. Her hair and dress are a series of stylistic contradictions which are hip, black, and unencumbered.)

(Music, spiritual and funky, underscores.)

TOPSY: *(Dancing about.)* Yoho! Party! Party! Turn up the music! Turn up the music!

Have yaw ever been to a party where there was one fool in the middle of the room, dancing harder and yelling louder than everybody in the entire place? Well, hunny, that fool was me!

Yes, child! The name is Topsy Washington and I love to party. As a matter of fact, when God created the world, on the seventh day, he didn't rest. No child, he P-A-R-T-I-E-D. Partied!

But now let me tell you 'bout this function I went to the other night, way uptown. And baby when I say way uptown, I mean way-way-way-way-way-way-way-way uptown. Somewhere's between 125th Street and infinity.

Inside was the largest gathering of black/Negro/colored Americans you'd ever want to see. Over in one corner you got Nat Turner sippin' champagne out of Eartha Kitt's slipper. And over in another corner, Bert Williams and Malcom X was discussing existentialism as it relates to the shuffle-ball-change. Girl, Aunt Jemima and Angela Davis was in the kitchen sharing a plate of greens and just goin' off about South Africa.

And then Fats sat down and started to work them eighty-eights. And then Stevie joined in. And then

Miles and Duke and Ella and Jimi and Charlie and Sly and Lightin' and Count and Louie!

And then everybody joined in. I tell you all the children was just all up in there, dancing to the rhythm of one beat. Dancing to the rhythm of their own definition. Celebrating in their cultural madness.

And then the floor started to shake. And the walls started to move. And before anybody knew what was happening, the entire room lifted up off the ground. The whole place just took off and went flying through space—defying logic and limitations. Just a spinning and a spinning and a spinning until it disappeared inside of my head.

(TOPSY stops dancing and regains her balance and begins to listen to the music in her head. Slowly we begin to hear it, too.)

That's right, girl, there's a party goin' on inside of here. That's why when I walk down the street my hips just sashay all over the place. 'Cause I'm dancing to the music of the madness in me.

And whereas I used to jump into a rage anytime anybody tried to deny who I was, now all I got to do is give attitude, quicker than light, and then go on about the business of being me. 'Cause I'm dancing to the music of the madness in me.

(As TOPSY continues to speak, MISS ROJ, LALA, MISS PAT, and THE MAN from SYMBIOSIS revolve on, frozen like soft sculptures.)

TOPSY: And here, all this time I been thinking we gave up our drums. But, naw, we still got 'em. I know I got mine. They're here, in my speech, my walk, my hair, my God, my style, my smile, and my eyes. And everything I need to get over in this world, is inside here, connecting me to everybody and everything that's ever been.

So, hunny, don't waste your time trying to label or define me.

(The sculptures slowly begin to come to "life" and they mirror/echo TOPSY's words.)

TOPSY/EVERYBODY: . . . 'cause I'm not what I was ten years ago or ten minutes ago. I'm all of that and then some. And whereas I can't live inside yesterday's pain, I can't live without it.

(All of a sudden, madness erupts on the stage. The sculptures begin to speak all at once. Images of black/Negro/colored Americans begin to flash—images of them dancing past the madness, caught up in the madness, being lynched, rioting, partying, surviving. Mixed in with these images are all the characters from the exhibits. Through all of this TOPSY sings. It is a vocal and visual cacaphony which builds and builds.)

LALA:

I must tell you about this dream I had last night. Simply magnifique. In this dream I'm running naked in Sammy Davis Junior's hair. Yes. I'm caught, in this larger-than-life, deep, dark tangled forest of savage, nappy-nappy hair. Yes, the kinky kinks are choking me, are wrapped around my naked arms, my naked thighs, breast, and face, and I can't breath and there was nothing in that closet.

THE MAN:

I have no history. I have no past. I can't. It's too much. It's much too much. I must be able to smile on cue and watch the news with an impersonal eye. I have no stake in the madness.

MISS ROJ:

Snap for every time you walk past someone lying in the street smelling like frozen piss and shit and you don't see it. Snap for every crazed bastard who kills himself so as to get the jump on being killed. And snap for every sick mutha-fucker who, bored with carrying about his fear, takes to shooting up other people.

MISS PAT:

Stop playing those drums. I said stop playing those damn drums. You can't stop history. You can't stop time. Those drums will be confiscated once we reach Savannah, so give

Being black is too emotionally taxing, therefore I will be black only on weekends and holidays. them up now. Repeat after me: I don't hear any drums and I will not rebel. I will not rebel!

TOPSY: *(Singing)*

THERE'S MADNESS IN ME
AND THAT MADNESS SETS ME FREE
THERE'S MADNESS IN ME
AND THAT MADNESS SETS ME FREE
THERE'S MADNESS IN ME
AND THAT MADNESS SETS ME FREE
THERE'S MADNESS IN ME
AND THAT MADNESS SETS ME FREE
THERE'S MADNESS IN ME
AND THAT MADNESS SETS ME FREE

TOPSY: My power is in my . . .

EVERYBODY: *Madness!*

TOPSY: And my colored contradictions.

(The sculptures freeze with a smile on their faces as we hear the voice of MISS PAT.)

VOICE OF MISS PAT: Before exiting, check the overhead as any baggage you don't claim, we trash.

BLACKOUT