

Turning of The Bones

Cashmere is an aging black man who works for the Lowenberg family in New Orleans in the 1950's. He is a proud man and often proclaims his heritage: "My mother was from Madagascar." Hubert Lowenberg is the Jewish patriarch of a Catholic family. He is in his 70s and a stroke has left him in a wheelchair. Adelia and Berta are Hubert's daughters and the story is told by granddaughter, Kate.

A poignant, insightful look into the lives, ambitions, emotions and longings of those players on life's stage as remembered in Kate's memory.

While not a musical, there are musical "numbers" that punctuate the action of the play. CD of the songs is available.

2M, 5F

2 Children (5-10) optional

Turning of The Bones

written by
Jan Villarrubia

music and lyrics by
Audrey Villarrubia

Great Stage Publishing

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a play with music in one act

by

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Cast of Characters

CASHMERE PETITJEAN

He is old, black and employed by the Lowenberg family. In some scenes, he is as young as eight. He is Catholic and speaks with a French Louisiana accent. More about CASHMERE later.

KATE

A middle class white woman in her late 40s, she acts as narrator and active participant.

HUBERT LOWENBERG

KATE'S grandfather and the Jewish patriarch of a Catholic family, he is in his 70s. A stroke years ago left him paralyzed on the left side. He used a wheelchair.

ADELIA

KATE'S mother and HUBERT'S daughter, she is in her late 20s and is hugely pregnant.

BERTA

HUBERT'S older daughter, she is in her 30s.

CASHMERE'S MOTHER

A Malagasy woman in full maturity, she has long, black, luxuriant hair. She is also a Louisiana slave.

HENNA WEIL

A frequent visitor to the family, she is Jewish and in her 80s.

CASHMERE'S GIRLFRIEND

An African-American woman played by the same actor as CASHMERE'S MOTHER.

ROSE

CASHMERE'S SISTER, played by the same actor as CASHMERE'S MOTHER.

LITTLE KATE (Optional)

The narrator as a child. Can be anywhere from 5 to 10.

BRENDA JOYCE (Optional)

CASHMERE'S grandchild, 7.

The Form, Time and Setting of the Play

The action takes place in the mind of KATE, the narrator. Part memory – which can be clear or faulty – and part imagination, much of what we see in KATE'S mind, happens in nineteen fifties New Orleans in a large, airy house built in 1908. Yet, pictures from KATE'S mind can span a century and a half and can be as far away as Madagascar. Scenes and fragments are short and move quickly from place to place and from one

reality to the next, melting into each other, resulting in a continuous stream of action. It might be best to have a bare stage, with a sofa/tub, simple table and a few chairs and leave lots to the creativity of the director and cast and the imagination of the audience.

The Character of CASHMERE

There are numerous aspects to CASHMERE, and his character constantly changes throughout the play. These changes should be made abruptly, as if the actor is suddenly playing a completely different role. And, in effect, he is. There is the *nurturing* CASHMERE, engaged with the white child or his own granddaughter and the *complaisant* CASHMERE who works for the white folks. There is the *distinguished, proud* CASHMERE when giving factual history about his ancestry; the *defiant* CASHMERE when gossiping about the white family he works for and commenting on life in the nineteen fifties; the *Malagasy* CASHMERE, a little boy; the *wise spirit* of CASHMERE; etc.

LITTLE KATE and BRENDA JOYCE

It was originally intended for the children to be imaginary. In a script-in-hand reading with actors, the play worked well with imaginary children. When the play was first produced in New Orleans, an experienced, white child actor was available to portray LITTLE KATE, so speeches were written for her. The BRENDA JOYCE character was performed by an African-American child actor who was given lines. The play has been written in a way that the LITTLE KATE and BRENDA JOYCE roles can be eliminated if the choice is not to have children in the production. It is vital to have either two children, one African-American and one white, or no children at all.

Original Musical Numbers

Tuning a Ukulele	ADELIA
HOUND DOG MOMMA	ADELIA
IT'S RAINING OUTSIDE	ADELIA (and LITTLE KATE)
HE'S NOTIN' BUT A DRUNKARD	ADELIA
SANATARY AND CLEAN	Everyone but CASHMERE
CHICKEN PICKIN' POPPA	ADELIA
LUCKY (Optional, and perhaps only an instrumental throughout the play)	

CD OF SONGS ACCOMPANIES SCRIPT

AT RISE:

KATE, the narrator, white, and in her late 40s is trying to concentrate on a book, but CASHMERE, black and in his 80s, keeps bugging her -- things like looking real close in her face, slightly pulling her hair, knocking off her shoe with his foot. KATE tries to ignore him, even moving from one place to another, but he follows closely behind her. She sighs, continues to try to concentrate, finally gives up and watches CASHMERE walk over to a kitchen table. LITTLE KATE, who may be an imaginary character, is seated at the table. She is white, anywhere from 5 to 10. .

CASHMERE

Eat your red beans, Miss Kate.

LITTLE KATE

It's too hot.

CASHMERE

Make a pie. Go 'head, now. Make them red beans and rice flat like a pan cake. That's it. Then you divide the pie in half -- use your fork.

KATE

(To audience)

Cashmere Petitjean spoke with a thick French Southeast Louisiana accent. He was dark brown, like the chicory coffee he constantly drank, and had blue white hair clipped close to his head. His uniform was a soiled, white butcher's apron that almost reached down to his shoes. It encased his tiny, bird-like body. His eyes, too, were blue, but clouded. I know now they were cataracts.

CASHMERE

Look. See? You got two halves. All right now. Cut those in half, then you got four. Count 'em.

LITTLE KATE

One. Two. Three. Four.

CASHMERE

That's it. Taste it now. Them red beans is cool enough to eat. It works every time.

(Coughs)

KATE

That cough! He had that little cough. And, always, a cigarette butt dangled from his lips, and his breath had the slight smell of wine. Even so, there was a certain dignity about him. He'd say . . .

CASHMERE

(To audience, proudly)

My mother was from Madagascar.

KATE

Last week, I saw Cashmere's eyes in a magazine. But they were bloodshot and glaring defiantly back into mine. They were the eyes of an *Antandroy* tribesman from Madagascar, and he was holding the largest egg I had ever seen. Since then, I've been overwhelmed with thoughts and memories of Cashmere. I don't even know where he's buried. He had lived in the house with us, in a small dark room in the basement. I was little then, so recollections are hazy and incomplete. Everything about Cashmere and his relationship to me and my family are fragmented inside my head. With time, memories disassemble, become impressions, assumptions, exaggerations. And sometimes a memory will be interrupted with Cashmere's ghost suddenly talking back to me. What I think I remember may be completely wrong. People become illusions. Now you see them...

CASHMERE

...now you don't.

(KATE exits.)

CASHMERE

You know how red beans got red? No? Lemme tell you. Long ago red beans was the color of clear glass. Take a bite, Miss Kate. Other beans was white, they had purple, black, orange, every color. Lady come along with her bucket, picked all the other beans, but couldn't see the glass color beans 'cause they was see-through. They wee little voices called, "Pick me! Pick me!" But it just sounded to the lady like something humming. Take another bite, Miss Kate. Well, those glass color beans decided they wanted to be a real color so they could get picked, too. They was no other beans red. So that's the color.

(LITTLE KATE begins choking.)

CASHMERE

Uh-oh! Little piece caught? Look up, Miss Kate! Bird! Bird! Bird! Bird! Bird! Look the bird way up there flying around. Yellow like the sun. See him? Do like this with your eyes. See him now? There you go. Little piece of ham went down all right?

(LITTLE KATE nods.)

Take yourself a breath, chere. Drink a little sip of milk, Miss Kate.

(HUBERT LOWENBERG, the Jewish grandfather, rolls in quickly in his wheelchair. He is in his 70s.)

HUBERT

Violet! Violet! God Dammit! Violet! I want my coffee! Cashmere! Cashmere!

CASHMERE

Right here, Mr. Lowenberg.

HUBERT

I want my damn coffee.

CASHMERE

Here your coffee, Mr. Lowenberg.

LITTLE KATE

Cashmere...

HUBERT

Where's Violet?

LITTLE KATE

How did black-eyed peas...

CASHMERE

Hush a minute, Miss Kate. I gotta see to your grandpa. Miz Lowenberg in the bathroom, sir. She don't hear you. She need to be in the bathroom a few minutes. Is that enough sugar?

HUBERT

Yeah.

CASHMERE

Here. Smoke a cigarette. Calm your nerves down. What you want, Miss Kate. Another story? Eat your beans.

HUBERT

Wait a minute.

CASHMERE

Yessir?

HUBERT

Don't leave. Here, take a cigarette.

CASHMERE

I got this one.

HUBERT

Take a fresh one, Cashmere. Sit with me a little while.

CASHMERE

Thank you, sir.

(LITTLE KATE tugs on CASHMERE, scratches her leg.)

CASHMERE

Just a minute, Miss Kate.

HUBERT

What you scratching, Kate? What's she got on her? Check her.

CASHMERE

Just a 'skeeta bite.

HUBERT

Chicken pox going around.

(LITTLE KATE starts laughing.)

CASHMERE

She don't have no chicken pox.

LITTLE KATE

We don't have chickens, Grandpa!

HUBERT

New lady moved in on the corner. She has long red hair. I saw her this morning walking her dog. Ugly dog.

CASHMERE

You want me to roll you out on the gallery?

HUBERT

It's too cold.

CASHMERE

I put a blanket on your legs.

HUBERT

Yeah, okay. And, tell Violet to come out when she's finished. I wanna talk to her.

CASHMERE

Yessir.

HUBERT

Tell her I changed my mind about the bathroom wallpaper.

CASHMERE

You don't like the canary bird paper?

HUBERT

No. I want the black with pink flamingos.

CASHMERE

Come on, Kate.

HUBERT

(To LITTLE KATE)

You want a ride?

LITTLE KATE

Push us fast, Cashmere!

HUBERT

(To CASHMERE)

Put her on my lap so she don't fall.

CASHMERE

Stop wiggling, Miss Kate. You know them little bitta fleas that bite you 'round the feet? Well they used to be big as cows long time ago. Lemme tell you what happened.

(CASHMERE exits with HUBERT, and LITTLE KATE. KATE enters.)

KATE

I only remember Grandpa in the wheelchair. His ring would clink against the wheel, right foot shuffling along the floor, guiding him straight so he wouldn't go 'round in circles. His walking days were brown, blurry pictures with dogs and wagons. My grandmother Violet said he was short, but tough, and killed two Germans in World War I. He was a German Jew. He had owned a grocery store during the depression and went bankrupt giving food away to old nuns. My grandmother, the Catholic, was the one with good business sense. "I thought I wanted a caveman," she used to tell me. They slept in different rooms. His smelled bitter, had a white piss can, and stacks of Playboys.

(CASHMERE enters into his own room in the basement.)

CASHMERE

Damp down in here. Lemme get that heater lit.

(A flame magically appears from his forefinger.)

He lights the heater.)

KATE

Cashmere's room was always neat and clean, but like a trickster's 'cause you never knew what to expect. A fine, beautiful chair . . . with no seat. An exquisite tray with a set of shiny, clean glasses, and when you'd lift the tray, the rim came up and the glasses stayed down. A drawer full of white, starched handkerchiefs -- all with the letter "F" or "H" for Frank, my father, or Hubert, my grandfather. And a drawer full of cigarette butts. Thursdays, his day off, my mother and grandmother would go down into his room and steal back everything he had stolen the week before. He especially liked our fancy baby dolls. Grandma said he probably gave them to his girlfriends.

(Enter CASHMERE'S GIRLFRIEND, a black lady in red)

CASHMERE

Hey, Miss Red!

CASHMERE'S GIRLFRIEND

Hey, Cashmere!

CASHMERE

Don't you look some fine in that hot color!

CASHMERE'S GIRLFRIEND

Hot color for my hot baby.

CASHMERE

Gimme some brown sugar, chere. Ooooo! Don't do me that now, you devil woman.

CASHMERE'S GIRLFRIEND

You got something for me, Cashmere?

CASHMERE

Do I got something for you, Baby? You know I do!

CASHMERE'S GIRLFRIEND

That's not what I mean. Something pretty. Something expensive.

CASHMERE

Come here, Sugar!

CASHMERE'S GIRLFRIEND

Stop it! Gimme my present, Cashmere!

CASHMERE

You gonna have to find it.

CASHMERE'S GIRLFRIEND

Where?

CASHMERE

You have to look.

CASHMERE'S GIRLFRIEND

Where is it?

CASHMERE

I'm not telling.

CASHMERE'S GIRLFRIEND

Give me a hint, Cashmere. Pleeeeease.

CASHMERE

Put your hand in my pants pocket here.

(She does. An endless handkerchief keeps pulling out, like the *Banana Man's* in the nineteen fifties.)

CASHMERE'S GIRLFRIEND

It's a trick handkerchief! You tricked me, Cashmere.

CASHMERE

Wait a minute, chere!

CASHMERE'S GIRLFRIEND

I'm leaving. I'm mad . . .

CASHMERE

(Presenting a frilly baby doll)

A pretty baby for my Baby!

CASHMERE'S GIRLFRIEND

Oh! She's so fancy! Cashmere, you picked this out yourself?

CASHMERE

You like it?

CASHMERE'S GIRLFRIEND

I'll show you how much I like it.

CASHMERE

Ooooooo, Baby.

(They kiss.)

CASHMERE'S GIRLFRIEND

Ummmmmm, Cashmere.

CASHMERE

Kate, you never saw anything like this.

(CASHMERE and GIRLFRIEND exit.)

KATE

We never once saw anything remotely like that. We never even saw any girlfriends. I was just trying to imagine...

(ADELIA enters singing and tuning a ukulele while tapping out a rhythm on the floor with her talented feet. In her late 20s, she is huge with child.)

ADELIA

(Singing and tuning)

My dog has fleas . . . My dog . . . My dog . . . My dog has fleas . . . has fleas . . . fleas . . .
My dog has fleas . . . My dog has fleas.

(Calling)

Cashmere!

(Singing HOUND DOG MOMMA)

One night I started drinking,
And they hauled me off to jail.
I fell under a spell,
For in the next cell
Was a woman with a ponytail.
She was a . . .

(Calling)

Cashmere!

(Singing HOUND DOG MOMMA)

Hound dog momma with a gray-haired ponytail,
A hound dog momma with a gray-haired pony tail.
She's old, but she's nice.
She's old, but she's paradise.
She's a hound dog momma with a gray-haired ponytail.

Now when the hound dog music plays,
You're in for a surprise.
One foot goes east and the other goes west,

ADELIA (Continued)

And so do both her eyes.
 She's not a chick, she's a hen.
 She's got a cool gone way with men.
 Oh a fella dies
 When her gray hair flies,
 Now let's begin again.

Hound dog momma with a gray-haired ponytail,
 A hound dog momma with a gray-haired pony tail.
 She's old, but she's nice.
 She's old, but she's paradise.
 She's a hound dog momma with a gray-haired ponytail.
 When the hound dog music plays,
 You feel so short of breath.
 There Momma goes
 Rippin' off her clothes,
 She could dance herself to death.
 She's a wrinkled, knock-kneed dream,
 And when she smiles at me, I beam.
 She's mine, all mine.
 She's sublime, divine.
 Now join me while I scream,

(Calling loudly)

CASHMERE! KATE CAN'T FIND HER NEW BABY DOLL! HAVE YOU SEEN IT?

(Singing HOUND DOG MOMMA)

Hound dog momma with a gray-haired ponytail,
 Join in!
 A hound dog momma with a gray-haired pony tail.
 She's old, but she's nice.
 She's old, but she's paradise.
 She's a hound dog momma with a gray-haired ponytail.

(Goes to an imaginary washing machine)

Those diapers should be finished washing by now.

KATE

That was my mother. She composed songs on the ukulele and tapped out little rhythms on the floor with her feet as she walked around the house. She'd put us all in the bathtub and sit on top the toilet seat cover playing her ukulele and watching us so we wouldn't drown each other. She taught us multiple harmonies, and then we'd sing for my father every night when he got home from work. Her lyrics were always about the farm or drinking too much. She'd never been to a farm and never touched alcohol. Once, one of Elvis Presley's agents listened to her songs in our living room. They asked her to write the sheet music and send it in. She never did. She couldn't read a note of music.

ADELIA

What is this? Cashmere? It looks like red beans and rice. CASHMERE?

(CASHMERE enters.)

CASHMERE

Coming. Co . . . coming, Miss Adelia. Miss Deelie . . . Deelie-do.

ADELIA

What is this?

CASHMERE

Red beans and rice...and diapers.

ADELIA

You're drunk again!

KATE

She didn't talk to him like that. Cashmere, I'm telling this...

ADELIA

You can hardly walk! Look at you! You have no pride whatsoever!
(ADELIA freezes.)

KATE

No way.

CASHMERE

(To audience, proudly, perfectly)

My mother was from Madagascar. Very beautiful, with long black hair.
(He freezes.)

KATE

He couldn't read or write. My grandmother picked out a birthday for him and filled out the forms, so he could get social security. How could he ever have known about Madagascar? Madagascar! Not Africa, mind you. There must have been some truth to this.

(Light fades on that scene and comes up on another. We are in Madagascar. A beautiful black woman with extraordinarily long, black, lush hair is seated on the ground, cooking, humming. She is CASHMERE's MOTHER. CASHMERE walks into this scene and becomes a Malagasy child, at home with this woman and place.)

CASHMERE'S MOTHER

Have you finished feeding the chickens, Cashmere?

CASHMERE

Yes, Maman.

CASHMERE'S MOTHER

I am cooking your favorite, mon petit. Rice and beans. You are a man now, Cashmere, you must aid your father. Tomorrow, you must go with him, help lead the *zebu* over the River of Deep Holes and to the market. We will get many good things for this *zebu*.

CASHMERE

Yes, Maman. Maman? Please tell me again about the egg which is big as the cooking pot.

CASHMERE'S MOTHER

You know old, blind Lalao who lives at the edge of the village? The grandson of her cousin's wife's neighbor's aunt found an egg not ten years ago buried in the sand. It was big enough to hold three pots full of water. White as the moon.

CASHMERE

Tell me about the time of the *Vazimba*.

CASHMERE'S MOTHER

During the time of the *Vazimba*, when Madagascar was a part of *Gondwana*, the elephant bird was as plentiful as rice.

CASHMERE

And it stood, taller than two men.

CASHMERE'S MOTHER

Old Lalao's great, great, great, great, great grandfather's great, great grandmother told stories about this elephant bird that could not fly. Sometimes it appeared in the South during rainy season. It stood taller than two men, one on top the other, and had legs thick as baobabs. It was gray as the rain and cried like a cat in heat. Stir this for me, mon petit.

CASHMERE

Yes, Maman.

(A sober adult)

Kate, I was born in Louisiana.

KATE

My fantasy, not his.

CASHMERE

The "Noble Savage" idea went out with yesterday's garbage.

KATE

They believe Madagascar was once a part of Africa and just broke off and floated away. The island remained isolated for hundreds of thousands of years. Flora and fauna evolved in strange ways. Trees are green plumes, chameleons two feet long. And the people . . . 18 different tribes. The names of the tribes, when translated, are beautiful.

(Reading from a book)

Dwellers in Long Valleys, The People Who do Not Cut Their Hair, The Numberless Invincibles . . .

(Light fades from the scene in Madagascar, CASHMERE'S MOTHER exits, and CASHMERE is pulled back into the reality with ADELIA. Lights come up.)

ADELIA

You smell like you bathed in alcohol! Don't tell me you're not drunk!

KATE

That's totally out of character! My mother wouldn't...

(To Cashmere)

You know my mother never would have confronted you like that!

CASHMERE

(Intoxicated, laughing)

Red beans and rice. A lotta lotta red beans and rices (sic) all around and up and down.

ADELIA

How did this happen?

CASHMERE

My some . . . supper time.

ADELIA

You put a plate of red beans and rice in the washing machine?

CASHMERE

Air tight, Miss Diddie-doo. No roaches, no antses (sic), nothing . . . nothing can get down in there.

ADELIA

(Laughing hard)

Well that was really smart! But, what a mess! Help me with this, Cashmere.

CASHMERE

I didn't know. I didn't, Miss Doodlebug. H . . . How did I know you was gonna put . . . put that wash in there?

ADELIA

Cashmere?

CASHMERE

Yes'mmmmmmmmmmm?

ADELIA

Do you know where Kate's new baby doll is? She can't find it.

CASHMERE

No'm. No'm. No'm. I . . . I didn't see no baby doll.

(Under the following dialogue, ADELIA,
exits, patting the floor with her feet.)

KATE

Mama paid Cashmere an extra dollar a week to sit with us, so she could have her own meals in peace.

CASHMERE

(To audience, suddenly sober, flippantly)

And Miss Adelia, her. Skinny little thing with her big belly poking out on top her two little toothpick legs. Always pregnant seemed like. All those little pale mouthed babies pulling at her.

KATE

What are you talking about? There were only three of us. Three sisters.

CASHMERE

Cut to the chase, Kate. This is about you and your family, not me.

KATE

You were part of the family. We were all in this together.

CASHMERE

That's your conscience whispering.

KATE

What's that supposed to mean?

(CASHMERE exits. Enter BERTA, a woman
in her early 30s. She wears red, silk, Chinese
pajamas, and holds an ice cap on her head)

BERTA

GIZZIE! Ooo!

(Touches her head, calls more softly)

Gizzie! Cashmere!

KATE

That was my Aunt Berta. Gizmo was her miniature Dachshund. He was overweight, born without a tail and had two shiny bald spots on his back where her boyfriend's mother had accidentally dropped bacon grease.

BERTA

Gizmo? Gizzie! Here, Roach Killer!

KATE

He'd tear cockroaches apart, limb by limb, wing by wing.

BERTA

Roach Killer! Gizzie? Oh, God, this head. Cashmere!? Gizmo! Come! Giz...

(Listens)

I hear him! He got out! Cashmere! Cashmere! Oh, God, I need a coke and a Stanback Powder.

KATE

He was a disgusting little dog who would always get erections on the monkey grass.

BERTA

That kid let him out again! I'm afraid he'll get rolled over! Cashmere!

KATE

She loved us, but I guess we got on her nerves a lot. Aunt Berta divorced before I could remember and never had any children. She waited all her life for an annulment of her marriage from the Catholic Church. She had a special devotion to St. Jude, Patron Saint of Impossible Cases. Gizmo slept in her bed. He was Aunt Berta's life.

(CASHMERE enters.)

CASHMERE

The dog out, Miss Berta. He after a cat.

BERTA

Quick! Help me, Cashmere. My head's splitting. Get the hose! He'll come for the hose. Hurry! Oh, God, it's another migraine. I'm gonna throw up.

(Freezes)

KATE

Aunt Berta loved clothes and hats.

CASHMERE

(To audience)

This one here, she always wore red pajamas and never ate with the rest of the family.

KATE

That's because she had gourmet tastes.

CASHMERE

I'd cook good mashed potatoes and greens and ham and she'd come in, smell it like it was a week old mouse and then tell me to go get her one of them greasy pizza pies at Venetia's.

BERTA

Cashmere!

CASHMERE

Yes'm, Miss Berta?

BERTA

Here's two dollars. Run get me a cheese pizza from the corner.

CASHMERE

Yes'm, Miss Berta.

(BERTA exits.)

KATE

Aunt Berta was ahead of her time. This was in the nineteen fifties. She knew Governor...

CASHMERE

Only mostly them Italians knew about pizza pies back then. They didn't have no drive-through take out.

KATE

She knew Governor Earl K. Long. That was Huey's brother. Earl was in and out...

CASHMERE

Only thing you could take out was them hot tamales from a stand down the street. Some kind of mystery meat. I never ate that stuff. She did, though.

KATE

Anyway, Earl was in and out of the mental ward. And she used to tell us about Jimmie Davis, the singing governor. He composed *You Are My Sunshine*.

(She starts singing the song.)

CASHMERE

And Chinese she'd eat. That was about it and cokes cokes cokes.

(Enter BERTA, all dressed up)

BERTA

Deelie?

KATE

My sisters found her dead one morning.

CASHMERE

Something busted in her head.

KATE

She had a cerebral hemorrhage.

BERTA

Deelie?

CASHMERE

Didn't eat right.

(Enter ADELIA)

BERTA

The governor's inaugural ball is Saturday night. What do you think of this? Is it too Stella Dallas?

ADELIA

It's not Stella Dallas. Not really.

BERTA

What, then? Something's not right. I can see it on your face.

ADELIA

You look nice.

BERTA

Nice! Just *nice*? God, that's the kiss of death.

ADELIA

It's the bow. The bow's gotta go. It makes the whole outfit a little *cussy-maridee*.

(Pronunciation help: *cussy* rhymes with "pussy;"
ma rhymes with "fa" – like in do-re-mi-fa-so-
la-ti..., the rest of the word will flow naturally

as it's spelled.)

BERTA

Oh, God. I don't wanna look *cussy*! It's the bow, you think? Too much?

ADELIA

Definitely.

BERTA

How 'bout this bra? Too much padding?

ADELIA

No. It's okay.

BERTA

Just *okay*?

ADELIA

It's perfect. Your figure's beautiful. You'll be the prettiest one there. You always are.

BERTA

I know Bob will there. Deelie, he's a state senator! He's been so sweet to me.

(ADELIA exits.)

KATE

When she died, she got flowers from Governor McKeithan, two of our past governors and governors from three other southern states. She was 39.

CASHMERE

You see, this was the time we still had to keep our mouths shut. Even then, I wasn't too good at it, like the time...

BERTA

Cashmere, here's two dollars. Run go get me a cheese pizza at Venetia's.

CASHMERE

Now, Miss Berta. According to Webster's dictionary, "run" is defined "to go steadily by springing steps so that both feet leave the ground for an instant in each step." You see me dusting this table? You just gonna have to wait till I'm finished.

KATE

This never happened.

CASHMERE

Or, if you in that much of a hurry, go get your lazy self dressed and run your own white behind to Venetia's.

BERTA

What?

(Freezes)

KATE

She wasn't lazy! She was the Director of Commerce for the state of Louisiana. She was a mover and shaker. Even opened the first tourist office in New Orleans.

CASHMERE

She was a lazy white woman.

KATE

She had a lot of migraines.

CASHMERE

Lazy.

KATE

You didn't know her.

CASHMERE

Did you?

(Proudly, to audience)

My name is Cashmere Petitjean. My mother was from Madagascar, very beautiful with long black hair. I was born in a house in Napoleonville and grew up with eleven pecan trees on each side.

(To Berta)

Get your own damn pizza, lady.

KATE

(To audience)

He never talked like that.

BERTA

God. This head! It feels like hot mashed potatoes and gravy sloshing around.

(BERTA exits.)

KATE

(Reading)

Oh, here it is. *The Antandroy, The People of the Thorny Brambles.*

(To audience)

Well, *that* could certainly describe Cashmere.

KATE (Continued)

(Reading)

They were dark-skinned, primitive, attractive. Lived in the arid South...

(KATE exits.)

CASHMERE

(To audience)

You'd think that was enough nitwits for one home. But they had other crazy white people coming all the time being that the house was in New Orleans on the main street with all the funeral parlors. People always stopping. On they way to the wake or the grave, one or the other. All dressed up with they hat and gloves. Look like they was having themselves a wonderful time, just come from a party.

HENNA

(Yelling offstage)

Where the hell is everyone?

(HUBERT, ADELIA, and LITTLE KATE enter. They sit at a table, eating a meal. CASHMERE waits on them.)

HUBERT

Here comes the pig, and there goes my appetite.

(Pushes plate away)

ADELIA

Daddy, be nice.

HUBERT

She always comes just in time to eat.

HENNA

(Offstage)

Get this damn dog outa my way!

HUBERT

Why the hell do we still put up with this mean old hag? She's not even related.

ADELIA

She's a friend. She was your mother's best friend. We have to be nice to her.

HENNA

(Yelling, still offstage)

Where the hell....?!

ADELIA

We're back here, Henna! Kate-honey, eat a few more green peas, baby.

KATE

How many?

ADELIA

Just a few, Kate.

HUBERT

She's a pig.

ADELIA

Gramme would turn over in her grave if she heard the way you talked about her friend.

HUBERT

Pig.

(HENNA and KATE enter. HENNA is a huge, stout woman in her 80s and carries a cane. She is Jewish.)

KATE

This was Henna. Every month, when I'd go to confession before the first Friday, I'd tell the priest I was mean to an old lady -- two times, three -- however many visits we had that month. I was about 11 or 12 before I realized that it was SHE who was mean to ME, not the other way around. So, I stopped confessing that sin.

HENNA

Are you deaf? I've been honking for twenty minutes. I had to park under a tree. I better not see one leaf on my fine Cadillac car. I just paid a fellow to wash and wax it.

HUBERT

Get out of my house, you old hag.

ADELIA

Daddy! He didn't mean it.

HUBERT

The hell I didn't.

HENNA

Enough already. Where's Violet?

HUBERT

Not here.

ADELIA

She'll be home soon.

HENNA

I'll wait.

(Sits)

HUBERT

I didn't say you could sit your big *toches* down.

HENNA

Shut up, you old dim wit or I'll hit you with my cane!

HUBERT

Who you calling a dim wit?!

ADELIA

Henna, have something to eat.

HUBERT

We're finished. There's nothing left.

ADELIA

Cashmere, get Henna a plate of food and a napkin, please.

HENNA

Bring me a dish towel. A napkin isn't big enough.

HUBERT

Pig.

(Tries to eat a little more)

CASHMERE

Here your food, Miss Henna.

HENNA

Gimme that. I just came from the most pathetic little funeral I've ever seen.

ADELIA

Oh, I'm sorry. Who died?

HENNA

Sam Wise.

LITTLE KATE

Momma, I don't want this meat.

ADELIA

Kate-honey, don't interrupt our guest.

HENNA

One beat up limousine with a coupla cars trailing. They put him in a pine box, right in the ground. Rotten little funeral.

(To ADELIA)

You finished?

ADELIA

Yes.

HENNA

You sure? Are you nourishing that baby? Look all the food you left. You're too skinny.

(Giving something to ADELIA)

Here. Something for the new baby.

ADELIA

Oh! A little cross! How sweet! Thank you.

HENNA

Those are real diamonds.

HUBERT

Paste.

ADELIA

Daddy!

HENNA

Go put it in the vault.

ADELIA

So generous! I...I don't know what...

HUBERT

Paste.

HENNA

(To HUBERT)

A plague on you!

(HUBERT pushes his plate farther away.)

HENNA

(To ADELIA)

Gimme your plate.

(Scrapes the remains of food from ADELIA'S dish onto her own. Turns to LITTLE KATE)

You want any more?

LITTLE KATE

No. I don't like pink meat.

ADELIA

Kate-honey, give Henna your plate.

HENNA

(Scraping LITTLE KATE'S food into her plate)

Wasting all that food.

(Turns to HUBERT)

Gimme...

HUBERT

(Quickly grabbing his plate and eating the last little bit)

Nothing left.

HENNA

(Takes a bite of her food)

Damn food's cold. Warm it up, *nigger*.

(ADELIA, HUBERT and LITTLE KATE gasp, look horrified and freeze.)

KATE

And I was shocked, too. Even at that young age, I knew not to ever use that word.

CASHMERE

(To audience, proudly)

Among the members of the Lowenberg family, use of the term *nigger* was strictly forbidden. The children of the household were instructed to use the term *colored man* or *colored woman*, never *colored lady*. I'd have preferred *Malagasy-American*, but that would've flipped them out.

KATE

Yes. I remember that. Why not *colored lady*?

(CASHMERE takes the plate from HENNA.
BERTA enters.)

BERTA

What's for lunch?

CASHMERE, ADELIA, HUBERT,
HENNA and LITTLE KATE

Grits and Grillards.

BERTA

Eew.

(BERTA exits)

HENNA

When I die, you're gonna see something you never saw before. I'll really be somebody. I'm gonna be buried in Chicago in a suite of air-conditioned rooms!

HUBERT

Yeah. And you're still gonna stink.

ADELIA

Daddy!

HENNA

And you should talk, you old *mamzer*! You who lost your store and let a woman support you! You are the one who will stink!

ADELIA

Kate-honey. You may be excused.

LITTLE KATE

But, Momma...

HUBERT

You gonna stink like week-old vomit, you old cheapskate! Everyone knows about your hair in the gumbo trick!

ADELIA

Kate. Go 'head, now.

LITTLE KATE

I wanna stay and watch!

HUBERT

"Waiter, there's a hair in my soup! I demand another bowl!" You old tightwad. And at the fine Roosevelt Hotel you do this!

HENNA

You *Potz!*

HUBERT

You came from slime and you're still slime! You swindled your two husbands for every last copper cent! Week old vomit!

ADELIA

Come on, Kate, let's go play outside on the swing.

(ADELIA takes the hand of LITTLE KATE, and they exit hurriedly.)

HENNA

I'll kill your ass!

(HENNA tries to hit HUBERT with her cane. CASHMERE restrains her.)

CASHMERE

Miss Henna! No!

HUBERT

You're gonna stink like cat etcr sitting in the sun!!

HENNA

You! You! Pooh!

(HENNA spits on HUBERT.)

HUBERT

You filthy...

(HUBERT spits on HENNA.)

CASHMERE

Mr. Lowenberg! Miss Henna!

(They spit back and forth on each other a few times. HUBERT grabs HENNA's cane.)

HUBERT

Now I got you, you old stinking cat wtf!

(Rolls toward HENNA)

HENNA

I'll get you! I'll get you! Just wait, you *mamzer*!

CASHMERE

Leave this house immediately, you whore! And never show your filthy face back here again!!

KATE

(Laughing)

Yes!

HUBERT and HENNA

What!?

CASHMERE

(To audience)

That's what I wanted to say.

KATE

Me, too! But, this never happened, of course. We were all expected to be polite. Grandpa was the only one who'd stand up to her.

CASHMERE

(To HENNA)

I . . . I mean . . . Go 'head, Miss Henna. Come back another time.
(HENNA begins her exit.)

HUBERT

"Are you nourishing the baby?" What do you know about babies?! You with all your miscarriages! You couldn't nourish a gnat!!

HENNA

I hope you feel like a big shot now.
(Exits)

HUBERT

Telling my Deelie how to nourish her baby! Ha! Ha! I got her good that time, Cashmere! What a tightfisted hag! She brags she never buys sugar! Steals all the little packets off tables in restaurants!

CASHMERE

Calm your nerves, Mr. Lowenberg.

HUBERT

Suite of air-conditioned rooms, my ass.

CASHMERE

It's okay. She gone.

HUBERT

Damn right it's okay. With that rat's nest for hair.

CASHMERE

Let's go see about your canaries.

HUBERT

Next time, I'm gonna pull that hair net off her head.

CASHMERE

The cage need cleaning.

HUBERT

I think she's got just one long, long strand of hair, wrapped around and around, piled up under that thing.

CASHMERE

Tam O'Shanter need fresh water. She laid another egg last night, Mr. Lowenberg.

HUBERT

My Tam O'Shanter. Let's go see her, Cashmere.

CASHMERE

That egg be light blue with little specks. Some pretty. We gotta clean her cage. It starting to smell like a chicken coop.

(HUBERT, CASHMERE and KATE exit.
ADELIA enters with LITTLE KATE.)

ADELIA

Kate-honey, it sounds like you have the "beautiful blues." For you, it's a tree in the rain, but it can be anything. Once, I had the "beautiful blues" looking at old, rusty cars in garbage dump. The color of the rust in the sunshine was so beautiful, I ached inside.

(Picking up LITTLE KATE, singing IT'S
RAINING OUTSIDE and dancing around
with her)

It's raining outside,
I got my windows open wide.
But I don't care if the rain comes in,

LITTLE KATE and ADELIA
(Singing IT'S RAINING OUTSIDE)

'Cause my baby just went out.

ADELIA
(Speaking to LITTLE KATE)

Almost time to go get cleaned up for Daddy!

(Singing IT'S RAINING OUTSIDE)

Now let me tell you that,

I got holes in the screens.

I guess it's time to spray Sweet Dreams.

But, I don't care if the bugs come in,

LITTLE KATE and ADELIA
(Singing IT'S RAINING OUTSIDE)

'Cause my baby just went out.

ADELIA
(Singing IT'S RAINING OUTSIDE)

Oh, the fighting was awful.

I heard the neighbors complain.

He said "We're through!" with a shout,

And then he stormed right out,

And it began to rain.

I don't care to eat.

No use in trying to sleep.

Truly I don't care if the roof falls in,

Me and my baby just fell out.

Oh no!

LITTLE KATE and ADELIA
(Singing IT'S RAINING OUTSIDE)

My baby just walked out.

ADELIA
(Singing IT'S RAINING OUTSIDE)

Oh, yeah.

ADELIA and LITTLE KATE
(Singing IT'S RAINING OUTSIDE)

My baby just went out.

(CASHMERE enters)

CASHMERE

Miss Adelia? Excuse me, Miss Adelia. Can I take the day off tomorrow? My sister Rose died.

ADELIA

(Putting LITTLE KATE down)

Kate-honey, go pick out what you wanna wear today for Daddy.

(LITTLE KATE exits.)

ADELIA

(To CASHMERE)

Rose died?

CASHMERE

Yes'm.

ADELIA

In Pass Christian?

CASHMERE

Yes'm.

ADELIA

I thought Rose died last year.

CASHMERE

No'm.

ADELIA

Oh, I guess I'm confused. I'm so sorry, Cashmere.

CASHMERE

Yes'm.

ADELIA

The stores are closed tomorrow for Washington's birthday. Frank and I could drive you.

CASHMERE

My son gonna drive me.

ADELIA

John?

CASHMERE

No'm. Emile Peters, Jr.

(ADELIA exits. Lights up on the dead ROSE, laid out on top a table. CASHMERE goes to her, reverently.)

CASHMERE

Rosie. Rosie. I can't believe . . . This was too fast. Why didn't you tell me you were sick? You're so cold. Where did all that life go, all that warmth? I remember when you taught me to dance.

(CASHMERE takes her by the hand, ROSE awakens, slides down from the table)

ROSE

(Laughing)

Not like that Cashmere! You so funny! You doing some kinda chicken dance or something!

CASHMERE

Chicken dance! Come on!

ROSE

Yeah, chicken. Flapping your arms. Bouncing around. I can see them feathers flying.

CASHMERE

Feathers! Aww, Rosie.

ROSE

You supposed to be smooth, like this.

(Shows him)

Come on, now. Dance with me.

CASHMERE

No.

ROSE

Cashmere!

CASHMERE

I quit. I look like a chicken.

ROSE

A big, handsome rooster. Now, come on here and dance with me.

(They dance.)

You getting it. Smoother, Cashmere. Think of them big, black swans gliding in the lagoon. They so proud. That's it. Lemme see you, now.

(They break apart. CASHMERE dances, eyes closed. ROSE goes back to the table, lies down, dead again.)

CASHMERE

I got it, Rosie!

(Waking from his dream)

Rosie. My Rosie. Teaching heaven to dance, now.

(KATE enters.)

KATE

That's another one of my fantasies. I never saw any of the women in Cashmere's life. The same woman keeps rolling out of my imagination, taking different forms: mother, sister, lover.

CASHMERE

And they're all stereotypes.

(Enter ADELIA. Lights out on ROSE)

ADELIA

Oh, Cashmere. How's your family doing?

CASHMERE

Fine.

ADELIA

Did you get our flowers in time?

CASHMERE

Yes'm.

ADELIA

I'm so sorry about Rose. It must be so hard on you and your family. I'm having a mass said for her, too. Is there anything I can do?

CASHMERE

No, thank you, Miss Adelia. But, you know? Rose didn't die?

ADELIA

She didn't?

CASHMERE

I thought she died.

(CASHMERE and ADELIA exit.)

KATE

He was a Catholic. Another drawer in his room was filled with religious articles. Shiny rosaries of every conceivable color; holy pictures of martyrs; prayer cards and missals, which he couldn't read; plastic dashboard Jesuses, but he had no car; medals with the heads of saints, a tiny fragment of material cut from the cloak of St. Francis of Assisi; a clear tube containing the breath of the donkey that carried the Holy Family and a pure, white feather dropped from the Holy Ghost when he appeared to the apostles in the form of a dove. One day, I remember, he brought his little grandchild to the house. He was beaming. He was so proud of her all in white lace with her rosary and veil.

(CASHMERE enters holding the hand of his granddaughter BRENDA JOYCE. ADELIA enters. KATE exits.)

ADELIA

Oh, Cashmere! She's beautiful! Made your First Communion. You look beautiful, darling!

CASHMERE

Tell Miss Adelia thank you.

BRENDA JOYCE

Thank you.

ADELIA

Such a big girl. I know you must be proud of her, Cashmere.

CASHMERE

Yes'm, I am. And she make good grades in school, too. She gonna be a teacher. She teaches all her baby dolls everything she learn in school that day. They all smart just like her.

(HUBERT enters.)

ADELIA

Daddy, come see.

HUBERT

A little bride. What's your name?

BRENDA JOYCE

Brenda Joyce.

CASHMERE

She gonna be a teacher, Mr. Lowenberg.

ADELIA

She made her First Communion today.

HUBERT

That's the little white wafer thing, huh?

CASHMERE

Tell Mr. Lowenberg about communion, Brenda Joyce.

BRENDA JOYCE

It's the body and blood of
(Nodding in respect)
Jesus.

HUBERT

Here. Here's a quarter. Get yourself some candy.

CASHMERE

What you say to Mr. Lowenberg, Brenda Joyce?

BRENDA JOYCE

Thank you.

ADELIA

You want some milk and cookies?

(BRENDA JOYCE looks at CASHMERE,
who nods.)

BRENDA JOYCE

Yes, ma'am.

ADELIA

Come on with me.

CASHMERE

Mind your manners, Brenda Joyce. Use a napkin. Watch your pretty dress don't get spilled on.

(ADELIA exits with BRENDA JOYCE.)

HUBERT

You go to church?

CASHMERE

No, sir.

HUBERT

But you're Catholic.

CASHMERE

Yessir. All the children was raised Catholic. My momma saw to it all us babies was baptized by a priest.

HUBERT

That's with water, baptism.

CASHMERE

Yessir. John the Baptist -- that was Jesus's cousin -- went around baptizing everybody. That's how come he got his name. He even baptized Jesus.

HUBERT

That's nice. A soothing thing for the little babies.

CASHMERE

Yessir.

HUBERT

My mother used to pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary. I'd hide and listen.

CASHMERE

I thought Miz Gramme was Jewish.

HUBERT

She was, but she had a devotion to the Blessed Mother. One Easter Sunday morning, she was in her yard eating bread and honey. She looked up and there, rising up toward the steeple of St. Mary's Italian Church, was the Blessed Virgin Mary. Where's Violet, Cashmere?

CASHMERE

I don't know, sir. Let's go get a little coffee.

(CASHMERE and HUBERT exit. KATE enters.)

KATE

Easter time at our house meant a fuzzy warm chick cupped in your hand, its tiny heart beating wildly. The little chicks were dyed bright greens, blues, reds. I always picked blue, my sister, red. Cookie and Root Beer, we'd call them. One would peck and peck the other's toe until it fell off. They'd both die of the pip if the cats didn't get them first.

(CASHMERE enters, his hands cupped, gently holding something. LITTLE KATE enters.)

CASHMERE

Cookie died, chere.

LITTLE KATE

No!

CASHMERE

The cat.

LITTLE KATE

That mean old cat!

(Starts to cry)

CASHMERE

Aww, Miss Kate, don't be sad. Lemme tell you about baby chicks. When the little chicken pass out dead, he ain't really dead. He come out of his feathers and fly way up high to the tippity top of the tallest palm tree. He set up there for a little while, looking around, eating caterpillars, having himself a good time. Then he fly up to the clouds, take a bite, fly up round the moon to say hello. Then he get a little tired of all that and figure he want to go be back by his little mistress. So he fly on down and make a bee line right for your heart. And whenever you get a little scared or nervous, he flutter around in there for you a little while telling you it's gonna be awright.

KATE

Sometimes he was so kind. But when he was drinking . . .

CASHMERE

(To LITTLE KATE)

Wh . . . what you want now?

LITTLE KATE

Orange juice.

CASHMERE

Walking aaaaaall over on my clean floors. Orange juice. Can't you see I'm working? Go tell . . . tell your momma you hungry. It ain't no time . . . ain't no mealtime now. Orange juice. Why don't you eat when you supposed to? Look, you tracked my floors all up! Foot prints! Foot prints! Looka that! Get outa here with that crying, girl! Get!

(LITTLE KATE runs off.)

KATE

(Reading)

The *Mahafaly* was a splendid primitive tribe of the desert Southwest. Their name means *Those Who Put Taboos On Things*.

CASHMERE

I don't wanna hear no crying. Miss Kate want orange juice. Miss Kate. Miss Kate. Well, I want a chifferon . . . a chifferome . . . etcr ! A chifforobe full of Mogan David Wine! And *Miss* whitey Kate can kiss my ass.

(ADELIA enters.)

ADELIA

Cashmere? What happened to Kate?

CASHMERE

I told her . . . I told her to get outa my kitchen.

ADELIA

You're drunk again!

CASHMERE

I ain't.

ADELIA

You reek!

CASHMERE

I ain't.

ADELIA

Get out of here and come back when you're sober.

KATE

Oh, come on! Don't put those words in my mother's mouth!

CASHMERE

If they had lit into me, maybe I would have stopped drinking!

KATE

Now you're saying my family enabled you?!

ADELIA

(Dancing, singing HE'S NOTHIN' BUT A DRUNKARD)

He's nothing but a drunkard,

ADELIA (Continued)

He never is at home.
 I don't wanna be his woman,
 I'm always here alone.
 I wanna go to mama,
 I know she'd take me back,
 But there ain't no runnin' water
 In that little mountain shack.

(ADELIA and KATE exit. LITTLE KATE
 enters, screaming, crying)

LITTLE KATE

MY CHIN!!

CASHMERE

(Sweetly, sober)

Aw, Miss Kate. You went and fell down? Go 'head and cry, chere. I know that chin hurt. But, that mean you getting to be all growed up. Everybody got bobos on they chin. Looka mine. Even them little Guinea mens (sic) got bobos on they chin. Did I ever tell you about those little Guinea mens and womens way way out in California -- not in the heart of California, but closer to the outskirts, right near to New Jersey? Blow your nose, Miss Kate. There you go. Dry them big, salty tears off your face. So, these little Guinea mens got these big trees they climb straight up and pick great blue fruits, sweet as cane sugar. They add a little rubber from them rubber trees and make bubble gum. Those little mens know how to blow bubbles ten times bigger than they heads! Then they put that bubble in the sun to bake it into a hard, giant, shiny ball. They bounce that ball all the way high up in the black nighttime sky. And that's how come they got the moon. Your chin better now? Come here, chere, give Cashmere a hug.

(LITTLE KATE goes to give him a peck on
 the cheek, but CASHMERE stops her.)

CASHMERE

No, bébé. White folks not supposed to kiss colored folks. But, huggin's okay.
 (To audience)

My name is Cashmere Petitjean. My mother was from Madagascar, very beautiful with long black hair. My parents were slaves, and Kate is making up most of this other stuff about me. Here she goes with another cliché.

(Lights up on CASHMERE'S MOTHER,
 CASHMERE leaves LITTLE KATE behind,
 walks into the Malagasy scene, instantly
 becoming a part of it, instantly becoming a
 young boy. She hums, sews.)

CASHMERE'S MOTHER

Ah, Cashmere, mon petit. Have you finished feeding the chickens?

CASHMERE

Yes, Maman. Maman? Tell me about Madagascar.

CASHMERE'S MOTHER

Oh, Cashmere. Again? I have to finish mending your father's shirt.

CASHMERE

Yes, Maman, again! Please! And how they called it the *Island of the Moon*.

CASHMERE'S MOTHER

They brought me to Louisiana on a big boat. I was just a little thing. I came from Madagascar. Some people called it the *Island of the Moon* because the moon seemed close enough to whisper to the trees. On the *Island of the Moon* orchid flowers whiter than rice grew in the shade, and you could pick papayas and mangoes right from the tree as you walked along in a blue forest.

CASHMERE

Maman? Were there slaves in Madagascar?

(Lights fade on that scene as CASHMERE walks from it and into the following. Lights up on this scene.)

HUBERT

(Angry, laughing, swatting, trying to reach under the wheelchair where LITTLE KATE sits, poking him.)

Violet! Aooow! Famn it! Come . . . come get this kid! Let go my wheel! Aooow! Stop it, Kate! 'Famn it! Adelia! Aooow! Cashmere!

CASHMERE

Miss Kate!

HUBERT

Cashmere! Get her! I can't move! I'm afraid I'll roll on her!

CASHMERE

Miss Kate! Let the wheel a loose!

HUBERT

Get her! She's sticking me, Famn it!

CASHMERE

You laughing?

HUBERT

Yeah, f amn it! Get her! She's got a hat pin! She's sticking me through the seat!

CASHMERE

Get out from under there, Miss Kate! What you doing your grandpa! Gimme that pin, girl!

(LITTLE KATE runs off.)

CASHMERE

Come here! Miss Kate! You better come back here. I'm gonna tell your momma! MISS ADELIA!

HUBERT

Don't tell on her, Cashmere.

(ADELIA enters.)

ADELIA

What's the matter? What did she do now?

HUBERT

Nothing.

ADELIA

Where is she?

HUBERT

She's not here.

ADELIA

Daddy, what did she do to you?

HUBERT

Nothing, I tell you.

CASHMERE

She got one of Miz Lowenberg's hat pins.

ADELIA

A HAT PIN!?

HUBERT

She didn't stick me.

CASHMERE

Yes she did.

ADELIA

Kate! Kate! You better not hide from me! Oh, God, I'm tired.

HUBERT

Deelie, don't punish her. She's so little. Just full of mischief like you used to be.

ADELIA

Kate! Wait till your father comes home! Kate!

HUBERT

Just let it go.

BERTA'S VOICE

KATE!!

ADELIA

Oh, God. Now what?

BERTA'S VOICE

Where are you, you little brat!? Adelia!!

ADELIA

This is too much! I could bite the thermometer!

(BERTA enters.)

BERTA

Adelia!

ADELIA

What did she do?

BERTA

She ruined my new brown hat! I just bought it for the luncheon to go with my black and brown suit!

ADELIA

How bad is it?

BERTA

She took a scissors and cut off all the feathers!

(HUBERT tries to stifle his laughter.)

BERTA

Daddy, stop laughing! It's not funny! She's destructive! She gets into everything! I have no privacy!

ADELIA

I'm so sorry.

BERTA

Don't you have enough with two?

ADELIA

Two what?

BERTA

Kids! You oughta call this next one *Un*.

ADELIA

Un ?

BERTA

For *Unnecessary*. There are so many of you and only one of me!

ADELIA

I can't help it if you had a bad marriage and no children!

BERTA

At least I have a nice figure!

ADELIA

To hang your dozens and dozens of outfits on!

BERTA

Clothes make the woman!

ADELIA

All you think about is your clothes!

BERTA

What else do I have, Adelia? I'm not even sure of my job anymore! Baton Rouge is playing politics, and I think they're trying to push me out! Oh, this head.

(BERTA exits.)

ADELIA

I coulda had a singing career! I coulda been famous as Connie Francis! I woulda been better! I'm so tired.

CASHMERE

Go lie down, Miss Adelia. I take care of Mr. Lowenberg. Go 'head.

(ADELIA exits.)

HUBERT

F amn kid.

CASHMERE

You all right?

HUBERT

Hell no! She stuck me like a F amn pig!

CASHMERE

Come on and get yourself a cigarette and calm your nerves.

HUBERT

Give me a little black coffee, Cashmere.

CASHMERE

Yessir. Mr. Lowenberg?

HUBERT

What?

CASHMERE

Miz Lowenberg and them is getting ready to leave for the coast tomorrow.

HUBERT

She's always running off.

CASHMERE

Why don't you go with 'em this time?

HUBERT

Hell no.

CASHMERE

Why you never go with 'em, sir?

HUBERT

I don't like it.

CASHMERE

Why, sir? Be different things to see over there. Be with your wife. Be with Kate.

HUBERT

It's too hard.

CASHMERE

What is?

HUBERT

I can't get around.

CASHMERE

Maybe Miz Lowenberg would let me go with you.

HUBERT

No. I don't know.

CASHMERE

I'll help you.

HUBERT

All right. Ask her.

CASHMERE

All right, sir.

(HUBERT and CASHMERE exit. KATE enters.)

KATE

Summers meant Gulfport, Mississippi. My grandmother owned a little summer house there. You know the kind -- with a sleeping porch and ceiling fans, so near the gulf that salt-winds kept it peeling. The drive over made me car sick.

(Lights up on ADELIA and HUBERT)

ADELIA

Cashmere! Cashmere! Come here and get Daddy, please! He's trying to get up. Daddy, wait!

(CASHMERE enters.)