

BITS & PIECES

a play by
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Nothing is lost, but it can never
be again as it was. You will only
find the bits and cry out because
they were yourself.

-- Loren Eiseley

Player Descriptions

ODELL du PLESSIS: An old-time Cajun of sixty-six years. He owns and used to star in the Bayou Bijou Carnival. He is balding, unshaven and fragile. His body is scarred and deeply bruised by his chronic struggle against hemophilia.

MISLOU du PLESSIS: Married to Odell for thirty-five years. She is a strong, hefty woman. At fifty-two her eyes are a watery blue and she wears billowing flower-print dresses.

NICKE du PLESSIS: At sixteen, he is their only son. Due to an accident on the high wire, he is now aphasic. Home from treatment, he wears slippers, hospital greens and there is a large white bandage that circles his clean-shaven head. When he walks, only his feet seem to move; the rest of his body is stiff and inflexible.

KENNY du PLESSIS: Odell's forty-three-year old deaf mute brother. He wears fisherman's hip boots and a parka with real fur.

PONY CHICOT: At eighteen, she's plain looking and gangly. Her outlook is fresh and mid-western. She is Nicke's fiancée and she dresses in a purple body suit.

FRANK SHIRALDI: A temporary driver for the Boudreax Bus Company. He's twenty-five, smoldering and lean. He wears a brand new red uniform with shiny black work boots.

Time

Tomorrow afternoon, in April of the year.

Place

All action takes occurs in a canvas tent on Elba, an isolated place on the Southern most tip of a Louisiana swamp.

Set

THIS PLAY SHOULD BE DONE IN THE ROUND. ALL ACTION TAKES PLACE INSIDE A MUSTY, ROTTING CANVAS CIRCUS TENT. THERE ARE REMNANTS OF A MORE PROSPEROUS TIME STREWN ABOUT THE PLAYING AREA: A POPCORN MACHINE, A PEELING PAINTED CLOWN FUNNY CAR, CARNIVAL POSTERS AND TWO BIG BLACK WARDROBE TRUNKS. A GIANT BANNER, BARELY LEGIBLE, READS, "The Bayou Bijou Carnival Presents... Odell and the Sparkle Twins!" THE BANNER STRETCHES ABOVE THE STAGE. SHEETS OF CANVAS SHOULD BE DRAPED FROM THE LIGHT GRID AND ATTACHED TO THE WALLS OF THE THEATRE, MAKING THE AUDIENCE PART OF THE ACTION...A REAL-LIFE AUDIENCE INSIDE THE BIG TOP WATCHING, NOT A PERFORMANCE, BUT THE REVELATION OF THESE PEOPLE'S LIVES. THERE ARE FIVE MAJOR AREAS. **ODELL'S AREA** IS IN THE CENTER. STRAW IS PILED ALONGSIDE A LARGE, HEAVY WOODEN TABLE. **MISLOU'S AREA** HAS PICNIC BASKETS, A FEW BOXES AND A SEWING MACHINE WITH ANOTHER FLOWER-PRINT DRESS ON IT WAITING TO BE SEWN. **KENNY'S AREA** IS AMONG THE WARDROBE TRUNKS. THERE ARE ALSO SANDBAGS, BROOMS, A LIVE SPOTLIGHT AND BLANKETS. **PONY'S AREA** IS THE ONLY EXIT FOR THE PLAYERS. HER AREA IS MARKED BY ONE END OF THE HIGH WIRE. WOODEN STEPS LEAD FIVE FEET UP IN THE AIR TO THE HIGH WIRE ANCHORED TO A METAL POLE. THE WIRE LEADS OUTSIDE THROUGH THE ENTRANCE SLIT IN THE CANVAS TENT. **NICKE'S AREA** CONSISTS ONLY OF A BLUE-STEEL COT. THERE IS NO MATTRESS; THE CHAIN-LINK METAL COILS ARE COVERED BY A WOOL BLANKET.

Lights

THE LIGHTS ARE THEATRICAL...A WORKING PART OF THE BAYOU BIJOU EXPERIENCE. PLACEMENT OF THE PHYSICAL INSTRUMENTS SHOULD BE MORE OBVIOUS THAN USUAL, TO SUGGEST TO THE AUDIENCE THAT THE SPOTLIGHTS, GLITTER BALL AND ALL THE WILD CHANGING COLORS ARE INTEGRAL TO THE SPECTACLE.

Act and Scene Breakdown

ACT ONE

Scene 1..... 1:00 pm on Wednesday
Scene 2..... Three pm

ACT TWO

Scene 1..... 7:00 am Thursday
Scene 2..... Three pm
Scene 3..... Dawn Friday
Scene 4..... Epilogue

ACT ONE

Scene 1PROLOGUE: INSIDE KENNY'S MIND SET.

THE STAGE IS DARK. A CIRCLE SPOT COMES UP ON KENNY. HIS HANDS ARE CLASPED BEHIND HIS BACK AS HE SPEAKS DIRECTLY TO THE AUDIENCE. HE IS NATURAL AND UNAFFECTED PHYSICALLY. THE VIOLET-BLUE OF A "HOUSE LIGHT" GEL WARMS HIM FROM ABOVE.

KENNY

Welcome to the Bayou Bijou Carnival. Name's Kenny. Glad y'all could make it. Most folks ferget we're down here. But we still have shows daily. Even when it pours. Should warn you that this whole island is built on aspirations run breathless. Littered with the crusts of futures gone rotten. On sunny days you can see 'em glitter on the water and if you're fast enough? You can scoop 'em up in yer cupped hands as they lap against the shore. And then? You poke out the tongue and suckle down other people's joy. "Hold me, feed me," they call out as they gurgle down yer throat. It's my job to pick 'em up, save a few in muh pockets... many as I can carry... and sweep the rest off the midway. Dreams die easy here but they never die alone.

BLACKOUT.

END KENNY'S MIND SET.

A CRACK OF THUNDER. IT IS ONE IN THE AFTERNOON ON A WEDNESDAY. SOFT RAIN PATTERS ON THE CANVAS TENT. IT IS COOL AND WET. LIGHTS UP SLOWLY ON ODELL, MISLOU AND PONY IN ODELL'S AREA. MISLOU HAS HER EYES CLOSED AS SHE METHODICALLY MASSAGES ODELL'S BARE FEET WITH OIL. ODELL IS FLAT ON HIS BACK ON THE TABLE IN HIS BOXER-SHORT UNDERWEAR. HIS LEGS DANGLE OFF THE EDGE. ODELL HAS A DEEP-TISSUE BRUISE, BRIGHT MAGENTA IN COLOR, THAT RUNS FROM THE INSIDE OF HIS RIGHT THIGH THROUGH HIS GROIN AND INTO HIS UPPER ABDOMEN. ODELL'S EYES ARE ROUND AS HE SEARCHES FOR MISLOU. MISLOU SINGS AN OLD RELIGIOUS HYMN. ODELL WINCES AND GROANS AT EVERY MOVEMENT MISLOU ENACTS ON HIS FEET, BUT HE NEVER SPEAKS OUT. **ANOTHER THUNDER CRACK.** NEXT TO MISLOU SLEEPS PONY. PONY IS ON HER SIDE, ALSEEP IN THE STRAW, WITH ARMS AND LEGS EXTENDED TOGETHER AND PARALLEL TO EACH OTHER, PERPENDICULAR TO HER BODY LIKE A HORSE'S. ODELL HOLDS HIS BREATH AND SPEAKS IN SPURTS.

ODELL

Ouch! Miz, yuh breakin' muh arches.
It's an unpleasant experience, hun.

MISLOU

Odell.

ODELL

I appreciate it. But you may not know
the extent of the damage yuh doin'.

MISLOU

I'm barely touchin' the soles.

ODELL

It's makin' my whole body ache.

MISLOU

That's not me. That's the protrusions
that stick out from yuh body. Little
warts...

ODELL

I have no...

MISLOU

Worry warts. Here's yuh Mislou drainin'
the trouble from the back of yuh mind and
yuh refuse to leggo.

ODELL

Muh worries are respectable concerns.
But muh feet, I cannot do without.

MISLOU

"The feet," Mamma used to say, "Are the
most beautiful part of the body: the
foundation that steadies the windows of
the soul."

ODELL

Yuh mother never had you massage her
feet!

MISLOU

All right.

MISLOU LEAVES HIS FEET ALONE. THEY SWING IN THE AIR AS ODELL
CATCHES HIS BREATH.

ODELL
Every lungful throbs down to muh
kneecaps.

MISLOU
Quiet, Daddy. Pretend that it tickles.

MISLOU TAKES THE OIL AND SQUIRTS IT ON ODELL'S HANDS. HE IS
TERRIFIED AND HOLDS HIS BREATH AGAIN AS MISLOU BEGINS TO MASSAGE
HIS FINGERS.

ODELL
Muh life's a curse!

MISLOU
Yuh can't be ticklish in the palms!

ODELL
Sixty-six years o' breathin'. And in the
end to spend it cryin' out at the
indignity of a tickle.

MISLOU STOPS MASSAGING HIM, WIPES HER HANDS OFF ON HIS BARE CHEST
AND KISSES HIM ON THE FOREHEAD.

MISLOU
Relax.

ODELL
Where did it go wrong? How did I miss
it?

MISLOU
What's that?

ODELL
White-hot happiness.

MISLOU
I don't think yuh find it. It's there
all the time.

ODELL
Where are the guts of dreams bred?

MISLOU
Don't, hun.

ODELL
Tell me. "Where are the guts of dreams
bred?"

MISLOU

Let yuh mind rest. You're burnin' up.

ODELL

Since it happened I stare at the top of this tent tryin' to understand why I went out and killed the only thing in muh life that didn't try to hurt me first.

MISLOU

Would you please put it to rest?

ODELL

As a child I remember bein' slugged in the head with a Cy Young baseball bat. Three inch gash that wouldn't close. First clue, I guess. Ran home squirtin' red over the lawns and concrete. Blood in muh shoes when I got home.

MISLOU

Please do not bring this up again.

ODELL

Least I didn't give Nicke the curse, true? He bleeds? His body straightens it out right off -- stopped dead dry.

MISLOU

Nicke...

ODELL

That's a clear-cut, God-given talent -- being able to heal yourself.

MISLOU

I'm not feelin' well...

ODELL

Twelve months, no sleep. A waterfall of blood cascading inside muhself that'll never stop.

MISLOU

I'll get yer medicine.

ODELL

Blood dried in muh joints. Tattoo bruises for the world to watch grow. And now muh only son lies swaddled in his own blood.

MISLOU SLAPS ODELL ACROSS THE FACE.

MISLOU
It was an accident!

MISLOU REALIZES THAT SHE'S HIT HIM.

MISLOU
(Cont'd)
Dear God. I didn't mean to...

MISLOU STARES AT HER PALM, TRIES TO WIPE OFF HIS SWEAT BUT CAN'T.

ODELL
(angry)
I can't give him back his life!

MISLOU
I'll get you a cool cloth...

ODELL
I can't trade my youth for his!

MISLOU
Yuh face is gonna swell and bruise...

MISLOU, IN A DAZE SEARCHES FOR A WASHCLOTH.

ODELL
Sendin' him home to die!

MISLOU
And it's all muh fault...

ODELL
Mislou!

MISLOU
Can't even depend upon his wife not to
inflict pain...

ODELL
If God's with muh, I'll beat him to the
grave!

MISLOU BREAKS DOWN, TRIES NOT TO CRY.

MISLOU
Don't ever leave me. We'd all be alone
without you.

ODELL

You'd all be free from the shackles of a bitter life gone sour.

MISLOU

Liar!

ODELL

There was a time, you remember, when Odell and the Sparkle Twins were a diamond in the dozens of Bayou shows? Squeeze in three-fifty patrons, give 'em each a helium balloon and a party hat plus, on Saturdays, a ten cent sack of fresh popcorn. Umm. Smell it? Huh? Smell the perfume and brilliantine?

MISLOU

I do remember. It smelled like muh mother's parlor.

ODELL

And then the light's spark on, burn a little and smell like leaves. Hear the children? Screamin' children as I would strut sixty foot 'cross that wire in the air with no support net.

MISLOU

I feel the screams at the hair on the back of my neck.

ODELL

The calliope sings. And you'd come out, muh beautiful wife, sellin' hot peanuts 'n ice cream sandwiches... twenty-five cents a piece or both for two dimes.

MISLOU

I remember. We lost money on the deal.

ODELL

But don't the memories taste like a hundred bucks?

MISLOU

We been starvin' on the past.

ODELL

Fingertips.

MISLOU

We just been through it.

ODELL

I remeber our fingertips touched.

MISLOU

Alright, talk through it. I'm here for you.

ODELL

I could feel the calluses.

MISLOU

Oh, Daddy.

ODELL

Eyes locked and I knew I missed him. Reached out fer muh hand and I slapped it away.

MISLOU

He's better now.

ODELL

Nicke's dead. Sending home a package of scar tissue.

MISLOU

He'll be here soon. You'll see he's better.

ODELL

We'll only recognize the clothes.

MISLOU

And the calluses.

ODELL

Sucked dry. No insurance. Doctor's take the merry-go-round. Lawyers paid with the roller coaster. Hospital put dibs on the horses. It's all so tiring.

MISLOU

We got the tent. And the highwire act. We got a useful trade still.

ODELL

Twelve inch wood spike, flat end in first. Imagine that. A spike rung through the side of yuh head's the first thing that stops you from a sixty foot fall. I can't imagine it. I can only breed the anger, the betrayal.

MISLOU

He was in a coma for six months. He doesn't know what happened. Nobody can say fuh sure what happened up there.

ODELL

I know what happened.

MISLOU

And that makes it any less worse for the rest of us?

ODELL

It's the sound that rings in my ears. Wood against skull. The banging drum beating out the instant when a father betrays a son forever. Crack! Forever silent. Thud! And the palms sweat eternal.

(quiet)

Whoosh... a life forgotten.

(whisper)

Ahh. The stench of blood dried in the soil feeding the thirsty lions of despise. And none of it leaves you alone at night.

MISLOU

I know.

ODELL

Reach me muh stick, if ya would.

MISLOU

I'll fix yuh a sandwich.

MISLOU GETS ODELL HIS WALKING STICK FROM UNDER THE TABLE. ODELL SITS UP AND WINCES AT THE PAIN IN HIS ABDOMEN. MISLOU GOES TO HER AREA AND MAKES ODELL A PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY SANDWICH WITH INGREDIENTS FROM THE PICNIC BASKET.

ODELL

Fuhget the sandwich. I'd spit it up.

MISLOU

Gotta eat. Can't starve yuh body.

ODELL

Naw, really. I'm too nervous anyways.
Dumblebum! I can barely breathe.

MISLOU

We'll go into town and have the Doc stoke
yuh fires.

ODELL

Nuthin' left tuh swap. Can't even work
it off.

MISLOU

I can work it off.

ODELL

A man who can't do an honest day's work
of sweat and grime don't deserve to be
healed.

MISLOU

Muh back's strong. I'll work it off.

ODELL

I'll be fine. I'm just not gonna eat.

ODELL GRABS HIS STICK AND EASES HIMSELF OFF THE EDGE OF THE
TABLE.

MISLOU

Careful. Let me help. You ain't been
off there in days.

ODELL WAVES HER OFF.

ODELL

I kin do it.

ODELL POSITIONS HIS STAFF AND TRIES TO STAND. HE LOSES HIS
BALANCE AS HE TRIES TO TAKE A STEP. ODELL TRIES TO CATCH
HIMSELF, MISSES THE EDGE OF THE TABLE AND FALLS HARD ON THE
SERENE AND SLUMBERING PONY.

MISLOU

Odell!

ODELL

Help muh, Mother!

PONY SHRIEKS AWAKE.

PONY
What's the prognosis!

ODELL
Dammit!

MISLOU GOES TO HELP.

PONY
Git 'em off muh legs!

MISLOU
Quiet, Pony. It's only Odell.

PONY
Somebody git 'em off muh beautiful legs!

ODELL
No. Boduh! Touch! Muh!

PONY
Numb from the pelvis down!

ODELL
Hush up an' gimmuh a chance.

MISLOU
Want me to help?

ODELL
I kin do it.

ODELL PUSHES HIMSELF UP A LITTLE. PONY PULLS HER LEGS OUT FROM UNDERNEATH HIM. ODELL COLLAPSES AND SITS ON THE STRAW GRABBING HIS KNEES.

PONY
Yuh coulda asked muh to move.

ODELL
Like a toenail shard in the carpetin'.
Always in the way, always bitin' muh big
toe.

PONY
I was outta the way asleep. Dreamin' of
kissin' Nicke's poutin' lips. And then
I'm shook awake by a theif tryin' to
steal muh kiss and ruin muh trade.

ODELL
Quiet up or I'll kick ya out. Send ya
packin'.

MISLOU
She won't do it again.

PONY
Never did it in the first place.

ODELL
And don't use Nicke's name around me.

MISLOU
Let her speak his name. She can't touch
him.

PONY
And failin' tuh touch is what got us all
in this predicament.

ODELL
I'll touch yuh with muh stick if yuh
don't close yuh lips. It'll be a tap yuh
never fuhget.

PONY
Nicke loves me. And you promised me if I
stayed on with no pay that the day of his
arrival home we'd be married.

MISLOU
Hush, Pony.

ODELL
I promised you nuthin'! Take you in and
feed yuh. Stole muh son away! Gave you a
starrin' role and now you're beggin'...

PONY
(upcut)
I'm not beggin'. I'm remindin'. You
have the tendency of selective memory.
I'm only clarifyin' muh intentions.

MISLOU
Eat.

MISLOU STICKS ODELL'S PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY SANDWICH IN PONY'S
MOUTH.

ODELL

You're not to upset him. We have a lot of catchin' up to do.

PONY EATS THE SANDWICH.

PONY

You're upset 'cause you can't affect muh. I won't allow you to explain to me muh dreams. And you can't stand it. Crush muh legs. Chop off muh arms to bloody stumps. But you'll never own me.

ODELL

I do own you.

PONY

I got a future of muh own. And it don't include you. That leaves the taste of bile in your throat, don't it Odell? Yes, it does. I can smell it on yuh breath. I got Nicke. And us bein' together forever? It's so beautiful that you had to ugly it up by pushin' yer own son offa the high wire act!

MISLOU

Pony?

ODELL

You...

MISLOU

Come with me and fill up the water buckets.

ODELL

I did no such thing!

PONY

Did too. But you can't ruin it forever. 'Cause I can leave here anytime I want.

ODELL

Go, then. Pack up and leave before he sees you.

PONY

I'm waitin' to take Nicke with me.

ODELL

I dare yuh never to come back.

PONY THROWS THE REST OF THE SANDWICH AT ODELL. HE DUCKS AS IT FLIES PAST HIM.

PONY

I ain't doin' nuthin' you ask. 'Sides, if I left you'd start beatin' on Mislou again.

MISLOU

He never touched me except for a hug and a soft caress!

PONY

Those caresses echoed across the swamp.

ODELL

What you been tellin' her? Lies? I seen you both over there cookin' stew, whisperin' secrets. Well lies have lives of their own. And it's you all that gots to account for 'em when the truth asks fer yuh hand in eternity.

PONY

It's you old man! You're the one who beats the truth and stretches the circumstance to fit yuh own form. We're only tryin' to keep our heads above the slimy gallons of lies that pour from every openin' on yer body.

MISLOU

Stop it! Both of you stop it!

ODELL

Lucifer visits you in yuh dreams. Every time you wake up you got a headful of righteousness and honor. Well yer the one who fergets that you were nuthin' more than a scoundrel in a dress of ribbons and lavender lace when I found you. You'd steal a dime off an amputee if it'd buy you a bottle of glossy nail polish.

PONY

That's right. 'Cause when night comes down and there's nobody there to read ya a story or pat yuh head and say yuh not a worthless piece of grime on the bottom of somebody's shoe, you gotta take pride in yuhself. And that's no fault of my own.

ODELL

So's I give a dollar. Ask if you wanna be a star under the Big Top. And yuh marble eyeballs get all syrupy and yuh little mouth opens, chin drops and ya says, "Oh, Yassah." Umm. Right. "Yassah." And then what happened?

PONY

Ya tried to stick yuh tongue down muh throat!

ODELL LAUGHS.

ODELL

And that's when you first tasted the bile in muh throat? Or was it later that night in the bed of muh pick up? Maybe last weekend? Under the table?

MISLOU

You didn't touch that peach of innocence?

ODELL

(asking Pony)

Well?

PONY

Yuh offer a little girl every dream she ever had? What's the price of a little happiness? Close yuh eyes and imagine that yuh in another's dreams. What's wrong with that?

MISLOU

I know he's not God's Angel but he'd never woo a tenderling.

ODELL

She's trash, Mother. And around here we burn the trash.

MISLOU

(to Odell)

Answer me.

ODELL

She ain't gonna answer. She's feelin' the taste of bile. And she can't bear tuh swallow it.

PONY SPITS IN ODELL'S FACE. PONY GRABS AN OVERCOAT AND STOMPS OUTSIDE.

PONY
I ain't swallowin' yuh spit anymore.

PONY EXITS. MISLOU STARES DOWN ODELL.

ODELL
She was never a definition of innocence.
I swear.

MISLOU
You ever though that yuh body bleedin'
itself to death is a flag? A banner
showin' a poor old man dyin' in a pool of
his sins? Stitched with the whimpering
dribble of sorrow and colored with pride
undone and pain inflicted? I bet yuh
body'd dry up and be well again if you'd
admit to yuhself that sometimes to win
is to lose.

ODELL
No flags will ever whip in the breeze for
me.

KENNY ENTERS. HE WEARS A YELLOW RAIN SLICKER OVER HIS FISHING
HIP BOOTS. KENNY, A DEAF MUTE, IS CRIPPLED IN ONE LEG AND HIS
SHOULDERS ARE UNEVEN. HE IS SOAKED TO THE CORE.

MISLOU
Kenny! Home so soon?

ODELL
Kinny! Kinny, where is he? Where's muh
son?

MISLOU
Give 'em a chance to dry off.

ODELL
Where's muh son?

MISLOU
Please!

ODELL
Nicke!

PONY ENTERS. SHE IS SOAKING WET.

PONY
What's all the shoutin' about? Yuh can
hear it 'cross the river.

ODELL
Was Nicke out there?

PONY
Nicke's home?

ODELL
Answer me.

PONY
Kenny! Yuh home!

PONY GOES AND HELPS KENNY DRY OFF.

MISLOU
There. Now we're makin' progress.

ODELL
Kinny!

MISLOU
He can't read yuh lips if all he sees are
fangs.

ODELL HOBBLER OVER TO KENNY AND PONY AND PULLS HER AWAY.

ODELL
Get off him. Kinny. Read muh lips.
Where! Is! Muh! Son!

PONY
You know he can't hear you.

ODELL
Would somebody save me from this idiocy?

PONY
He's yuh brother and all you ever do is
scream at the poor mute. I wouldn't
answer yuh either.

KENNY OPENS HIS MOUTH AND SILENTLY FORMS THE WORDS. MISLOU READS
HIS LIPS.

MISLOU
(reading Kenny's lips)
Mud. Three foot. B...b...bus...

PONY

The bus broke down!

ODELL

And you came back here without him?

MISLOU

Maybe the Sheriff told him what happened.

ODELL

Damn! They shoulda brought 'em by riverboat.

PONY

I'll fetch 'em.

ODELL

No. There's a storm comin'. You'd blow like a stick in a typhoon.

MISLOU

Muh baby's all alone. He'll not know what to do.

ODELL

I'll go get 'em.

MISLOU

I'll go with you.

ODELL

No.

MISLOU

At least take Kenny.

ODELL

He'll need to help y'all tie everythin' down. There's a storm comin'.

PONY

But you can't even stand straight up.

MISLOU

We'll all go.

ODELL

I can do it faster alone. Get me muh wrap. Start fixin' the loose ends.

KENNY HELPS ODELL DRESS IN RAIN GEAR. PONY AND MISLOU BEGIN TO PICKS UP LOOSE THINGS.

PONY

He'll be alright. He knows the swamp better'n any of us.

MISLOU

He'll hurry back. He'll bring Nicke.

ODELL TAKES KENNY'S HEAD IN HIS HANDS AND SPEAKS TO HIM SOFTLY, MOUTHING THE WORDS CAREFULLY.

ODELL

Take care. Of them. Love you. Brutha.

ODELL KISSES KENNY ON THE FOREHEAD. ODELL GRABS HIS WALKING STICK. THUNDER CRACK.

MISLOU

Careful!

ODELL

Not even heaven's artillery can stop the magnificent return of Odell and The Sparkle Twins!

ODELL SHAKES HIS STICK AT THE SKY AND EXITS.

BLACKOUT.

End of Scene 1

ACT ONE

Scene 2

TWO HOURS HAVE PASSED. MISLOU AND PONY SIT TOSSING PLAYING CARDS INTO A FEATHERED HAT. KENNY PICKS UP THE CARDS THAT MISS. HE SMILES AT THE PICTURES. A HOWLING WIND PLUS HEAVY RAIN SHAKE THE CANVAS TENT.

MISLOU

Smell the storm?

PONY

Can taste fish in muh mouth.

MISLOU

Odell can feel it in his entire body.
Starts to shake when the weather changes.

PONY

Wish it wasn't so wet. Humid. Closin'
in real cold.

MISLOU

How long it been now?

PONY

Two hours least.

MISLOU

Hope they ain't drowned.

PONY

Drowned dead.

MISLOU

If they is, then I'm movin' us all to
Texas.

PONY

Odell wants to stay here in Louisiana.

MISLOU

Not if he's dead.

PONY

Don't sound like ya ever loved him.

MISLOU

Do I remember love?

PONY

Do you remember love.

MISLOU

There are times.

PONY

I love Nicke. Even if he's dead I still love Nicke.

MISLOU

You're either lucky or dumb.

PONY

Prob'ly neither.

MISLOU

Prob'ly.

PONY

What ever made you like him?

MISLOU

Oh, he's real strong. Good shoulders. When he talked it was real gentle, like he wanted muh to hold his hand an' go see what's around the other side o' town. And I kept followin'.

PONY

Wish ya ever stopped?

MISLOU

Not for a wink.

PONY

He sure do yell.

MISLOU

It's his way. I know that I matter.

PONY

He should talk nicer to me.

MISLOU

Sounds like he did once.

PONY

Maybe he talked nice. But it felt like a tongue to me.

ODELL MOANS OFF STAGE. PONY AND MISLOU GO TO THE SOUND. KENNY DROPS THE CARDS AND FOLLOWS. FRANK SHIRALDI ENTERS CARRYING ODELL ACROSS HIS SHOULDERS IN A FIREMAN'S CARRY. THEY ARE BOTH DRENCHED AND MUDDY. ODELL CRIES...

MISLOU
Odell, honey?

PONY
Muh, oh muh!

MISLOU
Can ya hear muh, Odell?

FRANK
He's spitting up blood.

MISLOU
Place 'em down! It's his stomach.
Bruised!

ODELL
I lost muh stick.

MISLOU
We'll find it, baby.

FRANK PLACES ODELL ON THE TABLE. MISLOU STRIPS ODELL DOWN TO HIS UNDERWEAR.

PONY
Strong shoulders. What's yuh name?

FRANK
Frank Shiraldi.

MISLOU
Where'd ya find 'em?

FRANK
I work part-time for the Boudreax Bus
Company. The bus got trapped in the mud.

PONY
Where's Nicke?

FRANK
Nicke du Plessis?!
(excitedly checks a list in his pocket)

PONY
Yes!

FRANK

When the other bus came, we were missing one passenger. A Nicolas du Plessis.

MISLOU

That's muh son.

PONY

Where is he?

FRANK

I don't know. I was stupid enough to go about a hundred years up the road, thinking he maybe got lost and that I could find him.

PONY

Hundred yards is a whole new world up here.

FRANK

I'm from back East. And in a ditch I see this glob of yellow. I thought it was Nicolas du Plessis and I got real scared that he was dead and that it was all my fault, me being the driver of the bus. His face was down in the mud and I thought he was suffocating so I pulled him up.

PONY

Nobody can kill Odell.

FRANK

And this man tells me he's lookin' for his son Nicke. And he thinks it's me! I tell him my name's Frank, but he's pleading with me and dragging me up here. Then he just passes out about twenty yards from back. I thought you all could help.

MISLOU TAKES OFF ODELL'S SHIRT. HIS DEEP-TISSUE BRUISE HAS MOVED UP TO HIS PECTORALS NOW.

PONY

Nicke's lost. Out there alone.

MISLOU

If he's well enough to go off, he's well enough to take care of himself.

FRANK
What's the matter with him?

PONY
He's sick.

MISLOU
He's hemophiliac.

FRANK
Hemophiliac.

PONY
He can't stop bleeding.

MISLOU
And he won't take his medicine.

PONY
He says it's like being buried alive in
yuh own blood.

FRANK
He needs a doctor.

ODELL
He needs nuthin' but some quiet!

PONY
See? He's fine.

FRANK
Never before have I heard the dead speak.

PONY
Stay awake, Strong Shoulders. The dead
ain't the only thing that has somethin'
to say 'round here.

MISLOU
Get me a blanket.

PONY PANTOMIMES "AIRING OUT" A BLANKET FOR KENNY. KENNY NODS,
AND FINDS ONE FOR MISLOU.

FRANK
What's with him?

PONY
Deaf and dumb.

MISLOU
He's mute. Not dumb.

PONY
Odell's brother, Kenny. The lucky one.

FRANK
Why's that?

PONY
Hears whatever he wants. Says what's on his mind. And Odell can't touch him.

FRANK
Who're you?

PONY
Pony.

KENNY GIVES MISLOU THE BLANKET.

FRANK
Like on a farm?

PONY
Like on a merry-go-round.

MISLOU
Thank you for bringin' 'em home. You'll stay for dinner?

ODELL
Nobody does nuthin' 'til we find Nicke!

PONY
He's my beau.

FRANK
Oh.

PONY
Don't look so sad. We'll find him.

MISLOU
Pony, go get me some clean water.

PONY
Don't go away.

PONY EXITS WITH A LARGE BUCKET.

ODELL
Yuh saved muh life, son.

FRANK
Frankly, sir. You saved mine.

MISLOU
How's that?

FRANK
I'd still be out there searching for the bus.

MISLOU
Searching for muh son.

ODELL
I owe you.

FRANK
No you don't. I've never seen the rain come down sideways before.

MISLOU
We'll have a good typhoon.

ODELL
Can't leave 'til after the storm. Promise?

FRANK
I was lookin' for a reason to resign.

ODELL
Then you'll stay.

MISLOU
Close you eyes, Daddy. Yuh home now. Relax.

PONY ENTERS SOAKING WET. SHE HANDS MISLOU THE BUCKET. MISLOU TAKES A SPONGE AND WIPES OFF THE MUD FROM ODELL.

PONY
Water's up three foot already.

MISLOU
It's gonna hit. Full tide.

ODELL
Lucky yuh found me. Floodwater's wash yuh away.

FRANK

I may need to stay the night.

ODELL

The night? Hell, boy the roads'll be washed out for a week. You'll sleep, eat and live with us.

PONY

I'll fix you breakfast. Do yuh like chocolate chip pancakes?

MISLOU

We been outta chocolate chips for six months now.

PONY

(whispering to FRANK)

I saved a handful in my stockin'. You can have 'em.

ODELL

Speak up over there!

FRANK

Yessir.

PONY

We're not talkin' about you.

MISLOU

If you would please not start again...

ODELL

Hoardin' chocolate chips? Share 'em.

PONY

They're mine!

FRANK

I'll share mine.

PONY

No. I found 'em. I can do with 'em as I please.

ODELL

Mother, trash don't got any morals, let alone human consideration for the weak!

PONY

I won't give up. I won't.

FRANK

I got chocolate bars in the bus. We can break them up after the storm. There's plenty for everyone.

PONY

I want you to have mine.

MISLOU

We'll discuss this later.

ODELL

I want the chocolate chips she stole from all of us now!

PONY

No!

MISLOU

Please...

FRANK

Let's all calm down.

NICKE ENTERS UNNOTICED BY EVERYONE EXCEPT KENNY. NICKE IS SOAKED, MUDDY AND STIFF. A WHITE BANDAGE IS WRAPPED FROM HIS EARS UP AROUND THE TOP OF HIS HEAD. NICKE SHUFFLES FOR A WALK AND THE REST OF HIS BODY FOLLOWS PAINFULLY. HE HOLDS HIS NECK STRAIGHT AHEAD. HE HAS NO COAT. A WHITE ENVELOPE IS PINNED TO HIS SHIRT. HE PAUSES UNDER THE HIGH WIRE.

ODELL

I'll tear this place apart for those chips.

FRANK

There's no reason...

PONY

And he will too!

ODELL

Give 'em!

MISLOU
(screams)

Quiet, all of you!

ALL ARE SILENT. NICKE MOVES SLOWLY AND STOPS IN THE MIDDLE OF THEM. NOBODY MOVES. THEY ARE ALL FROZEN.

You lost too? FRANK

That's Nicke. PONY

Nicolas du Plessis? FRANK

Muh baby. MISLOU

Son? ODELL

Nicke? PONY

Fought outta hell on his own. ODELL

I can't go to him. Odell? I can't move to muh baby. MISLOU

It's like I never seen him before. PONY

Is it him? My son? ODELL

Come to me, baby. MISLOU

I can't look at 'em. He's not even here. PONY

It's him. MISLOU

It's Nicke but without the spark. No soul to express. PONY

He doesn't move. No sound. Eyes focused. FRANK

Marble statue. PONY

MISLOU

Ignorin' the entrance of muh only son
over a chocolate chip. Damn us all.

ODELL

Nicke? I missed yuh son.

MISLOU

He doesn't need us.

ODELL

I'm sorry.

MISLOU

Save the apologies. Just never mind the
excuses.

PONY

That ain't Nicke.

MISLOU

Can't just go and hug a total stranger.

KENNY GOES TO NICKE. KENNY PUTS HIS ARM AROUND HIM AND GENTLY
LEADS HIM TO **NICKE'S AREA**. KENNY SITS HIM ON THE CORNER OF THE
COT AND FOLDS NICKE'S HANDS. NICKE STARES AHEAD. KENNY GOES IN
FRONT OF NICKE AND KNEELS IN FRONT OF HIM, MOUTHING SOME WORDS IN
FRONT OF NICKE'S EYES. NO ONE SPEAKS FOR KENNY. KENNY TURNS HIS
HEAD AND MOUTHS THE SAME WORDS TO THE GROUP. NO ONE SPEAKS FOR
HIM. KENNY, SLOWER AND MORE DESPERATE FORMS EACH WORD, SEARCHING
FOR A KIND FACE. FRANK QUIETLY SPEAKS FOR KENNY.

FRANK

(soft)

Wel. Come. Home. Slugger. Missed.
You. Love. You.

NO REACTION FROM NICKE. KENNY SMILES AND NODS THANKS TO FRANK.
KENNY PULLS THE WOOL BLANKET FROM THE COT OVER NICKE'S SHOULDERS.

ODELL

He don't remember.

PONY

I bet he's mad.

ODELL

Twelve months waiting for this moment.

MISLOU

It ain't fair.

FRANK

I think he's tired.

ODELL

Twelve months of tyranny for a boy who don't remember nuthin'.

PONY

I remember.

ODELL

Might as well start from scratch.

MISLOU

I need some air.

ODELL

I'll go with you.

MISLOU

He'll know us in the mornin'.

ODELL

The rain gives birth to a swan...

MISLOU

Never be the same.

ODELL

... Returns an ugly duckling.

MISLOU AND ODELL EXIT. PONY GOES TO HER AREA, FINDS A BOX AND PULLS OUT A SILK STOCKING WITH THE CHOCOLATE CHIPS INSIDE.

PONY

Nicke? I got a present.

PONY GOES TO NICKE.

FRANK

He doesn't understand.

PONY

Here, Nicke. You're favorite chocolate.

PONY OPENS NICKE'S HAND AND POURS THE CHOCOLATE CHIPS INTO HIS PALM. NICKE HAS NO REACTION, HIS EYES ARE STILL FIXED.

FRANK

I don't think he hears you.

PONY
Eat 'em, honey. Before they melt to
syrup.

FRANK
He needs some sleep.

PONY
You don't have t' answer. I know you're
tired.

PONY TOUCHES NICKE'S FACE.

PONY
(Cont'd)
His face's so cold.

FRANK
Mine isn't.

PONY
Skin feels like chalk dust.

FRANK
Mine doesn't.

PONY
I love yuh Nicke.

PONY KISSES NICKE'S CHEEK. SHE TAKES TWO CHOCOLATE CHIPS FROM
NICKE'S PALM. SHE BACKS AWAY, EATS ONE CHIP AND STICKS THE OTHER
ONE IN FRANK'S MOUTH.

FRANK
(chewing)
Come home to die.

PONY
Naw. Just to say good-bye.

FRANK
What's the difference?

PONY
Way you look at it, I suppose.

FRANK
I like you, Pony.

PONY
What was that?

KENNY TAKES A PILLOW AND GOES TO SLEEP ON THE COT NEXT TO NICKE.

FRANK
I said you look tired.

PONY
Oh. Yes I am.

FRANK
Feeling alone?

PONY
I imagined it different. Nicke supposed
to come home and we'd ride away from
Odell and the Bayou Bijou. Be the
Sparkle Twins on our own.

FRANK
Sparklel what?

PONY
Nuthin'. Doesn't matter now.

FRANK
That's too bad.

PONY
Ain't it?

FRANK
I could help you.

PONY
I don't need help. I need Nicke.

FRANK
I can take you out of here.

PONY
I don't think Nicke should leave right
now.

FRANK
Maybe we'd leave him here.

PONY
I won't do that.

FRANK
We'd come back in a few weeks. You need
a break. It'd do you good to get away
for a while, wouldn't it?

PONY
Nicke needs me.

FRANK
Think about it.

PONY
I don't want to think. I'm so tired,
Strong Shoulders.

FRANK
I like it when you call me that.

PONY
You do?

FRANK
I do.

PONY
Good.

FRANK
Better get some sleep.

PONY
I like you too.

PONY KISSES FRANK ON THE END OF HIS NOSE. FRANK EMBRACES HER.
THEY KISS DEEPLY.

PONY
Now that's what I call a tongue!

FRANK
Your kisses are the type against which
all others are judged.

PONY GOES TO HER BED OF STRAW AND SLOWLY MOVES INTO HER SLEEPING
"HORSE" POSITION.

PONY
C'mon. It's cold.

FRANK GOES TO HER, KNEELS BEHIND HER. HE STROKES HER HAIR.

FRANK
Sleep, baby. Listen to the flutter of
the rain as it dances down around us.

PONY
Rains frightens me.

FRANK

Feel the breath of the night against your neck. Feel our hearts beat together.

PONY

I can feel it.

FRANK

Smells mixed in the haze and fog of a moment shared. The taste of knowing that we both love this moment... madly.

FRANK KISSES HER CHEEK AND RECLINES NEXT TO PONY. THEY FALL ALSEEP TOGETHER. ODELL AND MISLOU ENTER. THEY ARE BOTH WET.

MISLOU

Slow down, Odell.

ODELL

It's a hundred dollar idea! We'll be out of debt. Start again.

MISLOU

Don't wake everybody. Look at them.

ODELL

Old Frank made himself right at home at our table.

MISLOU

They look so calm. Did we ever used to look that way?

ODELL

Maybe muh news can wait.

MISLOU

You okay? It ain't like you to be so considerate of others.

ODELL

A great idea, my love, that steeps in its own juices overnight, will be sweeter the coming morn.

MISLOU

Fair enough.

ODELL

Odell's back. And proud to be with you.

MISLOU
I love to have him back.

ODELL AND MISLOU EMBRACE AND KISS.

MISLOU
Let's get some sleep tonight, huh?

ODELL
Storm's a mean one.

MISLOU
We've made it through worse.

THEY CRAWL ON THE TABLE TOGETHER AND COVER THEMSELVES UP WITH
BLANKETS.

ODELL
'Til the dawn.

MISLOU
Yes, Daddy.

LIGHTS DIM IN EVERY AREA EXCEPT **NICKE'S AREA**. THE VIOLET "HOUSE"
LIGHTS COME UP FULL ON KENNY AND NICKE ON THE COT. WE ARE NOW...

INSIDE NICKE'S MIND SET.

NICKE STRETCHES AND IS NOW PHYSICALLY UNAFFECTED. HE DISCOVERS
THE CHOCOLATE CHIPS IN HIS PALM AND EATS THEM ONE BY ONE.

NICKE
Uncle Kinny? You okay, Uncle Kinny?

NICKE PUSHES KENNY AWAKE. KENNY NOW IS ALSO UNAFFECTED
PHYSICALLY.

KENNY
What time is it?

NICKE
Middle of the night. Rains stopped.

KENNY
Nicke! How you been?

NICKE
Who'm I to judge? Place's changed a lot.

KENNY
Your fall cost us the midway. No
insurance.

NICKE
How's the back?

KENNY
Hurts. Especially when the rains come.

NICKE
Knee?

KENNY
Better.

NICKE
Good.

KENNY
We're pretty much broke.

NICKE
I bet so.

KENNY
Your mother thinks we should move to Texas. Weather's better there and more people need entertaining.

NICKE
Dad won't go for that. He loves Louisiana.

KENNY
We all like it here.

NICKE
Born under a cloudbank; die under one.

NICKE GOES TO ODELL AND MISLOU AND WATCHES THEM SLEEP.

KENNY
He's trying. We all are.

NICKE
Want a chocolate chip?

KENNY
They stick to my teeth.

NICKE
They aren't bad, for being in a silk stocking for a year. You're sure?

KENNY

One.

NICKE SMILES AND KENNY OPENS HIS MOUTH. NICKE FIRES A CHOCOLATE CHIP AT HIS MOUTH AND MISSES. KENNY PICKS THE CHIP UP AND EATS IT AS THEY BOTH LAUGH.

KENNY

Never tasted one so sweet.

NICKE

Takes you back to being a kid.

KENNY

Mamma's kitchen on a Saturday morning.

NICKE

Gramma. I remember those same Saturdays in her kitchen.

KENNY

Tasted a little piece of home.

NICKE

I can smell her. I used to nuzzle under her arm and eat those cookies.

KENNY

And then go to the ballpark. Eat three hotdogs.

NICKE

And popcorn.

KENNY

And soda pop!

NICKE

A soda pop. Can hear the fizz.

KENNY

Used to take you to the ballpark. Your little mouth'd screw up as you sucked down that cherry soda pop.

NICKE

Then back to Gramma's.

KENNY

For more cookies.

NICKE
And a glass of cold milk.

KENNY
Baseball and cookies. Nothin' better.

NICKE
People used to make fun of you at the ballgames.

KENNY
Never noticed or cared. Your father did, though.

NICKE
Dad?

KENNY
I'd read people's lips. Call me dumb. Stupid. Idiot. Hurt Odell more than me. I told him that I loved to go to the games, but it wasn't worth going if it meant having him bleed for a week after standing up for me.

NICKE
Dad was always a little careless.

KENNY
Careless, maybe. But he fights for what he loves.

NICKE
Look at them sleeping.

KENNY
First good night they've had since the fall. Your mother usually gets up and stares outside at the dark waiting for you to come home.

NICKE
Really.

KENNY
The accident took a lot out of them.

NICKE
What accident?

KENNY
That isn't funny.

NICKE

Uncle Kinny, I asked you a question.

KENNY

The accident when you fell sixty feet and cracked open your skull. Ring a bell?

NICKE

Oh, God. That was no accident.

KENNY

Not an accident?

NICKE

Oh, no. I did that on purpose.

KENNY

Nicke?

NICKE

I didn't plan to jump. Me and Dad's eyes locked. All I could see in his pupils was me with grey hair, a fat stomach and bleeding ulcers. Sixty feet up with nowhere to escape the future staring me back in the face. So I took the ultimate plunge. Ran away the only way I knew how.

KENNY

He thinks he pushed you.

NICKE

Well that's rude. I did it myself.

KENNY

You have to tell him. He's been worried that he killed the only thing he ever loved.

NICKE

He can't deal with the thought that he did something wrong.

KENNY

Aw, Nicke, you have to tell him. It's been eating him up.

NICKE

It's humbling if he suffers. Dad needs a little humility, I think.

KENNY
How can you torture him like that?

NICKE
He secretly enjoys it.

KENNY
How can you deny him Salvation from himself?

NICKE
Salvation? How about a little cooperation first? They practically ignored me when I come home.

KENNY
They were surprised.

NICKE
I'm not handing out the Salvation.

KENNY
Why won't you tell him?

NICKE
Easy.

KENNY
Give me a reason.

NICKE
I'm Odell du Plessis' son.

KENNY
That's an excuse.

NICKE
No, it's inbred. Part of my DNA. Besides, his dream of me taking over the Bayou Bijou died the instant my head was punctured. So Salvation and excuses really don't apply here.

KENNY
You're wrong, Nicke.

NICKE
I've thought a lot about it.

KENNY

You've forgotten that dreams don't die easy. They beat and scream and call out your first name. They taste bitter as they fade and they dare you to live without them. But you can't. Your skin wrinkles and the heart weakens and you become what you fear. Old. And all you remember is the sweet throb of the future bright in your gut and the dull, frozen irrevocable thud of the stinging silence of a dream unnurtured.

NICKE

"A dream unfulfilled is a life denied light." Gramma used tell me that.

KENNY

And now your father sits waiting for the painless death of his dreams.

NICKE

He'll never die.

KENNY

I can't do anything to help him. But you can.

NICKE

You tell him.

KENNY

He won't listen to me. He doesn't have the patience to let me explain.

NICKE

That's his problem, not yours. Or mine.

KENNY

Let him know.

NICKE

I can't, Uncle Kinny. That little dive cost me my motor skills. I can barely walk. Can't talk at all, so to speak.

KENNY

You'll find a way.

NICKE

They taught me how to sing.

KENNY
You could never sing.

NICKE
Still can't.

NICKE RIPS THE ENVELOPE FROM HIS SHIRT.

NICKE
(Cont'd)
(reading)
"To Whom it May Concern. This is to inform you that Nicolas (Nicke) du Plessis' frontal left brain lobe was traumatized at the conclusion of the fall."

KENNY
What does that mean?

NICKE
Murdered some brain cells.

KENNY
Go on.

NICKE
(still reading)
"Thus, his corpus callosum has been damaged and his motor and language skills are irreversibly impaired."

KENNY
You can't talk or walk.

NICKE
Worse than before.

KENNY
Never could run the bases very well. Go on.

NICKE
(reading again)
"Nicke has Broca's Aphasia."

KENNY
What's that mean?

NICKE
I've lost my language. Can't speak.

KENNY

Join the club. Dues are reasonable.

NICKE

(reading)

"Someday he may be able to speak slowly, but without great articulation. Currently he's a-grammatical and has numerous phonality deficits."

KENNY

You couldn't do any of that anyway!

NICKE

Wait, wait. This is the good part.

(reading)

"He has been trained to communicate with song. The brain does not connect song with speaking and thus, the victim tricks himself to speak through a melody."

KENNY LAUGHS. NICKE LAUGHTS TOO AND CLEARS HIS VOICE AND SINGS.

NICKE

(Cont'd)

(with great Operatic vibrato)

These people are full of crap!

THEY BOTH LAUGH AGAIN.

KENNY

Sounds like you had a pretty good time.

NICKE

Was great. But I wasn't critical anymore, so they shipped me back.

KENNY

Like rotten fruit.

NICKE PULLS OUT A MATCH STUCK IN HIS HEAD BANDAGE. HE LIGHTS THE MATCH WITH HIS THUMBNAIL AND SETS THE LETTER ON FIRE. IT FLASHES IN FLAME AND DISAPPEARS INSTANTLY.

NICKE

Didn't bother to come along. So they explained it all in a letter and pinned it to my nipple.

KENNY

You could've left the note for Odell.

NICKE

I've decided I'll explain it all to him.

KENNY

Good for you.

NICKE

In my own way I'll tell him. I'm going back up on that high wire and walk straight across. He'll get the message.

KENNY

Nicke?

NICKE

I practiced at the hospital. Walked the painted lines on the floors. Did the best on the red line. They used a thicker brush.

KENNY

You'll kill yourself, son.

NICKE

I have to do it. Pride's hurt. I have to get back up there one more time to show Dad and myself that I can do it again. Do it in the spirit of the Sparkle Twins.

KENNY

What about Pony?

NICKE

I love her. But she's better off without me. I can't take care of her anymore.

KENNY

I don't think she'd mind taking care of you.

NICKE

She deserves better than this. The rest of the world needs to love her like I do.

KENNY

We all missed you.

NICKE

I missed you all too.

KENNY

Goodnight, Nicke.

NICKE AND KENNY RETURN TO THE COT. THEY EMBRACE. KENNY RECLINES ON THE COT. RAIN BEGINS TO FALL HARDER. SLOWLY, NICKE BEGINS TO RETURN TO HIS STILTED APHASIC STATE. HIS BACK STIFFENS AS HE SITS ON THE CORNER OF THE COT AGAIN. ROLLING THUNDER. THE LIGHTS BEGIN TO FADE OUT. NICKE'S NECK GETS TIGHT, EYES GLAZE OVER AS HE STRUGGLES TO SPEAK OUT ONCE MORE...

NICKE

Uncle Kinny? It's too dark... I mean too late.

BLACKOUT.

END INSIDE NICKE'S MIND SET.

End Of Act One

ACT TWO

Scene 1

SEVEN A.M. THURSDAY MORNING. LIGHT RAIN FALLS AS THE LIGHTS COME UP. EVERYONE BUT ODELL AND NICKE ARE SLEEPING IN THE SAME POSITION AS AT THE END OF ACT ONE. NICKE NEVER SLEPT AND CONTINUES TO STARE AS HE SITS ON THE CORNER OF THE COT. ODELL ENTERS WITH A LARGE WOODEN SPOON AND A CAST IRON FRYING SKILLET. ODELL SEES NICKE AND GOES TO HIM.

ODELL
You're awake. Feelin' better, son? I'll cook ya up a good breakfast.

NICKE DOES NOT RESPOND.

ODELL
(Cont'd)
I didn't mean it. I reached out for yuh hand and missed it. I care for you... more than muh Carnival... more than muh own life. That counts don't it? Give it all away for a fifty cent piece if I could only see yuh smile again. Didn't even have a chance to wave good-bye.

NICKE'S LEFT HAND BEGINS TO SHAKE. ODELL TURNS, DOES NOT SEE THE MOVEMENT.

ODELL
(Cont'd)
I hope yuh can at least hear muh words. Don't have t' accept 'em. Just hope yuh listened.

ODELL TURNS BACK TO NICKE AND GIVES HIM A QUICK, AWKWARD HUG. NICKE DOES NOT MOVE.

ODELL
(Cont'd)
It's good to have you home.

ODELL QUICKLY STANDS AND BANGS THE SPOON AGAINST THE SKILLET AND WAKES EVERYONE UP WITH THE NOISE.

ODELL
(Cont'd)
Up! Up! It's a new day for the Divine Rights of Kings! Ever-body up!

MISLOU

Odell, what's wrong?

ODELL

The Absolute Monarchy has risin from muh
shoulders today. Wake up!

ODELL BANGS THE SKILLET IN PONY'S EAR.

PONY

I'm awake. I'm alert. And ringin'.

ODELL

I got the biggest idea. Two of the
biggest ideas that'll bring the crowds
back packin' to the Bayou Bijou and send
our pockets jinglin' with the change of a
full stomach and capital investments.

FRANK

What did he say?

PONY

We're gonna be rich!

ODELL

Yes, muh friends, two brainstorm
electrified themselves at one point in
time in muh head. Git yuh tickets now!

FRANK

What's up?

PONY

Look, Mislou! He even got Frank excited!

MISLOU

It's wonderful to all be back and
singin'.

ODELL

And you, my son, will play a large role
in this resurrection.

FRANK

Me?

PONY

What's the idea?

ODELL PUSHES HIS SHIRT SLEEVES. THE DEEP-TISSUE BRUISE HAS SPREAD TO HIS ARMS. ODELL'S ENTIRE BODY IS BLEEDING SILENTLY AND UNCONTROLLABLY ON THE INSIDE.

MISLOU

Did you sleep at all?

ODELL

Who needs sleep when you're hikin' the high road? Idea First. Imagine a side show. Strange deformations. A Freak show with a terror twist. Won't cost us to set it up, guaranteed to play to the kids all summer.

PONY

A freak show?

FRANK

With a terror twist. Listen.

ODELL

I stand outside and sell the tickets. Entice 'em with ideas and visisions of such fanastic magnitudes that they'll stand in line to see it twice. Mizlou'll control the cash flow and ticket stubs. And then out you come, Pony... Little Miss Mare-ry. The incredible half horse half girl. You'll snort and prance a lot.

PONY

I can do that!

PONY ACTS IT OUT.

MISLOU

Good, Pony. Good!

FRANK

She's fooled me!

ODELL

And we'll sell locks of your hair as "the mane from the tamed wild Pony." Two bucks for a little bagful. Then we bring out the butter for the toast. Our ace-ball in the side pocket.

FRANK

I'd buy a bag of her hair. Maybe even two!

ODELL

And then, for a dollar extra, we offer them the impossible ressurected. The sight alone will cause children to lose sleep for one year and give their allowance away to the poor... ladies and gentlemen, I give you the only example of...

ODELL GOES TO NICKE. ODELL USES A LOUD PITCH-MAN'S VOICE.

ODELL

(Cont'd)

..."The Vampire Boy Who Would Not Die!"

NICKE GASPS. FRANK MOANS. MISLOU CATCHES HER BREATH.

ODELL

(Cont'd)

Struck through the heart with a wooden spike, he rose from the dead to take his revenge on all those who ever held up a wood cross is defense!

ODELL PLACES THE WOODEN SPOON AND SKILLET ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF NICKE'S HEAD. NICKE DOES NOT MOVE.

ODELL

(Cont'd)

Not even a stake through the brain will kill the baby monster! He'll haunt you with the stench from the his coffin and invite you to spend the night in his vacant eyes!

ODELL TAKES THE SPOON AND SKILLET AWAY FROM NICKE'S HEAD AND RETURNS TO HIS REGULAR VOICE.

ODELL

(Cont'd)

Then Kinny comes out and drops dead into a coma due to fright. Then we announce that "The powers of Evil have begun to bubble inside the Vampire Boy Who Would Not Die" and we invite 'em back tomorrow. Then we have Nikce roar or somethin'. We'll work on that part. Can't miss.

NO ONE SAYS ANYTHING FOR A MOMENT.

MISLOU

I don't know, Odell.

PONY

I don't like it either.

FRANK

I don't think Nicke cares.

PONY

I think I should do more than prance around.

ODELL

Okay, you can whinny and count to ten with yuh hooves too. But what about the Vampire boy?

MISLOU

I said I don't like it.

ODELL

It'll be popular. No doubt there. We'll have such a novelty that we'll take business away from the travellin' shows and nudie bars.

FRANK

Worth a try.

ODELL

We'd be makin' a mountain outta an ant hill.

MISLOU

It seems kinda mean, cruel.

PONY

Like yuh makin' fun of him.

ODELL

Think about it. Now for Part Second.

FRANK

What do I do?

ODELL

We bring back the Act.

PONY

We all know that, Odell. Give Nikce a chance to regain his footin'.

MISLOU

He can hardly walk.

ODELL

Odell and the Sparkle Twins. Starring Miss Pony Chicot and on loan from the Boudreax Bussing Company... Mister Frank Shiraldi!

FRANK

A Sparkle what?

PONY

Strong Shoulders in the high wire act?

ODELL

Beautiful. You two'd bring the people back. The Sparkle Twins mean quality throughout the Southeastern seaboard. Twelve months with no show'll bring back old customers lookin' fuh revamped action.

FRANK

I'm no drawin' card.

MISLOU

It ain't fair to Nicke. He's right here and yuh kickin' him out.

ODELL

Temporary only. Nicke understands the importance of repeat business.

FRANK

Sixty feet up? I don't know...

ODELL

You're strong. Got a good look. Yuh hairy arms alone'll sell tickets.

FRANK

I don't think so.

ODELL

Shut up and humor an old man.

PONY

I'll help ya. You really only got to support muh weight. I'll do the rest.

MISLOU

What if he falls? One Vampire in the family is enough.

ODELL

He won't fall, 'cause I'm stayin' on the ground this time. I'll call it from below.

MISLOU

I vote "no."

PONY

It's worth a try.

FRANK

I vote "no, no, no."

ODELL

Pony, help him find an outfit.

ODELL GOES AND WAKES UP KENNY. ODELL CIRCLES HIS FINGERS ON KENNY'S FACE AND KENNY SMILES. **LIGHTS CHANGE TO A CARNIVAL SHOW.** THE GLITTER BALL ROTATES. KENNY PUTS ON A CLOWN SUIT AND RUBS RED CIRCLES ON HIS CHEECKS WITH GREASEPAINT. ODELL RUNS AROUND IMITATING A CALLIOPE'S VOICE. HE DANCES WITH MISLOU. PONY PULLS A SEQUINED SKIRT OVER HER LEOTARD. ODELL RUMMAGES AROUND IN HIS COSTUME TRUNK AND PULLS OUT A LION TAMER'S WHIP AND A MEGAPHONE. MISLOU EATS POPCORN FROM A SMALL PAPER SACK. PONY HELPS FRANK SNAP ON A SILK BLOUSE OVER HIS BUS COMPANY JUMPSUIT.

ODELL

(Cont'd)

Good day and welcome to the main event...
Odell du Plessis and the Bayou Bijou
Carnival gives you... The New Sparkle
Twins! Never before seen in this
hemisphere, you will be treated to the
most amazing portrayal of personal
strength and human perseverance!

(MORE)

KENNY TURNS ON THE SPOTLIGHT AND SHINES IT ON PONY AND FRANK. PONY PRANCES AROUND AND LEADS FRANK BY THE HAND TO THE STEPS GOING SIXTY FEET UP (ACTUALLY ONLY FIVE FEET) UP TO THE HIGH WIRE.

ODELL
(Cont'd)

For centuries, their daring- do has been fodder for rumor, excitement and one hundred and twenty-two percent pure entertainment... it's all real, it's all around good for you! Lords and Ladies... her are The Sparkle Twins!!!

REAL CALLIOPE MUSIC UP. FRANK EASES HIMSELF OUT ON THE WIRE AND STOPS. PONY PRANCES OUT ON THE WIRE RIGHT BEHIND HIM. HIS HANDS ARE GLUED TO HIS SIDE AS HE STARES DOWN AT THE GROUND.

FRANK
Odell? I don't think I can do this!

ODELL
Keep yuh head up, son! Nobody likes a sloppy performance.

(announcing)
Sixty foot in the air with no support net at all. It isn't just a feat of human triumph, it is a vision of Heaven on greased, heavy-gauge steel wire! And now.... The Amazing. Single Limb Flyover.

PONY TAKES ONE ARM, WRAPS IT AROUND FRANK AND THEN QUICKLY BRINGS HER ARM BACK AROUND. FRANK SCREAMS. PONY BOWS. MISLOU APPLAUDS.

ODELL
(Cont'd)
Exquisite!

MISLOU
Yuh'all lookin' pretty good. Straighten yuh back a little, Frank. Yuh slouchin'.

FRANK
I can't feel my toes.

ODELL
Now. The Double. Leg Flywheel!

PONY HOLDS ON TO FRANK'S SHOULDER WITH ONE HAND AND THEN LIFTS EACH LEG OUTWARD ONCE. FRANK WHIMPERS. PONY TAKES ANOTHER GRAND BOW.

MISLOU
Good Frank. Yuh confidence is buildin'!
I can see it in yuh performance!

ODELL

And now, my children. The Grand Finalé.
Odell and the Spectacular Sparkle Twins
will perform for you.... The Quadruple.
Appendage Gravity Robbery!

PONY HOLDS ON TO FRANK'S WAIST AND THEN QUICKLY JUMPS OFF THE
HIGH WIRE AND SHE PUSHES FRANK SHOULDER'S ON PURPOSE. FRANK'S
ARMS FLY OUT PARALLEL TO HIS BODY FOR A SPLIT-SECOND BEFORE HE
REGAINS HIS BALANCE AND CLAMPS HIS HANDS BACK TO HIS SIDES AGAIN.
FRANK FREEZES AGAIN WHILE PONY CHEERS AND BLOWS KISSES.

ODELL

You have experienced the oddity and the
enormity of history taking place before
yuh eyes, ears and hearts. A healthy
round of applause, if you would be so
kind, for the stupendous and stunningly
sprightly New Sparkle Twins! Appearing
now and forever at the Bayou Bijou Carni-
val.

BLACKOUT.

End of Scene 1

Scene 2

THREE IN THE AFTERNOON AND HEAVY RAIN AND ROLLING THUNDER BUILD. NICKE CONTINUES TO SIT. PONY IS TAKING HER SKIRT OFF. FRANK IS TAKING HIS WRIST PULSE.

PONY

Not bad for a newborn, Strong Shoulders.

FRANK

I haven't found a pulse yet.

PONY

Lucky you waited to faint after yuh got down.

FRANK

Thanks for catching me.

PONY

Yuh fell right into muh arms. But you done a lot better than Odell. He used to hop all around and wiggle the wire. It was impossible to get a good grip with yuh toes when he was up there.

FRANK

The ice is melting. I can feel a little blip in my wrist.

PONY GOES TO THE PICNIC BASKETS AND TAKES OUT A WHOLE WHEAT ROLL. SHE TEARS OFF THE CORNERS AND EATS THEM. AS SHE EATS THE ROLL SHE MOVES AROUND THE SPACE.

PONY

You'll make it. I think you'll like it here.

FRANK

What's the pay like?

PONY

You mean money?

FRANK

Money.

PONY

There's no pay here. We work for glory.

FRANK

I don't want to be famous. I want to eat.

PONY

Maybe you should leave now. Go back to your big bus.

NICKE IS NOT IN HER AREA. SHE BEGINS TO MOVE, DANCE ALMOST AND RUB HER BACK AGAINST THE HIGH WIRE POLE.

FRANK

I hate that bus. But I'll leave with you.

PONY

You'll eat. See? It's good bread. Want some?

FRANK

No.

PONY

You're the one starving.

FRANK

Will you leave with me?

PONY

I ain't kissed another's lips in twelve months.

FRANK

Me either.

PONY

My heart is Nicke's. Even if he can't kiss me back I still love him.

FRANK

That kiss was only like a hug.

PONY

Except wetter.

FRANK

I didn't mean nuthin' by it.

PONY

Don't matter. It happened but it won't again.

FRANK

I should leave.

PONY

We can work together. But I gotta help Nicke.

FRANK

I understand that.

PONY

I like you.

FRANK

I like you too.

PONY

But we can't.

FRANK

Punishing desire.

PONY

Nicke likes you too.

FRANK

Nicke?

PONY

He likes anybody I like. He's nice that way.

FRANK

Well, I guess he must have been something.

PONY

Settled?

FRANK

What should I do with all the like that pents up inside my mouth.

PONY

Do like me. Swallow. Or Spit.

FRANK

I really like you.

PONY

You know I like you.

FRANK
Consider it dropped.

PONY
We'll be okay.

FRANK
I trust you.

NICKE STRUGGLES TO TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND HIS LIPS BARELY MOVE AS HE SPEAKS. HIS VOICE IS QUIET AND ALMOST INAUDIBLE AS HE USES A SING-SONG TO COMMUNICATE...

NICKE
Red Rover. Red Rover...

FRANK
What's that?

PONY
Nicke? He's speakin' to muh.

NICKE
...Let Nicke come over.

FRANK
He's mumbling.

PONY
No. They're words.

FRANK
He's not making sense.

PONY
He is! He's talkin' to muh.

FRANK
I'll get Odell.

NICKE
Red Rover. Red Rover.

PONY
Yes! Oh, it's Nicke!

FRANK
He's heard every word.

NICKE
Let Nicke come over.

ODELL, MISLOU AND KENNY ENTER. THEY ARE WET AND CARRYING
SANDBAGS.

PONY
Mislou! Odell! He's speakin'!

FRANK
Jibberish.

ODELL
Later. The Typhoon's comin'!

MISLOU
Help us!

ODELL
We got minutes only!

THEY ALL START STACKING THE SANDBAGS OVER THE ENTRANCE. NICKE
CONTINUES TO SPEAK QUIETLY...

MISLOU
I'm scared.

PONY
Nicke spoke to muh!

NICKE
Red. Rover.

ODELL
Pile it higher, Frank. Go to it Kinny!

FRANK
I can feel the wind coming through!

MISLOU
More than wind. Rain'll spank yuh skin,
make it rash red.

PONY
I know he did.

NICKE
Red. Rover.

ODELL
Someone save Nicke!

MISLOU PUSHES KENNY TOWARDS NICKE.

FRANK

I can feel it through the canvas.

THE ENSUING TYPHOON SEQUENCE TAKES PLACE IN THREE PANTOMIME TABLEAUS. EACH TABLEAU IS TIMED TO THE SOUND OF THUNDER AND THE FLASHES OF LIGHTNING. THE LIGHTS FLICKER TO REVEAL THE TABLEAUS.

BLACKOUT.

TABLEAU ONE: THE LIGHTS FLASH. KENNY COVERS NICKE WITH A BLANKET. ODELL GRABS HIS CHEST. MISLOU DROPS A SANDBAG AND REACHES FOR ODELL. FRANK IS PUSHED BACK BY THE WIND AND FALLS INTO PONY'S ARMS. THUNDER.

NICKE

Let Nicke come over.

BLACKOUT.

TABLEAU TWO: LIGHTS FLASH. KENNY PUTS A CONSTRUCTION HAT ON NICKE'S HEAD. ODELL STAGGERS TO THE TABLE. MISLOU PUTS STRAW UNDER ODELL'S HEAD FOR A PILLOW. FRANK MOVE TOGETHER AND THEIR LIPS MEET AT THE SAME TIME FOR A KISS. THUNDER CRACK.

NICKE

Red Rover. Red Rover.

BLACKOUT.

TABLEAU THREE: LIGHTS STROBE. KENNY HUGS NICKE. ODELL GRABS FOR MISLOU'S HAND AND GRABS HIS CHEST AGAIN AS HIS BACK ARCHES OFF THE TABLE. PONY LEAVES FRANK'S EMBRACE, STEPS BACK BUT NEVER LETS GO OF HIS HAND. SEARING THUNDER POP.

NICKE

Let O- dell come over.

BLACKOUT.

End of Scene 2

Scene 3

FRIDAY AT DAWN. THE TYPHOON IS OVER. MISLOU IS DRAPED OVER ODELL'S BODY. PONY AND FRANK ARE NEXT TO EACH OTHER ON THE GROUND. THEY ARE BOTH SLEEPING LIKE HORSES. THE LIGHTS ARE DIM OVER THIS SCENE AS THE VIOLET-BLUE "HOUSE LIGHTS" COME UP STRONG ON NICKE AND KENNY AS WE ARE ONCE AGAIN...

INSIDE NICKE'S MIND SET:

NICKE

Uncle Kinny?

NICKE BEGINS TO MOVE. HIS LIMBS ARE STIFF.

NICKE

(Cont'd)

I'm scared Uncle Kinny.

NICKE TOUCHES KENNY'S ARM AND KENNY WAKES UP. NICKE TAKES OFF THE CONSTRUCTION HAT. NICKE'S NECK IS BRUISED PURPLE.

KENNY

What a storm. Worst we ever had.

NICKE

My neck hurts.

KENNY

Ouch. It's all bruised up.

NICKE

I think a sandbag hit me.

KENNY

Should've ducked.

NICKE

I don't remember how to do anything.

KENNY

Nasty bruise. You want me to get a cool sponge?

NICKE WINCES AS HE RUBS HIS NECK.

NICKE

Umm. I'm fine. I didn't mean to rob you of any beauty sleep.

KENNY

Too old for that.

NICKE

I just wanted to say good-bye.

KENNY

Where you going?

NICKE

Up there. I can make it across.

KENNY

Frank won't last. There's not need to rush.

NICKE

If I use my arms for balance, and keep my slippers on, I can walk across. Well, slide across.

KENNY

Don't, Nicke.

NICKE

Look at my hands. Like a baby's. They used to be rough with calluses.

NICKE HOLDS OUT HIS PALMS TO KENNY. KENNY TOUCHES THEM WITH HIS FINGERTIPS.

KENNY

A man's life isn't defined by the thickness of his palms.

NICKE

But my life has been. I'm dying, Kinny. And I'm frightened. Every day I lose more movement and it gets harder to breathe. Trapped and nobody here knows what it's like. They all think I'm some piece of rotten fruit!

KENNY

They don't think that.

NICKE

A man has to take that step and grab back his life. It's getting too late.
(stabbing finger into own chest)
All I ask myself, over and over is "How did I get in here?"

KENNY

I have some money saved. Pennies, fifty-cent pieces, silver notes. My coin collection. We can send you back to the hospital.

NICKE

Yesterday I tried to scream at them, reach out to my father and hold his hand to tell him that I loved him. Only my fingers wiggled. It's over, but I'm still crying out....Feed me! Hold me! I was jumping up and down, retching that my body couldn't respond.

KENNY

Give it time.

NICKE

All that came out was a child's playground game from the chocolate chip sandlots of my past. Help me, Uncle Kinny. Help me not to be scared of losing my mind!

KENNY

So much potential to offer. It's not a fair trial!

NICKE

And that, is why it needs to be stopped dead.

KENNY

All right, Nicke. I won't help you. But I won't stop you, either.

NICKE EMBRACES KENNY.

NICKE

I'll never forget you.

KENNY

And I will spend the rest of my life doing the opposite.

NICKE FALLS BACK ON THE COT. HE FEELS HIS BRUISED NECK AND HE PHYSICALLY GOES BACK TO HIS STATUE-LIKE STATE.

NICKE

I'm cold. So very cold.

NICKE STARES AHEAD ONCE AGAIN. KENNY THROWS A BLANKET BACK OVER NICKE'S SHOULDERS.

END INSIDE NICKE'S MIND SET.

LIGHTS COME UP BRIGHTER ON THE REST OF THE AREA. MISLOU WAKES AND WIPES HER EYES. SHE FOLDS ODELL'S HANDS OVER HIS CHEST. KENNY PICKS UP THE DEBRIS FROM THE ENTIRE AREA. PONY WAKES UP AND GOES TO MISLOU. MISLOU TAKES A SPONGE AND BUCKET OF WATER AND WASHES ODELL'S BODY.

PONY

How is he?

MISLOU

He's better.

PONY

I'm sorry.

MISLOU

Sometimes the best conclusions are beginnings.

PONY

Are you all right?

MISLOU

Yes.

PONY

I'll make some breakfast.

FRANK WAKES UP.

FRANK

Breakfast! I was dreaming of eggs and hot maple syrup.

MISLOU

Odell's passed on.

FRANK

What? What caused it?

MISLOU

What didn't?

FRANK

He was a good man.

MISLOU

He could just never fight off all the bad
in the world.

FRANK

And that killed him?

MISLOU

It's killed all the great men. We'll
tell Nicke later.

PONY

I miss him already.

MISLOU

Would you empty that costume trunk?

PONY AND FRANK GO TO THE TRUNK. THEY DUMP ALL THE CARNIVAL
COSTUMES ON THE GROUND.

FRANK

What happens now?

MISLOU

We move to Texas.

PONY

Odell wouldn't like that.

MISLOU WASHES ODELL'S LEGS.

MISLOU

Odell wouldn't like us all to die either.

FRANK

Texas does have room.

MISLOU

And people.

FRANK

And better weather.

TEARS STREAM DOWN NICKE'S FACE AS HE LISTENS. MISLOU WASHES
ODELL'S CHEST.

FRANK

Odell dead. Knew him for twenty-four
hours. I miss him too.

KENNY QUIETLY WIPES THE TEARS FROM NICKE'S FACE WITH A COLORED
SCARF. FRANK DRAGS THE COSTUME TRUNK NEXT TO THE TABLE.

MISLOU

I been tryin' to make muhself cry for losin' him. But look. All bruised up inside, a broken defenseless child with his hand eternally raised. "Call on me. I know the answer if you'll only notice muh outstretched arm." All his life he waved down attention. And when he was called on to explain himself... then he shone. In the minutes it took for him to birth an idea you fell in love with him.

FRANK

He can rest now.

MISLOU

I know. That's why I can't weep for Daddy. He's better off.

PONY

We gonna have a church funeral service?

MISLOU

Never wanted one. Just wanted to be dropped in the water to sink from where he came from. Get Kenny to help lift 'em.

PONY GOES TO KENNY AND TUGS ON HIS SLEEVE. KENNY FOLLOWS HER.

PONY

I don't think he knows.

MISLOU

Frank. Take down that banner.

FRANK

Yessum.

FRANK TAKES A POLE AND PULLS DOWN THE **ODELL AND THE SPARKLE TWINS** BANNER STRETCHED ABOVE THE AREA. MISLOU TAKES KENNY'S HEAD IN HER HANDS AND CAREFULLY FORMS HER WORDS FOR HIM.

MISLOU

Brother Odell. Is dead. He loved you. Okay?

KENNY GOES TO ODELL. HE TOUCHES THE SKIN AND MAKES HIS FIRST SOUND: A GUTTURAL MOAN. KENNY LOOKS AT NICKE. NICKE DOESN'T MOVE BUT THE TEARS ARE STREAMING DOWN HIS FACE. TEARS THEN BEGINS TO FALL DOWN KENNY'S FACE. KENNY BEGINS TO CRY; THE SOUND HE MAKES IS UNFAMILIAR, WRENCHING AND PAINFUL. MISLOU, PONY AND FRANK ARE TAKEN ABACK BY THIS SHOW OF EMOTION. PONY GOES TO KENNY. KENNY COLLAPSES ON HER SHOULDER.

FRANK

Feel like I'm stealing the flag.

FRANK HANDS THE BANNER TO MISLOU. SHE FOLDS IT UP.

PONY

(holding back tears)

What're you doin' with that?

MISLOU

Buryin' it.

PONY

You can't do that! We'll need it in Texas.

MISLOU

We'll make another if we need it.
Help me move him.

FRANK GRABS ODELL'S LEG. MISLOU GRABS ODELL'S ARM. KENNY SEES THEM, WIPES HIS EYES AND GRABS ODELL'S LEG WHILE PONY FOLLOWS AND GRABS THE OTHER ARM.

FRANK

Two, three, lift!

THEY STRUGGLE TO LIFT ODELL OFF THE TABLE.

PONY

He's light.

MISLOU

Sixty-six years of pressure packed inside. Only a pocketful of real joy.

ODELL IS LOWERED INTO THE TRUNK.

FRANK

You sure this is how he wants to be buried?

PONY

A rotting costume trunk for a coffin then
dumped in the swamp like garbage? That's
Odell's life in a sentence.

FRANK

That's an eyeful.

MISLOU PLACES THE BANNER ON TOP OF ODELL.

MISLOU

When he brought us out here thrity years
ago he stopped fightin' Kenny's battles
and had to face his own. It was then the
dreams started. It was the dreams that
lulled us to sleep at night.

MISLOU CLOSSES THE TRUNK AND LATCHES THE BUCKLES. KENNY AND FRANK
GRAB AN END AND DRAG THE TRUNK OUT. PONY AND MISLOU KICK OVER
THE SANDBAGS BLOCKING THE EXIT.

MISLOU
(Cont'd)

Let's let him rest.

THEY ALL EXIT. NICKE STRUGGLES TO HIS FEET. MOVING SLOWLY, HE
SHUFFLES TO THE STEPS LEADING TO THE HIGH WIRE. HE BENDS AND
CRAWLS UP THE STEPS. HE IS STILL PHYSICALLY LIMITED AND
UNCOORDINATED, SO THIS EASY TASK IS A REAL CHALLENGE. FINALLY AT
THE TOP STEP, NICKE STANDS STILL STARING AT THE WIRE BEFORE HIM.
PONY ENTERS.

PONY

That sure was quiet.

FRANK, KENNY AND MISLOU ENTER.

MISLOU

We need some quiet.

PONY

Where's Nicke?

FRANK

Nicke?

PONY
Where is he?

MISLOU
What?

FRANK
He's up there!

KENNY GOES TO THE SPOTLIGHT AND TURNS IT ON. HE FOCUSES IT ON NICKE.

MISLOU
Nicke? Stay there, son. We'll get yuh down.

FRANK
I'll sneak up and get him.

PONY
No. Let me go.

PONY GOES UP THE FIRST STEP. NICKE TAKES A STEP OUT ON THE WIRE.

MISLOU
Honey! We're comin' up to get you. Stay there.

NICKE CONTINUES TO MOVE ACROSS THE WIRE. PONY REACHES THE TOP STEP AND STOPS.

FRANK
Don't shake the wire. You can't reach him.

MISLOU
He's out too far.

PONY
I love you Nicke!

NICKE MOVES ACROSS THE WIRE. KENNY SHIFTS THE FOCUS OF THE SPOTLIGHT ON PONY AS SHE REACHES OUT TO HIM.

MISLOU
All muh babies are dyin'!

NICKE HAS MOVED ACROSS THE WIRE OUT OF AUDIENCE SIGHT.

FRANK
He's losin' his balance!

MISLOU
Come home, Nicke!

PONY
(screaming)
Nicke!!

BLACKOUT.

End of Scene 3

Scene 4

EPILOGUE: INSIDE KENNY'S MIND SET

KENNY IS UNAFFECTED AND THE SAME CIRCLE SPOT THAT WAS USED IN THE PROLOGUE IS USED HERE. HE SPEAKS DIRECTLY TO THE AUDIENCE AS THE CONCLUDING SCENE OCCURS BEHIND HIM IN SILENCE.

KENNY

And that's the story of the Bayou Bijou
Carnival live and direct from Elba,
Louisiana.

FRANK CARRIES NICKE'S LIMP BODY TO THE TABLE. HE RIPS OFF THE HOSPITAL GREENS.

KENNY

(Cont'd)

We appreciate your patronage. Three
shows daily. Tell all your friends.

PONY TAKES THE SPONGE AND RINGS OUT THE WATER. SHE WASHES NICKE'S BODY.

KENNY

(Cont'd)

When we leave here, there'll be trails of
sawdust and straw that'll follow us
wherever we end up. But we'll have to
leave behind pieces of the little
things... the way Nicke used to twist up
the corner of his mouth around a paper
straw as he sipped a soda pop -- how
Mislou could, with one flip of the wrist,
throw a bag of cotton candy to the back
row -- the thirty- one strokes of a brush
Pony used every showdate to beautify her
hair -- and of course, the guts of his
dreams Odell used to paint in the night
sky when he thought no one was lookin'.

MISLOU DROPS ON THE COT AND FOR THE FIRST TIME...SHE CRIES
SILENTLY.

KENNY

(Cont'd)

Someone wiser'n me said once that
"nothing is lost but it can never be
again as it was. You will only find the
bits and cry out because they were
yourself."

(MORE)

FRANK LIFTS A BLACK WARDROBE TRUNK AND BRINGS IT NEXT TO THE TABLE. A CRACK OF THUNDER AND THE RAINS BEGIN...

KENNY
(Cont'd)

Dreams don't die easy here. But sometimes
it's better that they die alone.

END INSIDE KENNY'S MIND SET.

FINAL BLACKOUT.

Curtain