

# **SOLEDAD**

A Play in Two Acts

by

J. E. Robinson

# SOLEIDAD

## **SOLEIDAD**

Copyright (c) 2020 By J.E. ROBINSON

CAUTION: Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performance of **SOLEIDAD** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for **SOLEIDAD** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No pro-fessional or nonprofessional Performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee. Inquiries concerning production rights should be addressed to [licensing@nextstagepress.net](mailto:licensing@nextstagepress.net)

### **SPECIAL NOTE**

Anyone receiving permission to produce **SOLEIDAD** is required to give credit to the Authors as sole and exclusive Authors of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The names of the Authors must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author.

## SOLEDAD

*To the memory of Reverend A. J. Maggos, pastor, Open Door Fellowship, Alton, Illinois, whose ministry emphasized that redemption through God's Grace and through the Love of Jesus of Nazareth is freely available to all, especially to those of us despised for our sins.*

## SOLEDAD

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

“Queenie” Herbie, a homosexual Death Row prisoner in Angola State Prison, Louisiana.

“Brother” Marcus, a Death Row Prisoner in Angola State Prison, Louisiana. Portrays an Angel in Act II.

“Floyd” Eustace, a Death Row Prisoner in Angola State Prison, Louisiana.

“Father” A Catholic priest. Portrays Steward in Act II.

NB: In composition, the Playwright envisioned male African American actors in these roles; nevertheless, this play does not preclude “nontraditional” casting.

### **SETTING**

Act I takes place in the colored chapel, Angola State Prison, Louisiana, on Maundy Thursday, during Holy Week, 1934.

Act II takes place in Heaven, time to be determined, in Eternity.

NB: Dialogue in Act II specifies serving “poke salad.” If not available, creamed spinach is an acceptable alternative, for dining purposes.

SOLEDAD

# SOLEDAD

## Act I

*The colored chapel of Angola Prison Farm, Louisiana, near Baton Rouge, Maundy Thursday, 1934, sometime in the late evening, as an insistent rain falls outside. The audience enjoys the perspective as if from the pulpit of the chapel. A door, the exit into the rain, stands at the back of the stage. Odd folding chairs sit haphazardly on the stage, facing the audience, and provide a claustrophobic feel, as if in the middle of the prison. A lone Crucifix sits in a chair.*

*After curtain, from the door, QUEENIE and BROTHER ENTER, dressed in white shirts and dark dungarees. Together, they carry a card table, which had sheltered them from the rain. Clearing a space at the center of the stage, they set up the card table. Brother sits at the card table. Brother closes his eyes, as if meditating. Queenie stands at the open door and watches the rain. Brother removes his shoes, as if to dry his feet.*

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, now, this what Queenie say. Queenie say, Lord, please, Lord, don't let it rain another day! "Well, it rained five days, sky black as night! Rained five days, sky black as night! Trouble in the lowlands—" What a sight! Yes, sir! Cold, too. *(to Brother.)* Queenie say that, Queenie say, now, betcha, we get rain Good Friday. At three o'clock, too! Cats, dogs, Queenie say that, and Queenie say, Tweetie, and more cats and dogs! Ain't never seen no holy week when it didn't rain at three o'clock Good Friday, cats and dogs...and Easter Sunday, and each and every Sunday 'till Pentecost, too! You?

**BROTHER.** Brother say, it rain when it rain when it rain, when it rain! Each and every man know. That what Brother say.

## SOLEDAD

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, now, Queenie say, hear what my aunties got to say. My aunties say “that just the Good Lord weeping over His Son.” Take a month of Sundays to do that—month and a half, if it rain ‘till Pentecost. Stop raining for the Sun to jump Easter morning.

**BROTHER.** Brother say, that Sun not some fool: it get on out of anyone’s way, anyway. That what Brother say.

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, that Sun, now, now, that there Sun, Queenie say, The Sun decide to leap, and that rain sure will get out of the way.

Betcha, they put the chain gang on sandbag duty

**BROTHER.** Brother say, yeah, bet! Brother say, they put that whole line out at the river, sandbagging away. Here, New Orleans—Brother say, they want that chain gang seen in New Orleans. Brother say, they say, show Treme, if they don’t keep the noise down. Brother say, Huey Long and they, they praying for all kind of rain to show up Treme. Brother say, put that message out from your great-granddaddy for your great-grandchildren to hear, and hear it loud and clear! This rain, it got to be delaying that priest a bit.

**QUEENIE.** (*looking out at the rain.*) Rain, rain, rain...rain, I just wish you go away! “Well, it rained five days, sky black as night!”

**BROTHER.** Queenie, Brother say, now, you know that ain’t nothing but “Back Water Blues?”

**QUEENIE.** Brother, Queenie say, I’m a small-“c” creole from Treme, New Orleans, Orleans Parish, Louisiana, United States of America, nineteen and thirty-four, no window at all, but in my door, all I see is Mister Westinghouse’s electric chair! Brother, don’t know about you—

**BROTHER.** Brother say, Brother see that electric chair, too, but Brother see that Mister Edison’s outside that door.

**QUEENIE.** Huey P. Long fixing to cook hisself some fried chicken, when he cook you! Don’t know about you, Brother, but Queenie, he know them blues, “Back Water” or otherwise. Like my aunties say, “sing them a little, scurvy them old blues away.” Scat! Ain’t that!

**BROTHER.** Then, Brother say, keep singing them blues, Queenie. Keep singing them blues. Keep Queenie from seeing what he got to see. That what Brother say. Brother say, scat, blues! Brother say, scat!

## SOLEDAD

Brother say, Brother can meet you. “I’s just a poor boy, a long ways from home.”

**QUEENIE.** (*laughing, sitting in a chair near the door.*) Queenie sees you! There you go, Brother, there you go!

**BROTHER.** (*laughing, singing, as Queenie keeps time.*) Brother say, “I’s just a poor boy, a long ways from home.” Brother say, Pap sing that, up in Shreveport, each and every night and day, and Pap knew the song he sing!—that what Brother say! Now, Brother say, Queenie back water it, but Brother say, “I’s just a poor boy, a long ways from home.” Brother say, Shreveport, Angola Prison Farm, other end of the state, other side of this man’s world—

**QUEENIE.** (*laughing.*) Queenie say, Queenie hear Brother! Hear that! Queenie hear Brother!

**BROTHER.** Brother say, that just what Brother say! Brother say, just that, but nothing more! Brother say—

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say—

**BROTHER.** (*singing simultaneously with Queenie, also keeping beat with hands.*) “I’s just a poor boy, just a long ways from home—“ Brother say, “I’s a poor boy, just a long ways from home—“

**QUEENIE.** (*singing simultaneously with Brother.*) “Rained five days, the sky black as night. Rained five day, sky dark as night—“

**BROTHER.** Now, listen, listen now, Brother say, “rain five day—“

**QUEENIE.** (*laughing, clapping time.*) Yes sir! Queenie say, yes sir! Yes sir!

**BROTHER.** “Sky black as night!” Brother say, Queenie, hear what Brother say, “rain five day, sky black as night!”

**QUEENIE.** My aunties, those down in Treme, they say “Hear, Herbie, you a poor boy, a long ways from home!” Hear that, now? Hear that, say, “you a poor boy, just a long, long way from home!”

**BROTHER.** Brother say, Marcus say, Pap up in Shreveport say, hear that, Herbie! Hear that!” Now, say, “rain five day, sky black as night!” Now, now, Poor Boy: in Shreveport, Pap say, “Herbie, you hear what Marcus say?” “Rain five day, on me, Poor Boy, that sky black as night!” Ma Rainey let out on that, Pap say, “shush, boy, Ma hit it, high and low!”

## SOLEDAD

**QUEENIE.** Yes sir! Yes sir!

**BROTHER.** Brother say, Pap say, high and low! Brother say, in Shreveport, Pap say, “Trouble coming ‘round our door—“

**QUEENIE.** And, Lord know, can’t live on that block no more!

**BROTHER.** No sir. No sir. Hear, now, what Brother say: Charlie move you around, Charlie move you away! In Shreveport, now, Pap say, “good luck to you, if you want to stay!” Now, hear that.

**QUEENIE.** Brother, we was having ourselves a good old time, and there you go, you got to spit.

**BROTHER.** (*feet dried, now putting on shoes.*) Brother say, sorry about that, Queenie. Brother say, sorry about that.

**QUEENIE.** Like my aunties down in Treme say—

**BROTHER.** Brother say, catch Pap in Shreveport—

**QUEENIE.** Out of sight, out of sight.

**BROTHER.** (*closing eyes.*) Brother say, get thee behind my behind. He don’t mind. Brother say, he blind. Brother say, he can’t see nothing, not-a-thing, no more.

**QUEENIE.** (*covering eyes.*) Queenie say, Queenie, too! No folk out there worth nothing!

**BROTHER.** (*opening eyes.*) Brother say, talk ‘bout that! Chain gang tomorrow?

**QUEENIE.** (*looking out the door, then closing it.*) Saturday more likely, that what Queenie say. Nothing Saturday before Easter. Nothing but more rain, and more rain...cats, dogs, Tweetie, too. They work us Saturday, we sleep for service Easter Sunday. That what Queenie say.

**BROTHER.** Brother say to Queenie, chain gang Good Friday. Brother say to Queenie, they say, “Good Friday?—Crucify! Work them like old Hebrew slaves!” Flood water don’t take no Holy Week. (*Together, Brother and Queenie move the card table to the middle of the floor. Queenie sets the Crucifix on the card table. Taking the Crucifix in response, Brother places the Crucifix over the door, its back to the audience.*)

**QUEENIE.** (*dumbfounded by Brother’s boldness, temporarily.*) Queenie say, you one hardcore one, my, Brother. One hardcore one. (*Laughing, Brother claps his hands. Sitting at the card table, Queenie*

## SOLEDAD

*puts his feet up.*) Down in Treme, my aunties say, one thing good about flood waters: catfishing easy. Catfish, big as this, big as a man arm, they go swimming in a man back yard. Don't need no pole, now. Man just open his back door, and take them on up, by the hand, in the hand!

**BROTHER.** (*clapping his hands again, again laughing. Brother sits at the card table as well, also with feet up.*) Brother say, that good. Brother say, good eats. Brother say, Pap say catfish in Treme got nothing on catfish in Shreveport. Brother say, Pap say, not a thing at all.

**QUEENIE.** Down in Treme, my aunties say, two them catfish, skillet of hot water cornbread, feed your whole generation. Good, good eats! Down in Treme, my aunties call Queenie up and say, "now, Herbie—" that just what they say, "now, Herbie, come on over and get some food." Hear this, Brother: triangle clanging. Greasing time! (*Brother suppresses a belch. Hearing the belch, Queenie laughs because of it.*) Queenie do that, too. (*Laughing once more, Brother claps his hands again.*) That that apple they gave you, Brother?

**BROTHER.** Probably sour.

**QUEENIE.** (*deadpan humor.*) Most likely. And stale.

**BROTHER.** (*laughing.*) Brother say, Queenie, Brother say, Queenie know apples don't stale.

**QUEENIE.** Now, Queenie say, now, Brother, don't get Queenie spitting, too. Free apple? Stale apple! Good Lord know that! Now, call Queenie a lie! Hear Queenie, Brother? Queenie say, call Queenie a lie! "Probably sour?" Free apple? Hm.

**BROTHER.** Brother say, free apple?—stale apple?—sour apple?—worm in apple! Queenie spitting?—Brother spitting, too! Get the behind my behind! Brother say, like Pap say in Shreveport, leave it be. Leave it be. Colored chapel in Angola Prison Farm no place for no spitting.

**QUEENIE.** "Leave it be..." Queenie hears, those aunties down in Treme say the same thing, but "keep that mouth clean." Queenie hears them, too. Down in Treme, my aunties say, go back to that catfish and hot water cornbread, if you want to mess your mouth up about something, Herbie. That worth talking about. Don't go messing your mouth up; Father might hear you. Alright then. Queenie hears Brother. Queenie hears. "Leave it be." Leave it be, leave it be.

## SOLEDAD

**BROTHER.** (*looking around the chapel, a bit sarcastically.*) Brother say, in Shreveport, Maundy Thursday, they needs twelve. They gots Brother and you. Where that ten more? Can't they count? That what Brother say.

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, down in Treme, the same. Good Lord washed His twelve; in Treme, Queenie say, we do the same.

**BROTHER.** Now, if that don't beat all!

**QUEENIE.** (*nodding, sullen.*) Sure do.

**BROTHER.** Now, to work inside Angola Prison Farm, Brother know them guards don't need to read and write, just mark the name—can't they count? Brother say, Brother see why they make us count off every now and then. They can't do that they selves. Brother say, warden did it. Brother say, Lord know, warden in Angola Prison Farm too thick to know numbers. Come in for ten, Warden let you go at twenty. Brother say, Queenie, you know that warden can't count.

**QUEENIE.** (*laughing, sarcastically.*) Queenie say, warden missed numbers in school.

**BROTHER.** In Shreveport, Brother say, they learn that on the second day. Queenie, you say they didn't let the warden come back for the second day? Brother say, that sorry, that sorry. That all Brother got to say! Shush Brother mouth. (*Clamping his mouth shut, Brother nods his head enthusiastically.*)

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, that the way warden got the job. (*Again, Brother nods his head enthusiastically. Turning to the Crucifix over the door, Brother zips his mouth closed and nods once more, also enthusiastically. Queenie laughs and applauds.*) Get thee behind my behind, please! Queenie say, Queenie say. (*The men sit in silence, generally. Queenie removes his shoes and shakes them, upside down, as if ridding them of a pebble. In pantomime, Brother compares his feet's size to Queenie's. Brother laughs. Queenie laughs. Queenie puts his shoes on. Brother pretends to shuffle a deck of cards, again in pantomime.*)

**BROTHER.** (*"shuffling cards."*) Brother say, those things Angola Prison Farm drive men to do, and men prepare to die! (*Brother pauses*

## SOLEDAD

*from “shuffling” to “play” a harmonica chord, again in pantomime. Afterward, Brother resumes “shuffling.” Queenie seems to doze off.)*  
Queenie—

**QUEENIE.** *(snapping to attention, as if waking wide awake.)* Queenie here, yessir! *(In pantomime, Brother pretends to set a deck of cards before Queenie. In pantomime, Queenie pretends to cut the deck. In pantomime, Brother takes the cards in hand, preparing to deal.)*

**BROTHER.** Brother got hisself a question—

**QUEENIE.** Brother got hisself a question?

**BROTHER.** Yessir! *(Brother begins to deal cards in pantomime, but the cards become a real deck, which Brother deals to himself and to Queenie, as if for poker. Queenie looks furtively to the door, and orders his hand. Queenie crosses himself at the end of the deal.)*

**QUEENIE.** *(discarding.)* Queenie here for Brother question, again. Hit me! *(Brother deals Queenie another card.)*

**BROTHER.** Brother say, Brother serve hisself up some powerful question. *(Brother discards. Brother claims Queenie’s card. Brother orders his hand.)*

**QUEENIE.** *(studying hand, momentarily.)* Then, hit up Queenie, Brother! Hit up Queenie! Queenie know how mean Brother questions can be.

**BROTHER.** They tells Queenie when? *(Opening the bidding, Brother pretends to flip chips into a kitty, again, in pantomime.)*

**QUEENIE.** They tells Brother?

**BROTHER.** “They tells Brother?” Hm! Brother say, they done told Brother!

**QUEENIE.** *(chuckling, moderately.)* Then, Queenie say, they done told Queenie, too!

**BROTHER.** Brother say, they done told Brother, they done told Queenie—

**QUEENIE.** Yes sir, they sure did. Queenie say, they say, “Sister, you one dead, deader-than-a-doornail sicka-you!” That just what David say they say.

**BROTHER.** *(studying his hand of cards.)* Brother say, Queenie don’t say they say? *(Having studied his hand, Brother flips real poker chips*

## SOLEDAD

*into a kitty at the center of the table. Brother sets the hand down.)* Then, why nobody say nothing about no noon? That what Brother want to know. That warden, he don't know nothing about no numbers. That little boy, he can't count, and Brother and Queenie both know—hand on a stack this high—that warden, he can't tell time. Ain't that man know, we supposed to go at noon? Now, that Brother question—what answer Queenie got? Brother want to know. *(Retrieving his hand, Brother studies his cards. Queenie studies his cards. Queenie tosses real poker chips into the kitty, meeting and raising Brother's bet.)*

**QUEENIE.** That Brother question for Queenie?

**BROTHER.** That Brother question for Queenie...now, what David say to Queenie, to say about that?

**QUEENIE.** *(in thought.)* Come now, David...talk to me...talk to me! *(after thought.)* David say, say, Queenie, that some raggedy table you got there— *(Brother throws down his hand as if having lost the poker hand. Queenie claims the kitty, fondling the chips. Brother and Queenie laugh. Chips in hand, Queenie examines the table's legs.)* Queenie say David say, say, Queenie, that warden got that bandy leg table, and David say, say, Queenie, you lucky the warden got one with four legs; he give most with three, and them legs got rickets. *(Brother and Queenie laugh. Gathering the cards, Brother shuffles them for another hand.)*

**BROTHER.** *(while shuffling cards.)* Brother say, if warden could count past two, and set time after dawn, then—Brother say—he know how to bring out a table that ain't bandy leg. Brother say, since warden only letting priest wash feet for two for Maundy Thursday, then, Brother say, warden say that table needn't be nothing but bandy leg! That what Brother say! *(Brother sets the deck before Queenie. Daintily, Queenie cuts the deck. Taking the cards, Brother deals himself and Queenie another hand of poker.)* Brother say, Queenie say to David, David, you right: Brother say this sure is one raggedy table the warden got here! That what Brother say!

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, Queenie tell David, and tell him not to get a big head—

**BROTHER.** Brother say, please no!

**QUEENIE.** *(ordering hand.)* No, sir!

## SOLEDAD

**BROTHER.** (*ordering hand.*) Brother say, enough New Orleans cops with big heads!

**QUEENIE.** (*as if suggesting something intimate.*) Yes, sir! (*Realizing a suggestive double entendre, Brother taps the table, urging Queenie to mind himself. Brother and Queenie study their hands. Brother taps the table again, reminding Queenie to place the first bet. Queenie tosses a poker chip into a kitty.*) Queenie tell Brother, maybe Governor Huey give warden some money, so he can buy them peckerwoods some new table, so them peckerwoods give rastus they table!

**BROTHER.** Brother say that, too. Brother say, Queenie, Queenie right on the ball!

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, Queenie say, Governor Huey did that with the electric chair. Now, Governor Huey, he give warden money for a new electric chair, them peckerwoods, they get it. And rastus, we get they chair—

**BROTHER.** (*interrupting.*) Brother don't like that—

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, Queenie say, now Brother, why Brother don't like that? Queenie say, Queenie say, what that supposed to be about?

**BROTHER.** Brother say, them peckerwoods in that chair, they might be poor white trash like the warden and Governor Huey; no telling what they was doing when that switch let go! (*Both men laugh.*)

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, Queenie say, them biscuits and gravy, most likely.

**BROTHER.** Brother say, “biscuits and gravy?” Brother say, this is the Depression—they poor white trash ain't got no milk or nothing for that gravy!—you know that! (*Both men laugh again.*)

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, Queenie say, when they takes you to the chair next month—

**BROTHER.** You, too, Queenie! When they puts us in that chair, only one thing we got to do! (*The men spit in their hands and shake an agreement, conventionally. Then, they slap each other's hands and shake hands again. They sit quietly, arms folded and drumming their fingers as they read their cards. Brother looks toward the door, anticipating an entrance.*) Brother say, Queenie, wonder what it like?

## SOLEDAD

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, Queenie say, Brother, Brother wonder what what like? (*Brother pantomimes flipping the electric chair's switch against the table, and he pantomimes receiving an electric shock, then folds his arms. Queenie shrugs.*) Queenie say, Queenie guess we fixing to find out soon enough.

**BROTHER.** (*counting poker chips.*) Brother say, Pap say, the hard way for you, Marcus. The hard way for you. Brother say, Pap say, no need washing your feet about that, no need.

**QUEENIE.** (*counting poker chips as well.*) Queenie say, my aunties say, same for you, Herbie. Same. Queenie say, Queenie say, aunties say, see ya! Wouldn't want to be ya!

**BROTHER.** Brother say, Pap say, sitting up there—or down there—wherever Charlie put the kitchen for colored folk...they ignore the Big Man here, you know they ignore the Big Man, too...Heaven ain't Heaven with no kitchen for colored folk—that just what Pap say. Brother say, Pap say there, well, fool, you about to find out! Just what Pap say! Brother say, Pap say, no need to ask why! Big, Big Boss Man about to give you the answer! (*The men resume playing their hands. Brother lays down his hand; Queenie throws his hand onto the table, realizing he had lost. Brother laughs, applauding, and collects the kitty, victorious. Brother counts chips carefully, stacking them on the table. Afterwards, the men wait. Brother looks at his wrist, as though checking the time.*)

**QUEENIE.** What Brother say?

**BROTHER.** Brother say? Brother say, that priest, he just got to be creole with a small "c."

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, why's that, Brother?

**BROTHER.** Brother say, that warden got a white priest, he'd be done been here and gone by now, Maundy Thursday and Holy Week, or no Maundy Thursday and Holy Week. Brother say, Brother say, anything, this priest colored, and arriving half-hour past time, at least! (*Queenie applauds and chuckles in agreement. Queenie also looks at his wrist, as if also checking time.*) Brother say, Pap say, dead man, they ain't got nothing to do but wait. Brother say, Pap say, tap my hand on it! Tap my hand on it. Nothing to do, but wait! (*Queenie laughs and applauds.*)

## SOLEDAD

*Brother gathers the playing cards into a deck, setting it at the middle of the table. Folding his arms afterwards, Brother faces the audience.*

*Silence for a moment or two, perhaps a simple cough. Queenie clasps his hands, looks at them, then coughs. Looking at Queenie momentarily, Brother nods as if dozing off. Clapping his hands, Queenie wakes Brother. Queenie stands at the door, watching the rain. Brother continues looking at the audience.)* Brother say, Brother say it true. Say it to Brother once, say, say Brother again, Brother say it true just the same. It will come when it come, soon enough, and when it come, it will have these two brown eyes. Brother speak to you, Queenie...Brother speaks.

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, Queenie say, Queenie don't fear it, Brother. Queenie say, Queenie say, Queenie expects it. End it now. Bring it on! That Queenie say. But, now Herbie—

**BROTHER.** Marcus, too, Herbie—Marcus, too.

**QUEENIE.** *(weeping silently, as if no one cares.)* Nineteen and Thirty-Four's been a bad, condemnable year!

**BROTHER.** *(stoically, as a Muslim.)* Name any this century that hasn't been, Herbie?

**QUEENIE.** *(weeping still.)* As bad as my aunties in Treme said about slavery.

**BROTHER.** Pap, too, Herbie—Pap in Shreveport, too...he didn't come here Palm Sunday, did he?

**QUEENIE.** *(wiping eyes with shirt sleeve.)* She said "no," most likely.

**BROTHER.** Did she ever say "yes?" How old is his little girl?—six?

**QUEENIE.** *(sitting at the table, facing Brother.)* Eight.

**BROTHER.** Eight. First communion is special for them.

**QUEENIE.** He still should have come!

**BROTHER.** *(vainly, so hollow.)* I know it is long, but that's the first Sunday he's missed. He'll come Easter.

**QUEENIE.** *(hopeful, encouraged, in vain.)* You think so, Brother? *(Brother claps his hands, clasping them, but not answering. FLOYD enters through the door, drenched.)*

**FLOYD.** *(upon seeing Queenie, in particular, upset.)* No! No! *(Floyd tries exiting through the door, but the door won't open.)*

## SOLEDAD

**BROTHER.** *(to Floyd.)* Brother say, Peace be unto you, Pretty Boy!

**FLOYD.** *(sarcastically.)* Floyd say, peace be unto this! *(Floyd flips off Brother.)* And, to you, too, faggot! *(Floyd flips off Queenie, lustily. Desperate to escape his company, Floyd stands at the closed door, unable to open it. Brother sets a third chair at the table, moving aside to provide room. Floyd glares at Queenie. Timidly, Queenie returns to his seat. At the door, Floyd turns his back to Queenie and Brother, revealing drooping prison pants. Over his shoulder, Queenie looks at Floyd. Over his shoulder, so mad, Floyd glares at Queenie. Floyd pulls up his pants, using his shirt tail to cover his buttocks. Brother signals for Queenie to ignore Floyd.)*

**BROTHER.** *(to Queenie.)* Brother say, we got six foot now. Brother say, that priest, now, he best wash them hands for them feet, six feet down. That what Brother say. *(to Floyd.)* Brother say, hey there, Pretty Boy Floyd—you sitting down or you standing up, or what?

**FLOYD.** Floyd say, I growing me some wings!—and I got your “pretty boy!” *(Floyd approaches the card table carefully, watching Queenie with suspicion. Queenie moves his seat to provide Floyd room. Floyd takes his chair and moves it away from the table, sitting. Floyd addresses Queenie rudely.)* What you think you looking at? Don’t give me them eyes! You turn to salt, looking that hard! Told you, already! Stop that! I’ll pluck them eyes out!

**BROTHER.** Brother say, stop looking at him. Brother say, you never know no one got eyes to look at you, if you ain’t looking at him looking. Brother say, say, look at your own feets and stop watching his. *(Sulking, Floyd and Queenie look away from each other. The door to the chapel opens, as if from a gust of wind. Brother leaves his seat to close the door; Brother waves through the door, as if greeting someone in the rain. Behind Brother’s back, Floyd flips off Queenie. Queenie fails to respond. Brother looks outside.)* Brother say, Brother say, Brother say, today, today, Brother say! Brother say, that chain gang good as set up, with this here rain. Brother say, Good Friday, they get that chain gang bagging up the river, just like in Nineteen-and-twenty-eight! Brother say, now, get your sleep in. Brother say, like Pap say in Shreveport: Charlie will work you!

## SOLEDAD

**QUEENIE.** *(to Brother.)* Queenie say, Queenie, now, give me some catfish! Good eats! Queenie say, Queenie say, get that chain gang going, watch them reach down deep and pluck up me some catfish, like my aunties did back in the day! Queenie say, bring it on! Fill up my belly!

**BROTHER.** Brother say, just like Pap did, too. Brother say, fill me on up, too! Yessir! Brother say, like Pap, “good rain, good river, Good Friday, good fishing, bestest best fish!” *(Floyd removes his shoes to remove a stone or a pebble, shaking them. Queenie watches Floyd as he does. Brother exits through the door.)*

**QUEENIE.** Queenie want to say, when I called out your name— “Eustace!”—after breakfast this morning, you jumped and spun around. Queenie want to say, I apologize for startling you that way. Sometimes, I cause that reaction in young men.

**FLOYD.** *(putting shoes on.)* Don’t talk to me. I done told you before, I am telling you again! Queenie, Herbie, Eustace, Floyd, how ever you want to put it. Do not talk to me—

**QUEENIE.** *(apologetic.)* I apologize. I don’t mean no harm, but when I offend someone, I’ve been taught to make amends.

**FLOYD.** You want to know how to make amends? You really do? Okay. Act like I’m not here. Act like I’m on the outside, some place, but here. Act like you don’t see me. Or, better yet, Herbie, you really want to know how to really make amends? Okay. Let me lay this one on you. Ready? Try acting like I even don’t exist. Act like I’m just dead. Lord know, I try that with you!

**QUEENIE.** Eustace, I can’t—

**FLOYD.** Herbie, I said don’t call me that! Not here! Don’t ever call me that!

**QUEENIE.** But, it’s your name, like Herbie’s my name. Your name ain’t Floyd. It’s Eustace.

**FLOYD.** When you call me that, when my name comes out of your lips, I don’t—it gives me the creeps! Makes my skin crawl all over. Don’t ever call me that again. I don’t want people to know I know you. Not here. Don’t ever call me that again. Act like I’m dead. Act like I never existed. *(Moving to the door, Floyd takes the Crucifix into his hands. Queenie approaches Floyd. Floyd kisses the feet of the Crucifix.)*

## SOLEDAD

**QUEENIE.** (*hesitant.*) Is that what you really want? Very well.  
(*Queenie takes the Crucifix from Floyd, with some effort. Queenie kisses his own fingertips. With his fingertips, Queenie touches the feet of the Crucifix. Queenie places the Crucifix in a chair, then puts the chair in a far corner. Brother enters through the door.*)

**BROTHER.** Brother say, Pap say, smell like river getting high. Brother say, Brother say, they might get that chain gang sandbagging tonight! Not wait for Good Friday. Maundy Thursday, right now, high enough as is.

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, aunties say, smell like river water topping off higher than high! Queenie say, aunties say, smell like they working a whole lots of chain gangs past dawn Good Friday. Queenie say, aunties say, that chain gang working like Hebrew slaves before that rain's through, and Holy Week is Passover, too! Queenie say, aunties say, that old Pharaoh say, "forget you, Passover you all working all night tonight!"

**FLOYD.** I ain't working tonight!

**BROTHER.** Floyd!

**FLOYD.** And I ain't talking that prison pidgin like you! "Brother say... Queenie say!" "Floyd say!" I ain't doing that "Floyd say!" And, I ain't working tonight, no matter what they say I do! Night-time's for sleeping, for any man, it ain't for working, Hebrew slave or prison slave, or any other kind of slave! Most definitely, it ain't for no sandbagging, no old swolled up river!

**BROTHER.** Brother say—

**FLOYD.** Stop that, Brother! Stop that! We going to the death house, before summer! Talk, man! Talk! Peace, be still! Peace be unto this waiting! For the birds, man! For the birds!

**BROTHER.** (*calming.*) Now, now...Brother say, like Pap in Shreveport say, like Big NeNe—she down in John the Baptist Parish, growing sugar, back in slavery time—"this is the hand I fan with." Peace. Peace, be still. Brother say, Floyd, you just sit there. Brother say, show the world what you look like without that mouth showing your face. That priest must be holed up by this rain. River took out a bridge or two, most

## SOLEDAD

likely. (*Floyd, sulking, sits at the table. Floyd fingers the stacked poker chips. Warily, Queenie sits at the table as well.*)

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, Queenie say, Brother, try your luck at another hand? Since he's here, and ain't talking, Queenie say, Queenie say, we might get a decent hand or two out of the way, for that priest and his foot washing for Maundy Thursday. He ain't about to say much, but he might could play one mean hand of poker. Queenie say, Queenie say, the ways he look—

**FLOYD.** (*to Queenie, in anger.*) I told you not to—

**BROTHER.** (*sitting at the table, cajoling.*) Hey, now, now. What that Brother say?

**QUEENIE.** Like Queenie say, Queenie say, a good hand or two might do. (*Queenie shuffles the cards, handing the deck to Brother to cut, which he does. Queenie shuffles the cards some more, then deals hands to himself, to Brother, and to Floyd, who reluctantly accept the hand.*)

**BROTHER.** (*ordering the hand.*) Brother say like the man told Hoover, when the stock market crashed. Brother say, “the Bank of Mellon is open!” (*Brother distributes poker chips to Queenie and to Floyd as they order their hands as well. As he reads his hand, Queenie coughs dryly; Brother tosses a pair of chips across the table to Queenie. As he reads his hand, Floyd rests his chin in his hand. Brother pats his forehead with his shirt sleeve, as if sweating. Brother tosses a chip into the kitty.*) Brother say, ante up. Brother say, like in Shreveport, “what you got?” (*Queenie tosses a chip into the kitty. Floyd continues reading his hand. Floyd sighs. Seeing the sigh as a sign, Queenie and Brother each toss into the kitty and additional chip. Frustrated by Floyd's silence, Brother gestures for Floyd to respond. Floyd shakes his head idly.*)

**FLOYD.** (*sighing.*) I got my tail in Angola State Prison, with a date in the Death House in June, playing poker in the colored chapel, waiting for a priest to come wash my feet, one last Maundy Thursday... (*tossing two chips into the kitty.*) And I ain't even got a pot! Four tens. (*In frustration, defeated, Brother and Queenie throw their cards down.*)

**BROTHER.** (*irritated.*) Brother say, Floyd, ain't you got no idea how to play poker? Brother say, you supposed to drag it on!

## SOLEDAD

**FLOYD.** (*raking in the kitty.*) Don't blame me, Bank of Mellon! He dealt the cards. I just read them and weeped. Leave my house and job alone!

**QUEENIE.** (*shaking his head, laughing, approaching the door.*) No, man...Queenie say, Queenie say!

**FLOYD.** (*to Queenie, angrily.*) What did I tell you!

**BROTHER.** (*to Floyd.*) Brother say, now, what did Brother say? "I'm fanning!" (*to Queenie.*) Brother say, see anything?

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, see rain. No hide, no hair, no priest! That what Queenie say! Rain, rain, rain all day! Queenie see, Queenie say! (*As Floyd arranges his winnings in a stack, Brother approaches the door.*)

**BROTHER.** Brother say, Queenie say, no priest yet? Brother say, warden bound to say "forget the priest!" Brother say, warden send them here. Maundy Thursday? Brother say, warden say "let the river wash their feet, while they busy sandbagging." Brother say, some rain come down any more, warden say "need to claim them cots," 'cause Brother say, me, you him, whole prison!—we all float down to the Gulf of Mexico, this rain coming down like this.

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, Queenie say, Queenie say!

**BROTHER.** Brother say that and more! Brother say, that old priest, Brother say he might turn back, if them bridges knocked out. Brother say, he said, do them Death House feets next Maundy Thursday. Brother say, this rain like this, priest say "forget this! Turn me to dry land! The way this rain go, Death House feets don't need no more water!" Hold now! Brother say, see that catfish out there? (*Brother and Queenie stare intently out the door, shielding their eyes to see better.*)

**QUEENIE.** (*stunned, shaking his head.*) Hush Queenie's mouth, what catfish?

**BROTHER.** (*pointing out the door.*) That there catfish!

**QUEENIE.** (*staring even more intently, then shaking his head, for emphasis.*) Who now? Hush Queenie's mouth—

**FLOYD.** (*from the table, in disbelief.*) You two seeing things. Your last days made you hungry. Just Death House hungry.

**BROTHER.** (*ignoring Floyd.*) Brother say, grab me up some of that catfish! Brother say, that pastor look enough for me, you, him, the priest

## SOLEDAD

if he show up, the whole colored side of the prison. And we let warden get some, too.

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, Queenie say, that there catfish, get it and fry it up, couple classes, the whole congregation, greasing and greasing! Hear Queenie say, Brother? Queenie say, Queenie say, greasing and greasing. (*Having heard enough, Floyd pockets his chips, as well as a couple from Brother's stack, which Queenie sees, pointing silently. Floyd approaches the door to see this catfish in the prison yard himself. Floyd glares at Queenie. Queenie cowers.*)

**FLOYD.** (*in doubt, must be made a believer.*) What old catfish?

**BROTHER.** (*pointing out the door.*) Brother say, right out there!

**FLOYD.** (*peering out, unsuccessfully.*) Where? That? That little bluegill! (*Floyd laughs, mocking them.*)

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say—

**FLOYD.** (*annoyed at Queenie, primarily.*) What I tell you? That ain't no cat, certainly no pastor's cat. Bluegill all the way! Bluegill, if I lived a day! No old cat. Might be able to feed a tomcat or two, maybe. Diet of Death House rice and gravy—hm—got you two seeing things. Plum crazy men! (*Closing the door, Floyd returns to the table, leaving Brother and Queenie at the door. Brother and Queenie open the door, and look out once more. Floyd glares back at Queenie. Queenie closes the door.*)

**QUEENIE.** (*to Brother.*) Do the body up for steaks. Spare the head and tail. Fish head stew the next day. Queenie say, that make Good Friday memorable.

**BROTHER.** Brother say, that menu, it got Brother greasing, for sure!

**QUEENIE.** Queenie say, Queenie say, that pastor cat?, Queenie say, Queenie say, forget that fried chicken, do that pastor cat for my last meal!

**FLOYD.** (*more than annoyed at Queenie.*) “Queenie say, Queenie say?” Warden say, Warden say! Warden like the Lord; Warden say “Warden lord around here: forget that ‘pastor cat.’ You gonna take what you gonna get!”

**BROTHER.** (*to Floyd.*) “Warden say, Warden say!” Brother say like Pap say, down in Shreveport. Pap say, you put words in the Big Boss

## SOLEDAD

Man's Mouth, soon, He put dirt in yours! Count 'em! Six whole feets of dirt! That just what Pap say. Brother say that, to you, too! Brother say, now, don't you trifle with Big Boss Man, He'd got something to say—**FLOYD.** (*sitting at the table.*) My date's before the end of summer. Let the "Big Boss Man" speak to me then. I will have the end of time to listen. (*Floyd alternates his glares between Brother and Queenie, neither one of whom responds. Brother returns to the table, followed, reluctantly, by Queenie. Moving his chair further away from Floyd, Queenie sits, a bit away from the table. Standing, Brother counts his poker chips—something is off—and Brother recounts the chips. Idly, Floyd watches, trying consciously to seem innocent.*)

**QUEENIE.** (*to Brother.*) Queenie say—

**BROTHER.** (*concentrating.*) Shh, shhh! (*In silence, Queenie watches Brother counting his chips once more, trying to locate an error. Queenie touches Floyd's shoulder, timidly. Floyd reacts negatively toward the feel and glares at Queenie. Queenie rests his hands in his lap, twiddling his thumbs. Brother finishes counting.*)

**BROTHER.** (*to himself, bewildered.*) Brother say, man, can't you count? Must have counted wrong.

**QUEENIE.** (*hesitant.*) Eustace, you—(*Enraged, Floyd slaps Queenie across the face, hard, with the back of his hand, stunning Queenie and Brother both. Opening the door, FATHER ENTERS, carrying an open umbrella and a closed umbrella.*)

**BROTHER.** (*startled.*) What now—

**FATHER.** (*setting the open umbrella by the door, closing the door, oblivious.*) Peace be unto you, my dear brethren, in the Name of the Lord! (*Making haste, Brother stuffs the poker chips into his pocket. Queenie privately wipes his face as if wiping away tears. Floyd continues to stare menacingly at Queenie, ready to strike again. Father remains oblivious.*) My Holy Week blessing to each and every one of you, my brethren, on this deluge-sodden Holy Thursday! May the Words of the Master comfort you with peace during the weeks to come! (*to the men, as Brother approaches.*) I do declare, Holy Week!, and it seems nineteen and twenty-eight has chosen to inflict Louisiana, all over again.

## SOLEDAD

It seems, time to gather up, two-by-two, all over again, if this keeps up—men, women, cats, dogs, little yellow canary birds, too!

**FLOYD.** *(to himself, sarcastically.)* Talk about yet another holy man, coming in from the rain...

**BROTHER.** *(to Floyd, behind Father's back.)* Brother say, peace, brother, peace.

**QUEENIE.** *(to Brother, but to Floyd, too.)* Never mind him. Angola Farm, Treme, inside, out, Eustace's mouth, messed up, just the same.

**FLOYD.** *(infuriated, curling hand back as Queenie cowers.)* What did I tell you!

**FATHER.** *(peacefully, conciliatory.)* Brethren, turn away the way of the hand, this night, of all nights! For Holy Thursday commemorates the Master's final hours as a Free Man. Beyond this night, He freed us all with His Stripes.

**BROTHER.** *(conciliatory.)* Thank you, Father.

**FLOYD.** *(to himself, relaxing his hand.)* I sense the company of the dead tonight, already.

**FATHER.** *(to Brother, offering the spare umbrella.)* May I beg your pardon for help, my brother?

**BROTHER.** *(accepting the umbrella.)* Gladly. *(Brother opens the door for Father. An umbrella in hand, Father exits into the rain.)* Hear Marcus, but good!, both of you! Herbie, Eustace: not a thing between you. Remember, this is our church! Not a thing! *(Umbrella in hand, Brother exits into the rain. Floyd rises slowly and stands at the door, watching them. Quietly, Floyd closes the door. Queenie moves to a far corner, cowering.)*

**FLOYD.** *(quietly seething.)* I need to teach you a thing or two again? You still that dense? You think this some game? You think I'm playing with you? People die this way. *(Floyd picks up the Crucifix. Floyd touches it, as if in devotion, saying a prayer. Floyd sets the Crucifix face down in the chair.)* And, you had to run to David, as if some white cop would help. You had to let me find out what he was to you. You might as well spat in my face.

**QUEENIE.** It was not what you think—

**FLOYD.** Yeah, what do I think?

## SOLEDAD

**QUEENIE.** David was just somebody I knew, that's all—

**FLOYD.** Is that all? His wife, she didn't sound like that's all. His wife, she sound like you been down to the Ninth Ward a couple of times. At the trial, his wife, she sound like you knew him, real well. Her, too. Yeah, I paid attention to that. Paid real close, real closest attention to that. Everybody in Treme knew it wasn't her that brought you there. Every time I turn around, they had to throw that in my face. They threw it all in my face! People die that way! People die that way!

**QUEENIE.** What Treme say don't mean nothing. I'll tell you the truth—

**FLOYD.** Herbie, I don't want to hear it. I'm over the truth.

**QUEENIE.** Doing time, short time, and Eustace not over jumping to conclusions. I see that. *(Enraged, Floyd lunges for Queenie, chasing Queenie around the table as Queenie evades him, shoving a table into Floyd's way. Queenie even resorts to opening the door to buy space away from Floyd. Calmly, Floyd looks out into the rain and closes the door. Now standing at the table, Queenie lifts a chair to shield himself from Floyd. Floyd approaches Queenie slowly. Holding the chair by a leg, Floyd claims the chair from Queenie, tossing it aside.)*

**FLOYD.** *(heartsick.)* You really this afraid of me? You can't be afraid of me. *(Floyd sets his hand on Queenie's shoulder, gently, and Queenie acquiesces. Hand on Queenie's shoulder, Floyd insists that Queenie kneels. Queenie complies, calmly. Floyd stands behind Queenie, now holding Queenie's chin. Floyd reaches into his pocket, as if for something. Stage lights go black. In the dark, a moan, painful, almost blood-curling, enough to startle and to shock anyone, followed by a hard, heavy thud. A moment of silence, stillness, should follow, the longer the better, though not over sixty seconds' worth. Let the audience cough and rustle before the lights rise again. When they do, allow the lights to rise slowly, revealing the table and chairs disturbed, and Queenie lying beneath a white sheet and Floyd's arms, outstretched as though embracing a freshly-discovered corpse. Alone, Floyd wails. Beneath umbrellas, and carrying large paper sacks, Brother and Father enter, in a pleasant mood.)*

## SOLEDAD

**BROTHER.** (*shivering.*) Brother say, Queenie say right. Brother say, this here rain is cold. Brother say, make Brother say, Brother need socks.

**FATHER.** Like we say, over in Mobile. That there rain is a Mardi Gras rain. Good for hot fish! And folk over in Mobile, they love them some hot Mardi Gras fish!

**BROTHER.** Brother say, Pap in Shreveport say it for me: “Shreveport, too, Father!” Brother say, Pap say, “Shreveport, too.”

**FATHER.** I got Mobile; you got Shreveport; they all got hot fish! Hot fish! Waters my mouth for Holy Week!—small wonder!—save me a heel from that Wonderbread, too, to pick the bones out! Eats eats! (*Father sees Queenie beneath the sheet first, before Brother. Father closes his eyes and puts his thumb to his lips, as though kissing a Crucifix. Father’s reaction draws Brother’s attention to Queenie’s body. Stunned, Brother approaches Queenie’s body. Brother pulls Floyd from Queenie’s body with some effort, for Floyd grieves at his rage. Brother moves the table out of the way. Brother takes a knee at Queenie’s body. Brother lifts the sheet from Queenie’s head. Brother looks to Father and shakes his head as Floyd wails and Father offers a silent prayer. Brother returns the sheet to Queenie’s body and sits heavily in a chair.*)

**FLOYD.** (*to Father.*) Bless me. I have sinned.

**FATHER.** (*heavily.*) Indeed, you have, my son. Indeed, you have. Must the dead for themselves bury our dead?

**BROTHER.** (*to Floyd, but to Queenie as well, it doesn’t matter.*) Peace. Peace be unto you, my brother. This moment, may you know the sign of peace. (*In a daze, Floyd opens the door. Floyd stands, head hanging, back to the audience, just inside the door, but still inside the set.*)

**FATHER.** (*to Brother, referring to Queenie.*) Do you know whether he has received Baptism?

**BROTHER.** We all have enjoyed baptism, in another life, in some form or another. Only the Father knows. Only the Father knows. This life does that to a human.

**FATHER.** The Father knows all of His children, by the numbers of hairs He planted on their heads. The Father knows all answers that He conceals from us in life. He reveals them in His time, after death, if need be. Before this child’s corpse, the Father touches my heart with a

## SOLEDAD

question He already knows too well: why kill him? (*Floyd shrugs. Father kneels at Queenie's shrouded body. Father blesses Queenie's corpse, kissing it. Father addresses Queenie's corpse, but also Floyd.*) May the Father bless you. (*Leaving Queenie's body, Brother pulls Floyd into the chapel, closing the door. Leaving Queenie's body, Father turns his attention to the large sacks. From the sacks, Father retrieves a large basin, two metal canteens of water, and a white towel.*) Today is still Holy Thursday. The State of Louisiana says that you, too, each of you, will die soon. This is your last Holy Week. Today, prepare your hearts for the accounting of your lives before His Throne. We shall begin with your feet. Prepare now! We shall begin. (*Brother and Floyd assume chairs to either side of Queenie's body, facing the audience. Stoically, Brother and Floyd remove their shoes. Father removes Queenie's shoes. Father washes Queenie's feet first, as stage lights dim.*)

### END OF ACT 1

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—  
ORDER A COPY AT [WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.NET](http://WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.NET)***