

QUILTING THE SUN

A fictional play based on the life of Harriet Powers, Quiltmaker

by Grace Cavalieri

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Quilting the Sun: Foreword
Essay Acknowledgement: Artworks

by Grace Cavalieri

From my house to the Wings Theater in New York City was only a few hundred miles, but it took years to reach the destination.

Preparing a play for a professional reading takes longer than training for the Olympics. With my play "Quilting the Sun," the writing took ten years. It took an additional two years, 2000-2002, to get the play mounted so that producers could see it.

Producer/Filmmaker William Gilcher conceived of this project and did pioneer work to uncover Harriet Powers. In 1990, the Smithsonian Institute and Gilcher's Visual Press of the University of Maryland commissioned me to write a television screenplay inspired by a magnificent quilt, made by the former slave Harriet Powers. This hangs in the Smithsonian Institution. Harriet Powers' quilts are closer in appearance to Picasso's work than to the story quilts of the post Civil War South. (Another Powers quilt is owned by the Boston Museum of Art.)

Although we knew little of Powers' life, we felt that her story should be told. The facts we knew were these: She lived from 1837 to 1911. She was married to Armstead Powers and had children. She sold her quilt to Jennie Smith, a white schoolteacher from Athens, Georgia for five dollars, half the asking price. Not enough, perhaps, to fill a 90-minute program for public television, but it was an intriguing start.

Initial research was conducted in Sandy Creek, Georgia and Athens, w producers and I unpacked mildewed boxes in the courthouse basement, beat down bushes to find the Powers' shack and pored over Miss Jennie's letters at the University of Georgia Library. We were guided by Gladys-Marie Fry, the scholar who brought Harriet Powers to notice in her book, *Stitched from the Soul*.

For two years I met with the principles of the production team, submitting draft after draft. My task was to imagine reasons Harriet might have sold her quilt. It was her lifelong project and, after all, she had always lived in poverty. Why did she need money at this particular time, and need it so badly that she relinquished a "spelled quilt," one that (I imagined) God told her to make? The only reason I could believe was that she did it to save the life of her child. Essentially, she sold one baby for another.

This quilt by Harriet Powers hangs in the Smithsonian.

The need to buy white man's medicine would be the reason for conflict, I decided. I would build the universe around this and populate it with characters. Five of them truly existed: Harriet Powers, her husband Armstead, her son Alonzo, Jennie Smith and the headmistress of the school where Jennie taught art, Miss Millie Rutherford. The rest I would imagine.

One crucial bit of information uncovered was that Harriet showed her quilt at the "Colored Fair" in Athens in 1886. This might have been where Jennie Smith discovered

it. I narrowed my time frame to a three-year time period and began to create the world of Georgia in the South during the years 1883-1886.

When the play was complete, the search for funding began. Ten years ago, a 90-minute period piece on public television would have required at least a million dollars; we couldn't find that amount. The producers began to spin off documentaries, hoping to recover the hard-earned material for television use.

In 2000, the copyright, according to the contract, reverted to me as the author. I did not stay up late at night waiting for this to happen, but I noticed the fact with interest, and spoke to Shela Xoregos, a New York director who had previously directed a play of mine. She suggested that I rewrite the screenplay for the stage.

Plays rarely come from film scripts, although it is common to go from theater to film. But going from film to stage presents problems in scope, point of view and the expansion of time. I didn't know where to begin. The screenplay had a large cast of characters. It could take advantage of aerial views and panoramic scenes help tell the story. Now I needed to think vertically, not horizontally, compressing the story to fit a specific space with only the characters necessary to tell the story. I felt like Harriet might have felt ripping stitches out of her quilt.

The preliminary reading was scheduled for September 12, 2001. I approached the city on September 11 and, of course, immediately returned home. That reading was rescheduled for November 7 at the Columbia Branch Library on Tenth Avenue. This was in preparation for the showcase reading on March 15, 2002 at the Wings Theater on Christopher Street in the West Village, NYC.

For the November reading, I had whittled down the play to twelve characters and removed all material but the basic story of Harriet's life. I thought I needed every single character on stage, and couldn't believe it when I was told that a play with twelve characters wouldn't find production at this time in history. Somehow I was able to kill off three, but I held the line at nine.

I don't consider my wastebasket a holy receptacle, but it was becoming a character bigger than the others. In my office is a trunk where I had 2,000 versions of this play in its various guises. There were to be more.

The Xoregos Performing Company, which had originally encouraged me was hired to stage my reading. We sent invitations, wrote personal notes, and made phone calls. On March 15, the small theater in the West Village was filled for a showcase reading. The audience liked what it saw and heard that day, and showed its appreciation in a heartwarming way.

What did I learn? That there is more writing to be done: Two of the professional pundits at the viewing claimed the play was too episodic. (I thought it was a patch-work quilt; I liked that quality.) I had to rewrite to develop a "through-line of narration," stitching it even more closely. Even more rewrites would occur during rehearsals.

After the March reading, four viewers requested scripts. One year later the phone still

had not rung, the mailbox was empty and the clock on the wall was ticking. But I heard the voice of Harriet in my ear, telling about selling her quilt: "I didn't lose anything. I can begin again."

In 2003 QUILTING THE SUN was presented at the Smithsonian Institution by its NYC cast, directed by Shela Xoregos. In 2007 the play received its premiere production, Center Stage, S.C. receiving a key to the City of Greenville. The play is slated for production, 2009, in Harriet Power's birthplace, Athens, Georgia.

And, like Harriet, I have not "lost" anything, not one moment of my life writing this. As Harriet Powers said, "God tole me to make this one."

Grace Cavalieri is a playwright and poet. She has had 22 plays produced throughout the country, including three productions in New York City, at the Quaih, WPA, and Common Basis Theaters.

QUILTING THE SUN

Time Frame: 1883-1886

Place of Story: Sandy Creek and Athens, Georgia

Main Characters: (ages may be slightly changed)

Ole Uncle Jerry:	(JuJu Man) indeterminate age
Harriet Powers:	age 40's
Big Mama:	age late 50's – 60's
Armstead Powers:	generally same age as Harriet
Alonzo Powers:	8 -11
Laura:	30's
Jennie Smith:	early 20's
Millie Rutherford:	32
Johnathan Crawford	early 20's

Others:

(Lizzie is a dummy on a pallet)

(Armanda is a dummy on a pallet)

CHARACTERS: *QUILTING THE SUN*

Uncle Jerry (Ju Ju Man) is a conjurer who uses African spells as religious practice among members of the black community. (African American)

Harriet Powers (ex-slave, 1837-1911) is a genius but does not realize this. She thinks God talks to her through her hands. Her quilts today hang in the Boston Museum of Art and the Smithsonian Institution. She spends a lifetime making one quilt, which is her work of art. She must decide whether or not to sell this for white man's medicine for a dying child. (African American)

Armstead Powers is married to Harriet. He is a farmer, and day worker. He is handsome, faithless, and finally urges Harriet to sell the quilt to ease their poverty. (African American)

Big Mama is from West Africa, Harriet's mother, who brought with her the rituals and art of her ancestors. (African American)

Alonzo is Harriet's 7-year-old son. He is instrumental in having Harriet show her quilt in public. (African American)

Laura is a young black friend of Harriet who seeks her sewing instruction and uses it to betray her. (African American)

Jennie Smith is the young white art teacher who sees the value in Harriet's quilt and buys it for \$5.00, half the asking price. (Caucasian)

Millie Rutherford is a white woman who is the Head Mistress of the Lucy Cobb School where Jennie Smith teaches. She is Jennie's antagonist. (Caucasian)

Johnathan Crawford is the son of a compassionate white family, prominent in the lives of the black community. Johnathan, however, is a member of the Ku Klux Klan. (Caucasian)

Empty stage, enter Jerry

Ole Uncle Jerry

They call me the JuJu man cuz I can see the living and the dead. Clear. This is the juju bag round my neck with graveyard dirt. It brings me luck. These too. (Holds up bands of copper around his wrist) Round these parts, our grans came from Africa and knew about making things out of wood, cloth, earth...pots and straw baskets. Iron work too. Round here they still make these things...souls of the dead are in em. The power is with us all the time, in the things we make with our hands. That's' where the spirit live. (He picks up a staff with a handle of spotted hyena.) I can change shapes. I can become any man. Magic means we make something out of nothing. Gods just shadows of us, in the tings we make, with our hands. That's where we tell our story.
(drums heard) (Jerry to side of stage where he is watching)

(Alonzo comes on jumps over the broom lying down cross stage, Big Mama rushes in from other side)

Big Mama

You know that bring bad luck. Now you go back 'n jump over that broom other way. (Alonzo does) I teach you nuthin? The devil come follow you, you do that. He follow you to Heaven's gate and take your soul. You wanta lose your soul? *(moves toward him)*

Alonzo (backing away from her)

I make the broom like you ask. Look! all tied up tight.

Big Mama

And you know better than walk backward. What the matter with you today. Walking backward same as cussing your mama. What's into you. *(drags broom and Alonzo off)*

Scene 1: *(Flash forward) Harriet and Armstead walking slowly across stage. She has a large bundle wrapped in a burlap sack. This is a scene that is repeated throughout the play.*

Armstead

We should be at Miss Jennie's house, hour and a half if the rain doesn't come.

Harriet

I'm not getting off the road. We're going straight . . . straight to Miss Jennie's.

Armstead

I'm not goin to the door. I'll stay out. You just go up to the door and get the ten dollars. You don't have to go in and talk to her. Just give it over to her.

Harriet

I know what to do. It's my quilt, isn't it? I been knowing Miss Jennie haven't I all these years now?

Armstead

She say ten dollars? You sure she say ten dollars?

Harriet

She's been saying that a long time. This thing is going to be there. It's going to be there with her forever. And we'll have the money for a little time.

Armstead

There you go. It's the only thing we got to sell. You got something a white lady wants.

Harriet

(Silence)

Armstead

You can sew more. You can make lots more quilts. They'll give you more scraps. You actin like you have a child in your lap you got to get rid of.

Harriet

This one is MY quilt.

Armstead

What makes it your quilt. You think you're high, Harriet. You're just a farm lady who makes dresses and plays the ends into quilts.

Harriet

This one I made . . . for me. This one I was told to make.

Armstead

You was making that quilt when Alonzo was a baby. Time to give it up.

Harriet

You don't know how it feels like to make something with your hands, with your scraps. To make something you think of. It's mine because it came from my head.

Armstead

You just a lady sewer who makes dresses and plays with the scraps.

Harriet

No, that's not it. You don't know what's it. This is not a piece of dirt with a potato growing. I made this out of my head. You touch this, you touch me.

Armstead

(Laughs)

Harriet

There is the Lord in this, I sometime hurt inside. I sometime am cold inside. I can't get out of bed. I get out of the bed. The children sick. I hurt inside. It's too dark. I pray I can't go on. I'm too tired, and then I get to a door inside myself, and I open the door and I go through the door and the Lord says to me, Go on Harriet, go on. And I go on. I do. Then I put the picture how that felt right here right here.

Armstead

(No Answer)

Harriet

Why when I talk don't you hear me.

Armstead

I hear.

Harriet

I don't know when you hear me.

Armstead

You a damn fool. You got something that white lady wants.

Harriet

This here makes me safe. It is all I got makes me feel that way.

Armstead

It's the only thing you got to sell.

Harriet

Our people never has anything to sell but themselves. They hands. What they hands make.

Armstead

You sell that I never drink one more drop.

Harriet

Humph. That lie makes me colder than I was before. *(Holds the quilt up to her.)*
It's got me in it.

Armstead

That's a good one. You in a quilt.

Harriet

My feelings. That's in this quilt.

Armstead

Hmm. *(Chuckles.)* If it got feelins in the quilt, we should charge twelve dollar.

Jerry

(enter the side)

See that sun overhead. Sun got four stops. Born, live, die, live again. (circles on floor with his stick) That's why we draw a cross through the sun (*makes a cross through the circle's center on stage floor.*) That X is how you know it's our sun. How you know it's a Bakongo sun. (*Moves the stick counter clockwise around and around and around.*)
(*exit Jerry*)(*drums*)

Scene 2: Jennie and Millie Rutherford in space, *Harriet enters, removes hat, moves to quilt form . This is a giant wooden structure on which a quilt is hung tightly by four corners. (Millie in conversation with Jennie)*

Millie

Jennie I've been so happy to see you, my dear. Harriet, Miss Jennie will be teaching at our Lucy Cobb School. She has just returned from studying *art* in *Paris*. Do you know where that is?

Harriet

No Mam. Where is art-in-paris? (Jennie and Millie laugh)

Millie

Well Paris is a place farther than Sandy Creek is from Athens Georgia. (Smile with Jennie) Across the ocean.

Harriet

Yes Ma'm. Sounds pretty. I always wanted to see an ocean.

Jennie

I'll let you get on with your sewing lesson. We'll meet tomorrow then?
(*exits*)

Millie

I want you to look at this line, Harriet. Ten stitches in a line with not a breath between them.

Harriet

Miss Millie I'm going to have to stand outside in the hall. The way you love yourself, there's no room on this form for two of us.

Millie

Don't tease me, Harriet, just because I'm proud. I was ten thumbs when you started me, and you finally got me to the place where I'm not an embarrassment to you.

Harriet

I think you on your way. You won't need Harriet coming here every day for awhile.

Millie

Oh no! you can leave me next week. Not this week.

Harriet

You say that every week.

Millie

I promise. You can leave me next week. I'll have my courage by then.

Harriet

Say that every week.

Millie

What do I owe you for today. Thirty cents, Harriet?

Harriet

It'll be fifty.

Millie

Harriet, you get more expensive by the hour.

Harriet

Better let me leave or it's a dollar. And don't forget the scraps for my quilting. You said you saved me some.

Millie

You can take these, and I'll have some larger pieces left over from the girls classes.

Harriet

I guess I'll be back then till you're ready.

Millie

Harriet, Mr. Crawford said to tell you your package is waiting at his store.

Scene 3: Outside Crawford's Store

(Harriet stands outside store and white voice is heard)

Johnathan

We're closed. The store is closed.

Harriet *(enters)*

Mr. Crawford says my package is waiting.

Johnathan

You can't hear me? We're closed. You people got special privileges?

(Harriet turns uncertainly)

Johnathan

(To Harriet) Okay MaDAM, it just came in.
(Brings out an item wrapped in brown paper.)
It's a beauty. I've seen Armstead handling this fishing knife in here for an hour.

Harriet

(Unwraps handkerchief with coins.) This is fifty cents here. I think it's the last fifty cents owed on it.

(Unfolds paper to hold up a beautiful gleaming fishing knife.)

Johnathan

Now get out before I take it back. I don't have to cater to you people just because my father does.

(Harriet exits where Jerry is waiting. He extends hand. She takes the wax. Both exit stage)

Scene 4: Outside Cabin

(Alonzo comes on jumps over the broom lying down cross stage, Big Mama rushes in from other side)

Big Mama

You know that bring bad luck. Now you go back 'n jump over that broom other way.
(Alonzo does) I teach you nuthin? The devil come follow you, you do that. He follow you to Heaven's gate and take your soul. You wanta lose your soul? *(moves toward him)*

Alonzo (backing away from her)

I make the broom like you ask. Look! all tied up tight.

Big Mama

And you know better than walk backward. What the matter with you today. Walking backward same as cussing your mama. What's into you. *(drags broom and Alonzo into cabin space)*

(Inside Harriet's cabin).

(Wind is up.)

(Form of Lizzie is asleep on pallet on the floor. Wind whistles)

Big Mama

Tole you that nuthin to be scared of. That your ancestors in the trees.

Alonzo

Today you said our ancestors in the earth. *(Mama nods authoritatively).*
Yesterday you say they in the water, made the river move.

Big Mama

All that. All that. They everywhere. That's what Ancestors are. You think they just somewhere? They wouldn't be ancestors less they be more than somewhere.

Alonzo

(Disgusted) Could just be the wind.

(Harriet Enters)

Harriet

Laura have her baby?

Big Mama

Good thing you're home. I'm set to go when I hear her bell ringing. You bring back something?

(Harriet holds up basket)

Harriet

And sugar for Lizzie. *(To pallet)* She still sleeping?

Big Mama

Been sleeping all day. Gave her some living water. *(Holds up Vessel, shaped like a small vase, narrow bottom, wide top, shaped like object in patch #1)*

(Harriet goes to Lizzie's pallet. There is a circle of objects around her bed . . . an African wooden cross. Cross has narrow center with wide edges fanning out at the four corners. Pieces of glass circle the bed. Dolls are placed at 4 corners.)

Big Mama

(Joins Harriet. Marks X at four sides of bed with chalk.)

Harriet

Chalk marks fading. Keep the marks strong.

Big Mama

She be better tomorrow.

(Armstead runs in.)

Armstead

They got Henry.

Big Mama

Who got Henry?

Armstead

They did. They took him.

Harriet

Who did?

Armstead

The sheriff and them.

Big Mama

I'm going to Laura. Henry gone and baby coming.

Harriet

They can't take people like before the war. They can't.

Armstead

I saw him with my eyes. I touched him. They says it cuz he couldn't pay down the store and then he got drinking and wild with it and then they took Henry to "work it off."

Harriet

Work it off.

Armstead

That means we never see him again. They'll work him for life.

Harriet

You stay here. *(Goes to shelf, pulls out pie.)* Laura's children coming back here with me.

Armstead

Harriet

Harriet

Don't say no more right now.

Armstead

Our cart. I never made that payment yet.

(Wind up. All listen. Big Mama listens.)

(Harriet moves to table. Opens Bible in the middle. Lays it on stand.)

Harriet

Leave that Bible open while I'm gone. Let those words out. *(Exits with Armstead)*

Scene 5: The Cabin

Ole Jerry enters.

Ole Jerry

Got my coat on backward for luck and I'm dragging my broom behind to keep witches away. I'm coming to call.

Big Mama

You come in, leave that broom outside. Don't want you sweeping my good luck away.

Ole Jerry

I keep the witches out my path. *(He leans in outside, enters.)*

Big Mama

I don't need nothing, Jerry, but some time to dry my meat today and get to my chores. So many babies born I got no time for anything but boiling water it seems.

Ole Jerry

(Seductively) Good for a woman to take time for herself.

Big Mama

Yes so if you'll 'scuse me now I will.

Ole Jerry

Brought you something.

Big Mama

Don't need nothing, Jerry.

Ole Jerry

A present. Bad luck to r'fuse a present from an admirer.

Big Mama

Don't say bad luck near this sill, you hear? Now you walk back in again, after I throws this salt. *(She does so. Jerry reenters)*

Ole Jerry

Well, you was worried about the dry spell this here time. You was saying.

Big Mama

No rain in a month. Doesn't help none. *(follows her inside.)*

Ole Jerry

For you! *(Whips out a dead snake with great flourish.)*

Big Mama

(Taken aback) Why, uh

Ole Jerry

Bet you didn't knows where to find one did ya.

Big Mama

I ain't been looking right yet.

Ole Jerry

This'll do you. Found it right outside and I'll hang it on that same bush where I found it.

You get rain shower by tomorrow morning. (*Lays snake down on table.*)

Big Mama

Thankee Jerry. I knows you mean well enough, but you do so poor.

Ole Jerry

Got more here. Brought you a horseshoe hang over your door.

Big Mama

Had one there.

Ole Jerry

This a shiny one from Ole Jerry here, keep witches off the place.

Big Mama

We got our bottle iron nails buried under that doorstep. No witches get in here.

Ole Jerry

Looks like if I was here taking care I could have you some good conjurin. Some love conjurin.

(*Mama stiffens*)

Ole Jerry

Dreamed of a funeral last night. You know what that means (*winks*) opposite. Sure sign of a wedding.

Big Mama

(*Stands*) Sorry you gots to be goin now Jerry. I been dreamin of weddings, myself. You know what that means. (*Winks*). Opposite.

Ole Jerry

(*Exiting, he sweeps his broom behind him down the path.*)

(*Mama outside, hanging the snake upside down from bush.*)(*Lights dim.*)(*Thunder Sounds.*)

Scene 6: The Crawford Store

Johnathan

What you want now?

Armstead

I want to see your father. Mr.Crawford know I was coming.

Johnathan

Well, It's hard to believe he would have forgot such an important appointment now, isn't it. But I believe anything you have to say to him, you can say to me.

Armstead

This is my personal business between Mr. Crawford and me.

Johnathan

Oh it's his PERsonal business,(calling) you hear that, boys?(*off stage murmurs, laughter*)

Armstead

When will Mr. Crawford be back?

Johnathan

Well, if he knew he had such an high person asking . . . well now, you want me to tell him you was here?

Armstead

Yes

Johnathan

Yes what?

Armstead

Yes I do

Johnathan

Yes I do *SIR*

Armstead

We don't need papers anymore. You hear about that? You just tell your father I was here.

Johnathan

You and your friends stay outside. You have to wait til your throat cut with a fishing knife to see you're not welcome here?

(Armstead exits store where Jerry stands. Armstead nods. Jerry draws x on ground . spits on it. Armstead walks around it. Will not walk on it. Jerry takes grains from pouch hanging from his neck and throws at door.)

Jerry

Graveyard dirt, Armstead. Onliest thing left for us to do now.

Armstead

No Uncle Jerry, not with me. I don't go with that.

Scene 7: In The Cabin: Harriet, Alonzo,. (Lizzie Sleeping)

Alonzo

Tell a story, a Big Mama story about her mama before she came on the ship and how her mama made houses and everything out of palm tree and clothes and . . .

Harriet

No. I'll tell you story about what I'm doing now.

Alonzo

Okay

Harriet

See this? (*Quilt in process. The Adam and Eve cutouts are pasted up on the wall.*) These from Big Mama's mama (*shows stars and sun cutouts worn and bent.*) But THESE are mine. My own and (*shows patch 1 of quilt.*) See this? Here Adam, Eve and the snake. Well, once there was no world.

Alonzo

What?

Harriet

And God say to Adam and Eve, "I give you everything fine. I give you this big garden." God says "Only one tree you can't eat from, and that is that one over there. The apple tree."

Alonzo

I like apples.

Harriet

Then the serpent, the snake . . .

Alonzo

Ooooooooooooooh

Harriet

The snake come and beguile Eve and whisper inside her ear. He act real nice, but he's really mean. He say to Eve. "Eve, LISTEN TO ME AND NOT GOD."

Alonzo

UhOoooooooooooooh (*knows this is wrong*)

Harriet

He say it again. "Eve, listen to me and not God." He act real nice, and say "You are pretty, Eve." He turns her head. She believes him. He say "GO AHEAD. Don't listen to God, go ahead. You eat that apple if you want to. You don't listen to God." So she wakes up Adam.

Alonzo

Where's he sleepin?

Harriet

She say “We don’t have to listen to God. I’m gonna eat that apple. You want some? Here.” She give him some and she eats a bit.

Alonzo

God say we can’t eat apples?

Harriet

Yeah, it was real good, real good. The serpent, he laughs and the next day God came and say to Eve, look at me right in my face. You did something. What you do? Eve say “Nothin Lord.” She’s looking around real innocent, but God’s smarter than her and he say, “What did you do?” Eve got scared, said “The snake said eat the apple.” The Lord say, “I give you everything and tell you not to do it and you do it. You don’t obey. You now lose your innocence and your happiness.”

Alonzo

What did God do to the snake?

Harriet

Oh, God made the snake to always crawl on his belly, slipping and sliding forever like the varmint he is.

Harriet

Look here. We got this cross that come from Big Mama’s gran’s stitching on her quilt and that is on every quilt, never mind what story. Her gran used this cross (*Picks up cut outs of cross, and suns. Holds against cloth. It falls apart from use.*)

Harriet

(*Shows the patch*) (*names the animals*) Can’t expect Eve who was never a child to know right from wrong. Trouble with Eve was she didn’t have a Mama to tell her things.

Alonzo

And a Big Mama either. That snake. How come that snake got feet? Snakes don’t have any.

Harriet

You saw the most important thing. In Africa, once a snake had feet. And he used to dance and run and jump and carry on just like you and me. And one day he was left by the village chief to tend the honeybees. To make sure no one stole honey from the hives, and Mr. Snake was getting hungrier and hungrier, so he coiled himself around a hive and thought he’d take a little sip real quick before the chief came back and it tasted so good.

Alonzo

(*Used to stories with morals*) Buuuut . . . ?

Harriet

But . . . when he tried to get away, his feet were stuck to the hive and he couldn’t move and he got caught! (*Alonzo nods like they knew it was going to happen.*) And the chief

said "You have disobeyed me. From this day on, your feet will stay stuck on this hive and you will go through life forever more sliding on your belly. And that's why the snakes today doesn't have any feet.

Alonzo

Is that the truth?

Harriet

Of course it's the truth. If this snake has feet, then everybody knows it's an African snake. Besides this is my quilt, isn't it? So I can do what I want with it. If the snake has feet, everybody knows it's mine, Harriet Powers.

Alonzo

Mama, I'm gonna teach you how to read and write your name.

Harriet

No proof Jesus Christ could read and write. He still made his way.

Alonzo

You say I born with a veil over my face? (Harriet nods) That made me special. I got the gift of Seeing, you said? I see your name big, and everybody knowing it. Everybody can read your name but you.

Harriet

I see you sleeping in one minute in the barn with the ox, you not stop

Scene 8: *Armstead Hauling A Sack Across Stage*

Armstead

Thought I wasn't going to see you this month at all, Mr. Crawford. I know it's been awhile. Didn't want you to take back the cart. You know I need it. You know I sorry, Mr. Crawford. I was waiting for some money, but I brought you some pickings instead. Next month I'll have the money. This is for this time. Food for your kitchen. I won't fail you again. These beans for you.

(puts sack down. Enters church)

Scene 9: Church.

Jerry

(Jerry comes in center gesturing people in)
Come Sister. Come in Brother. Say your soul

*(Church meeting) (Laura, Big Mama Armstead enter both sides of stage, take a seat)
(All murmur and respond to what's said)*

Jerry

People disappearing again just like it used to be. I guess somebody thought we had too much good, so they put on some white hoods again to try to scare us. I want to show you that this is just a piece of cloth. Look, I can put it on my head *(he does)* *(pulls it off)*. I want you to know that underneath, it's just a rotten man who's scared he can't show his own face.

Armstead

But if a rattlesnake is wanting to bite you, you got to be careful

Jerry

But you smarter cuz you a man and it's a snake. I just want you childrens to know if you hear anything coming down the road 'n you don't know what it is, you hide. You jump in a ditch.

Armstead

Men bein taken away if they don't pay a note on time. They takin them to some sort of work where they can't get help or anyone to speak up for them, just like slaves again.

Jerry

It's worse than bilious fever. Where the Klan meet, that where Satan has his seat. When we see this *(shows hood)*, we go on and know that hood just has a face underneath it.

Armstead

We seen Henry and them beaten with chains . We seen men pushed into the earth before they finished breathing.

Jerry

Won't always be this way. We got Jesus and we got spells *(holds up pouch)* We kneel down on our buckles and bows, but when we stand up... see this toadstool? This called the devil's snuff box. Bury it where they plow.

Armstead

There's talk of some grape vines stretched across the road tripping a few horses and a few hot coals dropped from the trees on em.

(All laugh appreciatively.)

(Harriet rushes in. She is wearing her power apron. She rushes to the front, takes the stage.)

Harriet

They on their way. *(Crowd murmurs and shifts in seats.)* Our friends warned us. *(Men getting up ready)* Please please listen. Wait. Don't leave. Please. Let them come.

Jerry

Listen to Sister Harriet.

Harriet

That door they coming in back there is the door of dark. Face it. Everyone of us, let us turn and face that door with our eyes and say in our heart, "I am changing the dark to light." Say it in your heart. Say it. "Dark to Light." "No Satan. Yes God."

*(Slowly, one by one, they stand and turn to face the door.)
(The group is silent, as if in prayer.)*

Harriet

Dark to light. Keep thinking it. My place is with the spirit against the force of dark. This is my power apron and it's got a spell. I stitched a prayer in it . (takes off apron and holds it up like a shield before her)

(There is a howl from outside. Harriet leads the group in a hymn. Noise of breakage, doors and glass. Sounds subdued by song. Confusion stops. Outsiders retreat.)

Jerry

(walks outside with congregation following)

See that hawk over there? Look up there. He flies high. Look how free. He's got trouble under him with all that air, but he gets higher. Once little sparrow held onto hawk's back, That's why sparrows only fly low. Ha! For trying to hold down a hawk. Strong feathers.(points upward) Look at him. He's not afraid.

Scene 10 : The Cabin

(Harriet is alone in the kitchen. Armstead creeps up behind Harriet, puts arms around her waist. She is surprised. Pushes him away.)

Harriet

What you doing? It's not even Sunday. You been gone two weeks and here you are, not even Sunday!

Armstead

I smelled some cooking.

Harriet

Humf. *(Sits him down and serves a plate.)*

(Armstead sitting. There is a bucket of water at his feet. Harriet is untying his shoe.He puts his foot in bucket)

Armstead

I smell rain, Harriet. I miss it.

Harriet

You didn't get fired.

Armstead

no, NO.

Harriet

You the lucky one. Ten men wanted that job in the mill. You got it.

Armstead

Yeah. I did. I wanted to be somebody, I just didn't know who! Can't smell air inside that textile mill. Everything makes me cough there.

Harriet

You'll get used to it, Armstead. Weavings and cuttings sometimes does that to your nose.

Armstead

Nah, . . . It's not that. It's like I think, I'll work and then I'll die. NO stopping. But when I work the land, I think . . . I work, I at least smell that rain coming before I die. You know what I'm saying, Harriet?

Harriet

You doing fine there though.

Armstead

It's like I grow a garden now I can't stop to pick it.

Harriet

You do what three men do. That's why they took you.

(Lifts foot up. He puts it on rim of bucket.)

Armstead

But something's starting to be wrong. I work all night when they not looking. Then when they watching me, I don't feel like doing anything.

Harriet

You know you can't be your own clock. You know that.

Armstead

I just go outside to feel that sun on my face. Stood in the rain one day.
(Armstead plunges foot in.)

Harriet

Anybody can work a field.

(Armstead puts other foot in. Harriet goes to stove to get kettle. Pauses it above his bucket. It's boiling hot.)

Harriet

You drinking there?

(Armstead shakes head, alarmed.)

Armstead

(Blurts out) I left the job.

Harriet

No, you didn't.

Armstead

Yes

Harriet

Then I don't want to talk to you. I'll get to bed now.

Armstead

Why? Same world tomorrow.

Harriet

(Brings out package with fishing knife. Throws it in his lap.) Might as well have it anyway. *(He opens fishing knife in its paper.)* Bought it to celebrate your new job.

Armstead

(Floundering for humor) They say dark skin woman bring you good fortune.

Harriet

They say with a light skin man, keep yourself a knife around the house.

Armstead

You off me again Hattie?

Harriet

Laura been by.

Armstead

So what she want now.

Harriet

It's what she had to give me.

Armstead

(snorts) That's new.

Harriet

She give me talk. She saw you.

Armstead

Huh?

Harriet

With that girl. She saw you in the tool shack.

Armstead

What she doing in my tool shack.

Harriet

For me. Looking to my tub. We supposed to dye colors that day.

Armstead

How she know it was me. I wasn't there.

Harriet

When wasn't you there.

Armstead

Whenever she came in and said she said she saw me. You believe Laura and not me?

Harriet

I know Laura and I know you. That's all I need . You bout as straight as your hound dog's back legs. And beside that...

Armstead

More? Then I'm going.

Harriet

It's about what makes me sorry.

Armstead:

Now I know I leaving.

Harriet

It's about how you been doing this since I know you.

Armstead

I come home to you, don't I?

Harriet

But it changes me. It makes my love stop up. It makes me cold inside. Stopped up love makes you dead.

Armstead

Stopped up what? That young girl tricked me into it.

Harriet

I always say she did so we can go on doing what ever we do. But I find out, I feel bad again like it's the first time even if it's the hundredth.

Armstead

I'm goin to the rows, pick some. Get out of here.

Harriet

If you know it makes me sick, why you keep on?

Armstead

She made me do it, Young girls're like that. Satan's in them.

Harriet

You make me far away from you like you with me but not with me. Like you're somewhere else. And I'm cold standing here in a stone dress. A heavy dress I can' t walk in.

Armstead

Harriet, what we always doing to each other? You know?

Harriet

(Shakes head) If we knew, we wouldn't be doing it . . . wouldn't be able to.

(Bird calls outside)

Harriet

Maybe rain coming. Change our bad luck.

Armstead

Couldn't hear anything in that old mill but the machines.

Scene 11:

Next Day : Outside cabin *(Lights up – Big Mama mixing dye in pot with Alonzo. Harriet carries out her apron to sew on. Uncle Jerry comes along with a box.)*

Jerry

Got me a love box.

Harriet

Don't tell the child that, Uncle Jerry. You know he doesn't know the difference between your stories and the world.

Alonzo (looks up from his book)

I want to hear, Mama. Let him.

Jerry

Well, this here box can get you the woman you love.
(Big Mama sniffs)

Big Mama

That's what he thinks.

Jerry

You just find a frog and put it in this box, and poke holes in the box. Then you go out in the evening at twilight just before it gets dark and find an ant bed.

Big Mama

Why don't you just go sit in that ant bed, make the story shorter.

Jerry

You stick the box right in the bed. The ants will eat up the meat off the frog and leave the bones.

Big Mama

Well I heard of a man making trouble for a woman when she was trying to get her grandchild to do his work. *(She pulls a thread from Jerry's sleeve.)* She got a thread off the man and cut a place to fit it in a tree. He had a headache the whole time.

Jerry (ignores her)

One week from the morning you find the frog skeleton, you go through the bones til you find one just like a fishhook. *(He walks around and around behind Big Mama.) (Opens box.)* take that fishhook bone and stick it right on your loved one when she not looking.

Big Mama

Goodbye Jerry. *(turns away)*

Jerry

Ole Jerry know when he's not wanted 'round. ***(Pats her goodbye on the back, leaving a fishbone stuck on back of her dress.) (Hobbles off.)***

Alonzo

That's the stupidest thing I ever heard. Preacher says its stooper'stition.

Big Mama

(Turns. All sugary now)

Now don't be too hard on Uncle Jerry. He's a good old man. No harm to him but his stories.

(hurrying after Jerry, to see where we went)(Harriet and Alonzo look at each other in shock at her change of heart.)

Harriet

Lonzo – you put down that book NOW and tend to the fire inside.

Alonzo

(Brings his book next to Harriet.) You promised.

Harriet

I didn't promise. What you care if I can read or not. You read to me. That's why there are young ones, to read to us.

Alonzo

Cary's granma can write her name.

Harriet

That old thing? I don't believe that.

Alonzo

She not too old to learn.

Harriet

Why you care what I learn?

Alonzo

(Brings a pencil) So you could read the Bible. I could teach you.

Harriet

These hands got a needle in 'em. They can only hold one thing at a time.

Alonzo

Letters make shapes like your pictures do.

(Points to image she is sewing.) (Picks up scraps off ground, arranging an "H" – traces his finger up and down. Sees her interest.)

Harriet

Hurry up. I haven't got all night and day to play with you.

(Alonzo leans over to pick up some more.)

Scene 12: Quilting Bee

Men carry in quilting form. Drum sounds mark beginning of quilting bee . Harriet goes to quilt form. Laura takes a stool at the quilt.)

Laura

Hope I didn't take your seat, Miss Harriet.

Harriet

No thank you no. I'm doing some cooking. I worked on this cover last week, now let

somebody else take my seat a while.

Laura

Well, I'm proud to take your seat, Miss Harriet. I hope it brings me luck. I hope this needle don't slip.

Big Mama

Laura's baby crying now. Must be teething. Laura let her see herself in a mirror too soon. Give em trouble with the teeth. Have to tie a frog round her neck now.

Harriet

(Teasing) But Mama, you told us to kill a frog will make the cow die.

(Mama deep in thought. Brows furrowed, her beliefs colliding.)

Big Mama

Hmmmmmmmm.....

Laura

Miss Harriet, why don't you bring your special quilt out here and let us all work on it.

Harriet

No thank you. That's just mine.

Laura

We placin the piece the way you do? Hear you're stitching Bible stories on there. How come you doing those stead of these pretty patterns we do? I seen Bible quilts in Carolina. They do them up there. Miss Harriet, how you know these stories? New Preacher teach you?

Harriet

I hear them in his sermons and I can remember what I hear a long time. Everybody sees things in their head. I just put them down so other people can see them.

Laura

I got my stitch down as fine as yours, Miss Harriet; twenty stitch a line.

Harriet

Well I'm happy. I'm glad. You been working on it a long time.

Laura

I've been going into town to do some sewing.

Harriet

I must have taught you good.

Laura

Yes indeed. I got me some special things coming up. Yes, praise God. Miss Crawford giving me thirty dollahS for three wedding quilts for her girls' hope chests.

Harriet

Miss Crawford! I've been working for Miss Crawford all these years. Everybody knows that.

Laura

Well with Lizzie been doing poorly, I told her. She asked me. Not my fault. God don't like liars.

Harriet

You say I couldn't come in to do her sewing?

Laura

Miss Crawford needs to get those dowry chests started. I just gave her a promise. She'd have them by summer. Not my fault. She needs them.

Harriet

Judas sold his friend for thirty pieces of silver too. I think I make a pretty picture of that on my quilt. A reminding that stays stitched forever. How people be.
(Laura looking down overly busy.) Have some black eyed peas. (Behind Laura's back) leans down, picks up tiny pebbles, polishes them on her skirt. Drops them in middle on peas. Spoons gravy over it. Hands plate to Laura with solicitousness)

Laura

They look delicious. Why thank you, sister.

Harriet

I hope you like them

Laura

I'm sure I will.

Scene 13 : Jennie's Studio

(In Jennie's teaching studio at Miss Lucy Cobb's School. The "students" are easels.)

Jennie

Girls, oblige me by repairing to your work, and perhaps you can be something other than pretty little houseplants upon leaving here. We are learning to adopt an uncommon curiosity.

(Jennie stands behind easel)

Jennie

Now my little scholar, a little more blood on the jacket. Good. The world is not by accident. Be precise.

Oh Lulu. Try to be more graceful with that brush.

To #5: Bold! Be bold. I grant you it may not be ladylike. It may just be something better.

(To Group) Don't gallop, girls. This is not a race. You are drawing horses, not competing with them.

(Miss Millie Rutherford, smiling and nodding comes to visit her new teacher. She walks behind the painting and is shocked.)

Jennie

Miss Rutherford what is the most frightening thing you've ever seen?

Millie

A lack of modesty in the class.

Jennie

No, the answer is Five mushrooms, each holding a paintbrush.

(To girls) Go Go. Leave. All of you. LuLu get out. I cannot watch. You're painting with perfume again. I'll have to write the publishing house to say Miss Jennie's art students are too comfortable with civility. We are sorry we cannot fulfill our obligation to make money for our school. Our students would rather sit with ankles crossed and feel the lace against their hems. Goodbye *(waves them off)* Goodbye. We'll stop now and resume in my study at two pm to decorate cake boxes. Surely my scholars can paint petals coming out of a flower's center.

Millie

Miss Smith, my resolve is stiffening and I think it's time we came to terms.

Jennie

We have known each other for elephant's years.

Millie

You amuse these students with your antics, more like a variety actress than a teacher, and while they are half my age, they are closer in age to you and everything affects them dearly. How do you assess them?

Jennie

The usual. Some clever, some witless. Most have very little under their boaters but pompadours and curls.

Millie

I am talking of your influence. First you allow many to call you by your Christian name. Some members of the church even speak of it. Let me be exact. The tombstones you have your girls design, and the decorated coffins have our citizenry curious about what

you think is art. Are we cultivating a lair of little ghouls?

Jennie

Two crows don't make a summer, Miss Millie. We paint seashells and sailboats as well. Art for memorials pays for our canvas, supplies, and pastels.

Millie

There are rumors of you painting with paraffin and oils mixed. Do you call also this art?

Jennie

It is done in other countries. If the action offends, I apologize.

Millie

Action and intention are one at Lucy Cobb School. We've also had complaints by one student Lulu Hanson.

Jennie

Lulu the human sniffle!

Miss Millie

This list you handed to her for an assignment to lead "an enriched life" One: cook two parts dandelion leaves with two parts goat milk for strength of thought; two, Do not indulge in tears or self pity; three: appreciate the world's gifts and walk among them at dawn, and a recipe for rose thorn tea! What kind of class assignment is that?

Jennie

I didn't think you'd approve of my poppy tea. Makes one quite giddy.

Millie

And teaching them to make rum balls for Christmas? I may not have your gifts but I have my integrity and you must conform or we will carry this conversation to its dreadful conclusion.

Jennie

You'll be happy to know today's assignment is a study of the heliotrope, fully clothed of course.

Millie

(exiting) And finally there will be no more exercising on the lawn with the girls before nature walks. They are reporting chilblains.

Jennie

We cannot move about the archipelago of furniture you've stuffed in my chambers.

Millie

No moving about is necessary. Ever.

(Exit Millie)

Jennie

Fly, Girls, Can you feel yourself flying? Leave the ground, twirl around. Move, Move So you can create motion in your art (*spinning around space*) Dance. Fear of being free. That's your trouble. Dance. (*Jennie pushes over a chair in fury*) exits
(*Waltz music becomes dissonant and deepens to dark drum beat*)

Scene 14: The Cabin

Harriet

(*Harriet gives a loud call*) MAMA! MAMA!
(*Mama comes rushing across*)

Harriet

(*Moans*) Lizzie dead, Lizzie dead.

Big Mama

(*desperate to say something*) No. Harriet. Lizzie not dead. You know that. She in the wind, the ground, the birds. You know that Harriet.
(*Harriet lets out a loud moan, head back and long heartrending cry.*)

Big Mama

(*Gets Harriet. Sits her down.*)

Harriet

What am I gonna do, Mama?

Big Mama

You goin on. That what. Armstead off with Alonzo. It's you and me. (*She gets out the thread and needle and paraphernalia from the trunk.*) We gonna make her something keep her warm in the ground. This my own death quilt. We going to finish it today. Lizzie going to have a warm quilt on her ground by night.

(*We see Big Mama pulling quilt from the trunk. Then it is spread fully over Lizzie's bed. Completely encircling the sick bed are candles, broken mirrors, crosses made of sticks, a doll, an African cross, Lizzie's dish and spoon.*)

Harriet

I didn't heal her, Mama.

Big Mama

I knew Lizzie had to go. Heard the owl hoot last night and a dog howling right after.
(*Sits Harriet down. Pulls out small square of material. She gets out the thread and*

needle and paraphernalia from the trunk.) She parted at the sun's high time, 'least. We make her something to keep her warm in the ground. She have Big Mama's quilt on her.

Scene 15:

Next day. *Outside cabin*

(Constant sound of pottery drums beneath scene. Grave site. Jerry, Big Mama, Armstead, Harriet begin ceremony at grave, heads down to ground, as in folk death ceremony. Old Jerry here is the African priest. All singing: "You must bow low/ Jesus been down to the mire." They form a circle and slowly begin a movement to the singing. The ring moves slowly counterclockwise and feet are slid along, hardly lifted from the ground. As the influence of the singing of the spiritual takes hold, the movement is more rhythmic until the whole body of the dancers become motion.)

(The grave has the death quilt, and all relics which belong to Lizzie, along with glasses, bottles and broken mirrors . . . Lizzie's doll, a vessel)

Jerry

(Incanting)

I saw death come down this road shaped like a big dog with a tongue hangin' out this close to me. I could touch him. Then it started stompin' and turned into a white ox. He pass this close to me. I seen him good. Then he turned into a shadow. I knew the spirits were calling and I shouted after I Ain't Ready to Go Yet. Leave Me Alone. Didn't know he was come to take the child away.

(Moaning and cries in answer to all he says)

Brothers, sisters. I sanctify the grave. New Preacher says we in America not Africa We can't be putting any covering on the ground *(He sees the death quilt on it.)* *(He leans down and picks up the quilt.)* He say, we Heathens? Savages dancing around? No Preacher. This no devil's work. We need to fall on our knees. We need to thank God for her life at all. We need to cover the child with her Mama's cloth. *(lays quilt carefully down)*

(Sound of drums beat beneath prayer.)

(Harriet goes inside cabin. Big Mama follows. She picks up Lizzie's blue dress, folds it, puts it in the trunk with other quilts materials.)

Big Mama

What you doing with the child's dress?

Harriet

I'm going to cut it up and use it and she be with us a long time.

Music up to black church space transition

Scene 16: Church – Harriet with Armstead. Redhaired Laura approaches. She wears elaborate hat.

Laura

Oh Sister. You are looking like you swapped a bad luck place for a good luck place today. And here come Armstead. Aren't you proud having a handsome man. Course you're pretty on the inside, Harriet. We all know that. You couldn't want better than that.

Harriet

The Lord is my shepherd, so I shall not want. We're just happy I didn't have to raise any red haired children. (*Harriet kisses her on the cheek and moves on*) and the Lord has bless us so far. (nods to invisible characters) Morning Sister Good, Sister Peace

(Roughly hewn benches. There are placards freestanding as if on the walls with the inscriptions PEACE AND GOOD WILL TO THE WORLD and GOD IS KING . . . SALUTATION IS PEACE.)

(All assembled. Laura bows her way down the "aisle" as if it were just for her.)

(There is choir music, or piano. The pulpit is a raised platform.)

Jerry

Are you ready for richness giving thanksgiving to God? Huh?

(group calls out answering each question)

Do you believe He cast out devil spirits with his word? Huh?

Power at work in you, huh? Once I cared about the things of this world. I play toss stead of work, I drink liquor and I had to take to my bed. Now that I made contact with the spirit, I have righteous living. My old name is now dead. (*Chorus of approval*) God's given me the power to raise the dead.

(Laura is violently involved and gets fevered with her salvation, her pitch rising and rising in intensity, out of control and beyond herself. She finally collapses to the floor in a state of ecstatic loss of consciousness, while one hand raises itself limply to arrange her hat's feather on her head, and she falls back into her coma. She is helped to the back for air. There is a march around the church, singing and returning to their seats.)

Jerry (*reaches back and pulls out his hyena stick*)

Jesus Christ give her the mojo. I seen it (shushing the group) Today we have a special en God call upon us. A soul brought to us, without no home. (Murmur in the congregation) Can we eat if this child not fed? (Jerry moves to the row and hands a basket to Harriet.) (Armstead stiffens to resist.) Lizzie gone, now a new girl spirit. found in the bulrush by the river. (Beat) (Harriet picks the baby out of the basket. She draws her close.)

Armstead

(Loud whisper) One more thing to feed.

Harriet

We'll let you name this little girl, Armstead.

(There is spirited singing of hymns. They stand with excitement, dance and sway while the piano plays . . .)

Harriet

My Mama said in Africa the lion mothers all suckle each other's babies. Don't matter who's whose. Long as they had the milk.

(Congregation exits)

Jerry moves from church space to address audience

Scene 17

Jerry

(to audience)

(picks up small pack of sticks and pulls out pouch from around his neck. Puts them together, holds them out to show)

You take these sticks and this graveyard dirt and you puts them in a bag with some night shade roots, set 'long the path of a devil farmer's land, soon his milk cow will go dry and the fine calf will lay dying and the chickens too. His wife's milk won't churn butter. Now if a conjurer got one blue eye and one black eye he can make a white man die with this here. And a blue gummed Negro can make death happen faster - right away

(Armstead enters stage side)

Jerry (sneaks up behind Armstead)

(holds up a piece of wax on a string.)

Here, you keep evil away with this wax hanging on this string here.

Armstead

Get away with that Uncle Jerry. You know I don't go for that stuff

Jerry

You wish you listen to ole Jerry once you need it

(Jerry walks on by, exiting, shaking his head with disgust)

Scene 18: A Field

(Johnathan enters)

(Armstead and Johnathan face each other)

Johnathan

My father says I'm to give you these slips of paper. You fill out your work done end of day. Make a mark here.

Armstead

You sayin it. Not Mr. Crawford

Johnathan

My father having me take over some. I say it. You do it.

(Armstead sizing up the load. Tries to count. He tries to read the print telling what to fill out, but is frustrated and jams paper in his pocket.)

Johnathan

Nobody would touch this load of beets to load them. Field hand says somebody put a spell and these beets were conjured by some black man. So nobody gets paid. You picked them yesterday.

Armstead

Everybody knows a white man can't catch a dark man's conjure anyhow. I don't give no damn for that conjure stuff. I load em up for you..First, you pay me for yesterday.

Armstead

(Indicates boxes)Those mine. Those mine. (hands him crumpled papers from pocket)

Johnathan

(Counts out some small slips.)

Armstead

Plus the boxes I brought up you say conjured.

Johnathan

Sorry Armstead. They were leftovers from yesterday. You're the only one who touched them. You must be the one scared the field hands away.

Armstead

You lying. You're making up rules. I brought them in for you, didn't I? That's more 'n ten I did for you, not these *(counts)* eight. I don't know how to cast no spells.

Johnathan

Let's see your papers.
(Armstead pulls papers out from back pocket.)

Johnathan

See what it says here? Read it.

(Armstead is frustrated and angry and cannot read the print.)

Johnathan

You can't read this. I say that wasn't today's pickings. And I wasn't here yesterday.

Armstead

(grabs Johnathan by the shirt and picks him up. Then he picks up a handful of slips from

the ground and counts ten, throwing the rest back in the dirt.

Johnathan

(From the ground, getting up) You ain't getting a penny for today, Armstead, not a rotten turnip. And you stay away from my father. I'm in charge now.

Scene 19: Cabin at night

(Harriet inside with dress on a rough crossbar form. She is pinning the hem. Armstead enters. Armstead is weaving unsteadily. He is roughed up and dirty. He sits down sloppily and eyes her. She keeps working.)

Harriet

You said before dark.

Armstead

I been in the fields picking.

Harriet

I told Mrs. Crawford I'd bring her this dress before dark, to try the hem.

Armstead

You and that damn dress. *(Circles it and her.)* I'll take the damn dress myself. *(He half lunges toward it.)*

Harriet

You're not taking this anywhere.

(Armstead moves forward with a fury.)

Harriet

(Positions herself before the form.) You touch this dress, you touch me. Same thing. *(He goes past her and with one yank rips the skirt from the top.)*
(Armstead staggers out, exiting)

Armstead

(Shouts back) Least I always come home, don't I? Some men don't come home.

Scene 20:

(Enter Jerry)

Jerry

You have Armanda to raise up now. I work good spells for him and you, so you can stay. You start that dress he rip on Friday? Can't finish work started on Friday. You know that.

Harriet

It Thursday Uncle Jerry.

Jerry

See this here rusty nail? You pound that in your doorstep. Pin bad luck right there. Won't come in again.

Harriet

Big Mama got one there, Jerry.

Jerry

You check that no file buried under there, is it? Or that man will leave you sure. Any rabbit run across you path lately? Front of you?

Harriet

Not that I seen. One behind me I think I saw.

Jerry

That's good. That's good. You be ok then. Take this iron ring, wear it round your wrist and tell Armstead make sure he stop carrying that hoe on his shoulder. He caused all this corruption that way. Don't bring it through the house neither or I can't cure you and him. You both be fine now.

Harriet

I got silver coins, Uncle. (lifts from around her neck)

Jerry

If things not better soon, hold one in your mouth while you eating

Scene 21: The Cabin

(Enter Armstead opens the door, carrying in Johnathan. Big Mama follows)

Armstead

Crawford's boy fall off his horse. Horse trip on some grapevines.

Harriet

You get Mr. Crawford.

Big Mama

You know what you got to do, Harriet.

Harriet

I couldn't heal Lizzie. I can't heal, Mama. I can't heal any white man if I can't fix Lizzie.

Big Mama

You know power not for just one kind of person. Healing for any kind. Armstead, get Harriet the living water. Candles under the bed. *(Armstead does so)*

Armstead

I don't want that dead Crawford boy in my house. I gettin help.(exits)

(Harriet has Johnathan lain on a pallet in the center of the floor. She sends Jerry and Mama out)

(Harriet's words are a mixture of things remembered, legends, African, and Christian. She moves continually, fixing and placing as she speaks. The words come to her as if in a dream, she pulls them from the air. She holds stones in her hands over her head making four stops. She places four large round polished stones at head, feet , each side. She will rotate these stones counterclockwise throughout. She moves softly, swiftly; talks softly, swiftly, she is urgent, she would breath life into him if she could, speaking pieces of ritual gathered and imagined from healing rites.)

Harriet

This is the Living Water. This water brings us back from our great great great grandmother's river. All the way back in Africa. Where Life starts. You can drink from her river. *(Sponges water into his mouth.) (She moves stones counter)* Birth, life, death, reborn. *(She holds high each of the stones as she names each.) (She picks up African cross.)* This is the power. From our ancestors. *(From a bowl she picks two stones, one black, the other white. She warms each with her hands, rubbing. She places one in each upturned palm of his hands.)* These are our suns. Bakongo sun brings warm to the hands. *(She takes two sticks and crosses them at his head, two more crossed at his feet, two more crossed at each side beyond the stones at each place.)*

Harriet

Dear Jesus God, This boy's in a jar here under you. He's somebody's child. He locked in. Let him out. Leaf from trees. *(Places wet herbs on his eyes.)* No more fever. Rock back ghosts. Rock back ghosts. Air and water. Fire and dirt. I hear bewitching inside the man rising. I hear bewitching inside the man falling. Air full of angels looking at you. Listen to a sick man's footsteps in the waves. They get stronger. The rivers rise. He's safe. Spirits unstrangle in you to say . . . you're free. Johnathan, you're back again.

Johnathan

Who?

Harriet

It's me. Harriet. Harriet Powers. Drink this sacred water. *(She sits him up. She takes the quilt and wraps it around his shoulders. She feeds him a sip of water. He holds her hand over the cup.)*

(enter Jerry, Armstead help him up, exiting)

Johnathan

(Whispers) I thank ye.(gasping) I had a thirst.

(Harriet is weakened and goes to her quilt. Buries her face in it. Holds it to her chest for strength. Mama conducts Alonzo in. He enters with twigs he's gathered for wrapping)

Scene 22: Cabin

Harriet picks up her quilt. (scene refers to quilt Patch #6)

Alonzo

(Drops his chore. runs his hand along fabric)
Why you have the angel there?

Harriet

Remember Preacher's sermon ? Jacob dreamed the ladder went from earth to Heaven.
How else would you show that?

Alonzo

Was it daytime or nighttime?

Harriet

The Bible is about all time. No special time.

Alonzo

Then why do you put suns in there?

Harriet

Good. You see the African suns. They're there to protect and comfort Jacob.
(Harriet lifts up sun pattern cut-outs)

Alonzo

I knew they were Big Mama's suns. She sews them on everything. But there only one
sun, teacher says.

Big Mama

That's enough for one night. You get up and get out. Africa got more suns than here.

Alonzo

And also Mama, Mama, new preacher say ain't no ancestors. Ain't no spirit.

(Harriet looks at Mama)

Alonzo

I didn't tell him that you say it. Big Mama didn't know. I tell him yes. But he gonna
come talk to us. He say he never see Big Mama there in that church. He comin to talk
to us.

Harriet

There's spirits in the trees, Alonzo. There's spirits even if new Preacher don't know it.
So don't tell him. Big Mama's right.

Alonzo

He say there one God.

Harriet

And he's right too. There's room up there. There's room up there for both of them . . . all of them . . . spirit ancestors and God . . . Big space up there. Heaven is big.

Alonzo

Bigger than Athens. I know that much! Bigger Miss Crawford's yard.

Harriet

Bigger than all the yards.

Alonzo

We can't all go to Heaven Preacher says, less we can write our name. You write your name, Mama?

Harriet

(Silence)

Alonzo

He say to us children we go to hell lest we can write our name and numbers.

(Harriet shoos him to bed.)

Harriet

Lonzo, see this? Don't worry bout me going to no hell. This here is my name. *(Holds up quilt patch with Two (Crosses) X's)* I wrote it for you last night. See? I wrote it twice. Don't be worrying about me going to hell.

Scene 23:

Armstead *(Walking across stage as if addressing "people.")*

Jerry follows behind him)

To "person #1: Here is my fishing knife. You got old parts in the barn you can part with? I see them rusting over there.

To "person #2: I got a sack of beans in my cart. Thankee. I give this knife and those beans for that wheel over there. In the corner there?

To "person #3: I work all day for that motor. All day long. That old moving part I can fix it. I could use it. This is a new knife.

Scene 24 : The Cabin

Outside cabin Front porch

(Armstead and Jerry pull sack to cabin space)(set it down)

Harriet

(Comes to door) Where the flour and sugar? You got paid today? *(She carries sugar box to take lid off.)*

Armstead

I got paid.

Harriet

Where my things?

Armstead

I got something different.

Harriet

What?

Armstead

I got something for you.

Harriet

Where my sugar?

Armstead

The man been having these in the barn a long time. I saw it when I fenced there.

Harriet

What you talking about?

Armstead

I ask him for it. Just needed fixing

Harriet

You crazy. You want to be kilt. Asking for what?

Armstead

I wasn't fraid to ask. It was right.

Harriet

What was right. What you know about what's right?

Armstead

(Dumps the bag on the porch, a mess of broken parts Wheel, motor, drive) These for you. (Walks away.)

Harriet

You crazy? *(enters cabin)*

Scene on the porch

(Simultaneous with scene 25)

Armstead and Jerry working on the machine, assembling pieces, Jerry handing him things. Jerry walks up holds a part. Jerry fitting treadle. He stands back. It falls off.) Armstead is trying the machine, turning the wheel, belt slips, then attaches again.. He tinkers with the finished sewing machine. Turning and turning. Men keep working on porch during the next scene

Scene 25:

(Laura is at Harriet's door. There is a beat when Harriet does not let her in, then does.

Laura pulls out a half made quilt which is in pieces. Harriet stares at it. Laura starts crying.)

Harriet

No need telling a fool she is one. She wouldn't be smart enough to believe it.

Laura

I'll pay you half what Miss Crawford gives me. I can't go back with this. Please.

Harriet

Oh no. I'll fix this one up for you and then you're going back to Miss Crawford to say you thought you were ready but you're not.

Laura

I thought I

Harriet

And that it'll cost her a little more, maybe double, to have Harriet because a fool got in the way and used up precious good time. *(Laura nodding and crying.)* You tell her that? Okay. Now let's see what you did here.

Arrnstead carries finished machine inside.

Armstead

Evening.

Harriet

Evening.

Armstead

Harriet?

Harriet

That's my name.

(She moves slowly, cautiously toward the machine, Laura hovering over shoulder. Turns wheel. Jumps back.)

Armstead

Yup. It'll work. (wheel falls off) pretty soon now

Scene 26: *(Alonzo enters with flyer in hand –Pulls Harriet outside. Pulls her across stage to a poster sign).*

Alonzo

Something's going on, Mama. Come on with me

(As they walk, Harriet takes Alonzo's hand.) Voices singing "The Fair is Coming" . Posters of "Circus coming" and "Fair coming . . . Alonzo traces letters on sign with his

finger. Harriet nods understanding.)

Harriet

Lonzo, you read what this sign says?

Alonzo

(Whispers) You can, Mama. *(Harriet folds him into her skirts).*
There's a fair coming. You see the "F" *(traces it with his finger)* Fair.

Harriet

Don't be touching other people's things

Alonzo

I didn't read that all, Mama. It said there's a circus coming too. With animals.

Harriet

It shouldn't matter to you what it said.

(Enter Laura)

Laura (hurrying over)

You hear Harriet about this year there going to be a place in the fair for colored. So you'll be entering your dresses. Win a prize.

Harriet

No I haven't thought about it. Don't think so. When you get old enough you don't like to make yourself a fool in front of people.

Laura

I'm taking in my cucumbers. Pickled in a jar. People say there never been bigger ones. Planted on the dark side of the moon. And the circus is coming right with it.

Alonzo

See Mama, with animals like you talk about on your quilt.

Laura

They're going to give a prize for the best pieces. That's what I heard about the fair in Atlanta.

Alonzo

Mama, we're going to the circus.

Harriet

Well there's no way were going to the circus now. That's a sin . . . with clowns and people eating fire. I would like to see the Bible animals, but the church say we shouldn't be indulgin' ourselves in the ways of the world.

Alonzo

I don't want to see the ways of the world. I want to see the elephant.

Harriet

My child won't go to the circus and he won't go to hell. (*Passes poster of Cotton fair.*)
But you might come to the cotton fair with me.

Alonzo

They have animals at the cotton fair?

Harriet

(*Teasing*) No, but you can see some big cucumber. And you'll see some real nice quilts.

Alonzo

No mama, your quilt.

Harriet

My quilt?

Alonzo

Your quilt should be hanging there.

Harriet

Oh, no you don't.

Alonzo

People will all stand around it, clapping their hands like it's a show. I know it.

Harriet

What are you trying to do to me, child? I'm in no mood for tricks.

Alonzo

I'll ask Poppa. He'll take me.

Harriet

No he won't and no you won't.

(*Alonzo moves to cabin*)

Scene 27: The Cabin, (*Alonzo and Big Mama*)

Big Mama

She's not going to take that quilt. She's got a job this week. She's going working. She can't go to any fair. Besides, that quilt . . . it is a spelled quilt.

Alonzo

Nobody ever will know it if it stays in that trunk

Big Mama

You know it, I know it. The babies being birthed, they know it. Now Armanda knows it.

Alonzo

She's just got to take me to the fair and the circus. . Mama say I have gift of sight and I see her quilt hanging up.

Big Mama

Well I know her better than you. I guess I do. She's not going to do it.
(Wind blows about the house.)

Alonzo

Looks like our ancestors talking to us. I hear them *(Listens)* They want everybody to see Mama's quilt. I hear them.

Big Mama

You do?
(This is a provoking remark to Big Mama. She listens to hear.)

(Harriet is alone, she takes out the quilt and spreads it. We see each square projected. It is luminous.)

Harriet

Well, dear God. What you got me doing now? I guess everybody will like this cover. If I did your work good enough. And if people see it, they will say of this dark skinned woman that Harriet Does Beautiful Work. She Must Think She's Beautiful Herself or Else How Could She Do This? And, even if not, I just might win myself a prize. And this here blue is Lizzie's dress. She be at the fair.
(She runs her hands over the blue that was Lizzie's dress.)

Scene 28: At The Fair. *(Fair music. Harriet's quilt is "hanging on the wall.")**(This can be shown in detail by projected screen on stage)* Nearby, Laura is placing her jars on a stand.) *(Enter Millie Rutherford. Approaches Harriet by her quilt)*

Millie

Harriet. Yes. Oh yes, your special quilt, I've seen it, very nice, colorful

Harriet

Miss Millie, you say this quilt is pretty?

Millie

Well, it's –uh –unusual. I –It's not exactly what we're used to. It's not exactly how you taught me to sew, Harriet. You made me be exact. This is, well let us say this defies all rules. It is fanciful in a way.

Harriet

You think it should be hung up here for people to look at?

Millie

Well of course anything can be displayed at the colored fair. That's why we have the fair.

Harriet

But *You* like it?

Millie

I think it's fine. It is different Harriet. – all those stars and animals and snakes with legs and suns and crosses. It is very interesting. After this, I'd keep it nice and clean in your little house to keep your children warm

(Jennie is making the rounds , Miss Millie joins Jennie. She points out baskets and the rag rugs and the weaving, some decorative iron from the men's work, home made toys for children.)

Jennie

These are the everyday things of life, Miss Millie. That's why I want to bring the students here As scholars, they should be trained to look for the beauty and use of everything around them. The reason I wanted you to see this Colored Fair is to observe the arts and crafts.

Millie

I don't agree, Miss Jennie,that students can gain anything, if the people are uneducated

Jennie

If you had been with me in Paris last year, you'd see how artists defy education.

Millie

Then how would you have us appraise this, then?

Jennie

One has to judge work on the period and time it came from, the tools available and work could be compared well to primitive people elsewhere.

(They arrive at the hanging quilts.)

In God's eye, nothing is wasted. No matter how poor people, they can always find bits and scraps of pieces to put together.

(Jenny stops in her tracks, taken with the quilt)

Millie

Harriet's quilt is unique, but it looks like a child's drawing.

Jennie

Yes. Unlike any I've ever seen. Anyone can make something for the second time, but it's god given to create something original.

Millie

Reminds one of a book of Egyptian drawings but (smirks) I doubt she read it.

Jennie

.But just think of the brave deeds told in hieroglyphs.

(Jennie touches the quilt carefully.)

(Harriet is watching her from a side angle with wariness.)

Millie

(comments on the blue of Lizzie's dress)

Why such a common faded blue work cloth used here? The other materials are so vivid. And what about the circles and x's? And the suns. What in the world was Harriet thinking of?

Jennie

They don't have to represent anything at all. Our dark friends often like to add decorative designs for no apparent reason.

Millie

Jennie, couldn't this be her child's quilt because of all the stuffed animals?

Jennie

No, what you see here is an innocent mind and a grown woman's skill.

(Jennie sees Harriet and Laura standing nearby)

Millie

I'll be at the handkerchief stand over there where flowers are flowers, something we can understand *(Millie off)*

Jennie

(To Harriet smoothing the quilt on its form) Aren't you the person who made this quilt?

Harriet

Yes. *(hurries away)*

Jennie

(To Laura) And who is that?

Laura

That's Miss Harriet Powers.

Jennie

Do you think her quilt is for sale?

Laura

No Ma'am. Probably not. Mine is though.

(Harriet is aware of Jennie.)

Jennie

(Turns to her and calls her)

Miss Harriet Powers. Do you call this a quilt?

Harriet

Yes I do. I call it a quilt.

Jennie

Well, I don't. I call it a work of art. What we have here is, pure and simple, a work of art.

Scene 29 *(Armstead and Harriet outside the cabin)*

Harriet

Selling this. All I got.

Armstead

Then it's all you got to sell.

Harriet

You don't know how it feels to make something in your head. Something you think of . .

Armstead

I've made things. Lots of things. And I've grown things out of dirt too.

Harriet

Am I selling one baby to save another baby? Guess so. I guess I know what I'm doing.

Armstead

We going on or not?

Harriet

If I give up something, looks like you can.

Armstead

I stopped drinking, didn't I?

Harriet

A lie will make you lonely.

Armstead

Leave me be.

Scene 30: The Cabin

Harriet

Lonzo, I want you to be quiet.

Alonzo

Yes mam, I won't put pepper on her shoe like Uncle Jerry say.

Harriet

I mean now

Alonzo

Yes, now

Harriet

Stop talking

Alonzo

(teasing) I stopped talking. See me?

Harriet

(catches and shakes him)

Miss Jennie here. You keep still outside by the fence or you can sit in here in that corner and keep still.

Alonzo

You always give me two bad choices

(Jennie enters)

Harriet

Miss Jennie.

(Seated at the table) (Quilt is laid out)

Jennie

Harriet, you do not know the talent you have.

Harriet

Oh yes I do. God talks to me through my hands. It's His.

(Jennie is pulling the quilt to her lap.)

Jennie

When I was in Paris I saw such appliquéés so beautifully rendered. I don't know where you could ever have learned such a thing.

Harriet

My gran taught my Mama. She taught me. I taught Lizzie and I'll teach Armanda.

Jennie

Harriet, I will pay you fifty cents to let me take this quilt with me.

(Harriet stiffens)

Jennie

Just for the night. Just for the night. I am leasing it from you to display it to my students in our morning session. You can pick it up at noon.

Harriet

(Pause) I don't know.

Jennie

I promise to have it ready. I am teaching your quilt to Miss Lucy Cobb Art students.

(Harriet is reluctant, but she knows it is an honor.)

The Lucy Cobb School *(she takes fifty cents from change purse and lays it on the bare oak table.)*

(This is a conflict for Harriet, but the money is tempting. Harriet begins folding.)

No one could ever touch that quilt the way you do.

(Still negotiating)

I have some lovely ends of material to give you. Velvet. From Paris. The last of two bolts. Wine velvet and white velvet pieces.

Harriet

(Harriet shakes out a crocus bag for the quilt.) I'll be there at noon to pick it up.

Jennie *(to herself, exiting)*

I must tell Miss Millie she is right. Her criticism that Art is not reality. It's not. It's better.

Harriet

S'cuse me?

Jennie

Nothing. It's lovely. I was saying the quilt is lovely.

(Armstead rushing across stage shouting)

Armstead

Harriet, Mr. Crawford say I keep the cart cuz I save his Johnathan. I give him garden pickings for his kitchen, on the month, he say, an' the cart is mine. That man got God in him. There one good whitefolks in this world *(bursts into front doorway. Almost bumps into Jennie)**(Puts hat in hands, backs slowly away.)*

Scene 31: Lucy Cobb School.

(quilt projected on screen as if the quilt is displayed at the front of the room, hung upright. Jennie has a pointer.)

(Jennie is referring to the notes she wrote at Harriet's house.)

Jennie

Patch #1. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. You will notice the only animal represented with feet has, in reality, no feet. I can't imagine why she put feet on a snake. We also see an elephant, camel, ostrich.

Jennie

Patch #5. My favorite is this orange calico lion in the center. You can see Jacob's ladder is in the next picture

(Harriet approaches the door)

Jennie

The Africans as a race are not an artistic people yet these innovations, you see, allow fancies full rein. Usually the quilt design is severely conventional, handed down from generation to generation.

(Unsure of where to wait, Harriet stands outside. Harriet hears Jennie's voice)

Jennie

My little scholars, this is true art. The sort of work one does if she thinks no one is watching so the creation becomes all that matters. The artist thinks not of herself here. (Jennie spots Harriet, beckons her in)

Harriet *(enters doorway)*

Miss Jennie. 'scuse me, but...Why you call my quilt art?

Jennie

(Jennie is searching herself for the reason) When I see work of such freedom, I know we are all capable of great work . . . When it makes me feel such hope, I call it "art." This lesson is about genius. How it is found in strange places.

(Harriet begins to back away)

Jennie

(Pulls Harriet to her side) Harriet Powers, I would like you to meet the Miss Lucy Cobb Art students. Girls, may I present Miss Harriet Powers, our quiltmaker.

(Miss Jennie starts applause(applause suggesting group.)(applause louder and louder to next scene, bell sounds over applause. Harriet rushing across stage to cabin)

Scene 32: Cabin

(Big Mama come on stage ringing bell) (She stops and looks at Harriet) (Armstead comes in from hearing the danger bell)

Harriet

What you sayin? Armanda?

Harriet

Armstead, Help – Mama! Somebody help me!

(Candles burning all around her bed in a circle. Cloth on “her head”. Fevered.)

Harriet

Should've been better by now. I give her High King John the Conquerer and first grown remedies this morning. Pecune, everything.

Armstead

Three days and fever breaks. Cy's son had it.

Harriet

It's been three days. I'm not waiting. Cy's son a little funny because of that. I want the doctor. I want Miss Crawford's doctor.

Big Mama

I got snake skin close 'round her waist.

Armstead *(ignoring Mama)*

You crazy? None of us have that doctor. What you going to pay him with?

Harriet

I'll find something to sell. We're going to get the doctor for Armanda. I lost one and I'm not losing two.

Armstead

She not even yours.

Harriet

I love her still. *(Crying)* We're getting the doctor. I'll buy him.

Armstead

Can't sell my ox. It's mine.

Harriet

(Gets money basket down. Looks inside. Holds up one coin.)

Scene 33: *Outside cabin*

Old Uncle Jerry going from “cabin to cabin” across stage.

Jerry

At Laura's House. We're seeking Jesus. *(He goes to “homes”, shouts inside and goes on.)* We're seeking Jesus. Bring a lantern and come at dark. Harriet needs our help. Be there now.

(Harriet, Armstrong, Big Mama, Laura, Alonzo assembled).

Jerry

Friends, cousins, sister, brotherfolk. You know why you here and I know why you here. Tonight we are seeking Jesus (*murmurs of acclamation*) and we're going to find him. (*rousing response*).

Jerry

Our sister Harriet brings us her trouble and she needs to find the renewing in her body temple. She comes to us empty. She'll leave us full. If we . . . SEEK JESUS.! (*All repeat*) SEEK JESUS.! (*all repeat.*)

Jerry

Do you know where he is, Sister Laura?

Laura

No I don't, but I wish I did.

Jerry

Can you see him without no eyes?

Armstead

No I can't but I want the light.

Jerry

Sister Harriet, do you have him in your house?

Harriet

No Uncle. He's nowhere. Nowhere to be found.

Jerry

Did Armstead take him to Athens in his cart?

Harriet

No, the cart was empty when he left and empty when he came.

Jerry

(*To Big Mama*) Is he in your kitchen behind the wood?

Big Mama

I wish he was. I wish he was.

Jerry

Sallie, Henry, did you set a place at the table or did you forget?

Laura

We set him a place but he didn't come down. His plate's still there.

Jerry

Then we need to find him.

All

We need to find him.

Jerry

How do we find him?

All

(Various Answers) Tell us. We don't know. How?

Jerry

In order to find, we got to seek.

All

Seek to find.

Jerry

Are we ready?

All

Yes. Dear God, we're ready.

Jerry

Are you right in the heart?

All

Yes.

Jerry

Then turn out the light
(all blow out their lanterns)
(Jerry emits a howl/groan/winding up to the rafters)

Jerry

Jesus! Where is Jesus?

Voice

Here is Jesus.
(Scrambling in dark. Chairs knocked over.)(Someone lights a candle)

Jerry

I don't see him.

Everyone

He ain't here. He ain't here. *(Dark)*

Jerry

Where is Jesus?

Voice

(From another place) Here he is .(scrambling sounds in the dark.)

Jerry

Nowhere. Nowhere to be seen.

(Repeat two more times with increased activity and frenzy and emotion)

(Jerry is on the floor sobbing. People are moaning and crying)

Jerry

Then where could he be, friends, where could he be.

Harriet

He's inside me. *(Sobbing)* He's inside me.

All

Right here. He be in me. *(Jerry begins to sing. They all join in song.)*

Scene 34: The Cabin

(Harriet enters exhausted from Laura's. She leans over Armanda and kisses her.)

Big Mama

Could be God's will. Preacher says.

Harriet

Jesus did not like sickness and this is not God's will. God don't like ugly. Anyway, I'll do God's will for him now . . . Jesus with me *(marches over, gets her purse and hat, lays them aside on table, from drawer pulls her large quilt, starts folding carefully)*

Big Mama

When you be back?

Harriet

With the doctor. When I find the white doctor. He'll take this quilt.

Big Mama

No white man take your piecings for his white medicine.

(Armstead enters, overhears)

Harriet

I want that doctor. I sewed Black Man's suns on my quilts, didn't I? I stitched Africa suns my whole life. Didn't save our babies.

Armstead

You crazy? No folks have that doctor. What make you think he'll come?

Harriet

I saw him up the house last year when I was helping. Miss Crawford get him for her baby. I carry linen up the stairs for him. He gave her white man juice in a bottle. Better than I got. She better now. I want that for Armanda.

Armstead

You can't have what they have, Harriet. Now you know that.

Harriet

We just got to get it for Armanda. I lost one, I'm not losing two.

Armstead

Armanda just a baby. Lizzie almost grown.

Harriet

I lost my girl. I'm not losing my baby.

Armstead

You know why Lizzie taken from us. She born too soon.

Harriet

That's right. Preacher say it was a sin. That must be why. But I loved her still. We got to get that white man bottle. I buy it.

Armstead

What you gonna buy white man's medicine with? I'm not selling my cart.

Harriet

No.

Armstead

I need that cart to carry things back and forth. I older, Hattie. I can't make my back do it all alone anymore.

Harriet

(Holding quilt to her.) We have other things to sell.

Armstead

(Looks around at their poverty.) These hard times Harriet. You not selling my ox.

Harriet

Armanda is mine and I don't lose what's mine. Come on. When I get out, you better be standing in front there.

Harriet *(moves to space alone)*

If'n I'm not supposed to take this quilt and show the world the Lord's work, then tell me now dear Savior, tell me now. I been carrying this with me a long long time. It's got Big Mama's hands in it, her stitches some. It got Lizzie's dress in it . . . it got my children's stories in it so now it's time to ask if the Lord Jesus likes the stories I'm telling, then the Doctor will like the stories I'm telling. If the Lord is ashamed of me and thinks I'm sorry, then I didn't do my stitchin right then no body'll buy it. It'll hang in the dark in the corner I'm ready Sweet Jesus, I'm gonna test my soul, God. Nobody likes this quilt? I did bad work for the Lord and I put in that trunk and never take it out. If peoples like and they see the stories and they see the devil in their lives, they'll see Jesus Christ die for our sins hanging there in this here patch -- and they see Judas priest with his 30 pieces of silver in that patch and they'll say NO Lord, no no no I won't be no Judas. They see Adam and Eve have a boy like my Alonzo. They say God can't be that different from me. Adam and Eve had a boy and I have a boy and they think God made us in His image, like the preacher say, and also Big Mama's in this quilt. And here's her suns from her Mama and her Big Mama. I'm gonna turn this quilt for everybody to see, Lord God, then we'll find out just how good a job I did. If I did what you tole me right. If the Doctor won't take it, somebody will.

(Harriet puts on her hat.)

I'll be back, Armanda.

Scene 35: *(Harriet and Armstead walking enroute Miss Jennie's)*

Armstead

Seems like something in my shoe. *(Lags behind under the pretext of fixing something. Takes hidden flask out of pocket. Takes a swig. Harriet looking straight ahead, but she knows.)*

Harriet

We don't want Miss Jennie smellin' liquor. She won't buy anything from us.

Armstead

We're almost there.

Harriet

She liked this quilt more than anybody I ever saw liked anything I ever did. She asked me questions about it and wrote down everything I said. It's the place for it if it can't stay with me.

Harriet

Now what are you doing? Why you stopping?

Armstead

It's not fair you have to sell it.

Harriet

Pictures still in my head and more of them. Nobody can take them away. Or the stories

I got to tell.

Armstead

I can't let you do it.

Harriet

What do you have to do with it all of a sudden?

Armstead

You selling it for Armanda. I . . . I got to stop now. We're turning back.

Harriet

What's into you? We're not turning back. Quilt'll get a good home there and somebody to care about it.

Armstead

Harriet

Harriet

I never like my name when it sounds like that.

Armstead

I can't let you sell your quilt for Armanda. She's . . . she's my baby. Harriet. Do you hear me? You are raising my baby. My love baby. You selling your quilt and it was me.

Harriet

Well I know that.

Armstead

What you mean?

Harriet

Always knew that.

Armstead

Always knew that.

Harriet

She's ours now

Harriet and Armstead in front of Jennie's home. (We hear Jennie's voice)

Jennie

Lift your brushes. One and two. Touch the china, three and four. Relax your wrist, one and two, blow gently on the surface. Dip the brush. A tiny bit, a dewdrop on the tip,

Listen to the music, feel it through your veins (*she stops seeing H at door*)

Scene 36: Jennie's home.
(*Harriet enters. Armstead outside.*)

Jennie

This has been a hard year for me too, Harriet, I may be leaving my teaching. I know I promised to buy it anytime you could part with it. I wish I could do better. I feel terrible about this.

Harriet

I'll just be taking it back then.

Jennie

Wait. Don't. I can't give you ten, but I have five dollars here in the house if you'll take it. If you could, I'd be honored and proud to own your quilt.

Harriet

I don't know . . . I . . . I have to ask Armstead.

Jennie

You can come visit it. Often. I'll keep it safe. You know that. Wait here. I've been saving some cloth for you. (*Gives Harriet package and dollar bills.*)

(*H. exits Jennie's house.*)

Armstead

You lose it?

Harriet

I didn't lose anything. I got me five dollar.

Armstead

You sure you want to leave it? She promised you ten.

Harriet

I'll be coming back to visit. Often, she says.

(*Opening Jennie's package, she sees an array of materials of cotton, calico, velvet and lace. There is also a cigar box. She opens it and sees a large homemade cross and a piece of cypress root. Holds it up.*)

Harriet

I like Miss Jennie, but you know something? She's strange as snow.

Armstead

But she's got your quilt.

Harriet

(moving)

I'm not dead yet, am I. I can start one, can't I.

Armstead

You got a made up mind?

Harriet

Yes. The quilt stays.

Armstead

We going then? It just on loan with her?

Harriet

Everything's just on loan, Armstead, even us. What you think? I said I can begin again. *(holds up material)* Look at these colors.

Armstead

You give her something better'n you got back.

Harriet

I got Armanda. She gonna cut this into Big Mama's suns and sew them on something someday

Scene 37: Cabin

Harriet moves across stage to cabin holding pieces of fabric. (Alonzo enters, breathless)

Alonzo

Mama. Miz. Crawford not home. I run all the way but Mr. Johnathan there and he say if you need his doctor, he take you there. He help you. He get medicine for Armanda but...

Harriet

But what Boy *(shakes him)* but what Mr. Johnathan say?

Alonzo

You bring money with you when you come. You bring dollars. For the Doctor and for him taking you there. *(exits)*

Harriet

Big Mama say I love everything I lose better than anything I got. Why? I say inside me. Why, Harriet? Why you lose everything, Jus' so you can find something better? Gotta stop. That's why I make Armanda so fine she be too good for dying. Ancestors just pass her by and say Leave her be for a time. Leave her stay with Harriet. We don't want her yet. Harriet stopped losing things. Everything Harriet make she gonna keep now. Go on Alonzo. Tell him yes.

Don't matter no how anyway. I got the living waters with me. And the words from Big Mama's Mama.

Ole Jerry (JuJu Man)

This here field where my gran grown up when she came from Africa. She run down toward that river and riz right up in the air. Fly right back to Africa. Turned around three times, stretched her arms out wide and fly back to Africa. Lots of folks did it then when times got bad. My Mama standing right there when it happened. Wish she taught us how. My mama tried it but she never fly. She say our Gran was just born with the power.

THE END