

TRUCKER UPPERS

written by
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Setting:

The highways of America

At Rise:

Let us describe the set in two ways: The first, for small-budget productions. For your sake, this play can be done with three chairs. There can be costuming, as you like, and props, as you like. You may want to concoct a Bigfoot costume. But it's your budget, or lack of it, and you may use your imagination, or lack of it, to stage this play. You will, however, need three chairs. There will be no play without three chairs.

If you can do it, place two of the three chairs side-by-side on a turntable. These two chairs will represent a long-haul truck. The third chair will represent all sorts of things, and should not be on the stage at the moment. And there you have it, your set.

We would like to suggest a second set as well, which we like to call our "Broadway set." Rather than two chairs, the truck will be represented by the cab of an actual truck, or something that looks convincingly like it. This cab should have its front end intact, but beyond the windshield, the remainder should be an exploded view, cut away to reveal the interior of the truck. This full-sized model should be on a turntable, so it can be rotated. Also, if the producers have the money, the truck can also be controlled by hydraulics, so that the truck may rise and fall as terrible things happen to it. The truck should be painted green, and on its door should be emblazoned a hand-painted logo offering the name of the truck: "The Rigger."

The Broadway production might like to make use of projections to represent the background our truck passes through, which will represent the entirety of America seen via the Interstates on the route

from Minnesota to New Orleans, Louisiana. We suggest actually driving from Minneapolis to NOLA and filming along the way to provide this backdrop. If you have the budget to do so -- and, of course you do, Broadway -- we insist we be taken along.

Feathers will occasionally explode from the truck. These must be purple and gold.

There is a small amount of music in this play. This can be provided in one of two ways: The play's two actors can either sing along with pre-recorded tracks, or an actual band should appear onstage. If you are able to do the latter, the band should emerge in surprising ways.

At the start of the play, Rhoades Johnson is in the cab of his truck.

He is a big man in a red straw cowboy hat, red boots, plaid pants, and a black cowboy shirt emblazoned with roses and skulls. We originally thought of John Goodman for the role, and he is still a good choice. But we also would like to suggest Nick Offerman.

A note on casting: Although Rhoades Johnson and the Narrator are referred to using masculine pronouns throughout the script, we insist one of the two roles be played by a woman. Originally we merely recommended this, but all y'all failed to do so, so now we insist. There must be a woman in the cast or we will not permit the play to be produced. We recommend Megan Mullally. Perhaps Nick Offerman knows how to reach her.

NARRATOR emerges, looks at the audience.

NARRATOR

Hell, give me a cup of coffee, honey. I've been driving a week straight without sleeping. Seem farfetched? A whole week without sleep? Nah, that's nothing. There's a story of trucker who went a year without sleep, just driving back and forth across the states, gulping coffee and pills. There's a story about a long-haul driver who was coming in late on his run and so threw a chain around a jumbo jet and let it drag him the rest of the way. We tell a lot of stories on the road. A lot of these stories you know ain't true, but some of them might be true. So maybe the guy in the story wasn't nine feet tall -- that's ridiculous -- but maybe he was seven feet, because some people actually are seven feet. And maybe he didn't kill eight bikers in a bar in Fresno, but maybe he fought three in Buford, and put two in the hospital, because that can be done. Things like that happen. So there's a tale that everybody tells, and I don't know how much of it is true and how much ain't. I reckon some of it is and some of it is exaggerated, but I'm buffaloes if I can tell you which is which. All I know is that when truckers talk, they talk about a man named Rhoades.

(The Narrator rises. Rhoades exits his truck, shivering.)

NARRATOR

Faribault, Minnesota. Or, more properly, a truck stop five miles outside the city limit. Not much of a place for a start of a story. March ain't no time to be in Minnesota, but, then, Rhoades wasn't gonna be there long.

(If this is to be the Broadway production, a gas pump should now be brought onstage, and Rhoades should start pumping gas. If you do not have the budget, represent this with a length of rubber hose, or, I don't know, mime it. Whatever.)

NARRATOR

Despite what the stories say about Rhoades, and despite the legends about his truck, he did have to stop for diesel every so often. Although they say the only reason he ever really stopped was for a girl he liked.

(The Narrator pulls on a wig, holds up a coffee pot.)

NARRATOR

This one was called Long Haul Sally.

(As Sally)

You know they say you never leave the cab of your truck.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Is that what they say?

NARRATOR

It's got some people speculating that you're actually a ghost. What sort of man don't leave the cab of his truck?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Well, I guess you can tell them better, Sally.

NARRATOR

Why spoil the fun? People like stories. Did you hear the one about the driver who had a bet with the devil?

RHOADES JOHNSON

I'd love to hear it, darling, but I'm on deadline.

NARRATOR

I can tell the ENTIRE story before you finish pumping.

RHOADES JOHNSON

All right then.

NARRATOR

He bet the devil he could haul gasoline faster than any man on earth, or any creature in hell. And so the devil set him up with a truck, and the devil got himself a truck, and they loaded them up with high octane, and they chased from Massachusetts to Seattle. And the devil he was fast, and the trucker he was faster. And the devil tried all his tricks. He blew out the trucker's tires, he set murderers and gamblers and loose women upon him, and the devil's tricks would work for a while, but then the devil would look in his rear-view mirror and there would be the trucker, coming up on his tailpipe. And as they traveled through the Northwest, the devil set the road itself on fire, so that the trucker was barreling through an inferno with his haul set to go off like a bomb. But the trucker he just kept going, and he passed the devil, and then, just a few miles outside Seattle, the devil played his worst trick of all. The trucker looked to his right in his cab, and there was his son, riding shotgun. And the trucker could drive as fast and as crazy as he wanted when he was alone, but he couldn't endanger the life of his son. So he slowed down and he limped into Seattle second to the devil. And the devil went to claim his soul, and he was laughing and dancing and mocking the trucker. And then he saw the trucker talking to a man in a suit, and the man in the suit gave him a suitcase full of money. The devil went and asked the trucker what was going on, and the trucker said, well, I never did care much for my soul. I figured you was going to have it anyway. But I bet this man that I could get two loads of gasoline to him in the time it would take a regular trucker to get one, and I bet him that I could do it by tricking you into driving the other truck. So you may have my soul, but the victory today is mine. You almost finished pumping?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Just finished.

NARRATOR

Shows you how well I know these pumps. I got their timing just so. I got all kinds of things figured out. I been working here

NARRATOR (cont.)

long enough I can tell what's going on with a driver the moment he pulls up to the pump.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Quite a skill.

NARRATOR

You don't believe me.

RHOADES JOHNSON

I didn't say that.

NARRATOR

Here I am freezing out here and you're calling me a liar.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Whoa now.

NARRATOR

I'll prove it. You're headed ... south.

RHOADES JOHNSON

10-4.

NARRATOR

New Orleans?

RHOADES JOHNSON

They need a load of chickens.

NARRATOR

For Mardi Gras.

RHOADES JOHNSON

I guess you can suss out a man just like you said.

NARRATOR

Mardi Gras is tomorrow, honey.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Like I said, I got a deadline.

NARRATOR

Mmm hm. But you ain't leaving just yet.

RHOADES JOHNSON

No ma'am.

NARRATOR

Because you need something else for the ride.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Yes, ma'am.

(The narrator hands him a large sandwich bag filled with pills. Rhoades takes a few.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

I could use a lot more.

NARRATOR

You can have whatever I have. I stopped taking them. They make me see things. Hallucinate.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Yeah?

NARRATOR

Noises at night. Eyes looking at me through my window. Bad smells. Garbage cans kicked over, chicken bones eaten. You ever see anything like that?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Can't say as I have.

NARRATOR

Eat a few of these, you will. When the next trucker comes by, I'll tell him you were here and you ate the whole bag without stopping.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Why would I do that?

NARRATOR

It makes for a better story. And, besides, you got a deadline.

(The narrator hands Rhoades additional bags of pills, or, if you have no budget, he mimes handing Rhoades the bags, although, honestly, how broke do you have to be not to even be able to afford a bag? Go outside! There's probably one in the street!

The narrator faces the audience, no longer speaking as Long Haul Sally. Rhoades crosses to the truck, climbs in.)

NARRATOR

They say Rhoades Johnson walked with the stride of 10 men. They say he weighed four hundred pounds and could eat an entire pig in one sitting. They say when he pissed, it formed rivers. All that is just talk, and ain't none of it true. But I tell you this: It is true that he set out for New Orleans with amphetamines in his hand and a suicidal run to New Orleans ahead of him. And here's something else that may be true.

(The narrator crosses to the back of the truck, or, if this is low-budget, the two chairs, and spins them, and then climbs on the back. The truck's lights come on, and the sound of an ENGINE starts. If you are low-budget, this will have to be represented with flashlights and, we don't know, a

recording of a lawn mower. You're creative; you'll figure it out.)

NARRATOR

When Rhoades climbed into the cab of his 18-wheeler, he didn't know it, but something climbed onto the truck with him. Had he seen it, even for a second, he would have seen something like an animal, but walking on two legs, with matted fur and angry eyes. But Rhoades didn't see this, because Rhoades was taking his pills.

(The Narrator spins the truck, and, as he does so, Rhoades tears open packages of pills and pours them down his throat, laughing maniacally. Lights flash and strobe. The truck (or chairs) spin faster and faster, and, when they stop, the truck (or chairs) directly face the audience, Rhoades inside it, eyes wild. If you have the budget, light him from underneath, like in a horror movie. If you don't have the budget, we would like to suggest you read the book "Management and the Arts" by William Byrnes, which will introduce you to some excellent introductory fundraising techniques.)

NARRATOR

When Rhoades came into Iowa, he was already flying. Old timers call it the Freightline Fever. And when Rhoades was feeling that numbness in his jaw, that pounding in his heart, and that throbbing in his temple, he did what every workingman behind the wheel does: He got on his CB radio and started to jaw.

(Rhoades speaks into a CB radio. The narrator produces his own and responds. If you have no budget, well, you can get old CB radios at thrift stores, and you must have a

day job, mustn't you? Did you not budget anything at all for this play?)

RHOADES JOHNSON

(Frantically)

I'm banging through with this Peter Car turkey hearse, blasting through bear's dens and chicken coops, ain't no city kitty or rolling discos riding my back door, going way past the double nickels affirmative, 5 by 5, and back to you.

NARRATOR

(To audience)

At that moment, for the first time, Rhoades saw something in the rear view mirror of his truck.

RHOADES JOHNSON

What sort of hippie hitchhiking caboose clinger?

NARRATOR

10-9. Do what?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Something in my rear view mirror. For just a second. I don't know what I saw, but it was hanging off the back of my truck.

NARRATOR

Copy. Can you give a description?

RHOADES JOHNSON

It looked like an ape. Or a bear. It was just hanging there, staring at me in the rear view mirror. It's eyes lit up and I saw it.

NARRATOR

What's its 20?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Maybe still on the trailer. Don't know.

NARRATOR

Copy. Can I advise you peer back and take a proper gander?

RHOADES JOHNSON

I'll try.

(Rhoades rolls down his window or mimes doing so. Rhoades glances out, speaking into the CB. As he rolls down the window, we hear chickens clucking loudly. If you have a Broadway budget, add small puffs of purple and gold feathers escaping from the back of the truck. Before this moment in the play, there were no clucking sounds, so this instance is particularly spooky. It also establishes the clucking noises to be used later.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

No, nothing.

NARRATOR

That's good --

RHOADES JOHNSON

NO IT IS SOMETHING CAUSE THERE IT IS!

NARRATOR

I need that 20.

RHOADES JOHNSON

I can just see it on the back of the truck. Just a hairy mass. An arm, hanging around the side. Whoa daddy, the size of that arm!

NARRATOR

Itemize its activity for me, please.

RHOADES JOHNSON

It's tugging at something. I think it's trying to get at one of the chickens.

(Purple and gold feathers explode from behind Rhoades, the chicken noises continue to crescendo. The amount of feathers flying out of the back of the truck continues to increase with the frenzy of the chickens.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

Dang mama and it got one. This thieving chicken chomper must come off my truck.

NARRATOR

Heck yes sir.

RHOADES JOHNSON

I'm going to try to shake him.

(The truck swerves back and forth, represented by spinning the turntable, or by the actor simply lurching from side to side violently.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

OFF YOU LONGHAIR.

NARRATOR

Advise?

RHOADES JOHNSON

I didn't see anything fall off. BURT REYNOLD'S MUSTACHE it's getting into another coop!

(More feathers fly. Rhoades swerves his car again, more violently. We begin to hear a cacophony of chickens clucking in sync with

each other. Cluck cluck CLUCK! cluck cluck CLUCK!)

RHOADES JOHNSON

GET OFF MY RIG HIPPIE!

NARRATOR

Disgorge that hitchhiker.

RHOADES JOHNSON

It's stuck like chewbaccy on daddy's dentures!

NARRATOR

OFFLOAD THAT CARGO.

RHOADES JOHNSON

It's climbing on top of the truck!

NARRATOR

REMOVE THE OFFENDING FREELOADER.

RHOADES JOHNSON

I'm coming to an overpass! I'm going to run up along the side and see if I can't knock it off!

(The truck swerves again. We hear a THUD and the vehicle lurches, represented by hydraulics or by the actor lurching in place, if you're cheap.)

NARRATOR

Status of unwanted payload?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Unknown. Didn't see anything fall off.

NARRATOR

I'm right on your bumper sticker, good neighbor.

(The narrator sets his chair down like it is another vehicle. He peers at the truck.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

That you in my rear view?

NARRATOR

That's a 10 and a 4. No sign of intruder.

RHOADES JOHNSON

(Imitating air horn)

HOOT HOOT!

NARRATOR

Let me investigate your other side.

(The narrator moves her chair to the other side, peers at the truck (or chairs representing the truck.))

NARRATOR

Nothing.

RHOADES JOHNSON

HOOT HOOT!

NARRATOR

So did you still want those pizzas you ordered?

RHOADES JOHNSON

That's a BIG 10 and 4.

NARRATOR

Pull on over!

(Beat.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

I can't pull over, Pizza Buddy.

NARRATOR

Do what?

RHOADES JOHNSON

You didn't see this thing.

NARRATOR

Hey, man, you ordered 17 pizzas from me. I've been driving 45 minutes to deliver them.

RHOADES JOHNSON

What's your name, friend?

NARRATOR

Grady Spurgeon.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Listen, Grady, you didn't see this confarnded thing. It was nine feet tall if it was an inch.

NARRATOR

Well, man, it ain't on your truck now.

RHOADES JOHNSON

I won't pull the truck over, Grady. Not until I'm at least 50 miles from here. That thing could be right behind me.

NARRATOR

I'M NOT FOLLOWING YOU 50 MILES!

RHOADES JOHNSON

Can you just throw them to me?

NARRATOR

What?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Just open your window and throw them to me!

NARRATOR

We're going 75 miles per hours! 17 danged pizzas!

RHOADES JOHNSON

Hand them to me. Through our windows. I'll hand you the money.

NARRATOR

Bwa?

RHOADES JOHNSON

I can drive straight. I can drive straight without thinking about it. I won't swerve an inch. Can you drive straight?

NARRATOR

Can I ...

RHOADES JOHNSON

If you can't drive straight, just tell me, and we'll call it a day. You'll be out a hundred bucks, and you'll have 50 miles to drive home, but that's the hand I'm dealing. I just got attacked by some giant hippie, and I WILL NOT STOP THIS UNTIL I FEEL SAFE.

NARRATOR

I can drive straight.

(To audience)

Grady Spurgeon had to drive straight. Pizza is a hard business, and a driver who comes back \$100 short is a driver without a job. And so Grady Spurgeon did the most dangerous thing he had ever done in his life, because he needed to. He drove up to the cab of an 18-wheeler going a frantic 75, he opened his window, and he started to hand the man his pizzas.

(The narrator hands pizza boxes, or mimes handing pizza boxes – but, honestly, you should be able to get pizza boxes, and your

*inability to do so is causing us to doubt
your production altogether.)*

RHOADES JOHNSON

You're doing it Grady!

NARRATOR

I'M DOING IT!

RHOADES JOHNSON

Just two more boxes, Grady, and I'll give you your money!

NARRATOR

I'M DOING IT! I'M ACTUALLY DOING IT!

RHOADES JOHNSON

GRADY! GRADY! YOU DID IT GRADY!! Let me get you your cash!

NARRATOR

I DID IT! I REALLY DID IT!

RHOADES JOHNSON

Here's a hundred dollar -- oh boy no.

NARRATOR

What is it?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Look in your rear view mirror. Do you see it?

NARRATOR

What? I don't see anything.

RHOADES JOHNSON

LOOK! Along the side of the highway! Do you see it?

NARRATOR

What am I looking for?

RHOADES JOHNSON

You don't see it, man? You don't see it running alongside the road?

NARRATOR

What is it? The hippie?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Ain't no hippie. It's a shoot and gosh darn Bigfoot, man. And it's coming up fast.

NARRATOR

Well, give me my money and get out of here.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Bye.

NARRATOR

Wait. My money.

RHOADES JOHNSON

I GOT TO GET!

NARRATOR

(To audience)

And, with that, Rhoades pushed his pedal to the medal and lit on out, cranking his big rig up to 100 miles per hour and leaving poor old Grady Spurgeon in his dust.

(As Grady)

NO! I NEED MY MONEY!

(To audience)

Grady stopped his car and got out.

(Standing; as Grady, looking around)

Oh, bull pucky. Ain't no Bigfoot. You son of a danged gun. I'll get you for this. I will get you, if I have to follow you all the way to New Orleans.

RHOADES JOHNSON

YOU DURNED BIGFOOT! YOU GET OFF MY TAIL!

(The truck spins again, and Rhoades consumes more pills.)

NARRATOR

Rhoades Johnson blew into Missouri with a big problem. He was doing 115 miles per hour, but every time he looked in his rear view mirror, there, by the side of the road, Bigfoot was right behind him. And he had a bigger problem, because he had to make a stop in Missouri.

(Beat)

Any of you who grew up in Nebraska or Iowa knows Missouri. It's a big state. It's a flat state. And, oh man, is it a boring state. But there is one thing that brings you across the border,

NARRATOR (cont.)

two, three time per year, every year. And that thing is fireworks. And Rhoades was looking for explosives, although nobody knew why. But if you got to get explosives, and you got a Bigfoot chasing you, well, you got a problem. Fortunately, there happened to be a shop in Missouri.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Who am I speaking to?

NARRATOR

(Into CB)

Sparky la Plante.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Sparky, am I right that you work at the Rocket's Red Flares fireworks store in Warsaw, Missouri?

NARRATOR

Yes sir, your one stop shop for anything that pops, right across the border from anywhere fireworks are illegal.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Listen, Sparky, can you prepare an order for me for pickup? WHOA DANG!

NARRATOR

I can sir. Is something wrong?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Too close. Sparky, I'll be coming through in 10 minutes, and I'll be coming in hot. Can you have the order ready then?

NARRATOR

Sir, yes sir. We know hot!

RHOADES JOHNSON

Peterbilt dependable transportation!

NARRATOR

Sir!

RHOADES JOHNSON

That thing is fast! Now, Sparky, am I right that Rocket's Red Flares is the store that actually straddles the Interstate?

NARRATOR

Sir, yes sir. The world's only drive-thru big boom fireworks crew.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Do you have those portable credit card readers, Sparky?

NARRATOR

Sir, yes we do, sir!

RHOADES JOHNSON

All right, Sparky. Take this order, and I want you, personally, to be ready to load it up, and I want you waiting there with a credit card reader. Can you do that?

NARRATOR

Sir! Yes I can, sir!

RHOADES JOHNSON

All right. I want 35 Death From Aboves. CLEDUS SNOW! I want 110 Shock and Awesomes. BUFORD T. JUSTICE! I need 500 Mo Betta Booms. GET AWAY FROM ME!

NARRATOR

Sir? You sound like somebody is chasing you, sir.

(To audience)

There it was, just across the border: Rocket's Red Flares. If you've never seen it, nothing can prepare you. It's 15 stories, straight up, made of solid concrete. Fireworks stream from its roof constantly, an endless concussive light show that has left the ground for miles around littered with frightened coyotes, charred pieces of multicolored paper, and dead American eagles.

NARRATOR (cont.)

And there, in the middle of this enormous concrete bunker, is the Interstate, running straight through it.

(The SOUNDS of explosions, and the frightened squawking of chickens. THE CHICKENS REACT. If you do not have the budget to produce these sounds through a professional sound system, just have an actor make the noises, and also pause for a moment to consider whether theater is the right profession for you or not.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

I'm coming for you!

NARRATOR

Rhoades slammed into the entry at full speed, jackknifing his truck just so as he hit his brakes, hard.

(Hydraulics represent this, or Rhoades mimes it. THE CHICKENS REACT.)

NARRATOR

The truck came to rest, amidst the terrified squawking of 1500 purple and gold chickens, tilted sideways, perfectly sealing off the entrance to Rocket's Red Glare. Rhoades threw his door open.

(Rhoades throws his door open.)

NARRATOR

And he called for Sparky La Plante.

RHOADES JOHNSON

SPARKY LA PLANTE!

NARRATOR

And he demanded his truck be filled with fireworks.

RHOADES JOHNSON

FILL MY TRUCK WITH FIREWORKS!

NARRATOR

(As Sparky)

Sir, you have sealed off the one entrance to our store.

(THE CHICKENS REACT, the store begins to fill with feathers.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

Then you'd better make it quick, hadn't you?

NARRATOR

Sir! Yes sir!

(To audience)

Dozens of employees streamed toward The Rigger with their arms filled with boxes of fireworks, loading them into the cab.

(As Sparky)

Sir, may I ask what you plan to do with all these fireworks?

RHOADES JOHNSON

No you may not.

NARRATOR

May I ask why you have sealed off one of our entrances?

RHOADES JOHNSON

No you may not.

NARRATOR

May I ask ...

RHOADES JOHNSON

No. And wait.

(They pause. The sound of footsteps approaches. THE CHICKENS REACT.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

Do you hear that?

NARRATOR

What?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Those footsteps?

NARRATOR

I am sure it is our fireworks show, sir.

RHOADES JOHNSON

That's no fireworks show. He's coming.

(THE CHICKENS REACT. Oh boy do they ever.)

NARRATOR

(to audience)

And, from the other side of the truck, outside the fireworks store, there came a pounding.

(A POUNDING. THE CHICKENS REACT.)

NARRATOR

I never heard the fireworks sound like that.

RHOADES JOHNSON

We have to finish up here.

NARRATOR

I don't know what that sound is.

(The pounding grows louder. Terrified squawking of chickens. Feathers fly. THE CHICKENS REACT.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

Time is up.

NARRATOR

It sounds like something is beating on your truck from outside.

(The pounding grows deafening. THE CHICKENS REACT.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

GET YOUR MEN TO FINISH NOW!

(All noises stop. Both pause. Suddenly, THE CHICKENS REACT. The sound of footsteps. Both look up.)

NARRATOR

What's that sound on the roof?

RHOADES JOHNSON

It's headed for the other entrance. We're done here.

(Rhoades pulls his door shut, or mimes doing so.)

NARRATOR

Sir! You still haven't paid!

RHOADES JOHNSON

Do you have the credit card scanner?

NARRATOR

Sir? Yes I do!

RHOADES JOHNSON

Get in!

(The narrator runs around to the other side of the truck, or to the other chair, and seats himself. The sound of the engine. The sound of footfalls. Both look up.)

NARRATOR

Whatever that sound is, it is right above us.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Putting the pedal down.

(Both lean back as though thrust against the back of the seat by the force of acceleration. If your set has hydraulics, this would be a good time to use them, and, if this is Broadway, have hydraulics. Audiences want something special.)

NARRATOR

It's getting louder

RHOADES JOHNSON

STRAP YOURSELF IN! WE'VE REACHED THE EXIT!

(The narrator fumbles for his seatbelt in a panic. Rhoades watches his rearview mirror intensely.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

AND WE'RE OUT! JERRY REED'S TRUCKER CAP, IT'S RIGHT BEHIND US!

NARRATOR

What's behind us, sir!

RHOADES JOHNSON

It's leaped off the roof of the building! It's hurtling down towards us!

B(oth slow down, as in slow motion, crying out.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

NARRATOR

(At the same time)

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

(To audience)

Dust erupted behind the Rigger, sending up a mushroom cloud of scorched fireworks wrappers and American eagle feathers. 1500 chickens cried out in terror, and Rhoades and Sparky cried out too.

RHOADES JOHNSON

(Still in slow motion)

AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

NARRATOR

(At the same time)

AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

(They resume normal speed. Both fall silent.)

NARRATOR

I have your bill ready sir.

RHOADES JOHNSON

My credit card is in my glove compartment.

NARRATOR

May I ask when you plan to drop me off?

RHOADES JOHNSON

I don't.

NARRATOR

I see, sir. And where are we headed?

RHOADES JOHNSON

New Orleans, Sparky.

NARRATOR

I see, sir. And why are we headed there?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Chickens, Sparky. I have to get these chickens to New Orleans before Mardi Gras. You ever see Mardi Gras, Sparky?

NARRATOR

I have never been outside Missouri, sir.

RHOADES JOHNSON

It's a disgusting spectacle, Sparky.

NARRATOR

I see, sir.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Let's take these chickens, for example, Sparky. You may have noticed that they are dyed purple and gold.

NARRATOR

I did notice that, sir.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Do you know what a throw is, Sparky?

NARRATOR

A throw, sir?

RHOADES JOHNSON

A throw. During the Mardi Gras parades, they throw things from atop the parade floats. Candy. Beads. Coconuts.

NARRATOR

That sounds very nice, sir.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Live chickens.

NARRATOR

Live chickens, sir?

RHOADES JOHNSON

The Krewe de Chauntecleer, Sparky. They take their parade down St. Charles on Mardi Gras, and they throw chickens from their floats.

NARRATOR

As pets he said hopefully?

RHOADES JOHNSON

As food, Sparky. The residents of New Orleans line St. Charles with portable grills. If they catch a chicken, they cook it and eat it.

NARRATOR

Amazing, sir.

RHOADES JOHNSON

They save the feathers, Sparky. They save them and make costumes out of them. The whole of St. Charles is lined with paradegoers dressed in purple and gold feathers, Sparky, waving two pronged grilling forks, chasing after floats calling out MISTER, MISTER, T'ROW ME SOMETHING! And down comes a chicken, and off comes its feathers, and, whoops, onto the grill it goes. It's alive one second and covered with Crystal hot sauce the next, and can you imagine anything more terrible?

NARRATOR

I suppose not, sir.

RHOADES JOHNSON

It's a nightmare.

(beat)

It's just a massacre, Sparky. So much death. So much horror.

NARRATOR

Sir?

RHOADES JOHNSON

It's just a rolling slaughterhouse, Sparky. Isn't it enough to make you weep.

NARRATOR

Sir? If you don't mind me asking, sir ...

RHOADES JOHNSON

Yes?

NARRATOR

Are you still talking about chickens?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Why do you ask?

NARRATOR

You got a distant look, sir, as though you were remembering something terrible. Something that wasn't chickens.

(Silence for a beat.)

NARRATOR

Sir?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Try not to be so perceptive, Sparky.

(SOUNDS: Squealing tires, screams. Rhoades flinches and shudders. If you cannot produce this effect, however low your budget, this may be the point in the script when you realize that you have not chosen the right project, or even the right life path.)

NARRATOR

Anyway, it seems irresponsible waiting to order the chickens until the last minute, sir.

RHOADES JOHNSON

It does seem that way, doesn't it Sparky. Danged irresponsible.

NARRATOR

And sir?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Yes, Sparky?

NARRATOR

What are the fireworks for?

RHOADES JOHNSON

If that ever becomes your business, I'll let you know, Sparky.

NARRATOR

(To audience)

At that moment, the Rigger hit a pothole, and feathers exploded from the back.

(Hydraulic jump, or miming. Feathers explode from behind the truck.)

NARRATOR

Sparky collected the feathers that blew in his window. Nervously, unconsciously, he began to string them together.

(The narrator grabs a handful of feathers, begins unconsciously tying them together in his hands. He will do this throughout the play, eventually ending up with a feather boa. Rhoades produces more pills, downs them. The vehicle spins.)

NARRATOR

Arkansas.

(The truck (or two chairs) stops spinning.)

NARRATOR

Where there was a cop who could stop him.

(The narrator rises, exits the truck. He steps forward, perhaps puts on a highway patrol helmet and silver wraparound shades, although this may be beyond your budget, in which case, what are you, a hobo?)

NARRATOR

What Rhoades forgot was that the highway is big enough to have more than one tall tale, and what he didn't know is that this stretch of road was home to one of the biggest of all: The head of the Arkansas highway patrol, Captain Urassis Mine.

(The narrator does the next part as an epic folk poem.)

NARRATOR

He was a giant of a man, about six-foot-nine / And he went by
the name of Urassis Mine / And if you rode the highways cross
the Arkansas line / You'd be caught dead in the sites of Urassis
Mine / Folks agreed that on the whole / There wasn't none meaner
in the highway patrol / If you crossed him once you'd be doing
time / Nobody sane crossed Urassis Mine / But if you're looking
for crazy, well, then, man / There were few much crazier than
Freewheelin' Dan / And Dan he had a mad design / To be the one
to take down Urassis Mine / Dan had a gang called the Lunatic
Aces / And just one look at their twisted faces / Told you these
were men well acquainted with crime / The sort of men that could
kill Urassis Mine / From Bull Shoales down to El Dorado / Where
Urassis went old Dan would follow / And Urassis he could read
the signs / These men aimed to take down Urassis Mine / The war
it raged for two decades / Between Urassis and them renegades /
They'd corner him, but every time / They'd meet death at the
hands of Urassis Mine / Arkansas highways were painted red /
With bodies of Lunatic Aces dead / But Freewheelin' Dan, he
cried out, saying I'm / Still going to get you, Urassis Mine /
Some say they are fighting still / In the Ozarks and in
Berryville / And they'll fight on until the end of time /
Freewheelin' Dan and Urassis Mine.

(Beat.)

NARRATOR

So here they were, at this moment in their story, face to face
for the first time ever; Urassis had his patrol car parked in
the highway, 10 feet away, and Freewheelin' Dan had his
motorcycle parked next to the patrol car. Of course, both men
had guns drawn. Freewheelin' Dan had some sort of hand cannon.

*(The Narrator produces a very large
revolver. Or mimes doing so, although this
is not going to be nearly as impressive.)*

NARRATOR

And Urassis had himself a sawed-off shotgun.

(Now the narrator produces a sawed off shotgun, or however this is to be represented. We dunno. Maybe a broom handle, although we will simply cry if we a see a broom handle in this scene. We will just cry and cry.)

NARRATOR

Now, Freewheelin' Dan was a talkative man, and he took dead aim on Urassis, and he said "This is a dance that's been on my card a long time." And Urassis was a man of few words, and so he said nothing. And Freewheelin' Dan moved like a puma, light on his feet and faster than you would expect, circling Urassis. And Urassis was a man who only moved when he needed to, and so he did not move at all. And Freewheelin' Dan grinned at Urassis, and he said "Ain't this pretty. Here we is at the end of a war that's been waging most of both of our lives, and what do we have but a Mexican standoff! We just can't seem to get the drop on each other!" And Urassis was a man of few words, and so he said nothing. And Freewheelin' Dan was crafty, so his free hand was reaching for a butterfly knife he had hidden in the belt at the small of his back. But Urassis was also crafty, and, with his free hand, he was reaching to his own belt in the small of his own back, where he had a pair of handcuffs. And Freewheelin' Dan grinned at Urassis, and he said, "So, who wants to make the move?" And Urassis smiled back, but he was a man of few words, and so he said nothing. And both made their move at once, in a moment that seemed suspended in time, as they ran toward each other, each firing their respective guns, each taking the shot -- Freewheelin' Dan in his side, Urassis in his shoulder -- and they kept on running at each other, the biker with his knife drawn, the cop with his handcuffs out. And just as they reached each other, and were just about to resolve their lifelong feud, a sound broke the air, like a tornado siren. It was the sound of a truck's air horn.

(SOUND: AIR HORN)

NARRATOR

And both the biker and the cop stopped for a moment and looked to see, and what they saw was the green front of The Rigger barreling toward them at 125 miles per hour, feathers billowing out from behind, Rhoades Johnson behind the wheel with a mad look in his eyes, pouring pills down his throat and yanking on his horn, with Sparky La Plante seated next to him, his face frozen in a mask of terror, his hands rapidly and reflexively tying a group of purple and gold feathers into what looked to be a long feather boa. Freewheelin' Dan leaped one way, and Urassis leaped the other, the truck passed between them, leaving behind a cloud of feathers and the sound of the terrified squawking of 15,000 chickens. And, as both watched, just up the road a bit, The Rigger struck both Freewheelin' Dan's motorcycle and Urassis Mine's patrol car, causing both to explode outward in opposite directions, raining the side of the highway with burning chrome and rubber and steel. Freehweelin' Dan let out a cry of despair, and Urassis, being a man of few words, said nothing. Freewheelin' Dan loped off into the wilderness, cursing, crying out "THIS AIN'T OVER BETWEEN YOU AND ME, URASSIS! WE STILL GOT US A DANCE TO DANCE." And Urassis, being a man of few words, said nothing. And Freewheelin' Dan cried out "FIRST I GOT ME A TRUCKER TO KILL THOUGH! FIRST ME AND MY GANG GOT TO GET THE SON OF A BOOTCH THAT SMASHED MY BIKE!" And Urassis, of course, said nothing, but nodded his head imperceptibly. For the first time in all the years that they had battled, Freewheelin' Dan and Captain Urassis Mine agreed on something.

(Beat)

It wasn't 20 minutes later, when Urassis was walking along the highway, that a pizza delivery car pulled up to him. A very angry man leaned out and said "Hey? You haven't seen a big green truck full of purple and gold chickens, have you?" Urassis didn't speak when he didn't need to, so he climbed into the passenger seat of the pizza truck. Then he pointed down the road. And as the pizza truck pulled out. Imperceptibly, Urassis grinned.

RHOADES JOHNSON

VOODOO!

NARRATOR
(As Sparky)

Voodoo, sir?

(The narrator crosses to the truck, takes his place in the passenger seat.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

You think it's a coincidence that I'm being chased by a sasquatch?

NARRATOR

Is that still happening, sir?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Haven't you seen it? Look in your side mirror. Every so often, you'll catch sight of him, running alongside the truck on the side of the highway.

NARRATOR

I have not seen it, sir.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Do you know anything about Voodoo, Sparky?

NARRATOR

It's a new subject for me, sir.

RHOADES JOHNSON

New Orleans is just silly with it. If you want a gris gris, there's a store on any corner that will sell you one. The businesses all run on voodoo, from the breweries to the restaurants to the Mardi Gras floats businesses. There are hoodoo women who will poison a man for you, or raise the dead, or send wild animals to block your path.

NARRATOR

Are you saying that a hoodoo woman has sent a Bigfoot to stop you?

RHOADES JOHNSON

There ain't no other explanation, to my way of seeing it.

NARRATOR

And why would she do that?

RHOADES JOHNSON

We've reached the point in the discussion where it has stopped being your business.

NARRATOR

If you don't mind me saying, sir, since I am in this truck with you, Bigfoot is chasing me too. And, if you will forgive me for saying so, sir, that makes it my business.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Oh, you've got a bit of fight in you, don't you, Sparky? There's some fire in that belly, isn't there?

NARRATOR

When it's needed, sir.

RHOADES JOHNSON

So how come you've never been out of Missouri, Sparky?

NARRATOR

Saving my money, sir.

RHOADES JOHNSON

For what, Sparky?

NARRATOR

If you don't mind me saying it, sir, we've reached the point in the discussion where it has stopped being your business.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Oh ho ho, all right, Sparky. Have it your way. And there it is: The Memphis-Arkansas Memorial Bridge, which will take us into Tennessee. We go south a few miles, we're in Mississippi, and then it's a straight shot to New Orleans.

NARRATOR

Sir?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Yes, Sparky?

NARRATOR

Do you remember that police car and that motorcycle we hit when we crossed the border into Arkansas?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Hard to forget hitting a police car and a motorcycle, Sparky!

NARRATOR

Is that that same cop and the same biker, ahead of us there?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Huh? Where?

NARRATOR

Look at the bridge.

(To the audience)

Rhoades cupped his hand over his eyes to see better.

(Rhoades cups his hand over his eyes, squints.)

NARRATOR

There it was, the Memphis-Arkansas bridge running across the Mississippi river. And there, in front of the bridge, and on the bridge, and on the other side of the bridge, and spilling over the distance into Memphis, were people. Half of them were

NARRATOR (CONT.)

Highway Patrolmen, dressed in leather jackets and boots and gloves, each with silver helmets, each with silver reflective sunglasses, and each with a shotgun. But that was only half of the people on the bridge. The other half were bikers -- members of the Psychotic Aces, as well as members of sister gangs: The Drunk Tarantulas, the Screaming Irish, the Vicious Punks, and the Broken Juvies. They had an assortment of weapons, including zip guns and crossbows and bludgeons with nails hammered through them so the pointy end of the nails stuck out. And there, in the front of the group, were three men: Freewheelin' Bob, holding a hand cannon; Urassis Mine, holding a sawed off shotgun; And Grady Spurgeon, from Iowa, holding a receipt for 17 pizzas.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Well, shoot, this can't be good.

NARRATOR

Do cops and bike gangs often join forces like this?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Not regular like.

NARRATOR

Are you going to stop?

RHOADES JOHNSON

No.

NARRATOR

(To audience)

Sparky La Plante watched as Rhoades Johnson did what he thought was the stupidest thing he had ever seen in his life: He watched as Rhoades pressed his foot down on the gas and sped the truck up even faster. Of course, Sparky had never been out of Missouri, and so his experience with stupidity was limited. He was just a few minutes from seeing Rhoades Johnson do something so stupid that this seemed reasonable by comparison. But, at this moment, Sparky had never seen anything quite so idiotic.

(As Sparky)

Sir?

RHOADES JOHNSON

If I can get us into Memphis, I think I can shake them on Beale Street.

NARRATOR

Why? What's on Beale Street?

RHOADES JOHNSON

It's the Running of the Elvises.

NARRATOR

I don't know what that is, sir, but we can't get across that bridge.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Sparky?

NARRATOR

Yes sir?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Stop calling me sir.

NARRATOR

(To audience)

Having said that, Rhoades jerked his wheel hard to the right.

(The truck, or chairs, turn on their turntables. Rhoades and the narrator scream.)

NARRATOR

All watched from the bridge as in the distance, the Rigger let up a puff of smoke as Rhoades took it toward the train tracks. Freewheelin' Bob scratched his jaw, confused. "Do you reckon he means to take it across the trestle?" he asked. Urassis said

NARRATOR (CONT.)

nothing, as was his way. In the meanwhile, Rhoades jerked the wheel of his truck hard to the right again.

(He does so, the truck, or the chairs, spin on their turntable. Both Rhoades and the narrator scream.)

NARRATOR

And, just like that, The Rigger was up on the train tracks and headed for the Harahan Trestle Bridge across the Mississippi River and into Memphis.

(As Sparky)

We're on the tracks!

RHOADES JOHNSON

Yes we are, Sparky.

NARRATOR

There's a train coming at us!

(To audience)

And there was. There it was on the other side of the tracks, a 50 ton diesel locomotive carrying 180 tons of freight, traveling at them at 75 miles per hour. The engineer, seeing Rhoades approaching him, pulled his air horn and did not let it go.

(SOUND: TRAIN HORN)

RHOADES JOHNSON

Golly, I guess we have to get across this bridge before every limb of our body is crushed under that danged locomotive.

(Both scream; sounds of train engine and whistle increase. Suddenly, all freezes.)

NARRATOR

(To audience)

"This is it," Sparky La Plante thought. "This is the moment when I die, and I have never done anything. I have never been anywhere. I haven't lived."

(The lights and sound resume, and the two start screaming again.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

We're across.

NARRATOR

(As Sparky)

I'm ALIVE!

RHOADES JOHNSON

You sure are, good neighbor.

NARRATOR

What's the cloud of smoke behind us?

RHOADES JOHNSON

As I reckon it's about 200 highway patrol vehicles and maybe 300 motorcycles. And probably one pizza truck.

NARRATOR

I want to tell you something.

RHOADES JOHNSON

I'm all ears, little buddy.

NARRATOR

I want to tell you this, because I am so happy to be alive right now, and I really, really think it is possible that you are going to kill me, and I really, really don't want to die. So I want to tell you this in the hopes that you will think about it, and you will not take my life in your hands, because you will

NARRATOR (CONT.)

know that I have a dream, and I have a life I want to live, and you are now responsible for that dream and that life.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Hit me with it, little friend.

NARRATOR

I want to open a gay bar.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Open a what now?

NARRATOR

I want to open a discotheque. I want to have specialty cocktails, and drag shows, and Donna Summer karaoke. I want to have my own office, with a one way mirror, so I can look down on my club. And I will see that it is filled with my friends, and they are dancing, and they are hugging, and they are falling in love, and they are happy, because I have made them happy.

RHOADES JOHNSON

A gay bar you say.

NARRATOR

That is my dream, Rhoades Johnson. I want you to know it, so you'll know what you can take away from me.

RHOADES JOHNSON

It's a fine dream, little guy.

.

NARRATOR

So do you promise to be careful?

RHOADES JOHNSON

I do. Just as soon as we reach the end of Beale Street. Which is right ahead of us.

NARRATOR

(To audience)

And Rusty looked ahead, and he saw Beale Street. The street was lined with onlookers. And, in the middle, there were 200 men and women, running down the center of the street, their contestant number pinned to their arms. Each had pompadour wigs. Some wore white jumpsuits. Some had gold capes. Some wore leather jackets and pants. Some wore gold lame suits. Some paused in their running to take karate poses, or to swivel their lips. All had sneers.

(As Sparky)

Oh my.

RHOADES JOHNSON

It's the Running of the Elvises.

NARRATOR

It's the most beautiful thing I have ever seen in my life.

(To audience)

And, for a moment, it was the most beautiful thing Sparky had ever seen. But the next moment, when Sparky realized Rhoades was aiming his truck right down the center of Beale, right toward all those Elvises, he realized that this was now, once again, the stupidest thing he had ever seen in his life.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Grab something and hold tight.

(Rhoades pulls on his air horn. The truck, or chairs, twist on the turntable so that the front of the truck faces the back of the theater.)

NARRATOR

(To audience)

With the sound of the airhorn, people turned and looked. At first it was onlookers, on the side of Beale, and they gaped, and they turned, and they ran. And soon the Elvises noticed, and scattered like frightened birds, most making noises like this as

they ran: "Ah wha I say a wha wha wha littlederlinthankyouverymuch." But one Elvis, dressed in a blue jumpsuit and American flag cape, panicked and ran in circles. Not knowing what to do, as the truck approached, he took a karate pose and cried out "T-R-O-U-B-L-E." As the truck struck him, his cape flew over the window.

(The narrator should now cast a spangled cape over the window. If your budget is too low to provide this, please contact the playwrights at 952-666-8173, give us your address, and we will come over and punch you in the face.)

Both the narrator and Rhoades scream again.)

NARRATOR
(as Sparky)

I think we hit him!

RHOADES JOHNSON

Can you see anything?

NARRATOR

I can't see anything!

RHOADES JOHNSON

Sparky, I need to you open the door on your side of the cab and get that cape off our window before we get in real trouble.

NARRATOR

IT COULD GET WORSE?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Get that cape off, Sparky.

(The narrator opens his door, or mimes doing so. He tugs on the cape.)

NARRATOR

I'm going to have to climb out on the hood to get this off!

RHOADES JOHNSON

Can you see the Elvis?

NARRATOR

I still can't see anything!

(The narrator disappears behind the cape for a moment, and then the cape vanishes with a whoosh, revealing the narrator hanging from the front of the truck like a figurehead on the front of a sailing ship. He is wearing a pompadour wig. He turns and looks back at Rhoades.)

NARRATOR

I say, Truckin Poppa, just where are you taking me?

RHOADES JOHNSON

New Orleans.

NARRATOR

Ooh mama. Mardi Gras.

(The narrator disappears down the grill for a moment, then reemerges, sans wig, in the cab. He is Sparky again.)

NARRATOR

He doesn't want to come off the grill of your truck.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Any idea why?

NARRATOR

Nope. He just keeps singing songs from King Creole.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Well, we can't stop anyway. That Beale Street trick bought us some time. But as soon as all those police cruisers and motorcycles untangle themselves from that mess, they'll be right back after us.

NARRATOR

Why is a pizza truck chasing you?

RHOADES JOHNSON

I'm going to go ahead and say it's more voodoo, and ask you to leave it at that. And there we are, we just crossed over into Mississippi. We're six hours to New Orleans, and all our troubles are trailing us by miles.

NARRATOR

Yeah?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Yeah. I'm feeling good! Feeling optimistic!

NARRATOR

Yeah? I feel optimistic too!

RHOADES JOHNSON

Yeah?

NARRATOR

Yeah! I mean, after all that, what else could happen?

(Rhoades slumps over his steering wheel.)

The lighting changes, strobing and growing strange, as noises play in the background: SCREAMS, SQUEALING TIRES, EXPLOSIONS. And then the lights go out.

They come up again on something positively dreamlike, a theatrical representation of flying through a swamp, and how you do that is your business.

The Narrator rides the front of the truck, now wearing the Spangled cape, and performs a dreamlike number, FEUFOLLET LETICHE:)

NARRATOR

Ain't nothing, man, but a tale of the bayou / A swamp gumbo of tall tales and hoodoo / But they are told by all possessing of speech / And most of all they say Feufollet Letiche / Feufollet Letiche Feufollet Letiche / Feufollet Letiche Feufollet Letiche / He got them hands just like a crocodile / With weeping eyes and an alligator smile / Good or evil -- man he's a bit of each / He's the devil of the swamp he is Feufollet Letiche / Feufollet Letiche Feufollet Letiche / Feufollet Letiche Feufollet Letiche / Where the swamp weed grow / There's Feufollet Letiche / Where the black snake go / There's Feufollet Letiche / Where the marsh gas glow / There's Feufollet Letiche / He'll drag you down below / Feufollet Letiche / Feufollet Letiche / Feufollet Letiche Feufollet Letiche / Lots of folks have just up and gone / The houses empty but their lights still on / The old folks whisper and the preachers preach / They say watch out, man for Feufollet Letiche / Feufollet Letiche Feufollet Letiche / Feufollet Letiche Feufollet Letiche / You can hear him weeping in the shaded wood / Calling out that he is just misunderstood / Go ahead to him but stay out of reach / Of the crocodile hands of Feufollet Letiche / Feufollet Letiche Feufollet Letiche Feufollet Letiche Feufollet Letiche.

Music stops. Narrator takes off Elvis wig.

NARRATOR

In his unconsciousness, Rhoades heard somebody shouting. They were shouting NO! Over and over again. NO! NO! NO! He tried to find the source of the shouting, but there were chains on his

NARRATOR (CONT.)

feet and handcuffs on his hands. And, from above him, on the roof of the cab of his truck, he heard the sounds of movement, as though a giant form had leaped from a great height and landed atop his truck. He smelled an animal smell and heard breathing, and, for a moment, he saw glowing, angry eyes peering into his window at him.

(Rhoades reacts in terror as the lights come back on.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

HOLY SALLY FIELD!

(Rhoades is in the passenger seat of the truck. He glances over at the narrator, who is in the driver's seat, brooding.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

What happened?

NARRATOR

You came down from all those pills hard.

RHOADES JOHNSON

How long have I been out?

NARRATOR

We're 15 miles to Louisiana.

RHOADES JOHNSON

You took over driving?

NARRATOR

Must have.

RHOADES JOHNSON

You could have just stopped and gone home.

NARRATOR

And miss Mardi Gras?

RHOADES JOHNSON

I hear that, little man. Let me take the wheel now.

(They swap positions)

Man, I've been having some bad dreams.

NARRATOR

I know. You've been talking in your sleep.

(Beat)

Rhoades, what is Miserlou, Louisiana?

RHOADES JOHNSON

What now?

NARRATOR

Miserlou, Louisiana.

RHOADES JOHNSON

You can probably guess that this is a tale I don't want to tell.

NARRATOR

I just drove you all the way through Mississippi. I think you owe me an explanation.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Well. Well well well. I reckon I do. Miserlou is a town that don't exist no more.

NARRATOR

What happened to it?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Lester Bontemps happened to it.

NARRATOR

Lester whowhat?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Lester Bontemps owns the world's largest Mardi Gras parade float factory and museum: Chubby Tuesday's House of Floats. It's right in New Orleans. Right in the French Quarter, in fact, on Royal Street next to the Hotel Monteleone. You ever been there?

NARRATOR

I've never been anywhere.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Well, there's a bar in there called the Carousel Bar. It rotates like a carousel, you see. And they make a drink there called the Vieux Carre. And that's where I met Lester Bontemps. We sat at the bar, and we spun in slow circles, and he told me he had a problem. There was a town called Miserlou, and they were throwing a Mardi Gras parade, and they had hired him to build a float for them. But there were production problems, and the shipment was late, and it had to be there in two hours. Trouble was, Miserlou was four hours away, down in Cajun country. And the roads were bad -- overgrown and sunk into the swamp. No man could make that run in that time. No man but one, the living tall tale, the giant who walked the earth, Rhoades Johnson. And we finished our drinks, and he put \$30,000 on the table and a set of truck keys, and he told me the job was mine if I wanted it, and the truck was outside if I took it.

NARRATOR

You made the run.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Heck yes I made the run. It wasn't easy, but I poured my pills down my throat and pressed my foot down on the pedal until I couldn't push no more. It was a bad truck. It was old. It was overloaded. I was running on bald tires. There was no horn. The windshield was cracked. The breaks were soft. And everything was tied down with duct tape and twine. The swamp reached out to me as I drove through it, trees clutching at the truck like brittle hands, foul water pouring through my cracked windshield like it was trying to drown me. And I could hear something the entire

RHOADES JOHNSON (CONT.)

time. It started as a sensation, like the air around me was pulsating gently. But then the pulsating grew stronger and came into my ears as a gentle throb. And as it grew louder, I realized it was drumming. And I'll admit, I got scared. So I took some more pills, and pressed down harder on the gas. And through the trees, I started to see what looked to be animals. Owls staring at me. Alligators twisting in the swamp. Possums curling on tree limbs. But I saw them only in flashes, and they seemed distorted. The owls had human eyes. The alligators had hunched backs and carried canes. The possums had rings on their fingers. And they made noises, but they didn't sound like the noises of animals. They sounded like laughter. And so I went faster still.

NARRATOR

How fast were you going?

RHOADES JOHNSON

I was up to almost 200 miles per hour when I hit Miserlou. And I hit it hard.

NARRATOR

Sir?

RHOADES JOHNSON

The breaks failed. It wasn't much of a town to begin with. A bar. A church. A school. A few dozen shotgun shacks. By the time the truck came to a stop, they were all gone. The main street of Miserlou, and it was the only street in Miserlou, was littered with broken glass, shards of wood, and the burning wreckage of a Mardi Gras float.

NARRATOR

And the people? The people of Miserlou?

RHOADES JOHNSON

They buried what they found.

NARRATOR

Oh.

RHOADES JOHNSON

I was blamed, of course. They said I was a drug addict. They said I was an ex con. They said I was insane. They said I was a dangerous driver. There wasn't enough of the truck left for me to show them the bad breaks. So I did time, and I got out, and here I am.

NARRATOR

We're not going to New Orleans to deliver chickens, are we?

RHOADES JOHNSON

I thought I told you not to be so perceptive, Sparky.

NARRATOR

You're driving this thing to the French Quarter, aren't you?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Yes.

NARRATOR

You're aiming for Royal Street. For Chubby Tuesday's House of Floats.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Yes.

NARRATOR

And all those fireworks you bought from me?

RHOADES JOHNSON

When I hit Lester Bontemps with this truck, there won't be nothing left of him at all.

(Loudly)

I know you know I'm coming, Lester Bontemps! You and your hoodoo woman can't stop me, no matter what you throw at me!

(Beat.)

NARRATOR

Rhoades, this doesn't seem like a good ...

The narrator notices that Rhoades is looking straight ahead, and his look is quite concerned.

NARRATOR

Rhoades?

RHOADES JOHNSON

(Whistles)

Truck Turner's ghost.

NARRATOR

(To audience)

Sparky turned to look. And then he had to look again, and give his mind a moment to comprehend. In that moment, the Elvis on the front grill turned and looked back at them, grinning, and he said "Oh, mama, that's a lot of Segways." And it was. The horizon was dotted with Segways, lined up along the Mississippi/Louisiana border.

(As Sparky)

What am I looking at, Rhoades?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Animal rights activists.

NARRATOR

Of course they are. Hey, this is the second shipment of chickens, isn't it?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Yes.

NARRATOR

That's why they wanted you down here in 19 hours. Because the first shipment was stopped.

RHOADES JOHNSON

That's right.

NARRATOR

And what happened to the other chickens, Rhoades?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Look real close, Sparky.

NARRATOR

(To audience)

Sparky stared out the window at the Segways, and their riders. Each held something in their hands, and petted it. Sparky couldn't quite make out what they held, but he could see flashes

NARRATOR (cont.)

of color: gold and purple. The Elvis on the front grill turned again, amazed. "Man," he said, "every one of those cats is petting on a chicken."

(The narrator rises from the truck (or chair) and steps out in front of the truck, one arm clutching what looks to be a chicken, the other a bullhorn. He stands in front of the truck, waving his arms. He speaks into the bullhorn.)

NARRATOR

Hey, man. We're going to have to ask you to just go ahead and stop the truck, man. This abuse of animals is not okay, you know, man, and we're really, really not going to let it happen.

(To audience)

But Rhoades did not stop.

NARRATOR (CONT.)

(As activist)

Hey, man -- what are you doing? We've formed a line, you know, and you're supposed to stop at the line. What gives? Stop the truck, man!

(To audience)

But Rhoades did not stop.

(As activist)

This really is not funny, man. We've formed a peaceful blockade on the border here, and you're coming at us with so much aggression! We will not be moved, man!

(To audience)

But Rhoades did not stop. Sparky began to panic. "I don't think they're going to get out of the way!" he said.

RHOADES JOHNSON

They'll get out of the way.

NARRATOR

But the activists did not move. Sparky then said "They seem pretty dedicated!"

RHOADES JOHNSON

They'll move.

NARRATOR

But they didn't. Now the truck was seconds from punching a hole in the line of Segways, and Sparky yelled "THEY'RE NOT MOVING, RHOADES!"

RHOADES JOHNSON

They'll move!

NARRATOR

The Elvis on the grill turned and looked at Rhoades, and he said, "Oh, man, I think you're gonna mess up my turquoise belt, poppa trucker." And with that, Rhoades began to howl.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Hooooooo!

NARRATOR

And with that, Sparky began to scream.

(as sparky)

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

(To audience)

And with that, the Elvis began to pray.

(As Elvis)

OhmamaohmamaohmamaohmamaohMAMA.

(to audience)

And a moment before the truck hit, the Segways flocked outward, the passengers yelping, their chickens squawking in terror. They instantly regrouped and began after The Rigger, but a Segway's top speed is only about 12 miles per hour.

(The narrator climbs onto the front of the truck, puts his pompadour on.)

NARRATOR

Baby heaven's sakes that was close!

RHOADES JOHNSON

I knew they would break.

(The narrator climbs into the passenger seat, removes pompadour.)

NARRATOR

(As Sparky)

You couldn't have known.

RHOADES JOHNSON

I knew it.

NARRATOR

You almost killed them.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Maybe. Maybe if it was just them. Maybe if they were alone on those Segways. Maybe. But they weren't alone.

NARRATOR

What?

RHOADES JOHNSON

They had chickens with them. Wasn't no way they were going to let those chickens get squarshed.

(Rhoades pulls on his air horn)

Whoo hoo! LOUISIANA! A LITTLE MORE THAN AN HOUR AND OUR TRIP IS DONE!

(There is a long pause.)

NARRATOR

Can we talk about this?

RHOADES JOHNSON

No we can't. I'll stop just outside the parade route on St. Charles and let you and the Elvis out.

NARRATOR

Rhoades.

RHOADES JOHNSON

NOTHING IS GOING TO STOP THIS.

NARRATOR

And, like that, something did. The truck, which was going 150 miles per hour, lurched to a stop. The Elvis on the front of the grill flew off, letting out a cry of "tellpriscillaandlisamarieIlovethem" before he hit the ground and rolled 35 feet, coming to rest in a heap. Sparky's head flew forward into the windshield, shattering it, and, just like that, Sparky was out of the picture.

(The narrator reenacts this. If this is the Broadway production, the windshield should shatter. You can afford a new candy glass windshield every night. Come on. What did you do with all that Cats money? The Narrator then slumps down, now invisible to the audience.)

Rhoades guns the engine. There should be a lot of hydraulics here.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

Tarnation WHAT?

(Rhoades looks in his rear-view mirror.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

OH you bad big ape.

(He exits his cab, holding a tire iron. As he walks around it, it spins, to reveal the back end to the audience. The Narrator is here, dressed as Bigfoot, holding the cab up in the air so it's wheels spin. This will no doubt be an expensive effect. We want to see accountants from the production companies biting their nails in horror at this moment, and doing fast calculations on slide rules, and fainting.)

If you're a low budget production, well, you're own your own here.

Rhoades brings the tire iron down across the back of Bigfoot's legs. This does nothing. He strikes Bigfoot across the back. Nothing. He flings the tire iron at Bigfoot's head. Nothing.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

All right then. All right.

(Rhoades crosses to his cab, pulls out a box of pills. He starts dumping pills down his throat.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

You think you can take me on? What are you? You're a myth! I'm the legend that walks! I'm the real life tall tale. I can gulp down 25 uppers at a time, watch me do it.

(He does; he will continue dumping pills down his throat)
I'm RHOADES JOHNSON, do you hear me! I'm half alligator and half eagle, and one year I killed more men than were born! I can fight 10 men with one arm tied behind my back, and I can fight 20 with both tied up. I sand my teeth instead of brush them and there ain't no creature on this earth I can't lick in a fair fight.

(Throwing down empty pill box)

I am ready for you, Bigfoot. And I am coming.

(Rhoades Johnson rushes at Bigfoot, leaps into the air, fist at the ready.)

Lights out at the moment of impact.

Silence for a moment, then lights back on. The Narrator is back in the truck, and Rhoades is pulling him out of the truck.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

Come on, man. Let's get you safe.

NARRATOR

(As Sparky)

What? Where are we?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Exposition and St. Charles. Start of the parade route. You're going to love it. The Elvis is already around here somewhere.

NARRATOR

How did I get here?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Crack on the head. Bigfoot issue. I fixed it.

NARRATOR

No, no, Rhoades, don't tell me that.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Come on out, little neighbor. Ain't got much time. I don't know how much you remember, but I got some mighty angry hombres on my tail.

NARRATOR

I'm not gonna get out.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Come ON, man. There's no time for this. Obviously you don't remember.

NARRATOR

I remember. I'm staying in the vehicle.

(The narrator buckles himself in, defiantly.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

You think I won't take you along for the ride, Sparky? You think this will stop me.

NARRATOR

I hear sirens, Rhoades. Sounds like someone has almost caught up to you.

RHOADES JOHNSON

I will take you with me, man. The whole way.

NARRATOR

Make a decision, or the cops and the bike gangs and the pizza guy and the animal rights activists will make the decision for you. I bet they're not more than a minute or so away.

RHOADES JOHNSON

All right. You want to see how this road ends, it's your decision.

Rhoades climbs into the cab, starts the truck.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Last chance, Sparky.

NARRATOR

Don't talk. Drive.

(To audience)

And so Rhoades did. He started his big rig down St. Charles. Behind him, there came the parade of those who wanted to stop him. If the stories are true, by the time Rhoades reached the French Quarter, he was being chased by seven thousand vehicles. Of course, the legends are almost never true, but those who were there say St. Charles was filled with police cars. The road was covered with outlaw motorcyclists. Trailing were hundreds, and maybe thousands, of Segways. And behind that was one lone pizza truck.

(As Sparky)

You're not a man who is going to do this, Rhoades.

RHOADES JOHNSON

You think you know me, Sparky? You don't know what kind of man I am. Look at this, Sparky. I'm a drug addict. Do you have any idea how many pills I take?

(Rhoades grabs handfuls of pill wrappers, flings them out the window. Put a fan on

this, so they fly out behind him, and keep the fan going, and pill wrappers flying, throughout the scene.)

NARRATOR

(To audience)

When these brightly colored pieces of paper came out of the window, a crowd of paradegoers assembled on St. Charles let out a cheer. They thought the parade had started. And the children did as children always do -- they began to run alongside Rhoades's truck, crying out "Hey mister! Hey mister! Throw me something!" But Rhoades just sped up his truck. And they sang, and this is what they sang:

(Singing)

We got a big parade / Going down St. Charles / Put on your chicken feathers and hat / Follow the drum / And have your grill turned on / Hey mister where my chicken at? / Get some Crystal sauce / Follow the second line / Let's make this Tuesday fat / I say hey mister / Won't you throw me something / Where is my chicken at? / Oh in Jackson square / Let's forget our care / We've had enough of all that / Oh I'll be there / At Krewe de Chanticleer / Saying where is my chicken at? / Where is it? Where is it? / Won't you throw it to me! / Toss me a chicken, oh, hey, mister, please / Laissez le Bon temp rouler! / Go take your chick out, man / And get our chicken, man / What do you think about that? / Put your feathers on / Let's march uptown / Hey mister where my chicken at? / We got a big parade / Going down St. Charles / Put on your chicken feathers and hat / Follow the drum And have your grill turned on / Hey mister where my chicken at?

(As Sparky)

You're not going to drive through this city at top speed, Rhoades. You're not going to put people at risk.

RHOADES JOHNSON

That ain't true, Sparky. I'm the most dangerous driver alive. I'm reckless and I don't care about safety. Just watch me!

NARRATOR

(To audience)

And with that, Rhoades began to weave back and forth across the street. The crowd assumed this was part of the show, and they let out a cheer. They ran alongside his truck, waving barbecue forks and calling out for him to throw them the chickens.

(The truck (or chairs) begins twisting wildly on its turntable.)

NARRATOR

But Rhoades just sped up his truck.

(As Sparky)

You're a good man, Rhoades. I just know you are.

RHOADES JOHNSON

You ain't right, Sparky. I'm an ex con. Look at all these fireworks, Sparky. I've made my truck into a bomb, Sparky, and who but a criminal would do that?

(Rhoades begins lighting fireworks, throwing them from the truck.)

NARRATOR

(To Audience)

And, of course, the crowd cheered this too. They chased after Rhoades, followed by patrol cars, followed by motorcycles, followed by Segways, followed by a pizza truck. And Rhoades just sped up The Rigger. At that moment, the Elvis rose up from the front of the truck, hanging from the grill.

(The Narrator climbs from the cab to the front of the truck, puts on his pompadour, and arches backward, hanging there like the figurehead of a ship and singing.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

OH Where did that DANGED Elvis come from?

(The Narrator steps off the truck, takes off the wig. Stares at Rhoades. As Sparky:)

NARRATOR

And him? Are you going to kill him too?

RHOADES JOHNSON

You don't know how crazy I am. I got a revenge I got to do. I'M COMING FOR YOU, LESTER BONTEMPS! I'M AIMING MY TRUCK RIGHT AT YOU! I CAN SEE THE FRENCH QUARTER NOW!

NARRATOR

And what is your revenge for?

RHOADES JOHNSON

YOU KNOW WHAT FOR! THEY PINNED THE WHOLE ACCIDENT ON ME! THEY SAID ...

NARRATOR

Yes?

RHOADES JOHNSON

They said ...

NARRATOR

What did they say?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Oh no, I ain't gonna to let you confuse me.

NARRATOR

What did they say about you?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Drug use. Convict. Bad driver. Insane.

NARRATOR

Was any of it true?

RHOADES JOHNSON

NO YOU DON'T! THERE IT IS. THERE'S ROYAL STREET! I AIN'T GONNA LET NOBODY ELSE STOP ME! BIGFOOT COULDN'T STOP ME!

NARRATOR

Rhoades, about Bigfoot.

RHOADES JOHNSON

What about Bigfoot?

NARRATOR

Has anyone seen him besides you?

RHOADES JOHNSON

Stop trying to confuse me!

NARRATOR

All right, Rhoades. Let's all go out together in the biggest fireworks explosion this town has ever seen. Let's burn down the French Quarter. Let's put the whole city underwater if we can. But let me ask you one question before we do.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Make it quick! There's Chubby Tuesday's!

NARRATOR

When we hit Chubby Tuesday's House of Floats, just before the truck bursts into flames, what will you tell yourself? How will you make this not your fault?

(Rhoades looks thunderstruck. He hits the breaks. Hydraulics here, and the truck spins and spins on its turntable. Finally, it comes to rest. Rhoades is distraught.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

I'm having an unpleasant realization, Sparky.

NARRATOR

About Miserlou?

RHOADES JOHNSON

I am not enjoying this sensation, Sparky.

NARRATOR

No, I reckon not.

RHOADES JOHNSON

It feels like the bottom of my stomach is dropping out. It feels like a screaming inside my head. It's the worst feeling I have ever felt.

NARRATOR

Go on.

RHOADES JOHNSON

It feels like guilt, Sparky.

NARRATOR

There it is.

RHOADES JOHNSON

I'm a bad driver, Sparky. And a lot of people paid for that.

NARRATOR

You're not a bad driver, Rhoades.

(Beat)

You're the worst driver I have ever seen.

RHOADES JOHNSON

They're coming for me, aren't they?

NARRATOR

Yes they are.

RHOADES JOHNSON

What do I do?

NARRATOR

You're in the French Quarter on Mardi Gras.

RHOADES JOHNSON

Yes I am.

NARRATOR

I'd say you have just enough time for a drink.

(Rhoades climbs out of the truck. It starts spinning again, and the narrator disappears behind it.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

(Addressing audience)

And so I climbed out of the cab and went into the Hotel Monteleone. I had never seen it like this. It was empty, and it was dark. I crossed to the carousel bar. It was also empty, and dark.

(Calling out)

Hello? Anybody here?

(To audience)

I didn't know it then, but I was about to do a long stretch. But I would never mind a minute of it. There was always something to do. I won't say I was a model prisoner, but there were those there who said I helped them along the way. But that's later. For now, I wanted a drink.

(Calling out)

I need a drink! I need a bartender!

(To audience)

This was the end of my legend, but the start of another. Sometimes you'll be driving on this country's interstates, and you'll see a very strange long-haul truck. Flashing lights pouring out from inside its trailer, and the pulsating sound of the music of Donna Summer, and, if you get close enough, you'll hear cheers and see people dancing inside. And there, in the cab of the truck, if you're paying close attention, you'll see a man watching through the side view mirror, and nodding, satisfied, a

RHOADES JOHNSON (CONT.)

long feather boa around his neck. But I didn't know that then.
All I knew was that I needed some alcohol.

(Calling out)

Hello?

(A figure steps out from behind the rotating bar. It is Bigfoot. He carries two drinks with him.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

Is one of them for me?

(Bigfoot nods.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

Thank you.

(He takes the drink. They clink glasses together, sip.)

RHOADES JOHNSON

Mm. A Vieux Carre. I haven't had one of these for years.

(They continue to spin and drink in silence. Sounds of a crowd approaching, sirens. Lights fade.)

END OF PLAY)