

# **BEETHOVEN AND MISFORTUNE COOKIES**

(Based on the true Life Story of Kabin Thomas)

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TRT: 60:00 (may run straight or with intermission)

In 2006, Kabin Thomas - a 43 year-old, black Music Appreciation Professor at The University of Arkansas whose classes all had wait lists and a 90% attendance record - was fired after a white student complained about the use of profanity and a graphic image depicting a lynching in one of his lessons. This is the story of how he lost himself and then found his way back.

Registrtration # Pau 3-610-867

- **Character Description** KABIN THOMAS, adored by students who clamored to be a part of his class.

- **Set Requirements** Upstage there is an old radio circa 1960 atop a side table. Stage Right is a desk with a CD player and a chair. Near desk is an easel and a flip board to depict the illustrations of Beethoven, Lady Day, and one graphic image which led to Thomas' firing. Stage Left is an old couch and behind it perhaps some file cabinets. As for props, there is a slip knot - ready-for-lynching- rope.

- **Time & Place.** The play is one continuous scene that goes back and forth in time between the present sessions with the psychiatrist (2007/8) and the past lessons in the classroom (1995-2006), and the 60's when Thomas was 11 in Detroit. There are classical and jazz music cues throughout along with lighting cues which are optional but may help to delineate between time and place.

## **BEETHOVEN AND MISFORTUNE COOKIES**

### **SET:**

**There is a desk center stage upon which sits a CD player. To the right of the desk is an easel with a Flip Chart. A small sofa is down stage left.**

*--Lights up on Kabin Thomas, a rather rotund, 40-something, African American Music teacher. He is center stage near his desk.--*

**KABIN** *(to the Audience as though his classroom):*

Hello Class. My name is Kabin Thomas, and I will be your Music Appreciation Professor for the semester. But, before I begin: For those of you who are offended by profanity, I urge you to get the fuck out of this class right now. (beat) And to the rest, I look forward to teaching whomever remains of the 250 of you; and I can promise you one thing: This class will never be tedious. Class dismissed.

*--Lights Change. Kabin sits on edge of desk and talks to the audience members, but we sense he is also relaying the story to his Psychiatrist.--*

**KABIN**

I started every semester the same way for 10 years; never a problem. Sure, there was a complaint here and there, but for every kid who dropped out, there were forty waiting to get in.

Every year, my class had a wait list. The list would become so long, they'd add another class, and then another. I was up to four classes that year, all of them with wait lists. Easy A?

Sure, but I also had a 90% attendance record.... A University of Arkansas 90% attendance record for 10 years! Come on, these kids loved me!

Listen, I appreciate being able to talk to you Angela, I really do. But you shrinks are all the same. It's always Mommy or Daddy's fault. Well my childhood was okay. Sure, my dad died when I was just a baby and my mom...she didn't tell me the truth about how he died until I was 13. But I don't want to talk about that. I'm here because I got fired. I was a professor for eleven years. The school claimed that I had a radical teaching style and that I used profanity, which I did. But it was always to make a point. And they also said that I showed a graphic photo in connection with one of my lessons; and that's true... but my students LOVED me and still, the school fired me. So that's how I ended up out here.

***--LIGHTS CHANGE. Kabin resumes teaching class.--***

**KABIN**

Today, Beethoven!

***--He crosses to flip-board and displays a picture of Beethoven--.***

This is what I can tell you about Beethoven. Ludwig Van Beethoven, born December 16, 1770, long considered Europe's greatest classical music composer, was a black man. Specifically, his mother was a Moore, that group of Muslim Northern Africans who conquered parts of Europe, making Spain their capital for some 800 years.

I bet most of you who have been listening to Beethoven never realized that all this time you were listening to soul music.

## **KABIN (Cont.)**

But yes, his mother was a Moore and his father... Well, Beethoven's dad was one of the great bastards of all time. He was an asshole. No, not an asshole; he was an ass crater. He was a drunk, and he was frustrated that his son, Ludwig, had all of this magic, but he wasn't as good as Mozart. Mozart could create music on command, and it would be exquisite; it would be delightful, and people would remember it. Beethoven had to struggle like a son of a bitch to make his music work. He had to work at it and work at it.

The beginning of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony had to be done over maybe 20 to 30 times.

*--He starts, then stops the CD player several times so that we repeatedly hear THE FIRST FEW NOTES of Beethoven's Famous Fifth Symphony.--*

## **KABIN (Cont.)**

He just couldn't find the right sequence. All that work just to get those first four notes right. But his dad didn't like that. That he had to *work* at the magic. It was just there for Mozart. For Mozart, it was effortless. So, when Johann van Beethoven came home, he kicked the cat, put the wife out, and beat the shit out of his son. He beat the shit out of him if he didn't practice enough.

He beat the shit out of him if he practiced too much. He beat the shit out of him if he hit the wrong note. He beat the shit out of him if he hit the right note. He beat the shit out of him just because he was there. I bet some of you know people like that. Maybe you have friends; maybe

it's one of you. I bet someone out there has gotten the shit beat out of them just for being there; just because the Genetic Lottery didn't spit you out a winning ticket. Well, here's the thing: Your DNA Does Not Account. (*He crosses to the easel and writes the letters DNA below the picture of Beethoven.*)

Forget about it. Throw it away if it sucks. Got gypped by a lousy set of parents? Put it behind you. Genetic Malcontent? Boo- Hoo, tell it to someone who cares! I say, if you were born with flat feet, become the best goddamn swimmer out there. Take the sour notes and tweak them like the Beet Meister did.

*--He crosses to desk to put in a new disk. We hear Beethoven's Adagio Movement of Pathetique, play.--*

**KABIN (Cont.):**

Hear that? That's the adagio movement from Beethoven's "Pathétique Sonata." Hear it?

*--At end of the first few bars Kabin begins striking the seat of the chair forcefully, as if he were Beethoven's dad beating Ludwig.--*

**KABIN (Cont.)**

You stupid son of a bitch. You worthless piece of shit. Do it again. Do it again. You stupid fuck. You dumb ass.

**KABIN (Cont.) (To Class)**

Did you see that? Beethoven took that anger and made some of the most beautiful music that you or I will ever hear. He made something glorious out of his misfortune, and we can do the same. We just have to take the sour notes and tweak them.

And if it doesn't come easy, work at it, then work at it some more, until you find exactly the right sound in exactly the right sequence, and the result will be pure beauty, no matter what kind of ugliness spawned it. (beat) Class dismissed.

*--Light Change. He is seated on the couch, now clearly directing his thoughts to his psychiatrist, Angela.--*

**KABIN**

I guess I was lucky in some ways not to have a dad around. My lessons on Beethoven always reminded me of that. But, it was hard on my mom and my sisters and brothers when he died. Hell, what did I know? I was only one. - Look, I don't want to talk about that! I want to talk about the strangest thing that has ever happened to me.

This morning, my rear-view mirror fell off, and I couldn't get it to stay back on. I tried crazy glue, putty, everything, but nothing worked! What's so strange about that? Well the exact same thing happened to me once before, on the worst fucking day of my life, and I cursed that broken mirror and everything else that happened that day. Yet, now that it's happened again, I look at it as a sign: Fuck looking back. As long as you can see ahead of you. That's my bumper sticker. Fuck the past!

*--Lights Change, Kabin crosses to center stage--*

**KABIN (to Class)**

Today, we pick up with Beethoven and the misfortune that would visit him in later years: his deafness. Was this just another evil that he could thank his son of a bitch father for? Or was it Typhus? What could have caused Beethoven to lose his hearing back then? It could have very well been lead- poisoning.

They used lead in everything back then, including medicine. One of the symptoms of lead- posing, besides bizarre and erratic behavior - including rages - is deafness. In fact, a sample of his hair years later proved that he had alarmingly high levels of lead in his system. Yet, even lead poisoning seldom led to the profound form of hearing loss that Beethoven exhibited.

You can bet he liked to play his music loud. He also had a habit of sticking his head into a huge vat of ice water just to stay awake... which, by the way, can be arranged for some of you sitting up there in the back.

All we know for certain is that by 1808, Beethoven started to hear this ringing in his ears- the beginnings of Tinnitus. By 1812, he could hear nothing. During this time, he was starting to become suicidal. So he moved to a little town called Heiligenstadt, just outside of Vienna. This is where he wrote what we know as the “Heiligenstadt Testament,” a testament to life.

**KABIN (Cont.)**

"Oh, what a bastard the devil is, but I will take this malady and I will persevere. I won't satisfy you, devil, who brings me such sadness by taking my own life. I will survive."

*--Kabin fiddles with the CD player. We hear Beethoven's 9th Symphony.--*

And it was a damn good thing he did! Because some of his greatest and most introspective works came from when he was deaf. His glorious 9th Symphony, he couldn't hear a note. Probably one of the greatest pieces ever created by humankind! Yet, the only place Beethoven could hear it was in his head.

*--Music continues to play for a few bars as Kabin lets the music float through him. It is a balm, a drug, a salve, his salvation. He then begins speaking above the music to the class --*

And at the end of the premier of this masterwork, he had to be turned around to see that the audience was applauding wildly. Did they like it? Was it any good? He had no idea until then. *(music slowly fades out)*

And when he saw that, he began to weep.(beat) Class dismissed.

*--Lights Change and Kabin is once again talking to the audience, as though his psychiatrist--*

**KABIN**

I loved teaching... But when they took that away, just like Beethoven, I headed for the hills...Hollywood Hills.

**KABIN ( to the unseen producers of A Reality TV Weight Loss Show)**

Well, I didn't use to be this big. I gained a lot of weight out here! Nobody walks in LA.

*--A' Cappella, he sings the first bar of "Walking in L.A." by Missing Persons (1988)--*

“Walkin’ in LA... Walking in L. A.! Nobody walks in LA.”

*-- We can see that it doesn't go over as intended. He quickly regroups.--*

**KABIN (Cont.)**

I can also play the tuba. I've subbed with some of the finest orchestras in the world.

(Beat) And, I've been a bouncer, and I cleaned stalls for a while in a porno book store on Hollywood and Vine. But, what I really am is a music professor, for ten... no, eleven years, at the University of Arkansas. Woooo pig sueeee, woooo pig sueeee wooo pig sueeee, Go Razorbacks! *(As though he is interrupted)* Oh, of course I'll sign a waiver.... No, I have no problem discussing why I'm so fat with the show's psychiatrist. That's the name of the show, right? “Why Are You So Fat”, or “How'd you get so Fat?” Something like that. But, it's not a competition, right? I don't win anything if I lose the most weight? ...No? Okay. That's okay.

And since I'm signing a waiver, does...does that also mean no pay? Oh, ok... *(with each sobering reality, he snaps himself back from the brink of discouragement to regain his enthusiasm )* But it will appear on National Television, right?! ...The Discovery Channel? Ok, I'm in! LA ROCKS!!!

*-- Perhaps the lights change as yet again, Kabin is in a different place and time. He dons sunglasses, and suddenly, Mr. Cool, he strides into the spotlight.--*

**KABIN (Cont.)**

Welcome to HOLLYWOOD, where everyone wants you to have a nice day. And why not? There's beautiful sunshine and fresh air. (*He coughs, removes glasses.*)

*-- Kabin suddenly seems to hear the voices. We hear the Sound of a distant metronome ticking away. --*

**KABIN (to himself, agitated)**

You have no talent, Kabin. You're a fucking moron, Kabin. You're not an artist young man, you are a pretender! How can one learn from a pretender?!? You reap what you sew, Kabin. You sew a sow! You are a sow!! You fucking sow!!!

*--Lights change again. Miles Davis' instrumental "So What" plays low as Kabin speaks to the audience--*

**KABIN**

I was talking to the show's shrink and telling her how I would listen to jazz artists like Miles Davis, Eddie Harris and how I took up the tuba myself to drown out those voices. (*music fades*).

And then I found beer. Which works even better. But no more, I promised her. No more beer. After all, how can I stay sober if I drink? And if I'm drunk I lose the gig. The Tuba is actually better anyway. It's like a fog horn; it blankets everything, so nothing gets through. Did you know that only 1 % of the population plays an instrument? And I chose a big instrument.

## **KABIN (Cont.)**

My father played one of the most delicate instruments there is. But it's easy to break a Violin. You can't break a TUBA though! My dad wanted to be a professional violinist, but my mom said that he wasn't good enough. I've subbed with some of the finest orchestras in the world, by the way. I know he was a teacher. He taught math in grade school. I'm a professor. He served in the Marines. I served in the Coast Guard. Marines take lives. Coast Guards save them. I didn't know him, but I always managed to one up him. The question is, what happens now? I'm 43, the same age he was when he died. Soon, I'll be 44. Who wins then?

So, I am telling her about this newspaper calling me a cancer on the university! A fucking cancer! A Blight I could have lived with. But a Cancer? My mother had just died of ovarian cancer the year before.

I wonder did they know that over 400 students signed petitions to have me reinstated. Did they know that? Huh? Whatever. Music was my life. It was as important to me as breathing; and now I was drowning. Without my class, who was I? What was I? Some fucking sideshow on another flash-in-the-pan, pseudo-psychological reality series? Of course, when I said that, the shrink got offended. But, the shrink I didn't give a shit about. It was the producers who I wanted to convince. The producers!! So I got an idea to ask them if I could come to their office

**KABIN (Cont.)**

and have a meeting with them, or if they were on the set, if maybe they could come and meet with me. So they agreed. And there I am thanking them...

**--He crosses down stage center, then begins talking to the Producers up in the light booth--**

**KABIN (to Producers)**

“First of all, I just want to thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me; and also I want to let you to know how much I really enjoy participating in ‘Why Are You So Fat?’ or, ‘How Come You're So Fat?’ (*searching*) I mean, uh, ‘What’s Making You Look So Fat This Week?’” ... “It’s ‘What Makes capital U capital S Fat!’” They said. “Oh,” I said. “What makes *US* fat?” Ok, that’s cool, capital U capital S as in the U.S. Oh yeah, that’s good. I got it now. But, what I would really like to talk to you about is an idea that I had that would more fully utilize my talent, you see..... Oh you have no more room?

Well actually, if you'll just look over my resume you'll see that I was a professor for 11 years at the University of Arkansas and...Look (*he is interrupted*).... I know you don't have any more time for me but if you'll just give me a chance!!! I'm sorry, I am so sorry... I know that you are very busy and uh... (*again interrupted*) no, no, no. This is the place for me! And I really appreciate being a part of what makes capital U capital S fat! And I value my sessions with Angela, really. But maybe we could possibly discuss this at another t...(again interrupted)... No, I understand. Good bye.... (*calling out*) And thank you. Have a nice day.

**--Lighting Cue, Sound. Cue. Miles Davis comes up low again--**

**KABIN (intermittently speaking to Angela and relating his conversations with Angela to the audience.)**

Well, that didn't work! So, I was back to the couch and spilling out my life story to Angela. And, by this point, I felt I could call my shrink by her first name. So, I was asking Angela,

“What do you want from me? I am trying to remember!” I knew I had to remember so I could understand why I was so fat!

“I hate to tell you this, Angela”, I said, “but I’m wondering if “ What makes U.S. so Fat?” is exactly what’s making me so damn fat!”

There was no doubt the show was adding to my weight gain. Still, it was really great having a free shrink to talk to and spill my guts.... Even if it *was* on National TV. But Angela wanted me to remember all of these things that I would just as soon forget. She wanted me to figure out why my mom told me about my dad when she did and how she did. And, I tried to remember what lead up to all of that, but I couldn’t. You see, I am like a shark. I may not look like a shark, but I'm all about moving forward. I don’t believe in looking back. But Angela wouldn’t relent. So, *for Angela*, I tried harder to remember. And, finally, I could remember sitting in my mom’s black Buick, crossing a string of train tracks, and she was like:

***--He crosses to chair, speaks to Angela--***

## **KABIN**

“Kabin, your poppa didn’t really die of a heart attack, like I told you. His heart did stop, but it stopped because... He shot himself.”

And I’m like, “What?”

“Yeah,” she said, “he blew his brains out because he was what the doctors called, ‘a paranoid schizophrenic’”. She told me this, going over these train tracks that seemed to go on forever. And I’m like, “What!!! Schizophrenic? Shot himself?” Why’d she wait to tell me now? Why now, when I was 13 years old? Why now?!!! “I swear to you Angela, I don’t know!!!” I can’t remember! I won’t remember!!

**End Act I (Intermission is optional. The play may continue uninterrupted if desired.)**

## **ACT II**

### **KABIN (to Angela)**

I can tell you his name. His name was Kertis Thomas. Spelled with a K. I spoke to my sister Kirsha recently and she said the day he died, he was calling around to all of his colleagues, trying to find out if any of them thought he was any good...you know, as a teacher. Kirsha was just 15. But she heard him on the phone for hours that day, desperately trying to reach someone. We don’t know any more than that. Nobody knows if he’d just gotten fired, or what lead up to his ... death. But she’s sure he was *looking* for something...some sort of validation. That’s all any teacher wants. To know you’re getting through, making a difference.... But maybe the photo went too far.

*--Light Change: KABIN RESUMES TALKING TO CLASS. Crossing to easel, he flips Beethoven's picture to reveal a picture of Billie Holiday--*

**KABIN**

Today, we're going to talk about the lovely Billie Holiday. Anybody ever heard of her? Good. Well, if what you think you know about Billie Holiday you learned from the movie, *Lady Sings the Blues*, a lot of that is just plain wrong.

What *is* true is that she was one of the first persons to take a song and truly make it her own. (*Kabin appears to cue up music as we hear Billie Holiday's voice singing Strange Fruit, low, in the background*) Her accessibility and emotionally honest, impossibly intimate vocalization would revolutionize the way music would be sung forever. Billie Holiday wrote and sang songs that are today considered haunting, riveting, virtuoso genius. Yet, back then, she wasn't even allowed to stay in the hotels where she performed.

*(Fade music)*

It was around August 1914, when Mom, Sadie Fagan, only 14, became pregnant with daughter, Billie. So, naturally, her good Catholic parents threw her out. She moved to Philadelphia, where she gave birth to Billie, born Eleanora Fagan, April 1915, and later settled in a poor section of Baltimore. Billie's parents married when she was three, but divorced soon after, leaving Billie to be raised by her mother and some pretty shitty relatives.

One day, Billie comes up to Sadie and says, "Mama, Mama, I've been raped." What does Sadie do? Does she ask who? Does she pick up and move? Does she call the police? Nope! Sadie pretends she just doesn't hear her at all. After all, Billie was only 9, and Sadie had been getting

## **KABIN (Cont.)**

all of these calls from school saying that Billie was late all the time, and half the time, she hadn't shown up at all. So, Sadie figured her daughter was just a little bum and a liar too, just like her jazz musician old man! So, she shipped her daughter to the House of the Good Shepherd, a Catholic reform school for black girls; and, at age 9, Billy was one of the youngest girls there. And while there, things only got worse.

Her cries continued to fall on deaf ears; and hell, if people doubt you long enough, eventually, you start doubting yourself. Maybe it was all my fault? Maybe I am crazy? But, finally at age 13, four years later, Billie got to move back home with her mom.

This time, no relatives. Now, she was safe- or so she thought. One day, a neighbor named Wilbert Rich decided that just looking at this sweet young piece of ass every day, the way it swayed this way and that, wasn't enough anymore. So, Wilbert Rich waited until Sadie had gone off to work, then he rang the doorbell. Billie let him in and Wilbert Rich raped her. But, Sadie got off work early that day and walked in to see it. Rich got 3 months in jail. And Billie? She was now 14... and she had finally found her voice.

*--Kabin adjusts disk as we hear music play from "Strange Fruit", a little louder now. He allows the music , again to wash over him for a bar or two. --*

## **KABIN (Cont.)**

It wasn't long after that that she began singing for tips in all-black night clubs. She borrowed her professional name, Billie Holiday, from a combination of then-screen-star Billie Dove, and her father's surname. And, from that moment on, Billie Holiday knew how to make them listen.

## **KABIN (Cont.)**

“Strange Fruit,” sung here by Holiday, was originally a poem written by a Jewish school teacher from the Bronx, named Abel Meeropol, after seeing this photo.

*(KABIN crosses to flip-board and reveals the famous photo of two black men hanging from a tree.)*

The picture was taken by Lawrence Beitler, and the men you see here were named Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith. Meeropol was so horrified by this, he wrote a poem of protest under the pen name of Lewis Allan. For those of you who saw the movie, *Lady Sings the Blues*, it was Meeropol, not Holiday, who set the poem to music, as the movie would have you believe. But, it was Billie Holiday who made the song famous.

*(Music plays low.)*

She performed it at The Cafe Society, New York's first integrated nightclub, in 1939. But, Columbia, her record label, refused to record it because they said that they feared a backlash by the record retailers in the South. Hmmmmm! Now, you've got to remember: this was the late thirties and our country was still very racist and deeply, deeply segregated. Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement didn't even happen until 20 years later, in the 60's. In fact,

### **KABIN (Cont.)**

Billie Holiday was one of the first black performers to ever sing with an all-white orchestra when she joined Artie Shaw's group after a successful tour with Count Basie in 1937. Write that down, because that's going to be on the test. And a lot of people were pissed off, even about that! And she wasn't even singing her song of protest then.

### **KABIN (Cont.)**

But, this song, “Strange Fruit”... The truth is that CBS just didn't have the balls to record it, or even want to. Even her great producer at Columbia, John Hammond, refused! It took a man named Milt Gabler, Billy Crystal's uncle, to finally have the guts to produce and record that record. And, in time, “Strange Fruit” became one of her biggest sellers. She sang it at every performance. And, according to her accompanist, Bobby Tucker, Holiday would break down and cry afterwards every time.

*--Music grows louder as Kabin takes out a --Slip-knot-ready for-lynching-rope from behind the flip-board and shows it to the class before draping it over the famous picture of the men--*

Class dismissed!

### **KABIN (To the Audience)**

The weird thing was, when I woke up that morning, I knew something bad was going to happen. But, even so, when I got to class, it seemed like they were all with me. They were

## KABIN (Cont.)

following, but I couldn't see her- that student who was sitting up there back in the back. Maybe if I could have seen her face, maybe I would have sensed something. I could have talked to her first. Very unlucky for me, that *that* student was sitting up in the back. Luck is such a mind fuck! Some people say *when you feel lucky, you are lucky*. And that's about maybe being positive first, and that positivity affecting the real world. But, not me. I think if you're feeling lucky, it's a sign that something good is going to happen. Like a premonition. And, if you're feeling unlucky- well, that's a sign too. And, like I said, I wasn't feeling too lucky that morning. (beat) So, I was telling the Dean,

*( light changes, as does his demeanor, to indicate that he is with the Dean)*

"There's a very good reason why I am late, Dean. It's very funny, actually. My rear-view mirror fell off this morning, and I couldn't get it to stay back on. I tried everything: crazy glue, silly-putty, but, no matter what I tried, I couldn't get the damn thing to stay up there."

*(Nervous laughter, then as an aside to the audience)* Of course that wasn't *his* problem. "I'm sorry I'm late," I said, "And it will never happen again." Then, he asked me about the photo. I told him that I thought it was pertinent to the lesson. How could they understand this black woman's interpretation of the song if they didn't understand what inspired it? The back story, if you will; or in this case, the *black* story. (Beat) And yes, I've used profanity at times, but it was always to make a point. But nothing I said made a difference. I was gently disposed of like some

**KABIN (Cont.)**

rotting piece of garbage that had gone overlooked for so long that it was now putrid, toxic. And yet somehow, I thanked him. Here I'd been, offered tenure the year before and I turned it down. Can you imagine? I thought it would squelch my drive, kill my passion to teach, knowing that I was safe whether I was any good or not; that maybe I would just be showing up to collect a paycheck. I was afraid my classes would become tedious and I would turn into a human metronome. Now, not only did I not have tenure, they're calling me a cancer.

I wanted to ask the Dean: did he think the white girl who was so offended by the photo ever gave any thought to the men in the picture? You think they were offended when those white dudes were putting those ropes around their necks? You think?! But no, I couldn't ask him that. I'd offended Southern White sensibilities... Guess there are things we'd all like to forget...

**KABIN (Cont.)**

Ridiculous thing, the classroom. You can fuck a student as long as nobody hears, but don't say the word 'fuck' because some people don't like that word. Hypocrites! And don't show offensive pictures that might make some people feel uncomfortable. (*Beat*) She called my class, "The Kabin Thomas Show, (*ala the old black-face vaudevillian*) "The Kabin Thomas Shoooooww." The God damn Kabin Thomas Show!!! Is that what my lessons were to her? An act? I'm 43 years old, the same age my dad was when he died. And now I'm wondering if this is the end for me

too. So that's when I left my wife and two kids in Arkansas and moved out here to Los Angeles, because this is where a lot of people come to die....Or to live forever.

***-- LIGHT CHANGES (This is the only Lighting Cue which is NOT optional) WE HEAR MARVIN GAYE's "What's Going On" play on the old radio . We see An 11- year-old-Kabin listening to the radio. As Marvin's song ends, Lee Marshall from the CKLW 20/20 News Team comes on. Kabin sits listening, as though a child--***

**THE VOICE OF LEE MARSHALL (*coming through radio*)**

“It's 20 minutes before 6:00 and this is CKLW delivering the news. Motor City Mayor has made on for an unidentified rapist. If you spot crime, dial 254 CKLW in Windsor and 261 NEWS in Detroit. The Big 8 wants to know!”

***--Kabin excitedly attempts to deliver what he has memorized on CKLW--***

**KABIN (as an 11-year-old)**

The deadly duo of Detroit's dastardly deeds as the dice decreed disagreement over seven come eleven, now she's in heaven. The man who delivered that double-barreled death with his package of penetrating pellets has been pounced in the pen....

And in another case of hot lead in the head, a heavy handed hitch- hiker tipped with a trigger and paid his bill in bullets. This has been Kabin Thomas, never one to exploit what we know as Detroit, only to hand-deliver every decimating decibel I can through my deluxe DJ skills, along with the rest of the CKLW 20/20 News Team.... *Yeah!* How did you like that

Grandpa? Did I sound just like the DJ's on CKLW? This has been Kabin Thomas for CKLW and the 20/20 news team. Now back to Motown...

*--We hear the Motown music so popular in the 60's and 70's come up as The Young Kabin begins to walk as though on a tight rope, joyfully extending his arms on either side to keep his balance--*

**KABIN (As an 11-year-old. Cont.)**

Grandpa Fitz, how come when I was five and we first moved to Detroit, there were only white families in our neighborhood, but now that I'm 11, they've all moved out? Now it's all black families. Why is that, Grandpa? Momma says it's because they got mad when we moved in. Now she's all scared. Every time she hears a siren, she gets all jumpy, like a rabbit. She acts like she doesn't like it where we live anymore. But, you know what, Grandpa? Today, she took me to see where Grandma works- that big beautiful house on the hill.

**KABIN (as 11- year- old Cont.)**

I've never seen a house like that in my whole life! It's real different from yours and Grandma's house. This is very nice; but that was beautiful. It's nothing like where momma and I live. It's the most beautiful house that I ever saw! And Grandma keeps it real clean. But, you know what I like about this house a lot better? You! I know whenever momma drops me off, I know I can find you up here in this same room in that exact same chair, and you'll tell me bible stories. Tell me about Job again Grandpa. Come on, tell me again. Please! And I'll tell you about

the news. I'll do it like they do on CKLW. You ready? Ten tiny trollops were trounced when trouble trembled in the trash heap known as Detroit.

*--Kabin laughs like a young boy and ends up laughing like an adult again talking to the audience as the lighting again reverts back to prior setting--*

**KABIN (As an adult to the audience)**

I loved CKLW. The station was electrifying. Byron McGregor and Lee Marshall were the DJ's spinning the news like it was the hottest song out. Every news break was done in alliteration. Free-flowing. phantasmagorical alliterations that depicted the horror that Detroit was becoming. Grandpa Fitz, on the other hand, was old and tranquil. He made me feel safe. You could always find him in that same room upstairs down at the end of the hallway. And I loved opening the door and tiptoeing in there and listening to him go on every bit as much as I loved listening to CKLW. He would show me all of his World War II stuff, including his 45 caliber pistol. He'd show me how to eject the cartridge. He'd show me the bullets, and he was always dressed in the same white shirt and grey pants. Everything about him was calm and certain.

**KABIN (Cont.)**

When I was with Grandpa Fitz, I didn't hear the voices. But, I know, I know... why 13? Why did my mom wait until I was 13 years old to tell me about my dad?

Was it because of what was happening in Detroit at the time? It was the 60's, and the place where we lived was becoming a ghetto, every year, little by little. I'd talk to Grandpa Fitz

about it, but he would always explain everything through bible stories. It scared my mom, though, the way our neighborhood was changing right before her eyes.

### **KABIN (Cont.)**

Still, why did she tell me then? Why wait to tell me something so important, something that she had to have known would have an effect on me for the rest of my life? I admit; I was baffled. I just couldn't connect the dots. Then, it hit me. Suddenly, I knew why it happened, why she told me when she did. I think it was because that's around the time that I discovered masturbation. Or self-loving as I used to think of it.

I was sleeping in my mom's bed. There was no man there, and I was the youngest. And, I always slept in my mom's bed out of habit until I was 13. Then, I started masturbating and I knew that I couldn't do that in my mom's bed. I knew that wasn't right. So, that's when I started sleeping in my own bed. So, I am thinking that's why she told me then; because that's when she figured that I was becoming a man. But, then I remembered something- something heavy, something that happened over at my Grandma's house.

### **KABIN (continues but now he is in the chair speaking to Angela)**

I remember pleading with my Grandmamma, one day, to believe me... "I saw him, I swear, he's there. Every day, he's there, Grandma! He shows me old pictures of the two of you, and he lets me hold his gun. Why would I lie, Grandma? Come on, I'll show you. He's up there

right now!(Beat) What are you talking about? Why are you saying that? Why are you so angry?  
I'm telling you the truth, Grandma. He's up there!"

### **KABIN (Cont.)**

That was the only time that I ever heard my Grandmother say the word "hell"! "Hell" was like "fuck" to her. She never said it. But on this day, she said, "Boy, what the hell are you talkin' about?" Then, she got on the phone, called my mom, and made her leave work and come to the house.

"Your son claims he's seen Fitz!" Then, my mom says, "Is that true? Answer me!" "Yes," I said, "Grandpa Fitz is upstairs, mom." Now, I'm in tears because I don't know what I did wrong. And then, my mom looks me in the eye and says, "Kabin, your Grandpa Fitz Patrick was dead long before you were born, son!" I didn't understand. No, no, I'd been playing with him for years, every time I came to visit. I would sit on his knee, and he would tell me Bible stories. He would show me all his World War II stuff. He loves me, he's up there!!!

That's when my mom dragged me up to that room. And, when she turned the door knob, opened the door and we walked in together, there was nobody there. Just an empty chair. No photos, no gun, no Grandpa Fitz. And, that's when she told me that day about my dad, on the drive back home. (*He has grown increasingly distraught as he remembers this*) She said that my father put a bullet through his brain because he was a paranoid schizophrenic. He'd been on

and off medicine most of his life. He suffered from delusions, and living with him could be like living with God or the devil, just depending. So, that's why she told me when I turned 13, because that's when she decided that I might be just like him.

*--We hear the Metronome soon joined by the Adagio Movement from Beethoven's "Pathétique Sonata. It begins low and then grows louder as KABIN begins hearing the voices-*

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## **KABIN**

You have no talent, Kabin. You're a fucking moron, Kabin! You're not a musician, you're a second rate tuba player! You're not a husband, you're a deserter! You're not a professor, you are a pretender! You're a cancer. Rid the world of the cancer, Kabin. Cut it out. Cut it out once and for all. Cut it out now!!!

*--He takes the noose which still hangs on the flip chart/easel, places it around his neck, and starts to pull desperately at it, choking himself. This continues as the music grows to a crescendo, and then suddenly, finally, it stops and we hear Beethoven's 9th Symphony fade in, the one written in Heiligenstadt-- At this point, [optional] on a scrim we see pictures dissolve into one another, of an 11 year old black boy, laughing, the same boy kissing his mother, the same boy playing near a radio. A young black man in a Coast Guard suit, the same young, tuxedo-clad man seated with his Tuba among the other orchestral musicians on stage, the same man, a little older, smiling in a photo with a graduate regalia with cap and gown in front of the University of Arkansas.*

*--Kabin is struck by the music. He tries to loosen the rope, then, finally, takes it off, and quotes from Beethoven's Heiligenstadt Testament--*

**KABIN (CONT.)**

“I will not satisfy you, devil, who brings me such sadness by taking my own life. I will survive.” *(He throws the rope completely off, louder now.)* Your DNA does not account, your DNA Does Not Account! I’m calling the shots here. Not you, or you, or you, or you, or you... Not even you, dad. I am not a Cancer! I’m Kabin Thomas, music professor. Kabin Thomas, music professor. *(breaking down)* I’m Kabin Thomas. I will always be Kabin Thomas, the music professor.

***--Lights change. Kabin is sitting on the couch talking with Angela. The demons have been exorcised--***

**KABIN (To Angela)**

I wish he would have waited, my dad. I wish I could have known him. Just to look into his eyes and maybe ease some of his pain. Tell him I understood, and that he wasn’t alone. *(looking heavenward)* It wasn’t your fault. You did nothing wrong. And I’m still grateful for the music you passed down to me. For everything... the good and the bad. For my life... All of it.

You won’t be seeing me again, Angela. See, it turns out we really do have our own notes. They’re in our DNA. And there’s this doctor, a geneticist. He says if I got what my dad had, he can help me tweak those notes, maybe. But I want to thank you for everything you’ve done for me. You’ve helped me to realize that I’m happy to be here, happy to be alive. And to

remember. You've helped me to remember....Who I am. (*beat*) I am Kabin Thomas, son of  
Kertis. I am Kabin Thomas, Music Professor. I'm Kabin Thomas, Music Professor. **THE END**