

LEAVINGS by Gail Parrish (EXERPT)  
Train Scene

(Oseola is leaving his home in rural Mississippi by train, heading to Chicago, 1915. He says goodbye to his mother before meeting his brother, Rafe, at the station.)

OSEOLA

Mama, how I look?

SALLY

Like a northern dandy. Just like a northern dandy.  
Pretty as you wanna be. You hurry up now. Don't go  
missing your train.

OSEOLA  
(kisses her)

Bye, mama

SALLY

Take care of yourself, you hear?

(Ossie exits. Lights down on Sally.  
Light rises on Rafe, with suitcase,  
waiting at the train station for  
Oseola. Sounds of steam from  
engine. Train whistles.)

Bells. Ossie enters with  
suitcase and sack)

RAFE

Fool, where you been?

OSEOLA

I had to get the food from Mama

RAFE

Country-ass nigger... Tie up your shoe laces for you  
trip. (notices his shoes) Lordy, Lord. Ossie got him  
some new shoes. Where you get them shoes?

OSEOLA

(tying shoes)

Lucy

RAFE

The undertakers daughter??

OSEOLA

Shoot, they fit!

RAFE

Shoulda never took no shoes from the undertakers  
daughter. Dead man shoes? It's bad luck.

OSEOLA

I said they ok.

Don't look like it's many white folks riding at all.

RAFE

And don't think for one minute they gonna take one of  
their cars for us. We gonna be packed like cotton in  
a bushel and still can't sit in those seats.

(Conductor enters)

CONDUCTOR

Tickets. Have your tickets out.  
(to Rafe) Tickets!

(to Ossie )

Colored car, Mister, Please move on up to the next car  
if you don't mind.

OSEOLA

No sir. This is where I belong.

CONDUCTOR

Listen, mister, I'm in charge of these train cars and  
I don't want no problems, you understand? If you're  
colored then you can stay here but if you a white man  
then I'm gonna ask you to move up to the other car so  
I can clear this aisle.

RAFE

If you need the aisle cleared we can both move.

CONDUCTOR

No sir. Just him. Mister are you white or are you  
colored?

OSEOLA

I told you what I am...

CONDUCTOR

I'm asking you again...

MAN'S VOICE FROM  
TRAIN

He's a high-yellow mongrel Nee-gro...

RAFE

Don't worry about it, Ossie

MAN'S VOICE FROM TRAIN

Mama laid down with Massa Charlie

(Ossie jumps to strike.  
Rafe holds him back)

CONDUCTOR  
Hey! You can get put off at the next stop.

RAFE  
Ossie, go on up there. It'd be better.

CONDUCTOR  
I'm asking you for the last time...

OSEOLA  
And I told you. What you want me to say?

RAFE  
Ossie, go on. It'd be ok.

(Ossie grabs his bag)

Gimme the food.  
(Ossie tosses bag to  
Rafe, exits)

MAMA BEA  
People always want Ossie to go over on the other side  
but he never would for good. He says better to have  
trouble in the world than trouble in mind. Trouble in  
mind bring on them spirits fast. That's what happened  
to some of his children and grandchildren.

LOREN  
They called themselves white?

MAMA BEA  
Passed. Yes ma'am

(crossfade to Arthur)

ARTHUR

I'm 37 years old. Married, 2 children. I live in a suburb right outside of Phoenix. About a year ago I found out I was Black. You think I'm kidding right? How could a person live 37 years of their life and not know something so..... so fundamental. It is fundamental, don't you think?

(truly questioning) )

You think? Well, anyway, this is what happened. I'm living my life like everybody else and I get this letter:

(Spotlight on Mama Bea)

MAMA BEA

Dear ARTHUR, you don't remember me. You were only two years old when I last saw you but I been keeping up with you and your brothers over the years when I talk to your mother ever now and then on the telephone. She tells me you are doing real good, nice wife, two children and that she told you all about me and your relatives here in Chicago and bout you being colored and all. ..

(spotlight down on Mama  
Bea)

ARTHUR

I'm not sure what else she said in the letter. Something about ghosts and some town in Mississippi, I don't really know. My head was pounding, I couldn't hear anything or breathe. "You. Being. Colored." was all I heard." I felt like I was in one of those movies -- a male Pinky or something. Imitation of Life. All of a sudden it all made sense. All the questions I had growing up. Where are my relatives? Why haven't I ever seen my cousins? Why does my mother only have a few fuzzy pictures of my grandmother? All of it made complete sense to me then. They passed. They passed for white. They moved us out to that suburb outside of Chicago when I was young and they never looked back. They just erased everything, every tie they had with their families. Well, almost every tie. Mama would go away once or twice a year and we could never go with her. That's where she'd go.

.... I confronted my mother. You know what she said? "I did it for you." She did it for ME!?!? Me??? Here I was, my whole identity screwed over...I didn't know who I was anymore. She said she was trying to help me, make it easier for me. She didn't want me getting beat up all the time like my brother by people thinking he was white, or called honky all the time like she was. She said she didn't want me to have to carry around a Black identity card just to walk around our neighborhood. Anyway, I figured I should tell my kids. I didn't want them going through what I went through. So I sat 'em down and told them the whole story. You know what Jason said?" Awesome". And Jeffrey? "I'm Black? Sweet". I should have figured as much. Things are different today than in my mother's day. Hell, they're different than in my day. Race just doesn't matter like it used to. I'm the same person I was before I got that letter. I look the same, act the same. It's just, according to some made up "rules" I'm quote-unquote "Black". (beat) I'm Black. What the hell does that even mean?

## LEAVINGS by Gail Parrish (Excerpt) Attack Scene

### MAMA BEA

Daddy was happy most times but then he got a bad streak a temper too. All of a sudden he be like a mad man.

(music stops. Ben suddenly pushes Sally away with fury. Sally stands up to him. He stops himself, tries to make up to her. She turns away.)

Like he cut a person head off and not even blink one eye. He had them green eyes, purty as you ever see but all of a sudden they turn dark as night. Black. That when you know to watch out. Something come over him and he turn to somebody else. All us go scattering but I know it was the spirits come on him. Them same spirts I'm telling you bout. They landed my daddy in prison after he married my mama.

(Sally turns away. Ben, dejected, climbs up to apartment. He stares out window, which becomes jail cell bars)

He say somebody say somethin about his mama and that set his temper off. Couldn't nobody say a word bout my Gramdma Tempe lest they want a beatin from my daddy. Thas fo sho. He say folks always be talking bout her living with his slave holder white daddy. Always had something to say like folks do. He was crazy bout his mama but his daddy, now that was something else. He had a hate for that white man couldn't nothin take away. Nothin. But then mama say he looked just like him, only dark. Them spirits come on him bad.

Real bad(pause).It was 1901 .I was bout eleven. My daddy, he was locked up in Jackson at the time f0r

beatin this man and my mama had me doin days work with her .

(Sally, Little Bea enter with broom and dust cloths, begin cleaning)

I sho loved workin long side Mama. She be singin whilst we change the bed clothes, wash the pots and pans. We was working at this one house and come to find out the man there was big in the Klan. But Mama say don't matter, a job is a job. She weren't never one to turn down a dollar, no matter where it come from. One day I was workin in this bedroom and the man, he come in. I could tell he had something on his mind.

(Sally exits. Little Bea sings softly while she sweeps. Jeremiah enters)

JEREMIAH

Hey, girl. . .

LITTLE BEA

Sir...

JEREMIAH

You like working for me?

LITTLE BEA

Ye...yessir...

JEREMIAH

(he approaches)

Well, that is what I like to hear

(he moves to touch her, she resists)

Boo!!

(he tries to pull her close, she runs, he goes after her, moving her to a chair or couch, as she resists)

Come on, now. Be good. You don't want to get your mama in trouble, do you?

(he climbs on her, starts unfastening his pants)

LITTLE BEA

MAMA!!! MAMA!!

(Sally runs in, grabs the broom and fights him to the ground. As she and Little Bea are running away, Jeremiah puts a knife to Sally's throat and moves her toward another room. Sally gestures to crying Little Bea to leave. Mama Bea continues to narrate as Little Bea acts out)



MAMA BEA  
(distraught)

I run out yelling going room to room but wasn't nobody there, so I run to the kitchen to get me a butcher knife, gonna run that Klan man through. But right then I heard that man let out a sound like a sick ole mule and my mama come down the steps, blouse all tore up. She took my hand to leave and told me...

SALLY

Don't say nothing to nobody, you hear? Specially your daddy.

(Little Bea, crying, exits with distraught Sally. Once Little Bea is offstage, Sally breaks down. She recovers after a few moments and speaks with difficulty)

I couldn't tell Ben cause with his temper he'd kill that white man shore as you born and then get killed hisself. But I couldn't go back there neither. I figured I'd just say they let us go, didn't need no more help. Well, I got on with another family and everything was fine then till I started feeling morning sick and I knew I was pregnant. It been a year since I last been with Ben. He knew it and I knew it.

(She looks at Benny, as he stares at her from cell bars)

I didn't want my husband dead so I figured the best thing to do was tell Ben I laid down with that white man on purpose. Figured I could take Ben's blows better than he could take bullets. So this is what I told him.

(pause. Ben rises. Paces, furious)

He believed it for awhile. He called me every kinda hoe in the book. Being locked up he couldn't hit me like he had a mind to. But Rankin a small place and once Ben got out he got enough word from enough folks of what really happened.

(Ben storms out of apartment-jail)

I knew he was going after that white man. And I knew what would happen then.

(Ben approaches Sally, embraces her then exits. Sally tries to stop him. Gun shots. Darkness then lights gradually reveal scene of man hanging, shown in silhouette. Sally screams in agony. With trembling hands Mama Bea opens the little, wooden box. Takes out a

tiny, old, yellowed news clipping. Hands it to  
Theresa. She reads)

THERESA  
(shaken)

Jackson, Miss. A colored man, Ben Slater, was taken from the city jail at Rankin last Friday night by a mob and hanged to a railroad bridge on the outskirts of the city. Afterward his body was riddled with bullets, cut down and placed on a pile of burning pine wood. Slater was charged with beating Jeremiah Thompson over a dispute over payment of wages to Slater's wife.

SALLY

Said it was about my pay. Everybody knew what it really was.  
(lights down on Sally. Spotlight on Mama Bea)

MAMA BEA

They came up on 'em right when they was cutting him down. Rafe and them Nicholson boys.

(Rafe enters, approaches Sally, then runs offstage.  
Screams)

Rafe was right there an saw his daddy, my daddy... layin there in that fire with his throat cut and bleedin, smoke rising from his body. Rafe never did get over losin my daddy. Mama neither.

(Sally rises and moves on. Ben, as apparition,  
enters and approaches her)

Daddy come visit Mama while she sleep long time and she talk to him then. But it wasn't the same as him in the flesh. Spirit different than flesh, that fo shore.

(pause)

And then Ossie was born looking just like a little white baby but Mama loved him just like me and Rafe. No different. No difference at all.