Elbow Room Study Guide

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BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Elbow Room is an anthology of twelve independent and unrelated stories about the experience of diverse groups of black Americans.

"Why I like Country Music" portrays a loving married couple sparring about the legitimacy of square dancing as a valid art form, using it as a symbol for radically differing worldviews coming from upbringings in the North and South. The husband tells about a fourth grade crush that results in him besting the class know-it-all to square-dance with the girl on May Day, and to this day, the scent of lemon and the sound of country music remind him of those heady days.

"The Story of a Dead Man" is about the family loyalty one straight-as-an-arrow cousin feels for another, an accomplished liar hell-bent on finding an exciting death. The narrator, William, feels obliged to set the record straight. The story sketches how their lives diverge and comes to a head as he introduces the cousin to his upscale future in-laws, with disastrous results. In the end, the cousins' family loyalty prevails.

"The Silver Bullet" looks at a small street gang and a crooked community activist competing to shake down a bar everyone assumes is protected by the rackets. In the end, all of the toughs get the spanking their mommas should have given them, and the bar owner scoffs at the idea blacks must join the mob to stand up for themselves.

"The Faithful" pits stubbornness with practicality in an age of changing hairstyles and religion. The two strands are united in a single figure that seems determined to fail in both his ventures, as he refuses both to offer Afro hairstyling and preach with the power the people want to hear.

"Problems of Art" deals with the fate of blacks in a white-controlled judicial system, as a black widow charged with DUI hires a white attorney to get across her complex story to a white judge, who she knows will want to hear only facts, not circumstances. Because the black complaining officer shows assumes her guilt and violates the statute, it is suggested she will keep her license, but clear she had indeed been drinking on the night in question, as is her habit.

"The Story of a Scar" examines love, ambition, and jealousy as a once-beautiful black women tells a fellow patient in a doctor's waiting room how she comes to be disfigured by a fellow postal worker and ex-boyfriend's knife. The woman at several points straightens the narrator out on how women think and how men ought to think about women. He submits silently to the powerful woman's opinion, but shows he truly gets the point when, at the end of the story, he finally asks her name.

"I Am an American" takes a black couple out of their milieu in Atlanta, GA, and makes them American tourists in London, caught up in helping two Japanese students report the theft of their money and passports.

"Widows and Orphans" examines the prosperous layer of the black community in Los Angeles as a lecherous college teacher recalls his failed romance with his former student and ex-fiancye, who is receiving civic honor at a banquet. The main action examines the teacher's lustful thoughts about her, bringing him to realize he still loves her, but she introduces him as a former teacher.

"A Loaf of Bread" examines the economics and psychology of white businesses operating in black neighborhoods. The leader of an ad hoc strike and the storeowner cannot put themselves in the other's shoes until the owner's wife demands he give away anything people want for a day, and mobs clean his shelves inside thirty minutes.

"Just Enough for the City" shows how various sects proselytize a predominantly black neighbor and their frustration when confronting someone who will not accept dry, facile answers about the meaning of love.

"Elbow Room" Analysis addresses race openly as an unorthodox writer tells the story of a mixed-race couple whose parents both resist the union. The philosophical white husband struggles to define "nigger," which his well-traveled and open-minded wife wears as a badge of honor. The question comes down to the uncomfortable choice of having their baby be white and blind or black and self-blinded, but the better situation would be having a world where everyone is appreciated and embraced.

"Why I like Country Music"

"Why I like Country Music" Summary

New York-born and raised Gloria dismisses country music as a valid art form, and hates the South in general, accepting horror stories from earlier refugees. Her -husband, the narrator, disagrees. He loves square dancing, which he masters during a South Carolina childhood, despite his rigid family's rejection of dancing and all Northern pretentious. Six hours a day in fourth grade, he watches Gweneth Lawson's rich brown neck, swaying braids, colorful ribbons, and white Peter Pan collar, and the scent of fresh cut lemons that surround her win his heart. Visiting from the South Carolina part of Brooklyn, NY, Gweneth is living with her uncle and anxious to soak up local folkways. Soft-spoken and not condescending, she breaks the Northern myth.

A strict but playful teacher, Mrs. Boswell intuits the infatuation and signals her realization by subtle, intimidating looks. Mrs. Boswell cannot abide clock-watchers or timid boys and is determined to prepare them for the sticky parts of the rose bed of life their mamas depict. The narrator has been spoiled by his father and expects his tantrums to yield results. Mrs. Boswell uses oversized, good-natured, but tongue-tied Clarence Buford as her foil when telling the boys how to find wives. Leon Pugh, the class know-it-all, waves wildly at every question, believing Gweneth is interested in his view that girls like it when boys blow their own horns loudly. That wisdom comes from Bronx connections. Mrs. Boswell does not dissuade pupils from consulting Leon when she gives no cut-and-dried answers, but seems to the narrator to be encouraging him to challenge Leon's leadership. Leon, of course, becomes the author's chief rival for Gweneth's affections, showing him up at Thanksgiving and Christmas present, and on the bus shooing other riders away from the seat reserved for Gweneth. The author is part of the swarm of love-struck boys that gets off at Gweneth's stop to hear, "Bye y'all" from the goddess.

Gloria surely cannot appreciate how Yankee and Confederate folkways used to mingle in the South. Meals, manner, and speech define them as Southerners, but their parents' morality, frugality, attitudes toward work, and ideas are Northern. History lessons, songs, flags, and park statues all negate the liberation brought by Northern dreamers after the "Historical Event," and May Day each year means a grand celebration of plaiting the maypole and square dancing. Mrs. Boswell divides her class into two groups to practice. The narrator and Leon are in the dance group, while Gweneth is among the plaiters. During recess, the author informs Mrs. Boswell he cannot dance, making her laugh. One does not have to be able to dance to square dance. It is made up to mock people who do dance. The narrator refuses to cooperate and brings in a note from his father asking he be excused, as he will only cry and ruin the show. Mrs. Boswell allows the change, but then switches Gweneth to square dancing. Leon begins jitterbugging with her, and, everyone but Queen Rose partners up, and she is transferred to the maypole. The narrator wants to go back to square dancing, to get just one swing with

Gweneth, but his father's note stands in his way. Clarence, who dislikes girls, joins the dancers. As the plaiters file out, the narrator hears Leon singing confidently.

The narrator is undone, watching Leon's victory and Gweneth's enjoyment, and begs his father for another note, but for once father stands his ground, because he has spent a lot of money outfitting him as a cowboy. The author drags himself to school on May 1 and sulks as the other students happily compare costumes. Leon even sports clanking silver spurs, and Gweneth outshines all the other girls, a vision in red and white that appear to float in the air. The boys all marvel at her smile and the narrator yearns to have her on his arm. The maypole plaiters perform first and return to their class groups. Mrs. Boswell remarks the narrator is learning the rhythm of the thing. Leon is anxious to begin dancing, but Mrs. Boswell says he cannot go out with razors on his shoes.

Leon sits grumbling, working to remove his spurs, and suggests dancing without boots, but Mrs. Boswell refuses and sends in a substitute from the plaiting team. The narrator does not recall walking out with Gweneth, but does remember watching the others and imitating them. Gweneth smiles at him, and he laughs at the memory an eternity later. During the final promenade, he promises to visit Gweneth in Brooklyn. However, years later, he stays in uptown Manhattan with no thought of Brooklyn, having mastered other dances. Lemon and country music resurrect Gweneth's memory, however, and he has grown into a master of the square dance. He knows Gloria disagrees, but he argues, quietly and mostly to himself.

"Why I like Country Music" Analysis

This story portrays a loving married couple sparring about the legitimacy of square dancing as a valid art form, using it as a symbol for radically differing worldviews. The wife, three generations removed from Southern life, epitomizes the haughty Northerners the author calls from his rural South Carolina childhood. He contrasts them with the love of his fourth grade life, a visitor from Brooklyn who breaks the Northern stereotype. He explains to Gloria the ironic mixture of Yankee and Confederate traditions in South Carolina culture in his formative years, which are quite foreign to her, and explains how this dance designed for those who cannot dance, has allowed him, with his teacher's help, to best his rival for beautiful Gweneth's attentions. To this day, the scent of lemon and the sound of Country music reminds him of those heady days.

"The Story of a Dead Man"

"The Story of a Dead Man" Summary

Billy Renfro is an accomplished liar who keeps his enemies nervous. People may say Billy dies in Houston, but he is only wounded, trying to repossess Monroe Ellis' Cadillac. Neither is it true Billy loses his left eye fighting a redneck near Limehouse, SC, en route to Charleston to repossess another vehicle for his boss, Floyd Dillingham. Billy enters the general store to buy an orange soda, but the white supremacist owner refuses him service and Billy draws his .22 too slowly. He must withdraw and drive away to the sounds of gunfire and rebel yells. Returning from his successful mission, Billy again thirsts for an orange soda, slips in unnoticed, holds his .22 ready at the counter, and this time he fires off shots and gives a swamp cry as he heads for Atlanta. The narrator, Billy's cousin William, feels obliged, by common ancestry, to refute enemies' mean rumors and Billy's own lies to clarify his life. Billy has a warm heart, tolerance for misfortune, and potential for reform, and William has invested considerable energy toward achieving the goal, drinking with Billy in a Chicago dive before taking him to meet Chelseia, William's steady and refined fiancye. Billy owes it to his mother's memory and the family to rebuild his life likewise. Billy's reaction is, "Bullshit!"

This meeting in Chicago occurs three years after Billy goes to work for Dillingham, seven after his mother's death, and 13 after going to prison for life, at age 17. Billy and William are both first-born sons, named after their paternal grandfather, Willis Joe Warner, an itinerate Baptist preacher. Billy's mother, "Mama Love," insists her boy get the affectionate nickname. Billy's father dies of alcoholism, Mama Love suffers a stroke, and Billy outgrows William physically and in sophistication. Billy loves Mama Love and sits with her, listening to raucous stories about her hapless son even while Billy is out gallivanting. At 16, Billy falls in with older boys, loses self-restraint, and impregnates an experienced girl. Her father and a tough judge demand Billy feed the baby for 21 years, whether it looks like him or not. Billy drives a garbage truck and turns into a sullen, cynical loner while William finishes school, attends church, and learns social graces. Mama Love throws Billy out of her home, and he lives with his common-law wife, and child in a part of town William dreads. The year William graduates and wins a church scholarship to college, Billy kills after a dice game someone who insults his wife.

William takes time off from college to visit Billy at Harper's farm, where black offenders are stocked for road gangs. William does not want to be among the mothers, sweethearts, and wives. Billy wears faded prison-issue blues that contrast with his sun-glossed skin, chews gum rapidly, and stares through William, declaring, "Me, I'm a dead man." William talks about college and obtaining salable knowledge. He has blocked out his life in decades leading to the ultimate goal of a good life in Los Angeles. Billy wants only that William cross the road and buy him lunch. Billy is furloughed to attend Mama Love's funeral after she, undoubtedly, dies of a broken heart and loneliness. William comes home to gather with the family. Billy is awkward and detached, unresponsive to

William's plans, and angry William is so upset by *his* mother's death. William realizes Billy is doomed, listening to him sing and laugh as the prison guard leads him away.

Seven years later, Billy is paroled and goes to work for Dillingham Automotives, Inc., tracking down blacks who default on their car loans. No white man will take the job and Dillingham wants someone with a reputation for ruthlessness to strike fear in often-violent deadbeats. Family gossip puts Billy in New York California, Detroit, and Baton Rouge, being wounded and perhaps married. By contrast, William settles in Chicago, copes with the soul-killing winds, purges his speech of southernisms, and embarks on his 30-year plan. He begins in the credit reference section of the Melrose Department Store and gradually moves up. He also meets and courts Chelseia Raymond, whom he believes will keep his eventual children safe and whose parents love and accept him. The Raymonds are three generations in Chicago and William five years there when Billy shows up. Billy's version of visiting William's office is fiction. William does not refuse to see him. William's secretary, Mrs. Mohr, accepts Billy's card, proclaiming him president of the Red Pepper Collection Agency, and gives it to William after Billy leaves. The cousins meet the next day at a bar, and William scarcely recognizes Billy. He has but one red eye and is dressed like an undertaker, with dried blood and dirt on his sleeves.

William tries awkwardly to joke. If it is true a man's life passes before his eyes at the moment of death, will it take Billy twice as long, having just one eye? Looking hurt, Billy tells an embellished tale about a hard-hearted widow in Eufaula, GA, Ruby Watson, who feeds Billy white pills supposed to make one smarter. One day he discovers the pills are jackrabbit feces and puts his .22 under her nose. She observes he is getting smarter and tells him his bullets are dead. To prove himself a man, Billy hands her his gun and slugs her in the chin. Ruby kills him, Billy laughs, and now he is on the road again for Dillingham. Billy tells additional magnificent lies about the chain gang, the Houston incident, and culinary, romantic, and other adventures across the continent while tracking down defaulted cars. While Billy is reciting, William phones Chelseia.

Billy's claims the Raymonds order him out of their home is false. Wearing one of William's best suits and sunshades to conceal his lost eye, Billy looks impressive, but Cheleseia watches him warily. The Raymonds stay home from their usual Thursday night canasta to meet William's cousin, and Mrs. Raymond prepares dinner. Over sherry, they chat about Billy being in "automotives." William clarifies he is a traveling salesman, which inspires Mr. Raymond to lament young people have so few opportunities. He has two degrees but had to settle for being a redcap at Union Station. Mrs. Raymond asks about California, to keep her husband from reminiscing. Billy maintains his cloud of mystery for over an hour, with William keeping him in check. Mr. Raymond lights a cigar and grows expansive about escapades as a redcap, and at 10:30 breaks out the bourbon. Quickly drunk, Billy relates his own escapades, and they form an unholy union. Billy shocks the Raymonds by removing his glasses, Mrs. Raymond returns to automotives, and Chelseia asks if Billy's involvement is in washing or pumping gas. William has never seen the vengeful twist to Chelseia's face, which she shares with her mother. Billy stiffens and looks enraged. William tries to affect a gracious exit, but Billy shrugs him off. William clarifies Billy lost his eye in a knife fight and is too proud to talk about it.

Billy's cry, "Bullshit!" severs the family bond. Billy strips to the waist to reveal welt like scars from his travels, refuses to be restrained or to tell the truth, claiming Dillingham sends him to collect the car or the ass of Wilfred "Inner City" Jones, who has ripped him off. Inner City puts out word he is looking for Billy, and Billy says he will be in Birmingham, where Earline Jones lives. Billy uses a glass and silverware to depict the scene. Mrs. Raymond is swooning, to Billy's joy, as he says Inner City's first shots miss when Billy opens up with his .38. Earline suggests they settle without guns, and earns a punch in the jaw. When Billy finishes his tale with the remark someone knew he had to die and next time it might be Billy, Chelseia declares him a "common *street nigger."* Billy introduces her to his cousin William. Mrs. Raymond shudders and flees, and Mr. Raymond laughs himself to tears. William begs Billy to tell the truth, but he joins in the laughter. William takes responsibility for removing Billy from the premises. Family rumors about Billy being unwelcome in Williams home are untrue. Chelseia will not interfere if Billy visits, but will not cook for him. It is a matter of family pride not to reject the liar. At present, however, Billy is out there somewhere hunting an exciting death.

"The Story of a Dead Man" Analysis

This story is about the family loyalty one straight-as-an-arrow cousin feels for another, hell-bent on finding an exciting death. The latter is an accomplished liar and the narrator, William, feels obliged to set the record straight. The story sketches conditions in a rural prison yard and in middle-class Chicago and the attitudes towards life that separate them. It also shows a tough black man being used to repossess cars from fellow blacks because no white man will take the job. Billy obviously expands his tales, but they make clear the lengths to which desperate car owners will go to protect their interests. Billy's boss is not an open racist like the redneck in the Limehouse, SC, grocery store, but he sees blacks as customers to exploit and Billy a thug to take care of those who interfere with his profits.

"The Silver Bullet"

"The Silver Bullet" Summary

When Willis Davis tries to join the Henry Street guys, they send him to knock off Slick's Bar and Grill, both to show what he has and (secretly) to finance an anticipated spring war with the Conchos on the West Side. Because everyone knows Slick is in the rackets, his place has never been hit. Dewey Bivins, the group's warlord, insists Slick is dead. Many rumors circulated about Dewey, too. Some say he is targeted by the Conchos, while others hold he is exempt from attacks for fear of disproportionate retaliations. Dewey walks the streets unarmed in his purple beret to show he is fearless. People respect him and imitate his swagger. Willis tries to recruit his friend Curtis Carter's help but fails. Slick's bar might still be covered, even if he is gone. Willis reconnoiters alone at 2 PM, when the small lunch crowd dies out. Alphaeus Jones, the bartender, eats at the counter. Bertha Roy, the cook, carries bag lunches to the ladies at Martha's Beauty Salon. Bertha is Willis' aunt's neighbor and must be avoided. Jones looks up and asks what Willis wants. Pretending to have a gun in his pocket, Willis demands the contents of the cash register, which Jones says is a silver bullet. Willis is the first fool to try this in years. Willis lays his hands flat on the bar and asks for a beer.

In the storage basement at 1322 Henry, Dewey proclaims Willis a "silver-bullet lie," as Willis slumps in a green chair, head down. "Chimney" Sutton, high on drugs and angry, guards the door. Harvey Gomez and Clyde Kelley have stone faces as Dewey charges Willis is lying and wants to join without paying his dues. Willis object he wants in badly, but it is crazy to confront someone whose hands are hidden under a counter. Hurrying off, Willis cannot see why joining the Henry Street guys is different from having a job or joining a church or union. They are not as bad as the papers claim. Late afternoon, Willis returns to tell Curtis about the silver bullet, but Curtis laughs. Jones is not going to attract news people by killing someone over $50, tops. Willis is angry at being tricked and worries about the Henry Street guys. Curtis suggests Willis get protection and adopt a new approach in the form of some guys on the West Side whom he will not name but whose address he provides.

Wednesday morning, Willis takes a bus to the office of W. Smith Enterprises and enters to meet R. V. Felton, bearded, red-shirted, and angry-looking. After ignoring Willis a while, R.V. asks what he wants, and Willis quotes Curtis' words, "I got a problem in community relations." R.V. announces that is their only concern here, the mobility of the community. R.V.'s hands come alive, tracing grandiose patterns in the air. Addressing community problems requires an appropriate agency, and R.V. has friends downtowns and in the community who realize his is the only legitimate and viable group. They have support and know what is going down, R.V. says with superiority, before relaxing and asking his new brother to articulate the specifics of his problem. At 1:30, Willis enters Slick's Bar and Grill, followed by R.V. Preparing to eat his lunch, Jones smiles at Willis and asks, "A born fool, hey?" Looking particularly mean, R.V. asks how much the place earns a week, and announces the bar is nationalized, and must pay the community 25?

on every dollar of income, minus a 3? tax and 10% of the profits, minus 2? tax on every plate of food served. Pay-ups are due before noon on Friday. Willis is their certified community collector and must be treated nicely, with a smile. Jones smiles, pulls out a 12-gauge shotgun, and steps back to get it in range. Willis heads for the door, but R.V. stands firm, ignoring Willis' pleas to leave and says they will be back Friday to examine the books. Bertha yells after Willis and R.V. they need a good whipping, and Jones just smiles.

That night, Willis tells Dewey about this. R.V. guarantees Willis 12% of the Friday take and Willis plans to turn over the $20-$30 a week to the gang. He envisions uniforms, equipment, and a slush fund for bail bonding, but Dewey does not share his enthusiasm. This is Henry Street territory. Willis tries to reproduce R.V.'s logic, but it falls flat. Dewey says any "naturalizing"' will be done by them, not the phony R.V. If Willis cooperates with R.V., the gang will find him. Next day, Willis waits for a crowd to enter the bar so he can slip in among them and apologize to Jones, but R.V. and Aubrey drive up and double-park. While Aubrey goes in, Willis approaches R.V., who lowers his take to 6%, because he has to cut Aubrey in. Aubrey summons R.V. to help and Willis follows. Jones stands behind the bar, shotgun in hand, but wanting no trouble. R.V. demands the books, which Jones denies having. It will take six hours for cops to arrive it he shoots R.V. Jones will probably get a medal.

R.V. reminds Jones that they are a nonprofit community-based grass-roots organization responsive to the community's needs, and the community will be interested in comparing this joint's total proceeds to the average income for the area. R.V. also says that they have student support. Jones gives them a count of ten to leave. Dewey and Chimney enter in full uniform and survey the situation. Jones reaches nine. Dewey confronts R.V. about the money, who spouts rhetoric about joining forces for the greater good. The gang has the manpower to effect nationalization. Dewey insists Willis declare his loyalty.

A man in a deep green suit yells in about a cop ticketing some double-parked car and asks if the owner is in the bar. Jones lowers the gun, remarking how big-time businessmen can fix tickets. The man smiles and asks why Jones is holding a gun. Swatting flies, he replies, nodding at the assembled toughs. The man observes a *real* businessman would own many cops, councilmen, judges, and the mayor and would not worry about one cop writing a ticket. Is R.V. like that? The man slaps R.V. twice, and then orders Dewey and Chimney out. Willis moves to follow them, but the man retains him. Willis observes R.V. sulking like a little boy. The man confers with Jones, and then announces the goodhearted bartender has begged him to let them go. When he punches R.V. in the face, R.V. orders Aubrey to take him out, but Aubrey does not move. Jones announces "Ten." R.V. and Aubrey slink away, but the man demands Willis remain. He laughs when Willis whines he had not known the rackets cover the bar, wondering why punks think blacks cannot have balls without joining the rackets. Jones admits to being young once, but never a fool. Willis passes Martha's Beauty Salon, where Bertha yells his momma should give him a good whipping. He pretends not to hear and runs faster down the street.

"The Silver Bullet" Analysis

This story looks at a small street gang and a crooked community activist competing to shake down a bar everyone has heretofore assumed is protected by the rackets. The smiling bartender holds everyone at bay until (implicitly) the owner in a suit re-appears, proclaims the true scope of power required to be effective, and scoffs at the common belief one must be in the rackets to be tough. Everyone gets the spanking their mommas should have given them.

"The Faithful"

"The Faithful" Summary

John Butler, barber and preacher, impeccable in his starched white jacket, watches the avenue through a faded painted window that needs washing. Some passersby wave while others pretend not to see him. His companions wince as Butler takes up his regular lament, "They still tryin' to starve us out." With him are fat second barber, Ray Powell, sly young Mickey Norris, playing hooky from school to earn money shining shoes, and two loafers playing checkers. After noon, with Ray at lunch and Mickey wandering, a wealthy young man wearing a massive tiara of black hair, looks in. Butler smiles hospitably and offers him a cut for $2.50 or $3, but he wants just a trim that will not mess up his "vibrations." He laughs a heavy hand makes a rusty register for barbers. At the end of the day, a few balding regulars drop in. They include John Gilmore, Dick Kendricks, and Willie Russell, backbone also of Butler's congregation. Butler complains young blacks are following whites in growing out their hair and running wild. Those who remember the barbershop in its noisy, crowded heyday want to see this back, but recognize a changing world outside the door. If he were not also Butler's parishioner, Gilmore would stop going there.

The few who listen to Butler's sermons at Second Calvary Church are bored. Some parishioners have strayed to Rev. Tarwell's church on 138th St. and like what they hear there. Tarwell may have himself crucified at Easter Sunrise Service and preach from the cross. He preaches like the old South, for which many are homesick. Butler is obsessed with a single theme, delivered in a comfortable chant, about biblical examples of family dysfunction. He finds it hard to get an "Amen" from his hearers. Wife Ella advises him to lay off that broken record. People want a good service and are not to blame for his barbershop going out of business. Trying to provoke him into arguing, Ella says let Ray do Afros if he is unwilling. Butler forbids any "fancy" cuts in his shop, because the young men hanging around will drive his regulars away. In that case, Ella says, he will lose his place soon - and will not be preaching much longer either.

On another slow Monday morning, Ray suggests going into processes, which do not imitate the whites and are being worn on the block. Butler's face twitches as he pictures winos and hustlers, and turns the idea down as the devil's work. Butler says he knows Ray thinks him a fool, but he is too old to change. Believes in shaping boys' lives by shaping their hair and wants to continue doing so. Scraping a few loose hairs may earn money, but it cannot do that. Around 1 PM, Gilmore comes in for a shave and asks carefully what Butler is planning to do about losing parishioners. Tarwell is considering hiring Butler as his assistant pastor so he can go into politics. Butler objects there is a difference in style between Tarwell's South Carolina people and his Alabamans. Gilmore says people are thinking about unity these days. Everyone is in the same boat. Late Thursday, looking sad, Ray announces he is moving to a new parlor on 145th St., because he has a family to support. Butler hopes his luck will improve with Ray gone, but Ray insists it has nothing to do with luck. Barber schools do not even teach the

down-home cuts Butler stubbornly insists on. Ray locks his mouth against any more hot words.

Butler's Sunday sermon pictures a close race between Esau and Jacob to their father Isaac's deathbed. Butler's calls for bets on the boys confuse parishioners, and few amens are raised. Usher Marie Gilmore leaves. On Monday, Butler asks Mickey how to do Afros. Mickey, who endures joking from his buddies over the close-cropped hair he wears so Butler will let him work here, says it is easy. Let it grow, put some stuff on it, and keep it even. To Butler this sounds like a process, but Mickey insists it is not and that anyone can do it. Butler asks Mickey what Afros do for the kids, but Mickey asks thought-provokingly, "What *don't* it do for you?" Gilmore comes in at closing time to announce Marie is going over to Tarwell, driven there by Butler. New talk about Alabama and Afros anger Gilmore, and he advises Butler shut the store and either reread his Bible or go home to cut hair the way he wants. Gilmore leaves before Butler says maybe all of them should go back. Butler spends the afternoon thinking about his situation. He owns the building clear, renting the upper floor to a teacher, but has little in the bank. He pays Mickey $3.50 a week and worries about him picking up alien ideas on 145th if he were to close his shop. Then Butler thinks about the South.

Tommy Gilmore, a boy Butler baptized, interrupts Butler's reverie by asking for an Afro. It is past closing time and costs $1.50, not the $1 Tommy holds up. Butler puts a board across the armrests and seats Tommy, announcing he will give him a nice schoolboy cut. Tommy objects. He wants an Afro. Mickey returns from an errand in time to point out the barber lacks combs and stuff, and Tommy's hair is not long enough yet. Butler silences Mickey, who retreats to is own green chair and watches like a bettor at a fixed poker game. Tommy struggles and whimpers, but it is over in ten minutes. Tommy returns, crying soundlessly, with his father, who says if Butler were not a minister of God, he would kick his ass. It is a new age, and Tommy "ain't no *plantation* Negro." Butler should have sent him elsewhere if he cannot give a decent haircut for $1. Gilmore threatens to shut down both Butler's barbershop and his church, and run all the "Toms" out of the community.

Another Sunday, Butler faces the last few strays of his scattered flock. Rumor is Tarbell's cross is ready. Marie Gilmore has returned, but not to listen to the sermon. She sits, head down, dressed in purple in a back pew. Butler stands silently, fierce and defensive, until nervous Betty Jessup up front asks if he is going to preach. Butler begins with a steady voice, "We are a stiff-necked people," that will be judged. All turn, amazed, when Marie demands to know who will judge them? Who is to say who will be judged or not? Who can tell the rules? Butler says nothing. At dinner, Ella asks what he will do next, and then sighs, strikes her chest, and asks God why he had to marry a man with a hard head. Butler replies she could do no better than him.

"The Faithful" Analysis

This story pits stubbornness with practicality in an age of changing hairstyles and religion. The two strands are united in a single figure that seems determined to fail in

both his ventures. A loyal remnant sticks with him until he drives them away by voicing his obsession they are out to get him. Butler sees the black community divided by their family origins in various southern states, but Gilmore insists this is passy in an age when they are gaining politically - a situation moving a rival cleric to leave the pulpit for the campaign stand.

"Problems of Art"

"Problems of Art" Summary

Attorney Corliss Milford is uncomfortable sitting in thin, severe, orderly Mary Farragot's apartment, waiting for her to return from an errand. The brief notes he has jotted on her personal life tell him his client is neat and restrained, but her living room seems like a sound stage, too calculated. Milford dislikes Mrs. Farragot's Sacred Heart of Jesus painting, a dime-store rendition of a mystery cannot improve a poor black woman's bleak existence. His notes show she is born in Virginia, has lived many years in Los Angeles, and is widowed but collects no Social Security from her husband. She is also a teetotaler arrested for DUI. Two weeks demanding a *white* lawyer has made her notorious at Project Gratis. It is now 11:45 AM and the hearing starts at 1:30 PM. Milford scans the living room, taking in details, particularly a framed close-up of Mrs. Farragot, younger, smiling, strong, and motherly, hardly the face of an alcoholic. Beside it is a snapshot of two smiling white children in highchairs, inscribed, "To Aunt Mary, Love, Tracy and Ken." A third picture is a faded black-and-white enlargement of a robust, arrogant uniformed black man saluting. It is inscribed, "To Mary Dear, Lots of Love, 'Sweet Willie.'" Milford realizes Mrs. Farragot is a "grass widow," and Willie, still around, the reason for her poverty, her DUI, and her insistence on a white lawyer. She distrusts males who look irresponsible like Willie. Milford returns to the religious painting, void of transcendence, tragedy, and majesty.

Mrs. Farragot returns, leading a heavy-set brown-skinned man, Clarence Winfield. Another witness May Francis Cripps refuses to come. Winfield deClares firmly he has seen everything, and the police have no call to arrest her. Mrs. Farragot asks him to speak good English, because white people otherwise do not understand. Winfield has worked around white folks and knows this. He asks Milford not to take offense. Milford studies broad-shouldered, middle-aged Winfield and his nervous, twitching client. Winfield looks strangely familiar and seems eager to be in motion. Milford asks Winfield to tell about Aug. 7. Winfield recalls sitting on his porch that hot night with Cripps and Buster Williams around 8:30, drinking beer, shooting the shit, and listening to crickets and kids, when a horn honk across the street and Mrs. Farragot runs out of her house. The light through her door illuminates the porch like a stage. The guy playing *Dixie* on his horn is pinned in like a sardine between Mrs. Farragot's car and another. The whole street is solid with cars, like a convention of *"Eye*-talian gangsters." Mrs. Farragot crumples into an armchair and begs Winfield to stick to the facts. Winfield continues carefully formulating each sentence. Mrs. Farragot moves her car up to let the guy out, just as Big Boy Ralston, a bank security guard who lives on the block, drives up and gets into a dispute with the horn-honker. Houselights go on as Big Boy exits his red Buick Electra, ready for his regular Friday fight. His opponent knows he stands no chance and uses the extra space to shoot out and race away. Mrs. Farragot backs slowly into her old parking space, but scrapes the Buick. Big Boy lays into Mrs. Farragot with foul language and someone calls the police. Winfield and Buster rush to her defense. Bessie Mayfield sells fish sandwiches for 50?, Mrs. Farragot stands crying in

her pajamas, and a squad car arrives, lights flashing. A white cop, assuming someone has been murdered, takes charge, but Big Boy confronts and infuriates him. His black partner steps in to gather facts, first from Big Boy and then from Mrs. Farragot, who is so upset the officer assumes she is drunk. She is too embarrassed to walk a line in front of her celebrating neighbors, refuses, and is hauled away. Winfield will tell this to a judge, but Mrs. Farragot worries no white judge will fail to throw her out of court. A white boy, however, may be able to make some sense of it.

The trio arrives at the DMV at 1:45, Milford convinced no judge will let Winfield tell his version during a non-jury proceeding. The colorful circumstances will be excluded. Milford admires Winfield's rough style and desire to look proper. Procedure is for Milford and the hearing officer to ask questions to which Winfield must respond without volunteering anything, concentrating on the fact Mrs. Farragot had not been drunk when arrested. Mrs. Farragot begs Winfield not to mess up and explains to her attorney Winfield is a "down-home" type who talks around a point. Pink-faced, silver/blond-haired, pleasingly plump Hearing Officer Harriet Wilson calls Mrs. Farragot's case and leads them to a stuffy hearing room and seats them around a hardwood table. Milford recognizes Mrs. Farragot's expression as the one in the old photograph. Overcoming a fascination with Winfield's red handkerchief, Wilson summons the complaining officer. Milford is annoyed by a mysterious look in Mrs. Farragot's eye as she suggests letting Winfield tell his story to the unexpected *female* judge. Mrs. Farragot is openly smiling now.

Wilson returns with a tape recorder and tall, dignified, olive-skinned Officer Otis S. Smothers. Mrs. Farragot focuses on the machine, which Wilson explains is standard procedure, since the decision is made in the state capital. Mrs. Farragot whispers to Milford concerns about lie detectors and being railroaded. Smothers observes them with quiet amusement before flawlessly delivering a statement that is a masterpiece of precision. Reading from his report, he cruelly mimics Mrs. Farragot's declaration "I ain't go'n do nothing." Milford questions him on probable cause and the possibility Smothers might have mistaken a Southern accent for slurred speech. As a fellow Southerner, Smothers deems this impossible. Winfield asks to tell the real story, which differs from the officer's version, but Mrs. Farragot asks Wilson not to allow it. She declares her innocence and maintains she had no intention of driving that night. She and Smothers are both black, but that does not matter.

As Mrs. Farragot tells her story, slowly, and precisely, Milford sees Wilson is deeply moved but Smothers is oblivious. After the statement, Milford asks what test the officer offered the suspect, reminding him the statute allowing a choice of breathalyzer, blood, or urine. Walking a line is not an option. Mrs. Farragot testifies she had been offered no options before being hauled off to jail in her pajamas. Wilson looks sad and amused as she shuts off the recorder, says the board will decide in 30 days, and permits Mrs. Farragot to keep her license in the interim. All stand. Milford meets Smothers' glare with a look of pleasure, and escorts Mrs. Farragot to the door. They hear Wilson reprimand Smothers about procedures.

Mrs. Farragot heads to the ladies' room. Milford congratulates himself on controlling the chaotic situation and forcing a logical conclusion, while Winfield refreshes himself at a water fountain. He thanks the attorney for his help and notes he has often warned Mrs. Farragot about drinking, but it had been a very hot night. Mrs. Farragot is partial to Maker's Mark (bourbon) and Winfield is surprised Milford does not know that. Mrs. Farragot struts up the hall, smiling broadly as in the old photograph. Winfield is sure between Milford and himself they can straighten her out.

"Problems of Art" Analysis

This story deals with the fate of blacks in a white-controlled judicial system. The white cop responding to a phone call assumes there has been a murder, which only escalates the existing tension. Mrs. Farragot insists on having a white attorney because only a white can get across her complex story to a white judge, who will want to hear only facts, not circumstances. She and her friend Winfield, who is willing to come forward, have dealt with enough white folk to realize they shut down when hearing anything but Standard English spoken. The black complaining officer shows no compassion to a hysterical black woman humiliated on the street in her pajamas, assumes her guilt, and summarily arrests her, violating the statute. Only after patting himself on the back for his victory over the system does the lawyer learn his client had indeed been drinking bourbon as is her habit.

"The Story of a Scar"

"The Story of a Scar" Summary

Dr. Wayland is late and has nothing to read in his waiting room, so the narrator politely asks his fellow patient how she has come by the scar on her face. Insulted, the woman takes an angry draw on her cigarette, and asks why his nose is bandaged. He smashed into a headboard while making love. She chuckles, mellowing, her appetites whetted. The narrator is small compared to this robust woman with firm round legs and a considerable chest, who remarks it was surely not his wife, because no wife is worth that, and adds the best men do not get married, they fish. The narrator insists he is no adulterer, but finds companionship wherever he can. The woman knows the ways of men and would not trust any of them to take her grandmother to Sunday school. The antiseptic scent returns the waiting room to silent solemnity.

The scar still fascinates the narrator. Running from her brow to the center of her chin, skirting the nose, it is thick, black, and grotesquely crisscrossed with stitch marks. The woman wears a honey-blond wig and purple pantsuit, which the author takes as an intentional, meaningful statement - like driving a purple Cadillac. When the narrator returns to the scar, she observes black guys in funny eyeglasses always have to know everything. She reads him the moment he comes in. He examines her big body for the miniature she once was, as she asks if he can picture her a pretty 16-year-old running off to Detroit with her mama's preacher. At 20, she is working in the Tenth Street branch of the post office, a sharp dresser with her choice of men. Even the white shift supervisor, D. B. Ferris, is after her on the sly. He offers her a desk job, but she has her pride. Ferris needs to show *respect* for black women. He assigns her to the facing table and government rules offer her no protection. She is making good money and likes the people on her shift. The narrator interrupts her ramblings to re-focus on the scar, but she denounces the male need to get just the details. That is how he breaks his nose, by not taking his time. This is her story, and she will tell it as she wishes. The narrator accepts this wisdom.

Her boyfriend, Billy Crawford, causes the scar, and she can see the narrator is just like him. Billy works the parcel-post window and attends night school on the GI Bill. He always has his nose in a book during lunch and, knowing no better at age 20, she sits down beside him. Billy looks up, declares she is clearly not like the riffraff, good-timers and bullshitters here, welcomes her to his table, and shares a cheese sandwich with her. He hates the way people here dress, talk, and carry on during work hours. Blacks would have no problems if they quit homesteading in post office jobs, but became like the Jews, Puerto Ricans, himself - and her - knowing where they are going and just pass through here. Here is a guy not afraid to wear the white shirt and black tie that make the others dislike him. Billy takes her on their first date to a place where white waiters do not get mad when they see blacks coming. He opens doors for her, orders wine with funny names, and advises her on menu choices. A war wound makes him appear to strut, and he has left his cheating wife. He distrusts women but is she is

different, a God-fearing woman who wants to improve her mind. Red Bone, a tough co-worker with yellow complexion, red hair, and a loud rap, sees the affair developing and warns her off this potential punk, but she takes the hurtful words as typical female jealousy and defends Billy.

Red has broken every man she has had. Billy could rise to supervisor if he crawled some and greased some palms, but he just works diligently, pulls overtime whenever possible, takes classes three times a week, and studies on his day off. She stays at his place once or twice a week but usually is home before midnight. Red tells her the workers resent the way she has been acting, talking, and strutting since starting to go with Billy. Billy has been hinting at marriage once he graduates and starts teaching high school, but she figures marriage or not she will have to work in the post office and does not want to have no friends. She begins watching Billy with a different eye.

Women, she advises the narrator, do not make conscious decisions in such cases, but begin considering how to respond should a man talk to her. Some women, especially married ones, lie to new boyfriends about the failed relationship, but she believes in telling the truth. Tommy is too good for her and deserves better, so she starts looking for someone on her own level. Teddy Johnson, nicknamed "Eldorado," transfers in at this point. He dresses gaudily, flashes two diamond rings and a gold tooth, is involved in numbers and other hustles, uses the post office job as a front, talks fast, walks crazy, and stalks women. He is the last true son of the Great McDaddy. The narrator interrupts. He knows hustling punk and assumes Teddy breaks up her romance, lives off her, cheats on her, and cuts her when she confronts him. The narrator is amazed at the woman's lack of self-respect and sense of proportion as to praise this brute. The fearsome woman lights another cigarette and struggles to compose herself before replying. Men like the narrator are born to and cared for by black mamas but still look at black women through paper and movie plots. She assures him Teddy loves her and the scar to him is what a wedding ring is to another man.

Can the narrator believe she has driven Billy crazy and kept him from graduating college? He does, based on what he knows already. It is the likely consequence of the pressures placed on him, and the narrator feels compelled to condemn her and her roughneck friends for Billy's destruction. Her eyes harden and she seems to grow larger and rounder on the red chair, taking on an aristocratic air of frightening wisdom as she continues icily. The narrator must write this on his brain, recall it whenever he stares at a scarred-up sister, and choke on it before daring to condemn her. She is as faithful to Billy as any woman could be to such an intense, focused man. Life is to be lived, not traded on like dollars. During her time with Billy, she wants to dance and make love while she is still young and pretty. No men chase older women, no matter how pretty they once were. Billy, however, sees nothing but his books, while Teddy knows how to live and is not out to destroy life. She listens to his rap and comes on to him. Red pushes her and offers to tell Billy for her, but she is no sneak and can handle her own affairs. Billy hears the gossip and sees Teddy hanging around her in the mailroom, but says nothing for a long time. Finally, he confronts her. Teddy is a greasy-smiling bloodletter, who will give someone a bad day if they are not careful, and he hopes that will not be his girlfriend.

Shift supervisor Ferris transfers several workers who lack seniority to the night shift. Billy tries to keep his girlfriend on the day shift, but she is relieved not to be watched by him and the others. She tells Billy you cannot fight the system and fails to catch the meaning of Billy's retort. There are some other things one can fight. Teddy begins logging overtime to be there when the nightshift breaks for lunch. With Billy home or at school, Red urges her to consider Teddy must be in love to work overtime when he does not need the money. Word gets back to Billy, who again says nothing but begins to change in attitude. She wants to break up but lacks the guts. The narrator, being so like Billy, must surely understand this kind of dude does not let girls decide when it is over. One night, Billy asks when got home last night, because he phoned at 6:30 AM and heard she was still out.

Later, Billy talks about learning discipline in the war to control his temper, but his true, cold, nature appears and she is frightened. It happens three years ago, at 5:30 AM, Sep. 22. She, Red, and Teddy are relaxing after their shift when Red's face changes suddenly. Billy approaches grimly and demands she go home, but Red insists he cannot order her around. Both voices are cold. Teddy steps in and Billy tells him to butt out. Red orders Billy back to his books and let decent folks alone. Billy gives his long-silent but brooding girlfriend one last chance to leave with him, but she explodes and tries to get at his face. The last thing she remembers is it turning bright, silvery, and hot. They tell her later Billy slices her too fast for anyone to act and stabs Teddy when he fights for the knife. It takes three men to drag him off as he keeps slashing. She thinks she has died and gone to hell, because she feels hot and prickly all over and hears a woman's voice yelling, "You devil!"

In the waiting room, with everything told, he woman lights a third cigarette and emits a great, relieving cloud. The narrator dares not look at his watch. After staring at the frosted glass door a while, the woman says in a slower, more pained voice, this is the third doctor she has seen. The first stitched her up like a turkey and the second refused to touch her. She asks the narrator if the man who has fixed his nose can do something about the scar. Trying to avoid her face, he assures her Wayland is skilled - when not late - and may be able to help. She expects no miracles, but hopes the part around her eye can be fixed. People say the rest does not look too bad. He says nothing, but feels irritation building. He plans on asserting his right to go in first, chivalry be damned. Then, he remembers the most important question, without which the whole exchange would be wasted. "What is your name?"

"The Story of a Scar" Analysis

This story examines love, ambition, and jealousy. Focused, overworked, and perhaps suffering post-traumatic stress following service in Vietnam and a failed marriage, Billy is simply too boring for a pretty 20-year-old. He will not allow her to leave for Teddy, characterized as a throwback to *The Great McDaddy,* a prizewinning play of the early 1970s. The unnamed narrator reminds the unnamed woman he meets in a doctor's waiting room of Billy before he goes crazy and slices her face, producing the ugly scar she hopes to have repaired. The woman at several points straightens the narrator out

on how women think and how men ought to think about women. He submits silently to the powerful woman's opinion, but shows he truly gets the point when, at the end of the story, he finally asks her name.

"I Am an American"

"I Am an American" Summary

Leon and Eunice Foster are surprised that in such a gritty old hotel, a rotund little man in blue suit and red tie would summon Americans to breakfast. Leon does not get a good look at his face, but intuits he is Bulgarian. Tired of tourism, on recommendation of good friends in Atlanta they have wired X from Paris, raced across the channel, phoned him as requested, and learned X has the flu. They check into a Georgian mansion converted into a bleak tourist hotel, hoping X will recover and call, but waiting in their fourth-floor room is unappealing, and they dress for breakfast. After Eunice finishes in the communal bathroom, Leon takes his turn, finding one of their Asian neighbors standing guard at the door while a companion tries to make the faulty toilet flush. He is tall, slim, conservatively dressed, and aloof - but not inscrutable. While Leon shifts from foot to foot, the Asian stands straight as a Samurai, studying him. Leon wants to talk but assumes he knows little English while Leon recalls only a few Mandarin phrases from long ago. Since the man is not dressed like Chairman Mao, Leon figures he could be Japanese, but with a big smile asks, *"Ni hau ma?"* The Asian responds, "I next." Eventually they hear a successful flush, and Leon wants to tell the next occupant not be too scrupulous about flushing, but lacks the words. When the sound of repeated failures begins, Leon flees to the third, second, and ground floors, without success. Leon sees the Bulgarian, still knocking on doors and pointing to the street and warning breakfast is served only 8-9 AM.

The Fosters make it to breakfast in the basement of the adjoining building, directed by the helpful Bulgarian. Most of the diners appear to be Americans, because they avoid eye contact. Next to the Fosters an attractive girl eats rapidly and complains about the countries she and her young man have visited. Across the room, the Asians eat silently, looking only at each other. A pale, dumpy woman delivers the Fosters' plates and returns to the kitchen. Eunice wonders how a place this sloppy can provide breakfast calls, and both grow suspicious of the Bulgarian. Leon races to their room, arriving just as the Bulgarian back theatrically out of the Asians' room, smiles, and bustles in the linen closet. Nothing appears disturbed, but Leon's suspicions are not eased. He rushes to the breakfast room, says *"Ni hau ma?"* and tries to convince the shorter of the two, who speaks some English, to check their room. The word "rob" rings a bell and they converse rapidly in their own language. Leon hears something that sounds like "New Sunday" repeatedly. The Asians rush out and all eyes focus on the Fosters.

Eunice suspects a false alarm, and they argue about the men's nationality. Eunice says they have the confidence of upper class folk back home, while Leon insists Japanese always carry cameras. Eunice calls him a dumb black bigot. The girl at the next table is complaining about Etruscan art as the *Japanese* students return, and ask if Leon has seen the "doorrobber," so they can file a police report. As Eunice gloats, Leon accompanies them to confront the suspicious, unhelpful, and xenophobic landlady. He determines they have lost their Eurail passes, passports, and $200 in travelers' checks.

The landlady shushes Leon, lest other guests hear. The doors all have signs warning to lock up valuables, so she is not responsible. The students intend to search and Leon feels drawn by honor into their posse. They spot a chubby Asian man on the street, talk, and rush into the hotel, asking Leon to watch the door, which he does, picturing an attic-to-basement search that ends in cornering the Bulgarian and insisting he commit *hara-kiri*. Leon expects to see the Japanese emerge either in hot pursuit or bearing the Bulgarian's head. Eunice insists Leon is overreacting, and when the Japanese emerge, they examine the street for Samurai or bobbies. The newest member is a businessman visiting from Osaka. Leon tries *"Ni hau ma?"* on him. They ask if Leon is African, perhaps Nigerian, and he advises them to tell the officials, while Eunice upbraids him for his foolishness.

They return to the kitchen to demand the landlady call the bobbies, but she only gives them a shilling for the pay phone. The diners look at them like entertainers hired to make the meal less boring. Leon wonders how many have been robbed during breakfast and whether the Bulgarian knows they will have this blind spot. Leaving Eunice to guard the rooms, Leon and the Japanese walk a mile to the bobby station, during which time Leon establishes their names and dilemma. The spokesman is Toyoniko Kageyama, and the taller one is Yoshitsune Hashima. Without money and passports, they cannot catch their flight to Japan on Monday, which is a bank holiday. They decide to visit the Japanese embassy, seemingly accepting their loss and working toward a solution without rankling about the thief. At the bleak little bobby station, Leon lets them go alone to report the crime, but the pale, elderly, mustachioed officer cannot understand, and Leon is asked to help. Leon describes the Bulgarian without revealing his suspected nationality, and stays with them while bobbies are assigned to take them back to the hotel. One has the same pencil-thin mustache, while the other is a cold, plump redhead exuding professional annoyance.

The bobbies discuss a recent homosexual rally in Trafalgar Square, which is, unfortunately, peaceful. Leon cannot believe he is listening to this instead of experiencing London nightlife with X. The bobbies search thoroughly without finding the Bulgarian or any other thefts. The landlady feigns sympathy and deClares such things unheard of before American tourists began arriving in '65. They suspect everyone and no one. The redhead questions the Fosters' part in the drama and promise to put the word out. The hotel is outside their jurisdiction, so Japanese must file a report at Paddington station. The landlady repeats tourists must be careful, Eunice announces it is 10:30 and she wants to start sightseeing, but the redhead insists Leon give a description. Eunice is annoyed and the Japanese just watch them all. The drive to Paddington is short and the bobbies drop talking about the rally. The routine is repeated. Waiting to be needed, Leon studies wanted posters. Four of the seven are black. Dissolute Wimberly Lane, valued at ?50, looks vaguely like cousin Freddy Tifton in Atlanta. Finally, Leon is summoned to describe the suspect and is asked his relationship to the complainants. Leon says he is an American in the room next to theirs. The bobby winks, a friend indeed, and advises they hurry to their embassy. Leon yearns to see the rest of London.

The Fosters meet the students that afternoon at Madame Tussaud's. Both smile and bow respectfully. They have been given temporary passports and enough money to get to Amsterdam. Hashima asks Leon to write his name and address and hopes someday to host him in Tokyo. He hands Leon a packet of Japanese stamps, and Eunice observes the Japanese are part-time Southerners. Leon agrees. After ten minutes at the Tower of London, where an escape artist and strong man collect donations from tourists. Eunice believes X will never call and they should just go home. As usual, Eunice is right.

"I Am an American" Analysis

This story takes a black couple, Leon and Eunice Foster, out of their milieu in Atlanta, GA, and makes them American tourists in London. The rundown hotel is below their usual standards, yet employs someone to summon American guests to breakfast. The couple sees the advantage having everyone out of their rooms for a limited one-hour period gives a thief, and Leon sees but does not study the face of the man who, indeed, robs their next-door neighbors. Leon plays their Good Samaritan, first in trying to catch the thief and then in making an official report. The strongest theme derives from the fact the neighbors are Asian. Friendly Leon wants to talk with them, but has only snippets of Mandarin to use, and they turn out to be Japanese. Leon innocently comments on inscrutability, camera carrying, *hara-kiri,* and other American stereotypes of Asians, and Eunice calls her husband a black bigot. Leon notices that the majority of the wanted posters in the bobby station are black, but draws no explicit racist conclusions. Instead, he observes one looks like a relative. The only blatant prejudice is shown by the landlady towards all foreigners and the London bobbies towards gays.

"Widows and Orphans"

"Widows and Orphans" Summary

In a crowded banquet room, Louis Clayton sits beside outdated Viola Richards who. a la 1940s cafy movies, greets him with a kiss on the mouth and laments he has shaved his beard. Her face is a mixture of pain and intrigue informing younger men she has been wicked in her youth. She slaps Louis' face. Their table companions are gracious, elderly, plump Mrs. Loretta Burton and her beautiful, coffee-brown daughter, Fredricka, who flutters her heavy eyelids at Louis before returning her attention to the head table. Over salad, Louis observes surrounding tables at this testimonial dinner for the Progressive Association of Greater Watts. Louis is the only outsider and only unattached male here. Mrs. Richards laments it has not worked out between him and Clair, making Louis recall another movie scene, but he says nothing. When she bets some woman is fattening him up for the fry, Louis thinks of his married paramour, whose husband is sophisticated and agreeable. When Mrs. Richards reminds him he has broken her baby's heart, he remarks mixed marriages often do not work out. Louis thinks of movies set in glass-enclosed penthouses like this one, looking out over the lights of Los Angeles. There is evident wealth in this room. While Chicano waiters clear tables, Louis inspects guests' faces, finding black look-alikes of Gregory Peck, Bette Davis, Edward G. Robinson and Marlon Brando. Snapping back to reality, he realizes only the guest speaker and his wife are white in this caste-defined affair. Fredricka is watching him and laughing.

Sullen but efficient Chicanos remove dinner plates and bring in dessert and coffee. Mrs. Burton complements Ricky on a dynamite job in her movie, but Fredricka insists her mother use her proper name. Clair has difficulty quieting the room so the program can begin. She is beautiful, with a smooth brown face somewhat rounded but still projecting careless energy and eliciting subtle excitement from anyone she looks upon. When their eyes meet, Louis knows he loves Clair. Her unspoken "Hello" fills Louis with fright, excitement, and fright again, and he looks away. Fredricka criticizes Clair's dress. When the crowd settles, Clair introduces the speaker, Lester Maltz. Louis has learned Clair is now a shrewd businesswoman and may run for office. While admiring her command of rhetoric, Louis tries to recall her rhythm in bed. He recalls many other women's rhythm, but not Clair's, retaining only her full-breasted shadow on the bedroom wall, the glow of her cigarette, and her question, "What do you want from me?" Fredricka resembles Clair, who talks on about perseverance, vision and the path of excellence, dedication. Mrs. Richards brags and wishes it had worked out. She does not like seeing Clair lonely. When Louis asks if she is close with anyone now, Mrs. Richards laughs quietly that Clair has been close to no one in her life. Louis knows this is true. Clair is tough and relentlessly tests the toughness of others. She is like a pretty bulldog and Louis used to pat her on the head to cool her anger. Someone has hurt her deeply and Clair has closed herself off. Louis believes she looks down on him for coming from the South, while she is two generations' removed. Five years ago, in Chicago on Clair's birthday, Louis gives her an engagement ring, which she happily accepts. He reads a card that

falls from her book, inscribed, "Happy Birthday, My Dearest, Darling, Me!" He falls deeper in love with her and the mystery of California, Clair's birthplace.

As the speaker begins talking about having ideals, Mrs. Burton tells Mrs. Richards Clair is setting an example for Ricky, who pouts her name is Fredricka. The mothers laugh, agreeing, say what you like about Watts, their girls prove they are doing something right. Fredricka reminds them she lives in Hollywood, but Mrs. Burton objects Hollywood, Watts, and Baldwin Hills are all the same, and young people are not happy with anything. That is why it is so good Clair is talking about positive things. Louis can feel bored Fredricka's eyes moving over his face and figures he is ten years older. She deduces from his dress he is from North Carolina before he tells her. She says she is in *The Syncopated Buck* and declares marriage a bore. She reminds Louis of a Swedish actress in a recent movie, and he tries to remember lines to use on her, before realizing she has probably memorized the dialog. The speaker declares everything has a price. Clair's eyes are fixed on thin, elderly Maltz, who is obviously successful if not wealthy. Like a good teacher, Maltz understands his audience consists of marginal winners in a game they do not understand.

Maltz reminds Louis of Cesar Romero, which makes Louis think about his own journey from his barely literate textile-working father's world in Baxter, NC, to his own as a college teacher writing love poems to a colleague's wife. New York first shows him a larger, mysterious world before he moves on to Boston and Chicago. The process is like shedding old skins, which Louis prays every night will not end. After taking his degree, Louis teaches at a small college when Clair sweeps into his classroom surrounded by California mystery. Louis remembers her cavorting in the snow, laughing giddy-gay like no one he has known. She is always breathless, bursting with energy, and intriguingly carefree, but as a student is disorganized and unfocused. Louis tries to help her by witty comments on her essays and discussions in his office, Maltz speaks of values to hold on, choosing, striving and never despairing. Even a junky, if disciplined, can inspire fellow junkies. Mrs. Richards cries, "Amen!" Mrs. Richards is moved, Fredericka studies Clair, and, fidgeting like a youngster in church, Louis studies the alternatively sullen, bored, and restless crowd. When Fredricka catches him, he reacts like he has been looking under her dress. He asks the name of her mother in the movie and she asks the name he is using in *his* movie. Seeing the irony in this harmless flirtation, Louis replies it was a long time ago. Fredricka asks if it was a hit and, looking at beautiful Clair, Louis whispers, "No."

Louis first comes to Los Angeles five years ago, invited by Clair to meet her mother. When she flies out of O'Hare a year earlier, Clair has already grown less animated, but claims she still loves Louis, but fears she is too complex for him to understand. By the time Louis flies in, marveling at the sense of space during the nighttime approach, Clair has changed more. She wears sequins, halter-tops, and much makeup. She drives Louis to Hollywood in her convertible and stares at the prints outside Grauman's, while Louis watches the mixture of street folk and tourists. They continue on to Baldwin Hills and the humid flatlands of Baldwin. A Santa Ana condition brings surly, hopeless people outdoors that night, reminding Louis of a Southern town dressed up in cement and

neon, while police helicopters remind inhabitants who is in charge. Louis observes he too would have rioted.

On the outskirts of Watts, Louis meets Viola Richards, who embraces him and but later slaps his cheek. Tonight she is radiant, listening to Maltz talk of honor while Louis remembers the shame and confusion of that slap, so inconsistent with the royal treatment he received. The living room displays the Golden Rule and a cheap painting of Martin Luther King, and, atop the television side-by-side pictures of Clair's late father, Dominion, and Charlotta Curry, an attractive, unsmiling white woman made up in the style of the 1940s, glaring with arrogant determination, and somehow familiar. When Clair suffers a fashion crisis, Mrs. Richards leads Louis to Clair's room, which is strewn and congested. A fox terrier, Marty, yaps at Clair's feet as she surveys a walk-in closet packed with outfits. To break the tension as Mrs. Richards laments working her fingers to the bone to be treated like this, Louis selects a dress. Snarling and snapping, Marty scratches Clair badly, and, sobbing for her daughter, Mrs. Richards slaps Louis. At a party for Clair's friends, a white-suited refugee from rural Florida high on marijuana says the welts show Louis has gotten too rough with Clair, but admits women turn into barracudas and must be treated that way.

Maltz presents Clair a civic achievement award and the audience applauds loudly. Louis' heart jumps with desire, seeing Clair at the podium and plans what to say to her once they are alone. Clair points out her Mom, proclaiming her the key to her success. Mrs. Richards declares, trembling, "That there's my heart up there," the child she has slaved to put through school and give things she never enjoyed. A nice white woman she once worked for said Clair is too pretty not to be great, and that becomes her solace and inspiration. Tonight, she is the happiest mother in the world. Louis focuses on Clair, who looks like the lady in the picture, who in turn looks like Barbara Stanwyck. Louis imagines that woman's story. She's a German farmer's daughter, who escapes the prairies for Los Angeles and hires a black maid to keep her starlet's cottage. Her break never comes, however, and she becomes one of those losers who get only minor character roles. Clair winks at Louis, who waves back, and recognizes her former teacher, who happens to be in L.A. Although only a former teacher to Clair, Louis stands and receives polite applause.

"Widows and Orphans" Analysis

This story examines the prosperous layer of the black community in Los Angeles as a lecherous college teacher who has escaped his humble Southern roots recalls his failed romance with Clair, the guest of honor at a banquet. Seated at table with Louis are Clair's self-sacrificing, unappreciated mother, who turns out to be much appreciated, the mother's friend, and that woman's jealous actress daughter, Fredricka. The story looks at blacks who have escaped the rural staff disparaging those who do so later or more partially. In a brief visit to Watts, Louis sees the South relocated and identifies with the rioters, despite the fact he lives in a world of old (white) movies. In the background of the story, a sympathetic white scholar seeks to explain to his successful black audience why they enjoy prosperity, while the main action examines Louis' lustful thoughts about

Fredericka and Clair, whom he realizes he still loves. She, however, looks on him as a former teacher.

"A Loaf of Bread"

"A Loaf of Bread" Summary

Grocer Harold Green is caught selling goods in one store at prices higher than others in better neighborhoods, and folk rise up in anger. He has done it for years and does not target people he considers neighbors. Nevertheless, his children watch him being picketed on the evening news and are upset. Harold is ashamed to have to tell them he is not dishonest. The children's school is being picketed, and Ruth is waiting for an opening to tell him about this. Harold recalls his father being exploited as an immigrant without complaining or picketing, and says these people do not know enough *not* to be exploited. If he closes down, someone will move in and do likewise. Ruth demands Harold give away to customers anything they request in an unannounced eight-hour period one day this week. Otherwise, she and the children will leave. Harold insists he will not knuckle under, to which Ruth replies, "We shall see."

Long resigned to victimization, the picketers at first are frightened by their audacity, but take to seeing themselves on television. Maids report being treated with respect, a sheet worker is addressed as "Mister" by his staunchly racist boss, a reluctant widow now wants to make picketing a daily event, and strangers are phoning for information, giving advice, vowing support, and telling tales of indignities inflicted by city officials, police, and other grocers. The community grows more restless. Nelson Reed, assembly-line worker, steady husband, father of three, and Baptist deacon, becomes an instant hero. After a life of trusting in God, Nelson realizes he has been wrong. Only money matters in this world, and Jesus does not appear on the dollar bill. People laugh nervously at this line, but wife Betty is wary. She finds the Old Testament message of vengeance more realistic than Christ's swift rise. An alderman invites Nelson to a talk show where, he proclaims his belief in Justice (capital "J"). Only God, the Alpha and Omega, has the right to assign capitals, but men talk of "Justice," "*G*reed," and "*E*vil." When they turn God into "god," the Savior will send them to *H*ell. The talk-show host laughs.

Harold is chilled by the interview, three days before Ruth's deadline. He sees a vindictive black man chatting about society's evil with an ambitious politician and a smug TV host. The children are frightened and flee the room. Harold complains in two days he has been made into a rascal, but he is not some vast corporation, just the owner of three stores, one of which costs extra in cab fares, insurance, iron bars, and pilfering. None of his costs attract attention, but passing on overhead does. Unimpressed, Ruth wants to advise him about Saturday --limit stock, give employees the day off, and hire security - but merely renews her threat. Harold replies he is concerned with only one color, that of their surname, and vows not to bend. "We will see," Ruth responds. Nelson's kitchen grows too small for meetings, and they book an abandoned theater for a mass meeting. The original picketers are honored with front-row seats.

Behind them sit occasional customers, then people from the fringes of the neighbor and beyond and the merely curious, then suburbanites whose outrage at injustice outweighs their fear of blacks, and in the very back stand old leftists, students, cynical young blacks, detached social scientists with tape recorders, and pamphleteers for other causes. There is ominous energy in the room as Nelson talks about long being a sucker for the words of Jesus and still stupid enough to believe, "the last shall be first and the first shall be last." Nelson has always been last, never wanted to be first, but resents God sweeping from the Tree of Life those who cling to the dried leaves he blows away. *Average* men are not really men, because they run away rather than facing adversaries. When average men stand up, they are broken by the weight and feel pain, which is what makes things fall into place. It is time to squeeze the four-flushers and declare "No more!" The people will hurt, but will no longer be just average. The chant, "No more!" rises and the people celebrate.

Unbeknownst to Ruth, Harold consults his brother-in-law, Thomas, an insurance agent, to plan strategy. Harold is not about to toss steaks to the crowd. He has never cheated, so why must he pay? Thomas agrees and tells how he uses death as a long happiness to sell policies. A college graduate who loves philosophy, Thomas believes if Harold attends a protest meeting to explain the realities of overhead and shows respect, people will understand. Harold refuses, because this admits guilt. They agree he should meet privately with Nelson on Friday. Harold vows to suppress no information. Harold and Thomas discuss how best to explain the ethics of profit, including the factor of circumstances. Fair profits lie between 15% and 45%, and the greater a merchant's risk, the more justified he is in earning more. Thomas offers the analogy of someone wanting to sell a used refrigerator. The seller is justified in wanting as much as possible and the buyer in paying as little as possible. The refrigerator's condition, the number of potential buyers, the seller's timeframe, and like factors determine the ethics of negotiating the price. Thomas insists the world has always accepted more than dollars is involved. They resolve nothing.

Little is resolved when Harold and wary Nelson meet. Harold brings two gray ledgers opens by declaring he has always treated Nelson well. Nelson does not want to look at the figures. All he knows is he pays 55? for a can of soup, while white folk two miles away pay 39?. Everybody understands this is ugly, and God does not like ugly. Blacks are human, too. Harold swears before God he is not evil and begs Nelson to examine the figures. He refuses, so Harold summarizes his situation. He's working 12-hour days in three stores, selling gourmet products in the "white" store, being robbed by clerks, and rarely visiting the store across town, because it profits are not worth the gas. His investment in this neighborhood is higher than in the other stores, so his prices must be higher. Businessmen deserve to make a profit. Nelson agrees. Harold asks if Nelson were in his position, what profit would seem fair, 15%-45%? Being a churchgoer, Nelson believes 15%, because church tithes are 10%. In restaurants, Harold counters, you tip 15%, and supermarkets have subtle ways of hiding their margins. Nelson grows angry. All he knows is he works hard and money slips through his fingers because Harold cheats him, just like the Mississippi company store did his sharecropping daddy. Harold intends to raise some hell. Neither man sleeps well that night. Harold insists he will not bankrupt himself, but Betty says he will do it to see his children grow, and because he is

a moral man. It has nothing to do with proving anything to the protesters. He will do it, because love lives in his heart. Nelson is insulted being asked to put himself in Harold's place. Nelson has cheated no one, lived by the Bible, helped others, and is poor. Betty will not discuss whether he is a fool, so Nelson drinks whiskey, paces the kitchen, thinking about how little he has, and spends the night talking by phone with his lieutenants, awakening Betty, who weeps over the bitterness and rage in her husband's voice.

On Saturday, Harold opens the store before dawn. Having given the two employees the day off, he sets up for what he insists will be business-as-usual, expecting few customers. Betty arrives first, around 9:30. After watching her wander uncertainly awhile, he asks if he can help. The 45-year-old selects a loaf of whole-wheat bread and takes it to the counter, smiling like a virgin first confessing love to herself. This touches Harold, and he refuses payment. At 10:30, a little girl comes for candy, and again it is free. At 11:15, he hands a wino a half-gallon of medium-grade red wine for free, provided he drinks it elsewhere. Harold feels good about the world, watching the wino gulping outside. At 11:25, two dozen picketers arrive, denouncing Harold as a parasite, and Harold laughs inwardly. He letters a giant sign, "FREE," tapes it in the window, steps out to yell, "Free!" and then stands like a sentry behind the counter. Nelson enters first, followed by still-angry lieutenants, then winos, nuns, teens, and students. The social scientist with tape recorder is last. Grinning like a madman, Harold yells, "All Free!" The winos react fastest, clearing the shelves of bottles in seconds.

The young men concentrate on cigarettes, lunchmeat, and beer. Students join in, for the thrill of it. The nuns back out. When Harold confirms to he means free, a cheer goes up and the older folks release the secret lusts of a lifetime and begin grabbing everything in sight. Lester Jones' wife orders him to drop his lettuce and concentrate on the gourmet section. The more enterprising fight over rusted carts to attack the bulk aisles. Fistfights break out with much cursing, as Harold hums and rings the register like a madman. Nelson leaves empty-handed. The shelves are bare in half an hour. Disappointed latecomers chase successful stragglers for a share. The social scientist slips away. At 12:10, Harold is alone, trying to slow his mind. Seeing Nelson watching him, Harold waves his arms around the store and says he is too late for a second load. The day is a total loss, this store is now bleeding him, and can Nelson now put himself in his shoes? Nelson replies his wife has bought a loaf of bread but forgotten to pay for it. It is brown bread, which costs more than white. In his store, Harold says, that is true:. It's 55? plus 2?, due to the government tax. Nelson hands him a dollar bill.

"A Loaf of Bread" Analysis

This story examines the economics and psychology of white businesses operating in black neighborhoods. Nelson and Harold are both honorable men but view things from opposite ends of the conflict. Each man's wife tries to be a restraining influence. Rapidly made into a demigod by his followers, Nelson knows only he cannot survive on his wages given Nelson's prices, and resents being asked to put himself in Harold's shoes. Harold knows he cannot stay in business without charging off the higher expenses of

operating in the neighborhood. Harold's wife is right. He gives everything away out of the goodness of his heart, and Nelson puts himself in the broken man's shoes by paying for his wife's bread at Harold's rate. Brown and white bread are symbolic of the whole incident - it costs more to be brown.

"Just Enough for the City"

"Just Enough for the City" Summary

A variety of evangelists work the neighborhood. The Germans pretend to be humble, choosing their words carefully. The Redeemer's Friends look sheepish, but are self-righteous and smug. As the narrator likes to read magazines he will not buy, he endures the newsstand boy's talk about the Master, an elderly East Indian and accepts his broadsides, and because he enjoys watching how a beautiful, peaceful Muslim girl's body moves inside her long dress, he buys Danishes and endures hearing how, as a descendant of Mohammed's beloved muezzin, Bilalia, he must submit. The Germans' young leader also talks about his particular prophet and promises the usual remedies, but fails to get the narrator's point about how most groups find their greatest success among blacks. The Redeemer's Friends are more direct. Anything not in the Bible is false and God has said openly what he will do at the end of time. The narrator respect this but teases them about catering to folks too weak to compete in the real world while considering greed a sin. Their leader finds a Bible passage, which the narrator does not dispute it, but says he is enough of a realist to accept evil has its rights and virtue can be as clumsy as evil is vigilant, both adding to the world's store of cripples. The young man shudders and produces passages no more convincing. The evangelist shows a picture of an idyllic world where all creatures live in harmony. When the narrator points out a flaw, the young man leaves.

The narrator is searching for a definition of love, which he is sure must involve suspending intelligence, the ability to conjugate the verb "to be" beyond "I am," and intuition, but wishes he could ask someone. The schedule-bound Germans insist on visiting when only senior citizens are home but refuse to interrupt their communion with televisions. The narrator lets them in, but they are ill prepared to debate. They have conceptual faith but cannot define love. The narrator offers another parable. A young man intent on suicide, is so concerned about the grief this will bring his parents, siblings, and girlfriend, he resolves to kill them first. A suicide note tells why he spares the sweetheart, and a professor of moral philosophy says the note justifies in his actions. The narrator asks the missionaries to tell him, without looking in their Bibles, what the note must contain.

The Germans never return. Next, George, a hardworking Arab grocer, tells the narrator the Koran offers the only religion suitable for businessmen, because it teaches one must charge everyone precisely what one charges one's mother while allowing everyone to cheat you. The narrator buys an overpriced donut and leaves, knowing he will learn nothing about love from the Koran. Finally, that evening, the narrator searches for his favorite waitress, an elderly widow, who has been fired from his favorite lunch place for not sharing in the side work. In fact, Mr. G. wants a younger woman at a lower salary and has viciously blocked unemployment to teach other employees a lesson. The narrator applauds the Greek's cunning but sympathizes with the ex-employee, and offers to testify if she files a grievance. She explains she is en route to a prayer meeting

and God must have ordained this meeting. The narrator responds unless God bothers himself with the progress of refried beans through one's colon, she is wrong. He is merely walking to relieve constipation. She insists otherwise and walks away. Love, the narrator thinks, must be going outward from one's safe position and God is the safest possible place.

The Redeemer's Friends send in reinforcements. The ghostly pale young minister brings a stout and very black woman, who declares false religions will crumble before the Redeemer. The narrator finds her lack of doubt irritating, and offers another parable. A good man and an evil man kneel to pray, each asking God to change the moral habits of his neighbors. God answers both petitions, playfully, making the good man respond henceforth only to evil and the evil man only to good. This confuses their followers, who band together and kill both men. Over their graves, God sprouts a red rose over the once-evil man and a black one over the once-good man. More confused, the followers ask God why and, no longer playful, God imparts his answer to a blind, deaf mute. The narrator asks what the message is and how the poor messenger communicates it to the others. They Friends vow to visit again when the narrator is in a better mood.

The narrator now takes lunch at a place run by a Chinese couple, precise Lester who cooks and lovely Doris who serves and sings along with Muzak. Lester does not like the narrator to compliment her voice, so he turns to an insurance salesman seated beside him. This man insists the world is a mess because the "Big Boys" are mad and cause suffering to teach us there is no such thing as a free lunch. When the customer leaves, the narrator wants to tell Doris the salesman knows nothing about love, and her voice is beautiful, but does neither. He is these days refusing to bow on his knees and cry holy. He goes to a bookstore whose clerk is a fascinating girl, not at all pretty, but whose face has an elusive, mysterious quality the bookstore atmosphere brings out. She reads Dante when not occupied with an air of peace and privacy that invites interruption. She listens to customers talk but never answers. A worshipful cop, a reverent old woman worried about the world being overtaken by UFOs, and a student talking out his frustrations all fail to draw her out. At the cash register, the narrator inspects her mystery more closely and finds her so liberated from the familiar, he determines he must inquire about her religion. When a young man flirts rudely from the doorway, however, her face transforms, distancing, hardening, and becoming withdrawn, drab, and wounded. The narrator pays quickly, saying nothing, but seeing in her face the shadow of a human soul.

The narrator loves the Redeemer's Friends' steadfastness and admits with the earlier ministers a much more mature white minister who defers to the black woman as she prepares to confront the narrator's latest foolishness. The narrator offers a parable. A sane man one day is given clarity of vision and realizes a friend hates him intensely without his face betraying it. He grows tormented as he observes hypocrisy everywhere. Hatred fills him with tremendous energy, and he imagines revenge. The stout woman remarks the narrator is crazy, but the older minister asks the narrator for the question at the end of the parable. Guessing it before he can respond, the three depart, smiling, while the narrator looks at himself in the mirror. In Lester's Grill, he sees a trio of gaudy and grotesque people whom Doris serves greasy meals, which they gaze at with love

and bow their heads in unison. Fearing he feels love, the narrator turns away. He is becoming sufficient.

"Just Enough for the City" Analysis

This story shows how various sects proselytize a predominantly black neighbor and their frustration when confronting someone who will not accept dry, facile answers about the meaning of love. The narrator speaks in parables like Jesus Christ, who roused similar frustration in his hearers. One minister quotes in full Mt. 23.13, apparently without realizing the woe is on the proselytizers. Once again, a strong-willed black is shown to control her environment.

"A Sense of Story"

"A Sense of Story" Summary

After four days of sitting silently at his murder trial, Robert L. Charles interrupts his attorney'x summation to tell the jury calmly he killed the sonofabitch and is only sorry the gun broke before he could get six slugs into him. Having ensured his doom and ended the trial, Charles sits down and the judge, a thoughtful, painstaking man, retreats to his book-lined office to read rapidly through the transcripts and decide whether evidence tip the scales against Charles, rendering the outburst moot. The facts present an open-and-shut case. Charles shoots his employer of 13 years, Frank Johnson. After hearing the shots, mechanic Jed Jones finds Charles bending over Johnson with a smoking gun in his left hand and stuffing bullets into Johnson's mouth with his right. Charles waits to be arrested, does not resist officers, pleads *nolo contendere,* and remains silent throughout his trial. His attorney, Franklin Grant, has been trying only to convince jurors it is manslaughter, which will spare Charles the death penalty. The prosecutor is Paul Lindenberry.

The judge first scans arresting officer Lloyd Scion's testimony about finding Johnson lying in a pool of blood, Charles sitting on the desk, and Jones by the door. Charles submits without a word. There is no fight in him. Scion's description of the wounds leads to an objection by Grant and a conference at the bench. The judge turns next to Jones' testimony. After several objections to questions about Charles' personality, Jones denies race keeps them from being friends. Charles is such a mope he makes even other blacks nervous. Charles is a top worker but his mind is always elsewhere. Jones first notices trouble between Charles and Johnson 8 years ago, when foreign cars become popular. Unlike Detroit-born mechanics, Charles learns to service them and invents a mixture that extends engine life, which Charles is sure will get him a desk job at the main office. Johnson tells Jones that Charles has gone crazy with some bathtub concoction too foolish for Johnson to present to the main office, and a month later, tells him Charles is blaming him for losing his formula and threatens him. Grant has no questions.

Ringing for coffee and a sandwich at noon, the judge has until a 3 PM judges' conference to read. He turns to the direct examination of Orion W. Rogers, company owner, who characterizes Johnson as a loving man and dedicated 18-year employee who, before it occurs to Rogers, pushes to hire blacks. Rogers cannot recall if Charles is among those hires but recognizes him as someone who frequently runs errands to the main office. Charles seems civil, loyal, and gentle, so this is shocking. Rogers cannot recall Johnson talking about Charles' invention, but is certain Johnson would encourage him. Grant objects to Roger's capacity to analyze how animosity arises between Johnson and Charles, but Lindeberry assures the court this is no fishing expedition. Unable to examine Charles, his wife, children, and other intimates, he must use whatever he has, and Rogers' insights as an employer are valid. Jones has been allowed to tell his version. The judge is bothered by the State's reliance on inferences

and abstractions, and Grant agrees. Rogers lacks personal knowledge and Charles is an atypical employee being an illiterate Southern black socialized in an environment of violence and possessed of a single skill. Charles' motivations lie beyond the competence of Rogers - and most white people - to know. The judge intuits a "sense of story," however, and reminds them of his warning yesterday the rules of society apply to all races. After pausing to fill and light his pipe and underline this exchange, the judge resumes reading, with Rogers saying Charles' talent does not match his ambitions. That is God's plan, but some employees find it hard to accept their lot. Some agitate and see offense where none is intended. Others, who are prima donnas, blame others for their shortcomings.

When Rogers mentions an ex-secretary reminding him about Charles' causing a disturbance 9 years earlier, the judge sustains Grant's objection to hearsay. Grant has no questions. The judge skips a few more pages to read Otis Piknett's testimony. Plinkett vividly recalls feeling uneasy 5-6 years ago when Charles approaches Johnson's desk and asks, "Is it time?" Hearing it is not, Charles leaves, smiling, not angry, but his eyes are popping out. Four years ago, Piknett tells Charles he wants to lay out an annoying customer. Charles nods towards Johnson's office and says he would like to do the same thing. Grant has no questions.

Dr. Walter R. Thorne, resident psychologist at the state mental hospital, testifies about Charles' mental makeup. Thorne first notes his formative years in segregated, violent, Virginia, and traumatic, abrupt dislocation to Detroit. Thorne sees no signs in Charles family of influence from a maladjusted personality and Charles is regular coming to work and singing in his church choir. Charles appears to live an adjusted, stable life. Thorne summarizes a few studies about paranoia in black males, which he discounts, while allowing room for chance. Thorne does not believe Charles acts out of paranoid fear in shooting Johnson. Grant has no questions. Finishing his coffee and reflecting on what he has read, the judge returns to Pinkett's cross-examination and redirect, focusing on why he advises Charles to find another job.

Pinkett is third in command after Jones and is often consulted by people, because he knows how to get along. Coming from the South and lacking common sense, Charles cannot get along, and that is why he suggests he move on. Charles acts like he is better than Johnson. Pinkett denies being jealous of Charles, who earns less. He just feels sorry for him. Johnson is always kind to Pinkett and likes black people, asking about their families, offering credit references. Grant tells the court he believes Pinkett is withholding something about this model employer and is allowed to continue his tedious fishing trip.

Soon, however, the prosecutor objects to allowing Pinkett to speculate about premeditation. After the judge rules, Grant puts on the record his hands are tied by Charles' refusal to contribute to his own defense. Grant is obliged to do his best on a case he had not wanted. He asks Pinkett to recall Charles' words carefully. Charles understands nothing and has given up on life. Johnson has hurt him badly. Pinkett recalls no arguments or threats, but the night Pinkett gets a raise, he hears Johnson say "I'm white," while giving him his envelop, without a raise, Pinkett believes. Grant

suggests there might have been a dispute and Johnson says, "I'm right." Pinkett agrees this is possible, but stands by what he hears. Johnson says it calmly, but his expression changes when he makes eye contact with Pinkett. It is too long ago for Pinkett to recall greater detail. Pinkett tells Grant Johnson is white and Charles as black as the ace of spades. Lindenberry objects to the judge falling asleep, and the judge now skips ahead as in the transcript he reminds the jury of a judge's burden in a complicated trial like this one. Pinkett resumes, talking about the princely Johnson's many kindnesses, which he must confess even though he wants to help Charles. Charles puts himself in positions calculated to cause friction with Johnson, not following orders, making repairs too slowly. Folks like that have to be knocked back into their place. The judge warns Pinkett to refrain from making value judgments. Prosecution witnesses may only answer specific questions. The judge explains the adversary system to the jury and the judge's role akin to literary critic.

The judge's clerk reminds him it is 2:05 PM and the conference starts at 3 PM. He requests the rest of the transcript as soon as it is typed. Relighting his pipe, the judge speeds up. The secretary delivers a note reminding him he must shine at the meeting for political reasons. The judge skims testimony from Rev. Lorenzo Blake, who characterizes Charles as a gentle, God-fearing man and is pained his actions reflect badly on the black folk of Roanoke, hometown to most of his parishioners. Blake recalls no conversations with Charles about his job but does recall talking about concerns for his son, Robert, Jr. Charles is ashamed of his lack of formal education, which forced him to fulfill his genius for cars by repairing them on weekends at home. This keeps him from disciplining his son, who is in with a fast crowd and trying drugs. As a concerned parent, Charles asks Blake to get the boy involved in positive activities with boys who read books. The State objects the jails are full of homicidal maniacs who read books, which moves Grant to object. Grant needs to establish Charles' parental concern to make a point.

Without judging Charles a devout Christian, Blake testifies he is a regular church drinker and, at times, a heavy but drinker. Southerners traditionally celebrate special occasions by drinking and shooting off guns. Lindenberry reminds the jury Scion has stated at his arrest Charles is not drunk. Receiving another note and the last of the transcript, the judge devotes a last ten minutes to skimming the State's summation, before directing a verdict of guilty as charged, putting his desk in order, and walking to the door. He returns to re-read Grant's summation about the jury serving as the community's conscience. They must find room in their hearts for an illiterate descendent of slaves who on the day of his son's graduation takes a drink and perhaps fires celebratory shots. Then, pocketing the gun, as a creature of habit he goes to work and shares with a boss known to take an interest in employees' families, the good news. Perhaps through a lapse of logic or memory of past frictions, but more likely merely in celebration, he accidentally ... At this point, the defendant interrupts. The judge lays the page down neatly on the pile.

"A Sense of Story" Analysis

This story examines a black man being tried for killing his white employer, largely through a transcript of testimony offered by black and white witnesses. The judge demands the rules of society apply to people of all races equally. The deceased appears to be a truly color-blind, beneficent man who comes into conflict with a remarkable, self-trained man, who blames him for the failure of an invention the murderer believes will secure his future. Because Charles refuses to participate in his own defense, the judge allows the attorneys latitude in questioning witnesses. Charles' pastor explains how parishioners remain linked to their rural homelands and the practice of drinking and shooting guns to celebrate great events. Why Charles interrupts remains unclear. Perhaps, he does not want his son brought into the story. Perhaps, the conflict with the victim runs deeper than anyone observes.

"Elbow Room"

"Elbow Room" Summary

An editor feels obliged to impose order on a piece by a shrill author who is an open enemy of conventional narrative categories, holds unevenness a virtue, and flaunts traditional modes. The editor points out flaws in discipline in comments on the draft of a story that begins with Paul Frost leaving Kansas for school in Chicago and remaining there to work in a mental hospital as an alternative to being drafted. Paul attends Quaker meetings, reads history, philosophy, and moral philosophy, and realizes many inmates are sane. Emerging rarely from his room, and not dating, Paul is taken for an idiot. After months of silence, Paul asks a patient why he is here and is unsettled when the patient turns the question back at him. Paul begins talking with total strangers, and everyone seems to be in a great hurry. For his second year of service, Paul is transferred to Oakland, CA, where he marries a black girl, Virginia Valentine, from Warren, TN, outside Knoxville.

Ginny escapes home ten years earlier, serving from 19 until 22 in the Peace Corps, the poor man's grand tour of the world, finding the human core of people in Ceylon, India, Senegal, Kenya, the Middle East, and Tanzania, and appreciating through the stories behind their smiles different ways of looking at the world. Back home, Ginny joins fellow storytellers in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and all over California. The peasants among them have become aristocratic without affectation and the highborn have developed an easy, common touch. They consider themselves a new tribe until "reacculturation" sets in, and they gradually feel self-conscious, guilty, tentative, and defensive. Over the months, they grow black and white. Ginny, like many of the more stubborn, abandons the East for California, like a wounded bird looking for somewhere soft to fall to earth.

The narrator also heads there, because in the East, words have detached from emotion and passion. Great myths have been reduced to folklore, humor has lost its bite, language has been whored to the tastes of the wealthy, and blacks have returned to entertaining with time-tested acts. Great literature has given way to lackluster tales of mugging, killing and stealing. Little men swagger and great men speak in clichys. Grotesque sadness spreads as caste shadows are drawn, imaginations re-segregate, and decent people grow indifferent and fearful More than a million stories die as people refuse to share stories the narrator feels obliged to narrate fully. Needing new angles and eyes, regeneration, and fresh forms, he heads to the new territory. The editor at this point raises a series of cautionary questions about race, caste, and personal freedom, to which he replies pithily and goes on telling about Ginny and Paul. He values Ginny for her stories, which he initially fears Paul will exploit. Ginny is not pretty, dressing in Levi's and wears a gangster cap from 1940s movies. She uses costume, like her laugh and swagger, to deflect attention from her secret, softhearted self, and employs defensive irony that translates, "Do not hurt me." Her complex country stories, flavored by international expressions, are also spiced with irony.

Ginny is a unique classic narrator and a magic woman. Paul is attracted by her outward display of strength and the narrator is sure he is too mature to view her as merely exotic. As the son of a successful Kansas businessman, Paul has an eye for value and has put the prairies behind him. Art is his means of redeeming family. His eyes radiate wholesomeness, directness, and an earnest need for superficial answers to "Who am I?" The narrator feels embarrassed and perverse digging to the core of Paul's mystery. As a couple, Paul and Ginny are self-assured and unabashed. Paul is unaware of his own vulnerable farm-boy innocence, and Ginny guards him against a rough, treacherous world. She protects this lucky innocent to heal herself.

Their November wedding is a quiet civil affair. Both sets of parents fail to talk them out of it, and Paul's stay home, while Ginny's fly out with food and a quilt sewn by her backwoods Cherokee grandmother. The dark-skinned mother sits solemnly, while the large-framed, Indian-featured father, Daniel, smiles nervously. Ginny, a deep reddish-brown, reassures her brooding mother, and Paul looks sober and responsible. During the Golden Gate Park reception. Daniel offers cigars but is ill at ease, and feels obliged to tell the black narrator he has always assumed color is the highest bond, but his daughter disagrees. Daniel has warned Paul against treating his daughter as a plaything. The narrator cannot tell him she has inwardly left his conventional world long ago. Nevertheless, watching the newlyweds hold hands, Daniel concedes they are a fine couple. Paul and Ginny consolidate their belongings in an apartment in the Mission district, Ginny works as a clerk, and Paul does construction by day and takes classes by night. They carefully and democratically choose friends among various nationalities and races, and their bustling cosmopolitan household stands out in an era when Eastern-style narrowness is growing. Paul's father, who views Ginny as a bad investment to be corrected, pressures him by phone to reconsider. They label one another deluded and narrow-minded, but resolve nothing.

Ginny laughs the old rascal is afraid he will have to kiss a pickaninny some day and is tempted to send him a minstrel picture. One night in December, Paul drinks wine at the table, looking upset and determined, and defends his father as decent but narrow-visioned. Also drinking, the narrator understands the old man. Convention demands that one of them be killed, crippled, or struck by lightning while making love. Paul laughs and says *he* need not worry. Ginny is a hybrid of African, European, and Indian bloodlines but is publicly defined as black. She is rough on the outside but gentle and sweet on the inside. It has taken him time to understand her contradictions and it will take his unsubtle father longer, but he will mellow. Paul repeats, *"I* don't have to worry." From the stove, Ginny wishes the old rascal would talk to her by phone, and Paul looks nervous and cornered. The narrator realizes it is not his story but cannot help intruding, because they lack perspective. After confusing comments on time differences between East and West, the slowing effect of diversity, and the lack of self-sustaining pure imaginations, he predicts Paul will have to force the reality of his wife into his father's mind and duck for cover. To illustrate his point, the narrator points at a Nigerian ceremonial mask and asks if Paul thinks it is beautiful. Paul replies it is a nice item with a good story behind it.

The narrator hypothesizes if Paul were an art dealer in a small town where other dealers find the mask ugly, how will he convince a buyer? Paul resents the

condescension, but the narrator insists Paul has enlisted in a psychological war. Fear takes control of Paul, and he orders him out of the house. Trembling and defeated, Ginny agrees he should leave, because whatever he thinks, Paul is her husband. Realizing this story is not ripe for telling, the narrator departs.

The editor's notes insist this section is too subtle and needs many explanations. He explains he has challenged Paul's structured world by attacking his assumptions too abruptly and Paul shuts him out defensively. Assumptions become as routine as brushing teeth, guarding the personality against needing to develop beyond what pre-exists from before birth. Paul's undefined "I" has the outlines of the entire world, and he pushes back against challenges. Guests must knock and blind men stand still when they hear an unfamiliar sound. The editor insists on greater clarity, but the narrator plunges ahead. After Christmas, Ginny apologizes for Paul and accuses the narrator of provoking him. Ginny's travels have taught her to accept people as they are and work from there. In Calcutta she learns about patience and faith, watching people ignore crippled beggars, assuming they are reincarnated rajas who have enjoyed the good life millennia earlier and need nothing more. One must accept what is under the Christmas tree and go on believing in Santa Claus. Ginny refuses to give up and invites the narrator to New Year's Eve mass. The Episcopal cathedral is massive, chilly, and dark and the crowd diverse. Ginny wears her mug's cap rakishly atop her strong, curly hair, sitting between Paul and the narrator as the magnificent choirs spread the faith of Bach from balconies above. The trio is deep in private prayers when a voice behind demands the dumb young man remove his hat in church or get out. Realizing he is addressing Ginny, Paul turns and informs the "old fart" this is his wife. As the choir tries to erase the incident, the narrator thinks, "This one's a man." From January onward, Paul opens his mind hungrily and heroically, reading widely and sifting facts from propaganda. In February, some kids calls Paul a nigger in a parking lot with Ginny, who cannot understand why this upsets him. He asks the narrator what it means to him to be a nigger and is angry to hear, "A descendant from Proteus."

In March, Paul upsets his father by announcing Ginny is pregnant. In this period, the rich story trove of a man paroled after 50 years in prison diverts the narrator, who observes his ambition and appetites subjected to an invisible clock regulates his days. A rich patron invites them to a party, where he recites his stories line-for-line to those who approach him in his corner. The hostess periodically swings her empty martini glass in a confident arc that assumes a tray will be there to accept it. The narrator laughs. The editor recommends cutting this unclear section, but finding it suggests the nature of the times, the author refuses. The author confesses a lack of clarity, focus, and control, required by the great clock spinning and East and West losing their difference. He resumes his story. It is a bombed-out time of cynicism and nakedness. Ginny is losing control of her stories. As her belly grows, her recollections turn anecdotal and lose the sense of personal epic. She becomes just a performer. Paul fails to locate the enemy in his battle for personal clarity, spends most of his time with white males out of doors, grows tan, grows a long black beard, reads the Bible and books on ethics, and appears like a suffering Christ when not affecting the styles of a street-corner dandy. He quotes the Hebrew prophets about neglecting the poor and denounces his father as a moral coward. Self-righteous, struggling, and abysmally alone, Paul's face still asks, "Who am

I?" The narrator longs to tell him he is the "abstract white man of mythic dimensions," but refrains because Paul's story is unfinished and must deal with his chaos alone. To his credit, Paul never tells Ginny he does not understand.

In June, both sets of parents make overtures. Ginny's family suggests names and Paul's mother sends money, hinting in strictest confidence her bloodline is not entirely European. Paul's father insists recognizing the baby means recognizing Ginny's family and enduring mutual visitations. When e hires a black employee, Paul says this is insufficient. Paul's mother is sure Ginny and the baby will be welcome to visit, but Ginny will not have her baby an honorary white. She tells Paul she is black but has created elbow room in her mind. In a tough world, anyone can pass for white, and niggers have for centuries, but relating to black, white, and the whole world would make for "*some* nigger!" She insists she is whiter than white and blacker than black, but can see through the fog. She hates having to choose, when each choice leaves one blind, and does not want her baby to be an honorary white, because blacks can at least peep around corners. The narrator realizes he no longer cares about Paul and Ginny's problems, because they no longer have a story worth telling. Ginny worries her stubborn husband's opening eyes may close, leaving him blacker than she has ever been. The narrator tells her for the sake of her child she must not be black, but "more of a classic kind of nigger." Ginny laughs and slaps his back.

In the late summer, feeling he owes Paul something, the narrator spends a Sunday walking the city with him. People in the park seem resigned and vaguely haunted. The narrator points out blacks whose actions, dress, or expressions define "nigger." Paul begins observing closely, but does not understand a bumper sticker reading, "Be proud to be a nigger." The narrator points out an arrogant, unwashed, crusty looking bearded young white man riding a ten-speed as a "bad parody of a part-time nigger." The narrator then asks, given two men on the street, one white and dressed like this and the other black and parading like a tailor's model, which in Paul's and his father's mind seems unnatural? Paul looks hurt and accuses the narrator of considering him racist. The narrator explains Paul comes from a lonely place where people value and abide with simplistic rhythms. Paul insists people can grow and his children will be great, but the narrator sighs they will be black and blind or white and self-blinded. Paul walks away fast, his aura gone, and looking beaten and drained like everything else in sight. Paul insists he has tried and is fighting. He knows being a nigger comes from thinking of yourself as a work of art.

Two months later, the narrator finds a Chicano family has taken over Paul and Ginny's apartment. He moves East, resigned to telling old stories. Six months later, a letter is forwarded from Kansas announcing the birth of Daniel P. Frost, accompanied by three photos. One shows Ginny smiling triumphantly with her in-laws. Paul stands apart, shaved and defiant. On the back is written, "He will be a *classic* kind of nigger." The editor demands this comment be clarified, but the author finds it difficult. He has been narrating a story not his own but needing to be told. He phones Kansas and learns they are en route to backwoods Tennessee. The narrator wagers his reputation on the ambition if not the strength of the boy's story. The editor demands he clarify this.

"Elbow Room" Analysis

The final story finally addresses race openly as an unorthodox writer tells the story of a mixed-race couple whose parents both resist the union. The philosophical white husband is struggling to define "nigger," which his well-traveled and open-minded wife wears as a badge of honor. The black narrator writes densely, and his editor periodically asks him to clarify, which in some cases helps the reader understand. The question comes down to the uncomfortable choice of having their baby be white and blind or black and self-blinded, but the better situation would be having a world where everyone is appreciated and embraced.

Characters

Dewey Bivins

In "The Silver Bullet," Dewey is the warlord of the gang Willis wants badly to join. Dewey rejects the rumor Slick is in the rackets and his bar is protected. Many rumors circulate about Dewey. Some say he is targeted by the rival Conchos, while others say he is exempted from attacks for fear of disproportionate retaliations. Dewey walks the streets unarmed with his purple beret cocked to the side to show he has no fear. People respect him and imitate his swagger. Dewey and Chimney appear in full uniform to confront R.V. Felton when the danger arises he will move in on their turf and rejects the idea of allying for the greater good. As the confrontation goes badly, Dewey demands Willis declare his loyalty to one side or the other and departs.

Rev. Lorenzo Blake

In "A Sense of Story," Blake is defendant Robert L. Charles' pastor, who characterizes Charles as a gentle, God-fearing man and is pained his actions reflect badly on the black folk of Roanoke, hometown to most of his parishioners. Blake recalls no conversations with Charles about his job but does recall talking about concerns for his son, Robert, Jr. Charles is ashamed of his lack of formal education, which forced him to fulfill his genius for cars by repairing them on weekends at home. This keeps him from disciplining his son, who is in with a fast crowd and trying drugs. As a concerned parent, Charles asks Blake to get the boy involved in positive activities with boys who read books. Without judging Charles a devout Christian, Blake testifies he is a regular church drinker and, at times, a heavy but drinker. Southerners traditionally celebrate special occasions by drinking and shooting off guns.

Red Bone

In "The Story of a Scar," Red is the tough but compassionate co-worker of the anonymous female narrator. Red has a yellow complexion, red hair, a loud rap, and reputation for breaking every man she has been with. She sees the affair with Billy Crawford developing and warns her off this potential punk, but she takes the hurtful words as typical female jealousy and defends Billy. When Teddy Johnson comes on the scene, Red urges her to break up with Billy, even offering to tell him if she is afraid. She argues wealthy Teddy must be in love to work overtime so he can be around while she is on night shift. When Billy forces the issue after work one night, Red tells him to go home to his books and leave normal folk alone to enjoy life, and calls him the devil as he slashes her friend from brow to chin and stabs Teddy.

Mrs. Esther Clay Boswell

In "Why I Like Country Music," Boswell is a fourth grade teacher, a disciplinarian with a sense of humor, determined to make men of her timid "little bunnies." She senses a love triangle in the air as the anonymous narrator of the story and know-it-all Leon Pugh vie to dance with beautiful Gweneth Lawson. In the end, she arranges for helps the author realize his dream by demanding Leon remove his spurs.

Clarence Buford

In "Why I Like Country Music," Clarence is the oversized, good-natured, but tongue-tied fourth-grader, whom Mrs. Boswell uses as her foil when telling the boys how to find wives. Clarence claims not to like girls over ever wanting to marry.

Fredricka Burton ("Ricky")

In "Widows and Orphans," Fredricka is a beautiful, coffee-brown, struggling actress attending a testimonial dinner for the Progressive Association of Greater Watts with her mother. Fredricka bitterly resents her nickname "Ricky." Bored and jealous of the evening's honoree, Clair Richards, Fredricka flirts innocently with older table companion, Louis Clayton, Clair's former teacher and ex-fiancy. She has finished filming *The Syncopated Buck,* due out next year, and declares marriage a bore. She reminds Louis of a Swedish actress in a recent movie, and he tries to remember lines to use on her, before realizing Fredricka has probably memorized the dialog.

Loretta Burton

In "Widows and Orphans," Loretta is Violeta Richard's gracious, elderly, plump table companion at a testimonial dinner for the Progressive Association of Greater Watts honoring Clair Richards, Burton angers her daughter, Fredricka, by calling her daughter Ricky, but is proud of her recent film work.

John Butler

In "The Faithful," Butler is a the central character, a stubborn, old school barber/preacher. Butler accepts a hand too heavy to offer Afros makes for a rusty cash register. Butler complains young blacks are following white youth in growing out their hair and running wild. Second Calvary Church is finding Butler's single-theme sermons boring and are abandoning him for Rev. Tarwell's church, and wife Ella advises him at dinner to lay off that broken record and let Ray do Afros if he is unwilling, but Butler insists there will be no "fancy" cuts in his shop. Butler also reject Ray's suggestion they offer "processes," branding them the devil's work. Butler claims he is too old to change and views shaping boys' hair as a way of shaping their lives.

When a particularly confusing sermon about Esau and Jacob leads even usher Marie Gilmore to leave, Butler asks Mickey how to do Afros, and considers selling out and returning to the South when Gilmore suggests he is losing it. He gives Tommy Gilmore a haircut that sends him home in tears and brings his father back, saying if Butler were not a minister of God, he would kick his ass, and threatens to shut down both Butler's barbershop and his church. When Marie Gilmore returns and from a back pew challenges Butler's contention this stiff-necked people will be judged, Butler has no answer, and wife Ella asks what he will do next. Butler cruelly tells her she married him, because she could do no better.

Curtis Carter

In "The Silver Bullet," Curtis is Willis Davis' friend, a crooked mechanic unwilling to risk getting involved with Slick and the rackets if Slick is, indeed, alive. Curtis puts Willis in touch with R.V. Felton on the West Side.

Robert Lee Charles ("Bob" / "Bobby Lee")

In "A Sense of Story," Charles is an illiterate black mechanic on trial for the murder of his white employer, Frank Johnson. Born in segregated, violent rural Virginia, Charles is only mildly traumatized by the move to the city. Married with children, Charles is embarrassed to be semi-illiterate and self-trained in auto mechanics, which is his job at Rogers' Auto Service and Supply. An apparent motivation for the murder, after which he does not flee or resist arrest, pleads *nolo contendere,* and remains silent throughout his trial, is having his invention of a lubricant to extend the life of foreign cars blocked by the deceased. Co-workers characterize Charles as a moping loner who gets along with fellow blacks no better than with whites. He tells one coworker he has given up on life. A regular churchgoer and .a member of the choir, Charles is considered by his pastor, Rev. Blake, a gentle, God-fearing man concerned about for a son he is too busy working weekends to discipline. Robert, Jr., has fallen in with a fast crowd and is trying drugs, and as a concerned parent, Charles asks Blake to get the boy involved in positive activities with boys who read books. Blake testifies Southerners traditionally celebrate special occasions - like Robert, Jr.'s high school graduation -by drinking and shooting off guns. Charles' frustrated attorney, Franklin Grant, uses this as a possible mitigating circumstance in the closing remarks Charles interrupts, thereby sealing his fate. The judge directs a guilty verdict.

Louis Clayton, Jr.

In "Widows and Orphans," Louis is the central character, a college teacher from Chicago attending a testimonial dinner of the Progressive Association of Greater Watts honoring his former fiancye, Clair Richards, Louis is the only outsider and only unattached male there. He sits with Clair's mother, who laments the relationship has failed, and her friend Loretta Burton and her beautiful actress daughter, Fredricka,

whom he has never met but flirts with innocently out of boredom. Louis has escaped Baxter, NC, where his barely literate textile-working father lives and dies, first for New York, then Boston and Chicago. He has been a college teacher for years and is currently involved in an affair with a colleague's wife. Energetic and intriguingly carefree Clair had been his student, disorganized, unfocused, and requiring personal attention. They become engaged before she flies home to Los Angeles and is clearly changed by the time Louis sees her again in her mother's home. At the banquet, as Clair speaks, Louis tries to recall her rhythm in bed but has retained only her full-breasted shadow on the bedroom wall, the glow of her cigarette, and her question, "What do you want from me?" After a moving testimonial to her mother, Clair recognizes Louis only as her former teacher, which deflates his ego and dissipates returning feelings of love.

Billy Crawford

In "The Story of a Scar," Billy is the ex-boyfriend responsible for inflicting the anonymous woman narrator's facial scar. Billy works the parcel-post window at the post office and attends night school on the GI Bill. At first meeting, he makes clear he hates those who homestead in post office jobs, rather than became like the Jews, Puerto Ricans, and himself in knowing where they are going and bettering themselves. Billy, who always wears a white shirt and black tie, could rise to supervisor if he crawled some and greased some palms, but he just works diligently, pulls overtime whenever possible, takes classes three times a week, and studies on his day off. Since his wife left him while he was at war, Billy has distrusted women but is sure the woman narrator is different, God-fearing and intent on improving her mind.

Billy hints at marriage once he graduates and starts teaching high school, but she begins longing to dance and make love while she is still young and falls into the arms of Teddy Johnson. Rumors reach Billy, who lets it fester before confronting her about when she gets in one night. He talks about learning discipline in the war to control his temper, but his true, cold, nature appears At 5:30 AM, Sep. 22, he confronts her, Red, and Teddy relaxing after their shift and demands she go home with him. When she explodes instead and tries to get at his face, Billy slashes her face from brow to chin and stabs Teddy, when he tries to disarm him. It takes three men to drag Billy off, as he keeps slashing.

Charlotta Curry

In "Widows and Orphans," Curry appears only as an attractive, unsmiling white woman made up in the style of the 1940s. glares out with arrogant determination, from an old photograph in Viola Richard's living room. Mrs. Richards had worked for this actress long ago, but the Lord had not been with Curry in a tough business. Clair Richards looks remarkably like Curry, who in turn looks like Barbara Stanwyck. Louis imagines Curry's story of a German farmer's daughter, who escapes the prairies for Los Angeles and hires a black maid to keep her starlet's cottage. Her break never comes, however, and she becomes one of those losers who get only minor character roles. Mrs. Richards

tells the people attending the banquet honoring her daughter that a white woman she once worked for, presumably Curry, had once given her hope to work on by saying Clair is too pretty not to succeed.

Willis Davis

In "The Silver Bullet," Willis is the chief character, who wants badly to join the Henry Street guys, who insist he prove himself by knocking off Slick's Bar and Grill. Willis fails to enlist his friend Curtis Carter, and his first visit to the bar is disastrous. When the Henry Street guys mock Willis, he turns again to Curtis, and his friend refers him to an address on the West Side. Visiting it, he meets R.V. Felton, who takes Willis under his wing. They go together to the bar to shake down bartender Alphaeus Jones and inform him Willis is now a certified community collector and must be treated nicely. Jones orders them out with a 12-gauge shotgun, and Willis begs Fulton to back down, but R.V. insists they will be back Friday to examine the books. Willis intends to apologize to Jones on Friday, but R.V. and his associate Aubrey drive up and confront Jones, again facing a shotgun. Two Henry Street guys also arrive, to protect their territory, and Willis is caught between the two sets of thugs. Willis runs away fast after Slick, very much alive, puts R.V. down and expels the punks.

Floyd Dillingham

In "The Story of a Dead Man," Dillingham is the liberal owner of Atlanta's Dillingham Automotives, Inc., who hires one-eyed Billy Renfro to track down blacks who default on their car loans to a job no white man will take. Dillingham gets Billy paroled from his life sentence for murder, because he has a reputation for ruthlessness that strikes fear in often-violent deadbeats.

Mary Farragot ("Miss Mary")

In "Problems of Art," Farragot is a thin, severe, orderly defendant who insists on having Brown and Barlow's Project Gratis assign a white attorney to handle her license suspension hearing over a DUI arrest. Farragot is born in Virginia, has lived many years in Los Angeles, and is widowed but collects no Social Security from her husband. She's also a teetotaler arrested for DUI. Her apartment makes Attorney Corliss Milford uncomfortable, particularly the Sacred Heart of Jesus painting that dominates the living room. It also has a framed close-up of her, younger, smiling, strong, and motherly, hardly the face of an alcoholic, a snapshot of two smiling white toddlers, Tracy and Ken, who call her Aunt Mary in the inscription, and a faded black-and-white enlargement of a robust, arrogant uniformed black man, her 'Sweet Willie.'" At the DMV hearing, Farragot deClares her innocence and maintains she had no intention of driving that night. As Farragot tells her story, slowly, and precisely, Milford sees the white, female hearing officer is deeply moved, but the black complaining officer is oblivious. Only when it appears Farragot has beaten the rap does her friend reveal he has often urged her to

go lightly on her favorite Maker's Mark (bourbon) which Farragot had certainly been drinking that very hot night.

R. V. Felton

In "The Silver Bullet," Felton is the bearded, red-shirted, and angry-looking man to whom Curtis Carter refers his friend Willis Davis for protection when his attempts to knock over Slick's Bar and Grill goes badly. R.V. works out of an office of W. Smith Enterprises, speaking expansively about community problems requiring an appropriate agency, claiming friends downtowns and in the community who realize his is the only legitimate and viable group that can operate in this sphere. R.V. takes Willis back to the bar to announces it is nationalized, and must pay the community 25? for every dollar of income, minus 3? tax. Every plate of food served must pay 10% of the profits, minus 2? tax. Pay-ups are due before noon on Friday. Play ball or close down. R.V. brings a hot-headed associate, Aubrey, back to deal with the bartender, and ends up in a confrontation with the Henry Street guys over turf, and is slapped, punched, and evicted by Slick, who is, contrary to rumors, very much alive.

D. B. Ferris

In "The Story of a Scar," Ferris is the white post office shift supervisor Ferris offers the anonymous female narrator a desk job in exchange for her affections, but is rejected. She tells Ferris he needs to show respect for black women, and he puts her on the facing table. Later, Ferris transfers her and several other workers who lack seniority to the night shift, where her ex-boyfriend Billy clashes her from brow to chin.

Leon and Eunice Foster

In "I Am an American," the Fosters are frustrated tourists from Atlanta, GA, who in London are drawn into helping their Japanese neighbors in the adjoining room recover from losing their money and passports to a sneak thief. Waiting in line outside the hotel's communal toilet, Leon first observes Kageyama whom he finds aloof but not inscrutable. Leon wants to talk but assumes Kageyama knows little English while Leon recalls only a few Mandarin phrases from long ago. They grow suspicious a place this sloppy can provide breakfast calls, and Leon races back to their room, arriving just as the Bulgarian back theatrically out of the neighboring room, and manages in the breakfast room to convince them to check their belongings. The Fosters argue about the men's nationality, Eunice saying they have the confidence of upper class folk back home, while Leon insists Japanese always carry cameras. Eunice calls him a dumb black bigot. Leon joins the students' posse, and pictures an attic-to-basement search that ends in cornering the culprit is ordered to commit *hara-kiri*. Leon accompanies them to two bobbie station and describes the culprit.

Waiting to be needed, Leon studies wanted posters. Four of the seven are black. Dissolute Wimberly Lane, valued at ?50, looks vaguely like cousin Freddy Tifton in

Atlanta. Leon explains he is merely an American in the room next to the victims, the bobby winks, a friend indeed, The Fosters meet the students that afternoon at Madame Tussaud's and Hashima asks for their name and address and hopes someday to host them in Tokyo. He hands Leon a packet of Japanese stamps, and Eunice observes the Japanese are part-time Southerners. Leon agrees. Eunice believes it is time to go home, and as usual is right.

Paul Frost

In "Elbow Room," Paul leaves Kansas for school in Chicago and works in mental hospitals there and in Oakland, CA, as an alternative to being drafted into the military. Quaker-influenced and philosophical, Paul marries a black girl, Virginia Valentine, from Warren, TN, who has learned much, traveling the world in the Peace Corps. Married to a strong, protective black woman, Paul fights with his narrow-minded father and struggles to figure out "Who am I?" which becomes a quest to understand what "nigger" means. His set Kansas background and entrepreneurial genes inherited from his rigid father, keep him from understanding, and when pressed by the story's strident and anonymous narrator, pushes back. The prospects of a baby forces him to face whether he/she will be considered black or white -- white and blind, Ginny and the narrator insist, or black and self-blinded. Paul eventually decides "nigger" means thinking of oneself as a work of art.

Virginia Valentine Frost ("Ginny")

In "Elbow Room," Ginny escapes backward Warren, TN, for three years in the Peace Corps, soaking up the stories of many cultures. Like many storytellers, she finds Eastern cities stiffling and moves to Oakland, where she meets and marries white Paul Frost. Not physically attractive and radically dressing, Ginny has adopted a tough exterior that protects an inner tenderness, and she protects her naive husband fiercely. The prospects of a baby forces Paul and Ginny to face whether he/she will be considered black or white -- white and blind, Ginny and the narrator insist, or black and self-blinded. Ginny is comfortable being black but prides herself on creating elbow room in her mind towards everyone. She is not entirely tolerant. However, she abhors how the Arabs among whom she once lived still sell women and slaves. Pregnancy saps Ginny's extraordinary gift for storytelling, to the narrator's despair, and he no longer sees her a magic woman.

George

In "Just Enough for the City," George is a hardworking Arab grocer exiled from Jaffa and well on his way to becoming a white man and American with the anonymous narrator's help. He tells the narrator that the Koran offers the only religion suitable for businessmen, because it teaches one must charge everyone precisely what one charges one's mother while allowing everyone to cheat you. The narrator buys an

overpriced donut and leaves, knowing he will learn nothing about love from the Koran. Another Muslim, a beautiful woman in a pastry shop also tries to convince him that, as a black man, he is a descendant of the Prophet's favorite muezzin and thus must submit to Islam.

John Gilmore

In "The Faithful," Gilmore is one of the balding regulars that drop into Butler's barbershop Gilmore is also a backbone of Butler's Sunday congregation who asks carefully what Butler plans on doing about losing parishioners to Rev. Tarwell, who is considering hiring him as assistant pastor so he can go into politics. Gilmore sees no problem with expatriates from South Carolina and Alabama worshiping together, because people are thinking about unity these days. Everyone is in the same boat. When wife Marie leaves Butler's congregation over a particularly confusing sermon, Gilmore stops coming to the barbershop as well, after advising Butler to shut the store and either reread his Bible of go home where he can cut hair the way he wants. Tommy Gilmore, his youngest son, whom Butler baptized, comes in asking for an Afro, but receives a cut Gilmore says makes him look like a "plantation Negro." Gilmore cannot kick a clergyman's ass as he would like, but threatens to shut down both Butler's barbershop and his church, and run all the "Toms" out of the community.

Gloria

In "Why I Like Country Music," Gloria is the beloved wife of the anonymous author of Gloria's people are three generations removed from the South and she has a strong hatred of square-dancing, to which the author is profoundly attached by memories of fourth grade.

Franklin Grant

In "A Sense of Story," Grant is the attorney for defendant Robert L. Charles. Grant maintains an illiterate Southern black socialized in an environment of violence and possessed of a single skill cannot have his motivations understood by white people. Grant, who feels his hands are bound by his client's refusal to take part in his own defense, is allowed leeway in making his case. He cross-examines none of the State's witnesses. Grant's summation challenges the jury to serve as the community's conscience. They must find room in their hearts for an illiterate descendent of slaves who on the day of his son's graduation takes a drink and perhaps fires celebratory shots.

Harold Green

In "A Loaf of Bread," Harold is the white grocer caught selling goods in one store at prices higher than others in better neighborhoods. He has done it for years, claims it is

not racially motivated but rather a simple matter of covering the higher overhead in this neighborhood and earning a fair profit. Harold recalls his immigrant father being exploited without complaining or picketing, and says these people do not know enough not to be exploited. If he closes down, someone will move in and do likewise. Wife Ruth demands Harold give away to customers anything they request in an unannounced eight-hour period one day this week. Otherwise, she and the children will leave. Harold meets Thursday night with his brother-in-law Thomas, an insurance agent, to formulate strategy. They agree to nothing other than Harold meeting with the leader of the pickets, Nelson Reed, and showing him the books. No agreement being reached, Harold opens the store before dawn, determined not to knuckle under, but is moved not to charge Betty Reed for a loaf of bread, followed by other small giveaways. When the picketers arrive, Harold makes a large sign, "FREE," displays it in his window, and invites them in, assuring them he means everything is free. Within half an hour his shelves are bare, but Nelson returns to pay for his wife's bread.

Ruth Green

In "A Loaf of Bread," Ruth is the wife of beleaguered grocer Harold who cares nothing about the black picketers outside his store and the children's school, but wants only to spare the children grief. She gives Harold a week to have a one-day giveaway, threatening otherwise to take the children and leave him. Ruth is calm throughout the story, responding to Harold's hot protests and arguments, "We will see."

Frank Johnson

In "A Sense of Story," Johnson is a white businessman, manager of Rogers' Auto Service and Supply, murdered in cold blood by a black employee, Robert L. Charles, whom he reportedly blames for preventing the home office from supporting his invention to extend the life of foreign car engines. Witnesses paint Johnson as a color-blind, compassionate man, asking about workers' health and their families, giving them time off for a variety of reasons some employers might consider frivolous, and offering to back their credit applications. Witnesses also describe a meeting with Charles in which Johnson's face changes quickly. No one has seen them argue or fight, but one recalls Johnson telling him Charles has threatened him.

Teddy Johnson ("Eldorado")

In "The Story of a Scar," Teddy is a newcomer to the post office who challenges Billy Crawford for the love of the anonymous female narrator. Teddy, who dresses gaudily, flashes two diamond rings and a gold tooth, has grown wealthy through the numbers and other hustles and just uses the post office job as a front. He talks fast, walks crazy, and stalks women. He is the last true son of the Great McDaddy. The male narrator knows hustling punk. When the female narrator is transferred to night shift, Teddy begins logging overtime to be around during her lunch break, and Red Bone urges her

to consider it must be love for Teddy to work overtime when he does not need the money. On the night Billy storms in demanding she go home with him, Teddy stands up for her and is stabbed trying to disarm Billy after he slashes his ex-girl friend's face from brow to chin. She believes Teddy looks on the scar as other men look at wedding rings.

Alphaeus Jones

In "The Silver Bullet," Jones is the calm bartender eating lunch in Slick's Bar and Grill when Willis Davis shows up to rob him as a test for joining the Henry Street guys. Jones needs no more than a threatening demeanor to get Willis to leave, but when he returns with R.V. Felton, who spells out the conditions of their shake-down, Jones pulls a shotgun and suggests it will take six hours for cops to arrive it he shoots, and he will probably get a medal. Jones holds the gun again when R.V., his hot-headed associate Aubrey, the Henry Street, and hapless Willis converge on the bar. Very much alive, contrary to rumor, Slick handles things and suggests Jones offer everyone a beer, but Jones, a true entrepreneur, demands the punks pay for it.

Jed Jones

In "A Sense of Story," Jones is the mechanic who is first on the murder scene Jones has worked at Rogers' Auto Service ten years and is second in command. Jones, who wants to help his accused coworker, denies race keeps them from being friends. Jones first notices trouble between Charles and Johnson 8 years ago, when Johnson confides to him Charles' lubricant is a bathtub concoction too foolish for Johnson to present to management and, a month later, claims Charles is blaming him for losing his formula and threatens him.

Wilfred ("Inner City") Jones

In "The Story of a Dead Man," Inner City is the second man who Billy Renfro claims is responsible for him losing an eye, Inner City rips off Billy's boss, Floyd Dillingham, who sends Billy to collect the car or the ass. Inner City puts out word he is looking for Billy, and Billy says he will be in Birmingham, where Earline Jones lives. Billy uses a glass and silverware to depict the scene. Mrs. Raymond is swooning, to Billy's joy, as he says Inner City's first shots miss when Billy opens up with his .38. Earline suggests they settle without guns, and earns a punch in the jaw. Billy finishes his tale with the remark someone knew he had to die and next time it might be he.

The Judge

In "A Sense of Story," the anonymous judge is forced to read the transcript of Robert L. Charles' murder trial after the defendant interrupts his attorney's summation and admits he killed Frank Johnson in cold blood. The pipe-smoking, diligent jurist is under pressure from his staff to be prepared for a politically-important judges' conference at 3

PM, but works until the last minute skimming rapidly before confirming the guilty verdict. The judge views himself as a literary critic in the adversarial trial situation.

Toyoniko Kageyama and Yoshitsune Hashima

In "I Am an American," Kageyama and Hashima are Japanese students visiting London and rooming next to Leon and Eunice Foster, who warn them their room may have been burglarized. Leon then goes out of his way to help them file a report with the police. Without money and passports, they cannot catch a connecting flight to Amsterdam and home to Japan on Monday, a bank holiday. Seemingly accepting their loss and working toward a solution rather than rankling about the thief, Kageyama and Hashima visit the Japanese embassy, where they receive temporary passports and emergency money. They meet the Fosters later at Madame Tussaud's, where they smile and bow respectfully. Hashima asks Leon to write his name and address and hopes someday to host him in Tokyo. He hands Leon a packet of Japanese stamps, and Eunice observes the Japanese are part-time Southerners.

Gweneth Lawson

In "Why I Like Country Music," Gweneth is a he ten-year-old beauty with whom the anonymous narrator falls in love in fourth grade, Gweneth is living temporarily in South Carolina with her uncle, coming from Brooklyn, NY. She breaks myths about how Northern blacks look down on Southern provincialisms. All of the boys moon over Gweneth, who realizes her popularity, but the author's chief rival is Leon Pugh. Decades later, the narrator remembers sitting behind Gweneth six hours a day, watching how her rich brown neck is set off by long, swaying braids, colorful ribbons, and the white of her Peter Pan collar. These, her brown eyes, and the scent of fresh cut lemons that surround her win his heart, but Mrs. Boswell teams Gweneth with Leon. At the May Day celebration, Gweneth outshines all the other girls, a vision in red and white that appear to float in the air. The boys marvel at her smile and the narrator yearns to have her on his arm. Gweneth, of course, ends up dancing with him, and the scent of lemon decades later still makes him think of her, though they never meet again.

Paul Lindenberry

In "A Sense of Story," Lindenberry is a young assistant district attorney prosecuting Robert L. Charles for murder. Lindenberry has a habit of leading witnesses and is frustrated by the latitude given the defense by the judge in what should be a cut-and-dried case.

Lester Maltz

In "Widows and Orphans," Maltz is the thin, elderly keynote speaker, obviously successful if not wealthy, like a good teacher, realizes his audience consists of marginal

winners in a game they do not understand and tries to explain their prosperity to them. Maltz reminds Louis of Cesar Romero.

Corliss Milford

In "Problems of Art," Milford is Mary Farragot's white attorney. Milford is uncomfortable sitting in thin, severe, orderly apartment, waiting for her to return from an errand. The living room seems like a sound stage, too calculated. Milford particularly dislikes the Sacred Heart of Jesus painting, which lacks any suggestion of mystery and surely cannot elevate a poor black woman's miserable life. Milford is assigned the case by his firm, Brown and Barlow's Project Gratis, after she campaigns two weeks for a white lawyer. Milford hears her friend and neighbor, Clarence Winfield, tell in colorful detail what he has witnessed, and prepares them both for the just-the-facts question-and-answers they should expect during the hearing. Milford catches the complaining officer on a technicality and congratulates himself on controlling the chaotic situation, Only after the hearing does he learn his client is partial to bourbon and had certainly been drinking that very hot night.

Mickey Norris

In "The Faithful," Mickey is a sly young boy who endures joking from his buddies over the close-cropped hair he wears so he can plays hooky from school and shine shoes for $3.50 a week in John Butler's dying barbershop. When Butler briefly considers giving Afros to restore his business, Mickey tells him it is easy. Let it grow, put some stuff on it, and keep it even. Mickey looks like a bettor in a fixed poker game watching silently as Butler gives Tommy Gilmore not an Afro, but a haircut that makes him look like a "plantation Negro," and brings his father in, threatening to shut down both the barbershop and church.

Otis Piknett

In "A Sense of Story," Plinkett testifies he vividly recalls feeling uneasy 5-6 years ago when Robert L. Charles approaches Frank Johnson's desk and asks, "Is it time?" Hearing it is not, Charles leaves, smiling, not angry, but his eyes are popping out. Four years ago, Piknett tells Charles he wants to lay out an annoying customer. Charles nods towards Johnson's office and says he would like to do the same thing. Pinkett, knows how to get along and advises Charles, to find another job because Charles, whom he wants to help, puts himself in positions calculated to cause friction with Johnson, not following orders, making repairs too slowly. Folks like that have to be knocked back into their place.

Ray Powell

In "The Faithful," Ray is the fat second barber argues for adapting to the times and offering Afros, and when Butler rejects the idea, sadly moving to a new parlor on 145th St., because he has a family to support. Butler hopes his luck will improve with Ray gone, but Ray insists it has nothing to do with luck. Barber schools do not even teach the down-home cuts Butler stubbornly insists on. Trimming will make money. Ray locks his mouth against any more hot words.

Leon Pugh

In "Why I Like Country Music," Leon is a fourth-grade know-it-all and the anonymous narrator's chief rival for the affections of beautiful Gweneth Lawson. Leon's view is girls like it when boys blow their own horns loudly. Leon's art projects and presents are first-rate. Gweneth sits by him on the bus, and Mrs. Boswell partners Leon with Gweneth for square dancing. Leon learns the steps and beams with pride in his conquest, but errs by including real spurs in his magnificent cowboy outfit, which he cannot remove fast enough to take the floor when Mrs. Boswell bans them. The narrator, thus, gets the girl and learns to love country music and square dancing for life.

Big Boy Ralston

In "Problems of Art," Ralston is a violently tempered bank security guard who lives on Mrs. Farragot's block. Ralston regularly gets into fights on Friday nights. Coming home from work in his prized red Buick Electra, Ralston is annoyed by someone honking to be let out of his parking space, exits his vehicle, but is disappointed when his opponent flees. Farragot, who has run out of her house in her pajamas to move her car up to let the man out, backs slowly into her old parking spot, scraping the Buick. Ralston lays into her with foul language and someone calls the police. Ralston goes nose-to-nose with the white cop, who assumes being called to this neighborhood means someone has been murdered, but his black partner turns attention on Farragot.

Chelseia Raymond

In "The Story of a Dead Man," Chelseia is the narrator's fiancye, a cultured fourth-generation Chicagoan, who from the start is suspicious of cousin Billy when he visits her parents' home. Her father, a retired redcap at Union Station unable to make better use of his two degrees, perennially laments how young people have too few opportunities and loves to tell stories of the old days, much to his wife's chagrin. Mr. Raymond bonds with tough Billy over bourbon until William is forced to escort his cousin out of the house. Chelseia insists the "common *street nigger"* is free to visit their home but refuses to cook for him.

Betty Reed

In "A Loaf of Bread," Betty is the militant strike leader's wallflower wife who finds the Old Testament message of vengeance more realistic than Christ's swift rise. On Saturday, Betty is the first customer to enter Harold Green's grocery store and is told her loaf of bread is free today, the first step in the day-long giveaway Ruth Green insists he hold, but Harold has vowed to resist. The picketers arrive, are told everything is free, and with the shelves bare, Nelson Reed returns to pay for Betty's loaf.

Nelson Reed

In "A Loaf of Bread," Nelson is an assembly-line worker, steady husband, father of three, and Baptist deacon, who becomes an instant hero leading the picketing against Harold Green's grocery store for setting prices higher in his store in a black neighborhood than in others in white areas. After a life of trusting in God, Nelson realizes he has been wrong. Only money matters in this world, and Jesus does not appear on the dollar bill. People laugh nervously at this line, and an alderman invites Nelson to a talk show where, he proclaims his belief in Justice (capital "J") and threatens *H*ell to the *G*reedy and *E*vil. The talk-show host laughs and the movement swells to where a theater must be rented for a rally. There, Nelson enflames the crowd by declaring average men must risk pain to become true men. Nelson reluctantly meets Harold privately but declines to review his books. Nelson knows only he is working too hard to see his money slip through his fingers through thievery. He resents being asked to put himself in Harold's shoes. When Harold opens his store to the picketers to take anything they want for free, they clear the shelves in under half an hour. Nelson returns to pay for his wife's loaf of bread, putting himself in now-ruined Harold's shoes.

William ("Billy") Renfro

In "The Story of a Dead Man," Billy is the cousin of the narrator, William Warner. One-eyed Billy tracks down blacks that default on their car loans to a Dillingham Automotives, Inc., a job no white man will take. Liberal Floyd Dillingham gets Billy paroled from his life sentence for murder because he has a reputation for ruthlessness that strikes fear in often-violent deadbeats. The cousins diverge at age 16, when Billy falls in with older boys, loses self-restraint, and impregnates an experienced girl. Billy is forced to drive a garbage truck to support the baby and turns into a sullen, cynical loner. When Billy's mother throws him out of her home, he settles with his common-law wife, and child in a part of town William dreads. When Billy kills a man who insults his wife, he lands on a road gang in at Harper's farm with death as his only goal in life. Working for Dillingham takes him all over the United States, and in Chicago, he visits his up-and-coming cousin William, tells him his lies, and is introduced to William's future in-laws, the Raymonds. Once the bourbon appears, Billy drops his feigned civility and swaps tales with Mr. Raymond, shocking Mrs. Raymond and William's fiancye Chelseia. Billy now tells the family William has rejected him, but Billy is welcome in their home because

family does not turn its back on family. Billy has a kind heart that may some day be rehabilitated.

Clair Richards

In "Widows and Orphans," Clair is the honoree and master of ceremonies at testimonial dinner for the Progressive Association of Greater Watts, Clair is a successful businesswomen perhaps on the verge of a political career. At the table with her proud mother sit Clair's former teacher and ex-fiancy, Louis Clayton, and two family friends. Clair is tough and relentlessly tests the toughness of others. She is like a pretty bulldog and Louis used to pat her on the head to cool her anger. Someone has hurt her deeply and Clair has closed herself off. A birthday present to herself, inscribed, "Happy Birthday, My Dearest, Darling, Me!" shows narcissism. Clair sweeps into Louis' classroom surrounded by California mystery. Louis remembers her cavorting in the snow, laughing giddy-gay like no one he has known. She is always breathless, bursting with energy, and intriguingly carefree, but as a student is disorganized and unfocused. Louis tries to help her by witty comments on her essays and discussions in his office, When she flies out of O'Hare a year earlier, Clair has already grown less animated, but claims she still loves Louis, but fears she is too complex for him to understand. By the time Louis flies in, marveling at the sense of space during the nighttime approach, Clair has changed more. She wears sequins, halter-tops, and much makeup. She drives Louis to Hollywood in her convertible and stares at the prints outside Grauman's, while Louis watches the mixture of street folk and tourists. After their breakup, some time after a tantrum during a fashion crisis, Clair apparently handles her issues and becomes a solid businesswoman. She winks at Louis, which raises his hopes of rekindling love, but she recognizes him publicly only as her former teacher, deflating his ego..

Dominion Richards

In "Widows and Orphans," Dominion appears only in an old, discolored print more Indian than African, a product of Virginia, Detroit, and Los Angeles. He dies when Clair is a baby.

Viola Richards

In "Widows and Orphans," Mrs. Richards is the proud mother of Clair, the honoree at a testimonial dinner by the Progressive Association of Greater Watts, Richards wishes Clair's romance with Louis Clayton, her companion at table, had worked out. She does not like seeing Clair lonely. When Louis asks if she is close with anyone now, Mrs. Richards laughs quietly that Clair has been close to no one in her life. Acknowledged as the key to Clair's success, Richards declares, trembling, "That there's my heart up there," the child she has slaved to put through school and give things she never enjoyed. A nice white woman she once worked for said Clair is too pretty not to be

great, and that becomes her solace and inspiration. Tonight, she is the happiest mother in the world.

Orion W. Rogers

In "A Sense of Story," Rogers owns Rogers' Auto Service and Supply, and characterizes the murdered Frank Johnson as a loving man who, before it occurs to Rogers, pushes to hire blacks. Rogers cannot recall if defendant Robert L. Charles is among those hires but recognizes him as someone who frequently runs errands to the main office. Rogers cannot recall Johnson talking about Charles' invention, but is certain Johnson would encourage him. Rogers says Charles' talent does not match his ambitions, a potentially dangerous situation for prima donnas who blame others for their shortcomings. Rogers' ex-secretary reminds him about Charles' causing a disturbance 9 years earlier, which the judge excludes as hearsay.

Bertha Roy

In "The Silver Bullet," Bertha is Slick's Bar and Grill's cook who every day carries bag lunches to the ladies at Martha's Beauty Salon down the block. Willis Davis knows Bertha is his aunt's neighbor and wants to avoid her as he shakes down the bar. Bertha insists his momma should give him a good whipping.

Lloyd Scion

In "A Sense of Story," Scion is the arresting officer who testifies about finding victim Frank Johnson lying in a pool of blood in his office, with defendant Robert L. Charles sitting on the desk, holding the murder weapon, and Jed Jones standing by the door. Scion reports Charles submits without a word, having no fight in him.

Otis S. Smothers

In "Problems of Art," Smothers is the tall, dignified, olive-skinned complaining officer who steps into an already tense situation only worsened by his white partner's assumption it is a murder scene. Called to testify at Mary Farragot's license revocation hearing, Smothers delivers a masterfully concise statement, but cruelly mimics Farragot's declaration "I ain't go'n do nothing." Attorney Milford gets Smothers to admit he failed to offer Farragot the prescribed options for sobriety testing before being hauling her off to jail in her pajamas. Smothers glares at the outcome and is then reprimanded over procedures.

Rev. Tarwell

In "The Faithful," Tarwell is a rival preacher to Rev. Butler, who on 138th St. offers what people want to hear. It is rumored Tarwell will have himself crucified at Easter Sunrise Service and preach from the cross. He preaches like the old South, for which many are homesick. Butler rejects the idea of becoming Tarwell's assistant pastor to free him to enter politics.

Thomas the Insurance Agent

In "A Loaf of Bread," Thomas is beleaguered grocer Harold Green's college educated, philosophic brother-in-law, who helps him plan a strategy. On analogy with how he sells policies by convincing clients to face reality, Thomas urges Harold to explain the economics of fair price setting and showing them respect.

Dr. Walter R. Thorne

In "A Sense of Story," Thorne is resident psychologist at the state mental hospital, who testifies about Robert L. Charles' mental makeup during his murder trial. Thorne first notes Thorne's formative years in segregated, violent, Virginia, and traumatic, abrupt dislocation to Detroit. Thorne sees no signs in Charles family of influence from a maladjusted personality and Charles is regular coming to work and singing in his church choir. Charles appears to live an adjusted, stable life. Thorne summarizes a few studies about paranoia in black males, which he discounts, while allowing room for chance. Thorne does not believe Charles acts out of paranoid fear in shooting Johnson.

Daniel Valentine

In "Elbow Room," Daniel is the large-framed, Indian-featured father of Virginia, who smiles nervously at her wedding to white Paul Frost, a union he has tried unsuccessfully to prevent. During the reception, Daniel offers cigars but is ill at ease, and feels obliged to tell the black narrator he has always assumed color is the highest bond, but his daughter disagrees. Daniel has warned Paul against treating his daughter as a plaything, knowing from experience biracial intimacy can lead to this. The narrator cannot tell Daniel Ginny has inwardly left his conventional world long ago. Watching the newlyweds hold hands, Daniel concedes they are a fine couple.

William Warner

In "The Story of a Dead Man," William is the narrator who graduates college and leaves the South for Chicago as the first step in a 30-year plan he sees ending with living the good life in Los Angeles married to his current fiancye, Chelseia Raymond. William's life diverges from his cousin Billy's at age 16, when Billy begins the downward spiral that

leads to a life-sentence for murder, while William continues school, goes to church, learns social skills, and cares for Billy's crippled mother, Mama Love until her death. In Chicago, he begins work in the credit reference section of the Melrose Department Store and is gradually moving up. William worries about his long-lost cousin, paroled from prison to repossess cars , who shows up one day at William's office. They meet at a bar next day, William begging his cousin to stop lying about his life, and dresses him up to meet Chelseia - and, unexpectedly, her parents. William tries to keep the conversation safe, but once the bourbon comes out, loses control as Mr. Raymond and Billy form an evil union. Billy now spreads rumors through the family that he is not welcome in William and Chelseia's home, but this is a lie. William will not turn family away and holds hope his cousin will reform.

Ruby Watson

In "The Story of a Dead Man," Ruby is the hard-hearted widow in Eufaula, GA, who Billy Renfro first claims is responsible for him losing an eye, Ruby feeds Billy white pills supposed to make him smarter, but they turn out to be jackrabbit feces. Billy hands her his gun to prove he is a man and slugs her in the chin. Billy laughingly tells his cousin, the narrator William Warner, Ruby kills him and now he is on the road again, repossessing cars.

Dr. Wayland

In "The Story of a Scar," Wayland is reputedly an excellent doctor but frequently tardy about appointments. In his waiting room the male and female narrators chat, he waiting for bandages to be removed from reconstructive surgery on his nose and she hoping something can be done with the brow-to-chin scar she wears after a slashing and turkey trussing. Another doctor has refused to touch her.

Harriet Wilson

In "Problems of Art," Wilson is the pink-faced, silver/blond-haired, pleasingly plump Hearing Officer Wilson must overcome a fascination with witness Clarence Winfield's red handkerchief to get down to work. Wilson clearly commiserates with the circumstances of Mary Farragot's DUI arrest, and admonishes the arresting officer for failing to obey the statutes strictly in determining intoxication.

Clarence Winfield

In "Problems of Art," Winfield is Mary Farragot's cross-the-street neighbor and witness Winfield a heavy-set, broad-shouldered, middle-aged brown-skinned man, who, like his friend, knows by experience blacks must speak good English for white people to understand them. Winfield is a "down-home" type who talks around a point, but he convinces Farragot's attorney circumstances on the night of her arrest outweigh sterile

facts. After the hearing, at which Winfield is not required to testify, he tells her attorney has often warned Farragot about drinking, but it had been a very hot night, so she almost certainly had been enjoying her bourbon.

Objects/Places

Brown and Barlow's Project Gratis

In "Problems of Art," Project Gratis is a Los Angeles law firm that assigns attorney Corliss Milford to defend Mrs. Farragot during her license suspension hearing over a recent DUI after she insists on white representation for two weeks.

Dillingham Automotives, Inc.

In "The Story of a Dead Man," Dillingham Automotives, Inc., is the Atlanta-based, white-owned company that employs Billy Renfro to track down blacks who default on their car loans. No white man will take the job and Dillingham wants someone with a reputation for ruthlessness to strike fear in often-violent deadbeats, and Billy has been convicted of murder and only recently had his life sentence paroled. The work takes Billy as far as New York California, Detroit, and Baton Rouge, and places him in several life-threatening situations.

The Germans

In "Just Enough for the City," the Germans are proselytizers who pretend to be humble and choose their words carefully. Their young leader talks about his particular prophet and promises the usual remedies, but fails to understand the narrator's point about how most groups find their greatest success among blacks. The schedule-bound Germans insist on visiting when only senior citizens are home but refuse to interrupt their communion with televisions. The narrator lets them in, but they are ill prepared to debate, having only conceptual faith that cannot define love, which is what he searches for. The narrator offers a parable. A young man intent on suicide, whose answer the missionaries cannot provide without looking in their Bibles, and the Germans depart, never to return.

Lester's Grill

In "Just Enough for the City," Lester's Grill becomes the anonymous narrators lunch place after his favorite waitress in another restaurant is unfairly fired. Lester's Grill is run by a Chinese couple, precise Lester who cooks and lovely Doris who serves and sings along with Muzak. There, an insurance salesman eating beside the narrator claims the world is a mess because the "Big Boys" are mad and cause suffering to teach people there is no such thing as a free lunch. The narrator dismisses this as he does the proselytizing of the theists. During another lunchtime, the narrator sees a trio of gaudy and grotesque people served greasy meals, at which they gaze with love and bow their heads in unison. Fearing he feels the love he has been trying to understand, the narrator turns away.

Limehouse, SC

In "The Story of a Dead Man" Limehouse, SC, is the small town between Atlanta, GA, and Charleston, SC, where Billy Renfro claims to have lost his left eye fighting a redneck. Billy stops at the general store to buy an orange soda, but the white supremacist owner refuses him service and Billy draws his .22 too slowly. Billy must withdraw and drive away to the sounds of gunfire and rebel yells. Returning from his successful repossession mission, Billy again thirsts for an orange soda, slips in unnoticed, holds his .22 ready at the counter, and this time he fires off shots and gives a swamp cry as he heads for Atlanta.

The Progressive Association of Greater Watts

In "Widows and Orphans," the Progressive Association of Greater Watts is the organization holding a banquet honoring Clair Richards. Its all-black membership of successful businessmen is addressed by a white professor, determined to help them understand the reasons behind their prosperity.

The Redeemer's Friends

In "Just Enough for the City," the Redeemer's Friends look sheepish, but are self-righteous and smug. They are more direct than competing proselytists. Anything not in the Bible is false, and God has said openly what he will do at the end of time. The anonymous narrator respect this but teases them, believing as a realist one must accept evil has its rights and virtue can be as clumsy as evil is vigilant, both adding to the world's store of cripples. The Redeemer's Friends send in reinforcements in the form of a stout and very black woman, who declares false religions will crumble before the Redeemer. The narrator finds her lack of doubt irritating, and offers a parable they cannot answer, but vow to visit again when the narrator is in a better mood. The narrator loves the Redeemer's Friends' steadfastness and admits with the earlier ministers a much more mature white minister who defers to the black woman as she prepares to confront the narrator's latest foolishness. The narrator offers another parable that convinces them he is hop less and they leave happily.

Rogers' Auto Service and Supply

In "A Sense of Story," Rogers' is the Detroit auto repair shop where conflict over one mechanic's invention of a lubricant to extend the life of foreign cars apparently leads to his murdering his boss. The shop is one of three owned by a white man, Orion W. Rogers, who integrates his work force years earlier at the white manager's - the deceased - recommendation. There are no traces of racial strife in the shop, although socializing does not extend to visiting one another's homes.

Second Calvary Church

In "The Faithful," Second Calvary Church is pastored by the Rev. John Butler, whose sermons are stuck in such a rut that parishioners are straying to Rev. Tarwell's church on 138th St., where they like what they hear. It is rumored Tarwell may have himself crucified at Easter Sunrise Service and preach from the cross. He preaches like the old South, for which many are homesick. Butler is obsessed with a single theme, delivered in a comfortable chant, about biblical examples of family dysfunction. He finds it hard to get an "Amen" from his hearers.

Slick's Bar and Grill

In "The Silver Bullet," Slick's Bar and Grill provides the setting for much of the action. It is run by Alphaeus Jones in the absence of the owner, who some say has died of TB in New Jersey, but at any rate has not been seen in years. It is also said the bar is protected by the rackets. Willis Davis is sent to knock the bar over as an admission test to the Henry Street guys, but is backed down by Jones. When Willis returns with R.V. Felton to spell out the conditions of the shakedown, Jones trains a shotgun on them and they leave. Willis is ready to apologize to Jones when R.V. and his hot-tempered associate Auburn show up to look at the books, the Henry Street guys show up to protect their territory, and Slick, very much alive, steps in to convince everyone to leave his premises alone.

Themes

Regionalism

Implicit or explicit the twelve diverse stories in *Elbow Room* is the fact of a cultural and emotional gap between black Americans in the urban North and those remaining in the homelands of the South. This gap is a function of time, expressed in generations, since a given family departs the South and manifests itself in Northern condescension. For individuals, the movement from a easy-going rural life marred by strict segregation and violence, to an impersonal, mechanical environment is shown as sufficiently traumatic to create a murderer. Another ymigry to Chicago, bent on a successful career in the white world, takes care to purge his speech of all southernisms. Several stories show ymigrys to Northern cities settle in clumps defined by their ancestral roots not in Africa but in the southern states, and even form churches with a distinctive regional flavor (viz., Virginia vs. South Carolina). "A Sense of Story" states clearly, under oath as it were, ymigrys from Roanoke, Birmingham, Charleston, Macon, Durham, and thousands of little towns keep close contact with their hometowns, and those with common state affinities ally under a larger umbrella. Conversely, Northern black attain mythical status among those who stay in the South, as people of progress and enlightenment, tempered by their newfound haughtiness. The opening story, "Why I like Country Music," establishes the theme by showing Northerners do not share the educational ramifications of Reconstruction, where Dixie and Yankee are unnaturally combined.

Race

Implicit or explicit the twelve diverse stories in *Elbow Room* is race. All are by and about blacks and show little more than irritation at being exploited or discriminated against by the majority white population. More frequent than comments about whites at large are comments about specific subgroups (German- and Greek-Americans, Britons, and Jews, all exploitative), and other minority groups (Chicanos - sullen service workers). An Arab immigrant is curiously described in passing as well on his way to becoming white. Asian stereotypes (demeanor, dress, and ubiquitous cameras) are discussed in "I Am an American" by a black married couple vacationing in London, and the wife calls her husband a black bigot. Most frequent, however, are passages suggesting blacks differentiate one another by the depth and hue of skin tone. Almost every character is described as almond-, peanut-, or yellow-toned, some degree of brown, or in testimony given in. "A Sense of Story," a black witness describes the defendant as black as the ace of spades. Discrimination or enmity is never suggested in these descriptions. Scattered incidents of red necked white racism are depicted, but the word "nigger" is used exclusively by blacks referring to other blacks, and in "Elbow Room," a major theme is what it means to be a "nigger." The black protagonist prides in the term and sees it as inevitable her baby define him/herself as black or white. If white, she says, the child will be blind to the world and, if black, self-blinded.

Religion

Implicit or explicit the twelve diverse stories in *Elbow Room* is religion, always there in the milieu, but generally reduced to religious pictures on living room walls and similar details. In four stories, however, religion forms a major thread, however. "The Faithful" shows two black congregations, separated in "style" by the origins in the South of the urban congregants and their pastors. Alabaman Rev. John Butler at declining Second Calvary Church draws conclusions from Biblical stories (several long excerpts of his preaching are quoted), while rival Rev. Tarwell's church on 138th St., is alive with what people want to hear. It is rumored Tarwell may have himself crucified at Easter Sunrise Service and preach from the cross. He preaches like the old South, for which many are homesick, and it is hinted he has joined the Social Gospel movement. In "A Loaf of Bread," a Baptist deacon becomes leader of a strike against price-discrimination by a neighborhood grocery store and discovers following the Christian "turn the other cheek" and "the last shall be first and the first shall be last" has only held him - and the black community - back economically.

In "Just Enough for the City," various devout individuals, Christian, Muslim, and ad hoc prophet-based, work to proselytize the black community. Catholics and Mormon have given up, but teams of Germans and the Redeemer's Friends knock doors and talk to people. Neither group can answer real-life questions from the narrator without referring to their Bibles for proof-texts, which merely insult his critical mind. Only a motley family praying over their food in a public setting suggests to the narrator they understand love. Finally, in "A Sense of Story," a pastor is unwilling to judge whether a parishioner on trial for murder is a good Christian, but does vouch for him as a regular churchgoer and member of the choir. He points out that blacks across the South celebrate great events by drinking and firing guns, which suggests to the defendant's white attorney a possible means of reducing the charge to manslaughter.

Style

Point of View

Elbow Room consists of twelve diverse stories sharing no common point of view. "Why I like Country Music" and "The Story of a Dead Man" are attempts by narrators intent on setting another character straight on events and/or conditions of the past. These stories, therefore, alternate between first-person present and third person past. "The Story of a Scar" is a first-person, past tense story within a story, with an anonymous male telling about the experience of listening to an anonymous female victim of a slashing tell her harrowing tale. "Widows and Orphans" and "Just Enough for the City" are told in the first-person past tense, and the remaining stories are told in an impersonal third person past. All of the narrators are black and most of the conflicts are among blacks. Whites have major roles in "Problems of Art" and "A Loaf of Bread," but only in the final story, "Elbow Room," is a white character central and the question of race openly engaged.

Setting

Elbow Room consists of twelve diverse stories sharing no common setting, but all narrated in the era of the Vietnam War and the rioting following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. "Why I like Country Music" takes place in affluent New York City, but discusses rural South Carolina as it was a long lifetime ago. "The Story of a Dead Man" is told from affluent Chicago, but recounts events and conditions in the rural South and a variety of places across the United States. "The Silver Bullet," "The Faithful," and "Just Enough for the City" are set in non-specific urban settings. "Problems of Art" and "Widows and Orphans" are both set in Los Angeles, the former in a modest apartment and DMV hearing room, and the latter in an opulent banquet hall, recalling events in Chicago. "The Story of a Scar" is set in a Detroit surgeon's waiting room but relates the build-up to violence in a branch post office. "I Am an American" is set in London, England, in a seedy tourist hotel and bobby stations. Finally "Elbow Room." Is set in Oakland and San Francisco, CA.

Language and Meaning

Elbow Room consists of twelve diverse stories generally told in standard American English. Specific words and phrases drawn from Southern dialect are sprinkled irregularly throughout. "The Story of a Scar," being told by the female victim of a slashing to what she believes is a "typical" male, is told vividly forcefully in the victim's natural dialect, as is the eye-witness testimony in "Problems of Art," where the defendant warns her neighbor to speak correctly, lest white officials ignore what he has to say. "I Am an American," set in England, involves communicating with British natives and visiting Japanese tourists. The bulk of "A Sense of Story" is a court transcript in

proper legalese, incorporating testimony from black and white Southern witnesses telling their stories naturally.

Structure

Elbow Room is an anthology of twelve independent and utterly diverse stories, "Why I like Country Music," "The Story of a Dead Man," "The Silver Bullet," "The Faithful," "Problems of Art," "The Story of a Scar," "I Am an American," "Widows and Orphans," "A Loaf of Bread," "Just Enough for the City," "A Sense of Story," and "Elbow Room." Common themes such as black diversity, overt and covert racial differentiation (including, but not prominently, discrimination and racism), and religion run through the stories, but in no way unify them. Most of the stories are told chronologically, with flashbacks to events that set up and provide context for the main narrative.

Quotes

"But Gweneth Lawson was above regional idealization. Though I might have loved her partly because she was a Northerner, I loved her more because of the world of colors that seemed to be suspended above her head. I loved her glowing forehead and I loved her bright, dark brown eyes; I loved the black braids, the red and blue and sometimes yellow and pink ribbons; I loved the way the deep, rich brown of her neck melted into the pink or white cloth of her Peter Pan collar; I loved the lemony vapor on which she floated and from which, on occasion, she seemed to be inviting me to be buoyed up, up, up into her happy world." Why I like Country Music, pg. 13.

"'One of us knowed he had to die,' he announced calmly. 'Next time, it might be *me.*' "'You common *street nigger!'* Chelseia shouted. "Billy held his naked arm toward me as if he were a ringmaster introducint an act. 'And this here's my cousin William,' he told Chelseia. "Mrs. Raymond shuddered and rushed from the room. "And then there came a burst of wild, almost hysterical laughter. But this was not Billy. I turned and saw Mr. Raymond. His bald head was bent almost into his empty plate. He seemed to be shedding tears." The Story of a Dead Man, pg. 54.

"The man laughed. He closed his eyes and kept the laugh suppressed in his throat. He laughed this way for almost a minute. 'You hustlers kill me,' he said at last. 'All that big talk and you still think a black man can't have no balls without being in the rackets." The Silver Bullet, pgs. 74-75.

" 'There's old slick Jacob now, a-crawlin' in to blind Isaac's beside underneath the *fleece* of a wild and woolly animal; and Esau standin' outside the door, just a-weepin' away. Next to him is old rebellious Absalmon, up in an *oak* tree, singin' by his hair with Joab ridin' *down* on him. Just okk at that boy cuss. I want to cut him down, Church, but I ain't got the strength. My arm is raised up to him, but my *razor's* kind of rusty. So can I git an *amenover here...*?'" The Faithful, pg. 80.*"*

"In his imagination Milford had long conceded the possibility of a beer. But what was that on a hot night? He now said this to Winfield, as he bent to drink. "Clarence Winfield chuckled. 'Many, Miss Mary don't drink no *beer!'* He leaned close to Milford's ear. 'She don't drink nothin' but Maker's Mark.' He laughed again. 'I thought you *knowed* that.'" Problems of Art, pg. 116.

"Something aristocratic and old and frighteningly wise seemed to have awakened in her face. 'Now this is the way it happened,' she fired at me, her eyes wide and rolling. 'I want you to *write* it on whatever part of your brain that ain't already covered with page print. I want you to *remember* it every time you stare at a scarred-up sister on the street, and *choke* on it before you can work up spit to condemn her.'" The Story of a Scar, pg. 129.

"'All you have to do is *look* at them.' Eunice told me. 'Japanese are like upper-class people down home. They don't look around much because they *know* who they are in

relation to everybody else.' "'Bullshit,' I said. 'They're Chinese. Whoever saw a Japanese without cameras?' "'Leroy, you're a black bigot,' Eunice told me. 'And a *dumb* one at that,' she added. I Am an American, pg. 147.

"Louis retained the rhythm of a good many women, but he could not remember Clair in this way. He tried very hard while watching her, but nothing resembling passion recalled itself to his conscious mind. He recalled only an image of her full-breasted shadow, floating on the wall of his dark bedroom. The tome of the shadow grew sharp and then hazy, as the orange glow of her cigarette brightened and dimmed between her lips. This image, and a single sentence, 'What do you want from me?', closed out all he could remember of her passion." Widows and Orphans, pgs. 166-167.

"The assembly-line worker looked unabashedly into the camera and said, 'I have always believed in *Justice* with a capital *J*. I was raised up from a baby believin' that God ain't gonna let nobody go *too far.* See, in *my* mind god is in charge of *all* the capital letters in the alphabet of this world. It say in the Scripture He is Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. He is just about the *onliest* capitalizer they is.' Both Reed and the alderman laughed." A Loaf of Bread, pg. 190.

"The Redeemer's Friends do not give up on a soul. They always come back with reinforcements. This time the young minister brings a stout black woman with him. She is not really black: she is the color of cinnamon on a brown hardwood table. She glares accusingly around my living room at the books, papers, and whiskey glasses. In her manner is the earned authority of the South." Just Enough for the City, pg. 220.

" 'I submit that he is an illiterate Southern black, socialized in an environment of violence, who possesses a single skill. He is a man who acted out of motives beyond the competence of this witness, and of most white people, to know.'" A Sense of Story, pg. 239.

"Paul laughed again. 'This is *real* life,' he told me. But he was getting a little drunk. He sipped his wine and said, 'In this house we pay close attention to reality. By public definition Ginny is black, but in fact she's a hybrid of African, European, and Indian bloodlines. Out in the world she roughhouses, but here at home she's gentle and sweet. Before anybody else she pretends to be tough, but with me she's a softy. It took me a long time to understand these contradictions, and it'll take my family longer. My father has a very unsubtle, orderly mind. I'm willing to wait. I see my marriage as an investment in the future. When my father has mellowed some, I'll take my wife home. As I said, *I* don't have to worry.'" Elbow Room, pg. 269.

Topics for Discussion

How are Chicanos portrayed in these stories?

What is the key to success in preaching to the black community?

In what ways is the word "nigger" used in these stories? What weight does it carry in various contexts?

What forms of black bigotry are shown in these stories?

How are the effects of Reconstruction and the Civil Rights movement indicated in these stories?

With which character do you most identify? Why?

Must, as the last story suggests, all whites be blind, and all blacks self-blinded? Substantiate your answer from at least two stories other than "Elbow Room."