

The Turner House Study Guide

The Turner House by Angela Flournoy

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

[The Turner House Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Plot Summary.....4](#)

[Trouble in the Big Room.....6](#)

[Week One: Swelling Bellies and Wedding Tulle.....9](#)

[Week One: Almost a Quorum and Motor City, Friday Night.....12](#)

[Week One: One North and Two South.....15](#)

[Week Two - Spring 2008: It Sure Ain't Free and Outta the Fields.....17](#)

[Week Two - Spring 2008: Memories and Far From Any Pulpit and Better Than a Burlap Sack \(Fall 1944\).....21](#)

[Week Three - Spring 2008: Downtown Sunlight and This Was The Surprise.....24](#)

[Week Three - Spring 2008: Enter Doubt and Corned Beef and Cabbage.....27](#)

[Week Three - Winter 1945: A Life To Get On With and Gotham in Detroit.....30](#)

[Week Four - Spring 2008: The Lucky Boy and Addiction is Real.....33](#)

[Week Four - Spring 2008: Sometimes It's Gotta Be You and A Typecast She Couldn't Shake...36](#)

[Week Four - Spring 2008: A Prudent Wife is From the Lord and Let Her Say Yes.....39](#)

[Week Four - Spring 2008: Brave, or at Least Brash; One Thing Was Clear; and Playing For Time.....42](#)

[Week Four - Spring 2008: Where the Turners Had Been Known; Up; and The First and the Last45](#)

[Week Four - Spring 2008: A Real Soldier's Return \(Spring 1945\) and Quitting Time \(Spring 1945\).....48](#)

[Week Five - Spring 2008: When The End Is Near; A Multiple-Man Operation; and Leverage...50](#)

[Week Five - Spring 2008: To Let Go Or To Hang On; An Old Man In Faded Slacks; and How Three Went North.....53](#)

[Week Five - Spring 2008: Losing The Call; Every Turner Dances; and For Better Things.....56](#)

[Characters.....59](#)



[Symbols and Symbolism..... 66](#)

[Settings..... 69](#)

[Themes and Motifs..... 72](#)

[Styles..... 78](#)

[Quotes..... 80](#)



Plot Summary

The Turner House by Angela Flournoy is a novel that follows Francis and Viola Turner as they find their way out of the poverty of sharecropping in Arkansas to Detroit where they eventually raise a family of thirteen children, most of them in a house on Yarrow Street - a house with more room than anywhere they'd ever lived before and that gave them hope for the future.

In 1958, Francis and Viola's eldest son Charles encountered a spirit or 'haint' that tried to drag him out of the window. Charles was 14 and he'd just decided to take over a small whatnot room to give himself space from his many siblings at night when the haint attacked. He fought back. Francey, the oldest girl finally dragged him out of the room. When his father comes, summoned by the commotion, the haint is gone and he tells Charles in no uncertain terms that haints don't exist in Detroit and based on his experience, they didn't. Charles sees the haint again in his life but he doesn't learn about his father's experiences until his mother finally admits the truth after she'd begun living with him and his wife Tina, too old to live on her own in the Yarrow Street house, which now sat empty.

The empty house is fortuitous for Lelah, the youngest of the thirteen Turner siblings who struggles with an addiction to gambling. Suspended from her job for borrowing money from many of her co-workers, Lelah has also been evicted for non-payment of rent; the bailiffs standing in her living room as she grabs what she can. She drives to the house on Yarrow and stays there for a time, taking her grandson Bobby to the library while her daughter Brianne is at work.

In 1944, as a younger man, Francis Turner was on the path to priesthood, living in the church under the guidance of Reverend Tufts. His mother sent money regularly for his care and he grew up in service to the church. Having lost his father early in life, Francis often felt abandoned so when he began to see a specter on a regular basis, he believed it was his father. He had no fear and likened it to the angel Gabriel when he finally told Reverend Tufts about it but his honesty is his undoing. Reverend Tufts had asked him why he felt he had a calling to the church. Rather than give him a spiritual diatribe, Francis told him about the 'angel' he regularly saw. Unfortunately, Reverend Tufts had no patience for the supernatural despite the fact that the bible is full of similar instances. Instead of advancing his charge into the priesthood, Reverend Tufts sends him to Detroit with a bland introduction to the pastor there. Francis' young wife Viola and their son Charles are left behind. Francis reads the letter and is much too proud to go to a new church and beg for a position in the hopes it will lead to something so instead, he looks for work and finds a place to stay.

Francis falls off the rails for a time. He sleeps with the woman who runs the boarding house – Odella Withers, but when her husband unexpectedly returns from the war, Francis finds himself alone again. He realizes that ignoring his wife and young son is a mistake and saves up enough money to return and bring them back to Detroit with him. This occurs just after Reverend Tufts informed Viola that her husband had seen haints



and was a heathen for having claimed it came from God. He'd likely succumbed to depravity he tells her as he puts his hand on her thigh, and feeling low she allows and encourages him. When her husband shows up on her doorstep and confesses his infidelity to her, she forgives him but she never tells anyone about Reverend Tufts and their intimacy. Instead, like Francis she resolves to make their marriage work. Thirteen children together are the testament to that resolve.

The Turner family is mostly happy. They gather for family events and though it feels like an invasion, they all dance and eat and enjoy each other. It is during the spring birthday celebration that Viola tells Charles that his father had seen haints as well. They hadn't told him because it had always made Francis feel as though he was missing something or hadn't resolved something. It created a life of uncertainty and Francis thought it would be easier for Charles if he simply thought they didn't exist. By telling him, she gives him validation that he isn't crazy, and the knowledge allows him to relax so that he and Tina can overcome the barrier caused by the haint's existence and enjoy the spring birthdays together.



Trouble in the Big Room

Summary

In 1958 Charles (Cha-Cha), the eldest of Viola and Francis Turner's thirteen children, claims a small closet-sized room as his own to separate himself from his siblings. The first haunting occurs soon after, the specter attempting to haul him out of the second story window. His three year old brother Lonnie saves him by yelling that he is trying to sneak out, waking the entire house. Everyone spills into the hallway to witness Cha-Cha fight the specter. Francey, the oldest girl, tells Cha-Cha to run, finally dragging him out, and putting a door between them and the ghost they refer to as a 'haint'.

Cha-Cha's father Francis insists 'there ain't no 'haints' in Detroit'. He makes Cha-Cha search the room, and then suggests if he isn't adult enough to sleep alone, he should move back in with his siblings. He notices the line of raw skin under his son's Adam's apple and for a minute, his veneer cracks, but then he instructs them to return to bed. Instead, they join Charles in his small room and talk about the incident. In the end, they all agree that the ghost is the price you paid if you wanted to sleep in the other room.

The next six children to inherit the space are untroubled by the spirit, though they remember Cha-Cha's fight with it vividly but as the years passed the story fades. By the time Lelah, the last of the Turner children inherits the room, their father's assertion - there 'ain't no haints in Detroit' is more famous than the reason he'd said it originally.

At twenty-five Cha-Cha's father helps him to land a job as a driver, transporting Chryslers in an eighteen wheeler. Cha-Cha works for thirty years before another incident occurs involving the spirit. This time it helps to run him off the road, the accident breaking six of Cha-Cha's ribs, his collarbone and his left arm. He wakes up in the hospital, to find his sons, Todd and Chucky, his sister Francey and his brother Troy there along with their mother Viola. He tells them the 'haint' tried again. Francey tries to stop him from talking saying he's taken a lot of painkillers and Cha-Cha finally realizes the other man in the room is probably the insurance man. Milton Crawford tells them GM Life and Trust takes the state of employees' minds seriously, and insists their entire conversation will have to be included in his report.

Three weeks later, Cha-Cha gets a letter from Crawford's boss telling him that his wages will continue if he is willing to see a company psychologist. His wife Tina tells him that they are trying to be sure that he isn't crazy and although Cha-Cha can't see anything crazy about seeing a haint, Tina assures him that sooner or later he'll realize that not everyone is as open-minded on the subject.



Analysis

This story opens with the introduction of Charles Turner, the eldest of thirteen Turner children born to Viola and Francis in Detroit. Charles, nicknamed Cha-Cha is a gangly boy going through adolescence that sets the pace and trends for his younger siblings.

The first theme surrounds family; taking place during a time when having large numbers of children is not unusual. With so many siblings, privacy is at a premium, and Charles just happened to stumble into the whatnot closet one night when he felt the need to get away from everyone. He curled up among the boxes and a tradition was started.

Traditions are obviously an important theme as the behavior of the oldest child impacts the continuing behavior of his siblings, each taking their turn after their older brother or sister left. Charles seeks to separate himself from his siblings, wanting some small bit of privacy, and claims the small whatnot room as his own. As the eldest, he begins a rite of passage that is a theme which continues as each successive child inherits the space after Charles moves out. The only child who didn't participate in this tradition was the youngest child, Lelah. Since Lelah had no siblings to escape, instead of moving over into the small room as a rite of passage, she stays in her room and her mother takes over the whatnot closet.

Ghosts, or 'haints' as they are referred to by the Turner family, are a theme that begins almost as soon as Charles claims the small room as his. The specter tries to throw him from the second story window, but Charles fights him off – a fact that will be remembered by his siblings for many years afterward. The ghost will torment Charles once more, thirty years into his career as a truck driver. His rig was at capacity, loaded with SUV's on their way to Chicago when according to Charles, the haint's blue light filled his cab, inducing a nameless fear.

Culpability is also a theme as insurance adjuster, Milton Crawford reminds Charles in his hospital room after the accident. Charles immediately begins to share his impressions of how the accident occurred, including the ghost's involvement. Milton listens avidly, and then informs Charles that everything he'd told his family spontaneously would be included in his report to the company. While his family argues, Charles tells him simply that he is tired, and that he should do whatever he feels he must. The consequences follow as Charles is informed that he will have to submit to a psychological examination if he wants his paycheck to continue.

Sanity is also a theme in this segment as Charles is told that he must submit himself for examination by a psychologist if he wants his benefits to continue. His wife Tina comments that they simply want to be sure he isn't crazy, and Charles insists that there is nothing crazy about seeing a haint. Tina warns him that one day he'll realize that just because he believes something is normal doesn't necessarily mean it is to everyone else, foreshadowing an upcoming issue related to his haunting experiences.



Discussion Question 1

How does each of Charles' siblings see the haint and how do their accounts differ, if at all?

Discussion Question 2

How does the haint appear to Charles each time, and in each case, how does Charles respond?

Discussion Question 3

What records does Charles hold in Chrysler and what does that say about his general character?

Vocabulary

translucency, paranormal, indignant, affront, augmenting, lexicon, proximity, litigious



Week One: Swelling Bellies and Wedding Tulle

Summary

The bailiffs give Lelah two hours to pack. She grabs what she can, taking only what she believes will have some use to her. She had been given seven days written notice, but the time flew by and she hadn't prepared. Lelah's daughter Brianne calls and Lelah hits ignore for the third time. She grabs her leather jacket and, trying to maintain a shred of dignity, she leaves with time to spare. She drives around for a while before heading to the home she grew up in, empty now since her mother had moved in with Charles six months earlier.

It is a relief to discover that Cha-Cha continues to pay the electricity bills. That way the house won't be considered abandoned, and since she has a key, she won't be seen as trespassing. In the light of day the next morning, Lelah notices the places where photos once hung – four generations of nearly a hundred faces that once graced the walls. Their absence is stark.

Norman McNair catches her as she is leaving. Norman tells her Cha-Cha asked him to look after the yard and porch. Norman had worked with her father for over thirty years transporting Chryslers and when Francis died, McNair took over the handy work for his widow. Norman tells Lelah that ever since a junkie broke into Mrs. Bowlden's home while she was away he'd begun looking through the window on the door as well to see if everything is okay. Lelah claims to have had the same idea, coming to check on the place herself, and Norman is gracious enough not to mention her car full of belongings.

Lelah drives to Brianne's and gets there at 8:45. Brianne passes her grandson Bobby to her, asking about her absence the day before. She'd had to find last minute care for Bobby and reminds her mother that she can find someone to take Bobby if the task is more than she wants or can handle, but Lelah insists she'd simply mixed up the days. Brianne heads to work at the old folks home while Lelah takes Bobby to the park. Lelah doesn't tell Brianne she is homeless, knowing that Brianne would feel pressured to take her in.

Lelah thinks about Brianne's father, Vernon Greene - how she'd married him because he was enlisting, thinking they'd travel together. Three years later she left him after he'd given her the only black eye she would ever take from him. She took Brianne home to her parents. Francis gave her the gift of his heartbeat, close and warm; a secure and safe place where so many babies like Brianne had been given the silent gift of his heartbeat, strapped to him as he went about his day. Now Francis was gone and the matriarchs of Yarrow Street are either dead or dying, or like Viola have gone to live with relatives.



The rain starts so Lelah takes Bobby to the Ferndale library. She used to take him home where she had a portion of the living room sectioned off with his toys, but now they were all in the garbage as Lelah had feared they would look valuable enough to cause someone to break into her car for. Like the rest of her belongings, she left them behind.

Analysis

Lelah's life is examined in this segment as bailiffs arrive to evict her from her home. Poverty is the opening theme as Lelah is evicted; given just two hours to pack by bailiffs. She tries to focus on the items that she remembers people moaning about losing after a fire – paperwork, photos, identification and the like, but she can't help but feel embarrassed that her neighbors are watching her walk of shame. Her daughter Brianne calls again, and again Lelah ignores her, unable to face her at the moment either. Though Lelah had been evicted in the past, she'd always left before the bailiffs arrived. Now, she looks around and it all looks like junk to her. She can't imagine needing most of it, so she leaves it behind.

Family continues to be an important theme, although Lelah's eviction causes her to miss her scheduled babysitting with her grandson. She tells her daughter Brianne that she mixed the days up, and assures her that everything is fine. She doesn't reveal her situation, knowing her daughter would feel obligated to help her out. She wants Brianne to succeed, finish school and get the kind of career that she can't easily be replaced in. The successive generations are touched on as Lelah finds herself in a matriarchal position with her daughter and granddaughter and although the basic theme of their lives appears to be repeating itself as her daughter is now a single parent much like she had been, Lelah is acutely aware that she is unable to offer the kind of support that her parents had given her when she found herself raising a child alone.

Lelah returns to the home she grew up in, and entering the empty house, she claims a rite of passage denied to her as a child – sleeping in the room all of her siblings had claimed as they took their turns at being the oldest sibling left at home. Memories occupy Lelah's mind as she climbs the stairs, remembering her childhood and coming face-to-face with the walls where four generations of her family once looked out from. Now, the wall is starkly bare and the family scattered.

Lelah's daughter Brianne is introduced and her son Bobby who is a focal point when Lelah misses a day that she was supposed to look after her grandson. Brianne is tough and determined, working as a nurse while Lelah minds Bobby. Lelah is occasionally unreliable in her scheduling where looking after Bobby is concerned so Brianne mentions that she can get someone else to do the job. Lelah insists that she can't threaten to fire her, foreshadowing that Brianne will likely do exactly that in the near future. For now, Lelah alternates between the park and the library to keep him amused, having no home to take him to.

Relationships and how they affect life is briefly examined as Lelah thinks about her marriage, and hopes for better for her daughter. Brianne is a single parent, much like



she had been after her marriage ended, but Lelah wants her to succeed. As such, she won't admit that she is homeless or in such financial straits. She doesn't want her daughter to have to carry the additional burden, or feel obligated to help her mother out. Lelah wants Brianne to be more than just an LPN because a Licensed Practical Nurse was easy to fire or replace. She sees a woman who has no options as someone who is just waiting for someone to step in and ruin her life. It was a lesson her mother had taught her that still applies.

Self-image is also a theme as Lelah examines herself critically, aware of her softening muscles and heavier chest. She aches from the move the day before, despite having taken little more than a carload from her home before leaving.

Discussion Question 1

What rite of passage was Lelah denied and how does her eviction right this?

Discussion Question 2

Why doesn't Lelah tell her daughter about her eviction?

Discussion Question 3

How does Lelah see history repeating itself and what is she trying to help Brianne avoid?

Vocabulary

oppressive, interloper, equivalent, connotation, matriarchs, conciliatory, intermittent



Week One: Almost a Quorum and Motor City, Friday Night

Summary

Charles finally books an appointment to see Dr. Alice Rothman and is surprised to discover that not only is she black but during the hour long visit, she doesn't ask him about the ghost at all. Instead, she asks him about his family and after an hour, suggests they schedule another session. Charles continues to see her and after three weeks, she declares he wasn't 'personally culpable' for the accident, despite never having spoken of the encounter with him. She invites him to continue coming, and he agrees despite having to pay for the sessions himself once he returns to work. Eventually, Alice asks about the first encounter. Charles tells her about it and afterwards Alice makes two suggestions. She tells him to pay attention to everything that he thinks, feels, hears, eats and smells whenever the haint appears, and then perhaps go to his mother's house and see how returning to that room made him feel.

Charles goes home. His brother Russell is already there, and soon after Troy, Francey, Marlene and Netti arrive. When Lelah doesn't show up, Francey announces that with six of the siblings present, they almost have a quorum. The meeting is to decide what to do with their mother's house. Marlene announces that she talked to the bank and learned that it had been refinanced in 1994. Now there was forty thousand owing on the house and although the nicest house on Yarrow Street, its value is only about a tenth of that. Charles states the obvious – they will be forced to short sell. Marlene insists that Viola be consulted, despite the fact that Charles is her legal guardian, so they go into her bedroom and give her the broad strokes. Viola insists she doesn't want to sell the house, convinced that when she gets her strength back, she'll be able to return there. A suggestion is made that they sell the house to a family member without the Turner name so they can keep the property without the debt, but they can't agree on who and Tina insists that it feels dishonest to her. They table the meeting without coming to a conclusion.

Lelah hasn't been to Gambler's Anonymous for months, and it isn't her destination now. She tells herself she is only going to Motor City to eat using the complimentary buffet tickets she has, but the tables draw her in. Lelah first realized she was an addict four years earlier, after asking a coworker at the phone company for a loan that soon blossomed into a thousand dollar debt. Though she paid it back, she borrowed from others as well and eventually from one employee who exposed himself to her, and during the grievance with HR, her borrowing money from coworkers came to light. She had been suspended for a month already and had no idea whether it would lead to termination.

One woman Lelah is watching finally wins more than \$500 and passes Lelah a \$20 blue and yellow chip for telling her she was poised to hit. After she leaves, Lelah considers



her possibilities. She went to eat before the good food was gone and afterward chooses a \$5 roulette table close to the bar. Soon she has more than \$300 in front of her. She has enough for a hotel room, and knows she should leave now, but in half an hour she could double it, she reasons. Then she'd have enough for a place to stay for a week. Her next bet costs her \$120, but with only \$180 remaining she couldn't leave. Thirty minutes later instead of having \$600, she was broke.

Analysis

Counselling is a theme that opens this segment as Charles is forced to attend to keep his benefits. He is extremely nervous about the first session, filled with preconceived notions as to what she might be like, and worried about how she might interpret what he tells her.

Dr. Alice Rothman is introduced, and Charles thinks of her as a natural black – not biracial as far as he can tell – and young in his mind. Although Charles thought his session would be confined to his encounter and the accident, he is surprised when at the end of the first session the subject hadn't even come up. In that way, Alice is able to convince him to come in again and to his surprise, Alice signs off on his mental health without hearing anything about the haint first. After he begins to attend voluntarily, he doesn't want to talk about the apparition anymore, worried that she might still decide he is crazy.

The family theme is touched on more than once beginning with when Alice asks Charles to tell her about his family rather than get right to the heart of the reason he'd been sent to her. Charles becomes quite indignant when Alice asks him how many family members have been or are still incarcerated. The strength of his response almost foreshadows the coming arrest or legal issue of a family member.

God and religions are themes briefly touched on as Charles asks Alice if she believes. When she tells him she is atheist, he admits that it was prayer that helped him get through the visitations.

Architectural advice is given to Charles by his father who told him that when he built his house, he should think ahead and plan for the days when stairs and multiple levels would be a problem. Charles takes his advice and, despite the trends of the neighborhood, he builds a sprawling home all on one level. He adds features to ensure he fits into the area, and while some of his neighbors now have foreclosure signs on them, but Charles is on his way to having his home paid off.

The family theme continues as Charles and enough of his siblings get together to take a vote as to what to do with their mother's home on Yarrow Street. Viola is consulted, but she insists that when she is steadier on her feet, she'll want to return to her home, so she doesn't want it sold despite how much she owes for it.

Poverty is also touched on in this segment as members of the Turner family struggle to survive. Viola refinances her home when Francis dies, and she is unable to meet her



monthly obligations for food and living. Now the bank holds a mortgage for \$40,000 against a home that would likely not sell for \$4,000. While this struggle is brought on as a result of day-to-day living, Lelah's issues stem from another beginning. Lelah is recently evicted, but not because of cost of living increases. Lelah's issues stem from a gambling addiction that swallows her income and has likely cost her a good job at the phone company. Her daughter Brianne also struggles as a single parent, raising Bobby on her own, and trying to make ends meet. Lelah babysits for her, but doesn't share her current financial setbacks with her.

Gambling and addictions in general are a theme in this segment also, as Lelah admits that she has a problem. She can't seem to help herself, allowing the tables to swallow every dime she has. Lelah's gambling is the sole cause of her financial and economic woe. She is on suspension from work pending an evaluation of her continuing employment after it is discovered that she has been borrowing from coworkers to supplement her gambling habit. This suspension certainly contributes to her spiraling inability to pay the bills and as such directly leads to her eviction. With only \$20 in her pocket, she is still unable to pass up the opportunity to gamble, telling herself that she can turn her meager resources into a night's stay in a hotel; then from there to a week's stay; and when she turns her \$20 into \$300 and then back to zero, her financial suicide is complete and her addiction intact.

Discussion Question 1

What is the main purpose of this family meeting called by Charles, and what is the outcome?

Discussion Question 2

What misconceptions does Charles suffer from where Alice is concerned, and what does she do that helps him to want to continue to get treatment from her?

Discussion Question 3

What are some of the classic signs of addiction that Lelah exhibits, and what has her addiction cost her just based on what has been read so far?

Vocabulary

condescend, hallucinations, precipitated, obligatory, superstitions, apparitions, deprivation, camaraderie



Week One: One North and Two South

Summary

When Francis Jr. first arrives in Detroit in the summer of 1944, he does so with a generic introduction to a pastor he's never met, \$15, a single pair of shoes and one small bag. He had already opened the letter on the train and was disappointed to see how little Reverend Tufts had done to actually help him. The letter doesn't suggest he would be worthy of apprenticeship, but instead simply asks that this member of his flock be assisted to find housing and employment. His pride prevents him from going to the church, and instead he asks strangers for advice on where to go for housing and work.

Francis Jr. comes by his pride honestly. His father, Francis Sr. had died as a result of a rusty nail puncture on his foot. Two years later, his mother dropped him off with Reverend Tufts while she took employment as a live-in maid for a white family in Little Rock. She visits him one Sunday each month, and sends monthly gifts of money and sweets until he turns 16. Then she is asked to go with the family when they move to Dallas, and she agrees.

When Francis Jr. gets to the train station, he talks to several people before making his way to Paradise Valley. There, he manages to find a room he can share with a Mr. Jenkins in a rooming house and then takes himself out for a drink. He thinks about Viola, waiting for a call from him at Jean Manroy's house down the road, but although he'd promised to call as soon as he was settled, he could this arrangement 'settled'.

Viola gets a message from Jean that his pastor friend hadn't heard from Francis, and since he'd snubbed the help offered him, Reverend Tufts considered himself absolved of anything Francis or Viola might need. Six weeks had passed since Francis Jr. left, and not a single word had been heard from him. The rumors circulate and soon even her own family begins whispering about the availability of phones Up North.

Finally a letter comes for Viola. Francis Jr. tells her that he is in Detroit; has a job and has somewhere to sleep for which he is grateful. He promises he is saving his money and misses her. Enclosed is \$7 which isn't even close to enough. Viola leaves school to work in the fields with her brothers and sisters. She knows that either fieldwork or housework is in her future and tries to decide which one will allow her more time to spend with the baby. Olivia and Lucille insist the news should make her happy as it proves he is still alive and she tries to look at it that way.

Analysis

Pride is the opening theme in this segment as Francis Jr. arrives at Michigan Central Station with little more than his bag, \$15, and a letter of introduction for the pastor of the church from Reverend Tufts. Francis had opened the letter on the train and is more than a little discouraged to find a generic and impersonal introduction that says nothing of his



possible apprenticeship or mention the fact that Francis had been like a son to him. Francis can't bring himself to beg a pastor he doesn't know for help, so he avoids the situation entirely by not going. Francis Jr.'s pride is what keeps him from revealing the depths of his disappointment when his mother tells him that she is going to go with the white family she works for to Dallas.

Family history is discussed with relation to how pride seems to run in the family, going all the way back to Francis Sr. who died after stepping on a rusty nail and allowing it to fester rather than call a doctor to come to town. When Francis Jr. is left with Reverend Tufts, he continues to learn how to be prideful, as Reverend Tufts shows he is more interested in self-regard than the church and its members. It is clear from the description of Reverend Tufts that greed is a theme that has taken hold in his life as he lives in considerable comfort while his small flock struggles to survive.

Miss Odella Withers is introduced as the woman who runs the boarding house that Francis Jr. rents when he first gets to Michigan. Francis tells her he has little money to spare, and Odella suggests that he share a room with another renter who only works nights so would need the bed during the day.

Family is a continuing and ongoing theme as Viola waits day after day for Francis to call her and let her know that he has arrived okay. When word finally comes, it is after Reverend Tufts has already left word for Viola that Francis hadn't even bothered to go to the pastor he'd left a letter of introduction to that Tufts considered a waste.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Francis Jr. decide not to go to the pastor Up North that Reverend Tufts had written him a letter of introduction to and what does he do instead?

Discussion Question 2

Why doesn't Francis Jr. call Viola when he arrives in Michigan and why is his letter both a relief and a disappointment when it finally reaches her?

Discussion Question 3

What kinds of things does Viola's family suggest may have happened to Francis Jr. when it takes him a while to contact her?

Vocabulary

congregation, impersonal, sanctioned, intonations, ramshackle, devolved



Week Two - Spring 2008: It Sure Ain't Free and Outta the Fields

Summary

The rest of the Turner children don't like the idea of Troy's girlfriend Jillian buying their mother's house to keep them from having to deal with the \$40,000 debt attached to it. That simple fact only makes Troy want to do it more. Troy mentions it to Jillian, but she becomes angry. His partner David calls someone he knows who can help them to forge the paperwork necessary, but tells them that Troy will have to provide his mother's social security card, Jillian's work history, Charles's signature if his name appears on the deed and his mother's thumb print.

Troy waits three days before approaching Jillian again on the subject. They were talking about his daughter's visit and Troy can tell that Jillian is looking forward to their yearly summer together. Jillian is stunned when Troy mentions talking to Dave about his mother's house again. He tells her about Dave's friend who can help for a fee, and suggests that perhaps Cara could come out in late July instead. Jillian can't understand why he would want to risk so much on a house worth next to nothing, but he insists that Charles wasn't the only one who put money into the house. He follows that with a story about Charles and how he'd made Troy jump through hoops to get his basketball gear, and feeling sorry for him, Jillian had backed down.

Charles helps Francey to snake a plug for her water-filtration system. Her husband Richard had once electrocuted himself and still had a fear of any kind of electrical work. As such, he makes himself scarce whenever that kind of work has to be done. Francey and Charles talk about his sessions with Alice, Francey disagreeing with many of the ideas Alice had presented to Charles. She can't understand why Alice feels it's necessary to dredge up the past and is convinced that most of what may or may not have happened is now unimportant. She insists that nothing crazy happened in their youth.

Charles had been asked by Alice to examine his life and in doing so, he finds himself questioning everything. Since Francey is the oldest girl, and as their parents aged, she and Charles had become the surrogate parents to the youngest of their siblings, he felt that she was the one to talk to about all of this, but now he wondered. The more Charles and Francey talk, the more he begins to see that all of his siblings had suffered from some kind of addiction at some point in their lives. Francey seemed to have backed away from family obligations since her hospitalization. When the only sibling that came to see her more than once was Charles, she took stock and stopped offering or providing help of any kind. Richard returns and, unwilling to discuss his sightings with anyone else, Charles excuses himself and says goodbye. A memory of an event in the summer of 1967 plays in a loop in his mind and is one of the incidents during which their father let him down profoundly, without even knowing it. He doesn't tell Francey about it.



Analysis

The twelfth Turner child, Troy and his life are glimpsed in this segment as he goes to his partner David Gardenhire for help to short sell his mother's home, despite objections from the rest of the family, and from his girlfriend Jillian. Jillian is also examined in brief as her opinions regarding Troy's idea are discussed. While the remainder of the Turner family worries about trusting her where their mother's house is concerned, Troy is the only one who knows how adamantly against the idea she is.

David Gardenhire is introduced as Troy's partner, and a resource for dealings that are not entirely legal in nature. His admission that he's used this source previously tells the reader that this is not a new situation for David and that he's bent or broken the rule of law he is supposed to uphold at least once in the past. The fact that he is using an untraceable 'burner' phone confirms this and Troy realizes that the use of this phone reveals just how illegal this action is.

Déjà vu is the opening theme as Troy takes his partner David Gardenhire home. Since becoming a police officer, Troy had often had a sort of cinematic déjà vu and this is one of those moments. As David tries to make arrangements that will help Troy to absolve his mother of her mortgage debt, a twinge that foreshadows trouble coming nags at him.

Get rich schemes and the alternative – working hard towards a goal – are compared and contrasted briefly as Troy considers his future and his desires for the future. Troy had long searched for a quick way to easy money. He'd bought into a pyramid scheme; sold knock-off cell phones and been taken by everything from health and fitness to tech gurus while David had taken another approach in life. David had slowly and steadily worked at his small business, installing Internet and cable and managed to purchase a loft on RiverWalk as well as a couple of other properties in the city. Troy can see that his partner is outpacing him, but still feels that David hasn't managed to amass nearly the kind of money that Troy is hoping for.

Poverty continues to be a theme as Troy discusses the issue of short-selling his mother's house to his girlfriend Jillian. She is angry that he would embark on a scheme of any kind after so recently promising her that he would begin contributing to their savings account, but hasn't. His history of half-baked schemes gone wrong does nothing to lend to his credibility, and though he promises to begin making deposits soon, Jillian has no faith in him. Poverty is discussed by Charles and Francey as well. Charles relates questions that Alice asked him, hoping to talk to Francey about them but Francey isn't thrilled with the tone of Alice's questions. She insists that poverty was a common issue and can't be called trauma to justify the existence of his specter. She relates their childhood poverty more to the hand-me-downs and starchy food.

Family is a continuing theme as Jillian talks to Troy about his daughter's upcoming regular summer visit. Though they haven't discussed children of their own, Jillian obviously enjoys having Camille around. Troy recalls how little of himself Francis gave to him during his childhood in their father and son relationship and as such has tried to be more interested in what Camille was doing. He doesn't think he has enough energy



left for another child. Still considering his mother's house, he suggests that Camille come out a month later so that he can put the extra cash into the cost of short selling, but Jillian is livid. Troy tells her that Charles is ready to follow the rules but in his mind there is a distinct difference between the destructive and violent crime and breaking rules that were predatory or prejudiced to begin with. Resentment bubbles up in Troy as he considers the dynamics that rule his family and particularly Charles who preaches honesty to his own destruction.

Addictions are a theme that Charles contemplates after his conversation with Francey. It seems to him that every member of their family fought an addiction of one form or another. Francey's addiction was food and now continues to be food but of a more health conscious variety; their father drank to excess; Lonnie dabbled in heroin beginning at age thirteen, and clearly was still dependent on something; Lelah suffered from gambling addiction; Tina seemed to be obsessed by the church; Troy was obsessed with success; and Marlene and his mother certainly had turned their love of flea markets to an obsession.

Fear is a theme that Francey accuses Charles of feeling when he admits to having checked out library books in an effort to understand the apparition he's seen off and on throughout his life, but Charles denies it. He does however recall a time in his life when as a younger man he'd helped his brothers collect bricks from construction sites for spare money. Just twenty bricks gave them a dollar. When they'd been chased off by police, Charles had hidden and while he cowered fearfully, to his surprise, his father had walked towards him, unaware that he was hiding there. He stayed there, even after the sirens were gone, and waited while his father unzipped his fly and urinated right into the space he was hiding in. Charles never said a word, but for years he felt as though his father had peed on him purposely.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Troy so determined that he be the one to handle the short sale of their mother's house, and what are the largest obstacles to this plan?

Discussion Question 2

What questions does Alice ask Charles that bother Francey, and why do they bother her?

Discussion Question 3

What character flaw does Charles realize most of the members of his family suffer from and what issues point to this flaw in each?

Vocabulary

ambivalent, perpetrator, ostensibly, diffused, harangued, libation, ostensibly, culmination



Week Two - Spring 2008: Memories and Far From Any Pulpit and Better Than a Burlap Sack (Fall 1944)

Summary

Lelah has an easier time avoiding the desire to gamble during the week, her activities with Bobby keeping her busy, but the weekends are harder. She even drives to Brianne's on Saturday morning, thinking she'd give Brianne a break but she is already on her way out with Bobby, headed for Chicago for the second weekend in a row to spend time with Bobby's father Rob. Brianne tells her to call Charles who is trying to reach her.

Instead, Lelah goes back to Yarrow Street and fills the hours by cleaning the house. She is reminded of times in the past and finds herself thinking about her father, and wondering where he'd found the strength to stop drinking, hoping that somehow she'd inherited some of that strength. She recalls Lonnie and his band practices in the basement; and remembers the one thing she hadn't taken from the house – her Gemeinhardt flute. Inside the box with it are a dagger with an ivory handle that appears Japanese in origin; a pair of gold door-knocker earrings and a pipe made of cherry or mahogany. Though she won't admit it to herself, the box had been on her mind since the first night that she'd returned to the house.

Lelah goes to the pawn shop and is offered \$20 for the earrings; \$200 for the dagger; and \$50 for the flute. When she returns to the Yarrow house, she feels sick at the thought of what she's done, knowing that she'll never buy them back and that the money will soon be squandered.

In the fall of 1944, Francis Turner Jr. manages to talk himself into a job at the bar on Beaubien as a dishwasher on his first night in Detroit. The shift isn't ideal, as he gets off at one in the morning, and after eating and cleaning up, he only gets between three and four hours sleep before Mr. Jenkins arrives for his turn. As such, he begins consuming coffee to stay awake, but it makes him jittery.

During the winter Francis discovers that the kitchen has little heat and even wearing a coat doesn't help as his hands ache with arthritis. He begins to spike his coffee with bourbon to stay warm, but the liquor loosens his tongue and when he spouts off under his breath a little too loudly, Clydell shows him the door. Francis begins sleeping with Odella, and she finds him employment after he provides her with a flood of excuses for not coming home with a new job each day. The first job was painting and the second job was a real 'Jim Crow' job in his mind. He was hired to wash and service executive's vehicles. Francis meets the McNairs – a couple which is living the dream he came to



Michigan with. Francis loses that job too accused of stealing a gentleman's gloves. Over all, Francis drank; lost each job he secured, and slept around.

Viola couldn't wait for Francis to send her money and is forced to go work, housekeeping for the Jogget family. Ethel and Harold Joggets have a son named Harold who is about the same age as Charles, although fussier. She works long days for little pay, and going home she wonders if Francis shares the existence she lives.

Analysis

Family continues to be the ongoing theme as Lelah looks after her grandson Bobby to help her daughter out. Berniece teases Lelah – the only one of her siblings that is able to really to, despite the fact that Duke and Miles were the inseparable comedians of the family.

Lelah's addiction to gambling continues to pick at the edges of her mind, making it hard for her to stay away from the lure of the casino. She manages to do so during the week when she has Bobby to care for distracted by his needs, but the weekends are long and anxiety ridden on her own. It doesn't take long before she gives in to the lure of the box of semi-valuables in the basement of her parents' home. Francis Jr.'s alcohol addiction is touched on, as is Lelah's resentment that she missed the days when he sometimes drank to excess; imagining he would have been more relaxed; smiled more; or said things that were ridiculous when he'd had too much. His sobriety disappointed her, as does her own inability to kick her own bad habit.

The cost of self-discovery is examined by Lelah years after her father contemplated the same cost himself. She reasons that one day, like people in Gambler's Anonymous revealed, she would hit rock bottom. An event would happen that would cause her to stop gambling once and for all, but taking items that belong to other family members to pawn them for money to gamble isn't the bottom because she hasn't even considered stopping. She wonders what it will take to make her quit once and for all.

Thanh is introduced as the cashier at the local pawn shop where Lelah goes to pawn the few valuables she finds in the Yarrow house. It appalls Lelah that she can so easily pawn the items that don't even belong to her, without so much as asking about the time period during which they can be bought back. A part of her knows that she never will, and that she should be ashamed of herself, but she can't shake the urge to take the money and turn it into chips.

Alone in Detroit, Francis Jr. contemplates his life but without the eyes of family or of the Reverend upon him, Francis Jr. spirals. He excuses his growing need for alcohol, blaming the cold weather and his own lack of self-worth for his excesses. His growing consumption costs him his job after his mouth runs on longer than it should have, and though he goes out daily to find another one, he amasses a growing list of excuses for not taking them. He begins sleeping with Odella – who is the only woman other than Viola he's ever been with, and while it does not absolve him of his rental obligations,



with no one watching over him, he sees no reason to worry about his fidelity or his obligations to his wife.

Responsibilities and obligations are examined from two generations in this segment as Lelah struggles to balance her obligations to her daughter and grandson with her personal demons much as her father had so many years before as he attempts to make enough money to survive and to send home. Both Lelah and Francis have opportunities to succeed but squander them on vices and addictions. In this way, Francis consigns his wife to a life of obligation and responsibility to cover their monthly expenses by working full time herself as well. Not only does his own life fall far from the pulpit, but he leaves behind little.

Norman McNair is introduced as a young Alabaman who rented a room near Francis. The McNair's represent the lifestyle that Francis should be living and isn't. Francis soon realizes that this period in time will come to represent the beginning of his walk away from God. Leaving the church and Reverend Tufts costs Francis his identity.

Discussion Question 1

How does Lelah justify her addiction to gambling and why does she tell herself that she isn't ready to quit yet?

Discussion Question 2

What causes Francis to lose the job he has as a dishwasher and what excuses does he come up with for not finding another one right away?

Discussion Question 3

How does Viola's life change as a result of Francis's fall from the pulpit and in what way does it mirror his?

Vocabulary

dissonance, precipice, magnanimous, predilection, insufferable, connoisseur, ubiquitous



Week Three - Spring 2008: Downtown Sunlight and This Was The Surprise

Summary

Lelah joins the line at the unemployment department's Problem Resolution Office along with about 60 others. She notes as many white people as there are black and the prospect that so many white people are unemployed reveals how difficult times really are. A young man tries to cut the line in front of Lelah, but a savvy woman behind her soon had him going to the back of the line. When she finally gets to the front, she is unable to find the rejection letter that was sent to her. The woman at the counter tells her she isn't eligible and asks what happened when she spoke with MARTHA, but Lelah tells her she couldn't get through. She learns that she has to get her employer to officially fire her before she can get benefits, so she backs away from the window thinking about how her life has become a series of windows to beg at.

Lelah goes to the telephone company to see if she can sort out her official status, but when the security guard at the desk calls upstairs to announce her, he is told that she is on the list of people not allowed in the building until her status is decided. He gently sends her on her way, and as she is leaving, she hears someone call her name. When she turns she sees Troy's old friend David. He invites her out for a drink, and they talk about old times, catching up. He tells her he owns several properties that he rents out, hoping they'll increase in value eventually. She doesn't tell him that she is little more than a squatter herself. David tells her he has a loft on the river and invites her to come see it sometime. They part in the parking lot, exchanging phone numbers, and as she sits in her car the phone rings. David's three o'clock appointment cancelled, and he invites her to come over. She goes there and he shows her around. Then, before she changes her mind, she kisses him. They fall to the couch together and everything else fades from her mind. All she wants to think about is this very moment.

Fear paralyzes Charles when he wakes to see his specter again, waking when he feels a subtle change in the air around him. He'd recognized the sound of it as well, like the beating of papery wings. For two hours the light at the windowsill remains, just a circle of light. It never materializes into anything else, but Charles is sure that simply by telling Alice about it finally, he'd given it life and invited it into his.

Analysis

Growing poverty and unemployment are the first themes in this segment as Lelah goes to the unemployment office to try to get financial help. She is surprised to notice the change in clientele this time compared to the previous time she'd been there. This time, there are as many white people as there are black. The first time she'd felt as though the fact that she was unemployed could be directly related to how black she was. This



time the equality of the races represented no longer feels like injustice but somehow is more disturbing as it spells out just how difficult finding employment might be.

Humiliation and exposure is all Lelah feels when she attempts to go back to work and talk to her union representative, reasoning that having paid her dues she should be entitled to help. When she gets to the front desk, she discovers a new security system has been activated that requires all employees to have cards, but since she knows the guard he calls up for her. As soon as he discovers she is on the list for people who are to be denied entry until their cases are sorted out, he apologetically shows her the door.

David Gardenhire sees her leaving and calls out to her, changing the tone and direction of her day when he invites her out to lunch, and to see his loft afterward. She quickly realizes that she hasn't had much opportunity to socialize with people, mostly having talked to those at the tables with her when she went out, and avoiding regular people. She remembers that most of Troy's friends were sleazy in nature and is more than a little concerned that David will be no different. She feels awkward with him and lies, telling him that she has been off for a week.

Addiction continues to be a theme as Lelah struggles through the fallout after losing all of the money she'd won, and trying to face her former employer. After seeing David, she tactfully doesn't ask him how his brother Greg is doing, having seen him shuffle past on the street, recognizing the gait of a man who is strung out.

Education and its importance is a theme in this segment as David tells Lelah how he had gone from a stint in the Navy to an Internet college he'd seen advertised on television where he got his certificate in electrical engineering. They end up in bed together, Lelah managing to shut out all of the issues plaguing her for now, and think only of her own pleasure. She allows herself to be swept up in David's arms as time for her stands still. Afterward, he gets up and goes into the bathroom, and Lelah's insecurity returns as she wonders how he will feel about her now that they had finished. To her surprise, he doesn't seem eager to get rid of her. When he begins kissing her again, she shuts everything else out one more time, succumbing to her own pleasure and thinking of nothing else.

Fear paralyzes Charles when the haint makes its reappearance after years had passed since the last visitation. He is too afraid even to slide out of bed to pray like usual, and blames his conversation about the haint with Alice for calling it back to him. Tina isn't home so he is unable to show her. He feels a sense of disappointment in himself as he waits for the inevitable confrontation that never occurs.

Discussion Question 1

What happens when Lelah goes to her place of employment to try to get help from her union representative, and why is that help unavailable to her?



Discussion Question 2

How can David's life be considered successful when compared to Lelah's and what financial moves has he made that will benefit him at a later date?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Charles believe his haint reappeared and how does he handle the visitation?

Vocabulary

proliferation, conspiratorially, delinquent, purgatory, enumerated, predilections



Week Three - Spring 2008: Enter Doubt and Corned Beef and Cabbage

Summary

Charles finally finds the nerve to get out of bed after the sun came up and the haint had disappeared. He can't help but wonder if he'd misinterpreted the haint from the beginning. Perhaps it wasn't a threatening entity after all. He'd researched haints on line the night before and had a pile of personal accounts that were similar to his that he wanted to take to Alice. Since Tina isn't home to talk to, Charles goes into his mother's room and wakes her and tells her that he's seen the spirit again. At first she denies any knowledge of it, and then reminds him of what his father had told him years earlier – there were no haints in Detroit. In fact, she tells him, his father had wondered about the condition of his mental health. Charles doesn't believe her, but the look on her face casts the first seed of doubt in Charles.

Tina heads home from the Lake Huron retreat the morning after it is done, and when she gets home she finds Charles asleep on the couch. She wakes him and learns that he'd called in to work, taking the day off. He tells her he'd seen the spirit again, and when he goes through the story for the second time, he is surprised by the look on her face. She clearly doesn't believe him, and when she asks if he is sure, he tells her she is starting to sound like his mother. He decides to share the experience with Alice, sure that she is the only one who will understand, but that isn't the case. When he tells her about the incident, she insists that the haint is a hallucination and she should never have encouraged him where it was concerned. Stunned, Charles hardly knows what to say to her. He berates her for seducing him into coming again and again, when clearly her only interest is in the money she is collecting from him, just as Tina had suggested before he left the house. He tells her how upset he is before walking out despite her protests in the background.

Lelah and David spend considerable time together, Lelah sleeping over several times. They talk, and Lelah enjoys how comfortable and normal everything feels with him. She discovers some meditation cd's on the night table and asks him about it, learning that he uses meditation to ground him and help him with the fact that he is alone. They talk about former partners and Lelah is mostly honest when it is her turn. She cooks for him, and tries not to, but can't help cataloging every moment that they're together, wondering when it will end.

Analysis

Charles dons Tina's terrycloth robe symbolic of protection of sorts when he finally manages to get out of bed. He'd learned after some research that in the Carolina's, some people painted their porches and doorjambes and in some cases even their



tombstones with the blue that is the color of the haint, thought to mimic the color of the ocean and their beliefs that haints are incapable of crossing bodies of water.

Vulnerability is high as Charles goes into his mother's room, needing to talk to someone about the haint that had been there all night. Her reaction is unexpected and sends a spark of doubt into Charles as she reveals that his father had once suggested Charles wasn't all there in the head. She warns him not to go telling stories. Charles expects this kind of attitude from perfect strangers, but from his family it is a slap as many of his siblings had seen it as well.

Doubt becomes a recurring theme in this segment as Charles approaches first his mother, then his wife, and finally Alice only to get relatively the same response each time. No one believed him. Tina had warned him not to go to Alice, and surely her words ring in his ears as Alice tells him that his 'haints' are simply hallucinations and she shouldn't have indulged him in this fantasy. Tina had warned him that Alice wasn't the friend he thought she was, she was paid to listen, but Charles doesn't want to hear it. Instead, he looks at her with disgust, something she'd only ever seen once before on his face and not directed at her. This doubt foreshadows a change in the way Charles sees the apparition that has shadowed him for his entire life.

Family is once again a theme in this segment as Tina recalls the first time she met Charles and how they became man and wife. She thinks about the family she married into, and by extension, their families, and feels connected to life. Somehow, moving out of the neighborhood had isolated Tina or perhaps insulated her, and the family had backed away from her, but she wasn't about to let that happen any more than she would let Charles push her away in favor of Alice.

Anger is the only emotion that Charles feels when he leaves Alice's office, realizing for the first time that she has no interest in him beyond his regular payments for his sessions. When Alice tells him that his ghost is merely a hallucination that she shouldn't have indulged, he tells her that he knows she was raised by white parents and accuses her of keeping him around merely to gain insight into her black heritage. Finally, telling her he isn't a lab rat and walks out.

Confidence is not Lelah's strong suit, especially where relationships were concerned, but she still tries to make a go of things with David. She cooks for him and sleeps at his loft three times during the first week. After leaving him, she would pick apart every moment, every comment, and every gesture, recalling each touch against her skin and fearing the future. Her lack of self-confidence has her leaving before he can ask her to and then taking roundabout routes home just in case, not wanting him to discover where she lives. This foreshadows his eventual discovery and a point in their relationship where she will either be forced to be honest, or run.

Meditation is a theme that David seems reluctant to discuss with Lelah at first, but her continuing curiosity about it eventually coaxes him to explain his ongoing practice. Everything in David's flat speaks to his desire for self-improvement and a better life and



is in direct contrast with Lelah's life. His strength and confidence is like a lifeboat to Lelah who feels like the only time she is really alive is with him.

Discussion Question 1

What does Viola tell Charles about his father and what he'd said about the haint Charles saw?

Discussion Question 2

Where does Charles go after talking to his mother and what happens when he again broaches the subject of the haint he sees?

Discussion Question 3

What does Lelah do in an effort to work her way into David's life and why?

Vocabulary

delirium, sedentary, relegated, barraged, consortium, epithet



Week Three - Winter 1945: A Life To Get On With and Gotham in Detroit

Summary

It is winter in 1955 and five months have passed. It seems more unlikely with each one that passes that Francis will return for Viola. She begins to save, wanting to leave as soon as she can. Each bus ride begins with gossip and jokes but soon dissolves as they travel into the white world they work in. When Barry Stuttle, one of the Deacon's sons begins looking in her direction, Lucille and Olivia encourage her to move on. Viola had stopped attending church, too afraid of Reverend Tufts's disapproval, despite knowing that she shouldn't care. She is acutely aware that she will always be thought of as the woman Francis left behind. She figures she needs about \$70 to tide her and Charles over until she can find work in a new place and writes to her brothers in Omaha and Cleveland, trying to feel out which would be the best place for her to go and have the most welcoming wife.

Meanwhile, Francis is working his fifth job at a stamping plant, and has finally managed to purchase a secondhand suit; wingtips and galoshes; and a fur-lined hat hoping to improve his appearance and elevate his standings. Francis is determined to take Odella somewhere special and he'd heard that the Gotham Hotel often served important local politicians, so he reasons that by taking her there, he will elevate himself in her eyes. These days, the idea of returning to Arkansas seems less and less feasible. He has no idea how to explain the months of silence and figures it would be easier to move on than to try to get Viola to forgive him. While he hasn't exactly secured his relationship with Odella, Francis hopes that by taking her on proper dates, and perhaps enrolling in school to gain a trade, she would see his value and potential.

Francis asks Odella to sit in the parlor while he walks to Hastings to find a taxi. When Odella realizes they are headed downtown, she tells him that as long as they have reservations, the evening should be nice. Francis tells her to be ready when the cab honks his horn and begins to tiptoe around the icy sections on the sidewalk in his wingtips which are a bit too tight. He hadn't made reservations, not realizing he should, but reasons that regardless, they should be able to have a drink or two at the bar at least. A whistle blows and Francis straightens up instinctively, falling on the ice. Officer Williams tells him to stop, and asks if he's been drinking. Francis assures him he hasn't, and admits he is headed for Gotham Hotel with a lady friend. Suspicious, Williams asks for identification, and tells Francis to empty his pockets. Feeling humiliated, he reaches for his wallet just as Odella walks up and identifies him as her tenant. She explains that he is new to the area and tells Odella that she should educate him to be quick when an officer asks him for identification. He leaves them standing in the road and Odella suggests they go home. Francis is determined to get to the Gotham Hotel and argues with her until he finally walks away from her. After reaching Saint Antoine Street, he



turns right instead of continuing downtown, going up the stairs and into a bar to drink until an employee wakes him at 3 a.m.

Analysis

Racial indignities are examined in this segment as Viola rides the bus to Pine Bluff each day to work at the Joggetses. Viola is only too aware of the indignities many colored workers suffered at the hands of their white bosses, and she is determined to save Charles from that kind of life.

Barry Stuttle is introduced as a prospective new suitor for Viola, but Viola has no intentions of staying in an area where she will be defined by the fact that her husband left her. She flatly ignores his attempts to get her attention, despite her sisters both encouraging her to move on.

Love, and its importance becomes clear to Viola even at the age of 18 as she realizes that she has a long life in front of her, and waiting for a husband who is not returning would consign her to a life without love.

Respectability becomes a growing desire for Francis as he looks for ways to become a proper suitor, worthy of Odella's attentions. He purchases clothes and shoes, dressing himself in a proper suit; and attempts to take Odella to the Gotham Hotel for supper. The Gotham Hotel symbolizes this degree of respectability in Francis's mind as he'd heard that local politicians had dined there. He figures that by eating where they eat, he might elevate his own status in Odella's eyes.

Forgiveness is something that Francis doesn't believe he deserves or will get from Viola. Francis would rather start over with Odella than face his wife's disapproval, knowing that he had no way to explain himself.

Guilt is a strong theme that plagues Francis. He hasn't forgotten his promises to Viola, but somehow is unable to keep them either. Instead, he continues to drink to excess and to see Odella on the side, hoping to find a way to work himself into her life.

Humiliation is the final theme in this segment as Francis is stopped by a policeman when he heads out to find a taxi to take himself and Odella to the Gotham Hotel. While he'd heard of this kind of behavior from policeman to colored people, he'd never seen Reverend Tufts humiliated in the ten years he'd been in his care.

Discussion Question 1

What do Viola's sisters try to convince her to do, and why is she reluctant?



Discussion Question 2

Why is Viola determined to leave the region they live in?

Discussion Question 3

What obstacles prevent Francis from taking Odella to the Gotham Hotel and why does he end up where he does instead?

Vocabulary

aspirations, alleviate, apprehension, indignities, intoxicated, traverse



Week Four - Spring 2008: The Lucky Boy and Addiction is Real

Summary

Troy and his partner Higgins stand watch as a house and its garage go up in flames. The rest of the day is spent writing tickets and talking about Higgins' children. Troy wants to tell him about his mother's house and the plans he has to buy it, but Higgins likes to gossip, so he kept it to himself. Higgins reveals that he is contemplating getting his first tattoo – something to commemorate his 15 years of service. After work Troy buys an ink pad and drives to Charles' house. Tina answers and lets him in, saying she needs to go out for a drive and promising to be back in 90 minutes. Troy heads to his mother's room and tells her the story he concocted to get her identification and thumbprint. Calling him her 'Lucky Boy', Viola is happy to see him, especially after the morning she'd had with Charles. Troy outlines the ancestry tree he claims he is trying to build. After assuring her that identity theft won't be a problem, he scans a copy of her identification, and she holds out her thumb while he inks and presses it to paper. She says she'd love to see him in uniform and adds that what she'd really like is to be taken for a drive. He promises to take her out next time, and leaves.

David visits his mother on the east side and while he is there Mr. McNair stops in while he is out front pulling weeds. He laughs when he notices David pulled out the basil his mother grew and asks David if he's talked to Troy lately. David says he has, and McNair tells him that something is going on at the Turner house. He tells David that Lelah has been there, coming and going at all times like a junkie. David assures him it sounds legal enough, and wonders if Lelah is trying to short sell the house. The idea depresses him.

Brianne gives Lelah \$40 when she drops Bobby off, and she pockets it without thinking. She sees a man on the front porch and recognizes David. She lets him in, discouraged to learn that they are already over, sure that once he knew it all he would leave. She invites him in, and he admits to having been visited by Mr. McNair. He tells her that just like their relationship, he figures this is none of Troy's business either, and feeling emboldened, she tells him a half-truth admitting to having gambled herself into trouble in the past. She admits to her recent eviction, but she assures him that she doesn't need rescuing. Then she shows him around, reminding him of the events that took place in each room. In the basement, she shows him the shower last and admits that her brothers used it most of their lives to give the girls more time upstairs. They shower together, and make love again and all Lelah wants is to hold on for as long as she can.



Analysis

The state of economics is clearly an opening theme as Troy and his partner Higgins attend a house first on the corner of McNichols and Livernois. The firemen no sooner have it out when a truck from Denning & Son General Contractors arrives, hoping to leave their card with the owner, or talk to them about rebuilding. The fact that a contractor is chasing this kind of lead speaks to the desperation that most people are feeling, trying to keep up with the rising cost of living.

Politics are a theme as Troy and Higgins discuss the political situation; Higgins convinced that black politicians that ran the city actually ran it into the ground and tells Troy that they have to stop voting the 'crooked niggas into office'.

Troy knows enough history after having conversations with David that he understood things weren't that simple. The problem had actually begun when the white population fled leaving thousands of black people with little education to run the city. They tried, but the suburbs boycotted them and when the automakers also made poor decisions, the downward trend spiraled. Troy tells Higgins that too many people sit around hoping things will get better instead of figuring out how to improve things, foreshadowing his efforts to improve the situation with his mother's house.

Troy visits his mother who calls him her 'Lucky Boy' which seems to foreshadow an unlucky future, particularly as Troy isn't truthful or forthcoming with her. Identity theft is a theme that concerns his mother and she admits that when he tells her that he wants to enter her information into a data base to create an ancestral tree. She listens as he explains their 'opt out' policy, lying further to convince her that her information is safe while the truth is that he wants it to steal her house, regardless of how noble his intentions might be.

Aging and the perils that accompany it are discussed by Viola as she advises Troy not to get old. She tells him how hard it is for her to sleep at night and how much pain she is in but Troy's only interest is in the identification he needs from her. Troy notices the plastic buckets near her and wonders as to their use. Viola also asks to be taken out – a common request for aged shut-ins but Troy is anxious to leave now that he has what he needs. On another front, David also deals with an aging mother. His brother Greg had pawned her television so recently David had purchased a 46" flat screen for her. She'd mentioned that the old television hurt her eyes, but the new one is no better, and is so real to her that nature channels come alive in her living room.

Addiction is touched on again – the theme part of David's life as well as Lelah's. David's brother Greg takes advantage of their aging mother again and again, while David replaces the items he pawns and tries to mend the damage done when he comes around. Lelah continues to struggle with the lure of gambling, and even talking about it with David makes her hands itch with a need to be there. David recognizes how difficult addictions are and vocalizes his support when she lies and tells him her gambling is in the past. It is interesting to note that David believes her despite learning first hand in his family that an addict will say anything necessary in order to get their next fix. During the



winter, McNair had found Greg stealing the siding right off of a neighboring house. The news humiliated his mother to such a degree that she begged off invitation to play cards for weeks.

Discussion Question 1

How does Troy convince his mother to provide him with the identification and security measures required in order to short-sell her home and what makes him think she knows the truth about what he is doing?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Mrs. Gardenhire refuse to watch her nature shows head on, despite glancing back at it frequently, and what happened that caused this change in her viewing habits?

Discussion Question 3

What half-truth does Lelah tell David and why is she unable to tell him the entire truth even now?

Vocabulary

disciplinarian, pretentious, finagle, utilitarian, degeneration, dilapidated, presumptuous



Week Four - Spring 2008: Sometimes It's Gotta Be You and A Typecast She Couldn't Shake

Summary

Alice is the third person to deny that Charles had seen the specter, and the meeting leaves him disheartened. He drives around, too fearful to return to the house on Yarrow, and not ready to face Tina either. He drives to his father's grave site and sits there for a time wondering how many ghosts were there. Charles had expected that subsequent sightings of the ghost would bother him less than the first one, but that isn't the case. While it still makes no noise, it returns again and again despite the fact that Charles changes rooms every night. It even shows up in the basement. One night he even gets up and touches it, but nothing changes. Finally, he begins calling his siblings one at a time hoping to find some emotional support. He calls them in order of age, beginning with Francey who is the next one down from him. One by one he works his way down the list and the first one of his siblings to actually admit to believing him is Lonnie who was only three the first time he'd seen the haint in the big room. Lonnie suggests he talk to the ghost, but Charles has no idea what he would say if he did. Troy wants to talk about the house on Yarrow, but Charles tells him that the whole family will make a decision about that and any proposal he has should wait until the next meeting. When Charles calls Lelah, he mentions that the house will likely be sold. Finally, he heads home where Tina tells him she wants the man she married back. Charles isn't prepared to compromise or make peace with her, and goes out onto the back porch with some food. Rocking there, he can't help but wonder if the problem is really him as he remembers how his mother used to tell him that everyone else can't be wrong all the time.

Lelah drives to Marlene's hoping to gain support against selling the Yarrow Street house. Marlene tells Lelah that she informed Charles she was opposed to the sale and Lelah wonders whether he is legally able to sell the home. Lelah blurts out that she is living there and had been for nearly three weeks. Marlene asks her if she feels safe there, and after a moment she leaves and returns with an envelope containing almost \$1,000. Lelah refuses the money at first, but Marlene accuses her of having Viola's misplaced pride, and finally convinces her to take it. She promises to pay her back but Marlene doesn't care. She just wants Lelah to promise that she won't blow it on the slots. Lelah almost tells her that the roulette table is a much safer bet, and is ashamed of herself for even thinking it.



Analysis

Fear is the initial theme in this segment as Charles drives around following three denials of the ghost he is certain isn't in his imagination. He is too afraid to follow Alice's advice and return to the house where it all began on Yarrow Street, considering it as the site of his undoing.

Poverty continues to be an ongoing theme as well as Charles takes note of the large houses up the boulevard that he had coveted as a child, imagining back then how much room there would be for their family and it depresses him now to see them empty and abandoned.

Self-doubt grows and gnaws at Charles as he considers the ongoing visitations he is having, and the responses he gets from his family and from Alice when he tells them about it. The only one to offer any kind of support is Lonnie who assures him that he isn't hallucinating. The rest of his siblings are busy with their own lives, and have little patience for Charles and his visitations, most believing it is all in his mind.

Family also continues as an ongoing theme as Troy pushes Charles for information on the sale of the family home, telling him that as far as he's concerned, it's much more important than the 'bad dreams' Charles is having. When Charles works his way down to Lelah, he tells her that she should say goodbye to the house if she wants to as it won't be theirs for long. Lelah cries and Charles hangs up feeling equally confrontational and frustrated. Tina is doing what she can to assemble the family for a gathering to celebrate the spring birthdays, revealing once again her dedication and love for the family she married into, despite Charles telling her that he doesn't feel much like hosting a celebration of any kind. Tina doesn't care, reminding him that the gathering isn't about him, or for him. She reminds him that both she and her mother are among the spring birthdays to be celebrated and that there is no telling how long his mother will be around to celebrate birthdays with them, foreshadowing a coming change in her health that is not an improvement.

Reconciliation is also a theme as Tina makes an effort to resolve the issues she is having with Charles. She tells him that she wants her husband back, and Charles realizes that she isn't interested in helping him sort things out as much as she is in getting her life and her husband to behave normally. He ignores her efforts to make things right, knowing that if she doesn't believe him there is no way to fix what is wrong. He goes out onto the porch instead, his mother's words of the past ringing in his ears.... Everyone else can't be wrong all the time – sometimes it might be him.

Secrecy is a theme that Lelah hopes to maintain as she continues to hide the depth of her addiction from the rest of the family. Most of the family still doesn't know that she has lost her job; that she's been evicted; that she is living at the empty family home on Yarrow; or that she'd pawned items that didn't belong to her. Marlene is one of the few she confides in, and she gives Lelah almost \$1,000 to help her out. At first Lelah turns the money down, but Marlene insists, upset that familial pride might get in the way of



family helping each other out again. Lelah takes the money and Marlene asks her to please not waste it on the slots. Lelah is too ashamed to admit that roulette is her game.

Discussion Question 1

What does Charles do in an effort to understand the ghost that continually appears, and what responses does he get?

Discussion Question 2

Which sibling or siblings believe Charles when he talks to them about the specter, and which of his family members think it is all in his head?

Discussion Question 3

How does Marlene try to help Lelah, and what stops Lelah from taking the high road as she originally intends?

Vocabulary

inaugural, ostensibly, insinuation, confrontational, transgression



Week Four - Spring 2008: A Prudent Wife is From the Lord and Let Her Say Yes

Summary

After two hours, Tina convinces Charles to come back in the house, telling him he should sleep in his own bed despite how much he snores. He knows that she thinks he needs her and wishes he didn't. He gets settled in bed, but Tina is on her knees at the foot of the bed and although he argues with her at first, she manages to convince him to join her. After they've prayed, she convinces him to return to bed, giving him the blood pressure pills that he realizes he's forgotten to take lately. He takes them and Tina gets into their usual spooning position, surprised to find that Charles has an erection. Before he can decide what he wants to do with it, she reaches behind herself and grabs him, deflating him almost immediately for reasons he doesn't understand. He almost barks a goodnight to her.

Brianne gets Bobbie up, feeling a bit out of sorts after having stayed up late to video chat with Rob on line. Toward the end of the call, he asked her to move in with him again, and she told him she'd think about it. When Brianne sees her mother outside the front door, she fights the instinct to grab Bobbie and hide in the bedroom like she would if her mother was a Jehovah Witness instead, but then she sees the McDonald's bag in her hand. She opens the door and Bobbie recognizes the bag immediately, calling out 'Mick Donna'.

They sit at the table and Lelah takes the \$40 out that Brianne had given her the day before, handing it back. They talk about her trip to see Rob with Bobbie, and then Lelah gets to the heart of the conversation she wants to have with Brianne. She begins by saying she knows Brianne wants to go back to school for her Bachelor of Arts and Registered Nursing degrees. Since she is working night shift (a lie she maintains rather than telling Brianne the truth) she adds, and looking after Bobbie during the day, she is never home. She suggests it would be more sensible if she moved in with Brianne so they could both save on rent and Brianne could return to school. For a moment they argue about Brianne returning to school, Lelah trying to convince her not to put it off too much longer, but then Brianne blurts out that she is moving to Chicago to be with Rob. She quickly adds that she's leaving at the end of the month, but that if Lelah wanted to continue to pay the rent, she could stay there. Brianne even adds that she can keep the furniture as she doesn't think she'll need it. Despite all of the desperate arguments Lelah comes up with, Brianne's mind is made up. Before Lelah can argue much more, Brianne asks her to leave.



Analysis

Relationships are a strong theme in this segment beginning with Tina and her efforts to placate Charles and make him forget the issues he's having. She isn't prepared to support him by telling him she believes him however, which is the only kind of support that Charles is interested in hearing from her. It is obvious to him that she pities him and that she thinks he needs her companionship right now. Perhaps part of him is even angry because there is some truth to that. Regardless of that, Charles has missed the bed they bought after his accident.

Faith is also a theme as Tina works to convince her husband that what he really needs is to give the whole problem over to God, and He would set Charles free. They quote scripture to each other before beginning their own prayers, and Charles can't help but compare their separate styles of prayer. Charles tended to spend his short time in prayer thanking God for what he had and apologizing for everything else. Tina believed that all you had to do was ask God for what you wanted and if you were worthy, you would receive. She'd developed a fervor he couldn't match since she'd left their church and joined the holy rollers.

The family theme continues as Lelah arrives at her daughter's house, mentally preparing herself to tell Brianne the truth. Brianne had spent a late night talking to Bobbie's father Rob, who asks her to move in with him. His earlier reluctance to take on the role of Bobbie's father full time had resolved itself and all it takes is a visit from her mother to convince Brianne that moving to Rob is a good idea.

The addiction theme continues as Lelah finally feels as though she's been forced into a position where she must impose on her daughter for a place to live. Despite her own agenda, she chickens out at the crucial moment and instead phrases her request as a favor to Brianne, telling her she could stay with Bobbie while Brianne returned to school. When Brianne isn't enthusiastic about the idea, Lelah becomes angry and when she raises her voice Bobbie begins to cry. Brianne asks Lelah to leave.

Discussion Question 1

Why isn't Charles prepared to forgive Tina and accept her attempts to make things right between them?

Discussion Question 2

What proposal does Lelah make Brianne and what decision does Brianne make on the spot as a result?



Discussion Question 3

What reasons does Lelah give for her offer to Brianne and what part of her story is truthful – what part is wishful thinking or outright fiction?

Vocabulary

concordance, supplication, disconcerting, metamorphosis, perfunctory, admonishment



Week Four - Spring 2008: Brave, or at Least Brash; One Thing Was Clear; and Playing For Time

Summary

Charles sleeps beside Tina and dreams of Alice. He is reaching out to her when he wakes and sees the window sill is glowing. He tries to wake Tina, but she rolls over mumbling, so he thinks about his PG13 dream about Alice. He decides to tell Alice how he feels but when he gets there she admits she wasn't expecting him after their last meeting. She invites him to go for coffee and on the elevator he leans in to kiss her. She backs up and he apologizes, afraid that he's ruined everything. They meet at the coffee shop and he apologizes for his behavior both before and in the elevator. She apologizes too, and suggests that Charles see her mentor, Gus, another therapist from here forward.

Alice tells Charles that before her adoption by white parents, she was one of seven children, all of whom had died shortly after her birth in a car accident along with her mother. Her father left her with a church woman shortly after. Rumors were that her oldest sibling had deliberately driven off the bridge. With Charles she admits she saw an opportunity to look at the kind of family she might have been part of. When Charles presses her, Alice admits she thinks he wants the ghost to stay as it separates him from his siblings. She gets ready to leave, and hands him the card of her therapist, suggesting Charles continue with Gus and a deep loneliness settles on him.

Lelah is so upset after her morning with Brianne that she calls David. They meet for coffee and Lelah is all set to ask him if she can move in with him when she notices that something has changed. He isn't looking at her. He unwraps the item he brought in with him, and explains how he came to have the knife she pawned days earlier, telling her how horrified he was to have found it at the pawn shop, realizing that Troy had stolen it years earlier and more recently Lelah had pawned it. He hardly knows what upsets him more, but he assures Lelah that they are done. He doesn't want to save her, and Lelah realizes how close she'd come to asking him to do exactly that.

David leaves, and drives to his mother's house. He slows down as he gets closer, and notices his mother and Mr. McNair walking hand in hand in the empty lot where a garden was growing. Stunned, David contemplates his mother and her relationship, and he is about to get out of his vehicle when he notices Greg pulling weeds. He says something, and his mother and Mr. McNair laugh like a happy family. Embarrassed, he gets back in his van and heads to Troy's place in Hamtramck to confront him about the knife.



Lelah goes straight to the casino. She waits for someone else to sit down before joining the roulette table. With its \$10 limit, Marlene's money would afford her nearly a hundred plays. She didn't care if she won, simply needing to kill time and find peace.

Analysis

Relationships continue to be a theme in this segment as Charles dreams of Alice and wonders how she feels about him. He thinks about how he's always backed away from taking a chance and wonders how his life might have gone had he been braver or surer of himself. He remembers times in his life when he'd passed on opportunities, thinking them too risky and hindsight showed what a boon it would have been. Tangled relationships in this segment begin with Charles and Alice and continue with Lelah and David and neither of these examples ends with a relationship intact. Another relationship that comes to light is one between Mrs. Gardenhire and Mr. McNair – a surprise to David but Norman had been in love with his mother since his wife passed away.

Loneliness is a recurring theme for Charles. After his encounter with Alice and her decision to stop acting as his therapist, he feels an intense loss. He'd hoped that by revealing his feelings for her, she would respond in kind, but instead he had ensured she would want no more to do with him.

Families and their complexities are an ongoing theme throughout, and this segment is no exception. Alice tells Charles about her family history, and relates the story of her siblings and her mother dying in a car accident. Rumors suggested her oldest brother drove the car off the bridge intentionally. Charles feels the same disconnection from his family when they don't believe his ongoing visitations truly exist. David discovers his best friend Troy stole a knife from a sailor named Tasaka when they were in Bangkok. He only learns this because he finds it in the pawn shop where Lelah took it. David's history with his brother Greg is enough to separate him from Lelah. Lelah is so upset by the meeting with David that she takes Marlene's money to the casino, looking for a place to feel normal.

Trust is also a theme, broken again and again by multiple characters beginning with Charles who breaks Alice's trust when he tries to kiss her. Alice breaks Charles' trust when she drops him as his therapist and says goodbye to him, suggesting he go to her therapist, Gus, instead. Lelah breaks David's trust by not being totally honest with him from the start. Instead, he discovers that Lelah's behavior is not much different from his brother, Greg's. She is also pawning things that don't belong to her; is living in a home that is supposed to be abandoned and is about to beg him to rescue her when he confronts her. Troy has also broken David's trust, having stolen the knife Lelah pawned from a fellow soldier in Bangkok for reasons David surely can't understand. David's equilibrium continues to falter when he goes to his mother's house and discovers that she and Mr. McNair are involved and that Greg appears to be a part of his mother's real life while he is the outcast. Lastly, Lelah breaks Marlene's trust when she takes the



money Marlene gave her to the casino, interested only in how long it can keep her from having to face reality.

Addiction continues to be a theme as well. David discovers the knife that Lelah pawned, recognizing it as one that Troy must have stolen from a fellow serviceman when they were in Bangkok. His history with his brother Greg is enough to have him severing ties with Lelah, unable to face her ongoing lies and deceit. Lelah can't help but go to the casino when David finishes with her; depressed and looking for a way to kill time without thinking. She doesn't consider Marlene's disappointment if she learns that Lelah gambled her money away, and this foreshadows a coming rift between Lelah and the rest of her siblings when they learn of her addiction issues.

Gus is introduced as Alice's therapist, and she recommends that Charles begin seeing him, explaining that he has helped her through many of her issues.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Alice indulge Charles for so long, and what does she reveal about her personal history to him?

Discussion Question 2

What does David discover that destroys his relationship with Lelah and why is he unwilling to even listen to her?

Discussion Question 3

What does David learn when he drives to his mother's house that puts him at odds with his family as well, and why is this such a betrayal to him?

Vocabulary

patronage, illegitimate, portentous, articulated, authoritative, camaraderie



Week Four - Spring 2008: Where the Turners Had Been Known; Up; and The First and the Last

Summary

Charles drinks two cups of coffee after Alice leaves, and contemplates the mess things have become. Tina had predicted the outcome with Alice correctly, and he had made a fool out of himself. Unable to summon the desire to go to work, Charles stops at a liquor store and picks up two cases of beer before driving to the old Turner house on Yarrow. He sits outside for a long time, leaving only to grab some fast food before returning. Two men pull up next to him, and they nod to each other before they drive away, leaving Charles to wonder if the Turner family still means something in this neighborhood.

Lelah sits at the roulette table till lunch, and is only \$75 behind at that point. After eating, she sits at a craps table and begins to win again. She plays recklessly, putting hundreds of dollars on Brianne's number 27, and to her surprise it wins. A man behind her comments, and reminds her that they attended GA meetings together some times. He calls her a pro, bothering her until she grabs her chips and leaves, driving back to the house on Yarrow. She parks in the front, afraid to go into the alley at night, and sprints to the front door.

Charles wakes when he feels a push against his back. Lelah pushes again and reaches in, turning on the light to see her oldest brother lying fetal on the floor. He manages to focus on her, and notes that she looks as bad as he feels. She goes downstairs to get him some water. Charles notices the duffle bag in the corner and asks if Tina sent her. She says no, and when Charles comments that it appears someone has been living there, she bursts into tears and finally tells him everything. She finishes up saying she hates herself. Then she considers how she found her brother and asks why he's there and getting drunk.

They sit together, exchanging sorrows; Lelah hearing about his visits from the spirit world and Charles learning about Lelah's battle with gambling and what it has cost her. She admits to having won a few thousand despite her best efforts, adding that at least she can pay Marlene back. They hear a noise and see a silhouette of a man on the porch where they discover Troy, drunk and sporting a new shiner. Charles mistakes him for the specter and barrels into him dropping him to the floor. Then Troy's police training kicks in and he subdues Charles, twisting his arm behind him. Lelah realizes that David had gone to confront Troy and now Troy is drunk enough to confront Charles and Lelah both. Lelah and Troy argue and Charles just sits there until a figure reveals itself behind his siblings. He calls out to them, but they are so engrossed that they don't hear him saying the haint is behind them. It steps forward and Charles feels as though he's been punched.



Troy sees Charles slump over first. Though still breathing, he resists consciousness. They drive him to the hospital, unable to bring him around on the way. When they learn that all he needs is intravenous fluids, Troy is weak with relief. Troy drives them back to the house on Yarrow, and apologizes to Charles for everything. He has an overwhelming urge to see his daughter Camille and resolves to book a flight to Germany as soon as possible. Meanwhile, Lelah moves her things downstairs to be with Charles.

Analysis

Humiliation is the opening theme in this segment as Charles sits by himself in the coffee shop after Alice leaves. His humiliation is only part of the overall abandonment he feels as a result of not only Alice but his entire family as well. Charles had convinced himself that Alice might be interested in him, and it was the first time in many years that he'd felt that way so his disappointment in her rejection is acute. Now he feels foolish and Tina's words ring in his ears as things had unfolded just as she'd predicted.

Charles decides to retreat to the house on Yarrow, using alcohol to dull the ache he feels. He parks near the primary school, now abandoned and an apt metaphor for the way he currently feels.

Resentment is the only adequate theme Charles can come up with to describe the way he feels for Tina, and he is unable to remember a time in several weeks where he'd felt anything resembling tenderness to his wife.

Courage and fear waffle in Charles as he sits outside the Yarrow house. He knows he should confront his fears once and for all, but a part of him would rather sleep intermittently on the couch for the rest of his life than to return to the big room only to discover that it held nothing unusual for him.

A sense of belonging still exists for Charles as he sits outside the Yarrow house and despite the changes in the neighborhood he discovers that he is still accepted by the locals including those who ruled the streets at night. It makes him feel as though the Turner family still meant something in this area.

Addiction continues to be an ongoing theme as Lelah sits at a table trying to find her comfort zone. She feels as though she needs to lose; an apt punishment for her behavior in her mind but despite betting recklessly, she wins again and again. As she plays, her mind circles around the mistakes she's made throughout her life and she is desperate to find somewhere to put the self-loathing and regret. Addiction is just around the corner for most of the Turner siblings as alcohol becomes the 'go to' relief for everything from rejection in Charles' case to embarrassment and loss in Troy's case.

Zach is briefly introduced as someone Lelah had seen at Gambler's Anonymous meetings in the past. He calls her a 'pro' and his misery is like an assault on her senses. When she gets up to leave, he holds out his hand for a goodwill gesture in the way of a chip offending Lelah's senses on so many levels. She leaves without giving him



anything, despite having been there and done that on numerous occasions, hoping for and depending on the goodwill of strangers.

The Yarrow house draws the Turner siblings to it – a symbol of family, unity and safety, despite the ghost Charles had first seen there. Lelah goes there when she is evicted and has nowhere else to turn; Charles goes there when he is unable to face Tina and her recriminations; and Troy heads for the Turner house to exorcise his demons, hoping to be able to ‘rescue’ Lelah from herself.

Discussion Question 1

What does Alice tell Charles about herself and how does that explain why she led him on?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Lelah so reckless with Marlene’s money when she goes to the casino, and what happens while there?

Discussion Question 3

What does Troy want more than anything at this time; what is he hoping to avoid and why?

Vocabulary

inclination, fluctuated, paragon, reciprocate, excommunicated, disparate



Week Four - Spring 2008: A Real Soldier's Return (Spring 1945) and Quitting Time (Spring 1945)

Summary

In the spring of 1945, eight months into his relationship with Odella, Francis learns that she has been married the whole time. Private Dennis Withers returns from Italy and Odella introduces him to Francis. Francis is surprised by Odella's infidelity, having never so much as mentioned her husband's name. She tells Francis that since Dennis had never written, and had been gone for over a year before Francis had come into her life and she couldn't be blamed for moving on. Now without her Francis discovers that Detroit is a backbreaking and lonely city. He thinks about Viola and knows his infidelity has to end.

When Ethel Joggets decides she wants biscuits for breakfast, Viola goes to the pantry to find flour. This was one recipe she knew without having to consult her sisters, and while she is collecting ingredients she hears a dull thud. By the time Viola stands up, Ethel had already reached Harold, scooping him up as he shrieked and turning to slap Viola across the face so hard that each finger raises a welt. Viola picks up her coat and walks out without a word. Sitting on the first bus home she realizes it is time to leave, and seek the help of one of her brothers. She is disappointed that she has no wedding ring to prove that her child was born in wedlock and that she'd tried to be a good wife.

While waiting for the second bus to come, a Packard pulls up and Reverend Tufts offers her a ride home. He comments on her discharge, marked by the fingers on her face, and mentions that she should be leaving to go north soon anyway. She admits that she hasn't heard from Francis but for once in the very beginning, and blames Reverend Tufts for encouraging him to leave in the first place. He reminds her that he had written an introduction, and had Francis gone there, he would have been fine. Still angry, she tells him he should be ashamed of himself and he has to wait until his heart rate slows and his anger is under control before he asks Viola whether or not she believes in ghosts.

Analysis

Dennis Withers is introduced as Odella's husband, just returned from Italy after a two year absence and named a hero in the black community. Odella takes him back, relegating Francis to his shared quarters once more.

Depression is a theme in this segment as Francis reels when Odella puts him aside because her husband – a surprise to Francis – returns from the war after being gone



without word for two years. Francis can't understand how she can just pick up where she left off with her husband as though nothing had happened between the two of them.

Fear is also a theme as Viola quits her job with the Joggets family, forcing her into taking action with her young son earlier than she had been prepared to. Her fear grows when she sees a Packard waiting in the same spot she'd been standing in a moment earlier, and all she can think is that Ethel had sent her husband and prosecution was in her future, perhaps for neglect or even something worse.

Humiliation is a brief theme as Viola promises herself that regardless of what happens, she would keep the depths of her humiliation to herself – and she had for all of her life. Inside however, the humiliation only continues when Reverend Tufts comments that she should be ready to head north to be with Francis any time now. Viola wonders if he is teasing or making fun of her.

Anger and confrontation replace Viola's fear and humiliation as she summons the courage to tell Reverend Tufts that Francis would still be there with her if it weren't for Tufts sending him away. He admits to being culpable to a degree, but adds that he never advised Francis not to stay in touch with her. Viola can't understand why Tufts would send him away to begin with since his mother had sent him money for Francis' care all of her life. Reverend Tufts prides himself on maintaining control and teaches his congregation to conduct themselves by channeling volatile emotion into Missionary works.

Discussion Question 1

What does Francis realize after Odella makes it clear that now that her husband has returned, whatever she and Francis had is over?

Discussion Question 2

What costs Viola her job, and what will change for her as a result of this loss?

Discussion Question 3

What does Viola blame Reverend Tufts for and does she have a valid case? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

heathen, boisterous, fiduciary, volatile, intellectual, congregation



Week Five - Spring 2008: When The End Is Near; A Multiple-Man Operation; and Leverage

Summary

By the time Charles gets home, Tina is beyond angry. While her Pastor would council her to forgive and understand, at the age of 60, she isn't prepared to adjust to anymore nonsense. Viola's doctor's visit is so distressing that Tina tries to reach Charles at work but he isn't there, and didn't even call in to tell them he wasn't coming. She calls Alice with no idea of what she planned to say, but Alice doesn't answer and Tina is convinced that she and Charles are together somewhere. The next morning she goes through his stack of printouts pertaining to the haint and comes across the picture of Alice with her adopted parents.

While Tina believes a single transgression is not a marriage ender, an affair is different. Tina can't forgive Charles for having a full on emotional or intellectual affair. While she is considering this, Charles walks in with Lelah. Tina can't say what she wants to with Lelah there so instead she blurts out 'Your mother has cancer'. Lelah has questions but Tina tells her she can get the answers from Viola herself so Lelah goes in to talk to her. Tina wonders now if she might have been wrong. Charles assures her nothing happened, adding that he'd slept at the Yarrow Street house which is where he found Lelah. He tells her Lelah is in trouble and needs somewhere to stay which is the final straw. Tina tells him she doesn't care, and rails at him, angry; frustrated; and humiliated.

Lelah talks to Viola who is resigned and has no intention of fighting her cancer or prolonging her illness. After their conversation, Lelah needs to talk to Brianne, but her call goes straight to voicemail so she hangs up, not knowing what message to leave. After Viola falls asleep, Lelah goes out to Charles who doesn't want to talk about his conversation with Tina. He asks Lelah not to tell anyone about their mother for the time being and reluctantly, she agrees.

Charles goes to his son Chucky's house, hoping to talk to Tina, but Chucky runs interference and after explaining she doesn't want to talk to him right now, Chucky closes the door in his face. Charles drives home, and discovers Lonnie's vehicle in the driveway. He parks on the road and goes in to find Lonnie singing hymns for Viola who sits with a look of rapture on her face. Lelah makes breakfast, and afterward Charles and Lonnie go for a drive to the Yarrow house – a tradition Lonnie upholds whenever he comes to town. They discover the metal garage has been taken right off of the foundation. Beyond angry, Charles curses and kicks at the few remaining items while Lonnie thanks the powers that be that he never got into the kind of drugs that would make him steal a garage.



Lelah drives to Brianne's and discovers a moving van in her parking space. She can hardly believe that things are happening this fast. Rob is standing outside with Bobby and she says hello on her way inside. She tries to talk to Brianne, apologizing for her behavior the last time they talked and hoping to convince her to stay for the family gathering two days hence. Brianne refuses and makes it clear that she will not stay, and will not come back for the gathering either. Lelah offers her \$1,000, but Brianne doesn't want that either. She finally agrees to take it, but only if Lelah tells her everything she can remember about Vernon. Reluctantly, Lelah agrees and by three o'clock most of the apartment is packed and they are ready to leave Detroit and Lelah behind.

Analysis

Infidelity is the opening theme in this segment, but is dependent on the definition applied. While Charles and Alice had never been intimate physically, Tina believes that even intellectual infidelity is wrong and points to a deeper betrayal. Charles tries to argue his position, but remembers the thoughts he'd had about Alice and the kiss he'd given her in the elevator and realizes he has no case. Tina isn't even sure she believes Charles betrayed her, but his day-to-day behavior is just as heartbreaking if not more so. She quotes a segment of scripture to him – Matthew 5:28, and by those parameters he knows he had indeed been unfaithful to some degree.

Jealousy is a theme that ties in with infidelity as Tina discovers a photo of Alice with her parents and compares herself to the woman who she is convinced has claimed her husband's attentions. She notes that while Alice's face is younger in appearance, their skin is about the same color although Alice is clearly taller than Tina is. Tina also notes that Alice is younger and has no smile lines or bags under her eyes yet. Her clothes are also more up to date. It is this jealousy that causes her to blurt out the meanest thing she can think of – the fact that his mother has cancer – in an effort to hurt him as much as he has hurt her.

Relationships are examined in this segment again as they have been throughout this story. Tina berates Charles for shutting her out and for treating her like his mother instead of his wife and going to Alice for the support he should be going to her for.

Religion is also discussed and Charles accuses Tina of becoming so wrapped up in the church that she throws scripture at him so regularly that he thinks she feels he is unworthy of her. Tina is angry that Charles chooses to talk to Alice about the ghost he is seeing rather than a priest whose business it is to deal with the bridge between the living and the afterlife.

Death and the dignity of life remaining are also themes as Viola learns she has cancer. She refuses treatment, knowing that her life is coming to an end, and is without fear. She tells Lelah that she has no intention of prolonging the inevitable with rounds of chemo and drugs. Now that she has been diagnosed with the disease however she doesn't have to fight to get the drugs necessary to get the relief she needs.



Family continues to be a theme as well. Tina has invited all family members to come and celebrate the spring birthdays, and now to say goodbye to Viola as well. Family secrets are revealed beginning with Lelah learning that her father had never quit drinking on his own – a fact that she'd held up in front of her like a badge of ability and something she could do if she wanted to. Viola tells her that the truth was that he was forced to quit for health reasons, and even then Viola had to send Charles after him to keep him from drinking. Charles tries to repair his family by going to retrieve Tina from his son's house, but she refuses to speak to him and his son won't let him in.

Lonnie arrives in a smashed up Lexus symbolic of his current financial and emotional state of mind. Once a symbol of opulence, the condition of the vehicle inside and out speaks to the current state of its owner and Lonnie confirms this himself when he admits to having borrowed the money so that he could get there.

Rob arrives to help Brianne pack up to move and Lelah does what she can to mend the damage she'd done when they last saw each other. Brianne is reluctant to even talk to her at first, but manages to leverage information out of her regarding her father and their relationship.

Discussion Question 1

What does Tina see as the biggest issue affecting her relationship with Charles and how might he repair this?

Discussion Question 2

What do Charles and Lonnie discuss while out for a ride, and what is Lonnie grateful for when they reach their destination?

Discussion Question 3

What leverage does Brianne use on Lelah and why is it effective?

Vocabulary

philandering, decorum, disseminate, capitulating, detritus, hypocritical



Week Five - Spring 2008: To Let Go Or To Hang On; An Old Man In Faded Slacks; and How Three Went North

Summary

Charles can see the house on Yarrow is disintegrating, moment by moment. On Thursday the Turner family begins to arrive. They take their turns filling in to spend time with Viola, tend to whatever she needs and fill her in on how her extended roots were faring. They all wanted to see the site of the missing garage, but Charles and Lelah beg off. Lelah goes to bed early, leaving Charles to inflate air mattresses and pile bedding on pallets.

Viola lies and considers the small amount of control she has, grateful that she could turn down the chemo while convincing the doctors to give her medication that works for her pain. She can't remember when she became more afraid of the pain than she was of dying, but now the pain had yanked her from sleep to consciousness and she knew that she had about half an hour before it became all consuming, crushing her under it. She is relieved when she sees Charles sitting in the armchair dozing and she tells him he has three years before he is older than his father or either of his grandfathers. Charles gets her pills ready and hands them to her, holding the water for her to drink but she hesitates, knowing she has to tell him the truth. She looks into his eyes and tells him that she's never seen a haint, but knows people who have. Her father was one of them and his brother Friend was another. She goes on to tell him all she can before the pain overwhelms her and she takes the pills, heading for the fog once more.

Charles decides to confront his haint like both Lonnie and Alice suggested. Just after 2 a.m. the haint appears but this time it isn't blue. Standing just four feet from Charles, he can see its features clearly. It smiles, revealing the gap between the front teeth, confirming what Charles suspected. He tells his father that he isn't alive, and is not real. The haint isn't wearing the clothes his father was buried in and in fact isn't even wearing shoes. He tells someone unseen under the bed to get up, sternly insisting that he never hides. Charles asks him what he wants and again the haint of his father asks where his pride is and says he should stop playing possum. He realizes that what the haint is saying is just a twisted desire of his own. He considers telling the haint it isn't welcome but he doesn't feel as though it is his right to do so. The haint, still looking under the bed, tells something unseen to do as it pleases then and disappears just before Lonnie comes in. For the first time, Charles wishes it would return.

In the summer of 1945, Reverend Tufts tells Viola that he isn't surprised that Francis had turned feckless. He was in fact a heathen, Tufts assures her, telling her that Francis saw haints and claimed they were sent from God. He tells her she shouldn't be upset, putting his hand on her thigh. She knows what he wants and shifts slightly, her action



giving him permission. He pulls her over one handed and she goes to him feeling both trapped and abandoned. In that moment, she thought she was living the lowest day of her life, but that wasn't the case. Tufts continues to appear, inviting her into his car, and she continues to get in and let him do what he wants. They seldom talk which is a relief. A month later, Francis arrives and admits he's done wrong but that he has a good job and has come for his family. She doesn't tell him about her indiscretion, knowing no good could come of it. Instead, they would spend a lifetime making up for it, each child a testament to their commitment.

Analysis

Humans are compared to ghosts, which is ironic in that one must be a human first and then die to become a ghost, but the analogy here is made that humans are prone to haunting houses, assigning an identity to them in the form of mortgages paid; rooms walked; porches sat and worried upon and hiding places found by children. Human beings live and then die in the houses they buy; and assign the inheritance with great care for after they are gone.

Family is a strong theme again in this segment as the Turner siblings and their families file into town, all in anticipation of the party to celebrate the spring birthdays in the family. This event is especially poignant as Viola is one of the spring birthdays being celebrated and it is likely her last.

Guilt is also a theme as Viola struggles with the way that she'd last spoken with Charles. She'd told him there were no haints in the hopes that he would find the kind of peace that his father never had, but now she knows that she has to tell him the truth. When she finds him in the room when she wakes, she knows the time has come and before the pills can turn her brain to mush again, she tells him about his father and his uncle – both of whom had been affected by a ghost throughout their lives.

Heredity is touched on in this segment as Viola talks to Charles about his father and his uncle. She tells him he's almost at the point where they died, and then tells him that both his father and his uncle saw haints as well. She explains that some are more benign than others. His father Francis had seen his grandfather, and believed that seeing him was a gift from God. His uncle Friend had one follow him as he left the region on horseback, and he was found in a hole resembling a grave with his head caved in by what appeared to be a horse, despite the fact that his was tied up a little ways away. It is clear to her that Charles has inherited their ability to see their dead ancestors, and by telling Charles she hopes to put his mind to rest.

Infidelity is also a theme in this segment as Viola is approached and then regularly fondled by Reverend Tufts before Francis finally returns for her. Tufts tells her that Francis was feckless and assures her that she is young enough to find a respectable man who will look out for her. She has no illusions that he will be that man. When Francis returns and confesses his betrayal, she almost tells him the truth, but realizes that no good will come of it.



Forgiveness is the final theme in this portion as Viola and Francis forgive each other and go on to add another dozen children to the one child they already had; each is a testament to their commitment to each other.

Discussion Question 1

What does Viola fear more than death and why?

Discussion Question 2

How does Charles finally identify his haint and what scene does he believe plays out in their encounter?

Discussion Question 3

How does Reverend Tufts abuse his position in the community and why does Viola let him?

Vocabulary

sedentary, depravity, repulsed, atoning, consecration



Week Five - Spring 2008: Losing The Call; Every Turner Dances; and For Better Things

Summary

Charles's father Francis lost his own father when he was just a child and with his mother gone also, he was lonely. He longed for his father so when he was visited by a pale skinned man in bare feet with his trousers hitched up, despite never seeing a picture of his father, he couldn't imagine it would have been anyone else. Francis had wanted his father so badly that when he saw him, he didn't question how he'd found his way back from the hereafter. The haint appeared every night from then on, sometimes in the form of a man, and sometimes as just a light. For years he told no one, but when Reverend Tufts asked him why he thought he'd been given the call to church leadership, instead of quoting scripture he told Tufts about the haint that had been coming to him for years, comparing him to the angel Gabriel. A week later, Tufts gave Francis a letter of introduction and sent him to Detroit. After that, Francis never saw the haint again. He thought about why often, but the conclusion was the same in the end – there weren't no haints in Detroit. When his son saw a ghost, Francis refused to believe him.

Now, as Charles sits in the house without Tina, his siblings begin the process of organizing the party, each tasked with accomplishing something or making something. Some grilled, some baked, some cooked and some ran errands for everything from booze to meat. Charles feels like a stranger in his own place, and realizes just how much Tina had contributed to each and every Turner function. Charles hoses coolers out in the driveway, wishing he could just climb back into bed. Miles hands him a hot link and a Corona and begins a conversation about the house. He suggests they tear the house down and simply mow the grass until they are ready to rebuild and Charles suggests they just enjoy the party for now. More brothers join in, each with opinions of their own, and Charles understands why Troy thought that just doing what he thought was right and dealing with the fallout later was a good idea. Not wanting to discuss it any further, Charles gets into his car and drives to Chucky's where he pushes his way past Chucky and goes in to talk to Tina. She tells him that if they no longer loved each other, they should go their separate ways and try to enjoy the rest of their lives. Charles kisses her the way he used to and they make love in their son's living room. When they arrive at the party together, they are greeted with cheers and the celebration of the spring birthdays continues. Speeches are made and dancing is done. The last one to speak is Viola, and she knows she will be both gracious and exhibit the strength and pride expected of the matriarch of the family.

In the summer of 1951 Francis went back to his job at the salt mines, doing whatever he had to so that he could support his wife and son and soon after Francey as well. Their first home was small, had rats; bad plumbing and poor heating. Viola looked after



neighbor's children for extra money and when he got the job at Chrysler they moved into the house on Yarrow. Viola, now five months pregnant does a happy dance upstairs, while Francis holds Francey in his arms and smiles at her, daring to hope for their future.

Analysis

Manifestation is the opening theme in this last segment as Francis, having recently lost his father and been dropped with Father Tufts by his mother has such a strong desire to bring his father back that his desires become manifestations in the manner of a man or by way of blue light. He considers these visitations to be a gift from God, but when he tells Father Tufts that he has been visited almost every night of his stay, Tufts interprets the visitation differently.

Fear is the theme that rules Father Tufts as he sends Francis away. The idea that Francis was regularly visited in his church disturbs him to such a degree that the letter of introduction he sends to the pastor in Detroit is distant and impersonal despite the fact that he had all but raised him.

Family celebrations are also strongly themed in this segment as the Turner family gathers at Tina and Charles' house to honor those family members who were born in the spring. Of those Viola Turner is on top of the list and the family and extended family members gather to express their love and respect, share stories and tell jokes.

Relationships and how to maintain and nurture them continues to be dominant as a theme in this segment, as Charles feels as though he is unable to participate in any familial celebrations until he manages to sort things out with his wife and Tina has made it clear that she has no intention of coming despite having been the one who invited everyone. Charles drives to his son Chucky's house to convince her and manages to remind her of the love they shared in the beginning of their relationship. She joins him at their house and the celebrations are on.

Sacrifice is one of the final themes of this story as Francis finally brings Viola and Charles to Detroit. Their first home is a sacrifice for both as Francis works in the salt mines to support them and Viola takes in neighbor's children to help out financially. She ignores the rats and the smell. She ignores the bad heating and poor plumping, willing to sacrifice these comforts in favor of a better future.

Hope is the final theme as Francis and Viola move into their Yarrow Street home, with room for their growing family. It is the foundation on which they will base the next 40 years of their lives and where they will raise their 13 children – each one a testament to their commitment to each other.



Discussion Question 1

How does Reverend Tufts take advantage of his position and why does Viola allow him to do so?

Discussion Question 2

In what way does Charles not want to repeat his father's mistakes and who helps to clarify this issue for him and in what way?

Discussion Question 3

What convinces Tina to rejoin her husband Charles at the family celebration?

Vocabulary

intercession, pragmatism, verbose, prepubescent, vacillated, inclusionary



Characters

Francis Turner Sr.

Francis Sr. died in 1930 after stepping on a rusty nail. The shoes he wore were so worn out that they did nothing to keep the nail from entering his left foot, piercing it nearly as far as the bone. He ignored family who begged him to see a doctor, but Francis Sr. couldn't imagine himself sending for a doctor from Pine Bluff to tend to his injury. Two weeks later he passed away leaving his wife Cynthia a widow with their young son, Francis Jr.

Francis Turner Jr.

Francis was a 6-year-old boy when his father died from blood poisoning after he stepped on a rusty nail, and the debt he left behind caused him and his mother to be evicted. They moved into a single room shack, staying there for two years and barely surviving until his mother found work as a live-in maid in the town of Little Rock. Francis was then taken to Reverend Tufts and at the age of eight began to help in the church.

He remains with the Reverend until his sixteenth year when the monthly money and sweets his mother sent stop coming. His mother visits every Sunday as a rule, but this time when she comes to visit, Cynthia reveals that the white folks she works for are moving to Dallas and have asked her to join them. She decides to do so, leaving Francis to fend for himself.

Francis is given a letter of introduction from Reverend Tuft but when he reads it on the train his pride prevents him from using it. Reverend Tuft's introduction is generic and impersonal. Francis is too proud to show up, but he isn't too proud to ask perfect strangers for help. After asking several people for advice, he gets on a streetcar headed to Paradise Valley. He manages to find a boardinghouse where Miss Odella Withers recommends he share a room with Mr. Jenkins who works nights. By sleeping opposite shifts, they both save on cost of living. He pays for a week and then treats himself to a drink in a local bar.

Francis married Viola Turner before going to Detroit, and eventually, together they raised a total of 13 children. The eldest child is Charles (Cha-Cha to most) and after an unusual encounter, Francis utters the statement that there 'ain't no haints in Detroit' to dispel his fear and encourage him to go back to bed. As the years pass, that statement will change its meaning several times, and eventually it will have little to do with the event that originally caused it. Francis Jr. dies in 1990.



Viola Turner

Viola met Francis when she was only 13 years old, just after she'd stopped attending school. At 15 years of age, he was already tall and generally opened the scripture for Reverend Tufts and already knew by heart most of the Old Testament. When he leaves for Detroit just a year later, Viola does all she can to keep her opinions to herself. It isn't until later that she learns that Francis had confessed to Reverend Tufts that he'd been seeing a spirit or haint almost nightly for all the time that he'd lived there. As soon as Tufts learned that, he sent Francis to Detroit.

Viola works in the field with her siblings to help make ends meet and considers working for a white family like her sisters had. Viola has three brothers – two in Cleveland and one in Omaha and two sisters – Lucille and Olivia. When she is eventually forced into doing so, she considers herself fortunate to have found a couple that doesn't play racial one up-man-ship with their staff.

After months pass, Francis finally shows up on the doorstep again, but not before Reverend Tufts tells her about her husbands' haint and his opinion of it. He makes advances that she accepts and even encourages, thinking maybe it would lead to train tickets out of town, but that doesn't happen and she doesn't ask. The return of Francis is a light in the darkness for Viola and she forgives him the indiscretions he confesses to. Together they return to Detroit with Charles and raise him as well as twelve of his siblings together.

When her son begins to see haints and asks her about them, she shuts him down at first, but then realizes that she can help him. When she sees him again, she explains that his father had also seen them and his uncle Friend as well. She tells Charles that the haint consumed him in many ways and made him feel like he'd missed something or left something undone. She didn't want Charles to be hampered by the spirit in his life, and after listening Charles agrees.

Reverend Tufts

Reverend Tufts is the pastor from the Baptist Church in Arkansas. Although Francis Jr. had lived under the Reverend's roof like his son for years, the Reverend does little by way of an introduction to his friend Reverend Matthews in Detroit. Despite a small congregation of fewer than 300 people, he manages to live in a two-story house, buy a new car twice each decade, have frequent haircuts and even pay tuition for his daughter at Tougaloo College. The Reverend has three deacons, but would have preferred none. Unfortunately, they are old and well respected, so he is unable to rid himself of them.

Reverend Tufts is described as pushy, and despite his short stature he is still able to loom over his parishioners. While many women would describe him as handsome, Viola and her sisters can't imagine how his looks would make up for his attitude and demeanor.



Reverend Tufts asks Francis what makes him think he's been given the call to serve God. When Francis tells him that he'd been visited for most of the ten years he'd lived with the Reverend, comparing his visitor to the angel Gabriel, the Reverend is appalled. In truth, despite evidence of angels in the Bible, he didn't appreciate superstition or claims of visitations. He sends Francis packing immediately with as little a recommendation as he can set up.

Weeks later, when Viola confronts him about Francis, the Reverend tells her the truth, and then tells her that she is young enough to find another man as he puts a hand on her thigh to see if she understands. Viola makes herself available to him, and he takes full advantage of her.

Charles (Cha-Cha) Turner

Born to Francis and Viola Turner, Charles is the eldest of their 13 children and was named after the Arkansas preacher who married them. Charles is wide and tall in stature. Now 64 years old, and 230 pounds, he'd been a truck driver for almost all of his life.

As the eldest, he lays claim to the large room in the house on Yarrow Street, and is convinced that the room was haunted. A ghost, or haint as they were often referred to, tries to yank 14-year-old Charles out of the window on the second story on the same summer that he first begins to claim it as a bedroom. He fought it off successfully, insisting that he wouldn't allow it to run him out of his room.

That isn't the only time he sees the 'haint' but once his father declared there were no such thing, he knew he'd never be able to change his mind.

When Charles turns 25, his father introduces him to his boss, and Cha-Cha begins his career as a truck driver. His wife is a woman named Tina who would give him two children and a grandchild. They live in a house at the edge of Franklin Village with five bedrooms and three and a half bathrooms, all located on one level – something Cha-Cha appreciates after he breaks his hip.

Charles doesn't see the haint again for years, but when he begins to talk to a therapist about it, the specter begins to appear with regularity, almost costing him his marriage. A conversation with his mother reveals that both his father and his uncle also had visitations and were consumed by them. She counsels him not to let that happen, and he takes her advice.

Tina Turner

Tina is Cha-Cha's wife and she encourages him to keep the story of haints to himself, regardless of what he believes personally. She is five feet two inches tall and grew up in Kansas City. Tina met Charles while she was working for a pharmacy. He'd come in to get pain killers for a tooth ache. After that, he came in semi regularly as his truck driving



schedule allowed. Her first impression of Charles is that he is unhealthy and thin looking and it inspires a maternal instinct in her for the first time. After they are married, Tina is pulled into his family as though she'd grown up in it.

Tina loves her husband but his conversations about the spirit he continues to see are pulling them apart, as are his visits to Dr. Alice Rothman. Since her husband began seeing Dr. Rothman, she noticed changes in his behavior and she finally accuses him of having either an emotional or an intellectual affair with her. Then she leaves him alone for a couple of days so that he can think about things.

Tina goes to stay with their son Chucky, telling herself that she still has enough years left in her that it mattered whether or not she is happy, and she is overjoyed when Charles shows up to convince her to come home.

Lelah (Lee-Lee) Turner

Lelah is addicted to gambling. Lelah married Vernon, but their marriage didn't last and she returned home. Vernon had introduced her to gambling, however, and that was something that continued to affect her life every day in one way or another. She worked for the phone company until she'd been suspended pending a permanent decision on her employment after borrowing money to gamble from several of her coworkers.

Lelah earned a chair in the youth orchestra at the local YMCA at the age of 14, playing a Gemeinhardt flute, and went on to play in the school marching band.

Lelah is evicted from her apartment for non-payment of rent and combined with her suspension from work, she is in a financial bind. Taking what few belongings she had that mattered, she stays at the family home on Yarrow Street, long since abandoned by family.

Lelah's sister Marlene loans her as much as she can spare and after an argument with her daughter Brianne, Lelah is back in the casino in a self destructive mood but this one time she couldn't lose. Winning more than she would have believed, she finally leaves and goes back to the house on Yarrow Street where she discovers her older brother Charles who is half hoping to meet with his haint. Together, they go back to Charles and Tina's home.

Francey Turner

Francey is the eldest of the girls in the Turner family. She had been a large woman for most of her life, but though she weighed 350 or so at her heaviest, she now was a slim 150 pounds thanks to a lot of juice and bariatric surgery. Now, she wears stretch pants and white athletic shoes that make her look like a health-conscious granny.

Francey was named after their father Francis because Charles had been named after the man who married his parents and Francey was the one who had come to her older



brother's rescue when the haint had tried to pull him out of the window when he was just 14.

Francey is married to Richard, a man who had electrocuted himself as a child and now refused to do anything electrically speaking in their Oak Park home.

Troy Turner

Troy is the twelfth child born to Viola and Francis Turner. Now a police officer, Troy also did service with the navy. Troy was married to Cara while he was in the service, and they had a daughter together, but after cheating on her three times, Cara took their daughter and moved to Germany. Six months later, Troy met Jillian at a job fair. They have been together for three years.

Troy tries to get his girlfriend to purchase his mother's house in a short sale by pretending to be a stranger, but she refuses.

Jillian Farmer

Jillian is Troy Turner's girlfriend. She earned a cosmetology license at the age of 32, and as soon as she was qualified, she quit her job with the airline as a flight attendant, and they opened a joint savings account. They planned to save for a down payment on a split level home where she could open a salon on the first floor while they lived above.

Jillian and Troy have been together for three years, having met at a job fair when Troy still lived with his mother on Yarrow. Jillian suffers from asthma and one angry shouting match had landed her in the hospital, so they'd promised not to yell at each other. Jillian wears her hair in ponytails mostly, and seldom wears more make up than lip gloss since quitting her job as a flight attendant. She is almost as tall as Troy who is five foot ten inches in height and she has a firm and linear shape. Troy originally thought she looked like a model when he first met her – statuesque and athletic.

Lonnie Turner

Lonnie is the youngest of Francis and Viola's thirteen children and witnesses the ghost's attack on his older brother.

Lonnie is the only one who will admit to remember the haint that attacked Charles when he moved into the whatnot room. He later is the only one who supports Charles when he tries talking to his siblings about the fact that he is seeing it again.



Russell Turner

Russell is a career military man who has survived three decades of service as a marine and a bout with throat cancer. He has a level of gregariousness and a resolution to stay optimistic that often annoys his siblings. His first-born son shames him when he grows up to be an anti 'big government' Republican. Russell is the son who contributes the most financial aid to his mother's care and she has a soft spot for him as a result.

David Gardenhire

David is Troy Turner's friend. He has dark skin and a lanky frame with an ageless face that could place him anywhere between 25 and 45. David and Troy had done their first tour together on the USS Carl Vinson. When David runs into Lelah again at the telephone company, he tells her he now installs cable and internet, and had been told that the telephone company was looking for independent contractors, so he'd come to put his name in.

David and Lelah date for a while and Lelah entertains the idea that she might have a future of some kind with him but when David discovers that she has a gambling addiction and that she's been lying to him, he washes his hands of her.

Dr. Alice Rothman

Alice Rothman is the doctor who is assigned to evaluate Charles after his encounter with the haint becomes known. She is a black woman, with skin darker than Charles had. Her hair is kinky and natural and she looks as though she might be in her mid-forties. Alice has a habit of chewing on her bottom lip when she is about to render a decision or make a point.

Odella Withers

Odella is the mistress of the boarding house that Francis Jr. manages to find accommodation in when he first arrives in Detroit. She has straight and even teeth and skin that is brown.

Dennis Withers

Dennis is a private who leaves Odella to fight in the war and isn't heard from again until his return 18 months later. He has an accent that reminds Francis of a broadcaster – energetic and clipped, and Francis observes that he doesn't look like he's much older than about sixteen years.



Higgins

Higgins is introduced as Troy's partner. While shorter than Troy, he is older at 49 years of age, and carries more physical weight. He's been with the department for 14 years, and tended to be a bit of a gossip. Higgins is considering getting a tattoo to commemorate his 15 years of service.

Barry Stuttle

Barry is the 25-year-old son of one of Reverend Tufts' church deacons. Barry seems to have little interest in clerical aspirations himself, taking on a job as a chef instead. Barry likes Viola and tries repeatedly to get her attention.

Ethel Joggets

Ethel is the first one to give Viola a job as a maid, based on the recommendations of her sister, Olivia.

Norman McNair

Norman McNair is an older man now, bald; his head spotted and wearing a pair of bifocals. He has withered old knee caps that look something like potatoes. Norman and Francis worked at the same company together for 32 years. After Francis died, Norman helped Viola with any handiwork necessary.



Symbols and Symbolism

Haint

A haint is a pale-hued specter that reveals itself to the Turner family for the first time when Charles first begins sleeping in the whatnot room. The specter challenges Charles for the room he is in, and Charles fights back. Later, his brother Quincy insists that it emitted an electric-like blue light that flickered whenever Charles landed a punch and at one point it had even winked at him. Seven-year-old Russell fainted and Lonnie cried, his bladder letting go right there in the hallway.

Haints have been known to push people into wells or make men who'd been hanged dance in the air. Francey would later add that its' skin was translucent like a jellyfish and it had huge, dark disks for pupils.

The fact that Charles sees a specter or spirit is important because his father and his uncle also saw spirits or haints and Viola even adds that his uncle Friend was killed by the one that followed him. His father Francis stopped seeing his benign haint when he moved to Detroit.

For Francis, the haint symbolizes his father's spirit. For Charles, the first visit from a haint is aggressive, as is the second, but after that the visits are mostly benign and in the end the specter seems to symbolize his father or a representation of him.

Demand for Possession

A Demand for Possession notice is the notice that Lelah receives telling her that she has to be out of her home within seven days. The time limit passes so quickly that before Lelah knows it, the bailiffs are on the doorstep with a two hour eviction.

This eviction is symbolic of how much Lelah is willing to sacrifice to maintain her gambling addiction.

Pontiac

A Pontiac is what Lelah drives and is the car that becomes her temporary home after she is served with a Demand for Possession. The size of the car limits the possessions she can take forcing her to evaluate the value of her things.

The Pontiac and its contents symbolize everything Lelah has in her life - her worldly possessions.



Gambler's Anonymous

Gambler's Anonymous is a free, open-to-all association that offers help for addiction to gambling of any kind. Lelah had attended at one time, and should have continued.

Gambler's Anonymous symbolizes Lelah's road to recovery, if only she would stay on it.

Gemeinhardt Flute

The Gemeinhardt Flute, still stored in the basement of the Yarrow house, is in a case with Lelah's name engraved along with her address. The flute is silver-plated and the head joint is solid silver according to the 29-year-old card tucked inside.

This flute is symbolic of Lelah's childhood, but her addiction allows her to pawn it without any consideration.

Nacirema Club

The Nacirema Club is a social club for black people with status. Odella introduces Francis to a Nacirema man who is responsible for hiring the caretakers of the cars that executives drive to work.

Nacirema is American spelled backwards and is symbolic of the separation between the black and white races at the time.

Electric Engineering Certificate

David goes to school online and gets a certificate for electrical engineering that he uses to get work with Comcast.

The certificate is symbolic of David's desire to be more than he is; to accomplish more than he has. It is symbolic of his desire to succeed.

Gotham Hotel

The Gotham Hotel is symbolic of success in Francis' eyes. He believes that Odella will see him as successful or at least capable of being successful if he takes her to the Gotham Hotel for dinner.

Up North

In the mid 1940's, Up North symbolized that magical place where jobs and housing was plentiful and where a man could support his family.



Untraceable Cell Phone

The untraceable cell phone that David uses to call his contact for Troy - the one who would help him to short sell his mother's house - symbolizes just how far from legal he is willing to go in this circumstance.



Settings

Detroit

Detroit is where Viola and Francis Turner raise their children.

Rust Belt

The Rust Belt is the route that Cha-Cha Turner drives, transporting Chryslers on an eighteen wheeler.

Yarrow Street

Yarrow Street is where Francis and Viola Turner raised their children and where Lelah returns to when she is evicted from her home.

Ferndale

Ferndale is the community where Lelah's daughter Brianne lived with her son, Bobby. It has a sizeable gay community and Lelah thinks it is a reasonably good place to raise a child.

Ferndale Library

The Ferndale Library is where Lelah takes her grandson to pass the time after she is evicted and finds herself homeless.

Franklin Village

Charles and Tina Turner live on the edge of Franklin Village.

Motor City Casino

Motor City Casino is where Lelah goes to gamble although she tells herself she is only going there to eat because she has 25 tickets for the buffet making her meals complimentary.



Tougaloo College

Tougaloo College is the college that Reverend Tufts manages to pay the tuition to send his daughter to. It is one of many extravagances that he enjoys as Reverend.

Michigan Central Station

The first place that Francis Jr. sees in Detroit after stepping off the train is the Michigan Central Station. The high domed roof, marble floors and myriad of corridors are palatial in his mind.

Little Rock

Little Rock is where Francis Jr.'s mother Cynthia finds work with a white family, acting as their live-in maid. When the family decides to move to Dallas, they ask his mother to go along, and she does leaving Francis Jr. behind.

Dallas

Dallas is where the white family that Cynthia Turner works for as a live-in maid moves to after the husband lines up work of some kind.

Beaubien Street

Beaubien Street is the heart of Negro commerce and at night, it doubles as the hub of Negro nightlife.

Central District

The central district is the district that Troy works with his partner David.

Hamtramck

Hamtramck is a surrounded by the city of Detroit, but is in itself a small city.

Kaiserslautern

Troy's 9-year-old daughter Camille and his ex-wife Cara live in Kaiserslautern, which is a community outside of Frankfurt, Germany.



Lynch Road Assembly Plant

The Lynch Road Assembly Plant is where Charles worked at the age of 23, putting Dodge Chargers together.

Chains-R-Us

Once a banquet hall, the space is owned by Clive Brothers and provides cash for gold and traditional pawn services.

Pine Bluff

Viola and her sisters take the bus to Pine Bluff each morning, going their separate ways to work from there. Viola is acutely aware of the indignities suffered by many black people when crossing into the white world of Pine Bluff and it represents everything she hopes to save her son Charles from.

Gotham Hotel

The Gotham Hotel represents respectability to Francis. He believes that by dressing up and taking Odella to a hotel where prominent politicians often dined, he would elevate himself in her eyes, and perhaps even his own.



Themes and Motifs

Hauntings: Benign and Belligerent

Hauntings are an ongoing theme throughout this story, seen first by Francis who wants contact with his father so badly that when he sees the spirit for the first time, he believes he has managed to conjure his father's spirit from the dead. Although the figure that appears to him is unfamiliar, particularly since he was so young when his father died, Francis has no fear of the specter from the very beginning. The fact that he witnesses this specter for most of the time that he lives with Reverend Tufts is enough to have the Reverend sending him packing when the visitations are revealed, but despite the Reverend's fears, the spirit Francis sees is benign – so much so in fact that he likens him to a visit from the angel Gabriel when he finally tells Reverend Tufts about it, and he remains convinced that these sightings are a gift from God.

Viola continues to believe in Francis long after her friends and family encourage her to move on but Reverend Tufts eventually reveals his reasons for sending Francis to Detroit, telling Viola that he has always been feckless. He hides his fear of the specter by telling Viola that he'd hoped that a change in locale would help Francis to set aside his notions of a ghost once and for all, but since there is no word from him, it is clear that he is unreliable. Reverend Tufts uses his position in the community and her insecurity to procure sexual favors from her, and as lonely as she is, Viola does nothing to discourage his attention. In Detroit, Francis doesn't use his letter of introduction as it does little to promote him, and since he never sees the haint again, Francis comes to the conclusion that they don't exist in Detroit. He never goes back to Arkansas again.

Charles begins seeing haints when he is 14 years old but his experience is a great deal different than the ones that Francis had. While Francis never had a reason to fear his visitations, and was never bothered by them in any way, Charles has quite a different time with his spirit which attempts to overpower him, and forces him to defend himself against it. Several of his siblings witness this attack, but will later block it out or convince themselves that it was merely their imaginations. When Francis talks to Charles about it, he insists that haints don't exist in Detroit, based on his own experience, and he later tells his wife that their eldest son might be mentally challenged. He never reveals his own visitations to her, unaware that the Reverend already had. Years later the haint appears to Charles again, only this time he is behind the wheel of a truck. When investigators talk to him about the accident, Charles tells him the haint was responsible, and manages to worry his employers enough that they insist he partake of counseling before returning to work.

Charles talks to Alice Rothman, the therapist appointed by his employers at Chrysler and she suggests several ways to document the visitations so that he can perhaps gain some understanding as to why he sees it when he does. She asks him to keep a journal, keep track of what he eats, and even suggests that he talk to his siblings for



support emotionally during this time. It seems that merely by talking about his experiences with Alice, he causes the haint to make contact again, and more frequently.

Charles's haint is unpredictable, sometimes more aggressive than others and as such, there are times when he is paralyzed by his fear of it. His wife Tina questions not only his mental stability, but also his lack of religious conviction when dealing with it, insisting that spirits are the church's area of expertise, not a therapist. Alice finally admits the truth of Tina's assessment, telling Charles she should never have encouraged him to think of his visitations as real. In an effort to get his life back on track, Charles asks the haint what it wants and in that visitation he comes to the conclusion that the haint in his life is his father Francis. To bring the visitations to a heel, Charles begins taking sleeping pills at night.

Family Ties

The Turner family is an emotionally close knit group overall, beginning with the core family of Viola and Francis, and their 13 children. The values instilled in the children come from the troubled beginnings of their parents.

Both Francis and Viola are unfaithful to each other during the time that Francis is sent to Detroit by Reverend Tufts. Francis repeatedly sleeps with Odella Withers, the woman running the boardinghouse he stays in, but when her husband Dennis unexpectedly returns from the war, Francis is summarily ousted from Odella's bed and her emotional life. Feeling betrayed, Francis is forced to examine his own behavior and comes to the conclusion that changes are required.

Viola becomes intimate with Reverend Tufts after he confesses that Francis is feckless and may even have mental issues related to the appearances of the ghost he claims to regularly see. In a time of weakness and loneliness, she allows the Reverend to fill the void she feels, knowing full well that it will never amount to anything.

When Francis shows up on her doorstep looking even worse than when he'd left, she accepts his confession and rededicates herself to her marriage with him. Together they move back to Detroit. Although Viola never reveals her indiscretion to Francis, she is acutely aware of the value of this second chance and Francis still feels guilty enough about his behavior that he is willing to work harder than most to make their marriage work.

As such, they work hard at ensuring their 13 children are loved, cared for, and learn the importance of family and sticking together, and these values are then passed on to their grandchildren as well. Despite the rocky start that Viola and Francis had, they manage to spend the rest of their lives together in relative happiness.

The children, and the children they have all value their family ties, coming together regularly for events such as the spring birthday celebration held at the home of the eldest child Charles and his wife Tina. All of the siblings who are able to attend do so,



helping to prepare food, buy liquor for the occasion, and celebrate the birthdays of the season.

Charles and Tina manage to repair their relationship, much as Viola and Francis had, despite what Tina sees as an emotional and intellectual betrayal by Charles and the fact that Tina had so involved herself in the church that she no longer saw her husband as much more than a soul that needed saving. Charles bridges the gap when he goes to her and convinces her that he still loves her as much as he always has, similar in many ways to how his father had convinced Viola that despite his indiscretion, he still loved, wanted and needed her.

The importance of family is revealed in many small ways as well, such as in the way that Viola is cared for by Charles and Tina when she is no longer able to live alone; and in how Charles and Tina have always been willing to lend a hand to any family member in need, regardless of the reason. This is revealed when Charles brings Lelah home after her losing battle with addiction to gambling causes her to lose everything.

Addiction Affliction

Addiction is something that reveals itself in many different ways within the Turner family beginning with Francis. Francis suffered from addiction to alcohol for most of his life. He drank to such excesses that eventually the doctor warned him that if he wanted to continue to live, he would have to stop drinking. Lelah, the youngest of the thirteen children, believes that Francis found the strength to stop drinking at that point, and uses his strength as a guidepost for her own addiction, telling herself that within her family bloodline lies the strength to set addiction aside if the need is strong enough. The truth is much simpler however, and Viola eventually tells her the truth. Her father had never actually quit drinking. Instead, Viola had often sent Charles after him to keep an eye on him, but that his weakness for alcohol was something he'd never conquered.

Charles is accused of being consumed by his visitations and during an argument with his wife Tina, he would accuse her of being equally addicted to religion, forsaking all else in her pursuit of God.

Charles is convinced that the Turner bloodline is prone to addiction, telling his therapist that his father had not only been an alcoholic, but had taken no joy in drinking. It seemed to Charles that Francis had needed to drink to punish himself for something in his past. Lonnie had used heroin, beginning as young as 13 and to date still took something as far as Charles could tell, but he didn't want to know what that something was. Troy was not addicted as much as he seemed obsessed with success, although he still hadn't figured out how to attain it, and Marlene and Viola had been consumed with the flea market stall they ran for years. As such, he believed that the Turners weren't able to do anything in reasonable moderation.

Charles sees himself as being addicted to being in control, and as the oldest sibling in the family, that control had been reinforced most of his life while Lelah was addicted to



gambling and had managed to lose everything several times over. Her most recent losses included her daughter Brianne and grandson Bobby who moved away in order to gain some distance from it all. David Gardenhire will tell Lelah that addiction is real and shouldn't be taken lightly when he learns that she has had trouble in the past, but when he learns that she is still in trouble, he washes his hands of her, knowing only too well what the cost of addiction can be because of his drug addicted brother Greg.

The cost of the various addictions of the Turner family is steep and in many cases insurmountable. Lelah will likely never earn the complete trust of her daughter Brianne who sees through her attempt to move in with her despite the fact that Lelah hides her recent eviction and need for somewhere to live in her altruistic suggestion that she look after her grandson while Brianne returns to school. It also costs her a relationship with David when she lies to him about her ongoing issues with gambling.

Each addiction has a cost that gets steeper with every deception told to hide it.

Bravery or Cowardice

In this story, Charles has an opportunity to examine his life and how decisions he'd made throughout it affected the outcome. While never describing himself as brave, Charles didn't see himself as a coward either until he'd had several sessions with Alice.

Charles has a dream about Alice which could be rated as PG13 at best, but left him lying in bed with a physical need he hadn't had for anyone in some time, and while he is lying there, he takes the opportunity to reexamine his life and the choices he's made. He thinks about times in the past when opportunities had presented themselves to him, and he'd taken the cautious route rather than take a chance. At the time, he would have considered himself to be prudent; or perhaps just too responsible to go out on a limb and take a chance, but now as he lies there reflecting on his past, he can see it as nothing more than cowardice that had cost him time and again. He particularly remembers an occasion when several black truckers he knew had approached him about starting a company of their own, and acting as independent contractors, but Charles had seen the move as much too risky to take a chance on, and had passed it up opting for the stability of his job with Chrysler instead. Twenty years later, and before the work had dried up as a result of increasing fuel prices, the same black truckers had managed to sell their company for a considerable profit while Charles continued to make his usual Chrysler salary.

Another example of his lack of bravery in his mind was the way he felt about Alice. Rather than tell her the truth, and confront his feelings, he hid them in a continuing need for counseling. His dream involving Alice forces him to take stock and he decides that for once in his life he will go out on a limb. When Tina is gone the next morning, he gets up and goes to Alice's office, determined to reveal the truth of his feelings to her. When they get on the elevator together to go for coffee, he leans over and kisses her, but she turns just enough that his kiss misses her mouth and his eyes can't help but see her horrified response. Although she brushes it off at the time, Charles apologizes and



wishes he could disappear. Rather than validating his bravery and rewarding it with a favorable response, Charles is rejected and reverts to a manner more in keeping with his past. Tina sees through his cowardice even before he does and accuses him of infidelity of an emotional or perhaps intellectual kind.

Charles manages to take one more leap of faith when he goes to his son's house to retrieve his wife and make an attempt to repair his marriage. To his credit, he is able to convince Tina that he still loves her and they go home together again.

Poverty

The Turner family knows about the struggles of poverty, beginning with Viola and Francis. Married young, Viola and Francis are separated after their son Charles is born when Francis is sent to Detroit, ostensibly to train under the pastor there. Francis takes a look at the letter of introduction given to him by Reverend Tufts before he left, and is dismayed and disappointed by the impersonal nature of the note he sent. In it, Reverend Tufts might have been introducing a complete stranger rather than someone who had grown up in his church with him. Instead of begging a stranger for a place in his church, Francis decides to push forth on his own. Although he'd heard that there were jobs aplenty and opportunities abounded, he still struggles to find his way in Detroit.

Francis first talks himself into a job as a bartender, but proximity to alcohol puts him on a road that leads downhill all the way. Soon he is drinking on the job as well, and the liquor loosens his mouth enough that his comments about his boss earn him a dismissal. In the first six months, Francis Turner holds four different jobs (one and a half of which he had willfully left) and had send just \$7 to his young bride to help her care for their son. He'd consumed enough alcohol to pay for their passage to Detroit several times, but had lost the will to make it happen. This is largely due to the attentions he is getting from Odella and when that stops, Francis realizes that his behavior has to change.

While Francis struggles to find his way in Detroit, Viola is left to fend for herself and her young son in Arkansas. With just \$7 received from her husband in a six month period, she is forced to hire herself out to a family with a young son. With older sisters, Viola hadn't learned many of the skills they had, and her learning curve in the kitchen is sharp and difficult as is her exposure to the indignities that many poverty stricken black people were subjected to when they worked for their white employers.

Poverty in the Turner family doesn't end in the first generation, despite the fact that Viola and Francis manage to purchase a house and live there for decades, raising 13 children within its walls. The Turner children also struggle to find their way – some as a result of bad relationships; some as a result of addictions; and some just because of poor decision making. When Viola is no longer able to live in the home she'd raised her children in, the economy is so bad that that home she owed nearly \$40,000 of mortgage on is only worth a tenth of that. The property is therefore worthless to them, and despite

their emotional attachment to it as the home they all grew up in, there is little chance that any Turner offspring will live there again, despite Lelah's brief stay of necessity after her eviction.



Styles

Point of View

The Turner House by Angela Flournoy is written in a third person omniscient point of view in which the writer allows the thoughts of all of her characters to be open to the reader; their feelings and emotions told from the writer's perspective. This point of view is especially effective in telling this story as the main topic of concern is the Turner family, consisting of 13 siblings and a multitude of extended family members.

The author chooses to allow each character a voice, and the advantage of using this writing style is seen in the flashbacks to earlier time periods which still come across as the here and now to the reader allowing the story to have better flow and continuity despite the jumps in time.

Another advantage to using this point of view is that the author can begin each section as a narrator, and then opt into the state of mind of the character involved, allowing the reader to suspend disbelief and let the author's characters come to life. It is easy for the reader to envision the degree of poverty Francis and Viola Turner faced; the struggle they faced raising a family of 13; the addictions and afflictions suffered by some characters and the love and continuity of the Turner family unit.

Language and Meaning

While The Turner House is a story told in current, modern day English language, it is a story that centers on the struggles faced by the Turner's - a black family in the first half of the 1940's in Arkansas.

The author clearly conveys the separation of black and white, both politically and economically as Francis and Viola Turner struggle to raise their children in a world that is far from racial equality. Throughout the story, a black/poverty based language is often used in which contraction such as ain't are used frequently in conversations and consonants are dropped at the end of many words ending in 'g' such as 'sneakin' instead of 'sneaking', showing a lack of formal education that was commonplace in the time period represented.

Francis Turner leaves a wife and son behind, sent to Detroit where he loses his way for a time, commits adultery, drinks to excess, and tries to convince himself that his wife Viola would never forgive the length of his silence anyway, so there was no point in attempting. Viola has seen only \$7 from Francis since he left - not nearly enough to care for her and his son. She works in the fields with her siblings on a sharecropping plot. Soon, she had no choice but to work for white people, taking two buses to get there, and feeling grateful to have the job. When Francis finally returns for her and Charles, Viola is no longer employed and is eager to get out of Arkansas, willing to do anything, and put up with any inconvenience to get away.



This story told of this couple is not uncommon. Many poverty stricken families, both black and white, left the homes and towns they were raised in so that they could survive. It could be said that one of the effects of poverty on the black communities of that time period was displacement. Despite a rocky start, Viola and Francis remain together and raise 13 children.

Structure

The Turner House by Angela Flournoy is a novel of almost 340 pages which is further divided into five sections and an introduction which is simply titled 'Trouble In The big Room'. The five sections range in length from 50-116 pages, the average being 62 pages in length. Each section is titled from Week One to Week Five.

Each of the 39 chapters range from 1-19 pages in length with an average of eight pages each. These chapter are titled rather than numbered and the titles coincide with the general topic of the section they are heading. For example, the introduction is titled 'Trouble In The Big Room' and reveals the encounter Charles first has with the specter that will continue to reveal itself to him throughout his life.

The story line tends to jump between present day events and the past within each week's division. For example, Week One contains information from the present, in which chapters one and three reveal how Lelah has managed to gamble herself into an eviction and a suspension at work but still continues to gamble while the second chapter reveals Charles' ongoing difficulties coping with the spirit world. The fourth and fifth chapters revert back to the summer of 1944 when Francis first arrives in Detroit.

The second week begins with three chapters of the story line in a current mode while again the last two segments revert to the Fall of 1944. Week Three has four chapters of current timeline with two chapters going back to the winter of 1945 while Week Four has twelve chapters of current timeline followed by two chapters which back track to the spring of 1945. The final section, Week Five, has five current timeline chapters followed by one that is set in the summer of 1945, two current timelines and then one final chapter that is set in the summer of 1951.

The author uses the changes in time lines to explain family history; to reveal how and why some decisions were made; and to inform the reader as to how the Turner family evolved.



Quotes

There ain't no haints in Detroit.

-- Francis Turner (Prologue - Trouble In The Big Room paragraph 14)

Importance: This statement is correct by all that Francis has experienced because when Francis moves to Detroit, the haint he has seen for years vanishes. He isn't clear as to why that happens, but doesn't tell his oldest son the basis for his knowledge on the subject - he merely asserts they don't exist there.

You can't threaten to fire me.

-- Lelah Turner (1 - Swelling Bellies And Wedding Tulle paragraph 61)

Importance: Lelah tells her daughter Brienne that despite her unreliability where looking after her grandson Bobby is concerned, they are family and she can't fire her or get rid of her foreshadowing that she will do exactly that before too long.

Excuse me, miss, no one is in jail.

-- Charles Turner (2 - Almost A Quorum paragraph 9)

Importance: Charles is asked by his job appointed psychologist how many of his siblings were incarcerated, speaking to a stereotype that Charles is understandably offended by. No member of their family had ever been in jail and he resents her even asking.

Francis never liked me pokin around with his plants when he was alive, so why would I start pokin now?

-- Viola Turner (3 - Motor City, Friday Night paragraph 1)

Importance: Viola has no interest in tending Francis's garden after he passes away and Miles suggests a garage accessible through the back at the kitchen door would provide a way to get in and out during the winter as well as protect a car. After the house is empty, Lelah is grateful to get into the garage so that she can avoid the prying eyes of neighbors like Mr. McNair.

I trust that you will be able to assist Francis Turner, of my flock, with securing housing and a good word at one of the fabled places of industry in your city,

-- Reverend Tufts (4 - One North paragraph 3)

Importance: This generic letter is what Reverend Tufts wrote in support of Francis who had been living under his roof for years, and its lack of endorsement fairly well assures that Francis will never see a chance of becoming a preacher. In fact, the letter sets him on the alternate course that shapes his life away from the church entirely - his faith was so shaken by the incident.



Plenty girls sittin around waitin for a letter like that, and it ain't never comin.
-- Lucille (5 - Two South paragraph 10)

Importance: Viola's sister Lucille tries to brighten her outlook after Viola receives a letter from Francis saying he's found a job and lodgings, misses her, and includes seven dollars. Viola thinks about how long he's been gone and how little he'd sent and fears she'll never be sent for while Lucille tries to get her to see that there are many girls who say goodbye to their men and never hear from them again. Viola still had her man, he loved her, and he was working. She should have been happier.

You got a prepaid for this one call?
-- Troy Turner (6 - It Sure Ain't Free paragraph 7)

Importance: Troy is surprised that David would take the extra precaution of purchasing a prepaid cell phone for this single use, and being an officer of the law, Troy should have taken a hint right there that this would be a more than slightly shady thing to do.

At some point that stuff doesn't matter no more.
-- Francey Turner (7 - Outta The Fields paragraph 4)

Importance: Francey and Charles talk about his last visit to psychologist, Alice Rothman, and Francey can't see the value in her line of inquiry where Charles is concerned. She believes that when one truly becomes an adult, the sins of the parents are set aside. The sign that you are truly an adult is that you no longer blame your parents for every shortcoming.

Are you two seeing each other again?
-- Lelah Turner (8 - Memories paragraph 8)

Importance: Lelah asks her daughter Brienne if she is seeing Rob, Bobbie's father again. This would be a significant development as this would foreshadow a possible move in their future, affecting the time she would be able to spend with them considerably.

Everybody's got to pay rent, soldier.
-- Odella Withers (9 - Far From Any Pulpit paragraph 9)

Importance: Odella makes it clear to Francis that even if she is sleeping with her, he has to pay for the space in her house.

Small as that county is, we might be distant cousins!
-- Ethel Joggets (10 - Better Than A Burlap Sack paragraph 1)

Importance: Ethel Joggets is the white woman that Viola is financially forced to take a job with and while talking they discover that their ancestors both originated from the same locale in the south of Virginia. She laughs after she says it, as though it is absurd to even consider, but the reality is that in their ancestors' time, it wasn't uncommon for a



slave owner to sleep with and have children by the slaves they owned. Ethel's comment, however, isn't meant to accent the kind of complicated relationships that existed at that time.

You have to wait until they invite you back.
-- Sheldon (11 - Downtown Sunlight paragraph 44)

Importance: A statement of the times, Lelah is told that she can't enter the place of her employment until they decide her status and invite her to return. A new safety feature, the security guard tells her, and Lelah jokingly asks what they think she'll do... shoot up the place? Sadly, it is a reality that many companies are forced to face and protect against.

Speak something into existence.
-- Charles Turner (12 - This Was The Surprise paragraph 1)

Importance: Charles wonders if by talking to Alice about the haint he'd seen, he had given it permission to enter his life once again, opening the door to more visitations.

He (Charles' father) said maybe somethin's off up in Cha-Cha's head.
-- Viola Turner (13 - Enter Doubt paragraph 22)

Importance: Viola tells her son Charles that not only did his father assure them that there were no haints in Detroit, but he also suggested that there might be a cog slipping in Charles that made him see such a thing. It isn't until later that Charles discovers the truth that his father and uncle had both seen haints multiple times as well.

If you can get used to being alone, sitting quiet for a long time with just you, then you can do anything.
-- David Gardenhire (14 - Enter Corned Beef And Doubt. paragraph 27)

Importance: This statement is one that Lelah should have paid more attention to as it is a road map for her own issues. When Lelah is alone for any length of time, she turns to the casinos where bright lights and crowds manage to drown the loneliness she struggles with. David learned to meditate in order to curb his own issues along this line and had Lelah listened, she might have avoided the problems foreshadowed by this conversation.

He been eyein you like you owe him money for at least a week.
-- Lucille (15 - A Life To Get On With paragraph 3)

Importance: Lucille tries to convince Viola that she should get on with her life since she hadn't heard from Francis in so long, assuring her that no one would fault her for it, and pointing out that Barry Stuttle is looking her over with interest.

Even with a reservation we'd have a hard time getting sat, no-named and colored as we are.



-- Odella Withers (16 - Gotham In Detroit paragraph 49)

Importance: Odella tries to tell Francis that simply desire and money is not enough to get an unknown black couple a table in a hotel like the Gotham, but Francis isn't listening, embarrassed and angry that officer Williams had accused him of being drunk.

They tryna get city workers to take one day off a month now for free, maybe more later.
-- Higgins (17 - The Lucky Boy paragraph 8)

Importance: A statement of the times, Higgins tells Troy about the latest attempt to save money by the city, and reassures him that should he hear anymore about it, he'll tell him.

I'da thought you didn't know me, the way you've been ignorin my calls.
-- Marlene Turner (19 - Sometimes It's Gotta Be You paragraph 3)

Importance: This statement from Marlene to Lelah reveals that she had been ignoring all of the calls from her siblings since her eviction, too embarrassed by her position to want to talk to anyone.

I'm moving to Chicago with Rob.
-- Brianne (22 - Let Her Say Yes. paragraph 57)

Importance: Brianne listens to the reasons Lelah has concocted to justify her moving in with Brianne and Bobby and after showering she gives Lelah the only answer she can. She tells her she is moving to Chicago with Rob, a decision she makes because she'd rather move than take her mother in and deal with her ongoing gambling issues.

If you're gonna backslide, this is the way to do it, huh?
-- Zach (27 - Up paragraph 5)

Importance: Zach is an example of the type of people who attend Gambler's Anonymous, but don't get enough out of it that they actually stop going to casinos - much like Lelah. Zach recognizes her from a meeting, and his presence is a reminder that she isn't ready to quit yet, so she is forced to leave to avoid him.

You do something like that, you can't blame a woman for getting on with her life.
-- Odella Withers (32 - A Real Soldier's Return paragraph 5)

Importance: Odella explains that her husband had left for war two years earlier and hadn't written so much as a word since. She justifies moving on with her life, claiming that after that length of time, a woman can't be blamed for doing so. Francis realizes he'd done just that with Viola as well.

I want you to know that I never seen no haints, Cha.
-- Viola Turner (37 - To Let Go Or To Hang On. paragraph 18)



Importance: Viola finally admits that although she'd never seen haints in her life, both her husband Francis and her uncle Friend had. Charles can't understand why his father lied to him but his mother explains that the haint his father saw messed with his mind, and was responsible for the fact that he'd never really been satisfied. He didn't want that to happen to his son, so he lied.

Don't try to tell me that all a these grown-ass people can't come up with three thousand.
-- Duke Turner (41 - Every Turner Dances. paragraph 16)

Importance: Duke is trying to come up with a solution that allows them to keep the family home on Yarrow Street, and believes that if they all pay into it, they can save it.