



# WILLY'S CUT AND SHINE

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BROADWAY PLAY PUBLISHING INC

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Bradford is an Assistant Professor of Dramatic Arts at the University of Connecticut, where he teaches theater history, theater literature and playwriting. Bradford holds a bachelor of arts from the University of Connecticut and his Master of Fine Arts degree from Brooklyn College of CUNY. He has written numerous stage plays and one acts. His play, *LIVING IN THE WIND*, was produced Off-Broadway at the American Place Theater to critical acclaim and numerous Audelco Theater Award nominations. He has received the Manhattan Theater Club Playwright fellowship and most recently a residency at the LARK Developmental Theater, New York.

WILLYS CUT AND SHINE was presented at the Lark Theater as a BareBones Presentation, opening on 27 March 2003. The cast and creative contributors were:

LOUIS/SOLDIER ..... Chad Boseman  
CLAUDE ..... Chad Coleman  
BENNET ..... Benard Cummings  
SYLVESTER ..... Arthur French  
NATE ..... Dondre Greenhouse  
SHERIFF/CAPTAIN ..... Tom Ligon  
HAROLD ..... Greg Mouning  
CHI-TOWN ..... Kareem Ra  
QUINCEY ..... Keith Randolph Smith  
*Director* ..... Daniella Topol

## CHARACTERS

*QUNICEY, a veteran of W W II and the brother of the murdered Louis. QUNICEYs mind is continually trying to reconcile his life as a black man in Georgia and the empty price he paid in Europe through the war. He is simply tired and wants nothing more than to lie down beside his murdered brother.*

*LOLAR, he is the dead friend of QUNICEY's, lost in the waning days of the war. LOLAR occupies the world in QUNICEY's mind. He is young, optimistic, rash, full of life.*

*CAPTAIN, the white officer in charge of QUNICEYs company during the war. Along with LOLAR, he occupies a hard fought for space in QUNICEY's mind. The structure, and content, of the play allows for this part to be doubled with SHERIFF FRANK.*

*BENNET MOORE, educated at a college in Boston, back home for varies reasons. Meticulous in appearance and speech, doing no more with his education than dispensing barbershop philosophy.*

*SYLVESTER ROY, retired railroad porter, living on his pension, old and no nonsense, has yet to lose a game of dominoes to HAROLD, and cannot fathom it.*

*HAROLD MORRIS, retired factory worker who spends his days in the barbershop with the fellows. He does enjoy their company, but also has a great desire to avoid his wife. A bit nervous when anything in his life shifts to the left or the right.*

CLAUDE BERRY, like QUNICEY, also veteran of W W II, saw action all over Europe, is home and having a hard time reconciling the freedom he experienced in a foreign country against the lack of freedom at home.

NATE PORTER, a young simple man who mentally functions enough to take care of his essential needs, one of which is spending time in the barbershop in order to feel accepted, and the other is gambling away his rent on a regular basis.

CHI-TOWN, a young gambler with a drug habit from Chicago, though he is originally from Durham, he has been gone for several years. His grandmother raised him and it is her funeral he comes home for. Having run out of drugs and money, he is stranded, in more ways than one.

SHERIFF FRANK, a bit younger than SYLVESTER. Not the least bit physically imposing. He and SYLVESTER have a history that is as old as they are. The SHERIFF is a man who is willing to take the law to the limits set by his "constituents" and no further.

## SET REQUIREMENTS

*The drama requires one set, which is the barbershop, and an open acting area for the scenes outside of the shop.*

*Large set pieces:*

*a small card table for the domino games*

*two or three barber's chairs*

*barber's work stand with mirrors and drawers*

*a mourners bench (church pew) in the space as well*

*there is one entrance/exit, which is the door to the shop*



## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Special thanks to Mac Wellman for bringing this brilliant playwright to our attention.

## ACT ONE

*(Scene opens, lights full up with the bang of a domino on table. Willy's Barbershop, Durham, Georgia, 1950, unseasonably cold. Two chairs and barber tables with mirrors and all the requisite utensils of a barber, a mourner's bench and a card table. Newspapers are everywhere. The barber, BENNET MOORE, is busy cleaning his clippers. HAROLD MORRIS and SYLVESTER ROY are busy at a game of dominoes.)*

SYLVESTER: What that look like? Huh? Look like fifteen to me. Get on the train or get left! Five, ten, fifteen.  
*(Writes down the score.)*

HAROLD: That hurt, didn't it?

SYLVESTER: Hurt? Hurry up and lay down that funky five-one. I'm doing business here.

BENNET: And where have you been hiding, Claude?

CLAUDE: Had to make a run to Clarkson, damn truck broke down.

HAROLD: Seem like by now you'd a come to the fact you ought to take better care of your shit and then you wouldn't...

CLAUDE: Seem like everyday now I'm more tired of people in general, but you in particular, Harold.

HAROLD: Why is it the evil, crazy Negroes, is the ones that live forever? Hmm? Now you seen them war reels, Negroes in them boats or what ever the hell they was,

'bout to hit the beach? They either gets shot *'fore* they hit the water, shot *in* the water, or shot *on* the damn beach, matter fact I'm still trying to figure out how we even won the war 'cause it look like everybody got shot! and for damn sho' you'd think dime to dollar, between Quincey and Claude, one of these Negroes would'a got shot in the ass!

*(HAROLD lays down a bone and SYLVESTER quickly follows with another.)*

SYLVESTER: Whoa! What is that? That fifteen? Five, ten, fifteen. I'll write it down, I got the pad.

CLAUDE: You know you spent many a sleepless night worryin' 'bout me and Quincey!

SYLVESTER: All of Harold's nights is sleepless, wondering whether or not Helen gone stab his ass.

BENNET: How many years has it been now, Mister Harold, and Helen is still a bit jealous?

SYLVESTER: Please! Don't be for Helen, Harold and the virgin Mary be thick as thieves.

HAROLD: Only reason I'm married right now is cause I was tired, bent down to catch my breath and when I stood up, Helen was standing there with the justice of the peace. Shoot, Helen know. I cain't even go back to the state of Louisiana! I swear they's fifteen geetchie waiting for me at the state line right now.

SYLVESTER: If you ever play a bone well as you lie, you might'a fooled up and won a game in the last twenty years.

BENNET: The monster under the bed is often much larger than the one who is literally at the front door.

*(Every one stops to look at BENNET before they all fall out.)*

HAROLD: What in the hell is he talking about?

CLAUDE: Damn Bennet!

BENNET: Mister Sylvester, are you prepared to tighten up that line in the back today?

SYLVESTER: I'm a little busy whipping Harold's ass, right now.

CLAUDE: You better leave him alone, Bennet. You see how his temples was jumping trying to get that last fifteen!

SYLVESTER: Don't rattle your change while I'm counting dollars, youngsta. You can get some of this when I'm through with Harold.

*(The phone rings.)*

HAROLD: I ain't here.

BENNET: *(Answers the phone)* Willy's Cut and Shine...I'm sorry Helen, no, Helen, he isn't here...soon as he get here, Helen...likewise, Helen. *(Hangs up phone)*

HAROLD: "Soon as he get here?" Did I say anything about "soon as I get here?"

BENNET: I'm a little tired of telling the same lie for you everyday. I thought I might change up.

HAROLD: You don't know how I set that up or backed it up. I might have something going on next week I'm setting ground work for...

CLAUDE: Groundwork?

HAROLD: That's what I said, groundwork. You don't know what I'm talkin' 'bout here.

SYLVESTER: Please! Every Negro in here, 'cept you Harold, know something 'bout *groundwork*!

HAROLD: See, that's why you Negroes always getting caught in some shit you ain't got no business in, 'cause you know too damn much.

CLAUDE: (*Laughing*) Helen know your ass is sitting right here. Where else you gone be?

SYLVESTER: He play like he ain't here!

CLAUDE: One these days she gone show up, then what you gone do?

BENNET: When a woman wants you, you cannot run and you cannot hide.

SYLVESTER: Watch the board, Harold.

HAROLD: Give me five. And whether or not I'm here, ain't the issue.

BENNET: Enlighten us.

HAROLD: The issue is, you cain't be jumping every time no woman call.

CLAUDE: You jump every time the phone ring!

SYLVESTER: Everytime.

HAROLD: Helen know when I step out the house, where I goes is my business.

CLAUDE: Helen catch you in the wrong spot that's yo' ass.

SYLVESTER: You waiting on Jesus to play that five-one, Harold?

HAROLD: Quit looking at my hand, Sylvester.

SYLVESTER: Ain't nobody worried 'bout yo' hand. Hell, I know what you got five minutes after I set up! YOU don't know what you got, don't know what to do with what you got. Which is why I been whipping yo' ass for the past thirty-two years.

BENNET: You are looking a bit rough through the neck, Mister Sylvester. It might be prudent to line it up before...

(NATE PORTER *enters and goes to the window.*)

NATE: Bennet.

BENNET: Nate.

HAROLD: (*Slaps a "bone" down hard*) Give me ten!  
Whatn't looking for that was you?

SYLVESTER: Ten? Negro, that bad eye getting worse every day. That's five.

HAROLD: Just write it down!

SYLVESTER: (*In the midst of writing*) Write it down?  
I'm writing it down, with yo' blind ass. Bennet,  
how old you think I am?

(*Immediately puts up his hand to keep CLAUDE from answering. NATE moves from the window to the empty barber's chair.*)

SYLVESTER: I ain't ask you, Claude.

BENNET: I'd say you are kicking sixty-five in the gluteus maximus, Mister Sylvester.

HAROLD: Whose day was it to bring the dictionary?

(*NATE moves from the chair to the window and back to the chair.*)

NATE: Ass. That's latin for ass.

HAROLD: Nate, you cain't count change, how the hell you know latin?

SYLVESTER: Seen two wars....

CLAUDE: Sylvester Roy, you know you was punching tickets on the midnight dog in '44! I would say you been as far as Boston, but I put money on the fact yo' country ass probably never got off the train! Now how you seen two wars from a train?

SYLVESTER: Don't worry how I seen two wars, I seen two wars, fool-and three wives...

HAROLD: From yo' back yard.

SYLVESTER: I got to go overseas to see something?

CLAUDE: You ain't seen no war. Ain't nothing else like it in the world.

SYLVESTER: You don't know what I'm talking 'bout. You got to put in some time on God's green 'fore you know what I'm talking 'bout. These two hands cut more dead Negroes out of trees than any one of you fools even know. You don't know nothing bout midday snatchings and midnight lynchings. Nothing 'bout mole piss and vinegar and white powder by the front door. Everytime you open your mouth "the war" fall out, but when you seen what I seen, you gets what they calls common mother wit sense. Which comes in handy when I'm trying to figure out whether or not I need my neck lined up! Give me ten.

BENNET: Did you say mole urine and...

*(NATE leaves the bench for the window again.)*

NATE: *(Nervous)* Louis coming through here today?

SYLVESTER: Young Rockefella ain't made his appearance yet.

BENNET: You are aware Mister Louis does not care for that term.

SYLVESTER: I don't like okra but it keep you humble, don't it?

CLAUDE: I don't know how you eat that mess. And what is all that slimy shit dripping off...

HAROLD: Fry it. Only way to eat okra and keep it down. Get you a corn meal batter, fry it deep. You might be

able to keep that down. Then again it ain't bad in some oxtail stew, my Aunt Lillian...

SYLVESTER: The light one?

HAROLD: Right, right, she got to have it once't a week, but don't mess 'round have one them geetchies work it in some gumbo for you, course you got to be careful 'bout any kind'a red sauce a geetchie try to give ya', I ever tell you....

SYLVESTER: Harold!

HAROLD: What?

SYLVESTER: You wanna play a bone 'fore you start lying?

HAROLD: (*Slams down a domino*) I don't know what you was in such a hurry fo'. Most folk try to run in the *opposite* direction of a ass whipping. What is that? Five, ten, fifteen. You want me to write that down?

(SYLVESTER *writes down score.*)

HAROLD: Louis come through here everyday, don't he, Nate?

CLAUDE: Rent check a little short again, Nate?

NATE: I seen him going into Wilmont's Hardware yesti'day, right through the front do', look like he was picking up some shoe polish, so I thought he was coming through here.

CLAUDE: That's why yo' ass whatn't here yesti'day.

HAROLD: What in the hell is he going up into Wilmots for? Get what he need from Simpsons like everybody else.

BENNET: When is the last time Simpson had something you needed, when you needed it?

HAROLD: He got plenty, and nine million catalogues to order whatever he *ain't* got...



CLAUDE: Take Simpson a week to order it and two mo' for it to come in. *(Pause)* A man oughtta' get what he want when he want it.

SYLVESTER: Ain't got nothing to do with what *is*, or what *ain't* on the shelves, Louis think cause he got some money he ain't got to....

CLAUDE: This ain't got *nothing* to do with money!

SYLVESTER: Then what he going in there for? And you know good and well what I'm talkin' 'bout here, Claude. Louis ain't got no damn business going into Wilmot's Hardware! He forget who he is sometimes.

HAROLD: *(Slaps a bone down hard)* Nate, was that you peeking in the window yesti'day afternoon?

SYLVESTER: *(Slaps a bone down hard)* Nate don't know what he did five minutes ago, let alone yesti'day.

NATE: *(He moves to the empty barber's chair.)* You don't know when he coming through today?

BENNET: I am not privy to Mr. Louis' work schedule, if that is what you're asking.

HAROLD: *(Pointing to the window)* Look like Louis coming 'cross the street right now.

NATE: *(He rushes back to the window, the sound of a car can be heard.)* Aww naw, naw, naw!

SYLVESTER: Nate, tell the man the Mill put you off. Louis ain't never put nobody on the street behind no money.

NATE: *(Looking out the window, the sound of a car moves from left to right.)* Who, who own a purple deuce and a quarter?

CLAUDE: Nobody in here.

HAROLD: Tuck Wilmont.

SYLVESTER: Get out the window, Nate.

NATE: Yep, there go Tuck Wilmont.

*(SYLVESTER, HAROLD, BENNET, and CLAUDE all go to the window.)*

CLAUDE: What the hell Tuck Wilmot doing on this isde of town?

HAROLD: Is that a...shotgun?

*(The sound of two shotgun blasts, pause then another. After a moment, the sound of a car engine gunning and roaring off.)*

NATE: ....awww naw naw naw! *(The men stand in frozen silence for a moment.)*

CLAUDE: Help me get him out the street.

*(CLAUDE exits with NATE to get LOUIS.)*

HAROLD: Good God a'mighty. Did you see that.

SYLVESTER: I'm standing right here, ain't I?

BENNET: *(He moves for the phone.)* I'm calling Meeks.

SYLVESTER: Doctor Meeks? I don't care how much money Louis got, we cain't take him to Meeks' office.

HAROLD: You might as well gone on, call George Clifford.

BENNET: Meeks'll come here.

SYLVESTER: *(Looking out the window at the two men working, does not bother to turn to the conversation.)*  
Meeks ain't coming here. You know who was in that car? Tuck Wilmot! Meeks ain't coming here. Not for this. What about Randolph?

BENNET: Randolph know what the hell he's doing? He don't know nothing about cutting on nobody!

SYLVESTER: He was a war medic, cut on Negroes's everyday!

BENNET: (*Moves back to the window, pointing to the action on the street*) A Medic? That was a shotgun!

(*NATE and CLAUDE make it to the door with LOUIS.*  
BENNET *hands him a barber sheet.*)

HAROLD: I tol' you, you might as well call George, hell I seen it from the window .....

CLAUDE: I swear to God, Harold!

SYLVESTER: Shotgun. Laid his chest wide open.

(*NATE slowly moves from the body to stand alone downstage, looking at his hands.*)

HAROLD: That's a lot of blood, Syl. I ain't never seen that much blood.

NATE: I would'a paid him, I whatn't back but a month, I would'a....this is bad, this is bad.

SYLVESTER: Shut up, Nate.

(*BENNET picks up the phone.*)

BENNET: I'm calling his wife.

SYLVESTER: Is you crazy? Everybody standing here know who was in that car.

CLAUDE: There's a murdered man on the floor! We just gone stand here?

BENNET: (*Clicks for a dial tone then dials*) All right! This is it. I'll call George Clifford at the funeral home. Tell him to come get Louis. When he get here, we tell him to mind his business. Clifford's good at that. Somebody needs to go over to Mountain Street, tell Mrs Louis what we got here and...George, yeah, listen...

HAROLD: Goin' in and out of Wilmot's, you cain't just go in and out there like that, you cain't....

CLAUDE: Harold, I need one mo' word from you. One mo'.

SYLVESTER: You just cain't tell no woman...

CLAUDE: That's the man's wife, Sylvester Roy.

SYLVESTER: You ain't got no idea what that woman will do! She liable to run all the way over to Wilmot's Hardware and....

BENNET: (*Hangs up the phone*) George ought to be here in a minute.

SYLVESTER: She don't need to know nothing about the car.

CLAUDE: She got a right to know....

BENNET: When we got to the window the car was gone.

CLAUDE: She don't need to know nothing 'bout all of us standing in the window watching Louis' murder! Huh? Nothing 'bout Tuck Wilmot and that purple deuce and a quarter?! That what you mean to say?

BENNET: I said what I mean.

CLAUDE: We can go over to there right now. Wilmots. Right now.

SYLVESTER: You and nobody else going nowhere 'cause you know big timber from brush, don't you? Now we gone take care of this like we always do. George Clifford gone do what he do, we gone put Louis in the ground, better than the average jack-leg negroe we ever cut out a tree. We gone cry and shout and then we gone go home to a house that's still standing in a neighborhood that ain't burning. That's what I'm gone do and that's what Claude's gone do.

CLAUDE: You better call Franks, then.

SYLVESTER: What for?

CLAUDE: (*Pointing to LOUIS*) You need another reason? What you think Quincey gone do? Hmmm? That's the

man's brother. You don't wanna tell the man's wife, what in the hell you gone tell Quincey?

HAROLD: And he was crazy 'fore he left for the war.

SYLVESTER: I'm gone call Sheriff Frank and tell him what? Tuck Wilmot just opened up a hole in Louis bigger'n the state of Georgia! And what you think Frank gone do?

CLAUDE: What he supposed to do.

SYLVESTER: Don't nothing in the world work like it supposed to! The sooner you figure that out the better you'll feel.

CLAUDE: I just thought 'cause you two was so tight, come up together and all....

SYLVESTER: How the hell a Colored man and a White man come up together in Georgia?

CLAUDE: He better do something, Mister Sylvester. He better do something right quick 'cause I ain't come home to live this no mo'! I don't care how many folk you done cut down outta' trees, I ain't doing this! You better call him. You think Quincey gone sit down for this? Not after what we been through.

SYLVESTER: You ain't been through nothing! You live to be seventy something in Durham County, Georgia, then you talk to me.

HAROLD: (*At the window.*) George Clifford should'a been here. Who going out there, tell Quincey?

(*Everybody looks at NATE.*)

NATE: What?

BENNET: Nate, you need to go out and tell Quincey.

NATE: Why me?

HAROLD: 'Cause yo ass was in the war with him.

NATE: So was fifty thousand other Negroes, so was Claude.

HAROLD: We sho' as hell ain't sending Claude.

NATE: I seen Quincey when he left and when he come home just like the rest of yaw. I ain't set foot outside Fort Hood my entire tour.

SYLVESTER: Thank God, we'd be speaking German right now if yo' silly ass ever found Europe.

NATE: You always got to something to say, don't you Mister Sylvester? Why don't you take your old ass out there. Tell Quincey his brother is laid out full of buckshot, bled out on the floor. Then tell him who did it. Now if he go crazy and kill yo' ass we ain't lost much since you the closet one to the grave anyhow.

SYLVESTER: You gone be a little closer than Louis here you keep....

CLAUDE: You cain't get no closer than this! We just talking here or we doing something?

*(Phone rings and BENNET answers it.)*

HAROLD: I ain't here.

BENNET: Yeah George...naw...you should have been here by now...I don't know George, listen, you know the money will be straight...if it ain't the money, what is it? I don't care what you heard, just come do this...George! *(He hangs up the phone.)*

SYLVESTER: Well what is it?

BENNET: He said he's not coming.

HAROLD: Ain't coming? How the hell George get to be an undertaker

BENNET: Said he heard the shotgun from his shop, didn't know what it was till we called, said he's not coming out the house. We got to bring him.

NATE: (*Staring at the body*) I ain't goin out there. I ain't going. I ain't going nowhere.

SYLVESTER: We ain't asking.

BENNET: You are probably the only one here Quincey can take.

SYLVESTER: Harold, bring your car 'round the front.

HAROLD: You know what kind of mess...you know Helen is liable to...

SYLVESTER: When the last time Helen been in that car? Back seat 'bout to fall through the floorboard! Just bring that raggedy car 'round the front so we can take care of this.

HAROLD: I got plenty family in Baltimore. I need to go home right now and pack! My *sister* live in Baltimore. I swear I'm moving, I swear I'm moving!

(HAROLD *exits* and NATE *starts to follow*.)

SYLVESTER: Where you goin'?

NATE: I'm just gone stand over here by, a...I'm just gone wait by the door, for Harold.

SYLVESTER: That's right. Soon as Harold pull up you and Claude get Louis in the back.

CLAUDE: So that's it? We gone come in here tomorrow play bones cut heads shine shoes like today was any other day?

BENNET: Somebody needs to go by Mountain Street, tell Mrs Louis.

HAROLD: (*He enters*.) Come on the street is clear.

CLAUDE: (*Putting on his coat*) You better call Franks, Sylvester, or to hell with you and everybody else in here.

SYLVESTER: You so fired to put yo' foot in something, Claude? You leave George Clifford's you go by Mountain Street. Tell Mrs Louis where her husband is and then you go home, you hear me! You take your ass straight home. And Nate....

NATE: I got it!

*(CLAUDE and NATE exit with the body. The phone rings a few times before BENNET snatches it up.)*

BENNET: George? I'm sorry, Helen, this is not a good time. *(He hangs up the phone.)*

HAROLD: *(He steps into the shop.)* What you mean "this ain't a good time?" Do you know Helen liable to get dressed and come down here?

BENNET: Just how would you define the situation, Mister Harold?

HAROLD: Damn! *(Beat. He exits.)*