

# Why I Live at the P.O.

**Libretto by Michael O'Brien with Stephen Eddins**

## **Prologue – in the back room of the post office**

SETTING: CHINA GROVE, MISSISSIPPI. JULY 1941. MID-MORNING.  
THE BACK ROOM OF A SMALL POST OFFICE (DOWNSTAGE RIGHT) IS SET UP WITH ALL THE AMENITIES OF A COMFORTABLE HOME – RADIO, SEWING MACHINE, IRONING BOARD, LAMPS, HOUSE PLANTS, ETC.

SISTER 1, OUR NARRATOR, SINGS HER TALE RIGHT TO THE AUDIENCE.

SISTER 1                    Fine. Fine.  
I was getting along fine- fine -  
I was getting along fine -  
Til Stella-Rondo came home.  
Stella-Rondo - my sister -  
Stella-Rondo - home again -  
Stella-Rondo - left her husband -  
You know - Mr. Whitaker?  
Mr. Whitaker - that photographer from Illinois?

(Course I went with Mr. Whitaker first, when he first appeared here in China Grove, taking “Pose Yourself” photos, and Stella-Rondo broke us up! Told him I was one-sided. You know, bigger on one side than the other? A falsehood: a deliberate, calculated falsehood: I'm the same! Stella-Rondo is exactly twelve months to the day younger than I am, and for that reason she's spoiled. Always had everything in the world she wanted...)

I was getting along fine...

## **Scene one – the kitchen of the family home**

TRANSITION TO: DAYS EARLIER, THE FOURTH OF JULY. LIGHTS UP ON THE FAMILY HOME, (CENTER STAGE). LATE MORNING. IN THE KITCHEN IS SISTER 2, SISTER 1'S DOUBLE IN THE FLASHBACK - SAME CLOTHES & HAIR, BUT MORE BEAUTIFUL AND MORE INNOCENT THAN OUR NARRATOR. A MISSISSIPPI CINDERELLA, BUSY COOKING DINNER. SISTER 1 MOVES UPSTAGE TOWARD THE FAMILY HOME AND FONDLY WATCHES SISTER 2. SHE INTRODUCES “HERSELF”.

SISTER 1                    Me. That's me,  
Fixing dinner for my family  
Last Fourth of July.

SISTER 2 (SINGS UNSELFCONSCIOUSLY TO HERSELF AS SHE BLISSFULLY PREPARES DINNER.)

SISTER 1 And SHE comes home - from Illinois!  
Separated - from Mr. Whitaker -  
Separated - first thing she did!  
Bringing - to our complete surprise -  
Bringing to our complete surprise –  
This child!  
This child of two!

STELLA-RONDO ENTERS WITH SHIRLEY-T., CARRYING AN IMPOSSIBLE AMOUNT OF LUGGAGE. THEY STOP IN THE YARD AND STELLA-RONDO CALLS INTO THE HOUSE.

STELLA-RONDO Mama? Mama, I'm home!

MAMA (CALLING FROM THE BACK OF THE HOUSE)  
Stella-Rondo?

MAMA RUNS UP THE HALLWAY FROM THE BACK OF THE HOUSE. SHE AND STELLA-RONDO RUN TO EACH OTHER AND HUG.

MAMA Here you are! Here you are!

SISTER 1 You oughta see Mama -  
Two hundred pounds and real tiny feet.

MAMA FUSSES OVER STELLA-RONDO AND SHIRLEY-T. DURING MAMA'S SOLO, STELLA-RONDO & SISTER 2 GIVE EACH OTHER A PERFUNCTORY PECK ON THE CHEEK. SISTER 2 GETS BACK TO WORK IN THE KITCHEN.

MAMA Here you are! Here you are!  
Like to make me drop dead for a second!  
Here you had this marvelous child,  
And never so much as a word wrote home about it,  
To your mama!  
I'm thoroughly ashamed of you!

SISTER 1 But of course she wasn't.

STELLA-RONDO Why, Mama –

SISTER 1 And Stella-Rondo just takes off this HAT -  
I wish you could see it -  
She just takes off this HAT –

STELLA-RONDO Why, Mama,

Shirley-T. is adopted.  
I can prove it.

MAMA

How?

SISTER 1

-- Said Mama.

SISTER 2

Hmmm! –

SISTER 1

-- Was all I said from the kitchen.  
Me - over a hot stove.  
Me - stretching two chickens over five people  
And a completely unexpected child,  
Without one moment's notice –

STELLA-RONDO

What do you mean - "Hmmm?"-

SISTER 2

Hmmm!

STELLA-RONDO

Hmmm?

MAMA

I heard that, Sister!

SISTER 2

Who, me?  
Why - I didn't mean a thing!  
Only Shirley-T. - whoever she is -  
Seems the spit-image of Papa-Daddy,  
If he'd cut off his beard,  
*If* Papa-Daddy'd cut off his beard.

SISTERS 1 & 2  
& MAMA

Which of course he'd never do!  
Which of course he'd never do!  
Papa-Daddy'd NEVER cut off his beard  
In the world.  
No, no, no!

Papa-Daddy'd never cut off his beard,  
But that Shirley T. - whoever she is -  
Seems the spit-image of Papa-Daddy,  
(Whoever *she* is – )  
*If* Papa-Daddy'd cut off his beard.  
Unh-unh!  
Which of course he'd never do!  
Which of course he'd never do!  
Papa-Daddy'd NEVER cut off his beard  
In the world.  
(Not one inch!)

MAMA                    Papa-Daddy'd *never* cut off his beard.

SISTER 1                Papa-Daddy's Mama's papa, and sulks.

MAMA                    Papa started growing that beard  
Out on the coast when he was fifteen.

SISTERS 1 & 2        No!  
& MAMA                Papa-Daddy'd never cut off his beard.  
Papa-Daddy'd never cut off,  
Never cut off,  
Never cut off,  
Never cut off,  
Never cut off his beard!

STELLA-RONDO        (FURIOUSLY)  
Sister -  
I don't need to tell you -  
You've got a lot of nerve -  
You've got a lot of nerve, and always did have.  
And I'll thank you to make no future reference  
To my adopted child  
Whatever!

SISTER 2                Very well, very well, very well – only –

SISTER 1                -- Of course I noticed –

SISTER 2                That frown! - Why - that's Mr. Whitaker!  
She looks like a cross between Papa-Daddy  
And Mr. Whitaker!

STELLA-RONDO        Well, she isn't!  
She's adopted.  
That's all I can say.

STELLA-RONDO GATHERS SHIRLEY-T. AND HER LUGGAGE, AND FLOUNCES UP THE STAIRS TO HER BEDROOM. MAMA LOOKS TENDERLY UP THE STAIRS AFTER THEM.)

MAMA                    Looks like Shirley Temple to me!

### **Interlude – Mama and Sister set the table**

MAMA AND SISTER 2 PREPARE FOR DINNER, SETTING THE TABLE AND PUTTING OUT THE FOOD.

MAMA                    Dinner! Dinner!

## Scene two – at the dinner table

STELLA-RONDO AND SHIRLEY-T. COME DOWN TO THE TABLE. PAPA-DADDY APPEARS AT THE END OF THE HALLWAY RUNNING THROUGH THE MIDDLE OF THE HOUSE AND SLOWLY HOBBLER TOWARD THE KITCHEN. HE MAKES HIS WAY TO THE TABLE AND TAKES HIS SEAT AT THE HEAD. ALL BOW THEIR HEADS AS PAPA-DADDY LEADS THEM IN THE GRACE.

SISTER 1                    And the first thing Stella-Rondo did -  
Was turn Papa-Daddy against me...

STELLA-RONDO    (WITH FALSE SWEETNESS)  
Papa-Daddy...

(PAPA-DADDY IGNORES HER)

STELLA-RONDO    (MORE INSISTENTLY)  
Papa-Daddy...  
Sister fails to understand.  
Sister fails to understand  
Why you don't cut off your beard.

PAPA-DADDY        What?? –

SISTER 1                    Took me completely by surprise! -  
And Papa-Daddy just LAYS down his knife & fork and –

PAPA-DADDY        What?? What?? Have I heard correctly?  
The postmistress  
Fails to understand  
Why - I don't cut off my beard?

HE GLARES AT SISTER 2.

SISTER 2                    (INDIGNANTLY)  
Papa-Daddy,  
Why, of course I understand!  
I did not say any such of a thing.  
The idea!

PAPA-DADDY        Hussy!

SISTER 2                    Papa-Daddy, nothing was further from my mind!  
You know I'd no more want you to cut off your beard  
Than the man in the moon!  
Stella-Rondo sat there and made that up  
While she was eating breast of chicken!

PAPA-DADDY        Have I heard correctly??  
                           The postmistress  
                           Fails to understand  
                           Why I don't cut off my beard?

STELLA-RONDO     Yes, you did say it!  
                           Anybody could of heard you.  
                           Anybody could of heard you  
                           That had ears!

SISTER 2            I didn't say any such of a thing!  
                           Stella-Rondo made that up!

PAPA-DADDY'S FURY GROWS. HE RISES.

PAPA-DADDY        "Bird's nest," did you call it?  
                           "Bird's nest?" "Bird's nest?"  
                           WHO got you that job at the P.O.? Who, who?  
                           WHO got you that job at the Post Office through his influence  
                           With the government?

SISTER 1            (Not that it isn't the next to smallest P.O. in the entire state of Mississippi...)

PAPA-DADDY        Hussy! Hussy!

SISTER 1            To be called such a thing  
                           By my own grandfather!  
                           I do not enjoy  
                           Being called a hussy.  
                           To be called such a thing!

SISTER 2            I never said any such of a thing!  
                           I never dreamed it was a bird's nest!  
                           I have always been grateful,  
                           Though this is the next to smallest P.O. in the  
                           Entire state of Mississippi.

STELLA-RONDO     Yes, you did say it!  
                           Anybody could of heard you!  
                           Anybody could of heard you  
                           That had ears!  
                           Heard you, heard you,  
                           Anybody could of heard you!  
                           Anybody could of heard you that had ears!

MAMA                (TO SISTER 2, POINTEDLY)  
                           Stop right there!!

## STANDOFF BETWEEN MAMA AND SISTER 2

SISTER 1            So, I pulled my napkin  
                          Straight back through the napkin ring -  
                          And left the table.

## SISTER 2 GETS UP HUFFILY AND GOES INTO THE HALLWAY TO SULK

MAMA                Call her back, call her back,  
                          She'll starve!  
                          Call her back, or she'll starve!  
                          Call her back! Call her back!

PAPA-DADDY        I will never cut off this beard!  
                          I will never cut off this beard!  
                          No!

## SHIRLEY-T. HAS SPIT UP. STELLA RONDO ATTENDS TO HER.

STELLA-RONDO     Oh, Shirley-T.!  
                          Oh, Shirley-T.!  
                          Oh, Shirley-T.!

PAPA-DADDY        No!  
                          Never -  
                          Never cut off this beard!  
                          Never -  
                          I started growing this beard when I was fifteen.  
                          Never, never, never, never, never!  
                          No! I'll never, never, never  
                          Cut off this beard!  
                          No, never -  
                          Not one inch.  
                          Never -  
                          Not as long as I live.  
                          Never, never, never, never, no!  
                          And I don't appreciate it in you at all!  
                          And you can all sit here  
                          And remember my words.  
                          And now I am going -  
                          Going out -  
                          Going out -  
                          and lie in the hammock.

PAPA-DADDY PASSES RIGHT BY SISTER 2 IN THE HALLWAY, GOES STRAIGHT OUT AND LIES IN THE HAMMOCK, CLOSES HIS EYES. STELLA-RONDO, SISTER 1, & MAMA. GATHER AROUND SHIRLEY-T.

STELLA-RONDO, Ohh -  
 SISTER 1, Shirley-T.  
 MAMA Poor Shirley-T.  
 - Lost the Milky Way  
 She ate in Cairo –

SISTER 1 BITTERLY, THINKING OF MR. WHITAKER  
 - Illinois.

### Scene three – in the yard and Stella-Rondo's room

SUDDENLY, UNCLE RONDO IS HEARD OFFSTAGE

UNCLE RONDO OHHHHHH ...

SISTER 2, STELLA-RONDO, AND MAMA ARE TRANSFIXED BY THE LONG, HARROWING SOUND OF UNCLE RONDO'S MOAN. MAMA HURRIES OFF THROUGH THE KITCHEN. STELLA RONDO GATHERS UP SHIRLEY-T. AND SCURRIES OFF THROUGH THE YARD.

UNCLE RONDO, WEARING STELLA-RONDO'S KIMONO, RUNS IN FROM THE BACK, WEAVING UP THE HALLWAY TOWARD SISTER 2

SISTER 1 Just then—

SISTER 2 What? What in the--

UNCLE RONDO OHH!  
 Oh! Oh! Ohhhhh ...

SISTER 1 Just then-  
 Not five minutes after-

UNCLE RONDO OHH!  
 Oh! Oh! Ohhhhh ...

SISTER 2 Uncle Rondo?

SISTER 1 Uncle Rondo!

SISTERS 1 & 2 Uncle Rondo!

SISTER 1 Uncle Rondo—in Stella-Rondo's peach-colored kimono!  
 A peach-colored kimono!  
 (All cut on the bias.)  
 Like something Mr. Whitaker probably thought was gorgeous!

UNCLE RONDO OHH!



Oh! Oh! Ohhhhh ...  
 Out of my way, Sister! I'm poisoned.

RONDO PUSHES PAST SISTER 2, LURCHES OUTDOORS INTO THE YARD

SISTER 1           He'd drunk a whole bottle of his prescription;  
                       He does it every Fourth of July,  
                       And then runs around  
                       And falls over in the –

OUTSIDE, RONDO IS ZIG-ZAGGING ABOUT. SISTER 2 WATCHES.

SISTER 2           No! Not –

SISTERS 1 & 2      -- the hammock!

UNCLE RONDO CRASHES INTO PAPA-DADDY IN THE HAMMOCK. PAPA-DADDY JOLTS AWAKE WITH A SHOUT.

PAPA-DADDY       HUHH??? ... Get away, get away!  
                       Oh, it's you.  
                       (PAPA-DADDY SWINGS BACK AND FORTH IN THE HAMMOCK)  
                       I would advise you  
                       To watch out for that hussy!

UNCLE RONDO      Who? (GENUINELY CURIOUS)

SISTER 1           ...Says Uncle Rondo...

PAPA-DADDY       Why, Sister, of course!  
                       That hussy said I should cut off my beard!  
                       (Right there at the table. Right there!)  
                       And after everything I've done for her.  
                       If you could only fathom the lengths  
                       I had to go to  
                       To get her that job at the P.O.!

UNCLE RONDO      Please, Papa-Daddy  
                       Please slow down!  
                       Please don't rock so!  
                       Please slow down!  
                       Please!  
                       You're making me dizzy as a witch,  
                       Dizzy as a witch,  
                       Dizzy as a witch!

PAPA-DADDY       (PAPA-DADDY IS ON A RANT, OBLIVIOUS TO UNCLE RONDO'S  
                       DISTRESS AND PLEAS)

But Stella-Rondo has a brilliant mind.  
 She's the one who always had the brains!  
 She's the one who had the common sense  
 To get out of town!

UNCLE RONDO      Please, Papa-Daddy  
                          Please slow down!  
                          Please don't rock so!  
                          Please slow down!  
                          Please!  
                          You're making me dizzy as a witch,  
                          Dizzy as a witch,  
                          Dizzy as a witch!

PAPA-DADDY      But Sister didn't learn to read til she was eight.  
                          Couldn't read til she was eight years old!  
                          Don't see how she gets the mail put up,  
                          Much less read it all!

UNCLE RONDO      Please, Papa-Daddy  
                          Please slow down!  
                          Please don't rock so!  
                          Please slow down!  
                          Please!

SISTER 1            Poor Uncle Rondo –  
                          He was too dizzy to get turned  
                          Dizzy to get turned  
                          Dizzy to get turned  
                          He was too dizzy to get turned  
                          He was too dizzy to get turned  
                          He was too dizzy to get turned  
                          Against me, for the time being.  
                          He's a good case of a one-track mind.  
                          Ask *anybody*.  
                          A certified pharmacist.

PAUSE. THEN: ABOVE AT A WINDOW, STELLA-RONDO LOOKS OUT, SEES UNCLE  
 RONDO. IN SHOCK:

STELLA-RONDO    OHH!

SISTER 1            Just then,

SISTER 2            Why, what in the...

STELLA-RONDO    OHH!

SISTER 1            Just then, Stella Rondo—

SISTER 2            Stella Rondo?

SISTERS 1 & 2       Stella-Rondo!

SISTER 2 RUSHES UPSTAIRS.

SISTER 2            Stella-Rondo, what's the matter?  
Are you mortally wounded?

STELLA-RONDO      Sister: do me a favor.  
Look out of that window  
And tell me what you see.

SISTER 2            ...the yard?

STELLA-RONDO      No!!!  
See any human beings?

SISTER 2            Papa-Daddy and Uncle Rondo.  
Yes, I see them.

STELLA-RONDO      See anything *different* about Uncle Rondo?

SISTER 2            Why, no,  
Only he's got on some terrible looking  
Peach-colored contraption.  
A horrid contraption.  
Something I wouldn't be found dead in...

STELLA-RONDO      Well – you won't be!  
You won't be!  
That happens—to be part of my trousseau!  
That happens—to be part of my trousseau!  
Mr. Whitaker—  
Took several dozen photographs of *me* in that kimono!  
Whatever could Uncle Rondo *mean*?  
Wearing part of my trousseau?  
Out in the broad open daylight—  
Without saying so much as saying “Kiss my foot?”  
And here I only got home this morning  
After my separation  
And hung my negligee up on the bathroom door  
Just as nervous as could be?  
Whatever could Uncle Rondo mean?

SISTER 2            Well, I'm sure *I* don't know!

STELLA-RONDO Well, he looks like a fool!  
Makes me sick to my stomach!  
He looks like a fool!

SISTER 1 (Please remember who said *that!*)

SISTER 2 Well, I say Uncle Rondo looks about as good as he can,  
Or anyone *could*—within reason—wearing that thing.  
He looks about as good as he can.

SISTER 1 (I stood up for him, please remember!)

SISTER 2 And who are *you*?  
Who are you to criticize—  
Home again, with a two-year-old child.  
A child you never said a word about to your Mama...

SISTER 1 (...not even a postcard!)

SISTER 2 ...with no explanation whatever?

STELLA-RONDO Well!  
Well, I asked you the instant I entered this house  
not to refer one more time  
To my *adopted* child!  
But Sister –  
You gave me your word of honor,  
Your sacred word of honor  
That you would never again, never again never again  
refer to my...

(SISTER 2 LOUDLY SLAMS THE DOOR)

SISTER 1 So I merely slammed the door.  
Slammed the door, slammed the door.  
Stella-Rondo pulled out every one of her eyebrows  
With some cheap Kress tweezers.  
I went down and made some green-tomato pickle.  
Somebody had to do it.

### **Scene four – in the kitchen and hallway and Stella-Rondo's room**

SISTER 2 GOES DOWNSTAIRS TO THE KITCHEN AND STARTS MAKING PICKLE. SHE SINGS TO HERSELF AS SHE WORKS, IMPROVISING, AS SHE DOES AT THE BEGINNING OF SCENE ONE. THIS TIME HER IMPROVISATION IS LESS FREE AND RELAXED, MORE ANXIOUS.

MAMA, SNIFFING THE AIR, COMES DOWN THE HALL AND INTO THE KITCHEN

SISTER 1            So in trots Mama...

MAMA                Sister? Sister, what? What do I smell?  
 You're making green tomato pickle?  
 Not very good  
 For your Uncle Rondo in his condition, I must say!  
 Or little adopted Shirley-T.  
 Shame on you!

SISTER 1            That made me tired.

SISTER 2            Well, Stella-Rondo'd better thank her lucky stars  
 It was *her* instead of me  
 Come trotting home from Illinois,  
 With some peculiar-looking child,  
 That peculiar-looking child of two.

MAMA                (PATIENTLY EXPLAINING)  
 But you must remember, Sister,  
*You* were never married to Mr. Whitaker.  
 I'd be just as overjoyed to see *you*  
 With your little adopted girl,  
 As I am to see Stella-Rondo.

SISTER 2            You would not.

MAMA                Don't contradict me!

SISTER 2            I will, and you would not!  
 Besides, you know as well as I do,  
 That child is NOT adopted!

MAMA                (STIFF AS A POKER)  
 She most certainly is!

SISTER 2            That child is *not* adopted!  
 That is no adopted child!  
 Stella-Rondo's too stuck up  
 To admit she had that child—  
 But she *had* that child—you know that!

MAMA                (RIGHTEOUSLY)  
 I prefer to take my children's word for anything  
 When it's humanly possible.  
 And here I thought we were going to have a pleasant Fourth of July.

SISTER 1 (SISTER 2 HAS A TERRIBLE THOUGHT)  
 Just then ... Just then ...  
 Something horrible,  
 Something perfectly horrible occurred to me.  
 Dare I say it?

SISTER 2 Mama ...  
 Oh, Mama ...

SISTER 1 I could barely put such a notion into words.

SISTER 2 Oh, Mama ...  
 Oh, Mama ...

MAMA Sister, what?

SISTER 2 Mama? Can that child ... talk? Talk?  
 Can she talk?  
 She hasn't spoken one single word since she arrived,  
 And she looks like ... *this*. (PULLS A WEIRD FACE)

SISTER 1 And I looked like ... that.

MAMA (MAMA HAS A TERRIBLE THOUGHT)  
 I remember that Joe Whitaker drank like a fish.  
 And I believe to my soul, he drank ... *chemicals*.

PAUSE. DISTRESSED, MAMA RUNS TO THE FOOT OF THE STAIRS. CALLS UP

MAMA Stella-Rondo? O-o-o-o-o! Stella-Rondo?

STELLA-RONDO What? (FLATLY, FROM HER BEDROOM)

SISTER 1 (Not even the grace to get up off the bed...)

MAMA Can that child of yours ... talk?

STELLA-RONDO Can she *what*?

MAMA Talk! Talk! Burdyburdyburdyburdy!

STELLA-RONDO Who says she can't?

MAMA Sister.

STELLA-RONDO You didn't have to tell me.  
 I could of guessed.

I know whose word of honor don't mean a thing!

... Oh, Shirley-T?  
 Shirley-T, honey?  
 Shirley-T, honey? Will you talk?  
 Come on, baby, talk,  
 Come on, baby,  
 Come on, come on...

MAMA AND SISTER 2 LOOK AT EACH OTHER ANXIOUSLY

SHIRLEY-T. (PAUSE, THEN) "*OE'm Pop-OE the Sailor-r-r-r Ma-a-an!*"

STELLA-RONDO Oh! That's my girl! My little adopted girl!  
 My little adopted girl, and she's as smart as she can be!  
 Oh! That's my girl! My little smart, adopted girl!  
 And you want to know something else?  
 She can tap-dance too!  
 (SHIRLEY-T. IS HEARD STOMPING AND JUMPING UP AND DOWN)  
 Which is more than *some* people I *won't* name can do!

MAMA (OVERWHELMED WITH HAPPINESS AND RELIEF)  
 Oh, that darling precious thing!  
 Mmm!  
 Sister, you ought to be ashamed.  
 Run upstairs!  
 Run upstairs *this instant* and apologize.  
 Apologize to Stella-Rondo and Shirley-T.

SISTER 2 Apologize for what?!?  
 I merely wondered--  
 I merely wondered about the child,  
 If she was normal.  
 Now that she's proved that she *is*,  
 I have nothing further to say.

MAMA RUSHES UPSTAIRS, ETC, AS DESCRIBED.

SISTER 1 You should've seen Mama—  
 Turn on her heel,  
 Run right upstairs,  
 Hug that child,  
 Furious at me,  
 Simply furious at me!  
 Me standing *helpless*,  
 Helpless,  
 While Stella-Rondo hadn't done a thing  
 But turn Mama





STELLA-RONDO Now, don't you mind what Sister says, Uncle Rondo!  
 She's been devoting this entire afternoon  
 To sneering,  
 Sneering, sneering,  
 Sneering out my window—  
 Just sneering at the way you look...

UNCLE RONDO WHAT'S *THAT*???

STELLA-RONDO Sister says you look a fool!

SISTER 1 Remember who said *that*?

STELLA-RONDO Sister says you look a fool!  
 Sister says you look a fool,  
 wearing that kimono...

IN A RAGE, UNCLE RONDO SPILLS OUT THE KETCHUP ALL OVER THE KIMONO

UNCLE RONDO SO!!!  
 ... SO *that's* her opinion???

UNCLE RONDO PULLS OFF THE KIMONO, THROWS IT ON THE FLOOR AND STAMPS & JUMPS UP & DOWN ON IT. (UNDER THE KIMONO, UNCLE RONDO IS WEARING AN OVER-SIZED WIFE-BEATER, BOXERS, LONG BLACK DRESS SOCKS WITH GARTERS, AND BLACK DRESS SHOES.)

UNCLE RONDO So, *that* is your opinion of me?  
 Your opinion?  
 That is what you *really* think of me, your "favorite uncle?"  
 Wearing Stella-Rondo's pink kimono?  
 You think your Uncle looks a fool!  
 Uncle looks a fool,  
 Uncle looks a fool.

SISTER 1 (You know who said *that*!)

SISTER 2 I never said any such of a thing—  
 And I'm not saying who *did*!  
 What I said is that you look all right.  
 You look all right—is what I said.

SISTER 1 (Please remember who said *what*!)

UNCLE RONDO But you think your Uncle looks a fool!  
 Uncle looks a fool,  
 Uncle looks a fool.

SISTER 1 (You know who said *that!*)

SISTER 2 No, no, no, no no!  
I never said that!

UNCLE RONDO A whole day stuck in the house with nothing to do!

SISTER 1 (Except his prescription...)

UNCLE RONDO Then to hear you make a remark like that,  
Behind my back!  
To hear you make a remark like *that!*

SISTER 2 I said no such thing!

MAMA You oughtn't have, Sister.

UNCLE RONDO You think your Uncle looks a fool!  
Uncle looks a fool,  
Uncle looks a fool.

SISTER 1 (You know who said *that!*)

SISTER 2 No, no, no, no no!  
I never said that!

MAMA You oughtn't have, Sister.

STELLA-RONDO Oh, yes you did!  
Oh, yes you did!

SISTER 2 Uncle Rondo,  
I think you better go lie down,  
I think you better go lie down,  
I think you ...

UNCLE RONDO Lie down, my foot!  
*Lie down?* My foot!  
That's the last straw!  
That's the last straw!

UNCLE RONDO STORMS OUT.

MAMA You oughtn't have, Sister.

SISTER 1 I ought to of known  
That he was fixing to do something  
Perfectly horrible.

But he didn't, right away  
In the precarious state he was in.

## Scene six – in the living room and kitchen

SISTER 1            While I cleaned up the mess from supper,  
Uncle Rondo just played cards.  
He played Casino  
With Mama  
And Stella-Rondo  
And Shirley-T.  
He gave Shirley-T. a nickel –  
It nearly tickled her to death.  
She called him “Papa.”

I was worn out.  
I was getting along fine  
Til Stella-Rondo came and turned my family against me.  
I was getting along fine, but now I was worn out.  
I was worn out and simply fell asleep on the sofa...

(SISTER 2 CURLS UP ON THE SOFA AND FALLS ASLEEP)

SISTER 1            And who should creep back in –  
But Uncle Rondo...

UNCLE RONDO COMES IN FURTIVELY AND LOOKS AROUND TO SEE IF THE COAST IS CLEAR. HE HAS A STRING OF FIRECRACKERS, WHICH HE LIGHTS. HE THROWS THEM UNDER THE SOFA. THEY ALL EXPLODE!

SISTER 2            (JUMPING AWAKE, ALMOST CLIMBING THE WALLS)  
AAAAAAHHHHH!!!!—

UNCLE RONDO      Rise and shine—hussy!

MAMA, STELLA-RONDO, SHIRLEY-T., AND PAPA-DADDY COME RUNNING INTO THE LIVING ROOM WHEN THE FIRECRACKERS START GOING OFF. SHIRLEY-T. MIGHT BE SCREAMING AND CRYING – IT SHOULD BE A CHAOTIC SCENE.

SISTER 2 NOW FREEZES. THINKS.

SISTER 1            And I'll tell you—  
It didn't take me longer than a minute  
To make up my mind  
What to do.  
It didn't take me *one* minute  
To make up my mind

What to do.

SISTER 2 (CONFRONTING THEM ALL)  
 I've decided!  
 I've decided!—I'll just go straight on down to the P.O.!  
 There's plenty of room for me there in the back!  
 I'll live from now on at the P.O.!  
 Now you and you and you and you have turned against me.  
 Now you and you and you and you have turned against me.  
 Now you and you and you and *you* have turned against me.  
 (THIS LAST TO SHIRLEY-T., WHO COWERS BEHIND STELLA-RONDO)  
 And now this whole entire house has taken Stella-Rondo's side!  
 This whole entire house has taken Stella-Rondo's side!  
 This whole entire house...  
 This whole entire house...

(SISTER 2 BEGINS TO GATHER THINGS FOR HER MOVE. SHE TURNS TO PAPA-DADY ON THE SOFA, GRABS A CUSHION FROM BEHIND HIM.)

SISTER 2 That's *my* cushion!—I did the needlework myself!

PAPA-DADDY Ugh! Hey!!

SISTER 2 GOES TO STELLA-RONDO, PULLS A BRACELET OFF HER WRIST

SISTER 2 That's *my* charm bracelet!

STELLA-RONDO Oww! Hey!

SISTER 2 Uncle Rondo gave it to *me*!

STELLA-RONDO He did not!

SISTER 2 Did so! Ask him!

UNCLE RONDO So!  
 So, that's the ways the land lies?  
 Want my army cot? It's yours, if we can get some peace!

SISTER 2 Well, thank you kindly for the cot.  
 But, "peace?"  
 (SHE IS GETTING WORKED UP)  
 "Peace" is not a word I would select  
 If I had recently just flung  
 A string of firecrackers  
 At a sleeping girl  
 Who was just lying down  
 And hoping for some rest,  
 A little rest,

When her entire family'd turned  
 When her entire family'd turned  
 Against her –

But –  
 Have you forgotten?—  
 Have you forgotten?—I am the postmistress of China Grove!  
 I may not be welcome here in my house,  
 But I've always got the P.O.!  
 Now you and you and you and you can tend to *your* house!—  
 And I will tend to mine!  
 (A GLEAM IN HER EYE; SHE HAS A DELIGHTFUL IDEA)  
 Oh, yes!  
 I will tend to *mine*!

SISTER 1            So, I hope to tell you,  
                          I hope to tell you  
                          I marched right in  
                          And took  
                          The *radio*.

SISTER 2 UNPLUGS THE RADIO AND CARRIES IT TO THE PILE OF HER BELONGINGS

STELLA-RONDO,  
 MAMA,  
 UNCLE RONDO,  
 PAPA-DADDY        NOOOO!

SISTER 1            They could of bit a nail in two.  
                          But they knew that it was mine,  
                          A gift from Uncle Rondo!

(SISTER 2 GOES ABOUT GATHERING UP THE THINGS SISTER 1 ENUMERATES)

SISTER 1            The sewing machine—(I paid the most on the motor)—Mine!  
                          The thermometer.  
                          The calendar.  
                          The Hawaiian ukulele—Mine!  
                          The watermelon rind preserves—(I made 'em all)  
                          The fern—(Even Mama couldn't deny *I* watered the fern.)  
                          The pair of bluebird vases—

MAMA                Who told you *you* could have those, Miss Priss?

SISTER 2            I'm the one who bought 'em and  
                          I'll keep track of 'em.  
                          You can see 'em every time  
                          you come to get your mail.

MAMA I'll never darken the door of that post office again  
If I live to be a hundred!

UNCLE RONDO Not me either!  
My mail can *rot*,  
For all I care!

STELLA-RONDO Not me either!  
I will *never* come down to  
That P.O.  
And relieve you of  
One single solitary piece of mail!

SISTER 2 And who in the world  
Do you think is going to sit right down  
And write *you* a letter?  
Mr. Whitaker?  
Mr. Whitaker?  
Mr. Whitaker?

He was mine before he was yours,  
He was mine and then you got him unfairly!  
He was mine and you got him unfairly,  
And now *you*  
Mysteriously home,  
With a child,  
Giving no rhyme or reason whatsoever  
For your separation...

And---you think  
That Mr. Whitaker  
Is going to sit down and write you  
a lengthy correspondence?  
Would Mr. Whitaker care to write?  
Would Mr. Whitaker care to write?  
Would Mr. Whitaker care to write—to *you*?  
Haa!

Well ...  
Well, I am moving to the P.O.  
And living there from now on—  
And if you wish to find me—  
If you wish to find me—  
Well, that's where I'll be.

PAPA-DADDY You will never catch me setting foot  
In that P.O.  
Even if I should ever get a notion

To write a letter!  
 I won't have you  
 Reaching out of that  
 Little old window  
 With a pair of shears,  
 Aiming to cut off my beard!  
 I'm too smart for you!

STELLA-RONDO      We *all* are!

STELLA-RONDO,  
 MAMA,  
 UNCLE RONDO,  
 PAPA-DADDY      We *all* are! We're too smart for you!

SISTER 2            Well,  
 Tell me one thing, if you're so smart:  
 WHERE is Mr. Whitaker?

UNCLE RONDO      And I'll thank you  
 To stop reading  
 All the pharmacy orders on postcards!  
 And telling everybody in China Grove  
 What you think is the matter with them!

MAMA                Ungrateful child! We don't need you, or the U.S. mail!

STELLA-RONDO      And if you think  
 That I will EVER write another postcard  
 You are sadly mistaken,  
 Sadly mistaken!

SISTER 2            Well,  
 Cut off your nose to spite your face?—  
 Cut off your nose to spite your face!—  
 Cut off your nose to spite your face!—

Well,  
 I have another question for you:  
 Supposing *you* ever care to write—  
 Supposing *you* ever wish to write—  
 Supposing *you* ever *dare* to write ....  
 ... And *beg* Mr. Whitaker to come and get you?

LONG PAUSE. STELLA-RONDO IS FIGHTING TEARS... SHE BURSTS INTO TEARS.

SISTER 1            I knew she'd cry.

MAMA                Stella-Rondo?

SHIRLEY-T.           Mama? Mama?

SISTER 1             Had a conniption fit  
Right there in the kitchen.

(STELLA-RONDO CONTINUES CRYING INTERMITTANTLY)

SISTER 2             So,  
It will be interesting to see  
How long she holds out...

STELLA-RONDO SCOOPS SHIRLEY-T UP, AND RUNS OUT OF THE ROOM & UPSTAIRS.

MAMA                Now look what you've gone and done, Sister!  
You go apologize!

SISTER 2             I haven't got time. I'm busy. I'm packing. I'm leaving.

UNCLE RONDO        Well – Why are you standing around?  
Stop wasting our time.

SISTER 2 CONTINUES TO GATHER HER THINGS AND LOAD THEM ONTO A WAGON

MAMA                Ungrateful child! You ought to be ashamed!

PAPA-DADDY         Hussy! Hussy!

SHIRLEY-T. FROM THE FOOT OF THE STAIRS OR STELLA-RONDO'S WINDOW, BLOWS A LOUD RASPBERRY AND STICKS HER TONGUE OUT AT SISTER.

SISTER 2 HEADS TOWARD THE P.O. WITH HER WAGON OF POSSESSIONS.

SISTER 2             So that is the last time,  
The very last time  
That I laid eyes on my family.

SISTER 2 LOOKS BACK ON HER HOME AND REALIZES SHE IS ALONE. THE LIGHTS ON THE HOME GO DOWN. BRIEF PAUSE AS SISTER TAKES IN HER SITUATION.

SISTER 1             So that is the last time,  
The very last time  
That I laid eyes on my family.

SISTERS 1 & 2        So that's the last time,  
That was/is the very last time,  
That's the last time  
My family has laid eyes on me ...  
The last time ...



The last time ...

The last time ...

SISTER 2 DISAPPEARS. SISTER 1 REMAINS, IN THE POST OFFICE.

## Epilogue – in the back room of the post office

SISTER 1           ... The last time my family's laid eyes on me  
                           For one, two, three, four ...  
                           One, two, three, four ...  
                           One, two, three, four ...  
                           One, two, three, four ...  
                           Five.  
                           Five solid days and nights ...

Oh, but I like it here.

I like it here.

Oh, but I like it here

At the P.O. –

At the P.O.!

I've got everything here the way I like.  
 Everything here the way I like.  
 Got my piano lamp, my sewing machine,  
 My bluebird vases and calendar,  
 My ironing board and ukulele,  
 And my preserves,  
 Every one of my preserves.  
 And the radio!  
 The *radio*!

And folks can take *whichever* side they want,  
 They can take *whosever* side they want,  
*Whatever* side they want:  
 I know which is which!

I've got everything here just the way I like.  
 Everything here just the way I like.  
 Everything here just the way I like.

Here I am. And here I'll stay.

At the P.O. –

At the P.O.

Here I am. And here I'll stay.

At the P.O. –

At the P.O.

-- And if Stella-Rondo ever came on bended knee  
And attempted to explain to me  
All the incidents in her life with Mr. Whitaker.  
I'd simply put my fingers in my ears ...  
put my fingers in my ears ...  
I'd simply put my fingers in both my ears ...

I just want the whole wide world to know I'm happy.  
I'm happy.  
I'm happy.

**THE END**