

**Selections from *Topdog/Underdog*
By Suzan-Lori Parks**

Stage Directions:

(Rest)

Take a little time, a pause, a breather; make a transition.

A Spell

An elongated and heightened (Rest). Denoted by repetition of figures' names with no dialogue. Has sort of an architectural look:

Lincoln

Booth

Lincoln

Booth

This is a place where the figures experience their pure true simple state. While no action or stage business is necessary, directors should fill this moment as they best see fit.

[Brackets in the text indicate optional cuts for production.]

(Parentheses around dialogue indicate softly spoken passages (asides; sotto voce)).

Scene 1

Booth

I had the sense to go back cause I was feeling something going on man, I was feeling something changing. So I—

Lincoln

Cut school that day like you did almost every day—

Booth

She was putting her stuff in bags. She had all them nice suitcases but she was putting her stuff in bags.

(Rest)

Packing up her shit. She told me to look out for you. I told her I was the little brother and the big brother should look out after the little brother. She just said it again. That I should look out for you. Yeah. So

who gonna look out for me. Not like you care. Here I am interested in an economic opportunity, willing to work hard, willing to take risks and all you can say you shiteating motherfucking pathetic limp dick uncle tom, all you can tell me is how you don't do no more what I be wanting to do. Here I am trying to earn a living and you standing in my way. **YOU STANDING IN MY WAY, LINK!**

Lincoln

I'm sorry.

Booth

Yeah, you sorry all right.

Lincoln

I cant be hustling no more, bro.

Booth

What you do all day aint no hustle?

Lincoln

Its honest work.

Booth

Dressing up like some crackerass white man, some dead president and letting people shoot at you sounds like a hustle to me.

Lincoln

People know the real deal. When people know the real deal it aint a hustle.

Booth

We do the card game people will know the real deal. Sometimes we will win sometimes they will win. They fast they win, we faster we win.

Lincoln

I aint going back to that, bro. I aint going back.

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Booth

You play Honest Abe. You aint going back but you going all the way back. Back to way back then when folks was slaves and shit.

Lincoln

Dont push me.

Booth

Lincoln

Booth

You gonna have to leave.

Lincoln

I'll be gone tomorrow.

Booth

Good. Cause this was only supposed to be a temporary arrangement.

Lincoln

I will be gone tomorrow.

Booth

Good

(Booth sits on his bed. Lincoln, sitting in his easy chair with his guitar, plays and sings.)

Lincoln

My dear mother left me, my fathers gone away
My dear mother left me and my fathers gone away
I dont got no money, I dont got no place to stay.

My best girl, she threw me out into the street
My favorite horse, they ground him into meet
Im feeling cold from my head down to my feet.

My luck was bad but now it turned to worse
My luck was bad but not it turned to worse
Dont call me up a doctor, just call me up a hearse.

Booth

You just made that up?

Lincoln

I had it in my head for a few days.

Booth

Sounds good.

Lincoln

Thanks

(Rest)

Daddy told me once why we got the names we do.

Booth

Yeah?

Lincoln

Yeah.

(Rest)

He was drunk when he told me, or maybe I was drunk when he told me. Anyway he told me, may not be true, but he told me. Why he named us both. Lincoln and Booth.

Booth

How come. How come, man?

Lincoln

It was his idea of a joke.

Answer the following questions:

What is the rhythm/pace of this scene?

How can you tell? (Hint: Look at the stage directions.)

What do we learn about the brothers' characters and points of view?

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Scene 2

Lincoln

Taaaaadaaaaaaa!

Booth

Lordalmighty, Pa, I smells money!

Lincoln

Sho nuff, Ma. Poppas brung home thuh bacon.

Booth

Bringitherebringitherebringithere.

(With a series of very elaborate moves Lincoln brings the money over to Booth.)

Booth

Put it in my hand, Pa!

Lincoln

I want ya tuh smells it first, Ma!

Booth

Put it neath my nose then, Pa!

Lincoln

Take yrself a good long whiff of them greenbacks.

Booth

Oh lordamighty Ima faint, Pa! Get me muh med-sin!

(Lincoln quickly pours two large glasses of whiskey.)

Lincoln

Dont die on me, Ma!

Booth

Im fading fast, Pa!

Lincoln

Thinka thuh children, Ma! Thinkuh the farm!

Booth

1-2-3

(Both men gulp down their drinks simultaneously.)

Lincoln and Booth

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

(Lots of laughing and slapping on the backs.)

Lincoln

Budget it out man budget it out.

Booth

You in a hurry?

Lincoln

Yeah. I wanna see how much we got for the week.

Booth

You rush in here and dont even look around. Could be a fucking A-bomb in the middle of the floor you wouldnt notice. Yr wife, Cookie—

Lincoln

X-wife—

Booth

—could be in my bed you wouldnt notice—

Lincoln

She was once—

Booth

Look the fuck around please.

(Lincoln looks around and sees the new suit on his chair.)

Lincoln

Wow.

Booth

Its yrs.

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Lincoln

Shit.

Booth

Got myself one too.

Lincoln

Boosted?

Booth

Yeah, I boosted em. Theys stole from a big-ass department store. That store takes in more money in one day than we will in our whole life. I stole and I stole generously. I got one for me and I got one for you. Shoes belts shirts ties socks in the shoes and everything. Got that screen too.

Lincoln

You all right, man.

Booth

Just cause I aint good as you at cards dont mean I cant do nothing.

Lincoln

Lets try em on.

(They stand in their separate sleeping spaces, Booth near his bed, Lincoln near his recliner, and try on their new clothes.)

Booth

Ima wear mine tonight. Gracell see me in this and she gonna ask *me* tuh marry *her*.

(Rest)

I got you the blue and I got me the brown. I walked in there and walked out and they didnt as much as bat an eye. Thats how smooth lil bro be, Link.

Lincoln

You did good. You did real good, 3-Card.

Answer the following questions:

What is the rhythm/pace of this scene?

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Scene 3

Booth

I had me “an evening to remember.”

Lincoln

You look like you hurt yrself.

Booth

Grace Grace Grace. *Grace*. She wants me back. She wants me back so bad she wiped her hand over the past where we wasnt together just so she could say we aint never been apart. She wiped her hand out our breakup. She wiped her hand over her childhood, her teenage years, her first boyfriend, just so she could say that she been mine since the dawn of time.

Lincoln

Thats great, man.

Booth

And all the shit I put her through: she wiped it clean. And the women I saw while I was seeing her—

Lincoln

Wiped clean too?

Booth

Mister Clean, Mister, Mister Clean!

Lincoln

Whered you take her?

Booth

Was over at her place. I brought thuh food. Stopped at the best place I could fine and stuffed my coat with only the best. We had the music we had the candlelight we had—

Lincoln

She let you do it?

Booth

Course she let me do it.

Lincoln

She let you do it without a rubber?

Booth

—Yeah.

Lincoln

Bullshit.

Booth

I put my foot down—and she melted. And she was—huh—she was something else. I dont wanna get you jealous, though.

Lincoln

Go head, I dont mind.

Booth

(Rest)

Well, you know what she looks like.

Lincoln

She walks on by and the emergency room fills up cause all the guys get whiplash from lookin at her.

Booth

Thats right thats right. Well—she comes to the door wearing nothing but her little nightie, eats up the food I’d brought like there was no tomorrow and goes and eats on me.

(Rest)

Lincoln

Go on.

Booth

I dont wanna make you feel bad, man.

Lincoln

Ssallright. Go on.

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Booth

(Rest)

We, uh, you know what shes like. Wild.
Goodlooking. So sweet my teeth hurt.

Lincoln

A sexmachine.

Booth

Yeah.

Lincoln

A hotsy-totsy.

Booth

Yeah.

Lincoln

Amazing Grace.

Booth

Amazing Grace! Yeah. Thats right. She let me do
her how I wanted. And no rubber.

(Rest)

Lincoln

Go on.

Booth

You dont want to hear the mushy shit.

Lincoln

Sure I do.

Booth

You hate mushy shit. You always hated thuh mushy
shit.

Lincoln

Ive changed. Go head. You had “an evening to
remember,” remember? I was just here alone sitting
here. Drinking. Go head. Tell Link thuh stink.

Answer the following questions:

What is the rhythm/pace of this scene?

**How can you tell? (Hint: Again, look at the stage
directions.)**

**What do we learn about the brothers’ characters
and points of view?**