

Full Draft One – May 2021

Why I Live at the P.O. ☺

A chamber opera in one act, based on the story by Eudora Welty

Libretto by Michael O'Brien, with Stephen Eddins

Music/Score by Steven Eddins

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Characters (in order of appearance)

Sister 1/Narrator; *Lyric Soprano*

Sister 2/Actor; *Lyric Soprano*

(*Sister is thirty-ish, Postmistress to the town of China Grove, Mississippi*)

Stella-Rondo, Sister's sister, exactly 12 months to the day younger; *Coloratura Soprano*

Shirley-T., Stella-Rondo's adopted (?) child, two years old; *Non-Singing Role*

Mama; *Mezzo/Contralto*

Papa-Daddy, Mama's papa; *Bass Baritone*

Uncle Rondo, Mama's brother, the town pharmacist; *Character Tenor*

Little Girl with a wagon, eight to ten years old; *Non-Singing Role*

Prologue

SETTING: CHINA GROVE, MISSISSIPPI. JULY 1941. MID-MORNING.

THE BACK ROOM OF A SMALL POST OFFICE (DOWNSTAGE RIGHT), SET UP WITH ALL THE AMENITIES OF A COMFORTABLE HOME - EASY CHAIR, RADIO, SEWING MACHINE, ELECTRIC FAN, IRONING BOARD, LAMPS, HOUSE PLANTS, ETC.

SISTER 1 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 1

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 INTRODUCES "HERSELF".

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

SISTER 2. (SINGS 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 - bringing -
Bringing to our complete surprise -
This child of two!

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

STELLA-R. (CALLING INTO THE HOUSE)
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 STELLARONDO RUN TO EACH OTHER AND EMBRACE.

MAMA. Here you are! Here you are!

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

DURING MAMA'S SOLO, STELLA & 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-R. 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-R.. 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-R. What do you mean- "Hmmm?"-

SISTER 2. Hmmm!

STELLA-R. 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 he'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 / & MAMA.	No! 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-R.	(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 Whatsoever!
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-R.	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

(TIME PASSES. MAMA AND SISTER 2 PREPARE FOR DINNER, SETTING THE TABLE AND PUTTING OUT THE FOOD.)

MAMA. Dinner! Dinner!

Scene 2

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 HOBBLES 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-R. (WITH FALSE SWEETNESS)
Papa-Daddy.

(PAPA-DADDY IGNORES HER)

STELLA-R. (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-R. 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 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.

[illegible]

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!

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, 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-R. 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-R
& SISTER 1
& MAMA

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

PAUSE,
BRIEF INTERLUDE. THEN:

Scene 3

CONTINUING: SISTER 2 IS NOW IN THE HALLWAY. SUDDENLY, UNCLE RONDO APPEARS, COMING DOWN FROM UPSTAIRS. HE IS WEARING STELLA-RONDO'S KIMONO AND SEEMS DISTRESSED, WEAVING ABOUT.

RONDO. OHHHHHH ...

SISTER 1. Just then—

SISTER 2 (SEEING RONDO)
What? What in the--

RONDO OHH!
 Oh! Oh! Ohhhhhh ...

SISTER 1. Just then-
Not five minutes after-

RONDO OHH!
Oh! Oh! Ohhhhh ...

SISTER 2. Uncle Rondo?

SISTER 1. Uncle Rondo!

SISTER 2. Uncle Rondo! Why, I didn't know who that was!

RONDO OHH!
Oh! Oh! Ohhhhh ...

SISTER 2. Uncle Rondo? What in the world?

RONDO OHH!
Oh! Oh! Ohhhhh ...

SISTER 2. What in the world?

SISTER 1. Uncle Rondo—in one of Stella-Rondo's peach-colored kimonos!

RONDO OHH!
Oh! Oh! Ohhhhh ...

SISTER 1 Why, whatever is that you're wearing?

RONDO Sister ... Get out of my way. I'm poisoned.

RONDO PUSHES PAST SISTER 2, GOES OUTDOORS,

SISTER 1. He drank a whole bottle of his prescription again;
He does it every Fourth of July.

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

SISTER 2 Not the hammock!
Uncle Rondo, stay away from Papa-Daddy!
Not the hammock!
Not if you're poisoned, Uncle Rondo!
Not the hammock!
Papa-Daddy will surely beat your head!
Not the hammock!
Not the hammock!

RONDO OHH!

Oh! Oh! Ohhhhh ...

SISTER 1. But, sure as shooting, every Fourth of July,
Uncle Rondo must have his prescription—
The whole bottle—
That whole horridly expensive prescription—
And that hammock.

RONDO STOPS. SEES PAPA-DADDY IN THE HAMMOCK. PAPA-D. JOLTS AWAKE.

PAPA-DADDY. HUUH??? ...
Oh, It's you.
By the by: did you hear that hussy?

**BRIEF INTERLUDE. TIME PASSES,
DUMB SHOW AS SISTERS 1 & 2 WATCH.**

SISTER 1 (And straight away, Papa-Daddy tried to turn Uncle Rondo against me! He told Uncle Rondo I didn't learn to read till I was eight! And he didn't see how I ever got the mail put up at the P.O.! And he said Stella-Rondo had a brilliant mind and deserved credit for getting out of town. All this time, poor Uncle Rondo was pleading with Papa-Daddy to slow down the hammock: it was making him dizzy as a witch to watch!)

RONDO (TO PAPA-DADDY) ...
Don't rock so ... Don't rock so ... pleaseohhhh ...

SISTER 1 Poor Uncle Rondo: too dizzy
To get turned against me, for the time being.
He's a good case of a one-track mind.
A certified pharmacist.

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

STELLA-R. Why ... why ... What in the ...
OHH!

SISTER 1 Just then, Stella Rondo—

SISTER 2 Stella Rondo?

STELLA-R. OHH!
Oh! Oh! Ohhhhh!

SISTER 2 Are you mortally wounded?
What in the world?

STELLA-R. OHH!
Oh! Oh! Ohhhhh!

SISTER 2 RUSHES UPSTAIRS.

SISTER 2 What's the matter? Stella-Rondo!
I say, are you mortally wounded?

STELLA-R. Sister: do me a favour.
Look out that window.
Tell me, do you see any human beings?

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

STELLA-R. Do you see anything different about Uncle Rondo?

SISTER 2 Why, no,
Only he's got on some terrible-looking
Peach-colored contraption.
Some terrible horrid peach-colored contraption
I wouldn't be found dead in,
That's all that can I see.

STELLA-R 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!
That happens—to be part of my trousseau!
I only just got home,
Hung it up on the bathroom door!
What on earth,
What on earth could Uncle Rondo *mean*?
What on earth could Uncle Rondo mean,
Wearing part of my trousseau?
In broad daylight—
Without saying so much as 'kiss my foot'?

SISTER 2. I'm sure I don't know.

STELLA-R He looks a fool!
It makes me sick to my stomach!
To my stomach!
I say, he looks a fool!

SISTER 2 Well, I say, Uncle Rondo looks as good as he can,
 As anyone in reason:
 Or anyone *can*—in that.
 And who are *you*?
 Who are you to criticize—
 Home again, with a two-year-old child,
 And no explanation?

STELLA-R I asked you not to refer one more time
 To my adopted child!
 Sister, you gave me your word of honor!
 Not to refer to my—

SISTER 1 I merely slammed the door.
 Slammed the door, slammed the door,
 So, I merely slammed the door—

Scene 4

CONTINUING SISTER 2 SLAMS DOOR, & GOES DOWNSTAIRS TO THE KITCHEN.

SISTER 1 --And went and made green-tomato pickle,
Stella-Rondo pulled out every one of her eyebrows
With cheap Kress tweezers.
While I made green-tomato pickle,

INTERLUDE. TIME JUMP.

KITCHEN. SISTER MAKING IS PICKLE WHEN MAMA WANDERS IN.

SISTER 2 (HUMS TO HERSELF, BUSY)
Hmm ... Hmm ... Hmm ...

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

SISTER 2 Well,
Stella-Rondo'd better thank her lucky stars
That it's me in this kitchen—
Me, in this kitchen—
You should all be thankful it's me in this kitchen—
And not me trotting in from Illinois,

With one very peculiar-looking child.

MAMA` I'd be just as overjoyed to see you
With a 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, that child is not adopted!

MAMA 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—sure.

MAMA Now, I thought we were going to have a pleasant Fourth of July.

SISTER 1 Just then ... Just then ...
Something 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 Mama ...
Oh, Mama ...

MAMA Sister, what?

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

SISTER 1 And I looked like ... that.

SISTER 2 Mama, I remember, Mr Joe Whitaker drank like a fish.
I believe to my soul, he even drank ... *chemicals*.

PAUSE.

MAMA TURNS, WALKS BRISKLY TO THE FOOT OF THE STAIRS. CALLS UP:

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

STELLA-R. What?

MAMA Can that child of yours ... talk?

STELLA-R. Can she what?

MAMA Talk! Talk! Burdyburdyburdyburdy!

STELLA-R. Who says she can't?

MAMA Sister!

STELLA-R. You didn't have to tell me!
I know whose word of honor doesn't mean a thing!

... Oh, Shirley-T?
Shirley-T, honey?
Shirley-T, honey? Will you talk?
Talk? Talk?

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

STELLA-R. Oh! That's my girl! My little adopted girl!
Just as smart as she can be!
That's my girl! My little smart, adopted girl!
She can tap-dance too!
She can tap-dance too!
Which is more than *some* people whom I *won't* name can do!

MAMA That darling precious thing!
Sister, you ought to be ashamed.
Run upstairs!

Run upstairs this instant and apologize
To Stella-Rondo and Shirley-T.

SISTER 2 I merely wondered--
Can't a person wonder?
I merely wondered about the child.
I merely wondered if she was normal.
Well, she's proved that she is normal.
Can't a person wonder?
I've nothing to apologize for.
And I have nothing further to say.

MUSIC – AS MAMA RUSHES UPSTAIRS, ETC, AS DESCRIBED.

SISTER 1 (Well, Mama just turned away on her heel, furious. Ran right upstairs and
hugged that baby. Mama still believed that child was adopted! And Stella-
Rondo just turned Mama against me, while I went back to that stove!)

So. That made Mama,
Papa-Daddy
And the baby,
All on Stella-Rondo's side.
Papa-Daddy. Mama. Baby.
All on Stella-Rondo's side.
And against me.
All, all. All on Stella-Rondo's side.
And against me.
Next ... Uncle Rondo.

Scene 5

MUSIC INTERLUDE: AS THE AFTERNOON PASSES.

SISTER 1 (Now, I must say, Uncle Rondo has been marvelous to me at various times
in the past. I always thought Uncle Rondo had all the brains of the entire
family. Once, he gave me a radio. And once he sent me to Mammoth
Cave, with all expenses paid!)

But—this would be the day
He was drinking that prescription,

His whole prescription—the Fourth of July.

EARLY EVE. THE SUPPER TABLE. UNCLE RONDO, SISTER 2, STELLA-R & MAMA.

STELLA-R. ... Oughtn't you try and eat a little something?
 ... Uncle Rondo? ... Uncle Rondo?
 ... A little something?
 Biscuits and ketchup, Uncle Rondo?

SISTER 2 (TO STELLA-R)
 Do you think it wise? Ketchup?
 Ketchup, and that kimono?
 Do you think it wise?

RONDO Any objections?
 Any objections??
 Any objections???
 Yes please, biscuits and ketchup.

STELLA-R. Don't you mind what Sister says, Uncle Rondo!
 Sister's been devoting this solid afternoon
 To sneering,
 Sneering, sneering,
 Sneering out my window—
 Sneering, at the way you look.

RONDO What's that??

STELLA-R Sister says you look a fool!
 In that peach-colored kimono,
 You look a fool,
 In that peach-colored kimono,
 She says you look a fool,
 And it makes her sick to her stomach!

SISTER 1 Do you remember who it was really said that?

RONDO ... *That's* her opinion??

UNCLE RONDO SPILLS THE KETCHUP, SPRINGS TO HIS FEET. TO SISTER 2.

Something horrible.

Scene 6a

MUSIC INTERLUDE.

THAT EVENING. MAMA, STELLA-R & SHIRLEY-T IN THE PARLOUR, JOINED BY
UNCLE RONDO. PAPA-DADDY IN THE HAMMOCK. SISTER 2 IN HER ROOM.

SISTER 1 Not that night:
Not in that precarious condition.
That night, Uncle Rondo just played Casino
With Mama,
Stella-Rondo ,
And Shirley-T.
He gave a nickel to Shirley-T,
Shirley-T called him Papa.

SHIRLEY-T. Papa!

STELLA-R. Did you hear that?

MAMA (AS THE OTHERS COO AND DOTE)
Oh, the precious, precious thing!
Why, did you ever!—

SISTER 1 I was getting along fine, fine—
 I was getting along fine, until—

TIME PASSES. EVENING TO NIGHT. NIGHT TO DAWN.

Scene 6b

DAWN. DAY IS BREAKING. SISTER 2 IS ASLEEP IN HER BEDROOM.. FAR AWAY,
THE CROWING OF A ROOSTER. UNCLE RONDO LURKING OUTSIDE HER DOOR.

SISTER 1 That next morning.
 That very, very next morning,
 Uncle Rondo, at six-thirty A.M.
 That very, very, very, very next morning—
 Uncle Rondo, at six-thirty A.M.—

RONDO HAS A STRING OF FIRECRACKERS, WHICH HE LIGHTS. OPENS THE DOOR.

RONDO Rise and shine—hussy!

RONDO THROWS THE FIRECRACKERS INTO THE BEDROOM.. THEY ALL EXPLODE!

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

SISTER 2 NOW FREEZES. THINKS.

SISTER 1 My doctor always told me
I was the most sensitive person
He'd ever seen in his life.
And I'll tell you—
It didn't take me longer than a minute
To make up my mind
What to do.

TRANSITION. DOWNSTAIRS, THE FAMILY HAS FINISHED BREAKFAST & PLAYING OLD MAID. AN OSCILLATING FAN COOLS THE ROOM. SISTER 2 MARCHES DOWNSTAIRS: AND SUDDENLY PULLS THE FAN PLUG OUT OF THE WALL.

ALL HEY!

SISTER 2 (CONTRONTING THEM ALL)
I've decided!—I'll just go straight down to the P.O.!
I've decided—There's plenty of room for me in the back!
I've decided—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
And this whole entire house has taken Stella-Rondo's side!

MOVES TO PAPA-DADY ON THE COUCH, GRABS CUSHION FROM BEHIND HIM.

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

PAPA-DADDY Uhh! Hey!

SISTER GOES TO STELLA-R, PULLS BRACLET OFF HER WRIST

SISTER 2 That's my charm bracelet!—Uncle Rondo gave it to me!

STELLA-R. Oww! Hey!

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

SISTER 2 That's the way the land lies!

ALL That's the way the land lies! That's the way the land lies!
That's the way the land lies! That's the way the —

SHIRLEY-T (*Blows a raspberry*)

SISTER 2 Now you and you and you and *you* have turned against me!

 Have you forgotten?—I'm the postmistress at China Grove!
Have you forgotten?—I'll always have the P.O.!
You tend to *your* house!—And I will tend to mine!
Now you and you and you and you have turned against me!

SISTER 2 CONTINUES PLUNDERING THE ROOM.

 Oh! That radio—is mine! (Go on, sue for it, I dare you!)
This sewing machine!—(I paid for most of it, it's mine!)
This thermometer!—This calendar!—This Hawaiian ukulele!—
These watermelon preserves, and bluebird vases
And most of the plants out back—
Are mine and I will keep them—
Mine and I will keep them—
Now you and you and you and you have turned against me!

MAMA Why, that's just fine, Miss Priss!
I'll never darken the door of that post office again!

RONDO Not me either! My mail can rot, for all I care!

STELLA-R. Not me either! I don't need one solitary piece of mail!

SISTER 2 Now, who'd send *you* a letter?
Who'd send *you* a letter?
Who'd send *you* a letter? Mr Whitaker?
Mr Whitaker?? To *you*? Haa!
He was mine before he was yours,

And then you got him, unfairly.
 Now *you* mysteriously home, with this inexplicable child!
 Would Mr Whitaker care to write?
 Would Mr Whitaker care to write?
 Would Mr Whitaker care to write—to *you*? Haa!
 Well ...
 I'm moving to the P.O. and living there from now on—
 And if you wish to find me—
 If you wish to find me—
 And if you wish to find me—
 Well, that's where I'll be.

PAPA-DADDY	I'll not set foot in there again! That P.O.? I'll sooner cut off my beard! That P.O.? I'll cut off my beard before going there— That P.O.? I'll cut off my beard before going there— And I'll never, never, never, never cut off this beard!
SISTER 2	Good riddance to you <i>and</i> your beard!
RONDO	My pharmacy's postcards! Don't read 'em! Those prescriptions are none of your business!
SISTER 2	I'll read what I want!—There's not a thing that you can do!
MAMA	Ungrateful child! We don't need you, or the U.S. Mail!
STELLA-R	Nor I! I will never write and I'll never want Another letter, nor postcard!
SISTER 2	You'll off your nose to spite your face?— You'll off your nose to spite your face!— Supposing <i>you</i> ever care to write— Supposing <i>you</i> ever wish to write— Supposing <i>you</i> ever dare to write And beg Mr Whitaker to come and find you.
LONG PAUSE. THEN: STELLA-RONDO BURSTS INTO TEARS.	
STELLA-R.	WAAAAAAHHHHHHH!!!!
MAMA	Stella-Rondo?

SISTER 2 I said from the beginning he'd up and leave her!

STELLA-R. WAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!!—WAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!!

MAMA Stella-Rondo!

STELLA-R. WAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!!—WAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!!

SISTER 2 I foretold every single thing that's happened! See?

STELLA-R. WAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!!—WAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!!

MAMA. Where did Mr Whitaker go?

SISTER 2 To the North Pole, I bet! And who can blame him?
I knew Mr Whitaker first, I knew him first, and I knew—
I knew him first and I knew—See?

STELLA-R. WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!!!!

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

MAMA Stella-Rondo??

(TO SISTER2) Go apologize.

SISTER 2 I can't. I'm busy. I'm packing. I'm leaving.

RONDO. Well ... Why are you standing around?
Don't waste any more time.

SISTER 2 PAUSES, THINKS. STEPS OUT ONTO FRONT PORCH. CALLS OUT.

SISTER 2 (Oh, Girl? You with that wagon!— Come help me haul these things down
the hill? I'm going to live in the Post Office! I'd be much obliged!)

RONDO I will happily give that girl a nickel.

INTERLUDE.

A GIRL (age 9?) WITH WAGON HELPS SISTER 2 MOVE OUT OF THE HOUSE.
SISTER 2 WALKS OUT OF THE HOUSE. SISTER 1 STEPS FORWARD—AND FOR THE
FIRST TIME, THEY SEE AND ACKNOWLEDGE EACH OTHER.

SISTER 1 So that—is the last time,
The very last time that I laid eyes ...

SISTER 2 So that—is the last time,
The very last time that I laid eyes ...

SISTERS 1&2 So that is the last time,
The very last time that I laid eyes ...
On my family ...
Or my family has laid eyes upon me ...
For one, two, three, four ...
One, two, three, four ...
One, two, three, four ...

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

SISTER 1 Five.
Five solid days and nights ...
But I like it here.
I like it here. I like it.
Here, at the P.O.
I've got everything here the way I like.
I've got my radio. My sewing machine,
My bluebird vases and calendar and ukulele.
And I'm growing butter-beans out in the back.
And folks can take whatever side they like,
Folks can take whatever side they like,
And if Stella-Rondo ever came to me on bended knee
And attempted to tell the whole truth—
I'd just put my fingers in my ears ...
I've got everything here the way I like.
Everything here the way I like.
Everything here the way I like.
Everything here the way I like.
Here I am. Here I'll stay. At the P.O.
I just want the whole wide world to know I'm happy.
Happy. Happy.

THE END