STRIKE

Short Play by Keenan Scott II
Commissioned by Baltimore Center Stage
AUTHOR’S NOTES

Synopsis:
During the railroad and bus strikes in Detroit in 1948 a group of friends try to enjoy their Friday night.

Dialogue:
//: This symbol is to indicate when the next speaker should start speaking. This helps create a natural following dialogue. This will also naturally happen with what actors bring to their characters.

Ellipses (‘...’): Indicate a breath or pause, slightly faster than a beat, but longer than a breath following a comma.

Dash (-): Indicates when the next character should interrupt that line.
CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

Cast: 2W/3M

Elle, 23
Sweet and reserved. She has old school ideals of how things should be.

Jeanne, 25
She is professional, but is the life of the party. She is a free spirit who speaks her mind.

Eugene, early 30s
Hard worker and a fan of baseball. Straddles the fence between serious and lighthearted.

Jonesie, late 20s
Always has a joke to tell and doesn’t take anything too serious. Woman crazy.

Smitty, 40-50s
Old man of the group, but loves to hangout when he can.
It’s 1948 in Detroit, Michigan where you can still see the aftermath of the Riots of 43’. The current railroad and bus strikes paralyze the city. The stage is dim. As the set rotates you see the makings of an elementary school classroom. Elle, a schoolteacher in her early twenties is cleaning up her classroom getting ready for the weekend. She looks at the clock in the front of her classroom.

ELLE
I should’ve been left already. Boog is going to kill me.

(JEANNE, woman of her early 20’s with unrefined grace enters the room.)

JEANNE
I’m ready to go.

ELLE
I wasn’t in a rush to walk home.

JEANNE
This strike has to go. I mean, I get it. Change gotta come, but a woman gotta get home too.

ELLE
Amen.

JEANNE
Girl, these kids today. Something must be in the water.

ELLE
Lucas was literally swinging from the ceiling today.

JEANNE
Well, his buddy George was asleep in mine.

ELLE
But today is Friday.

JEANNE
Exactly, let’s go.

(ELLE continues to straighten up.)

ELLE
I’m coming.
JEANNE
You know Eugene is going to have a fit.

ELLE
I know.

JEANNE
That man loves you.

ELLE
Yeah. But he hasn’t made me honest yet.

JEANNE
“Honest” Lena? What y’all have is a great thing.

ELLE
You would say that…you rebel.

JEANNE
Yes darling...yes I am.

ELLE
(Laughs.) Come on, crazy.

JEANNE
What’s the plan for tonight?

ELLE
Same. We’re going to walk in and see Boog and his friends drinking, listening to a game// or something.

JEANNE
Is Allen going to be there?

ELLE
Jonesie?

JEANNE
Yeah, that is one handsome man.

ELLE
I don’t know what you see-

JEANNE
Jeanne Jones doesn’t sound too bad ya’know.
ELLE
Oh okay, you might become an honest woman before me.

(They both share a laugh.)

JEANNE
Yeah, right. Come on, let’s start this hike home.

ELLE
You have a change of shoes.

JEANNE
You know I do.

(JEANNE pulls an extra pair of shoes out of her bag. ELLE straightens up one last thing with the help of JEANNE and they exit. Lights fade down. The set rotates. Lights slowly fade back up as you see a 30s-40s décor filled living room with a connected kitchen. EUGENE, man of his early 30s, World War II veteran that worked for the armed forces factory-assembling machinery and JONESIE, twenty eight year old blue-collar worker enters into EUGENE’s home. JONESIE goes and take a seat on the couch, while EUGENE is seen visibly hurt walking with a limp. He injured his ankle during a game of stickball in the park.)

JONESIE
I told you to sit down the final inning.

EUGENE
I had to get a home run.

JONESIE
You done went and hurt yourself over a home run.

EUGENE
Shut up. I got too excited coming around the bases.

JONESIE
Clearly. These are supposed to be “pick-up” games. We ain’t getting paid. This is just to pass time during the strikes. Not to relive your childhood.

(EUGENE laughs as he heads to fridge.)

EUGENE
Want a beer?

JONESIE
Yeah. (Goes to sit on couch.) You know Elle gonna kill you.
EUGENE
No she not.

JONESIE
How you figure?

EUGENE
Cause she ain’t gonna know.

JONESIE
Yeah...okay.

(EUGENE brings the beer to JONESIE. They clank cans and take a sip. EUGENE painfully takes a seat.)

EUGENE
Let the strikes end soon.

JONESIE
Yes Lord! So we can go back to work. Cause these bills don’t stop.

EUGENE
Amen.

EUGENE
What time is it? (Looks at clock.) Elle should be here by now.

JONESIE
Everyone’s commute is thrown off.

EUGENE
She’s been walking home.

JONESIE
The school is about two miles?

EUGENE
More like five.

JONESIE
That’s a hike. All that walking, she’ll lose some weight. (EUGENE gives him a look.) No, I’m not saying she needs it or anything. Elle is beautiful.

EUGENE
You think my wife is beautiful?
JONESIE
(Stuttering.) Well, I mean she-

EUGENE
She what?

JONESIE
You know what-

EUGENE
I’m messing with’ya.

JONESIE
Not funny.

EUGENE
Aye, turn the radio on. I think the Dodgers are playing. Gotta catch Jackie.

(JONESIE walks over to the radio and starts to tune it.)

JONESIE
They brought Satchel in to play with that boy Doby. They gonna win the pennant this year.

EUGENE
Jackie been playing lights out.

(JONESIE finishes tuning station to the Dodger game.)

JONESIE
We’ll see. (beat) This strike ain’t fun, but aren’t you glad the war is done.

EUGENE
Ain’t no different. We get treated the same. Discriminated during the war and now we get discriminated after. Fighting for a country that don’t fight for us.

JONESIE
You know I ain’t go, but I rather be working on these railroads than them big ass planes.

EUGENE
Wasn’t so bad. Either way, I’m working with my hands. I’m a mechanic, it’s what I do.

JONESIE
Aye, you think Elle gonna bring home that friend of hers.

EUGENE
Who? Jeanne?
JONESIE
Yeah, Jeanne. She’s one pretty lady.

EUGENE
Never heard you say that. Most of the time its, “Look at that Dame Gene.”

JONESIE
I’m a new man.

EUGENE
New man my ass.

(They both are finishing up their drinks.)

JONESIE
These the last beers?

EUGENE
Yeah. We should’ve stopped by the store.

(As they finish off their beers, a few knocks are heard at the door.)

JONESIE
I’ll get it. (He remains in his seat and screams.) Who?

EUGENE
I could’ve did that.

SMITTY (O.S)
It’s me.

(Now JONESIE stands and heads to the door.)

JONESIE
Me who?

SMITTY (O.S)
Me stupid.

(JONESIE opens the door. It’s EUGENE’S next-door neighbor SMITTY, a stocky man in his mid forties.)

SMITTY
Beers anyone?
EUGENE
What’s going on Smitty?

JONESIE
Right on time.

EUGENE
We just finished up what I had.

JONESIE
I’ll take those from you, kind sir.

(JONESIE takes the beers from SMITTY and takes them to the fridge. He grabs out enough for everyone. SMITTY goes to sit on the couch.)

SMITTY
What y’all boys in here doing?

EUGENE
Nothing much. Just getting home not too long ago.

SMITTY
This the Dodger game?

JONESIE
You know it.

SMITTY
That Robinson boy is something special.

JONESIE
Gene think he Jackie.

EUGENE
Here we go.

JONESIE
We have been playing these pick-up games and this fool think he playing Major League Baseball.

SMITTY
Is that right?

JONESIE
That’s why he limping.
EUGENE
You can’t hold no water.

JONESIE
Nope. Lena gonna give you the blues.

SMITTY
How’s Lena? She home?

EUGENE
She should be here soon.

JONESIE
And I pray with her fine friend.

SMITTY
Who? Jeanne?

JONESIE
Yeah.

SMITTY
She a good one. (To EUGENE.) When you and Lena gonna jump that broom?

EUGENE
(Hesitant.) Soon.

SMITTY
Start saving your money now. I’ve been married almost twenty years. It goes by quick.

EUGENE
You been married twenty years?

SMITTY
Yeap. I married when I was about eighteen, nineteen. I got kids around your age.

EUGENE
I remember you telling me that.

SMITTY
Don’t forget, a man only needs one woman.

EUGENE
Agreed.
JONESIE
(Coughs while speaking.) I disagree.

SMITTY
I’ll tell you this. Don’t ever hit your woman.// Don’t ever start talking crazy.

EUGENE
Of course// not.

JONESIE
Oh, he won’t.

SMITTY
When my wife get the yapping, I walk on out.

EUGENE
I rather my lady say, “why you walk out?” versus me saying something I can’t take back.

SMITTY
Right, cause I know if I stay, and start that back and forth, it’s gonna be no good.

EUGENE
That’s a battle we’ll never win.

SMITTY
Let me tell you something else.

EUGENE
Uh huh.

SMITTY
Keep y’all families out y’all business. If you or her do something, keep it in y’all house. Cause as soon as they do, its “she ain’t no good,” or “he ain’t shit,” and all that jive mess.

JONESIE
Now that’s the truth.

SMITTY
Keep everyone out your business and you’ll be fine. (Laughs.) One time, my old lady got so mad at me, she said, “Forget you and your momma.” I said, “How my momma get into this?” She says, “Cause she had you.”

(They all laugh uncontrollably.)

EUGENE
I can’t see Elle talking to me like that.
SMITTY
You say that now, wait til ya’ll married. Everything still cute right now.

JONESIE
Gene gonna figure it out.

SMITTY
I’m sorry, I didn’t know you were married.

JONESIE
I’m not.

SMITTY
Exactly.

(EUGENE chuckles.)

JONESIE
Oh, you Lou Costello now?

SMITTY
I’m more of a Bob Hope man.

JONESIE
Why you talk so much?

SMITTY
When you get to where I’m at, you can speak.

JONESIE
You gonna be in the grave by the time I get there.

SMITTY
So?

JONESIE
You want me to come dig you up?

SMITTY
Yeap.

JONESIE
And confess to your bones how I didn’t know nothing?

SMITTY
Yeap.
JONESIE
You sound foolish.

(They all laugh.)

SMITTY
You hear this fathead?

EUGENE
Y’all sound married.

(EUGENE hears ELLE coming down the hall.)

EUGENE
That’s Elle, make sure everything is straight. (All the guys rush around to make sure everything is cleaned up.) Hurry up. Pick that up. Put those bottles in the trash.

(Sounds of jingling keys are heard at the door. The guys rush to finish up. ELLE and JEANNE enter.)

ELLE
Hey love.

(EUGENE, JONESIE and SMITTY see that ELLE and JEANNE have bags of groceries, they get up to help them. EUGENE is slow to move.)

JONESIE
Let me help y’all with these.

(EUGENE tries to hide his limp, but does a horrible job.)

EUGENE
Let me get those honey.

ELLE
What happened to your leg baby?

JONESIE

EUGENE
Nothin baby, I’m fine.

JEANNE
Thank you.
ELLE
Don’t look like it. (EUGENE tries to hide his limp as he helps to put up the groceries.) Hey Smitty.

SMITTY
Hey darling.

JEANNE
What y’all boys in here doing?

JONESIE
Listening to the game.

ELLE
Told you.

(JEANNE goes to sit down with JONESIE.)

JEANNE
Ooo, who’s playing?

JONESIE
Jackie and the Dodgers.

JEANNE
He’s my favorite.

SMITTY
Yours and the rest of black folk.

JONESIE
Smitty, think the Indians gonna win the pennant this year?

SMITTY
How could they not?

EUGENE
He got a point. Them boys playing some good ball this year.

JONESIE
Hank Thompson and Willard Brown in the league now too.

EUGENE
We gonna take over soon.
JONESIE
Don’t move too fast now.

SMITTY
Maybe. Won’t be in my lifetime though.

EUGENE
How was work?

ELLE
Tiring.

JEANNE
Thank God, it’s Friday because them kids // today, whew.

ELLE
It was a lot today.

SMITTY
Y’all need me to come up there with my belt?

ELLE
No Smitty., // it’s quite alright.

JEANNE
Yes, we do.

JONESIE
I got a belt too.

JEANNE
Go figure honey.

ELLE
I just know I was ready to come home to my man.

EUGENE
Is that right?

ELLE
That’s right.

JEANNE
So where are our beers?
SMITTY
I didn’t know you ladies drank beer.

JEANNE
Why not?

JONESIE
I love a woman who can handle a beer.

JEANNE
Try a few.

(JONESIE jumps up to get the ladies a beer.)

ELLE
Baby, put some music on.

EUGENE
What do you wanna listen too?

ELLE
Surprise us.

(EUGENE goes to where they keep all of their records and picks out a record by Louis Jordan- “Run Joe”.)

JEANNE
Who’s that?

EUGENE
You’ll see. Let’s get this Friday night going.

(Once the music starts everyone gets up to dance. EUGENE is still visibly hurt.)

ELLE
So when are you going to tell me about what happened?

EUGENE
What you mean?

ELLE
Boog.

EUGENE
It’s nothing.
ELLE
Oh, so you weren't playing baseball?

EUGENE
Huh?

ELLE
(Imitates EUGENE.) Huh? You only wear these pants when you play. You have a dirt stain on the side of your leg like you been sliding and you smell like you been outside all day.

EUGENE
You got me.

ELLE
I know I do. Living out your childhood dreams?

JONESIE
That's what I said.

EUGENE
Shut up.

(JEANNE and JONESIE are clearly enjoying each other's company.)

JEANNE
I like this song.

JONESIE
You like it, I love it!

SMITTY
Who is this Gene?

EUGENE
Louis Jordan.

JONESIE
Can I pick the next one?

EUGENE
Yeah, yeah.

JONESIE
I love y'all collection.
EUGENE
Hey baby, let’s go to the room for a minute.

ELLE
Baby, we have company and-

EUGENE
We’ll be right back baby. They not going nowhere. (To everyone.) We’ll be right back y’all.

JONESIE
Cool.

JEANNE
The party just getting started, don’t be long.

ELLE
We won’t. (EUGENE and ELLE exit to their tiny bedroom. They have artifacts and painting hanging up on the wall.) Everything okay baby?

EUGENE
Yeah, I just wanted a moment with you. Haven’t seen you all day.

ELLE
You missed me.

EUGENE
Always.

ELLE
I know.

EUGENE
Oh, you know.

ELLE
Just a little.

(They share a moment.)

EUGENE
You okay baby? Seems like you have a lot on your mind.

ELLE
Just one of those days.
EUGENE
What you thinking?

ELLE
You happy here?

EUGENE
Yeah, why?

ELLE
Like, are you really happy?

EUGENE
Yes baby. I have a good job working for the railroads. Not the best, but it pays the bills. You work at a great school and the kids love you.

ELLE
But I can teach anywhere.

EUGENE
Yeah, but…(Gives her a look.) What is this about?

ELLE
I want us to be able to do everything we want to do.

EUGENE
I thought we were.

ELLE
I don’t know.

EUGENE
You thinking about your father, aren’t you?

ELLE
How you know?

EUGENE
I know you. You always have this look when you’re thinking of him. It’s like I see the little girl in your eyes when you do.

ELLE
After all these years, I still can’t shake it. I’ve tried baby. You know my father never came back, and that weighs on me. Not knowing why.
EUGENE
I know, but you have to find a way to let that go.

ELLE
That’s easy to say for you.// You had both your parents.

EUGENE
I’m not taking anything away from how you feel.

ELLE
We left too, but that was because there was no more work in Bama. My mother had to come work in factories, and that wasn’t by choice.

EUGENE
I get it.

ELLE
There has to be something in New York that caused him not to return.

EUGENE
You don’t know, and I don’t want to see you worry bout that for the rest of our lives.

ELLE
The rest of “our” lives?

EUGENE
Yes. You don’t want that?

ELLE
Yes. But I never heard you// really speak like that.

EUGENE
You know you mean a lot to me, right?

ELLE
I suppose.

EUGENE
I’m being serious. There is no one else I would want to spend my life with.

ELLE
Keep going. This sounds good.

EUGENE
You mean everything to me. (He bends down on one knee.) So Lena Marie// Blakely-
ELLE
No.

EUGENE
Will you marry me?

ELLE
YES, yes, you know I will.

(EUGENE stands to kiss her. He thinks for a moment.)

EUGENE
I heard New York has a great school system too. (ELLE hugs him tighter.) If that’s what you really want. We’ll go. Why not?

ELLE
Baby, really?

EUGENE
Yes, we just have to plan.

ELLE
Of course.

EUGENE
Like really plan.

ELLE
Okay, anything.

EUGENE
I’ll never leave you.

ELLE
I finally get to go to New York.

EUGENE
Yes, baby. And we’ll do it different.

ELLE
Boog?

EUGENE
And we’ll find him.
(They both share one more long passionate kiss before they both go back to the living room where everyone is still relaxing and still listening to music.)

ELLE
Look everybody.

(ELLE shows off her new engagement ring.)

JEANNE
(Screams.) It’s about time.

JONESIE
My main man. You didn’t even tell me.

EUGENE
I wanted it to be a surprise.

JONESIE
This a surprise alright. That’s why you have been so tight with your money.

EUGENE
Yeahhh man.

SMITTY
Proud of you young man. Now life begins.

JEANNE
Girl, when are we going shopping for this dress? We gotta-

ELLE
Slow down. Let’s just take this moment in.

EUGENE
Let’s celebrate.

JONESIE
These beers ain’t gonna work.

EUGENE
Go to the far cabinet. That’s where the good stuff is.

JONESIE
You got it.

(JONESIE goes to get the more expensive bottle of champagne.)
ELLE
We been saving that.

EUGENE
And what would be a better time?

(JONESIE goes to grab glasses for everyone then pours a drink for everyone.)

JONESIE
Alright, alright. A toast to the most beautiful couple I know. (Everyone raises their glasses.) Cheers.

JEANNE
Cheers.

SMITTY
Cheers to y’all.

(EUGENE and ELLE kiss. EUGENE goes to switch the record to Nat King Cole on the record player.)

ELLE
What you doing Boog?

EUGENE
You’ll see.

(When the song starts playing it slows down the mood. EUGENE and ELLE get close and start to dance; JONESIE and JEANNE do the same.)

ELLE
Umm. I like this.

EUGENE
You like this my future wife?

SMITTY
On that note, I think I will go. I got my wife waiting on me.

JONESIE
See ya Smitty.

SMITTY
Congrats again Gene. Alright Lena baby.
ELLE
Goodnight.

GENE
Night Smitty.

*SMITTY* exits. Everyone else continues to dance as lights fade down.

*The end.*