

# JITNEY

## Synopsis

The 1970s are the background for *Jitney*. In this story, Pittsburgh's gypsy cab drivers fight to save their business and retain their livelihood and are pitted again against a world that wants to tear down the inner city for redevelopment. Becker, a well-respected man in his sixties is reunited with his son Booster, after Booster's release from jail. A difficult relationship between father and son again points out how each generation confronts the world in his own way rather than building on the struggles of those who came before him.

## Characters

**BECKER:** A well-respected man who runs the jitney station. Sixties.

**DOUB:** A longtime jitney driver and Korean War veteran.

**RENA:** Youngblood's girlfriend and mother of their young son.

**TURNBO:** A jitney driver who is always interested in the business of others.

**BOOSTER:** Becker's son, recently released from prison. Early forties.

**SHEALY:** A numbers taker who often uses the jitney station as his base.

**YOUNGBLOOD:** A jitney driver and Vietnam veteran in his mid to late twenties.

JITNEY

Code: 70-01  
Time: 1:45  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Family  
Type 3: Responsibility

Act 1; Scene 4

BECKER

I kept seeing your face at your mother's funeral. How you just stood there and never shed a tear. Stood there with a scowl on your face. And now you want to come in here and ridicule me 'cause I didn't knock Mr. Rand on his ass. You wanna know why? I'll tell you why. Because I had your black ass crying to be fed. Crying to have a roof over your head. To have clothes to wear to school and lunch money in your pocket. That's why! Because I had a family. I had responsibility. If I had knocked him on his ass you would have went hungry. You wouldn't have had clothes on your back or a roof over your head. I done what I had to do. I swallowed my pride and let them mess over me, all the time saying "You bastards got it coming. Look out! Becker's Boy's coming to straighten this shit out! You're not gonna fuck over him! He's gonna grow big and strong! Watch out for Becker's Boy! Becker's taking this ass whipping so his boy can stride through this shit like Daniel in the lion's den! Watch out for Becker's Boy!" *(He has worked himself into a frenzy and is now near tears.)* And what I get, huh? You tell me. What I get? Tell me what I get! Tell me! What I get? What I get, huh?

Stay away from me! What I get, huh? What I get? Tell me? *(BOOSTER is silent.)* I get a murderer, that's what. A murderer.

And the way your mama loved you. You killed her! You know that? You a double murderer!

That woman took sick the day that judge sentenced you and she ain't never walked or said another word or ate another thing for twenty three days. She just laid up in that room until she died. Now you tell me that ain't killing her. Tell me that ain't killing her!

JITNEY

Code: 70-02  
Time: 1:25  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Family  
Type 3: Death

Act 1; Scene 4

BECKER

I was there! I was holding her hand when she died. Where was you? Locked up in a cage like some animal. That's what killed her. To hear the judge say that the life she brought in the world was unfit to live. That you be "remanded to the custody of the Commissioner of Corrections at Western State Penitentiary and there to be executed in the electric chair. This order to be carried out thirty days from today." Ain't that what the judge said? Ain't that what she heard? 'This order to be carried out thirty days from today.' That's what killed her. She didn't want to live them thirty days. She didn't want to be alive to hear on the eleven o'clock news that they had killed you. So don't you say nothing to me about turning my back when I nursed that woman, talked to her, held her hand, prayed over her and the last words to come out of her mouth was your name. I was there! Where were you Mr. Murderer? Mr. Unfit To Live Amongst Society. Where were you when your mama was dying and calling your name? *(Stops talking a moment to gather himself.)*

You are my son. I helped to bring you into this world. But from this moment on...I'm calling the deal off. You ain't nothing to me, boy. You just another nigger on the street.

JITNEY

Code: 70-03  
Time: 2:10  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Societal Order  
Type 3: Responsibility

Act 2; Scene 2

BECKER

All right. Since they boarding up the place we got to figure out what we gonna do. I talked to Tanenhill about renting that place down on Centre what used to be Siegal's egg store. We can do that. Or we can try to get on with another station. We can go on and play by their rules like we have been. When I first come along I tried to do everything right. I figured that was the best thing to do. Even when it didn't look like they was playing fair I told myself they would come around. Time it look like you got a little something going for you they would change the rules. Now you got to do something else. I told myself that's all right my boy's coming. He's gonna straighten it out. I put it on somebody else. I took it off of me and put it on somebody else. I told myself as long as I could do that then I could just keep going along and making excuses for everybody. But I'm through making excuses for anybody...including myself. I ain't gonna pass it on. I say we stay here. We already here. The people know we here. We been here for eighteen years... and I don't see no reason to move. City or no city. I look around and all I see is boarded up buildings. Some of them been boarded up for more than ten years. If they want to build some houses that's when they can tear it down. When they ready to build the houses. They board this place up the first of the month and let it sit boarded up for the next fifteen...twenty years.

And if we don't do something they'll put Clifford out of business. Put Hester out of business. Put us out of business. Let Clifford go on and sell his fish sandwich till they get ready to build something. Let Hester go on and sell her milk and butter. Cause we gonna run jitneys out of here till the day before the bulldozer come! Ain't gonna be no boarding up around here!

*(The men give cries of approval)*

We gonna fight them on that. Let them go board up somewhere else.

JITNEY

Code: 70-04  
Time: 2:15  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: War  
Type 3:

Act 2; Scene 1

DOUB

You ain't the only one been in the army. I went into the army in 1950. Looking to make something of myself. That was after the war. I didn't know they was gonna pull out a map stick a pin in it and say "Let's go kill some people over here." I wasn't in the Army but four months and they had me in Korea. Second Division. Company B. Fourth Battalion. It was a detail company. I think at that time the only dead body I had seen was my grandmama when Foster buried her. That's all I knew about a dead body. But I was meant to find out quick. The third day they put us on some trucks and drove out to the front lines. I was scared as I could get. The last words I remember my mama saying to me was how she was praying I didn't get sent to the front lines. I wasn't in Korea but three days and here I was on the front lines. Got out there and everything was quiet. The sergeant told us to get down off the trucks. We got down and started walking. Got near about two hundred yards when we saw our first body. Then another one. Then three more. The sergeants say "All right boys, we gonna clean up. I want you to stack the bodies six high." I never will forget that. "I want you to stack the bodies six high." Not five. Not seven. Six high. And that's what I did for the next nine months. Clean up the battlefield. It took me six months before I got to where I could keep my supper down. After that it didn't bother me no more. Never did learn how to do nothing else. They was supposed to teach me but they never did. They just never paid me no mind. There was a whole bunch of us they never paid no mind. What I'm trying to tell you is the white man ain't got no personal war against you cause you buying a house and they gonna tear down this block. You too young to be depending on driving jitneys. Is that what you want to do all your life?

JITNEY

Code: 70-05  
Time: 1:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Domestic Order  
Type 3: Family

Act 1; Scene 1

RENA

Darnell I don't understand. I try so hard. I'm doing everything I can to try and make this work. I'm working my little job down there at the restaurant...going to school...trying to take care of Jesse...trying to take care of your needs...trying to keep the house together...trying to make everything better. Now, I come home from work I got to go to the store. I go upstairs and look in the drawer and the food money is gone. Now you explain that to me. There was eighty dollars in the drawer that ain't in there now. What you need it for?. You tell me. What's more important than me and Jesse eating? You know I don't touch the grocery money. Whatever happens, we got to eat. If I need clothes... I do without. My little personal stuff... I do without. If I ain't got no electricity...I do without... but I don't never touch the grocery money. 'Cause I'm not gonna be that irresponsible to my child. 'Cause he depend on me. I'm not going to be that irresponsible to my family. I ain't gonna be like that. Jesse gonna have a chance at life. He ain't going to school hungry 'cause I spent the grocery money on some nail polish or some Afro Sheen. He ain't gonna be laying up in the bed hungry and unable to sleep 'cause his daddy took the grocery money to pay a debt. You know what you be doing better than I but whatever it is it ain't enough. It ain't all about the money, Darnell. I'm talking about the way you been doing. You ain't never home no more. You be out half the night. I wake up and you ain't there.

JITNEY

Code: 70-06  
Time: 1:30  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Domestic Order  
Type 3: Family

Act 2; Scene 1

RENA

Naw, Darnell, you ain't bought no house without me. How many times in your life do you get to pick out a house?

You bought a den for Darnell...that's what you did. So you can sit down there and watch your football games. But what about the kitchen? The bathroom? How many windows does it have in the bedroom? Is there some place for Jesse to play? How much closet space does it have? You can't just surprise me with a house and I'm supposed to say, 'Oh, Darnell, that's nice.' At one time I would have. But I'm not seventeen no more. I have responsibilities. I want to know if it has a hookup for a washer and dryer 'cause I got to wash Jesse's clothes. I want to know if it has a yard and do it have a fence and how far Jesse has to go to school. I ain't thinking about where to put the TV. That's not what's important to me. And you supposed to know, Darnell. You supposed to know what's important to me like I'm supposed to know what's important to you. I'm not asking you to do it by yourself. I'm here with you. We in this together. See...house or no house we still ain't got the food money. But if you had come and told me...if you had shared that with me... we could have went to my mother and we could have got eighty dollars for the house and still had money for food. You just did it all wrong Darnell. I mean, you did the right thing but you did it wrong.



JITNEY

Code: 70-07  
Time: 2:40  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Respect  
Type 3: Responsibility

Act 1; Scene 2

TURNBO

Time just keep going. It don't wait on nobody. Everything change. I remember when you was wearing diapers. Your mother did a good job of raising you. You can tell that right off. Your mother can be proud of you. It ain't easy these days to raise a child. I don't know what's in these young boys' heads. Seem like they don't respect nobody. They don't even respect themselves. When I was coming along that was the first thing you learned. If you didn't respect yourself...quite naturally you couldn't respect nobody else. When I was coming along the more respect you had for other people...the more people respected you. Seem like it come back to you double. These young boys don't know nothing about that...and it's gonna take them a lifetime to find out. They disrespect everybody and don't think nothing about it. They steal their own grandmother's television. Get hold of one woman...time another one walk by they grab hold to her. Don't even care who it is. It could be anybody. I just try to live and let live. My grandmother was like that. She the one raised me. She didn't care what nobody else done as long as it didn't cross her path. She was a good woman. She taught me most everything I know. She wouldn't let you lie. That was just about the worst thing you could be. A liar didn't know the truth and wasn't never gonna find out. And everybody know it's the truth what set you free. Now I ain't trying to get in your business or nothing. Like I say I just live and let live. But some things just come up on you wrong and you have to say something about it otherwise it throw your whole life off balance.

I know you don't want to hear this...but you don't need no hot headed young boy like Youngblood. What you need is somebody level headed who know how to respect and appreciate a woman...I can see the kind of woman you is. You ain't

the kind of woman for Youngblood and he ain't the kind of man for you. You need a more mature...responsible man.

You just wait awhile. You'll see that I'm right. I done seen many a young girl wake up when it's too late. Don't you be like that. You go on and find yourself a man that know how to treat you. (*TURNBO sits in a chair at the table.*) You don't need nobody run the streets all hours of the day and night. You ain't that kind of woman.

JITNEY

Code: 70-08  
Time: 2:50  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Murder  
Type 3: Revenge

Act 1; Scene 3

TURNBO

See, Becker's boy...Clarence is his name but everybody call him Booster... See now, Booster he liked that science. You know the science fair that they have over at the Buhel Planetarium every year where they have all them science experiments, where they make the water run uphill and things like that? Booster won first place three years in a row. He the only one who ever did that. I can't even count how many times he had his picture in the paper. They let him in to the University of Pittsburgh. You know back then they didn't have too many colored out there, but they was trying to catch up to the Russians and they didn't care if he was colored or not. Gave him a scholarship and everything. Becker was just as proud as he could be. Him and Booster was always close. Becker used to take him hunting down around Wheeling, West Virginia. They go hunting and fishing. Becker didn't have but the one boy. After he was born the doctor told his wife that if she had another one it was liable to kill her. Say she was lucky to have the one. Anyway, Booster goes out to Pitt there and he meets this old white gal. Young gal...about eighteen she was. Of course Booster wasn't about nineteen himself. Now her old man was some kind of big shot down there at Gulf Oil. Had a lot of money and had done bought the gal a car for her birthday. Booster and that gal...they just go everywhere together. She ride him around like she was his chauffeur. Of course, she let him drive it too. I believe he drove it more than she did. That gal was crazy about Booster, and they was just sneaking around and sneaking around, you know. She didn't want her daddy to know she was fooling around with no colored boy. Well, one day see her father was up here in the neighborhood looking for one of them whores. He find one and she tell him to drive up the dead end street there by the school, so she can turn the trick in the car. Don't you know they pulled right up in back of this gal's car where her and Booster done went to fool around! Her

father recognizes the car and he goes over and looks inside and there's Booster just banging the hell out of his daughter! Well, that cracker went crazy. He just couldn't stand the sight of Booster screwing that gal and went to yanking open the car door. Booster didn't know who he was. All he knew was some crazy white man done opened the door and was screaming his head off. He proceeded to beat the man half to death. To get to the short of it...the police come and the gal said that she was driving downtown on her way home from a movie, and when she stopped for a red light, Booster jumped into her car and made her drive up there on the dead end street...where he raped her. They arrested Booster and Becker got him out on bail cause he knew the gal was lying. The first day he was out...the first day!...he went over to that gal's house and shot her dead right on the front porch.

JITNEY

Code: 70-09  
Time: 2:35  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Value of Life  
Type 3: Family

Act 1; Scene 4

BOOSTER

Yeah Pop, you taught me a lot of things. And a lot of things I had to learn on my own. Like that time Mr. Rand came to the house to collect the rent when we was two months behind. I don't remember what year it was. I just know it was Winter. Grandma Ada had just died and you got behind in the rent 'cause you had to help pay for her funeral.

I don't know if you knew it, Pop, but you were a big man. Everywhere you went people treated you like a big man. You used to take me to the barbershop with you. You'd walk in there and fill up the whole place. Everybody would stop cussing because Jim Becker had walked in. I would just look at you and wonder how you could be that big. I wanted to be like that. I would go to school and try to make myself feel big. But I never could. I told myself that's okay...when I get grown I'm gonna be big like that. Walk into the barbershop and have everybody stop and look at me.

That day when Mr. Rand came to the house it was snowing. You came out on the porch and he started shouting and cussing and threatening to put us out in the street where we belonged.

I was waiting for you to tell him to shut up...to get off your porch. But you just looked at him and promised you would have the money next month. Mama came to the door and Mr. Rand kept shouting and cussing. I looked at mama...she was trying to get me to go in the house...and I looked at you...and you had got smaller. The longer he shouted the smaller you got. When we went back to the barbershop you didn't seem so big no more. You was the same size as everybody else. You

was just another man in the barbershop. That's when I told myself if I ever got big I wouldn't let nothing make me small.

Then when I met Susan McKnight and found out her daddy was the Vice-president of Gulf Oil...that's when I got big. That made me a big man. I felt like I was somebody. I felt like I could walk in the barbershop and fill it up the way you did. Then when she told that lie on me that's when I woke up. That's when I realized that I wasn't big from the inside. I wasn't big on my own. When she told that lie it made me small. I wanted to do something that said I wasn't just another nigger... that I was Clarence Becker. I wanted to make them remember my name. And I thought about you standing there and getting small and Mr. Rand shouting and Susan McKnight shouting out that lie and I realized it was my chance to make the Beckers big again...my chance to show what I had learned on my own. I thought you would understand. I thought you would be proud of me.

JITNEY

Code: 70-10  
Time: 2:10  
Type 1: Serio-Comedic  
Type 2: Relationships  
Type 3:

Act 1; Scene 1

SHEALY

Naw she wasn't the one. I thought she was but then I believe Rosie done put a curse on me. She don't want me to have no other woman. But then she didn't want me. I told her baby, just tell me what kind of biscuits you want to make. I'm like the mill-man I can grind it up any way you want. She knew I was telling the truth too. She couldn't say nothing about that. She say you a poor man. What I need with a poor man? I told her say if I make a hundred I'll give you ninety-nine. She didn't trust me on that one but I went down to the crap game, hit six quick licks, left with a hundred and sixty-three dollars. I went on back up there. She let me in. I lay a hundred dollars down on the table and told her, "Now, if I can just get one of them back I'd be satisfied." She reached down and handed me a dollar and I went on in the room and went to bed. Got up and she had my breakfast on the table. It wasn't soon long that ninety-nine dollars ran out and next thing I knew she had barred the door. I went on and left but I never could get her off my mind. I said I was gonna find me another woman. But every time I get hold to one... time I lay down with them... I see Rosie's face. I told myself the first time I lay down with a woman and don't see her face then that be the one I'm gonna marry. That be my little test. Now with that old yellow gal used to work down at Pope's I seen Rosie's face... but it was blurry. Like a cloud of something come over it. I say, "I got to try this again. Maybe next time I won't see nothing." She told me she didn't want to see me no more. She told me come back same time tomorrow and if she changed her mind she'd leave the key in the mailbox. I went up there and there was one man in the house and two others sitting on the doorstep. I don't know who had the key.

JITNEY

Code: 70-11  
Time: 2:10  
Type 1: Dramatic  
Type 2: Relationships  
Type 3: Love

Act 2; Scene 1

YOUNGBLOOD

No, Rena...people believe what they want to believe...what they set up in their mind to believe. I know what it looked like when I was gone all the time and not bringing home any money. But you could have noticed that I was tired...you could have said, "Darnell ain't talking too much 'cause he's tired." You could have noticed that I didn't act like somebody running the streets...that I didn't come home smelling like alcohol and perfume...that I didn't dress like somebody running the streets. If you had thought it all the way through, you could have noticed how excited I was when I got the UPS job...how I asked you if I could take it...you would have noticed how I was planning things...that I wasn't sitting around drinking beer and playing cards...how I would get up early on Sunday and go out to the airport to try to make a few extra dollars before the jitney station opened. But you ain't seen all that. You ain't seen the new Darnell. You still working off your memory. But the past is over and done with. I'm thinking about the future. You not the only one who thinks about Jesse. That's why I'm trying to do something different. That's why I'm trying to buy a house. Maybe I should have told you about the house. Maybe I did do it wrong. But I done it. I tried to show you I loved you but what I get for it?

But I know when you place your hand in mine you got to say, "Darnell's not gonna let me down...he loves me." I don't want to make no more mistakes in life. I don't want to do nothing to mess this up. I don't want to get old and be talking about I had me this little old gal one time...but I ain't seen her in twenty-two years.



I want you baby...I told you that. You already my pride. I want you to be my joy.  
Cause there ain't but one thing I done wrong...stay away from you one night too  
long.