There are three reasons why I've chosen to read tonight rather than talk to you. The first reason is that I can't think of anything to talk about for an hour. The second is that whenever I try to talk to strangers I get confused. I walk through Golden Gate park a lot. One day while I was walking, a car stopped beside me and the driver asked me how to get to the polo field. Of course, with my mind moving a thousand miles a second, I thought he meant polo ground, which would mean baseball, which would mean New York Giants, which would mean our San Francisco Giants. So I told the guy, "You don't mean polo grounds, you mean Candlestick Park, don't you?" He said, "Candlestick Park? Candlestick Park? I mean polo field. Horses. Bookety, bookety, bookety." "Oh, oh, that,"I said. "Go to Pretzel Lake and turn left." He said, "Pretzel?" "No, no, I don't mean Pretzel, I mean Spreckles." So by this time the guy was holding his stomach laughing at me. . . . The most embarrassing thing to happen to me, though, was at my sister's place in San Jose. She was giving a party for a girl friend of hers. I was invited down for the party, and I was going to be introduced to her friends. Before the people arrived, I tried to think of something to say. "Hello," would have been good enough, but being a writer I wanted to say a little more. At least, I would say, "I'm Lois brother and I'm very glad to meet you" or "Lois is my sister, and I'm very glad to meet you." So when the first couple arrived and Lois introduced me to them, I said very loudly and very clearly, "I'm Lois's sister, and I'm--oh, God, I don't mean it." But I had already said it, and for the rest of the night I got all kinds of strange looks. From my sister, from her husband, and so on.
The third reason I've chosen to read tonight is that I'd like you to know a little about my book. And if you like it, I'd like for you to buy yourself a copy. If you don't like what I read, buy a copy anyhow and give it to a friend you don't like.

Before getting into the reading, I would like to thank Mrs. Avis Stopple who invited me here tonight. Mrs. Stopple, as you all know, is the chief librarian here. My thanks to The Friends of the Library who made this program possible. Thanks also to my relatives and friends who showed up, and to you the general public.

I suppose I should, also, say something about the novel before I began reading, so that you will have some idea what it is about. And if you would bear with me, I'd prefer reading the notes that I've made on the book. That'll save a lot of "ers" and a lot of time.

The story takes place in 1948 on a Louisiana plantation. A young Negro, Marcus Payne, has just been bonded out of jail after killing another Negro youth in a bar fight over a woman. Marcus has been put on the plantation to work until his trial comes up. The overseer of the plantation is a Cajun by the name of Sidney Bonbon. Bonbon's job is to break Marcus. Marcus is proud, he's tough, he rebels against the system, the role a black man is supposed to play in the South. To break him, Bonbon works him like a slave from morning till night. They're pulling corn in the field now, and Bonbon has the habit of riding horse only a step behind Marcus's back... Bonbon has a Mistress in the quarters, a black woman by the name of Pauline. Pauline is the cook at the Big House. Marcus tries to make Love to Pauline—first, because he finds her extremely beautiful, and secondly...
because she's Bonbon's mistress. When Pauline turns him down, Marcus really wants revenge on Bonbon now, and he turns his attention towards Bonbon's little un-happy wife, Louise. What Marcus does not know is that Louise has been waiting a long time for something like this to happen. Because, she too, wants revenge on her husband for what he has done to her. She, too, wants to break away from that plantation.

Other characters in the book are Jim Kelly who tells the story; Aunt Margaret who works for Bonbon and Louise; Tite, Bonbon and Louise's little daughter; Marshall Hebert who owns the plantation; and Miss Julie Rand, Marcus's godmother, or his nan-nane, as we call them in Louisiana. Miss Julie Rand who had cooked for the Hebert family over forty years, but who now lives in Baton Rouge, got Marshall Hebert to bond Marcus out of jail. And she has asked Jim Kelly to look after Marcus while he's on the plantation. Because she knows how brutal Sidney Bonbon can be, and she knows Marcus's temperment. And she knows that these two will never ever get along.

Now, Marcus has been on the plantation a week and a half, and he and Louise have begun to notice each other.