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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

Seven Guitars

by August Wilson

SAMUEL FRENCH

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ISBN 978-0-573-69600-8

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AUGUST WILSON'S SEVEN GUITARS was first produced by Sageworks at the Walter Kerr Theatre on Broadway in New York on March 28, 1996. The performance was directed by Lloyd Richards, with sets by Scott Bradley, costumes by Constanza Romero, lights by Christopher Akerund, sound by Tom Clark, and music direction by Dwight Andrews. The Production Stage Manager was Jane E. Neufeld. The cast was as follows:

CANEWELL . . . . . Ruben Santiago
RED CARTER . . . . . Tommy Hollis
VERA DOTSON . . . . . .Viola Davis
LOUISE . . . . . .Michele Shay
HEDLEY. . . . . Roger Robinson
FLOYD "SCHOOLBOY" BARTON . . . . . Keith David
RUBY. . . . . Rosalyn Coleman

AUGUST WILSON'S SEVEN GUITARS was originally present at the National Playwright's Conference of the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center.

CHARACTERS

CANEWELL

RED CARTER

VERA DOTSON

LOUISE

HEDLEY

FLOYD "SCHOOLBOY" BARTON

RUBY

SETTING

The action of the play takes place in the backyard of a house in Pittsburgh in 1948. It is a brick house with a single window fronting the yard. Access to the room is gained by stairs leading to a small porch on the side of the house. This is Vera's apartment. Louise and Hedley live on the second floor in separate quarters which are accessed by steps leading to a landing and a flight of stairs alongside the building. The stairs are wooden and are in need of repair. The yard is closely flanked on both sides by the neighboring buildings. A ten-foot high fence stage right blocks our view into the yard at stage right and a four-foot high fence is at stage left. The yard is a dirt yard with a small garden area marked off by bricks in the downstage right comer where Vera has made a garden of vegetables and flowers. A cellar door leads into the basement where Hedley stores his gear. Off to the side and in the back of the yard is a contraption made of bricks, wood and corrugated sheet metal, which is where Hedley kills chickens. It doubles as a grill for cooking and when it is not being used, it breaks down with a minimum of parts left standing. During several of his scenes Hedley builds or dismantles his contraption and stores its pieces in the cellar. There is an entrance to the yard through a latched gate to the left of the building. There is occasionally a card table set up in the yard with an eclectic mix of chairs. Several light bulbs, rigged by way of extension cords, run from Vera's apartment to light the table so they can sit and play cards on the hot summer nights of 1948.

ACT I

Scene One

(The lights come up on **CANEWELL**, **VERA**, **LOUISE**, **RED CARTER**, *and* **HEDLEY** *gathered in the yard, dressed in their Sunday best. They have come from the cemetery where they buried* **FLOYD BARTON**. *There is lingering evidence of food and drink. A rare moment of silence has settled on the yard.* **LOUISE**, *in a much needed affirmation of life, begins singing a bawdy song.)*

LOUISE. *(Sings.)*[*]

ANYBODY HERE WANNA TRY MY CABBAGE
JUST STEP THIS WAY
ANYBODY HERE LIKE TO TRY MY CABBAGE
JUST HOLLER HEY.

RED CARTER. Hey!

LOUISE. *(Sings.)*

I GAVE SOME TO THE PARSON
AND HE SHOOK WITH GLEE
HE TOOK A COLLECTION
AND GAVE IT ALL TO ME
ANYBODY HERE WANNA TRY GOOD CABBAGE
JUST STEP THIS WAY.

(A sweet potato pie sits on the table. **RED CARTER** *takes a piece.)*

CANEWELL. Uh Huh, put that back Red! That's my piece!

RED CARTER. How's this yours when I got it.

---

* "Anybody Here Wanna Try My Cabbage" by Maggie Jones

CANEWELL. I had my eye on that piece.

RED CARTER. You had your eye on it and I had my hand on it. That go to show you the hand is quicker than the eye.

VERA. There's plenty to go around. Here, Canewell.

*(***VERA** *hands* **CANEWELL** *a piece of pie.)*

RED CARTER. I sure was hungry.

CANEWELL. I didn't eat nothing this morning.

LOUISE. It was hard to eat. I ain't felt like eating nothing either. But I said, "Let me go on and eat something cause I don't know how long it be before I eat again."

CANEWELL. I want Reverend Thompson to preach my funeral. He make everything sound pretty.

RED CARTER. I was just thinking the same thing! He almost make it where you want to die just to have somebody talk over you like that.

CANEWELL. It sound like he reading from the bible even when he ain't. I told myself Floyd would have liked that if he could have heard it.

VERA. Did you see them angels out there at the cemetery?

RED CARTER. Uh oh, Vera done saw some angels.

CANEWELL. I saw them out there too. They look like they was with the funeral home only they wasn't. Wasn't that them Vera? Had on black hats.

VERA. They come down out the sky.

CANEWELL. I seen them. I know who you talking about. One of them come and ask me how to get to Floyd's house.

RED CARTER. Somebody ask me the same thing. One of them men at the funeral.

CANEWELL. Did he have a black hat? Look like he was with the funeral home. Had kinda bushy eyebrows?

RED CARTER. Yeah. Had on a black tie.

CANEWELL. That's him. What did you tell him?

RED CARTER. I told him the truth. I didn't know where Floyd was staying at. He was staying in Chicago. Sometime he was staying here. Then he was staying over there. Next time he be staying around the corner somewhere.

CANEWELL. I told him I didn't see where it mattered too much seeing as how he wasn't home. He just kinda looked at me funny. I believe that's when he went over and started talking to you.

LOUISE. I ain't seen no angels. You all ain't seen none either. Red, did you see any angels out there?

VERA. There was six of them. They come down out the sky.

CANEWELL. They did just kind of show up. Like you looked around and they was standing there. Trying to act like they had been there all the time.

LOUISE. Hey, Hedley, Vera seen some angels at the cemetery.

CANEWELL. Hey, Vera…they was all dressed alike? Look like they might have been brothers?

RED CARTER. Maybe they was some of Foster's brothers. If they was with the funeral home.

HEDLEY. I seen them too.

CANEWELL. Hedley seen them. Louise…you didn't see them men in black suits always fussing about everything?

LOUISE. They was with the funeral home, fool!

CANEWELL. Naw…they wasn't with the funeral home. They seem like they was with the funeral home. I don't know who they was. If they was with the funeral home I would have seen them before. They just kinda showed up. Just like you turn around and they was there.

VERA. They carried Floyd away. I seen them.

CANEWELL. When it come time to throw the dirt in the grave seem like they didn't want nobody to do it but them? They tried to crowd everybody out. I say to myself, "It don't seem right not to throw some dirt in the grave." I figure it was better if I throw it in than if

some stranger throw it in. They didn't say anything. I just pushed on past them, scooped up a handful of dirt and threw it down in the grave. I could hear it when it hit the casket. It was kinda wet and it made a sound when it hit. I say, "You was a good old boy…but you dead and gone."

VERA. They carried Floyd right on up in the sky.

RED CARTER. That go to show you I don't know too much about nothing. Cause I always swore Floyd was going straight to hell.

CANEWELL. You know… I ask myself… I wonder did he know?

VERA. The bible say some things ain't for you to know. It say you know neither the day nor the hour when death come.

CANEWELL. He come like a thief in the night. And he don't go away empty. There's a song what go— *(***CANEWELL** *sings.)*[*]

HE'LL COME TO YOUR HOUSE
HE WON'T STAY LONG
YOU LOOK IN THE BED
FIND YOUR MOTHER GONE

Your mother. Sister. Brother. Friend. I don't believe he knew but then again I do.

RED CARTER. I believe everyman knows something but most times they don't pay attention to it.

VERA. I believe he knew something too.

LOUISE. Whether he did or not ain't done him no good. It ain't made no difference one way or the other. It didn't kill him but then it ain't kept him here either.

RED CARTER. Hey, Vera, give me a beer.

VERA. I ain't got no beer.

*(***VERA** *starts into the house.)*

---

*"Death Don't Have No Mercy" by Gary Davis.

CANEWELL. Here, get you a taste of this bourbon. Vera you going into the house, put on Floyd's record.

RED CARTER. You can get a whole case of beer for two dollars and fifty cents.

CANEWELL. I know. You can get any kind you want. Iron City. Duquesne. Black Label. Red Label. Yellow Label. You can get any kind of label you want. Some kinds do cost a little more.

RED CARTER. I would have got a case and carried it up here if I knew Vera didn't have any.

CANEWELL. I should have carried two. One on each shoulder. If I didn't have this bourbon. I looked at that bourbon and forgot all about that beer.

(The sound of **FLOYD BARTON** *singing* ***"THAT'S ALL RIGHT"*** *comes out of the kitchen window and envelopes the yard. There is a moment of silent reverie.)*

RED CARTER. Floyd "Schoolboy" Barton.

(The lights fade. The music carries into the next scene.)

Scene Two

(The lights come up on **FLOYD BARTON** *and* **VERA DATSUN** *dancing in the yard.* **FLOYD** *is a young man of thirty-five. He is a blues singer.* **VERA** *is eight years younger than* **FLOYD**. *It is early evening. They are dancing to* **FLOYD***'s record* ***"THAT'S ALL RIGHT"*** *which is playing on the radio inside the house. A rooster is heard crowing intermittently throughout the scene.)*

FLOYD. *(Singing on the radio.)*

"YOU TOLD ME BABY ONCE UPON A TIME
YOU SAID IF I WOULD BE YOURS
YOU WOULD SURE BE MINE
BUT THAT'S ALRIGHT..."

Listen…hear that?

VERA. It sound just like you.

FLOYD. Comeon, now…you supposed to lean back.

*(***FLOYD** *bends* **VERA** *back pushing his pelvis into hers.)*

VERA. Comeon, Floyd!

FLOYD. *(Singing.)*

"YOU TOLD ME BABY ONCE UPON A TIME
YOU SAID IF I WOULD BE YOURS
YOU WOULD SURE BE MINE
BUT THAT'S ALRIGHT..."

This the way you supposed to dance to my record. You supposed to act like you know something about it.

*(***VERA** *tries to break away.* **FLOYD** *hold her closer.)*

"BUT THAT'S ALRIGHT
I KNOW YOU IN LOVE WITH ANOTHER MAN
BUT THAT'S ALRIGHT..."

*(***FLOYD** *tries to kiss her.)*

VERA. Floyd, stop it now. Don't be doing all that.

*(***VERA** *breaks away.)*

FLOYD. Come here. *(He pulls her to him.)* I'll never jump back on you in life.

VERA. I don't want to hear it.

FLOYD. I just say I'll never jump back on you. If you give me a chance I'll prove it to you.

VERA. You done had more than enough chances.

FLOYD. Did you get that letter I sent you?

VERA. What you doing writing me a letter?

FLOYD. I knew that would surprise you. I say, "Vera gonna be surprised to see my name on the envelope." I sure wish I could have seen your face.

VERA. Had somebody writing all them lies.

FLOYD. Didn't it sound good? I like the way that sound. It cost me fifty cents. Some fellow down the workhouse be writing everybody letters. He read it back to me. I say, "Vera ain't never heard me say nothing like this." That be the kind of stuff I want to say but can't think to say. It sounded so good I started to give him an extra quarter. I say I'm gonna wait and see what Vera say.

VERA. He ought to have gave you your money back if it depend on what Vera say. I done told you my feet ain't on backwards.

FLOYD. My feet ain't on backwards either. I just got to missing you so bad. My life got so empty without you.

VERA. Floyd, I don't want to hear that. Just stop it right now.

FLOYD. What? Stop what? I'm telling the truth.

VERA. Go tell it to Pearl Brown.

FLOYD. See, you wanna bring all that up. I told you about all that in the letter. Pearl Brown don't mean nothing to me.

VERA. She sure meant something to you before. She meant enough to you for you to pack up your clothes and drag her to Chicago with you. She meant something to you then. Talking about you gonna send for me when you got up there. Left out of here telling me them lies and had her waiting around the corner.

FLOYD. She wasn't waiting around the corner.

VERA. She may as well have been. She might be waiting around there now for all I know.

FLOYD. Comeon now, Vera. You know better than that.

VERA. If you going back to Chicago…then just go ahead.

FLOYD. I got to go back. The record company up there waiting on me. They done sent me a letter telling me to come on back. I wanna go back and take you with me. I ain't gonna be here long. I just got to get my guitar out the pawnshop. I might have to pawn my thirty-eight. You still got my thirty-eight don't you?

VERA. It's in there where you put it. I ain't touched it.

FLOYD. I sat down there doing them ninety days, I told myself it's a good thing I didn't have that with me when they arrested me. Talking about vagrancy…if I had that thirty-eight they would have tried to dig a hole and put me under the jail. As it was they took me down there and charged me with worthlessness. Canewell had five dollars in his pocket and they let him go. Took me down there and give me ninety days.

VERA. Canewell say you threatened to burn down the jail house. That's why they give you ninety days.

FLOYD. They got that all mixed up. I asked one of the guards to show me the back door in case; there was a fire. He said the jailhouse don't burn. I told him give me a gallon of gasoline and I'd prove him wrong. He told the judge I threatened to burn down the jailhouse. The judge ain't even asked me about it. He give me ninety days for worthlessness. Say Rockefeller worth a million dollars and you ain't worth two cents. Ninety days in the workhouse. *(***FLOYD** *takes a letter from his pocket.)* Look here…look here. Look what they sent to my sister's house. *(He holds up the letter, bragging.)* It say, "Come on back to Chicago and make some more records." Say… "We'll talk about the details when you get here."

*(***VERA** *reaches for the letter.)*

Naw…naw. All you got to know is it say come on back. You ain't got to know all my business. *(He shows* **VERA** *the envelope.)* Look at that. "Mr. Floyd Barton." You get you a hit record and the white folks call you Mister. Mister Floyd Barton. *(He hands* **VERA** *the letter.)* Go on read it. Read it out loud. "Dear Mr. Barton. Our records show…" Go on…read it.

VERA. *(Reading.)* Dear Mr. Barton:

Our records show you recorded some material for us in August of 1947. We are uncertain of your status. If you are the same Floyd Barton who recorded "That's All Right" and are still in the business we would like to provide another opportunity for you to record. Stop by when you are in Chicago and we can discuss further arrangements. We are Savoy records…

FLOYD. 1115 Federal Avenue in Chicago Illinois.

Sincerely, Wilber H. Gardner, President.

*(***VERA** *hands him back the letter.)*

VERA. That's nice, Floyd.

FLOYD. I can't go without you.

VERA. I ain't going to no Chicago. You know better than to ask me that. What I want to go up there for?

FLOYD. Wait till you see it. There ain't nothing like it. They got more people than you ever seen. You can't even imagine that many people. Seem like everybody in the world in Chicago. That's only place for a black man to be. That's where I seen Muddy Waters. I was walking past this club and I heard this music. People was pushing and crowding in the club; seem like the place was busting at the seams. I asked somebody, I say, "Who's that?" They told me, "That's Muddy Waters." I took off my hat. I didn't know you could make the music sound like that. That told me say, "The sky's the limit." I told myself say, "I'm gonna play like that one day." I stayed there until they put me out. Mr. T.L. Hall asked me what I wanted to do. I told him I wanted to play at the Hurricane Club. He say he'd fix it.

VERA. I wouldn't put too much faith in whatever Mr. T.L. Hall say. I ain't never known him to do nothing for you. Call himself your manager. What he ever manage?

FLOYD. That's cause I didn't have a hit record. Its' different now. You get a hit record and you be surprised how everything change. Mr. T.L. Hall done got in touch with Savoy Records to set up a recording date for Chicago. They waiting on me now. Come here.

*(***FLOYD** *slides his arm around* **VERA***, she slides away.)*

VERA. I told you don't start that.

FLOYD. I want to make you happy. I got something for you.

VERA. It ain't nothing I need.

*(***VERA** *breaks off.)*

FLOYD. The first time I ever seen you. I never will forget that. You remember that?

VERA. Yeah I remember.

FLOYD. You was looking so pretty.

VERA. Floyd, don't start that. Ain't no need in you going back through that.

FLOYD. Naw, I was just saying… I seen you that first time. You had on that blue dress. I believe it was pink and blue.

VERA. It was two different kinds of blue.

FLOYD. I had just got out the army. They give me forty-seven dollars. Adjustment allowance or something like that. I come up Logan Street and I seen you. That's why I always say I had a pocket full of money when I met you. I seen you and said, "There go a woman." Whatever else you might say…a pretty woman…a nice woman, a not so nice woman…whatever else you might say, you got to put that woman part in there. I say, "Floyd, there go a woman." My hands got to itching and seem like I didn't know what to do with them. I put them in my pocket and felt them forty-seven dollars… that thirty-eight under my coat…and I got up my nerve

to say something to you. You remember that? Seem like that was a long time ago.

VERA. I had just left my mama's house.

FLOYD. I knew you was just getting started. But what you don't know, I was just getting started too. I was ready. You was just what I was looking for.

VERA. You was looking for anything you could find.

FLOYD. I said, "That's the kind of woman a man kill somebody over." Then I see you turn and walk toward the door. I said, "They just gonna have to kill me." That's when I went after you. I said you was just right for me and if I could get that I never would want nothing else. That's why you ought to try me one more time. If you try me one more time, you never carry no regrets.

VERA. I don't carry no regrets now. I'm gonna leave it like that.

*(***VERA** *starts into the house.)*

FLOYD. Comeon, Vera…

VERA. I done been there. Floyd, I ain't going back.

FLOYD. I told you what it was. It wasn't nothing to me. Pearl Brown don't mean nothing to me.

VERA. It wasn't nothing to you but it was something to me. To have you just up and walk out like that. What you think happened to me. Did you ever stop to ask yourself, "I wonder how Vera doing? I wonder how she feel?" I lay here every night in an empty bed. In an empty room. Where? Someplace special? Someplace where you had been? The same room you walked out of? The same bed you turned your back on? You give it up and you want it? What kind of sense does that make?

FLOYD. I told you I could see I was wrong.

VERA. You had what you want and I didn't. That makes you special. You one of them special people who is supposed to have everything just the way they want it.

FLOYD. I see where I was wrong. I told you that. It seemed like she believed in me more.

VERA. You supposed to believe in yourself.

FLOYD. A man that believe in himself still need a woman that believe in him. You can't make life happen without a woman.

VERA. I wanted to be that for you. Floyd. I wanted to know where you was bruised at. So I could be a woman for you. So I could touch you there. So I could spread myself all over you and know that I was a woman. That I could give a man only those things a woman has to give. And he could be satisfied. How much woman you think it make you feel to know you can't satisfy a man?

FLOYD. I ain't about being satisfied.

VERA. So he could say, "Yes, Vera a woman." That's what you say but you never believed it. You never showed me all those places where you were a man. You went to Pearl Brown and you showed her. I don't know what she did or didn't do but I looked up and you was back here after I had given you up. After I had walked through an empty house for a year and a half looking for you. After I would lay myself out on that bed and search my body for your fingerprints. "He touched me here. Floyd touched me here and he touched me here and he touched me here and he kissed me here and he gave me here and he took here and he ain't here he ain't here he ain't here quit looking for him cause he ain't here he's there! there! there! there!

FLOYD. Comeon. Vera…don't do this.

VERA. He's there. In Chicago with another woman and all I have is a little bit of nothing, a little bit of touching, a little bit of myself left. It ain't even here no more what you looking for. What you remember. It ain't even here no more.

FLOYD. It's enough for me. It's all I ever wanted. Even if I couldn't see it. That's why I come back. That's why this time I want to take you with me. I told you about all that. I ain't never wanted to hurt you. Whatever you is, that's enough for me. Okay? Now I don't know what

else to say. I ain't too good at talking all this out. Come and go to Chicago with me. I need you real bad. That's all I know to say. I ain't never needed nobody like I need you. I don't want no hit record if I can't have a hit record with you. See? That's all I know to say about Pearl Brown…to say about Chicago…to say about Vera Datsun. I don't want it if I can't have you with it.

VERA. Then you don't want it.

*(***LOUISE** *enters carrying a bag of groceries. There is immediate tension between her and* **FLOYD**.*)*

FLOYD. Hey, Louise.

LOUISE. How you doing, Floyd? You look like you done gained some weight.

FLOYD. A little bit.

LOUISE. Least they feed you down there in the workhouse. What are you going to cook, Vera?

VERA. Chicken. Potatoes and green beans. And some cornbread. Floyd likes his cornbread.

FLOYD. I can eat a whole pan of cornbread. I like cornbread. I like my chicken too. I can eat two or three chickens.

LOUISE. I can look at you and see that.

VERA. I'll fix you up a plate when I cook it up.

LOUISE. That be nice. That way I won't have to cook. I got a letter from my niece. She got into trouble down there in Alabama and she coming to stay with me. I'll tell you about it.

VERA. What kind of trouble.

LOUISE. Man trouble. What other kind of trouble a young woman get into? Somebody done killed some other body and somebody family done did this or that or the other. My sister say it's best she got out of there. I'll tell you about it. Floyd, I can't wait to beat you at a game of whist. You still play whist.

FLOYD. I done got better.

LOUISE. I done got better too.

*(***LOUISE** *exits.* **FLOYD** *puts his arm around* **VERA**.*)*

FLOYD. I done got better at everything I do.

VERA. I don't see how, seeing as how you ain't had no practice.

FLOYD. Watch.

VERA. Ain't gonna be no watching here.

*(***VERA** *exits into the house followed by* **FLOYD** *as the lights go down and* ***"THAT'S ALL RIGHT"*** *comes up on the radio.)*

Scene Three

(The lights come up on the yard the next morning. **HEDLEY** *enters from the basement carrying a piece of corrugated tin. He begins to work at setting up the stand where he kills chickens. He makes several trips to the basement.* **LOUISE** *enters from the porch. The rooster crows intermittently throughout the scene.)*

HEDLEY. *(Sings.)*[*]

"I THOUGHT I HEARD BUDDY BOLDEN SAY
HERE GO THE MONEY, KING,
TAKE IT AWAY…"

LOUISE. Hey, Hedley. What kind of cigarettes you got? Give me a pack of Old Gold.

*(***HEDLEY** *doesn't respond. He enters the basement and comes out carrying a crate of live chickens.)*

Give me some cigarettes. What kind you got?

HEDLEY. Chesterfield.

*(***HEDLEY** *enters the basement and carries out another crate of chickens which he stacks on the top of the other.)*

LOUISE. I want some Old Gold.

HEDLEY. I told you, woman. Chesterfields.

LOUISE. Why don't you get some Old Gold? You know I smoke Old Gold. Why you wanna be stubborn?

HEDLEY. The people smoke Chesterfield. The people smoke Lucky Strike. The people smoke Pall Mall. The people smoke Camel. Nobody smoke Old Gold. Who you know smoke Old Gold?

LOUISE. I smoke them. There's a whole lot of people smoke Old Gold. Anybody want a good cigarette smoke Old Gold.

---

* "I Thought I Heard Buddy Bolten Say" by Jelly Roll Morton

HEDLEY. I got Chesterfield.

*(***HEDLEY** *exits into the cellar.)*

LOUISE. Give me a pack of them. You seen Floyd? They let him out the workhouse. He come back here talking all that stuff. I hope Vera don't let him back in. He ain't up to no good. She be better off with the iceman…as ugly as he is.

*(***HEDLEY** *enters carrying a bucket, an apron, a bag of feathers, and various other tools.)*

HEDLEY. I don't see nobody.

*(***HEDLEY** *takes a small notebook from his pocket and writes in it.)*

LOUISE. He in there. After three months he liable to be in there all day.

*(***HEDLEY** *takes a pack of cigarettes from a carton he has in his basket and holds it out to her.)*

HEDLEY. That's three dollars and forty cents you owe me.

LOUISE. Oh hush up, man. It's liable to be thirty dollars and forty cents before I pay you.

*(***HEDLEY** *puts the cigarettes back.)*

You ain't said nothing about paying me for all the biscuits I made you. All them plates of collard greens. Them black eye peas. Give me a pack of them cigarettes!

*(***HEDLEY** *hands her the cigarettes.)*

I got me a little book too. You ain't the only one got a little book. I'm going up there and look in my little book and see how much you owe me.

HEDLEY. George Butler died. I sell many chicken sandwiches tonight. Many chicken sandwiches. Soon I'm gonna be a big man. You watch.

LOUISE. If you don't pay your rent you gonna be sitting out there on the sidewalk. Talking about being a big man. You gonna be a big man without a roof over your head.

HEDLEY. I always pay my rent, woman. You know that.

LOUISE. You ain't paid it this month. You two days late.

HEDLEY. I pay you tomorrow. Hedley sell plenty plenty chicken sandwiches tonight.

LOUISE. You pay me tomorrow. You know how Bella is about her money. I ain't gonna have her getting on me. And you clean up this yard. I don't want all them chicken feathers around here. And don't you be leaving any of them feet around here either. Did you go down there and see the doctor? You need to go back and see the doctor. You sick. I called them and told them you need to go down there and get tested.

HEDLEY. Hedley not sick no more. I go see Miss Sarah Degree. She give me the root tea. I feel just fine.

LOUISE. You need to go see the doctor. You be spitting up blood. That don't sound like no job for Miss Sarah. You go to see Miss Sarah when you have a cold. You need to go back to that doctor and do what they tell you. They got medicine they can give you. That's what happened to George Butler. He didn't go back to the doctor. You need to get another chest x-ray. Miss Sarah can't do that.

HEDLEY. Miss Sarah a saint. She a saint if ever God made one. She can heal anything. She got a big power. She got her roots. She got her teas. She got her powders. I wonder do she have a man? Maybe next time I ask her. A woman need a man. That's what Hedley say. I knock on your door last night.

LOUISE. You can knock all you want. You go knock on the doctor's door before you come knocking on mine.

HEDLEY. You know a woman need a man.

LOUISE. I don't need none that bad. I got me a thirty-two caliber pistol up there. That be all the man I need. You need to go see the doctor. It ain't like it was before. They letting the colored people in the sanitarium now. You can get help. They can make you well. You don't have to die from T.B.

HEDLEY. Everybody got a time coming. Nobody can't say that they don't have a time coming. My father have his time. And his father have his time. Hedley is fifty-nine years old. His time come soon enough. I'm not worried about that.

*(***CANEWELL** *enters. He is carrying a Golden Seal plant.)*

CANEWELL. Who is this out here. Hey Louise. Hey Hedley… I started to bring my bible. I'm gonna bring it next time I come.

HEDLEY. "Ethiopia shall stretch forth her wings and every abomination shall be brought low."

CANEWELL. I ain't talking about that. I'm talking about ain't but a hundred and forty-four thousand people going to heaven. That's what it say in Revelations. Say one hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of Israel shall be saved. All the rest gonna be cast into a fiery pit. Next time I'm going to bring my bible and show you.

LOUISE. Don't you all start that. What you got there?

CANEWELL. This is for Vera. This a Golden Seal plant. Ask Hedley about them. Hey Hedley tell her about the Golden Seal. Where's Floyd? Floyd here?

LOUISE. Don't get me to lying. He was out here with Vera. I don't know if he stay the night or not. I hope he didn't. She don't need to be getting tied back up with him. Not after that stuff he pulled.

CANEWELL. *(Calls.)* Hey, Floyd! Floyd! Get on out here man! They got some people from the neighborhood got together and went to see Miss Tillery about her rooster. They asked her to get rid of it cause it wake people up in the morning. She told them that's what it's supposed to do. They was still discussing the matter when I come on in here.

LOUISE. She need to get rid of it. This ain't the country, this the city. What she look like with that rooster?

CANEWELL. What you doing, Hedley? You fixing to kill some chickens?

LOUISE. If he start killing them chickens I'm going into the house.

HEDLEY. George Butler died. Hedley sell plenty plenty chicken sandwiches.

*(***HEDLEY** *exits into the cellar.)*

CANEWELL. George Butler died? Every time I look up somebody's dying. If they ain't dying from one thing they dying from another. I done known six or seven men that got killed. That's why I say I wonder when's my time. Seem like I'm lucky to still be alive.

LOUISE. They be playing Floyd's record more and more. Every time I turn around they be playing it. I got tired of hearing it.

CANEWELL. If he had listened to me he'd be a millionaire by now. Hey Floyd! Hey Schoolboy! I told Floyd if they put the record out it was gonna be a hit. They playing it all over. I told Floyd to get a cut of the money. They paid him a flat rate. I told him not to go for it. If he had listened to me he would be a millionaire by now.

*(***FLOYD** *comes to the window.)*

FLOYD. What you doing all that hollering for?

CANEWELL. Get on out here, man!

FLOYD. I be there in a minute.

LOUISE. I hear you won a raffle down at the Loendi Club.

CANEWELL. I did. That's the radio I give Vera. That's a RCA Victor radio.

LOUISE. I hear you was supposed to win twenty-five dollars with it. Turn some of it loose. I need to buy some groceries.

CANEWELL. Where you hear that? Somebody lying to you.

*(***FLOYD** *enters from the house.* **CANEWELL** *sizes him up.)*

Hey! Floyd "Schoolboy" Barton.

FLOYD. You see they playing the record? I told you! I told you the people would buy the record. I told you! They playing it everywhere.

CANEWELL. I know. I was the one who told you.

FLOYD. Naw. Naw. I knew it was gonna be a hit.

CANEWELL. I did too. I told you if they release it. I didn't know if they was gonna release it or not. I was sitting at home one day about two weeks ago and they played it. The first thing I say was, "I wonder if Floyd know."

FLOYD. Pitts come in the workhouse and told me. "Man, they playing your record." Time I looked around Mr. T.L. Hall was visiting me. All of a sudden he gonna invest some time in me.

CANEWELL. Time? He supposed to be your manager. Tell him to invest some money!

FLOYD. He told me to come down and see him this morning. He going to set everything up. Hey…look at this… I got a letter from the record company. Comeon we gonna go back up there and make another record. *(He shows* **CANEWELL** *the letter.)* You see that? They say, "Comeon, we'll work out the details when you get here!"

CANEWELL. I ain't going back up to Chicago.

FLOYD. It's gonna be different this time. We got a hit record.

CANEWELL. You got a hit record. You go on with it. I was up there and couldn't get back home. They arrested me for nothing. I ain't going back up there.

FLOYD. You don't have to be in Chicago for them to arrest you for nothing. They arrested me in Pittsburgh. I ain't done nothing but walk down the street. Come home from the cemetery after burying my mama, was walking down the street—and they arrested me. That ain't got nothing to do with Chicago. What's that got to do with Chicago?

CANEWELL. I ain't going back up there.

FLOYD. Mr. T.L. Hall gonna give us the money. It ain't gonna be like before

CANEWELL. Put me in jail. Couldn't get a job. I don't need all that. I ain't going back up there. They never get me back in the Cook County jail.

LOUISE. What you went to jail for? You ain't told us all that. You just say you didn't like it. What you went to jail for?

CANEWELL. Nothing. I ain't done nothing. Ask Floyd. Singing. That's all I did. I was right down there on Maxwell Street waiting on Floyd. I started fiddling with my harmonica. I said if I'm gonna stand here and play I may as well throw my hat down…somebody might put something in it. The police said I was disturbing the peace. Soliciting without a license. Loitering. Resisting arrest and disrespecting the law. They rolled all that together and charged me with laziness and give me thirty days. I ain't going back up there.

LOUISE. I don't blame you. Where's Vera, Floyd?

FLOYD. She in the house getting ready to go to work. Comeon, Canewell, go over to the pawnshop with me. I got to see about getting my electric guitar out of pawn.

*(***HEDLEY** *enters from the basement.)*

(Sings.)

"I THOUGHT I HEARD
BUDDY BOLDEN SAY…"

HEDLEY. What he say?

FLOYD. He said, "Wake up and give me the money."

HEDLEY. Naw. Naw. He say, "Come here. Here go the money?"

FLOYD. Well… What he give you?

HEDLEY. He give me ashes.

FLOYD. Tell him to give you the money.

HEDLEY. Soon I going to be a big man. You watch. Buddy Bolden give me my father's money I'm going to buy a big plantation. Then the white man not going to tell me what to do.

FLOYD. He ain't gonna tell me what to do either, and I ain't gonna have no plantation. I don't need nothing but that .38. I was up there in the workhouse. The Captain say hurry…the Sergeant say run. I say if I had my .38 I wouldn't do neither one.

HEDLEY. I gonna be a big man.

LOUISE. You ain't gonna be nothing.

HEDLEY. The bible say it all will come to straighten out in the end. Every abomination shall be brought low. Everything will fall to a new place. When I get my plantation I'm gonna walk around it. I am going to walk all the way round to see how big it is. I'm gonna be a big man on that day. That is the day I dress up and go walking through the town. That is the day my father forgive me. I tell you this as God is my witness on that great day when all the people are singing as I go by…and my plantation is full and ripe…and my father is a strong memory…on that day…the white man not going to tell me what to do no more.

LOUISE. There ain't no plantations in Pittsburgh, fool! This the city.

HEDLEY. I'm gonna make one.

FLOYD. Hedley say he gonna make him a plantation.

CANEWELL. Hey, Hedley, what you gonna grow?

HEDLEY. I grow anything. Just like the white man. I grow tobacco. I grow oats. Anything.

CANEWELL. You ought to put you in some sugar cane.

HEDLEY. No. No sugar. I hate the sugar. Sugar beat many a man.

CANEWELL. That's how I got my name. My granddaddy used to cut sugar cane in Louisiana. Somebody seen him say, "That boy can cane well." Otherwise my name would be cottonwell.

HEDLEY. It's gonna be a big plantation.

FLOYD. I just want to come and sit on your front porch and drink Mint Juleps.

LOUISE. Look at Floyd signifying.

FLOYD. The man say he gonna get him a plantation. I ain't gonna be the one who tell him no. Somebody else gonna have to do that. If I see where he get his that might make me want to get one too.

CANEWELL. You should have heard Hedley night before last, Floyd. He was talking more stuff than a little bit. He was talking about Buddy Bolden… St. John the Divine… St. John the Revelator. St. Yolanda. Told me his Granddaddy was John the Baptist.

HEDLEY. I say he was baptized by a man call himself John the Baptist.

CANEWELL. We was talking about Zombies. Lazarus. Hey… hey, tell him, Floyd, Jesus ain't had no business raising Lazarus from the dead. If it's God's will then what he look like undoing it? If it's his father's work, then it's his father's business and he ought to have stayed out of it.

HEDLEY. His father will him to do it. Jesus is the Obedient Son of the Father. He was a black man, you know. The bible say his hair was like lamb's wool and his skin the color of copper. That's cause Mary was a Moabite.

CANEWELL. That ain't got nothing to do with Lazarus. What Mary being a Moabite got to do with Lazarus? I'm talking about you ain't supposed to go against nature. Don't care whether you the Son of God or not. Everybody know that. Lazarus even know that. When Lazarus was dying the second time…he was dying from pneumonia…somebody went up and got Jesus. Lazarus saw him coming and said, "Oh no, not you again!" See, all Jesus had done by raising him from the dead was to cause him to go through that much more suffering. He was suffering the pain of living. That's why the bible say you supposed to rejoice when somebody die and cry when they come into the world.

*(***VERA** *enters from the house. She has a man's hat in her hand.)*

VERA. Is you all back on that again? Canewell, you left your hat here.

CANEWELL. I was wondering where my hat was. I thought it might be here. I was too embarrassed to come back and get it.

LOUISE. You ought to be embarrassed the way you all carried on.

FLOYD. What you doing with your hat at my house? You living dangerous.

VERA. It ain't your house. Let's get that straight first. If it's your house give me twenty-five dollars for the rent.

CANEWELL. They say wherever you hang your hat is your home. That just go to show you what a lie that is.

FLOYD. That's what I call home. If my hat's there, I'm gonna be there. What your hat doing in my house?

VERA. He left that hat here night before last. Him and Hedley sat out here talking about the bible and God knows what else. Sat here drinking that moonshine till they passed out. You know how Hedley get.

CANEWELL. I said I was gonna get crazy right with him. Ain't that right Hedley? We went tit for tat. Hey Vera, I bought you this Golden Seal plant. You plant that over there and that be all the doctor you need. That'll take care of everything you can think of and some you can't. You just take a pinch off of them leaves and make you a tea. Ain't that right. Hedley? Or else get you a little piece of the root.

HEDLEY. You have to plant it now. Don't let the roots dry out. The roots dry out easy.

*(***HEDLEY** *retrieves a shovel from beneath the landing and takes the plant from* **VERA**. *He begins digging in the flower garden.)*

CANEWELL. Tell her, Hedley. That be all the doctor she need.

HEDLEY. My grandmother used to make a tea with the Golden Seal. She make a tea or she chew the leaves and rub it on her chest.

LOUISE. We ain't living back when your grandmother was living. You can go right across the street and see the doctor. Doctor Goldblum don't charge but two dollars. You can get some real medicine.

CANEWELL. This is real. Where you think Doctor Goldblum get his medicine from.

*(***VERA** *puts the plant into the hole* **HEDLEY** *has dug.)*

HEDLEY. Watch you don't plant it too deep.

FLOYD. *(Puts his arms around* **VERA**.*)* What you planting that for? You ain't gonna be here to see it grow. We going to Chicago.

VERA. I ain't said nothing about going to Chicago.

CANEWELL. You trying to get Vera to go to Chicago and I'm looking to eat my breakfast in a brand new place.

LOUISE. I thought you was staying up there with Lulu Johnson.

CANEWELL. Naw I ain't up there no more. I'm drifting right now. But I ain't gonna be drifting long. I get me three rooms and a place to have a little garden and I'll be alright. Three rooms and a woman know how to sit with me in the dark and what else can a man want? If I was Rockefeller I could want for some more money… but other than that…what else could a poor man want?

LOUISE. Where you staying at if you ain't with Lulu Johnson no more?

CANEWELL. I'm staying down on Clark Street.

VERA. What you got on Clark street, Canewell?

CANEWELL. Nothing. I ain't got nothing.

VERA. Who you staying with?

CANEWELL. You don't know her. She just some old gal. I'm just helping her out with her rent. We got an understanding about what that is. It ain't nothing. I keep my trunk packed up.

VERA. That's what the problem is now. Everybody keep their trunk packed up. Time you put two and two together and try come up with four…they out the door.

FLOYD. The man said he got an understanding.

CANEWELL. Quite naturally when it's time for me to go… that be the end of our understanding. When it come to the end of our understanding I'm gonna drink a toast and keep on stepping.

FLOYD. Comeon, Canewell, I got to go downtown and get my money first. They owe me thirty cents a day for working in the workhouse. That's ninety days worth of thirty cents. I'm gonna use that to get my guitar out the pawnshop.

VERA. You can go down there and pay on the light bill before they cut it off. And bring something back here if you wanna eat. Even people that have a hit record got to buy some groceries.

HEDLEY. You know why the pawnshop have a sign with three balls? Wherever you see a pawnshop you see them three balls. You ever notice that.

CANEWELL. Yeah…come to think of it. They all got three gold balls. Even if it ain't nothing but painted on it. What that mean?

HEDLEY. That mean the pawnshop man betting you three to one you not gonna get your stuff back.

(They all laugh. **FLOYD** *exits into the house.)*

VERA. How much it cost to go to Chicago?

CANEWELL. It was seventeen dollars and forty cents when me and Floyd went up there. That was last year. They might have put one of them yearly increases on it. Common sense say that can't last but so long if everything go up every year.

*(***FLOYD** *comes out of the house carrying a guitar.)*

FLOYD. Hey, Canewell…remember this?

CANEWELL. That's that guitar you got off Odell.

FLOYD. I'm gonna carry this over to the pawnshop see what he give me for it. Then I wanna go over to the cemetery and visit my mother's grave. Vera, we be back. Joe Louis fighting tonight. Hey Hedley, Joe Louis fighting tonight.

HEDLEY. The Brown Bomber! Yes! The might Mighty Black Man!

*(***VERA, FLOYD** *and* **CANEWELL** *exit.* **HEDLEY** *kills a chicken as* **LOUISE** *retreats up the steps to her apartment. The lights go down on the scene.)*

Scene Four

(The lights come up on the yard. It is several hours later. **VERA** *and* **LOUISE** *are making food preparations.)*

LOUISE. That's all I know. Ain't no telling what the truth of it is. My sister say it's best if she get away from there for awhile.

VERA. When she say she coming?

LOUISE. I got the letter but she didn't say. She didn't say what train or nothing. I pulled that mattress out I can lay it down on the floor. She ain't gonna be here long knowing her. With her little fast behind. I believe there's more to it than what they say.

VERA. Probably is. You don't never get the full story.

LOUISE. Talking about love. People don't know what love is. Love be anything they want it to be.

VERA. She might have been in love. Love don't know no age and it don't know no experience. You say she going on twenty-five. She might have been in love. Found somebody treat her half right.

What good it get her? She ain't got none of them now. She lucky she living. Who need that kind of love? One man in the ground and the other in jail. What she got? Went from two to sometime one to none to ducking and dodging bullets…for what? For love? No thank you I don't need me no love. I'm forty-eight going on sixty. Hedley's the closest I want to come to love…and you see how far that is.

Floyd want me to go to Chicago with him.

LOUISE. What for? So he can dog you around some more up there?

VERA. That's what I told him.

LOUISE. You can do better than that. Floyd don't mean nobody no good. He don't mean his own self no good. How he gonna mean you any good?

VERA. I believe Floyd means well. He just don't know how to do. Everything keep slipping out his hands. Seem like he stumble over everything.

LOUISE. However it go he make it go that way. He remind me of Henry. That man walked out on me and that was the best thing that happened to me. When he left I told myself say, "If you have to say hello before you can say good-bye… I ain't got to never worry about nobody saying good-bye to me no more." I ain't never going through one of them good-byes again. He was standing upstairs in the hallway. Told me say, "I'm leaving." I asked him, "What for? After twelve years. Why you gonna leave after all this time? After you done used me up." He say, "It's something I got to do." Then he went on and gathered up his things. He left a razor and a pair of shoes. They still up there.

VERA. That's like Floyd left his old guitar.

LOUISE. He got to the doorway and I told him, "Leave your pistol. Don't leave me here by myself." He ain't said nothing. He took out his pistol and handed it to me. I told him, say, "I ought to shoot you." We laughed and then he kissed me good-bye. I ain't seen him since. I got that pistol upstairs now. What I'm trying to tell you is don't let no man use you up and then talk about he gotta go. Shoot him first.

VERA. Sometimes it seems like that more than they deserve.

LOUISE. Maybe you ought to go up to Chicago and find you a man.

VERA. Wouldn't that be something.

LOUISE. If you go up there with Floyd I give him six weeks and he be running around from this one to that one trying to keep you in the middle.

*(***FLOYD** *and* **CANEWELL** *enter the yard.* **FLOYD** *is still carrying his old guitar.)*

FLOYD. These people around here is crazy. They don't know I ain't going for that. I go down there…the woman see I got the envelope. I ain't got no other

piece of paper. She lucky I got that. I got other things to do then keep track of a piece of paper.

VERA. What piece of paper?

FLOYD. What kind of sense that make? She can see on the envelope they done sent me the letter to come down there. They told me that when I was in the workhouse. Say, "When you get out go down there." It ain't said nothing about no piece of paper.

VERA. What piece of paper?

FLOYD. She told me if I didn't have the paper I can't get my money. I told her all that wasn't gonna change nothing. The government still owed me thirty cents a day for my time in the workhouse. I'm the one worked out there in the yard. They wasn't. She told me come back tomorrow. I'm gonna go down there. Cause they gonna give me my money. Paper or no paper they gonna give me my money.

VERA. What piece of paper?

CANEWELL. When Floyd was in the workhouse they sent him a letter. Say when you get out take this letter down to such and such a place and they will pay you thirty cents for however many days you was incarcerated. Floyd go down there and the woman asked him where the letter was. Floyd ain't had the letter…he just had the envelope. She told him they couldn't pay him unless he had the letter.

FLOYD. What kind of sense that make? Paper or no paper they still owe me the money. Now I got to go back down there tomorrow and straighten that out. I got to wait till tomorrow to get my electric guitar. I needed the money to get the guitar, and now I need the paper to get the money. That's supposed to give you a little starting place. Otherwise they could arrest me right now for vagrancy and give me another thirty days.

(**RED CARTER** *enters. He is stylishly dressed.)*

RED CARTER. I see you still back up in the alley.

FLOYD. Hey, Red.

LOUISE. Ohh. Just the man I want to see. Give me one of them Old Golds. Hedley give me one of these old Chesterfields. Here I'll trade you the pack.

RED CARTER. Naw. I ain't gonna do that. I don't want no Chesterfield! I don't see how people smoke them things.

FLOYD. Canewell said he wasn't gonna talk to you. You must have done something to him.

CANEWELL. I ain't said that. How you doing Red? I said I wasn't going to Chicago with you.

RED CARTER. Who going to Chicago? What Chicago? How you gonna be going with me when I ain't going my damn self. I ain't said nothing about Chicago.

FLOYD. Comeon, we going back up and make another record. They sent the letter to my sister's house.

RED CARTER. The record come out… I couldn't believe it. They started playing it on the radio. I told myself Floyd always did say it was gonna be a hit.

CANEWELL. I did too. I say if they released it.

FLOYD. Comeon, we going back up there.

RED CARTER. I don't know. Chicago a long way. It take the Greyhound round about fifteen hours. If I wanted to go that far I may as well visit my mama down in Opelika, Alabama. Down there where the women soft as cotton and sweet as watermelon.

FLOYD. They got some like that up there. They got some like that in Chicago. They got some of the prettiest women a man most ever seen. Comeon let's go back up there and make another hit record!

RED CARTER. They, do got some pretty women up in Chicago. Allright. Comeon let's go.

LOUISE. Red, you play bid Whist? We gonna play some cards after the fight. I'll let you be my partner. I bet we make a good team.

RED CARTER. You never can tell about nothing like that till after you try it.

LOUISE. Ain't that the truth.

VERA. Comeon, Louise…you gonna show me how you cook greens?

CANEWELL. You don't know how to cook no greens.

*(***CANEWELL** *begins following* **VERA** *and* **LOUISE** *as they exit the yard into* **VERA***'s apartment.)*

You get you about three pounds of turnips and about three pounds of mustard. I like to mix them together. Then you get you a big pot. Put some water in it. Cut the stems off the greens and throw that away. Tear the greens up into little pieces. Don't cut them. Some people cut them. That's where you mess up. Put you in a little piece…about a quarter pound of salt pork in there with them. Turn the fire way down real low and let them cook up about six hours. Throw you some red pepper seeds in there first. Cook that up and call me when it get done.

*(***LOUISE** *lets the screen door slam in* **CANEWELL***'s face.* **RED CARTER** *takes out a cigar and hands it to* **FLOYD**. *During the following scene, the men set up the card table and chairs in preparation for the fight that evening.)*

RED CARTER. Here.

FLOYD. What's that?

RED CARTER. What it look like? That's a cigar. Ain't you supposed to pass out a cigar when you have a baby? WillaMae done had another boy.

FLOYD. You ain't supposed to pass out this cheap-ass stuff.

RED CARTER. Here you go, Canewell.

FLOYD. You supposed to get you some of them dollar cigars.

RED CARTER. Joe Louis' daddy didn't pass out dollar cigars.

CANEWELL. Joe Louis' daddy ain't never seen no dollar cigar. Joe Louis's daddy was a poor man. I know you is too. But damn if they couldn't have been ten-cent cigars. One of them ten-cent King Edwards.

FLOYD. King Edwards don't cost but a nickel.

CANEWELL. I said one of them ten-cent King Edwards. You not listening.

FLOYD. King Edwards don't cost but a nickel.

CANEWELL. That's the kind you know about. But you can buy some King Edward cigars that cost a quarter. Tell him, Red.

RED CARTER. They got some King Edwards cost fifty cents.

FLOYD. This cigar is stale.

RED CARTER. That's cause I been carrying it around with me for nine months.

FLOYD. How's WillaMae doing?

RED CARTER. She back at home now. That nine pound twelve ounces took a lot out of her but she handling it. Seem like he don't never stop eating. If I ate that much I wouldn't be able to get out the house. I wouldn't fit through the doorway. I wouldn't be able to get to the outhouse.

FLOYD. Hey Canewell, you remember that little rhyme about in days of old when knights was bold. I was trying to tell Red one time and couldn't think of it.

CANEWELL. "In days of old when knights was bold and paper wasn't invented
They wiped their ass on a blade of grass—"

FLOYD AND CANEWELL. "—And walked away contented!"

CANEWELL. But do you know this one?
"Ladies and gentlemen I stand before you to sit behind you to tell you something I know nothing about—"

FLOYD. "The admission is free you pay at the door There's plenty of seats you sit on the floor"

CANEWELL. "There's room for ladies but only men can go And that's about all I know"

FLOYD AND CANEWELL. "We're gonna discuss the four corners of the round table!"

FLOYD. That always lay me out.

RED CARTER. Do you know…

"One bright morning in the middle of the night
Two dead boys got up to fight
Back to back they faced each other
Drew their swords and shot each other
A deaf policeman heard the noise
And came and killed those two dead boys."

CANEWELL. "Watermelons sweet and green
Best watermelons you ever seen
You eat the meat
and pickle the rind
save the seed till planting time."

You know how to tell if a watermelon is sweet. You don't thump them. You treat a watermelon just like you do a woman…you squeeze them. If they soft they sweet. That's what my daddy told me. I don't know if it's true or not about the watermelon. But I do know a soft woman is sweet. There is some women you just melt right into them. I ain't talking about no fat woman. But I do know something about that. There be more woman there than any one man can handle.

FLOYD. There be a lot of them like that. Hard to handle.

RED CARTER. Where they at. I know how to handle them. I used to have seven women. I tried to keep them separate and give them all a day of the week. But that didn't work. I told one of them, "I'll see you on Tuesday. I got something to do Monday." She say, "Naw, Naw… I see you Friday night." I told the other one," I'll see you on Thursday I got something to do Tuesday." She say, "Naw, Naw… I'll see you Friday." They all wanted to see me on Friday cause I was working. There was a time I couldn't get a woman. I go anywhere near a woman they get up and run. Time I got me a job I couldn't keep them off me. Women everywhere. All of a sudden I got right popular…except they all wanna see me on Friday. I tried to move my Friday woman over to Sunday but she got mad. My Sunday woman quit me and my Monday woman wanted to see me on Saturday.

I got so confused I say the best thing for me to do was quit my job.

(Someone is heard approaching.)

FLOYD. Who's that?

CANEWELL. Ain't nobody but Hedley.

FLOYD. Hey Red, watch this.

*(***HEDLEY** *enters. He has been outselling his eggs and chicken sandwiches. It has been a good day, and his baskets are nearly empty.)*

(Sings.)

"I THOUGHT I HEARD
BUDDY BOLDEN SAY—"

HEDLEY. What he say?

FLOYD. He said, "Wake up and give me the money."

HEDLEY. Naw. He say, "Come here. Here go the money."

FLOYD. What he give you?

HEDLEY. He didn't give me nothing.

CANEWELL. You tell him to give you the money. If he don't give it to you come and see me I'll cut him for you.

HEDLEY. I'll cut him myself.

RED CARTER. Here go a cigar.

HEDLEY. Yes! My cigar smoke better than vour cigar.

RED CARTER. Naw, it don't smoke better than mine. You smoke a good cigar but it don't smoke better than mine.

CANEWELL. Red Carter got a baby boy.

HEDLEY. I hope he grow up and be big and strong like Joe Louis. Maybe one day I too have a son.

CANEWELL. Joe Louis fighting tonight. We gonna listen to it on the radio.

FLOYD. What you name him, Red?

RED CARTER. I ain't had the chance to name him nothing. She named him Mister.

CANEWELL. White folks gonna have a fit with a nigger named Mister. Mr. Mister Carter.

HEDLEY. Yes, the bible say Ethiopia shall rise up and be made a great Kingdom. Marcus Garvey say the black man is a king.

FLOYD. I don't want to hear nothing about no bible.

RED CARTER. I'm with you Floyd. If I want to hear that I'd go to church.

FLOYD. God is in his heaven and he staying there. He must be up there cause a lot of things down here He don't know. He must not know about it. If He did it seem like He would do something about it. Being that He God and everything ain't right in his kingdom. Wouldn't you want everything to be right if you was God? So I figure He don't know about it. That's why I don't want to hear nothing about no bible. Ethiopia or nothing else.

HEDLEY. The black man is the conquering Lion of Judea you know. He like Toussaint L'Ouverture. He is the king! Most people don't know that. Hedley know. He know himself what blood he got. They say Hedley go on you too serious with that. But! Hedley know the white man walk the earth on the black man's back.

RED CARTER. Ain't nobody walking on my back. I ain't gonna let nobody walk on my back.

FLOYD. All I want is you to get out my way. I got somewhere to go. See everybody can't say that. Some people ain't got nowhere to go. They don't wanna go nowhere. If they wanted to go somewhere they would have been there. Time done got short and it getting shorter everyday. The only thing I want you to do is get out my way.

HEDLEY. You watch what Hedley say.

RED CARTER. Where them women go? I thought they was gonna cook something. I ain't had a cooked meal in so long.

FLOYD. What's wrong with that woman you got?

RED CARTER. Her mama ain't taught her how to cook. She know how to do everything else but she can't cook. At

first I thought she was lying I come to find out it was the truth. I told her. "Come here baby I'm gonna show you this one time." Told her, "Pay attention." Then I showed her how to make biscuits. That's the only thing she can cook. That's why I'm getting fat. You hungry? We can go down there right now and get some biscuits.

FLOYD. You ought to teach her how to open up a can of beans. I don't want no woman who can't cook. She ain't too much good for me. She might be good for somebody but much as I like to eat she ain't good for me. That's what got me so mad when they arrested me cause I was gonna miss Vera's cooking. I asked the police say, "I done nothing. What you arresting me for?" He say, "I'm arresting you in advance. You gonna do something." I just look at him and told him, "Well, Boss you right cause if I had my druthers I'd cut you every which away but loose." He just laughed cause he know a black man ain't never had his druthers. They took me down there and beat me with them rubber hoses till I said Uncle. I told him say, "If I ever meet you out in the back by the alley one day we gonna have some fun." Give me ninety days for vagrancy.

RED CARTER. One time they arrested me for having too much money. I had more money than the law allowed. Must have…cause the police arrested me and put me in jail. Told me if I had that much money I must have stole it somewhere.

FLOYD. They got you coming and going. Put me in jail for not having enough money…and put you in jail for having too much money. Ain't no telling what they going to do next. *(***FLOYD** *takes out his .38.)* That's why I got this here.

CANEWELL. That ain't gonna do nothing but get you arrested for carrying a loaded weapon.

FLOYD. You allowed to carry a loaded weapon you just can't hide it. You can carry it in your hand. That's your best bet. See you can carry it like this here and walk right on by the police. They can't do nothing to you. But even

if you be carrying a empty pistol they can take and put you in jail for carrying a concealed weapon.

RED CARTER. Let me see that. That look like one of them thirty-eights.

FLOYD. That's a Smith and Wesson.

RED CARTER. *(Looks at gun.)* That's it. I used to have one just like that. I give it up for this snub-nose .32.

*(***RED CARTER** *takes out his pistol and shows the pistol to* **FLOYD**. **HEDLEY** *exits into the cellar.)*

FLOYD. I'd rather have that thirty-eight. This is nice but that got a bigger bullet.

CANEWELL. I don't need me nothing but this here.

*(***CANEWELL** *takes out an average size but thoroughly professional pocket knife.)*

RED CARTER. What you gonna do with that.

FLOYD. Canewell cut him some people now. Everybody know that. There's a whole lot of niggers around here wearing Canewell's scars.

RED CARTER. Somebody go to cut me and I be done put four or five holes in him before he can draw back his arm.

CANEWELL. Naw. Naw. It don't work that way. There a lot of people think it work that way. And there a lot of people that used to think it worked that way. Most of them is in the graveyard. The ones that still think that way that's where they headed.

RED CARTER. That's cause they gun wasn't oiled. You keep your gun oiled and your trigger finger strong the only thing can beat you is a bigger or faster gun. You can't get beat with no knife. A knife ain't nothing but a piece of history. It's out of style.

CANEWELL. Cutting don't never go out of style. And you don't have to depend on nobody for nothing. They quit making them bullets and ain't nothing you can do but try and beat somebody over the head with that hunk of metal.

RED CARTER. If you live long enough you just might find out.

*(***HEDLEY** *comes out of the cellar carrying a large butcher knife.)*

FLOYD. What that you got?

CANEWELL. Hedley got his chicken knife. He a smart man. If it be me and him against you all…we'd win.

FLOYD. Naw. Naw. Not in Nineteen forty-eight. That's why we won the war. We had bigger guns. You can't fight with knives no more. They got the atomic bomb and everything.

RED CARTER. You don't need no atomic bomb. That ain't nothing but a big knife. This little .32 can handle that.

HEDLEY. But can you handle this.

*(***HEDLEY** *holds up a hot pepper.)*

RED CARTER. What's that?

CANEWELL. Hedley got them peppers.

*(***HEDLEY** *pops one in his mouth and offers one to* **FLOYD**.*)*

FLOYD. Naw…naw. You never get me to eat that. Give one to Red Carter. Hey Red, eat one of them peppers.

RED CARTER. It ain't nothing but a pepper.

*(***RED CARTER** *puts one in his mouth and almost chokes.)*

CANEWELL. Hey Red, how many fingers I got up? Everything gonna stay like that for about a week.

*(***RED CARTER** *almost trips over* **FLOYD***'s guitar.)*

FLOYD. Watch it, Red. Watch it!

CANEWELL. Floyd have a fit if you trip over his guitar. Hey Red. Do I look like I'm made out of red glass?

FLOYD. I get my electric guitar. That will make me play better.

CANEWELL. Having a nice guitar don't make you play no better.

FLOYD. Not if you don't know how to play. But if you already know how to play good a nice guitar will make you feel better about yourself. If you feel better about yourself quite naturally you be able to play better. People see you with a nice guitar they know you put the music first. Even if you don't put the music first… it will work its way to the front. I know. I tried it many a time. I say, "Let me put this music down and leave it alone." Then one day you be walking along and the music jump on you. It just grab hold of you and hand on. Ain't too much you can do then.

CANEWELL. If I could put the music down I would have been a preacher. Many a time I felt God was calling. But the devil was calling too and it seem like he call louder. God speak in a whisper and the devil shout.

RED CARTER. They say God have planned but the devil have planned also.

FLOYD. Yeah, well I'm planning too. I get that guitar. Mr. T.L. Hall give me the rest of the money and we be in Chicago making another hit record.

RED CARTER. You supposed to get my drums out the pawn.

FLOYD. Where you drums? I thought you had some drums. They told me you was raising all kind of hell down at the Workingmen's Club.

RED CARTER. That's when I had my drums. They in the pawnshop now.

FLOYD. They your drums.

RED CARTER. Tell him, Canewell. They my drums but it's his band. When the record come out it ain't gonna have my name on it. It ain't gonna have your name on it. It's gonna say "Floyd Schoolboy Barton". Just like the other one. If it have your name on it you supposed to take care of the band. Otherwise I don't need my drums. Let them stay in the pawnshop.

CANEWELL. That's right. That where Mr. T.L. Hall come in. Go down there and tell him your drummer need twenty-five dollars to get his drums out the pawnshop.

Tell him my harmonica in there too. He supposed to be you manager. You supposed to pass the cost of running the band along to him.

FLOYD. The main thing is to get up to Chicago.

CANEWELL. I'll tell you this up front…*if* I go to Chicago. I say…*if* I go to Chicago. I want everything up front. It ain't gonna be like the last time. See bad luck and trouble try and follow me but I don't let it.

FLOYD. You ain't got to worry about nothing. Let me take care of it.

CANEWELL. I ain't gonna let nobody make no fool out of me.

RED CARTER. I ain't gonna let nobody make no fool out of me either. And I know you don't need to hear me say that twice.

FLOYD. That's all in Canewell's head. Ain't nobody making no fool out of him. That's the way the recording business work. You ain't gonna change that. The main thing is to get the record out here. Let the people hear it. Then come back and ask for more money. Then you can get double if it's any good. You can't be good just cause you say you is. The people got to hear it and want to buy it. That's what make you good. That's what I was trying to tell you when you walked out.

CANEWELL. I walked out cause the man didn't want to pay me what he said he was going to pay me. He didn't want to pay the agreed upon price. He wanna halfway be in the liquor business. Twenty-five dollars and a bottle of whiskey do not make thirty-five dollars. He walked up and handed me the whiskey I took it cause I thought it was a present. Then he wanna charge me ten dollars for it. That ain't no way to do nobody.

RED CARTER. I ain't gonna work like that with me either. We may as well get this straight now. If he tell me thirty-five dollars that's what he gonna pay me.

CANEWELL. You see what I'm saying? I asked him say, "Is there any other kind of way we can do this?" He just

looked at me. He told me "Leave." Just like that, "Leave." Just like you tell a dog "Sit". I told him "Bye!"

FLOYD. This time it's gonna be different. We gonna get the money up front.

CANEWELL. It wasn't all about the money. He treat me like he didn't care nothing about me.

FLOYD. He don't have to care nothing about you. You all doing business. He ain't got to like you. Tell him Red, you got to take advantage of the opportunity. It don't matter if he like you or not. You got to take the opportunity while it's there.

CANEWELL. Just cause I was there on an opportunity don't mean he got to treat me bad. He on an opportunity too. You creating an opportunity for him.

FLOYD. The man ain't mistreated you. You all just had a misunderstanding. That could happen with anybody.

CANEWELL. I just say it ain't gonna happen with me no more.

RED CARTER. If he try to do that with both of us he gonna have double trouble.

FLOYD. You all ain't got to worry about that. Let me handle the business. Red. I'll get your drums out the pawnshop. I'll go get some more money from Mr. T.L. Hall.

CANEWELL. That's why I say I don't need nothing but this.

*(***CANEWELL** *takes out his harmonica and blows a few notes.* **FLOYD** *plucks the strings and starts to tune the guitar.* **RED CARTER** *takes out some drum sticks and drums on the table. The men begin to play.* **HEDLEY** *exits into the cellar.)*

FLOYD. Let's see what we got here. *(Sings.)**

"GOD DON'T LIKE IT I KNOW
BETTER QUIT DRINKING SHINE
GOD DON'T LIKE IT I KNOW
BETTER QUIT DRINKING SHINE."

---

* "God Don't Like It" by Blind Willie McTell

*(***HEDLEY** *enters from the cellar with a piece of 2x4, a hammer, a nail, and a piece of chicken wire. He slams the board down and drives the nail in it, disrupting the music.)*

FLOYD. *(Puzzled.)* What you doing Hedley?

HEDLEY. Watch!

*(***HEDLEY** *wraps the wire on the nail.)*

CANEWELL. Hedley making him a one string. He say he know something about music.

FLOYD. What he gonna do with a one string? He can't do nothing with one string.

HEDLEY. Watch!

FLOYD. You can't do with that one string what I can do with these six. Even if you can do something I bet you that it be six times one. I make six times as much music.

HEDLEY. You watch. One string make plenty plenty music. One string make plenty plenty music.

CANEWELL. Look out! Hedley say he make plenty plenty music.

RED CARTER. Go ahead, Hedley. Look out, Floyd!

CANEWELL. I got a dollar on Hedley.

FLOYD. He can't top me with no one string. Canewell. He ain't said he was gonna top you. He just say he make plenty plenty music. You the one say you was gonna top him.

*(***HEDLEY** *finds a rock and puts it under the string to add tension to the wire.)*

HEDLEY. Now. When I was a little boy I asked my Grandfather where his mother was. He say she was long gone far away. Say when he play this he could hear her pray. I asked him, "How?" He say, "Listen." *(He plucks the string.)* I didn't hear her. But I learned it and I used to sit and play and try to hear her. Once. Maybe. Almost.

*(***HEDLEY** *begins to play the instrument. It is a simple tune for a simple instrument. Really not*

much more than a piece of wire vibrating. The men listen hard.)

FLOYD. If I could hear my mother pray again I believe I'd pray with her. I'd be happy just to hear her voice again. I wouldn't care if she was cussing me out. They say you don't miss your water till you well run dry. If I could hear my mother's voice again I never would say nothing back to her. I wouldn't mind hearing her singing either. She used to do that some time. Used to sing "Old Ship of Zion." I believe that was her favorite. Though sometime she used to sing the "Lord's Prayer." I can still hear her singing… *(***FLOYD** *sings.)*

"OUR FATHER
WHICH ART IN HEAVEN
HALLOWED BE THY NAME
THY KINGDOM COME
THY WILL BE DONE
ON EARTH AS IT IS
IN HEAVEN.
GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD
AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS
AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS
LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION,
BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL
FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM
AND THE POWER
AND THE GLORY
FOR EVER AMEN."

RED CARTER. Where your mother buried at Floyd? My uncle's out in Greenwood.

FLOYD. That's where she at. She out there in Greenwood. I was out there today. Me and Canewell went out there. They got her buried over in the poor people part. Took me three hours to find the grave. They let the grass grow all over. I took and pulled up the grass and cleaned off her grave. Said I was gonna get her a marker. And that's what I'm gonna do. Cause when I

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