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SF PERUSALS

August Wilson's

King Hedley II

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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KING HEDLEY II premiered at the Pittsburgh Public Theater, in association with Sageworks, in a co-production with the Pittsburgh Public Theater (Edward Gilbert, Artistic Director; Stephen Klein, Managing Director) and Seattle Repertory Theatre (Sharon Ott, Artistic Director; Benjamin Moore, Managing Director) on December 11, 1999. The production subsequently opened at Seattle Repertory Theatre on March 13, 2000. It was directed by Marion Isaac McClinton with set design by David Gallo, costume design by Toni-Leslie James, lighting design by Donald Holder, and sound design by Rob Milburn. The Production Stage Manager was Diane DiVita. The cast was as follows:

KING HEDLEY II . . . . . Tony Todd
RUBY. . . . . Marlene Warfield
MISTER. . . . . Russell Andrews
ELMORE . . . . . Charles Brown
TONYA . . . . . Ella Joyce
STOOL PIGEON. . . . . Mel Winkler

This production of ***KING HEDLEY II*** opened at Huntington Theatre Company (Peter Altman, Producing Director; Michael Maso, Managing Director) on May 24, 2000 in Boston, Massachusetts with the same artistic team and cast, except for the following changes: original music was composed by Max Roach and the Production Stage Manager was Glynn David Turner. This production then opened at Center Theatre Group's Mark Taper Forum (Gordon Davidson, Artistic Director; Charles Dillingham, Managing Director) on September 5, 2000 in Los Angeles, California with the same artistic team, except the Production Stage Manager was Tami Toon. The cast was as follows:

KING HEDLEY II . . . . . Harry Lennix;
Jerome Butler (October 17 - 22)
RUBY. . . . . Juanita Jennings
MISTER. . . . . Monté Russell
ELMORE . . . . . Charles Brown
TONYA . . . . . Moné Walton
STOOL PIGEON. . . . . Lou Myers

The production then opened at the Goodman Theatre (Robert Falls, Artistic Director; Roche Schuler, Executive Director) on December 11, 2000 in Chicago, Illinois with the same artistic team, except the Production Stage Manager was Diane DiVita. The cast was as follows:

KING HEDLEY II . . . . . Richard Brooks
RUBY . . . . . Leslie Uggams
MISTER . . . . . Monté Russell
ELMORE . . . . . Charles Brown
TONYA . . . . . Yvette Ganier
STOOL PIGEON . . . . . Lou Myers

The play opened at the John F Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on February 25, 2001 in Washington, D.C. with the same artistic team. It was produced by Sageworks, Benjamin Mordecai, Jujamcyn Theatres and Manhattan Theatre Club, in association with Kardana-Swinsky Productions. The cast was as follows:

KING HEDLEY II . . . . . Brian Stokes Mitchell
RUBY . . . . . Leslie Uggams
MISTER . . . . . Monté Russell
ELMORE . . . . . Charles Brown
TONYA . . . . . Viola Davis
STOOL PIGEON . . . . . Stephen McKinley Henderson

KING HEDLEY II transferred to Broadway at the Virginia Theatre with the same artistic team and cast. The opening night was May 1, 2001. It was produced by Sageworks, Benjamin Mordecai, Jujamcyn Theaters, 52nd Street Productions, Spring Sirkin, Peggy Hill and Manhattan Theatre Club, in association with Kardana-Swinsky Productions.

CHARACTERS

KING (KING HEDLEY II) – Has a vicious scar running down the left side of his face. Spent seven years in prison. Strives to live by his own moral code. Thirties.

RUBY – King's mother, former big band singer who recently moved back to Pittsburgh. Sixties.

MISTER – King's best friend since grade school and sometimes business partner. Thirties.

ELMORE – Ruby's longtime, but sporadic flame. A professional hustler. Sixties.

TONYA – King's wife of a few years. Thirties.

STOOL PIGEON – King's next-door neighbor. The Hill's spiritual and practical truthsayer. Late sixties.

SETTING

Pittsburgh, the Hill District, 1985. The setting is the backyards of a row of three houses. One of the houses is missing and the vacant lot provides access to the rear of the house where Ruby lives with King and Tonya. Three or four steps empty out of the house. A fence separates the yard from the house next door. Stool Pigeon lives in the house on the opposite side of the vacant lot. Buildings across the street in the front of the house are visible through the vacant lot and an old advertisement for Alaga Syrup featuring a faded portrait of Willie Mays is painted on one of the buildings.

For Rob Penny and Nicholas Flournoy
– fallen oaks of the Centre Avenue tradition

And for Chawley P. Williams
– don't you leave me here by myself

PROLOGUE

(The lights come up on the yard. It is a brilliant, starry night lorded over by a calm that belies the approaching tempest. **STOOL PIGEON**, *sixty-five, enters from the house carrying two ham bones. He clicks them together. Offstage, a cat meows.)*

STOOL PIGEON. You stay out of the way of them dogs now. They gonna come for these bones.

(The cat meows.)

I'm gonna get you some fish heads tomorrow. I got to go down to the Strip District. Used to have the live fish market right down there on Centre. Times ain't nothing like they used to be. Everything done got broke up. Pieces flying everywhere. Look like it's gonna be broke up some more before it get whole again. If it ever do. Ain't no telling. The half ain't never been told. The people don't know but God's gonna tell it. He gonna tell it in a loud voice. You ain't gonna be able to say you didn't hear it.

The people wandering all over the place. They got lost. They don't even know the story of how they got from tit to tat. Aunt Ester know. But the path to her house is all grown over with weeds, you can't hardly find the door no more. The people need to know that. The people need to know the story. See how they fit into it. See what part they play.

It's all been written down. We all have our hands in the soup and make the music play just so. But we can only make it play just so much. You can't play in the chord God ain't wrote. He wrote the beginning and the end. He let you play around in the middle but he got it all

written down. It's his creation and he got more right in it than anybody else. He say, "Let him who have wisdom understand." Aunt Ester got the wisdom. She three hundred and sixty-six years old. She got the Book of Life. The story's been written. All that's left now is the playing out.

(exits)

(The lights go down on the scene.)

ACT ONE

Scene I

(The lights come up on the yard. **KING HEDLEY II** *enters from the street. He is thirty-six years old and has a vicious scar running down the left side of his face. He goes to a small corner of the yard. He takes a packet of seeds from his pocket and begins to plant them.* **RUBY**, *sixty-one, enters from the house.)*

RUBY. When you gonna get the phone back on? You need a telephone.

KING. Soon as I get two hundred twenty-five dollars.

RUBY. I told Tonya I can go down and put it in my name.

KING. You ain't gonna get my phone on in your name. I'll wait till I get the two hundred and twenty-five dollars. What that look like, having my phone in your name?

RUBY. At least you would have a phone. You can't be without a phone.

KING. I don't need no phone, woman.

RUBY. I thought you was going back to work today.

KING. They didn't give Hop the contract. They was supposed to give him the contract to tear down that hotel in East Liberty. He had the lowest bid but they didn't give him the contract. Now he got to go to court. He's having a hearing on Thursday.

RUBY. How come they didn't give him the contract?

KING. They said his bid was too low. Say he don't know what he doing. He been tearing buildings down his

whole life and all of a sudden he don't know what he doing. They just afraid he gonna make a little bit of money. You got the lowest bid, you supposed to get the contract. They set up the rules and then don't want to follow them themselves.

RUBY. I got a letter from Elmore. He say he coming. Say he want to see you. Don't you be gambling with him when he come. You'll lose all your money.

KING. You ain't got to tell me about gambling with Elmore. He got all my money from the last time. He sold me that watch that quit working as soon as he walked out the door. You ain't got to tell me about Elmore. I know how he do. When he coming?

RUBY. He didn't say.

KING. What he wanna see me about?

RUBY. He say he want to see if you learned anything from being in jail. What you got there? What you doing?

KING. These some seeds. I'm gonna grow Tonya some flowers.

RUBY. You need some good dirt. Them seeds ain't gonna grow in that dirt.

KING. Ain't nothing wrong with this dirt.

RUBY. Get you some good dirt and put them seeds in it if you want them to grow. Your daddy knew what dirt was. He'd tell you you need some good dirt.

KING. This the only dirt I got. This is me right here.

RUBY. You stubborn just like him. You two of a kind. He couldn't get that Jamaican out of him. If he had did that he would have been all right.

KING. Haitian. He wasn't no Jamaican. He was Haitian.

RUBY. Haitian. Jamaican. They all the same. He was from the islands. What you and Mister up to? Tonya said you was selling refrigerators. You all out there stealing refrigerators, you goin' back to jail.

KING. See, there you go. You don't know where we getting them from. We selling them. We ain't stole them.

RUBY. Somebody stole them.

KING. I ain't asked the man where he got them from. He say do I want to sell some refrigerators. I ain't asked him where he got them from. I asked how much he was gonna pay me.

RUBY. What kind is they?

KING. They GE refrigerators. That's the best refrigerator on the market. Mellon got a GE refrigerator.

RUBY. You going back to jail. The police gonna find out. The police know everything.

KING. They don't know everything. They know where the whorehouse is and who sell the liquor after hours. But they don't know everything. They ain't God.

RUBY. What they don't know they find out.

KING. They ain't found out who killed Little Buddy Will in that drive-by on Bryn Mawr Road. His mama find out before they do. 'Cause she out there looking. They ain't found out who set that house on fire when them niggers tried to move out there in Shadyside.

RUBY. You watch what I'm saying. That's why they got the jail full, 'cause they find out who done what. That's their job to find out.

KING. They can find out all they want. I ain't done nothing. Leave me go with my business, woman. When you leaving? It's been two months since Louise died. You come here, call yourself taking care of her. You just come to see what you can get. Talked her into leaving you the house. Now that you got that, why don't you just go on.

RUBY. You watch yourself now. I told you the house was always in my name. It was never Louise's house. I give her the money for the house when I was singing. I sent her every month.

KING. That was money for her taking care of me.

RUBY. You don't know what it was for. Me and Louise had an understanding. I give her money for the house and I give her money for you. You don't know what went

on between me and Louise. You don't know nothing about what happened between us.

KING. I just want to know when you leaving. That's all you can tell me. It's going on three months now.

RUBY. You know what I'm waiting on. As soon as I get the money from the city for the house, I'm leaving.

KING. They got a senior-citizen high-rise right up the street. You can move tomorrow.

RUBY. They got a waiting list. Got over two hundred people on the waiting list. Besides, you got to be on Social Security. I'll be sixty-two next month. I can get my Social Security and won't have to ask nobody for nothing. The city was supposed to let me know how much they was going to give me for the house last week. I told you I was going to give you half of what they give me.

KING. I don't want you to give me nothing. If Hop get that contract, I'm moving. I'm liable to move to California. That way I won't have to put up with you.

RUBY. You watch yourself. I'm still your mama.

KING. My mama dead. Louise my mama. That's the only mama I know.

RUBY. I done told you now.

KING. Where's Tonya?

RUBY. She in the house getting ready.

KING. Tell her to come on.

*(***MISTER** *enters. He dresses neat, his shoes are always shined and he wears a hat. He is always polite and mannerly and has an easy and quick smile. He also carries a 9-mm pistol.)*

MISTER. Hey, King.

RUBY. Hey, Mister!

MISTER. How you doing, Miss Ruby?

RUBY. Give me two dollars. I need to get me some beer.

MISTER. I ain't got no money right now. I ain't got paid yet. They got a crowd of people standing out in front

of Aunt Ester's house. I started to go up there and find out what was going on. Aunt Ester's cat still watching that hole. Been up there two days now. I don't know how it can sit there that long.

KING. If it want that rat bad enough it will sit there till it come out.

MISTER. What you doing all dressed up? Where you going?

KING. Who said I was dressed up? Why I got to be dressed up?

MISTER. 'Cause you is.

KING. How many of the refrigerators you sold?

MISTER. I ain't sold but one. I need me one of them brochures. If I had one of them brochures I could sell a whole lot more. The people want to see what they look like.

KING. I told you I ain't got but one. Here…here…you take it! *(hands* **MISTER** *the brochure)*

MISTER. What model is it?

KING. Tell them you can get any model. What you care? They ain't gonna know the difference. If they do, just tell them it was a mistake. It ain't like they can take it back to the store. Don't tell them you can get the model that make ice, though. That's the only one we ain't got.

RUBY. I done told King…you better watch yourself. You all gonna end up in jail.

MISTER. We ain't doing nothing, Miss Ruby. We businessmen. We salesmen. We appliance salesmen. They might want us to go down to Philadelphia and sell some refrigerators down there. Then we be traveling salesmen.

KING. I might be able to sell some out in East Liberty. I'm taking Tonya to get her picture taken for our anniversary. High school ain't the only one make pictures. Sears make them every day.

MISTER. I always wanted to have my picture taken. You know how you have your picture taken when you pose

for it. I thought that would make you somebody. I posed for the police. They told me I wasn't nothing but a sorry-ass criminal. I say, "Okay just take my picture." They took my picture and I asked the man could I order some for my family and that was the beginning of all the trouble. They put me in the hole for trying to be smart. He don't know I was serious.

RUBY. What they had you down the jail for. Stealing something?

MISTER. Now, Miss Ruby…you ain't never know me to steal nothing.

RUBY. What they have you down there for? That's what most people down there for.

MISTER. They said I stole some TVs. But I didn't do it. Ask King. I knew who done it but I wouldn't tell them. They tried to make it like I did it. The judge threw it out when it come to trial.

RUBY. I know you stole them. I'm just telling you to watch yourself. You and King both.

MISTER. We ain't doing nothing, Miss Ruby.

KING. Hey Mister, do I have a halo around my head?

MISTER. A what?

KING. A halo. Do you see a halo around my head?

MISTER. You ain't got no halo. The devil looking for you and you talking about a halo.

KING. I had this dream last night. I dreamt I had a halo.

MISTER. I dreamt I had a pocketful of money. You see how far that got me. I had so much money I couldn't walk right. They had to put me in a wheelbarrow. I woke up and was still broke.

KING. Naw, I'm serious. I dreamt I had a halo. The police was chasing me and all of a sudden they stopped and just looked at me. I said, "It must be my halo," only I didn't know if it was there or not.

MISTER. I don't know if it's there or not either. Hey Miss Ruby, do you see a halo around King's head?

RUBY. Anybody get their dreams mixed up with real life is headed for Mayview. He gonna beat Stool Pigeon there.

MISTER. Stool Pigeon almost got shot yesterday. People don't like him coming in their yards and taking the lid off the garbage cans so the dogs can eat. One man took a shot at him. Right up there on Webster.

KING. I bet that's one yard he won't go in again.

RUBY. That old fool taking the lids off the garbage cans got all these rats around here. I done told him they gonna put him in Mayview. He wasn't right in 1948 when I met him. And he ain't right now. Got all them papers stacked up over there. You watch and see if they don't put him in Mayview.

KING. *(to* **RUBY***)* Where Tonya? Tell her to come on if she going. What she doing in there? Tell her to come on.

RUBY. *(calls)* Tonya! *(exits into the house)*

MISTER. Hey King, I heard Pernell's cousin's looking for you?

KING. Who? Who's Pernell's cousin?

MISTER. You seen him. He drive a red Buick. Got some light-skinned girl he go around with. He got a goatee. And he wear a yellow hat. Always got on a dark shirt. Riding around in a red Buick with a fake telephone. Look like he done hit the numbers or something.

KING. He got an earring in his ear?

MISTER. That's him!

KING. That's Pernell's cousin?

MISTER. They ran him out of Pittsburgh about ten years ago. He shot them two men out in Homewood Park. Two brothers. Got in an argument over a football game. One of them still walk around crippled. He's back in Pittsburgh now. Came back after Pernell's mother died.

KING. I don't care nothing about him.

MISTER. He care something about you. That's what he be talking. How you done killed Pernell and he never had a chance at life. How you cheated him out of that.

KING. Fuck Pernell!

MISTER. That's what somebody told me he said.

KING. Have a chance at what? What Pernell had a chance at? I never met a nigger that was dumber than him. Anybody flunk the third grade ain't got too much going for them. What chance he have? That show you how dumb Pernell's cousin is. Talking about I cheated him out of a chance at life. The nigger cut my face!

MISTER. He done put it out that he looking for you. He going all around talking about it. He talking blood for blood. You got to watch yourself. You know how Pernell was. His cousin just like him. Pernell was just like his daddy. They was two of a kind.

KING. Them was some sneaky motherfuckers. Him and his daddy both. I'm glad they both dead.

MISTER. They whole family's sneaky.

*(***TONYA** *and* **RUBY** *enter.* **TONYA** *is thirty-five years old. She is wearing a yellow blouse.)*

TONYA. How this look?

MISTER. You look nice. I like that yellow.

TONYA. Natasha think she smart. I told her about wearing my clothes. She done took my red blouse over to my mother's. Got my makeup and everything. She don't know she on borrowed time with me. I was gonna wear my red blouse.

RUBY. I told her she don't need no red.

MISTER. Hey Tonya, I want to get one of them pictures. I'm gonna show everybody and tell them you my sister. Sears got real good color too. They make their pictures look real clear.

RUBY. Sure do. Natasha's pictures turned out real nice.

MISTER. Natasha got them big eyes. The baby look just like her. How she doing? The last time I seen her she had blond streaks in her hair.

TONYA. She over my mother's. I had to send her over there. She think she grown. She don't know what she doing. Said she was going back to school but she change her mind every other week. She was going to hairdressing school but she quit that. Now she's gonna join the Navy. Next week it'll be something else. She don't know what she doing.

MISTER. Hey Tonya, do you see a halo around King's head? He talkin' he dreamt he had a halo. I told him he woke now.

KING. You don't know. I might have dreamt it 'cause it's true.

TONYA. If he did have one it's gone now.

RUBY. I told him he gonna end up in Mayview.

KING. Hey Mister, guess who's coming? Elmore. He say he coming to see what I learned.

RUBY. He need to stay where he at.

MISTER. Hey King, you remember that watch?

KING. Yeah I remember. I'm gonna get Elmore for that.

MISTER. Elmore sold King a watch that quit running two days later.

RUBY. I told King don't you all be gambling with Elmore when he come. You'll lose all your money.

MISTER. I'm gonna get me some crooked dice too. I'm gonna start practicing and be ready when he come. I know how to cheat, too.

RUBY. Elmore got a way with gambling. He don't need to cheat. You'll lose all your money if you gamble with him. I'm telling you.

MISTER. I'm gonna get me some dice and be ready for him. When he coming? Where he at? Last time he was out in California.

KING. I don't know. Hey Ruby where the letter? What the letter say?

RUBY. Talking about he a new man. *(takes a letter out of her pocket and tries to read it)* Here, Tonya, read this. My glasses in the house.

(hands the letter to **TONYA***)*

TONYA. *(reads)*

Dear Ruby,

I know we have had some problems when last I seen you, but I do believe you will be glad to see me as I am sure I will be. You have a hold on me. (Smile.) I am on my way to Cleveland and Pittsburgh is my favorite as I have had a lot of good times. Do you know any gamblers? If so, tell them to get ready as they will surely lose all their money. My oldest boy, Robert, is in the Army and is a sergeant. You remember he liked to play with guns. He says he will make a career. Tell King I am coming to see him. I know he have had some hard times. I want to see if he have learned anything.

*(***KING** *exits into the house.* **TONYA** *continues reading the letter.)*

I guess I will close for now. In a few days I will show you that I miss you, and if you think, you will see that the good times have always outweighed the bad times. My mother died last year and she always remembered you as I have. Look for me and you will see that I am a new man.

Your pal,

Elmore.

*(***TONYA** *hands* **RUBY** *the letter.* **RUBY** *folds it and puts it back in her pocket.)*

RUBY. I don't know why he can't stay where he's at. It ain't never nothing good with him. On one side it seem like he's all right but he'll turn on you every time. He'll flip that other side over on you in a minute. He talk sugar but give salt. 'Cause they both look the same, he don't even know it. He ain't the one that taste it. He need to stay where he's at. I'm getting too old for all this.

TONYA. Tell him not to come.

RUBY. Elmore don't listen to nobody. He don't pay no attention to what you say. He play at good manners but it ain't real. Something's always missing with him. There's always something he ain't got. He don't know what it is himself. If you gave it to him, he wouldn't know he had it. I see him every four or five years. He come on through and always leave more trouble than when he came. Seem like he bring it with him and dump it off. He come and dump off that trouble and then walk out smelling sweet.

MISTER. Ain't nothing wrong with Elmore. Elmore got some style. And he got class.

RUBY. *(to* **MISTER***)* He got some trouble he wanna dump off too. Where your wife? I ain't seen her in a while.

MISTER. My wife took all the furniture and left me. I'm scared to love somebody else.

RUBY. What she leave you for? I know you ain't hit her.

MISTER. She try to get me to change. I was gonna hit her but I changed my mind. She left 'cause I wasn't like she wanted me to be. But she ain't looking at that's what made her like me. I'm thinking she liked me for being me. Come to find out she wanted me to change. The first time I saw her, I knew I was in trouble.

RUBY. You probably was in love and didn't know it. The first time you seen her I bet you was in love.

MISTER. It don't last. First thing you know, she do something to mess it up. We was together four years. I had sixty-seven hopes and dreams but she messed it up.

TONYA. How she mess it up? She might have had a hundred hopes and dreams.

RUBY. You probably ain't treated her right.

MISTER. I treated her better than anybody else gonna treat her. She gonna find that out.

*(***KING** *enters from the house with a Glock 9-mm pistol. He shoves the clip in the gun.)*

KING. Pernell's cousin talking about he looking for me. Naw, I'm looking for him. I want to see him tell me that shit about cheating Pernell out of a chance at life. Come on, Tonya, if you going. Tonya, come on.

*(***KING** *starts out of the yard.* **STOOL PIGEON** *enters in a rush.)*

STOOL PIGEON. Lock your doors! Close your windows! Turn your lamp down low! We in trouble now. Aunt Ester died! She died! She died! She died!

(The lights go down on the scene.)

Scene II

(The lights come up on the yard. **KING** *is watering his seeds.* **STOOL PIGEON**, *carrying two jugs of water, enters from the house.)*

KING. Hey, Stool Pigeon.

STOOL PIGEON. You hear that wind last night? That was God riding through the land. We in trouble now. These niggers don't know but God got a plan. The Bible say, "I will call the righteous out of the land. I will gather thee to thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil that I will bring upon this place."

KING. Sound like he talking about Aunt Ester.

STOOL PIGEON. He had to get her out of the way before he bring the fire.

KING. Them people still up there standing around her house.

STOOL PIGEON. They been up there ever since the word got out about her dying. The Bible say to mourn for three days. Some people say you supposed to wait till they put the body in the ground. They done started their three days already.

KING. I went up and asked Mr. Eli. I'm gonna be a pallbearer.

STOOL PIGEON. I'm going up there and take the people these blankets. I'm gonna see if he want me to do anything.

KING. Hey Stool Pigeon. Do you see a halo around my head?

STOOL PIGEON. Aunt Ester's the one to ask about that. But it's too late now. She's gone. She ain't here no more. Aunt Ester knew all the secrets of life but that's all gone now. She took all that with her. I don't know what we gonna do. We in trouble now.

KING. Look at this. That's a gold key ring Aunt Ester gave me. I used to cut her grass and keep the path clear.

One day she come out on the porch and gave me that key ring.

STOOL PIGEON. "And the people went out and made idols and graven images of gold and silver in blasphemy against the Lord, and the Key was given unto the righteous that they might enter the kingdom for the scourge was upon the land and the wrath of the Lord God Jehovah was visited upon every house." You see, the Key belongs to the righteous. Aunt Ester gave you the key ring, that means you got to find the Key.

KING. Mr. Eli say she died from grief.

STOOL PIGEON. Died with her hand stuck to her head. She ain't seen nothing but grief. After three hundred and sixty-six years it ganged up on her. These niggers think it's a joke. But they don't know. The Spirit of God went out upon the waters and it commenced to rain. For forty days and forty nights. God already done that. He don't have to do that no more. He say next time he gonna come with the fire. Say he will bring it down upon the earth with a vengeance. I had a preacher say that once. "God will bring down fire on the earth with a vengeance." He say "You know what that mean?" Everybody say "Amen." He kept asking so I figured he wanted to know. He say "You know what that mean?" So I stood up and said, "Yeah, that mean He gonna fuck it up." They threw me out the church. For telling the truth!

KING. I went down to the drugstore and get Aunt Ester her medicine every week. Seem like it didn't do her no good.

STOOL PIGEON. God got a plan. That medicine can't go against God. God do what he want to do. He don't have to ask nobody nothing. Say, "I will call the righteous out of the land and raise up in thy midst a Messiah from amongst my people to redeem thy iniquities and he shall by the remission of blood make whole that which is torn asunder even though it be scattered to the four winds, for great is my name and ye shall know by these

signs the coming of a new day." See. He talking about the Messiah. He had to get Aunt Ester out of the way. God got a plan.

MISTER. *(entering from the street)* Hey, King. Hey, Stool Pigeon. Are your lights still out?

KING. They supposed to have them back on today.

STOOL PIGEON. They went out all over the city when Aunt Ester died. She died and all the lights went out. God got a plan.

MISTER. Them people still up there on the corner in front of Aunt Ester's house.

STOOL PIGEON. They ain't going nowhere. They gonna be standing up there until they put her body in the ground. I'm taking them some water before I go down to Pat's Place to get my papers. *(exits)*

KING. I thought you was at work.

MISTER. I called in late.

KING. If I was you, I would have been done quit. You was supposed to get a raise three months ago. Go down there and tell them people to give you a raise.

MISTER. They say they got to wait till they get some orders.

KING. That ain't your fault. If they can't get no business, tell them to close down. You working every day.

MISTER. We got a big order coming in this week. I'm gonna wait and see. You see Pernell's cousin?

KING. I went down to the 88 looking for him. I didn't see him. Somebody say he be up on Herron Avenue. I went up there and didn't see him.

MISTER. Sometime he be out in Homewood.

KING. I'm goin' out there and look for him. When I find him, that'll be the last time we see each other.

*(***KING** *points to a small barely discernible spot of green growing where he planted the seeds.)*

Look at that. See that growing. See that!

MISTER. Yeah, I see.

KING. Ruby tell me my dirt ain't worth nothing. It's mine. It's worth it to have. I ain't gonna let nobody take it. Talking about I need some good dirt. Like my dirt ain't worth nothing. A seed is a seed. A seed will grow in dirt. Look at that!

MISTER. Yeah, I see.

KING. How many of them refrigerators you sell?

MISTER. I sold two more. One man owe me fifty dollars. He say he gonna pay me on Tuesday. How many you sell?

KING. I sold three. That make seven. We ain't got but four more days to sell as many as we can, then they gonna move them down to Philadelphia and we be done missed our opportunity.

MISTER. I be asking everybody.

KING. You just ain't asked the right people.

MISTER. It ain't like they TVs. TVs would be easier.

KING. This better than TVs. Everybody already got a TV. But everybody be thinking about getting a new refrigerator. Only they don't never get around to it. That's when you walk up and offer them a brand-new GE refrigerator for two hundred dollars. That make you a hero. People be seeing you ten years from now smile when they see you. They don't never forget where they got that refrigerator from.

MISTER. Hey King, I was thinking… I want to get my money out the pot. I need to get me some furniture.

KING. Naw, naw. We supposed to get the video store! We split the pot and there won't be nothing to get it with. We got around six thousand dollars. We don't need but four more. I ain't gonna be poor all my life. See, you don't believe it.

MISTER. I believe it. I just need me some furniture.

KING. I need too! I need two hundred and twenty-five dollars to get my phone back on. Natasha talked to some nigger from Baltimore for six hours. I need, too, but you don't hear me talking about dipping in the

pot. See, 'cause I believe. I look at that sign say "Miller Auto Parts." Niggers don't believe it can say "Hedley Auto Parts." Or "Carter Auto Parts." Or you can have one say "Royal Videos." How you think Miller got that auto-parts store? 'Cause he didn't dip in the pot.

MISTER. I need to get me some money. We can get the video store later. I just want my money. It's been sitting in the pot all that time. I don't even know where the pot is. You say you got it but I ain't seen it. I just want my money.

KING. We already talked to the man about renting the place. He say to come back when we ready. We almost ready. Now you talking about splitting the pot. You want your money. That's why niggers ain't got nothing now. They don't believe!

MISTER. I just want my money. I need it. I got to get me some furniture.

KING. I need the money from the refrigerators to get my phone back on. Tonya pregnant. She want a car. I got to buy a crib. A stroller. Got to figure out how to get Ruby one of these refrigerators. I got the light bill. The gas bill. Got to get some food. But I ain't said nothing about splitting the pot. You supposed to pretend like it ain't there.

MISTER. I didn't know Tonya was pregnant.

KING. I just found out myself. Remember when we used to play touch football and everybody looking at me and we'd do that double reverse and I'd hand off to you.

MISTER. That was a touchdown every time.

KING. I used to tell Neesi I wanted to have a baby. Wanted somebody to hand off the ball to. Took me all this time. Now Tonya pregnant. It's like I finally did something right. That's why you got to leave your money in the pot. I don't want him to grow up without nothing.

MISTER. I'm supposed to get a raise on my job but I can't count on that. I need someplace to sleep. I just want my money. We can start another pot later.

KING. Okay. Okay. That jewelry store we was talking about and I told you I didn't want to do that.

MISTER. Down there on Fifth Avenue by Tobin's Distributors? I told you we can take that easy. Might get around twenty or thirty thousand. The least would be around ten thousand.

KING. Leave your money in the pot. We hit that jewelry store, we have enough to get the video store and you can still get some furniture.

MISTER. All right. When you wanna do it? We got to do it soon. I need me some furniture. I can take off work Wednesday. That's as good a time as any. Wednesday a slow day.

KING. All right. We'll do it Wednesday. Where Deanna go? Over to her mother's?

MISTER. Yeah, she over there. She bumped into a door and told her mother I hit her. Her mother called me up threatening me.

KING. That's what mothers supposed to do. You think she gonna call you up and talk sweet to you? Mothers look out for their kids. That's why Little Buddy Will's mother is out there in the street with her nine-millimeter looking for whoever killed her son. Mothers supposed to threaten you. Just make sure she ain't hanging around your front doorstep.

MISTER. Her mother might have her boyfriend come after me. I don't know. But you know I'm always ready for whatever go down.

KING. You just be ready to sell some more refrigerators.

MISTER. I sold more than you.

KING. I said just be ready to sell some more. We hit that jewelry store, I can put my life back in order. Only thing, I got to get Neesi off my mind. Every day it be the same. I can't carry her no more. It hurts. I thought Tonya would help. She made it worse. She showed me a lot of woman. All the woman she could be. I told myself I ain't gonna measure it. I ain't gonna measure

one against the other. They really about the same. Only thing, I can't get Neesi off my mind. That's my one wish.

MISTER. That be hard. Maybe if you don't try and put her off your mind, she'll go away. Like I can't remember a lot of things 'cause I ain't trying to forget them. If I was trying to forget them they be on my mind. Either that or they got some medicine make you forget things. Only thing with that is sometimes you forget your name.

KING. I'll try anything but I don't think it'll work. I went out and visited her grave yesterday. I feel like there's something I want to tell her but I don't know what it is. I was just thinking about the way she made me laugh. She'd say something and make it like she was joking with me, like it was good to be alive and she was just discovering that. Ain't too many people make me laugh. A lot more of them would make me want to kill. She made me do both. She was funny like that. Shed give you the strength, like you say, "I'm gonna kill Pernell," and the next thing you say is, "No, I ain't gonna kill him," and then she just look at you like you was King of the world and that's when you say, "Yeah, I can kill him and kill him good." That's the way she was. She turned state's evidence and I didn't laugh for a long while.

MISTER. She got scared and the police tricked her. She thought they was going to put her in jail.

KING. I know. I don't blame her. She blamed herself but she knew I didn't blame her.

MISTER. Neesi was special.

KING. I used to tell her I'd give her her weight in gold if she just whisper my name.

MISTER. I felt real bad when I heard she got killed in that car crash.

KING. They wouldn't even let me go to the funeral. Talking about she wasn't family.

MISTER. I know. I put a rose in her casket for you.

KING. Hey, we got the lights back.

*(***STOOL PIGEON** *enters carrying a bundle of newspapers.)*

STOOL PIGEON. *(reading newspaper)* "House Collapses in West End."

KING. Hey, Stool Pigeon.

STOOL PIGEON. *(showing them a newspaper)* God knocking down houses! He got Aunt Ester out the way and now he knocking down houses. Soon he gonna come with the fire.

MISTER. That's the wind blowing down that house.

STOOL PIGEON. God tell the wind what to do! He say, "Go blow that house down," and the wind go blow it down. You think Peter Wolf was bad! He blow down the sticks and the straw When it come to the brick he can't do nothing with it. But God can blow down the brick! You ever see it get so hot you can fry an egg on the sidewalk? That's God frying that egg! God's a bad motherfucker! He tell the sun and the moon what to do. You think the devil do that? The devil have a hard enough time trying to get your black ass to do something. Most times you have to hear the devil twice. God say something and you come to attention right away. He knocking down houses now but soon he gonna come with the fire. God's a bad motherfucker.

MISTER. Why you save all them newspapers? What you gonna do with them?

STOOL PIGEON. See I know what went on. I ain't saying what goes on…what went on. You got to know that. How you gonna get on the other side of the valley if you don't know that? You can't guess on it…you got to know. Look at that. *(showing them another newspaper)* "Man Bludgeons Schoolteacher." See? You got to know that. "City's Tax Levy Challenged." See? You got to know that. Some people don't mind guessing…but I got to know. If you want to know, you can ask me and I'll go look it up. The valley's got a lot of twists and

turns. You can get lost in the daytime! Look at that: "Man Stabs Assailant." See? You got to know that. If you don't, you gonna find out soon enough.

*(***RUBY** *enters from the house.)*

RUBY. You old buzzard! Go on in the house!

STOOL PIGEON. I don't want you, woman!

RUBY. Go on in the house! You need to throw them papers out. Can't even walk in there.

STOOL PIGEON. You mind your business now.

RUBY. This is my business. I'm going down to Pat's Place and tell them to stop saving them papers for you. I don't know why they give them to you. That's a firetrap. I'm gonna tell your landlord you got all them papers stored in there. If he don't do nothing I'm gonna call right down there to the city. They gonna send the fire inspector.

STOOL PIGEON. I ain't studying you, woman. The Bible say your enemies cannot harm you. Say "He that set his tongue against you shall I cause to rue all his misspoken words for a lie maketh the tongue swell with folly and the taste shall be as bile and a bitter reward shall be his just dessert." That's in the Bible! Roman 14:12. You know what that means, don't you? That means you can go to hell! *(exits into his house)*

RUBY. You can't even walk in there. He got all them papers stacked all over the place. You got to turn sideways. He think I'm playing but I am gonna call down there to the city. They don't allow that. They had that woman had sixty-seven cats. They made her get rid of them and if I call down there to the city they gonna make him get rid of them papers. King, give me twenty dollars to get Aunt Ester some flowers.

KING. You can't get no flowers for twenty dollars.

RUBY. Give me thirty then. I want to get her some flowers. She was real nice to me.

KING. I ain't got no thirty dollars. I'm trying to get the phone back on.

MISTER. I'll loan you thirty dollars, Miss Ruby. When you gonna pay me back?

RUBY. When I get it. I can't pay you otherwise.

*(***MISTER** *gives* **RUBY** *thirty dollars.)*

MISTER. Could you put my name on there too?

RUBY. I would. But this is something special between me and Aunt Ester. She was real nice to me.

MISTER. I got to get on to work. We got some orders we got to get out this week. Hey King, I'm gonna take off Wednesday and we can take care of our business.

RUBY. What you all got to do Wednesday? You all up to something.

KING. This my business, woman. Why don't you leave me go with my business. You ain't got to watch over me. You wasn't watching over me when you took off to East St. Louis and left me here with Mama Louise. You wasn't watching over me then. I don't need you to tell me nothing. Your time to tell me done come and gone.

RUBY. You watch yourself now.

(There's a knock on the front door.)

Somebody knocking on my door. *(calls)* Who is it? Who knocking on my door?

*(***ELMORE** *enters. He is sixty-six years old. The consummate hustler, he is stylishly dressed, though his clothes are well-worn and his overall look is a man whose life is fraying at the edges. Still, he exudes an air of elegance and confidence born of his many years wrestling with life. He stop and looks at* **RUBY**. *They look at each other a long while.)*

ELMORE. Here I am, on your hands again.

RUBY. You ain't good for nothing.

ELMORE. How you doing, Ruby?

RUBY. I'm doing. I'm doing without you.

ELMORE. You look like you doing all right. Did you get my letter? *(notices* **KING***)* Hey, King. Your mama tell you I was coming to see you?

*(***KING** *and* **ELMORE** *shake hands.)*

KING. Hey Elmore, why you sell me that watch?

ELMORE. 'Cause you wanted to buy it. I wanna see you happy. I don't want to sell you nothing you don't want.

KING. That wasn't right.

ELMORE. How else you gonna learn? I bet you ain't bought no more.

RUBY. Where your suitcase?

ELMORE. They in the car.

RUBY. You can sleep on the couch.

KING. You remember Mister?

ELMORE. How you doing?

*(***ELMORE** *and* **MISTER** *shake hands.)*

MISTER. I like that hat.

ELMORE. I got this in New York.

KING. Mister say he want to shoot some crap.

MISTER. I ain't got my dice yet.

ELMORE. I got some dice.

MISTER. Naw naw, we don't shoot no crap. We got us another thing going.

ELMORE. I told your mother if she knew any gamblers to let them know I was coming. I'm always looking for a crap game.

RUBY. That's the first thing come out his mouth. He can't even get in the door good before he looking for a crap game. Where my present? Why didn't you bring me a present?

ELMORE. I got it in the car. You know I got you a present. As many presents as I done give you. That's what I used to live for.

RUBY. That's what I say. I know you didn't come without a present. You got good manners. I know that.

KING. You want to buy a refrigerator? We selling refrigerators.

ELMORE. I don't need no refrigerator. No stove either. I'm traveling light.

RUBY. Come on in the house, let me fix you something to eat. I know you hungry. Come on, I'll *fry you* some chicken.

(exits into the house)

ELMORE. You selling refrigerators, huh?

KING. Yeah, me and Mister. How many you want to buy?

ELMORE. Where you get them from?

KING. Some white fellow I was in the penitentiary with ask me do I want to sell some refrigerators. I ain't asked him where he got them from, I just asked him how much he was gonna pay me.

ELMORE. How many you got?

KING. We got as many as you want. Different sizes. Some of them is great big twenty cubic.

MISTER. We sold sixteen already.

ELMORE. Where they at?

KING. I ain't saying where they at. They could be anywhere. The rail yard. In a truck. If I could have fit them upstairs they'd be up there. I ain't saying where they at. If you want to buy one I'll show you a picture.

ELMORE. I ain't said I want to buy one.

*(***KING** *takes the brochure from* **MISTER**.*)*

KING. Look at that. Which one you want? I'll let you have any one for two hundred dollars. There's some models we ain't got. We ain't got that one make its own ice. It'll cost you four hundred if we had it.

ELMORE. I want to see these refrigerators.

KING. Naw…naw, we can't let you do that.

ELMORE. I don't believe you got them.

KING. That's all right. Put in your order and see how fast one of them turn up on your doorstep. Delivered free. Come to think of it, we should charge twenty dollars for the delivery.

ELMORE. I don't want to buy none. I was gonna help you sell them. I always say three salesman is better than two. That way you sell three times as much. How much you gonna give me if I sell one?

KING. We'll give you twenty-five dollars.

ELMORE. Make it thirty. I got to cover my overhead.

KING. What overhead you got, nigger? You ain't got no overhead.

ELMORE. I got to get me some gas. I use up all my gas riding around trying to find somebody to buy a refrigerator. Ain't no tell how much you got to ride around. Now if you had some TVs, that be a different thing.

MISTER. That's what I told him.

KING. Naw… You can sell a refrigerator just as quick as you can a TV. You might sell it quicker. The trick is to find somebody with two hundred dollars. If they could make payments they be all right. But this is two hundred dollars cash money.

ELMORE. Make it thirty. I got to pay for my gas.

KING. All right. Thirty. We got till Friday. Else they be gone.

MISTER. We can't let them sit in one place too long.

KING. We got till Friday to sell as many as we can.

MISTER. Then they going down to Philadelphia.

KING. We selling refrigerators right now but me and Mister gonna open up a video store. We almost got all the money.

MISTER. And we gonna get the rest soon.

ELMORE. I don't know nothing about no video store but if you get you a little place and sell some fried chicken and put you a gambling room in the back…then you got something there. I'll go in with you on something

like that but I don't know nothing about no video store.

KING. That's all right. We know. We gonna call it Royal Videos.

MISTER. We gonna specialize in kung-fu movies.

KING. If everything go right, we liable to end up with Royal Videos in fifty states.

RUBY. *(calling from inside the house)* Elmore…come on.

KING. He's coming!

*(***STOOL PIGEON** *enters from his house with a bowl of chili and a newspaper. He sits on his steps and eats and reads.)*

STOOL PIGEON. Pirates winning four to two.

ELMORE. Who's that?

MISTER. That's Stool Pigeon. He don't bother nobody.

STOOL PIGEON. My name ain't Stool Pigeon. My name is Canewell. I *try* to tell these niggers that.

ELMORE. How you doing? I'm Elmore.

STOOL PIGEON. Yeah, I heard a lot about you.

MISTER. I got to get to work. Get me some money. The white man got all the money.

ELMORE. Money ain't nothing. I ain't had but a dollar sixty-seven cents when I met your mama. I had a hundred-dollar Stetson hat, a pint of gin and a razor. That and a dollar sixty-seven cents. I'm walking around with a hundred-dollar hat and a dollar and sixty-seven cents in my pocket. I told myself, "Something wrong. This ain't working out right." The razor was my daddy's razor. He had cut him eleven niggers with that razor. Had good weight to it. Felt nice in your hands. Make you wanna cut somebody. The pint of gin I had just borrowed from the after-hour joint. I stepped outside and saw her standing there. I asked her name and she told me. Told me say, "My name's Ruby." And somehow that fit her like she was a jewel or something precious. That's what I told her say, "You must be precious to

somebody." She told me she ain't had nobody. We got to talking and one thing led to another. I took and spent a dollar sixty cents on her. Bought me a nickel cigar. Now I got a razor, a pint of gin, a hundred-dollar Stetson, a cigar, two cents and a woman. I was ready for whatever was out there. I woke up in the morning and felt lucky. Pawned my Stetson. Got seven dollars and went down the gambling joint. Playing dollar tonk. Left out of there broke. She back at my place waiting on me. I got to at least bring dinner. I looked up and seen a white fellow standing on the corner. He wasn't doing anything. Just standing there. Had on a gray hat. I told myself, "He got some money." I walked right on by. I didn't look at him. When I got even with him, I threw him up against the wall. I told myself I wasn't gonna use my razor unless I had to. He gave me his money and I started to run. I can't walk away. I'm running but I ain't running fast. I heard the bullet when it passed me. That's a sound I don't never want to hear again. You can hear the air move. When that bullet split the air, it make a sound. If you don't know I will tell you. You can fly. I was running so fast my feet wasn't touching the ground. Yet I moving through the air. What I'm doing? I'm flying. Ain't nothing else you can call it. I got away and told myself I was lucky. Then I knew why I had woke up feeling like that. When I got to where I could look in my hand to see what I had. I looked down and I had seven dollars. I told myself, hell, if I could get fifty cents I can go back and get my hat out of the pawn shop. Call it even. Start over again tomorrow.

RUBY. *(offstage)* Elmore!

STOOL PIGEON. *(showing newspaper)* Look at that! "City Violence Escalates. Teen Killed in Drive-By." You got to know that!

ELMORE. "Teen Killed in Drive-By." I'm tired of hearing that. See…a man has got to have honor. A man ain't got no honor can't be a man. He can only play at being a man. He can pretend to be a man. But if he ain't

got no honor it'll tell on him every time. When the time come to be honorable you can't find him. Now what is honor? You ever seen that movie where this man goes to kill this other man and he got his back to him and he tell him to turn around so he can see his eyes? That's honor. A man got to have that else he ain't a man. You can't be no man stealing somebody's life from the backseat of a Toyota. That's why the black man's gonna catch hell for the next hundred years. These kids gonna grow up and get old and ain't a man among them.

KING. It used to be you get killed over something. Now you get killed over nothing.

MISTER. You might look at somebody wrong and get in a fight and get killed over that.

STOOL PIGEON. I seen a man get killed over a fish sandwich. Right down there at Seefus'. Had two fish sandwiches…one with hot sauce and one without. Somebody got them mixed up and these two fellows got to arguing over them. The next thing you know it was a surprise to God to find out that one of them had six bullet holes in him.

ELMORE. That's why I carry my pistol. They got too many fools out there.

KING. What you carrying?

ELMORE. I got me a Smith & Wesson Thirty-Eight Special.

MISTER. King got a Glock. I told him a Beretta be better.

KING. Any gun will kill. It don't matter how pretty the gun and it don't matter what size the hole.

ELMORE. Everybody walking around with big forty-fours leave a hole in you the size of a cantaloupe. I tried one of them but it made my shoulder sore. I didn't want to end up crippled so I went out and bought me a Smith & Wesson Thirty-Eight Special in 1959 and I ain't been without it since. I'm a gunfighter. That stop somebody dead in his tracks.

STOOL PIGEON. You a gunfighter, but God's a firefighter. God got the fire. Your little old pistol can't stand up

against God. The atomic bomb can't stand up against God. He say "I will smite my enemies. I will make battlefields out of the pastures and send a rain of fire on the earth so that all may know I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Numberless are my wonders and my vengeance is twice-fold." Twice-fold! God is a motherfucker!

ELMORE. Let's leave God out of it. God ain't got nothing to do with it. We ain't talking about God. We talking about something else. You know how many people crying, "Lord have mercy"? I don't want to hear nothing about God. Billy Cisco crying, "Lord have mercy" and got hit by a truck. Myrtle Johnson. 1522 Stemrod Street down in Montgomery, Alabama. Had eight kids get burned up in a fire. Where was God at then?

STOOL PIGEON. Job said, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away."

ELMORE. I don't want to hear nothing about Job. I'm talking about Myrtle Johnson. That's who I'm talking about.

STOOL PIGEON. "All the trials and tribulations that prevail against you shall come to naught for I shall be a protection and a fortress for thee."

ELMORE. Go tell that to Myrtle Johnson.

STOOL PIGEON. She know. God's a Great Comforter. There is a Balm in Gilead even though some people don't think so.

ELMORE. I don't want to hear that. God ain't got nothing to do with it.

KING. God's only in charge of some things.

ELMORE. You in charge. Who else gonna be in charge but you? It's your life. I'm sixty-six years old and I can do anything I want. I don't have to ask nobody nothing. If I can bear up under the consequences I can make a pit bull shit bricks and don't have to tell nobody how or why I done it.'Cause I'm the boss.

KING. I set me out a little circle and anything come inside my circle I say what happen and don't happen. God's

in charge of some things. If I jump up and shoot you I ain't gonna blame it on God. That's where I'm the boss… I can decide whether you live or die. I'm in charge of that.

ELMORE. Naw, naw, wait a minute…you ain't in charge of whether I live or die.

KING. Who's in charge? It ain't God.

ELMORE. I'm in charge! I ain't gonna just let you up and kill me. If it come to that it be me or you.

KING. See what I'm saying? That's the way it was with Pernell. It was me or him. Only I was in charge. I was the boss that day. And I'm in charge today.

ELMORE. Question: What if you in somebody else's circle and you don't know it? And all the time you thinking you in charge?

KING. They got a name for that.

MISTER. It's called a rude awakening.

ELMORE. The reason I ask is 'cause you all already in my circle.

KING. You might wake up and find out otherwise.

*(***TONYA**, *upset, enters from the street.)*

MISTER. Hey Tonya.

*(***TONYA** *ignores everyone and continues into the house.)*

She mad about something.

KING. Tonya… Tonya!

*(***TONYA** *exits without answering.* **KING** *follows her.)*

MISTER. I got to get to work. I'm gonna be late again. *(exits)*

KING. *(offstage)* Tonya!

RUBY. *(offstage)* Leave her alone.

KING. *(offstage)* What's the matter?

TONYA. *(offstage)* You ain't got nothing to do with this.

*(***ELMORE** *exits into the house.)*

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