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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

August Wilson's Ma Rainey's Black Bottom

SAMUEL FRENCH

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Licensees will need to acquire public domain recordings of "See See Rider" (also "C.C. Rider") by Ma Rainey and "Trust No Man" by Lillian Hardeway Henderson.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM by August Wilson, opened at the Yale Repertory Theatre on April 6, 1984; directed by Lloyd Richards; settings designed by Charles Henry McClennahan; costumes designed by Daphne Pascucci; lighting designed by Peter Maradudin; musical direction by Dwight Andrews; stage managed by K. White; with the following cast:

STURDYVANT . . . . . Richard M. Davidson
IRVIN . . . . . Lou Criscuolo
CUTLER . . . . . Joe Seneca
TOLEDO . . . . . Robert Judd
SLOW DRAG . . . . . Leonard Jackson
LEVEE . . . . . Charles S. Dutton
MA RAINEY . . . . . Theresa Merritt
POLICEMAN . . . . . David Wayne Nelson
DUSSIE MAE . . . . . Aleta Mitchell
SYLVESTER . . . . . Steven R. Blye

MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM by August Wilson, opened at the Cort Theatre on October 11, 1984; directed by Lloyd Richards; settings designed by Charles Henry McClennahan; costumes designed by Daphne Pascucci; lighting designed by Peter Maradudin; musical direction by Dwight Andrews; stage managed by Mortimer Halpern; with the following cast:

STURDYVANT . . . . . John Carpenter
IRVIN . . . . . Lou Criscuolo
CUTLER . . . . . Joe Seneca
TOLEDO . . . . . Robert Judd
SLOW DRAG . . . . . Leonard Jackson
LEVEE . . . . . Charles S. Dutton
MA RAINEY . . . . . Theresa Merritt
DUSSIE MAE . . . . . Aleta Mitchell
SYLVESTER . . . . . Scott Davenport-Richards
POLICEMAN . . . . . Christopher Loomis

Originally produced on the New York stage by Robert Cole, Ivan Bloch and Fred Zollo.

CHARACTERS

STURDYVANT

IRVIN

CUTLER

TOLEDO

SLOW DRAG

LEVEE

MA RAINEY

POLICEMAN

DUSSIE MAE

SYLVESTER

ACT ONE

(Sound: A female vocal rendition of "C.C. Rider." Lights: Fade to black, then after a moment, a warm glow fades up in the front hall from the overhead fixture spilling in through the double door windows, creating a dim glow in the Studio, and cool daylight fades up, streaming through the dirty casement window in the Bandroom. Sound: The song ends.)

*(***STURDYVANT** *enters down the Front Hall carrying a small bundle, followed by* **IRVIN**. **STURDYVANT** *flips a light switch left of the double doors. [Lights: The overhead practicals go on, generally illuminating the studio.]* **STURDYVANT** *quickly surveys the studio, moves toward the spiral staircase and finds his path blocked by the wooden stool. He moves the stool toward the right wall and starts to climb the staircase as* **IRVIN** *crosses to the radiator.* **IRVIN** *shivers, touches the radiator and turns the valve.* **STURDYVANT** *reaches the top of the staircase, opens the control booth door and flips a switch just inside the door.)*

([Lights: The lamps come on in the Control Booth and the stairwell of the spiral staircase.] **STURDYVANT** *unwraps the bundle revealing recording discs, which he begins to examine as* **IRVIN** *crosses to the singer's platform, picks up the music stand, moves the cane chair off the platform to the right, and crosses to the left door.* **IRVIN** *opens the door, exits into the back hall and disappears into a closet to the right.)*

([Lights: The closet light comes up, dimly illuminating the back hall and a descending step to the left.] **IRVIN** *returns carrying a microphone with a coiled cable on a tall stand. He places it in the center of the singer's platform, uncoils the mic cable, plugs it into the upstage left jack box, then returns to the mic.* **IRVIN** *cranes his neck to blow into mic, taps it a few times, glances up to the control booth, shrugs his shoulders, then crosses to the piano as* **STURDYVANT** *looks up and puts on his headphones.* **IRVIN** *reaches for the piano keys.)*

STURDYVANT. *(Speaks into the control booth microphone and is heard over speaker horn in the Studio.)* Irv…let's check that mic, huh?

*(***IRVIN** *steps away from the piano, points at the mic and nods his head. Into the booth mic:)*

Let's do a check on it.

IRVIN. *(Sighs, crosses to the mic and speaks into it.)* Testing… One… Two… Three…

([Sound: A piercing squeal of feedback over the horn speaker.] **IRVIN** *covers his ears in pain and glares at* **STURDYVANT**. **STURDYVANT** *turns upstage and adjusts the dials on the mixer.* **IRVIN** *speaks into the mic again. Cautiously:)*

Testing… One… Two… Three… Testing…

*(***STURDYVANT** *takes off his headphones and examines the recording discs.)*

How's that, Mel? *(***IRVIN** *pauses, then continues loudly.)* Testing… One… Two…

STURDYVANT. *(Looks at* **IRVIN**, *hastily, into the booth mic:)* Okay…that checks. We got a good reading.

*(***IRVIN** *crosses to the music stand upstage right. Into the booth mic:)*

You got that list, Irv?

IRVIN. *(Picks up the music stand and crosses toward the left door.)* Yeah…yeah I got it. Don't worry about nothing. *(Exits through the left doorway and into the closet.)*

STURDYVANT. *(Into the booth mic.)* Listen, Irv…you keep her in line, okay? *(***IRVIN** *returns, crosses to downstage right of the piano and looks at* **STURDYVANT**. *Into the booth mic:)* I'm holding you responsible for her…if she starts any of her…

IRVIN. Mel…what's with the goddamn horn? You wanna talk to me…okay! I can't talk to you over the goddamn horn…christ!

STURDYVANT. *(Into the booth mic.)* I'm not putting up with any of her shenanigans. You hear? Irv?

> *(***IRVIN** *crosses to the piano and bangs on the keys.* **STURDYVANT** *tries to yell over the cacophony, into the booth mic.)*

I'm just not gonna stand for it. I want you to keep her in line. Irv? *(***STURDYVANT** *leaves the control booth, bounds down the spiral staircase and lands right of* **IRVIN**. **IRVIN** *stops pounding the piano keys.)* Listen, Irv…you're her manager…she's your responsibility…

IRVIN. *(Crosses below* **STURDYVANT** *to the double doors.)* Okay, okay, Mel…let me handle it.

STURDYVANT. *(Fuming.)* She's your responsibility. I'm not putting up with any of this Royal Highness… Queen of the Blues bullshit!

IRVIN. *(Humorously.)* Mother of the Blues, Mel. Mother of the *Blues*. *(***IRVIN** *opens the upstage side of the double doors and goes into the Front Hall.)*

STURDYVANT. *(He crosses to the double doors, grabs the door and holds it open.* **IRVIN** *hangs his hat and coat on the wall hooks.)* I don't care what she calls herself. I'm not putting up with it. I just want to get her in here… record those songs on that list…and get her out. Just like clockwork, huh?

IRVIN. *(Crosses through the open door to left of* **STURDYVANT**.*)* Like clockwork, Mel. You just stay out of the way and let me handle it.

STURDYVANT. *(Lets the door swing shut, crosses to the radiator and turns the valve, as* **IRVIN** *picks up two of the wooden folding chairs and crosses toward the singer's platform.)* Yeah…yeah…you handled it last time.

*(***IRVIN** *unfolds one chair and places it upstage left of the platform.)*

Remember? She marches in here like she owns the damn place…doesn't like the songs we picked out… says her throat is sore…doesn't want to do more than one take…

IRVIN. *(Unfolds the other chair and sets it upstage right of the platform, over the mic cable.)* Okay…okay… I was here! I know all about it.

STURDYVANT. *(He crosses below* **IRVIN** *to the microphone as* **IRVIN** *counters to the radiator.* **STURDYVANT** *lowers the mic stand to its lowest position, moves it to the left edge of the platform. He lifts the left folding chair, picks up the mic cable and reroutes it to left of the left folding chair.)* Complains about the building being cold…and then…trips over the mic wire and threatens to sue me. That's taking care of it?

IRVIN. *(Touches the radiator and turns the valve.)* I've got it all worked out this time. I talked with her last night. Her throat is fine…we went over the songs together… I got everything straight, Mel. *(Crosses to right of* **STURDYVANT**.*)*

STURDYVANT. Irv, that hornplayer…the one who gave me those songs… Is he going to be here?

IRVIN. Yeah.

STURDYVANT. Good. I want to hear more of that sound. Times are changing. This is a tricky business now. We've got to jazz it up…put in something different. You know, something wild…with a lot of rhythm.

*(***IRVIN** *looks at him blankly.)*

STURDYVANT. You know what we put out last time, Irv? We put out garbage last time.

*(***IRVIN** *crosses to the left door and exits right into closet as* **STURDYVANT** *straightens the folding chairs.)*

It was garbage. I don't even know why I bother with this anymore.

IRVIN. *(Returns from the closet carrying a crate of empty Coke bottles and crosses toward the double doors.)* You did alright last time, Mel. Not as good as before, but you did alright.

STURDYVANT. You know how many records we sold in New York? You wanna see the sheet? And you know what's in New York, Irv? Harlem.

*(***IRVIN** *opens the upstage side of the double doors, crosses into the Front Hall and the door swings shut.* **STURDYVANT** *shouts.)*

Harlem's in New York, Irv.

*(***IRVIN** *props the crate against the downstage right wall.)*

IRVIN. *(Crosses through the double doors to right of* **STURDYVANT**.*)* Okay, so they didn't sell in New York. But look at Memphis… Birmingham… Atlanta…Christ…you made a bundle.

STURDYVANT. It's not the money, Irv. You know I couldn't sleep last night? This business is bad for my nerves. My wife is after me to slow down and take a vacation. Two more years and I'm gonna get out…get into something respectable. Textiles. That's a respectable business. You know what you could do with a shipload of textiles from Ireland?

([Sound: A door buzzer is heard from off right.] **IRVIN** *and* **STURDYVANT** *look at one another, relieved.)*

IRVIN. Why don't you go upstairs and let me handle it, Mel?

STURDYVANT. Remember…you're responsible for her.

*(***IRVIN** *crosses through the double doors and exits upstage the Front Hall as* **STURDYVANT** *climbs the spiral staircase, goes into the Control Booth and closes the door behind him.)*

IRVIN. *(From off right.)* How you boys doing, Cutler? Come on in.

*(***TOLEDO** *enters down the Front Hall, carrying a book and a newspaper, goes through the double doors and holds the upstage side of the double doors open as* **CUTLER** *enters, carrying a trombone case and a guitar case, followed by* **SLOW DRAG**, *struggling with a string bass in a soft case.* **CUTLER** *crosses to above the folding chairs and puts the cases on the floor.* **SLOW DRAG** *lays down his bass right of the cane chair.* **IRVIN** *enters down the Front Hall and crosses into the Studio.)*

Where's Ma? Is she with you?

CUTLER. I don't know, Mr. Irvin. She told us to be here at one o'clock. That's all I know.

*(***TOLEDO** *releases the upstage door, crosses to the piano, takes off his gloves and stuffs them into his coat pocket.)*

IRVIN. Where's…uh…the horn player…is he coming with Ma?

CUTLER. Levee's supposed to be here same as we is. I reckon he'll be here in a minute. I can't rightly say.

IRVIN. Well, come on… I'll show you to the bandroom, let you get set up and rehearsed. *(***IRVIN** *crosses to the left door and flips the light switch above the piano. [Lights: The Back Hall lamps come on, illuminating the Back Hall.]* **IRVIN** *crosses to left of* **CUTLER** *as* **SLOW DRAG** *picks up his bass.)* You boys hungry? I'll call over to the deli and get some sandwiches. Get you fed and ready to make some music.

*(***TOLEDO** *exits through the left door followed by* **SLOW DRAG**. **CUTLER** *picks up a case in each hand and starts to follow.* **IRVIN** *takes a piece of paper from his vest pocket and holds it up. Loudly:)*

Cutler…here's the list of songs we're gonna record. *(***IRVIN** *glances up at the control booth, tucks the paper into one of* **CUTLER'S** *full hands and* **CUTLER** *exits through the left door.* **IRVIN** *starts to follow.)*

STURDYVANT. *(Over the speaker.)* Irvin…what's happening? Where's Ma?

IRVIN. *(Turns back into the studio.)* Everything's under control, Mel. I got it under control.

STURDYVANT. *(Grows more animated.)* Where's Ma? How come she isn't with the band?

IRVIN. She'll be here in a minute, Mel. Let me get these boys down to the bandroom, huh?

*(***IRVIN** *exits through the left door.* **TOLEDO** *opens the bandroom door and enters, followed by* **SLOW DRAG**. **TOLEDO** *crosses to the piano and drops the book and newspaper on top of it.* **SLOW DRAG** *carries his bass to behind the piano and lays it down on its side.* **CUTLER** *enters the bandroom as* **IRVIN** *appears in the doorway and flips the light switch right of the door. [Lights: The overhead bandroom lights come on, illuminating the bandroom. The studio slowly dims.])*

IRVIN. You boys go ahead and rehearse. I'll let you know when Ma comes.

*(***IRVIN** *crosses into the back hall and closes the bandroom door.* **CUTLER** *leans his guitar case against the wall left of the lockers and crosses to the downstage right bench. He puts the trombone case under the bench as* **TOLEDO** *takes off his hat and coat, drops them on the downstage end of the piano and sits on the piano chair.* **SLOW DRAG** *crosses to the upstage center bench and sits.)*

CUTLER. *(Crosses to* **TOLEDO** *and holds out the piece of paper.)* What we got here, Toledo?

*(***IRVIN** *appears in the left doorway and crosses into the closet. [Lights: The closet light goes out.])*

TOLEDO. *(Takes the paper and reads it.)* We got… "Prove It On Me" … "Hear Me Talking to You" … "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" …and "Moonshine Blues."

*(***IRVIN** *enters the studio, closes the left door and crosses to the double doors.* **STURDYVANT** *looks down from the control booth as* **IRVIN** *opens the upstage side of the double doors and exits upstage the front hall.* **STURDYVANT** *leaves the control booth, climbs down the spiral staircase and follows* **IRVIN** *upstage the front hall.)*

CUTLER. *(Takes the paper, crosses to the Bandroom door and opens the door.)* Where Mr. Irvin go? Them ain't the songs Ma told me. *(Steps into the back hall and looks up the stairway.)*

SLOW DRAG. *(Crosses to the upstage center bench and sits.)* I wouldn't worry about it if I were you, Cutler. They'll get it straightened out. Ma will get it straightened out.

CUTLER. *(Turns to* **SLOW DRAG**.*)* I just don't want no trouble about these songs, that's all. Ma ain't told me them songs. She told me something else. *(***CUTLER** *steps back into the bandroom, closes the door, and crosses to upstage left of the piano.)*

SLOW DRAG. What she tell you?

CUTLER. This Moonshine Blues wasn't in it. That's one of Bessie's songs.

TOLEDO. Slow Drag's right… I wouldn't worry about it. Let them straighten it up.

CUTLER. Levee know what time he's supposed to be here?

SLOW DRAG. Levee gone out to spend your four dollars. He left the hotel this morning talking about he was gonna go buy some shoes. Say it's the first time he ever beat you shooting craps.

CUTLER. *(Turns to the lockers and opens the left locker, takes off his coat, hangs it in the locker, and closes it.)* Do he know what time he's supposed to be here? That's what I wanna know. I ain't thinking about no four dollars.

SLOW DRAG. Levee sure was thinking about it. That four dollars like to burn a hole in his pocket.

CUTLER. *(Crosses to right of* **SLOW DRAG**.*)* Well, he's supposed to be here at one o'clock. That's what time Ma said. That nigger get out in the streets with that four dollars and ain't no telling when he's liable to show. *(Crosses to right of* **TOLEDO**, *as* **SLOW DRAG** *rises, crosses right around the bench, takes off his hat and coat and hangs them in the open locker.)* You ought to have seen him at the club last night, Toledo. Trying to talk to some gal Ma had with her.

TOLEDO. You ain't got to tell me. I know how Levee do.

([Sound: The door buzzer is heard from off right.])

SLOW DRAG. *(Reaches into the locker and takes a half-pint bottle of bourbon from his coat pocket.)* Levee tried to talk to that gal and got his feelings hurt. She didn't want no part of him. She told Levee he'd have to turn his money green before he could talk with her.

*(***IRVIN** *enters down the front hall, followed by* **LEVEE**, *carrying a horn case and a shoe box.* **IRVIN** *holds open the downstage side of the double doors and points at the left door.* **LEVEE** *enters the Studio, crosses to the left door, opens it and exits into the Back Hall, closing the door.* **IRVIN** *exits upstage the Front Hall; the double door swings shut.)*

CUTLER. She out for what she can get. Anybody could see that.

SLOW DRAG. That's why Levee run out to buy some shoes. He's looking to make an impression on that gal. *(Opens the bottle and takes a drink.)*

CUTLER. *(Crosses to the downstage right chair, sits and lifts the trombone case onto the bench.)* What the hell she gonna do with his shoes? She can't do nothing with the nigger's shoes.

TOLEDO. Let me hit that, Slow Drag.

SLOW DRAG. *(Hands the bottle to* **TOLEDO**.*)* This some of that good Chicago bourbon!

*(***LEVEE** *opens the bandroom door, abruptly and slams it shut behind him. He crosses to the piano and drops the horn case on top of it.)*

CUTLER. Levee…where Mr. Irvin go?

LEVEE. Hell, I ain't none of his keeper. He gone on down the hall.

SLOW DRAG. What you got there, Levee?

LEVEE. *(Takes a pair of shiney new shoes from the shoe box and holds them up; mockingly:)* Look here, Cutler… I got me some shoes!

CUTLER. Nigger, I ain't studying you.

*(***LEVEE** *crosses right to above the upstage center bench, drops the empty shoebox on top of the lockers, then crosses to below the bench and sits.)*

TOLEDO. How much you pay for something like that, Levee?

LEVEE. *(Taking off his old shoes.)* Eleven dollars. Four dollars of it belong to Cutler. *(Putting on his new shoes.)*

SLOW DRAG. Levee say if it wasn't for Cutler…he would have no new shoes!

CUTLER. I ain't thinking about Levee or his shoes. Come on…let's get ready to rehearse.

SLOW DRAG. *(Crosses to behind the piano, picks up the bass and begins to remove the casing.)* I'm with you on that score, Cutler. I wanna get out of here. I don't want to be around here all night. When it comes time to go up there and record them songs… I just wanna go up there and do it. Last time it took us all day and half the night.

TOLEDO. Ain't but four songs on the list. Last time we recorded six songs.

SLOW DRAG. It felt like it was sixteen!

LEVEE. *(Rises and struts around, admiring the new shoes.)* Yeah! Now I'm ready! I can play me some good music now! *(Glances up from the shoes, stops and looks around the room.)* Damn! They done changed things around. Don't never leave well enough alone. *(He picks up the old shoes, crosses right around the bench and puts the old shoes in the shoebox on the lockers.* **CUTLER** *opens the trombone case.)*

TOLEDO. Everything changing all the time. Even the air you breathing change. You got monoxide, hydrogen… changing all the time. Skin changing…different molecules and everything.

LEVEE. *(Opens the third locker from the left, takes off his coat and scarf, hangs them in the locker and closes it.)* Nigger, what is you talking about? I'm talking about the room. I ain't talking about no skin and air. I'm talking about something I can see! Last time the bandroom was upstairs. This time it's downstairs. Next time it be over there. I'm talking about what I can see. I ain't talking about no molecules or nothing.

*(***CUTLER** *begins to assemble his trombone.)*

TOLEDO. Hell, I know what you talking about. I just said everything changing. I know what you talking about, but you don't know what I'm talking about.

LEVEE. *(Crosses right around the bench and faces* **TOLEDO***; points at the bandroom door.)* That door! Nigger, you see that door? That's what I'm talking about. That door wasn't there before.

*(***SLOW DRAG** *drops the bass case in the upstage left corner and carries the bass to upstage right of the piano.)*

CUTLER. Levee, you wouldn't know your right from your left. This is where they used to keep the recording horns and things…and damn if that door wasn't there.

How in hell else you gonna get in here? Now if you talking about they done switched rooms, you right. But don't go telling me that damn door wasn't there!

SLOW DRAG. *(Takes* **LEVEE***'s horn case off the piano and drops it on the upstage center bench with a bang.)* Damn the door and let's get set up. I wanna get out of here.

LEVEE. Toledo started all that about the door. I'm just saying that things change.

TOLEDO. What the hell you think I was saying? Things change. The air and everything. Now you gonna say you was saying it. You gonna fit two propositions on the same track…run them into each other, and because they crash you gonna say it's the same train.

LEVEE. Now this nigger talking about trains! We done went from the air to the skin to the door…and now trains. *(Crosses toward* **TOLEDO**.*)* Toledo, I'd like to be inside your head for five minutes. Just to see how you think. You done got more shit piled up and mixed up in there than the devil got sinners. You been reading too many goddamn books. *(Crosses to the upstage right corner and looks at himself in the mirror.)*

TOLEDO. What you care about how much I read? I'm gonna ignore you 'cause you ignorant.

SLOW DRAG. Come on, let's rehearse the music.

LEVEE. You ain't got to rehearse that…ain't nothing but old jug band music. *(Steps up onto the crates and admires his shoes in the mirror.)* They need one of them jug bands for this.

SLOW DRAG. Don't make me no difference. Long as we get paid.

LEVEE. That ain't what I'm talking about, nigger. I'm talking about art!

SLOW DRAG. What's drawing got to do with it?

LEVEE. *(Points at* **SLOW DRAG**.*)* Where you get this nigger from, Cutler? He sound like one of them Alabama niggers.

CUTLER. Slow Drag's alright. It's you talking all the weird shit about art. Just play the piece, nigger. You wanna be one of them…what you call…virtuoso or something, you in the wrong place. You ain't no Buddy Bolden or King Oliver…you just an old trumpet player come a dime a dozen. Talking about art.

LEVEE. *(Jumps down from the crates, crosses to the upstage center bench and sits.)* What is you? I don't see your name in lights.

CUTLER. I just plays the piece. Whatever they want. I don't go talking about art and criticizing other people's music.

LEVEE. *(Moves his horn case to the right end of the bench, opens it and takes out a silver-plated cornet.)* I ain't like you, Cutler. I got talent! Me and this horn…we's tight! If my daddy knowed I was gonna turn out like this he would've named me Gabriel.

*(***SLOW DRAG** *smiles derisively at* **LEVEE** *and plucks a single low note on his bass.)*

I'm gonna get me a band and make me some records. I done give Mr. Sturdyvant some of my songs I wrote and he say he's gonna let me record them when I get my band together. *(***LEVEE** *replaces the horn in the case, takes out some sheet music and waves it at* **CUTLER**.*)* I just gotta finish the last part of this song. Mr. Sturdyvant want me to write another part to this song.

SLOW DRAG. *(Looks over* **LEVEE***'s shoulder at the sheet music.)* How you learn to write music, Levee?

LEVEE. I just picked it up…like you pick up anything. Miss Eula used to play the piano…she learned me a lot. I knows how to play real music…not this old jug band shit. *(Crosses his legs; conceitedly:)* I got style!

TOLEDO. Everybody got style.

*(***SLOW DRAG** *crosses to upstage right of the piano.)*

Style ain't nothing but keeping the same idea from beginning to end. Everybody got it.

LEVEE. But everybody can't play like I do. Everybody can't have their own band.

CUTLER. Well, until you get your own band where you can play what you want, you just play the piece and stop complaining. I told you when you came on here, this ain't none of them hot bands. This is an accompaniment band. You play Ma's music when you here. *(Takes a rag from the trombone case and polishes the trombone.)*

LEVEE. *(Drops the sheet music into the cornet case.)* I got sense enough to know that. Hell, I can look at you all and see what kind of band it is. I can look at Toledo and see what kind of band it is.

TOLEDO. Toledo ain't said nothing to you now. Don't let Toledo get started. You can't even spell music, much less play it.

LEVEE. What you talking about? I can spell music. *(Leaps up, pulls out a roll of bills and peels off a single dollar bill.)* I got a dollar say I can spell it! Put your dollar up. Where your dollar? *(***LEVEE** *slaps the dollar bill on the floor downstage left of* **TOLEDO**.*)* Now, come on. Put your dollar up. Talking about I can't spell music.

TOLEDO. Alright, I'm gonna show you. *(Slowly rises, pulls a dollar bill from his pocket and places it on top of* **LEVEE***'s bill.)* Cutler. Slow Drag. You hear this? The nigger betting me a dollar he can spell music. I don't want no shit now! *(***TOLEDO** *sits. Confidently:)* Alright. Go ahead. Spell it.

LEVEE. It's a bet then. Talking about I can't spell music.

TOLEDO. Go ahead then. Spell it. Music. Spell it.

LEVEE. I can spell it, nigger! M-U-S-I-K. There! *(Leaps toward the dollar bills.)*

TOLEDO. *(Steps on the bills and blocks* **LEVEE** *with his arm.)* Naw! Naw! Leave that money alone! You ain't spelled it.

LEVEE. What you mean I ain't spelled it? I said M-U-S-I-K!

TOLEDO. That ain't how you spell it! That ain't how you spell it! It's M-U-S-I-C! C, nigger! Not K! C! M-U-S-I-C! *(Scoops up the bills and slips the money into his coat pocket.)*

LEVEE. What you mean, C? Who say it's C?

TOLEDO. Cutler! Slow Drag. Tell this fool.

*(***TOLEDO** *picks up his newspaper and begins to read.* **CUTLER** *and* **SLOW DRAG** *look away sheepishly and play a few notes on their instruments.* **LEVEE** *looks at* **TOLEDO**, *expectantly.* **TOLEDO** *looks at* **LEVEE**, *then at* **SLOW DRAG** *and* **CUTLER**.*)*

Well, I'll be a monkey's uncle! *(Drops the newspaper on the piano, pulls the dollars out of his pocket and hands one to* **LEVEE**.*)* Here's your dollar back, Levee. I done won it, you understand. I done won the dollar. But if don't nobody know but me, how am I gonna prove it to you?

LEVEE. *(Stuffs the bill into his pants pocket.)* You just mad 'cause I spelled it.

TOLEDO. Spelled what! M-U-S-I-K don't spell nothing. I just wish there was some way I could show you the right and wrong of it. How you gonna know something if the other fellow done know if you're right or not? Now I can't even be sure that I'm spelling it right. *(Picks up the newspaper.)*

LEVEE. That's what I'm talking about. You don't know it. Talking about C. You ought to give me that dollar I won from you. *(***LEVEE** *sits on the upstage center bench.)*

TOLEDO. Alright. Alright. *(Drops his newspaper on the piano and turns toward* **LEVEE**.*)* I'm gonna show you how ridiculous you sound. You know the Lord's Prayer?

LEVEE. *(Slides down the bench toward* **TOLEDO**; *eagerly:)* Why? You wanna bet a dollar on that?

TOLEDO. Just answer the question. Do you know the Lord's Prayer or don't you?

LEVEE. Yeah, I know it. What of it?

TOLEDO. Cutler?

CUTLER. What you Cutlering me for? I ain't got nothing to do with it. *(Leans the trombone against the bench and takes a tobacco pouch and a package of cigarette papers from*

the trombone case, then closes the case and puts it under the bench.)

TOLEDO. I just want to show the man how ridiculous he is.

CUTLER. Both of you all sound like damn fools. Arguing about something silly. Yeah, I know the Lord's Prayer. My daddy was a deacon in the church. Come asking me if I know the Lord's Prayer. Yeah, I know it.

TOLEDO. Slow Drag?

SLOW DRAG. *(Uncertainly.)* Yeah.

TOLEDO. Alright. Now I'm gonna tell you a story to show just how ridiculous he sound. There was these two fellows, see. So, the one of them go up to this church and commence to taking up the church learning. The other fellow see him out on the road and he say… I done heard you talking up the church learning. Say… is you learning anything up there? The other one say… Yeah, I done taken up the church learning and I's learning all kinds of things about the bible and what it say and all. Why you be asking? The other one say… Well, do you know the Lord's Prayer? And he say… Why sure I know the Lord's Prayer, I'm taking up learning at the church ain't I? I know the Lord's Prayer backwards and forwards. And the other fellow say… I bet you five dollars you don't know the Lord's Prayer, 'cause I don't think you knows it. I think you be going up to the church 'cause the widow Jenkins be going up there and you just wanna be sitting in the same room with her when she cross them big, fine, pretty legs she got. And the other one say… Well, I'm gonna prove you wrong and I'm gonna bet you that five dollars. So he say… Well, go on and say it then. So he commenced to saying the Lord's Prayer. He say… Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep… The other one say… Here's your five dollars. I didn't think you knew it.

*(***TOLEDO***,* **CUTLER** *and* **SLOW DRAG** *all laugh;* **LEVEE** *looks at them, confused.)*

Now that's just how ridiculous Levee sound. Only 'cause I knowed how to spell music, I still got my dollar.

LEVEE. That don't prove nothing. What's that supposed to prove?

TOLEDO. I'm through with it. *(***TOLEDO** *turns away from* **LEVEE** *and picks up his paper, as* **CUTLER** *opens his tobacco pouch, takes out a rolling paper and begins to roll a cigarette.)*

SLOW DRAG. Is you all gonna rehearse this music or ain't you?

LEVEE. How many times you done played them songs? What you gotta rehearse for?

SLOW DRAG. This is a recording session. I wanna get it right the first time and get on out of here.

CUTLER. Slow Drag's right. Let's go on and rehearse and get it over with.

LEVEE. *(Picks up the sheet music, takes a pencil from his case, faces left and straddles the bench.)* You all go and rehearse then. I got to finish this song for Mr. Sturdyvant.

CUTLER. Come on, Levee… I don't want no shit now. You rehearse like everybody else. You in the band like everybody else. Mr. Sturdyvant just gonna have to wait. You got to do that on your own time. This is the band's time.

LEVEE. Well, what is you doing? You sitting there rolling a reefer talkng about let's rehearse. Toledo reading a newspaper. Hell, I'm ready if you wanna rehearse. I just say there ain't no point in it. Ma ain't here. What's the point in it?

CUTLER. Nigger, why you gotta complain all the time?

TOLEDO. Levee would complain if a gal ain't laid across his bed just right.

CUTLER. That's what I know. That's why I try to tell him just play the music and forget about it. It ain't no big thing. *(Takes a box of matches from his coat pocket and lights the cigarette.)*

TOLEDO. Levee ain't got an eye for that. He wants to tie on to some abstract component and sit down on the elemental.

(Exasperated, **SLOW DRAG** *lays down his bass behind the piano as* **CUTLER** *puts the tobacco pouch, papers and matches in his coat pocket.)*

LEVEE. This is get on Levee time, huh? Levee ain't said nothing except this some old jug band music.

TOLEDO. Under the right circumstances you'd play anything. If you know music then you play it. Straight on or off to the side. Ain't nothing abstract about it.

LEVEE. Toledo, you sound like you got a mouth full of marbles. You is the only cracker-talking nigger I know.

TOLEDO. You ought to have learned yourself to read… then you'd understand the basic understanding of everything.

SLOW DRAG. Both of you all gonna drive me crazy with that philosophy bullshit. *(Crosses above* **LEVEE** *to right of* **CUTLER**.*)* Cutler, give me a reefer.

CUTLER. Ain't you got some reefer? Where's your reefer? Why you all the time asking me?

SLOW DRAG. Cutler, how long I done known you? How long we been together? Twenty-two years.

*(***CUTLER** *turns away from* **SLOW DRAG** *and continues to smoke the "reefer.")*

We been doing this together for twenty-two years. All up and down the back roads, the side roads, the front roads…we done played in the juke-joints, the whorehouses, the barn dances and city sit-downs… I done lied for you and lied with you…we done laughed together, fought together, slept in the same bed together, done sucked on the same titty…and now you don't wanna give me no reefer.

CUTLER. You see this nigger trying to talk me out of my reefer, Toledo? Running all that about how long he done knowed me and how we done sucked on the

same titty. *(Turns to* **SLOW DRAG**, *laughing.)* Nigger, you still ain't getting none of my reefer!

TOLEDO. That's African.

SLOW DRAG. *(Suspiciously.)* What? What you talking about? What's African?

LEVEE. *(Defensively.)* I know he ain't talking about me. You don't see me running around in no jungle with no bone between my nose.

TOLEDO. Levee, you worse than ignorant. You ignorant without a premise. *(Turns to* **CUTLER** *and* **SLOW DRAG**.*)* Now, what I was saying is what Slow Drag was doing is African. That's what you call an African conceptualization. That's when you name the gods or call on the ancestors to achieve whatever your desires are.

SLOW DRAG. Nigger, I ain't no African! I ain't doing no African nothing!

TOLEDO. Naming all those things you and Cutler done together is like trying to solicit some reefer based on a bond of kinship. That's African. An ancestral retention. Only you forgot the name of the gods.

SLOW DRAG. I ain't forgot nothing. I was telling the nigger how cheap he is. Don't come talking that African nonsense to me.

TOLEDO. You just like Levee. No eye for taking an abstract and fixing it to a specific. There's so much that goes on around you and you can't even see it.

CUTLER. Wait a minute…wait a minute. Toledo, now when this nigger…when an African do all them things you say and name all the gods and what not…then what happens?

TOLEDO. Depends on if the gods is sympathetic with the cause for which he is calling them with the right names. Then his success comes with the right proportion of his naming. That's the way that go. *(***TOLEDO** *returns to his newspaper.)*

CUTLER. *(Hands an unlit "reefer" to* **SLOW DRAG**.*)* Here, Slow Drag. Here's a reefer. You done talked yourself up on that one.

SLOW DRAG. *(Takes the "reefer" and pulls a box of matches from his vest pocket.)* Thank you. You ought to have done that in the first place and saved me all the aggravation.

CUTLER. What I wants to know is…what the same titty we done sucked on? That's what I want to know.

SLOW DRAG. Oh, I just threw that in there to make it sound good. *(Sits on the downstage right bench and lights a match.)*

CUTLER. Nigger, you ain't right.

SLOW DRAG. I knows it. *(Lights the "reefer" and starts to take a drag.)*

CUTLER. Well, come on…let's get rehearsed. Time's wasting.

(He picks up the trombone, rises and plays a few notes as he crosses to the downstage left chair. **LEVEE** *picks up his cornet, rises and plays.* **SLOW DRAG** *crosses above the upstage center bench, picks up his bass and crosses to upstage right of the piano.)*

Let's do it. "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" A-One. A-Two. You know what to do.

*([**MUSIC:*** **TOLEDO** *plays a short piano introduction to* ***"MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM"*** *as* **LEVEE** *plays a louder and faster introduction.* **CUTLER** *and* **SLOW DRAG** *join in at a leisurely tempo.* **LEVEE** *stops playing.])*

LEVEE. Naw! Naw! We ain't doing it that way. *([**MUSIC:** The Band stops playing.])* We doing my version. It say so right there on that piece of paper you got. Ask Toledo. That's what Mr. Irvin told me…say it's on the list he gave you.

CUTLER. Let me worry about what's on the list and what ain't on the list. How you gonna tell me what's on the list?

LEVEE. 'Cause I know what Mr. Irvin told me! Ask Toledo!

CUTLER. *(Irritated.)* Let me worry about what's on the list. You just play the song I say.

LEVEE. What kind of sense it make to rehearse the wrong version of the song? That's what I wanna know. Why you wanna rehearse that version?

SLOW DRAG. *(With forced patience.)* You supposed to rehearse what you gonna play. That's the way they taught me. Now, whatever version we gonna play…let's go on and rehearse it.

LEVEE. That's what I'm trying to tell the man.

CUTLER. You trying to tell me what we is and ain't gonna play. And that ain't none of your business. Your business is to play what I say.

LEVEE. *(Crowing.)* Oh, I see now. You done got jealous 'cause Mr. Irvin using my version. You done got jealous 'cause I proved I know something about music.

CUTLER. Nigger, you talk like a fool! What the hell I got to be jealous of you about? The day I get jealous of you I may as well lay down and die.

TOLEDO. Levee started all that 'cause he too lazy to rehearse. *(Turns to* **LEVEE**.*)* You ought to just go on and play the song…what difference does it make?

LEVEE. *(Steps toward* **CUTLER**.*)* Where's the paper? Look at the paper! Get the paper and look at it! See what it say. *(Turns away, disgusted.)* Gonna tell me I'm too lazy to rehearse.

CUTLER. We ain't talking about the paper. We talking about you understanding where you fit in when you around here. You just play what I say.

LEVEE. *(Turns to* **CUTLER***; curtly:)* Look… I don't care what you play! Alright? It don't matter to me. Mr. Irvin gonna straighten it up! I don't care what you play. *(Crosses right a few steps.)*

CUTLER. Thank you. *(Turns to* **TOLEDO**.*)* Let's play this "Hear Me Talking To You" till we find out what's happening with the "Black Bottom."

*(**LEVEE** and **TOLEDO** glance at one another, laugh conspiratorially and look at **SLOW DRAG**. They look at **CUTLER**. He chuckles.)*

CUTLER. Slow Drag, you sing Ma's part.

*(**SLOW DRAG** feigns insult then minces to center and lays his bass down on the floor.)*

"Hear Me Talking To You." Let's do it. A-One. A-Two. You know what to do.

*([**MUSIC:** **TOLEDO** plays a short introduction to **"HEAR ME TALKING TO YOU."** **LEVEE** and **CUTLER** join in.] **SLOW DRAG** mimes opening a bottle and drinking, then sets the imaginary bottle on the piano, picks up **TOLEDO**'s newspaper and fans himself.)*

SLOW DRAG. *(Singing.)*

RAMBLIN' MAN MAKES NO CHANGE IN ME.
I'M GONNA RAMBLE BACK TO MY USED-TO-BE, AH –
HEAR ME TALKING TO YOU, I DON'T BITE MY TONGUE.
YOU WANT TO BE MY MAN, YOU GOT TO FETCH IT WITH YOU WHEN YOU COME.

EVE AND ADAM IN THE GARDEN TAKING A CHANCE.
ADAM DIDN'T TAKE TIME TO GET HIS PANTS, AH –
HEAR ME TALKING TO YOU, I DON'T BITE MY TONGUE.
YOU WANT TO BE MY MAN, YOU GOT TO FETCH IT WITH YOU WHEN YOU COME.

*(**IRVIN** enters down the front hall, crosses through the double doors and into the studio. He crosses left and exits through the left door into the back hall.)*

OUR OLD CAT SWALLOWED A BALL OF YARN.
WHEN THE KITTENS WAS BORN THEY HAD SWEATERS ON.

*(**IRVIN** opens the bandroom door, crosses to behind the piano, leans on it and listens.)*

HEAR ME TALKING TO YOU, I DON'T BITE MY TONGUE.
YOU WANT TO BE MY MAN, YOU GOT TO FETCH IT WITH YOU WHEN YOU COME.

*(***SLOW DRAG** *turns toward the piano, sees* **IRVIN** *and stops. [**MUSIC:** The band stops.] All laugh.* **SLOW DRAG** *returns the newspaper to the piano and crosses to the bass.)*

IRVIN. *(Seriously.)* Any of you boys know what's keeping Ma?

CUTLER. Can't say Mr. Irvin. She'll be along directly, I reckon. I talked to her this morning, she say she'll be here in time to rehearse.

IRVIN. Well, you boys go ahead. *(Starts toward the bandroom door.)*

CUTLER. Mr. Irvin, about these songs… Levee say…

IRVIN. *(Turns to* **CUTLER**.*)* Whatever's on the list, Cutler. You got that list I gave you?

CUTLER. *(Pats his coat pocket.)* Yessir, I got it right here.

IRVIN. Whatever's on there. Whatever that says. *(Turns toward the bandroom door again.)*

CUTLER. I'm asking about this "Black Bottom" piece… Levee say…

IRVIN. *(Crosses to right of* **CUTLER**.*)* Oh, it's on the list. "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" is on the list.

CUTLER. I know it's on the list. I wanna know what version. We got two versions of that song.

IRVIN. Oh. Levee's arrangement. *(Turns to* **LEVEE***; he grins.)* We're using Levee's arrangement.

CUTLER. OK. I got that straight. Now, this "Moonshine Blues" …

IRVIN. We'll work it out with Ma, Cutler. Just rehearse whatever's on the list and use Levee's arrangement on that "Black Bottom" piece. *(He exits through the bandroom door and closes it.* **SLOW DRAG** *picks up the bass and crosses to upstage right of the piano.)*

LEVEE. *(Crosses toward* **CUTLER** *a step; triumphantly:)* See, I told you! It don't mean nothing when I say it. You got to wait for Mr. Irvin to say it. Well, I told you the way it is.

CUTLER. Levee, the sooner you understand it ain't what you say, or what Mr. Irvin say…it's what Ma say that counts.

SLOW DRAG. Don't nobody say when it comes to Ma. She's gonna do what she wants to do. Ma says what happens to her.

LEVEE. Hell, the man's the one putting out the record! He's gonna put out what he wanna put out!

SLOW DRAG. *(Crosses to left of* **LEVEE**.*)* He's gonna put out what Ma want him to put out.

LEVEE. *(Raises his hand, threateningly, toward* **SLOW DRAG**.*)* You heard what the man told you… "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," Levee's arrangement. There you go! *(Pokes* **SLOW DRAG** *on the nose.)* That's what he told you.

SLOW DRAG. *(Crosses to upstage right of the piano.)* What you gonna do, Cutler?

CUTLER. Ma ain't told me what version. Let's go on and play it Levee's way.

TOLEDO. *(Pedantically.)* See, now… I'll tell you something. As long as the colored man look to white folks to put the crown on what he say…as long as he looks to white folks for approval…then he ain't never gonna find out who he is and what he's about. He's just gonna be about what white folks want him to be about. That's one sure thing.

LEVEE. I'm just trying to show Cutler where he's wrong.

CUTLER. Cutler don't need you to show him nothing.

SLOW DRAG. Come on, let's get this shit rehearsed! You all can bicker afterward!

CUTLER. Levee's confused about who the boss is. He don't know Ma's the boss.

LEVEE. Ma's the boss on the road! We at a recording session. Mr. Sturdyvant and Mr. Irvin say what's gonna be here! We's in Chicago, we ain't in Memphis. I don't know why you all wanna pick me about it, shit! I'm with Slow Drag…let's go on and get it rehearsed.

CUTLER. Alright. Alright. I know how to solve this. "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," Levee's version. Let's do it. Come on. A-One. A-Two…

TOLEDO. How that first part go again, Levee?

LEVEE. It go like this.

*([**MUSIC:** **LEVEE** plays a short staccato introduction to his version of the **"BLACK BOTTOM."**])*

That's to get the people's attention to the song. That's when you and Slow Drag come in with the rhythm part. Me and Cutler play on the breaks. *(Paces in circles; animatedly:)* Now we gonna dance it…but we ain't gonna countrify it. This ain't no barn dance. This a city dance. We gonna play it like…

CUTLER. *(Impatiently.)* The man asked you how the first part go. He don't wanna hear all that. Just tell him how the piece go.

TOLEDO. I got it. I got it. Let's go. I know how to do it.

CUTLER. Ma Rainey's Black Bottom. Levee's Version. One. Two. You know what to do.

*([**MUSIC:** **LEVEE** plays his introduction to the **"BLACK BOTTOM"**; then the band joins in at a slower tempo. **LEVEE** stops playing.] He glares at the band, infuriated.)*

LEVEE. You all got to keep up now. You playing in the wrong time.

*([**MUSIC:** The band stops playing.])*

Ma come in over the top. She got to find her own way in.

CUTLER. Nigger, will you let us play this song. When you get your own band…then you tell them that nonsense. We know how to play the piece. I was playing music before you was born. Gonna tell me how to play.

*(**SLOW DRAG** examines the strings of the bass.)*

Alright. Let's try it again. A-One. A-Two…

SLOW DRAG. Cutler, wait till I fix this. This string started to unravel. *(Carries his bass downstage right and faces* **CUTLER.***)* And you know I want to play Levee's music right.

LEVEE. *(Crosses to behind* **SLOW DRAG.***)* If you was any kind of a musician you'd take care of your instrument. Keep it in tip top order. If you was any kind of a musician… I'd let you be in my band.

SLOW DRAG. Shhheeeeet! *(Turns upstage right and inadvertently steps on* **LEVEE***'s shoe.)*

LEVEE. Damn, Slow Drag! Watch them big-ass shoes you got.

SLOW DRAG. *(Crosses to upstage right and sits on the crates, facing downstage, holding his bass.)* Boy, ain't nobody done nothing to you.

LEVEE. *(Crosses to the upstage center bench, takes a rag out of his horn case and wipes his shoe.)* You done stepped on my shoes.

SLOW DRAG. Move them the hell out the way then. You was in my way… I wasn't in your way. *(Stretches one foot out toward* **LEVEE***; mockingly:)* You can shine these when you get done, Levee. *(All laugh except* **LEVEE.***)*

CUTLER. *(Leans his trombone against the piano, takes another "reefer" and a box of matches out of his pocket and lights the "reefer.")* If I had them shoes Levee got, I could buy me a whole suit of clothes.

LEVEE. *(Tosses the rag back into the horn case and sits on the upstage center bench.)* What kind of difference it make what kind of shoes I got? Ain't nothing wrong with having nice shoes. I ain't said nothing about your shoes. Why you wanna talk about me and my Florsheims?

CUTLER. *(Puts the matchbox in his pocket.)* Any man…who takes a whole week's pay…and puts it on some shoes—you understand what I mean, what you walk around on the ground with—is a fool! And I don't mind telling him.

LEVEE. What difference it make to you, Cutler!

SLOW DRAG. The man ain't said nothing about your shoes. Ain't nothing wrong with having nice shoes. Look at Toledo.

TOLEDO. What about Toledo?

SLOW DRAG. I said ain't nothing wrong with having nice shoes.

LEVEE. Nigger got them clod-hoppers! Old brogans! He ain't nothing but a sharecropper. *(***LEVEE** *and* **SLOW DRAG** *laugh.)*

TOLEDO. You can make all the fun you want. It don't mean nothing. I'm satisfied with them and that's what counts.

LEVEE. Nigger, why don't you get some decent shoes? Got nerve to put on a suit and tie with them farming boots.

CUTLER. What you just tell me? It don't make no difference about the man's shoes. That's what you told me.

LEVEE. Aw, hell, I don't care what the nigger wear. I'll be honest with you. I don't care if he went barefoot. *(Looks at* **SLOW DRAG**, *puts the cornet in the case and rises.)* Play something for me, Slow Drag.

*([**MUSIC:** **SLOW DRAG** plays a fast vamp on his bass.]* **LEVEE** *crosses to downstage center and does an easy shuffling dance.)*

A man got to have some shoes to dance like this! You can't dance like this with them clod-hoppers Toledo got.

*([**MUSIC:** **SLOW DRAG** plays **"DR. JAZZ."**] Singing:)*

HELLO CENTRAL, GIVE ME DOCTOR JAZZ.
HE'S GOT JUST WHAT I NEED, I'LL SAY HE HAS.
WHEN THE WORLD GOES WRONG AND I HAVE GOT THE BLUES,
HE'S THE MAN WHO MAKES ME GET ON MY DANCING SHOES.

*([**MUSIC:** **SLOW DRAG** continues vamping.] as* **LEVEE** *dances.)*

TOLEDO. That's the trouble with colored folks…always wanna have a good time. Good times done got more niggers killed than God got ways to count. What the hell having a good time mean? That's what I wanna know.

LEVEE. Hell, nigger…it don't need explaining. Ain't you never had no good time before?

TOLEDO. The more niggers get killed having a good time… the more good times niggers wanna have.

*([**MUSIC:** **SLOW DRAG** stops playing.]* **SLOW DRAG** *rises and puts his bass on the floor, right of the crates.* **LEVEE** *groans disgruntledly.)*

There's more to life than having a good time. If there ain't…then this is a piss-poor life we're having…if that's all there is to be got out of it.

SLOW DRAG. *(He turns to* **TOLEDO**. **LEVEE** *crosses to behind the piano and leans on it.)* Toledo, just 'cause you like to read them books and study and what not…that's your good time. People got other things they likes to do to have a good time. Ain't no need you picking them about it. *(Crosses to the downstage right chair, sits and puts his feet up on the bench.)*

CUTLER. Niggers been having a good time before you was born, and they gonna keep having a good time after you gone.

TOLEDO. Yeah, but what else they gonna do? Ain't nobody talking about making the lot of the colored man better for him here in America.

LEVEE. Now you gonna be Booker T. Washington.

TOLEDO. Everybody worried about having a good time. Ain't nobody thinking about what kind of world they gonna leave their youngens. "Just give me a good time, that's all I want." It just makes me sick.

SLOW DRAG. Well, the colored man's gonna be alright. He got through slavery and he'll get through whatever else the white man put on him. I ain't worried about that.

Good times is what makes life worth living. Now, you take the white man…the white man don't know how to have a good time. That's why he's troubled all the time. He don't know how to have a good time. He don't know how to laugh at life.

LEVEE. *(Crosses to left of* **SLOW DRAG**.*)* That's what the problem is with Toledo…reading all them books and things. He done got to the point where he forgot how to laugh and have a good time. Just like the white man.

TOLEDO. I know how to have a good time as well as the next man. I said, there's got to be more to life than having a good time. I said the colored man ought to be doing more than just trying to have a good time all the time.

LEVEE. Well, what is you doing, nigger? Talking all them high-falutin ideas about making a better world for the colored man. What is you doing to make it better? You playing the music and looking for your next piece of pussy same as we is. What is you doing? That's what I wanna know. Tell him, Cutler.

CUTLER. You all leave Cutler out of this. Cutler ain't got nothing to do with it.

TOLEDO. Levee, you just about the most ignorant nigger I know. Sometimes I wonder why I even bother to try and talk with you.

LEVEE. Well, what is you doing? Talking that shit to me about I'm ignorant! What is you doing! You just a whole lot of mouth. A great big windbag. Thinking you smarter than everybody else. What is you doing, huh?

TOLEDO. It ain't just me, fool! It's everybody! What you think… I'm gonna solve the colored man's problems by myself? I said, we. You understand that? We. That's every living colored man in the world got to do his share. Got to do his part. I ain't talking about what I'm gonna do…or what you or Cutler or Slow Drag or anybody else. I'm talking about all of us together. What all of us is gonna do. That's what I'm talking

about, nigger. *(Turns away from* **LEVEE** *and picks up his newspaper.)*

LEVEE. *(Looks at* **TOLEDO** *for a moment, then crosses to* **TOLEDO** *and puts a hand on his shoulder, subdued.)* Well, why didn't you say that then?

*(***TOLEDO** *shakes off* **LEVEE***'s hand.* **LEVEE** *crosses to below the upstage center bench.)*

CUTLER. Toledo, I don't know why you waste your time on this fool.

TOLEDO. That's what I'm trying to figure out.

LEVEE. Now there go Cutler with his shit. Calling me a fool. You wasn't even in the conversation. Now you gonna take sides and call me a fool.

CUTLER. Hell, I was listening to the man. I got sense enough to know what he saying. I could tell it straight back to you.

LEVEE. Well, you go on with it. But I'll tell you this… I ain't gonna be too many more of your fools. I'll tell you that. Now you can put that in your pipe and smoke it.

CUTLER. Boy, ain't nobody studying you. Telling me what to put in my pipe. Who's you to tell me what to do?

LEVEE. *(Crosses toward the crates.)* Alright, I ain't nobody. Don't pay me no mind. I ain't nobody.

TOLEDO. Levee, you ain't nothing but the devil.

LEVEE. There you go! That's who I am. I'm the devil. I ain't nothing but the devil.

CUTLER. I can see that. That's something you know about. You know all about the devil.

LEVEE. *(Crosses toward* **CUTLER.***)* I ain't saying what I know. I know plenty. What you know about the devil? Telling me what I know. What you know?

SLOW DRAG. I know a man sold his soul to the devil.

LEVEE. *(Crosses to the upstage center bench and sits, facing* **SLOW DRAG.***)* There you go! That's the only thing I ask about the devil…to see him coming so I can sell his this one I got. 'Cause if there's a God up there…he done went to

sleep. *(Takes his cornet and a rag from the case and polishes the cornet.)*

SLOW DRAG. Sold his soul to the devil himself. Name of Eliza Cotter. Lived in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama. The devil came by and he done upped and sold him his soul.

CUTLER. How you know the man done sold his soul to the devil, nigger? You talking that old woman foolishness.

SLOW DRAG. Everybody know. It wasn't no secret. He went around working for the devil and everybody knowed it. Carried him a bag…one of them carpet bags. Folks say he carried the devil's papers and what not where he put your fingerprint on the paper with blood.

LEVEE. Where he at now? That's what I want to know. He can put my whole handprint if he want to!

CUTLER. That's the damnedest thing I ever heard! Folks kill me with that talk.

TOLEDO. *(Puts the newspaper on the piano and turns to* **CUTLER**.*)* Oh, that's real enough, alright. Some folks go arm in arm with the devil, shoulder to shoulder and talk to him all the time. That's real, ain't nothing wrong in believing that.

SLOW DRAG. That's what I'm saying. Eliza Cotter is one of them. Alright. The man living up there in an old shack on Ben Foster's place, shoeing mules and horses, making them charms and things in secret. He hooked up with the devil. Showed one day all fancied out with just the finest clothes you ever seen on a colored man… dressed just like one of them crackers…and carrying this bag with them papers and things in. Alright. Had a pocketful of money, just living the life of a rich man. Ain't done no more work or nothing. Just had him a string of women he run around with and throw his money away on. Bought him a big fine house…well, it wasn't that big, but it did have one of them white picket fences around it. Used to hire a man once a week just to paint that fence. Messed around there and one of

the fellows of them gals he was messing with got fixed on him wrong and Eliza killed him. And he laughed about it. Sheriff come and arrest him, and then let him go. And he went around in that town laughing about killing this fellow. Trial come up, and the judge cut him loose. He must have been in converse with the devil, too… 'cause he cut him loose and give him a bottle of whiskey! Folks ask what done happened to make him change, and he'd tell them straight out he done sold his soul to the devil and asked them if they wanted to sell theirs 'cause he could arrange it for them. Preacher see him coming, used to cross on the other side of the road. He'd just stand there and laugh at the preacher and call him a fool to his face.

CUTLER. Well, whatever happened to this fellow? What come of him? A man who, as you say, done sold his soul to the devil is bound to come to a bad end.

TOLEDO. I don't know about that. The devil's strong. The devil ain't no pushover.

SLOW DRAG. Oh, the devil had him under his wing alright. Took good care of him. He ain't wanted for nothing.

CUTLER. What happened to him? That's what I want to know.

SLOW DRAG. Last I heard, he headed up north with that bag of his handing out hundred dollar bills on the spot to whoever wanted to sign on with the devil. That's what I hear tell of him.

CUTLER. That's a bunch of fool talk. I don't know how you fix your mouth to tell that story. I don't believe you.

SLOW DRAG. I ain't asking you to believe it. I'm just telling you the facts of it.

LEVEE. I sure wish I knew where he went. He wouldn't have to convince me long. Hell, I'd even help him sign people up.

CUTLER. Nigger, God's gonna strike you down with that blasphemy you talking.

LEVEE. Oh, shit! God don't mean nothing to me. Let him strike me! *(Stands and looks upward; mockingly:)* Here I am standing right here. What you talking about he's gonna strike me? Here I am! Let him strike me! I ain't scared of him. *(Looks at* **CUTLER**, *disdainfully.)* Talking that stuff to me.

CUTLER. Alright. You gonna be sorry. You gonna fix yourself to have bad luck. Ain't nothing gonna work for you.

([Sound: The door buzzer is heard from off right.])

LEVEE. Bad luck? What I care about bad luck? You talking simple. I ain't had nothing but bad luck all my life. Couldn't get no worse. What the hell I care about some bad luck? Hell, I eat it everyday for breakfast! You dumber than I thought you was…talking about bad luck. *(Turns away from* **CUTLER** *and sits on the upstage center bench.)*

CUTLER. Alright, nigger, you'll see! Can't tell a fool nothing. You'll see.

IRVIN. *(Enters down the front hall, crosses through the double doors into the studio, then crosses to the left door, opens it and shouts down the back hall.)* Cutler…you boys' sandwiches are up here… Cutler?

CUTLER. Yessir, Mr. Irvin…be right there. *(Starts to rise.)*

TOLEDO. *(Rises and crosses to the bandroom door.)* I'll walk up there and get them.

(He crosses into the back hall and closes the door. Simultaneously, **IRVIN** *crosses back into the Studio, closes the left door and moves to below the piano as* **STURDYVANT** *enters down the front hall, comes through the double doors into the studio and crosses to right of* **IRVIN**.*)*

STURDYVANT. *(Anxiously.)* Irv…what's happening? Is she here yet? Was that her?

IRVIN. It's the sandwiches, Mel. I told you… I'll let you know when she comes, huh?

*(***TOLEDO** *opens the left door a few inches, glances at* **STURDYVANT** *and quietly backs into the back hall, closing the door behind him.)*

STURDYVANT. What's keeping her? Do you know what time it is? Have you looked at the clock? You told me she'd be here. You told me you'd take care of it.

IRVIN. *(Crosses to the right folding chair and sits; exasperated:)* Mel, for Chrissakes! What do you want from me? What do you want me to do?

STURDYVANT. *(Points at the clock above the piano.)* Look what time it is, Irv. You told me she'd be here.

IRVIN. She'll be here, okay? I don't know what's keeping her. You know they're always late, Mel.

STURDYVANT. You should have went by the hotel and made sure she was on time. You should have taken care of this. That's what you told me, huh? "I'll take care of it."

IRVIN. Okay! So I didn't go by the hotel! What do you want me to do? She'll be here, okay? The band's here… she'll be here.

*(***TOLEDO** *quietly opens the left door and steps into the studio.)*

STURDYVANT. Okay, Irv. I'll take your word. But if she doesn't come… *(Turns upstage right and crosses to the spiral staircase.)* …if she doesn't come… *(He climbs the staircase, goes into the control booth, and closes the door.* **TOLEDO** *steps toward* **IRVIN**, *hesitantly.)*

TOLEDO. Mr. Irvin… I come up for the sandwiches.

IRVIN. *(Rises and crosses to right of* **TOLEDO**.*)* Say…uh… look…one o'clock, right? She said one o'clock.

TOLEDO. That's what time she told us. Say be here at one o'clock.

IRVIN. Do you know what's keeping her? Do you know why she ain't here?

TOLEDO. I can't say Mr. Irvin. Told us one o'clock.

([Sound: The door buzzer begins to ring incessantly off right.] **IRVIN** *goes quickly through the double*

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