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RARE BOOK COLLECTION



*Stephen Kelen-d'Oxylion*

129 East 58th Street, New York 22, ELdorado 5-4086

**POLK COUNTY**

by

**Zora Neale Hurston and Dorothy Waring**

A comedy of Negro life on a sawmill camp

with authentic Negro music

**In 3 Acts**

POLK COUNTY is the conventional length play.  
If it appears longer, it is because, to facilitate reading,  
double spacing has been used:

Stephen Kelen-d'Oxylicn:

129 East 58th Street  
New York, 22, N.Y.  
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SCREEN AND SETTING

The Lorton Cigar Company has its big mill and quarters deep in the primeval woods of South Central Florida. Huge live oaks, pines, magnolia cypresses, "sweet gum" (maple) and the like grow high. Spanish moss hangs the trees. Tall cabbage palms

STEPHEN KELEN -d:OXYLION

PRESENTS

P O L K C O U N T Y

A COMEDY OF NEGRO LIFE

ON A SAWMILL CAMP

WITH AUTHENTIC NEGRO MUSIC

IN THREE ACTS

BY

ZORA NEALE HURSTON

AND

DOROTHY WARING

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SCENE AND SETTING

The Lofton Lumber Company has its big mill and quarters deep in the primeval woods of South Central Florida. Huge live oaks, pines, magnolia cypress, "sweet gum" (maple) and the like grow lush. Spanish moss drapes the trees. Tall cabbage palms tilt their crowns in clusters above the surrounding trees. Scrubby palmettoes make a dense undergrowth.

The woods surround everything. Bull alligators can be heard booming like huge bass drums from the lake at night. Variagated chorus of frogs, big owls, and now and then the cry of a panther.

There are a hundred or more houses in the quarters. They are laid out in straight rows like streets. There is a main street, wider than the others called "The Square". On it are the public places like the Jook, or pleasure houses furnished by the management. There is a piano in it (sometimes a victrola also) tables for card games made of unpainted lumber, and a big table with a trip-string for dice. This is the life of the camp after work hours. There is a sort of cafe where soft drinks, tobacco, dried fish, chitterlings, etc. are sold. It is the second place in popularity.

The streets of the quarters are unpaved, sandy places. There are trees that have been left standing here and there.

The houses are of raw, second grade lumber, unpainted, each with a porch and two or three rooms. Each man with a "family" is allotted a house for which he is docked about fifty cents a week. The single men live with others or room

at the rooming house next door to the cafe. No fenced in yards, few flowers, and those poorly tended. Few attempts at any kind of decoration or relief of ugliness. Everyone lives temporary. They go from job to job, or from job to jail and from jail to job. Working, loving temporarily and often without thought of permanence in anything, wearing their switch-blade knives and guns as a habit like the men of the Old West, fighting, cutting and being cut, such a camp where there is little law, and the peace officers of state and county barred by the management, these refugees from life see nothing unlovely in the sordid camp. They love it and when they leave there, will seek another place like it.

Such a place is the cradle of the Blues and work songs. There they are made and go from mouth to mouth of itinerant workers from one camp to the other.

They are ephemeral in every way. The murderous fight of today is forgotten tomorrow and the opponents work together in utmost friendship inside of twenty-four hours. The woman of today may be forgotten tomorrow. Certainly it is remarkable for a love affair to survive a change of scene. There will be more women where they are going, and they say, "Let every town furnish its own. Its a damn poor town that can't furnish its own. Take no woman anywhere." Here and there an attachment becomes permanent, and they settle down together, or travel together from camp to camp.

The women are misfits from the outside. Seldom good looking, intelligent, or adjustable. They have drifted

### III.

down to their level, unable to meet the competition outside. Many have made time in prisons also. Usually for fighting over men. They too pack knives. No stigma attaches to them for prison terms. In fact, their prestige is increased if they have made time for a serious cutting. It passes for bravory--something to give themselves a rating in their small world, where no intellectual activities exist. Hence the boastful song: I'm going to make me a graveyard of my own, etc.

Rough, fighting drinking, loving, reckless, but at times a flash of religion comes to the top when they are very troubled or scared. Then for a short while, a Spiritual will well up out of them and be much-felt for the moment. Small churches have a hit-and-miss existence on the camps. They feel the need of a preacher for funerals. He is more often a man of the same stripe who reformed.

But these people have given the world the Blues, Work Songs, guitar picking in the Negro manner, and the type of piano playing which made Fats Waller famous, and is now being taken up by the world. Because it is typical, they call that type of piano playing "jooking".

# CHARACTERS

## \*\*\*\*\*

BIG SWEET, a handsome Negro woman around thirty. Physically very strong. She has a quick temper and great courage, but is generous and kind, and loyal to her friends. Sings well. Has the quality of leadership.

DICEY LONG, a homely narrow-contracted little black woman, who has been slighted by Nature and feels "evil" about it. Suffers from the "black ass". Her strongest emotion is envy. What she passes off as deep love is merely the determination not to be outdone by handsomer women. Yearns to gain a reputation as "bad" (the fame of a sawmill camp) to compensate for her lack of success with men. She is extremely jealous of BIG SWEET. Being short, scrawny and black, a pretty yellow girl arouses violent envy in her.

LONNIE, a soft spoken man with a baritone voice. He loves and relies on BIG SWEET because she is his opposite. He is loyal and kind. Tall, brown and well-made.

LEAFY LEE, a slim mulatto girl, who wants to be a Blues singer. Frustrated in her hopes of a career in the music halls, she takes to wandering aimlessly, and perhaps subconsciously comes to Lofton Lumber Mills in POLK COUNTY where Blues are not only sung in the real manner, but are made. Simple, kindly and timid of life.

MY HONEY, a fairly nice-looking brown man in his mid-twenties who has no other love but his "box" (guitar) when the story opens, though DICEY has resolved to make him hers. He is gentle, and not apt to resist her by force as the other men would do. So she persists in chasing and hounding him. He is pals with LONNIE, and gives him a sort of adoration:

STEW BEEF, portly, witty, good humored. Dances and sings:

SOB-THE-BOTTOM, big appetite, a rather good gambler at Georgia Skin but not above being sharp with less efficient players. Not really wicked, but considers himself smart:

LAURA B., just the average woman found on saw mill, turpentine and railroad camps. No looks to speak of. Just taking what life has to offer one who has no more to offer life than she has. Not bitter nor looking for anything particular.

BUNCH, )  
OTHER WOMEN, ) same type as LAURA B.

DO-DIRTY, )  
BOX CAR, ) usual type found on such "jobs" the kind of men who would be mis-fits in other places. Rough, cheerful, careless of human life, including their own, used to prison, hard work, and danger. Come day, go day, God send Sunday.

FEW CLOTHES, differs from the rest only in that he plays the mouth organ well:

NUNKIE, a no-good gambler - shifty and irresponsible. His soul is as black as his face and his face is as black as the sins he commits. Any place with a dice table is his home:

QUARTERS BOSS, a poor white would be a misfit outside of the job he holds, which is to keep order in the rough, lawless Negro quarters, where at least one person is killed every pay night. He is a little of a bully, but avoids trouble if he can. Tall lanky, and looks poor-white:

PIANO PLAYER, a good player who "jooks", that is plays by ear.  
 ELLA WALL, though primitive and pagan, has the air of a conqueror. She is strutting and self assured and accustomed to the favors of men which she in return grants freely. She practices Voodoo and feels she leads a charmed life:

A PREACHER, an old-time darkie - an aesthetic figure:

CHILDREN, about six or eight children (boys and girls)

MALE CHORUS, ) there will be a male quartet and a female  
 WOMEN CHORUS, ) quartet - if necessary a sextet.

DANCERS

DRUMMERS

- \* - \* -

VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL NUMBERS  
 \*\*\*\*\*

Wake Up, Jacob! Get on the Rock

What Did The Rooster Say To The Hen?

I'm Going To Make Me A Graveyard Of My Own

I Ride The Rainbow, Amen

Jesus Going To Make Up My Dying Bed

Cutting Timber!: Cutting Ties!

Chick-Mah-Chik-Mah-Craney-Crow

Polk County Blues

Nasty Butt, Stinky Butt

Oh, Angeline! Oh, Angeline!

The Fox Hunt

Careless Love

John Henry

Dance Music (A hot stomp)

Had A Good Woman, But The Fool Laid Down And Died

Troubles Will Be Over, Amen!

Daisies Wont Tell

Let The Deal Go Down!

I'd Rather See My Coffin Come Rolling In My Door

Lonnie Reads The Deck

The Moonlight Came Into My Room (Original Waltz)

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus

The House That Jack Build

Ever Been Down

The Prayer Chant

Dicey's Chant

Ella Wall's Chant

## CAST

(In Order of Their Appearance)

LONNIE

SOP-THE-BOTTOM

DO-DIRTY

FEW CLOTHES

STEW BEEF

BIG SWEET

NUNKIE

LAURA B.

BUNCH

QUARTERS BOSS

DICEY

MY HONEY

MAUDELLA

ALVISHUS

LEAFY LEE

A NEIGHBOR

BOX CAR

A PIANO PLAYER

ELLA WALL

A PREACHER

A ROOSTER, HENS, A CROW, CHILDREN, MALE CHORUS, WOMAN CHORUS,  
DANCERS, DRUMMERS.

(NOTE:

A southern community is clannish. Both white and black will get together on an outsider of either race. Hence the reaction of the Quarters Boss to Nunkie.)

ACT ONE.

SCENE 1.

SCENE

It is dawn. Birds twitter from the woods. A rooster crows lustily from offstage, and is answered by another. The Square is silent and deserted. Snores can be heard from the houses nearest the footlights:

Lonnie

(Enters upstage left. He has a heavy stick and raps on the porch of the house closest to where he enters and chants;)

Wake up, Jacob! Get on the rock

Taint quite day, but its five oclock!  
(Raps again and crosses the stage and raps on the porch opposite)

Wake up bullies! Day's a'breaking

Get your hoe-cake a'baking and your shirt-tail shaking!  
(Crosses back, raps again)

Hey, you rowdy mule-skinners! You better learn how to

skin. Cap'n got a new job and needs a hundred men!  
(A drowsy hum of noise begins to rise inside the houses. Lights begin to appear, and there is movement behind the drawn shades. Lonnie crosses and keeps rapping and chanting)

Wake up, bullies! I know you feel blue

I dont want you, but the Bossman do!

(The communal noises mount. More movement and lights and other signs of waking)

What did the rooster say to the hen?

Aint had no loving in the lord knows when:

(In a bantering tone)

Git out from under them covers, Sop-The Bottom! You

could have been in the bed when you was skinning last

night. Fall out!

(He turns away grinning)

Wake up, bullies! Pull for the shore!

Big crap game on the other side, and I know you want to go!

(Mounts a porch and listens at the window a minute)

Git up from there, Stew Beef! If you aint made it by now,

you better wait till night again. Git on up!

(Leaps off porch grinning)

(A hum in harmony follows his chants now. The camp is stirring.

Lonnie is down at the footlights.

He makes a last general call)

All up, bullies! Unless you want some trouble with the

bossman!

(Turns to exit, right)

I done called you once! I done called you twice!

(He holds the hum of his last syllable until he disappears off right. The lights have come up gradually, but not very much)

Rooster

(Crows, flaps wings, begins to strut as his flock of hens follow him on)

Hen

Ground cold to my feet this morning. I wish I had some shoes.

Rooster

(Doing a love dance around her)

What did the rooster say to the hen? Ain't had no loving in the Lord knows when.

Hen

(Uninterested)

These Polk County roosters! They want plenty loving, but they don't buy you no shoes.

Rooster

(Love dance around another hen)

How about a lil' kiss?

Hen  
(Evading Him)  
I want some shoes!

Rooster  
(Dances around another)  
Oh, gimme a lil kiss.

All Hens  
(Complaining in rythm)  
Well, I lay all the eggs, and I go barefooted!  
(Rythmic imitation of cackle)

Rooster  
(Trying to evade the issue)  
T'aint a man in Tennessee can make a shoe to fit your foot!  
(It is a well established chant-  
dance by this time)

Hens  
(Chanting in imitation of cackle  
and dancing)  
Well, I lay all the eggs and I go barefooted!

Rooster  
(Trying his luck with first one  
hen then another)  
T'aint a man in Tennessee can make a shoe to fit your foot!  
(Same chants and business for  
duration of dance)

Rooster  
(At end of dance)  
Aw, cutta-cut cut! You Polk County hens always hollering  
for shoes! Why I have to buy you shoes to love you! You  
get just as much out of it as I do. Aw, cutta-cut cut!  
(He leads them off between the houses  
clucking disgustedly)

(Lights are up in kitchens. The  
wooden shutters are open. Shades  
are up. There is a clatter of pots  
and pans. Breakfasts are being hur-  
riedly eaten, and buckets being packed  
with dinners. Men begin to drift out  
into the Square, collecting in a bunch  
to go to work.)

## Sop-The-Bottom

(Comes out playing his mouth  
organ and men begin singing)

I'm going to make me a graveyard of my own

I'm going to make me a graveyard of my own

Oh, carried me down on the smoky road

Brought me back on the cooling board

I'm going to make me a graveyard of my own

I'm going to live anyhow until I die

I'm going to live anyhow until I die

Sticks and stones may break my bones

Talk all about me when I'm dead and gone

But I'm going to live anyhow until I die.

## Do-Dirty

And that sure is the truth, man. I'm liable to make me a  
graveyard all by myself. I'm so mean till I'll kill a  
baby just born this morning.

## Few Clothes

Me too. Man, I'm mean! I have to tote a pistol with me  
when I go to the well, to keep from gitting in a fight  
with my ownself. I got Indian blood in me. Reckon thats  
how come I'm so mean.

(They all admit to Indian blood and  
meanness)

## Do-Dirty

(Yawning)

I sure aint like Lonnie. I swear I wouldnt let nobody  
beat me out my money like Nunkie done him last night.  
Stacking the deck, and carrying the cub and everything.  
I would have kilt Nunkie so dead that he couldnt fall  
over. They would have to shove him over.

## Sop-The-Bottom

Lonnie didnt even know Nunkie was carrying the cub to him. Lonnie cant skin worth a cent. He ought to quit trying to gamble.

## Few Clothes

I seen Nunkie what he was doing, but I aint no bet-straightener. Its more folks in the graveyard right now from straightening bets than anything else. Blind man aint got no business at the show.

## Do-Dirty

You done right. It wasnt none of your business. Blind man aint got no business at the show. But it is a good thing Big Sweet didnt come along about then. She would have cut Nunkie a brand new one.

## Sop-The-Bottom

I told Nunkie he better leave Lonnie's change alone, and then after he got it, I told him he better make it clean off this place before Big Sweet find out he got it.

## Few Clothes

Oh, she bound to find it out. My woman done found it out and she wouldnt let her shirt-tail touch her till she run tell Big Sweet all she know. If Nunkie aint gone, he better be on his way.

## Sop-The-Bottom

He claim that his knife going to back Big Sweet off him. Claim he aint scared, but I know better. He's talking at the big gate.

## Do-Dirty

(Laughs aloud)

Did the fool talk like that? You just wait till Big Sweet

get a hold of him. Before she turn him loose she'll make him tell her that she is Lord Jesus, and besides her there is no other.

Stew Beef  
I wouldnt exactly say Lonnie is blind. He aint really dumb to the fact. He just aint got his mind on no gambling. Lets folks talk him into the game. You know how he is--- half the time his mind is way off on something else.

Few Clothes  
Yeah, them sort of visions he have. But I likes to hear him tell about 'em.

Stew Beef  
Me too!

Lonnie  
(Singing off stage)  
I ride the rainbow, Amen  
I ride the rainbow, Amen  
I ride the rainbow, when I see Jesus  
Trouble will be over, Amen.

Stew Beef  
Here he come now. Sound like he been off on one of his trips.

(There is an eagerness as Lonnie enters. They all want to hear what he has to say)

Lonnie  
(Enters left, with a beatific smile on his face)

All  
(Very eager like children to hear a story)  
Hi there, Lonnie!

Lonnie  
(Brings himself back to the present with a visible effort)

Lonnie

'Lo, folks.  
(They draw around him)

Stew Beef

Sound like you been off this morning.

Lonnie

Fact of the matter is, I is been off.

Stew Beef

Where was you at? Tell us so we can know.

Lonnie

(Casually)

Oh, sort of knocking around Heaven a while.

Sop-The-Bottom

(Intensely interested)

Tell us how you managed to git there. I ever wanted to see the place.

Lonnie

(Illuminated)

On a great bird. A crow, diamond-shining black. One wing rests on the morning and the other one brushes off the sundown. He lights down out the sky, and I rides on his back.

Few Clothes

How do you manages to git where he is, Lonnie?

Lonnie

He comes right here. You all just dont see him when he come.

Stew Beef

How you know when he come?

Lonnie

A drum. A way off drum begins to throb. It gits closer and closer, and afterwhile, here come the Great Crow circling round to light down on the ground. I jumps on. Never do know where he going take me, but I dont care. I just goes.

Stew Beef  
Umph! Umph! Umph! Aint that wonderful?

Lonnie  
Sure is. This time, he took me crost a ocean, all made  
out of melted down pearls. And the shore was this coarse  
grainy gold. Wasnt no sand, no dirt-sand there at all.  
It was wonderful!

Sop-The-Bottom  
How come we dont miss you when you go?

Lonnie  
(Laughs in a superior way)  
Oh, thats easy! I just leaves my hull around here making  
motions, and you all thinks that I am here.

Sop-The-Bottom  
Thats a good thing, too, cause if the Boss ever figured  
you even got far enough off the ground to crack your heels,  
he sure would dock you for the time you was up in the air.  
(They all agree to this and laugh)

Stew Beef  
Aw, let the man tell us what Heaven was like. Thats what  
I wants to hear about.  
(General clamor)

Lonnie  
Tell you when we get to work.

Sop-The-Bottom  
What you trying to do---make out youse High John de Conquer?

Lonnie  
I knows him well; Nothing cant git too bad when Ole John  
de Conquer is around. (Laughs) Yeah, John de Conquer  
can find a way to beat out everything.  
(This makes a deep impression. Awe,  
and can it be possible? in their faces)

Sop-The-Bottom  
I know that High John was around in Slavery days, but I thought he was gone back to Africa for good.

Lonnie  
Supposing he was in Africa? What he care about distance? He could be right here in Lofton the next minute. He gits around right smart. Takes me off with him every occasinn-ally.

Sop-The-Bottom  
No wonder you gits along so good. If you got the inside tracks on John de Conquer, youse something on a stick. Gimme some luck in a skin game.

Lonnie  
Its too big to be brought down to that. Its for some thing big, like in your bosom.

Sop-The-Bottom  
Oh, to Hell with it then. If it cant make me hold the last card I'm through with John de Conquer right now. You can have him. He got a willing mind, but too light behind.

Do-Dirty  
Its a fact. Why he dont distribute out whole hams?

Lonnie  
Oh, he comes in handy. They got hams at the commissary if thats all in the world you wants.

Few Clothes  
That put me in the mind of something. (Opens his dinner pail and looks in) Looka here! Bunch done gimme the wrong thing in my dinner bucket. I done told her, I dont want no cold cornbread and molasses. I told her to fix ~~me~~ some black-eyed peas with fat-back. She going

Few Clothes  
to fix this bucket all over again, else Hell is going  
to break loose in Georgy;  
(Exits left in a hurry)

Do-Dirty  
I dont blame Few a bit. Dont give me no half-handed  
dinner bucket. I dont want no stingy woman over my cook-  
stove.

Sop-The-Bottom  
Some women folks aint exactly stingy, theys just contrary  
to that. I shacked up with a woman once that was so  
contrary she used to sleep humped up in the bed so you  
couldnt find no way to stretch out comfortable to sleep.

Do-Dirty  
Yeah, and I done been with some that pulls bed-covers.  
Wont let you stay covered up. Them kind of women dont  
look like they know what you bought a bed for. They  
think its some place to lay up and study evil.  
(All laugh)

Lonnie  
You telling the truth. I done seen 'em dreaming. They  
dont never dream about roses and scenery and sunshine  
like a sweet woman do. Naw, they dreams about hatchets  
and knives and pistols, and ice-picks and splitting  
open people's heads. I done seen 'em dreaming it!  
(There is a wild burst of laughter  
at this)

Sop-The-Bottom  
Lonnie aint lying. I had one like that down round  
Tampa one time. I tried hard to be good to that woman,  
but she wouldnt let me. Bought her shoes for her feet,  
and a brand new wig for her head. But she used to hump

Sop-The-Bottom  
 up in the bed and pull bed-covers right on. Lay up  
 there and dream about killing folks every night. Go  
 to bed evil and get up evil. Know what I done? One  
 Day I just told her, say, "Mary, gimme back the wig I  
 bought you." She hollered and cried and ask-ed me,  
 WWhat is I'm going to do for hair?" "Let your head go  
 bald" Man, I grabbed it, and I was out and gone. Left  
 her without a dust of meal or flour.

(They all laugh in approval)

Dicey put me in the mind of Mary more than anybody I  
 ever seen. Just wont agree with nobody or nothing. Why,  
 I seen Mary get into a fuss with a signboard one day.  
 We was coming long the road and a signboard said  
 Sweetheart Soap. Mary stopped and called the signboard  
 a liar! Said it was Octagon Soap;  
 (They all laugh loudly)

Lonnie  
 I better go see where My Honey is. I woke him up, but I  
 dont hear that guitar of his, so he might have dozed off  
 again.

Do-Dirty  
 Lets all go wake up the rascal. I know he aint woke  
 because he tunes that box before he pulls on his pants.  
 Lets go git him.

Lonnie  
 The Bossman is getting mighty tight about losing time.  
 I dont want us men that been together for a long time to  
 get parted. Thats why I most in general wakes the camp

Lonnie  
ahead of time-- to get everybody up and on the job;

Sop-The-Bottom  
Yeah, look like the more money he make, the more he  
feel like firing folks. But what can we do? He got us  
in the go-long;

Lonnie  
(Dreamily)  
Old John de Conquer could always find a way. He could  
make a way out of no-way. I'm gone to see about My Honey.

Sop-The-Bottom  
Come on, lets we all go long with Lonnie to My Honey's  
house, and come on back with the music.  
(This meets with general favor,  
and there is a stir of them all  
heading off left)

My Honey always got something good to be picking on his  
box.

(There is a general, happy exodus)  
(The lights have come up further.  
Calls, and answers can be heard from  
different directions. Male and  
female voices, and general stir)

Big Sweet  
(Enters left, crosses quickly and  
stealthily to right and wedges her-  
self against the wall of a house.  
She has on a man's felt hat set  
rakishly on the back of her head.  
She is smoking a cigarette, but  
she douses it, pushes the hat far  
back, and listens carefully. She  
peeps around the corner of the  
house on the alert in her ambush.  
She tenses as she hears stealthy  
footsteps, and gets ready to spring)

Nunkie  
(Enters from between two houses,  
very close to Big Sweet but does  
not see her as he steals along  
looking fearfully over his shoulder)

Big Sweet  
 (Pounces on Nunkie, seizes him  
 by the lapels of his coat and  
 buttons him up)  
 Where you think you going?

Nunkie  
 (Scared, startled, but recovers  
 and tries to appear defiant)  
 Take your hands off of me!

Big Sweet  
 Gimme that money back!

Nunkie  
 (Struggles to free himself, but  
 vainly)  
 Take your hands out of my collar, woman! I dont allow  
 no woman to button me up.

Big Sweet  
 (Tightens her grip firmly)  
 Well, I done done it, Mr. Nunkie, and look like there  
 aint no help for it. Gimme my Lonnie's money! You know  
 I dont allow none of you low-life-ted gamblers to hook  
 Lonnie out of his money. Give it here!

Nunkie  
 (Starts his hand to his pocket nervously,  
 but looking into Big Sweet's angry face,  
 thinks better of it)  
 I aint supposed to teach Lonnie how to skin, is I?  
 (Tries to wrench free)  
 Naw, I aint going to give you nothing! I aint putting  
 out nothing but old folks' eyes, and I aint doing that  
 till they dead. (Struggles) Let go!

Big Sweet  
 (Tightens his clothes around his  
 neck until he is being choked.  
 Shakes him violently)  
 Gimme!

Nunkie  
 (Desperate)  
 Take your hand out my collar!  
 (It is half appeal)

Big Sweet  
I'll beat you till you slack like lime! Gimme that six  
dollars you beat Lonnie out of! (Another twist) Gimme!

Nunkie  
(In desperate straits, tries  
to get to his pocket knife)  
I'll cut your throat-----

Big Sweet  
(Lands a terrific blow to his  
stomach)  
You going to cut me, eh? (Another blow to his face, and  
Nunkie goes down. She kicks him hard) I'll kill you.  
Gimme!

Nunkie  
(Trying to cover up)  
Murder! Help!

Big Sweet  
(Trying for another good place  
to kick)  
You didnt die! You multiplied cockroach. (Aims another  
kick) I'll teach you to die next time I hit you! Die!

Nunkie  
Murder! Murder! Somebody come git this woman off of me!!

Big Sweet  
Shut up that racket! I mean to kill you. Beating my  
Lonnie out of his money. Gimme! If you dont, and that  
quick, they going to tote you through three yards---  
this yard, the churchyard, and the graveyard. Gimme!  
(Sop-The-Bottom, Do-Dirty, Laura B, Few  
Clothes and Bunch rush in and take in  
the scene)

Laura B.  
OOOOOH, Big Sweet done caught Nunkie!

Sop-The-Bottom  
(With admiration)  
Look at that lump on his jaw! Big Sweet, you sure hit  
him a lick.

Bunch

You told that right:

Laura B.

(To Big Sweet)

Did you all have some words before you fell out?

Big Sweet

(Hovering over Nunkie so that  
he cannot escape)

He better gimme Lonnie's money before I finish him. I  
asked him nice and kind to gimme Lonnie's money, but naw,  
he had to get up in my face with some of his big talk.  
I'm going to kill him!

Do-Dirty

(To Nunkie)

Give it to her, man, if you got good sense. Taint  
nothing in the drugstore will kill you quicker than Big  
Sweet will about Lonnie Price. Give it to her!

Sop-The-Bottom

You might as well give it to her. You cant whip her.  
She got them loaded muscles. Come on, hand it to her.  
Give her that little spending change!

Nunkie

(Sullen and silent, rolls his  
eyes hatefully at Big Sweet)

Big Sweet

(Looks from the spectators back  
to Nunkie on the ground all curled  
up like a worm. This sends her  
into a fresh frenzy)

Dont you lay there all curled up like that!

(Puts her foot on top of him  
and presses down to make him  
straighten up)

Straighten up and die right!

(She glares at him, then turns  
full of self-pity to the crowd)

See? Thats how so many lies gets out on me. They twist  
theyselves all up and dies ugly, and then folks swears I

Big Sweet  
kilt 'em like that. (Kicks Nunkie) You aint going to  
die a lie on me like that. Straighten up!

Laura B.  
(Pleadingly)  
Give him one more chance, Big Sweet. Maybe he's fixing  
to give you Lonnie's money right now.  
(They all look expectantly at  
Nunkie, but he is sullen and  
slyly looking for a chance to  
run)

Do-Dirty  
Why you want to die so young, Nunkie? Give her Lonnie's  
money and live to get old.

Sop-The-Bottom  
I know I dont aim to get hurt trying to hold Big Sweet  
off you when she start to finish you. Big Sweet is two  
whole women and a gang of men.

Bunch  
(Disgusted, takes Few Clothes' arm)  
Oh, leave her kill him! If he ruther to die than to part  
with Lonnie's money, let him have his ruthers. Come on  
Few, lets go. Hard head make sore behind, you know.

Few Clothes  
(Disgusted)  
Yeah, Come on everybody, so we wont know nothing about it.  
Big Sweet can kill him dead for all I care.. He aint no  
kin to me.

Big Sweet  
And I am going to kill him too.. Old trashy breath-and  
britches aint got no business beating folks out of money  
they done worked hard for. Run get me my gun, Bunch!  
If God send me a pistol, I'll send him a man!

Nunkie  
(Terrified)  
Here's them few little old dimes is (He flings a little  
roll of bills at Big Sweet's feet and jumps to his knees)  
I got plenty more.

Big Sweet  
(Knocks him back down)  
Pick it up! You didnt get it off the ground did you? You  
got it out of Lonnie's hands. Pick it up!  
(Nunkie grabs up the money)  
You aint going to discount me like that. Git up from there  
and place it in my hand.

Nunkie  
(Hurriedly hands Big Sweet the money)  
Big Sweet  
(Snatches it angrily)  
Now, stand back and lemme see if it is all here. (counts  
it) Yeah, this is it. (Puts it in her dress pocket) I  
ought to beat you till your ears hang down like a Georgy  
mule for putting me to all this trouble. You aint no  
good for what you live, nohow. Just like your no-count  
brother, Charlie. Git! Sweep clean! Broom!

Nunkie  
(Dodges the blow Big Sweet aims  
at him to speed him and dashes off  
right. At the exit, he pauses)  
I'll get you for this. I aint scared of you. I'll-----

Quarters Boss  
(Rushes in right and seizes Nunkie  
who jumps in fright)  
What the hen-fire is coming off here?  
(He has his gun in his hand and  
his eyes on Big Sweet)  
(Dicey, and several more people,  
mostly men enter left on the run  
attracted by the excitement)

Nunkie

Big Sweet jumped me when I wasnt looking, and robbed me out my money.

Quarters Boss

Big Sweet, aint I done told you about your meanness? You aint to cripple up everybody on the place. You hear me?

Big Sweet

Youse a got-that-wrong. I wasnt bothering that thing.  
[She indicates Nunkie with contempt]

It come here bothering me.

Quarters Boss

(Examining Nunkie's messed up condition)

Big Sweet-----

Do-Dirty

(Giving Nunkie an unfriendly look)

He dont belong on this job, Mr. Pringle.

Quarters Boss

(Turning unfriendly eyes on Nunkie)

He dont? Then what is he doing in these quarters?

Sop-The -Bottom

Come in here last night to gamble. Bothering Big Sweet about Lonnie's money.

Quarters Boss

(A great light)

Oh, he did, did he? She ought to have kilt him dead.

Bulldozing the place and stealing, eh?

(Begins to frisk Nunkie roughly.

Finds the knife and a greasy deck of cards)

Toting knives and weapons.

(Finds about a dollar's worth of small change and transfers it to his own pocket immediately)

Stealing honest people's money too!

(Examins the deck of cards, then fixes Nunkie with an accusing look)

Up to all kinds of meanness, too.

(Shakes the deck under Nunkie's nose as if it were a set of burglar's tools)

Quarters Boss  
Unhunh! And toting concealed cards, highway shuffling,  
and attempt to gamble! (Grabs Nunkie roughly) You  
going down to Bartow to the big jail. Lets go!

Nunkie  
Dont take me to jail! Please, Cap'n! Lemme go this one  
time and I -----

Quarters Boss  
(Still glaring to intimidate Nunkie)  
Well, I'm going to let you go this time. But you know  
no outside folks aint allowed in these quarters. If I  
ever catch you on these premises again, I'll git you ninety-  
nine years and a jump-back in jail. Hit the grit!

Nunkie  
(Pulling his hat down tight on  
his head)  
Yassuh!  
(Nunkie starts to walk rapidly  
towards right, watching nervously  
out of the corner of his eye for  
signs of threats to his escape)

Dicey  
Poor Nunkie! It could be that he aint harmed a soul.  
(General growl of disagreement)

Sop-The-Bottom  
(Shortly)  
Aw, Dicey, you always got to pull different from everybody  
else. You know Nunkie is a mink.

Nunkie  
(Hearing Dicey defend him, thinks  
that things are improving for him,  
halts and decided to hit back at  
Big Sweet)  
Naw, I aint stole nothing. Big Sweet-----

Quarters Boss  
(Firing off his gun into the air)  
Git! Didnt I tell you to git?  
(Nunkie departs in a hurry, and  
all laugh but Dicey)

Dicey  
(Not daring to accuse Big Sweet  
directly, mutters out loud)  
Some folks thinks they is a lord-god sitting on a by-god.

They just loves to 'buke and boss.

Big Sweet  
Who you personating, Dicey? You must of woke up with the  
Black-ass this morning.

Do-Dirty  
Just like usual. (Sings) She got the Blues, she got the  
Black-ass too. The Blues dont hurt her, but the Black-ass  
do. (disapprovingly) Always thinking evil.

Dicey  
How come you all always got to take a pick-out after me?  
I cant break a breath without somebody got to hurt my  
feelings.

Quarters Boss  
Here! Here! Squat that rabbit and lets jump another one.  
(To Big Sweet )  
Big Sweet, not that I fault you for what you done this  
morning, but I been laying off to caution you for some time.

Big Sweet  
Caution me? Caution me about what?

Quarters Boss  
(Placating)  
Now, I aint after no fuss. I gits paid to keep order in  
these here quarters, and I tries my level best to do it.

Big Sweet  
Well, who told you not to? I know it wasnt me.

Quarters Boss  
You been lamming folks a mighty heap round here.

Sop-The-Bottom  
Who? Big Sweet? Big Sweet dont bother nobody. You must  
be talking about somebody else.

Bunch  
I aint heard nobody say nothing against Big Sweet. She's even nice.

Do-Dirty  
If folks leave her alone, she'll leave them alone. She just dont like to see nobody bulldozing the place and running the hog over other folks. She'll cold crawl you for that.

Laura B;  
And nobody cant coldwater her for that. Some folks is too biggity and imposing.  
(Everybody but Dicey joins in the testimonial by noises of approval)

Quarters Boss  
(Mocking)  
Yeah, yeah, I know. Thats all I can hear from most of you. Big Sweet aint never done a thing but praise the Lord. Her mouth is a prayer-book and her lips flap just like a Bible. But where do all these head-lumps come from that the Company Doctor is always greasing? Somebody done told me. Big Sweet lumps your heads, and kicks your behinds for you, and you all lie and make out you dont know who done it. How can I keep order like that?

Laura B.  
But we already got order! Lonnie dont like no rough stuff and Big Sweet, she-----

Quarters Boss  
I'm the one getting paid to look after things. Big Sweet is too heavy with her hands. Now, take Lonnie Price for instance: Lonnie is a good man. No better conditioned man ever been on the place. Works hard and regular and

Quarters Boss  
 dont git into no cutting scrapes. But I can count the  
 pay-days on Lonnie's head. Big Sweet's got a lump up  
 there for every pay-day. But will he tell me she done  
 it? Naw, indeed! A piece of lumber flew up and hit him,  
 or something like that.

Big Sweet  
 (Aroused)  
 I dont aim to let nobody tell me that I mistreats Lonnie.  
 Its my life time pleasure to do what I know he want done.  
 Lonnie, he's different. He dont like all this old rough  
 doings and fighting, so I makes 'em live better cause  
 what Lonnie says is right. (Tenderly) Lonnie is just  
 a baby, in a way of speaking. He thinks everybody will  
 just naturally do right, but I knows different. So I gets  
 around to see to it that they do.

Quarters Boss  
 Well, why you lam Lonnie? He dont act rough.

Big Sweet  
 (A self-conscious laugh)  
 I dont lam Lonnie. I just sort of taps him once in a  
 while. You see, Lonnie got his mind way up in the air,  
 and I taps him to make him know that the ground is here  
 right on, and that there's minks on it trying to take  
 advantage of him all the time. They cant fool me.  
 Lonnie dreams pretty things. Thats what make I love him so.

Quarters Boss  
 (Touched by Big Sweet's sincerity,  
 looks at her a long time)  
 I believe you do, Big Sweet. (Back to his official  
 manner) No use in talking, I reckon. If the rest of you

Quarters Boss  
all dont care how much Big Sweet whips your heads and  
kicks your behinds, I dont give a damn. (He turns shortly  
to leave, right) But still and all, the Company dont  
want all the help kilt off. You got to leave somebody  
to do the work on this job:

Sop-The-Bottom  
So far as that is concerned, more men makes time now than  
they used to do cause Big Sweet keeps a lot of 'em from  
cutting the fool and going to jail. She dont bother nobody.

Big Sweet  
(Seriously)  
No, I dont bother nobody. They bothers me. Looks like  
to me, folks ought to improve up some.

Laura B.  
(Triumphantly)  
See that? Big Sweet-----

Quarters Boss  
(Exasperated)  
All right! All right! Big Sweet is the bellcow, and to  
Hell with it! (Exits right quickly)  
(The minute he is gone, they all  
break into boisterous laughter.  
They dance and caper. Few Clothes  
pulls out his harp and begins to  
play "TRAIN" Big Sweet buck dances  
a few steps to a "break" then finishes  
off with a belly-wobble. They laugh  
and exclaim some more)

Bunch  
Big Sweet, youse a mess!

Dicey  
(Who has taken no part in the  
jubilation)  
Reckon I better go see about My Honey's bucket. I baked  
a cake so he could have some to carry in his dinner bucket.  
(She simpers, and goes off left  
quickly, walking as if she had some  
romantic secret)

Laura B.  
Is Dicey done shackled up with My Honey?

Big Sweet  
Aw, naw! He rooming with us right on.

Bunch  
What she doing fixing him a bucket, then?

Big Sweet  
Lord knows, I fixed My Honey's bucket last night just like  
always. He did mess with her for a day or so when he first  
come on the job, but that was long time ago. He dont  
mean Dicey no good, and she know it. She call herself  
fooling folks.

Sop-The-Bottom  
I thought My Honey could do better than that. Me, I  
wouldnt have her for a Christmas gift.

Laura B.  
So contrary. What she got to take up for Nunkie for?  
Everybody know he aint worth doodley-squat. Bet he will  
stay out of these quarters now, (Laughs) you sure give  
his head a straightening.

Do-Dirty  
But I would watch out for him if I was you, Big Sweet.  
You heard him say he aimed to get you.

Big Sweet  
I heard him, but I aint scared of that trash. I'll finish  
him next time he mess with me. Specially with my Lonnie.

Do-Dirty  
But he's the kind wouldnt come up and fight you a fair  
fight. He would lay way for you and try to steal you.

Sop-The-Bottom

And he hangs out around that Ella Wall in Mulberry all the time. She's jealous because you got such a swing around here. They're liable to try to gang you. They's dirty!

(From off-stage comes the sound of a guitar and men's voices singing JESUS GOING TO MAKE UP MY DYING BED)

Do-Dirty

Listen at old My Honey! That fool can cold pick a box!

Big Sweet

(Proudly)

You listen at my baby singing. Listen! That's Lonnie singing right in there. Listen!

Lonnie

(Voice off stage)

Well, I'm going down to the river.

Stick my sword up in the sand

Going to shout my troubles over, Lord

I'm going to make it to the Promised Land

Male Chorus

Well, well, well! I'm going to cross over

Well, well, well! I'm going to cross over

Well, well, well! I'm going to cross over

Jesus going to make up my dying bed.

Lonnie

Oh, meet me, Jesus, meet me

Meet me up in the middle of the air

And if my wings should fail me, Lord

Wont you meet me with another pair!

Big Sweet  
(In ecstasy)  
Do it, Lonnie, do it!

Chorus  
(The men come in singing the chorus. Lonnie and My Honey are walking side by side and the others are grouped close to keep the harmony straight. They are strutting, smiling and feeling anything but religious. They are carried away by melody and rhythm)

(A loud-laughing cheer goes up from the spectators. They egg the others on. My Honey is conscious of the good finger work he is doing and is grinning about it)

Lonnie  
(Sings)  
And in my dying hour

I dont want nobody to moan

All I want you to do for me

Is just to fold my dying arms  
(This manner of delivery pleases everyone. They show it by smiles and laughs. Men start on chorus)

Dicey  
(Enters running hard from left with an open switch-blade knife in her hands, leaps on My Honey and tries to button him up. He flings her off, but she attacks again grabbing hold of the pocket of his jumper and winding her hand in it and fointing at his middle with her knife. Everybody is struck dumb for a moment by the suddenness of the attack)

Oh,Yeah! (Panting) I got you! Trying to duck and dodge from me, but I got you!

My Honey

(Recovering his faculties somewhat,  
struggles to break the hold)

Git away from me, Dicey! Is you gone crazy in the head?

(Flings her off again so hard that  
she is off balance)

I dont want to hurt you. Why dont you leave me alone?

Dicey

(Seeking an opening)

I'll fold your dying arms for you!

(Big Sweet is tensing herself to  
seize Dicey from behind, and  
waiting for a favorable moment  
as she makes threatening motions  
with her knife at My Honey)

Trying to scorn me! I wont stand a quit. I mean to cut

you just as long as I can see you.

Big Sweet

(Darts in and grabs Dicey's uplifted  
right hand and wrests the knife away.  
Dicey gives a short scream of fright  
as she fears that Big Sweet means to  
cut her with it. But Big Sweet  
looks at it good, closes it, and puts  
it in her pocket)

Dicey

Gimme back my knife! I mean to stick my knife in him  
and pull it down. Gimme my knife! My money paid for it.

Big Sweet

(Calmly)

Naw, I better keep it. You doing too much talking about  
cutting folks to death these late days. You keep on  
flourishing that old free around here, and somebody is  
going to hurt you.

Dicey

(Rushes back and grabs hold of  
My Honey)  
(She tries to hit him in his face  
but he blocks every blow, and  
keeps shoving her off.)

Dicey  
I mean to kill you and go to jail for you.

My Honey  
Why dont you leave me be, Dicey? I done told you I dont  
want no parts of you. Behave yourself!  
(There is a strong growl among  
the males)

Sop-The-Bottom  
Its a good thing it aint me, she's pulling on. God knows  
I'd get her to go. She better not never draw no knife  
on me.

Lonnie  
(Angrily)  
I dont believe in knocking lady people around like I would  
a man, but if I was God, I sure would turn Dicey into a  
hog, and then I would cement the world all over, so she  
wouldnt have a damn place to root.

Dicey  
(Furiously to Lonnie)  
You keep your big mouth out of me and My Honey's business.  
Thats what the matter now --- me and him was getting  
along fine till you had to go tole him off and turn him  
against me. Yeah, I'm going to cut him, and a heap more  
round here if they mess with me.

Lonnie  
Big Sweet, why dont you talk some sense into this crazy  
fool? You know My Honey aint got no more use for her  
than he is for his baby shirt. She's just taking  
advantage because he wont knock her down like some mens  
would. (To Dicey) Turn My Honey go! Take your hands  
off of his clothes!

Dicey

Aint a'going to do it till I get good and ready. He aint going to quit me like I was some old dog.

My Honey

(Tartly)

I aint never said I wanted you yet. You better wait till somebody ask-es you before you go claiming 'em.

Lonnie

(Distressed)

How come we got to have all this changing words and disturbment? How come everything cant go on nice and friendly?

Big Sweet

(Looks at Lonnie's unhappy face,  
then interferes)

Lonnie is right. Taint no use in all this who-struck-John. (Approaches Dicey) Me, myself, I dont learnt better about a lot of things since I been with Lonnie. (Kindly to Dicey) Dicey, on the average, I am for the women folks, because the mens take so much undercurrents of us. But, Dicey, My Honey's case done come up in your court. He aint fooled you and mistreated you. All he ever done was joke with you a time or two. He done told you he dont want you. I wouldnt want no man that didnt want me. Pulling after a man that dont want you, is just like peeping in a jug with one eye. You cant see a thing but darkness. Take a fools's advice and leave the man alone, like Lonnie say.

My Honey

(Sullenly)

I done tried and tried to tell her that. But look like her head is hard.

Stew Beef

I sure would soften it up for her, if it was me.

Lonnie

I never did choose no woman that run me down.

Dicey

(Full of self pity)

Why you all want to double-teen on me? Always faulting me for everything. I cant even talk to my gentleman friend without everybody got to dip in.

My Honey

If you talking about me, you aint got none. You'll never snore in my ear if I can help myself.

Dicey

I know I aint yellow, and aint got no long straight hair, but I got feelings just like anybody else. Go on, treat me mean if you want to, but someday, you all going to wish you had of treated me right. (Exalted) I'm going to be propaganda! Everybody going to be talking about me. Mens is going to scream over me more'n they ever did over Ella Wall, going to make up songs about me too and they going to talk about me more'n they do about Big Sweet.

Lonnie

How you going to bring all that about, Dicey?

Dicey

I'm going go git me a new, big knife. That kind you touch a button and the blade fly open, and I'm going to make me a graveyard of my own. (As if visualizing) I'm going to cut everybody that bother me. I'm going to stick 'em just to see 'em jump. Carry me down to Bartow to jail and folks will come running from way off just to

Dicey  
look at me. They'll say, "There she is! That's Dicey,  
the one that kilt so many folks. Big Sweet? What you  
talking about, man? Big Sweet cant hold a light to Dicey  
Long. She'll kill you without a doubt. Slice you too  
thin to fry. Shoot until her gun jumps the rivets! Dont care  
care who it is and where it is, that Dicey Long will fight!  
She'll shoot in the hearse, dont care how sad the funeral  
is. That's Dicey Long!"

(In her reverie, she has released  
My Honey's coat and made gestures  
of exaltation. Now she comes out  
of it)

Then My Honey and a whole heap of mens will be pulling  
after me. I'm going to scorn him then. Tell him to come  
round another day. All of you all going to be trying to  
git in with me, but I aim to turn my nose up at you. I'll  
be Miss Dicey Long, with finger rings and things.

(The whistle blows loud and long  
and the men respond automatically.  
Before Dicey realizes it, they are  
moving off and My Honey is out of  
her reach)

Lonnie  
Come on boys! Another day! The work is hard, and the  
boss is mean. Can you make it.

Male Chorus  
Yeah!

Lonnie  
Can you break it?

Male Chorus  
Yeah!

Lonnie  
Can you shake it?

## Chorus

Yeah!!

Lonnie  
All right, then! Follow me, Bullies (Chants) Cutting  
timber! Ha! Cutting ties!

Dicey  
(Plaintive)  
My Honey!  
(She moves towards him, but Lonnie blocks her)

My Honey  
Aw, dont bother me woman. I'm going to leave this job  
just to get rid of you.

Dicey  
I'll wait for you. How long you going to be gone?

My Honey  
From since when till nobody knows!

Dicey  
Going to take me with you?

Lonnie  
Tell her, "no!" Let every town furnish its own.

Dicey  
Where you figger on going?

My Honey  
Way up in Georgy.

Stew Beef  
Man, is you crazy? Christ walked the waters just to go  
around Georgy, and you fool enough to go right in it!

Dicey  
(Almost sobbing)  
My Honey, tell me sure enough, if you go, when you coming  
back?

My Honey  
Not that it is any of your business, but I'll be back  
some old cold rainy day.  
(The second whistle blows short and sharp)

Lonnie  
Let's go!  
(They all make motions of leaving)

Stew Beef  
Let's go! The work is hard and the boss is mean.  
(Sings) Asked my cap'n what the time of day  
He got mad and throwed his watch away.

Lonnie  
(Entering into the spirit of  
kidding bossmen)  
Cap'n can't read and cap'n can't write  
How the hell do he know when the time is right?

My Honey  
Cap'n got a pistol and he try to play bad  
but I'm going to take it if he makes me mad

Do-Dirty  
My Honey, you better not take that box. Didn't Cap'n  
tell you not to bring it on the job no more?

My Honey  
I ain't got that man to study about. I takes my music  
and my meanness everywhere I go.

Stew Beef  
Aw, you make the time, don't you? Play that box, man!  
Give us something to walk on. Git with him Few Clothes;

(The men wave and yell back  
at the women who wave and yell  
at them and go off singing  
Cold Rainy Day. The animation  
in the women dies as the singing  
fades out. They are drab again,  
and begin to make slow motions  
of dispersal to homes)

Dicey  
(Stands looking forlorn after  
the men when all other women  
have turned away. Big Sweet  
looks at her and grows sympa-  
thetic. She approaches Dicey,

Dicey  
(and starts to put her arms  
around her, but Dicey spurns  
her)

You old destruction-maker! Taking My Honey away from me!

Big Sweet  
Nobody aint took him because he never was yours.

Dicey  
You did! You did! You and that Lonnie, and you more  
especial. Keeping him laying round your house night and  
day. I'm going to get even with you for it too. I'll  
put Ella Wall on you!

Big Sweet  
Ella Wall aint my Mama. I aint a bit more scared of her  
than I is of you. And then again, what I got to be scared  
about? Ella Wall aint no big hen's biddy, if she do lay  
gobbler's eggs.

Dicey  
You'll find out. You done more than Lonnie think you done  
to git My Honey away from me, and keep him tied up round  
your house like a yard dog.

Big Sweet  
(Angry)  
Thats a lie! I called you a liar. You dont like it,  
dont you take it. Here's my collar, come and shake it!  
(The atmosphere becomes tense.  
The others crowd around expecting  
action. Dicey backs off cringing)

Dicey  
Your time now, be mine after while.

Big Sweet  
So be it in the grand lodge!

CURTAIN

ACT ONE.SCENE 2.

SCENE

It is late afternoon. The sun is strong in the Square. Housework is done and suppers are cooked and waiting for the men to return. Women have changed into clean cotton housedresses, well starched, and sitting around on porches. Several large boys and frying-size girls are out in the Square playing CHICK-MAH-CHICK-CRANEY-CROW, as the women sit around and patch, or here and there two or three "visit" on the porch of a neighbor. A boy about fifteen is the Crow. A girl about the same age is the hen.

Maudella

All right, Alwishus, you be the Crow. I'll be Mama Hen.

Alwishus

Okay, now, but dont make out I didnt catch you when I did.

Girl

Aw, go on and get ready.

(Alwishus gets a stick about the size of a large pencil and squats in the center of the play area. The girls form in line behind the Mama Hen, each holding the girl in front around the body, of by her dress in the back, and start the march around the Crow chanting.)

Chick mah chick mah craney crow

Went to the well to wash my toe

When I come back my chick was gone

What time, Old Witch?

Alwishus

(Making a mark on the ground)

One!

Alwishus

(Same business till the count is three. The Crow gets up and assumes a predatory posture. The Hen and all her chicks go on the alert to avoid capture. The whole movement is a rhythmic dance with chanted words.)

Chickie!

Hen

(Dancing counter to Crow with all chicks with her)

My chickens sleep!

Crow

(Wing and foot movement)

Chickie!

Hen

(Foiling him)

My chickens sleep

Crow

I shall have a chick!

Hen

You shant have a chick.

Crow

My pot's a'boiling!

Hen

Let it boil!

Crow

(Executing banking flight as if he is leaving)

I'm going home.

Hen

(Undeceived)

There's the road!

Crow

I'm coming back!

(Suits action to words)

Hen

Dont care if you do!

Leafy Lee  
(Enters from right. A slim mulatto girl with a cheap suitcase in her hand. Walking slowly and looking about her as if searching. It is hot, and she wipes her face. She is not discovered immediately because of the excitement of the play-dance. She watches the dance with interest a minute, then advances more rapidly.)

Crow  
(Working up to a high pitch)  
My Mama's sick!

Hen  
Let her die!

Crow  
(Coming in closer for the kill)  
Chickie!  
(Darts in suddenly and seizes one of the chicks to loud screams of mock terror. It is then that Leafy Lee is discovered. They all stop and look.)

Laura B.  
(Under guise of a cough)  
Who is that?

Neighbor  
Look like she is white. What you reckon she want in here?

Laura B.  
Lord knows.

Dicey  
(Enters from her house and stands on porch staring at Leafy. Leafy approaches the girls and boys playing)

Leafy  
Hello.

Maudella  
(Bashfully)  
How de doo.

Laura  
Seem like she colored from the sound. (Undertone to others)

Leafy  
(Exhibiting a small piece of  
white paper)  
Can you tell me where I can find Miss Bunch?

Laura B.  
(Undertone)  
She colored. Hear her put that handle to Bunch's name.  
Miss Bunch. (To Leafy) Who was it you wanted to see?

Leafy  
(Approaching Laura's porch, setting  
down her bag and wiping her face.  
Miss Bunch. They told me at the office that she could  
let me have a room.

Laura B.  
Oh, then you expecting to stay here a while?  
(Catching herself)  
Oh, where is my manners today? Wont you come up on the  
porch and have some set down? Its sort of hot out there  
today.

Leafy  
Much obliged to you. It is real hot in the sun.

Bunch  
(Enters from her house across the  
street and stands on her porch  
listening)

Laura B.  
(Raising her voice so that Bunch  
can hear)  
You say you looking for Bunch? Is you some kin to her?

Leafy  
Oh, no. I never seen her in my life. The man at the  
office just give me her name on this piece of paper and  
said she might let me have a room to stay if she had one  
to spare.

Laura B.

Bunch aint around home right now. Seens like I seen her going to the commissary awhile back. You say you aim to stay here? You going to teach the school? You sort of looks like a schoolteacher.

Leafy

No.ma'am. I'm not a schoolteacher at all. I just come to stay around awhile.

Laura B.

Is you married?

Leafy

Oh, no Ma'am. I havent got no husband at all. All by myself.

Laura B.

Oh, I see, you got a man friend here, and you come to live with him.

Leafy

(Shocked)

Oh, no Ma'am. I havent got nobody like that al all. I dont know a soul here so far.

(All the women are out where they can listen and give each other significant glances on Leafy's answers.)

Dicey

(Calls over)

Er, Laura B., Come here. Maybe I can tell you where

Bunch went.

(Laura B. understands that Dicey wants to talk to her and gets up. Two or three other women head towards Dicey's porch at the same time, including Bunch)

Laura B.

(To Leafy)

You better step in the house and have a seat. It may be a little cooler in there. Maudella, pick up the lady's

Laura B.  
 suit-satchel and take it inside for her. She can set there  
 until Bunch come home and let her know.

Maudella  
 (With eyes devouring Leafy in admiration)  
 Yassum.  
 (She picks up bag and proceeds Leafy  
 into the house)

Leafy  
 (Up on the porch)  
 That was a pretty game you all were playing. I wish you  
 would teach it to me)

Maudella  
 (Happily)  
 Sure will because I likes to play it my ownself.  
 (They exit into house)

Laura B.  
 (As she joins the others at Dicey's porch)  
 You got a bug to put in my ear?

Dicey  
 Aint got nothing different. Dont be pointing out Bunch to  
 that gal. She aint nothing! Bunch dont want nothing like  
 that in her house causing disturbment.

Bunch  
 Oh, you knowed her before?

Dicey  
 Not to speak to, but look like I seen her somewhere. But  
 if I never seen her before, you can tell she aint nothing.  
 Just a old storm-buzzard out for what she can get. I  
 wouldnt have her in my house.  
 (There is a thoughtful silence)

Laura B.  
 She dont seem like no fan-foot to me. I figgered her out  
 for sort of nice, didnt you, Bunch?

Bunch  
Sort of kind of, Wants to play ring play with the young'  
uns. That dont sound so bad.

Dicey  
(Heated)  
That aint nothing but a form and a fashion and a outside  
show to the world. She done heard about the money our  
mens makes on this job, and she done come in time to make  
a pay-day. Better git her on off from here before sundown  
and the mens come home from work. She'll be after all us  
men before you can turn around. Lets git her way from here.

Laura B.  
The Quarters Boss must have figgered she was all right, else  
he wouldnt have let her in here.

Dicey  
Aw, that white man dont know what he talking about. I has  
words with Big Sweet sometimes, but she aint wrong all the  
time. She aint going to like no stomp-down fan-foot round  
here tearing up peace and agreement. Lets call Big Sweet  
and tell her. She'll get her gone from here, Quarters  
Boss or no Quarters Boss. You know Big Sweet. Us ought  
to halt her right now before the mens gits a chance to  
see her and cut the fool over her. Dont let the gator  
beat you to the pond, do he'll give you more trouble  
than the day is long. Send Alwishus after Big Sweet.  
She home.

(The first lines of POLK COUNTY are  
heard off stage left)

Big Sweet  
(Singing off stage)  
You dont know Polk County like I do  
Anybody been there, tell you the same thing too.

Laura B.

Here she come now, I sure is glad, because I sure dont know what to do.

Bunch

Me neither. I was going to tell Luara B. to bring her on over to my house, but if she is like Dicey say she is, I dont want no trouble with Few Clothes.

Laura B.

None of us dont want no kind of trouble like that. These mens dont want to half do nohow. Its just like pulling eye-teeth to git a pair of shoes out of 'em. They got a mouth full of gimme, and a hand full of much-obliged.

Big Sweet

(Enters left, still humming POLK COUNTY)  
Say, whats the matter over there? You all got your head together like crows in a storm.

(They all motion her to hurry over)

(Big Sweet crosses quickly and joins them without another word)

The law in here hunting somebody?

Dicey

(Very friendly)

Its a woman. A fan-foot.

Laura B.

Oh, we aint so sure about that part yet. But its a young, real high yaller-- I got her in my house till we can find out what to do about her. The Quarters Boss give her a note to Bunch to stay with her.

Dicey

A regular old strumpet making pay-days. Just somebody on the road somewhere. Color struck, too. Crazy about that little color she got in her face, and that little old hair on her head. You aint going to like her a bit. And she'll be after Lonnie and My Honey and everybody else right off.

Big Sweet

Come on, Laura B.

(She turns resolutely towards Laura B.'s house. Big Sweet and Laura B. lead the way with the others following slowly so as to appear just to happen up in time to see the show)

Laura B.

(At her porch, and in a low tone)

She dont look bad to me. If Dicey hadnt of said-----

Big Sweet

(Grimly)

Call her out.

(She rests her left foot on the steps, and her left elbow on her left thigh.)

(The voices of Leafy Lee and Maudella can be heard in gay talk and laughter inside)

Leafy

Well, I went up on that meat-skin

And I come down on that bone

And I grabbed that piece of cornbread

And I made that biscuit moan.

See, I got it right that time, didnt I?

(They both laugh)

Laura B.

(At door)

That Maudella is too fast and womanish. (Proudly) She aint scared of nothing!

(She exits into house while Big Sweet waits grimly.)

Laura B.

Miss, er, you child, its somebody out here wants to have a talk with you. Just step outside a minute.

(The other women are drifting up and around the porch.)

Leafy  
Leafy is my name. Leafy Lee. (Coming to door) Is it

Miss Bunch done come?

(Sees Big Sweet. Big Sweet looks Leafy over from head to foot slowly and deliberately, and back again. There is either hostility or cold indifference in the faces of every woman about her, as Leafy stands there on the porch and takes in the circle. Finally she meets Big Sweet dead in the eye. They eye-ball each other well, then Leafy breaks into a grin)

Big Sweet

(Tries to hold her solemn pose, but she also begins to grin. She purses her lips, but the chuckle gets bigger and bigger as she and Leafy expand their smiles. Finally Big Sweet gives in, takes her foot down, stands akimbo and with an attempt to conceal her admiration under rough good humor)

You crazy thing!

Leafy

(Laughing, imitates Big Sweet's stance)  
Crazy your ownself.

(The women look from one to the other in amazement)

Big Sweet

Youse all right, Little Bits. Taint nothing wrong with you. I been told you was stuck up and color struck, but youse all right. You grins natural. If you was stuck up you would try to smile.

(They both laugh at that)  
Where you come from and where you going?  
(All listen intently)

Leafy

Well, I come from New York, but I wasnt born up there. Mama and Papa is both dead, so I had to go for myself. Folks always told me I could sing, and I ever wanted to

Leafy  
sing like Ethel Waters. But I havent had no real good job yet. I got to sort of wandering around, and next thing I knew, I was way down here. They told me if I wanted to learn to sing Blues right, I ought to come learn how on a saw-mill job, so I heard about here, and come on. The Bossman says I can stay here and learn all I want to. So he sent me to Miss Bunch to get myself a room. But she is away from home somewhere. I'm waiting for her to come.

Big Sweet  
(Dawning happiness, though hard to believe)  
You mean you want to sing Blues-- sure enough Blues?

Leafy  
Thats right. Maybe I can make something out of myself if I do. Go back to New York and make enough money to take care of myself.

Big Sweet  
Well, you done come to the right place. What name did you say you was going by?

Leafy  
(Surprised)  
What name I'm going by? The one my Mama give me when I was born. Leafy, Leafy Lee.

Big Sweet  
Thats a pretty name to have. Specially when its yourn for real. Folks on these kinds of jobs uses different names at different times. I see what you come here for. You come here for a reason, and not for a season, and Leafy, you done come to the right place. Me and my man sings

Big Sweet  
 them Blues every night at our house. And we got a friend  
 man that cold picks 'em on a guitar. If he cant whip a  
 box, taint a hound dog in Georgy, and you know thats the  
 puppies range.

Leafy  
 Well you all the very people I want to meet up with. I wants  
 to sing the Blues.

Big Sweet  
 (Grabs Leafy by the hand and pulls her  
 down off the porch)  
 Come on go home with me so we can talk some. You aint got  
 a bit more sense than me and Lonnie got. I loves to meet  
 up with folks that loves good singing.  
 (The whole atmosphere has changed to  
 warmth. Everybody is beaming on Leafy,  
 except Dicey, who is tragically disappointed)

Laura B.  
 And Big Sweet sure can sing them Blues. When she gits hold  
 of a good one, she turn it every way but loose. She's the  
 one can help you out a lot.

Leafy  
 (Happily, then checks herself)  
 But if I go off with you, I'll miss Miss Bunch, then I wont  
 have no place to stay.

Bunch  
 Did you say Bunch? Here I is. I thought all the time you  
 was asking for Lena Branch. But you said Bunch, didnt you?  
 You can git your suitsatchel and come on cross the way  
 right now. I got a good room you can use.

Big Sweet  
 (Picking up the bag)  
 She going home with me for awhile. This child aint after

Big Sweet  
nobody's man. Anyway, I dont figger on nobody taking  
Lonnie away from me. Come on Little Bits. You going home  
with me.

Laura B.  
(Calling after them as they start  
upstage, left)  
Me and Stew Beef will be on over there after supper.

Bunch  
And me and Few:

Big Sweet  
Thats right, you all come on and make the poor child feel  
welcome. You see she's a opphan child. Everybody come  
on. Dont look to eat up none of our groceries,.but we going  
to have plenty music, and cut Big Jim by the acre.

(Big Sweet and Leafy go off chatting  
happily. The others watch them go.  
Dicey alone looks unhappy and stands  
looking after them grimly.

CURTAIN

ACT ONE.SCENE 3.

SCENE: Interior of Big Sweet's house.

TIME: Immediately after Scene 2:

Raw, unpainted lumber with rafters and uprights showing. Furniture cheap and the decor garish. Bright colored calenders and advertisements nailed on wall. Watermelon pink calico curtains at the two windows. White iron bed-stand in one corner with starched lace fringed pillowslips and a cheap spread. Three kitchen chairs and a cheap wooden rocker with a lace doily.

At the rise, Big Sweet and Leafy are discovered in the front room. Big Sweet is seated on the bed, and Leafy in the rocker. She has removed her hat and dress, and is cooling off in her underwear. There is an easy air of old acquaintance between them.

Big Sweet  
Its a wonder that your boy friend let you come off by yourself like this.

Leafy  
I havent got no fellow.

Big Sweet  
Whats the matter? You all had a falling out?

Leafy  
(Shakes her head slowly)  
Never had one -- not no real one.

Big Sweet  
(Astonished)  
How you mean? You look round twenty years old to me.

Leafy  
Twenty-too.

Big Sweet  
Whats the matter? Is you been sick, or something?

Leafy

Oh, I had fellows to come take me out to the moving pictures and things like that once in a while. And one fellow, he liked me real well, but I didnt care nothing about him. He even went and asked Papa for my hand.

Big Sweet

Your hand? What did he want with that?

Leafy

Why, why, he wanted to marry me. So he asked my Papa for my hand.

Big Sweet

How come he didnt say what he mean, instead of go asking for your hand?

Leafy

Thats what you say when you want to marry a girl.

Big Sweet

(Loud and embarrassed laughter)

Is that what they say when they want to shack up with a gal? When they feel they love come down?

Leafy

Thats the proper way.

Big Sweet

(Dumbfounded)

Umph! Umph! Umph! That just go to show you how bad it is to be ignorant. But, when you dont know, you dont know. Here, all this time these ignorant mens being going round here asking folks for they can when they ought to be asking for they hand. The no-manners-ted things! (Indignant)  
I better not hear no more of that kind of talk round here. They better not say can to me no more, even if its got tomatoes in it.

(Deep respect and awe comes over Big Sweet and a wistfulness)

Big Sweet  
Youse wonderfly, Leafy. You knows a heap of good things.

Leafy  
Oh, that aint nothing much to know.

Big Sweet  
I think its fine. Wisht I had of knowed that long time ago.

(A minute of deep thought.)  
You mean you aint never knowed nothing about no man?

Leafy  
Thats right. (Apologetically) Maybe its because I have never been in love with nobody that was in love with me.

Big Sweet  
(In awe)  
You aint joking?

Leafy  
(Embarrassed)  
No ma'am. I aint never given to no man.

Big Sweet  
I never expected to find nothing like that sure enough.  
(She leans her head against the  
bedpost with a far-off bitter look  
on her face and thinks)  
I'm glad for you, Leafy. Cause you done won the battle  
that I lost.

Leafy  
What do you mean by that?

Big Sweet  
I wanted to be a virgin my ownself. I always said that  
I was going to be one till I got married, when I was grow-  
ing up, and I meant to, too. That was my firm determina-  
tion. Course I didnt know what his name was going to be,  
but I knowed that I was going to find Lonnie some time or  
other. And I often wish that I could have come to him  
like you is now. (A deep, long sigh) No use wishing now.  
Them years is behind the mountains. I think that I would

Big Sweet  
 have made it too, but you see, Papa died when I was fifteen,  
 and times got mighty hard. It was too expensive for some-  
 body in the fix I was. I couldnt afford to be a virgin.  
 (Pause) Then, after that, I got to knocking around, and  
 found out what folks mean by careless love. You mean good,  
 and think maybe it will lead to something permanent. But  
 he hits you a love-lick and be gone! So when you get  
 through thinking and feeling, you try another one. Pretty  
 soon, you be feeling again like you been drug through Hell  
 on a buzzard gut. You find out its a lot of bulldozing,  
 imposing and biggity folks in the world that loves to take  
 advantage.. They looks fine from the top of their heads  
 down, but if you see 'em from the foot up, they's another  
 kind of people. They sings and says that the water in Polk  
 County taste like cherry wine. So I come pulling here like  
 a heap more girls done done. (A bitter laugh) Well, after  
 while, I met up with Lonnie, and then things was all right.  
 But by that time, I had done got my craw full of folks doing  
 they bullying and buldozing and trompling on everything  
 and everybody they could git they foot upon.

Leafy  
 (Rushes across to Big Sweet and flings  
 her arms about her)  
 You make me feel so little. Just being a virgin aint a  
 thing besides what you are, honey.

Big Sweet  
 (Wraps Leafy in a tight embrace)  
 Oh, you going to be a lot of help to me. You got more  
 schooling than I got.

But you knows the most. <sup>Leafy</sup> Mama used to always tell me that study-ration beat education all the time.

<sup>Big Sweet</sup>  
(Laughs heartily)  
And thats right, too in a way. We can sort of swap. You dont know a thing about this world, but I aim to put my wisdom tooth in your head. I mean to be your fore-runner like John the Baptist. Fight everything from graybeard to battle height.

<sup>Leafy</sup>  
You mean you really fights?

<sup>Big Sweet</sup>  
Yeah, I has to sometimes. Some folks aint going to do right unlesseen you do. I dont mean no harm, but one day about six years ago, me and God got to sort of controver- sing on the subject of how some folks loves to take advantage of everybody else. He said that sure was the truth, and He never had meant it to be that a'way. Preach- ing and teaching didnt do some of 'em no good. Jailing 'em didnt help 'em none, and hanging was too good for 'em. They just needed they behinds kicked.

<sup>Leafy</sup>  
Did God tell you to kick 'em

<sup>Big Sweet</sup>  
(Laughing)  
Well, He didnt exactly tell me to kick 'em, but He looked down at my big feets and smiled.

<sup>Leafy</sup>  
So you been kicking 'em, eh? (Laughing)

<sup>Big Sweet</sup>  
Sure is, and its done a heap of 'em good. I done made over

Big Sweet  
 this place more nearly like Lonnie say it ought to be.  
 No need in all this fighting and carrying on every pay  
 night. Pole cats trying to make out they's lions!

Leafy  
 Dont hurt yourself too much for other folks. Just like  
 Mama used to say, "Good nature make Nanny goat wear short  
 tail."

Big Sweet  
 (Laughing heartily)  
 Youse crazy! You must of told God the same thing I did.  
 When He ask-ed me, "Little angel, where do you want to go?"  
 I told Him, "It matters a difference where I go, just so I  
 go laughing."

There is a group noise of loud  
 talk and laughter at a distance,  
 and Big Sweets sits up and listens)  
 Thats the men folks done come home from work. Git into  
 your clothes right quick. You got to be ready when my  
 Lonnie and My Honey git here. Everybody will come pulling  
 in here to meet the new stranger.  
 (She jumps and opens the suitcase  
 on the floor)  
 I'll help you some.

Leafy  
 (Goes to bag quickly and selects  
 an attractive, but inexpensive wash  
 dress, and throws it over her head.  
 Big Sweet pulls it down and helps  
 fasten it)

Big Sweet  
 (Gives Leafy a playful slap on  
 her behind after the dress is  
 adjusted)  
 My Lord, Little Bits, you aint got a bit of meat on your  
 bones! The man marry you, going to have to shake the  
 sheets to find you.  
 (They both laugh)

Leafy

Maybennobody wont ever want me enough to marry.  
(There is a sound of footsteps at  
the outer door, and Big Sweet starts  
out of the room with a big smile on  
her face)

Lonnie

(Outside)

Hey, in there! Housekeepers!

Big Sweet

Thats my baby! (Calls) Hey yourself! Want a piece of  
cornbread, look on the shelf!

(She bolts out of the room,  
leaving the door wide open.  
Leafy hurriedly powders her  
face and puts on lipstick.  
The sound of a loud smack  
of a kiss comes to her as  
she applies the lipstick.)

Leafy

(Half wishful)

I wonder if these men do any raping around here?

CURTAIN

ACT ONE.SCENE 4.

SCENE: Same as Scene 3.

TIME: Two hours later.

Big Sweet, Lonnie, Leafy, My Honey, Stew Beef, Laura B., Bunch, Few Clothes, Sop-The-Bottom, and Do-Dirty, are all in the room.

Lonnie

(In a clean, starched shirt and overalls, is in the middle of the floor)

We done took Leafy for a little sister. She want to sing Blues, so we all got to help her out all we can. Each and every one of you teach her what you know.

Bunch

I dont know none. I like to hear 'em, but I never did know too many of them old reels and things.

Few Clothes

Youse the boss, Lonnie. We'se bound to do the best we can.

I'll play one, and My Honey, you help me out with that Guitar. The rest of you can sing the words. Big Sweet, you verse it out;

(He wipes off his harp and begins to play NASTY BUTT, and My Honey falls in playing with him. They play through a verse with flourishes, and vamp for the voices)

Stew Beef

(Carried away by the swing, starts to sing)

Thought I heard somebody say

You nasty-butt, you stinky butt

Take it away! Oh, you-----

Big Sweet  
 (Jumps up furious)  
 Stop it! Dont you sing nothing like that in front of Leafy.  
 She's a lady.

Stew Beef  
 Oh, excuse me. I didnt mean no harm.  
 (The men all look from one  
 to the other, puzzled)

Big Sweet  
 Teach her another one. I'm going to pass out the lemonade  
 whilst you all go ahead helping Leafy.  
 (She exits through door)

Sop-The-Bottom  
 (Brightly)  
 Us dont have to sing under the clothes of them Tampa fan-  
 foots. Lets we sing about a man.  
 (Pats his foot to get the swing  
 and begins)  
 Uncle Bud, Uncle Bud, Uncle Bud, Uncle Bud, Uncle Bud

Verse:

Uncle Bud is a man, a man like this  
 Great big man with a great big fist

Refrain: Lonnie  
 (Catches on fire)

Uncle Bud's got gals thats long and tall

And they rocks their hips from wall to wall  
 (It is their favorite song at work  
 and they take up the refrain with  
 great gusto)

Stew Beef  
 Oh, little cat, big cat, little bit of kitten!  
 going to whip their backs if they dont stop  
 spitting!

(The enjoyment mounts. The men  
 are putting plenty pep into it)

Lonnie  
 Oh, little cat, big cat playing in the sand

Lonnie  
 Little cat cuss like a natural man  
 (Shout of laughter as they tear into  
 refrain)

Lonnie  
 Oh, who in the Hell, the goddamned nation  
 Put this trash on Pa's plantation?  
 (Wild yell of approval)

Big Sweet  
 (Bursting through door with tray  
 of glasses full of lemonade)  
 Stop it! Dont you vip another vep on that.

Lonnie  
 (Injured)  
 Good Lord, Baby how we going to teach the girl if you  
 wont let us sing?

Big Sweet  
 You can sing without singing that, cant you?

My Honey  
 (Fools around with his box and  
 drifts into ANGELINE and begins  
 to sing it softly and absent-  
 minded. The men pick him up and  
 make harmony)  
 Oh, Angeline! Oh, Angeline!

Oh, Angeline, that great, great gal of mine

Big Sweet  
 Now, thats a new one that I dont know, but it sound nice.

My Honey  
 (Singing)  
 And when she walks, and when she walks  
 And when she walks, she rocks and reels behind

Big Sweet  
 (The drinks are passed out, but  
 she has the empty tray in her  
 hand, which she brandishes)  
 Stop.' That one aint fitten neither.

Lonnie  
 (Disgusted)  
 Oh, go ahead and instrument the box, My Honey. Big Sweet

Lonnie  
wont let us sing nothing at all.  
(Great howl for My Honey to play)

Leafy  
Oh, please do, Mr. MY Honey. I ever loved box-picking:

My Honey  
(So pleased at her interest, that  
he gets all fussed)  
Oh, thank you Ma'am, Miss Leafy, er, my compliments, er  
excuse me, of what you want me to pick for you?

Leafy  
Just anything you will or may.

Lonnie  
Polk County! You know you does that thing:  
(All, "Yeah, man! Polk County!")

My Honey  
(Plays the piece excitedly and with  
extra flourish, and is acclaimed)

Leafy  
(Deeply moved by his artistry)  
Thats great! I never thought to hear nothing as good  
as that. My Honey, you're an artist.

Lonnie  
Dont be calling my buddy out of his name. What is a  
artist nohow?

Leafy  
Its somebody can do something real fine and high and noble.  
And My Honey is one from way back. If he was to go to New  
York and pick his box like that, he would be famous, and  
make a lot of money besides. I wish I could sing like he  
can pick.

Lonnie  
My Honey, look like you done got to be somebody. You  
hear what Leafy say?

My Honey  
(Over modest)  
Oh, she just joking me. I just fools with this box cause

My Honey

I loves it better than anything else in the world. Nobody wouldnt be fool enough to pay money to hear nobody pick a box. Thats something done for pleasure.

Leafy

Yes, they would, too.

Big Sweet

I know you telling the truth, Leafy, cause I love to hear good picking so that I would give something to hear some if it wasnt round here free. And them white folks in New York could be even crazier than I is.

(Burst of laughter)

Now, lemme tell you all something. Lemme tell your heads something in front. I dont want no slack talk over Leafy. She's trying to make something out of herself. And I know when mens gits to slack-talking, next thing its something further. No loose talk and slack mouth around Leafy.

Lonnie

And thats right, too.

Big Sweet

And, oh, yes. No more mention about 'cans'. I done learnt the right way, now. You all got to come up to time. You supposed to ask a lady for her hand, not her can. You hear me? Thats stylish.

Lonnie

That a fact? I'm proud to know it.

Big Sweet

You done done all the asking you ever going to do, Lonnie, so this dont come before you. But tell everybody else on this job.

Stew Beef

Well, Sir! Hand! I done caught on New York style!

Big Sweet  
And dont be telling Leafy nothing about your after-ten-  
oclock-at-night feelings, neither.

Lonnie  
And my tongue is in Big Sweet's mouth. I say the same thing.

My Honey  
And I string along with my buddy. I'll fight about her too.

Leafy  
(Quickly and brightly)  
Will you, My Honey?

Lonnie  
Will he? Thats a true fact. Me and My Honey is buddies.  
Jack the Rabbit, Jack the Bear, two sworn buddies on the  
road somewhere. We backs one another up in everything.  
(There is a general murmur of confirmation)

Laura B.  
Lets we women teach Leafy a song.

My Honey  
Go ahead, and I'll pick it off for you.

Laura B.  
(Hesitates a minute)  
Oh, we dont know just which one it is just yet. You all  
liable to laugh at us. Come on, lets we all go out in  
the kitchen and practise up. Then we'll come back and  
show you if we make it.

Big Sweet  
Thats a good idea. Come on, you gals!  
(They all exit to the kitchen  
hurriedly and the men are left  
alone)

Few Clothes  
(Warming up on his mouth organ,  
begins to play THE FOX HUNT, and  
the men egg him on to the end)

My Honey  
That was real good, Few.

Few Clothes  
Lets me and you practise on together.

My Honey  
Just a minute. I want to speak with Lonnie private. Be  
back in a minute. Come over here Lonnie, where we can be  
to ourselves.

(They cross over near the kitchen door:  
Few Clothes fumbles around blowing a  
chord here and there)

My Honey  
You reckon Miss Leafy think I'm any good, sure enough?

Lonnie  
(Indignant)  
Think you any good? How can she help it if she got any  
sense? Youse a good man. Work regular, save your money,  
dont gamble and dont git drunk, what more can a woman  
want out of anybody? And then, you got a cool kind  
disposition, and looks good in clothes.

My Honey  
But do you reckon she believe it like that? You reckon---  
Oh, I wants you to talk to her for me. Tell her about me.  
Git Big Sweet to talk to her for me.

Lonnie  
(In great surprise)  
My Honey! I aint never seen you this way before. You  
claimed that the woman you wanted for a regular wasnt  
born yet, and her Mama was dead. All you wanted was that  
box to pick.

My Honey  
(Stands silent while the voices  
of the female quartet comes from  
the kitchen singing CARELESS LOVE)

CARELESS LOVE  
It was love, O Love, O careless love

Love, O Love, O careless love!

You caused me to weep, you caused me to moan

You caused me to leave my happy home.

## CARELESS LOVE

When I wore my apron strings low

When I wore my apron strings low

When I wore my apron strings low

You were always standing at my door;

Now I wear my apron to my chin

Now I wear my apron to my chin

Now I wear my apron to my chin

And you pass my door and won't come in

See what careless love has done

See what careless love has done

You've broken the heart of a many poor gal

But you'll never break this heart of mine

My Honey

Yeah, I know I said all of that, and I meant it too, when

I said it. But Big Moose done come down from the mountain.

(Listens to the singing for a space)

I done got a letter from Love, and I'll got to Hell, but  
what I answers it.

Lonnie

You said that like a man.

(Great admiration in his tones)

(The women burst in laughing  
triumphantly and all in good  
spirits)

Big Sweet

Leafy is doing all right, I'm telling you.

Laura B.

Yeah, she going to sing good too, when she learn some songs.

Lonnie

Git your box fixed, My Honey, lets hear what she done  
learnt.

Leafy  
Oh, I dont believe I know it well enough just yet. Maybe  
in a day or so. Let Big Sweet sing something.

Lonnie  
Big Sweet, why you dont teach her John Henry? That song  
they sings on the railroad camps?

Big Sweet  
My Honey plays that all the time. He can teach her and  
tell her.

My Honey  
Be glad to (begins to tune) Lemme git it tuned in Vastopool.  
(The Sebastopol tuning. He runs off a  
few scales and chords)  
But I cant handle the singing and the playing too. You  
sing it for her, Big Sweet, and I'll bottle-neck it off.

Stew Beef  
Now, you going to hear something, Miss Leafy. Big Sweet  
and My Honey is a mess on that.

Big Sweet  
Oh, nothing much. A woman aint even supposed to sing it.  
But I messes around with it on every occasionally.

Lonnie  
(Proudly)  
Aw, go ahead and sing, Big Sweet. You aint had no complaints  
from nobody yet.

My Honey  
(Does a brilliant introduction,  
and Big Sweet takes the center of  
the floor and sings\*JOHN HENRY\*)

Big Sweet  
John Henry driving on the right hand side  
Steam drill driving on the left  
Says 'fore I'll let your steamdrill beat me down  
I'll hammer my fool self to death, Lord!  
I'll hammer my fool self to death  
(All join in the chant)

Anhhanh! Aaaahahah! JOHN HENRY  
~~Anhhanah!~~ Etc.

John Henry told his captain

When you go to town

Please bring me back a nine-pound hammer

And I'll drive your steel on down, Lord!

I'll drive your steel on down. (Same business)

John Henry had a little woman

The dress she wore was red

Says I'm going down the track, and she never looked back

Says I'm going down the track, and she never looked back

I'm going where John Henry fell dead, Lord!

I'm going where John Henry fell dead!

The captain asked John Henry

What is that storm I hear?

He says captain that ain't no storm

T'aint nothing but my hammer in the air, Lord!

Nothing but my hammer in the air.

Who's going to shoe your pretty lil feet?

And who's going to glove your hand?

Tell me who's going to kiss your dimpled cheek

And who's going to be your man? Lord!

Who's going to be your man?

My father's going to shoe my pretty lil feet

My brother's going to glove my hand

JOHN HENRY

My sister's going to kiss my dimpled cheek

John Henry's going to be my man, Lord!

John Henry's going to be my man!

Where did you get your pretty lil dress?

The shoes you wear so fine?

Lord, I got my shoes from a railroad man

My dress from a man in the mines, Lord!

My dress from a man in the mines, on  
 (The crowd comes in/the hum,  
 pat their feet for drums, and  
 in the last choruses, they clap  
 hands on it as the excitement  
 rises to a high pitch. It ends  
 on a sort of frenzy. They cheer  
 Big Sweet and My Honey and themselves  
 when it is over)

Stew Beef

We did that thing! Man, we whipped that thing to a cold  
 jelly.

Big Sweet

(Proudly)

And did you hear Leafy coming in just like a old timer  
 towards the end?

(General clamor of praise for Leafy)

I done got me something fine when I friended with Leafy.

I mean to go with her, and stand by her, and prop her up  
 on every leaning side.

Lonnie

I hope you do. It something I'd love to see. Women folks  
 dont stand with one another like men friends do. Not on the  
 average, they dont.

Big Sweet

I mean this. I'm promising God and a couple of other  
 responsible characters to stand by Leafy through thick

Big Sweet  
and thin. Anybody that picks a fight with her, if they  
cant whip me too, they better not bring the mess up. You  
all can strow that around. I'm backing Leafy up. She's  
green as grass, and then she dont know nothing. But I'm  
with her in everything.

Laura B.  
We hear you. And then again, we going to tell it around.

Big Sweet  
Dont miss. Some folks like to take advantage of weak folks.  
Tell 'em in front, so they can know that Leafy aint by  
herself in the world.

(There is a sharp knocking on the  
door, and Big Sweet goes and opens  
it quickly.)

Oh, hello, Dicey. You coming in?

Dicey

(In the door)

Naw. I didnt come here to come in.

(She does come far enough to take  
in the whole scene and looks around  
the room with a grim expression.  
Sees Leafy seated next to My Honey,  
and the general happy air in the  
room.)

Big Sweet, I'll thank you to give me back my knife.

Big Sweet  
(Studies Dicey's face for a long  
minute. Sees the challenge there.  
Comes to a decision, and reaches in  
her pocket and hands Dicey the knife  
without a word. Everyone in the room  
except Leafy realizes that a challenge  
has been flung, and accepted. Dicey  
goes quickly, and Big Sweet shuts the  
door sharply)

Lonnie  
Poor Dicey, she sure is set on cutting out her own coffin.  
But me and High John aint going to let her. Are we, Big  
Sweet?

CURTAIN

ACT      TWC.

SCENE    1.

SCENE:

THE FOLLOWING SATURDAY NIGHT

THE JOOK

The Interior of the Jook is a large rectangular room. The piano is against the wall upstage, center. The long sides of the room are parallell with the footlights. The room is lighted by naked bulbs hanging from cords. There are entrances right and left in the ends of the building, and one at right of the piano. A few streamers of crepe paper hang from the ceiling, fragments of a past celebration that have not been removed. There is a table for dice, green top, string across the center for tripping the dice to the right of center and a rough pine table for cards to the left. There is a third table pulled out untidily from the left wall with unpainted kitchen chairs haphazard around it where the occupants of the night before have left them. There is a deck of cards on it.

At the rise, Do-Dirty and Sop-The-Bottom are at the dice table practising throws. The piano player is playing a hot stomp and Stew Beef, Laura B, Bunch, Few Clothes are dancing. The women have on hats of their men. Box Car is dancing alone and cutting steps and cheering himself with every "break".

Dicey

(Enters left and begins to work her way across the room to a seat on one of the benches against the wall at right. When she starts to pass Box Car, he grabs her and tries to dance with her. She snatches away rudely)

Box Car

(Annoyed)

Aw, come on and dance, why dont you?

Dicey

(Proceeding)

'Cause I dont want to.

Box Car

Well, what you come here for if you dont want to be sociable?

Dicey

(Tartly)

I didnt come here to dance. I come for a reason and not for a season.

(She switches on across the room)

Box Car

(Looking at her angrily for a moment,  
then shakes his head rolls his eyes  
up and sighs)

My people, my people! I likes folks thats nice and friendly.

Dicey

(Tightening her skirts up to sit)

It matters a difference to me if you likes me or if you dont.

None of you old mullet heads aint studying about me nohow.

I aint yellow, and aint got no long straight hair. Go

dance with some of them you screams over. If Big Sweet and

that Leafy was in here you wouldnt know I was even in here.

Box Car

(Maliciously)

You told that right.

(He goes back into his dancing and  
laughing at himself, and Dicey settles  
herself into a pose that indicates she  
is there but not of the place)

(The dance music mounts to a climax  
and ends abruptly. The dancers all  
exclaim cheerfully)

Laura B.

Hello there, Dicey. Look like you aint having yourself  
no fun.

Dicey

Maybe not right this minute, but I will be. (Laughs unpleasantly) Oh yeah! Before the night is far spent, I'll be having my proper amount of fun. (Mysteriously) Some that goes for a great big stew will be simmered down to a low gravy. (Laughs again) Then I'm going to show 'em my ugly laugh.

(They all look puzzled, one to the other for a moment but Dicey laughs again)

Stew Beef

Dicey laugh like she done found a mare's nest and cant count the eggs.

Box Car

(Impatiently)

Oh, squat that rabbit, and lets jump another one. (To Laura B.) Laura B, you always round Big Sweet, tell me something about that pretty little frail eel Big Sweet got at her house. Is she from New York sure enough?

Laura B.

Thats what she say, and she sure is got them kind of clothes.

Box Car

And she sure do become her clothes too. I really would like to git in there. How come you dont tell her about me? I aint got nobody.

Stew Beef

(Scoffing)

Oh, Oh! With nearly every man on the job after her? Boy! You sure going to get a plenty hindrance on that job.

Dicey

(Mysteriously)

I know one wont be pulling after her. You mean that stray, half dead-looking yellor gal that drug in here a few days back? Shucks! She aint no trouble.

Sop-The-Bottom

Which one aint going to pull after her? I know it aint me.  
She sure can git every cent I make, just like I make it.

Dicey

(Coquettishly)

My Honey aint.

Box Car

You better say 'Joe' cause you dont know. (Significantly)  
He could be worser off than anybody else around here.

Sop-The-Bottom

Yeah, he been buying a mighty lot of ice cream lately, and  
toting it to Big Sweet's house. He could be guilty.

Dicey

I dont see nothing on her to scream over.

Few Clothes

Thats natural. (General laughter) Who did you say was the  
crazy fool that wouldnt have that pretty little doll baby  
if he could git her?

Dicey

You heard me. I say My Honey wouldnt. He got somebody he  
like more better,

Box Car

(Scornfully)

Maybe you got some inside information on My Honey that the  
rest of us dont know about.

Dicey

(Taking him literally)

I dont have to tell you all me and My Honey's business.

Few Clothes

I aint never heard nobody say you and My Honey had no  
business together. You must have dreamt it.

Dicey

(Stung)

I'll show you if My Honey is mines or not. You just let that

Dicey  
yaller consumed thing, or anybody else get to messing  
around My Honey now.

Few Clothes  
What can you do if they do?

Dicey  
I'll take my knife and go round the ham-bone looking for  
meat. Thats what I'll do. I'll slice her too thin to fry.  
(She crosses quickly over to table and  
snatches a chair and drags it over to  
the bench)

Do-Dirty  
Dont take that chair off, Dicey. We fixing to git up a  
game.

Dicey  
Git it up then. You wont git this chair. I'm saving it for  
My Honey when he come. He got to have a chair to sit in  
when he pick his guitar.

Do-Dirty  
(Sarcastically)  
Oh, excuse me. I didnt know that My Honey had done bought  
any chairs in here, no more'n anybody else. I thought it  
was first come, first serve. (Growing angry) and then  
again, I aint heard nothing about My Honey making you no  
guardeen over him, to be saving him no chairs.

Few Clothes  
The first of my knowing it too. (General agreement)

Dicey  
How come every time I open my mouth all you all got to jump  
down my throat? I got friends in Mulberry that wouldnt  
spit on this old low-life-ated place. I friends with Miss  
Ella Wall. She could buy all the trash in this place and  
sell 'em. In fact she could pay for 'em and give 'em away.

Stew Beef  
Oh, is that who you cracking off of? Ella Wall is a used-to-be. Good gun, but she done shot.

Dicey  
(Jumping to her feet angrily)  
Who? Who you talking about?

Stew Beef  
Aw, sit down! What you hollering 'who' for? Your feet dont fit no limb.  
(There is the sound of a guitar offstage and the voice of My Honey singing)  
"Had a good woman, but the fool laid down and died".  
(There is a stir in the place at the sound)

Sop-The-Bottom  
Here come old My Honey now!  
(There is a stir of anticipated pleasure)  
He can evermore pick that box.

My Honey  
(Enters upstage right, with his hat set recklessly, his guitar around his neck and strumming)

Stew Beef  
Do that thing, My Honey! Have a fit! You got a fitten place to have it in.  
(He creates a pleasant stir as he walks slowly down towards center stage)

Dicey  
(Jumps up and offers the chair she has been holding)  
Have some set down. I been saving this chair for you Baby Boy.

My Honey  
(Unpleasantly affected by her too intimate address, halts and recoils)

Baby? Boy? How big do men grow where you come from?

Dicey  
I mean youse my boy.

My Honey  
Your boy? My mama is dead;  
 (He starts to turn away, left)

Dicey  
 (Still trying to save face as she  
 sees the grins on the faces of the  
 men)  
 Set down and play me something on that box.

My Honey  
 Dont believe I cares to set down just at present. I aint  
 tired the least bit. And my box aint tuned to play nothing  
 in particular.

(He crosses to where Stew and the  
 others are grouped around the table;  
 some sit on the benches, some in the  
 chairs)

Stew Beef  
 Where Lonnie at?

My Honey  
 (Looks elaborately in all of his pockets)  
 Dont believe that he's here.

Laura B.  
 (Laughing)  
 You crazy thing!

Stew Beef  
 But sure enough. You always be's together.

My Honey  
 (Seriously)  
 Thats what I want to know my ownself. I figured he might  
 have come on here. He's acting kind of funny and I wanted  
 to find out what was the matter with him.

Box Car  
 Aw, Lonnie is a man just like me. I aint going to waste no  
 breath asking about no jar-heads. What I wants to know is,  
 where is that pretty little doll baby from New York? How  
 come you aint scorching her tonight?

My Honey  
I aint got no deeds to Miss Leafy.

Box Car  
(Happy)  
Tell a blind man something! If you cant do no good, git out the way and give somebody else a chance.

My Honey  
(Soberly)  
Suppose us dont handle her name so careless like. Anyhow, her and Big Sweet will be on afterwhile. They putting they trunks on they backs tonight and they tray on they heads. Shoved me and Lonnie on out. Said they had to git dressed particular. (Smiles pleasantly to himself) Dont know who they gitting dressed so for.

Stew Beef  
But you hope its you.  
(Comes around the table and begins to rub My Honey all over his chest to the amusement of the others)  
Good gracious!  
(Snatches his hand away as if he got burned)  
Poor My Honey! His heart is about to burn a hole in his undershirt.

My Honey  
(Snatches away and backs downstage, fending his tensors off)  
Git away from me! I dont want no mens feeling all over me, like I was a woman. Gwan!! (Worried) Wonder where Lonnie is sure enough?

Sop-The-Bottom  
Oh, dont you worry about Lonnie. He's all right. Bet he's off somewhere having one of his visions. Nothing dont worry that Lonnie. He's just like High John de Conquer. Dont care what trouble it is. He can always find a way.

Laura B.  
Thats the truth, now. Just listen to Lonnie talk awhile,  
and he can make your side-meat taste like ham.

(Somebody begins to hum)  
Troubles will be over, Amen

Troubles will be over, Amen

Troubles will be over, when I see Jesus

Troubles will be over, Amen.

Do-Dirty  
Thats old Lonnie's song, all right.

Lonnie  
(Steps in the door and stands. He has  
a wild look in his eye, and a fixed smile  
on his face)  
Yeah, this old Lonnie.  
(Advances from right to left a few steps)  
Otherwise, Old Peter Rip-Saw, the Devil's High Sheriff and  
son-in-law! Hello, people!  
(There is a great gust of welcome,  
but all look at him curiously)

Laura B,  
Whats the matter with you, Lonnie? You got a grin on you  
like a dead dog in the sunshine.

Lonnie  
(Coming to center stage)  
Who said anything was the matter with me? Nobody aint heard  
me complaining is they?

Stew Beef  
Naw, but anybody can see you looks like you been drug through  
Hell on a buzzard gut.

My Honey  
(Goes to Lonnie and takes his arm)  
Whats wrong? You know you can git the last cent I got, and  
if you needs any backing up otherwise, you know so well I'm  
already dressed to die standing by you.  
(General clamor from the men to the  
same effect)

Lonnie

(Drags the table a little away from the group by the wall towards center stage and stands leaning heavily on it with both hands while he laughs and laughs without mirth. My Honey stands looking at him and listening for a moment then shoves a chair up behind Lonnie)

My Honey

Why you dont stop that laughing? You know you aint tickled.

Lonnie

(Drops loosely into chair)

Naw, I aint tickled.

(Puts his hand in the side pocket of his jumper-jacket)

I got a letter. Yeah man, somebody done wrote me a letter.

(Laughs) And I'm so outdone, till I just opened my mouth and laughed.

(The place breaks into a big hum. Everybody is conjecturing and wondering. Curiosity and sympathy are mingled. It goes on and gets higher)

Dacey

(Falls all over herself in a happy, gloating laugh)

Box Car

(Angrily)

What you laughing at, Dacey? This aint your fun.

Dacey

Do I have to tote a coffin in my pocket because Lonnie is feeling sad? Everybody dont have to cry at one time. Nobody round here dont cry when I cry. I cries all by my ownself. How come I cant laugh the same way?

(She bursts into loud, taunting laughter)

Aye, Lord! A heap sees, but a few knows. God dont love ugly.

Box Car

Well He must be aint got a bit of use for you.

Dacey

Maybe He aint. Maybe He's just like you. But that dont stop me from having my proper amount of fun when them that goes

Discoy  
 for pretty, and you all washes up so much, gets put out doors.  
 (She laughs gleefully all over herself)  
 Oh, me! I sure got something funny to tell Ella Wall when  
 she gits here.

(They all look at her in an unfriendly  
 way, and gather round Lonnie in an  
 attempt to soothe him)

Laura B.  
 Lemme go git you a piece of that fried rabbit we had for  
 supper, Lonnie.

My Honey  
 Would you choose a piece of barbecue?

Sop-The-Bottom  
 How about a big drink of likker? That will make you forgit  
 anything you got on your mind.

Lonnie  
 Naw, I thank you. I done had all I want to eat, and likker  
 wont do my case no good. Naw, I thank you.

(They all look from one to the other  
 in puzzlement, and Lonnie picks up the  
 deck of cards and begins to fumble with  
 it aimlessly)

Stew Beef  
 Did you and the Bossman have some words?

Lonnie  
 (Nervously lights a cigaretto)  
 Naw, And I dont never expect to have no words with him, long  
 as I stay here, neither. He may be lying, but he make out  
 he cant git along without me.

Box Car  
 And he told that right. Youse the best man on the job, with-  
 out a doubt.

(They all agree to that)

Lonnie  
 I tries to do whats right.

Stew Beef

So its something else, and look like you could tell us  
whats wrong? Did I hurt your feelings?

Lonnie

Oh, no. Not to give you no short answer, but this dont come  
before nobody but me. If my heart is beneath my knoes, and  
my knees is in some lonesome valley crying for mercy where  
mercy cant be found, its just me. No help can come to the  
place where I'm at.

Laura B.

(With deep feeling)

I reckon us all knows the feeling of that. Everybody is by  
theyselves a heap of times, even when they's in company.

Do-Dirty

So what can you do? Just open your mouth and laugh.

Stew Beef

Aw, we been sad long enough. Lets git up a skin game and  
laugh.

(He reaches for the deck of cards, but  
Lonnie clutches them to him and shakes his  
head)

Sop-The-Bottom

(Fishing another deck out of his pocket)

Here, I got a deck. Lets git on the other table.

Box Car

(Grabbing for them)

Is they star-back?

Sop-The-Bottom

(Showing them)

Sure.

Box Car

Thats all right then. I dont want nobody carrying the cub  
to me for my money I done worked for.

Sop-The -Bottom

(Arrogantly)

Aw, man, I dont have to cheat you when I can beat you  
(Coaxingly to Lonnie)

Come on man, and git in the game.

Lonnie  
You know I dont much gaming nohow, and tonight more especial,  
I dont.

Sop-The-Bottom  
Come on, My Honey.

My Honey  
You know my money aint going on no cards. Chew my tobacco  
and spit my juice. Save my money for another use.

(The crowd moves to the other card  
table noisily, and My Honey begins to  
pick absently on the box. Lonnie keeps  
his seat and fumbles with the cards.  
The pianist notes that My Honey is  
chording

(DAISIES WONT TELL)

and joins in. As the game is being  
organized, the crowd sings it first  
spottily, and then intensely on the  
chorus)

(All of the men except Lonnie and My  
Honey are in the game. The women  
stand around behind them very interest-  
ed and rooting for their own men. Lonnie  
is doing something with the cards that  
interests him. Dicey rocks her hips  
exultantly over to the game and looks on.  
My Honey starts that way, but on seeing  
Dicey going, he turns and walks towards  
the piano and sits on the seat. The pianist  
has gotten up)

Pianist  
(Hurrying across to the game)  
Gimme a card.

Sop-The-Bottom  
(Dealer)  
I'm ready to deal out your cards.

Box Car  
(Stops him abruptly)  
Dont deal me none. I want to scoop one in the rough.

Sop-The-Bottom  
That will cost you a dollar;  
(He offers the deck to Box Car and he  
selects one far down in the deck and  
turns it down beside him and places a  
dollar on the card)

Sop-The-Bottom  
 (Deck in hand)  
 All right you pikers, I'm dealing.  
 (Looks all around the table and stops abruptly)  
 I dont see no bets down. Its a quarter. Put your money on the wood and make the bet go good. And then again, put it in sight and save a fight.  
 (All put down a quarter. Few Clothes gets his from Bunch, who goes down in her stocking to get it on his request by gesture. They are all set)

Stow Beef  
 Let the deal go down, Sop-The-Bottom!

All  
 (In chorus)  
 Let the deal go down!

Sop-The-Bottom  
 (Sings)  
 When your card gets lucky, Oh, Partner!  
 You ought to be in a rolling game.  
 Let the deal go down, Boys!

All  
 (In chorus with harmony)  
 Let the deal go down!  
 (Sop-the-Bottom turns every card off the deck with doliberation and hits it on the table with a smack. All eyes watch eagerly to see who "falls.")

Sop-The-Bottom  
 I aint had no money, Lord, Partner! (Card smacks)  
 I aint had no change. (Card smacks)  
 Let the deal go down, Boys! (Card smacks)

All  
 Let the deal go down!

Sop-The-Bottom  
 (Turning another card and looking around the board)  
 Thats you, Stow Beef! You head-pocked shorty! Pay off!

Stew Beef  
 (Shoving in money and card)  
 I cant catch a thing tonight. Cant even catch nobody looking at me. Gimme another card.

Sop-The-Bottom  
 (Takes one from the discard)  
 Here! Take this Queen. Its clean.

Stew Beef  
 (Positively)  
 Aw, naw! Gimme another card. I dont play them gals till way late at night.

Sop-The-Bottom  
 (Hands him another card. Stew puts down another quarter and the game goes on)  
 I aint had no trouble, Lord, Partner!

Till I stopped by here.

Let the deal go down, Boys!

All  
 Let the deal go down!

Sop-The-Bottom  
 Thats you, Few Clothes! Pay off!  
 (Few Clothes does so sadly)  
 Here, you want another card?

Few Clothes  
 (Feeling in his pockets)  
 I'm clean as a fish, and he been in bathing all his life.  
 (Looks around at Bunch suggestively)  
 Bunch, lomme have another two-bits.

Bunch  
 Naw! You wasted up seven dollars pay night skinning. You gimme this to keep, and I'm a'going to do it too.

Few Clothes  
 I worked for that money. How come I cant spend it like I please?

Bunch  
 Naw! You wouldnt have doodly-squat if I leave you have your way. Naw!

Sop-The-Bottom  
 Lady people sure is funny about money. (To the table) I'm  
 raising the bet. Another two-bits. I likes long sitters and  
 strong betters. Put down! My pockets is crying for your  
 money.

(The others all put down another quarter)

Dicey  
 (Putting down money)  
 Four bits on Box Car's nine!

Stew Beef  
 (Looks around and sees that Dicey is  
 directly behind him and has her foot  
 on his chair)  
 Take your foot off my chair, Dicey! You holding me down.

Box Car  
 And a dollar my nine is the best.

Sop-The-Bottom  
 (Covers it)  
 Let the deal go down, Boys

All  
 Let the deal go down!

Big Sweet  
 (Enters left, followed by Leafy Lee.  
 Big Sweet has a new hair-do, and is  
 dressed very becomingly if a little  
 loud. Leafy looks very chic in a  
 low-priced silk dress)

Box Car  
 (Leaping up from the table)  
 Look a'yonder! Whooooo!  
 (Slams his hat down on the floor in  
 pretended ecstasy)  
 Must be a recess in Heaven--- all these little ground angels  
 out and walking around.

Sop-The-Bottom  
 (Also jumping up)  
 Big Sweet, youse sharp! You so sharp in that dress, that if  
 you didnt have but one eye, I would swear that you was a  
 needle.

My Honey

(Advancing quietly to meet them with  
a chair)

Miss Leafy, Ma'am, also Ma'am, will you be so condescending  
as to stoop without bending, and have this chair?  
(Big Sweet and Leafy advance leisurely  
to center stage, smiling and conscious  
that they look well)

Box Car

(Seizing a chair)

Miss Leafy, you dont want that old nasty chair My Honey got.  
Take this here nice one I got for you, Miss Leafy.

Leafy

(Accepting My Honey's chair with a self-  
conscious smile)

I thank you, but I reckon this one will do. I wouldnt want  
to deprive you. (To My Honey with a sweet smile) You sure  
I aint depriving you?

My Honey

(Overcome)

What would I look like setting down with with er, pretty  
ladies standing up?  
(There is a howl from the crowd)

Box Car

Listen at old bashful My Honey! Done found his tongue.

Stew Beef

Yeah, he's getting on some stiff time.

Sop-The-Bottom

Big Sweet, you got to accept this chair from me. The rest  
of these jar-heads is scared to tell you how pretty you is  
on account of Lonnie. (Throws Lonnie a pseudo-challenging  
look) Me, I aint got Lonnie to study about. I'll fight  
him about you right here and right now.

Big Sweet

(Casts an adoring look at Lonnie)

Oh, you bad, eh? You must be the guy that killed Jesse

James.

(General laughter)

Sop-The-Bottom  
I hates to tell you how really bad I is. I'm so bad till  
my spit turns to concrete before it hits the ground.

(General laughter)  
Fact is, I'm worsen than that snake that was so poison  
that he crawled up and bit the railroad track, and he was  
so poison that it killed a train when it come long past.  
(Great shout of laughter)

Stow Beef  
(Laughing)  
Stop your lying, Sop!

Sop-The-Bottom  
(Chuckling)  
Man, I aint lying.

Stow Beef  
Naw, you done quit lying and gone to flying.  
(Gets behind Big Sweet's chair and  
bends over her confidentially)  
But all joking aside, Miss Big Sweet. You evermore looks  
good tonight. You got on drygoods! It would take ten  
doctors to tell how near you is dressed to death.

Big Sweet  
(A concerned look at Lonnie)  
Much obliged for your compliments, but you all go on and  
woof at Leafy. I done heard all them lies too many times.

Box Car  
Thats right you is. So us can just tell Miss Leafy how much  
us loves her. (Tries to suppress a grin) Cause then that  
will be the truth. Miss Leafy, is your little foets rest-  
ing good in My Honey's no-count chair? You better git up  
and take minos.

My Honey  
Oh, she's doing all right where she is.

Box Car  
Oh, it'll do in a rush. But what you reckon a pretty girl  
child like she is would want with your old chair when she

Box Car  
can git mine? Take my chair, Miss Leafy. This is the first  
time I had a real good look at you, but I declare, already,  
I would rather all the rest of the women in the world to  
be dead than for you to have the toothache.

(There is a room-wide howl at the  
big lie and the audacity to tell it)

Sop-The-Bottom  
Man, how come you dont quit your lying?

Box Car  
(Suppressing a grin)  
That aint no lie. Miss Leafy, if that aint so, God is gone  
to Tampa, and you know He wouldnt fool around a place like  
that.

(They all laugh, and this time Box Car  
laughs himself)  
Take my chair and show these no-count jar-heads who you  
really love.

(Laughter)

Sop-The-Bottom  
(Pretended disgust)  
What you want to waste up the girl's time woofing at her for?  
Why you dont give the girl something to prove how much you  
love her? (Tenderly to Leafy) Miss, just tell me what it is  
your little heart crave and desire. I sure will git it for  
you. Course, I aim to give you a passenger train just for  
a sort of remembrance ----

(A howl of laughter)  
And then I aims to hire some mens to run it for you.

Do- Dirty  
(Shoves Sop-The-Bottom roughly aside)  
Git away, Sop! A passenger train! Is that all you aims to  
give a pretty girl baby like this? A little old passenger  
train? Miss Leafy, I aims to buy you one of them big ocean-  
liners, and then I aims to buy you a ocean of your own to run

Do-Dirty  
it on. (Scornfully) Passenger train!

Box Car  
Some these mens around here is too cheap to live. (Sighs  
heavily and rolls his eyes up) My people, my people!  
(Laughter)

Do-Dirty  
(Shoving in between Leafy and Box Car)  
Miss Leafy, Old Maker didnt give you all them looks you got  
to be talked to any which a way. Youse something special.  
You hear these jigs woofing at you and telling you about all  
they going to give you, and they dont even know how to talk  
to a girl like you.

Box Car  
Come on! Come on! Pick up your points.

Do-Dirty  
Oh, I'm going to pick 'em up.

Leafy  
(Smiling in the spirit of the game)  
And how would you talk to me, Do-Dirty?

Do-Dirty  
You just ask me something and see.  
(He makes an ornate gesture of  
getting ready to answer)

Leafy  
Mr. Do-Dirty, are you having a good time tonight?

Do-Dirty  
(Screws his face all up in a grimace  
that is meant to be very ingratiating  
and pleasing)

Yes Ma'am.

(The crowd howls as he does his act.

Then he comes out of it)  
That's the way to talk to a pretty girl like you with all  
that Nearer-my-God-to-Thee hair. (Makes a gesture of comb-  
ing long, silky tresses) If they answers you any other  
way they is sassing you  
(Laughter)

Do-Dirty  
Thats how come you ought not to be setting in that old chair  
My Honey stuck under you. (Offers chair) Move into this  
nice setting-chair that I got for you.

Leafy  
(Laughing)  
Reckon I'll have to humor you, Do-Dirty.

My Honey  
(Rushing forward with a gesture of restraint)  
No, no, Miss Leafy. Dont move out that chair I give you.  
(He is very earnest about it, and it  
is noted by all)

Stew Beef  
Look like old My Honey done got thunder-struck by lightning.  
(Looks at My Honey's face seriously)  
Dont move out his chair for goodness shake. It will throw  
him into a three-weeks spasm.

Dicey  
(Thrusting into the center of the group)  
How come she cant move? My Honey needs that chair more than  
she do. He got to set down to play, aint he?

My Honey  
(Quickly to defend Leafy)  
Aw, she aint keeping me from setting down if I want to. I  
can play if I wants to, but there aint no compellment about  
it. Just set and rest yourself, Miss Leafy. I loves to  
stand up anyhow.

(There is a tense feeling and silence for  
a minute. Everybody looks to Lonnie)

Lonnie  
Aw, table that talk. Leafy can set in any chair she will  
or may. They all belongs to the Bossman. If My Honey feels  
to stand up and let her set, thats his privilege. No need  
for all this who-struck-John about it.

Stew Beef  
Thats what I told her. (Indicating Dicey)

Dacey

(Significantly)

Some folks better sweep around they own door before they go trying to clean around mine. They got plenty to worry about they ownself.

(She throws Lonnie a triumphant look, and then purses her mouth in a knowing way. All look at Lonnie to see if that is the answer to his strange behavior)

Big Sweet

(Crossing to Lonnie hippily and with self assurance.

What you setting off by yourself for, Sugar, like youse somebody throwed away?

Lonnie

(Laying out the cards carefully, looks up at her briefly then down again without speaking)

Sop-The-Bottom

(Worried, but trying to be light)

Oh, leave the man alone. Maybe he's just dreaming up something like he always do.

Stew Beef

It cant be that, cause he always dream laughing. Something to make everybody feel good. He aint laughing now, and none of us dont feel right.

Sop-The-Bottom

Maybe its something deep this time. He might be way out on Ether's blue bosom somewhere travelling around. Then he going to come back and tell us something to make our work seem easy, and our burdens seem light.

Do-Dirty

Sure is the truth. This old saw-mill job seem just like New York with Lonnie around. I wouldnt stay here a day if he was to leave.

(General agreement with this)

Dicey

(Laughs)

If some folks would mind they own business instead of meddling with mine, they wouldnt be in the fix they's in.

My Honey

Aw, you always saying something nobody dont want to hear!

Box Car

(To Dicey)

Shut up!

Dicey

(With hand thrust suddenly into dress pocket)

You better come shut me up, then you'll know its done right.

My shutters aint working so good.

Box Car

Keep on cackling when Lonnie feel bad and I will.

Dicey

I wish to God you would put your hands on me. I'll cut every thing off you but quit it.

Box Car

Aw, ~~dont~~ be so public. Draw that knife and I'll draw my gun. (Ominously) And my gun dont lie to me. I'll shoot till ~~my~~ gun jumps the rivets.

Big Sweet

(Turns impatiently from her observation of Lonnie)

Aw, you all stop that racket in my ear!

Box Car

Well you make old ugly Dicey leave me be. Looking like some old phantassle!

Dicey

If I'm ugly, God made me ugly.

Box Car

Thats a lie! God aint never made nobody ugly. They gits that way they ownself. Thinking evil.

Big Sweet  
Hush!! I got to see about Lonnie. Its something wrong with him. (Tenderly) Whats wrong, Pudding-pie? You aint going to keep nothing from me, I know.

Lonnie  
(Looks carefully at the arrangement of cards, but does not look up at Big Sweet, who tries to get into his line of vision)

Piano Player  
(Begins to play softly and sing)  
I'd rather see my coffin come rolling in my door  
Than to hear my baby say she dont want me no more.

Big Sweet  
Lonnie, why you! You aint even told me if I look good in my clothes or not.  
(Piano keeps on in undertone)

Lonnie  
(Picks up a card and regards it intently.  
Everybody crowds about him and big Sweet)  
(There is a dramatic wait, then Lonnie begins to read the deck)  
Ace means the first time that I met you.

Deuce means there was nobody there but us two.  
Trey means the third party---Charlie was his name  
Four means the fourth time you tried that same old game  
Five means five years you played me for a clown  
Six means six feet of earth when the deal goes down.  
Now, I'm holding the seven spot for each day in the week  
Eight, means eight hours you sheba-ed with your sheik  
Nine spot, nine hours I worked hard every day  
Ten spot, the tenth of every month I brought you home  
my pay  
The Jack, thats Three-Card Charlie (Sensation) who played  
me for a goat

Lonnie  
And the queen, thats you, Pretty Mama, also trying to cut  
my throat.

(Rises to his feet)  
The king, thats me, old Lonnie, and I'm going to wear the  
crown.

So you better be sure your ready when the deal goes down!  
(There is a moment of stunned silence  
as Lonnie and Big Sweet stand facing  
each other)

Dicey  
(Breaks into raucous laughter which  
convulses her)  
Whatever goes over the Devil's back is bound to buckle  
under his belly.

(People are so intent on Big Sweet  
and Lonnie that they do not notice  
Dicey's antics, so she desists)

Big Sweet  
(Approaches and tries to take Lonnie's  
arm, but he jerks away)  
What make you mention Three-Card Charlie?

Lonnie  
(Hurt and belligerent)  
Because you make me do it, thats why. That bed-bug!

Big Sweet  
Bed-bug? Even so, what is Charlie being a bed-bug got to  
do with you and me?

Lonnie  
(Vehement)  
That is all he is, the scoundrel-beast, a bed bug.  
(Mimics stoop-shouldered posture)  
He is flat, he crawls, he bites in the secret of darkness,  
and he stinks!

Big Sweet  
(Bewildered and alarmed)  
Is you done gone crazy? What the Hell is the matter with  
you?

Lonnie  
I'm a straight man, and believe in doing right. So, I aint

Lonnie  
got no time to fool with you, and neither take up no time  
with you. I'm going down to the railroad station and grab  
the first thing smoking.

(There is a general sigh and cry of  
dismay from all. Leafy thrusts  
through and faces Lonnie)

Leafy  
What is done got the matter with you, Lonnie?

Lonnie  
I'm hurted. I'm hurt-ed to my very heart. (Bows his head)  
I loves Big Sweet, but she cant snore in my ear no more.

Stew Beef  
(Desperate)  
Lonnie you cant go off and leave us like that.

Laura B.  
Him and Big Sweet been gitting long too good to bust up  
and fall out.

Bunch  
It makes us all feel bad. What would us do?  
(There is a general feeling of  
helplessness and dismay)

Big Sweet  
(Resolute, steps forward, waving the  
others back, she raises Lonnie's chin  
and forces him to look at her)  
Dont you all worry. Lonnie is just talking, for some  
reason or another. (To Lonnie) You aint through with  
me Lonnie Price.

Lonnie  
(Trying to resist her)  
Oh, yes I is through with you. Why you think I cant  
quit you?

Big Sweet  
(Growing confidence)  
Because you belonged to me when they lifted you out of your  
cradle, and you going to be mine when they screw you down  
in your coffin.

Lonnie

Still and all, how come I cant git through with you?

Big Sweet

(Sensing his yielding)

Because I'm a damned sweet woman and you know it, too.

(Kisses him tenderly, which he does  
not resist)

Now, tell me what I done.

Dicoy

(On edge of crowd)

What she done, she been doing that:

(There is a general snarl from the  
crowd which has been anxiously watch-  
ing the progress of agreement with  
expressions of hope and pleasure)

Sop-The-Bottom

Hush up!

My Honey

(Intense)

I wish thunder and lightening would kill you!

Big Sweet

(Gestures for quiet)

Tell me, Lonnie, what is I done?

Lonnie

What is you done? You done fooled me. You done cut the  
ground from under my feets. You done put out the sun and  
muddied up all the water in the world. You done took off  
all my dreams. You done stuck my feet in the mire and  
clay, so I cant fly no more. You done drove off the Great  
Crow.

(There is a sob and a sigh from the crowd)

Big Sweet

I never meant to do nothing like that to you. Tell me  
how I done it.

(She is deeply moved)

Lonnie

(Looks at her searchingly)

You and Charlie been playing me for a fool. (He explodes  
on 'fool'.) And I dont intend to put up with it no more.

Lonnie  
I didnt choose you for that. Never no more.

Big Sweet  
No more? You got to have some, Lonnie, before you can have more. And you aint had none up to now.

Laura B.  
(Very partisan)  
Somebody done told a big old sway-back-ted lie. Big Sweet aint harmed a soul.

Big Sweet  
Lonnie, I dont know as yet where you got this mess from, but it certainly is a lie.

Lonnie  
I got a letter right here in my pocket say you been giving him my money. Say you been meeting him down in Mulberry.

Big Sweet  
(Indignant)  
Thats another lie! (Suddenly remembers and begins to laugh)  
Shucks! I thought you was mad with me about something.  
I did meet Charlie once, but it wasnt nothing.

Lonnie  
Nothing? You mean meeting another man on me aint nothing?  
(He shoves her away from him again)

Big Sweet  
(Smiling and hugging him again)  
That was way year before last.

Lonnie  
That dont excuse you none. Year before last I was working for you and bringing you home my pay just like I got it from The Man just like I been doing ever since.

Big Sweet  
But, Pudding-pie, what evil have I done? Since some old sea-buzzard had to go tell a lie on me, I reckon I better tell you how it was.

Lonnie  
And you better git it fixed, too.

Big Sweet  
Baby, you know old Charlie always did have a pick at me.

Lonnie  
That I know is so. **But** you always made out to me you didnt want him.

Big Sweet  
And I done neither. Never did. Well, about two years back, he took to picking at me, and sending me messages how he love me so hard, and all that money he had in his pocket was for me, till I got up a real good feeling for Charlie.

Lonnie  
(Groans)  
Do, Jesus!

Big Sweet  
So one time when he begged me so hard, I thought I might as well go down there and git all that money he had for me.

Lonnie  
(Groans and almost collapses on table,  
but Big Sweet makes him sit up again)

Big Sweet  
Wait a minute, Sugar, lemme finish telling you how it was:  
So I went down to Mulberry, and met him where he told me to come. He was there waiting with his hair all slicked down and everything. Soon as my toe-nails crossed the door-sill, I told Charlie, "Gimme what you got for me."  
He look like he didnt git the right understanding because he come telling me about all the love he had for me. So I asked him plain, "Is you got anything besides yourself?"  
(Emphatic with rage) And Baby, you know that mink didnt have a dime to cry. When he told me that, Honey, you know

Big Sweet  
that good feeling I had for Charlie took and left me right  
then and there, and I aint had it since. I turnt right  
round and come on home to you.

Lonnie  
(Jerks her roughly to him)  
I dare him to send you anymore messages. I'll give him  
a straightening if he do.

Big Sweet  
(Drops down in his lap and begins to  
fondle him)  
Which one would you rather believe --- your baby, or that  
old lying letter?

Lonnie  
I rather to believe you, Baby. I loves you harder than  
the thunder can bump a stump.

Big Sweet  
(Snuggles down, and Lonnie's hand  
unconsciously begins to caress her  
legs)  
You see, Sugar, I didnt fly hot and go accusing you when I  
found out that Ella Wall was sending for you all the time  
like she been doing for the last longest.

Lonnie  
You dont need to worry about Ella Wall and no other woman  
God ever made. You got the keys to the kingdom.

Stew Beef  
(Triumphant)  
There now! The mule done kicked Rucker!

Big Sweet  
(Hands on her hips, self-assured and  
smiling)  
What I put on you, Brother, soap and water wont take off.

Lonnie  
All right, I admits to the truth. You done put me on the  
linger. And I even went so far as to ask you for your, your

Lonnie  
hand. How come you wont marry me like I ask-ed you to?

Big Sweet  
(Recoils in hurt)  
Now, my feelings is hurt-ed, Lonnie.

Lonnie  
I dont see how come. I been good to you as any man could be  
and I'm asking you to be my wife. I aims to go with you  
and stand by you till I press a dying pillow.

Big Sweet  
And I loves you just as hard as you love me. But, Lonnie,  
you want us to be running and gitting married like  
common folks. Us got this big love that nobody aint never  
had be-fore. Us dont have to run to the courthouse and git  
papers and witnesses to prove if we is guilty. Us got that  
~~big-fogling~~ love for one another. If I go dragging you to  
the white folks, it wont look like I believe what you say.  
I aint never going to leave you, and I dont aim to let you  
leave me, neither. So what we got to act scared about?

Lonnie  
(Happy)  
I'm mighty glad to hear you say we is never to part, Baby.  
I just figured me and you ought to make a example out of  
ourselves for Leafy and My Honey and the rest of these  
folks round here.

Big Sweet  
Oh, its going to be plenty marrying going on round here  
first and last.  
(She looks pointedly at Stew Beef and  
Few Clothes) to  
Some of these womens is been good/they mens, and they going  
to git ast-ed for they hands. Things got to be different  
on this job.

Bunch

Lord knows its time. I aint seen a marriage on this job since I been here, and thats going on seven years.

Big Sweet

Its going to be plenty marrying going on pretty soon now. This place got to be fitten for somebody like Leafy to live in.

Stew Beef

How come you cant lead off, then?

Big Sweet

Dont try to do as I do. You do as I say do. Most of you all wont toll the truth. Just like I told Leafy -- she aint to believe a thing you all say after ten oclock at night, and nothing you promise no time on pay day. I know you. Youse a gang of minks. I ought to know you. I done summered and wintered with you, aint I? And then again, I hauled the mud to make you. I know just exactly whats in you.

Few Clothes

But, Big Sweet, these womens-----

Big Sweet

I dont want to hear it. If you will hang after 'em you going to marry 'em. You going to ask for hands. Not cans.

Lonnie

And me and you can stand on the floor with each and every couple, cant we, Baby? See the thing well done.

Box Car

I reckon we better start considering, if thats the way its going to be. But it sure is taking a lot of fun out of pay day.

Stew Beef

(Sighs heavily)

Stew Beef

Just cause you shack up with a woman now, you got to give her money. Umph! Umph! Umph!

Sop-The-Bottom

Its hard, but its fair. (Looks at Leafy) I might as well git married now and git used to things.

Lonnie

(With an air of command and finality)

Yeah, the time done come when big britches got to fit little Willie.

(Takes Big Sweet's arm affectionately)

Now, I can dream some more. Listen! I hear the drums of High John de Conquer. I can fly off on the big wings. I can stand on ether's blue bosom. I can stand out on the apex of power. Nobody can beat me doing what I'm supposed to do, and nothing cant keep me down. I got my wings. I rides the rainbow.

(He stands exalted, and his mood touches all. The faint throb of a distant drum permeates the silence, and gradually draws nearer. First Lonnie smiles beatifically, then good humor and laughter spreads over the place)

Stew Beef

Lonnie, youse a pistol! You can make anybody feel good. You can make a way out of no-way, and hit straight with a crooked stick.

Big Sweet

That is how come I ever loves Lonnie. (To Lonnie) Come on, lets we go home and get our night rest.

Lonnie

(Eagerly)

Thats the very corn I wants to grind.

(Rushes Big Sweet towards exit, right, downstage)

I got to speak to you pointedly about your hand.

(They stride ~~towards~~ exit, with the others clapping time with their hands, and exit)

(The others come out of the mood and begin spreading over the place.)

Box Car

(Passing Dicey puts his hand on her head)

Well, Dicey, you took and laughed too quick. Big Sweet and Lonnie didnt bust up like you was hoping.

Dicey

(Snatching away)

Keep your old nasty hands off my head! I aint got Big Sweet and Lonnie to study about.

Sop-The-Bottom

Oh, yes you is. You was cackling to beat the band, and urging it on. Thats how come I dont like you-- always for a fuss.

Dicey

Oh, nobody on this job dont like me nohow.

Box Car

Look like you dont want nobody to like you, the way you do.

Dicey

Yes, I do too. I wants folks to like me just like anybody else. Thats how come I likes to visit down at Mulberry. Ella Wall, and two three more likes me fine down there.

Laura B.

Thats the place you ought to live, then Dicey---where folks friends with you. How come you dont move down there?

Dicey

Naw, I aint going to move down there nothing of the kind. They will turn against me too. (Musing) Its a funny thing -----them that dont know me good is just crazy about me, but them that knows me well aint got no use for me at all.

Stew Boef

(Chuckling)

Maybe its because they know you.

(There is a spontaneous burst of laughter)

Dacey

(Instantly riled)

Thats right! Laugh! Like a passle of jackasses, You just wait till I see Ella Wall and my other friends. You'll be laughing out the other side of your mouth, then.

(She starts furiously towards left exit.

At the door she halts)

I'll give you something to cackle over -- you self-conceited dogs!

(She vanishes out of the door instantly)

(There is a light sprinkle of laughter after her exit)

Stew Beef

Lets dance this thing off. Play that piano, boy! I feels like a waltz. Miss Leafy, can I scorch you round the hall?

Leafy

(Hugging herself as if with cold, perches on the side of the table and looks nervously about her)

Not just now. Dacey ---- the way she looks at me --- she gives me the weak-trembles.

Box Car

(Crosses to table and stands admiring Leafy)

Pay it no mind. Dacey been talking about cutting up every body for the last longest. She aint crazy sure enough to think anybody is going to let her cut 'em and do nothing. Pay it no mind.

Leafy

(Still nervous)

You sure about that, now? The way she looks at me, nothing in the drugstore would kill me quicker than she would.

My Honey

(Trying to get closest to Leafy)

I wouldnt stand round and let her hurt you, even if she had that in mind.

Leafy

(Not too sure)

I hope you know what you talking about.

Box Car

Lets table this talk on Dicey and open up the house for new business. (Diffidently) My Honey, is Miss Leafy your best-goodest lady friend?

My Honey

If you want to know who going to search Miss Leafy home tonight, I'm doing it. Anything else you want to know there she is , ask her! She can tell you what she want you to know.

Sop-The-Bottom

Oh, you dont have to git mad because somebody else want to talk with the lady. She's a much-right, aint she? Much-right for me as she is for you.

My Honey

There she is. Ask her your ownself.

Box Car

(Diffident)

Miss Leafy, which would you ruther be, a lark a'flying, or a dove a'setting?

Sop-The-Bottom

He mean would you ruther be married or single?

Leafy

(Bridling)

Oh, you done asked me a hard question, Box Car. It all depends.

Box Car

Depends on what?

Leafy

(With an under-eye at My Honey)

It depends on whether I was in love or not. If I was in love, I would want to be a dove a'setting like Big Sweet. If I wasnt

Leafy  
in love, I would choose to be a lark a'flying like I been  
doing.

Box Car  
Now, we gitting deep. Is you seen anybody around here up to  
now that you figger you could nest with?

My Honey  
Oh, leave Miss Leafy alone! She dont want to be bothered  
with you into her private business.

Box Car  
I cant pick no box, My Honey, but I got a right to talk,  
aint I? Good Lord! I'm looking out for my ownself. I  
aint breaking into none of your arrangements, is I?  
(Turns back to Leafy)  
You aint answered me yet?

Leafy  
(Sits thoughtful)  
Well, and then again, I cant say.  
(The piano begins a waltz, and the  
couples begin to dance)  
But I did have a dream last night.  
(My Honey strolls over to the piano  
and stands. Box Car and Sop get  
partners and dance)  
No, it wasnt true. It was just a dream. He came right  
into my room last night. The moonlight was tropic-white.  
He kissed me. He pressed me there on my bed. But it was  
just a dream. A shadow thrown by the moonlight.  
(Sings)  
The moonlight came into my room  
With his laugh  
With his light  
With his loom  
He brought your face so near to me  
I could feel  
I could touch

## Leafy

I could see

I could seem

I could dream in the spell of the moon

In my room

Ah, the moon!

It was the full moon with his light

That brought you

And brought love

In the night.

He wove your wish right into mine.

With a kiss

That was bliss

So divine

Made you near

Ever dear, ever true--- Ah that moon!

In my room

Ah, the moon!

(The dancers keep on waltzing softly as Leafy sings in a sort of picturization of her dream-desires, there on the edge of of the table. My Honey approaches her, puts down his guitar, she steps into his arms and they waltz into the crowd as the curtain falls)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO.

SCENE 2.

SCENE

ONE MONTH LATER

INTERIOR OF BIG SWEET'S HOUSE

Raw, unpainted lumber with rafters and uprights showing. Furniture whole, but cheap. The decor, garish. Bright-colored calenders and advertisements nailed on walls. Watermelon-pink curtains at the two windows. White iron bedstead in one corner with clean, starched lace trimmed pillowslips, and a cheap, slazy silk spread. Three kitchen chairs and a cheap wooden rocker with coarse lace antimacassar.

At the rise, it is early night, and Big Sweet is in a loose wrapper arranging her hair for the street. She sings a light song as she dresses. She puts on her street shoes and stockings, adding proudly a pair of beribboned red garters. A silk dress is laid out on the bed, and she throws off her wrapper to put it on. But she whiffs under her arms, reaches over over on the window sill and gets her wash cloth and wipes again, dusts herself with talcum, and arranges the dress carefully to go over her head without wrinkling.

Lonnie

(Bursts in, his face lit up  
with happy excitement)

Sugar! Sugar! What you reckon? (He grins delightedly)

Old My Honey done got it out at last!

Big Sweet

(Dress still in her hands)

What?

Lonnie

He done got up the nerve and ask-ed Leafy for her hand.

They's going to git married sure enough!

Big Sweet

(Glorified)

No! Well, the old slow thing got it out at last, eh? I sure is glad.

Lornie

Yeah, and everything is going to be up to time, too. Bought license, a finger-ring and everything. Aint that something?

Big Sweet

(Pulling dress over her head)

When did you find it out?

Lonnie

He just told me a while ago at the commissary. I come quick as I could to let you know. I wouldnt take a play-pretty for that.

Big Sweet

Me neither. I'm so glad for Leafy. The poor thing wanted My Honey so bad, and look like the fool never was going to ask her. So bumble-tongued! I felt like zotting him over the head two three times.

Lonnie

He was scared she wouldnt have him. So pretty, and from New York and everything. But look like he done talked up a breeze now. Everything is copasetty.

Big Sweet

(Smiling)

That sly little hussy! She must of knowed he was due to ask. No wonder she went off from here around sundown to dressed to death. Where they at, now?

Lonnie

Down at the cafe. Eating ice cream out the same spoon and grinning at each other like two glad dogs in a meat house.

Big Sweet

(Laughs heartily)

They's in Heaven now, Baby. They cant help it.

Lonnie

And My Honey done bought out the place with chocolate bars, and I reckon done started on the chewing gum by now.

(They both laugh heartily, but proudly)

Big Sweet

(Fully dressed)

You wasnt much better when we first got together. (Crosses and kisses him lightly) Remember that first time down behind the saw-mill?

Lonnie

Aw, quit bragging on yourself! You knowed right then you had done laid me under conviction. And you meant to do it too.

Big Sweet

Of course I did. I seen right away I was going to love you. Man, I throwed you some waves the ocean aint never seen.

(Lonnie gives her an affectionate shove, and slaps her on her hips)

And I hopes that Leafy do the same by My Honey.

Lonnie

You women always setting round figuring out how to take the undercurrents on some man. But us likes it, though.

Big Sweet

But Lonnie, not changing the subject, us cant let Leafy and My Honey go get a house and live all by theyselves.

Lonnie

Why not? They'll be man and wife then, and he'll have all privileges. You cant-----

Big Sweet

Oh, I aint talking about that. Them two will starve to death if we leave them do like that.

Lonnie

Like what? My Honey makes good money all the time.

Big Sweet

Leafy is crazy about singing and dancing and she will forgit all about cooking something to eat. And My Honey he's earried away with picking that box and he wont think to say nothing to her about it. They'll sit round and starve just as stiff as a board:

(Both laugh)

Lonnie

Oh, I dont know, when that big gut reach and grab that little one, they'll scrabble up something to eat.

Big Sweet

But it would be more better if they stayed right here with us.

Lonnie

(Delighted)

You do git hold of the best notions! They got to stay right here. Anyhow, they going to be going to New York before long if Leafy have her way. She'll die the death of a doodle-bug if them folks in New York dont hear My Honey play that guitar.

Big Sweet

Oh, yeah, she done talked my ear-laps down about how famous My Honey will be when he gits up there. Somebody of note like Booker T. Washington. She claim I and you ought to go up there and sing for money too. (Laughs) She must figure them white folks up there is crazy----paying folks good money just to sing.

Lonnie

She swears they does it, though. Maybe white folks aint as smart as some folks thinks they is. Paying out good money to folks for haing they fun. (Chuckles) I hope I meets up with some like that.

Big Sweet

Well, us got money in the Post office. If Leafy and them go up there, or if things was ever to go wrong round here, us could go up there and look around.

Lonnie

We could, at that. (Gets up hurriedly) The skitter man is ill-sick in the hospital. Got to go put somebody else on the job till he gits better. (He hurries to door and opens it) I'll be looking for my ground-rations tonight.  
(He exits quickly)

Big Sweet

(Calls after him)

Okay, Papa! I'll meet you at the Jook.  
(She smiles to herself as she rubs powder on her face with a rubber sponge)

What I tell that lie for? I know I aint particular about going to no New York. I likes it here. I done come to be something here. I got Lonnie, and every body puts they dependence in him and me. Its nice. Wonder who wrote that mean letter to Lonnie? Sure do wisht I knowed. I'd fix 'em.

(There is a loud rapping at the door)

Big Sweet

(Listens)

Is that him doubling back? He must think I'm going to run off sure enough. Come on back in Lonnie. I know it aint nobody but you.

(Calls over her shoulder)

(The door is thrown open roughly and the Quarters Boss enters, with his pistol hanging loosely in his hand. Big Sweet stares at him in surprise. He shoves his hat far back on his head, and with legs apart stands looking Big Sweet over sternly)

Big Sweet  
Oh, er, was you wanting to see Lonnie about something?

Quarters Boss  
Naw, I come here to -----

Big Sweet  
Oh, you wanted to see me.

Quarters Boss  
I dont want to see you half as bad as the sheriff do, I reckon. (He pauses to let that sink in) Vergible Thomas wasnt able to go to work today.

Big Sweet  
(Off hand)  
He dont do too much work no day.

Quarters Boss  
(Losing his temper)  
Never mind about how much work he do. I been told that you jumped him.

Big Sweet  
They told you right.

Quarters Boss  
Aint I done told you and told you about stomping people and knocking 'em around?

Big Sweet  
(Calm)  
Vergible brought that on his ownself. I told him to hush his mouth. Talking all under folkses clothes and a whole lot of dirty, slack talk.

Quarters Boss  
(Sneering)  
Now, aint that just too bad? Slack talk in saw-mill quarters! Humph! Well, I aims to put a stop to you

Quarters Boss  
 bulldozing these quarters. You act like you're some lord-  
 god sitting on a by-god. Doing just as you damn please!  
 Do you know you done kilt three men since you been on this  
 job? THREE MEN!

Big Sweet  
 (Nonchalantly)  
 I know it. I kilt 'em my ownself, didnt I?  
 (Boss almost explodes with anger, but  
 cannot find words)

Big Sweet  
 (Sits in rocker and makes herself  
 comfortable)  
 And not a one of them minks died a day too soon, neither!  
 They was low and mean and bulldozing, and had done kilt  
 folks they ownselves. They wouldnt do for they selves,  
 they wouldnt do for nobody's else. They ought to been  
 dead ten thousand years, the no-count things!

Quarters Boss  
 So you mean to keep your meanness up, eh? Keep it up, and  
 see what happens to you, then. The Judge down to Bartow  
 told me the last time you was there for a killing, that the  
 very next time you come up before him for a killing, he  
 was going to go hard on you. He's going to lay ninety days  
 on you in the County jail!

Big Sweet  
 (Undistrubed)  
 Getting tough in his old age, eh? I bet you when lightning  
 strikes him, it goes off through the woods limping.

Quarters Boss  
 Smart eh? Well, you done done your last big talk around  
 here. Folks been bringing me news about your doings for  
 the last month or so. I got plenty on you now. I git sick

Quarters Boss  
and tired of some coming to me telling me how you runs over  
folks. Well, one person will tell me things, anyhow. I'm  
telling you, you got to leave off this job.

Big Sweet  
(Stunned)  
Me leave here?

Quarters Boss  
Yes, you leave here. And no later than next pay-day.  
(He strides sullenly to the door)

Big Sweet  
(Hard to comprehend the blow)  
You mean I got to go? I-----er, whats that you said?

Quarters Boss  
(At door)  
You heard me what I said. By next pay-day.  
(He slams the door hard and is gone)

Big Sweet  
(She is stunned and disorganized.  
She gets up slowly and moves about  
aimlessly. Finally, she sinks on  
the side of the bed with her hands  
in her lap)  
But how can I leave here? I wont have no home no more. Be  
like I was before. Just on the road somewhere. (Overcome)  
No! No! I just cant leave. I'm somebody now. Folks needs  
me. I cant go off feeling like nothing no more. And every-  
body here will feel like nothing again when me just sawdust.  
Some more sawdust piled up like that behind the mill with  
the rain and the storm beating on it. (She clenches her  
hands and supresses a sob) Poor Lonnie! He's going to  
follow me off and he aint never going to be satisfied no  
more. (In helpless appeal) Jesus! (Begins to chant)

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!  
(She sings the melody with a distant  
drum rythm under her. Then the strings  
in the orchestra take up the melody while  
she talks and chants against it)

Big Sweet

I aint nothing. None of us aint nothing but dust.

Saw dust. Piled up round the mill. What is left over from  
standing trees. Sometimes, when Lonnie talks, the sawdust  
shines like diamonds, and glints like gold. Then the light  
goes out, and we are dust again. Dust from God's Big Saw.

(Sings) Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

(She gets hold of herself and the  
music fades. She gets up and goes  
resolutely to the door)

Lonnie said meet him at the Jook. So I'm going and laugh  
and dance and sing.

(Quick exit)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO.

SCENE 3.

SCENE:

THE FOLLOWING NIGHT

INTERIOR OF THE JOOK

At the rise, Sop-The-Bottom, Box Car and Do-Dirty are at the dice table playing. The pianist is playing, but in an experimental manner. Bunch and Laura B. are sitting against the wall to the left, conversing in low tones and laughing quietly. Stew Beef and Few Clothes are in the center of the floor chatting inaudibly.

Box Car

(To Sop-The-Bottom)

Six is your point.

Do-Dirty

Two bits you dont six.

Box Car

What's your come-bet?

Few Clothes

(Shoving Stew affectionately and laughing)

Aw, man, I wouldnt believe that lie if I told it my ownself.

Stew Beef

Yeah it is so. Monkees can talk when they want to. (Laughs)

Few Clothes

Youse crazy! (Laughs) After that, I'm going to coon some with your old woman. (Lifts voice as he goes to card table)

Come on, Laura B, lets coon.

Laura B.

(Getting up briskly and going to table)

All right, I'll play you.

Few Clothes

(Braggadocia)

You reckon you know the game?

Laura B.

(Bragging)

If I aint a coon-can player, I'm a 'leven card layer.

Laura B.

(Shoves the deck towards Few)  
Strip it! (Chants) Before I'll lose my rider's change. I'll  
spread short deuces and tab the game.

Few Clothes

(Offers her the deck to cut she shoves  
it back in disdain)

Laura B.

Deal! I dont cut green wood.

Bunch

(Coming over to watch)

Naw, no need to cut a rabbit out when you can twist him out.

Laura B.

Thats right, (Sings) Give my man my money to play coon-can

He lost all my money but he played his hand:

(Stew Beef wanders over to dice game)

Sop-The-Bottom

(Starts Singing)

Oh, Angeline! Oh, Angeline!

Oh, Angeline, that great, great gal of mine:

(The four about the table form a quartet  
and sing)

Sop-The-Bottom

And when she walk, and when she walk

And when she walk she rocks and reels behind.

You feel her legs, you feel her logs

You feel her legs then you want to feel her thighs

You feel her thighs, you feel her thighs,

Leafy

(Enters downstage left, locked arms with  
My Honey, both are radiant)

Stew Beef

(Seeing them enter)

Shhhhh! Here come Miss Leafy. (The song ceases instantly)

How you do, Miss Leafy? Hello My Honey.

(Both respond and stroll towards piano)

(Box Car, Sop-The-Bottom and Do-Dirty all regard Leafy with hungry admiration as she swishes along with My Honey)

Box Car

(Turning completely from the game)

Oh, will I ever? Will I ever?

My Honey

(Over his shoulder)

No, you'll never, no, you'll never!

(All laugh at this passage)

Box Car

Well, you sure cant keep me from hoping.

My Honey

(Rests his guitar on piano and turns)

(Laughs good natured)

Thats right. I cant keep the sight out o your eyes, but I sure God will keep the taste out your mouth. (Takes Leafy's

arm again) Come on, Sugar, lemme find you a good seat.

(They head downstage)

Box Car

(Half in fun, half serious)

You dont care if us walk behind you do you, whilst you scorch

Miss Leafy to a chair?

My Honey

(Laughing)

You can walk behind and wish all you want to.

(Box Car, Sop-The-Bottom, Do-Dirty leave the table and fall in behind Leafy and My Honey with the most yearning and beseeching expressions in face and body and follow them along)

Box Car

(Feigning utmost desire)

Oh, I wish it was me!

Do-Dirty

(Same business)

Oh, dont I wish it was me!

Sop-The-Bottom

Lord knows, I wish it was me!

(All three together)

I wish it was me! I wish it was me!

(They follow My Honey and Leafy all around the room in a parade lamenting, while the others laugh at the show. Finally, My Honey and Leafy shoo them off and sit down)

D<sub>o</sub>-Dirty

(To Sop and Box Car)

Oh, well, look like he got us barred. We done let the 'gator beat us to the pond. We might as well give up.

Sop-The-Bottom

Yeah, My Honey got the business. (To My Honey) When you all figger on jumping over the broomstick? I know Big Sweet aint going to stand for no commissary license.

My Honey

We dont want none. We going to do it up brown.

Stew Beef

Yeah, man, he got them license in his pocket right now. I done seen 'em myself.

Laura B.

Yeah. And we done fixed up to give 'em a big woods dance and all. Just waiting for Big Sweet to make the arrangements.

Bunch

This marriage is got to be fine. Its the first one, and it will be setting the style for the rest of us.

Few Clothes

(Groans)

I reckon nothing cant stop the rest of you womens after this one come off.

Bunch

Thats right. Me and you is going to marry. You heard what Big Sweet said.

Stew Beef

(Looking at Laura B)

And I guess I'm dead on the turn.

Laura

If you expect me to do for you anymore.

Stow Beef  
Well, we better give My Honey a big send off. Plenty to eat and drink, and cut big jim by the acre. Then they will do the same by us. Any how, this one got to be fine. Its the first one to come off since here on this job I been. I'm gitting so I lakes the notion.

Laura B.  
Its about time.

Big Sweet  
(Enters upstage, right with Lonnie.  
She is greeted with enthusiasm)

Lonnie  
How ye folkses!

Big Sweet  
(Coming down to center stage and looking all around her)  
Well, people! I thought you all was teaching Leafy some more songs.

Stow Beef  
Leafy aint got her mind on no singing. Look at her.

Leafy  
(Coming out from under a long kiss)  
Yes, I do want to know some more song, too.

Big Sweet  
(Seriously)  
And I want you to learn all there is just as quick as you can.  
(Meaningly) It might git so you wouldnt be here to learn no more.

Leafy  
Why?  
(Everybody looks puzzled)

Big Sweet  
Oh, you just might not be here thats all. (To The room)  
You all learn Leafy some more.

Stow Beef

We done learnt her about all we know. Me and Laura B. was just saying we couldnt think up no more. Lonnie, how about that thing you and My Honey was messing with today down in the swamp?

Lonnie

Oh, if she wants to learn it, we can do the best we can. Come on My Honey, and git in quotation with the piano so we can show the girl.

My Honey

(Rushes to piano and gets guitar  
A chord or two is struck and Lonnie  
begins)

Lonnie

Mama, Mama, who is Jack?

Where's his horse and where's his shack?

Was he true a saw-mill man?

Did he skin and play coon-can?  
(Drums dominate)

This is the house that Jack built.

This is the malt that lay in the house that Jack built.

The is the rat that ate the malt, that lay in the house  
that Jack built.

This is the cat that killed the rat that ate the malt that  
lay in the house that Jack built.  
(All begin to join the rythm, clap  
hands stomp with the drums)

Lonnie

This is the maiden all forlorn

That milked that cow with the crumpled horn

That tossed the dog that worried the cat

That killed the rat, that ate the malt

Lonnie

That laid in the house that Jack built.  
(Drum Interval)

My Honey

This is the cock that crowed in the morn

That woke that priest all shaven and shorn, etc.  
(Drum Interval)

Big Sweet

Oh, this is Jack with his hound and horn, etc.  
(Drum Interval)

Leafy

Oh, Mama! Mama! Look at Sis

Out in the yard trying to do that twist

Come in here, and I mean now!

You're trying to be a rounder

But you dont know how

Let your Mama show you

Oh, this is the horse of the beautiful form.

That carried Jack with his hound and horn, etc.  
(The others have worked up to a high  
pitch and are on their feet for the most  
part, dancing, clapping, etc to the drums)

Lonnie

This is Sir John Barleycorn

That owned the horse of the beautiful form

That carried Jack with his hound and horn

That caught the fox that lived under the thorn

That stole the cock that crowed in the morn

That woke the priest all shaven and shorn

That married the man all tattered and torn

That kissed the maiden all forlorn

That milked the cow with the crumpled horn

Lonnie  
That tossed the dog, that worried the cat  
That killed the rat, that ate the malt  
That lay in the house that Jack built.  
(Every "that" is accented with drum and voice)  
(The drums continue and finally die away  
like the end of a rain-storm)

Big Sweet  
Did you git that one, Leafy? Git it right?

Leafy  
(Happily)  
Oh, yeah. I got it good. And I like it too.

Big Sweet  
(Very subdued)  
As I before said, git all you can just as quick as you can.  
I might not be here always to see to things.

Lonnie  
You been saying that all day. What you mean by that?

Big Sweet  
(With her eyes down, hesitates, while  
all hang on what she might say in  
explanation)

Dickey  
(Enters downstage, left, with a  
triumphant flourish with Ella Wall,  
who has the air of a conqueror and struts  
towards center stage)

Sop-Tho-Bottom  
Ella Wall, Lord! Hi ther. Ella!

Ella Wall  
(With a flourish)  
I'm folks.

Dickey  
I'll say youse folks. You was folks up in Middle Georgia  
before you ever come to Polk County. Youse folks in Mulberry,  
and youse folks in Lofton. Fact of the matter is, youse folks  
where ever you go.

Ella Wall

(Has advanced to center stage confidently expecting Big Sweet, Leafy, and Lonnie who are still there to give way. She is brought to a halt when she sees that Big Sweet does not move, and the others take their cue from her. Ella stops abruptly as she comes against them)

(She halts and looks Big Sweet up and down in a sneering way)

Hello, there, Big Sweet. Look like you got changing clothes, now.

Big Sweet

It do look like it, dont it?

Ella

You sure done improved up from what you used to be. I knowed you when you was just as naked as a jay-bird in whistling time.

(She laughs excessively and Dicey joins her in the slur by laughing)

Big Sweet

(Quietly)

You sure telling the truth, Ella. (Cruelly) But that was before I got the man that you was trying to git. Lonnie dont let me want for nothing. Every pay day I sits on my porch and rock and say, "Here come Lonnie and them."

Ella Wall

Them? What them?

Big Sweet

(Arrogantly)

Them dollars! You hear me. You aint blind.

Ella Wall

Lonnie? I just let you have him because I seen you was in need. I can git any man I wants.

Lonnie

Excepting me. Not since I come to know Big Sweet anyhow.

Sop-The-Bottom

(Woofing)

Pay Lonnie Price no mind, Ella, What you care about him when you can git me? If you handlos the money you used to handle about ten years back and let me spend it like I please, I'm yours any time.

(There is a big laugh and Ella is taken back)

Dicey

Who? Ella dont have to give no mens her money. They gives her. Sho's just like the cemotory. She aint putting out. Sho's taking in.

Big Sweet

(With a catty smilo)

I see you got something too, Ella, that you didnt used to have.

Ella Wall

What is it? (Displays her hands full of cheap jewelry) I always had jewelry and things.

Big Sweet

You got you a yard dog now (Indicating Dicey) to do your barking for you.

Box Car

(Pretending sympathy for Dicey)

Aw, aw! Big Sweet, what make you play so rough? Dicey, I wouldnt take that if I was you.

Stew Boef

(Egging the fight on)

Now, what you want to try to start something for, Box? You know Dicey aint going to get on Big Sweet. Not unlesson she's braver than I figure her out to be.

Ella Wall

Dicey dont have to act scared. She got somebody to back her up.

Big Sweet  
 I aint looking for no trouble, but if anybody pay their way  
 on me, God knows I'll pay it off:  
 (A yell of expectant excitement)

Box Car  
 Of course, now, Dicoy is going to back her crap.

Dicoy  
 (Afraid)  
 Us come in here for pleasure. Us didnt come here to fight:  
 (With a knowing leer) And then again, I dont have to be  
 fighting and carrying on. Some folks thats around here think-  
 ing they got the world by the tail aint going to be here  
 long. They everything will be nice:  
 (She looks venomously from Big Sweet to Leafy)

Leafy  
 If you're talking about me, I'm in the be class --- be here  
 while you're here, and be here when you're gone:

Laura B.  
 (Proudly)  
 Listen at little crowing!

Leafy  
 Yeah, I'm getting married to My Honey, and it wont be long,  
 either, and it aint no help for it. I got more right here  
 than you have. (Beams up proudly at My Honey) I got a  
husband on this job.

Dicoy  
 (Full of hate and frustration instantly  
 puts her hand in her pocket. Everybody  
 sees the gesture and grows tense)

Big Sweet  
 Dont you pull no knife in here. I dare you to even take it  
 out! And Ella Wall, you dont belong on this place at all:  
 The Bossman said particular he didnt want no stragglors on  
 the premises. Git on out here and take your yard dog along  
 with you. Git!

Ella Wall

(Shows hot resentment in her face,  
but looking around she sees nothing  
friendly in any of the faces. No  
possible help)

I'm going, but I'll be back. Your time now, but it will be  
mine after while. Come on, Dicey.

Dicey

(As they retrace their steps)

Hanh! Big Sweet wont be here long. (Laughs gloatingly)

Nobody didnt tell me, but I heard. Then other folks  
(pointedly at Leafy) can be straightened out.

Lonnio

Big Sweet can stay here just as long as she please, and go  
when she gits ready.

Dicey

(At door)

That aint what the Quarters Boss say.

(She and Ella exit laughing triumphantly)

(A profound silence settles over the place)

Lonnio

Now, what you reckon that Dicey mean by that?  
(He looks at Big Sweet questioning)

Stew Beef

I sure dont know.

Big Sweet

Oh, you all (Sighs)  
leave me be.

(She drags over to the table, left and  
drops down in a chair. She sits a moment  
gloomily)

Its another song I got to teach you, Leafy. It aint got no  
laughing in it, but I reckon you got to learn it. Help me  
out on it, My Honey, much as you can.

(Begins to sing to herself, gradually swells)  
Ever been down, know just how I feel

Ever been down, know just how I feel

Been down so long till down dont worry me

Big Sweet

I wonder will he answer if I write

I wonder will he answer if I write

I wonder will he answer if I write

Well you may leave and go to Hali-muh-fack

But my slow-drag will bring you back

Well, you may go, but this will bring you back.

(She gets an ovation as she ends first chorus. As she begins second verso Lonnie moves in closer as My Honey moves closer in his enthusiasm of playing)

Lonnie

(Crosses and puts his arm about Big Sweet's shoulders)

Its something wrong. Why you dont tell me what it is?

Big Sweet

(Breaks down)

You so nice. I didnt want to hurt your feelings.

Lonnie

(Commanding)

Tell me what it is.

Big Sweet

Well, the Quarters Boss come to me last night right after

you left and said I had to leave.

(This stuns everybody)

Lonnie

You leave? What he mean by that?

Big Sweet

Said somebody been coming to him saying I makes all the trouble

around here. Said I had to leave --- no later than pay day.

(A deep gloom settles over the place)

And thats how come I tell Leafy to do the best she can

whilst I'm here, so her and My Honey can git gone. Some-

body is liable to hurt her when I'm gone.

My Honey

I begs to differ with you---not to give you no short answer--- but Leafy got me behind her.

Big Sweet

I know, and I dont doubt you one bit. But you have to be on the job all day long, and a whole heap could happen in that time. Folks can steal her.

Laura B.

Some lowdown jig been toting lies to the white folks on Big sweet. Thats what's the matter.

Lonnie

Wish I was sure who it was. I sure would hang for 'em.

Stow Beef

Me too. (General chorus of agreement)

Big Sweet

(Idea)

Maybe it was the same one that wrote Lonnie that lying letter on me. You still got it, Lonnie?

Lonnie

(Feeling in his pockets)

Maybe I is. Done most forgot I had it. (Pulls out a crumpled letter written in pencil and hands it to Big Sweet) I always thought I didnt have no sense, and every time I thinks about the fuss I had with you, I know it.

Big Sweet

(Unfolding lotter and scanning it)

This letter say its from Three-Card Charlie, turning me some humble thanks for the spending-money I sent him. (Looks all around amazed) He must be crazy! I aint never sent him dime one.

Box Car

When was it wrote?

Big Sweet  
Oh, little better than a month back.

Box Car  
Then, Charlie sure never wrote it.

Lonnie  
How come he didnt? It would be just like the dirty mink to try  
to git my Baby away from me.

Box Car  
Because Charlie been dead to my knowing for more than over a  
year. Woman killed him in Savannah.

Lonnie  
Sure enough?

Box Car  
I know it for a fact. I was there. Remember I quit here and  
was off a couple of months. Seen her when she stabbed him.  
He sure did die.

Lonnie  
(Hugs Big Sweet impulsively)  
Well, well!

Box Car  
So if Charlie wrote you that lotter, things must be differont  
down in Hell from what it used to be. They didnt used to send  
out no mail from there.

Lonnie  
This dont say Hell. It say, Mulberry, Florida.

Box Car  
Maybe they done took in Mulberry for a new addition, but I  
aint heard nothing about it. I knows the place well.

Sop-The-Bottom  
Hush your lying, Box Car! How you know anything about Hell?

Box Car  
Dont tell me, man. I dont say in one place like the rest of  
you all. I gets around.

Lonnie  
So now, us know that Charlie aint wrote no letter back:

Wonder who?

Big Sweet  
And went and lied on me to the Quarters Boss?

Laura B.  
Aw, you know nobody done it but Dicey. Nobody else on the  
job would want to hurt you.

My Honey  
Sure. She's trying to hit a straight lick with a crooked  
stick. She figger she can git to Leafy if you is out the way.  
And she dont love me to all of that, neither. She just hate  
to be outdone.

Lonnie  
Well, I reckon she will move off with Ella now, so-----

Laura B.  
But you heard both of 'em put out they brags that they will  
be back with help.

Big Sweet  
(Resigned)  
I reckon they will have they swing. Everything will be back  
like it used to be.

Lonnie  
But you cant go.

Box Car  
Nobody here want you to go no where, do us?  
(A general protest against her leaving)

Big Sweet  
But the man done told me that the Company would rather have  
my room than my company. (Sighs heavily)  
(General desperation and gloom)

Leafy  
(Almost in tears)  
I'm the cause of it all.

Big Sweet

In a way you is, and then again you aint. All you done was come here and put words to the feeling I already had. I ever wanted things to be nicer than what they was. Ever since I been with Lonnie, more especial.

Stew Beef

But My Honey and Leafy is gitting married. We going to cut BigJim by the acre when that come off. Big woods picnic and everything. Who is going to general our business for us if you aint here?

Bunch

Nobody cant do nothing right on this place without you. What will us do if you aint here?

Big Sweet

Do like the folks over the creek, I reckon. Do without.

Lonnie

(Pulls out a chair and drops down in it backwards and sits in gloomy thought)  
I reckon you all know that if Big Sweet has to go, I dont aim to be here another minute. Taint nothing bad about Big Sweet at all. She got plenty good friending in her if you let her be.

Bunch

We all knows that.

Lonnie

(Face hard)  
Something is wrong round here if somebody like Big Sweet can be told to go. Somebody trying to drive her.

Sop-The-Bottom

And it sure aint clean.

My Honey

(Most dejected)

Everything was going along so good. Big Sweet doing the best she could to make everything nice-----

Lonnie

What is we? We aint nothing? We didnt come from nothing.  
We aint got nothing but the little wages we makes. Look like  
then us ought not to be bothered with trouble. Thats for  
big,rich folks, that got their many pleasures. Why we got to  
have troubles too?

(A harmonic, vocal chant whispers under him and  
gets a little stronger as he talks)

Where is these quarters nohow? Wild woods all around and the  
mill in the middle. (As if sudden discovery) We'se in a  
cage! Like a mule-lot down in a swamp!

Big Sweet

(Takes lead in chant and puts softly  
sung words to chant and the others  
follow her)

(Humming) I got my hands in my Jesus hands (With Chorus)

I got my hands in my Jesus hands.

Lonnie

Panthers in the swamp. Moccasins round your feet all day.

Standing in water.

(Chant grows intense but not loud.  
More fervent)

Trees falling on men and killing 'em. Saw liable to cut you  
in two. Sundown, nothing but these quarters to come to and  
keep on like that until you die.

(Chant dominates the pause with repetition  
of Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.)

Its something wrong. But what can we do? You dont know and

I dont know, so I cant tell you. Just moving around in the  
cage.

(The chant comes out in the open, while  
Lonnie sits and looks off into space)

Big Sweet

Sawdust, even if it do shine sometime.

(The faint whisper of distant drums comes  
and Lonnie begins to smile. More and more.  
The others watching Lonnie's face begin to  
smile too, as the drums become more audible)

Lonnie

(Smiling and chuckling)

What make me talk so disencouraged like? Old John de Conquer would know how to beat the thing. (Chuckles broadly) Shucks! High John could git out of things dont care how bad they was, and finish it off with a laugh.

(The drums are very pronounced now, and some pat their feet, and in other ways accent the rythn of the drums)

Big Sweet aint going nowhere. That Quarters Boss aint got no stuff for me. If he got to listen to everything that old Dicey say -----

Laura B.

Every lie she make up and tell.

Lonnie

I'm going to make my left-here now.

(Chorus of "and we're going when you go"!)

Stew Beef

One day after you leave, there wont be a sould in the quarters.

Lonnie

And I'm going to be the one to tell the Big Boss my ownself.

The man can wait till he git the straight of things, or else

we all can go. If the Boss ruther for him listen to lies

than for us to do his work, then we still can go.

(A great cheer goes up)

Tomorrow will tell the tale.

(The prayer-chant for victory takes up again)

Lonnie

(Getting to his feet dramatically)

Something ought to be like we want it. We aint got nothing:

We aint never had nothing. Our folks aint left us nothing:

(Chant dominates for a moment)

Six feet of earth when the deal goes down. (Chant) And we

aint never asked for much:

(Chant over drums is repeated and variated till curtain)

CURTAIN

ACT THREE.

SCENE 1.

SCENE:

FOLLOWING SATURDAY NIGHT

INTERIOR OF DICEY'S SHACK

At the rise, the shack is empty. It is of the same crude construction as Big Sweet's house, but little has been done here to relieve the raw unpainted lumber and careless structure. The bed is lumpy and covered by a worn, faded quilt. There is a small iron heater in the corner, downstage, right. It needs polish. The bed is across the center of the wall upstage. Two or three shoddy dresses hang against the door, which is left. A cheap suitcase is under the edge of the bed. The thin curtains are only half, and hung on strings that sag. Two unpainted kitchen chairs, and a goods box covered with newspaper complete the furnishings of the room, except for a chipped slop-jar in the corner behind the door.

There is no one in the room at the rise. One hears a key thrust hurriedly and nervously in the door, then Dicey opens the door and fairly leaps inside, looking back over her shoulder as she enters.

Dicey

(Shutting the door quickly and locking it)

I dont reckon nobody seen me come in.

(She turns on the light above her head and looks all around the room furtively)

Better git all ready before Nunkie git here for me.

(Pulls suit-case from under bed and puts it on the bed and opens it)

Dont want to forgit a thing! When I leave here this time,

this place wont never see me no more.

Dicey

(She takes down the clothes from the door and hurriedly folds them into the bag. Picks up a cheap comb with some of the teeth missing, a box of talcum, and puts them in. Keeps looking about to miss nothing)

They can have this little old furniture. I cant tote it nohow. Crip owed the man for it anyhow. Let 'em git it:

(She suddenly remembers the package that she brought in and eagerly grabs it and packs it)

Lord, I sure done want to forgit my regalia! Got to have that with me tonight:

(Rushes to head of bed and lifts the corner of the mattress and takes out a "hand" a small bundle about three inches long sewed up in red flannel and regards it fondly)

Wouldnt that be awful if I was to go off and forgit my

Mojo? (Regards it gloating) It was fixed for me to conquer and overcome. Big Sweet dont need to think she got no stuff

for me---- not with the help I got.

(Thrusts it deep into her bosom and smiles)

The Voodoo-man and Ella Wall say it will sure do the work:

(Sees the small, cheap mirror on the improvised dresser and takes it and carries it to the bed. Starts to pack it, then sits down on the bed and studies her features in the glass. Feels her hair first, then passes her fingers over her face in concentration in the mirror)

How come I got to look like I do? Why couldnt I have that long straight hair like--like-- Big Sweet got, and that Leafy? They own looks like horse's mane, and mine looks like drops of rain:

(Feels disgust, self-pity, then resentment)

And these mens is so crazy! They aint got no sense. Always pulling after hair and looks. And these womens that got it is so grasping, and griping, and mean. They wants EVERYTHING--and they gits it too. Look like they would be satisfied

Dicey

with some! Naw, they wants it all. Takes pleasure in  
 making other folks feel bad!  
     (Hurls mirror into bag face down  
     and slams it shut)  
 How come I got to be a swill barrel to take they leavings?  
 (In utter revolt) Things ought not to be that way. What  
 do they do more'n me? I wish they all was dead! Wish I  
 could cut 'em and mark 'em in they faces, till they all  
 looks worsen than me! They acts like they thinks the world  
 is made just for them to strut around and brag on they selves  
 in.

(She leans against the bed post and  
 thinks aloud on life and what it has  
 done to her and comes to her conclusions,  
 because they are unsuitable, as she  
 laments)

(During the lament a dance group  
 interprets Dicey's despair)

Pretty women! How I hate their guts!

This talk about equality is nuts!

Have I got an equal chance:

With anything thats wearing pants?

I'll tell the world, and Georgia too, taint so.

(Examines herself in mirror)

My looks is just a heavy load

That sends me down a lonesome road

And no one cares the way I have to go.

(Looks again in glass and sighs)

I aint a woman in a way

Where men have anything to say

Of love, and tenderness, and such.

I'm just another kind of mule---

A bad exception to a rule

So what I feel dont seem to matter much.

Dicey

(Conversation outburst of outrage at  
inequality)

What did the white folks do to Big Sweet for shooting them  
men? Nothing! Naw, with that hair and them looks, she  
could kill a thousand and they wouldnt care.

Yeah, a pretty gal can kill a man

And never sleep a night in can

They'll give her back her gun and let her go.

But let an ugly gal like me

So much as cripple up a flea

And they will build a new and better jail

The Judge and jury'll sit in state

And ponder grimly on my fate

And give me time, I've never seen it fail

They wont try me by no law books

They'll see the crime right in my looks

And sentence me according to my shape.

There'll be no mercy on the bench

I'll get a look thats meant to lynch

Good riddance for a trashy, ugly ape.

If Leafy Lee would shoot me dead

And weigh me down with red hot lead

It will be only a regrettable mistake

But if I scratch her yellow skin

It is a deathly, mortal sin

They'll put me in the chair and let me bake.

No, it aint right, and it aint fair

Cause I aint got that skin and hair

Dicey  
 I wasnt born the way I ought to be:  
 I'm on the outside looking in  
 So dont expect to see me grin  
 And laugh the way that pretty women do;  
 I have to scramble for a kiss  
 When they get all this married bliss  
 The men, the world, and Heaven too.  
 So I feels mean, and I get sad  
 I tries to laugh, but I aint glad:  
 I often curse the day that I was born.  
 I build some lovely dreams at night  
 Then see them killed in broad daylight  
 And all my tender feelings laughed to scorn:  
 I sure cant help the way I'm made  
 And so, when all is done and said  
 I'm just a victim of relentless fate:  
 I got big love, that I cant give:  
 I got a life, still, I cant live:  
 Just all damned up and turning into hate:  
 I hate the women through and through  
 Who get the things that I want, too.  
 I wouldnt like 'em, even if I could!  
 And women thwarted, just like me  
 Thought up those fires in Hell, in glee  
 So come on, Evil! Be thou now my good!  
 (Takes her knife out of her pocket,  
 feels the edge carefully, and begins  
 to whet it grimly on the edge of  
 the stove. Stops and tests it on her  
 thumb, and whets again vigorously)

Dicey

(Sings briefly)

Get your razor cause I got mine

Feel mistreated and I dont mind dying----

(There comes a swift, but stealthy,  
insistent knocking at the door.

Dicey halts whetting abruptly, looks  
scared, but on guard, wonders whether  
to open door or not, but as the knocking  
begins again, she hears the voice of  
Nunkie frightened outside)

Nunkie

(Offstage)

Dicey! Dicey! Let me in here!

Dicey

(Relieved, hurries to door, turns  
key and opens it partly)

Nunkie

(Bursting past her into the room)

What you keep me out there knocking for? Somebody could  
have cut my throat.

Dicey

I didnt know if it was you or not. Somebody could have seen  
me coming in.

Nunkie

Oh, they dont know----

Dicey

I bet they does, too. Lonnie, course I dont expect no more  
out of him. Big Sweet must got him fixed. He believe what  
she say all the time. Its a hidden mystery how she got  
him so tied up. And that Quarters Boss, he aint nothing.  
Made out he was going to run Big Sweet off, but you see she's  
here right on.

Nunkie

(Outdone and depressed)

Oh, you didnt tell him like I told you! If you had of made  
it bad enough-----

Dicey

(Hotly)

Yes I did too! I made it real distressing. But look like it dont do no good at all, no matter what you say about her.

Nunkie

(Glum)

I sure hopes we git her good tonight. Ella Wall say it will. She say they dont last when she hold that kind of dance on 'em. (Animated) Lord, if it work like she say! We dance on 'em and they all stand there in they tracks and cant move. Just like statutes! (Happy anticipation) And whilst they standing there and cant move at all, we go in on 'em with our knives and ruin 'em! I takes Big Sweet first one.

Dicey

And I takes that Leafy Lee. My Honey too! I hates him now just as bad as I used to love him. All I want to do is to git them two good, then I'm long gone, like a turkey thru the corn.

Nunkie

We better be fast. Just in case, you know. Big Sweet might be able to move some, and if she do-----

Dicey

Didnt Ella say they wont be able to move atall? Just like they made out of wood till we git through, and be out and gone.

Nunkie

(Not too assured)

Yeah, but Voodoo dont take on some folks. Specially if they got this straight hair. It aint got nothing to tangle in. Us better dash in and do what we got to do, and light out! After me and Ella gits Big Sweet hack all of 'em a lick or two and git for Mulberry.

Nunkie

(Imagines he hears a sound outside  
and is frightened)

Whats that?

(They both listen for a while)

Dicey

I reckon it wasnt nobody. They all down in the woods not  
far from where we going. (Face goes grim) My Honey and  
that Leafy thinks they going to git married.

Nunkie

(Restless)

You ready? Come on lets git out of here. I dont want  
to git hemmed up in here.

Dicey

Me neither, as far as that is concerned. But they all off  
down there carrying on over My Honey and Leafy.

Nunkie

(Very nervous)

Ella and them is waiting on us. Come on. Where your things?

Dicey

(Indicates suitcase on bed)

There everything is. You tote it while I put out the light  
and lock the door.

Nunkie

(Grabs up the bag and hurries to the door)

Hurry up.

Dicey

(Takes a few more whets with her knife)

In just a minute.

Nunkie

(Hand on door knob)

Aw, make haste!

Dicey

(Tests knife edge and is satisfied.

Smiles and puts it in her pocket, and  
moves to the light)

Dont crack that door till I outhen the light. Then wait for  
me. Its more better for both of us to step out at the same  
time.

Dacey

(She turns off light and goes  
softly towards the door)

I dont see to my rest what My Honey want with that Leafy  
nohow.

Nunkie

Taint nothing wrong with her. She sure is pretty, now.

Dacey

I cant see where at. She's too poor. She aint got no meat  
on her bones at all. And My Honey, he's kind of rawbony.  
too. I bet you when they gits in the bed together they bones  
sound like a dishpan full of crockery.

Nunkie

(Outside)

Aw, come on!

(The door closes softly, and the  
key is turned in the lock)

CURTAIN

ACT THREE.

SCENE 2:

SCENE:

AN HOUR LATER, THE SAME NIGHT.

A CLEARING DEEP IN THE WOODS.

The clearing is small, and freshly cleared. Brush hurriedly cut away. Wall of tropical growth around. Big trees, hung with Spanish moss. Glistening leaves and trailing vines, and bright flowers. Lush. Up stage, center is a rude seat covered with a symbolic cloth like a throne. Before it is a short length of log for a footstool. The drums are against the shrubbery, right. In the center is a miniature coffin with a circle of candles about it.

At the rise, Ella Wall in full ceremonials is seated on the throne. Two men, naked to the waist stand on either side of her with a gourd rattle, highly decorated in each hand. A red candle is fixed to Ella's headress and is alight. There is a small white candle fixed to the back of each of her hands. All of the others wear lighted candles also. The dancers are ranged around the clearing in a circle. Two women downstage right and left have no candles on their hands. They have cymbals poised to play. The men with the rattles have their arms uplifted tensely, waiting for the downstroke. The drums are playing the introduction. All the dancers have their hands extended toward the throne. The right hand is drawn back stiffly, while the left is extended full length, palms down, with knees flexed. They hold this pose rigidly while the drums mount and Ella begins to make rhythmic motions as she sits. The gourd-rattles take up and the "rattling men" beating a counter time on the back of the drums take up, and Ella steps down to the drums and begins to dance.

Ella

(Chanting)

Ah, minni wah oh! Ah, minni wah oh!

Dancers

(Beginning to dance)

Say kay ah, brah aye!

Ella

(Dances to coffin, makes some liquid movement of her upper body)

Yekko tekko! Yekko tekko! Yahm pahn sah ay!

Men

Ah yah yee-ay! Ah, yah yee-ay! Ah say oh!

Ella

(A vigorous solo about the coffin. Comes to dramatic pause)

Yekko tekko! Ah pah sah ay!

(Up to now, the dance has been mostly movements of the upper body. Posture dancing. Now it mounts. Ella is dancing solo against the Congo of the group, who circle the coffin in a wide circle as they dance with hands stiff at the wrist, palms down. Ella begins to sing and they fall in behind her)

Hand a' bowl, knife a'throat

Rope a'tie me, hand a' bowl

(Drums and rattles have mounted to furious pitch)

Hand a' bowl knife a'throat

Wang ingwalla, knife a'throat

Hand a' bowl, knife a'throat

Wango doe-doe, fum dee ah!

(The dance reaches a frenzy. Some leap over the coffin. Others do other steps. Ella dances furiously in the midst. Now their movements blend with hers. Now the others are mere background for her. At the climax, suddenly every candle is blown out and in the dim light, the dancers depart silently to the throb of the diminished drum tones.

CURTAIN

ACT THREE.

SCENE 3.

SCENE:

IMMEDIATELY AFTER SCENE 2.

WOODS PICNIC GROUNDS.

This clearing differs from the other only in that it is larger and shows signs of long use. A rude table has been contrived by laying long boards on saw-horses. An old tree stump is downstage center. A few wooden boxes are scattered around the edges for seats. A quilt or two have been brought along to sit on. These too, are along the edges, so that the main clearing is left for movement. Just beyond the clearing, upstage, left, a crude dressing booth has been erected of palm fronds. Several large market baskets covered with colored table cloths and towels are under the table. They have the refreshments in them.

At the rise, Bunch, Laura B. and Maudella are fussing around the table unpacking baskets and setting out the pans and dishes of foods, and tasteing things here and there as they work. My Honey is seated on the stump, with Few Clothes squatting on the ground beside him. Both have their instruments and are playing. All the men are grouped around the musicians harmonizing  
GEORGIA BUCK.

Lonnie

(Singing)

Oh, Georgia Buck is dead!

Last word he said

I dont want no shortening in my bread.

Chorus

Is that you, Reuben?

Is that you, Reuben?

And they laid poor Reuben's body down.

My Honey

Oh, rabbit on the log, aint got no dog

How am I going git him?

Lord knows!

Chorus

Is that you, Reuben?

Is that you, Reuben?

And they laid poor Reuben's body down.

Stew Beef

Oh, Reuben had a wife.

Swapped her for a Barlow knife

And they laid poor Reuben's body down.

Chorus

Is that you, Reuben?

Is that you, Reuben?

And they laid poor Reuben's body down.

Laura B.

(Admiringly)

Now, listen at Stew! (Beaming at his cleverness) Thats  
the biggest fool!

Stew Beef

(Acknowledging the compliment)

Being ~~shfool~~ never kilt nobody. All it do is make you sweat.

Laura B.

(Even prouder)

Didnt I tell you he was crazy?

Stew Beef

Did you cook that stew beef and bring it with you like I

told you? I'm gitting peckish.  
(Rubs his stomach)

Lonnie

Me too.

Few Clothes

(Starting to get up hurriedly)

Lets eat!

Lonnie

Big Sweet and Leafy say you aint supposed to eat before a marriage. After the couple stands up is when you eats.

Stew Beef

My Honey, go ahead and git your marrying done so we can eat. My biggest gut feel like it done dwindled down to a fiddle-string.

(They all get up and look towards the table)

Laura B.

Naw, Big Sweet said not to touch a thing till after the marriage.

Bunch

(Heaping up a pan of fried chicken)

These mens! They sure favors they stomachs. If Judgment Day was to come, Few would expect me to fix him a bucket to carry along.

Laura B.

Stew Beef is just the same. He ever love beef stew. Look like I cant never fill him up. Just like Eating-Flukus---- eat up camp meeting, back off of Association and drink Jordan dry.

Lonnie

Look like the thing to do is to git the marrying done.

You ready, aint you. My Honey?

My Honey

(Nervous, but trying to be casual)

Just as ready as a meat axe.

Sop-The-Bottom

Turn round here lets see how you look in your new suit.

(They all scatter back in a rough circle, around My Honey and look him over from head to foot)

You looks fine, man. Any gal ought to be glad to git you, looking like that.

Stew Beef

That suit is ready! Believe I'll git me one like that.

Laura B., you want me in a double-breaster like My Honey got on when we jump over the broomstick?

Laura B.

(Bridling)

Yeah. You would look good in it, all right.

Lonnie

Course My Honey look good. I picked out that suit for him to stand up in. (Looks to table) Maudella, run back there and see if Big Sweet done got Leafy dressed.

Maudella

(Hurrying towards booth)

Yessir.

Laura B.

Oh, dont worry the gal. It takes time for dressing for gitting married.

Lonnie

You women and your dressing! (Sighs) But I reckon us men just have to put up with you. We cant git along without you. But you sure got funny ways.

(The women protest this but the men laugh in agreement)

Stew Beef

Lonnie, you acts slow and everything, but you sure knows a heap. Always saying something deep.

Big Sweet

(Enters with Leafy all dressed in white with a veil. Big Sweet is holding the veil up from the grass with one hand. Maudella is walking behind and admiring Leafy with open mouth wonder. Leafy advances slowly with a nervous smile and downcast eyes. All the men gaze at her with awe and admiration)

My Honey

(Stares in awe, then takes a step  
or two towards her and stops as if  
approaching an altar)

Box Car

(More brazen, walks nearer and  
stands and admires)

Lord! I could lick icing off of that all day long.

Lonnie

Leafy, you looks like a glance from God.

My Honey

(Advances slowly, as Big Sweet  
looks at her handiwork and beams)

Baby, (Swallows hard) baby, you looks too good to walk  
on the ground.

Leafy

Much obliged for your compliments.

(They start to hold hands)

Lonnie

(Looking around)

Now, where is that preacher? He was here just a while ago.

Sop-The-Bottom

(Indicates the woods)

Oh, he stepped off a piece. Be back after while.

Big Sweet

(Fussing with the wreath)

Hold on a minute. I needs another hairpin right here.

(Turns to hurry off)

Be back in just a second. Want to catch that up a little

more.

(She darts off and disappears into the booth)

My Honey

(Takes Leafy's hand and they stand  
there smiling and swinging hands  
without speaking)

Do-Dirty

This marrying business is nice. Us could have been having

fun like this all the time, but we didnt have no sense.

If Big Sweet and Lonnie hadnt of told us, we wouldnt

know.

## Stew Beef

Thats a fact. You just wait till next month when me and Laura B, stand up. We going to have ---

## Few Clothes

Man, but me and Bunch is going to really break it up. She's going to have a dress like that and I'm going to be togged down in a suit and white shoes and everything. Lonnie, you sure done started something.

## Preacher

(Enters upstage, left on a run, with his eyes wild and popping. He stumbles to center stage with his mouth working, but no words come out. They look at him for a moment in astonishment. But Maudella cries out and points upstage left as Dicey leaps out into the clearing with her knife drawn. Her entrance is like the spring of a lioness. She is only a few yards off and behind My Honey and Leafy who are looking at each other)

## Dicey

(After her initial spring, stops dramatically, with her knife in hand and takes in the situation gloating. She has all the manner of a lioness ready to charge)  
Well, I told you I would be back, didnt I?

## My Honey

(Whirls, leaps in front of Leafy instinctively and holds his guitar like a shield)  
(The group is struck dumb for an instant. Everyone is frozen in their tracks)

## Leafy

(Gives a little cry of helplessness)

## Dicey

(Laughs, wringing herself from her hips)  
You cant do nothing. Youse planted in your tracks. I'm going to cut you all in your face.  
(Venomously as she crouches)  
Slice you too thin to fry.

Dickey

(Gestures to the woods behind her)  
I got plenty help to do it with.

(She advances slowly, knife poised and laughing. Suddenly, Ella and Nunkie run on to the edge of the clearing behind Dickey)

Big Sweet

(Enters hurriedly. Is brought up short by the tableau and gets set to spring, at the same time yelling)

"Lonnie! Stew!"

(Her cry and movement bring everybody alive, and they rush to the charge. It also affects Dickey profoundly and she leaps back in fright)

Dickey

(Backing up in betrayed horror of her situation)

They aint sleep! They can move!

(It is a bitter accusation of Ella who is also retreating)

Ella Wall

(Dazed and terrified by the danger, and astonished by the failure of her magic leaps back and looks at the onrush in unbelief)

Make it to the hard road! Dickey!

(They all turn and flee pell mell through the woods. The men start to pursue, but Lonnie halts them)

Lonnie

Stop! Box! Stew! My Honey! All you all! Stop!

Box Car

(Unwilling)

They will make they git-away!

Lonnie

Naw, they wont. Listen to me, now.

My Honey

We got to make it so they cant come back, Lonnie

(There is a shot off stage, right, and a loud voice cries "Halt!" Another shot. "I said 'Halt'! I'm shooting to kill next time.")

Big Sweet

The Quarters Boss!

Lonnie

Thats what I'm trying to tell you all. He knowed we was going to have this picnic down here, and you know he's always hanging around close enough to hear what go on.

Laura B:

That sure is so. Soon as you make the least noise, here he come.

Lonnie

Thats what I knowed. Its better for him to handle 'em than for us. You know they aint comeing back now. --- Not for years to come.

Big Sweet

Wont that be nice and fine?

Lonnie

And another thing, when I got to talking to Pringle and the Big Boss about Big Sweet going off, I took and told 'em not to listen to everything they hear. Just be around and see for theyselves who was stirring up trouble and who wasnt.

Laura B:

(Laughs)

Dicey was so glad to git to Pringle to talk, she got plenty chance to talk with him all she want to tonight.

All

(Laugh)

Stew Beef

Yeah, but she dont much no talk with him tonight.

Lonnie

Oh, poor Dicey was all right as far as she could see.

Big Sweet

But she couldnt see no further than from the handle of a tea cup round the rim.

Lonnie

Maybe she done the best she knowed how. It wasnt her fault.

Big Sweet  
Well whose fault was it then?

Lonnie  
Nobody's exactly. Her mama's womb just played a dirty  
trick on her when she borned Dicey. Thats all.  
(They laugh, but lightly)

Preacher  
(Mopping his face from fright, but  
getting control)  
I seen them folks a'coming while I was out there.

Lonnie  
I could tell you had seen something, but I couldnt know  
what. You ready to go to work?

Preacher  
(Assuming his official manner)  
If the bride and groom will take floor.  
(He advances toward them pompously  
as Big Sweet arranges the couple  
center but a little upstage)

Lonnie  
This is more like my dream. (Musing) Things is going to  
be better now. Folks everywhere will look upon us more.

Us can make things more better all around.  
(Unconsciously begins to hum, and  
the others drift in)

Troubles will be over, Amen

Troubles will be over, Amen

Troubles will be over, when I see Jesus

Troubles will be over, Amen

Preacher  
(Takes his stand before My Honey and  
Leafy, opens his book dramatically,  
and begins to perform the ceremony  
in pantomime. The singing goes on and  
the audience only sees the motions of  
the marriage and the movements of lips)

Lonnie  
I see the light-house, Amen

I see the light-house, Amen

Lonnie  
I see the light-house, when I see Jesus  
Troubles will be over, Amen.

Preacher  
(Triumphantly)  
I now pronounce you man and wife. Salute the bride.  
(A shout of joy breaks out and  
everybody rushes up to kiss Leafy and  
congratulate My Honey. Box Car, Sop-The-  
Bottom and Do-Dirty kiss enthusiastically.  
My Honey pulls Do-Dirty away)

My Honey  
Thats enough, DO. You only supposed to kiss a bride in  
a manner of speaking. You aint supposed to taste it at all!

Do-Dirty  
Aw, man dont be so selfish! You can git your little old  
kiss back when I gits me a wife.  
(Starts to kiss Leafy again, but My Honey grabs  
him)  
Man, I likes this thing. Taint going to be no time at all  
before I'm going to be asking a gal to gimme some hand!

Sop-The-Bottom  
Give Lonnie credit. He sure do think up some nice things!

Lonnie  
I got another notion right now.

Sop-The-Bottom  
What is it?

Lonnie  
(Getting a head start towards the  
table)

Lets eat!!  
(The men all break for the table  
except My Honey, who leads Leafy  
over tenderly and self-consciously)

Big-Sweet  
(Presiding at distribution of plates)  
One at a time! One at a time! Like gamblers going to  
Heaven. Its plenty for everybody.

Lonnie

(Stepping back from the table with his plate)

Ummmmmm! This is nice! Chicken purleau!

(Strolls over to the stump with his plate and sits down and eats a few mouthfuls. As the others get their plates they scatter from the table and sit about laughing and talking happily)

(My Honey and Leafy go sit on a a quilt with their plates and she feeds him with her fork)

My Honey

This is love, Baby, with the sun and the moon thrown in.

Leafy

Thats right. EVERYTHING! With the sun and the moon thrown in.

Big Sweet

(With her plate in her hand)

Everybody got what you want?

All

Yes, indeed!

Big Sweet

Well, all right now. I'm going and set down by Lonnie.

Come on Bunch and Laura B. Lets sit down by our men folks.  
(They cross to their places and sit down contentedly and all begin to eat)

Lonnie

Just like I keep telling you all. You can git what you want if you go about things the right way.

(Pets Big Sweet on the ground beside him)

Now, I can fly. Everything is going to be just fine.

(There comes the sound of the mystic drums.

They all listen. Lonnie smiles in his peculiar way as the drums grow in volume.

They smile, they laugh, then begin to sway to the drums)

Lonnie

I ride the rainbow, Amen

I ride the rainbow, Amen

Lonnie

(A hugh rainbow descends. They all  
scramble on board, plates in hand,  
and take seats. Lonnie in the very  
center with Big Sweet on one side  
My Honey and Leafy on the other,  
keep singing)

I ride the rainbow, when I see Jesus

Troubles will be over, Amen.

(The rainbow begins to rise as  
the verse is repeated. The rainbow  
rises slowly and the curtain begins  
to descend at the same time slowly)

FINAL CURTAIN

