Three original one act plays of Negro life

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THREE ORIGINAL ONE ACT PLAYS OF NEGRO LIFE

by

Thomas Desire Pawley

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, in the Department of Speech and Dramatic Art, in the Graduate College of the State University of Iowa

June 5, 1939
Dedication

To

My Father and Mother
Acknowledgment

To Professor Mabie, Dr. Conkle, and the members of the Experimental Seminar I wish to express my appreciation for both the encouragement and the criticism given me in the preparation of this volume of one act plays.

—Thomas D. Pawley
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JUDGEMENT DAY</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMOKEY</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FREEDOM IN MY SOUL</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
JUDGEMENT DAY
THE CAST
Zeke
Minerva
Rev'm Brown
Gabriel
Mephistopheles
Pluto
Hannabelle Lee
Solomon Jones
Cato

The home of Zeke and Minerva Porter
Judgement Day

Setting: The plainly furnished home of Zeke and Minerva Porter. Its appointments include an old dresser, a water basin and white pitcher, a double bed, chairs and a table. In the left wall there is a window through which can be seen a street sign marked "Plum Street" and a few feet beyond a grayish frame church. In the center, a door which opens on a porch. On the other side of the room, two doors, one of which leads into the kitchen, the other to a clothes' closet. (These doors in the scene of the "judgement" represent Paradise and Club Hades)

Time: One Sunday morning.

As the scene opens, Zeke is lying asleep on the bed with his feet extended toward the audience. He is dressed only in his shirt and long drawers and is snoring contentedly. Through the kitchen door, which stands partly open, Minerva is heard singing in a rich alto voice:

"I looked over Jordan
An' what did I see,
Comin' fo' to carry me--"

Suddenly the singing stops and Minerva begins calling Zeke.

MINERVA

Zeke! You up yit? Zeke!

ZEKE

(sleepily) Huh?

MINERVA

I say, it's time to git up!

ZEKE

Un-huh.

(Zeke turns over as Minerva enters the room completely dressed for church. She is halfway across be-
fore she realizes that Zeke is still in bed)

MINERVA

Well, if'n you ain't de laziest man whatever lived! Here I'se already to go an' you ain't started to git dressed! Zeke! Git up from dere! Don' you know its mos' time fo' church, huh?

(Zeke merely stirs and grunts sleepily)

Well! If talkin' ain't enough to git you up, I know what will!

(She turns abruptly and seizes the water pitcher. Returning to the bed she empties its contents on the sleeping black man. Zeke sits up immediately, fighting off an imaginary foe)

ZEKE

Cut it out! You don' push me right into de river!

MINERVA

Ain't nobody don' push you in no river. You's only dreamin'.

ZEKE

Den if I'se only dreamin' what's de whole ocean doin' on me?

MINERVA

Dat ain't no ocean—dat water come from de water company!

ZEKE

Den somebody musta poured it on me.

MINERVA

They sho' did. (grasping the pitcher) An' if you don' git out'n dat bed somebody's gon' pour some mo' on you.

ZEKE

Hey, waita minute...I'se up! What's de matter wif' you, anyhow? When I don' come home an' go to bed you raise hell; an' when I do, damn if you don' try to run me out agin'. Now, I asks you, what's a man gon' do wif a woman like you?
MINERVA

Don' you know it's mos' 'leven? Church's gon' be startin' in a few mo' minutes. Look yonder—some of de sisters is already goin' in. Laws' a mussy—Hannabelle Lee's got on a new bonnet, too!

ZEKE

You know dis ain't my mornin' to go to church.

MINERVA

How come it ain't? Zeke Porter, you better watch out befo' de Lawd strike you stone dead.

ZEKE

He ain't got no time to be bothered with me. Not today He ain't!

MINERVA

(shocked) You's blasphemin'!

ZEKE

Naw I ain't, I'se tellin' de truth. Don't de Lawd listen to everybody's prayers? Sho he do. An' ain't dere 'bout a million people a-prayin' to Him dis' Sunday mornin' all over de worl'? Sho dey is. Den how you figure He's gon' take time out to see what I'm doin'?

MINERVA

You's crazy, dat's what you is—But what you mean by sayin' dis ain't yo' mornin'?

ZEKE

Well, it ain't. Dis ain't communion day is it?

MINERVA

What difference dat make?

ZEKE

Well, it ain't no us'n my goin' to church when it's right across de street. 'Sides, I c'n lie here in bed an' shout 'n sing jus' as loud as I could over dere any day. Den I c'n do it lyin' down an dat's easier on my feet.
MINERVA

What's de communion got to do with it?

ZEKE

Well, dey gives away free wine on dat day. So when I gits thirsty from shoutin', all I'se gotta do is step up to de rail an' ask fo' communion.

MINERVA

You's a sinner! Oh, Lawd have mercy on him! He don't know what he's a-say'!

ZEKE

Minerva, ain't no us'n you botherin' Him-- I tell you He's too dawgone busy.

MINERVA

Oh, what's I'm gonna do 'bout you. De devil'll git you sho if I don' do sump'n!

ZEKE

Listen, honey. If dat devil come at me wif his pitchfork, I'm goin' right back at him wif' my razor.

(Minerva begins to wail in despair)

MINERVA

Oh, Lawd! What's I'm gonna do?

(At this moment a kindly looking old colored gentleman enters. His hair is grey and he wears a long frock tail coat. Among other things he wears a pair of grey spats on spotless brown shoes)

BROWN

What's the matter, sister?

(Minerva looks up, sees the minister, and runs toward him)

MINERVA

Oh, I'se sho glad you come in, Rev'nm Brown!
ZEKE

(standing up) Mornin', Rev'm.

BROWN

Mornin', Zeke. I was just passin' on my way to church when I heard Minerva shoutin'. So I come in to see what's the matter. Is there anything I can do?

MINERVA

There she is, Rev'm.

BROWN

Zeke, you ain't been beatin' Minerva, has you?

ZEKE

Naw, Rev'm. Do it look like I been beatin' anybody?

BROWN

No, it don't. What's the matter with you, anyhow? You look like you'd gone swimmin' with all your clothes on.

ZEKE

Ask her. She done it.

BROWN

Minerva?

MINERVA

Rev'm, I hadda do sump'm. Him sleepin' when it's mos' time fo' church.

BROWN

Oh!

MINERVA

Den after I gits him up he come tellin' me dat he ain't goin' 'cause it ain't communion day.

(Zeke turns sheepishly)
What's all this, Zeke?

Well, Rev'm, I jus' can't see why I'se got to go to church when she's jus' across de street.

That's jus' why you should go. Look at me—I come all the way 'cross town jus' to give you people the gospel—simply 'cause I know it's my duty.

Amen!

I ain't got nothin' 'gainst goin'. But it ain't no use if I c'n hear everything over here jus' as plain as day.

(pleased) Can you?

Sho' I can! When dem brothers 'n sisters gits to shoutin' it's a wonder de whole town don' hear 'em!

Even so, it's—it's the spirit of goin' that counts.

Maybe—but I ain't got the spirit today. 'Cose I'll be over on communion day like I said.

It might be too late then. Besides, you should come every Sunday. Remember, He said, "Six days shalt thou labor and on the seventh"....

(sitting on the bed) "Rest." An' dat's jus' what I'm gonna do!
BROWN
(confused) But—but that ain't what He meant—

ZEKE

Well, dat's sho' enough what He said, ain't it?

BROWN

(grudgingly) Ye-yes.

ZEKE

Well, now, ain't no us'n you tryin' to git me to go 'gainst de Bible. 'Cause when de Bible tell me to res', I'm a sho' gonna do it!

BROWN

(approaching) Zeke Porter, I command you in the name a' Gawd to get off of that bed and go into church and ask fo'giveness for your sins!

ZEKE

Now, Rev'm, you's gittin' jus' like Minerva.

BROWN

If you don't, I'll call down the wrath-a Gawd on you. Your soul will burn forever. You'll never see the gates-a paradise.

ZEKE

What's all dat you talkin' 'bout?

BROWN

On the day of judgement when Gabriel gits to blowin' his trumpet an' the dry bones rise outa the valley, your's'll sink deep into the depths of Hell!

MINERVA

Oh, Lawd, Lawd. Save him befo' it's too late! (She falls to her knees)

ZEKE

(frightened) Cut out all dat moanin', Minerval. Now, Rev'm, you know nothin' like dat ain't a gonna happen!
BROWN

I leave the matter in the hands—a Gawd—I wash my hands of it. I can't 'low the sacred garments of the min'stry to be soiled by a disciple of the devil!

MINERVA

Save him—save him!

BROWN

Come, sister, there ain't nothin' more we can do. It's up to him now. If you want to be saved an' enter them green fields when you come befo' Him for judgement, get down on your knees an' ask Him for fo'giveness. Then come into His church an' be baptised of your sins.

MINERVA

Come on, Zeke, befo' it's too late!

ZEKE

I ain't a comin' nowhere. Y'all jus' tryin' to scaire me, dat's all—an' it ain't gonna work. Now git!

(Minerva and Brown move towards the door. As they reach the threshold Brown turns, shakes his head sadly, then points at Zeke)

BROWN

Your soul belongs to the devil!

(They go out. Zeke watches them for a moment and then falls back on the bed and starts mumbling to himself)

ZEKE

Dey's both crazy—don't know what dey's talkin' 'bout—tryin' to scaire me—Gawd, I'se some sleepy!

(He lies still for a moment and the service across the street is heard to begin with a jubilant spiritual)

"I got shoes,
You got shoes,
All God's chillun' got shoes,
When I gits to Hev'm
Gon' put on my shoes
An' gon' shout all over God's Hev'm."

(Zeke begins to mutter sleepily as the spiritual dies)

ZEKE

Dey's tryin' to scaire me. Ain't nothin' goin' to happen... judgement.

(His voice trails off as the lights fade on the bed and come up slowly on the far side of the room. Immediately two brown angels appear through the doors)

GABRIEL

Well, this is the day.

MEPHISTOPHELES

It sho' is.

GABRIEL

I suppose we might as well get started. The chiefs'll be out in a minute.

MEPHISTOPHELES

Yeah, might as well.

(At this point they take out signs from under their garments. Gabriel takes out one marked "Paradise", dusts it off, and nails it over the kitchen door. Mephistopheles takes out another marked "Club Haedes" and nails it over the closet. As they finish both stand back to admire their work)

GABRIEL

Pretty smooth, huh?

MEPHISTOPHELES

Nothing like it--nowhere! Say ain't you Gabriel?

GABRIEL

That's right, an you?
Well, they call me Mephistopheles.

MEPHISTOPHELES

Mephistopheles! Well! Ain't seen you since the boss kicked you an' Pluto into Hades.

MEPHISTOPHELES

(as they shake hands) Yeah, it's been a hell of a long time, ain't it? Reckon you'll be sort of glad to blow your trumpet, too.

MEPHISTOPHELES

Yeah, I have been practicin' a pretty long time now. Well, what do we need?

A table for one thing.

MEPHISTOPHELES

What's the matter with this one? (He indicates a table which stands between the two doors) Just pull her out a bit.

MEPHISTOPHELES

There, that don't look so bad, do it, Gabe?

GABRIEL

No, it don't, but let's hurry an' get the chairs. (looking at his wrist watch) It's almost time for me to sound the call.

MEPHISTOPHELES

Okay.

(Each picks up a chair and places it behind the table)

GABRIEL

I 'spose the chief'll lay me out for not havin' his throne ready on time. But I been so devilish busy that judgment
was here before I knew it. (looking around) I guess that's all. You think of anything else?

MEPHISTOPHELES

No, I don't. An' now I got to beat it an' get things ready on the inside.

GABRIEL

Me, too! So long, Mephistopheles.

MEPHISTOPHELES

I'll be seein' you, Gabriel.

(They both go out through their respective entrances. For a moment Zeke is heard snoring gently, then Gabriel returns with a silver trumpet. He pauses, looks at his trumpet, takes a deep breath and blows a terrific blast. Startled, he examines the instrument; then decides that it must be all right)

GABRIEL

Hear ye, hear ye, ye descendants of Cain! Draw nigh on this day of judgment so that the Lords of Heaven an' Hell may pass judgment upon ye.

(With this he blows the trumpet once more. Again there is a discordant blast and he walks off, giving up the whole thing as a bad job. Almost immediately Pluto appears out of Hades wearing a top hat and evening clothes. From Paradise Minister Brown appears attired as before. He carries a huge black book which he places before him. He and Pluto do not greet each other, but merely bow. Minister Brown places the book on the table before him. Then he motions with his hands and a church choir begins humming softly. Simultaneously the devil motions and a familiar swing band begins jamming the same air. After a moment the music fades and they sit. Then the Minister, after much ado, pronounces the first name)

BROWN

Hannabelle Lee!
(The front door opens and the over-dressed Miss Lee primps up before them)

HANNABELLE

Howdy, Rev'rm. (The minister draws himself up haughtily)

Hi ya, Pluto!

PLUTO

Hi ya, babel

HANNABELLE

How's things doin'? (Pluto starts to get up) Never mind, I'll be over soon enough to find out.

BROWN

Well, since this woman has already made up her mind, I see no need for proceeding further in this case.

PLUTO

Okay by me! Over here, Hannabelle!

HANNABELLE

Better come on down tonight, Rev'rm. (To Pluto) Well, where do I go from here?

PLUTO

Mephistopheles is waitin' on the inside. He'll take care of you. See you later!

HANNABELLE

Okay. So long boys! (She goes out)

BROWN

Solomon Jones!

(The front door opens again and an old man enters. He walks reverently up before the judgment)

PLUTO

You're Solomon Jones?
JONES

Yessuh!

PLUTO

Want to join up with me? We're goin' to have a big time on the inside.

JONES

(shaking his head) No, I'se had my fling. All I wants to do now is res'.

PLUTO

Okay, gran'pop. (To Brown) Your man.

BROWN

Over here, Solomon. Now jus' go straight ahead an' don't be afraid. Nothing's goin' to harm you now.

JONES

Yessuh! (He goes out).

BROWN

Cato!

(The door opens again and a flashily dressed Harlem pimp comes in)

BROWN

What's your last name—we don't have no record of it.

CATO

Cato!

BROWN

What's your first name?

CATO

Julius Caesar--
(writing) Julius Caesar Cato! Well, Cato, you're charged with cheating at cards, shootin' dice, cuttin', an' livin' unmarried with women. What you got to say for yourself?

CATO

Nothin'.

BROWN

Don't you know you'll burn forever if you don't ask for fo'giveness?

CATO

Sho'!

BROWN

Don't you want to be fo'given?

CATO

Don't make a damn bit a difference to me.

BROWN

You'd better take him.

PLUTO

Okay. (He motions to Cato who comes over to him) Listen, there's a dame inside named Hannabelle Lee. Go on in an' tell her I sent you.

CATO

Hannabelle Lee! Say, this ain't gonna be half bad!

(He enters "Club Hades)

PLUTO

Who's next?

BROWN

Minerva Porter!
(Minerva enters. She has been weeping.)

BROWN

What's the matter, Minerva?

MINERVA

Nothin'.

BROWN

What're you crying for then?

MINERVA

Well, I'm worried 'bout Zeke. Please let him come with me. I don' want him to go one way an' me another.

PLUTO

Well, from what I hear about this guy if you'll come on in with me, you'll be sho' to be with him!

MINERVA

No--I'ze a good Christian, I is. An' I want Zeke to be with me.

PLUTO

Ain't much chance of that, sister.

BROWN

Yes, he's got a mighty bad record.

MINERVA

But ain't there nothing you can do?

BROWN

I don't know. If he won't such a good fo' nothin', maybe I could set him off on a star for a couple of thousand years--an' then after that maybe I could let him come to see you once in a while. But as it is--(He shakes his head)

MINERVA

Den if he can't come I guess I'ze got to go on by myself.
BROWN

You go on in--I'll do what I can. But I think his case is pretty hopeless. (Minerva enters "Paradise")

BROWN

Zeke Porter!

(The door doesn't open. Pluto and Brown look at each other)

PLUTO

Louder, maybe he didn't hear you.

BROWN

Zeke Porter!

(Zeke begins to stir)

ZEKE

Who dat call me?

BROWN

Zeke Porter, come to judgment!

ZEKE

Judgement! How come it come so soon? I ain't ready to go yit.

PLUTO

Maybe I'd better send Mephistopheles after him.

ZEKE

Dat's all right. Dat's all right. I' se comin'. (He approaches the table) So dis is judgement? It sho' looks familiar!

BROWN

Zeke Porter, of all the souls that have come before us, yours is the worse. Of all those we shall yet judge, not one approaches such a record as yours.
ZEKE

Is I-all dat bad?

BROWN

You mean, were you-all that bad. 'Cause you no longer exist as you were. Do you realize that you can't enter Paradise, and Hades don't want you?

ZEKE

But I gotta go somewhere. I can't jus' wander 'bout 'mong de stars.

BROWN

That's jus' the trouble.

PLUTO

Well, what're we going to do with him?

BROWN

I don't know. He's so lazy that he didn't even get to judgment on time!

PLUTO

(after a pause) I got it. We'll draw cards. The one that pulls the ace of spades don't have to take him.

BROWN

Good enough! Hand me the cards. I'll shuffle them.

PLUTO

Say--don't you trust me none?

BROWN

Sho' I trust you, but not on this deal.

(He shuffles them)

Now cut!

(Pluto reaches for the deck which Brown hands him. He looks at it for a moment, then draws a card)
which he looks at but keeps covered. Brown then places the deck in front of him, spreads the cards out, and picks one

BROWN

All right. Show your card.

(Pluto does so. It is the ace of spades. Brown looks at it for a moment then turns up his card, also the ace of spades)

PLUTO

I oughta known it'd turn out this way. You musta stacked the deck.

BROWN

I didn't do nothin of the kind.

PLUTO

Well, them two aces didn't jus' walk into that deck.

BROWN

How you know they didn't?

PLUTO

Huh?

BROWN

I say, mine did.

PLUTO

You mean--

BROWN

Has you forgotten who I am? All I'se got to do is wish for something to be, an' by the time I finish it shall have been!

PLUTO

Well, this don't get us nowhere.
BROWN
No, it don't.

PLUTO
Then there ain't but one thing to do.

BROWN
What's that?

PLUTO
Divide him up between us.

ZEKE
No-no-don't do that! Please, Mr. Devil!

BROWN
That's the only way--cut him up between us--half an' half.

PLUTO
Mephistopheles! Bring me the butcher knife!

MEPHISTOPHELES
Yes, sire!

ZEKE
Fo' Gawds' sake, don' cut me up!

BROWN
What you mean by calling on God? Maybe we oughta cut him up in quarters!

ZEKE
I'll do anything, anything you say! But don' cut me up!

BROWN
You oughta thought about that when you were alive on earth.
(entering) The butcher knife, sire. (He presents the knife to Pluto and then goes out)

ZEKE

Keep dat butcher knife away from me! Stay back I tell you!

PLUTO

(hypnotically) Come here, Zeke.

ZEKE

Wha-what?

PLUTO

Come here, Zeke!

ZEKE

Yessuh, yessuh, I'se comin'.

(Pluto advances with the butcher knife while Zeke crawls tremblingly forward. They stand facing one another)

PLUTO

Take off your shirt and prepare to die.

ZEKE

Yessuh, Mr. Devil! (He does so)

PLUTO

Hurry!

ZEKE

I'se hurryin' as fas' as I can.

PLUTO

Now say your prayers.

ZEKE

Oh, Lawd have mercy on me! Have mercy! Fo'give me, Lawd. Fo'give me.
(The lights begin to fade; then they come up again on Zeke tossing on the bed)

ZEKE

(sitting up) Dey's gone! An' I'se saved! I'se saved!

(At this moment the choir across the street begins singing)

An' dey's still over dere singin'! Maybe I'd better git over dere befo' it's too late.

(He begins pulling on his shoes hastily. His movements become slower and slower until finally he emits a huge yawn)

Golly, I'se so sleepy. I reckon I'll jus' take a little nap befo' I go---

CURTAIN
SMOKEY
THE CAST
Buck
Blue
Tommy
Hurt
Smokey
Joe

The Mason County Jail, Mason, Georgia
SMOKEY

Setting: The Mason County Jail, Mason, Georgia. Along the back wall a row of cells crowded with bunks. To one side, a roll top desk littered with papers. On one side of it, a bespattered cuspidor. Overhead a single light with an improvised shade. Between the cells on a stool is a pail of water with the handle of a dipper barely visible over the top. To the right of the row against the wall, a gun rack. On either side of the jail, a door.

As the scene opens, Buck Walters, a deputy sheriff, is seated at the desk with his feet propped against the side and his hat pulled down over his eyes. His jaws move up and down continually with an enormous quid of "cut plug". Occasionally he stops and spits into the cuspidor. Suddenly he sits up and shouts at a Negro who is sitting sidewise on one of the bunks with his head leaned back against the wall of the cell.

BUCK

(shouting) Hey, Blue!

BLUE

(sitting up) Yessuh!

BUCK

Bet I kin hit the center of that spittoon at ten paces!

BLUE

Shucks, Mista Buck, y'all couldn't hit de side of a barn if you was standin' right in front of hit!

BUCK

You mean to call me a lie?

BLUE

(laughing) Naw, nothin' like dat. But y'all oughtn't to pick on dat spittoon so much. Between you an' the Sheriff it's gittin' to be overworked!
BUCK
I reckon chawin' cut plug's 'bout the only thing left for us to do. Don't seem like nothin' ever happens here in Mason.

BLUE
You ain't wishin' fo' nothin' to happen, is you?

BUCK
Sure I am!

BLUE
Well, I never heard tell of a sheriff who wanted folks to stir up trouble befo'.

BUCK
(getting up and walking to the pail) Well, I ain't wishin' for nothin' big like chicken stealin' or murder. But hell, don't nobody ever even shoot crap 'round here no more!

BLUE
I thought dat was what y'all wanted. Seem like every time I got to rollin' dem bones down to Fat Sam's y'all 'ud bust up de game.

BUCK
Well, they don't even roll 'em down there no more. That reminds me, I was by Fat Sam's place yesterday. He an' the boys asked 'bout you.

(He takes a drink out of the dipper)

BLUE
Yeah?

BUCK
I told 'em you was gettin' 'long just fine.

BLUE
Well, seein' as how I se gittin' free board an' lodgin' I ain't gonna kick none. Say, Mister Buck?
BUCK

Un-huh?

BLUE

How come it dat every time y'all was to bust into Fat Sam's an' res' me, you never 'rested him?

BUCK

Well, Blue, that's a matter of bookkeeping.

BLUE

You mean, he's a numbers "bookie"?

BUCK

Naw, you fool! Well, ain't none of your business, but we figure like this—if he kin pay us a fine equal to what it'd cost the county to board him for thirty days then 'tain't no use to keep him.

BLUE

How come?

BUCK

Well, if we was to keep you an' him both the county would go twice as far in the red. But now if we let him pay us what it'd cost to keep you, then we come out even.

BLUE

Haw-haw-haw! Dat sho' is funny!

BUCK

What's funny?

BLUE

Fat Sam don' know it, but he's been payin' my board 'n lodgin' fo' de las' year!

BUCK

You better be glad there's somebody to pay it or you'll go out on the road next time we catch you.
BLUE
Oh, I ain't complainin' none. 'Sides, I likes it here.

BUCK
You ought to. You been here often enough--and there's no place like home, you know.

BLUE
Yeah, an' den I got you to keep me comp'ny! But y'all wouldn't really want me to go on the road sho' 'nuff.

BUCK
Why not?

BLUE
Well, seein' as I'se your only regular customer, wouldn't y'all have to close up de place if I was to leave?

BUCK
Never thought of that. Well, you just keep your trap shut an' be good, an' me an' the Sheriff'll let you stay.

BLUE
Okay, Mister Buck.

(At this moment the door swings open with a bang and Tommy Walters dashes in)

TOMMY
Sheriff just got back in town!

BUCK
He generally does 'bout this time-a day. But it ain't nothin' to break the front door down about.

TOMMY
That ain't what I come to tell you.

BUCK
(jokingly) No?
TOMMY
Ain't got no time to argue with you, Buck Walters, but if you was a real deputy you'd know all hell's bust loose in town!

BUCK
What's happened?

TOMMY
You know "Smokey" Williams, the nigger that works out to the Ashburn place?

BUCK
I've heard 'bout him--

TOMMY
Well, he just shot old man Ashburn.

BUCK
What in hell did he do that for?

TOMMY
Don't know, but the Sheriff's got him an' he's bringin' him here, right away.

BUCK
You're goin' to have comp'ny, Blue!

BLUE
(coming to the cell door) What you say?

TOMMY
An' what's more the Baker boys just come in to town tal­kin' 'bout gettin' up a lynching bee!

BUCK
Hell an' damnation! Once trouble gits to rollin' it don't know where to stop.
TOMMY

Well, I can't wait none. I got to get back up to the pool parlour to see what they's gonna do. I'll keep you posted. (He goes out)

BLUE

Mister Buck, y'all reckon dem Baker boys is in earnest?

BUCK

Looks that way Blue--but don't you worry none. Ain't nobody goin' to bother you.

BLUE

Mister Buck, y'all don't know dem mobs--once dey gits started dey lynch everybody with a black face.

BUCK

Long's I'm deputy Sheriff ain't nothin' like that goin' to happen.

BLUE

If dey attacks dis jail and dat Smokey's in here an' I'se with him, dey goin' take me long, sho's you born!

BUCK

Blue, I'm 'aprised at you. Ain't you never heard that sayin', "Don't you trouble trouble, if trouble don't trouble you?" Smokey ain't even got here yet.

BLUE

An' I pray to Gawd he don' never git here, neither!

BUCK

Well, I didn't mean he would'n be here. An maybe I'd better be gettin' ready just in case those Baker boys do decide on a necktie party.

(He begins rifling through the papers on the desk)

There's a box of cartridges 'round here somewhere. Here they are!
(At this moment Sheriff Hurt and another deputy enter with a clean cut colored man between them)

HURT

Open up that other cell, Buck, hurry!

BUCK

Okay, Sheriff!

(Buck proceeds to open up the cell next to Blue's)

HURT

All right, in there, Smokey!

(Smokey looks at Hurt for a moment, shrugs his shoulders, and enters the cell which Buck slams after him)

BUCK

There you are, Sheriff, now what's the dope?

HURT

You ain't heard yet? Thought by now it'd be all over the county.

BUCK

Oh, Tommy told me something, but he didn't stay long enough for me to get the whole story.

HURT

Ain't much to be told, but before I do that, Joe, you go outside and nose around. See if you can find out what them young sports up at the pool parlour's goin' to do.

JOE

Okay, Sheriff!

HURT

An' high tail it back here as fast as you can if they decide to start something.
JOE

I sure won't let no grass grow under my feet. (He goes out)

HURT

Well, I was at dinner about an hour ago when a man from the Ashburn place come bustin' in tellin' me I was wanted out there. So I drove out quick as I could while this fellow told me that old man Ashburn had been found shot to death. Well, after I got there and got to examining the body, in walks Smokey just as cool as you please an' says, "I done it, Sheriff."

BUCK

Just like that?

HURT

Just like that.

BUCK

You mean he didn't try to lie out of it or nothing? (The Sheriff shakes his head) Well, I'll be damned! What'd he do it for?

HURT

I done my best to find out, but he shut up like a clam soon's I got to questioning him. So it won't nothin' left for me to do but bring him here.

BUCK

If you gimmie five minutes, I betcha I'd find out.

HURT

That won't do no good with him.

(They look toward the cell where Smokey is seen lying on a bunk gazing at the ceiling)

He's the strangest nigger I ever did see--more like a white man--a German or something. And what's more, I can't find a person in the county that's had anything agin' him before now. It's got me beat.
BUCK
I'd sure like to know why he done it. Waita minute. I got an idea. Maybe Blue kin help us.

(He goes to Blue's cell, unlocks it and motions Blue toward the Sheriff)

Over there a minute!

BLUE
Howdy, Mister Sheriff!

HURT
Tol erable, Blue, tolerable. Sit down. (Blue hesitates)
Didn't you hear me? Sit down!

BLUE
Yessuh, I heard you—just wanted to make sure I heard you right.

HURT
You know him? (He motions towards Smokey)

BLUE
I reckon there ain't a colored person in Mason ain't heard of him.

HURT
Well, come on, tell me what you know.

BLUE
That's just it. I don't know nothin'.

BUCK
What?

HURT
Listen, if you're lyin'--
Honest, Mister Sheriff. Don' none of us know nothin' 'bout him. He didn't 'sociate with us none. Didn' shoot crap, never took a drink, didn' fool with no women or nobody. He jus' seemed to go 'long his way by his lonesome--

Hurt

Huh!

Buck

Sounds like one of them fairy tales I use to read when I was a kid.

Hurt

That's just what it is--only this one don't end "happily ever after."

Buck

Yeah, I see what you mean. (To Blue) You say he didn' even fool with no women?

Blue

Naw--leastwise not the ones we fooled around with.

Buck

What do you mean by that?

Blue

I don't 'zactly know myself. But I've heard tell he was in love with some gal out there on the farm. But I never seen her myself.

Hurt

This ain't helpin' much.

Buck

Guess you're right. Say Blue, don't the guy even smoke?

Blue

Dat's 'bout de only thing I ever did see him do when he come to town--an dat won't often.
HURT

All right, Blue, that'll be all.

(The move back toward the cell)

BLUE

Sorry, I couldn' hep' you none, Mister Buck.

BUCK

Well, if you think of anything let me know.

BLUE

Sho. Will dat, suh!

(During all this time Smokey has been gazing intently at the top of his cell. Now he gets up and goes to the window. Buck watches him for a moment then goes back to the Sheriff)

BUCK

Think it'd help any to try him again?

HURT

In a minute. But first I want to get ready in case Joe comes back with bad news.

BUCK

I was just startin' to do that when you come in. Now where'd I put those cartridges?

(As he begins to look for them once more the Sheriff goes over to a gun cabinet and takes out three rifles)

BLUE

Mister Sheriff, y'all expectin' to use dem guns?

HURT

You never can tell, Blue.

BLUE

Lawsey, lawsey. I knowed it would happen!
HURT

If you don't shut your trap I'll give you something real to yelp about!

BLUE

Yessuh, yessuh!

BUCK

Ain't got but one box of these. Just enough to load the three.

HURT

Well, we won't use 'em anyway. I ain't plannin' to shoot nobody. We'll just fire over their heads to show 'em we mean business.

BUCK

Hell, if they mean business that ain't gonna stop 'em.

HURT

You ain't suggestin' that I shoot 'em down, are you?

BUCK

You're the Sheriff, ain't you? You'd be doing what's right 'cordin' to the law.

HURT

Well, I ain't figurin' on doin' it.

BUCK

But I'm tellin' you Sheriff, if they make up their minds to take this nigger ain't nothin' but bullets goin' to stop 'em.

HURT

But man, I can't fire on my own folks!

BUCK

Well, I hope you ain't goin' to have to neither, 'cause some of mine might be out there too.
HURT
Well, let's forget about it 'til we hear from Joe.

BUCK
Okay. (He nods toward Smokey) Now shall we try him?

HURT
Won't hurt none I guess.

(Buck goes over and unlocks the door)

BUCK
Smokeyl (Smokey continues to stare out of the window)

Smokey!

SMOKEY
(turning) Yes?

BUCK
Sheriff wants you.

(Smokey comes out of the cell and walks over to the Sheriff)

SMOKEY
You want me, Sheriff?

HURT
Sit down, Smokey.

(Smokey sits down)

Cigarette?

SMOKEY
(taking it) Thanks.

HURT
Match, Buck?
BUCK

(handing a box to Smokey) Here you are, Smokey.

(Smokey takes the matches and lights his cigarette; then hands the box back to Buck)

SMOKEY

(laconically) Thanks. Now would you mind tellin' me what's all the ceremony's about? I ain't use to havin' white folks wait on me. Usually it's the other way 'round.

HURT

We want to treat you right.

SMOKEY

I see. Well?

HURT

Smokey, you're the hardest nut I've had to crack in a long time. But I got sense enough to see that all the bull-dozin' an' hell raisin' Buck an' me could kick up ain't goin' to make you tell us why you killed Ashburn less you want to.

SMOKEY

Thanks.

HURT

But you got a pretty good reputation 'mong the better folks in the county. You don't seem to have no enemies, neither--so if you talked you might get off light.

SMOKEY

You ain't foolin' me Sheriff--I'll talk when I get in front of a judge an' not befo'.

HURT

But if you talked to me first I might be able to put in a word for you.

SMOKEY

I told you I killed him, didn' I? What mo' you want?
BUCK

But if you'd only talk—

SMOKEY

Talk when I might get lynched any minute? If I'm gonna die, my reason'll die with me.

BUCK

Ain't nobody goin' to touch you--what d'ya think we got these guns for?

SMOKEY

That's what I'm wondering? You sho ain't goin' to use 'em 'gainst no white folks.

(Hurt and Buck look at each other)

I see I'm right!

HURT

But if you had a reason for killin' him, a good reason, I'd go out an' tell it to 'em if they come.

SMOKEY

I got a reason all right an' a damn good one, too. But what the hell does a mob care about a reason? All they want to know is 'did I kill 'im,' and that don't matter so much! I ain't no fool, Sheriff, an' I ain't 'scared of dyin' either.

BUCK

What! You mean you want to die?

SMOKEY

I knew what I was doin', knew what'd happen afterwards--knew I might never git to a trial where I could tell my story.

BUCK

But, man, how do you expect us to help you when you ain't playin' square with us?
SMOKEY

Maybe I ain't playin' square, but somebody didn' play square with me, neither.

BUCK

You sure are a queer one. (angrily) Listen, don't you know if any other nigger got stubborn like you, he'd pretty near git beat to death?

SMOKEY

Sho! But I ain't no ordinary man!

BUCK

God damn! He even admits it!

HURT

So you ain't goin' to tell us?

SMOKEY

Not unless I see where I'm goin' to git a trial.

(At this moment the door swings open and Joe runs in out of breath)

JOE

(gasping) They're comin'! Them Baker boys an' 'bout a hundred more. They saw me watchin' an' I barely got away to tell you!

HURT

Quick, take him back to the cell, Buck!

BUCK

Okay; come on, Smokey!

(He takes Smokey back to his cell and locks the door)

HURT

Now, Joe, you lock the back door while I get the front!
JOE
Okay!

BLUE
(moaning) Lawsy, lawsy, I knowed this was gon' happen! I knowed it! Now I 'se gonna git strung up long with him!

BUCK
If you don't cut out that moanin' I'm gonna string you up right inside that cell.

BLUE
But, Mister Buck, I don' wanna die.

BUCK
(ignoring him) All right, Sheriff, what's next?

HURT
Each one of you take one of these Winchesters an' we'll wait for them to make the first move.

BUCK
You mean you ain't goin' to do nothin'? You can't let 'em git the jump on you!

HURT
Now listen here, Buck Walters. I'm Sheriff an' I know my own mind. You're takin' orders from me, get it? An' if you don't like what I'm doin' you can get the hell out of here!

BUCK
Okay, Sheriff. But if this man dies it'll be your fault.

(At this moment the first roar of the angry mob outside is heard)

JOE
Who is it?
TOMMY

It's me! Tommy Walters!

(Joe unlocks the door and opens it)

BUCK

What is it, Tommy?

(Tommy rushes past him and goes up to the Sheriff)

TOMMY

Sheriff, I come to tell you you gotta give Smokey up!

HURT

What's that?

BUCK

What kind of talk is that from you?

TOMMY

But you gotta, I tell you. There's a hundred men out there an' they say that if the Sheriff don't give him up when they say so that they're comin' in an get him.

BUCK

We'll see about that.

TOMMY

Yeah--but Sam Baker says that if you and Joe and the Sheriff try to stop 'em, you'll get it, too!

BLUE

Oh, Lawd, lawd!

BUCK

Thanks, Tommy, now you get out of here. I don't want you to get hurt.

TOMMY

But--
BUCK

Go on, git out!

(Tommy goes out and Joe shuts the door after him. The roar outside gets louder)

JOE

Now what?

HURT

We'll wait. They'll make a break in a minute.

(Blue, during this time, has come to the door of his cell and stands there moaning softly to himself. Smokey sits on the edge of his bunk and says nothing)

BUCK

(after a pause) Damn! This is gettin' me. Shut up, Blue! Damn your soul! There's enough noise on the outside without you howlin' like a sick dog!

(at this moment someone on the outside shouts)

VOICE

Sheriff Hurt! Come on outside! We want to talk to you!

JOE

That's Sam Baker. Better go on out, Sheriff. Maybe you can talk 'em out of it.

(The Sheriff looks at the deputies nervously, rubs a hand across his mouth, and then walks toward the door)

HURT

Okay, but leave the door cracked. I might have to come back in a hurry!

(He goes to the door, pauses, then swings it open and steps out. The roar of the crowd greets him)
VOICES
There's the Sheriff! Come on out! Ain't scaired of your friends, are you?

(Joe swings the door almost shut and stands listening)

VOICE
Pipe down while we talk to the Sheriff!

(The voices outside quiet down to a low grumbling)

BUCK
Now they'll lay down the law to him an' he'll figure up some way to give in to 'em an' save his face at the same time.

JOE
Say, I got an' idea. While the Sheriff's outside we can sneak Smokey out the back way an' nobody'll ever know the difference.

BUCK
That is an idea—but spose they see us.

JOE
Nobody'll be expectin' it with the Sheriff out there. Besides, they're all around to the front of the jail an' in five minutes it'll be dark enough to try it.

BUCK
An' if it fails none of them northern newspapers can't say we ain't done our best!

BLUE
Mister Buck, y'all ain't gonna leave me, is you?

BUCK
(moving toward Smokey's cell) Ain't nobody after you. They don't lynch crap shooters!
BLUE

But Gawd, Mister Buck, please don't leave me locked up in dis yere cell. Take me with you!

BUCK

Shut up! Hey, Smokey, come on out!

SMOKEY

Now, what?

BUCK

Don't be so damn crabby!

SMOKEY

Sorry, but when there's a ravin' mob outside yellin' for your blood--

BUCK

Okay, okay, forget it! Listen, the Sheriff's gone outside to bargain with 'em. He'll probably put up a fake fight an' then let 'em take you out an' string you up on the first tree. Well, me an' Joe don't feel that way. I ain't in love with you or nothin', but I took an oath to uphold the law of Georgia an' that's what I'm gonna do. So we're goin' to slip you out the back way to the car an' try to make it for Augusta.

SMOKEY

'Spose it don't work?

BUCK

They'd git you if you stay here. You know that.

JOE

That's right, Smokey.

SMOKEY

Why you so anxious to see me git out of here alive?

JOE

Just like Buck said--besides, what difference does it make to you so long as you ain't lynched?
SMOKEY

I thought maybe you felt I had a right to kill Ashburn since nobody in Mason liked him much.

BUCK

To hell with that!

SMOKEY

Okay. Let's git goin'!

(They move toward the back door with Smokey between the two deputies)

BLUE

Mister Buck, Mister Joe, fo' Gawd's sake don' leave me here alone!

BUCK

The Sheriff'll be here to keep you company--you ready?

SMOKEY

Sho.

JOE

I'm all set.

(At this moment the front door opens and the Sheriff enters)

HURT

What the hell's goin' on here?

BUCK

We know what you're up against, Sheriff, so we're goin' to try an' make a break for the car an' take him to Augusta.

HURT

They'd catch you before you got started.

BUCK

We're willin' to take the chance. Besides you got your job to think about.
JOE

Sure, Sheriff, you'll be doin' your duty an' not hurtin' nobody's feelin's at the same time.

HURT

I don't know what to do. They say they'll get him one way or another. Say they'll burn the jail down on us if we don't give him up. But I told 'em that I'd have to talk it over with you first.

BUCK

Well, you have, ain'tcha? So go on back out there an' stall 'em off while we slip out the back way.

HURT

I don't know—I don't like it. They'd kill you too if they caught you.

JOE

Naw, they won't. We might get mussed up a little bit—that's all that ever happens.

SMOKEY

I'm the one who'll get killed, Sheriff!

HURT

(after looking at Smokey) All right! Go ahead! You got the car keys, Joe?

JOE

Yep.

HURT

Well, good luck to you. I guess every Sheriff in Georgia will be callin' me a fool tomorra mornin'.

BUCK

Hold 'em off 'bout five minutes. That'll give us a start on 'em.
HURT

All right!

(The Sheriff opens the door and Joe locks it after him)

BUCK

Come on, let's get started.

BLUE

Mister Buck, please don't leave me. I'm gonna die if you do!

BUCK

So long, Blue! I'll see you in the mornin'!

BLUE

Lawd, Lawd!

(The three men take up positions at the rear and prepare to dash out)

BUCK

Ready? (They nod) Here we go!

(He opens the door, looks out, sees that no one is outside, then motions the others out. The door closes easily after them. Blue stands watching them, moaning softly)

BLUE

They's gonna git me, I knows it, I knows it! Lawd, I ain't never gonna shoot crap no more if I ever gits out of dis!

VOICE

Hey, look there toward the back! They're takin' him away!

(Immediately there is a confused uproar)

VOICES

Quick, get 'em! Don't let 'em get away! Shoot that nigger!
(The roar increases. Shots are fired)

Stop him! He's goin' back to the jail!

(The rear door opens and Smokey staggers in. He slams and locks the door after him. As he turns and moves toward the front door we see he is wounded)

BLUE

Gawd a mussy!

(Smokey staggers to the front door, sees that it is locked, then slumps into the chair at the desk)

SMOKEY

They almost got me that time! But I ain't ready to go jus' yet.

BLUE

Where's Mister Buck an' Mister Joe?

SMOKEY

Where the hell do you think? The mobs got 'em!

BLUE

How come dey didn' git you?

SMOKEY

They did in the shoulder. But that didn' stop me from comin' back here to see you, Blue.

BLUE

See me?

SMOKEY

Sho! Ain't you glad to see me back--alive an' kickin'?

BLUE

Cut your foolishness--dey's gonna git us next.
SMOKEY

Maybe they will an' maybe they won't. But I ain't givin' up—not yet I ain't. An' if I dies, I jus' dies. Say, don't you want to git out of that cell?

BLUE

Don' make no difference now. I'se resigned. I know dey's gonna get me anyhow.

(Smokey picks up the keys which Buck has left on the desk and goes over to Blue's cell)

SMOKEY

Never heard you talk like that befo'. There, come on out.

BLUE

I never been in a scrape like dis befo'. Seems like dey's quietin' down outside.

SMOKEY

Must be up to some trick. We'll know soon enough!

BLUE

You think we's done fo'?

SMOKEY


BLUE

You gotta right to feel dat way Smokey. But I ain't done nothin' wrong 'cep shootin' crap. I swear fo' Gawd I ain't never killed a man.

SMOKEY

Maybe you ain't, Blue. I hadn't neither until yesterday; or was it today? But there's a lot of things worse than killin' a man, 'specially when you got a reason.

BLUE

Like what?
SMOKEY
What do you care?

BLUE
You talkin' 'bout de reason why you killed dat white man?

SMOKEY
Yes.

BLUE
Den I'd like to know what it is dat's worse den killin' a man.

SMOKEY
What makes you think I'd tell you after I did'n tell them?

BLUE
Don' know. But maybe it's cause we's in dis together now. Maybe it's because when you're dead it don't matter what you been told.

SMOKEY
Are you afraid of dyin', Blue?

BLUE
I don' know, Smokey. But I ain't as scaired as I been makin' out. But if a man's got a chance to save his hide, he's goin' to take it an' dat's what I was doin'. Naw, I don' reckon I'se scaired after all. Many's de time some fool with a razor done tried to rip out my guts but I allus come out of it alive.

SMOKEY
Maybe you ain't comin' out of this, Blue.

BLUE
I knows. I knows it from de moment dey said a mob was comin'. But I done said my prayers an' I'se ready. Is you ready, Smokey?

SMOKEY
What you mean?
SMOKEY

You don't kill a man.

SMOKEY

Yes, I killed him an' I'd do it again if I had to.

BLUE

You ain't sorry none?

SMOKEY

Sorry for what? When you kills a devil what's there to be sorry 'bout?

BLUE

What you talkin' 'bout?

SMOKEY

Listen, for twenty seven years I lived on the Ashburn place--from the very day I was born. I learned how to read and write right out there--an' when I grew up I worked, worked hard, you hear me? An' I made money, an' saved it, too! I never bothered nobody--minded my own business--stayed out of trouble so some day I could 'mount to something.

BLUE

Yeah, you never fooled 'round much.

SMOKEY

Well, one day a girl came there to work for Ashburn an' I fell head over heels for her right off the bat. Soon I got her to likin' me an' she promished she'd marry me.

BLUE

Who was she? I never seen her around.

SMOKEY

Her name don't matter. Well, everything was goin' on jus' fine until yesterday an' then something happened. I don't know why I done it but something told me to go by her room. When I got there I found the door cracked so I pushed it open an' right then an' there everything come crashin' down about me.
SMOKEY

What'd you see?

SMOKEY

Ashburn was in the room. He was makin' love to her. Makin' love to the girl who was gonna marry me! He jumped back when he saw me an' went out without sayin' nothin'. Then she got scared an' started sobbin' an' carryin' on. I didn't know what to think. Then she told me that he'd made her give in to him. Said he'd fire me an' take her job if she didn't. An' right then, Blue, I knew I had to kill a man an' I did. Now you know.

BLUE

I feel sorry for you, Smokey, but it's your own damn fault. If you'd-a messed around some instead-a stayin' on dat farm workin' your fool head off, you'd a known dat women is de mos' treacherous creatures on dis earth!

SMOKEY

Maybe I would, Blue; maybe I would've, but it's too late to be sorry now an', I ain't regrettin' it none--not a bit. It's the first thing I ever done without thinkin' beforehand. An' it give me a sorta feelin' of freedom. That's what it does. I won't never free before--always lookin' ahead to something bigger an' better an' this is what I got! Well, I'm free now, that's what I is. But I'm sorry 'bout you, Blue. I didn't mean fo' to hurt nobody else.

BLUE

I had it comin'. I'se been a good fo' nothin' all my life an' I 'spose de good Lawd is jus' 'bout tired-a all my foolishness. Look! (He points toward the cell windows where a red glow has begun to appear) Dey's set fire to de jail!

SMOKEY

Yeah, they're afraid of us Blue, that's what! They're afraid to come in an' get us. So the damn cowards decided to burn us out!

BLUE

Listen at 'em yellin', will you? You'd think dey's at a fish fry! Well, what's we goin' to do?
SMOKEY

What do you say we go out an' get them? If we's gonna die it ain't fit for us to die like rats. I tell you I'se free now an' I'm goin' to die free!

BLUE

Yeah, an' den we'll allus be remembered after dat! Come on, let's git goin' fo' dis jail crash in on us!

SMOKEY

Waita minute--I'll see if there ain't some pistols around here somewhere.

(He goes over to the gun cabinet)

BLUE

Dey sho' is raisin' hell out dere. We's gonna have a reception committee sho enuff.

SMOKEY

Yeah, but we'll leave our own callin' cards for them.

(He continues to look through the cabinet. Finally, he stands up with a single revolver in his hand)

BLUE

You got 'em?

(Smokey doesn't answer. He merely looks at the revolver)

What's de matter, Smokey?

SMOKEY

I guess I was countin' on too much when I said we'd both go out fightin'. (He turns to Blue) There ain't but one gun, an' I'm givin' that to you.

BLUE

But--

SMOKEY

I got you in to this an' you're gonna have the only chance there is of gettin' out of here. It don't matter 'bout me.
BLUE

You ain't gon' let 'em burn you up alive, is you?

SMOKEY

Hell no. That'd be jus' what they wanted. They say another nigger died scared as hell--an God knows Smokey ain't scared of nobody.

BLUE

Well, what we's gonna do?

SMOKEY

You take the back door while I take the front--

BLUE

I got de gun--I'm goin' out de front way.

SMOKEY

Like hell you are. I'm leadin' this parade.

(He extends his hand to Blue)

So long, Blue, I'm headin' fo' Jordan.

BLUE

So long, Smokey, an' I'll meet you on de other side.

(They separate. Blue goes to the back door, Smokey to the front)

SMOKEY

Ready, Blue?

BLUE

She's you born.

SMOKEY

Okay, let 'er go!

(The two men swing the doors open. Smokey plunges out, and immediately a fusillade of shots is heard. Blue opens fire at the back door. As he starts to
plunge out he recoils, hit. He turns, his gun falls from his hand and he staggers back into the room and falls sprawling. Outside the mob is in an uproar)

BLUE

Smokey, wait fo' me--I'm comin'!

CURTAIN
FREEDOM IN MY SOUL
THE CAST
Frank
Ace
Jones
Otho
Mack
Joe
Eddie
Morrison
Holmes
Taylor
First Bellhop
First Waiter
Second Bellhop
Second Waiter
Bellhops and Waiters

The sleeping quarters of the Negro employees of the Lake-wood Hotel.
Setting: The sleeping quarters of the Negro employees of the Lakewood Hotel. There are five beds in the room, all of which are unmade. The room is dirty and unclean—shoes, clothing, etc. lie in disorder all about it. The window in the rear is wide open from the bottom; the other, in the right wall, is shut tight although it is an extremely hot day, as one can see from the sun which is streaming in. The door to the rear is also open and in the hallway beyond can be seen doors to other rooms. Beneath each bed is the suitcase of the occupant—some are open, others partly closed. The walls, plastered a nasty grey, are streaked with dirt, smudges, and the pencillings of former occupants of the room. Every appointment gives one the impression of being squeezed into the cramped quarters.

As the curtain rises a "crap game" is in progress. Three colored boys are seen kneeling on a blanket in the small space they have made by pushing two of the beds back. Two of them are bellhops, the other a dishwasher. On one of the beds, off in a corner of the room, another Negro is sleeping, stripped to the waist with his bare feet hanging over the sides of the bed. Somewhere in one of the other rooms a radio is playing but suddenly a burst of static drowns out the music. The static continues and the man on the bed begins to stir. The Dishwasher stops on the verge of rolling the dice while one of the men begins shouting.

FRANK

Cut that goddam static out, will ya? Hey! (The static subsides)

ACE

Don' yell so loud, Frank, some of the guests might hear you. Who's fadin' me?

JONES

I am. Shoot a quarter.
ACE
Quarter? Hell, I ain't got but a dime left.

FRANK
I'll fade ya.

JONES
Like hell you will! I'm back man and back man's 'spose to fade. (To Ace) Shoot the dime. (He tosses a dime on to the blanket)

ACE
Ain't shootin' but a nickle.

JONES
What's the matter? Good gambler 'sposed to make all he can.

ACE
Don't bring me that stuff. Shoot a nickle I said.

JONES
I can't make nothin' this way.

ACE
Hell, you're a dollar an' a half to the good now. What mo' you want?

FRANK
Will you guys quit woofin' an' make up your mind. I want to get some sleep before I go back on.

JONES
All right--shoot the nickle. (He tosses a coin on the blanket and picks up the dime)

ACE
Now you're talkin'. (He begins shaking the dice) Lil' Joe, Lil' Joe--
(suddenly) Where's your money?

ACE

Did'n I put it down?

JONES

Ace, you know better'n to try an' jive me.

ACE

(tossing a nickle on the blanket) There she is--now watch me--Lil' Joe, Lil' Joe--

Mama's all sick,
Papa's got de blues,
An' baby she needs
A new pair of shoes!

(On the last line he rolls the dice out and snaps his fingers)

Bring it to me!

FRANK

Box cars! My dice! (Jones picks up the money) Shoot a quarter.

ACE

Too much for me.

FRANK

How 'bout you, Jones?

JONES

Sho--I'll fade you. (He tosses the quarter on the blanket) Gawd, it's hot in here. Can't you open that other window, Ace?

ACE

You know that window's nailed fas'.

JONES

Well, bust it open--need mo' air in here.
ACE
You talk like a fool. You want to git me in trouble?

FRANK
You ain't 'scaired of Morrison, is you?

ACE
What do you care.

FRANK
I'd jus' like to know--seems like you're always standin' up for him.

ACE
What if I am?

FRANK
Oh, nothin'. (To Jones) Watch me now cause my luck's turned.

JONES
Don't never believe nothin' till you see it--you got the dice, shoot.

FRANK
Gone to glory! (He rolls the dice on the blanket)

ACE
Nine! Go to it, Frank. Make them dice talk.

FRANK
(shooting again) Nine's my point! (He shoots again)
Nine's my point!

ACE
(to Jones) Bet he tens or fours fo' a nickle.

FRANK
(shooting again) Nine's my point!
JONES

Nothin' doin'.

FRANK

Nine's my point! Well, I'll be damn.

JONES

Crapped out! (picking up the money) Some day I'll show you boys how it's done. Who's fadin' me?

FRANK

I'm busted, besides I'm tired as hell.

ACE

Ain't got nothin' but this nickle an' I'm holdin' on to that.

JONES

That ain't no way to talk.

ACE

Nothin' doin'.

JONES

Okay.

FRANK

(getting up) Say, it is hot in here. Hadn't noticed it so much while we were shootin' crap.

JONES

That's what's wrong with you. You concentrate too hard. You gotta relax when you're rollin' the dice--like me.

FRANK

I'll be damned if I can relax in here. It's bad enough roomin' over the kitchen. But dammit, one window, an' no shades an' screens--I think I'll go an' see Morrison.

ACE

Don't be no fool. He'll fire you quick as that if you com- plain.
FRANK
So what? He promised to have it fixed over a month ago.

JONES
Maybe we oughta go an' see Eddie?

FRANK
The carpenter?

ACE
Sho, Eddie'll fix it, all right—if Morrison say so.

FRANK
Where'll I find him?

ACE
Oh, he's generally 'bout the hotel somewhere.

FRANK
I ain't supposed to be over there when I'm off duty.

ACE
Then stay here an' quit kickin'.

FRANK
I'll be damned if I will.

(He goes out just as two waiters come in)

MACK
What's the matter with him?

JONES
He's mad 'cause Morrison ain't had the window fixed.

JOE
(quickly) An' he's gone to tell him 'bout it?

ACE
He's gone to get Eddie.
JOE
(dischappointed) Oh. (stretching) Gawd I'm tired.
(The waiters take off their coats and throw them
carelessly on their beds)

MACK

(shouting) Otho! Wake up!

OTHO

What's the matter?

MACK

Time to go on.

OTHO

(sitting up) Seems like I just went to sleep. Make any­
thing? (He begins to dress)

MACK

Sixty cents.

JOE

Biggest bunch of cheapskates here I ever seen.

ACE

Business been bad all summer. Rich folks ain't comin' here
like they use to.

JOKES

Use to be a man could make five hundred dollars easy.

JOE

Yeah, well if we make fifty dollars in tips all summer,
we're goin' to be doin' good.

OTHO

I swear I don't feel like goin' down to the grill for a
few dimes.
MACK
Better hurry up or the boss'ill be up here. (He flops on the bed dead tired)

OTHO
Let him come--I could tell him a few things.

ACE
You're talkin' outa ya hat.

OTHO
Well, maybe I am. But if things don't pick up I'm cuttin' out.

ACE
Man, you can't do that. You done signed a contract. Fifteen dollars a month.

OTHO
That's just it. Fifteen dollars ain't enough when you're dependin' mostly on tips.

JONES
'Specially when the tips ain't comin' in.

ACE
What you kickin' 'bout? Bellhops doin' all right from what I hear.

JONES
I can't help what you hear. We signed the same contracts as the waiter's an' the tips ain't comin' in no faster.

ACE
You'll make yours from shootin' craps.

JONES
Sho, when there's suckers like you.

ACE
Who the hell you callin' a sucker?
MACK

Sit down, dishwasher. You're in high society now--mind your manners when you're talkin'.

ACE

I'll catch up with you yet.

MACK

If you had any sense you'd keep your money in your pocket. Here's the rest of us cryin' 'bout not makin' nothin' an' you losin' yours fast as you get it.

ACE

Mind your own damn business.

MACK

I'm just tellin' you for your own good.

(There is a momentary silence)

JONES

Wish Frank'd hurry back so that window'd get fixed.

JOE

I ain't gonna count too much on that. You know Eddie won't do a damn thing unless Morrison tells him to.

OTHO

Frank's gone to see 'bout the window?

JONES

Un-huh.

OTHO

That's something else I got to kick about. How they expect a man to res' in a steamin' hot oven like this? Jesus Christ, this is a hell of a hole! About the only thing we get that's half way decent is the food but the way they dish it out you'd think they was feedin' a bunch of two year olds.
ACE

Y'all better stop talkin' so loud. Somebody might hear you.

JOE

Who' gives a damn.

OTHO

I want 'em to hear me. Look at 'em layin' out there on the beach sunnin' themselves, will ya?

JONES

Sho' is the life.

OTHO

It's the life all right. But they're sweatin' hell out of us to keep it that way. Give 'em first class service, says Morrison—we do. So what? All we get is a "Thank you, George, here's a dime for your trouble." The next bastard that says that to me, I'm goin' to tell him he needs it more'n I do.

ACE

If you don't want them dimes you can give 'em to me.

OTHO

So you could lose 'em shootin' crap? Like hell I will. Well, I'm gone boys. Maybe I'll find a pot of gold this time.

ACE

Gold?

OTHO

That's what I said.

ACE

There ain't none.

OTHO

How come?
ACE
Ain't you heard? The gov'ments taken an' hid it.

OTHO
What?

ACE
Sho' nuff--buried it.

OTHO
Well, I'll be damned! (He goes out laughing)

ACE
Was he laughing at me?

MACK
You--or the gov'ment.

ACE
Huh!

(There is a short pause)

MACK
That sho' is a sweet number Otho's servin'--you know the one I'm talkin' 'bout, Joe?

JONES
Now boys, you mustn't talk about the guests.

JOE
Hell, I don't want to do no talkin' to her.

(They all laugh uproariously)

FRANK
(entering) Here we are, Eddie.

(Eddie enters mopping his face)
ACE

How you, Eddie?

EDDIE

How you Ace? What you doin' up here? Ain't you 'sposed to be in the kitchen?

ACE

Well, I generally takes my siesta 'bout this time a day.

EDDIE

Oh. (To Frank) That the window?

FRANK

That's the one all right. (Eddie climbs over the beds and begins examining the window) Got any idea who did it?

EDDIE

I reckon I did--Been so long I'd forgotten about it.

FRANK

You mind tellin' me why?

EDDIE

I didn't want to but--well--

FRANK

Morrison?

EDDIE

Yes.

FRANK

What in the hell did he want to do that for?

JOE

Maybe it'd cost him too much to put up a screen, Frank.

EDDIE

No, that won't it. It seems like about ten years ago there
was quite a noisy gang staying in here. That was when Morrison's father was manager. Before the place went down like it has in the last few years.

FRANK

Well--

EDDIE

One afternoon the boys raised so much hell the guests complained. So young Morrison got me to nail it up an' it's been like that ever since.

FRANK

That was reason enough, I 'spose. But how does he expect five of us to stay in this hole with only one window an' mosquitoes pouring in that by the dozens?

EDDIE

I don't know. Did you ever speak to him about it?

FRANK

Sho', lots of times.

EDDIE

An' what'd he say?

FRANK

That he'd speak to you.

EDDIE

He ain't said a word to me.

JOE

Can't you fix it anyhow, Eddie?

EDDIE

(apologetically) You know how it is. I can't do nothing less he says so.

JOE

Un-huh.
FRANK
You 'spose it just slipped his mind?

JOE
You know Morrison don't forgit nothin'.

MACK
That's right. Two days after we got here he was callin' everybody by his first name. No, he ain't forgotten.

FRANK
Then dammit he's doin' this on purpose!

JONES
Relax, Frank, relax.

FRANK
Yeah, I know it don't do no good to get angry, but every time I think of us jammed in here, workin' like hell an' him thinkin' he's doin' us a favor--

EDDIE
Sort of gets under your skin, don't it?

FRANK
How'd you know?

EDDIE
I've felt the same way myself time an' again. When the old man was runnin' the place this was a real hotel. He didn't think about making money--he just wanted to have a place where people could come an' enjoy themselves--rest if they wanted to. When he died his son took over. An' all he's ever thought about is makin' money. He's cut down on everything--one man's had to do the work of two men until the whole place has just run down. The people who used to come here don't no more. Just small time office help--an' then mostly on week ends.

JOE
They're small time all right. Nobody knows that better'n we do.
EDDIE
Two more years an' won't nobody be comin' here. I wish I could do something about it but if I said a word I'd lose my job.

FRANK
Then you're in the same boat as we are, 'cep for not hav­ing to stay up here with the colored help?

EDDIE
I guess I am.

JOE
It looks like we ain't gon' git no window.

EDDIE
Well, boys, I'm sorry. If Morrison says to fix it I'll be glad to do it.

MACK
We understand, Eddie.

EDDIE
If I think of it I'll suggest fixin' these quarters up.

FRANK
Better not risk gettin' in bad with him.

EDDIE
Just as you say. Well, so long.

FRANK
So long, Eddie, and thanks anyhow.

(Eddie goes out)

JONES
It looks like I'm gonna have to bust this window out after all.

ACE
You's a good gambler, Jones, but you ain't got no sense.
FRANK

Well, what're we gonna do? Stay here an' bake the rest of the summer?

ACE

What else can you do? You can't make Morrison do nothin' if he don't want to.

FRANK

I wonder.

ACE

Frank, you ain't fixin' for to start nothin', is you?

JONES

Aw, shut up!

ACE

Y'all think I'm dumb as hell, don't you? I know I ain't had as much schoolin'--ain't never been to college like some of you. But you listen to me, don't go foolin' with Morrison.

FRANK

He's a man like we, ain't he?

ACE

That don't make no difference. Maybe this is a hell of a dump--but that don't give us no right to go raisin' hell with him.

FRANK

He's got you 'scaired to death, I can see that. But listen, Ace, slavery don't exist no more.

(At this moment Otho enters abruptly and makes for his bed)

MACK

Otho! What you doin' back!
(Otho reaches under his bed without answering, pulls out his suitcase and begins throwing his belongings into it)

JOE

What's the matter, Otho? You ain't leavin'?

(Otho doesn't answer but continues to pack)

MACK

(approaching) Otho, what's happened?

OTHO

For Christ sake, leave me alone, will ya?

MACK

Well, goddam, don't get mad at me, I ain't done nothin' to you.

(He returns to his bed. Otho continues to pack while the others watch him in silence)

OTHO

(suddenly) Frank, will you take care of my laundry for me? It's at the Chinks'.

FRANK

Sure, Otho, where'll I send it to?

OTHO

I'll write you an' let you know. Maybe I can get another job somewhere.

FRANK

You been fired?

OTHO

Not exactly.

JONES

Then what the hell you leavin' for?
FRANK

Maybe we can help, Otho.

OTHO

Naw, you can't help none.

ACE

Ain't you gon' tell us what happened?

OTHO

I gave a guy his tip back. He got mad an' called the head-waiter. Won't long before I got mad and cussed 'em both out.

ACE

Then he fired you?

OTHO

No. I walked out.

MACK

Well, maybe we can fix it up.

OTHO

I don't want no fixin'. I'm tired of workin' for nothin'.

FRANK

It's the middle of the season, Otho. Won't be much chance of another job 'till later on.

OTHO

I'm goin', anyhow.

(Suddenly someone in another room begins rapping on the wall)

ACE

Listen!

(ALMOST IMMEDIATELY the rapping is taken up by the unseen occupants in other rooms. Then suddenly it stops as abruptly as it began)
ACE

Gawd amighty! Morrison's comin'! He'll give me hell if he catch me up here.

FRANK

Keep quiet everybody until we know where he's going. Somebody get that blanket off the floor, quick!

(Jones scoops the blanket off the floor and piles it on a bed. The room becomes quiet as everyone, except Otho, sits or stretches out on a bed. He finishes packing as Morrison enters. Morrison is a large, heavy-set man, and he is smoking a cigar. His face is set and his steely grey eyes take in everything in the room as he enters. He greets no one and no one makes an effort to speak to him. Seeing Otho busy at the bed he walks up to him)

MORRISON

Get your clothes packed and get out of here!

OTHO

If you'd use your eyes you could see that's just what I'm doing.

MORRISON

And keep your mouth shut when I'm talking.

OTHO

(facing him) And if I don't?

MORRISON

There's a sign downstairs that says, "Employees only" and you aren't one any longer--so now you're trespassing.

OTHO

You'd have me locked up?

MORRISON

I see you can take a hint.

ACE

Better do like he says, Otho.
MORRISON

(seeing Ace) What're you doing up here?

ACE

Well, Mister Morrison, you see, suh, I--

MORRISON

Get back to your work and stay there. What do you think I'm paying you for?

ACE

Yessuh. (He goes out)

MORRISON

(turning to the others) By the way, you boys ought to get another signal. You've been using that one for a long time. (He pauses) Well, why don't you say something?

OTHO

You said to keep quiet when you was talkin'.

MORRISON

I'm waiting for you to get out of here.

OTHO

Well, you ain't goin' to have to wait no longer.

MORRISON

Then get out.

OTHO

What about my pay?

MORRISON

You don't get any.

OTHO

Listen, I signed a contract with you--
MORRISON

Which I could terminate any time I got ready.

OTHO

Okay. But if I'm fired I'm 'sposed to get paid.

MORRISON

Not in this hotel.

OTHO

(after looking at him for a moment and approaching in dead earnest) I never knew what it felt like to kill a guy, but for two cents I'd stick a knife in your guts—

MACK

No need to get yourself in trouble, Otho.

FRANK

Yeah, Otho, it ain't worth it.

MORRISON

I don't need any help from you.

FRANK

Don't worry, it's him we're helpin'.

OTHO

You're gettin' awful brave all of a sudden, ain't you, Morrison? Well, you might as well, 'cause I ain't goin' to burn for Killin' trash like you.

MORRISON

Why you--(starting forward)

OTHO

But I'd just as soon drape you over one of those chairs over there. (He pauses) Didn't think I had the nerve to talk to you like this, did you? Well, I have, and what's more every bellhop and waiter workin' here feels same as I do—But they got to keep quiet 'cause they need the money. Keep on struttin' and lordin' it over 'em if you want to,
but one of these days you're goin' to wake up and find 'em gone. Huh! Guess I'd better go. So long, fellows. (He starts toward the door with his bag but stops) And here's something of yours, Morrison, I hope the next guy that wears it has better luck than I did. (He tosses his waiter's coat at Morrison and walks out)

MORRISON

(smarting) Anybody else feels that way better start packing now.

FRANK

Don't worry 'bout us, we need the money too bad.

JOE

Need it like hell.

MORRISON

What do you mean?

FRANK

Just what I said.

MORRISON

You'd better watch how you talk or you won't get that much.

FRANK

Catch me workin' for less than fifteen bucks.

JOE

That goes for me, too.

MACK

Me, too.

MORRISON

So? And what about you, Jones?

JONES

That just about expresses my sentiments.
MORRISON

Then beginning this minute all four of you're cut ten per cent—not only you, but every bellhop and waiter in the Lakewood. And you can tell the rest of them to come by my office in half an hour to sign new contracts. (He leaves)

JONES

Well, I'll be God damn!

MACK

You 'spose he meant it?

JOE

Sho he did.

FRANK

(jumping up) An' I meant it when I said I wasn't takin' no cut!

MACK

What're you gonna do?

JOE

Quit of course!

FRANK

Oh, no we're not, we're gonna strike, that's what.

MACK

You mean not work?

FRANK

Sho! Otho's right. It's time we quit workin' for nothin'.

JOE

You're damn right!

MACK

We'll all get fired.
FRANK

Not if all the rest of 'em come in with us. Hell, they're in anyhow. Didn't Morrison cut them, too?

MACK

Sho' he did.' Frank, I b'lieve you got something.

FRANK

Now, I'll tell you what we'll do--

JONES

Waita minute, Frank, waita minute. There you go gettin' excited again. How c'n you be so sure 'bout the other boys? How do you know they might not blame us for what Morrison's doing? In a way we are responsible.

FRANK

Ain't nobody responsible.

JONES

Sho', but they might not see it that way. Why don't one of us go an' talk to Morrison and see if he won't square it for them? Even if he is an ass, he ought to be able to see that they ain't responsible for what we've done. Then if he won't see the light, we can put your proposition up to 'em.

FRANK

Guess I was goin' a little too fas'. But givin' 'em their ten percent back won't help things much.

JONES

Then tell 'em so but do like I say in the meantime. You got to handle our folks with kid gloves or they'll bite hell out of you.

FRANK

Okay. You seem to be about the calmest of us. You go an' talk to Morrison. In the meantime, we'll get the rest of the boys in here an' tell 'em what's what. Okay?
JONES

Sho'. (He goes out)

MACK

(getting up) Come on, Joe, you an' me better go an' get
the others.

JOE

What about them that's workin'?

FRANK

Somebody might get suspicious of what's goin' on if they
were to walk off now.—Not that it'd matter a damn. But
they'll know soon enough, an' if we decide to do something
you can bet your life they'll come runnin'!

JOE

Okay. (He begins shouting) Everybody into Frank's room!

(They go out into the hallway and begin rapping on
doors and shouting the names of the occupants.
Frank sits on a bed deep in thought)

MACK

Open up! Morrison's gone!

JOE

Wake up, you guys.

(They continue to go down the hall in this manner.
Suddenly Ace pops into the room)

ACE

Morrison gone?

FRANK

(looking up) Oh, it's you? Yes.

ACE

What happened?
FRANK

Sit down and you'll soon find out.

ACE

Did Otho smash him one?

FRANK

No.

ACE

Thank Gawd. But what all these guys comin' in here fo'?

FRANK

You'll know in a minute.

(The hall begins to fill with other bellhops and waiters, most of them in shirtsleeves, others half-dressed, in bare feet, and stripped to the waist. As they enter the room they begin asking questions)

HOLMES

What's up, Frank?

TAYLOR

I was sleepin' sound as hell.

A BELLHOP

In the night it's the mosquitoes that keep you up. Hell, I might as well not sleep at all.

A WAITER

Come on, let's get started. I got to finish writin' my gal a letter.

ANOTHER WAITER

Oh, forget it. She ain't goin' to have no time to read it nohow.

THE WAITER

What you mean? You ain't insinuatin'—Say, that gal's stayin' home nights just because I ain't there.
HOLMES

Cut it out, will ya?

(As Joe and Mack enter the room, the group quiets down expectantly. Some are leaning against the walls. Most of them are spread out over the beds and on the floor)

FRANK

When Morrison was in here just now he fired Otho. 'Spose most of you know that, but that won't all that happened. Beginnin' this month we're all cut ten percent.

FIRST BELLHOP

The hell you preach!

HOLMES

How come?

FRANK

Well, we sorta come to Otho's defense and Morrison didn't like it. Then we started makin' cracks 'bout fifteen bucks not being enough an' he said we wouldn't get that much if we didn't shut up. Well, you know what happened when he said that. All of us swore we wouldn't work for less, an' right off the bat he cut everybody an' said that we're to come to his office in half a' hour to sign new contracts.

HOLMES

What's he cuttin' everybody for? We ain't had nothin' to do with what happened in here.

TAYLOR

I bet he was plannin' to do it all along an' was just waitin' for an excuse.

FRANK

Maybe he was an' maybe he won't. But Jones figured that since us four was partly to blame that we ought to try an' make it square with him as far as you all were concerned. So he's over talkin' to Morrison now.
FIRST WAITER

I bet he don't even see him.

FIRST BELLHOP

Jones's a smooth talker but if Morrison's made up his mind it ain't gon' do no good.

TAYLOR

Well, what do we do? I'll be damn if I'm goin' to work for less'n what I'm gettin' now.

SECOND WAITER

Let's tell him so.

HOLMES

We ought to wait until Jones comes back. Maybe he won't cut us.

TAYLOR

Jones ain't got a chance.

FRANK

'Sposin' Jones was to get your ten percent back, then what? you'd still be gettin' the same thing. You'd still be sleep-in' in dumps like this one. You still wouldn't be makin' nothin'. What the hell is fifteen bucks? The only reason we come out here for that was because he swore up an' down we could clean up on tips. You know how much cleanin' up we've done. If we make a hundred dollars all summer, in- cluding these penny ante tips, I'll eat my hat an' I ain't figurin' on buyin' a new one this fall either.

MACK

That's the Gawd honest truth.

SECOND BELLHOP

We ought to be gettin' more, workin' like we do,--an' that's a fac'.

FRANK

An' Morrison knows it, too. You know what he's doin'?-- Course you don't, though it's plain as hell. He's cuttin'
down on everything an' everybody so he can make more money. Nobody'd blame him for that if he'd do right by'em. But he ain't doin' right. Why he won't even do a little thing like havin' that window fixed while five of us've got to sleep in here jammed together like sardines. An' just as bad in everybody else's room.

SECOND WAITER

Mosquitoes so damn bad my body looks like I got the small pox.

FRANK

You know what's the matter an' you know what you ain't gettin'. It's time we started doin' something about it.

ACE

White folks lookin' up here.

JOE

Let 'em look.

FRANK

If we're goin' to work here for another month an' a half, we oughta be gettin' more.

ACE

How you gon' make Morrison do what he don' want to do?

FRANK

Strike!

(There is a roar of approval)

ACE

Man, you're crazy!

FRANK

We ain't got nothin' to lose. Morrison don't dare fire us all 'cause he'd be in a mess if he did. An' if he fire's one we'll all quit. An' if you're thinkin' about a job, figure out how much you'd make here in six weeks--about forty bucks. It ain't worth stayin' for.
A VOICE

Here comes, Jones.

HOLMES

Let's hear what happened before we decide anything, Frank.

FRANK

Well, all right.

(Jones walks in slowly. From the expression on his face the group senses that he has failed)

FRANK

How'd you come out, Jones?

JONES

 Wouldn't even see me.

JOE

The bastard.

MACK

Any man that won't sit down an' talk sense's got to be shown.

FRANK

Then, we're strikin'?

(There is a roar in the affirmative)

A VOICE

We'll make him take Otho back, too!

FRANK

Listen, everybody. Morrison wouldn't see Jones—he'll see us, damn his soul. What in the hell do we care what happens as long as we know we're right? (Shouts of approval) All of you that ain't dressed get out of here an' get some clothes on. We'll meet in the kitchen in five minutes—Holmes, go down to the Grill an' get the rest of the waiters. Taylor, you go an' get the bellhops. All right let's go!
(The group piles out of the room shouting. But Ace remains seated near the window. Jones and Frank see him and stop)

FRANK
Come on, Ace. The kitchen help are in on this, too.

ACE
I ain't goin'.

JONES
You're jokin'.

ACE
Not this time I ain't.

FRANK
What's the matter?

ACE
Guess I ain't got the nerve.

JONES
Ain't nobody goin' to hurt you.

ACE
If Morrison see me out there, no tellin' what might happen.

FRANK
Don't you think you deserve more pay?

ACE
I guess I do. But Morrison'll give it to me if he want me to have it.

JONES
Ace, I been givin' you hell all summer, but I never thought you was an Uncle Tom.
Wait a minute, Jones—Listen Ace, maybe you don't understand why we want you, 'cause one dishwasher ain't goin' to stop this strike. But we want everybody 'cause it'll show Morrison that we stand together.

ACE

Huh?

FRANK

Don't you see what we're doin'? It's a hell of a job that pays accordin' to how much you might make in tips. An' you kitchen help that ain't got no chance to make none—you all expect to be bellhops an' waiters someday. But after you do and then you find that you make the same as you did before—don't you see?

ACE

I don't know, Frank. You may be right. But 'long time ago my ol' daddy told me white folks would always look out for me if I'd just ask 'em. I don't need much, I ain't married or nothin', an' I ain't never wanted to be great or nothin' like that—so I reckon I'm satisfied just like I am.

JONES

Ain't no us'N talkin' to him. He ain't got the first bit of sense.

ACE

It's what I been taught all my life.

FRANK

I can't help what you been taught—that kinda stuff don't go nowadays. Yeah, there was a time when Uncle George could go to Massa John an' get everything he wanted. But you just try that jive today an' you'll get the door slammed in your face. I'm tellin' you, Ace, it's every man for himself an' the devil take them that's bringin' up the rear an' that's usually us.

ACE

But 'spose the strike don't work; 'spose we all get fired, an' maybe throwed in jail?
FRANK

What difference does it make? We're strikin' for something that's right an' that's all that counts.

ACE

But—

FRANK

Don't you see, Ace, for ten years Morrison's had his way. For ten years he's been bringin' colored boys up from the south because they were cheap and easy to handle—-an' he's payed 'em what he wanted an' made 'em like it 'cause they were 'scaired. But them days are over. From now on he'll treat us right or we'll keep on strikin' 'til he does.

ACE

It ain't no use. I ain't goin'.

JONES

Come on, Frank, they're waitin' for us downstairs.

FRANK

Okay, Ace, have it your way. But some day you're gonna wake up an' find that the war is over.

(They go out and Ace stands listening to their receding footsteps. He seems to be wondering what Frank meant by his last remark. Then slowly his dark face begins to light up with understanding)

ACE

I wonder if he's right?

CURTAIN
APPENDIX
The first two plays of this volume, SMOKEY and JUDGEMENT DAY, were presented in the Experimental Theatre of the University of Iowa under the direction of Professor Hunton D. Sellman.
Evening of April 21, 1939

Department of Speech and Dramatic Art
UNIVERSITY OF IOWA
Experimental Theatre Seminar - Speech 211, 212

Presents
For the first time on any stage

TWO ONE-ACT PLAYS

by

Thomas Pawley

Directed by Hunton Di Sellman

"SMOKEY"

Buck ........................................ Malcolm Robertson
Blue ........................................ Joseph Tandy
Tommy .................................... Neil Simpkins
Hurt ...................................... Leo A. Ruppert
Smokey .................................. Thomas Pawley
Joe ........................................ Earnest Lessenger

Place: The Mason County Jail
of Mason, Georgia
Time: Late one afternoon

"JUDGEMENT DAY"

Zeke ..................................... John Hoffman
Minerva .................................. Lynette Banko
Rev'm Brown ................................ Paul Fuller
Gabriel ................................... Earnest Lessenger
Mephistopheles ........................ Leo A. Ruppert
Pluto ..................................... Joseph Sorrentino
Hannabelle Lee ......................... Mary Sue Wootton
Soloman Jones ........................... Neil Simpkins
Cato ....................................... Malcolm Robertson

Time: One Sunday Morning
Place: The Home of Zeke and Minerva Porter

Technician: William Wetherbee
Stage Crew: Donald Sturgis, Max Ellis, Hubert White, Dorothy Bentley,
M. Egermayer, Katherine Kennedy, Jetline Preminger,
Rachel Wise
Light Control: Art Fear, Henderson Forsythe
Light Crew: John Hoffman, Helen Penyak
Sound: Mary Sue Wootton
Makeup: Adelaide Sears, Maxine Schafer