

The Jocker  
A play in two acts  
by Clint Jefferies

Contact:  
Clint Jefferies  
611 W. 137<sup>th</sup> St. #5  
New York, NY 10031  
[clint@clintjefferies.com](mailto:clint@clintjefferies.com)  
<http://clintjefferies.com>

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Biloxi Billy	45-55. An endless need to control. Totally insecure, so it's important that the other party in a relationship is totally dependent on him. Billy only feels secure when he kicks the dog, and the dog comes back anyway. He keeps Nat around so he can play the big man but has no clue how much Nat despises him. A tramp -- even a yegg.
Nat	14-18. He has never experienced a loving relationship -- in either direction -- so really has no idea what love is. He has nothing so lives however he can. Nat has no self-worth; no compunctions about prostitution, theft -- probably even murder. He only stays with Billy because he's afraid of him -- and because he doesn't see any other options -- but he's looking hard. A yegg.
Bama Boy	40's. From Alabama - as his nickname implies. 'Bama was very much like Nat at 12, but took up with a Jocker who was good to him. Bama is totally dependent. He's always relied emotionally on someone else. Now, he relies on Shakespeare. A 'bo all his life. He has a backwoods Alabama accent and is uneducated, but he's quick as they come. In the city he'd be called street-smart.
Shakespeare	20's. New to the road. Dropped out of college in '29. A 'bo looking for work wherever he can get it. The only really "gay" character in the modern sense of the word. He and Bama have been together about a year. Shakespeare's a 'bo in love.
Dodger	30's. From Brooklyn. Nice guy. Prefers women but a man will do in a pinch. Mostly he's just lonely. Dodger would do about anything for some meaningful human contact. An ordinary migrant worker hobo.
Lucky	Late teens to early 20's. An orphan and a loner. Tramp life in the '30's was hard for anybody, but especially for a black 'bo -- only the Mexicans had it worse. He makes money however he can, mostly by selling his ass. Quiet. Sullen. Has never trusted anyone in his life but his folks. Since they died, he refuses to get close to anyone. A tramp.

## A NOTE ON THE HISTORICAL ACCURACY OF *THE JOCKER*

*The Jocker* is about hobos, men riding the rails in search of work during the early days of the Great Depression. The characters are entirely fictional, but their milieu was not. Hobos were not a new phenomenon. Indeed, from the mid-1800's, much of America's economy depended on this large itinerant workforce. These were the men who logged the forests, brought in the harvest, built the great railroads, the dams and bridges, and mined ore in inaccessible and inhospitable parts of the country -- mostly for starvation wages and rancid food. With no other way to get from job to job, they traveled on the rods under boxcars, in refrigerator cars or "reefers," or on cowcatchers or in battery boxes, always at the mercy of the railroad security men -- the hated "bulls" -- who were free to do anything from demanding a dollar for safe passage to murder. In a single year during the '20's, one dead hobo was found near the tracks for every mile of railroad in the state of Connecticut. It was not an easy life -- nor one suited to longevity.

Between jobs they existed in shantytowns, "jungles" near the railyards, in shacks tacked together from rotten boards, cardboard, rusty tin, anything that might keep out a little weather.

These men were far from the romanticized figures of films and folklore. Theirs was a brutal life, devoid of creature comforts, with hardships at every turn: from brutal cops, to gangs of thugs, to simply being dismembered in a single slip while trying to catch a moving freight. The ever-present lice, dysentery and syphilis were comparative trifles. It was also a life devoid of women.

Like men at sea, or in prison, the hobo's sexual outlets were almost exclusively homosexual. In fact, the old hobo term "Jocker" (an older man who keeps an adolescent boy or "Punk" around for his servant and sexual plaything) is now used as a term for the dominant man in prison duos.

Hobo histories are amazingly up-front about these relationships. In KNIGHTS OF THE ROAD: a Hobo History, Roger Bruns notes that in the jungles it was not unusual for some hobos to dress in drag or be known by women's names. In HARD TRAVELIN': The Hobo and His History, Kenneth Allsop calls the union of Jocker and Punk a "routine road relationship." So routine, in fact, that in some locales simply traveling with a lad was enough to get a hobo arrested for child molestation. While the Jocker/Punk relationship was often one of "squalor, buggery and semi-slavery," Mr. Allsop quotes a researcher of the period: "I have seen wolves and their little 'fairies,' and their relationship seemed to be one of mutual satisfaction... Far from being miserable, the boy did not want to be separated from his friend. He resented and refused all efforts at his 'rescue'... In missions, older men give boys some candy, bananas or tobacco, and take them into the toilet or a dark corner and love them up."

Mr. Allsop goes on to add: "In 1914 California, 'widespread practice of homosexuality among the migratory laborers' was noted, and it was stated that in the up-state lumber camps 'sex perversion within the entire group is as developed and recognized as the well known similar practice in prisons and reformatories.' " Not all that surprising when one

considers the only women the tramp was likely to see over the course of a year was the occasional prostitute in a brief swing through a major city. And imagine the allure of the hooker who is at a state in her career that her clients are homeless men, tramps and bums. Not a pretty picture.

By all accounts, the well known children's song "The Big Rock Candy Mountain" actually began as a parody of the stories an older tramp might spin to a young farm lad to entice him onto the road -- and into his bedroll. An early version of the song from Alan Lomax's FOLK SONGS OF NORTH AMERICA pretty much speaks for itself. It begins:

*One sunny day in the month of May, a jocker he came hiking,  
He come to a tree and "Ah!" says he, "This is just to my liking."  
On the very same month on the very same day, a Hoosier's son came hiking.  
Said the bum to the son, "O, will you come to the Big Rock Candy Mountains?"*

After a chorus about cigarette trees, soda water fountains, lemonade springs and the like, the song continues:

*The punk rolled up his big blue eyes and said to the jocker, "Sandy,  
I've hiked and hiked and wandered, too, but I ain't seen any candy.  
I've hiked and hiked till my feet are sore. I'll be God-damned if I hike any more..."*

Or, he adds, be carnally used in the Big Rock Candy Mountains. In another version from 1927, the punk ends his lament with the following stanzas:

*There are no bees in the cigarette trees, no big rock candy mountains.  
No chocolate heights where they give away kites, or sody-water fountains.  
He made me beg and sit on his peg, and he called me his jocker.  
When I didn't get pies he blacked my eyes, and called me his apple-knocker.  
No more I'll roam from my very fine home. I'll save my junkerino.  
You can bet your lid that this old kid won't be no one else's punkerino.*

The society portrayed in *The Jocker* largely ended with the deepening of the Great Depression. With the worsening social crisis, whole families were suddenly on the road, and single women as well. The all-male life of the earlier hobo was gone. The tin lizzie sent more itinerant workers around the country by car. By the late '30's, automated rail switches and faster trains made hopping a freight an even riskier business. Labor unions helped to insure improved working conditions and salaries. By W.W.II, the hobo and the tramp who had ruled the rails since the 1850's were fading into legend.

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**jocker** ('dʒɔkə(r)). *N. Amer. slang.*

[f. JOCK<sup>3</sup> (Origin unknown; perh. f. an old slang word *jockum*, -am penis) + -ER<sup>1</sup>.]  
**a.** A tramp who is accompanied by a youth who begs for him or acts as his catamite.

**gunsel** ('gʌnsəl). *U.S. slang.* Also **gonsil**, **gunshel**, **gun(t)zel**.

[ad. Yiddish *genzel*, f. G. *gänslein* gosling, little goose.]

**1.** A (naïve) youth; a tramp's young companion, male lover; a homosexual youth.

**punk** (pʌŋk), *n.<sup>3</sup>* Chiefly *U.S.* Also 8 **punck**.

[Of obscure origin.]

**4. slang. a.** A passive male homosexual, a catamite; a tramp's young companion or \_gunsel\_.

--Oxford English Dictionary

a hobo jungle near the railyards of an Arizona mining town

1931

## ACT I, Scene 1

(A hobo "jungle" -- a semi-permanent camp where tramps and hobos live between travels. Like most, this one has living quarters made of rotten box-car planks, rusty tin, canvas, cardboard -- anything, in fact, that might keep out a little wind and rain. This one's by the side of the rail yards of a mining town in the southwest.)

(A broken down wooden fence with barbed wire on top runs diagonally across the back of the stage. SR is a pile of old railroad ties and assorted garbage. Where the ties meet the fence is the enclosure of 'Bama Boy and Shakespeare. It's not much more than some boards propped up on one side and a pole on the other supporting a large piece of canvas that is open on SL. It's not quite high enough for a man to stand upright. SL is a rusty half 55 gallon drum that serves as a community campfire. Branches are propped over it from which hang blackened tin cans -- the local cooking utensils. Around the fire are assorted planks, crates, bricks, etc. that serve as tables and chairs as needed. Far SL - almost in a separate area - is a small portion of an abandoned box car. The whole undercarriage and wheels are gone, as is most of the side facing us, but enough of the roof is left to make a pretty decent shelter.)

(At rise, it's twilight. Light comes not only from the full moon, but from the embers of the campfire as well. A kerosene lantern is lit inside 'Bama & Shakespeare's enclosure, throwing large shadows of the interior across the canvas. Biloxi Billy, a middle-aged man in a somewhat battered suit and tie, is

*entering DL. He carries an old valise with a rope for a shoulder strap, and a pack on his back with a coffee pot and assorted odds and ends dangling from it. He sports a bowler. Following him, dog-like, is Nat, a kid obviously WAY too young to be out on his own -- probably not much over 14 although not even he knows for sure. He wears filthy overalls and a tattered shirt with the sleeves ripped off. He carries a pack -- well, a bulging roped-together bundle of various possessions -- that's almost as big as he is. They stop R and look around.)*

**Billy**

Well, this is it, boy: The finest jungle in the great Southwest.

**Nat**

Don't look like nobody's here.

**Billy**

Oh, they will be. Don't take long for word to get around when there's a whole rail crew bein' hired on.

*(he cackles)*

Two dollars a day and all the bad salt-pork you can eat -- for anybody fool enough to sign up.

**Nat**

*(pointing to 'Bama & Shakespeare's shack)*

Looks like somebody set up over there.

**Billy**

Prob'lly come in on the overnight. Wanna be first for them high-dollar positions! Yes, my little gunsel, as the great showman said, there's one born every minute.

**Nat**

You sure this is gonna work out -- this deal with Red...?

**Billy**

*(cuffing Nat on the ear)*

Shut up you little idgit! You wanna screw the whole deal? Don't you never say nothin'...

**Nat**

Ouch! Ain't' nobody here.

**Billy**

Not that you can see. Listen boy, you don't say nothin' you hear? You don't even think 'nothin' 'bout all that. By the time the shit hits the fan you an' me be long gone. You hear?

**Nat**

*(dropping his bundles and poking around by the fire)*

Yeah. I hear. Looky -- they got stuff to eat...

**Billy**

*(whacking him on the butt with his walking stick)*

And you keep your grubby little paws off of it. These folks is gonna be our neighbors for a spell. Never shit where you live, boy -- at least not 'till you're ready to leave. There's words to live by. Come on. Pick that crap up. Looks like a likely spot over there. You get movin'

*(He heads towards the boxcar section.)*

**Nat**

*(under his breath)*

Blow me.

**Billy**

What was that?

**Nat**

I said homey... It looks real homey, sir'.

**Billy**

Well, move your butt. Don't want some other tramp gettin' this prime real estate.

*(They cross into the boxcar.)*

Not bad. Not bad a'tall. You can shimmy up there and bang some boards over that hole in the roof.

**Nat**

*(jumping)*

Shit! There's rats.

**Billy**

Ain't nothin' but some mice. Don't be such a little fairy.

**Nat**

Who you callin' fairy?

**Billy**

*(laughing)*

Well 'scuse me Mr. high and mighty punk-boy. Would yer highness mind gettin' yer royal ass a-movin' an' unpack this shit? Looks like we gonna be here a few days. Well? You waitin' for the spirit to move you, boy?

**Nat**

Naw.

**Billy**

"Naw" what?

**Nat**

No. Sir.

**Billy**

There you go! We'll learn you manners in no time. Here, first of all, take the can and get on down to the creek for some water.

**Nat**

Yessir.

*(Nat takes an old, rusty gas can and heads for the path to the creek UL, but he hears laughter and instinctively pulls back into the shadows. 'Bama Boy and Shakespeare are entering . They're both*

*soaked and barefoot. 'Bama is a solid looking man in his 40's wearing only an old pair of trousers and suspenders with a shapeless old hat. His right foot is wrapped in a thick white bandage. Shakespeare is in his 20's and is dressed in an old pair of long-johns that have been cut off just above the knees. They both carry their boots and the rest of their wet clothes: shirts, coats, socks, etc. They've just done laundry in the creek. Shakespeare supports 'Bama who limps on the injured foot. They're in no hurry, laughing as they flop down near the campfire and start spreading out wet clothes to dry. As soon as he's sure he won't be seen, Nat disappears down the creek path.)*

**Shakespeare**

Damn! I feel about a pound lighter.

**'Bama**

Lemme get a good look at you...

*(Seriously, he turns Shakespeare into the light.)*

Hell! You're a white boy! All this time I thought I was travelin' with a darkie.

**Shakespeare**

*(laughing)*

Shut up. You weren't exactly a box of Ivory Snow yourself.

**'Bama**

You ain't kiddin'. I got a good whiff of myself 'long 'bout the Arizona line an' damn near passed out.

**Shakespeare**

The creek felt good.

**'Bama**

Damn tootin'. I coulda just laid there all night.

**Shakespeare**

You manage to keep your foot dry?

**'Bama**

Yeah. I think so.

**Shakespeare**

Let me see.

*('Bama props his foot up on a crate and Shakespeare crouches to inspect it.)*

Not too bad. Just a little blood's soaked through this time.

**'Bama**

Goddamn fool thing to do.

**Shakespeare**

It was my fault. If I hadn't been so slow grabbing the rail...

**'Bama**

Don't you start up. You done fine. Ain't no easy thing snaggin' a freight goin' that fast. Damn near ripped my arm out of the socket. I just slipped, that's all. Lucky it wasn't my leg.

**Shakespeare**

Two toes are quite enough, thank you. They hurting you much?

**'Bama**

Not too bad. A couple of hours after it happened, that's when I thought I was 'bout to start screamin'. By now it's O.K. It just sort of keeps throbbin'.

**Shakespeare**

As long as it doesn't get infected.

**'Bama**

Don't worry. A boxcar wheel cuts you clean as a scalpel. Hell, I knowed a man got his leg took off right at the knee. Hardly bled at all. He was up an' hoppin' around in no time.

**Shakespeare**

Just keep an eye on it. You see any red streaks, we're gonna get you to a doctor pronto.

**'Bama**

Stop frettin'. It's only a couple 'a toes.

**Shakespeare**

But if it starts to...

**'Bama**

Shakespeare...

**Shakespeare**

I'm serious you gotta watch it. If it starts getting those...

**'Bama**

*(calmly but deliberately cutting him off)*

Damn lucky we got the night train. Got us in first.

*(Bama pulls out some soap, pours some water out of a tin can, and lathers up his face. He'll start shaving with the edge of a broken bottle.)*

We're 'bout sure to be the first in the lineup tomorrow. I hear they're gonna be signin' up two hundred. First men in line sure to get in.

**Shakespeare**

First *man* you mean. You're not going anywhere with that foot.

**'Bama**

Well, they ain't gonna pay me to sit here on my butt.

**Shakespeare**

They "ain't gonna pay you" to bleed to death either.

**'Bama**

I can work just fine. Now I don't want to hear nothin' more about it.

**Shakespeare**

Don't be crazy. You think anybody's gonna hire you anyway with a gimp foot?

**'Bama**

Just standin' in line, ain't nobody gonna notice 'an I...

**Shakespeare**

Stop it. Right now. I mean it. You're not moving from this camp 'till that foot closes up good. You hear me?

**'Bama**

I can't let you...

**Shakespeare**

You've taken care of me plenty. I guess I can take care of the both of us for a week or two.

**'Bama**

Now don't go tellin' me...

**Shakespeare**

No sir. You hear me now. You take one step toward town tomorrow and I'll knock you down with a two by four. I swear I will.

**'Bama**

All right. All right, calm down now. I'll do like you say, Shakespeare.

**Shakespeare**

You promise?

**'Bama**

Yeah. I promise. Now let me get shaved. I may be a 'bo but it don't mean I gotta go 'round lookin' like a tramp.

**Shakespeare**

You look OK. Besides, that broken bottle doesn't look altogether sanitary.

**'Bama**

You got somethin' better?

**Shakespeare**

Nope. Wish I did. Hell, I remember when I'd throw away a razor blade every time I used one.

**'Bama**

That woulda been before '29 I figure.

**Shakespeare**

Yeah. University of Maryland. Coat and tie every day too.

**'Bama**

See! Who'd want to live like that?

**Shakespeare**

Yeah. Who needs it. Clothes... food... shelter... what a bother.

**'Bama**

Naw, I'm serious. I mean, sure, I'd like things to be better, but look what we got...

**Shakespeare**

OK. We got lice. We got a can and a half of beans left...

**'Bama**

Ya see? What else you need? Got the creek all to ourselves... Got the prime spot in the whole jungle... Right cozy near the fire...

**Shakespeare**

*(with a crooked smile)*

Hell, it's just like Park Avenue. Who needs a roof and a bed when you've got all this great -- uh -- dirt and cardboard?

**'Bama**

You seem to think I'm jokin'. No sir. I wouldn't trade for nothin'. Sure, I get hungry now an then. An' the rods under a boxcar ain't the most comfortable transportation. But we don't got to answer to nobody, Shakespeare. Ain't a man alive can tell us what to do or

when to do it. I lived this way all my life, an' I got no reason to want to change now.

**Shakespeare**

*(with a laugh)*

The real world isn't all that bad. I could even get used to a real mattress -- and maybe a bathtub again.

**'Bama**

Yeah. Sounds good enough. But remember that day -- Iowa I think it was -- you an' me, we was walkin' through that pasture, an' we got sort of crazy, an' we took off every last stitch of clothes we had on, and just laid out there all day long. The grass was 'bout as soft as a carpet, an' there wasn't nothin but sky an' clouds, an' the smell of the... Aw shit, I'm soundin' stupid, ain't I?

**Shakespeare**

No. Go on. I'm right there with you.

*(Unseen, Nat has come back up the creek path. When he sees 'Bama and Shakespeare, he slides behind the side of the box-car, watching them.)*

**'Bama**

Well, you could just smell all the grass, and the sunflowers and even the cows. An' you could hear the grasshoppers, An' the sky looked like it wasn't never gonna stop. Hell. I guess that afternoon I was 'bout as happy as a I ever been in my life. You know? An' you was lyin' there next to me...

*(Suddenly embarrassed, he fumbles with shaving again.)*

Aw hell, you know what I mean.

**Shakespeare**

Yeah. I know.

**'Bama**

That's why I stick to the road. I guess that's about all I want outa life. Days like that.

**Shakespeare**

Yeah, well, that's why I keep taggin' along with you -- you old fool.

**'Bama**

Watch it sonny boy. I ain't that old.

**Shakespeare**

Yeah. I know what you mean. I remember that day all right. Hell, there's just something about being on your own. Even nights like this.

*(looking around at the trash)*

Now the ambiance could be a little different...

**'Bama**

Whatever the hell that means...

**Shakespeare**

But there's a full moon -- hell of a moon.

**'Bama**

That it is.

**Shakespeare**

*(with an evil grin)*

And there are other compensations.

**'Bama**

Such as?

*(In response, Shakespeare takes hold of 'Bama by the back of the neck, turns 'Bama's head, leans over and gives him a long, deep, firm kiss on the mouth. He comes up, his face covered with 'Bama's shaving cream.)*

Shit, Shakespeare... We're right out here in front of God and everybody...

**Shakespeare**

There's nobody else here. You said so yourself.

*('Bama stands and they press together in another long, slow, lover's kiss.)*

**'Bama**

*(referring to Shakespeare's soaked shorts)*

You're gettin' the front of my britches all wet.

## **Shakespeare**

Then take them off.

*(Shakespeare reaches up and slides the suspenders off of 'Bama's shoulders. The loose trousers slide to the ground. They kiss again, Shakespeare's hands roaming down onto 'Bama's butt.)*

## **'Bama**

*(a little hoarse)*

Uh... You wanna go on in the tent?

## **Shakespeare**

Yeah.

*('Bama leads. Hand in hand, the men disappear inside the makeshift tent. In the dim, flickering light from the lantern, we can see their silhouettes on the dirty canvas. Totally absorbed in the action, Nat is creeping forward, obviously seeking a clear line of sight into the open side of the enclosure. We can see the shadow of 'Bama lying back, looking up at Shakespeare.)*

## **'Bama**

How the hell'd I ever get hold of somethin' like you?

## **Shakespeare**

*(Sliding off his wet shorts)*

Just lucky I guess.

*(Shakespeare gently lowers himself on top of 'Bama, 'Bama's legs sliding up to wrap themselves around Shakespeare's back.)*

You know I love you 'Bama Boy.

## **'Bama**

Yeah. I know. I love you too Shakespeare.

*(They are kissing again, slowly rubbing their bodies together. A low growl, or maybe a purr comes from one of the*

*men. But it's all too much for Nat. Way too engrossed in what's going on in front of him, he lets the water can slip from his fingers. It hits the ground with a great crash. The two men jump up, Shakespeare poking his head out of the tent. In a panic, Nat has grabbed the can again and started to run toward the boxcar, but he trips again and goes sprawling, the can spilling with another loud crash. He scrambles to his feet, and finally disappears behind the boxcar. By now, Shakespeare is out of the tent, a tattered blanket wrapped around his waist. Bama leans out, his head and shoulders visible.)*

What in hell was that?

**Shakespeare**

Looked like a kid.

**'Bama**

Well, hope he got him an eyeful.

**Shakespeare**

Probably a bit of an education, if you know what I mean.

**'Bama**

Always glad to help the cause of higher learnin'...

*(By now they are back inside the tent and getting back to business.)*

**Shakespeare**

*(going for Bama's nipples)*

Guess we better keep going. Wouldn't want to leave class half finished...

**'Bama**

Watch it! Them things is ticklish... Aw, shit, Shakespeare... No fair...

*(They are rolling together, laughing and groping as the lights fade to black.)*

## **Act I, Scene 2**

*(The next morning. Some lazy smoke hangs above the campfire and lanterns have gone out. All is quiet in 'Bama & Shakespeare's tent. In the boxcar, the bundles are unwrapped, with odds and ends of possessions scattered about. Some straw has been strewn around on the floor. Nat is asleep, naked, against one wall, wrapped in a filthy blanket. Billy stands over him, dressed in a union suit open to the crotch, scratching himself awake.)*

**Billy**

Come on. Get up, boy. I need some coffee.

**Nat**

Uhhhhh.

**Billy**

*(giving him a none-too-gentle kick)*

I said, get your ass up an' moving, boy. Whadda you think I keep you around for? Let's have some breakfast.

**Nat**

*(shifts sleepily and throws the blanket off, exposing his butt)*

Huh-uh...

**Billy**

You wave that purty white butt around much more 'an I'll give you a plug better than the one you got last night.

**Nat**

*(pulls the blanket back over his ass)*

Huh-uh.

**Billy**

Don't you "huh-uh" me. You squealed good enough when you was gettin' it last evenin'

if I remember correct.

**Nat**

*(without moving -- or even bothering to open his eyes)*

I was squealin' 'cause it hurt like hell. I think you made me bleed again.

**Billy**

Good for 'ya. Gotta remind you who's boss every now and again. Now you want some more of this prime Mississippi Sausage, or you gonna get your ass out there and get the fire started like I told you?

**Nat**

Make your own fuckin' coffee.

**Billy**

*(suddenly and swiftly grabs Nat's hair and gives it a vicious twist, jerking his head back)*

What did you say, boy? You wanna repeat that for me?

**Nat**

Nothin'. I didn't say nothin'.

**Billy**

Damn right you didn't .

*(He gives Nat a little slap -- just hard enough to make him feel it.)*

Now, you gonna get that coffee made?

**Nat**

*(softly)*

Yessir.

**Billy**

*(smacking him again)*

Couldn't quite hear you, boy.

**Nat**

*(shouting)*

I said yessir.

**Billy**

*(giving his hair enough of a twist to be  
clear he means business)*

An' you had a real nice time last night, didn't you? Nothin' a punk like you likes better than a good poke from his ever-lovin' Jocker, is there?

**Nat**

No sir.

**Billy**

Come on. Tell me.

**Nat**

*(flatly)*

Yeah, I loved it. Damn! You're hurting me! You're fucking prince charming, all right?

**Billy**

*(This slap is hard.)*

Damn right, I am. Now cut the lip, little man. You understand?

**Nat**

*(a feeble attempt at believability)*

OK. I'm sorry. I like it fine. You know I do. Really. Only sometimes ya get kinda... Listen, I'm tryin...

*(He will not cry.)*

**Billy**

*(let's go of Nat's hair and chuckles)*

You're a fuckin' little liar. That's what you are. Hell, don't know why I bother with you. You don't know nothin' 'bout gettin' along by yourself. You ain't learned enough to last two days on your own.

**Nat**

I'm learnin'. I'm learnin' plenty.

**Billy**

You know, that mouth of yours is gonna get you in trouble some day. Go on. Be a good kid for a change. Get some clothes on. Let's have some breakfast.

**Nat**

Yeah. OK.

*(He slides into his overalls and puts on some worn out work boots -- no socks -- no underwear. In the meantime, Billy is getting into his trousers and shoes.)*

**Billy**

You ain't really bleedin' are you?

**Nat**

Naw. I'm OK.

**Billy**

That's a good kid. You're just so young an' purty I get a little carried away sometimes.

**Nat**

Sure.

**Billy**

*(with a lewd wink)*

Besides, wouldn't be no fun if you didn't squeal a little.

**Nat**

*(picks up the coffee pot and water jug without looking at Billy)*

Yeah. I'll get your coffee goin'.

**Billy**

*(continues dressing: shirt, tie, coat & bowler)*

Wait there a second. Listen now: We got us a good scam set up here. I'm goin' on up to town 'an meet with Red an' Al. But as far as anybody comes around here knows, I'm goin' up to get work on the new spur -- just like everybody else. You got that?

**Nat**

Yessir.

**Billy**

You just keep your eyes open and your mouth shut. You got that? You let your mouth flap an' somebody's liable to get hurt.

**Nat**

You said this was gonna be simple. Real easy, no shootin' or nothin'.

**Billy**

Ain't nothin' ever simple 'bout takin' somethin' away from somebody who don't want it took. Soon as you start thinkin' lazy like that you in big trouble. Best remember that -- long as you wanna stay alive and out of the lock-up. You hear?

**Nat**

Yessir.

**Billy**

(gives Nat a swat on the butt)

Good boy. Now go on, git.

(*Nat leaves with the coffee pot and jug. Out of sight of Billy, he stops for a moment, leaning on the fence with his eyes shut, breathing hard for self control. For a moment, we're not sure if he's going to scream or burst into tears. But he just takes a deep breath. He opens his eyes again, swallows hard, and heads for the campfire. He's just put water and coffee in the pot when 'Bama emerges, naked and glowing, from the tent. He stretches and grins, happily humming a couple bars of "Hallelujah I'm a Bum". Mid-whistle he sees Nat and quickly grabs whatever's handy to cover himself.*)

**'Bama**

Shit! Sorry -- I didn't think anybody else was around just yet.

**Nat**

It's OK. Just me. Mind if I start up your fire?

**'Bama**

*(grabbing a union suit from the clothes draped around the fire and slipping into it)*

Naw. Go ahead. T'ain't our fire, anyway. Everybody in this section just sorta uses it.  
*(calling into the tent)*

Hey! Shakespeare! We got company...

**Nat**

*(with a snort)*

Yeah. Break out the good silver. Prince Albert's come a callin'. Sorry, but I seem to have misplaced my callin' card.

**Bama**

How old are you, son?

**Nat**

I dunno. Old enough.

**'Bama**

*(getting into the pants he left crumpled on the ground)*

Look, it ain't none of my business, but ain't you a little young to be off by yourself?

**Nat**

I ain't by myself. I'm with Billy.

**'Bama**

Oh...

**Billy**

*(emerging from the boxcar)*

Do I hear my name being taken in vain?

**'Bama**

'Mornin'.

**Billy**

Mornin' yourself. Name's Billy. Biloxi Billy. Pleased to meet you. This here's Nat.

Sorta my prot,g,. Shake hands with the gentleman, Nat.

**'Bama**

*(shaking hands)*

Everybody calls me 'Bama Boy. Uh -- from Alabama, you know. Long time ago. My partner, Shakespeare's in the tent. Hey, Shakespeare, come on. We got neighbors.

**Shakespeare**

*(emerging, groggy, in the same cut-off long-johns he was wearing last night)*

Oh. Uh... Mornin'. We got coffee yet, 'Bama?

**'Bama**

This here's Biloxi Billy and Nat. They're sorta -- travelin' together.

**Shakespeare**

OK. Whatever. Pleased to meet you, gentlemen.

**Billy**

Help yourself to the coffee. Plenty to go around.

**'Bama**

Uh... This is Nat here workin' on the coffee.

**Shakespeare**

Well, God bless Nat. Where the hell are my clothes?

**'Bama**

Here y'are. We washed everything last night. 'Member?

**Billy**

*(taking a seat near the fire)*

So, y'all here for work on the rail spur?

**'Bama**

You bet. Well, Shakespeare is anyway. I sorta messed up my foot.

**Billy**

What happened?

**'Bama**

Sorta missed grabbin' a ladder. Southern Pacific got a couple of my toes.

**Billy**

Sorry to hear that. Tough break.

**'Bama**

*(shrugs)*

Ain't so bad. Just kinda sore. Ya know? Y'all on the night freight too?

**Billy**

No sir. Me an' Nat here, we got cushions all the way.

**'Bama**

Damn! Good for you!

**Shakespeare**

Cushions?

**'Bama**

Seats. They was on the overnight coach.

**Shakespeare**

Jesus! What have we been doin' wrong, 'Bama? I haven't seen the inside of a coach since '29.

**Billy**

Ya see, when we signed up at the slave market...

**'Bama**

That's a labor agency...

**Billy**

...right by the main stem...

**'Bama**

That's the main railroad yard.

**Billy**

In Big Chi...

**'Bama**

That's Chicago...

**Billy**

Well, they took our dollar...

**'Bama**

That's for findin' them work...

**Billy**

An' sent us coach on the UP...

**'Bama**

That's the Union Pacific...

**Billy**

An set us off here in Arizona.

**Nat**

Which is a kinda dry state in the American southwest.

**Shakespeare**

Thank you -- both.

**Nat**

Pleasure to be of service.

**Billy**

Shut your yap, boy.

**Nat**

Well, the little gaycat seemed to need some help.

**Shakespeare**

Gaycat? Never mind. I don't think I want to know.

**'Bama**

It's just somebody who hasn't been ridin' the rods long. Like a greenhorn.

**Shakespeare**

Like me.

**Nat**

Yeah. That's all it is.

*(He rolls his eyes at Billy, who elbows him in the ribs.)*

No offense.

**Shakespeare**

None taken. I guess.

**'Bama**

That coffee hot?

*(By now, everybody's pretty much dressed for the day. Billy's in a suit and tie -- worn but presentable. Shakespeare's in pretty much the same -- Nat's in his overalls and boots, 'Bama -- who doesn't have to be anywhere -- is just in union suit, trousers, boots and suspenders, with the ever-present battered fedora.)*

**Nat**

I guess so. This is the fourth or fifth time 'round for the grounds. Don't know how much they got left in them. That's life in Hooverville.

**'Bama**

Don't matter. Coffee's coffee.

**Shakespeare**

You hear how much they're payin?

**Billy**

Two dollars a day. Room and board's four a week.

**Shakespeare**

Can't we just stay here?

**'Bama**

Yeah, but they take it out of your pay, anyhow.

**Shakespeare**

So eight a week clear.

**Billy**

Yup.

**'Bama**

Done better, done worse.

**Shakespeare**

Company store?

**Billy**

Nope.

**'Bama**

Well, that's a blessin'.

**Billy**

You said it, Mister.

**Shakespeare**

So? What are we waiting for? Still got a hike into town. You two coming along?

**Billy**

I am. Nat here's too young. They'll take him on harvest, but not for railroad work. Yeah. I'm ready. This coffee tastes like shit anyway -- pardon my French.

**Shakespeare**

You stay off that foot now. You hear?

**'Bama**

Yes sir.

**Billy**

Nat, you go on back to our place now. Don't be hangin' around botherin' this gentleman. Ya hear me, boy?

**Nat**

Yeah.

**Billy**

Yeah what?

**Nat**

Yessir.

**Billy**

Git on then.

*(Nat saunters back toward the boxcar.  
To Shakespeare:)*

You ready, son?

**Shakespeare**

Let's go. Keep your fingers crossed for me 'Bama.

**'Bama**

I will.

*(Shakespeare and Billy exit DR. 'Bama, ignoring Shakespeare's admonitions, hobbles around rinsing out tin cans, putting away clothes, etc. Nat just stands near the box car watching,*

*seeming to size him up. 'Bama notices, but doesn't say anything -- but being stared at is obviously making him uneasy. Finally, Bama sits down and lights a stogy.)*

**'Bama**

Uh... Did you want somethin' son? Or am I just such a looker you can't keep your eyes off me.

**Nat**

You look all right -- for an old guy.

**'Bama**

Thanks. I s'pose.

**Nat**

You're welcome -- I s'pose.

**Bama**

*(a little laugh)*

Well, we got us a sassy one here. So why ain't you with your folks, boy?

**Nat**

Ain't got none. You?

**'Bama**

Folks? Naw. Never knew mine.

**Nat**

Wife 'n kids?

**Bama**

Ain't you supposed to be doin' somethin'? I distinctly remember somebody tellin' you "not to bother the gentleman."

**Nat**

Sometimes I don't hear so good. So you got a wife an kids?

**Bama**

No. If it's any of your business.

**Nat**

It ain't. Just curious. You really never knew your folks?

**'Bama**

Nope.

**Nat**

Me neither. What happened to yours?

*('Bama makes no response.)*

Sorry. Didn't mean to get nosy. Just makin' talk, ya know?

**'Bama**

It's OK. Just somethin' I don't talk about.

**Nat**

Yeah. Well -- I'll make myself scarce. Maybe talk to ya later, huh?

**'Bama**

Come on over here.

**Nat**

*(crossing over)*

Yeah?

**'Bama**

Here, make yourself useful. Get me a fresh bandage out of that pack over there.

**Nat**

Sure.

**'Bama**

*(starting to untie the wrap around his foot)*

So -- talk. Tell me somethin' about yourself.

**Nat**

Whadda you wanna know? Ask me anything.

**'Bama**

OK. Like where do you come from?

**Nat**

None of your business.

**'Bama**

*(with a laugh)*

Guess I asked for that.

*(Nat hands him the new bandages.)*

Thanks.

**Nat**

Any time. Shit. That looks awful. How's it feel to get your toes cut off?

**'Bama**

Ain't too comfortable. Actually, it hurts like hell.

**Nat**

I bet. I saw a guy cut in half once.

**'Bama**

Do tell.

**Nat**

Yep. Right outside of Fresno. He musta fallen off the rods. Clean in two. Damn. Ain't never seen nothin' like that again. Well -- till now. But this ain't hardly in the same league, you know.

**'Bama**

Just as glad.

**Nat**

Muncie.

**'Bama**

What?

**Nat**

Muncie Indiana. It's where I'm from. You asked.

**'Bama**

So I did.

*(a pause)*

I don't know.

**Nat**

Don't know what?

**'Bama**

What happened to my folks. I was in an orphanage 'till I was 12. I was just sorta left there.

**Nat**

Oh.

**'Bama**

You did ask. We even now?

**Nat**

*(lightly)*

Yeah. My ma was a whore. I mean a real one. She didn't just sleep around, she got paid for it and everything. Don't know which one my pa was.

**'Bama**

Your ma died?

**Nat**

No. She's probably still around. I was lyin' before. It's just easier, you know? To tell people you ain't got no folks. Here -- let me do that... You're makin' it bleed again.

*(He starts to wrap new dressing on  
'Bama's foot.)*

Nope. I just up an' left 'bout two years ago. Hopped a freight.

**'Bama**

All by yourself?

**Nat**

Yep.

**'Bama**

You got balls kid.

**Nat**

More balls then brains. Almost starved. Almost got beat to death. Met up with a gang of tramps. Well, they had their own ideas 'bout what I was good for you might say. That's when I met Billy.

**'Bama**

He good to you?

**Nat**

Now that's REALLY none of your business.

**'Bama**

Fair enough.

**Nat**

When Billy found me, I was in a ditch feelin' pretty sorry. My ma had this sayin': "rode hard an put up wet." Well I guess that was me. Rode hard and put up wet. There's a laugh. An' it was even rainin' -- well I wasn't exactly a purty picture if you get my drift.

**'Bama**

I reckon I do.

**Nat**

Billy prob'ly saved my life.

**'Bama**

That counts for a lot.

**Nat**

I s'pose. That should hold you for awhile.

*(He's finished the dressing, leans back, and lights a smoke.)*

**'Bama**

Ain't you kinda young for that?

**Nat**

After what I just told you, you worried about me smokin'?

**'Bama**

Sorry.

**Nat**

Your turn.

**'Bama**

OK. I guess we got a few things in common.

**Nat**

I figured.

**'Bama**

Oh?

**Nat**

Well, you didn't look too shocked or nothin. I tell a farmer that story -- somebody fresh on the road -- an he's ready to adopt me. You didn't bat an eye.

**'Bama**

It true?

**Nat**

Most of it. Sometime maybe I'll tell you the bad stuff. So, 'bout you?

**'Bama**

I runned off from the orphanage when I was twelve. Met somebody sorta like your Billy. Name was Dakota. We was together a long time.

**Nat**

How much like Billy?

**'Bama**

I couldn't rightly say. I don't know Billy.

**Nat**

No. I guess you don't. How long you together?

**'Bama**

Thirty-three years.

**Nat**

Shit! You with the same jocker thirty-three years? Hell, you wasn't no punk that long.

**'Bama**

*(laughing a little)*

No. I reckon I wasn't no punk no more. We called 'em gunsels back then. An' he wasn't no jocker either. We was just sorta -- partners after awhile.

**Nat**

Shit, you won't catch me with no fuckin' jocker in thirty years. Not with Billy for sure.

**'Bama**

Then I guess Billy <IT2>ain't<IT0> like Dakota.

**Nat**

I guess not. What happened to him?

**'Bama**

Don't want to talk about that.

**Nat**

Fair enough. Guess we're even again, huh?

**'Bama**

Yeah.

**Nat**

So what about Shakespeare? You finally decide to take on one for yourself?

**'Bama**

*(laughing again)*

Don't' you think Shakespeare's kinda old to be somebody's punk?

**Nat**

Yeah. But I was raised to damn polite to say so.

*(There is a new gleam in Nat's eye.)*

So you ain't got no boy of your own?

**'Bama**

No. Shakespeare an' me are partners. Even-up. You understand?

**Nat**

Yeah. I understand.

**'Bama**

Listen. I'm goin' down to the creek. Wash up the rest of these clothes.

**Nat**

I thought somebody told you to stay off that foot.

**'Bama**

Sometimes I don't hear so good either.

**Nat**

Mind if I tag along?

**'Bama**

It's a free jungle. You wanna grab that pack for me?

*(They are starting for the creek path.)*

**Nat**

Come on now. Lean on me. That's good. So you really never had a boy of your own, huh?

**'Bama**

Why in hell would I want one? Boys ain't nothin' but trouble.

**Nat**

Maybe so. Maybe not. Go on. Put your arm around my neck. I can hold you all right.

**'Bama**

I don't know 'bout that.

**Nat**

I do. Come on. Easy does it...

*(Their voices fade into the distance as the lights fade to black.)*

## Act I, Scene 3

*(It's late at night about a week later and the jungle is more crowded. Bama's sitting near the fire with his foot up. Shakespeare's near him, a book in his lap. On Bama's other side is Nat. On the other side of the fire is Billy, without jacket or tie, and a few sheets to the wind. Beside him is Dodger, a powerful man in his '30's with a distinct Brooklyn accent. Perched on the railroad ties, almost unseen in the shadows, is Lucky, a young black man dressed in amazingly tidy looking trousers, shirt, suspenders and collarless shirt. The group is all singing at the top of their lungs and passing around a jug of moonshine. All, that is, but Lucky, who remains aloof.)*

### 'Bama, Shakespeare, Nat, Billy & Dodger

*(singing -- badly)*

One sunny day in the month of May  
A jocker he come hiking.  
He come to a tree and "Ah!" says he,  
"This is just to my liking."

In the very same month on the very same day  
A Hoosier's son came hiking.  
Said the bum to the son, "Oh, will you come  
To the Big Rock Candy Mountains?"

There's the buzzing of the bees in the cigarette trees  
Near the soda water fountain  
At the lemonade springs where the bluebird sings  
On the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

Where once he come in the...  
The punk rolled up his....

*(It becomes immediately obvious that each of the singers has launched into a different verse.)*

### Billy

Naw! Shit, that ain't it.

**Dodger**

I don't think I know any more.

**Nat**

'Bama was right.

**Shakespeare**

Huh?

**Nat**

'Bama had the right verse. Go on. Sing it.

**'Bama**

Naw... I don't think I 'member all of it...

**Nat**

Sure ya do... Go on.

**Shakespeare**

*(passing him the jug)*

Here you go Caruso... Take another belt. It aids the memory...

**'Bama**

All right... Here goes:

*(sings)*

The punk rolled up his big blue eyes  
and said to the Jocker, "Sandy,  
I've hiked and hiked and wandered, too,  
But I ain't seen any candy.

I've hiked and hiked 'till my feet are sore  
I'll be God-damned if I hike any more..."  
Uh... something... something... Something else...  
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains

*(As he launches into the chorus,  
everyone but Lucky drunkenly joins in  
again.)*

**'Bama, Shakespeare, Nat, Billy & Dodger**

*(singing)*

There's the buzzin' of the bees in the cigarette trees  
Near the soda water fountain  
At the lemonade springs where the bluebird sings  
On the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

*(There's some bad harmonizing on the last line, then everyone breaks out in applause and whistles.)*

**'Bama**

Well 'fraid that 'bout does me in. How 'bout you Shakespeare?

**Shakespeare**

Aw, don't be an old fogey. I was just getting started.

**Dodger**

Well, you know, the old folks gotta get their rest...

**Shakespeare**

*(handing Dodger the jug)*

Here ya go, Dodger. Let's keep this party goin.'

**Dodger**

Here's mud in your eye.

*('Bama's gotten up, but he just stands there, uncertain.)*

**Shakespeare**

Listen, 'Bama, you want to hit the hay, it's fine. Probably better for your foot anyway.  
Get a little shut eye.

**'Bama**

*(sitting down again)*

Naw. I guess I ain't that tired.

**Dodger**

*(handing 'Bama the jug)*

Over to you, 'Bama Boy. Warm up the insides a little. Whacha been readin'  
Shakespeare?

**Shakespeare**

Oh, nothin'

**Dodger**

Come on... Let's see... Lee's Miserables?

**Shakespeare**

Yeah. Close enough anyhow.

**Dodger**

What's it about?

**Shakespeare**

Oh, just a bunch of French guys. See, they...

**Billy**

*(who has been swigging from his own bottle and is by now pretty sodden)*

Shit. One more dead soldier.

*(He throws the bottle into the fire.)*

Go get me another one, Nat.

**Nat**

Ain't you had enough?

**Billy**

You best not start up, boy.

**Nat**

All right... All right... I'm gettin' it.

*(Nat goes to get another bottle from the boxcar.)*

**Billy**

Damn right you're gettin' it.

**Dodger**

So how long's it been, 'Bama?

**'Bama**

Hell, I don't know? Where was we... Oregon?

**Dodger**

Maybe... It was that lumber camp...

**'Bama**

All I remember is the meat they was givin' us. You 'member?

**Dodger**

Remember! Hell, that shit was so green the rats wouldn't even touch it.

**'Bama**

Even the bread had some kinda little critters in it...

**Dodger**

No... It was just up from San Jose. I remember, 'cause right after that I went into 'Frisco and blew my whole wad on a week with a certain lady friend of mine...

**Shakespeare**

Just how friendly was she?

**Dodger**

At two bucks a night she was friendly as I wanted. Damn -- she was a looker too.

**Nat**

*(Returning, he fairly throws the bottle at  
Billy, and goes back to sit near 'Bama.)*

Here.

**'Bama**

I remember now. You're right. It was California. Dakota an' me tagged up to Frisco with you when they let us go. I think you introduced us to the little lady. She was right purty at that.

**Dodger**

Yep. Almost as purty as Shakespeare here.

*(He winks at 'Bama.)*

**Shakespeare**

Aw, shit. Give me a break.

**Dodger**

Ten years you think?

**'Bama**

Yeah. At least. Gotta be before '25 'cause I'm pretty sure Dakota was still wearin' that God-damned Bowler.

**Dodger**

Hell yes. I don't think he went anywhere without it.

**'Bama**

Half the time I swear he slept in it.

**Billy**

An' what in hell's wrong with a bowler?

**Dodger**

No offense, Mister. I'm sure they was right stylish hats.

**Shakespeare**

In Nineteen-four.

*(Dodger, Shakespeare, 'Bama and Nat burst into gales of drunken laughter. Billy, unamused, takes another belt.)*

**Dodger**

So where *is* Dakota? Last I heard, you two was headed out to work harvest.

**'Bama**

Uh... Dakota ain't with me no more.

**Dodger**

No kiddin'?

*(Suddenly unsure if he's touched on a ticklish subject...)*

What... I mean... uh... So he settle down or what?

**Shakespeare**

Uh... Dakota died, Dodger.

**Dodger**

Aw shit, I'm sorry. When did...

**Shakespeare**

About a year ago I guess.

**Dodger**

Hell, that's rough' Bama. I'm real sorry. Jesus. You know, I never saw any two people tighter than the two of you. Must have been awful rough.

**'Bama**

(*very quiet*)

Yeah. It was.

(*Suddenly, it seems like 'Bama's breathing a little too hard...*)

**Dodger**

'Bama? You OK? Jesus... You're looking kinda white... That foot acting up?

**Shakespeare**

Yeah. That's probably it. Gettin' bad again? Maybe we should pack it in. What do you say, Bama?

**'Bama**

No. I'm fine. Gimme another swig of that will ya?

**Dodger**

Yeah. Sure. Here you go.

**Billy**

Yeah. Time to pack it in. Come on, boy.

**Nat**

You go on. I'll be there directly.

**Billy**

*(Staggering over behind Nat, and clumsily pulling Nat to his feet. In his own drunken way, he may even be trying to be romantic.)*

Naw. Come on now. I think you an' me got some business over in our own neck of the woods...

**Nat**

*(trying to disengage)*

Really. I'm OK here. I ain't sleepy yet. You go on ahead.

**Billy**

*(Behind Nat, he nuzzles the back of Nat's neck.)*

Who said shit about sleepin'? I gotta meet some people later, but I think maybe we got us some better things than sleepin' we can be doin' in the meantime...

**Nat**

Billy...

**Shakespeare**

Listen, Billy, maybe...

**'Bama**

*(quietly)*

This ain't our business, Shakespeare.

**Billy**

*(He hangs one arm around Nat's neck as he lewdly gropes inside Nat's overalls with the other.)*

Come on, Boy, you make Billy feel real good now. Maybe make you feel purty damn good too...

**Nat**

*(pushing Billy off)*

God damn it, stop pawin' me. I said I'll be along.

**Billy**

*(obviously wounded)*

Well fuck you. Just fuckin'... fuck you then. Ain't nothin' you got I can't get better someplace else. You hear me? You just watch. You just fuckin' watch.

*(to Lucky)*

Hey nigger! Yeah, that's right, you boy.

*(He's staggering over to where Lucky is perched.)*

**Lucky**

*(doesn't move, his voice is even, unperturbed)*

And what can I do for you?

**Billy**

I know you. You know that? You sit yourself up there in the dark all you want, but I know you.

**Lucky**

I reckon you do.

**Billy**

Columbia River Timber Camp last year. You remember?

**Lucky**

I remember.

**Billy**

*(to the group)*

Hell, this boy musta done half the camp. Four bits a throw.

*(shouting)*

Line forms to the right! Ain't that right, boy?

**'Bama**

Listen, Billy...

**Billy**

Ain't that right, boy?

**'Bama**

(*rising*)

Billy, I think you...

**Lucky**

Yes sir. Price has gone up since then, but otherwise your memory's pretty accurate.

**Billy**

Damn straight.

(*He's digging in his pocket.*)

Here's your two bits. Over there... You an' me... We'll show this little shit what's what...

**Lucky**

'Fraid the price has gone up, like I said.

**Billy**

Yeah. O.K. How much?

**Lucky**

Twenty five bucks.

**Billy**

What... Aw shit. Who you kiddin'? Come on... Take your two bits and get your butt...

(*He takes Lucky by the arm.*)

**Lucky**

(*quiet but deadly*)

You take that hand off of me 'less you want to lose it.

**Billy**

Don't you get uppity with me, nigger... You move your ass like I tell you...

(*Before Billy's quite sure what's happened, Lucky has a knife at his throat.*)

**Lucky**

(*with amazing calm*)

Let me make myself clear. Twenty five dollars ain't half enough to roll over for a drunk-ass piece of shit like you. I don't need a case of the clap near that bad.

*(He gives a short laugh.)*

An, by the way, it's Mr. Nigger to you.

*(He pushes Billy backward, who lands comically on his butt. Lucky sits, cleaning his nails with his blade. Billy gets to his feet.)*

**Billy**

You gonna regret that, boy. You won't be so high and mighty some night without that pig sticker. You hear me? You gonna fuckin' wish you never seen me.

**Lucky**

Already do.

**Billy**

*(laughing to cover)*

Shit, who want's your nasty black ass anyway? Twenty five dollars? Hell, you ain't worth twenty five cents.

*(He's got it together now.)*

I got me some people to meet. Important people. Ain't got time for you anyhow. Deal with you later. But I'll be back directly. An' I'll be a little sobered up by then. An' if you know what's good for you -- Mr. Nigger -- you won't be anywhere 'round when I get back. An' boy. Boy!

**Nat**

Yeah.

**Billy**

You know where you better be when I get back, don't you?

**Nat**

Yeah.

**Billy**

Yeah. 'Cause I ain't in no mood for no bullshit.

**Nat**

Yessir.

**Billy**

Evenin' gentlemen.

(*He exits DL.*)

**Dodger**

Now there's a piece of work.

**'Nat**

Aw, he's all right when he ain't liquored-up.

**Dodger**

If you say so.

**Nat**

Uh... Listen, 'Bama... There's somethin' I gotta talk to you 'bout...

**'Bama**

Yeah?

**Nat**

Well, more like somethin' I gotta show you.

**'Bama**

Yeah. OK. Bring it on out.

**Nat**

No. I mean it's kinda personal, you know? Could you come on over? It'll only take a minute.

**'Bama**

I guess. OK. Do me good to stretch my legs a mite anyway.

**Shakespeare**

You be careful on that foot now. You want help?

**Nat**

I'll help him. I know how. Come on.

**Dodger**

Don't worry, I'll take care of Shakespeare.

**'Bama**

Yeah. OK.

('Bama and Nat exit into the box car.  
Dodger and Shakespeare continue to  
talk quietly, but we can't quite hear.)

**'Bama**

So what am I s'posed to see?

**Nat**

Nothin'

**'Bama**

Then what?

**Nat**

Dodger & Shakespeare seem to be gettin along good.

**'Bama**

(looking at Dodger & Shakespeare  
sitting close and talking quietly)

Yeah. You got another one of them bottles up here?

**Nat**

Yeah. Sure.

(He gets one. They both swig.)

**'Bama**

So you drag me up here to talk about Dodger & Shakespeare?

**Nat**

No.

**'Bama**

Well what, then? Go on.

**Nat**

I think... I'm in trouble.

**'Bama**

What kinda trouble? You pregnant?

**Nat**

Come on. I'm serious, 'Bama. I'm really in trouble.

**'Bama**

Okay.

**Nat**

Bad trouble. See I...

**'Bama**

Wait a minute. Shouldn't you maybe be talkin' to Billy 'bout this?

**Nat**

I can't...

*(There is a pause.)*

**'Bama**

O.K. Go on then.

**Nat**

Well it's Billy, see... He's got this job all set up. See, he knows a couple of the guys who run the payroll for the UP...

**'Bama**

Wait a minute there.

**Nat**

No. I gotta tell you. See, the pay comes in all in greenbacks, an' Billy an' these men are gonna be waitin...

**'Bama**

Huh-uh. I don't want to know 'bout any of this. You understand? You don't tell me nothin' more 'bout what they're gonna do. Some things ain't healthy to hear about.

**Nat**

Ain't nobody gonna get hurt or nothin.

**'Bama**

Doesn't matter. I still...

**Nat**

I told somebody.

**'Bama**

What?

**Nat**

I didn't mean to, you know. But if Billy finds out, he'll kill me. You seen him. He will. You seen what he's like when he's mad.

**'Bama**

Whoa, now. Just slow down...

**Nat**

See, he sent me into town this mornin' to find Red. That's one of the payroll men. An he told me how I'd know him an' 'bout his red hair, an' what he'd be wearin' an' all. See, he said it wasn't no good for him to be seen 'round there too much, talkin' to them, you know? So anyway, I go up to Red like Billy's ask me to, an' I ask him his name, an' when he says "Red" I start to tell him...

**'Bama**

I don't want to know what you told him.

**Nat**

OK. But I told him everything I was supposed to. OK? But then he starts askin' questions, you know? Stuff I thought he shoulda knowed about. An' I answer him all right, an' I tell him everything. You understand? Everything. But then as I'm leavin' somethin' ain't sounded right. You know? It just didn't feel like it should. So I grab one of the men, an' I play dumb and I ask him if Red is the man doin' the hirin'... Bama...

He's a Pinkerton man. You get it? He's a bull. A Pinkerton agent.

**'Bama**

Aw shit.

**Nat**

That's what the man told me. He's a security dick. An' his name's Red. I mean shit, how was I to know there was two of 'em? An both of 'em with red hair! I spilled everything to him. What am I gonna do? Billy's been workin' this whole thing up for months. It's all he talks about. I tell him I gone an' blowed up the whole thing he's gonna kill me. I mean it. An' if I don't tell him...

**'Bama**

It was just a mistake. You didn't mean to do nothin'...

**Nat**

You think that's gonna make a hell of a big difference?

**'Bama**

No.

**Nat**

So what do I do?

**'Bama**

I dunno. You gotta tell him. You can't let him walk right into a load of Pinkertons. Not 'less you want him killed.

**Nat**

An' when I tell him?

**'Bama**

Well, I'd guess I'd duck if I was you.

**Nat**

He'll do somethin' bad to me 'Bama. I mean it. Somethin' real bad. He come at me with a broke bottle once. He gets mad enough, he'll... Shit, I don't know what he'll do, but I tell you I ain't gonna be walkin' the next day. 'Bama, I'm scared...

*(Nat is at the point of sobbing. 'Bama*

*just reaches over and holds him till he calms down a little.)*

**'Bama**

You still gotta tell him.

**Nat**

Yeah. I know.

**'Bama**

I can't do it for you.

**Nat**

I know.

**'Bama**

What goes on between a Jocker an' his boy -- that's private. Ain't nothin' for me to be stickin' my nose in. You understand?

**Nat**

Yeah.

**'Bama**

*(He takes a deep breath.)*

But things get bad -- I mean real bad -- bad like you think he's really gonna cut you up or somethin' -- you come to me.

**Nat**

You mean it?

**'Bama**

Yeah. He just take a whack or two at you, that's between y'all. But If he does somethin' really crazy, I mean really hurt-you-bad crazy, I'll stop him. OK? You understand?

**Nat**

You promise, 'Bama?

**'Bama**

Yeah. I promise.

**Nat**

Just sit here with me? Just for a minute?

**'Bama**

Yeah. Sure. Just take it easy.

*(Nat puts his head down on 'Bama's shoulder. 'Bama looks off toward the fire where Shakespeare and Dodger are still talking.)*

**Dodger**

You never met Dakota?

**Shakespeare**

No. Never. He was gone when I met 'Bama.

**Dodger**

They were a hell of a pair all right.

**Shakespeare**

How long you know them?

**Dodger**

Off and on for two or three years maybe. They were just real good people, you know?

**Shakespeare**

Yeah. I know 'Bama is.

**Dodger**

And Dakota took care of him. I mean, they'd been together a hell of a long time even back then, but anybody mess with them and believe me, there was hell to pay.

**Shakespeare**

Damn. 'Bama's always so calm now...

**Dodger**

No, I don't mean 'Bama -- it was Dakota looking out for him. I mean like he was his own kid. Dakota musta been pushin' sixty by then, but that man was strong as an ox. I remember on the way down from Cheyenne one winter, there were these three railroad bulls. Pinkertons, you know? Well, they've come through the freight we was all on, one's got a rifle and the other two have clubs, and they're beatin' the living shit out of every 'bo they find and pitchin' them off the train -- and it's doin about fifty miles an hour. I mean, you know most of those poor bastards were dead before they hit the ground. Well, they drop down into the boxcar about five of us was in, and they grab some guy on the other end of the car and club him. I mean they just keep on clubbin' him 'till he stops screamin'. Then they yank open the door and roll him out -- and that's when one of them goes for 'Bama. Clubs 'Bama Boy right on the head. Shit, all hell broke loose. Dakota comes at those coppers like he's crazy or somethin. They start to go for him, but before they know what's happened, he's taken a club off one of them, an cracked his head open. I mean wide open. His brains were running out you know?. The other one shoots at him, but it just takes off part of Dakota's shoulder. Well, Dakota just grabs him and pitches the guy out the door. The third one, well you never seen anybody beat it out the roof of a box car so fast. But that's just how Dakota was. Sweetest guy in the world unless you messed around with 'Bama Boy. That's what he always called him, "His 'Bama Boy." Never met anybody else tight like the two of them. Musta hit him real hard when he died.

**Shakespeare**

Yeah.

**Dodger**

You were there?

**Shakespeare**

No. I came a few weeks later.

**Dodger**

Hell, they'd been partners for years. Must have been like losing an arm or something.

**Shakespeare**

Worse.

**Dodger**

Huh?

**Shakespeare**

'Bama took it so hard it was... scares me sometimes.

**Dodger**

How do you mean?

**Shakespeare**

When I met him -- hell, I didn't exactly meet him, I tripped over him -- I mean literally.  
He was lying there and        I tripped over him. I thought he was dead.

**Dodger**

He was sick or something?

**Shakespeare**

Near as I could tell, he hadn't eaten anything in about two weeks since Dakota'd died.  
Well, not unless you can call Jim Beam eating.

**Dodger**

Hell, I didn't even know Bama was a boozer.

**Shakespeare**

He's not. Not more than anybody else. It was just... then.

**Dodger**

At least he snapped out of it.

**Shakespeare**

Yeah. After a while.

**Dodger**

How'd you two start traveling together?

**Shakespeare**

Well, when I found him, he wasn't exactly in a condition to take care of himself, so I just got him some food and stuff, you know, and cleaned him up a bit.

**Dodger**

He was lucky it was you. Lots out there woulda just rolled him.

**Shakespeare**

Actually, somebody had. He didn't have anything on him but his clothes. Well, after he got better, we just sort of tagged along together. I mean, I was green as all get out. Still am I guess. He sorta showed me the ropes. Hell, he taught me how to snag a freight without gettin' myself killed. He's kept me fed. I've been real lucky he was with me. Guess it was his way of thanking me for helping him out at first.

**Dodger**

Me. I travel alone. Never had a partner. Got a wife, but she's back in New York. I send back money when I can. You're lucky.

**Shakespeare**

Yeah. I am. 'Bama's... Well... Bama's not like anybody else. He just gets... I don't know... funny sometimes. That's why I don't talk about Dakota much. You saw how quiet he got.

**Dodger**

Sorry. Didn't mean to bring up a bad subject.

**Shakespeare**

No... Hell, you didn't know. Glad you did. I've always wanted to hear about Dakota. 'Bama doesn't talk about him. I mean never.

**Dodger**

Hell, I got pictures if you want.

**Shakespeare**

Of Dakota?

**Dodger**

Yeah. Me and 'Bama and Dakota when we was traveling together. We stopped and saw my sister up in Albany. She took 'em. You wanna see?

**Shakespeare**

Sure.

**Dodger**

Come on. Got them in the shack.

*(Shakespeare stands, but starts to weave.*

Steady buddy.

**Shakespeare**

*(grinning)*

Damn. Little too much moonshine I think.

**Dodger**

I got you. Come on.

*(His arm around Dodger's shoulder,  
Shakespeare and Dodger exit D. L  
'Bama is watching them go. 'Bama rises  
and takes another long pull from the  
bottle.)*

**Nat**

*(sleepily)*

'Bama?

**'Bama**

You'll be OK. Just get on to bed now. You need me, I'm close enough.

**Nat**

Thanks 'Bama.

**'Bama**

Yeah. Sure.

*(Bama leaves the boxcar and walks to  
where Shakespeare and Dodger exited,  
looking after them, obviously upset.  
'Lucky, is lying back on the railroad ties,  
looking up at the stars. He calls out.)*

**Lucky**

You lose something, Mister?

**'Bama**

Yeah. Naw. Hell, I don't know.

*(He takes another long swig from the bottle.)*

**Lucky**

Your friend's down that way.

**'Bama**

Yeah. I saw. Maybe I better...

*('Bama starts off L where Shakespeare disappeared, seems to think better of it and returns to the campfire -- then looks off again.)*

**Lucky**

*(coming down to join 'Bama)*

You left alone tonight?

**'Bama**

Yeah. Looks like. Maybe.

*(Bama takes another swig.)*

**Lucky**

You want some company? Other than that stuff?

**'Bama**

Yeah. I want Shakespeare... Shit!

*(Suddenly, violently, he kicks over a crate near the fire.)*

Damn it! Fuck. Don't mean nothin... I just drunk too much.

**Lucky**

Looks like maybe you have.

**'Bama**

Sorry.

**Lucky**

You want to sit down? Hell, maybe you better lie down. Looks like your foot's bleeding. Come on. Lucky'll get you tucked in.

**'Bama**

'Fraid I ain't in the market for what you're sellin', son. Hell, can't afford no twenty-five dollars even if I were. Sorry.

**Lucky**

Right now, I'm just looking to get you inside in one piece. Come on. Now later, when you sober up, I'll be more than happy to talk economics with you... Hell, I ain't never got twenty-five dollars in my life. Take it easy now. We'll get you inside. That's a good boy.

*(Lucky gets 'Bama inside the tent, then goes to the fire and sits, warming himself. On the other side of the stage, Dodger has entered from DL.)*

**Dodger**

Oh. Hello.

**Lucky**

Hello yourself. Where's your friend? Somebody looking for him.

**Dodger**

Oh, he's down at the tent looking at pictures.

**Lucky**

Pictures, huh?

**Dodger**

Yeah. Just forgot my jug. Oh. There it is.

*(He takes a swig, then offers it to Lucky.)*

Uh... you want a chug?

**Lucky**

Don't mind if I do.

**Dodger**

I'm kinda smashed.

**Lucky**

Seems to be going around.

*(Dodger takes a step as if to go, then hesitates, looking sideways at Lucky, obviously undecided...)*

**Lucky**

Uh... How 'bout another swig? You mind?

**Dodger**

Naw. Here you go.

*(They both drink in silence for a moment.)*

Should get back to the kid. Just left him sitting down there.

**Lucky**

Nice guy, huh?

**Dodger**

Yep. Real nice.

*(There's another pause. Dodger should leave -- but doesn't.)*

Damn. I wish...

**Lucky**

What?

**Dodger**

Nothin'

**Lucky**

OK.

**Dodger**

I just wish... Shit. It's hard, you know.

**Lucky**

What?

**Dodger**

Bein' on the road.

**Lucky**

Don't I know.

**Dodger**

By yourself, I mean.

**Lucky**

Yeah. I think I get the drift.

**Dodger**

I just get... I just wish I had me a partner. You know, like Shakespeare and 'Bama. You know?

**Lucky**

You can always take on a preshun.

**Dodger**

A what?

**Lucky**

An apprentice. You know -- like the kid that was sitting over here.

**Dodger**

I wouldn't do that to a kid. Hell, everybody knows what the tramp's got him around for. I ain't like that.

**Lucky**

Just stick to the fairer sex, huh? Must get lonely. Ain't many women out here.

**Dodger**

You ain't just a kidding. Damn. I haven't seen a woman in... Doesn't matter. And hell, I don't care what other people do -- you know. But that's a kid. He ought to be home with his folks.

**Lucky**

Well, men get kinda randy out here. As I'm sure you know. Most of them take whatever they can get.

**Dodger**

Yeah. I know.

**Lucky**

And you?

**Dodger**

Yeah. Sure. Hell, I been in the lumber camps. Two hundred guys, and you don't see the outside of a forest for six months... eight months. Everybody kinda gets that way. Shit, there was times -- with buddies, you know. I ain't ashamed of it. Hell, it's better than watchin' them line up for...

**Lucky**

*(quietly)*

Whores like me?

**Dodger**

I didn't mean...

**Lucky**

Yes you did. We been goin' along real well here. Real honest. No need to start lyin' now.

**Dodger**

OK yeah. Whores. But you ain't bad.

**Lucky**

Thanks.

**Dodger**

No, Really. Hell, I'd probably sooner take you on than some of them women whores they had up in Oregon. Damn, those were some hard lookin' babes. Believe me. An every one of 'em's... you know... got something. You know?

**Lucky**

Occupational hazard.

**Dodger**

You got...

**Lucky**

Nope. I don't. In case it matters to you.

**Dodger**

Naw. I mean...

**Lucky**

Well, after tonight, it's not exactly a secret what I do for a living. So cards on the table buddy, if you find yourself -- in need, shall we say -- and got no where else to go... That's what I'm here for.

**Dodger**

Yeah. I know.

**Lucky**

You aren't exactly running the other way.

**Dodger**

No.

**Lucky**

So?

**Dodger**

Listen, I'd be lying if I said it hadn't crossed my mind...

**Lucky**

No.

**Dodger**

But it just ain't the same with a man. Not like a woman, you know?

**Lucky**

*(standing)*

Then we'll just forget it. It's been nice talking with you. OK? Thanks for the snort.

**Dodger**

It's just I get so lonely sometimes. I mean, yeah, I get horny too, but mostly I just get lonely, you know... Just wanna feel somebody... next to me.

**Lucky.**

I know. It's all right. Nothing to be embarrassed about. Everybody needs to feel somebody close now and then.

*(Gently he presses his body against Dodger's back, gently rubbing Dodger's shoulders.)*

**Dodger**

Yeah.

**Lucky**

*(He slides his arms around Dodger's sides, sliding a hand inside his shirt.)*

I'll stop if it doesn't feel good.

**Dodger**

It feels good. I'm not even sure I want it to, but it feels good.

**Lucky**

I'm good at what I do.

**Dodger**

Yeah. I guess you are.

*(Turns around, holding Lucky gently by the arms.)*

Look, I ain't got no twenty-five dollars.

**Lucky**

That was just bullshit. It's eight bits. Or if you ain't got that, a couple cans of beans or somethin' will do as good.

**Dodger**

*(reaching in his pocket)*

Eight bits. Eight bits is just about what I got. That right?

**Lucky**

Perfect.

**Dodger**

Only... I ain't gonna kiss you. I just can't do that with a guy, you know?

**Lucky**

It's your eight bits, you call the shots.

**Dodger**

You got a tent?

**Lucky**

Just down there. Follow me.

**Dodger**

Yeah? Yeah. OK.

*(Together, they disappear down the creek path. Billy enters from DL just in time to see them go, and heads for the boxcar.)*

**Billy**

Boy! You ready like I told you?

*(picking up a revolver)*

Hell, I'd go out and shoot me a nigger, but I'm just in too good a mood. Hey, kid!

**Nat**

*(emerging from the shadows)*

Yeah?

**Billy**

Damn, you still dressed? Kick them breeches off, boy. Billy's home -- happy an' horny.

**Nat**

Listen, Billy, I gotta talk to you.

**Billy**

Later. Nothin' like puttin' the finishin' touches on a job to get my juices a-flowin'.  
*(He is undressing.)*

Come on now. You want a little lovin'-up, don't ya?

**Nat**

Sure, Billy. It's just...

**Billy**

*(coming up behind Nat and rubbing his crotch on Nat's ass as he unhooks Nat's suspenders)*

Yes sir. This gonna feel real fine. You just get down there and let Billy-boy make you feel real good...

**Nat**

Please, Billy. Just let me talk for a second.

**Billy**

I done told you, talk ain't what I need right now.

**Nat**

But you got to...

**Billy**

I don't got to do nothin. Now get them overalls off and get down there like I told you.

**Nat**

Not now Billy! Would you listen to me?

**Billy**

Don't make me mad now, boy. Come here.

*(Billy grabs Nat again, but Nat pushes him away -- hard.)*

**Nat**

Stop it! You hear me? Just stop it. I got to...

*(But Billy backhands Nat across the face -- hard enough to send him sprawling.)*

**Billy**

You don't go tellin' me what to do! You hear me? Now I ain't gonna tell you again. Get them pants off and get down on your belly or you gonna see stars, little man! Well? You got somethin' to say?

**Nat**

*(Getting up slowly, he faces Billy.)*

No. I guess I ain't got nothin else to say. Nothin.

*(He drops his overalls and steps out of them, naked.)*

That what you want?

**Billy**

That's a start.

*(Nat slowly turns his back to Billy, an odd, cold expression on his face.)*

**Nat**

I reckon that's more what you got in mind. That's really all you want from me, ain't it?

**Billy**

*(unbuttoning his union suit)*

That's all. Now was that so all-fired hard? Why you gotta go an' get me riled? Huh?

**Nat**

Sorry, Billy. Won't happen again. I promise. Never again.

**Billy**

Go on. Get on back there.

**Nat**

*(moving out of sight, further into the boxcar, Billy following)*

Whatever you say, Billy.

*(The stage is empty for a moment, and then Shakespeare enters from DL.)*

**Shakespeare**

'Bama? You still awake? Hey, Bama, you gotta see these pictures...

*('Bama staggers out of the tent, bottle in*

*hand. He looks like hell. His shirt's gone, he's barefoot, and it looks like he may have been crying. The bottle he got from Nat is nearly empty by now. He stands in the shadows, Shakespeare at a distance.)*

**'Bama**

Shakespeare? That you?

**Shakespeare**

You still up?

**'Bama**

Shakespeare? You goin' with him?

**Shakespeare**

Dodger? Damn, you gotta see... (these pictures...)

**'Bama**

You... You ain't goin' with him?

**Shakespeare**

Goin' where? 'Bama, what are you...

**'Bama**

See, if you really was... I don't think I could...

**Shakespeare**

'Bama?

**'Bama**

Oh God. You really here Shakespeare... I didn't think you was gonna... Aw shit...

*(He stumbles toward Shakespeare, nearly falling on him. He sinks to his knees, wrapping his arms around Shakespeare who stands, bewildered. 'Bama is choking -- clutching Shakespeare with all his might. He is wild, almost violent.)*

Shit, Shakespeare... Jesus...

**Shakespeare**

"Bama... What... It's OK... What's the matter?..."

**'Bama**

Jesus, you come back. Don't never leave me, baby. Please... Don't never...

**Shakespeare**

I'm here. I'm not going anywhere...

**'Bama**

I thought you was gone. Christ, I just knowed you'd gone an...

*(By now, 'Bama has dissolved into convulsive sobs.)*

**Shakespeare**

*(getting on his knees to hold 'Bama)*

Where would I go? Come on, 'Bama...

**'Bama**

Just don't never leave me? Promise? Not for nothin... I can't... I ain't got nothin' if you leave me...

**Shakespeare**

*(trying to pull 'Bama up to a standing position)*

Never. I promise. OK?

**'Bama**

*(breaking away violently)*

God damn it... Why do I... Shit, it's just that... I can't... I just fuckin' can't...

*(He turns to Shakespeare again, gasping, tears streaming down his face.)*

Please baby?

**Shakespeare**

Come on, 'Bama, I'm not going...

**'Bama**

Really? Fer sure? I can't...

*(Shakespeare takes 'Bama's head and gently kisses him on the mouth.)*

**Shakespeare**

Don't be a fool. I love you. You know I do. I'm here. It's OK.

**'Bama**

No foolin?

**Shakespeare**

No foolin. I promise.

**'Bama**

*(Steps back, wobbling, but on his own.)*

Make love to me? Please?

**Shakespeare**

Whatever you want... 'Bama Boy.

*(Shakespeare and 'Bama kiss again, gently.)*

Whatever you want. Always.

*(Again they kiss. The lights fade to black.)*

## **Act II, Scene 1**

*(The next day, around twilight. As the scene progresses, the sky will get progressively darker. Billy & Nat are discovered in their living space. Nat is in his usual attire, sitting passively, almost detached. Billy nervously gets into a coat with turned up collar, a large hat, etc. trying to disguise himself for the evening's events.)*

**Billy**

Shit. You sure Red ain't comin'?

**Nat**

*(absently lookin out the entrance)*

Not since two minutes ago when you asked the last time.

**Billy**

Shit. Where is that son-of-a-bitch? He shoulda been here an hour ago.

**Nat**

Maybe he ain't comin'.

**Billy**

Damn his hide... Musta turned chicken-shit. An' we need the extra man. The whole thing's lots more risky with just Al 'an me.

**Nat**

Maybe you oughta just forget it.

**Billy**

Forget it? You plum crazy, boy? Ain't I been workin on this thing since Denver? Hell, we ain't got a red cent nohow. You better hope this job pulls off right, or we ain't gonna have nothin' to eat 'cept them rats you like so much. You hear somethin'? That Red?

**Nat**

No. Ain't nothin.

**Billy**

You could come an' do it if you weren't so damn puny. We gotta learn you to drive a car. All he's gotta do is come up from behind after I stop the truck, jump in, 'an take off. I give the driver just a little tap on the head, we leave him be, bag up the greenbacks, an' we're on easy street. No muss, no fuss, no bother.

*(Billy is shoving his revolver into the waistband of his pants.)*

**Nat**

If there ain't' gonna be no bother, then what's that thing for?

**Billy**

Gotta always be prepared for complications, boy. Don't matter none if you're sellin' Bibles or blowin' safes. Always gotta be prepared for complications. Shit. It's time. We just gonna have to do this without him.

**Nat**

When you be back?

**Billy**

No more than a hour. You be sure everything's packed up ready to travel. After, we won't be wantin' to stick around no longer than we gotta. You hear now? You be ready?

**Nat**

Yes sir.

**Billy**

Good boy. Now if Red gets here, you tell him this: We two miles up the Black Creek road. There's only one man on the truck. I act like I'm hurt an' when the driver gets up to help me off the road, that's when Red jumps in. It's real simple. Real easy. They don't expect nobody knows payroll comin' in on an' old timber truck.

**Nat**

Yeah. I know.

**Billy**

Yeah, well here's what Red don't know. You make sure you get this straight: Al's got an extra set of the keys made up in case the driver takes 'em out with him. They're hid right under the seat by the driver's side door. You got that now?

**Nat**

Keys under the seat by the driver's door.

**Billy**

Yeah. You tell him that if he gets here. An' tell him to move his ass.

**Nat**

If he gets here.

**Billy**

You all right, boy? You been actin' a mite peculiar. You ain't comin' down with somethin'?

**Nat**

I'm fine. You go on.

**Billy**

One hour. You be ready now.

**Nat**

I will.

*(Billy pulls his hat low and leaves, exiting out the DL path. Nat watches him go, then turns and sits again in the semi-darkness of the old boxcar, staring straight ahead. Lucky and Dodger are coming up the creek path. Both are wet, wearing only workboots with old blankets wrapped around their waists.)*

**Dodger**

Damn! I'm gonna freeze my nuts off.

**Lucky**

Sun goes down around here, it starts to get cold. We should of come up earlier.

**Dodger**

What the hell. I needed that. I'm all wrinkled up like an old prune.

**Lucky**

Well, what do you expect? We been in that creek all afternoon.

**Dodger**

Don't know what's the matter with me. I shoulda been up in town tryin' to get on the work list. Aw, fuck it. Only live once, right? I had a real good day. Real good day. Ya know?

**Lucky**

Yeah. Me too.

**Dodger**

Night wasn't half bad either.

**Lucky**

We aim to please.

**Dodger**

*(Comes up behind him and gives him a squeeze)*

You sure as hell do that. Damn.

**Lucky**

Watch out. One more squeeze like that 'an I'll have to add fifty cents to your bill.

**Dodger**

*(Giving Lucky another squeeze, his hands wandering a bit.)*

An how much is this gonna cost me?

**Lucky**

Oh, I'm just runnin' you a tab. Come on now. Unwind. I gotta get dressed.

**Dodger**

What's your rush?

**Lucky**

Gotta get dressed.

**Dodger**

Not as far as I'm concerned.

**Lucky**

*(Slipping into his work clothes which are  
beside the fire.)*

Best cool off now. Some of us gotta work for a living.

**Dodger**

Oh.

**Lucky**

Oh? Oh what?

**Dodger**

I was just hopin' we could... Never mind.

**Lucky**

Look now, buddy: a man's gotta eat, right? An' unless you got more than that buck sixty-five I found in your pants last night, I best not be lookin' to you for no sugar daddy. You catch my drift?

**Dodger**

Yeah.

**Lucky**

No. I'm serious. You understand? This ain't personal. I had a real good time with you -- I mean all day and everything, not just last night. But I gotta tend to business, 'cause this particular black ass has no intention of starving out here in the middle of hell and gone.

**Dodger**

Yeah. Fair enough. But...

**Lucky**

But what?

**Dodger**

Nothing. Guess you'll be all night?

**Lucky**

Probably not. Ain't nothin' but a bunk house out at the rail head. No privacy or nothin'. Whatever sales I got to make, I'll likely be makin' out back of the cook house, or in the woods or somethin. Not likely I'll be bedding down for the night.

**Dodger**

Then maybe tonight...

**Lucky**

It's still eight bits, Dodger.

**Dodger**

Yeah. Sure.

**Lucky**

An I can't say when I might be back here. All depends on business. You know?

**Dodger**

Anybody ever pay you in advance?

**Lucky**

That's not exactly the way it works.

**Dodger**

Well here then.

*(He picks up his trousers, pulls some coins out of his pocket and presses them into Lucky's hand.)*

Advance payment. For tonight.

**Lucky**

I could just take off with it. Live high in Mexico.

**Dodger**

I trust you.

**Lucky**

*(grinning)*

More the fool you.

**Dodger**

Nope. Business is business. Just call it insurance. You gotta come back now. You already got my eight bits.

**Lucky**

You can bank on it.

*(They stand staring at each other for a moment, obviously not quite ready to leave each other. Lucky is dressed, Dodger's just wrapped in the blanket like an Indian.)*

Uh... Gettin' cold. You better get some clothes on.

**Dodger**

Yeah. I better. See you tonight

**Lucky**

Wish me luck.

**Dodger**

Uh... Yeah...

*(Lucky is gone DL. Dodger just stares after him. Then he hears a voice -- Nat has come up behind him.)*

**Nat**

Hey Sitting Bull...

**Dodger**

Huh? Oh, it's you.

**Nat**

Eight bits? Damn! Can I bring 'round your car Mr. Rockefeller, sir?

**Dodger**

Aw, shut up.

*(Dodger grabs his clothes from near the fire and heads off. Nat watches him go,*

*then follows to make sure he's out of sight. Deliberately, he walks over to the creek path, making sure nobody's around. Then he walks over to 'Bama's tent. He stands, undecided for a moment, starts to leave and then comes back, obviously agitated about something. Finally, he takes a deep breath and crouches near the entrance to the tent.)*

**Nat**

"Bama? 'Bama, you in there?

**'Bama**

*(sleepily)*

Shakespeare?

**Nat**

Naw. It's me. Nat. You asleep?

**'Bama**

No.

**Nat**

Yeah. You was. Sorry. I didn't know you was takin' a nap.

**'Bama**

*(emerging, dressed but groggy.)*

No problem. My foot's just kinda been worse today. Thought maybe if I lied down for a bit...

**Nat**

Lemme see.

*(Nat helps Bama to sit on a crate and prop his foot up. Nat unwinds the bandages.)*

**'Bama**

My own fault. Bein' such a damn jack-ass. Shouldn't 'a drunk so much last night.

**Nat**

Damn' Bama. This don't look so good. It's kinda oozin' stuff.

**'Bama**

It'll be fine. I been pourin' whiskey on it to keep the infection down.

**Nat**

You oughta have a doctor.

**'Bama**

Now don't start in on me. Shakespeare was goin' on 'bout it all mornin'. Swears he's comin' back with a doctor. Guess he's gonna pay him on our good looks. I got one more clean bandage in there. Wrap it up for me, will you?

**Nat**

Sure, 'Bama.

**'Bama**

Where's Billy?

**Nat**

Oh, he went out for a while.

**'Bama**

You don't look too broke up. He musta took it all right when you told him.

**Nat**

He was kinda drunk last night.

**'Bama**

He wasn't the only one.

**Nat**

Look, I gotta tell you somethin.

**'Bama**

I ain't goin' no where.

**Nat**

Well... You just been...

**'Bama**

Yeah?

**Nat**

I just wanted to say -- you know -- I... Thank you.

**'Bama**

For what?

**Nat**

Oh, just for everything, I guess.

**'Bama**

OK.

**Nat**

No. Honest. You're the first person ever was... Well nobody else...

**'Bama**

Go on. Can't be all that much...

**Nat**

You just treated me like... Like I was worth somethin.

**'Bama**

Everybody's worth somethin'.

**Nat**

Not to hear Billy talk. Or the cops. Or the bible thumpers on State Street. To hear them I'm just another piece of shit on the road. But you really -- you know -- talk to me.

**'Bama**

That ain't so much

**Nat**

No. I mean you talk TO me -- I mean to ME -- not at me. You talk to me like I was somebody. Same as you'd talk to a judge or the governor or somebody important. I'm just tryin' to say... I ain't never met nobody like you before.

**'Bama**

Believe me, son. I ain't nothin' special. You just ain't met enough folks yet.

**Nat**

Shit! Believe me -- I met plenty. I met folks from the Atlantic to the Pacific. An' to 'bout all of them, I'm 'bout like dirt. An' Billy... He treats me like... Shit. Ain't words for it.

**'Bama**

Nat, sometimes folks don't understand what it's like bein' a kid growin' up out here. Maybe if there is somethin' different 'bout me, that's what it is. I been out there like you. An' I kinda remember the way it was -- how scared I was most of the time. Damn, Nat, you take care of yourself a lot better then I did when I was your age. Maybe Billy...

**Nat**

Maybe Billy just got a mean streak. No. I mean it. He treats me bad, Bama. He treats me real bad. I don't mean just that he hits me an' shit.

**'Bama**

Look, I'm sure he doesn't mean...

**Nat**

You don't know! He does mean it. I don't care what he does nights. That ain't' nothin one way or the other 'cept sometimes it hurts. It's what he does every day. They way he looks at me -- the way he talks to me -- the way he makes me feel like I ain't nothin'. I don't want that no more. Maybe it was good enough before. But it ain't since...

**'Bama**

What's different now? Since what?

**Nat**

Since I met you.

**'Bama**

Aw. Nat... Listen...

**Nat**

I can't stay with Billy no more. I mean it. I can't. Please 'Bama, hear me out. There ain't much I'm good at, but I can learn. An' I can get stuff. I mean in town, I can always beg a few bucks off old ladies an' stuff. An I can carry stuff.

**'Bama**

Nat, you shouldn't even be...

**Nat**

No 'Bama! Listen! There's lots of stuff I can do. I can stitch up your clothes. An I can wash your stuff for you. An' when your short, Billy's taught me how to lift a wallet so's nobody'll ever notice. I can do...

**'Bama**

Look son, it's not as easy as...

**Nat**

No! You can't say no! You hear me. I'll do whatever you ask me. An nights! Doin' that for you would be nothin' but pleasure, 'Bama. I know it would. I could always be there when you need it. Always. Doin' anything you wanted me to do. See?

**'Bama**

*(pained)*

Listen, I ain't gonna...

**Nat**

*(he is crying now.)*

No! Please, 'Bama. Please! You gotta take me. I seen you an' Shakespeare doin' it -- that first night. He didn't do half the stuff I could do for you. I know how. Please, 'Bama. Just put your arms around me. I can show you how much I...

**'Bama**

Now just stop. You gotta listen to me. You just gotta stop an' listen to me, Nat.

**Nat**

*(He is totally out of control by now)*

You gotta stop sayin' no! You can't say no to me. I know I ain't much now, but I can learn, Bama. Shit. I ain't never loved nobody before in my whole life. You gotta take me with you. Billy'll kill me. Please, 'Bama I love you...

*(He is fumbling with 'Bama's clothes.)*

Come on, Bama. Let me show you. Please, 'Bama. I can make it good for you. You can do anything, 'Bama. Anything at all. I want you to.

**'Bama**

Stop it, Nat. Just stop it. Now.

*('Bama fairly rips Nat off of him.)*

**Nat**

*(knowing already that he's lost)*

'Bama... please?

**'Bama**

Nat, I'm sorry. I can't. I'm sorry, but I can't. You understand?

**Nat**

No.

**'Bama**

Well first, you don't take a kid from another jocker. You just don't. That's the road. Men been killed for it. It ain't right. You ain't mine.

**Nat**

Well I damn sure ain't his.

**'Bama**

An' even if you were...

**Nat**

What?

**'Bama**

I know... I know how it is for you. I was just twelve when I was -- with somebody -- the first time. You know what I mean? You're too young. I ain't gonna...

**Nat**

But you was just twelve. You just said... I'm at least...

**'Bama**

That don't mean I was old enough.

**Nat**

But Billy's doin' it anyway...

**'Bama**

Billy shouldn't be doin' it. An' I ain't gonna do it. I ain't gonna. It just ain't right. Not 'till you're old enough that it's you decidin' who you want to be with...

**Nat**

But I want to be with you.

**'Bama**

It can't be, Nat. It ain't gonna be. You understand? Come mornin' I'll take you up to town. They got places there...

**Nat**

An orphanage?!?! You gonna try an' stick me in some damn orphanage?

**'Bama**

Doesn't have to be that. There's churches an' stuff. Places where you can learn...

**Nat**

Or with some fuckin' psalm-singers? Preachers? There's a laugh. One of the first old bastards spread my ass was a preacher...

**'Bama**

We'll find someplace. Someplace where you can grow up normal...

**Nat**

Why don't you just say it you shit? Why don't you just come out and say it?

**'Bama**

Say what? Nat...

**Nat**

You just don't want me. Do you? That's all it is, ain't it? All the time you was actin' like I was somethin' special, but you was just fuckin' me 'round weren't you? You don't want me for nothin. Hell, you just can't fuckin' get rid of me fast enough can you?

**'Bama**

Nat, it's for your own...

**Nat**

Ain't good enough for you. Ain't smart enough, ain't big enough, ain't hard enough, ain't soft enough, ain't fuckin' somethin...

**'Bama**

Ain't nothin" wrong with you, Nat. You...

**Nat**

I ain't Shakespeare. That's what I ain't. That's the whole deal, ain't it? You damn right there ain't nothin' wrong with me. You got your fuckin' Shakespeare so Nat can just take a fuckin' hike. What is it 'bout him? Huh? Tell me. He's too fuckin' old to be your punk. He don't know shit 'bout the road. He can't do half the things for you I could. He don't even let you...

**'Bama**

What Shakespeare an' I do ain't...

**Nat**

Don't you tell me what ain't my business. I seen you. I seen you raisin' your legs for him. Maybe there ain't nothin' wrong with me after all. Maybe it's you. You an' him. That's all you want, ain't it? You don't want some punk who'll treat you good -- somebody like me -- somebody to take care of... No. You really want it like that, don't you? You ain't good for nothin' but to roll over an beg for some little jackass who don't got nothin' to give you to stick it up your butt like a punk, like some fuckin' bitch...

**'Bama**

Nat, you don't know what you're talkin'...

**Nat**

Oh, I know all right. Now I get it. You don't want a punk-boy like me, 'cause that's what you are. You ain't nothin' but a punk yourself. All you ever been -- all you ever gonna be. Well you just roll over an' be pussy for him, 'cause let me tell you, fucker, you ain't

half man enough to be Jocker to me.

**'Bama**

Now just...

**Nat**

I fuckin' hate you. You hear me? I hate you , you fucked-up son-of-a-bitch.

*('Bama is trying to hold on to Nat, trying to calm him down.)*

You get your hands off me. Let go of me you god-damned shit. I mean it. I'll kill you. I swear I will. You let go of me or I'll slit your fuckin' throat. God damn it. Let go!!! Let go!!!

*(Nat dissolves into anguished sobs, finally going limp in "Bama's arms. Finally, Bama sits Nat down, wipes his face, and speaks to him softly.)*

**'Bama**

Nat... Where's Billy?

**Nat**

I dunno.

**'Bama**

Nat, I said, where's Billy?

**Nat**

I... I told you... He...

**"Bama**

You didn't tell him nothin'. Did you?

**Nat**

I...

**'Bama**

He's just walkin' right into them Pinkerton men, ain't he.

**Nat**

I can't tell you how it was.

**'Bama**

Jesus Christ.

**Nat**

Once Billy was gone you an' me was supposed to...

**'Bama**

Oh, Jesus Christ.

**Nat**

You an' me...

**'Bama**

Nat, you got to...

**Nat**

Don't you tell me what I got to do. Don't you dare try an' tell me nothin'. You ain't got the right. You ain't my Jocker.

*(Nat backs away from 'Bama -- Toward the boxcar.)*

**'Bama**

*(rising)*

Nat. Please...

**Nat**

Don't you say nothin'. You just stay away from me. Just keep the fuck away from me.

*(Half blinded by tears, he stumbles into the boxcar. He starts violently stuffing his few possessions into a bundle. Items belonging to Billy, he flings to the other side of the room. 'Bama stands near the fire, uncertain. He takes a step to follow Nat, then thinks better of it.)*

**'Bama**

Fuck!

*(He tries to walk toward the path, but his foot gives out and he stumbles onto his knees.)*

Shit... God-damn...

*(He struggles to his feet again and looks toward the boxcar. He shakes his head, defeated for the moment, and absently picks up the discarded bandage that Nat has removed earlier. It is soaked in blood. He takes a deep breath, and picks up an empty water can. Looking tired and dejected he trudges toward the creek path. He stops to take one look back toward the boxcar, then turns and leaves the stage.)*

*(Nat emerges from the boxcar. He's still crying, his bundle of possessions hanging awkwardly from his back. He walks toward the fire, and stands for a moment, looking toward 'Bama's tent and sobbing. Suddenly, he takes the coffee pot, a skillet, a rock, anything he can lay his hands on and flings them wildly at 'Bama's empty tent. He stands for a second, gasping for air, his rage not yet spent, but with no particular target. He turns to go, head down, barreling for the road out, but literally collides with Shakespeare who is coming from the other direction. Nat falls, his pack goes flying.)*

**Shakespeare**

Whoa there! You OK?

**Nat**

I'm fine. Just fine.

**Shakespeare**

OK.

*(Nat is trying to tie his bundle more securely, various items are threatening to fall out again...)*

You want some help with that?

**Nat**

No.

**Shakespeare**

'Bama in the tent?

**Nat**

How should I know?

**Shakespeare**

*(Not seeming to notice Nat's monosyllabic responses)*

Shouldn't have been so late, but the doctor wouldn't come.

**Nat**

What doctor?

**Shakespeare**

For 'Bama. For his foot. Doctor wouldn't come unless I gave him ten dollars. Hell, I don't have a whole buck to my name...

**Nat**

Yeah. I gotta go.

**Shakespeare**

Listen, his foot any better? There was red streaks... Shit, I don't want to scare him but...

**Nat**

No. Ain't no better.

**Shakespeare**

Jesus. I gotta get the doctor. I just got to.

**Nat**

Ain't gonna get somethin' for nothin'.

**Shakespeare**

Ten bucks. Shit. There was a time that wouldn't have been anything...

**Nat**

*(Suddenly looks directly at Shakespeare for the first time, a cold expression on his face.)*

You want ten dollars?

**Shakespeare**

Yeah. What? You got...

**Nat**

I ain't got shit, but I know how you can get it. Maybe a lot more.

**Shakespeare**

Yeah?

**Nat**

How bad you want it?

**Shakespeare**

'Bama's gonna lose that foot. He doesn't know it yet, but without a doctor, he's gonna lose it. Maybe the whole leg. That bad enough?

**Nat**

*(pauses for a second, then makes a decision.)*

Two miles up the road. Billy's there. You tell him you're gonna fill in for Red. He'll tell you what to do.

**Shakespeare**

What is it? What do I have to do?

**Nat**

If you gotta ask, you don't want that money bad enough. You better hurry. Ain't much time now.

**Shakespeare**

Just this. Just tell me this: Is anybody gonna get hurt?

**Nat**

No. Billy says it's real easy. Nobody gets hurt. Well, you want the money or not?

**Shakespeare**

Don't tell 'Bama where I went.

**Nat**

No. I won't tell 'Bama nothin.

**Shakespeare**

*(Hanging Nat his coat and hat.)*

Here. Take this stuff, will you.

**Nat**

Yeah sure.

**Shakespeare**

And Nat?

**Nat**

Yeah?

**Shakespeare**

Thanks. You're a good kid.

*(Nat stands with his mouth open, starting to say something, but nothing comes out. Shakespeare turns and heads off down the road. Nat wanders over to 'Bama's tent and drops Shakespeare's coat and hat there. He seems uncertain, suddenly frightened. He walks back to the boxcar and sits for a moment, his*

*head in his hands. Then he gets up again and with some resolution heads back for the road DL. He starts to call out)*

**Nat**

Shakespeare...

*(But he's stopped by 'Bama's voice at the edge of the creek trail.)*

**'Bama**

Nat! Where you goin'... You don't have to go.

**Nat**

*(keeping his back toward 'Bama)*

Yeah. I do. Billy might come back...

**'Bama**

I told you before, I won't let him...

**Nat**

I just gotta go back in...

*(He starts toward the boxcar, but 'Bama has him by the shoulder.)*

**'Bama**

Nat...

**Nat**

*(wheeling, looking very frightened)*

Let go 'a me. Don't touch me.

**'Bama**

*(between Nat and the road)*

Now stop it, Nat. Be sensible...

**Nat**

Just get out of my way. I mean it.

**'Bama**

Nat, I ain't lettin' you...

**Nat**

You ain't stoppin' me from...

**'Bama**

Just sit the hell down. Shakespeare will be back soon an' the three of us will sit down an'...

**Nat**

I said I'm goin'...

**'Bama**

*(physically restraining him)*

Nat, Shakespeare'll know what to do...

**Nat**

Shakespeare don't know shit.

**'Bama**

*(Not letting go of Nat)*

I tell you... Stop that. Just settle down. Shakespeare will...

**Nat**

Let me go, god damn it. Shakespeare's gone.

**'Bama**

Shakespeare's just workin' late an... Gone? What you talkin' about?

**Nat**

He's been here and gone. That's what I mean. That's all. Now turn me loose.

**'Bama**

*(letting go of Nat)*

Gone where?

**Nat**

How do I know? Gettin' late. I'm leavin'.

**'Bama**

Not 'till you tell me what's goin' on.

**Nat**

Nothin'

**'Bama**

Don't lie to me. I see his hat an' coat there. There's somethin' goin' on here. What's the matter with you?

**Nat**

Nothin.

**'Bama**

The hell there ain't. Somethin's scared the shit out of you. Now you tell me.

**Nat**

I SAID NOTHIN'

*(Nat makes a break for it, but Bama's still too fast for him. He grabs Nat and holds on.)*

**'Bama**

You ain't goin' nowhere till you tell me what the hell's goin' on around here.

**Nat**

Let go of me you fucker. Shakespeare ain't comin' back, All right? He's gone. Now get your fuckin' hands...

**'Bama**

You tell me.

**Nat**

Not never...

**'Bama**

What are you...

**Nat**

Let me the fuck...

**'Bama**

You tell me...

**Nat**

Serves you right.

**'Bama**

What did you do? You done somethin...

**Nat**

I...

**'Bama**

You tell me. I mean it!

**Nat**

Stop, you're hurtin' me...

**Bama**

You tell me what...

*(Nat wrenches free of Bama's grasp, whipping out a long knife. He backs away, threatening 'Bama with it.)*

**Nat**

You just keep away from me. I mean it. You ain't touchin' me.

**'Bama**

Now calm down boy...

**Nat**

I ain't your boy!

**Bama**

Just tell me!

**Nat**

He's gone with Billy. Okay? He ain't comin' back. Him or Billy neither. OK?

**'Bama**

You done what?

**Nat**

Serves you fuckin right. Yeah. I done it. What you gonna do...

**'Bama**

You little shit. You fuckin' little...

*(He makes a grab for Nat, but Nat lunges, raising his knife and slashing 'Bama across the arm. 'Bama stands stunned for a moment, holding his forearm, blood dripping between his fingers.)*

You...

**Nat**

*(suddenly horrified at all that's transpired)*

'Bama... I... Bama...

*(He takes a step forward, as if to help 'Bama, who just stands there with his mouth open. The knife slides from Nat's fingers and drops to the ground.)*

**'Bama**

What did you do? What the hell did you do?

**Nat**

I didn't mean... I was just... 'Bama... 'Bama?

*(Nat is backing away, afraid of what*

*('Bama might do to him.)*

**'Bama**

Where is he, Nat? Where'd you send him?

**Nat**

Two miles up the road. But it's too late, Bama. They already...

*('Bama wheels on Nat, fire in his eyes.  
Nat backs away again.)*

**'Bama**

You sit right there. You understand?

*(Nat just nods and sits where he is.)*

You don't go nowhere -- you don't move 'till I get back.

*(turning and stumbling toward the road  
as fast as his foot will allow.)*

Shakespeare. Oh, sweet Jesus. Shakespeare...

*(We hear him shouting further away  
down the road.)*

Shakespeare? You hear me? Shakespeare?

*(Nat sits, trembling, as 'Bama voice  
trails off in the distance. The lights fade  
to black.)*

## **Act II, Scene 2**

*(It's several hours later. Late at night. The stage is very dark, as if storm clouds have rolled in. Nat sits in shadow, silently at the entrance to the boxcar, holding his small bundle of possessions tightly against himself. He is unseen by Dodger who sits near the fire, poking at it morosely with a stick. There is a rustling from the direction of the road and Dodger stands, looking to see who's coming. Lucky emerges from the shadows. He's barefoot, nearly naked, his shirt wrapped around his waist. Even it is in tatters, streaked with blood, as are his side and his legs. He leans against the first available surface for support and breathes heavily.)*

### **Dodger**

Jesus! Lucky... What happened... Lucky... Answer me

*(He helps Lucky to sit near the fire.)*

Can you talk? Christ, look at your eye... Lucky...

### **Lucky**

*(attempting a smile)*

A little rough lovin', you know?

### **Dodger**

Rough... Shit... You got blood everywhere. Where's your boots?

### **Lucky**

Guess they took 'em.

### **Dodger**

They who?

### **Lucky**

Four of them. Maybe five or six. I don't know. My face was in the mud most of the time.

**Dodger**

What did they...

**Lucky**

They did exactly what I suggested, only I guess they didn't feel like payin' for it. Took everything.

**Dodger**

But wasn't nobody else around? Couldn't you holler...

**Lucky**

I was screamin'. Screamin' 'cause I thought they were goin' to kill me. You know? Yeah, a couple of other guys came, I guess. Just watched it. Hell, nothin' but a nigger bitch gettin' his. You know?

*(He tries to get up again, but his legs fail him. He sits heavily, choking back tears.)*

Couldn't even get to my knife. Three of 'em held me down while they kept tradin' places. You know? One, then the next one... Then the next one... Don't know how long I was down there. They finally stuffed somethin' in my mouth to shut me up. Think maybe they broke a tooth. I'm kinda tore up. Won't stop bleedin'... All the way here... Just more blood...

*(Again, he tries to stand up, but Dodger is holding him. Lucky starts to laugh. Not exactly hysterical, but not exactly in control either.)*

**Dodger**

Just sit there. Here. Drink somethin' Here, lemme clean you up some. Shit.

**Lucky**

*(still laughing)*

It was Billy set me up.. Gettin' even, you know? One of 'em even said his name -- said he'd have to thank Billy for the tip. Hell, they was there waitin' for me. Well, guess I got what I went out for. Part of it anyhow. Looks like my moneymaker gonna be out of service for a while. An' look... See? I still got it. Ain't that somethin?

*(He opens his palm. He's holding the four quarters that Dodger gave him earlier.)*

I was holding on to it when they jumped me. You know, just rolling them quarters around in my hand, thinkin' about, you know, later. Ha! That's a laugh, ain't it? Held on

to it the whole time. Ain't that a hoot? Here you go, Dodger. Customer deserves a refund. Looks like I ain't gonna be much use for a while. Here. Take your eight bits.

**Dodger**

*(closing Lucky's hand around the money.  
Quietly)*

No.

**Lucky**

Come on, Dodger. It ain't gonna happen for a while. Believe me.

**Dodger**

*(Holding Lucky's hand closed.)*

Well when it does, I'm paid up. No welshing now. I'm in no hurry.

**Lucky**

You're a fool.

**Dodger**

Yeah.

**Lucky**

*(standing)*

Well, better get back to the mansion house. Get the darkies to draw me a nice hot bath...

**Dodger**

You can't be by yourself. Look, you're still bleeding. Come on with me.

**Lucky**

Naw. I'm fine. Just got to get some rest.

**Dodger**

Don't be crazy. I got plenty of room. We'll get you fixed up...

*(Dodger tries to put his arm around  
Lucky, but Lucky turns on him violently.)*

**Lucky**

I said leave me be, damn it. You hear me? Just leave me be. I can take care of myself.

**Dodger**

Yeah. You took good care of yourself tonight.

**Lucky**

I'm here, ain't I. I'm alive ain't I? And I'll be alive tomorrow just fine thank you. On my own. Okay? I take care of myself.

**Dodger**

Lucky...

**Lucky**

I take care of myself. Just go on now. Look, I appreciate what you're trying to do, but I...

**Dodger**

*(quietly)*

Lucky, shut up.

**Lucky**

I don't let...

**Dodger**

Shut up.

**Lucky**

What?

**Dodger**

Lucky? Please?

**Lucky**

What?

**Dodger**

Please. Just let me help you.

**Lucky**

I...

**Dodger**

Please?

**Lucky**

*(defeated)*

Aw, fuck.

**Dodger**

Thank you.

**Lucky**

Shit. Somebody's coming. I don't want anybody seeing me like this...

**Dodger**

Come on. I got some Iodine in my shack.

*(He tries to support Lucky.)*

**Lucky**

No. It's OK. Just let me loose. I can walk on my own.

**Dodger**

You sure?

*(Lucky nods.)*

OK. Come on then.

**Lucky**

Yeah. I'm comin'.

*(Together, but not touching, they start to go. What they've heard is 'Bama Boy coming down the road, carrying Shakespeare who appears fine except for a bit of blood on his shirt.)*

**Shakespeare**

'Bama, please. Put me down. I told you, I can walk fine.

**Dodger**

Shit -- looks like a bad night all around. You OK?

**'Bama**

Yeah. He's fine. Just fell an' twisted his ankle some. What about him?

**Lucky**

Yeah. I just tripped too. I'm going on, Dodger.

**Dodger**

I'm coming. Shit. Hell of a night.

**'Shakespeare.**

Yeah. Hell of a night.

*(Lucky and Dodger exit.)*

Please 'Bama? Put me down? I'm fine I tell you.

**'Bama**

You ain't fine. Stop twitchin'.

**Shakespeare**

You're gonna fuck up your foot even more. 'Bama...

**'Bama**

Would you be quiet?

*('Bama sets Shakespeare down near the fire. Nat has stood up, still clutching his bundle for dear life. He stares toward 'Bama and Shakespeare.)*

Now you just sit there. You don't move around you hear?

**Shakespeare**

All right, Bama. But I tell you, I'm OK. It doesn't even hurt. Not much anyway.

**'Bama**

I don't care. You still got a bullet in there. You just sit still and do what I tell you.

**Shakespeare**

Yes sir.

**'Bama**

You. Boy. Come here.

*(Nat just stands and stares.)*

I said get the fuck over here.

*(Nat does.)*

Put that shit down.

*(Nat does.)*

You get me some clean water. And find something clean to use for a bandage. You hear me?

**Nat**

Yeah. What you gonna do?

**'Bama**

I don't know. And some whiskey. Find me some whiskey. Well, go on.

*(Without a word, Nat follows orders.*

*'Bama is taking Shakespeare's shirt off  
of him and inspecting a small, almost  
bloodless wound in his side.)*

What the hell were you doing out there, Shakespeare? What made you do such a damn fool thing?

**Shakespeare**

Needed some money. Nobody was supposed to get hurt.

*(He gives a rueful laugh.)*

Especially not me.

**'Bama**

When I get my hands on Billy...

**Shakespeare**

Wasn't his fault. I shouldn't have been there at all.

**'Bama**

No, you shouldn't.

**Shakespeare**

Wrong place... Wrong time...

**'Bama**

*(trying to clean up the wound)*

Saw the whole thing. Saw the whole God damned thing. Just too far away to do any fucking good. Damn foot. He pushed you right into it -- right into the middle of it. Soon as that fuckin' bastard saw what was goin' down, he shoved you right in front. That's when all the shootin' started. Lucky we got away at all.

**Shakespeare**

Thanks 'Bama. I wasn't seeing much but dirt by then. I just kept hearing all that shooting.

**'Bama**

I guess they thought you were dead. Last I saw, the Pinkertons had Billy and the other one pinned down in the gully. Far enough away I could drag you out... You got that water yet?

**Nat**

Yeah. Here.

**'Bama**

It's gotta come out, you know. The bullet. If it's in deep, we'll have to take you to a doctor.

**Shakespeare**

Don't you think they might ask how I got shot?

**'Bama**

Don't matter. I don't know what I'm doin'. Can't leave it in there. You could die.

**Shakespeare**

You can get it out.

**'Bama**

I don't know. Shit, I ain't never... If it didn't go in far...

*(Billy comes crashing down the path.)*

**Billy**

Get the pack, boy. They can't be far behind me. Well, what the fuck you waitin' for? Move!

**Nat**

I ain't goin' nowhere.

**Billy**

Fine, then keep the fuck out of my way. They ain't far behind.

*(he runs for the boxcar)*

Shit! You ain't even packed up! I'll kill you boy. What's the matter with you? I swear I get my hands on you...

**'Bama**

*(hardly even looking up.)*

You get your shit and go. You still here when I'm through with Shakespeare I'll cut your throat.

**Billy**

What the...

*('Bama shoots Billy a look that makes him stop dead, his mouth still hanging open.)*

Fine. You all just sit here and wait for the cops. I'm gettin' the fuck gone.

*(He ducks into the boxcar, wildly stuffing things into his pack.)*

**Shakespeare**

Bama -- you and Nat go on. You said it yourself... They're gonna find me one way or the other. I got this bullet. No reason for all three of us to land in jail... Please, 'Bama.

**'Bama**

*(going to pick up Nat's knife, which still is lying where Nat dropped it earlier.)*

I'm gonna try to get that out, if I can do it without killing you. There's places we can hide...

**Shakespeare**

*(rising to go to 'Bama)*

Talk sense, 'Bama. There's no way...

*(suddenly, something is terribly wrong. Shakespeare stops. He's holding his side. He starts breathing too hard.)*

**'Bama**

Shakespeare? Shakespeare... You better...

*(But Shakespeare slumps to the ground, gasping. 'Bama is there in an instant, holding him up. Panicked.)*

Shakespeare? Come on. It hurtin'? Tell me what... Shit! Shakespeare. You all right? What is it?

**Shakespeare**

*(weakly)*

I think it's worse than I thought.

**'Bama**

Just don't move. Okay? Just don't move any.

**Shakespeare**

It' hurts now, 'Bama. Hurts real bad...

**'Bama**

You just lie back. I'll find a doctor. I'll get somebody.

**Shakespeare**

No. Please? Hold on to me? Please? I'm scared.

**'Bama**

Shakespeare, I gotta...

**Shakespeare**

I can't feel my legs, 'Bama. I can't feel anything down there at all. Please? Just hold on to me.

**'Bama**

Nat! You run, boy. You find somebody...

*('Bama is beginning to cry. Nat just stands rooted to the spot.)*

**Shakespeare**

I'm scared, 'Bama. I'm real scared.

**'Bama**

You gonna be fine. It ain't nothin. You'll see. You gonna be...

**Shakespeare**

I didn't even feel it at first -- the bullet, you know -- didn't even know I was shot.

**'Bama**

It can't be too bad then.

**Shakespeare**

God-damn I feel it now.

**'Bama**

Here. Drink some whiskey.

**'Shakespeare**

No. In a minute. I just want to look at you.

**'Bama**

What for? Shakespeare, you gonna be seein' plenty of me. I'll go with you. Whatever...

**Shakespeare**

I really love you, Bama. You know? I really do. I always have.

**'Bama**

Yeah. I know, Shakespeare. I love you too.

**Shakespeare**

It ain't so bad, you know. Ain't so bad...

**'Bama**

'Course it ain't. Now I gotta go an...

*(He is gone. 'Bama just stares.)*

Shakespeare? Come on Shakespeare... Shakespeare?

*(Desperately, he feels Shakespeare's neck, his face. He bends over and listens to Shakespeare's chest, becoming increasingly frantic. He screams.)*

Shakespeare...

*(He violently grabs onto the body as if he will force life into it.)*

Shakespeare. Come on. Come on. You got to... Please. You can't leave me. You promised. Shakespeare. Please, Shakespeare...

**Nat**

*(approaching -- touching 'Bama on the arm.)*

'Bama. He's...

**'Bama**

*(screaming)*

Get off me! Don't you touch me! He's gonna be fine. He's just passed out. That's all. Get me that doctor. Get me a fuckin' doctor. Now! Shakespeare? Please Shakespeare...

*(He rocks the body, sobbing.)*

**Nat**

'Bama. He's gone.

*(as if realizing it for the first time, 'Bama holds the body at arm's length -- staring at it -- horrified. In the distance, there are the faint sounds of men's shouts.)*

**'Bama**

Gone?

**Nat**

Bama -- you gotta go. You hear them?

**'Bama**

*(barely audible)*

Shakespeare?

**Nat**

They're comin' Bama. You gotta run. You hear me?

**'Bama**

Shakespeare? Please?

*(Gently, 'Bama lays down the body. He doesn't move for a long moment. Then,*

*'Bama rises and turns on Nat.)*

**'Bama**

You better go.

*(Without emotion now, he picks up the knife.)*

**Nat**

Bama...

**'Bama**

You better go, while you still can.

**Nat**

*(backing away.)*

'Bama -- I didn't mean...

**'Bama**

Don't care what you meant.

**Nat**

Please, 'Bama

**'Bama**

You...

*(Nat stands rooted to the spot, terrified.  
'Bama looks at the knife in his hand.  
Very close to murdering Nat where he  
stands. He is breathing harder and  
harder, about to explode.)*

**Nat**

Please 'Bama...

**Billy**

You comin' or not, boy?

*(With pack in hand, he's left the Boxcar,  
but it's his last act in this life. With the  
cry of some great, wounded animal,  
Bama lunges for him. It's over in an*

*instant. Billy's on the ground, dead.  
'Bama stands over him, knife in hand,  
breathing hard. The shouts are closer  
now. Also the sound of dogs.)*

**Nat**

'Bama... You... 'Bama...

**'Bama**

*(not moving)*

Get out of here.

**Nat**

'Bama -- they're comin'

**'Bama**

Do what I said.

**Nat**

Please, 'Bama.

**'Bama**

GET OUT! NOW!

**Nat**

Come on, 'Bama You gotta run.

*('Bama wheels on him, the knife held  
out.)*

**'Bama**

You next?

**Nat**

Don't Bama. Get rid of it. Don't you hear them...

*(Bama drops the knife. He stares at  
Billy.)*

Come on!

*(He grabs 'Bama by the arm and drags  
him toward the creek trail. 'Bama turns  
and looks back.)*

**'Bama**

Shakespeare?

**Nat**

Go, damn you. Run.

**'Bama**

What about Shakespeare?

**Nat**

God Damn you -- you gotta get out of here. Run!

*(The voices and dogs are louder now. Very close. For the first time, 'Bama seems to hear them. He looks at Nat stupidly.)*

**'Bama**

Run?

*(Nat gives 'Bama a shove -- hard. 'Bama stumbles.*

**Nat**

Run! NOW!

*(He shoves bama again. 'Bama backs up, still staring at Shakespeare. Then he turns. Clumsily, he runs down the path and off.)*

*(Nat stands for a moment, looking around at the carnage. The shouts are almost upon him. Very deliberately, he bends down and picks up the bloody knife. He wipes the handle on his overalls. Then he sits near Billy's body. Waiting. The yaps of the hounds grow in volume as the lights fade to black.)*

## ACT II, Scene 3

(*Two weeks later. The jungle is deserted. 'Bama and Shakespeare's enclosure is gone. So are the utensils, etc. around the campfire. The only thing on stage is 'Bama. He's huddled in a corner wrapped in the rag of a blanket. He's filthy, obviously hasn't shaved or bathed since we last saw him. He might be asleep, or he might just be lying there not caring to move. It's hard to tell.*)

(*Lucky, dressed in ill-fitting clothes -- that probably came from Dodger -- is trudging on stage, followed by Dodger.*)

**Dodger**

You don't have to go, you know.

**Lucky**

Fraid I do. Construction's moved on. Won't be much more business around here.

**Dodger**

Well, I'm gotta be moving on too. Maybe you want to...

**Lucky**

Huh-uh. No.

**Dodger**

Why not?

**Lucky**

Look. You've been real great. I mean it. You took care of me the way nobody has since my ma.

**Dodger**

So why?

**Lucky**

I just don't want it.

**Dodger**

*(wounded)*

Then I guess that's that.

**Lucky**

Come on, Dodger, don't look that way. It's not you. I promise it's not. I just...

**Dodger**

Look, I'm not asking you to marry me or anything. Hell, think my wife might object to that anyway. But we get along good. You know we do. We have fun. We maybe even could keep -- you know -- taking care of each other.

**Lucky**

It's just not my -- nature. Don't push me, Dodger. It's not gonna happen. I'm sorry, but that's the way it is. I just need to be by myself.

**Dodger**

Then why? I just want to know why. Is that so much to ask?

**Lucky**

Shit, I don't know. OK? I don't even know myself. I don't think I can explain it. I just don't want it. I don't want the -- responsibility. Not for anybody but me. And I don't want to be depending on somebody either. Look, we had a good time together. And I appreciate all you did for me when I was beat-up. I really do. And maybe someday I'll find some way to pay you back. But I can't get -- tangled up with anybody. Not even you Dodger. Listen, maybe I even want to, but I just can't. OK?

**Dodger**

You want it bad as me. I know you do.

**Lucky**

Maybe I do. Don't matter.

**Dodger**

But Lucky I...

**Lucky**

I know.

**Dodger**

Shit I started to... I'm tryin' to say...

**Lucky**

I know what you're tryin' to say, Dodger.

**Dodger**

I really... like you, Lucky.

**Lucky**

I know. I really... like you too.

*(He turns to go.)*

**Dodger**

Lucky?

**Lucky**

*(not turning)*

Yeah?

*(But Dodger just turns Lucky around.  
With a certain amount of trepidation  
Dodger kisses Lucky -- on the lips.  
When they're finished, Lucky looks  
away.)*

**Dodger**

I just had to do that.

**Lucky**

You aren't making this any easier.

**Dodger**

I'm not trying to.<EL>

**Lucky**

Shit... Almost forgot. Here. Your eight bits

*(He digs in his pocket and hands Dodger  
back his money.)*

**Dodger**

What you talking about? You earned that fair and square. More than once.

**Lucky**

'Fraid not. Go on. Take it. I can't charge for something I wanted to do anyway. Not right.

**Dodger**

No. I want you to keep it. Really.

**Lucky**

Listen, after all you've given me... And you ain't got shit...

**Dodger**

It's not a gift.

**Lucky**

Then what?

**Dodger**

For when I run into you again. I will, you know. I want the first night all paid up. Deal?

**Lucky**

Yeah. Deal.

*(He slips the quarters back in his pocket.)*

See ya.

**Dodger**

Yeah. See ya.

*(Lucky turns and leaves. Dodger watches after him 'till he's out of sight. Finally he turns. He notices 'Bama and trudges over to him.)*

'Bama?

*(no answer)*

Come on, 'Bama, I know you're awake. You gonna just lie there 'till hell freezes over?

**'Bama**

Leave me alone.

**Dodger**

Don't think there's any more booze around. You' polished the last of it off. Come on, 'Bama. It's been three weeks. Actin' like this ain't gonna bring Shakespeare back.

**'Bama**

Fuck you.

**Dodger**

At least eat something?

*(no answer)*

Hell, I can't do anything with you. Don't know why I keep trying.

*(Bama gropes around for a bottle, finds it empty, and pitches it against the fence.)*

All right, 'Bama, you won't help yourself, I'll fuckin' drag you out of here if I have to.

*('Bama looks at him for the first time.)*

**'Bama**

You fuckin' touch me, I'll cut you. I swear I will.

**Dodger**

*(standing, defeated.)*

Fine. Do what you want. I'm leaving today. Understand? Everybody's gone.

*(no response)*

Aw fuck.

*(He stands, undecided for a moment. Then, turns on his heel and stalks off stage. 'Bama pulls the blanket up closer around himself. He just stares into space. Then, from the trail path, Nat -- cautiously -- enters. He is well dressed and carries a real pack. He approaches 'Bama.)*

**Nat**

'Bama?

*(no answer)*

'Bama?

*(again no response.)*

OK. Don't talk to me if you don't want to. I heard how you was. All the way up in town I heard. All the 'bo's talkin' about it.

*(He picks up a few discarded bottles)*

Jim Beam. Jim Beam. Jack Daniels. Jim Beam. Damn. At least you're consistent. Real good bootleg too. Must have been the rest of Billy's stash. Now there's a piece of work. Can't even say I'm sorry he's gone.

**'Bama**

You're one cold mother-fucker.

**Nat**

It talks! Cold? Maybe. Learned early.

*(aping a school marm)*

"What you learn early will stay with you the rest of your life."

*(normal voice)*

Some teacher kept saying that. You know, before I ran away. Guess she was right at that.

**'Bama**

Why'd they let you go? Thought maybe they'd hang you.

**Nat**

Nope. Sorry to disappoint. I screamed everything from rape to child molestation to self defense. Hell, I had them sob-sisters from the child welfare weepin' into their little black notebooks. Justifiable homicide. That's what it was. Set me up with a nice family where I could live normal and get rehabilitated. That's right.

**'Bama**

I'd get back there if I was you.

**Nat**

Can't. Got things to do. You know? Places to go. Things to see.

**'Bama**

Then go see 'em. Jesus, can't stand the sight of your face.

**Nat**

Can't say I blame you.

**'Bama**

Don't matter. Don't matter who... Just fuckin' leave me be.

**Nat**

Fat chance.

**'Bama**

Last person tried to move me, I took a broken bottle to 'em. I got plenty more reason to cut you up.

**Nat**

You won't.

**'Bama**

Try me.

**Nat**

I ain't leavin'.

**'Bama**

Aw shit, Nat. Just get your fuckin' little ass out of here. I don't want to think. OK? You just make me start thinkin' too much, an' I'm out of whiskey. I don't want...

**Nat**

Don't care what you want. Ain't about what you want.

**'Bama**

Shit, why won't you...

**Nat**

I love you.

**'Bama**

*(rising up for the first time. He looks at Nat dead in the face. He is suddenly frightening)*

Get out. Get the fuck out. Don't nobody say that to me. Specially not you. You ain't got the right to use that word. YOU HEAR ME?

**Nat**

Can't help it. I love you. Ain't that a riot? I can't leave you. Not here. Maybe not ever.

**Bama**

You don't get it, do you? You killed him. You killed the only thing in this life that meant shit to me -- that meant anything to me -- anything good an' fine an' decent. Does that get through that selfish little pig-brain of yours? Then you come here and you tell me you LOVE me? You think I give a rat's ass what you feel? I'd just as soon carve up your face as look at you.

**Nat**

Don't blame you. But I still love you.

*(Bama looks at Nat. He takes him firmly by the collar. Then, deliberately, he hawks and spits in Nat's face. 'Bama lies back again. Nat calmly wipes off the spittle. He pulls out a new knife and hands it to 'Bama.)*

You want to carve me up too? Well, this one's brand new. Lifted it from the people they put me with.

*(Bama sits up.)*

**Bama**

I just might. Might make me feel a whole bunch better. Might just take you with me. Little fucker...

*(For a second he just might, too. But he drops the blade in a coughing fit. 'Bama can't seem to get his breath.)*

**Nat**

Go on now. Hawk it up. Probably close to pneumonia if you ain't got it already. Let's see the foot.

**'Bama**

*(Almost sobbing as Nat pulls aside the blanket.)*

Stop... Just leave it. Damn you, stop it...

**Nat**

Don't' look much worse anyway. Maybe all that booze just sort of pickled it.

*(As Nat continues, 'Bama is almost like a*

*baby, or perhaps a basket-case in a nursing home. He let's Nat handle him passively, choking back a sob every now and again.)*

We'll have to get a fresh dressing on that. See? Mercurochrome. Also compliments of the good Higgins family. Where's some water?

*(He starts to clean 'Bama up through the next.)*

Damn, you smell like shit, you know? Let's start with the face. God-damn. Whew! I shoulda stole some soap too. You want something to eat? I did walk away with plenty of food. Let's see... How about an apple? Pear? No? Maybe later. I hope you fit into some of the clothes I brought 'cause these here I'm gonna burn. I guess you'll clean up all right.

**'Bama**

I ain't gonna love you back.

**Nat**

Maybe you will.

**'Bama**

Not long as I live. I promise.

**Nat**

Then I guess I better get used to it.

**'Bama**

I ain't even what you thought I was. I ain't what you was after back then.

**Nat**

I know. Don't matter.

**'Bama**

I can't take care of you even if I wanted to. Hell, I can't even take care of myself.

**Nat**

I know.

**'Bama**

You'll regret it.

**Nat**

*(He is perhaps close to tears, but keeps his voice light.)*

Who can say? All I know is, I love you. Don't that beat all? You ain't nothin' that can do shit for me, but I still love you all the same. You don't even love me back any. Probably never will. Why not? Don't seem to matter. Don't think I ain't thought all this through. Always somebody takin' care of you. First Dakota, then Shakespeare. Guess I'm next. Ain't life a hoot. Was lookin' for a new jocker and turned into one instead.

**'Bama**

Please? I'm beggin' you. Just go. It hurts too much. Just... livin'...

**Nat**

Maybe for you. Not for me. And I'm the one in charge, ain't I? See, I learned somethin' watchin' you an' Shakespeare. I learned... Well... There was somethin I wanted -- I mean somethin' I really wanted. More than anything. More than even livin' maybe. More than I'd ever wanted anything in my whole miserable life. Well, I got it. Sometimes you get what you wish for, you know? I mean you get exactly what it is you wished for. Don't matter. Now I got it I ain't letting it go. Ever. You understand? Not ever.

*(Bama just turns his head away.)*

And maybe -- maybe if I hang on long enough, you'll -- forget all the bad stuff.

**'Bama**

No.

**Nat**

Well, a man can hope, huh?

*('Bama starts to shudder. A sob escapes him. Suddenly, the flood gates open. He is racked with sobs. Ever so gently, Nat cradles 'Bama's head in his lap.)*

There now. Nat's here. Everything's gonna be all right. I'm with you. I'll take care of you. I ain't ever gonna leave you. I promise.

*('Bama's doesn't look up. His body shudders with sobs and Nat rocks him gently. The lights slowly fade.)*

Always. You hear me? Always.

*(The stage has gone black.)*