

# **BLACK CREEK RISIN'**

A full-length play

By LaDarrion Williams

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

**MAMA JAKES** - A strong and proud majestic black woman in her forties who is a prominent bootlegger of an infamous whiskey. She was once an owner of a popping Juke Joint named Black Creek before the law of Prohibition hit.

**HOOCHIE** - Mama Jakes seventeen-year-old daughter who often thinks she's grown. She's a lot like her mother. Aspiring singer.

**WILLIE EARL** - A man of Haitian Creole descent. He is Mama Jakes top seller and partner in bootlegging. A jazz player who is on his way to New York in a band and is in love with Mama Jakes.

**JAKES T. TALLEY "JT"** - Mama Jakes absent share cropper of a husband who just come back from Monroe.

**CAT JONES** - A provocative twenty-five-year old black woman who was once a waitress/singer. She is abused by her boyfriend and seeks solace with Mama Jakes.

## SETTING

Black Creek Juke Joint. Somewhere in the backwoods... deep off in the bayou of Louisiana.

## TIME

Summer, 1920

## SYNOPSIS

*In the sweltering and ripe bayou summer of 1920, Mama Jakes, a majestic black woman decides to start bootlegging whiskey with her young partner/ musician Willie Earl when the law of prohibition rains down, resulting in the closing of her prominent juke joint, Black Creek. This sets in motion a chain of life-changing events that greatly impact Mama Jakes and her entire family. Black Creek Risin' is a play about love... bootlegging... and the dark secrets hidden in the backwoods of Louisiana. A first of LaDarrion Williams' Black Creek Trilogy.*

## ACT ONE

### SCENE ONE

*We are in a dilapidated old juke joint somewhere in the rural area of Louisiana. A record scratches and tunes a song with much effort. As it cooperates, the serene bearings of a trumpet hauntingly play from a phonograph throughout a sad attempt of a shack. A makeshift bar is covered with remnants of whiskey bottles and stubbed out cigarettes. A few handmade stools, cabinets filled with mason jars and a cupboard give it its finishing touch.*

*In the middle is a few tables with chairs mounted on top of them. Also, old tenements of dancing and the sweet Jazz music seem to collate with the ramshackled walls, a raised stage, and a corrugated tin roof. Off on the side is a grand piano and a silver tin can collect rainwater in isolation. The wooden floorboard might as well be waning down to be a hole. An open window is by a screen door where a lemon tree invades the juke joint.*

*A sweltering heat rises inside this juke joint. It's that type of heat that makes your sweat stick to your clothes. There are distant sounds of scattered storms receding itself away from us.*

*The recording of the trumpet fades right along with the pitter patter of rain to a deafening silence. MAMA JAKES enters through the squeaky screen door with a majestic stride. She carries a large crate of moonshine bottles and sits them down by the door.*

*Her copper skin glistens with sweat, her hair wrapped in a tignon, and her womanly curves are encapsulated in a dress as she bends over to hide the crate with a thin sheet. She then looks at her empty and somewhat untouched juke joint. A growing pain lurks underneath and MAMA JAKES almost surrenders to a palpable sadness.*

MAMA JAKES

Hoochie! Hoochie, you best bring your narrow ass out here and clean up this here mess!

*(There is no response to whom she's calling for.)*

Hoochie, you hear me calling you, nah!

*From the right, HOOCHIE, her young daughter, around sixteen years of age enters. In a lot of ways, she's like her mother. Outspoken. A growing power inside of her. She runs her hand through her wild hair and stifles a yawn.*

HOOCHIE

Mama, what got you out here yellin'? 'Bout to wake the dead.

MAMA JAKES

Hell, wakin' the dead will be easier than wakin' yo' sorry behind up. Tend to them bottles over yonder.

*HOOCHIE crosses over to clean up the bottles with defiance.*

HOOCHIE

I swear these men don't have no home trainin' when they come to a juke joint. Just come over here and throw shit on the ground like it's they house. If they come out here and mess up, can't imagine what they house look like.

MAMA JAKES

You ain't know they ain't raised right by now? You got a whole lotta growin' up to do.

*(HOOCHIE drops the bottles in the tin bucket, almost shattering them.)*

What you tryin' to do, break the pieces that's already broke?

*MAMA JAKES finds herself in the middle of the juke joint, looking around.*

HOOCHIE

M ama, I don't know why you tryin' to throw these parties any how. People don't go out no more since that new law. How many showed up last night? Two? Three?

MAMA JAKES

*(Reflectively.)*

Folks a lil scared now to drank a lil hooch. Chile, I remember this place useta' be packed like sardines. People sweatin', dancin' and fightin' all over the place. Friday and Saturday's useta be the nights.

HOOCHIE

M aybe you should do some of yo hexin' to bring people back. Get Big M ama's mojo bag and sprinkle some dust by the door.

MAMA JAKES

Hoochie, hexin' ain't gon' do nothin' fo' this place.

*(Beat.)*

Just gotta let old dreams die out as they should.

*MAMA places one hand behind her back and rubs out the plaguing ache and the other hand-- she fans herself.*

HOOCHIE

You could still try it. It ain't like it's gon' hurt none.

M AM A JAKES

I don't do that hexin' thang no mo'. You know that.

HOOCHIE

Big M ama said never give up on your wings. Said you was somethin' special.

M AM A JAKES

She was always sayin' that. Hell, one time she said you had it. And if that ain't the livin' gaul.

HOOCHIE

Did she? I'ont remember that?

M AM A JAKES

*(Pulls out a Lucky Strike to smoke. Lights it and puffs.)*

Well, she did. Hell, she said everybody done had it. Swear that woman was goin' stone cold crazy in her last days... Talkin' 'bout spirits be comin' through here and talkin' to her. I said, if they comin' in here tell 'em to fix some shit up.

HOOCHIE

Nah, she said you useta' have people come in and out Black Creek 'fore day in the mornin'. Shoutin' and dancin' the night away like they minds done went crazy.

M AM A JAKES

Had yo pappy mad as all get out.

*(Pauses, turns to HOOCHIE.)*

Say, Hoochie, what they callin' this law again?

HOOCHIE

Prohibition. We learned about it in school. Folks ain't allowed to even sell or make hooch.

M AM A JAKES

That's a dog gone shame. Liquor is what keepin' this country up... damn crackers and they gov'ment.

HOOCHIE

M aybe they'll let up soon.

M AM A JAKES

They betta-- folks gots money to make and clubs to fill.

*(Continues to puff her spare.)*

Crackers just ain't liable to let nobody live. They know we make the best hooch. M essin' wit folks money. Even Dale's shuga shack down by the swamp done closed up.

HOOCHIE

What we gon' do since Black Creek goin' under, M ama?

M AM A JAKES

I'mma do what I do best.

HOOCHIE

You gon' still sell that hooch? M ama, the law said--

M AM A JAKES

Stay out my business and don't concern yo'self with this hooch. Concern yo'self with that cleanin'. Gon' head and move that bucket over here 'cause ain't no mo' rain comin' today.

HOOCHIE smacks her lips and goes to move

the tin can and places it behind the bar.

HOOCHIE

All I'm sayin' M ama, is I'ont want you to get in trouble.

M AM A JAKES

What makes you think I is? Willie Earl is my best man on the job. He smooth like silk and slick like a fox. Ain't nothin' gets past him. Hell, he can talk the drawers off a man if he had to.

MAMA JAKES seems to crack a small smile to herself. She doesn't let HOOCHIE see.

HOOCHIE

Uncle Willie sho'll is smooth.

M AM A JAKES

Yeah, he stuck on smooth.

MAMA makes her way over to the bar and pulls

out two slabs of hog guts. HOOCHIE turns up

her nose from the stench.

HOOCHIE

Ooh wee-- them guts stank, M ama!

M AM A JAKES

Whatchu you talkin'? This gon' be supper.

HOOCHIE

(Groaning.)

No, M ama, not again.

M AM A JAKES

Little miss high and mighty can't be too picky. Things gettin' a lil tight 'round here.

HOOCHIE

What you talkin' 'bout tight? I saw Uncle Willie goin' in and out of here with another batch of your famous hooch. That's the third time this week.

M AM A JAKES

Nosey tail. You 'sposed to be sleep when he was doin' that. You best not tell yo' pappy 'bout dat either.

HOOCHIE

I ain't. Yo' secret safe wit me.

M AM A JAKES

(Puffs the last drag of her Lucky Strike  
and dabs it out.)

Ain't tryin' to have him mess up a good thing me and yo' Uncle got goin'.

HOOCHIE

Big M ama said Uncle Willie useta' be sweet on you.

M AM A JAKES

Chile, ain't no body studyin' Willie.

HOOCHIE

That ain't what Big M ama said. She said Uncle Willie useta have you on this dance floor and he was barely my age at the time. Big M ama said you'd be shakin' sumthin' that you tryin' to set free and she had to chase him off at times with a broom just to keep him off ya'. Sayin' that he had no business gettin' behind a grown woman.

M AM A JAKES

M ama knows she could put ten on two tellin' that story.

HOOCHIE

I sho'll do miss her.

M AM A JAKES

She don't miss you.

HOOCHIE

M ama! What makes you say somethin' like that?

M AM A JAKES

You know damn well how mean Big M ama could be.

(As if she's has a bitter taste in her  
mouth.)

That woman left us with all this stuff to look after and puttin' 'alla this on me. This land, house and juke joint. Can't say I blame her 'cause that's how she was even to her last breath. M ean as ever.

HOOCHIE

Well, she was only mean to you. Not to me. She luv'd me.

Beat. MAMA JAKES continues to clean the  
pig

guts.

M AM A JAKES

I reckon that's true. She gotta be in heav'm cause that woman was so mean, the devil himself knew not to fool with her. HOOCHIE wipes off the counter. MAMA catches herself slightly laughing, because in all, she misses her mother.

HOOCHIE

All I know is I miss her singin' them old spirituals 'round the house. How she sang 'em, M ama?

M AM A JAKES

Chile, first thing she'd do when she wake up is sang. Beat the rooster crowin' 'fore day in the mornin'. Got on my nerves at time with that.

HOOCHIE

And you be singin' right along with her. It was like y'all was the same when y'all did it. M ama, you know you was singin' on Sunday mornin's. Y'all useta' be in the kitchen cookin' breakfast and singin' up a storm.

(Crosses over to MAMA JAKES and wraps her arms around her.)

Sing somethin', M ama, please...

M AM A JAKES

Hoochie, go on, nah. It's too hot to be playin'.

HOOCHIE

Please... M ama. I just wanna hear you sang.

M AM A JAKES

If I sing, will you keep cleanin' up this pigsty?

HOOCHIE

Yes'm.

M AM A JAKES

(Exhales, then sings with a gruffness just like "Big Mama".)

I'M GON' LAY DOWN MY BURDEN, DOWN BY THE RIVER SIDE... DOWN BY THE RIVER SIDE... DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE... I'M GON' LAY DOWN MY BURDEN, DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE... I AIN'T GON' STUDY WAR NO MORE.

(Not letting herself get lost in the memory, she puts up a defense.)

There. Get to cleanin'.

HOOCHIE

(Starts clapping.)

Ooh wee! Sound just like Big M ama.

M AM A JAKES

Chile, nobody can sang like Big M ama.

HOOCHIE

You 'ont miss her?

M AM A JAKES

Chile, I miss that woman like I miss child birth. She dead and gone, and ain't nothin' I can do about that. The Lawd done called her to glory.

HOOCHIE continues to clean for a moment

until she stops.

HOOCHIE

Hold on, ain't Papa supposed to be back? He been gone for almost a week.

M AM A JAKES

Still tendin' them fields in M onroe. Hell, he need to 'hur up on home, that yard out there is gettin' full of weeds. It's startin' to get summer time and them water moccasin's gon' come back out foxes hidin' themselves in the weeds and eat all our chickens up. And you know the creek gon' rise around the kerosine house.

HOOCHIE pats her wild hair. MAMA JAKES

shakes her head. She washes and dries off her hand.

M AM A JAKES

Lawd, chile, you need to be tendin' to this head. Sit on over here.

MAMA JAKES sits by the middle table and pulls

out a chair. HOOCHIE sits on a small stool.

She begins to bite her nails.

HOOCHIE

I'ont know what to do wit' it.

M AM A JAKES

(Parts her hair then begins to twist it into braids.)

Need to shave it off. That's what you need to do with it.

HOOCHIE

I ain't shavin' my damn head, M ama!

MAMA JAKES smacks her the side of head.

M AM A JAKES

Watch that mouf'. No chile of mine gon' be walkin' 'round lookin' like an alley cat.

MAMA JAKES continues layin' on a hands to

her daughter's hair. There is a nice moment  
between them.

HOOCHIE

I'm just sayin', I ain't shavin' my head.

(Beat. Then inquiringly:)

M ama, don't you wish our hair was like those white women?

M AM A JAKES

Shit, naw.

HOOCHIE

It be so pretty though. Blonde and flowing like. I even saw one in town one time, her hair was so nice.

M AM A JAKES

Hell, our hair is pretty too. It's firm and made out of wool. Just like Jesus.

HOOCHIE

Jesus? Now I know you don't believe Jesus black, M ama?

M AM A JAKES

I sure as hell do. It says so right in the Bible. His skin made like a furnace and copper.

(Points to her forearm.)

Just like that. So in all, with that wool ass hair, Jesus was a straight nigga just like us.

HOOCHIE

You funny, M ama.

(Catches MAMA JAKES stifling a  
smile.)

M ama, it's good to see you smile again. Seein' you sang and talk about Big M ama.

M AM A JAKES

Whatchu talkin' 'bout? I smile.

MAMA JAKES tries to conjure up a platonic smile. HOOCHIE doesn't buy it.

HOOCHIE

Ever since Big M ama died and this Prohibition law messin' up everythin', you just don't smile much no mo'.

HOOCHIE grabs her mother's hand and kisses it tenderly.

HOOCHIE

I miss seein' that pretty smile, is all M ama.

From the outside, we hear a blare of a trumpet.

It plays something fire, something electric.

WILLIE EARL enters with the trumpet in his hand and a bag of crawfish in the other. He's a tall and handsome young man with mulatto skin due to his Haitian Creole nature and sweet slick curly hair. His baby face exudes freshness and youth and there is a rhythm and musicality to his step.

WILLIE EARL

Bonjour, y'all.

HOOCHIE

Hey, Uncle Willie. He goes over to HOOCHIE and kisses her on the forehead.

WILLIE EARL

How's my bè ti fi?

HOOCHIE

Tired as all get out. M ama makin' me get up at the crack of dawn just to clean up.

WILLIE EARL

(To MAMA JAKES, in Creole.)

Pauve ti bete...Whatchu doin' that for, woman?

M AM A JAKES

Cuz I felt like it. She gotta help out 'round the house and the juke joint. Don't want JT come yellin' cause she ain't pullin' her part 'round the house.

HOOCHIE

See, I told you.

WILLIE EARL

Chirren' her age like to sleep in for a while.

M AM A JAKES

Not in my house they don't. Hoochie too grown to be sleepin' in.

WILLIE EARL

You crazy as a bed bug.

M AM A JAKES

(Looking at the bag in his hand.)

Is that my crawfish in yo' hands?

WILLIE EARL

Sho'll is. Fresh off the boat.

M AM A JAKES

Hoochie, take this to the back and prep 'em for me.

HOOCHIE

Okay, M ama. HOOCHIE gets up and goes to grab the bag and exits to the back of the juke joint. WILLIE EARL make his way to the bar area.

WILLIE EARL

Heard from JT?

M AM A JAKES

Not in a few days.

WILLIE EARL

Still tendin' them fields for them white folks?

M AM A JAKES

Sho'll is. He needs to be here tendin' to ours. You see them weeds out there, growin' faster than I can keep up?

WILLIE EARL

(Goes to look out the screen door.)

Yeah, I see 'em. I'll tend them fa' ya' in a minute.

M AM A JAKES

I ain't axein' for nothin' else of ya'. You done too much 'round here as it is.

WILLIE EARL

I don't mind at all, Cher. I can fix the door hinges, the bar area, cut down the grass. Anythin' that needs a fixin', I got it.

M AM A JAKES

Willie Earl, you already did most of that. Keep on, people'll think you my man instead of JT.

WILLIE EARL

(Shoots a dangerous smile.)

Is that such a bad thing?

(A quick beat.)

Anybody come around last night?

M AM A JAKES

Velma and her husband came by. That reminds me, Willie Earl, I need you to talk some sense into that man. He done grabbed Velma so hard, 'bout broke her arm off. I'ont 'low that in my place, and you know that.

WILLIE EARL

A' right, I'll talk to him, Cher.

M AM A JAKES

Bad enough folks don't come here now and havin' drunk fools beatin' on each other ain't good business. It ain't like it matters no how.

WILLIE EARL

Ah, you'll get Black Creek up and runnin' again. Just wait and see, Cher.

HOOCHIE enters in from the back with a tin  
can bucket. She swivels her hands around  
inside, cleaning the crawfish.

HOOCHIE

The new law got everybody scared. Only thing nigga's know how to do now is go on up  
to the church house.

M AM A JAKES

It's a damn shame. White folks be doin' all kind of stuff down at that courthouse and  
now they got everybody scared of drinkin' or buyin' a lil hooch.

WILLIE EARL

You doin' alright keepin' this place afloat.

Beat. WILLIE EARL sits by MAMA JAKES  
at the

table in the center.

M AM A JAKES

How's that new gig on the Canal? They sellin' all that food, huh?

WILLIE EARL

I'm not gon' be talkin' 'bout the new spot in front of you. That's not how we do things.

M AM A JAKES

Why not? You can say it in here. I'on't blame Andy goin' deeper down in the bayou and  
openin' his own juke joint. Food is a way to a lot of people's heart. Thinkin' 'bout takin'  
that route myself.

WILLIE EARL

It's good. Jumbalaya, that dirty rice... Keeps people full. But you know all the folks  
wants to do is drink and that's it. I mean, he pays me well, but I want to go out on my  
own soon, path my own way.

HOOCHIE

Thinkin' 'bout travelin' this summer again, Uncle Willie?

WILLIE EARL

I don't know, lil bit. Me and the band been talkin'. It cost a lot to travel, but cost too much not to. Gotta go where the money is.

M AM A JAKES

Where you thinkin' on travelin' to now?

WILLIE EARL

King Oliver want's me to go on the road with him and his band. They thinkin' on goin' to Memphis first, then off to New York City.

HOOCHIE

New York City? That's mighty far.

WILLIE EARL

It ain't that far. Just all the way up the Delta past Tennessee.

M AM A JAKES

Might as well be on the other side of the world.

(Tinged with sadness, she stiffly  
composes herself.)

You just got back from St. Louis, now you 'bout to hit the road again?

WILLIE EARL

Now Cher, nothin' set in stone jus yet. I ain't gon' put all my eggs in a basket. You know I'm not tryin' to go too far cause of y'all. I'm still waitin on the word, but you gals got me for the rest of the summer far as I'm concern.

HOOCHIE

(Mimics WILLIE EARL playing the  
trumpet.)

I sho'll like to see ya' play that trumpet in New York... It's gon' be like you openin' up the gates of heaven. When Black Creek was full, I would be listenin' out my bedroom window. How'd you play that one song that get people drunk as a skunk?

WILLIE EARL takes out his shiny golden

trumpet and plays a beautiful Jazzy tune while tapping his foot on the floor rhythmically.

HOOCHIE raises her skirt up, swings and sway

her hips to the rhythm. She even shimmies her shoulders sensually.

M AM A JAKES

(Looking wide-eyed at her daughter's surprisingly good dancing talents.)

Hoochie!

(Stands up.)

Who the hell done taught you how to dance like that?!

HOOCHIE

(Still dancing.)

It's just a natural feelin, M ama.

MAMA JAKES chases HOOCHIE around the

bar. The music and dancing instantly stops.

M AM A JAKES

Natural feelin', my ass! You too fast to be hikin' up your skirt like that. Keep thinkin' you a grown woman and these men'll hem you up out there.

WILLIE EARL

O, vini, li jis dancin.

M AM A JAKES

Don't be bringin' that mess up in here... speakin' things I can't be understandin'.

WILLIE EARL

I'm jus sayin', you can't blame the girl. The dancin' blues is in her blood and the music is in her bones. Shit... Back in your day I swear you useta' tear this floor up too.

M AM A JAKES

Now don't you sit there and tell that lie.

WILLIE EARL

Woman, please. Hoochie, back in the day, your mama useta clear the whole damn dance floor, swingin' them hips. I'm tellin' you, she'd hike up her skirt and go to town. And I 'membra that one time you damn near shimmied Beau Dubont into a heart attack. Hell, he clutched his damn chest so hard, he 'bout fell out on this here floor!

M AM A JAKES

(Trying not to crack a smile.)

Willie Earl, stop puttin' ten on two!

WILLIE EARL

Cher would tear this juke joint up at nights. I swear before the Lawd her voice was like them sweet pralines out there in that yard.

(Goes deeper with a Haitian accent.)

Oh Bondye mwen, her voice would rock the whole juke joint wit' majik. Just sangin' and dancin'.

M AM A JAKES

He lyin' like a dog.

WILLIE EARL

If I'm lyin', I'm flyin'. I swear this place use to be packed with folks, all up in here and on the porch there and boy, music would be blarin' from here to Timbuktu. See, this woman, Hattie Belle Ceaser, came in this juke joint, Hoochie, and she'd challenged yo' mama right here on this dance floor. Hoochie... yo' mama showed up and showed out! She was the queen supreme.

(Goes up to MAMA JAKES and looks her deeply. Almost making love with her with his eyes.)

And when she smile, it was like watchin' a star shine brighter than anythin' in the sky. Yon zanj dwat devan me'... Tried to get her to join my band, but she wasn't havin' that. You was a youngin' though, so you can't remember.

M AM A JAKES

And so was you. Hell, you still a baby yourself.

WILLIE EARL

I'm only three Ace's a Spade from thirty.

MAMA JAKES gives him a dangerous smile

and takes out her pocket knife and jabs the catfish viciously.

M AM A JAKES

Like I said, still young.

WILLIE EARL

What you plannin' on doin' the rest of the summer, lil bit?

M AM A JAKES

She gon help me fix this here place up.

WILLIE EARL

You ain't gon' make this child work.

M AM A JAKES

Best believe I is. When I was her age, Big M ama made me go work in somebody's kitchen.

WILLIE EARL

Girls like Hoochie don't need to be in somebody's kitchen. She smart...need to be in them books. Ah, kite rèv la ti fi...

MAMA JAKES finds herself a bit swooned.

M AM A JAKES

What I say 'bout speakin' that?

HOOCHIE

I sho'll don't wanna be in nobody's kitchen. Especially white folks, I'll be liable to poison 'em messin' wit me!

WILLIE EARL

I bet you would, lil bit.

M AM A JAKES

You young.. You don't know what you want just yet.

WILLIE EARL

Nah... I'ont believe dat. Hoochie is somethin' special. She just like you. Probably can sang just like ya', we done seen her dance already.

HOOCHIE

Uncle Willie, maybe one day I can come sang in your band?

WILLIE EARL

You wanna sing?

## HOOCHIE

(Sings with deep inflections. With soul.  
Think Bessie Smith.)

GIMMIE SUM LOVIN' DOWN AT THE BLACK CREEK, SHIMMY ME 'SUM  
SHUGA, IT'S FREE GIMMIE YO' BLUES FROM MEMPHIS, WITH THE BAYOU  
IN YO' EYES, GIMME ME YO' LOVIN', BABY, BLACK CREEK RISE.

## WILLIE EARL

Ooh lil ti fi sangin '! Apple don't fall far from the tree I see. Cher, you sho'll got you a  
sanga on your hands!

MAMA JAKES goes up to her daughter.  
Deeply

amazed by her talents.

## M AM A JAKES

Hoochie, chile, I ain't know you can sang. Why you ain't tell nobody 'lil girl?

## HOOCHIE

I don't know. I just know you and Big M ama 'useta sang and it made me feel good on  
the inside, M ama.

## M AM A JAKES

Ain't that sumthin'... Big M ama sho'll was right. Baby you somethin' good. Ain't that  
somethin, Willie Earl?

## WILLIE EARL

She sho'll is. I can see she got that Calinda spirit.

## HOOCHIE

Not as good as y'all.

WILLIE EARL cuts in between them and spins

HOOCHIE around in the middle of the floor.

They dance. They sing together. It's magic.

WILLIE EARL

Hoochie, you can be anythin' you wanna be, ya' hear? Life's too short to be in somebody's kitchen slavin' away and wastin' all yo' talents. No offense to ya', Cher, but times are changin'. Laissez les bon temps roulez.

HOOCHIE

Uncle Willie, what that mean?

WILLIE EARL

Let the good times roll, lil bit. Let 'em roll. Black folks be makin' music now... changin' the whole wide world with they singin'. Things are startin' to open up for the colored folks 'round here. M amie Smith just recorded her first record and it's sellin' like Candy Lady's lemon pound cake. But our band, we got us a new singer, her name is M a' Rainey and she's sumthin' good too. Watch what I tell you. She sho'll love me when I play my trumpet.

HOOCHIE

I betchu she ain't good as M ama. She sho'll can sing too.

(To MAMA JAKES.)

M ama, why don't you be in Uncle Willie's band?

M AM A JAKES

I ain't got time for that mess.

WILLIE EARL

Oh, it's mess now?

M AM A JAKES

You know what I mean.

HOOCHIE

I'm gon' join. I sho'll like to sang and dance. Can't be in nobody's kitchens.

MAMA JAKES looks on, a bit of hurt hangs on

her face. She makes her way back to the bar to  
hide it.

M AM A JAKES

I guess it ain't no sense arguin' wit y'all.

HOOCHIE

Ooh, I'm gon be playin' my records all through Nawlins. I swear.

HOOCHIE starts to dance and sing the same  
song from before around the living room.

WILLIE walks up to MAMA JAKES.

WILLIE EARL

(Under his breath.)

We need to talk 'bout somethin' private.

M AM A JAKES

(Nodding.)

Hoochie, go on and dance yo' way up to the house and bring some plates and things for  
supper.

HOOCHIE

Y'all gotta talk 'bout that hooch?

M AM A JAKES

Gal, do like I say! This grown folks business.

HOOCHIE

(At the door.)

Sho'll 'lotta grown up talk fo a 'chile who gotta get up early like 'em.

WILLIE EARL burst into laughter.

M AM A JAKES

(Takes off her shoe.)

Chile, if you don't go on, I know sumthin'.

HOOCHIE dances her way outside, slamming  
the screen door. WILLIE watches, to see if the  
coast is clear. Beat. Then he pulls out a thick  
rolled up wad of money and hands it to  
MAMA

JAKES.

WILLIE EARL

There you are.

M AM A JAKES

How was it in the city? Did Young Chauncey and 'nem follow ya'?

WILLIE EARL

Crossed them off at St. Raynard Parish where they have the gang watching the Bangtails and I split. Sold all I got too.

MAMA JAKES counts the bill money with a  
big

smile. She takes a few bills out, hands it to  
WILLIE EARL and puts the rest in the crevice  
of her breasts.

M AM A JAKES

People's buyin' this much shine like they life depended on it.

WILLIE EARL

Don't I know it. They was flockin' to my truck like God done called them to the church revival. They say it's got somethin' special. They wondering what it is.

M AM A JAKES

What you done told 'em?

WILLIE EARL

That it got the magic touch from my cherie. You know they callin' you the bootleggin' Queen of Nawlins? It's like you puttin' a hexin' on this here stuff.

(Real smooth:)

Tankou majik.

M AM A JAKES

(Excited.)

I knew they's gone like it. I just knew it.

WILLIE EARL

I was in M emphis and them people was drinkin' yo' hooch mo' than they drink the communion juice at church.

M AM A JAKES

M emphis, huh? How was them juke joint's up there?

WILLIE EARL

Boomin'. You know I had to hit up Beale Street. Got me some craps goin, watched a bunch of Salopri's lose a couple of C's, and I blew my horn and set the whole house on fire!

M AM A JAKES

Win anythin'?

WILLIE EARL

(Acting as though he's shooting craps.)

Weh, Cherie... I'm good luck, keep tellin' you that, baby.

MAMA JAKES steps back, then smirks. They

both eye each other sensually. It's something dangerous.

M AM A JAKES

I bet you is.

WILLIE EARL

You should make more come Sunday. Load it up and go out to the Treme and then onto the Delta.

M AM A JAKES

I'll start on it. Lawd, I hate you's going out there all by yourself-- don't want you to run into no people lookin' for trouble's. I done heard that them crackers gettin' they own lil gang together in town and causin' a whole bunch of ruckus.

WILLIE EARL

You talkin' 'bout Holland gang? Ah, nah, they up to somethin' bigger, we just runnin' a lil rum and hooch, is all.

M AM A JAKES

Still gots to be careful.

WILLIE EARL

Ah, Cher, I'll be fine. Folks don't wanna play with me. Shiddd... I ain't gon' lie, I did what ya' told meh, went on over to Skid Road to make the sell, and it was a bunch of crackers waitin' in them woods-- you know me, I be ready to cut me a cracker's throat if he try me. I 'membra comin' up on that road, and when my lights shine on them, these white goson's just stood there. It was 'bout ten of 'em... Standin' there lookin' like the dyab they are. One of 'em came up to my window, I looked him dead in the eyes and I swear before the Lawd I thought me and this cracker was gon' dance, Cher! Had my pocket knife ready, I was gon' jam it in that cracker's jugular and skin the rest of 'em alive if I had ta'. But all he did was give me this thick fold of money grabbed that liquor and I went on 'bout my business.

M AM A JAKES

You got that necklace I gave ya'?

WILLIE EARL

(Pulls a skeleton key-shaped necklace  
from his shirt.)

Worried 'bout me nah?

(Playfully.)

Now I know Cherie ain't worried about meh?

M AM A JAKES

Always worried 'bout ya'. It's a dangerous thing we doin' here. Got to make sure you protected and stay off the roads come sundown in Biloxi. I mean it, Willie Earl. Crackers catch wind, we both gon' be in a heap of trouble. I already sent a lil bit for M r. Pratt up in M ississippi, he a white man that'll let you stay wit' him for the night but even that ain't gon' keep you safe on the way there.

WILLIE EARL

Cher--

M AM A JAKES

Just follow that map. Can't have somethin' bad happen to you on my account.

WILLIE EARL

It ain't. What you worried for? We ain't got caught left.

M AM A JAKES

And let's keep it that way. I just got a lil bit left and I can keep this land from goin' under. M ama left me under a lot of back pay.

MAMA JAKES continues to talk and busy to herself. WILLIE leans over the counter to watch MAMA JAKES bending over to grab some potatoes.

WILLIE EARL

You's lookin' mighty fine this mornin', woman.

M AM A JAKES

Boy, betta get out my face with that crazy talk.

WILLIE EARL

That husband of yours just don't know what to do with ya'.

M AM A JAKES

And you do?

WILLIE EARL

Oh, you know I'll treat you real nice. Not have you in that hot house alone all day and all night. Be right there by you every second. Take you out somewhere nice, probably the Quarters and show you off as the Fanm plus in all of Nawlins.

M AM A JAKES

What's that you be talkin'?

WILLIE EARL

It jus means prettiest woman... that's all.

M AM A JAKES

(Incredulous.)

Hmmm... that's what they all say. Nigga's promise you one thing one day, and the next day, they just stop livin' life. Lettin' it pass 'em by.

WILLIE EARL

Is you talkin' 'bout JT?

(A slight look from MAMA.)

Not me, Cher. Not me. You know I'd take real good care of ya'.

M AM A JAKES

Boy, I'm old enough to be yo' mama.

MAMA makes her way back to the bar area.

WILLIE EARL

But you not my mama.

(MAMA JAKES stops.)

You don't even look yo' age, woman. You could be old as M ethusela and still look like a dish. Woman, you just don't know I wanna kiss so bad it make my insides hurt. Hell, I wanna taste that sweet nectar on yo' lips under the moon light.

M AM A JAKES

You just bumpin' yo' gums.

(A beat, then...)

What about Cat, and oh, Rita?

WILLIE EARL

(Almost laughs too loudly.)

Rita? Cher, now you know I ain't talked to that woman in 'bout two years. And Cat, we ain't got that somethin' like me and you got.

M AM A JAKES

M hmm... Let you tell it.

(Shift.)

You know she still axe about ya'? Rita, I mean. Saw her prissy ass at the flea market.

(Mocks RITA with a high-pitched voice.)

Sayin' how she just missed the sight of you and she couldn't stand you goin' out on the road.

WILLIE EARL

That woman just don't know how to take a hint.

M AM A JAKES

You need you a woman that's gon' take care of your home while you out takin' care of yo dreams.

(Beat, on to other matters.)

You ready to eat?

WILLIE EARL

You can be that woman.

(She doesn't respond back.)

Why you ignorin' my advances?

M AM A JAKES

Cause I know you's a damn fool, that's why.

As she walks around the bar area, WILLIE

EARL grabs her by the waist and they spin their way to the center of the room.

WILLIE EARL

Remember when we danced that one time? That time I was on the trumpet and you on that microphone, singin' your heart out. We made some sweet music, baby. Fè mizik dous anba solèy la...

M AM A JAKES

That was a long time ago. Now you know if JT come here and find us like this he'd get his shot gun and blow a hole clean through ya'.

WILLIE EARL

JT ain't gon' do a Goddamn thing. C'mon, baby, let me just fall fa' ya'. Fall so deep in a hole it'll take somethin' mo' than God to get me out.

M AM A JAKES

Willie Earl--

She attempts to pry away from him.

WILLIE EARL

Lawd, woman, you just don't know, when I be on them roads, late in the night when all of God's earth be asleep, I lie awake, thinkin' 'bout ya'. Sho'll do. I think 'bout ya, and when I go ta sleep, I dream 'bout you. Feel ya' up like a cold pillow in my bed. Findin' all the sweet and cold spots and squeeze you somethin' good.

He spins her and leans her back, pushing his pelvis into hers.

M AM A JAKES

(Enjoying this a little too much.)

M an, you betta get away from me with that foolishness.

It seems that they're dancing to their own  
music, their own beat. MAMA closes her eyes.  
Enjoying

the sweet temptation of freedom.

WILLIE EARL

Run away with me to New York City.

M AM A JAKES

(Opening her eyes at the word "New  
York.")

New York? What the hell am I gon' do in New York?

WILLIE EARL

Be my woman.

M AM A JAKES

Ah, Lawd, now I know you talkin' crazy.

WILLIE EARL

Beb... C'mon, ain't you ever thought about it? Us?

Beat. MAMA JAKES is silent. She's fighting  
his spell...

M AM A JAKES

Not at all. These neck of the woods been my home 'alla my life. Ain't no thoughts  
crossed this mind of leavin' the bayou. Uh-uh. Naw.

WILLIE EARL

I'll take you away from here. You and Hoochie. Leave this all behind and let JT rot in it.

MAMA breaks away from him and goes to peel

the potatoes by the bar. WILLIE stands in the  
middle of the floor, defeated.

M AM A JAKES

Shouldn't be talkin' this way. Everything's good here... We got our 'lil business goin'. Why don't we just focus on that?

WILLIE EARL

Because doin' that is not all what we are, Cher. That's not all that life has to give. You can leave these backwoods and do somethin' with ya' life. You can see what the world got to offer. See things you ain't never dreamed of. Shidd...With yo skills on knowin' how to run a business, woman, you could be richer than M adame CJ herself. I'm tellin' ya'. Cher, there's so many thangs out'dere... so much of the world to see. World is bigger than these backwoods. Cuz when I was out on the road, I seent things, Cher, things I ain't never thought was possible. And I know you'd like it.

M AM A JAKES

That's crazy talk now. Just stop it.

WILLIE EARL

It's only crazy because somewhere in that big ole hard head of yours you believe that it's true. This land is killin' ya' spirit. I know you made a promise to Big M ama, but that things gon' get harder and harder. It's killin' ya. I can see it in yo' eyes. Vini non avè m'fanm.

M AM A JAKES

(Tightly.)

Willie Earl... You speakin' on things you don't got no business speakin' on.

WILLIE EARL

Cher, why can't you see straight through it. Huh? I hate that you wastin' away yo'self at the pain--

M AM A JAKES

Willie-- you gon' let me peel these potatoes so I can make this money?

WILLIE EARL

God damn it, woman, why can't you let this land go?!

She slams the knife on the bar area.

M AM A JAKES

'Cause it won't let me go!

(A painful and brewing silence.)

You know what I see out there, Willie? Huh? I see all that house my mama left me. I see how it broke her down. Things she saw, things she made me feel because she couldn't get past it. I see how she made a promise to keep it. And everyday I step off that porch, I just look at the front yard, look at it and remember her blood and sweat would water the grass out there to make it grow. And I see that 'alla that broke her down and she ain't had nothin' when she left in this world. Cuz she was Negro woman. And now she left me with that world of hurt and I-- be damned if I do the make the same mistakes she made. I'm buildin' somethin'. Not for Big M ama, not for JT, hell, I don't even know it's for me. But this land, this here juke joint, it's apart me, and cuttin' it out ain't gon' help none.

(Another beat, she continues to peel the potatoes.)

Now, you want sumthin' to eat? All this runnin' 'round gon' have you lookin' po' as a snake.

WILLIE EARL

(Heavy from the rejection.)

Naw. I'm worn out anyhow, I's gon' get some rest.

M AM A JAKES

Don't be mad at me, Willie.

WILLIE EARL

I ain't mad, Cher.

(Definitely mad.)

I ain't mad. Let me hit the road.

M AM A JAKES

Least have Hoochie fix ya' a plate 'fore you go.

WILLIE EARL

That's alright. Think about what I say.

M AM A JAKES

I ain't.

Beat. WILLIE grabs his trumpet.

WILLIE EARL

Since you ain't, I'll be back Sunday for the pick up.

With indication, he points to the jars behind her.

M AM A JAKES

You come over anytime before then. You know Hoochie gon' be axein' 'bout you and wonderin' where ya' at.

WILLIE EARL

See you later, hear?

WILLIE is out the screen door. Engulfed in her own feelings, MAMA continues to peel her potatoes and the lights fade.

SCENE TWO

A couple of days has passed. HOOCHIE stands by the screen door sweeping dust outside. She grabs the door mats and dusts it off.

HOOCHIE

(Sings.)

I GOT THE SWEET, SWEET BLUES IN MY HEART. NO MATTER WHERE I AM, FAR AND NEAR, IT WILL ALWAYS BE THERE... DOWN HERE AT THE BLACK CREEK.

(There is a clacking noise. Rocks are being thrown against a window. HOOCHIE runs over to it and looks out.)

You better stop throwin' them rocks at my window, Buford or I'll whoop you good! Yeah, you betta run, 'ole snaggle tooth bastard!

MAMA is at the door with two crates.

M AM A JAKES

Ooh chile, it's hotter than the devil's ass out there.

(Sees HOOCHIE by the window.)

What you yellin' 'bout now?

HOOCHIE

That stupid boy Buford Easely. He messin' with me. He keep on I'mma knock that one tooth out his mouf.

MAMA JAKES crosses to the bar and places her

jars on the shelf.

M AM A JAKES

Why you's so mean to that boy? Better be lucky somebody payin' attention to ya'.

HOOCHIE

I ain't mean to him, he just get on my nerves. And he cry like a lil sissy when he don't get his way.

M AM A JAKES

(Fanning herself.)

He's a sweet young boy. You need to be goin' out with somebody like him.

HOOCHIE

He's too uppity for me. Just cause yo' daddy work in some big fancy hotel don't mean you eatin' high off the hog.

M AM A JAKES

Girl, how's that food comin' along?

HOOCHIE

It's done.

M AM A JAKES

Willie Earl and Cat gon' come by.

HOOCHIE

Ooh, Auntie Cat, it's like we don't see her much in a month of Sunday's. She still seein' all them mens?

M AM A JAKES

Hush up! You talkin' too much.

The sound of a car pulls up outside.

Somebody pullin' up.

HOOCHIE

Who dat?

M AM A JAKES

A car door slams. There is a knock at the screen door. HOOCHIE peers out the window.

HOOCHIE

Oh, that's Auntie Cat right there.

HOOCHIE opens up the screen door. CAT

JONES strides in with a tray in her arms. There is a certain heaviness and tiredness to her walk.

CAT

Hey y'all.

M AM A JAKES

Hey, there.

CAT

M ama, I got the cornbread in this tray.

M AM A JAKES

Set it over there.

CAT crosses over to the bar area and sets the tray on the counter top.

CAT

Willie not here yet?

M AM A JAKES  
(Goes to look out the door.)

Naw... I don't know what's takin' him so long. He said he was gonna take a quick nap.

CAT  
(To HOOCHIE.)

Hoochie, I know you don't got that Easely boy runnin' down the street again?

HOOCHIE  
Told him I was gon' knock him out if he keeps messin' with me.

M AM A JAKES

If ya' ask me I believe she a lil sweet on him.

HOOCHIE  
M ama!

CAT  
He's a good looking boy and his family got a little money too. Probably marry him and all.

HOOCHIE  
I ain't worried 'bout him. I'm gone be making my own money one day what I need with a man.

(Beat. Goes to sit by CAT.)  
Auntie Cat, where you been for the past couple of weeks?

CAT shoots a glance at MAMA JAKES.

CAT  
I've been in M onroe, you know with M ama, workin' at the lil shack sangin'.

M AM A JAKES  
Sure it ain't been with that man?

CAT  
(Turns to face her.)  
M ama Jakes!

M AM A JAKES  
Chile, I'm just axein' a question. You ain't been around much, figured you got yourself a man to lay up with.

CAT  
I'm not focused on finding no man just yet. I was with my M ama.

M AM A JAKES  
(Beat; then...)

How's she doin'?

CAT  
She had a spell a couple of days ago. Doctor man done gave her some medicine.

M AM A JAKES  
Doctor...hope it ain't nothin' serious.

CAT  
M e too. And I think I caught something that she had. Cause I ain't been feeling too hot either.

HOOCHIE  
M aybe M ama can give you some of that stuff she useta' make.

CAT  
Oh, that voodoo hexing stuff?

M AM A JAKES  
I'll fix you a glass of vinegar and lemon...clear it right up.

MAMA JAKES goes to the bar and starts to  
make the remedy for CAT.

CAT  
JT's not up at the house?

M AM A JAKES  
Nah. He's probably on his way back from M onroe.

HOOCHIE goes by the cornbread and sniffs the  
good smell coming from it. She examines it.

HOOCHIE  
You did good, Auntie Cat. Ain't cooked it too fast. Usually you be burnin' it.

M AM A JAKES  
Hoochie--

HOOCHIE

What, M ama? I'm just sayin'.

M AM A JAKES

It looks good, Cat. I taught you right.

CAT

See, I can cook.

(MAMA JAKES sets a glass of  
lemonade in front of CAT.)

I wish ya' had some of the good stuff, M ama Jakes. This new law got everybody scared to even drank.

M AM A JAKES

Tell me about it. It's bad for the business.

CAT

White folks crackin' down hard on people and they places of business. M akin' 'sho nobody even thinkin' 'bout sellin' it.

M AM A JAKES

Heard somethin'?

CAT

Yeah, M s. Beulah said that they got some white men down at the jailhouse because of it. A dog gone shame.

M AM A JAKES

It sure is honey.

CAT

So, what's going to happen to Black Creek?

M AM A JAKES

It's home for now. Ain't no tellin' what JT want's to do. Everybody closin' up shop or sellin' they land.

CAT

You ain't thinkin' 'bout sellin' this land is you?

M AM A JAKES

Hell naw. Crackers just don't want no colored to have they own. I owe that land tax collector fifty mo' dollars and I'm done. Then I'm gon' stick by this here land. M ama worked herself into the grave to keep this land after the war.

CAT

Good-- got too much good memories in this place.

They both look around.

M AM A JAKES

Chile, we sho'll do.

CAT

You know Yule M ay and her daughter done left they house. Said they went to the city to work in some kitchens.

M AM A JAKES

Did they?

CAT

M mmmm, I went by her house but her neighbor, the Candy Lady said that she packed up and left a few days ago.

M AM A JAKES

Candy Lady? Chile, she stay in everybody business and gossipin'.

CAT

That's what she say-- said she saw everybody just a packin' up and movin' on out like they bein' followed by Moses to the promise land. Last I heard, she said she made her way down to Florida to get some work by the ocean. But the Candy Lady just watched her go.

M AM A JAKES

She ain't leavin' is she?

CAT

I'ont think so. She sat on her porch and just watch everybody. I went to her and tried to get that cream to help mama with the pain in her hands. I ain't had a bag of bones but said I can pay her back later. We just watch people leave. Leavin' all they had and used to. Like the wind... blowin' which way ever they want. But that's what people doin' now.

HOOCHIE

The way this world operatin', nigga's can't be much but sharecroppers and kitchen maids.

CAT

That's your way of thinkin'?

HOOCHIE

Sho'll is. Why can't it be? Think about it, crackers don't want you to be nothin' but that. They know we's powerful-- and so they try to stop us from bein' better.

CAT

Then what you gon' do?

HOOCHIE

I'mma sang. M aybe sang in Uncle Willie's band.

CAT

I remember when I was starting high school, I wanted to be a music school teacher.

HOOCHIE

What happed to that?

CAT pauses, then turns to HOOCHIE and

smiles congenially.

CAT

(With much brevity in her voice.)

Life, baby. Life.

HOOCHIE

That life you talkin' seems like it happens only to the nigga's down here.

CAT

Well, the good book say that God himself rain on the just as well as the unjust.

HOOCHIE

Well, down here in the bayou we can't afford no mo' rain cause the creek gon' rise. Throw some of that rain uptown to them white folks mo'.

MAMA softly laughs to herself.

CAT

Since Willie Earl been traveling, I'm thinking about travelling too.

M AM A JAKES

Travel where?

CAT

I don't know... maybe travel to New York City or maybe Italy.

M AM A JAKES/ HOOCHIE

Italy!

CAT

Yeah, y'all two never heard of Italy?

HOOCHIE

Ain't that's where them fancy slick haired crackers live?

CAT

It's across the ocean. It's so beautiful. I saw pictures once and I thought to myself, now I'm gonna go there one day.

M AM A JAKES

Italy just may be right for ya' then.

CAT

M ama you don't ever just wanna get away, and just enjoy yourself outside of these backwoods? It's so much out there.

M AM A JAKES

Nah-uh, ain't no sense of it cause we wasn't allowed to. Hell, I believe no matter where you go, your problems always gon' find ya'. You can be here or all the way in Timbuktu.

CAT

I'd like to. Just start over and things. Get away from here.

The door opens and WILLIE EARL steps in  
with

his trumpet in his hand.

WILLIE EARL

I smell that good cookin' all the way out there in the yard.

CAT

Good God, don't you ever give that trumpet a rest?

WILLIE EARL

You know practice makes perfect. Or maybe you don't.

MAMA JAKES

Willie, come on over 'chere and get ya' somethin' to eat.

WILLIE EARL laughs and smoothly makes his

way to the bar by MAMA JAKES.

CAT

I made that cornbread that's on the table.

WILLIE EARL

Oh, Lord, somebody gon' have ta'call the wagon.

(Off CAT'S look of contempt.)

Oh, I'm just ta' teasin' y'all can fix me a plate, Cher.

CAT

Where you comin' from that got you smilin' ear to ear?

WILLIE EARL

I met with King

HOOCHIE

That jazz player you's was talkin' 'bout earlier?

WILLIE EARL

I did. They really want me to go on the road with them. Hell, practically beggin' me to go. Met wit' them, talkin' the right money and mad it official and everythin'. They wanna play at a new big club openin' up there. It's gon' be the biggest thing to hit Harlem.

M AM A JAKES

What club now?

WILLIE EARL

You know that Jack Johnson? That new Heavy weight that knocked out ole cracker James Jeffries about ten years back. Well, they say he rented the upper floor of the building on the corner of 142nd Street and Lenox Avenue in the heart of Harlem and opened an intimate supper club called the "Club Deluxe". They want us to come play for him for a while.

CAT

Leavin' again... What's new? Everybody else come second to you and your music.

WILLIE EARL only retorts with a genial smile.

WILLIE EARL

Now ya' know, I gots to go where the music takes me. If it takes me all the way to New York to the waters of Florida... I gots to go. The music don't ever let me down.

(A slight jab.)

It chooses me.

MAMA JAKES crosses back over to him to hand

him a plate. WILLIE starts to eat.

M AM A JAKES

When they want ya' to leave?

WILLIE EARL

(Looking to MAMA inconspicuously.)

They want to leave at the end of the week. Two day journey ya' know.

CAT

Why so soon?

WILLIE EARL

(Still looking at MAMA JAKES.)

Well-- things ain't changin' to much 'round here. It's somethin' new. And they got themselves a tour comin' up, they need a new trumpet player for they new set. King and M a Rainey done heard me play "rooter to the tooter" and offered me a spot on his band.

Don't get me wrong, now, I told him no not right now at first. That offer, Cher, it's too good to pass up. Harlem? Lawd...

HOOCHIE

Harlem... I heard that's where all them fancy niggers live.

CAT

Don't use that word, Hoochie.

HOOCHIE

Why not?

CAT

It's degrading to us.

HOOCHIE

(Smiling to appease CAT.)

Is that where all them fancy colored folks live?

WILLIE EARL

Some of 'em, yeah.

The front door opens and finally, it's JT, in his mid-fifties, a rough man with ashen hands and

dark skin. He wears overalls and a wife beater with a straw hat hanging halfway off his head.

He goes over by the bar.

JT

I'm home.

(Takes off his straw hat and throws it on the bar.)

Ain't been gone for but a week. Shit, I'm tired.

MAMA JAKES starts to mechanically fix a plate

of food for him.

M AM A JAKES

How was M onroe?

JT

Them God damn crackers tried to jiff us out of five dollars.

M AM A JAKES

Five dollars? For what?

JT

Said they only gonna pay us for a few of days since we finished the work early. But that bastard was like, ain't no sense of payin' y'all for the week when y'all didn't work it. But damn hell, we worked close to a week.

M AM A JAKES

Did you get yo' money?

JT

Hell yeah I got my money! Had to almost sock that cracker right in his jaw for it. He was gon' call them white folks in town, but I ain't care. Bastard just didn't wanna pay no damn body.

M AM A JAKES

You ain't do nothin' stupid, did ya' JT?

JT

What's stupid for gettin' somethin' that belongs to you? That's my Goddamn money. I worked hard for it. He steady sittin' up there on his high horse, tellin' us, and you know it's a group of us, talkin' 'bout he had to dock our pay for comin' in late off of lunch that one time. I said, man if you don't get outta here with that bullshit.

(To MAMA JAKES.)

Get me a cold lemonade.

WILLIE EARL

That job that bad?

MAMA JAKES pours him a glass of fresh  
lemonade.

JT

Hell yeah it's that bad. You know a nigga can't work nowhere but in the fields. Had us out there thirteen hours in the hot blazin' sun. Shit, only niggas too. I say to my main man Zeke, now I know goddamn well this man ain't got only nigga's out here plowin' the fields. But he did... and sum 'o bitch was bold about it too. That's why he ain't wanna pay us either-- but bet yo ass I got my damn money. And I betchu that white man ain't gon' never try to rip Jakes Talley off no mo.

M AM A JAKES

(Nonchalant.)

Well, you home now. You can get you some rest.

JT

'Sho nuff, I'm tired. Aye, M ae, since when did Short Leg get outta the crazy house?

M AM A JAKES

Short Leg out?

JT

That's what I hear on my way here. Beulah act like she couldn't wait to tell me that he got out. You know that man is crazy as a damn critter bug to be roamin' these streets. Singin' some buck ass song about him gettin' him a dollar on a two way street. And we all know he ain't got no damn money. Blind as a bat, I had to tell Beulah he got himself almost hit by two tractor trucks.

M AM A JAKES

Lawd, Beulah needs to be watchin' him, or get somebody who's liable to look out for him. Stead of bein' in that church house all day long, thinkin' God gon give you a whole lotta money if you stay.

JT

That's all they do. When they tried to help, said that he went stone cold crazy on them people's down there. Bernie done said that she was out all night lookin' for his crazy ass. Better be lucky his ass didn't go into town and cause a ruckus with 'dem white folks.

WILLIE EARL

You know they got him released because his family wanted his check he get a month.

JT

Such a shame, tryin' to give that man's money to that jack-legged preacher-- it ain't like he gets much and they tryin' to give it to that damn church. M an need that damn money.

You know he got to go to Clay store down on Ninth and pick up his medicine. How he gon' do that when that woman take all his money and give it to that damn preacher?

M AM A JAKES

They ain't gotta use his check. That check for him to get his medicine and help him live right. Not spend it on themselves.

JT

It's they business not ours. I ain't worried 'bout it.

( Viciously stabs his food with a fork.)

I see them weeds growin' somethin' strong out there.

M AM A JAKES

Yeah, and you need to cut 'em. Probably snakes all under the house and everythin'.

JT

Shit, I'll do it tomorrow. I'm tired as hell.

He slides the plate over and chugs the rest of his lemonade.

JT

Why we ain't seein' you out there, Willie Earl?

WILLIE EARL

Nah, you ain't gon see me in nobody's field.

JT

Afraid you gon' get them pretty lil hands dirty?

WILLIE EARL

M usic is my life's work.

JT

M usic... You should be doin' a man's work.

WILLIE EARL

Nah, I'm just a man that believes he should be rising above his circumstances. So workin' in them fields ain't what I want in my life.

JT slaps his knee and laughs.

JT

What nigga you know that can rise above their circumstances? Hell, look at Short Leg, nigga done went into the army and fought in that damn World War to rise above his circumstances. Now look at him. Barely can talk and think for his damn self. Before that Beulah had kicked him out of the damn house to try to make him find his way in the world. She did that for spite 'cause the boy look like that nigga she was foolin' with that ran out on her when he was born. What was that nigga's name...? Uh... it was somethin' Bo, Bo-somethin'. She ain't loved that boy because of it. Now she kicked him out figured he gon' be like his daddy and run the streets and get himself into some trouble. See, Short Leg was smarter than that... Pulled him self up by his bootstraps and joined the damn army. Why? I don't know. Fought in that damn war and got himself shot up in the head and now he don't act right. White man done sent his ass back on home with a few dollars a month and the clothes on his back to make him feel satisfied. Beulah done figured out he gettin' money comin' in a month, get all nice wit' him and got him back into her house and she take all his money every month. I guess she figure a fish only gets caught when it open its mouth so she caught his ass. I think it's a goddamn shame. But 'dat army... That's how they do ya'. Use you up and throw yo' ass away like you two day old trash. I'm tellin' ya, I'ont know why these nigga's think goin' to the army is just gone change things. It ain't. White man and his army don't give a damn 'bout niggas. You signin' up to work for 'em just to die. And you callin' it risin' above yo' circumstance. Nigga, please.

M AM A JAKES

This country is built for one person and one person only: the white man.

JT

Shidd, you got that right. That goddamn white man got niggas shakin' in they boots when it come to drinkin' some hooch. Ain't nothin' wrong with havin' a good drank or two. God made it for us to enjoy.

M AM A JAKES

M an whatchu you talkin', God ain't made no liquor.

JT

(Slapping his knee.)

God done put the potatoes out here for us didn't he? Iight, so, therefore, he done made it. People wanna blame it for the bad things they do. Whiskey is just sumthin' ya' drink. It brings out the real person that's been buried inside you. Now what's the real problem, liquor or you? Ain't nothin' wrong with drinkin' a lil shine.

M AM A JAKES

Hmmp. Let you tell it.

HOOCHIE

M aybe Daddy's right, M ama.

M AM A JAKES

(Quickly and apprehensively to  
HOOCHIE.)

Stay outtta grown folks business like I told ya.

JT

I'm tellin' y'all niggas ain't good for nothin' but to be controlled... that's all this mess of new law is doin'.

WILLIE EARL

I don't know, colored people can rise up. We strong as a people. We can make our own opportunities. I mean, look at those who came before us... they tried to break us down, but God damn it, we came back stronger.

MAMA JAKES looks to WILLIE with a side eye.

JT grumbles with a hearty laughter.

JT

Nigga you ain't got sense God gave a billy goat. You gon' head and try and go out there and make your own opportunities if you want to... Them white folks ready boy, they want you to stir somethin' up... string yo ass up in them Goddamn trees and laugh at yo' high yella' ass strugglin' to let a breath leave them thin 'ole lips of yours.

WILLIE EARL

I'm creating opportunities for myself.

JT

And what is that? Playin' that Goddamn trumpet? M an, you don't get outta here with that bullshit. You playin that damn thing ain't gon' make no money in this world. And if it did, hell, all they gon' do is take it from ya'. Ain't that what they be doin' when a nigga get a lil land and money? Shiddd... colored man ain't 'llowed to make no money in this world unless it's pennies on the dollar. Even that at times is too much.

WILLIE EARL

Plenty of colored folks makin' money out there.

JT

Yeah, and you gotta play into the white man hands, don't ya? You betta get yo' high yella ass in them fields like the rest of us. Break ya' back and do some honest work. Shit like that will make you a real man. Don't be no geechie boy 'alla yo' life.

WILLIE EARL

(Tightly and with pride.)

I'm going places, JT. And I ain't fightin' in no white man's army or plowin' they fields, either. The same fields that are filled with the bones and dreams of our elders. I got too much respect for my life to let it come to that. I got dreams. I got the music and when I leave this world I wanna leave with a smile on my face and the music in my heart. 'Cause that's the only way to live.

He steals a quick glance to MAMA JAKES. For

a moment JT sits there and then he burst into a laugh.

JT

Sho', sho'. But what dreams gon' do for ya in this world? Huh? Not a Goddamned thing. Shit, you better hang up that dream talk 'fore you find somethin' out there you ain't gon' wanna to find. And no dream is gonna save ya' either.

A slight beat between the men.

M AM A JAKES

Everybody gots they own path.

JT

Path my ass! They want to keep us all in our place. Just back in M onroe them white folks was just starin' us down, boy. Like they was a overseer from the plantation. Same look M r. EJ Johnson gave my pappy before they strung his ass up after the war. Some others they bow they head and mosey on they own way. But I swear before God that it was like if you made one move they was gon' shoot you dead right then and there and leave yo' body to rot in the street. M e, well, I looked one of them in they eye, cause I was brought up to look a man in his eyes. M akes me think what my Pa said before he died, "when a man realizes he will die, he will never walk in fear again." And that's what I live by when it comes to these white folks.

But that cracker sho'll stared me down and I did the same thing to him. Looked him right dead in the eyes. I'ont walk in fear of no man 'cause if you can't protect your life, than it ain't yours to protect.

CAT

Willie you think this country will get any better for us?

WILLIE EARL

Honestly, I don't know--

JT

(Interrupting)

Hell no! I'm tellin' y'all this country don't give a damn about us niggas. Shidd... Nigga's gotta fly when the white man gotta walk.

WILLIE EARL

That's why most of these juke joints sellin' that liquor off on the side, JT.

MAMA JAKES gives WILLIE EARL a  
cautious

look.

JT

Shidd... now these folks playin' with the governments money now. They get themselves locked up or worse. Keep playin'. They even locked up Bassie.

M AM A JAKES

Bassie? For what?

JT

Sellin' that shit on the side. He messed wit the gov'ment, now they done threw his stupid ass up in the jail house.

MAMA JAKES and WILLIE EARL steal a  
glance

at each other.

M AM A JAKES

You know Bassie pissed off a lot of crackers ever since he burned down that store. White man said he was stealin'.

JT

Well, they got him on this one. And they ain't gon' let his ass out either. White folks don't play 'bout they money. His sister Annie Mae asked me and some of the boys to save a lil change to get him, I say hell naw. Let the nigga stay in jail. Always been a lil bad ass ever since his daddy ran off with that woman from Biloxi.

WILLIE EARL

Well, I'll let you think on that.

WILLIE EARL stands up and gathers his things

up.

CAT

You leavin', Willie?

WILLIE EARL

Got a practice down the hill.

JT

I'mma go on and lay down up at the house.

WILLIE EARL and JT exits. CAT and

HOOCHIE goes to help MAMA JAKES clean.

HOOCHIE

M ama, you heard what Pa said--

M AM A JAKES

Hush up-- clean these dishes...

HOOCHIE continues to clean. Suddenly, CAT

falters over and suddenly vomits.

HOOCHIE

Auntie Cat!

The lights fade to black.

SCENE THREE

Next morning. The heat rises. MAMA JAKES is

on the couch with a tin bucket at her feet, scrubbing clothes. She wipes the sweat from her brow. JT enters groggily through the screen

door. He leans against the wall. Looks at

MAMA JAKES with a look of lost penitence.

MAMA JAKES senses his presence and turns.

M AM A JAKES

There's a plate of grits and a piece of bacon for ya' on the bar.

JT hardens and mechanically goes over to the

bar area and grabs the plate of food. He eats it with his fingers.

JT

I see the stove top fixed up.

M AM A JAKES

Cuz I took care of that the other day. It's back regular now.

JT continues eating.

JT

M ae, Hoochie thinkin' 'bout goin' back down to that school house?

M AM A JAKES

It's damn near June, she ain't got a few more months till they back in. Why?

JT

She need to go ahead and quit that school mess and get up in these kitchens in town. White woman told me she lookin' for somebody to come work for her.

I told her, I say, I gots me a daughter that do real good in the kitchen, cookin' and the cleanin'. And she said she'll pay her five dollars a week for doin' that.

M AM A JAKES

What white woman?

JT

Somebody's rich wife that I was workin' for. Have Hoochie work there for a few days out of the week. Teach her good, teach her that life ain't no free ride.

M AM A JAKES

The girl just turned sixteen.

JT

You was younger than her when you first started. I'm just sayin' help around the house. That auction comin' up. You thought 'bout what I said?

M AM A JAKES

No, I ain't thought 'bout what you said.

JT

They payin' good money for land. 'Specially down here in the bayou. You know you owe them still.

M AM A JAKES

Just fifty mo' dollars.

JT

Where we gon' get fifty dollars from? That tax collector ain't playin' 'bout his money. That's why I say get Hoochie in them kitchens if you ain't 'keen on sellin' the juke joint.

M AM A JAKES

We fine. Ain't no sense of talkin' 'bout money. Too early for that.

JT

You think them tax collectors on this here land care that it's too early? They want they money just like the regular folks and don't care 'bout what time it is.

M AM A JAKES

(Forthright.)

Hoochie ain't workin' in nobody's kitchen.

JT

I don't know why Big M ama thought leavin' this place for us to take care of was a good idea. Woman didn't know how to keep up a land. She owe a lot of money and stuck us with the bill. I say sell it, get you some money and move on. Hell, that's what everybody else is doin'. White man with his fancy breeches and slick hair buyin' up people's property like there's no tomorrow--

M AM A JAKES

Big M ama put a lot into this land. Put her whole heart and spirit into it. Can't let white folks come in here and change it for they benefit.

JT

M ight as well. Cuz they gon' take it if we don't come up with that fifty dollars. They already don't like a woman ownin' a land. And a nigga woman at that.

M AM A JAKES

We fine, like I said.

JT grabs a toothpick and gives MAMA JAKES  
a

rising suspicion.

JT

You sho'll talkin' a whole lotta "we fine". I sho'll ain't seen't you in them kitchens in a while.

M AM A JAKES

JT, you ain't been home but a day. How you gon' see me in somebody's kitchen?

He smacks his teeth and swivels the toothpick  
to the side of his mouth.

JT

I's jus sayin... I ain't seen't you in them kitchens in a long time.

MAMA JAKES gets up and goes to the clothes  
line that escapes from the window and starts to  
pin clothes on it.

M AM A JAKES

Don't start now, JT.

Beat. JT watches her closely.

JT

I see Geechie boy still comin' 'round here.

M AM A JAKES

Yeah, he said he leavin' again by the end of the week. Goin' up to New York City.

JT

Is he now?

M AM A JAKES

Yeah-- Hoochie gon' miss him.

JT

Is you?

M AM A JAKES

Is I what?

JT

Gon' miss him?

MAMA continues to hang the clothes on the line.

She doesn't have time for his antics today.

M AM A JAKES

You know I've known Willie for a long time.

JT

Woman, that ain't answer my question.

M AM A JAKES

JT go on down the hill or somewhere. Startin' with me early this mornin'.

JT

You know there's been some talks down in town. Zeke's wife Edna tellin' us things and sayin' there's talks in town. Talks 'bout you and him sellin' shine. Sayin' y'all got that good stuff.

That makes MAMA JAKES turn. Silence stands

between them.

M AM A JAKES

Folks need to learn to mind they own Goddamn business. Ain't they got nothin' better to do then be in mine.

JT

So you got's business?

(Her silence gives him the answer.)

Goddamn it, woman. Now I done told ya' 'bout that sellin' that shine shit!

M AM A JAKES

We ain't hurtin' nobody, JT.

JT

The hell you ain't! You gon' have them Goddamn police up in this house ramblin and tearin' up my shit and they gon' throw yo' stubborn ass in the calaboose.

M AM A JAKES

I know the law. They ain't got nothin' on me.

JT

You and that house nigga of yours some special kinda stupid, you know that? It's against the law for y'all to be doin' that bootleggin' shit!

M AM A JAKES

Oh, it's just lil hooch. Hell... You say earlier ain't nothin' wrong with a lil shine.

JT

I say drinkin' it, I ain't say nuffin' 'bout selling it!

M AM A JAKES

White folks doin' it all over town. Nigga gal do the same and it seems that the whole world gon' fall apart.

JT

You betta shut that shit down for I know somethin'. I ain't workin' all over town for them white folks to throw me in no damn cell. You crazy as hell, woman.

M AM A JAKES

We ain't gon get caught--

JT

Woman, you betta shut that shit down like I said!

Beat. MAMA JAKES stands her ground and challenges him with a deep stare of contempt.

M AM A JAKES

I ain't. We got a good business goin' and I ain't givin' that up. And since you on my ass, how was M onroe?

JT

Whatchu talkin' 'bout? I worked. That's how M onroe was.

M AM A JAKES

That's all?

JT

I been in them fields all damn day. A week straight with no damn day off.

M AM A JAKES

A week... So you done lied earlier, huh? You said you ain't worked but three days.

JT

(Tripping up.)

Woman, I don't even know what the hell you talkin' 'bout.

M AM A JAKES

Somethin' down there got you goin' back or stayin'.

(She looks at him dead in the eyes.)

You still messin' around... And you on my case 'bout some damn moonshine?

JT

I done told you, I was workin' all day.

M AM A JAKES

You betta not bring that shit home to me, I know somethin’.

JT

I told yo’ God damn ass I ain’t messin’ wit’ nobody!

M AM A JAKES

You can always lie through your teeth, man. I don’t know who you think you foolin’. But you can’t lie to me, nigga. It’s sumthin’ ‘bout you, JT. It sumthin’ ‘bout you and I can see it right through them eyes. Ever since me and you done met, I could always tell it in yo’ eyes. It’s like they can tell the truth even when you don’t want to. You can always tell when a dog do somethin’ wrong by the look in its eyes. You know, sometimes I lay there in that bed wonderin’ if everythin’ you done said for the past twenty years was lies. And when the world of hurt falling down on me, I let it. And it ain’t no sense cryin’ about it neither because tears ain’t gon bring out the truth. ‘Specially wit’ you...

(Laughs to herself.)

A dog that bites is a dog that bites. Out ‘cho mouf was, “I’m gon’ love me this woman right ‘chere. I’m gon’ love her and I ain’t gon’ let nobody else love her.” And I ‘useta to smile all the time. When it was rainin’ outside, and the creek risin’, I just had a smile on my face because I was in love with this beautiful strong man who loved and honored me. And I was a fool for thinkin’ all that was true cuz when truth shows itself only a fool or a coward won’t accept it. And I guess at the end of the day M ama did raise a fool because I believed you.

JT

You keep callin’ me a lie--

M AM A JAKES

Whatchu gon’ do? Huh? You can’t do nothin’ more than you already done because I am numb, JT. I am numb and I can’t feel nothin’ no mo.

JT goes up to her, they’re face to face. MAMA JAKES stands her ground.

JT

You gon’ feel somethin’ good and hard if you keep flappin’ yo’ mouf. I’ve been workin’ hard and I don’t even take no shit from them crackers and I ain’t gon take no shit from you. I want some peace and quiet in my house.

M AM A JAKES

I am sick and tired of you sayin' this yo' house. When we met, you ain't had shit but the rags on yo' back! Don't you ever forget this is my house, my juke joint and my land!

JT backhands her and MAMA JAKES crashes against the bar counter top. JT looks on almost regrettably.

JT

I'm the man and you the woman. You best not ever forget yo' place!

MAMA JAKES recoups. She grabs a knife from

the bar and holds it towards him with a tight fist.

M AM A JAKES

(Slowly and with resolute.)

Nigga, that's the first and last time you gon' put yo' hands on me.

A moment of realization. MAMA JAKES still holds the knife towards JT, ready to slice him up good. She's good for it.

JT surrenders with a look of contempt and exits out the screen door. Blackout.

SCENE FOUR

High evening. HOOCHIE sits by the bar, softly humming to herself. Suddenly, the screen door burst wide open with WILLIE EARL propping up CAT on his shoulder. She's bloodied and partly unconscious.

WILLIE EARL

Hoochie!

WILLIE EARL places CAT by the stage area.

HOOCHIE

What happened to Auntie Cat?

WILLIE EARL

Candy Lady called me and told me she heard a ruckus. I got there and I seen she been beaten somethin' awful. Some crazy nigga did it and left her in the house to die.

WILLIE EARL goes over to the bar and grabs a rag, wets it with water and rushes back to CAT.

HOOCHIE touches CAT lightly.

HOOCHIE

She out cold, Uncle Willie. I don't think she breathin' or nothin'.

WILLIE EARL

C'mon, Cat... Stay with me. Stay with me, Cat.

(He leans down, softly whispers.)

I still owe you a dance, remember? C'mon.

WILLIE taps the cold towel on CAT's bloodied face. She flinches but doesn't awaken. WILLIE EARL looks at her with deep care and fear.

HOOCHIE

Who in the hell did this to her?

WILLIE EARL

Nobody didn't see the bastard.

HOOCHIE

M ama in't gon' like this. She gon get Papa shot gun and blow a hole through somebody.

WILLIE EARL

We can't let that happen. M arie say she got a baby comin'.

HOOCHIE

Auntie Cat gon' have a baby?

WILLIE EARL

She is.

(To CAT, softly...urgently.)

Cat... Do you hear me? Who did this to you? Answer me?

HOOCHIE

(Seeing CAT stir awake.)

Looks like she wakin' up.

WILLIE EARL

Hoochie go run and get some water.

(HOOCHIE makes her way out.)

Cat, can you see how many fingers I'm holdin' up?

He holds up two fingers.

CAT

(Struggles.)

Two... I think.

WILLIE EARL

That's good. That's real good. Now, who the hell did this to you?

CAT

I can't say that.

WILLIE EARL

What you mean you can't say? Tell me, tell me now, Cat! I ain't playin'.

CAT

Willie, leave it be!

WILLIE EARL

Ah, Catherine. Now-- it's me, tell me who banged you up real bad. And what about the baby?

The word "baby" makes her stiff.

CAT  
I can't. He'll kill me.

WILLIE EARL  
Who?

Beat. CAT almost tells him. She wants to. But  
she truly cannot. She turns away from him.

CAT  
Nobody, just leave it be!

WILLIE EARL  
Cat, I ain't. Some nigga done hurt you. I 'ont wanna see you hurt like this.

WILLIE EARL wipes the tears from her face.

CAT  
Willie Earl, just leave me alone.

WILLIE EARL  
I can't do that, Cat. I can't do that. I want you tell me. You know I'ont like to see ya'  
hurt.

CAT  
How did we get here, Willie?

WILLIE EARL  
(Softly.)  
What's that you talkin'?

There is heavy breathing come from CAT. A  
lump forms in her throat and she almost renders  
to her tears.

CAT  
How did we get here? How did I lose my dream... how did I lose my music?

WILLIE EARL

We all got our ways, Cher.

CAT

I guess you right 'bout dat.

WILLIE EARL

Who did this to you? Tell me.

CAT

You a good man, Willie Earl. Always have been. I sho'll did throw away a good thing with you.

(Beat. Grabs his hands and places it on her cheek.)

I'm so sorry, Willie...

WILLIE EARL

Hush that up. You ain't got nothin' to be sorry for. We was just in two different places, is all. We was young, barely eighteen.

CAT

And in love. I was in love with ya', Willie. And you sho'll luv'd me. You was the first man that treated me sumthin' nice and saw me complete and whole. M ade me feel somethin'. And I just foolishly threw you away. I let all the world get to me. And I--

(She looks at him deeply in the eyes.

Getting lost in the magic of them.)

Yo' eyes, Willie. Yo' eyes always had magic in 'em. That's what I luv'd 'bout ya'. You always had that magic in yo' eyes and it made me feel some type of safe. M ade my heart race-- and I messed it up, Willie...

WILLIE EARL

Cat--

CAT leans in and kisses WILLIE EARL. It's a desperate and hungry kiss. The screen door

cracks open. MAMA JAKES appears, looks on

at the both of them.

What the hell is goin' on here?

M AM A JAKES

Blackout.

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

Hours later. The setting sunlight spills through the windows. MAMA JAKES makes her way around the room, softly whispering to herself.

She's got a bowl full of dust and shakes her mojo bag. CAT walks in, hair damped with water. A tense silence grows between them.

MAMA JAKES studies her. CAT has her head down in shame.

What you doing?

CAT

Sit there...

M AM A JAKES

CAT sits down on the floor where she pointed. A soft sheet covers the wooden floorboard. MAMA hangs the mojo bag over CAT'S head.

Thought you didn't do voodoo like this no more.

CAT

MAMA JAKES continues to study her. Her eyes... narrowing.

You gon' tell me what happened or not.

M AM A JAKES

CAT hesitates for a moment. Deciding which truth she's looking for.

CAT

It's just some asshole thinking he can lay a hand on me.

(MAMA JAKES takes her thumb and wipes the powder on CAT'S forehead.)

Some fella from Reynard Parrish they say. Tried not to pay me.

M AM A JAKES

If mens puttin' they hands on ya, it's liable to happen again.

CAT

M ama, can we just leave it be, please?

M AM A JAKES

Alright... If you ain't gon' tell me the truth, then you can just stay right 'chere and let me put this on ya'... it's gon keep you safe...

MAMA JAKES hovers her hands over CAT.

These two women are now in silenced

communion with each other. MAMA JAKES

whispers to herself. It's a whisper that we nor CAT can decipher. But it is something powerful.

It then turns into a soft and lowly hum.

MAMA JAKES continues to hover hands swiftly over

CAT, pausing over her womb. She senses

something. Finally, her eyes open.

CAT

M ama... About Willie Earl--

M AM A JAKES

What about him?

CAT falls silent.

CAT

I'm sorry.

M AM A JAKES

What you sayin' sorry 'bout that for?

CAT

I know he--

M AM A JAKES

You just feelin' a whole lot, is all. It's a natural thing.

CAT

Natural? Ain't nothin' natural about none of this. I'm just so tired. Ever since I was a little girl, I always accepted my place in the world and the love that I was given. My daddy comin' into my room with five fools and they have they way with me anyway they wanted while I tried to keep my legs closed. "Just take it easy," they say. "You'll get used to it in a while." M ama in the kitchen, makin' cornbread... I cry for her but she just standin' there, glad that it ain't happenin' to her. I saw the look on her face when them men's closed the door and in the dark, I would feel the hot breath of my daddy and his friends and them pressin' against me as they take turn. When I tell you I prayed, I prayed. Prayed to Jesus to save me from that dark room. I prayed so hard and so long my mouth got numb. God didn't show up. And I accepted it. I watch you, watch ya' sang yo' songs right there. Dance one dance. And I'd just watch you throw fools out who didn't respect you. They call you outcha name.

People laughin' and shoutin' in here. And I saw you shinin' as people comin' through the door. Shinin' so bright you'd blind somebody. But at the end of the night, after everybody done went home ... you'd sit at that bar, leanin' over, tired and weary from the night. You'd be countin' yo' money and me collectin' my bills and you and Willie Earl just be smilin' at each other. I knew right then and there he luv'd you mo' than he luv'd the music that was in his heart. I accepted that too because we was youngins. Willie Earl was good to me. Showed me things I ain't never thought was good. He made me feel like I had a choice in the matter on who can love me. But I ain't know what to do with it. I let him go. The world sho'll have a way of makin' you survive when you ain't got nothin' left. When we gals be beat with an inch of our lives, bein' turned into grown folks when we still a child at heart. Then the world makes ya' do things that ain't natural for a woman. I let men lay up with me and explore every part of me the world couldn't get to. They lay on top of me, plowin' themselves into me. And I would try to search for the same look of magic Willie Earl give you in they eyes and like that little girl prayin', I got nothin'. And I accepted that. They do they business and I just turn into that little girl that was in that dark room, foolishly prayin' for God to show up. I'm just so tired. I cry somethin' bad, M ama Jakes. I cry a creek of tears cause them mens get to go on about they lives and I'm left with the scars. I accepted that the world wasn't made for me and this is the life I was given. M ight as well get paid while doin' it.

There is a deafening silence between the women.

Both of them hear something at the door and

finds HOOCHIE standing there with a world of  
hurt on her face.

M AM A JAKES

Ah, baby you heard ‘alla that?

HOOCHIE steps into the bar further and goes  
to hug CAT. And they continue to hug and hold  
onto each other in silence.

HOOCHIE

I love you, Auntie Cat.

CAT

I love you too, Hoochie.

(HOOCHIE doesn’t let her go.)

I shouldn’t be bringin’ this on y’all. I’m sorry.

M AM A JAKES

Don’t you say sorry. Baby, you like my own kin. We family... You hear me? We family.

(Beat, then down to business. MAMA

JAKES places her hands on CAT’S  
stomach.)

Now what about this baby you carryin’? I felt the baby’s spirit when I blessed ya’. He  
strong.

CAT

I’m thinking about goin’ to go see M arie Laveau. She can make somethin’ and I can just  
piss it out.

M AM A JAKES

(Sharply.)

You went to see M arie?

CAT

I did. I gave her two whole dollars and a bag of my wishes for a down payment.

M AM A JAKES

Cat--

CAT

I don't wanna bring a child into my world, M ama Jakes. M arie said she can do it tomorrow.

M AM A JAKES

You ain't seein' that woman. You gon' keep this baby. It's innocent and it can't control who its daddy or mama. But baby, it's gon' bring you that happiness you been longin' for. I feel it in my spirit.

(Invoking that stern motherly voice.)

It'll be the worst thing you ever do. Trust me. This chile gon' be a Moses for his people, leading them into that Promise Land.

CAT rubs her belly. And she thinks for a

moment.

CAT

M ama, it ain't gon' be fair to this baby. To bring him into a world of pain. I done a lot of things in my life, and I can't have that type of blood on my hands. Like you say, he innocent. I ain't havin' this baby.

CAT gets up and leaves.

HOOCHIE

I could hate them bastards for what they did to her?

M AM A JAKES

Hoochie--

HOOCHIE

No, M ama, I could hate them for what they do to Auntie Cat. All men ain't shit!

M AM A JAKES

"Men ain't shit"... Oh, baby girl, you got a lot to learn. Men are put on this earth to kill, steal and destroy, that's what my mama all ways used to say. But we can't live without 'em. That's the way the good Lawd done made it. If you ask me, they a gift and a curse. They supposed to go out, hunt and kill, and we women, we cook it up for them to eat it. It's the way of the world.

And if we try to make things outta line, oh, all they liable to do is smack our pretty faces with the back of they hands. Big M ama useta say, "God in hev'm is a man, so that's why he put the weight of the world in the coochie of the woman." It's like it's in they spirit. It makes them feel whole and strong when they gots control. But we women, we gots the power... we always gots the power and there ain't nothin' they can do about it.

HOOCHIE

Tell me Daddy don't put his hands on ya', M ama.

(MAMA JAKES falls silent.)

I could hate him.

M AM A JAKES

Naw, baby. Hoochie... Don't hate nobody, nah. You gives them all yo' power. Yo' daddy love you. He just... he has a hard time showin' it. When a man like him, who has a years full of pain and go out into the world, it beats him to the ground. Yo' daddy comes home, he can't seem to leave the pain out there in the world. He brings it with him. He goes to bed with it at night and it's starin' at him in the mornin'. But he loves you, he just...he just don't know how to show you. So don't hate him, baby.

MAMA JAKES looks off aimlessly as if she's  
in

her own world.

HOOCHIE

Well, I ain't gon' let no man put his hands on me. I'll cut off his pecker before I let that happen.

M AM A JAKES

(Smiles and chuckles to herself.)

And you betta. Never allow a man to make you feel weak or scared. You hear me?

HOOCHIE

I hear you, M ama.

(A beat.)

Willie Earl leavin' soon.

MAMA JAKES goes by the window to look  
out.

We hear scattered thunder approaching.

M AM A JAKES

I know child, ain't no sense of remindin' me. The time is here and we knew it.

HOOCHIE

You ain't gon' miss him?

M AM A JAKES

(Yes...)

Willie will be back down sometime. Ain't no sense of missin' somethin' you know is gonna be back.

HOOCHIE

New York is a long way, M ama. Wish we can go wit him.

Beat. MAMA JAKES turns away from her.  
Her

energy is depleted.

M AM A JAKES

I'm gon' sit outside for a spell. Catch some of this wind.

MAMA JAKES opens the screen door and goes  
out . HOOCHIE is left looking after her. A  
storm is now closer and the lights fade out.

SCENE TWO

Night has fallen. The juke joint is empty. Soft  
raindrops fall on the tin roof. Then it grows  
with the sound of rumbling thunder. MAMA  
JAKES

enters, rubbing her neck. The humidity is  
spectacled on her face. She goes by the bar,

takes out a wrapped sage. She lights it with a  
match and it burns brightly.

M AM A JAKES

(Prays.)

M ama, I know you sittin' with those who came before us. But you sho'll left me wit a lot. That's how ya' do though. Always did... crazy thing is, you do it even in death.

MAMA JAKES makes her way around the bar,

cleansing it of the bad energy. The sage burns.

MAMA JAKES sees the burning fire ravaging

the sage bundles. MAMA JAKES stops still.

Senses something amiss as she stares at the

bright flame. She then goes over by the bar and reaches towards the floor, pulling the floorboard

apart. She comes back up with a jewelry box.

On the sides of it are carved mask-like figures

akin to African Totems. She takes out a

parchment

piece of paper and reads it. It looks old.

M AM A JAKES

Alright, M ama, I'm gon' finally listen to you.

She places the piece of paper and douses the

sage out and places it in the box. She comes to the middle of the juke joint. Looks to the door.

Then she separates one of the floor boards and

hides the jewelry box under it and replaces the

floorboard. MAMA JAKES then goes over to

the record player and plays some music.

M AM A JAKES

BABY YOU PUTTIN' A HURTIN' ON ME IT'S THAT LOVIN' FROM NEW YORK TO NEW ORLEANS BABY YOU PUT THE BLUES IN MY HEART... OH YES... PUT A HURTIN' ON ME.

She pulls out a fresh ripe lemon from her basket and continues to dance sensually. Thunder

crackles above. MAMA JAKES continues to

shimmy her shoulders and sways her hips to the music. The music continues on. MAMA JAKES

stops-- knowingly senses someone in her midst.

M AM A JAKES

It's open, Willie.

WILLIE EARL opens the screen door slowly.

He's all wet from the rain.

WILLIE EARL

(Pulling out a wrapped cloth.)

I'ont know how you do that.

M AM A JAKES

I just know when you near.

WILLIE EARL takes out his bill fold money.

WILLIE EARL

Here you go, Cher. We sold out again.

(She counts the money. She takes out a few dollar bills and hands it to him.)

Naw, Cher. That's yo money.

M AM A JAKES

Willie Earl...

WILLIE EARL

Cher... Keep the money. You finally did it... You paid it off.

M AM A JAKES

Alright. Guess I gotta go peel mo' potatoes.

She puts the money in the crevice of her breast.

WILLIE looks as though he has something on  
his mind.

WILLIE EARL

Cher, you know this the last time I'm runnin' for ya, right?

MAMA JAKES stops walking. Then she nods  
slowly.

M AM A JAKES

I know, Willie.

WILLIE EARL

There's somethin' I gotta ask before I leave tomorrow night.

M AM A JAKES

What is it now?

WILLIE EARL

Come with me? You and Hoochie pack up some clothes and we can hit the road. You know I love her like she my own.

M AM A JAKES

Now Willie, we ain't gon' start this again. I can't go with you on no road and you know that.

WILLIE EARL

Woman, I love you, and I know you love me too.

She's silent. She does... But can't admit it. She  
wants to.

M AM A JAKES

Just wishful thinkin'. I'm not the woman to be settin' my hopes on somethin' ain't gon' happen. You ain't gon' want no old woman like me on the road. I'll be tired before the sun go down at times.

WILLIE EARL

Woman, that don't matter to me none. You are the sun that goes down and the moon that comes up. Come with me now.

MAMA JAKES

Make sure you stop by, I'll pack you a couple of fish sandwiches for the road.

MAMA JAKES goes behind the bar and starts to

peel some potatoes. The rain sounds heavy

between the silence. WILLIE EARL stands in the middle of the bar with a feeling of relentlessness permeating from him.

WILLIE EARL

I'm gone , Cher.

MAMA JAKES

(Not wanting him to go.)

Alright now.

WILLIE EARL approaches the door. Looks on.

He then exits out to the night. MAMA JAKES mindlessly rushes over and opens the door.

MAMA JAKES

Willie! Come back in this juke joint.

WILLIE steps back in, now drenched again.

WILLIE EARL

What is it, Cher?

(Without words, MAMA starts to unbutton his shirt and dries his chest with a rag towel. She takes off his necklace.)

Whatchu doin'?

## MAMA JAKES

Hush up.

She takes off his shirt completely and his powerful chest and arms are bare. He guides

her hand with the lemon to his lips, and he licks it sensually. His hands then explore her body,

her very essence. She leans in and kisses him passionately and hungrily with bated breath. The lights dim on them in half, and their two

shadowed bodies become bronze as WILLIE

EARL effortlessly lifts MAMA JAKES on the bar

top counter and climbs on top of her. The sound

of the summer rain overpowers their sweet melodious moans. In the growing dark, WILLIE

EARL makes love to MAMA JAKES. And the

lights fade to a blackout.

## SCENE THREE

Next morning, CAT comes from the back. She

looks around the empty juke joint. It's a look of longing. A look of... guilt. She goes by the piano and plays a note. It's a simple note. Nothing too fancy. She then steps on the raised stage, looks out with stars in her eyes. The world seems to

dim around her.

CAT

I DONE MADE MY MISTAKES, LOST MY FAITH... WORLD KEEPS SHIFTIN'  
CAN'T FEEL THE GROUND BENEATH ME, AFRAID TO LET GO, AFRAID TO  
HOLD ON. I GOTTA WHOLE 'LOTTA SOMETHIN' NOW YOU GON' SEE  
MADE PEACE WIT' 'ALLA MY SORROWS LAY IT DOWN FOR 'ALLA  
TOMORROW, AND I CHOOSE TO BREAK FREE.

CAT continues to sing with power and  
determination. Her hands are around her

stomach until her life's song ends. JT enters and  
slams the screen door. CAT freezes at the sight

of him.

CAT

M ama was letting me stay in the back of the juke joint for a while.

There's a long beat before JT responds.

JT

Whatchu think you can come up in here and run your mouth?

CAT

I ain't told her nothing, JT. Honest. Willie Earl brought me up in here to--

He steps closer to her.

JT

To what? M hmm?

CAT

You hurt me bad, JT.

JT

Shouldn't of been runnin' your God damn mouth!

CAT

Are you even able to love somebody, JT?

JT

Is I what?

CAT

Love-- you know what that is? It's like your heart is hard as a rock. I 'ont think you capable of love.

JT

Woman, stop talkin' crazy shit. Comin' up here talkin' about love. Hell, what yo' ass know 'bout it? Huh? You the talk of the town... lettin' all these mens get between them skrawny legs and sittin' talkin' 'bout love. Love don't love nothin' 'bout you. Never will. Accept that and get it outta that big ole head of yours.

CAT looks at JT in his eyes. It's a moment.

Long. Short. Whatever... It's a moment for CAT to look him deep in his eyes.

CAT

I can't keep doing this.

JT

Doin' what? Bein' with me? Bitch, you ain't got nothin' else.

CAT

I got a whole lot of something now.

She places her hand on her stomach.

JT

You done went and got pregnant? Ah, shit.

(Beat, then...)

Does M ae know?

CAT

She knows that I'm pregnant. But she don't know by who. I can't keep lying to her, JT.

CAT goes by the door.

JT

You gon' get rid of it.

CAT, in this moment, looks on with sternness.

With confidence and a moment of realization.

CAT

No.

JT

The hell you mean “no”?! You gots to get rid of it.

CAT

I ain't getting rid of my baby.

JT edges close to her. CAT back up against the bar.

JT

You wanna run that by me again?

CAT

I rightly decided to keep this baby. I need somethin' good in my life. Somethin' that gon' make me smile again. Make me keep on in this world. And that's what this baby gon' do, JT. It's gon' love me and I'm gon love it.

JT gets all in her face.

JT

Woman, I ain't playin' withchu. You need to get rid of that baby.

CAT

I said, no! I'm keepin' this baby and there's nothin' you can do about it.

JT

Bitch, I ain't playin', now you gon' get rid of that baby like I say.

JT grabs her by the throat. CAT struggles to scream.

CAT

I... ain't!!!

HOOCHIE

(From offstage.)

I think it's in here, M ama!

JT immediately steps away from CAT. She regains her composure swiftly as HOOCHIE and MAMA JAKES enter the juke joint with boxes in their hands.

HOOCHIE

Hey, Papa.

MAMA JAKES looks at JT and then CAT. Her

suspicion rises like the morning sun.

M AM A JAKES

What goin' on in here?

(To CAT.)

Cat... I ain't gon' axe again.

JT

(Putting on his straw hat.)

I'm goin' down the hill. See y'all later.

He exits out. MAMA JAKES looks back at CAT.

M AM A JAKES

Hoochie?

HOOCHIE

M a'am?

M AM A JAKES

Go up to the front of the house. Let me talk to Cat for a minute.

HOOCHIE looks to CAT with confusion and  
obliges. CAT becomes nervous. Tears fall from  
her eyes.

CAT

M ama--

MAMA JAKES slowly goes up to CAT,  
backing

her into the bar.

M AM A JAKES

So, JT is the one who beat the shit outta you?

(CAT is unyielding.)

And you the woman that he seein' in M onroe.

CAT

I'm sorry, M ama. I'm so sorry--

M AM A JAKES

Cat-- look me in the eye. And tell me the truth.

CAT looks in her eyes.

CAT

Yes. I am. But M ama Jakes, I --

MAMA JAKES raises her hand in the air to

silence her. CAT flinches.

M AM A JAKES

That baby boy you carryin'... It's his, ain't it?

CAT

(Nods.)

Yeah. I mean, yes, M a'am.

M AM A JAKES

(Shaking her head.)

M hmm. The dog that bites is a dog that bites.

CAT

I'm sorry, M ama. I'll get rid of the baby. I'll--

M AM A JAKES

You ain't gettin' rid of that baby. I had me a dream last night and that boy you carryin' gon' do some great things in the near future. He's gon' be somebody and he's gon' need somebody to love him. You want me to forgive ya' for the wrong you did? Keep that baby.

(Steps back, then calls:)

Hoochie!

HOOCHIE

(Appears by the hall.)

M a'am?

M AM A JAKES

Pack some stuff... We goin' to New York City.

HOOCHIE

What you mean we goin' to New York?

M AM A JAKES

Girl, just do like I said and stop axin' questions. Go on now.

HOOCHIE, sill confused, disappears off to the front house.

CAT

M ama, what's goin' on?

M AM A JAKES

Willie Earl asked me to go to New York City with him and I was sittin' here thinkin' I can't go 'cause I gotta child and a husband here. JT ain't no good. You and him messin' around, and...

(Looks around the bar.)

I've been holdin' onto somethin' that it may be time to let go.

MAMA JAKES prances around the bar. She

pulls out a metal container with a thick wad of cash. She stops and looks at the old sage on the bar counter top. MAMA JAKES thinks. Then

hands the container of money to CAT.

CAT

This is crazy, M ama. You goin' to New York City with Willie Earl--

M AM A JAKES

I reckon JT knows about the baby?

CAT

(Places her hands on her stomach.)

He does.

M AM A JAKES

Probably already asked you to get rid of it I bet. That's how he is.

CAT

Wait, you really gonna go to New York City?

M AM A JAKES

I'm tired too. And I've been carryin' the whole world on my shoulders. I deserve better.

There is a knock at the door... WILLIE EARL

opens the door and enters with a nice suit on.

WILLIE EARL

Cat, how you doin'?? You feelin' better?

CAT

Fine. M ama--

M AM A JAKES

Cat, can you go help Hoochie with her stuff please?

(CAT hesitates.)

Go on, now.

CAT

Yes, M ama Jakes.

CAT goes off. MAMA JAKES and WILLIE EARL

are both in silence.

WILLIE EARL

Last night--

M AM A JAKES

Now boy, I'm gon' hitch on this ride wit you. But you better not steer me wrong now.

WILLIE EARL

So, you comin'?

M AM A JAKES

(With a smile bright as the sun.)

I's takin' a chance on you and boy, you do wrong by me, we gon' dance. Alright?

WILLIE EARL has a big ole smile on his face.

WILLIE EARL

Hot damn, woman, you sho'll know how to brighten up a day!

He leans in for a kiss. HOOCHIE and CAT

appears and sees this.

HOOCHIE

M ama, what you doin'?!

MAMA JAKES steps away swiftly. Then shifts.

M AM A JAKES

(Deeply embarrassed.)

Hoochie, put the suitcase by the doorway. Cat, that container... hold on to it.

HOOCHIE

M ama, what's goin' on?

(Confused at what's in front of her.)

You and Uncle Willie?

M AM A JAKES

Hoochie, you too young to understand--

HOOCHIE

What you talkin' I ain't gon' understand! What about Papa? How could you--

M AM A JAKES

Yo' pappy got Cat pregnant and the one that was beatin' her.

Silence. HOOCHIE is shocked and looks to

CAT.

WILLIE EARL

(To CAT.)

He puttin' his hands on ya'?!

M AM A JAKES

Willie--

HOOCHIE

You tellin' lies, M ama!

HOOCHIE still stares at her mother. A world of betrayal hanging on her face.

M AM A JAKES

Hoochie, I know ya' don't understand this now-- but we goin', we gettin' out of here. C'mon, 'hur up.

(HOOCHIE doesn't move. MAMA JAKES looks at the floorboard where HOOCHIE is standing. Where she hid the jewelry box. Time is of the essence.)

Hoochie, baby, I need ya' to move ya' feet. I ain't want you to find out like this, baby. I didn't. But we can't stay here.

HOOCHIE stares at her. Unrelenting until she... starts to move the things off the bar top and places them by the door.

WILLIE EARL

Cher--

M AM A JAKES

Willie Earl, there's something I need to tell ya'--

WILLIE EARL

What is it, Cher?

JT enters back in, confused at all the packing.

JT

Woman, what's goin' on here?

(MAMA JAKES doesn't answer.)

You hard of hearin', woman!

WILLIE EARL steps in.

WILLIE EARL

She's leavin' with me, JT.

JT

She what?!

WILLIE EARL

I said, Cher, and Hoochie is leavin' with me.

JT

Is that right? And where the hell is y'all goin', cause I know it ain't to no damn New York.

M AM A JAKES

We goin'. You ain't got no say so in the matter.

JT

Woman, you must be outcha' Goddamn mind!

M AM A JAKES

I know about you and Cat.

Beat. JT is a bit thrown.

JT

What is yo' crazy ass talkin' 'bout?

M AM A JAKES

You done got her pregnant. Ain't no sense of lyin' 'bout it.

JT

M ae, now--

M AM A JAKES

Far too long I've been livin' with your ass, I just can't take it no more. So me and Hoochie, we leavin'. We goin' to New York.

JT

(In a fury.)

YOU AIN'T GOIN' NO GOD DAM N WHERE!!!

WILLIE EARL holds MAMA JAKES back.

M AM A JAKES

We goin', and there's nothin' you can do about that.

JT

Crazy ass bitch, you think you gon take my chile away from me. Hell no!

JT steps closer to them. A beat, then...

WILLIE EARL

They all leavin' wit meh. JT, let this be smooth now. No problems. We gon' go and get outcha house.

A beat. JT looks at all of them.

JT

Y'all crazy as hell. Go. Get the hell outta of my Goddamn house for I blow a mud hole in y'all asses.

MAMA JAKES and WILLIE grabs the stuff  
and

head towards the door.

WILLIE EARL

You got it, Cher?

M AM A JAKES  
(Still eyeing JT.)

Yeah, I got it.

As they walk out, JT attacks WILLIE EARL  
and flings him on the ground.

JT

Get up, nigga!

WILLIE EARL stands up jabs JT in the face.  
The

two begin to have a blurred battle in the bar.

M AM A JAKES

Stop it!

CAT

Stop!

M AM A JAKES

JT!

The spirited fight continues. These two lions  
crashes against everything in the bar.

HOOCHIE

Uncle Willie!

WILLIE punches JT. He falls to the ground. JT  
is now on top of him, pummeling WILLIE  
EARL

with powerful blows.

M AM A JAKES

I said, stop it!

WILLIE EARL slabs JT on the jaw.

HOOCHIE

Daddy stop!

The two men make their way by the bar,

crashing against the counter. Glass shatters all around them.

M AM A JAKES

Stay back, Hoochie!

JT

Crazy ass nigga! Come in my house!

The blurred battle comes to a halt. A knife falls to the floor. Then a weird cough comes from

WILLIE EARL. A blood stain forms around his heart.

HOOCHIE

Uncle Willie!!!

M AM A JAKES

Oh, my God!

WILLIE EARL falters and crashes on the floor.

M AM A JAKES

(Looks to JT.)

You son of a bitch!

MAMA JAKES tends to WILLIE EARL.  
Blood

stains her fingers.

HOOCHIE

What's wrong with Uncle Willie, M ama?

M AM A JAKES

Come on, baby. Wake up. Wake up.

WILLIE EARL

(Breathless.)

Cher...

M AM A JAKES

You gon' be alright... Just breathe, baby. Breathe.

WILLIE EARL

("I love you.")

Mwen renmen ou....

M AM A JAKES

Nah, Willie, nah!!!

WILLIE EARL dies in her arms. MAMA  
JAKES

lets out a loud shriek. JT goes back by the bar  
area and rests. Looks at all of them with a  
smirk.

JT

Guess no New York City for y'all.

A beat. MAMA JAKES stands up. A raging  
storm raging inside of her now. She continues to  
look at JT with eyes of murder.

She goes behind the bar and grabs the SHOT

GUN from below and points it JT.

M AM A JAKES

YOU SON OF A BITCH!!!

JT runs across the bar by the door. Her hands tighten and just before she pulls the trigger.

JT

Woman, you crazy!!! Put that gun down for you hurt yo'self!

M AM A JAKES

Nigga, you taught me to shoot something square in its eye. And that's what I'm gone do.

Just as she's about to shoot, her daughter, her firstborn stands in between her father and the gun.

HOOCHIE

M ama!!! PUT THE GUN DOWN!

M AM A JAKES

Hoochie, get outta the way!!!

HOOCHIE

M AM A!!!

JT

You gon' kill me, bitch! Kill me over some piece of trash, huh?! I'm yo' husband!

HOOCHIE

M ama, please, put the gun down.

A loud bang! JT falters. And we realize  
MAMA

JAKES has shot a warning shot in the air.

JT

You was really gon' kill me...

Daddy... get out!!!

HOOCHIE

JT looks at his daughter with a rushing guilt.

Hoochie, baby--

JT

GET OUT!!!!!!

HOOCHIE

JT now has a world of hurt on his face. He then goes out door and exits. MAMA JAKES drops

the gun to the floor and crawls over to WILLIE EARL'S dead body and cusps him into her arms.

Willie Earl...

M AM A JAKES

Both CAT and HOOCHIE stare at WILLIE

EARL'S lifeless body.

I'm so sorry, M ama.

HOOCHIE

Come on, Willie. Wake up, baby. Wake up.

M AM A JAKES

MAMA JAKES continues whisper to him.  
Cries.

You don't think JT's is coming back, do you?

CAT

They don't answer. There is a strange noise coming from outside. A sound of a crackling

fire.

CAT

Oh, my God. He's burning the house down!

CAT gets up and goes to the window. Smoke  
rises inside the house.

HOOCHIE

Come on, M ama!

M AM A JAKES

I can't leave him! I can't leave him! Not like this!

CAT

We have to get out! Now!

HOOCHIE pulls on her mother to leave but she  
doesn't budge. The smoke becomes more dense.

HOOCHIE

(Coughing.)

M ama, we gotta go!!!

CAT

M ama Jakes, come on!

MAMA JAKES continues to hold on to  
WILLIE

EARL. The fire grows ominously around them.

M AM A JAKES

Get Hoochie outta here, Cat.

(Beat, then regrettably.)

Take care of ha'.

HOOCHIE

M ama, no. You comin' with us! Come on now!

M AM A JAKES  
TAKE HOOCHIE OUTTA HERE!

A beat of them realizing what she's doing.

.HOOCHIE  
(Sobbing.)  
M ama, no... Please, M ama, Please, come on!

CAT  
Come on, Hoochie. Come on!

HOOCHIE  
No!!!

Sounds of wood and debris falling. The fire  
grows in rage from the outside.

CAT  
We have to go, now!!!

HOOCHIE  
M ama, please for me!

MAMA JAKES looks to her daughter. A beat.

Then... She stands up.

M AM A JAKES  
Okay, baby, come on, baby...

CAT  
It's comin' down!

MAMA JAKES looks to WILLIE EARL's  
dead

body. They struggle but make their way to the  
door.

CAT exits first then HOOCHIE and swiftly  
MAMA JAKES slams the door on them and

barricades it!

HOOCHIE

M AM A!!!!

CAT

M AM A JAKES! OPEN THE DOOR!

M AM A JAKES

TAKE CARE OF HER CAT! TAKE CARE OF HOOCHIE!

CAT

Hoochie, come on! We gotta go!

HOOCHIE continues to bang on the door. The

smoke grows around MAMA JAKES.

M AM A JAKES

Hoochie, just go, baby!

HOOCHIE

M AM A, PLEASE!!!! OPEN THE DOOR!!!! M AM A!!!!

M AM A JAKES

I love you too, baby... I have to do this. You gon' be somethin'...

HOOCHIE

M AM A! OPEN THE DAM N DOOR!!!

Black Creek juke joint becomes so filled with  
smoke it's hard to see. MAMA JAKES coughs  
violently and she weakly makes her way to

WILLIE EARL. She cusps him once more in her  
arm.

MAMA JAKES

(A decree of promise.)

It ain't over, Willie Earl. It ain't over.

MAMA JAKES looks around her juke joint.

Her

place. The memories seem to come to life as the flames outside roar. She then looks out to the audience with a sense of knowing.

That same haunting sound of trumpet plays as

the lights slowly fade. And in the darkness, we hear old Black Creek come falling down.

END OF PLAY