

RED CARTER: I would have got a case and carried it up here if I knew Vera didn't have any.

CANEWELL: I would have carried two. One on each shoulder. If I didn't have this bourbon. I looked at that bourbon and forgot all about that beer.

(The sound of Floyd Barton singing "That's All Right" comes out of the kitchen window and envelops the yard. There is a moment of silent reverie.)

RED CARTER: Floyd "Schoolboy" Barton.
(The lights fade. The music carries into the next scene.)

SCENE 2

The lights come up on FLOYD BARTON and VERA DOTSON dancing in the yard of the house where VERA lives. FLOYD is a young man of thirty-five. He is a blues singer. VERA is eight years younger. It is early evening. They are dancing to FLOYD's record "That's All Right," which is playing on the radio inside the house. A rooster is heard crowing intermittently throughout the scene.

FLOYD *(singing on the radio)*:

"You told me, baby, once upon a time
You said if I would be yours
You would sure be mine
But that's all right . . ."

FLOYD: Listen. . . . Hear that?

VERA: It sound just like you.

(FLOYD slides his arm around VERA and begins to dance.)

FLOYD: Come on, now . . . you supposed to lean back.
(He bends her back, pushing his pelvis into hers.)

VERA: Come on, Floyd!

FLOYD *(singing)*:

"You told me, baby, once upon a time
You said if I would be yours
You would sure be mine
But that's all right . . ."

This the way you supposed to dance to my record. You supposed to act like you know something about it.
(VERA tries to break away. FLOYD holds her closer.)

FLOYD *(singing)*:

"But that's all right
I know you in love with another man
But that's all right . . ."

(FLOYD tries to kiss VERA.)

VERA: Floyd, stop it now. Don't be doing all that.
(VERA breaks away.)

FLOYD: Come here.
(He pulls her to him.)
I'll never jump back on you in life.

VERA: I don't want to hear it.

FLOYD: I just say I'll never jump back on you. If you give me a chance I'll prove it to you.

VERA: You done had more than enough chances.

FLOYD: Did you get that letter I sent you?

VERA: What you doing writing me a letter?

FLOYD: I knew that would surprise you. I say, "Vera gonna be surprised to see my name on the envelope." I sure wish I could have seen your face.

VERA: Had somebody writing all them lies.

FLOYD: Didn't it sound good? I like the way that sound. It cost me fifty cents. Some fellow down the workhouse be writing everybody letters. He read it back to me. I say, "Vera ain't never heard me say nothing like this." That be the kind of stuff I want to say but can't think to say. It sounded so good I started to give him an extra quarter. I say, "I'm gonna wait and see what Vera say."

VERA: He ought to have gave you your money back if it depend on what Vera say. I done told you, my feet ain't on backwards.

FLOYD: My feet ain't on backwards either. I just got to missing you so bad. My life got so empty without you.

VERA: Floyd, I don't want to hear that. Just stop it right now.

FLOYD: What? Stop what? I'm telling the truth.

VERA: Go tell it to Pearl Brown.

FLOYD: See, you wanna bring all that up. I told you about all that in the letter. Pearl Brown don't mean nothing to me.

VERA: She sure meant something to you before. She meant enough to you for you to pack up your clothes and drag her to Chicago with you. She meant something to you then. Talking about you gonna send for me when you got up there. Left out of here telling me them lies and had her waiting around the corner.

FLOYD: She wasn't waiting around the corner.

VERA: She may as well have been. She might be waiting around there now for all I know.

FLOYD: Come on now, Vera. You know better than that.

VERA: If you going back to Chicago . . . then just go ahead.

FLOYD: I got to go back. The record company up there waiting on me. They done sent me a letter telling me to come on back. I wanna go back and take you with me. I ain't gonna be here long. I just got to get my guitar out the pawnshop. I might have to pawn my thirty-eight. You still got my thirty-eight, don't you?

VERA: It's in there where you put it. I ain't touched it.

FLOYD: I sat down there doing them ninety days, I told myself it's a good thing I didn't have that with me when they arrested me. Talking about vagrancy . . . If I had that thirty-eight they would have tried to dig a hole and put me under the jail. As it was, they took me down there and charged me with worthlessness. Canewell had five dollars in his pocket and they let him go. Took me down there and give me ninety days.

VERA: Canewell say you threatened to burn down the jailhouse. That's why they give you ninety days.

FLOYD: They got that all mixed up. I asked one of the guards to show me the back door in case there was a fire. He said the jailhouse don't burn. I told him give me a gallon of gasoline and I'd prove him wrong. He told the judge I threatened to burn down the jailhouse. The judge ain't even asked me about it. He give me ninety days for worthlessness. Say Rockefeller worth a million dollars and you ain't worth two cents. Ninety days in the workhouse.
(FLOYD takes a letter out of his pocket.)

Look here . . . look here. Look what they sent to my sister's house.

(He holds the letter up, bragging.)

It say, "Come on back to Chicago and make some more records." Say . . . "We'll talk about the details when you get here."

(VERA reaches for the letter.)

Naw . . . naw. All you got to know is it say come on back. You ain't got to know all my business.

(He shows her the envelope.)

Look at that. "Mr. Floyd Barton." You get you a hit record and the white folks call you Mister. Mister Floyd Barton.

(He hands VERA the letter.)

Go on, read it. Read it out loud. "Dear Mr. Barton. Our records show . . ." Go on . . . read it.

VERA *(reading)*: "Dear Mr. Barton: Our records show you recorded some material for us in August of 1947. We are uncertain of your status. If you are the same Floyd Barton who recorded 'That's All Right' and are still in the business we would like to provide another opportunity for you to record. Stop by when you are in Chicago and we can discuss further arrangements. We are Savoy Records—"

FLOYD and VERA: "—1115 Federal Avenue in Chicago, Illinois. Sincerely, Wilber H. Gardner, President."

(VERA hands him back the letter.)

VERA: That's nice, Floyd.

FLOYD: I can't go without you.

VERA: I ain't going to no Chicago. You know better than to ask me that. What I want to go up there for?

FLOYD: Wait till you see it. There ain't nothing like it. They got more people than you ever seen. You can't even imag-

ine that many people. Seem like everybody in the world in Chicago. That's the only place for a black man to be. That's where I seen Muddy Waters. I was walking past this club and I heard this music. People was pushing and crowding in the club; seem like the place was busting at the seams. I asked somebody, I say, "Who's that?" They told me, "That's Muddy Waters." I took off my hat. I didn't know you could make music sound like that. That told me say, "The sky's the limit." I told myself say, "I'm gonna play like that one day." I stayed there until they put me out. Mr. T. L. Hall asked me what I wanted to do. I told him I wanted to play at the Hurricane Club. He say he'd fix it.

VERA: I wouldn't put too much faith in whatever Mr. T. L. Hall say. I ain't never known him to do nothing for you. Call himself your manager. What he ever manage?

FLOYD: That's cause I didn't have a hit record. It's different now. You get a hit record and you be surprised how everything change. Mr. T. L. Hall done got in touch with Savoy Records to set up another recording date. They waiting on me now. Come here.

(FLOYD slides his arms around VERA. She tries to slide away.)

VERA: I told you don't start that.

FLOYD: I want to make you happy. I got something for you.

VERA: It ain't nothing I need.
(She breaks away.)

FLOYD: The first time I ever seen you . . . I never will forget that. You remember that?

VERA: Yeah, I remember.

FLOYD: You was looking so pretty.

VERA: Floyd, don't start that. Ain't no need in you going back through that.

FLOYD: Naw, I was just saying . . . I seen you that first time. You had on that blue dress. I believe it was pink and blue.

VERA: It was two different kinds of blue.

FLOYD: I had just got out the army. They give me forty-seven dollars. Adjustment allowance or something like that. I come on up Logan Street and I seen you. That's why I always say I had a pocket full of money when I met you. I seen you and said, "There go a woman." Whatever else you might say—a pretty woman, a nice woman, a not-so-nice woman—whatever else you might say, you got to put that "woman" part in there. I say, "Floyd, there go a woman." My hands got to itching and seem like I didn't know what to do with them. I put them in my pocket and felt them forty-seven dollars . . . that thirty-eight under my coat . . . and I got up my nerve to say something to you. You remember that? Seem like that was a long time ago.

VERA: I had just left my mamma's house.

FLOYD: I knew you was just getting started. But what you don't know, I was just getting started too. I was ready. You was just what I was looking for.

VERA: You was looking for anything you could find.

FLOYD: I said, "That's the kind of woman a man kill somebody over." Then I see you turn and walk toward the door. I said, "They just gonna have to kill me." That's when I went after you. I said you was just right for me and if I could get that I never would want nothing else. That's why you ought to try me one more time. If you try me one more time, you never carry no regrets.

VERA: I don't carry no regrets now. I'm gonna leave it like that.

(VERA starts into the house.)

FLOYD: Come on, Vera . . .

VERA: I done been there. Floyd, I ain't going back.

FLOYD: I told you what it was. It wasn't nothing to me. Pearl Brown don't mean nothing to me.

VERA: It wasn't nothing to you but it was something to me. To have you just up and walk out like that. What you think happened to me? Did you ever stop to ask yourself, "I wonder how Vera doing—I wonder how she feel"? I lay here every night in an empty bed. In an empty room. Where? Someplace special? Someplace where you had been? The same room you walked out of? The same bed you turned your back on? You give it up and you want it? What kind of sense does that make?

FLOYD: I told you I could see I was wrong.

VERA: You had what you want and I didn't. That makes you special. You one of them special people who is supposed to have everything just the way they want it.

FLOYD: I see where I was wrong. I told you that. It seemed like she believed in me more.

VERA: You supposed to believe in yourself.

FLOYD: A man that believe in himself still need a woman that believe in him. You can't make life happen without a woman.

VERA: I wanted to be that for you. Floyd. I wanted to know where you was bruised at. So I could be a woman for you. So I could touch you there. So I could spread myself all over you and know that I was a woman. That I could

give a man only those things a woman has to give. And he could be satisfied. How much woman you think it make you feel to know you can't satisfy a man?

FLOYD: It ain't about being satisfied.

VERA: So he could say, "Yes, Vera a woman." That's what you say, but you never believed it. You never showed me all those places where you were a man. You went to Pearl Brown and you showed her. I don't know what she did or didn't do, but I looked up and you was back here after I had given you up. After I had walked through an empty house for a year and a half looking for you. After I would lay myself out on that bed and search my body for your fingerprints. "He touched me here. Floyd touched me here and he touched me here and he touched me here and he kissed me here and he gave me here and he took me here and he ain't here he ain't here he ain't here quit looking for him cause he ain't here he's there! there! there! there!

FLOYD: Come on. Vera . . . don't do this.

VERA: He's there. In Chicago with another woman, and all I have is a little bit of nothing, a little bit of touching, a little bit of myself left. It ain't even here no more, what you looking for. What you remember. It ain't even here no more.

FLOYD: It's enough for me. It's all I ever wanted. Even if I couldn't see it. That's why I come back. That's why this time I want to take you with me. I told you about all that. I ain't never wanted to hurt you. Whatever you is, that's enough for me. Okay? Now I don't know what else to say. I ain't too good at talking all this out. Come and go to Chicago with me. I need you real bad. That's all I know to say. I ain't never needed nobody like I need you. I

don't want no hit record if I can't have a hit record with you. See? That's all I know to say about Pearl Brown . . . to say about Chicago . . . to say about Vera Dotson. I don't want it if I can't have you with it.

⁵VERA: Then you don't want it. ~~—~~ ~~5~~ ~~2~~
(LOUISE enters, carrying a bag of groceries. There is immediate tension between her and FLOYD.)

FLOYD: Hey, Louise.

LOUISE: How you doing, Floyd? You look like you done gained some weight.

FLOYD: A little bit.

LOUISE: Least they feed you down there in the workhouse. What are you going to cook, Vera?

VERA: Chicken. Potatoes and green beans. And some cornbread. Floyd likes his cornbread.

FLOYD: I can eat a whole pan of cornbread. I like cornbread. I like my chicken too. I can eat two or three chickens.

LOUISE: I can look at you and see that.

VERA: I'll fix you up a plate when I cook it up.

LOUISE: That be nice. That way I won't have to cook. I got a letter from my niece. She got into trouble down there in Alabama and she coming to stay with me. I'll tell you about it.

VERA: What kind of trouble?

LOUISE: Man trouble. What other kind of trouble a young woman get into? Somebody done killed some other body and somebody family done did this or that or the other. My sister say it's best she got out of there. I'll tell you