

# **CORNBREAD & BEANS**

An original play, written by,

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**Cast of Characters:**

(In order of appearance)

**Little Red** –

A young white man; a farm hand, in over-alls and boots, a John Deere cap on his head. He's somewhat simple-minded.

**Melvin** –

An older black man, the owner of the country-store; dressed in his work-a-day attire.

**Melody** –

A young, white and attractive woman, mid-twenties in a black dress.

**Cat** –

A young black man, mid-twenties to early thirties, dressed in a black suit, black shirt and black tie.

**Big Red** –

An older black man, in a black suit, white shirt and black tie.

**Mr. Woods <Carl>** –

An older white man, who is the largest land-owner in the county. Pressed jeans and polo shirt with a little golfing logo on it.

**Mrs. Woods <Barbara>** –

The younger, trophy wife of Mr. Woods. She won't leave the house unless she's dressed to kill.

**ACT ONE**  
**SCENE ONE**

*Scene: The interior of a small, not prosperous, country store/diner. The locale is a farming community in the South. The time is November 1970. The set, scenery and dress reflect this period. Inside the store, on the far right wall is a pot bellied wood-stove; on the same wall but in front of that is an old piano. On the back wall is a counter with three stools and a serving area behind it with a doorway leading to the kitchen off to the right. In the middle of the room is a table with four seats around it. On the left wall is an entry door with a bell over it, and another door beyond that leading to the restroom. Hanging on the walls is a collection of old signs advertising brands of dry goods, soft drinks, fishing tackle and other miscellaneous paraphernalia scattered about in a randomly organized manner.*

*At rise: The room is empty then the bell over the door rings as Little Red enters and walks to the counter. Pulling out a stool he sits down.*

**Little Red**

Yo, Melvin. Where ya at?

*(Silence in the store.)*

**Little Red**

Melvin? Come on, man, I'm starvin' out here.

*(Offstage the sound of a toilet flushing. The restroom door opens and Melvin enters the room drying his hands on his apron.)*

**Melvin**

A'right, a'right, hold your horses, Red. Jeez, act like it's a 'mergency. Where's the far?

**Little Red**

Hey, Mel. Good to see you, man. How you doin'?

**Melvin**

About the same I was a few hours ago when you was here for breakfast.

*(Melvin walks behind the counter.)*

**Little Red**

What's the lunch special today, Mel?

**Melvin**

Cornbread and beans.

**Little Red**

Ah, hell, Mel. That's the same thing you had yesterday.

**Melvin**

No, yesterday it was beans and cornbread. Today it's cornbread and beans.

**Little Red**

Oh, okay. What kind of beans are they?

**Melvin**

Half pinto, half navy.

**Little Red**

That's what it was yesterday.

**Melvin**

No, yesterday it was navy and pinto. Today it's pinto and navy.

**Little Red**

Oh, okay. I'll take a bowl. You got any onion and some of those little oyster crackers? I like them little oyster crackers. They taste different than those regular crackers. You ever notice they taste different?

**Melvin**

That's right, and I keep 'em just for you Red.

*(Melvin goes back into the kitchen. Red sits at the counter and happily looks around the store. Red taps out a drum roll on the countertop. He hums a little tune. Melvin comes back in with a bowl of bean soup in one hand and a saucer in the other hand that has some onion slices and a couple packs of oyster crackers on it. He sits the bowl and saucer in front of Red.)*

**Little Red**

You know what you need in here Mel?

**Melvin**

No, but I guess your going to tell me.

**Little Red**

You need a jukebox. You know? Some music?

**Melvin**

You tell me that every time you come in here and I tell you the same thing every time.

**Little Red**

I do? You do? What do you tell me?

**Melvin**

I tell you that it's bad enough having to listen to the customers. I don't want to have to listen to some idiotic sounding racket coming out of a machine too.

**Little Red**

But, Mel, if you had a juke box you'd get more customers. Every fancy place has a juke box now. Why, people probably come from all over if you had a juke box. I bet you'd do twice the business.

**Melvin**

Uh, huh, and I'd go crazier twice as quick.

**Little Red**

These sure are some good beans, Mel. Why, these are the best beans I've ever had.

**Melvin**

You say that every day, Red. You see why I don't need a jukebox?

**Little Red**

Huh? I don't get it. How would a juke box make the beans taste different?

**Melvin**

*(Shaking his head.)*

You want some cornbread, Red?

**Little Red**

No thanks, Mel. These little oyster crackers are just fine. Did I ever tell you that they make these little oyster crackers way up north? They make 'em up there by the ocean where they catch the oysters. One of these days I'm gonna go up there to the oyster place. I ever tell you that, Red?

**Melvin**

Ya, Red. You tell me that every day. You see why I don't need a jukebox?

**Little Red**

Well, I hope they got jukeboxes up there where the oysters come from. When I go up there I want me some oysters, some oyster crackers and some jukebox music.

**Melvin**

I'll be in the kitchen, Red. Holler if you need anything.

*(Melvin goes through the door into the kitchen.)*

*(Little Red sits at the counter eating his beans, onions and oyster crackers, happily humming a tune. In a moment the door opens, the bell rings, and a young white woman, Melody, enters. She stands in the doorway for a moment looking around. Little Red turns to see who has entered and he is awe-struck by the sight of this woman who is obviously not a local.)*

**Melody**

Are you the proprietor of this establishment?

**Little Red**

*(Beat.)*

Am I who?

*(Entering behind the woman now are two black men, Cat and Big Red. The three of them walk to the middle of the room.)*

**Cat**

*(Looking around.)*

Sheee-it.

**Big Red**

*(Walks over to the pot-bellied wood stove and warms his hands. Lifts his head and sniffs the air.)*

I smell food.

**Melody**

*(Walks to the table, pulls out a chair and sits. Looks around at the room.)*

Well, what goes around comes around.

**Cat**

Let's go someplace else.

**Melody**

We're lucky we made it this far the way that engine is heating up. We'll wait here for the tow truck. I hope this place has a telephone. I don't see a telephone anywhere, do you?

**Cat**

*(Steps over to the table and sits down disgustedly.)*

Sheee-it.

**Big Red**

*(Speaking to Little Red.)*

Hey, buddy, this place got good food?

**Little Red**

*(He is sitting with his mouth open as he looks upon this collection of individuals, as if they have arrived from another planet. Points to himself.)*

Me?

**Big Red**

*(Laughs a big laugh.)*

Well, I hope you ain't on the menu. I mean does this place sell food? Is it a restaurant?

**Little Red**

Oh, you mean food to eat. Oh, yeah. Mel's got the best food in town. But he don't have a jukebox. I've been trying to tell him he needs a jukebox, but he won't listen to me. Hey, y'all not from around here are ya? Where y'all from?

**Big Red**

We're from Washington DC.

**Little Red**

Washington DC? Hey, that's the capitol. I've heard of that place. Ain't that by the ocean? Do they have oysters there?

**Cat**

Shee-it.

**Big Red**

Yeah, man. The Chesapeake Bay is full of oysters. We got oysters big as your hand.

**Little Red**

Really? All we got around here is bluegill and catfish. But the fishin' ain't been good since the river got up.

**Big Red**

Is that a fact?

**Little Red**

Yep, that's a fact. If they ever build the damn dam it'll keep the damn river from getting' up. Then the fishin' might come back.

**Big Red**

Is that a fact?

**Little Red**

Yep. But they been talkin' about building that damn dam for twenty years. Every year the river gets up and ruins the fishin' I don't know when they'll ever build the damn dam.

*(Beat.)*

Damn.

**Cat**

Sheee-it.

**Melody**

Will you quit saying “sheee-it” and go find a phone.

*(Big Red laughs. Cat jumps to his feet, looks around the room, goes to the counter and looks over it, then he goes to the door and opens it several times making the bell jangle loudly. Melvin comes into the store from the kitchen.)*

**Melvin**

*(Exasperated.)*

Red, will you quit running in and out the damn door. What the hell’s the matter with you ...

*(Sees he has other customers.)*

Oh, howdy folks.

**Big Red**

Hey, don’t blame the door bell on me. I didn’t do it.

**Melvin**

No, not you, I was talking to Red.

*(Pointing at Little Red.)*

**Little Red**

I didn’t do it. It was him.

*(Pointing at Cat.)*

**Cat**

*(Pointing at Big Red.)*

My names not Red, he’s Red. I’m Cat.

**Little Red**

*(Looking at Big Red.)*

Hey, is your name Red too? That’s my name. Ain’t that funny? Neither one of is red, I’m white and you’re a Negro – I wonder why they named us Red?

**Cat**

*(Looking at each of them, then he speaks to Big Red.)*

I do see a family resemblance. Maybe he’s your little brother. Maybe he’s your son. You sure you’ve never been in this hillbilly burg before? Maybe you got family all over these hills.

**Little Red**

Oh, we don't got any hills around here. It's flat as a pancake here, ain't it Mel?

**Cat**

I still say there's a family resemblance. I see it.

**Big Red**

Uh, huh. I see yo ass winnin' the comedy show at the county fair too, mo fro.

**Melody**

*(Speaking to Melvin.)*

Our car engine is overheating. Could we borrow your telephone to call a garage?

**Melvin**

Well, sure. I'll call them for you. Y'all have a seat and make yourselves at home.

Would you like something to eat while you wait?

**Big Red**

*(Steps over to the table and pulls out a chair and sits.)*

Now you're talkin'. Some food sure sounds mighty good. What's cookin' that smells so good?

**Little Red**

That's Mel's cornbread and bean soup. Mel makes the best bean soup. The cornbread is real good too but I like oyster crackers in mine.

**Cat**

*(Sits down at the table also.)*

Sheee-it.

**Melody**

Yes, please. Bring us each some of your cornbread and beans.

**Melvin**

What would you like to drink?

**Big Red**

What'cha got?

**Melvin**

We've got sweet tea and un-sweetened tea.

**Melody**

Three sweet teas.

**Melvin**

Coming right up.

*(He goes into the kitchen.)*

**Big Red**

This little place come in mighty handy, didn't it?

**Melody**

Anything is better than being stuck on the side of the road. Don't you agree, Cat?

**Cat**

Sheee-it.

**Melody**

Can't you say anything else?

**Big Red**

Cat need a new outlook on life. Maybe some cornbread and beans do him good.

**Cat**

Sheee-it.

**Little Red**

Say, how do they catch those oysters? Do they use worms and minnows or artificial lures?

**Cat**

*(Looks at Little Red.)*

Your names Red, right?

**Little Red**

Little Red. They call me Little Red. I don't know why, I'm all growed up now.

**Cat**

You like oysters?

**Little Red**

Oh, yeah. I like them oysters. Mrs. Woods, she's the bosses wife, when she goes to Atlanta she brings me back oysters in a little can. You know, like a sardine can? But those oysters taste lots better than sardines.

**Cat**

I know this man, he's a oyster fisherman, he told me how they catch 'em. You want me to tell you?

**Little Red**

Yeah.

**Cat**

Well, see they go out in these big boats with big nets. They push the net over the side and let it sink to the bottom of the ocean. Then see, they spike the water and wait for the oysters to come to the net.

**Little Red**

Spike the water? How do they do that?

**Cat**

That's the secret, see. They throw some cocktail sauce, horseradish and lemon juice over the side, it floats on the water and then the oysters smell it and come swimming right to them. When the ocean is full of oysters, swimming' right over the net, then they haul that net up and catch the oysters inside it.

**Little Red**

Whoa. You mean they don't even need a fishin' pole?

**Cat**

Nope. Just the net and some spike. Then they haul those oysters in.

*(Big Red looks away, shaking his head. Melody gives Cat a disgusted look and turns to Little Red.)*

**Melody**

Don't listen to him. He's telling you a story. He doesn't know anything about fishing.

**Little Red**

But it makes sense. I do the same thing, the spikin' ya know, when I go to the catfish hole. But I don't use horseradish and stuff, I use chicken guts that's been out in the sun for a few days to ripen it up. Them catfish like the stink. Hey, ya'll wanna go fishin? Rivers up but we can still try.

**Melody**

Well thank you, that's very nice of you to offer but once our car is fixed we have to be leaving.

**Little Red**

*(Gets up and walks to the door, looking outside.)*

Hey, is that your Cadillac? That's the new 1970 model ain't it? Wow, nice car. You say it overheats? I'm a mechanic. Let me see your keys. Maybe I can fix it for you.

**Cat**

*(To Big Red, enthusiastically.)*

Yeah, Red, let the man have your car keys.

**Big Red**

*(To Little Red.)*

(Big Red, cont.) Well, now, that's an expensive car. You sure you know what your doin'?

**Melody**

Let him look, Red. If he can fix it we won't have to wait for the garage.

*(The kitchen door opens and Melvin comes out with a tray in his hands.)*

**Little Red**

Melvin, you tell them. I can fix any car, can't I?

**Melvin**

Huh? Oh, yeah. Red, he's a top-notch mechanic. He can take a car apart and put it back together blind-folded. He fix anything on wheels. I'll get your tea.

*(Melvin goes back into the kitchen.)*

**Big Red**

*(Stands and takes the car keys from his pocket. Hands them to Little Red.)*

Okay, my man. Take a look-see.

**Little Red**

You watch, I'll get you goin' before you can say "lickety-split".

*(Little Red goes out the door.)*

**Cat**

Hah, Red, you ain't never gonna see that car in one piece no more.

**Melody**

I'm sure the man is quite capable.

**Cat**

Sheee-it. I told you we should have took the train.

**Big Red**

If we took the train we wouldn't have no car when we get to Nashville.

**Melody**

That's right, and the train doesn't go through Pawville. Besides, I wanted to come back through here. I haven't seen this area since I was a little girl.

**Big Red**

*(To Melody.)*

What you think, Melody? Has it changed much?

**Cat**

No, the river still get up.

**Melody**

Hah, hah, Cat. Red's right. You could win the comedy show at the county fair.

*(Melody, Cat and Big Red pick up their spoons and start in on the beans and cornbread. Cat takes a bite of the cornbread and a spoonful of beans, his eyes get big. He digs in.)*

**Big Red**

Hah, look at Cat. I think he likes the local food. He might want to stay here, Melody. Him and Little Red can be fishin' buddies. He can send us pictures of the fish he catch when we get to Nashville.

*(Melvin comes back with three glasses of tea in his hands.)*

**Melvin**

Well? How's the meal?

**Melody**

It's delicious. Thank you.

**Big Red**

It's darn good. I haven't had cornbread and beans like this since my Granny passed away, years ago, bless her heart. Matter of fact, it's so tasty it reminds me of an old song. Does that piano work?

*(Pointing across the room.)*

**Melvin**

That old thing? I guess it does, might be out of tune. Nobody's played on it for a long time. You're welcome to give it a go if you want.

*(Big Red stands and moves to the piano, raising the cover. He sits at the bench.)*

**Big Red**

Alright, let's see if I remember that song. Believe it or not, it's called "Cornbread and Beans".

*(He strikes a chord ...)*

Beans and Cornbread had a fight  
Beans knocked Cornbread outta sight  
Cornbread said "Now that's alright, meet me on the corner tomorrow night"  
I'll be ready, I'll be ready tomorrow night  
I'll be ready, I'll be ready tomorrow night  
I'll be ready, I'll be ready tomorrow night

That's what Beans said to Cornbread "I'll be ready tomorrow night"

Beans told Cornbread you ain't straight  
You better wake up or I'll gash your gate  
Been in this pot since half past two  
Swelling and puffing and almost due  
I'll be ready tomorrow night, that's what Beans said to Cornbread  
You always getting mad at me, I ain't mad at you  
I'll be ready tomorrow night, I'll be ready, Mmmmmm

Beans grabbed cornbread by the toe  
Beans said "Cornbread let me go"  
Cornbread said "I'll lay you low, I'm gonna fight you, you so and so"  
Meet me on the corner, met me on the corner tomorrow night  
That's what Beans said to Cornbread , you so bad, you always wanna fight

Meet me on the corner tomorrow night and I'm gonna beat the hell out of ya  
Oooohhhh (meet) on the corner tomorrow night  
Beans hit Cornbread on the head, Cornbread said I'm almost dead  
Beans told Cornbread (NOW?) get up man, you know that we go hand in hand

Beans told ???  
That's what Beans said to Cornbread, We should stick together hand in hand  
We should get up every morning and hang out together like sister and brothers  
Every Saturday night we should hang out like chitterlings and potatoes salad

Like shrawberries and shortcakes, YEAH  
Like cornbeef and cabbage, YEAH  
Like liver and onions, YEAH  
Like red beans and rice, YEAH  
Like ,YEAH  
Like soft cream and vanilla, YEAH  
Like bread and butter, YEAH  
Like pot cakes and molasses.  
Beans told cornbread, it makes no difference what you think about me,  
but it makes a whole lot of differences what I think about you, we  
should hang out like together like pot cakes and molasses,  
That's what Beans said to Cornbread.

*(While Big Red has been playing, at the end of the first verse, Little Red opens the door and stands there, half in and half out, listening in happiness and wonder. At the end Little Red dances into the room doing a jig. In his hand he has a wrench and a dirty rag.)*

### **Little Red**

Yee-hi. That's better than a juke box. See, Mel, I been telling you all along that you needed some music in here.

**Melvin**

Little Red, I think you're right. Now this is music I can listen to. They don't have this on any of them jukeboxes.

*(To the others.)*

Say, are you folks musicians?

**Melody**

Yes, we're on our way to Nashville to cut a record.

**Melvin**

Did you say earlier you were coming from Washington DC? You took the long way to Nashville coming this way, didn't you?

**Melody**

Yes, but we had to go to Pawville. That's why we came this way.

**Melvin**

Pawville? Over in Calladin County? I know some folks over there. Was you looking for anyone in particular, if you don't mind my asking.

**Melody**

Yes, my Aunt Clarrisa. We went to her funeral this morning.

**Melvin**

Clarrisa? Not Clarrisa Matthews?

**Melody**

Yes, that's my aunt. Do you know her?

**Melvin**

Well sure I know her. I grew up over in Calladin County. We were neighbors for a few years until my folks moved us over here. Why, I can't believe she passed on. What happened?

**Melody**

No one really knows. I talked to her on the telephone four days ago. She sounded fine. Right after we hung up my agent called to tell me about the Nashville contract. I called her right back to tell her the news. She was so happy. She was going to come to Nashville and stay with me for awhile.

*(Beat. Beat)*

The next day, two days ago, her neighbor called me to say Aunt Clarrisa had gone to sleep in church, just sitting there in the pew. When they tried to wake her, after the service, well,

*(Beat. Beat)*

she had just passed away.

*(Everyone sits silently for several moments. Melody is quietly crying into a napkin. Big Red reaches over and lays his hand on her shoulder.)*

**ACT ONE**  
**SCENE TWO**

*(The door bell loudly jangles, interrupting everyone from their quiet thoughts. Mr. Woods and his wife, Mrs. Woods walk into the room. He is loud and obnoxious and supremely self-confident of his station in life. She is a very young, pretty woman; quiet, somewhat overwhelmed by Mr. Woods, most of the time.)*

**Mr. Woods**

Red, what the hell are you doing? I ain't paying you to hang out at Mel's all day.

*(Mr. Woods narrows his eyes when he sees the two black men and the white woman sitting at the table. Mrs. Woods eyes are wide open in surprise.)*

**Little Red**

Don't worry Mr. Woods. I'll finish it up. I'm just helpin' these folks out with their car.  
*(Turns to Big Red.)*

It's your thermostat. It's stickin'. But that ain't no big deal.  
*(Turns to Melvin.)*

Say, Mel. Call the garage back and tell them to send out a new thermostat for a '70 Cadillac Eldorado, a gasket and a gallon of anti-freeze. Tell them it's the big 472 cubic inch engine. Oh, yeah, and tell them we don't need the tow truck no more.  
*(Turns to Mr. and Mrs. Woods.)*

These folks are musicians. You ought to hear the singin' this man just did.  
*(Turns to Big Red.)*

Can you do another one?

**Mr. Woods**

*(Skeptically.)*  
Musicians?

**Mrs. Woods**

*(Even more surprised.)*  
Musicians?

**Big Red**

*(To Little Red.)*  
The thermostat?

**Little Red**

Yep, you can tell because there's no coolant going through the hoses. I done got the old one out. When the new one gets here it won't take but a few minutes to put it in then that Caddy'll be right as rain.  
*(Looks out the door.)*

(Little Red, cont.) Speakin' of rain, that black cloud don't look good.

**Mr. Woods**

That's right, by God. That's why I came looking for you. It's fixing to rain like a cow pissin' on a flat rock. I want you to fix that tractor so we can plow before it rains.

*(From outside come the sudden sound of a lightning crack and then the roll of thunder. Heavy rain begins to fall. Little Red jumps back in the room and closes the door against the onslaught of Mother Nature.)*

**Mr. Woods**

Well, hell. There goes the damn plowin'. Sheee-it.

**Cat**

Sheee-it.

**Mr. Woods**

*(Looks quickly at Cat.)*

What'd you say?

**Cat**

*(Looks at Mr. Woods innocently.)*

Huh?

**Melvin**

Well, hey, everybody. We're inside and warm and dry. Mr. Woods, Mrs. Woods why don't ya'll sit here at the counter and I'll fix ya up something to eat. How about some cornbread and beans?

**Mr. Woods**

Sheee-it.

**Cat**

Sheee-it.

*(Melody kicks his leg under the table and gives him a dark look. Mrs. Woods goes to the counter and sits down.)*

**Mrs. Woods**

*(To Mr. Woods.)*

Come on, Carl honey. Sit down.

**Mr. Woods**

No, we're leaving. Let's go, Barbara.

**Mrs. Woods**

Are you crazy? I just got my hair done. We're going to the country club for the dance tonight. If you think I'm going out in that mess and ruin my hair then you better think again. Come on and sit a spell. It'll ease off in a minute then we can go.

*(She turns to speak to Melody.)*

So, ya'll are musicians? What kind of music do you do? What brings you here? Are you passing through or staying or what? Are you the entertainers at the country club dance tonight?

**Melody**

No, we were on our way to Nashville. Our car broke down and this kind gentleman

*(Points to Little Red)*

offered to fix it for us. We're very grateful for his assistance.

**Mrs. Woods**

Nashville? Will you be playing there? In a club?

**Melody**

Maybe, but right now we have a recording contract. A record to cut. We might play some clubs, if we have time.

**Mrs. Woods**

A recording contract?

*(Looks at Mr. Woods who is standing across the room, looking out the door at the falling rain, in a bad humor.)*

Isn't that exciting, honey?

*(Back to Melody.)*

What kind of music do you play?

**Melody**

Oh, we do blues, jazz, rock. We have our own sound. It's kind of different.

**Melvin**

Say, Mr. Woods, do you remember Clarissa Matthews? From over in Calladin County? She left here about twenty years or so ago.

**Mr. Woods**

*(Turns slowly and looks at Melvin.)*

Clarissa Matthews? Yeah, I remember her. What about her?

**Melvin**

*(Points at Melody.)*

This young lady is Clarissa's niece. She came back for Clarissa's funeral. On her way to Nashville.

**Mr. Woods**

*(Beat. Swivels to look closely at Melody and asks in astonishment.)*

Her funeral? Clarissa died?

**Melody**

Yes. Two days ago. Did you know my aunt?

**Mr. Woods**

*(Walks to the counter and sits heavily on the stool next to his wife. Beat.)*

Yes, I knew Clarissa. Last I heard she moved to Washington DC. Took her niece to raise, after her sister and brother-in-law died in a car wreck.

*(Beat.)*

So that's you? You're Clarissa's niece?

**Melody**

*(Curious.)*

How did you know Aunt Clarissa? She never talked much about when she was young.

**Mr. Woods**

*(Beat.)*

Uh, well, we just knew each other when we were kids. I thought she was still in Washington DC. How long, I mean, when did she move back here?

**Melody**

She came back here five years ago, after I started college. She said she missed the country.

*(Little Red is looking out the window of the door.)*

**Little Red**

Lord have mercy, look at it come down. I never seen it rain so hard. Damn river gonna get up even higher. Might not never get no good fishin'.

*(He turns and looks at the others.)*

Hey, since it's too wet to plow, let's hear some more music. How about it.

**Big Red**

Hell, I'm game. What about it, Cat? You wanna practice some?

**Cat**

My guitar's out in the car trunk. If you think I'm going to get it out of the trunk in this rainstorm you crazy. It'll get ruined.

**Melvin**

My son left an old guitar here when he left for the merchant marine. I'll go get it.

*(Melvin goes through the door into the kitchen.)*

**Little Red**

Yip-ee.

**Cat**

Sheee-it.

**Mrs. Woods**

Oh, this is so exciting. We're going to hear professional musicians. Isn't this exciting honey?

**Mr. Woods**

Sheee-it.

*(Melvin comes back into the room with a guitar, a snare drum and a cymbal.)*

**Melvin**

I found the guitar and look what else was in the closet. I can't play them, maybe one of you want to use it?

**Little Red**

Hey, I can play it. Let me see it.

**Mrs. Woods**

Isn't this exciting? Three musicians, a piano, a guitar, a drum? This is a treat, isn't it honey?

**Mr. Woods**

Sheee-it.

**Little Red**

*(Sits on a stool and arranges the drum and the cymbal in front of him.)*

Ya'll go ahead. I'll just follow along with a little beat.

*(Big Red goes to the piano. Cat is tuning the guitar.)*

**Big Red**

Alright, Little Red. I'm goin' to play a blues tune, you tap out something to match it. Show us what you got.

*(Big Red lays his hands on the keyboard and plays a short song. Little Red, amazingly, provides a coherent, accompanying beat.)*

**Melody**

Wow, that works. Okay, what should we do, fellows?

**Cat**

I know what fits right in here.

**Melody**

What's that?

**Cat**

You'll know it when you hear it. Just back me up.

(Tobacco Road)

I was born in a dump,  
Mamma died and daddy got drunk,  
Left me here to die or grow  
In the middle of Tobacco Road.

Wo wo wo

Grew up in a rusty shack,  
All I owned was hangin' on my back.  
Only you know how I loathe  
This place called Tobacco Road,  
But it's home.  
The only life I've ever known  
Only you know how I loathe  
Tobacco Road

Gonna leave get a job  
With the help and the grace from above  
Save my money get rich I know,  
Bring it back to Tobacco Road.

Wo wo wo

Bring dynamite and a crane,  
Blow it up, start all over again.  
Build a town, be proud to show,  
Give the name Tobacco Road  
But it's home.

The only life I've ever known  
I despise you 'cos you're filthy,  
But I love you 'cos you're home.  
Tobacco – oooo Ro-oad.

**Mrs. Woods**

*(Clapping wildly.)*

Oh, that was wonderful. Wasn't that wonderful, honey.

**Mr. Woods**

Hmmm.

**Little Red**

Yip-ee. Come on let's do another one.

**Big Red**

Me and Cat both sung, how about you do the next one, Melody?

**Melody**

Alright. What do you think I should do?

**Cat**

You pick. Just start. We right with ya.

**Melody**

*(Looks at Mrs. Woods.)*

This was performed by a lovely lady, Janis Joplin, who departed this cruel world just last month.

(Try (Just A Little Bit Harder))

Try, try, try just a little bit harder

So I can love, love, love him, I tell myself

Well, I'm gonna try yeah, just a little bit harder

So I won't lose, lose, lose him to nobody else.

Hey! Well, I don't care how long it's gonna take you now,

But if it's a dream I don't want No I don't really want it

If it's a dream I don't want nobody to wake me.

Yeah, I'm gonna try yeah, just a little bit harder

So I can give, give, give, give him every bit of my soul.

Yeah, I'm gonna try yeah, just a little bit harder

So I can show, show, show him love with no control.

Hey! I've waited so long for someone so fine

I ain't gonna lose my chance, no I don't wanna lose it,

Ain't gonna lose my chance to make you mine, all mine.

All right, get it! Yeah!

Try yeah, try yeah, hey, hey, hey, try yeah,

Oh try whoa! Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa,

Oh anybody, oh anybody, oh anybody,

Try oh yeah (just a little bit harder)

Whoa I gotta try some more,

I said try yeah, aw I said try,

I said try try try try try try,

Oh try oh yeah, try oh yeah!

Hey hey, I gotta talk to my man now,

You know I, I gotta feel for my man now,

I said I, I gotta work for my man now,  
You know I, I gotta hurt for my man now,  
I think-a every day for my man now,  
You know it, every way for my man now.  
I say try, try yeah, oh try yeah,  
Hey hey hey, try yeah-hey, oh, try...

*(Mrs. Woods, Little Red and Melvin are laughing and clapping. Mr. Woods sits staring off into the distance, lost in his thoughts.)*

### **Melody**

Here's one you might like.

(San Francisco Bay Blues)  
Got the blues from my baby  
Left me by the San Francisco Bay.  
This big ocean liner took her so far away.  
Didn't mean to treat her so bad  
She was the best girl I ever have had.  
She said good-bye, and she made me cry  
I'm gonna lay right down and die.

Well, I ain't got a nickel and I ain't got a lousy dime.  
If she don't come back I think I'm gonna lose my mind.  
If she ever comes back to stay,  
Well, that'll be another brand new day,  
Walking with my baby down by the San Francisco Bay.

Sittin' in my back door  
Wondering which way to go  
That woman I'm so crazy about  
She don't love me no more.  
Lord, I think I'll grab a freight train  
Because I'm feeling blue,  
Ride all the way to the end of the line  
Thinking only about you.

Well, meanwhile in another city  
Just about to go insane  
Thought I heard my baby  
The way she used called my name.  
If she ever comin' back to stay  
Well, that'll be another brand new day  
Walking with my baby down by the San Francisco Bay  
I really mean it!  
Oh, walking with my baby down by the San Francisco Bay, whew!!

*(Everyone seems to be enjoying the impromptu party except for the dour Mr. Woods. He gets up from the stool and goes into the restroom, closing the door behind him.)*

**Mrs. Woods**

Oh, that was wonderful. What else do you know?

**Little Red**

Yeah, do another one.

**Big Red**

Hold on now, I'm thirsty.

*(Turns to Melvin.)*

Say, what else you got to drink besides tea? Got anything with a little more bite to it?

**Melvin**

Well you know, this is a dry county, but I keep a little, you know, tonic for my rheumatism. How about some of that?

**Big Red**

Hell yeah, some tonic sounds good. Bring it out.

**Melvin**

Comin' up.

*(Melvin goes through the door into the kitchen.)*

**Mrs. Woods**

*(To Melody.)*

Oh, I envy you. Being in the entertainment business and all. I wanted to be an actress when I was younger.

**Cat**

What do you mean, when you were younger? You young now. You look like an actress too. I'd buy a ticket to see you in the movies.

**Mrs. Woods**

Aren't you sweet. But it's too late now.

**Melody**

It's never too late to do something you really want to do. You just have to go do it.

**Cat**

That's right. It's called passion. If you got a passion to do something, the doing takes care of itself. I done some acting. I was in some movies out in Hollywood, but I decided

(Cat, cont.) I like singin' better. And besides, before Shaft, there wasn't that many parts for black cats.

**Mrs. Woods**

Shaft? The movie? It came to our drive-in theater here back in the summer. I wanted to see it but my husband wouldn't go. Is it a good movie?

*(Melvin comes back in the room with a mason jar full of a clear liquid and pours some in glasses for everyone.)*

**Melvin**

Was it good? Why, I never saw anything like it. Best damn movie ever made. My opinion, anyway.

*(To Big Red.)*

How's that tonic?

**Big Red**

Best damn tonic ever made. My opinion, anyway.

*(Melvin tops off Big Red's glass.)*

**Melvin**

Plenty more in the root cellar. Just don't tell Johnny Law about it, know what I mean?

**Big Red**

Tell who about what?

**Cat**

*(To Mrs. Woods.)*

If you didn't catch the show, would you like to hear the score?

**Mrs. Woods**

The score? You mean the music? Sure.

**Cat**

*(To Big Red and Melody.)*

Ya'll know this one.

*(To Little Red.)*

Just play along with us, Little Red.

**Little Red**

Okay.

**Cat**

Three, four, let's do it some more.

*(Cat strums a chord and picks a tune on the guitar.)*

**Cat**

Who's the black private dick  
That's a sex machine to all the chicks?  
Shaft, ya, damn right

Who is the man that would risk his neck  
For his brother man?  
Shaft, can you dig it?

Who's the cat that won't cop out  
When there's danger all about?  
Shaft, right on

They say this cat Shaft is a bad mother  
Shut your mouth  
But I'm talkin' 'bout Shaft  
Then we can dig it

He's a complicated man  
But no one understands him but his woman  
John Shaft

**Mrs. Woods**

*(Looking at Cat and overcome with some strange emotion.)*

Oh, oh, oh. I've got to see that movie. Oh.

*(Melvin goes through the door into the kitchen on some errand.)*

**Big Red**

*(He is filling a pipe and speaks to Mrs. Woods.)*

So, you want to be an actress, huh?

**Mrs. Woods**

Well, like I said, I thought about it. But it's too late now and besides, I don't know anything about it. Those actresses study for years to learn how to do it.

**Big Red**

What? Shoot, some of them actresses work at Walgreens and go straight to the big screen. You just have to get discovered.

**Mrs. Woods**

How do they get discovered?

**Cat**

That's easy. You just have to be in the right place at the right time. The right place is Hollywood. The right time is whatever time somebody with your looks gets there.

**Mrs. Woods**

But I don't know anything about it. I mean, you have to know something, don't you?

**Big Red**

There's only four things you need to know to be a successful actress and actor.

**Mrs. Woods**

Oh? What's that?

**Big Red**

Number one: Don't forget your lines. Number two: Don't trip over the furniture. Number three: Don't look at the camera unless it's part of the scene. And last: Just remember, it's so easy even a monkey can do it. Look at Cheetah. Cheetah been doin' it every Saturday morning for years.

*(The restroom door opens and Mr. Woods comes out. He sees the bottle on the table and pours himself a big glass and drinks it down in one big swallow.)*

**Mrs. Woods**

There you are, honey. I was beginning to wonder if you fell in.

**Mr. Woods**

Come on, let's go.

**Mrs. Woods**

It's still pouring out there. Can't you hear it?

*(Melvin comes into the room.)*

**Melvin**

Just heard some bad news on the radio. The rivers so high the bridge is out. Fellow from the garage must be stuck on the other side. Telephone out too. Looks like we're all stuck here, for a while anyway.

**Mr. Woods**

Sheee-it.

*(He pours himself another glass of tonic.)*

*(Big Red lights his pipe and Mr. Woods sniffs the air and turns suddenly to Big Red.)*

**Mr. Woods**

What's that smell? What are you smoking? Is that reefer?

**Big Red**

*(All innocence.)*

What this? Naw, this is some incense. Besides, I don't inhale it. If you don't inhale it, it don't count. Ain't that right, Cat?

**Cat**

That's right, Red.

*(He reaches out to take the pipe and inhales a big lungful, exhaling the smoke towards Mr. Woods.)*

**Mrs. Woods**

What's reefer?

**Mr. Woods**

It's illegal is what it is, by God.

**Big Red**

Hey, here's a song about reefer. Ya'll ready?

(Champaign And Reefer)

Yeah bring me champagne when I'm thirsty.  
Bring me reefer when I want to get high.  
Yeah bring me champagne when I'm thirsty.  
Bring me reefer when I want to get high.  
Well you know when I'm lonely  
Bring my woman set her right down here by my side.  
Well you know there should be no law  
on people that want to smoke a little dope.  
Well you know there should be no law  
on people that want to smoke a little dope.  
Well you know it's good for your head  
And it relax your body don't you know.

Everytime I get high  
I lay my head down on my baby's breast.  
Well you know I lay down be quiet  
Tryin' to take my rest.  
Well you know she done hug and kiss me  
Says Muddy your one man that I love the best.

I'm gonna get high  
Gonna get high just as sure as you know my name.  
Y'know I'm gonna get so high this morning  
It's going to be a cryin' shame.

Well you know I'm gonna stick with my reefer  
Ain't gonna be messin' round with no cocaine.

**Mr. Woods**

That smells like reefer to me. We got law in this county. I think I'll call the sheriff.

**Melvin**

Telephone out.

**Mr. Woods**

Sheee-it.

*(A sudden huge crack of lightning and thunder, the lights go out, plunging the room in darkness.)*

**Mrs. Woods**

*(Screams in fright.)*

**Melvin**

Hold on folks. Everybody sit tight. I'll get the lanterns.

**Mr. Woods**

Sheee-it.

**Cat**

Sheee-it.

**ACT TWO**  
**SCENE ONE**

*(The room is lighted by several lanterns; two hanging on the wall, the third sitting on top of the pot-bellied stove. Everyone is in the same position from before when the lights went out, except for Melvin who has just finished lighting the last lantern.)*

**Melvin**

There now, see we got a fire in the stove, light, food, tonic – why we can sit here till the cows come home.

**Little Red**

The cows are probably swimmin’.

**Cat**

Yeah, you can catch ‘em in a big net. Like the oysters.

**Mrs. Woods**

Isn’t this cozy? Why, it’s like a scene in a movie.

*(To Mr. Woods.)*

Ain’t this cozy, honey?

**Mr. Woods**

Sheee-it.

*(He gets up and walks into the restroom, closing the door.)*

**Melvin**

*(Pointing toward the restroom.)*

Got a light in there too.

Be right back. Gonna go get us some more tonic.

*(Melvin goes through the kitchen door. Little Red moves over to the piano and sits on the bench, talking to Big Red. Cat stands, stretches and walks over to the door, looking out. Mrs. Woods walks over to sit at the table by Melody. )*

**Mrs. Woods**

My name is Barbara. Yours is Melody, right?

**Melody**

Yes, Melody.

**Mrs. Woods**

So, you’re originally from around here?

**Melody**

Yes, my Mom and Dad were in a car wreck when I was four years old. My Mother's sister, Aunt Clarissa, she adopted me and raised me.

**Mrs. Woods**

But you moved away, after that?

**Melody**

To Washington DC.

**Mrs. Woods**

How come your aunt moved you away?

**Melody**

Well, at the time I was just a little kid, I didn't know why we moved. You know, everything had changed, with Mom and Dad, you know, after the wreck. Years later I asked my aunt why we moved and she said she wanted me to go to good schools. I think she just figured we both needed a change. One time she told me she had some bad memories from around here, something to do with a man. She wouldn't tell me the whole story though.

*(Beat.)*

What about you? Are you from around here?

**Mrs. Woods**

Oh yeah, born and raised here. I was thinking of going to Florida or California or somewhere, then my husband, he proposed. We went to Vegas for our honeymoon. That's the only place I've ever been.

**Melody**

How did you and your husband meet?

**Mrs. Woods**

Oh, I was right out of high school, I won a silly little beauty contest the country club organized. He was one of the judges. He swept me off my feet. Look at this big diamond he gave me for an engagement ring.

*(Beat.)*

He's a real nice man, treats me good, but he don't like to do much. He's always running around, working and checking on his property and farms during the week. Sunday he plays golf at the country club, I take tennis lessons.

*(Beat.)*

It's a good life.

*(Beat.)*

How did you get in the music business?

**Melody**

My Aunt Clarissa signed me up for lessons when I was a little girl, then I was in the band in high school. I always liked it so I majored in music at college. I was singing in a hotel lounge for extra money. Big Red and Cat were in the band. One night, several months ago, this man from Nashville heard us and paid for us to cut a demo. Just a few days ago he called and offered us a contract.

**Mrs. Woods**

So you and Mr. Cat aren't, well you know, together?

**Melody**

No, Cat and Big Red and I are just business partners. Well, we're more than that really. We're good friends. They're good men. You can't find better friends.

**Mrs. Woods**

Oh, you're so lucky. I can only imagine your life.

**Melody**

It's probably not what you imagine. It's hard work, really.

**Mrs. Woods**

But you're doing something with your life.

**Melody**

That's what my Aunt Clarissa said I should do. She told me, she said, girl, if you want to sing, then you be the best singer you can be. She was so happy when I told her about the recording contract.

**Mrs. Woods**

Your Aunt Clarissa sounds like she was a good woman. Raising you and taking care of you and all.

**Melody**

Yes, she was.

*(Beat.)*

I can't believe she's gone.

*(Beat.)*

She was the only family I had. She was like a mother to me. I love her so much.

*(Beat. Beat.)*

I guess she's in heaven now with my Mom and Dad.

**Mrs. Woods**

*(Reaches out and takes Melody's hand in hers.)*

She was in heaven before she passed away.

**Melody**

What do you mean?

**Mrs. Woods**

My Granny told me something, years ago, before she passed away. She said that if a person, before they die, can look back at their life with no regrets, with happiness at what they've done with their life, then, even on their deathbed, they are already in heaven. Your aunt raised you to be a fine person. She had no regrets. That was her heaven.

*(Several long beats as the two women, who are of an age, sit quietly at the table. The restroom door opens and Mr. Woods comes out. He almost bumps into Cat who is standing by the door, looking out at the rain. They each stand for a moment appraising the other.)*

**Mr. Woods**

A record contract, huh? Is there any money in that, or is it just a way not to have to do any real work?

**Cat**

I guess that depends on what you mean by "real work". If you mean is it something that a person does because they like it, because they're good at it, because they get paid and because they might get paid a lot, then yeah, it's real work. If you mean is it like being a field hand and sweatin' and slavin' to get a handful of dollars at the end of the week to make somebody else rich, then no, it ain't real work.

**Mr. Woods**

You speak your mind, don't you?

**Cat**

That's right. You got a problem with that?

**Mr. Woods**

Maybe I do.

**Cat**

Oh, so you one of them dudes think a black man should shuck and jive? Think a black man should know his place?

**Mr. Woods**

Everybody should know their place. It's what organizes the world.

**Cat**

Uh, huh, organize it for who?

**Mr. Woods**

You know what I mean, boy.

**Cat**

*(Beat.)*

Well now you're being disrespectful and insulting. I ain't said or done nothing to you that's disrespectful or insulting. There's no need for you to be that way to me.

*(Steps close to Mr. Woods, who backs up a step.)*

But I'm gonna tell you this right now. I ain't your fuckin boy. You call me "boy" again, I'm liable to forget my manners and cut your honky mutha fuckin throat for ya.

**Mr. Woods**

*(Laughs derisively.)*

See what I mean. You people always got a knife and ready to use it aren't you?

**Cat**

You're wrong there. Not all of us got a knife. Just some of us. But maybe we all should. If the Reverend Martin Luther King had used a knife on some ofay trash, then maybe one of them ofay trash mutha fuckers wouldn't have been left to shoot him. Maybe if Jimi Hendrix had used a knife first the Man wouldn't have been able to stick that hot needle in his arm.

**Mr. Woods**

So it's all a conspiracy huh? All you black dudes get killed by the white man in a conspiracy?

**Cat**

Naw, it ain't just the black man who gets killed by the white man. It's good white folks who get killed by bad white ofays too.

**Mr. Woods**

What do you mean by that?

**Cat**

Jack Kennedy was for the black man and it was a white cracker who shot him. Maybe Jack Kennedy still be alive if he'd stuck a knife in that redneck mutha fuckers ass first.

**Mr. Woods**

Sheee-it.

**Cat**

Sheee-it.

*(Both men stand toe to toe, ready, like drawn bow strings. It was a tension that demanded a release. All it would take is a spark to set them off. Mrs. Woods looks around and sees her husband standing by the door.)*

**Mrs. Woods**

Hey, honey, where've you been? Will you do me a favor and see if Melvin has any soda pop? I'm real thirsty.

*(Cat and Mr. Woods back slowly away from one another, holding eye contact. Mr. Woods turns and goes into the kitchen. Cat turns back to the door and looks out the window. Beat. Beat. Beat. Mr. Woods returns with a bottle of pop in one hand and another full jar of the tonic in the other. He sits at the counter, drinks steadily from the jar of tonic, not even bothering with a glass, and ignores the others. Melvin comes back into the room.)*

**Melvin**

It sure is quiet in here. How about some more music?

**Little Red**

Hah, I thought you told me you didn't want any music, Mel. All of a sudden you're a music lover?

**Melvin**

I told you I didn't want to hear none of that idiotic racket they play on the juke boxes. These folks play good music. How about it? What else ya'll know?

**Big Red**

I got one for ya. It's a rainy night song. Everybody ready?

*(Cat gives Mr. Woods a dark look as he walks back to the table. Mr. Woods returns Cat's look, then Mr. Woods lifts the bottle of tonic to his mouth. Cat picks up the guitar and sits down. Little Red sits on the piano bench next to Big Red.)*

**Big Red**

One and a two and a you know what to do...

**Big Red**

The cars hiss by my window

Like the waves down on the beach

The cars hiss by my window

Like the waves down on the beach

I got this girl beside me

But she's out of reach  
Headlight through my window  
Shinin' on the wall  
Headlight through my window  
Shinin' on the wall  
Can't hear my baby  
Though I called and called  
Yeah right  
Woo!  
Windows started tremblin'  
With a sonic boom  
Windows started tremblin'  
With a sonic boom boom  
A cold girl'll kill you  
In a darkened room  
Yeah woo  
Ride  
Ride on  
Weooooo!  
Wawa eooo!  
Oooo owa owaaa!  
Wa waaaaea!  
Ooo wa wa wa waa!

Uh-huh

**Mrs. Woods**

Alright.

**Little Red**

Yeah.

**Melvin**

Now that there is music.

**Mrs. Woods**

*(To husband.)*

Honey, isn't this great? Come over here and set by me.

*(Mr. Woods just lifts the bottle of tonic to his mouth and takes a big swig.  
He seems determined to drink himself into insensibility.)*

**Big Red**

Come on Melody. Sing us one.

**Melody**

Okay, how about this one. It's another rainy night song.

Riders on the storm  
Riders on the storm  
Into this house we're born  
Into this world we're thrown  
Like a dog without a bone  
An actor out alone  
Riders on the storm

There's a killer on the road  
His brain is squirmin' like a toad  
Take a long holiday  
Let your children play  
If ya give this man a ride  
Sweet memory will die  
Killer on the road, yeah

Girl ya gotta love your man  
Girl ya gotta love your man  
Take him by the hand  
Make him understand  
The world on you depends  
Our life will never end

Gotta love your man, yeah

Wow!

Riders on the storm  
Riders on the storm  
Into this house we're born  
Into this world we're thrown  
Like a dog without a bone  
An actor out alone  
Riders on the storm

Riders on the storm  
Riders on the storm  
Riders on the storm  
Riders on the storm  
Riders on the storm

**Melody**

Come on, Cat. It's your turn now.

**Cat**

Nah, I don't feel like it right now.

**Melody**

What? Since when don't you feel like singing? Are you sick?

**Big Red**

Cat sick in the head. Come on, man, sing us something.

**Cat**

*(Looks at Mr. Woods darkly.)*

Alrite, here's one.

**Cat**

Well, I've been down so Goddamn long  
That it looks like up to me  
Well, I've been down so very damn long  
That it looks like up to me  
Yeah, why don't one you people  
C'mon and set me free

I said, warden, warden, warden  
Won't you break your lock and key  
I said, warden, warden, warden  
Won't you break your lock and key

Yeah, come along here, mister  
C'mon and let the poor boy be

Baby, baby, baby  
Won't you get down on your knees  
Baby, baby, baby  
Won't you get down on your knees  
C'mon little darlin'  
C'mon and give your love to me, oh yeah

Well, I've been down so Goddamn long  
That it looks like up to me  
Well, I've been down so very damn long  
That it looks like up to me  
Yeah, why don't one you people  
C'mon, c'mon, c'mon and set me free

**Mrs. Woods**

*(Looks at Cat in wonder.)*

That's – so real.

**Cat**

*(Looks intently at Mrs. Woods.)*

You want real? Try this on for size.

(Light my fire)  
You know that it would be untrue  
You know that I would be a liar  
If I was to say to you  
Girl, we couldn't get much higher  
Come on baby, light my fire  
Come on baby, light my fire  
Try to set the night on fire

The time to hesitate is through  
No time to wallow in the mire  
Try now we can only lose  
And our love become a funeral pyre  
Come on baby, light my fire  
Come on baby, light my fire  
Try to set the night on fire, yeah

The time to hesitate is through  
No time to wallow in the mire

Try now we can only lose  
And our love become a funeral pyre  
Come on baby, light my fire  
Come on baby, light my fire  
Try to set the night on fire, yeah

You know that it would be untrue  
You know that I would be a liar  
If I was to say to you  
Girl, we couldn't get much higher  
Come on baby, light my fire  
Come on baby, light my fire  
Try to set the night on fire  
Try to set the night on fire  
Try to set the night on fire  
Try to set the night on fire

**Mrs. Woods**

*(Looks adoringly at Cat.)*

I love it.

**Little Red**

What next? Mr. Woods, what song do you want to hear?

*(Everyone looks at Mr. Woods. He has drunk himself unconscious and is passed out with his head on the countertop.)*

**Mrs. Woods**

*(Apologetically.)*

My husband doesn't hold his drink well. And his bedtime was hours ago. Let's let him rest.

**Big Red**

Melody, it's your turn again.

**Melody**

Wait a minute. I've got to visit the ladies room.

*(Melody stands and walks across the room to the restroom, opens the door, enters and shuts it. Little Red and Big Red are deep in conversation. Mrs. Woods stands up.)*

**Mrs. Woods**

I think I'm going to go out in the kitchen and find something to eat.

*(She walks to the kitchen door, turns and looks at Cat.)*

**Mrs. Woods**

You want to help me look for something to eat?

**Cat**

Yeah, I got me a powerful hunger.

**Mrs. Woods**

Me too.

*(Cat and Mrs. Woods go into the kitchen.)*

**ACT TWO**  
**SCENE TWO**

*(Melody is sitting at the table by herself. Melvin is sitting on a stool, leaning against the wall, asleep. Big Red is showing Little Red how to play chords on the piano. Mr. Woods is passed out at the counter. The kitchen door opens and Cat and Mrs. Woods enter the room.)*

**Melody**

Well, there you are. I thought you'd packed up and left us. Where have you been all this time?

**Cat**

Uh, we was looking for something to eat.

**Melody**

I'm starved. What did you find?

**Cat**

Nothing out there but sardines, oyster crackers and bean soup. Some raw onions if you want one.

**Melody**

No thanks. Hey, it's stopped raining anyway. The sun should be up soon. If the bridge is clear maybe we can make it to Nashville by tonight. I don't know about you but my butts getting sore from this old hard chair.

*(Suddenly the lights come back on.)*

**Melody**

Hooray.

**Little Red**

Alright.

*(Melvin jerks awake at the sound of their yells.)*

**Melvin**

What? What?

**Little Red**

Electricity is back on, Mel.

**Melvin**

*(Looks blearily around.)*

So it is. I better check the telephone. Listen to the radio. See if the bridge is open yet.

**Little Red**

Hey, Mel, what's there to eat. I'm hungry.

**Melvin**

Beans and cornbread.

**Little Red**

Ah, hell, Mel. That's what you had yesterday.

**Melvin**

No, yesterday it was cornbread and beans. Today it's beans and cornbread.

**Little Red**

Oh, okay. Can I get a bowl. Hey, you got some more of those oyster crackers? I like those oyster crackers.

**Melvin**

Sure, I'll go warm up the beans.

*(Melvin goes off into the kitchen.)*

**Little Red**

Mel's got the best bean soup. And now he's got music. Hey, let's do another song.

**Cat**

Alright, I got one.

(Love me two times)

Yeah!, come on, come on, come on, come on

Now touch me, baby

Cant you see that I am not afraid?

What was that promise that you made?

Why wont you tell me what she said?

What was that promise that you made?

Now, Im gonna love you, till the heavens stop the rain

Im gonna love you

Till the stars fall from the sky for you and I

Come on, come on, come on, come on

Now touch me, baby

Cant you see that I am not afraid?

What was that promise that you made?

Why wont you tell me what she said?

What was that promise that you made?

Im gonna love you, till the heavens stop the rain

Im gonna love you

Till the stars fall from the sky for you and I

Im gonna love you, till the heavens stop the rain

Im gonna love you  
Till the stars fall from the sky for you and I

*(Beat. Beat. Beat. When Cat is finished he and Mrs. Woods sit and look at each other. Melody and Big Red share a knowing glance. Little Red is, as usual, out of the picture and he looks back and forth at the others with a blank expression. Beat. Beat. Beat.)*

*(Melvin comes back into the room. He has a roll of telephone wire in his hand.)*

**Melvin**

Phone came on for a minute so I called the garage. They say the thermostat part on the way. Then the phone went out again.

*(Mel holds up the wire, turns to point toward the sleeping Mr. Woods, puts a finger to his lips indicating a secret and then puts the telephone wire in his pocket.)*

They say on the radio news the bridge is open again so when the part gets here Little Red can fix your car and you can drive on to Nashville.

*(Beat.)*

I sure hate to see ya go though. Why, this old store ain't seen this much fun in I don't know how long.

**Melody**

*(Melody stands and walks to Melvin. She gives him a big hug.)*

You've been a wonderful host. I can't think of anyplace else I'd have rather waited out the storm. Thank you.

*(Cat and Big Red also walk over and thank Melvin, shaking his hand in sincere gratitude. Mrs. Woods and Little Red watch smiling. Outside, a horn blows. Little Red jumps up and goes to the door.)*

**Little Red**

It's the truck from the garage. I'll go finish the thermostat.

*(He goes out the door.)*

**Big Red**

*(Speaking to Cat.)*

Whoop, that tonic filled me up. Gotta go drain the drainpipe.

*(He goes into the restroom and closes the door.)*

*(Melody and Mrs. Woods walk to the door and stand looking outside. Cat sits at the table and watches the two women.)*

**Mrs. Woods**

Look how beautiful it is. The sun is shining, the birds are singing, you would never know that big old storm blew through here last night.

**Melody**

Yes, it's a beautiful day. It's a day that makes you believe in new beginnings. That anything is possible. You know what I mean?

**Mrs. Woods**

*(Looks at Melody, then looks back outside.)*

Yes, for the first time in my life, I think I know what you mean.

*(Little Red comes back in from outside. The restroom door opens and Big Red comes into the room. Melvin comes back in from the kitchen with a to-go bag in his hand.)*

**Little Red**

Cars fixed.

**Melvin**

*(Puts the bag in Big Red's hands.)*

Here, I fixed you a snack to hold you over.

**Big Red**

Well, thank ya sir. Say, what do we owe you for the cornbread and beans?

**Melvin**

Shoot, you don't owe me nothin'. I ought to pay you for the music.

**Big Red**

It was on the house.

*(Looks at the others.)*

Well, ya'll ready to hit the road?

**Cat**

*(Sitting at the table.)*

No. There's one thing I want first.

**Big Red**

What's that?

**Cat**

I want to hear Barbara sing a song.

**Mrs. Woods**

What? Me? I can't sing.

**Cat**

Yes you can. I heard you hummin'. You hum real pretty. If a person can hum like that then they can sing. I ain't goin' nowhere till you sing a song.

(Cat, cont.) *(Picks up the guitar.)*

Big Red, would you accompany Barbara on the piano, please? Little Red, the drum please?

**Big Red**

Well, shoot yeah. Come on, sing us a song.

*(He moves to the piano.)*

**Little Red**

*(Grabs up the drum.)*

Come on, one more song.

**Melody**

Yes, please sing us a song, Barbara.

*(Mrs. Woods is flustered. Almost in a panic.)*

**Cat**

*(Softly.)*

If you want to be an actress, you got to be on the stage. You might as well do it here, amongst friends, just to get used to it. Right?

**Mrs. Woods**

Well, I do know one song. Me and my Momma used to sing it together when I was a little girl. You promise you won't laugh?

**Melody**

Nobody's going to laugh, honey. You just close your eyes and imagine you and your Momma are singing this song.

*(Mrs. Woods takes a deep breath and closes her eyes. Beat.)*

**Mrs. Woods**

Chorus:

This land is your land, this land is my land  
From California, to the New York Island  
From the redwood forest, to the gulf stream waters  
This land was made for you and me

As I was walking a ribbon of highway  
I saw above me an endless skyway  
I saw below me a golden valley  
This land was made for you and me

Chorus

I've roamed and rambled and I've followed my footsteps  
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts  
And all around me a voice was sounding  
This land was made for you and me

Chorus

The sun comes shining as I was strolling  
The wheat fields waving and the dust clouds rolling  
The fog was lifting a voice come chanting  
This land was made for you and me

Chorus

As I was walkin' - I saw a sign there  
And that sign said - no tress passin'  
But on the other side .... it didn't say nothin!  
Now that side was made for you and me!

Chorus

In the squares of the city - In the shadow of the steeple  
Near the relief office - I see my people  
And some are grumblin' and some are wonderin'  
If this land's still made for you and me.

Chorus (2x)

**ACT THREE**  
**SCENE ONE**

*(Melvin is puttering around the restaurant with a broom in one hand and a dustpan in the other. Mr. Woods is still slumped across the countertop, asleep. Melvin drops the dustpan and it makes a large rattle as it hits the floor. Mr. Woods is jerked awake by the noise.)*

**Mr. Woods**

*(Groggily.)*

Red? Finish that tractor, Red. Damn it Red, where are you?

*(He looks bleary-eyed around the room.)*

Mel, where the hell is Red?

**Melvin**

Red gone, Mr. Woods.

**Mr. Woods**

Gone? Hell you mean gone?

**Melvin**

He went to Nashville.

**Mr. Woods**

What? Hell do you mean he went to Nashville? I didn't tell him to go to Nashville.

**Melvin**

He left with them musician folks.

**Mr. Woods**

*(Jumps to his feet.)*

What?

**Melvin**

Yeah, that one fella, Big Red, he offered him a job playin' the drums. Say he gonna teach Little Red to play the piano too. Ain't that somethin'? We might see Little Red on the Grand Old Opry. Imagine that? He tole me to tell you to mail his last check to his Momma.

**Mr. Woods**

Are you shittin' me? Well that sorry son of a bitch. I'll kill him. Who told him he could quit on me?

**Melvin**

Why, I thought you'd be happy for the boy. Lord knows he just wastin' away here.

**Mr. Woods**

Wastin' away hell. He has a job, keeping my equipment running. That sorry son of bitch.  
*(Looks around the room. He walks to the door and looks outside.)*  
Where the hell's my car? Where's my wife?

**Melvin**

Huh, oh, she in the restroom. Been in there a long time. Now that you mention it, I was startin' to wonder if she okay.

*(Mr. Woods goes to the restroom door and tries the handle. It's locked.)*

**Mr. Woods**

Barbara? Barbara? Are you in there? Open the door.  
*(Beat. Beat.)*  
Barbara, open the damn door now.  
*(Angrily yells.)*  
Barbara, open the door or I'll kick it down.  
*(Beat. Beat.)*

*(Mr. Woods stands back and kicks the door. He kicks it again. Then again, and it busts open.)*

**Mr. Woods**

*(Angry.)*  
Barbara?

*(The room is empty.)*

**Mr. Woods**

What in the hell is goin' on around here?

*(Melvin is looking into the room.)*

**Melvin**

Look, the window open. Maybe she climbed out that way. Look, there's something wrote on the mirror, looks like it was wrote in lipstick.

*(Mr. Woods stands for a moment looking into the restroom, apparently reading the writing on the mirror. He slowly turns and walks out into the middle of the room.)*

**Melvin**

*(Reading the note on the mirror, out loud.)*

(Melvin, cont.)

Carl, I'm leaving you. I'm going to Hollywood to be an actress.  
Please wish me luck. This is for the best. I hope you understand, and  
please, don't have any regrets.

**Melvin**

*(In a voice of wonder.)*

Well I be dawg.

*(Mr. Woods is standing mute in the middle of the room. He looks upwards.)*

**Mr. Woods**

Oh, Clarissa. I'm so sorry.

**CURTAIN**

## Cornbread and Beans

### CREDITS:

Title	Writer	Year published	Time	Hover at address and click for Link
Cornbread & Beans	Louis Jordan	1949	3:00	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fM9jT2eM6KQ">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fM9jT2eM6KQ</a>
Tobacco Road	John. D. Loudermilk	1960	4:30	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4Sfh8LFMaw">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4Sfh8LFMaw</a>
Try (Just a little bit harder)	Jerry Ragover	1960	4:11	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEpbytFS-Nk">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEpbytFS-Nk</a>
San Francisco Bay Blues	Jesse Fuller	Mid-1950's	4:12	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2zLvqcbL3Y&amp;feature=related">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2zLvqcbL3Y&amp;feature=related</a>
Shaft	Isaac Hayes	1971	4:40	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHbYLjWEEQA">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHbYLjWEEQA</a>
Champagne & Reefer	Muddy Waters	1949	6:45	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmDQzWusJZ0">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmDQzWusJZ0</a>
Cars Hiss By My Window	Jim Morrison, The Doors	1970	4:59	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QoU16KYRWZQ">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QoU16KYRWZQ</a>
Riders On The Storm	Jim Morrison, The Doors	1970	6:37	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKbPUzhWeeI">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKbPUzhWeeI</a>
Been Down So Long	Richard Farina	1937	4:44	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwMc0TjW_6Y">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwMc0TjW_6Y</a>
Light My Fire	Robby Krieger	1966	7:08	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUKIkRmUr0Y">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUKIkRmUr0Y</a>
Love Me Two Times	Jim Morrison, The Doors	1967	3:13	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfZgGR9ijgU">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfZgGR9ijgU</a>
This Land Is My Land, This Land Is Your Land	Woody Guthrie	1940	4:31	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxiMrvDbq3s">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxiMrvDbq3s</a>

Production note: The total minutes of the stage-play equals the script pages plus the music. That is; 49 pages plus 58 minutes, fifty seconds of music equal a total playing time of approximately 107 minutes.