East Texas Hot Links

By Eugene Lee

ROY:

Damn.

XL:

What's eatin' at you, Roy Moore?

ROY:

I wish I was someplace else.

XL:

Where else you gon' be but where you at?

ROY:

I don't know. Maybe somewhere where somethin's happenin'.

So quiet out here at night you can hear the stars shinin' you listen hard enough.

XL:

Where else you gon' get that?

CHARLESETTA:

A dirt road ain't no place to run a business…

XL:

When they open up that new paved highway, might change things fo' ya'. It's gon' run from Dallas to Houston and they workin' from both ends to try to open it up spring of next year… '56. Might help your bid'ness grow.

COLUMBUS:

Might my ass. Ain't no good for my business. I got two pieces of property standing in their way. They don't wanna pay me half of what they're worth and look like I'm gonna have to take it.

CHARLESETTA:

Thank God that highway ain't gon' cut through these woods. All that concrete y'all layin' ain't gon' let nothin' grow.

COLUMBUS:

Yeah! Seems to me we'll have the Top o' the Hill to ourselves. Good Lord willing and the creek don't rise.

XL:

You ain't got no entertainment, that's all. Lights and what have you.

CHARLESETTA:

My daddy bought that damn blues box over there…

XL:

What you expect? You don't serve no food.

CHARLESETTA:

I serve what I can, XL. Now don't you start.

ROY:

You need something to happen here. Get people from Elkhart and Grapeland, Groveton and Palestine to comin' our here and spendin' they money. That's what you need… a show.

CHARLESETTA:

Where I'mo put a crowd like that? It's enough of a show goin' on in here as it is. With all the lies y'all chunkin' at each other.

XL:

She talkin' 'bout you, Roy Moore.

ROY:

What you mean XL?

XL:

She talkin' 'bout chunkin' lies. You the worst. Mr. Basketball hero…

ROY:

I ain't got to lie 'bout that. It's in the record book. You can look it up. I damn near singlehandedly out scored damn near every team they could convince to get on the court with me. Shit! Averaged thirty-three points a game! Reboundin'! Coach said to me just the other day. I seen him, on his way to fishin'… He said he ain't never coached a better player. Now that's from the coach.

CHARLESETTA:

Old Coach Scott? He losin' his mind I heard.

ROY:

We was the best in the state of Texas.

XL:

Y'all didn't play nobody.

ROY:

True. But we was still better than everybody. The best colored schools from Dallas to Lubbock walks off the court shakin' they heads and cryin' and shit. If they'da played us 'gainst the whites it woulda been embarassin' to 'em. We had some boys… James Smith and them long arm'd Colter boys… who could run and jump and put that ball in that hole like myself. I used to love, to hear them drawers pop. WHHPT! People in the bleachers would be fallin' out. Women screamin' my name. Roy Moore! Charlesetta know. We was beatin' teams by twenty ta thirty points.

CHARLESETTA:

Yeah… they could play.

XL:

Them good old days is gone now.

ROY:

Water under the bridge. But I got the keys to the gym and I'll whup your ass 'til it rope like okra. I plays me some basketball still. It be hard to top that in my life. Unless Charlesetta come on 'round and admit she in love with me.

CHARLESETTA:

You'da had a better shot at playin' 'gainst them white boys.

COLUMBUS:

You ever wish you coulda played 'gainst 'em, Roy.

ROY:

Not no more I don’t. We won the Colored State Championship. I got that. Hell colored man can’t make no better life for hisself playin’ games with no white folks. You gon’ learn that one day, XL.

XL:

I know it already. I ain’t no fool.

COLOMBUS:

Professor! Hot damn, speak of the devil…

ROY:

Adolph you better than the damn Pony Express. You don’t let nothing stop you from deliverin’.

ADOLPH:

A man can get around ‘long as he got a good mule. A good mule and a wagon. Miss Charlesetta, that damn sheep herdin’, bootlegger, Jake Watson, sent you a package. Said it’s his best batch to date. Soon as I get my taste, I’ll tell you if he lied.

ROY:

Jake say, you drink enough of his corn, it’ll make you bullet proof. Make you walk into a lion’s den wearin’ a pork chop suit.

COLUMBUS:

Charlesetta, anybody leave anything for me today?

CHARLESETTA:

Miss Alberta. And Benny Frank say he sorry he missed you. He say he'll bring the rest at the end of next week.

COLUMBUS:

He ain't sorry he missed me. No such thang. He too 'shamed to give me this half-ass piece of payment to my face.

ADOLPH:

Step right up, gentlemens! For just the measly price of a bottle of beer, you'll hear words strung together and wrapped into stories… like you never understood before. A bourbon back could set bail for a barrage of booksense to rival the bard hisself. Boy, boy, boy … buy me a bottle and hear my wise ass. Buy me a drink! Let me tell you what think. Step right up. No waitin'. Hear the man talk. I entertain as well as educate. Step right up and put your bottle down at my table… lend an ear to my fable. I know woe. Knew him well. He was my best friend. 'Til I was introduced to vodka and gin. I don't know woe no mo'.

DELMUS:

What you lyin' 'bout tonight, Adolph.

ADOLPH:

I speak only the truth.

DELMUS:

And the truth will set you free.

ROY:

What you know ‘bout what the truth is …?

DELMUS:

I know enough to know mine ain’t the same as yours.

ROY:

And I’m damn sho’ grateful for that.

XL:

The truth is the truth. Period.

ADOLPH:

We all awfully glad you spoke that so clearly, XL. But that’s a lie.

CHALESETTA:

All ya’ll lyin’. The truth is in the Bible.

DELMUS:

Nawh. The truth for me is outside these piney woods somewhere. It's colored people somewhere doin' more'n what these white folks let us do down here. I read it.

ROY:

Delmus, can you spell read?

DELMUS:

What? Nawh. I mean, yeah. Yeah, I can spell it… can you?

COLUMBUS:

You ain't gon' find the truth about no colored man's life in no book you readin'.

CHARLESETTA:

Y'all leave that child alone. Delmus, close my door, baby.

ADOLPH:

Step right up. Feed the bluesbox if you sufferin' and want to nourish your spirit wit' a song. Everybody suffers. Sufferin' from unrealized pride, or too much pride. Humble pie, or the horn of plenty. Hurtin' 'cause you out o' balance. Shittin' in high cotton and can't stand the smell. Blues singin' sets sufferin' up on a shelf. Let you see it from someplace else. Like a mirror. It ain't real but it's the best view you got. Sufferers born every minute all over the world. So I always got somebody to talk to. Ravaged and burdened souls speak the same language. Slings and arrows. It's outrageous!

ROY:

Somebody better git that old man out that bottle ‘fore he drown in it. Hell old man you startin’ to shrivel up. We gon’ look for your alcoholic ass one day and not be able to find you.

ADOLPH:

We all destined to be dinner for some deity. The Greeks…Romans or some’a them old peoples used to say, “Humans are bred by the gods for sport. To feed the gluttony of the gods.” Food for they immortality.

XL:

You won’t be talkin’ that talk when they sayin’ words over your pickled ass.

ADOLPH:

I’ll be well marinated. Burial is but final digestion by the gods. We become waste material.

COLUMBUS:

You end up shit in the end.

ROY:

It’s some folks out here ain’t much more’n that when they alive.

ADOLPH:

A sufferer speaks!

ROY:

I don’t suffer nothin’!

ADOLPH:

You speak the language. And that puts a number to the people you can talk to. People will listen. Some will even hear. Only your own will understand.

XL:

I’m a survivor.

ADOLPH:

Same difference.

DELMUS:

I’m buyin’ everybody in here a drink! Especially you XL. How ‘bout that!?

Well how ‘bout everybody chippin’ in to buy me a drink?... or somethin’?

ADOLPH:

That boy is in dire need of help.

XL:

Man just hungry.

COLUMBUS:

Don’t look to me like he been missin’ no meals… I’mo have one mo’ cold one. Charlesetta, before I go and see what this woman of mine burn’t up today.

ROY:

Any woman burn up a pot of Jello couldn’t cook nothin’ else for me.

COLUMBUS:

You gon’ let him talk about your sister like that brother-in-law?

XL:

You married her. I ain’t liable no more. Anyway he tellin’ the truth.

COLUMBUS:

Belinda can cook… some thangs. She make a good breakfast.

XL:

Belinda can't cook, Columbus. After twenty years you just can't tell the difference no mo'.

COLUMBUS:

She ain't killed me yet.

XL:

Hell, I hope she don't do that and try to bring her no cookin' self back home. Bring me one too, Charlesetta, sweetheart. My bro'-in-law'll pay. Right, bro'-in-law?

COLUMBUS:

What you do with yo' money, XL?

XL:

All I don't give to you I try to feed myself with.

ADOLPH:

You work this week, XL?

CHARLESETTA:

Adolph…you know if XL is sittin' up in here at seven in the evening on a Friday, and ain't drunk…

ROY:

…And he ain't cussed Columbus out…!

CHARLESETTA:

He ain't worked this week.

XL:

I might'a work't! I might'a spent my money on a good time. Might'a been in a warm, wet womb… rockin'...

ROY:

Jake Watson gon' shoot you 'bout his sheep boy…Ha!

XL:

I don't even wear wool sweaters…

CHARLESETTA:

What kind of good time you spend your money on, then?

XL:

We ain't work't. Rain early in the week…

COLUMBUS:

Been dry the past two days.

ROY:

Didn't do much more'n drizzle when it did rain.

CHARLESETTA:

You could'a found something else to do this week. Henry Raines was lookin' for somebody to fix some fence… How you gon' eat?

COLUMBUS:

You could'a worked for me. I need that house on Fifth street painted on the inside. These damn renters of mine don't care one good got damn 'bout…

XL:

Thank you but no, 'Lumbus. I couldn't do that.

COLUMBUS:

What? That white man's money different than mine?

XL:

Yeah… it's longer. Work for you? You out yo' mind? You married my sister… should'a knowed you was a fool then.

ROY:

Aw hell, he gettin' started.

XL:

He already my landlord. Be just my luck, 'Lumbus'll get mad at her, and take it out on me. If I'm working for you and you and her have a spat… I might as well find me another job and a place to live. You liable to fire me and then jack my rent up as high as giraffe pussy. 'Lumbus wh'ont you sell me my house?

COLUMBUS:

I'd be happy to be rid of it. But you got to convince me I'mo get my money from you.

ROY:

XL so cheap he pick his teeth to feed his dog.

XL:

That's all a dog supposed to get. He a dog. That's his place.

ROY:

Talk to Prescott Ebert, XL. Get the money from him. He better'n the bank.

XL:

Nawh, I get this supervisor job… I'll get it on my own.

CHARLESETTA:

And if you don't get no supervisor job… How you gon' eat if you ain't workin?

XL:

I got food at the house. Why all y'all all a sudden so worried 'bout me? I got money. I just want to make it stretch 'til we get back to layin' the rest of that interstate. Got me a job. Mr. Prescott Ebert got me a job. A good job. My family been workin' for the same ugly white man since he was a ugly white baby. So don't y'all worry your little hearts out no sleep on my part. Ebert's waitin' on supplies to get here from Oklahoma, so he only usin' half crews. When they all get back to work, I'll be on my job.

CHARLESETTA:

When you expect that to be?

ADOLPH:

Hard to know. Radio today say they plan to maybe tear up the highway y'all laid up to now, see can't they find no mo' bodies and take your boss man to jail.

XL:

I don't know nothin' 'bout that mess.

ROY:

What'chu gon' do for work if they shut Ebert down, XL?

XL:

I'll just git a job workin' for whoever… Whatever company git the contract got to hire peoples. You know they gon' finish the interstate. I might even get me a new supervisor job wit' my experience. Ride 'round in a new company pick-up and tell Niggahs what to do all day, and how fast to do it! Right now I'm the only colored man Prescott Ebert allow to handle the dynamite, 'cause he can trust me.

ROY:

Prescott Ebert. That half a white man. I ain't figured out how a man run that much influence over folks… in a wheelchair.

COLUMBUS:

That Ebert family used to own more slaves than any family in the whole state of Texas…

CHARLESETTA:

He Klan ain't he…?

COLUMBUS:

Big time Klan… Sheriff Hanky is too!

XL:

Klan my ass! He got more colored working for him now in this county than any other anybody around. Why he wanna be killin' some…? Mr. Prescott Ebert ain't killed nobody. He a disabled veteran. He lost his legs in the war…fighting for his country.

ADOLPH:

I lost my eyes in the same war fightin' for his country.

COLUMBUS:

He still fightin' and killin' to keep this his country, XL. I know you got to make a livin', XL, but …

ROY:

A Klansman in a damn wheelchair! One'a 'nem electric chairs, ain't it…? I mean power chairs, or what, what you call it…?

XL:

Ain't no damn electric chair, fool!

ROY:

Oughta be electric.

CHARLESETTA:

If he didn't do it, XL… he sure as hell knows who did.

ROY:

Damn white man get around better with no legs than I do with two. “Titty Baby” said they should’a cut his whole life short ‘stead’a stoppin’ at his legs. I agree with “Titty Baby” on that.

COLUMBUS:

They ain’t gon’ mess with that man.

CHARLESETTA:

A word to the wise, Roy Moore, you best not let Buckshot hear you callin’ him no “Titty Baby.”

ROY:

I heard XL and them callin’ him that.

CHARLESETTA:

You notice they don’t call him that to his face? You been livin’ long enough to know…

ROY:

I ain’t scared of no Buckshot. I’m just havin’ fun. He ain’t gon’ kill nobody…

COLUMBUS:

Naw, but you won’t have much to say ‘bout what he’s likely to do.

XL:

That's right, Buckshot ain't snatched nobody's tongue out they mouth in 'bout ten, fifteen years or so, right, professor?

ADOLPH:

Yeah, been 'bout that long since that suck ass fool Tom Pete called him Titty Baby to his face and stuck his tongue out like a little kid. Buck smacked him across the top'o his head… made his teeth bite down so hard his tongue dropped out his mouth and landed on his brand-new wingtips.

COLUMBUS:

Tom Pete choked'ta death on his own blood.

ADOLPH:

Buckshot got six years in Huntsville for that.

COLUMBUS:

They let him out early 'cause he behaved hisself. I wouldn't want to test 'im, though.

ROY:

I told y'all I ain't scared of no Buckshot. Big ain't everything. We talkin' 'bout Mr. Prescott Ebert. He ain't half the man Buckshot is and he killin' colored boys right and left and prob'ly gon get away with it. Gon' just roll right on scot-free. Plus, XL got a point… I don't care how many Niggahs he lost out there, they still gon' build that highway. You got that right. They don't care none 'bout some colored meat… long as they got some more to put in they place. It had to be that white man or somebody like him. It couldn'ta been nobody colored.

XL:

Why not?

ROY:

‘Cause we don’t kill each other…

XL:

Like hell we don’t. Y’all kill me tryin’ to make me feel bad ‘bout workin’ for a livin’…

ADOLPH:

The man lost three in the first month.

CHARLESETTA:

Damn near one a week.

XL:

It ain’t been but two.

ADOLPH:

Two too many. Get the pie and get to eat it too.

CHARLESETTA:

You was workin’ out there XL. What the hell happened to them men? It don’t make you a little scared for yourself?

XL:

What I got to be scared of? I been knowin' these white men all my life. They done all the time treated me fair. I can't ask no more'n that from any man. White or colored.

CHARLESETTA:

Did you know them boys? You ever talk to 'em?

XL:

Hell, it's eighty, ninety mens scattered up and down that stretch of highway doin' everything from blastin' and clearin' and cuttin' down trees to levelin' and layin' the last layer of blacktop… How I'mo know? I just work for him just like everyone of them other Niggahs that can't nobody find now 'cause once they got they little pay they went they own way and can't find they way back… They run off, I guess.

COLUMBUS:

They got paid?

XL:

Yeah, the man pay everybody what he owe ‘em for the week at the end of the day every Saturday. Me myself, I gits back in that company pick-up with my money in my pocket and brings my ass on back to the house. But some of ‘em out there… they get lost in liquor and sniffin’ behin’ some of them fast-tailed gals down there. Saturday evenin’ come ‘round… just before quittin’ time, you see ‘em switchin’ past on the road. Goin’ to Grapeland wit’ nothin’ but a smile on they face. But it don’t take much more’n that to turn these boy’s noses. I seen ‘em slobberin’ at the mouth and fightin’ over which one would git to spend his money on which gal. Like a pack of wild dogs in heat. These fools start droppin’ off that truck like flies chasin’ them short skirts. I’m surprised more of ‘em don’t come up missin’ by Monday mornin’, they way they act when they get a piece of change in they pockets.

CHARLESETTA:

Seem like to me they would let they family know where they went off to. Ain’t nobody heard nothin’ from none of ‘em. Somebody came by here last week from the church collectin’ money for the family of the one they found buried in all that cement on the viaduct. Ethel B’s boy. The one e’rybody said was so cute. Musta been ‘bout twenty.

ROY:

Her oldest boy, Yancy. Said they wouldn’ta found him if it wasn’t for his hand stickin’ outta one’a the slabs…

CHARLESETTA:

This keep up it’s gon’ be more of us in the ground than it is walking around on top of it. Now that’s a God awful shame.

XL:

‘Course now seein’ is different from bein’ told, but the way I heard it… that boy was sittin’ up there and wasn’t watchin’ while they was pourin’ that cement or he went to sleep or was half drunk or somethin’ or other and he fell off in the cement and maybe bumped his head and got knocked out…

COLUMBUS:

Didn’t nobody see him fall off in there?

XL:

Why y’all askin’ me? I wasn’t there. I was fifteen miles down the road layin’ blacktop. They all come back from lunch break and seen a dog sniffin’ ‘round the slab they laid that mornin’… and come to find out the dog was gnawin’ on that boy’s hand…

CHARLESETTA:

Lord have mercy! Did they try to pull him out? Had the cement dried hard…?

XL:

They got him out. But he was suffocated. Didn’t nobody want him to die. Hadn’t nobody even noticed the boy missin… to my knowledge.

ADOLPH:

Everything needs something to die so it can keep on livin’.

COLUMBUS:

I don't know now, Dr. Adolph. You explain to me and make me understand how that boy dyin' like that gon' help somebody live.

ADOLPH:

That white man got about half a day's work that he didn't have to pay for. And they got to see a dead colored man. They live for that. Some of 'em. I don't mean to lie. Not all of 'em.

COLUMBUS:

Most of 'em, tho'.

ADOLPH:

In these parts, yeah. Plus somebody else got the job that boy left open. Links in the food chain. Feed me with your death and I'll feed your brother with mine.

COLUMBUS:

Sounds like murder to me.

ADOLPH:

That's part of it. Call it what you will or may. We all a part of it. Links…in the food chain.

ROY:

That's right and I got the biggest link of 'em all right here 'tween my legs.

CHARLESETTA:

More like a Vienna sausage…what I hear…

ROY:

You don't have to go by what you hear, baby… You can find out for yourself if you want to. You know I been tryin' to get a taste of you with your sweet self for a long time now. Let you get a taste of me too…

CHARLESETTA:

And I been tellin' you for a long time – NO. No sir, Mister, you can keep all that to yourself. I'm scared of you anyway Roy Moore. Ever since Widow Brookman died underneath you, you might as well cut that thang of yours off, 'cause far as I'm concerned it got a curse on it.

COLUMBUS:

I guess that shut you up.

XL:

But now, Charlesetta, Widow Brookman was old and she had a bad heart.

ADOLPH:

I'd say she had a pretty big heart considerin' what she did for Roy. That wasn't for real your first and last taste was it, Roy?

ROY:

I ain't had nothin' to do with that woman dyin'.

COLUMBUS:

You loved that woman to death!

CHARLESETTA:

Me and a whole lotta women in this county ain't takin' no chances. You don't want to do nothin' but jump up and down on a woman and go… I heard.

ROY:

From who?! What you heard…?

CHARLESETTA:

Now, Roy, you don't want me to embarrass you up in here…

ROY:

I ain't done nothin' I'm ashamed of.

XL:

'Cause you ain't done nothin'.

ROY:

I done my share. I'm by myself right now… Charlesetta, come on now, just like you. You can't believe everything you hear. Gimme a chance.

CHARLESETTA:

No.

ADOLPH:

Sweet bitter fruit… wastin' on the vine.

ROY:

Damn shame, ain't it?

XL:

Word gets around down here. Don't give up. Roy…try another state.

ROY:

Nawh, now Charlesetta know she like this dark meat.

ADOLPH:

She been wantin' to butcher it all up…

CHARLESETTA:

Not if it's on a real man.

ADOLPH:

Leave you with whatever's left when she get her fill.

CHARLESETTA:

Might not be nothin' left when I get through.

ROY:

Ain't no way you take all of me. She know it, too. I think you scared. Be so good to her she be buyin' me clothes and cars and tryin' to get me to move in with her so she can take care of me and let me live off her…

XL:

You been smokin' that wacky weed boy…?

CHARLESETTA:

He for sho' ain't in his right mind talkin' to me like that.

ROY:

Charlesetta, you know I'm just ribbin' you. Let me have that trotter in that jar there. When you gon' get some more?

CHARLESETTA:

Soon as they cripple some more hogs…

XL:

That damn loco weed make you eat anything.

ROY:

No sir, buddy. I don't eat no back feet. I don't eat nothin' but front feet.

COLUMBUS:

Boy, you ain't got the sense you were born with.

CHARLESETTA:

You don't eat no back feet, but you'll put away a pound of chitlins…?! Eat like you been starvin'.

ROY:

Starvin' for some nookie…

CHARLESETTA:

Aw hush…!

ADOLPH:

Sex and the food chain might be linked.

ROY:

I'll bet you gon' help us see how.

ADOLPH:

I'd reckon to guess they done studies on insatiable sexual appetites. Person's consumed by sex… lost in lust. Lewd lunches of tube steak washed down with seminal lubricants. Fanciful freaks fallin' prey to formidable fellatio frenzies. Cunnin, clever, cunnilingual craftsmanship and creativity…culminatin' in climax…coming soon in a hole near you.

COLUMBUS:

Go 'head professor! Speak!

CHARLESETTA:

What that got to do with eatin' chitlins?

ROY:

I don't eat just anybody's chitlins.

CHARLESETTA:

How you even shape your mouth to say something like that? Your whole family eat everything off a hog but the oink…!

XL:

Used to bring 'em to school for lunch. Wrapped in paper napkins…with little brown chunks…

ROY:

See there…?! Y'all know he lyin' now. I don't eat nobody's hog shit. Talkin' 'bout chunks, XL you need to hush tellin' lies like that.

ADOLPH:

As a child, I seen more'n one chicken in my mama's yard turn around and eat his own shit.

ROY:

Remind me to never eat chicken at your mama's house. Did he like it?

ADOLPH:

I don't know. But some of 'em do it. Time and time again. Must taste good to 'em. A chicken ain't nothin' but a scavenger. A damn chicken ain't shit.

COLUMBUS:

I don't see where it could be any good for 'em, irregardless of the taste of it. You body done had 'bout all it wants to do with it by the time it comes out like that. All the nutrients and what have you is all used up. Don't make much sense to me to put something back into your body that it done already kicked out.

ADOLPH:

Wild dogs'll eat the runt of they litters.

CHARLESETTA:

Uh huh, and that's why they call 'em wild. Like that fast-tailed cousin of mine, Constance…went to Houston when she found out she was pregnant, and the damn fool took a coat hanger to the baby before it got formed good inside her. Damn near bled herself to death and now she can't have no children. Put that on your chain…

ADOLPH:

Even single-celled organisms are consumed. Bugs eat the amoeba and plankton and something bigger than the bugs eats the bugs…

XL:

Damn, Adolph, that piece of college you got made you a dangerous man. I can't understand half of what you be talkin' when you start carryin' on…

COLUMBUS:

What you call it, XL? A "piece" of college? Did he pass?

XL:

Passed right by the front door! Ha!

ADOLPH:

I matriculated for nearly a quarter of a term at Prairie View State Colored College, read an armful of books a week before having to return to the work force to provide for the rest of my family.

COLUMBUS:

You had to get your ass back out there in that cotton field.

ADOLPH:

That's what I miss most 'bout bein' blind. Books. But you see, not all of one's education is received inside the hallowed halls of a learning institution. I can watch that food chain, for example, at work within the confines of these four walls.

XL:

You can't watch nothin' blind man.

COLUMBUS:

Hush now, XL, you out of line. Now, Adolph, ain't no single-celled organisms in this place. Miss Charlesetta, he tryin' to say you got bugs.

CHARLESETTA:

No, but it's some single-minded fools up in here.

ROY:

She ain't got no bugs…no pig feet…

ADOLPH:

‘Cause you eat ‘em all. She ain’t got bugs, ‘cause she kill ‘em. She ain’t got mice, ‘cause these nasty smellin’ cats ‘round here eat ‘em. We devour each other. Eat away at each other on a daily basis. Our appetites take on shapes that straddle the thin line between love and hate. We love and get as much nourishment from people we hate as we do from our loved ones. Even you should be able to see that, XL.

XL:

I see it. I ain’t blind.

ADOLPH:

Each and every one of us gets fatter and lives longer because we come together here in this place and feed off each other.

CHARLESETTA:

Ain’t but one thing about any one of you hard-legged has-beens I’mo get fat off of…and that’s your wallets. Anything else you can keep in your pants. I runs a business here, Roy Moore.

COLUMBUS:

And it come a long way since your daddy was runnin’ it.

CHARLESETTA:

Runnin’ this place is more’n likely what killed my daddy. That big heart of his finally give out on him.

ROY:

Let me have one more cold one please, when you get a chance.

ADOLPH:

See how we feed off each other.

CHARLESETTA:

That's why I don't serve no real food.

ADOLPH:

Her beer makes you fatter and your money makes her fatter.

CHARLESETTA:

I might die here but I'll never kill myself tryin' to cook for and feed you fools too.

That boy sittin' out there by the road talkin' to Adolph's mule.

ROY:

What about the man who sold Charlesetta this beer? Where do he fit in? He feedin' off all of us? That white man…

COLUMBUS:

He further up on the chain…like your boss, XL.

ROY:

But now it's somebody somewhere feedin' off him, ain't it?

COLUMBUS:

Like these damn renters of mine feed off me…

XL:

Now just a minute there, 'Lumbus. I pay you your rent money on time reg'lar. I don't owe you a dime. You talkin' 'bout them other Niggahs livin' off you and your good heartedness. I tole you before what to do 'bout these folks payin' you whatever little bit they want to when they want to. If it was a white man they'd pay up or end up out on they ashey asses…

COLUMBUS:

I can't just throw folks out to the world, XL…like that. Now your cousin…if it was you, you'd kick her and her three children out the house they rent from me…wouldn't you?

XL:

If she don't pay her rent. You need to do what's best for you. Let that old man of hers get up off his lazy ass and go to work. All the time with his hand out and say it's for the children…

COLUMBUS:

That's your cousin. Your family…

XL:

Moselle and me barely kin. ‘Sides that, she ain’t gon’ end up out in the cold. She’ll find somebody else to take advantage of. You really ain’t helpin’ her none yourself like you think you is, ‘Lumbus…makin’ her not be more responsible. Lazy folks don’t deserve no more’n they get for theyselves. You let folks use you.

COLUMBUS:

My mama left me these houses. Rest her soul. And if it’s one thing I remember ‘bout how she ended up with ‘em is that she helped people who was in trouble with they mortgages.

ADOLPH:

Mama Frye had the money ‘cause she was bootleggin’.

COLUMBUS:

So she paid off the notes.

XL:

She kept the deeds.

COLUMBUS:

Better’n the bank gettin’ it. Right down to your family, XL. That house you livin’ in now yo’ mama would’a lost it to the bank if Mama Frye had’na took it up. She let ‘em stay on. All she asked for was enough to pay whatever taxes came due.

XL:

You chargin’ me more’n that.

COLUMBUS:

XL, I got to keep ‘em up. Take money to do that. I don’t want to argue with you, XL, ‘bout this. I been bad mouthin’ these lazy ass renter’s of mine, but…even your cousin XL…even they come through sooner or later some kinda way.

CHARLESETTA:

‘Cause they know you ain’t gon’ padlock the door and leave they belongings by the road. You, like my daddy, was…free-hearted to a flaw. He gi’ away half any profit this cafe could bring in. Was a time when folks from damn near Louisianna come through and get a sa’mich and a beer on Saturday night and Sunday after church. He’d sweat over that big ass pit out back, that I ain’t set a fire in since he died, but he’d have some’a everything cookin’ ‘cross that fire. Venison, lamb, that greasy ass goat meat, link sausage, and chicken and ribs and pork roast sa’miches, with his sauce on it, ain’t been none of that made since he died either. My point is he give away more’n he sold. He cared about people. He’d help anybody ask ‘im. And Lord knows they was askin’. Columbus, folks will take unfair advantage if you let your guard down and try to be nice to ‘em.

ROY:

Like a dog can smell it when you scared of ‘im.

COLUMBUS:

I feel better ‘bout myself if I help people when I can. What kind of world you think this would be if you didn’t have kind-hearted people? It’s been times I know y’all needed somebody’s kind heartedness. And don’t sit up here and lie and say y’all ain’t never took no help from nobody.

XL:

Not from you.

COLUMBUS:

You livin’ in a house I own.

XL:

And I pay for the privilege.

ROY:

XL, this man just bought yo’ cheap ass a beer.

COLUMBUS:

Look at that. It don’t hurt me none. I eats myself three square meals a day. I got everything I need and most the things I want. I’m comfortable.

XL:

You don’t want no more’n what you got?

COLUMBUS:

Didn't you just hear me, XL? Didn't you just hear what I said? I got all I need. You know what a need is? That's something you can't live without. Something that if you don't have it…you die. Air, water…you need food, you need shelter to protect you from the weather. Them's the basics. Anything beyond that…if you read your Bible…is gluttony.

CHARLESETTA:

Greed gon' be the death of you, XL.

XL:

I don't hurt nobody.

ROY:

You don't help nobody either.

XL:

I fend for myself. When you beholdin' to people they respect you less for it. They got somethin' over you… Commence to act like they own a piece of you 'cause you let 'em help you.

ADOLPH:

That how you feel 'bout Prescott Ebert?

XL:

He don't give me things. I works for what I get from him. I give him some part of myself for everything he pay me.

ROY:

That's why it ain't no more to you than the little bit you is. You let Prescott Ebert pick away at you.

XL:

I take care of myself. Y'all gon' get enough of messin' with me. I'm goin' to the outhouse. Y'all want anything?

COLUMBUS:

Y'all pray for my bro-in-law.

ROY:

You take him to Rusk they'll give you five pounds of sugar for 'im if he's crazy enough and they keep 'im.

ADOLPH:

Yeah, let 'em study his ass. XL might be some kind'a missing link. Maybe they can make some sense of 'im. I cain't.

COLUMBUS:

He jus…cain't keep his mouth shut…

ROY:

Whether he know what he talkin' 'bout or not.

CHARLESETTA:

Been like that fo'ever. He ain't gon' change. We got to love his ig'nut ass, though. He one of God's children. Blessed in other ways…

ADOLPH:

Maybe…

CHARLESETTA:

Maybe…

ADOLPH:

God made a mistake.

XL:

Let me have a Schlitz, Charlesetta. 'Lumbus you want one?

ROY:

You ain't buyin' nobody but 'Lumbus a beer?

XL:

Ain't nary one of the rest of you offered to buy me nothin'. Just 'cause I'mo buy 'Lumbus a beer don't mean I want to spend all my money helpin' the rest of y'all get drunk. That's what's wrong with the average colored man now. Take kindness for weakness. I don't want to be read wrong by nobody. That's just the way I am. I don't know no other way to be. I ain't sayin' I won't help somebody…if I can. I don't mix business and pleasure. If I'mo help you…we can make us a deal…in like a business kinda situation. Shit, beyond that I ain't got no kids, no wife, everybody in my family got families of they own. I ain't responsible for nobody but mine own self. Been like that since I was thirteen. Talkin' 'bout chains. I ain't got nothin' to do with no kind of chains.

ADOLPH:

Every livin' thing got a part to play. Multiply and subtract is what it add up to. We are hunter and game for each other.

XL:

'Lumbus don't hunt…

COLUMBUS:

I fish… I've seen some scary things in these woods…

ADOLPH:

You don't have to be in the woods to be a hunter.

COLUMBUS:

Never really had the heart or the stomach for huntin'. Not since I had to help Shirlene birth that first baby she had…

XL:

You "had" to help her birth that baby…?

COLUMBUS:

Wasn't nobody else around. She good at it on her own now. She musta had, what…six since then.

CHARLESETTA:

Eight.

COLUMBUS:

If I hadn't been there and done something that first time though…no tellin' what would'a happened. That child came out from in between her legs into my hands. Mine was the first face he saw in his life. If I hadn'ta been there, he might not be livin' today…

XL:

So he owe you…?

COLUMBUS:

Naw, XL. If anything, I feel like I owe him. I'm just sayin' that seein' that baby be born…gave me a different understandin' 'bout killin'. I ain't so much as wrung a chicken's neck since that day.

XL:

You still eat meat?

ROY:

Cooked by Belinda?

COLUMBUS:

Well, hell, yeah. I ain't got to kill it to eat it…

XL:

One day you might have to learn to like killin' again to feed yourself, or that baby you say you owe…what you gon' do then?

COLUMBUS:

When that day get here I'll concern myself with that. I ain't forgot how to hunt.

ADOLPH:

Sometimes as hunter…we are our own game.

XL:

Now I hunt, but I ain't game for bein' game for nobody.

ADOLPH:

Everything livin' on this earth can, and if it ain't careful…hell even if it is careful, will be hunted by something else in time.

XL:

If he don't hunt them first. Me myself, I live to eat…not to get ate. I go huntin'…I take my rifle and my dogs…

CHARLESETTA:

Myself…I hate to see something die.

ADOLPH:

You ain't never been hungry. When I was in the war you had men tryin' to kill one 'nother over a damn grasshopper. Hungry! Hungry enough to need to see something die. That damn starvation is a son 'ne gun. Starvation of the stomach…the soul…the spirit. When starvation starts to set in…sense steps aside. You stop thinkin' 'cause all you can do is feel. Since that shit blew up in my face…my eyes been on a diet of darkness. Truth be told tho'…I see better in the dark. Ain't even got to close my eyes to dream.

COLUMBUS:

You remember what things and people look like tho', don't you?

ADOLPH:

Yeah, I got leftovers in my head. I remember what this place used to look like when Baby David ran it. I ‘member what most of you looked like back then. I ‘member what I looked like. I remember ‘bout every book I ever read, too. That’s why I wallow in what I’ve seen and learned. ‘Cause it’s all I get.

COLUMBUS:

Ain’t too much changed that much in the years you been blind. Cotton is still king. Niggahs still sing when they work it. This place been the same place for as long as I been here in it. I like that. Familiar. Everything got a place in time and in the world. If you lucky you know what that is before you die. I know the good and bad in this place…got my feet planted solid on the ground in this place…I know where to walk to keep from steppin’ in shit.

ADOLPH:

Even if you step in it. It ain’t nothin’ but shit. It decomposes too.

COLUMBUS:

See there. You ain’t missin’ nothin’ you ain’t already seen.

ADOLPH:

I reckon not.

CHARLESETTA:

That’s the truth. Play C-6 one time for me there, Roy.

ROY:

What you gon' do for me?

CHARLESETTA:

I ain't studyin' you, Roy Moore.

ROY:

I swear woman you treat me like a stepchild. Tomorrow ain't promised to you now. You gon' spend the rest of your life by yourself? You don't have to. Don't you want a man to take you places?

CHARLESETTA:

You mean like the picture show in town on colored night? I can go there by myself.

ADOLPH:

And for him she held no torch a burning. No craving, no yearning. No place, in her heart or in her loins.

ROY:

Tell me no but don't tell me never. Charlesetta, just tell me that before you die, you might gi' me some.

CHARLESETTA:

Alright, Roy, Before I die…I might gi' you some.

ROY:

Thank you. That's why I'mo get up tomorrow. Hopin…

XL:

He'd probably like it better after you dead, Charlesetta.

ROY:

What you say, Niggah? Boy, how you live to get to be as old as you are?

CHARLESETTA:

Roy!

COLUMBUS:

XL, please hush before somebody have to hurt you.

XL:

When y'all harry assin' me that's alright. But if I do the same it's not.

COLUMBUS:

We all just havin' fun.

ROY:

You cross the line.

XL:

I cross the line? Y'all the ones…treat me like I don't belong.

ADOLPH:

It's the squeaky wheel that gets the oil, XL.

CHARLESETTA:

Don't nobody mean you no harm, XL. We just don't understand you sometimes. But we don't think you understand you either. We know the good Lord. He ain't through with you yet.

ROY:

But you can bet I done closed the book on your ass.

CHARLESETTA:

Roy Mo'. Both of y'all hush!

Now if you can't get along, little doggies…get along on outta here!

XL:

Tell Roy Moore to quit pickin' at me. Shut his mouth!

ROY:

You the one all the time got something stupid to say when you need to just keep your mouth closed. ‘Stead ‘o stickin’ your own foot in your mouth you do better to suck on one ‘a nem hog feet.

XL:

Aint nobody ‘pointed you sheriff ‘round here, Roy Moore. You ain’t no white man.

ROY:

You ain’t neither, Niggah.

XL:

I got ‘cho, Niggah. Don’t make me have to go to my truck…

ROY:

If you go…you better get in and drive off, ‘cause I ain’t got to go to my truck…

COLUMBUS:

Come on now. Y’all ‘bout to get on my nerves now.

BUCKSHOT:

How y’all colored folks doin’ this e’nin’?

ALL:

Buckshot! Buck!

BUCKSHOT:

Let me have a cold one there, Miss Charlesetta, would you please. See if I can't wash some of this damn dirt down. What y'all talkin' 'bout?

ROY:

Warfare!

BUCKSHOT:

How in the hell y'all get on that?

ADOLPH:

Is war fair?

BUCKSHOT:

In war…all is fair.

ADOLPH:

Man has a natural attraction to conflict. As in love. In the battle of the sexes…the human rat race…call it what you will…it ain't much different…'cept maybe the weapons.

BUCKSHOT:

Mamie got some weapons with her, hot damn.

Woman ain't cut her toenails since I married her. Miss Charlesetta, I thought you said you was gon' get some newer records to put in…

XL:

It's time to get rid of that old thing.

CHARLESETTA:

That jukebox is bought and paid for, thanks to my daddy. Don't cost me no more'n one or two of these lights to run it. It's days when that box with all them old records in it bring in more money than this bar. Now you don't just get rid of a partner like that. As for the records…I ain't been nowhere to get no new ones. Ain't had the money.

CHARLESETTA:

Why you askin' for new records…? You don't play half the ones that's in there now. You play that same damn gut bucket blues.

BUCKSHOT:

I didn't say get rid of what's in there. I mean add to it. A man ought to have a choice when he spends his money.

CHARLESETTA:

I agree with you on that.

BUCKSHOT:

I like this tune, though. Brings my mind back to when I was locked up.

ROY:

Man, why in the hell would you want to be reminded of that?

BUCKSHOT:

'Cause I won. They thought they was lockin' me up but all they did was to free up my mind. I didn't have anything I had to think about for three and a half years. My mind was free. It wasn't 'till I got out that I had things I had to think about. Like what I'm gon' eat, or when.

ROY:

Wasn't you supposed to be thinkin' 'bout the reason you was in there?

BUCKSHOT:

I knew why. I didn't need to ruminate on that. I let my temper get the best of me. But by myself, behind that wall…in my head, I flew airplanes, and sailed big ass ships all over the world…kickin' ass in every port. Daydreamin'. I got good at it. I like rememberin' that. It calmed me down. This gut bucket blues squeezes all the anger out of my life.

ADOLPH:

Only your own will understand.

BUCKSHOT:

My temper ain't as bad as it was befo' I did my time. 'Cause I was pretty much at war with myself when I went in. I had too much pride.

ADOLPH:

War is the child of pride. Proud people fight for whatever it is they proud of. Pride is the daughter of riches.

XL:

Richard who?

ROY:

There you go…

ADOLPH:

XL, my mule got more sense than you.

COLUMBUS:

Bass ackwards! Boy, you use your brain and your mouth in the wrong order. I bet if you thought about some of the things before you said ‘em…we might not ever hear a peep out of you.

CHARLESETTA:

But he can’t keep nothin’ to hisself. Damn brain got a hole in it.

XL:

That thinkin’ shit hurts.

ROY:

If that don’t beat all. It hurts you to think? It’s more wrong with you than I thought…

XL:

It don’t hurt hurt…! All I did was ax a simple question. Adolph said pride was somebody’s daughter…

ADOLPH:

Riches.

XL:

Right! And I axed, Richard who? You gon’ have to break that fancy talk down a little bit more for me Adolph. I can’t digest them big words. Go back to this pride foolishness…

ADOLPH:

Foolish pride.

XL:

Pride ain't nobody. That's just a word like 'Lumbus say. How a word gon' have a child? Some'a the shit you say don't even make sense to you, Adolph.

DELMUS:

Charlesetta! What time you got?

CHARLESETTA:

It's time you bought a watch. Who you waitin' for, Delmus? Don't be runnin' in and out my place. If you gon' wait out by the road…wait out there!

DELMUS:

I got business to see to. Tryin' to see 'bout some work. You think I plan to be breathin' this same East Texas air forever you ain' thinkin' with your right mind. I'm goin' places you can't even dream about.

XL:

Yeah, I heard. You still gon' be a country Niggah…

DELMUS:

If I was in Africa I could be a prince.

ADOLPH:

You sho' can't do that in Texas.

DELMUS:

It ain't nine-thirty is it?

COLUMBUS:

Who you waitin' on, Delmus? They know you in here if you ain't out there…if they know you.

DELMUS:

They don't know me. XL, Mr. Ebert left me a note at the house 'bout workin' wit' him. I want to thank you for puttin' a word in for me.

XL:

Don't thank me. He seen you up in town. In Grapeland. He asked me who you was…I just told him.

DELMUS:

Well I 'preciate it. It ain't nine-thirty, is it?

CHARLESETTA:

Shut my door! You lettin’ bugs in!

ADOLPH:

It’s nine-fifteen.

ROY:

How do you do that, Adolph?

ADOLPH:

I can feel what time it is.

XL:

How you feel time?

ADOLPH:

I just slip the face off this old pocket watch and feel the hands.

ROY:

That boy been actin’ strange lately.

COLUMBUS:

Lately?

ROY:

Ever since his mama ran off with that musician.

COLUMBUS:

All his life. And I'll tell you what caused it. Readin' them damn funny books when he was growin' up. Delmus used to live in them damn things.

BUCKSHOT:

He got good meat on his head. Y'all stay off him.

CHARLESETTA:

Delmus got good sense. He don't bother nobody. Needs a good woman, that's all.

XL:

From what I hear, he got one already…over in Grapeland.

CHARLESETTA:

Grapeland? Who?!

ROY:

Hot damn, if you don't sound like you jealous there, girl! I'mo have to write that down with my red Crayola. I ain't never heard you turn a word for nobody like that.

CHARLESETTA:

I like all you knuckleheads. I wouldn't marry none of you, Roy Moore. I don't like to see you cuttin' and eatin' away at each other. We got to help each other live in this world.

COLUMBUS:

Let Dr. Adolph tell it…only way we can do that is to die. Right, Adolph?

ADOLPH:

Not the only way. You could kill.

CHARLESETTA:

Not me.

COLUMBUS:

Uh-huh. That boy, Delmus, didn't grow up in the real world. All that make like shit in them funny books ruint his mind.

ADOLPH:

You are what you eat!

DELMUS:

That ain't all I read.

ADOLPH:

You read Machiavelli? Aquinas? The Bible?

DELMUS:

Nawh, but I read the Constitution. I can recite the Declaration of Independence.

BUCKSHOT:

Young Delmus, you got yourself a honey, huh?

DELMUS:

I'm workin' on it.

BUCKSHOT:

You get a girl you got to get a job.

DELMUS:

I'm working on that too.

ADOLPH:

If you can learn to read and feed yourself knowledge…eat steak, son…

BUCKSHOT:

Oh yeah! Glad you said that. Roy Moore! Mamie told me to tell you she got a pot of chitlins on the fire and they be ready ‘bout the time you come through this evenin’.

That shit ain’t funny. This boy is hell on a pot of wrinkles. He sat up in my kitchen one day last winter and inhaled ‘bout fo’ pounds in a half hour.

XL:

Damn, Roy, did you taste ‘em? Sound like you need to start raisin’ hogs!

BUCKSHOT:

Ain’t nothin’ wrong ‘bout chitlins. You wash ‘em real good. I can’t stand the smell of ‘em to clean ‘em. I eats ‘em though. Miss Charlesetta, gi’ that boy there a beer. I’ll pay for it. You old enough ain’t you there, Young Delmus?

DELMUS:

Yeah.

BUCKSHOT:

Here’s to you and your honey. Don’t get none on ya!

CHARLESETTA:

Hey, Uncle Boochie.

BOOCHIE:

Somethin’ in here don’t feel good.

XL:

Boochie Reed! Come on over here and look in my hand and tell me when I'mo strike oil on my land and be a big rich cattle baron.

BOOCHIE:

I don't need to look into your hand to tell you the answer to that is never. You got to own some land before you can find oil in it. You ain't got enough land to bury you in if you drop dead today, or somebody bust a cap off in your skinny little dip stick lookin' ass. Don't play with me! Not today.

XL:

Damn Boochie! I was just playin'…

BOOCHIE:

Don’t play with me!

ADOLPH:

What it look like, Boochie?

COLUMBUS:

What’s the matter, Boochie? Them boys up on the road musta put a stompin’ on your wallet last night.

BOOCHIE:

I lost more sleep than money. Them young brothers don’t’ know nothin’ ‘bout gamblin’…as a lifestyle. They didn’t break me. Ain’t a card game back up here in these woods that can do that. Fifteen hundred dollars is just fifteen hundred dollars. I had broke all them before midnight, and was reachin’ for my hat to go when they started talkin’ ‘bout how I ought to give them a chance to win they little money back and flashin’ they pistols and carryin’ on. I wanted to tell ‘em everybody got a gun, but I just sat on back down. ‘Cause I had drove down there by myself and it felt like my pistol would’a been the only one in the room not pointin’ at me if anything jumped off. And it woudn’ta been worth my goin’ to jail for killin’ that many people in the same family, on the same night, in the same room. Wasn’t but three hundred of it my money no how. I just paid my way outta there by lettin’ ‘em win back they little piece of change. And even then it took ‘em to sun up this mornin’. I’ll catch up with ‘em again.

ROY:

They ‘cuse you of cheatin’?

BOOCHIE:

Them damn fools so stupid, I ain't got to cheat 'em to beat 'em.

CHARLESETTA:

You want a Schlitz, Boochie?

BOOCHIE:

Yes, please, sister and a taste of that corn if you got some. How you doin' this evening?

CHARLESETTA:

Fair to middlin'…

BOOCHIE:

You deserve better than that.

CHARLESETTA:

I agree with you on that. How's Aunt Clara, Uncle Boochie? I know I need to get over there and sit with her. When Daddy took sick she was here everyday seein' after y'all's brother.

BOOCHIE:

She can't sit still. Her and Deacon was out in the yard when I come through this mornin'. He was fussin' with her and threatenin' to leave her before she drive him to drinkin'. He can't keep her in the bed 'less he tie her down.

ADOLPH:

I looked in on her last week myself. Just to see. We had a nice talk.

BOOCHIE:

I bet you did. She was out in the yard this mornin' with a stick in one hand and a Bible in the other tryin' to catch herself a chicken. Preachin' at 'em…chasin' and callin' 'em sinners and heathens. Said she was gon' fry some chicken to give to the dawg.

XL:

She gon' crazy?

BOOCHIE:

Nawh. Said the dawg axed her to fry him some chicken and she didn't blink a eye. That ain't crazy. I call it shinin'. Folks tend to shine they brightest just before they go.

CHARLESETTA:

Yes they do. Daddy didn't make much sense sometime, neither. Towards the end there…mixin' up the past with whatever…he was talkin' bout. If he told me how to set a "good fire" in that pit once, he did it every half hour…and I ain't set a fire in that pit since he died. He run through every customer he ever had. I couldn't tell sometimes if he was talkin' to me or thinkin' out loud to hisself…you know what I mean?

BOOCHIE:

Yeah. I think she on her way out.

CHARLESETTA:

I'll get by there tomorrow, and see her.

COLUMBUS:

Back up a minute, Boochie. Did you say you lost fifteen hundred dollars last night?

XL:

Fifteen hundred dollars…cash?! I would'a shot my way outta there for that much money.

ADOLPH:

And theyd'a been sayin' mass over your moldy ass this mornin'.

BOOCHIE:

You a greedy man, XL.

XL:

Damn right I'm greedy.

ROY:

You gon' get fat.

XL:

I can't get fat. White doctor say my metabolism too fast. I can eat anything I want…as much of it as I want and still stay slender.

CHARLESETTA:

Shut up, XL. You the same way with food you is with money. Don't neither one of 'em stay with you long enough to do you any good. You turn my stomach talkin' 'bout how skinny your fat ass is.

DELMUS:

I can't thank you enough, XL.

XL:

Buy me a beer sometime.

DELMUS:

I can do that this evenin'. You better catch me while you can. 'Cause pretty soon gon' come the day y'all have to get on the highway you want to see me.

CHARLESETTA:

What highway you gettin' on? You gon' leave your Grandma by herself?

DELMUS:

She be alright. Them people from church do more for her than I do anyhow. I ain't gon' spend another summer choppin' and pullin' cotton or haulin' nobody's pu'p wood…pickin' nobody's peas. I won't never have nothin' that way.

ADOLPH:

What is it you want?

DELMUS:

I can read. I can learn. Get me a trade. I want to see more of the world for myself.

BUCKSHOT:

You and your honey? What make you think it's gon' be any different for you someplace else?

DELMUS:

I'm leavin'!

BUCKSHOT:

Stuck his chest out when he said that didn't he?! Alright, young Delmus, don't start swellin' up on us now. We all friends here.

DELMUS:

My daddy left. My mama left. Must be somethin' to leavin'. They didn't come back.

CHARLESETTA:

No they didn't. You go on and do what you think you got to do. Y'all get off that child.

DELMUS:

Damn! Charlesetta, how much it cost for me to buy XL a beer?

CHARLESETTA:

Who you tryin' to call, Delmus? That fast tail gal over in Grapeland?

DELMUS:

She ain't got no phone. I'm tryin' to call Mr. Prescott Ebert, XL. Look here. He gave me this number and said to call when I got here. But don't nobody answer…

XL:

I'll call Mr. Ebert's brothers and let them know you are here.

Gimme a nickel, Delmus. I am makin' this call on your behalf.

COLUMBUS:

XL, I thought you said Ebert wasn't doin' no work on that highway this week.

XL:

Collect call for Mr. Ebert from XL Dancer. He know me. I'll hold.

ADOLPH:

Cripus attucks. Man fed the cause of the democracy with his life. A cause that left his children starvin'.

XL:

Hello there, Mr. Ebert! It's me, XL! Yes, sir. I'm over here at the cafe…Top o' the Hill. Yes sir. Well…do remember that young fellow you asked me about if he was wanting to do some work? Uh-huh…that's the one. He's sittin' here now waitin' to be picked up. Said one'a y'all left him some kind of note…Well they ain't here yet. Yes, sir, I'll tell him. Half hour. Thank you, sir.

BUCKSHOT:

You heard from your mama and daddy? You know where they at?

DELMUS:

My mama's in Houston.

XL:

You don't have to do that. Well, yes sir, I agree. I have earned it. Goin' on ten, twelve years now, sir. Yes sir…and my daddy…Yes sir he used to tell me 'bout when you was a cute little baby…Yes sir…I think I could handle that. I'll make you proud. Yes sir. Glad to be of help. I 'preciate that. Thank you now. Goodbye. Charlesetta, gi' me a cold beer would you please. I might buy my house from you sooner than you think, Columbus. The Eberts be by to get you directly.

DELMUS:

Get me a job, get me some money, grab me my girl and get my ass to the city.

CHARLESETTA:

Oh you just gon' put us down, huh?

DELMUS:

Y’all be alright.

BOOCHIE:

How old are you young brother?

DELMUS:

Twenty-three.

BOOCHIE:

A young man. Let me see your hand.

DELMUS:

How much you gon’ charge me for the readin’, Mr. Boochie? I ain’t got but so much money on me this evening. I’m tryin’ to save much as I can…Me ‘n my new honey gon’ get out these woods.

ROY:

Where you goin’?

DELMUS:

Houston. I want to be somebody. Make somethin’ of myself.

XL:

You and your honey?

DELMUS:

I can’t change the world from here. I got to move.

BOOCHIE:

I see. No charge for you this evening. Let me see your hand.

BOOCHIE:

Nawh, the other one.

BOOCHIE:

And you twenty-three now?

DELMUS:

Yes, sir. What is it what you see, Mr. Boochie?

BOOCHIE:

I felt it when I come in. You ain’t no twenty-three. You might not see twenty-three. Somebody means to do you harm. It’s hangin’ over your head. A dark cloud.

XL:

I don't see no cloud over his head. Where it at, Boochie? Look like he got a pretty bright future to me.

BOOCHIE:

I'm just tellin' you what I see. What you do about it is your business. I didn't know nothin' 'bout who you was goin' to work for…but that just proves my point. I know he your boss, XL but they ain't…you know I love me some money…but they ain't made enough to pay me to work for that son of a bitch.

XL:

Mr. Ebert be by to get you directly.

CHARLESETTA:

XL, you call that white man back up and tell 'im Delmus ain't workin' for him.

XL:

They on they way now. Be hell to pay they come out here for nothin'.

COLUMBUS:

What kind of work he tell you it was he wanted you to do?

BUCKSHOT:

Good question.

DELMUS:

Note said sixty-five dollars a week. Here, see for yourself.

COLUMBUS:

XL, didn't you say just a while ago that wasn't no work happening on that highway this week?

XL:

I said half crews.

BOOCHIE:

I 'magine he hard pressed to find anybody to work for 'im these days.

XL:

Sixty-five dollars a week?

DELMUS:

Found this note in my box this mornin'. Mr. Boochie, could you look again. Maybe you missed something. I mean is I gon' get this job? I need to make myself some money.

BOOCHIE:

I don't need to look again.

CHARLESETTA:

You need money so you can buy things for that gal over in Grapeland? She don't need you. Half the women in Grapeland is kept by some white man like Prescott Ebert, anyway. How you get your heart wrapped around one of 'em?

DELMUS:

Just luck, I guess. But she sure is nice to me. Pretty, too. I ain't been able to get to her like I like to since that old truck of mine quit on me. That's why I need to get me some transportation. Sixty-five dollars a week! I get me a month or two savin' much as I can…

COLUMBUS:

What kind of work you think he got for Delmus to do this time of night, XL?

XL:

What I look like, some kind of mind reader? Boochie he one for that…I done told all'a y'all I don't keep up with how that man run his business. He don't pay me no sixty-five dollars no week.

BOOCHIE:

Dark clouds…storms, been known in the past to pass…and not 'mount o nothin'. Quiet and gentle. I do mean to scare you if I can, young brother. I'd keep my butt unemployed for the time being. You in the middle of something ugly, I know it. Whether you heed me or not…is your choice. But if I know I got to tell you. This is my gift. A God-given asset…to share. I share what I see and what I know. I have had enemies might be sittin' here drinkin' and havin' fun with us now if I had give them half the kindness I just give you. Go on home, son…

XL:

Why don't y'all go on and let Delmus do what he want to do? Now Delmus, you a grown man. You know how hard it is to find a good job. Boochie Reed don't work for a livin'. How he gon' know what's right for you?

CHARLESETTA:

Forget the job and the woman, Delmus. Ain't neither one of 'em good enough for you.

XL:

Like you his mama…

BOOCHIE:

Stay close to your own strong house. Keep your ears and eyes open…your head needs to be clear 'til it passes. Protect always yourself. Expect others are doing the same. Pray.

DELMUS:

Sittin' up at that house ain't gone get me what I want. I don' t mean no disrespect Mr. Boochie and I 'preciate your concern Charlesetta…I really do, but I'mo have to go to work. Ain't nothin' gon' be happenin' to this neck in these piney woods. Now when y'all die they gon' have to come in here to get you to take you to the cemetery. You ain't got no place else you go but to this black hole in the woods. I got ambition. Ambition need sunshine.

CHARLESETTA:

Who is the girl?

ROY:

I think you really are jealous, Charlesetta. Y'all listenin' to her? Talk like she might drive over to Grapeland and get out her car and knock on this woman's door.

XL:

Might even kick the damn door down.

DELMUS:

It's Reverend Robertson's daughter…

CHARLESETTA:

Luretha? You eatin' out somebody else's plate son. You don't need to be goin' up there to see her.

DELMUS:

Why not?

XL:

Oh, she just jealous…

COLUMBUS:

Nawh, now I heard a few things 'bout that girl myself. S'posed to be real light skinned and pretty. Could pass for white.

DELMUS:

That's her. She's mine.

CHARLESETTA:

Her mama used to work for the Ebert family. Hair so long she could wipe her ass with it. All them Ebert men got women and high yellow children scattered all over Grapeland.

COLUMBUS:

And then white men get mighty pissed off 'bout any colored messing 'round with 'em, too.

DELMUS:

Not Luretha. .Y'all can say what you want to, you can't turn me around. She eighteen and she likes me and I likes her. Her daddy keep a pretty tight rein on her. Got her workin' at the church house with him a lot. She could get me goin' to church. I'd sit up in church all day if I could get to look at something like Luretha while I sat there.

CHARLESETTA:

Reverend Robertson ain't that girl's daddy.

DELMUS:

So! Soon as I get my money together that ain't gon' matter. You just hide and watch.

CHARLESETTA:

Where'd you meet her?

DELMUS:

Coupl'a weeks ago I rode over to Grapeland with Woodrow, to get some scratch for his chickens, and try and find a clutch for that truck of mine, and we run into each other comin' out the Western Auto. It was two other boys after her, but when I come on the scene she got rid of them.

BUCKSHOT:

Miss Charlesetta, could I please have another ice cold beer? This one had a hole in it.

CHARLESETTA:

If Boochie got a bad feelin' 'bout you and this job…I think you ought to listen to what Boochie got to say.

ROY:

You ever been wrong 'bout something like this, Boochie?

BOOCHIE:

One time, I saw a cloud like this one hanging around over Albert D.

ROY:

Albert D is dead. Died sleepin' in his house when it caught fire. How was you wrong?

BOOCHIE:

I told him he was just gon' get sick.

ROY:

Can't get much sicker than dead.

BOOCHIE:

Haven't been wrong since. Ask anybody. Ask anybody you want to out there in that graveyard. Most of 'em in there was warned by me when death was tippin' up behind 'em. Most of 'em was walkin' backwards anyway. So anybody would see where they were goin' before they would. Gideon Brown cut the cards for me the day before he died. I told him just what I said to young Delmus here. Miss Flozelle wouldn't pay for her reading…she got so mad. Rest her soul. Begged me to look. Then called me everything but a child of God when I told her what I saw. That's why I don't charge if I see bad things no more. 'Cause most the time I sincerely do hope I'm wrong. That money be my gamblin' money. If I got five or ten dollars from somebody and saw darkness in they hand or over they head or in they cards…I couldn't bring myself to spend that money, but I could lay it on a pile in a card game. I provide a service. Not only…am I right about darkness. I got the same record at givin' good news. Ask Buckshot. I see sunshine too. And be just as right about it. Buck, didn't I tell you go ahead and plant as much of that sweet corn, that one year, as much as you wanted 'cause you was walkin' on fertile ground?

BUCKSHOT:

Yeah, now he right about that. The year before that I got so mad at that land I set fire to it. I went to Boochie and asked him to take a look and see if it was gon' be worth my time to work that old piece of earth. He told me that land was fertile. That was twenty years ago. Boochie was a young man. I was, too. But he told me that then and I'll be damned if that dirt didn't start to produce. Mamie, too. She got our first child that year. But Boochie was right on that one.

DELMUS:

When you see a cloud…a dark cloud…is it anything you can do?

BOOCHIE:

I did what I could do. I told you it was there.

CHARLESETTA:

Is there anything he can do…?

COLUMBUS:

Can't you run that dark cloud off, Boochie?

XL:

Can't y'all find nothin' else to talk about other than this silliness?! Damn! He a grown man and he responsible for what he do. Now y'all ain't got to be getting' all up in his life and liberty and so on like that…Right, Adolph?

ROY:

We just don't want to see anything happen to the boy.

XL:

Why you so all'a sudden worried 'bout this boy now? Not too long ago you was talkin' 'bout how stupid he is, Columbus…Y'all make me not understand you sometimes. Delmus, you need to make some money…

ADOLPH:

You can't spend it if you dead…

CHARLESETTA:

XL, you call that white man back and tell him ain't no need in him comin' 'cause Delmus…

DELMUS:

Nawh, I got plans! I better go on and see 'bout this job, Charlesetta. I can take care of myself. 'Sides that's a job and a paycheck…

XL:

He prob'ly pay you in cash…

DELMUS:

Shoot…that be like sunshine…chase that cloud away. Right, Mr. Boochie?

BOOCHIE:

I told you what I saw. What you do about it is your business.

COLUMBUS:

I'll give you some work, Delmus. You don't need to go work for that white man.

XL:

Mr. Ebert pay more, Delmus. And workin' for 'Lumbus ain't nothin' steady. Don't let these scaredy cat fools ruin a good thing for you. My family been workin' for the same ugly white man since he was a ugly little white baby, and that family been good to me. You see that truck I drive out there? Ain't cost me a penny. They even put gas in it. They take care of they workers. That time I spent in the hospital up in Dallas. They paid for it. You don't think I had the money?

ROY:

Wait a minute, Boochie! Cut the cards, Delmus. Let him cut the cards. See what the cards say…

BOOCHIE:

I'm done wit' it.

XL:

Why don't all'a y'all let this boy alone so he can go and get some work and some money?

CHARLESETTA:

Why you care whether or not he go to work for that white man?

COLUMBUS:

Ebert pay you to find people to work for ‘im?

XL:

Nawh! Why you say that? Delmus said hisself he needed to make some money and don’t nobody ‘round here pay no more than Ebert. I’m tryin’ to do the boy a favor.

ROY:

I don’t know…I don’t think he could pay me a hundred and sixty-five…

XL:

‘Cause you ain’t got no heart.

COLUMBUS:

Well tell me this, XL, how come he want Delmus to go to work and you supposed to be his pet Niggah…?

DELMUS:

Now y’all let XL alone. He tryin’ to help me. I’mo go outside and wait by the road.

CHARLESETTA:

Delmus, didn't you hear 'bout the colored men workin' for Prescott, they can't find? 'Bout Ethyl B's boy they found in a slab of cement…dead?

DELMUS:

Nawh, you lyin'…Yancy?

ROY:

That's the one. Stiff as a board. Even still didn't you just hear Boochie Reed tell you, you got a dark cloud over you and that somebody mean to do you harm?

DELMUS:

Yeah…but…

ADOLPH:

Yeah, but…? That's what Julius Cesar told his wife Calpurnia, when she talked 'bout the storms and such bein' a sign that they was trouble amiss. "Yeah, but I got to go to work, honey."

BUCKSHOT:

Miss Charlesetta, could I have one mo' cold one there while y'all work this out? XL'll pay fo' it. Spend some of that silver, boy.

XL:

Hell…I'll buy you a beer.

CHARLESETTA:

How much it cost to get that pick-up of yours runnin'? I'll loan you the money if you tell that white man you changed your mind.

DELMUS & XL:

I/He can't do that!

BUCKSHOT:

Like hell you can't. Delmus, I hope and pray you ain't mixed up in some Klan mess.

XL:

What you talkin' Buck!?

BUCKSHOT:

They been raisin' hell every Friday night for 'bout a month now. You can always tell, 'cause they been meetin' back up in Judge Meeks pasture, and Sheriff Hanky'll leave that young Deputy of his at the gate by the road. I seen the light from the cross they was burnin' last Friday from my back door. Every now and then I'd hear 'em whoopin' and sangin'. Thought I heard some music one night. Mamie was scared to death when I told her what it was. I just loaded up that twelve gauge, and called all my dogs up in the yard. Hot damn, if a cricket had'a broke wind out there I'da made it his last 'un. I need to know what kind of highway work the man got for him to do this time of evenin'?

XL:

Prob'ly ain't no highway work…prob'ly something 'round his house or something like that.

BOOCHIE:

XL, you a lyin' ass.

COLUMBUS:

XL…you ought to be 'shamed of yourself.

XL:

For what?

COLUMBUS:

See you ain't fat but you tryin' to keep your little belly full. You a greedy man. Some things you eat'll kill you. How much he pay you to bring this boy to him? I know you, XL. Everybody in here know you don't do nothin' nice for nobody.

BOOCHIE:

For nothin'.

COLUMBUS:

What they want him for…this evenin? I'll bet a nickel to a fist full of hog shit, you know more 'bout them other missin' colored boys than you lettin' out too…

DELMUS:

Y’all don’t understand. I can’t understand why y’all want to keep me from workin’ my way outta these woods. I’ll be outside.

BUCKSHOT:

Don’t go nowhere, Delmus, just yet.

DELMUS:

Let’a go of me, Buckshot! Put me down!

XL:

What you tryin’ to do, Buckshot? Let that boy go.

COLUMBUS:

Just sit your ass down, son.

BUCKSHOT:

Now, XL, talk fast.

XL:

Talk fast ‘bout what?

BUCKSHOT:

‘Cause we don’t want your boss man to pull up out there and…

XL:

I told y’all I don’t know nothin’ ‘bout none of this mess!

COLUMBUS:

That ain’t the truth, XL. You jumped up awful fast to get to that phone to let that white man know Delmus was here.

BUCKSHOT:

And if you so high up on Prescott Ebert’s list of workers, how come you ain’t goin’ over there to do no work?

ROY:

What they gon’ do, XL…? Put Delmus in some cement too?

CHARLESETTA:

Hush, Roy! XL, say what you know! Right now or so help me…

XL:

So help you what? I ain’t got to stay here and be treated like this. Don’t nary one of you know what you talkin’ ‘bout.

ADOLPH:

Your eyes get bigger than your belly, XL… You eat too much, you get lazy and you go to sleep. That white man will feed off you ‘till ain’t nothin’ left…then he’ll pay somebody else to help him get you out of his hair.

BOOCHIE:

‘Cause he let you ride around in his pick-up with his name drawed all over it...

BUCKSHOT:

Aye, God, man I hope you ain’t thinkin’ Prescott Ebert gon’ take care of you for the rest of your life!

XL:

Nawh, I don’t think that but I know he’ll take care of me for the rest of Delmus’ life if he don’t act right.

ROY:

What that mean?

DELMUS:

Yeah…

ROY:

What it mean?

XL:

Alright…I shouldn't say nothin', but alright. Delmus, the Ebert brothers want to have a talk with you. They ain't got no work for you to do.

ADOLPH:

Oh Lord.

DELMUS:

Talk…? 'Bout what? What about that note?

XL:

I don't know nothin' 'bout no note.

BUCKSHOT:

Watch fo' them white folk 'Lumbus.

COLUMBUS:

I knowed it was something fishy 'bout all this.

BUCKSHOT:

Come on out wit' it Mr. Simple Ass Goddamned Nigger…

XL:

That's the last Nigger I'mo be called by you.

ROY:

You going' to your pick-up?

BUCKSHOT:

You'll be as many Niggahs as I want to call you…this evenin'.

XL:

You bes' get on out of my face! Ain't nobody scared of you, "Titty Baby."

CHARLESETTA:

Buckshot!

COLUMBUS:

Come on now, Buck! He didn't mean it.

XL:

Damn if I didn't mean it!

ROY:

Let him go, Buckshot! Let him go!

COLUMBUS:

Don't hurt him, he ain't worth goin' to jail for, Buck!

BUCKSHOT:

He too clumsy ‘bout the mouth.

BOOCHIE:

Let ‘im kill ‘im. He need to die.

XL:

I’ll tell ya! I’ll tell…! Let me go!

BUCKSHOT:

Talk fast…

XL:

It’s that girl from Grapeland!

DELMUS:

What about her?

XL:

One’a ‘nem Ebert boys wants her for hisself. Ah…let me go, Buckshot…

BUCKSHOT:

What you call me a while ago? I ought to cut your boot lickin' tongue out yo' mouf! You know what I done to the last fool to call me out my name like that!?? Huh?? Huh???

CHARLESETTA:

Don't cut him in here! Floor's hard enough to keep clean as it is.

XL:

Let me go!

COLUMBUS:

Say what you know, XL.

ROY:

How much they pay you, XL?

XL:

They just want to talk to the boy…scare 'im off. That's all. They just want him to stay away from that girl.

DELMUS:

All the talkin' in the world ain't gon' do that. What about what she want…don't they care none about that?

ADOLPH:

Son…these is white men we talkin' about.

BOOCHIE:

We sittin' here with a Judas goat.

COLUMBUS:

XL, I know you didn't have good sense…but I thought you had some sense.

ROY:

Y'all…

XL:

They told me they wasn't goin' hurt the boy…just talk to him and tell him to leave the girl alone. Said they would even offer him a job or some money hisself if he would just forget about the gal and go on…

ROY:

Y'all…!

COLUMBUS:

And you believed them? You a bigger fool than I thought you was.

ROY:

Yon' they come y'all.

CHARLESETTA:

Break his neck, Buckshot.

XL:

Nawh! Nawh…nawh. Please…I'm sorry…Please!

ROY:

What Ebert be drivin', XL? A white pick-up? Like yours?

XL:

Yeah, that's it.

ROY:

That's him.

He be right out!

DELMUS:

I ain't goin' out there!

ROY:

Changin' your mind 'bout that little girl now, huh?

DELMUS:

Nawh!

ADOLPH:

Let's wait and see if he comes in here.

ROY:

The man in a wheelchair, ain't he? How he drive hisself over here?

XL:

It ain't Prescott. It's his two brothers.

ROY:

Yeah it's two of 'em sittin' up in there. He be right out! He went out back to relieve hisself!

BUCKSHOT:

What you gon' do, XL?

XL:

Me? What you mean?

CHARLESETTA:

He mean you best get your narrow ass out there and tell them white men to go on ‘bout they business.

COLUMBUS:

Tell ‘em you talked to Delmus and he said he would leave the gal alone…just like they want.

DELMUS:

I don’t know if I’mo able to do that. I got plans. I ain’t scared.

ADOLPH:

Don’t be no fool, boy!

COLUMBUS:

Well, go on out there then! With your plans! Go on out there. A hard head’ll make a soft ass…Go on…

ROY:

Delmus, you just hush. You done proved you ain’t got no idea what you need to be doin’.

BUCKSHOT:

You know, XL, I lived amongst killers and felt sorry for ‘em, but…a weasel like you ain’t got no real value…

I could just crack…

XL:

Stop it! Buckshot…!

BUCKSHOT:

Won't…

be no mess.

XL:

I can't brea…I can't breathe! You chokin' me!

CHARLESETTA:

Don't kill 'im Buck, 'til he go out there and call them white dogs off…!

XL:

I can't call 'em off. It's more'n just them two.

BUCKSHOT:

Look out that door again, Roy.

XL:

They ain't out there. I don't know where they at.

BOOCHIE:

Back off in the woods?

BUCKSHOT:

The goddamned Klan! You ain't goin' nowhere…no count, skinny ass, goddamn…!

XL:

Now wait a minute…wait a minute, y'all! Y'all got it all wrong! He did it to hisself. He ain't had no business messin' 'round…!

DELMUS:

Say who?! Whyn't you say somethin' to me before now? You wasn't gon' tell me…?

XL:

Let me go talk to the man.

BOOCHIE:

What you gon' tell him?

XL:

I'll tell 'im what 'Lumbus said…that the boy gon' leave the girl alone. But you gon' have to do that, Delmus! It's plenty pretty girls for you to like…

DELMUS:

That ain't what I want!

XL:

You can’t have what you want! These white men gon’ have they way! They the law! They didn’t need me! They could get this boy on his own. Just like Ethyl B’s boy!

CHARLESETTA:

Whyn’t you let ‘em do that then…?

XL:

They asked me who he was…I told ‘em. Me and Ethyl B’s boy was in Grapeland standin’ there with Mr. Ebert, loadin’ some boxes for ‘im when they seen Delmus and Luretha laughin’ and talkin’ together right out in the middle of public there in town. You a marked man and a damn fool!

DELMUS:

She ain’t white!

XL:

Don’t matter. They claim her so…you can’t have her. That’s a law in Grapeland they ain’t wrote down. That girl is poison. She the one need talkin’ to. If she’d stop flouncin’ herself up in Niggahs’ faces…wouldn’t nobody be messin’ wit’ her. Every chance she get, she sneakin’ off somewhere teasin’ ya with all that hair and rubbin’ up against you. She know what she doin’. She the one wasn’t gon’ be happy ‘til she got somebody killed. All y’all just as black as I am, but Prescott Ebert have helped me when none’a y’all could. Prescott Ebert the only man I ever worked for…what you think I’mo do?! I heard him tell his brothers to set up a meeting, ‘cause she was on the prowl again. I knew. But I wasn’t ‘bout to say nothin’. Yancy, Ethyl B’s boy knew too. He went straight to the sheriff, call hisself gon’ be smart. You seen what that got him? Wasn’t nothin’ I could’a done to help them boys or you but get myself killed.

They ain’t gon’ sit out there all night…

DELMUS:

How come, XL? I ain’t never done nothin’ to you.

ADOLPH:

Wild dogs eat the runt of the litter.

COLUMBUS:

Them white men gon' be walkin' up that door shortly and they gon' want to know why they can't get in.

ROY:

That damn sign out there say "Colored Only."

XL:

Y'all best send that boy on out, there…

DELMUS:

You think I'mo go out there and get in that pick-up with them…?

XL:

Delmus, they just want to scare you off.

DELMUS:

They can't do that!

ADOLPH:

They ain't really had they chance yet.

DELMUS:

I ain't goin' out there. Scare me off…?! How much you get to get me killed? I don't believe you did this XL…! You wasn't gon' tell me?! You knowed what they wanted and you didn't warn me?! You the one need to die!

COLUMBUS:

Calm down now, Delmus. They ain't gon' do too much in front of everybody here. You be alright in here. XL, what happened to them other boys?

CHARLESETTA:

They got gals in Grapeland too?

XL:

One did. Same girl as a matter of fact.

DELMUS:

That's bullshit!

XL:

See there fool…if I had'a told you, you wouldn'ta believed me. That first boy was caught kissin' the very same girl. Yancy just seen more'n he could keep to hisself.

See now, y'all gon' mess around and get me killed! I shouldn'ta said nothin'!

CHARLESETTA:

Nawh, nawh now Mr. Greedy Skinny man. Mr.
I-can-eat-all-I-want…much-of-it-as-I-want. You set up them other boys?

XL:

If I hadn’ta kept my mouth shut, I might’a been one’a them other boys!

CHARLESETTA:

You still might. You lock the door, Roy?

ROY:

Sho’ did!

XL:

Don’t y’all. Don’t do this…please!

CHARLESETTA:

Please what…? Forgive you? Better lock the back too.

BUCKSHOT:

Roy Moore, I say we should wring this chicken’s neck.

ROY:

I’d be content to just shoot his ass.

XL:

Let me go out there and tell the man something.

BOOCHIE:

You ain't licked the man's ass enough?

CHARLESETTA:

Buckshot, if he move you cut his damn tongue out his mouth and I'll chunk it in that white man's face myself. Good goddamn I hate you, XL Dancer! If I had the strength…I'd jerk your heart right out your chest, 'cause you ain't usin' it. Delmus! Here take my keys and git in my car out back…it's got a tank of gas…and don't you stop drivin' for nothin' or nobody, you hear me?!! Call me collect here tomorrow twelve noon. Let me know where you at. Go on now! Not that way!

ADOLPH:

I'll go wit' 'im.

DELMUS:

What for?

ADOLPH:

'Cause you can't see where you goin'.

ROY:

One of 'em comin' round the back.

XL & DELMUS:

Oh, shit!

COLUMBUS:

Go call ‘em off, XL.

XL:

Mr. Ebert! Yoo-de-hoo! Mr. Ebert, sir! ‘Round front here!

ROY:

Delmus, get your shit together, he got ‘em out front.

They both out front…go on boy!

COLUMBUS:

You got money?!

ROY:

I ain’t never seen XL talk that fast. Wonder what kinda lie he tellin’…?

BUCKSHOT:

White man got his hands on his hips with that hump in his back on one side. Shakin’ his head…

ROY:

Got a pistol in his hand. Look like he countin' his toes. Boy, look at XL grin…

BUCKSHOT:

Grinnin' like a damn possum eatin' persimmons.

CHARLESETTA:

You see my car leave?

COLUMBUS:

Yeah, there they go. They ain't payin' it no mind.

BUCKSHOT:

XL pointin' up here at us. Wait a minute! That's one mad white man. Slapped XL up side his head with that pistol! Ho! Here he come. Open the door…look like that boy bleedin'.

CHARLESETTA:

Lock it! He deserve what he get! Lock it! I mean it! Butt lickin' ass! Should'a thought about that. He wasn't gon' help that boy Delmus none. Wasn't no help to Ethyl B's boy. Let 'em beat the shit out of 'im. Good goddamn riddance!

XL:

Open the door!

ROY:

Go to your pick-up like you was talkin' a while ago! You just keep your ass out. Go drink with them white folks in the woods.

COLUMBUS:

They drivin' off y'all.

CHARLESETTA:

They goin' after Delmus?

COLUMBUS:

No, they headin' towards town.

XL:

Come on y'all!

BUCKSHOT:

The Lord takes care of fools and babies. Let him in, Miss Charlesetta. I want to hear what he got to say.

CHARLESETTA:

Then you go on out there with ‘im. I think he ought to die.

COLUMBUS:

Come on now, Charlesetta…

CHARLESETTA:

And anybody like him! It’s enough white mens lined up to kill a colored man without one of your own getting’ in line to help ‘em.

COLUMBUS:

Delmus’ll be alright. Might be a blessin’ in disguise. He say he been itchin’ to leave. He gone. XL didn’t do nothin’…really.

ROY:

You need to stop defendin’ him, ‘Lumbus. Somethin’ wrong with that boy. He didn’t do nothin’ my ass! Yeah he did. Nothin’!

CHARLESETTA:

Nothin’! That’s just what he did. And we can’t just do nothin’. You do nothin’ nothin’ happens…nothin’ changes. You got to do to change things. I want to see him dead.

COLUMBUS:

But Charlesetta you killin' one of your own…

CHARLESETTA:

I don't claim him. He's death in the flesh.

XL:

Open the door! I got to talk to y'all!

CHARLESETTA:

Let him in! I'll say it to his goddamn face!

COLUMBUS:

You alright, boy?

BUCKSHOT:

Your white man look't a little disappointed out there.

ROY:

Why didn't you go to your pick-up and get your pistol on that white man when he slapped you like that?

XL:

Drinks on me, y'all…

CHARLESETTA:

Your money ain't no good in here.

BUCKSHOT:

Boy you got more nerve than a brass ass cat.

CHARLESETTA:

You make this the last time you darken my doorway, XL Dancer! You caterin' to them people feedin' off us don't set well with me at all. I mean that. And if anybody even call your name in my presence…I ain't responsible for what I do. You hear me?

COLUMBUS:

Where you goin'?

XL:

Back to my house, I guess.

COLUMBUS:

You ain't got no house. I want you out by tomorrow evenin'.

XL:

Where I'm supposed to go, 'Lumbus?

COLUMBUS:

I don't care, XL.

ROY:

They goin' leave Delmus alone, Mr. Supervisor?

XL:

They through with it for now…but if they catch him with that girl they gon' kill him and they don't care who know about it. I won't be back, Miss Charlesetta. Maybe you should'a busted me upside my head with that bat. I'd rather die from that than from what them Eberts liable to do now.

CHARLESETTA:

If you don't get from in my sight and off my property I will accommodate your cowardly ass.

XL:

I'm gone!

Y'all gon' be here?

COLUMBUS:

We ain't goin' nowhere.

XL:

I'm sorry y'all. I'm gone.

CHARLESETTA:

Just like a damn rat. Go crawl off in some hole somewhere.

ROY:

Maybe they scared some sense into him.

BUCKSHOT:

Well, that rat had to eat hisself some cheese this evenin'. I should'a broke his damn neck. Hot damn. Boochie Reed called it, didn't he? First thing he said when he walked in here was, somethin' ain't right.

CHARLESETTA:

If they don't kill him…one'a us ought to.

COLUMBUS:

Give him enough rope he'll hang hisself eventually.

BUCKSHOT:

Nawh, Niggers like that live forever.

CHARLESETTA:

Lord let me stop shakin'. Y'all want a taste? On me. Calm my nerves. They would'a killed that boy. Now he can't come back. Shit! I'mo have to get somebody to take me to get my car. You do that for me, Roy?

ROY:

Hell, I'll tote you on my back if you want me to.

CHARLESETTA:

Nawh, just a ride in that old Ford be fine. I'll buy you some gas.

COLUMBUS:

Good thing Delmus got out when he did.

ROY:

Where you think he goin'?

CHARLESETTA:

His mama's sister is in Fort Worth. My guess is that's be his first stop.

COLUMBUS:

He said something tonight 'bout wantin' to go to Houston.

CHARLESETTA:

We'll know what to do when he call.

ROY:

What we gon' do 'bout XL? Charlesetta say we can't just do nothin'. I can't forgive him. Best thing we could do would be to wake his ass up in the mornin' and cut his damn throat.

BUCKSHOT:

I could do that.

I tell you shit like this pisses me off! 'Tween Mamie and that mule of mine and sick cows, and early frosts, droughts…Jim Crow not wantin' you to have nothin'…and now XL…Colored man can't help but be pissed off…he get pissed on so much. I could do that. Five in the mornin'…that Niggah dies.

COLUMBUS:

Damn, I'mo have to find somebody else to rent that house. And spend the rest of my life with that fool's sister. You better fill this glass again, Miss Charlesetta. I'mo put some blues on the box.

CHARLESETTA:

Play C-6.

BUCKSHOT:

Let me gi' you what I owe you. I'mo go out back befo' I get up the road. If Mamie call tell her I'm on my way. Roy come through and get me just 'fo' day…we'll get that done.

COLUMBUS:

It's nice to have a Top o' the Hill to come to…to get above all the shit in your life. Boy howdy!

CHARLESETTA:

I hope to God Delmus got the sense to just keep drivin'…

ROY:

He fo' sho' can't turn around and come back.

BOOCHIE:

What I owe you, little Mama?

Oh Lord no!

CHARLESETTA:

What's the matter, Uncle Boochie?

BOOCHIE:

No, no…! Lord, Nawh! Nawh!

CHARLESETTA and **COLUMBUS:**

What's wrong, Boochie? Sit down.

ROY:

XL comin' back. Ebert's pullin' up behind him.

CHARLESETTA:

I'll kill that Niggah. Why he bringin' 'em back here?

ROY:

Get down y'all…they got rifles!

CHARLESETTA:

Turn out the lights.

COLUMBUS:

XL, You son of a bitch!

CHARLESETTA:

God damn you XL Dancer. God damn you boy!

End of Play.