

FEEDSTORE QUARTET
A Musical Play

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Cast of Characters:

JOE [Bass/Baritone]
JOEY (JOE as a Boy) [Boy Soprano]
JOE as a Young Man [Baritone]
EUGENE [Tenor]
GENE (EUGENE as a Boy) [Boy Soprano]
EUGENE as a Young Man [Tenor]
RUFUS [Baritone]
RUFUS as a Young Man [Baritone]
CHARLIE [Baritone]
CHARLIE as a Young Man [Tenor]

The time: a sultry summer Saturday in the mid-1950s.

The place: The sidewalk in front of the feed store of a small Mississippi town. There are three high-backed rocking chairs and a nail keg on stage.

As a musical Prologue is heard, sunrise brightens the stage, and Joe, an old black man, is discovered sitting on a nail keg. He wears blue trousers, faded and torn, laced high-top shoes, and a well-worn white, long-sleeved dress shirt, buttoned up to the neck. There is a red-tipped, white cane nearby. Joe plays on a battered accordion.

As the play progresses, we will eventually meet three old white men who one-by-one will amble in, greet each other, and sit down in rocking chairs: first is Eugene, who has had a mild stroke and uses a crutch. Rufus, a boastful roustabout about his youth, is the next to appear. He is a bit rumpled, and shows his age more than his companions. The last is Charlie, a retired peanut farmer from Alabama, currently living with his son's family. Though he speaks with a stutter, Charlie's appearance is neat — hair combed, shirt freshly ironed, and high-top shoes shined. Joe and Eugene appear as young boys, apx. 10 years old, and all four old men are seen as young men throughout the play.

As Joe senses the presence of the audience, he turns to them and sings, playing his accordion.

SCENE 1 — MISSISSIPPI MORNING

JOE

MISSISSIPPI MORNING

JOE

Mississippi morning
A thing to behold
You won't find me mourning
When the sun shines gold
Warming my face
Bestowing some grace
On the coming Mississippi day

(Joe recognizes the audience and speaks directly to them as he continues to play the squeezebox.)

Mornin' folks ... Sweet mornin' ain't it?.

Ise knows dis be a glorious sunrise dis morning ... can't see it, but oh, how Ise do remember sunrises.

Mississippi morning
The sun's gonna rise
One more day is dawning
Under southern skies.
Kissing my face
A gentle embrace
Till this Mississippi morning turns into another hot
Mississippi day

(Joe stops playing he senses Joey who runs across the stage chased by Gene.)

GENE

Hey Joey, wait up!

JOEY

Catch up, white boy. Gene, you is so slow!

(The boys disappear into the wings and Joe continues to sing.)

JOE

Times is hard for us colored folks what with *separation* and all ... well times is hard for the white folks too ... but we contend ... we smiles ... we works for the white folks ... Ise plays my squeezebox ... keeps me happy ... keeps me going.

So I sits here on this nail keg
Got my squeezebox, got my songs
Share my music and my singing
The whole day long
And a nickel or a dime
Or a penny come my way
From the passersby that pass me by
And hear my songs each day

(Gene and Joey run across the stage again, this time Joey chases Gene.)

GENE

Passed you Joey; now you catch up!

JOEY

You tricked me.

(The two boys run off stage.)

JOE

Mississippi morning
A thing to behold
You won't find me mourning
When the sun shines gold
Warming my face
Bestowing some grace
On the coming Mississippi day

Mississippi morning
The sun's gonna rise
One more day is dawning
Under southern skies
Kissing my face
A gentle embrace
Till this Mississippi morning turns into another hot
Mississippi day

Gotta love those Mississippi Mississippi Mornings
Gotta love those Mississippi Mississippi Mornings
I say those Mississippi mornings
Those Mississippi mornings always turn into a hot
Mississippi day

SCENE 2 —THE OLD WHITE MEN

(Eugene hobbles across stage and puts his crutch in the barrel with the rakes, shovels etc.,

takes one of the rocking chairs, tips it forward and with his handkerchief dusts it off before sitting.)

JOE

Howdy Eugene, shore was a beautiful sunrise, warn't it.

EUGENE

Damn dirty rockers ... Hey there Joe ... guess you might say that.

JOE

(He lets out a high quivering note on the squeezebox.)

A *fine* sunrise! The best that I can recollect. Sweet, sweet Mississippi mornings. Just like when we was boys ... running and playing ...

EUGENE

Now don't you go telling stories, Joe.

(The boys run across the stage once again.)

GENE

I gotta get home for supper. Mama's making cornbread ...

JOEY

Aw, let's play some more ... I ain't gotta go home yet ... my Mammy's doing wash for the white ladies.

(They exit, one going one direction, one going another direction. Young Eugene and Young Joe appear.)

YOUNG JOE

Where you been Gene? Didn't see you under the tree this morning.

YOUNG EUGENE

Helping my Mama. Old Bessie ain't giving much milk so had to put her out to another pasture.

YOUNG JOE

Been playin' my squeezebox and another tune is coming out ... here, wanna hear it?

YOUNG EUGENE

Shore ... play it to me.

(Young Joe starts playing the introductory notes to "Love Can Be A Burden". Joe picks up the tune on the accordion as the scene shifts back to the feed store.)

EUGENE

... that old tune again?

(Rufus approaches.)

JOE

Morning Mista' Rufus, mighty fine morning, ain't it?

RUFUS

Mighty fine, mighty fine, Joe, how'd you know it was me?

JOE

Being blind only means I can't see, but I got other senses.

(Rufus stumbles over Eugene as he plants himself in the second rocker)

RUFUS

... I suppose we is all blind *(looks over at Eugene)* one way or a tuther. Wouldn't you say Eugene?

EUGENE

Settle down Rufus and stop making such a fool of yer-self.

RUFUS

Fool? Me? You calling me a fool, Eugene?

(During this back-and-forth with Eugene and Rufus, the Young Eugene and Young Rufus appear somewhere upstage from their older selves.)

YOUNG EUGENE

You going fishing this morning Rufus?

YOUNG RUFUS

Yeah, Eugene, I hear they are a biting down in the creek ... over past the colored quarters.

EUGENE

Why ain't you gone a fishing this morning like you said you was?

RUFUS

Decided I'd go a fishing right here on this boardwalk, castin' out my line to catch some of your old grumpiness and throw it back in ... ain't no good for frying anyways ...

YOUNG RUFUS

Me and Lula Mae gonna have us a fish fry this evening down by the creek and afterwards gonna get myself lucky, if you know what I mean.

YOUNG EUGENE

Yeah, I know what you mean ... I warn't born yesterday ...

YOUNG RUFUS

I got an idea ... why don't you come and watch, you might learn something or two ...

YOUNG EUGENE

Ha, from you? No thanks!

(The two young men disappear upstage.)

EUGENE

You calling me grumpy? Didn't you look in the mirror this morning when you shaved? Wait, guess not, with that stubble I suspect you didn't shave.

RUFUS

... always finding fault Eugene. Guess that is what makes your day ...

(Charlie enters and takes the 3rd rocking chair.)

EUGENE

Howdy Charlie, sit a spell and help me calm Rufus down ...

CHARLIE

(Tips his hat toward JOE and drops a coin in JOE's tin.) P-p-p-play us one a' your happy tunes Joe; that'll really hance-up this hot m-m-morning. You old fools smartin' at each other already this morning? *(JOE plays upbeat section of "Mississippi Morning".)* Couldn't you just wait a bit at least till a cool breeze comes up.

RUFUS

Now Charlie you is the only cool breeze this town has ever seen ...

CHARLIE

Would feel even cooler iff I had me a nice cold beer ...

EUGENE

Is that all you ever think about Charlie, a cold beer? You know this here is a dry Baptist town ...

CHARLIE

I ain't no Baptist ... I-I-I is a Methodist, and Methodist ...

JOE

I's being a Methodist too Mr. Charlie ... and as I see it a beer ain't never hurt not one of God's childrens.

RUFUS

That aint what the preacher says ... he says that evil drink, like evil women, will lead no man to a good ...

CHARLIE

(He interrupts Rufus.) Well, Rufus, I a-a-a-m a g-g-good man, and a cold beer ain't never led me nowhere but to satisfaction.

(JOE's playing has slowed to a soothing final chord.)

EUGENE

(He chuckles.) Satisfaction ... that's what we all need ... 'sat-n' here in these rockers.

RUFUS

... and I am gonna help out this sorry little breeze by rockin' ...

SCENE 3 — ROCKING CHAIR

ROCKING CHAIR SONG

EUGENE:

Rock Rock

RUFUS

Rock Rock

CHARLIE

Rock Rock

RUFUS

Rock Rock

EUGENE:

Rock Rock

RUFUS

Rock Rock

CHARLIE

Rock Rock

RUFUS

Rock Rock

CHARLIE

It's so satisfying
Makes the day go flying
Makes our troubles go away

RUFUS

Rock Rock
Rock Rock
Rock Rock

EUGENE

Gets us through another day

Rock Rock

RUFUS

Keeps the day a passing
Keeps us all from asking
Where the years all flew away

EUGENE

Gets us through another day

CHARLIE

Makes our feet go kicking
As the clocks go ticking
And the endless seconds fly

EUGENE

Let the day go rock-a-bye

RUFUS

Keeps the breezes blowing
Keeps the cool air flowing
Keeps Mosquitoes passing by

EUGENE

Let the day go rock-a-bye

CHARLIE

Oh so satisfying
Let the day go flying
Let our troubles rock away

EUGENE

Get us through another day

RUFUS

Keep those chairs a-going
Keep them to and fro-ing
Let those gentle creakers sway

EUGENE

Get us through another day

RUFUS

Rock Rock
Rock Rock

CHARLIE

Rock Rock
Rock Rock

CHARLIE

Rock Rock (etc.)

RUFUS

Rock Rock (etc.)

CHARLIE

Rock Rock (etc.)

RUFUS

Rock Rock (etc.)

CHARLIE

Rock Rock (etc.)

Rufus and Charlie keep alternating

JOE

Can't rock
Sitting on a nail keg
Can't rock
keeping time with my left leg

RUFUS/CHARLIE

Rock / Fan / Rock / Swat
Rock / Fan / Rock / Swat
Rock / Fan / Rock / Swat
Rock / Fan / Rock / Swat ... (etc.)

EUGENE

Cool the time of day
Shoo the flies away
Rocking chair will be the master
Make the day go by us faster
Rockerfeller, Lady Astor
Keep your gold and alabaster
Keep your jewels and keep your wages
Rocking Chair's the Rock of Ages

EUGENE/CHARLIE/RUFUS

Rock Rock Rock Rock
Rock Rock Rock Rock
(add JOE)
Rock Rock Rock Rock
Rock Rock Rock Rock

JOE/RUFUS

Rock Rock Rock...(etc.)

EUGENE/CHARLIE

It's so satisfying
Makes the day go flying
Makes our troubles go away
Gets us through another day

Keeps the day a passing
Keeps us all from asking
Where the years all flew away
Gets us through another day

Makes our feet go kicking
As the clocks go ticking

And the endless seconds fly
Let the day go rock-a-bye

Keeps the breezes blowing
Keeps the cool air flowing
Keeps Mosquitoes passing by
Let the day go rock-a-bye

Oh so satisfying
Let the day go flying
Let our troubles rock away
Get us through another day

EUGENE/CHARLIE/RUFUS/JOE

Keep those chairs a-going
Keep them to and fro-ing
Let those gentle creakers sway

(Three old men settle back into their rocking chairs ... Rufus picks up a fly swatter that he waves vigorously all about and spying a fly on the floor quietly sneaks up on it and WHAM!)

SCENE 4 — MISSISSIPPI INSECTS

EUGENE

Careful with that weapon, Rufus, you could harm an innocent feller if you don't watch out.

RUFUS

Gottcha that time, you miserable insect. Innocent ... you? ... well, I guess you just might be.

EUGENE

Just don't know where them buggers come from.

(Gene and Joey appear picking black berries.)

GENE

Pickin' berries ain't no fun ...

JOEY

Naw it ain't ... can't stand itchin' from them chiggers.

GENE

Swarms around you like they does Old Bessie.

JOEY

... I hates them bugs.

MISSISSIPPI INSECTS

GENE

Mississippi Mississippi
Mississippi Insects

Mississippi Skeeters
Buzzing bout my head
Bit my ankles Bit my elbows
Till they bled

Mississippi Critters
Won't leave me alone
Keep me itching keep me
scratching
Make me yelp and moan

Mississippi Nippers
Cottonpicking pain
Buzzing buzzing buzzing
buzzing
Driving me insane

Mississippi Mississippi
Mississippi Insects
Mississippi Mississippi
Mississippi Insects

JOEY

Mississippi Mississippi
Mississippi Insects

Mississippi Chiggers
Causing me to scratch
Bit me picking berries
In the blackberry patch

Mississippi Critters
Won't leave me along
Keep me itching keep me
scratching
Make me yelp and moan

Mississippi Nippers
Cottonpicking pain
Buzzing buzzing buzzing
buzzing
Driving me insane

Mississippi Mississippi
Mississippi Insects
Mississippi Mississippi
Mississippi Insects

ADD OLD MEN

Mississippi Mississippi Mississippi Insects
Mississippi Mississippi Mississippi Insects!

(The boys scramble off stage.)

EUGENE

Maybe, just maybe, them flies follow you around to hear more of your made-up stories.

SCENE 5 — MAMA’S BREAKFAST

RUFUS

Stories? What stories? Didn’t I hear tell that once upon a time you milked cows for a living?
Moouoooo ...

(Gene *appears to one side*; Young Eugene and Young Rufus appear on another.)

GENE

(*Holding milk pail.*)

Mama. Do I have to? Every morning!

YOUNG RUFUS

You are always talking about having to milk Old Bessie ... that’s just one old cow ... she can’t give that much milk ... seems to me she must be older than the barn you milks her in.

YOUNG EUGENE

There you go again Rufus, making smart-alecky remarks about things you don’t know nothing about. And yeah I milks old Bessie. Up every morning before the sun...

GENE

Yes, Mama, I know...no milk, no biscuits....

EUGENE

... Mama sent me out with a bucket and I sat on that stool, grabbed Bessie’s udder and pulled ... Yes, I remember ...

(Young Rufus *exits and* Gene *appears.*)

MAMA’S BREAKFAST [TRACK 4]

GENE

That butter
Them biscuits
A bucket of syrup

Mama makes breakfast
Mama brews coffee
Mama churns butter
Mama kneads biscuits
Mama
Thinking of your breakfast each
morn

Mama stokes the fire
Mama dusts the flourMama

EUGENE

I remember
I remember
A bucket of syrup
I remember

Mama
Mama
Mama
Mama
Mama I get misty
Thinking of your breakfast each
morn

Mama

Mama cuts the cornbread
Mama pours the sweet milk
Mama
Thinking of your breakfast each
morn

Mama
Mama
Mama I get misty
Thinking of your breakfast each
morn

Old Bessie snorts at me
Old Bessie gives a kick
Old Bessie smacks with a swish of her tail
Old Bessie, I keep milking
Old Bessie, Through her antics
Old Bessie, Till I have filled up the pail
Old Bessie grazes grass
Old Bessie chews her cud
Old Bessie waddles her udder which
stiffens and shudders and splashes
and splutters
So Mom'll make butter soon,
Soon
Soon, MOO!

(We now see Young Eugene as well as Gene sitting with the milking pail.)

YOUNG EUGENE/GENE

Mama makes breakfast
Mama brews coffee
Mama churns butter
Mama kneads biscuits
Mama
Thinking of your breakfast each
morn

EUGENE:

Mama
Mama
Mama
Mama
Mama I get misty
Thinking of your breakfast each
morn

(Light fades on Gene as he exits and Eugene comes out of his memory repose.)

RUFUS

There he goes, dreaming again ...

CHARLIE

What's wrong with dreaming ... I-I-I remember them sweet days back on my peanut farm back in Alabama. Up ever mornin' afore s-sunrise, me and my boys out in the fields hoeing and weeding. Grew some of the sweetest watermelons in the county to feed the h-h-h-hogs with, they was crisp and cold. *(He takes a deep breath breathing in the air as if back in Alabama smelling the breakfast aroma.)*

EUGENE

Slow down Charlie, that stuttering is making me dizzy. Enuf said about your gal-darn peanut farm.

RUFUS

You didn't own them 80 acres ... warn't you just a sharecropping dirt farmer? ...

CHARLIE

... might not a owned 'em, but I sure did bring in the best p-p-peanut crop in Alabama ...

(Young Charlie appears in a special light on stage left.)

YOUNG CHARLIE

Boys! Get yourself together. We gotta be in the fields before the sun has it's way with the dew ...

CHARLIE

... nobody raised better goober peas ...

GOOBER PEAS [TRACK 5]

CHARLIE

Goober peas is peanuts
Gold from the Alabama dirt
Goober peas sustain us
Precious manna from the
earth

So here's to you
George Washington Carver
You gave the peanut glory

Goober peas is peanuts
Gold from the Alabama dirt
Goober peas sustain us
Precious manna from the
earth

So here's to you
George Washington Carver
You gave the peanut glory
You are a true Tuskegee

YOUNG CHARLIE

Goober peas is peanuts
Gold from the Alabama dirt
Goober peas sustain us
Precious manna from the
earth

So here's to you
George Washington Carver
You gave the peanut glory

Peanut butter
Cracker Jacks
Peanut brittle in croker sacks
Peanut boiling
Roasting too
What would circuses and
baseball do
Without your tang and crunch
and smells
Popping out of paper shells

Goober peas is peanuts
Gold from the Alabama dirt
Goober peas sustain us
Precious manna from the
earth

So here's to you
George Washington Carver
You gave the peanut glory
You are a true Tuskegee

Though born in Kansas
You are a true Tuskegee son

Though born in Kansas
You are a true Tuskegee son

RUFUS

All you raised was them peanuts? Seems an awful waste of good dirt.

CHARLIE

Also watermelons ... raised them to feed the hogs ... made the sweetest smoked ham f-f-for miles around.

RUFUS

Lula Mae's paw used to raise watermelons ...

JOE

Just when did you move here, Mister Charlie?

CHARLIE

When my d-d-dear Sara died ...

YOUNG CHARLIE

Sara, where'd I put my straw hat last night? Oh, never mind Sara, here it is just where I left it ... You out there with your canary? You and your bird, makes for two songbirds in my life. ...

CHARLIE

My Sara died late on a summer evening and the next day her pet canary died in its cage. She always had a songbird of one kind or another to keep her company whilst I was in the fields. Sara's canary died in mourning is what they say ... I guess pets know more than us folks reckon.

JOE

How long it's been since you been living here in Mississippi?

CHARLIE

I guess it has been might'n near two years ... still a stranger in these parts ... my sons said it was too much for me to handle alone, the farm t-t-t-that is.

SCENE 6 — CHARLIE'S TURN

(A woman passes by accompanied by promenade #1 music, and the old men ogle her as she passes.)

CHARLIE

Lady, God bless them titties!"

RUFUS

Charlie you didn't skip a beat, didn't studder one word. Guess you are remembering what you would have done with them titties iffing you were a young man.

CHARLIE

I-I-I still can handle 'em Ru-Rufus. I might be old, but I ain't dead. Brings me back to when I first saw my Beautiful Sara ...

(Young Charlie appears with his fiddle.)

YOUNG CHARLIE

Do you remember, Sara? The Saturday barn dance ... and all the gals from miles around were swishing their skirts as they danced and my eyes fell on you, Sara MacFearson ... your eyes shined as blue as the summer's sky and your hair as blond as corn silk ... but I must admit it warn't just your hair and eyes that I first noticed ...

EUGENE

Charlie I'd say you getting excited over titties is a little late, you is swiveled up just like the rest of us.

CHARLIE

S-S-S-speak for yourself Eugene, from what I hear tell you ain't never used yours, swiveled up or not ... Them si-si-Saturday night dances Sara made the old barn shake ...

RUFUS

Yeah, my Daddy's barn shook too, but it weren't cause of no square dance. Yep, that hay loft saw lots of action

EUGENE

Now Rufus when you gonna own up to the fact that you was a virgin before you thought you got Lula Mae in the family way.

YOUNG CHARLIE

... I fiddled till I fiddled my heart out that night, ... and when I saw you swishing your skirts, and laughing out loud, I asked who you was and my friend told me "that is Sara McFearson" ... I laid my fiddle down and made my way through the crowd You gave me such a look I almost studded when I told you my name ... and you took my hand ...

JOE

So you was a caller, Mister Charlie?

CHARLIE

Sure was, fancied myself a musician in my youth. I'm told you made a living at it, Joe? ...

JOE:

Played accordion and pie-ano in my day...

(Lights come up on Young Joe.)

YOUNG JOE

Seems like all I ever wanted to do is play music ...

YOUNG CHARLIE

Allamande left ... Alamande right ... join me Sara in a spin ... let's promenade ... take my hand ...

YOUNG JOE

Tunes come into my head and I ain't satisfied till I find them through my fingers into my squeezebox.

YOUNG CHARLIE

(He claps his hands to the beat of a square dance.)

I'm taking you Beautiful Sara down the aisle ...

EUGENE

How in the hog's shed did you call them square dances with that stutter you have?

CHARLIE

Never stuttered back then ... here, I'll s-s-s-show you ...

SCENE 7 — SQUARE DANCE

(He stands up and with his feet he beats out the rhythm.)

CHARLIE

Gimme a hoedown, Joe.

(JOE picks up the rhythm and plays a hoedown. As Charlie gets into the call Eugene gets up to dance and invites Rufus to join him.)

Grab that gal
And swing her around
Do-se-do and be proud

(Young Charlie plays the fiddle.)

SQUARE DANCE

YOUNG CHARLIE

Allemande left

Allemande right

Kick those heels off the ground
Spin her around
Spin her out of sight

CHARLIE

Allemande left

And allemande right

Kick those heels
And spin her around

Promenade
Yee-ha!

Over the bridge
Do some more do-si-dos

Allemande left
Allemande right
Kick those heels off the ground
Spin her around
Spin her out of sight
Take her hand in a promenade
Around she goes
Take her home
Over the bridge
Do some more do-si-dos

Allemande left
Allemande right
Kick those heels off the ground
Spin her around
Spin her out of sight
Take her hand in a promenade
Around she goes
Take her home
Over the bridge
Do some more do-si-dos

Sara is my gal
Sara is my all time pal
Sara dances
Sara glances
Sara turns and my pour heart burns
Sara is my girl
Sara is my whole world
Sara flows
Sara glows
Sara reels and my pour heart peals

Allemande left
Allemande right
Kick those heels off the ground
Spin her around
Spin her out of sight
Take her hand in a promenade
Around she goes
Take her home

Take her hand in a promenade
Around she goes

Take her home
Over the bridge
Do some more do-si-dos

Allemande left
Allemande right
Kick those heels off the ground
Spin her around
Spin her out of sight
Take her hand in promenade
Around she goes
Take her home
Over the bridge
Do some do-si-dos

Sara is my gal
Sara is my all time pal
Sara dances, Sara glances
Sara turns
and my pour heart burns
Sara is my girl
Sara is my whole world
Sara flows
Sara glows
Sara reels and my pour heart peals

Sara is my gal
Sara is my all time pal
Sara dances
Sara glances
Sara turns and my pour heart burns
Sara is my girl
Sara is my whole world
Sara flows
Sara glows
Sara reels and my pour heart peals

Allemande left
Allemande right
Kick those heels off the ground
Spin her around
Spin her out of sight
Take her hand in a promenade
Around she goes
Take her home

Over the bridge
Do some more do-si-dos

Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara
Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara

Over the bridge
Do some mre do-si-dos

Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara
Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara Sara

BEAUTIFUL SARA

CHARLIE

Beautiful Sara
I love my dear Sara
If I could tell her
If I could say
How much I love her
One more time one more day

Beautiful Sara

I love my dear Sara

I feel my Sara
Always inside
I'll come home to her
I'll be back by her side

Sara Sara Sara Sara
Sara Sara Sara Sara
Sara Sara Sara Sara
Far too soon I lost my wife

Sara Sara Sara Sara
Sara Sara Sara Sara
Sara Sara Sara Sara
Now I live far from her side

Beautiful Sara
I love you dear Sara
Some day I'll join you
My grave next to yours
I'll lie beside you
One last time
Evermore
Evermore

YOUNG CHARLIE

So simple and sweet
You make life complete
Beautiful Sara

I love you dear Sara

Marry me Sara
Be my darling wife
Beautiful Sara
I pledge you my life
Wonderful Sara

I need you dear Sara

Sara Sara Sara Sara
Share with me a perfect life
Sara Sara Sara Sara
Sara Sara Sara Sara

Sara Sara Sara Sara
Wash away my toil and strife
Sara Sara Sara Sara
Sara Sara Sara Sara

So simple and sweet
You make life complete
Beautiful Sara

I love you dear Sara

Beautiful Sara
I love you dear Sara

(Young Charlie disappears and the lights come back up on the storefront.)

CHARLIE

Sara, my dear Sara ... she left me too soon. Her picture hangs above my bed ... and at night she watches over me until that day when we will once again be side-by-side in Alabama.

(The old men settle down to fanning themselves and swatting as we hear Promenade #2.)

SCENE 8 — THE LINCOLN AND OLD HUDSON

(A car speeds past, with a rumbling sound, kicking up dust. The old men follow the car with their eyes as the car passes.)

EUGENE

Darn it to hell and back, what was that?

LINCOLN

RUFUS

Twarnt no Hudson.
I know a Hudson when I see one
Coulda been a LaSalle

CHARLIE

Rambler?

A Studebaker
Ford or Edsel, Oldsmobile
Mercury Buick Pontiac Chrysler
Dodge

Plymouth

Chevrolet
Or even a Packard

Maybe a DeSoto

Or a Cadillac
Or one of them Lincolns

EUGENE

One of them Lincolns

Lincoln

Lincoln

Lincoln

Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln

Lincoln

Lincoln

Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln, Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln	Abraham Lincoln	
What was he thinkin'		
Abraham Lincoln		Abraham Lincoln
What was he doing		
What was his notion	Abraham Lincoln	
Stirring things up		
Starting all that commotion		Abraham Lincoln
Lincoln Lincoln	Lincoln Lincoln	
Abraham Lincoln	Abraham Lincoln	
What was he thinkin'	What was he thinkin'	
Abraham Lincoln	Abraham Lincoln	Abraham Lincoln
Shaking foundations		
Rattling the nation		
With that Emancipation Proclamation		
Emancipation	Emancipation	Emancipation
Emancipation	Emancipation	Emancipation
Just another word for Yankee		
Subjugation		Yankee subjugation
Should be obvious		
Shouldn't be surprising		
That there needs	That there needs	That there needs
would be a	would be a	would be a
Southern Uprising	Southern Uprising	Southern Uprising
All that Yankee meddling		
All that overreaching		All that Yankee meddling
All that Yankee Communist	All that Yankee Communist	
Civil Rights preaching	Civil Rights preaching	
All them boycotts,		All them boycotts,
marches		marches
Calls for integration		Calls for integration
Threatening peaceful	Threatening peaceful	
Separation	Separation	

RUFUS/CHARLIE/EUGENE

Emancipation Segregation Integration Separation
 Separation Integration Segregation Emancipation
 All them boycotts, marches
 Calls for integration
 Threatening peaceful Separation
 All that Yankee Meddling
 All that overreaching
 All that Yankee Communist
 Civil Rights preaching
 Should be obvious
 Shouldn't be surprising
 That there needs would be a Southern Uprising
 Emancipation emancipation
 Just another word for Yankee subjugation

JOE

All persons held as slaves
 Shall be
 then,
 thence forward
 and for-
 ever
 free

 And the
 United States

 will recognize
 and maintain

Shaking foundations		
Rattling the nation		the freedom
With that Emancipation Proclamation		of such
Lincoln Lincoln Abraham Lincoln		persons
What was he thinkin'		and upon
Abraham Lincoln		this act
What was he doing		
What was his notion		
Stirring things up		An
Starting all that commotion		Act of
Lincoln Lincoln		
Abraham Lincoln		Justice
What was he thinkin'		
Abraham Lincoln		I invoke
What was he		the considerate
What was his notion		judgement
Stirring things up		
Starting all that commotion		of mankind
Lincoln Lincoln Abraham Lincoln		and the gracious
What was he thinkin'		favor of
Abraham Lincoln		Almighty God

RUFUS
Lincoln

CHARLIE
Lincoln

EUGENE
Lincoln

Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln

Lincoln

Lincoln

Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln

Lincoln

Lincoln

Lincoln

Lincoln
Lincoln

Lincoln

Lincoln

RUFUS

Or maybe it was a Cadillac

(The three men relax back into their rockers as the music slowly subsides.)

CHARLIE

... nuff said ... we lost, them Yankees won, 'nuff said.

EUGENE

Well, them Yankees might'a won ... (Rufus interrupts)

RUFUS

We was talking about cars, not wars. I remember my daddy had an old Ford ... that was long before I saved up and bought my Hudson ... and that old Ford had a rumble seat and I'd take the gals who was sweet on me and park that old Ford down by the river and we would pull open that rumble seat ... rumble and tumble. Now that was before my Lula Mae and my Hudson ...

CHARLIE

S-s-sure that weren't no C-c-c-cadillac, Rufus? Didn't know Lincoln made big cars like that.

RUFUS

Now Charlie, why must you always interrupt me ...

(A young teenaged woman passes to promenade #3, as the old men ogle after her.)

SCENE 9 — CRINOLINES

RUFUS

Look at her ... swishing them skirts just like her grandma did way back when ... she sure knew her way into my rumble seat ...

CHARLIE

(After gesturing like tipping his hat to the young woman.)

Mornin' Miss Wanda.

(The three men watch as she passes by.)

EUGENE

To be a stranger here, Charlie, you sure do know the ladies.

CHARLIE

Just an observer, Eugene, can't help noticing pretty young things.

RUFUS

I hear tell that she got knocked up before she was just finished high school.

CHARLIE

Is that a f-f-fact?

RUFUS

Guess the acorn don't fall far from the tree.

CHARLIE

What are you s-suggesting?

RUFUS

That she had a kid and put it up for adoption.

EUGENE

... or maybe she went to one of them back alley doctors.

CHARLIE

... you think?

RUFUS

You don't see no snot nosed kid pulling at her skirt tail, now do you?

Did you see all them crinolines she is wearing under her skirt? Enough to make it clear that she is inviting young men to get up under there. If her grandma had crinolines like that we would have had to give up the rumble seat for the hayloft.

(All the while Charlie is still in the process of getting his pipe packed and lit.)

EUGENE

What's an old fart like you know about crinolines? Going around using words you don't even know the meaning of. Crinolines for lord's sake. Where'd you dig that one up?

CRINOLINES

JOE

Crinolines

The lady's legs are in thin

Crinolines

The gal's invitin' sin in

Crinolines

Ticklin' as she walks on by

Crinolines

Pricklin' 'gainst her inner thigh

Crinolines

Slinkin' over naked skin

Keepin' codgers thinkin' of the state they're in

Like crinolines

They're fitchetin' and burnin'

Itchin' scratchin' yearnin'

Mooning swooning reeling

Tryin' to hide their feelings

For ladies walkin' by in

Crrrinolines

What say you, gentlemen?.

(Gene appears under the tree whittling on a stick.)

GENE

Pretty girls flirt with boys
Pretty girls take their toys
Pretty girls plum annoy
A pretty girl just ain't the same
as boys

Pretty girls swish and wiggle
Pretty girls wish and sigh
Pretty girls dish and giggle
No pretty girl will ever catch my eye

JOE/EUGENE/RUFUS/CHARLIE

Crinolines
The lady's legs are in thin
Crinolines
The gal's invitin' sin in
Crinolines
Ticklin' as she walks on by
Crinolines
Pricklin' 'gainst her inner thigh
Crinolines
Slinkin' over naked skin
Keepin' fellas thinkin' of the state they're in
Like crinolines
They're fitchetin' and burnin'
Itchin' scratchin' yearnin'
Mooning swooning reeling
Tryin' to hide their feelings
For ladies walkin' by in
Crrrrinolines
Oh those ladies walkin' by in
Crrrrrrinolines

GENE

No pretty girl will ever catch my eye

No pretty girl will ever catch my eye

(Gene disappears.)

SCENE 10 — A SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN

(A Negro woman crosses in front of the old men to promenade #4, Charlie tips his hat as he sees her pass.)

JOE

Mornin' Bertha. Tired feet so early this glorious morning? ... well, take care and don't let this hot Mississippi day do you no harm ...

RUFUS

Why'd you do that Charlie? No need to tip your hat to a Negress for lord's sake.

CHARLIE

Just being f-f-friendly Eugene, everybody needs some friendliness from time to time and with this hot spell I figured even a Negress could use a little.

RUFUS

... an old codger like you tipping his hat to ...

CHARLIE

... just being a southern gentlemen ...

A SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN

CHARLIE

A southern Gentleman
Can be a hero
Just by tipping his hat
Even to a Negro
Woman like that

A southern gentleman
Can lighten her woe
With a tip of his hat
Lightly to a Negro
Woman like that

A southern gentleman
Can give a salute
Just by nodding his head
Not too solemn or cute
Simply clear-eyed and mute
As he meets a Negro
Woman like that

A southern Gentleman
Can be a hero
Just by tipping his hat

JOE

Tipping hats don't change the times
In which we are livin'

Tipping hats don't change the crimes
They remain a given

Tipping hats is better than
the back seat of the bus
Or the poll tax
Or lynching parties

Even to a Negro
Woman like that

RUFUS

Gentleman or no, just don't do nobody no good to be tipping a hat to a Negro woman. She's got her worries and we got ours. Yessirree, now my Lula Mae used to pile clothes in the back seat of my Hudson and cross the tracks to the quarters where that old Negro woman lived and hired her do the ironing. One day Lula Mae was dropping off the ironing and that woman told my Lula Mae to bring it on into the house, that she warn't doing no heavy lifting, and she said, "I's taking care of myself." So let her go take care of herself without tipping your hat.

CHARLIE

Parden me boys ... for b-b-being what I have always been ... and I p-p-pride myself in being a gentleman.

JOE

... and a gentleman you are, Mista Charlie.

EUGENE

Well, I ain't never tipped my hat to a Negro woman ... just ain't done here in these parts.

(Young Eugene and Young Joe appear under the tree.)

YOUNG EUGENE

Hey Joey, I saw you talking to that Bertha girl down by the tracks the other day ...

YOUNG JOE

... just a friend, Gene ... just a friend, that's all ...

YOUNG EUGENE

Oh, thought you might be spooning her ...

YOUNG JOE

Nah, I just likes her, that all ...

YOUNG EUGENE

OK ... iffing you say so ...

(The young men disappear.)

EUGENE

Hats are for keeping the sun out of your face, not for tipping ...

SCENE 11 — LULA MAE AND ME AND MY HUDSON

RUFUS

My hat was always off for my Lula Mae, she was a tiny gal, even after having all my children ... and when she drove my Hudson over them railroad tracks she would bounce up from the seat. Bouncing about just like when we was young and running moonshine.

EUGENE

Oh, you and your old Hudson. You just keep a talking about your so called 'conquests' in it's back seat ... I bet the only behinds that back seat ever saw was the behinds of your snotty-nosed youngens. Lord knows you had plenty.

RUFUS

Now Eugene I got that Hudson after I married my Lula Mae, and my conquering days was over. So you leave my kids alone. They are my reason to be living and maybe if you had one or two of your own you just might understand that. Yes I had a yard full and ever' day I thank God that Lula Mae gave me them kids ... But what a car that Hudson was ... Lula Mae and me ...

(Young Rufus *appears.*)

YOUNG RUFUS

... and my Hudson ... my-oh-my and boy can that flivver fly; might as well have wings. Jump in Lula Mae, let's go flying. I want to throw up a trail of red dust that this part of Mississippi ain't never seen before ... a trail of dust that them Feds can't see through ... the bumpier the better ... and when I hits them bumps Lula Mae, careful of your head, it might-near hit the ceiling ... good thing it's padded ... just like the back seat ...

LULA MA AND ME RUFUS

Let me tell you a story of
Lula Mae and me
In the back seat of my Hudson
Twisting and turning
Tingling and burning
Necking and knocking
Rolling and rocking
Lula Mae and me
And little Jake in her belly
In the back seat of my Hudson

YOUNG RUFUS

Lula Mae now don't you cry
Lula Mae I shall stand by you
Lula Mae now don't you fear
Lula Mae I'll keep you near me
No need for distress
I'll hold you in your white wedding dress

RUFUS

So Lula Mae was in the family way. So's I did the right thing, I married her. Times were hard and I had no way to support her, excepting with my Hudson. So I became what you calls an en-tre-pre-neur. With my Lula Mae right by my side, in my Hudson, keeping way clear of the feds.

RUFUS

Let me tell you a story of
Lula Mae and me
And big mason jars of moonshine
In the back seat of my Hudson
Smuggling past midnight
Moonshine in moonlight
Racing and turning
Skidding wheels burning
Fenders a-knocking
Carriage a-rocking
Lula Mae and me
And big mason jars of moonshine
And little Jake in her belly
In the back seat of my Hudson

YOUNG RUFUS

Lula Mae now don't you cry
Lula Mae I shall stand by you
Lula Mae now don't you fear
Lula Mae I'll keep you near me
No need for distress
I'll hold you in your
White all about
Slightly taken out
Wedding dress

She bore my eldest only son

I said sweet Lula name the day

I got the prettiest gal around

Lula Mae and me
And my Hudson
Lula Mae and me
And my Hudson
Lula Mae and me

My Lula Mae is more than fun

When there's a baby on the way

I am the happiest guy in town

Lula Mae and me

Lula Mae and me

Lula Mae and me

Let me tell you a story of
Lula Mae and me
And our great big family

Let me tell you a story of
Lula Mae and me
And our great big family

With a dozen picnic baskets
In the back seat of my Hudson
Laughing and squabbling
Giggling and babbling
Day trips past midnight
Storm clouds and sunlight
Life keeps on turning
Pleasing and burning
Fate keeps on knocking
Reeling and rocking
Lula Mae and me
And our great big family
With little Jake and June
And Pearl and April
Charity and Mae
And a dozen picnic baskets
In the back seat of my Hudson

She bore my daughters one by one

Add five more kids so they can play

I have the prettiest brood around
Lula Mae and me
And my Hudson
Lula Mae and me
And my Hudson
Lula Mae and me
Lula Mae and me
And my Hudson
Lula Mae and me
And my Hudson

Lula Mae and Jake
And June and Pearl and April
Charity and Mae
And my Hudson and me

With a dozen picnic baskets
In the back seat of my Hudson
Laughing and squabbling
Giggling and babbling
Day trips past midnight
Storm clouds and sunlight
Life keeps on turning
Pleasing and burning
Fate keeps on knocking
Reeling and rocking
Lula Mae and me
And our great big family
With little Jake and June
And Pearl and April
Charity and Mae
And a dozen picnic baskets
In the back seat of my Hudson

My Lula Mae is more than fun

When there's a baby on the way

I am the happiest guy in town

Lula Mae and me

Lula Mae and Jake
And June and Pearl and April
Charity and Mae
And my Hudson and me

YOUNG RUFUS

... only thing I love as much as I love my Lula Mae ...

RUFUS

... is my Hudson ... man-oh-man, what a flivver it was ... motor always humming, never snortin' ... god I loved that sound.

(Young Rufus *disappears upstage.*)

SCENE 12 — JOE REMEMBERS

EUGENE

You loved that old wreck of a car ... I'll give you that. But Lula Mae ... as I recall ... well I don't doubt you loved her ... but Lula Mae ... well... I shouldn't tell tales out of school....

RUFUS

Eugene you is full of it ... might I just bring up the fact that you never made it to first-base with any girl? ... and the fact is that Old Bessie's teats was the only teats that you ever touched.

(Young Eugene and Young Joe appear.)

YOUNG JOE

... and who was that white girl I saw you with over behind the feed store the other day?

YOUNG EUGENE

Lula Mae Odum. Seems she was itching for me to take her to the picture show. I told her that I couldn't afford to take her to no picture show, much less take her for a coke afterwards. I said why don't you ask Albert Barnes. He was flirting with her.

YOUNG JOE

Didn't I see him gettin' on the Trailways bus the other day?

YOUNG EUGENE

Might have ... seems I heard he was going to college over there at Ole Miss. Lula Mae seemed awful anxious ...

(The two young men disappear.)

RUFUS

... them's just tall tales. I loved my Lula Mae and my Lula Mae loved me ... and that's the way it was. I did take Lula Mae to the movies ... seems like it was a Gene Autry double feature ... amidst all that riding, shooting, and singing, we sat in the back row and it was better than the rumble seat in paw's old Ford. And right there in that dark picture show I asked Lula Mae to marry me ...

JOE

I saw one of them Gene Autry shows ... or was it Hoot Gibson? Had to sit in the balcony could not buy no popcorn like the folks below.

CHARLIE

Why might that be, Joe?

JOE

Guess they didn't want no popcorn dropping on the heads of the white folks *(he laughs.)*

EUGENE

(Charlie *laughs too*. Eugene *glares angrily at Joe, but turns to Rufus instead*.)

Rufus, when you tell your tall tales you seem to always leave out the best parts. Now why do you think that is?

RUFUS

Well Eugene, since you is such a ‘know-it-all’ why not tell us why you never married ... never saw you in the back row of the picture show with no gals.

EUGENE

Get it in your head that some folks just ain’t the marrying kind ... besides, I had my Mama to take care of.

RUFUS:

Well, I took good care of my Lula Mae when she needed me.

YOUNG RUFUS

From just that one time?

JOE

Just goes to show you what a shotgun can do to a feller in these parts.

YOUNG RUFUS:

No, Lula Mae, don’t cry. It’s OK. I won’t abandon you!

RUFUS

My Lula Mae, she was my pride in life ... she was the prettiest girl in town, and I married her ... may she rest in peace ...

CHARLIE

And my dear Sara ...

SCENE 13 — MAMA DON’T GO A-FRETTIN’

(Young Eugene *appears*.)

EUGENE

Mama used to fret so about my not getting married and giving her “her grandbabies” as she always put it.

YOUNG EUGENE

No Mama, I haven’t asked Mary Helen to the prom yet.

EUGENE

Guess I could’a married; there were girls ... yes Rufus ... there were girls ... always a flirting ...

YOUNG EUGENE

Maybe I'll ask Alice Louise.

EUGENE

I don't know why they even gave me a second look ...

YOUNG EUGENE

Yes, I guess Effy Ann is pretty ...

EUGENE

... but Mama said I was handsome enough.

MAMA DON'T GO A-FRETTIN'

EUGENE:

When I was a young man
I dreamed that I was tall
I was dark
I was handsome
The envy of all
Turn back the clock
Show me that handsome face again
Show the swagger
Show the youth
Show the grace again
To be the envy of young men

When I was a young man
Girls would give me the eye
They would smile
Blush and whisper
While sauntering by
Time will move on
The pretty girls go on their way
When you smile and walk and talk
On a sunny day
But never ask the girl to stay

Mama don't go a-frettin'
Cause I am not the marrying kind
Turn me loose and let me fly

YOUNG EUGENE

Mama makes breakfast
Mama brews coffee
Mama churns butter

Mama loves her boy

Mama I love you
Mama don't cry
I am not like other boys
I can't say just why

Mama is lonely
Mama is ailing
Mama is fragile
Mama needs her boy

Mama don't go a-frettin'
Cause I am not the marrying kind
Turn me loose and let me fly
To seek the treasures I gotta find

To seek the treasures I gotta find
Mama
Mama
Mama
Mama

When I was a young man
I dreamed that I was tall
I was dark
I was handsome
The envy of all
Turn back the clock
Show me that handsome face again
Show the swagger
Show the youth
Show the grace again
To be the envy of young men

Mama don't go a-frettin'
Cause I am not the marrying kind
Turn me loose and let me fly
To seek the treasures I gotta find

Mama I love you
Mama don't cry
I am not like other boys
I can't say just why

Mama don't go a-frettin'
Mama don't go a-frettin'
Mama don't go a-frettin'
Mama don't go a-frettin'

Mama is lonely
Mama is ailing
Mama is fragile
Mama needs her boy

Mama I love you
Mama don't cry
I am not like other boys
I can't say just why

When I was a young man
I dreamed that I was tall
I was dark
I was handsome
The envy of all
Turn back the clock
Show me that handsome face again
Show the swagger
Show the youth
Show the grace again
To be the envy of young men

Mama I love you
Mama don't cry
I am not like other boys
I can't say just why

Mama don't go a-frettin'
Cause I am not the marrying kind
Turn me loose and let me fly
To seek the treasures I gotta find

Mama don't go a-frettin'
Mama don't go a-frettin'
Mama don't go a-frettin'
Mama don't go a-frettin'

Mama is lonely
Mama is ailing
Mama is fragile
Mama needs her boy

(Young Eugene disappears and the lights come back up on the three old men.)

CHARLIE

So Eugene, you always lived with your Mama over there on Sanders Street?

EUGENE

Until last year when I had my stroke ... couldn't take care of her no more so had to put her in the old folks home way out there on Palmetto Road. Hurt me a lot to put her there, we was always so close.

RUFUS

Well I guess if we live long enough we will all end up in the old folks home ...

EUGENE

... spent my life devoted to Mama.

(The old men settle back into their rockers, Eugene wheeling his fly swatter, Rufus catching a wink of a nap, and Charlie fiddling with his pipe. Young Eugene and Young Joe appear.)

SCENE 14— LOVE CAN BE A BURDEN #1

(Young Joe plays the instrumental line from “Love Can Be A Burden” on his squeezebox as Young Eugene listens.)

YOUNG EUGENE

What’s that you playing, Joey?

YOUNG JOE

Donno Gene, just a tune that keeps comin’ in my head. Donno where it comes from ... just seems right in my fingers, as if my fingers is making the tune.

YOUNG EUGENE

You sure is musical.

YOUNG JOE

I just play this tune over and over ... sometimes I just go down the road and folks stop and listens, shakes their heads and then goes on their way ... seems to make them sad or something.

YOUNG EUGENE

Ain’t making me sad. Makes me feel *all good* inside. Play it some more Joey.

LOVE CAN BE A BURDEN

YOUNG JOE

Love can be a burden
Love can lay you low
Love is what you make it
You give it and you take it
You cry in joy and woe

(They sit under the tree and Joey plays the tune again but in a slower tempo as the scene changes back to the Feedstore set where Eugene and Rufus have fallen asleep, both snoring loudly.)

SCENE 15 — JOE JOINS W.C. HANDY

CHARLIE

Beginning to sound like a cockfight around here.

JOE

Better than them two bickering about Lula Mae ...

CHARLIE

You got that right Joe ... so Joe, tell me about when you was a traveling music man.

JOE

When I was 18 ... full of piss and vinegar ... I aimed to pursue what I loved most, my squeezebox and the sweet sounds that it made. So I said my goodbyes to these parts and made my way north up the Mississippi River to Clarksdale, where the great W. C. Handy and his orchestra, The Knights of Pythias, played.

CHARLIE

That the man who wrote that song about that Saint Louie Woman?

JOE

He's the one. It was my luck that they didn't have an accordion player, so I stepped up with my squeezebox and said ...

YOUNG JOE

"Well Mr. Handy, I ain't never played with no band but I surely can make a joyful noise with my squeezebox."

JOE

That was all it took. The accordion it was and later the 88 ivories of the piano (*pronounced pie-anno*) ... and for two years, I played and I played ... iffing you get my gist.

YOUNG JOE

My-oh-my, come on in Gals, and bring them boys in with you as well ... let's party, that is if you brought a bit of hooch to liven things up ...

JOE

And when Mr. Handy went north of Memphis I stayed behind ... set out on my own, a playing from town-to-town ... played in Negro clubs and on occasion for white folks ...

YOUNG JOE

... I'll get us started with a partying song ... (*he hits a few chords*)

JOE

So's I played and I played ... pretty much all over the south ...

(Young Joe *disappears.*)

THE SONGS THAT I SUNG

JOE

Some men say
That love can be a burden
But not for me
And not when I was young
I would be 'toxicated
Feelin' free, elevated
By the songs that I sung
By the bells that I rung
By the loves that I won

Some folks say
That love can be a burden
But not for me
And not when I was young
There were plenty of beauties
Quite a handful of cuties
Who delighted in the songs that
I sung

Some folks say
That love can be a burden
But love's a game
You play it for the fun
I got plenty of kissin'
From the sweeties who'd listen
So excited by the songs that I sung

See those old men
Some a-snorin'
Some a-fartin'
Some a-swattin' flies
Rockin' away the day
Under Mississippi skies
Their burden lies
In their memories of love
Or so they say

YOUNG JOE

Won't settle down
In a one horse town
Gonna call my home
Every road I roam
There are places to be
There are people to see
There are tunes to be told
There are honeys to hold

Some folks say
That love can be a burden
But not for me
And not when I was young
There were plenty of beauties
Quite a handful of cuties
Who delighted in the songs that
I sung

Some folks say
That love can be a burden
But love's a game
You play it for the fun
I got plenty of kissin'
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Some folks say
That love can be a burden
But not for me
And not when I was young
There were plenty of beauties
Quite a handful of cuties
Who delighted in the songs that
I sung

Some folks say
That love can be a burden
But love's a game
You play it for the fun
I got plenty of kissin'
From the sweeties who'd listen
So excited by the songs that I sung
We'd be shakin' to the bells that I rung

Such sweet reminiscin'
Of the towns and the kissin'
I have known by the songs that I sung

Some folks say
That love can be a burden
But not for me
And not when I was young
There were plenty of beauties
Quite a handful of cuties
Who delighted in the songs that
I sung

Some folks say
That love can be a burden
But love's a game
You play it for the fun
I got plenty of kissin'
From the sweeties who'd listen
So excited by the songs that I sung
We'd be shakin' to the bells that I rung
I'd be wakin' to the loves that I won

CHARLIE

... what brought you back to these parts Joe?

JOE

Being here with family after cataracts took over my eyes and I slowly went blind. Shore do miss being on the road with my music and being free.

(Young Eugene *appears.*)

SCENE 16 — LOVE CAN BE A BURDEN #2

LOVE CAN BE A BURDEN

YOUNG EUGENE

Stay in your four corners
Travel in your mind
Love can be elusive
Or welcome or intrusive
A comfort or unkind

Love can be a burden
Love can lay you low
Love is what you make it
You give it and you take it

JOE

Love can be a burden
Love can lay you low
Love is what you make it
You give it and you take it

You cry in joy and woe

Love can be diminished

More than can be born

Will make you weep

Love will leave you a withering heap

Love can be a burden

Love can lay you low

Love is what you make it

You give it and you take it

You cry in joy and woe

You cry in joy and woe

Love can be unfinished

Love can make you mourn

Love will rob your sleep

Feeling so careless and cheap

Love will leave you a withering heap

Love can be a burden

Love can lay you low

Love is what you make it

You give it and you take it

You cry in joy and woe

You cry in joy and woe

(The young men disappear and the two boys are revealed under the tree.)

SCENE 17 — UNDER THE TREE: PLAYMATES

WISHING I HAD ME A PLAYMATE

GENE

Wishing I had me a playmate

Being alone all day ain't no fun

If I could have me a playmate

I wouldn't just be sitting here

Whittling and sitting and whittling here

Making nothing much out of this stick

Cause I ain't got no talent for whittling here

Not even a lick

(He looks up and sees Joey walking toward him, kicking a can and hitting it with a stick. He closes his pocket-knife, puts it in his pocket and hides behind the tree.)

JOEY

Wishing I had me a playmate

Being alone all day ain't no fun

If I could have me a playmate

I wouldn't just be walking here

Skipping and tripping and talking here

Talking to no one else but myself

I would rather be walking and talking here

With somebody else

GENE

Hey boy ...

JOEY

You calling me? I's ain't done nothing wrong. My paw says its ok for me to walk down this road ...

GENE

Did he now. So where you going? Fishing? I don't see no pole, hook, line or sinker, no can of worms neither, if there was worms in that can you is a kicking I reckon they'd be gone by now.

JOEY

No ... not going fishing. Just walking down this road kicking this old can.

GENE

Wanna stop awhile and play with me under this live oak tree. The shade'll keep us cool.

JOEY

I see you got yourself a rope. What you planning to do with it?

GENE

This here rope is for jumping.

JOEY

Jumping?

GENE

Yeah, for jumping. You know, jumping rope. Like this ...

JOEY

That's for girls to do. I never seen no boys do that.

GENE

Boys can do what boys want to do. 'Sides, girls plays with dolls.

JOEY

Let me try.

GENE

Hey, you are good, colored boy! What's your name colored boy?

JOEY

Joseph, but you can call me Joe.

GENE

How's about I calls you Joey? My name is Eugene, but you can call me Gene.

JOEY

Hey Gene.

GENE

Hey Joey.

GENE/JOEY

Looks like I found me a playmate
Someone to share in a day of fun
I've always wanted a playmate
Someone I could be friends with here
Someone to play and pretend with here
And it looks like this kid is the one
Cause a boy needs a boy to be friends with here
And share in the fun

(Exhausted they fall propping themselves up against the tree.)

(Lights come back on Feed Store. Eugene picks up the fly swatter and aims toward an insect but as he is about to swat it, it flies away.)

EUGENE

Dad-gum-it, missed again ...

(Young Eugene and Young Rufus can be seen fishing. Young Eugene has just missed a fly with a swatter too.)

YOUNG RUFUS

... story of your life Eugene.

YOUNG EUGENE

Just might be ... but the story of your life Rufus ain't no better. To hear you tell it, it was all nice and pretty between you and Lula Mae before you took her to Louisiana and married her.

YOUNG RUFUS

Now Eugene don't you go starting nothing about my Lula Mae again. I know she was sweet to you just like she was sweet to all the boys ... that was why I loved Lula Mae so much ... she loved every body ...

YOUNG EUGENE

Shucks ... I know ... Lula Mae was like a bumblebee, sampling nectar from every sweet flower in town.

YOUNG RUFUS

... now who is making up stories ... Eugene if you weren't my friend, I sware I would ...

CHARLIE

I-I-I once set on a bumblebee, *(The young men disappear.)* Sara had to pick out the stinger with a magnifying glass and tweezers. Couldn't sit on that side of my backside for a month I seem to recollect.

RUFUS

... so now are we talking about bumblebees? ... Shoulda gone fishing this morning instead of putting up with all this daggonit talk about insects, crinolines, tipping hats ... just talk, talk, talk.

EUGENE

Now Rufus no need to go to cussing, next thing you know you will be talking dirty again. We was just a saying ...

SCENE 18 — THE PREACHER PASSES BY

(The Baptist pastor waddles down past the three gentlemen to the beat of the promenade #5.)

CHARLIE

Here comes that Baptist p-p-preacher man. With that b-b-belly looks like he has had a cold b-b-beer or two.

RUFUS

Howdy Brother Perkins, nice morning. God in his heaven has smiled on us this beautiful day ... a Garden of Eden right here in Mississippi ... right here in Mississippi ...

CHARLIE

Good s-s-sermon s-s-Sunday morning preacher. But I thought for a moment there when you s-s-started talking about that evils of loose women that you had s-s-stopped preaching and had gone to meddling.

EUGENE

We need to hear more about them loose women like Jezebel herself ...

RUFUS

... or those man killers like Delilah and Bathsheba ...

(Young Eugene appears.)

YOUNG EUGENE

Look, Lula Mae, I took you to the movies, but now I'm taking you home.

EUGENE

... bright red lipstick ... garish rouge ...

YOUNG EUGENE

No, Lula Mae. No, I ... I'm not Albert ...

RUFUS

... dying their hair ... that henna ...

YOUNG EUGENE

... look, if you want to go necking, go with Rufus.

EUGENE

... just not natural ...

YOUNG EUGENE

You know he's got a crush on you.

RUFUS

... wouldn't you say Brother Perkins?

PAINTED LADY

EUGENE

Preach it from your pulpit, Pastor
Teach us 'bout the culprit faster
Warn us 'bout the evil female she-devil

Painted Lady
Lipstick red
Calls damnation on my head

Painted lady
Powdered face
Stains my soul with black disgrace

Painted lady
Eyes lined black
Throws our souls down Hell's wide crack

Preach it from the pulpit, Pastor
Teach us 'bout the culprit faster
Warn us 'bout the
Loose-lipped goose-hipped
Woozie floozie

Painted lady
Breasts puffed high
Makes all good intentions die

RUFUS

Painted lady
Cheeks flared rouge
Save our souls from that deluge

Preach it from the pulpit, Pastor
Teach us 'bout the culprit faster
Warn us 'bout the
Loose-lipped goose-hipped
Woozie floozie

Painted lady
Perfumed smell
Strews rose-peddled paths to hell

Painted lady

Painted ladies
Mend your lives
Be clean wholesome moms and wives

Preach it from the pulpit, Pastor
Louder, faster
Guide us past her
So we'll outlast her
That evil devil
Tainted painted lady

Waists cropped thin
Wide hips shake, inviting sin

Painted ladies
Mend your lives
Be clean wholesome moms and wives

Preach it from the pulpit, Pastor
Louder, faster
Guide us past her
So we'll outlast her
That evil devil
Tainted painted lady

EUGENE

... yeah, a good washcloth and some lye soap would do a world of good to the faces that get painted up every day, turning women into hussies and Jezebels.

RUFUS

... the sins of the flesh is all about us, and the temptation of paint on our lovely ladies does not fit in with God's mission for them to be our wives, mothers of our children, and keepers of our houses.

EUGENE

See you Wednesday night for prayer meeting Preacher, and I expect I just might be testifying.

CHARLIE and JOE

Amen!

(The three old men wave the preacher on his way as we hear once gain the promenade #5.

RUFUS

You ain't never gonna catch me testifying ... I just might tell the sons'a bitch just what I think of him. OK, yeah, I might testify ... testify what a hypocrite he is ... baptized all my children 'cept my first born ... said he was conceived in sin ...

(Lights dim on the old men and Young Rufus appears and speaks as if to himself.)

LULA MAE AND ME REPRISE

YOUNG RUFUS

Lula Mae, it's me
Lula Mae, It's you
And me

(He speaks as the music continues)

I'll take her over the border and we'll get married by one of them ... what ya' call 'em? ... Justice of the Peace. She'll wear Mama's old wedding dress. So what if it's Albert's baby. I know, but no one else needs to know. Even Lula Mae doesn't need to know that I know.

Lula Mae, I'll marry you
I'll be there, you stop your crying
Lula Mae, I'll carry you
I don't care, you keep on lying
Telling me it's mine
I will say it's mine
There will be no blame
You'll both take my name

RUFUS

Yeah, my Lula Mae in her Mama's old faded, let-out, wedding dress was a sight to behold. I loved my Lula Mae darling,

(Young Rufus disappears.)

SCENE 18 — STRANGERS

(Another promenade #6 of another car that comes up and stops. The old men listen up as they are being asked a question by the driver.)

CHARLIE

What's that young man? ... No, no, no ... no beer around here. This here is a dry town, you couldn't get a cold beer here if your life depended on it ... if you keep on driving that a ways and down that dirt road you'll come up on a roadhouse and iffin' it is open one might partake of a cool one.

JOE

Partake? Mista Charlie you sure do talk highfalutin' when you talk about wanting a cold beer.

(We hear the car door slam and the car drives off.)

EUGENE

Who was that young man driving that car? Seems he was a bit light-skinned to be a chauffeur. Think I saw another guy in the back seat ...

RUFUS

Never seen them young men before ... sure hope that guy in the back seat ain't one of them Feds cause I already drank all that moonshine.

CHARLIE

So that young man's a stranger to these parts?

(Young Charlie appears.)

YOUNG CHARLIE

Sara marry me and let's get us a little farm and settle down ... have a brood of boys ... live out our lives rooted in the Alabama soil. You ... me... peanuts boys. We will be home.

CHARLIE

I am a s-s-stranger here myself, as they say ...

STRANGERS IS STRANGERS

CHARLIE

See that young man passing through
He's a stranger to these parts
Nothing he can say or do
He's a stranger from the start
Will always be a stranger in our hearts

Strangers is strangers
When away from home
Strangers is strangers
Wherever they roam
Coming to places
That aren't their own
Strangers are strangers
That's how they are known

Sett'ling in places
No matter how long
Strangers stay strangers
They never belong
Like that young man passing through
I'm a stranger in these parts
Nothing I can say or do
I'm a stranger from the start
Will always be a stranger in my heart

Strangers is strangers
When away from home
Strangers is strangers
Wherever they roam

Strangers is strangers
They're never at home

OCTET

YOUNG CHARLIE

Sara Sara Sara Sara

CHARLIE

Beautiful Sara

[Charlie *and* Young Charlie *repeat as ...*]

JOE

Some folks say that love can be a burden

YOUNG JOE

So delighted in the songs that I sung

JOE

Some folks say that love can be a burden

YOUNG JOE

So delighted in the songs that I sung

[Joe *and* Young Joe *and the Charlies repeat as ...*]

RUFUS

Let me tell you a story of

YOUNG RUFUS

Lula Mae and me

RUFUS

Let me tell you a story of

YOUNG RUFUS

Lula Mae and me

[Rufus *and* Young Rufus *and the Joes and the Charlies repeat as ...*]

EUGENE

Mama don't go a frettin'
Cause I am not the marrying kind
Mama don't go a frettin'
Cause I am not the marrying kind
Mama don't go a frettin'
Cause I am not the marrying kind
Mama don't go a frettin'
Cause I am not the marrying kind

YOUNG EUGENE

Mama I love you
Mama don't cry
Mama I love you
Mama don't cry
Mama I love you
Mama don't cry

CHARLIE/JOE/RUFUS/EUGENE

Love can be a burden

YC/YJ/YR/YE

Love

Love can lay you low

Love

YOUNG EUGENE

Never you mind, Mama. If I wanna go out walking all day, that's my business.

YOUNG JOE

I'm Joe. "T's my first time on a freight. Going to Clarksdale. Gonna play for W. C. Handy.

YOUNG EUGENE

No Mama, I haven't been crying. My eyes are red from the dust on the road, that's all.

(Lights fade on the young men and the scene changes back to the Feedstore.)

SCENE 19 — EUGENE'S PASSION

(Another car speeds past to the promenade #7.)

RUFUS

Who was that driving in that little blue car that just passed?

EUGENE

I think that was the banker's son.

RUFUS

I know it was the banker's son's car, but that warn't him driving.

CHARLIE

Oh-oh-oh, musta been that other fellow, you know the Banker's son's s-s-s-special friend.

EUGENE

What do you mean special friend?

CHARLIE

You know ... I hear they's s-s-s-sweet amongst the daisies,. S-s-s-s-s-s-some boys ...

RUFUS

SING IT CHARLIE!

(Young Eugene and Young Rufus appear throughout this song playing catch.)

SOME BOYS

CHARLIE

Some boys play ball
Some boys don't
Word is that some boys
are queer for each other
That the Bible calls sin

RUFUS

Wouldn't you say, Eugene?

YOUNG RUFUS

Come on, Eugene, don't drop the ball
 Come on, Eugene, just catch the ball
 Come on, Eugene, here, toss it like this
 Underhand, if you must
 Come on, Eugene for the love of
 Just put the glove
 In front of your chest like this

CHARLIE

Some boys chase girls
 Some boys don't
 Word is that some boys
 are queer for each other
 That the church condemns

YOUNG RUFUS

Well I'm asking Lula Mae
 Iffin' I can only get her away
 From that a-hole Albert
 For just a minute today

CHARLIE

Some boys like dancing
 Some boys don't
 Holding a girl up tight
 Ain't what some boys like

YOUNG RUFUS

Yessiree, Lula Mae and me
 Yes tonight dancing close and tight
 Never quit, it'll be the best
 With her tits against my chest
 Lula Mae will feel my passion
 way down there
 When there's nothing left between us,
 not even air

CHARLIE

Some boys play ball
 Some boys don't
 Word is that some boys
 are queer for each other
 That God won't condone

YOUNG EUGENE

I'm tryin' I'm tryin'
 I just ain't no good at catch
 I'm doin' I'm doin'
 Just like you say
 But me and ball playin' ain't no match

RUFUS

Wouldn't you say, Eugene?

YOUNG EUGENE

Mama says "Go to the Dance, Eugene"
 But she won't like being left alone
 at home. Besides
 I don't have a date and I will not be
 going on my own.

RUFUS

Some boys like dancing
 Some boys don't
 Holding a girl up tight
 Ain't what some boys like
 Wouldn't you say, Eugene?

YOUNG EUGENE

I know, Rufus
 You go, Rufus
 I think I will just stay home
 Rufus, don't talk dirty
 Not with Mama near

 God forbid she'd hear

RUFUS

Wouldn't you say, Eugene?

(The young Rufus and Eugene slowly fade upstage into the darkness.)

RUFUS

We have enough trouble with the coloreds in this town to have to deal with them daisy boys too. Ain't natural and it ain't right I say.

JOE

Now gents, tread lightly on those boys. They is God's work just like us. Just a bit more musical, that's all. Wouldn't you say Eugene?

(Joe hits a loud, quick chord from "Love Can Be A Burden" the music softens and is played as the tree set wagons downstage and we see the boys sitting there.)

SCENE 20 — THE BOYS UNDER THE TREE (PART 2, THE KISS)

JOEY

It's fun playing with you Gene.

GENE

Yeah, shore is better than playing by myself.

JOEY

I know plenty colored boys in the quarters, but none is my age.

GENE

... so you come all the way from the quarters just to play with me?

JOEY

I likes sitting here under this tree in the shade watchin' you whittle on that old stick.

GENE

Not much of a whittler, once I get the bark off the stick I just keep whittlin' till it ain't a stick no more.

JOEY

Maybe soon you might run outta sticks and have to cut this tree down and then we wouldn't have no tree to play under and no shade to sit ...

(Gene puts the stick down and reaches over and touches Joe's hair, Joe reacts.)

Why you touch me like that Gene.

GENE

Wanted to know how a colored boy feels like.

JOEY

We feels like other folks I'm a guessin'.

GENE

Wanna feel my hair? It feels different from yours.

JOEY

Don't know, never gave feeling white boys hair much thought.

GENE

Gimme a kiss Joey.

JOEY

Give you a kiss? Iffin I does, what you gonna *give* me back?

GENE

I'll let you play my squeezebox.

JOEY

Squeezebox? What's that? I don't see no squeezebox?

GENE

It's right here behind the tree. (*He reaches behind the tree and hands it to Joe, it's a small tattered instrument.*) I don't know how to play, I try but all I gets is a squeaking noise. Is you musical like they say colored folks are?

JOEY

I could learn myself to play one, if I had one.

GENE

Alls I want for it is a kiss, Joey. (*He gives the squeezebox to Joe.*)

JOEY

You shore they ain't no folks looking ... I ain't gonna kiss you if they is.

GENE

Nah, ain't nobody home around here but me.

JOEY

OK, but just one kiss.

GENE

That'll do. (*Gene grabs Joey and kisses him for what seems a very long time to Joey. The boys sit up, both leaning against the tree, Gene on one side and Joe on the other. Joey takes the squeezebox and begins to finger it; a tune evolves.*]

HE KISSES ME

GENE

I kissed me a colored boy
Named Joey
I kissed me a colored boy
Today

I kissed him
I did it
I kissed him
I kissed me a colored boy
Named Joey
I kissed me a colored boy
Today

I kissed him

I kissed him

(Young Eugene *and* Young Joe *appear*.)

YOUNG EUGENE
He kisses me
Far from the traveled path
Secluded in the half-
Light of the trees
He goes with me
Where no one else will go
Well hidden places no-
Body else sees

GENE
That's how
To do

I wish
We could

YOUNG EUGENE
He kisses me

JOEY
He kissed me
A white boy kissed me
Don't know what to feel
Or to say

He kissed me
A white boy kissed me
Don't know what to feel
Or to say

He kissed me

YOUNG JOE
He kisses me
Far from the traveled path
Secluded in the half-
Light of the trees
He goes with me
Where no one else will go
Well hidden places no-
Body else sees

JOEY
What now?
Where to?

I wish
He would

YOUNG JOE
He kisses me

Far from the traveled path
Secluded in the half-
Light of the trees
He goes with me
Where no one else will go
Well hidden places no-
Body else sees

I think of him
Alone in my room at night
Alone in my room
Where he's never been

He kisses me
Far from the traveled path
Secluded in the half-
Light of the trees

Far from the traveled path
Secluded in the half-
Light of the trees
He goes with me
Where no one else will go
Well hidden places no-
Body else sees

I think of him
Alone in my room at night
Alone in my room
Where he's never been

He kisses me
Far from the traveled path
Secluded in the half-
Light of the trees

YOUNG EUGENE and YOUNG JOE

He kisses me
He kisses me
He kisses me

He kisses me
He kisses me
He kisses me

(Gene and Joey disappear upstage. Young Joe and Young Eugene are alone, Joe is playing "Love Can Be a Burden" tune on the squeezebox.)

SCENE 21 — YOUNG JOE AND YOUNG GENE REVEAL THEIR FEELINGS

YOUNG JOE

Gene, there sure is magic in this tune.

YOUNG EUGENE

How do you mean Joey?

YOUNG JOE

It tells me something about how I feel ... about being here under this tree with you.

YOUNG EUGENE

Don't need no squeezebox music to tell me that. All I know is when you is here there is something that makes everything better.

YOUNG JOE

I know, but the music just makes it feel even better.

YOUNG EUGENE

I don't need nothing to make my feelings better, iffin' I did I just might explode. When I dream about you and me I don't know what to do ... I just go on dreaming. Here we sit under this cloudless sky, if someone was to walk down this road right now one of us would have to hide behind this tree.

YOUNG JOE

Hiding ain't agonna make it no better or no worse Gene.

YOUNG EUGENE

... oh, but how I do dream.

(The young men sit silently for a beat or two as a sunset turns the sky red as the tree set wagons back upstage.)

SCENE 22 — EUGENE THE BIGOT

(Back at the Feedstore the four old men, EUGENE has fallen asleep and snores loudly.)

JOE

Now Mista Rufus this hot Mississippi heat seems to have put Eugene ta snorning

RUFUS

Eugene, wake up before you catch more flies ...

EUGENE

Damn it to hell Rufus ... I was having myself a beautiful dream ...

RUFUS

About all them girls who was so sweet on you once upon a time?

(Glaring at Joe and changing the subject.)

Charlie you ever been over to the *nigger* quarters?

CHARLIE

Ever spring I go d-d-down and hires the *colored* p-p-preacher and his mule and a plow.

RUFUS

I stopped growing me a garden ... too much darn hard work ...

EUGENE

Seems to me they don't do nothing 'cept sit around all day and no telling what they do at night ... propagatin' more youngens.

CHARLIE

I'm a guessing just like we did when we were young, Eugene. Men are men, no matter what color they is.

EUGENE

Yeah, well you ain't never seen me lying around in the shade since I was a man. There hardly was a hole dug for a septic tank that I didn't roll up my sleeves and pitch in. I remember one day I left the job to check on some supplies and when I came back to the job that no-good nigger I hired was fast asleep under a big live oak. I took me a handful of salt from the saltshaker Mama put in my lunch box and snuck over to him and poured a little down his open mouth. He jumped up and screamed, 'lordy, lordy, Mr. Eugene you is done gone and poisoned (*pronounced pie-send*) me," so I told him to get his sorry ass off my job and that if he spent his nights sleeping instead of whatever it was he was doing he might be able to stay awake long enough to earn a living for all them youngens that was running around his tarpaper shack.

RUFUS

(*Looking over at Joe.*) Now Eugene I do believe you is being just a bit too harsh on this subject ...

CHARLIE

Face it Eugene, our time has just about come and gone ... it is the young folks that's gotta deal with the troubles we are handing them ...

JOE

Days go by, years go by, some things change, but most things seems to stand still here in Mississippi ...

EUGENE

Well, things may be changing, but I ain't gotta like it ...

MORE LIKE US

EUGENE

Why can't the whole world be more like us
Instead of fiddlin' and fartin' and all that fuss
All them commin's and goin's and partin' the waves
Just be good people in all their ways

JOE

It would be iffing you would just give it a try

EUGENE

Lazy bums everywhere
Sittin' on their derriere

CHARLIE

Greasy boys on the dole
Shockin' with their rock 'n' roll

RUFUS

Yankee scum makin' rules

Tryin' to make us out as fools

EUGENE

Changin' times, changin' ways
Bring about no better days

EUGENE/CHARLIE/RUFUS

Why can't the whole world be more like us
Instead of fiddlin' and fartin' and all that fuss
All them commin's and goin's and partin' the waves
Just be good people in all their ways

JOE

It would be iff'n' you would just give it a try
You would be amazed

EUGENE/CHARLIE/RUFUS

Why can't the whole world be more like us
Why can't the whole world be more like us

A DUSTY ROAD

JOE

A dusty road
A live oak tree
A world away
In blades of grass
Where young boys play

The tree stands tall
And boys will grow
Becoming men
And time will pass
And that was then

The dusty road
The live oak tree
It still stands tall
In blades of grass
I still recall

(None of the old white men seem to pay any attention to Joe and his song.)

(Once again the three old men settle back into their rockers.)

SCENE 23 — CHARLIE'S LAMENT

CHARLIE

(As the following speech progresses CHARLIE begins to show anger and it builds to the song.)

Now boys we all got our s-s-stories; Rufus you got your brood of kids and grandkids, and you, Eugene, you got your M-m-m-mama even if you did put her in the old folks h-h-home. All I got is, well, it's like this, I'm a s-s-stranger here in these parts. My home is back in Alabama and that's where I belong ... not here ... not s-s-sitting in front of this feed store ... not living in M-m-m-ississippi ... this damned s-s-s-studder is driving me mad! N-n-never s-s-studded before my Sara left me and they took me away to live here ...

LIVING A LIE

CHARLIE

Living here is like living a lie
Sitting tight while the mem'ries fly by
Telling tales while I chuckle or cry
Passing time till I dry up and die

I am just a-passing through
At this late time of my life
Don't belong, just passing through
Far removed from home and wife
Strangers is strangers
All that's left to me
Strangers is strangers
All I'll ever be

Living here is like living a lie
Sitting tight while the mem'ries fly by
Telling tales while we chuckle or cry
Passing time till we dry up and die

(Rufus interrupts...)

RUFUS

Charlie you is no stranger here, you live here in this here Mississippi town. You is as much a part of this town as me and Eugene. We live here and we sure as snuff is gonna' die here, you can take me for my word.

CHARLIE

Na-na-not me boys. These old bones are going back to Alabama one of these days and I'm gonna be buried next to my Sara after I die.

EUGENE

Well, I ain't never been out of this town. Never had no desire to. Guess Mama will die in the old folks home and my turn will be next. Got us a plot over at Greenwoods Cemetery

just under an old live oak tree all hung with moss, keeping it peaceful. Guess that's what dead folks need ... peace. Lived my youth under a live oak tree ...

(We hear a bit of Dusty Road played slowly.)

JOE

A live oak tree ... hung with moss ...

(With that the feedstore wagons upstage as the tree set wagons downstage.)

SCENE 24 — YOUNG EUGENE AND YOUNG JOE PART

(Young Eugene is sitting under the tree whittling as Young Joe approaches carrying a small battered cardboard suitcase with his squeezebox tied to it.)

YOUNG JOE

What you whittling the day away with today Gene?

YOUNG EUGENE

Nothing special. *(He looks up at Young Joe.)* What's that you got there Joey, you can't be thinking of hopping a freight ... you know there ain't been no train on those *(he pauses)* ... or are you just moving and looking for a place to live on this side of the tracks ... oh, no Joe, you can't live here with me ... you thinking about moving in with me Joe? Nobody around here won't allow that.

YOUNG JOE

Nope, not planning on living with you Gene and I surely ain't looking to live amongst white folks. No Gene, just takin' my leave.

YOUNG EUGENE

Your leave? What you mean?

YOUNG JOE

Taking my squeezebox and going north Gene. Like I's been telling you, ain't no place for me around here ... the quarters are full of young men like me just sitting around doing nothing and a waiting ... waiting for what I don't know ... so I gotta make my own way.

YOUNG EUGENE

Oh, Joey, don't go.

YOUNG JOE

Gotta go, Gene, you know I gotta go. I heard about that great Negro musician, a Mr. Handy, up yonder in Clarksdale and I aims to meet him and play my squeezebox for him.

YOUNG EUGENE

Aw Joey, stay with me. We can figure out a way for you to play your squeezebox here Joey. There must be a way for you and me to be together. Stay, Joey, stay.

JOE'S FAREWELL

YOUNG JOE

I gotta be now
What I's gotta be
I gotta see how
I'm a gonna be
I gotta be free Gene
Let me be free Gene
I gotta go now
Get me on that freight
I gotta see how
Before it's too late
I gotta be free Gene
Let me be free Gene

YOUNG EUGENE

Don't go away
No Joe don't leave today
Stay just a little longer
Please just stay
You mustn't go
No Joe now don't you know
That nothing good can follow if you go

It ain't no good loving
If you have to hide behind a tree
Loving ain't loving
If your love's got no place it can be
Loving you is too uncertain Gene
Loving you behind a curtain Gene
Loving you is my burden Gene

Don't go away
No Joe don't leave today
Stay just a little longer
Please just stay
You mustn't go
No Joe now don't you know
That nothing good can follow if you go

I gotta go
I cannot wait
No more longer
I can't stay
Just let me go
You know today
Or tomorrow I would go

Don't tell me 'bout loving
If you're gonna hop a train and fly
Loving ain't loving
If your love is only by and by
Loving you is too uncertain Joey
Loving you behind a curtain Joey
Loving you is my burden Joey

Our love is forbidden

Where we're livin'
It's time that we give in
Face my leavin'
You know that it's so
It's time to let go.

YOUNG EUGENE

But Joe I don't want to let go ... I want you to stay Joe ...

YOUNG JOE

Gene, living among white folks ... or living with you ... ain't no place for a colored boy like me. I gotta go find my life away from this town. Can't hide behind your tree forever, Gene. I'm heading north, maybe as far as Memphis or maybe all the way up there in Harlem.

I gotta be now
What I's gotta be
I gotta see how
I'm a gonna be
I gotta be free Gene
Let me be free Gene

It ain't no good loving
If you have to hide behind a tree
Loving ain't loving
If your love's got no place it can be
Loving you is too uncertain Joey
Loving you behind a curtain Joey
Loving you is my burden Joey

Our love is forbidden

It's time that we give in

Go then Joe just go
What you waiting for
Go now you must know
That you're nothing more
Than a useless boy
Like some used up toy
Just another stupid nigger

Go now Joe just go
Go now Joe just go

It ain't no good loving
If you have to hide behind a tree
Loving ain't loving
If your love's got no place it can be
Loving you is to uncertain Gene
Loving you behind a curtain Gene
Loving you is my burden Gene
Our love is forbidden
Where we're livin'
It's time that we give in
Face my leavin'
You know that it's so
It's time to let go.

(They stare at each other in stunned silence. Young Joe slowly turns and leaves. The tree disappears and the lights on the feed store comes up on the three old men.)

SCENE 25 — THE DAY ENDS

A DUSTY ROAD REPRISE

(The four old men seem to be lost in quiet reverie.)

ALL FOUR (at first humming):

Mmmmm

The tree stands tall
And boys will grow
Becoming men
And time will pass
And that was then

Mmmmmm

The tree stands tall
In blades of grass
I still recall

(The old men settle down in silence.)

RUFUS

Well, guess I better be getting my shopping done afore the store closes and head out for the house. It'll be dark before you know it and them grand youngens of mine will be awaiting to see what I brung 'em. *(He gets up and enters the feedstore. Charlie and JOE acknowledges Rufus as he leaves.)*

CHARLIE

See you tomorrow morning at church Rufus. I believe it is dinner on the ground day. Well Eugene, I-I-I better g-g-get home myself. Play me out Joe.

(Joe hits a chord or two of a hoe down as Charlie gets up, knocks the burnt tobacco from his pipe, puts it in his pocket, straightens his tie, dusts off his pants, puts his hat on and tips it to Joe and then to Eugene, he then flips another coin into Joe's tin cup and exits. Eugene and Joe are alone on stage in silence.)

EUGENE

Well guess I better go visit Mama out at the old folks home. She expects me every day and if I don't go it will be hell to pay tomorrow. Guess that's why folks call me a Mama's boy ... well ... later it is just me and the television set ... whatever.

(He gets up to leave, reaches for his crutch and takes it from the barrel.)

JOE

Been a nice Sat'dee, warn't it Gene.

EUGENE

You know, Joey...

JOE

Yes, Gene?

EUGENE

... mmm. See you next Saturdee...

JOE

See you Saturdee...

(Eugene hobbles halfway off stage, stops, turns and looks at JOE, then he slowly leaves the stage.)

SCENE 27 — LOVE IS A BURDEN FINALE

JOE

Well folks, that's how it is here in Mississippi. The old south, you might say ... but I ain't sad. I just looks for the day when I will be drinking from that glorious fountain up there *(he points to the heavens)* ... where love will be no burden, no more. *(He begins to play once more.)*

JOE

Love can be a burden,
Love can lay you low
Love is what you make it
You give it and you take it
You cry in joy and woe.

(Eugene reappears.)

JOE/EUGENE

Stay in your four corners
Travel in your mind
Love can be elusive
Or welcome or intrusive
A comfort or unkind

(The rest of the cast returns to the stage.)

JOE/CHARLIE/RUFUS/EUGENE

Love can be unfinished
Love can be diminished
Love can make you mourn

**JOEY/GENE/YOUNG JOE
YOUNG CHARLIE/YOUNG
RUFUS/YOUNG EUGENE**
(Humming)

More than can be born
Love will rob your sleep
Will make you weep
Feeling so careless and cheap
Love will leave you in a withering heap

ENTIRE CAST

Love can be a burden
Love can lay you low
Love is what you make it
You give it and you take it
You cry in joy and woe

Love, I'll take your burden
I will be your toy
Love, I'll let you take me
To heal me or break me
I cry sweet tears of joy

Love, Give me your burden
I will hold you dear
Love, Teach me to give it
To hold it and live it
My love is always near
Love is always near
Love is always near.

(Lights fade, black out.)

