

Three Plays eBook

Three Plays by Zora Neale Hurston

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Contents

Three Plays eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Page 1.....	4
Page 2.....	6
Page 3.....	8
Page 4.....	10
Page 5.....	12
Page 6.....	14
Page 7.....	16
Page 8.....	18
Page 9.....	20
Page 10.....	22
Page 11.....	24
Page 12.....	26

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
Author: Zora Neale Hurston		1
THREE PLAYS		1
LAWING AND JAWING		1
TIME: Present		1
TIME: Present		5
Lincoln Mob		5
CURTAIN		6

Page 1

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THREE PLAYS

Lawing and Jawing

Forty Yards

Woofing

by

Zora Neale Hurston



LAWING AND JAWING

by Zora [Handwritten: (Neale)] Hurston

TIME: Present

Place: Way cross Georgia

Scene: Judge Dunfummy's Court.

Persons: Judge Dunfummy, Officer Simpson and another, Jemima Flapcakes, Cliff Mullins, John Barnes, two lawyers, a clerk, a pretty girl and her escort.

Setting: Usual court-room arrangement, except that there is a large red arrow pointing off-stage left, marked "To Jail."

Action: At rise everybody is in place except the Judge. Suddenly the *clerk* looks off-stage right and motions for everybody to rise. Enter the *Judge*. He wears a black cap and gown and has his gavel in his hand. The two *policemen* walk behind him holding up his gown. He mounts the bench and glares all about him before he seats

Page 2

himself. There is a *pretty girl* in the front row
left, and he takes a good look at her, smiles, frowns
at her escort. He motions the police to leave him and
take their places with the spectators and he then raps
vigorously with his gavel for order.

Judge

Hear! Hear! Court is set! My honor is on de bench. You moufy folks set
up!

(He glares at the boy with the pretty girl)

All right, Mr. Whistle-britches, just keep up dat jawing now and see
how much time I'll give you!

Boy

I wasn't talking, your honor.

Judge

Well, quit looking so moufy.

(to clerk)

Call de first case. And I warn each and all dat my honor is in bad
humor dis mawnin'. I'd give a canary bird twenty years for peckin'
at a elephant.

(to clerk)

Bring 'em on.

Clerk

(Reading)

Cliff Mullins, charged with assault upon his wife with a weapon and
disturbing the peace.

(As *Cliff* is led to the bar by the
officer, the *Judge* glares ferociously
at the prisoner. His wife, all
bandages, limps up to the bar at the
same time.)

Judge So youse one of dese hard-boiled wife-beaters, huh? Just a mean old woman-
Jessie! If I don't lay a hearing on you, God's a gopher! Now what *made* you cut such a
caper?

Cliff

Judge, I didn't go hunt her. Saturday night I was down on Dearborn



Street in a nasty ditch [*Handwritten: nasty ditch crossed out in pencil, (buffet flat)*]
—

Judge

A nasty ditch? [*Handwritten: A nasty ditch crossed out in pencil, (Buffet flat)*]

Cliff

Aw, at Emma Hayles' house.

Judge

Oh, yes. Go on.

Cliff

Well,

(Points thumb at wife)

she come down dere and claim I took her money and she claimed I wuz spending it on Emma.

Cliff's wife

And dat's just whut he was doing, too, Judge.

Cliff

Aw, she's tellin' a great big ole Georgia lie, Judge. I wasn't spendin' no money of her'n.

Woman Yes he was, Judge. There wasn't no money for him to git *but* mine. He ain't hit a lick of work since God been to Macon. Know whut he 'lowed when I worry him 'bout workin'? Says he wouldn't take a job wid de Careless Love Lumber Company, puttin' out whut make you do me lak you do, do, do.

Judge

So, you goes for a sweet-back, do you?

Cliff

Naw suh, Judge. I'd be glad to work if I could find a job.



Page 3

Judge

How long you been outa work?

Cliff

Seventeen years—

Judge

Seventeen years?

(to woman)

You been takin' keer of dis man for seventeen years?

Woman

Naw, but he been so mean to me, it seems lak seventeen years.

Judge

Now you tell me just where he hurt you.

Woman

Judge, tell you de truth, I'm hurt all over.

(Rubs her buttocks)

Fact is I'm cut.

Judge

Did you git cut in de fracas?

Woman

(feeling the back of her left thigh
below her buttocks)

Not in de fracas, Judge—just below it.

(She starts to show the *Judge* where
she has been cut. He motions to stop
her.)

Judge

Stop!

(to Officer Simpson)

Grab him. Put him in de shade.

Cliff

Judge, I'm unguilty! I ain't laid de weight of my hand on her in malice.

You got me 'cused of murder and I ain't harmed a child.

Judge

Lemme ast *you* something. Didn't you know dat all de women in dis town



belongs to me? Beat my women and I'll stuff you in jail. 90 years. Take 'im away.

(*Cliff* is led off to jail. *Judge* looks angrily at the boy who is holding hands with the pretty girl)

You runs me hot and I'm just dyin' to sit on yo' case. Whut you in here for?

Boy
Nothin'.

Judge
Well, whut you doin' in my court, you gater-faced rascal?

Boy
My girl wanted to see whut was goin' on, so I brought her in.

Judge
Oh yeah!

(Smiles at *girl*)

She was usin' good sense to come see whut I'm doin', but how come *you* come in here? You gointer have a hard time gittin' out.

Boy
I ain't done a thing. I ain't never done nothin'. I'm just as clean as a fish, and he been bathin' all his life.

Judge
You ain't done nothin', hunh? Well den youse guilty of vacancy. Grab 'im, Simpson, and search 'im—and if he got any concealed weapons, I'm gointer give 'im life-time and eight years mo'.

(The *officer* seizes the boy and frisks him. All he finds is a new deck of cards. The *Judge* looks at them in triumph.)

Unh hunh! I knowed it, one of dese skin game jelly-beans. Robbin' hard workin' men out they money.



Page 4

Boy

Judge, I ain't used 'em at all. See, dey's brand new.

Judge Well, den youse charged wid totin' concealed cards and attempt to gamble. Ten years at hard labor. Put him in de dark, Simpson, and throw de key away.

(He looks at the girl and beams.)

Don't you worry bout how you gointer git home. You gointer be took home right, 'cause I'm gointer take you myself. Bring on de next one, clerk.

Clerk

Jemima Flap-Cakes, charged with illegal possession and sale of alcoholic liquors.

Judge

(She is a fat, black, belligerent looking woman. *Judge* looks coldly at her.)

Well, you heard whut he said. Is you guilty or unguilty? And I'm tellin' you right now dat you come up befo' *me* it's just like youse in church. You better have a strong determination, and you better tell a good experience.

Jemima

(Arms akimbo)

Yes, I sold it and I'll sell it again.

(snaps fingers and shakes hips)

How does ole booze-selling mama talk?

Judge

Yes, five thousand dollars and ten years in jail.

(Snaps fingers and shakes hips)

How does ole heavy fining papa talk?

(She is led away, shouting and weeping)

Clerk

De Otis Blunt, charged wid stealin' a mule.

(*Lawyer* arises and comes forward with the prisoner)

Lawyer

You can't convict this man. I'm here to represent him.



Judge

Yo' mouf might spout lak a coffee pot but I got a lawyer

(Looks at other lawyer)

dat kin beat your segastuatin'.

(Looks admiring at girl)

How am I chewin' my dictionary and minglin' my alphabets?

Lawyer

Well, I kin try, can't I?

Judge

Oh yeah, you kin try, but I kin see right now where he's gointer git all de time dat God ever made dat ain't been used already. From now on.

(To *lawyer*)

Go 'head, and spread yo' lungs all over Georgy, but he's goin' to jail!

Mules *must* be respected.

LAWYER

(Striking a pose at the bar)

Your Honor,

(Looks at the pretty girl)

Ladies and Gentlemen—

JUDGE

Never mind 'bout dat lady. You talk yo' chat to *me*.

LAWYER

This is a clear case of syllogism! Again I say syllogism. My client is innocent because it was a dark night when they say he stole the mule and that's against all laws of syllogism.

(JUDGE looks impressed and laughs)

Page 5

JUDGE

Dat ole fool do know somethin' 'bout law.

LAWYER

When George Washington was pleading de case of Marbury vs. Madison, what did *he* say? What *did* he say? Scintillate, scintillate, Globule orific. Fain would I fathom thy nature's specific. Loftily poised in ether capacious, strongly resembling a gem carbonaceous. What did Abraham Lincoln say about mule-stealing? When torrid Phoebut refuses his presence and ceases to lamp with fierce incandescence, then you illumine the regions supernal, scintillate, scintillate, semper nocturnal. Syllogism, again I say syllogism.

(He takes his seat amid applause)

JUDGE

Man, youse a pleadin' fool. You knows yo' rules and by-laws.

OTHER LAWYER

Let me show my glory. Let me spread my habeas corpus.

JUDGE

'Tain't no use. Dis lawyer done convinced me.

OTHER LAWYER

But, lemme parade my material—

JUDGE

Parade yo' material anywhere you wants to exceptin' befo' me. Dis lil girl wants to go home and I'm goin' with her and enjoy de consequences. Court's adjourned.

CURTAIN

"FORTY YARDS"

by

ZORA [*Handwritten: (Neale)*] HURSTON

"FORTY YARDS"

(A Negro football game with the popular concept of Negro life)



TIME: Present

PLACE: Washington, D.C.

SCENE: The Ball Park

PERSONS: The Howard and Lincoln teams, the Howard band, cheer leaders, spectators.

SETTING: The park with grandstands on either sides and up-stage.

ACTION: At rise, the grandstands are full, the cheer leaders are violently gyrating to whip up the mob. The Lincoln colors fly from the right. The Howard from the left. Both have cheer leaders. First is heard the Lincoln mob singing "DIDN'T HE RAMBLE, RAMBLE."

Lincoln Mob

And didn't he ramble, ramble, ramble all around, in and out of town
He rambled, he rambled, rambled till Ol' Lincoln cut him down

Howard Mob

There'll be nothing but sweetmeats, for our football team
There'll be nothing but sweetmeats for our football team
Baked Hampton, boiled Shaw, fried Union, Lincoln Slaw,
There'll be nothing but sweetmeats, for our football team.

(Enter the HOWARD BAND, led by a hot-strutting drum major. They parade the field and the men students pile down and fall in behind the team. They sing and shout to the TEAM SONG:)

This is the t-e-a-m team
On which the hopes of Howard lean
Beat Ol' Hampton, beat Ol' Union
Sweep Ol' Lincoln clean



Page 6

We are the b-e-s-t best
Of the r-e-s-t rest
Come and watch us put Ol' Howard
On top of Lincoln's chest.

We'll hit the l-i-n-e line
For a hundred ninety-nine
For we love Ol' Howard, yes we love her
All the t-i-m-e time.

(At the conclusion the teams takes the field. The ball is put into play and LINCOLN kicks off to Howard. As the ball is caught and when the player who is carrying the ball plunges, followed by his team, the Lincoln players fall on their knees and begin to sing I COULDN'T HEAR NOBODY PRAY. The HOWARD team charges down shouting Joshua fit de battle of Jericho. Whenever a player is tackled there is a duet of dancing. Every step is a dance. Finally the grandstand catches fire and the dancing and the shouting runs riot up there. When the ball is on Lincoln's ten-yard line, they hold Howard there by rounding up both teams into a huddle and the bunch-shout and sing to a QUICK CURTAIN.)

CURTAIN

LINCOLN'S PRAYER:

Ah, ah, they shall not ah pass us
Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord
They shall not pass us, Ah-h-h-h.

[Handwritten (Jul. 21, 1931)]

"WOOFING"

By

ZORA **[Handwritten (Neale)]* HURSTON

"WOOFING"

TIME: Present.

PLACE: Negro Street in Waycross, Ga.

PERSONS: Loungers, two children, guitar
players, women, band—



SETTING: Porch and side walk, *etc.*

ACTION: Thru the open window of 'one' of the shacks a WOMAN is discovered ironing. A MAN is sitting on the floor of the porch asleep. She hums a bar or two, then comes to the window and calls to the man.

Woman Good Black, why don't you git up from dere and carry dese white folks clothes home? You always want money but you wouldn't hit a lick at a snake!

Man

Aw, shut up woman. I'm tired of hearin' bout dem white folks clothes. I don't keer if dey never git 'em.

Woman

You better keer! Dese very clothes took and brought *you* out de crack. 'Cause de first time I saw you you was so hungry till you was walkin' lap-legged. Man, you had de white-mouf, you was so hungry.

(Enter another MAN leisurely. Good Black sees him and calls)

Good Black

Hey, Cliffert, where you headed for?

Cliffert

Oh, no where in particular.

Good Black

Come here then, fish, and lemme bend a checker game over yo' head. Come on, youse my fish.

Cliffert

(Comes to the porch and sits)

Git de checkers and I'll have you any, some or none. I push a mean chuck-a-luck myself.

Woman

(Voice inside quarreling)

Dress up and strut around! Yes! Play checkers? Yes! Eat? Yes! Work? No!!

Page 7

(The game starts. A period of silence in which they indicate their concentration by frowns, cautious moves, head scratching. GOOD BLACK is pointing his index finger over the board indicating moves. He wig-wags, starts to move, scratches his head thoroughly, changes his mind and fools around without moving)

Cliffert

Police! Police! Come here and make dis man move!

Good Black

Aw, I got plenty moves.

(Scratches his head)

Jus' tryin' to see which one I want to make. But when I do move, it's gointer be just too bad for you.

(A guitar is heard off stage and
Cliffert brightens. He cups his hand
and calls)

Cliffert

Hey Lonnie! Come here! Ha, ha, ha! I got me a fish.

(Enter LONNIE picking "East Coast" on
his box and stands watching the game.
He ceases to play as he stops walking)

Ha, ha! You see ol' Good Black goes for a hard guy. He tries to know more than a mule and a mule's head longer'n his'n. Ha, ha! I set a trap for him and he fell right in it. Trying to ride de britches! Now look at him.

Good Black

Aw, shut up! You tryin' to show yo' grandma how to milk ducks. You can't beat me playin' no checkers.

(Scratches his head again)

Just watch me show my glory.

Woman

(Leans out of window)

Good Black! When you gointer come git dese clothes!

(He does not answer, he is trying to
concentrate)

Lonnie

You got him Cliffert. You got him in Louisville Loop. He's yo' fish all right.



Cliffert

(Boastfully)

Man, didn't I push a mean chuck-a-luck dat time! I'm good, better, and best. Move, Man!

(To Good Black)

I tole you not to do it.

Good Black

All dat noise ain't playin' checkers. You just wait till I make my move.

Woman All right, now, Mr. Nappy-Chin! I don't want to have to call you no mo' to come keer dese white folks clothes! I'm tired of takin' and takin' affa you! My belly's full clear up to de neck. I don't need no lazy coon lak you nohow. I'm a good woman, and I needs somebody dats gointer give aid and assistance.

Good Black,

Aw, go head on', woman, and leave me be! Every Saturday it's de same thing! Yo' mouth exhausting like a automobile. You worse than "cryin' Emma". You kin whoop like de Seaboard and squall lak de Coast Line.

(Taps his head)

You ain't go all dat b'long to *you*, and nothin' dat b'long to nobody's else. You better leave me 'lone before you make a bad man out of me. Fool wid me and I'll go git me somebody else. I'm a much-right man.



Page 8

Woman Now you ain't no much right man neither. You didn't *git me* wid no saw-mill license—You went to de court house and paid a dollar and a half for me. Tain't no other woman got as much right to you as I got. De Man to tell you youse divorced befo' yo' kin play dat much-right on me!

Good Black

De Man don't have to tell me nothin'! I got divorce in my heels.

Woman You ain't de only one dat knows where de railroad track is, I done made up my mind, and I done promised Gabriel and a couple of other men dat if yo' don't do no better than yo' been doin', I'm gointer pack me a suit case and grab de first smoky thing I see. I'll be long gone.

Good Black

Aw, yo' ain't no trouble! Yo' can be had. Yo' ain't never gointer leave me.

Woman

How come I won't? Just 'cause I been takin' keer of yo', don't make a park ape out yo'self. I'll leave yo', just as sure as yo' snore!

Good Black

(Rises and hitches up his trousers)

Aw, yo' ain't gointer leave me, and if yo' go, yo' wouldn't stay, 'cause I'm a damn sweet man, and yo' know it!

Lonnie

Hey, Hey!

(He begins to pick and Good Black sings. Lonnie sings a line now and then)

Good Black

Yo' may leave and go to Hali-muh-fack
But my slow drag will—uh bring yo' back
Well yo' may go, but this will bring yo' back

I been in de country but I moved to town
I'm a tolo-shaker from my head on down
Well, yo' may go, but this will bring yo' back

Some folks call me a tolo-shaker
It's a doggone lie I'm a back-bone breaker
Well, yo' may go, but this will bring yo' back.



Oh, ship on de sea, boat on de ocean
I raise hell when I take a notion
Well, yo' may go, but this will bring yo' back.

Oh, who do, who do, who do wackin'
Wid my hells a' poppin' and my toe-nails crackin'
Well, yo' may go, but this will bring yo' back.

Woman Dat's all right too, pap but if yo' can't make me tote dese clothes home, don't
bring de mess up. Yo'se abstificaly a humbug.

Cliffert

Man, come on back here and move, or else own up to de folks yo' can't
push no checkers wid me.

(He sits and begins to lay out moves
with his fingers and scratch his head.
Enter another MAN and stands akimbo
looking over Cliff's shoulder)

Cliff

(Looking up)

Don't stand over me lak dat, ugly as yo' is.

Man (Skanko)

You ain't nobody's pretty baby yo'self!

Cliff

Dat's all right, I ain't as ugly as yo'—youse ugly enough to git behind
a Simpoon weed and hatch monkees.

Page 9

Man (Skanko)

And youse ugly enough to git behind a tombstone and hatch hants.

Cliff

Youse so ugly dey have to cover yo' face up at night so sleep can slip up on yo'.

Man (Skanko)

You look like ten cents worth of Have-Mercy. Yo' face look lak ole Uncle Jump-off. Yo' mouth look lak a bunch of ruffles.

Cliff

Yeah, but yo' done passed me. Yo' so ugly till they could throw yo' in de Mississippi River and skim ugly for six months.

Man (Skanko)

Look here, Cliff, don't yo' personate me! Counting from de little finger back to de thumb—yo' start anythin', I go yo' some.

Cliff Go head and grab me buddie, but if yo' don't know how to turn me loose too, don't bring de mess up! If yo' hit me, I may not beat you, but yo'll be so dirty when St. Peter git yo' dat he can't use yo'.

Man (Skanko)

Don't call *me* buddy. Yo' buddy is huntin' coconuts. Don't yo' try to throw me for a nap. Do. I'll kill yo' so stiff dead they'll have to push yo' down. Yo' gointer to make me do some double cussin' on you.

(He picks up a heavy stick and walks
back towards Cliff)

Now I got dis farmer's choice in my hands, yo' better git outa my face.

Cliff

Yo' wanta fight?

Man

Yeah I wanta fight. Put it where I kin use it and I'll sho' use it. I'll fight anybody. I get so hot sometimes I fights de corner of de house. I'm so hot I totes a pistol to keep from gettin' in a fight wid myself. I prints dangerous every time I sit down in, in a chair.

Cliff Man, this ain't no fighting weather. Ha, ha, ha! Did yo' think I was mad sho' nuff? Yo' can't fight me. They's got to be runnin' before fightin' and they's got to be plenty *good* runnin' before dis fight comes off.



Man

All right now. Yo' leave me alone and I'm a *good* man. I'm just like an old shoe. If yo' rain on me and cool me off I'm soft! If yo' shine on me and git me hot, I'm hard.

(He drops the stick and exits)

(Cliff is shaking all over. He looks after the Man to be sure he is gone)

Good Black

Kah, kah, kah. Whut yo' so scarred about? De way yo' was talkin' I though yo' was mad enough to fight.

Cliff

I was. I gits hot real quick! But I'm very easy cooled when de man I'm mad wid is bigger'n me.

(He drops into his seat, wiping his face)

Man did yo' see how he grabbed up dat check? He done skeered me into a three-week's spasm!

Good Black's Wife

Good Black, dese clothes is still waiting.

Good Black

Well, let 'em wait on, I done tole yo' once. Yo' kind run yo' mouf but yo' can't run my business.

(Enter a PRETTY GIRL. She strolls happily across without stopping. Good Black pretends to cough)



Page 10

Good Black
Who is dat?

Girl
(Turns and glares at him)
My old man got something for dat cough yo' got.

Cliff
Dat's right, tell dese old mullet hear married men to mind they own
business. Now, take *me* for instance. I'm a much-right man.
(Gets up and approaches her
flirtatiously)
I didn't quite git yo' name straight. Yo' better tell it to me again.

Girl
My name is Bee Ethel, turned round to Jones.

Cliff
(Flirtatiously)
Yo' pretty lil ole ground angel yo'? Where did yo' come from?

Bee Ethel
Detroit. Yo' like me?

Cliff
Do I lak yo'? I love yo' just lak God loves Gabriel, and dat's his best
angel. Go 'head and say somethin'. I jus' love to hear yo' talk.

Bee Ethel
Gimme five dollars. I need some stockings.

Cliff
Now Mama, dis ain't Gimme, Ga. Dis is Waycross. I'm just lak de
cemetery. I takes in but never no put out. I ain't puttin' out nothin'
but old folks eyes—and I don't do that till they's dead. Run
long, mama.

(The girl exits and he resumes his
seat)

Cliff
Come on, Good Black, lemme wrap dis checker roun yo' neck.

Good Black
Gimme time, gimme time! Don't try to rush me.



(He begins same business of figuring out moves and scratching his head)

(Enter two or three girls and fellows.
The girls are dressed in cool summer dresses, but nothing elaborate)

Lonnie

I know I'm gointer play something now.

(He tunes and plays "Cold Rainy Day".
He begins to sing and the others join in. Not all. But all start to dancing.
They couple off as far as possible and Lindy. The men unmated do hot solo steps. The men cry out in ecstasy)

1. Shimmy! If you can't shimmy, shake your head.
2. Look, baby, look! Throw it in de alley
3. Look, if you can't look, stick out, and if you can't stick out, git out.

(At the end of the son and dance, one of the girls exclaim)

Girl

Aw, we got to go. Mama's looking for us.

(The three girls exit, walking happily. The men watch them go)

Cliff

Oh boy, look at 'em! Switching it and looking back at it.

(He imitates the girl's walk)

Good Black

Yeah Lawd, ain't they specifyin'! They handles a lot of traffic.

Page 11

Cliff

(Seating himself again)

Yeah, but dat don't play no checkers. Come on here, Good Black and lemme finish wearing your ant.

Good Black's Wife

Good Black, yo' better come git dese clothes.

Lonnie

Good Black, yo' wife kin cold whoop for what she want.

Good Black

Yeah and if she don't git, she keep right on whoopin'. B'lieve I wants a drink of water. Wisht I knowed where I could slip up on me a drink.

Cliff

Aw man, come on back here and move. Yo' doin' everythin' but playin' checkers. You'd ruther move a mountain wid a pry bar than to move

(Points)

dat man.

Good Black

(Seats himself)

Lemme hurry up and beat dis game befo' yo' bust yo' britches.

(He wags his finger to indicate moves, scratches his head, but doesn't move.

Several men enter and group around the players. All offer suggestions. One

says, "you got him Cliffert. He's

locked up just as tight as a keyhole".

Another: "Aw, man he kin break out!"

Another: "Yeah, but it'll cost him plenty to git out of dat trap".)

Cliff

Police! Police! He won't move!

Another Voice

Aw, leave go de checkers and less shoot some crap.

(Enter a WOMAN in a house dress, head rag on, run down house shoes. She goes to the edge of the porch and calls inside)



Woman

Him there Bertha, what yo' doin'.

Woman Inside

Still bumpin' de white folks clothes—hittin' for de sundown man. Come on in and have some sit down.

Outside Woman

Ain't got time. Got a house full of company. I took a minute to see if yo' could let me have a little skeeting garret.

Inside Woman

How come yo' didn't git yo'self some snuff whilst yo' was at de store? De man ast yo' what else. I ain't no Piggly Wiggly. Reckon I kin spare yo' a dip tho.

(She hands out the box and the outside woman fills her lip and hands it back)

Outside Woman

Much obliged, I thank yo'. Reckon I better heel and toe it on back, to see how de comp'ny is makin' out.

Inside Woman

Step inside a minute I want to put a bug in yo' ear.

(She makes an urgent gesture and the other woman goes inside)

Page 12

(Lonnie is sitting off to himself and picking “Rabbit on de Log” softly. A small BOY dashes on with a lolly pop in his hand. He is licking it and laughing. He is pursued by a little GIRL yelling “you gimme my all day sucker! Johnny! You gimme my candy, now!” They run all over the stage. The men take notice of them and one of them seizes the boy and restores the candy to the girl. She pokes out her tongue at the boy and says “goody, goody, goody, goody, goody!” She notes the guitar playing and begins to dance. The boy makes faces back at her and dances back at her. The music gets louder, dancing faster, check board gets upset. General laughter at that. When dance is over, boy snatches the lolly pop again and races away and the girl runs behind him yelling “Johnny! You gimme my candy! Johnny!” The music stops and the crap game gets under way. Furious side bets for 5 and 10 cents each. Loud calls on Miss “Daisy Dice”, snake eyes, “Ada from Decatur”. Somebody suggests a soft roll, others object on the ground that it’s too easy for the experts to cheat)

Good Black
Gimme de dice! I’m gointer play ’em like John Henry.

Lonnie
John Henry didn’t bother wid de bones. He used to play Georgy Skin.

Good Black He shot crap too. He played everythin’ and everythin’ he played, he played it good. Just like he uster drive steel. If I could whip steel like John Henry, I wouldn’t stay here and nowhere else.

Cliff
Whut would yo’ do?

Good Black
I’d go somewhere and keep books for somebody.

Lonnie
I know how to play John Henry.

Good Black
Well, turn it on and let de bad luck happen.
(As Lonnie plays thru a verse warming
up, all the men get interested and
start to hum. Cliffert shouts out)

Cliff
Lawd, Lawd, what evil have I done)
(They sing John Henry. At the close,
the woman who came to borrow snuff

emerges from the house still talking
back at the woman inside)

Woman

He ain't no trouble. I tole him, I says, "yo' must think youse de man
dat made side meat taste lak ham." See yo' later.

(She exits hurriedly. The crap game
goes on until a band is heard
approaching)

Lonnie

Who dead?

Cliff

Nobody. Don't you know de Imperial Elks is goin' to New York to de Elks
Grand Lodge? Yeah, bo, and they's takin' they band. Dat's supposed to be
de *finest* band in de United States.

(The band approaches followed by a
great crow. The crap game is instantly
deserted and all follow the band)