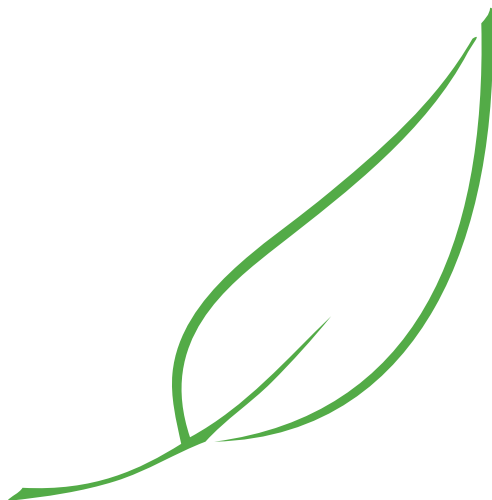


Jubilee In The Rear View Mirror

By Garret Mathews



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JUBILEE IN THE REAR VIEW MIRROR

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SYNOPSIS: *Jubilee in the Rear View Mirror* is a comedy-drama about two men of the same age but different color who must share a jail cell in the rural South at the height of the civil rights movement.

During Freedom Summer (1964), a young black civil rights worker from the North finds himself incarcerated in a small Mississippi town with a white racist. At first, the white man acts as if his cellmate has an infectious disease and uses toilet paper to divide the cell into two halves (he makes sure the lone toilet is on his side). But he gradually gains respect for the black man who is far his superior in sophistication and life's experiences.

CAST OF CHARACTERS*(7 male, 3 female)*

DEAN BUELL (m).....A white man in his 20s. (81 lines)
 KATES (f).....A black man in his 20s. (142 lines)
 MARLA BUELL (f)A white woman in her 20s. (37 lines)
 WILLIE (m).....A white man in his 20s. (45 lines)
 GUARD (m).....An overweight white man. (37 lines)
 SPOTSWOOD (m)A middle-aged white man. (21 lines)
 MINISTER (m).....A middle-aged white man. (62 lines)
 NURSE NO. 1 (f).....A white woman. (8 lines)
 NURSE NO. 2 (f).....A white woman. (2 lines)
 YOUNG MAN (m).....A white man in his 20s. (Non-speaking role)
 EXTRAS.....Voices on the radio; car voice. (8 lines)

SET REQUIREMENTS

ACT ONE is inside a sparsely furnished county jail in Jubilee, Miss. Several mattresses are on the floor inside the lone cell. There are no bunks. No linen. No blankets. At the back of the cell is a small window. Sunlight filters through into the cell. A dirty toilet is in the center of the cell. Several folding chairs are both inside and outside of the cell. Some are upright. Some are overturned. There's a high school-style desk with pencils, writing paper and a transistor radio on top. At back is a door that leads to the front of the cell.

ACT TWO is inside a living room in Jubilee, Miss. The furnishings are simple, suggesting the folks who live here don't have much money. There's a door at stage left with a baseball bat beside it. There's a large window at stage right. There's a portable hospital bed in the center of the room next to a chest of drawers. A tray with a glass of water on it is beside the bed. Also on the tray is the same transistor radio that was in the cellblock.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

Inside a jail cell in a backwater Mississippi town in 1964 during the civil rights movement. A white racist (BUELL) is incarcerated for being drunk and beating up his wife. He must share the small compartment with a young black man (KATES) from the North who came to Jubilee to help register black voters and was arrested.

ACT TWO

Inside a mobile home in the poor part of Jubilee, Mississippi. Buell was shot at the end of the first act by a Ku Klux Klan member angry that Buell was being too friendly with Kates. A seriously injured Buell is on a portable hospital bed.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This play is rooted in the events surrounding the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. I researched this play by interviewing numerous civil rights activists, including lawyers who took on cases of African-Americans being denied service in restaurants and stores and the brave Freedom Riders who boarded buses in hostile territory to protest segregated waiting areas. I also traveled to Money, Mississippi, where 14-year-old Emmett Till was slain, and Philadelphia, Mississippi, where three civil rights workers were killed and buried in an earthen dam.

Before pressure was brought to bear, black children in department stores were not allowed to try on new shoes. Salesmen traced the edges of their old shoes onto pieces of butcher paper and fetched an approximate fit from inventory. African-Americans attempting to cast ballots could lose their jobs or even be thrown in jail. And they would most likely be rebuffed at the courthouse. Special literacy tests were administered to would-be black voters. One popular question (that had no correct answer) was, "How many bubbles are in a bar of soap?"

I grew up in rural Virginia in the Jim Crow-era of separate and unequal treatment for people of color. When I was a child, there were white-only bathrooms and colored-only motels. African-American kids were bused as far as 50 miles to the regional black school where the administration was lucky to get even used typewriters or Bunsen burners because first dibs on the 'good stuff' went to the white schools.

Most black adults in my home town were janitors. The highest-ranking black man was the gentleman at the auto dealership who was allowed to change oil filters. He was there for 30 years and never moved up to fenders. Black women were mostly domestics. They didn't have an identity. They were referred to by the person they worked for, as in, "There goes Mrs. Miller's Clarita."

Eighty miles away was a county that had no blacks within its borders. The locals boasted that the last person of color to enter its borders had been

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hanged. They'd even show you the tree. It's not like that any more. Much credit goes to the hundreds of civil rights workers who risked their lives to right long-standing wrongs. This play is dedicated to the civil rights individuals who risked their lives to come to the deep South to work for change and I'm happy to tell their story.

—Garret Mathews

ACT ONE

Time: 1964

SETTING:

Inside a sparsely furnished county jail cell in Jubilee, Mississippi.

A sullen, imposing WHITE MAN in his 20s is the lone inmate in the cell. He leans against a pillow that he has propped on the floor against the wall. He wears a white t-shirt with a pack of cigarettes in the front pocket. He wears jail-issue pants. He is barefoot. Bored, he blows smoke rings.

The INMATE picks up the transistor radio and turns it on. There's static before sound.

VOICE ON THE RADIO: *(In drawling southern fashion.)* This is Swap Shop. You got something you want to buy, sell or trade, just give us a call here at the station, you hear? C. J. Rife's got a dinette set for sale. Grandkids jumped on it a right smart, but the legs still hold up good. Five dollars. Firm. Call . . .

The WHITE INMATE changes the station. There's static and then sound.

DIFFERENT VOICE ON THE RADIO: *(Also drawling.)* Welcome to *News About Town*. Billy Lee Freeman, age 86, passed. The wake will be Thursday from seven until ten in the evening. Visitors are asked to sign the book in ink pen and not pencil. *(The ANNOUNCER riffles through papers until he gets to the next item.)* The February meeting of the White Citizens Council of Jubilee, Mississippi, will be held tonight at the Mount Shiloh Baptist Church. Members are asked to bring a covered dish. Time ain't gonna be announced 'cause they don't want no outside agitators.

BUELL: Guess I'll be missin' that one.

A face appears in the small window. The WHITE INMATE recognizes his visitor and turns off the radio.

The WHITE VISITOR is about the same age as the WHITE INMATE, but not as intimidating. The man in the window, a simple fellow, wears a farm cap.

WILLIE: When you gonna stop beatin' that wife of yours?

BUELL: No time soon.

WILLIE: Hungry?

BUELL: Damn straight. They don't feed in here worth a lick.

The MAN IN CAP passes a sandwich through the bars of the small window.

BUELL: Catfish sandwich from Mungro's. Best in the Delta. Thanks, Willie.

WILLIE: You'd do the same for me. This ain't all, Mungro gave me a tote sack.

WILLIE reaches in his bag and passes a huge dill pickle through the bars which is promptly devoured. WILLIE passes a bottle of Coca-Cola through the bars. The WHITE INMATE opens the Coke with a small bottle opener that's a companion piece to his pocket knife. The WHITE INMATE takes a big bite out of the sandwich.

BUELL: You a friend.

WILLIE: Aw, it ain't nothin'.

BUELL: One good thing 'bout bein' in jail. Gets me off that sorry gravel truck. Seat cushion's shot. Damn springs rippin' me a new asshole.

WILLIE: How come Marla signed papers against you? Never did before.

BUELL: Guess I never tore the doorknob off and stuffed it down her bra before. *(The WHITE INMATE prances around in the distressed manner of a woman with a large weight on one side of her chest.)* You talk about wearin' a falsie.

WILLIE: How much time they give you?

BUELL: Three days. Say they wanna teach me a lesson. (*WHITE INMATE takes another bite of sandwich and washes it down with Coke.*) Know where I'm goin' when I get out?

WILLIE: Probably not to hearth and home.

BUELL: Rosie's.

WILLIE: Yeah?

BUELL: She got a new lead whore. Craziest woman I ever seen.

WILLIE: Yeah?

BUELL: After she humps you and you're kinda noddin' off, she steals your underpants.

WILLIE: No shit?

BUELL: First few times, I thought maybe I left 'em under the bed or something. Walked out feelin' the cold wind up my butt crack. (*BUELL finishes his food.*) Then one night, she showed me this big ol' suitcase. Asks if I want to see what's inside. I'm like this on the bed. (*BUELL puts his hands behind his head in satisfied-lover style.*) She pulls out one pair of drawers after another. Must-a been a hundred or more. All colors. All sizes. All stains.

WILLIE: What she gonna do? Open up a store?

BUELL: Figures they might be worth somethin' some day. If one pair belongs to a guy who ends up being a Congressman, he'd pay big money to get 'em back and she can afford to go to cosmetology school.

WILLIE: Want me to wash your car?

BUELL: You don't care?

WILLIE: Naw, I'll do it after I run my muskrat traps.

BUELL: Ol' Anzell Rigsby still your fur buyer?

WILLIE: The same.

BUELL: Still cuts with the one hand on the knife and the other hand holdin' a peanut-butter sandwich?

WILLIE: The same.

BUELL: Jubilee, Mississippi, might not be famous for much, but at least we got Anzell.

WILLIE: Last night I watched him gut a red fox. Man was slingin' entrails to beat the band. Right hand looked like a red blob cause a all the blood. He gives me a wink and switches hands. Left one gets the knife. Right one gets the sandwich. I puked chunks, I don't mind tellin' you.

BUELL laughs.

BUELL: Too bad I'm a jailbird. I'd liked to see that.

WILLIE: Well, it's still there. Ain't like ol' Anzell ever cleans up or nothin'. Well, I gotta go.

BUELL: Where to?

WILLIE: Vance Supply. Drawing's this afternoon. Buy ten dollars worth of stuff and you get registered for a clock-radio. Newest thing. Wake up to tunes.

BUELL: You goin' to the meetin' tonight at Shiloh Baptist?

WILLIE: I guess so. Nothin' else to do. I don't know why they gotta do all that hollerin' and screamin', though. Gives me a headache.

WILLIE hears stirring at the front of the jail and leaves the window before he's found out.

A uniformed GUARD opens the door to the cellblock and sticks his head in. The GUARD is white and overweight.

GUARD: Hey, Buell. You know them tennis-shoe-wearin'-Commie-lovers from up North we said was comin'? Well, one of 'em's here already.

BUELL: What color is he?

The GUARD sings in racist fashion.

GUARD: "Camp Town ladies sing this song. Do-dah, do-dah."

BUELL: Goddamn. A spade. Gotta divvy up the space.

BUELL takes out a roll of toilet paper and divides the cell into two distinct halves. BUELL makes sure the toilet is on his side as well as the high school style-desk.

The GUARD is prepared to usher the new inmate to the cell, but the new inmate doesn't immediately come.

Offstage, we hear the voice of KATES in distinct – and eloquent - Northern accent.

VOICE OF KATES: *(Offstage.)* My good man, why do I have to be handcuffed? The cell is so close I can smell it from here.

GUARD: 'Cause it's the rule.

VOICE OF KATES: *(Offstage.)* What if I give my solemnest assurance I won't try to escape?

GUARD: 'Cause it's the rule.

VOICE OF KATES: *(Offstage.)* What if I said scientific tests have proven that handcuffs are harmful to the epidermis?

The GUARD is exasperated.

GUARD: If I put the cuffs back on my belt, will you shut the hell up?

VOICE OF KATES: *(Offstage.)* Certainly.

The GUARD goes offstage to remove the handcuffs. The GUARD with a set of keys on his hip and handcuffs on his belt escorts KATES to the cell. KATES strides in hero fashion like he's a rock star. KATES pretends HE is receiving huzzahs from imaginary well-wishers. KATES is barefoot and in the same prison garb as BUELL. KATES talks like Elvis.

KATES: Glad to be here. Thank you very much. Glad to be here. *(KATES looks around at his new digs.)* Never have I seen such understated interior decorating. Spartan to be sure, but wondrously functional. Dehumanizing, yet purposeful. My congratulations to the architect. If it wasn't Frank Lloyd Wright, then certainly it was his first cousin.

The GUARD doesn't know what to make of such talk. KATES nears the cell. The GUARD selects the right key of the several on his chain and opens the door, but the KATES doesn't immediately go in. KATES has yet to see BUELL or the toilet paper partitioning the space.

KATES: Let me drink in the moment, if you don't mind. (*HE puts his index fingers against his temples and closes his eyes.*) My very first incarceration. What's it going to be like? I'm thinking crumbling cinderblock walls. Escape tunnel under the head board. Scalp tissue on the bars from countless suicide attempts.

KATES looks into the cell for the first time. KATES sees the toilet paper bisecting the cell, and BUELL leaning against the pillow. Laughing out loud, the GUARD slams the door as HE EXITS.

GUARD: You two was made for each other.

BUELL looks at the KATES as he would someone with an infectious disease. KATES enters the cell and extends his hand in friendly fashion to BUELL.

KATES: Ah, my comrade in stir.

BUELL turns his head. Undeterred, the KATES shakes his own hand. Realizing he's not going to have a conversation with his new neighbor, the KATES begins a dialogue in which he is both himself and his cellmate. KATES jumps back. HE assumes a redneck's voice and character.

KATES: Who you, boy? (*HE jumps forward as he goes back to being himself.*) Civil rights volunteer, thanks for asking. Name's Kates, Roscoe Lee. 'A-minus' student at the University of Chicago. Came to this outpost with my mostly Caucasian brethren to help register black voters. Only five percent of the Negro population in Jubilee is signed up. Intimidation is the weapon of the white power structure. Threaten to dynamite the houses of the black underclass if they dare go to the courthouse. We have our work cut out.

A jaunting BUELL pretends to be totally disinterested, but HE takes everything in. BUELL's not about to admit it, but HE is intrigued by the black man's intelligence and life's experiences. KATES jumps back, the signal that HE is now the redneck cellmate both in voice and character.

KATES: This is Mississippi, boy. Armpit of humanity. Work like that can be bad for your health. Can get you strung up. *(HE jumps forward, returning to his persona and voice.)* Don't I know it. Just about every white person I've seen down here looks at me like I should be tied to a whipping post. *(HE jumps back, returning to the redneck voice and character.)* So how you end up in the clink? *(HE jumps forward, returning to his persona.)* We found out that prospective white voters don't have to take a test at all, but blacks have to answer forty-five questions out of fifty. And they're full of stumblers, too. If you've been teaching civics all your life, you just might pass.

BUELL continues to feign disinterest. KATES jumps back and turns into the redneck cellmate.

KATES: And being an upstanding boy and all, you didn't like that. *(HE jumps forward and turns back into himself.)* No, I didn't. Pitched a bitch right in front of the voting registrar. Said his policy is patently unfair and racist to the core. Threw his big book of names and addresses on the floor and stomped it. A cop with a beach ball for a belly shows up. Asks what I'm doing. I tell him I'm doing my part to rid Jubilee of a long-standing social evil. *(HE jumps back and turns into the redneck cellmate in voice and character.)* And he got mad at your uppity ass and busted you? *(HE jumps forward and becomes himself.)* Got me for loitering. His word. Illegal use of mouth. My words. Strongly suggested I get in the paddy wagon. I hesitated ever so slightly and got what he said I had coming. Pow. In the side of the head. *(HE feels the wound.)* So here I am.

BUELL: Damn nigger.

KATES does not react to the word. KATES looks at the line of toilet paper that bisects the cell.

KATES: What is this? A line of demarcation?

BUELL: I don't know about that De-Mar-Ca-Shun, but you got your side of the cell and I got mine. White. Not-white. And right now, you on my side.

KATES obediently steps over the line of toilet paper to his side of the cell. KATES notices that the toilet is in BUELL's territory.

KATES: How come you've got the crapper? Even the dark people have to shit. *(HE wiggles his ass in the manner of someone who has to take a dump.)* I'm not saying I have to right now, but I will eventually. Nature of the beast. *(HE looks at the toilet and the line of toilet paper.)* Sorta poses a dilemma, doesn't it?

BUELL pretends HE isn't paying attention.

KATES: I've got an idea. *(HE re-routes the path of the toilet paper until it splits the toilet seat in half.)* Perfect solution. When you have to go, it's like this. *(HE pretends to take a shit on his cellmate's half of the commode seat, taking every precaution not to touch the other side. KATES grunts, strains and pretends to defecate.)* And then when I have to go. *(HE moves to the other side of the commode. KATES is equally careful not to touch the other half of the toilet. KATES groans, strains and pretends to defecate.)* It's the compromise of the century. United Nations stuff. The bringing together of the East and West.

BUELL: Damn nigger.

KATES: So what was your crime?

BUELL ignores his cellmate.

KATES: Wait, wait. Let me guess. (*From his side of the cell, KATES looks BUELL over.*) Definitely not a white-collar operation. That rules out money laundering, tax fraud and embezzlement. I'm thinking, at the minimum, a punch in the nose. On the top end, a homicide. But most likely, something in between like a pistol-whipping. (*HE pumps his fist.*) Yes, that's it. A person of my skin pigmentation was walking down the road. You're thoroughly honked off that a black man is allowed to breathe, much less stroll. Go on, tell me I'm right.

BUELL: I ain't tellin' nothin'.

KATES: Your every instinct tells you to shoot down the fool. But in an astonishing display of self-discipline, you don't put the bullets in the chamber. You merely beat him senseless with the butt of the weapon. (*HE bows.*) You, sir, are a marvel of restraint.

The GUARD opens the door of the cellblock.

GUARD: Got a visitor.

KATES: For whom, if I may be so presumptuous?

GUARD: The coon.

KATES primps for the visitor HE knows is HIS. A white MINISTER with glasses walks through the door and moves toward the cell. HE wears a clerical collar above his black shirt. The GUARD exits. BUELL tries not to let it show, but now HE is even more interested in what's going on.

MINISTER: You OK? I heard what happened.

KATES: Guy must've had lead weights in his nightstick.

MINISTER: In these parts, they call that truth serum.

The two men embrace through the bars.

KATES: I thought you'd be in here for sure. I mean, you were right beside me when the cop came.

The MINISTER takes a seat on the folding chair outside of the cell. KATES sits on a folding chair inside the cell.

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KATES: You were just as pissed off . . .

The MINISTER is embarrassed by KATES's choice of language. KATES rephrases so as not to offend the MINISTER.

KATES: Just as, uh, irritated, as I was.

MINISTER: Yes, like you, I saw the ballot test that only Negroes have to take. And, like you, I listened to the voting registrar say he only lets Coloreds in his office every other Thursday between two and two-fifteen, and if it's too long a line, he pretends his diabetes is acting up and sends everybody home. Never met a more arrogant man. I don't mind telling you I almost said bad words to that person.

KATES: Oh, yeah? Which ones?

MINISTER: But I held back. Just looked at him sternly. He said for me to go back up North where I came from. Said they weren't going to arrest a man of the cloth. That was unacceptable. Nothing's going to change with the movement until white folks start going to jail. Lots of white folks. Put the story in big-city newspapers. Show the pictures on the nightly news. Let the masses see the same injustice we're seeing. So I hatched a plan.

KATES: Go on.

MINISTER: I decided I would use the weapon of repentance. Told the voting registrar God loves him no matter what he's done. Over and over. Louder and louder. Same with the police officer. Sounded like I had a megaphone for a throat. Had to be the highest decibel count in the history of forgiveness. If that wasn't disturbing the peace, I don't know what is.

KATES: But no arrest.

MINISTER: Told me to go home. Said they don't run in men of the cloth.

BUELL, suddenly, to the MINISTER.

BUELL: Shit, you crazy.

KATES and the MINISTER look at BUELL in surprise that BUELL has been following their conversation.

KATES: Well, there's always next time.

MINISTER: Remember the classes in non-violent civil Disobedience at the University of Ohio we sat through before coming to Mississippi?

KATES: They pounded Martin Luther King's teachings into us like a sledgehammer. Thou shalt accept all manner of indignity without rebuke. Thou shalt smile when thine enemies bring an exponentially enhanced nightstick to the back of your head.

MINISTER: It's the right way. I'm convinced of it. If we hit back, or even threaten to, we're just like them. But with better subject-verb agreement.

KATES: So you want to find out if I've strayed from the path?

MINISTER: Well, they did knock you around pretty good. And you were a member of the Golden Gloves.

KATES goes into a boxing shuffle for a few seconds.

KATES: My older brother went to college in a little town in South Carolina. Liked to go out for a cheap meal every now and again. Same old blah, blah, blah as everywhere else below the Mason-Dixon. No blacks get served at lunch counters.

BUELL has a booger in his left nostril. Using his left forefinger, HE honks it out. But HE continues to listen to the conversation.

KATES: One day Leroy and some of his buddies decided they had enough of that shi . . . *(HE looks at the MINISTER and stops in mid-word.)* . . . Had enough of that stuff. They decide to face the situation head-on. Waltz in the local five-and-dime and order grilled cheese sandwiches and iced tea. They don't expect top-of-the-line service.

The MINISTER nods. HE is familiar with the tactic.

MINISTER: Sit-in protests.

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KATES: Forty-five minutes pass. Never do get their sandwiches. And when the iced tea finally arrives, there's a half-inch of salt in the bottom of the glasses. Waitress laughing so hard she's spitting on herself. Leroy and the others just sit there.

BUELL looks at his left forefinger, sees booger residue and wipes it on the wall of the cell.

KATES: It gets close to noon. The lunch crowd starts coming in. Hundred and one places to sit, but nobody does.

MINISTER: They didn't want to be in the same dining facility as the Negroes.

KATES: There's this big stalemate. A whole bunch of whites with stomachs growling against seven black persons who think they're good enough to eat grilled cheese sandwiches inside a public eatery on a Wednesday morning.

BUELL pretends not to listen, but his every antennae is raised. To further send the message HE isn't paying attention, HE rolls a cigarette between his fingers in the manner of a magician rolling a coin. The GUARD opens the door of the cellblock.

GUARD: Just wonderin', preacher, does that flock of yours wear them little Jew hats in the middle of their heads that look a baseball cap without the brim?

Laughter offstage from the GUARD's fellow officers. In a mocking demonstration for the MINISTER, the GUARD tries to fold his patrolman's hat until it looks like a Jewish skull cap. Laughter offstage. The GUARD gives up.

GUARD: Don't seem to wanna Jew down.

More laughter offstage. The MINISTER looks at the GUARD and shakes his head. Chuckling, the GUARD returns to the front of the jail, shutting the door.

KATES: First, they tried asking the kids to leave. That didn't work. Then they considered grabbing hold of arms and legs as a means of forcible expulsion.

MINISTER: But that didn't work because they'd actually have to touch a black person.

KATES: Yeah, might rub off on them. So they tried condiments.

MINISTER: Condiments?

KATES: The bottles of ketchup and mustard on the lunch counter. The biggest of the townies advances on Leroy and starts squirting on the back of his head. Big hush comes over the crowd. Is the buck nigger gonna take it, or is he gonna jump up out of that seat and start duking?

BUELL is so transfixed HE drops his cigarette.

KATES: Leroy just sits there. This makes the others in the raiding party bolder. Medium-sized racists and even little-sized racists take the plastic bottles and empty them on the students' heads. Some even use their imaginations and make red and yellow patterns. It's like art, but without the standard canvas.

BUELL picks up the cigarette. KATES looks at him. BUELL goes back to rolling the cigarette between his fingers, but continues to listen carefully to the conversation.

KATES: Not a single demonstrator lost his cool. They kept their eyes straight even through increased dosages of ketchup and mustard. The back of Leroy's shirt looked like somebody tried to design a flag while on reefer.

BUELL, suddenly, to KATES and the MINISTER.

BUELL: Somebody pours shit on me like that, he ain't gonna live 'til morning.

KATES: When you go about doing something, do you play to win?

BUELL: Damn straight.

KATES: That's what Leroy and the others did. Play to win.

BUELL doesn't reply, but it's clear that KATES's words have an impact.

MINISTER: What about the cops?

KATES: Ah, yes, the cops. Stormed in like Marines.

MINISTER: I'll bet they weren't handing out lollipops.

KATES: Arrested them for trespassing. Leroy said he didn't think it was possible to fit that many people in the back seat of a squad car and still be able to shut the door. Took them to a place that was more like a cesspool than a jail. Gave each man an aluminum cup and a toothbrush.

MINISTER: That's a hard way to go.

KATES: The students passed the time singing protest songs. When they wouldn't shut up, the guards took away their mattresses. When the singing continued, the guards removed the screens on the cell windows so the mosquitoes could come in. Leroy said he almost got eaten alive.

MINISTER: But their spirit wasn't broken.

KATES: No books. No newspapers. They had to provide their own entertainment. One of the guys was a foreign language major. Taught the others French and Spanish. Another kid majored in Russian history. Gave lectures on the Romanovs. It was like exam time at school. All that was missing was the midnight oil.

There's a commotion at the front desk. We hear the muffled voice of an agitated woman. Even though the door to the cellblock is closed, we can still make out the words.

MARLA: *(Offstage.)* How's my husband? I want to see my husband.

The door of the cellblock opens. The GUARD sticks his head in.

GUARD: It's your wife, Buell. Guess she forgives and forgets.

BUELL throws the cigarette on the floor in disgust. Clearly, HE does not want to see his spouse. The GUARD turns to BUELL's WIFE. Because the door is open, her agitated voice is loud and clear.

MARLA: *(Offstage.)* You can't stop me from seeing my husband.
You take me to him, and you do it now.

With the door still open, the GUARD turns toward BUELL.

GUARD: C'mon, Buell. It's your call. Does she come back or do I send her home?

MARLA: *(Offstage.)* I gotta right to be with him. I gotta right.

BUELL leans against the bars. HE is ashamed that his wife came to the jail.

MARLA: *(Offstage.)* Deanie, I'm sorry. Them laws damn near camped out on the porch. Wouldn't leave 'til I gave you up. I was weak, Deanie. Not strong like you.

BUELL: You butt-ugly.

BUELL gives a dismissive hand signal indicating HE doesn't want to see his wife.

MARLA: *(Offstage.)* I don't know what to do without you, baby. You gotta come back and take your rightful place.

The GUARD turns back toward BUELL's WIFE. The door to the cellblock is still open. The GUARD addresses BUELL's wife offstage.

GUARD: He says not at the present time. Maybe later.

MARLA: *(Offstage.)* I'm his wife. He wants me. He just ain't thinkin' right, that's all.

The GUARD closes the door. We hear him leading BUELL's WIFE away. We hear the GUARD's muffled voice.

GUARD: *(OFFSTAGE.)* You come back on Sunday. Liquor be out of his system by then. Might even buy you flowers.

BUELL: Damn woman's suffocatin' me.

KATES and the MINISTER resume their conversation.

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KATES: Powers that be offered to let Leroy and the others go if they'd admit they went in the diner to cause trouble. Leroy just laughed. Said he went in there to increase his calorie intake.

The MINISTER laughs and pats his stomach.

KATES: The fourth day, they finally let Leroy call home. He spent the first five minutes trying to stop Mama from crying. Then he started talking about something you'd never guess.

MINISTER: The pathetic criminal justice system?

KATES: Football. Leroy was a tailback at George Washington High. Could run like the very wind with the pigskin pressed against his numeral. Broke every land-based record there was. *(HE pretends to run with an imaginary football, stiff-arming imaginary tacklers.)* Football field was across the street from the jail. Friday night. Big game between county rivals. Leroy gets on his tiptoes. He can see the people going into the stadium. He can smell the popcorn. He can hear the cheerleaders.

MINISTER: I'm no English major, but I know tragic juxtaposition. Former prep football star on the inside looking at his former life on the outside.

KATES: But Leroy handled it. Said a sis-boom-bah for both teams and got back to the business of being a political prisoner. Told Mama he used the light from the stadium to write letters to sit-in demonstrators in North Carolina and Virginia. I listened on the other line. Proudest little brother in the world.

MINISTER: Did the diner desegregate?

KATES: Two weeks later. More and more kids from Leroy's college got involved. Crackers finally realized it was cheaper to serve sandwiches than put half the student body in jail. Mama and I were there for the big day. I asked for a refill on my RC Cola. White lady with the apron said, "You betcha, sugar." Lord, God, almighty. You talk about a miracle.

MINISTER: Makes the loaves and fishes pale by comparison.

KATES: To answer your question, yeah, Doctor King's lessons took. Sitting in that diner made me see the big picture. Kids and cops could have fought it out. Matched each other lead pipe for lead pipe. Send people of both colors to the hospital.

MINISTER: But that didn't happen.

KATES: This didn't happen either. *(HE goes into the dialect of a submissive black man.)* Boss, we sorry for livin'. Whip me, Mister Man, up one side and down the other. I needs a beatin', so's I'll stay in line. *(HE stops the dialect.)* They sat upright in that restaurant like men. With all their dignity. All their grace. The rabble with their squirt bottles wanted to rob them of that, but they failed. The bigots didn't count on charm school. They were ready for street brawl. When that didn't materialize, they were like a bunch of three-year-olds trying to solve a simultaneous linear equation. *(HE looks at BUELL who is scratching his butt.)* Nothing to do but stick their fingers up their rear ends.

The GUARD opens the door and sticks his head in the cellblock.

GUARD: Chow time, boys.

BUELL: I ain't hungry.

KATES: And what's on le menu this evening? Filet de pork? Or perhaps some brochettes au saumon followed by your finest sorbet.

BUELL is impressed by KATES's vocabulary, but tries not to show it.

GUARD: Chunk of Spam and a baked potato. Looks like two ball bearings.

KATES takes on his cellmate's voice.

KATES: I ain't hungry.

MINISTER: Well, I am. Restaurant across the street serves something I had never heard of, country-fried steak. They cover the meat with what looks like bile duct, but it's actually quite good. *(HE gets up to leave.)* Need anything?

KATES: Some travel brochures. Assuming I don't get murdered down here, the family is planning a trip to New York City. Go to a Broadway play. Ellis Island. Take in a Yankees' game. Watch Mickey Mantle play. He's pretty good for a white guy.

BUELL is shocked that a black man can be such a world traveler.

BUELL: You mean you goin' to New York?

KATES is momentarily taken aback that BUELL has actually initiated a conversation, but quickly recovers.

KATES: Family tradition. Every summer we take a vacation. My parents always try to top the place we went the year before. Don't let anybody tell you otherwise. There's nothing like the Grand Canyon.

BUELL: I ain't never been two counties over from Jubilee.

The MINISTER embraces KATES through the bars and turns to leave. When the MINISTER opens the door to the cell, we hear, offstage, the voice of the GUARD.

GUARD: (Offstage.) Howdy, Mister Spotswood. That's a mighty nice-looking pistol. Can I hold it?

SPOTSWOOD has the voice of an older man. It is strong and authoritarian. SPOTSWOOD has the GUARD's respect.

SPOTSWOOD: (Offstage.) Guess so.

GUARD: (Offstage.) That's a big barrel. You shoot something with that and it sure ain't gonna ricochet. Smells like it's just been fired. Target range?

SPOTSWOOD: (Offstage.) Nope, niggers.

The two men laugh.

GUARD: (*Offstage.*) We got us one back there. Don't you go and shoot him now.

The laughter increases.

SPOTSWOOD: (*Offstage.*) Meetin' tonight at the Shiloh Baptist, but we ain't stayin' long. Back-sassin' jungle bunnies havin' their own meetin'. We gonna go over there with ball bats. Bust out some taillights. Then call you laws and say they drivin' illegal.

GUARD: (*Offstage.*) Well, you know our number.

SPOTSWOOD: (*Offstage.*) I come to see Buell.

The door opens and a paunchy WHITE MAN with slicked back hair walks in the cellblock. HE has middle-aged redneck written all over him. Black shoes. White socks under pants that don't go down far enough. HE wears an undershirt under a plaid shirt. The pistol is in the waistband of his pants. His body language conveys anger and belligerence. KATES nods pleasantly to SPOTSWOOD. By way of response, SPOTSWOOD points the pistol at KATES, who dives on the floor in horror. SPOTSWOOD pulls the gun back.

SPOTSWOOD: Maybe next time, boy. And don't get them hopes up. I hit what I shoot at.

BUELL pumps SPOTSWOOD's hand through the bars.

BUELL: This means a lot. Somebody big as you comin' down to see somebody like me.

SPOTSWOOD gives an angry look to KATES, who picks himself off the floor.

SPOTSWOOD: You lookin' at that boy like he's your buddy. You ain't turned nigger-lover on us, have you?

To gain SPOTSWOOD's approval, BUELL proudly shows the line of toilet paper bisecting the cell.

BUELL: Make sure he don't get too friendly. (*HE turns to KATES.*)
They just brought him in here. I didn't have no say one way or the other.

SPOTSWOOD nods his approval. KATES realizes he's probably not going to be killed and returns to his confident self. With BUELL and SPOTSWOOD looking on, KATES assumes the yoga position on his side of the cell. KATES puts his hands above his head and brings them down slowly. KATES takes a deep breath, lets the air out slowly and repeats the procedure.

KATES: Om.

BUELL and SPOTSWOOD stare at KATES in disbelief.

SPOTSWOOD: He don't act like one of our niggers.

BUELL: Ain't. He's a new nigger.

SPOTSWOOD: How do you know?

BUELL: He told me.

SPOTSWOOD: You talked to him? Boy don't need talkin' to. He's one of them. (*HE acts like an ape, jumping up and down and scratching his underarms.*) Ugga, bugga.

KATES arches his eyes and says nothing.

SPOTSWOOD: They tryin' to take away our way of life. Throw us aside and move theirselves in. (*HE puts the pistol back in his pants.*) Now that place where you work – the gravel pit. You want some jigaboo bossman tellin' you where to take your truck? When to clean it?

BUELL looks at KATES. BUELL mumbles the words SPOTSWOOD wants to hear, but there's a trace of uncertainty in his voice.

BUELL: No, sir.

Suddenly, SPOTSWOOD punches the bars of the cell.

SPOTSWOOD: That's the stakes here, boy. Do you want the niggers to sit in school next to our kind?

BUELL adheres to the party line.

BUELL: No, sir.

SPOTSWOOD: Do you want 'em to swim in the same pool?

BUELL: No, sir.

SPOTSWOOD: White race is the only race there is. Don't ever forget that, boy.

BUELL: Yes, sir. *(HE looks at KATES and then back at SPOTSWOOD.)* You go out much away from Jubilee?

SPOTSWOOD: Went to Jackson once to get a part for the cotton baler. Wanted to see the big buildings downtown. Parked the truck across from the Statehouse. I was in a blue space when I shoulda been in a red space. Cops 'bout had a shit fit. I finished my business and hightailed it out. Ain't never been back.

BUELL: Ever been to New York City?

SPOTSWOOD: Hell, no. Only fairies live there.

BUELL: What about the Grand Canyon?

SPOTSWOOD: Ain't nothing in Miss-our-a I wanna see.

KATES slowly mouths the word, "Ariz-on-a."

BUELL: What would you do if you was at a restaurant they didn't want you to be at and all of a sudden people started puttin' ketchup and mustard on your head?

SPOTSWOOD: Kill 'em.

BUELL: What if it was somethin' you believed in, and if your side was gonna win out, you had to let that shit go down your back?

SPOTSWOOD: Kill 'em again after they dead. *(HE hitches his pants.)* Ain't just anybody gets to be doorkeeper of the White Citizens Council, Buell. It's what they call one of them growth jobs. Gonna take you somewhere some day. If you don't fuck it up.

SPOTSWOOD exits. The GUARD opens the door and sticks his head in.

GUARD: Exercise time, boys.

KATES runs in place for a few seconds and then wipes imaginary sweat from his brow.

KATES: What are our options?

GUARD: Get out in the yard and walk around the 36-by-48-foot space like a tiger in a cage. The good people of Jubilee can see you from the road. Some will give you the finger. Some will cover up their children like you're the devil. Everybody will wish you'd go back where you came from. *(Beat, as the guard pulls up his sagging pants.)* Or you can stay in here and play grab-ass with each other.

KATES: We'll take it under advisement. Thank you.

The GUARD exits. BUELL adjusts the line of toilet paper to give his side of the cell more space.

BUELL: What you wanna be when you grow up?

KATES: Criminal lawyer. Defend the underdog. Have to be in my part of the country, though. Bring that shingle down here and I'd have to hang it on a push broom. *(HE adjusts the line of toilet paper to give his side of the cell more space.)* What about you? What would you like to do?

BUELL: Go to Atlanta. Stand under the big Coke-Cola sign. Get somebody to take a picture. Be the first person in my family to see Peachtree Street. They say you can look past where the sun goes down and that road's still goin'.

BUELL turns the radio on. There's static before sound.

VOICE ON RADIO: *(Drawling.)* "Moonlight Madness Sale. Tonight and tonight only. Door-buster specials throughout the store."

Clearly, KATES has never heard anything like this. HE listens in wonderment. BUELL changes the station. There's static before sound. The voice is that of a little boy, also drawling. The youngster is clearly reading from a prepared text, some of which is beyond his comprehension. The little boy stumbles over several of the words.

CHILD'S VOICE ON RADIO: "My Pop sells the highest quality cars and trucks in the entire world. Biggest inventory this side of the Yazoo River. If you want the best deal on brand new 1964 motor vehicles, come to-"

BUELL changes the station.

KATES: They let little kids sell cars down here?

BUELL: Lot smarter than the Daddy. Weekly Reader puzzles that man's ass.

BUELL changes the station. There's static before sound.

WOMAN'S VOICE ON RADIO: *(Drawling.)* "Been hurt in an accident? Got your back in an uproar? Got your finger mangled so bad you can't hardly point? Call the law office of Jim Ed Dinkens and Associates on Magnolia Street in downtown Jubilee. We stand up for you. No recovery, no fee."

BUELL turns the radio off. HE holds his ribs.

BUELL: Ain't hurt this bad since I was a kid and we was diggin' for buried treasure and my cousin hit me in the back of the neck with a hoe.

KATES: What happened?

BUELL: Laws kicked me.

KATES: You wouldn't go peaceably?

BUELL: I ain't gettin' in the back of no squad car for no man. You gotta put me back there. *(Proud of himself.)* Took five of 'em. Three got called from off-duty. Took turns with their boots 'til I was down on the ground. They smarter than they look. Stay on one body part.

KATES rubs his head.

KATES: Didn't take but one blow for me. I don't like to clot.

BUELL: Felt like they gonna split me in two. If they had a prisoner-whopping team, them boys be all-stars.

KATES: There are rules against that. Even down here.

BUELL dismisses KATES's concern with a wave of his hand.

KATES: I'm serious. What they did to me was right on the brink. If what they did to you was worse, the Leflore Sheriff's Department is definitely culpable.

BUELL doesn't understand the word.

KATES: Means you can seek legal redress. Means they have to pay the piper.

BUELL: But I'm nobody. You can't go to court unless you somebody.

KATES: That's where you're wrong. In our system of justice, anybody can appeal for relief. Doesn't matter if you're at the top of the food chain. *(HE looks at BUELL.)* Or the bottom.

The GUARD opens the door and enters the cellblock. The GUARD has a clipboard and pencil.

GUARD: Time to take the count.

BUELL and KATES look at each in puzzlement. There are only the two of them in jail. Even BUELL can't understand why the GUARD has to make a big deal of counting heads. The GUARD walks down the hall to the front of the cellblock. The GUARD finger-points to BUELL and makes a mark with his pencil onto the clipboard.

GUARD: One.



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