

Roland sweeps the sidewalk outside the cleaners. MR. SMITH, (62) African American, appears in the doorway.

MR. SMITH

They robbed Bobby's gas station last night.

ROLAND

Now that's not right.

MR. SMITH

You know how many kids he's helped with that basketball program?

ROLAND

A whole lot.

MR. SMITH

They best stay clear of my place, that's all I got to say.

They both walk inside the store. Most of the liquor is behind the register. Roland goes to the back cooler and starts restocking the shelves. BILLIE HOLIDAY (37) comes up from behind him and ducks under his arm to give him a hug, then leans up against the wall next to him.

ROLAND

Sometimes it takes a Lady Day to brighten my day.

BILLIE

You seem pretty bright already.

ROLAND

That's because I haven't started drinking yet. I'm clear.

BILLIE

How about you stay clear so you can write me something?

ROLAND

I can write you a poem while I'm drunk.

BILLIE

(Laughs) Yeah you can, can you? Will it be as good as if your head was clear?

ROLAND

No, but it will be equally
devotional.

BILLIE

If you were back on your feet, what
do you think you'd be doing
artistically?

ROLAND

I haven't stopped writing...

BILLIE

You know what I mean.

ROLAND

You sound like my mother.

13

INT. MR. SMITH'S LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

13

Mr. Smith opens the cash register and gives Roland \$20.

ROLAND

You know what, you go ahead and
hold on to that, put it in the
safe. I'm going to save some money
for a while and clear my head.

MR. SMITH

Sounds like a good idea.

ROLAND

I need to get back East too.
Haven't seen my family in years.

MR. SMITH

Okay, take care Roland.

ROLAND

Thanks. Have a good night.

22

INT. MR. SMITH'S LIQUOR STORE - SAME

22

Mr. Smith strums on an ACOUSTIC GUITAR, as he often does when
it's slow in the store. Johnny Bee enters the liquor store
and walks over to Roland. Roland stands up from his stool
and they shake hands in silence.

ROLAND

Good to see you, man.

JOHNNY BEE
Yeah, glad to be here.

ROLAND
Here, this is Mr. Smith. He owns
the place. This is my father,
Johnny Bee.

JOHNNY BEE
Good to meet you.

Johnny Bee shakes Mr. Smith's hand and Mr. Smith is silent.

ROLAND
You win big?

JOHNNY BEE
Lost big. In fact, a young lady
just fleeced me for my last dollar.
Picked my pocket.

ROLAND
Are you kidding? Here, have a seat.

Johnny Bee sits in Roland's stool.

JOHNNY BEE
Do I look like I'm joking? I never
joke about money.

MR. SMITH
What'd she look like?

JOHNNY BEE
She was yellow, pretty little
thing. Hair in pigtails. Fast lil
thing.

ROLAND
Tiffany...

MR. SMITH
You don't recognize me. I don't
expect you too, then either.

JOHNNY BEE
Have we met?

MR. SMITH
Oh yeah. You knew my father. Duke.

JOHNNY BEE
Okay, you're Duke's son. Good to
meet you again.

(MORE)

JOHNNY BEE (CONT'D)

How's your old man. I haven't seen him in a long time, now.

MR. SMITH

I guess the last time you saw him is when you won that Cadillac El Dorado off him in a card game.

JOHNNY BEE

Yeah, pink El Dorado like Sugar Ray Robinson's. Hell of a ride.

MR. SMITH

I begged you to let me buy it back off of you, remember?

JOHNNY BEE

Man, that was a long time ago.

MR. SMITH

So what ever happened to that car?

JOHNNY BEE

I drove it all the way to Seattle and sold it.

MR. SMITH

He loved that car, man. He never got over losing it. He just lost his will to live after that.

JOHNNY BEE

He passed?

MR. SMITH

Yeah. It's been 35 years now.

JOHNNY BEE

Nobody ever told me. I figured he just quit the game.

MR. SMITH

He quit the game, alright.

JOHNNY BEE

God bless his soul. He had a fast hand. Not fast enough to beat me, but he beat his share.

ROLAND

Why didn't you sell Mr. Smith that car, man?

JOHNNY BEE

You can't be sentimental in the game.

ROLAND

Man, how do you reconcile taking these innocent peoples' money.

JOHNNY BEE

Innocent? If they were innocent, they wouldn't be in the game.

MR. SMITH

A lot of good people have bad habits.

JOHNNY BEE

Man, I got took. Are you in a state where you can loan me some bread?

ROLAND

Yeah, how much do you need?

JOHNNY BEE

She took me for a hundred and twenty dollars.

ROLAND

Mr. Smith, please get that two hundred dollars I had you put aside for me.

MR. SMITH

That leaves you at zero.

ROLAND

Not after today.

Mr. Smith steps behind the cash register and gets Roland's savings and lays it on the counter. Roland picks it up and hands it to Johnny Bee.

JOHNNY BEE

Thank you. I'll get it back to you.

30

INT. MR. SMITH'S LIQUOR STORE - DAY

30

Roland drinks from a bottle of THUNDERBIRD WINE in the cooler and sees Parker enter through the bottles and cans. Mr. Smith immediately recognizes him.

PARKER

Good morning. Is...

MR. SMITH

Good morning. Your father is in the back, he'll be right out.

Roland has been drinking pretty hard and is visibly off.

ROLAND

Parker this is Mr. Smith. I thought you'd like to sleep in. I'm a morning person. That's when I do my hunting. Found a ten dollar bill this morning on my walk.

PARKER

You're already buzzed? I thought you were taking a break.

ROLAND

I had a good break. A real good break. Your grandfather is on his way here, so you made good timing.

PARKER

What do you do here?

ROLAND

I stock the shelves and mainly I'm a watcher. I sit and make sure things aren't shoplifted. I also work through jobs through GAIN through the welfare department. Mr. Smith pays me under the table. And I can drink what I want, I just do it in the cooler.

PARKER

I guess that works out for you.

ROLAND

Yeah, it's ideal for a drunk.
(laughs)

PARKER

How can you employ him when he's wasted?

MR. SMITH

The thing about your dad, he's completely honest, sometimes to a fault. I can trust him with anything. That kind of nobility is rare these days.

ROLAND

I'm not even that wasted. You haven't seen me real wasted.

PARKER

I don't want to see you that way, man.

MR. SMITH

We used to own a record store next door. Once cassettes came out, people stopped buying albums. They just made their mix tapes. Couldn't keep it going.

Johnny Bee enters wearing a sky blue suit.

JOHNNY BEE

Well look came all the way from New York.

Johnny Bee shakes Parker's hand. Then Roland's and gives Mr. Smith a nod.

PARKER

Hey, longtime! I was six last time.

JOHNNY BEE

I got something for you, kid.

Johnny gives Parker a \$50 bill.

PARKER

Thanks!

JOHNNY BEE

Last time I saw you you stepped on that glass running around barefoot.

PARKER

I remember. You gave me a \$50 bill back then too.

JOHNNY BEE

I do what I can. A man need money in this world.

Johnny Bee gives Roland the \$200 he owes him.

ROLAND

Give that to Parker.

Johnny Bee gladly gives it to Parker.

JOHNNY BEE

Be smart with it.

ROLAND

I guess you beat some innocent souls out of their hard earnings.

JOHNNY BEE

I'll say it again so Parker can hear it. If they was innocent, they wouldn't be in the game.

PARKER

How did you get so good at cards.

JOHNNY BEE

It's not really about skill. It's about who can cheat the best.

ROLAND

High John de Conquerer! High Johnny Bee de Conquerer true to his name! True to the game. I might be drunk on Thunderbird and Night Train, but you drunk on the game.

JOHNNY BEE

I don't drink and I don't smoke.

ROLAND

No, gambling is his only vice. But then we all have at least one, don't we? I know I've got several.

JOHNNY BEE

When are you going to grow up? It's not even lunchtime yet and you already hopped up.

ROLAND

Woah, Parker may need a translation for that one. In the 20s hopped up originally meant high on opium, but it started to extend itself to other substances and ended up meaning intoxicated. Thing is, I'm not even really drunk yet.

JOHNNY BEE

Come see me in Georgia, Parker. I'm going home.

Johnny Bee shakes Parker's hand.

PARKER

I'll definitely come out that way
and see you.

JOHNNY BEE

Dukes son. Your dad never should
have gambled that Cadillac away if
he loved it so much. But then, I'm
sure he thought for sure he'd win
the hand. Can you blame me for
wanting to ride in style?

Johnny Bee extends his hand for a shake.

MR. SMITH

I'm not waisting any energy on it.

Mr. Smith shakes his hand after a pause.

JOHNNY BEE

Straighten yourself out, Roland.
You hear?

ROLAND

Eventually I will.

Roland and Johnny Bee shake and Johnny Bee turns and walks
out of the store, leaving a bit of a vacuum in his absence.

PARKER

I'm going to go too. I have school
tomorrow.

ROLAND

I want to give you something before
you go. Smith, I'll be back.

Roland grabs a beer and puts it in a paper bag.

MR. SMITH

Do your best up there at school.

Parker and Mr. Smith shake hands.

PARKER

Thanks. Take care.