

A FREE COUNTRY

a play

by

Stephen Most

What do we know but that we face
One another in this place?
-- W. B. Yeats

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[MAC sits on the bed inside his shack in a Seattle shantytown. It is one of many squatters' settlements across the country that became known as "Hooverilles" with ironic reference to President Hoover, who had no remedy for the Great Depression except the hope that "prosperity is just around the corner."]

MAC is an Irishman in his late forties or early fifties. His shack is sparsely furnished. In addition to the bed, there is a stove, whose dull glow indicates a fire within, a tinderbox, and a stand or table holding a kerosene lamp.

On this rainy winter night in 1930, MAC lights the lamp. There is a blanket on his bed. He places on the blanket objects of personal value that were around the room and on his person: some photographs, a letter, a stack of membership cards wrapped in twine, a pocket-sized red songbook, an IWW button. After looking at each solemnly, he rolls these items into the blanket.

From its hiding place under the mattress MAC retrieves a revolver. He spins the chamber, then takes a bullet from his pocket and puts it in the chamber, which he spins again. Deliberately, MAC places the revolver on the bed beside the rolled blanket.

Then MAC raises a bottle of whiskey and unscrews the cap. He is about to drink when someone knocks at the door. MAC is motionless at first, hoping the person will go away, but after a moment he screws the cap back on, tucks the bottle into the bedroll, and hides the gun under his mattress.]

LEON: Anyone there?

[Silence. LEON knocks again.]

LEON: Hey, is anyone in there?

MAC: Hold your horses. I'm comin'.

[LEON stands in the doorway. Though tall and wearing a hat and coat, he seems beaten down by the weather. MAC looks carefully at LEON, a colored man in his thirties. Outside in a driving wind, rain continues to fall.]

LEON: Mind if I come in outa the rain? Tryin' to make it to my shack, but it's hard to see out there. Headed for your light.

[MAC says nothing.]

LEON: The way sure is slippery. Almost fell over.

MAC: With them boards on the mud, it's a regular skid road.

LEON: I can make it. Just wet, that's all.

MAC: A goddamn tideflat.

[LEON steps close to the light.]

MAC: What happened to you?

LEON: Nothin'. I'm okay.

MAC: You been in a fight.

LEON: Got out of a fight.

MAC: Lookin' for trouble?

LEON: Can't help it if trouble finds me. Guy tried to cut me. Didn't let 'im.

MAC: Looks like you can defend yourself.

LEON: When I have to.

MAC: And fend for yourself.

LEON: We all doin' that.

MAC: It's an ill wind that blew ya here. Blew us all here.

[For a moment LEON watches MAC sink into the privacy of his despair.]

LEON: I better be goin'. So long, brother man.

MAC: Hold on.

LEON: You don't mind?

MAC: Mac's the name.

LEON: Leon.

MAC: Ain't seen you before.

LEON: Only been here couple weeks.

MAC: Big sprawl o' shacks. Too many men to keep track of.

LEON: Growin' every day. President says prosperity's 'round the corner.
All I see 'round the corner is more shacks like this one.

[MAC laughs bitterly.]

MAC: Take your hat off.

LEON: Mighty kind.

MAC: Play cards?

LEON: Not any more.

MAC: You quit?

LEON: Play a game, 'fore you know, you playin' for keeps.

MAC: Wasn't gonna bet. Got nothin' to bet.

LEON: I don't play.

MAC: You religious?

LEON: Bible never said nothin' bout bid whist and blackjack. Closest it gets is, "Time and chance happen to all."

MAC: Time and chance. That's what happened to me. Time and chance— and a stacked deck.

LEON: A stacked deck. Yes, indeed.

MAC: And there's no beatin' the odds.

LEON: Is cards how you pass the time?

MAC: Never went in for solitaire.

LEON: Didn' mean you playin' by yourself. You a hermit?

MAC: Oh no.

LEON: Never met a hermit.

MAC: When someone comes by, we usually talk.

LEON: Guess you wouldn't.

MAC: What?

LEON: Meet a hermit. Not in a city.

MAC: You could.

LEON: Prob'ly wouldn't.

MAC: Not likely.

LEON: What do you talk about?

MAC: With a hermit?

LEON: When somebody comes by.

MAC: Depends. If it's someone I knew in the old days, we talk about old times: people we knew, things we did. You know. If not, well, politics and women.

LEON: That's it?

MAC: What about you?

LEON: What about me?

MAC: Is that what you talk about?

LEON: Politics and women?

MAC: More interestin' than weather. Nothin' you can do about the damn weather.

LEON: Nothin' I can do about politics. And women— If I had lovin' on my mind, I sure wouldn't go through your door.

MAC: What door would you go through?

LEON: I ain't tellin' you.

MAC: Days go by, don't even see a woman's face. Single men. That's all there is 'round here. Men with no work. And no place to go.

LEON: This is just a stop on my road. Unless Lady Luck does me in.

MAC: For me, it's all come down to this.

LEON: This ain't so bad. Roof ain't leakin'. Got a stove. Firm walls. This is nice cardboard. Nice and thick. Where'd you get this?

MAC: Know where the glass company's at? They give out that cardboard they put between panes.

LEON: That's good stuff. Say, do you cook on this stove?

MAC: Coffee now and then.

LEON: No food, eh?

MAC: Rats would get it. Walls ain't that thick.

LEON: So you get soup tickets, go to the Salvation Army.

MAC: Starvation Army's more like it. Stand in line for a bowl o' oatmeal or stew. And then they sing at ya. Depresses the hell outa me.

LEON: Gotta eat somehow. Some folks say we in a Depression. Like a big hole people can't get out of. Or it's the way we're s'posed to feel.

MAC: You depressed?

LEON: Not me. There's no Depression for us colored folks.

MAC: You're here, ain't ya? These times are hard for everybody.

LEON: Times are no tougher now than they been, for us. Only difference is the white folks got it rough. And that makes things better, way I see it.

MAC: Oh, does it now?

LEON: It does. 'Cause we all on the same level. You got nothin', we got nothin'. All of a sudden, we no lower than you. In fact, we got somethin' you ain't got.

MAC: Yeah?

LEON: We know how to make it through tough times.

MAC: I survived plenty o' tough times. Don't think I was livin' high off the hog when the Crash came. Far from it. Far from it.

[*Silence.*]

LEON: You work today?

MAC: Yeah.

LEON: I split wood for a widow. She made me a good lunch—a beef sandwich!— and she let me have some cans to tin my roof.

MAC: There's work here and there. But no jobs. Not even shingle weavin'.

LEON: Lookin' for a real job—might as well spit in the wind. Long ago I learned—when the wind's blowin', bend so you not blown down.

MAC: But don't stoop. A man's got his pride.

LEON: What work did you find?

MAC: Mule job at the pier.

LEON: I bet that had you bendin'. What did you carry?

MAC: French sailor had four bags and a gunnysack full of stuff he bought at Pioneer Square. I took it to his ship. He said prices here are so low, it's like stealin'.

LEON: What he pay you for luggin' all that?

MAC: Not much. Nuff for a blanket.

LEON: New blanket, eh?

MAC: No, this used one. Practically all used up. Like me.

LEON: Your bedbugs will have company tonight!

MAC: Nearly killed me last night.

LEON: They don't call em sharks for nothin'. Sharks o' the night!

[*They listen to the rain.*]

MAC: It's wet enough for sharks.

LEON: I got shark bit too. Lost a bundle playin' poker.

MAC: When was that?

LEON: Little while ago.

MAC: Tonight? You said you quit cards.

LEON: I quit. I ain't playin' no more.

MAC: Oh, a recent conversion! What was it? Bad luck or a bad deal?

LEON: Man was dealin' from the bottom o' the deck. He was slick, but I caught on.

MAC: That's an old trick.

LEON: Had a crooked deck too, that sonavabitch.

MAC: How could you tell?

LEON: I know when a deck is marked. If you losin' regular, look at the cards. Look for a pattern of little notches on the back. With a deck like that, you can cheat anybody.

MAC: You call him on it?

LEON: You bet I called him on it. But he pulled a razor on me. Big long one, like a barber uses. I wasn't gonna let him slash me on top of robbin' me, so I stepped out o' there. I'll get him, though. He gonna pay me back and be glad he did.

MAC: Sure, pal.

LEON: I ain't foolin'. I mean what I say.

MAC: You blow your stack, and you'll be a lot sorrier than you are now.

LEON: I don't get sorry. I get even.

MAC: You'll get killed: that's what you'll get. Better go back to your place and cool off.

LEON: Oh, I'm plenty cool right here. Don't you worry 'bout me.

MAC: So, a gamblin' man.

LEON: Never was a shark. But I liked to bet, test my wits 'gainst the odds. Paid my way a few times. What I like is when folks think I don't know what's goin' on. I let 'em think it. Then I take their money. Been doin' that since the first time I laid a bet.

MAC: Layin' a bet is like baitin' a line. What takes skill is reelin' the sucker in.

LEON: Depends on what the bet is. First time I put somethin' in my pocket, the suckers was waitin' with their mouths open.

MAC: When was that?

LEON: Remember when white folks was lookin' for a "great white hope" to take the title from Jack Johnson?

MAC: Sure do.

LEON: And you remember when he fought Jim Jeffries?

MAC: Yeah. Jeffries had hung up his gloves. He came out o' retirement for that fight.

LEON: Bettin' men had heavy odds ridin' on him, and they put a lot o' money down. Folks thought I was nuts to bet on Johnson. Until Johnson knocked him out in round fifteen!

MAC: Jeffries was way past his prime.

LEON: I was so proud that day, and it wasn' just the money. It was knowin' I was smart as anyone else. And knowin' a colored man could be best in the world.

MAC: You can say that—

LEON: I know that.

MAC: —except when you're talkin' bout heavyweight champions. Ever since John L. Sullivan, all but one have been Irish.

LEON: None held a candle to Jack Johnson. He woulda flattened Dempsey—or Tunney.

MAC: Never! Look what Dempsey did to Jess Willard, and it was Willard who kayoed Johnson.

LEON: Jack Johnson threw that fight.

MAC: You're crazy!

LEON: He took a dive.

MAC: Willard knocked him out.

LEON: Johnson had been warned he'd be killed if he kept the crown.

MAC: Where'd you get that load o' crap?

LEON: It's true. White folks couldn't tolerate no colored champion. So Johnson went down for the count.

MAC: Were you there?

LEON: How was I gonna be in Havana? Course I wasn't there.

MAC: Neither was I. But I can tell you: Willard chopped him down like a spruce in the forest. And when Johnson crashed, there was no gettin' up.

LEON: What about the photograph?

MAC: What photograph?

LEON: The one that showed Jack Johnson stretched out on his back durin' the count, shadin' his eyes with his arm so everyone would know he coulda stood up and whupped Willard.

MAC: He was beaten. The better man won.

LEON: He threw the fight, man.

MAC: What did he get for doin' that? He had plenty o' money. He wouldn't have folded for a death threat. Musta gotten one o' those every day.

LEON: Gov'ment was after him too. I heard that if Johnson hadn't thrown that fight, they was gonna take his passport, make him stay in Cuba.

MAC: Why would the government care?

LEON: They was afraid of 'im.

MAC: Afraid? The government wasn't 'fraid of the Hun. Waged a whole war 'gainst the Kaiser's boys.

LEON: They was afraid of a colored man in his prime. A colored man who was strong, rich, and cocky, runnin' around with white women, laughin' in their faces. That's what they had to stop.

MAC: You got to be jokin'. He was no threat.

LEON: Jack Johnson was showin' colored fellas what we capable of.
Exposin' a power we can use to even the score.

MAC: What power was he exposin'?

LEON: Our confidence. And their fear. Their fear of us.

MAC [*laughs*]: Ah, that won't get you a flea in a flophouse.

LEON: The hell it won't!

MAC: You don't know what power is. Or what the government will do to
crush a real threat.

LEON: There's no crushin' us. We down all the way already. But when
we rise—

MAC: They'll be shakin' in their shoes.

LEON: They will fear us. They'll fear our anger. And when we show our
strength—

MAC: You crazy fool!

LEON: Watch out. Watch what you callin' me, or we gonna see who's
crazy!

MAC: I don't fear you. Don't fear nothin' after what I been through.
Don't you dare try to even no score with me.

LEON: I ain't keepin' score. Just passin' the time with you.

MAC: I respect a man who's willin' to take his life in his own hands. A
man like that is worth ten with no courage.

LEON: You think so?

MAC: But don't waste your moment.

LEON: Got any coffee?

MAC: None left.

LEON: Didn't make much, did you?

MAC: I didn't make any.

LEON: You told me you did.

MAC: Haven't made coffee for a week.

LEON: You didn't do all that carryin' for one fleabitten blanket. You must have had enough left over to buy some coffee. Or a meal. Or a woman.

MAC: Ain't got much appetite these days. Of any kind.

LEON: You lettin' your fire die.

MAC: So what?

LEON: Ain't you cold? I don't like it this cold. Mind if I put some wood in?

MAC: Go ahead.

LEON: This is all you got. [*LEON feeds the fire in the wood stove.*] You gonna be cold after this burns. For sure. 'Cause your blanket ain't no good. It'll warm you more from you scratchin' yourself than from coverin' your body.

MAC: A blanket like this—

LEON: Now, a good blanket, that's worth workin' for. A brand new blanket. You should get one for yourself. You can make the money. But that thing: it's pitiful, man.

MAC: You think so, do ya?

LEON: Better to have no blanket than that miserable thing. What did you buy it for? Someone prob'ly gave it to you to get rid of it.

[*LEON laughs. MAC glares at him.*]

MAC: Are you tryin' to offend me?

LEON: No.

MAC: Look me in the face, goddammit!

LEON: Sorry. Don't mean nothin'. It's just—such a pathetic thing, can't help myself. I seen misery, but this is misery!

[MAC watches LEON laugh.]

MAC: I guess it is pathetic lookin'.

[For a moment MAC laughs—or is he crying?—as LEON watches.]

MAC: There was a time when a blanket like this was the most precious thing a man owned. As precious as his freedom. 'Cause one or two lousy blankets were just about all he had.

LEON: Old bindlestiff, ain't ya?

MAC: That's right.

LEON: I seen 'em on the road with their blankets rolled up and tied behind 'em. Lookin' like snails!

MAC: We carried everythin' we had in those bedrolls. Inside, a man would tuck a photo or two, a plug of tobacco, a favorite book, a letter from his sweetheart if he had one. Whoever owned this blanket took it from one bunkhouse to the next.

LEON: Looks like yours is rolled up an' ready.

MAC: I ain't goin' nowhere. Nowhere on a rail.

LEON: Not in this weather.

MAC: I'm leavin' this shack feet first.

LEON: You— work in the woods?

MAC: Wheat and timber mainly. Did some pickin'. Hops, apples. There were lots of jobs then. In those days all you had to do was hop a freight to get a grubstake. You were free as a man could be,

workin' when you had to, livin' like you wanted: no clock to punch, no boss you wanted to punch.

LEON: Didn' go for the mills or the mines, the year-round work, did ya?

MAC: Not me. That was for guys who wanted to settle down, raise a family.

LEON: That's what my brother did. Built himself a nice house in the country. Raisin' food on his plot of land, fishin' in the creek, huntin' in the woods. My niece and nephews playin' wherever they like. It's beautiful. Hard times don't even touch them.

MAC: Why don't you live there?

LEON: The place is too small for me. 'Specially in the winter. If I'm gonna be inside, I'm gonna be where I can hear some music, in a speakeasy or a club. Or that roadhouse on the Everett line. Last week I heard this saxophone man who really knew how to play! He was swingin' a tune I couldn't get out of my head. "I hate to see that evenin' sun go down." [*LEON hums a saxlike riff.*] "I hate to see—" [*LEON hums some more.*] Next time I get some change, gonna hear him again. I'm gonna go there and listen for awhile, have a taste o' somethin' liquid, then go in the back room, sit in ona— Hunh, was gonna say 'in on a game.' That habit's gonna die hard.

MAC: In winter I'd always head for a city—Portland sometimes, Tacoma, or here to Seattle. Get off that boxcar carryin' my bindle—maybe have a can of somethin' wrapped in it; and walk right to the jungle, find my friends.

LEON: In them hobo camps.

MAC: Some called em that. And they called us 'boes.

LEON: That's what my momma said the city was full of: 'boes and ho's.

MAC: We'd gather scraps of wood, papers, get a fire goin' in a can. Hang a stewpot over the top. Get a mulligan boilin', men pitchin' in whatever food they're carryin'. Then we'd start singin', havin' ourselves a time. [*MAC sings to the melody of "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."*]

I pray, dear Lord, for Jesus' sake
Give us this day a t-bone steak
And if thou havest custard pies
I'd like, dear Lord, the largest size.

O hear me Lord, I'm prayin' still
But if you won't, our union will
Put porkchops on the bill of fare
And starve no workers anywhere.
A-men!

What a time to be young. Seems like a long time ago. A long time,
but as clear in my mind as wakin' from a gray dream and seein' all
the colors of the world.

Oh hear my cry, Almighty Host
Give us this day some quail on toast—

LEON: I saw a hobo camp. Wasn' far from here.

MAC: It was on higher ground. Up that way. Who'd sleep in this
marsh?

LEON: Came to Seattle one time with my momma when she was lookin'
for a job. And she told me, "Leon, you stay away from them
bums."

MAC: You know, there's a story. At harvest time in the Palouse, the
wheat farmer's daughter, a little girl, hears a knock at the door.
She opens it, sees a man, and calls out, "Momma, there's a bum at
the door." And her mother says, "That's no bum, darlin', that's a
harvest worker." Few months later, after the harvest is in at that
farm, there's another knock at the door. Little girl opens it, sees
the man she saw before, and says, "Momma, the harvest worker's
at the door." Her mother says, "That ain't no harvest worker.
That's a bum."

LEON: That's a good one.

MAC: It's how it was. Now there's no harvest and no workers. Just
bums.

LEON: I ain't no bum.

MAC: Nothin' to be ashamed of.

LEON: Oh, I ain't ashamed of being poor. Nothin' wrong with bein' poor.

MAC: We were proud to be bums. You know, once when I was young, I was lookin' for a handout on the street, and this well-dressed man walks toward me. I ask him for a nickel. He says, "Why don't you get a job?" I says, "Why should I?" He says, "To make money." And I says, "What for?" He says, "So you can buy the things you need." I tell him, "I can get what I need." And he says, "Fine. Then you can save your money and put it in a bank." And I says, "Why do that?" He answers, "If you save enough, your money will make money, and then— you won't have to work!" [*MAC shrugs comically.*] I'd already achieved what he was goin' to all that trouble for! And I damn well knew I'd rather be a bum on the rails than a bum on the plush.

LEON: That didn' happen to you.

MAC: You heard it before?

LEON: Must have. When I first lived in this city, my friends and I used to get together for nickel beer and wild entertainment.

MAC: Wild entertainment?

LEON: On the waterfront, listenin' to the soapboxers. I remember one fellow was tellin' the crowd, "If a man has long fingernails, that means he's a wise man!" Think he got that from some Chinaman. Or another time I heard, "the way to be healthy all your life is to eat nothin' but fruit." Nothin' but fruit. How you gonna do that? Crazy ideas.

MAC: What about the men who were talkin' 'bout worker solidarity to fight wage slavery?

LEON: Me and my friends shook our heads over that one. Imagine them white folks thinkin' they slaves when they get wages. Damn fools!

MAC: Maybe you didn' get what they were tryin' to tell ya.

LEON: What they callin' 'wage slavery', that was freedom for a slave. Workin' ten hours a day. Bein' paid for your work. Bein' able to

leave your job and go to another. Anyone who thinks that's slavery don't know what he's talkin' about.

MAC: Just cause slavery is oppression, that don't make wage slavery any kind of freedom. Oh, come on now. Don't tell me you'd like to have wage slavery right now.

LEON: Oh, I would. Beats doin nothin'. Beats bein' poor, livin' in a hole like this shack city.

MAC: That's why we're in this hole. 'Cause some folks settled for wage slavery 'stead of fightin' for their rights as workers. Bosses just played us off against each other. And now they got cheap labor.

LEON: I don't see much of any kind of labor out there. Or many bosses neither. But we had some funny evenin's down by the docks. There was one guy sayin', you should go naked as much as possible, and you had "a right to go naked anywhere, 'cause we're children of nature." We sure laughed 'bout that. I remember, there were four of us. We were sayin', "Okay. We gonna take off all our clothes and run downtown. Course they gonna put us in jail. But we just tell the judge, 'We got a right to go butt naked, your Honor, 'cause that's the way God made us!'"

[LEON laughs.]

MAC: You ever see me soapboxin'?

LEON: You? Don't believe so—

MAC: I was out there: wavin' my arms, raisin' my voice, singin' songs, tryin' to pull the crowds away from the Bible-bangin' Sallies.

LEON: Don't believe I ever saw you—

MAC: A jawsmith stickin' his neck out for the workin' man. And you, you saw nothin' but 'wild entertainment.' That's what workers' solidarity has come down to in this day and age. A joke. A waste of hope. It's every man against every other man.

LEON: Not as bad as that.

MAC: Damn near. Swindlers and scabs out there, they're the ones gettin' by. Swindlers and scabs! That's what happened to worker solidarity.

LEON: I dunno. I better be goin'.

MAC: Go on! The door is waitin'.

LEON: I wasn't laughin' at you.

MAC: Sure you were! You and your punk friends.

LEON: I was a kid—you know how it is.

MAC: You're not a kid any more. Where do you stand?

LEON: On worker solidarity? Never was no worker solidarity. Never will be. Long as some men paint themselves better than others.

MAC: Do you think I paint myself better than you?

LEON: Didn' say that.

MAC: Don't you take me for a fool!

LEON: Take it easy. Be seein' you, Mac.

[LEON goes. MAC takes the bottle out of the bedroll, opens it, and takes a long drink. After a moment, LEON reappears in the doorway.]

LEON: Forgot my hat.

MAC: Goddammit!

LEON: I knew it!

MAC: What do ya mean?

LEON: You— holdin' out on me. You bought that today with the Frenchman's money.

MAC: What if I did?

LEON: Jus' goes to show, man. That's all.

MAC: What're you drivin' at?

LEON: You talkin' 'bout your fellow worker, 'bout solidarity between laborin' people. But you won't share your bottle with a Negro.

MAC: That's got nothin' to do—

LEON: Everywhere I go, visitin' friends, meetin' strangers, when a man's got a bottle, he shares it. That's how it is. You know it— 'less you been livin' in a different country from me all these years. 'Less you thinkin' I ain't good enough for your bottle.

MAC: You callin' me a racist?

LEON: I ain't callin' you nothin. Jus' sayin' how it is.

MAC: You're judgin' me wrong.

LEON: I worked many years with white men. Many times a man would roll a Bull Durham and lick it, light it up, and pass it 'round. Or open a bottle and have a taste with the other white men. Never pass it to me or any colored man. 'Fraid I'd 'niggerlip' it. That's what they say. That's what I'm talkin' 'bout, Mr. Worker Solidarity.

MAC: You're layin' that on the wrong guy. My union recruited colored workers! Had colored organizers recruitin' colored workers!

LEON: If you say so, Mr. White. If you say it, must be right.

MAC: Come on, I ain't no white man. I'm an Irishman!

LEON: You talkin' to a colored man. That makes you a white man. And for me, talkin' to a white man is like that bottle. It's like all I am is colored glass. Could be gin in there or moonshine, even brown ale. But the glass is colored, so white folks think everythin' inside must have that same color.

MAC: You're doin' what you accuse 'white men' of doin: makin' me out to be a racist like there's no difference 'tween me and others of my complexion. Like there's no difference 'tween Irish and Italians, bosses and workers, Wobblies and AFL. You call us all 'white men.' But hell! Havin' the same pigment of skin don't mean a goddamn thing.

LEON: It don't have to. For you. To us, it makes a big difference. We're on one side of a color line, whether you see it or not. You don't have to see it. We do. All you see is the color that keeps us there.

MAC: Ah, that color line is just a pigment of your imagination.

LEON: I ain't jokin'. Look at the color of my skin. It don't take imagination to see skin.

MAC: I'm not sayin' it does. It don't matter, that's the point I'm makin'.

LEON: To see who someone is, that takes imagination. But tell me: when white people look at you, do they think they know you?

MAC: Yeah. They think I'm a bum.

LEON: When they look at you, they see a man. A man who's like no other. They look at me and all they see's a Negro, can't see past this skin. Enjoy your bottle. Have a little solidarity with yourself. I'll be on my way.

MAC: Don't you accuse me and run off.

LEON: I ain't accusin' you. It's just the way it is. Sometimes the rain is better than the shelter from the rain.

MAC: Wait and listen, will ya? I did hide this bottle. I hid it when I heard you at my door. But that was before I saw who you were: white, black, or Chinese.

LEON: You heard my voice.

MAC: Do you know why I hid it?

LEON: I don't care.

MAC: I didn' wanna socialize. Wanted to get drunk tonight. Blind drunk.

LEON: Help yourself.

MAC: Got nothin' to do with you. Every man's got a right to the suicide of his choice. It's a free country.

LEON: Be free, man, be free.

MAC: Oh hell, take the goddamn bottle. Have a drink.

LEON: You gonna need it all. No use drinkin' yourself half blind. And if you gonna do yourself in, you gonna need more bottles 'n that puny pint. Drink up!

MAC: No, take it.

[*MAC hands the bottle to LEON.*]

LEON: What is this?

MAC: Moonshine. Usually I'm sober as a judge. But I had a hard night last night. Couldn't sleep at all.

LEON: This'll lay you out if you have enough.

MAC: Lay me out like a slab. And why not? What else am I good for?

LEON: What are you sayin', man?

MAC: Tell me, Leon. . . You ever lose your handle on what you've lived for?

LEON: Don't know. I'm just livin'.

MAC: Last night I was headin' for my place when I saw this shack near the big mudhole one street over. Has a strong slanty roof, solid cedar door. Know the one I'm talkin' 'bout?

LEON: No, I don't.

MAC: For some reason I wanted to look in, find out who lived there. So I knocked. No answer. I stood there awhile, then swung the door open. And the first thing I saw— was a coffin. A brand new coffin. Walnut with shiny brass handles. And a man lyin' in it completely dressed! Guy about my age lyin' there like a corpse. I walked in, stood next to it starin', didn't know what to do. And then he sits up. Says, "Whadya want?" That coffin was his bed! I stammered somethin'. Got out of there quick.

LEON: You got the heebie jeebies, man. No wonder you couldn' sleep.

MAC: Couldn' get the sight of him out of my mind. Somethin' about him looked familiar: the color of his hair, the look in his eyes, reminded me of, of a friend.

LEON: Why didn' you stay and talk to him?

MAC: You kiddin'?

LEON: You was scared. But what about him? Here he is havin' a nice nap and a stranger comes in. He sits up and sees this look of horror on the fellow's face. Who suddenly is gone! How do you s'pose he felt?

MAC: You suppose I spooked him? He mighta thought I was a ghost!

LEON: He prob'ly drinkin' tonight jus' like you. Somethin' stiff!

MAC: Could be!

LEON: If you two was ever to know each other, you might laugh about it. Life goes on. Can't always close the book on it so neatly.

MAC: Don't be so sure.

LEON: I remember one time when I was a boy, had the heebie jeebies bad. People was gunnin' for my daddy. Some men shot at him in the street. We didn' dare stay at the house. So we went to the cemetery up the hill: the one that's set aside

for colored folks. Figured they wouldn't go after him there. I was scared, oh man! But Grandmama, she leaned back against a tombstone and held me and my brother. Folded us in her arms. [*LEON hums.*] Grandmama led us in prayer many times that night. And she said, "Don't you know: the good Lord didn't deliver us from slavery to have us die at the hands of evil men. The sun will rise and bring a new day." After awhile that sun rose like it always does, and we walked away from there back to our shack.

MAC: Who were those 'evil men'?

LEON: Don't want to get into that.

MAC: Why did they wanna kill your father?

LEON: Look, it's none of your—

MAC: I bet I know. And I bet they had their reasons.

LEON: You don't know shit 'bout my family! Or 'bout me neither.

MAC: You'd be surprised. I can see right through the glass.

LEON: You ain't the first man mistook his bottle for a telescope: liftin' it 'til you on your back, lookin' at the stars.

MAC: I ain't mistakin' a thing. You're the one's mistaken, thinkin' a 'white man' sees nothin' but skin. I judge folks by what they do, not by their shade; not the way you judged me for bein' a racist.

LEON: What is this, Judgment Day?

MAC: In a way.

LEON: Look: I see you got no hope. No handle either. But let's get past that skin-deep ugly stuff.

MAC: That's not what I'm talkin' 'bout. Those men you're callin' evil—

LEON: You don't wanna bring my family into this.

MAC: All I said is, I bet they had their reasons. You can prove me wrong.

LEON: You provin' yourself wrong.

MAC: Why don't you put me to the test? Take it as a game to pass the time.

LEON: What game, judgin' people you don't even know?

MAC: I do it. Don't everybody? Usually folks gettin' judged by strangers can't respond. But you can speak for your family.

LEON: I don't need to prove nothin'. There's enough proof in this bottle.

MAC: You afraid of the truth?

LEON: What truth?

MAC: That's what we'll find out. Let's you and me lay it on the line.

LEON: You goin' into deep waters now— way over your head.

MAC: If you got somethin' to hide—

LEON: I got nothin' to hide. All right, what do you bet?

MAC: The rest o' the bottle. Put it down right there. If I'm wrong, it's yours. And if I'm right, you get a chance to take the bottle back by stickin' somethin' on me if you can.

LEON: Who says if you right?

MAC: I'm the judge. You'll have to take my word.

LEON: Same when it's my turn then.

MAC: But we have to be honest, with an open mind. Only way to play this game. Straight shootin'. Truth and consequences.

LEON: Okay. I want to see how you judge my people.

MAC: First some facts. You were raised in Washington. Am I right?

LEON: Born and bred.

MAC: And your daddy was a coalminer.

LEON: How'd you know that?

MAC: You're 'bout thirty. Born turn o' the century

LEON: Right.

MAC: Weren't many Negroes in the state turn o' the century. And if you came from one o' them Negro elite families, you wouldn't be here.

LEON: Prob'ly not.

MAC: Your people came here by rail. On a Northern Pacific train. That's what brought 'em to the mines o' Washington.

LEON: You right on track: my daddy an' Momma, Granddad an' Grandmama too, they was all ridin that train.

MAC: Your grandmother too! Wasn't just a sometime job for one man. Your people were makin' a life here.

LEON: What are you gettin' at?

MAC: They traveled 'cross the country to take jobs away from men who were on strike.

LEON: Oh now, wait a minute! That's not why they came. The company—

MAC: The company brought scabs to break the strike.

LEON: Oh Lord. You callin my people scabs like I heard all my childhood. It was 'black scab' this, 'nigger scab' that.

MAC: Ain't it true? They were scabs.

LEON: That's your judgment, eh?

MAC: That's right. And the men who shot at your daddy were union men who got pushed out of their jobs by your people.

LEON: It was the railroad did it to all of us.

MAC: Didn't have to be that way. Your folks musta known they were bustin' a strike. A strike for better wages, shorter hours, safer workin' conditions.

LEON: So you suggestin' that my daddy and my granddaddy should have joined— That wasn't in the cards, man! Wasn't in the cards!

MAC: So they were scabs. The bottle's mine. Your turn to be the judge.

LEON: No, wait a minute. A word ain't no judge. A word ain't no judgment, man. You don't know the way it was.

MAC: The hell I don't.

LEON: You wanna hear or just hang onto that ugly word?

MAC: All right. Okay, spill it. You get one appeal. That's part o' the game.

LEON: It better be. See, my family was sharecroppers. After Emancipation, after the war ended, they was in Tennessee workin' fifty acres, still plantin' cotton, pickin' cotton. Doin' every job from blacksmith to wheelwright. And they didn' get paid, you see, 'cause they was in debt; in debt to the Man for lettin' 'em use the land. Then a recruiter came from the Iron and Coal Company seekin' out Negro workers.

MAC: Must have been a strike.

LEON: He offered my granddaddy a dollar a ton for minin' coal and a cabin to live in. And he took it. No other way he'd get a job. For him it was more than a job. It was the answer to his prayers. Granddaddy used to say, he'd go into a mine shaft so narrow, he'd have to kneel. And he'd be prayin' in the darkness every day, thankin' the Lord for takin' him away from that plantation.

MAC: He should have prayed he wouldn't blow up in there.

LEON: I'm tellin' this story. Don't need your help. Granddaddy started out loadin' coal cars, pushin' 'em to the mine entrance.

MAC: Those blasted mines were dangerous as hell.

LEON: Mules pulled 'em from there. After awhile he heard of a better-payin' job as a muleskinner further north. My grandparents and their children walked all the way, pullin' a cart with their stuff. Years went by. Then one day a recruiter came from the Northern Pacific coal company: Big Jim Shepperson. The company had asked him to get them anythin' but white miners. Anythin' but white and they'd put 'em to work in Washin'ton. So Big Jim went through the South and up North to all the minin' towns that had colored workers. And that's how my family came here. Together with seven hundred men, women, and children on a train from St. Paul. On board, in every car there was Pinkerton guards. As the train was crossin' Idaho, the Pinkertons broke open boxes of Winchesters and handed rifles out to the men. Told 'em to watch out the windows for 'wild Indians.' But once they got near the Cascade range, the men was told there was strikin' miners waitin' for 'em, ready to shoot 'em when they came into town. By then they had no choice. Train wasn't gonna let 'em off noplase else. So they got themselves ready—

MAC: To take jobs from union workers.

LEON: Ready to die. I'm tellin' you like my granddaddy told me. He and the others stepped off that train onto the platform. They lined up, just like in a chain gang, only they was holdin' rifles as they marched into town. And the strikin' miners jeerin' at 'em, sayin', "Look at them nigger slaves!" Granddaddy was afraid, but he started singin'. All the men, up and down that line, was singin', and it wasn't no work song:

I'm goin' through, I'm goin' through,
I'll pay the price whatever others do;
I'll take the way with the Lord's despised few;
I'm goin' through, Jesus, I'm goin' through.

MAC: I hear you. The old divide-and-conquer.

LEON: They was united in spirit.

MAC: I'm talkin' 'bout all the men, rifles aimin' at each other across the divide the company put between 'em.

LEON: They didn't aim. Mighta started someone shootin'.

MAC: There was a divide. That's what I'm sayin'. Between the men there was hatred and fear and a willin'ness to kill.

LEON: They didn't wanna kill nobody.

MAC: The company set 'em against each other. They're still doin' that. Bosses break a strike with colored scabs to keep us workin' people at each others' throats, hatin' each other, thinkin' our skin divides us when really it's them.

LEON: Oh, I don't blame bosses for the hate I seen. I take each man for who he is, rich or poor.

MAC: While the boss takes you for a ride. A ride across the picket line.

LEON: Only way a man like me got to work on the docks, in the shipyards—

MAC: Was scabbin'. Bustin' the union. In your family tradition. My judgment stands.

LEON: So you standin' with the men who shot at my daddy. Is that what you tellin' me? After what I told you?

MAC: I wouldn'ta done what they did.

LEON: But you wouldn'ta stopped 'em. Am I right, Judge? If they had shot my daddy, you woulda cheered. And what if they lynched him?

MAC: How dare you? How dare you say that to me? My friend— Wesley—

LEON: You woulda gone.
Nothin' evil 'bout those
men. Not to you. 'They
had their reasons." You
woulda stood there
watchin' while they strung
my daddy up, let him
hang. You woulda
celebrated with those men!
Am I right?

MAC: Wesley, he was a leader.
Recruited men into the
ranks of the IWW. Had
that visionary gleam,
piercin' eyes. He inspired
men, inspired 'em to join
the Wobblies, to fight for
the eight-hour day. Until
he was drafted. Sent to
France. He was cited for
bravery there. He'd been
back only a month or two.
The war was over. We
were in Centralia. I didn't
know it was Armistice Day,
but Wesley did. He was
wearin' his uniform. Had
his hair trimmed. And
they killed him.

LEON: Your friend was lynched?

MAC: By a mob of respectable citizens. They'd planned a raid on
Wobbly Hall that day. They wanted to drive the union out of
Centralia. But they didn't expect a veteran would be in the
hall when they broke in. When the mob was bashin' down the
door, Wesley told the boys— he said, 'I fought for democracy
in France, and I am gonna fight for it here.' And he fought
'em until his gun jammed and a bunch of men overpowered
him. They tore his uniform off him, and they mutilated his
body. And after they'd done that, the men tied him up with
ropes and dragged Wesley to a wagon bridge over the
Chehalis. That's where they hung him, over the river. Last
night, when I couldn't sleep, it was his face— He was the best
of us. The best of us. Why did he have to die?

LEON: Nobody here 'sides you and me.

MAC: Oh man, I need a drink.

LEON: Don't you drink up the prize. I ain't had my turn yet.

MAC: Have you no sympathy?

LEON: There's a noose over my head every day. Over the head of every colored man. All we have to do is cross the line.

MAC: Let's go down for double.

LEON: You got another bottle.

MAC: I'm raisin' the stakes.

[MAC takes the gun out from under the mattress.]

LEON: What are you doin', Mac?

MAC: Winner take all.

LEON: Put that back, man!

MAC: It's yours if you win.

LEON: I won't play that game.

MAC: You could use this.

LEON: Oh, no.

MAC: You could get your money back.

LEON: I got trouble enough.

MAC: You in the game or ain't you? It's your turn! If you don't like it, you can leave.

LEON: Put it away!

MAC: And then I win. I win the prize.

LEON: Don't be crazy, man.

MAC: Stayin', are ya? Go on then. It's your turn to be the judge.

LEON: Who are you to make all the rules? You make up the game, rig it so I can't win. And then you set the stakes so I can't even go ahead on.

MAC: You're free to go.

LEON: Oh, so now you're emancipatin' me. You're a white man just like the rest of 'em.

MAC: Is that your judgment?

LEON: I haven't started judgin' you.

[LEON picks up the revolver.]

MAC: Go ahead.

LEON: Don't you tell me what to do.

[LEON opens the chamber, looks into it, and spins the cylinder before putting the gun down.]

LEON: If I'm gonna be the judge, this stays by my side, to give the court some authority.

MAC: You see if you can win it.

LEON: Oh, I ain't gonna win no prize.

[LEON picks up the bottle and drinks.]

MAC: Hey! Don't kill it.

LEON: It's better this way. How's a judge gonna have an open mind if a prize is ridin' on his judgment?

MAC: Then give me some and get on with it.

LEON: Stand up. *[LEON bangs his fist down as if it were a gavel.]*
The court is in session.

MAC: All right.

LEON: First some facts. You came from Ireland. And you joined the Industrial Workers of the World.

MAC: That's right. I'm a Wobbly.

LEON: The I.W.W. We used to call 'em the "I Won't Work" union.

MAC: For us, it was "I Will Win."

LEON: Now you didn't jus' push your union; you was takin' over, like a gang.

MAC: We were too unruly to be a gang.

LEON: A lot o' men joined you 'cause you controlled the rails. Man couldn't get on a boxcar without you makin' him sign onto your union or you'd push him off. That's what I heard. Ain't that how you did it?

MAC: We didn't do that. Didn't have to.

LEON: I heard different. You guys acted like the bulls and like the Pinkertons, only for the unions. Bosses didn't want you to do that. But there was somethin' else they wanted you to do, and you did it for 'em.

MAC: Yeah? Well, set me straight, judge.

LEON: In my court, it's "Your Honor."

MAC: All right, Your Honor. Show me the error of my ways.

LEON: Why do you suppose the big companies like Northern Pacific brought all those workers here from Ireland and England and Sweden and Norway and all them foreign places? Boatloads and trainloads of you. Enticin' you with low fares, jobs, cheap land.

MAC: They needed good workers, lots of 'em, to build up industry, give the railroads somethin' to carry.

LEON: We was good workers, and we was already here. This country was built on the backs of slaves. Generations of slaves

laborin' under the whip. And after Emancipation finally came, there was plenty of colored folks sharecroppin', lookin' for wage work. But the companies wanted white men to take the good jobs, and they wanted men like me to take the jobs that was too dirty and too dangerous for the white folks. Your unions fell right into that, attackin' colored workers, callin us 'scabs' like you still doin'. You pushed us right under where the bosses wanted us. And then they used us against you.

MAC: You can't call me on that. We Wobs saw through that game. We had colored members; we knew we had to if we were gonna take over. But you didn't join us. You let yourselves be used.

LEON: That's right, I coulda joined the Wobblies. That woulda done a lot for me. Room and board at the government expense— if I'd lived to enjoy it.

MAC: I did eight years in Walla Walla.

LEON: What was the rap?

MAC: "Attackin' the lynchmob" in Centralia! Prosecution claimed we fired at 'em for no reason. Anyone who said different was locked up with us. If I'd quit the union, they woulda let me out after five. But I went in a union man, and I came out o' there a union man.

LEON: You proud, I can see that. Proud of your union card. But for me, bein' a Negro is trouble enough. Joinin' you wouldn'ta done me no good. I wanted to raise a family, to get by like anyone else. So I go lookin' for work, and I hear, "Sorry, we don't need a janitor." "Sorry, that's a union job." "Sorry, for white men only." Then when the union goes out on strike and I get my first decent-payin' job, union men beat up on the colored workers and call us 'scabs.' That's how the game is rigged, and you was a part of it.

MAC: That's what we were tryin' to change. But we needed your help, and you didn't have the guts to join us. Just thinkin' about yourself. You got nothin' on me.

LEON: Oh, I do. Somethin' personal. Somethin' you did to me.

MAC: Without even knowin' ya?

LEON: That's right. You was in Seattle at the end of the war.

MAC: Sure was.

LEON: You was here when shipyard workers was demandin' more pay.

MAC: I was in the thick of it.

LEON: And you pushed for a general strike like the rest o' the Wobblies.

MAC: We did more than push. We got all the unions behind us. Almost all of 'em. And we ran this city.

LEON: Oh, you did.

MAC: It was amazin' even to us. We workin' stiffs had three days to get everythin' organized, no more than that, and things fell into place better than we ever dreamed. We kept the peace without weapons. We provided power to the city. Delivered milk to every family. Served thousands of meals every day, fed anyone with two bits or a smile. It was the time of my life. I always believed people are cooperative by nature, and those days proved me right. It was the opposite of greed. It was each responsible for all.

LEON: It lasted five days.

MAC: It was a moral victory.

LEON: Before that strike, I was workin' steady at the shipyards. Had me a woman. Was livin' in a nice house. That was the last decent job I had.

MAC: Wasn't our fault the government closed the shipyards.

LEON: Wasn't your fault? You Wobblies was talkin' revolution, gettin' folks scared about the Bolsheviks takin' over. Gov'ment had to come down hard on this town. Might still be a shipyard here if it wasn't for you. 'Cause that's where we are, you

know. This was the shipyard right here. Where this swamp city is tonight, I used to work with hundreds of men. Right here, where men wash up like junk from a shipwreck.

MAC: We couldn't have known.

LEON: Naw. You couldn't have known. You couldn'ta known that my wife would leave me when I lost my job! I can't blame you for that. Can't blame you for the drinkin' I did when the shipyard closed. Or for how I felt lookin' down at white men's feet, snappin' that rag, sayin' "Polish, suh?" I can't blame you for that. Marchin' your glorious revolution over the backs of folks like me. Who you didn't even know. And wouldn'ta cared if you did. I was just a scab! I can't blame you for that? Can't blame you for ruinin' my life! And for what? A five-day holiday! That's what I call you on, Mac.

MAC: You think I'm guilty.

LEON: Think it? I know it.

MAC: I get an appeal. You had one. You see, there's no force weaker than the feeble strength of one. One finger, what can that do? But a hand can do somethin', and the hands of a group of men can do almost anythin'.

LEON: So you need a group to be powerful?

MAC: That's right.

LEON: I disagree. A single man can be powerful indeed. My granddaddy was a slave, but he was never enslaved in his mind. He made sure my daddy learned to read and write. And he made us go to school and work hard every day. That took determination in a town where we was hated. But Granddaddy held us to it.

MAC: You had hopes for yourself.

LEON: Oh yes. Second generation out o' slavery. We figured things was bound to get better.

MAC: Ever think you'd end up in a place like this?

LEON: I'm not endin' up here.

MAC: I don't mean this is the end. Not for you. No tellin' what might happen in your lifetime. But me. A man whose youth has gone. Whose life is reduced to the space between these walls.

LEON: You askin' me to pity you?

MAC: No.

LEON: That's good. Justice is blind in this court. My granddaddy told me, forgive the sinner but not the sin. We lookin' at the sin tonight.

MAC: What sin? The sin of tryin' to make a better world? That's exactly what you want too: a world where you'll have work and dignity, same as everyone. There's no sin in goin' for that. Your Honor, if you could only imagine what I was in those days.

LEON: You told me already: a bum.

MAC: A bum with the greatest power a man can have. The power of a great idea unitin' him with other men.

LEON: Here we go again. The General Strike.

MAC: I'm talkin' about One Big Union.

LEON: Sounds like wild entertainment to me.

MAC: One Big Union of the workers who are producin' the wealth everywhere in the world. That's what it takes to show the power that workin' people have. A power so simple and so great once you think about it: All we have to do is fold our arms and everythin' stops. The great industrial machine that we built, that we run every day, stops in its tracks!

LEON: That's the dream you keep comin' back to. I tell you, it'll never happen, not long enough to do anythin'.

MAC: It happened in Paris sixty years ago. It took two armies, the German and the French, to break the Paris Commune. But

when all the workers o' the world join forces, nothin' will be able to turn us back. 'Cause everythin', every business, every army, every government depends on us.

LEON: When I first walked in here, I thought you was a hermit. Now I see you a one-man parade.

MAC: One among thousands.

LEON: Maybe in the old days. But now that parade is just marchin' through your head.

MAC: Listen now. And listen carefully. When you take action, you don't know exactly what's gonna happen, you don't know who's gonna get hurt. That's the way it is. That's the price of it. But you gotta weigh that against what you get. A lot o' men died buildin' the railroads. Many are buried in the mines; more than necessary if the workers had called the shots. But look around you. Every city, every industry's built on sacrifice. So you got no case against me for what happened to you. We couldn'ta known what the government would do. Those shipyards didn't want to close. We thought that when they saw how united we were, how powerful we were, they'd give in.

LEON: And raise wages?

MAC: Yes. And if the General Strike had won, workers everywhere would know how to keep the bosses from drainin' our lifeblood from us and leavin' us in the dirt when we're all used up.

LEON: Seems like that's just where you left me: in the dirt while you was up there on your soapbox dreamin'.

MAC: It's not a dream. Cooperation between workers—

LEON: Can't you get down off that damn soapbox for a minute, man? There's no crowd out there. Jus' me. And I'm tellin' you, you left me in the dirt! And I can tell you what the sin was too: thinkin' you knew what was good for everybody an' imposin' it on everybody.

MAC: You can call it a sin to do what needs to be done. But you gotta think more about what's good for people in general and less about yourself if you want mankind to advance.

LEON: What's good for people in general— is that what you was thinkin' about when they lynched your friend, Wesley?

MAC: That's not fair. You weren't there. They came in shootin'. Men were screamin'. It happened so fast, we weren't ready for 'em. When they attacked Wesley, I made a dash down the stairs to get reinforcements. To bring men from the saloon. But it was empty. I stepped into the street, and I saw that mob draggin' Wesley, blood gushin' from his yellow hair.

LEON: Wesley— was white? And they lynched him? Mutilated his body? That happened to a white man?

MAC: He was a Wob, and it was open season on the Wobs. If only I had been killed that day. If only I had fired at the lynchmob, I could have made 'em run. Instead I panicked. I stepped back in the doorway! How many nights have I seen Wesley's face hauntin' my dreams? How many mornin's have I woken with the cold sweats, feelin' I'd betrayed him, betrayed myself.

[MAC lunges for the gun, grabs it before LEON can stop him, and pulls the trigger. The revolver does not shoot.]

LEON: Put that down! You still don't know what you're doin'—

MAC: Oh, I do—

LEON: To me!

[LEON grabs for the gun. After a struggle, MAC lets the gun go. LEON points it at him.]

LEON: I will reach my verdict, and I will execute the sentence.

MAC: All right.

LEON: You betrayin' it all, Wesley and everythin' you lived for. You ain't gonna convince me your cause was worth any sacrifice when you desertin' it yourself.

MAC: Maybe I am desertin', but— I gave it all I had. Sacrificed everythin' already.

LEON: My judgment stands.

MAC: You can condemn me for a failure: a rash old fool whose life has come to nothin'. But don't condemn what I lived for. The hope for the future—

LEON: Can't judge the future. No admissible evidence.

MAC: That's what we fought for. And won! We won the eight-hour day.

LEON: When is the last time you worked only eight hours for a paycheck? I never did.

MAC: We saved freedom of speech.

LEON: Freedom of speech?

MAC: Cities had ordinances against speakin' up in public. In spite of the First Amendment. Which is just lines on paper if nobody puts his body on the line for it. And that's what we did: hundreds of us. We took on city after city in free speech fights, gettin' up on the soapbox and gettin' arrested for speakin'! You know what I was sayin' in Spokane when the cops hauled me off to jail? The Declaration of Independence! We clogged their courts and sang in our cells all winter until finally the taxpayers got so mad that they were feedin' all those Wobs that the city backed down and repealed the ordinance.

LEON: Another moral victory.

MAC: A real victory. If they can arrest you for speakin', anythin' can happen to you and nobody will hear about it.

LEON: Seems to me that's the way it's been all my life. Ain't nobody heard what I have to say. I could stand up there on your soap box and no one would listen. And if I went to jail, no one

would care. So thanks for your Wobbly victories, but they don't mean nothin' to me.

MAC: No one will listen if you go to jail by yourself. You need a like-minded crowd.

LEON: It takes more than a crowd. That man in India who's leadin' marches to the sea, he's usin' his soul power. Mahatma Gandhi. Now there's a powerful man.

MAC: People can do great things when they're united, fightin' for the same cause. But when we let our differences divide us, we're lost. That's when there's no hope.

LEON: Hope? What hope? While you playin' with you life? You'd do better sayin' your prayers.

[LEON offers both the bottle and the revolver to MAC.]

LEON: Here. You entitled to the suicide of your choice. It's a free country.

[LEON starts to leave.]

MAC: Wait! Here. You take the gun. Make that gambler pay you back.

LEON: You still don't get me. You think I'd throw myself onto the wheel of chance with the odds against me?

MAC: What do you mean?

LEON: Look, if that cardshark had killed me like he was tryin' to, nothin' would have happened, you know: a white man killin' a colored man; not even worth investigatin'. But what if I walk out of here and point this at him? What if somethin' happens and he gets shot? Police would be all over. They'd search every shack, terrorizin' people, arrestin' colored men all over the city—not just to get me, but so the likes of me would know they better not harm another white man.

MAC: That kind of thing don't get in the papers.

LEON: It's happened before. It'll happen again.

MAC: It's like you live in a different country.

LEON: A separate one.

MAC: One big disunion. Can there be any, any— ?

LEON: Between us? Different things happen to a man like me than happen to you.

MAC: Is there no common ground?

LEON: Beneath our feet. And that's mud!

[*They laugh.*]

LEON: Gonna head for my shack.

MAC: Take it easy. Slippery footin' out there.

[*LEON goes. MAC looks after him, at the doorway. MAC picks up the revolver and takes the bullet out before putting the gun under his mattress. Then he replaces the photographs, letter, membership cards, red songbook, and IWW button where he found them in his pockets and around the room. Adjusting the wick of the lamp, MAC hears LEON singing as he walks to his shack.*]

LEON: I woke up this mornin' with my mind
Set on freedom
Woke up this mornin' with my mind
Set on freedom
Woke up this mornin' with my mind
Set on freedom
Hallelu, hallelu, hallelujah.