

Scene 4: BLACK BOTTOM  
How Soon We Forget

(WILLA, GUSSIE, HONEYBEE, CHARLES, OLIVER are sitting playing CARDS. CHARLES arm is around HONEYBEE. A big shiny diamond is on HONEYBEE'S hand.)

WILLA

That's a pretty rock on yo' fanger. I know you ain't making that kinda money pressin' hair.

HONEYBEE

What I make ain't yo' business. I got Charles, and he gets me anything I want.

WILLA

(To CHARLES) And you fine having a woman who work in the whorehouse?

CHARLES

Willa don't start. This the holiday. We ain't here to play who shot John. Throw that card down.

HONEYBEE

I don't work there. I just go there and fix the girls hair.

GUSSIE

(To Honeybee) That's where Charles met you, ain't it?

HONEYBEE

And if he did? Sides, my sister works there not me. And what she do is her bitness. Hell, y'all sister the one running the cathouse and you wanna judge me? Chil' please!

GUSSIE

You livin' with a married man and yo' sister sleeping with every man. Y'all's mama sho raised you two, now didn't she? (Throws down card) Ever'thang Charles get is dirty. Women, money--

(HONEYBEE stares at GUSSIE and rolls her eyes.)

CHARLES

Clean money, dirty money, (Throws down card) it all spend the same.

OLIVER

I know that's right. I hear Fats paying y'all runners thirty-five a week. That's better than Ford Motors.

CHARLES

Oh, yeah. He treat all his number runners good. We makin' Bread-n-Butter, baby. Bread-n-butter! (Throws card down.)

WILLA

I bet if you ain't have no money (Points to HoneyBee) this high yella thang sitting here wouldn't have nothing to do with you. (Throws down card)

GUSSIE

(To HoneyBee) You do know Charles married? Or did he forget to tell you that?

CHARLES

Ain't no need of tryin' to shame nobody. 'Cause I ain't shame 'bout nothing I've done.

WILLA

You should be. You married.

GUSSIE

That's how these country nigga's do. Come up North, make a new family and forget what they got back home.

HONEYBEE

She down south and I'm up here. I got Charles and the ring. (Flashes ring)

WILLA

You and him both gone burn in hell. Up here livin' in sin.

HONEYBEE

You and this messy hen, here ain't saints either.

GUSSIE

Who you calling messy and you just two seconds out'a the whore house?

OLIVER

Willa, get yo' cousin. We tryin' to play cards.

CHARLES

I ain't gone let you and keep disrespecting HoneyBee, hear?

GUSSIE

What you mean, let me? She doing a good job disrespecting herself.

HONEYBEE

(Stands to leave) I ain't gotta take this. Charles take me home.

GUSSIE

Listen to her, Charles.

CHARLES

Bee, you ain't gotta go nowhere. You with me, and ain't nobody in this room got a right to judge nobody.

GUSSIE

It ain't judging. It's the truth.

CHARLES

Sit on down, Bee. Ain't nobody at this table free from sin. Willa? Yo' preacher know you gamble? Yo' husband know you sneak sneak over to Fats putting yo' numbers in? You hit the number for Sev'ny-five dollars, right?

OLIVER

(Teasing) That's how you paid for this dining room table, Willa?

(WILLA turns her head in embarrassment and HONEYBEE smiles with a light chuckle)

CHARLES

That's what sin do. (Looks at Willa) Get us what we ain't 'spose to have. (Throws card down, kisses Honeybee's cheek) Baby, we won this round.

(There is a knock on the door. OLIVER goes to answer. PEARLENE, CHARLES'S wife, and their 3-year-old daughter, NETTA stand outside. PEARLENE is holding a suitcase in one hand.)

OLIVER

Hey, now.

PEARLENE

You gon' let us in or what?

OLIVER

Who you?

PEARLENE

Pearlene.

(OLIVER smiles. He turns around and calls out for WILLA.)

OLIVER

Willlllaaaaa!

WILLA

(Walks to the door) Well, loookah here! Pearlene! (Takes the suitcase) I'm glad y'all got the tickets I sent you. Hope the train ride was comfortable. Gone in the dining room. We got a card game going. I'm sho you can give 'em a hand.

(WILLA has a devious smile on her face. PEARLENE lets herself in. NETTA is by her mother's side. All eyes are fixed on PEARLENE. CHARLES is beyond shocked and ashamed. He stands and walks over to PEARLENE. They stare at one another with no words.)

PEARLENE

So? When was you gone come get us? Me and the baby been waiting two years. She three.

CHARLES

Pearl . . .

PEARLENE

You a liar.

CHARLES

Pearl, lemme just talk to you.

PEARLENE

I waited for you. No letter. No tickets. No show. You forgot you had me and yo' baby in Miss'sippi?

CHARLES

Pearl? I ain't—

PEARLENE

You ain't worth a damn! That's what you ain't!

(PEARLENE looks past CHARLES and stares over at HONEYBEE. HONEYBEE holds up her hand with the ring CHARLES bought for her and looks at it admiringly to taunt PEARLENE. CHARLES looks over at HONEYBEE and then back at PEARLENE.)

PEARLENE

She the reason you ain't come? She know I'm you wife?

CHARLES

(A beat) She do now.

(END SCENE)