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# Tobacco Road

By Nunnally Johnson

This is Tobacco Road today,  
but a hundred years ago...  
... when the first Lesters  
came to Georgia, it was different.  
It run 15 miles down the ridge  
to the Savannah River...  
... through the richest  
cotton and tobacco plantations...  
... in the whole South...  
... past fine big homes that the Lesters  
themselves built and lived in.  
But that was a hundred years ago.  
Come a time then  
when the land fell fallow...  
... and worse and worse.  
But you think the Lesters  
would leave it? No, sir.  
They stayed on and on...  
... but all that they had  
and all that they were...  
... that's all gone with the wind  
and the dust.  
And this...  
This is Tobacco Road today.  
Whoa.  
Hi, Henry. How come?  
Can't complain, Jeeter.  
That's good. Hey, is it...?  
Is it true what I hear,  
that Bessie's back?  
Yes, sir, last week.  
Buried her husband  
down at Statesboro.  
Wasn't hardly cold  
before she picked up and hiked home.  
Well, ain't that good?  
Say, is she...?  
Is she still full of spirit?  
Jeeter, it's worse and more of it.  
I do declare, it looks like my head's  
gonna split open...  
...with all this singing  
and yelling and hallelujah-ing.  
Whoo! She sure got a powerful voice.

Ain't been quiet since she got back.  
Yeah, well, so long, Henry.  
You know you got a blowout there?  
I can get home  
as long as I got one good one.  
I'm gonna trade this darned car in  
next year.  
Well, so long, Henry.  
What's the matter?  
- Supper ready?  
- Supper? Huh.  
What about that wood?  
Well, there it is, can't you see it?  
How come I can still see it?  
How come you didn't sell it?  
Well, you can't sell no wood if nobody  
wants to buy no wood, can you?  
You're the craziest old fool  
I guess I ever did see.  
That's the fourth time you've taken  
that same load to town...  
...and brung it back.  
Ain't even had it out of the car.  
No, and I ain't gonna  
take it out of the car.  
Hey, here comes Lov.  
He's toting a croker sack.  
It's got something in it.  
Reckon it's turnips  
he's got in that sack.  
Turnips? Mm.  
I sure could use me  
some turnips right now.  
If it is, Lov sure will give his wife's  
poor old ma some of them turnips.  
He'll give me some...  
...because Lov and me, we certainly  
think a whole heap of each other.  
Come on, get back.  
Pretend like you didn't see him.  
Come on, let's get back  
and just act natural-like.  
Hi, Lov! Ain't seen you in a long time.  
Say, you must be plumb worn out...

...toting whatever it is  
you got in that old croker sack.  
- I ain't tired.  
- How's Pearl, Lov? Is she all right?  
That's what I come for.  
I wanna talk to Jeeter about Pearl.  
Well, what's she done now?  
She been treating you mean again?  
Jeeter, you gotta  
say something to Pearl.  
I'm getting darned sick  
of the way she's acting.  
Well, are you treating her right?  
What's that gotta do with it?  
She's married to me, ain't she?  
Well, what's she done now?  
Well...  
...one thing, she won't talk to me.  
- What do you want her to say to you?  
Anything, I don't care what.  
She could ask me is my back tired...  
...when I come home  
from the coal chute, couldn't she?  
Or do I think it's gonna rain...  
...or when is I gonna get my hair cut.  
There's a lot of things  
she could ask me...  
...but she won't say one darn word.  
Well, maybe you don't  
go about it right.  
Why, I tried every way I know how.  
I kicked her  
and I poured water on her...  
...and I chucked rocks  
and sticks at her...  
...and all she does  
is bawl a lot when she's hurt.  
You can't call that talking.  
Well, her not talking  
ain't anything to get mad about.  
Why, Ada here  
never spoke a word to me...  
...for the first 10 years  
we was married...

...and them was the happiest  
10 years of my life.  
She runs away too.  
I'm sick and tired  
of the whole business.  
Give her time, boy. She'll be all right.  
She ain't but 13, remember.  
You listen to me, Lov Bensey.  
If you don't like what she's doing,  
bring her back home.  
Get yourself another wife.  
You can have Ellie May.  
Oh, every time I say anything,  
y'all want me to marry Ellie May.  
Well, it ain't no use,  
that's all there is to it.  
I want a young wife. I ain't gonna take  
no 23-year-old woman for a wife...  
...and have everybody  
laughing at me.  
- Hey, Lov.  
- Hey, Ellie May.  
It's Pearl I'm talking about.  
Lov, will you tell me whatever it is  
you got in that croker sack?  
I been looking at it  
since you come here...  
...and Lord knows  
I'm just dying to know.  
Turnips, by cracky.  
Turnips. I ain't...  
I ain't had me a good turnip  
since a year ago last spring...  
...and, oh, the good Lord only knows  
how bad I've wanted one.  
Why, you know, I could eat me  
that whole croker sack full of...  
I could eat me  
a whole wagonload full of turnips...  
...between now and sundown.  
Don't look for me to give you none,  
because I ain't.  
Well, that's a whopping mean thing  
to say to Pearl's poor old pa.

Ain't you gonna give me  
just a bite, Lov?  
No.  
I tell you what I'll do.  
I'll make you a trade  
for some of them there turnips.  
I ain't trading turnips with nobody.  
If you'll give me  
some of them turnips...  
...I'll go to your house  
the first thing in the morning...  
...and tell Pearl to behave herself.  
Tell her that ain't no way  
to treat a man...  
...who's gone to the bother  
of marrying her.  
And I'll tell her she's gotta  
stop hiding in them bushes...  
...and ask if it's gonna rain.  
- And are you gonna get your hair cut.  
Well, what do you say, Lov?  
I don't gotta pay you for that.  
I already give you some quilts  
and two quarts of cylinder oil...  
...and \$ 7 to marry Pearl,  
and that's enough.  
You gotta make her behave  
for nothing.  
Just one little bitty bite, Lov?  
It ain't no use you niggling at me.  
Lov.  
Please, Lov.  
All my children  
all the time blaming me...  
...because the old good Lord  
made me poverty-stricken.  
Them and their ma's  
all the time bawling me out...  
...because they ain't got nothing to eat,  
as if I had anything to do with it.  
Yes, sometimes it looks to me...  
It looks to me like the good Lord's got  
it in good and plenty for a poor man.  
But I ain't complaining.

No, sir, I ain't complaining.  
Ow! Ow!  
Hold him, Ellie May,  
hold him, hold him.  
Hold him, hold him, Ellie May.  
Hold him, Ellie May.  
Hold him, honey.  
Give me my turnips, you old fool.  
You old fool.  
Give me my turnips.  
Give me my turnips.  
Give me some of them turnips,  
you old fool.  
Let go my leg.  
Let go my leg, you fool dog.  
Let me out of here.  
Hold him, Ellie May.  
Hit him in the head.  
Hey, give me some  
of them turnips, you old fool.  
Give me some of them turnips.  
I wish I'd known what kind of family  
I married into. I wouldn't have done it.  
I hope Lov don't hold  
no hard feeling agin me.  
Whoo!  
- Hallelujah, Brother Jeeter.  
Hallelujah, Sister Bessie.  
Welcome home.  
Thank you, Brother Jeeter.  
Brother Jeeter,  
will you join me in a song?  
Sure, I'd like to. What'll we sing?  
- "It's the Old-Time Religion. "  
- That's good enough for me.  
That's enough.  
That was all right.  
You know, I feel better already.  
- Jeeter Lester.  
- Yeah.  
You've sinned.  
- Who, me?  
- Yes, sir.  
This morning when I was laying abed

thinking, a voice come to me and said:

"Sister Bessie, get up and go down  
to Jeeter Lester, he's at it again. "

You sure you ain't got me  
mixed up with somebody else?

- The voice said it was you.

- I ain't done nothing, Sister Bessie.

- Not one little sin?

- Well, not one big sin.

Maybe a little sinning in general,  
but nothing you could call a real sin.

How come the voice say it was you?

Oh, that's easy. The Lord knows  
what a powerful sinner I was.

I guess I was about the most  
sinningest man in the whole world.

- Nothing lately?

- No, no, nothing lately, Sister Bessie.

Well, I'm mighty glad  
to hear that, Jeeter...

...because I'm out this morning  
to run all the sin off Tobacco Road...

...and I got a good start.

- How's your folks?

- Oh, they're all right.

They just... They ain't up yet.

- This morning, they is just a little tired.

Tell them I said hey.

I sure will, Sister Bessie.

Psst!

Jeeter.

What are you doing hiding here?

- I near about run into her.

- Well, is it nice here?

Jeeter, Captain John's coming back.

- Captain John's dead.

- It's his son, Captain Tim. It's the same.

He's coming back to Tobacco Road.

- He's gonna give us farmers credit?

- That's what everybody says.

Ada. Ada.

Praise the Lord,

Captain John's coming back.

- Why, I thought Captain John was dead.



He is.  
Gonna get me a good mule  
and some seed cotton...  
...and some guano, and I'm gonna...  
Who put this old plow  
down in the dirt?  
You did, seven years ago.  
First thing I'm gonna do  
is to burn off all this old broom-sedge...  
...and clear my fields.  
And, Dude, see if you can find  
some harness.  
There used to be a bridle  
in the kitchen.  
Oh, I think Grandma ate it.  
Yes, sir. It looks to me  
like Dude and me...  
...we is gonna raise us  
about a bale an acre...  
...because the way I feel now, Ada,  
it's just like I used to feel every spring.  
Why, you can smell  
the smoke from the burning sedge...  
...and the wind blowing  
from the fresh-plowed ground...  
...it just gets down into your soul...  
...and you just feel like you...  
Just feel like you gotta plant  
or bust.  
What ails you now?  
Spring come and gone already?  
Well, there ain't no use  
starting today. Look.  
What? I don't see nothing.  
Well, there ain't no use  
starting a fire...  
...if a rain's gonna come up  
and put the fire out, is there?  
You ain't gonna have no crop  
no how, Jeeter Lester.  
Not if Mr. Tim was to come,  
give you a mule and some seed cotton...  
...some guano and the sun  
would shine day and night...

...you still ain't gonna have no crop  
this year.  
What are you talking about?  
You ain't gonna have no crop  
because you got a sin on your soul.  
You stole them turnips from Lov...  
...and it's the wrong time  
of the year for stealing.  
Lov is my son-in-law.  
You can't steal from your son-in-law  
because he's kinfolks.  
And right on top of that...  
...you got to go and tell Sister Bessie,  
a religious woman...  
...that you didn't steal no turnips.  
And I didn't, neither.  
The Lord don't hold with anybody  
that steals around planting time...  
...and he sure don't hold with anybody  
that steals...  
...and then lies and says he didn't.  
You wait. You'll see.  
Well, I ain't scared.  
You just wait.  
Well, I ain't scared.  
No little old turnips  
is gonna scare me.  
No, sir, no...  
No use getting scared of a turnip.  
A little old turnip.  
Whoever heard tell of such a fuss  
over a few little old turnips.  
Jeeter, that one was pretty close.  
Ada, you know what I...  
What I done to Lov Bensey is sure  
beginning to bother my conscience.  
- Morning, Henry.  
- Hey, Jeeter.  
Is Sister Bessie home?  
Sister Bessie? Jeeter...  
Well, hallelujah, Brother Jeeter.  
- Hallelujah, Sister Bessie.  
- Well, Sister Ada...  
...I am glad to see you

looking so fine.  
Jeeter's got something to tell you.  
Yeah, Sister Bessie, I done made me  
a great big mistake yesterday...  
...but it clean slipped my mind  
at the time.  
But the Old Nick  
got the upper hand of me...  
...and I done taken  
some turnips from Lov Bensey.  
He stole them turnips.  
Yes, Sister Bessie, I stole them...  
...and I'm sure needing prayer  
about as bad as any man you ever seen.  
I just gotta clear my soul...  
...so nothing won't stand  
between me and a crop of cotton.  
Jeeter, where them turnips now?  
Well, to tell you the truth,  
Sister Bessie, we ate them.  
AII...  
Well, all excepting this one.  
Why, that's a summer turnip.  
Where on earth did Lov Bensey  
get summer turnips?  
That ain't no summer turnip.  
That's a winter turnip.  
- You don't suppose I told him...  
- That's a summer turnip.  
You sure?  
Let me taste it.  
- It tastes like it, all right.  
- Let me taste it.  
- Tastes like a summer turnip.  
- That's a summer turnip, all right.  
I'd go down there now if I wasn't afraid  
he wouldn't beat me with a stick.  
All right, now, get down.  
Get down on your knees.  
Oh, Lord, Jeeter Lester's at it again.  
He stole all of Lov Bensey's turnips  
and now he's ate them all up.  
It's too late to do anything  
about that now...

...but it seem to me  
like you never did see...  
...such a stealing man  
in all my born days.  
- Amen!  
- Now, Lord, you gotta make him quit...  
...right now for good and all. Amen.  
Does that clear me?  
It will if you don't do it no more.  
Anybody else?  
Well, while you're at it, you might...  
You might mention Dude...  
...because he's the most sinningest  
in the family.  
Dude? Is this Dude?  
Come on here, Dude,  
Sister Bessie's gonna pray for you.  
Well, I do declare.  
If he ain't a grown-up man now.  
Why, when I went away, he weren't  
nothing but a skinny little old boy.  
Yeah. I guess he must be  
about 20 now, ain't he, Ada?  
Mm-hm.  
You know, I do wish...  
...he had more sense, though.  
Well, I guess he's about  
got his growth, though.  
Oh, he's pretty too.  
- Kneel down, Dude.  
- I don't want nobody praying for me.  
- Kneel before I knock you down.  
- You lay a hand on me...  
...I'll toss you over this house.  
- You see.  
That's what you gotta pray for.  
He ain't got no respect for his pa.  
Lord, save Brother Dude  
from the Old Nick...  
...and make a place for him in heaven.  
That's all. Amen.  
Lord be prai...! Wait a minute, here.  
That seems to me like a darn  
short prayer for a sinner like Dude.

Dude don't need no praying.  
He's just a boy.  
Hey, you!  
Look at the old scoundrel,  
still full of beans.  
How are you, Jeeter?  
- Captain Tim.  
- Praise the Lord.  
- Captain Tim.  
- Praise the Lord.  
Captain...  
Captain Tim.  
You look more like your pa every day.  
I sure am glad to see you,  
Captain Tim.  
- You remember Ada, don't you?  
- Why, sure. How are you, Mrs. Lester?  
And Dude.  
- Dude.  
- Don't you go there.  
- He might let me blow the horn.  
- How would you like to have a horn?  
- Nobody gonna give me no horn.  
Come sit down here beside me,  
and I'll give you a horn of your own.  
- How'd you like a nice big...  
- Let go of me.  
Toot-toot! Beep-beep!  
Toot-toot! Beep-beep!  
I sure do love an automobile horn.  
Toot-toot! Beep-beep!  
Dude. He can sound more like a horn  
than a horn can.  
He's the last of my boys, Dude is,  
and I sure am proud of him.  
- Tell me, how are the crops coming?  
- No crops, praise the Lord.  
No crops in the last seven years.  
Nobody got no money to grow any.  
That's why everybody's so glad  
to see you come to give them some.  
- What's that?  
- Well...  
...all I need is a mule

and some seed cotton, and guano...  
Now, wait a minute, Jeeter.  
I can't understand  
how that idea got around...  
...but I'm sorry,  
but I won't be able to help you.  
Tell you the truth,  
I'm in pretty much the same fix you are.  
What do you mean, Captain Tim?  
You'd better tell him, Payne.  
- Well, you see, Mr. Lester...  
...I'm from the bank in Augusta.  
We're down here to collect money,  
not to lend it.  
You mean I can't have me no credit  
to grow me no crop this year?  
- I'm afraid not.  
- Why, I just gotta have credit...  
...because me and my folks,  
we're starving here on Tobacco Road.  
Mr. Lester, have you ever thought  
about getting away from here?  
And work in them darn mills?  
But if you're starving...  
That ain't got nothing to do with it.  
Why, Captain John told me I could stay  
on my place as long as I wanted to.  
He said he couldn't give me any more  
credit in the stores up at Fuller...  
...but I could live here till I died.  
- You know that, Captain Tim.  
- Yeah, I know he did, Jeeter...  
...but you see, that land  
doesn't belong to us anymore.  
The bank's taken it over.  
There's nothing I can do about it.  
Well, I can't understand that.  
Why, this was my daddy's place  
before me...  
...and his daddy's place before him...  
...and Lord knows  
how many Lesters before that.  
Why, there wasn't nothing here  
before they come.

Why, they built this road  
hauling tobacco kegs...  
...15 miles  
down the ridge to the river.  
And now I don't own it,  
and you don't own it.  
And the darned banks own it...  
...and they never had nothing  
to do with it.  
We don't wanna be hard on you  
old farmers, Mr. Lester...  
...but we're gonna put this entire  
section under scientific cultivation.  
There wouldn't be any place for you.  
If you're gonna grow crops on it,  
why can't I grow crops...  
...just the same as I did  
for Captain John?  
Well, I'm afraid that's impossible.  
Please don't let him take me away,  
Captain Tim.  
I'm liable to go before long...  
...and if they send me away,  
I'm liable to go long before my time.  
Please don't let them take me away,  
will you, Captain Tim?  
What about it? Couldn't you  
do something for this man?  
I don't know how we could,  
Mr. Harmon.  
- Lf he could pay a little rent...  
- Rent?  
I can't even get enough money  
to buy anything to eat with.  
Well, what about your children, Jeeter?  
Haven't you got one that could help you?  
Why, we must've had...  
How many, Ada?  
Oh, about 17, 18 head.  
And there ain't one of them  
worth the powder to blow them up.  
How much rent would it be, Payne?  
Hundred dollars for the year.  
Hundred dollars?

When will you have to have it?  
Well, coming back down here  
next Sunday afternoon.  
Well, I guess that's all I can do, Jeeter.  
It's not very much.  
Maybe you can dig it up before Sunday,  
from one of your children or somewhere.  
Oh, Jeeter...  
...here's a dozen new corn  
I was taking home, if you can use it.  
- Goodbye, Jeeter.  
- Goodbye, Captain Tim.  
Sometime Sunday afternoon,  
after dinner.  
Sometime Sunday.  
Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.  
Things have taken a turn  
for the better already.  
Let's get home  
and eat some of this corn...  
...before Dude and Ellie May  
know anything about it.  
Where's my sweater? I'm going to Fuller.  
Where's my sweater?  
What are you going to Fuller for?  
Sister Bessie's gonna buy me  
a brand-new automobile...  
...with a big horn on it.  
Where's my sweater?  
Seems like I seen it in the bed, son.  
Don't be too long, Dude boy.  
Say, is that boy as crazy  
as we think he is?  
- Hallelujah, Brother Jeeter.  
Hallelujah, Sister Bessie.  
- Hallelujah, Sister Ada.  
Hallelujah, Sister Bessie.  
Listen, Bessie,  
how come you tell Dude...  
...that you're gonna buy him  
a brand-new automobile...  
...with a great big horn on it?  
Dude and me's gonna need it  
to drive and do our preaching with.



- Is you got that much money?  
- I ain't only got that much money...  
...from my dead husband's insurance,  
but I got a bit more beside.  
Ada, Sister Bessie's got herself  
a whole mess of money.  
Come on,  
let's go get that automobile.  
Oh, Dude boy,  
you's as pretty as you can be.  
Wait a minute. How come Dude gotta  
go with you to get that automobile?  
How come I don't go instead of Dude?  
Why, Dude don't know nothing  
about no automobile excepting a horn.  
- Didn't he tell you?  
Tell me what?  
- Us is gonna get married.  
- Come on. Us ain't got no time to lose.  
Bessie, is you going out of your mind?  
Brother Jeeter...  
...tonight the voice come to me again.  
And it said, "Marry yourself  
to a new husband, Sister Bessie.  
Because it ain't good for a lady like you  
not to be married to a good man...  
...that you could  
turn into a preacher...  
...and who could help you spread  
the good Word most everywhere. "  
And it looks to me like Dude.  
Well, Dude ain't got sense enough  
to be a preacher.  
He wouldn't know what to talk about  
when it come time to get up to preach.  
- Leave that to me.  
What do you think, son?  
I don't care about it.  
We're gonna be very happy too.  
Come, let's go get that automobile.  
Dude boy.  
Gonna be a preacher.  
I wonder how much...  
How much money Sister Bessie's got.

Well, now,  
I wonder if she'd lend me...  
...about \$ 100...  
...so I...  
...wouldn't have to move.

Well, now...  
...I wonder if she wouldn't...  
...how I'd go about  
getting it away from her.

Remind me tomorrow  
to think about that idea, will you?

- I wanna get leave to marry Dude.
- Fill that in.

Will you do it? I can't write words.

- Can you sign your name?
- I can touch the pen.
- What is your name?
- Sister Bessie Rice.
- Who are you gonna marry?
- That's him.

That kid? You ain't gonna marry him,  
are you?

- That boy ain't hardly grown.
- He's willing.
- How old are you?
- I don't have to tell that, do I?

I can't give you a license  
if you won't state your age.

Well, I was 38 not so long back.

- How long back?
- Well, I'm 39 now, but I don't show it.

Look here, son. What do you mean  
to marry a woman that old?

Marry a girl your own age.

You try and talk him out of it,  
I'll start a service now.

I don't know. Sister Bessie there,  
she sweet-talked me into it.

- How's that boy gonna support you?

The Lord will provide.

That ain't gonna be soon.

He ain't gonna get married here.

- Now, don't you try and stop us.
- What are you fixing to do?

- You too, ma'am.  
- Look, Sister Bessie...  
"Sowing in the Morning. "  
All right now, Dude boy.  
"Shall We Gather At The River. "  
Cut that out! What's the idea of blowing  
them horns? Get out of them cars.  
- Get out of that.  
Us is gonna buy one.  
You ain't gonna buy one  
if you bust it up.  
Stop it, Dude boy, until it's ours.  
- You got any money?  
- Yeah. I got enough...  
...if it don't cost more than \$800.  
- Who is that, your kid?  
- That's Dude Lester from Tobacco Road.  
Him and me's gonna get married.  
It's in the bank at Augusta.  
You're gonna marry? How old is he?  
None of your business. All you  
gotta do is sell us this automobile.  
Get out of that car.  
Call the bank and check on that.  
I got a nice little jalopy right over here.  
I know you're gonna like it.  
I'll fill it up with gas  
and you can drive it out right now.  
You can use those tags  
until I get some from Atlanta.  
- Shut up! Shut up!  
- You like it, Dude boy?  
- Ain't nothing wrong with it so far.  
- We'll take it.  
- Here's the check.  
- That's fine.  
- Now you sign right here.  
- I always make my mark.  
- What's your name?  
- Sister Bessie Rice.  
- Sister Bessie Rice, touch the pen.  
- Oh, no. Wait a minute.  
For a big thing,  
we always ask a blessing.

- What?  
- First we sing a little hymn...  
...then kneel down  
and have a prayer.  
Now, just a minute, Sister Bessie. Is all  
that necessary? I'm a religious man...  
"In the Sweet Bye and Bye,"  
everybody.  
Ain't that a pretty automobile.  
He's driving it too.  
Oh, I wish all my children was here  
to see it and hear that pretty sound.  
He hit a tree.  
That's driving, Dude boy.  
How come you ain't  
got that out of there?  
Can't get this automobile through...  
...if you don't get that old one out.  
- Sure you can, Dude boy. Shove it.  
Just shove it out of your way.  
Yeah.  
I told you you could do it, Dude boy.  
Oh, ain't this a pretty automobile?  
Oh, I knew you could do it, Dude boy.  
I knew you could do it.  
If this ain't the prettiest thing  
I ever seen in all my life.  
Yes, sir.  
This is sure a fine automobile.  
Take your hands off there, you old fool.  
Yes, sirree.  
Here, give me...  
Let me fix that for you, Dude boy.  
You got it all upside down  
and every which way.  
Broke, all right.  
But say, that don't hurt  
the running of it none, does it?  
No, runs like it was brand-new yet.  
The horn wasn't hurt none at all.  
Sounds as pretty as it did  
this morning.  
Say, this is a great day  
for Tobacco Road.

Bessie, is you...?  
Is you and Dude gonna get married...  
...clear all the way  
or just by leave of the county?  
We is married already.  
Hey, you touch my car, woman,  
and I'll hit you with a stick!  
Dude, you sure is a lucky boy.  
A brand-new automobile  
to run around in...  
...and married all at the same time  
and on the same day.  
Ain't many a man lucky enough  
to get a wife like Sister Bessie...  
...as pretty as she is at her age.  
Why, yes, sir. You know,  
she'd make a great wife for any man.  
I don't care where you'd find him.  
Shut your mouth, Brother Jeeter.  
You know, Ada, why,  
Sister Bessie is just like...  
She's just like one of the family.  
Yeah. Just the same  
as if she was born in it. Yeah.  
Why, everything we got is half hers...  
...and everything she's got  
is half ours. Yeah.  
She's just, you know,  
like blood relations.  
Oh, that's powerful nice of you,  
Brother Jeeter.  
You know, Bessie,  
Ada and me's...  
...mighty proud of you and Dude  
and that automobile.  
I'm just wondering  
how much it cost you.  
Why, I paid \$800 cash for that car,  
and look at it already.  
Eight hundred dollars.  
You know, Ada...  
...\$800 to a lot of poor folks...  
...would be a whole heap of money,  
but not to Sister Bessie.

After the money she got  
from her dead husband's insurance...  
...why, it's just chicken feed.  
- You know, if I was to ask her...  
- Eight hundred dollars, that's all it was.  
What did you say?  
I said, that's all the money  
there was in the insurance.  
Of course,  
maybe I got 75 cents left over...  
...but that's all the big money  
there was.  
You mean to tell me  
you ain't got no \$ 100 to lend me...  
...to keep me from being  
put off of this ground?  
Nobody gonna give you  
no money, fool.  
If Bessie had another \$ 100,  
she'd give it to me.  
- But I ain't got no more \$ 100.  
- But I was counting on it.  
You ain't gonna get it, so shut up.  
- Oh, now, Dude boy...  
Then why don't he shut up  
about \$ 100 if you got it?  
You'd give it your husband,  
wouldn't you?  
- Come on, let's ride somewhere.  
- But you don't understand.  
- You're gonna put me off of here.  
You're so old...  
...you're gonna die soon anyhow.  
- Dude boy.  
If you don't, they're gonna  
put you on a poor farm.  
If you was a natural son, you wouldn't  
be saying that to your folks.  
You wouldn't be making things worse.  
Oh, shut up.  
Yes, but, Dude...  
Oh, Dude boy. Dude boy.  
Oh, Dude. Dude boy!  
Oh, don't go, Dude boy.

Sometimes I feel like if I just had me  
a stylish dress to be buried in...  
...I'd be ready to find me a nice place  
to lay myself down in and die.  
Get out of the way. You ain't never  
gonna get no new dress.  
Pa been promising you that...  
...but you're gonna die and be buried  
in just what you've got on.  
- Don't say that to your poor ma.  
- Who's gonna stop me?  
She's gonna be buried in...  
- Don't say that.  
- Let go of me, you old fool.  
You got a nerve  
putting your hands on me.  
Gonna sit there  
on that cold ground all night?  
Looks like the Lord sends me...  
...about every misery  
he can think of just to try my soul.  
Hey, you know, he must be gonna do  
something powerful big for me...  
...or he wouldn't test me so hard.  
Well, hope he can see his way clear  
to doing it before Sunday.  
Yeah. You know,  
I bet if Tom was here he'd help us.  
Tom was just about the best  
of all the children, I reckon.  
Yeah. Lizzie and Clara Belle,  
they were the best of the...  
But Tom, Tom was...  
He was about the best of the boys.  
I guess Pearl was about the prettiest,  
with all that long, yellow hair.  
Yeah. Tom, he was even good to me.  
I used to hope some of them  
would write to me.  
About give up looking for them  
to come back to see me...  
...but I did think maybe Lizzie Belle,  
anyway, would write.  
Well, maybe they did.

How do you know?  
Didn't you never ask  
at the post office?  
Well, what was the use?  
I couldn't read what they said anyway.  
I must have a whole lot  
of grandchildren somewhere.  
Bound to have, with all of them  
boys and girls off from home.  
Everybody says I have, anyhow.  
Sure don't know how other people  
know more about such things than I do.  
Looks to me like I ought to be the one  
that knows the most about my children.  
Yeah, it looks like all we know  
is Dude and Pearl and Ellie May.  
And five buried out there in the field.  
You know, I'll bet if Tom knowed the fix  
we was in, he'd give us the money.  
Well, it ain't no use wondering about it  
if you can't get to him in time.  
Sunday ain't but two days off.  
And if the Lord's figuring on doing  
anything for us, he had better hurry up...  
...or else it's gonna be too late.  
Now, look, Lord,  
this time I ain't fooling.  
I'm in a powerful bad fix.  
You know, they're figuring on  
taking Ada and me to the poor farm.  
You know what a powerful sinner  
I've been.  
You know there ain't been  
no bigger sinner than me...  
...between here and Savannah.  
And you know there's nobody been  
any sorrier for their sins than I have...  
...once they was done.  
But what I'm here to tell you is...  
...that you'd better watch out pretty  
close for me the next couple of days...  
...because I wanna do what I gotta do  
without committing any real big sin...  
...because I know



how you feel about stealing.  
Now, I like Sister Bessie  
about as well as the next one...  
...or I wouldn't give  
her new automobile a thought...  
...but I'm here to tell you, Lord...  
...you'd better step in  
and help me out pretty quick...  
...or I'm afraid I'll have to take matters  
in my own hand.

Amen.

Sister Bessie!

Sister Bessie,  
you sure are a fine-looking woman.

- Yeah. Where's Dude?

- He'll be back in a minute.

- How you feeling, Jeeter?

- Why, I...

I sure spent me a heart-broke night.

You know, Jeeter, I feel just about  
as sorry for what Dude done...

...as anything I ever seen in my life.

- Why, he darn near broke my arm.

Them yams smell good, don't they?

- Yeah.

- Can I get you a cup of chicory?

Chicory?

Well, I wouldn't wanna be...

Wouldn't wanna be putting you out...

Aah!

Oh, you ain't putting me out none.

Just sit down.

Yeah, this is the arm

I do all my farming with.

You know, I do all my good farming  
with this arm...

...and it's a sin and a shame,  
the way it's gonna hold me up.

That Dude ought to be ashamed  
of himself.

Yeah, I knew you'd be sorry.

If there was only something on earth  
I could do.

- Well, maybe there is, Sister Bessie.

- Well, what is it?

Well, the matter of fact is...

...I've got a very important matter coming up with Captain Tim tomorrow...

...and after that I'll be all set for the year.

But right now I just need a little change to get along on.

- Yeah?

- As I was coming up the road there...

...I seen a load of cut wood over in that field and I said to myself:

"Wouldn't it be smart if I was to haul that wood to Augusta and sell it?"

Why, that's Henry Peabody's wood, ain't it?

- But he ain't here.

- I know, but it don't seem just right.

Wait a minute. I ain't stealing it.

I'm just figuring on selling it and giving Henry half of that money.

Why, he'll be mighty happy to get it...

...without the trouble of hauling it down to Augusta.

Well, I reckon, in that case...

No, sirree, Bob. I ain't forgot.

- I'm sanctified.

- Hallelujah.

- Yeah. Would you lend me your car?

- To haul wood in?

Well, wait a minute. You know

I wouldn't be asking you no favors...

...if it wasn't for my arm...

It's near broken

and I can't do no farming.

Well, I'm just thinking

what Dude would say.

Dude? What's Dude got...?

- You tell your husband everything?

- No, no.

- Well, wait...

- It's only...

Maybe... Can't tell.... I'll be back here by sundown maybe with a pretty for you.

I guess it's all right. But I reckon you better get going before he gets back.  
Going? Sister Bessie, I'm gone.  
Top up, will you...?  
Get down there, top. I'll bust you.  
Why, you crazy top, I'll tear you.  
Dude boy, Dude. Dude.  
What are you doing?  
Why, this durn old top didn't wanna go down!  
- Did you hurt the car much?  
- Oh, not the running of it.  
- And the horn wasn't hurt none.  
- Say, Dude boy...  
...Jeeter wants to take wood to Augusta and sell it.  
Clear to Augusta?  
Climb in and I'll drive you.  
Well, I wasn't exactly figuring on anybody going with me.  
I was figuring on going down there by myself.  
Ain't nobody in the world gonna drive this except me.  
I ain't gonna stay here by myself.  
- Let's get the wood in there.  
- I ain't never drove clear to Augusta!  
Come on, Jeeter,  
we'll just pull us a big one.  
Jeeter.  
Come on, let's get it all in there. Put in the wood.  
That's violation of city ordinance number 382.  
You get out and sell the wood. I'll be waiting here on the corner somewhere.  
You looking for somebody?  
Yes, sir, I wanna see the banker.  
Susie May, this gentleman wants to see the banker.  
May I ask your name?  
- Sure.  
- Well, what is it?  
- Jeeter.

Jeeter Lester, from Tobacco Road.  
Oh, yes. Just a minute, Mr. Lester.  
Well, what kind of a year  
are you gonna have, Mr. Lester?  
Ain't gonna have no year at all  
unless we get some money.  
Will you come in, Mr. Lester?  
How do you do, Mr. Lester?  
Come right in.  
Well...  
...say, is you the banker?  
Why, of course.  
We met the other day  
with young Tim Harmon.  
- I was hoping you'd drop in.  
- Well, I gotta be going now.  
What's the matter?  
Didn't you come to pay the money?  
No, I come to borrow it.  
Well, so long.  
A hundred dollars, huh?  
Ain't nobody gonna buy no wood.  
Maybe we better start back  
toward Fuller, huh?  
And not have nothing to eat?  
I'm hungry.  
Hey, wait, wait. Wait just a minute.  
You know, I been sitting there looking  
at that hotel and I got me an idea.  
The idea what I got, I never spent me  
all night in a hotel in my life...  
...and the idea was maybe  
we could sell something...  
...and all three of us  
stay all night in that hotel.  
Nobody ain't gonna sell my brand-new  
automobile, if that's what you're thinking.  
Well, everybody ought to spend them  
one night in their life in a hotel...  
...so they have something to go home  
and tell folks about.  
What you figure on selling, old man?  
Come here, come here, come here.  
Look at there. See that spare tire?

That ain't no good, you can only ride  
four of them at one time.

- Hi, mister.

- Good evening.

We all wanna stay all night  
in your hotel.

- Okay, sign right here.

- You sign it.

- All right, what's your name?

- Jeeter.

- Jeeter what?

- Jeeter Lester, from Tobacco Road.

All right. What's his name?

- Dude's name is Dude.

- Dude what?

- Dude Lester.

- All right.

- And hers?

- Hers is Mrs. Dude.

- Him and me's married.

- All right. Touch the pen.

Come on, touch the pen.

That'll be a dollar and a half.

This way, please.

I'll bet Ada wishes she could be  
us, so she could stay all night in a hotel.

- Beep-beep! Toot-toot!

- Shut up, will you.

It sure is a fine place.

- Here we are.

You know, I never knowed hotels  
was such fine places as this before.

I wish Lov Bensey could see me now.

One of these days, I'm gonna spend me  
the rest of my life in one of these hot...

Hey!

- That ain't much of a bed for three.

- This is theirs. You're sleeping in here.

Well, what do you think of that?

Different rooms for different people.

- They gonna lock us in?

- You know, I betcha...

...Ada won't believe me

when I tell her.

**It's already 8:**

Look at that electric light.

I'm gonna sit me up all night long...

...and look at that electric light.

Well, good night, good night.

Good night, Jeeter.

Hey there, mister. Hey.

Hello.

Hi.

- Morning.

- Morning, captain.

Hey, is this the poor farm?

That's it.

Yeah...

...I thought so.

- What's that?

- That's the bath bell.

- The what?

- The bath bell.

You have to wash up all over  
or no dinner.

- Oh, yeah.

- Huh?

All right, Lord,

don't say I didn't tell you.

Whoa!

Hey, mister, mister.

Come here, would you?

- What is it?

- Come here.

Say, you wanna buy

a brand-new automobile cheap?

- This one?

- Yeah, it's brand-new.

It ain't been hardly broke in yet.

- What are you breaking it in with, an ax?

- Ax? Why, no.

That don't hurt it none.

Don't hurt the running of it none.

Why, this car's brand-new.

Cost \$800 yesterday.

Say, listen, I tell you what I'll do.

I'll sell you this car right now today

for \$ 100 and I'll throw in the wood.

- A hundred dollars, huh?

- Yeah.

And \$ 100 I got to have me,  
and today.

- What's the great rush?

- Well, mister...

...there's only \$ 100

stands between me and the poor farm.

- Are you sure this car's yours?

- Sure, it's mine.

You don't suppose I'd be selling you  
somebody else's car, do you?

- Well, I wouldn't know. How's she run?

- Like a \$40 mule.

- Move over. Let me try her.

- Yes, sir.

- So long, chief.

- So long.

- Chief?

- Yeah.

- Of police?

- Yep.

You crazy fool.

Where's my automobile?

You shut up, Dude, and listen to me.

- Your car is outside.

- Is it hurt much?

It looks like

the Seaboard Air Line hit it.

But what I ought to do

is to lock you all up...

...for if ever there was a nuisance,

it's you Tobacco Road folks.

You ain't worth

the expense to the county.

You're just naturally trifling,

and I reckon that's all there is to it.

Hush that yowling.

You made me late, and I ain't gonna

put off my Sunday dinner any longer...

...messing around in a family squabble.

So get out of here.

Get in your car and go on down

to Tobacco Road and stay there.  
You ain't gonna put him  
in a chain gang?  
If you don't get out of here,  
I'll put you in it.  
Why, he stole my overalls and he  
broke my automobile and threw... Aah!  
Now get out!  
Yes, and don't you never think about  
getting back in again neither.  
You mean you ain't gonna ride me  
to the poor farm?  
No, this here machine's  
mine and Bessie's.  
And you nearby ruined it already.  
If that's the way you feel about it...  
...get out of here  
and get off of my land!  
It ain't gonna be your land long.  
They gonna throw you off it.  
What are we chucking rocks  
at them for?  
They made me mad.  
- Did the man come?  
- Not yet.  
Couldn't you even get me no snuff?  
I couldn't get you no nothing.  
Ain't nothing much  
worth taking anyway, I reckon.  
I'm sorry, Ada.  
I ain't blaming you.  
Well, maybe things  
will be better over there.  
- Maybe they'll...  
- They sure couldn't be no worse.  
Jeeter. Oh, Jeeter.  
Jeeter, wait a minute. I ain't mad.  
Jeeter, wait. I gotta talk to you,  
Jeeter. Wait a minute.  
Jeeter, wait. I gotta talk to you.  
Jeeter, wait a minute.  
Wait a minute, Jeeter.  
I ain't mad at you no more.  
It's about Pearl. She's gone off again.



You ain't gonna hit me  
with a rock?  
Don't you understand?  
Pearl's gone off to Augusta.  
What was you doing to her?  
I wasn't doing a thing to that girl  
except tying her up with some rope.  
She busted loose from me,  
and I ain't seen her since.  
How you know  
she ain't out in the woods hiding?  
I tell you, she's gone off to Augusta.  
Jones Peabody seen her  
and she told him she was going there.  
Thank the Lord.  
Jeeter, you gotta do something.  
That's the way they all went, Lov.  
Every darned one of them.  
Lizzie Belle and Clara and...  
I can't remember  
all their darned names...  
...there was so many,  
but they all done the same thing.  
They up and run off down  
to the cotton mills in Augusta...  
...so they'd have pretty clothes  
and a hat to wear.  
Maybe she'll come back by herself.  
You reckon she will, Jeeter?  
Well, I wouldn't trust none of them.  
No, they didn't like  
living on Tobacco Road.  
They didn't like the clothes  
their ma made for them...  
...so they just all up and went  
and run off.  
I sure hate to lose her  
for some reason or other.  
She's pretty.  
I used to love to just sit out on the porch  
and watch her through the window...  
...when she was combing  
and brushing her pretty yellow hair.  
You know, I was just thinking.

Wouldn't it be a good idea for you...  
...to have Ellie May  
come down to your house...  
...and kind of look after the place  
and cook for you?  
I don't know  
of a prettier sight to see...  
...than just to look into Pearl's  
pale blue eyes early in the morning.  
They is awful pretty any time of day,  
but I don't reckon I'll ever forget...  
...how pretty they is  
just when the sun's coming up.  
Well, Ellie May's gotta get married  
somewhere...  
...and if you don't take a fancy to her,  
I don't know where.  
Reckon if I was to go  
up to Augusta and find her...  
...she'd let me bring her home?  
Who, Pearl? No, what's the use?  
She'd do the same thing over again.  
Now, with Ellie May,  
that'd be different.  
Ada and me is liable  
to be going away pretty soon...  
...and there wouldn't be nobody here  
to look after Ellie May.  
You know, you just say the word...  
...and I'll have her wash up  
and come down.  
Oh, she's mighty old for a wife.  
Well, you'll get used to that.  
What about what all  
I give you for Pearl?  
Well, with Ellie May,  
I'll give you the quilts back.  
And say,  
you can be sure of one thing...  
...she won't be running off  
all the time. No, sir.  
Well...  
...all right.  
Tell her to wash her up

and come on down.  
Go get yourself washed up and go down  
to his house and fix up for him.  
Crazy fool! You...  
Look what you done to my automobile!  
I ought to put you in the chain gang.  
You damaged my car.  
You just about ruined it already!  
I'm gonna kill you, you crazy...!  
Pearl's gone.  
Ellie May, do you want to go?  
Yes, Ma.  
Hey, it's Mr. Payne.  
How are you, Mr. Payne?  
Go on, Ada, get him a drink of water.  
You've come for the money?  
How you gotta bust in talking business  
right away the minute the man comes?  
Get him a drink of water first.  
How are you, Mr. Payne?  
I'm sure glad to see you.  
Make yourself right at home. Ada, Ada,  
get Mr. Payne a glass of water.  
Come on.  
Well, I hope you've managed  
to get the money, Mr. Lester.  
Money. Money.  
No, sir, I ain't, and that's a fact.  
You know, it looks as though  
I'm in a whopping bad fix...  
...and no fooling.  
You know, Mr. Payne, why,  
it looks like the good Lord...  
...don't want us  
to grow things in the earth anymore.  
If he did,  
he'd be more careful about it.  
Yeah, he'd make the rich people  
loosen up...  
...and lend us farmers some money.  
Mr. Payne don't care nothing  
about what you think about that.  
Mr. Lester, why don't you go on up  
to Augusta and get work in the mills?

In the mills?  
Why, I wouldn't work  
in them darned mills.  
That's a place for women.  
Winding string on little spools  
and things like that.  
No, sir, not for me. I wouldn't...  
I wouldn't go up there  
if they'd give me \$ 15 a week.  
No, no, I just simply couldn't...  
Well, I just simply couldn't  
live like that, that's all.  
I guess it'll be a whole lot better  
on the poor farm.  
Well, that's all right, Ada.  
You go on up there...  
...and look for the rest of the children.  
I wouldn't stop you.  
No, I wouldn't do anything  
to stop you...  
...but not for me.  
Me, it's different.  
I couldn't live in the city.  
The city don't like me  
and I don't like the city.  
I can't live propped up.  
I've got to be on the ground.  
And that's why I like the poor farm.  
It's on the ground  
and it's in the country.  
I better go where you go.  
Well, I don't know  
what else there is to say.  
I hate this about as much  
as anything in the world.  
But it's not my land and not my bank,  
and I haven't got any choice.  
Well, you can't blame you.  
- You don't...  
- Tomorrow's the 1 st.  
- Yeah, that's right.  
- I'm sorry.  
- So am I.  
- Goodbye.

Goodbye.

Well...

...if we start now, we ought  
to get there in time for supper.

Want a lift?

It's Captain Tim. Hi, Captain Tim.

Hi, Ada. Come on, hop in.

Come on, come on, Ada.

Come on, come on.

You're gonna get a ride after all. Yes.

Which way?

Well, we was just taking a walk  
over to Ludlow.

It's such a nice day.

To the poor farm?

Well, that's about it, Captain Tim.

We're here, Jeeter.

Thank you, Captain Tim.

Hey, wait a minute.

This ain't no poor farm.

You won't ever see no poorer farm.

Why, you made a mistake.

This is my place, boy.

Maybe I did, but I had to do it.

I don't mind telling you, Jeeter,  
I couldn't really afford it...

...but I had to do it.

Well, the man's done  
been here and put us off...

...and if he comes back  
and finds us still here...

...he's liable to send us  
to the chain gang.

He won't be back.

I saw him down the road and fixed it...

...so you and Ada can stay here,  
for six months anyway.

I'd like to have made it the whole year,  
but I just didn't have the money.

You mean you paid him some rent?

Yes, I gave him \$50, Jeeter.

And here's \$ 10 for you  
to get yourself some seed and guano.

What I'm really doing,

I'm staking you for six months...  
...to see if you can really grow yourself  
a crop this time.  
You think you can do it?  
Well, answer the man, can't you?  
You can do it, Jeeter. You did it  
for my dad, you can do it for me.  
The good Lord certainly looks out  
after the poor.  
You keep after him, Ada.  
He'll do it all right if you keep after him.  
You mind if he gets me some snuff  
out of that \$ 10?  
If snuff's gonna help you get Jeeter  
to work, Ada, get all you want.  
Ada, Ada, you know  
what I'm gonna do?  
- Take a nap?  
- I'm gonna raise myself a bale an acre.  
I'm gonna... I know where  
I can borrow me a good mule...  
...and I'm gonna buy myself  
\$ 10 worth of seed-cotton...  
...and guano and snuff.  
You see all that land there?  
I'm gonna burn off  
all that broom-sedge...  
...and clear myself  
about a hundred acres.  
Then I'm gonna plow up  
that ground...  
...and I'm gonna clear it  
as far as you can see.  
And look at that sky, Ada.  
Yeah, this is just about  
the best year for...  
For planting  
since the Lord knows when.  
Yeah, I can just tell the way it smells...  
...that this is gonna be  
a great year for cotton, yeah.  
When you gonna do  
all these big things?  
Oh, pretty soon.

Next week, maybe.

With Dude and Ellie May gone...

...there's nobody left but us.

Where's Grandma?

Why, I ain't seen her since yesterday.

Well, maybe she's gone up  
in the woods and couldn't get back.

Maybe she even died up there.

She never stayed away  
like that before.

No.

I'll go up there one of these days  
and look for her.

I think this looks like...

...it's gonna be the best year

I ever had.