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"W O O F I N G"

By Neale

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43 W. 66<sup>th</sup> St.

New York City

"W O O F I N G"

TIME: Present.

PLACE: Negro Street in Waycross, Ga.

PERSONS: Loungers, two children, guitar players, women, band -

SETTING: Porch and side walk, etc.

ACTION: Thru the open window of 'one' of the shacks a WOMAN is discovered ironing. A MAN is sitting on the floor of the porch asleep. She hums a bar or two, then comes to the window and calls to the man.

Woman

Good Black, why don't you git up from dere and carry dese white folks clothes home? You always want money but you wouldn't hit a lick at a snake!

Man

Aw, shut up woman. I'm tired of hearin' bout dem white folks clothes. I don't keer if dey never git 'em.

Woman

You better keer! Dese very clothes took and brought you out de crack. 'Cause de first time I saw you you was so hungry till you was walkin' lap-legged. Man, you had de white-mouf, you was so hungry

(Enter another MAN leisurely.  
Good Black sees him and calls)

Good Black

Hey, Cliffert, where you headed for?

Cliffert

Oh, no where in particular.

Good Black

Come here then, fish, and lemme bend a checker game over yo' head. Come on, youse my fish.

Cliffert

(Comes to the porch and sits)  
 Git de checkers and I'll have you any, some or none. I push  
 a mean chuck-a-luck myself.

Woman

(Voice inside quarreling)  
 Dress up and strut around! Yes! Play checkers? Yes! Eat?  
 Yes! Work? No!!

(The game starts. A period  
 of silence in which they in-  
 dicate their concentration by  
 frowns, cautious moves, head  
 scratching. GOOD BLACK is  
 pointing his index finger over  
 the board indicating moves.  
 He wig-wags, starts to move,  
 scratches his head thoroughly,  
 changes his mind and fools around  
 without moving)

Cliffert

Police! Police! Come here and make dis man move!

Good Black

Aw, I got plenty moves.  
 (Scratches his head)  
 Jus' tryin' to see which one I want to make. But when I do  
 move, it's gointer be just too bad for you.

(A guitar is heard off stage and  
 Cliffert brightens. He cups his  
 hand and calls)

Cliffert

Hey Lonnie! Come here! Ha, ha, ha! I got me a fish.  
 (Enter LONNIE picking "East Coast"  
 on his box and stands watching the  
 game. He ceases to play as he stops  
 walking)  
 Ha, ha! You see ol' Good Black goes for a hard guy. He tries  
 to know more than a mule and a mule's head longer'n his'n.  
 Ha, ha! I set a trap for him and he fell right in it. Try-  
 ing to ride de britches! Now look at him.

Good Black

Aw, shut up! You tryin' to show yo' grandma how to milk ducks.  
 You can't beat me playin' no checkers.  
 (Scratches his head again)  
 Just watch me show my glory.

Woman

(Leans out of window)

Good Black! When you gointer come git dese clothes!

(He does not answer, he is  
trying to concentrate)

Lonnie

You got him Cliffert. You got him in Louisville Loop. He's  
yo' fish all right.

Cliffert

(Boastfully)

Man, didn't I push a mean chuck-a-luck dat time! I'm good,  
better, and best. Move, Man!

(To Good Black)

I tole you not to do it.

Good Black

All dat noise ain't playin' checkers. You just wait till I  
make my move.

Woman

All right, now, Mr. Nappy-Chin! I don't want to have to call  
you no mo' to come keer dese white folks clothes! I'm tired  
of takin' and takin' affa you! My belly's full clear up to  
de neck. I don't need no lazy coon lak you nohow. I'm a  
good woman, and I needs somebody dats gointer give aid and  
assistance.

Good Black,

Aw, go head on', woman, and leave me be! Every Saturday it's  
de same thing! Yo' mouth exhausting like a automobile. You  
worse than "cryin' Emma". You kin whoop like de Seaboard  
and squall lak de Coast Line.

(Taps his head)

You ain't got all dat b'long to you, and nothin' dat b'long  
to nobody's else. You better leave me 'lone before you make  
a bad man out of me. Fool wid me and I'll go git me some-  
body else. I'm a much-right man.

Woman

Now you ain't no much right man neither. You didn't git me  
wid no saw-mill license - You went to de court house and paid  
a dollar and a half for me. Tain't no other woman got as much  
right to you as I got. De Man got to tell you youse divorced  
befo' yo' kin play dat much-right on me!

Good Black

De man don't have to tell me nothin'! I got divorce in my  
heels.

Woman

You ain't de only one dat knows where de railroad track is,  
I done made up my mind, and I done promised Gabriel and a

Woman (Cont'd)

couple of other men dat if yo' don't do no better than yo' been doin', I'm gointer pack me a suit case and grab de first smoky thing I see. I'll be long gone.

Good Black

Aw, yo' ain't no trouble! Yo' can be had. Yo' ain't never gointer leave me.

Woman

How come I won't? Just 'cause I been takin' keer of yo', don't make a park ape out yo'self. I'll leave yo', just as sure as yo' snore!

Good Black

(Rises and hitches up his trousers)

Aw, yo' ain't gointer leave me, and if yo' go, yo' wouldn't stay, 'cause I'm a damn sweet man, and yo' know it!

Lonnie

Hey, hey!

(He begins to pick and Good Black sings. Lonnie sings a line now and then)

Good Black

Yo' may leave and go to Hali-muh-fack  
But my slow drag will - uh bring yo' back  
Well yo' may go, but this will bring yo' back

I been in de country but I moved to town  
I'm a tolo-shaker from my head on down  
Well, yo' may go, but this will bring yo' back

Some folks call me a tolo-shaker  
It's a doggone lie I'm a back-bone breaker  
Well, yo' may go, but this will bring yo' back.

Oh, ship on de sea, boat on de ocean  
I raise hell when I take a notion  
Well, yo' may go, but this will bring yo' back.

Oh, who do, who do, who do wackin'  
Wid my hells a' poppin' and my toe-nails crackin'  
Well yo' may go but this will bring yo' back.

Woman

Dat's all right too, pap but if yo' can't make me tote dese clothes home, don't bring de mess up. Yo'se abstifically a humbug.

Cliffert

Man, come on back here and move, or else own up to de folka yo' can't push no checkers wid me.

(He sits and begins to lay out moves with his fingers and scratch his head. Enter another MAN and stands akimbo looking over Cliff's shoulder)

Cliff

(Looking up)

Don't stand over me lak dat, ugly as yo' is.

Man (Skanko)

You ain't nobody's pretty baby yo'self!

Cliff

Dat's all right, I ain't as ugly as yo' - youse ugly enough to git behind a Simpoon weed and hatch monkies.

Man (Skanko)

And youse ugly enough to git behind a tombstone and hatch hants.

Cliff

Youse so ugly dey have to cover yo' face up at night so sleep can slip up on yo'.

Man (Skanko)

You look like ten cents worth of Have-Mercy. Yo' face look lak ole Uncle Jump-off. Yo' mouth look lak a bunch of ruffles.

Cliff

Yeah, but yo' done passed me. Yo' so ugly till they could throw yo' in de Mississippi River and skim ugly for six months.

Man (Skanko)

Look here, Cliff, don't yo' personate me! Counting from de little finger back to de thumb - yo' start anythin', I got yo' some.

Cliff

Go head and grab me buddie, but if yo' don't know how to turn me loose too, don't bring de mess up! If yo' hit me, I may not beat you, but yo'll be so dirty when St. Peter git yo' dat he can't use yo'.

Man (Skanko)

Don't call me buddy. Yo' buddy is huntin' coconuts. Don't yo' try to throw me for a nap. Do. I'll kill yo' so stiff dead they'll have to push yo' down. Yo' gointer to make me do some double cussin' on you.

(He picks up a heavy stick and walks back towards Cliff)

Man (Cont'd)

Now I got dis farmer's choice in my hands, yo' better git outa my face.

Cliff

Yo' wanta fight?

Man

Yeah I wanta fight. Put it where I kin use it and I'll sho' use it. I'll fight anybody. I git so hot sometimes I fights de corner of de house. I'm so hot I totes a pistol to keep from gettin' in a fight wid myself. I prints dangerous every time I sit down in, in a chair.

Cliff

Man, this ain't no fighting weather. Ha, ha, ha! Did yo' think I was mad sho' nuff? Yo' can't fight me. They's got to be runnin' before fightin' and they's got to be plenty good runnin' before dis fight comes off.

Man

All right now. Yo' leave me alone and I'm a good man. I'm just like an old shoe. If yo' rain on me and cool me off I'm soft! If yo' shine on me and git me hot, I'm hard.

(He drops the stick and exits)

(Cliff is shaking all over. He looks after the Man to be sure he is gone)

Good Black

Kah, kah, kah. Whut yo' so scarred about? De way yo' was talkin' I thought yo' was mad enough to fight.

Cliff

I was. I gits hot real quick! But I'm very easy cooled when de man I'm mad wid is bigger'n me.

(He drops into his seat, wiping his face)

Man did yo' see how he grabbed up dat check? He done skeered me into a three-week's spasm!

Good Black's Wife

Good Black, dese clothes is still waiting.

Good Black

Well, let 'em wait on, I done tole yo' once. Yo' kind run yo' mouf but yo' can't run my business.

(Enter a PRETTY GIRL. She strolls happily across without stopping.

Good Black pretends to cough)

Who is dat?  
 Good Black

Girl  
 (Turns and glares at him)  
 My old man got something for dat cough yo' got.

Cliff  
 Dat's right, tell dese old mullet hear married men to mind they own business. Now, take me for instance. I'm a much-right man.  
 (Gets up and approaches her flirtatiously)  
 I didn't quite git yo' name straight. Yo' better tell it to me again.

Girl  
 My name is Bee Ethel, turned round to Jones.

Cliff  
 (Flirtatiously)  
 Yo' pretty lil ole ground angel yo'? Where did yo' come from?

Bee Ethel  
 Detroit. Yo' like me?

Cliff  
 Do I lak yo'? I love yo' just lak God loves Gabriel, and dat's his best angel. Go 'head and say somethin'. I jus' love to hear yo' talk.

Bee Ethel  
 Gimme five dollars. I need some stockings.

Cliff  
Now Mama, dis ain't Gimme, Ga. Dis is Waycross. I'm just lak de cemetery. Itakes in but never no put out. I ain't puttin' out nothin' but old folks eyes - and I don't do that till they's dead. Run long, mama.  
 (The girl exits and he resumes his seat)

Cliff  
 Come on, Good Black, lemme wrap dis checker round yo' neck.

Good Black  
 Gimme time, gimme time! Don't try to rush me.  
 (He begins same business of figuring out moves and scratching his head)

(Enter two or three girls and fellows. The girls are dressed in cool summer dresses, but nothing elaborate)



Lonnie

I know I'm gointer play something now.

(He tunes and plays "Cold Rainy Day". He begins to sing and the others join in. Not all. But all start to dancing. They couple off as far as possible and Lindy. The men unmated do hot solo steps. The men cry out in ecstasy)

1. Shimmy! If you can't shimmy, shake your head.
2. Look, baby, look! Throw it in de alley
3. Look, if you can't look, stick out, and if you can't stick out, git out.

(At the end of the son and dance, one of the girls exclaim)

Girl

Aw, we got to go. Mama's looking for me.

(The three girls exit, walking happily. The men watch them go)

Cliff

Oh, boy, look at 'em! Switching it and looking back at it.

(He imitates the girl's walk)

Good Black

Yeah Lawd, ain't they specifyin'! They handles a lot of traffic.

Cliff

(Seating himself again)

Yeah, but dat don't play no checkers. Come on here, Good Black and lemme finish wearing your ant.

Good Black's Wife

Good Black, yo' better come git dese clothes.

Lonnie

Good Black, yo' wife kin cold whoop for what she want.

Good Black

Yeah and if she don't git, she keep right on whoopin'. B'lieve I wants a drink of water. Wisht I knowed where I could slip up on me a drink.

Cliff

Aw man, come on back here and move. Yo' doin' everythin' playin' checkers. You'd ruther move a mountain wid a r' bar than to move

(Points)

dat man.

Good Black

(Seats himself)

Lemme hurry up and beat dis game befo' yo' bust yo' britches.

(He wags his finger to indicate moves, scratches his head, but doesn't move. Several men enter and group around the players. All offer suggestions. One says, "You got him, Cliffert. He's locked up just as tight as a keyhole". Another: "Aw, man he kin break out!" Another: "Yeah, but it'll cost him plenty to git out of dat trap".)

Cliff

Police! Police! He won't move!

Another Voice

Aw, leave go de checkers and less shoot some crap.

(Enter a WOMAN in a house dress, head rag on, run down house shoes. She goes to the edge of the porch and calls inside)

Woman

Him there Bertha, what yo' doin'.

Woman Inside

Still bumpin' de white folks clothes - hittin' for de sundown man. Come on in and have some sit down.

Outside Woman

Ain't got time. Got a house full of company. I took a minute to see if yo' could let me have a little skeeting garret.

Inside Woman

How come yo' didn't git yo'self some snuff whilst yo' was at de store? De man ast yo' what else. I ain't no Piggly Wiggly. Reckon I kin spare yo' a dip, tho.

(She hands out the box and the outside woman fills her lip and hands it back)

Outside Woman

Much obliged, I thank yo'. Reckon I better heel and toe it on back, to see how de comp'ny is makin' out.

Inside Woman

Step inside a minute I want to put a bug in yo' ear.

(She makes an urgent gesture and the other woman goes inside)

(Lonnie is sitting off to himself and picking "Rabbit on de Log" softly. A small BOY dashes on with a lolly pop in his hand. He is licking it and laughing. He is pursued by a little GIRL yelling "you gimme my all day sucker! Johnny! You gimme my candy, now! They run all over the stage. The men take notice of them and one of them seizes the boy and restores the candy to the girl. She pokes out her tongue at the boy and says "goody, goody, goody, goody, goody!" She notes the guitar playing and begins to dance. The boy makes faces back at her and dances back at her. The music gets louder, dancing faster, check board gets upset. General laughter at that. When dance is over, boy snatches the lolly pop again and races away and the girl runs behind him yelling "Johnny! You gimme my candy! Johnny!" The music stops and the crap game gets under way. Furious side bets for 5 and 10 cents each. Loud calls on Miss "Daisy Dice", snake eyes, "Ada from Decatur". Somebody suggests a soft roll, others object on the ground that it's too easy for the experts to cheat)

Good Black

Gimme de dice! I'm gointer play 'em like John Henry.

Lonnie

John Henry didn't bother wid de bones. He used to play Georgy Skin.

Good Black

He shot crap too. He played everythin' and everythin' he played, he played it good. Just like he uster drive steel. If I could whip steel like John Henry, I wouldn't stay here and nowhere else.

Cliff

Whut would yo' do?

Good Black

I'd go somewhere and keep books for somebody.

Lonnie

I know how to play John Henry.

## MONROE BOND

Good Black

Well, turn it on and let de bad luck happen.

(As Lonnie plays thru a verse warming up, all the men get interested and start to hum. Cliffert shouts out)

Cliff

Lawd, Lawd, what evil have I done)

(They sing John Henry. At the close, the woman who came to barrow snuff emerges from the house still talking back at the woman inside)

Woman

He ain't no trouble. I tole him, I says, "yo' must think youse de man dat made side meat taste lak ham. See yo' later.

(She exits hurriedly. The crap game goes on until a band is heard approaching)

Lonnie

Who dead?

Cliff

Nobody. Don't you know de Imperial Elks is goin' to New York to de Elks Grand Lodge? Yeah, bo, and they's takin' they band. Dat's supposed to be de finest band in de United States.

(The band approaches followed by a great crowd. The crap game is instantly deserted and all follow theband)

ROE BOND