

The Worm and The Saxophone

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Tonight, if all goes as planned...I think I can afford to die in peace; a spell of euphoria with a wave of wonder taking me over in a sweet glow as I'm returned to the earth. That sounds a bit like poetry if I do say so myself. I really ought to write that down. Ah...yes...but I'm far too tired to do anything else but lay here looking up at a clear evening sky and hope that my efforts pay off, and somehow it worries me. Did I do enough? Will my sheer exhaustion give way to my ultimate heroic sacrifice? Or will my plots be hampered by bad luck and a fate with plans other than my own? Its times like these – tired and done in, unable to move another muscle – with time come to an end, the Gods looking down over a sunset as brilliant as a jewel that I cannot help but to ask, 'why couldn't I be born with great strength, worthy of great things?'

They say everyone has a weakness, so I look to the old Gods...the old Heroes. Hercules had his rage, Achilles had his heel, even Alexander The Great had his blind ambitions. Me...I have my weakness too. I was born blind. But I never let it hold me back, never let it keep me under. It's understandable how people might take it as a weakness, being blind. Me...I don't know anything about that, all that weakness stuff. Sure my life is hard sometimes. But whose life isn't? It's true that I'm all alone in the world. Nobody knows I'm here. Nobody knows the troubles I have, struggling day to day trying to survive in a world where the strong eat the weak. Nobody cares. I know, I know...no pity parties here, it's just that...well...I have no friends. No one cares that I'm alive. And those who do see me...well, they just walk right past, or scream and run away. I don't mind. I'm used to it. I'm not handsome by any means. And from what mama says, I come from a family whose looks were not all that high on God's priority.

Still, it would be nice to have the looks to match my cunning – looks that would maybe compliment my smarts. Mama says too that God gave me the ability to survive! I can just picture her now, 'Bosco, you just pick yourself up, wipe the dirt off and just keep on fighting. God made you blind so your other senses can shine through better than anybody else's an' lead you to better fortune! You just keep your head above ground, keep your wits about you and keep on inching along. You'll have your day.' Well, today I'll need all the luck in the world. You see, today is for Old Moses. Old Moses and Stella. I can't help but to think they were somehow made for each other, like the stars shone down on them alone the very day they came into this world; like fate creating a masterpiece, singing a melody of love for the blind, unwittingly caught up by two lovebirds. Ah...poetry! I really ought to write that down. If I could see the letters an' all...just maybe I would.

You would never think of blindness as a strength until it becomes quite obvious to you the things you miss when you're used to being lead by your sight alone. But I could hear things that you wouldn't believe – hell, I can feel the poles of the earth, the magnetic core of the earth shifting beneath me, I'm not even kidding. I can hear the tires on the road kicking up dust from a long way off, I can hear the breeze whispering through the sycamore trees and the dip of some mangy creature in the marsh, the bubbles it produces; easing its self down like a giant. Jeebus, I can even hear the rain falling from the heavens long before it hits the ground. I can feel it down in my soul like a small child laughing, lighting up the world. But let's just forget about all that for a moment and instead concentrate on just why it is that I brought you here. And I did bring you here. Make no mistake. That's also my power. I guess you can say that I'm rather intriguing. An enigma: a mystery wrapped in a riddle.

The answer is simple. I guess I'd like you to hear my story, share with me an adventure of the soul; try to see from my point of view the light of human understanding and reasoning, which I am still struggling to fathom to this day. I guess too, that I just want you to know why I'm doing this. I won't lie to you. It was a tough decision, let me tell you. If you knew me, you would understand that this story is not really about me per se, no, but rather about a special sweet friend of mine – or to be exact...two special friends of mine. Old Moses Johnson, my very good best friend – My only friend, who doesn't know I exist – and a special lady, Stella, My girl, My true love, who is really the key to my soul. Today I give her away. To Moses. Moses and Stella sitting in a tree...

Let me take you back a little.

It began one rainy day in the summer of 1956...

I found Stella deep in the ground, buried in the dirt, just lying there, tucked away in a fine red-oak coffin fitted with black velvet. So lonely she appeared, so lost to the world; lovely, mystical, like a treasure just waiting for someone to come along and give it meaning – a great gift waiting to light up the darkness in someone’s life. And despite the rain and the mud (which I love, which always brings me out) her skin was clean, smooth and cool to the touch – as beautiful as anything I had ever seen. I tell you, right then and there...I fell in love. But as much as I wanted her to free my soul, as much as I wanted to breathe life back into her old frame, I left her in her rightful place in the ground. I mean...I had to. What could I do, little old me?

Maybe you’ll understand by the end of this tale why I felt so helpless. Stella was my best kept secret; a secret of the ages. I didn’t tell anybody. I just harboured this great secret the duration of my life. But I’m old now and I can no longer keep her hidden away. You see, she was my secret to hold deep down in my soul; my very own precious Angel. To me...it was like God Himself came down from Heaven and showed me the way; a precious gift to light my soul and bring meaning to my drab, colourless little corner of the world. It sure is exciting to see what she’s capable of. Like a Queen of soul resurrected, she’ll make Old Moses a fine mate – hopefully inspire him to do great things, wonderful things; amazing things. I have faith in her qualities. I know she’ll accomplish great things. With someone to guide her along, help her find her way, there’s no stopping her.

You see...another tickling aspect of my tale is the music, the soulful essence of Jazz whispering through these back wooded parts of the Carolinas, the cotton and the corn and the wheat and the leaves – the ghosts of the old slave days...somehow freed, somehow dancing, their feet tapping, their fingers snapping away to old Jazz Legends like Artie Shaw, Fats Waller, Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis and Joe “King” Oliver. You know...the original beat boys of the Saxophone, those sons of Jazz who could make the music inhale souls with every sweet note, those raw beats that could send out little love hearts with every breath exhaled. You see, I was taught the simple rhythm – the snap of the fingers, the tap of the feet and the pop of the soul – by Old Moses Johnson of South Carolina, who, in a predominantly Blues corner of the great big world of the Carolina’s, was only seduced (and could only be seduced) by Jazz. The same goes for me too. I truly appreciate Blues, don’t get me wrong, but I absolutely love the Jazz.

You see, Old Moses Johnson was not truly taken up by the fluid rifts of the melancholy Blues; the kind that steals your heart away giving you an ache deep down in your soul, twanging those most agonizing emotions, forcing you to remember what it’s like to have lost a kind of bright fluttery feeling that a first true love produces. No nothing like that. No...Old Moses only truly loved the Jazz. He played a rag tag Saxophone by the name of ‘Mags,’ a rusty, pitiful sounding thing, but that never bothered him. Mags was worn out like an escaped convict tunnelin’ to freedom done worn his spoon all the way down to the nub.

Old Moses loved Mags – would never let her stray too far from his mind. ‘Good ol’ Mags’ he’d say. He be playin’ her all day, every day, well into the night, and sometimes too – when he made it out to old ‘Shady Hoppers’ two, three times a year, he made the Piano sing the blues, just enough to kick it up with a good old Jazz style; a kind of boot popping melody of sweet symphonic transition that is undeniable when it comes to two abominable forces coming together to sing and dance under one roof, invading one soul. And like that, right in broad day light he an’ Mags would have the early afternoon drinkers swinging an’ groovin sumthin furious to their own brand of style! He came home with stories to tell to the breeze, smoking Colts and sippin Old English til he could barely stand. And that’s how Old Moses made it.

And so it happens that Me and Old Moses Johnson have something in common besides our affinity for Jazz: we're both blind. I live down the way from Old Moses' little house, deep behind the little sticks, past an old tractor plow, on the edge of a great field of cotton on the edge of a small marsh. And when I was little I took to him immediately. Old Moses had all the old vinyl Jazz records howling from his front porch from sun up to sun down, and me...well, that was my heart and soul, the butterfly wings that brought a sweet bounce into my soul and carried it off like little notes soaring and dancing through the air. Visitors rarely came out here to disturb our little engagement of the soul. No one but one person ever came out here regularly: Lateecia Johnson, Old Moses' daughter; pretty little thing with big bright eyes – at least that's what I imagine. Says she doesn't need no man but the Lord. Plannin to go to college too. Sweet young thing with the sweet voice of a song bird. Sometimes I imagine smooth dark skin and juicy lips and a cute button nose. Its times like this that I wish I had me my sight. 2 comments

Every Thursday during the hottest months, June and July, like clock-work – just before sunset – come rain or sunshine, she rides her bike the six miles down the loneliest back country road, that same old package sitting in her basket like a happy little treat: bread, vegetables, beef, pork, rice, sugar, tea and a bottle of cheap wine with sweet Ingram Cigars. Today is her last ride down to these parts due to the fact that she be movin to New Orleans next week for College. So that's why today is so important. Moses, he deserves a special lady like Stella to bring him round – to keep him from talking to the old ghosts of the day and night, to free his soul from the old beats that he had become accustomed to over the years. Just to keep him from talking to the wind. You see, each and every day – since as long as I can remember – I been listenin to him talk, humming his sweet soulful songs, songs that he writ all by his self. And sometimes, right around sunset, facing the west, the evening sun splashing upon his little world, he speaks his mind to the dusty breeze, to the trees, to the world and to the good Lord above.

It never seems to bother him that he has no friends. Well, I mean...except me. And I think that because we're both blind...well, that gives us a sort of freedom that you could never find if you had your sight to teach you the wonderful colours of the world. You see...besides the colour of my skin – my not being black like Old Moses Johnson, I have a special element that only someone without the gift of sight could possess. Like a wild romance gone off in my heart and soul, whipping up the earth, I 'feel' the music. I mean I actually feel it. The Jazz riffs, the wild Saxophone screaming, the piano twiddling sweet excited keys like the world was only beginning to find itself. 2 comments

You see...it's the Jazz that gives me the colour black deep down in my soul. As far as Lateecia goes, she only ever saw me on one occasion and unlike her father, she saw for certain my colour, my repulsive nature. And quite surprisingly – as is most folks' prerogative – she didn't frighten off. It was me who was the one who fled. And believe me, when I felt her get too close – when she done gone and stole away my comfort, I was outta there! And though it ain't manly of me – I hate to admit – I ain't one to stick around when troubles brewin.

Lateecia be comin' round soon I reckon, droppin off the groceries, so I best be quick in my telling of this tale so we both – you and I – can come to a resolution, and maybe make Old Moses Johnson's world come to life; bring Stella back from the grave to make his acquaintance and mayhaps bring those high jazzy notes with her. Oh how I dreamed of this day for so long. Oh how I may live to remember (and regret) this day forever; the day I give my sweet woman over to someone else. Oh Stella... My beautiful fair darling, you'll have to forgive me, for you and I can never be. You're beautiful and I love you...but...well, you'll just be too much for me to handle. I ain't as strong as Old Moses. I can't love you like he can.

Mama always said 'Justice too, comes with a price.' It means that someone always pays in the end. I suppose you'll have your Justice too, Stella my love. I suppose it will be me who pays the price with my broken heart.

Life is funny like that sometimes, that true Justice is more often than not, a strange thing in itself, hardly worth the pain in the end. That reminds me of the rain – how we both love the rain, Me and Old Moses, especially in these parts. The rain keeps people from these here parts, keeps people away. Me and Old Moses...we like the mud – that it's so slippery and inviting. We love the smell of the leaves and the sounds they make when the water splashes over them. That in itself is poetry, a sort of Lord of music if you will – a type of magical orchestra whipped up by Mother Nature herself.

If you ask me, I just enjoy the way his old house sounds when the rains come – that cool comforting sound of water breaking over a hot roof, the funny leaking sounds it makes, the sweet rhythmic 'drip-drip-drip' sound, plopping down hard into steel pails and nailing wooden boards is like music to my ears, a sort of tenderness that only the angels up in Heaven could provide with their little kisses. And always, I feel his foot tapping the floor. I can feel his fingers snapping, his old hips shaking up the old rickety floorboards like he havin trouble letting go of his long time groove. In the early mornin I can smell the bacon grease on the griddle and the eggs and coffee as strong as the day. Oh my...what a smell!

I visit him every day, come rain or sunshine! No matter what day it is, be it those Bloody Friday's when the crosses sometimes burn in the front homes of black folk in these here parts – or those dog down days when their sons are put to lynching and hanging, found strung up in the trees right in their own back yards. I visit him on Sundays too, and together we listen to the old records where black beauties sing in their own coloured churches, belting out grand hymns of the Lord, singing of grace, forgiveness and love. No matter what day it is I'm always there, singing and dancing along, the floorboards shifting and vibrating beneath me as Old Moses turns up his beats, just going about his business in the garden or with the cleaning around the house.

You see, Moses being blind kind of gives us a bond that no one quite knows of – what with my being of a different colour than him an' all. And when any of his relatives come around (which is very rare,) I dash off for fear of getting him into trouble – for fear of getting myself into trouble. You see, they might say he was akin to keeping company of strangers, strangers who have no right being on his doorstep. Old Moses likes the company. He cooks a mean spread and plays the Blues when visitors come. Me I stay hidden, just tapping and snapping and be-bopping the day away just out of view. He plays the Blues just for them, but they don't know that Me and Old Moses have our hearts set on the Jazz and not the Blues. I mean...when we hear the Blues greats: Robert Johnson, Howlin' Wolf, Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, Blind Gary Davis, Skip James, John Lee Hooker, B.B. King...well, life is just swell. But when we hear Jazz legends – guys like Bunk Johnson, Buddy Bolden, Earl Hines, Nick La Rocca, Jinny Walker, Petey Johnson (who is of no relation) Skip Caldera and 'Green Joe' Brawler...well, nuthin else seems to matter. Then...life is but a dream.

It's getting late now and Lateecia will be here soon. In fact I can feel the wheels of her bike coming down the road, rumbling forth like a giant. The sun is almost outta sight. I can feel that too – can hear it on the trees, feel the shift in the leaves as it climbs just beneath the horizon, as if they be curling up, settling in for the night, trying to hold their warmth in. She'll be here shortly. I hope I didn't forget anything. Let me see...I done got the match sticks in place. I began early this morning. I hope they work. I guess I'll have to wait and see. I'm all filled up with stress now, feeling extra clammy. I get that way sometimes. I can't help it. Sometimes the world just seems so big and rough and I feel so little and fragile. I just want to stick my head in the dirt sometimes when things get too heavy. Oh here she comes now – just at the main road, turning in, peddling hard, proolly smiling sumthin beautiful too.

I heard Old Moses put on some Jinny Walker a lil while ago. Seems Lateecia has taken to Old Jinny last time she was down in these parts. I'm a good ways from the front steps, hiding away in the grass, lost to the world, but I can still hear Old Moses' foot tapping away on the porch steps as good as anything. I can hear his old chair

rocking back and forth, can smell the tangy smoke from an old Ingram just wafting in the wind. I can hear Lateecia riding up as we speak, her breath comin in full like a seasoned thoroughbred. Hell, I can almost hear her letting off a great big ol' smile, looking at her old daddy's kind face smiling, his dark glasses with the glint of the dusk on em, his arms out waiting to squeeze his baby girl sumthin' good.

I can hear her old shoes, the dirt and rocks crunching beneath, as well as the squeak of the kickstand. I can almost feel the bike leaning, resting to one side, the handlebars all askew. She walks up the little landing to give her old man a great big hug, what a sweet, sweet voice she has, I fall in love every time. "Hi daddy! I see you got old Jinny Walker on." Again I can just imagine her smiling, imagine her hugging me ever so tight, her sweet voice takin me away from these here parts, just about to turn me into a great white Swan so I could fly away and find me my freedom. "You sure know how to spoil me daddy! Mama doesn't know good music if it came up and bit her in the caboose. But don't tell her I told you that, else I might find myself in for a hidin." Her giggles are intoxicating, carrying on the wind right into my soul. Until the thick rasp of Old Moses drowns it out.

"Your Mama dun't know Jake Whipson from Dill Freazy even on a good day. It ain't right to not have any rhythm. But don't tell her I said that else I might find myself gettin hidin too." But together their laughter is like something right out of a movie, strong, endearing and filled with pleasure – quaint and hearty, filling the evening air, seeming to rush right on through me, seeming to soar right on into the great big world. "Well, daddy...I didn't get you no Ingrams today. And I sure as hell din't get you no cheap fool's wine either. Nope! I'm afraid I had to splurge this time. So..." She pullin' out a paper bag, and a crisp box of Cigars, I can almost smell them. Sweet, wonderful, and rather...mystical, like the sweet cocoa just fell from the trees and landed in the paper, sitting on the sweeter side of life.

Of course Old Moses – too curious for his own good sometimes – just has to get in there, rushin her, "what did you go on an get me baby girl?" I love the way he laughs, like a small child, raspy and thick, sort of like Louis Armstrong. He done put his own Ingram out beneath his foot. I know because I can smell it wafting in the air along with the tough rubber and the old floorboards of the porch.

"Well, daddy...I figured since I'm leavin on Sunday for New Orleans...I thought I would spend a full three dollars on Some Madagassi – right from Italy, and a pack of Fighting Cock Cigars, right from Spain, the same place where they run the Bulls." I adore her. What can I say?

"Aw, baby...!" He loves em. I can tell from the tone in his voice. I'm willin to bet he done got a big ol' lump in his throat too. Wish I could see him reach out an' wrap his arms round her. If I had one wish, that's it. He's so proud of his baby girl, "Baby...you're the most beautiful specialest daughter a dad could ever have. An' you done got your good taste from me – my side of the Family. But don't tell your mama that."

The way she laughs just lights my old heart up like a little light, giving me warmth, "Never, daddy..." She takes out a Cigar – one of the expensive ones, lights it for him and walks inside to get a cup. I can smell the wine. Definitely not the cheap ol Red Rooster wine. Hmmm...Madigassi? I never heard of it. Smells great though. Lateecia, she got good style and better taste. "I can't stay long daddy, the night is comin an' I still have to go over all my papers. I'm signed in to a dorm already and I even have a job lined up washing dishes."

"Baby girl...you just keep on goin forward. Don't you ever stop followin all your dreams. You just keep right on goin right up to the stars."

"I will daddy."

“God done gave you some good looks and a big heart and a big ol’ fat brain to become all that you dare to be. And don’t you ever let any man lead your life. You don’t need no man stealin away your independence, your pride and your drive. You work hard and don’t be afraid to speak your mind an’ tell it like it is. You just remember that God done gave mouths to everybody, just as He gave the world to people, both men and women and to all colours too. You don’t ever let no white fool take all your chips. You put them in when Pharaoh is in your hand and keep them close when the Devil be sidin up to seduce you. You done made me proud comin this far. You just keep on goinn the rest of the way now you hear?”

“Yes daddy.”

“Baby girl, you gone an’ outdone yourself in the best way here tonight! This is the tastiest Cigar and the freshest, sweetest red wine I done ever wrapped my lips round in my life. I’ll cherish them both on the best days.”

I can feel them so close to each other, Old Moses’ arm slung over her shoulder, a proud man shinin through, his soul absolutely beaming. I can feel the shift in the wood as he stands up, taking her by the hand, “Have a dance with your ol’ man. I got some soulful Jinny saved for me an’ you. You’ll like it.” Without hesitation she stands up. And after a brief moment, I hear it, the light to all the good graces the world over, like God got it just right, playing Himself through the soul of a man and his Saxophone, coming off like the sweetest gift to ever grace mankind: love. Innocent and soulful love. As they begin to sway, I can’t even keep my ear on their conversation I’m so hypnotized by the music; something about the way of the world, and the way of man, the way of darkness and the way love comes in an steals all hearts away to bliss and rainbows. But she really needs to go soon. It’s getting dark.

And like that, after a sweet kiss goodnight, the music and me, like two far off lovers come together under the same moon...the song is over. I can hear Old Moses’ arms wrapping about his baby girl ever so snug. And I can hear it in Lateecia’s voice, the love for her old dad, the only man she’ll ever truly admire, the only man she’ll ever hold close forever and ever deep in that spot reserved in her heart for him alone. “I got to be leavin now daddy. But I’ll stop in on Saturday same time to say goodbye.” Makes me almost cry the way they hug, so deeply, so filled with joy and love.

“You the best, baby girl! A gift from the good Lord above. An’ you remember that nobody is above you. Nobody! An’ tell that ol’ coot of a ma I sends my regards.”

“Will do! G’night daddy. Love you!”

She leaving now. Oh no! All my efforts! She’s ridin away! What do I do! What do I do! Will she hear me if I scream? Is it possible? What about all my hard work? The match sticks! The stupid match sticks! She didn’t see the match sticks! Oh Heaven’s! Just my luck! I have only one choice! I’m desperate! I’ll do anything! “Lateecia! Lateecia! Come back! Please come back! The match sticks are for you! Come and see the match sticks!” Oh no! She didn’t hear me! Oh...! Oh my gosh...! What’s this! Is she stopping? Oh my God! She stopped! Please...! Please...come back! She looking this way. Turning her bike around. Can this be real? Hooray! Yipee! She’s coming back! Turning around and coming back! Is this really happening? Did she hear me? Is that even possible? Coming back swiftly now, a sense of urgency in her wheels!

That voice, so beautiful, so...utterly intoxicating... “Daddy...?”

“What is it baby girl? You forget sumthin?”

“No, I...well...just sumthin I noticed.”

“What is it? I don’t have anythin in my teeth do I?”

“Silly daddy...!” A giggle. “No. It’s just that... Hmm...well, I never noticed it before.”

“What you talkin bout?”

Wonderful! Just wonderful! She’s getting off her bike! Oh my God! This is actually happening! I can’t believe it! “Well...it’s these match sticks!” She’s leaning down now, her hand taking one up.

“Match sticks? In the road?”

“Yeah, right down here off the porch.” She’s scratching her head now, a bit perplexed. She looking over to her old dad a tad suspicious, “Are you playin some sort of prank on me daddy?”

“Prank? What you goin on bout girl? Have you gone an’ lost your pretty lil mind on me? What is it?”

“You are pranking me aren’t you daddy?”

“Heaven’s no child! I have no idea what you goin on bout! Now give it to me straight, what’d ya find?”

“Match sticks! A lot of em.”

“Match sticks?” Old Moses is perplexed too. My plan is working! Thank you Lord! Thank you!

“Yeah, match sticks. Right in the dirt.” She sees em but she can’t believe her own eyes! “They laid out like little arrows!”

He takes a deep drag of his cigar, unsure quite what to think of it. “Well, that’s quite odd. Are they Blue Navy Match sticks by any chance?”

“Yeah they are, why?”

“Well, I done gone and lost a whole box of Blue Navy’s this morning.”

“That’s strange daddy.”

“I’d say. Wait a minute... Like little arrows ‘leadin off,’ you say?”

“Yeah, like little arrows, leadin off...”

“Leadin off to where?”

“I don’t know. Over in the grass past the old plow, it looks like. You sure you aren’t pranking me daddy?”

“Oh stop it silly girl! I have no idea what you talkin bout! Now take my hand. I can’t just lead myself off

through no grass and weeds now.”

It’s working! My plan is working! Together their feet are like thunder, shaking the ground coming closer and closer. Closer...now...just a little bit closer... Keep on coming Old Moses...almost there...

“Watch your step daddy, there’s a little slope here, you don’t wanna take a spill.”

“I wonder who coulda done it? I mean...I ain’t had no visitors. Nope. You the only one since Ida Cromchild back in April. An’ she only came in for tea and left straight away after that – no poking about an’ creepin about. She just left. I heard her leave too.”

“No...these match sticks are pretty fresh.” She bending low now! She must have heard my cries! Mama would be so proud of me! “Well, ain’t that a pickle, daddy!”

“What is it baby girl?”

“Well, this is the strangest thing I’ve ever seen.”

“What is it?”

“Stella? You sure you got that right?”

“Yeah, I’m sure! Clear as day. I’m lookin at it right now!”

Oh no! She’s bent low. Too close to me! Oh no...! Please don’t touch me Lateecia! Please don’t hurt me! Please...I’m begging you!

“There’s a little earthworm right beside the ‘X.’ Shoo little worm! Yuck! I hate worms!”

“Nevermind about the worm. What about the ‘X?’”

“I guess it must be like a treasure map, like...you know... ‘X’ marks the spot!”

“Tell you what, you go on back and get my shovel baby girl, we gonna dig this thing up, whatever it is.”

She going to get the shovel. I think I best be putting some distance between me and her. I don’t feel so safe being too close to her. Sometimes I forget just how big people are til they get too close. Then I realize they’re giants!

“Okay, I got the shovel. What do you suppose it is daddy?”

“I have no idea baby girl. What say we start diggin and find out.”

“The dirt’s soft daddy. Good soil. Off you go little worm. I don’t want to squash you.”

“How far down you at?”

“Almost a foot.”

“Anythin yet?”

“Nope, I –” She got it! “I got something here daddy!”

“I heard that. Sounds like wood. Like a wooden case or box or sumthin.”

“I think you’re right daddy. Hold up, lemme get down a little deeper and have me a better look. Got my fingers all up in the dirt. Kinda gives me the willies!”

“It’s a case of some sort. Sounds like it could be a case for an instrument, a guitar maybe.”

“Nope. Not a guitar daddy. Too small. I got one side of it. Hold on, I’mma pull it out.”

“I love the smell of fresh dirt. You ever remember eating mud when you was just a lil thing baby girl?”

“You an’ mama told me a hundred times when I was little daddy. Hold on, I got it out! This thing kinda heavy. It looks like it’s in pretty good shape though, minus a small hole in the top. Maybe some water seepage but no more than a tiny hole. The latches seem to be workin fine. There goes one of em. This second one has a bit of rust but...with a little elbow grease...there we are.”

My heart is on edge! I would scream to the Heaven’s right now if I was not so taken over with the prospect of being squashed to death. Hooray! Lateecia done gone and opened it right up! Finally Stella...! You’re free! Free at last! I can now die in peace. They found her, my beautiful Queen, My angel of the morning. This one’s for you Old Moses. Just for being my friend. For being the only one who has ever shared with me a life like no other. Together our weakness shall conquer all enemies. Together shall we conquer the darkness with the bright light – the music of the soul: Jazz! You go on and play her my Old friend. You go on and love her like only you can.

“Well, daddy...you’re not going to believe this!”

“What is it?”

“Why, it’s a Saxophone daddy!”

“A Saxophone?”

“Yeah, a pretty damn fine lookin one too!”

“Lemme see that. Ah...very well kept. Musta been down there for a long time. Good weight. Good feel.”

“Why don’t you go on and play somethin?”

“Okay, just let me get a feel for it. Any requests?”

“How about some Jinny Walker daddy?”

“Funny I was just thinking the same thing!”

Oh the sound Stella makes! Fresh as the morning rain! The beat! The rhythm! Moses you sly devil you! You done gone an’ outdone yourself. “How’s that sound baby girl?”

“I didn’t know you could play Jinny Walker daddy! I was just kiddin! Here you go an’ play Jinny Walker. You sound just like him! Go on! Don’t stop there!”

You go Old Moses! I do have to say so myself that she’s right you know? You can play Jinny Walker just as if he showed up out of the blue, walked down the six mile road to come play right on your doorstep. You pretty good ol son!

“Well daddy, I guess you got yourself an early birthday wish!”

“Stella. I think we’ll call her Stella! Just like the match sticks.”

“Now I suppose we can put your old Saxophone down for a rest daddy! I mean, now that you have Stella.”

“You know baby girl...I suppose we can.”

“What I don’t understand is ‘who’ would go out of their way to creep up the road in the middle of the night, break into your house while you slept, steal your matches and do such a thing for you?”

“Baby girl...I have no idea. Maybe ol Ida came creepin about this mornin.”

“No way Ida can creep. Not if she’s pushing two-eighty. You woulda heard her for sure!”

“Yeah, I suppose you right.”

“Well, maybe it was God. Maybe he wanted you to get back in the saddle and start writin music again daddy.”

Maybe. Maybe you right. I have been meanin’ to get back at it.”

“Well, there you go daddy! The good Lord does work in mysterious ways huh?”

“Indeed He does baby girl. Indeed He does..”

“You should write a song daddy. Maybe call it Stella. After the Saxophone.”

“I think I will write a song. You’ll hear it next time you come to visit from College.” I feel him shifting, as if in deep thought. “Baby girl...you said there was a lil worm right beside the X?”

“Yeah Daddy. It’s gone now - crawled away. I’m not touchin it if that’s what you mean?”

“Naw, baby girl, you ain’t gotta touch it. You just let it go about its business. I was just thinkin of a song. Sumthin across Nick La Rocca, Bunk Johnson an’ Buddy Bolden, livened up Jinny Walker style. I’ll call it ‘The

Worm and the Saxophone.”

“That’s brilliant daddy! I love it! ‘The Worm and the Saxophone.’”

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