Vagrants and Loiterers

By Kwame Dawes

South Carolina, c.1950

You got that clean waistcoat, the bright white of a well-tailored shirt, you got those loose-as-sacks slacks and some spit-polished shoes, and you know, whether you are looking like money, or about to take a stroll, to tilt that hat like you own the world; yeah, smoke your pipe, roll your tobacco, and hold loose as authority, your muscles, lithe and hard; and every so often, when you feel the urge, you reach into the waist pocket and pull out that watch on its chain, then look in the sky and say *Gonna be a cold one when it come,* like God gave you that fancy clock to tell the future. These are the easy boys of the goodly South; waiting for what is out of frame to happen: the sheriff with his questions, the paddy wagon, the chain gang, the weight of the world. Waiting, with such delicate dignity, fickle as the seasonal sky.

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