

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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