

# 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.

Source: *Poetry* (April 2018)