

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Poker!, by Zora Neale Hurston

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK POKER! ***

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[Transcriber's Note: This play transcribed from an original manuscript. There are pencilled notations possibly by Ms. Hurston herself. These pencilled edits have been transcribed as *[Handwritten: (text)]]

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POKER!

Time—Present

Place—New York

Cast of characters—

Nunkie

Too-Sweet

Peckerwood

Black Baby

Sack Daddy

Tush Hawg

Aunt Dilsey

SCENE—

A shabby front room in a shotgun house.

A door covered by dingy portieres upstage C. Small panel window in side Wall L. Plain centre table with chairs drawn up about it. Gaudy calendars on wall. Battered piano against wall R. Kerosene lamp with reflector against wall on either side of room.

At rise of curtain NUNKIE is at piano playing.... Others at table with small stacks of chips before each man. TUSH HAWG is seated at table so that he faces audience. He is expertly riffing the cards ... looks over his shoulder and speaks to NUNKIE.

TUSH HAWG Come on here, Nunkie—and take a hand! You're holding up the game. You been woofin' round here about the poker you can play—now do it!

NUNKIE

Yeah, I plays poker. I plays the piano and Gawd knows I plays the devil.
I'm Uncle Bob with a wooden leg!*[Handwritten: Last sentence crossed out
in pencil in manuscript.]

BLACK BABY Aw, you can be had! Come on and get in the game! My britches is cryin' for your money! Come on, don't give the healer no trouble!*[Handwritten: last sentence crossed out in pencil]

NUNKIE Soon as I play the deck I'm comin' and take you alls money! Don' rush me.

Ace means the first time that I met you
Duece means there was nobody there but us two
Trey means the third party—Charlie was his name
Four spot means the fourth time you tried that same old game—
Five spot means five years you played me for a clown
Six spot means six feet of earth when the deal goes down
Now I'm holding the seven spot for each day of the week
Eight means eight hours that she Sheba-ed with your Sheik—
Nine spot means nine hours that I work hard every day—
Ten spot means tenth of every month I brought you home my pay—
The Jack is three-card Charlie who played me for a goat
The Queen, that's my pretty Mama, also trying to cut my throat—
The King stands for Sweet Papa Nunkie and he's goin' to wear the crown,
So be careful you all ain't broke when the deal goes down!
(He laughs—X'es to table, bringing
piano stool for seat)

TUSH HAWG Aw now, brother, two dollars for your seat before you try to sit in this game.

NUNKIE

(Laughs sheepishly—puts money
down—TUSH HAWG pushes stack of chips
toward him. Bus.)

I didn't put it down because I knew you all goin' to be puttin' it right
back in my pocket.

BECKERWOOD

Aw, Y'all go ahead and play.

(to TUSH HAWG)

Deal!

(TUSH HAWG begins to deal for draw
poker. The game gets tense. SACK
DADDY is first man at TUSH's left—he
throws back three cards and is dealt
three more)

SACK DADDY My luck sure is rotten! My gal must be cheatin' on me. I ain't had a pair since John Henry had a hammer!

BLACK BABY

(Drawing three new cards)

You might be fooling the rest with the cryin' you're doin' but I'm
squattin' for you! You're cryin' worse than cryin' Emma!

TOO-SWEET

(Studying his three new cards)

(Sings)

When yo' cards gets lucky, oh Partner, you oughter be in a rollin' game.

*[Handwritten: get you foot offa my chair etc]

AUNT DILSEY (Enters through portieres—stands and looks disapprovingly) You all oughter be ashamed of yourself, gamblin' and carryin' on like this!

BLACK BABY Aw, this ain't no harm, Aunt Dilsey! You go on back to bed and git your night's rest.

AUNT DILSEY

No harm! I know all about these no-harm sins! If you don't stop this card playin', all of you all goin' to die and go to Hell.

(Shakes warning finger—exits through portieres—while she is talking the men have been hiding cards out of their hands and pulling aces out of sleeves and vest pockets and shoes—it is done quickly, one does not see the other do it)

NUNKIE

(Shoving a chip forward)

A dollar!

SACK DADDY

Raise you two!

BLACK BABY I don't like to strain with nobody but it's goin' to cost you five. Come on, you shag-nags! This hand I got is enough to pull a country man into town. *[Handwritten: Last sentence crossed through in pencil.]

TOO-SWEET You all act like you're spuddin'! Bet some money! Put your money where your mouth is * [Handwritten: els my fist where yo mouf is.]

TUSH HAWG Twenty-five dollars to keep my company! Dog-gone, I'm spreadin' my knots!

SACK DADDY

And I bet you a fat man I'll take your money—I call you.

(Turns up his cards—he has four aces and king)

TUSH HAWG (showing his cards) Youse a liar! I ain't dealt you no aces. Don't try to carry the Pam-Pam to me 'cause I'll gently chain-gang for you!

SACK DADDY Oh yeah! I ain't goin' to fit no jail for you and nobody else. I'm to get me a green club and season it over your head. Then I'll give my case to Miss Bush and let Mother Green stand my bond! I got deal them aces!

NUNKIE

That's a lie! Both of you is lyin'! Lyin' like the cross-ties from New York to Key West! How can you all hold aces when I got four? Somebody is goin' to West hell before midnight!

BECKERWOOD Don't you woof at Tush Hawg. If you do I'm goin' to bust hell wide open with a man!

BLACK BABY

(Pulls out razor—Bus.)

My chop-axe tells me I got the only clean aces they is on this table! Before I'll leave you all rob me outa my money, I'm goin' to die it off!

TOO-SWEET

I promised the devil one man and I'm goin' to give him five!

(Draws gun)

TUSH HAWG

Don't draw your bosom on me! God sent me a pistol and I'm goin' to send him a man!

(FIRES. Bus. for all)

AUNT DILSEY

(Enters after shooting bus. Stands. Bus. drops to chair)

They wouldn't lissen—

(Looks men over—Bus.)

It sure is goin' to be a whole lot tougher in hell now!

CURTAIN

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