



# SUMMERTIME



BY: **EKOW DUKER**

“... and the living is easy...  
fish ... are jumping...”

She stopped mid breath, well before the cotton was high, and turned expectantly towards him. His head was hunched onto his shoulders and with his arms outstretched in a prayer-like posture, he looked like a mantis about to strike.

“How was that?” she asked. Her speaking voice soft and slightly accented, so different from when she sang.

“Who told you to stop?” he asked from the middle of the first row, staring at her through steepled fingers.

Instinctively, she took a step back and edged closer to the black drapes behind her. His red velvet jacket could have sprouted from the matching upholstery and the shadows swirling at his feet only enhanced his likeness to a disembodied apparition.

“I won’t hurt you.”

“Come closer, into the light where I can see you.”

She took two steps forward and came to a stop with her hip thrust forward in a deceptively aggressive pose. She waited for him to speak and rubbed the head of the microphone with her fingers, coaxing jagged thuds out of the banks of loud speakers.

He winced as if in pain. “Stop that!”

“I’m sorry.”

He unfolded his long legs and leaned forward with his elbows resting on his knees and his head cupped in his hands. He looked thoughtful, kind almost.

“I want you to imagine swinging a metal bar in a vicious arc that intersects with my head.” He patted the back of his head to show exactly what he meant.

“Why would I do that?” she asked slowly.

“Why? Surely the thought had entered your mind already.”

She blushed and felt the red blotches swarm up her neck like an infectious disease. His lips split in a sudden grin, more startling because it was so unexpected.

“Now sing with the same grit and determination with which you wanted to maim me...”  
He looked down at the heavy Breitling draped around his wrist, “... a few minutes ago.”

Her chest began to heave as if she'd just run at full pelt down the aisles and vaulted onto the stage but she nodded and took a deep breath. Then without warning, the rich sound of a saxophone surrounded her, floating lazily above the bass beat and the wailing of the lead guitar.

“Well, your Daddy's rich...”

“... and your Mama's good looking...”

She glanced up at the empty stalls, forgetting she was naked. Her feet moved of their own accord and as she sang, the creases stitching his forehead melted away and a rapturous smile spread across his face.

“O hush, little Baby, don't you cry...”

Her voice took hold of 'Baby', caressing it fiercely and only reluctantly letting it loose to expire in the warm air.

“One of these mornings...  
you're gonna rise up singing...  
you gonna spread your wings...  
and fly to the sky...”

“Sing!” he hissed. “Sing you bitch!”

“but until then...  
nothing, nothing can harm you...  
with Daddy...  
and Mommy...  
standing by.”