

(WILLA, a woman in her 60s, sits on the chair with a serene demeanor and skillfully sews together colorful patches into a beautiful quilt. The soft hum of her favorite classic tunes fills the cozy living room. Suddenly, the door swings open, interrupting the peaceful atmosphere. ROY, a fifteen-year-old with an air of teenage indifference, enters. He holds a stack of mail and a book in his hands. With a nonchalant toss, he throws the book on the table and settles in.)

**ROY:**

Here yo' mail, Ant Willa. (Holds out mail.)

(Willa glances up from her quilting, her eyes catching Roy's troubled expression. She doesn't say anything right away, sensing his distress. She takes the mail and sets it beside her.)

**WILLA:**

Truant officer come by. Care to explain why you ain't been going to school?

**ROY:**

Ma'am?

**WILLA:**

You been going somewhere, but it certainly ain't school.

**ROY:**

(A beat) I'm quitting.

**WILLA:**

What you mean, quitting?

**ROY:**

They ain't teaching me nuthin! I told my teacher, 'I'm going to be a doctor, so my people don't get refused medical treatment just because they're not white.' And she said, (mocking her voice) 'Most you'll ever be is a janitor. That's better suited for Coloreds.' (He pauses a beat, reflecting) Most colored men I know, got low-paying jobs. (Frustrated) Serving, cleaning, or driving white folk around in cars they don't even own. So, what's the use of school? I don't need a degree to be no janitor!

**WILLA:**

Don't look down on the janitor.

**ROY:**

I'm not. But it's like having a basket of fruit on the table. Apples, oranges, bananas, and pears—you go to reach for the pear, and white folk SLAP your hand and tell you, 'You only can have the banana!' (Pushes his book onto the floor) I swear! Living in Pontiac, only get you what's at the bottom! Pontiac ain't no different than Alabama!

(Willa's eyes land on the book on the floor. She doesn't respond or react right away, focused on the piece of cloth she's sewing onto the quilt. With a soft but firm voice, she reasons with Roy.)

**WILLA:**

Ain't where you live, Roy. It's what's livin' in you. In yo' head, in yo' heart . . . But you ain't gon' be nothin' if you don't go to school. Don't let that teacher or nobody else make you feel unworthy.

**ROY:**

She put us down ever'day. She ain't gon' change.

**WILLA:**

She may not. The change starts in you.

(Roy, unable to contain his emotions, stands abruptly and walks over to the window. His demeanor is crestfallen, his gaze fixed on the gloom of the city beyond. A sense of hopelessness fills the air.)

**WILLA:**

Member, what I used to tell you when you'd get down and out back home?

**ROY:**

(A beat) 'When they knock you down . . . the dead don't get up.'

**WILLA:**

Is you dead?

**ROY:**

No, ma'am.

**WILLA:**

(Willa stands and quietly walks over to Roy.) We ain't make this world, Roy. But we can change it. It's not gon' be easy, it never is. 'Speshly, for the Colored. (Willa extends both hands, palms up, toward Roy. She slowly flips them over, revealing the top of her hands, a silent invitation for him to stare.) You see these marks on my hands? Member how you and my sons would ask about 'em and I'd never tell you how I got 'em?

**ROY:**

Yes'um.

**WILLA:**

I only had a third-grade education. Ain't the best reader. Don't use the finest words. . . but I know education import'n. In Miss'sippi, they beat us if they caught us tryin'a learn somthun other than what they wanted us to know. When I came to Detroit, all I could do was put a 'X' for my name. And biggest word I know'd had seven letters: C-O-L-O-R-E-D. Colored. Daddy made sure all his kids knew that word. To keep us in our place—and from getting killed.

(Willa, after a moment, returns to the chair and sits. Her eyes wander, reflecting on her past life in Mississippi. There's a brief moment of introspection before she continues reminiscing.)

**WILLA (Cont.):**

So, the preacher was teachin' us to read and write down scriptures. Was 'bout six of us there . . . Three white mens showed up from nowhere, pulled us outside . . . beat us for learnin'. . . I mean, they beat us . . . Made me hold out my hands and whipped 'em (a few beats, fights back tears.) whipped 'em till they liked to, tore to shreds—

When you can't read, ever'thang hid from you. Can't tell truth from a lie. And if you can't put numbers together in yo' head somebody'll always cheat you. (Holds up her hands and shows her marks) These my school marks. (Examines her hands) Ever'day when I look at these scars, that look like raised earthworms crisscrossed over my hands, it reminds me of what whitefolk ain't want me to have (a few beats) An Education.

(Roy, compelled by a newfound understanding, walks over to Willa. He examines the marks on her hands quietly, his demeanor shifting to one of shame as he realizes what she went through just to learn to read. He picks up his book from the floor, holding it with a different perspective. Willa waits a beat before speaking.)

**WILLA (Cont.):**

Doctor Roy Griffin. That's yo' name. That's who you are. And when your teacher or anybody else make you feel less than who you are, don't be afraid to stand up and challenge them, respectfully, when they wrong. Hear?

(Roy, looking at Willa with pride and hopeful eyes, smiles, sensing a shared connection and understanding. The room warms with a subtle acknowledgment of the unspoken bond between them.)

**WILLA:**

Make a difference for our family. And all the Coloreds who want what you want (gently places her hand on his heart)  
Equity, Equality, and Education. It's a right. Not a privilege. You understand me, son?

**ROY:**

Yes'um.

(The warmth deepens as he embraces her in a hug. He retrieves his book, and smiles. He exits.)

**End Scene**