

**ЫЈΛϣϑ**  
*SidoneIvhi*

**BLOOD BOUNDARY**

by  
Vicki Lynn Mooney

Vicki Lynn Mooney  
416 South Perdue Ave.  
Claremore, OK 74017  
(918) 923-2025  
[vicki@mooneyart.com](mailto:vicki@mooneyart.com)

**ᄒᄒᄒᄒ**

*SidoneIvhi*

# BLOOD BOUNDARY

By Vicki Lynn Mooney

A Full-Length Play for 3 Men and 3 Women

## CAST

### By Order of Appearance

James Broughton	16-17, Bright and articulate mostly Cherokee youth who passes for white and was raised as white.
Virgil Barnes	21-23, An undirected young budding Klansman. James' cousin.
Tassie Vann	18-21, A beautiful mixed blood girl with intelligence and ambition. Also James' cousin.
Aunt Jane	72, Tart, truth-telling Cherokee/Creek family matriarch. James' and Tassie's great aunt.
Billy Vann	36, A dark-skinned Cherokee man with a big personality and big dreams. Entering into a new phase of his life influenced by W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey. James' uncle.
Fain Cuddahy	57, An elegant, but down to earth retired madam. Virgil's grandmother.

## Time

June 4, 1920 - June 10, 1921

## Place

Tulsa, Oklahoma  
Paris, France

SCENE 1

*Tulsa, Oklahoma - June 4, 1920.  
The sound of a turnkey doorbell  
echoes throughout the bare  
reception hall of a grand house  
on Archer Street. The house has  
been stripped of most of its  
finery save for a few chairs and  
dusty occasional tables  
scattered about. The doorbell  
sounds intermittently as James  
Broughton and Virgil Barnes  
scuffle at the threshold each  
trying to enter first. The  
cousins burst into the room at  
the same time and velocity. The  
emptiness of the house evokes a  
wave of nostalgia for James  
while Virgil scavenges with  
glee.*

JAMES

It seems so much bigger empty.

VIRGIL

The doorplate, doorbell, both of them would bring a bit,  
and I'm not talking salvage!

(Stopping to admire a fancy  
inlaid table)

Aunt Flo served me my first cocktail on this little table!  
She wouldn't mind if I took it for a keepsake, do you  
think?

JAMES

As far as I know, Grandmother sold all the contents at  
auction a while ago. I'm sure you would be welcome to  
whatever is left over.

VIRGIL

(Rifles through the tables  
in turn and finds a deck of  
playing cards.)

Cards! Still play poker, James?

JAMES

It's very popular in my dormitory.

VIRGIL

Do you win?

JAMES

Bet on it!

VIRGIL

Nine bedrooms! Man, I love this house. What could a person do with nine bedrooms?

JAMES

It's mother's idea to turn it into a hospital; or at least it was until she started to fail.

VIRGIL

Naw! A hospital! Who's going to come to a hospital in this part of town?

JAMES

The sick and injured, I presume.

VIRGIL

(Laughs)

You presume! You a duck out of water in these parts, James!

(Pulls out a flask and hands it to James.)

Here, take a pull on this. Loosen up, fella!

JAMES

(Sniffs)

What is it?

VIRGIL

Corn liquor. It'll rip your head right off.

(James sips and coughs a bit.)

That your first drink?

(Virgil laughs as James passes the flask back to him.)

I thought so.

JAMES

Ah, country ways!

VIRGIL

Are you coming back to Oklahoma when you're through with school?

JAMES

Grandmother and Opa will be settled in Switzerland by the fall. I'll be joining them briefly before I begin my medical studies in France.

VIRGIL

You call Mr. Rolfe "Opa?"

JAMES

It's German for grandpa.

VIRGIL

Is that what they talk in Switzerland?

JAMES

They speak German, French, Italian -- depends on where you are and who you meet. I also speak Latin and Greek as well as English. Language has always come naturally to me.

VIRGIL

You going to be a doctor like your Ma?

JAMES

Not exactly. Opa is encouraging me to go into eugenics, but I have a mind more towards surgery.

VIRGIL

That Mr. Rolfe, he's a real smart man! Smart enough to sniff out Aunt Flo's medicine patents, make her richer than God, and then, turn right around and marry her. That's German efficiency!

JAMES

He's given me every advantage. He has been more than generous with me.

VIRGIL

I have friends who talk about eugenics all the time. Very science-minded friends. Lots of them.

JAMES

Opa is right that eugenics is a growing field, but I don't think it's the right field for me.

VIRGIL

How come?

JAMES

Aboriginal origins, you know.

VIRGIL

Aboriginal?

JAMES

Indian blood.

VIRGIL

Can't be that much. No one would guess our family even had Indian blood if your mamma didn't stand up and preach it out loud.

JAMES

Oh yes, Mamma will preach!

VIRGIL

Does anyone up there where you're going to school know you're an Indian?

JAMES

I really should get back to Mother.

VIRGIL

Here, James, here. Listen, cuz...

(Offers his flask)

She beat that old Spanish Flu once; she can beat it again.

JAMES

I wish I had your faith.

(Takes a chair and sips from  
the flask)

Or that I could do something!

VIRGIL

You're doing all you can do, cuz.

(Takes back his flask and  
pulls on it)

Are Aunt Flo and Mr. Rolfe coming?

JAMES

They had already embarked on their Grand Tour when I received the news of Mother's relapse. So unexpected.

VIRGIL

Embarked! Presume! Aboriginal! They sure teach you to talk prissy at your school!

JAMES

What would you have said, Virgil?

VIRGIL

I would have just said that they'd already went.

JAMES

So, they didn't teach English at your school?

VIRGIL

You know, I think they did. Could have been that I just wasn't paying attention.

(Swigs from his flask)

Let's play cards! That was Grandpa Joe's cure for everything! Too bad your ma and grandma were on the outs with him. He would have taught you how to cuss and spit and smoke and play cards!

JAMES

Around our house, we referred to him as Mr. Cuthbert.

VIRGIL

He was your grandpa, too, James. He had a lot of stroke until he started losing power over all this Indian land business.

JAMES

We always gave him wide berth.

VIRGIL

That's too bad, because he was something. I could always get hired on the drilling rigs when Old Joe was around. Had a little trouble staying hired, but he had a way of fixing things. Nobody will touch me now; I think I've been blackballed in the oil business.

JAMES

For what?

VIRGIL

Laughing.

JAMES

Laughing?

VIRGIL

At the wrong time. You know how it goes when someone gets hurt, falls on their face or trips -- like that? And because it's not you, you laugh?

JAMES

That's what you did?

VIRGIL

Well, yeah! Only thing -- it was my boss.

JAMES

Oh.

VIRGIL

Damned if I didn't pull a pipe out of the hole and set it right down on his foot. Man, you ever want to see a man's face go through changes? Whoop! Surprise, pain, purple, panic! But, I probably wouldn't have laughed so hard if I knew the pipe sliced off three of his toes.

JAMES

You cost your boss three toes?

VIRGIL

Oh, that's common on an oil rig. Maybe not three at a time, but men are always losing fingers and toes. I admit it wasn't really funny and I'm sorry I laughed...real sorry. No one wants to hire me now.

JAMES

What will you do?

VIRGIL

I need to come up with something and this house is giving me ideas. You're Aunt Flo's heir, right James? As her only grandchild, why can't you sell it to me?

JAMES

One, she's not dead and two, even if she were, the property doesn't belong to her. This was my grandfather's allotment; Grandma Flo occupied it, she made improvements on it, but she never had a real claim upon it as an Intermarried White. I think it just goes back to the tribe or maybe the government since grandmother lost her lawsuit.

VIRGIL

For a lady who wasn't all that respectful of Indians, I will never understand why she fought so hard for so many years to be adopted as a Cherokee.

JAMES

For the property, of course. My grandfather's allotment, this house, all of it.

VIRGIL

All the way to the Supreme Court.

JAMES

She assumed that being white and having money would work to her advantage there.

VIRGIL

Not because she was trying to be an Indian!

JAMES

Definitely not.

VIRGIL

She gambled big.

JAMES

There are some things that money can't buy. Evidently, tribal membership is one.

VIRGIL

You're on the Dawes Rolls, ain't you?

JAMES

I don't know, Virgil.

VIRGIL

Is there any reason this couldn't be yours? It's your grandpa's allotment...

JAMES

I'd have to live here, wouldn't I?

VIRGIL

I'd move in with you!

JAMES

I'm planning to be in Europe for at least the next several years.

VIRGIL

Where they don't know you're Indian.

JAMES

The only place it ever comes up is out here.

VIRGIL

You're afraid them old eugenics boys gonna get you in the lab and start taking brain measurements! You scared they gonna figure you out.

JAMES

I should be careful that I don't become 'subject' rather than scientist, considering the field.

VIRGIL

You'd be famous!

JAMES

Spare me. I have no desire to become a novelty for them to poke at and diminish. I do not wish to be judged by a lesser standard, which I would be, perhaps, should my native blood be discovered.

VIRGIL

You're for sure one-hundred percent white from Grandpa Joe's side of the family.

JAMES

All white from my father's side.

VIRGIL

And from what I understand even your part-Cherokee grandpa wasn't all that much Cherokee.

JAMES

How much Cherokee he was depends on who in the family you ask.

VIRGIL

Well, do you know how much you are on the Dawes Rolls?

JAMES

I'd have to ask Mother. I'm not sure I'm on it.

VIRGIL

You a white man, James. If you ain't on the Dawes Rolls there's nothing stopping you from claiming full white.

JAMES

What do I know of Indians? My father was gunned down in the street by a drunk Indian! That's what I know.

VIRGIL

Hell, James! Go on to Europe and don't tell 'em squat over there. Who would have thought that this lovely lady of a house would end up on the wrong side of town? This whole part of town was the original Downtown Tulsa, you know, but a few years after statehood the big boys got together and saw that too much money was going to the wrong element and just moved it one mile south. Grandpa Joe, because he was a bootlegger and let his girls marry indians - well, that made him a wrong element. The family ended up with a lot of property, but you can't sell it for nothin' and nobody's buyin' but ex-slaves from the south and those uppity ones from the north.

(He looks to James who is  
lost in thought)

We could go out and chase girls, or something. Get your mind off of things.

JAMES

I need to stick close by, Virgil.

VIRGIL

Me and the boys are heading out tomorrow night to go camping in the hills for a few days. Sorry I can't take you with me, but it's kind of like a fraternity...secret handshakes, you know, and all.

JAMES

Yes, yes, a fraternity. I'm ready to walk back. You?

VIRGIL

I'm going to take a little turn around upstairs to see if there's anything else Aunt Flo wanted me to have. James?

JAMES

Sure.

Virgil bounds upstairs. James walks about distracted, impatient to be somewhere else. After a moment, the doorbell rings and James crosses to answer it just as Tassie enters through the front door with a key. Both she and James are slightly startled at the sight of each other.

TASSIE

Are you James?

JAMES

Yes.

TASSIE

Your mother...

JAMES

I'm coming.

(He starts out the door then returns and shouts up the staircase)

Virgil!

(No response)

JAMES (CONTINUED)

Virgil! I'm leaving!

(No response)

James and Tassie hurry out.

Virgil comes backing down the stairway wrestling a trunk and chattering away, not realizing James is gone.

VIRGIL

What we'd do is make this place a private gentlemen's club, where men of importance may freely speak their minds on topics of the day -- if you get my drift -- the Negro Question, to put it plainly.

(He reaches the bottom of the stairs and does not see James so he shouts for him.)

And, I want to build it up big, right here, James! Right on the edge of Little Africa!

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 2

The next day. Aunt Jane and James let themselves in to Florence's house. James carries Aunt Jane's basket of refreshments while Aunt Jane carries a vase and bunch of flowers to arrange.

AUNT JANE

This house is on the last footprint of Weli's allotment. I'm so glad it went to a Cherokee family.

JAMES

I suppose that was the government's doing.

AUNT JANE

It was my doing. My doing entirely. Our family lived on this land before there was ever any talk of allotments. When my grandpa came here there wasn't even a town, just a few folks trying to get to a place far enough away from white people so we could live in peace.

JAMES

Was your grandpa a full-blood, Aunt Jane?

AUNT JANE

Full-blood, half-blood, quarter-blood -- none of that mattered back then. We all lived together, worked together, sat in the same church pews at the same time, and when our time was up, we was buried side-by-side in the same graveyards. We were Creek, and Cherokee, and Osage and any-which-way mixed or blended.

(She begins arranging the  
flowers in the vase.)

Blood quantum is a white man's invention, James, not ours. The Dawes Rolls may list us as full or half or quarter blood, but before then, we all just called each other Natives.

JAMES

Virgil said that Grandpa Weli wasn't hardly Cherokee at all.

AUNT JANE

Who's Virgil?

JAMES

My cousin. Aunt Molly's son.

AUNT JANE

Well, he's wrong. Take a cookie if you want one; I made your favorite.

(James finds a cookie in the  
basket and takes a nibble)

JAMES

Pecan!

AUNT JANE

You probably spent more time at this house than you did at your own house.

JAMES

Once Mamma started practicing medicine it was rare to find either of us at home.

AUNT JANE

You were the light of her life, James. She was mighty proud of you.

JAMES

I should have paid more attention when she spoke of your side of the family, Aunt Jane. I didn't realize how much it meant to her.

AUNT JANE

(Embrace)

Family is everything to us. So good that you were with her at the end.

JAMES

Her face lit up and she looked right at me -- or through me, I don't know -- and she called me Jiminy or something like Jiminy - happy like - and then she just closed her eyes.

AUNT JANE

Happy like?

JAMES

Very happy.

AUNT JANE

Howa! (how-ah': truth, alright) *Tsimi!* (chee'-me: Jimmy)

JAMES

That's what she said!

AUNT JANE

We called you *Tsimi* when you was a baby, but your Grandma Flo put a stop to it.

JAMES

Why?

AUNT JANE

Flo dearly hated to hear Cherokee spoken. But, there is more to it than that.

JAMES

Is "Jiminy" some sort of blessing in Cherokee, Aunt Jane? Because when I was little and mamma tucked me in at night, she'd kiss my hair and whisper "jiminy" last thing before she blew out the lamp.

AUNT JANE

She blessed you with every breath, my child. She was calling a gentle spirit to look over you with her prayer. Tsimi is just the Cherokee way of saying James, or near to it as we can get. "Hokta, Tsimi!" means, "Jimmy, look!"

JAMES

She became so confused at the end. Did you hear her trying to tell me about her brother, or had you already left the room? She doesn't have a brother!

AUNT JANE

She has a brother, James, a half-brother. You'll meet him.

JAMES

I have a half-uncle?

AUNT JANE

No such thing as a 'half-uncle.' He's your mother's brother so he's your uncle. Your Cherokee uncle.

JAMES

What's his name?

AUNT JANE

Billy Vann.

JAMES

Why have I never heard of him before?

AUNT JANE

Your grandma Flo didn't want you or anybody else to know. He'll be here directly. I want you to meet what is left of your Cherokee family.

JAMES

I wish I'd asked her more...

AUNT JANE

Doyu? (Is that true?)

JAMES

Beg pardon?

AUNT JANE

Doyu? Is that true? Because, if you really want to know the truth, I can tell you.

The doorbell RINGS just before a booming gust of masculine laughter.

BILLY VANN

Do it again, Tassie!

(Doorbell RINGS again, to his chortling delight. Aunt Jane crosses to the door)

I love that sound! Love it!

(Billy and Tassie enter. Tassie carries a valise. Aunt Jane opens her arms to welcome them)

AUNT JANE

(Hugging Billy)

There's my big boy!

(Billy Vann transmits his happiness by hugging Aunt Jane within an inch of her life.)

Listen, honey, do you need to sit down? You've been on your feet all day.

BILLY VANN

(Takes a chair)

All day today, and all night last night.

AUNT JANE

(To James)

He's a porter for the railroad!

BILLY VANN

Not for long, not too much longer. Now that the white boys are back from the War, they want our jobs.

AUNT JANE

Take your job and call you shiftless?

BILLY VANN

About right. Since they can't own us anymore, they think they are still entitled to the biggest part of what we have, or make, or buy and sell as they can get. They think they deserve all of it and they don't mind bleeding you to the last drop to get it.

AUNT JANE

Well... James, did you meet Tassie?

JAMES

I, uh...not really.

TASSIE

I came to fetch you for your ma.

JAMES

Yes, I recall seeing you but I don't remember your name.

TASSIE

Tassie Vann.

AUNT JANE

Tassie is your cousin, James. Her daddy is Billy Vann.

BILLY VANN

That's me! Billy Vann.

(Stands and offers his hand to James whose expression suggests he has just stepped into a Technicolor world. They shake hands.)

Not what you expected, I'm sure.

AUNT JANE

This is your Uncle Billy.

JAMES

How do you do?

BILLY VANN

Why, I do fine, James! I'm so pleased to meet you at last. I see Alma in you; I see your daddy too.

AUNT JANE

Billy was born before your grandpa ever met Flo.

JAMES

Did grandmother know that?

TASSIE

If y'all will excuse me, I'm going to check the upstairs rooms against the inventory.

(Tassie opens her valise and pulls out a checklist. )

AUNT JANE

Go right ahead, honey.

Tassie tucks a pencil behind an ear before she goes upstairs.

AUNT JANE

Yes, James. Your grandma knew Weli had a son, but she never met him. After your grandpa took up drinking again, he just stopped going home. Billy and your daddy looked after him in the last few years of his life.

(To Billy)

Good boys, you was, both of you.

JAMES

Did Mother know you?

BILLY VANN

Oh yes, we were the deepest of friends.

JAMES

But, she never said anything!

AUNT JANE

She couldn't, James. It was her way of protecting you -- and him. Your grandma too, in a way.

JAMES

I am overwhelmed.

AUNT JANE

Let it steep. Let it steep for now and you can ask me about it any time you want to know.

JAMES

I appreciate that. I, uh...what, uh...I don't know what to ask.

BILLY VANN

Let it steep. Your mamma blinked twice when she met me, too.

AUNT JANE

(To Billy)

I've got the deed and all the papers with me!

BILLY VANN

All the paperwork in order?

AUNT JANE

Free and clear.

Tassie returns from the upstairs rooms.

TASSIE

We are missing a couple of things. A big trunk and that pretty little inlaid table.

AUNT JANE

They have to be around somewhere. The place don't look like it's been broke into. Which reminds me...

(She takes the house keys from her pocket and turns them over to Billy)

Here's the keys to your new house!

BILLY VANN

Means the world to me, Aunt Jane.

AUNT JANE

You should turn your keys over, too, James.

JAMES

I will. I don't have them with me.

BILLY VANN

Bring them by tomorrow, be fine.

JAMES

I will.

AUNT JANE

Tassie, take this vase and put the flowers in some water.

(To James)

And, James, you go with her. The kitchen pump will need to be primed for sure, and you've got the muscle for it. Will you do that for me?

JAMES

Yes, ma'am.

James and Tassie exit to the kitchen.

BILLY VANN

He looks so much like Tsimi, it makes me want to cry.

AUNT JANE

He was raised by Florence; she raised him as white. As far as he knows, his daddy was Shep Broughton.

BILLY VANN

And I thought I was gonna be the surprise.

Aunt Jane lays out cookies and cups. She pours lemonade from a quart jar.

AUNT JANE

You were, darlin', no doubt about it. But, Alma said, "When James asks about his father, if he does, tell him the truth." And I will but he's got to want to know.

BILLY VANN

If that's the way Alma wanted it, that's the way it shall be. I won't lie to him.

James and Tassie return from the kitchen. Tassie replaces the flowers on the mantle.

TASSIE

(To Aunt Jane)

So pretty, Aunt Jane! Are these from your yard?

AUNT JANE

I have more than I know what to do with. I made pecan shortbread for you, Tassie! They're James' favorite, too. Set y'all down. Grab one!

Tassie grabs a cookie and kisses Aunt Jane on the cheek before taking a seat.

TASSIE

Mmmm, Aunt Jane!

AUNT JANE

James?

(Offers him the cookies)

JAMES

I already had one.

AUNT JANE

Well, this is us. All that's left of Weli's line.

JAMES

I never met him.

TASSIE

Me either, James, but I wish I did.

AUNT JANE

He'd be happy that y'all will be neighbors. James will take over his mother's allotment right next door!

JAMES

I have no use for it; I'm not staying.

AUNT JANE

That's your choice, but your mamma left you a lot more than land. You've got the ice house to dispose of, the coal mine to finish shutting down, the oil lease they're getting ready to drill on the northeast corner of her property.

JAMES

I had no idea.

AUNT JANE

Well, do you know that you're due your own allotment when you turn twenty-one? Alma has held it in trust for you all these years.

JAMES

Does that mean that I am listed on the Dawes Rolls?

AUNT JANE

Of course you are! You're Cherokee. That's the first thing your mamma did after childbed. You gonna turn your nose up at that?

BILLY VANN

She wanted you to have resources so you could get out from under your grandma's money. If you want to.

JAMES

What do you know of my grandmother's financial situation?

BILLY VANN

There you go. That's the first time you've looked me in the eye. You don't have to claim kin to me, James, that's alright. Just drop off my key tomorrow evening.

JAMES

Thank you. I will.

James makes a hasty retreat.

BILLY VANN

Guess he won't be calling me Uncle Billy.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 3

Late that night, moonlight illuminates the interior of the house as James and Virgil tiptoe inside. James carries the small inlaid table.

JAMES

I know where I can put this so she'll think she overlooked it.

VIRGIL

(Lights a candle)

I'll light a candle.

(James immediately blows it out)

JAMES

No, no. I'll be right back and help you get the trunk.

James exits toward the kitchen with the table. Virgil relights the candle and then a cigarette while he waits. With the added illumination, Virgil notices a newspaper on a nearby table. He snatches it up, suddenly agitated.

VIRGIL

What the hell, what the hell, what the hell!

James returns, not happy to see Virgil slacking.

JAMES

No light! Let's put the trunk back and get out of here.

VIRGIL

Did you see this?

JAMES

No light!

Virgil brushes James back when he tries to blow out the candle for the second time.

VIRGIL

I just lit a smoke. Nobody's gonna see us and what if they did? We're putting things back not carrying it out. This is the darkie newspaper, James! Oh, man! Do you see this headline?

JAMES

(Reading)

"Race Scores Big Point in G.O.P." You can hardly expect the Party of Lincoln to be against Negro suffrage.

VIRGIL

Well, the Republicans here don't want it. White Republicans.

JAMES

Goes without saying.

VIRGIL

Don't that make you mad?

JAMES

Why should I be mad?

VIRGIL

Because...niggers, James! Do you want them taking over?

JAMES

Taking over what?

VIRGIL

Hell, I don't know! The state! The government! If that don't scare you it should. They'll drive this country into the ground if you give them an inch!

JAMES

That is a most unlikely scenario, Virgil.

VIRGIL

What in the hell is the matter with you?

JAMES

Why are you so afraid?

VIRGIL

I ain't afraid of no stupid nigger.

JAMES

Have you ever met a Negro who is smarter than you?

VIRGIL

(Blowing a lip fart and  
rolling his eyes)

Why you call them Negros?

JAMES

Have you ever met a Negro smarter than yourself? You  
undoubtedly have, they just didn't let you know it.

VIRGIL

Met a 'Negro' smarter than me? Hell no! That's not even  
possible!

JAMES

Who's smarter, you or me?

VIRGIL

You are.

JAMES

I've met Negros who are smarter than I.

VIRGIL

There's two kinds of smart!

JAMES

Do you know what either one of them is?

VIRGIL

(Takes a second to answer)

One of them would be book smart...ain't it?

JAMES

Yes. Now, can we move the damned trunk?

VIRGIL

Do you think I'm smart? I know I'm not book smart.

JAMES

I agree that you are not book smart. Now, can we please  
get out of here?

VIRGIL

Why you so spooked?

JAMES

I'm not spooked.

VIRGIL

It's because of the gal, isn't it? You trying to look good for that gal.

JAMES

What gal?

VIRGIL

You said, "I know where I can put this so she...." That gal. Who is she?

JAMES

The daughter of the new owner.

VIRGIL

Is she pretty?

JAMES

Yes, she's pretty.

VIRGIL

Uh-huh, and her daddy -- does he like you?

JAMES

We just met this morning, Virgil. I don't know whether he likes me or not. Come on! Help me get the trunk and let's go!

VIRGIL

In a bit; I'm still smoking.

JAMES

Christ, Virgil, you can be such a weasel!

Virgil laughs at James' frustration.

VIRGIL

Well, what are they like, the new people?

JAMES

Like people, Virgil. They are both just like people.

VIRGIL

Young or old? Tall or short?

JAMES

They are regular size. She's about our age and he's her daddy. It's not like I asked them their birthdays.

VIRGIL

Well, what's their name?

JAMES

Vann.

VIRGIL

White Vann or blanket-ass Vann or jigaboo Vann?

JAMES

They are relatives of my Aunt Jane. She said she was happy that the house went to a Cherokee family.

VIRGIL

I forgot that crazy old cut-throat squaw is your aunt. Well, good thing you ain't on the Dawes Rolls, James. I wouldn't want to claim kin to that!

JAMES

Don't you have a frat party to go to?

VIRGIL

A frat party? What's a frat party?

JAMES

A fraternity party.

VIRGIL

(Checks his pocket watch)

Oh, damn! I need to be there now!

JAMES

The trunk!

VIRGIL

Alright, alright, alright!

Virgil leaps into action. He and James return to the front porch for the trunk and carry it into the back of the house. James leads as they return with Virgil closely following.

JAMES

I'll just lock up...

Suddenly, the doorbell RINGS. Both boys stop in their tracks. James, holding the key, realizes the door is unlocked and they both rush out the kitchen door as Fain enters.

FAIN

Florence? Hello, Flo?

(She lights the candle and sees the disarrangement of the room)

Looks as if my sister is no longer at this address.

(She takes the candle, picks up her carpet bag and walks upstairs)

I hope there is a bed up these stairs.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 4

The Next Afternoon - A large, beautifully lettered sign bearing the legend: Hospitality House rests, propped up on chairs. Billy Vann puts down his paint and brush, and steps back to admire his new signage. A huge painting of a Harlem street scene featuring a portrait of W.E.B.

DuBois stands against the wall with other similarly themed paintings. James enters through the open door.

BILLY VANN

'Siyo, James. Means hello.

JAMES

'Siyo, yes, I know osiyo.

BILLY VANN

Did you let yourself in with a key last night?

JAMES

(Long beat)

Yes.

BILLY VANN

Was it you spent the night upstairs?

JAMES

Why, no! Someone slept here last night? I'm sorry; I forgot to lock the door.

BILLY VANN

Did you get nostalgia or something?

JAMES

Maybe a little.

BILLY VANN

I figured nostalgia. You know how I can tell you're Cherokee?

JAMES

(Scoffing)

How do I give myself away?

BILLY VANN

Two things. You are well-spoken, and a well-spoken man is respected by our people. And two, you didn't lie to me when I asked you if you'd been here -- even though I could see you wanted to. Your Grandpa Weli always held that a man was only as good as his word.

JAMES

That's a handsome sign. Hospitality House.

BILLY VANN

Thank you. I'm just putting the finishing touches on.

JAMES

You did this yourself?

BILLY VANN

A carpenter friend built it for me, but I painted it and did the lettering.

James spots the portrait and other paintings piled up along the stairs.

JAMES

Did you do the portrait of DuBois?

BILLY VANN

You know W.E.B. DuBois?

JAMES

Well, not personally...

BILLY VANN

But you know who he is?

JAMES

Of course. He's in the New York City papers quite often.

Tassie enters from the upstairs.

TASSIE

Hello, James! How nice to see you!

JAMES

Miss Tassie.

TASSIE

(Takes in the new sign)

Oh, daddy! It's perfect! Give me that paintbrush! It's finished.

BILLY VANN

Needs to dry.

JAMES

So, the idea is to make this into a hotel?

TASSIE

A House of Hospitality. It has nine bedrooms and I have all the training I need to run it. There are more and more people coming to town. Famous leaders come from all over to see what we've done then they go out and spread the gospel! More and more people come every day and they all need a place to stay. They all need something good to eat. And we're going to make them feel right at home.

BILLY VANN

Only better!

(To James)

Maybe while you're here, James, you can help me put Tassie's picture up.

(He indicates the DuBois painting. James hops to the task)

JAMES

(To Tassie)

You painted this?

(Tassie nods modestly)

Very nice. Where do you want it to go?

BILLY VANN

Right up here. Front and center.

JAMES

Are you sure you want to do that?

BILLY VANN

I'm sure.

JAMES

So, this will be a hotel for coloreds?

BILLY VANN

Hospitality House is open to anyone, as long as we've got the room and they've got the money.

TASSIE

We are very hospitable folks; we don't care what color.

BILLY VANN

Except green!

TASSIE

Except green!

JAMES

But, DuBois puts a lot of people off.

BILLY VANN

He don't put me off. Does he put you off?

JAMES

Not at all. I won a debate tournament last session arguing for his policies.

BILLY VANN

He's going up.

(He holds the painting up to  
the wall.)

JAMES

I like your painting style, Tassie. I've been to a lot of museums and I've not seen anything like it. It has such energy -- primitive and not primitive -- very strong. Maybe Gaugin, I don't know... I think it's really good. It's just that it could seem provocative to some.

BILLY VANN

Some what, white people?

JAMES

Well, don't be surprised.

BILLY VANN

I won't be surprised. After all these years riding the railroad, I promise you I will not be surprised by anything white people say or do.

TASSIE

White people are not the only ones coming into town.

BILLY VANN

Folks flooding in to see how we do things up in Greenwood. Like it nor not, KKK, they're coming to learn how we build up business for ourselves, how to teach other folks how to build business. Tulsa is a boom town on both sides of the tracks! We're just booming louder over here.

Billy takes his paint and paintbrush and exits toward the kitchen. James shouts after him.

JAMES

You're a revolutionary! They'd love you in Paris!

TASSIE

You've been to Paris, France?

JAMES

We got stuck there during the War. After the Lusitania, Grandmother could not be persuaded to step onto a boat for another year.

TASSIE

Did you go to school there?

JAMES

I would have liked to, but I had tutors instead. You said you'd had training in hospitality?

TASSIE

At Miss Tate's Academy for Young Ladies in Savannah. We learn about everything from chamber pots to bookkeeping.

JAMES

Chamber pots! What in the world is there to teach of chamber pots?

TASSIE

How to choose them, how to buy them, how to clean and care for them, but above all, how to be discreet. Chamber service will not be one of my duties, but I need to know how to train the staff. How can I set the example unless I can perform these most humbling tasks myself?

JAMES

It's a good thing chamber pots are becoming a thing of the past.

Billy Vann returns with hammer and nails to hang the painting. He reaches for a chair to stand on when James anticipates him.

JAMES

Let me get that.

James climbs on the chair. Billy hands him hammer and nail.

TASSIE

Chamber pots are not part of the past for us. They won't run water to this part of town. Not any time soon.

BILLY VANN

Nor will they pipe in gas. We've got the funds to bring it, they just won't let us have it.

JAMES

That makes no sense.

(Hammers in a nail. Billy hands him the painting and he hangs it, making small adjustments until it hangs perfectly)

BILLY VANN

It does if you're trying to knock out your competition. First they come in and say, "No, no, no! Ya'll folks can't live on the white side of town," and they push us back on this side of the tracks. Then they tell us, they make a law, mind you -- that we can't shop over there either. Say, "Y'all go over on the other side of the tracks and see how you do when you can't buy nothing nowhere!" You know, we did alright! How does it look, Tassie?

TASSIE

You are the best daddy in the whole wide world!

BILLY VANN

You should take a walk around on the hill up behind us, James. That section takes up most all of your grandpa's original allotment. You'll see many fine houses and more than a few mansions. They're all owned by black families and they all have Crappers in the back yard. As long as we don't have running water on this side of town, we'll have no choice but to continue to avail ourselves of Mr. Crapper's invention.

JAMES

We never had running water at mamma's house either.

BILLY VANN

Alma has a good well on her property. If you want to modernize, that might do the trick.

JAMES

I'm going back to Europe in the fall to begin my medical studies.

TASSIE

A doctor, James! Aunt Alma would be so proud!

BILLY VANN

So, you want to follow in your mother's footsteps?

JAMES

I'd like to learn surgery. There have been so many advances in surgery due to the War.

BILLY VANN

(Laughs)

You wantin' to dig bullets out of people? You a chip off the old block, alright!

JAMES

Mamma never told me she treated gunshot wounds!

BILLY VANN

Not your mamma, your grandpa, and your daddy.

TASSIE

For ague or childbirth or sick children folks would call Aunt Alma. Everyone knew better than to send for her if somebody got shot.

JAMES

I never knew her to be squeamish...

BILLY VANN

She only treated one bullet wound in her life and the man died in her arms. The man was your father, and Alma never got over it.

JAMES

No wonder she couldn't talk about him. What a burden to bear. And she was pregnant with me when he was killed, wasn't she?

BILLY VANN

She was, and only thirteen years old at the time.

JAMES

My god, such tragedy.

BILLY VANN

I loved them both, James, but your daddy was like a brother to me. He was only eighteen when he died; I can tell you stories about him all day long. Any time you want to hear one...

JAMES

Listen...uh, I'm not sure how I should address you.  
(Upset)

BILLY VANN

My preference would be Uncle Billy, but if you can't manage it, you could call me 'sir' as you would any other man.

TASSIE

Daddy....

BILLY VANN

Call me Billy, be fine.

JAMES

Alright, Billy. I don't know where you got that information, but you are misinformed. My father was twenty-seven years old when he was murdered. I have a newspaper clipping. I can show you!

(James starts off in a huff,  
but quickly returns)

JAMES (CONTINUED)

I meant to return your key.

(Offers the key to Billy.  
Billy turns away, waving  
toward Tassie. Tassie  
takes James' hand when he  
offers her the key.)

TASSIE

James, don't run off.

(To Billy)

Daddy, don't be such a booger.

(To James)

We are just getting to know you and there is so much more  
I'd like to hear about Paris.

JAMES

Another time.

BILLY VANN

Let him go.

TASSIE

Daddy, you don't realize how long it's been since I've had  
a conversation about more than the price of eggs and the  
weather!

(To James)

He didn't mean to upset you.

JAMES

I believed every word he said until he intimated my father  
was a surgeon. I know my grandmother, and if that were the  
case, she would have bragged it to the moon and back. But,  
when you said he was eighteen -- I knew that was a...wasn't  
true.

BILLY VANN

Never lied to you. Never will.

TASSIE

He has doubts, Daddy; he never called you a liar. He  
didn't even know we were alive until yesterday. It's  
natural he should have some doubts. We can understand  
that, can't we? A little bit? Can't we, Daddy?

BILLY VANN

We gonna head back to the boarding house for supper, James. Miz Clare always fix plenty extra.

TASSIE

It's fried chicken night! Folks send from way over town for Miz Clare's fried chicken. Do come!

BILLY VANN

On the way, we'll walk up the hill. Give James a look at his grandpa's allotment. Now, if you pardon me I'll go wash up then we'll lock up and go get something to eat.

(Billy exits)

TASSIE

The homes on the hill are so beautiful, James. You don't have another engagement, do you?

JAMES

Tassie, I'm sure I have overstayed my welcome.

TASSIE

Not so, James. When we go out, we'll stay off family topics. We can talk about the places you've been; you're the only person I know here who's been anywhere outside of Oklahoma. Besides myself, that is. I'd love to see any part of Europe, especially Paris. Please come.

JAMES

You're easy to talk to; he's not so easy.

TASSIE

I do know what you mean, but there is a way. Daddy has been all over this country on the railroad; say the name of any town and he will chew your ear ragged. If that fails, just say Marcus Garvey or DuBois and he'll be off to the races.

JAMES

I like you very much, Tassie. There is no reason why we can't be friends.

TASSIE

And I like you very much, James. Yes, friends.  
(Tassie begins to tidy up in preparation to leave.)

James edges slightly toward  
the door. Tassie turns.)

Are you afraid we're going to parade you around in public claiming kin? We wouldn't do that; we wouldn't dream of doing that to you. Why, Aunt Alma accepted us and I know she loved us with all her heart, but she never introduced Daddy as her brother. Not to anyone. You think we don't know? Deep down in his heart my daddy may crave to hear you call him uncle, but he'll be happy if you just show him respect.

JAMES

I do respect him. I just didn't expect him.

TASSIE

(Laughs)

Well, that's alright! Daddy prides himself on being unexpected.

JAMES

He has a definite point of view.

TASSIE

We'll have plenty to talk about, but we won't be giving anyone anything else to talk about. So, what you do is you hold onto this key for now and hand it over to Daddy at the boarding house table tonight. The old tenant turning over the key to the new tenant, you see. That's all it will look like if anyone cares.

FAIN enters through the open front  
door carrying her carpet bag.

FAIN

Hello!

TASSIE

Hello and welcome. May I help you?

FAIN

Has this place changed hands? I have this as my sister's address.

TASSIE

My father and I just took over. Your sister was...?

FAIN

Florence Cuthbert Wimsey, but she married again to a man named Orville Farley.

JAMES

She's remarried again since Mr. Farley. Her name is Rolfe now.

FAIN

Thank you very much, young man. Can you tell me where she is living now? I came all the way from San Francisco, and I've been carrying this bag for days.

JAMES

(James takes the bag from her hand and places it on a nearby chair)

James Broughton.

(Offers his hand)

Florence is my grandmother. Which of her sisters are you?

FAIN

I am Fain, the eldest.

TASSIE

Welcome to Tulsa, Miz Fain. I'm sorry Hospitality House isn't ready to receive guests at present, but if you want a hotel recommendation --

FAIN

I was hoping to stay with my sister.

JAMES

I'm sorry, she's in Europe now. She quit Oklahoma and Indian Territory for good about three years ago.

FAIN

Europe?

JAMES

Yes, on a Grand Tour ending in Switzerland.

FAIN

Three years ago. She never writes me back!

TASSIE

Will you be needing long term or short term accommodations, Miz Fain?

FAIN

I'm not sure... But, a place where I might find a decent meal and a bath?

TASSIE

Certainly. San Francisco is such a long way!

JAMES

I don't recall Grandmother mentioning a Fain.

FAIN

Flo being so much younger, we were never close. She evidently doesn't remember me; maybe that's why she doesn't reply.

JAMES

She always said she was the eldest.

FAIN

Well, if that's her claim, she may have the honors. I'll trade forty-nine for fifty-seven any day!

Billy Vann's voice precedes his entrance.

BILLY VANN

I'm hungry! Let's head over to Miz Clare's for some chicken. We late all the big pieces will be gone!

(Spots Fain. Stands  
thunderstruck)

FAIN

Billy Vann. As I live and breathe!

BILLY VANN

Miz Fain.

FAIN

It's been years.

BILLY VANN

(Bowing over her hand, he  
kisses it)

Yes, it has.

(He steps back)

This is my daughter, Tassie.

FAIN

We've met. She's delightful!

BILLY VANN

And James here is, uh...

JAMES

I've introduced myself as well.

FAIN

So, this is your establishment. I don't feel so bad now  
about spending the night.

BILLY VANN

It was you who slept here last night?

FAIN

Yes, the door was open so I came in. All I wanted was a  
place to lay down my head. I thought I was in my sister's  
house.

BILLY VANN

No trouble at all, Miz Fain. What brings you back to  
Oklahoma?

FAIN

As you know, Josiah is gone...

BILLY VANN

Yep, Ol' Joe bit the dust last spring.

FAIN

I'm retired now and I have a grandson whom I've never met.  
I left a note on his mother's door this afternoon for him  
to meet me at his Aunt Florence's. I thought to come back  
and wait here rather than camp out on his porch.

BILLY VANN

You're welcome to wait for him here.

FAIN

Oh Billy, you are always the gentleman.

BILLY VANN

We're fixing to go get something to eat. If you want to come with us, I'll stand you to a good plate of fried chicken. Or, do you want to stay and wait for your grandson?

FAIN

Oh, you've made my mouth water! It suddenly occurs to me that I am quite famished!

TASSIE

I'll lock up the front door. We'll go out the back.  
(Tassie crosses to lock the door. Billy holds up his hand to stay her)

BILLY VANN

(To Fain)

Want to leave another note for your grandson?  
(Crosses to fetch a tack from his can of nails. He fishes out a tack and hands it to James. )

BILLY VANN (CONTINUED)

Here's a tack. Put it up on the door for her, will you James?

FAIN

(Finds a pen and paper in her bag and begins scribbling)

Thank you, I will.

(Fain finishes her note. James takes it from her noticing that it is addressed to Virgil.)

JAMES

Virgil Barnes is your grandson? No need to put this up, he is out of town for a few days. He's my cousin!

FAIN

Your cousin! You can tell me all about him over dinner.  
 (Tassie steps out on the porch to lock the front door.)

Lead the way!

(She sidles up beside Billy and takes his arm.)

BILLY VANN

Not here, my dear.

(He very gently puts her aside.)

FAIN

Need we be so formal?

BILLY VANN

This ain't San Francisco, Fame. We got KKK peeking over bushes and around every corner. Indian Territory changed since you left.

FAIN

Oh, goodness. But, there always was that element.

BILLY VANN

Well, it only got worse. Shall we? James, will you escort your Aunt Fain so we don't get jumped?

JAMES

(Offering his arm)

Miz Fain.

FAIN

(Taking his arm)

With pleasure. Oh! My bag!

(James picks up her bag from the chair.)

Thank you, James!

BILLY VANN

That looks right. I'll hug up to my Tassie here.

(Tassie takes his arm)

You lead, we'll follow.

JAMES

But, I don't know the way.

BILLY VANN

I'll haw and gee you until we get there. Now, let's go before all that's left is backs and necks!

James leads the procession toward the back door. They all exit.

LIGHTS OUT:

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 5

Four days later - The lobby of Hospitality House begins to take a cleaner, fresher shape. A desk has been added in expectations of check-ins. Tassie and Fain work to find a comfortable arrangement of two newly reupholstered club chairs.

TASSIE

To the left?

FAIN

Scooch it just a bit....

(Tassie slides the chair as directed. Fain takes a step back)

Let's check how it looks as travelers will see it as they step through the front door.

(She crosses to the door and pretends to enter as a customer)

My, how inviting! I'll stay!

TASSIE

You're such a big help, Miz Fain! We are lucky to have you pitching in here when I know you can afford the best lodging in town.

FAIN

This is fun for me, Tassie. Besides, who doesn't prefer to stay with friends?

TASSIE

Almost family, not blood kin, but in the circle.

FAIN

Almost blood kin. Did you know that I was supposed to marry your grandpa before he married my sister?

TASSIE

No!

FAIN

His sister put a stop to it and I was put aside. Well married Florence instead.

TASSIE

Why would Aunt Jane put you aside?

FAIN

I really can't say. She was most kind about it, but I was passed over in favor of my younger sister.

(Before Tassie can ask  
another question)

So, did you decide what sweet treat we will offer your Aunt Jane this afternoon?

TASSIE

Aunt Jane's shortbread. Everyone loves it, her most of all!

(Aunt Jane enters from the front porch. She carries a folio of papers for James and a bag of cuttings from her flower garden for Tassie.)

AUNT JANE

Who loves shortbread... besides me?

TASSIE

I do! I do!

(Crosses to greet Aunt Jane and takes the bag)

AUNT JANE

I'm looking for James, Tassie. He's not at his ma's and I didn't want to leave these important papers in the box. Thought he might be over here with y'all.

TASSIE

James will be here for supper. He's taken to eating with us every night, but he's not here now.

AUNT JANE

Where's Billy?

TASSIE

Hardware store. Aunt Jane, do you remember Miz Fain?

AUNT JANE

My eyes not what they used to be.

(Squints)

Fame?

TASSIE

Fain.

AUNT JANE

They used to call you Fame, didn't they?

FAIN

Some did, I suppose.

AUNT JANE

You jumped fence a long time ago. What brings you back to these parts?

TASSIE

She's here to meet her grandson for the very first time!

AUNT JANE

You have a grandson in Tulsa?

FAIN

Molly's boy.

AUNT JANE

I thought Molly belonged to Joe and Bess.

TASSIE

While you ladies catch up, I'm going to go take my shortbread out of the oven.

AUNT JANE

I brung you some kitchen herbs, too. You'll want to get them in some dirt as soon as you can.

TASSIE

(Picks up Aunt Jane's sack)

Thank you! I'll do that. Oh! And pack Daddy's lunch!

Tassie exits.

FAIN

You know I was pregnant when Joe tried to pawn me off on Weli.

AUNT JANE

I knew, but I wasn't sure you did.

FAIN

Molly was my baby with Joe. Joe was not my father. Joe was Molly's father, not mine. I had to leave her with Joe and Bess to raise.

AUNT JANE

Surely your mother wasn't blind.

FAIN

Bess wasn't our ma. She raised us and we loved her. We called her Ma but she didn't give birth to any of us. I think I'm the only 'sister' who knows. Listen, I'm not here to cause trouble. I'm not in contact with any of the sisters.

AUNT JANE

You looked up Flo.

FAIN

I thought she might remember me a little. We lived in the wagon for a couple of years -- always one step ahead of the law -- which is why we ended up in Indian Territory. Joe moved me to town and put me to work as soon as we arrived. The rest of them lived in a tent with Bess for seven more years until Florence was old enough to...

AUNT JANE

Marry?

FAIN

She'll never know how lucky she was.

Billy Vann enters from the back.

BILLY VANN

Auntie! I see you've met Fain.

AUNT JANE

Oh, I know Fame from way back.

BILLY VANN

She's going to stay here with Tassie while I am training my replacement. I step on board the Eastbound train this afternoon and I'll be gone for the next few weeks.

Billy's eyes go the portrait on  
the wall.

AUNT JANE

Be good for Tassie to have another woman in the house.

FAIN

Don't you worry, Billy. We'll manage splendidly together.

BILLY VANN

Well now, I don't know... with all the meanness going on and what-not. A body never knows what a bunch of liquored-up white thugs gonna try to do. They was up in Greenwood last night trying to run folks over with their car! They ran right up on the sidewalk trying to run folks over!

AUNT JANE

Was anybody hurt?

BILLY VANN

They tried, but their car stalled. Then folks gathered around and surrounded them and boxed them in so they were afraid to move. Our Negro constable called their Sheriff and he came and escorted them back to their side of town.

He glances sideways at the  
painting.

FAIN

Close call.

BILLY VANN

They was itching to start something.

AUNT JANE

It's one thing when they rough up one of ours for being over there after dark. Now they're coming over here to car-kill us? Completely out of hand.

BILLY VANN

Raises my hair plumb off my head. It's like they're wanting to spark off another Red Summer.

AUNT JANE

Don't say so, Billy! Don't even think it!

BILLY VANN

If that's what they want, we're not giving it to them. But, they don't even need an excuse! That's what worries me.

Tassie enters with a plate of cookies. She places the plate on the desk.

TASSIE

What worries you, Daddy?

BILLY VANN

Never mind, never mind.

He crosses to the wall and begins to take down Tassie's painting.

TASSIE

What are you doing?

BILLY VANN

I'll put it back up when I'm through traveling. When I quit the railroad, it goes back up.

TASSIE

Don't take it down!

BILLY VANN

I'll put it back up when I'm here full time. If anybody don't like it, they can talk to me about it.

TASSIE

If someone expressed an objection to this painting, I hope they would talk to me about it! I painted it! I hope you would trust me to argue my own cause and defend the content at least as well as you would. We do believe in the same things.

BILLY VANN

I'm putting it in my room. I've got to get ready for work.

Billy exits upstairs with his painting.

TASSIE

What in heaven's name...

AUNT JANE

KKKers tried to run down a sidewalk full of people over on Greenwood last night.

FAIN

Let him win this one, Tassie. He's right; it's for the best.

TASSIE

He knows I can hold my own in any debate!

AUNT JANE

He's not scared that someone is gonna rush in here and try to debate you. That's not what he's afraid of.

LIGHTS DIM.

LIGHTS OUT.

END OF ACT I

## ACT II

## SCENE 1

Three days later. The lobby of Hospitality House. Fain stands face to face with Tassie grasping both of Tassie's wrists. Tassie tries to break her hold but fails.

FAIN

Try again, and don't telegraph your intentions.

(Tassie tries again, struggles, then breaks the hold on one hand. She smiles at Fain)

Alright, hand free! What do you do with it?

(Tassie hesitates. Fain takes advantage and again overpowers her)

Too late! You must respond immediately. Life or death, Tassie, life or death every time!

(Tassie breaks the hold and pushes Fain back with such force that she topples over onto the floor)

Now what do you do?

(Tassie holds out a hand to help her stand)

No! RUN!!!

(Tassie helps Fain up.)

TASSIE

Combat is not a skill that is taught at Miss Tate's Academy for Young Ladies.

FAIN

Seriously, Tassie, every girl should know how to defend herself. One never knows how these encounters may end and you can't be squeamish about it because he won't be. Go for his soft parts - his eyes, his nose, his manly parts...

(She demonstrates a knee to the groin.) (MORE...)

FAIN (CONTINUED)

...as hard as you can! Use everything you've got so you can put him down long enough to get away. Hurt him so he can't chase you. You see?

TASSIE

We were taught: "A slap in the face will put a man in his place."

FAIN

That is terrible advice. It might work with a boy who likes you and gets a little bit fresh, and you see it all the time at the movies, but if a man is out to do you harm, a slap in the face will only serve to stimulate. I take it Miss Tate is a spinster who knows nothing of -- man's baser nature.

TASSIE

(Giggles)

If you met her, you'd know how right you are.

FAIN

What I'm trying to impress upon you is that if you are going hit a man, hit him where it really hurts.

TASSIE

I want to try it again.

Fain obliges by seizing her wrists. Tassie frees one hand in one smooth move, mimes a knee to Fain's groin, and sprints toward the door.

FAIN

Bravo!

Aunt Jane enters carrying a small parcel.

AUNT JANE

What's this? Y'all gals rasslin'?

TASSIE

Miz Fain is teaching me self defense!

AUNT JANE

James not here?

FAIN

Not yet, I've been thinking "any minute now" all day long.

TASSIE

She's on pins and needles. Her grandson is back in town and James is bringing him by today.

AUNT JANE

I divided my tulips and irises and brought you a bunch of bulbs.

TASSIE

(Takes the parcel)

These will make the front yard so nice! It's a beautiful day. Would you like to see what we've done in the back, Aunt Jane? You can help me decide where to put the bulbs.

AUNT JANE

Let's take a look.

The three women exit to the back of the house.

A short while later, James enters with Virgil, stopping at the threshold to block his view of the painting that was hanging in the lobby.

JAMES

Don't break anything, alright? If you start to get upset or riled up, turn around and take yourself right back out the door, but don't break anything.

VIRGIL

I know. I know. Keep an open mind.

JAMES

(Relieved the painting is gone)

You'll like her.

VIRGIL

What smells so good?

(Virgil spots the plate of  
cookies. He grabs a cookie  
and takes a bite)

Mmmm, cookies! I could get used to having a grandma.

JAMES

She can't be far. They must be out back. Wait here.

James exits to the rear of the  
house. Virgil wolfs another  
cookie and stuffs a few extra in  
his pocket.

Fain enters.

FAIN

Oh, my goodness. You are so like Josiah.

VIRGIL

That's what everybody says.

FAIN

Virgil Barnes?

VIRGIL

Yes, ma'am.

FAIN

I'm Fain Cuddahy. Have you been told anything about me?

VIRGIL

You say you're my grandma.

FAIN

That's true.

VIRGIL

My grandma died before I was born.

FAIN

I understand that you were very close to Josiah.

VIRGIL

Me and Ol' Joe, buds to the end!

FAIN

Doing what buds do, right? Cards and drinking and women - all those manly pleasures?

VIRGIL

You know Ol' Joe, alright.

FAIN

Then you also must know that Joe didn't mind crossing boundaries. Say, go outside his marriage for instance, whenever or where ever his need arose.

VIRGIL

No fence could keep him out; no fence could keep him in.

FAIN

Are you like that?

VIRGIL

Yes, ma'am. I was raised a rebel.

FAIN

I'm sure it comes naturally to you. Your mother, Molly, was my child by Joe - the result of one of his over-the-fence escapades. He and his wife raised her as I couldn't keep her at the time, but I was and always will be Molly's mother. That makes you my grandson.

VIRGIL

Is there anybody in the family who can back you up?

FAIN

No.

VIRGIL

I'm trying to figure out what you want from me.

FAIN

Molly was my only child and I am a woman of some means. When I got word that she had been taken by the flu last year, I knew I'd have to redraw my will. I wanted to meet you, perhaps get to know you.

VIRGIL

And that's all?

FAIN

Well, I was also thinking of buying you a present, but I'm not here to force myself upon you. Whether you accept me or not is your decision.

VIRGIL

I don't have anybody left either.

FAIN

Yes darling, I understand how that is.

VIRGIL

Might as well, then...

FAIN

Might as well what?

VIRGIL

Accept you. Might as well accept you.

FAIN

Thank you. That's a start!

VIRGIL

What kind of present you buy me?

FAIN

What kind of present would you like?

VIRGIL

Bottle of top shelf whiskey?

FAIN

Are you a drinking man, Virgil?

VIRGIL

I drink.

FAIN

I mean, if whiskey is what you want more than anything else in the world, then you shall have your bottle of top shelf whiskey. How can I know what to buy if you don't tell me what you really want?

VIRGIL

What I really want more than anything is to have this house. Aunt Flo's house.

FAIN

Interesting, but out of the question. Choose again.

VIRGIL

Okay, a car! Will you buy me a new car, grandma?

FAIN

(Laughs)

What will it be -- a Model A? A roadster?

VIRGIL

You are playing with me!

FAIN

In a way, I am. But, we can talk about that on the way to the dealership. Do you know the way?

VIRGIL

You're kidding me.

FAIN

Call my bluff.

(She finds her handbag and  
strolls toward the door)

Let's go!

Virgil scurries to join her and they go out the front door arm in arm.

## SCENE 2

Later that evening - Aunt Jane sits with James in the lobby of Hospitality House. She hands him Weli's medicine bag containing all his grandfather's surgical tools.

AUNT JANE

If you're gonna be doctoring on people, I think it's right for you to have Weli's medicine bag.

JAMES

This was Grandpa's barber kit?

AUNT JANE

Back then a frontier barber like Weli had to do a lot more than cut hair. He'd pull teeth, and be a patcher-upper for all kinds of hurts. When someone got shot, they'd send for Weli; he saved many a young man's life.

JAMES

(Going through the bag with  
a sense of delight)

This is wonderful! Thank you so much Aunt Jane.

AUNT JANE

Weli would want you to have it. Your mother named Mr. Harjo executor of her will and as trustee for your land allotment.

JAMES

Where will my allotment be?

AUNT JANE

You won't know that until you file your claim, I reckon. They can assign you an acreage anywhere. I know some got a hundred and sixty acres of nothing but scrub-brush and rocks.

JAMES

I don't think that I could take land, even scrub-brush and rocks, knowing it was intended for native tribal people. I wouldn't feel right about it. I have -- what? Maybe two drops of Indian blood?

AUNT JANE

Your grandpa is on the Dawes Rolls as a quarter-blood when he is actually five-eighths. Your mamma is listed as an eighth when she is actually one-quarter. You are listed as a sixteenth but you are much more than that.

JAMES

Then, I am more Cherokee than I have been led to believe.

AUNT JANE

Oh yes, much more.

JAMES

Why are they listed as less than they were?

AUNT JANE

Had to do with land sales. Those who claimed half-blood or more had to wait years longer before they could sell off any part of their allotment.

JAMES

At one eighth, I would definitely be considered an Indian, but officially I am one-sixteenth.

AUNT JANE

You can pass for white, but you're not as white as you think you are.

JAMES

It would be ridiculous for me to disrespect my father by claiming to be an Indian when the whole world can see I am mostly white. My father was murdered by a drunk Indian!

AUNT JANE

It wasn't the indin who was drunk! That particular indin never had a drink in his life! Shep Broughton was the drunk! And the murderer.

JAMES

What are you saying?

AUNT JANE

I'm saying that your mother was one-quarter Cherokee and your father was most likely full blood. He was an orphan, so we'll never know. Makes you round out to a half blood at the very least. Hope that's not too much indin for you.

JAMES

You are telling me that Shepherd Broughton was not my father.

AUNT JANE

Alma left Shep Broughton in the same week she married him. He manhandled her something awful. She had nothing to do with him forever after; she was his wife in name only. She was in love with another man, James, heart and soul.

JAMES

And, the other man was an Indian?

AUNT JANE

Cherokee. *Tsimi Gule*. (chee'-me goo'-leh) Means Jimmy Acorn. I'm sorry if this comes as a shock, but your mother wanted you to know the truth.

JAMES

Jiminey.

AUNT JANE

*Tsimi* was his name. She loved him. They loved each other. You look just like him, you just got Alma's white skin.

JAMES

Mother should have told me!

AUNT JANE

She was going to, James; she was planning to tell you. Then she took ill and by the time you got here she couldn't really keep her thoughts together.

JAMES

Aunt Jane, do I have a Cherokee name?

AUNT JANE

The same as your daddy's: *Tsimi* (chee'mee: jimmy) But everyone called him Jimmy.

JAMES

*Tsimi*. Does Billy have a Cherokee name?

AUNT JANE

*Weli*. (well'-lee: William) Means William. So's Billy.

JAMES

Both named for our fathers. Does that make me illegitimate, too?

AUNT JANE

No more or less legitimate than any other person who walks on the face of the earth.

Suddenly, the sound of a car motor intrudes and the honk of a Model A Ford blares. Car lights bounce off the walls inside the house.

Tassie runs through the front door in a panic.

TASSIE

Someone just ran a car up into the yard!

The engine shuts off. Laughter is heard, and Fain bursts through the front door with wildly windblown hair.

FAIN

A joy ride! A joy ride! I've just been on my first joy ride!

Virgil enters, all grins.

AUNT JANE

Lord a-mercy!

TASSIE

Y'all about scared me to death!

FAIN

I'm sorry, Tassie! We were carried away!

VIRGIL

Grandma bought me a new car, James! We just drove it off the lot!

JAMES

A new car!?

VIRGIL

Brand new Model A! I was going to go for a roadster but they would have had to order it. This one was just sitting there raring to go! Come on, take a look!

James follows Virgil back outside.

AUNT JANE

My heart is getting back to normal.

TASSIE

Good, Auntie! Is there anything I can do for you?

AUNT JANE

I'm alright.

(To Fain)

Looks like you hooked him good.

FAIN

He's a man. I've never had a problem setting hooks in men. It's all a matter of having the right bait.

The Model A roars to a start and  
it pulls away.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 3

Spotlight vignette: In the car a  
few minutes later. Virgil drives.

VIRGIL

Man, she plunked down a wad of cash and the Gates to Heaven swung wide open! Not even Ol' Joe could have done that. Well, he probably could, but he wouldn't have.

JAMES

She's a nice lady.

VIRGIL

If she wasn't my grandma, I'd marry her! She's gonna put me in her will.

JAMES

Where are we going?

VIRGIL

Nowhere. We're just riding around in my new Model A!

(He blows the horn just for  
fun)

It's like I made a fairy tale wish and poof! It came true!

JAMES

Stroke of luck, Virgil. Purely a stroke of luck.

VIRGIL

What's the matter with you?

JAMES

Nothing, just thinking.

VIRGIL

Wishing you was the one with the new car?

JAMES

I could have a car.

VIRGIL

Get one! We'll have races!

JAMES

No point. I couldn't take it to Switzerland.

VIRGIL

You still going?

JAMES

Maybe not as soon as I planned, but yes, I will return to complete my studies.

VIRGIL

Yeah, back over to Switzerland where nobody knows about your tainted blood. As long as you're not on the rolls, no one could ever find out.

JAMES

I am on the rolls after all. I can get an allotment if I want one.

VIRGIL

You gonna get one?

JAMES

Do I look like a homesteader to you?

VIRGIL

Hell, you don't look like an indin either.

JAMES

Well I am. I'm one sixteenth on the rolls.

VIRGIL

The hell you say. Guess you are an indin then - but, I'll never tell!

(Chuckles to himself)

Now that's funny... Find out one little thing and all of a sudden your whole life gets flipped around. Madison Grant - you know who he is?

JAMES

He's a eugenicist.

VIRGIL

Mr. Grant says that a cross between a white and an indin is an indin and a cross between a white man and a negro is a negro. So, if the dumbest white man is smarter than the smartest indin and the dumbest indin is smarter than the smartest negro that puts me on top! All of a sudden I am smarter than you, James!

JAMES

I find that quite specious.

VIRGIL

You find that specious? You find that specious?

JAMES

That's what I said.

VIRGIL

Specious.

JAMES

Yes!

VIRGIL

Goddamn it, James! What the hell does specious mean?

JAMES

It means that you are not smarter than I.

VIRGIL

You can believe that if you want to, but any white girl you want to marry, any white girl you want to touch will turn away if she finds out.

JAMES

I think there is a lot you don't know about white girls.

VIRGIL

What do you know about girls anyway? How many women have you had?

JAMES

I'm a gentleman. Gentlemen don't tell.

VIRGIL

You never had a drink until I gave you one!

JAMES

Don't flatter yourself; children drink wine in France.

VIRGIL

You don't even shave!

JAMES

I would if I could grow a beard.

VIRGIL

Well that's a tell, a dead giveaway. Indians don't grow beards. Jesus, James! You are one!

JAMES

Instead of going nowhere, do you want to take me somewhere?

VIRGIL

Where to?

JAMES

The northeast corner of Mamma's property.

VIRGIL

Where's that? Be about Pine and Lewis, wouldn't it?

JAMES

I don't know the streets that well.

VIRGIL

I know where it is.

JAMES

Do you know what spud means?

VIRGIL

Like 'tater?

JAMES

In relation to drilling.

VIRGIL

Oh, you "spud in" when you're drilling an oil well.

JAMES

They'll be spudding in next week. Mamma leased a few acres to Lucky Hand Drilling.

VIRGIL

Never heard of them. Do you think you could get me hired on? I've got a car to keep up and I sure could use some folding green.

JAMES

That's a good idea. I'll see if I can. If you've never heard of them, maybe they've never heard of you and that would be a good thing, wouldn't it?

VIRGIL

I promise, promise, promise that I won't cause no trouble this time.

JAMES

I'll ask Mr. Harjo.

VIRGIL

That would be great!

(James withdraws in thought)

That girl back at the house - the one I almost ran over?  
She your cousin?

JAMES

I'm not sure. Why?

VIRGIL

Because I think she might be part jig. Something about her; look at her close.

JAMES

Sure, Virgil, I'll look at her close. If I catch her looking like she's trying to take over the country, I'll be sure and let you know.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 4

August 28, 1920. A few months later. Billy Vann, now retired from the railroad, takes his place as full time proprietor of Hospitality House. He has brought the painting of DuBois downstairs in order to hang it.

Tassie and James sit together while James polishes Weli's old instruments.

JAMES

There's something about these old surgical instruments that thrills me to the bone. My grandpa used these very tools to save my father's life when he was a boy.

BILLY VANN

Maybe we could get our Dr. Jackson to show you his surgical tools. I'm sure he has all the latest equipment.

TASSIE

He might! And, he lives right up the hill!

JAMES

Are you talking about Dr. A. C. Jackson whom the Mayo brothers call "the most able Negro surgeon in America?"

TASSIE

Daddy knows him! You could ask him couldn't you, Daddy?

BILLY VANN

We go to some of the same community meetings. I don't really know him, but I'd ask him though. He thought very highly of your mother.

JAMES

Uncle Billy, wouldn't it be better if they just called Dr. Jackson "the most able surgeon in America" instead of "the most able Negro surgeon in America?"

BILLY VANN

He IS the best Negro surgeon in America!

JAMES

No doubt he is; he's a brilliant man. I'm saying that if he's the best then he's the best and putting Negro into it kind of draws away from his accomplishment. Don't you think?

BILLY VANN

Do I think?

TASSIE

We're used to that, James.

JAMES

Well, I'm not used to it! I'm going to be a surgeon myself. Am I going to be a "surgeon" or a "Cherokee surgeon" or maybe "Half-Breed surgeon?" Who decides who gets called what? Who decides?

BILLY VANN

Don't matter how smart or skilled you are, skin color decides, and there is nothing anybody can do about it. Maybe Dr. Jackson feels the same way you do, but for me, I am proud to share the sidewalks of my city with the best Negro surgeon in America.

TASSIE

What's wrong with being a Cherokee surgeon, James?

JAMES

I am Cherokee, but Cherokee I am not. I've never been to a stomp dance; I've never even been hunting. Of all the languages I speak, I don't speak my native language.... How can I call myself Cherokee when all I know how to be is white?

BILLY VANN

It's not your fault you were kept in the dark, son.

JAMES

I know they did it to save us all scandal. Seems like somewhere along the way someone should have told me.

BILLY VANN

Alma couldn't take the chance, James. Your grandma Flo kept you pretty much under wraps until she got you sent off to school back east. With oil and aviation and all these thousands more strangers coming in now, there's no one left who remembers, much less try to make something out of it.

JAMES

That's how I feel when I come back to Oklahoma. Like a stranger.

TASSIE

You're not a stranger to us, James.

BILLY VANN

I'm calling it a day. We'll put this up tomorrow.

Tassie meets him at the stairway  
for her good night kiss.

TASSIE

Good night, Daddy. Get some good rest.

BILLY VANN

See y'all in the morning.

JAMES

'Night, Uncle Billy!

BILLY VANN

Don't stay up too late.

Billy exits up the stairs.

JAMES

What would you think if I stayed?

TASSIE

In Oklahoma?

JAMES

Here, in Tulsa.

TASSIE

Not go to France to study? Crazy. That's what I think.

JAMES

My oil well came in. We are calling it the Gule #1.

TASSIE

Nice. Cherokee for acorn.

JAMES

Yes, the seed of something new. They're drilling two more wells starting next week.

TASSIE

So, you're going to be an oil man now and forget all about being a doctor?

JAMES

I don't want to give that up completely. Maybe I could apprentice myself to Dr. Jackson.

TASSIE

Just skip all that learning and training that doctors need to have and go straight to the operating room?

JAMES

When you put it that way...

TASSIE

The Sorbonne, James. You would give up the Sorbonne for what?

JAMES

I don't belong there. I don't belong in Europe, I don't belong with Grandmother and Opa - Mr. Rolfe - anymore. Do you know what they talk about over dinner? Eugenics! They're both obsessed with it and that's the thing... Grandmother knows about me! Whenever I'd mess up as a child she'd say, "That's the Indin coming out in you!" Makes me wonder if Mr. Rolfe gave me every opportunity in the world just to see how I'd stack up.

TASSIE

You stacked up, didn't you? You showed him.

JAMES

But I know how they believe, both of them!

TASSIE

Try not to think the worst of them, James. They probably just trying to give you the best life possible.

JAMES

Best life possible. What can that be for me now?

TASSIE

That's pretty funny. Here you go grabbing up all the indin baggage you can pile on and trying to feel sorry for yourself because you're part indin. How many times have you suffered any name-calling in your life?

JAMES

I was taken for a Romanian once. In Europe, that isn't very flattering.

TASSIE

Not flattering! Daddy and I are both mostly Cherokee, yet the best possible life we can achieve is only as much as a nigger can do, because my Negro blood is the only one anybody sees. One drop, right? You look white, James, you have the manners of a white man and you speak like a white man because you were raised white. You can be white if you want.

Suddenly, Virgil's Model A runs up into the yard. James crosses to the painting by the desk.

TASSIE (CONTINUED)

Oh Jesus, there's Virgil. I sure wish your cousin would learn how to drive!

James turns the painting to face the wall. A car door slams, the car grinds into reverse, grabs first, kicks it into second gear and scats down the road.

Fain enters.

TASSIE

Virgil not coming in?

FAIN

No.

(They all breathe a sigh of relief)

I missed my supper.

TASSIE

Let me get you something.

FAIN

Just a sandwich, Tassie. Thank you.

Tassie exits to the kitchen.

JAMES

He sure dropped you off in a hurry.

FAIN

Something is going on. I wanted to take him to dinner at St. Elmo's, but we passed several carloads of men going in the other direction. Virgil recognized some of the men, so he flagged them down and spoke to them for a minute. When he came back to the car he said he was taking me home.

JAMES

Did he say why?

FAIN

Something to do with the taxi driver that was shot last week. He died today.

JAMES

Is that all? If he's dead, what's the rush?

FAIN

You don't like Virgil's friends, do you?

JAMES

I've not found anything in common.

FAIN

Good. Good.

JAMES

What's wrong?

FAIN

I can't talk about it, James, not until I begin to digest and I don't know how I'm going to digest it when I can't swallow it to begin with.

Tassie returns with a sandwich and  
a cup of tea on a tray.

TASSIE

Here you go, Miz Fain. Roast beef alright, I hope?

FAIN

Yes Tassie, you're wonderful. I'm going to take this straight up to bed.

TASSIE

You alright?

FAIN

Yes, I'm fine. Good night!

JAMES & TASSIE

Good night!

Fain carries her tray upstairs.

TASSIE

She's not fine. What happened?

JAMES

Virgil must have said something to upset her.

TASSIE

All that boy has to do is open his ugly mouth! He has no manners!

(She goes to the front door  
and looks out.)

He did it again! That is the third time he's run up all over my new plantings! Squashed flat! He called Daddy a coon the other day! Under his breath, but he said it.

JAMES

Billy set him straight?

TASSIE

Daddy don't talk back to peckerwoods! Much as we hate to do it, Daddy's going to have to ask Miz Fain to leave. We love her but we've had about enough of Virgil.

JAMES

Don't blame you.

TASSIE

I notice you turned the picture around.

JAMES

I, uh...

TASSIE

I know why you did it, James. If you hadn't, I would have.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 5

September 4, 1920. One week later. Billy directs James who is on a ladder to hang the painting. Tassie lounges nearby reading the Tulsa Star.

BILLY VANN

I've been to the corner of 135th Street and Lenox Avenue in Harlem! We don't need white business to prosper; (MORE...)

BILLY VANN (CONTINUED)

we've proved it right here! My blood is a mix of three great tribes--

TASSIE

That you know of...

BILLY VANN

(To James)

I was saying, that I have the blood of three great tribes running in my veins, not one greater than the other.

TASSIE

As far as you know...

BILLY VANN

Tassie, I'm talking to James! I have as much to offer as any man, that's all I really want to say...

(The hanging is complete.

Billy steps back and surveys the job and gets wound up again)

I am not ashamed of my black skin and I am not afraid to show what I stand for! If people come in here and don't like this picture they can, for damn sure, just walk right back out.

TASSIE

I take it you've read the Tulsa Star today?

BILLY VANN

Yes, I did. Smitherman is right, you know. This can't happen again! If they'll drag a white man out of jail and lynch him... I'm going over town to try to order a telephone. Then, I'm gonna find us a gun.

TASSIE

Because of Mr. Smitherman's editorial?

BILLY VANN

Enough is enough! "We have suffered and cowered... When the armed lynchers come, we too must gather armed. When the mob moves, we propose to meet it with sticks and clubs and guns." Not my words, W.E.B. DuBois said that.

TASSIE

Sticks and clubs and guns, Daddy?

BILLY VANN

We have the right.

TASSIE

But, wouldn't it be better for men of experience with arms, like all those young, strong veterans coming back from the war -- wouldn't it make more sense for those men to be the defenders? Wouldn't it? Have you ever shot a gun, Daddy?

BILLY VANN

That's not the point. I'll be back with a gun.

Billy makes a hasty exit. James climbs down the ladder.

JAMES

I'll give him a gun. I'm not going to give it to him today, but there's a gun at Mamma's house he can have.

TASSIE

He knows nothing about guns!

JAMES

I'll teach him. I've never been hunting but I'm a marksman in target shooting. I'll show him how to handle it.

TASSIE

I wish he wouldn't.

JAMES

A man needs to defend his castle. Having protection is a good idea. But, when he cools down...

Fain comes down the stairs,  
stopping when she notices the  
painting hanging permanently over  
the desk.

FAIN

Oh, children. Oh, children.

(She crosses to stand before  
the painting)

Tassie, your painting.

TASSIE

Yes, ma'am.

FAIN

My grandson -- I've only seen him once since the lynching and we argued. I'm afraid, I'm very afraid that if he see's this...

TASSIE

We've been meaning to talk to you about that, Miz Fain. Daddy and I think you might be more comfortable at the new Tulsa Hotel. They have much nicer amenities over there.

FAIN

Because of Virgil?

TASSIE

Yes, ma'am.

FAIN

I understand. I'll leave right away and cause you no more trouble.

Fain is upset as she starts up the stairs.

TASSIE

Miz Fain! You don't know how much we hate this.

FAIN

I hate it, too!

(She's very shaky. Tassie rushes to comfort her. Fain blots her eyes and pulls herself together.)

I'm sorry. I'll go pack right now.

(She starts up the stairs and reconsiders)

Perhaps you could take that down - just until I clear out.

TASSIE

Daddy wouldn't like that. He just put it up. Permanently.

FAIN

I see. I'll hurry.

Fain exits up the stairs.

JAMES

Too bad we can't choose our relatives.

TASSIE

Really? Who would you choose, James?

(They hear Virgil's car pull  
up outside.)

JAMES

Not Virgil.

TASSIE

Go knock on Miz Fain's door. Tell her hurry-hurry!

James bounds up the stairs.

Tassie crosses to the front door,  
determined to keep Virgil out.

Virgil takes one step inside  
carrying a hastily gathered  
bouquet of zinnia. Tassie blocks  
him.

TASSIE

My zinnias! You pulled up my zinnias!

VIRGIL

(Offering her the flowers)

A posey for my grandma!

TASSIE

(Takes the flowers)

She'll be down in a minute.

(She steers him back a step)

You can wait for her in your car.

(She shuts the door in his  
face)

VIRGIL

(Bursts through the door)

No you don't, wench! You don't tell me what to do!

TASSIE

Please, sir. Will you kindly wait in your car?

Virgil goes after her like a shot.

VIRGIL

That's better, Tassie.

(He spins her around and  
grabs her breast.)

Pretty Tassie with the pretty titties.

Before he can make another move,  
Tassie pokes him in the eye with  
her thumb then knees him violently  
in the crotch. The confrontation  
is over.

VIRGIL

Bitch! You bitch!

Fain enters from the stairway with  
James following with her bags.

Tassie gathers the flowers, now  
scattered on the floor and exits  
to the kitchen.

FAIN

What did you do to Tassie?

VIRGIL

Ask what Tassie did to me!

FAIN

I can guess. I wasn't expecting you.

VIRGIL

We had words, grandma, and I wanted to make up. I brought  
you some flowers... And, maybe I can get fifty bucks?

FAIN

I'll give you twenty dollars if you'll drive me to the  
Tulsa Hotel right now.

VIRGIL

Grandma, I can't see right now. Let me try and sit down for a minute.

(Virgil starts into the lobby, but is blocked by James. James offers Fain's bags to Virgil, but Virgil pushes past.)

Stop playing keep away, damnit! Can't y'all see I'm hurt?

(Virgil limps to a chair with an excellent view of the W.E.B. DuBois portrait.)

Uh-oh! There we go! Y'all didn't want me seeing this here monkey on the wall! Did a jig make this mess? Have to be, right? Give a monkey a paint brush and you'll get a picture of another monkey, sure enough.

FAIN

Your eyesight is recovered. Let's go.

VIRGIL

(Starts to stand, but sinks back in pain)

Sure enough, grandma. I'm not taking you to the Tulsa Hotel, though, that place is owned by jigaboos, too.

(To James)

I told you that gal was part jig, didn't I, James? Only a whore would know a trick like that.

FAIN

I taught her that trick. Get up.

Billy comes storming into the room from the back of the house.

BILLY VANN

You laid hands on my daughter, peckerwood!

He pulls himself back when Aunt Jane enters through the front door. She is confused by the tension in the room.

AUNT JANE

Is today the day when I'm supposed to come for supper?

JAMES

Yes, yes, Aunt Jane. Tassie's in the kitchen.

AUNT JANE

(Rooted in her spot)

Vv. ( Uh-huh: Yes) Did you have any luck, Billy?

BILLY VANN

They ain't no guns for sale today or I would have shot somebody already! Folks who already got them are keeping them. No one wants to sell.

VIRGIL

What do you need with a gun?

BILLY VANN

My Constitutional right to self-defense. For starters.

AUNT JANE

I bet a couple of white boys could get you one. James, why don't you take your cousin and go find a gun for your Uncle Billy?

VIRGIL

You got a jigaboo uncle, James? This shiny fellow standing here?

FAIN

How dare you!

JAMES

Mr. Vann is my mother's half-brother and yes, he is my Uncle Billy. Don't call him any such names again. Call him Sir or Mr. Vann.

VIRGIL

Race traitor! There's your Indin comin' out. No wonder you don't want to study eugenics; you've got surprise after surprise popping up out of the old woodpile, don't you?

JAMES

When I thought I was white, I looked down on you. Now that I know who I am, I look down on you even more.

VIRGIL

One drop of blood is all it takes, James. If you've got an uncle that looks like him, chances are you've got more than a drop or two yourself.

FAIN

One drop is all, is it?

VIRGIL

Carved in stone. No doubt about it.

FAIN

One drop of blood would keep a man out of your 'fraternity?'

VIRGIL

Don't even try!

FAIN

You're going to have to quit them, I'm afraid. You see, my mother was an quadroon. Your Grandpa Joe bought me out of a New Orleans whorehouse when I was eight years old. Then, he and Bess - not my mother and not his wife - made rounds at brothels for several years: St. Louis, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Kansas City. In every town we'd pick up another pretty little girl until the wagon was full. Oh, and Joe worked those women, made them believe their babies were going to a happy home. Some gave him money to take their daughters. But, what Joe did was bring us out to Indian Territory. He thought indians would pay big money to ravish little white girls, or white-looking girls anyway. But indians don't rape children and they took extreme umbrage at his proposal, so we packed up and ran. We landed near Tulsa and after he'd groomed me for a while - which is how I got Molly - he turned me out. As I look back on your ancestry, my dear grandson, it occurs to me that you don't even qualify as white trash. If all it takes is one drop of blood, that makes you a Negro, Virgil.

VIRGIL

Liar!

FAIN

No, I'm sorry, but that's the god's honest truth.

VIRGIL

I'll never believe it!

FAIN

Sure you will. Now, come give Grandma a kiss and drive me over to the Tulsa Hotel. I'll introduce you around. You're going to need new friends.

VIRGIL

You whore!

FAIN

That's right, Grandma was a whore; Grandpa was a pimp. Do you still want fifty dollars or not?

VIRGIL

(Virgil tears toward the door and turns.)

If word of this gets out...

FAIN

It will, most certainly. Your friends don't know me, but their grandpas sure do. Tell them Fame says hello.

Virgil rages out. James crosses to the door and watches until Virgil drives away.

JAMES

Just making sure he wasn't coming back with a gun.

BILLY VANN

If he does, he won't be alone.

FAIN

Looks like I've lost my ride.

(Picks up her bags)

Point me in the right direction and I'll be on my way.

BILLY VANN

Oh, no! You're not leaving us now! James, take her bags back upstairs.

(James takes her bags, but waits for her direction.)

FAIN

Are you sure, Billy? I don't know what else he might do.

BILLY VANN

Stay with us. We'll take good care of you.

James takes Fain's bags upstairs.

AUNT JANE

I don't know about you, but I feel better now that the truth is in the open. Old Joe and them thought money was the world. But when you make money the whole measure of your life, then it don't bother you to cheat and steal or even buy and sell human flesh.

(Tassie enters.)

Come here, Tassie. Are you hurted, sweetheart?

TASSIE

Bah! It was over before it started. Miz Fain taught me how to take care of the bad boys.

(To Fain)

You play for life or death every time. It worked!

BILLY VANN

If Virgil was black and Tassie was white, he'd already be swinging from the nearest tree.

FAIN

Billy! You wouldn't!

AUNT JANE

'Course he wouldn't! Madness, that's what it is, madness - until there's a dead man hanging from every other tree in town? You don't want to see that Billy. That's not justice, that's crazy.

BILLY VANN

If he'd hurt her...!

AUNT JANE

He didn't. Don't blow it up bigger than it was; that's what they do.

James returns from upstairs.

James crosses to Fain.

JAMES

Aunt Fain, is Grandmother...? Does she know?

FAIN

Truly, James, does it matter? I was old enough to remember my mother. Florence was only four when Joe got her. Personally, it's a hard lick to take and it's something she doesn't really need to know. I'd never tell her. Unless she wanted to know...

JAMES

She wouldn't.

(James clasps her hand and  
turns to Tassie.)

Tassie will you get a room ready for me?

TASSIE

Sure, James!

JAMES

(To Billy)

I want to move in tonight. I'm going to go grab my kit. Mamma has some guns at home and I'll bring those, too.

BILLY VANN

I appreciate the gun, but this isn't your fight, James.

JAMES

Yes it is; you're my family.

James exits through the front  
door.

AUNT JANE

Howa! He has a warrior spirit.

BILLY VANN

I can't let anything happen to Alma's boy. He doesn't belong here.

TASSIE

James knows how to shoot a gun, and I'm glad he wants to stay with us.

(Tassie exits upstairs to  
ready James' room.)

BILLY VANN

Alma would have had that kid on a boat to the far side of the world yesterday. What he needs to do is go be a doctor, not stay here and fight yahoos with me.

AUNT JANE

But, he will. I don't see him leaving you to defend Tassie by yourself.

BILLY VANN

Not Alma's child, not Tsimi's only son. I could never forgive myself if he got killed because of us.

FAIN

Tassie's always wanted to see Paris.

BILLY VANN

Yes...

FAIN

And James is already accepted at the Sorbonne. Let me take them both to Paris and get them out of this mess.

AUNT JANE

Tassie's needed here. Why don't you just take James?

FAIN

I don't think he'd go without her.

BILLY VANN

Wait a minute. I can get Miz Clare to do the cooking.

FAIN

Miz Clare of the chop-lickin' chicken, Miz Clare?

BILLY VANN

Between her and me and a couple of maids, we could handle Hospitality House until this blows over.

AUNT JANE

That would work. Tassie will go if she knows you're took care of.

(To Fain)

For how long?

FAIN

For as long as possible, I think.

(Tassie comes down the  
stairs)

You can let me know when you want Tassie to return.

TASSIE

Return from where?

FAIN

Paris! I want to take you and James to Paris!

TASSIE

When?

FAIN

Right away!

TASSIE

Why right away?

FAIN

Because James needs to be in school. And, because I like your company. We'll find you a teacher and you'll be speaking French in no time! You can take art classes.

TASSIE

You know how much I love Paris, but I have responsibilities. And, Daddy.

BILLY VANN

Miz Clare has took a liking to me, Tassie, and I like her. She is wanting to get out of the boardinghouse business, but she still loves to cook. We'll be fine here. I wouldn't have you miss out on Paris for anything. This is an opportunity, gal, take it!

FAIN

If not for yourself, please do it for James. We all know he has no future here, Tassie, but I don't think I can persuade him to go without you. I need your help.

The rumbling of multiple cars is  
heard driving down the street.

Billy crosses to the window at first rumble, watches three cars drive by and waves.

BILLY VANN

Partiers. Maybe a wedding...

James enters, hyper-vigilant, from the kitchen. James carries a rifle, a six-gun, and a knapsack full of ammunition.

JAMES

I locked the back door. Did you see who just drove by?

BILLY VANN

Pretty women in pretty dresses, not nobody looking for a fight.

JAMES

Do you want the pistol or the rifle? I brought all the ammunition I could find. It's all I could carry tonight; I'll go back in daylight for my other things.

BILLY VANN

Give me the pistol and sit down, son.

JAMES

(He shakes as he hands Billy the gun.)

It's loaded.

BILLY VANN

Thank you. Sit, sit, something has come up.  
(Billy looks to Aunt Jane and then to Tassie.)

AUNT JANE

Tassie, honey!

(She rises and begins a quick shuffle toward the back door)

Would you walk me out to the Crapper? Don't let me trip in the dark!

TASSIE

Sure, Aunt Jane.

(Gently escorts Aunt Jane  
out through the kitchen)

JAMES

Is it about Tassie?

BILLY VANN

Partly Tassie, partly Miz Fain. They're both in danger.

FAIN

I've gotten myself into some trouble here, James. Virgil may think that he is named in my will. He isn't, but I once told him I would - then, the more I learned of his ambitions, I found that I could not, in good conscience, fund his future. I fear he may be considering whether I'm worth more to him dead than alive.

BILLY VANN

So, Miz Fain needs to go and I need to get Tassie as far away from Tulsa as I possibly can.

JAMES

I'll take care of Tassie!

BILLY VANN

I take care of Tassie! And, I'm sending her off. The Plan is to send both targets away so there is nobody left to go after.

JAMES

We can protect her.

BILLY VANN

No, we can't. Tassie will want to go on about her daily business, but what about somebody laying for her or looking to catch her alone? I'm pretty sure that Virgil would murder her...

(Indicates Fain)

...for money. How far do you think he'd go with Tassie for revenge?

FAIN

The thing is, James, we don't think she will go unless you do. Tassie loves Paris. You have friends there!

JAMES

(To Billy)

If we go to Paris, what happens to you?

BILLY VANN

Once the targets are gone, this will all die out.

JAMES

And, if it doesn't die out?

BILLY VANN

I won't have to watch my daughter go up in flames. Man-to-man, James, will you help me?

JAMES

Of course I will, Uncle Billy.

BILLY VANN

I appreciate that more than you will ever know, son.

FAIN

I'm going to go find Tassie.

(To James)

You can break the news. Be excited!

Fain exits to the kitchen.

JAMES

Shall I take first watch tonight?

BILLY VANN

No need. If he didn't come back right away, he won't be back tonight. Virgil has a lot to chew on right now.

JAMES

He travels with a dicey crowd.

BILLY VANN

I'm not trying to picture him running into some peckerwood bar and getting them all stirred up. What's he gonna say: "My grandma is a Negro and I'm a Negro, too! Come on boys, help me string myself up!"?

Fain enters with Tassie and Aunt Jane. James rises to the occasion.

JAMES

Tassie! Wonderful news! Aunt Fain is taking both of us to Paris! We'll have so much fun traveling together!

BILLY VANN

That's your dream, and it's coming true! I'm putting y'all on the Eastbound train tomorrow afternoon.

TASSIE

That's not enough time.

FAIN

Oh, don't pack much at all. We'll buy all new clothes when we get to New York City. We want to look stylish when we arrive in Paris... then we'll go shopping again!

JAMES

I can't wait to introduce you to my friends. But, it also occurs to me that with Mamma's affairs and the oil leases...

AUNT JANE

Mr. Harjo will send you your royalty checks, and allowance, and rents and take care of all those things for you.

FAIN

Then it's settled!

TASSIE

I know why you're taking James and I'm glad that James wants to go. So, why are you taking me now?

FAIN

Because Billy saved my life once, and it would not only be a great honor but also my greatest joy to give his daughter her fondest wish.

TASSIE

When the three of us move out it will just be you, Daddy.

FAIN

And Miz Clare.

BILLY VANN

Miz Clare enough!

TASSIE

Daddy!

JAMES

I know Tassie is concerned, as I am, about your security.

BILLY VANN

Listen, y'all don't need to worry about me. First thing in the morning I'm going to go to the police station and offer a discount on room and board for police and War veterans. With cheap rent and Miz Clare's cooking, I imagine we'll fill up right quick.

TASSIE

Alright, Daddy, you win. I'm going to Paris!

BILLY VANN

(Gathers her into his arms)

I'm gonna miss you so much, but I want you to have this. Go have the time of your life. Paint lots of pictures for me.

AUNT JANE

Get out there and frisk in greener pastures, gal! Kick up your heels; don't let nothing hold you back!

JAMES

We'll have a grand adventure. Two Cherokee cousins set loose in Paris! I can't wait to show you, Tassie!

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 6

Spotlight Vignette:

June 1, 1921 - In Tassie's Paris studio. The clock reads 2AM as Tassie steps back from her easel, pleased and proud to consider her latest painting.

She notices the time on her clock, flips her 1921 calendar from May to June, and removes the finished painting from the easel. She then replaces it with a blank canvas and climbs into bed, where she quickly falls into a deep, exhausted sleep.

Tassie slumbers in serenity, unaware when an apparition of Aunt Jane drifts by and stops to kiss her forehead before moving on.

Billy is suddenly sitting on the foot of Tassie's bed weeping silently, copiously, into his hands.

Tassie rouses to her elbows trying to make out the dark form in the dark shadow at the foot of her bed. She tries to say something, but it only comes out as a mumble.

When she sits upright, her father's apparition turns and looks upon her face for one last time.

She jerks forward, reaching out to him.

TASSIE

Daddy!

When she opens her eyes, he's not there. She's awake now, confused to find herself in such an unusual position. With no memory of her dream, she lies back down, punches her pillow and tries to sleep.

She tosses, then leaps out of bed and goes to her easel. She starts painting fire with manic energy.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 7

Ten Days Later - Tassie, disheveled and distressed stands at her easel; she's out of red paint. Hundred of sketches of flames are spread out all over the room.

Fain knocks and enters.

FAIN

Hi, sweetheart. You may want to get dressed. James is on his way over.

TASSIE

James has Finals.

FAIN

Not today. He rang me from the Post Office... Are these sketches?

TASSIE

What day is it?

FAIN

Wednesday, June 10th.

TASSIE

Did I get a letter? It's not like Daddy to go for three weeks without writing! We don't get news of what happened or is happening - just a race riot in Greenwood with thirty dead!

FAIN

Thirty dead out of eleven thousand, Tassie. If you were a gambler you'd like those odds. James is on his way. Why don't you try to run a brush through your hair?

TASSIE

I don't care what I look like! I want to go home!

FAIN

(Takes Tassie into her  
embrace)

Of course you do, darling. Tassie, Tassie...

James knocks.

TASSIE

Come in!

(James enters)

Do you have a letter?

JAMES

News, anyway. I received a packet from Mr. Harjo. Let's all sit down.

TASSIE

I don't want to sit down!

JAMES

Please sit down, Tassie. It's not good news.

(Tassie sinks onto the bed  
beside Fain, who slips an  
arm around the girl.)

I sent a telegram to Mr. Harjo on the first of the month asking him to try to find out about Uncle Billy and Aunt Jane in the riot.

TASSIE

Daddy! Don't tell me. I knew it; he is.

JAMES

He's gone, Tassie. I'm so sorry.

TASSIE

Did they lynch him?

JAMES

(Shakes his head 'no,' and  
produces Mr. Harjo's letter  
from the packet)

I can't read it, Aunt Fain.

Fain takes the letter from James,  
moves to better light and reads.

FAIN

He says: "This is all I know and I did hear it third hand, but the man in question had ties to the family and likely did either know or know of Mr. Vann. This fellow bragged that he'd killed an old woman after telling her to say her prayers. Said she was on her knees and when she started to pray in Cherokee he shot her in the head. Then he claims he shot Billy Vann and set the house afire. All thirty-five square blocks of Greenwood have been burned to the ground. Hospitality House is rubble. Thousands of people are still missing. The death toll is in the hundreds, at least, despite the official estimates. Bodies were buried in unmarked graves before family had a chance a to claim them. I understand that there has been a lot of bulldozer activity on the west side of town."

TASSIE

Aunt Jane?

FAIN

He says that "the most prominent Negroes were targeted along with their most prominent sympathizers, first among them was your Aunt Jane," and that it "was all a well planned and coordinated attack including an aerial assault."

JAMES

This was coming for a long time.

FAIN

Mr. Harjo ends with heartfelt condolences for the loss of your loved ones. He says, "I advise you to stay where you are as there is, literally, nothing to come back to."

(Beat)

You, both of you, will always have a home with me.

TASSIE

They'll get away with it.

JAMES

They will if no one speaks out. We will never let them be forgotten. *Weli, hokta! Tsimi, hokta!* We are the last of your line.

LIGHTS OUT.

FINAL CURTAIN.

THE END