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Infants of the Spring: Disrupting the Narrative

Ifa Bayeza

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INFANTS OF THE SPRING: DISRUPTING THE NARRATIVE

A Thesis Presented

by

IFA BAYEZA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2018

Department of Theater

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A Thesis Presented

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IFA BAYEZA

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“We’re out to shake things up, set fire to the past until it and all of its presumptions crumble to the ground.”

– Wallace Thurman, 1934

“Reclaiming my time! Reclaiming my time!”

– Congresswoman Maxine Waters, 2017

“I don’t want to stay angry, but write and feel triumphant.”

– Janelle Monae, 2018

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To an incredible cast and invaluable crew, all of the divine designers

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To creative colleagues in the UMass Theater Department, Afro-American Studies and beyond ...

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To my parents

Eloise Owens Williams for her love of theatre and language

and

Paul Towbin Williams, M.D, for teaching me the art of seeing,

and for their mutual magic ...

To Wallace Thurman for his dream deferred and his fire ...

My humble and perpetual gratitude!

ABSTRACT

INFANTS OF THE SPRING: DISRUPTING THE NARRATIVE

MAY 2018

IFA BAYEZA, B.A., HARVARD UNIVERSITY

M.F.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Harley Erdman

This written portion of my thesis will document and codify how I as dramaturg, writer and director adapted and staged the classic Harlem Renaissance novel *Infants of the Spring* by Wallace Thurman. I walk the reader through how seeing as a director influenced my creative choices through key aspects of production: script development, design, and building the ensemble. The thesis will conclude with a post-production reflection and summary.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

From March 21 through March 30, 2018, the University of Massachusetts Department of Theater presented *Infants of the Spring*, a dramatization of the 1932 novel by Wallace Thurman which I adapted and directed as my MFA thesis project. Eight glorious performances auspiciously began the first day of spring and, by the final curtain, the production had come to a glorious full bloom. With a cast of seventeen, a three-story scenic design, sixty-six costume changes and an eclectic sound design scored like a movie, it was a sumptuous production, the whole seeming greater than the sum of its parts.

I now have the daunting task of recounting what we did and how. Despite my myriad notes, notebooks of research, emails, sketches, and detailed PowerPoint presentations, the experience is a blur, as if a whirlwind had flown through my mind and body. For months, from the project's inception, I was in such a heightened state, living in a sort of perpetual present, that pausing now to reflect seems an alien activity. Upon exiting after a performance, thesis committee member and adviser Chris Baker told me "you have created a work of art." How does the artist recount the process?

My thesis, entitled "Disrupting the Narrative," will explore my methods, examining this theme in three key areas: script development, design, and my work with the ensemble throughout rehearsal and production and will conclude with a post-production reflection and summary. The thesis will chronicle how seeing as a director influenced all elements of the creative process: dramaturgy and playwrighting, the treatment of design, interaction with actors and building the ensemble. Ultimately, I will chronicle how the creation of the work disrupted my own narrative

as an experienced writer and dramaturg, how by embracing and incorporating fully and with authority the role of director, I have become a better writer and theater artist.

CHAPTER 2

DISRUPTING THE LITERAL NARRATIVE: LIBERATING THE TEXT

“We’re out to shake things up ...”

First published in 1932, the novel *Infants of the Spring* by Wallace Thurman vividly examines the legendary Harlem Renaissance from the inside out. The notoriously sardonic Thurman puts the entire New Negro Movement under indictment, challenging the power of art to create true social change and exposing the peril to the individual artist seeking to meet that expectation. A generation of writers blazes brilliantly and brazenly for an era and then, but for a few, becomes lost for decades. Set in 1929 and based on actual events, Thurman’s prescient novel portrays the fall almost in real time. This penetrating tragicomedy captures the jagged fibrillating pulse of the American Jazz Age at its glorious end. Written a near century ago, *Infants of the Spring* is a remarkably prescient exploration of sexuality, gender and class in urban America and a searing examination of the intersectionality – crossroads or crosshairs -- of race and American Modernism.

With biting caricatures of Renaissance luminaries, such as writers Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston, and Claude McKay; visual artist Richard Bruce Nugent, as well as scholar-activists, Alain Locke and W.E.B. DuBois, *Infants of the Spring* is a virtual portrait gallery of the major African American literary and cultural personalities of the time. Its greater strength, however, is the odd assortment of everyday characters Thurman brings to life and in his unvarnished self-criticism. In his 1929 essay, “Notes on a Stepchild”, he clarified his ambition:

It would be his religious duty to ferret deeply into himself—deeply into his race, isolating the elements of universality, probing, peering, stripping all in the interest of garnering literary material to be presented truthfully, fearlessly, uncompromisingly. (241)

With *Infants of the Spring*, his grand experiment, he came so close!

A brief synopsis: After a meteoric debut, Harlem Renaissance novelist, “the hope of the Negro people,” Raymond Taylor struggles to create his next work, a vitriolic, fictional chronicle of the eccentric fellow roomers in the Harlem boarding house where he lives, an early experiment in work-live space for Negro artists called “Niggerati Manor.” When, to help pay the rent and perhaps introduce a new plot twist, Raymond invites the white Danish visitor Stephen Jorgenson to move in, Stephen’s very presence begins to disrupt the equilibrium in the household, undermining Raymond’s authority and forcing him toward an increasing self-doubt. Intertwined with his spiraling collapse is the fate of the entire household. As his mind unravels, the delicate relationships disintegrate. Ray’s intellectual girlfriend Lucille falls for a roustabout, the childlike Pelham gets jailed for rape, Stephen’s fascination with Negro life gives way to loathing, and the self-assured, insouciant painter Paul Arbian commits suicide. Ray discovers that he has been wrong about everyone, as blind to their true identities and frailties as he has been to his own. Only when he has lost everything does he realize the novel he was seeking to write. Only when he has lost everyone, does he comprehend his love for them. Only when his world collapses does he begin to see.

From spring to winter, confidence to desolation, joy to despair, community to solitude, innocence to awareness, *Infants of the Spring* is a story of the fall from an imperfect paradise where life is chaotic, crazy, wild, effulgent and strange to a desolate and lonely place beneath the stark clarity of a winter night.

The novel ends with an image of dominating white light – a metaphor not only of the white power structures that historically have controlled, exploited and disparaged black people

and our culture, but of Raymond's own internalized hatred, as well, the veiled white gaze that all along has existed behind his eyes.

Infants of the Spring intimately chronicles a sensitive young man's struggle with the familial and cultural environment that simultaneously feeds and stymies his creativity. Like James Joyce's Stephen Daedalus, Thurman's Raymond Taylor is constricted by the weight of history and the toll of expectation and ambition. In many ways, *Infants of the Spring* is a portrait of an artist as a young black man.

Thurman has been given a begrudging place beside the works of his luminous peers, Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston and Jean Toomer, the book deemed a peripheral work, secondary in stature to other Renaissance novels. Disrupting the narrative of its being "a pretty inept book," as described in the initial *New York Times* review (quoted in Singh and Scott, 444) or worse, "so poorly done, it hardly seems possible that the best read, most brilliant, and most uncompromising of the Harlem artists could have written it," as David Levering Lewis railed in his still definitive study of the era, *When Harlem Was In Vogue* (277), I aim to reassert the importance of the work, itself, elevating it not only to a premiere status within the movement, but to its seminal importance as a work of literature, conveying in style and story the depth and texture of black creative genius as a central, defining element of the Jazz Age.

"I agree with you it's a most disappointing novel," Thurman confessed in a letter to his colleague, the Marxist literary critic Granville Hicks. "I didn't realize what a job I had undertaken until the first draft had been accepted by the publisher and I had pocketed the advance. I tried my darnedest to back out of the deal. I wanted another year to work on the book." (445)

In a new medium, I have attempted to give Mr. Thurman that second shot, transforming the once obscured classic African American novel into a vibrant contemporary play.

Approaching *Infants of the Spring* as a director indelibly affected script development and forged the work's ultimate success as a drama.

I first discovered the novel when I was an undergraduate at Harvard University, taking an introductory course in African American literature. The many remarkable works I encountered that semester fueled my life-long interest in the genre and spawned a particular love for the Harlem Renaissance period. I was stunned how little of African American history was known or accessible, let alone celebrated. Even then, *Infants* stood out as a unique work. In no other novel had I encountered such a frank portrayal of homosexuality, class bias and colorism within the African American community, nor had I seen articulated the schism among African Americans regarding attitudes toward the black musical idioms of Blues, Jazz and Negro Spirituals. In no other novels of the period was there such an attempt to capture the urbanity and intellectualism that must have been at the heart of the Negro Renaissance movement. Nor had I encountered women characters of such depth and variety, or such a casual egalitarian intermingling of white and black characters. While some of the language was on occasion stilted as the book's early critics decried, where else was there even an attempt to capture the conversation of poets, artists and activists, who were at the heart of the literary movement?

Years later, while living in Chicago, I re-read the work to see what resonance it retained. Only then did I realize another reason I had found the work so appealing. The text was ninety percent dialogue! That was the first time I thought that a flaw in the narrative might be its strength as a drama, that it might be a play trapped in a novel. When DuSable Museum of African American History in 1995 presented an exhibition of first edition African American

novels, I took a stab at the first adaptation and presented *Infants* as a community engagement support event, a one-night table-reading in the museum conference room. While I sensed the potential for *Infants* to become a significant drama of race, in this first attempt at recasting it, I could not discern how to free the work from the still lumbering constructs of the narrative. I tinkered with the work over the years but could not to my satisfaction deliver its promise.

The UMass Graduate Theater program provided the perfect laboratory. Several critical factors converged. Returning to school after many decades to become a director, to interrogate, enliven and codify my creative process, I had hoped to emerge more able to direct my own work, and that of others, with a particular focus on new plays. I did not anticipate that becoming a director would make me a better playwright, or that *seeing* as a director would be key to the shaping and development of *Infants of the Spring*, to its successful transformation from a “minor” classic novel to a vibrant contemporary drama.

Shortly after the UMass Theater Department season play selection committee announced that *Infants of the Spring* would be part of the 2017-1018 season, I immediately started the rewriting and refining. In my earlier adaptation attempts as writer, alone, I had been deferential, even reverent, toward the work. As a director, my loyalties now lay with the theater medium, a three-dimensional sonic environment populated by living human beings. While it is evoked from the imagination, drama has a concrete reality that demands its own specificity. Creating the directorial conceptual framework was key to the success of the written adaptation.

Reading the work as a director, I began to evolve and formulate critical questions. Director to writer, the first question I asked was, “When does this drama happen?” While the action was always set in the year 1929, I had not considered the conceptual arc this date offered, making it emblematic of both the Renaissance and the overall historic trajectory of the country.

The title provided the next cue: *Infants of the Spring*. Could I establish the time period more specifically and use the shift of seasons to propel the drama? Could the drama progress from the innocence of spring and the abandon of summer into the shock of fall and the bleakness of winter? I realized that I could literally chart the work within the six-month period from mid-June when Stephen, having just graduated university, first arrives in Harlem and moves in with Raymond, to early December with winter just around the corner. What great dramaturgical serendipity when I discovered in my research that December 2, 1929 was the coldest temperature ever recorded for that date up to that point in the century! Even the weather seemed congruent with the emerging concept.

The discoveries around this conceptual arc would guide the distillation of the story and its progression from the joyful comedic beginning to the tragic and desolate conclusion. The plot progression no longer seemed random but a clear path to an ending that was simultaneously inevitable and a surprise.

The next question I asked as a director was “Where does this take place? Where is the essential action?” The plot always unfolded within a Harlem brownstone manor and various locations throughout Manhattan. In attempting to strip the scenes to the essential action, I began also to think of the essential environment, to consider a more fluid and elastic scenic space that was not literal or naturalistic, but abstract, able to metamorphose into the multiple places of action. Thus the play began to lift itself from its realistic moorings and I began to see its potential for abstraction.

Confronting the early draft’s hefty size, two colleagues I deeply respected advised me to streamline the novel’s many plots by reducing the number of characters. I was urged to consider focusing on the relationship between the protagonist writer Raymond, his fellow boarder, the

painter Paul Arbian, and Stephen Jorgensen, the white Danish grad student who moves in with them – to think of the play as a love triangle and to cut Lucille, Raymond’s on-and-off-again girlfriend. In addition, I was counseled to cut Eustace, the bon vivant sometime concert singer. As a writer, I was very distressed by these suggestions. Eustace’s “gin sermon” is one of the most brilliant pieces of dialogue in the novel. A multi-layered pure performance, it captures to perfection the cadence of the black preacher tradition in a mocking double-entendre prayer for Spirit to descend in the form of “gin.” It is one of the reasons I fell in love with the book to begin with. Likewise, for me, Lucille had been the first modern, independent black woman I had encountered in the literary realm. She considered herself an equal intellectual peer to her male counterparts and was, for better or worse, freely in charge of her own sexual choices. So much of her story was my own as a young woman, I felt assaulted at the suggestion that she be cut, and yet, a bit intimidated by the very declarative voices of the seasoned theater artists advising me to do so. Making all of the stories peripheral to the male trio of Raymond, Paul and Stephen might yield an interesting story, timely in its exploration of homosexual tension, but it would have required my introducing a sexual narrative that really isn’t in the book and exploring the work as a gay man’s drama, which would tax my capacity as a cis gender heterosexual female. In addition, while there is a lot of talk about sex, there’s very little physicality in the work itself. Except for the frequent fights, physical closeness is virtually absent. In truth, it is the absence of true intimacy that is at the root of all of the tragedies that befall the manor’s inhabitants.

In my role as director, I discovered a solution to the conundrum. Instead of telling the playwright what to cut, I asked, “Since you feel so strongly about this, why is this important to you? What is the reason that each of these characters is in Raymond’s life?”

With this question, I began to see that the story, for me, was not about Raymond and Paul and Stephen, but about *Raymond*, how all of the other characters affect his life. This generated a conceptual image of *Infants of the Spring* as a multi-dimensional portrait of the artist as a young black man. Instead of the three-way tension of a triangle around which the peripheral characters revolve, the conceptual image became a star, a center light around which all of the other characters orbit and from which they draw energy – a *ray*. Just as in a galactic setting, the competing tensions exert pressure from all sides, threatening to pull apart or collapse into impenetrable dark matter.

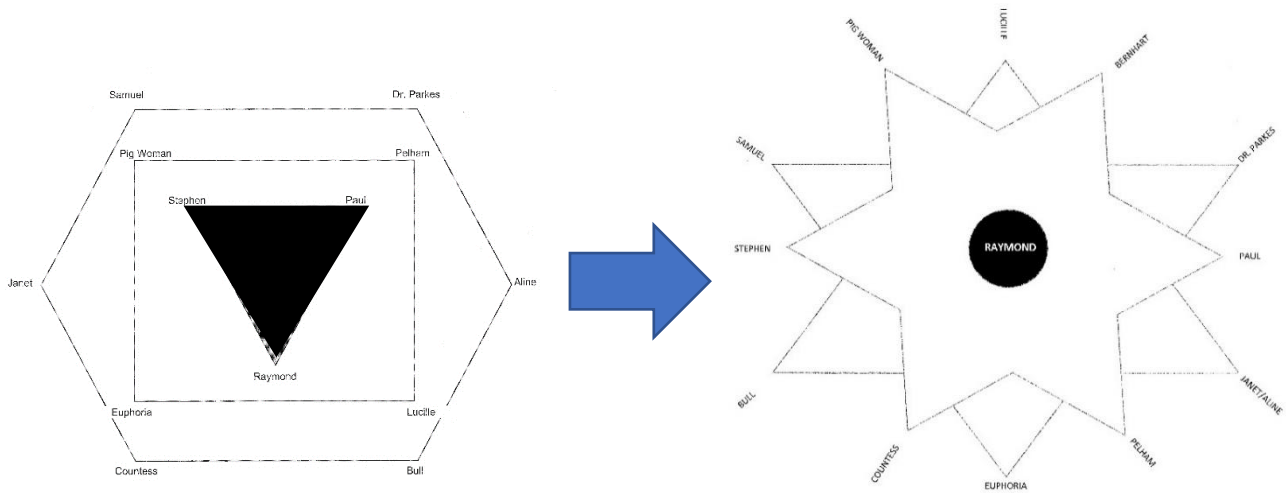


Figure 1. My initial visual conceptualization of the play's character dynamics and the revise with the central focus on Raymond as the drama's driving force

Using this directorial image, I could confidently defend my choice to keep all of the characters. Solutions to tightening the script would have to be found elsewhere. I learned an invaluable lesson as director: to put the question before the criticism, to ask of the writer, “What is your intent and why is this important?”

Women characters, thought to be peripheral in the book, became axes of the drama. Even Eustace proved to be critical, offering vital comic relief to the play’s escalating tragedy. Seeing

as a director allowed me to approach the work with greater independence and freed me as a writer and dramaturg to engage the text with more authority, I began adding light touches of my own voice with stronger buttons to scenes and integrating elements of Thurman's actual personal history both to bolster character and clearly center the drama around him. As director, since the drama was to revolve around Raymond, I determined that we needed to know more about him.

In earlier play drafts, during the course of each character's interaction with Raymond, we learn of their back story. In fact, we learn much about the histories, travails, desires of everyone *except* Raymond. I assigned myself the task of strengthening his story and finding places within the drama to build its progression. Scenes One and Scene Six and of Act I and Scene Nine of Act II now integrate three elements of Thurman's actual biography.

The fact that Thurman was born and raised in Utah always struck me as significant. The imagination reels at what the experience of growing up in the early 20th-century land of Mormons must have been for a dark-skinned, exceptionally bright Negro youth. The simple addition of the lines "Utah! Hee-Haw!" coming from the lips of the urbane Paul Arbian in Act I, Scene One was enough to suggest the surreality of Raymond's past and present. Thurman's attending the University of California also struck me as another unique detail. Adding this distinct West-coast air to Raymond's history helps ground his intellectual pedigree and makes his alienation from "the Black Mecca" more palpable from the very first scene.

The saga of the magazine FIRE!! also became a central motif, providing a perfect way to make visible Raymond's inner story, inserting the crushing misfortune of the actual magazine as a source of the fictional Raymond's emotional fragility.

In real life, Thurman, Hughes and Hurston were the triumvirate leaders of a vanguard of younger Renaissance artists. Determined to break free of the carefully managed New Negro

literary environment, controlled and curated by the older generation of cultural leaders, such as W.E.B. DuBois and Alain Locke, the trio determined to create a new manifesto and to announce their primacy in a new literary magazine, self-published, primarily with Thurman's money, and edited by him. From the magazine's title *FIRE!!* all in caps with two exclamation points their intent was clear. In an ironic and tragicomic twist of fate, the day before distribution of the first edition, the warehouse containing all the copies burned up. The experience proved so traumatic that the one slim initial volume was the singular fruit of their grand idea, the volume only reissued and made available to the public more than fifty years later.

Could such a psychic blow as this be a source of the fictional Ray's emotional unease? In the novel, there are very few suggestions of his delicate mental state until his collapse on the subway, and even then, he simply swoons and wakes up in Bellevue.

In this new adaptation, the magazine's manifesto and solicitation page are repurposed to create an entire scene, visualizing and dramatizing Raymond's mental collapse as a hallucinatory nightmare – a fractured church service, minstrel show and slave auction, ending with the prophet-poet's body catching afire. As a playwright, I had no idea if the scene would work. It was literally too crazy for me! The director's vision was the driving force and I had to learn to trust it. The moment became one of the most striking and talked about scenes in the production.

Melissa Burton in the recent *Gather Out of Star-Dust, A Harlem Renaissance Album* suggests the words from the *FIRE!!* preamble, while not accredited, were crafted by Langston Hughes. Perhaps the refrain:

Fy-ah! Fy-ah!
Fy-ah
Gonna burn ma soul!
Fy-ah
Gonna burn ma soul!

“Fy-Ah/ Gonna burn ah Soul!” The cadence rings like Hughes, but the arrhythmic modulation of the subsequent verses, the anger and rage, the disunion of metaphoric images still sounds like Thurman to me. Hughes’ passion is always tempered by compassion and Hurston’s by humor. Of the three writers, only Thurman’s voice was possessed of such consistent and persistent vitriol, so caustic, at times it threatened to consume him. The preamble’s central image of raging fire certainly echoes Thurman’s passion as articulated in *Infants* when Raymond exclaims, “We’re out to shake things up, set *fire to the past* until it and all of its presumptions crumble to the ground!” (italic mine).

Once I began to see the work as Thurman’s interior drama, other adaptation choices fell into place. Pelham, the addle-brained possible rapist, became the unintegrated child-self, in which Thurman had isolated all of his insecurities about capacity and color. The line, “he’s so consarn’d black” and Thurman giving Pelham’s grandmother the name Grandma Mack clearly suggested this correlation in his own mind for Grandma Mack was the name of Thurman’s actual grandmother. I thus wrote and directed the scene so that the two men seem to mirror each other.

Lucille remained important as Raymond’s “anima” counterpoint and she, in turn, elevated the role of Euphoria, the manor’s owner. The two women, representing normative desire and expectation, become an exterior balance to the internal turmoil within the manor and within Raymond’s own tortured mind.

The rehabilitation of the Pig Woman was also a director-driven evolution. The casually drawn character within the novel takes on African deific principals and becomes the non-literal, non-verbal representation of the ignored, ancestral African presence.

Paul, whose suicidal tendencies bore no resemblance to Richard Bruce Nugent, upon whom the character is based, came to represent Thurman's foreboding precognition. The real Nugent lived to be 82. It was Thurman who was suicidal, and who within two years of the novel's publication would drink himself to death.

What surprised me was the necessary deletion of the cameo caricatures of the well-known figures of the Renaissance, such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston, Countee Cullen and Alain Locke. While their inclusion potentially offered more name-dropping newsworthiness, their deletion allowed focus on the fictional characters Thurman had so beautifully created, and the agonizing drama that was metaphor his brilliant, brief life.

I began to view the drama as a sort of Jungian landscape where all of the figures were reflections of Thurman, where the external world is conveying and expressing the internal emotional experience. Pulling the work away from naturalism and moving toward a more expressionistic interpretation had immediate implications for design. The central image of Ray as the star subsequently fed and supported design choices. Text, image, sound and movement became indelibly intertwined.

CHAPTER 3

DIRECTING AND DESIGN

“Here we are, my studio’s right this way.”

Over the summer of 2017 when I was assigned the production design team for *Infants of the Spring*, I was thrilled. The constellation consisted of two faculty members: the UMass Theater Department’s new Assistant Professor of Costume Design Yao Chen; Senior Lecturer Priscilla Page, who is co-founder and Administrator of the department’s Multicultural Theater Certificate Program as dramaturg. Lighting designer and M.F.A. candidate Tamara Harris would be doubling shows so that I could have at least one member of my class cohort on the team. They were joined by two remarkable undergraduates: sound designer Alexander Blaustein and scenic designer Sean Sanford. Despite the diversity of the group on many levels, I was the only African American member and the singular resource with any depth of knowledge about the culture and period. *Infants*, moreover, was not only my first mainstage show within the department, it was my first experience of mounting a full production. How to talk to designers, how to bridge the knowledge gap and encourage independence? How to foster collaboration and still allow myself full creative interaction? I was to learn while doing.

Schedules precluded our meeting as a group in the pre-production phase during the summer months and early fall semester. Still, meeting with designers individually, I was able to evolve a coherent process. PowerPoint presentations that I created over the summer on the art, music, dance, literature, politics, personalities and technologies of the period gave each of my designers a quick immersion experience. In addition, I had amassed my own resource library, rich in visual content, which I made available to them. Once the school term began, this research was enhanced by Professor Page and fellow graduate student Shaila Schmidt who was invited to

join the team as associate dramaturg. This preparatory work created an invaluable foundation for our vision sessions. With my design and production team assembled, we began our journey of discovery.

This production would be my first opportunity to hone my stage vision, to begin to discern my signature as director. I was determined to generate an environment percolating with ideas in quest of a singular vision. While not fully a writer-director-designer like Robert Wilson or Robert Lepage, I have always had very strong design inclinations, and as a director I was intricately involved with the *Infants* design process on all fronts. In interacting with the designers, I discovered a sub-set of my theatrical process, a kind of art direction to achieve my desired stage picture and sound. I also began to develop some maxims for myself: Building trust is a constant enterprise. Cultural missteps can be teachable moments. No element is too small to go unattended.

Scenic Design: In early drafts of the play, I lifted the description of Raymond's apartment straight from the novel and inserted them as stage directions: "a large studio, a riotous red and black themed bachelor pad of wicker chairs, hook rugs and a writing desk. There's also a Murphy bed, a daybed couch, an old upright piano and a Victrola." As director I found this description far too cumbersome, and in beginning conversations with Sean, I began to see the environment differently.

Since reading Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* when I was twelve, I have been in love with stage minimalism and as a director sensed that this would be central to the *Infants* scenic environment. The depth and height of the Rand Theater stage offered a tantalizing opportunity to envision a set evocative of Thurman's transcontinental peers, German auteur Bertolt Brecht and the great Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold, who was the focus of an independent study

during my second year in the program. I was also interested in Adolphe Appia's theories of shadow and light and the interplay of level, as well as experiments with scale and illusion of the writer-director-designer Robert LePage. I understood that his dependence on media and projection was beyond the scope of the UMass Theater Department and my own skills. Still I was determined to explore these concepts in a different fashion.

How to make the design fluid and jazzed like Harlem in the 1920s, the streets as alive with music and movement as the minds of the artists the story follows? Of the myriad images I collected to share with Sean, three specific ones fed the ultimate design. One of the most significant was a black and white ink drawing by Richard Bruce Nugent, which I originally used as the front cover for my manuscript. It visually represented so many tensions within the story – the stark contrast of race, the tumbling towers and the temptation of the jungle, the contrasting profiles of two men, one white, one black, a woman's figure dancing between them. Additionally, the art deco style made the work seem simultaneously present-day and period-specific, the black and white motif evocative of stark, disturbing silhouettes of contemporary artist Kara Walker. Lastly, Nugent was the model for the character of Paul Arbian, and since I had begun to integrate some of Thurman's actual history, it seemed appropriate to reference Nugent's work.

Two sketches from Adolphe Appia's *The Living Work of Art* offered tantalizing suggestions of how to convey the multiple floors of the manor, as well as the breakaway scenes throughout Manhattan. One, in particular, suggested to me ways to think about *Infants'* puzzling last line, "The dark tower, itself, would soon crumple and fall, once again leaving the dominating white light ... in full possession of the sky."



Figure 2. (L to R) Sketches such as this one by Richard Bruce Nugent and renderings by Adolphe Appia influenced early scenic design conversations.

Fortunately, Sean is a tremendously gifted designer, yet *Infants* was also his first mainstage show. His initial designs had a beautiful sweep and vertical arc, but with windows, clothes lines and wild shafts of light, they were far too busy for me. We kept stripping away and stripping away until we generated a design that had all the ingredients I was seeking. Through constant dialogue built on mutual respect, we arrived at our elemental three-story set with multi-levels and playing areas, the dialogue of light and dark, black and white. It possessed a beautiful symmetrical octagonal, floor-level raised platform, a winding asymmetrical staircase, and upstage center the looming “dark tower.”

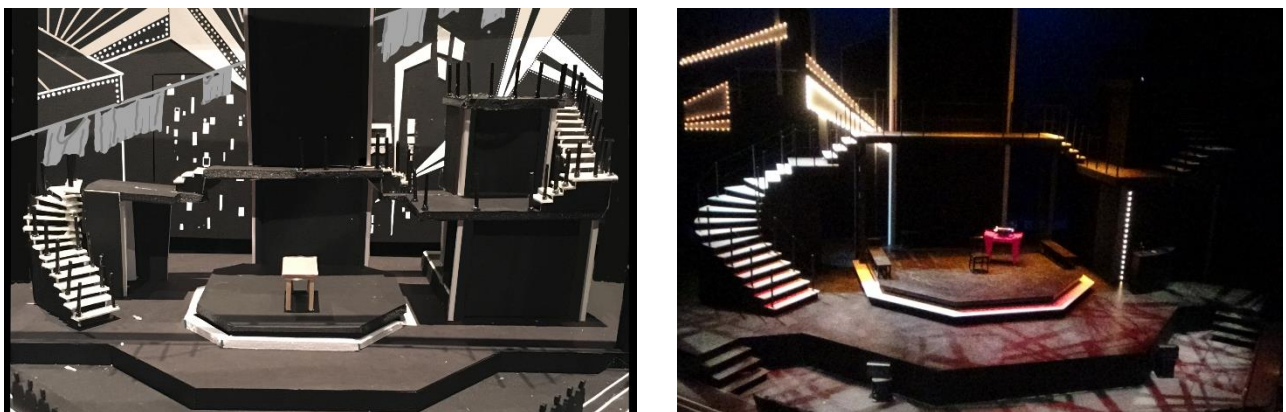


Figure 3. Early model by Scenic Designer Sean Sanford and *Infants of the Spring* production pre-show with Sean’s final scenic design. Photo credits: Sean Sanford and Pam Dickler, respectively.

Being adventuresome requires allowance for misadventures, and Sean and I had a few. The funniest, our discussion of how Paul Arbian's paintings, which are so prominent in the story, would be represented in the play. A gift from Paul to Raymond, they are the most striking element in Ray's studio; however, Thurman's novel gives no specific description of the paintings except that they are "erotic." As mentioned, I based my initial thoughts about them on the extant paintings and prints by Richard Bruce Nugent, upon whom the character of Arbian is based. Nugent's work, in turn, reminded me greatly of the contemporary work of Walker and the late Cuban print-maker Belkis Ayon, both of whom figured prominently in my initial thoughts.

Only when I began seeing as a director did I also begin to question where in this now beautifully stark and elemental environment would we put them, what would they actually look like, who was going to create them and how could we make them disappear with the various mood and location shifts.

We first considered real human tableaux, that is, live actors posing behind one of the scrims. The silent, bejeweled chorus girls in Stephen Sondheim's *Follies* and the statuesque mute African woman warrior in Hansberry's *Les Blancs* recently staged by London's National Theater had created powerful stage pictures as did the hooved horsemen in the original *Equus*. Still, I was not about to ask an undergraduate cast of actors to simulate the overt eroticism of Nugent or Walker; moreover, the action of the play was so tight, we didn't have enough bodies. Lastly, with the difficulty I had casting, it was highly unlikely that I would find even one six-foot tall walk-on to pose in a nude body suit.

We considered letting Sean create some sketches, but he was already overwhelmed with the drafting and execution of the set design, and the thought of having a white designer create works meant to evoke the Harlem Renaissance seemed contrary to my vision and mission. We

considered creating some Nugent knock-offs, enlarging four of his original works and, through the Fine Arts Department, using the large-scale printer to create the canvases. This too proved an uncomfortable solution for Nugent's most erotic images featured extremely Nordic-looking subjects down to the flaxen pubic hair. To stay with my Harlem Renaissance theme and blend the images with the starkly dark set, I tried re-coloring the work, turning the images into "photographic negatives," making the white background and figures black and rendering Nugent's subjects more African than he possibly had ever intended. Luckily, before we continued further with this folly, we were told we were over budget. The experience taught me another valuable lesson: if an idea seems too challenging, keep thinking. Less can be more.

I went back to my mother's adage, "Use your imagination. Play 'Pretend.'" In a moment of frustration, I decided, we would imagine the paintings and pretend they were there. Everyone in the cast would have to see them and interact with them, and at different times in the play, even experience them in different ways. Through the actors' gestures, the audience would have to imagine the paintings, and in so doing, make up their own ideas about the nature of Paul's work and its aesthetic value.



Figure 4. Ethan Blake as Danish visitor Stephen Jorgenson taking in a painting by Paul Arbian. Photo credit: Jon Crispin.

Freeing the set of the necessity for literal paintings allowed me to see the entire production as a series of paintings, a moving gallery. The portrait of the artist as a young black man became an ever-shifting sequence of portraits of black life and black beauty. The human tableaux created by the ensemble within the play pay living homage to the numerous visual artists. This gave me the opportunity to reference, not only Nugent, but other artists whose work has inspired me from that period and beyond. These included Williams Johnson, Romare Bearden, Archibald Motley, and Betty Saar.



Figure 5. Painting by Williams Johnson, Philippe Janvier as Bull in *Infants*; collage by Romare Bearden, Mary Elineema-Kidela as Pig Woman in *Infants*. Photo credits: *Infants of the Spring* UMass production, Jon Crispin.

The stark environment of Sean’s set provided the perfect canvas for the human tableaux alive with movement and color, as originally called for in my stage directions, only this time, they were really human. In addition to solving the problem of “the paintings,” I discovered how significantly visual artists informed my casting, movement and costume choices.

The final touch was the red desk. We had determined that there would be no “furniture.” The beds and couches and accoutrements of the apartment would all have to be created from two stationary benches and two portable ones. Still we needed some kind of surface to serve as Raymond’s desk, bar and dining table. My colleague and graduate classmate Claudia Nolan told

me of an art deco exhibition at the Cleveland Museum of Art. I ordered the catalogue and about three-quarters of the way through turned the page to a red, lacquer, Cubist-inspired desk that became the centerpiece of the design. The desk confirmed the primacy of the writer, and the bright cherry red reinforced Ray's fire, and the unique construction established an immediate connection to Modernism.



It was a very easy and animated collaboration that yielded a magnificently fluid design: the Harlem Renaissance from the inside out. Sean's final design was at once the skeletal spine of a brownstone, the platforms of a subway, a seedy alley in the Village, the city skyline, a swanky bachelor pad and the dark catacombs of New York City's Tombs. The piano the early stage directions had originally called for became the steps, black and white keys that danced and curled round the manor like Stevie Wonder's *Songs in the Key of Life*.

Figure 6 (inset).
Isaiah Grace as
Raymond at his desk,
the scenic centerpiece
modeled after Leon
Jallot dressing table,
retailed at Lord &
Taylor, 1929. Photo
credit: Jon Crispin.

Figure 7: *Infants*
ensemble curtain call
March 2018. Photo
credit: Pam Dickler.



Lighting Design: Because the set design was so large, it had to be constructed on the stage. Lighting designer Tamara Harris and I were thus late in being able to see the full design, and well into tech, she was still furiously building cues. Fortunately, Tamara and I early on had copiously combed through the text, scene by scene, beat by beat for clarity on place, mood, and the focus of each moment. Throughout our numerous conversations, she had been so attuned to the script and to my articulation of the vision that time and again each of her lighting choices was a surprise and delight. Under her adept eye, the city was aglow, alive, animated with light.

Pulsing with energy ...

The courtroom and the Tombs
were places of sinister
authority. Ray's studio
could be awash with morning
sunlight or seething red with
anger. The subway was surreal.
In Paul's lonely Greenwich
Village bathroom scene, the
bathwater seemed to shimmer,
a solo lightbulb swaying
overhead. Transitions



Figure 8. Brandon Medina as Paul Arbian with Sandra Seoane-Serí; lighting design by Tamara Harris, costume by Yao Chen. Photo credit: Jon Crispin.

were seamless and cinematic. Attending to each dramatic moment, Ms. Harris was a wonder!
She is a poet who writes in light!

Costume Design: I was honored to learn that internationally renowned, award-winning costume designer and new UMass faculty member Yao Chen was assigned to my project. Her numerous design credits include *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (2016, Orlando Shakespeare Theatre, *Amadeus* (2014) at the Theatre Espressivo, San Jose, Costa Rica; *Little Princess* (2017) at Seattle Children's Theatre, and numerous Shakespeare productions in the U.S. and in China. In addition, her renderings and designs were selected for publication in *The Art of Costume Design* by Focal Press. I was more than excited to begin working with her.

In anticipation, early in the fall 2017 semester, I prepared a PowerPoint presentation of photographs by James VanDerZee, the noted African American photographer whose 1969 Museum of Modern Art exhibition, “Harlem on My Mind,” remains a standard-bearer of black style and fashion during the Harlem Renaissance. Van Der Zee’s prolific portfolio, which captures almost every aspect of life in black New York, was a perfect starting point for our discussions. It was important to me that black bodies on stage be beautiful and VanDerZee’s work was one of the earliest to represent this ethos. I also shared with her some of my personal books, such as *Rhapsodies in Black*, *Art of the Harlem Renaissance*. She significantly expanded my resources with her own research to create an astounding costume design, drawing profiles and couture combinations from the photographs and the show’s vivid color palette from the paintings.

Yao’s input was critical to my understanding of the passage of time within the work. While I had determined that the plot would progress from spring to winter, Yao insisted that I be much more specific. She needed the details to map out her costume plot. The information would yield another benefit. As characters moved from season to season, the costume design would serve the vital function of marking time.



Figure 9. Examples of Yao Chen's designs, which in construction and color palette reflect the influence of Harlem Renaissance artists: (L to R) Winhold Reiss' portrait of Langston Hughes, Isaiah Grace as Raymond Taylor; Sandra Seoane-Serí and Mickey Jones as Aline and Janet, studio portrait by James VanDerZee; *Infants'* ensemble and street scene by Archibald Motley. Photo credits, *Infants of the Spring* UMass production, Jon Crispin.

Yao's costumes would live in the natural world in delicate counterpoint to the abstract scenic environment. Grounded in realism, they would establish the real time and physical world of the drama. Yao also created an Expressionist links to the internal world of Raymond's mind through the key choice of dressing Raymond, alone, in a singular unit costume. As others transformed around him, even with some mutability in the use of his vest and jacket, or losing a shoe, Raymond's costume remained the same throughout the entire play. Granted he was on stage for the whole performance, mitigating any costume change, but Yao's pragmatic solution to that problem offered the subtle suggestion to the audience that they were perhaps experiencing a memory play, all happening within Raymond's mind.

Working across cultures, there is always potential for some things to get lost in translation. This may in turn confound the mind or expand it. The moment can be one of tension or teaching. An example of each: At the initial full design team meeting, Yao's presentation was a stunning overview of the sixty-six costume changes within the show, with support imaging for each character. When she got to the presentation for Bull, the opening slide featured a painting with a series of obese black men eating watermelon. I had suggested in our early conversations that Bull represented the black laborer and blue-collar physicality. That the first thing someone would think of would be the gluttonous consumption of watermelons took me by surprise. In that moment, I realized that stereotypical images of black people had been so pervasive, they had even reached China. Via email, beginning with Thomas Edison's 1909 film to miscellaneous food packaging labels, I took the opportunity to share with Yao a brief history of the denigrating portraits of black people in relation to an otherwise harmless fruit. The experience also made me clarify that by "physicality" I meant sensuality, or the employment of all of the senses, that Bull was a physical man, a laborer and boxer, his emotions just under the surface of the skin. The exchange deepened my understanding of the character and reinforced my commitment to disrupt the encrusted, almost fossilized negative imaging of African Americans, and to use every opportunity to dislodge it.

By contrast, another misrepresentation led to revelation: the case of Dr. Parkes. In the novel, the character is a satiric portrait of the African American cultural icon Alain Locke; however, given the university's connection to the legacy of W.E.B. DuBois and the strong Victorian imaging related to his character, our costume choices were leaning more toward him. When we got to that character discussion in the presentation, Yao created a "sonic anagram," pronouncing W.E.B. DuBois as "WEB DuBious."

It was a mistake of genius! A serendipitous Hip-Hop jump across time, honoring the leonine, disruptive critical thinker, whom Christopher Hinton in his keynote 2017 DuBois Day Lecture described as “the ultimate embodiment of radical rupture.”



Figure 10. (Top to Bottom) A young W.E.B. DuBois at the Paris Exposition, 1900, the model for Dr. Parkes; Yao Chen’s magical realization in *Infants* with Isaiah Grace as Raymond and Philippe Janvier and Sabine Jacques as two of the six Dr. Parkeses (photo credit: Jon Crispin); my Chicago subway encounter with an anonymous Dr. Parkes, December 2017 (photo credit: Ifa Bayeza); the Dr. Parkes chorus in *Infants of the Spring*, Act II, Scene 8 subway challenge to Raymond’s grasp on reality in the UMass 2018 production (photo credit: Jon Crispin).

Yao's inadvertent phrasing was a breakthrough for me, affirming my goals to generate what Hinton called "epistemic rupture," the dislodging of Western ethnocentric knowledge, which was at the heart of DuBois' work as scholar and critical thinker. Refracted through time and fractured through language, W.E.B. DuBois and WEB DuBious were parallel universe personae, and the perfect *entre* to the conceptualization of the chorus of Dr. Parkeses – one of a few times in our process where realism crossed paths with magic.

Sound Design: Alexander Blaustein and I worked together like a Jazz duo. As director, I wanted to experiment with sound, to explore how the medium could be another way to lift the production away from traditional realism. I wanted a sound design to demonstrate the insurgent power of black musical innovation during the time in which the play is set, to celebrate the genius of black musical innovation in the form of Blues and Jazz, to make the musical presence as visceral as the play's rich discourse on writing and visual arts. Still I did not want period music alone. I saw the production's potential to demonstrate the power of black music throughout time, to chronicle the waves of musical originality, brilliance, beauty and power, spawned during the devastating trauma of enslavement, rebirthing through each generation resistance and resilience in the form of creativity. I wanted to link the Renaissance to its African past and to a vision of neo-African future. I sought to highlight the evolution of Jazz from the vortices of the Renaissance to the Black Arts Movement and Hip Hop, all three being emblems of disruption through black identity reclamation, reconstruction, and assertion. Pragmatically I also wanted to cover transitions with music to maintain the play's fluidity and pace. Thus while costumes would convey time, the music would not be bound by it. Alexander was primed and "fittin' to go!"

Janelle Monae says “music is the weapon of the future.” Alexander and I each brought our arsenals of sound, and with our own version of call and response began to find an aesthetic and rhythm. Through Professor Page, I recruited her husband, Jazz scholar and concert producer Glenn Seigel, who was kind enough to share his encyclopedic knowledge with Alexander in a series of listening sessions. An avid researcher, Alexander also embarked on his own YouTube forays. With the research I had done for my 2010 novel *Some Sing, Some, Cry*, I felt amply armed with my musical knowledge of the period, but I did not think myself sufficiently conversant with later and more contemporary artists. I learned to trust both my collaborator and my ear. Working together in the spirit of adventure, we created not only a nearly stress-free interchange, but a friendship.

Alexander’s ultimate design contained all the ingredients that I had sought, and then some. Anchored by period artists such as Fats Waller, Sidney Bechet, Eubie Blake, Ellington and Armstrong, the sound bed also integrated black arts movement icons Max Roach and Eric Dolphy, contemporary Jazz artists Oliver Lake and Mike Reed, and classical composers William Grant Still and TJ Anderson. Raymond typed to the rhythm of *Drums Unlimited*. The Pig Woman’s odd Exu-like gait was accompanied by Cecil Taylor’s free-style piano. The final move from the manor unfolded to Bessie Smith’s laconic, politically charged *Nobody Knows You (When You're Down and Out)*. Paul’s suicide and farewell to the world was underscored with John Coltrane’s *Love Supreme*.

From big bands to stride, symphonies to the lone solo voice singing a Sea Island prayer, the score was a remarkable polyphonic tapestry. The dramatic score not only propelled the story within the play, but also conveyed the story of African American music, making the performative excellence of the past live and present.

CHAPTER 4

BUILDING THE ENSEMBLE

Preparation: With the spring 2018 production of *Infants* in my sights, at the end of the 2017 fall semester, I set out for Chicago, where I had arranged a directing observership at Goodman Theatre, where Artistic Director Robert Falls was beginning rehearsals on *Blind Date*, a new play by Rogelio Martinez. The experience was a tremendous boon to my thoughts on structuring rehearsals. Bob's practice was a model of pacing and patience. I learned to regard time as my generous friend and not the enemy. I watched him take the space he needed to sift through the script line by line, chiseling, refining, clarifying; and to repeat even a small beat until he got it right. Additionally, I learned much from his manner on establishing congeniality and authority, encouraging the ensemble to invest in their characters with independent research, and creating an environment of curiosity and candor.

The play, itself, was an ideal model. Like *Infants of the Spring*, Martinez's *Blind Date* called for a large cast, with a core of principal characters and a supporting ensemble, playing multiple roles. The play was also a creative interpretation of real events and characters with interwoven storylines. The experience was an ideal practicum study for my upcoming venture.

I borrowed and modified several of his practices to great effect. For instance, an initial table reading of Act I with actors playing their specific characters was followed by a read-through of the script's dialogue and stage directions by the ensemble in their sitting order around the table, so actors were reading parts that were not their own. The value, Bob explained, was that the cast would be listening and not "acting." He would stop them after each scene for discussion. What is the scene about? What happens? What is the essential conflict? Where are

we in time? What happens in one sentence? If you had to give the scene a name, what would it be? This kind of text analysis I was used to doing on my own. I discovered that involvement of the ensemble in this process not only gave the actors deeper insight into the world of the work, but also began to strengthen camaraderie and mutual respect. It empowered the cast to participate in the evolution of a new work. Bob also had the actors individually research the characters they were playing and periodically each would present three little known facts to the ensemble. I would modify and employ both exercises to great effect. The group table read encouraged all of the ensemble to invest in the production, regardless of the size of their part. Inviting all *Infants* ensemble members to choose a book from my personal library that related to their character was particularly important for these young actors in my charge for it encouraged them to incorporate intellectual curiosity and hunger into the rehearsal and their ongoing practice.

Auditions: Given the small numbers of actors of color in the program, I began to seed the ground early. A five-minute script of scene highlights the department Season Showcase in October 2017 served to give me a sneak peak of the acting pool and to generate campus interest. This was followed by a December 2017 table reading of Act I for the same purpose. By auditions, we had a healthy turn-out. For the first cut, I focused only on monologues, and if they didn't have that, a story or song. Call-backs featured mostly group scenes and duets, rotating actors so that I could see at least two ensemble combinations. I closed the sessions with two group improvisations: a prayer circle and a movement exercise to see dance capacity and relationship chemistry. As *Infants* was a play about the intersections of race, it was critical that I see how white and black actors related to one another and how the actors related to one another across gender, as well. These group improvisations were critical to casting choices for often the actor with the strongest vocal performance was completely at sea in the physical exercise. The

experience was critical to my evolution, as well, for I began to realize how essential movement would be to the successful articulation of the play. As my directing teacher Gilbert McCauley professed, “It’s all a dance.” How, I pondered, would I pursue this theory without a choreographer?

After the auditions and a couple of late patch-ins, *Infants of the Spring* had its premier ensemble of seventeen:

Infants of the Spring

CAST

| | |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| Raymond | Isaiah Grace |
| Stephen | Ethan Blake |
| Sam | Nick Baker |
| Countess Nijinski | Sarah Etkin |
| Paul | Brandon Medina |
| Eustace | Jhayden Sheftall |
| Pelham | Darius Taylor |
| Bull | Phillipe Janvier |
| Janet | Mickey Jones |
| Aline | Sandra Seoane-Serí |
| Euphoria | Sabine Jacques |
| Lucille | Sabrina Victor |
| Dr. Parkes | Brandon Barker |
| The Pig Woman | Mary Elineema-Kidela |

ENSEMBLE

Ryan Dunn

Izzy Salant

Alyssa Cochran-Caggiano

Satsuki Murakami

The success of my casting efforts reflected the groundwork of Production Dramaturg Priscilla Page and my directing advisor Assistant Professor Judyie Al Bilali, who, as founders of the Multicultural Theater Practice Certificate Program, had been working diligently since its inception to foster a more inclusive environment within the department. The *Infants of the Spring* ensemble's depth of diversity was in great measure due to their foundational work.

Lending new definition to "African American," students of Cape Verdian, Haitian, Dominican, Ghanaian and Filipino descent, hailing from regions as disparate as Chicago, Illinois and Chicopee, Massachusetts immediately dispelled any monolithic definition of "blackness." The white ensemble members reflected equally diverse backgrounds – Irish, Jewish, Italian and middle American Oklahoman. A Japanese exchange student, only here for the semester, completed the ensemble, and by her participation, instantly gave the production a global scope. For many, *Infants* would be their first opportunity to originate a character and sustain that evolution through a whole play. For many, this would be their first race-specific work, as well.

Rehearsal – Guiding Young Actors: "I'm going to give you all of my secrets," said Mei Ann Teo in our meeting after *Infants*' first design run. Assistant Professor of Theatre at Hampshire College, the Singaporean theatre/film maker has worked with The Public Theater, Berkeley Rep, Theatre of Yugen, Crowded Fire, Cutting Ball, and the Bay Area Playwrights Festival. Internationally, her award-winning work has graced festivals from Serbia to Belgium and China. With a focus on documentary theatre and original ensemble creation, rooted in personal and communal history, she was highly instrumental in helping me to forge and clarify my vision and to see and think as a director.

Professor Teo went above and beyond the call of duty as one of my thesis committee members and provided me with detailed critique and suggestions throughout the rehearsal

process. Our three meetings were immeasurably helpful, particularly to my pacing of the show and some of my stylistic choices. “Let the scenes bleed in and out,” she said. “The actors can trickle in before a scene starts.” With this note, I could get rid of those pesky black-outs between scenes and allow ensemble members to be both actors and crew, in the half-light creating seamless transitions. “Do they leave as characters or actors?” she asked. It wound up being a little bit of both. The stylistic adjustment cut time and created fluidity. Like the era itself, the production was in constant motion.

Among her other pearls of wisdom, which I immediately applied:

- You need to be unhappy with what you’ve done so you can see it.
- Translate problems into exercises.
- Tell your actors, “Offer your intimate self to the audience.” Ask them, “How do we reveal that private self in a public space?”
- Think of scenes as continuous emotional time.
- What does the line mean in the actor’s physical life? How is it coming out of his body?
- Plot = Action.

Working in the moment, I developed some maxims of my own to which I repeatedly returned in guiding the ensemble during rehearsals and production:

- Use your eyes
- No limp wrists (male or female)
- Shoulders back.
- Find the light (feel the light).
- Noun/Verb/Adverb: Weigh your words. Which is most important in the phrase?
- Cadence: think of lines like music.
- Find your inner movie star: expand your prototypes.
- Use what you got.
- Stay in the present, even when recounting the past.
- Place your voice in the diaphragm and not the head and throat. There’s strength in the lower register, more air.
- Figure it out.
- Read beyond the line, look underneath it for nuance.

- To expand your options, play against your body type.
- Give more, get more.
- There's power in stillness. Plant your feet.

The list may seem doctrinaire in print. In application the impact was quite different. “I love all of my children equally,” was my mother Eloise Owens Williams’ oft-repeated refrain when raising me and my three siblings. Though I never quite believed her as a child, when directing *Infants of the Spring*’s youthful ensemble of seventeen, I came to understand the delicate balancing act required. The scenes were so intricate, there was little time for individually scheduled work; nevertheless, regardless of the size of the part or depth of experience, I assessed each actor for individual strengths and challenges and carved out a strategy to move them forward, often modifying the script or adjusting the action, improving both.

I cast junior Isaiah Grace as the lead, Raymond Taylor. Tall, with a Barrymore-like profile, a physical instrument like a model, he moved as if he had been put together with a wrench. In addition, he had an easy-going persona that while wonderfully warm seemed so contrary to Raymond’s fire. Still he took direction well. In Directing Studio the semester before, I had already gotten him to unfurrow his brow by instructing him to recite his lines to the mirror and learn to speak through his eyes and not his forehead. He returned to next rehearsal with a brow as smooth as a baby’s. In casting him, I followed my hunch. Isaiah would need constant direction of physicality: relax your hand, bend your knees, move with Pelham on a five-count, don’t bend from the torso, just lower your head from the neck. On the line, “But I love you,” take her by the shoulders. This small gesture work, which I adapted from readings about renowned playwright-director, Maria Irene Fornes, deepened Isaiah’s grasp of his character and expanded his capacity and confidence. I was amazed at his delight when, through the physical work, he

discovered new depths of emotion. By the end of the play, in his final monologue, he presented the rare image of a strikingly tall, young black man with clear eyes, shedding real tears. “Don’t be afraid of your fear,” he told a high school audience member in a post-play talk-back.

“Embrace it.”

Sandra Seoane-Serí has a remarkable stage presence, A Filipina-Dominican, she has delicate, dark features. Ava Gardner comes to mind. For the character of Aline, I suggested she play against “type” and told her to watch some Mae West and Jean Harlowe movies. In a sandy brown wig, she created a unique Aline, morphing the two movie icons into her character, sultry and sassy in one moment and explosive in another. I saw in an earlier production (UMass Theater’s 2017-2018 PlayLab’s *Snow Flakes*) that she liked to fight. She didn’t own any heels and rode her bike to school every day. Investing in this feisty spirit, I asked fight choreographer to give her a more prominent role. “When somebody slaps her, Aline is going to slap ‘em back!” With Aline throwing punches and kicks and her best friend Janet, played by Mickey Jones trying desperately to restrain her, Sandra turned a previously man-centered fight scene into an equal opportunity brawl, instantly displaying the burgeoning spirit of independent womanhood that was characteristic of the 1920s.

Sabine Jacques, as Euphoria Blake, owner of the boardinghouse, in one monologue carries the history of southern lynching terror, the Great Migration, World War I and the Red Scare. We broke the speech down, from the young girl going away to school, to the future race leader meeting her idol, to the newly-minted communist and jailed felon to entrepreneur. I told her, yes, it’s a story of the past, but stay in the present for each beat.

Freshman Mary Elineema-Kidela was originally cast as an ensemble chorus member. When she told me after the first read-through that she was intrigued by the Pig Woman, I said,

“Great! That’s your part!” I had originally planned to use one actor, doubling the character with Euphoria, but Mary’s stepping up freed me to imagine the Pig Woman in a wholly new way. Her lithe, petite frame meant that I could move away from the stereotypical body image evoked by the character’s name and explore the deeper resonance of the role. We set out to answer Mary’s question, “What is her story?” Through non-verbal theatre we would learn how to pace the Pig Woman’s presence throughout the length of the play. Mary’s unique body and presence and her *danseuse*-like qualities, evocative of both Martha Graham and Carmen De Lavallade combined with her fierce Nina Simone spirit. I was determined to find suitable choreographic support. Erica Wilson-Perkins from UMass Department of Music and Dance was kind enough to step in. In two brief sessions, she gave Mary the “body language” for her “bat dance,” her labored walk up the stairs, and the ritual in the window at twilight that ends Act I. From the first moment, she appeared the bearer of ritual, in this world but not of it, of this world and not in it.

For every actor I created a chart of work and specific goals. Though I kept the notes to myself, hearing my mother’s counsel, I strove to apply them equally. Even ensemble members. My mantra was to make them understand that they could be essential without centrality, and if they gave more, they got more. By the end of our rehearsal process, going into production, every chorus member had a line, tailored to their specific gifts.

When I began this process, I knew I had a strong visual sense and ample literary dexterity. I wondered, however, how well I would work with actors. As an M.F.A. candidate focused equally on directing and dramaturgy, I was free to study in both arenas, but my teaching assistant duties were all dramaturgical. Relying on experience gleaned in the field, my lessons in Directing Studio and my independent projects, I sought to test my acumen with this project. In

addition to the marvelous realization of the play, the overwhelmingly glowing comments of my young ensemble were most affirming:

Because of you, I know I have a voice. And I will use it. – Sabrina Victor

This has been a life changing experience. Thank you for believing in me and thank you for seeing me! – Sabine Jacques

I have learned so much about myself through this process, especially what I am capable of as an actor. – Sarah Edkin

You have allowed me to go on a journey that has helped me to grow and feel strong, empowered and worthy as a black man and now I feel like I have a voice that matters and has something to say. – Brandon Barker

Dancin', improvising a song, meeting in the park for lunch, throwing a party, breaking up a fight, inverting language, empowering it with new meaning, originating black characters, these children of the African Diaspora and friends, from their disparate and distant points have woven a communal experience, re-membering. Through this young ensemble, the production of *Infants of the Spring* has disrupted the pattern of severance and erasure, literally and kinetically linking the African American performative excellence of the past to its future.



Figure 11. UMass Amherst Department of Theater 2018 production of *Infants of the Spring*, full ensemble and adapter/director Ifa Bayeza in notes session after first preview, the first day of spring, March 21, 2018. Photo credit: Sandra Seoane-Serí.

CHAPTER 5

POST-SCRIPT

“I get by with a little help from my friends”

Mounting a production of this magnitude would not have been possible without the vigorous, creative support of numerous individuals within and outside the department. Judyie Al-Bilali and Assistant Director Urgyen Joshi were grand pinch-hitters, providing actors with critical individual character work so that I could focus on ensemble scenes and transitions. The production’s Undergraduate Acting Adviser Milan Dragicevich shared with the cast a crash course in rhetorical devices, articulation and voice projection. Martha Cuomo and Julie Nelson tutored individual actors on their respective accents, ranging from Russian royalty to Danish grad student to Irish immigrant. Fight choreographer Ryan Winkles put amazing intellect behind explosive physicality in each fight scene. The actors flew across the stage with such passion and ferocity, they startled every night. Stage Manager Colin Fodaski kept me to my schedule. Kristin Jensen and the entire costume shop worked fingers to the bone with such good cheer. Technical Director Michael Cottom pushed his crew and himself double-overtime to deliver the set. Props Master Barbara Neulinger provided us the perfect period-specific phonograph, telephone and typewriter. These three simple additions to our minimalist set, symbolic tools of modern commerce and communication, subtly underscored the intersection of African American culture with technology and its crucial role in the Renaissance.

Turbo-Dramaturg Priscilla Page, amidst completing her own doctoral thesis, with associate dramaturg Shaila Schmidt, created the excellent actor packet, the production’s dynamic poster, as well as the richly detailed audience overview booklet and lobby display. Because of their work, the life of the play began even before audiences entered the theatre, and their post-

play discussions continued the dialogue well after the curtain. Production Manager Julie Fife, with gentle manner and soft voice, made it all happen, overseeing an enormous cadre of student workers too numerous to name, but to whom I am eternally grateful.

From my first week on campus, Afro-American Studies Program Chair Amilcar Shabazz has made me feel welcome. Together with Dr. John Bracey, he has supported my work in spirit and in-kind and has challenged me to ground my efforts in solid research, scholarship and a commitment to activism.

I could set out to experiment because of the solid foundation in scene work and text analysis I received in my two years of scene study and text analysis in the Actor Director Studio with Theatre Department Chair Gina Kaufman and Gil McCauley. Chris Baker always had my back whenever I felt like a voice in the wilderness playwright.

My cohorts Gaven Trinidad, Claudia Sloane, Jen Onopa, Christina Beam, Mary Corinne-Miller and the inimitable Tamara Harris have been a constant source of inspiration and enlightenment. May our paths cross often!

To my intrepid advisers Judyie Al Bilali, Harley Erdman (and Megan Lewis in absentia), who have kept me sane, my heartfelt thanks. From the moment I stepped on campus, they have been enthusiasts, supporting my vision and quest. With this production of *Infants of the Spring*, a dream deferred has come true.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND REFLECTION

THE DARK TOWER TODAY: TOWARD AN AFROFUTURIST HYBRIDITY

Wallace Thurman's vision speaks intensely to both historic and contemporary manifestations of America's racial pathology, presaging works such as Simone Browne's *Dark Matters*, which explores the role of surveillance in the "marking, making and marketing of blackness" (p.26) and the difficulty of asserting black identity under the persistent presence of white domination and the white gaze. *Infants of the Spring*, in a fictional setting, reveals the impact of this surveillance during an apex of black American creative innovation, and demonstrates through its plot how this crushing power can emanate from the black gaze, as well. Yet, even in this satiric mode, the work conveys in style and story the depth and texture of black creative genius as a central, defining element of the Jazz Age. It is self-reflective in its tragic awareness, suggesting that appropriation by mainstream popular culture will yield the movement's demise.

It is my hope that through the re-envisioning of this work as a drama, the Harlem Renaissance will be seen anew, not only as an inspiration to the post-World War I explosion of creative innovation that swept America, but as a movement equal in stature and productivity to major vortices of Modernism spanning the globe at that time. I would love for the literary coterie of Hughes, Hurston, Nugent and Thurman to be shown the respect and recognition afforded Hemingway and Fitzgerald or Meyerhold and Stanislavsky. I would love for the musical theater innovations of Sissle and Blake to be lauded in the same breath as Gershwin's name. I wish Duke Ellington had been crowned King of Jazz instead of Paul Whiteman and Louis Armstrong

acknowledged as Emperor. I will settle for this small, beginning gesture, reconstructing, remembering and re-presenting a novel, which, while flawed, had such great ambition – to capture an age in all of its magnificent, chaotic glory. While Fitzgerald is credited with coining the phrase The Jazz Age, to quote the great Congresswoman Maxine Waters, I'm "reclaiming our time."

I have pursued a production alive with contemporaneity. Conscious of the cycles of history, I have sought to suggest through directorial vision both the dynamism and dangers that the Harlem Renaissance shares with today's Hip Hop culture and to elicit a dialogue between past and present. I also strove to simulate the interplay of black arts during that time and to display the spectrum of interdisciplinary influences within my own theater aesthetic. I aimed to disrupt the narrative of African American marginality by bringing this new dramatic adaptation center-stage and placing the African American experience as central to this pivotal era in American and world history. I planned also to disrupt my own narrative as an experienced writer and dramaturg, to embrace and incorporate fully the role of director.

As a playwright, dramaturg and producer, I have built my career in the professional world of work. I have used the opportunity that the university has provided to employ the techniques I have learned, to capture my process and to systematize "thinking like a director."

I was keen to explore the notion of an African-centered aesthetic and to pursue a conceptual vision reflective of the independent spirit endemic to the Harlem Renaissance and to draw from black creative mentors in the quartet of Thurman, Hurston, Hughes and Nugent, who are featured so prominently in the story. My work in production also engaged in dialogue with the thoughts and writings of numerous contemporary black artists and scholars who are exploring this terrain. These individuals include director and writer Paul Carter Harrison and his insistence

on the presence of ritual as critical to the black aesthetic in drama, Omi Osun Joni L. Jones and her discussion of the use of Yoruba cosmology and Jazz improvisational theory in ensemble development, poet and literary scholar Kevin Young on the inherent integration of multiple arts in black aesthetics throughout history and choreographer Camille A. Brown in the exploration and elevation of black vernacular movement.

Similarly, I employed lessons I have gleaned from directing colleagues in the field. I have been privileged to have worked with tremendously gifted directors on many of my plays. The constellation includes Oz Scott, Shirley Jo Finney, Talvin Wilks, Benny Sato Ambush and Carl Hancock Rux. I am grateful for the techniques I have learned from them and am anxious to continue codifying my applications and modifications of these strategies and methods.

As a child of the Civil Rights Movement, with a life experience steeped in the intersection of race, I have made that the subject of my body of work. As a child of integration, I have evolved an aesthetic via that experience, drawing from the multiple influences that have crossed my path. Interrogating and re-examining historical events, new truths outside the dominant cultural narrative, bringing what is outside in, giving what was marginal central focus has been my mission.

Celebrating my life-long enthusiasm for experimental theater and, blending genres like a Jazz musician, bending history like a blue note, I have begun to create my own hybridity – my own *integration* – exploring in my process the intersections of the arts as I have in content explored intersections of race. As audience, as student and as practitioner, I have been fascinated by innovations with light, sound, movement and scale from directors as varied as Vsevolod Meyerhold, Robert Wilson, Robert Le Page, George C. Wolfe, and Ivan Van Hove. From these various influences and techniques, I have added my own inventiveness to create a unique

production environment and to present the Afrofuturist portrait of a failed Utopia as both a celebration of its glory and a cautionary tale.

APPENDIX

INFANTS OF THE SPRING

A man in a dark suit and hat is shown in mid-air, falling from a height above a city. He has a look of panic or surprise, with his mouth open and one hand clutching his hat. The city below is composed of several tall, colorful buildings in shades of orange, red, and yellow, with small windows. The background is a plain, light color.

INFANTS of the SPRING

BY WALLACE THURMAN

ADAPTED
AND
DIRECTED
BY
IFA
BAYEZA

INFANTS OF THE SPRING

Wallace Thurman's Jazz Age Classic

adapted by Ifa Bayeza

Infants of the Spring

Synopsis

Based on real events, Wallace Thurman's classic novel *Infants of the Spring* vividly examines the legendary Harlem Renaissance from the inside out with a virtual portrait gallery of the major African American literary personalities of the time. Thurman's incendiary work puts the entire New Negro Movement under indictment, challenging the power of art to create true social change and exposing the peril to the individual artist seeking to meet that expectation. A generation of writers blazed brilliantly and brazenly for an era and then, but for a few, became lost for decades. Set in 1929, Thurman's prescient novel foresees the fall. Equally hilarious and poignant, the tragicomedy captures the jagged fibrillating pulse of the American Jazz Age at its height and glorious end.

Raymond, a young writer, touted as the next great Negro voice, is crumbling under the weight of expectation. Prodded by his quixotic girlfriend, his philanthropic landlady and his Victorian mentor, he staves off anxiety and pays the bills by entertaining his young, progressive white friends with hot jazz, Harlem nights and wild bootleg parties. The experimental boarding house for aspiring Negro artists, where he lives, ruefully known as "Niggerati Manor," hosts an odd assortment of poets, painters and singers mingled with green newcomers from the Deep South and the exotic West Indies, providing the perfect setting for Raymond's eclectic "salons." When Stephen, a young Danish exchange student, becomes bedazzled with this insider's view of Harlem, Raymond casually suggests he try living there. To Raymond's surprise, Stephen accepts the offer. Ray seizes the opportunity to study and chronicle the effects. What begins as a cynical lark pushes the boundaries of tolerance and exacerbates the frailties of every tenant in the manor as this avant-garde experiment in integration seems to create its opposite – disintegration. Love turns to loathing, pride to infamy, and virtuosity to madness. One by one, Raymond's colleagues fall until he alone is left standing.

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CHARACTERS

An ensemble of thirteen actors plays multiple roles.

Principal characters in order of appearance:

THE PIG WOMAN: a trickster god or Obeah woman, perhaps from the West Indies.

RAYMOND: a dark-skinned, urbane Harlem Renaissance author from the West Coast.

STEPHEN: a visiting graduate student from Denmark.

SAM: a white radical, son of a stockbroker with communist sympathies.

COUNTESS NIJINSKY: a Jewish girl from the Bronx passing as Russian royalty.

PAUL: a strikingly handsome avant-garde painter.

EUSTACE: a pudgy, would-be classical concert singer.

PELHAM: a slow-witted, but eager, young man originally from the deep South. *

BULL: a local Harlem tough, longshoreman, chauffeur and amateur prize-fighter.

JANET: a pretty brown-skinned elevator-operator. *

ALINE: Janet's best friend, a very fair-skinned, white-looking shop girl.

EUPHORIA: Full-figured, landlady, a self-made realtor and "Policy" queen.

LUCILLE: Raymond's on again-off again girlfriend, a self-assured executive secretary.

BERNHARDT: A mysterious, over-the-hill actress.

DR. PARKES: An elder intellectual and race leader. *

*The actor playing **PELHAM** may also play **DR. PARKES**. The actor playing **JANET** may also play **BERNHARDT**.

A **SUPPLEMENTARY ENSEMBLE** of male and female actors may also play these roles as well as smaller roles, representing the roving chorus of New York City dwellers who inhabit the work

PLACE: Harlem and other parts of New York.

TIME: From the spring to the winter of 1929.

SETTING: The main scene of action is a Harlem brownstone, converted into a boarding house. The visual style should suggest the sleek, sensual Art Deco design of the times. The manor is multi-level with views into various quarters, the principal action in Raymond's apartment. Other scenes may include Paul's studio, the communal dining and living area, the hallway and doors of the top floor apartments, the main stairwell and the front stoop. This environment should also evoke other Manhattan settings, including the park, a speakeasy, street-sides, the subway, the courthouse, the Tombs, the Village.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

Harlem, late evening, mid-June. The Manor, a spacious brownstone building with multiple floors, the interior stairwell cloaked in shadows. Despite its somewhat rundown condition, majesty can be discerned.

An apartment door cracks opens to reveal a sliver of light on the upper floor. An old woman emerges in mismatched disheveled clothes. The PIG WOMAN talks in an unknown tongue of clicks, hisses and yelps and, descending the stairs, sweeps at the ceiling and air in a violent ritual motion with an old broom. Hearing noises, she stops and peers over the banister to the floors below.

From the street, RAYMOND leads his entourage of the COUNTESS, SAM and STEPHEN up the stoop and into the manor.

RAYMOND

The Countess knows about an after-hours cabaret.

COUNTESS

Exclusive! Top secret! Only I have password.

SAM

It's getting rather late.

RAYMOND

That's the idea.

COUNTESS

Nothing starts till 11:30.

RAYMOND

We promised Stephen a night of thrills.

STEPHEN

Hot jazz, wild rhythms!

SAM

Get ahold of yourself.

STEPHEN

Why on earth would I want to do that?

In the Manor's dimly lit hall, RAYMOND and the PIG WOMAN make momentary eye contact before she disappears into the darkness above.

COUNTESS

Stephen likes our speakeasies.

RAYMOND

Here we are, gentlemen. We'll have a couple of drinks and then set out.

STEPHEN

(fingering the bannister)

Nice diggings you have here.

RAYMOND

It's "digs." Damn right.

RAYMOND ushers the COUNTESS, STEPHEN and SAM into his apartment.

RAYMOND

My studio's right this way. Beware, Sam doesn't care for it very much. Countess?

SAM

I merely objected to the decorations, Raymond.

RAYMOND flicks on the light to his sparsely appointed studio apartment, dominated by a red lacquer writing desk with his typewriter. Giant paintings are displayed on the walls: bold tableaux of statuesque nudes, as if the art deco erotic works of Bruce Nugent have morphed with the incendiary vision of Kara Walker or the haunted Ayon Belkis. The figures appear to be alive with movement. Or they can be imaginary.

COUNTESS

It's art, Sam.

RAYMOND leans on his desk, blithely observing while his guests make themselves at home. Mesmerized by the paintings, STEPHEN walks downstage and peers into the audience as if more paintings were hanging there.

RAYMOND

He thinks they're decadent.

SAM

Flamboyant and vulgar.

STEPHEN mimics the poses in the paintings. The
COUNTESS ambles, joining in.

COUNTESS

I find them quite erotic. Especially this one.

RAYMOND

You see, Stephen, Sam can't forget that he's a Nordic and that I'm a Negro. According to all the sociology books, my taste is naturally crass.

COUNTESS

He must not go in for loud colors.

RAYMOND

It's a confession of my inferior race heritage. Am I right, Sam?

STEPHEN

I like the room ... And these pictures are rather astonishing. Who did them?

SAM

The most impossible person on the planet.

RAYMOND

Wrong again.

COUNTESS

Paul is one of the most delightful people in the world. I only hope he drops in before we leave, Stephen. You'll enjoy him.

STEPHEN

He certainly handles contrast well.

SAM

His pictures are obscene.

RAYMOND

Everything that Sam doesn't understand he labels obscene.

COUNTESS

You're supposed to be his oldest friend, Stephen. Maybe you're willing to take up his education where Raymond leaves off.

RAYMOND

Well, I'm going to start with a high ball. Last of the good stuff.

RAYMOND goes to an inset bar and begins mixing drinks.

SAM

Don't you think you've had enough?

RAYMOND
(handing drinks out.)

Shall I fix three, then?

COUNTESS

Make ours a double. We'll make up for Sam.

STEPHEN

Can't say that I'm crazy about the taste of your gin.

RAYMOND

Harlem gin! An invaluable and ubiquitous commodity. Couldn't do without it.

COUNTESS

It wobbles your legs and curls spine.

RAYMOND
(handing glass to SAM)

I made yours weak.

STEPHEN

When he was at University of Toronto, he wouldn't take a drop.

RAYMOND

A toast! Here's to your first time in Harlem, Stephen Jorgenson.

COUNTESS

To your first day in New York.

RAYMOND
(raising his glass)

To your first visit to these United States.

SAM

To fellowship.

STEPHEN

And my father's bank account.

COUNTESS

Vashe Zdarovye!

RAYMOND, STEPHEN and the COUNTESS drain their glasses.

STEPHEN

At last I know what firewater is.

RAYMOND

It's funny. I usually dislike Samuel's friends. Reformed socialist missionaries, they are all so saccharine and benevolent. You have no idea how they sympathize with me, a poor benighted Negro.

STEPHEN

It was all pretty foreign to me – coming to Harlem.

RAYMOND

(To the COUNTESS)

I got the impression he was anticipating some sort of cannibal attack.

STEPHEN

You're right, I was frightened. I had never seen a Negro before in my life! That is, not over two or three. New York is alarming enough, but when I emerged from the subway at 135th Street, it was the most eerie experience I have ever had. I felt so conspicuous, I wanted to camouflage my white skin, and assume some protective coloration. I suppose, in reality, no one paid the slightest attention to me, but I couldn't help but feel that everyone was sizing me up.

RAYMOND

The dark faces, suspicious eyes ...

COUNTESS

The only white person!

STEPHEN

I was ready to bolt!

SAM

I think you exaggerate.

STEPHEN

If anything, I'm guilty of understatement.

RAYMOND

Don't, for God's sake. When it comes to race, I prefer frankness to evasion anytime.

STEPHEN

Do all these Harlem houses have such nice interiors?

RAYMOND

Not by a damn sight. My landlady is a visionary. She knew the difficulties experienced by Harlem artists in finding congenial living quarters. She thought that by turning this house over to Negroes only engaged in creative work, she would make money.

STEPHEN

Is the house entirely filled with these ...er... creative spirits?

RAYMOND

Not yet. But we have high hopes. Only the top floor remains in the hands of the Philistines. One of the ladies up there claims to be an actress. We call her Bernhardt. The other tenant on that floor was living here when—

STEPHEN approaches the drawings to view them more carefully.

STEPHEN

Tell me more about the fellow who drew these.

PAUL and EUSTACE enter from a side door.

PAUL

Nothing doing. I'm a person you've got to see to appreciate. Really Raymond, another Nordic. Ain't he a beaut, Eustace?

SAM

Cut the comedy, Paul.

COUNTESS

Oh Paul, my pet, I want to introduce you to Stephen Jorgenson. He just arrived in America today, and this is, of course, his first visit to Harlem.

PAUL

(to STEPHEN)

You should part your hair on the other side.

RAYMOND

Don't scare him to death, fellas.

SAM

This is Paul, Stephen. He's the one responsible for these abominable drawings. And —

EUSTACE

Eustace Savoy! Actor, singer and what have you. Mad to gleet you!

RAYMOND

“Spoonerisms.” A poetic innovation.

PAUL
(to STEPHEN)

Have you ever been seduced?

STEPHEN

Oh my—

PAUL

You just look so pure and undefiled, I had to ask.

COUNTESS

Don’t mind Paul. He’s harmless.

PAUL

Speak for yourself, Czarina.

STEPHEN

I love your drawings.

PAUL

You should. Everybody should. They’re works of genius.

SAM

You’re as disgustingly arrogant as ever.

PAUL

Therein lies my charm, Samuel. You know you love us. Where’s the gin, Ray?

PAUL pours himself and EUSTACE two shots.

RAYMOND

To Samuel Carter! – Like so many radical migrants from New England, low man on the proletariat totem pole, on the verge of crawling penitently back to the wealthy uncle, when, lo and below, he becomes aware of—

COUNTESS

A new cause!

RAYMOND, PAUL, EUSTACE

The American Negro!

EUSTACE

We shise to rine!

A rare collection of individuals.

STEPHEN

PAUL and EUSTACE down their shots in one swallow.
PAUL immediately goes for refills.

RAYMOND
(snatching bottle from PAUL)

Hey, don't drain the bottle.

PAUL

It's not for us?

SAM

I'm ready to go whenever you are, Stephen.

STEPHEN

But I don't want to go just yet.

PAUL

Where you from, Stephen?

STEPHEN

Copenhagen, Denmark.

PAUL

Tell me about yourself.

STEPHEN

There's nothing to tell. I was born in Canada. My father is Norwegian, my mother, a Dane. The family moved back to Copenhagen, but I decided to return to get my degree at the University of Toronto. That's where I met Sam. And now I'm here getting a Ph.D. from Columbia.

PAUL

Why?

STEPHEN

There's nothing else to do. If I stop going to school, I'll have to go to work.

PAUL

See, he's one of us.

SAM

God forbid!

STEPHEN

But these drawings. Tell me about them.

PAUL

That's easy. I'm a genius. Never had a lesson in my life, and I never intend to. I think that Oscar Wilde is the greatest man that ever lived. I also like Blake, Rimbaud, Poe and Whitman. And, of course, Whistler, Gauguin, Picasso and Zuloaga.

STEPHEN

But that's not telling me anything about your paintings.

PAUL

Unless you're dumber than I think, I've told you all you need to know.

A timid knock on the open side door.

RAYMOND

Come.

PELHAM sidles into the room.

PELHAM

Hello everybody. I didn't know you had company.

RAYMOND

That's alright. Stephen Jorgenson, meet Pelham.

(bemused.)

He's an artist too.

STEPHEN

Pelham, is it?

STEPHEN proffers his hand. PELHAM steps back.

SAM

Pelham's the only decent person in this house.

RAYMOND

You mean he's the only one you can impress. What's that in your smock, Pelham?

PELHAM

Oh, um ... a new poem I been workin' on. Would you like to hear it?

RAYMOND

I can't tell you how much.

PELHAM

(retrieves a paper from his apron pocket)

Okay, okay ... “Beautious maidens alla flutter/ On life’s threshold ...

Beautious maidens/ Gracious mother

RAYMOND

Rhapsodic!

PELHAM

You think so? Um – that’s all I got so far.

RAYMOND

The night is young.

SAM

(under his breath)

Bloody hell.

PELHAM

Thank you, Raymond! You don’t know what it mean to me. You’re the great hope of the Negro people, Raymond. Everybody say that. I just wanna be like you! Making some fine poetry and art. This gonna be my magnum opus, “A Portrait of Two Girls,” daughters of Miss Isabelle, the actress lady who live upstairs. I gotta go finish the pictures, though. To go with the poem!

PELHAM exits in a flurry.

PAUL

Bring drinks!

SAM

You shouldn’t encourage him.

RAYMOND

Like I said, we’re still working on the leftovers.

STEPHEN

I’ll tell you what’s rhapsodic. All of the cabarets, the speakeasies, the private clubs, the theaters. All of the entertainers, musicians, singers and actors ... it’s marvelous!

COUNTESS

Harlem is bound to be startling and wondrous. Is it not part and parcel to zee greatest city in the world? Harlem, 1929! What better time could you ask for?

RAYMOND

There’s nothing miraculous about it. People rave about the progress of the Negro. The Negro had to make progress, or he wouldn’t have survived. We have the same percentage of

poverty, middle-class endeavor, family life, and underworld as everybody else. We function under the same conditions that make this city a nightmare for everybody.

STEPHEN

Jesus Christ, Raymond, you don't appreciate the place. You're too much a part of it.

RAYMOND

Me a part of Harlem? How come?

STEPHEN

You know what I mean.

RAYMOND

But I don't.

STEPHEN

Well, you live here. You've always lived here.

RAYMOND

Three years isn't always.

STEPHEN

You're quibbling now.

RAYMOND

Actually, I grew up on the West Coast.

PAUL

Utah, Hee-haw!

RAYMOND

Attended the University of California.

PAUL

Hardly anyone who lives here is from here, Stephen. We all come here to find what? Our dreams, our lot, our people.

EUSTACE

Some woyk.

PAUL

We all come here from somewhere.

STEPHEN

Where's that for you?

PAUL

... Gouldtown, New Jersey. Fiendishly ironic. A stop on the Underground Railroad. Fugitive slaves thought to hide out by blending in, marrying up with the local white folk – Dutch indentured servants who didn't know better. They blended in so well, after a while they didn't realize they were colored. When the census bureau came through and marked them with a "C", half the town committed suicide. *I ...* came to Harlem. I am thus the quintessential "New Negro." When I first met Raymond, I had to apologize.

(starts to pour himself another drink)

I didn't realize a person of his coloration could be so articulate.

RAYMOND

(taking the bottle from PAUL)

Will wonders never cease?

EUSTACE

Ghoul Town, huh? Paul's from Washington, DC.

PAUL

It was a good story. In reality, Stephen, Raymond's the authentic one. First novel, Broadway play. He even had some money un—

RAYMOND

Listen Stephen, just because you've become fascinated by this new and bizarre environment, you shouldn't lose your reason. Harlem is New York. Please don't let the fact that it's black New York obscure your vision. You're intrigued by the newness of the thing. You should try living here.

STEPHEN

By Jove, that's an idea! Shoot, if everyone else comes to Harlem, I don't see why I can't too. I'll move in with you.

RAYMOND

Move in? ... With me?

STEPHEN

Sure! I much prefer this room to the one I have now, and certainly prefer your company to that of those nincompoops at the International House. It's so interesting!

SAM

Stephen, white people don't live in Harlem.

STEPHEN

Why not? You said, yourself, everybody comes from somewhere.

SAM

It just isn't done, that's all.

PAUL

What on earth would your friends say?

STEPHEN

You're the only friends I give a damn about. There's plenty of room. I could sleep on the couch. I don't see why I shouldn't live here. If you don't mind?

RAYMOND

There isn't any reason why you shouldn't, but—

SAM

I can think of a few.

COUNTESS

He'll cover half the rent, darling. Free you up to write.

STEPHEN

Why, I could move in tomorrow! I think I will!

RAYMOND

... .. Glad to have you.

PAUL

There's no life to this party.

COUNTESS

Come on, let's all go to zat speakeasy.

SAM

And who's going to pay the bill?

PAUL

Why Stephen, of course.

STEPHEN

But—

PAUL

But hell! It's your party!

Scene transition: Wild party! Night club to speakeasy to cabaret to greasy spoon, gyrating, all-night juggernaut.

In the wee hours of the morning, the PIG WOMAN exits the building as a PAPERBOY rolls by and a lone BEAT COP strolls the empty street.

ACT ONE

SCENE TWO

RAYMOND's apartment, two weeks later, early July. EUSTACE looks over some record albums. STEPHEN, SAM and PAUL lounge while RAYMOND busies himself in last minute prep for his party, the Victrola softly playing in the rear.

PELHAM

Here your drinks.

EUSTACE

Ah, a throast to the toat!

As EUSTACE downs his drink.

STEPHEN

Handy guy, Pelham.

EUSTACE

(strolling to the Victrola with the records)

Old housemaid, right down to the bricks.

SAM

I can't believe you've actually been living in Harlem?

STEPHEN

Why? It's been two weeks.

SAM

I'm just surprised is all.

PAUL

You mustn't let so many things surprise you, Sam. It's a sign of adolescence.

RAYMOND

Wonder what's keeping the girls?

PAUL

Who wants to know?

RAYMOND

Who the hell asked?

PAUL

You, Raymond. Your pad, your party.

RAYMOND

Fiderk you, Paul. I'm not Sam, you know.

PAUL

Okay, Colonel.

EUSTACE

... We've got a name for the house.

STEPHEN

What is it?

EUSTACE

Niggerati Manor.

SAM

Whose idea was that?!

PAUL

Mine, of course.

STEPHEN

Niggerati Manor. Don't get it.

PAUL

You wouldn't.

SAM

All of us can't be as clever as you, Paul.

PAUL

This is news?

RAYMOND

The name's quite appropriate, I would say—

As JANET and ALINE enter.

PAUL

Ah, the delicious Aline and the nut-brown Juno.

JANET

The name is Janet.

Hello.

STEPHEN

... Maybe.

ALINE

She's a Negro?

STEPHEN
(whispering, incredulous)

Comes in all sizes, shapes and colors. Like fruit.

PAUL

So what's the dirt?

JANET

No dirt, 'cept Stephen's permanently become a nigger.

PAUL

Paul!

SAM

BULL strides up. Still in his chauffeur's jacket, he holds up a fresh bottle of liquor.

BULL

Everybody sober?

ENSEMBLE

Hooray for Bull!

RAYMOND

Pelham, we need you!

PELHAM takes BULL's bottle and jacket.

BULL

There's another pint in the pocket.

PELHAM

What are folks havin'?

As PELHAM scurries around taking orders, ALINE ventures back toward the Victrola, where EUSTACE is choosing records.

SAM

This man is a human being and should be treated as an equal.

JANET

Oh, shut up, Sam.

SAM

You people make a slave out of him.

(catching PELHAM as he passes)

Gin and tonic, no ice.

PELHAM exits.

BULL

It is a damn shame the way you do him.

RAYMOND

He enjoys it, Bull. He lives in the kitchen, literally! That's all he's used to, waiting on someone else. His artistic talent really lies in that direction.

SAM

I don't agree.

RAYMOND

Samuel, you never agree with anyone.

ALINE

Oh, shut up, Sam, you too, Raymond.

As a new record comes on, ALINE moves suggestively toward STEPHEN.

ALINE

Come on, Barrymore, let's dance.

JANET

Ooo, The Duke, Hot Feet! I love that one. Eustace, sing it with me!

EUSTACE

Eustace Savoy does not sing jazz.

JANET and ALINE

Negro please.

STEPHEN

This song has lyrics??

ALINE and JANET

Does now!

JANET
(improvising lyrics)

*Sweet Mama's runnin' wild,
And you lost your honey bun?
Well, Come on along
Where the night is young!*

*The blues comin' fuh yuh,
And you got nowhere to run?
Well, Come on along
And have some fun!*

*Come on up to Harlem,
Just ease on up the stair,
Cause everybody who's somebody
Is gon be there!*

*So put on another rekkud,
And turn up the juice,
We's raisin' up Cain
And raisin' the roo—oo-ooof*

ALINE attempts to demonstrate the grind to Stephen. BULL gleefully watches. SAM remains rooted to his chair, but his feet can't resist the rhythm. Suddenly EUSTACE jumps up and begins to scat along with the song. JANET picks up with a new verse.

JANET

*Yeah, Paps drinkin' whiskey,
And Mama drinks wine,
Bumpin' along,
To the Georgia grind!*

*If you're feelin' frisky,
Then I'm feelin' fine,
So come on along,
For a real good time!*

EUSTACE and JANET

*Come on up to Harlem,
Just Ease on up the stair,
'Cause everybody who's somebody
Is gon be there!*

EUPHORIA enters, a butterscotch bundle of energy. Seeing her, JANET drops out while EUSTACE obliviously continues. RAY moves to turn the music down.

EUSTACE

*So put on another rekkud,
And turn up the juice,
We's ah raisin' up Cain
And raisin' the roo—...*

(finally seeing EUPHORIA)

Oo—oo—oops.

EUPHORIA

Good God! Another party?

PAUL

Not at all, mia landlady, just a recreational period.

EUPHORIA

Got anything to drink?

EUSTACE

On its way, Madame Euphoria.

EUPHORIA

Well, Paul, gotta job?

PAUL

Of course not.

EUPHORIA

Well, why haven't you?

PAUL

I'm waiting for you to find me one.

EUPHORIA

Be at my office at nine in the morning. And I mean nine. You ought to be ashamed to sponge off your friends all the time.

PAUL

I should be ashamed? You mean they should be honored.

EUPHORIA

I'd settle to be paid some rent some time or other. Maybe like the first of the month?

As partyers move away to avoid this discussion, SAMUEL signals to STEPHEN. STEPHEN follows SAM into the hallway. EUPHORIA likewise motions to RAY and they sequester by his desk. While other partygoers slow dance and trade partners in the corner, simultaneous conversations ...

EUPHORIA
Who is that?

RAYMOND
My new roommate.

EUPHORIA
What?

RAYMOND
The Dane.

EUPHORIA
He's white.

RAYMOND
Believe me, he's harmless.

EUPHORIA
White and harmless? ...
Those two words don't go together.

EUPHORIA
...They're ... well, you know ...
Listen, this is a respectable house and
this is just too *strange*.

STEPHEN
What is it?

SAM
I'm worried about you.

STEPHEN
About me?

STEPHEN
How come?

SAM
Your moving up here and all.

SAM
It just isn't the best step to take.

STEPHEN and RAYMOND
Why not?

SAM
... They're ... well, you know ...
For a respectable white man,
this is just too strange.

STEPHEN
I'm only practicing what you profess to believe. And I've never been more contented in my life. This is heaven compared to that sterilized joint you put me in.

SAM
I guess it's all right, but, Stephen ...

EUPHORIA and SAM
You have to be careful.

STEPHEN
About what?

EUPHORIA

Don't get me started.

SAM

... Well ... the women for one.

STEPHEN

Oh, I see. That's what bothering you? Don't worry, old man. It's just a flirtation. I have no intention of adding to the current mulatto crop.

SAM

It's risky, Stephen. You don't know Negroes. You don't know anything about their problems.

STEPHEN

I know enough to realize that most of these problems exist only in the minds of people like you.

SAM

Now, you're quoting Raymond.

STEPHEN

And I couldn't quote a saner person. Get this straight, Sam. I'm no hypocrite. I like Raymond. I like his friends. I like Aline. And none of my likes are based on color. I know nothing of your damned American prejudices. A person is a person to me. I'm well able to choose my own friends.

SAM

There's no need to be angry.

STEPHEN

I haven't much patience with people who don't have the courage of their convictions.

SAM

But ...

Carrying a new tray of drinks from his apartment, PELHAM runs into STEPHEN and SAM. STEPHEN takes his glass and rejoins the party. SAM does likewise and reluctantly follows. As the trio enters RAY's studio, EUPHORIA downs her drink and stands.

EUPHORIA

Well, gotta go.

RAYMOND

What's the rush?

EUPHORIA

It's late, and I have to make time in the morning. Not being an artist, I gotta work.

PAUL

We should excommunicate you.

RAYMOND

Can't, Paul. We owe her rent.

EUSTACE

Why bring that up? Give me another drink, Pelham. Help me to drown my sorrows.

ALINE

Don't forget me.

JANET

Or me.

SAM

All of us, damn it.

PELHAM whirls around busily. EUPHORIA pulls RAYMOND aside.

EUPHORIA

Come on and see me to my car, will you, Raymond? I've got a wad of bills and I don't like these Harlem streets at night.

RAYMOND

Okay, Euphoria. See you later, gang.

RAYMOND and EUPHORIA exit.

ACT ONE

SCENE THREE

The sidewalk bordering the manor. EUPHORIA and RAYMOND walk arm in arm.

EUPHORIA

Think the house is going to go, Raymond?

RAYMOND

Sure. It's the grandest project, ever.

EUPHORIA

It doesn't pay.

RAYMOND

Did you expect it to?

EUPHORIA

I at least expected to collect the rent that's due when it's due.

RAYMOND

Who's behind?

EUPHORIA

Eustace and Pelham. I don't mind about Pelham so much. As long as he's there, I don't have to hire someone to keep the rooms clean or run the furnace, but Eustace makes no effort to get hold of some money.

RAYMOND

He has so much darn junk that he can pawn, you needn't worry.

EUPHORIA

I guess you're right. But is the house is going to be artistically productive? None of you seems to be doing much work. All I run into are gin parties.

RAYMOND

That's part of our creativity.

EUPHORIA

And I don't think you ought to let Paul hang around. He's nothing but a parasite.

RAYMOND

He's a most charming parasite and I'm certain he has more talent than any of us.

EUPHORIA

Why doesn't he do something with it then?

RAYMOND

Give him time. Some day he will surprise us all.

EUPHORIA

I hope so. I don't like unproductive people. Those girls for instance. They're no good.

RAYMOND

They're decorative.

EUPHORIA

Nigger girls ain't got no business being decorative. They're nothing but chippies, and nothing but trouble, especially with that that that--I meant this house to be a monument to the New Negro, not some dive for some ofays to be slinking uptown to do their business. I wish some more artists and writers would move in. And I wish you all would work like Pelham does.

RAYMOND

You should be thankful there's only one Pelham in the house. If the Negro Renaissance is ever going to live up to its name, it's going to be Pauls we need, not Pelhams.

EUPHORIA

But, Raymond—

RAYMOND

Euphoria ... You're the grandest landlady ever. No one else in Harlem would stand any of us.

EUPHORIA

When I come back, maybe somebody will be working for a change ... I'm banking on you.

RAYMOND

Good night.

EUPHORIA exits. RAYMOND retraces his steps.

RAYMOND

Word flashed throughout the nation announcing a "Negro Renaissance." New York City's top of the world! Harlem! The welcome mat to modernity! Novels, plays and poems by and about Negroes were deliriously acclaimed. Blues shouters, tap dancers, high yaller chorus girls, and singers of Negro spirituals were reaping an unparalleled harvest. The Negro was evident in high places more than ever before, but unless the group began to do something worthwhile, there would be little chance of their making a

foundation. Could culture be the rock upon which their people could build? Or were they just a fad? Prone to make one grand surge, then sink into oblivion?

(A scream comes from the house and then a crash.)

RAYMOND

What the hell ...?

ACT ONE

SCENE FOUR

The Manor hallway, moments later.

RAYMOND enters followed by JANET to find ALINE on the bed sobbing while STEPHEN and BULL are locked together, brawling. Both are quite drunk, swearing.

STEPHEN

The bastard's trying to kill me!

ALINE

He slapped me!

RAY separates BULL and STEPHEN, who gets thrown to the floor. As RAY tries to hold BULL's arms, restrained by JANET, ALINE kicks and punches at BULL.

BULL

And by God, I'll slap you again! Y'hussy! With a white man, eh? Your own race ain't good enough? You want a white man?

(breaking RAY's hold, he lunges for ALINE as RAY is spun to the floor.)

You goddam bitch, I'll kill you!

As ALINE and JANET flee from the room, STEPHEN grabs BULL from behind and is sent crashing into the bed.

ACT ONE

SCENE FIVE

The apartment, the next afternoon. Sunlight streams through the windows. RAYMOND awakens still sitting in the corner. STEPHEN is passed out on the bed. PAUL is indolently leaning against RAY's desk, his legs stretched out onto the floor.

PAUL

Good morning.

RAYMOND

How the hell did you get in here?

PAUL

I had to sleep somewhere. The Bull's in my bed.

STEPHEN awakens and slowly sits up.

PAUL

You will seduce colored ladies, will you?

STEPHEN

Say, that guy was nuts.

PAUL

Nonsense, he's just a good Negro.

STEPHEN

You mean he's a damn fool.

PAUL

For trying to protect the chastity of his womenfolk?

RAYMOND

Go to hell, Paul.

PAUL

All right Raymond, but you know I'm right. We all can't be as civilized as you.

STEPHEN

Do you mean that guy actually got sore at me?

PAUL

Oh no. He just felt playful. Forget it. I'm going to see how near Pelham is to breakfast.

PAUL exits.

RAYMOND

Damn awful mess you started.

STEPHEN

What? You're as bad as Sam. Can't a fellow rush a girl? What's the row? Ow!

RAYMOND

All Negroes aren't alike. There are some who object to seeing Negro women with white men.

STEPHEN

Horse shit. You go out with the Countess.

RAYMOND

That's different. She's a patron.

STEPHEN

You're nuts. Let's eat.

STEPHEN on his exit is startled by BULL entering. Behind BULL are PAUL and PELHAM, holding a serving spoon and potholder. BULL has a flattened cardboard box under his arm.

BULL

'LoHow y'all doin'?

STEPHEN immediately backs up. As the quartet enters, BULL sets the cardboard box down beside RAY's desk.

BULL

What'd y' say, Stephen?

(slaps STEPHEN on the shoulder.)

Weren't we pie-eyed last night! Jeez, was I drunk! ... I'm a man, you know.

Only PAUL has the temerity to laugh.

BULL

I'm a man. An' I expect to be a man among men. Now maybe I was in the wrong last night. I'm so goddam bullheaded when I get drunk, but you see, I ain't used to seein' no

white man with no colored woman ... But I forgot you wasn't no ordinary white man. An' Aline ain't exactly colored 'less you know it Aw Hell, I'm sorry.

STEPHEN

(smiling triumphantly at RAYMOND)

'S'all right, Bull.

BULL

My mama was took by a white man, and an uncle of mine was lynched on suspicion of havin' a white woman. I swore to avenge them ... by havin' every white woman I could, an' by hurtin' any white man I could get my hands on. I hates the bastards! If ever I catch one of 'em round one of my women, hell's doors won't open quick enough to catch him ... But, Stephen, you ain't nothin' but colored like the rest of us. I like you.

BULL grabs STEPHEN and pulls him close.

PAUL

(Noticing the flattened cardboard box.)

What you got there, Bull?

BULL

Just a drawing of mine I brung along to show you.

PAUL

Drawings!

Everyone crowds around him.

BULL

Yeah, I always did like to draw from a kid. Been takin' a correspondence course. Ain't like you guys. I'm after money. I don't wanna work for some white man all my life, and I'm too dumb to be a doctor or nothin' like that. I box pretty good, but I'm real apt at drawin'.

(proudly opens the box to display the inside.)

Didn't have no paper, so I did it up on this here cereal box.

EUSTACE

Nice dress.

PAUL

Nice biceps, too.

STEPHEN

Kind of Amazonian.

PELHAM

He coulda sharpened the pencil.

ACT ONE

SCENE SIX

The apartment, a few days later, afternoon.
RAYMOND is typing at his desk. He stops,
crumbles up the paper and then reaches for the
phone. Spot on LUCILLE on the other end.

LUCILLE

New York Urban League. Mr. Craig's office. This is Lucille, how may I help you?

RAYMOND

Let's have an affair.

LUCILLE

Too conventional. How about lunch? Roscoe's?

RAYMOND

Anyplace but Roscoe's. Sam's there with Stephen. Trying to save him from Harlem.

LUCILLE

Sam's a pill. The subway kiosk on 135th?

RAYMOND

No, let's meet at our spot in the park.

Scene segues from the busy 135th Street station to
Central Park North, LUCILLE enters, carrying a
pint of Chinese food with chopsticks already in
place. They stand very close, not touching, the pint
container between them.

RAYMOND

'Lo 'Cille.

He spreads his jacket on the grass. She sits beside
him and offers him the container. They are used to
sharing.

LUCILLE

Did you finish your chapter?

RAYMOND

Sometime this morning after the liquor was gone and I'd kicked Aline and Stephen out of
my bed.

LUCILLE

Aline and Stephen?

RAYMOND

They're quite gone on one another, despite Bull and Samuel.

LUCILLE

I don't see what Stephen sees in her.

RAYMOND

Cat.

LUCILLE

What I really meant, of course, is that I don't see why she wants Stephen.

RAYMOND

I thought you liked him.

LUCILLE

He's the only one of your friends I do like, but I wouldn't go to bed with him.

RAYMOND

He hasn't asked you, 'Cille.

LUCILLE

It wouldn't do him any good if he did. I'd never go to bed with any white man.

RAYMOND

I'm disappointed in you, 'Cille. You, of all people. You spend ninety-nine percent of your time, in the office and out, with Nordics. You agree with me that a human being is a human being, and yet ...

LUCILLE

I wouldn't go to bed with a white man, because I'd never be sure that I wasn't doing it just because he was white.

RAYMOND

Do you think that about Aline?

LUCILLE

I'd bet my life on it. I'd be willing to bet almost every other Negro woman Stephen meets will automatically assume the horizontal position the moment he makes a pass.

RAYMOND

I make a pass every time I see you.

LUCILLE

In view of our mutual emancipated beliefs, I thought it important to prove platonic friendships are possible and sensible.

RAYMOND

Oh shut up ‘Cille. Haven’t you ever been in love?

LUCILLE

Damned tootin’. All my life.

RAYMOND

Can’t you ever be serious?

LUCILLE

About love? Over Chinese food?

RAYMOND

How’s the job then?

LUCILLE

Let’s don’t talk about that. My idea of heaven, some place where there were no typewriters, adding machines, or sentimental persons prating on about creating goodwill between whites and blacks.

RAYMOND

Like that chap, Miller in your office.

LUCILLE

The dog.

RAYMOND

Did he try to make you again?

LUCILLE

I don’t give him the chance. I like salary for my work and I don’t do bed duty after hours. Wait—you finish your chapter, really?

RAYMOND

Another day in the life of Niggerati Manor.

LUCILLE

I hope you don’t always have a mob like you did the last time I was there. I worry about you, you know ... Yes, it’s unfortunate the warehouse burned up—

RAYMOND

Unfortunate? I spend my own money to—give voice to a New Negro manifesto, and my entire investment, my entire royalty check—poof! “A quarterly for Young Negro Artists! FIRE!” First edition so hot, it went up in flames! If it wasn’t funny, it would be hilarious.

LUCILLE

You can't let that throw you, Ray. You can't dwell on what was lost ... Is Stephen going to stay permanently?

RAYMOND

Seems so.

LUCILLE

Is Aline part of your plan to keep him there?

RAYMOND

Don't be silly. That's their own doing.

LUCILLE

All right, innocence. But I know you. Half of your life is spent maneuvering your friends, creating distraction for yourself.

RAYMOND

Poppycock.

LUCILLE

Liar. You'd even make a pawn of me if I'd let you.

RAYMOND

Is that the reason you won't have an affair with me?

LUCILLE

Affair with you? Don't be silly.

RAYMOND

I'm quite serious.

LUCILLE

Raymond, I've told you a dozen times—

RAYMOND

All right, then, let's forget it.

LUCILLE

As you will. Let's eat.

RAYMOND

... I need to get back to work.

He hands her back the container. A slight expression of disappointment flits across LUCILLE's face as RAYMOND exits.

ACT ONE

SCENE SEVEN

Tight circle of light on EUPHORIA, standing and in the middle of a story, outside of time.

EUPHORIA

The backwoods of Georgia. I had never been away from home before. I had never had any friends, never had any comrade but my mother, the dirty little brats she taught, and my father, whom I seldom saw. Spent most of his time roaming the highways, with a knapsack and a Bible, preaching to country Negroes. I hadn't wanted to leave home. I did not know how to mix with people. But my mother took no notice. No siree! She packed me off and I had to seem glad to go ... I arrived in Huntsville. Alabama? Scared to death when I got off that train ... There was supposed to be a school bus. I couldn't see nothin'. It was so quiet, deathlike as I stood there. Well, I looked around. Maybe the bus was late. Right there on the side of the road was a telegraph pole. And dangling from it, the burnt body of a Negro man ...

Lights up to reveal the exterior of RAY's building, early evening, the summer sun just setting.

STEPHEN, ALINE, PAUL, SAM, JANET and EUSTACE seated on the stoop. EUPHORIA joins them, sitting in the middle. RAYMOND lingers on the periphery.

EUPHORIA

I tell you I tore lickety split down that road. Found out the school hadn't even sent the bus. Folks was too scared ... But, I couldn't get that picture out my mind. I had nightmares, wakin' everybody up. I started hearing voices, "Your race needs you! Negroes have suffered too long! Fight and fight out in the open!" I don't blame folks at that school for thinking me crazy. I'd make up fiery speeches and shout them to the pine trees. The school couldn't hold me. I was determined to do something! I was on a white charger, leading a black army to victory!

RAYMOND

And so ...

EUPHORIA

Poor little fool that I was, I came to New York! No money, no friends, nothing but a bunch of silly dreams and that terrible urge to fight for my race.

PAUL

You were dumb.

SAM

How do you mean dumb?

PAUL

To be like that ... to want to fight?

SAM

Haven't you any race pride?

PAUL

Fortunately, no. You have enough for both of us.

RAYMOND

Go on Euphoria.

EUPHORIA

(standing to act out her story)

The moment I got to town, I went to the offices of the NAACP. I just knew they would welcome me with open arms as just the type of woman they had been looking for. The damn stenographer told me to make an appointment. Didn't even look up. So, I bust right past her and came face to face with my hero, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, himself, a bronze idol with a curlicue mustache and a little gautee. I forgot all my fiery speeches. My tongue was just like a piece of lead. I could only say that I wanted to work. He sent me to the YWCA, ain't that nothin'? Found me a job doing housework. Me, doing housework! When I had come all the way up here to be a race leader! ... Somebody give me a cigarette, will yuh?

RAYMOND comes up to her and leads her back to the group. He sits behind and straddles his legs for her to lean back.

EUPHORIA

... I was cookin' for some radical dame downtown. Found me reading Marx. Gone was the Negro cook. I became a new person in her eyes. "My Negro kitchen mechanic who reads Marx," she'd say. My dream had come true! She took me to the Village and I joined the Socialist Party. I wasn't just helping my own race, but the entire race of working men and women.

PAUL

Oh no.

SAM

Shut up, will you?

EUPHORIA

I was living. I was happy. Tramping from one sweat shop to another, mass meetings and caucuses. Late at night cafes in the Village. I took a lover.

PAUL

A what?

EUPHORIA

I lost all sight of color and race.

PAUL

Was he an ofay?

EUPHORIA

(standing again, deflecting)

Freedom, free love. It was all the same game ... Then the war came.

(snaps her fingers)

Changed everything ... They hauled me into court and charged me with sedition. Couldn't imagine a Negro could think deep enough to be a radical. Told me to plead insanity. Locked me up in the Tombs like a common vagrant and put me to what? Scrubbing floors ... When they let me out, I found nothing but strangers. The noble ranks of the Reds were hiding in attics or basements, muttering their speeches to themselves. I was disgusted as hell. So, I came back ... home to Harlem. Colored were coming by the thousands needin' housing and jobs. I opened an employment agency, sending folks out to do housework, for forty percent of their wages ... exploiting the people I had once planned to save. I wanted money and nothing else.

PAUL

And your lover?

EUPHORIA

Damn the lover!

STEPHEN

Here's two dollars. Who wants gin?

As the group disperses, EUPHORIA lingers in thought, RAYMOND watching her. As she exits, he heads for his typewriter.

ACT ONE

SCENE EIGHT

A week later, mid-July, toward the end of the workday. RAYMOND sits at his desk. He is in the midst of typing EUPHORIA's story.

RAYMOND

The future leader of the race now ... wanted money and nothing else.

He stops to review the page, and then begins typing again.

As he types ...JANET peaks in.

JANET

Hey.

RAYMOND

Come! Well?

JANET

Got anything to drink?

RAYMOND

Is that the reason you disturbed me? No, I have nothing to drink and no money.

JANET

What's wrong with you?

RAYMOND

I happen to be busy.

He returns to his typing. JANET meekly settles herself into a chair. He stops.

JANET

Finished?

RAYMOND

Looks like it.

JANET

Don't be so nasty, Raymond.

RAYMOND looks at her for the first time and observes JANET's eyes are full of tears.

RAYMOND

What the hell?

JANET

I'm a damned fool, Raymond.

RAYMOND

So are we all.

JANET

Raymond, I'm in love.

RAYMOND

Poppycock.

JANET

Honest to God.

RAYMOND

With whom?

JANET

Stephen.

RAYMOND

Don't be silly.

JANET

I ain't, Raymond. I love him.

RAYMOND

So does your best friend.

JANET

No she doesn't.

RAYMOND

Well, she acts like it.

JANET

She don't love him, not like me. She just took him to show me she had more chance. Don't you see Raymond, if he'd never seen her, I'da had him. He likes her best 'cause she's almost white. All men are like that. Pass up a brown girl to get to a high yaller.

RAYMOND

You're a bigger fool than I thought you were.

JANET

I'm serious. I never fell for a white man before. Aline has. But Stephen's the first one for me and I'd give anything to have him.

RAYMOND

Just because he's white?

JANET

It's not that. It's just that ... it's just that he's different.

RAYMOND

Different from Negroes. He has white skin. It's a badge of honor you'd like to wear.

JANET

I don't see where you got any right to talk. What about Bah-bah-rah — Countess Nijinsky! She's not white I suppose.

RAYMOND

We're good friends.

JANET

Good friends, yeah, I know. So are Stephen and Aline good friends. The little whore. But I'll show her. She can't keep him. I ain't yaller, but I can get a white man same as she.

JANET exits.

The voice of the COUNTESS emerges from behind the couch, where she has been doing yoga.

COUNTESS

She doesn't know how to work with what she has, Raymond.

RAYMOND

How did you get in here?

COUNTESS

You forget, I have zee key. Countess Barbara Vanitzanov Zarkarka Nijinsky! Your patron, here to keep you honest and productive.

RAYMOND

That's funny.

COUNTESS

(dropping into her natural Bronx accent.)

It's funnier than you think. Have you seen the *Harlem News* this week? Did you notice how my name was flung all over the society page?

RAYMOND

I never read that junk.

COUNTESS

Well, the countess was here and the countess was there. It's beginning to get awful. I'm hiding out. *In-cog-Negro*.

RAYMOND

Don't you enjoy it?

COUNTESS

I'm not entirely a rat, Raymond. I do have some feelings. But a girl's gotta make a living.

RAYMOND

I don't get the connection.

COUNTESS

I'm washed up downtown. Besides, I can get better treatment and more money from colored men than I ever made downtown. Face it. I've got limited looks and no special talent. When I first came up here, I enjoyed it. Everybody made such a fuss over me. Someone called my Countess the first night and I've been the Countess ever since. Now it just makes me sad.

RAYMOND

Why?

COUNTESS

I see through it. It's tragic to realize that your Negro men are so eager. And I'm not talking about men like Bull, no I'm talking about your professional men, doctors, lawyers, dentists, businessmen, social workers, even writers. Yapping about racial injustice and racial solidarity, and then the moment someone like me comes along and gives 'em the gleet, they fall all over each other. It's tragic.

RAYMOND

More pathetic than tragic. Bleed 'em well, then write your memoirs.

COUNTESS

Pays the rent.

(Reverting to her Russian accent.)

Are we so very different, Raymond?

STEPHEN enters.

STEPHEN
Jesus Christ, I'm tired. Get any work done?

RAYMOND
With some difficulties.

STEPHEN
What kind of difficulties?

RAYMOND
Yours, Stephen.

STEPHEN
Mine? Say, what the hell's eating you tonight?

RAYMOND
Your love affairs.

STEPHEN
Talk sense. You're drunk.

COUNTESS
Janet's been talking to him about you.

STEPHEN
Janet? What have I done to her?

COUNTESS
She says she loves you.

STEPHEN
Horse feathers.

RAYMOND
She says you prefer Aline to her because Aline's almost white, but she's going to make you despise her brown skin.

STEPHEN
Are you completely nuts?

RAYMOND
I'm not that imaginative, Stephen.

STEPHEN
But I hardly noticed the girl since I've been chasing Aline.

COUNTESS
Since?

RAYMOND
Then you have given her a play?

STEPHEN
Hell, I kissed her, and she asked me to take her out, but I didn't think she was serious.

COUNTESS
Well, she thinks she is. You'd better give her a break.

STEPHEN
I'm not that ambitious.

RAYMOND
Go ahead, give the girl something to be thrilled about.

STEPHEN
What's eating you anyhow? If I thought—

PAUL bursts into the room.

RAYMOND
What the hell do you want?

PAUL
Come upstairs, all of you.

STEPHEN
For what?

PAUL
We're gonna pray for gin and we need reinforcements.

STEPHEN
Grand idea.

PAUL
Come on, Raymond.

RAYMOND
Oh all right, but I wish you people would leave me alone some time.

PAUL
You people?

ACT ONE

SCENE NINE

Moments later, PAUL and STEPHEN mount the stairs, followed by the COUNTESS and RAYMOND. On the second landing, they join JANET, ALINE, BULL and EUSTACE in the middle of a prayer circle.

EUSTACE

Beloved, we join hands here to pray for gin. An aridity defiles us. Our innards thirst for the juice of juniper. Something must be done. The drought threatens to destroy us. Surely, God who let manna fall from the heavens so that the holy children of Israel might eat will not let the equally holy children of Niggerati Manor die from want of a little gin. Children, let us pray.

(EUSTACE rolls his head heavenward.)

Oh, Lord, Lord, send us some gin. Oh Lord! Send us someone with some money to buy gin, or visit thyself upon the bartender on the corner and make him allow us credit. Father in heaven, we bend before Thee. Hear, oh hear our plea. Send us some gin, Lord, send us some!

(A low moan escapes, one often heard in a colored church revival. It grows and swells throughout the room, and then abruptly stops.)

And, Lord, send me a little sandwich, too.

RAYMOND attempts to ease out.

PAUL

Raymond, you're always good at chiseling a couple of bottles.

RAYMOND

I'm not over-anxious for a drink.

PAUL

Who wants to hear one of my stories?!

RAYMOND, ALINE, JANET and STEPHEN

Nobody.

PAUL

Then I'm off for adventure.

PAUL descends the stairs and exits the building. The others follow in a staggered pattern.

BULL

Aw heck, I'll go and bring back enough gin to ossify the whole bunch of you.

EUSTACE exits upstage left toward his flat.

BULL

See yuh, college man.

BULL exits. RAYMOND unrolls the paper and sits down on the stairs to read.

JANET, lingering on the stairwell, looks back at ALINE and STEPHEN whispering to each other on the upstairs landing.

JANET

I'm going home.

ALINE

Don't let me stop you. The key's in my pocketbook.

JANET

I don't need your keys. I'm not living at your house anymore.

JANET exits. STEPHEN makes an attempt to call out. ALINE restrains him.

ALINE

Never mind, baby. She ain't goin' nowhere. She'll be right there when I get home.

STEPHEN

(sensing RAYMOND's mood)

Let's go to Paul's. He won't mind.

ALINE and STEPHEN exit left to PAUL's studio. Suddenly, from the third floor, PELHAM careens down the stairs, nearly knocking RAYMOND over.

RAYMOND

Whoa, whoa, whoa!

PELHAM

Got to put the finishing touches on my picture. A portrait of Pavlova. I copied it out of the *New York Times* "Rotogravure" supplement.

As PELHAM continues to his room ...

EUSTACE enters hallway, followed by
EUPHORIA.

EUSTACE

Every day, another unknown Negro singer gets headlines in the paper—Starring on Broadway! I'm older and more experienced, and what do I get? Some sometime gig in Harlem, maybe.

EUPHORIA

Pretend it's Carnegie Hall!

EUSTACE

I won't sing spirituals.

EUPHORIA

Why won't you sing them? They're your heritage.

EUSTACE

Nonsense. Must every Negro singer croon slave songs?

EUPHORIA

Roland Hayes sings them.

EUSTACE

He throws them to his audience like a bone. I'm no slave and I won't sing slave music even if I never have a concert.

EUPHORIA

You seem perfectly content to never have your rent, too.

EUSTACE

I have no further interest in the matter.

EUSTACE turns back to her and exits upstage.

EUPHORIA

It's a job, Negro!—Raymond! This moron, I got him an audition. He can sing all the Schubert, Schumann, Handel, Brahms and Beethoven he likes, but he 's gotta sing some damned spirituals ... What am I to do, Raymond? He wants to sing opera. You know as well as I do that Eustace can barely sing anything. Raymond, can't you make him understand?

EUPHORIA exits, RAY catches BERNHARDT shrouded in black, peering from the upper floor.

RAYMOND

Evening. Care to run lines?

In a huff, BERNHARDT disappears behind her apartment door.

ACT ONE

SCENE TEN

Late July PAUL's studio. PAUL sketches while SAM sits on a stool, his uncomfortable model.

PAUL

I had been walking for miles, not having any cab fare. I didn't want to come home. I saw this apartment house. Dimly lit, warm and inviting. And sure enough, there was the nicest cubby hole beneath the stairs. I lay down and went to sleep, dreaming a flower garden, canopied by spreading oaks, and perfumed by fresh magnolias. The soil was pungent and black, fecund. White, red lilies, pale narcissi, slender polychromatic orchids, lotus blossoms. The trees were so thick, only an occasional sunbeam filtered through. I was in Eden, aware of a presence calling me, luring me closer, until there was a complete merging and supreme ecstasy. Then a scream woke me up. I had been discovered. I could hear the woman clattering down the tile hallway, clak, clak, clak, clak, clak—shouting for a policeman. I jumped, bumped my head against the staircase, rushed out to the sidewalk and saw her wildly gesticulating to the cops. Naturally, I ran upstairs, over to the next apartment. Came down the steps and nonchalantly strolled onto the street.

SAM

Did you really have that dream?

PAUL

You would ask.

SAM

That's no answer. Did you really have that dream?

PAUL

Of course.

SAM

Was the presence male or female?

PAUL

I don't know.

SAM

Did you ever have an affair with a woman?

PAUL

Certainly.

SAM

Did you ever ... indulge in homosexuality?

PAUL

Of course!

SAM

Which did you prefer?

PAUL

Honestly, I don't know why you come up here.

The scene opens to reveal the rest of Niggerati Manor. At the center, RAYMOND composes at his desk as the actions and sounds of the building swirl round him.

From the rear comes EUSTACE's lugubrious yowl. He enters.

EUSTACE

All right, already! I'll sing my spirituals! I'll so astound them with my repertoire, they'll have to realize my true *métier*! *Hee-ee-hee-ee-hee-ee-hee ... Ezekiel saw the wheel/ Way up in the middle of the air/Now Ezekiel saw da wheel in a wheel/Way in the middle of the air ... Who's that yonder ... Who dat? ... Who's that/Who dat—Shit ... Who's that yonder dressed in white? Way in the middle of the air! It must be the children of the Israelites! Way in the middle of the air!*

As EUSTACE bellows, lights up to reveal PAUL painting with a fury. PELHAM in his downstage room is drawing, a sketchpad on his lap, his hand movements painstakingly deliberate.

PELHAM

The finishing touches on my magnum opus! ...

RAYMOND

His "Portrait of Two Girls" ... the two daughters ... of the actress. No one, except Pelham, ever had much traffic with her.

PELHAM

Oh, my pie!

PELHAM checks the oven. He pulls out a fresh pie, and with great attention, puts a pie on a tray, adds a flower. Sketch pad under his arm, PELHAM carefully picks up the tray and starts his slow trek across the hall and up the stairs.

RAYMOND

Pelham was ... different. He would bake her cakes and pies. Cut out paper animals and color them for the girls. Hardly a day passed that they did not invade his room to watch him work. It was inevitable that he should finally start painting their portraits.

PELHAM reaches BERNHARDT's upper floor door and knocks. The door opens slightly, and PELHAM bows reverently and sidles inside. As the door closes behind him, the PIG WOMAN peaks out.

RAYMOND

The Pig Woman lived next door to her. It was not known how long she had been living in the House. Euphoria found her there. And there she remained.

(stops his speech to ponder this strange creature)

Three times a week, she left at six in the morning and always returned exactly twelve hours later. The other days, she remained unheard, unseen, a silent cipher of a person who held converse with no one except herself ... I remember when I first saw her. I had just moved into the house ...

The PIG WOMAN remains on the stairwell as the scene shifts in time to ...

ACT ONE

SCENE ELEVEN

The Manor stairwell, three years earlier.

PAUL is supervising PELHAM and EUSTACE who are moving this way and that, carrying a huge boxed painting down the stairs. RAYMOND enters, carrying a box.

PAUL

Careful, careful. It's my latest.

(to RAYMOND)

This will go perfectly in your new apartment. You've got the right light, space for it to breathe.

EUSTACE

Did you ever want to be an interior decorator or somethin'?

PAUL

I must have an aesthetic ambiance!

EUSTACE

Could the "ambiance" be a little bit bigger?

From the top landing, the PIG WOMAN utters a hoarse, guttural shriek, as if coming from the throat of a wounded parrot.

RAYMOND, PELHAM and EUSTACE rush into the hall to find her wildly gesticulating.

Shaking her broom, she points toward the rafters of the building and the unseen sound of battering wings.

PELHAM

Don't worry, I'll git it!

PELHAM rushes up the stairs and grabs the broom from the PIG WOMAN. EUSTACE hides behind the boxed painting. The PIG WOMAN descends to the center landing and points wildly as PELHAM swats at the invisible creature flying about. PAUL leans on the bannister, laughing.

PIG WOMAN

Dat Evil Spirits, I tell you. Bad luck. Dis house be doomed. De people in it be damned!

PELHAM

I got it! I got it!

The PIG WOMAN scurries up the stairs and disappears into her flat.

PELHAM emerges from the rear, tenderly holding a trembling piece of newspaper in his palms.

PELHAM

I think I got it.

PAUL

It was a bat.

RAYMOND

A bat, a stray bat, blindly beating itself against the ceiling.

Taking the paper from PELHAM's hands, PAUL efficiently wraps it into a neat triangle.

PAUL

I'll take it to the cellar and burn it.

PELHAM follows PAUL a few bewildered steps.

ACT ONE

SCENE TWELVE

The manor, back in the present, a few days later,
now mid-August.

PELHAM

(Spreading his arms wildly like wings)

Whew! I finished! I finished my picture. Whew! It look just like 'em. I got the colors just right. Look! See!

As different tenants come to their door or pass him
on the stairs, PELHAM stops to show off his work.

PAUL

Pelham, you're a Dadaist!

SAM

Hideous!

PELHAM

Thank you!

JANET

(Sitting on the steps by herself)

Did you ever think about art school?

ALINE

Unbelievable.

STEPHEN

Rather incongruous background.

PELHAM

Thank you! Thank you! Miss Isabelle say she really like it, too. She say to give her the picture and a poem to go with it, so I can't fix no dinner for y'all tonight.

RAYMOND

The muse must function this one time, uninterrupted by menial tasks.

PELHAM exits, rushing to his room.

PAUL

Well, I guess I'll cook.

RAYMOND

You're volunteering?

PAUL

On one condition ... I must be left alone.

STEPHEN

Pray tell, what's it going to be?

PAUL

Meat balls and spaghetti.

ACT ONE

SCENE THIRTEEN

An hour later, RAYMOND's studio,

RAYMOND, STEPHEN and ALINE are already eating. PAUL is standing upstage center with his cooking utensils as if they were paint brushes. EUSTACE enters and sits down to resume his meal.

EUSTACE

Three times I been Pelham's door to tell him it's dinner. I ain't going for that Negro again.

STEPHEN

This seasoning is so unusual, Paul. How did you get it so tangy, almost sweet.

PAUL

I knocked over the contents of the sugar bowl, I believe.

PELHAM enters, sheepishly reverent.

PELHAM

I have written ... my poem.

PAUL

The cognoscenti might scoff, but the public will acclaim.

PELHAM automatically begins gathering the dirty dishes and then stops, remembering his new status.

PELHAM

Miss Isabelle promised to present both the poem and the portrait of her daughters to her art club. She say she is certain that many of her friends will commission me to do their portraits, and that the club may request me to write the verses for they Christmas cards.

STEPHEN

Mother of God.

PELHAM comes to sit beside RAYMOND.

PELHAM

She just like a mother to me. I don't remember neither father nor mother. I remember only my grandma, Grandma Mack. Everybody called her that. She brung me up from Virginia to New Jersey with a family of white people when I was still a baby. I helped

out inna kitchen and the laundry, makin' up the beds, washin' windows, sweepin', dustin', and ironin'. I went to school a bit. Grandma Mack had no patience fuh that.

RAYMOND

Refused freedom! Loyal to ole miss and master until their death!

PELHAM

The only true genteel folk in these United States, she say. When the family moved North, Grandmother Mack come up, too. They were as much her family as me, she say. I wasn't really no relation whatsoever. I was just another stray pickaninny no one had claimed, but she had an affection for me cus she say—

PELHAM and RAYMOND

“He so consarned black!”

PELHAM

So she adopted me and brung me with her.

RAYMOND

Grandma Mack ... never forgave Abraham Lincoln for freeing the slaves.

PELHAM

“Niggers was made to be servants. God has willed it, she say. We the sons of Ham who have been cursed for looking upon his father's nakedness.

RAYMOND

We the children from Cain who have been cursed and made black for murdering his brother!”

PELHAM

She couldn't stomach no highfalutin' niggers. “If they would stay in they place, they wouldn't have to worry bout bein' lynched.” She didn't understand what art could do, huh Raymond? When I was fourteen, the older son of the house went to Europe to be an artist, a portrait painter. When he come back, it was my job to clean up his studio. I looked at all them—the brushes, the paints, pots and canvases. Lithograph reproductions, his little beret ... I decided I had to be uh artist!

RAYMOND

He used sheets of toilet roll for tracing paper, copied the reproductions onto smoothed out paper bags.

PELHAM

I drew everybody.

RAYMOND

Formed designs in the dishwasher.

PELHAM

Washed windows so to trace figures on the surface of the glass.

RAYMOND

Peeling the potatoes ...

PELHAM

A constant exercise in carving. When I turned twenty ... Grandma Mack died. But her white folk gave me her savings and I hightailed it—to New York!

RAYMOND

Risk it all for fame and fortune as an artist!

PELHAM

Got me a job as a valet and happened upon Miss Euphoria Blake's advertisement in the *Harlem News*.

ENSEMBLE

"Congenial Studios for Negro Artists."

PELHAM

I moved in right away. With paints, charcoal, modeling clay, brushes, scalpels, palettes, easels, water colors, and everything else the clerk in the art store suggested I might need. And I changed my name from George Jones to Pelham and dedicated my life to some serious business.

(strokes RAYMOND's desk, coveting it.)

And now I have finished my poem. I couldn't have done it without you. 'Specially you Raymond. You're the great black hope of the Negro, everybody say that.

RAYMOND

Far too many times to be true.

PELHAM

Your name's in the magazines and newspapers. Y'all is like Gods to me, far up the Mount Olympus ... Well, I better go.

(whips out a folded paper from his apron)

I must give this for whom it is intended.

PELHAM exits.

EUSTACE

I gotta practice, everybody. *Water boy! Water boy!* ...

EUSTACE exits.

STEPHEN

Say, who's going to do the dishes?

ALINE looks at him and shrugs.

ACT ONE

SCENE FOURTEEN

A neighborhood speakeasy, early September.
RAYMOND joins LUCILLE at the bar.

LUCILLE

Gee, I haven't seen you in a coon's age.

RAYMOND

(motions for a drink as he removes his coat.)

Your fault, my dear.

LUCILLE

Not so sure. Where could we go ... your house?

RAYMOND

Not yet. Let's have a drink.

LUCILLE

What are you in the dumps about?

RAYMOND

Nothing, I suppose. Everything. That damned house is getting on my nerves.

LUCILLE

Too much whoopee?

RAYMOND

No, not particularly. Too much everything. And particularly too much Pelham.

LUCILLE

Why don't you be frank with him? No, you couldn't. He wouldn't believe you anyhow.

RAYMOND

I can't laugh at him anymore. It hurts.

LUCILLE

He's happier than you.

RAYMOND

Oh hell, let's forget it.

(drains his glass and motions to the bartender.)

Let's have another ... So what have you been up to?

LUCILLE

Falling in love.

RAYMOND

Good God. If another woman tells me that, I'm gonna commit murder. And who, if I may ask, is your beloved?

LUCILLE

Bull.

RAYMOND

Bull!!

LUCILLE

Yes, Bull ... I knew you'd be surprised ... Well, I met him at your house. He took me home one night when you couldn't be pried away from Countess Najinsky. Bah-bah-wah.

RAYMOND

Is this retaliation?

LUCILLE

Not at all. Why should it be?

RAYMOND

Quit kidding.

LUCILLE

I mean it, Raymond. I'm mad about him.

RAYMOND

As Stephen would say, horse shit.

LUCILLE

Damn it all Raymond. Something in me revolts against this stodgy suffocating life I lead. I'm sick of being surrounded by sterile white people and Negroes who are sterile and pseudo-white. Bull's like my, my Jack Johnson.

RAYMOND

You're as full of hoey as a backyard telephone booth. You told me you were frigid.

LUCILLE

Don't be nasty.

RAYMOND

Maybe I shoulda been. Maybe I'm jealous.

LUCILLE

Nonsense.

RAYMOND

Why's it nonsense? I ain't human?

LUCILLE

Sure, you're human, plenty much. And maybe you're jealous, but not for what you think.

RAYMOND

Oh no?

LUCILLE

No. You're too much in love with yourself ever to love anyone else. You're jealous just because it happened without your knowledge. Had I made you believe you engineered the thing, you'd be happy.

RAYMOND

Jesus, this is good. Educated girl gives herself to the roustabout.

LUCILLE

Bull may be an ignorant roustabout, but at least he's man enough to get what he wants.

RAYMOND

What do you mean by that?

LUCILLE

Forget it. Let's go.

RAYMOND

I ain't going nowhere till you 'splain.

LUCILLE

I ain't gonna 'splain.

RAYMOND

Damn it all, Cille.

LUCILLE swiftly downs her drink, gets up, adjusts her hat and starts from the room. RAYMOND follows, staggering slightly.

ACT ONE

SCENE FIFTEEN

RAYMOND's studio, a while later, a late-night salon. PAUL is reclined on the floor. He is coloring series of voluptuous geometric designs, the papers scattered about the floor. STEPHEN and ALINE are curled on a corner of the day bed, heads together, intimately whispering. The COUNTESS is on the floor beside PAUL. She watches him work with admiration. SAMUEL sits frowning and bolt upright in one of the chairs. EUSTACE and JANET are sharing another chair and sifting through records. BULL is seated on the couch. PELHAM is in the rear corner, mixing drinks. RAYMOND enters, LUCILLE follows, hooking his arm, and then swirling toward BULL.

RAYMOND
(grabbing a bottle)

Hi, everybody.

BULL

Say, what's the—

LUCILLE

High as kites!

LUCILLE wraps herself round BULL and guides him to the couch. RAYMOND watches them jealously as LUCILLE's head slumps to BULL's shoulder.

RAYMOND

Why in hell don't someone make some noise? Start the Victrola, Samuel. I want music, I tell you! I must have music! The world's crazy. I want jazz, crazy as the world!

(improvising a wild drunken riff)

Drink gin, drink gin/ Drink gin with me, goddamn/ I don't give a good goddamn/ If my wo-man/ Got uh new man/ An' won't drink gin with me, goddam ...

The COUNTESS starts toward him. He pushes her away.

BULL

Pipe down, son.

RAYMOND

Go to hell. Sonofabitch—Oh—

RAYMOND staggers, then flops down beside the
COUNTESS and PAUL.

RAYMOND

Paul's gone phallic again. Hey, Sam, seen this?

The COUNTESS draws RAYMOND's head into
her lap. PAUL continues painting LUCILLE has
gone to sleep on BULL's shoulder.

COUNTESS

Read out loud, Eustace.

As JANET hums an improvised blues softly ...

EUSTACE

Langston Hughes ...
I am your son, white man!
Georgia dusk
And the turpentine woods,
One of the pillars of the temple fell.
You are my son! Like hell!
The moon over the turpentine woods
The southern night full of stars
Juicy bodies of nigger wenches
Blue black against black fences
O, you little bastard boy
What's a body but a toy?
The scent of pine wood in the evening air
A nigger night, a nigger joy,
A little yellow bastard boy.

COUNTESS

Marvelous.

SAM

Disgusting.

RAYMOND

How d'y' figure disgusting?

SAM

It's an insult to any self-respecting Negro.

RAYMOND

How come? How come, I say?

SAM

It's vulgar. Why should one of your poets prate publicly about yellow bastard boys? You ought to be ashamed of them.

RAYMOND

How come?

STEPHEN

Both of you shut up. Pelham!

PELHAM enters.

STEPHEN

Fix us another drink.

RAYMOND

Ain't gonna shut up. Gonna make Samuel tell me what he means. He don't know a damn thing about it. Misfit white man tryin' to be a latter day abl'shionist. Makin' a career of Negroes. He comes here to direct and patronize.

COUNTESS

Hush, sweet.

RAYMOND

Ain't gonna hush. Gonna tell him what I think. 'Bout all these meddlin' whites. They oughta stay outta Harlem.

STEPHEN

Now you're becoming a race purist?

RAYMOND

That's what Sam thinks I oughta be. He frowns at you and Aline. He tells me privately Barbara ain't nothin' but a common hussy. Then lectures her 'bout losin' respect.

SAM

You're drunk and damn insulting.

RAYMOND

I ain't drunk. I'm just tellin' the truth. You can't stand to see a Negro and a white woman, can you. You pukin' hypocrite. You can't stand it up here, yet every night here you come, lookin' to give your life some goddam purpose!

SAM leaps to his feet.

SAM

That's it! That's what I say about you Negroes. You don't know how to treat decent white people who mean you good. You'd rather lick the boots of trash.

RAYMOND

You want me to lick your boots, do you? You goddam sonofabitch.

RAYMOND throws his drink in SAM's face. SAM punches RAY in the jaw. Pandemonium erupts. BULL lunges for SAM. STEPHEN attempts to grab him, ALINE and JANET caught in the scramble try to separate the men. The COUNTESS smacks whoever she can with a couch pillow and PAUL makes a desperate effort to rescue his drawings. EUSTACE sits perched on the edge of his chair.

EUSTACE

Mercy, me!

RAYMOND in his drunken state swings at SAM and misses, losing his balance. As RAY falls to the floor, SAM kicks him in the head. BULL goes airborne.

BULL

You lousy white trash, I'll stomp your dirty guts out!

Only STEPHEN's tackle of his legs prevents BULL from carrying out his threat. The men fall atop one another like dominoes. PELHAM stands transfixed at the door, a tray of empty glasses in his hands.

ACT ONE

SCENE SIXTEEN

RAYMOND's, the next afternoon. RAYMOND has nearly slept through the day. STEPHEN is almost dressed.

STEPHEN

You made rather an ass out of yourself last night.

RAYMOND

To the contrary, I would say I made asses out of the rest of you. I didn't ask you to fight.

STEPHEN

Why'd you throw liquor in Sam's face, then. Just a friendly gesture?

RAYMOND

He deserved it. Negotarians. It's a new thrill — cultivating Negroes. And Negroes make this sort of person possible.

STEPHEN

Which means?

RAYMOND

Ninety-nine percent of the Negro race is motivated by a sense of inferiority. A slave race actuated by slave mentality. By their every action, they subscribe to the doctrine of Nordic superiority, and the louder they cry against it, the more they mark themselves. In the white world, what is Samuel? A total nonentity. Among Negroes, my God, he's a king, looked up to, pursued. And look at Barbara. Absolutely down and out until she came to Harlem. And you.

STEPHEN

Me?

RAYMOND

Don't play dumb. You can't be unaware of the subservience around you. Lucille, Paul and I are the only ones who act remotely natural.

STEPHEN

And Bull, I made friends with Bull.

RAYMOND

Bull is so afraid of the white man, his only recourse is to floor one at every opportunity. Should one suddenly turn the tables and smash him back, he'd run away like a cowed dog. Negroes are a slave race and a slave race they'll remain.

STEPHEN

Gee, you love your people today.

RAYMOND

The white man still has all the power. He still holds the whip. The rest of the races have to dance and imitate. Even white folk. All cater to the masters holding the money bags.

STEPHEN

I don't follow you, Raymond. Is this communism you're preaching?

RAYMOND

I preach nothing. I don't give a good goddamn about communism. It can no more change the status than democracy. Our monied rulers. Their star is at its zenith. But there are signs. We might have the pleasure of seeing our enshrined leaders lose their valued heads.

STEPHEN

And if that should happen?

RAYMOND

I'd stand by enjoying the carnage.

STEPHEN finishes putting on his clothes.

STEPHEN

I say, you've learned your lesson well. But which line will you be in?

STEPHEN exits. RAYMOND's confused mind cannot form a retort. He haphazardly paces.

RAYMOND

He was going he knew not where. Always he had protested that the average Negro intellectuals and artists had no goals, no standards, no elasticity, no plasma. And now he was beginning even to doubt himself. He wanted to do something memorable. Something which could transcend and survive. But he was becoming less and less confident his talent was sufficient. He needed genius and there was no assurance that he had it, no assurance that he had done anything more than "learned his lessons well." Mind chaotic and deranged. Tortured, a seething melting pot into which too much metal had been poured. Coherence was lacking. Ideas toppled over one another striving for expression. He struggled to free himself, but it was futile. He was fast fading into obscurity, into a dark labyrinth to which he had no key.

The door flies open. PAUL grabs him and pulls him into the hallway as ALINE and STEPHEN rush toward him.

PAUL

Come downstairs, quick. Pelham's been arrested.

RAYMOND

Criminy, for what?

STEPHEN

We don't know.

RAYMOND

Nonsense.

ALINE

No foolin'. They've taken him to jail.

RAYMOND

What?

STEPHEN

The doorbell rang. He rushed downstairs and a moment later brought in two burly white guys.

PAUL

One of em asked if he was George Jones. He smiled and said yes. The big one flashed a badge.

RAYMOND

Jesus, cops!

ALINE

Big beefy white ones.

STEPHEN

They said they had a warrant for his arrest. They searched the room, looked under the bed, in all the drawers, and in Pelham's trunk.

PAUL

Then they led him out of the room. Still in his smock and beret.

RAYMOND

Hell! Call Euphoria! I'm going to the police station.

From behind her cracked door, the PIG WOMAN listens. The house now quiet, she stretches her arms and raises them toward an indifferent sky.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

That afternoon. Police Precinct, loud with complaint, ringing phones, babble. RAYMOND enters. DESK SERGEANT towering behind a huge desk snaps his fingers at RAYMOND indicating where to stand.

POLICEMAN

(to the ENSEMBLE awaiting processing)

Hey! Hey!

(answering phone)

Harlem, 28th Precinct! Hold!

(to RAYMOND)

What!

RAYMOND

Have ... have you got a Pelham here?

The POLICEMAN barely searches the record book.

POLICEMAN

No.

(back to the phone receiver. Sees the person has hung up, puts the receiver back.)

RAYMOND

Oh ... I mean ...

(phone rings)

George Jones.

(phone rings)

POLICEMAN

(picking up the phone, speaking to RAYMOND)

Yeah.

RAYMOND

What's he in for?

POLICEMAN

(to the phone)

Harlem, 28th Precinct ...

(to RAYMOND)

Rape.

Rape?!

RAYMOND

Hold!

POLICEMAN
(to phone receiver)

What'd I just say?

(to RAYMOND)

... May I see him?

RAYMOND

No visits on Mondays and Tuesdays.

POLICEMAN
(to phone receiver)

Yeah, well we all wanna talk to somebody.

EUPHORIA and PAUL enter. As they move
downstage center POLICEMAN and PRECINCT
CROWD fade from view and exit.

This is a hell of a mess!

EUPHORIA

Old Bernhardt's having hysterics.

PAUL

What's it all about?

RAYMOND

Pelham raped Gladys.

EUPHORIA
(at RAYMOND's confusion)

Gladys, the older of the actress lady's two daughters.

I don't believe it.

RAYMOND

EUPHORIA reaches in her purse then shoves a
folded paper in his hand.

Read this.

EUPHORIA

"Beautiful maiden all aflutter ..."

RAYMOND

EUPHORIA

Read down.

PAUL

(reading over RAYMOND's shoulder)

Gladys ... Oh you who I adore,
And do anything for,
How long I long!
Remember the song,
Entitled let's do it,
The bees and the birds,
They all do it,
So why not you and me?"

RAYMOND

... It's his poem.

PAUL

It's awful.

EUPHORIA

It's a confession is what it is!

ACT TWO

SCENE TWO

A Tuesday, the week after Labor Day. A crowded courtroom, cacophonous with sound, the lighting a depressing gloom. PROLETARIANS of all races occupy the benches and chairs. A towering POLICEMAN guards the entrance, scrutinizing all who pass. Bail runners clutter the doorway. Everyone is talking, a droning interchange, but no one can distinguish what is being said. Enter PAUL, RAYMOND, EUSTACE and EUPHORIA.

EUPHORIA

What a zoo!

The JUDGE's gavel punctuates the scene.

JUDGE

Dismissed. Next.

EUSTACE

When does Pelham come on?

COURT CLERK

No talking.

(To PAUL, who has his sketch pad out)

No writing neither, bub.

PAUL starts to retort. EUPHORIA takes his pad away just as PELHAM is led in by the POLICEMAN. He appears frightened and dejected.

COURT CLERK
(played by the COUNTESS)

Arraignment hearing of George Jones. Docket number 3259741.

JUDGE

What are the charges?

PELHAM

But, but, but . . .

CLERK

Rape and assault of a minor, Your Honor.

PELHAM

But I, I, I . . .

JUDGE

Is the defendant represented by counsel?

PAUL stands and pushes through the courtroom gate and stands next to PELHAM.

PAUL

Here, your honor.

The actress “BERNHARDT” enters heavily veiled.

PELHAM

(smiling, relieved)

Miss Isabelle Miss—It’s me, Pelham!

JUDGE

Sit that man down! Sit Down!

Upon sight of PELHAM, BERNHARDT goes into hysterics. Everyone begins talking at once.

BERNHARDT

(played by JANET)

That man raped my baby! That fiend defiled my child!

EUSTACE

Mercy me!

BERNHARDT

That fiend defiled my child!

BERNHARDT

Keep away from me, you blaggart!

“What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?—

Out, out, you damned spot!”

EUPHORIA

Pelham, sit down!

PELHAM

No, no. . . . I, I, I. I’m innocent!

JUDGE

Order! Order, Restrain the prisoner!

EUPHORIA

Pelham, sit down!

PELHAM

You tell ‘em!

JUDGE

Order! Retrain that man!

PELHAM

You didn’t like my poem?!

PELHAM is stunned in disbelief. PAUL wildly sketches the scene. Bernhardt faints into Euphoria’s arms.

ACT TWO

SCENE THREE

RAYMOND's apartment, sometime later in September. RAYMOND is slumps at his desk, BULL, LUCILLE, EUSTACE and PAUL make up the rest of the company. An air of gloom pervades.

LUCILLE

What are we going to do without Pelham?

EUSTACE

Guess I'll have to drix the minks.

As EUSTACE glides to the bar cupboard, he practices ...

EUSTACE

All God's chilluns got wings ...

PAUL

Your voice is changing.

EUSTACE

Changing? How?

PAUL

Second childhood. It's going up and down.

EUSTACE

That was the song, you idiot, not my voice. Why will Paul discuss things about which he knows nothing? Always talking about my voice and he knows nothing about music.

PAUL

I know I like Debussy better than Strauss, that Ravel is infinitely superior to Schubert, and that Ellington is no Whiteman, thank God.

EUSTACE

(missing the pun completely)

Preposterous. There are no modern musicians worthy of a seat next to Schubert.

LUCILLE

Eustace, you're a bloody blue stocking.

EUSTACE

I know music.

PAUL

I suppose that's why you sang a hymn by Handel and said it was Brahms.

EUSTACE

I never argue with ignorance. Let's drake another tink.

PAUL

Will you stop that?

EUPHORIA enters.

EUPHORIA

Well, the sap's in for it.

LUCILLE

Did he really rape her?

EUPHORIA

He says he didn't. And the doctor says this isn't the first time she's been tampered with.

RAYMOND

They can't hold him, then.

EUPHORIA

They are holding him. And they're going to hold him for trial. He's sunk. You oughta see the stuff he's written her. It's awful.

PAUL

It's always been awful.

LUCILLE

How can they prove he wrote it?

EUPHORIA

Bernhardt took care of that. She had him write her a special poem and sign it, then went straight to the police.

RAYMOND

I'll be damned. His "Magnum Opus."

BULL

He oughta go to jail and stay there. What the hell's he messin' with a minor for? They oughta give him life.

LUCILLE

Is there proof that he actually raped her?

EUPHORIA

Maybe he didn't, but there was some sort of something. I didn't know he was such an imbecile. I went to see him at the Tombs. He cried the whole time I was there, swore he hadn't harmed her. I asked him why he wrote her such stuff. He said he was trying to write like Paul.

PAUL

Good God! Such blasphemy!

EUPHORIA

Talkin' about kissing her in secret places and churning butter in the lily cup.

PAUL

That's plagiarism!

LUCILLE

Yours was bad enough. Can't they see that it's only what he thinks is poetry?

EUPHORIA

In the past tense, old dear, with remarks to the effect of what had happened and how much more enjoyable it would be in the future once she had the hang of it. One to three is what he'll get.

PAUL

Well, at least we'll have a trial to go to.

LUCILLE

You're a heartless wretch, you know that?

PAUL

Well, there's nothing we can do about it and I've always wanted to see someone I know on trial.

EUPHORIA

Why don't you take Pelham's place?

PAUL

First of all, I haven't raped anyone and, secondly, I wouldn't be so commonplace. When I go on trial—

EUPHORIA

Which will be soon.

PAUL

It will be in the grand manner like Wilde or Villon or Dostoevski's near execution. You see, I'm a genius.

EUPHORIA

Keep telling yourself.

ACT TWO

SCENE FOUR

RAYMOND's, a week later, late September.
RAYMOND is reading the page in his typewriter as
STEPHEN enters.

RAYMOND

'Lo, stranger. Where you been?

STEPHEN

Oh nowhere.

RAYMOND

He stays away a week and has been nowhere. Extraordinary.

STEPHEN

It really doesn't matter, does it?

RAYMOND

What the hell's eating you?

STEPHEN

Nothing.

RAYMOND

Liar. Ever since Pelham got arrested, you've been acting strange. Spit it out.

STEPHEN

Jesus Christ! Can't a fellow just be tired and moody?

RAYMOND

I've seen you tired and moody before. That ain't it.

STEPHEN

All right then ... you're the doctor. Treat yourself to a diagnosis.

RAYMOND

Ever since Pelham's arraignment, you deserted Aline and turned to Janet, vacillating from one to the other. Now two girls, hitherto inseparable, have a positive dislike for one another. I know this because both, of course, confide in me when they come up here looking for you.

STEPHEN

Aw, dry up will you?

PAUL and EUSTACE enter.

PAUL and EUSTACE

We got it, we got it.

RAYMOND

You've got what?

PAUL

Wouldn't you like to know? And I mean it's hot stuff, eh Eustace?

STEPHEN heads for the door.

EUSTACE

Nay, nay, my lord. List' Ye to the revelation. Tell 'em, Paul.

PAUL

Gentlemen, having considered the scarceness of food in our cupboard, Eustace and I held a séance. The spirits were kind enough to reveal to us a plan whereby we can thwart the wolves. We're going to give a donation party.

RAYMOND

A what?

EUSTACE

We can raise somethin' for Pelham's defense. And stock the cupboard at the same time. We'll invite everyone we know.

PAUL

And those we don't.

EUSTACE

Isn't that grand?

STEPHEN exits angrily, slamming the door.

EUSTACE

Mercy me! What's wrong with him?

RAYMOND

I'm for any damn thing. But for Christ sake, get the hell out of here and leave me alone. Didn't you hear me say get out? I'm working here.

PAUL and EUSTACE exit. RAYMOND angrily types away, the sound of the machine becoming rhythms of a drum solo ...

ACT TWO

SCENE FIVE

A few nights later, early October. PARTY-GOERS, lined up in the aisle, prepare the party.

ENSEMBLE
(rhythmically spoken)

*Hey, Pops, keep that beat uh beats,
I feel a rhythmic brainstorm comin' on,
One, two, keep that rhythm's heat,
One more rhythm like that and I'll be gone,*

*Oh, man, don't stop now—we jumpin',
Give it everything the Law allow,
This thing might turn into somethin',
If I ain't mistaken, here come somethin' now!*

The CROWD lets out a shout and spills onto the stage lining up outside the Manor. They chatter among themselves and pass out flyers that read ...

*Two-sixty-seven west a hundred thirty-sixth!
Euphoria Blake's Place!
Two-sixty-seven west a hundred thirty-sixth!
Euphoria Blake's Place!*

*Two-sixty-seven west a hundred thirty-sixth!
Euphoria Blake's Place!*

The neighborhood BEAT COP appears.

ONE LONE VOICE

Hidey-hidey-hidey ho!

(echoed by the CROWD)

Hidey-hidey-hidey-ho!

As the COP surveilles, the party-goers whisper and, feigning they are just casual strollers, nonchalantly enter the Manor's front door ...

ENSEMBLE

*Two-sixty-seven west a hundred thirty-sixth!
Euphoria Blake's Place!
Two-sixty-seven west a hundred thirty-sixth!
Euphoria Blake's Place!*

The COP, sensing something, follows ...

ACT TWO

SCENE SIX

RAYMOND's apartment, moments later. PAUL and EUSTACE inventory the donations, which guests have dropped off as PAUL mixes punch, taking a moment to sample. RAYMOND sits off to himself. STEPHEN looks through some records. Neither seems in a party mood.

EUSTACE

Donations! To the cause of Negro art!

EUSTACE and PAUL

Sugar (check) carrots (check) corn meal (check) flour (check). And hot ziggity. Taters. Taters. Nice ripe taters.

PAUL

Throw those in the chowder.

EUSTACE and PAUL

Crackers (check), can salmon (check).

EUSTACE

And Jesus, Master! Half case of champagne! And—

EUSTACE and PAUL

Caviar!

PAUL

Old Mother Savoy has surpassed herself tonight.

EUSTACE

Pelham where are you when we need you?

PAUL

Stephen, have some punch!

STEPHEN

No.

STEPHEN tosses down the records and angrily swipes a bottle of gin from RAY's bar.

PAUL
Go easy. The night is young.

STEPHEN
What of it?

STEPHEN walks off to himself just as SAM enters through the front door.

EUSTACE
Two cans of corn ...
(observing STEPHEN's exit and SAM's entrance.)
Yaller corn meal ... And two pounds of sugar.

As PAUL and EUSTACE turn to attend to the records, SAM approaches RAYMOND.

SAM
Raymond, I owe you an apology.

RAYMOND
For what?

SAM
For what happened.

RAYMOND
Oh that. Forget it.

BULL enters with one arm around LUCILLE and the other around a full grocery bag.

BULL
Hey, Raymond. Got a sack full of eggs. An' my sweet patootie brung the bacon.

As RAYMOND stands and approaches the couple.

EUSTACE
(pulling BULL away)

Thanks, Bull.

RAYMOND
Hello, Cille.

The COUNTESS enters with her entourage, A FLAPPER, accompanied by a JAPANESE MOVIE STAR and a GANGSTER.

COUNTESS

This is our very own Raymond Taylor!

(placing a bill in RAYMOND's palm)

Oh Raymond. Allow me to introduce Sessue Hayakawa of silent movie fame.

HAYAKAWA

黒人藝術家へ (Kokujin-geijutsuka-e.) For Negro art.

(AS HAYAKAWA takes a deep bow.)

COUNTESS

And Miss Nugent.

FLAPPER

I'm already a Negro in my veins.

COUNTESS

And Mister?

GANGSTER

Luciano.

RAYMOND stares at the bill then puts it in his pocket as the COUNTESS continues with her party.

COUNTESS

(strolling and addressing the audience)

Discounting the Indians, who were here before all of us, Negroes are the only original thing in America and they are so unintentional about it. When I first arrived, I found nothing could soothe me, but Negro Spirituals.

EUSTACE

Water Boy! Water Boy!

LUCILLE

Good God, what a mob.

RAYMOND

Still hep on your man?

LUCILLE

Why, Raymond?

RAYMOND
How long you gonna play this?

LUCILLE
What?

RAYMOND
You know damn well what.

BULL
Here's your drink, baby.

An elderly gentleman enters and approaches RAYMOND. DR. PARKES (played by the actor who plays PELHAM), wearing spats, gloves, a waistcoat, spectacles, and a curlicue mustache, seems from another time.

RAYMOND
Dr. Parkes!

DR. PARKES
I've been trying to find you for the past half hour, my boy. Perhaps I should wait for a more propitious moment.

RAYMOND
Dr. Parkes, you know Lucille.

LUCILLE
Of course! And this is—

BULL
Just call me Bull.

BULL play-punches DR. PARKES in the chest.

DR. PARKES
Very nice to meet you, Mr. Bull.

BULL
What ails yuh, Doc?

LUCILLE
Dr. Parkes is a Doctor of Philosophy, honey.

PAUL approaches and interjects.

PAUL

Mother hen to all us chicks, guardian angel to young Negro artists.

BULL

Well, I got some drawings I might like to—

LUCILLE

Come on, baby, let's dance.

LUCILLE drags BULL away. RAYMOND follows with his eyes.

PARKES

When Miss Blake told me you were having a get-together, I thought splendid. But this is hardly what you would call a "salon". Saloon, maybe.

RAYMOND

We packed in everyone we could.

DR. PARKES

Ah! I do see some of my people. Sweetie May Carr ...

RAYMOND

The world's first Negro, Negro anthropologist.

DR. PARKES

Tony Crews!

RAYMOND

Literal champion of the blues.

DR. PARKES

Oh, and DeWitt Clinton.

RAYMOND

If a sonnet could fix the race problem ... Poets' paradise.

DR. PARKES

Fair share of pimps and prostitutes, too.

RAYMOND

Yes, invited them all!

DR. PARKES

But, Raymond, it's still a question of the cause. That young man, George Jones.

RAYMOND

You mean Pelham? The trial's a month off. He's still in jail.

DR. PARKES

Where he belongs. He's a common criminal.

RAYMOND

He's slow. And? Emotional. I don't know the effect being locked up will have on him.

DR. PARKES

I am concerned about the effect it will have on you.

RAYMOND

On me? I don't know what you mean?

DR. PARKES

This scandal could hurt all of you living here?

PAUL

Dr. Parkes! If it's scandal you want, let me show you my latest oeuvres!

PAUL sweeps DR. PARKES away with him.
JANET and ALINE enter, conspicuously drunk.

JANET & ALINE

Hi, Raymond. Where's Stephen?

RAYMOND

Find the gin.

EUSTACE

(carrying a soup pot)

Chow's-on! Line-up!

As GUESTS line up, DR. PARKES examines a painting in PAUL's upstairs studio.

DR. PARKES

Art holds a mirror to nature, my boy. No mirror would reflect a man composed of such contortions or *proportions*.

PAUL

It's a self-portrait?! My Phallic Period.

LUCILLE and BULL, finding themselves at the end of the line, begin dancing ...

LUCILLE

Do you got some gumbo with some hot sauce in it?

BULL

Makes you wanna rumble! Put your back bone in it!

ENSEMBLE

(Picking up on the rhythm)

Do you got some gumbo with some hot sauce in it?

Makes you wanna rumble! Put your back bone in it!

As a Louis Armstrong lick comes on, LUCILLE lets loose and begins to show off the new dances she's learned, BULL her toreador.

LUCILLE and BULL

Bear Claws,

Uh-huh, uh-huh!

Or maybe, can you do the Black Bottom?

Aw'right, aw'right!

Do the Lindy Hop,

Just watch me now!

And Mess-Around!

Come on, come on!

Conga,

Ola! Ola!

Ooo Baby, can you feel that rhythm!

You know I can!

Do the Turkey Trot,

Don't stop, don't stop!

And Shimmy on down!

The guests follow suit and dance round the apartment.

ENSEMBLE

Bear Claws, Or maybe do the Black Bottom, Do the Lindy Hop and Mess-Around!

Conga, Ooo Baby, Feel that rhythm! Turkey Trot, and Shimmy on down! (repeats ...)

DR. PARKES escapes down the hall, PAUL right behind him.

DR. PARKES

I tell you, your pictures are too—distorted! Too loud!

PAUL

What?!

TOO LOUD!
DR. PARKES

YES, THAT'S THE IDEA!
PAUL

DR. PARKES runs smack into LUCILLE.

LUCILLE
I can do the Charleston better than anybody. I got spunk!

DR. PARKES
That hardly describes your inebriated condition, *Lucille*. Down home they'd just call you drunk!

LUCILLE
Why you— shipwrecked monkey-chasin' Man Friday, why don't you take your Black Star boat back to Africa?! Oh, that's right. It sunk!

LUCILLE takes a wild swing at DR. PARKES.
PAUL lifts him out of the way just in time.

DR. PARKES
(exiting in a huff)
Just like niggers, just like niggers!

RAYMOND escapes to the hallway where
EUPHORIA has a grave DR. PARKES by the arm.

EUPHORIA
They're just a little exuberant, Dr. Parkes. You know artists. I intended to make this house a showplace of Negro talent. And Raymond here's our star. He's been working furiously on a new . . .

SAM approaches RAYMOND and tugs his arm.

SAM
I've got to talk to you.

RAYMOND
Wait till tomorrow.

SAM
But you don't know what happened.

RAYMOND

And I don't give a good—

SAM

Listen, Raymond. For God's sake. Find Stephen and get him out of here. He's terribly drunk and in an awful mess.

RAYMOND

What the hell are you talking about?

SAM

He, Aline and Janet had a scrap.

RAYMOND

And so?

SAM

No one can find him. He was standing at the doorway there and all at once there was a dust up. I pushed through the crowd in time to hear Stephen shouting, "You goddam sluts!" Before I could grab him, he hit Janet in the face and then took a punch at Aline.

RAYMOND

Jesus!

SAM

See what you've done? Got a decent boy into a sordid mess.

RAYMOND

He did a pretty good job by himself. I've got my own "mess."

SAM

(under his breath)

I told him not to live with niggers.

RAYMOND does a double-take, as SAM exits. The party has reached new heights. Even the COP has joined in. Color lines have been eradicated. Whites and blacks cling passionately together as if trying a permanent merger. Liquor, jazz, music!

LUCILLE and BULL, locked tight in an embrace sway together on the dance floor. As she abandons herself, RAYMOND stands to the side, glowering.

EUPHORIA enters, cradling JANET in her arms, JANET, holding a handkerchief to her nose.

EUPHORIA

Raymond, there must be no more brawls or bawdy parties in this house! This mess has got to stop!

RAYMOND shakes her off and grabs LUCILLE.

RAYMOND

So, y'want a cave man, huh?

BULL tries to grab LUCILLE back, but RAY pushes him off, LUCILLE caught in the middle. PARTY-GOERS bump and tumble. Pandemonium! Camera flash, freeze frame! Police whistle, sirens!

ACT TWO

SCENE SEVEN

RAYMOND's, still in his clothes from the night before, sits up in bed. As he reads the letter to himself, lights come up on STEPHEN sitting alone on a random city street.

STEPHEN

Dear Raymond ... I'm gone. Don't ask me why. That party last night finished me. I've drunk my fill of Harlem. I couldn't seem to talk to you about it. I knew you wouldn't understand. I'm fed up on Harlem and on Negroes. I have no prejudices, you know, yet recently I feel lost, permeated with disgust. I shudder if— if I have to shake hands with a Negro. I have lived recently with a fear that I had become unclean. I rushed in panic to a doctor to be examined. I feared, unreasonably that Aline and Janet were unclean and that I had become contaminated, diseased. My phobia has become so pronounced that I automatically changed my seat in the subway last night when a Negro man sat down beside me. I'm damn neurotic, I know. An egregious ass. Words, words, words. You stand apart from the others. You never have been and never will be a Negro to me. You're just you. But again, words. I have a room at the enclosed address. You can bring me my clothes. I can't come back but I must see you ... and talk. I await your call.

Spot fades on STEPHEN. Scene shifts back to RAYMOND's apartment, PAUL standing nearby.

PAUL

What's happened to the goddamn Swede?

RAYMOND

Nothing.

(as PAUL lingers)

What

PAUL reluctantly exits. RAYMOND gets busy, punching at his typewriter.

RAYMOND

My Dear Stephen, a messenger boy will bring you your clothes.

EUSTACE ushers in DR. PARKES and SAM, both carrying a folded newspaper.

EUSTACE

(backing out of the apartment)

I'll just make myself scarce. Some tidying up to do after that party.

DR. PARKES

Samuel and I have been discussing you, Raymond.

RAYMOND

What crime have I committed now?

DR. PARKES

None at all. We're concerned. We are your friends.

SAM

We just think it best that you move.

RAYMOND

Move?

DR. PARKES

Yes. You see, the newspapers here in Harlem are bound to make a sensation out of Pelham's case when it comes up. They'll embroil you in it and all who come here.

RAYMOND

Nonsense.

SAM

(shoves his newspaper at RAYMOND)

The whole house is getting a bad reputation.

RAYMOND

The New York Call?

DR. PARKES

Harlem's most respectable news weekly. Front page.

RAYMOND

(reading from the paper)

"A house in Harlem, which has for its residents a number of young Negro writers and artists. Instead of pursuing their work, they spend their time drinking and carousing with a low class of whites from downtown."

(to SAM)

That must mean you ... "Of racial integrity they have none. They are satisfied to woo decadence, satisfied to dedicate their lives to ..."

SAM

"A routine of drunkenness and degeneracy ..."

DR. PARKES

"With cheap white people..."

RAYMOND

As opposed to expensive ones?

DR. PARKES

Rather than mingle with respectable elements of your own race.

RAYMOND

“Their work is, almost without exception, a glorification of the lowest strata of Negro life. Led on by these white friends, they libel their own people, injuring them, insulting them by being concerned only with the underworld of pimps and Jezebels!” – Surely, you don’t take this tripe seriously?

DR. PARKES

My picture is in that paper and it’s not for handing out a literary prize! This is a very serious matter, a matter of protecting yourself from unnecessary attacks on your reputation. This is a new day in the history of our race. Talented Negroes are being watched by countless people, white and black. They are waiting for you to produce something new, something tremendous. Scandals in the newspaper simply won’t do.

RAYMOND

My habits and life are my own business.

SAM

But you owe it.

RAYMOND

I don’t owe anything to anyone.

DR. PARKES

I’m afraid you don’t understand. Suppose the white press should take up this business of whites and Negroes mingling so indiscriminately?

RAYMOND

Well, suppose they do? You spend fifty percent of your time with white people.

DR. PARKES

It’s not a matter of white people. It’s the *kind* of people.

RAYMOND

The party last night? Granted they are part lunatic, but they’re people who take on new points of view, who aren’t afraid to explore. My kind of people, Dr. Parkes. We’re tired of being patronized and patted on the head. We don’t want to have to beg and do tricks. If we are acclaimed it will be for real achievement. And by that I don’t mean the usual two-penny, mediocre, undistinguished events, hysterically praised by your N. double A.C.P., and your tired *New York Call*. We’re out to shake things up, set fire to the past until it and all of its presumptions crumble to the ground.

DR. PARKES

I 'm afraid you've gone off on a tangent, my boy. We are concerned for you. I think you misjudge Samuel. He really has your welfare at heart, and so have I. You cannot create to the best of your ability, being constantly surrounded by a group of parasites and nonentities.

RAYMOND

They are my friends.

SAM

But—

RAYMOND

There is no more to say. If you'll excuse me,
(plasters newspaper to DR. PARKES' chest.)
I've got to get dressed and go downtown.

DR. PARKES
(discreetly affronted)

Forgive us for breaking in on you this way.

RAYMOND

All right, Dr. Parkes. Good day.

DR. PARKES

Coming Sam?

SAM

Not this minute.

DR. PARKES

All right then. Goodbye.

PARKES exits.

SAM

Where's Stephen?

RAYMOND

I don't know. Now get out of here and get out damn quick. I'm sick of you. I hope to God you never come back here again.

SAM

But Raymond—

RAYMOND

But Raymond, hell.

SAM

I was only trying to help.

RAYMOND

Confine your crusading to niggers who get lynched. I don't need it. I'm sick of all you goddam reformin', lily-livered bastards, comin' up here seeking yo' thrills and pleasures then try to raise me up like I'm your private project. Bringing Dr. Parkes along to school me?

SAM

You don't know who your friends are.

RAYMOND

Apparently not.

RAYMOND grabs his coat and stands, waiting for SAM to exit.

ACT TWO

SCENE EIGHT

Late-afternoon that day, The Tombs, just before visiting hours conclude, the grim outline of the city jail etched in shadows. Steel gates clang, guards loom ... RAYMOND enters. In the darkness, people are laughing, weeping, praying, shouting – a tower of Babel compressed, deafening. PELHAM enters, his wrists in shackles.

PELHAM

Raymond!

RAYMOND

Hello, Pelham.

PELHAM

I ain't done nothin'. I ain't done nothin'. I ain't done nothin'. I ain't done nothin'.

RAYMOND

We know. Everything's going to be all right. Everything's going to be—

PELHAM

I'm ruined, Raymond. I'm ruined. I ain't done nothin' and they keepin' me in jail. Raymond, they beat me at the station, knocked me around and kicked me. God knows I ain't done nothin'. They gon' keep me in jail forever.

RAYMOND

Nonsense.

PELHAM

Everyone'll look down on me. I'll be a convict. My Grandma Mack in heaven is punishin' me. I know I'm wicked, Raymond, but but but I ain't done nothin'. I ain't done nothin'! I want a preacher. I ain't done nothin'!

RAYMOND

Shut up, Goddamn you.

PELHAM

I ain't! I ain't! You gotta help me, Raymond. What I'm to do?! What I'm gon do?

The scene falls away. RAYMOND walks in circles as if he has lost all sense of direction ...

ACT TWO

SCENE NINE

Moments later. RAYMOND finds himself on a train platform. The swish of a rail car traveling full speed, wheels screeching, its horn blasting, fire alarm in the distance, rush-hour traffic below. His silhouetted figure in a halo of light, RAYMOND stands on the platform, his mind reeling. Staggered randomly on the platform, other ENSEMBLE MEMBERS as WORKING STIFFS await the train. Their backs are turned from him as he rants.

RAYMOND

Fire!

Melting steel and iron bars, poking livid tongues between stone apertures and burning wooden opposition with a cackling chuckle of contempt—

Fire!

Flaming burning, searing, and penetrating far beneath the superficial items of the flesh to boil the sluggish blood—

Fire!

A cry of conquest in the night, warming those who sleep and revitalizing those who linger in the quiet places dozing—

Fire!

Weaving vivid, hot designs upon an ebon bordered loom and satisfying pagan thirst for beauty unadorned the flesh is sweet and real . . . the soul an inward flush of—Fire!
Beauty? . . . flesh on fire—on fire in the furnace of life blazing . . .FY-AH!

ENSEMBLE

Fy-ah! Fy-ah!

Fy-ah

Gonna burn ma soul!

Fy-ah

Gonna burn ma soul!

One of the ENSEMBLE with his back turned begins to speak.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER

Now! This!

The ENSEMBLE MEMBER turns around. To RAYMOND's surprise, it's DR. PARKES.

DR. PARKES

My boy! Is the kind of get-together that we NEED!

In unison, ENSEMBLE MEMBERS directly behind RAYMOND about-face downstage. They are *all* DR. PARKES.

ALL DR. PARKES

THIS, my boy!

In unison, the DR. PARKESSES pop their canes on the ground.

ALL DR. PARKES

Is the K-I-I-I-I-ND of get-together that we NEED!

In unison, the Dr. PARKESSES pop their canes twice on the ground and shimmy.

ALL DR. PARKES

For NEGRO ART!

DR. PARKES 1

LA-A-A-A-ADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

DR. PARKES 2

Being a non-commercial product interested only in—

ALL DR. PARKES

THE ARTS!

DR. PARKES 3

It is necessary tha—at—

ALL DR. PARKES

WE!

DR. PARKES 4

Make some—

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Apppeeeeeeeeeallll ... | DR. PARKES 5 |
| Fuh | DR. PARKES 6 |
| A-A-A-A-Aid-duh! | DR. PARKES 1 |
| From in-ter-ested— | DR. PARKES 2 |
| Friends. | DR. PARKES 3 |
| The seed issue, I say, the seed issue | DR. PARKES 4 |
| I ... | DR. PARKES 5 |
| have covered -- myself— | (doing a Kappa Shimmy into the Pretty Man) |
| But! | DR. PARKES 6 |
| For the second issuuuuue ... | DR. PARKES 1 |
| WE! | ALL DR. PARKES |
| Would appreciate having— | DR. PARKES 2 |
| Fifty people! | DR. PARKES 3 |
| I say, fifty people! | DR. PARKES 4 |
| Sub-scri-i-i-i-i-i-i-i-be. | DR. PARKES 5 |
| For— | DR. PARKES 6 |

| | |
|--|--|
| Ten dollars, only ten dollars! | DR. PARKES 1 |
| EACH! | ALL DR. PARKES |
| And fifty more to— | DR. PARKES 2 |
| Sub-scri- <i>i-i-i-i-i-i-i-i</i> -be. | DR. PARKES 3 |
| For five dollars. | DR. PARKES 4 |
| Five, only five, I say five dollars! | DR. PARKES 5 |
| EACH! | ALL DR. PARKES |
| A dollar, then a dollar, one dollar! | DR. PARKES 6 |
| WE! | ALL DR. PARKES |
| Make no eloquent or rhetorical plea. | DR. PARKES 1 |
| <i>FIRE!</i> ... Speaks for itself! | ALL |
| | The DR. PARKESES each hold their hands to their ears. Suddenly there is only deafening silence |
| <i>FY-AH!</i> <i>FY-AH!</i> <i>Fy-ah gonna burn ma soul!</i> <i>Fy-ah Gonna burn ma soul!</i> ” | ENSEMBLE |
| | The soulful lament suddenly turns into an animated chant and ring shout as the DR. PARKESES dance frenetically around Raymond, poking, taunting, kicking up their heels. |

ENSEMBLE

FY-AH!

FY-AH!

Fy-ah gonna burn ma soul!

Fy-ah Gonna burn ma soul!”

As the DR. PARKESES all turn upstage, resuming their original positions, the sounds of the subway blend with the fractious disembodied voices from RAYMOND’s recent past. He swoons, his body gyrating.

ACT TWO

SCENE TEN

Sometime later. A city street curb. RAYMOND sits, his feet in the gutter. TWO POLICEMEN attend him.

POLICEMAN 1

How's the coon?

POLICEMAN 2

He's coming out of it. Must be epileptic.

RAYMOND sits up abruptly.

POLICEMAN 1

All right, all right.

POLICEMAN 2

Your name Raymond Taylor?

RAYMOND

Yes.

POLICEMAN 2

You live at 267 West 135th Street?

RAYMOND

Yes.

POLICEMAN 2

We found a letter in your pocket, called your house. They'll be after you soon.

RAYMOND

What happened?

POLICEMAN 1

You was headed for Bellevue, buddy. Fell out on the street. Ever do that before?

RAYMOND

No.

POLICEMAN 2

I bet you're an epileptic.

No. RAYMOND

Ever have heart trouble? POLICEMAN 1

No. RAYMOND

Get him some water. POLICEMAN 2

I ain't got no water. POLICEMAN 1

Sit quiet there. You can go home when someone comes after you. POLICEMAN 2

I was unconscious? RAYMOND

Brother, you been unconscious for years! POLICEMAN 1

ACT TWO

SCENE ELEVEN

RAYMOND's apartment, two weeks later, a cool Indian summer mid-October afternoon, the sky turning twilight. RAYMOND reclines in his desk chair. STEPHEN enters quietly. RAYMOND opens his eyes.

STEPHEN

I didn't mean to wake you.

RAYMOND

(sitting up, he is wan and moves slowly)

I wasn't asleep.

STEPHEN

Are you surprised to see me?

RAYMOND

Mm ... more or less.

STEPHEN

I heard you were ill.

RAYMOND

How?

STEPHEN

I telephoned of course. Your messenger boy stunt hurt.

RAYMOND

I really didn't see any sense in our seeing one another.

STEPHEN

Yes ... I know ... I've got some liquor, some good liquor.

RAYMOND

I don't want a drink. I'm ill.

STEPHEN

Horse ... feathers. There isn't a damn thing wrong with you.

STEPHEN goes to the alcove and pours out two drinks. Returning, he hands one to RAYMOND.

RAYMOND

So what's this chapter?

STEPHEN

Always the author... ... What's going to happen to us, Raymond?

RAYMOND

Who the hell knows, and who the hell cares? What's going to happen to me? I'm going to write a series of books which will cause a stir but won't sell. They'll be severely criticized, then forgotten. Negroes will swear I have no race pride and whites will be disappointed that there are no stereotypes. What's going to happen to you?

STEPHEN

Let's don't talk about that. I've never been anything but a camp follower. I'll never have the courage to rush to the vanguard ...Afraid of the dark I suppose. The world has become too large. I can't see the skyline. But you, you've got a vision. You have something to fight for *and* against. You've got to fight, Ray. You have the element of greatness.

RAYMOND

Merely planting seeds for someone else to harvest.

ACT TWO

SCENE TWELVE

Courtroom, late October. PELHAM's trial in progress. RAYMOND sits with PAUL and EUSTACE in the crowded, noisy chamber. PELHAM is wailing away.

JUDGE

Order! Order! This is a court of law! Control your client, or I will have him removed and held in contempt!

PELHAM

What's that? Somethin' else? Oh Lawd!

EUSTACE

This isn't looking so good.

PELHAM sinks down and continues to whimper. EUPHORIA bustles in and squeezes beside RAY.

EUPHORIA

A little coin, a little coin. A few words with certain undercover men I know, and Pelham will serve only a scant portion of his term.

RAYMOND

Why doesn't he stop crying?

CLERK

Silence in this court! Call your next witness.

EUPHORIA

What?! What witness?

An old WOMAN is led into the room.

RAYMOND

The Pig Woman!

PROSECUTOR

Would you state your name for the record?

PIG WOMAN

Muriel Winston.

PROSECUTOR

Miss Winston. Are you familiar with the defendant?

PIG WOMAN

I ain't "familiar"! I knows him is all!

PROSECUTOR

And how is that?

PIG WOMAN

He live in the apartment building same as me. And I seen him.

PROSECUTOR

Seen him doing what?

PIG WOMAN

I peeks out the crack in my door and seen him chasing Gladys up and down the stair and around the hallway with a no good look in him eye.

PELHAM'S LAWYER

Objection.

JUDGE

Sustained. Just tell them what you saw, please.

PIG WOMAN

It be a lot. I made it me business to keep tab on every inning in him vile game.

PELHAM'S LAWYER

Objection.

JUDGE

Sustained.

PIG WOMAN

I sent him kiss her. I sent him touch her, too.

PROSECUTOR

When was this?

PELHAM's LAWYER

Objection, your honor! Hearsay! How would she know this? What is her proof!

PIG WOMAN

(whips out a folded paper)

It all be here! I have made notations of the dates and hours—

(she stands, pointing RAYMOND)

on dis piece of paper him t'row away!

The courtroom erupts. The PIG WOMAN looks squarely at RAYMOND. PELHAM loses it.

ACT TWO

SCENE THIRTEEN

Early November, the park where RAYMOND and LUCILLE met it seems ages ago. The square is less crowded, the people moving more slowly and with less confidence. They are all in their coats to brace against the brisk fall air. Her arms folded around her, LUCILLE sits on the bench, watching them. RAYMOND arrives and sits beside her.

LUCILLE

It's too bad he got the works, but there's nothing to be done, is there?

RAYMOND

No, I suppose not. It seems a pity. Why didn't they lock Paul or me up, too? We're as guilty as he for encouraging him.

LUCILLE

What's going to happen to the girl?

RAYMOND

Paroled to the custody of her mother so that she can continue her schooling.

LUCILLE

It is a mess, but we might as well forget it. Anyway, I told you over the phone I have something else to talk about.

RAYMOND

Yeah? Well, what? And what's with the top-secret confab? We should go inside—

LUCILLE

I'm pregnant.

RAYMOND

Pregnant!

LUCILLE

You needn't shout it all over the place.

RAYMOND

Bull, I suppose.

LUCILLE

Yes.

RAYMOND

Well, does he know?

LUCILLE

I told him last night. He accused me of conniving to get a husband and socked me in the jaw.

RAYMOND

Are you serious?

LUCILLE

I assure you, it's no joking matter.

RAYMOND

After all that defending of our womenfolk, he's not willing to give the kid his name?

LUCILLE

It won't be necessary for it to have a name. I want you to help me find a doctor.

RAYMOND

Surely, you can find your own.

LUCILLE

To perform an abortion. I don't know those kinds of people. It's a rather simple request.

RAYMOND

Too damn simple. I sincerely hope that—

LUCILLE

That I what? Don't be so melodramatic, Raymond. I thought you hated scenes. I am making you a very simple request.

RAYMOND

'Cille, we should get married.

LUCILLE

You need another drink.

RAYMOND

No, really, I'm serious.

LUCILLE

Marry, you and I? My dear Raymond, you'd cut my throat after the first week and I'd wind up bashing you over the head with your typewriter.

RAYMOND

But I love you.

LUCILLE

And I love you too. That's how I know that I can depend on you to help me. I have already composed a toast to my recovery. May we forever be gay and young, witty and wild—ready to set the world afire! Infants of the Spring! ...

(standing, taking an envelope from her pocket.)

I've got the money here. Just find me what I need.

LUCILLE sits and places the envelop on the bench. RAYMOND lo

ACT TWO

SCENE FOURTEEN

The Manor, later that evening. RAYMOND enters and finds EUSTACE sitting on the steps.

EUSTACE

Don't you hear? Spirituals a callin'? Yes, Lawd, I'll sing yuh spirituals. I hope you's all happy. I'm happy! Whew! Look at me so happy!

(breaks down crying)

You made me to sing them spirituals. It was the only way I could get the audition, you said. Well, I sang 'em and they... they said I wasn't good enough. I didn't even get to Schubert.

RAYMOND retreats quietly to his room.

EUSTACE mounts the stairs. Unconsciously, he croons the Negro Spiritual to soothe himself and the song is beautiful.

EUSTACE

Who's that yonder dressed in white? It must be the children of the Israelites ...

ACT TWO

SCENE FIFTEEN

Moments later, RAYMOND's apartment. He finds his door unlocked, enters and discovers ALINE waiting, seated at his desk, she pokes at the keys.

ALINE

Well, Raymond, how's every little thing?

(As she stands, she jiggles a set of keys and tosses

... Got them off Stephen.

RAYMOND

Pretty fair, Aline. Where've you been so long?

ALINE

I've been here almost every night. You wouldn't see me.

RAYMOND

Been busy. Where's Janet?

ALINE

I don't know. We're not friends anymore.

RAYMOND

What caused the grand bust up this time?

ALINE

Jealousy.

RAYMOND

Still fighting over some man?

ALINE

Not exactly. I decided I'm gonna pass for white ... Oh, he's a swell fellow, Raymond, with oodles of money. He's gonna get me an apartment n'everything. But I'm supposed to be white, see? I offered Janet the chance to be my maid, so she could stay with me, but she got all hinky and laid me low.

RAYMOND

Can't say as I blame her. Your best friend, who's stuck by you through thick and thin. Seems a bit crass for you to want her to be your maid.

ALINE

Stuck by me? Stuck by me, that's good! Didn't I get my mother to take her in when she had nowhere to go? Ain't I always been the one to hustle up money for us to live on?

RAYMOND

Calm down, sister. It's all okay by me. Have a drink.

ALINE

Thanks.

RAYMOND fixes two drinks.

RAYMOND

Here's to your new life, old dear. May yo' chirrens escape the tar brush.

ALINE

Think I'm doing right, Raymond?

RAYMOND

What's to worry about?

ALINE

Well, there's my family. I guess, but I'm afraid someone's gonna tell. This bloke doesn't even know I'm colored, see. What if he ... like Stephen? Or what if I wanna come back? What if I get homesick?

RAYMOND

Homesick for Harlem? My dear, you've been reading too many novels.

ALINE

Well ... I'm gonna do it. Just think, Raymond an apartment in the Fifties, a maid, fine parties, theaters and swell cafes. Ain't it gonna be grand?

RAYMOND

I suppose it will. Let's toast to your new life.

EUPHORIA enters with PAUL.

ALINE

Never mind. I gotta go. See you.

ALINE exits.

PAUL

What's the matter with her?

RAYMOND

A little nervous I guess. She came to tell me she's crossing the line.

EUPHORIA

Doing what?

RAYMOND

Going to pass.

PAUL

Bully for her.

EUPHORIA

Why, the little hussy. Passing for white, huh? Just like her no count mother.

PAUL

Well ... why not? I'm gonna quit being a nigger myself.

EUPHORIA

What are you gonna do, Paul, be born again?

PAUL

I can pass for Spanish. I have. Why, didn't I ever tell you about my trip to South America and how I was received at the Spanish Delegation in Washington when I returned?

EUPHORIA

I've got something I must say to both you, all of you...Pelham's going to be paroled within six months.

RAYMOND

That's great news!

EUPHORIA

Well yes. And he's finally come to his senses and decided to take up a respectable trade.

PAUL

Pray tell, what would that be?

EUPHORIA

That isn't, however, what I wanted to talk to you about. I'm changing my policy about this place. You'll all have to move by the end of this month. That's three weeks.

PAUL

Move? What's the idea?

EUPHORIA

I mean it. I'm disappointed with this house. When I turned it into studios for you people, I thought I was filling a real need in the community. White artists downtown have hotels and houses where they live in a group and I thought Negroes in Harlem should have the same type of place. I expected great things to come out of it. I expected it to contribute something to me and my talent, too. I was wrong. It's caused me nothing but worry, and given rise to nothing but slanderous gossip, which is detrimental to me and my business. I won't have people accusing me of running a miscegenated, bawdy house any longer.

PAUL

A what? Oh, that's good. Ain't that a grand phrase, Raymond?

RAYMOND

I understand your position thoroughly.

EUPHORIA

I thought you would. Hoped—It's a matter of business, see? There's nothing to this art stuff, paintings you can't understand, writing stories.

PAUL

But what are you going to do with the house?

EUPHORIA

I'm gonna turn it into a dormitory for Negro working girls, ages eighteen to thirty.

PAUL starts laughing.

RAYMOND

Well, I'll be damned.

PAUL

You win the fur-lined bathtub, old dear. Dormitory for working girls?

EUPHORIA

It isn't funny. It's something that's long been needed, a very serious enterprise. Where is there a place that's decent for young girls, young bachelor women, rather, to stay? The YWCA is a joke. Restrictions and white-washed walls. No chance for girls to express their own personality. And these common ordinary rooming houses are not fit for decent girls to consider. Suppose Aline and Janet had had a nice congenial dormitory to move when Aline's no good mother turned them out? Suppose Lucille had such a place before, you know . . .

RAYMOND

I'll be glad to get out, Euphoria.

PAUL laughs wildly.

EUPHORIA

That's all I have to say. You have three weeks to make other arrangements.

PAUL

But what's going to happen to the Pig Woman?

EUPHORIA

Her name's Muriel and she's going to stay and keep house.

PAUL

Hooray for her! And you, I suppose, are going to play Queen Sappho to this new Isle of Lesbos?

EUPHORIA slaps PAUL across the face.

EUPHORIA

And you got three hours!

ACT TWO

SCENE SIXTEEN

December, an exceptionally cold day, the shrouded sky threatening snow. The Manor is in the midst of being transformed. WORKMEN abound. The walls where PAUL's paintings were mounted are being stripped and re-plastered. The middle of the hall is filled with boxes. MURIEL WINSTON, now in a housekeeper's crisp, new uniform, supervises as workmen carry out RAYMOND's desk, leaving him holding his typewriter. The PIG WOMAN exits with the phonograph, taking one last look at RAYMOND and then the empty apartment. STEPHEN enters.

STEPHEN enters the now bare room. RAYMOND puts his typewriter in its case, bolts it and then looks over his shoulder.

RAYMOND

Stephen! You're just in time to bid goodbye to the grand experiment.

STEPHEN

I've been called back to Euro pe. My mother is ill. I sail tomorrow.

RAYMOND

Family – a hell of a thing.

STEPHEN

Sam's gone back to work for his uncle ... trying to save the company. What's left of it. I'll be prevailed upon to stay at home and become a respectable schoolmaster, I suppose. Hell, let's finish a bottle of gin before I have to go ...

(STEPHEN pulls a pint bottle from his pocket, takes a swig and then offers it to RAYMOND.)

Got to adhere to the tradition.

RAYMOND

Okay, Stephen.

(accepting the bottle)

Here's to the all of Niggerati Manor and all within.

Just as RAY tilts the bottle to his lips, the phone rings.

RAY hands the bottle back to STEPHEN, looks around and remembers the phone is on the back alcove. He turns to answer it, his back to the audience.

RAYMOND

Hello ...Yes, this is Raymond Taylor

RAYMOND returns to face STEPHEN.

STEPHEN

What is it? What's happened?

RAYMOND

It's Paul . . . Paul is dead.

ACT TWO

SCENE SEVENTEEN

That night, an alley in Greenwich Village. Bodies huddle in doorways for warmth. RAYMOND enters a strange house. A gaunt white MAN in old glasses and a worn sweater approaches him.

MAN

Are you Raymond Taylor?

RAYMOND

Yes.

MAN

Come this way, please. I'm the one who called.

RAYMOND follows the man.

MAN

Earlier this evening we went to a party. When the party came to an end, he was nowhere to be found. I came home without him and an hour or so later I hear this huge commotion in the bathroom. The door was jammed. Someone suggested breaking it down ... I tried to salvage as many pages as I could. Only managed the one. Dried it over the radiator. The title page, only thing legible, I'm afraid...

As the MAN gingerly hands RAYMOND the salvaged warped page, above a single light bulb flickers in a second story seedy bathroom, illuminating PAUL's solitary figure. Standing in a claw-foot tub, he wears a crimson streaked kimono, his face blanched white, in the style of a Kabuki performer, his arms outstretched.

PAUL

... "Wu Sing Tong: The Geisha Man."

RAYMOND

Since leaving the Manor ... Paul had evidently been ... selling himself.

PAUL imagines his neck and body caressed as he so wished to be adored. Arms appear from within the robe and fondle him as he, in slow ritual fashion, dons red make-up under his eyes.

PAUL

To Ecstatic Spirits with whom I cohabit ... And whose golden spores of pollen I shall broadcast and fertilize, it is written ...

PAUL lowers his arms, to reveal the red “make-up” is blood, spewing from his wrists. The gentle hands now grab at him and then disappear.

RAYMOND

... Paul Arbian.

PAUL stumbles a moment, then sinks into the tub, arranging his body and robe artfully. As life ebbs, and the crimson-streaked water overflows, his attention turns to a small night stand beside the tub upon which sits a folio. He opens it, reviewing the top page and goes to set it back. As life ebbs, pages fall randomly through the air like snow. Lights fade ...

RAYMOND slowly exits the stage, descending to the aisle, on the opposite path from when this journey began. Standing under a single shaft of a street light, he studies the lone surviving page.

RAYMOND

Beneath this inscription, he had drawn a distorted black skyscraper, modeled after Niggerati Manor, and on which was focused an array of blinding white beams of light. The foundation of this building was composed of crumbling stone. The facade had cracked, the eaves strained, the stairwell tottered and heaved. The windows bulged, the glass shattered, falling to the ground in crystal shards.

(glancing up at the snow, he tenderly shields the paper within his coat jacket, and then looks back one last time)

The dark tower, itself, would soon crumple and fall, once again leaving the dominating white light ... in full possession of the sky.

RAYMOND turns toward the uncertain future, folds up his collar, puts his hands into his pockets and, resolute, steps into the darkness.

The streetlight slowly fades to black.

END

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