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# From "Flight to Canada"

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odies ridin up the chills of your vision on screen. we got to make it. we will.

the snake fire in my tongue touches his, and we begin to roast in our love heat. blackness, blackness is my gladness. i am the happiest black girl in the world. pipo is asleep, and we love.

pipo is not asleep. pipo is now cryin in the dark. his little head lifted up in the dark, he watches us kiss. and we, my old man and me laugh.

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FICTION / ISHMAEL REED

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### *From Flight to Canada*

Rockland Porke, known by his competitors as “the oil hog,” resides in a huge plantation, near Swin’erd, Virginia, one of his many homes around the world. He has just completed the pushups he does after his morning nourishment: two gallons of slave mother’s milk, and though he’s nearly ninety years old he is trim and fit and has outlived all of his doctors. Bubbly-eyed in wonder, Uncle Tom, his slave, is standing against the wall, arms folded, at Porke’s beck and call.

There’s a knock at the door. It’s Moe, the white house slave—Mingy Moe as the Mammies in the kitchen call him. He looks like an albino: tiny piggy pink eyes, white Afro. “Sorry to disturb you, Master Porke, but Abe Lincoln, the President of the so-called Union, is outside in the parlor waiting to see you. He’s fiddling around and telling corny jokes, shucking the shud and husking the hud. I told him that you were scheduled to helicopter up to Richmond to shake your butt at the Magnolia Club tonite but he persists. Says, “The very survival of the Union is at stake.””

“Hand me my robe, Uncle Tom,” Porke says as he stands in the middle of the room, in his briefs. Uncle Tom, his old grey hair concealed by a turban, dressed in blow-out pants and wearing an Arabian-night sword about his waist (he looks like a Moorish lamp) seeks clarification. “Which one do you wont, Suh, the one with the spangly fritters or the silvery-squilly Liberace-street clothes?”

“Give me the spangly one,” and turning to Moe Porke says, “Now, Moe, you tell this Lincoln gentleman that he won’t be able to stay long. Before I fly up to Richmond I have to check on my investments all over the world.”

“Yessir, Mr. Porke,” Moe says, exiting. Momentarily, Lincoln, Gary

Cooper awkward fidgeting with his top hat, humble looking, imperfect—a wart here and there—enters the room. “Mr. Porke, it’s a pleasure,” he says, extending his hand to Porke who sits behind one of those ornate desks General de Gaulle used to give press conferences from. “I’m a small time lawyer and now I find myself in the room of the mighty, why—”

“Cut the yokel-dokel, Lincoln, I don’t have all day, what’s on your mind?” Porke says, rejecting Lincoln’s hand at which Lincoln stares, hurt.

“Yokel-dokel? Why I don’t get you, Mr. Porke.”

“O, you know, log cabin origin. That’s old and played out. Why don’t you get some new speech writers? Anyway, you’re the last man I expected to see down here. Aren’t you supposed to be involved in some kind of war? Virginia’s off limits to your side, isn’t it? Aren’t you frightened, man?”

“No, Mr. Porke. We’re not frightened because we have a true cause. We have a great, a noble cause. Truth is on our side marching to the clarion call. We are in the cause of the people. It is a people’s cause. This is a great, noble and people period in the history of our great Republic. We call our war the Civil War but some of the fellows think we ought to call it the War Between the States. You own fifty million dollars worth of art, Mr. Porke. What do you think we ought to call it?”

“I don’t feel like naming it, Lanky—”

“Lincoln, Sir.”

“O yes, Lincoln. Well, look, Lincoln, I don’t want that war to come up here because to tell you the truth I’m not the least bit interested in that war. I hate contemporary politics and probably will always be a Tory. Bring back King George. Why would a multinational like myself become involved in these queer crises? Why, just last week I was abroad and was appallingly and disturbingly upset and monumentally offended by the way the King was scoffing at this . . . this nation as you call it. They were snickering about your general unkempt, hirsute and bungling appearance—bumping into things and carrying on. And that Gettysburg Address. What kind of gibberish was that? Where were you educated, in the rutabaga patch? Why don’t you put a little pizazz in your act, Lanky. Like Lee. Now, that Lee is sharp. His generals are punctual and smart. He’s as elegant as a line from his neatly-clipped hair down to his bedroom slippers. I gave his side a couple of railroads because I figure if they win they’ll be a hit on the continent. Why, already they can waltz. I’d hate to think what would happen if you went over there with that woman of yours. Why does she make those midnite telegrams to the *Herald Tribune* after drinking god knows what? And besides having a lunatic for a wife you upped and joined some kind of far-out political movement.”

“We call ourselves the Republican Party, Mr. Porke, but don’t look at me. I didn’t name it.”

"A far-out institution if there ever was one. Free Soilers, Whacky Money people. Abolitionists. Can't you persuade some of those people to wear a tie? Transcendentalists, Free Farmers, X-Whigs, Anti-Know-Nothings, and those awful Whitmanites always running about hugging things. And this Yogarhini, Mama."

"O the Hindoo have some fine points, Mr. Porke."

"—And what's with this Garrison fellow urging negroes to cut the throats of their masters. Is he nuts?"

"Look, Mr. Porke," Lincoln says in his high-pitched voice, "I didn't come here to discuss my party, I came to discuss how we could win this war, Mr. Porke; end this conflict," he says, pounding the table. "We are in a position to give the South its death-knell blow."

"'Death-knell blow.' There you go again with that cornpone speech, Lincoln, 'death-knell blow.' Why don't you shave off that beard and stop putting your fingers in your lapels like that? You ought to at least try to polish yourself, man. Go to the theatre. Get some culture. There's a play, 'Our American Cousin.' Let me give you the Porke box seat. Leave your wife behind and, Lincoln, I want you to stop the brawls and hooliganism at these Republican conventions. They're very rowdy and . . . well, if you don't I'll have to contact General Stanton; you know there's always one of our people keeping an eye on things in your . . . your cabinets. Why, under the Crown. . . ."

"Now, you look here, Mr. Porke. I won't take your threats. I knew it was a mistake to come down here, you, you capitalistic pea-picker." Rockland Porke, startled, removes his cigar from his mouth.

"Yes, I know what you think of me. I never went to none of this fancy school in the east and, well, shucks, I guess my speeches don't contain a lot of Latin and maybe my anecdotes aren't as understated as they should be but, Mr. Porke, I'm speaking from my heart and my soul, Mr. Porke, and that's what the American people like. You sit there and make fun of our nation, our war, and our party. I know you think we look silly but you know what, Mr. Porke, we're trying, Mr. Porke. We're trying to let each man, no matter how he may not have no fancy continental manners, to speak his piece, Mr. Porke. To Speak His Piece!!" Lincoln says, wagging his finger in Porke's blushing face. Uncle Tom stands there amazed.

"Now, I didn't come all the way down here through Confederate lines to hear you talk about my party, my war, and my wife; I came to ask you to do your patriotic duty, Mr. Porke."

*Train whistle.* "Mr. Porke, listen to your train. That great locomotive that will soon be stretching across America, bumping cows, pursued by Indians, linking our eastern cities with the West Coast. Who built your trains, Mr. Porke? The people did, Mr. Porke. Who made you what you are today, Mr.

Porke, a titantic titan of ten continents, Mr. Porke? Who worked and sweated and tilled and toiled and travailed so that you could have your oil, your industry, Mr. Porke? Why, we did, Mr. Porke. Who toted and tarried and travestied themselves so that you could have your many homes, your ships and your great tall buildings reaching to the azure skies? We did, Mr. Porke. Yes, I know I'm a cornbread and a catfish-eaten curmudgeon known to sip some scuppernong wine once in awhile but I will speak my mind, Mr. Porke. Plain Abe. Honest Abe. And I don't care how much power you have in Congress. It won't stop me from speaking my mind and if you say another word about my wife, Mr. Porke, I'm going to haul off and go you one right upside your fat head. Don't forget I used to chop wood." Lincoln turns around. "I'm leavin.'" Uncle Tom, tears rolling down his cheeks, applauds Lincoln until Porke gives him a stern look.

"Hey, wait a minute, come back, Mr. Lincoln, Mr. President."

Lincoln, stunned, stops and slowly turns around. "You know, I like your style. How's about a drink of Old Crow?"

"Well, I'll stay for a few more minutes but I warn you, Mr. Porke, if you so much as whisper some calumny and perfidy about my wife I'm going to belt you one."

"Sure, Mr. President. Sure," Porke says as Lincoln returns to his seat in front of Porke's desk. Porke is at the liquor cabinet reaching for the Old Crow, when, *zing!* a bullet comes from the direction of the window and shatters the bottle. The contents spill to the floor causing a fire which Uncle Tom douses with a bucket of water.

"Why I'll be," Porke says, staring at the pieces of glass on the floor. Lincoln and Uncle Tom are under the desk.

Moe, the white house slave rushes in. "Massa Porke, Massa Porke, the Confederates are outside whooping it up and breaking Mr. Lincoln's carriage. We hid Mr. Lincoln's party down in the wine cellar until the episode passed and do you know what, Mr. Porke? Somebody has drunk up all the wine."

"Somebody has drunk up all the wine!" Porke and Uncle Tom say simultaneously.

"Uncle Tom, give me the telephone. I want to call Lee." Uncle Tom obliges, tipping across the room, grinning from ear to ear.

"I don't want any of that grey trash snooping about my door," Porke says, frowning. Outside rebel yells can be heard.

"Hello, give me that Lee. . . . Well, I don't care if he is at the front tell him to bring his ass away from the front. This is Rockland Porke speaking . . ." To Lincoln, Moe and Uncle Tom: "That got em."

"Hello, Lee? What's the big idea of your men come busting up to my place and annoying my guests. I told your boss, Jeff Davis, to keep that war off

of my property. . . . Why you impertinent scoundrel." Hand over the phone, to the trio in the room, mimics Lee. "Says extraordinary emergency supersedes the right to the privacy enjoyed by the individual no matter what station in life the individual may hold. Look you little runt if you don't get those men off my property I'll, I'll. . . . My father's dead, I'm running this thing now. I don't care how long you've known the family—my brother David and me are running things now.

"Who's up here? Why, the nerve. For your information, Mr. Abraham Lincoln is up here." Lincoln tries to shush Porke, but Porke signals him that it doesn't really matter. "You'll do no such thing." Hands over phone to Lincoln. "Says he's coming up here to arrest you.

"Look, Lee, if you don't get those men off my property I'm going to create an energy crisis and take back my railroads and on top of that I'll see that the foreign countries don't recognize you. And if that's not enough I'll take back my gold.

". . . Now that's more like it. Now you're whistling Dixie. Who ever gave you permission to call me Rocky, only a handful of relatives know that. No apologies are necessary. I know you're under stress. No, I won't tell Davis. Forget it. That's fine. Says he's going to send an escort up here to see to it that your men return safely to the border. Lee said he was preparing to invade Washington but will call it off in deference to your comfort. . . . O you don't have to come up here and play nigger for three days for punishment, anyway, who will run your side of the war?

"No, I won't tell Davis about this incident. Look, Lee, I got to go now." Hangs up. To trio: "Boy, when you say gold, they jump. And speaking of gold, Mr. President, I'm going to give you some."

"Why, Mr. Porke, now that you speak of it I did come down here to ask you to buy some bonds."

"Sure, sure, Lincoln, I know. You don't have to tell me. I know that the war is even-steven right now and this gold will help out, but if you insist upon calling it 'buying bonds,' well, Lincoln, I'll take a chance on your little Union. The nerve of that guy Lee. I'm going to take back that necklace I gave Mrs. Jefferson Davis. Why, they can't do that to me. Just for that." Porke goes to his safe, removes some bags of gold and places them on the desk. "That ought to do it, Mr. President, and if you're in need of some more I'll get my brother David to open up Fort Knox and all that you guys wheelbarrow out in an hour you can have. David's so smart he lives in a bank. Doesn't even leave."

"Why, thank you, Mr. Porke. You're a patriotic man. But all of this gold really, I. . . ."

"Take it. Take it. I'll fix these Confederates. That Lee. Sits on his horse as if he was a Caesar or somebody."

"The Confederates are innocent, Mr. Porke. The other day, one of them was tipping his hat and curtsying and one of my snipers plugged him. And in the Chattanooga campaign, Grant tells me that once he was ascending Lookout Mountain and the Confederate soldiers saluted him. 'Salute to the Commanding General,' they were saying." The men share a chuckle on this one.

"My generals may look like bums with their blouses unbuttoned and the excessive drinking and their general ragged appearances but they know how to fight. Why, that Grant gets sick at the sight of the blood and gets mad when you bring up even the subject of war, and he's never read a military treatise—but he can fight. His only notion of warfare is 'go where the enemy is and beat hell out of him.' Crude though it may sound it seems to work."

"You know, Mr. President, I'm beginning to like you. Here, have a Havana. I have three homes there. Ought to come down sometime, Mr. President, play some golf, do some sailing on my yacht. Get away from the Capitol."

"Well, I don't know, Mr. Porke, I'd better not leave town with a war going on and all." (Pause.)

"Where did they get the idea that you were some kind of brooding mystic, tragic and gaunt, a midwest Messiah? I was saying to myself, how can a smart corporation lawyer like this Lincoln be so way-out?"

"I keep my mouth shut, Mr. Porke. And when I can't think quick enough I walk over to the window, put my fingers into my lapels, throw my head back and gaze toward the Washington Monument, assume a somber, grave, countenance. It impresses them and the myths fly."

"You know, Mr. Lincoln, I wish you'd do something about that fugitive slave law. There are four of my niggers out in a place called Emancipated City. I'd like to bring them back here. Teach them a lesson for running away. They're giving the rest of the niggers around here ideas. They're always caucusing, not admitting any of my white slaves or the white staff. They pass codes to one another and some of them have taken to writing.

"They're in contact, so it seems, with slaves in the rest of the country, through some kind of intricate grapevine, so Fort Worth, the Creole tells us. Sometimes he gets black with them so's they won't know who he's working for. They're so trusting and kind-hearted they accept him as one of their own—it's each other that they hate. You ought to hear my son, who's an explorer, tell it. He's an authority on them. Right now he's in the Congo on a little expedition for my conglomerate, checking on resources though he tells the natives he's looking for the source of the Nile. Aren't Africans trusting? He's majored in some new-fangled study they're teaching at one of those experimental colleges. I think they call it 'Anthropology.' First I

was against it. Wanted him to go to Yale, like me—but when I saw what the little stinker was up to and how this ‘Anthropology’ could be used I set up foundations to finance some of these, er, ‘anthropologists.’ Anyway, it’s on his advice that I don’t permit anyone in the household or in the cabins to use the telephone. The slaves think it has magical properties anyway. I let Uncle Tom use it to call in supplies from the general store. He’s such a simple creature he wouldn’t have the thought powers to think of using it for a nefarious purpose. He’s been in the house so long he’s lost his thirst for pagan ways and is as good a gentleman as you or I.” Lincoln nods, approvingly.

“Why, thank you, Cap’n,” Uncle Tom says.

“Don’t mention it, Tom. Why, I don’t know what I’d do without you. He brings me two gallons of slave woman’s milk each morning. It keeps me going.”

“Well, Mr. Porke. If you had read my campaign literature then you would know that I believe what a man does with his property is his own affair. I’m really lazy fair when it comes to that.”

“Laissez-faire.”

“Right. But I’ve been thinking. Maybe it’s not a good thing for this country to exist half-slave and half-free.”

Porke rises. “Look, Lincoln, one of them niggers, Randy Shank, wiped me out when he left here. Took all the small cash I had on hand. Why, I had to wire Switzerland for money. Took two luxury liners to get it over here and do you know what? That other nigger, Contraband, put a bomb in the flower pot at my Daddy’s funeral and the bomb blew up my Daddy’s remains.” Porke gets the sniffles. “And that other old nigger, the one they called 40s, took all my guns, slaughtered my livestock and shot the Overseer right between the eyes. And the worst betrayal of all was that Raven Quickskill, my trusted bookkeeper. Fooled around with my books, so that everytime I’d buy a new slave he’d destroy the invoices so I’d have no record of purchase; he was also writing passes and forging freedom papers. We gave him LITERACY, the most powerful thing in the pre-technological pre-post-rational age, and what does he do with it? Uses it like that old VooDoo—that old stuff the slaves mumble about. Fetishism and grisly rites only he doesn’t need anything but a pen he had shaped out of cock feathers and chicken claws. O they are bad niggers, Mr. Lincoln. They are bad, bad niggers. Not one of them with the charm and good breeding of Ms. Phillis Wheatley who wrote a poem for the beloved founder of this country, George Washington.

“And then that black Stray Leechfield. We saw him as nothing but a low-down molasses slurper and a mutton thief, but do you know what he did? He was stealing chickens, methodically, not like in the old days when



they'd steal one or two and try to duck the BBs, but had taken so many over a period of time that he was over in the other county, big as you please, dressed up like a gentleman, smoking a seegar and driving a carriage which featured factory climate control air conditioning, vinyl top, AM/FM stereo radio, full leather interior, power lock doors, six way power seat, power windows, whitewall wheels, door edge guards, bumper impact strips, rear defroster, and soft ray glass.

"It was full of beautiful women fanning themselves and filling the rose tinted air with their gay laughter. He had set up his own poultry business, was underselling everybody in eggs, gizzards, gristles, livers—and had a reputation far and wide for his succulent drumsticks. Had a white slave fronting for him for 10%. Well, when my men finally discovered him, after finding he'd built a dummy to look like him so we'd think he was still in the fields, do you know what he did, Mr. Lincoln? He stabbed the men. Stabbed them and fled on a white horse, his cape furling in the wind. It was very dramatic. Didn't he gambol?"

"You defend negro ruffians like that, Mr. Lincoln? You yourself, Mr. President, said that you were never in favor of bringing about social and political equality with them. You don't want them to vote either. I mean I read that in the newspaper. They're not like us, Mr. Lincoln. You said it yourself, there are physical differences. Now, you know you said it, Mr. Lincoln. When General Fremont got brash and freed the slaves in the western territory you overruled his proclamation, and now General Stanton tells me that you have some sort of wild proclamation on your desk you're about to sign."

"I haven't made up my mind yet, Mr. Porke. I guess I'm a little wishy-washy on the subject still. But. Well, sometimes I just think that one man enslaving another man is wrong. Is wrong. Is very wrong," Lincoln says, pounding the table.

"Well, I won't try to influence your decision, Mr. President. Would you like Uncle Tom to help you with one of those sacks?"

"Thank you, Mr. Porke." Uncle Tom goes over and helps Lincoln with two of the heavy gold bags.

"And before you leave, Mr. President, go down to the kitchen and have Juddy, the maid, fix you a nice snack. She'll be so thrilled. All she talks about is Massa Lincoln, Massa Lincoln. Maybe you can sign a few autographs." Porke rises and walks over to Lincoln who is now standing, his hands heavy with sacks of gold.

"And think before you sign that proclamation, Mr. President. The slaves like it here. Look at this childish race. Uncle Tom, don't you like it here?"

"Why, yessuh, Mr. Porke. I loves it here. Good something to eat when you wonts it. Fat back. Possum. Some whiskey and a little nookie from time

to time. We gets whipped with a velvet whip and there's free dental care and always a fiddler case your feets gets restless."

"You see, Mr. President. They need someone to guide them through this world of woe or they'll hurt themselves."

"I'll certainly consider your views when I make my decision, Mr. Porke. Well, I have to go now. And thanks for contributing to the war chest, Mr. Porke. Buying these bonds and all."

"Sure, Lincoln, anything you say." Goes to the window. "Hey I think the escort Lee sent up has arrived. Look, Lincoln, I'm throwing a little shindig for Mr. and Mrs. Jefferson Davis. Why don't you come down? I'd like to get you two together for one day. Take time off from the war."

"You can arrange that, Mr. Porke?"

"I can arrange anything. They called my father God's God, Mr. President. Although you may hate Lee's flag and Lee hate yours, everybody salutes our flag. I can arrange anything on earth and soon," Porke says looking skyward, "in the heavens too."

Uncle Tom and Lincoln exchange surprised glances as Porke begins a strange maniacal incongruous laugh. Thunder and lightning emblazon the sky.

Lincoln and Uncle Tom exit as Porke is left behind, rocking on his heels, tears streaming down cheeks, laughing wildly.

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CRITICISM / DARWIN T. TURNER

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## Visions of Love and Manliness in a Blackening World: Dramas of Black Life from 1953-1970

At present, two types of drama are being discussed and practiced by Black dramatists of America. One type has been designated "Black Arts" drama, which includes such variations as Black Revolutionary drama, drama of Black Experience, and Ritual drama. No particular label has been applied regularly to the other style of drama. For convenience, I call it "Traditional"—not to imply that it is old-fashioned or archaic, but to suggest that it continues the traditional or habitual practice of emulating styles of American drama rather than seeking styles uniquely identifiable with Black culture.

Black dramatists and critics have propounded simplified distinctions be-

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This article is taken from a lecture at the Fifth Annual Institute for Afro-American Culture, The University of Iowa, 1973.