

A Noble Act
by Phillip W. Weiss

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Tagline: Doing right often takes courage.

A community long divided by race and at the brink of destruction earns a reprieve in a most unexpected manner.

Battle Hymn of the Republic: lyrics by Julia Ward Howe (1861), music by William Steffe (1856).

Although inspired by historical events, this play is entirely a work of fiction. No similarity to any actual persons, living or deceased, should be inferred. Nor should this play be construed as an attempt to present an alternative history.

Characters

Ezeriah Walton III aka Walton – governor, son of Ezeriah Walton II aka Junior, grandson of Ezeriah Walton

R. Fennington “Riff” Greene – advisor to the governor

Delbert T. “Mac” McVey – advisor to the governor

Rev. Marvin Lewis Kane – black civil rights activist

Rev. Rolf Dennis Abercrombie – black civil rights activist

Danesha Trescott – black civil rights activist

Ezeriah Walton –tenant farmer, later governor

Eunice Walton – Ezeriah’s first wife

Ollie Fisher – Confederate army prison guard

Rufus Trescott – runaway slave, soldier, educator

Lyle Ogilvy – advisor to the governor

Lem Carpenter – advisor to the governor

Lulu Belle Walton – Ezeriah’s second wife

Ezeriah Walton, Jr. aka Junior – Ezeriah’s son

Hank Covington – industrialist, owner of a local steel factory

Amanda Trescott – wife of Rufus Trescott II

Rufus Trescott II – black educator, son of Rufus Trescott aka Trescott

Logan Federson – labor union president

Clancy Kilkenny – labor union vice president

Bruce Davenport – political activist

Harold – black WW II army veteran

Philip – black WW II army veteran

Clark Henry – restaurant owner

Ernie Thompson – newspaper reporter

Dale Tiergard – police officer

Edward Lefkowitz – political activist

Axel Barnes – Danesha’s friend

Police Officers

Scene 1

Time: 1965

*Place: Capital City located in a state in the southern United States.
The setting: Office of the Governor. Sitting behind the desk is the governor:
Ezeriah Walton III. Seated opposite him are his two advisors: R. Fennington "Riff"
Greene and Delbert T. "Mac" McVey.*

RIFF

The niggers are acting up again, governor. They're threatening to march on the capital and demand the right to vote.

MAC

They already have the right to vote! What more do they want? Is it our fault that they can't pay the poll tax?

RIFF

No, it isn't. But this is becoming serious. All kinds of agitators are pouring into the state stirring up all kinds of trouble. It isn't right.

MAC

No, it isn't. We don't need any outsiders telling us how to deal with our Negroes. Where do they get off trying to do that? Who the hell are they?

RIFF

They're just a bunch a pompous hypocrites, that's all, using the niggers to attack us.

MAC

I think it's about time that we took action to stop all this agitating now. Before it gets out of control.

WALTON

What do you mean, out of control?

RIFF

It could escalate into something much bigger, and much more dangerous.

WALTON

Stop pussy footing with words and speak plainly. What exactly are you trying to say?

MAC

What I'm saying is this: the niggers want to take over, that's what I'm saying. Period. I can't be any more explicit.

RIFF

Well, that ain't ever gonna happen. Ever! They take over and all hell will break lose. No white person would be safe. It would be a catastrophe. It would be the end of civilization, at least as we know it.

MAC

It sure would, governor, and you know it. White people have kept control in the state ever since the end of the civil war. Today, the niggers say they want the vote, tomorrow they'll be screaming that they want everything! It ain't natural and it ain't right.

RIFF

Can you imagine the niggers trying to run the government? When I was in the service, they couldn't even do kp duty without screwing it up.

MAC

The worse thing Harry Truman ever did was to integrate the armed forces. That and the emancipation proclamation. That's what made the niggers become so uppity.

RIFF

You think so? I thought it was when the Supreme Court ruled that school segregation was unconstitutional. After that ruling the niggers went crazy. Now they want to send their kids to the same schools as our kids. If we allow that then we can kiss the schools goodbye. What white teacher is gonna want to be stuck in a classroom with a bunch of acting-out niggers? I wouldn't.

MAC

But you're not a school teacher, so you don't have to worry about that.

RIFF

But I have three kids in school and so I do have to worry. Where could I send my kids if the niggers are allowed to come in? I'd probably have to move, but to where?

MAC

Wherever there are no niggers.

RIFF

But they're all over the place! You can't avoid them.

MAC

Maybe now you can't. But there's a way to solve the problem.

RIFF

How?

MAC

Get rid of 'em.

WALTON

What are you talking about?

MAC

I mean just that. Drive 'em out of the state.

WALTON

How would you pull that off? One-third of the state is black.

MAC

So what? It could work.

RIFF

You know, Mac, sometimes I think you have cotton in your head.

MAC

Hear me out. We could offer a cash award to any nigger who decides to leave the state. Could be worth the money.

WALTON

I appreciate the sentiment behind the proposal, but the plan lacks practicality. Trying to get one-third of the population to leave would just create more problems.

MAC

Then we're back to square one, governor, and I don't like it.

WALTON

And I don't like it either.

RIFF

Me neither.

WALTON

I remember when I was a little boy growing up in Caseyville, most of my pals were niggers. I really enjoyed playing with them. We had a lot a fun. We used to play ball, swim in the lake, do all kind of kid stuff, and then we started school and they went to their school and I went to mine, just like it was meant to be. Everyone got along fine and everyone knew their place. Then that damn reporter showed up in town and started spreading those filthy lies about my father and grandfather, which got the niggers all riled up and open to being manipulated by all kind of outside agitators, both black and white.

RIFF

I hear you loud and clear, governor. It's the fault of the commies, I tell you! McCarthy was right. He just was fingering the wrong people. If he were alive today, he'd know what to do.

WALTON

What are you implying? That I can't handle the situation?

RIFF

No, of course not, governor. I was just saying ...

WALTON

What?

MAC

Don't worry, governor, Riff didn't mean nothing. You're more than man enough for the job. We both know it. You're a chip off the old block, as the saying goes. You weren't elected governor for nothing.

RIFF

That's right, governor.

WALTON

That's right, boys, I wasn't elected governor for nothing. We got work to do.

End of scene 1.

Scene 2

Time: same as scene 1

Place: A public park located somewhere in Capital City. In the park is assembled a large crowd of people, mostly black. On a temporary wooden rostrum are standing three people: the Rev, Marvin Lewis Kane, the Rev. Rolf Dennis Abercrombie and a woman, Danesha Trescott. They are black. They are engaged in a lively discussion.

ABERCROMBIE

I just can't take it anymore. The governor's obstinacy is just too much to bear.

KANE

Just try to keep your cool. Our time will come.

ABERCROMBIE

I'm trying, brother Marvin, a whole lot, but the indignities just keep piling up.

KANE

Well, you gotta try harder because that's what the system wants, for you to act out. Don't you understand that?

DANESHA

Brother Rolf is right. We can't wait much longer, otherwise we'll lose the crowd, and then where will that leave us?

ABERCROMBIE

The sister knows what she's saying, brother Marvin.

KANE

You must think before you act, and I am telling you the time is not yet come for us to mobilize for action.

DANESHA

We have been enduring inequities for centuries. Black women have suffered especially hard. We must have justice.

KANE

Justice is like a butterfly: beautiful to behold but hard to catch.

ABERCROMBIE

No, I say. Justice is much more than something that flutters around waiting to be caught. It is a universal concept and something that's all around us.

DANESHA

That's all talk. What we need now is action.

KANE

You do realize, of course, that the court has issued an injunction prohibiting us from marching.

ABERCROMBIE

I know that, brother Marvin, but sometimes the time comes when we must obey a higher law.

DANESHA

That's right. A higher law.

KANE

I wholeheartedly agree, but here on earth an injunction is still an injunction, totally enforceable, and if we defy the court our entire movement could be discredited and damaged, even beyond repair, and get a lot people hurt too.

DANESHA

Including you.

KANE

This wouldn't be the first time I have experienced the painful sting of violence. But this has nothing to do with me, personally. This has to do with the movement.

ABERCROMBIE

But the people are here, now. They want action, now. They want leadership, now. What good is it whipping up the people just to send them home empty handed?

KANE

I'd rather that they go home empty handed than bloodied and bleeding, because the police are posted just across the way and they are waiting for an excuse to act.

ABERCROMBIE

So let them act. We will fight.

KANE

But that would be foolish, my brother. There's enough illegality in the world. Why add to it? We would be branded as hoodlums, mere opportunists looking to use our grievances as a pretext to act out.

DANESHA

Brother Marvin, we have dilly dallied enough. We can't worry about what others may think. We have to act. The black women of this country demand action. We no longer will accept being treated like second-class citizens. We want our black men to act like men and stop being afraid.

KANE

Those are brave words, but we are not rabble rousers. We are here to do serious work. Already we are being accused of acting as fronts for radical groups who want to exploit our grievances for their own political purposes. In fact, I have seen them in our ranks distributing all kind of inflammatory material of the kind that frankly turns my stomach.

ABERCROMBIE

We have nothing to fear from them. They're just white boys making some noise.

KANE

What they're doing is more than just noise making. They are trying to take over.

DANESHA

Let them try. We have our agenda. They have theirs. By acting now we will steal their thunder.

ABERCROMBIE

The sister is right.

KANE

I cannot agree. To act now would play right into these agitators' hands and would provoke a police response that would lend credibility to their brutal tactics.

Offstage (repeatedly): We want justice! We want justice! When do we want it? NOW!

ABERCROMBIE

Do you hear them?

KANE

I hear them, loudly and clearly.

ABERCROMBIE

Do you heed their words?

KANE

I heed their words.

DANESHA

So speak to them. Tell them what they've come from all over the country to hear. Tell them the truth! Tell them it's time to march!

End of scene 2

Scene 3

Time: 1857

Place: a yard in front of a shack located in an immense field a few miles outside of Capital City. A young man is digging a hole with a shovel. His name is Ezeriah Walton. He is a share cropper. Standing at the entrance to the shack is his wife, Eunice.

I'm almost done. EZERIAH

Good. EUNICE

It's a sad time, such a sad time. EZERIAH

Yes. EUNICE

But it's God will. EZERIAH

Whatever. EUNICE

We did all that we could. EZERIAH

Yes, we did. EUNICE

Doc Jones did all that he could. EZERIAH

Yes, all that he could. EUNICE

Now he is gone. EZERIAH

Yes, he's gone. EUNICE

But he won't be forgotten. EZERIAH

It's too bad we couldn't bury him proper in a cemetery. EUNICE

You know we couldn't afford that. This is the best we can do. EZERIAH

Yes, the best we can do. EUNICE

I'm just a dirt farmer. EZERIAH

And I'm your wife. EUNICE

And we are poor. EZERIAH

Yes, we are poor. EUNICE

But we are not dirt! EZERIAH
(angry)

A black man enters. His name is Rufus. He's out of breathe and terrified.

RUFUS
Sir! Help me! They're after me!

EZERIAH
Who's after you, boy?

RUFUS
My master!

EZERIAH
You running away?

RUFUS
I have to. He's out to kill me.

EZERIAH
Who's your master?

RUFUS
Mister Lemuel Scott of Scott's Plantation.

EZERIAH
Is that the same Lemuel Scott who lives in Coates County?

RUFUS
Yes, sir.

EZERIAH
I heard of him. He has a reputation for nastiness toward his servants. Beats up on them at slightest provocation.

RUFUS
And so he does!

EZERIAH
That ain't my concern, boy. You just turn around and go back.

RUFUS
(imploring)

I told you, he wants to kill me!

EUNICE

Whad you do?

RUFUS

Nothing, really, I'm telling you! You gotta believe me!

EUNICE

Well you musta done somethin'.

RUFUS

It's like this: he caught me reading a newspaper.

EZERIAH

Since when can niggers read?

RUFUS

I taught myself. I listened to my master's kids getting instruction and I picked it up. I couldn't help it!

EZERIAH

Niggers who can read. What's this world coming to?

EUNICE
(to Ezeriah)

That boy's gonna get us into trouble.

EZERIAH
(to Rufus)

She's right. You better skedaddle now or otherwise you'll get us all into a heap of trouble.

RUFUS

I wouldn't want that to happen, sir.

EZERIAH

What's with you niggers anyway? You got it good. You just don't know it. You have no worries, no cares, you got your master taking care of you, that is, as long as you don't get uppity, stay respectful and do what you're told. Trouble is: you're all spoiled.

RUFUS

But, sir, I want my freedom!

EZERIAH

Freedom? Why? Look at me and my wife. We're free. We work this land, work harder than any slave, and what do have to show for it? Nothing! Right now you caught us at a bad time. We just lost our baby.

RUFUS

I'm sorry to hear that, sir, I'm really am. Is there anything I can do to help?

EZERIAH

That's right good of you to ask. Show's that you're kindly. Being that you're a learned nigger, maybe you could say a few words over the grave. I'm kind of rusty on my bible learning.

RUFUS

(points to the hole)

Is that the grave?

EZERIAH

It's gonna be.

RUFUS

I'd be right honored to say a few words.

EZERIAH

That's good of you. I'll go inside and fetch the coffin.

Eunice and Walton exit. Moments later both return. Walton is carrying a small plain wooden coffin. Inside the coffin is the corpse of the dead child. Ezeriah places the coffin into the hole and then covers it with dirt. Eunice is weeping.

EUNICE

My baby, my baby, my poor little baby. He never had a chance to live.

**EZERIAH
(to Rufus)**

Go ahead. Say some words.

RUFUS

Lord, please receive this baby into your arms and let this baby enjoy the fruits of eternal life. For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory for now and forever. Praised be the Lord and amen.

EZERIAH and EUNICE

Amen.

**EZERIAH
(to Rufus)**

Those were right fitting words. (to Eunice) Give the man some food. It's the least we can do to show our thanks.

Eunice exits and soon returns with a bundle of potatoes. She hands them to Rufus.

EUNICE

This is all we have.

RUFUS

I can't leave you with nothing.

EZERIAH

Don't worry about us. We'll manage. Now, it's time for you to get moving. Maybe we'll meet again.

RUFUS

Maybe.

Rufus exits. Ezeriah picks up the shovel and starts filling in the hole.

End of scene 3

Scene 4

Time: 1864

Place: The interior of a cabin located inside a prisoner of war camp housing capture black Union soldiers. Present are two confederate soldiers: Ezeriah, who is a sergeant, and a teenager, Ollie Fisher, a private.

OLLIE

What are we gonna do with all these niggers?

EZERIAH

Guard 'em.

OLLIE

But, sarge, I don't wanna be guarding a bunch of niggers. I wanna be out there fighting Yanks.

EZERIAH

Stop your griping. You don't know when you got it good.

OLLIE

But sarge, the niggers ain't even soldiers. Boy, that damn Lincoln created a big mess, he sure did, with that emancipation. It made the niggers think they're our equals.

EZERIAH

Well, what did you expect from Lincoln? To keep 'em slaves?

OLLIE

We can't afford to have uppity niggers. All they know is being slaves. They can't handle being free. They need us white folks to make sure they don't get into trouble.

EZERIAH

Yeah, I know that, but things are a-changin'.

OLLIE

They look strange wearing uniforms.

EZERIAH

How so?

OLLIE

They ain't real soldiers.

EZERIAH

They were real enough to give us a good fight.

OLLIE

There's no way a nigger can beat white soldier.

EZERIAH

The Yanks seem to think otherwise.

OLLIE

What do the Yanks know about niggers?

EZERIAH

They know how to get them to the fighting for them.

OLLIE

And how to get their asses whapped and become prisoners. Why don't we jus' return them to their masters?

EZERIAH

Who knows where they come from? And to tell you the truth, I couldn't care less. It's enough for us to have to guard them.

Rustling sounds from offstage.

Hush! You hear that?

OLLIE

Yeah.

Both pick up their rifles.

EZERIAH

(points his rifle in the direction of the noise)

Who's out there? I'll give you to the count of three to talk. One ... two ...

VOICE

From offstage

Don't shoot!

EZERIAH

I won't if you show yourself now.

A black man enters. It is Rufus He is wearing a union army uniform.

OLLIE

Okay, nigger, hands up! Trying to sneak up on us, eh?

RUFUS

No, sir. Not at all. There was no other route to take.

OLLIE

All you niggers are liars. Maybe I should shoot you now.

EZERIAH

Easy, Ollie. There's no call for that. *(pauses, then to Rufus)* Wait a minute! I think I know you from somewhere. Have we ever met before?

RUFUS

I don't think so, sir.

EZERIAH

I'm sure that we met. *(pause)*. Yes, now I remember! You were that fellow who showed up at my place in 1857. Isn't that right?

Rufus stares at Ezeriah.

RUFUS
(relieved)

That's right! And you are that white man who helped me. I'm right glad to meet you again.

EZERIAH
What are you doing being a soldier?

OLLIE
(to *Ezeriah*)
You know him?

EZERIAH
(to *Ollie*)
Yes, I do. We met by chance a few years ago on my farm. He was lost, wandering around, and I made sure he got back on the right path.

RUFUS
How is your wife, sir?

EZERIAH
She's dead. She died from typhus. But thank you for asking.

RUFUS
I'm truly sorry to hear that, sir. She seemed like a good woman.

OLLIE
(to *Ezeriah*)
Since he was tryin' to escape, let's shoot him, and all of his pals too. Who'd miss a few dead niggers?

EZERIAH
Enough of that talk, Ollie. Nobody's gonna be shooting anybody, at least, not now.

OLLIE
Then what are we gonna do with him?

EZERIAH

(to Ollie)

Stop your pestering me. *(to Rufus)* Why are you tryin' to escape?

RUFUS

I really wasn't trying to escape. I was jus' tryin' to find me some grub. Me and the boys don't have enough to eat.

EZERIAH

Why didn't you say that in the first place?

RUFUS

What good would it have done? You white boys have no use for us.

EZERIAH

We're not that heartless. The fact is, we barely got enough food for ourselves, and Ollie is right: we have cause to shoot you, but we won't and I'll tell you why: because I owe you, that's why.

OLLIE

Sarge, what in tarnation are you talkin' about? The nigger was escaping!

EZERIAH

Don't sass me, Ollie or I'll give you what for. This man helped me in my time of grief. He said words that comforted me and my wife and helped send my baby boy to heaven. I can't forget that.

OLLIE

But he's no preacher. He's a nigger.

EZERIAH

I know that, but still, he said the words, and said them right proper and with feeling too.

OLLIE

Sarge, I think this nigger has spooked you. They can conger up all kinda of stuff to mess up your head.

EZERIAH

I'm not spooked. I'm talkin' sense.

OLLIE

So what are we gonna do with him?

EZERIAH
(to Rufus)

Where were heading to, boy?

RUFUS

I don't know. Jus' wanted to get away.

EZERIAH

Going where?

RUFUS

To my home.

EZERIAH

What kinda work you do?

RUFUS

I'm a carpenter, you know, do odd jobs. I also teach school for colored kids in town.

OLLIE

Sarge, who cares what this nigger does or where his lives? He is a prisoner and was escapin'. So let's shoot him and be done with it.

EZERIAH
(to Ollie)

Watch what you're sayin', boy! It could cost you.

OLLIE

You know that we're under orders to report all runaways to the captain.

EZERIAH

I am aware of that, Ollie. You are beginning to vex me.

OLLIE

I don't mean to, sarge. I jus' don't want us to get into trouble.

EZERIAH

Will you shut up already! (to Rufus) So, what am I supposed to do with you?

RUFUS

I'm at your mercy, sir.

EZERIAH

Yes, I guess you are. (to Ollie) Ollie, you take this nigger and march him across the field to that big maple tree over yonder.

OLLIE

Why'd you want me to do that for?

EZERIAH

Don't question me, boy! Jus' to it!

OLLIE

(to Rufus)

Okay, nigger, get movin.'

Ollie turns to exit. Then Ezeriah hits Ollie on the head with the butt of his rifle knocking Ollie unconscious.

EZERIAH

Okay, here's your chance to scam.

RUFUS

I don't know what to say. What about him? (*glances at Ollie*)

EZERIAH

Don't worry about him. I'll tell him you hit him. He'll be so rattled he won't know the difference. Now, get lost! And if I see you around here again, I may not be so kind. By the way, before I forget, what's your name?

RUFUS

Rufus Trescott.

EZERIAH

And where's your home?

RUFUS

Alton, Illinois. That's where I have my wife and child.

EZERIAH

Okay, Rufus Trescott from Alton, Illinois. Now skedaddle!

Rufus stares at Ezeriah, then exits.

End of scene 4

Scene 5

Time: 1890

Place: Capital City, the governor's office. Sitting behind the desk is Ezeriah. He is the governor of Alabama. Sitting opposite him are two men: Lyle Ogilvy and Lem Carpenter. They are Ezeriah's special advisors.

LEM

I tell you, governor, it's either us or the niggers.

LYLE

That's right, governor. We can't let this go on!

LEM

If I ever get my hands on one of those damn agitators I'll ...

EZERIAH

Can that talk, Lem. I have more important business to discuss.

LYLE

More important than dealing with agitators?

EZERIAH

Look, boys, I wanna start a school for colored folk.

LEM and LYLE
(*shocked*)

What!

EZERIAH

You heard me.

LYLE

But that'd be like pouring fuel on the fire.

EZERIAH

No, it would be more like putting out the fire, or better yet, starting our own fire, one that we can control.

LEM

But, boss, you know if we give in to the niggers, they'll take over everything!

EZERIAH

We're not givin' in to anybody. We'll be keeping everything under our control. Look, it's 1890. Things are a-changin' and there's nothing we can do about that.

LYLE

Governor, nobody gives a hoot about the niggers except whenever they forget their place.

EZERIAH

That's where you're wrong. Dead wrong.

LYLE

You show me one white person in this state who gives a hoot about the niggers, and I'll paint your house.

EZERIAH

(laughs)

You'll paint my house? Don't do me any favors. You couldn't do hard work even if a gun was pointing at you.

LEM

Whatcha have in mind, governor?

EZERIAH

Like I was saying, I wanna build a school for colored folks. A trade school where they could be taught all kinds of skills. Help them become productive members of society instead of being dependent on the Yanks for help.

LEM

Oh, I see. You wanna out-yank the Yanks!

EZERIAH

Well, kind of. I also wanna show the world that in our state we white folk really do care about our coloreds, which is more than I can say for the white folk up north, hypocrites that they are.

LYLE

So, who's gonna run this school?

EZERIAH

You're puttin' the cart before the horse. First we gotta get the school built and that will cost money. That's why I've had you gents meet me today. To discuss raising the necessary funds.

LEM

What do you want us to do?

EZERIAH

The usual. Knock on doors, tell them who sent you, explain why, and ask them to support the project. If anyone gives you lip, let me know and I'll take care of it. Tell them that this is for the good of the state. Now, get out of here and make sure you leave the same way you came in, by the back door.

Lem and Lyle exit.

Ezeriah gets up, walks over to the door of his office and opens the door.
I want to send a telegram to Rufus Trescott, Alton, Illinois.

End of scene 5

Scene 6

Time: 1898

Place: A dining room in the Walton house. Seated at the table are Ezeriah, his wife, Lulu Belle, and their son, Ezeriah Walton II, aka Junior, who is 20 years old.

JUNIOR

Well, father, I'm doing quite well in my studies.

EZERIAH

I'm so glad to hear that. Don't you agree, mother?

LULU

Of course I do. He's such a good boy.

JUNIOR

Soon I'll be applying to law school.

EZERIAH

Excellent choice of avocation, my boy, excellent.

JUNIOR

Father, if it isn't too much to ask, would you mind if I went to town tonight with a few of my friends?

EZERIAH

You just got in from school, boy. What's your rush?

LULU

Oh, papa, stop fretting. The boy wants to be with his friends. Let him have his fun!

EZERIAH

(to Lulu)

I realize that, mother. (to Junior) What's so important that you gotta leave so fast?

JUNIOR

Papa, it isn't like I don't want to be with you and mother. Of course I do. It's just that I had already made plans to get together with some friends.

EZERIAH

And who may they be?

JUNIOR

Just friends that I made at school.

LULU

Then why don't you have them come here instead? Then we could meet them and show them some real hospitality

JUNIOR

I'd love to, mother, but we already made other plans.

LULU

Papa, it looks like our boy has a crowded social calendar.

EZERIAH

So it seems. (*picks up the newspaper*). Says here in the paper that the Battleship Maine blew up in Havana harbor.

JUNIOR

That could mean war!

LULU

Oh my!

EZERIAH

What do you plan to do, Junior?

JUNIOR

I don't know. I really want to complete my studies.

EZERIAH

But sometimes duty calls.

LULU

Papa, let the boy finish his studies.

EZERIAH

I'm not telling him what to do. I'm just saying that sometime we have to, what's that fancy word, prioritize.

JUNIOR

I know. That's why I'm meeting with my friends tonight. We're gonna talk about the war, and about some other stuff, such as maybe paying a visit to the Trescott School.

EZERIAH

Now why would you want to do that?

JUNIOR

Because the niggers there are getting mighty uppity.

EZERIAH

Uppity? In what way?

JUNIOR

Homer Beasley told me that last week a nigger wearing the Trescott School cap winked at his sister while she was shopping in town, and it upset her so much that she ran home crying. We can't allow such things to happen.

EZERIAH

That sounds serious. Maybe I ought to call Mr. Trescott and discuss the matter with him.

JUNIOR

Papa, you can call him, but we're set on paying that school a visit and teaching those niggers a lesson.

LULU

Junior, you listen to your papa.

EZERIAH

Mr. Trescott is a friend of mine and I'm sure that we can settle this matter without adding to the distress.

JUNIOR

Papa, you're not governor anymore.

EZERIAH

But I still can pull a few strings, so let me do my string pulling and you go upstairs and read a book.

JUNIOR

But, papa ...

EZERIAH

Don't you "but Papa me", you hear? Me and Mr. Trescott will work things out. And don't you even think about sneaking out, because if you do, I will not let you back in. I will cut off all your funds, render you destitute, disavow your debts and personally see to it that you enter the army as a private, not an officer, and that is final.

JUNIOR
(*dejected*)

Yes, papa.

Junior exits.

EZERIAH

I hope we haven't raised a fool for a son.

LULU

I hope not also, papa.

EZERIAH

I hope I didn't make a mistake starting up that school.

LULU

You did what you thought was best.

EZERIAH

It was either that or have every colored boy in town lollygagging around with nothing to do except make trouble, and that would just rile up the white folk, and you know what that would mean: Ku Kluxers.

LULU

Oh my!

End of scene 6

Scene 7

Time: 1920

Place: an office in a steel mill located at the outskirts of Capital City. Sitting behind the desk is Hank Covington, the president of Consolidated Steel. Sitting opposite him is Junior. Both men are dressed in business suits.

COVINGTON

I'll tell you, Junior, maybe I should jus' throw in the towel and quit.

JUNIOR

Why are you thinking that way, HC? I never known you to quit anything.

COVINGTON

It's all this labor agitation. It's becoming too much for me to deal with.

JUNIOR

It is a lot to deal with, but you're not dealing with it alone. I'm here with you.

COVINGTON

I pay the highest wages in the industry, installed the newest equipment but all they want is more and more and more! When will it stop?

JUNIOR

You know, HC, we have not exhausted all of our options.

COVINGTON

What do you mean?

JUNIOR

You know, we got a lot of colored folk who'd be glad to work for you.

COVINGTON

You mean hire niggers to do skilled work? Steel smelting isn't like frying up grits or picking cotton.

JUNIOR

HC, your thinking is outdated. From what I saw in 1898 when I commanded a company of colored troops in Cuba, and from what I saw in the last war, with strong leadership niggers can do okay.

COVINGTON

But, Junior, being in the army is not the same as working in a factory. I don't have the same authority.

JUNIOR

But you do, HC. Just in a different form. You have the power to hire and fire, and close shop if you have to.

COVINGTON

But if I close shop, then we'll be off line and lose money, and that's something I want to avoid, if at all possible.

JUNIOR

I know that HC, and to avoid that we gotta think about hiring niggers until the white workers come back to their senses.

COVINGTON

You know, of course, that if we do hire niggers, a lot of people are gonna become mighty upset. It may also play into the hands of those radicals that want to close down my operation.

JUNIOR

Actually, it would undercut the Reds. Don't you see: the Reds want to radicalize the entire community, blacks and whites. By hiring the niggers, we'll divide the whites and blacks against each other.

COVINGTON

Junior, I don't know where you come up with these ideas, but you seem to know what you're talking about.

JUNIOR

Thank you, HC. My late father, the governor, taught me to hold on, stay calm and head off trouble if at all possible. The niggers will appreciate you, and as for whether they can do the work, they'll learn. My father knew that when he founded the Trescott School.

COVINGTON

Remember how in 1898 the whites wanted to burn down the school? We almost had a war here too.

JUNIOR

Yes, but because of my father, and Mr. Trescott, cooler heads prevailed and the troublemakers were duly punished, and during the war several boys from Trescott served in the army, a few even as officers.

COVINGTON

I still can't countenance the US army allowing niggers to be officers. It ain't right.

JUNIOR

I know how you feel but that's the way it is. I'll go over and talk with Mr. Trescott and explain the situation to him.

COVINGTON

You do that, Junior, and get back to me quick, you hear! And say hello to your wife for me.

JUNIOR

I will.

End of scene 7

Scene 8

Time: Same day, late afternoon.

Place: An office at the Trescott School. Sitting behind the desk is a distinguished looking black man, Rufus Trescott II. Standing next to Trescott is his wife, an attractive black woman, Amanda Trescott.

TRESCOTT

The Ku Klux is on the move again.

AMANDA

Yes, they are.

TRESCOTT

They're a menace to society.

AMANDA

You mean they're a menace to black society, don't you?

TRESCOTT

That's what I meant, dear.

AMANDA

What do you plan to do about it?

TRESCOTT

I wrote a letter to President Wilson expressing the black community's indignation and concern.

AMANDA

And you think writing a letter will accomplish something?

TRESCOTT

My dear, what more do you expect me to do? I am an educator, not a politician.

AMANDA

You know that my father was murdered by a lynch mob, yet you persist in doing nothing.

TRESCOTT

I have you and the children to think of.

AMANDA

Stop using me to excuse your own cowardice!

TRESCOTT

(indignant)

Me, a coward? How dare you? I put my life on the line during the Spanish American War, did I not? Did I not receive an official commendation for bravery, signed by Colonel Roosevelt himself?

AMANDA

So what! That was a white man's war, not yours. There is a war happening now, right here, at this very spot, being conducted against our people, and you do nothing except write letters that are ignored.

Telephone rings. Trescott answers the phone.

TRESCOTT

(speaking in the phone)

Yes ... Mr. Walton is outside wishing to speak with me? Yes, fine. Please tell Mr. Walton that I'll be right with him. *(Trescott hangs up the phone.)* Mr. Walton is waiting outside. He wants to speak with me.

AMANDA

About what?

TRESCOTT

I don't know.

AMANDA

Do you want me to leave?

TRESCOTT

No, my dear, stay. I also want to assure you that I am not a coward.

AMANDA

Then act like the fearless man I know you are; the man that I married.

Trescott picks up the phone.

TRESCOTT

(into the phone)

Ask Mr. Walton to come in. (Junior enters. Trescott hangs up the phone, gets up, walks around the desk and greets Junior.)

Mr. Walton, what a pleasure it is to see you.

JUNIOR

Same here, Rufus.

They shake hands.

JUNIOR

(to Amanda)

Hello, Amanda.

AMANDA

(stiff, formal)

Hello, Mr. Walton.

TRESCOTT

(to Junior)

Please sit down.

All three sit: Trescott behind his desk, Amanda at Trescott' side, both facing Junior who is seated on the opposite side of the desk.

TRESCOTT

(to Junior)

So what brings you to my school today?

JUNIOR

A matter of great urgency.

TRESCOTT

What may that be?

JUNIOR

As you know the workers at Consolidated Steel are becoming increasingly obstinate, making many unreasonable and even outrageous demands that management simply cannot accept, such as a fifty-cent an hour wage increase and reducing the work week from sixty to forty-eight hours. Accepting such demands would mean putting the company out of business. Our families have a long history of working together to smooth over all kinds of difficulties that have threatened the stability and well-being of our community. Once again it is necessary for our families to link forces. Will you help?

TRESCOTT

What exactly is it that you want?

JUNIOR

Let me open and frank with you. All the skilled positions at the mills are currently held by white workers, many whom aren't even Americans. But they were hired because they had the skills necessary to operate a steel mill.

AMANDA

No, they were hired because they were white and would work for lower wages than the "local help."

JUNIOR

I'm not here to quibble with you.

AMANDA

What makes you think I'm quibbling?

TRESCOTT
(to Amanda)

Let's not get sidetracked.

AMANDA

Okay, let's just sweep it under the rug, like we always do.

JUNIOR

I'm not here to debate or defend my company's hiring practices. Rather, I'm here to ask for your help and support, which will benefit not only the mill but your school and the entire community, black and white.

TRESCOTT

Go on, I'm listening.

JUNIOR

Consolidated Steel wants your school to start training colored boys to take over the skilled jobs at the steel mill.

TRESCOTT

That's asking a lot. We're not geared up to provide that kind of training. And won't that mean displacing some of the white workers?

JUNIOR

Consolidated Steel will assist you in developing a training program for the new employees.

AMANDA

Why can't you just hire more foreigners?

JUNIOR

Because the political climate has changed.

AMANDA

So, you want to use Negroes as scabs to force the white workers to drop their demands, isn't that right?

TRESCOTT

Mr. Walton, what you are asking us to do is mighty risky and something that could ignite a huge explosion. I'm not sure I want to take such a risk. I have my wife and students to think about.

JUNIOR

Let me be frank: You depend on the state for much of your funding, don't you?

TRESCOTT

Of course, we do. You know that, and for that we have your father to thank.

JUNIOR

Who, at great personal and political risk, reached out to your father and made him the number one Negro educator in the United States. It would be a shame if all that goodwill ended here. At the risk of sounding blunt, I need to warn you that if your help is not forthcoming, then the funding from the state for your school could be jeopardy.

TRESCOTT

I'll need time to think this over.

JUNIOR

Of course. But we'll need your answer soon. You know how to reach me. *(to Amanda)* It was a pleasure meeting you again. *Junior exits.*

AMANDA

What do you plan to do?

TRESCOTT

Like I said, think it over.

End of scene 8

Scene 9

Time: Early evening.

Place: Junior's office, located in downtown Capital City. Junior is sitting at his desk sipping on a drink. There is knocking at the door. Junior puts the drink inside the draw of his desk.

JUNIOR

Come in.

Amanda enters.

Amanda! To what can I attribute this visit?

AMANDA

I want you to stop pressuring my husband to commit suicide and to leave our school alone.

JUNIOR

Your school? It is my father who was responsible for getting that school built.

AMANDA

I am aware of that. But times have changed, and your father is long gone and things must move on.

JUNIOR

Does that include us?

AMANDA

What happened between us is over and done with. Right now the reason why I'm here is strictly business.

JUNIOR

You expect me to believe that?

AMANDA

You had your chance with me, but you wimped out.

JUNIOR

You knew that our “friendship” could never go beyond a certain point.

AMANDA

Oh, stop it! You seduced me. I was a young girl, innocent and impressionable and you were, well, a young man with ... ideas.

JUNIOR

You knew how felt about you.

AMANDA

I thought I did, but you were just handing me lines.

JUNIOR

I meant them.

AMANDA

No, you didn't and you proved that by your actions.

JUNIOR

What was I to do? Tell my father about us? That would have destroyed him and everything he had worked for.

AMANDA

You mean it would have destroyed you.

JUNIOR

Yet here you are now, in my office, uninvited, trying to con me into protecting your husband, but it won't work. All you're doing is provoking me.

AMANDA

How can you live with yourself?

JUNIOR

Stop it already. I am doing my job. My client wants to keep his business operating, but to accomplish that the workers have to come to their senses. What is wrong with that?

AMANDA

What is wrong is that instead of dealing squarely with the issues you're playing the race card.

JUNIOR

Now look here, Amanda. Nobody's playing the race card. Now if you don't mind, I happen to have some work to do.

AMANDA

I'm sure you do.

JUNIOR

Please leave.

AMANDA

I once really cared for you. It just shows how naïve I was.

JUNIOR

Look, Amanda, if you do not leave now I will call security and have you escorted out. Do I make myself clear?

AMANDA

Okay, Junior, I'll leave but we're not finished.

JUNIOR

That's where you are wrong. Now, please leave.

Amanda exits. Junior picks up the phone.

Hello. ... Security? ... A colored woman just left my office ... I want you to follow her and then let me know where she goes. ... Good ... Call me this evening at home.

Junior hangs up the phone, then pulls open the drawer of his desk, take out his drink and gulps it down.

End of scene 9

Scene 10

Time: The next day

Place: An office located in the headquarters of Local 814 of the Amalated Steel Workers of America. In the office are the president of the union, Logan Federson, the vice-president, Clancy Kilkenny, and a third man, Bruce Davenport, a labor activist.

BRUCE

I'll call New York today if you want.

KILKENNY

We can handle things just fine without bringing in outside help.

BRUCE

Look, I know what you think, but I'm no Red. I'm as American as red, white and blue.

KILKENNY

That I find hard to believe. If it was up to me I'd toss you out of this office right now.

FEDERSON

Clancy, the man came here claiming that he wanted to help. The least we can do is hear him out.

KILKENNY

I heard enough already. He's nothing but a nigger lover who just wants to stir up trouble so he could take over the union.

BRUCE

That is ridiculous.

FEDERSON

Mr. Davenport, we have a serious situation here. Our workers are working twelve-hour shifts, six days a week, for peanuts and management won't budge. The membership is getting more and more impatient. If management refuses to seriously negotiate we might have to call a strike, which could mean big trouble for us. Now, how can you help us?

BRUCE

I want to meet with the black community in this town to encourage them to support the strike.

KILKENNY

The last thing we need is help from niggers. They are natural born scabs who will destroy the union.

BRUCE

But if we don't reach out to them, then management will, and then what will you do?

KILKENNY

We'll keep them in their place, that's what we'll do.

FEDERSON

Clancy, let's not fly off the handle. Maybe Mr. Davenport is right. We gotta stay one step ahead of management.

KILKENNY

But Logan, bringing in niggers, well, that would create problems, lots of problems. Let's say we do bring them in, what's to stop them from taking our jobs?

BRUCE

Nobody would be taking your jobs.

KILKENNY

Are you serious? You expect us to believe that?

BRUCE

Yes, I do because it's true. You have nothing to worry about.

KILKENNY

All you Bolsheviks are the same. Trying to get over on us with empty promises. Well, guess what? It won't work here.

BRUCE

I'm not trying to get over on anyone. I'm here to help.

FEDERSON

Look, Mr. Davenport, it's like this: if we agree to open our membership to niggers, management will offer them our jobs at a much lower wage. That you can take to the bank. So I have to agree with Clancy on that point.

BRUCE

Instead of treating the Negro as a threat, why not treat him as an ally? Promoting solidarity will strengthen your union.

KILKENNY

Here we go with more of that Bolshevik talk. (*to Bruce*) We have nothing in common with niggers, get it? My father was a steel worker, and my grandfather fought for the South, and there is no way I'm gonna let some slick talking Red from New York City undermine my union.

FEDERSON

This talk of solidarity is fine in New York City, but down here it just won't go. It is contrary to our traditions and would only raise tensions and cause trouble in the ranks.

BRUCE

But if management locks you out, they'll use the Negro as a scab to try to break your union. That's why we have to reach out to them now.

FEDERSON

I know what management will do, and I know what we will do to deal with that.

KILKENNY

Now you're talking, Logan.

BRUCE

Do you understand what you're saying?

FEDERSON

I appreciate your offer to help and it was a pleasure meeting you.

Federson and Bruce shake hands.

BRUCE

If you change your mind I'll be staying at the Hotel Edison. You can reach me there. Good bye. *(Bruce exits)*

KILKENNY

I don't like that boy at all. He's nothing but a modern day carpetbagger looking to rile up the niggers at our expense.

FEDERSON

I get your point, but times are a-changing, and we gotta change with the times.

End of scene 10

Scene 11

Time: the next day

Place: A street corner in Capital City. Bruce is distributing flyers.

BRUCE

What do we want? Justice! When do we want it? Now! Friends, listen to me. We must unite, be one, don't let the bosses keep you down! You gotta fight for the right, and by doing right you will win the fight!

A police officer enters.

POLICE OFFICER

What are you doing, boy?

BRUCE

Exercising my first amendment rights.

POLICE OFFICER

Don't sass me, you hear? So, I'll ask you again: what are you doing?

BRUCE

I'm exercising my right as a US citizen.

POLICE OFFICER

You got permission to conduct a public demonstration?

BRUCE

I'm not demonstrating.

POLICE OFFICER

Looks like to me you are.

BRUCE

Look, sir, I am exercising my right as an American citizen to protest ...

POLICE OFFICER

You're sassing me again.

BRUCE

... against racial injustice and against all forms of oppression, and ...

POLICE OFFICER

I'm ordering you to cease and desist, now!

The police officer suddenly takes out his baton and starts beating Bruce.

BRUCE

(trying to fight back)

Stop it! Stop it! You're hurting me!

POLICE OFFICER

(while continuing to beat Bruce)

You didn't listen to me, so now I'm teaching you a lesson in manners and why you should respect the law.

BRUCE

(screaming)

I am an American! I have rights!

POLICE OFFICER

And I'm the law!

The police officer continues beating Bruce. Bruce collapses onto the sidewalk.

POLICE OFFICER

You damn agitator. I'll teach you to give me lip!

Amanda enters. She sees what is happening.

AMANDA

(alarmed, to the Police Officer)

Stop it! You'll kill him! *The Police Officer stops beating Bruce.*

POLICE OFFICER

(to Amanda)

I am ordering you to move on! This is official police business!

AMANDA

He's hurt! You've done your job!

POLICE OFFICER
Do you know this man?

AMANDA
No, I don't.

POLICE OFFICER
Then leave! Now!

The Police Officer resumes beating Bruce.

AMANDA
I will not leave! I demand that you stop beating that man!

The Police Officer blows his whistle. Soon two other police officers enter.

POLICE OFFICER
(to the officers)
This woman is creating a disturbance and interfering with official police business. Take her to the station. I'll take this guy in myself.

AMANDA
That is a lie! He was beating that man! I saw it myself!

Police Officer 1 slaps Amanda in the face, knocking her down.

POLICE OFFICER 2
(to Amanda)
Shut up! Niggers gotta learn to have respect.

POLICE OFFICER 1
Or else.

POLICE OFFICER 2
Damn agitators! Trying to Bolshevize my country. We'll show them! Let's run 'em in.

End of scene 11

Scene 12

Time: Next day.

Place: Junior's office. Junior is sitting behind his desk reading a newspaper. A bottle of bourbon and a glass is on his desk. His phone rings. Junior picks up the phone.

JUNIOR

They're here? ... Show them in. Junior hangs up the phone.

Junior places the bottle and the glass inside a drawer in his desk. Bruce and Amanda enter, escorted by police officer 1. They are handcuffed and both are disheveled and their faces badly bruised.

Welcome to my office. *(to the police officer)*. You may go now.

POLICE OFFICER 1

If they give you any trouble, let me know. I'll be right outside.

JUNIOR

That's very kind of you, but I don't expect that your services will be required. Oh yes, you may remove their handcuffs.

Police officer 1 roughly removes their handcuffs, then exits.

(to Bruce)

I haven't had the pleasure of your acquaintance. So please permit me to introduce myself. I'm Ezeriah Walton, Jr. My father was the governor of this state. Presently I am chief counsel and advisor for the Consolidated Steel Corporation.

BRUCE

(angry)

I don't care who you are or why you brought us here, but let me tell you this: the whole world is going to hear about your barbaric police tactics.

AMANDA

It's outrageous.

JUNIOR
(to Amanda)

You hush! *(to Bruce)* Now before you go flying off the handle, which is what got you into trouble the first place, permit me to inform you that it was I who bailed the both of you out.

BRUCE

I didn't ask for your help, okay.

JUNIOR

Let me point out that the charges against you are serious but I can arrange to have them dropped. All you need to do is leave and agree not come back. Your presence here is a detriment to this community. This is not New York City. Down here we do not tolerate rabble-rousing. You people think that you have the answer to every social problem, but you don't. Before I bailed you out I familiarized myself with your case and frankly what I learned appalled me. You had the temerity to assault one of our law enforcement officers while in the performance of his lawful duties. He had cause to employ deadly force, but in this part of the country our police officers are taught to act with civility and restraint.

AMANDA

That's news to me.

JUNIOR

I told you to hush up! I'll deal with you later! *(to Bruce)* As for you, I want you out of town on the next train.

BRUCE

This is a free country. You can't make me leave.

JUNIOR

This is a free country but that does not mean you are free to violate our laws.

BRUCE

I didn't violate any laws; you violated my rights.

JUNIOR

Here you are in my office, under arrest and facing serious charges and yet you have the audacity to lecture me. Amazing. Why do all you radicals insist on being so ... stubborn? But enough of this philosophizing. Let me warn you now: If you continue on this dangerous path, you will be putting yourself at grave risk; I will not be able to guarantee your safety. So I strongly urge you to leave while you can. I have the train ticket in my desk drawer. (*Junior opens the desk drawer and takes out a train ticket.*) Here. (*Junior places the ticket on the desk.*) Take it.

BRUCE

Keep the ticket. I'm staying here to serve the cause of freedom and justice for the exploited and oppressed.

AMANDA
(*to Bruce*)

Leave while you can. Don't you see that you're dealing with a thug?

JUNIOR

Amanda! Please! That is enough! (*to Bruce*) So, what will it be?

AMANDA

You have nothing on us!

JUNIOR
(*to Amanda*)

On the contrary: The police have sworn statements from six citizens of excellent standing in the community who have attested to the felonious nature of your actions yesterday and will so testify in court. You should be at home with you husband, not on the street plotting insurrection with radicals.

AMANDA

You are below contempt. Wait till my husband hears about this.

JUNIOR

He's heard about it already. I called him myself. He'll be here shortly to fetch you.

AMANDA

I was beaten, arrested and humiliated.

JUNIOR

That is unfortunate. However, you have only yourself to blame.

AMANDA

The officer was beating this man (*gestures to Bruce*). Look at his face!

BRUCE

(*to Amanda*)

Stop wasting your breathe.

JUNIOR

(*to Amanda*)

He was causing a disturbance, demonstrating without a license, resisted arrest, and assaulted a police officer. As a result the officer had to apply force. (*to Bruce*) You do understand that, don't you?

BRUCE

What I understand is that I am a victim of police brutality.

JUNIOR

Your gumption is admirable but misguided. You leave me with no choice but to have you remanded back to jail for further "processing." *Junior picks up the phone*. Please inform the officer that his presence is required.

Police officer 1 enters.

POLICE OFFICER 1

Yes, sir?

JUNIOR

The gentleman is unwilling to accept our offer of leniency, so please escort him back to our penal establishment.

POLICE OFFICER 1

Stand up!

BRUCE

Don't touch me!

Bruce jumps up, tries to grapple with the officer but trips over the chair, falling on the floor. Police officer 1 takes out his baton and starts beating Bruce.

POLICE OFFICER 1

You still haven't learned your lesson.

Police officer 1 continues beating Bruce. Soon Bruce stops moving.

AMANDA

Stop it! (to Junior) Please tell him to stop beating that man.

JUNIOR

That will be enough, officer. I believe the gentleman has learned his lesson.

Police officer 1 stops beating Bruce and drags him off stage.

(to Amanda)

You see, Amanda, it does not pay to break the law.

AMANDA

(contemptuous)

It is you who is breaking the law.

JUNIOR

Yesterday I told you to stop sassing me, and I meant it.

AMANDA

You pig!

Junior quickly moves from behind his desk and slaps Amanda on the face.

JUNIOR

How dare you say that to me, you uppity guttersnipe. If it weren't for me, you'd be two-bit whore plying your trade on Main Street.

AMANDA
And you'd be my pimp!

JUNIOR
I've had enough of your insolence!

AMANDA
You phony!

JUNIOR
Nobody forced you to put out for me!

AMANDA
You led me to believe that you loved me!

JUNIOR
I never misled you. Never!

AMANDA
(*contemptuous*)
Yeah, right.

JUNIOR
I did what I could to make things better for you.

AMANDA
Any dope with a rich and influential father could have done that.

JUNIOR
Amanda, as much as you may not believe what I am going to say, I don't want to see anything bad happen to you, but if you keep on provoking me ...

AMANDA
Oh, shut up!

JUNIOR

How dare you tell me to shut up! Do you know who I am? I'm one of the most powerful men in this state, and I can make and break anyone I want, including you. Do you hear? *Junior slaps Amanda again. Amanda spits in Junior's face.*

(enraged)

Why you dirty, filthy tramp! It's about time I taught you a lesson.

Junior tears open the front of her dress, hits her again and throws her onto the floor.

AMANDA

(screaming)

No, no, no, no!!!!!!

End of scene 12

Scene 13

Time: Following morning, 3 AM

Place: The bedroom in the Trescott residence. Trescott and Amanda are in bed.

TRESCOTT

My God! Whatever gave you cause to confront the police?

AMANDA

The man was being beaten!

TRESCOTT

And then you got beaten in return, and, what's more, jeopardized the reputation of the school.

AMANDA

What do I care about the school's reputation? The school is a front, that's all, nothing more. They want to use you to break the union.

TRESCOTT

I didn't mean it the way it sounded. When I showed up in Mr. Walton's office and saw what condition you were in, I was shocked. I didn't know what to think.

AMANDA

What did you expect? The police beat me.

TRESCOTT

Is that all that happened?

AMANDA

What do you mean? Isn't that enough?

TRESCOTT

Did anyone else besides the police harm you?

AMANDA

Of course not.

TRESCOTT

I may be under the thumb of these white people, but I'm no fool. One look at your torn dress was more than enough proof that something more happened.

AMANDA

I got into a little scrape with one of the whores who was in the holding pen with me.

TRESCOTT

I wish I had gotten to the prison sooner. Nobody was telling me anything. I was frantic.

AMANDA

Look, Rufus, we got to put this behind us.

TRESCOTT

(angry)

I'm tired of acting the part of the house nigger! The hell with the school! The hell with everything! Let's get out of here and go up north!

AMANDA

Give up everything? And do what? Go up north so you can land a ten-dollar a week job as a porter and I can work as a maid? No thank you. We belong here. This is our home.

TRESCOTT

But after what happened to you ...

AMANDA

What happened to me is not important. What is important is that we survive because that day will arrive when things change and justice triumphs.

TRESCOTT

Amanda, I hope you're right because if you're not, when that day comes and justice is denied, there will be an orgy of violence so great that it will bring down the entire country, with me leading the charge, if I'm still alive.

AMANDA

Stop your foolish talk. You're a school teacher, not some kind of rabble rouser. Right now I need to get some rest. So let's go to sleep and not talk about this anymore.

End of scene 13

Scene 14

Time: Next day

Place: Covington's Office. Seated behind the desk is Covington and Junior. Seated in front of the desk are Federson and Kilkenny.

JUNIOR

You can't fool us. We know what you were up to. Using the cover of "labor management talks" to rile up people and instigate revolution. You're just a bunch of Bolsheviks, or even worse, their dupes.

FEDERSON

(shocked)

You're talking pure nonsense. We're not fronting for anybody. We want a fair and equitable contract for our members. That is our agenda.

JUNIOR

You expect us to believe that? You're just buying time. The day before yesterday the police arrested one of your operatives who was openly preaching revolution, right here on our streets.

KILKENNY

Sir, if I may, I think you got your facts wrong. We do not employ agitators in our organization, and I for one have absolutely no use for them.

COVINGTON

What you people want is to rile up the public so as to drive me out of town and take over my operation. I will tell you now: that will not happen. Do you hear? Your people are lucky to have jobs, good paying jobs. Instead, you're trying to destroy me!

KILKENNY

That is not true! You're making huge profits and ...

COVINGTON

(outrage)

How do you presume to know how much this company makes?

FEDERSON

We don't presume anything, sir. We know for a fact that the company can afford to meet our demands. You're just being stubborn.

COVINGTON
(indignation)

Why I never ...

JUNIOR
(to Federson and Kilkenny)

Gentlemen, you are barking up the wrong tree. It is not management that is dependent on you, it is your members who are dependent on us. I hope I make myself clear. Now, I understand that you are demanding a twenty-five percent across the board pay raise for your members, a forty-eight hour work week and health insurance coverage paid for through employer contributions. If we accede to your demands, this company will go out of business.

FEDERSON

That is baloney. You can afford it, easily. You just don't want to pay, period. You want to hoard the profits.

COVINGTON

Now you're sassing me. I have a good mind to throw you out right now.

JUNIOR

Enough of this petty bickering. Mr. Federson, by law, we are under no legal obligation to meet with to you, yet as a matter of courtesy we have set aside this valuable time to have this discussion, the purpose of which is to arrive at an amicable arrangement so as to keep this factory operating, which would be to the mutual benefit of both labor and management. But when you take advantage of our hospitality and good faith to plot insurrection, then that is going a bit too far.

FEDERSON

Mr. Walton, please speak plainly. You are talking in riddles. I have no idea what you are talking about.

Junior picks up the phone.

JUNIOR

(speaking on the phone)

Are they here yet? ... Good. Show them in. *(Junior hangs up the phone.)*
Soon you'll find out what I'm talking about.

Two police officers enter, dragging Bruce with them. Bruce is semi-conscious. He collapses onto a chair.

FEDERSON

(shocked, to Bruce)

What happened to you?

BRUCE

(mumbling, incoherent)

Mmmmm.....

FEDERSON

(To Junior)

What did you do to this man?

JUNIOR

That's not your concern. You know him, right?

KILKENNY

We have no use for the likes of him.

JUNIOR

(excited, to Kilkenny)

So you do know him! *(to Covington)* You, see, Mr. Covington, they do know him! *(gloating, to Federson)* What do you have to say now?

FEDERSON

Did you invite us here to talk or to try to intimidate us?

JUNIOR

Not intimidate, rather to encourage you to drop your pretensions and just be open and honest with us as to your true intentions.

FEDERSON

If you are suggesting that we are negotiating in bad faith, I can assure you that you are mistaken.

KILKENNY

We're here to negotiate a contract, period.

JUNIOR

No. You're here to try to shake us down by employing professional agitators such as this gentlemen here (*gestures to Bruce*) to instigate the niggers to riot and help you take over the steel mill.

FEDERSON

That's insane!

BRUCE

(Moans loudly)

Ooooooooooh ...

JUNIOR

(to the police officers)

Take him away.

POLICE OFFICERS

Yes, sir.

The police officers grabs Bruce by the collar and drags him off-stage.

JUNIOR

As you were saying?

FEDERSON

Your charges are preposterous! Fantastical!

JUNIOR

Preposterous you say? Well let me tell you this, and you can take this back to your membership: Your plot has been foiled and if you do not retract your demands we will begin replacing your members with the very same niggers that you and your Bolshevik friends were so callously plotting to turn against us.

KILKENNY

That'll be the day. All the niggers are good for is doing grunt work. Our members are skilled workers.

JUNIOR

No, no, no, my friend. Just like we trained your boys, most of whom are semi-illiterate, we'll train niggers too, such as the ones who attend the Trescott School. At least they know how to read and write.

KILKENNY

Ha! From Trescott? Don't make me laugh. They don't know nothing about steel making.

JUNIOR

We'll teach them, even if we have to import teachers from England and Germany.

FEDERSON

And Mr. Trescott is going along with this?

JUNIOR

Of course. He is a good citizen.

KILKENNY

(angry)

Those damn niggers! Undercutting us! Maybe we need to teach them a lesson!

JUNIOR

We don't like dealing with niggers any more than you do, but you're forcing our hand. Either you back down now or we will lock you out.

FEDERSON

Or maybe we'll strike!

COVINGTON

You do that and you'll be sorry, you damn Bolsheviks!

JUNIOR
(to Federson)

Be reasonable. You strike and I can guarantee that your members will never set foot the inside of that steel mill again. So, what do you want to do? The choice is yours.

KILKENNY
(to Federson)

I think they're bluffing. They have no more use for niggers than we do.

JUNIOR
(to Kilkenny)

Sir, this is no bluff. We are not going to allow one of the biggest steel mills in the country to be taken over by irresponsible rabble, and if means training colored men to do your work, we will do it.

FEDERSON

Okay, Walton, we've heard enough. *(to Kilkenny)* Let's get out of here. All of a sudden I find the air in here stifling. *Federson and Kilkenny exit.*

COVINGTON

If they go out and strike, I will personally ask the President of the United States to send in troops.

JUNIOR

That won't be necessary, Mr. Covington. Even pinko-commies like Federson know when they're licked. To show our union "friends" that we are serious, I recommend immediately hiring one or two coloreds from the Trescott school as "Junior Floor Managers." I'm sure the niggers would appreciate that. *(chuckles)* And people up north call us racist.

End of scene 14.

Scene 15

Time: 1947

Place: a funeral parlor in Capital City. Rufus Trescott, Jr. is dead. His body is lying in state in the casket which is open. Among the numerous attendees paying their respects are Junior, Amanda, and Amanda's twenty year old daughter, Danesha.

JUNIOR

I came over as soon as I heard the news.

AMANDA
(cold)

That's very kind of you.

JUNIOR
(to Danesha)

Hello, Danesha. You are looking lovely.

DANESHA

Thank you. Mr. Walton.

JUNIOR

Your father was a great man, a credit to his people.

AMANDA

Yes, you should know.

JUNIOR

Yes, I should. If it weren't for your husband, the steel mill would have closed and this community would have suffered. But instead, today we all can be proud of all that we have accomplished. Isn't that right, Amanda?

AMANDA

Of course it is, if you say so.

JUNIOR

But let us not quibble during your time of loss.

A man enters. He is a reporter. His name is Ernie Thompson.

ERNIE

Mrs. Trescott. My name is Ernie Thompson and I'm a reporter for the New York Evening Standard. I'd like to know if you'd like to make a statement.

JUNIOR

My dear sir, this is neither the time nor the place to pester Mrs. Trescott. If you wish to make any inquiries, direct them through me.

ERNIE

And you are?

JUNIOR

Ezeriah Walton, Jr.

ERNIE

Ezeriah Walton, Jr. *(pause)* Wait a minute! Are you the same Walton who was responsible for breaking the Consolidated Steel strike back in 1920?

JUNIOR

I wouldn't characterize my role, minor as it was, in such flamboyant language.

ERNIE

I was just a young tyke at the time, but from what read all hell broke loose down here after you brought in a bunch of blacks to replace the white workers.

JUNIOR

There were some local disturbances, but we were able to smooth things over.

ERNIE

After you asked the president to call in the troops. Right?

JUNIOR

Regrettably we were left with no other option.

ERNIE

What do you have to say about the late Mr. Trescott?

JUNIOR

He was a truly great man, a credit to his race and a role model for all Negroes who wish to advance in this society.

Amanda starts weeping.

DANESHA

Mother, what is it? (to *Ernie*) Look what you've done! You have upset my mother!

ERNIE

And you are?

DANESHA

Danesha Trescott. Rufus Trescott was my father. And this is my mother.

ERNIE

First, on behalf of my paper I would like extend our condolences.

DANESHA

Thank you.

ERNIE

And also apologize for barging in like this, but your father was a well-known public figure in the Negro community and throughout the nation.

DANESHA

Yes, I know, and we are all devastated by his passing. My father was a wonderful and loving man.

AMANDA

Excuse me. What is your name again, sir?

ERNIE

Thompson. Ernie Thompson, ma'am.

AMANDA

(regaining her self-control)

Mr. Thompson, let me assure you that am perfectly capable of speaking for myself.

ERNIE

Ma'am, I didn't mean any disrespect.

JUNIOR

(to Amanda)

This is neither the time nor place for you to be making any statements.

AMANDA

I disagree. This is the perfect time and the perfect place to make statements, especially as it relates to the truth.

ERNIE

Could you elaborate on that?

JUNIOR

No, she cannot elaborate.

AMANDA

I want to let you know that what happened in 1920 involved more than just a labor strike.

DANESHA

(shocked)

Mother! What's come over you? What are you talking about?

JUNIOR

(to Ernie)

The lady is obviously too distraught to engage in meaningful conversation at this time. Perhaps you should come back tomorrow.

AMANDA
(to Junior)

You skunk! You bastard! I've been living a lie for twenty-seven years!

Ernie takes out a pad and begins frantically taking notes.

DANESHA
(to Junior)

Mr. Walton, what does she mean?

JUNIOR

Your mother is delirious. I'll call an ambulance.

AMANDA
(Indignant)

Don't you dare call an ambulance. In fact, just leave now! Why are you here anyway? You don't belong here. *(to Danesha)* Do not listen to this man.

Two black men enter, both dressed in military uniforms. Their names are Philip and Harold.

PHILIP

We heard a commotion. Is there a problem?

AMANDA

Philip! Harold! Thank God, it's you! Please ask this "gentleman" *(gestures to Junior)* to leave. He is upsetting me.

PHILIP

Excuse me, sir. Ms. Amanda is asking you to leave.

JUNIOR
(outraged)

Do you know who you are talking to?

HAROLD

Yes, sir, we do know who you are. However, this is a family gathering and you're not family.

JUNIOR

Why you lousy stinking nig ... (*Junior catches himself*).

PHILIP

Excuse me?

HAROLD

If you don't leave now, sir, I will have to assist you.

JUNIOR

If you so much as put a finger on me, I will call the police!

HAROLD

Why don't you just do that! Sir, I am a major in the United States Army and fought the Nazis in Italy, France, and Germany. Now, I do not know what you did to get Ms. Amanda so riled up at you but your presence is upsetting her and frankly is beginning to upset me too. So, please leave ... now!

PHILIP

(*Gesturing to Junior to leave*)

Sir, if you don't mind?

JUNIOR

(*enraged*)

You haven't heard the last of this! *Junior exits.*

AMANDA

(*weeping*)

Thank you! My heroes! My wonderful heroes! Trescott School taught you well.

PHILIP

(*to Harold*)

If he's true to his word, there might be trouble.

HAROLD

If there is, we'll be ready for it. (*Harold glances to the sidearm affixed to his belt.*)

DANESHA
(to Amanda)

Mother, I still don't understand what is going on.

AMANDA

After the service, you and I will talk. It's about time you learned the truth, about everything.

Ernie continues frantically jotting notes on his pad.

End of scene 15.

Scene 16

Time: Summer, 1957. 2 AM

Place: A diner in Montgomery, Alabama. There is a man behind the counter. He is preparing to close the diner for the night. His name is Clark Henry. A police officer is sitting at the counter drinking a cup of coffee. The officer's name is Dale Tiergard.

Still hot outside. TIERGARD

That it is. CLARK

How's business? TIERGARD

Kind of slow lately, but I can't complain. CLARK

You still have today's newspaper around? I want to find out how the Cards did today. TIERGARD

Oh, they won. They beat the Reds three to one. CLARK

Great! That means I'm going to win ten dollars in this pool down at the station. TIERGARD

Oh, so you boys gamble? CLARK

Nah. Just a little baseball pool. Innocent stuff. That's all. TIERGARD

I used to play the horses, but I gave it up. Too many variables to figure. CLARK

TIERGARD

Like anything else, you can't let it take control of you. It's supposed to be entertainment.

CLARK

Not when money is involved. Then it becomes business.

Tiergard finishes drinking his coffee.

TIERGARD

I'll be leaving now. How much I owe you?

CLARK

It's on the house.

TIERGARD

That's mighty kind of you. *Tiergard reaches into his pocket, pulls out some change and places two quarters on the counter.* That's for the service.

CLARK

And that is mighty kind of you, officer.

As Tiergard is exiting, Danesha and a young black man enter. His name is Axel Jones. They sit down at the counter.

DANESHA

We would like to order some food.

CLARK

We're closed.

AXEL

Excuse me, sir. Obviously you're still open. We would like to order some food.

CLARK

Like I said, we are closed.

DANESHA

It look like you're open to me.

CLARK

I don't care what it looks like to you. I'm telling you that we are closed and that you have to leave. *(to Tiergard)* Officer, I'm having a problem. *(Tiergard stops, and turns around.)*

TIERGARD

What's the problem?

CLARK

I told these two here that I'm closed but they're refusing to leave.

TIERGARD

(to Danesha and Alex)

Is that true?

DANESHA

My friend and I came in to the place, asked to be served and were refused service.

TIERGARD

What's your name?

DANESHA

Why do you need to know my name?

TIERGARD

Because I want to know who I'm talking to.

ALEX

Officer, we don't want to make trouble. We just want to be served.

TIERGARD

The man told you that he is closed. Why don't you leave?

ALEX

Officer, we just got off the train and this was the only place open and we are hungry.

TIERGARD

Where you coming from?

ALEX

New York City.

TIERGARD

What are you doing here?

DANESHA

He's visiting me. I live here.

TIERGARD

Yeah? Where?

DANESHA

At the old Trescott School. My mother runs it.

TIERGARD

So, Amanda Trescott is your mother? She had some nerve starting that smear campaign against Mr. Walton.

DANESHA

It was no smear campaign.

TIERGARD

To me it was. Mr. Walton is a fine man. Your mother had no cause to do what she did. You know, I think it is time for you and your boyfriend to leave.

DANESHA

You have no cause to order us to leave. We demand to be served.

TIERGARD
(angry)

What? You “demand” to be served? I don’t care what you “demand.” The man said he’s closing. I’m ordering you to leave. Now.

DANESHA
(defiant)

We’re not leaving.

Alex gets up from his seat.

ALEX

Officer ...

Tiergard grabs his baton and hits Alex squarely on head. Alex collapses onto the floor, bleeding heavily.

DANESHA
(shocked)

Alex! *(to Tiergard, enraged)* Look what you’ve done!

TIERGARD

Shut up! You’re under arrest.

Tiergard grabs Danesha, spins her around, then pushes her roughly onto the counter and handcuffs her.

DANESHA
(screaming)

Get off of me! Leave me alone! I didn’t do anything!

TIERGARD
(angrily)

I told you to shut up!

Tiergard repeatedly hits Danesha on her back with his baton. Danesha keeps screaming.

DANESHA

No! No! No!

End of scene 16

Scene 17

Time: 1965.

Place: the Governor's office. Continuation of scene 1

WALTON

(to Mac and Riff)

That's right, boys, I wasn't elected governor for nothing. We got work to do.

MAC

We'll teach the niggers, once and for all.

WALTON

Teach them what? We've been trying to "teach" them for over three hundred years and look where it's gotten us. Look, fellas, the time is past when we can just beat up on the Negro.

RIFF

What are you sayin', governor?

WALTON

What I'm saying is that we have to develop more creative ways to communicate with the blacks. Busting heads just don't work anymore.

MAC

I don't know about that, governor. We're dealing with a bunch of radicals who wanna take over everything and put the niggers in power.

WALTON

I know what they want.

RIFF

Then why not just call out the police and bust a few heads?

WALTON

You're not listening to me. That tactic does not work anymore. So, tomorrow morning I'm going to pull a little surprise that will shake things up. You watch.

What do you have in mind?

MAC

Tomorrow you'll find out.

WALTON

End of scene 17

Scene 18

Time: Next day

Place: The executive headquarters of the National Association for Racial Equality. Present are the Rev. Marvin Lewis Kane, the Rev. Rolf Dennis Abercrombie, Danesha, and a white man, Edward Lefkowitz. Lefkowitz is wearing a jacket on which is affixed a button with the slogan Justice Now!

KANE

I must disagree with your suggestion.

EDWARD

Look, Reverend, the time is now for direct action. Talk is good, but like the saying goes, talk is also cheap. It's action that gets results.

ABERCROMBIE

I agree with Eddie. It is time to act.

KANE

(to Abercrombie)

But we must not act with rashness. Our message must be non-violent.

DANESHA

But Reverend, non-violence does not seem to be working. And I will tell you: the only thing the white man understands is force. My late mother, Amanda, and I could attest to that. *(to Edward)* No offense to you.

EDWARD

Not only is none taken, I wholeheartedly agree. What happened to your mother and to you are an outrage. If your parents were still alive they'd be here with us, ready to march. I'm certain of it. You give me the signal, and I can have hundreds of activists down here within hours and between us, no army in the world will stop us. We will shake the foundations of this rotten society to the core.

DANESHA

Shake it, nothing! Bring it down! All the way down!

KANE

This is wrong! The movement is about obtaining justice, not perpetrating violence! Violence only begets violence!

ABERCROMBIE

Brother Kane, you have taken us far. You have brought our grievances to the attention of the world, and I have been there, at your side, as you have converted the pulpit into an instrument for mass action. But now you seem to be holding back and that troubles me.

EDWARD

(to Kane)

He's right. The people are backing us, now let's use them!

DANESHA

You can count on the sisters to do their part too!

KANE

You're making it hard for me. You know that my detractors are accusing me of demagoguery. If we go your route, we could lose public support. We can't afford that. Don't you understand that?

DANESHA

I understand it, but I'm not a politician. I'm an activist, and as far as I'm concerned it is now payback time.

KANE

Do not use the cause to settle personal accounts.

From offstage comes the sound of knocking on the door. Everyone is startled.

ABERCROMBIE

Who could that be?

KANE

I don't know. *(to Edward)* Were you expecting anyone, Eddie?

EDWARD

No.

DANESHA

Me neither.

Again, the sound of knocking on the door.

ABERCROMBIE

Whoever it is, they are persistent.

KANE

See who it is.

Abercrombie opens the door. Walton enters. He is alone. Everyone is shocked.

WALTON

Good day. May I join you?

KANE

(recovering his composure)

Why, governor, it's a ... pleasure to see you. What, pray tell, is the purpose of your visit?

WALTON

I understand that you have certain grievances that you wish to bring to my attention, so here I am.

DANESHA

(to Kane)

Don't trust him. He's got something up his sleeve.

WALTON

(laughs)

If you'd like, you can check my sleeves. In fact, I'll even take off my shirt, though I would consider such an action to be somewhat unconventional.

KANE

Would you care to sit?

WALTON

Why, thank you for asking. *(Walton sits.)* As you can see, I'm here alone. No assistants, no reporters, no snoops, no spies, just me, and I'm all ears.

ABERCROMBIE

Well, governor, needless to say we are somewhat shocked by this visit.

WALTON

Why so? Are you not part of my constituency? However, I do not recognize that gentleman there (*gestures to Edward*). Who may you be?

EDWARD

My name is Edward Lefkowitz.

WALTON

You're not from these parts, are you?

EDWARD

I'm from New York City.

WALTON

Then you must be here for the climate. A lot of New Yorkers like coming to our lovely state. We have such a mild climate here.

DANESHA
(*to Walton*)

We really have nothing to say to you.

WALTON
(*to Kane*)

Is that true?

KANE

Look, governor, you caught us unawares. You know the issues.

WALTON

I do? What issues are you referring to?

KANE

Governor, please stop mincing words. You know quite well what grieves us.

WALTON

Yes, I heard something about that. Unfortunately, whenever you protest I'm always out of town and so I only hear about them from the news, and I don't need to tell you how the media can get things twisted.

DANESHA
(irritated)

Governor, we're already on to you, so you need not continue this charade. Why don't you get to the point?

WALTON

My dear lady, your family and mine go back a long way together and so I am genuinely surprised by your hostility.

DANESHA

Oh, get off it already, will you? You know perfectly well what we demand: to stop being treated as second-class citizens.

WALTON

Those are mighty fine words, and it just so happens to I am in full accord with your aims.

ABERCROMBIE

If you feel that way, then why haven't you acted?

WALTON

To do what?

KANE

Governor, it is a known fact that in this state people of color are being denied access to the voting booth.

WALTON

Is that so? I thought that matter was resolved by the fifteenth amendment of the US Constitution.

ABERCROMBIE

You're mocking us, governor. You know damn well that the Negro has been effectively barred from voting.

WALTON

Effectively barred from voting? That sounds harsh. Every state has the right to set eligibility requirements for voting. That's in the US constitution too.

ABERCROMBIE

Then what do you want from us?

WALTON

(to Edward)

What exactly are you doing here with these illustrious people?

EDWARD

Like you said, governor, I'm just visiting.

WALTON

You know, young man, back in 1920, another young man from New York City came to this community and caused a lot of trouble. Are you planning to follow in his footsteps?

EDWARD

I know who you're talking about. Bruce Davenport.

WALTON

You know your history. That's good. You also know that he disappeared.

DANESHA

Don't you mean he was murdered?

WALTON

(to Danesha)

Did I say that?

ABERCROMBIE
(to Walton)

Frankly, your tone is beginning to trouble me.

WALTON
(to Abercrombie)

My dear sir, I'm just talking. I just don't want to see anything bad happen to your friend.

DANESHA

Meaning?

WALTON

Why all this defensiveness?

DANESHA

Governor, when you start talking in circles, we know that you're hiding something.

WALTON

My dear, as the saying goes, I'm an open book.

DANESHA

Then how come what happened to me and my friend was swept under the rug?

KANE

Let's not bring that up now.

DANESHA

Why not? What happened to me, and my friend, and to my mother, can happen to any one of us.

WALTON

Danesha, you know that the job of the police is to enforce the law, and from what I understand, you got off quite lightly.

DANESHA

I was a victim of police brutality.

WALTON

Is that why you are now associating with radicals? To use them to pursue a personal vendetta against the state?

DANESHA

Not against the state, against you and your rotten family!

WALTON

So it's personal, not political.

KANE

Governor, we are digressing. Let us keep on track.

WALTON

Yes, let's do that.

KANE

We are demanding that all unreasonably restrictive restrictions on voting be rescinded immediately.

WALTON

To agree to that would give unscrupulous elements in our community license to commit voter fraud.

ABERCROMBIE

We're not talking about voter fraud, we're talking about removing encumbrances that prevent law abiding citizens from voting.

WALTON

But preventing voter fraud is a key responsibility of government.

DANESHA

You have an answer for everything, don't you? (*to the others*) I told you not to trust him.

WALTON

What have I said that gives you cause not to trust me?

DANESHA

Because you're a conniver, that's why. You know it, I know it, we know it. It's part of your family's history.

WALTON

A history that the Trescott family shares.

KANE

Mister Governor, as you know our grievances are of a longstanding duration, and our demands for justice have been repeatedly ignored, and so naturally we harbor skepticism over whether you are serious about wanting to bring these matters to a mutually satisfactory conclusion.

WALTON

Oh, I'm serious. You can count on that. Otherwise I wouldn't be here. I too want to bring these matters to a mutually satisfactory conclusion. This state has a long history of working cooperatively with the Negro community. I know of no reason why we cannot work together again.

ABERCROMBIE

Then what is it you propose?

WALTON

(*to Abercrombie*)

I'll get to that. Don't you worry.

ABERCROMBIE

I'm not worrying. Rather, I am perplexed as to what brought you here now. I'm not sure there's anything new to talk about. We want the right to vote. Period.

WALTON

(laughs)

You can't get more straightforward than that. But how does his presence *(gestures to Lefkowitz)* help you accomplish your aim?

ABERCROMBIE

He is an ally for our cause.

EDWARD

That's right. I support their demand for justice.

WALTON

And what do you get in return?

EDWARD

What do you mean?

WALTON

Is my question not straightforward?

ABERCROMBIE

Governor, you're missing the point. Mr. Leftkowitz's presence is not the issue.

WALTON

I beg to differ with you. I believe his presence is the issue. According to federal authorities he is the head of a known radical organization with ties to Havana and Moscow. *(to Leftkowitz)* Isn't that true?

EDWARD

Governor, don't believe what you read.

WALTON

So, you're telling me that my information is incorrect?

EDWARD

Look, I'm not here to defend my organization.

WALTON

Then why are you here? I ask because I frankly resent you trying to take advantage of these good people to promote your Marxist political agenda. Do I make myself clear?

KANE

Governor, if you are suggesting that I'm a communist, or serving as a front for Communist agitators, then please permit me to assure you that you are mistaken.

WALTON

Reverend, I'm a man who judges others by the friends they keep. So, what conclusion am I supposed to draw?

DANESHA

And what about you?

WALTON

What about me?

DANESHA

You and the Ku Klux Klan.

WALTON

I knew that sooner or later you'd bring that up. My dear, reports of me hobnobbing with the Ku Klux Klan are mere rumors. Has it ever occurred to you that my political base may be somewhat broader in scope? Is there any record of me ever having attended a Klan meeting or taken a penny from the Klan?

DANESHA

First, don't call me dear and second, just because there's no photograph of you with the Klan doesn't mean you're not part of that crowd. You do have a record of covering your tracks.

WALTON

Believe what you want. The fact is that I was elected into office by a large majority of the electorate and ...

DANESHA

You mean a large majority of the white electorate.

WALTON

No, I mean the entire electorate.

KANE

Look, Governor, we're starting to drift away from the main issue which I believe is the reason you paid us this unexpected visit.

WALTON

Yes, perhaps you're right. So, let me get to the point. I'm willing to seriously consider all of your demands, plus request special funding to re-open the Trescott School, something that should please Danesha, if you agree to the following: one, publicly denounce and reject all outside agitators currently allied with your organization; two, direct all your followers to disband and return home at once; three, publicly agree to an invitation to meet with me privately at the Governor's office; and four, agree to join my administration as special counselors for domestic affairs.

KANE

That's all?

WALTON

Isn't that enough?

KANE

Sir, it seems that all you want to do is buy us off.

WALTON

No, not at all. What I'm doing is reaching out, trying to build a bridge between us.

KANE

(incensed)

No. What you are doing is trying to ensnarl us in your web. You seem to think that this is 1920 and you can manipulate and play people off against each other like you Waltons did in the past, but those days are over. It saddens me that even a hundred years after the abolition of slavery, this state still cannot bring

itself to deal fairly and squarely with all of its constituents, citizens who simply want the opportunity to fully participate in the democratic process. I do not believe they are asking too much.

WALTON

No, it is not asking too much. In fact, I completely concur with the sentiments you expressed. All I want is for us to work cooperatively to make this state an even better place in which to live. I do not believe that is asking too much from you.

KANE

Those are fine words. Yet regrettably I must decline your offer. You see, governor, things really haven't progressed. You're still motivated by fear, and if I agree to your conditions, I will become your instrument through which justice will be denied to those for whom such a denial is now becoming increasingly difficult to bear. So mark my words.

DANESHA

Freedom now! Trescott School will not be a tool! Remember Amanda Trescott! Remember Axel Barnes!

ABERCROMBIE

(to Danesha)

That's right, sister. Freedom now!

LEFKOWITZ

Power to the people! End all oppression! Remember the 1920 Steel Workers' strike! Remember Bruce Davenport!

DANESHA, ABERCROMBIE, LEFKOWITZ, and KANE

(together, chanting loudly)

Freedom now! Freedom now! Freedom now!

WALTON

You want freedom? I'll give you all the freedom you want. *(to Kane)* Let me have a pen and a sheet of paper. *Kane stops chanting and hands Walton a pen and a blank sheet of paper.* Thank you. *While the chanting continues, Walton commences to writing. When he is finished he gives the sheet of paper to Kane.* Read this.

KANE

What is this?

WALTON

Just read it.

KANE

Kane reads the paper in silence and then signals the other to stop chanting. They stop. There is silence. He then reads aloud.

From the Office of the Governor, an executive order. By the power vested in me as governor of this state, I hereby declare as null and void all rules, regulations and statutes intended to deprive any citizens of this state eighteen years of age and over the right to vote. This executive order shall go into effect immediately. Signed Ezeriah Walton III, governor. *Kane gives the paper to Abercrombie.* I don't know what to say, governor. *(pause)* Frankly, I am shocked. Given the tone of our conversation, indeed, given the history of this country since its inception, this was the last thing I would have expected from you. *(pause)* Thank you. *Both men shake hands and then embrace.*

WALTON

(to Kane)

I would be greatly honored if you and your associates would be so kind as to witness that document.

KANE

(on the verge of tears)

Why, of course, governor. The honor would be ours.

ABERCROMBIE

(his voice filled with emotion)

Governor, you sure are full of surprises, and glory be to you. *(to Kane)* Here, Brother Marvin, you be the first to sign. *(Abercrombie gives the paper to Kane who signs it and gives it back to Abercrombie.)* Thank you, brother. *(to Walton)* If you don't mind my asking, governor, what made you do this?

WALTON

A long time ago my grand pappy, Ezeriah, who, as you know started out as a dirt farmer and later became governor, once helped out a runaway slave who had shown my grand pappy genuine kindness during a time of great sorrow and distress. Later on, during the civil war, my grand pappy returned the favor. That

set a positive example for us to follow. Then politics drove a wedge through our community producing nothing but enmity and grief, which has been pulling all of us down into the abyss and threatening our very survival, for as Mr. Lincoln said, a house divided against itself cannot stand. To that I say: amen! Enough enmity. Enough empty talk. Let us unite!

KANE

How are your political allies going to take the news?

WALTON

Probably not too well, but like my grand pappy used to say: things are a-changin'.

DANESHA

They sure are. (*Danesha, beaming with admiration for the governor, looks at Walton and then goes over and hugs him. The others loudly applaud.*) Thank you and God bless you!

(Abercrombie gives Danesha the paper, which she signs with a big flourish.)

Stage goes dark. When the lights go on, the entire cast has formed into a chorus and sings the first stanza and refrain of Battle Hymn of the Republic.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.

Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.

The end

