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A STRANGER ON THE BUS

By Ed Shockley

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JUNIOR DELANEY

SARA DAVIDSON

MONTY DAVIDSON

MARY (MAY) DELANEY

MRS. DAVIDSON

JOSEPH DELANEY

JIM CROW

GATEKEEPER

VENDOR

ANNOUNCER

NEWSCASTER

LIBERTY DELANEY

PROFESSOR

SUPT. BARNES

MISS CATHERINE

MOUSE/MAN

STUDENT CHORUS

JOSEPH (Young)

MAY (Young)

MARGARET (Young)

MONTY (Young)

ALL AMERICAN MOM

MARGARET DAVIDSON

MEDIC

FACELESS SOLDIERS

GATE KEEPER

REVEREND

HARRY GOLDEN

PLESSY

MARSHALL THURGOOD

ED

TOPEKA

KANSAS

SUPREME COURT

LIBRARIAN

VENDOR

PARENTS #1, 2 & 3

SANDERS

CAPTAIN

FOOTBALL TEAM

ANNOUNCERS

DOROTHY COUNTS

CHIEF

THREE STOOGIES

JCS PROTESTERS

WOOLWORTH'S MANAGER

WOOLWORTH PATRONS

BARBERS

SUIT

GRADY COLE

JOHNNY ACE

BLACKBIRDS

BLACK LAWYER

BLACK UNDERTAKER

BLACK COUNCILMAN

BAILIFF

JULIUS CHAMBERS

JUDGE MCMILLAN

INTEGRATIONIST CHORUS

DEFECTORS 1,2 & 3

GIRL ON BUS

Multiple casting may be used as desired by your production for dramatic effect and/or practical purposes.

PROLOGUE

(A private room in Memorial Hospital. LIBERTY is asleep in a hospital bed. SARA and JUNIOR stand watch over her.)

JUNIOR: I always told myself things were going to be different for my baby sister.

SARA: They will be.

JUNIOR: When?

SARA: Soon.

JUNIOR: They've been saying that since back when mama was a little girl.

SARA: Change doesn't come easy, but it comes.

JUNIOR: I wish I could believe that.

SARA: We're both old enough to remember when your mother wasn't allowed in Memorial Hospital.

JUNIOR: And now my sister is here after getting attacked in an integrated high school riot.

(Sara takes Junior's hand.)

SARA: It's not a perfect world but it's getting better.

(Enter MONTY.)

MONTY: Sara.

(Sara let's go of Junior's hand.)

SARA: Uncle Monty.

JUNIOR: Hey, Mr. Monty.

MONTY: I'm glad to see you again, Junior, though not under these circumstances.

JUNIOR: That makes two of us.

MONTY: How's your sister.

JUNIOR: Resting.

SARA: They gave her something to help her sleep.

MONTY: What do the doctors say?

JUNIOR: Bruises, maybe a mild concussion.

MONTY: Is your mother on the way?

JUNIOR: Pop went to pick her up.

MONTY: So what happened?

SARA: Didn't you hear about the riot at Harding?

MONTY: Let's not use words like riot until we know the facts. We don't want to unduly alarm anyone.

JUNIOR: One of the other bus drivers told me there were policemen in gas masks with drawn batons, an angry mob screaming racist filth, a group of blacks kids with chains and two by fours, and even a few Klansman gathered just beyond the school grounds, so you'll have to let me know which part isn't cause for alarm?

(Enter MAY, JOSEPH and MRS. DAVIDSON.)

MAY: How's my baby?

JUNIOR: She's a little banged up, that's all.

MONTY: Mother, what are you doing here?

MRS. DAVIDSON: Of course I'm going to come look in on Liberty; I've known this child since back when her mother thought she was just a bad case of indigestion.

JOSEPH: That damn Crow never gets tired of chewing on my children.

MRS. DAVIDSON: I beg your pardon?

JUNIOR: That's just something Pop always says. Every time Crow bites you the world gets smaller.

MONTY: Crow, huh.

JOSEPH: And I been trying to kill that bloodsucker all my life.

MONTY: It does sometimes seem like a living, breathing, flesh-eating monster.

JOSEPH: If that's all he wanted then I could take it.

MONTY: I don't understand.

JOSEPH: It's our dreams he's after.

(The voices fade into gibberish as the shadow of CROW grows until it fills the room then a giant black bird appears silhouetted against a confederate flag.)

CROW: Rockabye baby

In the treetops;

When the bow breaks...

Boom shaka laka laka

Boom shaka laka laka

Boom! Gonna rock the house!

(GIRL sits up and has the head of a hornet.)

HORNET/GIRL: Oh my god!!

CROW: Boom shaka laka laka

Boom shaka laka laka

Boom! Gonna rock the house!

Wassup!!!

(Crow chases Hornet/Girl off. A bookish looking white PROFESSOR in black lab coat lectures while Civil War era black caricature slides are shown.)

PROFESSOR: Jim Crow, and this will be on the test, is a mythical agent or symbol, if you will, of oppression and disfranchisement of the American so-called Negro. Legend has it that the

great traveling minstrel performer Thomas Darmouth Rice saw a gimp-legged black stable boy performing an odd little dance. Um...

(The Professor dances.)

I spin around, I turn around and jump just so.
Every time I turn around I jump Jim Crow.

(The Professor composes himself again.)

Did I mention that this will be on the midterm? Mr. Rice, or "Daddy" as he was called by his admirers, smeared burnt cork onto his face, copied the dance and Jim Crow was born! Mr. Crow remained a relatively harmless buffoon until near the end of the last century when he was adopted by the southern legislature as the official symbol for a system of segregation laws limiting the freedoms of so-called Negroes. A landmark Supreme Court case, Plessy versus Ferguson, you all must be very intelligent since no one is taking notes, Plessy v Ferguson established the legal precedent for separation of the races. Buses, railroad cars, public bathrooms, drinking fountains, all were set aside for exclusive use by a single race under a system of apartheid misnamed for a fictitious trickster bird called Jim Crow.

(Jim Crow has been growing out of the floor behind the Professor and eventually covering the slides with his shadow. Crow strikes Professor.)

CROW: *(To audience:)* Fictitious am I... Excuse us...

(Crow is heard mauling the Professor as limbs and shards of clothing come flying onto the stage.)

And now for our show.

(Black. Letters appear on a wall:)

CHAPTER I: IN THE SHADOW OF A CROW (ANY COLORED SCHOOL: 1932)

(A door flies open making a great noise. SUPERINTENDENT BARNES enters. He has an enormous white head and is followed by a black mouse/man and Crow.)

SUPERINTENDENT: What in tarnation is going on here?

(Lights reveal a colored classroom. All of the children are masked except YOUNG MAY and YOUNG JOSEPH.)

CATHERINE: Learning was going on in here until you interrupted.

MOUSE: This is Superintendent Barnes.

CATHERINE: Oh, well I'm glad you're here so now you can demonstrate for my children the proper way to enter a classroom.

(Pause. Superintendent exits. Knocks.)

Enter.

(Superintendent enters sans the puppet mask.)

SUPERINTENDENT: Hello, uh....??

MOUSE: Catherine.

CATHERINE: Miss Catherine.

SUPERINTENDENT: I'm Superintendent Barnes.

CATHERINE: Welcome to Any Colored School. Say good morning to Superintendent Barnes, children.

EVERYONE: Good morning, Superintendent Barnes.

CATHERINE: He is the man who is going to buy us new textbooks and a pencil sharpener, maps and the like. Now who would like to read for him?

(Hands fly into the air.)

Joseph.

JOSEPH: "Warning," by Langston Hughes.

Negroes

Sweet and docile,

Meek, humble, and kind:

Beware the day

They change their mind!

MAY: I knew then and there that I was going to become a teacher. I wanted to talk to white folks like Miss Catherine.

(Miss Catherine steps into a circle of light.)

CATHERINE: Learn, children, learn; knowledge is a ladder.

(Crow turns off her light. The children revolve in their seats and have white faces on the backs of their heads. A book is passed from student to student. Each reads a page and laughs. Finally it reaches Monty.)

MARGARET: What you got there, Montgomery?

(Monty shares the book with Margaret.)

Why would somebody write that in their math book?

MONTY: Cause our old books get sent over to the colored school after we're done with 'em.

MARGARET: They ain't bothering you so why you want to bother them?

MONTY: Heck, Margaret, it's only niggers.

MARGARET: What happens if I tell momma?

MONTY: I don't know, she's the one who set me wise to the books in the first place.

(Crow appears as Abraham Lincoln. Pictures of segregated life circa 1930's appear.)

CROW: Four score and several years ago, our four fathers set forth upon this continent a new nation conceived in trickery and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal; except on buses, at lunch counters, public restrooms, water fountains and anyplace else where my shadow falls south of Mason's Dixon line.

(Crow laughs like PeeWee Herman. "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" is sung in choral arrangement. He becomes a bus driver and chants "Boom shaka laka back!" as black riders get on the empty bus. It travels a short distance. Joseph and May are seated in the front of the "Colored

section." The white seats are empty while blacks crowd into the back. Monty, Margaret and Mrs. Davidson enter and sit in the whites only section. More whites enter. Monty and Margaret give their seats to elderly white patrons then stand. Crow moves the "Colored" sign two rows back chanting, "Boom shaka laka black." Joseph and May rise. Monty sits.)

MONTY: Sit down, Margaret.

MARGARET: I think I'll stand.

MRS. DAVIDSON: *(To driver:)* Her father, god bless him, was the same way.

(Crow growls at Margaret while the song: "I'll Put a Spell on You" plays and the lights fade to black.)

**CHAPTER II: IN THE SHADOW OF A HAWK
(WORLD WAR II: 1939-1945)**

(A bell rings signaling the start of a wrestling match. Crow, barelegged, carries a placard announcing "World War II.")

ANNOUNCER: Are you ready to rrrumble? Introducing in the blue corner, fighting for freedom, justice and the American way, undefeated in nineteen sanctioned bouts, the good old U.S. of A!!!!

(Cheers. MOM enters in apron with apple pie.)

And the opponent, in the red corner, fighting for fascism, race purity and the Aryan manifesto, undefeated since the last world war; let's have a rousing welcome for the blitzing Nazi!!!

(Enter Nazi helmeted "cousin It" made all of blond hair and wearing jack boots.)

MOM: I like your hair.

(Combatants square off as pictures of Nazi troops, Pearl Harbor, concentration camps, etc. play in the background.)

MONTY: War!

JOSEPH: War!

MAY: War!

MARGARET: War!

EVERYONE: We all know what we're fighting for!

(Each cycle of the chant concludes with a tableaux interpreting the statement of a solo character.)

(MONTY: LIBERTY!)

(MAY: DIGNITY!)

(JOSEPH: EQUALITY!)

(MARGARET: HUMANITY!)

(The chant continues under the scene. Events are counterpointed by blows in the wrestling match reflecting who is empowered by the conditions in society.)

MARGARET: The men were off stopping the Nazi hoard.

MAY: The factories were empty so they opened the doors.

MRS. DAVIDSON: The Davidsons do not work in factories.

MARGARET: It's for the war effort.

MAY: Men...

MARGARET: women...

MAY: black...

MARGARET: white...

MAY: old...

MARGARET: young...

MAY/MARGARET: ...working side by side.

(The integrated mill workers pose for a snapshot reminiscent of "Rosie the Riveter." Joseph looks at the picture as he writes to May.)

JOSEPH: Dear May: Thank you for the picture. I don't know that I could make it through this war without your voice playing in my mind. I thought things would be different but the army is segregated and colored troops get all of the dirty jobs.

MONTY: Second Lieutenant Montgomery Davidson reporting for duty, sir.

JOSEPH: We dig the trenches and latrines.

MAY: *(To Margaret:)* Would you like to try my homemade pumpkin bread?

(Margaret takes the cake.)

MONTY: Begging your pardon, sir...

MARGARET: *(To May:)* This is delicious.

MAY: Thank you, Miss Margaret.

MARGARET: Please, just plain Margaret.

MONTY: ...The Davidsons have been proud to serve on the front lines in every war since the battle of Hornet Hill...

JOSEPH: We scrape barnacles off battle ship hulls and haul freight...

(Margaret gives May a picture.)

MARGARET: That's Martin, we got married right before he went overseas. He doesn't even know that I'm pregnant.

MONTY: I would rather go to the front as a foot soldier than supervise a platoon of coons digging ditches.

MARGARET: That's my brother Monty beside him.

JOSEPH: ...building bridges, maintaining supply lines...

(Joseph poses for a photo.)

MAY: That's Joseph, he ain't too happy how they treating him in the service.

MARGARET: Things'll be better when he comes home.

JOSEPH: It's as if they forgot we fought in every war since this country first became a country.

MAY: No matter what happens lets you and I stay friends.

CROW: In coming!!!

(Sound of artillery fire. Monty screams in pain as shrapnel tears his leg and he falls.)

JOSEPH: What I hate most is tagging bodies.

MEDIC: This one's alive.

(SOLDIERS in faceless black masks enter with a stretcher.)

MONTY: It's hard to hate when you're lying bloody on a beach in Normandy wondering who'll get to you first, the Medics or the sandcrabs. Trust me, if you ever get hung up in a bad way like that, no matter what kind of prejudice life poured into you, you'll be as glad to see a nigra as the next man.

(The faceless blacks pick Monty up. Joseph enters a camp library. Crow hypnotizes the LIBRARIAN into silence after each statement from Joseph.)

JOSEPH: I'm not trying to make trouble but it seems to me that if I can die for this country then I ought to be able to take a book out from the camp library to pass a Saturday night.

CROW: Boom shaka laka boom.

JOSEPH: What kind of a fool I got to be to fight for democracy in Europe and let myself get treated worse than a dog here at home?

CROW: Boom shaka laka boom!

JOSEPH: Imagine what would happen if all of us trained colored killers were to take offense at the same time and start to marching through the streets of America pointing our guns at whoever did us dirty?

LIBRARIAN: Will that be one book or two?

CHAPTER III: IN THE SHADOW OF A DOVE
(V-J DAY: 1945)

(Joyous squeals and paper streamers as characters celebrate V-J Day. "How You Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm..." sung. Pictures of Hiroshima are the backdrop.)

MAY: The war is over!

MARGARET: *(Going to soldier:)* Martin? Oh, sorry.

MONTY: The world is safe from Nazi racism!

MARGARET: Have you seen private Martin Townes?

MRS. DAVIDSON: Serves the Japs right for Pearl Harbor.

MARGARET: Has anybody seen my husband?

(Crow delivers a telegram to Margaret on a bike.)

Noooo!!!

(May comforts Margaret.)

MONTY: *(Talking to Uncle Sam:)* Let me get this straight, Sammy. You are telling me that because I took a bullet in the war, you are giving me a first class education... Money to buy a house... Medical... Dental... An honored place in society?

(A key attached to a purple heart is pinioned onto his chest. He is carried parade fashion around the stage while "God Bless America" is sung. Joseph tries to join the parade and is stopped by Crow who spreads his arms like a giant swinging door. Whites enter past Joseph. Crow talks and acts like the gatekeeper from the Wizard of Oz.)

GATEKEEPER: Yeeessss?

JOSEPH: I want to join the party.

GATEKEEPER: Of course you do.

JOSEPH: I walked the wartime streets of Paris and was treated like a man, a king. Eating where I want to, dancing in the nightclubs, drinking from the public fountains...

GATEKEEPER: Do tell.

JOSEPH: Them Frenchies were so glad to see us after we run off Hitler that they treated us like royalty.

GATEKEEPER: I'm sure...but you're not in Kansas anymore, Dorothy,

CHORUS: ...so back of the bus or go to jail.

(Joseph prepares to attack. May stops him.)

JOSEPH: I should have stayed in France.

CROW: Boom shaka laka bye.

(Joseph tears off his epaulets and discards them.)

MARGARET: This doesn't make any sense!

MAY: It doesn't have to, Margaret, he's a Crow.

(May leads Joseph away. Margaret stares at Crow.)

CROW: Shaka boom boom!

(Black. Joseph and May appear together.)

JOSEPH: When they finally let us fight all I could think about was getting back here safe to you.

MAY: If you're not careful you're gonna end up with a wife, Joseph Delaney.

JOSEPH: I can think of a whole lot of things could be worse, May Trossman.

MAY: Welcome home.

(May kisses Joseph then turns and begins folding laundry at the Davidson house. Margaret is now visibly pregnant and wears a black maternity dress. Enter Monty who walks with a cane.)

MARGARET: Monty!!

MONTY: Would you look at you!

(They hug.)

MARGARET: Momma! Momma! Monty's home!

MRS. DAVIDSON: *(Off:)* Praise the lord!

(Enter Mrs. Davidson.)

Why didn't you call, we would've met you at the train!

MONTY: They kept changing my discharge from the hospital and G.I.s were tying up the phones at every whistle stop...

MRS. DAVIDSON: Nevermind, you're here. Let me look at you... Skinny as a sharecroppers's stepson. What were they feeding you in that army?

MONTY: If it wasn't horsemeat it sure tasted like it.

MRS. DAVIDSON: Well, we'll fatten you up before holiday.

MONTY: I heard about Martin, sis. I am so sorry.

MARGARET: I guess the Lord has his own plan.

(They hug again.)

MONTY: Nobody can take his place but I promise to be as good as a father to my little nephew.

MARGARET: Or niece. I think this child is what's keeping me from going to pieces altogether.

MRS. DAVIDSON: We hired a girl to help around the house.

(May is folding laundry, lost in her private thoughts.)

MAY: My dreams of teaching got hung out to dry like an embroidered tablecloth.

MARGARET: This is May.

MONTY: The girl you wrote me about from the factory?

MAY: There weren't many schools that took Negroes.

MARGARET: They laid off all the Negroes and women as soon as the war ended.

MRS. DAVIDSON: I wanted an experienced domestic but Margaret was stuck on this child and you know how your sister can get.

MARGARET: There are things more important than how you fold a napkin.

MAY: Joseph was having a hard time finding work too.

MRS. DAVIDSON: Not when it comes to maids there aren't.

MAY: I guess sometimes you have to make your way as best you can.

MRS. DAVIDSON: May, come meet my son, Montgomery.

(May puts on a smiling mask and joins the group.)

MONTY: Welcome to the Davidson home. I hope you enjoy it here.

(May is taken aback by his sincerity. Meanwhile Joseph is seen going from pillar to post seeking jobs, apartments, etc. Each statement is greeted by a polite, "No." and a hand offering domestic or menial symbols...brooms, shears...et cetera.)

JOSEPH: I gave four years of my life for this country...(No)... The sign says vacancy...(No)... All I want is a chance...(No)... I don't want to have to smile for a living...(No)... It's not fair...(No)... Maybe I'll just run off back to France like some of them other soldiers.

(May places her hand on his shoulder. She wears a wedding gown. Margaret and Monty watch the ceremony.)

REVEREND/WEDDING PARTY CHANT: Love. Love. Love will. Love. Love will. Love will save. Love. Love will save us. Love will. Love will save us. Somehow. Love. Love will. Love will save... Somehow...

CROW: *(To audience:)* Dearly despised. We are gathered here today in the face hatred, to join together two domestics in holy desperation. If anyone present knows of a reason why these two should not be wed then speak now or forever hold your peace... Okay then I'll object. I mean, considering the fact that they both have dead-end jobs, little education, they endure daily humiliations at the hands of...well...me and their nappy headed children don't have cause to hope for anything better for as long as they both shall live in my shadow, I think they might be wiser to go out and toss themselves under the tires of the next segregated bus!

(Crow snaps and the chorus of employers continues.)

CHORUS: Joseph could you...

Over here, boy...

Run this up to...

Take the mop and...

If you want to make tips you have to learn to smile...

Hey, boy...

(May comforts Joseph and hands him a smiling mask. Margaret holds baby Sara and watches horrified.)

MRS. DAVIDSON: May, why don't you give the upstairs windows a good scrub?

(May must desert Joseph, who puts on the mask and starts his life of service. Crow laughs.)

MARGARET: *(To May:)* My brother could get him a position at his club. At least the pay would be better.

(Monty and Joseph exit together. Black.)

CHAPTER IV: FIRST LIGHT (1954)

(The image is a lonely candle burning in the darkness. HARRY GOLDEN appears with a box of popcorn and 3-D glasses.)

HARRY: I'm Harry Golden, editor of the North Carolina Israelite, and I introduce for your consideration the Harry Golden White Baby Plan. Let's not bother with the difficult task of integrating public facilities. Negroes have extensive access to resources as baby sitters; white families need childcare; put the two together and the deed is done. Want to see Clark Gable? Get a white baby. Want to eat at Woolworth's? Get a white baby. Want to whisper in the ear of a city bus driver? Get a white baby. And if there aren't ample infants to go around then some enterprising souls could manufacture and market plastic facsimiles for odd hours or short notice. I'm Harry Golden and that's how I see it.

(The scene begins at a swing in the park. May is pregnant. All the children are white, all the caregivers are black.)

SARA: May?

MAY: Yes, Sara?

SARA: Why are you so fat?

MAY: Child, the things you say. I'm about to have a baby.

SARA: But you already have a baby.

MAY: Junior is too big to be a baby anymore. He's going into the third grade.

SARA: I'm in third grade too.

MAY: I know.

SARA: Do you think he'd like to go to school with me? We could be in the same class and you could pick us both up after school and we could do homework together while you made cookies...

MAY: It sure sounds nice.

SARA: Well?

MAY: Well what, Sara?

SARA: Can he come to my school?

MAY: It's not up to me.

SARA: I know it would be okay with momma.

MAY: I'm sure it would be but it's not her decision either.

SARA: Then who gets to decide where we go to school?

MAY: Well, there's this great big old evil bird that shows up everywhere that colored people and white people meet and he tries really hard to keep us from becoming close.

SARA: Why?

MAY: Here come your momma, why don't you ask her that question.

(Enter Margaret.)

SARA: Mommy! Mommy!

(They hug.)

MAY: Are you sure you should be out and about?

MARGARET: If fresh air and baby hugs aren't good for me then I'm not long for this world.

SARA: Why won't the bird let me go to school with Junior?

MARGARET: The bird, huh?

MAY: If you got a better way to tell it I'm all ears.

MARGARET: Well, this mean old Crow figures that if he can keep us apart then we won't ever find out how much we are alike and start working together to pluck his feathers.

SARA: Somebody needs to shoot that old bird.

MARGARET: There're a whole lot of good people trying.

SARA: Like who?

MARGARET: You pluck a feather every time you're nice to little Joseph Junior.

MAY: And there's a lawyer named Thurgood Marshall who just won a big case against the Board of Ed in Topeka Kansas where he got a colored girl named Brown, into a white school?

SARA: Is he a Marshall like in the serial movies?

MARGARET: *(To May:)* You started it.

MAY: Well, he's a lawyer and that's a type of a lawman.

(Spaghetti Western music. Enter MARSHALL THURGOOD while headlines of Thurgood Marshall's N.A.A.C.P. exploits play in the background.)

MARSHALL: Hear tell you boys is looking for me.

PLESSY: If you be Marshall Thurgood, you heard right.

MARGARET: And I guess you can say he's been killing a whole gang of bad laws all over the country.

PLESSY: This is the Topeka Kid. One of the Ed brothers out of Kansas.

TOPEKA: That's right. You been gunning down my kin all over the country.

MARSHALL: And once I lay you and Plessy here to rest, colored folks everywhere'll be free to go to school where ever they please.

PLESSY: You talking mighty big for a fella who's outnumbered and outgunned.

TOPEKA: Either you're awful good, or you know something we don't know.

MARSHALL: I'm awful good; and I know something you don't know.

PLESSY: And just what might that be?

(Marshall whistles and SUPREME COURT JUSTICES enter in black trench coat/robes which they throw open to reveal gavels tucked into their belts.)

Howdy, boys. Glad to see ya'll come round to help put this here Marshall back in his place.

TOPEKA: I don't like the look of those fellas, Mr. Plessy.

PLESSY: Shucks, Topeka; this the same gang helped me blow holes in the Constitution way back in 1896. They're working for Crow. Ain't that right, boys?

JUSTICE: Wrong.

(The Judges draw their gavels and beat Plessy into unconsciousness.)

TOPEKA: *(Indicating Thurgood:)* He's the one trying to integrate the schools!

(Crow crosses to Marshall.)

CROW: You changed the Court on me, didn't you?

MARSHALL: Eisenhower was a General in the army before he became President and you know what the war did to people's attitudes.

(Blacks and liberal whites cheer and hoist Marshall Thurgood onto their shoulders.)

TOPEKA: The sky is falling! The sky is falling!

CROW: Get a grip, Topeka.

TOPEKA: Plessy's dead. The Supreme Court has turned on us. We've lost everything.

CROW: I haven't survived this long without learning a few tricks. Five, four, three, two, one.

(The Justices have been huddling and then throw a bone to Crow.)

TOPEKA: What's that?

CROW: The Justices can't reverse a fifty-eight year old public policy of discrimina...uh...I mean segregation without throwing me a bone.

(Topeka reads the dinosaur-sized bone.)

TOPEKA: With all deliberate speed. I don't get it.

CROW: It's a loophole. That's the way we work it. Watch.

(Crow becomes a hotdog type school transfer application vendor.)

VENDOR/CROW: Step right up, get your fresh, hot, 1954 school transfer applications. You can't change schools without a transfer application. Just fill it out, get it approved and you could be the first Negro in all of North Carolina to graduate from a white school.

(Joseph and Junior approach amidst a crowd of PARENTS and children.)

PARENT #1: I want one, mister.

(Crow looks at the child.)

VENDOR/CROW: Too short. Get your 1955 transfer application. Be the first of your kind to...

PARENT #2: Over here! Over here!

VENDOR/CROW: Too old. I got 'em. 1956 applications.

PARENT #3: What about my Henry?

VENDOR/CROW: He's simply too...too... *(To Topeka:)* I'm integrating the schools... *(To crowd:)* Step right up, now, don't be shy. *(To Topeka:)* I'm just not approving transfer applications from anybody darker than Jefferson Davis.

(Joseph becomes wary after watching then leads Junior away without seeking an application. Blackout.)

CHAPTER V: THE SHADOW OF A DAWNING (1957)

(There is a knock. The rectangular light from an opened door illuminates Margaret. May holds a swaddled infant.)

MAY: I'm sorry to bother you, oh my goodness, you brought Sara along?

(May hugs Sara while Crow sneaks in past them both.)

MARGARET: When I told mother that I was coming to this neighborhood she insisted I not travel alone.

MAY: I wish you hadn'ta told her you were coming over here.

MARGARET: Why, what's going on?

MAY: *(To Sara:)* Junior's in the back playing them rock and roll records, why don't you go holler at him while me and your mamma talk?

(Sara crosses to Junior's area.)

I just can't see my way around this schooling business. I've got Joseph on the one side shouting about our duty to the race,

(Joseph appears isolated.)

JOSEPH: I don't care what it takes; I don't care what we sacrifice. I don't care if we have to live over my brother's garage and dip water out of a rusty can. I'm gonna see my children get the same chance at a good education as any white child.

MARGARET: And we both have my mother bending every available ear about how the Courts are ruining the schools.

(Mrs. Davidson appears playing cards.)

MRS. DAVIDSON: People naturally want to be with their own. They can let their hair down and be themselves. I agree that the colored schools need to be every bit as good as the white ones but as for this other nonsense I'm not for it in the least.

(The world becomes youth. Music plays. Lights fade on the adults. Sara and Junior are in his room.)

SARA: Solid send me, daddy-o.

JUNIOR: You're hep to Sam Cooke?

SARA: Yes. And Little Richard and baby Ray Charles' killer saxophone.

JUNIOR: Wouldn'tve pegged you for being in the know.

SARA: Just because I'm at Harding High doesn't mean I'm squaresville. Heck, my mom takes me to see all the acts at the Grady Cole Center and usually we go to the colored show.

JUNIOR: Why is that?

SARA: Everybody seems to have a better time.

JUNIOR: I wouldn't know since I can't get into the white shows.

SARA: Trust me, you're not missing much.

JUNIOR: I'd like to see for myself one day.

SARA: Soon.

JUNIOR: It's a date.

(Shift to Margaret, May and Joseph.)

MAY: He ain't gonna get into one of them white schools anyway so why should we risk our jobs?

JOSEPH: If I don't pour but one more drink for one more white man at one more country club for the rest of my natural life that's still one drink too many.

MAY: And what about your son walking round with one more hole in his shoes or your daughter in one more threadbare diaper cause if you get let go from that piece of job that's where we'll be and for what? To make application to a school that's not gonna take no nigroes noway?

MARGARET: They just might take Junior.

MAY: They've turned down every transfer application for two years straight.

JOSEPH: That's exactly why 1957 should be different. They know that they could end up back in court if it looks like they ain't making progress.

MAY: Will you explain it to him, Margaret.

MARGARET: He might be right, May.

MAY: Not you too?

MARGARET: Monty thinks this is going to be the year and as a High School Athletic Director he's in a position to know.

JOSEPH: I don't think Mrs. Davidson would let you go...

MAY: I ain't worrying no domestic work. The woman promised to pay for Junior's college and she sure can change her mind easy as the wind.

JOSEPH: Tell her the whole thing is my doing.

MARGARET: Heck, I'll tell her it's my doing.

MAY: If something happens to our boy, Joseph Deleany...

JOSEPH: He's making application to Central High and let the chips fall where they fall.

(Black Crow appears in front of a newspaper with a headline announcing that the first black youth have been accepted into four formerly white schools.)

CROW: People, I've been all over the country dealing with these integrationists. Here in my hand is a neatly typed application from a Negro student requesting transfer into a white school. Permit me to demonstrate the proper handling of such requests.

(Crow places it neatly on the floor then stomps it in an elaborate tantrum complete with body flips.)

Read my beak; you never give in until a Federal Court makes you. It's only nineteen fifty-seven for pity's sake! We could go years without a concession if you'll just show some backbone. Okay?!!!!!... I'm glad we had this little chat.

(A billowy cloud of white chiffon looms in front of Junior as May and Joseph, in island ceremonial regalia, confront him. A drum plays.)

JUNIOR: But all my friends are going to West Charlotte.

JOSEPH: Your friends weren't chosen to integrate Central High School.

JUNIOR: Why me?

MAY: Somebody has to be first.

JOSEPH: You should feel honored.

JUNIOR: I get to leave all of my friends behind. I get to go to a school where I'm not wanted and maybe get bounced around the locker room by a couple of muscle necks. I get to hear whispers behind my back and conversations that end suddenly as soon as I enter a room. I get to not be invited to join any of the social clubs, skip all the Saturday night parties then after four years miss my senior prom. What an honor.

MAY: Maybe it will be over by the time your prom rolls around.

JUNIOR: It's been this way for as long as both of you have been alive, hasn't it?

JOSEPH: No, it's been a whole lot worse.

MAY: Joseph!

JOSEPH: But that doesn't matter. What matters is that you understand a brave man fights for what is right because it's right and for no other reason. And if you can look your little sister in the eye after you pass on a chance to pluck a feather off of that damn Crow that's been pecking at us for the better part of a century then you can go on back to the colored high school with my blessings.

(Junior crosses to the billowy doorway.)

JUNIOR: Just tell me this, Pop, when do I stop living for you or the next generation or for the race and start living for me?

(Enters from out of the billows.)

CROW: When I'm dead, pal, now are you coming or what?

(Junior stands at the billow opening waving then is snatched inside. There are shouts and the Central High FOOTBALL TEAM enters. They are presented as heads above a painted flat of beach bodies.)

TEAM: Central!!!

CAPTAIN: I can't hear you!

TEAM: Central!!!

CAPTAIN: Are we mean?

TEAM: Errrrr!!!

CAPTAIN: Are we lean??

TEAM: Errrrr!!!

CAPTAIN: Will we repeat as state champeen???

TEAM: Errrrr!!!!

CAPTAIN: Who are we?

TEAM: Central!!!

CAPTAIN: Who are we?

TEAM: Centrall!!!!

CAPTAIN: Who are we??

TEAM: Central!!!

MONTY: All right. It's been a great mini-camp. The final cuts will be posted outside my office around lunchtime but everybody hold their head up high because you're all winners. The Principal is here to say a few words so listen up...Ed?

TEAM: Sanders. Sanders. Sanders. Sanders.

ED: Tomorrow, as you know, is the official start of school and as always I am looking for you boys to set the tone for the year to come. It is especially important this semester because Central High is one of five schools scheduled to receive a Negro.

CAPTAIN: Don't worry. We'll take care of it.

ED: That is exactly the type of leadership I expect from our 1956 state champions.

CAPTAIN: Consider it done.

ED: Good. With you boys protecting him we can avoid unseemly incidents.

CAPTAIN: You want us to protect the nigra?

ED: I expect you to show the world how Central High School welcomes a new student. I expect you to demonstrate how the kids at Central respect the law. And I demand that you spare me the disappointment of having to cancel an entire season of football, which I will do, if so much as one punch or even an unpunished insult is reported to me by our young Negro. Now, are there any questions?

FOOTBALL PLAYER: Why are we doing this?

ED: Because it's the law, because I fought beside Negroes in Korea, because it's simply the right thing to do. I am not here to threaten you but rather to apprise you of the facts. I have every intention for integration to work here at Central High School. Do I make myself clear?

TEAM: Yeah.

MONTY: I can't hear you.

TEAM: Yes, sir!!!

(Four players join together singing, "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord," barbershop quartet style. DOROTHY COUNTS & Reverend enter through the house. Dorothy wears a neutral black mask. Angry masked crowd leads chant of "Hate, Hate, Hate.")

ANNOUNCER/CROW: We are broadcasting to you live from Harding High School, Charlotte North Carolina, where a timid young Negress, Dorothy Counts, is attempting to wade through an angry crowd and on this temperate fall morning, 1957, become the first to attend a white

high school in this city's history... Reverend...Reverend... You accompanied the Counts girl through the mob, would you care to make a statement?

REVEREND: Just that I fought in Korea and have never seen more hatred than at Harding today.

ANNOUNCER: *(Aside:)* Good, good, that ought to shake up the rest of them.

(Exit Crow and crowd as Dorothy crosses alone onto the stage, takes off her mask and joins Sara at a cafeteria table.)

DOROTHY: Sara!

SARA: Hi, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: I am so glad to see you. It feels like this lunch period is the only time all day long that I can catch my breath.

SARA: I haven't seen you around. Everybody thought you'd withdrawn.

DOROTHY: Nothing so dramatic, just a little fever.

SARA: Oh.

DOROTHY: Folks certainly weren't happy to see me, they made that perfectly clear. It's funny, my dad's friend lived as a missionary in India and told me stories of these people they called Untouchables. They were considered unclean, treated terribly; and now I feel like one.

(The crowd of chanters has been slowly closing in.)

I'm just talking on and on about myself and not a word about you. How have you been?

SARA: My mother was taken to the hospital.

DOROTHY: No.

SARA: She has cancer.

DOROTHY: I'm so so sorry.

SARA: I'm sorry too.

DOROTHY: If I can help in any way...

SARA: Well...

DOROTHY: What?

SARA: I really need my friends right now...

DOROTHY: Of course you do.

SARA: ...and they all dumped me because of you. The other kids called me names. It just settled down yesterday when they thought you were gone. I can't go through this again. If my grandmother ever found out about our lunches she'd be fit to be tied. And the last thing I need is to upset my family right now. I'm sorry.

(Sara rises and turns her back. Dorothy puts her mask on as the chant builds and the crowd closes in making her disappear.)

NEWSCASTER/CROW: The image of Charlotte, North Carolina, as a town of tolerance took a devastating blow today as Dorothy Counts, one of four negroes attending white schools for the

1957 academic year summarily left Harding High School after attending only three days. The situation has been tense from its inception but today, after a physical attack in which a projectile was thrown, her fearful parents have withdrawn their child and taken her to Pennsylvania to complete her education.

(Mrs. Davidson turns off the radio and talks to Margaret who is convalescing in a rocker covered in a shawl. Sara sits writing in the background.)

MRS. DAVIDSON: I am disgusted, thoroughly disgusted, by the behavior of those hooligans.

MARGARET: That seems kind of funny, mother, coming from you.

MRS. DAVIDSON: They don't speak for Charlotte. We have never been a city to out and out mistreat nigras.

MARGARET: No, we just deny Negroes several basic rights of citizenship on a daily basis.

MRS. DAVIDSON: Don't be ridiculous, Margaret.

MARGARET: I suppose you think they like sitting in the back of the bus or watching you drink from the modern electric cooler while they get rust and dust from a porcelain fountain that's probably older than hoop skirts.

MRS. DAVIDSON: I think that they deserve electric water coolers and modern schools but I am not about to give them mine until they demonstrate that they can respect public property and not tear it up leaving everybody to go without.

(Enter May.)

MARGARET: It is perfectly obvious that Negroes do not know how to respect property. I suppose that's why we so often hire them to care for our houses and children.

MRS. DAVIDSON: You're determined to twist everything that I say, aren't you?

MARGARET: I agree that it is twisted but I don't think it's my doing.

MRS. DAVIDSON: Why do I even bother trying to talk sense to you.

(Exit Mrs. Davidson. Margaret has a coughing fit.)

MAY: You shouldn't argue with her, it's not good for you.

MARGARET: On the contrary, it is my favorite medicine. Now rest yourself, just the same and tell me how the day turned out for Junior. I've been dying to know, especially once I heard the news from Harding.

MAY: I have to tell you I was plenty worried but he hasn't had so much as an evil look since he got to Central High.

MARGARET: How do you imagine two schools in the same city could be so completely different?

MAY: God only knows. Sara, didn't you tell me you had lunch with the Counts girl?

SARA: Once or twice.

MAY: Did she have any other friends?

SARA: People don't become friends in three days, May. We just happened to eat lunch at the same time and talked a little while we ate.

(Pause.)

MAY: You're right, Sara, no one could mistake that for being friends.

(Exit May.)

MARGARET: Maybe if just one person had stood beside her she would have stayed.

(Exit Margaret. Sara sits in a light that fades to nothing as sad music plays. Suddenly flashing police lights break the blackness. A battery of rifles appears.)

CHIEF: We've got the place surrounded. You've been under surveillance for the past six months. You all are under arrest for making terroristic threats and conspiring to plant an explosive device in an area high school. Back out slowly with your hands held high where we can see them.

(Three men in Klan sheets sans headdress back onto the stage. They turn around and look like THE THREE STOOGES.)

CURLY: I told you we'd never pull off blowing up a colored school.

LARRY: If you hadn't blabbed to an undercover cop we'd've been fine.

CURLY: He was white.

LARRY: Just because he's white doesn't mean he's on our side.

CURLY: Really?

MOE: Shut up, bonehead.

(They execute a typical slapfest.)

CROW: With guys like these on my side it's a wonder I've survived as long as I have.

(Funeral organ music. The stage clears and the mood changes to a death march. Mrs. Davidson screams. Sara and May scream. The space becomes a graveyard on a rainy afternoon. The projection is "R.I.P. Margaret Townes (Davidson) 1923-1959".)

MONTY: Faced with the untimely death of my only sister at the age of thirty-six, I am hard pressed to find any idea to seize upon that is a comfort. Especially when I consider what a loving, sensitive, genuinely kind person she is...was. I can only hope that God in his infinite wisdom has some scheme in which an incomprehensible tragedy like this makes sense.

MAY: Mr. Monty?... It's not my place to speak not being family but I passed quite a few hours with Miss Maggie, especially toward the end, and there's some things I think she'd want me to share if it's alright.

MONTY: This is May, our housegirl, and one of Margaret's closest friends.

MAY: Like many of you I'm gonna miss...uh...Miss Margaret terrible bad. She named my daughter Liberty there and I come up with Sara, out the Bible but that's not what I.. In them last days...she was in a lot of pain. What worried her, though, was not the cancer eating at her body but what was gonna happen to her loved ones once she was gone on to glory. She pleaded with me to make sure you all understand that by the time we end up out here in a muddy cemetery she's already gone on to a better place; so while we're down here mourning she's drinking milk and honey in a land that's been promised. I guess that's all I got to say.

MRS. DAVIDSON: Thank you, May.

(May prepares to put on her mask. Mrs. Davidson stops her.)

I mean it, thank you.

(They lock arms and exit.)

MONTY: How are you holding up there, champ?

SARA: I've had better days.

MONTY: Haven't we all. Well, way back when your father died I swore to your mother that I'd treat you like my own daughter and now I'm making that same promise to you. You and momma are all the family I've got.

SARA: And May.

MONTY: Yeah, I guess May too; and together we'll get through this, alright?

SARA: Deal.

(Monty starts to leave but Sara doesn't accompany him.)

I just want a minute alone.

MONTY: I'll wait in the car.

(Exit Monty. Sara kneels. Crow starts dancing on Margaret's grave.)

CROW: The winner and still world champion. Crow! Crow! Crow! *(To Sara:)* And you're next, pet, though I must admit that I was so looking forward to crushing your mother's bleeding heart under foot like a...like a...like a...

MARGARET: *(Voice:)* Grape?

CROW: Yes, like a...Ahhhhh.

(Bright light. Cathedral music. Enter Margaret as a Dove.)

What are you doing here?

MARGARET: Protecting my loved ones from you.

CROW: But you're dead.

(Margaret nods affirmatively.)

It doesn't make any sense.

MARGARET: It doesn't have to, I'm a dove.

(Margaret exits with Sara while choir sings "Somebody's Calling My Name.")

**CHAPTER VI: THE BREAK OF MORNING
(WOOLWORTH'S CAFETERIA: 1960)**

(An apple pie with a slice missing. The protestors, all faceless afros, are singing Margaret's song.)

CROW: Are you talking to me? Are...you talking...to me? I hear you talking and there ain't nobody here but you and me, so you must be talking to me.

MARGARET: They are demanding that you let them eat at the department store lunch counters and they'll keep coming back by the dozens filling every available stool until you either serve them or go bankrupt.

CROW: You want a piece of me? Come on, take your best shot.

(The chorus chants, "Woolworth's." A bell "dings" and a sign is carried announcing, "ROUND ONE" as the MANAGER gets called to the stool whereupon sits a WHITE PATRON drinking coffee. The two whisper. The manager calls over a SECOND WHITE PATRON who stands beside him. The chant builds. Everyone tenses to sprint. The manager gives the seated patron a check. She fakes right then rises left as Patron #2 takes the seat. Harry Golden appears.)

HARRY: After careful study of the situation here in my beloved hometown, the obvious answer to this complex confrontation of wills has presented itself to me, Harry Golden, editor of the North Carolina Israelite. For years, Negroes and white citizens in Charlotte and throughout the entire south have coexisted peacefully in bank lines, bus lines, grocery store checkout lines, and paying bills at Duke power. The fact of the matter is that there is no problem of integration, not as long as people are standing. It is only when the Negro attempts to sit down that the sensibilities of southern gentry are affronted. Therefore I submit for your consideration the Harry Golden Vertical Negro Plan. If we will do away with the chairs in all public facilities, schools, restaurants and the like, then there will be no untidy movement toward integration. Classroom desks can be raised to approximately chest height and the restless youngsters can stand for their lessons like eighteenth century accountants. Additionally folks will eat faster and probably digest better in a vertical position and free from the unsettling tensions inspired by protesting college students. I'm Harry Golden and that's how I see it.

(Crow carries a sign announcing "ROUND TWO," as a bell "dings" again. This time there are no chairs. Black protestors mill around standing. Sara enters. The manager brings out a chair for her to sit on. She sits and the manager gloats at his cleverness but when he walks away she rises and gives the seat to a protestor. Junior takes off his mask and crosses to Sara. The rounds continue as a backdrop to this scene. Throughout the dialogue black girls measure Junior and Sara with their eyes then suck their teeth and turn away.)

JUNIOR: That was pretty brave what you did.

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