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Product Code A0290-F

My Name is Ossian Sweet

A Docu-Drama by Gordon C. Bennett

**Based on the Sweets Trials; Clarence Darrow, Defense
1925, Detroit, Michigan**

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MY NAME IS OSSIAN SWEET

by Gordon C. Bennett

14 Actors/ 25 Characters
7 Black Actors/7 White Actors + Extras if desired

PRINCIPLE CHARACTERS:

OSSIAN SWEET; *early twenties, black, and with a Southern accent that wears off with time; very ambitious, brave, and passionate about Gladys, medicine, and civil rights.*

GLADYS SWEET; *Ossian's wife. A lovely woman, early twenties, with the refinement typical of the black middle class in the 20's, with a sense of humor, and generally self-composed. Also functions as principle narrator.*

HENRY SWEET, SR.; *Ossian's father, middle-aged, a man of courage working within the white Southern culture. His passion is for his family and education, and instills that value in his sons.*

DORA SWEET; *Henry, Sr.'s wife and Ossian's mother. Middle-aged with a laid-back yet deeply caring attitude. She loves the old Negro spirituals, and sings them (solo) at several key moments within the dramatic scenario.*

HENRY JR.; *Ossian's younger brother, who admires Ossian and follows his path through higher education to Detroit. He gives Ossian his full support.*

CLARENCE DARROW; *the era's famous defender of civil liberties. He's a tall white man in his sixties who has lost very little energy to age. He's brilliant, witty and very persuasive.*

PROSECUTOR TOMS; *the white lawyer heading the prosecution.*

JUDGE MURPHY; *the white judge presiding over the first trial.*

INSPECTOR SHUKNECHT; *a white man in his thirties, key witness for the prosecution and, thanks to Darrow's cross-examination, for the defense as well.*

ENSEMBLE:

MAN 1; *(Black) Dr. Scarborough, Black Neighbor 1, Otis Sweet*

MAN 2; *(Black) Ben Mitchell, Black Neighbor 2, Walter White*

MAN 3; *(White) Fleurant, Klansman, Springarm, Andrews, Witnesses*

MAN 4; *(White) Tourist, White Neighbors 1, 3 & 5, Voice over loudspeaker, Jury Foreman*

MAN 5; *(White) Waiter, White Neighbors 2, 4 & 6, Hubbard, Witnesses*

EXTRAS; *Two+ Women for Crowd Scenes/Witnesses and Back-up Singers (?)*

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Historians have become increasingly interested in the saga of Ossian Sweet and his family in Detroit in the 1920's. Sweet, a Negro migrant from Florida seeking a better life in the North, became a medical doctor, married Gladys Atkinson from a middle-class black family, and ultimately bought a “dream house” in a white neighborhood, despite previous attempts by blacks to integrate neighborhoods in a city rife with members of the KKK. They moved into their home, then over two days and nights a mob gathered, screamed and threw stones, attempting to evict them. The Sweets had secured guns to defend themselves, and in the ensuing pandemonium Ossian's brother Henry fired shots from an upstairs window, killing one white man and wounding another. All were arrested and charged with murder. The bold defense of the Sweets by the renowned defense attorney Clarence Darrow over two trials marks one of the most courageous and pivotal moments in the long struggle of African Americans to secure their civil rights. Indeed, it appears to be the first time in this country that an African-American was acquitted of murder by an all-white jury. As such, it predated and foreshadowed many events and victories that occurred later in the long struggle for civil rights in America.

This two-act play, through compelling story and dialogue, music and projected imagery, engages the audience in a profound way. Gladys Sweet who, in the role of the narrator, opens and closes the play, also plays an important character as Ossian's wife. Ossian leads us through his childhood and some of the experiences that formed his perspective on life then steps into the story “in real time.” Technical effects may include visual projections thrown on the backdrop, if the producing team desires: these will enhance the story as it unfolds. Ossian's mother Dora, who loves the old “spirituals,” plays a major role with her sweet voice: her songs become a commentary on the action.

ACT I is prologue: the Sweets' family background, the events leading up to that fateful night of September 9, 1925, the events of that night, and the NAACP's appeal to Darrow to anchor the Sweets' defense team. ACT II covers the explosive courtroom action, with an “Afterward” presented by Gladys Sweet and her mother-in-law Dora, who continues to sing haunting spirituals that date back to the slavery era. The term “African-American” will not be found in the dialogue, despite its common usage today. In the twenties both black and white races referred to people with darker skins as “Colored” or “Negroes.” With apologies, those terms will be used in this play, with the exception that Clarence Darrow did occasionally use the term “black.”

FINAL OBSERVATION: By definition, *My Name is Ossian Sweet* is a work of fiction, yet an epic docu-drama based on well-researched historical events. Given the strong contingent of both black and white characters, this drama provides an outstanding opportunity for colleges or companies consisting predominantly of one race or the other to work together to produce the play, with positive and harmonious results both on and off-stage.

PRODUCTION NOTES APPEAR AT END OF PLAY

My Name is Ossian Sweet

by Gordon C. Bennett

ACT I; Scene One

(STAGING: It is suggested throughout the script that projections are used to enhance the action, mood and era of the play. This may be accomplished by projecting images onto a full-length scrim, or onto the walls on either side of the stage or onto a plain, neutral backdrop. Various simple set pieces and furniture are used to represent the various scenes. Sound and Music, particularly the spirituals sung by DORA, play a major role. For the opening, a PORCH is centered upstage with a screen door leading to the interior of OSSIAN'S boyhood home. On the porch are two white chairs, one a rocker for DORA, the other any such chair as might be seen on a porch in the early 1900's. A bucket sits on one corner of the porch. A bush or two placed downstage will add to the sense of an exterior setting.)

(AT RISE: The porch, in dim light, barely visible. Spotlights reveal GLADYS and OSSIAN downstage, separate from each other, ready to address the audience. GLADYS, a handsome woman of light complexion with a commanding presence plays both a major character in the story as well as a narrator of sorts. OSSIAN is an articulate, well-educated man of darker complexion. HE is dressed in a homespun shirt and pants, old shoes, and holding a straw hat in his hands. OSSIAN speaks with a slight southern accent; GLADYS' speech is refined middle-class.)

GLADYS

It was long before the advent of Thurgood Marshall and the Brown decision by the Supreme Court. It was ages before Rosa Parks and James Meredith and Selma and Martin Luther King, Jr. *(Beat; SHE gestures toward OSSIAN)* This man was born in October, 1895, and he is facing a journey of epic proportions. His odyssey begins in sun-baked Bartow, Florida. It takes us to Wilberforce College in Ohio, Howard Medical School in Washington DC, and then to Paris. Paris—the city of lights, they say, but not without its darkness. Then it will end, for all intents and purposes, in the sun-baked summer of 1925, in Detroit, Michigan. I will play a role in his remarkable odyssey.

(GLADYS crosses to OSSIAN, takes his hand and smiles. OSSIAN returns her smile.)

GLADYS, *Continued*

(To Audience) I am Gladys.

OSSIAN

(To Audience) My name is Ossian *(Gaelic pronounced "Oh'-shun)* Sweet.

GLADYS

I became his wife.

(GLADYS exits.)

OSSIAN

Ossian. Peculiar name to drop on a colored child born in rural Florida in 1895. Its roots are in Gaelic or the Celtic tongues, and it is more often found in Irish families. When I asked Mama where they got it she just said they liked the sound. That wasn't good enough for me, especially when my school-mates jeered and ragged me about my name. Often I wished I had a normal name, like Tommy or Joe. *(Beat)* Later I decided it was jake. It made me unique, in a way. From the beginning I wanted to be somebody special.

(LIGHTS dim on OSSIAN; LIGHTS UP on porch set upstage. DORA, Ossian's mother, obviously pregnant, is seated on the rocking chair. SHE rocks softly humming an old spiritual. Ossian's father HENRY SR. mounts the step(s) to the porch, then stands, gazing at DORA. HE is exhausted.)

HENRY SR.

Is there anything to eat, Dora? I been cuttin' timber on McClasky's acres all day. Legs aching, arms, shoulders...

DORA

I made you some barley soup. I'm sorry, you need a real dinner but I've been torn between this child aching to get out and poor Oscar. His fever's still high. And he's developed a hacking cough that comes and goes.

HENRY SR.

I sent for Doctor Will.

DORA

Oh, he came by, but can't seem to figure it out. Says he might have infection maybe. Or consumption.

HENRY SR.

Doctors, what do they know? I hope someday we have a *real* physician to treat colored folks—somebody who's spent more time studyin' than just sixty days in a rural clinic. *(Beat)* We'll try some of cousin Jane's poultices. They've worked on me. *(Crosses to DORA; kneels to put his hand on her belly.)* And what about this child aching to get out? Whoa, that's a kick all right!

DORA

(Laughs) He's something else, that one. Can't wait to see what the outside world is like.

HENRY SR.

You're sure it's a "he?"

DORA

With a kick like that?

HENRY SR.

(Rising) I'll take your word it's a boy, honey. You did make the right call with every one of Sadie's seven. *(Sighs)* Dora, I'm worried about Oscar, and Doctor Will's about as useful as an extra thumb, dammit!

DORA

I wish you wouldn't use profanity.

HENRY SR.

(Grinning) Well, it's my only flaw.

DORA

(Laughing) Where's that humble man I married?

HENRY SR.

I gave up humility when I married you, Dora. When a man has to raise a family deep down in the old South, fightin' mosquitoes and floods and bigoted damned crackers—

DORA

There you go again!

HENRY SR.

I didn't use the Lord's name.

DORA

You know it's implied, Henry Sweet! Why don't you use some other exclamations to make your point—not so blasphemous and maybe more colorful.

HENRY SR.

Like what?

DORA

My Daddy used to say "Jumpin' Jehosophat!" when he was startled or upset. Mama said "Good Land Sakes!" or "Don't that beat all!"

HENRY SR.

I dunno. *(Rising)* They just don't have the same punch in 'em. My father said that a man's got to say what he feels and it's no sin to damn somebody who needs damning.

DORA

Henry! Only the Lord can pass judgment on a man.

HENRY SR.

(Nods solemnly; grunts in agreement) Um, hmm. Dora, you got that right.

(DORA responds with a nod and begins to rock and hum once again.)

HENRY SR., *Continued*

Well, I'm going over to get cousin Jane. She'll know how to make a poultice for little Oscar. *(Leans over; whispers)* Wouldn't want to lose our firstborn with another on the way.

DORA

Not to worry, honey. Whatever he's got, the Lord will pull him through.

(LIGHTS FADE OUT on porch.)

ACT I, Scene Two

(SPOTLIGHT OSSIAN downstage.)

OSSIAN

But he didn't. My brother died eight days after I was born. Mama said, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away," and she sang her old spirituals to get over it.

(DORA sings from offstage.)

DORA, *Singing*

*Swing Lo, Sweet chariot, comin' for to carry me home;
Swing lo, sweet chariot, comin' for to carry me home.*

(OSSIAN listens intently. HE continues after DORA finishes.)

OSSIAN

Later, I decided that the good Lord wasn't all that good. I mean, why would he give white people trained doctors and medicines and even build a hospital and leave Negroes with a few shacks pretending to be medical clinics? At least not in central Florida. *(Beat; shifts position)* But that wasn't the worst of Bartow. I was about six or seven, I guess, when I saw something that really seared my simple soul. I had been down at the Peace River, fishing. When I heard the hound dogs baying, I took my pole and ran for cover.

(OSSIAN runs to where HE is partially hidden by a bush. SOUND EFFECTS: the baying of hounds in the distance, then angry shouts followed by the sounds of a mob drawing nearer. OSSIAN cocks his head, listening, then stares out.)

OSSIAN

It was hideous! The whites were raving and dragging this Negro they'd tied with ropes toward the bridge over the river. Some of them were carrying a huge barrel and kindling and others had cans of kerosene and they dragged him up on the bridge and tied him to the barrel.

(The crowd noise swells and ebbs. People are shouting and cursing but we can hear Ossian's voice over it, horrified and strained like a scared child.)

OSSIAN, *Continued*

Somebody struck a match and they set fire to the kindling and soon the barrel went up in flames, with the colored man tied to it.

(We hear the crackling sound of fire burning wood, the noise swells to engulf us... then a splash.)

OSSIAN, *Continued*

The crackers pushed him off the bridge into the water. And some waded into the river slobbering at the mouth. They yanked the barrel with the burnt flesh of a man back to the bank, where they could—Oh, God! *(Beat)* Damn those crackers! *(Beat)* I never forgot the Peace River and what I saw at the age of seven.

(OSSIAN is overcome with emotion; HE shudders then crouches, and shakes his head as if to clear his mind of the scene. LIGHTS FADE OUT on OSSIAN who exits as LIGHTS RISE on the porch. DORA hums the melody to "A Motherless Child" as SHE rocks in her chair knitting. SHE begins to sing aloud. Shortly, HENRY SR. shouts, "Dora! Doraaaa!" from offstage. DORA abruptly stops singing as HENRY SR. rushes in.)

HENRY SR.

(Very angry) Dora, they've done it again, those white devils. Hunted down a colored man, dragged him through the brush along the river, and incinerated him.

DORA

Good Lord!

HENRY SR.

You haven't heard nothin' yet?

DORA

No! Who was he?

HENRY SR.

A drifter named Fred Rochelle. Said he confessed to killing a white woman named Taggert.

DORA

Did he do it?

HENRY SR.

They said he confessed to it. Maybe they forced a confession, who knows? Dammit to hell, this can't go on in a civilized country. No trial or nothin'. Lynch law here in Bartow! *(Beat)* You seen Ossian?

DORA

He's upstairs.

HENRY SR.

How long's he been upstairs?

DORA

Well, I—I guess he came in about ten minutes ago. I asked him if he was hungry and he just shook his head. Started upstairs and I said, "You all right, Ossian?" He just nodded and went up to his room. *(Beat)* My Lord, he did have a strange look in his eyes!

(HENRY SR. jumps at this and runs into the house. We hear him going up the steps, coming back down after a moment while DORA puts her head in her hands, shaking and humming the tune from "Motherless Child." HENRY SR. enters the porch. DORA rises, they exchange a long look.)

DORA

Did he...?

HENRY SR.

(Nods. A beat) He saw it. He's—he's in shock.

DORA

Oh! Oh my. *(THEY hug each other, desperately)* What now? What'll it do to him?

HENRY SR.

He's been a strong child. We told him about the race thing and he's seen how we have to live in Bartow. We've told him about how our people are treated here and everywhere in this country. We've tried to prepare him for this. Still—

DORA

But he saw—everything? We should get the preacher.

HENRY SR.

But he needs a mother's love beyond anything else. Dora, Dora--you go up and sing to him. Sing your heart out. Sing from your soul, my love. Sing him back to life!

(DORA nods, goes into the house. HENRY SR. angrily kicks the bucket off the porch then sits heavily on the step. LIGHTS FADE TO HALF. HENRY SR. stares out, immobile, while from upstage we hear DORA, singing.)

DORA, *Singing*
He's got the whole world in his hands,
He's got the whole world in his hands,
He's got the itsy bitsy babies in his hands,
He's got the whole world in his hands...

(LIGHTS DOWN porch.) set, up on GLADYS and OSSIAN))

ACT I, Scene Three

(LIGHTS UP: GLADYS and OSSIAN share the stage, standing up left and down right; GLADYS in dress, white gloves and hat and OSSIAN in a suit, tie and also wearing a hat. This is the first we've seen OSSIAN in a store-bought suit and well-shined shoes.)

GLADYS

By 1900, Bartow was a divided town, cut in half by the South Florida railroad tracks. The whites lived on the West side, with their nice homes and gardens, a public library and the imposing municipal building with its sign, "For Whites Only." Also, their fancy new high school. The main streets on the West Side were paved but not on the East Side, where mud and dirt turned to clay in the hot months and slush during the rainy season. Through the generosity of some good folk in Polk County the colored folks were endowed with a gift of \$500 to build a two story school. Ossian Sweet and his siblings all went to this under-furnished Union Academy, which provided a meager education through the eighth grade.

(GLADYS crosses DL to OSSIAN. THEY look at each other; then GLADYS motions "continue" to OSSIAN.)

OSSIAN

Living on the wrong side of the tracks wasn't a major problem for the Sweets. When he moved into Bartow, my father purchased two and a half acres on which to grow citrus and build a small farm. He sold vegetables, cut timber for some folks, and did odd jobs on both sides of town. My mother's ancestors were slaves, whose owners brought them to Florida from North Carolina. Mama scrambled to gather knowledge. Self-taught in everything but sewing and cooking, she loved music and literature, and wanted us children to master both of 'em. She had me and my brothers study violin; the girls all learned piano – or tried their hardest – and they all sang in the church choir.

(LIGHTS DIM: MUSIC; Black church choir exuberantly singing a Negro spiritual or OPTIONAL VISUAL PROJECTION of same. GLADYS takes Ossian's arm and THEY stroll DR. VISUAL/MUSIC OUT; LIGHTS UP on OSSIAN and GLADYS.

GLADYS

Ossian's father never trusted whites, as he said, any further than you can heave an anvil. Dora had plenty to do around the little farm, and Henry made sure she never worked for anybody on the west side. Ossian's folks were church people, and Dora was especially strict

GLADYS, *Continued*

about Ossian and his siblings honoring the Sabbath. That meant they weren't allowed to wander through the neighborhood or play stick ball with their friends. Bible study and quiet games like Chinese checkers were fine.

(MUSIC; a gospel choir singing "Go down, Moses, way down to Egypt land, Tell old Pharaoh, Let My People Go!" The MUSIC CONTINUES to underscore the following speech.)

GLADYS, *Continued*

And whenever the big red doors were open Dora would lead her husband and their growing brood down to the African Methodist Episcopal Church to honor and praise the good Lord.

(MUSIC segues into SOUND OF UNSEEN PREACHER crying, "Good day, Good People, Glory be to God!")

GLADYS, *Continued*

Sometimes Ossian wondered why God required so much praise.

(SOUND: A DISTANT TRAIN WHISTLE. GLADYS exits. OSSIAN crosses downstage, stopping to gaze intently over the audience. HENRY SR. enters and crosses to OSSIAN. HENRY SR. slaps his son on the back.)

HENRY SR.

Takin' one last look at it, hey, son? You won't be back for a while.

OSSIAN

I'm sorta—scared, Dad. I sorta wish I could stay with you and Mama forever.

HENRY SR.

We won't be here forever. Look, son, we talked it out. Finishin' eighth-grade won't get you where you want to go. Fact is, thousands of Negroes are movin' north for an education, for jobs, for a better way of life. Leavin' Jim Crow behind. No beatin's and lynchin's in the North. And this town here, it won't be like this forever. The race thing's heatin' up. Some day somebody's going to light a match and the top'll blow right off. I want you long gone when that happens.

OSSIAN

(Gulping hard) Dad, I—that river—the bridge down there—

HENRY SR.

I know, son. You seen it yourself, when you were only as big as a hoppin' frog. *(Beat; shakes his head sadly.)* Nobody should have to learn that lesson that young. *(Beat; grabs OSSIAN by the shoulders and shakes him gently)* But you have to shake it off, son. *(Beat)* Son, when you get to Wilberforce, you won't have time for those terrible memories. Let 'em disappear. *(Beat)* You hear, son?

OSSIAN

(Nods) I'm going to work hard, I promise. I want a college degree, and I will do anything. I'll work any job they give me to get it.

HENRY SR.

Sure. You'll be shovelin' snow and paintin' and waitin' tables, washin' dishes and all that. Not to mention studyin'. No time for girls, neither.

OSSIAN

(Grinning) Aw, Dad...!

HENRY SR.

(Playfully jabs OSSIAN or knocks off his hat) C'mon, wave good-bye to your mother. You got a train to catch.

(Putting his arm around his son, HENRY SR. walks OSSIAN upstage toward the porch. DORA enters onto the porch from the backdoor and blows them a kiss. SOUND: TRAIN WHISTLE again. OSSIAN stops and turns to his father.)

OSSIAN

Dad, I want to be special. I'm going to make you proud.

HENRY SR.

I know that, Ossian.

(FATHER and SON embrace, warmly. On the porch, DORA sadly waves good-bye. SOUND: TRAIN HUFFING AND PUFFING at the station. LIGHTS DIM: OPTIONAL VISUAL PROJECTION: Rickety old train station, train waiting to leave. DORA sits on her rocker and sings sadly to herself.)

DORA, *Singing*

*Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
A long ways from home, a long ways from home...*

(LIGHTS FADE OUT. DORA continues to sing throughout the scene change.)

DORA, *Continued Singing*

*Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child...
Oh yes, true believer...
A long ways from home..."*

ACT I; Scene Four

(VISUAL PROJECTION: A WEATHERED COLLEGE CAMPUS, perhaps with a central old building. SOUND EFFECTS: bird songs, dog barking, students talking, occasional shouts. SOUNDS FADE OUT with the visual. UPSTAGE IN DIM LIGHT: Scarborough's office, with a bookcase, desk and two upholstered chairs.)

(AT RISE: Exterior; a bust of William Wilberforce downstage; a wooden bench upstage of it. OSSIAN and GLADYS stand above the bench, their hands on the back.)

GLADYS

Wilberforce Academy. Named after the great liberator. *(Crossing to the bus, feeling its shape and texture)* William Wilberforce, the stubborn parliamentarian who abolished the British slave trade back in 1807. *(Crosses to address the audience directly)* But now it's 1910. This is the best school in the country for colored folks moving north to finish their education. Or continue it, as Ossian's father would say. *(Crossing back to Ossian)* You can get a college degree here, Ossian.

(OSSIAN takes her hands and THEY sit together on the bench.)

OSSIAN

I know.

GLADYS

But it's a denominational school. And strict.

OSSIAN

I guess I can handle it. Mama was strict.

GLADYS

Bartow. No cards or stickball on Sundays at Mama's. You call that strict?

OSSIAN

Mama did her best to be strict.

GLADYS

Mama was a pushover compared to President Scarborough. *(Holds out booklet)* Read the rules and weep.

OSSIAN

I've been reading the rules. No drinking or smoking. I never imbibed and only once did I take a drag on a cigarette. Tasted terrible!

GLADYS

There's more. You get chaperoned when you're with girls. Regardless of their probity, or lack of it—how they're dressed or how they talk, down to earth or genteel—

OSSIAN

I never met a genteel girl who was colored—

GLADYS

I resent that—

OSSIAN

(Gestures apologetically) Except present company!

GLADYS

As to the rule against profanity—it's interpreted broadly.

OSSIAN

Can I get in trouble for saying “darn?”

GLADYS

(Poking him playfully) You're darn right you can!

OSSIAN

I hear there's one that's even vaguer—is that a word, vaguer?

GLADYS

It is if you make it one, Mr. Webster.

OSSIAN

It's about being with “bad company.”

GLADYS

Oh, that's similar to those towns where they pick up Negroes on a charge of vagrancy. Covers a multitude of sins.

OSSIAN

Standing on a street corner—

GLADYS

That qualifies. Many a Negro's rotting in some disgusting cell with a vagrancy charge against him.

OSSIAN

Damn! *(Abruptly)* Excuse me. I'm late for an appointment.

(LIGHTS SHIFT. GLADYS exits as OSSIAN crosses upstage to the President's “office”. SCARBOROUGH, immaculately dressed, wearing glasses, the picture of a perfect gentleman, doesn't bother to rise when OSSIAN enters.)

OSSIAN

Dr. Scarborough, sir. What is the charge, vagrancy?

SCARBOROUGH

(Puzzled) Vagrancy?

OSSIAN

I'm sorry, sir, the word was in a previous conversation. I was just—

SCARBOROUGH

Better get focused, Sweet. You should know that your academic work—right now—leaves much to be desired. Papers are late, grades suffering, some of your teachers wonder if you're lazy. Also, there's the matter of your manners.

OSSIAN

Oh, that's not me, sir. I'm as quick as any man to hold the door for a lady.

SCARBOROUGH

I'm talking about the classroom, Sweet. Focus, man, focus!

OSSIAN

I'm sorry, sir.

SCARBOROUGH

(Rising, making OSSIAN wait) Sweet, I like you. *(OSSIAN is relieved.)* You have a native intelligence you obviously didn't acquire from the natives. *(Chuckles at his own joke)* I suspect it's due largely to the wisdom and influence of your worthy parents. Use your head, Sweet. Draw on your memory to recall what they taught you about hard work and the value of knowledge. I hear you've been keeping bad company.

OSSIAN

Sir, I've been wondering what that particular phrase in the handbook meant. I gather I am about to find out.

SCARBOROUGH

(Sternly) Professor Vernon overheard you talking with another student, a female who shall be nameless—listening to what they call ragtime music.

OSSIAN

Is that banned as well?

SCARBOROUGH

Ragtime music has a corrupting influence, Mr. Sweet. It's not good for the soul.

OSSIAN

They dance to it in Xenia, sir.

SCARBOROUGH

That's the devil's town, Sweet. That music's the devil's toolbox!

OSSIAN

But it's lively, and some folks think it's fun. Does being fun make it evil?

SCARBOROUGH

We decide what's evil at Wilberforce, Sweet. *In parentis loco*, we make rules designed to keep our students on the straight and narrow! We have a responsibility to the families from which you come!

OSSIAN

I am sorry, Dr. Scarborough. I will attempt to avoid disreputable company, sir. No girls, no ragtime. I am trying to be Christlike. I don't drink, smoke, play cards, throw dice, or take up with ladies who do.

SCARBOROUGH

Are you being insolent, Sweet?

OSSIAN

I hope not, sir. If so, I apologize.

SCARBOROUGH

Sweet, I am inclined to remove you from this campus—permanently. (*Sighs audibly*) The only reason I don't is that you remind me very much of myself at your age.

OSSIAN

Ah... Thank you, sir. Is that all?

SCARBOROUGH

One thing more. You're pursuing the wrong program here. This obsession with music— You know that fiddle of yours keeps students awake at night.

OSSIAN

I'll tone it down, sir.

SCARBOROUGH

That's not the point, Sweet. Think about taking more of the classics—languages, science—

OSSIAN

But I've always liked music, sir. My mother taught me the violin at a young age.

SCARBOROUGH

Talk to your father, Sweet. I believe him to be a very sage man.

OSSIAN

Come spring, he plants an herb garden for Mama. She loves sage in her turkey dressing!

(SCARBOROUGH does a double-take on this then guffaws as OSSIAN crosses down. LIGHTS SHIFT. SOUND: A SINGLE VIOLIN, playing something familiar. A SPOTLIGHT now on GLADYS and OSSIAN downstage. GLADYS holds a letter. The violin continues to underscore the next speech.)

GLADYS

(To audience, under violin) Ossian didn't talk to his father directly. It cost too much to return home or for Ossian's father to visit Wilberforce. And Henry, Sr. was very busy making a living in Bartow. That included raising ten very active, hungry children, including Ossian's younger brother, Henry Sweet, Jr. Henry, Sr. did write to his son.

(GLADYS hands OSSIAN the letter. HE opens it slowly and sits on the bench to read it. SOUND: A TWANG! – a misplayed violin note. VIOLIN OUT.)

OSSIAN

Well...My Dad agrees with Dr. Scarborough...

GLADYS

A wise man, your father.

OSSIAN

I guess. Anyhow, he says to listen to Dr. Scarborough and chart a new career. Scrap the violin. Forget that *fiddle-faddle*—

GLADYS

(Grimacing) Ouch!

OSSIAN

—And take up something more respectable. Like medicine!

(GLADYS rolls her eyes at this.)

OSSIAN, *Continued*

Well, why not? *Beat: building enthusiasm*) It's a wonderful thing to be a doctor. Not one of those rustic types carrying a beat-up stethoscope and a few folk remedies from house to house but – *(Beat)* – but a real physician! Not a Doctor Will, you know... *(Beat: swells with pride)* but the notable Dr. Sweet, trained at... *(Beat)*

GLADYS

(With pomp) Howard University?

(OSSIAN is momentarily taken aback.)

OSSIAN

(Recovering) Why not, Gladys, why not? *(Grabs GLADYS and swings her around, surprising her)* What a calling, medicine! Dad's right, all right all right— It sure beats all that fiddle-faddle! *(THEY laugh together.)* Gladys, let's get married!

GLADYS

(Gently pushing him away) But you haven't met me yet. Not as Gladys Atkinson, of Detroit, Michigan.

OSSIAN

Oh, criminy!

GLADYS

(Flirting) That comes later, love.

OSSIAN

I can't wait!

GLADYS

You need to learn a little patience. Your *patients* will appreciate it, *Doctor Sweet*.

(LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

ACT I; Scene Five

(VIOLIN MUSIC to underscore set change. AT RISE: The living room of the Atkinson home. The space is occupied by a settee and an upholstered chair circling an inlaid (i.e., expensive) coffee table placed on an oval or round Oriental rug. There's a plate of hors d'oeuvres on the coffee table. OSSIAN and GLADYS are standing in front of the settee.)

OSSIAN

Whoop-de-do! I love you! That dance at the St. Antoine YMCA. *(OSSIAN pulls GLADYS onto the settee.)* Was that about a month ago?

GLADYS

(Some horseplay) Exactly one month to the day, silly.

(THEY kiss.)

OSSIAN

So this is the anniversary of our first meeting? Then it was a month ago tonight that I learned to dance *(Takes a spin)* and met the most beautiful woman I had ever seen!

GLADYS

And I met the most handsome man I'd ever seen, excepting, of course, Buster Keaton.

OSSIAN

(Scowls then grins) You are joking?

GLADYS

I am joking.

OSSIAN

I guess you don't think I have a sense of humor.

GLADYS

You're a serious man Very ambitious, going for that goal dead ahead. An eyes-on-the-prize sort of person. I like that.

OSSIAN

I managed to put myself through Wilberforce and Howard University. Isn't it funny I worked as a waiter in Detroit during the summers and never met you until now? *(Rises suddenly)* Listen, my dear Gladys— After we're married I want to study abroad. Sweetie, it'll be such an adventure for us to travel abroad, visit Vienna and Paris and—

GLADYS

(Rising) Just a minute, young man. You haven't yet asked my father for my hand in marriage.

OSSIAN

Ben Mitchell is just your step-father...

GLADYS

So?

OSSIAN

So that invalidates the obligation, my lovey-dovey.

GLADYS

All right then... *(THEY kiss again. SHE indicates the plate of hors d'oeuvres on the coffee table.)* Have some hors d'oeuvres. I made them myself.

OSSIAN

(Teasing her) I never heard that word until I came into this *middle class* house!

GLADYS

It's a middle class street.

OSSIAN

(Looking about) You have such fine things; the genteel library with a thousand books, the piano room—

GLADYS

That's where Benjamin gives his private lessons. But his primary source of income is playing in the pit orchestra at one of the downtown theaters. He's very good—we should go down sometime. *(Beat)* Now what is this middle class business?

OSSIAN

Oh, nothing. Just that your house in this neighborhood is a far cry from Foggy Bottom where most of the colored people live lives of not so quiet desperation.

GLADYS

I feel for them, darling. Just the same—

OSSIAN

Never mind that. I am just now getting used to the idea of a Negro middle class. There were no inlaid coffee tables in Bartow. But what I can't understand—

GLADYS

Is how we got to live on this street, in a white neighborhood? *(OSSIAN nods.)* I don't know, it's just always been kind of—open. There's a Negro doctor on our block *(SHE motions)* that way. You know I was the only Negro girl in my elementary school, one of three in high school. As far as middle class goes, you'd better get used to it. A doctor is a professional man and that automatically makes him middle class.

OSSIAN

You know, I never thought about that. *(Sits on settee; Beat)* Your mother's away?

GLADYS

Visiting Aunt Julie in Pittsburgh.

OSSIAN

Do you like your step-father?

GLADYS

He pays the bills, including courses I took in nursing and El-Ed— Well, I didn't actually *last* through either one. *(Beat)* Ben's well known around town. He plays gigs for both white and black groups, besides the orchestra job. *(Sits beside him, and adopts a sly, teasing tone)* But I liked him better in a previous life.

OSSIAN

In a what?

GLADYS

I was Portia to his Caesar. You know, I have more than a passing interest in reincarnation. About half of the people in the world believe in it, Hindus and—

OSSIAN

Are you pulling my chain?

GLADYS

(Beat) Maybe, maybe not. Would God go to the trouble of making a soul for just one lifetime, when he could use it over and over? What a waste!

OSSIAN

What?

GLADYS

(Claps her hands) You're born! *(Claps again)* You're dead! *(Once more)* End of story.

OSSIAN

(Grabbing her) Tell me you're joking.

GLADYS

(Playfully breaks away; rises, takes a few steps) Sometimes I have this dream of being another person, long, long ago, nobody you'd recognize, not someone historic like Cleopatra, just a commoner in London or a Chinese peasant woman who invented gunpowder—

OSSIAN

A woman who...?

GLADYS

Oh yes. Women are learning that they have brains and always did. You do know that we have the right to vote now?

OSSIAN

There was a rumor to that effect.

GLADYS

Historically men have stolen women's achievements and claimed them for themselves. But your specialty is obstetrics, so you should know there's *something* that women can do that men cannot—ever, never—do!

OSSIAN

(Puzzled) You're a strange one, my love, my turtledove.

GLADYS

(Sidling up to him) I'm glad you said that. I've always wanted to be a mysterious woman. Have another *hors d'oeuvre*.

OSSIAN

I never eat anything I can't spell. *(Takes and eats one anyway)* These are good. You made them yourself? *(GLADYS nods.)* So you can cook— That settles it! *(Gets down on his knees)*

OSSIAN, *Continued*

I am ready to make a formal proposal. (*Searches his pockets*) Oh, there's one problem. I forgot the ring.

GLADYS

(*Pulls him to his feet*) You never bought one.

OSSIAN

I'm still saving. My next gall-bladder will put us over the top! (*Beat; THEY laugh. OSSIAN inspects the room.*) Church weddings are so—conventional. Why can't we have it here?

GLADYS

In this house? Mother wouldn't stand for it. No, it has to be St. Matthews. (*With a stern look*) I'm not living in Foggy Bottom!

OSSIAN

I don't expect you to. Could we live with your mother and step-father here? Just temporarily. It'll save us some money, and in six months or so we'll be able to take that—extended honeymoon—to exotic places in Europe.

GLADYS

Including London and Berlin?

OSSIAN

The medical schools I want for post-graduate study are in Vienna and Paris.

(*BEN MITCHELL [MAN 2] enters, dressed in a white orchestra jacket and bow tie, rather dapper. He's fifties but seems younger—laid-back, with a sly sense of humor.*)

MITCHELL

You'll love Paris.

GLADYS

Ben!

OSSIAN

Well hello, Mr. Mitchell!

MITCHELL

I just overheard that last bit. Sorry to interrupt your little—tryst. I know you're stuck on each other. Some day you should make it legal. Any hooch, doll?

GLADYS

Sorry, Ben.

OSSIAN

(Whispers to GLADYS) Hooch?

GLADYS

(Whispers back) Liquor.

MITCHELL

(To OSSIAN) Can you spare a coupla clams?

OSSIAN

Clams?

MITCHELL

Dollars.

(OSSIAN gives MITCHELL two dollars. MITCHELL nods his thanks.)

MITCHELL

Back soon. I'm gonna see a man about a dog.

OSSIAN

What?

GLADYS

He's going out for some booze.

MITCHELL

By the way. I'm fine with you staying here for a while after you're hitched.

GLADYS

You *were* eavesdropping!

MITCHELL

Just overheard a bit of it, doll. *(To OSSIAN)* But you should buy her a handcuff, fella.

(MITCHELL exits.)

GLADYS

That's an engagement ring.

OSSIAN

I think I like Ben, but—what kind of talk is that?

GLADYS

It's current street talk. I'll be your translator.

OSSIAN

I'm going to need one—*doll*. (*THEY kiss.*) I like that, *doll*!

(*THEY kiss passionately LIGHTS FADE OUT with WEDDING MUSIC IN as OPTIONAL VISUALS are projected: church wedding, showing the bridal aisle; Then outdoor scene, bride and groom leaving in a hail of confetti. END SCENE.*)

ACT I; Scene Six

(*MUSIC transitions into the SOUNDS OF GULLS' CRIES, SHIP'S BELL, ETC. Optional VISUAL PROJECTIONS of a 1920's ocean liner with passenger deck. AT RISE: OSSIAN and GLADYS, down center, ready to embark on their trip overseas, each carrying a shopping bag and standing near a luggage cart on which several suitcases are piled. THEY gaze out looking at the ship.*)

GLADYS

SS Carmania. It's a handsome ship, Ossian. And not a cloud in the sky! (*Looking up*) Don't you wish you could soar like a gull with nothing to do but catch fish and scavenge around boats all day?

OSSIAN

A fine life, I'm sure—for gulls. (*Referring to ship*) Looks a bit weather-beaten, don't you think?

GLADYS

I'm sure it seaworthy, darling. Isn't this exciting? As a girl I never dreamed that I'd be spending my honeymoon on an ocean liner heading for the Mediterranean—and Europe!

OSSIAN

Well, it's a belated honeymoon, sweetie. (*THEY kiss.*)

GLADYS

It'll be wonderful! (*Beat*) Oh, I've brought you a present! Sort of a *bon voyage* gift.

OSSIAN

And I bought you something too!

GLADYS

You didn't! Alright, you first!

OSSIAN

No, you!

GLADYS!

(*Trying to grab the bag he's holding*) Please, please, please?

OSSIAN

Oh, all right.

(OSSIAN removes a parasol from his shopping bag and hands it to GLADYS.)

OSSIAN, *Continued*

Here.

GLADYS

A parasol! It's so pretty!

OSSIAN

Well, you're fair-skinned and the sun is hot.

GLADYS

(Posing with the parasol) Now I can pretend to be a lady!

OSSIAN

You don't have to pretend, sweetie. You *are* a lady. Maybe an African princess in a former life.

GLADYS

That's nice. Thank you, love.

OSSIAN

I'm getting into it, sweetie. But where's my gift? Let me see it!

GLADYS

Patience, remember?

(GLADYS looks into her bag, savoring the moment. A beat...then SHE shows him a leather carrying-case, 20's style.)

GLADYS, *Continued*

Will this do for the notes you'll be taking at the feet of those learned medicine men in Vienna and Paris?

OSSIAN

(Examining the case approvingly) You bet it will. Thank you, thank you, thank you—

(GLADYS cuts him off with a kiss.)

OSSIAN, *Continued*

Medicine men, you say? I'm more interested in a very wise woman. Madame Curie.

GLADYS

Hmm. What is this radium you're so interested in?

OSSIAN

Radium is going to revolutionize medical science! It has great potential for treating diseases. Madame Curie thinks it may even be used to treat and cure cancer, some day.

GLADYS

Oh, how wonderful!

OSSIAN

I want to hear all of her lectures while we're in Paris! I can't wait!

GLADYS

You can wait. Relax, my darling. *(Hugs him, playfully swinging him around)* I want to live in present tense this whole trip. We'll savor every moment from here to Paris. We may never pass this way again. Besides, we're on our honeymoon, even though it's belated.

OSSIAN

Which gave you time to become pregnant. But you don't show much.

GLADYS

It's too early. *(Beat)* Ossian, what if our child were born in Paris?

OSSIAN

I'd like that, wouldn't you?

(GLADYS nods. THEY hug. Beat. SOUND: A warning bell or ship's horn is heard.)

GLADYS

It's time.

OSSIAN

It's past time, love.

(OSSIAN grabs the cart with their luggage but GLADYS stops him.)

GLADYS

(Waving) Porter! Oh, porter!

(LIGHTS OUT.)

ACT I; Scene Seven

(MUSIC from the 1920's underscores the set change to an outdoor café; a table, lunch setting and two chairs angled. Optional VISUAL PROJECTIONS: PARIS, something recognizable such as the Eiffel Tower; also the Champs Elysees, including shops and cafés. With stage set MUSIC OUT. SOUND EFFECTS: A busy street; perhaps people speaking in French. AT RISE: GLADYS, obviously pregnant, sits by herself, idly examining a menu. Downstage of the café an American TOURIST, [MAN 4], an imposing figure with a Texas hat and the accent to match, meets OSSIAN on a narrow sidewalk. THEY stop dead, eyeing each other.)

TOURIST

(Condescendingly) Hey, boy—what are you doing over here?

OSSIAN

(Smiling slyly) Same as you, I guess. I'm pursuing an advanced degree in medicine.

(TOURIST just grunts at that; eyes OSSIAN suspiciously.)

TOURIST

(Beat) Whenever I meet a social inferior on a narrow sidewalk, I never give way.

OSSIAN

(Beat) On the other hand, I always do.

(OSSIAN steps aside, letting the TOURIST pass. THEY stop and exchange glances. TOURIST scowls; OSSIAN grins then continues toward GLADYS at the outdoor table. TOURIST exits.)

OSSIAN

(Greeting GLADYS, kissing her) Hello, sweetie.

GLADYS

Darling, what happened between you and Mr. Big Hat?

OSSIAN

Nothing much. *(Sits next to her)* But I learned that when an American tourist travels abroad he packs his racism with his toothbrush. *(Spots waiter)* Garçon! *(WAITER [MAN 5] enters.)* Café au lait, pour deux, s'il vous plait! *(To GLADYS)* Are you hungry, dear? How about some frogs' legs?

GLADYS

I don't have much of an appetite today, darling. And it's too late for those kinds of cravings.

OSSIAN

Women are unpredictable, especially when they're—as my mother would say—*with child*. (*GLADYS sniffs at this phrase.*) But hasn't it been fun here in this pleasant town by the Seine. Ah, the city of lights! I should say, Paris is enlightened! No segregated lunch counters, separate water fountains and toilets here.

GLADYS

No Jim Crow here. It's so color-blind.

OSSIAN

Only the imported variety. Our money's as good as that of the white tourists. You notice the stunned looks on their faces when they pass us walking down the street looking them straight in the eye?

GLADYS

So different back home!

OSSIAN

Especially in Barlow—or Detroit. (*Chuckles; a beat*) And Gladys...I've been more than satisfied with the interaction among the learned men. I've been learned a whole lot!

GLADYS

That's *taught*, dear. Stop it.

OSSIAN

Oh, the back-country grammar. (*Grins slyly*) Sometimes it just slips out.

GLADYS

You do it to torment me. (*THEY engage in a little horseplay.*) And I've learned so much about art. There's cubism you know, that's the latest.

OSSIAN

I'm not sure I want to know.

(*The WAITER enters once again and serves GLADYS and OSSIAN their coffee.*)

OSSIAN, *Continued*

Ah, merci. (*The WAITER nods and exits.*) We're making real advances in obstetrics, you know.

GLADYS

(*Touching her abdomen*) Just in time for me.

OSSIAN

A Cesarean can be performed with little risk to the patient. (*GLADYS frowns.*) And there's a gas called "twilight sleep" that eases virtually all your pain during labor.

GLADYS

I'm not sure I want that. The pain would make the whole experience more genuine, more real—I should think. And it's traditional.

OSSIAN

What? Are you taking a biblical viewpoint? Surely you don't believe that God ordained that women suffer giving birth because Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit!

GLADYS

No, I don't see it as God's punishment for Adam's misdeed. But Ossian, I want to experience everything that women have experienced for ten thousand years. I don't want to miss anything. I want to be awake and alert, not drugged by your medicines.

OSSIAN

Natural childbirth. Very good, my sweetie.

GLADYS

Darling, must we go to the hospital? It can happen at home—I mean, our apartment. Your specialty is obstetrics, and I feel perfectly safe with you.

OSSIAN

But there may be complications.

GLADYS

Oh, nonsense. Did they teach you how to boil water?

OSSIAN

Well, I—

GLADYS

In Asia and Africa women working in corn fields or the rice paddies just squat when the time comes and the baby drops. Next day they strap it to their backs in a basket and go back to harvesting.

OSSIAN

But we don't live in Asia or Africa! (*Beat*) Gladys, I've studied obstetrics and gynecology, but I'm not that experienced with deliveries. I'd feel much better about this if—I want to take you to the American Hospital! (*Beat*) You know I've made a donation.

GLADYS

You study obstetrics but you know little about delivering a baby. What *did* they teach you?

OSSIAN

Oh, I've seen it done. You basically need towels, warm water, and a sterile knife.

GLADYS

What? A knife? No knife!

OSSIAN

No, no, no. Not a Cesarean, love. It's to cut the umbilical cord.

GLADYS

Oh. *(Beat, then puts her hand to her belly)* Ooooh. *(Feeling pain)* Oh!

OSSIAN

(Rising in alarm) Did that hurt? How often are the pains coming?

GLADYS

(Starting to rise) That was the first one, silly.

(OSSIAN helps GLADYS to her feet. SHE holds his arm and takes a few steps then gives another gentle cry of pain.)

GLADYS, *Continued*

We should go home.

OSSIAN

No! I insist. Garçon! *(The WAITER enters.)* Call us a cab, please! The American Hospital!

(The WAITER nods and turns to hail a cab, extending his arm. HE holds the pose for a moment then BLACKOUT.)

ACT I; Scene Eight

(SOUND EFFECTS: Chatter, alarm bells, other hospital sounds. Optional VISUAL PROJECTIONS: Exterior of an old hospital; images of hospital interior with nurses. AT RISE: The American Hospital Administrator's office. DR. FLEURANT, [MAN 3], Chief Administrator sits behind the desk. HE speaks English with a slight French accent. OSSIAN, very angry, stands near the doorway. GLADYS is seated near the desk. SOUNDS/VISUAL PROJECTIONS FADE OUT with LIGHTS UP.)

OSSIAN

This is the American Hospital, is it not, Dr. Fleurant? We happen to be Americans!

FLEURANT

I'm so sorry, it is not *my* policy.

OSSIAN

Then whose policy is it, Monsieur?

FLEURANT

Well, it's not exactly—policy. That is, it's an established tradition. You see, the other Americans who patronize this hospital just don't feel quite comfortable with—uh—with—

OSSIAN

Colored people! With sweaty Negroes in the bed next to them! In the ward next to them! Do they think we'll soil the linen or that our germs will make them sick?

FLEURANT

(Rising in protest) Oh no, not at all. Nothing like that but—

OSSIAN

Do you know that I've donated to this hospital since we arrived in Paris?

FLEURANT

I didn't know. I'm very pleased, but if you thought that would guarantee a place—

OSSIAN

I didn't do it for that reason but I assumed—

FLEURANT

I am sorry, sir. I'll be happy to return your money, Mr. Sweet.

OSSIAN

It's *Doctor* Sweet, you Gallic bigot! To quote my father's father, your *policy* stinks like a dead polecat on a hot stone!

GLADYS

Ossian!

FLEURANT

It's not *my* policy. The Council of Surgeons here—that is, of course I'm ashamed and embarrassed, but there is no help for it. I must ask you to leave. There's another hospital—

OSSIAN

A hospital for the poor and indigent, I suppose—

GLADYS

(Struggling to her feet) Ossian, we need to go home.

FLEURANT

(Relieved) I'll call you a cab. It's the least I can do.

(FLEURANT crosses down left onto "the street". HE signals for a cab in the manner of the Waiter and holds the pose through the end of the scene.)

OSSIAN

(Assisting GLADYS) The very least indeed!

GLADYS

(Taking a step or two with difficulty) Come home, darling. I'll teach you to boil water.

(BLACKOUT.)

ACT I; Scene Nine

(SOUNDS OF BUSY 1920'S CITY TRAFFIC underscore the transition to Scene Nine. Optional PROJECTIONS: 1920'S Detroit, Michigan; factories, workers on an assembly line, etc. STAGE SET for upcoming action: Stage Right, a lectern for the Klansman's address. Upstage, the Sweets' Garland Ave bungalow represented by two walls with two doors leading off on a raised platform. [See PRODUCTION NOTES.] A few pieces of furniture—perhaps several chairs and an inlaid coffee table suggest the Sweets' living room; there is a pile of guns on the table. A street sign labeled "Garland Ave" is set DL. There may be a bench beside it facing the audience. AT RISE: GLADYS, DR, addresses the audience. SHE may begin speaking as the set change is completed.)

GLADYS

Detroit was booming when Ossian and I returned to our adopted city. By the early 20's the great migration brought thousands of colored people and European immigrants to the northern metropolitan areas. Of course, Negroes were last to be hired and first to be fired. Henry Ford, who didn't care much for black folks, gave them the poorest paying and most dangerous jobs. But there was other work as well, and it generally paid more than you could earn down on the farm. That didn't mean you got treated any better. By 1922 the population of Detroit had swelled to one million. About a tenth were colored; Detroit's Negro population had doubled over the previous decade, and most of them had settled into the poor, run-down section of the city called Foggy Bottom. Meanwhile the Dodge brothers and Chrysler were building new factories and offices. Tire factories and other ancillaries of the automotive boom were hiring and the whole scene was so dynamic the Chamber of Commerce proclaimed that "In Detroit Life is Worth Living." Of course, for many colored folks and other immigrants, that depended on whether you could find decent housing and a job that paid the rent. Not so easy.

(Optional VISUAL PROJECTIONS: Film clip from "Birth of a Nation," if available; Photos of Klan activities, including night scenes with burning crosses.)

GLADYS, *Continued*

Racial tension intensified with the growing influence of the Ku Klux Klan, which had been reborn during the 1920's. In the aftermath of DW Griffith's silent film, *Birth of a Nation*, which extolled the heroism of the white-robed "patriots," the KKK spread well beyond the South, with a membership of over three million. Detroit was fertile ground for heralding the "God-given supremacy of the white race."

(SPOTLIGHT on KLANSMAN, [MAN 3], at the podium. LIGHTS OUT on GLADYS who exits Left. The KLANSMAN is dressed in white but with the hood thrown off his head. On his chest and/or the front of the lectern we see the Klan symbol; a Knight in armor wielding a sword. The KLANSMAN speaks to the audience with vigor and conviction. Soft PATRIOTIC MUSIC underscores his speech.)

KLANSMAN

Good evening, fellow Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, my good friends, and friends of friends. This is a White Man's Organization, exalting the Caucasian Race and teaching the doctrine of White Supremacy. This does not mean that we are enemies of the colored and mongrel races. But it does mean that we are organized to establish the solidarity and to realize the mission of the white race... We stand for white supremacy. Distinction among the races is not accidental but designed. This is clearly brought out in the one book that tells authoritatively of the origin of the races. This distinction is not incidental, but it is of the vastest import and indicates the wisdom of the divine mind. It is not temporary but is as abiding as the ages that have not yet ceased to roll. The supremacy of the white race must be maintained, or be overwhelmed by the rising tide of color. We must keep this country a white man's country. Only by doing this can we be faithful to the foundations laid down by our forefathers. This republic was established *by* white men. It was established *for* white men. Our forefathers never intended that it should fall into the hands of an inferior race.

(SPOTLIGHT FADES OUT on KLANSMAN; LIGHTS UP on alternating "conversations" between two pairs of "NEIGHBORS" at various positions on the stage. In these exchanges, two black actors, [MAN 1 and MAN 2], play the roles of the black neighbors and two white actors [MAN 4 and MAN 5] play all the roles of the white neighbors. Changing of hats, stance and mannerisms differentiate each character. The dialects of the two black characters may differ but should be spoken in better English than the whites. Some whites may be immigrants speaking with an accent. There should be a sense that tension is building as a crowd grows, gathering steam for the explosive climax that will occur in and around the Sweets' bungalow.)

WHITE NEIGHBOR 1

Hey – Hey Marty! Did you hear? That nigger doctor's buying the property at 2905 Garland.

WHITE NEIGHBOR 2

Damn! We been through this already. Tideman Avenue and before that. Huh. *(Beat)* The seller's white, isn't she?

WHITE NEIGHBOR 1

Mrs. Smith is, yeah. But her husband's a mongrel. Been passin' fer years. The point is they plan to move in August. Take us by surprise.

WHITE NEIGHBOR 2

Can't let that happen, Harry.

WHITE NEIGHBOR 1

Damn right. Our property values will take a dive! And we're a long shot from payin' off our mortgage.

WHITE NEIGHBOR 2

They've still got Foggy Bottom. Let 'em live where they belong!

(The pair of BLACK NEIGHBORS appear as the WHITE NEIGHBORS exit.)

BLACK NEIGHBOR 1

Is Sweet and his family too good for Foggy Bottom? It's not the Taj Mahal but we've managed to live here twenty years. Why do they have to move into a whitey neighborhood full of crackers?

BLACK NEIGHBOR 2

He's not like us, you know. Medical specialist, works at Dunbar Hospital. They say he's a good a doctor as any white man.

BLACK NEIGHBOR 1

Yeah, but he's going down the same path as Bristol, Fletcher, and Turner. All of 'em thought they could hold down a house in a white neighborhood. Detroit's full of Klansmen and other bigots. Somebody gets hurt real bad in the end.

BLACK NEIGHBOR 2

But it's time for the middle class Negroes to get some decent housing!

BLACK NEIGHBOR 1

Are these urban rednecks going to let it happen? I don't think.

BLACK NEIGHBOR 2

Who's side are you on, Jonesy?

BLACK NEIGHBOR 1

Tranquility. We got our families to protect too.

(The second pair of WHITE NEIGHBORS appear as BLACK NEIGHBORS exit.)

WHITE NEIGHBOR 3

Hey Clyde—you heard about the get-together at the elementary school tonight?

WHITE NEIGHBOR 4

Yeah, but who's the organizer?

WHITE NEIGHBOR 3

I think James Conley's behind it—the realtor—just lives a block down the street. My old lady says 'er whole coffee clatch is goin'.

WHITE NEIGHBOR 4

Then the women are with us, eh?

WHITE NEIGHBOR 3

You bet your life. They don't want no pickaninnies playin' see-saw with their children durin' recess! *Our* children, pal.

WHITE NEIGHBOR 4

I get your drift. Let's pack the place tonight. We'll go house to house and raise hell! What's this bunch callin' themselves?

WHITE NEIGHBOR 3

It's the Waterworks Park Improvement Association.

WHITE NEIGHBOR 4

That's a mouthful, ain't it? Couldn't they pick a simple name—like KKK?

(LIGHTS CROSSFADE to OSSIAN and GLADYS, standing or sitting by the "Garland Ave." street sign.)

GLADYS

(Gazing out) Ossian, I do love this bungalow.

OSSIAN

You've always loved that house.

GLADYS

It's so right for us! But now I'm wondering. Ossian... *(Hugs him)*...is it the right thing to do? I don't want to put our family and friends at risk.

OSSIAN

But it's your dream house. And it's my dream that someday this neighborhood, this city, this country will be color-blind, at least where housing is concerned. I know what happened when others tried to integrate and didn't make it—

GLADYS

Dr. Turner was forcibly thrown out— He had to sign away his house!

OSSIAN

I know—there is a risk. As for me, I'd rather go down trying than give up our home now. *(Hugs her)* Oh, Gladys, there has to be a first time. There *will be* a first time. We can be the first. We can wedge that door open for so many others.

GLADYS

I'm scared. *(Beat)* I lived on an integrated block—middle class, of course—and it was nothing like this. I didn't know I'd be so—frightened.

OSSIAN

But the others had no means to protect themselves. We have guns. We can defend ourselves.

GLADYS

Guns! What good are a few guns? The whites can get all the guns they want. Besides—

OSSIAN

(Cutting her off) —God grant that we never have to fire a shot. But we have to show them we're determined to defend ourselves. So far Negroes have been too damn timid! I want to prove that a Negro's got the same right as a white man to live where he wants. That he has the right to raise his children in a decent neighborhood with good schools, libraries, stores—

GLADYS

(Deeply disturbed, cutting him off) —Yes, oh yes! But Ossian—is it worth the price?

(This brings the discussion up short. OSSIAN sighs deeply, taking her hands.)

OSSIAN

Gladys, my love, my turtledove. I can't ask you to enter that house until things cool down. I'll just move in, alone, and then – later – I'll send for you.

GLADYS

(Placing her hand over his mouth) Shut your mouth, love! *(Holding him)* I may be scared to death but I'm no coward. And where my husband goes I will go. *(Beat)* I will be your Ruth. *(Ossian responds with a puzzled look.)* From the Bible, silly!

(OSSIAN nods, smiles at her. HE glances outward.)

OSSIAN

Well, there's the bungalow. Your dream house, love. *(Kisses her)*

(LIGHTS CROSSFADE to third set of WHITE NEIGHBORS.)

WHITE NEIGHBOR 5

Hey, did you make the meeting, Bill?

WHITE NEIGHBOR 6

No, I had to work late at Ford. Overtime pays the rent. But I really wanted to be there. Wha'd they talk about?

WHITE NEIGHBOR 5

Well, somebody from the Improvement Association went on about property values, with a bunch of charts 'n stuff. Man, you're really in a bind when some niggers move into your block! Then there was some talk about how to get them Sweets to change their minds, or to move them out if they do move in.

WHITE NEIGHBOR 6

They've been seen movin' guns into that house. They're building an arsenal! My wife's real scared o' what could happen. You know there's been race wars all over the country!

WHITE NEIGHBOR 5

Well, if it comes to that, so what? We can find guns.

WHITE NEIGHBOR 6

But they've asked for police protection.

WHITE NEIGHBOR 5

Fat chance.

WHITE NEIGHBOR 6

I don't know. This mayor's different. What if he orders the police to protect that house?

WHITE NEIGHBOR 5

No way, buddy. He knows where his votes are. *(Softly)* And I know there's men in the force with Klan membership.

WHITE NEIGHBOR 6

But Schuknecht's the Precinct Commander. Some folks say he's a nigger-lover.

WHITE NEIGHBOR 5

Nah. You worry too much! If we can't buy 'em out we'll drive 'em out! You tell your wife, everything's jake!

(BLACKOUT. The last two NEIGHBORS exit. SOUNDS of a MOB. Chants are heard over; "Get out niggers, get out!" LIGHTS UP on the Sweet's bungalow. OFFICER SCHUKNECHT stands near the house observing the unseen crowd. OSSIAN and GLADYS, along with OSSIAN'S BROTHERS, HENRY JR., and OTIS SWEET, [MAN 1], are in the living room. OSSIAN distributes the guns that were lying on the table to his BROTHERS.)

OSSIAN

Take this, Otis, you may need it. And Henry, take this rifle.

HENRY JR.

What do you think they'll do?

OSSIAN

God knows. But in case they storm the house...

(The SOUNDS OF THE MOB grow in intensity with more chanting over; "Hang them, Lynch them. Hang them, Lynch them!" SCHUKNECHT raises his hands to quiet the mob.)

OTIS

Ossian, I'm scared! This is the second night they've mobbed the street!

OSSIAN

Don't worry, Otis, there are ten defenders in this house—six more upstairs. And a man's home is his castle—

GLADYS

And castles were easy to defend. Of course there were walls and ramparts and a moat, which we don't have but—

HENRY JR.

But we have courage. And besides, we're right. Being right makes you feel secure.

OTIS

I'd feel more secure with a couple of Tommy-guns.

GLADYS

We have Commander Schuknecht standing guard, with his contingent of police.

OTIS

And how many of them are Klansmen?

GLADYS

They've pledged to do their duty. (*Hugs OTIS*) Dear brother, I know your fear, and it's real. But please—let's think and pray for the best possible outcome—of course we have to remain vigilant.

OSSIAN

The policemen are obliged to protect us and defend our house from vandals. And the mayor made it clear he doesn't want a repeat of what happened to Dr. Turner.

(SOUND: CROWD NOISE SWELLS despite SCHUKNECHT. Chanters shout "Coons, get out, get off this street! Coons get out, get off this street!" HENRY JR. in particular seems visibly upset.)

HENRY JR.

I'm going to take a few shots at the mob. Scare them off!

OTIS

You can't do that! Not unless they fire shots at us.

GLADYS

Henry, we don't want to precipitate violence.

(CROWD NOISE SWELLS, THEN EBBS. Carrying a rifle, HENRY JR. heads for the Interior doorway.)

OSSIAN

If you shoot that weapon, fire over their heads.

(HENRY JR. exits quickly.)

GLADYS

Ossian, don't let him go. We don't know what he'll do. He has the best of intentions but—
(CROWD NOISE SWELLS again; raising her voice) Ossian, at least go with him—

OSSIAN

We should stay here, to defend this side of the house.

GLADYS

Oh, Ossian! *(Shouting)* Henry, Henry!

(SOUND: BREAKING GLASS.)

OTIS

What's all that?

OSSIAN

They're throwing rocks. Must have broken some windows.

(CROWD NOISE EXPLODES; then suddenly: SOUND; FOUR GUNSHOTS. ALL freeze. OSSIAN, GLADYS, and OTIS look at each other in alarm. CROWD NOISE SWELLS. SOUND: KNOCKS/POUNDING at the door.)

OTIS

Should we—should we open the door?

OSSIAN

I don't know. Remember what happened to Turner!

GLADYS

But it may be Officer Schuknecht.

(OSSIAN nods, goes to door and opens it. OFFICER SCHUKNECHT steps in.)

SCHUKNECHT

Who fired those shots? *(OTIS shakes his head, shrugs.)* They came from inside the house.

(HENRY JR. enters, from the Interior doorway.)

HENRY JR.

(With certainty) I did, Officer.

SCHUKNECHT

You may have killed someone. Two men are wounded. *(Crosses to the outside door; calls out)* Is either one...?

(Apparently a man is dead. SCHUKNECHT turns back to the family.)

SCHUKNECHT, *Continued*

One of them's dead. *(Calling to police outside)* We'll need more handcuffs in here! *(Turns back to the Sweets)* You're under arrest. All of you— Are there others upstairs? *(GLADYS nods)* You are under arrest for murder—everyone in this house!

(SCHUKNECHT produces a pair of handcuffs and takes charge of OSSIAN.) What do you have to say for yourself, Dr. Sweet?

OSSIAN

(With mild sarcasm) God Bless America!

(BLACKOUT. CROWD NOISE SWELLS, then EBBS. In the blackout DORA sings.)

DORA, *Singing*

*Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
A long ways from home, a long ways from home"*

ACT I; Scene Ten

(Optional PROJECTIONS: County Jail exterior, then interior, showing cells. DORA's singing continues to underscore the set change. AT RISE: the visiting room at the local jail represented by two sets of bars and several stools. OSSIAN and his brother, HENRY JR. stand apparently expecting visitors. GLADYS, feeling ill, sits on one of the stools. HENRY SR. enters. GLADYS rises. OSSIAN and HENRY JR. are both surprised and happy to see their father.)

OSSIAN

It's our Dad! Hey, Dad!

HENRY JR.

Daddy, how are you?

(THEY embrace and kiss their father.)

HENRY SR.

Well, look at you boys— Henry! Ossian! Gladys! Are they treating you well!

OSSIAN

Reasonably well, considering—

HENRY SR.

This young lady looks pale. (*Touching GLADYS' forehead*) Are you well, Gladys?

GLADYS

No, I—I feel cold.

(*HENRY SR. takes his jacket off and places it around GLADYS.*)

HENRY SR.

You shouldn't be in this dank, damp place!

GLADYS

It's just for a few days. The judge is hoping I can make bail, which he set pretty low.

HENRY JR.

(*To HENRY SR.*) But how's Mama? I wish she was here too.

HENRY SR.

My words exactly. But you know your Mama. With our brood of ten it's like someone's always sick with the fever or dysentery or something. I told her I'd find somebody to take care of the chillin' but she said, no, she wanted to come but—

OSSIAN

Well, she never liked the iron horse, as she called it—

HENRY SR.

That's a part of it, too, but mostly it's her caring—and singing—to the chillin'. Trying to keep 'em healthy and in school. (*Beat*) But she said she's never stopped prayin' for you'all.

OSSIAN

But you didn't know that you'd find us all—here, did you?

HENRY SR.

In jail? No, but when you wrote you were gonna move into a house in a neighborhood full of crackers, we figured there'd be trouble. You can't tell me Detroit is that much different from Bartow. (*To OSSIAN*) Son, what's the situation, legally?

OSSIAN

There's good news and bad news. The bad news is that the police arrested all of us after a white man got killed outside our house in the street. It was total chaos, Daddy. Hundreds, thousands maybe. They threw stones through our windows and we sort of panicked—

HENRY SR.

Understandable—

OSSIAN

And Henry here, well he—

HENRY JR.

Well, I was just trying to scare them off I guess. I don't know exactly what happened but the gun went off and—well, that ain't exactly what happened. But I swear I didn't want to kill anybody I just wanted to scare them off, disperse that crowd of damn-whites with their—

HENRY SR.

Hold on, son! I think we've heard enough bad news for one night. You did say there's some good news?

OSSIAN

We've been assigned Judge Murphy, who's known to be fair—even progressive. There's more good news—the NAACP wants to organize our defense!

HENRY SR.

N-double-A...?

HENRY JR.

It's rather new, daddy. It's a national organization formed with the intent of advancing Negro rights in this country. They've already assembled a fine team of colored defense attorneys.

HENRY SR.

So there's to be—a trial?

OSSIAN

Yes, of course. They're calling us murderers but we're saying it's self-defense. A man has a right to defend his home that he bought and paid for.

HENRY SR.

Hold on just a dang minute, boy. *(Beat; pacing, pondering this)* You say you've got a good team of colored lawyers. That may well be, but I never yet heard of any colored lawyers gettin' a black man acquitted by a white jury. And don't tell me it's any different in the North. You need a white man leading your defense team.

OSSIAN

I think you're right, Daddy. It's a white jury.

VOICE (MAN 4)

(Over loudspeaker) Ten Minutes!

HENRY SR.

That's my point. Where's Otis and the others who were arrested?

HENRY JR.

Somewhere else, maybe a different cell block. They haven't told us.

HENRY SR.

We'll find out when we leave here, and we'll make damn sure the warden knows that Gladys is sick!

OSSIAN

I can just hear Mama saying, "Henry Sweet, profanity! And in a prison yet!"

HENRY SR.

The best place for it. *(To GLADYS)* But I wish dear Dora was here now, to make a poultice or some homemade chicken soup for this young lady.

HENRY JR.

There's no place to make soup here.

GLADYS

Thank you just the same. *(Weakly)* I'll be fine.

HENRY SR.

I wish my Dora were here. *(Taking OSSIAN aside)* Son, I want to say something personal to you.

OSSIAN

Yes, sir?

HENRY SR.

(Wraps his arm around OSSIAN's shoulders) Now you put yourself and your family in a predicament because you broke the color line here, such as it may be. You moved into a neighborhood where you wasn't wanted. Am I right so far? *(OSSIAN nods meekly, HENRY SR. takes a step away)* Some folks, both colors, would say you're crazy for doin' that. Some would call you a muddle-headed fool or a headstrong, stubborn young man. And some—

HENRY JR.

Daddy...?

HENRY SR.

(Beat) I said, *some folks*. Not me. I'm not sayin' that. No way. What I'd call you is a—principled person. An honorable man. Heroic even. I'd say a man has a right to defend his home and family against mob rule. We've seen too much of that down south already. Aggressive mobs and passive Negroes. But you, Ossian—you and Henry Junior and Otis and Gladys and your whole circle of family and friends—you've stood up to them! You've held

HENRY, SR., *Continued*

your ground! And I've never been more proud of this family—and of you—than I am this very minute!

OSSIAN

(Fighting back tears) Thanks, Daddy.

(HENRY SR. hugs OSSIAN, then HENRY JR. The VOICE over the loudspeaker interrupts once again.)

VOICE (MAN 4)

Five minutes!

OSSIAN

Daddy, I said the NAACP is working on the case. Actually, they are looking for a prominent white attorney to anchor the defense. Someone famous even. Have you heard of Clarence Darrow?

HENRY SR.

No, son.

OSSIAN

He's just about the most famous criminal lawyer in the country. They're going to send a delegation to his office to ask him to join our defense. You can't imagine what that would mean to us! But we've heard that he's about to retire. If not, he may want a small fortune to defend us. I don't know if he'll do it *pro bono*. That means no fee. I guess he gets two or three grand for some cases.

HENRY SR.

What's a grand, son?

OSSIAN

(Winks at his brother) That's a thousand clams.

HENRY SR.

What's a clam?

OSSIAN

That's a dollar.

HENRY SR.

They have a strange way of talking about money in Detroit.

(The OTHERS react in various ways to OSSIAN teasing his father.)

GLADYS

(Poking OSSIAN in the ribs) Ossian, don't be so mean to your father!

OSSIAN

I'm sorry, Dad.

VOICE (MAN 4)

(Over loudspeaker) Time! All visitors must vacate!

(The FAMILY quickly exchanges hugs as HENRY SR. prepares to leave. HE is about to exit reluctantly, then turns and waves farewell. The LIGHTS FADE OUT and a SPOTLIGHT focuses on DORA sitting in her rocker downstage with knitting in her lap. DORA sings "Lonesome Valley" as we transition to the next scene.)

DORA, Singing

*Jesus walked this lonesome valley,
He had to walk it by himself,
Oh, nobody else could walk it for him,
He had to walk it by himself.
You have to go and stand your trial
You have to stand it by yourself,
Oh, nobody else can stand it for you,
You have to stand it by yourself.*

ACT I; Scene Eleven

(SPOTLIGHT OUT on DORA; SOUNDS once again of a busy city street. Optional VISUAL PROJECTIONS: New York City in the 1920's; a street with brownstone houses. AT RISE: Clarence Darrow's study. There is a desk and a chair to one side and a large cot on the other. The desk is piled with books, notebooks, and papers, some of which have fallen to the floor. DARROW is lying asleep on the couch, fully clothed but with a large blanket or quilt covering him. ARTHUR SPRINGARM, [MAN 3], and WALTER WHITE, [MAN 2], behind the desk, peer in at DARROW. SPRINGARM coughs, then WHITE coughs a bit louder. DARROW shifts his position, still asleep. WHITE knocks on the desk and DARROW wakes suddenly, throwing off his blanket and rising to a sitting position. HE grunts with a huge "Ugh" and expels his breath.)

WHITE

Mr. Darrow? We didn't know you were asleep, they said to go into your study, that you were expecting us.

SPRINGARM

(As he picks up some of Darrow's papers scattered on the floor.) We're very sorry.

DARROW

Leave those papers alone, young fellow. That's all part of my filing system!

SPRINGARM

Oh, I am sorry.

(DARROW examines them intently.)

DARROW

Oh, you're the fellows from the NAACP.

WHITE

Yes, sir. I'm Walter White. James Weldon Johnson's courier, in a manner of speaking. And this is Arthur Springarm, our legal advisor.

DARROW

(Musing) NAACP. You're coming to me, with a Negro defense team already assembled?

WHITE

Mr. Darrow, you've been a member of the NAACP since its inception. You've always been willing to plead the rights of colored men, and defended the poor and the powerless. You've worked without recompense or material reward to elevate the education as well as the civil rights of Negroes. And besides, you're the best known and the most eloquent of any defense attorney in America.

DARROW

Despite what they say, flattery will get you nowhere. *(Smiles, then grunts, nodding)* Well, this matter in Detroit bears consideration.

(DARROW gets to his feet, with some effort. HE is a large man, late sixties, with a craggy face, intense but not unfriendly. HE shakes their hands.)

DARROW

You fellows ever take a nap? *(THEY shake their heads)* No? You should try it. I like a late afternoon nap. Twenty minutes will do it. Gets you relaxed and rejuvenated. When you awaken you're ready to continue. It's like a new day. You get two days for the price of one!

SPRINGARM

I'll give it a try.

DARROW

Don't put me on, young fellows are always too busy for naps. You came here from Detroit, eh?

SPRINGARM

Yes, Mr. Darrow. It's urgent. We need you.

DARROW

It's always urgent. Look, fellows, I'm a tired old man. I just finished a case in Tennessee—I'm sure you know about Scopes—and the whole affair, from my investigation of the circumstances to the end of the appeals trial went well over two years. That's a hell of a long time for an old man to concentrate. *(Beat)* But what the hell, it came out all right. Look here, I'm about done and at my age I should have my ass in a rocker on somebody's porch. Preferably a pretty woman's. I know what you want but I'm weary. The hell with the porch, my friends think I should go on the lecture circuit. I'm an agnostic, as you may have guessed from Scopes, and I'd like to have a series of debates with believers—Christian and Jewish ministers or, what do they call 'em—rabbis. I'll put 'em to the test by demanding evidence for whatever they say they believe. Like I did with Bryan, God rest his soul.

WHITE

You certainly held your own with Mr. Bryan, sir.

SPRINGARM

More than that. You made it clear that Bryan's faith couldn't stand scrutiny.

WHITE

H. L. Menken dismissed him as a quack. And Eugene Debs called Bryan a “shallow-minded mouther of empty phrases, a pious, canting mountebank, a prophet of the stone age.”

DARROW

Rather too harsh, I'd say. *(Beat; chuckles)* I liked what Will Rogers said about my debating skills. Now where is that darn thing?

(DARROW looks through his desk, scattering additional papers. SPRINGARM bends to retrieve them but DARROW clears his throat. THEY exchange glances. SPRINGARM straightens up, smiling apologetically. DARROW looks again and finds the document he wants.)

DARROW, *Continued*

Here it is. It's an essay on the proposed lyceum debates. This reporter quotes Will Rogers as saying, “Don't anybody debate with Darrow. He will make a monkey out of any opponent. He hadn't been in Tennessee two weeks till he had the entire state jumping up on the backs of chairs, picking flees off each other.”

(ALL guffaw.)

DARROW, *Continued*

Of course, that William Jennings Bryan was easy pickins compared to some of the intellectuals they want to throw in the ring with me. You know, I feel sorry for that poor old fundamentalist. He loved his Bible and stuck with it no matter what.

WHITE

There's wisdom in the Bible, but I've always felt it was meant to be a book of faith, not a book of science.

DARROW

Absolutely right. That's why they're back to teaching evolution in Tennessee.

(DARROW sits at his desk. WHITE stands directly facing DARROW.)

WHITE

Mr. Darrow, we'd like you to defend Ossian Sweet and his family. It's a chance to break open the whole issue of housing segregation. In Detroit you'd have a grand opportunity to set this country on a different path.

DARROW

(Musing) That so? Hmm. *(To WHITE)* Did the defendants fire into that crowd?

WHITE

(Disconcerted) Well, sir, the shots—I suppose—could have come from anywhere. It hasn't been established—

DARROW

Don't hedge, young fella. I know you weren't there but do you think the defendants fired the shots?

WHITE

(Taken aback) Yes, sir, I do.

DARROW

And you, Mr. Springarm?

SPRINGARM

Yes, sir.

DARROW

Good. Splendid. If they lacked the courage to defend themselves I wouldn't consider them worth defending in court. *(Beat)* Gentlemen, I've always fought for the underdog, and I believe in tolerance. I believe in justice. *(Beat)* But what do you say— Can this case be won?

WHITE

If I may review it, Mr. Darrow... The Sweets bought a bungalow in a white neighborhood and over two nights they were hounded and besieged by a mob from that neighborhood. Ultimately in defending their home one of the Sweets fired some warning shots—

DARROW

(Impatiently) I've read the brief. I know the story. They had good reason to fear that mob. Hundreds, thousands of Negroes have been the victims of mob violence. *(Beat)* But can the case be won?

SPRINGARM

After the police arrested the Sweets they asked them a number of questions. Unfortunately some of the facts adduced by the Sweets were erroneous. Ossian's younger brother, Henry, admitted to firing the shots, a damaging confession. The jury will be all white, the prosecutor is aggressive, and the city is set against the Sweets.

DARROW

But gentlemen, can the case be *won*?

WHITE

It may well depend on who is appointed judge. *(Enthusiastically)* But the NAACP is determined to use the case to advance the cause of the Negro. If possible, to establish his civil rights in a hostile society. *(Rather dolefully)* But this is still 1925 and, frankly, it may well be a lost cause.

(DARROW nods then rises.)

DARROW

Gentlemen, I will join the defense. Lost causes are the only ones worth fighting for.

(WHITE and SPRINGARM look at one another. It takes a moment to sink in that DARROW has accepted the case. THEY jump up beaming, shake DARROW's hand vigorously, then turn to clasp each others' arms. DARROW takes a few steps downstage, pulls a notebook and pencil out of his vest pocket and makes a note in it. BLACKOUT.)

END ACT I

ACT II; SCENE ONE

(AT RISE: An empty courtroom. Downstage, DORA, illuminated by a SOFT SPOTLIGHT, sits in her rocking chair, her knitting in her lap. DORA sings "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen" as SHE rocks.)

DORA, Singing

*Nobody knows the trouble I've seen, nobody knows my sorrow,
Nobody knows the trouble I've seen, Glory Hallelujah!"
Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down, Oh yes Lord;
Sometimes I'm nearly to the ground, Oh yes Lord...*

*Nobody knows the trouble I've seen,
Nobody knows but Jesus...*

(As the LIGHT FADES on DORA, CLARENCE DARROW enters and is about to address the Audience. DORA appears to fall asleep.)

DARROW

(To Audience) It took me three weeks to select the jury, and it was not an easy matter. Almost every prospective juror had an opinion, and few of them had any sympathy for my clients. Eleven colored men were being tried and although one tenth of the city were Negroes it was crystal clear than none of *them* would become jurors. I wondered what a white man would think of his chances of getting a fair trial in Africa if he had killed a Negro and was placed on trial before twelve men with black faces. Eventually we managed to find twelve men who said they could be fair, but of course they knew nothing about fairness. To any man all of his opinions, attitudes, and prejudices are fair or he would not hold them. But no lawyer worth his salt ever really wanted a *fair* jury. The State wants a juror who has grown cold, serious, unimaginative, and a Presbyterian, if possible...Presbyterians are the worst, because they believe in temperance. The defense wants a man who is alert, witty, emotional, and either Catholic, or without any religious faith whatsoever. At any rate, I've come to the conclusion that the law and the facts can be overcome with the right jury.

(LIGHTS DOWN.)

ACT II; Scene Two

(AT RISE: The SWEETS seated in the courtroom. PROSECUTOR TOMS sits behind a table Down Left. DARROW takes a seat at a table opposite. The Honorable Frank Murphy, JUDGE, seated at his bench upstage has a clear view of the witness box beside it as well as both Counselors. OSSIAN, GLADYS and HENRY JR. sit near DARROW. There is an evidence table for exhibits along with a few chairs simulating a jury box; one chair for the foreman and the others vacant, leaving the jury to be imagined. DORA exits leaving her chair rocking empty downstage.)

JUDGE

Mr. Toms, is the prosecution satisfied with the jury?

TOMS

Yes, your honor.

JUDGE

Mr. Darrow, is the defense satisfied?

DARROW

Yes, your honor. I think we have got a pretty good jury. Six of them are Irish Catholics.

TOMS

I strongly object to that characterization!

JUDGE

I'd like to ask Mr. Darrow what makes a Catholic a good juror. Are you suggesting that Irish Catholics will not find a hanging verdict?

DARROW

No, your honor, it's just that I never yet met an Irish Catholic who didn't think that someday he might be in trouble himself.

(General laughter. JUDGE gavels for order. A pre-recorded VOICE is heard.)

VOICE

The State of Michigan vs. Ossian Sweet, et.al. His Honor Frank Murphy, presiding.

JUDGE

The jury will be seated.

(JURY FOREMAN, [MAN 4], enters and takes his seat. Optional VISUAL PROJECTION: INTERIOR OF A COURTROOM, INCLUDING THE JURY. In these days, everyone dressed rather formally, even in the heat of summer. GLADYS and OSSIAN, dressed accordingly, have a whispered conversation.)

OSSIAN

(Whispering) Twelve white males! But they appear to be working class people, mostly.

GLADYS

Mr. Darrow says he got the jury he wants. Do we know anything about the judge?

OSSIAN

Name's Murphy, and he assigned the trial to himself. He'll be fair.

GLADYS

We can hope. But even the best men are subject to political pressure.

(OSSIAN puts his hand on her arm to quiet her as the JUDGE is ready to proceed. Optional PROJECTION OUT.)

JUDGE

(Gavels) The jury is seated, and this court is pleased with your appearance. I would urge you to be particularly attentive throughout the trial. If your attention wavers from heat exhaustion, squalling babies, flea bites—or any other untoward or unusual circumstance—you may ask for a short recess. Now then, Mr. Toms—please outline the case for the State.

TOMS

(Rising) Yes, your honor. To put it concisely, the People will present argument and evidence supporting the following premises. First, we shall prove that race prejudice had nothing to do with this unfortunate event—I should say, this deplorable, despicable event in which one of our citizens was killed by someone firing shots from the Sweets' house on the night of September 9th, 1925. The indicted persons are Negroes, yes. But white persons caught in a similar crime would also be prosecuted for murder. Killing is killing and murder is murder, no matter what the color of the killer's skin or that of the deceased. Now, the defense will argue that the Sweets were firing shots at random because they had just moved into this house, that the neighbors were hostile, and that they feared for their lives. The defense will argue that a mob had assembled that night to drive the Sweets from their new home, but this is utterly preposterous. The prosecution has numerous witnesses who will testify to the fact that there was no mob, as such, perhaps no more than a dozen people pausing on the street near the Sweets' house to discuss the weather, issues before city council, or other current matters. No violence was threatened or perpetrated against the Sweets. *(Directly to jury)* Now, one more thing. I caution you gentlemen against bias. The defense has enlisted a very well-known attorney, some might say a celebrity.

DARROW

(Posturing) Surely not a celebrity!

TOMS

Perhaps not. But I ask you gentlemen to remember that Mr. Clarence Darrow is not faultless. He is certainly an eloquent speaker, and he has swayed many with his wit and powers of persuasion. But this case must be decided on the facts, and the facts alone. Do not let yourself be swayed by Mr. Darrow's reputation, nor by his passionate observations and claims. He may be eloquent but he may also be wrong.

DARROW

Thank you, Mr. Toms. I concede that indeed, I am a fallible creature.

JUDGE

Mr. Toms, are you finished? *(TOMS nods)* Mr. Darrow?

DARROW

Your honor, the defense asks that we be allowed to postpone our opening argument.

JUDGE

(Nods) Very well. In that case, will the People present their witnesses?

TOMS

Directly, Your Honor. The People call Mr. Norman Schuknecht to the stand.

(Officer SCHUKNECHT, in uniform, enters the courtroom and crosses to the witness box. HE places his hand on a Bible.)

SCHUKNECHT

I swear on this Bible to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me God!

TOMS

Inspector, you were in charge of the police detail protecting the Sweets' house on the night of the shooting?

SCHUKNECHT

Yes, I was.

TOMS

What instructions did you give that detail?

SCHUKNECHT

They were to protect that house if any incident occurred. I said that Dr. Sweet could live there if we had to take every man on the police force to see that he did.

DARROW

(Interrupting) Does that mean you were expecting violence, Inspector?

SCHUKNECHT

No, I—

TOMS

Objection! This is my witness, your honor.

DARROW

I'm sorry, Mr. Toms. I forgot myself.

JUDGE

Sustained. Mr. Toms?

TOMS

When you got to Garland Avenue and Charlevoix that evening—the time was about 7:30?—and there was no one about? Is that correct?

SCHUKNECHT

There were people on the street just walking up and down but there was no congregating.

TOMS

Did you see anyone armed with clubs or carrying weapons?

SCHUKNECHT

Not at any time, no.

TOMS

And what happened at 8:15 PM, Inspector?

SCHUKNECHT

Suddenly a volley of shots was fired from Dr. Sweet's home.

TOMS

What could you see?

SCHUKNECHT

I saw flashes of guns.

TOMS

How many shots?

SCHUKNECHT

About fifteen or twenty.

TOMS

And did you know that someone had been shot and killed?

SCHUKNECHT

Not at once, no. But I was soon told that two men had been shot, one only wounded but—Mr. Leon Breiner had been killed by that barrage from the Sweets' house.

TOMS

Then what did you do?

SCHUKNECHT

I arrested the Sweets and their companions. There were some eleven people defending the house, and they had quite an arsenal, as it turned out.

TOMS

What type of weapons?

SCHUKNECHT

One shotgun, two rifles, and seven revolvers.

(TOMS drags out a canvas bag and dumps it on the center table with a loud bang. HE shows the court three of the guns leaving them on top of the bag.)

TOMS

The People introduce these weapons into evidence, to be marked Exhibit A. I show you three of the guns, the other seven are in this bag on the table. Now, Inspector. You arrested the ten men—and one woman, Gladys Sweet, is that right—and took them to the station?

SCHUKNECHT

Yes, sir.

TOMS

And where are they now, Inspector?

SCHUKNECHT

(Pointing) Seated there, Your Honor.

TOMS

Is it your conclusion, Inspector, that the Sweets or their friends in the house fired those shots without provocation?

SCHUKNECHT

Yes, sir.

TOMS

They had no reason to fear for their lives?

SCHUKNECHT

No, sir.

TOMS

So Mr. Breiner was killed with malice aforethought?

DARROW

Objection! That is a legal term and the Inspector is not testifying as a legal expert.

JUDGE

Sustained. Anything else, Mr. Toms. *(TOMS shakes his head)* Mr. Darrow?

DARROW

(Rising) Thank you. Inspector, you said there were people—neighbors of the Sweets—milling about on Garland Avenue and adjacent streets before the shooting?

SCHEKNECHT

A few people, yes. I don't know if they were milling, however.

DARROW

Oh, I'm sorry. Your word was congregating. What would be the definition of congregating?

SCHUKNECHT

I don't know.

DARROW

Well, sir, this group of people in the courtroom here—the audience—are they congregating?

SCHUKNECHT

I don't know. I wouldn't think so.

DARROW

How would we know if they were congregating?

SCHUKNECHT

I don't know. I suppose I'd consult Webster.

DARROW

Ah. But short of consulting an actual lexicon, let me ask you this? Do you know how the state of Michigan defines a mob, according to Ordinance 15001 of the criminal code?

SCHUKNECHT

I believe it's twelve or more people armed with clubs or other dangerous weapons—uh—

DARROW

Let me finish for you. *Or* thirty or more people, whether armed or not. Would you say there were thirty or more people, milling about—or congregating?

SCHUKNECHT

Well, over the course of the evening there might have been thirty or more—

DARROW

Would you say they had a common purpose?

SCHUKNECHT

I don't know. I doubt it.

DARROW

But you don't think they were out to scare the Sweets? To intimidate them, harass them, or drive them from their home?

SCHUKNECHT

No.

DARROW

Did they throw any stones or anything else at that home?

SCHUKNECHT

No, sir.

DARROW

We'll see about that. I am going to ask you this question, Inspector, and be very careful how you answer it: was there a mob threatening the Sweet family on the night of the shooting?

SCHUKNECHT

I wouldn't call it a mob, sir.

DARROW

Well, forget the word mob. Let's say there were people along the block near the Sweet house. You said maybe thirty people, but let's expand our scope, Inspector. Say, two blocks each way from their house at 2905 Garland Avenue. How many people would you say were on the street two blocks each way? Five hundred perhaps?

SCHUKNECHT

Oh, no sir. At the most, I'd say about—two hundred. But—

DARROW

Now we're getting at the truth. You started at thirty, Inspector.

SCHUKNECHT

What I meant was—

DARROW

I know what you meant, officer. *(Beat; turns to walk away then turns back)* Oh, one more thing, Inspector. You said you were told that Mr. Breiner had been killed by what you called a "barrage" from the Sweets' house. We don't actually know that any shot fired from that house killed him, do we?

SCHUKNECHT

Well, no, sir.

DARROW

There's no way of telling, for certain, who killed Breiner?

SCHUKNECHT

Probably not.

DARROW

Thanks you, sir. I am through with this witness, Your Honor.

JUDGE

Mr. Toms?

TOMS

The State calls Mr. Alfred Andrews.

(ANDREWS, [MAN 3], enters and takes the stand. HE puts his hand on the Bible and swears.)

ANDREWS

I swear on this Bible to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me God.

TOMS

Mr. Andrews, you were outside in view of the Sweets' house on the night in question, is that right?

ANDREWS

Yes, sir.

TOMS

You were there with a few friends talking about this and that?

ANDREWS

Yes, sir. Nothing special.

TOMS

Before the shots were fired from the Sweets' home, did you and your friends threaten the Sweets in any way?

ANDREWS

No sir. Absolutely not.

TOMS

So there was no provocation for them firing those shots?

ANDREWS

No, sir.

TOMS

Your witness, Mr. Darrow.

DARROW

Mr. Andrews. Do you live near the Sweets' house?

ANDREWS

Oh no. I'm a block away, on "Go-thee."

DARROW

"Go-thee?" Oh, you mean Goethe Avenue?

ANDREWS

Everybody calls it "Go-thee."

DARROW

(Stifles a chuckle) I see. Perhaps you're not aware that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was a famous German philosopher and man of letters. He's turning in his grave right now. *(DARROW grins broadly)* At any rate, were the Sweets friends of yours?

ANDREWS

(Visibly upset) Oh no, sir. I didn't know them.

DARROW

But you knew they were going to be your neighbors. Wouldn't you want to make friends with new neighbors?

ANDREWS

Well, sir, yes—that is, ordinarily but—

DARROW

I see. It depends on the color of their skin.

ANDREWS

I didn't say that.

DARROW

Mr. Andrews, are you a member of the Ku Klux Klan?

ANDREWS

No sir, I am not.

DARROW

Then why do you belong to the Waterworks Improvement Association?

ANDREWS

That has nothing to do with the Klan!

DARROW

So you do belong to it. Not the Klan—I mean the Waterworks Improvement Association?

ANDREWS

Well, yes, but it has nothing to do with the Klan.

DARROW

You said that already. There's a penalty for redundancies. *(Grins)* Now along with the Waterworks Improvement Association there happens to be a Tireman Improvement Association. A day or so before this confrontation on the night of the shooting, someone from the Tireman Improvement Association spoke at a meeting of the Waterworks Improvement Association. This event took place at the elementary school diagonally across from the Sweets' home?

Yes. ANDREWS

Were you at that meeting? DARROW

I was. ANDREWS

And was this a kind of pep rally? DARROW

I don't know what you mean. ANDREWS

Well, did he tell you about the racial troubles they had in his neighborhood? DARROW

Well, he told us about a Negro named Turner who had bought a house on Spokane Avenue. ANDREWS

Did he say his organization forced Turner and his family to leave their house? DARROW

Well, yes. He said his organization wouldn't have Negroes in their neighborhood and they would cooperate in helping us keep them out of ours. ANDREWS

(Sarcastically) Very noble, I'm sure. Did the crowd applaud him? DARROW

Yes. ANDREWS

Did you applaud? DARROW

Yes. ANDREWS

You feel that way now? DARROW

Yes, I haven't changed. ANDREWS

DARROW

You know a colored person has certain rights?

ANDREWS

Yes, I was in favor of keeping the Sweets out by legal means.

DARROW

Did the speaker talk of legal means?

ANDREWS

No, he was a radical. I myself do not believe in violence.

DARROW

Uh-huh. How many people were there?

ANDREWS

About—maybe five hundred.

DARROW

Did anybody in that audience of five hundred people or more protest against the speaker's advocating violence?

ANDREWS

(Sullenly) I don't know.

DARROW

Thank you, Mr. Andrews. *(ANDREWS leaves the witness box and exits the courtroom.)* It is becoming very clear, gentlemen of the jury, that the Sweets had good reason to fear violence while they were moving into their home on Garland Avenue. Indeed, the threat of violence was palpable—it was in the air—from these five hundred people at an incendiary meeting and the mob that gathered on the streets that night when the Sweets felt compelled to defend themselves.

TOMS

With all due respect, Mr. Darrow, this is no time for a summation. The People have more witnesses to present.

DARROW

But I deferred my opening statement. Your Honor—

JUDGE

Not now, Mr. Darrow. The prosecutor is presenting witnesses.

DARROW

I *am* sorry, Your Honor. May I ask my esteemed adversary how many witnesses he intends to parade before this court?

TOMS

I have some fifty witnesses.

DARROW

(Slyly) Would that be considered overkill, your honor?

JUDGE

The State has every right to present their witnesses as do you, Mr. Darrow. Let's get on with it, Mr. Toms.

TOMS

Yes, Your Honor. *(Shuffles papers)* Mr. Eben Draper!

(LIGHTS DIM. Optional VISUAL PROJECTIONS: Headlines under the masthead of the Detroit News and/or Detroit Free Press are shown, perhaps five or six, spaced 3-5 seconds apart, e.g., "PROSECUTION WITNESSES FARE WELL AT SWEET TRIAL"; "SWEET TRIAL CONTINUES, TOMS CLASHES WITH DARROW"; "DARROW SAYS PROSECUTION WITNESSES ARE LIARS"; "TOMS WILLING TO LET GLADYS SWEET MAKE BAIL"; "PROSECUTION NOW RESTS IN SWEET TRIAL." During this time, a silent "parade" of witnesses files by the witness box, each pausing just long enough to swear the standard oath in succession. MAN 3 and MAN 5 may alternate as "witnesses" in this manner, or add female EXTRAS, if you like—the idea being to suggest that the State has a plethora of witnesses. A name of the director's choice is to be announced for each witness, for example, "Mr. Ray Dove.")

TOMS

Mr. Ray Dove.

WITNESS 1

I swear on this Bible to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me God...

TOMS

Mr. John Smythe.

WITNESS 2

I swear on this Bible to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me God...

TOMS

Mr. Samuel Lemon.

WITNESS 3

I swear on this Bible to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me God...

(The pace may quicken until five or six “witnesses” have sworn in—and out— until MR. DWIGHT HUBBARD, [MAN 5] is called to the stand. DARROW breaks in, holding HUBBARD, a young man seemingly mentally impaired who is easily rattled or confused.)

DARROW

Hold that witness! I have a few questions for Mr. Hubbard.

(Optional PROJECTIONS, OUT. LIGHTS RESTORE on the courtroom.)

DARROW

Now, Mr. Hubbard—may I call you Dwight?

HUBBARD

Yes, sir.

DARROW

On that evening, you were sitting on the curb on Garland Avenue, near Charlevoix?

HUBBARD

Yes, sir.

DARROW

You were waiting for a truck, you said. Now what did you see happened?

HUBBARD

Well, there were a great number of people and officers. Er—I won't say a great number, but a large—there were a few people there and the officers.

DARROW

A few people, Mr. Hubbard? But you started to say a great crowd, didn't you?

HUBBARD

Yes, sir.

DARROW

Do you know how you happened to change your mind so quick?

HUBBARD

What, sir?

DARROW

You were talking to some people about it, weren't you? Did you talk to any police officers?

HUBBARD

Yes, sir. Lieutenant Johnson.

DARROW

And you were supposed to say just a few people but you forgot and told the truth. There was a large crowd of people, is that right, son?

HUBBARD

Well, I suppose— Yes, sir.

DARROW

And when you started to answer my question you got confused, didn't you? (*HUBBARD covers his face with his hands*) Son, I didn't mean to embarrass you. (*Beat*) The witness is excused.

(*HUBBARD gets up and scurries away.*)

DARROW, *Continued*

Gentlemen of the jury, you can see what the state has done with these witnesses. They have been coached—carefully coached to minimize the number of people there that night and to suggest that unlike most mobs it was an amiable mob, a neighborly mob, perhaps even a welcoming committee gathered to invite the Sweets to a lawn party where lemonade, brownies, and watermelon would be provided.

TOMS

I object to this characterization of a neighborly mob!

DARROW

It does sound like an oxymoron. But one has to wonder what other answers were implanted—or, let us say *suggested* to the witnesses by these officers.

TOMS

Your honor, I object!

JUDGE

To what do you object?

DARROW

I think he objects to the truth, your honor. In general I find that prosecutors are disturbed by the introduction of truth into a proceeding like this.

TOMS

Mr. Darrow! I find your tone insulting!

DARROW

Sorry, I was being facetious.

JUDGE

Gentlemen, gentlemen! (*Beat*) Mr. Toms do you have additional witnesses?

TOMS

No. The State rests, Your Honor.

JUDGE

Very well. We'll take a ten minute recess.

(The JUDGE exits.)

ACT II; Scene Three

(The courtroom is filled with whispered comments and hushed conversations. GLADYS leans into OSSIAN.)

GLADYS

I'm worried, darling. Nothing's been said about the rocks and stones—the broken windows—except that the Inspector denied it!

OSSIAN

I know. But Mr. Darrow won't let that slip by. It's an important element in our defense. *(Takes her arm, comforting her)* Don't worry, sweetie. I'm very impressed with Mr. Darrow. When he suspects a witness is hiding something he grabs him and doesn't let go until he shakes the whole truth out of him. He's so persistent!

GLADYS

(Smiles) I'll bet he was a bulldog in a former life.

OSSIAN

If a bulldog had brains enough he could be Darrow.

(THEY poke each other, chuckle softly, and continue to whisper as HENRY SR. approaches DARROW.)

HENRY SR.

Mr. Darrow, sir. I hear that you're quite famous.

DARROW

Mr. Sweet, some would say that I'm *infamous*.

HENRY SR.

I didn't even know your name before this trial.

DARROW

Just as well, Mr. Sweet. I'm sure you've had more important things on your mind.

HENRY SR.

That may be, sir. But what's important to one man is peanuts to someone else. On the other hand... *(Beat; looks around to see if he's being overheard—motions to another place across the room)* May we talk, sir—over there?

DARROW

Of course.

(DARROW and HENRY SR. cross to a vacant area.)

DARROW, *Continued*

You can talk freely.

HENRY SR.

Mr. Darrow, to be blunt, my wife and I would sooner have a Christian for a defense attorney, but at least you're a gentleman and your heart's in the right place. There's somethin' to be said for that.

DARROW

Indeed.

HENRY SR.

Even if you are an atheist.

DARROW

Oh, not an atheist, sir. An agnostic.

HENRY SR.

I'm not real clear on the difference, Mr. Darrow. You don't believe in God, do you?

DARROW

Well, I don't believe in no God, either. As I tried to explain to Mr. Bryan in Tennessee, without much success, I'm an agnostic. Now that's somebody who says you can't prove there's a God and neither can you prove there's no God.

HENRY SR.

Hmm. *(Puzzles a moment)* I'm afraid that's too philosophical for me, sir. I'm jest gonna keep prayin' in my own way—and Dora's in Florida prayin' even harder, I suspect—and we'll let you get on with your arguments and evidence. I do like how you're pokin' holes in the prosecutor's case. Is it as flimsy as you make it sound?

DARROW

No, Mr. Toms has a strong case. But we can beat him, Mr. Sweet.

(TOMS, who has been talking to GLADYS motions to DARROW to come over to them which HE does.)

TOMS

Mr. Darrow, I ask you to talk some sense into Mrs. Sweet.

DARROW

What is it?

TOMS

The State is willing to drop all charges against Gladys Sweet. However—

GLADYS

I have told Mr. Toms that I will not accept this offer. I refuse!

DARROW

Mrs. Sweet, do you understand what you are rejecting?

GLADYS

I do.

DARROW

But consider your health. You are what—twenty-two years old? Somewhat...frail? If you insist on standing trial you will be returned to that damp, dank cell for God knows how long!

GLADYS

(Defiantly) As long as my husband, his brothers, and our friends are being tried for murder—I will not desert them.

DARROW

(Patting her arm, deeply touched) My dear Gladys. *(Beat)* What can I say?

ACT II; Scene Four

(JUDGE MURPHY returns to the courtroom. OTHERS take their places. The JUDGE seats himself and gavels for order. The trial resumes.)

JUDGE

Is the defense ready to proceed?

DARROW

We are, yes. But I would like to begin with a comment or two in lieu of the opening that the court permitted me to defer.

JUDGE

You may proceed with that belated opening, Mr. Darrow.

DARROW

(Crossing to address the jury) Gentlemen, self-defense is the dearest right of a free man. No civilized society could long survive without the right of self-defense. But the right of self-defense cannot be an excuse for wantonly taking human life. You gentlemen have been told a part of the story of September 9th, as it appeared from the outside, and it will be our duty and pleasure to show you the facts as they appeared from inside that little house on Garland Street and Charlevoix Avenue—the facts as they appeared to eleven people of the black race who had behind them a history, and who were affected by the knowledge of the appalling and uncivilized treatment of their race by those who should have considered themselves their brothers and protected them instead. I am indebted to my colleague, Mr. Hays, and to others on the defense team for doing some very important research. We know that a man's right to defend his home and property is supported by case law in the state of Michigan. We could cite several favorable court decisions, in this state and others—that is, favorable to the premise that if a man's home is under attack that man has the right to defend his home by any means available, even by armed force. In *Pond v. People* the court ruled—and I quote—“A man who is assaulted in his own house need not retreat in order to avoid slaying his assailant.” I would only add the word *even*. *Even* to avoid slaying his assailant. Your honor, members of the jury, we conceive the law to be this, that there must be some justification for shooting someone in self defense. That a man is not justified in shooting merely because he is fearful—but that a man is justified if he has reasonable grounds for fear. That is or was the situation in the case before us, as we shall continue to demonstrate. Certainly the State has failed to present any evidence of conspiracy, or of malice aforethought in the shots fired from the house which killed one of the bystanders. Rather, if a man's home is his castle, the Sweets were only doing what the law gives them the right to do. Now, Your Honor, you have the depositions that were taken, under oath, from potential witnesses for the defense who were afraid to appear in court due to the possibility of retribution should they appear. Your honor will examine those, of course. Today, however, I am going to call someone to the stand who can give us the most accurate and complete eyewitness testimony as to what happened on the night of September 9th, 1925... I would suggest to the jury that this witness will bring truth and probity to these proceedings that no one else has been able to do, or is likely to do. The defense calls *(Pause)* Dr. Ossian Sweet!

(There is a stir in the courtroom. OSSIAN slowly rises, walks to the witness box, and places his hand on the Bible.)

OSSIAN

I swear that I will tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me God.

DARROW

Would you please state your full name for the jury?

OSSIAN

(Firmly) My name is Ossian Sweet.

DARROW

(Stating a fact) You are a Negro.

OSSIAN

I am.

DARROW

Tell us about your background, Dr. Sweet.

OSSIAN

I was born and raised in a small community in central Florida. Bartow. My father and mother were loving parents who believed in education as the route to success in this world. However, my childhood was shaped by additional, more nefarious elements: essentially the racism that permeated and still endures in the deep South. At the age of seven I was hiding near the Peace River and saw a black man brutally killed and mutilated by a gang of rednecks—

DARROW

By that you mean whites?

OSSIAN

Yes, we also called them crackers. This man had been accused of murder, and admitted to it, but he was given no hearing, no trial, nor was he locked in a jail until his crime could be proven. Instead he was chained to a barrel on the bridge and the kindling was set on fire. The Negro shouted, “I’m only sixteen, you damned crackers! I told you I did it and I shouldn’t have and I’m sorry, but I still got a life to live! Help me, somebody! God help me!” And the whites cried out, “Shut your face!” and “Murderer!” and “God don’t help no scum like you!” The crackers pushed him into the water and then yanked the barrel with the colored man back onto the bank, where these jeering white men could rip off some flesh—fingers and toes—or seize some other souvenir to drag home to their neighborhood so that they could remember that—that wonderful day—that damned glorious moment in the history of Bartow, Florida.

TOMS

Excuse me, your honor. Is everything this man witnessed in childhood to be used as justification for crimes committed in 1925?

DARROW

We need to demonstrate his state of mind as he experienced the humiliation of his race as a child and up to the present time.

JUDGE

As long as it pertains to his perspective on the night of September 9, 1925, I’ll allow it.

DARROW

Please continue, Dr. Sweet.

OSSIAN

I'll try to be brief. I subsequently attended Wilberforce Institute and then studied medicine at Howard University. While I was not physically victimized during those years I took note of what was happening: racist riots in many Northern cities. I was, quite frankly, cowering in a basement with some friends one night in Washington, DC, when whites battered a black man to death in front of our apartment, and I was too afraid to go out to his defense. I moved into Detroit and set up practice as a doctor associated with Dunbar Hospital. I met my lovely wife Gladys in Detroit, where her family had been living in a white neighborhood for years. We married, and after some time spent building my practice I determined to travel in Europe and study at two of the most famous medical schools in the world, in Vienna and Paris. In Paris I was honored to sit at the feet of Madame Curie, best known for her discoveries in the new field of radium and its benefits for curing disease.

DARROW

But Dr, Sweet, why were you so determined to move into that house on Garland Avenue?

OSSIAN

My wife loved it, and I had hoped to have a home for our baby—a place where she could attend school across the street in a healthy environment. My wife and I decided to sacrifice many things in life so that our little one would have the best advantages possible.

DARROW

A vision that anyone here would share with you.

TOMS

May we proceed to the events of September 9th, if it is not too much trouble, Mr. Darrow.?

DARROW

Certainly. Dr. Sweet, you had decided to move into that nice home at Garland Avenue and Charlevoix, despite the warnings you'd received from neighbors and other members of the (*Sarcastically*) noble Nordic community in Detroit. Is that correct?

OSSIAN

Yes, sir. We had been warned, but my wife loved that bungalow, as she called it, I knew of previous racial incidents in Detroit, and I knew about Dr. Turner's ugly affair—he was my colleague at Dunbar Memorial Hospital and had thought more positively of white people—so much so that when they banged at the door of his new home, he opened the door and a mob poured in, tearing up the place. He was forced to sign over the deed to his house!

DARROW

Yes. Now you bought your house and began to move your furniture into it on September the 8th. You stayed up all night listening to the sounds of a gathering mob—

TOMS

Your honor, we object to the term “mob.” It hasn't—

JUDGE

Sustained. Refrain from calling it a mob.

DARROW

There were people congregating all night?

OSSIAN

Yes, sir. We could hear the angry voices. Some cried “Niggers out! Get the niggers out!” and worse garbage.

DARROW

The next evening it got worse. What did you do when you got home from your hospital rounds on the evening of September 9th?

OSSIAN

First thing I remember is my wife telling me of a phone conversation she had with Mrs. Butler, in which the latter told her of a conversation between the motorman of a street car and a woman passenger, to the effect that a Negro family had moved into the neighborhood and they would be forced out before the next night.

DARROW

When did you observe anything outside?

OSSIAN

We were playing cards. It was about eight o'clock when something hit the roof of the house.

DARROW

What happened after that?

OSSIAN

Somebody went to the window and then I heard the remark, “The people, look at all those people!”

DARROW

And then?

OSSIAN

I ran out to the kitchen where my wife was. There were several lights burning. I turned them out and opened the door. I heard someone yell, “Go and raise hell in front. I'm going back.” I was frightened, and after getting a gun, ran upstairs. Rocks kept hitting our house intermittently. I threw myself on the bed and lay there a short while, trying to collect myself. Perhaps ten minutes—then a rock came through the window. Part of the glass hit me.

DARROW

What happened then?

OSSIAN

Pandemonium—I guess that’s the best way of describing it—broke loose. Everyone was running from room to room. There was a general uproar. My brother had just driven up and people were shouting “Get them! Get them!” My brother, Otis, and our friends from the insurance company pounded on the door, and we let them in. The mob surged forward—it looked like a living sea. Stones kept coming faster. I ran downstairs. Another window was smashed. Then one shot. Then eight or ten from upstairs; then Inspector Schuknecht knocked on the door and we let him in; then it was all over.

DARROW

State your mind at the time of the shooting.

OSSIAN

When I opened the door and saw the mob, I realized I was facing the same mob that had hounded my people throughout its entire history. In my mind, I was pretty confident of what I was up against, with my back against the wall. I was filled with a peculiar fear, the kind no one could feel unless they had no knowledge of the history of our race. I knew what mobs had done to our people before.

DARROW

(Beat. DARROW sighs deeply.) Thank you, Dr. Sweet. I have defense Exhibit A to place in evidence. *(DARROW pulls a wooden box of stones from a secluded place and dumps them on the guns that lay on the Exhibit Table—making a loud noise)* These are the stones and rocks that were found on the Sweets’ property, inside and outside the house. We have not included the broken glass, fearing that someone in this court might inadvertently cut themselves.

TOMS

I object. Your honor, these stones might have been gathered from any quarry or back lot in the city.

JUDGE

There is sufficient evidence they were gathered at the Sweet residence. They will be labeled “Defense Exhibit A.”

DARROW

I would just remind the jury that the stones were thrown before the shots were fired, which is the opposite of what the prosecution implied. The crowd attacked the Sweets’ home and they attempted to defend themselves. The sequence is, stones thrown, shots fired. Your witness, Mr. Toms

TOMS

That point is in dispute. *(Beat)* Mr. Sweet, you make it all sound like a very harrowing experience.

OSSIAN

Doctor Sweet.

TOMS

Doctor Sweet. Now you were all arrested and taken to the station house. Your wife, two brothers, medical colleagues, insurance men you know, a narcotics agent, your chauffeur. Eleven people. Is that correct?

OSSIAN

Yes, sir.

TOMS

There you were asked some questions and provided answers.

OSSIAN

Yes, sir.

TOMS

The problem is that your testimony under oath differs in several respects from those answers you provided the police on the night of September 9th. For one thing, you told the police you hadn't stockpiled any guns when it's clear that wasn't true.

OSSIAN

Fear made me say things that night. I thought if I told the truth it would be misinterpreted. It is generally known that Negroes are beaten up at police headquarters. I wanted to say the right things. I confess that I was scared.

TOMS

I find that disturbing, to think that any of our citizens would consider the police the enemy. They are sworn to protect each and every citizen, of whatever gender, faith or color.

OSSIAN

Nevertheless, the experience of Negroes is quite different with regards to the police.

TOMS

I see. You do admit, of course, that Leon Breiner was killed by a bullet fired from your home.

OSSIAN

No, I do not.

TOMS

Did anyone else, from outside your house, fire any shots that night?

OSSIAN

I am not certain. It could have been a policeman, or someone in the mob.

TOMS

But no evidence has been introduced, no one has testified to that effect?

OSSIAN

I don't believe so.

TOMS

And what of your brother, Henry Sweet. Did he not admit to firing shots from an upstairs window?

OSSIAN

Yes.

TOMS

I believe he confessed to firing a shot over the heads of the crowd that had gathered—then he fired directly into the crowd.

OSSIAN

I cannot remember his confession in detail. But he didn't admit to killing Mr. Breiner. And there may have been other shots fired. The fact is that we don't know who killed Mr. Breiner.

TOMS

I am not asking you whether your brother killed Mr. Breiner. Now I am simply asking whether it is *possible*, in what you have called the pandemonium of that frantic evening, that your brother, Henry Sweet Jr., killed Mr. Breiner.

DARROW

Speculation! Doctor, you don't have to answer that question.

OSSIAN

I will answer it, because it's a fair question. (*Sighs deeply*) It is *possible*, yes. (*Beat*) It is also *possible* that the world will end tomorrow, maybe the sun explodes—or if it doesn't end, that some of humanity's noblest and best dreams will be fulfilled. It's *possible* that people of various colors will learn to live together as neighbors, in harmony and concord. It is *possible* that Jim Crow laws will be revoked and that Negroes as well as women will gain access to the ballot. In some future time it is *possible* that a black man will run for governor of a state, and win—or the presidency, if his dreams are big enough. In this world anything that can be imagined, and for which people are willing to make sacrifices, even if it means risking their lives, is *possible*.

(*There is a long silence. OSSIAN stands, gazing steadily at the jury. DARROW leans back, smiling. TOMS crumples into his seat. The JUDGE nods, thoughtfully.*)

JUDGE

Is that all, Mr. Toms? (*TOMS nods*) We'll take a short recess before summation.

(*The JUDGE exits. GLADYS catches OSSIAN leaving the witness stand and hugs him firmly. THEY whisper together as DARROW seeks out TOMS. Optional PROJECTIONS: NEWSPAPER HEADLINES, e.g., "PROSECUTOR BATTERS SWEET WITH QUESTIONS";*

“TOMS FAILS TO BREAK SWEET TESTIMONY”; “DEFENSE RESTS IN SWEET TRIAL: SUMMATIONS TO BEGIN.”)

DARROW

(Approaching TOMS; Facetiously) You’re making this trial pretty hard for me, Toms.

TOMS

How is that, Mr. Darrow?

DARROW

You’re too nice. You’re calling me “sir” and “Mr. Darrow” and paying me all too much deference, as if I were a crown prince or something. The way you’re behaving I can’t work up enough ire and desire. I need an opponent who will challenge and insult me and make me feisty. The way it’s going I don’t know whether I can muster all the passion I need to win.

TOMS

(Grinning) Is that right, Your Eminence?

(TOMS takes an exaggerated bow, then returns to his seat; after a chuckle, DARROW returns to his.)

ACT II; Scene Five

(JUDGE MURPHY enters. Optional PROJECTIONS OUT. Once again, ALL return to their respective places in the courtroom.)

JUDGE

(Using gavel) Summations, please. Mr. Toms, then Mr. Darrow.

(TOMS rises and crosses towards the jury.)

TOMS

I concede the right that under the law any man may live where he likes or wherever he can afford to live. But we all have many civil rights which we voluntarily waive in the name of public peace, comfort, and security, and because we are alarmed to insist upon them I have a right to be a domineering, arrogant martinet to my subordinates; I have a right to remain seated in a street car while an elderly woman or a mother carrying her child stands; I have a right to play the piano or honk my automobile horn when a woman next door is tossing on a sick-bed—all these things and many more are civil rights which I may insist upon. But I would be ashamed to insist upon them, and so would you. But there is one civil right which no man surrenders, except at the command of God or his country, and that is the right to live. When John Hancock and fifty-four others of our forefathers fixed their signatures to the Declaration of Independence, they subscribed, as one of the eternal principles on which this

TOMS, *Continued*

country was founded, to this doctrine: “All men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” And I have no doubt that our forefathers purposely put the most important of those rights first—the right to live. All your specious arguments, Mr. Darrow, all of your social theories, all your cleverly conceived psychology can never dethrone justice in this case. Leon Breiner, peacefully chatting with his neighbor at his doorstep enjoying his God-given and inalienable right to live, is shot through the back from ambush. (*Glancing at DARROW*) And you can’t make anything out of these facts, gentlemen, but cold-blooded murder.

(*TOMS returns to his chair; DARROW rises to address the jury.*)

DARROW

Gentlemen, there are many reasons why this case is so important. In the first place, eleven people are on trial charged with a crime which might involve imprisonment for life. Mr. Toms said that one man’s life is important. What about the lives of eleven? In the next place, underneath it all is the everlasting problem of race and color and creed that have always worked their evil in human institutions. It is not so hard to show men that their opinions are wrong; it is next to impossible to take away their prejudices. Prejudices do not rest upon facts; they rest upon the ideas that have been taught to us with our mothers’ milk, and they stick almost as the color of the skin sticks. My clients are here charged with murder, but they are really here because they are black. Reverse this: supposing one of you were charged with murder and you had shot and killed somebody, while they gathered around your home, and the mob had been a black mob and you lived in a black man’s land and you had to be tried by twelve blacks, what would you think about it? You would probably think about pleading guilty and throwing yourself on the mercy of the court. There is a curious thing about this business. This noble race that I belong to says that if there is a single drop of colored blood in you, you are not Nordic. But if now and then you find a Negro who has written some wonderful story, or who has excelled on the stage, who has made a name for himself or accomplished great achievements, and there are many of them and getting more every day, then this same man, white man, will say, “Is he a full blooded Negro?” “No he has got an eighth white blood in him.” “Then that’s how he came to be so smart.” Lunacy! Ah, well...

(*There is a long pause as DARROW studies the jury.*)

DARROW, *Continued*

It’s time we got back to the 8th of September. How long ago was it, gentlemen, that you sat here and listened to the evidence in this case, without ever hearing of a stone being thrown? A good long while. The policemen didn’t tell you. Mr. Toms said nothing. But there’s an old saying that only fools and children tell the truth. There was the young man who lived near the Dove house, perhaps a bit backward, I don’t know, and he saw somebody throw stones and he heard them light and heard windows break *before* the shooting. And there was the journalist who happened by, and he said rocks were thrown at the house, and he heard glass break. And Dr. Sweet, of course, described it vividly. (*DARROW goes to the exhibit table and picks up some stones.*) And you can see that these are not just pebbles, as one of their witnesses said. Many of them are clearly big enough to break a window or two.

(DARROW throws a large rock on top of the pile.)

DARROW, *Continued*

And the prosecutor would have you believe that shots were fired first, which precipitated the mob throwing stones in retaliation. It is clear, gentlemen, that the opposite happened. The mob began to throw stones and the Sweets fired those shots to defend themselves and to disperse the mob! And so it went... *(Beat)* Now then... What kind of a man is Dr. Sweet? Out of those eleven people on trial, half of them are at least college graduates or attending college. They would compare favorably with anybody who lives around the corner of Garland and Charlevoix, wouldn't they? I suspect they would know how to pronounce *Goethe*. *(Pauses to savor the irony)* Now Ossian Sweet had ambition and he worked his way up and graduated from college and is a member of a learned profession. He earned the money to go to Europe and complete his medical education there. Post-graduate. Any reason why any of you should be ashamed to associate with him? I don't think so. Is there anything criminal about Dr. Sweet? Would you be afraid to meet him in an alley? Not at all. And yet, gentlemen, they could not live at the corner of Charlevoix and Garland, which is not especially a high-toned neighborhood at that, nothing swell about it, nothing very great about it. But Gladys liked her bungalow and Ossian was determined to live as a man rather than die as a coward. So they moved in. The Sweets spent their first night in their home afraid to go to bed. The next night they spent in jail. Now the State wants them to spend the rest of their lives in the penitentiary. The State claims there was no mob there that night. *(Laughs)* Gentlemen, the State has put on enough witnesses who said they were there, to make a mob.

(DARROW pauses to let this sink in, then crosses to make his final plea to the jury.)

DARROW, *Continued*

Gentlemen, I speak for a race which will go on and on to heights never reached before. I speak for a million blacks who have some hope and faith remaining in the institutions of this land. I speak to you on behalf of those whose ancestors were brought here in chains. I speak to you on behalf of the faces, these black faces, which have haunted this courtroom ever since this trial began. I ask you to understand my clients, and I ask in the name of the race, in the name of the past and hope of the future, in justice to black and white alike, that you shall render a verdict of not guilty in this case.

(DARROW turns and nods at the JUDGE.)

JUDGE

Is that all, Mr. Darrow?

DARROW

Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE

The jury is excused for deliberation, and to agree upon a verdict.

(The JURY FOREMAN rises, then steps aside as if to allow other members of the jury to pass him by, exiting to the jury room. HE then exits as well. OTHERS rise as JUDGE MURPHY exits the courtroom.)

ACT II, Scene Six

(The LIGHTS DIM on the Judge's bench and the jury box. As before, the courtroom is filled with conversation. DARROWS and TOMS cross Down Left. GLADYS, OSSIAN and HENRY, JR. gather together opposite. Optional PROJECTIONS: Again, Detroit newspaper headlines, e.g., 'OPPOSING ATTORNEYS CONCLUDE SUMMATIONS TO JURY,' "JURY BEGINS DELIBERATION IN SWEET CASE," "JURY MEMBERS AT LOGGERHEADS IN SWEET CASE," " SWEET JURY CONTINUES INTO THANKSGIVING," "JUDGE TO SUMMON JURY BACK ON FRIDAY."

DARROW

Excellent summation, Mr. Toms.

TOMS

I'm afraid you bested me, sir.

DARROW

No, I liked your right to life argument. Very forceful, I must say. Of course, that can be argued both ways.

TOMS

Very true. I'm not sure I convinced anyone, Mr. Darrow.

DARROW

Toms, it's a white jury, for God's sake. Most of them won't change their minds about Negroes as a result of this trial. I'm just hoping for a few holdouts who'll expand the right of self-defense to include people they've been taught aren't really people.

TOMS

Well, that's the big question, isn't it?

(TOMS exits. DARROW approaches the SWEETS, who look expectantly to him.)

OSSIAN

Mr. Darrow, we hear that all sorts of fights are breaking out. That jury is yelling and swearing at each other.

HENRY JR.

There are some newspapermen playing cards in the next room to them. They say they never heard such a row, and they're so mad—I mean the jurors—that they're breaking up the furniture.

DARROW

(Grinning) The State'll pay for it, Henry. Anyway I think it's a good omen. If that jury had returned with a quick verdict I wouldn't have given a nickel for our chances.

GLADYS

That's what I thought. When they couldn't agree on Wednesday and debated on through the holiday—

HENRY JR.

At least we spoiled their Thanksgiving!

GLADYS

Well, they can't all be bigots, Mr. Darrow.

DARROW

I think you're right, Gladys. But I've learned to never count a jury's votes before they're hatched.

(During the conversation, the JUDGE has returned to the bench and the JURY FOREMAN is once again seated in the jury box. The JUDGE bangs his gavel, bringing the court to order. TOMS, DARROW, and the SWEETS take their places as the LIGHTS RESTORE.)

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes

See "Author's Production Notes" Next Page

AUTHOR'S PRODUCTION NOTES

The **costuming** should be of the 1920's. Pay some attention to detail in outfitting the ensemble, but the most important thing to remember is the comparative formality of the era. Hats were worn more often than not. Women wore dresses, not slacks, albeit the skirts were getting shorter, and men generally appeared in public dressed in suits and ties, whatever the occasion, or whatever their class or rank in society.

Suggestions for **staging** and set pieces are given throughout but are just that: suggestions. Since the first act especially is episodic, virtually all scenes will be created with minimal staging with just a few pieces of furniture to suggest the locale. You can economize on staging by, for example, using the same desk for three scenes in ACT I, those involving Dr. Scarborough, the Paris hospital administrator, and Clarence Darrow's study.

The exception to minimalist staging would be the early scenes involving the **back porch** at the Sweets' home in Florida, and later in ACT I, Scene Nine, the **living room** where the Sweets have taken refuge from the mob in their newly purchased "bungalow." A designer may choose to create a **reversible** set piece, the **same platform** (perhaps no more than 10' x 12') rolled out for both scenes, with one side being the porch and the other representing the living room in the Sweets' home. This is the only set piece requiring flats (or fragments thereof) to create the effect of exterior vs. interior walls, with suitable doorways; and it should be lifted off the stage floor by 6-8 in.

The **gun shots** in ACT I, Scene Nine, supposedly fired from the back of the Sweets' house, may be enhanced by some clever lighting effects. The shots themselves should be startling but not so loud as to terrify the audience: the object is surprise, not intimidation.

On the technical side, the **sound effects** are essential; the **visual projections** are not. The latter, however, skillfully prepared and shown clearly on a scrim (rear projection) or backdrop (front projection), will certainly enhance the production. Without them, you may want to bridge some of the gaps between scenes with brief transitional music, either in the context of Dora's "spirituals" or related to the period, such as light jazz or ragtime.

A final note on DORA and her **music**. Ideally she will have a strong, pleasant voice, to sing the "spirituals" with feeling but without any of the vocal flairs or dramatic departures from the melody used by many professional singers. We're looking for a genuine quality, not an "entertaining" delivery. These songs should not be loud, but they must be *heard*. Music for these songs may be found in collections of old (Negro) spirituals.

Additional **female vocalists** might be added, at the director's discretion, to accompany DORA in those instances when back-up vocals may add depth to or enhance the music. The singers should not "upstage" DORA, and in some cases they might be heard from the wings, distantly, rather than be seen on stage. DORA should go solo on songs directly related to the plot, such as when comforting Henry JR in ACT I, Scene Two. However, the vocalists could back DORA on songs directed more toward the audience, such as "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen" to open ACT II; and in closing the play, singing "My Lord, what a morning," with DORA and GLADYS could be very effective.