

RED SUMMER

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Darkness.

A whistling sound.

A harsh light shines and silhouettes a man.

He is dancing.

He's doing a shuffle. Old timey, made up moves.

He's neither nimble or rigid...he's light.

He moves toward us in his dance.

He stops.

He whistles. Something short and tired.

He lights a cigarette.

The city comes to life.

People are moving with suitcases and newspapers and the days work to do. Their voices start to lift and overlap. This IS The Great Migration. The movement of millions of Black people from the south to the north in the early 20th century.

HEADLINE: THE GREAT MIGRATION

The period from 1916-1970 where more than 6 million Black people fled Jim Crow violence in the south in search of greater opportunities in the north.

HEADLINE: Omaha. 1919

VOICES (Overlapping)

Levysport, Louisiana 1920 I had gone to school in New York, to learn to be a doctor.

Macon, Georgia 1917 I wasn't afraid to go on my own.

Houston, Texas 1917 I've never been north of Wichita Falls.

Tuskegee, Alabama 1918 I put me, my brand new baby daughter and my 3 yr old son in the back of a wagon.

Rosewood, Florida. 1923 By the time the fire had settled in the house, we had nothing left.

Troy, Alabama 1916. Dear Sirs I am enclosing a picture of a lynching which speaks for itself.

The overlapping ends as the chorus comes together.

These parts may be assigned as needed.

Include the core cast and the chorus.

May include Will or not.

Spring, Texas 1917 We kept getting approached by the labor agent from up in Philadelphia, said there was good work to be had and no Jim Crow.

Said a man could exercise his right to vote if he felt like it.

The black papers were tellin folks “Go! Go!”

Papers said there was labor shortages, white men was striking on account of low pay.

They knew the colored folks would come up there and take that pay with a smile on they face...

Will: And boy did we. (*a fuck you smile*)

WILL BROWN, stands in the center having his smoke. HANNAH, passes by, carrying suitcases, singing: GO DOWN OLD HANNAH. (*This may underscore the migrant voices as well*) They lock eyes. WILL goes to say something and stops short. HANNAH exits. WILL begins to whistle as the scene transitions to THE PACKING PLANT. MAC enters singing. WILL joins in. His body moves differently than others. He’s slower, slightly hunched, his hands clenched tight until he shakes them out. He’s an unmedicated, long term rheumatoid arthritic and some days are worse than others.

GO DOWN OL HANNAH

Why don't you go down old Hannah, **well, well, well,**

Don't you rise no more, **don't you rise no more**

Why don't you go down old **Hannah, Hannah,**

Don't you rise no more.

If you rise in the morning, **well, well, well,**

Bring judgement sure, **x2**

If you rise in the morning, morning,

Bring judgement sure.

HEADLINE: THE GREAT WAR IS OVER!

Our boys return home from the perils of war to find jobs filled.

SCENE 1. PACKING PLANT. CON'T

MAC and WILL continue to sing as the stage clears.

It's blistering outside, causing the area to smell worse than usual.

A job at the packing plant is not for the faint of heart, it's hard work, and they are underpaid but loyal.

WILL

Zella gonna be cooking tonight?

MAC

Sho is. For ME.

WILL

Now you know that woman wouldn't leave me hanging on a meal.

MAC

She wouldn't--but I sho as hell would.

WILL

I'll give you ten cents for the food. You know I ain't got no woman to look after me. Skinny as I am.

MAC

Come on down round 6 o'clock, we'll have a plate for ya.

WILL

That'd be real nice. Real nice.

MAC

Ima have Zella bring a lady too. Her cousin Hannah coming to stay a while, maybe stay altogether.

WILL

Hannah, eh?

MAC

Just like that song there.

WILL

I'll come down for dinner and stay for dessert.

MAC

There you go now.

WILL

Where she coming from?

MAC

Hannah been all over. Chicago, Ohio, Kansas City. Girl can't stay still.

WILL

I like that in a woman, I do.

(Mac: Mmm-hmmm)

MAC

You uh, you talk to Taylor today?

WILL

Ooooo Mac! Now you know I try to avoid that man when I can.

MAC

Said that plant down in Topeka...well, white boys came home and bout half them negroes loss they jobs down there. Nearly got ran out of town. Two folks died in a struggle.

WILL

Is that so?

J

MAC

It's so. Been hearing about that going on a few different places now. Don't be going after them foreign workers. Come straight after the negroes.

WILL

We'll what Why he tell you that? What that mean for us?

MAC

I don't know what it mean for us...but he did make a point to let me know.

WILL

Hmm. Half these white folks up here HANDED us they jobs going on strike and such. Only came up this way to work as is.

MAC

You ain't got to tell me. Ise with ya. Survived a war, getting paid a quarter more'n us and still got room to bellyache.

Goes back to singing and working.

WILL

I'll be damned if some drafted good ol boys try to run me out of here.

MAC

You ain't much of a runner, I'll give you that.

They exchange a joking look.

This was an accidental disabled joke.

WILL

Alright now, I see you...I see you.

MAC

I didn't even mean nothing by that.

WILL

I know you didn't.

I reckon we gon be in the clear up here. Been working for Taylor two years now without a problem. The white boys he do got on, don't give us one.

MAC

You know how folks be changing when they friends come round.

They both go back to work.

MAC

How you gonna go overseas and fight for your life...just to come back here and stir up more mess. I sure would be glad to just be alive.

WILL

Some people don't see so clear. They looking for a fight, don't care whose on the other side.

Beat.

WILL

I woulda gon over, ya know...if they coulda used me. I woulda showed this country what it was missin', stifflin a negro.

MAC

Pleas our men went over there. Youse covered.

WILL

White boys probably usin em as shields.

MAC laughs low.

MAC

Oooo, you better watch all that now, don't let nobody hear that.

WILL

I lying?

MAC

No, no no no. I didn't say that.

WILL

Yeah, lemme Just keep this job while I'se got it.

MAC

Saying all that I'm more concerned for your neck than ya job.

They both go back to working and singing.

SCENE 2. MAC and ZELLA'S PLACE. SAME EVENING

Where MAC and WILL leave off in the tune, ZELLA picks up humming and hanging laundry out to dry. The music underscores the following memory. A memory both universally shared and also sovereign to the person recalling it.

ACTOR:

Well, when some of the folks started uppin and leavin and-and sometimes sneaking off in the middle of the night. We never saw dem again. Some of em went running so scared and fast, they barely could kiss folks goodbye for they take off with a little cornbread or something in they hand, never to see they Mama or Daddy or brothers again from the day they leff, to the day they died. Never came back home. And we prayed for em...to make safe passage. Now, if they was sposed to be free n all that, why they gots to run like they ain't? Ooo, I sure did miss a great many of my family. I hope--they did alright for themselves.

HANNAH enters and whistles; a catcall.

ZELLA flips around and sees her.

*Both women have a deliberate way of speaking. Zella is warm and takes her time, she's been trained in the ways of southern hospitality. Hannah, was as well, but sharpened by travels to larger and more northern cities, and an intention to leave the south behind her. Sometimes, with Zella she slips back in time.

ZELLA

Hannah.

She takes a second to take her in.

Excited.

ZELLA

You're here, you're here, you're here!!

HANNAH

(facetiously)

I am. Where is this again?

ZELLA

Omaha, Nebraska.

HANNAH

Omaha...right. You like it here?

ZELLA

Uh, it's not for everyone. But it's home for now. Look at you. You look...smart.

HANNAH

It comes with the profession.

ZELLA

I'm so proud of you. I'm glad to have you. I have just a few more sheets to hang. And then we gon have dinner, I told some neighbors to come on over and meet you.

HANNAH

Oh, you doing too much, cousin! I don't need all the royal treatment.

ZELLA

It may be my way of enticing you to stay. You wanna get settled in?

HANNAH

No, I think I'll sit out here with you, it's a perfectly fine day.

ZELLA

One thing I've learned round here, that don't mean much. Could be a storm any second.

ZELLA goes back to hanging.

HANNAH sits on the stairs with her face up at the sun.

HANNAH

Is that so?

ZELLA

That's so. I got supper cooking, Mac'll be home soon. Got a room set up for you and everything.

HANNAH

I'll only be in your hair a short time. Soon as I find a teaching job round here, I'll be on my way. I know they have a boarding house for single girls.

ZELLA

Nonsense, you stay as long as you need. Mac and I alone together so much, it gets so quiet. I can hear that man's thoughts fore he opens his mouth. We need some excitement around here.

HANNAH

I am NOT that exciting. Zella! I thought y'all would have a house full of children by now.

ZELLA

Blessed in many other ways. Still waiting on the Lord for that one.

HANNAH

Well, no one says you have to have children. It's okay if you don't. I'm never having any. That's for sure.

ZELLA

Hannah! You work with children.

HANNAH

Pre-cisely. I work with them and know too much now. I gotta see em all day, what need I got coming home to em too? Procreation, pass me by!

ZELLA

Procreation?! What a word.

HANNAH laughs. She takes her shoes off and rubs her feet.

ZELLA

How's your trip up? You stop and see Auntie Syl?

HANNAH bristles.

HANNAH

It was...as to be expected. Yes, Aunt Syl is doing just fine.

ZELLA

What that mean? As to be expected.

HANNAH

Long, cramped, loud and irritating. My feet hurt, I was in standing room only till we came out of Missouri. I swore I could finally take a full breath rising outta there.

ZELLA

Oh Hannah.

HANNAH

Plenty of room to sit up front of course. But no, I'm standing in the back piled in with everyone else. They made a couple extra stops too, just to come onboard and rough up a few of the men. Claiming they didn't have tickets.

ZELLA

Oh. As to be expected.

HANNAH

See? There.

...

I tried to get Aunt Syl to come up too. It ain't gonna happen. She said she already moved once in her life and she ain't finna do it again. I told her, it may be nice to CHOOSE to move this time...and she said "it's nice to CHOOSE to stay, too." She said...

HANNAH puts on a deeper southern sound.

HANNAH

'Lor' willin' an da crick don' rise, I'ma be set'n rye herr." Is what she say and the look in her eyes, I knew she meant business.

ZELLA giggles.

ZELLA

Oooo, I miss that. The way she talk. The way you talk. Ya'll sound like home.

HANNAH

Florida home?

ZELLA nods with a smile.

ZELLA

People up here have a more siddidy way of talkin to ya. When I get to hear a Floridia kinda talk, I swear I could fall right in. I thought Mississippi was close enough, but now...I see it ain't. Ain't nothing like the orange grove sound of Florida. You know they call palmetto bugs cockroaches up here?

HANNAH

I heard that in Chicago! Cockroach? I never heard a more made up name. Everybody up here sounds like they got somewhere important to be. Cockroach.

ZELLA

Always in a hurry! Walking like...

ZELLA walks fast and stiff back and forth a couple times.

ZELLA

I do miss that easy pace. The Florida...pace.

They stare at each other, holding a painful secret.

HANNAH

I've decided not to miss anything about it. Fore long, enough of those folks will make their way up here and it'll slow down again.

ZELLA

Ugh, I do wish they'd bring the water too.

HANNAH

Wouldn't that be something...?

ZELLA

Ain't seen a beach in--(*trails*) Well, you been all over the place, Ms. Travellin'. I sure do want to hear your stories.

HANNAH

Ain't much to tell. Found out every new place is just like the old place.

MAC and WILL enter, swinging lunch boxes and joking loud.

MAC

I tole that good for nothing negro he better face the facts! His DOG looked better than his woman...and he wouldn't be runnin his mouth if h--

WILL stops him in his tracks when he sees HANNAH.

MAC

Hannah, I didn't know you'd be--

ZELLA clears her throat. *“And what about me?”*

MAC

Oh hey sugar bottom, didn't see you there either. You just a tiny little thing.

WILL and HANNAH share looks.

MAC and HANNAH hug.

HANNAH

Oh, it's fine Mac. Know I was raised with three brothers, I done heard every ugly woman joke youse gots to tell. Ooo lord, you need a wash. You smell that Zella?

ZELLA

Oh, I'm used to it now. Jus smells like rent getting paid.

HANNAH's attention turns to Will.

HANNAH

Hello.

WILL

Ms.

Hello.

MAC

Will, this Zella's cousin Ise telling you about. Hannah.

WILL

I seen you today. Out walking with your bags.

HANNAH

I remember your face.

WILL

Oh, I remember yours.

ZELLA and MAC react.

HANNAH

And you couldn't be bothered to offer to help me with those bags.

WILL

Oh! I wanted to.

HANNAH

Well, I stopped to see if you would. Just a little ways up from where you was. And you never came.

MAC

Will's got a condition, Hannah. He can't be carrying things too far or long. Probably didn't want to embarrass himself by dropping your items and looking weak.

HANNAH

A condition, I'm sorry.

WILL

Ah, it's bad arthritis. (pronounced: Arthur Ritis) To hear Mac talk you think I'm bout to drop dead right here.

MAC

The way he be acting at work! I don't know!

HANNAH

My Auntie has the 'ritis. I've seent the trouble it brings.

WILL

Yes ma'am. I had a poor time with it today, or I would've had your bags for you.

HANNAH

I'm glad to know you now.

They shake hands and it lingers.

MAC

Zell, I could smell them biscuits from two blocks back.

ZELLA

Come on in and get washed up now, we can eat straight away.

MAC

By the way, I invited Will over for dinner.

ZELLA

Mmmhmmm, I see that. Get on in here.

SCENE 3. MAC and ZELLA's HOUSE. CON'T

The table is being set. It's small and the setup is quaint and country.

It matters to Zella though, that things look nice, Hannah helps.

The four sit to eat and talk. Their guards are down, this is where they can just...be.

MAC may be singing in underscore.

An ACTOR is there, with a memory to share, about community and family.

ACTOR:

We just took care of each other. We loved each other. If I didn't--if my cows didn't have milk, we didn't have to worry about milk, we got it from the neighbors. Or if somebody didn't have meal or flour, we make sure we got them what they needed. People shared what they had. If ya house needed fixin, they shared that. We was family like that. You know, family wasn't just blood then. We was neighbors and a community, We watched after each others chirrun and -- everybody need family, whether you blood or not.

IN SCENE:

Somewhere along the way the conversation turned to the political. Hannah leans in. Zella pulls back. Mac is drinking and opinionating. Will observes until he's ready to speak.

We jump in:

MAC

Yeah, I've been hearing the stories and all that. But I tend to not pay that no never mind. Now I promised my WIFE, the BEST life I could give her. Moved her on up here from Florida by way of Mississippi and I don't have to tell you how good we bout have it compared.

HANNAH

Have you seen the papers, Mac? White men starting riots over work and housing...you ain't concerned about that?

MAC

No! Listen, these people called us up here Hannah. They WANTED the Negroes up here to take this work. Half these men was hollerin about strikes and carryin on cuz they think they worth more.

(lowers his voice) Well they ain't worth much as they think!

Everyone is taken aback.

Mac gets why.

MAC

That's what I can say in my OWN home. They ain't got ears everywhere.

WILL

I got a post down in Tennessee said "Wanted: Negro Workers." And I was looking for any reason to get my behind out of there.

MAC

Pssssh, us too! And BOY was they mad about it!

HANNAH

Mad about what?

MAC

They want to eat you alive, Hannah. And then mad when you got the sense to jump out of their mouth.

WILL

Tennessee? White folks tried to hold up a whole train of leaving negroes! The one I was on. Tried to arrest every last one of us! I said...oh, these peckawoods WANT us now?? I mean, I said it in my head. Just saying some kind of prayer that train would pull away with me on it.

HANNAH

And you were willing to work for whatever they offered ya, up here? Didn't matter?

ZELLA

Hannah, the fellas makes a good living.

WILL

We get treated real fair down at the stocks. That's worth it alone. I ain't constantly looking over my shoulder. THAT'S worth it alone.

HANNAH

I ain't coming atcha about it. I do the same. I get paid a quarter what a white school teacher gets paid and that's no matter whether I'm in the south or up in Chicago or wherever I go. That's only reason I'm asking.

MAC

Well, the way I see it is like this Hannah, my grand daddy didn't get paid nothing. Nothing at all. So I am living his dream. Man, ya'll exhaust me with all this talk. Bout made me lose my stomach, talking all this earful!

WILL

All that hooch what made you lose your stomach.

MAC

Well, it's better company than "what the white man gon take next" talkin...here, I got something that gon get this party motivated. ZELLA! We got a new rule. We ain't talkin bout white folks on the off hours.

ZELLA

Even Ms. Virginia?

MAC is off in the next room, looking for something.

HANNAH

Whose Miss Virginia?

ZELLA

She our landlady. A good woman. She rents to all the negroes round here. I do her laundering for a discount.

Gossipy beat.

ZELLA

She does own a couple salacious businesses...we just don't participate in that side of things.

HANNAH

What? Whorehouse?

ZELLA

Hannah Mary!

WILL laughs and then wide eyed NODS at HANNAH.

MAC reenters with his instrument.

HANNAH

We all grown...we can say Whorehouse.

MAC

See? Now THAT is dinner conversation. I got my trusty girlfriend.

He brandishes the guitar.

WILL

See, everything got to be a show.

MAC

Don't act like you don't like it either, Will. Lifes too short to be bellyaching about everything. Now come on baby, get ready to show em what we do when ain't nobody looking.

ZELLA

Mac Sweetly!

MAC starts to play.

He sings "BLACK GIRL (IN THE PINES)

ZELLA dances, lifting her skirt up to show a little leg.

WILL claps along, amused.

HANNAH laughs and eventually ZELLA pulls her up to dance too.

The song goes on for a minute as they really enjoy themselves.

It ends with a big flourish from MAC.

MAC

You see dancing like THAT down at the Madam's house, Will?

WILL

Oh, come on with all that.

HANNAH

Madam Virginia?

ZELLA

Mac, don't start no trouble now.

MAC

Will, lives down there!

ZELLA gives him a look.

WILL (*animated*)

Oh! No! Not at the brothel part. Jus at her regular house. She rents out rooms.

HANNAH

By the hour?

ZELLA

Hannah Mary.

HANNAH

I'm jus gassing ya! Those things took up FULL blocks where I was in Chicago. Wasn't nothing over there. Hardly the scandal it is other places.

WILL

I stayed in Chicago for awhile, myself. Omaha is small potatoes by Chicago standards.

HANNAH

I'm sure you found plenty of trouble over there.

WILL

Naw...but it liked to find me though. It was a very entertaining city. Music, shows, gangsters too. Lots of money to be won over Chicago way. (*beat*) Good churches too.

MAC

HA!! Churches. Will you would burn to a crisp walkin into a Lords house...me too. Me too. Zella get's prayers in for both of us, Sundays.

ZELLA

I don't be prayin for you.

A quick, playful set of looks between them.

MAC

But you gotta say they got pretty good entertainment down in the 3rd ward here too, Will...dancing shows and...

ZELLA

How you know what they got?

MAC

Stories woman, ain't nothing but stories. Men at work be talking about it. Horns rising out the top of they heads as they do. And I don't partici--particulate...I'm jus listening...participate.

WILL

Mac, you need to lay off the hooch now, man. What other song you know on that thing.

ZELLA bursts out laughing.

ZELLA

Thats the only one! And he barely know that.

MAC

That woman ain't loyal!

WILL

I want some more entertainment!

HANNAH

Oh Zella! DO one your stories. The old ones Granny tole us.

MAC

What stories this?

HANNAH

You ain't never done em for Mac? Oh, Zella knows how to tell you a story like she's on the stage. She used to make us all gather round her and she/

ZELLA

I ain't done that since we was/ kids...

HANNAH

She would put on all the Brer Rabbit stories like she was him herself. Knew em by memory. I know you still know em.

MAC

You been holdin' out on me woman?

ZELLA

Oh Mac, hardly. I ain't thought of those since...well...*(she goes into character)* everybody gather round now, I gotsta tell ya's a story. Bout da ol farmer n de Brer Rabbit.

They sit and listen, a willing audience.

ZELLA fully embodies her characters, coming to life as we haven't seen her before.

ZELLA

Brer Fox was sick n tired of having to mind his peanut patch. Cuz everyday, some critter of some sort would come by and scoop up all his goobers. And he has just a mind of who it is too. So one day Brer Fox gets smart and he fixes up a rope from the tree.

I KNOW it's that troublesome no good Brer Rabbit. Look right here...hole in my fence, jus big enough for one mischevus hare. I'm gwine tie this here rope to this here tree and sets me a trap. So when he comes hoppin long, it'll string him right on up here and I can catch em in de act!

So Brer Fox sets his trap and goes on bout his day. A little bit later, what do you know? Brer Rabbit comes sneakin on in through the fence.

(Rabbit sounds) Well Brer Fox ain't round to watch his peanut patch and I sure am hungry! And SNAP! Jus like that...Brer Rabbit was swinging upside down on account Brer Fox trap worked jus as good as you please. Brer Rabbit knewed he was caught. And if he didn't think of a way to get down--

Brer Fox gwine be havin rabbit stew tonight.

He waited there, patiently til he heard the sounds of a lumbering through the forest. Why it was Brer Bear...and he wasn't known for being the brightest.

Uh hello, Brer Rabbit. WHy you hanging upside down like that?

Oh! Why I'm watching Brer Fox's peanut patch. Matter fact, I'm making a whole dollar an hour to watch it. Somebody been stealing his goobers and I'se gwine find out who.

Well that's mighty nice a ya, Rabbit. Mighty nice.

Brer Bear was NO match for the wits of the quick minded Rabbit.

Say, how you feel about making an extra dollar or two bear? I know you got a large family to feed. You can take my spot for the rest of the day and earn you some good cash for your family. Now, wouldn't your wife like that?

Brer Bear wasn't too keen on hanging upside down...but he agreed to it. He was so big his head bout near touched the ground and the tree branch bent all it could. A little while later he heard Brer Rabbit hoppin up the road and sayin

Brer Fox! I know who been in your peanut patch! You caught the crafty theif, you did. And imagine Brer Fox surprise to see big ol Brer Bear hanging there, upside down, big as you will. Brer Bear TRIED to apologize...

Brer Fox I ain't take no peanuts...

But THWACK! Brer Fox walloped his behind!

Ouch! OUCH! Listen up now!

And the more he tried to explain, the more Brer Fox walloped him. Meanwhile Brer Rabbit slicked off down the hill, laughing all the way...with a pocket full of big, ripe peanuts.

ZELLA's audience claps and she bows.

HANNAH

I knew you couldn't forget that, Ze.

ZELLA

You was right. It was like Granny was...like she was right here with us! You remember Zeke used to do all the rabbit sounds and he had those big ol buck teeth and--and--

ZELLA starts to waver. She's lightheaded.

She's overcome with memory.

MAC and HANNAH jump to her side.

HANNAH

Get her some water Mac.

He does, quickly.

She waves them off.

ZELLA

Don't be silly. I'm fine...I jus need to lay down. I jus got a little...

HANNAH

It's alright, it's alright.

She lets MAC take over. MAC leads ZELLA to the bedroom. HANNAH ushers herself and WILL outside to the porch. WILL is concerned.

WILL

Zella gon be alright?

HANNAH

She gon be jus fine...it's just...ain't nothin but remembering.
... It hits some people different.

WILL

I ain't heard a Brer tale in a mighty long time. Took me back too. Grew up with all them.

HANNAH

Us too. We may be up here now, but we all got that southern scent on us. Can't never get rid of it.
We're foreigners to this land.

WILL

I hear you on that, Hannah. Humboldt, Tennessee.

HANNAH

Eustis, Florida.

BOTH

Omaha, Nebraska.

They take a moment and laugh.

WILL

What's it like down Florida way? Never been there myself.

There's a pained look from HANNAH.
How to answer this.

WILL

Only thing I know about Florida is plantations, beaches, and oranges.

Space.

HANNAH

Bout all I know about it too. (*a weak laugh*) You know I ain't had an orange since I left?

WILL

You ain't?! Well, they mighty pricey.

HANNAH

They charge what I could pay for half a meal for one little ol shriveled orange up here!

WILL

They do.

HANNAH

When I could pick them off the ground and they'd be fat. Heavy in my hand and I could tell the best ones just by looking at it. I grew up with juice running down my arm. Everything smelled like citrus. I had scratches in my legs, climbing so many trees. Or I'd put a bunch in my apron and carry em home to my mama and she'd say "how a little thing like you carry so many big fruits?" Big fruits...in't that quaint. Big fruits.

WILL

Whatcha Mama do with all them oranges?

HANNAH

Oh, she'd make marmalade...juice em, make glazes for chicken, put em in cake. When you surrounded by one thing, you know all the ways to do it. But I mostly just remember squatting down there, like little kids do, neverminding my bare legs...hiding away in the shade of the trees. Peeling them wide open and the juice just running down my arm.

She looks at him with a sad smile.

HANNAH

That seems more dream than real. But I feel torn like that a lot. Somewhere between now and then. Between anger and joy. Between wanting to fight so hard I catch the world on fire and laying low because I've seen what they can do.

WILL

They.

She nods.

WILL

Oh right. They.

HANNAH

I ran away from Florida one day and I never looked back. I been so many places since then, just looking for a place to catch my breath.

WILL

Omaha that place?

HANNAH

I just wanted to see my cousin. We got split up for a long time, it hurts to think on all the things we missed out on together. We was together everyday for the whole first part of our lives. I just...I keep running and running from what happened...but I gotta realize, I'm just carrying it everywhere with me. Hmmph, it's made me cynical.

WILL

What's that? Down on yourself?

HANNAH

On everything.

WILL

And you probably got some reason to be that. I don't know what happened to ya. And I know better than to ask ya. You ask me what happened in my life before...well, I'd grow very suspicious of your character.

HANNAH

That's right. You should already know.

WILL

Yeah, but I don't want to live all...cynical. Am I using it right?

HANNAH

You are.

WILL

I don't want to do that. I want to be free. In my head and in my heart. And if I keep picking up my past and lugging it to every saloon, card game, post, and front porch wit me...I ain't free at all. People start to call you a grifter when you act on that freedom...to get up and move and start new. I ain't no grifter. I'm just light on my feet. What's that called? A DRIFTER...I jus like to mooove.

WILL does a light-on-his-feet dance.

HANNAH

Oh, I would LOVE to be light on my feet. My feet Will, concrete blocks. But still, I drift too...

WILL holds out his hand to make HANNAH light on her feet too. She laughs and accepts it.
They shuffle on the porch.

WILL

Feels good to leave a place and not have to say goodbye to nobody.

HANNAH

Oh yes. Yes it does.

WILL

Sometimes I get this idea over me that it would be nice to drift back to the people who knew me as a boy. Sometimes I want to drift back to where I started.

HANNAH's head drops.
She wants that too.

WILL

What do you want, miss Hannah?

HANNAH takes her full time.

HANNAH

I want to see trees for the beauty that they are and not wonder how many of my brothers swung from them.

Their shuffle stops.

HEADLINE:

RACE RIOT SWEEPS CHICAGO 3 DEAD. 50 HURT

Clash begins when colored boy invades white district.

ACTOR

I've never been north of Wichita Falls. I had grown up knowing that white folks ruled everything and to not fall in line was to risk the very breathe you was breathing. You gotta say Yessir or No Maam, or you facing trouble. So, I started getting round them. If the answer was yes...I'd say "Ohhhh, well I reckon so" and if it was a no--I'd say "Ohhhh, well, I don't know bout that." I did it still they started catching on...so I had to...you know...Oooo Them folks could have your life as soon as they had the thought...and your corpse would never see a trial.

SCENE 4. VIRGINIA'S. The next morning.

VIRGINIA TOOMEY is preparing to leave her house. She lives here with WILL and JED, the man she's dating. He flirts and teases with her as she attempts to get ready.

VIRGINIA

Jed, now stop that funny business! I gotsto get out here and look presentable and all that.

JED

Aw woman, you gon give me a bad reputation you go out there too cleaned up.

VIRGINIA

Jed, the last thing *you* got to worry about is a good reputation. I got news for you.

JED

Where you off to?

VIRGINIA

The courthouse.

JED

Oh lord, you know I stays away from there. Whatchu got to do down at the COURThouse.

VIRGINIA

Fighting, basically. Been fighting so hard might as well gimme some gloves and a put me in a ring. I worked HARD to get the vote here in Nebraska and now I'm fighting twice as hard to continue my business ventures. Look at this petition I got served with just yesterday.

JED

Oh Lord, whose after you know?

VIRGINIA

Oh, more no good bible thumpers VOWING to shut me down. Won't be satisfied until they got a church on every corner.

JED

What good is having all them churches, if you ain't got a place to exercise your sins?

VIRGINIA

They don't understand the first thing about supply and demand.

JED

So what's this 'tition say?

VIRGINIA

Oh! It says...

She takes a paper out.

VIRGINIA

It says--signed by The people of Omaha vs the Madam...The MADAM Virginia Toomey...whose immoral and ungodly business has placed a dark cloud over the city. Guess how many signatures.

JED

How many?

VIRGINIA

242.

JED

That ain't nothing.

VIRGINIA

Ain't nothing is RIGHT. All mostly women and a few forced husbands...WHO if I were really immoral and ungodly, I'd compare the names on this petition to the ones in my client books and show those women how they *could* be better spending their attention.

JED

Send em running, Virginia!

VIRGINIA

I'm friends, acquaintances or business partners with nearly every man running this town. And they are some of my best customers. These ninnies have been putting the heat on me since the war ended. All worried about their future husbands being distracted by some good time girls. Well, maybe ya'll could learn a thing or two and you wouldn't be so concerned. The other half, just mad I got housing I give to the negroes stead of the whites.

JED

Well, that ain't no big surprise. We taking their jobs, according to them. They houses, according to them and they women. According to me.

JED pulls VIRGINIA closer to him, nuzzling into her neck.

VIRGINIA

I prefer Colored tenants to White cuz your people know something about minding they own business. They just as holy, but don't let it stop em from taking a good deal when they find one. I put whites up in my rooms, next thing you know they tryna own the place. Putting requests in, making demands of me. And I won't have it Jed. I won't. I am a third generation daughter of Nebraska and I will NOT be put out by religious zealots in my home state.

...

...

I think they could come for you and I next, Jed.

JED

Whatchu mean, come for us?

VIRGINIA

It ain't no secret you're living under my roof.

JED

I'm just a tenant. Same as Will.

VIRGINIA

You haven't paid me a dime.

JED

Not in cash, no.

VIRGINIA

Down at the club I have it all straight with my books. Same with the houses.
You are the only loose end. The thing I can't defend.

JED

You just said yourself, you know all the mens whose opinions mean something.

VIRGINIA

Mmmhmm, and their opinions on whores and alcohol are far greater to their opinions of Colored men with white women.

JED

So whatchu tryna say?

VIRGINIA

I just want you to be prepared. When they remind us that this union between us is illegal. And they may want to do something about it. Use it against me in some kind of way...no telling.

JED

The way I see it, we only criminals if I marry you. So you got nothing to worry bout.

VIRGINIA looks at him.

He smiles. Jk/Jk.

JED

They can't lay a finger on me unless they catch me doing something more than just living here.

VIRGINIA

Jed, you are far too smart to sound so ignorant. Since when have they asked for PROOF that a Colored man did something wrong?

JED

You wouldn't take up for me?

VIRGINIA

Course I would! They'd have to cut me in half to get to ya. But there's only so much a woman can do, when it ain't benefiting them. You seen those things in the Bee? They looking to stir up trouble against you folks.

JED

I ain't seen it.

VIRGINIA grabs the paper.

VIRGINIA

Negro attacks white woman in her home.

...

This is the third one wrote about this month. It's white women attacked by Coloreds here in Omaha.

JED

I ain't heard nothing bout all this.

VIRGINIA

Cuz they only print about it in the Bee. Colored papers won't report this.

JED

I ain't heard about it on the street either.

VIRGINIA

You ain't seen what's going on in Chicago? Boston too...making it's way right here to our very front step.

JED

No Ma'am.

VIRGINIA has all of the papers.

VIRGINIA

Chicago--3 dead, 50 hurt. DC--Negro soldier was killed, Coloreds fought back in Boston...and now they're talking about Colored attacking girls here...you get it? They're stirring up trouble for a REASON, Jed. (change) When white men feel a threat, they stir up trouble for a *reason*, Jed.

JED

What fer? They want fighting over this way too? People gettin along jus fine, long as you know your place.

VIRGINIA

The men in charge here, want the town to feel unsafe, so people don't trust it's leadership. They want Mayor Smith out because he doesn't appreciate the way most of us make money. They need folks scared of Colored folks and fighting over jobs so no one sees what they're really doing...And they will use anything to ensure their own law and order around here. Mark my words, Jed. Any Colored man in this town could be a scapegoat.

JED

Well, I ain't done nothing to nobody. I sit in here and mind my business, just like you said. I don't do nothing to nobody.

VIRGINIA

That's not the point baby. Whatchu do or don't do is of no importance. People already mad at colored folks, won't take long to turn the town against em.

JED

Well, if them NO GOOD negroes jus stay out of trouble...if these attacks is true.

VIRGINIA

They WANT them to be true, so they make them true. That's how power works, Jed. More power than you or I will ever know. I've seen it too many times. Taking whatever they want. Demanding what you got. I've seen it too many times. They start with you putting your safety on the line...you'll do next to anything to stay safe.

JED

You got me now, you ain't got to worry bout those folks hounding you.

VIRGINIA

You ain't even got the power to give me your name, Jed. You're not even a person, love.

She puts her hand to his face then sweetly kisses him.

VIRGINIA

Well, I have a DAY.

VIRGINIA puts on her hat.

VIRGINIA

Wish me luck out there, darling! There's a world to change.

HEADLINE: RACIAL TENSIONS RISE AS JOBS AND HOUSING GROW SCARCE.

SCENE 5. PACKING PLANT. MORNING

MAC and WILL were working and have paused to read two pink slips.

ACTOR 1 enters, or has entered in the previous transition, whistling or singing a work song.

ACTOR:

We tole everybodyto come on up here. We was makin 1.50 a day...it was hard work but it wasn't no sharecropping...yo feet may get tired but your back ain't breakin. We was inside too. In the factory jobs. And the hours was set. I don't see how they pay such wages as is, they don't work you or drive you. You got a bossman, but ain't nobody coming round with threats if you ain't working fast enough. You still get your fair wage. I know some fellas workin got moved up and was making even more. Some folks taken work in domestics--they waiters, bellhops,...I ain't never been trained in no profession like that. That factory work suit me jus fine, yes, yes. Jus fine.

WILL

What's this mean now?

MAC

They cutting back our time, Will.

WILL

Our hours?

MAC

That's right. Down six days to four.

WILL

How can they do that? Ain't right.

MAC

White man say we took his opportunities, white boss gives em back.

WILL

That's not how it be. These OUR opportunities.

MAC

You know better than that. Ain't gon have no coloreds up here working while these crackers out here struggling. That ain't gon fly.

WILL

Well, whatchu gon do?

MAC

Prolly have to go over to the steel mill and see if they got some hours, prolly same as every other negro that got this here slip today. God dammit. I have half a mind to grab my pistol and pay Taylor a visit.

MAC hits something nearby. He punches the air.

WILL

You alright, Mac? Jus keep it cool, now.

MAC

Naw I ain't alright, Will. They jus gonna keep pink slippin us up so north we ain't got nowhere else to go. Be in Canada before long. I tole my woman she ain't got to work. What kinda man I is? That's not how it's sposed to be.

WILL is struggling to perform, his arthritis is flaring up.

MAC sees this and helps. He's tender.

MAC

And what you gon do? Hard enough to let them pick you up here.

WILL

Naw, I'll be just fine. I maybe can't do this here forever, but even a cripple can play some poker like nobody's business.

MAC

Oh, that's your work plan? Poker? Gambling?

WILL

Hey, ain't nobody coming for that job.

MAC laughs.

MAC

I guess that's so. You jus sit down for a few minutes til ya get your hands right. Ya hurtin'?

WILL

Yeah. Yeah...look in my jacket over there. Pull me out that bottle.

MAC does this.

Opens it and smells it.

MAC

Oooo BOY! That likely to put you out!

WILL

Naw, I'm used to it by now. One swig to numb the pain, two swigs to kill it altogether and three to go to sleep.

MAC

Oh, Dr. Will Brown.

WILL takes one swig and then the other.

He struggles with the cap and MAC takes it from him, taking his own swig.

MAC

Getting worse, huh?

WILL

Every year. But I do know it's about to rain.

I'm a doctor and a weatherman, I guess.

MAC

I guess you gots lots to fall back on when they put us outta here then, huh?

WILL

It's gonna be alright. You and Zella gon make sure it's alright. Y'all ain't no pushovers. You do whatchu got to do.

MAC

Did I lie to my wife? I promised her I was gonna give her a better life. Now I'm feeling like I'm not delivering on that promise.

WILL

We gon work something out. It can't always be like this. Things will straighten out.

MAC

When Will? You too old to be sounding that fool hardy.

WILL

My granddaddy lived to 98 I heard! 98.

MAC

Good for him.

WILL

So I reckon I am still young is all I'm saying.

MAC

You get my point.

WILL

I get your point. I just can't live all cynical like that.

MAC

You been hanging round Hannah. CYNICAL.

...

They got all the power. I'm getting tired of not feeling like a man.

WILL

They got power of this?

He points to MACs head.

WILL

They got power of this?

He puts his palm on MACs heart.

WILL

They tell you what you can and can't do with that?

MAC

No they do not.

WILL

No, they do not.

Ain't nobody stopped us yet.

MAC seethes.

MAC

No. They ain't.

WILL

And they can't.

WILL points to his own head and puts a palm on MACs heart.

They hold.

Within this transition there is music or singing/vocalization underneath. A shift in mood is occurring.

SCENE 6. THE ROAD. LATER

The music/vocalization continues underneath this. ACTOR is placed. The final memory to share. The one before the tone shift at the end of the scene. This one takes time. ZELLA and HANNAH are walking and carrying laundry bundles.

ACTOR

By the time the fire had settled in the house, we had nothing left. We lost family, our homes and things special to us. There was nothing left but our ashes, our memory and that last flame of hope any of us dared to hold onto, and the burning crosses in what was our front yards. We took off that night and headed up north. We heard that it was wonderful and you would be free and make good money. And I did find people had more freedom of self and expression. You had choices you could make in the north you couldn't in the south...but the difference was...you knew who the enemy was. Here, you don't always know who the enemy is. They're happy to sit next to ya, share a train...but when the ride is up they going one way with a briefcase and youse going your way with a mop or broom...cuz it's just the same.

ZELLA

I appreciate you cousin, making these deliveries with me. I ain't felt right walking alone.

HANNAH

I'll walk with you any time.

ZELLA

I just feel like we're being watched all of a sudden. You feel--

HANNAH nods with an intensity in her eyes.

ZELLA

I used to feel welcomed.

HANNAH

Things are changing. I felt this way in Kansas City too...something turning sour round us.

ZELLA

Even the women...

HANNAH

They follow their men.

ZELLA stops walking.

ZELLA

I know that I never talk about what happened back home.

HANNAH

And you don't have to.

ZELLA

Well, after the other night, I thought maybe I should. I had a spell come over me I ain't had in quite some time.

HANNAH

I shouldna pushed you to tell that story.

ZELLA

It's been coming on before then Hannah. This drowning feeling. I was wondering if knowing YOU was coming up here were part of it. Just being with you again. I was doing good...been doing good...put the past behind me and after I met Mac you know...it was like he swept me off my feet and into a new world. And then...seeing you *felt* good...but something deep down pulled tight and sad.

...

...

ZELLA

I said I didn't remember it Hannah, I've been saying it for years. But I can't--I do...I remember it like it was happening in front of me right now. I've been running from that night ever since. I thought I could catch my breath when I married Mac, when we saved up money, when we came to Omaha...I feel NOW like I'm never gonna catch my breath. Like they ripped it right out of me and --

ZELLA starts to have a panic attack.

HANNAH drops the packages to hold her.

HANNAH

I'm here. I'm here. I'm here.

She demonstrates breath and they both breathe together.

*DOES THE CHORUS BREATHE TOO?

(I think so)

*The continuation of the “shift”.

This shift is from hope and opportunity to reality.

The awakening that things aren't as different as they hoped.

The tones are non verbal. Tones can be met with light, sound, song, vocalization, call and response and/or dance, that denote the emotional state of Black people as unrest grows.

It is the manifestation of their emotions, where their words have become obsolete. It takes the place of the migrant storytellings, as we now know that those are moving forward into a dark place. All of the scenes can connect through these types of transitions.

Here: the chorus can stay and breathe with Zella as the next scene is set. The idea that these multitudes of experiences are part of one great story, affected by everyone's energies.

The emotions:

Power, intimacy, survival, family, peace, fear, resilience and the cycle itself are a tug of war between the American dream hope and the reality of their lives.

HEADLINE: RACIAL VIOLENCE INCREASES IN OMAHA

Blacks become more aggressive. Caution is urged.

SCENE 7. VIRGINIA'S PARLOR. LATER

WILL, MAC, and JED all sit around a table, they're playing poker and smoking cigarettes.

JED

Oooo boy, youse a cheater, Brown.

WILL

You should be used to losing now Jed, how much you do it.

MAC

Keep it cool boys, keep it cool.

JED

You know I'm better with a partner here.

MAC

That's right. Where John be at?

A tension.

JED

Oh, you ain't hear.

MAC

Hear what now?

WILL

Johns in the clink, man.

MAC

What? What that fool pull now? He still out tryna swindle white folks out a couple extra bones?

JED

Naw, one of them white girls over on center claimed he ravished her.

MAC

What? They got John tied up in all that mess?

JED

Jus day before last.

MAC

How I'm just now knowing?

JED

They stop putting em on the front page after bout four false accusations. Maybe they...I don't know...investigating from now on?

WILL

Ya hear that Mac? You gotta read INSIDE the paper, not just the headline.

MAC

Funny coming from an illiterate sonovabitch.

WILL

Well, I'm keeping up better than you!

MAC

I don't read the white papers.

JED

Well you need to start. Because they gots lots to say regarding us here.

MAC

Who, where?

JED

Every negro IN this town. They rallying MOBS to protect the whites from US. You remember Charles Grant?

MAC

Yeah, came up from Columbus.

JED

That's right. White girl claimed he ravished her, he was in jail bout three weeks for they find out she lyin.

MAC

Yeah, I member that. Charles got a clubbed foot...she say he had a clubbed foot?

JED

Said nothing of the sort. Said it were a black man bout forty years old.

MAC

That's you, me and Will!

JED

And it don't matter which one it was. Charles was the one...what they call him?

WILL

The Boogeyman of Center street.

JED

The boogey/man of Center street.

MAC

The boogeyman...that's right. Ain't Charles a librarian? He one of them DuBois negroes.

WILL

Sure was. Always in the books, quiet.

JED

Taking care of his mama.

MAC

If Charles Grant was a Boogeyman, I'm the devil hisself.

JED

They never even questioned his mind to doing something like that. "Uhhh, Mr. Grant..."

MAC

You mean “Boy.”

JED

You right. BOY!! Forty year old BOY with the CLUBBED foot...are you the boogeyman of Center Street? And Charles ain't say a word, pissin in his britches. SOLD! To the lyin little white girl at 3032 Center Street...the reputation of one upstanding negro.

MAC

Oooo-weeee. That's something. I still ain't seen Charles around.

JED

He left for Chicago, second they let him out.

MAC

I hear that.

JED

They ain't got to prove nothing...a white girl tell on you...you through, boy.

MAC

I don't even look at em. I don't even blink. I see one coming? I cross the street! That little pink toes? That's MY boogeyman right there.

WILL

But it do lead me to wondering, if white ladies be lying like that...why you with one Jed?

JED

Virginia ain't like that.

WILL

How you know?

JED

Cuz she always say yes.

JED is defensive in stance.

WILL

They do till they don't I reckon.

JED

Sides she the one who told me to start keeping up with the paper. Stay on top of it. They entice they women to tell these lies. But they can't jail all of us. Virginia's in good with the right people. So, so am I.

WILL

But don't you think it look funny? You knowing your people getting jailed on account of her people, being with a ol pink toes? It look suspicious. Like you don't care.

JED

And who my people? Jed gon do what Jed gon do.

WILL

Well, maybe that's just cuz they ain't rounded YOU up yet. But one day...when you done playing house nigga...it gon be your turn.

JED spits. Staring at Will.

JED

You better watch how you talking partner. You getting real outta step.

MAC

It's alright Jed. Will, let's tone it down man. You lookin for trouble.

WILL

Aw, just got that whiskey going to my head.

JED

Sides, wasn't you already brought up on charges there yourself Brown?

WILL

I was just the boogeyman that day. Ain't nothing come of it.

JED

Aw, on account you crippled?

WILL

On account I ain't no rapist. That's why you won't see me on the make with no white woman in the first place.

JED

You been seen with plenty white women.

WILL

Yeah, well not no more. Get into a lovers spat and next thing you know you in the hoosegow! Next thing you know they got you strung up with whatever they could find...a white woman is the most unsavory character you can go with you ask me.

VIRGINIA enters through the front.

Spirited. Just home from work.

A little drunk.

VIRGINIA

Oh boys! I didn't know we was having a party!

MAC really does avert eye contact.

She kisses Jed, passionately.

VIRGINIA

Ya'll look mighty somber. Well, I won't have that. We's celebratin' tonight boys.

VIRGINIA puts on some music.

The tension between the men stands.

VIRGINIA dances. She pours a drink and doesn't notice a thing between them.

VIRGINIA

Boys, I went to the city today and ooo they were up in arms about you colored men hanging round white girls. Just like we doin now. I don't feel scared of ya. Ya'll ain't gonna attack me now are ya?

MAC

I best be on my way.

VIRGINIA

Now Mac, you just wait right there and lemme tell ya somethin.

MAC obeys. Eyes down.

VIRGINIA

I got it on good authority...these attacks...white boys in black face. Mmmhmmm, that's right. They've been going round actin like niggers on the prow! And the papers been eatin it up. Course, that don't matter.

Separate thought.

They take me for a stupid woman.

She drinks. Holding silent court.

She gets more comfortable.

VIRGINIA

They tried to shut me down and I looked them dead in their dead eyes and told them I will put a whore on every corner and a nigger in every house they try me further. (*excited again*) Oooo, they was so gobsmacked, not one had ever heard a *lady* talkin like that. We need somethin more upbeat!

She jumps up again and goes to the music player.

She holds out her glass, shaking it.

VIRGINIA

Jed. Fix me another drink right away.

JED jumps to command.

WILL

Yes uh yes uh yes uh, yes ma'am Miss Virginia.

JED staring at WILL, is now at attention ready to fight.

WILL and MAC stand up too.

MAC to referee.

WILL

You gon hit me, man? Didn't you jus call me a cripple? Sounds about right.

JED

I'm not looking for no trouble Will. But I will find it.

WILL

Yeah and she's standing right behind you!

JED goes in for a punch, changes his mind and punches MAC instead.

MAC falls back and steadies himself.

VIRGINIA

What on earth! Jed, what are you doing?

JED

Will, I'm too good a man to hit a gimp. You keep your big mouth off Ms. Virginia, boy.

VIRGINIA

Will, you got something you wanna say to me?

WILL ignores her to tend to MAC.

WILL

You good, Mac? Didn't know he was gone up and do something like that.

MAC

Am I good? Am I good? Man Will! You gotta learn to keep your mouth closed if you ain't gonna be fighting ya own fights.

WILL

I didn't know sonofagun was a hot head!

MAC

Glad I could find out for ya!

WILL

You alright?

MAC

Man, I'm fine. Don't touch me. I gotta go home and explain this to Zella. Don't you be coming around expecting no meals for at least a week.

WILL

Well damn! I didn't hit you.

JED

Mac, I apologize that your boy got you here hit.

MAC exits. WILL, JED and VIRGINIA stand there.

VIRGINIA

I think, as the owner of this house, I have a right to know what was said about me. I don't care for no fighting in my home. This ain't jungle law in here, Will.

WILL

Wasn't nothing.

JED

Sure wasn't.

VIRGINIA

I do more for you people than anyone in this town, Will. You'd do right to stay in my graces. I thought they had it wrong about ya'll being violent...don't make me look foolish. My own, Jed, for goodness sakes.

JED

I'm sorry Miss Virginia.

WILL

Yes, Miss Ginny.

VIRGINIA feels a fire.

She gets closer to Will.

Exuding power.

VIRGINIA

I take enough shit here from men, I won't be taking it from Niggers too. You understand, me? JED? Turn that music, up. I ain't done celebratin.

She dances away from him.

*This ending tone is power, it surges off of Virginia.

SCENE 8. MAC and ZELLA's HOUSE. LATER

MAC comes home bruised from the punch, waking ZELLA who is startled by the damage.

ZELLA

Mac! Now what in sam hill happened to your face?

MAC

Oh, I'm fine, Zella. He had whiskey fist as it is.

ZELLA

Who?

MAC

Jed.

ZELLA

Jed? Why would Jed hit you?

MAC

Cuz he too big a man to hit Will. Can you get me something?

ZELLA gets MAC something for his eye.

ZELLA

Oh, lord. Will running his mouth again?

MAC

You already know.

ZELLA

And here you go getting right in the middle of it.

MAC

I was an innocent bystander, honey girl.

ZELLA

The second you sitting at a poker game drinking and carrying on you are no longer classified innocent.

What was Will on this time?

MAC

Aw, he got Jed all riled up about being with Virginia.

ZELLA

What he care about that for?

MAC

Said how you gon be with a white woman, when all them out here lying on your kind? Or something like that.

ZELLA

Oh, he talking about those things in the Bee?

MAC

You be reading that?

ZELLA

I see em from time to time. Seems more a yellow writin' than the news. Miss Virginia got em all over her house. Said we should read em, cuz it's getting dangerous out there.

MAC

Yeah, but fer who?

ZELLA sits down to look at him.

ZELLA

It makes me worried Mac. You been feeling it too? This tension in the air. I had Hannah to walk my deliveries with me today.

MAC

Well, that's good.

ZELLA

And, I went to deliver to Mrs. Leforts door and she didn't open it like she usually do. She just yelled from inside. Drop em off at the door and be on your way.

MAC

Well, you know her husband's a pervert maybe she was indisposed.

ZELLA

The whole route felt like that today. Closed doors and...I lost one house. No reason why just--we don't need your services.

MAC

They cut my hours back.

ZELLA

No, Mac. You been a good worker. The best.

MAC

Don't want anymore trouble coming out tween them and us.

ZELLA

Them and us. Still! THEM and US. Maybe that's it. Maybe that tension is just what it feels like waking up from a dream. Realizing here just ain't no different than there.

MAC

No, Ze. Things are changing.

ZELLA

Then they bout to get worse. I can feel that.

MAC

Well, we don't know that.

ZELLA

We been through this.

MAC

Folks just got to get comfortable is all.

ZELLA

Hmmm, are WE comfortable? Always tiptoeing round what they want.

MAC

I been having dreams Ze. Bad dreams. Fires. Folks screaming so loud my ears buzz well into the day. I-I been seeing bodies strung up, swinging...but they really floating...thousands of em above me. Babies ripped out of their mothers...I see teeth like dogs Ze, but they human...

ZELLA

Why you ain't tell me this, Mac?

MAC

(unconvinced)

They jus dreams...

ZELLA

I know we been feeling bad, down, cuz God ain't give us a child...

MAC

It still ain't too late.

ZELLA

That's what I'm getting at. Two years ago, a little more...you ask me and it'd be all I wanted. Nothing would make me happier than a child. Now, Mac, I think about bringing a baby in to this world and it don't even seem fair.

Space.

ZELLA

Coming up from Mississippi was one thing, that you could just expect this. But we left it behind us and came up here where it's supposed to be the good life, for every one. And, well when that air starts ta gettin' thick it feels like everything we left behind. Following us. So one day, it's gonna be following our baby too. And I can't think of putting my baby in danger of being less than human. And if it's a boy...Mac...I couldn't survive if they did to our son what they do to colored folks. I couldn't survive it.

MAC

I can't see this going on forever. It can't. Think of how far we is from where we came. It's changing. It's getting better, I swear it to ya, it's getting better, sweet Zella.

ZELLA

Not fast enough, Mac. Not nearly fast enough.

*The tone here is intimacy.

SCENE 9. VIRGINIA'S HOUSE. NEXT MORNING.

VIRGINIA and JED are in bed. VIRGINIA stretches, she's waking up.

She greets:

VIRGINIA

Good morning, Sweet Jed.

JED

Mornin' Ginny. How you feeling after last night...

He laughs.

VIRGINIA

Like my drink was too strong, the music too cheerful and my body was too...willing.

JED

Is that right?

VIRGINIA

Oh, what time is it? I have an early meeting...I'm gonna be late on account I was treating Sunday night like Saturday.

JED

You always got some meeting.

VIRGINIA

This is just a formality. They just needed the name of--well it don't matter. They want a name, they gon get a name and you and me...we can walk up the street and can't nobody touch us.

JED

What name?

VIRGINIA

They just want an end to all the public hysteria is all. They want to find the culprit of these heinous crimes. Give the town some peace.

JED

And how you gon provide that?

VIRGINIA

I didn't get this far without knowing how to give men what they want. Even if I gotta make it up.

JED

You make last night up?

VIRGINIA

Off the top of my head. Speaking on last night. I want Will Brown out of here.

JED

Aw, Ginny. Will ain't nothing. He was jus drinking. I handled him.

VIRGINIA

By punching Zella's husband. Oh, I saw.

JED

Either way, he won't be bringing you up again. He was jus drunk.

VIRGINIA

He's ungrateful. He's a grifter and a transient...been here two years just about. Now he's starting to stir up trouble and I'm starting to not even feel safe round him.

JED

Will do something to you?

VIRGINIA

Not yet, but I know the type when I see one. He would! Given the right circumstances.

JED

Ginny, Will practically crippled. He couldn't do nothing to you.

VIRGINIA

I *said* if the "circumstances" were RIGHT, Jed. You taking up for him?

JED

No, now, no I am not.

VIRGINIA

Good. I'll tell him myself, if we see him tonight. Now, I'm working hard to keep my businesses safe of scrutiny and I can't be associated with unsavory characters.

JED laughs.

VIRGINIA

What's funny about that?

JED

Nothing. Last night Will was carrying on about how white women are the unsavory characters these days. Little white girls got us shaking in our shoes.

VIRGINIA

Oh, did he?

JED

It's jus somethin--you mad at him and ya'll talkin the same way.

VIRGINIA

That is something ain't it.

Beat.

VIRGINIA

The name they want Jed--

JED

Mmmhmmm?

VIRGINIA

Is the name of a Black man. A face they can use as a symbol of all the attackers over the summer. One they can send to trial and then to jail to help settle all this business.

WILL enters. But not into their dimension.

He does a small, curled softshoe tap as their conversation continues.

JED

Well, good luck with that one. Can't punish nobody that ain't done nothin.

VIRGINIA

If they say he's guilty, he's guilty. We can't risk riots in the street, like them other cities. We need to put it to bed, for the good of the town. Losing one man...or risk even more.

JED

And you're gonna help them with that.

VIRGINIA

I'm going to ensure my survival above all, Jed. As always. It's just business.

*This tone is survival.

Even for Will.

Scene 10. MAC AND ZELLA's HOUSE. LATER.

WILL dances out of one scene and onto Zella and Macs front porch. ZELLA is at the door already pissed, but with a softness.

ZELLA

I don't really want you seein my husband, he got a black eye thanks to your black mouth, Will!

WILL

Zella, I know. I jus want to apologize.

ZELLA

He don't need your apologies! He need some rest...you got him out til damn near midnight smelling like smoke and doing lord knows what.

WILL

In my defense Zella, your husband is a grown man.

ZELLA

Well I think you're both a coupla no-good children.

WILL

Jus let Mac know...I'm turning over a new leaf. I'm only drinking ale from here on/ Zella. I'm only playing Rummy and not poker...and I won't ever get him hit on account of me /again.

ZELLA

Oh lord, save me!

ZELLA

You through?

A beat.

WILL

Is Hannah home?

ZELLA

You are really something else. No Hannah ain't home.

WILL

Well that's all then.

WILL turns to go.

ZELLA is amused.

ZELLA

You sweet on my cousin?

WILL

I jus...I enjoy her company.

ZELLA

She standing in for a teacher down at the Mercy School for Girls...she'll be off round 5 o'clock. You can walk her home if you feeling up for it.

WILL

Is that so? I will WILL my body to do jus that. Thanks Ze. You looking mighty fine today, by the way.

ZELLA

Bye Will. And don't be coming round for no meal this week! I ain't feeding ya!

*This tone is love of family.

HEADLINE: CURFEW SUGGESTED AFTER SEVERAL WHITE WOMEN ATTACKED BY UNIDENTIFIED BLACKS.

Protect yourselves and your women.

SCENE 11 . OUTSIDE. Later that evening.

HANNAH is exiting the school she works in to find WILL waiting for her.

HANNAH

Why, Will Brown. To what do I owe this visit.

WILL turns and smiles at her.

WILL

Zella mentioned where you might be, thought I could walk you home.

HANNAH

She talkin to you?

WILL

Jus barely.

HANNAH

You can walk me home. I'd appreciate it. You sure you gon be okay? You walked all the way here.

WILL

I'ma be just fine. I might slow you down a spell.

HANNAH

It's a beautiful night, we can take our time.

WILL

So youse teaching?

HANNAH

Jus setting in. Another teacher out having a baby.

WILL

Oh, I see.

HANNAH

Soooo...what are you getting into tonight? More trouble?

WILL

Me? Naw, naw, naw. I'll jus be playing cards with Miss Virginia and Jed, like I do. Nothing special. Iffen they ain't still mad at me either.

They walk.

They don't know what to say.

WILL

I've been thinking on some of the things you was talking about the other day, Ms. Hannah. About where you came from, about running away.

HANNAH

Oh, sometimes I just get to going...

WILL

A lot of what you were saying was new to me. But it was making sense. I thought it before but never had the mind to express it, to put it into words like that. You made me feel like the world was bigger than I'd known...

HANNAH is flattered.

ACTOR 1 and ACTOR 2 walk by as a couple.

Huddled up together.

WILL nods and waves, slightly.

WILL

Hi there, Miss Loebeck.

ACTOR 1 nods back.

HANNAH

Who's that?

WILL

Agnes Loebeck, she's a neighbor.

HANNAH

Some things really are different up here. You was sayin...

WILL

I just laid eyes on you and everything felt... I got something for you.

HANNAH

Will, you didn't.

WILL

I had to. I wanted to. Close your eyes.

HANNAH

Don't kiss me.

WILL

Not until you want me to.

HANNAH closes her eyes.

WILL

Put your hands out.

She does.

WILL pulls out an orange and puts it in her hand.

She looks at it.

HANNAH

An orange?

...

Oh, Will.

WILL

Got the fattest one I could find. That there probably just touched Florida not but a few days ago.

HANNAH

It's a good one.

WILL

Then why you look so sad?

HANNAH

I'm not! I'm...bittersweet.

WILL

Oh, I see.

She sniffs the orange

HANNAH

My thumbnail was stained orange. Popping so many these open.

WILL

Is that so?

HANNAH

It is.

WILL

Miss Hannah.

HANNAH

Yes, Will.

WILL

You got something you want to say? You looking at that orange like it stole your last piece of candy.

HANNAH

I'm scared to eat it.

...

I feel like one bite of this orange.

One taste-- Is going to take me back.

She stops herself.

WILL

Back to what? I know there's been something on the tip of our tongue.

Been feeling like you hiding it this whole time.

HANNAH

I'm not hiding anything.
I don't owe nobody nothing.

WILL
Alright.

HANNAH stops walking.

HANNAH
Now you ever hear of Eustis? Where I'm from?

WILL
I have not.

HANNAH
Well, it's a small town. In the middle of land but there's a big ol lake there. With beaches all the way round it. Lots of black folk, doing well and taking care of our own. Got our own little community, with a grocery store, a bank and a church. The colored folks stay to themselves and the whites stay to themselves, cept they didn't like too much that we was doing so good. They weren't too happy bout the fact that we didn't need their stores or services for much at all. But also, didn't want us on their side of town.

WILL
Right. We call that a lose lose.

HANNAH
Well, my uncle owned the grocery store. That was Zella's pap. And my brother Ezekiel, he did have a white friend. And that white friend was out with Zeke playing jacks on the street outside the store. It was the most normal of days Will. Unc was working, we was playing...the sun was brighter than bright. Zeke's friend got mad on account Zeke won the game. My brother was KNOWN to cheat now, it was a family joke. Zeke the Sneak. His friend ran home hollering about how he lost to a cheat...they was nine years old.

...

HANNAH
Fore we knew it they was riding through towns with hoods and fire on horseback as fast as you please. That's all they needed to hear, Will. Just a child, upset over a game of jacks was enough for them to come riding into our lives and burning them to the ground. They lit the whole town up, Will. I lost

two brothers in a fire at our house, Daniel and Ashley, who we called Bam. They shot my baby brother Zeke with a gun used on wild game. Nine years old. Jacks still in his hand.

HANNAH

I couldn't see nobody through the smoke--I was jus screaming for Zella. She found me and we ran out into the groves, out where we could maybe see clearly. Something I regret to this very day.

...

They was out there too. Had dragged my Unc out of his store, degraded him and lynched him right in front of me and his honey girl. We were so quiet, hiding there. I covered Zella's eyes. But he saw me, he sputtered--Look away, little girl. But--but I couldn't.

WILL

They got him.

HANNAH

You think you'll see a man FIGHT, FIGHT for his life...and I think he was but it was one man against ten, then twenty, then a crowd so big I couldn't see him anymore until they dispersed. And you just--something inside me cracked. Inside our whole family cracked that day Will. We scattered. My aunties all took a child and just split apart. My Unc was a good, law-abiding, god-fearing man and they didn't care about none of it. You can be good all your life and...

Zella and I hid beneath that orange tree that night.

And I just know we left some of us behind there too.

Watching our town burn into the sky. Leaving was the only power we had left.

That's what I ain't been talking about.

WILL

Miss Hannah, I don't know what to say. I jus can't believe you seen all that and even got the druthers to to still be standing.

HANNAH

Do I? Am I standing.

WILL

Right here in front of me.

There's a stillness between them.

WILL takes the orange from her hand and breaks it open for her.

He pushes the peels in his pockets.

HANNAH

Will you eat it with me?

WILL

Course I will.

He gives HANNAH some wedges, she bites into one.

WILL

Is that a good one?

HANNAH eagerly nods, she cries.

WILL eats his piece.

HANNAH

It is.

Will reaches out and brushes the trickle of juice running down her forearm.

She breathes and pushes her hair back out of her face.

HANNAH

I'm ready now.

WILL

For what?

HANNAH

For you to kiss me.

WILL leans in and does so.

*A rare bit of peace. The last bit of peace.

SCENE 12. MAC and ZELLA's HOUSE. THE NEXT DAY

ZELLA is hanging laundry from the line.

The day is bright. A mild late September.

She hums. HANNAH runs in urgent.

HANNAH

Zella! Ze--they arrested em!

ZELLA

Hannah! Arrested who?

HANNAH

Will. Mac. Bout forty of em. Came by they work place and rounded them up.

ZELLA

For what?

HANNAH

White couple said somebody attacked them last night. Said they beat the man up and raped the girl.

White teachers at the school, talking bout it. Making light. Said they gon sleep well.

ZELLA

No. Mac would never.

HANNAH

They don't care, they don't care, they don't care Zella. You don't see? They don't care about who would or wouldn't. Somebody gonna have to answer for this. They gon make sure of it.

ZELLA

We gotta go down to the jail then.

HANNAH

And do what? I went by there, there's a bunch of em, standing outside hollerin.

ZELLA

Let's find Ms. Virginia. She can help us.

HANNAH

You think she just may?

ZELLA

Well, she was with them last night. We got to get ours out of there. Let me talk to her.

*Pure fear.

POLICE ON HUNT FOR BLACK BEAST WHO ATTACKED AGNES LOEBECK.

Pretty, little Agnes Loebeck and her escort were attacked late Sunday night by Black assailant.

SCENE 13. JAILHOUSE. SAME TIME

MAC and WILL behind bars.

An ACTOR is there as well.

MAC

Let us out of here man! We didn't do nothing!

MAC kicks at something.

WILL

Mac, Mac...calm down that doesn't do anything for us.

MAC

The least they can do is tell us why the hell they got us in here. Packed in here like cows to the slaughter.

WILL

We'll be out soon enough. Every last negro in here been picked up and let go for something.

MAC

All these folks? At once? Oh no, Will. This about to be a big to do. You ever seen anything like this? And over what?

ACTOR

Agnes Loebeck.

MAC looks at him.

MAC

What'd you say, boy?

ACTOR

Agnes Loebeck. She said she was attacked and raped last night by a Colored man. So they about to find out who.

He hands them a paper.

ACTOR

They calling him the Black Beast.

MAC

The Black Beast? Oh lord, we moved from Boogeymen to BEASTS now! YOU HEAR THAT FELLAS!!! BEASTS. What in the world is WRONG WITH FOLKS!

WILL does a calming gesture as MAC starts to read the paper.

MAC

Agnes Loebeck....she live right across the way from us. You know her, Will?

WILL

Yeah, the Loebecks. I do know them. I say hi to Agnes from time to time.

MAC

Where you was last night?

WILL

Playing cards with Ms Virginia and Jed.

...

And fore that I was with Hannah.

We did see Agnes. She walked by with a man.

MAC

Ya say anything?

WILL

I said Hello, as I always do. I was well within my rights.

MAC

Were you?

WILL

Yeah, why you sound like that?

MAC

Cuz you didn't have me over. Y'all usually have me over when you playing cards.

WILL

It wasn't nothing personal Mac. We just didn't think of it. It was late. I got home and they was already playing. When you know me to pass up a game? *(pause)* Whatchu trying to get at, Mac?

MAC

I'm just tryin to figure out where you was last night. I see you most nights.

WILL

I came by to see you and Zella stopped me at the door! Woulda talked to ya at work if we had it.

MAC

Yeah, yeah. A little of everything, huh?

WILL

You think cuz I didn't see you I was out doing this mess? Since when Mac? Since when you been seeing me like that? Hmmm? The BLACK BEAST...is that me?

MAC

No.

WILL

I'm standing here in front of ya. Is this a BEAST? Half the time you got to to turn the cranks for me. Lift the bags up for me...you got to perform half my duties some days just so I can get a paycheck. And now you can look at me and question my...my ways of being a man?

MAC

No. No Will. That ain't right of me. I just feel...

MAC breaks down.

MAC

I just feel scared, Will. They got us in here like animals--like we ain't men. Like we ain't the same. They can do whatever they want to us. They come in here right now judge, jury and executioner if they want to. And we are made to be DUST. And not a court in this nation would bat an eye. They could

snuff us out and feel just fine setting down to dinner. Ya hear me, Will? I came up here to be a MAN. I came up here to live a life.

WILL

They gon figure out who did this OR who didn't do it like all those times before and we gon be on our way.

MAC

That's right.

WILL

Be eating Zella's cooking by dinnertime, I betcha.

MAC

That's right.

WILL and MAC make eye contact.

WILL points to his head, MAC follows.

WILL points to his heart, MAC follows.

*A tone of resilience. An internal lie.

HEADLINE: NEGROES PLANNING TO KILL ALL WHITES.

Arm yourselves from the terrorism of Blacks.

SCENE 14. VIRGINIA'S HOUSE. SAME TIME

ZELLA and HANNAH confront VIRGINIA in her home.

ZELLA

Miss Toomey.

VIRGINIA

Zella.

ZELLA

This is my cousin, Hannah.

She takes in Hannah and ignores her.

There's a mutual, immediate distrust.

ZELLA

Ms. Virginia. You heard about the arrests today?

VIRGINIA

I did! It boils my blood. They tried to take my Jed in! Luckily I was there to stop him and give them a sound alibi. Those people are out for blood! And Agnes Loebeck is about as honest as a wooden nickel! Her whole family is half outta their mind. I mean, if this really happened of course I PRAY they find the culprit. But, if there's anything we've learned about these times, the truth is hardly what matters.

ZELLA

Yes, exactly. Ms. Virginia they have Mac down there.

HANNAH

And Will! Your tenant Will Brown.

ZELLA

And we want...we NEED your assist getting them out of there.

VIRGINIA

What could I possibly do?

ZELLA

I don't know! What you did for Jed. Just give them an alibi so they don't get mixed up in all this mess.

VIRGINIA

I can't alibi for them if I don't know where they were. I could alibi for Jed because he's mine.

ZELLA

But you know Mac would never lay his hands on a woman like that. They don't know that.

VIRGINIA

I trust that the courts will be fair in finding the guilty party. Mac has nothing to worry about so he'll be returned to you.

ZELLA sees a new reality crack open.

ZELLA

But...it's not fair. Rounding up menfolk at their jobs and taking them to JAIL already ain't right.

VIRGINIA

There's nothing I can do. They wouldn't listen to a me anymore than a negro gal.

HANNAH

You just said that's how you got Jed free.

VIRGINIA

I'm not responsible for Mac or Will.

HANNAH

Will was HERE last night. With you and Jed.

VIRGINIA

No he wasn't.

HANNAH

Yes. He was. I left him here. I stood outside and watched him up to the doorway. He was trying to walk me home but his condition was acting up.

VIRGINIA

...

HANNAH

We went for a walk last night and I continued on and he came here to play cards. He said with Jed and Miss Ginny.

VIRGINIA

Did you see him walk in?

HANNAH

I'm sure I did.

VIRGINIA

And what time was this?

HANNAH

Early evening.

VIRGINIA

According to the papers the attack happened round midnight...plenty of time for that good for nothing to sneak back out and cause that girl harm.

JED enters.

HANNAH pushes past VIRGINIA.

HANNAH

Jed! Jed...were you here playing cards with Will last night?

JED looks at VIRGINIA, she shuts it down.

VIRGINIA

You two need to get out of my house right now.

HANNAH

Jed, I know he was here. They arrested them. All your friends. Will and Mac are sitting behind bars right now.

VIRGINIA

This has nothing to do with us. This is bigger than any of you know...this there's no stopping what's happening. Jed and I can't help you. We didn't see Will last night.

ZELLA starts to break down.

VIRGINIA

Everybody who knows that man knows he's a fast talking, boozin/, gambler. So raping ain't so far off from all that. Mac will be returned to you. GO. Leave us be.

HANNAH

That's not Will!

JED starts to usher the women out of the door.

HANNAH

Jed, please help us. You know this is wrong. Will wouldn't hurt nobody.

JED

I'm just one of them out there.

HANNAH

Jed, please.

ZELLA

Jed, don't do this.

ZELLA wails.

JED

Don't go downtown. Y'all need to stay up this way and stay indoors. I'm sorry.

The door is closed.

VIRGINIA

Jed.

JED
Ms. Ginny.

VIRGINIA
No one else who comes to that door will enter this house.

JED
Yes Ma'am.

VIRGINIA
Pour me a drink, Jed.

*A tone of the continued cycle.

SCENE 15.

JAILHOUSE. MAC is sitting with his head in his hands. WILL pacing.
ACTOR 2 enters as guard.

ACTOR 2:

You're free to go.

MAC

We're free?! Oh thank the lord. Come on Will.

ACTOR 2 Pushes Will back.

ACTOR 2

You're in the lineup.

WILL

What's going on?

A commotion.

MAC

You gotta do a lineup Will.

WILL

A lineup? For real?

MAC

It gon be alright. You wasn't there.

WILL

It was dark out, you think...you trust this?

MAC

(shakes his head)

I'll do what I can do.

There's a roar of voices from the outside.

WILL

What in the world is that?

WILL and MAC look at each other.

WILL

Don't leave me here.

MAC

You gon be alright man.

A long eye contact.

MAC

I'll see what I can do.

MAC exits.

WILL

There's nothing you can do.

ZELLA awaits.

They run to hug each other.

ZELLA

Where's Will, Mac?

They exit.

AGNES LOEBECK PINS ATTACK ON WILL BROWN

Police take assailant to Loebeck house surrounded by mob. "That's him," confirms Loebeck.

SCENE 16. THE TORNADO

A shift.

There's a dynamic change. WILL is alone (?) But everything is moving fast, around him. It's like being in the center of a tornado. Everyone is gone (?) in character--and are now just voices, crowding in, the tornado itself.

Within this tornado:

A projection montage of white mobs.

The sound of the mob, deafening.

Gunshots.

Hoots and hollers.

A shadowed cut out of a lynched body.

A projection of flames engulfs it and it all disappears.

A projection of an orange tree.

ACTOR

He was huge, like a monster. He had red eyes. And his breath smelled like alcohol. He was crazed and overwhelmed me.

ACTOR

He was Seven feet and the size of three men.

ACTOR

I'd never forget his face. That's the animal. Right there. Number 4.

ACTOR

Turn to your left.

A flashbulb.

ACTOR

Turn to face us.

A flashbulb.

WILL

I didn't do nothing! I-I--HELP ME!

ACTOR

AGNES LOEBECK PINS ATTACKER AS WILL BROWN.

JED

I heard he had relations with the Loebeck girl, gave her a ring and everything.

VIRGINIA

What's done is done. What's one man for the good of all others?

ZELLA

I've enclosed a photo of yet another lynching.

VIRGINIA

I won't be taking it from niggers too.

MAC

15,000 SURROUND THE COURTHOUSE SEEKING JUSTICE

JED

Thank God they are keeping our streets safe out here.

MAC

I will not give up this man!

ACTOR

ANGRY CROWD NEARLY LYNCHES MAYOR!

ACTOR

We set off in the direction of the northern star.

ACTOR

You even look at a white person the wrong way...

VIRGINIA

THE BLACK BEAST IS HANDED OVER TO THE CROWD!

ZELLA

My children deserved better and I knew we did too.

ACTOR

I knew we did too.

JED

I knew we did too.

VIRGINIA

I knew WE did too.

MAC

I knew...

COMPANY:

JUSTICE IS SERVED WITH LYNCHING OF WILL BROWN.

Tornado stops.

It's silent again.

HANNAH Enters.

HANNAH

On Sunday, September 28, a group of youths gathered in south Omaha and began a march to the Douglas County courthouse. Eventually, thousands of angry people gathered at the courthouse and by evening, the Omaha police and city officials inside the courthouse were virtual prisoners. The size of the crowd was estimated as between 5,000 and 15,000 people. By 8:00 p.m. the mob had begun firing on the courthouse with guns they looted from nearby stores. Two people were killed in the gunfire. By 8:30 the mob had set fire to the building and prevented fire fighters from extinguishing the flames. Inside, Will Brown moaned to Sheriff Mike Clark,

WILL

"I am innocent, I never did it, my God I am innocent."

HANNAH

The mayor refused to give Will up, risking his life in the process, as the mob proceeded to lynch him as well. He was shot down from the light pole and spared.

VIRGINIA

Brown ended up in the hands of the crazed mob.

WILL

When they lifted me off the ground
I felt weightless
Something came through like a flash.
A piece of childhood I had long forgotten
Weightless.

ZELLA

He was beaten nearly unconsciousness. His clothes were torn off by the time he reached the building's doors.

WILL

The heaviest thing in me was fear...
But I could barely make that out
Fear is a pounding for me...
A boomboom boomboom boomboom
But I couldn't hear that over the yelling and the hollering...

JED

Then he was dragged to a nearby lamp pole on the south side of the courthouse at 18th and Harney around 11:00 p.m.

WILL

The sting of random punches thrown
Fell upon my eyes, my jaw, my neck...wherever they could
My arms flailed

HANNAH

The mob roared when they saw Will, and a rope was placed around his neck.

WILL

Someone pulled off my shoe
And silly of me, I thought “hey, I’m gon need that back.”
Their hands gripped hard at me
Passing me across the sea of em
Like a boat...

ACTOR

Will was hoisted in the air, his body spinning.

WILL

I turned my head one way, I know I was hollerin myself
But they couldn’t hear
It wouldna made no difference if the only sound was me
Their minds were made up
And they knew it
And I knew it

ACTOR

He was riddled with bullets.

MAC

His body was then brought down, tied behind a car, and towed to the intersection of 17th and Dodge.

WILL

I searched...I searched everywhere in any eye
For someone who had known me
Someone I could cling to
Someone I could say goodbye to
And I saw not one

HANNAH

Wills body was burned with fuel taken from nearby red danger lamps and fire truck lanterns. Later, pieces of the rope used to lynch Brown were sold for 10 cents each.

WILL

Spit shooting out of their yellow teeth
Noses snarled like dogs
Fangs bared and wanting blood

The Blood of the Black Beast as they'd called me...

ACTOR

Will's charred body was dragged through the city's downtown streets.

WILL

The Black. Beast.

ZELLA

Where they took pictures....smiling....posing around his remains. Some still wearing their church clothes.

WILL

Not Will as my friends called me.

Willie like my mama said.

Big Boy like my Pa.

Slick like my grandmammy.

Or Will Brown, sweet as a lover.

Hannah...

VIRGINIA

A grand jury sought 189 indictments, only a few were convicted on minor charges.

WILL

Not one of those names could be found now.

The Black Beast had been born.

MAC

The riot made the front page of the New York Times, where it was reported that the majority of Omahans were "not only not ashamed but actually pleased by the work of the mob."

WILL

After a while you stop feeling anything at all

And you wonder if you're dead yet...

Which bullet was it?

Which tug of the rope did it?

HANNAH

Two days later in Elaine, Arkansas 237 Black sharecroppers would be lynched in the culminating event that would end what would later be called, The Red Summer.

WILL

You just surrender to the inevitable
The hate of it.

HANNAH

We didn't see this coming.

WILL

The fate of it.

HANNAH

I wish I had walked in with you

...I wish you had stayed with me.

He quiets her.

His hand on her face, she cherishes it.

WILL

I brought you something.

HANNAH closes her eyes and holds out her hands.

WILL regards the orange, he puts in her hands.

WILL

Look away, little girl.

HANNAH nods.

She just stares at the orange, she sits underneath a light pole.

Without regard to her bare knees.

She eats the orange.

Everything stops.

WILL

And as for the grave they put me in.

A hole in potters field.

What was left of me to bury

Just one word to sum up the life I'd known.

Lynched.

The city bustles with migrants again. Their voices overlapping. Their suitcases at the ready, they keep moving.

VOICES OVERLAPPING

I am enclosing a picture of a lynching again.

VOICES

I had grown up knowing that white folks ruled everything and to not fall in line was to risk the very breathe you was breathing.

We'd never see them again.

Everybody need family whether they blood or not.

But the difference was...you knew who the enemy was. Here, you don't always know who the enemy is.

We'd heard it was wonderful.

END OF PLAY.