

On The Nature Of The Dark Matter That Dominates The Present Mean Mass Density Of The Universe

by

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DESCRIPTION

Four characters become caught up in an academic controversy involving a charge of “liberal bias” by a group dedicated to a conservative agenda, a charge that also becomes mixed with questions of racial identity.

CHARACTERS

- LILLIE PERKINS, professor - white with African ancestry
- HANNAH MORGAN, student - white with African ancestry
- MITCHELL PALMER, student - African American
- LAWRENCE BOALS, Perkin’s literary agent - white - British/Irish

PERKINS, in most scenes, will have a stand-up leather briefcase, with the opening at the top.

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SCENE 1

PERKINS’ classroom, first meeting of the class. PALMER and MORGAN seated upstage. PERKINS stands at a lectern downstage.

PERKINS: Welcome to your class on Contracts and Property, otherwise known as “The Bottom Line.” That was my lame attempt at a joke -- they don’t come often, so I encourage you to groan when they do. In this cross-disciplinary class -- and by “cross-disciplinary” I mean reading more than the dull text of your dull textbooks -- you will learn those “laws” of contracts and property that are required by your station in life -- but you will also learn --

PALMER raises his hand holding a textbook.

PERKINS: -- that far from being “sacred writ,” these “laws” are also a kind of mythology that people have used to cover up a multitude of sins.

PALMER’s hand still up.

PERKINS: Yes, it is true my lawyers-to-be -- laws controlling property and contracts do not come down like the Ten Commandments -- there is no Great Lawyer in the sky, I am afraid to say -- instead, they come out of the down-and-dirty power struggles between

those that have and those that don't have but surely want to have more than they have. I see I already have a question on deck. Yes, Mr. --

PERKINS consults her seating chart.

PERKINS: -- Palmer?

PALMER stands and comes downstage, faces the audience.

PALMER: Professor Perkins?

PERKINS: We've established that.

PALMER: This is a course on contracts and property?

MORGAN comes downstage on the opposite side. She has PALMER in her sights.

PERKINS: Yes.

PALMER: That is what we are paying for, right?

PERKINS: I take it these questions lead to something?

MORGAN: Who is that man?

PALMER: Because we just heard you declare something about "mythologies" --

MORGAN: Sharp --

PALMER: I thought maybe we had wandered into a class on fiction.

MORGAN: -- sharp-tongued --

PALMER: It's not a class about fictions, is it, Professor Perkins?

MORGAN: Obnoxious --

PERKINS: Just my luck.

PALMER: Because if you teach us --

PERKINS: The rough beast slouches --

PALMER: -- that the free-enterprise system that conserves our liberty --

MORGAN: Handsome --

PALMER: -- and keeps professors like you employed --

PERKINS: My very own conservative watchdogs have arrived.

PALMER: -- is just a "mythology" -- well --

MORGAN: No, toothsome -- "toothsome"?

PALMER: If you mean Students for a Free Academics --

MORGAN: But "toothsome" he is.

PALMER: -- then, yes, we have arrived --

PERKINS: It's only the first class, Mr. Palmer --

MORGAN: Too bad he's got --

PERKINS: -- at least give me time to set my liberal ducks in order --

MORGAN: -- shitty politics --

PERKINS: -- before the SFA takes its standard wild and inaccurate gunshots --

PALMER: We are not trying to impose --

PERKINS: "Ingénue" is not your group's strong suit, Mr. Palmer.

MORGAN: -- what a handsome face -- but damn!

PALMER: We don't want to interfere --

MORGAN: I am desiring --

PERKINS: Then go back to your seat --

MORGAN: -- what should dry me right up --

PERKINS: -- because you're interfering right now --

PALMER: But we are here to keep a watch on you, and we do want to hear the truth.

PERKINS: You'll hear what's right.

MORGAN: But wet and in a sweat am I over him!

PERKINS: And they'll all hear it when the honored member of the Students for a Free Academics goes back to his seat.

PALMER does not move.

PALMER: Not the color of their skin but the content of their character --

PERKINS: What are you talking about?

MORGAN: What is he talking about?

PALMER: We know about your mixed-raced background, Professor --

PERKINS: It's not exactly a secret --

PALMER: -- the liberal "white-black" woman --

PERKINS: So that invalidates what I say?

PALMER: -- you have it in your textbook -- mixing laws and "mythologies" -- an example of what the SFA sees as liberal bias --

PERKINS: It's your past, too --

MORGAN: Her past is like mine --

PALMER: And that is where you're wrong -- that past ain't mine, never was mine -- we live different, we won't need it to get our jobs.

MORGAN: Then I don't want none of it either!

PALMER shoots MORGAN a "look." MORGAN does not look away.

PALMER: Not the color of their skin but the content of their character --

PERKINS: If their character had any content --

PALMER: Let's all stick to the real truth.

MORGAN: You make my thighs hum!

PALMER backs up to his seat. PERKINS turns and catches MORGAN staring up PALMER, which startles MORGAN, who moves back to her seat. PERKINS faces the audience.

PERKINS: Let me tell you all a story.

Transition.

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SCENE 2

PERKINS in BOALS' office.

PERKINS: He wasn't rude -- exactly.

BOALS: So, you told him about --

PERKINS: Told them --

BOALS: -- about the memoir?

PERKINS: -- the memoir --

BOALS hands her a Scotch.

PERKINS: -- thanks -- all of them -- not just him.

BOALS: Of course, all of them. But about the memoir --

PERKINS: And humans as property and corrupted contracts --

BOALS: In the first minutes of your first class --

PERKINS: I was a little -- provoked --

BOALS: Because the memoir comes in, if I remember, in lecture six, on the coattails of --

PERKINS: I know the sequence --

BOALS: And it also comes out later --

PERKINS: Point taken -- he just -- pushed my --

BOALS: Lillie? Hey -- you couldn't have been that surprised --

PERKINS: No.

BOALS: The dark ooze of conservatism --

PERKINS: I just didn't think they would --

BOALS: Because you are Lillie Perkins?

PERKINS: Of course.

BOALS: The Lillie Perkins.

PERKINS: The one, the only --

BOALS: But didn't they just so-to-speak piss on the shoes of an emeritus at the school? a prize-winner, award-gatherer -- a bigger fish than you, and yet the president --

PERKINS: The "liberal bias" charge is bogus --

BOALS: So what? These guys don't shy away from shitting on the altar, so why would you think they'd --

PERKINS: Because.

BOALS: Because you are --

PERKINS: The Lillie Perkins.

BOALS toasts.

BOALS: To the Lillie Perkins, then!

PERKINS: All right, so I wasn't that surprised -- but if the SFA wants to shoot at me, I'll start them off early. I don't have time for being defensive.

BOALS: Or the skill.

PERKINS: You don't think so?

BOALS: Lillie Perkins is not as hard-boiled as she thinks she is. She's not. Then how'd he get to you so easily? Your house, your rules -- and he's, bam!, got you telling them about great-great-great-grandfather William and great-great-great-grandmother Ellen --

PERKINS: All right --

BOALS: -- and their escape from slavery --

PERKINS: All right --

BOALS: How did that happen to such a tough gal?

They drink in silence.

PERKINS: I'd prefer to talk about --

BOALS: Lillie?

PERKINS: Yes?

BOALS: Lillie?

PERKINS: What?

BOALS: Your face is not finished with this business.

PERKINS: You're watching my face?

BOALS: It's a good face to watch.

PERKINS: All right -- a woman -- sitting near him --

MORGAN steps into a light.

BOALS: Picture the seating chart --

PERKINS: I can't -- remember -- but she had glued her eyes to him.

PALMER steps into a light.

PERKINS: And he ignored it. At first.

BOALS: And then?

PERKINS: He locked onto her. And she did not look away.

BOALS: And?

PERKINS: That stuck with me. He's black and she's white.

MORGAN and PALMER circle each other.

BOALS: White-looking.

PERKINS: Yes.

BOALS: Because you are the expert in that.

BOALS puts down his drink.

BOALS: Don't tell me -- show me. I'm this Mitchell Palmer. You are the nameless she.

PERKINS puts down her drink. They look at each other.

MORGAN and PALMER come together, move together.

BOALS: What was she thinking?

PERKINS: I don't know.

BOALS: You must have estimated --

PERKINS: I don't know.

BOALS: Think of the chart.

PERKINS: Hannah Morgan.

Suddenly PERKINS pulls back, though she doesn't take her eyes off BOALS.

BOALS: What do you know?

PERKINS: That can't be right.

BOALS: Lillie? (*kiddingly*) Lillie?

PERKINS: Jealous.

BOALS: That must have been unexpected.

PERKINS: I brought it out as anger.

BOALS: Your authority undercut.

PERKINS: So, I marked my territory.

BOALS: And while being righteous --

PERKINS: Lust marks its own territory.

BOALS: And there you are, lectern-bound, being so adult.

PERKINS: And serious. Logical.

BOALS: Selling that memoir.

PERKINS: And coming up dry.

BOALS: And how hard-edged did you say Lillie Perkins was?

MORGAN and PALMER stop moving.

PERKINS and BOALS move apart just slightly, and this "just slightly" breaks their gaze.

MORGAN and PALMER do the motions as PERKINS describes, and they mimic what BOALS and PERKINS do.

PERKINS: At the end of class she put her hand on him.

BOALS: Show me.

PERKINS puts her hand on BOALS' arm.

PERKINS: He noted it -- go ahead, note it. Then he gently picked it up -- go ahead -- and gave it back to her. And she --

PERKINS puts her hand back on BOALS. BOALS goes to do as before, to lift the hand off.

PERKINS: No. He picked it up, yes -- but then he -- brought it to his mouth --

PALMER gently nips the flesh on MORGAN's knuckles.

BOALS does not do anything with PERKINS' hand.

PERKINS takes her hand back.

MORGAN takes her hand back.

PERKINS picks up her drink, turns away from BOALS.

MORGAN and PALMER exit out of their lights.

PERKINS: You'd have thought they were a couple --

BOALS: Abetted by your seating chart.

PERKINS sips, fidgets.

PERKINS: Lawrence, you said you had something --

BOALS: Good time for a shift. And something it is I have for you. Why are we drinking my expensive single malt? Hmmm?

PERKINS: No.

BOALS: Yes.

PERKINS: You have a contract?

BOALS: For the woman in contracts. To be celebrated with matchless gaiety.

PERKINS: It's real?

BOALS: Your memoir will be --

Shift of lights. PERKINS addresses the audience.

PERKINS: The memoir will be published. Fucking A. Finally!

BOALS addresses the audience.

BOALS: She already has several best-selling books -- in contracts and property, that is --

PERKINS: They're so gripping!

BOALS: She's famous in a small circle.

PERKINS: But new editions each year, updates --

BOALS: Bring in its own pretty penny.

PERKINS: But the memoir -- that comes from the heart.

BOALS: That realm of dark matter.

PERKINS: You cynic!

BOALS: You mean someone in his right mind.

PERKINS: Not all hearts -- and not my heart.

BOALS: She really wants to tell about her memoir. Now liberated by a contract.

BOALS smiles, raises his glass. Light out on him, stays up on PERKINS.

PERKINS: My memoir.

PALMER and MORGAN appear as William and Ellen, the main characters of PERKINS' memoir. They will also speak other voices.

PALMER is dressed in a torn shirt and pants, shoeless. MORGAN is dressed in a simple torn dress, shoeless. Think of a scene from some edition or a melodramatic theatre production of Uncle Tom's Cabin.

PERKINS: My great-great-great-grandparents -- my primal sources. William. And Ellen.

PALMER [as slavemaster]: I'll show you how to give a white man respect!

PERKINS: She, white; her husband, black --

MORGAN: Please, please, kind sir, don't hurt my husband!

PERKINS: But her white was a dark white --

PALMER [as slavemaster]: Quiet, wench, or you'll regret the day you were born.

MORGAN: *(eye-roll to heaven)* I already do!

PERKINS: A slave bred by the master --

MORGAN now mimes as if "the master" is taking her from behind.

MORGAN: Ah, ah, ah, ah --

PERKINS: -- but nothing else from the "master" -- except the constant lash and the occasional fuck.

"The master" finishes with MORGAN.

PALMER: Don't give them no cause to strike you, my angel --

MORGAN: I am dirt!

PALMER: God will find us a way. I can suffer this man's lash --

MORGAN [as slavemaster]: We'll see about that!

MORGAN and PALMER fall as if thrown to their knees.

PERKINS: They couldn't take any more.

PALMER: I can't take no more, Ellen.

MORGAN: I got no heart left, William.

PERKINS: Only the two choices every slave had.

PALMER: We leave --

MORGAN: Or we die. That's it.

PERKINS: They did not die.

BOALS brings on a pair of green sunglasses and a hat for MORGAN and a carpet bag for PALMER. They stand as if in a diorama -- white master, subservient slave.

PERKINS: They lived by an ingenious illusion. She pretended to be his white master --

Under PERKINS' words, MORGAN and PALMER begin to sing to the tune of Stephen Foster's "De Camptown Races."

[From FOSTER'S Plantation Melodies, No. 3. "Gwine to Run All Night," or De Camptown Races, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camptown_Races]

MORGAN & PALMER: De coon dogs, dey be lickin' our trail -- Doo-dah! doo-dah!

PERKINS: She wrapped herself in bandages, pretended to have weak eyes --

MORGAN & PALMER: Break our bones and t'row us in de jail -- Oh! doo-dah day!

PERKINS: Traveling to Philadelphia with her "property."

MORGAN, PALMER & PERKINS: Oh! day-doo-dah day!

MORGAN and PALMER do a shuffle/cakewalk move, then stop, hold pose.

MORGAN & PALMER: Gwine to run all night!

PERKINS: They used property and contracts to free themselves --

They do another shuffle/cakewalk, then hold the pose.

MORGAN & PALMER: Gwine to run all day!

PERKINS: Loved that irony!

MORGAN and PALMER suddenly break out of their pose.

MORGAN & PALMER: *(screaming)* And what we really wanna do is tear out their fucking hearts!

They immediately snap back into their pose. PERKINS breaks out of her “professorial” pose.

PERKINS: I really wanna tear out their fucking hearts, too!

PERKINS snaps back into her “rational” pose.

MORGAN & PALMER: *(singing)* Gwine to run all night! Gwine to run all day!

MORGAN, PALMER & PERKINS: I’ll bet my money on de bobtail nag / Somebody bet on de bay.

Everyone holds a final “button.” PALMER and MORGAN take a pose.

PERKINS: And they made it -- they actually made it --

A strobe/snapshot. PALMER and MORGAN undress. BOALS brings them contemporary clothes and takes their shed clothes.

PERKINS: Eventually to England to escape the Fugitive Slave law, then back here, and so on and so on and so on down to me.

PERKINS touches her skin.

PERKINS: This skin?

PERKINS displays her skin.

PERKINS: All this time you thought it was -- and that I was -- I get that all the time!

MORGAN and PALMER are now as they were at the top of the show. BOALS comes back into the light. MORGAN and PALMER move to their seats in the class.

PERKINS: So, when do I sign?

BOALS: As soon as the papers arrive.

PERKINS: At our price?

BOALS: Yes. It’s not a sin to want the money.

PERKINS: Such confidence.

BOALS: You own what you know, and you can parlay that into anything you want --

PERKINS: My intellectual “property.”

BOALS: Why do you think we call them “properties” around here? In my business, the word “contract” --

BOALS with an open hand.

BOALS: -- should never mean “contract.”

BOALS makes a fist. He gives PERKINS the sign of the cross.

BOALS: Enjoy. I know someone’s in there who can do just that.

PERKINS muses for a few moments, then looks up and give BOALS a big-thank you smile, which he returns. Transition.

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SCENE 3

MORGAN at the café: table, chairs, a coffee cup. PALMER, wearing a backpack, stands, not leaving, not sitting.

MORGAN: It was just by chance --

PALMER: By chance --

MORGAN: I swear --

PALMER: That our paths would cross right here.

MORGAN: Most every day I come here for tea and study --

PALMER: And I have a class right over there just about this time.

MORGAN: That so?

PALMER: That’s so.

MORGAN: What a coincidence. What else would you call it?

PALMER: That depends.

MORGAN: On?

PALMER: Why you know my schedule.

MORGAN: Who says I know about “schedule”? Is this how you treat a body who simply says hello to your oh-so-serious face?

PALMER: “Ingénue” is not your strong suit.

MORGAN: You should see how grim you look.

PALMER: I have reason.

MORGAN: You're thinking I'm a snake in the grass.

PALMER: We are not the most beloved around campus.

MORGAN: Hard work keeping that SFA party line pure.

PALMER: I don't think you're a snake in the grass.

MORGAN: You should try trusting a little more like that, Mitchell Palmer -- it'll keep that high dark forehead of yours wrinkle-free.

PALMER slings off his backpack, puts it on the empty chair.

PALMER: All right --

MORGAN: What?

PALMER: Let's call it chance.

MORGAN raises her hand to display her knuckle.

MORGAN: You bit my knuckle. See, I haven't washed it -- not that you could see it from that far away -- not a snake in the grass at all. So why not sit?

PALMER sits.

PALMER: Costs nothing to sit.

MORGAN: Treat me to a chai.

PALMER: You laid that hand on me -- maybe it's me who'd like a chai out of your pocket.

MORGAN: Is something out of my pocket what you'd like?

PALMER mimes putting a hand on an arm.

PALMER: Why did you --

MORGAN: Your attention -- to know more about what you were doing.

PALMER: With Perkins?

MORGAN: With all of it.

PALMER: "It" is big and indefinite.

MORGAN: So, let me be more specific.

PALMER: I have five minutes before class.

MORGAN: I have three minutes of what I want to say. Did you like doing what you were doing to Perkins today?

PALMER: It needs to be done.

MORGAN: "It" is big and indefinite.

PALMER: Then this: arrogance made to answer for its arrogance -- blindness made to see.

MORGAN: Your forehead just got really smooth.

PALMER: Did you like what I was doing?

MORGAN: All that "not the color of your skin but the content of your character" -- really?

PALMER: I'm not stupid -- my skin gets me things -- I trade off it --

MORGAN: And they trade off you -- a black conservative --

PALMER: I've got it under control. But it's not just the politics -- not just the hunt --

MORGAN: Because you got a core, right?

They lock eyes for a moment.

PALMER: Because I got a core -- right.

MORGAN: A heart.

PALMER: In which I believe. And I got a class.

PALMER gets up, grabs his bag.

PALMER: Tea here every day?

MORGAN: But can't guarantee it -- things get changeable. Be better to set a time.

PALMER: A date.

MORGAN: Improves the odds.

PALMER: I still don't trust you.

MORGAN holds up her hand.

MORGAN: I will not wash 'til we meet again.

PALMER points to her hand.

PALMER: I'm not sure why --

MORGAN: I'm glad you're not sure.

They lock eyes.

MORGAN: Tomorrow would be good.

PALMER: Tomorrow, then.

Transition.

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SCENE 4

PALMER sets the classroom for the next scene -- chairs, lectern -- talking or singing verses from "Walk, Jaw Bone." (See below)

BOALS, wearing a white half-mask and dressed as a Master, grabs MORGAN and takes her from behind. When he is done, BOALS discards MORGAN, who falls to her hands and knees. BOALS turns his back on her and sits in a chair to get himself ready to leave.

PERKINS watches the scene. PERKINS steps forward, wearing a black half-mask and carrying a knife. She caresses MORGAN's face, then stands over BOALS, knife raised. MORGAN, seeing this, rushes to embrace BOALS, to protect him. This confuses PERKINS.

But MORGAN, without BOALS being able to see her, gestures to PERKINS to hand her the knife, which PERKINS does. MORGAN slides it in between herself and BOALS, and the expectation is that she will stab BOALS.

However, MORGAN kills herself, and her body slumps to the floor at BOALS' feet. BOALS pushes MORGAN away with his foot and then spins and catches PERKINS' wrist, holding her tight. PERKINS pulls out another knife.

BOALS: I think, my dear, that we could use a contract.

Freeze. PALMER, finished setting up, takes off PERKINS' mask, unlocks BOALS' grip on PERKINS, takes off the props. Then he and MORGAN take their seats.

[From "Walk, Jaw Bone" (1844) -- pages 210-211 from "Minstrel Songs, Old and New" (1883)] -- <http://www.bluegrassmessengers.com/jawbone--version-1-original-minstrel-lyrics.aspx>

PALMER: Dey made me a scar-crow in de field,
And a buzzard come to get his meal,
But in his face I blowed my bref,
An' he was a case for ole Jim Death.

Next come a hungry eagle down,
Oh! gosh thinks I, dis nig's done drown;
But he winked an' cried "I'se de bird ob de free
And won't eat de meat ob slabery."

Den down de bank I see'd de ship,
I slide down dar on de bone ob my hip;
I crossed de drink an' yare I am,
If I go back dar, I'll be damn!

Transition.

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SCENE 5

PERKINS at the lectern, briefcase beside her. PALMER and MORGAN are in their seats, PALMER with his hand raised. He holds a notebook.

PERKINS: And that concludes our work for today. Do your reading, and don't forget to think about it!

PALMER beelines to PERKINS, trailed by MORGAN.

PALMER: Why didn't you call on me, Professor?

PERKINS: Because you make the same point in every session --

PALMER: Are you saying I don't have the right to say --

PERKINS: I'm saying we have a syllabus.

PALMER: But you constantly shift off the subject --

PERKINS: If you have more complaints, you know my office hours --

PALMER: So that's how you would silence me.

PERKINS: Mr. Palmer --

PALMER: I have a right to voice --

PERKINS: But you don't have a teaching contract to teach --

PALMER: Isn't there a contract between teacher and student -- in fact --

PALMER consults his notes.

PALMER: -- you said as much on --

PERKINS: Did I?

PALMER: You did.

PALMER flips some pages.

PALMER: And contracts -- not to be broken -- the resulting bad faith --

PERKINS: Destroys trust --

PALMER: Your words.

PERKINS appraises him, then turns to MORGAN.

PERKINS: Agree?

PALMER goes to say something, but PERKINS puts up a hand to hold him off.

PERKINS: (to MORGAN) Do you agree with him?

PALMER ignores the hand.

PALMER: In a class about --

PERKINS: (to PALMER) You are in favor of free expression --

PALMER: Of course.

PERKINS: Then let Ms. Morgan express.

PALMER: Not until --

PERKINS: (to MORGAN) Some tongues seem to have more privileges than others.

PALMER: Sarcasm isn't --

PERKINS: Mr. Palmer, let go of the bone because I am not going to debate you right now.

PALMER: It's exactly the time and [place] --

PERKINS: It's exactly not. I'm on to you, Mr. Palmer, you and the Students for Free Academics, but this is still my house and still my rules.

PALMER: So, you deliberately cut off a student in mid-sentence --

PERKINS: When we've all heard that sentence several dozen times, and it gets in the way --

PALMER: Which means you'll also ignore an opposing argument.

PERKINS: Not if I hear an actual argument --

PALMER: So now I don't know how to argue --

PERKINS: An argument with reason -- but I'm not hearing that -- I'm just hearing complaints.

PALMER: So academic freedom's not a "rule" in your house?

PERKINS: I have a rule against whining.

PALMER: And anyone who disagrees is a whiner --

PERKINS: Mr. Palmer, you may be disagreeable, but don't flatter yourself that you or your SFA are actually disagreeing, with me or anyone else, because I haven't heard one well-seasoned, cool-headed intelligible rebuttal to anything the class has to offer. You and the SFA act just like arsonists --

PALMER: Now were criminals --

PERKINS: Because you set things on fire, kill off whatever's inside, then come back to sift the trash.

PALMER: You know, Professor, you're right -- this is not the time and place because you won't debate me. Dismiss me, belittle me, cut me off -- but go face-to-face, explain your actions, tell us why you continually hate the traditions that have made this country great - - I'm sorry for having taken up your time.

PERKINS: So that's how the peacock looks in full bloom. Somehow, I don't think you're sorry at all.

PALMER turns to exit, looks at MORGAN.

PERKINS: You didn't answer my earlier question.

MORGAN looks at PALMER, then back to PERKINS.

MORGAN: (*slight hesitation*) Yes. Of course, I agree.

PALMER: Let's go.

PALMER and MORGAN exit.

Abrupt shift into harsh downlight. PERKINS pulls a knife out of her briefcase and raises it, and from her comes a low growl, her body tensed to kill. PALMER and BOALS gather on either side of her.

PALMER: Do it.

BOALS: Don't do it.

PALMER: Do it.

BOALS: Don't.

As they continue this back and forth (they can ad lib the "good angel/bad angel" routine), the low growl ratchets up into a scream, capped off by a suddenly downward stab of the knife, and then silence.

PALMER & BOALS: You've just cut your own throat.

PERKINS: It didn't feel that bad.

PERKINS examines the knife, licks the edge, she puts the knife away, regains her composure. PALMER and BOALS exit.

Transition.

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SCENE 6

MORGAN moves to catch up with PERKINS.

MORGAN: Professor Perkins?

PERKINS: Ah.

MORGAN: Look, I'm --

PERKINS: Hannah Morgan. Middle name Susan.

MORGAN: Right. Look, I just wanted to -- you know, back there --

PERKINS: I shouldn't have --

MORGAN: Look, I own something I think you'll find -- interesting. Given what you've mentioned -- about --

PERKINS: I've mentioned a lot.

MORGAN: About the -- memoir -- family background --

PERKINS: You're actually interested in that.

MORGAN: Whether I wanna be or not.

PERKINS: I don't know what that means, but all right. I've got a meeting with the Dean --

MORGAN: I'll make an appointment.

PERKINS: Make it soon.

PERKINS moves on. MORGAN moves to follow.

MORGAN: He's really very nice -- Mitchell --

PERKINS: You know about his group?

MORGAN: Yes.

PERKINS: They've caused a lot of problems for --

MORGAN: Yes.

PERKINS: And trashed a lot of --

MORGAN: Yes.

PERKINS: And that they get their checks cut from some deep conservative pockets --

MORGAN: He's not all wrong in what he says.

PERKINS: He's very wrong if he thinks "liberals" run this capitalist farm we call a law school. My fear? Not his conservative rant -- it's got no legs. My fear is that Mr. Palmer is just a black face being used by some nasty people for some nasty purposes.

MORGAN: That's not fair to --

PERKINS: Maybe not fair but maybe right -- he wouldn't be the first -- and that really gets under my skin, no matter what he sells. I have great patience with challenge, with fair and open exchange -- but not with indictment, not with diatribe and accusation and name-calling --

PERKIN's vehemence has frozen the air between them.

PERKINS: I will be late to my meeting.

MORGAN: And I need to --

PERKINS: This week would be fine -- if you still want --

MORGAN: I do.

PERKINS: Good.

MORGAN: And you will definitely find it interesting.

PERKINS: A mystery -- all right, then, this week.

MORGAN: Yes.

MORGAN moves off. PERKINS watches her.

PERKINS: Lillie -- gotta put a lock on that big ol' mouth of yours. "Do not plunge thyself too far in anger." A closed mouth will gather no feet.

Transition.

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SCENE 7

PERKINS and BOALS. BOALS hands PERKINS a drink.

BOALS: So he did show up -- here --

PERKINS: Thanks -- by the book. Made an appointment. Wore a tie. And his heart upon his sleeve. He is a believer.

BOALS: In things you don't believe.

PERKINS: I don't need to share the beliefs to see he's got heart.

BOALS: That dark matter again.

PERKINS: (*overlapping*) -- dark matter -- all you cynics are just boiled-over romantics.

BOALS: Cynic or not, the man with heart has you in his crosshairs. The man with heart works for snipers, is a sniper.

PERKINS: It's not just me.

BOALS: No, it's the "liberals."

BOALS raises his glass.

BOALS: To the liberals, then. But you still have his bullseye on you.

PERKINS: This month. Maybe next month they'll go after disabled Wiccans --

BOALS: Crippled witches?

PERKINS: -- and they should really call themselves "crippled," who are they fucking kidding calling themselves "differently abled" -- not to mention, though we will, over and over and over, their fucking anti-Judeo-Christian fucking paganism --

BOALS: Lillie, when you get pissed, your face goes all cubist.

PERKINS: "Piss"casso'd? Sorry.

BOALS: We are celebrating, Lillie --

PERKINS: I know, Lawrence -- but you really don't know --

BOALS: I give you two more minutes for non-celebratory matters.

PERKINS: These guys are like -- locusts.

BOALS: Palmer?

PERKINS: The guys behind him. To be honest, I don't know what they want when they talk about getting more "conservative" people -- it's not like I'm avant-garde.

BOALS: You are a white-looking woman with dark Africa in her DNA -- you're a "white/black," a hybrid, an eraser of categories.

PERKINS: And unmarried, so ergo lesbian?

BOALS: And, if I remember correctly, you have wagged that tongue of yours against certain contracts and property-law faculty that believe all human affairs can be whittled down to buying and selling and the tender mercies of the marketplace.

PERKINS: Because I value the human heart. Well, I do.

BOALS: And that apparently has made you some enemies. (*gentle mock*) You liberal, you.

This does not perk up PERKINS.

BOALS: Come on, Lillie -- you have one handsome contract -- and one handsome agent, if I don't mind saying so -- This is going to be grand for you. The memoir's got just the right pinch of everything in it. Including great writing. And a story that just hooks --

PERKINS: A relief not to have to explain the statute of frauds yet again.

BOALS: I am sure.

They fall silent for a moment.

BOALS: Come on. We have reservations. Shall we?

PERKINS: Can I take a rain check?

BOALS: Lillie --

PERKINS: I -- have -- prep --

BOALS: Prep -- sounds like a mild bronchial condition. Well. Rain check it is.

They stand. PERKINS drains her glass and hands it to BOALS. BOALS drains his glass.

PERKINS: I'm sorry. Thanks. Thank you. For everything.

BOALS: Just don't forget to help me spend my commission when I get it.

They pause. They shake hands. Transition.

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SCENE 8

PERKINS and MORGAN in PERKINS' office. PERKINS stares out the window.

MORGAN: I can come back --

PERKINS: No -- please. Sit. Just a slight --

MORGAN: I'm sorry --

PERKINS waves it away. MORGAN sits. PERKINS sits. PERKINS stares at MORGAN a beat too long.

MORGAN: Really, I can --

PERKINS: No, I'm sorry -- it's rude -- but I'm thinking -- given your -- link with Mr. Palmer --

MORGAN: Do I believe, you mean -- like you asked?

PERKINS: Yes.

MORGAN: Am I a snake in the grass?

PERKINS: Exactly.

MORGAN: Let me show you my answer.

MORGAN digs into her backpack and pulls out a slim weather-beaten wooden case, slightly larger than a book. A small hook-clasp holds it shut, and the hinges, instead of being metal, are made from leather.

MORGAN: It won't explode.

PERKINS doesn't open it right away. She rubs her hands over the rough grain, smells the leather hinges.

PERKINS: Something from your family.

MORGAN: Yes.

PERKINS: An heirloom.

MORGAN: Exactly.

With a flick of her thumbnail, PERKINS unhooks the clasp and opens the case. Inside is a metal and more modern-looking metal case.

MORGAN: Open that.

PERKINS opens it and brings out a tintype.

MORGAN: By the edges -- please.

PERKINS: Of course. A tintype.

PERKINS turns it over, reads.

PERKINS: "John and Susan Morgan, July 19, 1907."

PERKINS looks at the tintype, then at MORGAN.

PERKINS: Her face.

MORGAN: Yes. My great-grandmother.

PERKINS: I can see her face in yours. But him?

BOALS comes out as JOHN MORGAN, dressed as in the picture, wearing an Indian headband and holding a shawl and a single flower. Sits. MORGAN comes to sit by him. BOALS hands her the shawl, then the flower.

MORGAN: My great-grandfather.

PERKINS: Susan Morgan -- your middle name. But she's as black --

MORGAN: And Cherokee.

PERKINS: -- as he isn't. And as you aren't.

BOALS and MORGAN prepare for their photo.

MORGAN: A white man from the mountains, as white as could be made white in those colored North Carolina times.

PERKINS: They couldn't marry.

MORGAN: As illegal as murder, and thought even worse.

A strobe flashes: the picture. They adjust themselves.

PERKINS: So how?

MORGAN: Because John Morgan pretended to be an Indian. Tusca-tawba-erokee, he called himself. The headband.

Second strobe. They prepare for one more.

PERKINS: And they made this work?

MORGAN: I'm sitting here.

Third strobe. MORGAN rises, hands BOALS the shawl and flower. BOALS exits. MORGAN joins PERKINS.

MORGAN: I know -- my white skin. Like yours -- everybody knows about your book.

PERKINS: Soon to be published.

MORGAN: Any discounts for students?

PERKINS: Maybe it'll be required reading.

MORGAN: That would please the conservatives.

PERKINS: Would that please you?

MORGAN pauses. She picks up the wooden box, taps it with her finger.

MORGAN: As a kid, I used to imagine them in that photo --

PERKINS: And?

MORGAN: And what?

PERKINS: Did you? Feel what they felt?

MORGAN takes the photo. She puts it in the case, the case in the box, and the box into her bag.

MORGAN: I know I really wanted to.

PERKINS: But?

A moment of suspension.

PERKINS: Is there anything else you wanted to talk about?

In answer, MORGAN holds out her hand, which PERKINS realizes MORGAN wants her to shake, which she does. Then MORGAN rises and turns to leave.

PERKINS: Why do you have that with you? Here, at school. That's a valuable piece of memory -
- why risk it?

MORGAN: In our family, the one on a journey gets to take the picture.

PERKINS: Any journey?

MORGAN: Going to the Bahamas is not a “journey.”

PERKINS: But a young white/black woman coming to law school connected to a conservative black man -- that’s a journey.

MORGAN: I have Contracts reading to do.

PERKINS: So do I.

MORGAN: So I should --

PERKINS: So should I. But we still have the question we started out with.

MORGAN: Snake in the --

PERKINS: Am I wrong for asking the apparent girlfriend of the one student in my class who seems bent on [leading] --

MORGAN: Bent on what? What is Mitchell “bent on,” according to you?

PERKINS: At the moment not interested in that. I want to know your bent, in coming to show this to me.

MORGAN: You asked me if I was --

PERKINS: I’m still asking.

MORGAN: And I told you I’d answer your question, and I showed you the picture.

PERKINS: But the picture was an answer to something, Ms. Morgan, before you even walked in here. Did you think of the simple showing as a contract? Have we agreed to something, one white/black woman to another? My contracts are a little tougher than that. I know what the picture shows -- but I don’t know what it means. To you. To your “journey.” Because when I asked you, you couldn’t -- or you wouldn’t -- tell me.

A moment of suspension.

PERKINS: So tell me.

A moment of suspension.

PERKINS: Have you shown that picture to Mitchell Palmer?

MORGAN: I have my reading to do. Goodbye.

MORGAN leaves. PERKINS muses. Transition

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SCENE 9

MORGAN and PALMER having coffee, MORGAN with a print-out in her hand. To the side, in a separate light, stands PERKINS.

PALMER: I tell you, we didn't do that. We didn't.

MORGAN: Your crew --

PALMER: We wouldn't do that. It's not about that -- I'm not about [that] --

MORGAN: It's so fucking nasty!

PALMER: I didn't do it.

MORGAN: But you know who did.

PERKINS: The security guard dropped the envelope on my desk.

PERKINS holds up an envelope.

MORGAN: I can't believe you'd want to protect those fuck-ups.

PALMER: They're not mine -- I don't know who --

PERKINS: *(opening it)* I opened it.

PERKINS makes an "opening letter" sound effect as she takes out the same printout MORGAN holds.

MORGAN: Don't lie to me.

PALMER: Don't think I'm lying to you.

MORGAN shoves the paper close to PALMER's face.

MORGAN: Because no human being deserves to be treated like this.

PERKINS: I typed in the URL --

PERKINS makes "clickety" keyboard sounds.

PERKINS: -- and up pops my faculty picture --

MORGAN: "The new 'massah' in town"!!

PERKINS: And the cartoon balloon pinned to my mouth says --

MORGAN: "I'se gonna get me some conservative white meat to eat!"

PERKINS: Caption reads, "This is one species -- "

MORGAN: “ -- that should be made extinct.” Extinct? Are you and your buds going to hunt her down? Get yourself some coon?

PERKINS: The glories of free speech.

PALMER: It's free speech.

PERKINS dances while she sings “Jim Crow.” [From “Jim Crow” (1829)

*Words and Music by Thomas Dartmouth (“Daddy”) Rice, 1808-1860 --
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jump_Jim_Crow]*

PERKINS: I sit upon a hornet's nest,
They dance around my head;
They tie a viper round my neck
And send me off to bed.
Wheel about and turn about and do jis so,
Eb'ry time I wheel about I jump Jim Crow.

Light out on PERKINS.

PALMER: Are you taking her side?

MORGAN: I'm not taking anyone's --

PALMER: Not even mine?

MORGAN: And which is that, Mitchell?

PALMER: Which do you think, Hannah?

PALMER touches her face softly.

PALMER: Which side do you think I want to be on?

MORGAN: Just don't pun me that you're on “the right side.”

PALMER: We didn't put that rag out. We have a job, but not that.

MORGAN: It's so nasty.

PALMER: I don't disagree.

MORGAN: I want to believe you.

PALMER: And I want to believe you.

MORGAN: But what?

PALMER: I know that you went to see her, in her office.

MORGAN: How do you know that?

PALMER: I know. There's a lot to talk about in that course.

MORGAN: That's all we talked about.

PALMER: Now here's where it comes down to the nub, Hannah: I believe you as much as you believe me. You believe me about that paper -- I believe you about Perkins.

MORGAN: I do.

PALMER: Then I do, too. And so that makes us both fully believed, don't it?

MORGAN: I hope so.

PALMER: Know so. We haven't known each other long, but I do know this: I hate it when --

MORGAN: I hate it, too -- about myself, about --

PALMER: Makes me feel a thousand miles away.

MORGAN: It does?

PALMER: Yes.

MORGAN: That true?

PALMER: Yes.

MORGAN: Because it makes me feel double that.

PALMER: Always gotta one-up on me.

MORGAN: I like being one-up on you.

PALMER points to the paper.

PALMER: We didn't do that.

MORGAN: Okay.

PALMER: You sure?

MORGAN: Mitchell, the SFA -- I just don't think it's your way.

PALMER: If it's not mine, Hannah, then I have got a problem. Actually --

MORGAN: Actually what?

PALMER: Actually, I do have a problem.

MORGAN: So, tell me.

PALMER points to the paper again.

PALMER: That's part of it. I have the "name" of SFA president -- but there's -- God, it wasn't supposed to be about this --

MORGAN: There's what?

PALMER: There's a -- push -- by some of the deep pockets to --

MORGAN: Act like assholes?

PALMER: Up the "voltage."

MORGAN: Like an electric chair --

PALMER: It wasn't supposed to be like that.

MORGAN: You're getting scammed, aren't you? You suspect --

MORGAN caresses his cheek.

MORGAN: Because you have such a convenient black face for them.

MORGAN keeps touching his cheek. She then gives his cheek a sharp but not hard slap.

MORGAN: Don't let them use [it] --

PALMER: There's only one person I'm liking getting used by.

MORGAN: Don't you even think about giving me a slap.

PALMER: Wouldn't do what I'm not thinking about doing.

MORGAN: What are you thinking about, then?

PALMER: See if you can read my mind.

They read each other's mind. Transition.

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SCENE 10

PERKINS and BOALS. BOALS has a bag of nuts or chocolate coffee beans.

PERKINS: I don't want this to -- I don't want this to fuck-up the contract. I don't want this to --

BOALS: The contract will be signed, sealed, and delivered.

PERKINS: Have you seen the full-court press on me?

BOALS: I have because you've told me about it.

PERKINS: I just don't want --

BOALS: You have an agreement to a contract. Is Contract Woman losing her faith in contracts? Besides all this has been pretty in-house anyways, hasn't it? Tempest in a teapot sort of thing?

PERKINS: It's not a teapot. This is about academic freedom --

BOALS: Of course.

PERKINS: But?

BOALS: Well, I've been thinking about that -- whose?

PERKINS: Mine!

BOALS: And so should you have yours -- but isn't the freedom for both sides --

PERKINS: Whose side are you on?

BOALS: I'm always on the side of my bread and butter.

PERKINS: This is serious --

BOALS: Can that tell from your serious face.

PERKINS: Then treat it as serious -- treat me as serious.

BOALS: As if I haven't been.

PERKINS: Not if you take that -- Brit piss-off attitude about something that just cuts at me --

BOALS: "Brit piss-off" --

PERKINS: You know, that little -- thing --

BOALS: Thing.

PERKINS: Mannerism -- (*badly imitating*) "I'm always on the side of my bread -- "

BOALS: I'll tell you what.

PERKINS: Tell me what.

BOALS sticks the bag in his pocket.

BOALS: Let us do “serious,” just for the sake of calming Lillie Perkins.

PERKINS: Now you are pissed off.

BOALS: Let us do serious. You begin. Begin.

PERKINS: No.

BOALS: Begin.

PERKINS: If I can’t teach because some conservative knucklehead --

BOALS: Or earnest student -- heart on his sleeve, remember --

PERKINS: I am not “liberal” -- I just try to talk some common sense into them.

BOALS: And what’s so common about your common sense? What makes your common sense more common than his?

PERKINS: It’s my class. My name’s on the syllabus.

BOALS: Which means they shut up?

PERKINS: It’s about courtesy and respect --

BOALS: Which means on your terms?

PERKINS: No, on the terms for any civilized discourse --

BOALS: “Civilized discourse” --

BOALS bows in mock servility to PERKINS.

BOALS: *(mock Southern accent)* Beg yer pardon, mistress, but with great respect and courtesy --

PERKINS: What are you doing?

BOALS: -- we would like to take over this here plantation because of the radical inequalities --

PERKINS: What are you doing?

BOALS: Imagine William and Ellen going up to their owners, in civilized discourse --

PERKINS: Mitchell Palmer and his -- crew -- are not oppressed!

BOALS: They feel oppressed --

PERKINS: They can feel what they want, but they are not --

BOALS: Feel they have to change the rules.

PERKINS: These -- vandals are not interested in revolutionary liberation!

BOALS: And who says revolutions always liberate?

PERKINS: What good is a revolution that doesn't? Look, "the new 'massah' in town" is not discourse, it's not revolution, it's insult --

BOALS: "Insult" is what free speech is about, or it's not about anything.

PERKINS: Are you being purposefully pig-headed?

BOALS: I am purposefully taking you seriously.

A moment of suspension.

PERKINS: You are, aren't you?

BOALS: You asked me to. I do what I'm asked if I like what I'm asked to do.

BOALS takes out the bag, offer. PERKINS demurs.

PERKINS: Your bread and butter. It's just so frustrating!

BOALS: When they don't play by the rules.

PERKINS: Oh, they play by the rules. They follow the school's protocols for filing complaints to the last crossed "t," and they file them from the trustees on down to the janitors. They cram the campus rags with letters and editorial screeds. They hijack the lingo and the process to set themselves up as protectors of academic openness -- and then anyone who disagrees with them gets painted as intolerant or "liberal." "So that" -- c'mon -- continue your job --

BOALS: "So that."

PERKINS: Before long, this flood of blame washes over everything and by its sheer weight begins to take on the smell of a truth. Before long it's "that white/black woman in Contracts just can't stand to have anyone disagree with her!" And suddenly I've got "I've gonna get me some conservative white meat to eat!" coming out of my cartoon mouth --

BOALS: What is it, Lillie?

PERKINS: It's nothing.

BOALS: What is it?

PERKINS: I got a call -- from the Dean -- to come in for a "chat."

BOALS: Really?

PERKINS: As of nine a.m.

BOALS: Tomorrow?

PERKINS: In all its petty pace.

BOALS: Is this something "official"?

PERKINS: Will it go on that "permanent record"? No -- in my world, "chat" means a tiny warning shot across the bows. Then it can bump up to "a little talk," then a "discussion" --

BOALS: But not across their bows -- this Palmer and his --

PERKINS: The accuser gets the leverage, not me.

BOALS: But Lillie, clearly, with your accomplishments -- why are you smiling?

PERKINS: I so enjoy seeing how naïve you are.

BOALS: There you go. I am living up to our agreement. In clause 17-dash-c of our contract, it declares that I am to provide a kind of clownish entertainment by affecting a charming naiveté -- good work?

PERKINS: So far.

BOALS: Relief supplied.

PERKINS: My record, you said --

BOALS: Exemplary, I'm sure.

PERKINS: Maybe at some point it -- but at the moment, fingers are pointed, and that makes the poobahs nervous.

BOALS: But this is not front-page-of-the-Times stuff. Professors get smash-mouthed every day, and it hardly makes a ripple, right? Would you like some?

PERKINS: I don't have much news value, so, no, I don't get the front page, or even an inside. No, maybe you're right --

BOALS: In all my naiveté --

PERKINS: This is a tempest in a teapot --

BOALS: A tempest is a tempest, though.

PERKINS: Just ride it out.

BOALS: I'm sure your colleagues -- you're smiling again.

PERKINS: Why do you think I'm here telling you and not coffee'd-up with my colleagues? My department chair? Crowned with supportive emails? Because they're all scared -- the tar-brush can swing wide. And I am not universally liked --

BOALS: I didn't realize it would be so --

PERKINS: And I am taking up the valuable time of my ace literary agent.

BOALS: Don't worry about the publisher -- what we have will be signed, sealed --

PERKINS: (*overlapping*) Sealed and delivered -- yes -- good.

BOALS: I'm sorry to see you so fretful.

PERKINS: I keep my routine, make light -- I just don't want the memoir --

BOALS: Repeat after me: it will soon be signed, sealed, delivered. That's your mantra.

A silent moment between them.

BOALS: I was just playing devil's advocate, back there -- and a bit of an ass --

PERKINS: I asked for it -- honor-bound to deliver.

BOALS: The ass part?

PERKINS: The advocate. Believe me, it's more honesty than I've gotten lately -- I need to remember that this does swing both ways --

BOALS: Don't you give in to the crap, though.

PERKINS: I promise to remain un-crapped-on!

BOALS: Good.

Another silent moment between them.

PERKINS: I'd better go --

BOALS: And I do have calls --

A hesitation, then BOALS pops a candy into PERKIN's mouth. PERKINS goes to shake BOALS' hand. Instead, BOALS gives her his fist, and they bump knuckles. Transition.

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SCENE 11

PERKINS in her own light. BOALS drops an envelope at her feet and exits. She picks it up, opens it, and PERKINS responds with fear and loathing. She holds it face-out so that the audience can see it. PERKINS is now speaking to the "administration."

PERKINS: It's a death threat! Can't you see that? And through my emails now as well. See what it says! I've got others. One says that "niggers" should be sent back to Africa, especially for barbecue. At least change my email address, keep it private. At least give me a parking space near my classroom, let me have all my classes in the same building -- You won't, you mean. The email address is "public" -- and -- let me get this straight -- access to it is a "freedom of speech issue" -- I see. I don't see, but I see --

PERKINS tosses the death threat to one side, sits on the floor, trembling, alone.

PERKINS: Damn damn damn damn damn --

PALMER appears as he did before, as WILLIAM, and he inches toward PERKINS.

PALMER: Ellen? Ellen?

PERKINS looks up, sees him.

PERKINS: William? What am I saying? William?

PALMER: Ellen -- we're safe.

PERKINS jerks away.

PERKINS: Get away from me.

PALMER: What's the matter?

PERKINS: Get away from me!

PALMER: This is me, William --

PERKINS: No, it's not --

PALMER: This is William --

PERKINS: It is not!

PALMER: -- and I am telling you we are safe. We are free.

PALMER goes to touch her face. PERKINS pulls back.

PALMER: We just crossed the Philadelphia city line, Ellen. We're free.

PERKINS: No, no, no!

BOALS enters, wears the white half-mask. He carries in a costume that he slips over PERKINS which transforms her into a "plantation mistress" but also in the style of a dominatrix, complete with a short whip or quirt. Think of Scarlett O'Hara in spike heels.

BOALS then clamps PALMER into a set of chains clearly made out of something like links of black construction paper. He also slaps PALMER's face a few times until PALMER gives him the "proper" eye-rolling frightened Negro face.

PERKINS: Good.

The scene is now set and should be played for the maximum humiliation of PALMER. Director and actors are free to come up with actions that show this, in addition to or in place of the actions listed below.

PERKINS places a foot in PALMER's crotch, grinds it gently.

PERKINS: Is it true?

PALMER: What ma'am?

PERKINS: Say it again.

PALMER: Ma'am.

PERKINS: *(with relish)* Ma'am -- that niggers got big ones?

PERKINS gives a little more grind.

PERKINS: I ain't feeling anything.

PALMER: I don't know, ma'am.

PERKINS grinds a touch harder. PALMER yelps, cuts it off.

PERKINS: Still ain't feeling much.

PALMER: I got what's I got, ma'am -- can't make it no bigger than it's got a mind to get.

PERKINS: I would not use the word "mind" and "you" in the same sentence, you ignorant muthafuckin' jungle bunny. My, my, listen to my language!

PERKINS moves her foot from PALMER's crotch to his stomach and briefly stands on him as she walks across his body. BOALS stands PALMER up and straps onto him a huge soft sculpture black penis. PALMER is absolutely terrified.

PERKINS: Ah! Maybe I was wrong after all -- the porch monkey's got a mind of a kind after all.

PERKINS stands in front of PALMER with her back to him several feet away, bends over, and lifts her skirt. BOALS begins to sing as much as he can of the following song underneath the action.

["Twinkling Stars Are Laughing, Love" (1855) Poetry and Music by John P. Ordway -- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/amss.as114040/?st=text>]

Twinkling stars are laughing love,
Laughing on you and me;
While your bright eyes look in mine,
Peeping stars they seem to be.
Troubles come and go, love,
Brightest scenes must leave our sight;
But the star of hope, love,
Shines with radiant beams tonight.

CHORUS

Twinkling stars are laughing love,
Laughing on you and me;
While your bright eyes look in mine,
Peeping stars they seem to be.

Golden beams are shining, love,
Shining on you to bless;
Like the queen of night you fill
Darkest space with loveliness.
Silver stars how bright, love,
Mother moon in thronely might,
Gaze on us to bless, love,
Purest vows here made to night.

CHORUS

PERKINS: Come on, nigger lad -- plowing time.

PALMER, frozen, does not move. PERKINS shuffles backwards a step or two towards PALMER, her hips lifted.

PERKINS: I said, boy, the time is now, boy --

Still, PALMER does not move. PERKINS takes another step back.

PERKINS: Come on, darky --

PALMER does not move. PERKINS takes another step back. She is very close.

PERKINS: Come on, jigaboo --

PALMER goes to back away, but BOALS, still singing, stops him. PERKINS backs up until she is almost touching the penis. PALMER looks away. BOALS, in a classic interrogation move, forces PALMER's head forward and lifts open his eyelids so that he is forced to look.

But instead of backing into PALMER completely, PERKINS stands up, spins to face him, and grabs the penis. With a sharp tug, she pulls the penis free.

PERKINS: You will not be needing this anymore.

PERKINS whacks PALMER a couple of times with the penis, then tosses it to BOALS. BOALS wraps it around PALMER's neck -- a noose -- and jerks it upward.

BOALS: We got ourselves a wind chime!

PERKINS and BOALS laugh, then they cut the laughter off. BOALS pulls the penis away.

PERKINS moves in close, looks PALMER straight in the face. BOALS lets him go. PERKINS and PALMER stare at each other. PERKINS abruptly turns away, rips off the dress, rubs herself down as if she were wiping off slime, grunting in disgust as she smooths everything away. BOALS gathers up everything and exits with PALMER.

PERKINS picks up the death threat that had been tossed to one side. She looks up and around -- waits.

PERKINS: Where is it?

Keeps looking -- waits.

PERKINS: The punishment? Where is it? When does it come, for these, my bloody racist thoughts?

Looks -- waits.

PERKINS: Nothing.

BOALS appears in the shadows.

PERKINS: Nothing.

BOALS moves toward PERKINS.

PERKINS: It felt --

BOALS: What?

PERKINS: Can I even say this?

BOALS: Say what you want.

PERKINS: It felt --

BOALS: What?

PERKINS: I'm ashamed to say this.

BOALS: Only shame in hiding what you know from yourself.

PERKINS: All right, then. It felt --

BOALS: Yes?

PERKINS: Good. Hard. Bitter. Good.

PERKINS holds up the death threat like a chalice.

PERKINS: A strong hatred -- the best light to bear in our hands as we cut through the dark matter of life --

BOALS: Are you surprised?

PERKINS: By?

BOALS: Yourself?

PERKINS: Absolutely!

BOALS: By what?

PERKINS: How clean it feels.

BOALS: To do what?

PERKINS: To slice off what we are commanded to respect -- like "civilized discourse" --

PERKINS folds then tears the death threat in half, in quarters, and so on.

PERKINS: Hatred really is a kind of grace.

BOALS: Pain can be a privilege sometimes.

PERKINS finishes, turns to BOALS.

PERKINS: Will be signed, sealed, and delivered, you said.

BOALS: I did. This contract will become a contract.

PERKINS stares at BOALS, and then, without preface, she kisses him, hard, long. BOALS does not pull away, then pulls away -- slowly. He cups his hands; PERKINS puts the torn letter in them.

INTERMISSION

SCENE 12

PALMER and BOALS come on in half-masks to sing. [From "Balm of Gilead" (1861), arranged by H. T. Bryant. <http://www.bluegrassmessengers.com/balm-in-gilead--1854-version-a-sinners-cure.aspx>]

PALMER & BOALS: Oh, we ain't, going home anymore,
Oh, we ain't, going home anymore,
Oh, we ain't, going home anymore,
Down't the peach blow farm.
Balm of Gilead,
Balm of Gilead,
Balm of Gilead,
Going home no more.

* * * * *

SCENE 13

MORGAN and PERKINS at the café: table, chairs, coffee cup.

MORGAN: I was rude.

PERKINS: I think you were only responding to my rudeness.

MORGAN: Which may've been a response to [my] --

PERKINS: Enough. But there was something else?

MORGAN: But it seems so small against what you're --

PERKINS: And what what is that?

MORGAN: The -- letter -- letters -- and emails --

PERKINS: The grapevine's pretty active --

MORGAN: Everyone's wired --

PERKINS: Look, I'm open for business if you want to talk, but I've got a department meeting coming up, which is not going to be pretty, so let me try this for speed: it's about the memoir and your picture --

MORGAN: And Contracts --

PERKINS: And Mitchell Palmer --

MORGAN: And pigment.

PERKINS: Pigment?

MORGAN: Discoloration.

PERKINS: (*with accent*) "Dis cuhlah [color] nation" --

MORGAN gives PERKINS a strange look.

PERKINS: I'm channeling. "Color" -- that's new. Let's start there. Just jump in. Go on!

MORGAN: You're fine with being white/black --

PERKINS: And you're not --

MORGAN: No, I'm not. I never have. And I don't want anyone to know.

PERKINS: But you've told me. I asked if you had showed Mitchell Palmer the picture.

MORGAN: I wish I hadn't.

PERKINS: Let's put the "why" about Palmer to the side for a moment -- the problem with your "cuhlah" is --

MORGAN: The "problem" with my color is that I don't want my "cuhlah."

PERKINS: But you are "cuhlah'd."

MORGAN: No, I'm not.

PERKINS: Yes, you are.

MORGAN: I won't be stuffed into a category.

PERKINS: But you can't be a nothing. And what's wrong with the category?

MORGAN: I see me as moving into being an everything -- an everything bagel --

PERKINS: By just bleaching it away.

MORGAN: Get me some Clorox and watch!

PERKINS: The problem with young people --

MORGAN: The problem with young people is old people bitchin' 'em out about "their ancestors."

PERKINS: For a good reason.

MORGAN: My family's always got me "rememberin'" and "witnessin'" to the glorious past of them that died to carry on --

PERKINS: Like John and Susan Morgan --

MORGAN: Just Black History-speak -- Martin Luther King'd 'til I'm blind. I am so sick of "carrying the torch" -- the smell of burnt "testifyin'" flesh to remind me of my ancestors -- and my dad, the white side of the deal -- he's the worst about it! Expungin' his guilt. Purgin' his -- Professor, I just wanna be the mongrel I am, the mongrel everybody really is. I don't want black because I've seen how that word just grinds people up --

PERKINS: But you can't deny --

MORGAN: And I don't want white because I don't want to guilt myself about privilege -- let me finish -- and I don't want liberal and I don't want conservative and I don't want any of these strait-jackets --

PERKINS: Then what do you want?

MORGAN: Past it all -- that's what I want. Pass it all to go past it all, just past it all, above -- around -- beyond it all. I want no more -- fucking labels patched on to me -- sorry -- I don't even want family telling me --

PERKINS: But, Hannah, a real identity --

Light up downstage.

MORGAN: Shut up! Shut the hell and damnation up!

MORGAN stalks into the light.

MORGAN: Link:

the transnation of the older generations
carries me in its histories from Afric ["ah-FREEK"]
to this empire's bantustans,
where even now our unasked-for emperors hold
their colored death grips.

Fuck it!

We are the new mestizo of the hyphen-nation.

Born in the desires that inhabit this borderland between the emptinesses of destin(y-
n)ation --

we are the postmodern, we are the

"land of all of us," pan-everything,

Mix-cegenation is the core of the new carbonation
of the new non-nation, our bodies the location
of this postmodern archipelago, each of us double-helix'd
by DNA of text and phone and email
and the universal declaration of the human right to human rights
and that we will be divided and conquered, fucked and fucked-over,
extracted, redacted, burned, twisted, packaged, and forgotten
no more, no more, no more, never again.

We float confused, contradictory, ambiguous, ambivalent,
torqued, tidal, multi-tongued, lunar-mad --
But we are also large, we include multitudes,
feel them in your nostrils, look for us under your feet,
hear the stars beat out the very pulse of the universe,
all of us universal, all of us at home in the in-between.

Link:
End.

Light out. MORGAN moves back to PERKINS.

MORGAN: See --

PERKINS: Quite some journey your tintype is on.

MORGAN: Like a noose around my neck. I thought you could help me -- but maybe you're stuck, too.

At that moment, PALMER appears.

PALMER: I thought we had our 11 o'clock.

MORGAN: We do.

PERKINS stands.

PERKINS: I'm sorry -- I didn't know --

PALMER: That's all right, Professor -- we have tea together pretty much every day at 11.

PERKINS: Really? (to MORGAN) Right here? Every day?

MORGAN looks PERKINS straight in the eye and says nothing.

PALMER: Yes, here.

PERKINS: Well, I was just going anyways.

A moment of awkwardness as MORGAN gets up.

PERKINS: *(to MORGAN)* I hope I have been of use to you.

PERKINS moves away, and PALMER and MORGAN sit. As PERKINS watches them, they argue hard in silence. Then MORGAN and PALMER catch PERKINS watching, and another moment of awkwardness among the three of them. Hard. Transition.

* * * * *

SCENE 14

The classroom: MORGAN and PALMER seated. PERKINS is not yet there. PALMER fidgets. PERKINS enters, takes her position.

PERKINS: Welcome. Today --

PALMER stands, a paper in his hand. PERKINS sees him, waits. PALMER waits.

PERKINS: Either you have something to say or you don't, Mr. Palmer.

MORGAN stands, rips the paper from his hand.

MORGAN: This is what he wants to say.

PALMER: *(hissing)* Sit down.

MORGAN ignores him, keeps the paper from him.

MORGAN: The -- ESS -- EFF -- A -- gets a kick outta having everything written out, like the good little fascists they are. All for the archives.

PALMER: Sit down.

MORGAN does not sit down.

PERKINS: Sit down.

MORGAN still does not sit down.

MORGAN: Don't you want to hear their razor intellect at work?

PERKINS: I don't --

MORGAN: It's all about you.

MORGAN rounds on PALMER.

MORGAN: Don't!

PALMER sits.

MORGAN: The ESS -- EFF -- A -- wants to move him out. Didn't know that, did you? They've used him up and now want to throw him away. So, he's making his big play --

MORGAN reads.

MORGAN: "The Contracts and Property class of Professor Lillie Perkins should be avoided as a 'toxic intellectual site'" -- listen to that! -- "since she clearly is not interested in intellectual diversity." (to PERKINS) There's lots more.

PERKINS: I think you should stop --

MORGAN: (*exaggerated*) "The -- ESS -- EFF -- A -- has filed a complaint with the university against Professor Perkins based upon the following indictments -- " Such a long word! (to PALMER) I told you to leave me alone! (to PERKINS) I'm going to go on -- this is so fascinating!

PERKINS: No, you're not.

MORGAN: "The use of extraneous material, like personal family history -- "

PERKINS: Ms. Morgan --

MORGAN: " -- her so-called 'memoir,' to divert students from the proper study of the law."

PERKINS: Ms. Morgan, I want you to shut up.

MORGAN: There's more.

PERKINS: You need to work this out somewhere else and some time else. Do you understand me?

MORGAN very deliberately balls up the paper.

PERKINS: Mr. Palmer can post that on the website -- or nail it to the church door, I don't care. What I want is for you to sit down now.

As MORGAN sits, she drops the paper into PALMER's lap.

MORGAN: Consider it all worked out, Professor.

PERKINS: Consider yourself warned for the last time.

A tense silence. BOALS steps up behind PERKINS.

BOALS: I wouldn't do it.

PERKINS: "Extraneous material," was it?

PERKINS pauses, gathers herself.

BOALS: You might not want to.

PERKINS: *(to BOALS)* Shut up. *(back out)* This memoir that has your -- knickers twisted --

BOALS: This is not your better nature.

PERKINS: *(to BOALS)* Fuck off. *(back out)* I use it to show how stupid it is for anyone of good faith to hold anything sacred if "sacred" also means injustice, pain, lies, smugness --

BOALS: Which cuts both ways --

PERKINS: -- and if the study of the "sacred" property laws shows us anything, it shows us that the more liberal we become, the better we become as people. *(to PALMER)* I want you to stand up.

BOALS: Are you sure you want to --

PERKINS: Without a doubt.

BOALS: Don't do things without a doubt.

PERKINS: *(to PALMER)* Stand up, without your paper, and face me. In fact, come down here -- step out of the safety of the herd.

BOALS: Never argue with a fool in public, Lillie --

PALMER: I will not be mocked.

BOALS: People won't be able to tell who is which.

PERKINS: Asking you to face me isn't mockery -- it's just asking for some guts.

BOALS: You will lose --

PERKINS: Come here.

BOALS: -- even if you win this.

PERKINS: I don't care. It's time not to care.

BOALS: It's never that time.

PALMER moves downstage so that PERKINS can face him directly.

PERKINS: Step closer.

BOALS: The dark heart rises.

But so impatient is PERKINS that before PALMER can move, PERKINS moves closer to him.

PERKINS: Mr. Palmer, since this university now considers each student a “consumer/purchaser of educational commodities,” you and your compatriots can stay and “consume” what I have to offer or go. I prefer you stay.

PALMER: I can't -- I have to --

PERKINS: Then do it.

PALMER: I'm sorry for the website -- the SFA had nothing to do --

PERKINS: Neutrality and apology just feed the beast, Mr. Palmer. The point is, the rough beast needs killing.

PALMER leaves. MORGAN follows him out.

PERKINS: I wish I had enough ego for arrogance without regret.

BOALS: But all you have is a heart.

PERKINS turns back to begin the lecture.

PERKINS: Anyone else? Good. Property -- Contracts -- Binding relationships -- where shall we begin?

Transition.

* * * * *

SCENE 15

PALMER and MORGAN, PALMER with the balled-up paper in his hand. He turns and bounces it off MORGAN. MORGAN picks it up.

MORGAN: You want something harder.

PALMER: Give me your fucking heart, then. It wasn't your show --

MORGAN: Because I despise what they want to do to you -- the ESS-EFF-fucking-A --

PALMER rounds on her with a gesture so uncharacteristically menacing that it brings MORGAN up short.

MORGAN: They're just using you -- back off -- you said so your[self] -- back [off] --

PALMER: You are such a goddamned liar.

PALMER snatches the paper out of her hand.

PALMER: You have forfeited.

MORGAN: I saw your hands shake, Mitchell -- I know that you --

PALMER: Don't, don't, don't!

MORGAN: I didn't want to see you --

PALMER: *(into MORGAN's face)* I told you to shut up!

Eyes level with each other until MORGAN looks away.

PALMER: I have been touched by the "mulatto" -- oh look at that face! -- look at that face! -- is the sterile mule, the Hannah Morgan half-breed having a twinge?

PALMER unbuckles his belt and snaps open his pants.

PALMER: Does the mulatto want to finish hacking them off?

MORGAN: Can't lose what you don't have.

PALMER reaches into his underwear.

PALMER: Wrong -- as usual. Always thinking you have what you don't really have.

PALMER stretches his underwear, speaks into his crotch.

PALMER: No worry, huevos -- she ain't getting near you again. *(to MORGAN)* They're happy.

MORGAN: At least something is.

PALMER: No thanks to you.

PALMER buckles up.

PALMER: What I don't have -- is what I thought I had but which I now know I don't have -- which is you covering my back. You make me sick.

MORGAN: Maybe you need to be sick like this more often --

PALMER: Shut up.

MORGAN: At least you're talking in your own voice.

PALMER: And at least the ESS-EFF-fucking-A are honest in being dishonest with me. Shut up. You lied about why. You don't despise them, really -- The only thing you despise is --

MORGAN: You.

PALMER: See how easy that is.

MORGAN: It's true.

PALMER: Why else would you humiliate me?

MORGAN: It felt --

PALMER: Don't give me "it." You felt --

MORGAN: I felt -- sharp -- saying --

PALMER: "Sharp" so you could cut off [my] --

MORGAN: Yes, of course.

PALMER: Not for my own good.

MORGAN: Completely not for your own good.

PALMER: At least now [you're being] --

MORGAN: Completely. God, it feels --

PALMER: You feel --

MORGAN: I feel mean and selfish and -- clean. This -- un-Christian rush --

PALMER: The way that mulatto brain works.

MORGAN: Don't call me that.

PALMER: Calling out your mulatto thinking --

MORGAN: Don't call me that.

PALMER: You feel clean, so aaaalllllll God's chillun gotta feel clean like you --

MORGAN: Is that supposed to be --

PALMER: -- because what Hannah Morgan feels --

MORGAN: -- your "black" voice -- the one they want to steal?

PALMER: (*even more exaggerated*) -- has gotta trump what aaaalllllll God's chillun feel --

MORGAN: (*echoing*) Testifyin' in his best "black" voice.

PALMER: (*laughing*) Black voice? Black what? This is just one mulatto talkin' betrayal to another. We two are so far from being "black." We've been "mix-cegenated" till we're nothing but shadows --

MORGAN: For you, maybe --

PALMER: But isn't that what you always wanted, Hannah banana? To be nothing like that tintype photo of yours? Well, you have made it, girl. You're clean, and mean, and bleached like a ghost and sterile as a scalpel -- and shy of me.

MORGAN: I gave you a gift --

PALMER: You gave me pain.

MORGAN: That was the gift.

PALMER: You come along to "do me good" --

MORGAN: You won't get used anymore --

PALMER: By you or anyone else, which makes me now a complete half a man -- yassuh! (*in his best black voice*) And why would the cleansed one over there want to stay with a mongrel like that? Like me? Hmm? I thought so.

Transition.

* * * * *

SCENE 16

PERKINS and BOALS. Umbrellas.

PERKINS: I was out of line.

BOALS: Be more specific.

PERKINS: I'm not sure I want to be.

BOALS: I want you to be.

PERKINS: I'm not sure I can.

BOALS: Denial does not flatter you.

PERKINS: I want to tell you about what happened in class today.

BOALS: But you just said you came to tell me you were out of line.

PERKINS: Now that I'm here I'd rather tell you --

BOALS: Not interested.

PERKINS: You've been interested before.

BOALS: You pay me to have interest -- I'm your agent. But don't you have deans for this?

PERKINS: They're being useless at the moment.

BOALS: Have you kissed them as well?

PERKINS: You're saying my kiss would make them useless?

BOALS: You never know when intellectuals connect with sex and power.

PERKINS: You're being cruel.

BOALS: Until you tell me why.

PERKINS: Did my kiss make you useless?

BOALS: I'm not an intellectual.

PERKINS: So it made you what?

BOALS: Your kiss --

PERKINS: Made you what?

BOALS: It gave me --

PERKINS: What?

BOALS: Pause.

PERKINS: That's a denial.

BOALS: Don't flatter yourself.

PERKINS: Why not if you won't.

BOALS: This is going to go nowhere.

PERKINS: "Pause" --

BOALS: Lillie, you should go.

PERKINS: What is this "pause" my simple kiss gave you?

BOALS: You want to think the "pause" is desire, but it isn't. Look --

PERKINS: Look at you --

BOALS: I don't want to [talk] --

PERKINS: If it wasn't "desire" for me -- just a "pause" -- that's so little -- so stingy --

BOALS: So you want to know?

PERKINS: Yes.

BOALS: I “paused” -- and I did think -- desire -- perhaps why not?

PERKINS: Use her.

BOALS: A little twinge. A weakness.

PERKINS: You’ve given in before?

BOALS: With regret.

PERKINS: But at the moment of the giving in --

BOALS: You think you know, but you don’t.

PERKINS: I was going to say you felt pleasure at giving in.

BOALS: You would have guessed wrong because you think the regret comes after the giving in.

PERKINS: It does for most people.

BOALS: Because most people lie to themselves. They think the pleasure of the moment is, well, a pleasure and go on from there.

PERKINS: You don’t like pleasure.

BOALS: I don’t like being lied to -- and pleasure is a cheat.

PERKINS: That’s an ill-conceived [thought] --

BOALS: What’s ill-conceived and as common as grass is conceiving that pleasure protects us from life’s bent for misery and defeat -- gives us an antidote -- a protection --

PERKINS: You’d prefer to be miserable.

BOALS: I’d prefer to be honest with myself. And with you.

PERKINS: So I get included?

BOALS: Because I am not so much the fool as to throw away what might be uncommon.

PERKINS: Me.

BOALS: You.

PERKINS: Which is why I get the “pause”?

BOALS: Before I regret again -- and ruin --

PERKINS: What?

BOALS: I don't want to be part of a story about the intellectual who discovers a body below the latitude of her neck.

PERKINS: That's cruel.

BOALS: Exactly.

PERKINS: And that's cruel as well.

BOALS: They don't call it a sharp tongue for nothing.

PERKINS: Too bad the mind doesn't match. You really think I'm just a brain with an unfed cunt? I know what lies below this neck.

BOALS: We --

PERKINS: "We"?

BOALS: -- only have your word for that.

PERKINS: You should stop sucking on your "royal we" and regret and take my word for it -- even you might be pleased at what you'd learn if you'd let yourself. Or maybe Lawrence Boals is just afraid. Maybe it's just common-as-grass performance anxiety and Lawrence Boals can't admit to being common --

A moment of suspension.

BOALS: Everything must be clean between us if there is anything between us. A kiss, fumbling in the dark, a spasm -- not my idea of a good idea.

PERKINS: Your idea of a good idea stinks.

BOALS: And yet, there it is, laid on the table.

PERKINS: At least something got laid.

PERKINS is unsure whether to stay or go.

BOALS: It's amazing what a kiss will reveal, isn't it?

PERKINS: You said "if."

BOALS: Did I?

PERKINS: Don't play dumb unless you are.

BOALS: I did say "if."

PERKINS: "If there is anything between us." Why did you say that?

BOALS: What do you think that means?

PERKINS: From you? I don't know.

BOALS: You don't trust me.

PERKINS: In your -- our -- business, yes. With this --

BOALS: You don't.

PERKINS: More like, what I expected to happen didn't happen when I kissed you -- well --

BOALS: And?

PERKINS: And so now I don't know how to know what to expect.

BOALS: You don't know your own want.

PERKINS: No. I don't.

BOALS: That's good -- because neither do I. Mine, that is. Or yours.

PERKINS: Which leaves us --

BOALS: In a much better position.

PERKINS: Why doesn't it feel better?

BOALS: Which would you rather feel, better or honest?

PERKINS: I'd rather feel them both at the same time.

BOALS: That's our "much better position" -- "honest" and "better" is now much more possible.

PERKINS: "If there is anything between us."

BOALS: If there is anything between us.

PERKINS: Other than just air.

BOALS: And a "maybe."

PERKINS: I am going to kiss you again.

They kiss.

PERKINS: That is goddamn amazing.

BOALS: Tell me about your class.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 17

MORGAN in her room. On the floor, in its own light: the tintype. She circles it, kneels -- finally picks it up, stares at it.

MORGAN: Damn damn damn damn damn damn --

BOALS enters as JOHN MORGAN, wearing a headband and dressed for a photograph. He carries a shawl and a flower.

BOALS: Don't.

BOALS kneels down to her.

BOALS: Don't cry.

BOALS puts the shawl around MORGAN, gives her the flower, takes the tintype from her and pockets it. Then he pulls a small mirror and a handkerchief out of his other pocket. He holds up the mirror for MORGAN and hands her the handkerchief. When MORGAN looks, she recoils at what she sees, which startles BOALS.

BOALS: What?

Instead of answering, MORGAN grabs the mirror and stares into it. Then she examines her hands and arms, goes back to the mirror.

MORGAN: My skin -- my color.

BOALS: I like your skin. And your color.

MORGAN: You're white.

BOALS: And you're not. And that's a strange thing to say. And besides I'm not white.

BOALS points to the headband.

BOALS: Tusca-tawba-erokee -- remember? C'mon, we got to get ready.

MORGAN: For what?

BOALS: This is not like you, to be so forgetting.

BOALS helps her to her feet, then puts the handkerchief, mirror, and tintype in his suit pocket. He points.

BOALS: Right there -- the photographer. Remember? Wedding picture? Remember you're stuck with me?

BOALS helps MORGAN pose.

BOALS: Gotta hold it still. Put your arm through mine -- tuck in close.

They pose, hold it for a few seconds. Strobe flash.

BOALS: 'Nother one.

They take a second pose for several seconds. Strobe. They take a third pose. Strobe.

BOALS: That's all the money we got.

BOALS turns MORGAN to face him.

BOALS: It ain't about the money, anyway.

They embrace. BOALS lifts her, carries her over the "threshold," puts her down. They embrace again.

PALMER enters, carrying a small metal container holding some blackberries, gives it to BOALS, then exits.

MORGAN: He brought me blackberries for courting -- blackberries.

BOALS: Sweet physic, I called them.

MORGAN: Sweet as an angel's fingertip.

BOALS: We sat on your porch eating them.

MORGAN: You meet a person, you cross the river --

BOALS: You sit on their porch with the smell of blackberries in the air, and you talk out the loneliness. "Color" in that?

MORGAN: (*echoing, smiling*) Color in that?

BOALS: Amen.

PALMER enters wearing the white half mask holding a rifle.

PALMER: I will render vengeance to mine enemies. [Deut. 32:41] Like the ring of that. I'm going to cut out your eyes.

Aims at BOALS. PERKINS enters, pulls a long red ribbon from the end of the rifle towards BOALS and MORGAN. Just before the ribbons reaches BOALS's heart, everyone freezes. Transition.

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Scene 18

PERKINS, wearing latex rubber gloves, speaks to the administration. She holds up her hands. Her open-top briefcase sits next to her.

PERKINS: I did what you told me to do so you could “lift latents” off the letter -- and still I’m getting the letters, and still my mailbox is jammed every day -- how long does this go on?

PERKINS peels off the gloves.

PERKINS: “Work their way through the system.” Uh-huh. And you have every confidence in me. Uh-huh. I’ll tell you what -- it seems to me that this system’s rigged for the persecutors. I hope you haven’t hurt yourself bending over backwards too much.

PERKINS drops the gloves into the briefcase.

PERKINS: Sorry. You can understand my anxiety -- I have no training in protecting myself from assassins.

PERKINS picks up the briefcase.

PERKINS: Yes, you’ve said that already -- you have every confidence in me. And what do I do about students who disrupt my class? My best. Just like you.

Lights shift: MORGAN. PERKINS sees her.

PERKINS: I can’t talk to you right now.

MORGAN: Your secretary said you’d be here.

PERKINS: Let me be more exact. I don’t want to talk to you [right now] --

MORGAN: I’ve been waiting.

PERKINS moves off. MORGAN follows.

MORGAN: Something amazing has happened. Please.

PERKINS: Tell me why I should. After what happened.

MORGAN: I don’t have an excuse -- I was out of line.

PERKINS: You were more than that.

MORGAN: Whatever “more” that is, that’s what I was. And even more. And I’m sorry.

PERKINS: Which still gets you nothing.

MORGAN: Look, I just wanted to tell you that something amazing happened. Would a “vision” count as amazing? Of John and Susan Morgan? That would count, wouldn’t it?

They look at each other. In the shadows appears PALMER, with a camera. They do not see him.

PERKINS: Tell me.

MORGAN: I was Susan.

PERKINS: You were Susan?

MORGAN: I know, wrong color -- now -- but then, just like the picture.

PERKINS: You, who doesn’t want to be black?

MORGAN: Apparently I’m open.

PERKINS: Or opened.

MORGAN: Or opened.

PERKINS: Does this have anything to do with Mr. Palmer?

MORGAN: Do you have time for a tea?

PERKINS appraises her.

PERKINS: I don’t know. Because I don’t know if I can trust you.

MORGAN: It’s just a tea. I’ll treat.

PERKINS: I’ll pay for my own.

PERKINS continues to appraise her.

PERKINS: I’m on pause.

MORGAN: Are you thinking about “yes”?

PERKINS puts her arm through MORGAN’s arm.

PERKINS: I am thinking of giving you some more time to convince me.

They walk off. PALMER snaps several pictures -- several strobe bursts. Transition.

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SCENE 19

*BOALS in his office. PERKINS on the opposite side of the stage. MORGAN upstage.
All in individual lights.*

BOALS: Did you see it?

PERKINS: They forwarded it to you?

BOALS: Yes.

PERKINS: Those bastards --

BOALS: My email address is on the company website. The pending contract is hardly secret.

PERKINS: I'm sorry --

BOALS: I'm actually pleased -- not with the lesbian theme --

MORGAN: "Arm in arm they go / The liberal white-black dyke and her white-black ho." Christ!

BOALS: How's your student -- what's her name?

PERKINS: Hannah Morgan.

BOALS: How's she taking it?

PERKINS: I don't know.

BOALS: They reamed her out pretty good.

MORGAN: "Hannah Susan Morgan's got nigger blood in her veins."

BOALS: Is that story true?

PERKINS: She's got African in her background, just like me.

MORGAN: Only two people aside from me know that story. My story.

PERKINS: Why are you pleased?

BOALS: No bad publicity. The controversy can be spun into a good spin for the book. Embattled professor, freedom of speech, the tragedy of race in America --

MORGAN: Fucking sold me out.

PERKINS: The race cards --

BOALS: I'm just suggesting --

PERKINS: I'm not disagreeing -- I'm angry enough --

BOALS: Then no.

PERKINS: What?

BOALS: We should let it sit.

MORGAN: "Watch the two niggers passing like the wind."

BOALS: Nothing decided in anger.

MORGAN: "Mongrel" was right.

PERKINS: "Anger" from here feels fine to me.

BOALS: See how it feels in the morning.

MORGAN: His goddamn fears have made him a fool.

BOALS: I just wanted to check in with you.

PERKINS: You did?

BOALS: I did.

PERKINS: You're sweet to do that.

BOALS: Yes I am.

PERKINS: No regrets?

BOALS: *(laughing)* It's amazing what a second kiss can reveal.

Lights out on PERKINS and BOALS. MORGAN remains lighted. She fidgets, then strides downstage. She peers into the audience as if peering into a mirror.

In the shadow PERKINS appears holding a jar of facial cleanser named "Dead Sea Black Mud." PERKINS opens it, and MORGAN scoops out a gob and smears it across her face. She keeps on doing it until her face is covered in black grainy mud.

In the shadow to her other side appears BOALS holding a towel and, if needed, a bowl of water.

MORGAN examines herself in the mirror: a face black but also minstrel black. She tries several large-toothed smiles, mugs, rolls her eyes and other minstrel moves.

Then MORGAN takes the towel from BOALS and wipes off the mud, using the water if needed, until her face comes back to its original state.

MORGAN: *(smiling broadly)* Thought so. I just thought so.

MORGAN hands back the towel, and PERKINS and BOALS exit.

MORGAN speaks into the air.

MORGAN: Mom? Hey there -- Dad around? I want both of you on the phone -- it's time to give you all a travel update.

Transition.

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SCENE 20

MORGAN and PALMER.

PALMER: I am fighting them.

MORGAN does not respond.

PALMER: I am not weak.

MORGAN again does not respond.

PALMER: I am not going to let a bunch of white guys think that they can get one over on me, kill off what I believe.

MORGAN still does not respond.

PALMER: This is a fight I have [to make] --

MORGAN: *(interrupting)* Don't blow smoke up my ass. You saw the website. Savaged -- both of us.

PALMER: That's right.

MORGAN: *(mocking)* "That's right." Even if I don't agree with her, I respect her --

PALMER: Stop it -- *(equal mock)* -- "even if" -- now who's blowing smoke -- of course you agree with her -- two birds of the same mulatto feather -- sisters of the "mix" -- you showed her the picture, after all.

MORGAN: I showed her the picture because of her --

PALMER: Don't play me "stupid," Hannah! You showed her the picture because you were collecting your "crew." Just like you were doing with me. So you could tell mama and papa and everyone else to fuck off on "carrying the torch" and let you be your "universal you" -- Hannah beyond --

MORGAN: That doesn't make it open season --

PALMER: You had no intention of sticking with Perkins past her expiration date. Or with me.

PALMER waits for a response.

PALMER: I am not hearing rebuttal. I am not hearing retort.

PALMER gets none.

PALMER: You just didn't think my expiration date would last this far -- Hannah self-righteous, Hannah in control who can just throw things away when she wants to. Everybody was using everybody else in this dance, so what's your problem now?

MORGAN: Because I don't want to end up like you.

PALMER: You could do worse --

MORGAN: Being you would be all the "worse" I could take --

PALMER: You could end up like Perkins, smug and "oh poor me." But -- I momentarily forgot -- that is you -- at least that's the Morgan narrative for today for the Hannah who comes to shame me.

MORGAN: I'll take that over heartless and gutless.

PALMER: So much smoke -- you're a fog machine! If anything comes out of this, child, you might learn to stop making up fairy tales and just try on being straight-out with yourself about yourself.

MORGAN: How about you being straight-out with me?

PALMER: You sure?

MORGAN: Where did they get that information about me? From whom --

PALMER: (*echoing*) From whom --

MORGAN: -- did they get all that low down? And the pictures, arm-in-arm?

PALMER: The same place as "the new massah" "conservative white meat" stuff --

MORGAN: I'm not talking about that one.

PALMER: I am -- that was mine.

MORGAN: You swore it wasn't.

PALMER: I lied. Flat out.

MORGAN: You betrayed me.

PALMER: I only did what you were doing to yourself -- to me -- it does take two to tango. And our dance didn't feel all that bad -- or if it felt bad to you, you faked your pleasure like a real pro, had me believing you really wanted it.

MORGAN: (*unconvinced*) I am not like you.

PALMER: Dawn comes late to Marblehead.

A momentary suspension.

PALMER: Who said revelation would comfort? You didn't come here to find out if you were staying or going -- your self-righteous mind was already made up. You just came to mix in the demons you need to justify that new chapter in your "journey" called "betrayed by love and Mitchell." Or is it, "I have re-found my niggerness"? What you didn't expect -- don't like -- can't deny -- we're still a pair.

MORGAN: Not anymore.

PALMER: Oh yes we are.

MORGAN: No.

PALMER: So go away and start making me hideous. You won't find it hard. Go.

MORGAN hesitates.

PALMER: You can go.

MORGAN stays.

PALMER: You can go.

MORGAN still stays.

PALMER: You can go.

MORGAN: All right! I was a coward.

PALMER: That's not the word I'd use.

MORGAN: You've already used "marblehead" and smug and --

PALMER: Here's the word: when you read that paper to Perkins, in class, I knew then I was in the company of a careless person. I have been finding out it's not healthy to hang with a careless person who feels herself as clean and sharp as a scalpel.

MORGAN: And what does it say about you that you would fight to take over an organization that uses up your black face on things that don't care two shits about black people?

PALMER: It says this about me -- that I like power -- getting it, using it, getting it back. Without it, my black face will get used up. With it, I get a voice for what I believe.

MORGAN: What you believe sucks.

PALMER: That shows how much you don't understand.

MORGAN: It'll rot your soul.

PALMER: That's a sentimental wrong idea said by people who don't have any power.

MORGAN: There it goes already.

PALMER: I will not make a virtue out of feeling that when I am on my knees, I have kept my integrity intact. That's just a synonym for spineless. I got a spine -- I got spine to spare. But this is not the conversation I want with you, as philosophically interesting as it may be -- I want to know this: you staying or you going? You in or you out? You up or you down? You this side or that side? You --

MORGAN motions for him to stop.

MORGAN: I'm not going to insult myself by offering you any forgiveness.

PALMER: I promise to do the same for you.

MORGAN: And your principles still suck.

PALMER: Why don't we ask John and Susan Morgan what they think about them?

A momentary suspension.

PALMER: Do you want to get some tea?

PALMER offers her his arm.

PALMER: And maybe something after the tea as well.

Transition.

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SCENE 21

PERKINS' office. PERKINS stares off into space. MORGAN enters, carrying the wooden case holding the tintype.

MORGAN: I'm sorry -- I didn't mean to startle [you] --

PERKINS: I thought you were someone else.

MORGAN: But you did ask me to come.

PERKINS: I've asked several to come.

MORGAN: (*showing box with tintype*) And bring this.

PERKINS turns away, stares back into space. MORGAN, not sure what to do, sits down.

PERKINS: Sit down.

MORGAN, already seated, remains sitting.

PERKINS: Not that long ago you were telling me that you wanted nothing to do with being "black," being anything, just do your work and pass by -- and all of a sudden they have you up on lesbian charges on the website and in chat rooms -- and you refuse to duck and cover.

PERKINS faces MORGAN.

PERKINS: Whazzup?

MORGAN raises the box.

MORGAN: I have been having more visions.

PERKINS: I am not in the mood.

MORGAN: Okay. Then I've been talking to my parents some more, trying to get them to remember for me -- help me remember.

PERKINS: Because you lack a memory?

MORGAN: Because I'd forgotten -- for a moment -- that what was good about all of that can die off with me -- because of me -- and what is [bugging you] --

PERKINS: A change of heart.

MORGAN: You sound like you don't believe me.

PERKINS: That's because I don't.

MORGAN: Why wouldn't you?

PERKINS: Because you have no heart to change.

MORGAN: Why did you call me to come here?

PERKINS: Not because I love hypocrites.

MORGAN: Then why?

PERKINS: I just named you heartless -- you staying or you going?

PERKINS waits for MORGAN to make a move. MORGAN doesn't make a move.

PERKINS: She stays. Angry. But -- what? Still believing that she is a nice girl, re-calling "what was good about all of that" -- nice words -- good liberal sentiment -- heartfelt, eh? -- tell me, then, how do you stand the self-hatred? Who gave them the information about you for the website? Of the two of us who knew, who gave it to them? I know I didn't.

MORGAN sits tight.

PERKINS: But what do I see walking yonder across the quad but Mitchell Palmer glued to Ms. Hannah Morgan. I think it was you. I think it was he. Was it?

MORGAN: Yes.

PERKINS: And from where do I espy their arm-in-arm happiness? From the steps of the administration building where I have just been reamed out by the President and the trustees, in no small measure because of Mr. Mitchell Palmer's esteemed S-F-A, under his new management. He, by the way, did some "testifyin'" at the meeting. Did you know that?

MORGAN: Yes.

PERKINS: You knew he was going to do that?

MORGAN: Yes.

PERKINS: And you said nothing to me. And you met him after he left me behind. Anything?

MORGAN: You walk your road, I walk mine.

PERKINS waits.

PERKINS: That's it.

MORGAN: It didn't end well for your people, did it?

PERKINS: How do you know that?

MORGAN: I've been reading.

PERKINS: You've been reading.

MORGAN: I have been doing my assignments.

PERKINS: No, it didn't end well. They lost everything at the end: the farm, the school, their good name.

MORGAN: And John Morgan was murdered for lying about his whiteness -- oh yeah -- shot down by a moonshiner who thought he was keeping the race pure.

PERKINS: And Susan Morgan?

MORGAN: Susan went on -- and on and on and on.

PERKINS: Such a waste.

MORGAN: I agree. On both sides. Mitchell's got ideas that will work. He's not stuck in the myth.

PERKINS: He's not stuck in the myth.

MORGAN: He is all about moving forward.

PERKINS: Well, you have got yourself on a bullet train, don't you?

PERKINS checks her watch.

PERKINS: We're done.

PERKINS stands, hands folded in front of her, peering at MORGAN. PERKINS gestures for the wooden box.

PERKINS: May I? Before you go. My last time.

MORGAN hands over the box. PERKINS opens it carefully, takes out the tintype, stares at it.

PERKINS: Such a waste, Hannah.

PERKINS takes the tintype and puts one edge against one palm and the other edge against the other palm. Without much effort, PERKINS could bend it in half.

PERKINS: You are a fucking traitor, and they all deserve better.

MORGAN: You wouldn't.

Without hesitation PERKINS bends it in half.

PERKINS: So much for civilized discourse.

PERKINS tosses it on the floor. MORGAN drops to her knees to pick it up, carefully unbends it.

BOALS enters.

PERKINS: Right on time.

BOALS: I'm sorry -- I'm interrupting --

PERKINS: *(checking watch)* Not a thing -- right on time --

BOALS: I came as soon as I --

PERKINS: Lawrence, this is Hannah Morgan.

BOALS: Hannah Morgan. *(to MORGAN)* What are you -- *(to PERKINS)* Why is she --

MORGAN: I'm fine.

PERKINS: Ms. Morgan, my agent Lawrence Boals.

BOALS: Lillie -- the Professor -- has talked about you. Only good things.

PERKINS: *(to BOALS)* You all right?

BOALS: Nice to meet you. *(to PERKINS)* I'm fine.

PERKINS: You don't look fine.

BOALS: We'll talk later.

PERKINS: Something tells me we should talk now.

MORGAN: I was leaving --

PERKINS: Yes you were.

PERKINS ignores MORGAN. PERKINS and BOALS look at each other, and an understanding passes between them. MORGAN watches.

PERKINS: There's trouble.

BOALS: It can be worked out.

PERKINS: Because of everything --

BOALS: If not this one, we'll get ourselves another one -- and there are legal reme[dies] -- Lillie -- Lillie -- we'll get another publisher --

PERKINS: *(to MORGAN)* You said that Susan Morgan had gone on and on --

MORGAN: Why should I answer you?

PERKINS: You said --

MORGAN: She started a school, an academy, just like --

PERKINS: Just like my people did --

MORGAN: Named after John Morgan.

PERKINS: Funny how we think schools will make us smarter.

MORGAN: And books.

PALMER enters in shadow, wearing a something like a trench coat.

BOALS: Imagine how much worse if --

PERKINS: And how good would you call it now, Lawrence -- all the barbarians --

Transition moves seamlessly into the next scene. BOALS and MORGAN exit.

* * * * *

SCENE 22

PERKINS walks up to PALMER. Light as if coming from a streetlight.

PERKINS: -- are at the gate, and waiting --

PALMER: Who's at the gate? Which gate?

PERKINS: Of Paradise. Would you like to fuck me?

PALMER stares at her.

PALMER: Rephrase it.

PERKINS: Right -- of course -- I would like you to fuck me.

PALMER: Could be better.

PERKINS: I want you to fuck me.

PALMER: Why?

PERKINS: Because it's the closest I'll get to tasting what a winner tastes.

PALMER stares at her.

PERKINS: You pause.

PALMER: I could let you have a taste.

PERKINS: Somehow, I knew you wouldn't disappoint me.

PALMER: I wouldn't want you to have yet another disappointment in life.

PERKINS moves into a different light as light goes out on PALMER, who exits.

PERKINS: We did "it" in my office -- late -- I wanted a record of his coming and his going left with the security guard. I knew he couldn't resist -- Hannah or no Hannah -- that's the way an appetite for power works. After he left, I summoned up a facility I did not know I had for playing the aggrieved victim of a rape.

PERKINS makes a melodramatic gesture.

PERKINS: I was good.

PERKINS makes another melodramatic gesture.

PERKINS: It worked.

Behind her, in a dim light, PALMER, now looking like WILLIAM (ragged clothes, terrified), appears with a noose around his neck.

PERKINS: Some things just never change.

BOALS joins PERKINS.

BOALS: How are you doing?

PERKINS: I'm fine.

BOALS: Good.

PERKINS: I'm going to write another book.

BOALS: You will need to get yourself a different agent. I can't. Not after --

PERKINS gives BOALS a violent, vicious shove out of the light. Light on PALMER out.

PERKINS: Some things just never goddamn change, do they?

End of play.