SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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SF PERUSALS

Native Son

The Biography of a Young American

by Paul Green
and
Richard Wright

Adapted from the novel by Richard Wright

A play in eleven scenes to be performed without an intermission.

A Samuel French Acting Edition

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NATIVE SON was first presented as a Mercury Production by Orson Welles and John Houseman at the St. James Theatre, New York City, March 24, 1941. It was directed by Welles, with Canada Lee in the role of the confused and erring Bigger Thomas. This revised version of the drama was produced by the Carolina Playmakers for the Dedication of the Paul Green Theatre at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N. C., September 29, 1978, with the following company:

Director ..... *Lee R. Yopp*
Set Designer ..... *Tommy Rezzuto*
Lighting Designer ..... *Peter Baselici*
Costume Designer ..... *Bobbi Owen*

CAST:

BIGGER THOMAS ..... *Gordon Tobias Cureton*
A Negro youth about twenty or twenty-one years old.

HANNAH THOMAS ..... *Mary Hargraves*
His mother, fifty-five.

VERA THOMAS ..... *Shannon Spears*
His sister, sixteen.

BUDDY THOMAS ..... *Clarkston Hines*
His brother, twelve.

JACK HENSON ..... *Herman Levern Jones*

GUS MITCHELL ..... *Eugene Atwater*

"G.H." RANKIN ..... *Hubert L. Williamson, Jr.*
Cronies of Bigger and about his age.

ERNIE JONES ..... *Stanley J. Serxner*
A cafe and night club owner.

HENRY G. DALTON ..... *Earl Wynn*
A capitalist, about fifty-five.

ELLEN DALTON ..... *Marion Fitz-Simons*
His wife, about fifty.

MARY DALTON ..... *Jeni Lamm*
Their daughter, twenty-two or twenty-three.

PEGGY MACAULIFE ..... *Betty A. Setzer*
The Dalton cook and maid, forty.

JEFF BRITTEN ..... *Steven Bernholz*
A private detective and local politician, forty-five.

JAN ERLONE ..... *Lyndon Fuller*
A labor leader, twenty-eight.
JED NORRIS ..... *Gerald Unks*
A newspaperman, forty.
CLARA MEARS ..... *Debra L. Woodward*
Bigger's girlfriend, twenty.
MISS EMMET ..... *Carrie Renee Spotts*
A social worker, thirty-two.
DAVID A. BUCKLEY ..... *Leonard McLeod*
District Attorney, forty.
EDWARD MAX ..... *Lloyd Borstelmann*
An elderly lawyer.
REVEREND HAMMOND ..... *Prince Taylor*
A fundamentalist preacher, fifty.
REPORTERS ..... *Robert F. Byrd, Donald Capparella*
Matthew B. Clayton, Mark Kogan, Chris McIsaac
Ken Strong, Ralph Weeks, Jr.
GUARDS ..... *David Craig, Cullum Rogers*
JUDGE ALVIN C. HANLEY ..... *Dwight Hunsucker*
COURT STENOGRAPHER ..... *Susan Byrum*

Technical Director ..... *David M. Glenn*
Production Stage Manager ..... *Cynthia A. Boardman*
Assistant Stage Manager ..... *Haskell Fitz-Simons*
Master Carpenter ..... *Randall J. Bailey*
Master Painter ..... *Donna Beeson*
Costumer ..... *Judy Adamson*
Assistant to the Costume Designer ..... *Michel Yeuell*
Costume Assistants ..... *Tracy Sanders, Carol Vick*
Stage Carpenter ..... *Marshall Ballew*
Master Electrician ..... *Pam Mills*
Sound Technician ..... *Bob Ferguson*
Sound Console Operator ..... *Deanna Riley*
Property Mistress ..... *Belinda Mitchell*
Assistant to Paul Green ..... *Rhoda Wynn*

SCENES

I. The Thomas one-room apartment, an early mid-winter morning.

II. A street in front of Ernie's Kitchen Shack, later the same day.

III. The Dalton breakfast room, a few hours later.

IV. Mary Dalton's bedroom, late the same night.

V. The Dalton breakfast room, the following morning.

VI. The kitchenette apartment of Clara Mears, evening of the same day.

VII. The basement of the Dalton home, the next afternoon.

VIII. A room in a ruined apartment house, night, a day later.

IX. A hearing room in the City Courthouse, some days later.

X. The Courtroom, a week later.

XI. The death cell, some days later.

TIME

1939–1940

PLACE

The Black Belt of Chicago mainly

Native Son

SCENE I

In the darkness of the theatre, a strident alarm clock begins ringing. It continues a while and then dies out as the curtain rises on a small poverty-stricken room in an old apartment house in the crowded Black Belt of Chicago's southside. A door at the Right leads into the hallway, and at the Right Center is a pallet of quilts upon which two of the Thomas family, BIGGER *and* BUDDY, *sleep. Farther back and at the Right is a rusty iron bed upon which* VERA *and* HANNAH *sleep, and at the Center Rear is a small dresser with a dull and splotched mirror. At the Left Rear, screened from view by a cheap chintz curtain, is a corner nook with a gas stove, a sink, and shelves for groceries. A drop leaf table, covered with an oilcloth, is against the wall at the Left Front. There are a couple of chairs, a box and a chest about the room. The plastered walls are cracked and show the lathing here and there. A few crayon likenesses of dead relatives are on the wall—* BIGGER'S *father, his grandfather and grandmother. And in clear dominance above the one bed at the Right Rear is a large colored lithograph of Jesus Christ hanging on the Cross, with the motto—"I am the Resurrection and the Life." A flower pot on the sill of the window at the Left Center with a single red geranium is the room's one pretense to beauty. As the curtain rises the family is busy getting dressed and preparing breakfast. The muffled form of* BIGGER THOMAS *lies bundled under a quilt on the pallet. Far away in the distance the chimes of a great clock are heard ringing.*

HANNAH. (*The middle-aged careworn mother who is busy at the stove and still wearing her flannel nightgown.*) You children hurry up. That old clock done struck the half-past. Hear me, Vera?

VERA. Yes, Ma. (VERA *is a slender brown-skinned girl of sixteen, dressed in a pink cotton nightgown.*)

HANNAH. And you too, Buddy. I got a big washing on my hands today.

(BUDDY, *a dark sober little fellow of twelve, is standing by the stove buttoning his shirt with one hand and warming the other at the gas flame. He is shivering from the morning chill.*)

BUDDY. Yessum.

HANNAH. And, Vera, you got to get to that sewing class. (BUDDY *sneezes.*) Yes, look at that boy, caught cold again sleeping on that old floor. Told you better sleep with me and Vera at the bed foot. (HANNAH *is now fastening her skirt which she has pulled on over her nightgown.*) Turn your head, son, so we can get our clothes on. (*Silently* BUDDY *turns and looks toward the pallet where* BIGGER *lies, buttoning his shirt the while. The sleeping* BIGGER *turns over, muttering under his quilt, and stuffs a pillow against his head.*)

VERA. Ma wants you to get up too, Bigger. Somebody'll stumble over you. (*She pulls her dress over her head and slips her cotton nightgown off underneath it.* HANNAH *looks toward the pallet and sighs.*)

HANNAH. Get the milk from the hall, Buddy.

BUDDY. Yessum. (*He quickly pulls on his little old coat, his lips blubbering from the cold.* HANNAH *pushes the table out from the wall and begins setting a few dishes on it.* BUDDY *goes out as* HANNAH *calls after him.*)

HANNAH. Take the empty bottle. Every time I got to tell you. (*He turns back, picks up a bottle by the door and*

disappears.) And, Vera, spread up the bed. (*She begins singing her shrill morning song as she works.*)
Life is like a mountain railroad
With an engineer that's brave—
We must make the run successful
From the cradle to the grave.

BIGGER. (*Muttering from his pallet.*) How the hell can a man sleep with all this racket?

VERA. (*A little testily.*) Who'd want to sleep when the rest of us have to get out and work so hard?

BIGGER. (*Growling.*) Yeah, start right in soon's I git my eyes open! (*He covers his head with the quilt again.*)

HANNAH. Let him alone, Vera.

VERA. He ought to be up looking for a job. It's the truth, Ma.

HANNAH. Well, he's got his application in down at the relief station.

VERA. But he ought to get out—hunt for work—maybe ask that truck man to take him back, and we'd have something for Christmas!

BIGGER. (*Sitting suddenly up.*) And that white man sassing at me? No, sir. (BIGGER *is a dark muscular young fellow of some twenty or twenty-one with deep-set eyes and sensitive heavy face. He is dressed in rumpled trousers, shirt and socks.*)

VERA. Thought it was you sassing at him?

BIGGER. You go to— (*Muttering darkly.*) They don't want no niggers driving trucks down to Florida—

HANNAH. Better get up, son.

BIGGER. Might as well—tongues clanging like fire bells. (HANNAH *goes out with her towel and is heard humming her song Offstage.* BIGGER *rises and stands over his shoes, kicks one into place with his foot, and then rams his left foot down halfway into it. He stomps to get the shoe on.*) These old shoes wet from that snow four days ago. I was looking for a job *then.*

VERA. (*Who is now putting things on the table.*) Well, knocking the house down won't dry 'em. Every morning you get up like something mad at the world! (BIGGER *stomps his right foot to get the other shoe on.* BUDDY *enters at the Right with a bottle of milk.*)

BUDDY. (*Coming up to the table and helping* VERA.) Goody, peaches to go with them cornflakes.

VERA. And we better go slow on 'em, too. That relief box got to last till Saturday. (BUDDY *pours the milk.* BIGGER *lights a cigarette and stands smoking and staring before him.* HANNAH *returns, still singing her song.*)

HANNAH.

Watch the curves, the fills, the tunnels,
Never falter, never fail.
Keep your hand upon the throttle
And your eyes upon the rail.

(*She hands her towel to* VERA, *who takes it and goes out at the Right.* BUDDY *strains at the can of peaches with a large pocket knife.*)

Gimme that knife. And get away from this table until you done washed yourself. Go on. Vera's got the towel. (BUDDY *shies away and goes out.* HANNAH *appraises the knife an instant in her hand.*) Why any human being wants to carry around a knife as big as this, I don't see. Why you give it to him, Bigger?

BIGGER. (*As he reaches out and grabs the knife.*) I didn't *give* it to him. He just wanted to tote it a little bit. (HANNAH *opens the can with a can opener.* BIGGER *sits bent over in a chair smoking and idly turning the pages of a movie magazine spread on the floor before him. She looks over at him.*)

HANNAH. Bigger, try for one time to roll that pallet up. No telling when Miss Emmet might come by.

BIGGER. (*Still lazily reading.*) That old caseworker ain't studying 'bout us.

HANNAH. She got us on relief—and kept us from starv-

ing. (VERA *comes in again.* BIGGER *rises and rushes out at the Right, bumping into somebody in the hall. A woman's high-pitched voice fills the air with a whorl of words.*)

VOICE. Heigh—you! Yeh, look at you, just look at you, Bigger Thomas, a-tromping and a-scrouging. I'm ahead of you and you knows it! Git back in line and wait your turn, boy. (BIGGER *comes back and stands angrily in the door.*)

VERA. (*With a biting little laugh.*) Reckon Sister Temple told him his manners.

BIGGER. (*Wrathfully.*) All right now, and what's so funny about that old woman with the toilet trots? (BUDDY *enters.*)

BUDDY. Here's the towel, Bigger. (BIGGER *grabs the towel, balls it up and hurls it across the room, then sits down and resumes his magazine.* VERA *and* BUDDY *help their mother at the table, passing in and out of the nook with a few dishes and food.*)

VERA. (*Coming from the stove.*) And that's another thing he ain't got—no respect.

HANNAH. Sister Temple lives with her Lord.

BIGGER. And her Epsom Salts! Eats it like oatmeal. Jack says so.

VERA. Yeh, and that Jack's breaking his grandma's heart like you're breaking Ma's.

BIGGER. I wish you'd stop being a little snot, dirting up where you don't belong.

HANNAH. (*Opening a box of cornflakes.*) That's no way to speak to your own sister, son, and her getting to be a young lady now. (BIGGER *flaps his magazine over irritatedly.*)

VERA. If you was the sort of man Ma always hoped you'd be, you'd not have to wait for your turn to go to the bathroom. You'd be up early and get there first. But no—you'd rather hang around Ernie's place with Jack and that low-life gang and let us live on relief.

HANNAH. Hush, Vera.

BIGGER. (*Muttering.*) Relief don't say more'n forty

people got to use the same toilet every morning—lining up like women to see Clark Gable. (*With sudden viciousness as he flings out his arms.*) It's the way the damned white folks built these rat nests!

VERA. Now don't start cussing the white folks again.

HANNAH. They what keep us alive right this minute. (*He gets up, picks up the towel and strides into the hall.* HANNAH *wags her head dolefully.*) Now here we go again. Said to myself last night we was gonna quit fussing at him. Don't do no good.

VERA. How can we help it, Ma, and seem like some devil growing in him all the time. (*Her voice filled with angry earnestness.*) He gets more like a stranger every day. And there's that Clara woman he runs with. Here I try to make myself respectable and be somebody. He ain't never got a *smile* for nobody.

HANNAH. (*Calling contritely.*) Come on back, son. Le's try to eat in peace, Vera.

BUDDY. (*Piping up.*) Bigger says we ain't got nothing to smile about, says that's what's wrong with the niggers—always smiling, and nothing to smile about. (*He leans over, smells the peaches and wrinkles his nose in delight.*)

HANNAH. Shut yo' mouth, boy.

BUDDY. That's what he say—

HANNAH. Yeh, he say a lot he hadn't ought to. If the white folks ever hear him talkin' 'gainst them—

VERA. And some these days they're gonna hear him. Mark my words, Ma. Some of these days he's going to sit down and cry, and he'll wish he'd made something of himself instead of just a tramp. But it'll be too late then. (BIGGER *appears in the doorway.*)

HANNAH. Bigger needs God in him, that's what. I've prayed, and Reverend Hammond's put up special prayers for him. Yeh, God's what he needs, po' boy.

BIGGER. God! (*Flinging out a gesture, his voice rising mockingly.*) Yeh, you got him hanging on the wall there—

the white folks' God! (*Mockingly.*) "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

HANNAH. (*With a touch of piteousness as she looks fervently at the picture on the wall.*) Your pa lived by it—he believed in that—

BIGGER. But that white mob back in Mississippi didn't believe in it. (*Half-chanting.*) "They hung his head on the thorny cross, the red blood trickled down."

HANNAH. Bigger, stop that!

VERA. (*Quickly.*) Come on, le's eat breakfast.

BUDDY. (*Uncertainly.*) Yeh, le's eat! (*They sit to the table.*)

HANNAH. Bow your heads. (*Suddenly there comes a thin, dry rattling sound in the wall at the Rear. They all sit listening an instant.* BUDDY *calls out.*)

BUDDY. Listen! That rat again—I hear him!

BIGGER. Yeah, that's old man Dalton all right. (*Hacking a hunk of bread off from the loaf and buttering it.*) If that old rat stick his head out this time, I'm gonna scrush it for him. (*The noise in the wall is heard still again.*)

BUDDY. (*Whispering.*) That's him, aw right.

HANNAH. Bow your heads, children. (BUDDY *and* VERA *bow their heads.* BIGGER *sits munching his bread and staring moodily before him.* HANNAH'S *words rise in deep humility.*) Our Father in Heaven, we thank thee for this food you have prepared for the nourishment of our humble bodies. We thank thee for the many blessings of thy loving grace and mercy. Bless this home, this food and these children you gave me. Help me to raise them right. And thine be the power and the glory forever and ever—Amen. (*They all begin eating. Suddenly* BIGGER *springs out of his chair with a shout.*)

BIGGER. There he go! (*He lunges across the room, flings himself over the bed and begins jabbing in the corner with his foot. Then springing back he seizes an old baseball bat from the floor.*)

BUDDY. (*As* VERA *and* HANNAH *jump to their feet.*) Where is he? Where is he?

BIGGER. Stop up his hole! He's our meat this time. (BUDDY *grabs a box and puts it in front of the hole.* BIGGER *creeps toward the chest.*) The sonofabitch, I see his shiny eye. (BIGGER *lunges behind the chest and strikes a shattering blow against the floor. There is a scramble as* BUDDY *rushes across the room and peers under the bed.* BIGGER *creeps forward, his whole body tensely alive.*)

BUDDY. (*Pointing.*) Yonder—yonder—

BIGGER. (*Bending down.*) Jesus, look at them teeth! (*He grabs the end of the bed with one hand and swings it around.*) He's behind that box now. (*His voice is charged with a harsh intensity.*)

VERA. (*Half-weeping.*) Let him go, Bigger. Let him go.

HANNAH. (*Piteously.*) Unstop the hole, let him out.

BIGGER. Gimme that skillet, quick! (BUDDY *rushes over to the alcove and hands him the skillet.* BIGGER *takes aim and hurls it into the corner.*)

BUDDY. (*Excitedly.*) You hit him, you hit him!

(*A smallish young white woman, carrying a black portfolio in her hands, stands in the doorway. She looks inquiringly and then half-frightenedly at the scene before her. Now* BIGGER *creeps toward the kitchen nook.* HANNAH *and* VERA *have their arms about each other, watching him breathlessly.* BIGGER *stands waiting, poised, his hand raised.*)

BIGGER. (*His feet weaving to the Right and Left.*) Yeah, there you sit on your hind legs and gnashing them tushes at me—I'm gonna beat your brains out— Wheeooh! (*With a yell he jumps forward and strikes with flailing, lightning blows along the curtain edge on the floor.*)

HANNAH. Bigger, Bigger!

BIGGER. (*Lifting the rat up and holding it by the tail, a*

murmuring chant running from his lips.) I got you, old man Dalton, got you this time. I done told you yo' time would come—I put out your light. You dead now—dead, dead, dead, dead—

VERA. Stop him, Ma! (*The woman in the door now stands shaken and weakly leaning against the lintel.* VERA *sees her.*) Look, Ma!

HANNAH. (*Moaning.*) Mercy sake, Bigger. Here's Miss Emmet.

BIGGER. Try to run now—try to bite me—just try it, you fat, slimy, greedy bastard! (*His words gradually die out as he looks up and sees* MISS EMMET. *She comes on into the room.*)

HANNAH. Miss Emmet!—Bigger, take that thing out of here right now!

MISS EMMET. I came a little early—before you got to work. (*She is a kindly, efficient, young woman, serious-faced and sincere.*)

BUDDY. We just killed a rat. Yessum. (*With a touch of boyish pride.*) Bigger done it. Ain't he a big one?

BIGGER. That scutter could cut your throat—the biggest one we ever killed. (*Holding the rat up.*) See him, Miss Emmet?

MISS EMMET. Yes, I see it. (*Drawing back.*) Better throw it away.

BIGGER. (*Feeling him.*) See how fat he is—feeding on garbage. They get more to eat than we do. Yeh, old Dalton, you're going to the incinerator and there ain't no coming back. (*He shakes the rat at* VERA *and she squeals.*)

MISS EMMET. (*Quietly.*) Why do you call it Dalton, Bigger?

BIGGER. Just call 'em that.

BUDDY. Yessum—we calls all the rats "Old Man Dalton"—the big millionaire what owns all the houses round here. Gimme heah, Bigger.

BIGGER. (*Now beginning to grow silent again, the excite-*

ment dying in him.) Okay. (*He hands the rat to* BUDDY *who takes it proudly and goes out.* BIGGER *sits down on the chest, finishing a hunk of bread.*)

HANNAH. I said to the boys, "You might leastwise say '*Mister* Dalton.' " (*A small meek smile passes around* MISS EMMET's *lips.*)

MISS EMMET. Yes, considering Mr. Dalton's kindness to the people of your race.

HANNAH. Sit down, ma'am. (MISS EMMET *sits down and opens her portfolio.*)

BIGGER. (*Softly.*) Kindness?

MISS EMMET. Yes, kindness. Think of all he does for your race—his gift of millions of dollars to colored schools, and then that new recreation hall with the ping-pong tables—

BIGGER. Ping-pong tables. What good are they to a man that's burning down? (*Mockingly.*) Yes, ma'am.

HANNAH. (*Watching* MISS EMMET *eagerly, holding her cup of coffee in her hand.*) Don't mind him, ma'am. I pray the Lord you got some good news for us, ma'am.

MISS EMMET. (*Now all business-like.*) I hope so.

HANNAH. Bless you, ma'am. I knowed you'd help us.

MISS EMMET. Just a final question or two, Bigger, about your application. As head of the house— (*She takes out a double-leaved form sheet and unstops her fountain pen.*)

BIGGER. (*With a little laugh.*) We ain't got nothin' but this one room, and there ain't no head to it.

MISS EMMET. But as soon as we place you in a job, Bigger, you'll feel differently.

BIGGER. (*Fumbling with the movie magazine.*) What kind of job?

MISS EMMET. Mr. Dalton is interested in placing his jobless tenants.

HANNAH. (*Happily.*) Hear that, Bigger?

BIGGER. (*With the faintest touch of a snicker.*) Yessum. He wants to be sure we're able to pay the rent. (HANNAH

sets her coffee cup down and wipes her hands on her apron. BUDDY *reappears and goes back to his bowl of cornflakes.*)

MISS EMMET. (*As she looks at her wristwatch.*) There's an opening with Mr. Dalton's family itself—the job of chauffeur. You might get that place. According to the record here, you're a first-rate driver.

BUDDY. He sure can drive. And he can fix cars too. I can tell you that! (*Snapping his fingers.*) She's gone from here. (*He proudly grasps an imaginary steering wheel and "drives."*) Hot dog!

MISS EMMET. But we must supply Mr. Dalton with *all* the facts. (*Sympathetically.*) Here under previous history you failed to mention that matter of the reform school, Bigger. (*Reading from her report.*) Three months term, ending June 15th, 1939. Metropolitan Home for the Detention of Juvenile Delinquents—Theft—Taking of three automobile tires from a colored garage— Is that right?

BIGGER. (*With a faint touch of mockery.*) Yessum, that must be about right.

MISS EMMET. And you haven't had any other trouble since, Bigger?

HANNAH. No'm. (VERA *and* BUDDY *say "No'm" too.*)

BIGGER. No'm.

MISS EMMET. (*Holding out her fountain pen.*) Now please sign there.

BIGGER. (*With apparent reluctance as he takes the pen.*) I done signed that paper once.

MISS EMMET. Yes, but this is added material and we must follow the Washington rules.

BIGGER. Sure, if the big man in Washington say so. He the boss. (*With a flourish in the air, he writes his name.*)

MISS EMMET. (*Taking the blank, breathing on it, and then giving it a little drying wave in the air.*) I'll send Mr. Dalton a confidential report recommending you, Bigger. In fact, I'll *take* it to him right away.

HANNAH. (*Joy breaking over her face.*) God bless you,

ma'am. Bigger gonna have a good job— (*Touching her hands together evangelically.*) Bless the Lord, bless the Lord. Bigger will make a new start— From now on he will, ma'am. Won't you, son? (BIGGER *is silent.*)

BUDDY. (*With fervent admiration.*) You gonna drive Mr. Dalton's big car, Bigger. (*Suddenly putting his hands on the steering wheel of his imaginary car and driving it around the room.*) Swoos-s-sh! Look out, everybody—old cannonball coming round the curve. (*He bumps into* MISS EMMET *who stands up with a gentle little laugh.*)

HANNAH. Look out, boy, you 'bout to run over the lady!

BIGGER. (*Flinging up his hand and grinning as he adopts the attitude of a traffic cop, at the same time blowing a sharp whistle through his teeth.*) Hey, what you mean running through that red light? Pull up heah and lemme see your license, boy. (*He scuffs* BUDDY's *hair a bit in spontaneous friendliness. Then his face grows heavy again.*) But, pshaw, I ain't gonna get that job.

MISS EMMET. Now good-bye, Mrs. Thomas. Good-bye, Bigger. You'll hear as soon as I contact Mr. Dalton. Keep your head up.

HANNAH. (*Following her to the door.*) Bless you, ma'am, bless you—whole soul and body! (*She turns happily about the room.*) And my prayers are answered. I knowed they'd be. (*She turns to* VERA *and hugs her, then begins piling the household wash rapidly in a sheet.*)

VERA. (*Coming by* BIGGER *and stopping—with deep earnestness.*) Maybe this is the real break. We are all so glad, Bigger. And we can quit living in one room like pigs.

BIGGER. Aw, cut it out.

VERA. Good-bye, Ma. (*She goes by her mother, gives her a little pecking kiss and then turning gives* BIGGER's *arm an affectionate squeeze.*) And you'll help me pay for my domestic science, won't you?

HANNAH. Sure he will.

VERA. Come on, Buddy, time you was out selling your papers. (*Jubilantly.*) This is a big day for all of us.

HANNAH. (*Jubilantly also.*) Ain't it the truth. Thank the Lord for the bountiful blessings of this day. (*She looks over to the picture of the religious figure.*) Now let's all hurry. (BIGGER *is now sitting at the table idly marking across the movie magazine with a pencil.*)

BUDDY. (*Putting on his overcoat and cap.*) 'Bye, Ma. (*Standing in front of* BIGGER.) You lemme ride in that Cadillac sometime?

BIGGER. (*Spreading out an imaginary document in front of him and beginning to write gravely.*) Have to examine the records of the—er—Detention Home first. How the hell I know what you been doing on the sly?

BUDDY. (*His face crinkling into a smile.*) Bigger, you sure a case. Look, Ma, Bigger's smiling.

BIGGER. Hell, I ain't smiling none. (BUDDY *scampers out after* VERA.)

HANNAH. (*Laying a coin on the table by him.*) Here, son, take this fifty cents. Run down there to the corner and get me two bars of that hard soap, a bottle of bluing, a box of starch, and a can of Red Devil lye, and make a bee-line back to the basement. Sister Temple and me will be needing it for the work. (BIGGER *continues to scrawl with his pencil.*) Hear me?

BIGGER. Yeh.

HANNAH. (*Turning to him, her voice affectionate and serious.*) Bigger, that good white lady is right. From now on, you're the real head of the house. She gonna get you that job. I ain't gonna be with you always, trying to make a home for you children. And Vera and Buddy has got to have protection. Hear me, son? (*She lifts the bundled sheet of clothes over her shoulder.*)

BIGGER. Uhm—

HANNAH. I'll be too old to work soon. (*Laying a hand*

gently on his shoulder.) And some day yet you'll believe like me—my boy—believe in God. In His protection I'm never afraid—never afraid. (*She indicates the religious calendar on the wall, then bends over, touches him lightly on the hair with her lips and goes silently and suddenly out. For an instant he sits stock still. His hand goes up in the air as if to feel the top of his head and then comes down on the table in a clenched fist. He looks upward at the picture of Christ on the wall. He begins to study it closely, and gradually a wry twisting smile slides around his lips.*)

BIGGER. (*Reading.*) "I am the Resurrection and the Life." —Uhm— (*He gets sharply up and puts on his old leather coat and cap. The chimes begin to ring again. He stands listening.*) They ringing your bells, Lord, high in the white man's tower! (*As if irritated by some inner thought, he slaps the coin down on the table.*) Heads I get your stuff, Ma, tails I don't. (*Disgustedly.*) Heads—damn! (*He gives a little laugh, shakes his shoulders and spits angrily. A signal whistle comes up from outside the window at the Left. It is repeated. He stands in indecision a moment and then goes over and looks out. Finally he raises his hand in a sort of fascist salute and waves it across the pane.*) Hey, Jack. Yeh—yeh—I'll meet you at Ernie's. (*He turns back toward the bed, pulls forth a wooden packing box and unlocks it. He takes out a pistol and looks at it and then up.*) This here's what you didn't have, Lord—but I got it! (*He makes a movie quick-draw, then crams the pistol into his coat.* HANNAH *comes in.*)

HANNAH. (*To herself.*) Seem like my mind failing away. Forgot my washboard again. (*Queryingly.*) What you up to, boy? (*Without answering,* BIGGER *kicks the box back under the bed and goes quickly out. Something in his actions disturbs* HANNAH. *She gazes worriedly after him and then hurries to the door and calls.*) Bigger! (*More loudly.*) Bigger! (*But there is no answer. She hurries into the hall,*

calling.) Come back here, boy! (*The chimes continue to ring. The scene fades out.*)

SCENE II

The chimes die away as the scene opens on a street and sidewalk in front of Ernie's Kitchen Shack, somewhere on Indiana Avenue near 47th Street. At the Right Front the gullet of a narrow alleyway leads back into the shadows. And at the mouth of the alleyway sits a garbage can, looking like a squat molar in its maw, across which is a staring label saying "Keep Our City Clean." The entrance to Ernie's place of business is through a door in the Center with windows on either side. Adjoining the "shack" is an empty building with a boarded-up window on which are posters announcing in large letters the candidacy of two men for the office of District Attorney for Cook County. One of the men depicted, David A. Buckley, is middle-aged, of imposing bearing, and declared to be "The Party's Choice for District Attorney." The other, Edward Max, is somewhat elderly, less commanding, and announced to be "The People's Choice." At the Left Front is a hydrant and near it a steel lamppost topped above with the usual globular glass. The sounds of a busy thoroughfare are heard Off at the Left—a streetcar clanging, automobile horns, now and then a tremulous roar of a heavy truck, and once or twice the siren of a police car or ambulance—a great wash of droning sound. BIGGER *enters. He stares at the posters and reads aloud to himself.*

BIGGER. "David Buckley—for District Attorney. The law is your protector." You old sonofabitch, I bet you make

a million a year already in graft. If I was in your shoes for just one day, I'd never have to worry again. (*He spits at the poster.*) Get elected and no telling how much you'll steal. (*He turns toward the poster of* MAX.) And you, old crumb, they say, are a communist!— (*Mockingly.*) "The people's friend!" Wants us all to become Reds! (JACK *enters. He is a rather short, pudgy, young Negro, alert and quick-moving.*)

JACK. Hiya, Bigger!

BIGGER. Hiya, Jack. (*Gesturing to the posters.*) Which of them bastards you gonna vote for?

JACK. (*In sudden and hilarious ridicule.*) Vote, you say! Vote!—for the right price. (*He bows about him in laughter, slapping his thighs.*) All politicians in Chicago are crooks, you know that. That's the way white folks run things, ain't it? And we niggers got no say-so.

BIGGER. Yeh. (*Indulgently.*) And if you and me run things, we'd steal all we could too, wouldn't we?

JACK. Sho' God would! Last 'lection I voted twice—five bucks a crack. I was only nineteen. (*Imitatingly.*) "You twenty-one, boy?" "Oh, yessuh, twenty-one my last birthday—twenty-one." "Here you are." (*Pantomimically he reaches to take the money. They both laugh.*)

BIGGER. (*Looking off.*) Time G.H. was here.

JACK. He'll be here soon. Everything's jake.

BIGGER. Okay.

JACK. (*Softly.*) Passed old Blum's pawnshop while ago—old devil setting in there like a crab.

BIGGER. (*Looking carefully about him.*) Yeh, I seen him. Back to the door—bent over by the cash register working in his books. How much you think we get?

JACK. Hundred-fifty bucks anyhow. It's a cinch.

BIGGER. Cinch—and a white man. (*Shaking his head.*) Hope you're right.

JACK. Getting up into big time, boy. Not like— (*With a chuckle.*) stealing tires from a nigger garage. (*He laughs.*)

BIGGER. (*Pulling his dollar watch from his pocket.*)

Uhm—twenty minutes till. Gimme a cigarette, Jack. I done smoked out. (JACK *pulls out a pack of cigarettes and gives* BIGGER *one.*)

JACK. (*Peering at him narrowly.*) And ain't no gun in it.

BIGGER. Who said a gun? Gus say it?

JACK. Somebody get killed—then the hot seat. (*Whistling.*) Jesus! No! (BIGGER *stares at him.*)

BIGGER. That Gus Mitchell—old tongue wags at both ends. He keep mo' out of trouble just wagging one end. (*He lights his cigarette and holds the match for* JACK.)

JACK. Gus got mighty sharp eyes, though. (*After a few draws.*) Gosh, you shake like an old woman. And what your hands doing sweating so?

BIGGER. (*Throwing down the match.*) Hell, light it yourself.

(JACK *lights up.* CLARA MEARS, *an attractive, young Negro girl, comes in at the Right, carrying a package under one arm. She smiles brightly over at* BIGGER *and stops.*)

CLARA. Hi, Bigger.

JACK. Hi, Clara.

BIGGER. (*Nonchalantly.*) Hi, Clara.

CLARA. (*To* BIGGER.) Thought I'd find you here.

BIGGER. Smart girl—

CLARA. Missed you last night, honey.

BIGGER. I was busy. (*She puts out a hand and touches him affectionately on the arm.*)

CLARA. Gonna see you tonight?

BIGGER. Maybe.

JACK. (*Laughing.*) Maybe.

CLARA. The Rhinelanders got a house full of company for Christmas—but I'll get off. Maybe we'll go to a picture? (*Looking at her wristwatch and then up at the sun.*) Gee, I got to hurry. (*Giving* BIGGER's *arm a farewell squeeze.*) It's a date.

BIGGER. (*Still nonchalantly.*) Okay. (*She gazes deep into his face and then hurries out at the Left.*)

JACK. Shucks, that gal loves the very ground you walk on.

BIGGER. It don't matter.

JACK. Uh? It better matter.

BIGGER. Love 'em and leave 'em.

JACK. Not Clara. (*They puff in silence a moment and then stare Off before them.* BIGGER *runs his fingers around inside his collar and twists his head.* JACK *looks at him.*) Kinder warm today—for December.

BIGGER. Yeh.

JACK. Be glad when summer comes and them sweet old watermelons start rolling up from the South.

BIGGER. (*Sharply.*) Summer or winter—all the same. (*He pulls out his watch again.*)

JACK. Yeh, all the same. Quit looking at that old dollar watch—time never pass. (*He chuckles.*)

BIGGER. What's so funny? (*He spits.*)

JACK. Gus say he don't want you in on the Blum job neither—too nervous, he say.

BIGGER. Lousy runt!

JACK. Say you too hair-trigger. Now keep your shirt on and quit that spitting. There he come.

(JACK *straightens up and stares Off as* GUS MITCHELL *comes cake-walking briskly into the scene. He is a small-sized Negro about* BIGGER'S *age and wears his cap turned round like a baseball catcher. As he enters, he cups his right hand to his mouth as though holding an imaginary telephone transmitter and his left hand to his ear as a receiver. He grins as he bows.*)

GUS. Hello—hello.

JACK. (*Responding quickly with his telephone pantomiming.*) Hello—Yes—uhm—old Gus boy—

GUS. Who's speaking?

JACK. Why—er—this is the President of the United States of America.

GUS. Oh, yes suh, Mr. President. What's on your mind?

JACK. I'm calling a cabinet meeting this afternoon at three o'clock—as Secretary of State you must be there!

BIGGER. (*Satirically.*) Hah-hah.

GUS. Well, now, Mr. President, I'm pretty busy. Bombs falling all over Europe. I'm thinking of sending that old Hitler another note.

JACK. And them Japs—they—

BIGGER. (*Pantomiming like the others.*) Hello, Mr. President. I just cut in from the sidelines and heard what you said. Better wait about that war business. The niggers is raising sand all over the country about no jobs! You better put them down first.

JACK. Oh, if it's about the niggers, Mr. Wilkie, we'll wait on the war!

BIGGER. Yes, suh. At a time like this, we Republicans and Democrats got to pull together!

GUS. Reckon we can do without you, Mr. Wilkie. (GUS *and* JACK *bow about in sudden and rich physical laughter, slapping their thighs, their knees easy and bent.* BIGGER *stares at them morosely.*)

JACK. Lawd, Lawd, Lawd—

GUS. I bet that's just how white folks talk.

JACK. Sho, it is—

(ERNIE *comes to the door at the Rear. He is a stoutish phlegmatic Negro of fifty or more.*)

ERNIE. 'Bout time to open up here, and how you 'spect me to have any customers and you all wallowing all over the pavement?

BIGGER. Go suck something, Ernie Jones!

ERNIE. (*Angrily.*) I don't want none of your back-talk, Bigger Thomas. Cut out the monkeyshines and move on!

BIGGER. Nine o'clock our zero hour—ten minutes and we go.

ERNIE. Ten minutes then 'fore I call a cop. (*He turns back into the shadow.*) You're up to devilment, I know you. (*He disappears.*)

BIGGER. (*Muttering.*) Sonofabitch! (*Turning toward* GUS *and staring at him with hard bright eyes.*) So you don't want Mr. Wilkie in on the deal—huh—meaning me?

GUS. Aw, I was just joking, Bigger.

BIGGER. You wanter live and keep doing well—so drop the joking. (*He pauses a moment, then with sudden anger.*) Where's G.H.? Goddammit, I'm ready for old Blum!

JACK. Christ, don't talk so loud. Ernie'll hear you. (*They are silent for a moment.* BIGGER *tilts back his face and the sun shines full upon it.* JACK *stares up at the sky and sneezes twice.*)

GUS. That's a sign o' bad luck!

BIGGER. (*Yelling.*) Go to hell!

GUS. (*Doggedly.*) Grandma allus said so—double sneezes, evil seizes.

BIGGER. Superstition—you niggers—signs, wonders! Look up there—the white man's sign.

JACK. What?

BIGGER. That airplane—writing on the sky—like a little finger— (*They all three look up.*) So high up, looks like a little bird. (*Waving his hands.*) Sailing and looping and zooming—and that white smoke coming out of his tail— (*He walks restlessly about.*)

JACK. (*Reading—afar off.*) "Use Speed Gasoline"—

BIGGER. (*Exultantly.*) Yeh, Speed. That's what them white boys got—speed!

GUS. (*Whispering.*) Daredevils.

BIGGER. Go on, boys, fly them planes, fly 'em to the end of the world, fly 'em smack into the sun! I'm with you. Goddamn! (*He stares up, the sunlight on his face.*)

GUS. (*Unable to let well enough alone, doffing his cap in*

a mock bow to BIGGER.) Yessuh! If you wasn't *black* and if you had some *money* and if they'd *let* you go to that *aviation* school, you might could be with 'em.

JACK. Yessuh.

BIGGER. (*Fiercely.*) Yeh, keep on, keep on now!

JACK. (*Flexing his hands as though holding onto controls, he makes the sound of an airplane motor.*) Thrr—hu-hu-hu-hu—

BIGGER. (*Raucously, half-singingly.*) Wish I had wings for to fly now!

GUS. (*Satirically.*) Reverend Hammond say God's gonna give us *all* some wings—in the judgment day.

(BIGGER *joins* JACK *in the roar of the plane, primping his lips.* GUS *also joins in, and for a moment the sound of the motor goes on uninterruptedly. They stretch out their arms like wings and go "flying" about.* G.H., *a darkish heavy-set young Negro, comes in at the Left. He lifts one hand in a mocking "Heil Hitler" salute, holding his nose with the other.* BIGGER *sees him and barks out an order.*)

BIGGER. You pilot!

G.H. (*Falling in with the game.*) Yessuh, Major!

BIGGER. Give her the stick and pull right over! (*He bends over, squinting, as if peering down through glasses from a great height.*) Machine gunner, look at that crowd down there on Michigan Avenue doing their Christmas shopping. Give 'em some hot lead. Hah, hah, hah, peace on earth! (*Making the rat-tat-tat of a machine gun.*) Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat, rat-tat-tat-tat-tat— Look at 'em fall! (*He speaks in a half singsong as he turns with growing excitement about him—exultantly.*) Now we gonna dive-bomb that Tribune Tower. (*He leads off with the zooming roar of an airplane throttle opened at full speed. The others join in.* BIGGER *cries out wildly.*) Turn 'em loose!— The bombs! The bombs! (*He*

makes a kicking motion downward with his foot, and then in a high whine depicts the passage of the bombs earthward. They all make the "boom" of the explosion together.)

GUS. (*Bent over, staring down.*) Lawd, look at that smoke!

BIGGER. A direct hit, Sergeant. (*Loudly.*) Look at the fires—things flying through the air—houses—people—streetcars—hunks of sidewalk and pavements. Goddamn! Whoom— Tracer bullets. (*Yelling.*) Look out! There come the fighter planes! (*Frantically pulling his pistol.*) Cold steel! Watch the turn— Give 'em the hot lead. (*The three boys look at him and then spring back in fear, their playful spirit suddenly gone.*)

GUS. (*Pointing.*) Look, he's got a gun. I knowed it. (BIGGER *continues to aim about him. The others mumble in half fear.*)

BIGGER. (*Hunching out his shoulder and running at* GUS *who dodges him.*) Crash him! Crash him!

GUS. (*Throwing out his hands in fear.*) Put up that gun, fool!

JACK. Bigger!

BIGGER. (*Whirling and leveling the gun at* GUS.) Ride into 'em or I'll shoot your lights out. (*He gives a high wild laugh.*)

G.H. Bigger, for Christ's sake! Somebody'll see you!

GUS. I told you he's crazy! Now look at him!

BIGGER. (*Advancing upon* GUS *with gun leveled.*) You sonofabitch, don't you call me crazy—

GUS. (*Backing away toward the other two boys, who stare at him silently.*) He's yellow. He's scared to rob a white man, that how come he brung that gun. (*He moves behind* JACK.) I told you to leave him out of it. (BIGGER *jams his gun back into his blouse and suddenly darts out his hand, seizes* GUS *by the collar, and bangs his head against the wall.*)

BIGGER. (*His face working in violent rage, as he pulls his*

knife again.) I don't need no gun. Yellow, huh? (*Pushing the knife against* GUS's *stomach.*) Take it back.

JACK. That ain't no way to play, Bigger.

BIGGER. Who the hell said I was playing?

GUS. Please, Bigger. I was just joking. Oh, you hurt me.

BIGGER. (*His lips snarled back over his teeth.*) Want me to cut your belly button out?

G.H. Aw, leave him alone, Bigger.

BIGGER. Put your hands up. Way up! (GUS *swallows and stretches his hands high along the wall. He stares out with wide frightened eyes, and sweat begins to trickle down his temples. His lips hang open and loose.*) Shut them liver lips.

GUS. (*In a tense whisper.*) Bigger!

BIGGER. (*Pressing the point of the knife deeper against his belly.*) Take it back. Say "I'm a lying sonofabitch."

GUS. (*With a moan.*) Quit!

BIGGER. Say it, say it.

G.H. (*Staring horrified at him.*) For Christ's sake, Bigger!

BIGGER. Take it back. Say it. (GUS *begins to slump down along the wall.* BIGGER *jabs him slightly, and he straightens up quickly with a howl.*) Say "I'm a lying sonofabitch."

GUS. I'm—I'm a lying sonofabitch. (*His arm falls down and his head slumps forward.* BIGGER *releases him.*)

BIGGER. Next time you whimper on me I won't ease up—I'll kill you. (*Hissing.*) You ain't gonna be in on this robbing old Blum. I'll take your share of the haul. Now scat! (*He starts again at* GUS, *who gazes wildly around him a moment and then flies out of the scene at the Right. For a while they are all silent. The noise of the city rolls in across the scene.*) Somebody say something, Goddamit!

JACK. (*Watching him.*) Don't cuss at us.

G.H. (*Angrily.*) Lay off! (*Somewhere from a tower a clock booms. They listen, stock still.*)

JACK. All right, zero hour.

BIGGER. I ain't going nowhere—now.

G.H. Hundred fifty bucks waiting in that cash drawer. (*They eye him in cold silence.*) Goddamit, you scared! You scared all along.

JACK. We was gonna walk in quiet—put a piece of little hard stick against old Blum's back—"Hand over your money," we say— (*He pulls a sort of wooden peg from his pocket.*) and then back out. Now, you bring along a gun and a knife—maybe kill somebody and put us in the 'lectric chair. (*Laughing harshly.*) You scared!

G.H. You done ruint everything.

JACK. Maybe that's what you want.

BIGGER. You go to hell! (ERNIE *comes to the door.*)

ERNIE. For the last time, Bigger Thomas, get away from here. I done had enough of you, hear me?

BIGGER. (*Whirling on him and jerking out his knife.*) Make me!

ERNIE. I'll fix you this time—I'll get my gun! (*He turns around and reaches up as if to lift a hidden weapon down from above the door. But* BIGGER *springs forward, grabs him and jerks him out to the sidewalk. With a swipe of his knife he cuts off a piece of* ERNIE'S *coat and holds it up, yelling.*)

BIGGER. This is a sample of the cloth. Wanta see a sam-ple of the flesh?

G.H. Come on. Let's get away from here.

(BUDDY *comes running into the scene carrying a bundle of papers under his arm and an envelope in his hand. He stops for an instant and looks at the scene, and then hurries forward.*)

BUDDY. Bigger—that lady come by the house—sent a message for you. (BIGGER *stares at* ERNIE *and chuckles. At the same time he reaches out and takes the letter from* BUDDY. BUDDY *stands waiting to hear the contents of the letter.*)

BIGGER. You all keep quiet whilst I read my mail. (*He*

backs off a few steps, opens the letter with a rip of his knife and looks at it.) Good Gordon gin! (*The others watch him.* BIGGER *shouts out at them.*) Damn all of you now—you can all go to hell! I'm gonna be driving for a millionaire, and don't you speak to me no more, none of you. Hear me? (*He laughs and spits.*) I spit in your slimy faces—a bunch of yellow cowards.

JACK. (*Placatingly, as he edges forward.*) Is it a job for real, Bigger?

BIGGER. And when I go riding by in Mr. Dalton's Cadillac, tip your hats—

G.H. (*Moving up in curiosity.*) Uhm, uhm—driving a Cadillac!

JACK. Driving for a millionaire—lawd, lawd!

G.H. And maybe driving one them millionaire gals around. They say they're hot numbers. Say so, Bigger? Yeh, yeh.

JACK. Hear tell they'll go to bed with anything from a poodle dog on up.

G.H. Rich, rich. I bet their mattresses is stuffed with hundred dollar bills. Soft, soft.

JACK. And they got them butlers in uniform, tiptoeing about and standing by the bed at night to turn the millionaires over when they grumble. (*He and* G.H. *jiggle their feet, laugh and hug each other, then pantomime turning their masters in their beds.*)

BIGGER. Hah! Hah! Yeh, I'm finished with all you cheesy little punks—I'm on my way now. Don't ask me for time to die. (*He makes an upward gesture, then feeling in his coat pocket, pulls out a coin and scornfully throws it at them.*) Here, take this fifty cents and buy you some hash. (*He turns and goes quickly out at the Left.* BUDDY *goes with him admiringly.*)

BUDDY'S VOICE. (*Offscene.*) Paper, mister, paper!

ERNIE. On his way now! (*Mopping his forehead.*) Somebody gonna kill that fool yet.

JACK. Or he's gonna kill somebody. Takes more'n a job to cure what ails him!

G.H. (*Picking up the coin from the pavement.*) Come on, let's get something to drink, Jack.

JACK. And a nickel for some canned music.

G.H. Old boogie-woogie take the pressure off.

ERNIE. Yeh, come on in. What'll you have? (*The boys start into the cafe. The automatic phonograph immediately begins playing a drumbeaten blues song and continues. The scene fades out.*)

SCENE III

As the blues music dies away, the curtain rises on the sun-filled, spotless DALTON *breakfast room, a short time later.* MR. DALTON *is seated at the table. He is about fifty-five or sixty, well-dressed and with pince-nez, beribboned glasses on the bridge of his nose.* JEFF BRITTEN, DALTON'S *private detective, sits on a sofa at the Left reading a newspaper. He is a little younger than* DALTON *and always certain and self-important in his manner.* BIGGER, *dressed as usual in his old black leather coat, is standing near* DALTON *with his cap in his hand.*

DALTON. (*Reading in a hurried slurring tone.*) Twenty years of age—grammar school education—poor student but learns quickly when he applies himself— (*He glances at* BIGGER.) Counted as head of the house—color complex—father killed in a race riot in Mississippi when the applicant was five years old. (*He looks up again, clearing his throat.*) Quite a lot of background factors.

BIGGER. (*Mumbling uncertainly.*) Yessuh, they wanted to put it all down.

(PEGGY, *the Irish cook and maid, refills* MR. DALTON'S *coffee cup. She is middle-aged, vivacious and efficient.*)

DALTON. (*Continuing.*) Knows how to obey orders but is of unstable equilibrium as to disposition. (*Chuckling.*) Never mind all these words, Bigger—part of the new social philosophy. Uh, what kind of car did you drive last?

BIGGER. A truck, suh.

DALTON. Got your license?

BIGGER. (*Showing it.*) Yessuh, I can drive most any kind. I can handle a Cadillac right off.

DALTON. Well, I have a Buick.

BIGGER. Yessuh.

(MRS. DALTON *enters, carefully feeling her way. She is dressed in shimmering, almost ghostly, white and carries a white pet cat in the crook of her arm.* PEGGY *gently helps her to her chair.*)

PEGGY. Let me bring you some tea, Mrs. Dalton.

MRS. DALTON. Thank you, Peggy. (*To* DALTON.) Is someone with you?

DALTON. Yes, Ellen. This is the boy the relief sent—Bigger Thomas. (*To* BIGGER.) Now, Bigger, about this reform school business. Just forget it. I was a boy myself once, and God knows I got into plenty of jams.

MRS. DALTON. (*Softly.*) But you weren't colored, Henry. There's a difference. (*She sips the tea* PEGGY *has provided.*)

DALTON. (*A little impatiently.*) I know, I know, Ellen, that's why I'm telling him to forget it.

BRITTEN. (*Rising and calling out.*) We'd better get started, Mr. Dalton.

DALTON. (*Rising also.*) Yes, Britten. (*To* MRS. DALTON.) They're threatening a rent strike, Ellen, over on Prairie Avenue.

BRITTEN. Left-wingers behind it, Mrs. Dalton. But we'll take care of them radicals all right. Oh, yes.

DALTON. More of that Edward Max's work. Britten here's trailing right after him. We'll see he never becomes District Attorney—we'll see to that.

BRITTEN. And that squirt of a labor leader—Jan Erlone—I've got an eye on him too. I know it worries you—him dating your daughter.

DALTON. (*Abruptly.*) Peggy, suppose you show Bigger around. Let him try his hand at that furnace. It's cantankerous as the devil at times. He suits me all right, Ellen. (*To* BIGGER.) I always leave the final decision in these matters to Mrs. Dalton. (*A buzzer sounds, and* PEGGY *turns quickly.* DALTON *calls out.*) No, you don't, Peggy. Mary will eat downstairs here.

PEGGY. (*Stopping.*) Yes, sir.

DALTON. No more of this breakfast in bed in the middle of the day. I've told her. (*He takes his overcoat and cane from* BRITTEN *who has picked them up from a chair.*)

MRS. DALTON. But she was out late last night, Henry, at the university.

DALTON. She can get up just the same. (*He bends to kiss* MRS. DALTON *on the forehead.*)

MRS. DALTON. Henry, the flowers—

DALTON. Oh yes, you wanted me to take them to the hospital.

MRS. DALTON. Yes, I'll show you. (*She rises and they go out together.* PEGGY *begins to clean up the table.* BRITTEN *comes over to* BIGGER *and takes hold of his coat sleeve.*)

BRITTEN. Where'd you get that coat, boy?

BIGGER. (*Trembling.*) From the welfare, suh. (BRITTEN's *coat opens and reveals his badge.* BIGGER *flinches.*)

BRITTEN. (*Chuckling.*) Don't be alarmed. I'm not the law. I'm Mr. Dalton's private detective. Asking questions is my business. (*He turns and goes out after* DALTON. *The buzzer sounds again, more insistently this time.*)

PEGGY. (*Shaking her head.*) I know—in my soft heart I want to answer it. But Mr. Dalton's right— We've got to be firm. Have one of my hot rolls.

BIGGER. No'm—no'm—I ain't hungry.

PEGGY. (*Deftly buttering a roll and sticking it out to him.*) Take it. (*He takes it with a slow hand and bites into it.*) Good?

BIGGER. Yessum—Sure mighty good.

PEGGY. That's one thing I can pride myself on—my bread. I always say everybody in the world's got at least one talent—it's up to him to find it and be happy. Mine's cooking and I evermore like to do it. (*Staring at* BIGGER *an instant.*) Well, you've got a talent, too. That's the way the Lord made us. Of course maybe it's a little harder for you colored people to find yours on account of—well, but don't you get discouraged. We'll all help you. (*The sound of an automatic furnace turning itself on in a great windy draft comes up from the basement below.* BIGGER *stands listening to it.*) Oh, that's the furnace—it works by machinery. A big thing it is—has to be big to warm this old house. That'll be one of your duties—to keep it stoked up and the ashes cleaned out.

BIGGER. Yessum. I can learn machinery easy—always could.

PEGGY. Maybe that's your talent. I believe you're going to fit here. (*Still working at the table.*) Before I forget it, Miss Mary's going to Detroit tomorrow. She's visiting her grandmother for the Christmas holiday. You'll have to come early in the morning and drive her to the LaSalle Street Station.

BIGGER. Yessum.

PEGGY. She's not a bit like her folks. Drives her father crazy! Runs around with a wild bunch of radicals. But she's good-hearted—she'll learn better. She'll marry and settle down one of these days.

BIGGER. Yessum.

PEGGY. Now Mrs. Dalton—you'll like her. She's a fine lady.

BIGGER. She—she can't see, can she?

PEGGY. (*Pouring herself a cup of coffee and drinking*

from it.) She's blind. Went blind years ago. She loves people and tries to help them—especially colored people. Loves that cat and her piano and her flowers. (*She sets her cup down and wipes her hands on her apron.* MRS. DALTON *comes feeling her way in from the Left dressed as before and carrying the white cat.*)

MRS. DALTON. Have you told the young man his duties, Peggy?

PEGGY. Part of 'em, ma'am. I haven't spoke about the flowers yet.

MRS. DALTON. Bigger, you are to water them every morning.

BIGGER. Yessum.

PEGGY. I'll start the cleaning, ma'am. (MRS. DALTON *makes her way along the table and sits down.* PEGGY *goes out at the Right.* MRS. DALTON *takes one of the blossoms from the vase on the table and strokes it against her cheek.*)

MRS. DALTON. (*Detached.*) Flowers are wonderful creatures, Bigger. Each with a personality of its own. You'll learn to love them while you are here.

BIGGER. (*Nervously, but with respect.*) Yes, ma'am. (*He looks about him and lifts a glass of water from the little table. He drinks and watches* MRS. DALTON *over the rim.*)

MRS. DALTON. Bigger, we've decided to engage you. This is your new start.

BIGGER. Thank you, ma'am.

MRS. DALTON. Now you are one of us—a member of the family. We'll do all in our power to help you find your way in this new life. (*Her face tilted up, as if drinking in the sunlight that pours through the window.*) Bigger, I used to teach school, and I once had a colored boy in one of my classes who was so distrustful and fearful that he carried a knife and a gun.

BIGGER. Huh? (*The water glass drops from his hand to the floor.*) Oh— (*He bends down in a scramble to pick up the glass, but his eyes remain on her face. He stands up*

again, his knees bent a little.) I'm sorry, ma'am. I dropped one of your glasses.

MRS. DALTON. (*Quietly.*) That's all right—accidents will happen. (*A little strongly.*) I too have known what fear is, Bigger. But I am afraid no longer in this darkness. (*She indicates her eyes.*) I have dedicated my life to wiping out fear. We must wipe it out of you, for fear produces hate, and hate produces death and destruction. That is the woeful lesson of this pitiful, tragic world. And if we as individuals cannot win a victory over ourselves, how can we expect the nations to?

BIGGER. (*Whispering but watching her as if fascinated.*) Yessum.

MRS. DALTON. (*Rising.*) That is all, Bigger. You have the job. You'll have your own room. Your pay will be twenty dollars a week, which will go to your mother. There will be five dollars more for yourself. You will have every second Sunday off. Is that clear? And you can start this evening.

BIGGER. Yessum.

MRS. DALTON. We have a lot of books in the library. You may read any you like.

BIGGER. No'm. Yessum.

MRS. DALTON. You don't have to read them. Peggy'll show you the rest of the routine. (*Turning.*) And if you're ever bothered about anything—about anything—come to me and we'll talk it over. (*She turns and moves slowly out at the Left.* BIGGER *stares after her as the door closes.*)

BIGGER. Uhm—queer—that old woman! Jesus! (*Shivering.*) Like I can feel her all over my skin. (*The sound of his own words seems to give him courage. He straightens up and gazes about him.*) So this the big job I been waiting for, talking about. (*Gesturing about him.*) This the new world, Bigger. That old world gone—liquor, Clara, Ernie, them boys, even old Blum! (*He picks up a silver knife.*) Huh, solid silver. Yeh, rich folks! And me sitting in clover.

This here the clover patch. Gonna eat me a belly full of it. Like a cow, yeh, like a big bull grazing in the moonlight on top of a hill. (*Fiercely and reprimandingly to himself.*) Goddammit, Bigger Thomas, here you make a new start! (*He puts the knife down.* MARY DALTON *enters from the Left, dressed in a flowing red robe opened at the bosom. It blows and trails behind her. Her hair is bunchy and tousled, and she is puffing a cigarette.* MARY *is a slender, pale-faced girl of some twenty-two or three, with wide, restless dark eyes. Her lips are rouged heavily, and her fingernails done to a deep vermillion. Her whole appearance denotes a sense of boredom and weary child-like disillusionment. She comes to the table, then stops and glances at* BIGGER. BIGGER *takes a back step.*) Yessum.

MARY. (*Quenching her cigarette on a saucer.*) I'm not going to hurt you. (BIGGER *stands with downcast eyes, saying nothing.* MARY *pours herself a cup of coffee and gulps down a couple of aspirin tablets. She gazes at* BIGGER.) What's your name?

BIGGER. Bigger—Bigger Thomas, ma'am.

MARY. Funny name. Where'd you get it?

BIGGER. (*Without looking up.*) They just give it to me, ma'am.

MARY. (*Sitting down and picking idly at a roll.*) Our new chauffeur?

BIGGER. Yessum.

MARY. Do you belong to a union?

BIGGER. No'm—no'm, I ain't never fooled with them folks, ma'am.

MARY. Better join a union or Father'll exploit your shirt off. My name's Mary Dalton. I'm the pampered daughter and heiress to all the Dalton millions. And I've got a helluva hangover.

BIGGER. (*Uncertainly.*) Yessum.

MARY. Guess they've already told you about me though—how lazy I am and all—Peggy has, bless her sweet, dumb soul. Has Mother hired you?

BIGGER. Yessum.

MARY. Where do you live? (*Now* BIGGER *looks at her.*)

BIGGER. Over on Indiana Avenue and—

MARY. (*Bitingly.*) Ah, in one of the Dalton rat-traps. (*With a bit of energetic confiding.*) So you're on our side. Say, I'll have you meet Jan Erlone, a special friend of mine, and Edward Max and some of our friends. Max is going to be the next D.A. He knows what it's all about—a great man. We're having a rally down at party headquarters tonight.

BIGGER. Yessum.

MARY. (*Mockingly.*) Yessum—yessum—the subservience of the defeated.—You'll drive me down there—

BIGGER. Got to—got to stick to my job.

MARY. That is your job—to take me were I want to go. (*As if quoting.*) There is a new spirit abroad in the world, Bigger. People have lost their trust in the old leaders. The old security is gone. Upheavals are ripping this terrestrial ball to pieces. Young people don't know where to turn anymore. Everywhere we are searching for something to live for—to dream for—to fight for. We have been betrayed, Bigger. And we alone can save ourselves—the young people, the laboring people. And in the great struggle all are brothers—black, white, yellow or red. (BIGGER *blinks helplessly at her. She takes out a cigarette and looks around for a match.*) Match! (BIGGER *does not move.*) Father and Mother made a law-abiding punk out of our last chauffeur. He's got a job in Washington—big government pay. (*Loudly.*) Match! (BIGGER *nervously feels through his pockets, finds a book of matches and steps toward her and holds it out to her.*) Light it! (*He strikes the match and lights the cigarette. She takes a deep draw and blows out smoke.*) Have you got a girl? (BIGGER *blinks helplessly at her.*) Why don't you talk? (*He is silent.*) Bigger, how do you colored people feel about the way you have to live? Do you ever get real mad? I'm not saying the right things, but what are the right things to say? I don't know. Bigger, say something.

(*Strongly.*) How is it that two human beings can stand in a foot of each other and not speak the same language? Bigger, what are you thinking about? What are you feeling? (*He still doesn't answer.*) Do you think I'm crazy?

BIGGER. No—no, ma'am.

MARY. I appoint you a committee of one to look after me tonight. Get me home if I should happen to drink too much. Hell, I always drink too much. (*With a laugh she throws her coffee cup against the wall and breaks it.* PEGGY *comes in at the Left.*)

PEGGY. Did something break, Miss Mary?

MARY. I dropped my cup.

PEGGY. (*Sighing.*) Is your head better?

MARY. No.

PEGGY. I'll get you an aspirin.

MARY. I've already had two.

PEGGY. I wanted to bring your tray up, darlin', but your father—

MARY. I know. He's issued his orders.

PEGGY. (*After a moment, quietly.*) Come with me, Bigger, and I'll show you about the furnace.

BIGGER. Yessum. (*In the distance* MRS. DALTON *begins playing a Chopin prelude on the piano.* MARY *shudders.*)

PEGGY. And then the flowers.

BIGGER. Yessum. (*He follows her out.* MARY *stands smoking and gazing before her.*)

MARY. (*Mockingly in the air.*) Yassum—yassum. (*The piano continues to play. The scene fades out.*)

SCENE IV

The bedroom of MARY DALTON *later that night. When the curtain rises, the piano stops playing. At the Left Front is a door opening into the hall, and to the Left and set at an angle from the audience is* MARY'S *bed draped in*

ghostly white and raised like a dais or bier. At the Center Rear is a filmy-curtained window, and to the Right of that a huge oblong mirror, so tilted that its depths are discernible, but only a vague blur of images is reflected in it. In front of the mirror is a delicately-patterned chaise longue and stool. An entrance to the dressing-room is at the Right Front. The walls of the bedroom are cold and dead, and the whole scene is bathed in the snowy city's pallid light which glimmers through the window.

BIGGER'S VOICE. (*In hushed anxiety.*) Please, Miss Dalton. Please, stand up and walk. Is this your room? (*Her voice, stiff-lipped and almost mechanical, is heard in the hall at the Left, drunkenly.*)

MARY'S VOICE. A great celebration, Bigger. God, I'm drunk!

BIGGER'S VOICE. (*Tense and in a hushed pleading.*) Sh-sh—

(MARY *appears in the door, her hat awry, her hair hanging down, her eyes set in a frozen stare and her face mask-like and dead. She grasps the lintel with her right hand. She has some pamphlets in her left hand.*)

MARY. And you're drunk too. It's a victory, Bigger. Hooray for the rent strike. Hooray for our side!

BIGGER. For Christ sake! (*Still unseen, his voice a sort of moan.*) This ain't my job, Miss Dalton.

MARY. It is your job—to get me home—safe home. (*She pulls* BIGGER *on into the room. His head is lowered, his face somewhat averted from her. On his left arm he carries* MARY'S *red handbag, hung by its handle. He is dressed in his chauffeur's uniform, with overcoat.*) The people are strong, Bigger—you and me—thousands like us— Poor Father—

Gimme a drink. Why don't you give me a drink? (*She reaches for the handbag.*)

BIGGER. No'm.

MARY. (*Rocking her head from right to left, mockingly.*) Yessum—yessum— My father—a landlord that walks like a man— And we had a big celebration, didn't we? Here, Bigger, I want you to read these pamphlets—"The Road to Freedom," "Share the Wealth."

BIGGER. (*Moaning again.*) Lemme go, Miss Dalton. (*Suddenly his head snaps about him as if he hears an enemy in the dark.*) I got to go—ain't my job—got to get out of here.

MARY. (*Stuffing pamphlets into* BIGGER's *pocket.*) Here, take these! Put them in your pocket! (BIGGER *pulls away.*) What are you scared of? You don't frighten me, Bigger. I frighten you now— See, it's all turned around. Crazy world, isn't it?

BIGGER. This your room, Miss Dalton? They kill me—kill me—they find me in here. You home safe now. (*He turns away.*)

MARY. (*Insistently.*) Know what I am, Bigger?

BIGGER. (*Mumbling.*) I dunno— No'm—I dunno. Please'm, Miss Mary, you keep calling my name. Don't.

MARY. I'm what the Russians call "the penitent rich"—I feed the poor— (*Her hands go out as if scattering largesse to a begging world.*) And I'm drunk—and I'm dead—drunk and dead—inside I am— (*Giggling, as though at herself.*) I'm just a girl falling to pieces, Bigger. (*Shaking her head.*) I want to talk— Trouble with the world, Bigger—nobody to talk to— Mother and Father—they talk up to God in the sky—I talk down—way, way down to you at the bottom— (*With wild, emotional impulsiveness.*) Oh, I wish I was black— Honest, I do—black like you—down there with you—to start all over again—a new life— (*She puts out her hand toward him. He shivers and stands trembling. She touches his hair.*) Your hair is hard. Like little black wires—I know— It has to be hard—tough—to stand it— (*She touches his cheek.*)

BIGGER. (*In a whispering scream.*) Naw—naw! (*The air of his lungs hisses through his lips and dies, as it were, in an echoing supplication. His face glistens more brightly with the sweat that drenches it.*)

MARY. (*Looking at her hand.*) See, not shoe polish—it won't come off. (*Now touching her own cheek and gazing at her crooked, spread-out fingers and wagging her head hopelessly.*) There's a difference, and there's not a difference— (*His eyes are lifted, gazing blindly at her.*) Bigger, what are you thinking—what are you feeling? (*She begins to weep noiselessly.*)

BIGGER. (*Moaning, twisting his shoulders as if in the grip of some overpowering, aching pain. Gasping.*) Lemme go.

MARY. Yes, that's what I want—to break through and find you, to understand you.

BIGGER. Ain't my job—ain't my job— (*As* BIGGER *speaks,* MARY *falls, and he lifts her suddenly into his arms.*)

MARY. Your arms—hard—hurt—make me feel safe—and hurt— I want to suffer—begin all over again—home—take me home. (*Singing.*) "Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home—" That's Mother's favorite song. (*With a cry.*) Mother! (*Her eyes blare wide with fear.*) Let me go! Let me— (*But still his arms, as if against his will, hold to her.* MARY *is now staring at him coldly.*) Who are you? (*Lifting a weak hand, she strikes him blindly in the face.*) Stop— (*Shrieking.*) Stop it!

(*Wriggling like a rubber thing, queerly alive, the breath goes out of her. Her head falls back and she lies still and limp in his arms. For a moment* BIGGER *does not move. Fascinatedly he gazes at her face, his lips open and breathless. He jerks his face away from hers and lowers her feet to the floor, but the upper part of her body hangs over his arm. He looks frantically about him, then eases and half-drags her to the bed. A sob rises into his throat.*)

BIGGER. Miss Mary—Mary—Mary—Miss Dalton—(*With his head bowed, his hands reach to touch her reclining figure.*) Gotta get away—get away quick. (*Now, as if from some interminable distance deep in the house, comes the sound of* MRS. DALTON'S *gentle voice.*)

MRS. DALTON VOICE. Mary!— Is that you, Mary?

(BIGGER *springs up terrified. The door at the Left swings open and the blur of* MRS. DALTON'S *tall form stands there in its white dressing gown. And now, as if the calling voice had penetrated into* MARY'S *deep unconsciousness, the bed heaves and a murmur rises from it.* BIGGER'S *whole body grows taut, caught in a flooding horror of fear. He stares at* MRS. DALTON *with wide eyes, and as she moves farther into the room he backs noiselessly around the bed from her, the palms of his hands outstretched as if in piteous supplication before her unseeing vision, and his lips making a gasping, soundless cry. For an instant the scene is silent.* MRS. DALTON *clasps her long fingers in front of her and stands listening at the bed.*)

MRS. DALTON. (*In her normal voice.*) Mary? (BIGGER *remains across the bed from* MRS. DALTON, *his face tilted and his eyes glued in awe upon the white figure. One of his hands is half-raised, the fingers weakly open as if an object he had been holding had just dropped from them.* MRS. DALTON *calls again.*) Mary, are you asleep? (*There is no answer from the bed. The white figure turns slowly and seems to look about the room.* BIGGER *shrinks back into the shadows as if unable to face the blinding condemnation of that sightless face.* MRS. DALTON *feels toward the bed, and then, as if touching* MARY *through the air itself, suddenly draws back.*) You reek of liquor. Mary, you're drunk! (BIGGER *carries his right hand to his mouth as if about to scream.*) My poor child—why do I fail you? Sleep—sleep

then. (*She fumbles for the coverlet, spreads it over* MARY'S *feet and turns back toward the door. A low sigh of relief passes through* BIGGER'S *lips.* MRS. DALTON *wheels about.*) What is it? (*The sleeping figure lifts a hand and mumbles as if waking up. Quick as a flash and with an instinctive action,* BIGGER *picks up a pillow and pushes it down against* MARY'S *face. Her hands flash up in the gloom, clawing helplessly at his arms. But he holds the pillow against her, heedless of her struggle, his face turned watchfully toward* MRS. DALTON. *She takes a step back toward the bed, then stops—in alarm.*) Mary—are you ill? (MARY'S *form on the bed moves, and there is a sound of a heavy breath. A quick, muscular tautness in* BIGGER'S *entire body indicates the enormous strength with which he is holding the pillow. The white hands continue to clutch futilely at his wrists.* MRS. DALTON'S *voice calls out sharply.*) What is it, Mary? (*She listens.*) Mary! (*The white hands have fallen limp by the pillow now.*) Goodnight, Mary. I'll call you early for your train.

(*She moves silently from the room. The door closes behind her. For a moment there is no sound or movement; then with a deep, short gasp of relieved tension,* BIGGER *falls to the floor, catching the weight of his body on his hands and knees. His chest heaves in and out as though he had just completed a hard foot-race. Gradually his heavy breathing subsides, and he stands slowly up looking at the door. His body is relaxed now, the burden of fear gone from him. Then he looks toward the bed, his whole attitude changing, his body becoming taut again. He takes a step forward, then stops uncertainly. He stares at the white form, his face now devoid of that former hard concentration. With a quick movement, he bends, and stares down at* MARY'S *face. Slowly his right hand goes up in the air, the fingers sensitively poised, until again he assumes the*

same position in which he was standing and looking when the white blur of MRS. DALTON *first roused him. He stares anxiously at* MARY'S *face, as though a dreadful knowledge were on the threshold of his consciousness. His right hand moves timidly toward* MARY *and touches her, then is jerked quickly away. He touches her head, gently rolls it from side to side, then puts his hands behind him as if they had suffered some strange and sudden hurt.*)

BIGGER. (*In a whisper.*) Naw—naw— (*For a moment he stands looking at the still form as though it had in some manner deeply offended him. Once more he places his hand on* MARY'S *head. This time it remains there and his body does not move. He mumbles frenziedly.*) Naw—naw—naw— (*He is silent for an instant, then whispers.*) She's dead. (*He takes a quick step back.*) I didn't, I tell you, I didn't. Wake up, wake up, Miss Dalton. (*His voice takes on a note of pleading.*) Miss Dalton, Miss Mary— (*For a second he stands, then straightens up suddenly. He turns, walks swiftly to the door, opens it, and looks out into the darkness. All is quiet. He walks back to the Center of the room and stands looking at the bed. He mumbles piteously.*) Naw—naw—naw—I didn't do it—I didn't do it— (*In a clear, sober, deep voice, as if all his faculties were suddenly alive.*) They'll say I done it— I'm black and they'll say I done it. (*Again he bends over the bed.*) It was your fault. I didn't want to come to your room. You were too drunk to walk. You made me come, you bitch. I hated you then—I hate you now! Yeh. (*His voice dies out. Far away in the depths of the house, a clock booms the hour.*) Seem like that clock winding itself up to wake the world and tell what I done. Got to hide her—get her away from here—so they'll never know—can't tell what happened— (*He stops, trembling violently, then looking back over his shoulder at the door, slides his hands under* MARY'S *body and lifts her in*

his arms. The hum of the furnace switching itself on is heard below.) Naw, ain't nothing happened. Just a dream—a dream—I been dreaming. (*With a smothered shriek.*) It ain't no dream—it's happened! Cold—cold—she's growing cold. (*Listening to the furnace draft.*) Yeh, everything cold around me—like a great tomb. That furnace needs tending, boy. (*With a moaning cry he rushes through the door with the body of* MARY *in his arms. The sound of the furnace draft grows louder and continues. The scene fades out.*)

SCENE V

The sound of the furnace draft dissolves gradually into the metallic tingling of a telephone. The scene is the DALTON *breakfast room* (*same as Scene III*), *a few hours later.* MR. DALTON *is using the telephone.* MRS. DALTON *is sitting in a chair, bolt upright, listening.*

DALTON. Now, Mother, don't get upset. We'll get things straightened out. You know how impulsive Mary is. She might be on a later train. I'll call you back. (*He pauses, then hangs up the receiver and turns to* MRS. DALTON.) Well, it doesn't look good, Ellen, it doesn't. (*Shaking his head.*) I can't understand Mary's bed not being slept in and her trunk not packed and still in her room.

MRS. DALTON. (*With a tremor in her voice.*) Mary had been drinking again last night, Henry. When I came into her room—I—

DALTON. Yes, yes—maybe that Erlone fellow she goes with knows something. He called up from the station—seemed worried.

MRS. DALTON. Mr. Britten ought to be back any minute with some news. (PEGGY *comes in with a tray at the Right Front. Her face shows signs of recent weeping.*)

PEGGY. Here's your tea, Mrs. Dalton—

MRS. DALTON. (*With a gesture.*) No, thank you, Peggy.

PEGGY. But you must keep up your strength, ma'am.

MRS. DALTON. No, thank you. (BRITTEN *comes in.*)

BRITTEN. Whew, snow's pouring down all right. Regular blizzard for old Santa Claus. Well, Mr. Dalton, Buckley better get busy. That labor crowd's talking up this fellow Edward Max for District Attorney, and talking loud.

DALTON. I know, I know—but Buckley'll win. We'll see to that.

MRS. DALTON. (*Quickly.*) What did you find out at the station, Mr. Britten?

BRITTEN. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Mrs. Dalton. (*A sob breaks from* PEGGY. *She goes out.*) Mmm—I don't understand her car being left out there all night. Your new chauffeur says he brought Miss Dalton home about two o'clock.

MRS. DALTON. About two-thirty this morning. I heard the clock strike downstairs. Later I went to her room. She was restless.

BRITTEN. Ahm— By the way, this colored boy Thomas—is he all right?

DALTON. We have his complete record. I'm sure he's all right.

(PEGGY *comes in and listens. While they are talking,* BIGGER *slowly enters the conservatory at the Rear. He has a watering can in his hand and goes about quietly and methodically watering the flowers. But even in his nonchalant and detached manner, we sense that he is straining every nerve to hear the words of the group in the breakfast room.*)

BRITTEN. (*To* PEGGY.) And what do you think of this Thomas boy? Is he polite? Does he pull off his cap when he comes into the house?

PEGGY. Yes, sir.

BRITTEN. Does he seem to be acting at any time? I mean, does he appear like he's more ignorant than he really is?

PEGGY. I don't know, Mr. Britten.

BRITTEN. I'd like to talk to him again.

PEGGY. (*Gesturing toward the rear glass door of the conservatory.*) He's out there watering the flowers.

MRS. DALTON. I'm sure he's all right, Mr. Britten.

BRITTEN. (*In a loud voice.*) Come in here, boy! (BIGGER *turns, opens the glass door and comes slowly through, still carrying the watering can in his hand.* BRITTEN *turns to him.*) I want to ask you some more questions!

BIGGER. (*Blinking and starting back.*) Yessuh.

BRITTEN. What time do you say you took Miss Dalton from here last night?

BIGGER. About eight-thirty, suh.

BRITTEN. You drove her to her night class at the University? (BIGGER *hangs his head and makes no answer.*) Open your mouth and talk, boy. (BRITTEN *puts out a placating hand to the* DALTONS. *They wait.*)

BIGGER. Well, Mister, you see—I'm just working here.

BRITTEN. You told me that before. You drove her to school, didn't you? (BIGGER *still makes no answer.*) I asked you a question, boy!

BIGGER. (*His face strangely alert and yet impassive.*) No, suh, I didn't drive her to school.

BRITTEN. Where did you drive her?

BIGGER. Well, suh, she told me after I got as far as the Park to turn around and take her to the Loop.

DALTON. (*His lips parted in surprise.*) She didn't go to school?

BIGGER. No, suh.

MRS. DALTON. Why didn't you tell us this before, Bigger?

BIGGER. (*Quietly.*) She told me not to, ma'am.

BRITTEN. Where did you take her, then?

BIGGER. To the Loop, suh.

BRITTEN. Whereabouts in the Loop?

BIGGER. To Lake Street.

BRITTEN. Do you remember the number?

BIGGER. Sixteen, I think, suh.

BRITTEN. (*Rubbing his chin.*) That's a good boy—Uhm—Sixteen Lake Street—the Labor Defenders' Office.

BIGGER. Yessuh.

BRITTEN. (*Kindly.*) Say, boy, the water is pouring out on the floor.

BIGGER. Thank you, suh. Yessuh! (*He jerks the watering can up and hugs it in front of him.*)

BRITTEN. How long was she in this place—Number Sixteen?

BIGGER. 'Bout half an hour, I reckon, suh.

BRITTEN. Then what happened?

BIGGER. (*Quietly.*) Then they came out.

BRITTEN. They?

BIGGER. Her and this—this Mr. Jan. Miss Mary said to go by there to pick him up.

DALTON. Jan Erlone—she's been dating him.

BRITTEN. (*Confirmingly.*) Uh-huh. (*He looks triumphantly around him.*) And then you drove 'em to—?

BIGGER. To the speaking—to hear that man—Mr. Max—

BRITTEN. Erlone's one of his crowd, a Red. And then where did you go?

BIGGER. To Ernie's Kitchen Shack.

BRITTEN. And how long did they stay there?

BIGGER. We must have stayed—

BRITTEN. We? Didn't you wait outside in the car?

BIGGER. Naw, suh. You see, Mister, I did what they told me. I was only working for 'em.

BRITTEN. And then what did you do?

BIGGER. I didn't want to, Mister. I swear I didn't want to. They kept worrying at me until I went in and had a drink with 'em.

BRITTEN. (*With a placating gesture toward* MRS. DALTON.) A drink, eh? So they were drinking—

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