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John Ball's
**In the Heat of
the Night**

Adapted by Matt Pelfrey

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**

FOUNDED 1830

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Adapted by Matt Pelfrey
Based on the novel by John Ball**

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JOHN BALL'S IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT is produced by exclusive arrangement with Dominick Abel Literary Agency, Inc, 146 West 82nd Street, #1B, New York, NY 10024

JOHN BALL'S IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT was commissioned by Godlight Theatre Company, New York, NY. Joe Tantalo, Artistic Director, www.godlighttheatrecompany.org

JOHN BALL'S IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT was first produced by God-light Theatre Company at 59E59 Theaters March 19-April 25, 2010. The production was directed by Joe Tantalo, with production design by Maruti Evans, sound design by Elizabeth Rhodes, costume design by Virginia Monte, choreography by Hachi Yu, and fight choreography by Rick Sordelet. The production stage managers were Christina Hurtado, Meredith Brown, and Derek Shore. The cast was as follows:

NOREEN PURDY	Scarlett Thiele
SAM WOOD	Nick Paglino
CHIEF GILLESPIE	Gregory Konow
PETE	Lawrence Jansen
CHARLES TATUM/ENDICOTT/AL JENNINGS	Adam Kee
CORONER/MAYOR SCHUBERT/KLANSMAN	Michael Shimkin
VIRGIL TIBBS	Sean Phillips
HARVEY OBERST/PURDY/KLANSMAN	Ryan O'Callaghan
MELANIE TATUM	Julianne Nelson
ERIC KAUFMAN/RALPH/KLANSMAN	Bryce Hodgson

CHARACTERS

Actor #1: Chief Gillespie

Actor #2: Virgil Tibbs

Actor #3: Sam Wood

Actor #4: Pete/Man In Shadows/Klansman 1

Actor #5: Harvey Oberst/Purdy/Klansman

Actor #6: Charles Tatum/Endicott/Al Jennings

Actor #7: Coroner/Mayor Schubert/Klansman

Actor #8: Eric Kaufman/Ralph/Klansman

Actor #9: Melanie Tatum

Actor #10: Noreen Purdy

- When double or triple casting, many other configurations are possible. This is how the premier production divided up the roles.
- Barfly 1 & 2 were not used in the original production.

Scene One

(Night.

Sticky and hot.

*A radio plays...songs...a bit of news perhaps...We're in
Argo, Alabama...it's 1962.*

Someone sits in a dark car.

Face barely visible in the glow of a cigarette.

*It's just him. And the dark. And the heat. And the red
glow of the cigarette.*

*His name is **SAM WOOD**, late 20s, and he's a police officer.
SAM just sits there.*

For the longest time.

Not moving.

But suddenly –

He stiffens. Sits up. Stubs out his cigarette.

He sees what he's been waiting for...

Hoping for...

In a window, she appears.

*Her name is **NOREEN PURDY**. From the looks of her, she
could be anywhere from sixteen to twenty one.*

No matter what her age is, she's stunning.

She has a raw, reckless sexuality to her.

Her hair slick with sweat.

Shirt unbuttoned.

*She uses the unbuttoned shirt like wings, flapping them
to cool her perspiring body.*

*After a long moment, she peels her shirt off. Uses it to dry
her forehead.*

Her neck.

Between her breasts.

*She lingers at the window for a moment, then steps
away...*

She's gone.

SAM *bites his lip, disappointed.*

But then...

NOREEN *steps back to the window.*

Holds an ice cold glass of lemonade.

She takes a long, cool drink.

Now she seems to be looking right at Sam.

SAM *slides down in his seat.*

A long moment, then...

She pulls the blind.

Lights fade.)

Scene Two

(Darkness.

A fan whirs.

Night bugs chirp.

4 A.M.

Hot.

Moonlight through a window.

A phone rings in the dark.

Someone groans, then –

A light turns on.

GILLESPIE *sits up in bed. Grabs the phone.)*

GILLESPIE. *(groggy)* Gillespie...

PETE. Chief...

GILLESPIE. Yeah...?

PETE. ...hate to wake you –

GILLESPIE. Who is this?

PETE. Pete. Chief, its P –

GILLESPIE. What is it?

PETE. We got us a problem.

GILLESPIE. Talk.

PETE. Yeah, it's pretty late –

GILLESPIE. Goddammit, get to it!

PETE. Well, if Sam's right, we may have a first-class murder on our hands.

(That gives him a jolt –)

GILLESPIE. Wait – what?

PETE. We got us a murder! Sam –

GILLESPIE. Sam's dead?

PETE. No – Sam found a body! A murdered body, sir.

(He's waking up a bit more now.)

GILLESPIE. You shittin' me?

PETE. No, sir.

GILLESPIE. Who?

PETE. Don't know.

GILLESPIE. Local?

PETE. Not sure yet.

GILLESPIE. Where – ?

PETE Will Keith Rd, Chief, just below Johnson.

(long pause)

Whatcha' want me to do?

(GILLESPIE has to think about that a moment. Then –)

GILLESPIE. Nothin'. Don't do anything. I'm on my way.

(He stands up. Takes a big breath, then very slowly lets it out...)

(Lights shift to:)

Scene Three

(The road.

Police lights drench the stage.

A body sprawled on the ground. GILLESPIE, SAM WOOD.)

GILLESPIE. Where's the wallet?

SAM WOOD. Didn't find it, Chief.

GILLESPIE. Not on the body?

SAM WOOD. No, sir.

GILLESPIE. You look?

SAM WOOD. That's Charles Tatum.

GILLESPIE. Not what I asked.

SAM WOOD. Sorry. I looked around. Nothing.

(beat)

GILLESPIE. Charles Tatum...

SAM WOOD. Real estate guy...

GILLESPIE. I know who Tatum is.

SAM WOOD. Sorry.

(GILLESPIE runs a hand through his hair, staring at the body, scans the area –)

GILLESPIE. How long's he been dead?

SAM WOOD. Hour or less? Who done this can't be far.

GILLESPIE. All I asked was how long he's been dead.

SAM WOOD. Sorry.

GILLESPIE. I know my goddamn job. You think I don't, we can have that talk.

SAM WOOD. Yes, sir. Sorry –

GILLESPIE. And stop sayin' sorry. "Sorry, sorry, sorry" every five seconds. You're like a goddamn mosquito in my ear.

SAM WOOD. Sorry, si –

(GILLESPIE looks around, perhaps we get the impression he's buying time, thinking about exactly what he's supposed to do here. Finally...)

GILLESPIE. Chalk 'im, then get me pictures from all angles. And keep traffic away – throw up a barricade or something.

SAM WOOD. Yes sir.

GILLESPIE. Take your car, check the railroad station and the north end of town, see if anyone's crazy enough to try hitchhiking outta here.

(SAM stands there, waiting to see if there are more instructions coming.)

Get going for chrissake.

SAM WOOD. Yes, sir – sorry – I mean –

GILLESPIE. Go!

(SAM scuttles off.)

(staring at the body) Son-of-a-bitch...

(Lights shift to:)

Scene Four

(The Train Station.

A dim light reveals an AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN [TIBBS], well dressed, waiting for a train.

SAM enters cautiously, sees the AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN.

He visually reacts, shocked to actually see someone.

Retreating around the corner, he takes a moment to compose himself as –

Lights change.

For a moment, the Train Station Vanishes.

Only SAM's face is visible in a shaft of light. Then...

In another place and time

CHARLES TATUM, 50, appears.

Alive.

It's night. TATUM walks down the street.

The AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN materializes from the darkness. He pulls a crowbar from inside his jacket.

TATUM checks his watch. Stops. Looks around, as if lost.

The AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN creeps up from the shadows and –

SLAM! Cracks him over his head.

TATUM drops...tries to cover himself. *The AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN continues hitting TATUM, but in the scuffle he loses his grip on the crowbar and finishes TATUM by strangling him with his bare hands.*

It's brutal and sad and pathetic.

Now with his victim dead, The AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN rifles through Tatum's pockets, steals his wallet and vanishes.

Lights widen on SAM. He takes a breath and pulls his gun.

Lights return to normal.

The AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN as he was, sitting on the bench.

SAM slips from cover, slinks up to The AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN and –)

SAM WOOD. On your feet, black boy. Now! On your fucking feet!

(The AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN reaches for his coat.)

Now you don't. Don't! Hands where I can see 'em.

(SAM grabs him, slams him face first into the wall.)

Fingers apart and lean against 'em. Don't move 'til I say, understand?

(SAM takes the man's wallet. Full of cash. SAM excited. Pats him for a weapon.)

You're commin' with me. One false move, I drop you with a bullet in your spine. Got me? No quick moves.

(SAM gets his radio.)

Wood from the railroad station. Bringing in a colored suspect. I repeat, I got me a colored suspect!

(He hangs up.)

You stepped in shit this time boy. You stepped in a big ol' pile a shit.

(Lights shift to:)

Scene Five

(Police Station. Gillespie's office.

GILLESPIE *faces The AFRICAN AMERICAN SUSPECT*
[TIBBS].

SAM *stands nearby.*)

GILLESPIE. You know your name, boy?

(beat)

Hm?

(beat)

You know your name, don'tcha?

(beat)

I'm waitin', goddamnit.

SAM WOOD. Answer the Chief, boy...

(long pause)

TIBBS. I know my name.

GILLESPIE. Know what kind a trouble you're in?

TIBBS. Why don't you tell me.

GILLESPIE. Sam, this boy got attitude?

SAM WOOD. Seems that way.

GILLESPIE. We're off to a bad start.

SAM WOOD. Chief don't like a bad start.

GILLESPIE. Shut up, Sam.

SAM WOOD. Sorry. I mean, I'm...

(But GILLESPIE ignores Sam, focused on his prisoner –)

GILLESPIE. Don't like it this hot. Just hangs on you. Makes people smell like animals when you can't wipe the sweat away fast enough. Heat like this, don't matter how many showers you take. Two minutes later you're sticky again. Reminds us what we really are, deep down. Same with killin'. Fact is, I got just about everything I hate right here in this goddamn room. An' it's got me itchy. Itchy an' pissed off. Now tell me your goddamn name!

TIBBS. Virgil Tibbs.

GILLESPIE. What you in such a rush to leave for, Virgil Tibbs?

TIBBS. Was I in a rush?

GILLESPIE. What're you doin' in my station?

TIBBS. Waiting for the train.

GILLESPIE. Which one?

TIBBS. Five-seventeen.

SAM WOOD. That's to Montgomery?

TIBBS. Correct.

GILLESPIE. When an' how'd you get here?

TIBBS. Local...from downstate.

GILLESPIE. Keep goin'. What's downstate?

TIBBS. My mother.

GILLESPIE. Just a good boy visiting Mommy?

(TIBBS doesn't answer.)

She give you all this money? She a rich old lady? She reach into her mattress and give it to ya?

TIBBS. Earned it.

GILLESPIE. Boy like you can't earn money like this.

TIBBS. You bet I did.

GILLESPIE. Don't play it like this, boy. At least come up with a better story –

TIBBS. Every penny.

GILLESPIE. Think I'm stupid?

TIBBS. Not yet.

GILLESPIE. Oh, you're beggin' for a thrashin', boy.

TIBBS. Just answering the questions bein' asked.

GILLESPIE. Even if you could make this kind of scratch, you'd spend it faster than a hummingbird fucks. You people don't know how to hold your money. Get paid, you act like it's the first time you seen a dollar bill.

(TIBBS doesn't take Gillespie's bait.)

GILLESPIE. (*cont.*) So where's it you work, makes you this money? Maybe I just live in the wrong part'a the country.

TIBBS. California.

GILLESPIE. Where in California?

TIBBS. Pasadena.

(*beat*)

Near Los Angeles.

GILLESPIE. I know where the hell it is!

(*beat*)

Find a pot a gold out there in queersville?

(*no answer*)

What is it you do, boy?

TIBBS. I'm a police officer.

(*beat*)

GILLESPIE. Hope you're not expectin' me to believe that?

TIBBS. I don't expect anything from you.

(*A long moment. Finally, GILLESPIE pulls SAM aside.*)

GILLESPIE. You question this man any before you brought him in?

SAM WOOD. No, sir.

GILLESPIE. Why the fuck not?

SAM WOOD. Your orders were check the railroad station, then look –

GILLESPIE. Alright, alright, shut up...

(*GILLESPIE moves back to TIBBS.*)

You're a cop in California?

TIBBS. There's an ID in my wallet.

(*GILLESPIE picks up the wallet with the air of handling something distasteful and unclean.*

He looks at Tibb's ID.)

GILLESPIE. You know we wouldn't let the likes of you be a cop down here, don'tcha?

(beat)

That was a question.

TIBBS. You assume I'd wanna be a cop here.

(beat)

Now, if it's all the same, the sooner I get back the better.

GILLESPIE. You're not going anywhere. Not until I say so. Not until I check up on you. Sam, get 'im outta here. Throw 'im in detention.

(to TIBBS)

And pardon my lack'a manners, boy: Welcome to Argo, Alabama.

(Lights shift to:)

Scene Six

(Restroom.

A sign says 'MEN - WHITE.'

SAM *splashes his face.*

PETE, *a police officer who works the night desk, takes a leak.)*

PETE. Whoooooeee! I'm tellin' you, Sam, old big shot Gillespie's gonna take this one right in the cornhole!

SAM WOOD. Keep your goddamn voice down!

PETE. He ain't gonna hear.

SAM WOOD. Pete, I'm serious. I like my job and I need my job!

PETE. Fine, fine...

(PETE shuts up, smiling, finishes peeing. SAM dries his face with a towel.)

(beat)

SAM WOOD. So what you got?

PETE. Oh, now you wanna hear what I gotta say?

SAM WOOD. Just don't scream it at the top'a yer lungs.

PETE. Gillespie sent a wire to Pasadena sniffin' up on the black boy you caught.

SAM WOOD. Don't blame him.

PETE. Shit, of course not. By the looks, I wouldn't be surprised he ain't one of those agitators set on causin' trouble.

(beat)

So wait 'till you hear what we got back. "Confirm Virgil Tibbs, member Pasadena Police Department, past five years. Before that, member of the Los Angeles Police department."

SAM WOOD. I'll be damned.

PETE. Gets better.

SAM WOOD. Doubt that.

PETE. Present rank, Investigator. Reputation: excellent.
Specialist: homicide.

SAM WOOD. Ho-lee-shit!

PETE. And here's the goddamn kicker: Sons a bitches out there in California say: Advise if his services are needed. Can you believe that? "Advise if services are needed!"

(**PETE** cackles.)

SAM WOOD. Wow.

PETE. Bet you next month's pay Gillespie don't know a damn thing about 'vestigatin' no homicide. Don't know how he got this job in the first place.

SAM WOOD. We'll see.

PETE. Don't tell me you like 'im? Practically treats you like a nigger.

SAM WOOD. He treats me like he treats everyone else. Like he treats you. Don't start shit with me.

PETE. He's full of 'imself. Prolly figures this'll set him up for something bigger down the road.

SAM WOOD. How'd you get all this dope?

PETE. I find out what I wanna find out.

(**SAM** moves to go.)

PETE. And I tell ya, if I get a chance to see Gillespie twist in the wind, this'll be good no matter how it goes down.

SAM WOOD. What's got you so worked up on the Chief?

PETE. Ain't you noticed? The man is a first rate asshole and a world-class sonuvabitch.

SAM WOOD. A boss a' mine bein' an asshole ain't new to me. But I guess you've lived a privileged life up to now.

PETE. Plus, it ain't right they made him Chief. He ain't from around here. Job belonged to Cliff Longers.

SAM WOOD. 'Cept he was a white knight.

PETE. So what? You got a problem with The Boys?

(**SAM** shrugs.)

Far as I'm concerned they should just let them Klan boys be the law, you'd see this state runnin' like a top. We sure as shit wouldn't be having these niggers thinkin' they own the place. Or worse: nigger-lovin' jews comin' in with their bus rides and sit-ins an what-not.

SAM WOOD. Maybe you're right. I dunno...

PETE. Course I'm right, Sam. You know I am. This whole damn country's goin' in the wrong direction. Got them faggot Kennedy boys runnin' their mouths off and niggers thinkin' they know somethin'. This Tatum fella ain't gonna be the only body layin' in the street if this shit don't get taken care of soon.

SAM WOOD. What's Tatum have to do with that?

PETE. I heard they was plannin' on cartin' in black boys to do all the building they got planned.

SAM WOOD. You'll believe anything, won't ya, Pete.

PETE. Can't stick your head in the sand, Sam. Gonna be a time to take a stand.

SAM WOOD. I gotta get back.

PETE. Yeah, you do.

(*An odd moment between **SAM** and **PETE**, then:*

SAM exits.

(*Lights shift to:*)

Scene Seven

(Hallway. SAM rushing out from the bathroom almost slams into GILLESPIE, who looks even more annoyed than usual.)

GILLESPIE. Jesus, Sam! Watch out!

SAM WOOD. Sorry, Chief.

GILLESPIE. Lookin' for you anyway. Go see Tatum's daughter at Endicott's place. Get to her before she hears about this shit some other way. Understand?

SAM WOOD. Yes, sir. I'm on it.

(SAM exits. GILLESPIE takes a moment, collecting himself, before heading into...)

Scene Eight

(Detention. GILLESPIE and TIBBS.)

GILLESPIE. Pasadena says you're a hotshot.

TIBBS. Doubt those were the words.

GILLESPIE. Ever look at dead bodies?

TIBBS. More'n I'd like.

GILLESPIE. Gonna look at one now.

(Pause. GILLESPIE expects some kind of response, but gets nothing from TIBBS.)

Suppose you come along.

TIBBS. No thanks.

GILLESPIE. It'll keep you out of trouble.

TIBBS. Am I in trouble?

GILLESPIE. Not yet.

TIBBS. I'll just wait for my train.

GILLESPIE. Missed it already.

TIBBS. Then the next one.

GILLESPIE. Won't be another for a long while. Let's go.

(GILLESPIE unlocks the cell door.)

TIBBS. I'd rather not get in your way.

GILLESPIE. I wouldn't let ya.

TIBBS. I don't see the point. From what I've seen, you got things under control.

GILLESPIE. The point is I asked you.

TIBBS. Askin' or tellin'.

GILLESPIE. Come on, Tibbs. I seen it in your eyes this entire time.

TIBBS. Seen what?

GILLESPIE. You wanna show this dumb cracker how you earn that fat paycheck. Ain't that right, boy? You can tell me the truth. Cause I sure as shit'll be honest with you: I wanna know how you do it. I wanna see if that badge is real or just something they give away for free. You got the attitude, but other than that, I'm not sure I'd let you wash my car's windows.

(The gauntlet is thrown. A long moment, then...)

TIBBS. Let's go.

(Lights shift to:)

Scene Nine

(*Morgue. GILLESPIE, TIBBS, Tatum's body, and THE CORONER.*)

THE CORONER *bristles when he sees Tibbs.*)

CORONER. What's goin' on here, Chief?

GILLESPIE. This man works for the Pasadena Police Department.

CORONER. So what?

GILLESPIE. I'm lettin' him tag along with me. That okay with you?

CORONER. No, it ain't. But it's your call.

GILLESPIE. Damn right it is. (*to TIBBS*) Well, Virgil, there you go. It's all yours.

(*TIBBS goes to examine the body.*

He raises the dead man's hands, examines first the palms, then the fingernails.)

TIBBS. New manicure.

GILLESPIE. That important?

TIBBS. Maybe.

(*GILLESPIE looks to CORONER.*

CORONER *shrugs.*

TIBBS *replaces the hand, moves up to peer at the massive head wound.*)

TIBBS. I'll need silver nitrate and acetic acid.

CORONER. (*to GILLESPIE*) He talkin' to me?

TIBBS. Yes. I'm talking to you.

CORONER. We don't got any a' that shit.

(*TIBBS looks at Coroner, then to Gillespie.*)

TIBBS. Ammonium hydrosulfide?

CORONER. Nope.

(*TIBBS gets the picture.*)

TIBBS. Can you get some?

CORONER. S'pose I could make some calls.

TIBBS. It would be a help.

CORONER. See what I can do.

TIBBS. I'll give you a list of other items, but in the meantime, how about some tooth picks?

CORONER. Yeah, that I can rustle up. Hold on.

(CORONER exits.)

GILLESPIE watches **TIBBS** work.

TIBBS rubs one hand alongside the cheek and jaw of the dead man.

TIBBS progresses to the feet. Gently, he unties one of the dead man's shoes, places the shoe on the floor, removes one sock and examines the foot and ankle.

TIBBS examines the knees of the dead man's trousers.

CORONER enters and hands **TIBBS** the toothpicks.)

TIBBS. Much appreciated.

(CORONER waits, interested in how they'll be used in the autopsy.)

TIBBS puts one in his mouth, the rest in his pocket.)

CORONER. (annoyed) What's this about? (to **CHIEF**) Who is this boy anyway?

GILLESPIE. Already told you.

(TIBBS glances at his watch.)

TIBBS. What time was this man killed?

GILLESPIE. Wood found him, 3. A.M.

CORONER. I put time of death about an hour earlier.

TIBBS. (to be clear) At two?

CORONER. Maybe a little later. 2-2:15 - 2:30.

(TIBBS feels the face again.)

TIBBS. Rigor's begun.

CORONER. No, it ain't.

TIBBS. Feel his jaw.

(CORONER does. By his look, he realizes Tibbs is right.)

The time of death has to be earlier. We've got post-mortem lividity in the legs.

(Embarrassed, THE CORONER glares at Tibbs.)

TIBBS. *(cont.)* Can I assume you have a thermometer here?

CORONER. We do.

TIBBS. I wanna check the loss of heat from the brain. It's the best way to determine time of death.

(beat)

Ain't that right Chief?

GILLESPIE. Always been my favorite method, Tibbs.

(PETE races in –)

PETE. Chief! It's Harvey Oberst – He's runnin' like a Jack Rabbit!

GILLESPIE. What – ?

PETE. It's Oberst –

GILLESPIE. Speak so I can understand you goddammit!

PETE. I'm sorry – He's runnin'! They got him cornered in the old mill. He tried to make a run for it but –

GILLESPIE. That dumb piece a' white trash... *(to TIBBS)*
Don't you go nowhere!

(GILLESPIE flies out the door. PETE follows.)

(CORONER stares at TIBBS. He clearly doesn't like being alone with him. Over this –)

(Sound of hunting dogs barking.

Heavy breathing – like a man running, tearing through bushes, grunting as he falls, etc.

Then shouts: a fight, a struggle, punches landed, grunts of pain...

Lights shift to:)

Scene Ten

(Police Station. GILLESPIE slams through the front door –)

GILLESPIE. Damn, did that squirrely prick put a fight! I'll give 'im that. The boy can run, but he can't outrun the hounds.

PETE. Where is he?

GILLESPIE. Andy and Mitch taking 'im around back.

(beat)

Shit, sun's barely up and we caught ourselves a murderer. How you like that?

(TIBBS enters from hallway.)

TIBBS. You got your man?

GILLESPIE. Like I said, we know our business.

TIBBS. There a confession?

GILLESPIE. Punk had Tatum's wallet.

PETE. Hot damn! Red handed! You nailed 'im, chief! You nailed 'im!

TIBBS. But no admission of guilt?

GILLESPIE. That's comin' up in just a few minutes.

TIBBS. I'd like to observe.

GILLESPIE. Watch and learn.

(Lights shift to:)

Scene Eleven

(A cramped and hot interrogation room.

OBERST *slumped in a chair. He's sweaty, and has a bloody nose.*

He's got a nervous, frightened disposition – like a roach worried about getting squashed.

TIBBS *watches near the door as GILLESPIE gets in Oberst's face.)*

GILLESPIE. You had his wallet!

OBERST. – It was just laying out there. I just –

GILLESPIE. Sure it was. Sure...

OBERST. Was walking by – so, so –

GILLESPIE. Thought you'd help yourself?

OBERST. If I didn't someone else would, so yeah, why not?

GILLESPIE. Sure, most people'd just start rootin' around a dead body –

OBERST. Ain't like that – you don't know!

GILLESPIE. I do know! You killed this man for his money.

You thought, "This is the free pass I been waitin' for."

OBERST. Bullshit!

GILLESPIE. "I do this one thing and" –

OBERST. NO!

GILLESPIE. You did!

OBERST. I DIDN'T, GODDAMN YOU!

(a long beat

Then –)

GILLESPIE. Oh, yes. Yes, you did. You sure as hell did.

(Lights change:)

(CHARLES TATUM appears in another place and time.

It's the night of the murder. He's walking down the street.

OBERST *approaches TATUM as if preparing to attack him...physically he's in that reality, but he continues to talk and interact with GILLESPIE and TIBBS.)*

GILLESPIE. (*cont.*) You knew he was a big shot! Real Estate guy walkin' around at night, fixin' to buy up half the city, now that's a boy who's gotta have some money on 'im, ain't that what you were thinkin'?

OBERST. No!

GILLESPIE. Big shot workin' for someone like Endicott's gotta be loaded.

OBERST. He was laying there, his –

GILLESPIE. You thought, "This man is askin' for it!"

OBERST. YOU STOP SAYIN' THAT!

(And with that outburst, OBERST attacks TATUM. He tries to grab TATUM from behind. They scuffle.)

OBERST wrestles Tatum's cane from him.

TATUM makes a break for it.

OBERST chases him, catches him, throws him against a wall and beats him to death.

Horried by what he's done, he backs away from the crumpled body and throws the murder weapon aside as he reenters the jail scene:)

OBERST. (*cont.*) You got it dead wrong...DEAD WRONG –

GILLESPIE. The fuck I do!

OBERST. Man, I ain't followin' what Endicott's doin'...

GILLESPIE. Everyone knows he's got Tatum down here buyin' up property!

OBERST. Well, I don't! And I don't give a shit, either! Got plenty'a my own problems.

GILLESPIE. You sure as hell do.

OBERST. Ya don't know crap about me, Gillespie!

GILLESPIE. Here's what I know: You got a murdered man's wallet. And I'm tellin' you, kid, that is all I need.

OBERST. He couldn't use it – if not me, someone else – One'a your own men!

GILLESPIE. You're just twistin' here...

OBERST. You know what I'm talkin' about –

GILLESPIE. What'd you bash that skull in with?

OBERST. You tell me 'cause I don't know.

GILLESPIE. A rock? You sprayed that man's brains all over the street!

OBERST. He was a little guy, I could've handled him easy if I'd wanted to! All I did – I'm tellin' you – is pick his fuckin' wallet. Nothin' else!

GILLESPIE. (*into intercom*) Pete! Get in here!

(PETE runs in.)

PETE. Yeah, chief?

GILLESPIE. Book him. Suspicion of murder.

PETE. That'd be my pleasure. (*to OBERST*) C'mon, dipshit.

(PETE hauls OBERST out.)

(GILLESPIE turns to TIBBS.)

GILLESPIE. This how fast you catch murderers in your neck of the woods?

TIBBS. Might need to dig a little deeper.

GILLESPIE. Excuse me?

TIBBS. Don't think he's your man, Chief.

GILLESPIE. You bought that kid's story? Shit, I thought you were supposed to be the hotshot cop? (*sneers*) Maybe you should take notes for your people on the coast. Not sure how they do it out there, but I'll tell you one thing: I ain't impressed.

TIBBS. You want the results of my examinations?

GILLESPIE. I know all I need about the body.

TIBBS. You know Oberst's left handed?

GILLESPIE. So what if he is?

TIBBS. The fatal blow was with a blunt instrument.

GILLESPIE. I know.

TIBBS. And delivered at an angle of about seventeen degrees from the right and from behind. That makes it almost certain the assailant was right-handed.

GILLESPIE. Maybe he is, maybe he ain't, but –

TIBBS. When Oberst thumped himself in the chest he did it with his left hand.

GILLESPIE. That's thin, Tibbs.

TIBBS. Then there's his shoes. And the fact he needs a shave.

(GILLESPIE just stares at Tibbs, refusing to ask why, not willing to concede more territory to this man.)

Tatum was hit from behind. Means he was either assaulted by someone he knew and trusted, who stepped behind him for a moment, or, more likely, someone sneaked up quietly enough to hit him without warning. If Tatum had been warned, even by a second, he'd've turned his head and the blow would've landed at a different angle.

(beat)

Your suspect's wearing hard leather heels and has steel plates to make them last longer. In those shoes every step is noisy. He couldn't possibly've made a surprise attack with them on.

GILLESPIE. Have you considered a man might, oh, I don't know, **CHANGE HIS FUCKING SHOES?**

TIBBS. But you mentioned this man is poor white trash, which suggests he has only a limited number of shoes and doesn't change often...

(GILLESPIE laughs, shakes his head. TIBBS continues, undeterred:)

Judging by the stubble on his chin, I'd guess he was up all night. If he went home to change his shoes, he'd probably shave.

GILLESPIE. So fucking what? Maybe he didn't! I didn't shave last night!

TIBBS. But we know he does so regularly. There're razor nicks under this chin that showed that.

(GILLESPIE, keeping his rage deep inside, just stares at TIBBS for a good, long moment.)

GILLESPIE. (*sarcastic*) Pretty sure of yourself, ain'tcha, Virgil?

TIBBS. I just do the job in front of me.

(*As if Gillespie doesn't?*)

GILLESPIE. (*seething*) Virgil's a pretty fancy name for a black boy.

TIBBS. (*sharp*) Not really.

GILLESPIE. What do they call you where you're from?

(*pause*)

TIBBS. They call me Mr. Tibbs.

(*The moment hangs there. GILLESPIE looks like he's about to go at Tibbs when –*)

(*SAM enters.*)

SAM WOOD. Chief –

(*He sees he's interrupted something.*)

I'm sorry...

GILLESPIE. (*doesn't take his eyes from TIBBS*) Don't know how to knock anymore, Sam?

SAM WOOD. I'm sorr – I'm...I was at Endicotts and –

GILLESPIE. You break the news?

SAM WOOD. I did, and, uh, they asked to come down and talk to you.

GILLESPIE. They?

SAM WOOD. Endicott and Tatum's daughter...But I can have 'em wait, or...

GILLESPIE. Not necessary. Send 'em in. You ain't interrupted shit.

SAM WOOD. Yes, sir.

(*SAM motions out the door, steps aside as MR. ENDICOTT and Tatum's daughter, MELANIE, enter. Both looked haggard and grief-stricken. MELANIE, especially, is a wreck...*)

GILLESPIE. Mr. Endicott...

ENDICOTT. Thanks for seeing us, Chief...

GILLESPIE. I hope Sam expressed our condolences to you and Ms. Tatum.

ENDICOTT. He did. Thank you. But to brass tacks: Do we have any idea who...?

GILLESPIE. Not yet. No. But we will.

ENDICOTT. I want to help. I want to get who did this.

GILLESPIE. When Ms. Tatum feels able, we'd like to have her formally identify the body.

ENDICOTT. Can I do that?

GILLESPIE. Sir?

ENDICOTT. I don't want her to go through that.

GILLESPIE. ...I'm sure that'll be fine.

ENDICOTT. *(to Melanie)* If I can spare you seeing her father like –

MELANIE. I don't want to be spared...

(She looks like she's shut down some part of herself to subdue her grief...she avoids eye contact, speaks in a low voice...like all of her energy is going into a battle to control her emotions.)

ENDICOTT. You're in no condition to...

MELANIE. What condition should I be in?

(silence)

(stronger, to GILLESPIE)

I...do not want to be spared.

GILLESPIE. Understood.

MELANIE. Who'd do something like this?

SAM WOOD. Don't know, Ma'am. But you can be damned sure we're gonna find out.

(GILLESPIE glares at SAM. He shrinks back a little bit, but can't take his eyes off MELANIE.)

ENDICOTT. I know you and your department will do everything possible to find and punish the person who did this. Whatever I can do to help, I want you to call on me. I don't care what it is. Understand?

GILLESPIE. We're gonna do our best to –

TIBBS. (*cutting in*) Can you tell us what the nature of your relationship was?

(*All eyes go to TIBBS, sitting in the corner.*)

(*MELANIE wipes her eyes, also looking at TIBBS.*)

ENDICOTT. Who are you?

GILLESPIE. He's a police investigator out in Los Angeles, California.

TIBBS. Pasadena.

GILLESPIE. What difference does it make?

ENDICOTT. I haven't heard your name.

GILLESPIE. Call him, "Mr. Tibbs."

(*Beat. TIBBS glances at GILLESPIE, then to ENDICOTT:*)

TIBBS. Virgil Tibbs.

ENDICOTT. What is it you do out there?

TIBBS. I specialize in crimes against persons – homicide, rape, and similar major offences.

MELANIE. And you're here because...?

GILLESPIE. Sam found Virgil waiting for a train and brought him in as a possible suspect. Then we found out who he was.

MELANIE. How long are you in Argo?

TIBBS. Just 'till the next train.

(*It's impossible to tell what ENDICOTT or MELANIE think of TIBBS.*)

MELANIE. My father is a ...was...a real estate developer.

ENDICOTT. We're buying properties on the West side... Charles was helping me on a commercial project. We're putting in a department store and a movie theatre.

TIBBS. Anyone you know might not like your plans?

ENDICOTT. This could've been because of me?

TIBBS. At this point, we're just asking questions...looking for anything.

ENDICOTT. This project will provide jobs in the demolition, in the construction, and steady employment with the businesses themselves. Plus, we'll pull in traffic for every other business in Argo. Who the hell would have a problem with that? I suppose there are interests in town who oppose me...don't like me for personal or political reasons...but why any of that would be transferred to Tatum...

(beat)

Anything else at the moment? I think Ms. Tatum should rest.

MELANIE. I'm not tired.

ENDICOTT. None the less...

GILLESPIE. No. Go ahead. We'll be in touch.

TIBBS. One last thing.

ENDICOTT. Yes?

TIBBS. What kind of department store?

ENDICOTT. Woolworths.

TIBBS. Who else has been working with you and Mr. Tatum?

MELANIE. Eric.

ENDICOTT. Yes. Eric Kaufman.

TIBBS. He'll need to be interviewed.

GILLESPIE. *(an edge in his voice)* Sam, see them out.

(ENDICOTT, MELANIE and SAM exit.)

(GILLESPIE explodes -)

Let's get something straight here, Tibbs: I don't like being interrupted. An' I sure as hell don't like bein' second guessed. Not in my station and not in front of someone like Endicott. That too much for you to understand?

TIBBS. Not at all.

GILLESPIE. N'fact, This might be a good time to get yourself back to the station. No reason to risk missing another train.

TIBBS. I couldn't agree more.

(beat)

Good luck with your investigation. I'm sure you'll get your man in no time.

(TIBBS offers his hand to shake. GILLESPIE doesn't take it. He turns away.)

Can I get Sam to drive me to the station?

GILLESPIE. No, Tibbs, ya can't. I need all my men right where they are. Walkin' ain't gonna kill you.

(beat)

(TIBBS exits as)

(Lights shift to:)

Scene Twelve

(Police Station Lobby. SAM catches up with TIBBS. PETE watches as he does desk work.)

SAM WOOD. Hold on, Virgil...

TIBBS. Hmm?

SAM WOOD. ...just wanted to, ah... *(notices PETE, tries to lower his voice a bit)* ...just, you know, say "thanks."

TIBBS. What for?

SAM WOOD. Letting me off the hook with the false arrest thing.

TIBBS. Not the first time it's happened to me.

SAM WOOD. Still, you could've made it tough...

TIBBS. You like what you do here, Sam?

SAM WOOD. What'd'you mean?

TIBBS. Police work.

SAM WOOD. S'pose so.

(beat)

TIBBS. Been good to meet you.

(TIBBS extends his hand to shake.

Awkward moment as SAM isn't sure what to do, but then he shakes hands with TIBBS.

PETE eyes all of this.)

Maybe I'll see you out in California some day.

(TIBBS exits.)

(PETE stares at SAM.)

SAM WOOD. Fuck off, Pete.

(SAM exits. PETE shakes his head, disgusted with SAM.)

Scene Thirteen

(GILLESPIE in his office when PETE sticks his head in.)

PETE. You got a call.

GILLESPIE. And when I turn off the intercom, it's 'cause I don't wanna talk to nobody.

PETE. I know...but it's Mayor Schubert.

(PETE exits.)

(GILLESPIE sighs, mouths "fuck."
He takes a moment, then picks up the phone.)

GILLESPIE. Gillespie.

FRANK. This is Frank Schubert.

(Mayor FRANK SCHUBERT appears in a separate light.)

GILLESPIE. Yep?

FRANK. What's going on down there?

GILLESPIE. We got a murder.

FRANK. I'm talking about this colored detective your boys spaded up.

GILLESPIE. That's taken care of.

FRANK. Then why the hell'd I just get a call from Pasadena confirming a request to borrow your boy for a few days.

GILLESPIE. I didn't call nobody. An' I sure as shit don't need no help with –

FRANK. Goddamn Endicott...

GILLESPIE. What about 'im?

FRANK. He's got a boner for the black boy and he made the call. Thinks he might do some good. I assumed you were already on board for some dumb reason and thanked the son-of-a-bitch kindly.

GILLESPIE. This's the first I heard about it. Endicott's a goddamn meddler.

FRANK. Tell me something I don't know.

(pause)

GILLESPIE. So what is it you expectin' me to do here?

FRANK. Take care of it.

GILLESPIE. Meanin' what?

FRANK. Meanin' use the boy.

GILLESPIE. The hell I will.

FRANK. Yeah, the hell you will.

GILLESPIE. Bullshit, Frank. My station. I'm runnin' it the way I want an' I sure as shit ain't gonna let some outsider run my investigation!

FRANK. You're overlooking something here Bill.

GILLESPIE. N'what's that?

FRANK. This boy gives you the perfect out.

GILLESPIE. Who says I need one?

FRANK. Suppose this detective finds the man you want?

GILLESPIE. Suppose I find the –

FRANK. (*cutting him off*) Just shut up a damn second and listen: He ain't got no police powers here.

GILLESPIE. So what?

FRANK. So he'll have to hand the whole damn thing over to you.

GILLESPIE. And if he screws it up I eat the shit?

FRANK. Well. Then he takes the fall doesn't he? And so does Endicott. Either way, you win. But if you don't use 'im, and by some strange twist of fate you don't apprehend the killer...well, it's all on you. And you alone. And whether or not you and I find Endicott to be a cocksucker, he still has a lot a' pull in this town. And I sure as shit don't want him backing anyone else for Mayor next year, if you follow.

(*pause*)

GILLESPIE. I just kicked 'im out.

FRANK. Well then, you best get him back.

(FRANK *disappears.*)

(GILLESPIE *hangs up and crosses to –*)

(*blackout*)

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