

THE SHOWMAN AND THE SPIRIT

A Play

By

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THE SHOWMAN AND THE SPIRIT

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THE SHOWMAN AND THE SPIRIT

For Ken Larkin

THE SHOWMAN AND THE SPIRIT

CHARACTERS

ANDY LEVITT	Late twenties; White; An idealistic teacher who is still learning.
MICHELLE WOMACK	Early thirties; African-American; A vital and commanding straight-shooting secretary.
LAWRENCE MUFFET	In his vibrant seventies; African-American; An entertainer.
VERONICA MUFFET	Middle twenties; African-American; Delicately beautiful and carefully raised.

TIME: February, 1976

PLACE: A high school in the Bronx

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ACT I SCENE I

The all-purpose room of a Bronx high school. Early in the day.

ANDY. *(Sort of practicing a speech.)* James Hudson...*(He tries again.)* James Hudson...! *(MICHELLE noisily enters, pushing a collapsed table on wheels.)* James Hudson...James Hudson was the son of a former slave who...who grew up to become...

MICHELLE. Good morning, Andy! Hey, you want to buy a raffle ticket?

ANDY. ...An eminent scholar, an outstanding athlete, a renowned Shakespearean actor, one of music's most glorious baritones...

MICHELLE. I'm just doing this for Jamaal, his school makes him sell these things...

ANDY. ...And an activist for peace and justice all over the...

MICHELLE. ...And check this out, the prize is a black and white TV. Who in their right mind is going to want a black and white TV?

ANDY. Michelle! You mind? I'm trying to...you know...

MICHELLE. Oops, sorry. Carry on. *(She salutes and exits.)*

ANDY. ...For peace and justice all over the world. A graduate of Harvard Law School, Hudson was a dauntless advocate for his people...He was a rare visionary and a courageous fighter of social injustice—*(Michelle enters pushing another table.)*

MICHELLE. I didn't know you were going to be giving a speech. That's cool. And you're doing it without notes.

ANDY. It's not a speech, it's just an introduction. I don't need notes.

MICHELLE. Yea, I guess you only need notes when you're talking shit.

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ANDY. I better make some notes. (*He digs into his backpack for a pen and writes some notes as Michelle starts setting up tables.*) This is going to be good, right? I mean, I'm a little worried...that they moved the assembly to 8th period. You think if I talked to Mr. Murphy...?

MICHELLE. Mudfoot? My boss isn't coming in today.

ANDY. He's not coming in? But it's James Hudson Day!

MICHELLE. I love how you made up a new holiday! Nope, he's home with a migraine headache, which I think you gave him.

ANDY. Maybe I could call him...at home? No?

MICHELLE. Yea, you do that and you're going to talk yourself out of an assembly altogether.

ANDY. But—

MICHELLE. Look Andy, Mudfoot a.k.a. assistant principal...he knows the school is expected to do something...Black History Month and all that good stuff.

ANDY. But they don't do anything! Every time I come up with an idea the other teachers are all "Oh we tried that years ago. We can tell you how that will go."

MICHELLE. Any kind of change, they don't like it. These old hands are always like, "If we do that, we're gonna lose control!" Lose control...please...like they ever had control. But that's their thing—you can't lose control.

ANDY. Really. And my chair, Mrs. Costello...

MICHELLE. Ugh. That heifer is as irritable as sandpaper on a dog's butt. Old Calamity Costello—whatever you're going through she knows someone who has it worse. (*Once the tables are up, Michelle starts wiping them down.*)

ANDY. And she wouldn't even let me contact our guest speaker! I don't even know what she said to him. I mean, I would've liked to talk to the guy before today.

MICHELLE. Yea, I've been meaning to ask you about this guy—this actor—this Muffin...

ANDY. Muffet. Lawrence Muffet.

MICHELLE. ...Cause I did some reading up on him and I see that homie played thirty-two Pullman porters...

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ANDY. Yea, I know...but he knew Hudson.

MICHELLE. *(Continuing to talk over Andy.)* Seventeen janitors...

ANDY. They were good friends...

MICHELLE. Twenty-six butlers...

ANDY. He's got to be very knowledgeable...

MICHELLE. Eleven waiters...

ANDY. Okay, I get it...

MICHELLE. Five shoeshine men, three stable hands...

ANDY. Yea, yea, yea...you know, he could walk in any minute...

MICHELLE. *(Emphatically.)* And an Indian named Sam! *(Pause.)* Am I missing something? Like according to you, these are parts Hudson refused to play.

ANDY. Yea but—

MICHELLE. And this whole shebang is supposed to be about Hudson, right?

ANDY. I know what you're saying but—

MICHELLE. Who refused to be stereotyped, right? I'm just wondering, like, out of all the possible speakers you could have, why is Uncle Tom coming to talk?

ANDY. Because he's alive and he's the only one who answered my letter!

MICHELLE. Oh. So this old man is coming all the way from California to speak at a high school in the Bronx? And on his own dime?

ANDY. Yea, he's coming with his daughter.

MICHELLE. They must really be hard up for excitement. That doesn't seem kind of whack to you?

ANDY. It's an honor to speak about Hudson. I mean, right?

MICHELLE. I think it's strange but maybe that's just me. And I didn't want to say nothing but nobody is really sure why this assembly is about Hudson anyway.

ANDY. What do you mean? He was a great American hero...a giant of the 20th century!

MICHELLE. Yea, who these kids have never heard of.

ANDY. But that's the point—cause they should know about him. My students know. My third period class is really excited.

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MICHELLE. You just *love* your third period. And the teachers—they keep asking me if he went to school here or something. I’m just telling you what they’re saying.

ANDY. My God, it would be nice to get a little support. And now this 8th period crap? When I was in school I never went to a last period assembly. What if they don’t—

MICHELLE. We’ll get them there. Before the assembly I’ll cruise by Dodger Stadium.

ANDY. Dodger Stadium?

MICHELLE. You know, where those cut-ups go when they’re dodging class.

ANDY. When Muffet gets here I’ll go over everything. Costello should have let me call him. You got Kevin to do the AV, right? Cause we have slides and oh, I’m going to need an overhead projector.

MICHELLE. Don’t worry about Kevin, he’ll be here.

ANDY. And we’re going to close it with the record of Hudson singing his signature song, “Deep River.”

MICHELLE. This old man is going to need a place to sit down till eighth period. I better get some chairs. *(Michelle exits as Andy scribbles some notes and then tries them out.)*

ANDY. Now you may be wondering how a man who, in spite of being one the most courageous and significant cultural figures in the world, could be erased from our national consciousness so that even the teachers in this school don’t know who he is... *(He scratches that out.)* James Hudson died last month in a small house in Newark, New Jersey. Forgotten. But today we will remember him and talk about him. We are privileged to have with us, a friend of James Hudson who can give us a rare inside look into the life of— *(We hear the stentorian voice of LAWRENCE MUFFET from the hall.)*

LAWRENCE. Veronica! *(Beat.)* Veronica! *(Lawrence enters, finely dressed.)* Excuse me, young man, is this what they call the multi-purpose room?

ANDY. Yes, you must be Mr.—

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LAWRENCE. I'm looking for my daughter. (*Andy walks toward him, holding out his hand but Lawrence is preoccupied.*) I told her we were to meet in the multi-purpose room. I hope she's not lost.

ANDY. Mr. Muffet? It's good to meet you.

LAWRENCE. (*More to himself.*) She went to the ladies room but we are strangers here...And she doesn't know her way...

ANDY. I'm sure somebody will direct her here. Mr. Muffet, I'm Andy Levitt and I—

LAWRENCE. (*As if just noticing him.*) You know who I am?

ANDY. Yes, yes, I—of course...I was the one who—

LAWRENCE. Then you know that last June I was bestowed with an Honorary Doctorate of Law from my Alma Mater, Carlisle College.

ANDY. Uh yea...Congratulations on that! What an—

LAWRENCE. And you'll be kind enough to address me accordingly.

ANDY. Uh huh.

LAWRENCE. What's the matter, can't you talk boy?

ANDY. (*At a loss.*) Yes...um...Oh! *Doctor Muffet!* (*He offers his hand again and this time Lawrence accepts it and they shake.*) Welcome to Franklin Pierce High School—

LAWRENCE. Did we have a conversation on the telephone?

ANDY. No, you spoke to our department head, Mrs. Costello. But I will be the one handling—

LAWRENCE. That was a woman?

ANDY. Yes. But—

LAWRENCE. I thought I was speaking to a man.

ANDY. No, she's a woman. I can understand why you—

LAWRENCE. She had a sound like a bullfrog.

ANDY. Yes, I guess she does now that you mention it. But I was the one who wrote you and then your daughter wrote back and—

LAWRENCE. Where *is* my daughter? I better see if I can find her.
(*Lawrence starts to leave.*)

ANDY. Anyway, I'll be the one introducing you. (*Lawrence stops and turns.*)

LAWRENCE. You.

ANDY. Yea, I hope that's all right.

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LAWRENCE. You're a student here?

ANDY. Student? No, I'm on the staff. I'm an English teacher.

LAWRENCE. An English teacher...*(Regarding him skeptically.)* Then you won't object if I pose some questions to you.

ANDY. That's what I'm here for. Anything you need to know—

LAWRENCE. I need to ascertain your knowledge of my career and the Black struggle in motion pictures.

ANDY. You mean like a quiz?

LAWRENCE. You're an educator, aren't you?

ANDY. Well, I think of myself more as just a guy who teaches. Now about the assembly, I'm not sure what Mrs. Costello told you but it's—

LAWRENCE. Let me tell you exactly how my talks go. I generally cover a lot of ground and what-have-you. You will introduce me with some background information provided by my daughter Veronica.

(VERONICA enters, carrying a large scrapbook. She is followed by Michelle who is loaded down with folding chairs.) And by George, here she is, right on cue!

MICHELLE. I thought she might be yours, I found her lost, roaming the halls.

VERONICA. I wasn't lost. *(Lawrence goes to Veronica and puts his hands on her shoulders.)* My audience of one!

ANDY. *(Immediately drawn to Veronica.)* Hi, I'm Andy! *(Michelle is left standing there holding the chairs that she finally lets fall with a clatter.)*

VERONICA. Oh, did you need help with those?

MICHELLE. Nope, I got it. *(Setting up the chairs.)* Dr. Muffet, would you like to sit down here?

LAWRENCE. On that?

MICHELLE. I know, we got some hokey-padokey furniture here but that's the public school system for you. Personally, I don't care what I sit on but would it break their budget to spend something on a new typewriter? I keep telling them that if you want me to do a 1976 job you got to give me 1976 equipment.

LAWRENCE. *(Taking a seat.)* You tell them, little sister. Well Veronica, here we are in what is known as the Bronx.

VERONICA. Hmm.

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LAWRENCE. Veronica is a scientist and therefore an observer. Nothing gets by her. For instance, just this morning, on the subway she observed a passenger with a striking resemblance to Elizabeth Taylor. “Look, Elizabeth Taylor” she said.

MICHELLE. No kidding, Liz Taylor on the number six train?

VERONICA. I didn’t say it *was* her. I just said it looked—

MICHELLE. Well, you never know. Just the other day I saw Sophia Loren shopping at Key Food.

LAWRENCE. Did you now?

MICHELLE. Yea, she was buying a jar of Ragu spaghetti sauce.

ANDY. Very funny. Michelle’s a riot. Now, about the assembly...

LAWRENCE. (*Laughing.*) A jar of Ragu spaghetti sauce! (*Enjoying the moment.*) Yes, I suppose anything is possible in New York. It is good to be back. New Yorkers love life in the raw. There’s a beat. A tempo. The earth is always in action. It moves with the beat of a drum. It’s the great universal tempo. Veronica, I’m going to show you some of the sites I used to play at. I wonder who is still here...I wonder who is still alive. I hear that Ladybug McGee is still living up in Harlem. I gave her a kick-off in the theater, you know.

MICHELLE. Ladybug McGee? She’s still around? Not for nothing but I always thought she was kind of silly with that voice of hers.

LAWRENCE. No, Ladybug had a magnificent comic talent. We should have a picture of me and Ladybug in our archives here. Veronica has it all in her portfolio. You can start laying it out, Veronica. (*Veronica begins spreading out photos and clippings on the table.*) In the meantime, let me give you the lowdown or outline or what-have-you on my talk. And then we can schedule my appearance.

ANDY. Wait a minute...

LAWRENCE. I beg your pardon?

ANDY. You said schedule your appearance?

LAWRENCE. I know what I said.

ANDY. The assembly *is* scheduled. It’s scheduled for eighth period.

LAWRENCE. The eighth period of what?

ANDY. Of today.

LAWRENCE. No.

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ANDY. What?

LAWRENCE. What. Veronica has to give you notes and then I have to approve your introduction...

ANDY. I don't have time. I have to teach a class next period. But this was all set. In our letters...when you talked to my chair...

LAWRENCE. Talked to your chair?

ANDY. My department chairman, Mrs. Costello.

LAWRENCE. Who?

ANDY. The bullfrog!

LAWRENCE. I don't know what she was croaking about but what I said was that we would talk about my talking. I told her I would be in New York but that I have to approve the setting and the theater and what-have-you.

ANDY. But that was all arranged.

LAWRENCE. I haven't even asked you certain questions that you need to answer.

ANDY. Go ahead, ask!

LAWRENCE. I don't like to be rushed. Restless, restless, just like the human race. We need to wait awhile and see how this water flows.

ANDY. How what water flows? What are you talking about? This doesn't make any sense.

LAWRENCE. You're telling me I don't make sense?

ANDY. Why would you come all the way out here if you're not even sure you're—

LAWRENCE. How can I be sure of anything when I haven't even posed my questions to you yet?

ANDY. What is with these questions? We had an arrangement.

LAWRENCE. I thought you were an educator. You act like an amateur.

ANDY. Well nobody told me there would be a test!

LAWRENCE. *(Rising.)* Let's go Veronica.

MICHELLE. Now Dr. Muffet, hold on. Just a second now...Let's all calm down. I know you went to a lot of trouble to get here...

LAWRENCE. I did.

MICHELLE. And Andy went to a lot of trouble to organize this event.

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ANDY. Yes, I did. Do you know how hard it was just to get approval to get this assembly on?

LAWRENCE. They didn't want me? They didn't want me to come?

ANDY. It's not personal against you. They didn't want anyone to come. They never want anyone to come. I had to fight for this. I had to fight very hard for this...for you.

LAWRENCE. You fought for me to come?

ANDY. Yes, I fought because I think it's that important.

MICHELLE. That *you're* that important.

LAWRENCE. By George, that answers my questions then. You passed the test! Okay, now we're cooking.

ANDY. So, you're going to talk—this afternoon, I mean?

VERONICA. He talks all the time to schools.

LAWRENCE. I'm a fixture in the community. Not that I'm a man who generally likes to talk. At home, I don't even like it when the phone rings. I go "Oh no, here's someone who wants to talk." I guess if you got a woman at home you get used to all that talking but I'm alone, except for Veronica and she'll be off resuming her graduate studies. She'll soon be returning to her microscopes and bacteria and what-have-you. In fact, I can show you...I have right here her review from the Berkeley faculty commenting on her outstanding—*(Lawrence starts to take out an envelope from his jacket pocket but Veronica goes to him and touches his arm.)*

VERONICA. Dad, tell them about your presentation.

LAWRENCE. Now, let me tell you about my presentation. You announce me and I make my entrance. *(He acts it out.)* I walk out on stage and then I pause...and turn...and I fix my eyes on the audience, greeting them with a warm expression of gratitude as they conclude their applause and sit back down in their seats.

VERONICA. And then he starts speaking.

LAWRENCE. "I am Lawrence Muffet. M-U-F-F-E-T," I tell them. After I expeditiously get through the business of being born I go into when I was a young guy out of school, lots of ambition going to practice law or whatnot but I quit that because I didn't see myself as another down and out Black lawyer chasing ambulances. So, I transferred to the

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college of education in show business by singing on riverboats. Went from that to vaudeville, traveling through the south with a stock company—putting on little short plays and singing and whatnot to finally landing in New York City and the legitimate stage...

ANDY. Okay, but you understand that there's a very limited amount of time and—

VERONICA. And he sprinkles in tidbits about the other personalities of the era.

LAWRENCE. That's the pepper! I will remark upon the individuality of these personalities. Whole personalities that had to be reckoned with. And of course then, I will present the saga of my arrival in that great place called Hollywood. It's quite a story.

ANDY. Yea, but you see, the focus of this event—

LAWRENCE. I know all about the focus. You see, after I tell about my kick-off in Hollywood and that happened there, then the children can ask me questions. And that's when the great and relevant subject comes up—Black is beautiful. I will spell out the ingredients that make it so and I will tell them that they are all Black warriors, just like me. Then I bring it all home, singing my big signature number, "Deep River."

ANDY. *(After a pause—figuring out how to respond.)* Dr. Muffet, here's the thing—

LAWRENCE. I know. I know what you're going to say. You've got a lot of Puerto Rican children in this school. I see that. But I'll be sure to say that they are included, that they too can be warriors.

MICHELLE. And to think that Mudfoot is going to miss this.

ANDY. Let's go back to when you talk about the other personalities. You see, I was thinking specifically of—

LAWRENCE. Oh, we can play that game. You can throw out a name and I can tell you something. It's nice to hear a name ring again. You had all these magnificent personalities who had names and then all of a sudden you didn't hear those names anymore. *(Beat.)* You throw me a name and by George, as quick as you can say jackrabbit, I'll tell you something. Bill "Bojangles" Robinson? He was a tender-hearted fellow, always doing something for someone. Stepin' Fetchit? Step could dance like lightning. Satchmo? He was a sensation. I called him the laughing

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trumpet player. He was always laughing. Well, I would be too if I made that much dough. You give me a name and I'll tell you.

ANDY. Okay, how about James Hudson?

LAWRENCE. Yes, I was going to mention him.

ANDY. Well, we need more than a mention. I mean, you understand that the assembly today is all about him.

LAWRENCE. *(Pause.)* All about who?

ANDY. James Hudson. *(Pause.)* Dr. Muffet? *(Pause.)* You knew him, right?

LAWRENCE. *(Subdued.)* Yes, I knew James Hudson. I gave him his kick-off.

ANDY. You did? But I thought he was already a name in the theater when—

LAWRENCE. I'm not talking about the stage. I gave him his kick-off in motion pictures. He was kind of strange in that area.

ANDY. You mean because he refused to play certain parts that they—

LAWRENCE. I don't care to talk about that.

ANDY. The thing is that well, you see...well, look... *(He unrolls a poster to show Lawrence.)* We're calling today "James Hudson Day." *(Beat.)* That's what we're calling...it.

LAWRENCE. *(Reading the poster.)* "We salute James Hudson." *(He puts on his glasses to read the small print at the bottom.)* "Friend of James Hudson, Lawrence Muffet, will speak on the life and impact of the great James Hudson." *(Pause.)*

ANDY. You see, we've already put this whole thing together. We have slides and film clips and a recording of *him* singing "Deep River." *(A long pause. Veronica goes to her father.)* What? Did you want to sing the song...is that...it? *(At a loss.)* Is there a problem?

VERONICA. You wrote us a letter...

ANDY. Yea...and I said—

VERONICA. You said this was to be a celebration of performers *such as* James Hudson for Black History Month.

ANDY. No, I meant...Did I not make it clear?

LAWRENCE. And you're an English teacher? Veronica, let's go.

ANDY. Go?! You can't go!

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LAWRENCE. *(To Veronica.)* They think we came all this way for one appearance. That I'm so desperate for an engagement? Let's go, Veronica. We have other things to do.

ANDY. But...but!

MICHELLE. Dr. Muffet, hold on. Just hold on. Maybe we can straighten this out. I mean, since you did travel all the way up here on the Liz Taylor local and all...Come on, how would you like to see our auditorium? You did say you wanted to see it, right? I mean as long as you're here...it's cold out there...you don't want to go. *(She gives him a wink.)* Come see the auditorium.

LAWRENCE. The theater?

VERONICA. Dad, there seems to be a lot of confusion and disorganization—

MICHELLE. *(Talking over Veronica.)* Yes, our theater. We would love to show it to you.

LAWRENCE. *(Considering it.)* Are you going to show it to me?

VERONICA. Dad...

MICHELLE. Yes, I'll take you. Andy has a third period class to teach.

LAWRENCE. Veronica...? We might take a look at the theater but that doesn't mean—

MICHELLE. That's right. Come on Doc, you come with me. Right this way...*(She takes him by the arm.)*

LAWRENCE. You coming, Veronica? *(Michelle leads Lawrence out. Veronica is about to follow. Andy touches her arm and stops her.)*

ANDY. Could I talk to you a second...I mean, what just happened here? I feel like I hurt him and I didn't mean to...I mean if Costello had just let me make the call this whole thing would have—

VERONICA. I have to go.

ANDY. I didn't mean to hurt him. That's the last thing I...I'm just very nervous, you know? Like I'm trying to do something here and if this thing doesn't work out...if I like fail...they're never going to let me forget it. Anytime I have a suggestion they'll—I know it sounds weird but this is like a big deal to me.

VERONICA. It was a big deal to him too.

ANDY. I thought you said he talks to schools all the time.

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VERONICA. Yes, sitting at a child's desk in a circle of fourth graders. This was going to be different.

ANDY. Look, I want him on that stage. I want him to speak.

VERONICA. About James Hudson.

ANDY. Well, yea. It's James Hudson Day!

VERONICA. There are many well-written histories about James Hudson. Anybody can go into the library and dig into those.

ANDY. I'm hoping after the assembly they will.

VERONICA. My father is...my father is a man of stature...

ANDY. I'm sure...

VERONICA. ...And he doesn't deserve to be treated like a...like a...

ANDY. I have tremendous respect for him.

VERONICA. No you don't. I could tell you about the films he made outside of the studio system. Films that he wrote and produced and starred in. Films that—

ANDY. And I would love to hear about all that but the bell is going to ring and I have to get to my third period class. Those kids are really looking forward to hearing about Hudson. Maybe if you came with me and met these kids...

VERONICA. I have to find my father. Where did that woman take him?

ANDY. Come with me. My third period would love to meet you.

VERONICA. Me? Why?

ANDY. You knew Hudson, right?

VERONICA. No, I didn't know him.

ANDY. But if he and your father were such good friends...

VERONICA. That was before I was born. (*Beat.*) James had gone by the time I...

ANDY. Oh yea, of course. He would've left Hollywood by then. Fucking blacklist.

VERONICA. So, this James Hudson thing, this was all your idea?

ANDY. Yea.

VERONICA. I didn't think anybody knew who he was anymore. I heard he died somewhere around here.

ANDY. In New Jersey...in Newark.

VERONICA. In Newark, right. He was alone?

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ANDY. He had been living pretty much in seclusion for years.

VERONICA. *(Clearly affected.)* Oh.

ANDY. Yea...

VERONICA. It's sad...It's wrong...that...A man like...

ANDY. A man like...? *(A pause. Veronica seems to have shut down.)*

You were going to say...

VERONICA. Nothing...never mind...I'm not saying anything.

ANDY. Yes you are...*(The class bell rings.)* Look, I'm free at lunch. We can talk then, yea? You won't leave, okay? Okay?

VERONICA. We'll let you know. I have to find my father. *(She walks off as the noise from the hallway grows louder.)*

SCENE 2

Michelle steps out onto the stage of the auditorium.

MICHELLE. Dr. Muffet? Come on out and take a look here. *(Lawrence enters from the wings onto the stage.)*

LAWRENCE. What happened to Veronica? I thought she was right behind—*(Finding himself on stage has an immediate and marvelous effect on him. He takes in the sea of seats in the audience.)* This is quite a house. Yes, by George, quite an impressive house.

MICHELLE. This stage needs to be swept and oh, they still have tape on the floor from the last production. They just did "Sweet Charity." It was great. *(She sings.)* "Hey big spender..." BUP-A-DUP-BOM! *(She flings her hips to Lawrence's appreciation.)*

LAWRENCE. You could stop a show cold, cooking like that!

MICHELLE. That show got Mudfoot shakier than the cafeteria jello.

"Wh-wh-what are they supposed to be, prostitutes?" I said "No Mr.

Murphy, they're just dancers." He bought it. I'll tell you though, we got some really talented kids here. Let me get this tape off so they can sweep this bad boy up. *(Michelle gets down on her hands and knees and starts picking tape up off the floor. Lawrence takes center stage.)*

LAWRENCE. I guess this is where a young actor learns his trade now. In my day, you joined a stock company. We'd travel throughout the

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south and sing songs and put on little plays. *(He sings.)* PACK UP ALL MY CARES AND WOE, HERE I GO SINGIN' LOW *(Michelle joins in.)* BYE BYE BLACKBIRD. *(Lawrence speaks.)* We used to get our bookings through the Theater Owners Booking Association, the T.O.B.A. or as we knew it, "Tough On Black Actors." *(Michelle laughs. She continues to tug tape off the floor as she listens.)* Of course, I had to play dummy to get in the stage door. If they had known about my law degree I wouldn't have gotten a job. I traveled the circuit with the likes of Stringbean the comedian, Butterbeans and Susie and Pegleg Bates who danced with a wooden leg. Those were some rugged days. *(He sings.)* WHERE SOMEBODY WAITS FOR ME, SUGAR'S SWEET AND SO IS SHE.. *(He speaks.)* They'd book you for forty weeks and they made sure that they were the toughest forty weeks you would ever know. They kept you broke and on the edge. In those days, stock companies were imperative. Now they're dead. *(He sings.)* NO ONE HERE CAN LOVE OR UNDERSTAND ME... *(Lawrence stops as if lost in thought. Michelle, still tugging off tape takes the song up where he left off.)*

MICHELLE. *(Singing.)* OH, WHAT HARD LUCK STORIES THEY ALL HAND ME...

LAWRENCE. *(Watching her work.)* You know, you look like you jumped out of a spring box. You know, when the peach trees are blossoming...Ah the aroma of a peach tree as you walk by.

MICHELLE. Oh no...you don't want to flirt with me. You don't want to go there.

LAWRENCE. Yes I do.

MICHELLE. *(She stops picking up tape.)* Now let's talk about this assembly. You know, what about that?

LAWRENCE. You remind me of this girl I had—a secretary who worked for me at the Lenox Avenue Theater. She was terrific. She checked the lines at every performance and if a guy missed or changed lines she would rehearse him the next morning till he got it right. With her, you had to stay right with the book.

MICHELLE. Uh huh, well I don't mean to get all by the book on you but—

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LAWRENCE. You know, we started Harlem's first legitimate theater.

MICHELLE. You did?

LAWRENCE. Oh yea. The drama thing was just catching on and we knocked them out! We were like a neon sign that read "Welcome to a new era of show business!" We were a successful Black professional company. We gave these actors opportunities they couldn't get anywhere else. *(Beat.)* And me...I was a real actor of the old school. *(Lawrence looks out into the audience and preaches with passion.)* It's live audiences that make actors. Real actors are dying fast these days. It's TV dammit! That thing is a monster! It will grind actors right out of existence! When there is no live audience to let them know when they're bad, they go on boring us because they think they're good! *(He looks at Michelle who is listening intently.)* You do look like you walked out of a rose garden.

MICHELLE. I take it that you're not married.

LAWRENCE. No, I free-lance. I'm a free-lancer.

MICHELLE. Oh, okay.

LAWRENCE. I had a wife...

MICHELLE. Your daughter's mother.

LAWRENCE. No. No...Her mother was someone else entirely. *(Pause, as this takes him somewhere else.)* I've had some funny people in my life.

MICHELLE. *(Brightly, to bring him back.)* They say there are two women for every man now.

LAWRENCE. Then some man's got four. Cause there is somebody out there with my two.

MICHELLE. There are plenty of fish in the sea.

LAWRENCE. Eels! And old women. But whatever, I pursued that line of pleasing the ladies when I was in this world.

MICHELLE. Where do you think you are now?

LAWRENCE. I'm out of the world now. I live down a long and twisted dirt road, way back at the outer end of everything. I have my cat and my walnut trees. I grow walnuts with a shell so soft you can crack 'em with your fingers. *(Beat.)* But what I want to know is, what kind of man gets

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to walk with you? If it was me walking with you, my feet wouldn't touch the ground.

MICHELLE. Oh, I had two husbands and in between there was someone I had my son with and now.. (*She indicates nothing.*)

LAWRENCE. What kind of husbands did you have?

MICHELLE. The bad kind.

LAWRENCE. Give me the rundown of number one.

MICHELLE. No, I won't talk about him.

LAWRENCE. (*Respectfully.*) I see. You've lived through some things.

MICHELLE. Who hasn't?

LAWRENCE. And the other one?

MICHELLE. Gary? Well, he was an improvement over the first one.

LAWRENCE. Glad to hear that.

MICHELLE. His main problem was that he could not tell the truth.

LAWRENCE. One of our great poets said that the truth is whatever satisfies the soul. So when you say he never told the truth, what exactly do you mean?

MICHELLE. I mean he lied. And he didn't just lie, he lied about stupid stuff like where he got his hair cut. And when he and his brother got together, oh my God, we're talking lying to the tenth power! The two of them would go out to play cards on Saturday night and come back Tuesday afternoon with some tall tale about how they were held up and locked inside the trunk of Gary's car. Please, like those two galoots could fit inside the trunk of that little Chevy Monza.

LAWRENCE. So, he was a big man?

MICHELLE. Like a refrigerator with feet. Gary was a good example of what happens when you start doing drugs late in life instead of getting it over with when you're young, like sensible people do.

LAWRENCE. How does a beautiful woman like you get mixed up with such characters?

MICHELLE. Beautiful? Please, I know what I look like.

LAWRENCE. You're perfect. And I mean all the way down. You don't even need makeup. The higher the gloss, the cheaper the merchandise. Like furniture, a dull finish shows the natural beauty.

MICHELLE. Yea, that's just what I want, a dull finish.

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LAWRENCE. My problem is that I have never been loved by anybody the way I love them. Either they love me or I love them. It don't ever fit together. I never had a relationship that worked out right.

MICHELLE. I hear you.

LAWRENCE. That's how it always is. Everything repeats, you know.

MICHELLE. So, what do you think? About talking today?

LAWRENCE. But you don't want Lawrence Muffet to speak. You want a lecturer on James Hudson. Oh, I could tell you about him. I could talk about riding around in his Oldsmobile or how I tended his geraniums when he was out of town. He was very particular about his geraniums and wouldn't trust them to just anybody. Oh and the time... *(He starts laughing.)* The time he had me take care of his two big dogs. Oberon and Othello were their names. I took them to the beach one morning—I thought they'd like that—and they go running into the ocean and they start swimming away! I see their big black heads bobbing in the waves, I mean, they were half-way to Hawaii and I'm on the shore jumping up and down yelling "Oberon! Othello! Where you guys going?!" Thank God, they had their fun and then came swimming back. I never did tell James about that. Yes, I could tell those little anecdotes. But this is school and the children deserve something more. I can't say what was in James Hudson's head and deliver his message. I can only deliver my own.

MICHELLE. And what message is that?

LAWRENCE. *Drive!*

MICHELLE. Drive. What's that mean?

LAWRENCE. I like these questions you're asking because you know what you're getting? The real deal, McNeil. For my company I chose actors of great histrionic ability but they had to have the discipline and the drive. That was the first rule. If you didn't have the drive to get past whatever was in the way—then you didn't move, baby. You got nowhere. You just lay there and rotted on the vine. Drive!

MICHELLE. I'd like to get you in a room with my son. Now listen, Dr. M., you and me and Andy, we all want the same thing today. So, if we can get our heads together—

LAWRENCE. Who's Andy?

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MICHELLE. Stop that, you know who. Listen, he cares about the kids and they like him even if he is kind of goofy. Most of the other teachers here are either old burn-outs who are only interested in hanging in for a pension or they're young bon vivants who are just passing through for the inner city experience. He's not like that. He comes early, he stays late and while he's here, he's *here*, you know? He wants to teach.

LAWRENCE. It sounds like you're sweet on him. But you listen to me, it's better to be an old man's darling than a young man's fool

MICHELLE. Whatever. Dr. Muffet, do me a favor and come over and stand here a second.

LAWRENCE. Oh, are you directing me?

MICHELLE. Yea. Now, stand over here.

LAWRENCE. Downstage?

MICHELLE. Yea, stand downstage here.

LAWRENCE. (*Following instructions.*) Okay, here I am.

MICHELLE. Now, I want you to look out at the audience...

LAWRENCE. At the empty seats.

MICHELLE. I want you to look out and imagine them at eighth period today. They'll be filled with young people who will come expecting to hear from a bona fide movie actor. Now I want you to visualize how those faces are going to look when we announce that there is no assembly today because Dr. Lawrence Muffet has chosen not to appear on our stage...

VERONICA. (*Entering.*) Here you are!

LAWRENCE. Here *you* are! Why do you keep disappearing on me?

MICHELLE. So Doc, don't go anywhere. I have an idea...I'm going to catch Andy in between classes and talk to him. I mean, we got to give these kids something, right?

LAWRENCE. Yes, you are right about that.

VERONICA. What's going on?

MICHELLE. We're just trying to work something out. Now you just hold on here and—

VERONICA. Then could we get a couple of chairs? My father shouldn't have to stand. (*Michelle starts to indicate that there's an audience full of empty seats available but thinks better of it.*)

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MICHELLE. Yea, I'll get them. Y'all stay here and don't go wandering off. *(She starts to exit but turns back.)* But if you should go roaming, you be sure to stay out of stairway number seven! *(Michelle exits.)*

LAWRENCE. Isn't she terrific...

VERONICA. What do you want to do? *(Lawrence is still looking after Michelle and not listening.)*

LAWRENCE. ...Like a young Ethel Waters.

VERONICA. Did she talk you into something? You don't have to—

LAWRENCE. *(Still looking after Michelle.)* ...Well...we're here so we might as well...

VERONICA. You mean you want to talk about James?

LAWRENCE. *(This brings him back to the situation at hand.)* Oh no...no. I didn't come here to—*(Cutting himself off.)* Where were you anyway?

VERONICA. Can we just go?

LAWRENCE. Now, wait a minute. Sometimes you gotta stay and work it out. I tried to tell you when you left Berkeley like that—

VERONICA. Stick to the subject.

LAWRENCE. That is the subject. You're always so ready to give up. You were doing so well.

VERONICA. I was a mess!

LAWRENCE. You're better now.

VERONICA. No, I'm not. And the doctors...they say until I can talk about my mother...*(No response from Lawrence.)* I told them...I've never been allowed to say her name. *(No response.)* They think it's time. They think if I talk about her...if we—

LAWRENCE. You're well enough now. You're not depressed anymore.

VERONICA. If we could start by saying her name. Lola Dove.

LAWRENCE. What's the difference. She's dead.

VERONICA. I know, but if we could say her name—

LAWRENCE. Lola Dove. There. Lola Dove is dead. She died with a whiskey in one hand and a reefer in the other.

VERONICA. If we could talk about her.

LAWRENCE. We did two pictures together—both at Metro. I was her butler in one and I helped her on a train in the other.

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VERONICA. If you could tell me something about her—

LAWRENCE. You want to know something about her? She was a bridge-burner. You understand what I'm saying? You hear me? That bridge is burned! (*The class bell rings.*)

SCENE 3

The class bell is ringing and we can hear the din of students in the hall. Michelle catches Andy in his classroom.

ANDY. Do you believe this guy? What a...But he seems to love you so maybe you can make him understand—

MICHELLE. Yea. You know, I'm thinking and I got this idea—

ANDY. And how in hell did you know to call him "Doctor?" My third period class is so excited. You should've heard the discussion. We can't let them down.

MICHELLE. I know what you're saying but I was talking to him and—

ANDY. Talking to who?

MICHELLE. Dr. Muffet. And I think we can fix this. I mean, he's got a lot of good stuff to say and if you ask him about Hudson in the right way...well, I think that...if you kind of make it about him and—

ANDY. No!

MICHELLE. Can I finish what I was—

ANDY. What? You want these kids to come in thinking they're going to hear about a hero and we give them this nobody who wants to talk about himself all day?

MICHELLE. You're being a little harsh on the guy.

ANDY. He started it! But you know what...his daughter...she's interesting...

MICHELLE. His daughter?

ANDY. She reminds me of some old movie star...I can't think of who it is but she's got that kind of beauty, doesn't she? It kind of takes your breath...

MICHELLE. What's your point?

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ANDY. I'm getting this sense that she harbors some strong feelings about Hudson...It's like she wanted to say something...There is something in her...something about Hudson that she wants to get out...And well, it doesn't hurt that she's a beautiful woman.

MICHELLE. What?

ANDY. I just mean, she's a woman of class and distinction.

MICHELLE. Uh huh.

ANDY. I'm just saying there's something going on with her. If you can keep him from leaving and I can work on her...

MICHELLE. Yea, you work on her.

ANDY. What's with the attitude?

MICHELLE. Can I just say something? I don't know, maybe I'm crazy but I think the kids would get a kick out of this guy. There's more to him than what we...I mean, what's one actor they never heard of instead of another?

ANDY. (*Wounded.*) I thought you were in my corner.

MICHELLE. I just think—

ANDY. I thought you got it. I've got my class coming in...Where are they now?

MICHELLE. Still in the auditorium. I'm on my way down there now. Aphrodite wants a chair.

ANDY. We've just got to find a way to...you know...Just don't let them leave. Okay? You know what you have to...Michelle, just...just *do* something! (*He walks away from her.*)

SCENE 4

Veronica stands alone on the auditorium stage. Michelle enters toting two folding chairs.

MICHELLE. Here's your tuffet, Miss Muffet. (*She looks around as she sets up the chairs.*) Where's your father at?

VERONICA. He went to the men's room.

MICHELLE. (*Spotting a push broom in the corner.*) Where did this come from?

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VERONICA. The janitor left it here. At least I assume he was the janitor.

MICHELLE. He was supposed to sweep the stage. *(She takes the broom.)* It's like my grandmother said, you want something done right... *(Michelle begins sweeping, going back and forth pushing the broom and Veronica has to keep moving out of her way.)* Did I lug those bad boys all the way down here for nothing or are you going to sit down on one of them? *(A long silence as Michelle sweeps.)*

VERONICA. So...You've been working here a long time?

MICHELLE. Eleven years.

VERONICA. Eleven years! That's a long time. *(Pause.)* How stable. *(Pause.)* I can't imagine being in the same place for eleven years. *(Pause.)* I suppose there's something to be said for having such a stable position.

MICHELLE. *(Pushing the broom.)* Yea, it's great.

VERONICA. *(Another long pause.)* You live around here?

MICHELLE. Hm hmm.

VERONICA. In an apartment?

MICHELLE. No, in a pasture with some cows. *(Beat.)* I live in the apartments a couple of blocks away.

VERONICA. You've lived there a long time?

MICHELLE. Since my son was born.

VERONICA. Oh, you have a son. How old is he?

MICHELLE. Nine.

VERONICA. You really are stable. *(Michelle looks at her and keeps sweeping.)* At least you're able to provide your child with such a stable situation.

MICHELLE. *(Stops sweeping for a moment.)* Honey, if you use the word "stable" one more time, I'm going to have to climb you like a ladder.

VERONICA. I meant it as a compliment.

MICHELLE. *(She resumes sweeping.)* There aint nothing stable about my situation. I'm just holding on here. They got a long line of people looking for work. I don't know where they find them but they're out there. They must be digging them out of sand dunes, getting them off

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flotillas and whatnot. "We'll pay you fifteen cents and all you have to do is work like a dog." "Okay!"

VERONICA. *(After a long pause.)* I wonder what's taking my father so long. *(Pause.)* He seems to be very smitten with you.

MICHELLE. Smitten?

VERONICA. It means he likes you.

MICHELLE. I know what smitten means.

VERONICA. I seem to be getting under your ruffles. *(Michelle stops, looks at her and resumes sweeping.)* You keep sweeping where you already swept. I think you may have a psychological need to keep busy. Perhaps you're someone who has to keep moving to avoid your feelings. Do you understand what I'm saying?

MICHELLE. No, that's over my head. But then, I have a low head.

VERONICA. *(Rising, she puts her hand on the broom handle.)* Could you stop sweeping? It's getting on my nerves. *(Michelle stops and stares at her. Each tighten their grip. Lawrence enters. Veronica lets the broom go and Michelle returns it to the corner.)*

MICHELLE. I was just coming to look for you.

LAWRENCE. I was having a very interesting confabulation in stairwell number seven.

MICHELLE. I thought I told you not to go there!

LAWRENCE. I know. You might say I was intrigued. *(He proceeds to act his story out.)* I peek in and I see these four young men in there. And they're smoking and mumbling and growling, "ra, ra, ra..." So I step in and they're looking at me and I'm looking at them and they're looking back at me wondering when I'm going to start preaching at them. But what they don't know yet is that I'm really a learner not a preacher. I don't tell anyone what to think. But I look into their eyes to see what makes them tick and I say to them: "You have cynical ways, young men, you could lead a better life before it's too late."

MICHELLE. Uh huh. You said that.

LAWRENCE. I say: "This is just transit, you know. You pass through this world but one time so you better get your business done while you're here. So you should stop smoking. There are no tobacco fields in heaven."

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MICHELLE. And how did that go over?

LAWRENCE. Well, to tell you the truth, they weren't all that welcoming. There were four of them and three of those four were big mouths...But we're having a conversation and I tell them I'm an actor by profession and they're all "I never saw you on television ra, ra, ra..." And I start explaining about my work and the biggest mouth pipes up "I never heard of you! I'm going to be a real star!" And I say "Let me tell you something—supporting roles were the secret to my longevity. Do you know that the average life span of what you call a star is ten years? When you fall, you drop all the way to the bottom, there's no middle-ground and you could find yourself performing in some bucket of blood, the last stop down in show business. So if you want to be a star, think about that eleventh year and learn how to clip coupons."

MICHELLE. And they're still hanging in?

LAWRENCE. Oh yea. Like I said, three of them are making a lot of noise but it's the quiet one who interests me. He doesn't say anything but he's got this serious kind of look about him. He's not talking so I figure he must be listening. I fix my eyes on that one. And I say, "I know you have problems and it's okay to stumble—that's okay—but you got to get up and maintain your stand." And then, I tell them "I am still striving for perfection but I have inner peace." And that's when the three smart alecks make their exit amid some vulgar remarks. But the quiet one, he stays behind. And he's looking straight at me and almost in a whisper he says "How do you get inner peace?" And I think about this a moment because I have to carefully consider what I'm going to tell this young man. And I say to him "If you look inside and are honest with yourself it will come to you. It will come to you as clear as distilled water—like pure, unpolluted fluid. It's a gift that we're all entitled to. *(Beat.)* It's a gift in the chemistry of man." *(Lawrence pauses, looking out at the empty seats.)* It must be lunchtime about now. *(The class bell rings.)*

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SCENE 5

The auditorium stage. Andy enters and takes center stage and addresses an imaginary audience.

ANDY. James Hudson achieved all that a man could hope for as an actor, singer, athlete and intellectual... (*Veronica enters from the wings.*) There you are. Where's your father.

VERONICA. That secretary, or whatever she is, took him to the cafeteria.

ANDY. Help me. I don't know what to do. (*Beat.*) You started to tell me something before...

VERONICA. Let me show you his clippings. (*Presenting the scrapbook.*) There's this one movie, "Harlem Concerto"—he wrote it. He played a violinist. Langston Hughes wrote him a note about it—

ANDY. You started to say something about Hudson. About how you felt about—

VERONICA. Did you hear me? Langston Hughes!

ANDY. Look, I appreciate the work your father did and the road he paved and all that but these kids are expecting the story of a giant. And I can't give them some...some...

VERONICA. Some what?

ANDY. Some butler! (*Pause.*) I'm sorry...I—

VERONICA. I think you're confused. Those were some of the parts he played.

ANDY. Parts that James Hudson refused. (*Beat.*) I'm trying to be a good teacher. (*Beat.*) I'm just—Let me ask you something. When *you* watch those movies...and I'm not talking about a couple of race films, I mean all the others your father was in...what do *you* feel? What is that like for you?

VERONICA. (*This throws her off.*) The point...the point is...I don't understand why you have such a big thing for James Hudson. Why isn't this assembly about Dr. King or Malcolm or somebody people remember? Why is James Hudson so important to you?

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ANDY. Because. Because when he died last month and nobody knew who he was... You see, I was at Beckville.

VERONICA. You were? (*Andy nods.*) You must have been very young.

ANDY. I was seven. There was this bus that took all us families of trade unionists out of Brooklyn and into the country for a picnic and to hear the great James Hudson sing. I knew he was great because my parents told me. I was so hopped up that I beat my big brother David to the window seat. The adults were murmuring something about expecting trouble. You see, the citizens of Beckville didn't want Hudson singing in their meadow cause they said he was a Communist. None of that mattered to me—it was a beautiful day full of fresh air and corn on the cob. And when Hudson walked onto the stage it was like seeing, you know, something you had only heard about, like Mount Everest or something. And then he sang. He sang “Joe Hill.” We heard an ugly noise in the distance. He sang “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen.” The noise got closer. He sang “There’s a Man Going Round Taking Names.” The noise, we could now tell, was an angry mob. And as we saw them coming over the rise, what did James Hudson do? He launched into the fucking anthem of the Soviet Union! People were urging him to get off the stage for his own protection. He would not move. He looked over at that bloodthirsty throng, coming closer with their war cries, coming after him, wanting to kill him. And he sang again. (*He sings the spirited anthem.*) WE SHALL NOT, WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED; WE SHALL NOT, WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED. (*Speaking.*) And we sang with him! (*Singing.*) LIKE A TREE THAT’S STANDING BY THE WATER; WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED! (*Speaking.*) We sang our guts out. And I felt like I was a part of something—A higher wholeness. And I watched and listened as his commanding voice drove the demons away. And as we wildly cheered, rejoicing in the great one’s triumph, I cried out to the world, “JAMES HUDSON IS KING GOD!” And David said I was an idiot, that there was no such thing as God. He was always so literal. (*Beat.*) The concert carried on and concluded with, what else, but “Deep River.” Back on our bus, my mother said it was my brother’s turn to get the window seat. David was big and bossy and whenever he got the window he would lean up against it and block my view. If you

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had a big brother, you'd know what I mean. As we rode, we saw contorted faces lining the road, shrieking awful words. David started the kids chanting "sticks and stones can break our bones but names can never harm us." And that's when the first rocks came flying in, shattering the windows. In a second everything went haywire. Local police arrived and what did they do? They slowed up traffic on purpose to turn us into sitting ducks. I was down on the floor and the mob was rocking the bus. I could hear my mother yell out to the cops, "Why aren't you helping us?" With the bus stuck, they got the door open and tried to get on and get at the Black people. My dad, the gentlest guy in the world, grabbed one of those coming in, by the collar, and hollered "What's wrong with you?!" And as he threw that thug out the door, a rock got him bang, on the side of his head. My father would never hear out of his right ear again. But you don't mess with a busload of trade unionists from Brooklyn and we—well, the grown-ups—fought them off. I was still on the floor, covering my head when I heard that first hiss of the bus back in gear. That's when I peeked out. I looked to see where my brother David was, because he had been unusually quiet in the commotion. And there he was, very still, by the window. He was...shimmering...as if he was sleeping under a blanket of rubies. I heard an unearthly wail coming from what sounded like my mother. I sat up and rubbed my eyes to see that in fact, David was covered in glass and blood. (*Beat.*) It left him so that...well, you couldn't look at him again without thinking about that day. (*Pause.*) But it *was* a wonderful concert.

VERONICA. I heard.

ANDY. I knew then that someday...I would teach what Hudson taught me. I made a vow. (*Pause.*) You started to tell me something...before...

VERONICA. No, I didn't.

ANDY. ...You see, I was thinking that the two of us...

VERONICA. The two of us?

ANDY. We could...I mean if your father doesn't want to...If he doesn't want to speak about Hudson. Maybe then, the two of us could...

VERONICA. Talk about Hudson? You want me to talk about how my father is no James Hudson? You be careful, there are some old wounds

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you're scratching at. Things you can't understand. And my father...those parts...they might have been subservient but he invested each one with dignity...and...I mean... *(She thrusts the scrapbook at him.)* I told you, there is more to him than that!

ANDY. Calm down. Okay, okay. But you didn't answer my question before.

VERONICA. How do I get to the cafeteria? I'm going to get my father and we're going to get out of here. *(She starts to leave. Andy blocks her.)*

ANDY. How do *you* feel when you see your father's mainstream movies? Just tell me that.

VERONICA. *(She stops and turns away from him.)* I don't see those movies. *(It is painful for her.)* Like I said, these are old wounds...*(She turns to face him and he goes to her.)* Leave me be!

ANDY. I'm sorry. I've upset you.

VERONICA. I'm just being histrionic. A trait I must have inherited from my mother. She was an actress. She was a famous actress.

ANDY. Your mother?

VERONICA. Lola Dove. Lola Dove was my mother.

ANDY. I knew you reminded me of one of those...Wait—Lola Dove and Lawrence Muffet? They were married?

VERONICA. No, they weren't married. *(Backing away from him.)* You're very dangerous.

ANDY. I am?

VERONICA. You're a dangerous person...You look at me that way and get me to say things I've never said out loud.

ANDY. Lola Dove...wow. Wait, didn't she have something going on with Hudson?

VERONICA. That's gossip.

ANDY. I remember something about him and a white movie star...It was her, wasn't it?

VERONICA. I wouldn't go there...

ANDY. ...It got him into trouble...Lola Dove and James Hudson, that makes sense. Lola and your dad...?

VERONICA. Well, it happened. I'm living proof of that.

ANDY. Are you sure?

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VERONICA. What are you suggesting?

ANDY. I'm just saying...looking at you...it would seem more likely that it was Hudson who...I mean, are you sure?

VERONICA. You *are* dangerous. Stop looking at me that way. (*A pause. Veronica is struggling. She starts to go but she wants to stay. Finally, she marches up to Andy. They don't notice Lawrence and Michelle enter from the wings.*) I didn't know James. All I know is what I saw on the screen, just like everybody else. (*Andy nods.*) Okay? All I know is what I saw up there. I never met the man.

ANDY. But you know things. And you want to tell me.

VERONICA. Yes, I know some things. (*Beat.*) I know my mother loved him. I know he let her go. After all, he was married. The FBI was following him. She was white so she could get away with it. The magazines would smirk that Lola Dove had a taste for men of the darker hue—that was just Lola. But they would never let him get away with it. And so he was gone, just like that. Wiped away. All that was left of James Hudson was a few recordings and flickering images. But oh, those images. Because when he came on that screen...when he came on he seemed to push everyone else aside. It was like had had to say, give me some room! GIVE ME ROOM TO BREATHE! (*Beat.*) And I would bask in the light of that colossal spirit—so close and so remote—and I would think...or believe...or pretend...What if she had *his* baby...And I could be carried in those powerful arms. What if he could burst through the screen and into my life. I wanted the flesh and blood of him to take me with him because with him, anything was possible. I would be hoisted on those strong shoulders. I would grow up in the golden glow of that smile. I would be what I wanted to be more than anything else. I would be James Hudson's daughter. (*Veronica spins round to look at Andy and sees Lawrence standing there. The class bell rings.*)

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