

ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT WINGS

ACT ONE

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SCENE ONE

A corner in lower New York, at the edge of a colored district. Three narrow streets converge. A triangular building in the rear, red brick, four-storied, its ground floor a grocery. Four-story tenements stretch away down the skyline of the two streets. The fire escapes are crowded with people. In the street leading left, the faces are all white; in the street leading right, all black. It is hot Spring. On the sidewalk are eight children, four boys and four girls. Two of each sex are white, two black. They are playing marbles. One of the black boys is JIM HARRIS. The little blonde girl, her complexion rose and white, who sits behind his elbow and holds his marbles is ELLA DOWNEY. She is eight. They play the game with concentrated attention for a while. People pass, black and white, the Negroes frankly participants in the spirit of Spring, the whites laughing constrainedly, awkward in natural emotion. Their words are lost. One hears only their laughter. It expresses the difference in race. There are street noises—the clattering roar of the Elevated, the puff of its locomotives, the ruminative lazy sound of a horse-car, the hooves of its team clacking on the cobbles. From the street of the whites a high-pitched, nasal tenor sings the chorus of "Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage." On the street of the blacks a Negro strikes up the chorus of: "I

Guess I'll Have to Telegraph My Baby." As this singing ends, there is laughter, distinctive in quality, from both streets. Then silence. The light in the street begins to grow brilliant with the glow of the setting sun. The game of marbles goes on.

WHITE GIRL. (*tugging at the elbow of her brother*) Come on, Mickey!

HER BROTHER. (*roughly*) Aw, gwan, youse!

WHITE GIRL. Aw right, den. You kin git a lickin' if you want. (*Gets up to move off*).

HER BROTHER. Aw, git off de cart'!

WHITE GIRL. De old woman'll be madder'n hell!

HER BROTHER. (*worried now*) I'm comin', ain't I? Hold your horses.

BLACK GIRL. (*to a black boy*) Come on, you Joc. We gwine git frailed too, you don't hurry.

JOE. Go long!

MICKEY. Bust up de game, huh? I gotta run! (*Jumps to his feet*).

OTHER WHITE BOY. Me, too! (*Jumps up*).

OTHER BLACK GIRL. Lawdy, it's late!

JOE. Me for grub!

MICKEY. (*to JIM HARRIS*) You's de winner, Jim Crow. Yeh gotta play tomorrer.

JIM. (*readily*) Sure t'ing, Mick. Come one, come all! (*He laughs*).

OTHER WHITE BOY. Me, too! I gotta git back at yuh.

JIM—Aw right, Shorty.

LITTLE GIRLS. Hurry! Come on, come on! (*The six start off together. Then they notice that JIM and ELLA are hesitating, standing awkwardly and shyly together. They turn to mock*).

JOE. Look at dat Jim Crow! Land sakes, he got a gal!
(*He laughs. They all laugh.*)

JIM. (*ashamed*) Ne'er mind, you Chocolate!

MICKEY. Look at de two softies, will yeh! Mush! Mush!
(*He and the two other boys take this up.*)

LITTLE GIRLS. (*pointing their fingers at ELLA*) Shame!
Shame! Everybody knows your name! Painty Face! Painty
Face!

ELLA. (*hanging her head*) Shut up!

LITTLE WHITE GIRL. He's been carrying her books!

COLORED GIRL. Can't you find nuffin' better'n him, Ella? Look
at de big feet he got! (*She laughs. They all laugh. JIM puts
one foot on top of the other, looking at ELLA.*)

ELLA. Mind yer own business, see! (*She strides toward them
angrily. They jump up and dance in an ecstasy, screaming and
laughing.*)

ALL. Found yeh out! Found yeh out!

MICKEY. Mush-head! Jim Crow de Sissy! Stuck on Painty
Face!

JOE. Will Painty Face let you hold her doll, boy?

SHORTY. Sissy! Softy! (*ELLA suddenly begins to cry. At
this they all howl.*)

ALL. Cry-baby! Cry-baby! Look at her! Painty Face!

JIM. (*suddenly rushing at them, with clenched fists, furi-
ously*) Shut yo' moufs! I kin lick de hull of you! (*They all
run away, laughing, shouting, and jeering, quite triumphant now
that they have made him, too, lose his temper. He comes back
to ELLA, and stands beside her sheepishly, stepping on one foot
after the other. Suddenly he blurts out*): Don't bawl no more.
I done chased 'em.

ELLA. (*comforted, politely*) T'anks.

JIM. (*swelling out*) It was a cinch. I kin wipe up de street wid any one of dem. (*He stretches out his arms, trying to bulge out his biceps*). Feel dat muscle!

ELLA. (*does so gingerly—then with admiration*) My!

JIM. (*protectingly*) You mustn't never be scared when I'm hanging round, Painty Face.

ELLA. Don't call me that, Jim—please!

JIM. (*contritely*) I didn't mean nuffin'. I didn't know you'd mind.

ELLA. I do—more'n anything.

JIM. You oughtn't to mind. Dey's jealous, dat's what.

ELLA. Jealous? Of what?

JIM. (*pointing to her face*) Of dat. Red 'n' white. It's purty.

ELLA. I hate it!

JIM. It's purty. Yes, it's—it's purty. It's—outa sight!

ELLA. I hate it. I wish I was black like you.

JIM. (*sort of shrinking*) No you don't. Dey'd call you Crow, den—or Chocolate—or Smoke.

ELLA. I wouldn't mind.

JIM. (*somberly*) Dey'd call you nigger sometimes, too.

ELLA. I wouldn't mind.

JIM. (*humbly*) You wouldn't mind?

ELLA. No, I wouldn't mind. (*An awkward pause*).

JIM. (*suddenly*) You know what, Ella? Since I been tuckin' yo' books to school and back, I been drinkin' lots o' chalk 'n' water tree times a day. Dat Tom, de barber, he tole me dat make me white, if I drink enough. (*Pleadingly*) Does I look whiter?

ELLA. (*comfortingly*) Yes—maybe—a little bit—

JIM. (*trying a careless tone*) Reckon dat Tom's a liar, an' de joke's on me! Dat chalk only makes me feel kinder sick inside.

ELLA. (*wonderingly*) Why do you want to be white?

JIM. Because—just because—I lak dat better.

ELLA. I wouldn't. I like black. Let's you and me swap. I'd like to be black. (*Clapping her hands*) Gee, that'd be fun, if we only could!

JIM. (*hesitatingly*) Yes—maybe—

ELLA. Then they'd call me Crow, and you'd be Painty Face!

JIM. They wouldn't never dast call you nigger, you bet! I'd kill 'em! (*A long pause. Finally she takes his hand shyly. They both keep looking as far away from each other as possible*).

ELLA. I like you.

JIM. I like you.

ELLA. Do you want to be my feller?

JIM. Yes.

ELLA. Then I'm your girl.

JIM. Yes. (*Then grandly*) You kin bet none o' de gang gwine call you Painty Face from dis out! I lam' 'em good! (*The sun has set. Twilight has fallen on the street. An organ grinder comes up to the corner and plays "Annie Rooney." They stand hand-in-hand and listen. He goes away. It is growing dark*).

ELLA. (*suddenly*) Golly, it's late! I'll git a lickin'!

JIM. Me, too.

ELLA. I won't mind it much.

JIM. Me nuther.

ELLA. See you going to school tomorrow?

JIM. Sure.

ELLA. I gotta skip now.

JIM. Me, too.

ELLA. I like you, Jim.

JIM. I like you.

ELLA. Don't forget.

JIM. Don't you.

ELLA. Good-by.

JIM. So long. (*They run away from each other—then stop abruptly, and turn as at a signal*).

ELLA. Don't forget.

JIM. I won't, you bet!

ELLA. Here! (*She kisses her hand at him, then runs off in frantic embarrassment*).

JIM. (*overcome*) Gee! (*Then he turns and darts away, as*

(The Curtain Falls)

ACT ONE

SCENE TWO

The same corner. Nine years have passed. It is again late Spring at a time in the evening which immediately follows the hour of SCENE ONE. Nothing has changed much. One street is still all white, the other all black. The fire escapes are laden with drooping human beings. The grocery store is still at the corner. The street noises are now more rhythmically mechanical, electricity having taken the place of horse and steam. People pass, white and black. They laugh as in SCENE ONE. From the street of the whites the high-pitched nasal tenor sings: "Gee, I Wish That I Had a Girl," and the Negro replies with "All I Got Was Sympathy." The singing is followed again by laughter from both streets. Then silence. The dusk grows darker. With a spluttering flare the arc-lamp at the corner is lit and sheds a pale glare over the street. Two young roughs slouch up to the corner, as tough in manner as they can make themselves. One is the SHORTY of SCENE ONE; the other the Negro, JOE. They stand loafing. A boy of seventeen or so passes by, escorting a girl of about the same age. Both are dressed in their best, the boy in black with stiff collar, the girl in white.

SHORTY. (*scornfully*) Hully cripes! Pipe who's here. (*To the girl, sneeringly*) Wha's matter, Liz? Don't yer recernize yer old fr'ens?

GIRL. (*frightenedly*) Hello, Shorty.

SHORTY. Why de glad rags? Goin' to graduation? (*He tries*

to obstruct their way, but, edging away from him, they turn and run).

JOE. Har-har! Look at dem scoot, will you! (SHORTY grins with satisfaction).

SHORTY. (looking down other street) Here comes Mickey.

JOE. He won de semi-final last night easy?

SHORTY. Knocked de bloke out in de thoid.

JOE. Dat boy's suah a-comin'! He'll be de champeen yit.

SHORTY. (judicially) Got a good chanct—if he leaves de broads alone. Dat's where he's wide open. (MICKEY comes in from the left. He is dressed loudly, a straw hat with a gaudy band cocked over one cauliflower ear. He has acquired a typical "pug's" face, with the added viciousness of a natural bully. One of his eyes is puffed, almost closed, as a result of his battle the night before. He swaggers up).

BOTH. Hello, Mickey.

MICKEY. Hello.

JOE. Hear you knocked him col'.

MICKEY. Sure. I knocked his block off. (Changing the subject). Say. Seen 'em goin' past to de graduation racket?

SHORTY. (with a wink) Why? You int'rested?

JOE. (chuckling) Mickey's gwine roun' git a good conduct medal.

MICKEY. Sure. Dey kin pin it on de seat o' me pants. (They laugh) Listen. Seen Ella Downey goin'?

SHORTY. Painty Face? No, she ain't been along.

MICKEY. (with authority) Can dat name, see! Want a bunch o' fives in yer kisser? Den nix! She's me goil, understan'?

JOE. (venturing to joke) Which one? Yo' number ten?

MICKEY. (flattered) Sure. De real K. O. onc.

SHORTY. (*pointing right—sneeringly*) Gee! Pipe Jim Crow all dolled up for de racket.

JOE. (*with disgusted resentment*) You mean tell me dat nigger's graduatin'?

SHORTY. Ask him. (*JIM HARR'S comes in. He is dressed in black, stiff white collar, etc.—a quiet-mannered Negro boy with a qucerly-baffled, sensitive face.*)

JIM. (*pleasantly*) Hello, fellows. (*They grunt in reply, looking over him scornfully.*)

JOE. (*staring resentfully*) Is you graduatin' tonight?

JIM. Yes.

JOE. (*spitting disgustedly*) Fo' Gawd's sake! You is gittin' high-falutin'!

JIM. (*smiling deprecatingly*) This is my second try. I didn't pass last year.

JOE. What de hell does it git you, huh? Whatever is you gwinc do wid it now you gits it? Live lazy on yo' ol' woman?

JIM. (*assertively*) I'm going to study and become a lawyer.

JOE. (*with a snort*) Fo' Chris' sake, nigger!

JIM. (*fiercely*) Don't you call me that—not before them!

JOE. (*pugnaciously*) Does you deny you's a nigger? I shows you——

MICKEY. (*gives them both a push—truculently*) Cut it out, see! I'm runnin' dis corner. (*Turning to JIM insultingly*) Say you! Painty Face's gittin' her ticket tonight, ain't she?

JIM. You mean Ella——

MICKEY. Painty Face Downey, dat's who I mean! I don't have to be perlite wit' her. She's me goil!

JIM. (*glumly*) Yes, she's graduating.

SHORTY. (*winks at MICKEY*) Smart, huh?

MICKEY. (*winks back—meaningly*) Willin' to loin, take it from me! (*JIM stands tensely as if a struggle were going on in him*).

JIM. (*fnally blurts out*) I want to speak to you, Mickey—alone.

MICKEY. (*surprised—insultingly*) Aw, what de hell——!

JIM. (*excitedly*) It's important, I tell you!

MICKEY. Huh? (*Stares at him inquisitively—then motions the others back carelessly and follows JIM down front*).

SHORTY. Some noive!

JOE. (*vengefully*) I gits dat Jim alone, you wait!

MICKEY. Well, spill de big news. I ain't got all night. I got a date.

JIM. With—Ella?

MICKEY. What's dat to you?

JIM. (*the words tumbling out*) What—I wanted to say! I know—I've heard—all the stories—what you've been doing around the ward—with other girls—it's none of my business, with them—but she—Ella—it's different—she's not that kind——

MICKEY. (*insultingly*) Who told yuh so, huh?

JIM. (*draws back his fist threateningly*) Don't you dare—! (*MICKEY is so paralyzed by this effrontery that he actually steps back*).

MICKEY. Say, cut de comedy! (*Beginning to feel insulted*) Listen, you Jim Crow! Ain't you wise I could give yuh one poke dat'd knock yuh into next week?

JIM. I'm only asking you to act square, Mickey.

MICKEY. What's it to yuh? Why, yuh lousy goat, she wouldn't spit on yuh even! She hates de sight of a coon.

JIM. (*in agony*) I—I know—but once she didn't mind—we were kids together—

MICKEY. Aw, ferget dat! Dis is *now!*

JIM. And I'm still her friend always—even if she don't like colored people—

MICKEY. *Coons*, why don't yuh say it right! De trouble wit' you is yuh're gittin' stuck up, dat's what! Stay where yeh belong, see! Yer old man made coin at de truckin' game and yuh're tryin' to buy yerself white—graduatin' and law, for Christ sake! Yuh're gittin' yerself in Dutch wit' everyone in de ward—and it ain't cause yer a coon neider. Don't de gang all train wit' Joe dere and lots of others? But yuh're tryin' to buy white and it won't git yuh no place, see!

JIM. (*trembling*) Some day—I'll show you—

MICKEY. (*turning away*) Aw, gwan!

JIM. D'you think I'd change—be you—your dirty white—!

MICKEY. (*whirling about*) What's dat?

JIM. (*with hysterical vehemence*) You act square with her—or I'll show you up—I'll report you—I'll write to the papers—the sporting writers—I'll let them know how white you are!

MICKEY. (*infuriated*) Yuh damn nigger, I'll bust yer jaw in! (*Assuming his ring pose he weaves toward JIM, his face set in a cruel scowl. JIM waits helplessly but with a certain dignity.*)

SHORTY. Cheese it! A couple bulls! And here's de Downey skoit comin', too.

MICKEY. I'll get yuh de next time! (*ELLA DOWNEY enters from the right. She is seventeen, still has the same rose and white complexion, is pretty but with a rather repelling bold air about her.*)

ELLA. (*smiles with pleasure when she sees MICKEY*) Hello, Mick. Am I late? Say, I'm so glad you won last night. (*She glances from one to the other as she feels something in the air*) Hello! What's up?

MICKEY. Dis boob. (*He indicates JIM scornfully*).

JIM. (*diffidently*) Hello, Ella.

ELLA. (*shortly, turning away*) Hello. (*Then to MICKEY*) Come on, Mick. Walk down with me. I got to hurry.

JIM. (*blurts out*) Wait—just a second. (*Painfully*) Ella, do you hate—colored people?

MICKEY. Aw, shut up!

JIM. Please answer.

ELLA. (*forcing a laugh*) Say! What is this—another exam?

JIM. (*doggedly*) Please answer.

ELLA. (*irritably*) Of course I don't! Haven't I been brought up alongside— Why, some of my oldest—the girls I've been to public school the longest with——

JIM. Do you hate me, Ella?

ELLA. (*confusedly and more irritably*) Say, is he drunk? Why should I? I don't hate anyone.

JIM. Then why haven't you ever hardly spoken to me—for years?

ELLA. (*resentfully*) What would I speak about? You and me've got nothing in common any more.

JIM. (*desperately*) Maybe not any more—but—right on this corner—do you remember once——?

ELLA. I don't remember nothing! (*Angrily*) Say! What's got into you to be butting into my business all of a sudden like this? Because you finally managed to graduate, has it gone to your head?

JIM. No, I—only want to help you, Ella.

ELLA. Of all the nerve! You're certainly forgetting your place! Who's asking you for help, I'd like to know? Shut up and stop bothering me!

JIM. (*insistently*) If you ever need a friend—a true friend—

ELLA. I've got lots of friends among my own—kind, I can tell you. (*Exasperatedly*) You make me sick! Go to the devil! (*She flounces off. The three men laugh. MICKEY follows her. JIM is stricken. He goes and sinks down limply on a box in front of the grocery store.*)

SHORTY. I'm going to shoot a drink. Come on, Joe, and I'll blow yuh.

JOE. (*who has never ceased to follow every move of JIM's with angry, resentful eyes*) Go long. I'se gwine stay here a secon'. I got a lil' argyment. (*He points to JIM.*)

SHORTY. Suit yerself. Do a good job. See yuh later. (*He goes, whistling.*)

JOE. (*stands for a while glaring at JIM, his fierce little eyes peering out of his black face. Then he spits on his hands aggressively and strides up to the oblivious JIM. He stands in front of him, gradually working himself into a fury at the other's seeming indifference to his words*) Listen to me, nigger: I got a heap to whisper in yo' ear! Who is you, anyhow? Who does you think you is? Don't yo' old man and mine work on de docks togidder befo' yo' old man gits his own truckin' business? Yo' ol' man swallers his nickels, my ol' man buys him beer wid dem and swallers dat—dat's the on'y diff'rence. Don't you 'n' me drag up togidder?

JIM. (*dully*) I'm your friend, Joe.

JOE. No, you isn't! I ain't no fren o' yourn! I don't even know who you is! What's all dis schoolin' you doin'? What's all dis dressin' up and graduatin' an' sayin' you gwine study be a lawyer? What's all dis fakin' an' pretendin' and swellin' out grand an' talkin' soft and perlite? What's all dis denyin' you's a nigger—an' wid de white boys listenin' to you say it! Is you aimin' to buy white wid yo' ol' man's dough like Mickey say? What is you? (*In a rage at the other's silence*) You don't talk? Den I takes it out o' yo' hide! (*He grabs JIM by the throat with one hand and draws the other fist back*) Tell me befo' I wrecks yo' face in! Is you a nigger or isn't you? (*Shaking him*) Is you a nigger, Nigger? Nigger, is you a nigger?

JIM. (*looking into his eyes—quietly*) Yes. I'm a nigger. We're both niggers. (*They look at each other for a moment. JOE's rage vanishes. He slumps onto a box beside JIM's. He offers him a cigarette. JIM takes it. JOE scratches a match and lights both their cigarettes*).

JOE. (*after a puff, with full satisfaction*) Man, why didn't you 'splain dat in de fust place?

JIM. We're both niggers. (*The same hand-organ man of SCENE ONE comes to the corner. He plays the chorus of "Bon-bon Buddie The Chocolate Drop." They both stare straight ahead listening. Then the organ man goes away. A silence. JOE gets to his feet*).

JOE. I'll go get me a cold beer. (*He starts to move off—then turns*) Time you was graduatin', ain't it? (*He goes. JIM remains sitting on his box staring straight before him as*

(*The Curtain Falls*)

ACT ONE

SCENE THREE

The same corner five years later. Nothing has changed much. It is a night in Spring. The arc-lamp discovers faces with a favorless cruelty. The street noises are the same but more intermittent and dulled with a quality of fatigue. Two people pass, one black and one white. They are tired. They both yawn, but neither laughs. There is no laughter from the two streets. From the street of the whites the tenor, more nasal than ever and a bit drunken, wails in high barber-shop falsetto the last half of the chorus of "When I Lost You." The Negro voice, a bit maudlin in turn, replies with the last half of "Waitin' for the Robert E. Lee." Silence. SHORTY enters. He looks tougher than ever, the typical gangster. He stands waiting, singing a bit drunkenly, peering down the street.

SHORTY. (*indignantly*) Yuh bum! Ain't yuh ever comin'? (*He begins to sing: "And sewed up in her yeller kimona, She had a blue-barreled forty-five gun, For to get her man Who'd done her wrong." Then he comments scornfully*) Not her, dough! No gat for her. She ain't got de noive. A little sugar. Dat'll fix her. (*ELLA enters. She is dressed poorly, her face is pale and hollow-eyed, her voice cold and tired*).

SHORTY. Yuh got de message?

ELLA. Here I am.

SHORTY. How yuh been?

ELLA. All right. (*A pause. He looks at her puzzledly*).

SHORTY. (*a bit embarrassedly*) Well, I s'pose yuh'd like me to give yuh some dope on Mickey, huh?

ELLA. No.

SHORTY. Mean to say yuh don't wanter know where he is or what he's doin'?

ELLA. No.

SHORTY. Since when?

ELLA. A long time.

SHORTY. (*after a pause—with a rat-like viciousness*) Between you'n me, kid, you'll get even soon—you'n all de odder dames he's tossed. I'm on de inside. I've watched him trainin'. His next scrap, watch it! He'll go! It won't be de odder guy. It'll be all youse dames he's kidded—and de ones what's kidded him. Youse'll all be in de odder guy's corner. He won't need no odder seconds. Youse'll trow water on him, and sponge his face, and take de kinks out of his socker—and Mickey'll catch it on de button—and he won't be able to take it no more—'cause all your weight—you and de odders—'ll be behind dat punch. Ha ha! (*He laughs an evil laugh*) And Mickey'll go—down to his knees first—(*He sinks to his knees in the attitude of a groggy boxer*).

ELLA. I'd like to see him on his knees!

SHORTY. And den—flat on his pan—dead to de world—de boidies singin' in de trees—ten—out! (*He suits his action to the words, sinking flat on the pavement, then rises and laughs the same evil laugh*).

ELLA. He's been out—for me—a long time. (*A pause*) Why did you send for me?

SHORTY. He sent me.

ELLA. Why?

SHORTY. To slip you dis wad o' dough. (*He reluctantly takes a roll of bills from his pocket and holds it out to her*).

ELLA. (*looks at the money indifferently*) What for?

SHORTY. For you.

ELLA. No.

SHORTY. For de kid den.

ELLA. The kid's dead. He took diphtheria.

SHORTY. Hell yuh say! When?

ELLA. A long time.

SHORTY. Why didn't you write Mickey——?

ELLA. Why should I? He'd only be glad.

SHORTY. (*after a pause*) Well—it's better.

ELLA. Yes.

SHORTY. You made up wit yer family?

ELLA. No chance.

SHORTY. Livin' alone?

ELLA. In Brooklyn.

SHORTY. Workin'?

ELLA. In a factory.

SHORTY. You're a sucker. There's lots of softer snaps fer you, kid——

ELLA. I know what you mean. No.

SHORTY. Don't yuh wanter step out no more—have fun—live?

ELLA. I'm through.

SHORTY. (*mockingly*) Jump in de river, huh? T'ink it over, baby. I kin start yuh right in my stable. No one'll bodder yuh den. I got influence.

ELLA. (*without emphasis*) You're a dirty dog. Why doesn't someone kill you?

SHORTY. Is dat so! What're you? They say you been travlin' round with Jim Crow.

ELLA. He's been my only friend.

SHORTY. A nigger!

ELLA. The only white man in the world! Kind and white. You're all black—black to the heart.

SHORTY. Nigger-lover! (*He throws the money in her face. It falls to the street*) Listen, you! Mickey says he's off of yuh for keeps. Dis is de finish! Dat's what he sent me to tell you. (*Glances at her searchingly—a pause*) Yuh won't make no trouble?

ELLA. Why should I? He's free. The kid's dead. I'm free. No hard feelings—only—I'll be there in spirit at his next fight, tell him! I'll take your tip—the other corner—second the punch—nine—ten—out! He's free! That's all. (*She grins horribly at SHORTY*) Go away, Shorty.

SHORTY. (*looking at her and shaking his head—maudlinly*) Groggy! Groggy! We're all groggy! Gluttons for punishment! Me for a drink. So long. (*He goes. A Salvation Army band comes toward the corner. They are playing and singing "Till We Meet at Jesus' Feet." They reach the end as they enter and stop before ELLA. THE CAPTAIN steps forward.*)

CAPTAIN. Sister—

ELLA. (*picks up the money and drops it in his hat—mockingly*) Here. Go save yourself. Leave me alone.

A WOMAN SALVATIONIST. Sister—

ELLA. Never mind that. I'm not in your line—yet. (*As they hesitate, wonderingly*) I want to be alone. (*To the thud of the big drum they march off. ELLA sits down on a box, her hands hanging at her sides. Presently JIM HARRIS comes in.*)

He has grown into a quietly-dressed, studious-looking Negro with an intelligent yet queerly-baffled face.

JIM. *(with a joyous but bewildered cry)* Ella! I just saw Shorty—

ELLA. *(smiling at him with frank affection)* He had a message from Mickey.

JIM. *(sadly)* Ah!

ELLA. *(pointing to the box behind her)* Sit down. *(He does so. A pause—then she says indifferently)* It's finished. I'm free, Jim.

JIM. *(wearily)* We're never free—except to do what we have to do.

ELLA. What are you getting gloomy about all of a sudden?

JIM. I've got the report from the school. I've flunked again.

ELLA. Poor Jim.

JIM. Don't pity me. I'd like to kick myself all over the block. Five years—and I'm still plugging away where I ought to have been at the end of two.

ELLA. Why don't you give it up?

JIM. No!

ELLA. After all, what's being a lawyer?

JIM. A lot—to me—what it means. *(Intensely)* Why, if I was a Member of the Bar right now, Ella, I believe I'd almost have the courage to—

ELLA. What?

JIM. Nothing. *(After a pause—gropingly)* I can't explain—just—but it hurts like fire. It brands me in my pride. I swear I know more'n any member of my class. I ought to, I study harder. I work like the devil. It's all in my head—all fine and correct to a T. Then when I'm called on—I stand up—all

the white faces looking at me—and I can feel their eyes—I hear my own voice sounding funny, trembling—and all of a sudden it's all gone in my head—there's nothing remembered—and I hear myself stuttering—and give up—sit down—— They don't laugh, hardly ever. They're kind. They're good people. (*In a frenzy*) They're considerate, damn them! But I feel branded!

ELLA. Poor Jim.

JIM. (*going on painfully*) And it's the same thing in the written exams. For weeks before I study all night. I can't sleep anyway. I learn it all, I see it, I understand it. Then they give me the paper in the exam room. I look it over, I know each answer—perfectly. I take up my pen. On all sides are white men starting to write. They're so sure—even the ones that I know know nothing. But I know it all—but I can't remember any more—it fades—it goes—it's gone. There's a blank in my head—stupidity—I sit like a fool fighting to remember a little bit here, a little bit there—not enough to pass—not enough for anything—when I know it all!

ELLA. (*compassionately*) Jim. It isn't worth it. You don't need to——

JIM. I need it more than anyone ever needed anything. I need it to live.

ELLA. What'll it prove?

JIM. Nothing at all much—but everything to me.

ELLA. You're so much better than they are in every other way.

JIM. (*looking up at her*) Then—you understand?

ELLA. Of course. (*Affectionately*) Don't I know how fine you've been to me! You've been the only one in the world

who's stood by me—the only understanding person—and all after the rotten way I used to treat you.

JIM. But before that—way back so high—you treated me good. (*He smiles*).

ELLA. You've been white to me, Jim. (*She takes his hand*).

JIM. White—to you!

ELLA. Yes.

JIM. All love is white. I've always loved you. (*This with the deepest humility*).

ELLA. Even now—after all that's happened!

JIM. Always.

ELLA. I like you, Jim—better than anyone else in the world.

JIM. That's more than enough, more than I ever hoped for. (*The organ grinder comes to the corner. He plays the chorus of "Annie Laurie." They sit listening, hand in hand*) Would you ever want to marry me, Ella?

ELLA. Yes, Jim.

JIM. (*as if this quick consent alarmed him*) No, no, don't answer now. Wait! Turn it over in your mind! Think what it means to you! Consider it—over and over again! I'm in no hurry, Ella. I can wait months—years—

ELLA. I'm alone. I've got to be helped. I've got to help someone—or it's the end—one end or another.

JIM. (*eagerly*) Oh, I'll help—I know I can help—I'll give my life to help you—that's what I've been living for—

ELLA. But can I help you? Can I help you?

JIM. Yes! Yes! We'll go abroad where a man is a man—where it don't make that difference—where people are kind and wise to see the soul under skins. I don't ask you to love me—I don't dare to hope nothing like that! I don't want nothing—

only to wait—to know you like me—to be near you—to keep harm away—to make up for the past—to never let you suffer any more—to serve you—to lie at your feet like a dog that loves you—to kneel by your bed like a nurse that watches over you sleeping—to preserve and protect and shield you from evil and sorrow—to give my life and my blood and all the strength that's in me to give you peace and joy—to become your slave!—yes, be your slave—your black slave that adores you as sacred! (*He has sunk to his knees. In a frenzy of self-abnegation, as he says the last words he beats his head on the flagstones.*)

ELLA. (*overcome and alarmed*) Jim! Jim! You're crazy! I want to help you, Jim—I want to help—

(*The Curtain Falls*)

ACT ONE

SCENE FOUR

Some weeks or so later. A street in the same ward in front of an old brick church. The church sets back from the sidewalk in a yard enclosed by a rusty iron railing with a gate at center. On each side of this yard are tenements. The buildings have a stern, forbidding look. All the shades on the windows are drawn down, giving an effect of staring, brutal eyes that pry callously at human beings without acknowledging them. Even the two tall, narrow church windows on either side of the arched door are blanked with dull green shades. It is a bright sunny morning. The district is unusually still, as if it were waiting, holding its breath.

From the street of the blacks to the right a Negro tenor sings in a voice of shadowy richness—the first stanza with a contented, childlike melancholy—

Sometimes I feel like a mourning dove,
Sometimes I feel like a mourning dove,
Sometimes I feel like a mourning dove,
I feel like a mourning dove.
Feel like a mourning dove.

The second with a dreamy, boyish exultance—

Sometimes I feel like an eagle in the air,
Sometimes I feel like an eagle in the air,
Sometimes I feel like an eagle in the air,

I feel like an eagle in the air.

Feel like an eagle in the air.

The third with a brooding, earthbound sorrow—

Sometimes I wish that I'd never been born,

Sometimes I wish that I'd never been born,

Sometimes I wish that I'd never been born,

I wish that I'd never been born.

Wish that I'd never been born.

As the music dies down there is a pause of waiting stillness. This is broken by one startling, metallic clang of the church-bell. As if it were a signal, people—men, women, children—pour from the two tenements, whites from the tenement to the left, blacks from the one to the right. They hurry to form into two racial lines on each side of the gate, rigid and unyielding, staring across at each other with bitter hostile eyes. The halves of the big church door swing open and JIM and ELLA step out from the darkness within into the sunlight. The doors slam behind them like wooden lips of an idol that has spat them out. JIM is dressed in black. ELLA in white, both with extreme plainness. They stand in the sunlight, shrinking and confused. All the hostile eyes are now concentrated on them. They become aware of the two lines through which they must pass; they hesitate and tremble; then stand there staring back at the people as fixed and immovable as they are. The organ grinder comes in from the right. He plays the chorus of "Old Black Joe." As he finishes the bell of the church clangs one more single stroke, insistently dismissing.

JIM. (as if the sound had awakened him from a trance, reaches out and takes her hand) Come. Time we got to the

steamer. Time we sailed away over the sea. Come, Honey! (*She tries to answer but her lips tremble; she cannot take her eyes off the eyes of the people; she is unable to move. He sees this and, keeping the same tone of profound, affectionate kindness, he points upward in the sky, and gradually persuades her eyes to look up*) Look up, Honey! See the sun! Feel his warm eye lookin' down! Feel how kind he looks! Feel his blessing deep in your heart, your bones! Look up, Honey! (*Her eyes are fixed on the sky now. Her face is calm. She tries to smile bravely back at the sun. Now he pulls her by the hand, urging her gently to walk with him down through the yard and gate, through the lines of people. He is maintaining an attitude to support them through the ordeal only by a terrible effort, which manifests itself in the hysteric quality of ecstasy which breaks into his voice*) And look at the sky! Ain't it kind and blue! Blue for hope. Don't they say blue's for hope? Hope! That's for us, Honey. All those blessings in the sky! What's it the Bible says? Falls on just and unjust alike? No, that's the sweet rain. Pshaw, what am I saying? All mixed up. There's no unjust about it. We're all the same—equally just—under the sky—under the sun—under God—sailing over the sea—to the other side of the world—the side where Christ was born—the kind side that takes count of the soul—over the sea—the sea's blue, too—. Let's not be late—let's get that steamer! (*They have reached the curb now, passed the lines of people. She is looking up to the sky with an expression of trancelike calm and peace. He is on the verge of collapse, his face twitching, his eyes staring. He calls hoarsely*): Taxi! Where is he? Taxi!

(*The Curtain Falls*)

ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT WINGS
ACT TWO

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

Two years later. A flat of the better sort in the Negro district near the corner of Act One. This is the parlor. Its furniture is a queer clash. The old pieces are cheaply ornate, naïvely, childishly gaudy—the new pieces give evidence of a taste that is diametrically opposed, severe to the point of somberness. On one wall, in a heavy gold frame, is a colored photograph—the portrait of an elderly Negro with an able, shrewd face but dressed in outlandish lodge regalia, a get-up adorned with medals, sashes, a cocked hat with frills—the whole effect as absurd to contemplate as one of Napoleon's Marshals in full uniform. In the left corner, where a window lights it effectively, is a Negro primitive mask from the Congo—a grotesque face, inspiring obscure, dim connotations in one's mind, but beautifully done, conceived in a true religious spirit. In this room, however, the mask acquires an arbitrary accentuation. It dominates by a diabolical quality that contrast imposes upon it.

There are two windows on the left looking out in the street. In the rear, a door to the hall of the building. In the right, a doorway with red and gold portières leading into the bedroom and the rest of the flat. Everything is cleaned and polished. The dark brown wall paper is new, the brilliantly figured carpet also. There is a round mahogany table at center. In a rocking chair by the table MRS. HARRIS is sitting. She is a mild-looking, gray-haired Negress of sixty-five, dressed in an old-fashioned Sunday-best dress. Walking about the room nervously is HAT-

TIE, her daughter, JIM's sister, a woman of about thirty with a high-strung, defiant face—an intelligent head showing both power and courage. She is dressed severely, mannishly.

It is a fine morning in Spring. Sunshine comes through the windows at the left.

MRS. HARRIS. Time dey was here, ain't it?

HATTIE. (*impatiently*) Yes.

MRS. H. (*worriedly*) You ain't gwine ter kick up a fuss, is you—like you done wid Jim befo' de weddin'?

HATTIE. No. What's done is done.

MRS. H. We mustn't let her see we hold it agin' her—de bad dat happened to her wid dat no-count fighter.

HATTIE. I certainly never give that a thought. It's what she's done to Jim—making him run away and give up his fight—!

MRS. H. Jim loves her a powerful lot, must be.

HATTIE. (*after a pause—bitterly*) I wonder if she loves Jim!

MRS. H. She must, too. Yes, she must, too. Don't you forget dat it was hard for her—mighty, mighty hard—harder for de white dan for de black!

HATTIE. (*indignantly*) Why should it be?

MRS. H. (*shaking her head*) I ain't talkin' of shoulds. It's too late for shoulds. Dey's o'ny one should. (*Solemnly*) De white and de black shouldn't mix dat close. Dere's one road where de white goes on alone; dere's anudder road where de black goes on alone—

HATTIE. Yes, if they'd only leave us alone!

MRS. H. Dey leaves your Pa alone. He comes to de top till he's got his own business, lots o' money in de bank, he owns

a building even befo' he die. (*She looks up proudly at the picture. HATTIE sighs impatiently—then her mother goes on*) Dey leaves me alone. I bears four children into dis worl', two dies, two lives, I helps you two grow up fine an' healthy and eddicated wid schoolin' and money fo' yo' comfort—

HATTIE. (*impatiently*) Ma!

MRS. H. I docs de duty God set for me in dis worl'. Dey leaves me alone. (*HATTIE goes to the window to hide her exasperation. The mother broods for a minute—then goes on*) The worl' done change. Dey ain't no satisfaction wid nuffin' no more.

HATTIE. Oh! (*Then after a pause*) They'll be here any minute now.

MRS. H. Why didn't you go meet 'em at de dock like I axed you?.

HATTIE. I couldn't. My face and Jim's among those hundreds of white faces— (*With a harsh laugh*) It would give her too much advantage!

MRS. H. (*impatiently*) Don't talk dat way! What makes you so proud? (*Then after a pause—sadly*) Hattie.

HATTIE. (*turning*) Yes, Ma.

MRS. H. I want to see Jim again—my only boy—but—all de same I'd ruther he stayed away. He say in his letter he's happy, she's happy, dey likes it dere, de folks don't think nuffin' but what's natural at secing 'em married. Why don't dey stay?

HATTIE. (*vehemently*) No! They were cowards to run away. If they believe in what they've done, then let them face it out, live it out here, be strong enough to conquer all prejudice!

MRS. H. Strong? Dey ain't many strong. Dey ain't many happy neider. Dey was happy ovah yondah.

HATTIE. We don't deserve happiness till we've fought the fight of our race and won it! (*In the pause that follows there is a ring from back in the flat*) It's the door bell! You go, Ma. I—I—I'd rather not. (*Her mother looks at her rebukingly and goes out agitatedly through the portières. HATTIE waits, nervously walking about, trying to compose herself. There is a long pause. Finally the portières are parted and JIM enters. He looks much older, graver, worried.*)

JIM. Hattie!

HATTIE. Jim! (*They embrace with great affection.*)

JIM. It's great to see you again! You're looking fine.

HATTIE. (*looking at him searchingly*) You look well, too—thinner maybe—and tired. (*Then as she sees him frowning*) But where's Ella?

JIM. With Ma. (*Apologetically*) She sort of—broke down—when we came in. The trip wore her out.

HATTIE. (*coldly*) I see.

JIM. Oh, it's nothing serious. Nerves. She needs a rest.

HATTIE. Wasn't living in France restful?

JIM. Yes, but—too lonely—especially for her.

HATTIE. (*resentfully*) Why? Didn't the people there want to associate—?

JIM. (*quickly*) Oh, no indeedy, they didn't think anything of that. (*After a pause*) But—she did. For the first year it was all right. Ella liked everything a lot. She went out with French folks and got so she could talk it a little—and I learned it—a little. We were having a right nice time. I never thought then we'd ever want to come back here.

HATTIE. (*frowning*) But—what happened to change you?

JIM. (*after a pause—haltingly*) Well—you see—the first year—she and I were living around—like friends—like a brother and sister—like you and I might.

HATTIE. (*her face becoming more and more drawn and tense*) You mean—then——? (*She shudders—then after a pause*) She loves you, Jim?

JIM. If I didn't know that I'd have to jump in the river.

HATTIE. Are you sure she loves you?

JIM. Isn't that why she's suffering?

HATTIE. (*letting her breath escape through her clenched teeth*) Ah!

JIM. (*suddenly springs up and shouts almost hysterically*) Why d'you ask me all those damn questions? Are you trying to make trouble between us?

HATTIE. (*controlling herself—quietly*) No, Jim.

JIM. (*after a pause—contritely*) I'm sorry, Hattie. I'm kind of on edge today. (*He sinks down on his chair—then goes on as if something forced him to speak*) After that we got to living housed in. Ella didn't want to see nobody, she said just the two of us was enough. I was happy then—and I really guess she was happy, too—in a way—for a while. (*Again a pause*) But she never did get to wanting to go out any place again. She got to saying she felt she'd be sure to run into someone she knew—from over here. So I moved us out to the country where no tourist ever comes—but it didn't make any difference to her. She got to avoiding the French folks the same as if they were Americans and I couldn't get it out of her mind. She lived in the house and got paler and paler, and more and more nervous and searay, always imagining

things—until I got to imagining things, too. I got to feeling blue. Got to sneering at myself that I wasn't any better than a quitter because I sneaked away right after getting married, didn't face nothing, gave up trying to become a Member of the Bar—and I got to suspecting Ella must feel that way about me, too—that I wasn't a *real man!*

HATTIE. (*indignantly*) She couldn't!

JIM. (*with hostility*) You don't need to tell me! All this was only in my own mind. We never quarreled a single bit. We never said a harsh word. We were as close to each other as could be. We were all there was in the world to each other. We were alone together! (*A pause*) Well, one day I got so I couldn't stand it. I could see she couldn't stand it. So I just up and said: Ella, we've got to have a plain talk, look everything straight in the face, hide nothing, come out with the exact truth of the way we feel.

HATTIE. And you decided to come back!

JIM. Yes. We decided the reason we felt sort of ashamed was we'd acted like cowards. We'd run away from the thing—and taken it with us. We decided to come back and face it and live it down in ourselves, and prove to ourselves we were strong in our love—and then, and that way only, by being brave we'd free ourselves, and gain confidence, and be really free inside and able then to go anywhere and live in peace and equality with ourselves and the world without any guilty uncomfortable feeling coming up to rile us. (*He has talked himself now into a state of happy confidence*).

HATTIE. (*bending over and kissing him*) Good for you! I admire you so much, Jim! I admire both of you! And are you

going to begin studying right away and get admitted to the Bar?

JIM. You bet I am!

HATTIE. You must, Jim! Our race needs men like you to come to the front and help— (*As voices are heard approaching she stops, stiffens, and her face grows cold*).

JIM. (*noticing this—warningly*) Remember Ella's been sick! (*Losing control—threateningly*) You be nice to her, you hear! (*MRS. HARRIS enters, showing ELLA the way. The colored woman is plainly worried and perplexed. ELLA is pale, with a strange, haunted expression in her eyes. She runs to JIM as to a refuge, clutching his hands in both of hers, looking from MRS. HARRIS to HATTIE with a frightened defiance*).

MRS. H. Dere he is, child, big's life! She was afraid we'd done kidnapped you away, Jim.

JIM. (*patting her hand*) This place ought to be familiar, Ella. Don't you remember playing here with us sometimes as a kid?

ELLA. (*queerly—with a frown of effort*) I remember playing marbles one night—but that was on the street.

JIM. Don't you remember Hattie?

HATTIE. (*coming forward with a forced smile*) It was a long time ago—but I remember Ella. (*She holds out her hand*).

ELLA. (*taking it—looking at HATTIE with the same queer defiance*) I remember. But you've changed so much.

HATTIE. (*stirred to hostility by ELLA's manner—condescendingly*) Yes, I've grown older, naturally. (*Then in a tone which, as if in spite of herself, becomes bragging*) I've worked so hard. First I went away to college, you know—then I took up

post-graduate study—when suddenly I decided I'd accomplish more good if I gave up learning and took up teaching. (*She suddenly checks herself, ashamed, and stung by ELLA's indifference*) But this sounds like stupid boasting. I don't mean that. I was only explaining—

ELLA. (*indifferently*) I didn't know you'd been to school so long. (*A pause*) Where are you teaching? In a colored school, I suppose. (*There is an indifferent superiority in her words that is maddening to HATTIE*).

HATTIE. (*controlling herself*) Yes. A private school endowed by some wealthy members of our race.

ELLA. (*suddenly—even eagerly*) Then you must have taken lots of examinations and managed to pass them, didn't you?

HATTIE. (*biting her lips*) I always passed with honors!

ELLA. Yes, we both graduated from the same High School, didn't we? That was dead easy for me. Why I hardly even looked at a book. But Jim says it was awfully hard for him. He failed one year, remember? (*She turns and smiles at JIM—a tolerant, superior smile but one full of genuine love. HATTIE is outraged, but JIM smiles*).

JIM. Yes, it was hard for me, Honey.

ELLA. And the law school examinations Jim hardly ever could pass at all. Could you? (*She laughs lovingly*).

HATTIE. (*harshly*) Yes, he could! He can! He'll pass them now—if you'll give him a chance!

JIM. (*angrily*) Hattie!

MRS. HARRIS. Hold yo' fool tongue!

HATTIE. (*sullenly*) I'm sorry. (*ELLA has shrunk back against JIM. She regards HATTIE with a sort of wondering hatred. Then she looks away about the room. Suddenly her*

eyes fasten on the primitive mask and she gives a stifled scream).

JIM. What's the matter, Honey?

ELLA. (*pointing*) That! For God's sake, what is it?

HATTIE. (*scornfully*) It's a Congo mask. (*She goes and picks it up*) I'll take it away if you wish. I thought you'd like it. It was my wedding present to Jim.

ELLA. What is it?

HATTIE. It's a mask which used to be worn in religious ceremonies by my people in Africa. But, aside from that, it's beautifully made, a work of Art by a real artist—as real in his way as your Michael Angelo. (*Forces ELLA to take it*) Here. Just notice the workmanship.

ELLA. (*defiantly*) I'm not scared of it if you're not. (*Looking at it with disgust*) Beautiful? Well, some people certainly have queer notions! It looks ugly to me and stupid—like a kid's game—making faces! (*She slaps it contemptuously*) Pooh! You needn't look hard at me. I'll give you the laugh. (*She goes to put it back on the stand*).

JIM. Maybe, if it disturbs you, we better put it in some other room.

ELLA. (*defiantly aggressive*) No. I want it here where I can give it the laugh! (*She sets it there again—then turns suddenly on HATTIE with aggressive determination*) Jim's not going to take any more examinations! I won't let him!

HATTIE. (*bursting forth*) Jim! Do you hear that? There's white justice!—their fear for their superiority!—

ELLA. (*with a terrified pleading*) Make her go away, Jim!

JIM. (*losing control—furiously to his sister*) Either you leave here—or we will!

MRS. H. (*weeping—throws her arms around HATTIE*) Let's go, chile! Let's go!

HATTIE. (*calmly now*) Yes, Ma. All right. (*They go through the portières. As soon as they are gone, JIM suddenly collapses into a chair and hides his head in his hands. ELLA stands beside him for a moment. She stares distractedly about her, at the portrait, at the mask, at the furniture, at JIM. She seems fighting to escape from some weight on her mind. She throws this off and, completely her old self for the moment, kneels by JIM and pats his shoulder.*)

ELLA. (*with kindness and love*) Don't, Jim! Don't cry, please! You don't suppose I really meant that about the examinations, do you? Why, of course, I didn't mean a word! I couldn't mean it! I want you to take the examinations! I want you to pass! I want you to be a lawyer! I want you to be the best lawyer in the country! I want you to show 'em—all the dirty sneaking, gossiping liars that talk behind our backs—what a man I married. I want the whole world to know you're the whitest of the white! I want you to climb and climb—and step on 'em, stamp right on their mean faces! I love you, Jim. You know that!

JIM. (*calm again—happily*) I hope so, Honey—and I'll make myself worthy.

HATTIE. (*appears in the doorway—quietly*) We're going now, Jim.

ELLA. No. Don't go.

HATTIE. We were going to, anyway. This is your house—Mother's gift to you, Jim.

JIM. (*astonished*) But I can't accept— Where are you going?

HATTIE. We've got a nice flat in the Bronx—(*with bitter pride*) in the heart of the Black Belt—the Congo—among our own people!

JIM. (*angrily*) You're crazy—I'll see Ma— (*He goes out.* HATTIE and ELLA stare at each other with scorn and hatred for a moment, then HATTIE goes. ELLA remains kneeling for a moment by the chair, her eyes dazed and strange as she looks about her. Then she gets to her feet and stands before the portrait of JIM's father—with a sneer).

ELLA. It's his Old Man—all dolled up like a circus horse! Well, they can't help it. It's in the blood, I suppose. They're ignorant, that's all there is to it. (*She moves to the mask—forcing a mocking tone*) Hello, sport! Who d'you think you're scaring? Not me! I'll give you the laugh. He won't pass, you wait and see. Not in a thousand years! (*She goes to the window and looks down at the street and mutters*) All black! Every one of them! (*Then with sudden excitement*) No, there's one. Why, it's Shorty! (*She throws the window open and calls*) Shorty! Shorty! Hello, Shorty! (*She leans out and waves—then stops, remains there for a moment looking down, then shrinks back on the floor suddenly as if she wanted to hide—her whole face in an anguish*) Say! Say! I wonder?—No, he didn't hear you. Yes, he did, too! He must have! I yelled so loud you could hear me in Jersey! No, what are you talking about? How would he hear with all the kids yelling down there? He never heard a word, I tell you! He did, too! He didn't want to hear you! He didn't want to let anyone know he knew you! Why don't you acknowledge it? What are you lying about? I'm not! Why shouldn't he? Where does he come in to—for God's sake, who is Shorty, anyway? A

pimp! Yes, and a dope-peddler, too! D'you mean to say he'd have the nerve to hear me call him and then deliberately——? Yes, I mean to say it! I do say it! And it's true, and you know it, and you might as well be honest for a change and admit it! He heard you but he didn't want to hear you! He doesn't want to know you any more. No, not even him! He's afraid it'd get him in wrong with the old gang. Why? You know well enough! Because you married a—a—a—well, I won't say it, but you know without my mentioning names! *ELLA springs to her feet in horror and shakes off her obsession with a frantic effort*) Stop! *(Then whimpering like a frightened child)* Jim! Jim! Jim! Where are you? I want you, Jim! *(She runs out of the room as*

(The Curtain Falls)

ACT TWO

SCENE TWO

The same. Six months later. It is evening. The walls of the room appear shrunken in, the ceiling lowered, so that the furniture, the portrait, the mask look unnaturally large and domineering. JIM is seated at the table studying, law books piled by his elbows. He is keeping his attention concentrated only by a driving physical effort which gives his face the expression of a runner's near the tape. His forehead shines with perspiration. He mutters one sentence from Blackstone over and over again, tapping his forehead with his fist in time to the rhythm he gives the stale words. But, in spite of himself, his attention wanders, his eyes have an uneasy, hunted look, he starts at every sound in the house or from the street. Finally, he remains rigid, Blackstone forgotten, his eyes fixed on the portières with tense grief. Then he groans, slams the book shut, goes to the window and throws it open and sinks down beside it, his arms on the sill, his head resting wearily on his arms, staring out into the night, the pale glare from the arc-lamp on the corner throwing his face into relief. The portières on the right are parted and HATTIE comes in.

HATTIE. (not seeing him at the table) Jim! (Discovering him) Oh, there you are. What're you doing?

JIM. (turning to her) Resting. Cooling my head. (Forcing a smile) These law books certainly are a sweating proposition! (Then, anxiously) How is she?

HATTIE. She's asleep now. I felt it was safe to leave her for a minute. (*After a pause*) What did the doctor tell you, Jim?

JIM. The same old thing. She must have rest, he says, her mind needs rest— (*Bitterly*) But he can't tell me any prescription for that rest—leastways not any that'd work.

HATTIE. (*after a pause*) I think you ought to leave her, Jim—or let her leave you—for a while, anyway.

JIM. (*angrily*) You're like the doctor. Everything's so simple and easy. Do this and that happens. Only it don't. Life isn't simple like that—not in this case, anyway—no, it isn't simple a bit. (*After a pause*) I can't leave her. She can't leave me. And there's a million little reasons combining to make one big reason why we can't. (*A pause*) For her sake—if it'd do her good—I'd go—I'd leave—I'd do anything—because I love her. I'd kill myself even—jump out of this window this second—I've thought it over, too—but that'd only make matters worse for her. I'm all she's got in the world! Yes, that isn't bragging or fooling myself. I know that for a fact! Don't you know that's true? (*There is a pleading for the certainty he claims*).

HATTIE. Yes, I know she loves you, Jim. I know that now.

JIM. (*simply*) Then we've got to stick together to the end, haven't we, whatever comes—and hope and pray for the best? (*A pause—then hopefully*) I think maybe this is the crisis in her mind. Once she settles this in herself, she's won to the other side. And me—once I become a Member of the Bar—then I win, too! We're both free—by our own fighting down our own weakness! We're both really, truly free! Then we can be happy with ourselves here or anywhere. She'll be

proud then! Yes, she's told me again and again, she says she'll be actually proud!

HATTIE. (*turning away to conceal her emotion*) Yes, I'm sure—but you mustn't study too hard, Jim! You mustn't study too awfully hard!

JIM. (*gets up and goes to the table and sits down wearily*) Yes, I know. Oh, I'll pass easily. I haven't got any scarey feeling about that any more. And I'm doing two years' work in one here alone. That's better than schools, eh?

HATTIE. (*doubtfully*) It's wonderful, Jim.

JIM. (*his spirit evaporating*) If I can only hold out! It's hard! I'm worn out. I don't sleep. I get to thinking and thinking. My head aches and burns like fire with thinking. Round and round my thoughts go chasing like crazy chickens hopping and flapping before the wind. It gets me crazy mad—'cause I can't stop!

HATTIE. (*watching him for a while and seeming to force herself to speak*) The doctor didn't tell you all, Jim.

JIM. (*dully*) What's that?

HATTIE. He told me you're liable to break down too, if you don't take care of yourself.

JIM. (*abjectly weary*) Let 'er come! I don't care what happens to me. Maybe if I get sick she'll get well. There's only so much bad luck allowed to one family, maybe. (*He forces a wan smile*).

HATTIE. (*hastily*) Don't give in to that idea, for the Lord's sake!

JIM. I'm tired—and blue—that's all.

HATTIE. (*after another long pause*) I've got to tell you something else, Jim.

JIM. (*dully*) What?

HATTIE. The doctor said Ella's liable to be sick like this a very long time.

JIM. He told me that too—that it'd be a long time before she got back her normal strength. Well, I suppose that's got to be expected.

HATTIE. (*slowly*) He didn't mean convalescing—what he told me. (*A long pause*).

JIM. (*evasively*) I'm going to get other doctors in to see Ella—specialists. This one's a damn fool.

HATTIE. Be sensible, Jim. You'll have to face the truth—sooner or later.

JIM. (*irritably*) I know the truth about Ella better'n any doctor.

HATTIE. (*persuasively*) She'd get better so much sooner if you'd send her away to some nice sanitarium—

JIM. No! She'd die of shame there!

HATTIE. At least until after you've taken your examinations—

JIM. To hell with me!

HATTIE. Six months. That wouldn't be long to be parted.

JIM. What are you trying to do—separate us? (*He gets to his feet—furiously*) Go on out! Go on out!

HATTIE. (*calmly*) No, I won't. (*Sharply*) There's something that's got to be said to you and I'm the only one with the courage— (*Intensely*) Tell me, Jim, have you heard her raving when she's out of her mind?

JIM. (*with a shudder*) No!

HATTIE. You're lying, Jim. You must have—if you don't stop your ears—and the doctor says she may develop a violent

mania, dangerous for you—get worse and worse until—Jim, you'll go crazy too—living this way. Today she raved on about "Black! Black!" and cried because she said her skin was turning black—that you had poisoned her——

JIM. (*in anguish*) That's only when she's out of her mind.

HATTIE. And then she suddenly called me a dirty nigger.

JIM. No! She never said that ever! She never would!

HATTIE. She did—and kept on and on! (*A tense pause*) She'll be saying that to you soon.

JIM. (*torturedly*) She don't mean it! She isn't responsible for what she's saying!

HATTIE. I know she isn't—yet she is just the same. It's deep down in her or it wouldn't come out.

JIM. Deep down in her people—not deep in her.

HATTIE. I can't make such distinctions. The race in me, deep in me, can't stand it. I can't play nurse to her any more, Jim,—not even for your sake. I'm afraid—afraid of myself—afraid sometime I'll kill her dead to set you free! (*She loses control and begins to cry*).

JIM. (*after a long pause—somberly*) Yes, I guess you'd better stay away from here. Good-by.

HATTIE. Who'll you get to nurse her, Jim,—a white woman?

JIM. Ella'd die of shame. No, I'll nurse her myself.

HATTIE. And give up your studies?

JIM. I can do both.

HATTIE. You can't! You'll get sick yourself! Why, you look terrible even as it is—and it's only beginning!

JIM. I can do anything for her! I'm all she's got in the world! I've got to prove I can be all to her! I've got to

prove worthy! I've got to prove she can be proud of me! I've got to prove I'm the whitest of the white!

HATTIE. (*stung by this last—with rebellious bitterness*) Is that the ambition she's given you? Oh, you soft, weak-minded fool, you traitor to your race! And the thanks you'll get—to be called a dirty nigger—to hear her cursing you because she can never have a child because it'll be born black—!

JIM. (*in a frenzy*) Stop!

HATTIE. I'll say what must be said even though you kill me, Jim. Send her to an asylum before you both have to be sent to one together.

JIM. (*with a sudden wild laugh*) Do you think you're threatening me with something dreadful now? Why, I'd like that. Sure, I'd like that! Maybe she'd like it better, too. Maybe we'd both find it all simple then—like you think it is now. Yes. (*He laughs again*).

HATTIE. (*frightenedly*) Jim!

JIM. Together! You can't scare me even with hell fire if you say she and I go together. It's heaven then for me! (*With sudden savagery*) You go out of here! All you've ever been aiming to do is to separate us so we can't be together!

HATTIE. I've done what I did for your own good.

JIM. I have no own good. I only got a good together with her. I'm all she's got in the world! Let her call me nigger! Let her call me the whitest of the white! I'm all she's got in the world, ain't I? She's all I've got! You with your fool talk of the black race and the white race! Where does the human race get a chance to come in? I suppose that's simple for you. You lock it up in asylums and throw away the key!

(*With fresh violence*) Go along! There isn't going to be no more people coming in here to separate—excepting the doctor. I'm going to lock the door and it's going to stay locked, you hear? Go along, now!

HATTIE. (*confusedly*) Jim!

JIM. (*pushes her out gently and slams the door after her—vaguely*) Go along! I got to study. I got to nurse Ella, too. Oh, I can do it! I can do anything for her! (*He sits down at the table and, opening the book, begins again to recite the line from Blackstone in a meaningless rhythm, tapping his forehead with his fist. ELLA enters noiselessly through the portières. She wears a red dressing-gown over her night-dress but is in her bare feet. She has a carving-knife in her right hand. Her eyes fasten on JIM with a murderous mania. She creeps up behind him. Suddenly he senses something and turns. As he sees her he gives a cry, jumping up and catching her wrist. She stands fixed, her eyes growing bewildered and frightened*).

JIM. (*aghast*) Ella! For God's sake! Do you want to murder me? (*She does not answer. He shakes her*)

ELLA. (*whimperingly*) They kept calling me names as I was walking along—I can't tell you what, Jim—and then I grabbed a knife—

JIM. Yes! See! This! (*She looks at it frightenedly*).

ELLA. Where did I—? I was having a nightmare—Where did they go—I mean, how did I get here? (*With sudden terrified pleading—like a little girl*) Oh, Jim—don't ever leave me alone! I have such terrible dreams, Jim—promise you'll never go away!

JIM. I promise, Honey.

ELLA. (*her manner becoming more and more childishly silly*) I'll be a little girl—and you'll be old Uncle Jim who's been with us for years and years— Will you play that?

JIM. Yes, Honey. Now you better go back to bed.

ELLA. (*like a child*) Yes, Uncle Jim. (*She turns to go. He pretends to be occupied by his book. She looks at him for a second—then suddenly asks in her natural woman's voice*) Are you studying hard, Jim?

JIM. Yes, Honey. Go to bed now. You need to rest, you know.

ELLA. (*stands looking at him, fighting with herself. A startling transformation comes over her face. It grows mean, vicious, full of jealous hatred. She cannot contain herself but breaks out harshly with a cruel, venomous grin*) You dirty nigger!

JIM. (*starting as if he'd been shot*) Ella! For the good Lord's sake!

ELLA. (*coming out of her insane mood for a moment, aware of something terrible, frightened*) Jim! Jim! Why are you looking at me like that?

JIM. What did you say to me just then?

ELLA. (*gropingly*) Why, I—I said—I remember saying, are you studying hard, Jim? Why? You're not mad at that, are you?

JIM. No, Honey. What made you think I was mad? Go to bed now.

ELLA. (*obediently*) Yes, Jim. (*She passes behind the portières. JIM stares before him. Suddenly her head is thrust*

out at the side of the portières. Her face is again that of a vindictive maniac) Nigger! (The face disappears—she can be heard running away, laughing with cruel satisfaction. JIM bows his head on his outstretched arms but he is too stricken for tears).

(The Curtain Falls)

ACT TWO

SCENE THREE

The same, six months later. The sun has just gone down. The Spring twilight sheds a vague, gray light about the room, picking out the Congo mask on the stand by the window. The walls appear shrunken in still more, the ceiling now seems barely to clear the people's heads, the furniture and the characters appear enormously magnified. Law books are stacked in two great piles on each side of the table. ELLA comes in from the right, the carving-knife in her hand. She is pitifully thin, her face is wasted, but her eyes glow with a mad energy, her movements are abrupt and spring-like. She looks stealthily about the room, then advances and stands before the mask, her arms akimbo, her attitude one of crazy mockery, fear and bravado. She is dressed in the red dressing-gown, gown dirty and ragged now, and is in her bare feet.

ELLA. I'll give you the laugh, wait and see! (*Then in a confidential tone*) He thought I was asleep! He called, Ella, Ella—but I kept my eyes shut, I pretended to snore. I fooled him good. (*She gives a little hoarse laugh*) This is the first time he's dared to leave me alone for months and months. I've been wanting to talk to you every day but this is the only chance— (*With sudden violence—flourishing her knife*) What're you grinning about, you dirty nigger, you? How dare you grin at me? I guess you forget what you are! That's

always the way. Be kind to you, treat you decent, and in a second you've got a swelled head, you think you're somebody, you're all over the place putting on airs; why, it's got so I can't even walk down the street without seeing niggers, niggers everywhere. Hanging around, grinning, grinning—going to school—pretending they're white—taking examinations— (She stops, arrested by the word, then suddenly) That's where he's gone—down to the mail-box—to see if there's a letter from the Board—telling him— But why is he so long? (She calls pitifully) Jim! (Then in a terrified whimper) Maybe he's passed! Maybe he's passed! (In a frenzy) No! No! He can't! I'd kill him! I'd kill myself! (Threatening the Congo mask) It's you who're to blame for this! Yes, you! Oh, I'm on to you! (Then appealingly) But why d'you want to do this to us? What have I ever done wrong to you? What have you got against me? I married you, didn't I? Why don't you let Jim alone? Why don't you let him be happy as he is—with me? Why don't you let me be happy? He's white, isn't he—the whitest man that ever lived? Where do you come in to interfere? Black! Black! Black as dirt! You've poisoned me! I can't wash myself clean! Oh, I hate you! I hate you! Why don't you let Jim and I be happy? (She sinks down in his chair, her arms outstretched on the table. The door from the hall is slowly opened and JIM appears. His bloodshot, sleepless eyes stare from deep hollows. His expression is one of crushed numbness. He holds an open letter in his hand).

JIM. (seeing ELLA—in an absolutely dead voice) Honey—I thought you were asleep.

ELLA. (*starts and wheels about in her chair*) What's that? You got—you got a letter—?

JIM. (*turning to close the door after him*) From the Board of Examiners for admission to the Bar, State of New York—God's country! (*He finishes up with a chuckle of ironic self-pity so spent as to be barely audible*).

ELLA. (*writhing out of her chair like some fierce animal, the knife held behind her—with fear and hatred*) You didn't—you didn't—you didn't pass, did you?

JIM. (*looking at her wildly*) Pass? Pass? (*He begins to chuckle and laugh between sentences and phrases, rich, Negro laughter, but heart-breaking in its mocking grief*) Good Lord, child, how come you can ever imagine such a crazy idea? Pass? Me? Jim Crow Harris? Nigger Jim Harris—become a full-fledged Member of the Bar! Why the mere notion of it is enough to kill you with laughing! It'd be against all natural laws, all human right and justice. It'd be miraculous, there'd be earthquakes and catastrophes, the seven Plagues'd come again and locusts'd devour all the money in the banks, the second Flood'd come roaring and Noah'd fall overboard, the sun'd drop out of the sky like a ripe fig, and the Devil'd perform miracles, and God'd be tipped head first right out of the Judgment seat! (*He laughs, maudlinly uproarious*).

ELLA. (*her face beginning to relax, to light up*) Then you—you didn't pass?

JIM. (*spent—giggling and gasping idiotically*) Well, I should say not! I should certainly say not!

ELLA. (*with a cry of joy, pushes all the law books crashing to the floor—then with childish happiness she grabs JIM by both hands and dances up and down*) Oh, Jim, I knew it! I

knew you couldn't! Oh, I'm so glad, Jim! I'm so happy! You're still my old Jim—and I'm so glad! (*He looks at her dazedly, a fierce rage slowly gathering on his face. She dances away from him. His eyes follow her. His hands clench. She stands in front of the mask—triumphantly*) There! What did I tell you? I told you I'd give you the laugh! (*She begins to laugh with wild unrestraint, grabs the mask from its place, sets it in the middle of the table and plunging the knife down through it pins it to the table*) There! Who's got the laugh now?

JIM. (*his eyes bulging—hoarsely*) You devil! You white devil woman! (*In a terrible roar, raising his fists above her head*) You devil!

ELLA. (*looking up at him with a bewildered cry of terror*) Jim! (*Her appeal recalls him to himself. He lets his arms slowly drop to his sides, bowing his head. ELLA points tremblingly to the mask*) It's all right, Jim! It's dead. The devil's dead. See! It couldn't live—unless you passed. If you'd passed it would have lived in you. Then I'd have had to kill you, Jim, don't you see?—or it would have killed me. But now I've killed it. (*She pats his hand*) So you needn't ever be afraid any more, Jim.

JIM. (*dully*) I've got to sit down, Honey. I'm tired. I haven't had much chance for sleep in so long— (*He slumps down in the chair by the table*).

ELLA. (*sits down on the floor beside him and holds his hand. Her face is gradually regaining an expression that is happy, childlike and pretty*) I know, Jim! That was my fault. I wouldn't let you sleep. I couldn't let you. I kept thinking

if he sleeps good then he'll be sure to study good and then he'll pass—and the devil'll win!

JIM. (*with a groan*) Don't, Honey!

ELLA. (*with a childish grin*) That was why I carried that knife around—(*she frowns—puzzled*)—one reason—to keep you from studying and sleeping by scaring you.

JIM. I wasn't scared of being killed. I was scared of what they'd do to you after.

ELLA. (*after a pause—like a child*) Will God forgive me, Jim?

JIM. Maybe He can forgive what you've done to me; and maybe He can forgive what I've done to you; but I don't see how He's going to forgive—Himself.

ELLA. I prayed and prayed. When you were away taking the examinations and I was alone with the nurse, I closed my eyes and pretended to be asleep but I was praying with all my might: O God, don't let Jim pass!

JIM. (*with a sob*) Don't, Honey, don't! For the good Lord's sake! You're hurting me!

ELLA. (*frightenedly*) How, Jim? Where? (*Then after a pause—suddenly*) I'm sick, Jim. I don't think I'll live long.

JIM. (*simply*) Then I won't either. Somewhere yonder maybe—together—our luck'll change. But I wanted—here and now—before you—we—I wanted to prove to you—to myself—to become a full-fledged Member—so you could be proud—(*He stops. Words fail and he is beyond tears*).

ELLA. (*brightly*) Well, it's all over, Jim. Everything'll be all right now. (*Chattering along*) I'll be just your little girl, Jim—and you'll be my little boy—just as we used to be, remember, when we were beaux; and I'll put shoe blacking on

my face and pretend I'm black and you can put chalk on your face and pretend you're white just as we used to do—and we can play marbles—only you mustn't all the time be a boy. Sometimes you must be my old kind Uncle Jim who's been with us for years and years. Will you, Jim?

JIM. (*with utter resignation*) Yes, Honey.

ELLA. And you'll never, never, never, never leave me, Jim?

JIM. Never, Honey.

ELLA. 'Cause you're all I've got in the world—and I love you, Jim. (*She kisses his hand as a child might, tenderly and gratefully*).

JIM. (*suddenly throws himself on his knees and raises his shining eyes, his transfigured face*) Forgive me, God—and make me worthy! Now I see Your Light again! Now I hear Your Voice! (*He begins to weep in an ecstasy of religious humility*) Forgive me, God, for blaspheming You! Let this fire of burning suffering purify me of selfishness and make me worthy of the child You send me for the woman You take away!

ELLA. (*jumping to her feet—excitedly*) Don't cry, Jim! You mustn't cry! I've got only a little time left and I want to play. Don't be old Uncle Jim now. Be my little boy, Jim. Pretend you're Painty Face and I'm Jim Crow. Come and play!

JIM. (*still deeply exalted*) Honey, Honey, I'll play right up to the gates of Heaven with you! (*She tugs at one of his hands, laughingly trying to pull him up from his knees as*

(*The Curtain Falls*)

DIFF'RENT
A Play in Two Acts
(1920)

CHARACTERS

CAPTAIN CALEB WILLIAMS

EMMA CROSBY

CAPTAIN JOHN CROSBY, *her father*

Mrs. CROSBY, *her mother*

JACK CROSBY, *her brother*

HARRIET WILLIAMS, *Caleb's sister (later Mrs. ROGERS)*

ALFRED ROGERS

BENNY ROGERS, *their son*

SCENES

ACT I

Parlor of the Crosby home on a side street of a seaport village in New England—mid-afternoon of a day in late spring in the year 1890.

ACT II

The same. Late afternoon of a day in the early spring of the year 1920.