

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

by
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DESCRIPTION

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

CHARACTERS

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

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

Scene 1

Perkins' classroom, first meeting of the class. Palmer and Morgan seated upstage. Perkins stands at a lectern downstage.

PERKINS

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

Palmer raises his hand holding a textbook.

PERKINS

-- that far from being "sacred writ," these "laws" are also a mythology that people have used to cover up the sins created by power, race, sex, and greed.

Palmer's hand still up.

PERKINS

I see I already have a question on deck. Yes,
Mr. --

(consults seating chart)

-- Palmer?

Palmer stands and comes downstage, faces the audience.

PALMER

Professor Perkins?

PERKINS

We've established that.

PALMER

This is a course on contracts and property?

Morgan comes downstage on the opposite side. She has Palmer in her sights.

PERKINS

Yes.

PALMER

That is what we are being tuitioned for, right?

PERKINS

These questions lead to something?

MORGAN

Who is that man?

PALMER

Because we just heard you declare "mythologies" -
-

MORGAN

Sharp --

PALMER

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

MORGAN

-- sharp-tongued --

PALMER

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

MORGAN

Obnoxious --

PERKINS

Just my luck.

PALMER

Because if you teach us that the free-enterprise system that conserves our liberty --

MORGAN

Handsome --

PALMER

-- and keeps professors like you employed is a mythology --

PERKINS

The rough beast slouches -- my very own conservative watch-dogs have arrived.

MORGAN

No, toothsome -- "toothsome" he is.

PALMER

If you mean Students for a Free Academics -- then, yes.

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

Too bad he's got --

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

-- shitty politics --

PERKINS

-- before the SFA takes its standard wild gunshots --

PALMER

We are not trying to impose --

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

-- what a handsome face -- but damn!

PALMER

We don't want to interfere --

MORGAN

I am desiring --

PERKINS

Then go back to your seat --

MORGAN

-- what should dry me right up --

PERKINS

-- because you're interfering right now --

PALMER

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

PERKINS

You'll hear what's right.

MORGAN

But wet and in a sweat am I over him!

PERKINS

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

Palmer does not move.

PALMER

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

PERKINS

What are you talking about?

MORGAN

What is he talking about?

PALMER

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

PERKINS

It's not exactly a secret --

PALMER

-- the liberal "white-black" woman --

PERKINS

So that invalidates what I say?

PALMER

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

PERKINS

It's your past, too --

MORGAN

Her past is like my past and his --

PALMER

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

MORGAN

Then I don't want none of it either!

Palmer shoots Morgan a "look." Morgan does not look away.

PALMER

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

PERKINS

If their character had any content --

PALMER

Let's all stick to the real truth.

MORGAN

You make my thighs hum!

Palmer backs up to his seat. Perkins turns and catches Morgan staring
up Palmer, which startles Morgan, who moves back to her seat. Perkins
faces the audience.

PERKINS

Let me tell you all a story.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 2

Perkins in Boals' office.

PERKINS

He wasn't rude -- exactly.

BOALS

So you told him about --

PERKINS

Told them --

BOALS

-- about the memoir?

PERKINS

-- the memoir --

Boals hands her a scotch.

PERKINS

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

BOALS

Of course all of them. But about the memoir --

PERKINS

And humans as property and corrupted contracts --

BOALS

In the first minutes of your first class --

PERKINS

I was a little -- provoked --

BOALS

Because the memoir comes in, if I remember, in
lecture six, on the coat-tails of --

PERKINS

I know the sequence --

BOALS

And it also comes out later --

PERKINS

Point taken -- he just -- pushed my --

BOALS

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

PERKINS

No.

BOALS

The dark ooze of conservatism --

PERKINS

I just didn't think they would --

BOALS

Because you are Lillie Perkins?

Of course. PERKINS

The Lillie Perkins. BOALS

The -- PERKINS

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

PERKINS
"Liberal bias" is bogus --

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

PERKINS
Because.

BOALS
Because you are --

PERKINS
The Lillie Perkins.

BOALS
To the Lillie Perkins, then!

PERKINS
All right, so I wasn't that surprised -- but I don't have time for being defensive.

BOALS
Or the skill.

PERKINS
No?

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

PERKINS
All right --

BOALS
-- and their escape from slavery --

PERKINS
All right --

BOALS
How did that happen to such a tough gal?

They drink in silence.

PERKINS
I'd prefer to talk about --

BOALS
Lillie?

PERKINS
Yes?

BOALS
Lillie?

PERKINS
What?

BOALS
Your face is not finished with this business.

PERKINS
You're watching my face?

BOALS
It's a good face to watch.

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

Morgan steps into a light.

BOALS
Picture the seating chart --

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

Palmer steps into a light.

PERKINS
And he ignored it. At first.

BOALS
And then?

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

BOALS
And?

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

Morgan and Palmer circle each other.

BOALS
White-looking.

PERKINS
Yes.

BOALS
Because you are the expert in that.

Boals puts down his drink.

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

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

Morgan and Palmer come together, move together.

BOALS
What was she thinking?

PERKINS
I don't know.

BOALS
You must have estimated --

PERKINS
I don't know.

BOALS
Think of the chart.

PERKINS
Hannah Morgan.

Suddenly Perkins pulls back, though she doesn't take her eyes off
Boals.

BOALS
What do you know?

PERKINS
That can't be right.

BOALS
Lillie?
(kiddingly)
Lillie?

PERKINS
Jealous.

BOALS
That must have been unexpected.

PERKINS
I brought it out as anger.

BOALS
Your authority undercut.

PERKINS
So I marked my territory.

BOALS
And while being righteous --

PERKINS
Lust marks its own territory.

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

PERKINS
And serious. Logical.

BOALS
Selling that memoir.

PERKINS
And coming up dry.

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

Morgan and Palmer stop moving.

Perkins and Boals move apart just slightly, and this "just slightly"
breaks their gaze.

Morgan and Palmer do the motions as Perkins describes, and they mimic
what Boals and Perkins do.

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

BOALS

Show me.

Perkins puts her hand on Boals' arm.

PERKINS

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

Perkins puts her hand back on Boals. Boals goes to do as before, to
lift the hand off.

PERKINS

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

Palmer gently nips the flesh on Morgan's knuckles.

Boals does not do anything with Perkins' hand.

Perkins takes her hand back.

Morgan takes her hand back.

Perkins picks up her drink, turns away from Boals.

Morgan and Palmer exit out of their lights.

PERKINS

You'd have thought they were a couple --

BOALS

Their own seating chart.

Perkins sips, fidgets.

PERKINS

Lawrence, you said you had something --

BOALS

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

PERKINS

No.

BOALS

Yes.

PERKINS

You have a contract?

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

PERKINS
It's real?

BOALS
Your memoir will be --

Shift of lights. Perkins addresses the audience.

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

Boals addresses the audience.

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

PERKINS
They're so gripping!

BOALS
She's famous in a small circle.

PERKINS
But new editions each year, updates --

BOALS
Bring in its own pretty penny.

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

BOALS
That realm of dark matter.

PERKINS
You cynic!

BOALS
You mean someone in his right mind.

PERKINS
Not all hearts -- and not my heart.

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

Boals smiles, raises his glass. Light out on him, stays up on
Perkins.

PERKINS

My memoir.

Palmer and Morgan appear as William and Ellen, the main characters of Perkins' memoir. They will also speak other voices.

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

PERKINS

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

PALMER [AS SLAVEMASTER]

I'll show you how to give a white man respect!

PERKINS

She, white; her husband, black --

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

But her white was a dark white --

PALMER [AS SLAVEMASTER]

Quiet, wench, or you'll regret the day you were born.

MORGAN

(eye-roll to heaven)

I already do!

PERKINS

A slave bred by the master --

Morgan now mimes as if "the master" is fucking her from behind.

MORGAN

Ah, ah, ah, ah --

PERKINS

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

"The master" finishes with Morgan.

PALMER

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

MORGAN

I am dirt!

PALMER

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

MORGAN {AS SLAVEMASTER}

We'll see about that!

Morgan and Palmer fall as if thrown to their knees.

PERKINS

They couldn't take anymore.

PALMER

I can't take no more, Ellen.

MORGAN

I got no heart left, William.

PERKINS

Only the two choices every slave had.

PALMER

We leave --

MORGAN

Or we die. That's it.

PERKINS

They did not die.

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

PERKINS

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

Under Perkins' words, Morgan and Palmer begin to sing to the tune of
Stephen Foster's "De Camptown Races."

[From FOSTER'S Plantation Melodies, No. 3. "Gwine to Run All Night,"
or De Camptown Races, <http://www.pdmusic.org/ministrel.html>]

MORGAN & PALMER

De coon dogs, dey be lickin' our trail -- Doo-
dah! doo-dah!

PERKINS

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

MORGAN & PALMER

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

PERKINS
Traveling to Philadelphia with her "property."

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

Morgan and Palmer do a shuffle/cakewalk move, then stop, hold pose.

MORGAN & PALMER
Gwine to run all night!

PERKINS
They used property and contracts to free
themselves --

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

MORGAN & PALMER
Gwine to run all day!

PERKINS
Loved that irony!

Morgan and Palmer suddenly break out of their pose.

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

They immediately snap back into their pose. Perkins breaks out of her
"professorial" pose.

PERKINS
I really wanna tear out their fucking hearts too!

Perkins snaps back into her "rational" pose.

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

MORGAN, PALMER & PERKINS
I'll bet my money on de bobtail nag --
Somebody bet on de bay.

Everyone holds a final "button." Palmer and Morgan take a pose.

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

A strobe/snapshot. Palmer and Morgan undress. Boals brings them
contemporary clothes and takes their shed clothes.

PERKINS

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

(touching herself)

This skin?

(shows it around)

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

Morgan and Palmer are now as they were at the top of the show. Boals
comes back into the light. Morgan and Palmer move to their seats in
the class.

PERKINS

So when do I sign?

BOALS

As soon as the papers arrive.

PERKINS

At our price?

BOALS

Yes. It's not a sin to want the money.

PERKINS

Such confidence.

BOALS

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

PERKINS

Intellectual "property."

BOALS

Why do you think we call them "properties" around
here? In my business, the word "contract" --

Boals with an open hand.

BOALS

-- should never mean "contract."

Boals makes a fist. He gives Perkins the sign of the cross.

BOALS

Enjoy. I know someone's in there who can do just
that.

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

* * * * *

Scene 3

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

MORGAN

It was just by chance --

PALMER

By chance --

MORGAN

I swear --

PALMER

That our paths would cross right here.

MORGAN

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

PALMER

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

MORGAN

That so?

PALMER

That's so.

MORGAN

What a coincidence.

PALMER

Why do you know my schedule.

MORGAN

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

PALMER

"Ingénue" is not your strong suit.

MORGAN

You should see how grim you look.

PALMER

I have reason.

MORGAN

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

PALMER

We are not the most belov'd around campus.

MORGAN

Hard work keeping that SFA party line pure.

PALMER

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

MORGAN

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

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

PALMER

All right --

MORGAN

What?

PALMER

Let's call it coincidence.

Morgan raises her hand to display her knuckle.

MORGAN

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

PALMER

Costs nothing to sit.

MORGAN

Treat me to a chai.

PALMER

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

MORGAN

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

Palmer mimes putting a hand on an arm.

PALMER

Why did you --

MORGAN

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

PALMER

With Perkins?

MORGAN

With all of it.

PALMER

"It" is big and indefinite.

MORGAN

So let me be more specific.

PALMER

I have five minutes before class.

MORGAN

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

PALMER

It needs to be done.

MORGAN

"It" is big and indefinite.

PALMER

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

MORGAN

Your forehead just got really smooth.

PALMER

Did you like what I was doing?

MORGAN

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

PALMER

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

MORGAN

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

PALMER

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

MORGAN

Because you got a core, right?

PALMER
Because I got a core -- right.

MORGAN
A heart.

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

Palmer gets up, grabs his bag.

PALMER
Tea here every day?

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

PALMER
A date.

MORGAN
Improves the odds.

PALMER
I still don't trust you.

Morgan holds up her hand.

MORGAN
I will not wash 'til we meet again.

Palmer points to her hand.

PALMER
I'm not sure why --

MORGAN
I'm glad you're not sure.

They lock eyes.

MORGAN
Tomorrow would be good.

PALMER
Tomorrow, then.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 4

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

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

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

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

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

BOALS

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

Freeze. Palmer, finished setting up, takes off Perkins' mask, unlocks Boals' grip on Perkins, takes off the props. Then he and Morgan take their seats.

[From "Walk, Jaw Bone" (1844) -- pages 210-211 from "Minstrel Songs, Old and New" (1883)] -- <http://www.pdmusic.org/minstrel.html>]

PALMER

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

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

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

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 5

Perkins at the lectern, briefcase beside her. Palmer and Morgan are in their seats, Palmer with his hand raised. He holds a notebook.

PERKINS

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

Palmer beelines to Perkins, trailed by Morgan.

PALMER

Why didn't you call on me, Professor?

PERKINS

Because you make the same point in every session.

PALMER

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

PERKINS

I'm saying we have a syllabus.

PALMER

But you constantly shift off the subject --

PERKINS

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

PALMER

So that's how you would silence me.

PERKINS

Mr. Palmer --

PALMER

I have a right to voice --

PERKINS

But you don't have the teaching contract to teach.

PALMER

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

(consulting his notes)

-- you said as much on --

PERKINS

Did I?

PALMER

You did.

(flips some pages)

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

PERKINS

Destroys trust --

PALMER

Your words.

Perkins appraises him, then turns to Morgan.

PERKINS

Agree?

Palmer goes to say something, but Perkins puts up a hand to hold him off.

PERKINS

(to MORGAN)

Do you agree with him?

Palmer ignores the hand.

PALMER

In a class about --

PERKINS

(to PALMER)

You are in favor of free expression --

PALMER

Of course.

PERKINS

Then let Ms. Morgan express.

PALMER

Not until --

PERKINS

(to MORGAN)

Seems some tongues have more privileges than others.

PALMER

Sarcasm isn't --

PERKINS

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

PALMER

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

PERKINS

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

PALMER

So you deliberately cut off a student in mid-sentence --

PERKINS

When we've all heard that sentence several dozen times interrupting.

PALMER

So you'll ignore an opposing argument.

PERKINS

Not if I hear an actual argument.

PALMER

So now I don't know how to argue.

PERKINS

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

PALMER

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

PERKINS

I have a rule against whining.

PALMER

And anyone who disagrees is a whiner --

PERKINS

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

PALMER

Now were criminals --

PERKINS

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

PALMER

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

PERKINS

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

Palmer turns to exit, looks at Morgan.

PERKINS

(to MORGAN)

You didn't answer my earlier question.

Morgan looks at Palmer, then back to Perkins.

MORGAN

(slight hesitation)

Yes. Of course I agree.

PALMER

Let's go.

Palmer and Morgan exit.

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

PALMER

Do it.

BOALS

Don't do it.

PALMER

Do it.

BOALS

Don't.

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

PALMER & BOALS

You've just cut your own throat.

PERKINS

It didn't feel that bad.

Perkins examines the knife, licks the edge, then puts the knife away, regains her composure. Palmer and Boals exit.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 6

Morgan moves to catch up with Perkins.

MORGAN
Professor Perkins?

PERKINS
Ah.

MORGAN
Look, I'm --

PERKINS
Hannah Morgan. Middle name Susan.

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

PERKINS
I shouldn't have --

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

PERKINS
I've mentioned a lot.

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

PERKINS
You're actually interested in that.

MORGAN
Whether I wanna be or not.

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

MORGAN
I'll make an appointment.

PERKINS
Make it soon.

Perkins moves on. Morgan moves to follow.

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

PERKINS
You know about his group?

MORGAN

Yes.

PERKINS

They've caused a lot of problems.

MORGAN

Yes.

PERKINS

And trashed --

MORGAN

Yes.

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

He's not all wrong in what he says.

PERKINS

He's very wrong if he thinks "liberals" run this capitalist farm we call a law school. My fear? His conservative rant's got no legs. My fear is that Mr. Palmer is just a black face being used by nasty people for nasty purposes.

MORGAN

That's not fair to --

PERKINS

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

Perkins' vehemence has frozen the air between them.

PERKINS

I will be late to my meeting.

MORGAN

And I need to --

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

I do.

PERKINS

Good.

MORGAN

And you will definitely find it interesting.

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

Yes.

Morgan moves off. Perkins watches her.

PERKINS

Lillie -- gotta put a lock on. "Do not plunge thyself too far in anger." A closed mouth will gather no feet.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 7

Perkins and Boals. Boals hands Perkins a drink.

BOALS

So he did show up -- here --

PERKINS

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

BOALS

In things you don't believe.

PERKINS

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

BOALS

That dark matter.

PERKINS

(overlapping)

-- dark matter -- all you cynics are just boiled-over romantics.

BOALS

Cynic or not, the man with heart has you in his cross-hairs. The man with heart works for snipers, is a sniper.

PERKINS

It's not just me.

BOALS

No, it's the "liberals."

(raises his glass)

To the liberals, then. But you still have his
bulls-eye on you.

PERKINS

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

BOALS

Crippled witches.

PERKINS

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

BOALS

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

PERKINS

"Piss"casso'd? Sorry.

BOALS

We are celebrating, Lillie --

PERKINS

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

BOALS

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

PERKINS

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

BOALS

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

PERKINS

And unmarried, so ergo lesbian?

BOALS

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

PERKINS

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

BOALS

And that apparently has made you some enemies.
(gentle mock)

You liberal, you.

This does not perk up Perkins.

BOALS

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

PERKINS

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

BOALS

I am sure.

They fall silent for a moment.

BOALS

Come on. We have reservations. Shall we?

PERKINS

Can I take a rain check?

BOALS

Lillie --

PERKINS

I -- have -- prep --

BOALS

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

They stand. Perkins drains her glass and hands it to Boals. Boals drains his glass.

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

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

They pause. They shake hands. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 8

Perkins and Morgan in Perkins' office.

PERKINS
Your -- link with Mr. Palmer --

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

PERKINS
Yes.

MORGAN
Am I a snake in the grass?

PERKINS
Exactly.

MORGAN
Let me show you my answer.

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

MORGAN
It won't explode.

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

PERKINS
Something from your family.

MORGAN
Yes. An heirloom.

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

MORGAN
Open that.

Perkins opens it and brings out a tintype.

MORGAN

By the edges -- please.

PERKINS

A tintype.

Perkins turns it over, reads.

PERKINS

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

Perkins looks at the tintype, then at Morgan.

PERKINS

Her face.

MORGAN

Yes. My great-grandmother.

PERKINS

I can see her face in yours. But him?

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

MORGAN

My great-grandfather.

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

And Cherokee.

PERKINS

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

Boals and Morgan prepare for their photo.

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

They couldn't marry.

MORGAN

As illegal as murder, and thought even worse.

A strobe flashes: the picture. They adjust themselves.

PERKINS

So how?

MORGAN

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

Second strobe. They prepare for one more.

PERKINS

And they made this work?

MORGAN

I'm sitting here.

Third strobe. Morgan rises, hands Boals the shawl and flower. Boals exits. Morgan joins Perkins.

MORGAN

I know -- my white skin. Like yours -- like your book.

Morgan picks up the wooden box, taps it with her finger.

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

And?

MORGAN

And what?

PERKINS

Did you? Feel what they felt?

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

MORGAN

I know I really wanted to.

PERKINS

But?

A moment of tense silence.

PERKINS

Is there anything else you wanted to talk about?

In answer, Morgan holds out her hand, which Perkins realizes Morgan wants her to shake, which she does. Morgan rises and turns to leave.

PERKINS

Why do you have that with you, here? Why risk it?

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

Any journey?

MORGAN

Going to the Bahamas is not a "journey."

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

I have Contracts reading to do.

PERKINS

So do I.

MORGAN

So I should --

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

Snake in the --

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

Bent on what? What is Mitchell "bent on," according to you?

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

You asked me if I was --

PERKINS

I'm still asking.

MORGAN

And I told you I'd answer your question, and I showed you the picture.

PERKINS

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

A moment of suspension.

PERKINS

So tell me.

A moment of suspension.

PERKINS

Have you shown that picture to Mitchell Palmer?

MORGAN

I have my reading to do. Goodbye.

Morgan leaves. Perkins muses. Transition

* * * * *

Scene 9

Morgan and Palmer having coffee, Morgan with a print-out in her hand. To the side, in a separate light, stands Perkins.

PALMER

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

MORGAN

Your crew --

PALMER

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

MORGAN

It's so fucking nasty!

PALMER

I didn't do it.

MORGAN

But you know who did.

PERKINS

The security guard dropped the envelope on my desk.

Perkins holds up an envelope.

MORGAN

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

PALMER

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

PERKINS

(opening it)

I opened it.

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

MORGAN

Don't lie to me.

PALMER

Don't think I'm lying to you.

Morgan shoves the paper close to Palmer's face.

MORGAN

Because no human being deserves to be treated like this.

PERKINS

I typed in the URL --
(make "clickety" keyboard sounds)
-- and up pops my faculty picture --

MORGAN

(pointing)

"The new 'massah' in town"!!

PERKINS

And the cartoon balloon pinned to my mouth says -
-

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

Caption reads, "This is one species -- "

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

The glories of free speech.

PALMER

It's free speech.

Perkins dances while she sings "Jim Crow." [From "Jim Crow" (1829)

Words and Music by Thomas Dartmouth ("Daddy") Rice, 1808-1860 --
<http://www.pdmusic.org/minstrel.html>]

PERKINS

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

Light out on Perkins.

PALMER

Are you taking her side?

MORGAN

I'm not taking anyone's --

PALMER

Not even mine?

MORGAN

And which is that, Mitchell?

PALMER

Which do you think, Hannah?

Palmer touches her face softly.

PALMER

Which side do you think I want to be on?

MORGAN

Just don't pun me that you're on "the right side."

PALMER

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

MORGAN
It's so nasty.

PALMER
I don't disagree.

MORGAN
I want to believe you.

PALMER
And I want to believe you.

MORGAN
But what?

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

MORGAN
How do you know that?

PALMER
I know.

MORGAN
There's a lot to talk about in that course.
That's all we talked about.

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

MORGAN
I do.

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

MORGAN
I hope so.

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

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

PALMER
Makes me feel a thousand miles away.

It does?

MORGAN

Yes.

PALMER

That true?

MORGAN

Yes.

PALMER

Because it makes me feel double that.

MORGAN

Always gotta one-up on me.

PALMER
(smiling)

I like being one-up on you.

MORGAN

We didn't do that.

PALMER
(pointing to paper)

Okay.

MORGAN

You sure?

PALMER

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

MORGAN

It's not mine, Hannah -- but I have got a problem.

PALMER

So tell me.

MORGAN

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

PALMER
(points to paper)

There's what?

MORGAN

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

PALMER

MORGAN
Act like assholes?

PALMER
Up the "voltage."

MORGAN
Like an electric chair --

PALMER
It wasn't supposed to be like that.

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

Morgan caresses his cheek.

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

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

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

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

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

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

MORGAN
What are you thinking about, then?

PALMER
See if you can read my mind.

They read each other's mind. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 10

Perkins and Boals. Boals has a bag of nuts or chocolate coffee beans.

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

BOALS

The contract will be signed, sealed, and delivered.

PERKINS

Have you seen the full-court press on me?

BOALS

I have because you've told me about it.

PERKINS

I just don't want --

BOALS

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

PERKINS

It's not a tea-pot. This is about academic freedom --

BOALS

Of course.

PERKINS

But?

BOALS

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

PERKINS

Mine!

BOALS

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

PERKINS

Whose side are you on?

BOALS

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

PERKINS

This is serious --

BOALS

Can that tell from your serious face.

PERKINS

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

BOALS

As if I haven't been.

PERKINS

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

BOALS

"Brit piss-off" --

PERKINS

You know, that little -- thing --

BOALS

Thing.

PERKINS

Mannerism --

(badly imitating)

"I'm always on the side of my bread -- "

BOALS

I'll tell you what.

PERKINS

Tell me what.

Boals sticks the bag in his pocket.

BOALS

Let us do "serious," just for the sake of calming
Lillie Perkins.

PERKINS

Now you are pissed off.

BOALS

Let us do serious. You begin. Begin.

PERKINS

No.

BOALS

Begin.

PERKINS

If I can't teach because some conservative
knucklehead --

BOALS

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

PERKINS

I am not "liberal" -- I just try to talk some common sense into them.

BOALS

And what's so common about your common sense? What makes your common sense more common than his?

PERKINS

It's my class. My name's on the syllabus.

BOALS

Which means they shut up?

PERKINS

It's about courtesy and respect --

BOALS

Which means on your terms?

PERKINS

No, on the terms for any civilized discourse --

BOALS

"Civilized discourse" --

Boals bows in mock servility to Perkins.

BOALS

(mock Southern accent)

Beg yer pardon, mistress, but with great respect and courtesy --

PERKINS

What are you doing?

BOALS

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

PERKINS

What are you doing?

BOALS

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

PERKINS

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

BOALS

They feel oppressed --

PERKINS

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

BOALS

Feel they have to change the rules.

PERKINS

These -- vandals are not interested in revolutionary liberation!

BOALS

And who says revolutions have to liberate?

PERKINS

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

BOALS

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

PERKINS

Are you being purposefully pig-headed?

BOALS

I am purposefully taking you seriously.

A moment of suspension.

PERKINS

You are, aren't you?

BOALS

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

Boals takes out the bag, offers. Perkins demurs.

PERKINS

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

BOALS

When they don't play by the rules.

PERKINS

But here's how it works in my in-house. I've got "I'se gonna get me some conservative white meat to eat!" coming out of my cartoon mouth -- and I get a call from the Dean to come in for a "chat."

BOALS

Really?

PERKINS

As of nine a.m.

BOALS

Tomorrow?

PERKINS

In all its petty pace.

BOALS

Is this something "official"?

PERKINS

In my world, "chat" means a tiny warning shot across the bows. Then it can bump up to "a little talk," then a "discussion" --

BOALS

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

PERKINS

The accuser gets the leverage, not me.

BOALS

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

PERKINS

I so enjoy seeing how naive you are.

BOALS

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

PERKINS

So far.

BOALS

Relief supplied.

PERKINS

My record, you said --

BOALS

Exemplary, I'm sure.

PERKINS

Well, maybe at some point it might help -- but at the moment, fingers are pointed, and that gets the poo-bahs nervous.

BOALS

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

PERKINS

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

BOALS

In all my naiveté --

PERKINS

This is a tempest in a teapot --

BOALS

A tempest is a tempest, though.

PERKINS

Just ride it out.

BOALS

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

PERKINS

Why do you think I'm here telling you and not coffee'd-up with my colleagues? My department chair? Crowned with supportive emails?

BOALS

Beyond this literary agent's charm.

PERKINS

Because they're all scared -- the tar-brush can swing wide. And I am not universally liked --

BOALS

I didn't realize it would be so --

PERKINS

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

BOALS

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

PERKINS

(overlapping)

Sealed and delivered -- yes -- good.

BOALS

I'm sorry to see you so fretful.

PERKINS

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

BOALS

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

A silent moment between them.

BOALS

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

PERKINS

I asked for it -- you were honor-bound to deliver.

BOALS

The ass part?

PERKINS

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

BOALS

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

PERKINS

I promise to remain un-crapped-on!

BOALS

Good.

Another silent moment between them.

PERKINS

I'd better go --

BOALS

And I do have calls --

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

* * * * *

Scene 11

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

PERKINS

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

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

PERKINS

Damn damn damn damn damn --

Palmer appears as he did before, as William, and he inches toward Perkins.

PALMER

Ellen? Ellen?

Perkins looks up, sees him.

PERKINS

William? What am I saying? William?

PALMER

Ellen -- we're safe.

Perkins jerks away.

PERKINS

Get away from me.

PALMER

What's the matter?

PERKINS

Get away from me!

PALMER

This is me, William --

PERKINS

No, it's not --

PALMER

This is William --

PERKINS

It is not!

PALMER

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

Palmer goes to touch her face. Perkins pulls back.

PALMER

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

PERKINS

No, no, no!

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

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

PERKINS

Good.

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

Perkins places a foot in Palmer's crotch, grinds it gently.

PERKINS

Is it true?

PALMER

What ma'am?

PERKINS

Say it again.

PALMER

Ma'am.

PERKINS

(with relish)

Ma'am -- that niggers got big ones?
(a little more grind)

I ain't feeling anything.

PALMER

I don't know, ma'am.

Perkins grinds a touch harder. Palmer yelps, cuts it off.

PERKINS

Still ain't feeling much.

PALMER

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

PERKINS

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

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

PERKINS

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

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

["Twinkling Stars Are Laughing, Love" (1855) Poetry and Music by John P. Ordway -- source: pages 33-35 of "Minstrel Songs, Old and New" (1883), <http://www.pdmusic.org/minstrel.html>]

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

CHORUS

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

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

CHORUS

PERKINS

Come on, nigger lad -- plowing time.

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

PERKINS

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

Still, Palmer does not move. Perkins takes another step back.

PERKINS

Come on, darky --

Palmer does not move. Perkins takes another step back. She is very close.

PERKINS

Come on, jigaboo --

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

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

PERKINS

You will not be needing this any more.

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

BOALS

We got ourselves a wind chime!

Perkins and Boals laugh, then they cut the laughter off. Boals pulls the penis away.

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

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

PERKINS

Where is it?

Keeps looking -- waits.

PERKINS

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

Looks -- waits.

PERKINS

Nothing.

Boals appears in the shadows.

PERKINS

Nothing.

Boals moves toward Perkins.

PERKINS

It felt --

BOALS

What?

PERKINS

Can I even say this?

BOALS

Say what you want.

PERKINS

It felt --

BOALS

What?

PERKINS

I'm ashamed to say this.

BOALS

Only shame in hiding what you know from yourself.

PERKINS

All right, then. It felt --

BOALS

Yes?

PERKINS

Good. Hard. Bitter. Good.

Perkins holds up the death threat like a chalice.

PERKINS

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

BOALS

Are you surprised?

PERKINS

Absolutely!

BOALS

By what?

PERKINS

How clean it feels, to slice off what we are commanded to respect -- like "civilized discourse" --

Perkins folds then tears the death threat to pieces.

PERKINS

Hatred really is a kind of grace.

BOALS

Pain can be a privilege sometimes.

Perkins finishes, turns to Boals.

PERKINS

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

BOALS

I did. This contract will become a contract.

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

INTERMISSION

Scene 12

Palmer and Boals come on in half-masks to sing. [From "Balm of Gilead" (1861), arranged by H. T. Bryant. Pages 108-111 of "Minstrel Songs, Old and New" (1883), <http://www.pdmusic.org/minstrel.html>]

PALMER & BOALS

Oh, we aint, going home any more,
Oh, we aint, going home any more,
Oh, we aint, going home any more,
Down't the peach blow farm.
Balm of Gilead,
Balm of Gilead,
Balm of Gilead,
Going home no more.

* * * * *

Scene 13

Morgan and Perkins at the café: table, chairs, coffee cup.

PERKINS

But there was something else?

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

And what what is that?

MORGAN

The -- letter -- letters -- and emails --

PERKINS

The grapevine's pretty active --

MORGAN

Everyone's wired --

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

And Contracts --

PERKINS

And Mitchell Palmer --

MORGAN

And pigment.

PERKINS

Pigment?

MORGAN

Discoloration.

PERKINS

(with accent)

"Dis cuhlah [color] nation" --

Morgan gives Perkins a strange look.

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

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

PERKINS
And you're not --

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

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

MORGAN
I wish I hadn't.

PERKINS
Let's put to one side. The problem with your
"cuhlah" is --

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

PERKINS
But you are "cuhlah'd."

MORGAN
No I'm not.

PERKINS
Yes you are.

MORGAN
I won't be stuffed into a category.

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

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

PERKINS
Just bleach it away.

MORGAN
Get me some Clorox!

PERKINS

The problem with young people --

MORGAN

The problem with old people is them bitchin' out young people about "their ancestors." My family's always got me "rememberin'" and "witnessin'" to the glorious past of them that died to carry on --

PERKINS

Like John and Susan Morgan --

MORGAN

I am so sick of "carrying the torch." Professor, I just wanna be the mongrel I am, the mongrel everybody really is. I don't want black because I've seen how that word just grinds people up --

PERKINS

But you can't deny --

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

Then what do you want?

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

But, Hannah, a real identity --

Light up downstage.

MORGAN

Shut up! Shut the hell and damnation up!

Morgan stalks into the light.

MORGAN

Link:

the transnation of the older generations carries me in its histories from Afric ["ah-FREEK"]

to this empire's bantustans,
where even now our unmasked-for emperors hold
their colored death grips.

Fuck it!

We are the new mestizo of the hyphen-nation.
Born in the desires that inhabit this borderland
between the emptinesses of destin(y-n)ation --
we are the postmodern, we are the
"land of all of us," pan-everything,

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

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

Link:
End.

Light out. Morgan moves back to Perkins.

MORGAN

See --

PERKINS

Quite some journey your tintype is on.

MORGAN

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

At that moment, Palmer appears.

PALMER

I thought we had our 11 o'clock.

MORGAN

We do.

Perkins stands.

PERKINS

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

PALMER

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

PERKINS

Really?

(to MORGAN)

Right here? Every day?

Morgan looks Perkins straight in the eye and says nothing.

PALMER

Yes, here.

PERKINS

Well, I was just going anyways.

A moment of awkwardness as Morgan gets up.

PERKINS

(to MORGAN)

I hope I have been of use to you.

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

* * * * *

Scene 14

The classroom: Morgan and Palmer seated. Perkins is not yet there. Palmer fidgets. Perkins enters, takes her position.

PERKINS

Welcome. Today --

Palmer stands, a paper in his hand. Perkins sees him, waits. Palmer waits.

PERKINS

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

Morgan stands, rips the paper from his hand.

MORGAN
This is what he wants to say.

PALMER
(hissing)
Sit down.

Morgan ignores him, keeps the paper from him.

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

PALMER
Sit down.

Morgan does not sit down.

PERKINS
Sit down.

Morgan still does not sit down.

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

PERKINS
I don't --

MORGAN
It's all about you.
(rounds on PALMER)
Don't!

Palmer sits.

MORGAN
The ESS -- EFF -- A -- wants to move him out.
Didn't know that, did you? They've used him up
and now want to throw him away. So he's making
his big play --
(reads)
"The Contracts and Property class of Professor
Lillie Perkins should be avoided as a 'toxic
intellectual site'" -- listen to that! -- "since
she clearly is not interested in intellectual
diversity."
(to PERKINS)
There's lots more.

PERKINS
I think you should stop --

MORGAN

(exaggerated)

"The -- ESS -- EFF -- A -- has filed a complaint with the university against Professor Perkins based upon the following indictments -- " Such a long word!

(to PALMER)

I told you to leave me alone!

(to PERKINS)

I'm going to go on -- this is so fascinating!

PERKINS

No you're not.

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

Ms. Morgan --

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

Ms. Morgan, I want you to shut up.

MORGAN

There's more.

PERKINS

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

Morgan very deliberately balls up the paper.

PERKINS

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

As Morgan sits, she drops the paper into Palmer's lap.

MORGAN

Consider it all worked out, Professor.

PERKINS

Consider yourself warned for the last time.

A tense silence. Boals steps up behind Perkins.

BOALS

I wouldn't do it.

PERKINS
"Extraneous material," was it?

Perkins pauses, gathers herself.

BOALS
You might not want to.

PERKINS
(to BOALS)
Shut up.

(back out)
This memoir that has your -- knickers twisted --

BOALS
This is not your better nature.

PERKINS
(to BOALS)
Fuck off.

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

BOALS
Which cuts both ways --

PERKINS
-- and if the study of the "sacred" property laws
shows us anything, it shows us that the more
liberal we become, the better we become as
people.

(to PALMER)
I want you to stand up.

BOALS
Are you sure you want to --

PERKINS
Without a doubt.

BOALS
Don't do things without a doubt.

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

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

PALMER

I will not be mocked.

BOALS

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

PERKINS

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

BOALS

You will lose --

PERKINS

Come here.

BOALS

-- even if you win this.

PERKINS

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

BOALS

It's never that time.

Palmer moves downstage so that Perkins can face him directly.

PERKINS

Step closer.

BOALS

The dark heart rises.

But so impatient is Perkins that before Palmer can move, Perkins moves closer to him.

PERKINS

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

PALMER

I can't -- I have to --

PERKINS

Then do it.

PALMER

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

PERKINS

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

Palmer leaves. Morgan follows him out.

PERKINS

I wish I had enough ego for arrogance without regret.

BOALS

But all you have is a heart.

Perkins turns back to begin the lecture.

PERKINS

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

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 15

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

MORGAN

You want something harder.

PALMER

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

MORGAN

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

Palmer rounds on her with a gesture so uncharacteristically menacing that it brings Morgan up short.

MORGAN

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

PALMER

You are such a goddamned liar.

Palmer snatches the paper out of her hand.

PALMER

You have forfeited.

MORGAN

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

PALMER

Don't, don't, don't!

MORGAN

I didn't want to see you --

PALMER

(into MORGAN's face)

I told you to shut up!

Eyes level with each other until Morgan looks away.

PALMER

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

Palmer unbuckles his belt and snaps open his pants.

PALMER

Does the mulatto want to finish hacking them off?

MORGAN

Can't lose what you don't have.

Palmer reaches into his underwear.

PALMER

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

Palmer stretches his underwear, speaks into his crotch.

PALMER

No worry, huevos -- she ain't getting near you again.

(to MORGAN)

They're happy.

MORGAN

At least something is.

PALMER

No thanks to you.

Palmer buckles up.

PALMER

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

MORGAN

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

PALMER

Shut up.

MORGAN

At least you're talking in your own voice.

PALMER

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

MORGAN

You.

PALMER

See how easy that is.

MORGAN

It's true.

PALMER

Why else would you humiliate me?

MORGAN

It felt --

PALMER

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

MORGAN

I felt -- sharp -- saying --

PALMER

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

MORGAN

Yes, of course.

PALMER

Not for my own good.

MORGAN

Completely not for your own good.

PALMER

At least now [you're being] --

MORGAN
Completely. God, it feels --

PALMER
You feel --

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

PALMER
The way that mulatto brain works.

MORGAN
Don't call me that.

PALMER
Calling out your mulatto thinking --

MORGAN
Don't call me that.

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

MORGAN
Is that supposed to be --

PALMER
-- because what Hannah Morgan feels --

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

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

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

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

MORGAN
For you, maybe --

PALMER

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

MORGAN

I gave you a gift --

PALMER

You gave me pain.

MORGAN

That was the gift.

PALMER

You come along to "do me good" --

MORGAN

You won't get used anymore --

PALMER

By you or anyone else, which makes me now a complete half a man -- yassuh!

(in his best black voice)

And why would the cleansed one over there want to stay with a mongrel like that? Like me? Hmm? I thought so.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 16

Perkins and Boals. Umbrellas.

PERKINS

I was out of line.

BOALS

Be more specific.

PERKINS

I'm not sure I want to be.

BOALS

I want you to be.

PERKINS

I'm not sure I can.

BOALS

Denial does not flatter you.

PERKINS

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

BOALS

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

PERKINS

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

BOALS

Not interested.

PERKINS

You've been interested before.

BOALS

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

PERKINS

They're being useless at the moment.

BOALS

Have you kissed them as well?

PERKINS

You're saying my kiss would make them useless?

BOALS

You never know when intellectuals connect with sex and power.

PERKINS

You're being cruel.

BOALS

Until you tell me why.

PERKINS

Did my kiss make you useless?

BOALS

I'm not an intellectual.

PERKINS

So it made you what?

BOALS

Your kiss --

PERKINS

Made you what?

BOALS
It gave me --

PERKINS
What?

BOALS
Pause.

PERKINS
That's a denial.

BOALS
Don't flatter yourself.

PERKINS
Why not if you won't.

BOALS
This is going to go nowhere.

PERKINS
"Pause" --

BOALS
Lillie, you should go.

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

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

PERKINS
Look at you --

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

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

BOALS
So you want to know?

PERKINS
Yes.

BOALS
I "paused" -- and I did think -- desire -- perhaps why not?

PERKINS

Use her.

BOALS

A little twinge. A weakness.

PERKINS

You've given in before?

BOALS

With regret.

PERKINS

But at the moment of the giving in --

BOALS

You think you know, but you don't.

PERKINS

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

BOALS

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

PERKINS

It does for most people.

BOALS

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

PERKINS

You don't like pleasure.

BOALS

I don't like being lied to -- and pleasure is a cheat.

PERKINS

That's an ill-conceived [thought] --

BOALS

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

PERKINS

You'd prefer to be miserable.

BOALS

I'd prefer to be honest with myself. And with you.

PERKINS

So I get included?

BOALS

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

PERKINS

Me.

BOALS

You.

PERKINS

Which is why I get the "pause"?

BOALS

Before I regret again -- and ruin --

PERKINS

What?

BOALS

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

PERKINS

That's cruel.

BOALS

Exactly.

PERKINS

And that's cruel as well.

BOALS

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

PERKINS

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

BOALS

We --

PERKINS

"We"?

BOALS

-- only have your word for that.

PERKINS

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

A moment of suspension.

BOALS

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

PERKINS

Your idea of a good idea stinks.

BOALS

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

PERKINS

At least something got laid.

Perkins is unsure whether to stay or go.

BOALS

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

PERKINS

You said "if."

BOALS

Did I?

PERKINS

Don't play dumb unless you are.

BOALS

I did say "if."

PERKINS

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

BOALS

What do you think that means?

PERKINS

From you? I don't know.

BOALS

You don't trust me.

PERKINS

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

BOALS

You don't.

PERKINS

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

BOALS

And?

PERKINS

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

BOALS

You don't know your own want.

PERKINS

No. I don't.

BOALS

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

PERKINS

Which leaves us --

BOALS

In a much better position.

PERKINS

Why doesn't it feel better?

BOALS

Which would you rather feel, better or honest?

PERKINS

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

BOALS

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

PERKINS

"If there is anything between us."

BOALS

If there is anything between us.

PERKINS

Other than just air.

BOALS

And a "maybe."

PERKINS

I am going to kiss you again.

They kiss.

PERKINS

That is goddamn amazing.

BOALS

Tell me about your class.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 17

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

MORGAN

Damn damn damn damn damn damn --

Boals enters as John Morgan, wearing a headband and dressed for a photograph. He carries a shawl and a flower.

BOALS

Don't.

Boals kneels down to her.

BOALS

Don't cry.

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

BOALS

What?

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

MORGAN

My skin -- my color.

BOALS
I like your skin. And your color.

MORGAN
You're white.

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

Boals points to the headband.

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

MORGAN
For what?

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

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

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

Boals helps Morgan pose.

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

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

BOALS
'Nother one.

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

BOALS
That's all the money we got.

Boals turns Morgan to face him.

BOALS
It ain't about the money, anyway.

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

Palmer enters, carrying a metal bucket holding blackberries, gives it to Boals, then exits.

MORGAN

He brought me blackberries for courting -- a bucket of blackberries.

BOALS

Sweet physic, I called them.

MORGAN

Sweet as an angel's fingertip.

BOALS

We sat on your porch eating them.

MORGAN

You meet a person, you cross the river --

BOALS

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

MORGAN

(echoing, smiling)

Color in that?

BOALS

Amen.

Palmer enters wearing the white half mask holding a rifle.

PALMER

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

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

* * * * *

Scene 18

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

PERKINS

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

Perkins peels off the gloves.

PERKINS

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

Perkins drops the gloves into the briefcase.

PERKINS

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

Perkins picks up the briefcase.

PERKINS

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

Lights shift: Morgan. Perkins sees her.

PERKINS

I can't talk to you right now.

MORGAN

Your secretary said you'd be here.

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

I've been waiting.

Perkins moves off. Morgan follows.

MORGAN

Something amazing has happened. Please.

PERKINS

Tell me why I should. After what happened.

MORGAN

I don't have an excuse -- I was out of line.

PERKINS

You were more than that.

MORGAN

Whatever "more" that is, that's what I was. And even more. And I'm sorry.

PERKINS

Which still gets you nothing.

MORGAN

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

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

PERKINS

Tell me.

MORGAN

I was Susan.

PERKINS

You were Susan?

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

You, who doesn't want to be black?

MORGAN

Apparently I'm open.

PERKINS

Or opened.

MORGAN

Or opened.

PERKINS

Does this have anything to do with Mr. Palmer?

MORGAN

Do you have time for a tea?

Perkins appraises her.

PERKINS

I don't know. Because I don't know if I can trust you.

MORGAN
It's just a tea. I'll treat.

PERKINS
I'll pay for my own.

Perkins continues to appraise her.

PERKINS
I'm on pause.

MORGAN
Are you thinking about "yes"?

Perkins puts her arm through Morgan's arm.

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

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

* * * * *

Scene 19

Boals in his office. Perkins on the opposite side of the stage.
Morgan upstage. All in individual lights.

BOALS
Did you see it?

PERKINS
They forwarded it to you?

BOALS
Yes.

PERKINS
Those bastards --

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

PERKINS
I'm sorry --

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

MORGAN

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

BOALS

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

PERKINS

Hannah Morgan.

BOALS

How's she taking it?

PERKINS

I don't know.

BOALS

They reamed her out pretty good.

MORGAN

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

BOALS

Is that story true?

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

Why are you pleased?

BOALS

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

MORGAN

Fucking sold me out.

PERKINS

The race cards --

BOALS

I'm just suggesting --

PERKINS

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

BOALS

Then no.

PERKINS

What?

BOALS

We should let it sit.

MORGAN

"Watch the two niggers passing like the wind."

BOALS

Nothing decided in anger.

MORGAN

"Mongrel" was right.

PERKINS

"Anger" from here feels fine to me.

BOALS

See how it feels in the morning.

MORGAN

His goddamn fears have made him a fool.

BOALS

I just wanted to check in with you.

PERKINS

You did?

BOALS

I did.

PERKINS

You're sweet to do that.

BOALS

Yes I am.

PERKINS

No regrets?

BOALS

(laughing)

It's amazing what a second kiss can reveal.

Lights out on Perkins and Boals. Morgan remains lighted. She fidgets, then strides downstage. She peers into the audience as if peering into a mirror.

In the shadow Perkins appears holding a jar of facial cleanser named "Dead Sea Black Mud." Perkins opens it, and Morgan scoops out a gob

and smears it across her face. She keeps on doing it until her face is covered in black grainy mud.

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

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

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

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

Morgan hands back the towel, and Perkins and Boals exit.

Morgan speaks into the air.

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

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 20

Morgan and Palmer.

PALMER
I am fighting them.

Morgan does not respond.

PALMER
I am not weak.

Morgan again does not respond.

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

Morgan still does not respond.

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

MORGAN

(interrupting)

Don't blow smoke up my ass. You saw the website. Savaged -- both of us.

PALMER

That's right.

MORGAN

(mocking)

"That's right." Even if I don't agree with her, I respect her --

PALMER

Stop it --

(equal mock)

-- "even if" -- now who's blowing smoke -- of course you agree with her -- two birds of the same mulatto feather -- sisters of the "mix" -- you showed her the picture, after all.

MORGAN

I showed her the picture because of her --

PALMER

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

MORGAN

That doesn't make it open season --

PALMER

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

Palmer waits for a response.

PALMER

I am not hearing rebuttal. I am not hearing retort.

Palmer gets none.

PALMER

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

MORGAN

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

PALMER

You could do worse --

MORGAN

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

PALMER

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

MORGAN

I'll take that over heartless and gutless.

PALMER

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

MORGAN

How about you being straight-out with me?

PALMER

You sure?

MORGAN

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

PALMER

(echoing)

From whom --

MORGAN

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

PALMER

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

MORGAN

I'm not talking about that one.

PALMER

I am -- that was mine.

MORGAN

You swore it wasn't.

PALMER

I lied. Flat out.

MORGAN

You betrayed me.

PALMER

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

MORGAN

(unconvinced)

I am not like you.

PALMER

Dawn comes late to Marblehead.

A momentary suspension.

PALMER

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

MORGAN

Not anymore.

PALMER

Oh yes we are.

MORGAN

No.

PALMER

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

Morgan hesitates.

PALMER

You can go.

Morgan stays.

PALMER

You can go.

Morgan still stays.

PALMER

You can go.

MORGAN

All right! I was a coward.

PALMER

That's not the word I'd use.

MORGAN

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

PALMER

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

MORGAN

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

PALMER

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

MORGAN

What you believe sucks.

PALMER

That shows how much you don't understand.

MORGAN

It'll rot your soul.

PALMER

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

MORGAN

There it goes already.

PALMER

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

Morgan motions for him to stop.

MORGAN

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

PALMER

I promise to do the same for you.

MORGAN

And your principles still suck.

PALMER

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

A momentary suspension.

PALMER

Do you want to get some tea?

Palmer offers her his arm.

PALMER

And maybe something after the tea as well.

Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 21

Perkins' office. Perkins stares off into space. Morgan enters, carrying the wooden case holding the tintype.

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

I thought you were someone else.

MORGAN

But you did ask me to come.

PERKINS

I've asked several to come.

MORGAN

(showing box with tintype)

And bring this.

Perkins turns away, stares back into space. Morgan, not sure what to do, sits down.

PERKINS

Sit down.

Morgan, already seated, remains sitting.

PERKINS

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

(Perkins faces Morgan)

Whazzup?

Morgan raises the box.

MORGAN

I have been having more visions.

PERKINS

I am not in the mood.

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

Because you lack a memory?

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

A change of heart.

MORGAN

You sound like you don't believe me.

PERKINS

That's because I don't.

MORGAN

Why wouldn't you?

PERKINS

Because you have no heart to change.

MORGAN

Why did you call me to come here?

PERKINS

Not because I love hypocrites.

MORGAN

Then why?

PERKINS

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

Perkins waits for Morgan to make a move. Morgan doesn't make a move.

PERKINS

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

Morgan sits tight.

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

Yes.

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

Yes.

PERKINS

You knew he was going to do that?

MORGAN

Yes.

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

You walk your road, I walk mine.

Perkins waits.

PERKINS

That's it.

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

How do you know that?

MORGAN

I've been reading.

PERKINS

You've been reading.

MORGAN

I have been doing my assignments.

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

And Susan Morgan?

MORGAN

Susan went on -- and on and on and on.

PERKINS

Such a waste.

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

He's not stuck in the myth.

MORGAN

He is all about moving forward.

PERKINS

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

Perkins checks her watch.

PERKINS

We're done.

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

PERKINS

May I? Before you go. My last time.

Morgan hands over the box. Perkins opens it carefully, takes out the
tintype, stares at it.

PERKINS

Such a waste, Hannah.

Perkins takes the tin-type and puts one edge against one palm and the
other edge against the other palm. Without much effort, Perkins could
bend it in half.

PERKINS

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

MORGAN

You wouldn't.

Without hesitation Perkins bends it in half.

PERKINS

So much for civilized discourse.

Perkins tosses it on the floor. Morgan drops to her knees to pick it
up, carefully unbends it.

Boals enters.

PERKINS

Right on time.

BOALS

I'm sorry -- I'm interrupting --

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

BOALS
I came as soon as I --

PERKINS
Lawrence, this is Hannah Morgan.

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

MORGAN
(getting up)
I'm fine.

PERKINS
Ms. Morgan, my agent Lawrence Boals.

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

PERKINS
(to BOALS)
You all right?

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

PERKINS
You don't look fine.

BOALS
We'll talk later.

PERKINS
Something tells me we should talk now.

MORGAN
I was leaving --

PERKINS
Yes you were.

Perkins ignores Morgan. Perkins and Boals look at each other, and an understanding passes between them. Morgan watches.

PERKINS

There's trouble.

BOALS

It can be worked out.

PERKINS

Because of everything --

BOALS

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

PERKINS

(to MORGAN)

You said that Susan Morgan had gone on and on --

MORGAN

Why should I answer you?

PERKINS

You said --

MORGAN

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

PERKINS

Just like my people did --

MORGAN

Named after John Morgan.

PERKINS

Funny how we think schools will make us smarter.

MORGAN

And books.

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

BOALS

Imagine how much worse if --

PERKINS

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

Transition moves seamlessly into the next scene. Boals and Morgan exit.

* * * * *

Scene 22

Perkins walks up to Palmer. Light as if coming from a streetlight.

PERKINS

-- are at the gate, and waiting --

PALMER

Who's at the gate? Which gate?

PERKINS

Of Paradise. Would you like to fuck me?

Palmer stares at her.

PALMER

Rephrase it.

PERKINS

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

PALMER

Could be better.

PERKINS

I want you to fuck me.

PALMER

Why?

PERKINS

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

Palmer stares at her.

PERKINS

You pause.

PALMER

I could let you have a taste.

PERKINS

Somehow I knew you wouldn't disappoint me.

PALMER

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

Perkins moves into a different light as light goes out on Palmer, who exits.

PERKINS

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

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

PERKINS

Some things just never change.

Boals joins Perkins.

BOALS

How are you doing?

PERKINS

I'm fine.

BOALS

Good.

PERKINS

I'm going to write another book.

BOALS

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

Perkins gives Boals a violent, vicious shove out of the light. Light on Palmer out.

PERKINS

Some things just never goddamn change, do they?

Blackout.