Little-Known Documents

God Sends Sunday

WALLACE THURMAN

INTRODUCTION BY SARAH GLEESON-WHITE

Hidden in plain sight in the Beinecke Library's James Weldon Johnson Collection at Yale University lies the typescript of "God Sends Sunday," a hitherto unknown three-act play by the Harlem Renaissance enfant terrible, Wallace Thurman. The 149-page play was only recently added to the collection's "manuscript miscellany," and, perhaps also accounting for its status as unknown, it shares the title of the poet Arna Bontemps's first novel, written as Thurman was writing his *God Sends Sunday*, sometime between 1929 and 1931.[1] After publishing his novel, Bontemps collaborated with the poet Countee Cullen on a "straight play" of it (Bontemps), which eventually became the Broadway musical *St. Louis Woman* and then a Federal Theater production for which Langston Hughes was brought on board.[2]

Set at the turn of the twentieth century, Bontemps's novel tells of the amorous and other adventures of Lil Augie, a rapscallion Black jockey who traverses the country from New Orleans to St. Louis to Los Angeles. Thurman's play, by contrast, is set squarely in 1920s Harlem and focuses on the good-living Johnson family, Black southern transplants who run a respectable boarding house; their newest tenant is Jock, a former jockey. Thurman's *God Sends Sunday* narrates a now familiar tale of Harlem life, one of generational and regional conflict arising out of the Great Migration to the "city of refuge,"[3] a plot and set of themes that hark back at least to Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods* (1902) and, indeed, to Thurman's 1926 story, "Cordelia the Crude, a Harlem Sketch," and which are here overlaid with a folksy humor deriving from the down-home, wise-cracking matriarch, Miranda, and from neighborhood gossip and philanderings.

While Bontemps and Cullen's dramatization of Bontemps's novel was both poets' first foray into playwrighting, Thurman had already composed several plays, with his frequent collaborator, the white playwright and editor William Jourdan Rapp: *Color Parade: A Dramatic Trilogy* (*Harlem: An Episode of Life in New York's Black Belt*, *Jeremiah the Magnificent*, and *Black Cinderella*) and *Sultan*

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Smith.[4] Stamped on the blue card cover of *God Sends Sunday* is the first clue to its provenance: "Elisabeth Marbury, 234 West 44th Street, New York." The New York heiress Marbury was a powerful Broadway agent to whom Dorothy West introduced Thurman in late 1929 or early 1930. According to West, Marbury "believed enough in his talent to advance him a generous sum to keep him in food and rent while he completed" *Infants of the Spring* in mid-1930 (171). Another clue that might aid in situating *God Sends Sunday* is Thurman's reference, in a letter to Harold Jackman, to "the [David] Belasco play . . . over three quarters finished" ("To Harold Jackman" 168). Zora Neale Hurston recalled that Belasco "commissioned Wallace Thurman to dramatize a Negro novel, but when Thurman turned in the finished work, Belasco rejected it with the statement: It does not contain the simple Negro that *we all know*" (111). Could this "Negro novel" be Bontemps's (as yet unpublished?), and could Thurman have radically altered its plot, to Belasco's chagrin? Thurman concludes his letter thus: "I shall try once more to finish Act Three of *Goodbye New York*" ("To Harold Jackman" 169). The "Belasco play" and *Goodbye New York*, of which I have found no other trace or mention, may well be one and the same thing; in *God Sends Sunday*, the lecherous Reverend Blackstone does indeed bid New York goodbye.

There is a related, at least as perplexing, question to consider: How did Thurman and Bontemps come simultaneously to compose narratives bearing the same title and featuring (if to different degrees) a Black jockey? They knew each other well after first meeting in Los Angeles in 1922. But we can only speculate how much they shared or absorbed of each other's work, although it may be fruitful to recall the entanglement—"the tensions between originality and derivativeness" (Moynihan, "*Romans à Clef*" 126)—of Thurman's *Infants of the Spring* with Richard Bruce Nugent's *Gentleman Jigger*, which Sinéad Moynihan and others have teased out.

While it may not—yet—be possible to find answers to the questions the unearthing of *God Sends Sunday* generates, it is clear that the discovery matters. To begin, in expanding the Thurman opus, the play encourages us to regard him as much a playwright as a novelist—he remains almost exclusively known as the author of the novels *The Blacker the Berry* and *Infants of the Spring* even as we now have at least four of his plays.[5] *God Sends Sunday* also forms an important addition to the corpus of interwar Black drama, a relatively understudied genre, especially in the comic mode, that may reflect the instability of the genre: How to stage Blackness in the wake of minstrel and other popular traditions of white performance so contemptuous of African Americans (see Colbert)? *God Sends Sunday* undertakes something of a juggling act in this regard. If indeed aiming to exploit "Negromania on Broadway" (Thurman, "To Langston Hughes" 109), Thurman would have been somewhat obliged to cater to an audience wishing for familiar "stereotypes of the happy, carefree African American who does not and will not challenge white supremacy" (Dickson-Carr, Introduction 251). Such an audience, irked by or willfully disregarding the play's depictions of the predicaments of Jim Crow Harlem, and the grueling dailiness of these, might prefer to take at face value the layabout, the buffoon, the "pool hall Johnnies," and other types Thurman deploys for comic ends (*God Sends Sunday*, act 1).

God Sends Sunday also brings into view an intriguing set of relations between major New Negro authors (Thurman, Bontemps, Cullen, Hughes) and between texts and genres (novel, straight play, musical). Such twists and tangles encourage a different thinking about New Negro authorship, in terms of, most obviously, single authorship but also collaboration: as a practice if not central to then certainly persistent during the period, and one that exceeds its more conventional formulation as coauthorship. That is, the convolutions that *God Sends Sunday* discloses, which I have only sketched, conjure a more elastic model of collaboration—one that incorporates not only multiple players but also multiple texts, a dynamic that in turn generates plastic literary forms seemingly amenable to different contexts, functions, and audiences. I suggest that the uncovering of Thurman's play—and the networks converging on it—invites us to build on the work of Moynihan, Darryl Dickson-Carr, and others to consider the significant role of collaboration—coauthorship, transmediality, intertextuality—in interwar Black literary culture

(see, e.g., Dickson-Carr, *Spoofing*; Gleeson-White, "Reading Plagiarism" and *Silent Film*).

Notes

1. The phrase "God Sends Sunday" seems to derive from the Black church; see McClain, *Come Sunday*. The Beinecke Library purchased the play from the rare book and manuscript dealer Wyatt Houston Day sometime before 2013.

2. Bontemps and Cullen's play remains unpublished.

3. "City of Refuge" was a working title of Thurman and William Jourdan Rapp's first play, *Harlem*.

4. *Harlem* premiered on Broadway in February 1930. Only a synopsis of *Black Cinderella* (also titled *Harlem Cinderella* at points) survives, in the Wallace Thurman Collection of the James Weldon Johnson Collection in the Yale Collection of American Literature at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; there is nothing to indicate it was ever produced. Rapp and Thurman's correspondence indicates Thurman was at work on *Sultan Smith* during spring 1929. The play was "woven around the experiences of Joseph F. Smith, founder of the Mormon religion" (Thurman, "To Langston Hughes, Wednesday" 126).

5. Thurman wrote a third novel, *The Interne* (1932), with A. L. Furman.

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God Sends Sunday

Act One

Friday evening, about six oclock. The kitchen in the Harlem home of Samuel Johnson and family. There are two entrances to this room, one upstage right which leads to the remaining rooms in the house some of which are upstairs, and the second which opens into a miniature backyard. Near this latter door is a window, beneath which is a small kitchen table. An antiquated icebox, an old fashioned cupboard, a gas range, a stationary wash tub, and a large circular table which sits in the centre of the room surrounded by chairs, complete the furnishings.

As the curtain rises, Ezra and Josie, the two small Johnson children, and Julia, a neighbor's child, are playing a game. The two girls are standing on one side of the stage, poised as if ready to run. The boy stands some distance away, preparing to pursue them.

Josie and Julia (*in a syncopated chant*)**:** Is you ready Mister Wolf?

Ezra: I'm puttin' on ma shoes.

Josie and Julia: Is you ready Mister Wolf?

Ezra: I'm puttin' on ma coat.

Josie and Julia: Is you ready Mister Wolf?

Ezra: I'm puttin' on ma hat.

Josie and Julia: Is you ready Mister Wolf?

Ezra: I'm comin' down de stairs, and here I is.

He begins to chase the two girls, who dart and dodge about the stage, attempting to elude his outstretched hands. There is much shouting and laughter as they race about. Finally they all meet, tumble and fall in a heap near the doorway on the right. Miranda, their mother appears in the doorway, followed by Sally. Miranda is a large, lovable, stalwart, middle aged Negress. She wears a homemade cotton housedress and a gingham apron. Sally is given to dressing in clothes better suited to a woman many years her junior. She is voluable and vain. At the moment she is somewhat saddened because her husband, Bill, is quite ill and not expected to live.

Miranda: Drat these chillum. Git up from dere. Arollin' 'round de floor like apes. Caint you fin' no place to prance an' rare 'cept in de kitchen? Git on out into dat yard. Do you hear me?

Ezra: Aw, maw, we's jes' playin' Wolf.

Miranda: I'll wolf you. I don' see where you learn so much foolishness.

Josie: We plays dat in school, don' we Julia?

Julia: Sho.

Miranda: Dats de reason Ezra comes home wit no seat in his britches. See, Sally, dats what dey learn in school. Didja evah hear o' such mess?

Ezra: De teacher says games is good fo' us.

Miranda: I don' car what yo' teacher says. I'm de one has to patch yo' britches. Now git into dat yard. I don' wan' none o' yo' back talk. (*The children exit.*) Have seat Sally. Don' mind me. I gotta git ma dinnah on. (*She notices a pile of books on the table.*) Aint kids de beatenest things? Dey thinks you aint got nothin' to do but pick up after 'em. (*She crosses to door on left and calls.*) You Ezra. Come in here suh. (*Ezra enters.*) Hurry up. You moves like de dead lice is fallin' off you. How often mus' I tell you 'bout droppin' dem books in de firs' empty place you sees? Now put 'em where dey belongs, an' take off dem school clothes. You knows betta. (*Ezra has picked up books during this speech and slow dragged off the stage.*) Chillum shure is a bother.

Sally: But they's nice to have 'round in time o' trouble. They sorta comfort chu. (*She sniffs and seems about to cry.*)

Miranda: Now don' you start afrettin'. Dats de reason I brung you ovah here so's you'd git yo' mind off yo' troubles. You jes' trust in de Lawd. Yo' ol' man'll be alright.

Miranda begins to busy herself around the kitchen and all through the ensuing scene she keeps up a constant trek from the cupboard to the sink, and from the sink and icebox to the stove, putting things in pots, rinsing out pans, et cet era.

Sally: I hopes so Mirandy, I hope so. He's such a good man. Right in de prime o' life too, an' he done bin such a good provider, much betta'rn them other niggers I married befo' him. It don' seem right fo' de Lawd to take him an' leave so many no 'count darkies waitin' fo' de Jedgement Day.

Miranda: He aint dead yet, is he? De way you is carryin' on you'd think de poor man done already gone to glory.

Sally: But de doctor done said . . .

Miranda: Drat de doctor. His guess aint no better'n mine. He aint bin called into no private con'frence wit de Almighty. An' aint I don' tol' you time an' time again not to mess wit dat dicty nigger doctor?

Sally: Whats de mattah wit 'im?

Miranda: Betta ask me what aint de mattah wit 'im. Dat niggers all wrong das all. Adrivin' up here in dat shiny car like he was Elijah in de fiery chariot, aclearin' his throat all impo'tant like, an' writin' a mess o' furrin' words on paper so de druggis' kin charge yo' eyeballs out. I wouldn't let dat darky trim ma corns.

Sally: Dey say he's de bes' in Harlem.

Miranda: Dey say. Who is dey? A passel of dumb niggers dats bumfoozled by all his puttin' on. You betta git yo'self a white doctor befo' its too late. Nigger doctors may be alright, but I jes' aint got no time fo' em. Not since dat ol' fool back home tol' Mamie Smith she had tumor, an' give her some medicine to work it out. Does you know what happened? Two months later she was doin' de white folks washin'. All a sudden she hadda pain, an' calls fo' me. I fin's her asquirmin' on de floor shoutin: De tumors comin' out like de doctor done said. It come out alright, an' it wasnt no tumor. It was another yaller chil' she couldn't 'count fo', both she an' her husban' bein' black as de ace o' spades. I aint had no use fo' no darky doctor since.

Sally: But dey's diff'rent up here in de north.

Miranda: Don' you fool yo'self. Niggers is niggers anyplace you finds 'em. Its like dis . . .

Josie (*poking her head in the door*)**:** Oh maw.

Miranda: Now whachu want?

Josie: Kin I go ovah to Julias?

Miranda (*mocking her daughter's whiny tones*)**:** No, you caint go ovah to Julias.

Josie: Aw, maw, I wanna hear Amos an' Andy.

Miranda: Dats all I hear, ev'ry night. Amos an' Andy. You betta git back into dat yard. I'll Amos an' Andy you. (*Josie slams the door shut as her head disappears. Miranda brings a pan of potatoes to the table, sits opposite Sally and begins to peel them.*) What is dis Amos an' Andy stuff anyhow?

Sally: Its two cullud men. Dey talks on de radio ev'ry night. Sometimes dere real funny. You oughta git a radio, Mirandy.

Miranda: Fo' what? You know Sam an' me don' have no money to spend on all dat foolishness. We jes' manages to git along as is.

Sally: Radio's good comp'ny. Dey keeps you from gittin' lonesome.

Miranda: Wit all dese kids an' dis big house, I don' have no time to git lonesome. Radio's allright fo' folks what don' have nothin' to do. Wouldn't I be sompin' rarin' back in a chair wit ma arms folded, lis'nin'? Who'd do de cookin' an' cleanin', and de washin' an ironin'? I ask you.

Sally: I guess you're right. Is you goin' to de church meetin' tonight?

Miranda: 'Spec I will. I'se pretty tired, but I don' wanna miss goin' tonight. Caint tell what dem onery niggers'll put ovah if some of us loyal members aint dere.

Sally: Wish't I could go.

Miranda: Why don'chu? Some o' dem lodge members kin stay wit Bill. Whats de lodge good fo' if t'aint to be some use at a time like dis?

Sally: No. Guess I betta stay home. Bill might git worse, an' I nevah would fo'give maself if sompin' happened an' I wasn't there. He's bin so much better'n ma other husban's. I do hates to miss dis meetin' tho.

Miranda: If de niggers'd 'member what a church is fo', dere wouldn't be all dis strife and 'cension. An' dey wouldn't need dese meetin's. Always arguin' 'bout money. Worse dan a pack a thieves.

Sally: Its jes' dat Deacon Simpson. He's de disturbin' element. He aint nevah liked de Reverend Blackstone.

Miranda: Don' you be no fool. You know t'aint de deacon a tall. Its dat low down wife o' his.

Sally: Aint it de truth? She shure is one hussy. Ev'ry one knows how she's bin stuck on de reverend, dat is, ev'ryone but de Deacon. She she done pulled de wool ovah his eyes.

Miranda: Dese fool wimmen make me sick, a throwin' demselves at de preacher, den gittin' mad cause he won't sleep wit' 'em. De dirty wenches.

Sally: Dey don' 'preciate Reverend Blackstone, cause he's a righteous man an' denies de flesh. Dere aint many ministers'd pass up chances like he's done. De wimmen oughta be 'shamed o' demselves.

Miranda: You aint bin above makin' eyes at 'im yoself.

Sally: Why, Mirandy Johnson!!

Miranda: Aint no need you actin' all 'sprised. You know well as I do folks done already said you was hopin' Bill'd die, so's you could set yo' cap fo' de reverend.

Sally: I don' wanna hear dat nigger gossip. You knows I'se crazy 'bout ma poor husban', he bein' so much betta to me than de others. Is you fo'gittin' he's alayin' ovah dere gittin' ready to die? (*She begins to sob.*)

Miranda: Dere . . . dere . . . Sally. I didn't mean no harm. But you know how niggers talk, an' you aint always 's careful as you might be. You talks too much 'bout yo' own bizness in de fus' place. No more'n week ago you was tellin' folks you was gittin' sick o' Bill. No wonder folks talk.

Sally: Why Mirandy, I don't recollect sayin' any such thing.

Miranda: Well I does. Right at de meetin' o' de missionary society. De one we had ovah to Sister Wakefields. You low'd Bill aint got no style. An' all de time you was makin' eyes at de reverend.

Sally (*sniffing*)**:** Is dat anyway fo' you to talk when ma poor Bill's flat [on] his back.

Miranda: I aint talkin' 'bout Bill. I'm talkin' 'bout you.

Sally: Well, Mirandy, you know de good book says dere's a time fo' ev'rything, an' dis shure aint no time to lay me low. I know I has ma faults. But I allus did give Bill Madison credit fo' takin' care o' me. He jes' won' stand fo' me to work. You knows dat, an' you als knows dem other niggers I was married to didn' have no feelin' fo' me atall.

Miranda: Dats all passed now. What we gotta worry 'bout is savin' de church from fallin' into bad hands. Now dat meetin' tonight is gonna be plenty hot,

'cause I 'tends to git dem niggers tol' an' I know dey aint gonna like it.

Sally: It kills me how stingy dey wants to be when de pastor asks fo' sompin', but let some outsider come 'long an' dey wants to give 'im de church.

Miranda: Aint it de truth? De trouble starts when he wont join dat no'count lodge. No ev'ry time he opens his mouth dey is ready to jump 'im. Jes' like last Sunday when he asked fo' an electric fan. Now dey all knows dat de church is hot in de summertime an' dat de Reverend sweats like a stud horse when he gits full o' de spirit. Yet dey wouldn't give 'im no extra money to buy a little fan.

Sally: Dem niggers is too much fo' me.

Miranda: An' dis Mears wit all his hifalutin' talk 'bout de church aint got no bizness cuttin' in on de Lodge's sermon collection less de minister joins de lodge. Where else dey gonna have sermon free? All Reverend Blackstone asked fo' was five dollahs fo' himself an' half de collection fo' de church. An' his own members aint got sense enuff to back 'im up.

Sally: Niggers is a mess, yes indeedy. But I know you aint gonna let 'em betray de pastor.

Miranda: Jes' wait 'll I get 'em tol' tonight. Now if de Reverend'll . . .

Bub, Miranda's sixteen year old son, enters from the right. He is a typical Harlem adolescent, anxious to be considered a full grown man. He affects extreme cut clothes, which are de rigeur with Harlem's pool hall Johnnies, and walks with an exaggerated swagger.

Bub: Hello maw. Howdy, Missis Madison.

Sally: Hello Bub.

Miranda: Where you bin boy? Now don' tell me you is jes' getting' outa school. I knows you bin gallivantin' 'round de streets.

Bub: Say, maw

Miranda: Don' you maw me. Change dem clothes an' git out here an' rake dat yard like yo' paw done tol' you.

Bub: There's a man waitin' to see you.

Miranda: A man? What man? What he want?

Bub: He said paw sent him over to rent the room.

Miranda: Where is he?

Bub: Out on the stoop.

Miranda: On de stoop? A man come to rent ma room an' you leaves 'im out on de stoop. You aint got an ounce o' sense. Bring 'im in fool.

Bub exits. Sally rises from chair.

Sally: Guess I betta be gittin' back home, Mirandy.

Miranda: Dere Aint no need fo' you to rush. If dey needs you, dey'll call. Dat lodge brother kin watch ovah Bill, an' he knows where you is.

Sally: No, I gots to go. I done bin 'way too long now. Dat man's so good to me, Mirandy. He done even put all his 'surance in ma name.

Miranda: Stop spreadin' dat ovah town too. Fust thing you know, if Bill does some, some nigger'll swear you killed 'im jes' cause you'd have some money comin' from de Metropolitan.

Sally: Guess you're right. I'll be careful. You's a true friend Mirandy. Now I mus' run.

Miranda: Alright, Sally. I'll come ovah befo' I goes to church meetin'.

Sally: O.K. (*She exits left. Miranda hastily drops potatoes she has peeled into a pot and places it on the stove. Bub enters with Jock. Jock is a tall, well built, handsome, brownskin young man. A nonchalant, happy go lucky hedonist. He is dressed plainly and quietly.*)

Bub: Right this way, mister. Here he is, maw.

Jock: Howdedo, Missis Johnson. Yo' husban' sent me here to rent yo' room. Ma names Bass . . . Bass.

Miranda: Pleased to meetcha, Mister Bass. (*She wipes her hands on her apron and shakes his hand.*) Come right in. Take a chair. Bin in Harlem long?

Jock: No, I jes' blew in today. Bin west, out in Detroit workin' fo' Ford.

Bub: Oh, boy, I hears Detroit's hot stuff.

Miranda: Hush yo' mouth.

Jock: Detroit's dead now. T'aint like it was after de war. Aint no money to be had. Dats why I come here. I'm gonna work on de docks.

Miranda: On de docks? You done gotta job already?

Bub:[1] Yes'm. Soon's I git off de train ovah on de Jersey side, I catches maself a ferry an' makes fo' de docks. Dats where I met yo' husban'.

Miranda: You sho is a hustler aintchu?

Jock: When you bin out in de worl' long as me you hasta hustle. Aint nobody gonna give you nothin'.

Miranda: You shure said a mouthful. S'too bad mo' young men don see dat.

Jock: It sho is. I runs into 'em all ova de country, cryin' de blues 'bout not bein' able to fin' work an' all de time prayin' to de Lawd wont find none.

Miranda: Dey jes don' wanna work. I gotta nigger livin' here dats de same way. Swears he caint fin' no job. Jes cause he caint hava position an' go to work all dressed like Mister Charley.

Jock: Dats it. Nigger's gittin' hifalutin' an' don' wanna dirty dere hands.

Miranda: Dey bin dat way ev'ry since Lincoln set de slaves free. My mother uster tell me how after de war, niggers jes' set down and waited fo' somebody to come long an' feed 'em. Lots o' em starved to death 'cause dey didn't have sense enuff to know dey hadda work to git food. In dese days all de young men think 'bout is livin' offen some woman.

Jock: Not me. I allus did say, dat de woman aint bo'n whats got money enuff to keep me. I likes to be ma own boss, an' to be dat I has to make ma own money.

Miranda: Dats right son. Now you jes make yo'self comf'table while I goes up an fixes de room. (*She starts out right, turns in the doorway.*) Bub . . . watch dem vittles', an' dey betta not burn. (*She exits.*)

Bub: Gee. I betchu bin ev'rywhere.

Jock: Well nigh. I started aroamin' when I was younger'n you. Always did have itchin' feet. Jes' caint seem to settle down.

Bub: I wanna travel too, but Ma an' Pa wont lemme stop school.

Jock: Aint no school better'n trav'lin'.

Bub: Dont I know it? Betchu cant tell those old fashioned folks nothin' like dat. Here I is sixteen years old, and they keeps forgetting I'm old enuff to hustle for myself. I wanna see the world before I get too old.

Jock: You sounds jes' like me when I was yo' age. Don' worry sonny, you gotta long time befo' you gits ol', and' de worl'll still be waitin' fo' you.

Bub: I know, but I'm as much a man now as I ever will be.

Jock: Yeah?

Bub: Shure. I even got an ol' lady.

Jock: Lawdy split ma slats!!!

Bub: Yes I has, and I mean she's righteous. You wont tell the old folks will ya? They'll raise hell if they found out.

Jock: I aint no snitch, but ainchu startin' out kinda early?

Bub: Naw man. I knows fellers younger'n me got three or four wimmen. But me . . . I'm a one woman man see.

Jock: Oh yeah?

Bub: Shure. Dere aint no sense in messin' 'round too much. I don' wanna wear maself out

Jock: Boy, you're a mess. Where'd'j'ou learn so much?

Bub: I know ev'rything a man oughta know. You gotta be wise in this man's town. Ever bin here before?

Jock: Two or three times, but I didn' stay long.

Bub: Well you can take it from me, you gotta watch your step in Harlem. Its just full of slick niggers, and they know all the tricks. Anytime they try to put something over on you, you just call on me.

Jock: I'll do that pal.

Bub: And if you wants to meet some brownskins . . . . my . . . my . . . Makes me orry eyed to think about 'em.

Jock (*staring out into hallway*)**:** Well, I'm picked. Completely defeathered.

Bub (*puzzled*)**:** Whachu mean?

Jock: Oh hello . . . hello.

Emmaline has entered. She is an attractive brownskin girl quiet, shy and plainly dressed. She has just come in from work. She carries a medium sized package. She is obviously discomfited by Jock's steady stare and confidential manner.

Bub: Oh . . . hello sis.

Emmaline: Hello Bub.

Bub: This guy's gonna rent the empty room. He's regular too believe me.

Jock (*to Emmaline*)**:** Ma names Jock . . . Jock Bass.

Bub: Was you ever on the race tracks?

Jock: Shure. Dats how I got ma name. Befo' I grew up so big I uster ride de horses. Er . . . whats your sister's name? Give us a knockdown pal.

Bub: Oh, that's Emmaline.

Jock: Pleased to meetcha Emmaline. Mighty pleased to meetcha.

Bub: Tell me some more about the horses. Think I could be a jockey too?

Jock: Emmaline is sho' one pretty name. Ma maw's name was Emma.

Emmaline (*flustered*)**:** Was she?

Bub: Didja ever win many races?

Jock (*staring intently at Emmaline*)**:** You an' my maw got de same kinda eyes, an' I declare if you aint jes' de same size an' color.

Bub: Say, Buddie, you're wastin' your jive. She dont collar. Too dumb. Wait'll you see the good lookin' broads runnin' loose on the avenue.

Emmaline: Don' pay no' tention to Bub, Mister Bass. He's all mouth.

Jock: I betchu got mo' boy friends than you kin shake a stick at.

Bub: Her? Aint nobody'd have her.

Emmaline: You git fresh an' I'll shure tell maw.

Jock: De man in Harlem mus' be blind to letchu 'round loose.

Bub: Aint nobody gonna bother with her, and there's no use in you wastin' your time. I tell you what. After dinner tonight you come go out with me. I know a couple'a broads down the street we can meet in a jiffy. With your line and my class we'd be a riot.

Emmaline: Aint dat a nice way for a boy to talk?

Bub: Dry up Fido. When I wantcha, I'll whistle.

Miranda (*offstage*)**:** Does I smell dem vittles' burnin'? (*She enters and rushes toward the stove.*) You good fo' nothin' little. . . . Oh hello Emmaline. (*Examines pots on the stove.*) It's a good thing dere aint nothin' burned. Yo' room ready, Mister Bass.

Emmaline: I betta show 'im where it is.

Bub: Dont trouble yo self. He aint got no time for you. Let a man show him.

Miranda: Whats dat you said? A man? You aint dry behin' de ears yet. Dis is de beatenest boy, Mister Bass. I swanee[2] I don' know whats gonna become o' him.

Jock: Girls is much nicer, aint they?

Miranda: Oh. Dis is ma daughter, Emmaline. I know Bub aint had sense enuff to tell you.

Jock (*bowing and grinning broadly*)**:** Pleased to meetcha Miss Emmaline. Mighty pleased to meetcha.

Miranda (*to Emmaline*)**:** Is you lost yo' tongue? Dis is Mister Bass.

Bub: I told her that. She's too dumb to talk, that's all. Come on Jock, I'll show you your room.

Miranda: Hol' on. Don' you git so familiar all asudden. De gentleman's name is *Mister* Bass. You's a heap too fresh. Now show *Mister* Bass to his room. Make haste. You gonna rake dat yard tonight if it'd de las' thing you does.

Bub (*defiantly*)**:** Come on Jock. (*Starts out.*)

Miranda: We'll have dinnah soon's de ol' man comes home.

Jock: You caint have it too soon fo' me, mam. I packs a powerful appetite. An' de bes' place in de worl' to get known wit folks is at de dinnah table. I'll be ready when you is cause I'se plenty anxious to git friendly wit dis whole family. (*After giving one more ardurous*[3] *glance at the bewildered Emmaline, he exits behind Bub.*)

Miranda (*bustling about the kitchen*)**:** I'se way behin' wit ma dinnah. Betta open me a coupla can o' beans an' set de table, Emmaline. (*She continues to move busily about. After a moment she notices that Emmaline has not moved, but is still staring at the door through Jock has just gone.*) Whats de mattah? Is yo' hat an' coat glued on?

Emmaline: Now maw.

Miranda: Well git 'em off. Didn' you hear me say . . . set de table?

Emmaline: Yes, maw.

Miranda: Well do it den, an stop standin' dere lookin' all fussed like Gabriel done blowed his horn.

Emmaline: Yes maw. (*She removes her hat and coat and hangs them on back of door on the left.*)

Miranda: Bill's done took worse. Aint much chance fo' him I guess.

Emmaline: Yes maw.

Miranda: If you yesses me jes' one mo' time, I'm gonna lam a pot at yo' nappy head. What's wrong witchu?

Emmaline: Dere aint nothin' wrong. I'm jes kinda tired.

Miranda: Aint no need you gittin' tired befo' you set dat table. Don' fogit to set a place fo' Mister Bass.

Emmaline: Is he gonna stay here?

Miranda: Aint I done tol' you he's de new boarder?

Emmaline: Mus' I put on de red table cloth?

Miranda: Will you lissen to de gal? Is you out yo' head? You know we don' use dat red tablecloth 'cept on Sundays. Lawd, de sight of a strange man done made my gal a plumb fool. Don' you go actin' peculiar 'round here.

Emmaline: Whachu mean?

Miranda: You know what I mean. Didn' I letchu read de doctor book so's you'd git some sense into yo' head. I jes' dare you to lay up wit de fus' man dat sweet talks you.

Emmaline: Why maw!!!

Miranda: Don' maw me. I see you gittin' all dreamy eyed. I was young once maself.

Emmaline: I don' even know dis man.

Miranda: You're gonna know 'im. He's gonna be here fo' sometime I guess. You know I aint nevah had no men roomers here befo' les' dey hadda wife, jes' 'cause o' you. But I gives you credit fo' bein' ol' enuff to take care yo'self now. Un'er stan'?

Emmaline: Yes maw.

Miranda: Be shure you does. Whatchu got in dat bundle?

Emmaline (*unfastening the package*)**:** I brung some col' keena[4] home.

Miranda: What it t'is?

Emmaline: Here's some col' roast beef fo' Pa's lunch.

Miranda: Hope its better'n dat lamb you brung yestiday. Dat was de toughest meat I evah did try to chew. Who does de buyin' down dere anyhow?

Emmaline: De madame.

Miranda: She shure could'nt do no shoppin' fo' me. Whats dis?

Emmaline (*not looking*)**:** Eggs.

Miranda: Eggs, me annie. Since when did dey put eggs up in bottles? Whats dis you got here?

Emmaline: Oh, de eggs is in de other sack. Dats bath salts.

Miranda: Bath salts? Whats dem?

Emmaline: To put in de tub when you takes a bath. It makes de water smell sweet.

Miranda: Great Jehovah, keep ma peace!! Bath salts!! Makes de water smell sweet! Where'd'j'ou git dis stuff?

Emmaline: De madame give it to me.

Miranda: Stop yo' lyin' gal. You know you done sneaked dis. Aint I don' tel' you not to steal from de white folks? Takin' bath salts an' we aint got de fus' bit o' butter in de house. Ainchu nevah gonna have no sense? If you'r gonna steal, steal sompin' we need.

Emmaline: But maw. You see . . .

Miranda: I aint seein' nothin'. Go an' set de table. (*She returns to the stove.*) Bath salts!! I nevah heard tell o' such mess.

Emmaline begins to set the table.

Josie (*poking her head in the door*)**:** Maw, Julia says its almos' time fo' Amos an' Andy. Kin I go ovah?

Miranda: You kin march yo'self right in here an' get ready fo' supper.

Josie: I don' wan' no supper. I wanna hear Amos an' Andy.

Miranda: If I haf to say one mo' word to you . . . git on upstairs an' wash some o' dat dirt off yo' face. 'Pears to me you're black enuff witout rootin' in de ground. Hurry up. (*Josie crosses the stage and exits right.*) Is you got dem beans open yet? Y' paw'll be here soon.

Emmaline: I'm gonna fix 'em now.

Miranda: Put 'em on de stove. Use dat little white saucepan.

Emmaline: Alright maw. (*She takes two cans of beans from the cupboard and opens them, then walks to sink and dumps the contents into the designated saucepan.*)

Miranda: I kinda wanted you to go to de church meetin'. but I guess you betta stay with Sally.

Emmaline: Aint no reason fo' me to go. I aint on de deaconess board.

Miranda: You's a member in good standin', ainchu?

Emmaline: Yes'm.

Miranda: Den you gotta right to be at all de bizness meetin's, sides I may need yo' vote. I specs de niggers is gittin' ready to fire de minister.

Emmaline (*astounded*)**:** Fire de minister? What fo'? He aint bin here but a month.

Miranda: I knows it. An' he's de bes' one deys had yet. Here t'aint hardly May an' we's had mo' ministers since Christmas dan dere are months in de year.

Emmaline: No wonder de church caint git outa debt, an' we aint got near as many members as we had dis time las' year.

Miranda: Don' I know it. Ev'ry minister dat leaves takes a handful o' members wit him. All we needs is to have three mo' preachers an' by nex' Christmas dere won' be a soul lef' to worship in Mt. Moriah. Wont dat be sompin'?

Emmaline: Whats de mattah wit de Reverend Blackstone? 'Peared to me ev'ry body like him.

Miranda: Dey did 'till dis lodge mess come up.

Emmaline: I don' understan' it.

Miranda: I 'spec de lawd's kinda puzzled himself. Didja season dose beans?

Emmaline: Yes maw . . . . (*Cassie enters. She is a shrewish elderly lady, who has lost all the bloom of youth and beauty through hard work necessary to support both herself and an indolent young husband. Her clothes are ill matched and wry. She always seems to be out of breath. She is burdened down with two large sacks of groceries.*) Hello Cassie.

Cassie: Hello Emmaline. Howdy, Mirandy.

Miranda: Home early, ainchu?

Cassie: Yeah. I got off early so's I could fix a nice dinnah fo' Bob. He went to work today. I knew he'd be tired an' hungry.

Emmaline: Don' tell me Bob's gotta job.

Cassie: He sho has. De man I works fo' tol' me to send Bob downtown to an office where dey needed a porter. Co'se porter work aint down Bob's street, but he hada do sompin. An' the poor dear is so tired o' loafin'. Why no longer'n yestiday he said to me, he said . . .

Miranda: What time he sposed to go to dat job?

Cassie: At nine dis mornin'. I set de alarm befo' I went to work.

Miranda: Is you shure?

Cassie: Suttinly. Why?

Miranda: Oh, nothin', 'cept when I went pas' you' room 'bout noon to leave some clean towels, Bob was still in de bed.

Cassie: In de bed? At noon? Oh, no, Mirandy, you mus' be wrong.

Miranda: I tell you he was lyin' up dere big as cuff,[5] jes' acallin' hogs.

Cassie: I caint believe it. Is you plumb shure?

Miranda: I know t'wasn't no ghost I seen.

Cassie: The onery coon, an' me tellin' de white folks how smart he be an' how hard t'was fo' him to find work. An' Mirandy, he promised so faithful like to be dere bright an' early. An' me like a fool rushin' home with special vittles'.

Miranda: Ainchu bin married to 'im long enuff to know betta?

Cassie: Oh, Mirandy, jes' wait'll I get ma hands on dat nigger.

She rushes from the room and collides with Sam entering the door on the right. Sam is a genial, heavy set, middle-aged, homespun Negro. He is attired in his denim clothes and carries a lunch kit.

Sam: (*In the doorway as Cassie rushes by him*)**:** Whoa gal. Dats almos' a knockout punch you gimme den. Don' you do dat fo' I gits some dinnah in me. (*Enters the kitchen.*) Whats de mattah with Cassie?

Miranda: De same ol' trouble. Bob was 'sposed to get a job an' done slept thru it as usual.

Sam: Dat niggers shure does love his bed. Umh-uh. How's ma two gals?

Emmaline: De new boarder done come.

Miranda: An' she's bin actin' like a fool ev'ry since.

Sam (*removing his hat and coat and preparing to wash at the kitchen sink*)**:** Got yo' eyes peeled already, oh gal? 'Fraid you gotta look pas' him. Dat boy don' wan' no wife.

Emmaline: Whacu mean?

Sam: He's jes'a footloose rover.

Miranda: Dat may be true, but I bet he'd make some man a good husban'. Aint he done gotta job de fus' day he lands in de town.? An' don' he look up 'spectable people to live with?

Sam: Dat don' mean nothin'.

Miranda: 'Pears to me it means a lot.

Emmaline: He sho' do act like a gen'leman.

Sam: I aint sayin' he aint. I'm jes' sayin' he don' wan' no wife.

Miranda: You know so much. Mus' think you're a gypsy. Here you jes' met de man today, an' to hear you talk, you already knows de color o' his guts.

Sam: I don' hafta know a man a year to figure 'im out. I says he aint de marryin' kind, an' I know what I'm talkin' 'bout. Git me a towel, Emmaline.

Miranda: You knows too much.

Sam: Jes' lissen to him talk den. Dat boy was bo'n wit itchin' feet. He aint nevah stayed nowhere long enuff to git set. He's de kind dat meets a woman, says howdy, states his bizness, an' keeps his hat on so's he kin make a fast getaway.

Emmaline: Here's your towel, paw.

Sam: Thanks gal. Don' let de ol' lady pick you no man.

Miranda: I aint doin' nothin' o' de kind.

Sam: Maybe den you wants 'im fo' yo'self.

Miranda: Hush yo' mouth, Sam Johnson, I'se ol' enuff to be dat boy's mother, an' after bein' with you fo' ovah twenty years, I don' nevah want no other man's pants hangin' in ma bedroom. Another thing. How many times mus' I tell you to wash upstairs in de bathroom. You aint sposed to wash in de kitchen sink.

Sam: An' how many times mus' I tell you to buy me a tin basin? You know I don' like all dat fancy plumbin'.

Miranda: You kin take a nigger outa de country, but you shure caint take de country outa de nigger.

Sam: Dats alright, ol' lady. You aint so citified yo'self. Don' you still bathe in a tin tub right here in de kitchen, 'stead o' usin' all dat mess upstairs? Yo' maws jes' too sad, Emmaline. (*Ezra and Josie come racing into the room and rush over to their father. He picks them both up and jostles them around.*) Hello kids. Bin good?

Miranda: Dey caint be but so good. It aint in 'em. You's de father ainchu?

Sam: Lemme see. I recognizes de nose an' mouth, but I aints so shure 'bout de eyes. Come to think, dat ol' nigger Jasper, you uster go wit back in Eatonville, had eyes jes' like Josie here, an' if I aint mistaken Ezra kinda looks like Mose Smith aroun' de head.

Miranda: Stop yo' foolishness befo' I spills dis pot of beans ovah yo' nappy head. Put dem chillum down

an' serve dem plates. You kids take yo' places an' be quick 'bout it. Emmaline . . . you go call Bub an' de new boarder. I know dat suits you to a T.

Emmaline: Yes, maw. (*She exits hurriedly.*)

Miranda: Dats de fastes' she's moved dis ev'nin'.

Sam: I aint worried 'bout dat. She's too much like you to lose her head.

Josie: I'm like you aint I paw?

Ezra: Naw you aint. I am. You's a heap too ugly.

Sam: Dat aint no way to talk to yo' sister. Always 'member son, de wimmen is right while dere present. When dey leaves dats another thing. Oh, Mirandy, How's Bill? I jes' met Mears goin' ovah dere.

Miranda: Sally 'lowed he was worse.

Sam: Guess itsa good thing Mears dropped in.

Miranda: 'Pend on him to be somewhere in dis neighborhood when its our dinner time.

Sam: He don' come here no more'n dat jackleg minister o' yours.

Miranda: Mears is jes' de lodge president. De reverend Blackston's a man o' God.

Sam: God oughta feed 'im den or else set 'im up in de rest'rant bizness.

Miranda: Don' talk dat way 'bout de Lawd front o' de chillum. Dey's wicked enuff as tis.

Sam: I aint talkin' 'bout de Lawd. I'm talkin' 'bout dat blue-gummbed penny snatcher.

Miranda: He don' snatch pennies nothin' like Mears.

Sam: T'aint no fault o' his. He jes' don' git de chance.

Miranda: An' Mears aint gonna git no chance to cheat de church when yo' lodge has dere annual sermon either. I'm gonna fight 'em to de last ditch. Deres a church meetin' tonight.

Sam: I don' see why you gotta fight. It wont mean nothin' to you who gits de money. Aint neither one o' dem gonna give you any.

Miranda: De preacher brings me de Holy Ghost. De lodge aint bringin' you nothin'.

Sam: Maybe not, but when I dies dere gonna give you enuff money to keep me outa de Potter's field. De church aint gonna give you nothin' but a lot of mouth an' crocodile tears. Let de niggers fight dis out amongst demselves. Be like me, Mirandy, jes sit back an' let 'em break dere own necks. It don't mattah who gits de collection, we kin still pay de landlord an' eat.

Miranda: Eat. Dats all you think about.

Sam: What else is dere in dis worl'? I got you, de kids, a nice home, a full belly, an' a good job. What else I want?

Miranda: You betta fin' Christ an' seek Salvation.

Sam: If goin' to Church on Sunday jes' to show off yo' new clothes, an' see who kin make de mos' noise is seekin' salvation I don' want none.

Miranda: Sam. I do wish you wouldn't be so wicked. You caint live witout God.

Sam: I aint tryin' to. But you cant tell me God is comin' thru some fornicatin' minister.

Miranda: All minister's don' fornicate.

Sam: Dere's sompin' wrong with 'em den. I don' wanna have nothin' to do wit 'em dey does fornicate, an' if dey don't I knows dey'll beat me to hell.

Miranda: Why, Sam Johnson!!!

Ezra: Whats fornicate, paw?

Josie: I'm gonna ask ma teacher.

Miranda: Hush yo' mouths. See what comes o' you bein' so wicked?

Sam: Fo'git it Mirandy. You know I don' mean nothin'. If you likes to fight an' fuss wit de nigghers its alright by me. Time I works hard on de docks, I aint got no strength fo' anything cept'en you an' de kids. Aint dat right? Now where are dem chillum? Guess I'll hafta go after Emmaline.

Miranda: Lemme go after 'em. (*She starts for the door.*) Here dey come. Its time. (*Emmaline enters followed by Jock and Bub.*) Where you bin so long? Don' you know dinnahs waitin'?

Jock: Its ma fault, Missus Johnson. I got to runnin' off de mouth an' didn' have sense enuff to stop.

Bub: Jock was showin' us some keen pictures of places he's bin.

Sam (*to Jock*)**:** Glad to see you agin. Ev'rything alright?

Jock: Ev'rythings forty plus. Dis is shure ma lucky day. New town, new job, new home, an' of all dese de home is de best.

Sam: T'aint got much style, an' de ol' ladies kinda cantankerous, but we has a good time. Guess you'll sit ovah here next to me.

Emmaline: I foxed his place ovah here.

Bub: You would put 'im next to you. You're just the type.

They all sit down. From left to right there is Josie, Sam, Emmaline, Jock, Bub, Miranda and Ezra.

Miranda: Its yo' turn to say de blessin', Ezra.

Ezra: Aw, Bub aint said it fo' two days.

Josie: Goodie, goodie.

Miranda: Say dat blessin' boy. Don' gimme none o' yo' lip.

Ezra: How I lay me . . . I mean . . . O Lord we humbly thank thee fo' dese blessin's we's 'bout to receive, pray de Lawd ma soul to keep, fo' de nourishments, amen.

Sam (*laughing*)**:** Boy, you shure says a mean blessin'. Ev'rybody dive in. De foods gittin' col'.

Miranda: Aint nobody gonna dive in nothin' 'till Ezra says dat blessin' right. He's a jes' bein' cute. Now say it befo' I gits ma switch.

Ezra: Now I lay me . . .

Josie: Dat aint right. Lemme say it maw. I know a good one.

Bub: Hurry up. I wanna eat.

Miranda: Go ahead Josie. I'll tend to you later, young man.

Josie: De time is long, de food is short, Lawd gimme room to git enuff.

Miranda: You Josie!!

Everybody laughs.

Sam: Where'd you git dat one gal?

Miranda: What am I evah gonna do wit these kids? Dey always shows off afore company.

Jock: I aint no comp'ny, I'm in da fam'y, an' I loves dese kids.

Sam: If evah gonna eat guess we betta git goin'.

Miranda: I hopes you likes what we has, Mister Bass. I don' know your tastes an' we don' go in fo' fancy food.

Jock: When it comes to vittles', mam, I aint hard to please. Dese beans tastes like mo' and mo'.

Emmaline (*shyly*)**:** I fixed 'em.

Jock: No wonder dey tastes so sweet.

Bub: She aint done a thing but opened de can.

Emmaline: I hadda season 'em didn't I?

Jock: All you has to do is look at 'em to make 'em sweet to me. Pass yo' hand over dis coffee will ya? Den I won' need no sugar.

Miranda: Now lissen Mister Bass, don' you go sweet talkin' my girl.

Jock: Dere aint no harm in me, mam, I'm jes' a big brother to all de gals.

Sam: I hopes you'll stay wit us awhile.

Jock: I aint fixin' to leave soon. I'm kinda tired o' roamin'. Bin on de road well night ten years, goin' from place to place. Done bin 'bout ev'rywhere dere is to go, an' seen mos' everything. Now I wanna settle down.

Miranda: Dats right son. A rollin' stone gathers no moss.

Sam: Stones don' need no moss. De longer dey rolls de longer dey keeps from shelterin' worms.

Josie: Gimme some mo' beans, paw?

Sam: Shure. Pass me yo' plate.

Bub: Wisht I could travel like Jock. He's even bin in the army.

Emmaline: Was you in de war?

Jock: Was in de war? Say, I drove mules all ovah no man's land.

Bub: Didja shoot many Germans?

Jock: I aint shot a thing but craps. All I did was drive mules and dig trenches. I aint had no use fo' a pick an' shovel since.

Bub: Didja know many French wimmen?

Miranda: You Bub!!! (*She smacks at his face. He dodges.*)

Sam (*laughing*)**:** I knew he'd git 'round to de wimmen sooner or later. Ma son's a blip.

Miranda: T'aint nothin' to laugh at. He's jes' like his father, nothin' in his head but de swish o' petticoats. I bet . . . (*The doorbell rings.*) Go to de door, Bub. (*Bub gets up from the table and exits right.*) I guess its dat big mouth Mears. I jes' knew he'd come befo' we finished dinnah. Git ready to fix another plate Emmaline. He's shure to be hungry. De way he keeps up wit our meal time aint nobodies bizness.

Bub ushers Mearns into the room. He is small of stature, wears flashy clothes, and talks loudly.

Mears: Howdy folks

Sam: Come in, Brother Mears. Dere's a chair ovah in de corner. How's Bill?

Mears: I don' know. De doctor was dere wit 'im. He mus' be pretty bad off. I didn' go in de room where he was.

Miranda (*aside*)**:** 'Fraid you'd miss dis free dinnah.

Mears: Whats dat you say, Sister Johnson?

Sam: She said: Wontchu have some dinnah?

Mears: O aint long ago et.

Miranda: Nevah mind dat plate Emmaline. I'm so sorry you've eaten Brother Mears.

Sam: We got some powerful good beans.

Miranda: Do finish up dese beans, Mister Bass. Dey'll spoil if lef' ovah. (*She passes the dish of beans to Jock.*)

Jock: Don' care if I does. Beans is ma weakness. 'Specially when dey bin fixed by someone like Miss Emmaline here.

Mears: I don' care much fo' beans maself.

Miranda: You betta not come here to dinna of'en. We jes crave beans, from mo'nin' 'till night. We has 'em mos' ev'ry meal lately.

Bub: This is the first time we've had beans in a month.

Miranda glares at him then speaks quickly.

Miranda: What time it t'is?

Mears: About seven o'clock. I heard Amos an' Andy on a radio jes' as I come in de door.

Josie: Oh, maw, I wanna hear 'em.

Ezra: An' me too.

Miranda: Shut up an' eat yo' dinnah.

Mears: Is you a stranger in these parts, Mister Bass?

Jock: Yeah, I jes came in today.

Mears: Where you from?

Jock: Straight from Detroit. Befo' dat I was in a Michigan lumber camp, an' befo' dat I was pickin' cotton in Mississippi, an' befo' dat I was pickin' oranges in Flordia. Den I worked on some ships an' went to China, de Philipines, Panama, an' mos' ev'ry where else dere is to go.

Mears: Oh. Does you belong to any lodge?

Jock: Naw. How kin I git time to join wit anything?

Mears: Well, if you plans on stayin' here long you might's well join wit us. De lodge needs young blood, an' you needs pertection 'ginst sickness an' death.

Miranda: Dat pertection 'pends on de state o' de treasury.

Mears: Whachu mean, Sister Johnson?

Miranda: I means, Brother Mears, dat it aint bin but so long since one o' yo' members died an' his widow' is still waitin' fo' de money you owes her.

Mears: We pays all our claims. As de president an' treasurer I sees to dat in time.

Miranda: In time is right. Dats liable to be any day from now 'till de judgment. De members pay dere dues. I caint see why when dey gits sick an' dies, you caint pay 'em whats due.

Sam: Dats de lodge bizness Mirandy. You don' un'erstan'.

Miranda: I un'erstan's enuff to know somebodies messin' wit de money.

Mears: I resents dat, Sister Johnson.

Miranda: Dats alright wit me too.

Mears (*turning to Sam*)**:** You know one thing, Brother Johnson, yo' wife jes don' like me, das all.

Miranda: It sho' took you long time to fin' dat out.

Sam: Don' pay Mirandy no mind. She don' mean no harm.

Miranda: I aint gonna harm nobody, an' know it, not even a dog, but dat don' make me like 'im, specially when I thinks he's gonna bit me someday.

Mears (*uncomfortably*)**:** Guess I betta run back ovah to do Madison's, an' see what de doctor said.

Sam: Alright Mears. Tell 'em I'll be ovah pretty soon.

Mears: I'll se you den if you aint long. I gotta go to dat church meetin'. You'll be dere too wontchu, Sister Johnson?

Miranda: I sho will.

Mears exits.

Sam: You shure is a case, Mirandy.

Miranda: You kin bet yo' bottom dollah, I aint no case fo' de police like yo' precious Mears. I caint harly wait to git to dat meetin'.

Josie: Maw, aint dere no desert?

Miranda: No, dere aint no desert. You kids go on upstairs an' wash yo' greasy selves, den study yo' books 'till time fo' yo' bedtime milk. I don' wan' no foolishness outa you neither.

Ezra and Josie: Yes maw. (*They start from the room.*)

Sam: Yo' daddy'll be up witchu soon.

The children exit. Bub gets up from the table.

Bub: 'Scuse me.

Miranda: Where ya goin' son?

Bub: To de movies.

Miranda: Oh, you is, is you? Now aint dat nice?

Bub: Aw, maw, you told me I could go.

Miranda: Yo' paw tol' you to take up de yard too, butchu didn' do it.

Sam: How come you didn' rake up de yard son?

Miranda: He's too lazy dats why.

Bub: No I aint paw.

Miranda: Don' you contradict me suh.

Sam: Now, now, Mirandy, don' fly off de handle. Come here son.

Bub goes to him.

Miranda: Is it any wonder he don' 'mount to nothin'?

Sam: Now, son, tell me, man to man. How come you didn' rake up de yard?

Bub: I didn't get home 'till late, and then I talked to Jock 'till dinner time. Gee, Paw, he's a wonderful guy. Told me all about the places I wants to go to.

Sam: You'll git dere someday.

Jock: Dats what I tol' 'im. Dere aint no need to rush. You kin always see de worl' but you caint always stay home.

Sam: Shure, you gotta finish school, fus'. 'Cose when me an' Mister Bass was comin' long, school

didn' mattah so much. Long as a man had his health an' strength, he could git along witout book-learnin, but you needs all you kin git in dis day an' time.

Miranda: He don' wanna learn nothin' 'cept to be a pimp.

Sam: Dats stuff an' nonsense. Ma boy aint gonna be no pimp. He's gonna be a man's man like his daddy. Aintchu son?

Bub: Yes, paw.

Sam: Go on to de movies. You kin rake de yard tomorrow. Is dat o.k.?

Bub: Yessir

Sam: Now beat it. (*He gives him a goodnatured smack. Bub exits hurriedly.*)

Miranda: Dats what I say. I tells de kids dey caint do sompin', an' you comes along an' tells 'em dey kin. You know one thing, Sam Johnson, I'm gonna walk right outa here someday, an' leave you here to raise dese brats.

Sam: No you wont ol' lady. You couldn't live witout us. Now you know . . .

Mears (*rushing in the back door*)**:** Sam!! Sam!!

Sam (*getting up hurriedly*)**:** What it t'is?

Mears: Bill done died, an' Sally's throw a fit.

Sam: No!

Miranda: Great day in de mawnin'!!

Mears: You betta come right ovah, both o' you. Is you got some ammonia fo' Sally to smell.

Miranda: Yes. Go on Sam. I'll fin' it. (*Mears and Sam exit hurriedly. Miranda nervously explores the cupboard.*) Lawdy, Lawdy, where is dat stuff. You Emmaline, don' sit dere like you caint move. Come on an' help me find dis stuff. (*Emmaline rushes over to the cupboard.*) Caint nevah fin' nothin' 'round here when you needs it. Po' Sally . . . . (*To Emmaline*) Don git in ma way . . . ah, here t'is. (*She takes ammonia bottle from cupboard shelf and starts for the back door.*) Clean up de dishes when Mister Bass gits enuff, an' take care o' de chillum, cause when I comes back I gotta go. Even de death o' Bill Madison aint gonna keep me from dat church meetin'. (*She rushes through the back door.*)

Jock (*after a moments pause*)**:** Who is dis Bill?

Emmaline: Jes Sally's husban'. Dey live nex' door, an' ma an' Sally's bin friends since dey was girls.

Jock: Oh.

There is another pause.

Emmaline: Does you want sompin' mo' to eat?

Jock: No, thanks, I'se had plenty.

Emmaline: Well, I guess I betta clean up de table,

Jock: Lemme help you.

Emmaline: Oh, no, I kin do it. You jes sit dere, les' you wants to go to yo' room.

Jock: But I wants to help you. I'd like to help you all de time. Hows dat?

Emmaline (*confused*)**:** Oh, dats alright.

Jock: Don' you like me jes' a little bit?

Emmaline (*shyly*)**:** Sho. I aint got no cause not to has I?

Jock: Den warm up an' be human. You acts like you is kinda 'fraid o' me, an' I wants to be close friends witchu. Is dat a go?

Emmaline: Sho . . . now I betta clean up dese dishes. (*She begins stacking the dishes and takes a pile of them to the sink. Jock also picks up some of the dishes and follows her.*)

Jock: Did I hear you say you aint got no boy friend?

Emmaline: No, I aint got none.

Jock: How come?

Emmaline: I jes aint seen none I liked, an' maw don' lemme go out much.

Jock: You don' need to go out an' you don' need to look no further. From now on, I'm yo' boy friend.

Emmaline: Why, Mister Bass . . .

Jock: An' my names. You gonna call me dat from now on, see?

Emmaline: Alright, Jock.

Jock: Now dat dats settled you might swell gimme a little kiss.

Emmaline: I couldn't do dat. Maw'd raise de devil, knowin' I kissed you de firs' day we met.

Jock: Now you lissen to me. Yo' maw don' hafta know nothing 'bout what goes on 'tween you an' me. I bin lookin' all ovah de country fo' a gal like you, an' when I fin's you it don' take me no long time to know I loves you. An' since yo' eyes show you likes me, dere caint be no harm ina kiss kin dere?

Emmaline: No, but . . . (*He takes her in his arms and before she has time to resist he has kissed her.*)

Jock: Gawd, you're a sweet kid. (*He kisses her again.*)

Emmaline (*struggling to get away*)**:** I mus' do dese dishes.

Jock: Let de dishes wait. I'm gonna help you, an' we kin work all de faster after lovin'.

Emmaline: It jes don' seem right.
Jock: Another kiss'll make it rights.
Emmaline in attempting to get away has caused them to back near to the left wall between the cupboard and the door. When they reach this spot, Jock secures her tightly in his arms and kisses her passionately. She gradually succumbs and lies contentedly in his arms, her body pressed against his.
Emmaline: Jock, Jock.
He leans over to kiss her again, then his eye catches sight of the electric light button. Loosing one arm he places his lips against hers, then reaches out and presses the light button. There is complete darkness, and a tense silence as the curtain falls.

Editor's Notes

The punctuation and capitalization of the stage directions have been regularized for readability; otherwise, this transcript replicates the text as it appears in the typescript.

1. The typescript identifies this speaker as Bub, but Jock is surely meant here.
2. "Swanee" here means "I swear," "I declare."
3. Thurman likely intended "arduous."
4. It is not clear what "keena" means here, but surely it refers to some food item—perhaps colcannon?
5. "Big as cuff" here means brazenly, unashamedly.