



JAMES BALDWIN
ONE DAY WHEN I WAS LOST

A Scenario Based on Alex Haley's THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X

"Sharp. . . . Precise. . . . There is no questioning the depth
and sincerity of Baldwin's admiration for Malcolm X."

—*The Times Literary Supplement*



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A SCENARIO BASED ON ALEX HALEY'S
"THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X"

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(The late afternoon, in New York, from the Statue of Liberty in the bay, and the bus water traffic, the downtown spires, the midtown spires, then the garage of the New York Hilton Hotel.

The garage is utterly silent, long and ominous.

The door leading to the hotel opens, and a man's long, lean silhouette crosses the garage swiftly and gets into a car.

There is a long pause before he turns on the ignition and the sound of the motor rolls through the garage.

The moment we hear the sound of the motor, the car's side-view mirror fills the screen—blank as the garage. The radio begins to play—"soul" music—and the car's side-view mirror begins to move, up, into the daylight.

We see the driver's bespectacled eyes in the rear-view mirror: eyes both haunted and alert.

The music pauses. We hear an announcement that MALCOLM X will be appearing at the Audubon Ballroom in the evening.

The side-view mirror, reflecting darkness, then light, then the traffic in the streets.

A red light; people crossing the street; soul music.

We now see the driver, MALCOLM X, bearded, harried, and yet, at the same time, calm and proud.

As the car begins to move again, the side-view mirror begins to reflect inexplicable images—swift, overlapping, blurred.

A fire fills the screen. Then, hooded men, on horseback, smashing in the windows of a country house; a fair, young mulatto woman, pregnant, flinching as the horsemen ride between her and the house; and between her and the camera.

A voice is heard, shouting, "Brothers, sisters, this is not our home! Our homeland is Africa! *In Africa!*"

We hear a trolley-car's clanging bell, and see, from the point of view of the motorman, a beaten, one-eyed black man, lying across the streetcar tracks, watching his death approach.

MALCOLM's face.

The car is moving uptown, through the streets of Manhattan, and we watch MALCOLM watching the people and watching the tall, proud buildings. Following MALCOLM's eye, we begin picking out, isolating, certain details of these buildings:

A cupola, at the topmost height of a New York building, transforms itself, as we pass, into the balcony of the presidential mansion in Dakar: flags flying, throngs of black people cheering. The bearded MALCOLM is smiling and responding to the cheers.

A very young black STUDENT, male, with a bright and eager face, is speaking to him.)

STUDENT *You must return. You must come back to us.*

MALCOLM *I have come back. After many centuries. Thank you—thank you!—for welcoming me. You*

have given me a new name!

(MALCOLM, in a great hall, somewhere in Africa, being draped in an African robe.

The black ruler, who places this robe on him, pronounces this new name at the same time that MALCOLM repeats it to the STUDENT.)

MALCOLM *Omowale.*

STUDENT *It means: the son who has returned.*

MALCOLM *I have had so many names—*

(We see the Book of the Holy Register of True Muslims. A hand inscribes in this book the name: *El-Haji Malik El Shabazz.*

We see a family Bible and a black hand inscribing: *Malcolm Little, May 19, 1925.*)

I will come back to you. I promise—(After a moment) God willing.

(The windows of New York buildings, blinding where the sun strikes.)

MALCOLM'S VOICE OVER *So many names—*

(We hear the raucous sound of a Lindy Hop.

In the side-view mirror: a conked and sweating MALCOLM, dancing, spinning.

A voice yells, "Hey, Red! Go on, Red!"

MALCOLM acknowledges this, without missing a beat. He is dancing with a very young, radiant, black girl, LAURA. They execute a particularly spectacular and punishing *pas de deux*, the crowd roaring them on, and when MALCOLM has, literally, set LAURA'S feet on solid ground again, he holds her against him a moment. They are very, very young: and they smile at each other that way.)

MALCOLM *You are the cutest thing.*

(MALCOLM'S present, weary, bearded face: very much alone. Idly, he watches a very attractive blond girl striding along the avenue.)

MALCOLM'S VOICE OVER *Sophia—*

(The car stops for a light.

The blond girl, who is actually not SOPHIA, enters a jewelry shop. We see her through the glass.

In the side-view mirror, we see:

MALCOLM'S long hands tangled in SOPHIA'S long blond hair. They kiss—a long moment—and then we see that they are in a room, on a bed. SOPHIA is wearing a loose robe. MALCOLM is naked to the waist.)

MALCOLM *And what you going to tell your white boy about your black boy? your fine black stud? your nigger?—You hear me talking to you, Miss Anne?*

SOPHIA *I am not going to speak about you at all.*

MALCOLM *Suppose somebody else tells him?*

SOPHIA *Who could make him believe it?*

MALCOLM (laughs) *You keep telling me you know how white men are. (She kisses him.) Don't nobody care about you people at all?*

(He pulls her down on top of him. She buries her head in his chest. Then she looks up at him.)

SOPHIA *I don't think so—don't laugh—only you—*

(And MALCOLM pulls her head down on his chest.)

(MALCOLM, in prison, in a fist-fight. He and his opponent are separated by the guards. A voice yells, "Satan!")

MALCOLM (shouting) *I didn't do a damn thing! I was minding my own business when this joker come fucking over me! I ain't no punk!*

(The GUARDS subdue him and hurl him into solitary, MALCOLM shouting and cursing every inch of the way. When the door locks behind him, he begins beating on the door, finally slumps.)

MALCOLM'S VOICE OVER *So many names.*

(A tree, from which flutter old, discolored rags—which once were clothes, which once were bloodstained; great birds circling in a luminous gray sky; and then clothes billowing from the clothesline of the Little home.)

A lone female black voice, singing:

"Bye and bye,

Bye and bye,

I'm going to lay down

This heavy, heavy load."

The very fair, young mulatto woman, pregnant, trudges from the clothesline toward the house. This is LOUISE LITTLE.

The one-eyed EARL LITTLE, preaching.)

EARL *God has sent us a prophet who will take us home. Do you understand that, brothers and sisters? do you understand that? To take us home! Back to Africa! We're going to leave this accursed people, who been slaughtering us so long! (His listeners all are black: a not overwhelming number. We are in a black church.) But we must raise ourselves so that we need nothing from the white man—nothing!*

(Holster of a white man on horseback. The horse is restless.

From within a white house a black hand lifts a white curtain, lets the curtain drop.)

LACK VOICE *Lord have mercy.*

EARL *We shall establish our own businesses, raise our own food—*

(LOUISE, at the stove, cooking: and watching the clock.)

EARL *And when we have established our sufficiency, we will do as Christ told us to do—we will shake the dust of this most accursed of nations from off our feet. And join our brother, Marcus Garvey, and go home!*

(The Klan, riding through the night.

LOUISE hears this. She looks quickly at the children, who are silent.

The clothes on the line, billowing over the heads of some of the riders as they enter the Little yard.

LOUISE walks to the door, and faces the riders. LOUISE is nearly as white as they are and this lends her a very particular bitterness and a contemptuous authority.

If they are intimidated by the particular quality of her fury, they are nevertheless together and she is alone.)

LOUISE *What you all want here, this time of night? I got my children's supper on the stove.*

EARL *Where's your husband?*

LOUISE *If he was home, would I be standing out here in the yard?*

EARL *If you want to keep on standing, you better watch your tongue.*

JISE *You can veil your face, but you can't hide your voice, Mr. Joel. I know every one of you.*

(A RIDER laughs. His horse rears.)

IDER *Well, if you know every one of us, you know we mean business. You tell your one-eyed liver-lipped preacher husband—*

JISE *You tell him whatever it is you got to tell him! or ain't you man enough?*

IDER *We trying to be patient—*

IDER *You half-white bitch—*

JISE *I might be your daughter, for all you know—or your sister—!*

IDER *Your husband keep on stirring up the bad niggers in this town, we going to have his ass in a sling—you tell him that!*

IDER *He going to lose his other eye!*

(His restless horse rears again, and, in a sudden fury, the RIDER smashes in one of the windows with the butt of his gun. He prods his horse, and all the RIDERS follow him. They ride around the house, smashing in every window with their gun butts, and ride away. LOUISE'S clenched hands on her swollen belly.)

(Night. The streetcar tracks, from the motorman's point of view.

EARL rushes to catch this streetcar but misses it. He stands, in an odd and violent frustration on the tracks, watching the streetcar vanish. He begins walking home.

A car with Nebraska license plates moves slowly along the dark streets, and we see that the two white men in the car are armed.

EARL walks under the billowing clothesline, and the light falls on his face as his wife opens the door. He walks slowly around his violated house; we hear the children whispering and weeping.

He turns to LOUISE, who stands in the doorway, who has not moved.)

JISE *Earl, maybe now you'll listen to me. We can't stay here. Earl. We got to go.*

CL *I ain't going to let them drive me away like this.—Oh, no. Oh, no.*

JISE *Listen to your children in there, crying, scared to death! Man, can't you hear your children?*

CL *I hear my children. That's why we ain't going to run.*

(He starts into the house. LOUISE stops him.)

JISE *Earl, it don't matter about me. I ain't worried about me. I ain't never asked for you to worry about me. We made our choice, and that's all right. But my babies, Earl—my babies!*

(She is weeping. He holds her to him, a long moment; we watch his face.)

EL *All right. Tell you what. We'll go. We'll go. But we can't go nowhere tonight. I got to get busy fixing these windows. And tomorrow morning—early tomorrow morning—I'll start arranging for us to get out of this town.—But it going to be the same thing, no matter where we go. They ain't never going to treat us right, not here. This white man is too sick. We got to get to Africa.*

JISE *Earl—where in Africa?*

EL *Wherever Brother Garvey leads us.*

JISE *I wish I was black—black like you—blacker than you! Goddamn it, how I hate them, hate them—! Every drop of that white rapist's blood that's in my veins!*

EL *Hush. (He strokes her belly.) We can't get far, nohow, before this little one gets here. He in a hurry. I can feel him pushing up against my hand.*

JISE *He'll sure be here before we get to Africa.*

(They go into the house.
We see a map, and LOUISE'S finger.)

JISE'S VOICE OVER *No. You were born here, Malcolm. (Her finger touches: Omaha.) And then we moved—here.*

(Her finger touches: Milwaukee.)

(Night. The screen is dark. A match is struck in the darkness. It flickers, seems nearly to go out; then another wisp of flame appears; then another.

EARL turns in bed, beginning to awaken.

LOUISE sits up.)

JISE *Earl!*

(The flames are devouring the house. They gather up the children, covering them with blankets, with anything, and get them out of the house.)

EL *We got all the children? Where's Malcolm?*

JOSE *He's here. They're all here.*

HILD'S VOICE *Here I am.*

(We watch EARL'S desperate face, watching the fire.

LOUISE is watching.

The arrival of the fire engines. The firemen are white.

The crowd gathering. The crowd is white.

The fire trucks come to a halt; and the firemen stand and watch the fire.

EARL turns and watches the crowd. He picks up the baby, MALCOLM, and holds him in his arms.

Father and son, the mother and the children watch the crowd watching the fire.

A map.)

JOSE'S VOICE OVER *And then your father built a house—here. (Her finger stops at: Lansing.) That's where we stayed.*

(A sea gull, turning and turning in the sky. A bright summer day.

The young, bright, gawky, conked MALCOLM, walking, with his shoes and a pair of girl's shoes tied over his shoulder.)

MALCOLM *I wasn't really born there. I just grew up there.*

IRA *I never heard of it.*

MALCOLM *Well, there's a big town not too far from it, called Detroit—that's where they make the cars. You ever hear of Detroit?*

(MALCOLM and LAURA are walking along a deserted Cape Cod beach, barefoot, he with his trousers rolled.)

IRA *Yes. I've heard of Detroit. Was—Lansing—a nice town? Did you like it there?*

MALCOLM *I didn't want to live there. No more than I want to live in Boston.*

IRA *What's wrong with Boston? I live here.*

MALCOLM *Well, I think I'm big enough to overlook that. In fact, I'm thinking of kidnapping you. You want to be like all them hill clowns? them people your grandmother like so much?*

IRA *Just because my grandmother likes them doesn't mean that I have to like them.*

MALCOLM *She want you to like them. She want you to be like that. She want you to marry somebody like that. Like that deacon—what's his name—so black and puffed up he can't hardly talk—the on*

who call me Master Little—ha! I ain't master of nothing. He say he "in banking." In banking! (An elderly black man, solemnly winding an impressive watch.) He don't see penny one in that bank. They don't let him nowhere near the money. All he do is mop their floors. (Which, after the gentleman has elaborately tucked his watch away, we see is all too true.) And old Miss Stella, talking about she with a "old family"—yeah. And what she doing with that old family? She cook their food and scrub their toilets—(A handsome black woman is simultaneously putting on her street clothes and expertly filling a large, respectable-looking handbag.)—and take home their leftovers. If she married to that cat "in banking," I reckon she better.

JRA *Don't talk like that.*

LCOLM *Well, it's true! And that cat "in utilities." He in, all right—when he ain't outside riding a bicycle for the gas company. In utilities!*

JRA *That's another generation. You haven't got to be like that.*

LCOLM (stops walking; looks at her) *You' damn right.*

JRA *Oh—!* (Suddenly, she grabs his hand and starts running with him. They start laughing. They run to the water's edge and fall down, laughing, in the sand.) *Oh, look!*

LCOLM *Look at what?*

(But he follows her finger and sees what she sees: the sea gull, turning and swooping in the sky.)

JRA *He wears the sky like an overcoat.*

LCOLM (looks at her, amused and moved) *Honey, he's just looking for food. He got a lot of mouth to feed.*

JRA *You're always so—practical.*

LCOLM *I better be.*

(He kisses her, lightly, playfully, like a brother, and sits up. He takes their shoes off his shoulders and rests them on the sand.)

JRA *It's peaceful here.*

LCOLM *You think so? I wish it was. I wish I could make it peaceful for you. I guess I'd do anything for you—if I could do anything—*

JRA *But you can, Malcolm, you can! You—you could be a wonderful man.*

MALCOLM *You know, when I was a little boy, where we lived—(He pauses, to be reassured by LAURA, who is lying on her side, watching him.) I ain't never really told you about where we lived, but I was in the country—and we grew our own food—that was my daddy's idea—(We watch LAURA, watching MALCOLM.)—and so we had our own garden, you know, and so I asked my mama if I could have my own little garden, too. And so she said, Yes, and she let me. I loved it and I took care of it. I used to love to grow peas. I used to be proud when we had them on the table—on our table—*

(LOUISE, smiling, humming, shelling peas.)

MALCOLM'S VOICE OVER *I used to crawl on my hands and knees, looking for the bugs and the worms and then I'd kill them and bury them. (We see the ground very close, as if from the viewpoint of a crawling child, and remain fascinated before one enormous green shoot.) And sometimes I would lie down on my back between my nice clean rows and gaze up at the blue sky at the clouds moving—*

(MALCOLM'S face.)

MALCOLM —and think all kind of things.

JIRA What kind of things?

MALCOLM *All kinds of things. I used to dream that I would be speaking to great crowds of people—and would somehow do something which would help my father and my mother. I didn't want my mother to work so hard. (We watch LAURA watching MALCOLM. He suddenly grabs her hand and looks up at her.) They used to fight because they both worked too hard.*

(The blue sky, from the viewpoint of someone lying on his back.)

JISE'S VOICE OVER *We ain't never ate rabbit before in this house, Earl!*

(The sky: very still.)

EARL'S VOICE OVER *Well, we going to be eating rabbit today!*

(The sky goes out of focus, goes black for a moment, tilts out of sight, and LOUISE comes in focus.)

JISE *We only raised rabbits to sell to white folks.*

EARL *Did you hear what I just told you?*

(A rabbit, EARL'S hands on its neck, being whirled around and thrown to the floor.)

LOUISE is horrified, sweating, speechless.)

EARL *Fix it for dinner. I be back soon.*

(LOUISE looks at the rabbit at her feet picks it up, puts it on the sink, finds a knife.

EARL leaves the kitchen, and the yard.

LOUISE walks from the darkness of the kitchen into the brightness of the yard.)

LOUISE *Earl!*

(EARL turns to face her: in focus, though already quite far away. LOUISE has her back to us.)

LOUISE *Earl—?*

(EARL waves his hand, and, after a moment, turns and walks away. We watch him—startlingly—
from the point of view of LOUISE—vanish from our sight.

MALCOLM is still holding LAURA'S hand.)

MALCOLM *Are you cold?*

LAURA *No.*

MALCOLM *You were shivering.*

LAURA *Every time you touch me, makes my blood run cold.*

(They laugh. He kisses her, lightly, playfully, as before. Then, suddenly, they really kiss. They
pull away, staring at each other with fear and wonder, and kiss again. MALCOLM pulls away.)

MALCOLM *You're the nicest girl I ever knew.*

LAURA *You're the nicest boy.*

MALCOLM *Oh, I'm not nice. I'm not nice at all. Your grandma's right about me. You should listen to her.*

LAURA *I have a mind of my own, Malcolm. I'm not a child.*

MALCOLM *Yes, you are. Compared with me, you are. I don't come from around here. You don't know
anything about me. Maybe everything I ever told you was a lie.*

LAURA *I don't know anything about you? I know you're smart and distinguished—and—you're very
nice.*

MALCOLM *Will you come dance with me at the Roseland—Saturday night? I know your grandma gone have a fit.*

IRA *You name the night. I'll handle the fit.*

MALCOLM (after a moment) *It's time we was going.* (He kisses her on the cheek, very sorrowfully.)
Come on.

(We watch them walk away, becoming very small figures, between the sea and the land, the sky.)

(MALCOLM'S garden. Night.

We travel slowly through MALCOLM'S rows.

The sky: dark.

LOUISE, at the stove, and watching the clock.)

EARL'S VOICE OVER (in the rhythm of the clock) *Separate! Separate! Leave this accursed land! Separate!*

LACK VOICE *Lord, have mercy.*

(The town: empty, dark.

Into this silence: the clanging of the streetcar bell.

The badly beaten body of EARL LITTLE lands heavily on the tracks. He tries to move; he cannot.

The clanging bell grows louder.

EARL'S mouth opens in terror.)

(The frosted office door of an insurance company. LOUISE walks through this door.

LOUISE is facing a white man, who sits behind his desk.)

LOUISE *You know as well as me that my husband's policy was paid up. He worked and suffered and starved to keep up on that policy!*

MAN *Mrs. Little, we do not deny that. But you must try to understand our problems, too. Our investigators inform us that your husband met his death at his own hand. And, in that case, we cannot pay the policy. And that is the law. I deeply regret it—but my hands are tied.*

LOUISE *The law!*

MAN *But it is the law, Mrs. Little. You may—indeed you do—have all my sympathy. But I am not the law.*

LOUISE *You can sit there and fix your mouth to tell me that my husband picked up a hammer and*

*slammed it in the back of his own head and then dragged his body across the streetcar tracks? How
a man going to beat in the back of his own skull?*

THE MAN *Your husband's body was found lying across the streetcar tracks. Our verdict is suicide.*

JISE *Suicide.*

(THE MAN rises.)

THE MAN *I'm very sorry, Mrs. Little. I'm afraid there's nothing we can do.*

JISE *You got any children?*

THE MAN *I have—three little boys.*

JISE *And you got life insurance. When one of them cuts your throat to get it, you just remember me*

(Early in the morning, in the well-appointed kitchen of a white woman.)

THE WOMAN *Why, I no more thought of you as his wife—excuse me, his widow—of that—I thought
you were white—saying nothing is the same thing as lying—that rabble-rousing—I'm sorry, I'm a
mother, too. But you'll have to go.*

JISE *I hope I live long enough to hear somebody say them words to you. And maybe I will.*

(In the very different kitchen of the Little home, LOUISE is facing an earnest, young, white
welfare worker, MISS DUNNE.)

MISS DUNNE *Mrs. Little, you remember—sometime ago, when you lost your husband—*

JISE *When my husband was murdered.*

MISS DUNNE *You will remember that we discussed—*

JISE *You. Not we.*

MISS DUNNE *—the advisability, perhaps—*

JISE *Of me sending my children away. And I said then, and I say now, that you'd already robbed
these children of their daddy and I wasn't going to let you rob them of their mother. Now, what you
doing here, this morning?*

MISS DUNNE *We are only concerned with the welfare of the children—we want to make sure that they*

are properly cared for—

JISE (laughs) *If you could hear yourself—!*

IS DUNNE *Mrs. Little—*

JISE *You want to make sure—make sure—how did you put it, you college-educated, dried-up, cat-faced, white bitch? —what did you say—you want to take care of my children? I'd tear you limb from limb before I'd give my children over to you, or anybody who looks like you. I can take care of my children.*

IS DUNNE *We have reports on all of your children, Mrs. Little, all of them are delinquent—and one of them is a thief—*

JISE *Is what?*

IS DUNNE *A—thief—Mrs. Little.*

JISE *Get out of my house.*

IS DUNNE *Mrs. Little—*

JISE *Out, I say!*

IS DUNNE *You'll regret this, Mrs. Little.*

JISE *If you don't move out this open door, you soon going to be past all regretting.*

IS DUNNE *I think you must be crazy.*

JISE *I got my kids to feed. I ain't going to let you drive me crazy.*

(In the asylum: a ravaged LOUISE.)

JISE *Don't you let them feed that boy no pig.*

(The untidy back of the young, untidy MALCOLM's head, sitting in a moving car, between two white OFFICIALS.)

OFFICIAL *Now, you just remember, boy, you lucky. This ain't the reform school. This is just a nice private home. A real nice couple runs it, and you'll go to school, and all, and nobody'll bother you just as long as you keep your nose clean—we giving you a chance to make something of yourself, boy.*

D OFFICIAL *You're on probation, like they told you in the court. You know what that means? (He looks over to MALCOLM, who does not answer.) Look, kid. Your mother's just tired. It's only natural. She'll be all right. (Silence.) Okay. It's rough. But keep your nose clean.*

(A dining room table, five surly white youths, seated. They come closer and closer, staring up at MALCOLM—at us.)

S. SWERLIN'S VOICE OVER *This is Malcolm—Malcolm—Malcolm Little! our new guest. He's just like all the rest of us and we're going to treat him just like a brother, now, you hear?*

(But the boys, as we can gather from their reaction to this cheerful species of blackman, are totally unable to do this on command.)

(A furiously grieving, silent MALCOLM, chopping wood.

MALCOLM, washing dishes.

MALCOLM, weaving, dribbling, dancing across the basketball court, rising high in the air, seeming to fly, as he makes the basket, which wins the game.

A sweating, grinning, exhilarated MALCOLM, in the locker room, surrounded by the ecstatic basketball team, of which he is the only black member. They are very proud of him, and very affectionate. Just as this sequence ends:)

CE OVER *Where's Malcolm?*

(We are at the school dance, panning through the white boys and girls, dancing or flirting in the darkness outside. MRS. SWERLIN sits on the sidelines.)

JL (a young white student: laughs) *He can't dance.*

(Night. The Negro section of Lansing. A black bar, loud music, laughter, men and women.

A very dressed-up MALCOLM, wandering the streets and entering this bar. He walks to the jukebox, drops in a coin, stands there until his record begins to play.

MALCOLM'S face, tentative, eager, smiling, in shadows.)

WOMAN'S VOICE OVER *Honey, I know you ain't twenty-two, like you claim. But you sure is big for your age.*

(MALCOLM, raking leaves. He does this quietly, stolidly, thoroughly. He puts them in a pile; he sets them aflame. Then he stands very still, looking not at the flames but at the sky.

From within the house, we watch MRS. SWERLIN watching him.)

S. SWERLIN (calls) *Malcolm.*

(MALCOLM, in the kitchen, peeling potatoes. MRS. SWERLIN is at the oven, baking, checking the progress of whatever is in the oven; then at the sink, etc.; near the end of this scene, she sits down, facing MALCOLM.)

S. SWERLIN *Oh, you would have liked my father, Malcolm. He came here from the old country and I guess he must have had clothes on his back because they let him in—but that's about all he had. But he was a stubborn man, and hard as a flint-stone. Of course, he wasn't hard with us. We knew how to get around him. I think girl children get on better with their daddy than boy children, don't you, Malcolm?*

LCOLM *I don't know, Mrs. Swerlin.*

S. SWERLIN *But you got on all right with your daddy, didn't you?*

LCOLM *Oh. Sure. I guess so.*

S. SWERLIN *You guess so?*

LCOLM *I mean—yes, ma'am. We got on fine.*

S. SWERLIN *I guess you—people say all kinds of things about your daddy. But I don't listen. My father taught me better than that. The way my father was, well, if he was your friend, he was your friend. That's all there was to it. He didn't listen to what people said. Don't you think that's the way to be?*

LCOLM *Yes, ma'am.*

S. SWERLIN *If there was more people like that, this world would be a better place, I bet you. How you getting along with the other boys?*

LCOLM *Oh, we get along fine.*

S. SWERLIN *They're nice boys. Oh, they get out of hand every once in a while, wouldn't be human if they didn't—but they right nice lads. I ain't never been able to have none of my own, you know. It wasn't the Saviour's will. So I got me a houseful of other people's children, because everybody gets in trouble. People forget our Saviour was in trouble. You got any news from your mother?*

LCOLM *No, ma'am.*

S. SWERLIN *You write to her?*

LCOLM *No, ma'am—I don't think they let her have no mail.*

S. SWERLIN *Malcolm—a boy has one mother. I know that. And no one can take her place. And I wouldn't try. But I feel like a mother to you. And we're all very proud of you here. Yes, sir. You*

can bet your life on that. I ain't seen many boys, white or black, like you. You've got a lot on the ball, Malcolm, and I just know you can make something of yourself and you'll always have firends. You know why?

LCOLM *No, ma'am. (She lifts his chin. For a moment, they watch each other.) Why?*

S. SWERLIN *Because you're a friend. You treat people kind. People like to be around you. Everybody noticed that. You must remember—you keep that spirit and you can be anything you want to be.—Tell you what. I know you kind of lonesome here, sometimes. It's only natural for you to want to see your people. Tell you: Fridays and Saturdays, after your work's finished, go on and take the bus to Lansing, see your friends. I know you won't get into no trouble, now, will you, Malcolm?*

LCOLM *No, ma'am.—Thank you, Mrs. Swerlin.*

(Night. The Negro section of Lansing. The bar.

MALCOLM and SHORTY, sitting in a booth.

SHORTY is—short; much darker than MALCOLM; and a little older.)

ORTY *No. I just didn't think I could take it no more, cousin.*

LCOLM *So what are you going to do now?*

ORTY *Hustle me up another slave, I reckon—this town, man!*

LCOLM *It ain't so bad—is it?*

ORTY *Oh, shit, I forgot, you been over there with all them ofays so long you wouldn't even know.*

LCOLM *I ain't thinking about them ofays.—You know what I'm thinking about.*

ORTY *Homeboy, you are a clown. A natural clown. These broken-down black bitches around here, they glad to give you some pussy, have you working out like a champion, man, hollering about oh it's good, it's good, Daddy, time you ready to drop they just belch and want some more. You clown. You know why? Because you young and you dumb and they really think you white.*

LCOLM *Shorty, you sound like you jealous—or something.*

ORTY *I ain't jealous.*

LCOLM *Why you jumping salty on me, then?*

ORTY *The bitch puts out for you for free. Where she do it? In the room I pay for. She bring you your eggs in bed. Where she get the eggs? Huh? She say, Baby, have another drink. Where she get the bottle? Then she powder and perfume you and she send you home just before I get home with,*

maybe, even a little change in your pockets—

LCOLM *Shorty, I ain't never had nothing to do with none of your women! What you telling me?*

ORTY *Nothing. But all that shit she give away, it comes off my black ass. I got to stand for somebody to call me nigger, every day, all day, so I can bring home the shit she give away to you for free, because she really thinks you white.*

LCOLM *Well, she might think I'm white—*

ORTY *Oh, you kind of think so, too. I can't really blame you. They got you kind of turned around, over at that school—and, over here, these black bitches think you cute—(MALCOLM, involuntarily, grins.) Yeah. You wait till you start slaving out here, baby.*

LCOLM *They might make me Class President. I got the best grades, honest, and I'm very popular.*

ORTY *You are?*

LCOLM *Yeah. Everybody says so.*

ORTY *Yeah?*

LCOLM *Well, look, it ain't just a matter of being black. Nobody can help being black. But—everybody can be somebody—!*

ORTY *Yeah.*

LCOLM *Shorty you think I'm wrong?*

ORTY *I think I'll move on up to Boston. I ain't going to be able to get no more jobs in this town.*

LCOLM *What you going to do in Boston?*

ORTY *Be somebody.*

(Evening. The study of the SWERLIN home.)

MALCOLM enters the SWERLIN study, to face MRS. SWERLIN, and a stranger, JUDGE MERRITT.

MRS. SWERLIN is radiant.)

S. SWERLIN *Oh, we've got such good news for you, Malcolm—you tell him, Judge. Malcolm, you remember Judge Merritt?*

LCOLM *Yes, ma'am. How do you do, sir?*

(MALCOLM smiles, and the JUDGE nods.)

JUDGE MERRITT *Well, son, you know that you've been staying with the Swerlins kind of on probation, you might say. After it was judged necessary to send your mother away—because she was unable properly to take care of her children—(MALCOLM is rigid, excessively attentive.)—well you presented something of a problem, too. Looked like you were about to take the wrong path there, for a while. You remember we were thinking of sending you to reform school—you remember, boy?*

MALCOLM *Yes, sir. I remember.*

S. SWERLIN *The Board had a meeting this afternoon, Malcolm—*

JUDGE MERRITT *The Board had a meeting and it was decided, in view of the amazing progress you have made with the Swerlins—your fine scholastic record and the phenomenal improvement in your, ah, character—that it will not be necessary to send you to reform school. It is the judgment of the Board that you have reformed yourself.*

S. SWERLIN *Didn't I tell you, Malcolm? Didn't I tell you? Oh, I'm so proud of you—so proud—just like you were my own—!*

MALCOLM *Thank you. Thank you, sir. Thank you, Mrs. Swerlin.*

S. SWERLIN *I didn't do it, Malcolm. You did it. Oh! your mother would be so proud of you!*

JUDGE MERRITT *We're all proud of you. You keep it up, you hear?*

MALCOLM *I surely will, sir. Thank you. Thank you.*

(They turn away from him. The moment their backs are to him, MALCOLM, irrepressibly, executes a jubilant dance.)

JUDGE MERRITT and MRS. SWERLIN are walking toward the living room.)

JUDGE MERRITT *I was walking through the nigger section of town today. I declare, I don't know how those people live—sometimes I wonder if they are people—*

S. SWERLIN *Sometimes I wonder, too—of course, I know that God made everybody—*

JUDGE MERRITT *—the children are filthy, the shacks just falling down around their heads—they can't fix the shacks but they got the big, shiny cars out front—*

S. SWERLIN *I just don't know how niggers can be so happy and be so poor.*

(We watch MALCOLM'S reaction to this, as the living room doors shut off MRS. SWERLIN and JUDGE MERRITT.)

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