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For Johnny Wright

Hey, see, when Branch signed Jackie to that contract, that was the beginning of the civil rights movement.

—Buck O'Neil

February 14, 2003

KXLY TV interview

(While in Spokane, WA for Onyx Theatre-Troupe production of *National Pastime*)

Cast of Characters

JACKIE ROBINSON, black baseball player; from six years old to forty-three years old

BRANCH RICKEY, white baseball executive; from early fifties through eighty

WALTER "RED" BARBER, white radio broadcaster, from the South; late thirties (may double as Bus Driver)

WENDELL SMITH, black newspaper columnist for *Pittsburgh Courier*; mid-thirties or older (may double as Bus Passenger)

MALLIE ROBINSON, Jackie's mother; from late twenties to fifties

CLYDE SUKEFORTH, white baseball coach and scout

RACHEL ISUM (ĪSUM) ROBINSON, Jackie's girl, and later wife; early to late twenties

JANE RICKEY, Branch's wife; early fifties to early sixties

LYLAH BARBER, Red's wife, also from the South; late thirties

LEROY "SATCHELL" PAIGE, black baseball player; of indeterminate age

MULE, Negro League ballplayer, mid-thirties

HAROLD "PEE WEE" REESE, white Brooklyn Dodgers Team Leader, from the South; late twenties

DIXIE WALKER, white baseball player (may double as Officer of the Day or Bus Driver)

OTHERS, BUS DRIVER, BUS PASSENGER, OFFICER OF THE DAY & MESSENGER (all these may be handled by doubling; Bus Passenger may be unseen)

Time and Place

Act I: Cooperstown, New York, 1962, and elsewhere throughout the United States, from the 1920s to August, 1945.

Act II: The United States, Canada and Cuba, late 1945 to Spring, 1947; and Cooperstown, 1962.

Production Notes

The Set

Keep it simple. Don't build a ballpark, just establish the baselines. This play is best realized with as little set as possible. Avoid a design that will slow down the transitions and dramatic action. Rely on lights and sound for transitions. That said, there is a grandstand area, a locker room area, one or more press areas (one with microphone), an office area, and one or more neutral areas. There may also be a discernable void from which the Dugout Voices will emanate. Also, a desk, chairs and benches, as needed.

The Narrator Convention

The characters of Red Barber and Wendell Smith also serve a narrative function in Act I. Red and Wendell's narration establishes the external, historical aspects of Jackie Robinson and Branch Rickey's journey, continuing until both Red and Wendell become more personally involved in the journey and are absorbed into the story itself.

In Act II, narrative duties fall upon Rachael Robinson and Jane Rickey. Here, the narration is of a more intimate nature, as these soul mates help reveal the interior, personal journey of their partners.

All narrators can move the story along by helping with transitions from one scene to the next, and providing and clearing props during these transitions.

Author Note

National Pastime was substantially revised while the playwright was a Fellow at the Hawthornden Castle International Retreat for Writers in Lasswade, Scotland, in the Fall of 1998.

Acknowledgments

National Pastime premiered at Spokane Civic Theatre, a community theatre in Spokane, Washington, in its Studio Theatre on April 18, 1998. *National Pastime* was developed with the guidance and support of the Civic's Executive Producer John G. Phillips, and was directed by Jack Delehanty, with the following cast and crew:

RED BARBER.....	Rick Douglas
WENDELL SMITH	H.W. Tony Anthony
BRANCH RICKEY	Norman Gano
JACKIE ROBINSON	David Casteal
MALLIE ROBINSON.....	Liz McAlpine
CLYDE SUKEFORTH.....	John Brooks
RACHEL ISUM ROBINSON.....	A'Dell McAlpine
JANE RICKEY	Barb Gale
LYLAH BARBER.....	Marcie Chase
LEROY SATCHEL PAIGE	'Aalim Khalil, Bryan Jackson
COOL PAPA BELL	H.W. Tony Anthony
EDDIE	Rick Douglas
MULE.....	Percy "Happy" Watkins
HAROLD "PEE WEE" REESE.....	Austin de Paolo
BUS DRIVER / OFFICER OF THE DAY / "DIXIE" WALKER	R. Scott Powers
Producer	Alice Kennedy
Stage Manager	Irish Everette
Technical Director / Lighting Design	Peter Hardie
Set Design / Scenic Artist	Nik Adams
Costume Design and Construction.....	Dee Finan, Susan Berger
Script Typist.....	Roberta Homoki

Acknowledgments (continued)

The first professional production of *National Pastime* was at Fremont Centre Theatre in South Pasadena, California on March 19, 2005. The play was directed by James Reynolds, with the following cast and crew:

JACKIE ROBINSON	Jed Reynolds
BRANCH RICKEY	Frank Ashmore
RED BARBER.....	Vaughn Armstrong
WENDELL SMITH	Ted Lange
MALLIE ROBINSON.....	Luise Heath
CLYDE SUKEFORTTH	Dan Payne
RACHEL ISUM ROBINSON.....	Denise Boutté
JANE RICKEY	Sarah Lilly
LYLAH BARBER.....	Connie Ventress
LEROY SATCHEL PAIGE	Lamont Thompson
MULE.....	Ken Sagoes
HAROLD "PEE WEE" REESE.....	Todd Cattell
"DIXIE" WALKER	Travis Johns
BUS DRIVER.....	Bryan West
OFFICER OF THE DAY	Travis Johns
Producer	Lissa Reynolds
Associate Producer	Daphne Bloomer
Set Designer	Victoria Profitt
Stage Manager / Sound Designer.....	Katie Dunn
Casting Director	Fran Bascom
Managing Director	Rosemary Layng

The East Coast Premiere of *National Pastime* was at Stamford Theatre Works in Stamford, Connecticut on February 2, 2006, directed by Steve Karp, Founder and Producing Director of Stamford Theatre Works.

NATIONAL PASTIME

by Bryan Harnetiaux

ACT I

(At Rise: The lights fade up on BRANCH RICKEY and JACKIE ROBINSON in tableau, as they will appear late in the play, backstage at baseball's Hall of Fame in 1962, the day of Robinson's induction. [If the crowd is in the grandstand, it should be segregated.] Both wear overcoats and appear to be in mid-conversation. RICKEY is eighty years-old at this point, stooped, and using a cane. ROBINSON is forty-three, already old beyond his years. The sound of typing on a manual typewriter fades in, followed by the sound of a play-by-play broadcast of a baseball game. Lights up on WENDELL SMITH at his typewriter in the press area, typing.)

SMITH. To Wesley Branch Rickey. General Manager, St. Louis Cardinals Baseball Club. St. Louis, Missouri. Dear Mister Rickey. It is now 1935. The war is over. The South lost. Where are the Negro ballplayers?

(SMITH continues typing as the lights fade up on WALTER "RED" BARBER, at the microphone, in the midst of a broadcast.)

BARBER. *(With only a hint of a Southern accent, both direct and understated:)* ...two out, two-two tie, bottom of the ninth. Robinson dances off third. The Dodgers need this run. Midway through the 1947 season, and they're just a half-game behind the Giants in the standings. Jackie looks like he might burst into flames any minute. The pitcher winds up—Robinson breaks for home! Here comes the ball, here's Robinson and—oh, Doctor—the Dodgers win it three to two!

(SMITH pulls the sheet of paper out of his typewriter. BARBER pushes the microphone aside and relaxes.)

SMITH. This is a story about two men who ended up inside history over sixty [or appropriate benchmark; e.g. "almost seventy," etc.] years ago.

(Indicating tableau:)

Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson. That's them, July—help me here, Red—

BARBER. July 23rd, 1962.

SMITH. — July 23rd, 1962—backstage at Cooperstown, New York.

BARBER. Baseball's Hall of Fame. Rickey was eighty at the time, Robinson forty-three. They're both long dead now.

(The lights fade out on RICKEY and ROBINSON.)

Wendell there's dead, too.

SMITH. You're no better.

BARBER. Wendell, he's a columnist. Got a license to say anything he wants. Now, I'm a broadcaster. Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, the Commissioner of Baseball after the Black Sox scandal of 1919, once told me my job is simply to report what happens. That's all. Just report. If there's judgments to be made, let the people make them.

(The lights come up on RICKEY, who now sits in the grandstand, studying his little black book, packed with details about current players and future prospects.)

Branch Rickey was the President of the Brooklyn Dodgers from 1942 until 1950. He would be sixty-four years old when he walked into the history books.

SMITH. Branch Rickey was one of the cleverest son of a guns I ever knew.

(The lights come up on ROBINSON, now in the locker area changing clothes.)

Jackie Robinson would become one of the best friends I ever had.

BARBER. Jack Roosevelt Robinson was a Black man—we called them “colored” back then—and on April 15, 1947, played first base for the Brooklyn Dodgers in the season opener at Ebbets Field. It was the first time a colored man ever played major league baseball in this country. That day Robinson weighed in at one hundred

ninety pounds, stood a hairbreadth under six feet, and was in his twenty-eighth year.

SMITH. He looked about three hundred years old to me.

(SMITH and BARBER are gone. Lights fade down on RICKEY and up on MALLIE ROBINSON, sitting. Train sounds slowly fade in. ROBINSON puts on a child's cap and joins MALLIE, excited and out of breath.)

MALLIE. Where you been?

ROBINSON. With Mack, lookin' at the white folks.

MALLIE. You stop your runnin' around 'n stay right here. Go to sleep now, like your brothers and sister.

ROBINSON. They got sandwiches. Mack's gettin' us some.

MALLIE. Where is your brother?

ROBINSON. He was crawlin' through the white car gettin' us sandwiches. Somebody yelled "nigger" and I ran.

MALLIE. My Lord.

ROBINSON. Mack's faster than them crackers.

MALLIE. You hush your mouth, Jackie Robinson.

ROBINSON. Mack calls 'em crackers.

MALLIE. We'll see about that.

ROBINSON. He be back.

MALLIE. He best, or I'll tan him good.

ROBINSON. Mama, I'm hungry. We got sandwiches?

MALLIE. *(Digs through a bag and hands ROBINSON a biscuit.)* Take this now, and shush.

ROBINSON. *(Eating biscuit:)* Where we goin', mama?

MALLIE. I 'tole you before. Your Uncle Burton's.

ROBINSON. Uncle Burton's. Where's Uncle Burton's?

MALLIE. 'Member, place called California. Pasadena.

ROBINSON. Pasadena. That in Georgia?

MALLIE. Oh, we're done with Georgia. Pasadena's a whole different place.

ROBINSON. Daddy in Pasadena?

MALLIE. You go to sleep now.

ROBINSON. Where is daddy?

MALLIE. He's gone. He's just gone.

ROBINSON. I sure hope Mack got some sandwiches.

(Lights fade out on train scene and up in bleacher area. SMITH sits several rows above RICKEY or stands nearby, unnoticed. We hear the sounds of batting practice and ballplayers' voices in the distance. RICKEY watches the action below, taking notes in his black book.)

SMITH. By the mid-thirties Branch Rickey was already an institution in baseball. Raised in Southern Ohio, around Madison Township, strong Methodist roots. Bible in one hand, baseball in the other. His mama wanted a minister in the family, his daddy was hopin' for a catcher. Rickey ended up playing pro ball. From the beginning, he *thought* baseball as much as he played it. It was a good thing he did, 'cause after a couple of years his throwing arm went out and his playing days were over. For awhile he flirted with the law.

RICKEY. *(Calling out to the playing field below:)* Clyde. Have that kid Musial hit.

SMITH. Got a degree and practiced briefly in Boise, Idaho.

RICKEY. Yes, Musial. Get him a bat.

SMITH. Within a year, he returned to baseball.

RICKEY. *(Patiently:)* Find him one.

SMITH. Mr. Rickey was a patient man. He knew a thing or two about time. Maybe 'cause as a young man he spent a year in a sanitarium waitin' out tuberculosis. Now, newspaper columnists

are notoriously impatient. We're usually writing about something we wanna see happen today. By the 1930s, the Negro press and the communist paper, *The Daily Worker*, started campaigning to end the color line in major league baseball. Early in 1935, I wrote an open letter to Branch Rickey, then of the St. Louis Cardinals, sharing my views on the subject. By the time spring trainin' rolled around, I hadn't heard a word.

(To RICKEY:)

I like that kid out at second, but he can't go to his left. Drags his right foot across the left when he moves. Break him of that, you got a decent fielder.

(RICKEY turns and looks at SMITH, then turns back.)

RICKEY. You're right.

(Writes in his book.)

How'd you get in here?

SMITH. Told them I was your chauffeur. Come to pick you up.

(RICKEY smiles.)

RICKEY. You're Smith, *Pittsburgh Courier*. Branch Rickey.

SMITH. Gotta trim your roster today. What, ten players?

RICKEY. Eleven.

SMITH. There'll be a lot of heartache out there by sundown.

RICKEY. We'll find a place for most of them in the minors, if they want to play bad enough.

SMITH. Yessir, it looks like the Cardinals got a fine batch of young *white* men to pick over.

RICKEY. I got your letter.

SMITH. I missed your answer. You give me one day, I could put nine colored men on that field that'd have these children for lunch.

RICKEY. What makes you think playing forty, fifty games a season in the Negro Leagues would prepare those men to compete for a hundred and fifty-four games a year in the major leagues?

SMITH. You seen Josh Gibson, Cool Papa Bell? Ever watch Satchel Paige pitch? Some call his fastball his “bee ball” – batters just hear it buzz by.

RICKEY. (*Thumbing through his book, and finding entry:*) I’ve seen them all, Mr. Smith. I put Satchel Paige at somewhere around forty years old.

SMITH. These men deserve a chance.

RICKEY. This isn’t heaven, Mr. Smith. Baseball is a business. I’m general manager of the St. Louis Cardinals Baseball Club, and they pay me to come up with the best team I can, given the world we live in. Judas Priest, if Jim Crow’s outside the ball park, he’ll be in here, too. You get rid of Jim Crow, then come talk to me about Josh Gibson and Satchel Paige. What do you think of that kid up there at the plate?

SMITH. He’s white. Ah, he looks good with a bat. Branch Rickey, the visionary. Inventor of spring training, the minor league farm system. Here’s the man, I said.

(*SUKEFORTH enters.*)

SUKEFORTH. Branch, the missus – oh.

SMITH. Here’s the man that can make it happen.

RICKEY. Clyde, Mr. Smith, from the *Courier*. Clyde Sukeforth.

(*SMITH and SUKEFORTH exchange nods.*)

SMITH. Good day, Mr. Rickey.

(*SMITH exits.*)

RICKEY. What is it?

SUKEFORTH. The missus called. She wants to know when you’ll be home.

RICKEY. (*Only half listening:*) I’ll call Janie.

SUKEFORTH. Ya know, that Musial doesn't hit too bad for a pitcher.

RICKEY. He's an outfielder now.

(RICKEY and SUKEFORTH are gone. BARBER enters and watches ROBINSON tiptoe to a chair carrying a bat, glove and one spike. Through the following, ROBINSON puts on his socks and the spike, and begins looking for the other one.)

BARBER. Compared to Georgia, life in Pasadena was good to Mallie Robinson and her five children—Edgar, Frank, Mack, Willa Mae and Jackie. Mallie settled in doing domestic work for white families in the area. They stayed with Uncle Burton 'til Mallie somehow got her hands on a house at 121 Pepper Street, smack in the heart of a white neighborhood. The white folks tried to squawk when the Robinson family came along, but nothing ever came of it. There were some indignities the children accepted as glancing blows—the community pool was only open to coloreds on Monday—the day they changed the water.

MALLIE. *(Off:)* Jackie, are you up?!

(JACKIE winces but does not respond, now hurriedly looking for the other spike.)

BARBER. By and large, Jackie and his friends—known as the Pepper Street Gang—kept their noses clean. Most of the time it was one sport after another, every size and shape of ball, and every game known to man.

MALLIE. *(Off:)* Jack Roosevelt Robinson, are you dressed? The Lord's waitin'!

BARBER. All in all, life was good for young Jack Robinson. Though *separate but equal* treatment was the order of the day, it was fairly tolerable from a child's standpoint. Like most places, life was more separate than equal. Then again, no colored boy had ever been lynched in Pasadena, California.

(BARBER exits; ROBINSON finds the missing spike and is climbing out the bedroom window when MALLIE, ready for church, stops him.)

MALLIE. You get your black bottom back in this house.

(He does.)

Where you think you're going?!

(No response.)

I'm on to you, Jackie Robinson. Sneakin' around here like a common thief. And don't you go tellin' me you don't know it's Sunday. It follows Saturday as day follows night. You can play football every other day – Sunday mornin' is the Lord's.

ROBINSON. Baseball.

MALLIE. Don't you sass me. Whatever godless kind of ball it is, it can wait.

ROBINSON. You always tellin' me the Lord's watchin' over me everywhere. Why can't he be watchin' me at the park, 'stead of some old church?

MALLIE. 'Cause he's inside this mornin'.

ROBINSON. How do you know?

MALLIE. 'Cause he told me so! 'N with your Granddaddy McGriff sittin' right there at his side, lookin' on.

ROBINSON. Mama, we got a big game.

MALLIE. It can wait.

ROBINSON. I'll be late.

MALLIE. Least you'll be alive. Quit whinin' and get yourself dressed. You pray real good, you might make it there.

ROBINSON. Yes, ma'am.

MALLIE. I'm worried about your soul, Jackie. You're wrestlin' with the devil. Runnin' around with that Pepper Street crowd, into this and that. You need the Lord. Get on, now.

(On exit.)

And don't you think I didn't hear your sister talkin' about your stealin' four bases yesterday over at the park. You dwell on that durin' the service – when it's over there's gonna be a reckonin'.

(MALLIE *on exit; calling off:*)

Willa Mae, are you ready?!

(ROBINSON *is gone, SMITH enters. During the following, the lights slowly fade up on RICKEY asleep in a chair, with his black book and some newspapers in his lap and an extinguished cigar in his hand.*)

SMITH. Branch Rickey worked for the St. Louis Cardinals for over twenty years. He was Vice President and General Manager most of the time – primarily responsible for player development. Rickey'd served as Field Manager from 1919 to 1925, when he was fired mid-season due to the team's poor record. Stayed on with the Cardinals in the front office another fifteen years. He survived the firing, the World War and the Depression – which left him broke, but undaunted. By the late thirties, he was still with the Cardinals and had recovered nicely. But by 1940, the Cardinals' fortunes had taken a turn for the worse.

(SMITH *exits. JANE RICKEY enters, and shakes RICKEY gently.*)

JANE. Branch. Honey, let's go to bed.

(RICKEY *stirs.*)

RICKEY. Are the kids asleep?

JANE. Branch, the kids are grown.

RICKEY. *Aagh.* What time is it?

JANE. Late.

RICKEY. Did Clyde call?

JANE. The phone was off the hook. Have you eaten?

(*He nods.*)

Did we win?

RICKEY. Six-to-five.

JANE. Good. We'll start a ten game win streak, now.

RICKEY. It might be too late. They're looking for a scapegoat. The fingers are pointing at me, with the help of Sam Breadon.

JANE. Sam?

RICKEY. Sam's let the word out he might fire me as General Manager. It's in the evening editions. Oh, he's denying it—just rumor, he proclaims.

JANE. Oh, Branch. Fired. The Cardinals would be nowhere without you. Sam Breadon is an ungrateful jerk — with halitosis!

RICKEY. Now, Mother. We've been losing, attendance is down. I have to tell you, our position is not good.

JANE. You have a contract. He wouldn't dare!

RICKEY. This firing maneuver is just to appease the press. He can't afford to fire me. The GM contract's up next year. I don't think he'll renew it. Things aren't going to get better for awhile. There's a war on. It's inevitable we'll be involved. One of the casualties will be baseball. No matter what, I'm done with the Cardinals after next year. I'd rather dig ditches than work one more day than I have to for that man. I find him dishonorable.

JANE. You're too old to dig ditches. Maybe it's time to slow down. You're fifty-nine, you've had heart trouble. Things happen for a reason.

RICKEY. We should sell our Cardinal stock, cut our losses. Sam's interested. Judas Priest, I hate to give him the satisfaction.

JANE. You don't have to stay on. Sam's not a complete monster. He'd have to let you out, if you asked.

RICKEY. He can fire me, I won't quit. He has my word.

JANE. We'll take a vacation. You can finally start your book, make Charlie Scribner happy.

RICKEY. Sometimes I wonder why a man trained in the law devotes his life to something as comically unimportant as baseball.

JANE. Now. You've been a good provider, raised six children—all happy and healthy. And you love the challenge. There's nothing wrong with that.

RICKEY. One enterprising reporter caught up with me today as I tried to duck out. You'd have thought he was working on my obituary. "Mr. Rickey, what's the most exciting event of your career?" I told him it hasn't happened yet!

JANE. Alright, you're three steps ahead of me.

RICKEY. Janie, what would you say to New York?

JANE. New York?!

RICKEY. Brooklyn. George McLaughlin called me some time back. He knows my contract's up in forty-one. Said the Dodgers are looking for a new General Manager. Stock ownership—I could write my own ticket.

JANE. What do you think?

RICKEY. What do you think?

JANE. I don't think you're ready to write a book. I'll get the check-board, you can tell me about Brooklyn.

(JANE starts to exit. The phone rings.)

Are you here?

RICKEY. I'll talk to the *Post-Dispatch*.

(Answering the phone.)

JANE. Good evening, Rickeys. Yes, Charlie, just a moment. Charlie, on the City Desk.

(RICKEY takes the phone as JANE picks things up and is about to exit.)

RICKEY. Charlie, how are you? Oh, I'll heal. It's a little boy's game, but we're all grown men.

(Stealthily disconnects the call.)

Now my wife, Jane, she thinks Sam Breadon is a jerk—with halitosis.

(JANE reacts.)

JANE. Branch!

(The phone rings again. RICKEY answers it.)

RICKEY. Charlie! Sorry, bad connection. How's Sarah and the kids...

(The lights fade down on RICKEY and JANE, and up on BARBER. Through the following, the lights slowly fade up on ROBINSON and RACHEL ISUM. As dance music fades in, ROBINSON and RACHEL become increasingly aware of each other.)

BARBER. By the time Jack Robinson showed up at the University of California at Los Angeles in 1939 he had already made quite a name for himself, lettering in every high school sport, and shredding records along the way. Finished sittin' in the catbird seat, sorting out college scholarship offers. Robinson passed on the big universities, in favor of Pasadena Junior College, so he could stay home and help his mother. By that time Mallie could tell a basketball from a baseball from a football with only a modicum of coachin'. Robinson tore up the junior college circuit, lettering in football, baseball and track. Through these years, his greatest inspiration was his brother Mack. He'd chased Mack's shadow for years. Finally did beat his brother's junior college record for the broad jump. After junior college Robinson accepted a scholarship at UCLA. First person to ever letter there in four sports. Through all of this, Robinson had no social life to speak of, no companion to spur him on or complicate his life. No wonder mosta' the time he was tighter than a Smokey Mountain tick.

(BARBER drifts off, as ROBINSON approaches RACHEL.)

ROBINSON. Excuse me. I'm Jack Robinson.

RACHEL. Rachel. Rachel Isum [*Isum*].

ROBINSON. Nice meetin' you. Mind if I join you?

RACHEL. Nice band. Are you having fun?

ROBINSON. Yeah, I guess. You go here? I haven't seen you in any classes.

RACHEL. I'm in the nursing program. You?

ROBINSON. Physical education. I mostly play ball.

RACHEL. (*Aware of the music:*) I've seen you play. You're easy to spot.

ROBINSON. That's for sure.

RACHEL. It ever bother you?

ROBINSON. Some think they're better. Makes you work harder.

RACHEL. Harder at what?

ROBINSON. Getting ahead – winning.

RACHEL. They say your brother was a runner.

ROBINSON. That'd be Mack. He won a silver medal at the Olympics in thirty-six.

RACHEL. Silver's good, right?

ROBINSON. Just a half step from great. Jesse Owens got the gold.

RACHEL. Right. Two Negroes coming in first and second, right under Hitler's nose. That was something.

ROBINSON. Yeah. Second don't mean much. Mack found that out. He came back from Berlin – no job, white-only restaurants, segregated hotels. Everybody wants to hear about Jesse Owens, can Mack introduce them. They're standin' there talkin' to the second fastest man in the world –

RACHEL. They probably don't mean any harm. Maybe your brother's too sensitive –

ROBINSON. My brother left Germany a hero and came back here just another runner-up, and a nigger to boot. He comes home, can't even get his old job back. He's sweepin' streets downtown! Sorry.

RACHEL. No, it was me about him being too sensitive. I might feel the same way. Isn't anything going to stop me from finishing college – being a registered nurse.

ROBINSON. I don't think you need worry about that. You'd be the kind of nurse that'd make a man wanna get sick...

RACHEL. I bet an athlete like you can dance and talk at the same time.

ROBINSON. (*Surprised, and hesitant:*) Oh, yeah. Sure.

(They rise and start to dance. RACHEL is assured and graceful, ROBINSON is tense and clumsy. Through the following he will step on her toes twice.)

Do you live on campus, Rachel? Oops, sorry.

RACHEL. No. I live with my folks.

ROBINSON. I'm with my mom. For now. I'm saving for a car and – oh! You okay?

RACHEL. Fine. You might have to carry me home. Maybe we should either talk or dance.

ROBINSON. No, I'll get it. Stick with me now.

(BARBER returns. RACHEL and ROBINSON continue to dance, then separate.)

BARBER. Lylah and I are partial to the waltz. My grandparents taught us. Some said they were the most elegant couple in the state of Mississippi. Rachel and Jackie danced and talked their way through that entire spring and summer. Started sharing pieces of themselves, to see how they fit together. They talked more than they danced. Robinson played football in Hawaii through the fall of 1941, managed to save a few bucks for the future, and help Mallie out, too. By that time, I'd been hired to do radio broadcasts for the Brooklyn Dodgers, and hung my hat at Ebbets Field, Flatbush. Robinson left Hawaii in early December, 1941. He was on a steamer back to the states when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. His induction notice was waiting for him when he arrived home. Before he left for basic training at Fort Riley, Kansas, Jackie and Rachel Isum got engaged.

(BARBER exits, SMITH enters. ROBINSON puts on a military uniform shirt and hat. RICKEY enters to gavel sounds.)

SMITH. Branch Rickey's contract with the St. Louis Cardinals was not renewed, and in 1942 Mr. Rickey became President and General Manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. He negotiated a quarter-interest in the team, to boot. He was in his early-sixties now, a time when most of us are workin' our way through our last pair of good shoes.

RICKEY. (*Gavel, again.*) If everyone will take a seat, we'll get started.

SMITH. It was not the ideal time to take over a major league ball club. The war was at its height, and every able-bodied man was workin' for Uncle Sam.

ROBINSON. (*To RACHEL, via letter:*) Our company should receive orders soon. The rumor is the colored soldiers go straight to the front. It doesn't work that way at the Fort Riley Canteen. We must wait in line for a table, while whites come and go as they please. Nobody cares, even the Negroes. Not enough to do anything about it. I've re-applied for Officers Candidate School. Joe Louis, the boxer, is attached to our company—the Brown Bomber. I've asked him for help. He saw me play football at UCLA, and has friends in Washington. We'll see.

SMITH. Like most teams, the Dodgers faced a player shortage. The grandstands were half empty, too. Things were desperate.

RICKEY. Clyde is passing out the five-year plan we've developed to re-vitalize this organization, and bring a pennant to Brooklyn. The meat of the coconut starts on page three—

RACHEL. Dear Second Lieutenant Robinson. I finish the semester next Friday, then a two week break. I'll stay in San Francisco for the holidays, if you can get leave. Joe Louis got you into OCS—see if he can get you here for Christmas.

SMITH. Things were so bad the St. Louis Browns had a one-armed outfielder playing centerfield. Huh. Later on Bill Veeck [*Věk*] of the Cleveland Indians sent a midget up to bat, number one-eighth on his back. He walked.

RICKEY. After spending twenty-five years in the Cardinal organization, some of you may doubt my capacity to bleed Dodger blue. Others may see this as my opportunity for revenge because they let

me go. In either case, your scouting reports would be inaccurate. There's no room for sentiment in baseball, especially in times like these. It's a business, and you'd better run it like a business. You want to insult me, tell me I've been lucky, or unlucky. Luck is never enough, gentlemen. Luck is the residue of design.

ROBINSON. (*On phone:*) Provost Marshall Raines, please.

RICKEY. And what you have before you is the new design for the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball club.

ROBINSON. (*On phone:*) Second Lieutenant Jack Robinson calling.

RICKEY. If luck follows, we'll surely take it. In the meanwhile, we rebuild brick-by-brick. Now, if you'll all turn to the top of page five, and take a moment to look at our proposal—

ROBINSON. (*On phone:*) Yes, major, sir. I filed the report several weeks ago about combining the lines at the Canteen. The Negro soldiers—yes, I know. With all due respect, my men—sir, could I come over and—President Roosevelt's— As a matter of fact, it would not bother me if my wife was in line with a nigger. I am a Negro! I do not accept your apology. Is that so. I'll see you eat those words all the way up the chain of command to the President himself. And if I don't sound colored enough, *izwurksreelhodontat*, you cracker racist idiot!—sir.

(Hangs up phone.)

RICKEY. The key to our strategy entails an extensive scouting effort throughout the country, and beyond. Clyde here can smell a prospect out the window of a passing train. We are developing contacts everywhere the game is played in earnest. Yes—

RACHEL. (*Corresponding with ROBINSON:*) I am proud of what you did at Fort Riley, Jack. They should name the canteen after you. I like to think you were transferred so you can help other Negro soldiers.

ROBINSON. Camp Hood, Texas, is not an upgrade. I was banished. It is hot, flat, and mainly white, except for the 761st Tank Battalion. They call us The Black Panthers.

RICKEY. Yes, there's a notation near the end of the plan about the Brooklyn Brown Dodgers, and the formation of a new league for coloreds, the United States League. I'm referring to, where are we —

RACHEL. I got your letter today. It's been two weeks, mister. Texas doesn't look that much farther on the map.

RICKEY. Ah, here. I've instructed Clyde and a few others to scout discreetly for colored ballplayers. The Negro leagues have been hurt more than us by the war.

ROBINSON. I might be able to grab a week in early June.

RICKEY. They're not half as organized, and very well could fail. Yes, colored ballplayers.

ROBINSON. Could we meet somewhere in between? My intentions are honorable *enough*.

RACHEL. School's not over 'til the end of June. One of my friends calls you the phantom fiancée, and accuses me of writing letters to myself. I need to see you again, Jack, to know that we are real.

RICKEY. The new league would start up after the war. This would be the Brown Dodgers and a half dozen other teams up and down the Eastern seaboard.

ROBINSON. Baseball keeps us sane. I pitched today in the inter-company championship. Struck out eight and homered twice.

RICKEY. Not only could this be a profitable endeavor, but should the climate ever change and the Negro be allowed to play in the major leagues we'll have assembled the finest talent available.

ROBINSON. They called us "demon niggers" from the dugout, and wished us luck on the front.

RICKEY. And, gentlemen, ultimately it is talent that leads to wins that draw the fans that buy the tickets that reap the profits.

ROBINSON. The score was twenty to three.

RICKEY. Thank you. We'll keep you posted.

(RICKEY and RACHEL exit; ROBINSON moves to the "bus stop," as BARBER and the BUS DRIVER enter.)

BARBER. On a hot, humid August day, in Texas, nineteen forty-four, Second Lieutenant Jack Robinson decided to go in to town for the evening. At Camp Hood, Robinson boarded a Southwestern Bus Company shuttle at station twenty-three.

(BARBER exits. ROBINSON boards the bus and shows the BUS DRIVER a pass.)

ROBINSON. Afternoon.

(BUS DRIVER does not respond. ROBINSON works his way down the aisle and stops mid-way, encountering an unseen acquaintance.)

Hey, Mrs. Jones. Virginia? Lieutenant Robinson, Bravo Company. I work with your husband – The Black Panthers. Yeah.

(Indicating seat:)

Do you mind?

(ROBINSON sits.)

Gordon's Alpha Company. Right, the company tournament. Gordon homered that day.

BUS DRIVER. Hey, soldier.

ROBINSON. He's got a sweet swing.

BUS DRIVER. Soldier!

ROBINSON. *(Looking around:)* Who's – he talkin' to me?

BUS DRIVER. Yeah, you. You need to move on back.

(A beat.)

Coloreds in the back.

ROBINSON. Says who?

BUS DRIVER. Says the law. Says me.

ROBINSON. You drive the bus, I'll ride the bus. We'll be fine.

(Bus stops. BUS DRIVER walks back to ROBINSON.)

BUS DRIVER. Look, boy, you want to get me fired? Coloreds gotta ride in back.

(Pointing to PASSENGER in back:)

He knows.

ROBINSON. *(Glances back at PASSENGER.)* That's where he chose to sit. I choose to sit by Mrs. Jones here. I don't see you asking Mrs. Jones to move.

BUS DRIVER. She's not—colored.

ROBINSON. What?! Ah, she's not colored enough. You think I'm sittin' with a white woman. That what this is about? Fancy nigger sittin' with a white woman.

(To MRS. JONES:)

No, no, it's all right.

(To BUS DRIVER:)

We're not movin'. And if you touch me, they'll be pickin' you up in little pieces.

(To another unseen passenger, up front:)

Lady, you stay out of this. Go ahead, report me!

(To BUS DRIVER:)

You want me to drive?

BUS DRIVER. I got your name. I know your face.

ROBINSON. 761st Tank Battalion, Bravo Company, Second Platoon. Robinson. R-O-B-I-N-S-O-N.

BUS DRIVER. We'll see how smart you are, boy. There'll be MPs at the station, smart boy.

(BUS DRIVER exits. ROBINSON now paces back and forth in a rage, confined in a small room. OFFICER OF THE DAY enters.)

OFFICER OF THE DAY. Where is this Sambo?

ROBINSON. Somebody lookin' for me! I'm right here.

OFFICER OF THE DAY. *(To unseen aides:)* This man's an officer?!

ROBINSON. You damn right I'm an officer. Am I free to go?

OFFICER OF THE DAY. Free to go—

ROBINSON. Sir.

OFFICER OF THE DAY. It's customary to salute a senior officer when he enters a room.

ROBINSON. It's the law on a military installation I can ride the bus anywhere I want, with anyone I want, in any seat I want. Order number two one three six, July, nineteen forty one—sir.

OFFICER OF THE DAY. You had better calm down, son, and accept the fact—

ROBINSON. I'm not your son, or your Sambo. The only thing I'll accept is an apology.

OFFICER OF THE DAY. You're right good with numbers. How are you on sections sixty-three and sixty-four of the Articles of War. Uncooperative with the MP's, insubordinate to a senior officer. How are you on the chapter on courts martial. You know, gentlemen, is it me, or do I detect the faint odor of whiskey?

(Lights fade down on ROBINSON and OFFICER OF THE DAY and up on BARBER who crosses to the press table and begins doing some paperwork in his scorebook.)

BARBER. Robinson was court martialed. Charged with insubordination based upon his conduct *after* the bus incident. After a lengthy trial, he was acquitted of all charges.

(RACHEL enters the neutral area wearing a nurses uniform, and carrying a lunch bag.)

However, Robinson's days in the military were numbered.

ROBINSON. *(Off:)* Rachel!?

BARBER. He soured on the army and it on him. Everybody started lookin' closely at his infirm ankle and that old football injury. In November, nineteen forty-four, he was honorably discharged from active duty by reason of physical disqualification. Jack Robinson was a civilian again.

ROBINSON. *(Off:)* Rachel?

(ROBINSON, *with suitcase, joins RACHEL.*)

Rachel, I—

RACHEL. Sit.

(He does.)

ROBINSON. You haven't given—

RACHEL. *(Handing him part of her sandwich:)* Eat.

(ROBINSON takes the sandwich and eats half-heartedly.)

ROBINSON. Please let me—

RACHEL. Don't!

(They eat in silence.)

LYLAH. *(Joining BARBER:)* Hi, sugar.

(BARBER acknowledges her.)

Are you about ready?

BARBER. Just need a moment to finish the paperwork.

LYLAH. I heard Pee Wee homered in the bottom of the ninth.

BARBER. It was a beauty, Lylah.

LYLAH. The South in all its glory in Flatbush tonight. It's very clever of Harold Reese to go by "Pee Wee." I suspect it lowers the pitcher's expectations.

(Lights up on RICKEY and JANE, playing checkers. She completes a triple jump to both his and her surprise. The lights remain up on all three couples throughout the following.)

JANE. I've never made a triple jump against you in my life.

RICKEY. Then it was overdue.

LYLAH. *(Gazing at the field below:)* It always looks so peaceful down there when the field's empty.

JANE. *(RICKEY moves again and JANE promptly makes another jump.)*
Branch?!

RACHEL. What am I supposed to do? Kansas City, Kansas must be a thousand miles from here.

ROBINSON. Missouri. Kansas City, Missouri. They're next to each other.

RACHEL. Jack, you should have told me.

RICKEY. (*Moving checker piece:*) I'm going to bring a Negro to the Brooklyn Dodgers.

JANE. (*Studying the board:*) Yes, that new league.

RICKEY. No, the white Dodgers.

ROBINSON. I've got nothing. I'm trying to save for us. The Kansas City Monarchs are the best team in the Negro Leagues. I can make \$400 a month, and room and board.

RACHEL. Room and board—traveling all over creation. You got somebody else?!

ROBINSON. No!

JANE. What are you doing?

RICKEY. My job.

BARBER. Branch Rickey told me today that in the not too distant future I'd be calling play-by-play for a colored ballplayer down on that field.

LYLAH. A Negro! Here?

JANE. Who knows about this?

BARBER. Said it was a secret.

RICKEY. Just the Board. I'll probably tell Red.

BARBER. Felt like a warning.

LYLAH. What did you say?

BARBER. Nothing. I asked him to pass the biscuits. He knows where I'm from.

ROBINSON. Maybe you want me to run an elevator. Bus tables. Shine shoes!

RACHEL. Finish school – get your degree.

ROBINSON. I'm done with school. This is what I can –

RACHEL. Football in Hawaii, the army, OCS, the trial. Now baseball. You haven't stopped long enough in one place to get a good look at you. I'm tired of it. I'm tired of waiting.

RICKEY. I need your support on this.

LYLAH. Right now I think we need a very dry martini. Pee Wee's waitin' downstairs.

ROBINSON. What?!

JANE. This could bury you.

ROBINSON. What do you want?

BARBER. I've got that Yankee offer to fall back on.

RACHEL. For you to decide what you want most.

JANE. You are sixty-four years old. Just tell me you're not going to join The Flying Wallendas.

(JANE exits.)

LYLAH. We'll get a cab.

BARBER. I'll be right down.

(LYLAH exits.)

RACHEL. I've got to get back to work. Let me know what you decide, and I'll let you know if I still care.

(RACHEL exits; ROBINSON remains, suitcase in hand. BARBER closes his scorebook, looks down on the field, puts on his hat and exits. RICKEY shuffles off, after JANE. MULE enters and crosses in front of ROBINSON, heading for the locker area.)

ROBINSON. Hello.

MULE. *(Not stopping:)* Whatchasay.

ROBINSON. Ah, they sent me over —

(MULE pauses.)

—I just got in. Name's Robinson.

MULE. Robinson. Robinson?

ROBINSON. You with the Monarchs?

MULE. Yeah.

ROBINSON. I was just hired —

MULE. Oh, the new shortstop. Yeah, Robinson. Now I got it. Mule. I'm the catcher.

ROBINSON. Glad to meet you.

MULE. Thought you weren't comin' 'til later. My cousin Newt's been fillin' in at shortshop.

ROBINSON. Mr. Duncan said to be here Friday.

MULE. Frank said Friday. Today Friday?

(ROBINSON nods.)

You're sure?

ROBINSON. Yeah.

MULE. Well, then, let's get you settled. Locker room's this way.

(ROBINSON follows MULE into the locker area.)

Frank's in a meetin'. Friday? Game ain't 'til five.

(LEROY "SATCHEL" PAIGE is sprawled out on a bench, or the floor, a whiskey bottle nearby. He appears to be passed out. MULE ignores PAIGE and goes about finding ROBINSON a locker. ROBINSON sets his bag down and stares at PAIGE.)

ROBINSON. He all right?

MULE. Better be. He's pitchin' today. You don't look like the wind to me.

ROBINSON. Huh?

MULE. Wind. Frank says you run like the wind. He wants Cool Papa ta teach you 'bout runnin' the bases—share the meaning of life.

ROBINSON. Cool Papa Bell.

MULE. (*Indicating locker:*) You can have this one.

(*PAIGE groans and shifts position.*)

Friday. Ah, clubhouse man will be by with your uniform—why 'm I thinking it's Tuesday.

(*ROBINSON draws close to PAIGE.*)

Oh, I, I wouldn't wake him up just yet.

ROBINSON. This is Satchel Paige!

MULE. That's him. Do me a favor?

(*Producing letter:*)

Could you have a look at this. Frank usually handles my mail, but he's busy. Says you been to college 'n all. Seems kinda official.

(*Hands ROBINSON letter.*)

ROBINSON. Is he—he's drunk.

MULE. Oh, we don't call it that. No, no. He's on his medication. For his arm. He's got where he uses it 'fore he pitches, which is about every day. Then he kinda tends to sleep on his right side so the juices flow down into his arm, an' soothe it. Keep it from gettin' sore.

(*Indicating letter:*)

What's it say?

(*ROBINSON reads letter.*)

ROBINSON. It says you've been evicted. That they sold your stuff for back rent.

MULE. Damn!

(*PAIGE jumps, and groans. MULE whispers to ROBINSON:*)

Where you stayin'?

PAIGE. Mule, quiet!

(PAIGE falls on the floor, if not already there.)

Who is that!?

MULE. Just me, Leroy, and the new shortstop.

PAIGE. Whadda we need with a shortstop. Nobody hit a ball off me that way in weeks.

MULE. I think he's movin' into his pre-game warm-up. Try not to rile him. What's your first name?

ROBINSON. Jackie.

MULE. Leroy, this is Jackie, ah, Robinson – my new roommate.

(PAIGE sticks his arm up, feeling for ROBINSON's hand. ROBINSON takes his hand to shake it.)

ROBINSON. It's an honor, sir.

PAIGE. No, no. Help me up!

(ROBINSON pulls PAIGE up off the floor.)

Sir. Hear that, Mule. Pay attention.

ROBINSON. Mister – Mule says you're pitching today. I've wanted to see you pitch since I was a little boy –

(PAIGE moves towards ROBINSON.)

MULE. Now, Leroy. The first account of your pitchin' is in the Old Testament. Book of Numbers.

(PAIGE sits.)

PAIGE. See you met the worst catcher that ever put on a mitt. Thinks he's done his job if he knocks the ball down, saves the umpire's life. Every now and then he'll catch one by sheer accident. Whoa!

(PAIGE topples over, seemingly passed out again.)

MULE. (*Trying to revive PAIGE:*) Leroy! Leroy!! Oh, Frank ain't gonna like this.

(*To ROBINSON:*)

He'll slip away for days if we don't snap him outa it in a hurry. I'll, I'll get Frank. You, you, you – grab that water over there and toss it on him.

ROBINSON. What?! I don't –

MULE. (*On exit:*) Oh, he'll carry on, but it's for the good a the team.

(*MULE's gone. ROBINSON locates the bucket of water and approaches PAIGE. He first flicks some water on PAIGE's face, without effect.*)

ROBINSON. (*Softly:*) Mr. Paige.

(*No response.*)

Mr. Paige.

(*No response. Reluctantly, ROBINSON tosses the bucket's contents on PAIGE, who springs to his feet.*)

PAIGE. (*Calling off:*) By God, Mule, it's a Grand Slam!

(*MULE enters.*)

He bought the whole farm. These rookies are gettin' dumber by the minute. Maybe I'm just gettin' better and better.

ROBINSON. Oh, man –

PAIGE. You owe me twenty dollars!

MULE. Damn! Gotta admit, you never been better.

PAIGE. Figured it'd take my best to hoodoo a college boy.

MULE. They didn't teach you out in California how to know hokum when you see it?

ROBINSON. No, sir. I guess not.

PAIGE. Listen'd to too much *Amos 'n Andy* out there.

MULE. Welcome to the Monarchs. Play hard, have fun, and never underestimate us. School's out.

PAIGE. Mule here's the Minister of Rookie Education.

MULE. Gotta find my game face. Get ready to handle 'ole Long Tom – that's Leroy's *fast* fastball. You'll hear it from shortstop.

PAIGE. We'll get him a chair out there, so he's comfortable.

MULE. (*On exit:*) Oh, one more thing. As a rule, divide anything he says by eight.

ROBINSON. (*Calling off:*) See ya.

PAIGE. More fun around here than a court martial.

ROBINSON. Yeah. Everybody here know my life story?

PAIGE. There you go – the Monarchs are the best team in the Negro Leagues. Didn't get that way by hiring on anybody who wrote 'em a letter. They checked you out. Even asked me what I thought. Said I was at a football game at Stanford in '39 and saw a Negro name of Robinson carry three white men and the ball over the goal line for a touchdown. Told 'em if that was you, take a close look. Don't see somethin' like that every day.

ROBINSON. I appreciate it.

(PAIGE gives ROBINSON a towel and indicates to mop up the water on the floor, which he does.)

PAIGE. Not sure this league can hold you, if you're any good.

ROBINSON. Hold me?

PAIGE. There's some talk like you might be the one to change things. Maybe you're just here to hide.

ROBINSON. I'm tryin' to find where I belong. I don't know where that is. Figure guys like you are here, must be pretty good.

PAIGE. I'm here 'cause I'm not *there*. Playin' with the white man.

ROBINSON. You should be.

PAIGE. No question about that. But I'm not. In the meantime, this is the best there is. It's good ball, the money's big and green, and there isn't anything I'd rather be doin'. Mix in a little barnstormin' in the off-season, it's a decent life. You come here ready to say the same thing ten years from now? What are you, twenty-five?

ROBINSON. Twenty-six.

PAIGE. There's white men your age been in the majors seven, eight years already. I'm gonna tell you two things, then I'll leave you to Mule and Papa. You better be here because you love being with your people, and you love this game. That's gotta be enough—along with the money. Money can ease the pain—don't let 'em tell you different. Second—maybe there's somethin' going on. Heard Wendell Smith took you, Sam Jethro, and Marvin Williams up to Boston.

ROBINSON. Yeah, we went up there.

PAIGE. Red Sox manager watch you work out?

ROBINSON. He was there, with some others.

PAIGE. *Hmph.*

ROBINSON. We about knocked down that left field wall. Those balls left dents. Never heard a word.

PAIGE. Last year or so, there's been some white scouts sniffin' around. One of 'em asked to see my birth certificate. Told him it'd been mislaid, but if he wanted to see somethin' I'd trim his sideburns with Long Tom. Work hard here. Learn everything you can about this game. And dream small.

(On exit.)

Oh, and don't look back, somethin' might be gainin' on ya.

(PAIGE exits. Cross-fade to RICKEY, sitting in the grandstand watching batting practice below, black book in hand. SMITH enters carrying a rolled-up poster.)

SMITH. Welcome to Pittsburgh.

RICKEY. Mr. Smith.

SMITH. You're throwin' Ralph Branca today.

(*RICKEY nods.*)

RICKEY. Ralph loves pitching here. Lot of room out there to catch the ball, if the batter's hell-bent on trying to hit it out. We're trying to get our free-swingers to focus on the gaps, use their heads instead of muscle. They aren't interested in the geometry of Forbes Field. Feel like Paul railing at the Ephesians.

SMITH. Most of these boys look at a bat and see a club, instead of a tool.

RICKEY. (*Indicating nearby thermos:*) I've got some hot coffee.

SMITH. Don't mind if I do.

(*RICKEY pours coffee for SMITH and hands it to him.*)

You a political man, Mr. Rickey?

RICKEY. I vote.

SMITH. A friend told me you coulda been governor of Missouri if you'd had the inclination. Chose baseball instead. 'Course a ball-park can't wall out politics.

(*Unrolling poster:*)

You take this poster, here. A man right in your city running for city council put this out.

RICKEY. (*Only a glance at the poster.*) Ben Davis, American Communist Party.

SMITH. Negro soldier here, Negro ballplayer there. One laying dead, caked in mud in France, the other alive with nothin' to do. Says here "Good enough to die for his country but not good enough for organized baseball." They tell me a million colored soldiers were in the War. Now they're comin' home, some of them in a box. Yessir, you look out there, you can see politics creepin' over that outfield fence.

RICKEY. I heard you were in Boston last week.

SMITH. Took three ballplayers up for a tryout. It's only the beginning.

RICKEY. Don't kid a kidder, Mr. Smith. That tryout was to appease a liberal Boston politician pushing an ordinance banning Sunday games – to leverage baseball to let the Negro play. The Red Sox put on a little show. Word is while your men worked out, the coaches were in the dugout with *The Racing Form*.

SMITH. (SMITH *hands the coffee cup to RICKEY.*) If it was a joke, you're part of it. Member of the league subcommittee "examining the race issue." Ha!

RICKEY. Politics is the art of the possible, Mr. Smith. Until the mainstream white press and politicians take up the standard, the issue will not be joined. Right now it all carries a sickening red tinge. *The Daily Worker* and the Ben Davises of this world may be dead right, but they will not tweak the conscience of the board rooms. Nor will a Negro press set on embracing Communist rhetoric.

SMITH. (*Starting to exit:*) A present.

(*Hands RICKEY the poster.*)

Our mistakes are small and well-intentioned compared to yours. Hear you're starting your own Negro League. United States League – Brooklyn Brown Dodgers. Even a colored reporter has his sources.

RICKEY. (*Gathering himself:*) Wendell, do you think Jackie Robinson can throw from the hole at shortstop?

(SMITH *stares at RICKEY.*)

He's one of the men you took to Boston. You must think a lot of him. How's his arm?

SMITH. He's playin' for the Monarchs. Go see for yourself.

(*Lights up on ROBINSON in the locker area.*)

RICKEY. I've got Clyde Sukeforth doing just that.

SMITH. You gonna lure him away from the Monarchs for your Brown Dodgers.

RICKEY. That's what I want people to think. For the time being.

SMITH. What're you up to?

RICKEY. Off the record.

(SMITH *nods.*)

We're going to bring a Negro to the Brooklyn Dodgers. The *white* Dodgers.

SMITH. When?

RICKEY. Soon. He may have to spend a season in the minors. Probably our farm club in Montreal.

SMITH. A Negro, playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

RICKEY. Yes. The darker the better. I don't want any doubt, any temporizing.

SMITH. You're looking at Jackie Robinson.

RICKEY. We've been looking at dozens of ballplayers. Robinson's name keeps popping up.

SMITH. I like him. He can throw from the hole. His arm's probably the weakest part of his game. I'd look at moving him to second base. He's a quick study, and he's dark enough.

RICKEY. Is he man enough?

(Sukeforth *enters and approaches* ROBINSON.)

SUKEFORTH. Robinson?

ROBINSON. Yeah?

SUKEFORTH. Clyde Sukeforth. I work for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

SMITH. Man enough?

SUKEFORTH. Could we talk a minute?

ROBINSON. You talk, I'll listen.

SMITH. He's not faint-hearted, if that's what you mean.

SUKEFORTH. They say you've got a shoulder problem.

SMITH. This man's a rock.

ROBINSON. Just a twinge.

RICKEY. Whatever kind of man he is right now, they'll cut him in half.

ROBINSON. What's this about?

SUKEFORTH. Branch Rickey sent me — to scout you.

ROBINSON. You lookin' for some darkie to run the bases and look thankful, like Boston?

SMITH. Probably helps he was raised in the North.

SUKEFORTH. I'm supposta find out if you've got a written contract with the Monarchs.

ROBINSON. What business is it of yours?

RICKEY. I need a little more time, Wendell —

SUKEFORTH. There's this new Negro League startin' up. We're organizin' the Brown Dodgers.

RICKEY. — to be absolutely sure.

SUKEFORTH. We need to know your arm's okay.

ROBINSON. I go payday to payday, week to week.

SUKEFORTH. Could we throw a few?

RICKEY. There's no margin for error.

ROBINSON. I'm supposed to let it rest, take a few days off.

SMITH. We're growin' old here, waitin'.

SUKEFORTH. I'll come by after the game. You don't have to throw full steam — I just need to see your move.

RICKEY. I know.

SMITH. I've gotta get to the press box.

SUKEFORTH. If the arm's okay, Mr. Rickey wants to see you in New York. I've got a couple tickets on the night train.

ROBINSON. I can't leave the team.

SUKEFORTH. You said you can't play anyway. Maybe they'll give you a couple of days off, to mend up. See you this afternoon.

(Lights fade out on locker area and up on office area, where SUKEFORTH now waits.)

SMITH. *(On exit:)* I'd take my chances on Robinson, if I were you.

(SMITH exits. RICKEY crosses to the office area and joins SUKEFORTH.)

RICKEY. Where is he?

SUKEFORTH. Down the hall.

RICKEY. How was the trip?

SUKEFORTH. Pretty good. He doesn't say much.

RICKEY. There'll come a point here where you'll go ahead and leave.

SUKEFORTH. Sure.

RICKEY. Whatever happens in this room doesn't leave this room.

(SUKEFORTH nods.)

Find him.

(SUKEFORTH exits. RICKEY may sit behind the desk, take out a file, or open his black book and consult notes. He is as anxious as we will ever see him. ROBINSON enters, followed by SUKEFORTH.)

Hello, Jackie. Branch Rickey.

ROBINSON. Hi.

RICKEY. How was the trip?

ROBINSON. Fine.

RICKEY. Have a seat.

(ROBINSON sits.)

How do you like playing for the Monarchs?

ROBINSON. It's okay. Good bunch of guys. Travel's pretty tough.

RICKEY. Jackie, I want to talk to you about an opportunity, and we had to be certain we weren't stepping on any toes—legally speaking.

ROBINSON. Yeah, okay. I haven't promised him anything.

RICKEY. Oh, I know that.

ROBINSON. (*Overlapping:*) I'll hear what you've got.

RICKEY. Certainly. That's all I'm asking.

(A pause, as RICKEY searches for where to begin.)

Do you know why you're here?

ROBINSON. He said something about a colored team at Ebbets Field. Brooklyn Brown Dodgers.

RICKEY. That's what he was supposed to say.

(Both ROBINSON and SUKEFORTH react.)

I've got you here under false pretenses, Jackie. The truth is you're not a candidate for the Brooklyn Brown Dodgers. We're interested in you for the regular Brooklyn organization. Perhaps at Montreal to start with—

ROBINSON. Montreal!

RICKEY. Later on, if you can make it, you'll have a chance with the Brooklyn Dodgers.

(A pause, as it sinks in.)

You think you can make it?

ROBINSON. I...if I got a chance...look, if this is some joke—

RICKEY. This isn't Boston, Jackie. Clyde knows I wouldn't joke about something like this. Clyde?

SUKEFORTH. Right. Right!

RICKEY. (To ROBINSON:) He doesn't know any more about this than you do. This is no joke. This is a plan. We're out to break the color line in baseball.

ROBINSON. What makes you think baseball will let you?

RICKEY. That's *my* problem. *Your* problem is deciding whether you want to be the one to do it, and convincing me I've got the right man. You can walk out the door right now, go back to Kansas City—we'll find somebody else. It'll never leave this room. Or you can stick around and we'll peel the orange and see what happens.

ROBINSON. I'd like to hear more.

RICKEY. Well, then, let's get started.

ROBINSON. I wouldn't mind some of that water.

(RICKEY pours a glass of water and hands it to ROBINSON, who drinks.)

RICKEY. I want this to work, Jackie, but I've got to be sure. If it doesn't, no one will try again for twenty years. You're a good ballplayer. We know that. You can field, you can hit, you can hit with power. We've watched you with the Monarchs, reviewed your stats from high school, college, talked with your coaches. There's a lot of people who know baseball in your corner. Wendell Smith of the *Courier* speaks very highly of you, and I value his opinion. There's some concern about your arm. We might try you at second base, perhaps first.

ROBINSON. I've played some second. I could learn first.

RICKEY. Good.

ROBINSON. My arm's good enough for shortstop.

RICKEY. I'm not saying it isn't. It's not your skill as a ballplayer I want to talk about. It's the spiritual journey that lies ahead. The richest treasure anybody has, Jackie, is his personal dignity. You come with us, it will be rough. What I don't know is whether you have the guts.

ROBINSON. What's that supposed to mean?

RICKEY. Exactly what you think it means. Look at your fists. All I did is ask a question. You want to open the door for the Negro race in the major leagues, you've got to unclench those fists. I'm no political zealot. My job is to put together a team that wins games. I don't do that, I'm gone. This can't be about entitlement, or debt. It can't be about blackness. We win only if we convince the world we're doing this because you're a deserving ballplayer and a fine gentleman. Otherwise, deal me out.

(Silence.)

We're both in this. I'm on the line here, too. My investigators tell me some people at UCLA considered you a racial agitator.

ROBINSON. Racial agitator —

RICKEY. Karl Downs thinks —

ROBINSON. You talked to Reverend Downs?

RICKEY. Met him. Thoughtful man. Knows you inside out. He thinks it's your competitive nature, misread by the white man. Of course, he hasn't read the record of your court martial at Camp Hood, and he wouldn't know that just last month you took after a gas station attendant outside of Birmingham, and three or four Monarchs had to pull —

ROBINSON. Hey, wait a minute! That man wouldn't —

RICKEY. Calm down. I'm not the enemy.

ROBINSON. — the man wouldn't let me use the bathroom. Sounds like you're looking for a nigger who's afraid to fight back!

RICKEY. I'm looking for a ballplayer with the guts *not* to fight back. You want to fight, go see your friend, Joe Louis. If you want to play baseball —

ROBINSON. I'm just supposed to take it, whatever happens?

RICKEY. Yes! We'll do what we can, but most of it will be up to you, Jackie. I might have done the same thing at Camp Hood. Ebbets Field is not Camp Hood. If you come with us, you do your talking with your bat and glove. This is non-negotiable.

ROBINSON. What do you mean, do what you can?

RICKEY. We live with the rules the way they are—Jim Crow and all. New York's not exactly pretty, but there are places outside the city that can get down right ugly. The point is, we live in the world that exists.

ROBINSON. The only thing that should count is what I do on the field.

RICKEY. Agreed. The box score in the morning paper is all anybody should need. A box score is a very democratic thing. That's what you've got to do. Force them to look at the box score and nothing else. You do that, maybe they'll forget about what they think they believe. But that's incidental.

(ROBINSON is clearly troubled.)

I don't want to paint too bleak a picture. Many people, fans, some white sports writers, common folk, will root for you. We're coming out of a world war. Perhaps we can parlay this new-found optimism into something tangible. And grab us a pennant along the way. I've got to have your plain answer.

ROBINSON. I'll try.

RICKEY. Your best.

ROBINSON. My best.

RICKEY. Good!

(Through the following, RICKEY takes off his coat.)

Clyde, I think that'll do. See that Jackie and I are not disturbed.

SUKEFORTH. Sure. I'll just...yes. Right.

(SUKEFORTH nods to ROBINSON and exits.)

RICKEY. You're playing second base for the Dodgers. The team took the overnight to Philadelphia, city of brotherly love. You've got a doubleheader and hope to catch a couple winks. Everybody's registering at the Heritage Hotel. Harold Reese just signed in, and got his key. You're next.

(Signals to ROBINSON to step up and register. ROBINSON catches on.)

ROBINSON. You want me to sign in?

RICKEY. That's why you're here.

ROBINSON. There's no pen. What are we doing here, Mr. Rickey?

RICKEY. Ask the clerk for one, he's there with his back to you.

ROBINSON. *(Indicating:)* There?

(RICKEY assumes the role of the clerk, with his back to ROBINSON.)

RICKEY. Right here.

ROBINSON. Say. Hello?

(RICKEY turns to face ROBINSON.)

RICKEY. Can I help you, boy?

(A pause.)

Well?

ROBINSON. I, I need a pen. To sign in. I'm with the Dodgers.

RICKEY. Oh, yeah, you're that new boy, Robertson.

ROBINSON. Robinson.

RICKEY. You can't stay here. No Negroes. Sorry.

(RICKEY turns his back on ROBINSON.)

ROBINSON. The team's staying—are you telling me, Mister Rickey—

RICKEY. Try the Carlyle, out the front, to the right, three blocks, then one block East. I hear it's a nice place.

ROBINSON. What are you—

(RICKEY takes ROBINSON by the arm.)

RICKEY. You go two-for-four that afternoon, and the next morning over breakfast and the sports page the clerk tells his wife about you,

that you seemed a decent fellow. A couple days later – St. Louis. For the first time you're invited out with some of the boys after the game, to get a bite to eat.

(Talking to an unseen player nearby:)

Thank you, sir. That's a pastrami and a Pabst Blue Ribbon.

(Turning to ROBINSON, handing him a pen and paper.)

Oh, Mr. Robinson, I wonder if you'd mind signing the menu. I saw you play yesterday. That triple off the wall, I thought they'd get you at third for sure.

(ROBINSON signs menu and hands it back to RICKEY.)

What would you like?

ROBINSON. Ah, pastrami's fine, and a ginger ale.

RICKEY. Pastrami and a ginger ale. We'll have it ready out back in a couple minutes. You can go right through there.

(ROBINSON stares at RICKEY.)

You can't eat in here. I'd lose my job. That'll be eighty-five cents out back.

(ROBINSON looks from RICKEY to the unseen ballplayers.)

ROBINSON. What about them?

RICKEY. They're teammates, Jackie, not social workers. A third of the ballplayers in the major leagues are from the South. The Dodgers are no different. The law says you don't eat here.

(RICKEY escorts ROBINSON to the "on deck circle.")

You walk out, eat your sandwich in the parking lot. Maybe next time they'll be more careful about where they eat. Now, you're in Cincinnati, in the on deck circle. Not twenty feet from the closest box seats.

(ROBINSON begins to loosen up, as if the batter "on deck.")

Hey, you on deck. Jackie Robinson. Yeah, Jackie Robinson. Hey, boy! You get up, you concentrate now, nigger boy. That's right,

nigger boy. You think about your mama up there, nigger boy. I know'd your mama before you was born. Yeah, me and your mama, out behind the wood pile. Know'd her real good. Oh, she was nice, for a nigger woman.

ROBINSON. Stop it!

RICKEY. (*Upset, but continues:*) Oh, she liked it—

ROBINSON. Stop! I swear I'll—

RICKEY. What, you'll what!?

ROBINSON. You enjoying—

RICKEY. What are you going to do, Jackie?!

ROBINSON. I'm gonna—

RICKEY. Gonna what!?

ROBINSON. I'm gonna kill him.

RICKEY. You *feel* like you're gonna kill him.

ROBINSON. You're damn right! Nobody talks—

RICKEY. Are you gonna kill him?

ROBINSON. He deserves killin'.

RICKEY. But are you gonna kill him?!

ROBINSON. No!

RICKEY. What are you going to do?

ROBINSON. I'm going up to bat.

RICKEY. And what?

ROBINSON. Crush the ball.

RICKEY. (*Gesturing:*) You're up at bat.

(*RICKEY positions ROBINSON.*)

The catcher's here. Pitcher's out there, sixty feet, six inches away. Once the ball leaves his hand you've got a tenth of a second to react.

The guy in the stands is still yelling, the umpire and your teammates are unconcerned. What have you got to do, Jackie?

ROBINSON. I've gotta focus.

RICKEY. Focus, yes, yes—c'mon, he's about to wind up and the man's yelling about your nigger mother—

ROBINSON. Gotta concentrate.

RICKEY. Concentrate, yes. But it's hard. You hear the catcher call for the jungle bunny pitch, the guy in the box seats won't let up, the crowd is yelling, the pitch is coming—

ROBINSON. I've gotta be *deaf!*

RICKEY. Look out!

(RICKEY sweeps ROBINSON's legs out from under him, and he falls to the floor. Out of breath, he continues:)

And he hits you in the back with a ninety-five mile an hour fastball, and smiles at you all the way to first. You decide to steal second, wipe the smile off his face—get even.

(Beckoning ROBINSON to get up and participate. He does so, in time to be knocked down again.)

But you get a poor jump, and the catcher's throw is on the mark and the shortstop's got the ball, but instead of tagging you out at the bag, he charges and drops you like a lineman.

(ROBINSON is down again.)

And he keeps on tagging you. You're out, you're out, you're out—you black, coon, tarbaby, nigger-trash!

(ROBINSON holds up his hand for RICKEY to stop.)

ROBINSON. Mr. Rickey! Mr. Rickey!

(RICKEY backs off, drained.)

RICKEY. You can't stop them all, or change them all, or kill them all.

(He goes to the desk, takes a drink of water from the same glass ROBINSON used, and then picks up a book.)

I understand your mother, Mallie, raised you Methodist. You still believe in God?

(ROBINSON *nods.*)

This is for you. Papini's *Life of Christ*. I find it helpful. Page forty-six – "Ye have heard that it hath been said..."

(*Urging* ROBINSON *to read, which he does.*)

ROBINSON. – "hath been said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

RICKEY. (*Urging* ROBINSON *to continue:*) "Turning the other cheek" –

ROBINSON. "Turning the other cheek means...cutting the chain of the inevitable wrongs at the first link. Your adversary...is...ready for anything but this. Every man has an obscure respect for courage in others, especially if it is moral courage."

RICKEY. "[It] make[s] the very brute understand that this man is more than a man."*

(*A beat.*)

You'll have to stand it for three years. I hope I'm dead wrong about what you'll face.

(RICKEY *puts his coat back on.*)

ROBINSON. Three years.

RICKEY. After that, you're on your own. We'll be in the clear. You gotta girl?

ROBINSON. What?

RICKEY. Have you got a girl?

ROBINSON. I don't know.

* This quoted material is drawn from Dorothy Canfield Fisher's translation of Giovanni Papini's *Life of Christ*, at 104-06 (Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., copyright 1923).

RICKEY. What do you mean, you don't know?

ROBINSON. Well, I... The way I've been travelin' around, not writin' as I should. We're still engaged—I think. We're not dis-engaged.

RICKEY. Sounds to me like you've got a girl. What's her name?

ROBINSON. Rachel, Rachel Isum.

RICKEY. You love her?

ROBINSON. You know, I do.

RICKEY. When we finish here, you call Rachel Isum. Tell her all about this. She's the only one you can tell, until we go public. Then, if you're smart, Jackie, you'll marry her. There are times when a man needs a woman at his side. Six hundred a month, and a thirty-five hundred dollar signing bonus.

(RICKEY extends his hand.)

Deal?

(ROBINSON and RICKEY shake hands.)

ROBINSON. Deal.

End of Act I

ACT II

(The lights fade up on ROBINSON and RICKEY, then JANE and RACHEL. RICKEY is rifling through the desk in the office area; ROBINSON is pacing in the neutral area, dressed for travel. RACHEL and JANE are both in the grandstand.)

ROBINSON. *(Checking his watch:)* Daggummit! Rachel, mama!

RICKEY. *(RICKEY is looking for something in the desk.)* Judas Priest!

MALLIE. *(Off:)* Don't you "daggum" me!

ROBINSON. Oh, mama. Rachel!

RACHEL. *(From grandstand:)* What?

MALLIE. *(Off:)* And don't you yell at your wife like that!

ROBINSON. We're gonna miss the plane.

(The phone rings on Rickey's desk.)

RACHEL. We've got plenty of time. Your mama's got a surprise. Keep your shirt on, and take your coat off.

(The phone rings again. ROBINSON sits, groaning. The phone rings a third time, and RICKEY picks it up.)

RICKEY. *(On phone:)* Rickey.

JANE. *(From grandstand:)* Branch?

(RICKEY grimaces, and braces himself.)

What are you doing?!

RICKEY. Back among the living.

JANE. I called the hospital to see what time you were going to be discharged —

RICKEY. *(Unwrapping a cigar:)* Alan came by early on rounds, and sprung me.

JANE. *(Pointedly:)* Did he send you to the office?!

RICKEY. As a matter of fact, he wrote me a prescription that says exactly that. The fires are raging, Mother.

JANE. I'm driving in to get you.

RICKEY. (*Preparing to light his cigar:*) I'll ask Clyde —

JANE. Don't move! How do you feel? Any dizziness or nausea?

RICKEY. Only the kind induced by politics.

JANE. I'm leaving right now. And don't you dare light that cigar!

(*RICKEY hangs up the phone, and chews on the cigar as he continues to work at his desk.*)

RACHEL. I was filling out a job application for Mercy General Hospital when Jackie called and told me about Branch Rickey and the Dodgers. Jackie left the Monarchs in September and came West for some time off. The next move was Mr. Rickey's. On October twenty-third, he had Jackie fly to Montreal and sign a contract in front of God and everyone. He was to play the nineteen forty-six season with the Montreal Royals, the Brooklyn Dodgers' farm club. On February tenth, nineteen forty-six, a few weeks before spring training, we got married.

(*RACHEL joins ROBINSON, carrying a shoe box with string around it.*)

ROBINSON. Rae, we've got to —

RACHEL. (*Handing ROBINSON shoe box:*) Chicken. Your favorite.

(*ROBINSON groans.*)

Don't say a word. She's so cute. Took the wings out. Says you hate wings.

ROBINSON. We're gonna be late. They give it away on the plane. I'm not carrying a greasy box of chicken from here to Daytona Beach.

(*MALLIE enters, carrying a thermos.*)

MALLIE. Here we go. Is he whinin'? Break him of that right away. I used to send him to his room.

(*MALLIE and RACHEL share a laugh.*)

ROBINSON. We've gotta go. Mama, please. Thanks for the chicken.

RACHEL. Yes, thank you, Miss Mallie.

MALLIE. (*Overlapping, handing ROBINSON the thermos:*) Don't lick your fingers. Hot coffee to wash it down. Look at you two. Mr. and Mrs. Jack Roosevelt Robinson. Ain't you the two luckiest people on earth.

(MALLIE hugs RACHEL.)

You're goin' into a different world. Be careful, and trust the Lord. He'll provide.

(To ROBINSON:)

I'm so proud of you. You do us right.

ROBINSON. I will, mama. Come on, now.

(ROBINSON, RACHEL, and MALLIE all start to exit.)

RACHEL. We'll call when we get in.

ROBINSON. Two rings – we're fine, and we love you.

(All three exit. JANE watches them leave.)

JANE. (*Through the following JANE comes down from the grandstand, and approaches the office area:*) To get to Daytona Beach, the Robinsons had to change planes in New Orleans, and again in Pensacola. In New Orleans, they were told their seats had been preempted by military personnel, and they'd have to catch a later flight. They emptied the shoe box and thermos as they watched three more flights take off. Spent the night in an infested, flea-bitten downtown hotel for coloreds. When they got to Pensacola the next day, they were removed from the connecting flight. Finally, they caught a bus to Daytona Beach, so Jackie'd get to the Dodger training camp on time. The *Pittsburgh Courier* had assigned Wendell Smith to cover Jackie's spring training, and the season that was to follow. He was there to meet the Robinsons at the station.

(JANE crosses to the office area.)

I don't believe my eyes.

RICKEY. Now, Janie.

JANE. What is wrong with you?!

RICKEY. Well, at least Alan's finally got a name for it. It's here somewhere —

JANE. You know what I mean.

RICKEY. There were things that —

JANE. (*Overlapping:*) The world kept spinning on its axis just fine without Wesley Branch Rickey.

RICKEY. Not really. This Robinson thing — ah, here it is.

(*RICKEY hands JANE a piece of paper.*)

JANE. (*Reading:*) Meniere's disease. Meniere's? I've never heard of it.

RICKEY. Apparently it's just Meniere and me. I hate coming in second, even when it's a disease. They've named it, but they can't cure it. It's associated with the inner ear. Alan says I can expect occasional bouts of nausea and dizziness. I'm fine, rested. I've got a meeting with Red Tuesday about his contract. I've got to find the last one. The Yankees have made a proposal —

JANE. Don't you let Red get away. The fans would never forgive you. Neither would I. I can just see another headline — "El Cheapo Rides Again."

RICKEY. I'll make him a fair offer. I'm not sure he wants to stay.

JANE. Maybe Lylah and I should settle this over some of those very dry martinis she's fond of.

RICKEY. I'll call the cavalry if I need it. There's a bigger problem. The mayor, and all the other politicians in rut. They've discovered the Negro vote and suddenly it's an election football.

JANE. The Robinson contract.

RICKEY. I need more time to work inside the organization, smooth the way. They're not going to let me have it. Harold Reese is coming by.

JANE. Pee Wee's in town?

RICKEY. Just for the morning. Do you have to call him that?

JANE. Branch, the world calls him Pee Wee.

RICKEY. It's unbecoming.

JANE. It's not the United States Senate.

RICKEY. He isn't even that small. Why do families do that to each other?

JANE. We call Branch, Jr. "Twig."

RICKEY. I should sic you on Mayor LaGuardia.

JANE. Does he know about Jack Robinson?

RICKEY. He's on to something. He's leaning hard on that Anti-Discrimination Committee to open the leagues to Negroes. That's the one I resigned from when we found our man. The mayor wants to re-take the high ground from Ben Davis and the communists, secure the colored vote. And he knows the race issue is on the owner's agenda for the winter meeting.

(RICKEY discovers the BARBER contract.)

Aah, here it is.

JANE. Would that be so bad? If all of you, the mayor, the communists, Branch Rickey – all working together?

RICKEY. Ever the optimist. These people want to paint in broad strokes. This can't get done in the political arena without endless compromise. Our plan is simple. Get the right man on the field and let him perform for all the world to see. If it doesn't work, there'll be no shortage of politicians in the wings to take over.

(A knock at the door.)

Fiorello LaGuardia is trying to defeat his political enemies. I have no foe, except the clock. Come in.

(HAROLD "PEE WEE" REESE enters.)

Hello, Harold. You remember Mrs. Rickey.

JANE. Pee Wee.

REESE. Ma'am.

JANE. Good to see you. What are you doing for the off-season?

REESE. We're stickin' pretty close to Louisville 'til spring trainin'. We get enough of the big cities the rest of the year.

RICKEY. Thank you for coming by, Harold. Mind if Jane sits in? She's the brains of the outfit.

REESE. No, sir. Ma'am.

RICKEY. Harold, I need to share something with you, as the team leader.

(REESE reacts, demurely.)

Now, we know some of them call you Captain. Well deserved. There'll be an announcement shortly and people will want to know your reaction. We're going to sign a colored ballplayer to play for Montreal and, perhaps, later on, for the Dodgers—if he's good enough.

REESE. Wow.

RICKEY. I wanted to spend some time with the players at spring training before this occurred, but it's not in the cards. How do you think it'll sit, Harold? He could be in camp by spring.

REESE. *(A pause.)* Mr. Rickey, it's your ball club. You must know what you're doin'. If the man's good enough, then I guess it oughta help the team.

RICKEY. Precisely. Would it make a difference if I told you he's a shortstop?

(JANE reacts more to this than REESE, the current Dodger shortstop.)

REESE. No, sir, I don't think so.

RICKEY. What about the other members of the team?

REESE. I don't know, Mr. Rickey. Some of the fellas 'll be upset.

RICKEY. Will you keep me posted, Harold?

REESE. You bet.

RICKEY. Good. We need to keep this quiet for now.

REESE. Loose lips sink ships.

RICKEY. His name's Jackie Robinson.

REESE. Yeah, I heard about him. With the Monarchs.

RICKEY. *(Rising from chair, causing REESE to rise, too:)* Thank you, Pee Wee. My sense is he may belong over at second base.

REESE. Could be.

JANE. *(Crossing to REESE, and taking his hand:)* I look forward to seeing you opening day, Pee Wee.

REESE. Me, too. Mrs. Rickey. See ya, now.

(REESE exits. The lights fade down on the office and up on JACKIE and RACHEL, now huddled at the bus station. RACHEL is asleep on JACKIE's shoulder.)

JANE. *(Watching JACKIE and RACHEL:)* Branch cajoled a week's delay out of the mayor on his radio broadcast on race relations and major league baseball. Two days later, Robinson signed his contract in Montreal. The news accounts of Jackie's signing were largely negative, outside of the colored press and *The Daily Worker*. The New York sportswriters were generally supportive. The vested interests and others with a stake in the status quo were vicious, accusing Branch of grandstanding, calling him all sorts of names. One said he was seeking to erect the Rickey Temple in Harlem.

(JANE exits. SMITH enters the bus station and approaches ROBINSON and RACHEL.)

SMITH. *(Whispering:)* Hey, Jackie. How ya doin'?

ROBINSON. What time is it?

SMITH. Little after two. I got your wire. What happened?

ROBINSON. The South's what happened. They did everything but put us up in cargo. Bumped in Pensacola, said they needed to

lighten the load due to weather. Watched two standby white passengers walk right by.

RACHEL. (*With eyes still closed:*) They were fat, too.

ROBINSON. Thought you were asleep. This is the man I've been tellin' ya about, Wendell Smith.

SMITH. Ma'am.

ROBINSON. My wife, Rachel.

(*RACHEL sits up and gathers herself.*)

RACHEL. Hello.

SMITH. Rachel.

RACHEL. Thanks for meeting us.

SMITH. You two probably ready for bed.

ROBINSON. How far's camp?

SMITH. Not too far. They've got you in a private house, nearby. Nice couple – Duff and Joe Harris.

ROBINSON. Negro couple?

(*SMITH nods.*)

The camp's segregated.

SMITH. No, it's not that, exactly. Rickey thinks this'll be better to start with. More comfortable for everybody.

ROBINSON. I don't like it. I had better treatment with the Monarchs.

RACHEL. (*Rises and picks up her things.*) Jack, I could sleep standing on my head right now. Let's just go with Wendell for tonight.

ROBINSON. (*To SMITH on exit:*) You're going along with this – that what you're saying?

SMITH. For now. They're still tar and feathering people in this part of the world. He told you, Jim Crow and all. No surprises here.

ROBINSON. How do I stand next to my woman? Look like one of those little jockeys on the front lawn.

(ROBINSON and SMITH exit; RACHEL lingers.)

RACHEL. We stayed with the Harrises those six weeks, and Jackie had a good spring. The Montreal team worked out with the Dodgers. Everybody wanted a look at him. I got a set of baseball rules, and studied with Jackie in the evening. He said somebody in the family's got to be able to argue with the umpires. Everyone was very polite. Mr. Rickey came down several times. He was always telling Jackie—

RICKEY. *(RICKEY enters as RACHEL exits.)* Be daring! Be daring!

(Lights up as RICKEY, BARBER, and LYLAH are about to play cards. RICKEY deals cards as JANE enters with a tray of drinks.)

JANE. That winter, we had the Barbers over for what had become our annual holiday pinochle tournament, boys against girls. As usual, where Branch was involved, it was never that simple.

(Serving a drink to BARBER:)

One Tom Collins.

BARBER. Thank you, madam.

JANE. Branch still had one big item left on his Christmas list. He'd made a counter proposal to Red for a three year contract that topped the Yankee offer.

(Serving LYLAH a drink:)

One very dry martini, extra olive.

LYLAH. *Merci'.*

JANE. The forty-six season was around the corner and Red hadn't got back to him.

(Setting a cup of tea down in front of RICKEY:)

And *Lipton*. A teetotaler since his Madison Township days.

RICKEY. Thank you, Mother. I'm under, the bid's to you.

JANE. (*Sitting, picking up her cards and arranging them.*) Sometimes, I wish he'd just drink like the rest of us.

RICKEY. (*Checking score.*) It all hangs in the balance. Don't falter, Walter.

LYLAH. Branch, please, spare us your rhyme schemes.

RICKEY. Bid or go out, Janie.

JANE. Twenty-six.

BARBER. A tepid twenty-seven, Wesley.

LYLAH. Tepid. Bid legs of pinochle if you must, Red, but swallow the adjectives. If you have to cheat, confine yourself to the acceptable code.

(*To JANE:*)

I pass, Jane – with enormous help.

RICKEY. Walter, I'll have to say thirty.

JANE. Thirty-one. You two feel free to bid wildly against each other –

BARBER. I've got to go thirty-three, once.

LYLAH. Divide and conquer.

RICKEY. Thirty-three. Thirty-three. I believe that's what we've offered you, Walter, excluding bonuses.

JANE. Branch!

LYLAH. No, Jane, that's quite all right. I think the Dodgers have been very patient. I know I have.

RICKEY. I've got to know who's going to call balls and strikes for us. If it's the travel –

JANE. For the love of Pete, Branch. Lylah and I talk about this more than you two.

LYLAH. This has nothing to do with travel. The Yankees want him to go on the road, too. I've always thought those Western Union recreations were silly, anyway. This is about that colored player. Red,

tell him what you're going to do, and put an end to it. I know how you feel. He's not asking you to room with the man.

BARBER. Lylah. Branch, you make people uncomfortable —

LYLAH. (*Overlaps:*) I asked Red to check with the Yankees, see what their plans were, but you swore him to secrecy about this whole Negro thing.

BARBER. —you poke around in dark places. I'm from Mississippi. My family...I had an uncle who was partial to telling plantation jokes. I like what I do. I like the Dodgers. They're my team, and this is not Mississippi. I get paid handsomely to be the eyes and ears of Flatbush. I realize I don't have to do what you're doing—I don't even have to like it.

RICKEY. And —

BARBER. Oh, I'll sign your damn contract.

RICKEY. Good.

BARBER. As old Judge Landis said, I'm just a broadcaster — all I do is report. So, it comes down to the bottom line — I think they call it economic determinism. Nothin' fancy.

JANE. Can we play cards now?

LYLAH. You men and your games.

RICKEY. You might have added that you loathed the Yankees.

(The lights fade on the card game. BARBER and LYLAH cross to the grandstand and sit. RICKEY crosses to the neutral area and sits. As he does so, a roll call is heard, off. VOICE #1 is the same throughout; the other voices vary, but are uniformly middle-aged to old men. [All VOICES except RICKEY's may be recorded.])

VOICE #1. St. Louis Cardinals.

VOICE #2. Yes.

VOICE #1. Chicago.

VOICE #3. Yes.

VOICE #1. Philadelphia.

VOICE #4. Philadelphia votes yes.

VOICE #1. New York Giants.

VOICE #5. Yes.

VOICE #1. Brooklyn. Brooklyn?

RICKEY. No!

VOICE #1. Cincinnati.

VOICE #6. Yes!

RICKEY. (*Overriding VOICE #6:*) Hold your horses! This requires more than a yea or nay. The Dodgers are categorically against any further study of this issue. We all know this is a vote against Negroes in major league baseball. Gentleman, this is un-American. Sure, as owners of the ballparks and concessions, you're making money off the Negro Leagues. Chicken feed! The Negro fan is the best fan alive.

VOICE #5. Come on!

VOICE #6. (*Overlapping:*) Do the roll call! Cincinnati votes yes.

RICKEY. They find joy and exhilaration watching the likes of Josh Gibson, Double Duty Radcliffe, Satchel Paige. And they already come to see our boys in considerable measure. You integrate baseball, bring these players to the major leagues, they will come in droves. You'll have to build bigger stadiums. We all know the colored ballplayer can compete—

VOICE #2. Shut him up!

VOICE #3. Ah, let him wheeze.

RICKEY. (*Continuing, unruffled:*) Satchel Paige has made fools of every shade of batter there is, and we've passed him by. He was a walking gold mine. Probably still is. We're so mired in ancient history, we cannot see the possibilities for economic growth—for every team from Boston to St. Louis. It's coming, gentlemen. And you won't be able to say no. We can do this together—otherwise we'll be also-rans. Also-rans!

(JANE enters.)

JANE. The vote was fifteen-to-one to table the issue of Negro participation in major league baseball.

RICKEY. Gentlemen, you haven't an ounce of common sense or entrepreneurial spirit, to say nothing of decency.

(RICKEY crosses to his desk, where he sits and works.)

JANE. The leagues announced the issue was under serious study, and that nothing in the rules prevented a colored man from playing major league baseball. There was talk of great concern among the owners that any transition be done in a manner that preserved the tradition and integrity of the Negro Leagues.

(JANE joins BARBER and LYLAH in the grandstand. Lights up on RACHEL, sewing a button on Robinson's Montreal jersey.)

RACHEL. Jackie played well with the Royals at Daytona Beach. They gave him a first base glove, and he learned the position.

ROBINSON. *(Off:)* Rae, you seen my belt?

RACHEL. *(Calling off:)* Check the closet door, on the hook.

(To audience:)

He was not the only Negro in camp.

ROBINSON. *(Off:)* What hook?

RACHEL. *(Calling off:)* Inside the closet.

ROBINSON. *(Off:)* Got it. Quit hidin' my stuff!

RACHEL. Mr. Rickey had also signed Don Newcomb, Roy Campanella, and Johnny Wright. Don and Roy were just kids, and were sent to rookie camp. But Johnny Wright started the season with Montreal. He and Jackie roomed together on the road, and that helped. Johnny was a pitcher. In the spring exhibition season, it was one thing after another. In one game Jackie and Johnny were removed from the field because a local ordinance didn't allow Negroes and whites to play against each other. A day game in Ft. Lauderdale was canceled because the lights didn't work.

(ROBINSON enters in his Montreal uniform, except for jersey and spikes. He finishes putting on his belt and then looks in a mirror.)

If it wasn't Jim Crow, it was the sportswriters, always looking for a story. Mr. Rickey kept a tight reign on it, and Wendell helped out, too.

(SMITH enters and finds his seat in the grandstand.)

How's it feel?

ROBINSON. Good. Can't even tell you fiddled with it.

RACHEL. Mr. Rickey hears you gained eight pounds –

ROBINSON. Who's gonna tell him! You want me runnin' wind sprints day and night.

RACHEL. Serve you right, those late night sandwiches, extra pieces of pie.

ROBINSON. It's all that road food – potatoes 'n gravy, rolls, stuff like that.

RACHEL. They don't serve greens on the road?

ROBINSON. What you doin'?

RACHEL. Fixin' this. Don't want you poppin' a button on opening day. There.

(Hands ROBINSON his jersey, which he puts on.)

ROBINSON. Thanks.

(A sigh.)

Opening day.

RACHEL. You gonna sleep in your uniform?

ROBINSON. Maybe. Might not wear the spikes.

(They kiss.)

RACHEL. Baseball's tomorrow – right now I need your help.

(RACHEL shows ROBINSON a piece of paper.)

This is the apartment. By the time you finish the road trip and get to Montreal I want to have everything ready. Now's your chance.

ROBINSON. (*A quick glance at the paper.*) Looks good to me.

(*RACHEL draws ROBINSON back to the paper. Indicating:*)

That the couch?

RACHEL. *Mm-hum.*

ROBINSON. This “T” here, what’s that?

RACHEL. That’s a table. I thought maybe a little end table, something second hand.

ROBINSON. That’s good. “KT” – kitchen table.

RACHEL. (*Overlapping:*) Kitchen table. It’ll catch the morning sun.

ROBINSON. Yeah. And this “C”?

RACHEL. Oh, that’s the crib.

ROBINSON. Crib?

RACHEL. Crib.

ROBINSON. Rae! You sure?

(*RACHEL nods.*)

When?!

RACHEL. November.

ROBINSON. Daggum!

(*ROBINSON hugs RACHEL.*)

Oh, is that all right!

RACHEL. I won’t break.

ROBINSON. We’re gonna have a family.

RACHEL. We sure are.

ROBINSON. Boy, what am I doing?

RACHEL. You’ve already done it.

ROBINSON. I mean tryin’ to play ball. Make a livin’ at it.

RACHEL. Hey. You doin' what you're supposed to be doin'?

ROBINSON. I think so.

RACHEL. And you're good? Then we'll all be fine. What's that you say when you're up to bat?

ROBINSON. Don't think, just hit. You are one fine coach, woman. I love you.

(ROBINSON twirls RACHEL around, ultimately lifting her into the grandstand where she joins SMITH. ROBINSON exits.)

JANE. On April 18, 1946, the Montreal Royals opened the International League season in Jersey City with Jackie Robinson in the starting lineup. Branch stayed in Brooklyn, buried in his work—so he said. I came over with Red and Lylah.

RACHEL. Twenty-five thousand people showed up to see if a Negro could play ball in a white man's league.

JANE. Over half of them were colored. Red had the day off and wanted to see Robinson in uniform.

(ROBINSON appears in uniform, bat in hand.)

He didn't know when Branch might have him join the Dodgers, and he wanted to be ready.

(Crowd noises fade in. ROBINSON stands at home plate, bat in hand. A number of Ballpark Voices can be heard amidst the customary sounds, including: "Atta boy, Jackie," "You're the one, Robbie," mixed with "Go back to Harlem, boy," "Throw him a watermelon," and "Knock the nigger down!" ROBINSON, now at bat, imperceptibly flinches at some of the catcalls. RACHEL reacts, too.)

RACHEL. As Jackie stepped up to home plate, I wondered how he had enough energy to swing the bat. He'd been up most of the night.

BARBER. *(Practicing, to himself; those around him are unaware of his "broadcast":)* It's a beautiful afternoon for the International League season opener. Just a few cirrocumulus, and that lucky old sun. We have the new man up for the Royals, Jack Roosevelt Robinson, looking crisp as a five-dolla' bill. There's a ball, outside. According

to the Dodger front office, Robinson, who wears number nine, was named after the old Rough-Rider himself, Teddy Roosevelt—this country's twenty-sixth president. Robinson, a right-handed batter, has the lumber cocked high behind his ear, perpendicular to the ground. Here's the next pitch, and there's a drive down the left field line. The park won't hold this one—it's a homer for Jackie Robinson.

(Crowd noise, then lights fade on ROBINSON and all exit except JANE and RICKEY. She joins RICKEY in the office area; he is on the phone.)

JANE. Jackie Robinson took the league by storm, playing with an intensity no one could ignore.

RICKEY. *(On phone:)* Frank, this is not Armageddon! It's your duty, as the president of the league.

JANE. Everywhere the Royals went there were crowds, and controversy.

(JANE exits.)

RICKEY. Shaughnessy, Jackie Robinson will be at first base this weekend in Baltimore. Rioting and bloodshed! There'll be standing room only. Let Baltimore lock us out! They'll lose their gate receipts, you can hit them with a substantial fine, and we'll pocket three wins by forfeit. See you Friday, Frank!

(Hangs up.)

Judas Priest!

(RICKEY exits. The lights fade up on RACHEL in a neutral area, now the Montreal apartment.)

RACHEL. *(Opening envelopes with a letter opener:)* Jackie kept his promise to Mr. Rickey. He didn't say a word on the field through all the "nigger this" and "nigger that." Montreal was wonderful. Cute little neighborhood—there were Negroes, Whites, Asians, French. Jackie couldn't go a block without being stopped. On the road in the states it was different. As the team started winnin' it warmed to Jackie, at least on the field. He played plenty of solitaire in the locker room.

(ROBINSON *is now in the apartment area, with letters in hand.*)

Johnny Wright and Wendell would come over, and that helped. And there was the mail, lots of it. At first, we answered it together.

(RACHEL, *reading letter:*)

Robinson, say good-bye to your wife, nigger boy. Next time you play, you die.

(*Shaken, RACHEL hands him the letter. He looks at it, and takes her in his arms.*)

ROBINSON. Oh, now, sugar. They'll always be a few cracker fruit-cakes out there. Lookie here.

(*Showing her letter again:*)

Next time you play, you die, D-Y. Fella probably shoots like he spells.

RACHEL. After that, the front office handled the mail.

(*RICKEY and SMITH enter and join ROBINSON. ROBINSON is subdued now, and does not engage either RICKEY or SMITH. RACHEL joins JACKIE through the following.*)

By June, Jackie had survived one long batting slump, my morning sickness, and the loss of Johnny Wright.

(*To RICKEY and SMITH:*)

Could I get you anything, Mr. Rickey? Wendell?

RICKEY. No thank you, Rachel.

(*WENDELL shakes his head.*)

You've got quite a girl here, Jackie. When are you due, Rachel?

RACHEL. November.

RICKEY. It will be here before you know it. Janie carried our little ones like she was —

ROBINSON. What did the doctor say?

RICKEY. He's putting it under the category of nervous exhaustion. It's moderate, and it's manageable. Doc's recommending ten days rest. He wants to see you again in the morning. There's some vitamins he wants you to try, to build your stamina. There'll be side-effects. He claims you'll pull the ball more.

(ROBINSON *manages a smile.*)

RACHEL. Mr. Rickey, is this man the Dodger's doctor or Jack's doctor?

ROBINSON. Rachel—

RACHEL. No.

RICKEY. It's a fair question. He's our team physician.

ROBINSON. He knows what he's doing—

RACHEL. Seems like a team physician might be more concerned about the team.

ROBINSON. I like him.

RICKEY. Rachel, you and Jackie can consult with anyone you like.

RACHEL. I'm a nurse, Mr. Rickey. You're not living with this man. He may look strong as an ox—he comes home, it takes two hours to let go of the game. You see him when he gets back from a road trip, see what he's like.

ROBINSON. Come on, now.

RACHEL. I'm happy the team's in first place and Jack's leading the league in hitting. But you're barely hanging on. Wendell knows, so don't talk to me about ten days and some pills.

ROBINSON. Rachel! Mr. Rickey, we're just trying to get a handle on all this, get use to it.

RACHEL. You tell him what you told me.

ROBINSON. Now that's between us.

RACHEL. Not any more. Tell him.

ROBINSON. I'm thinking, maybe, this isn't for me.

SMITH. You thinkin' about quittin'?!

RACHEL. Jack, tell them about Reverend Downs.

ROBINSON. I was talking to Karl. He's President now at Sam Houston College. He needs a coach down there. Says if I want it, the job's mine.

RICKEY. Did he encourage you to quit?

ROBINSON. Said I'd have to find my own path. That he'd pray for us.

RICKEY. Jackie, I'm not going to let you off as easy as Reverend Downs. We want you to get well, of course. If it takes ten days, so be it. The Dodgers are behind you one hundred percent.

ROBINSON. Mr. Rickey, last week I helped Johnny Wright pack. Out of nowhere, you send him to Class C, Border League. Johnny finds a notice in his locker. That his one hundred percent?!

RICKEY. I told you, this is a business. We start acting on sentiment, everybody loses. Johnny has the talent, but he wasn't performing. I hope he finds what he lost, and works his way back up. Your problem is not performance. If you need rest you'll get it. If it's something else, I'd like to hear about it.

RACHEL. Jack.

ROBINSON. I don't know. There's no respect. A little from the team...there haven't been any dinner invitations. It's just Rachel and me. Then you cut Johnny. I realize, a nod and I'm gone. A few errors, another slump. We have to think about the baby.

RICKEY. You have —

ROBINSON. (*Cutting him off:*) Let me finish! I gotta put up with all the junk, and play deaf-mute.

RICKEY. I need to say some things to you and I'm going to be plain. First, you're under contract. It's your obligation, and a matter of honor. Keep it. And you have been keeping it, beyond most people's expectations. Secondly, you're too impatient. Respect is earned, Jackie. The record books are full of promising ballplayers who strung together a couple, three good months. The kind of re-

spect you want is earned over a season. Even then, don't expect a parade. When you're in the vanguard, it's lonely.

ROBINSON. I'm not afraid —

RICKEY. Now you let me finish. If you're running on anger, you've got the wrong fuel. You didn't believe me, and now it's happening. I secured that promise because I knew that every moment spent answering catcalls would sap your energy as a competitor. It's exactly what they want you to do, if they were that smart. But if this is to work Jackie, you can't just play deaf — you must *be* deaf. I say these things as President and General Manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, and as your friend. Let us know what you decide.

(RICKEY *readies to leave.*)

Rachel, thank you —

SMITH. (To RICKEY:) Wait a minute. You bring me along just to bear witness?!

(To ROBINSON:)

Everything this man said is right — but it's not enough. He's an egg-head, and he's white. So I guess that's why I'm here. To say to you what he won't say, or can't say, or has no right to say. You are a nigger in a white man's league, and every colored man, woman and child is watching you. And without a court order or shot being fired you've got yourself in a position to change the feel of things. And — I'm sorry Rachel — you damned well better do it, or die trying! Why you think he picked you? Sure, you're a good ball player. Not a great one. You might be — not yet. You don't have any scars. Oh, you've been inconvenienced some here and there — nicks and scratches! You weren't stooped by the time you were ten by a way of life that said you were a piece of black dung. Well, now it's your turn to pay, and if you gotta run on anger some of the time, do it! Life's a lot more messy than he'd have you believe.

(*On exit, to RICKEY:*)

And you jumped the gun on Johnny Wright.

(SMITH *exits, followed by RICKEY.*)

RACHEL. We got out of the city and found a little cabin on a lake. Quiet sounds – waves lapping, wind in the trees in late afternoon.

(Takes ROBINSON's hand and puts it on her stomach.)

There. Feel that?

ROBINSON. *(He does.)* Like a soft bunt.

RACHEL. Oh, I think this baby's gonna be strong like his father and mother.

(Another kick.)

Oooh, that was a line drive off the wall. What? Talk to us.

ROBINSON. Wendell's right. It's different now. Not just about the game any more – winning or losing. As a kid, I knew about Jim Crow. I didn't have to look him in the eye. I watched the scoreboard, ignored him. You could do that back there. Then the army – canteen lines, the bus. Started hearing myself say things. Didn't recognize the voice. It wasn't just about somebody messin' with me. Scared the hell outa me. I mean it felt good, but I didn't want it to mean so much. Then the Monarchs. Playin' ball, makin' good money – watchin' the scoreboard again. Only it's not the scoreboard I see. It's Jim Crow starin' straight at me. I turn away, he's still there. Turn again, still there with those eyes. And then I turn and there's Branch Rickey, holding out his hand.

RACHEL. Sounds like you know what you've got to do. Nobody I know is as strong as you when you put your mind to something – except maybe Mr. Rickey. He can't help you here. Someday we'll teach this baby to read and I think he'll read about his daddy. And maybe he'll have to read about Jim Crow – 'cause he'll be gone.

(ROBINSON exits.)

Five days later Jackie was back in uniform tearin' the cover off the ball. The Royals went on to win the league, and Jackie was voted Most Valuable Player. We spent the Fall in California with Mother Robinson, waiting to see what happened next. On November 18th, Jackie, Jr. was born.

(A telephone rings at Mallie's Pepper Street home, and then a baby cries. ROBINSON enters, and RACHEL joins him.)

MALLIE. *(Off:)* Jackie—stop that phone! I'll get the baby, Rachel's still asleep.

RACHEL. I'm up. I'll get him, Miss Mallie. He's hungry is all.

(RACHEL exits in direction of cries, as MALLIE enters.)

MALLIE. Comes by it naturally.

ROBINSON. *(Answering phone:)* Hello.

MALLIE. His father had a hollow leg.

ROBINSON. Hey, Mr. Rickey. Fine. He's great—a bit loud. Still hasn't figured out what the night's for. I'll tell her. Say, I was wondering...yunno...if you decided what... Sure. I understand. Cuba? Fine with me. Oh. When? What'd it say? Yeah. Lieutenant Brock. Okay. Yeah, just a second.

(Looks out the window.)

There's one across the street.

(MALLIE checks this out, too.)

I appreciate it. Oh, I know. Don't these idiots have anything better to do in the off-season. You too—happy holidays.

(ROBINSON hangs up phone.)

Mr. Rickey. He wishes everybody Merry Christmas. Says spring training's in Cuba—Dodgers and Royals both.

(Answering the unasked question:)

He hasn't decided.

MALLIE. Another threat.

(ROBINSON acknowledges this.)

Never thought I'd see the day the Pasadena Police Department would be out front protecting you. Reverend Downs wrote me about that job at his college with your name on it. Said you'd de-

cided to play ball, get shot at, or hung. Maybe along with your wife and child.

ROBINSON. *Shhh*, now! You sayin' I should take that job?

MALLIE. I'm sayin' you better be ready. Your daddy wasn't strong enough. One day, when it got too much, he just slunk away. You started this, you better see it through.

ROBINSON. I am, mama. I want it, I can feel it—it's close. It's just—Rachel and the baby. I worry about it—

MALLIE. Then you ain't prayin' hard enough, as usual. And if that don't work, you think about your granddaddy McGriff—my daddy. He never got to high ground to get a good look. Your grandfather was a slave. Even after he was freed, had "BURKE," his owner, branded on his arm 'til the day he died. Every time he reached for a cup of coffee or shook a hand, there it was. He lived with that. All you gotta do is hit a little ball and run around a lot, you got a police car parked out front with a bunch a white men inside protecting you. So don't you go feelin' too sorry for yourself.

(MALLIE exits in the direction of RACHEL and the baby. Lights fade out on ROBINSON and up on RICKEY, pacing back and forth, a sheaf of papers in his hand, with JANE observing him nearby.)

RICKEY. *(Muttering:)* Judas Priest!

JANE. This is when you want to stay out of his way. What is it?

(No response.)

Branch?

(Still no response.)

He's almost deaf now on the right side.

(She waits until his left side is near her.)

Branch!

(RICKEY reacts.)

What's wrong?

RICKEY. Human nature, mother. Human nature. Here's three proposals of marriage in the last month.

JANE. I hope you said no.

RICKEY. For Jackie. Speaking engagements, half a dozen Robinson fan clubs, from Harlem to Pasadena.

JANE. That's wonderful!

RICKEY. It's not wonderful. He's not even on the roster!

JANE. Well?

RICKEY. Well what?

JANE. When?

RICKEY. Not you too, Jane.

(They exit.)

(Lights up on DIXIE WALKER in the locker area. He is in street clothes, readying to leave.)

REESE. *(Off:)* Mail call!

(REESE enters dressed partly in uniform, letters in hand.)

WALKER. *(With a Southern accent:)* Pee Wee! Get dressed. We're goin' in ta Havana to that new joint, Mike's. Food's American.

REESE. Can't. They got me sittin' in on a coach's meeting.

(Handing WALKER a letter from the stack of letters:)

Estelle.

WALKER. Every Tuesday an' Friday, like clockwork.

(WALKER puts letter in his pocket.)

C'mon, all work an' no play – oh, hey, got something here for *you*.

(WALKER pulls out a folded-up petition, and hands it to REESE, who unfolds and examines it through the following.)

It ain' gonna happen, Pee Wee. Two more a the boys signed today. Time for you to step up, buddy. Sometimes a leader's gotta know when ta follow.

(Referring to petition:)

Keep it, we got others. No different than that time the Reverend Rickey and the other ol' ladies tried to change our curfew. Same thing here. Look, they got their own league, Pee Wee.

(ROBINSON hurries in, in search of mail.)

ROBINSON. Oh – hi.

WALKER. *(To ROBINSON:)* Hey, sport.

(To REESE:)

I'll get that back tomorrow. You want anything?

REESE. I'm all right.

(WALKER exits.)

How you doing, Robinson?

ROBINSON. Fine, Captain.

REESE. Pee Wee.

ROBINSON. You don't mind?

REESE. Everybody calls me Pee Wee. Always have.

ROBINSON. I don't want you to think –

REESE. No problem. Lookin' for this?

(REESE hands ROBINSON a letter.)

Pasadena.

ROBINSON. My wife – Rachel.

REESE. You live out there?

ROBINSON. We're stayin' at my mother's. 'Til we know where we're going. Back to Montreal, you know –

REESE. Yeah. Maybe Brooklyn, you keep hittin' like you are. There's talk. And 'ole Mr. Rickey, he knows talent. You like Cuba?

ROBINSON. It's okay. I can make it one more week. The heat's good, I'm down around three peach pies – about eleven pounds.

REESE. Oh, yeah.

(They share a laugh.)

A couple of coaches said Leo might use you at first base tomorrow in the practice game – with us.

ROBINSON. The Dodgers? You're not talking Montreal?

REESE. That's what I heard.

ROBINSON. Nobody's said anything. 'Course you'd know, right?

REESE. Yeah, well, scuttlebutt's pretty reliable.

(A pause.)

Not everybody's happy about it.

ROBINSON. About what?

REESE. You maybe comin' up – to the main team.

(REESE hands ROBINSON the folded-up paper. ROBINSON looks at it.)

Couple of them are goin' around the clubhouse. Sorta petitions, I guess. I didn't know whether –

ROBINSON. I appreciate it. Don't see your name here.

REESE. The clubhouse, it's a different place. The owners got all the cards, generally. But what happens in here – the boys kinda decide. Hell, we spend more time in here than out there, if you think about it. Some of 'em are just mad.

ROBINSON. Mad?

REESE. On having to come to Havana to work out. They figure it's because a you and the others. It might calm down when we get back to the states. Things tend to run their course.

ROBINSON. Yeah.

REESE. You could do something.

ROBINSON. What would you do?

(RICKEY enters neutral area and sits, studying his black book.)

REESE. It's complicated. Just what I'm doin' here—letting you know.

(ROBINSON hands REESE back the paper. There is a knock.)

ROBINSON. I mean if you were me.

REESE. I guess I'd try not to think about it too much.

RICKEY. It's open.

ROBINSON. I'll try that, Captain.

(ROBINSON exits. REESE carefully folds up the petition and exits. WALKER enters; he is somewhat stunned at seeing RICKEY.)

WALKER. Mr. Rickey?! Ah, you wanted ta see me.

RICKEY. Have a seat, Dixie. Just got in tonight. Leo tells me you've had yourself a fine spring.

WALKER. Thank you. I, I am. I think I'm seein' the ball better. We've been workin' on my stance.

RICKEY. How did you like Cuba?

WALKER. Little small. I'm glad we're back in the states. Can't wait to get to Ebbets Field.

RICKEY. We've got the ground crew working around the clock. I think it'll be ready for the festivities next week.

WALKER. Great! I love that 'ole band box. Yunno, over the years, I've hit twenty-five, thirty points higher there than on the road.

RICKEY. *(Glancing in his black book:)* Thirty-two points higher last year. Frankly, Dixie, that's why I'm surprised you want to be traded.

WALKER. Traded?

RICKEY. I have to tell you, I don't think it's feasible, at least not right away. Most teams have settled their rosters at this point. It might be mid-season before something develops—

WALKER. *(Overlapping:)* I, I, wait—I ain't said nothin' about no trade.

RICKEY. Oh.

(Takes out folded-up paper, opens it, and hands it to WALKER, who stares dumbly at it.)

Is that your mark there, Dixie?

WALKER. Yeah, I signed this. It don't say nothin' about a trade.

RICKEY. Oh, I think it does. That's about the only way you could read a document like that. Now, you've been with us a good while, Dixie, so I want to find out what teams you'd prefer we approach.

WALKER. Mr. Rickey, I didn't do nothin' here except express my views. Just like some a the others. There's talk this boy might be brought up. I gotta right to my views. This here's a democracy.

RICKEY. Dixie, you can have your views, but this is no democracy. This is mutiny, plain and simple. We pay you for your bat and your glove, not your opinions. I think your best bet may be St. Louis or Pittsburgh. What city do you think Estelle would prefer?

WALKER. I...I don't know. I'd have to check.

RICKEY. *(Rising:)* That's a fine starting point. You let me know what you come up with, and we'll initiate some discreet inquiries. Like I said, I think it'll be mid-season before we can get you a decent contract.

(RICKEY takes folded-up paper back.)

Dixie, I hope you get off to a blazing start. It'll help your position. In the meantime, we'll keep this to ourselves. We'll see you and Estelle in Brooklyn — she's coming up for opening day?

WALKER. Ah, yeah. Sure.

RICKEY. Then we'll see you both the end of next week. Good night.

WALKER. Good night.

(WALKER exits. RICKEY crosses to the locker area, takes one of several notes out of his pocket and affixes it to Robinson's locker, then exits. JANE enters the neutral area, carrying a fluted glass filled with orange juice and champagne.)

JANE. Oh, it's lovely. Yes, let's come out on the patio. We should have our brunch out here.

(Calling off:)

Lylah, grab the pitcher.

(RACHEL enters, then MALLIE. They too carry champagne glasses.)

RACHEL. This is a lovely backyard, isn't it, Miss Mallie?

MALLIE. *Mm-hum.* Your tulips just poppin' up. Back home, they're already open.

(LYLAH enters, carrying the pitcher and her glass.)

LYLAH. Same in the South. They're in bloom by now. Nature is more subdued in the East. Who's ready for a splash?

JANE. Rachel?

RACHEL. Just a swallow.

(LYLAH pours.)

It's so nice of you to have us over.

JANE. Well, it isn't every day a mother gets to see her son play professional baseball for the first time.

LYLAH. How 'bout you, Mallie?

MALLIE. Oh, I believe not. This concoction's got some kick. Think I'll just finish this up and have some of that coffee you mentioned.

RACHEL. Would you like me to get some for you?

MALLIE. No, no. 'Least my stomach's stopped floppin' around from that plane. It was mighty kind of your husband to let me have that extra ticket. You know, I don't know whether I was tremblin' up there because I was nearer the Lord, or 'cause I was sittin' on nothin' but air. Maybe a little of both.

JANE. If you'd like to lay down before the game – there's plenty of time.

MALLIE. Oh, I'll be fine. I couldn't sleep. Rachel says we'll see Jackie later.

JANE. Branch thought it best.

RACHEL. He's got to focus on the game, Miss Mallie. Might be hard to do if he knew you were there.

MALLIE. But it's not a real game.

LYLAH. It's a practice game, what they call an exhibition game.

MALLIE. I see.

RACHEL. Montreal's playing the Dodgers for three games, then the regular season starts — for the Dodgers.

MALLIE. An' Jackie's on Montreal —

JANE. So far —

MALLIE. And Mr. Rickey hasn't made up his mind about Jackie —

JANE. Not yet.

MALLIE. There goes my stomach again. I see your husband today, I might have to give him a little nudge.

RACHEL. Now, Miss Mallie —

JANE. (*Overlapping:*) You go right ahead.

RACHEL. Mr. Rickey's got us sitting on the Dodger side, so Jack won't see us.

LYLAH. Just out of range of the tobacco juice.

JANE. Lylah prefers the opera. The game hasn't done Red or you any harm.

LYLAH. I'd rather have Red translate for me. He finds the elegance in it all. I mean, I wish your son luck, but they're out on that field clubbing a little ball, running around like wild Indians, spitting here and there. It's silly, is all.

(*To MALLIE:*)

Wouldn't you prefer to listen to Marian Anderson?

MALLIE. I'll let you know after the game.

LYLAH. She has tremendous voice and range.

MALLIE. We could use her in the church choir. Reverend Downs has her recordings. She sounds mighty far away to me.

RACHEL. Miss Mallie has a beautiful voice. We sang together in the choir this winter.

MALLIE. I just sing, is all. The Lord's way of talkin'. What I want to know is what do I do so I don't make a fool of myself today?

RACHEL. You'll be just fine.

LYLAH. Just root, toot, toot for the home team. Be primitive. Yell, cheer, gesticulate freely.

JANE. It's called having fun, Lylah.

MALLIE. I saw Jackie play once against some big time players, back home. He was jumping around like one of them kangaroo critters. There gonna be some of that today, I might get the giggles.

RACHEL. There could be.

JANE. That's what makes him so exciting to watch.

MALLIE. You're talking to his mama. I've been tryin' to drain the juice out of the child since he's been upright.

LYLAH. Does it come from his father's side?

MALLIE. Could be. I don't think so.

RACHEL. He couldn't be too much like you, Miss Mallie.

LYLAH. Oh, Jane mentioned you're a – widow?

MALLIE. Jackie' father wasn't around much.

LYLAH. Oh, that's too bad.

MALLIE. Maybe. Maybe he's better off.

LYLAH. I can't imagine that, Mrs. Robinson.

MALLIE. Don't expect you could. We was sharecroppin' the Sasser plantation for our cabin and provisions, out near Cairo [*Kāro*] – not

far from where Granddaddy McGriff, my daddy, was a slave. I talked Jerry, Jackie's daddy, into gettin' Sasser to let us half-crop, take a chance on the profits. Jerry was a real hard worker, but that 'ol white man didn't make it easy. Kept at him, 'n at him, 'n at him, 'n he jus' left. Never came back.

LYLAH. I'm sorry.

MALLIE. I accept your apology.

(A beat before laughter, first from MALLIE, then the others. The lights fade down on the brunch and MALLIE, RACHEL, JANE, and LYLAH cross to the grandstand, to be joined by PAIGE, MULE, etc. The lights fade up on BARBER in the press area in front of the microphone, and SMITH at his typewriter, typing. As all of this occurs, ballpark sounds fade in. A MESSENGER will deliver notes, similar in appearance to that posted by RICKEY, to both BARBER and SMITH, and quickly exit.)

BARBER. *(Broadcasting:)* —and there's a pop fly out shortstop way. This should do it. Reese settles under this can of corn and the ball falls outa the clear blue April sky into Pee Wee's mitt. And that's curtain on the first of three exhibition games between the Dodgers and their Montreal farm club. The boys of Flatbush take this one handily, six to one. Start dinner, Lylah, I'll catch the 4:17 Southbound.

(SMITH and BARBER each read the note delivered to them. ROBINSON enters the locker room area, takes the note off his locker and reads it. As he does so the ballpark sounds may be replaced by Djembe drumming that continues underneath the "Today" sequence, building in intensity as ROBINSON undergoes the robing ritual, which should be both organic and transcendent in nature. During the robing ritual, Robinson's Montreal cap and jersey give way to a Brooklyn jersey and hat, with PAIGE handing him a first baseman's glove.)

Take note, folks, there'll be two more exhibition games before the Dodgers open the 1947 season against the Braves on Saturday. Just a minute here, this just in from the front office. Today —

(SMITH stops typing, overcome.)

SMITH. Today –

(SMITH *cannot continue.*)

BARBER. – today the Brooklyn Dodgers, five days before the season opener –

RACHEL. Today –

PAIGE. Today –

MALLIE. Sweet Lord, today –

BARBER. – settled their nineteen forty-seven roster announcing –

PAIGE. Today –

RACHEL. Yes, today –

MALLIE. Yes, Hallelujah – today!

BARBER. Today purchased the contract –

RACHEL. Yes –

PAIGE. Let's hear it –

MALLIE. Yes, they did –

PAIGE. Say it –

MALLIE. Go tell it now –

ALL but BARBER and SMITH. Today!

BARBER. Purchased the contract of –

MALLIE. Oh, sweet Jesus –

PAIGE. Say the name –

RACHEL. Say his name –

BARBER. Jackie Roosevelt Robinson –

RACHEL. Jackie –

MALLIE. Roosevelt –

PAIGE. Robinson –

BARBER. Jackie Roosevelt Robinson —

RACHEL. He's the one —

PAIGE. Sure now?

MALLIE. Again now —

BARBER. Jackie Roosevelt Robinson —

RACHEL. That's him —

PAIGE. Not me —

MALLIE. Glory be!

BARBER. — from the Montreal Royals.

RACHEL. Today —

PAIGE. Today —

SMITH. Today —

MALLIE. Amen!

(RACHEL, PAIGE, and MALLIE return to the grandstand. Barber's broadcast is replaced by Smith's typing. ROBINSON now stands alone in full Dodger uniform.)

SMITH. *(While typing:)* Today, the Brooklyn Dodgers purchased the contract of Jackie Roosevelt Robinson from the Montreal Royals. He will report immediately.

ALL. *(SMITH, BARBER, and OTHERS, off:)* TODAY!!

(Immediately the sounds of the ballpark fade in, with Barber's play-by-play broadcast underneath, followed by the DUGOUT VOICES. [The VOICES should be recorded.] These may simply be disembodied voices off, or they may emanate from a dugout, with spectral figures in silhouette. The lights fade up on the grandstand crowd, then SMITH and BARBER. ROBINSON is now playing "first base." His fall to his knees during the DUGOUT VOICES sequence is not the result of the ground ball off his chest, but his response to the weight of all that he has endured and all that is to follow.)

BARBER. Still no score in the fourth, in this first of three games between Brooklyn and their long-time nemesis. Branca's only allowed three singles and a walk. He looks over at first.

DUGOUT VOICES. Hey, king of the niggers!

(ROBINSON *snaps a look in the direction of the dugout.*)

Welcome to the big leagues, king of the niggers!

BARBER. Robinson holds the runner on.

DUGOUT VOICES. Hey, rabbit ears!

BARBER. With the forty-seven season barely a few weeks old Robinson looks right at home at first base. Branca delivers, and it's a ball outside.

DUGOUT VOICES. Jungle bunny – over here. Yeah, hear you're Rickey's new shoeshine boy! We're ready when you are, boy. Come on over to our dugout, darkie!

BARBER. There's a fly ball out Snider's way and the Duke gathers it in for the first out of the inning.

DUGOUT VOICES. Yeah, say hi to your wife Rachel. She's in here with us.

ROBINSON. You can do this –

DUGOUT VOICES. Do like that chocolate stuff –

ROBINSON. I can do this, Rae –

BARBER. Brings up Newsome, with one out, one on –

DUGOUT VOICES. We know you hear us, nigger – get over here and kiss my lily-white ass.

ROBINSON. Rachel, Jackie Jr. –

BARBER. Sounds like the bench jockeys are giving Robinson an earful. Branca looks in for the sign –

DUGOUT VOICES. Hey, niggerboy, we're talkin' to you –

ROBINSON. Mama –

DUGOUT VOICES. Hey, dog-meat —

ROBINSON. Mack, Frank, Edgar, Willa Mae —

DUGOUT VOICES. Oh, I think he's gonna cry —

ROBINSON. Granddaddy McGriff —

DUGOUT VOICES. We're sorry, nigger boy. Yeah, got a present for you —

ROBINSON. Buck, Cool Papa —

DUGOUT VOICES. Nice necktie —

BARBER. Ball one to Newsome —

ROBINSON. Mule, Satchel —

DUGOUT VOICES. Come on over boy —

ROBINSON. Johnny Wright —

DUGOUT VOICES. Grab little Jackie, too. Yeah, we got his size. King of the niggers —

BARBER. And here's the pitch, and it's a shot toward first.

(ROBINSON falls on his knees, devastated; he does not move through the following.)

The ball hits hard off Robinson's chest. He drops to his knees, smothers the ball, picks it up and manages to tag first for the out. Oh, Doctor! Nice work by the new first-sacker, who's shaken up on the play.

DUGOUT VOICES. Lookie what the darkie found! You're a lucky nigger.

(RACHEL comforts MALLIE in the grandstand. JANE is stoic; it is LYLAH that is greatly agitated.)

BARBER. Remarkable work. By a remarkable man!

(REESE appears and through the following crosses to ROBINSON, and helps him to his feet.)

Robinson's slow gettin' up. He took a pretty good thump. Reese trots over to check on his teammate.

DUGOUT VOICES. Hey, Pee Wee, got any diseases yet? What's he look like in the shower? Wouldn't turn my back, if I was you!

(Laughter.)

Better watch out, Pee Wee — that stuff'll rub off on you!

BARBER. Makin' sure the rookie's all right —

DUGOUT VOICES. Hey, it's the nigger boys!

(REESE puts his arm around ROBINSON's shoulder to comfort him. There is silence.)

REESE. *(To ROBINSON:)* Nice play, Robinson. Nice play.

(Lights fade out on ROBINSON and REESE and up on BARBER, SMITH, and the crowd.)

BARBER. Jackie Robinson spent his entire career with the Brooklyn Dodgers —

SMITH. 1947 through 1956.

JANE. Branch left the Dodgers in 1950 —

RACHEL. Jackie always said Mr. Rickey was like a father to him.

JANE. They stayed in touch the rest of their lives.

(RICKEY enters with a cane, then ROBINSON. They are in tableau, as at the beginning of the play.)

SUKEFORTH. In forty-seven Jackie was National League Rookie of the Year —

MULE. Most Valuable Player in forty-nine —

LYLAH. He survived all sorts of shabby treatment that first season —

PAIGE. Some teams had standing orders for their pitchers to knock him down.

MALLIE. The abuse of my son let up some after 1948 —

LYLAH. The third and last year of his long silence.

RACHEL. And it got a lot more noisy around our house when Jackie Jr. was joined by his sister Sharon and brother David.

BARBER. In those ten years, Jackie Robinson –

LYLAH. (*Overlapping:*) Won a batting title –

MALLIE. Stole home base nineteen times –

JANE. Played in six All Star games –

MULE. And six World Series –

PAIGE. And welcomed over forty Negro ballplayers to the Major Leagues – including me.

BARBER. In 1955, Jackie and the Dodgers laid to rest the “wait ’til next year” lament –

SMITH. Took the World Series in seven games from that team up in the Bronx, ah, help me here Red –

BARBER. Name slips my mind.

RACHEL. A few weeks later, on December first 1955, we were about to sit down to dinner when it came over the television that a Black woman name of Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery Alabama for refusing to give up her seat on the bus to a white man. Jack just looked at me.

SMITH. In 1962 Jack Roosevelt Robinson was elected to baseball’s Hall of Fame.

(The lights fade down on the grandstand, with the crowd, SMITH and BARBER in tableau, and up on ROBINSON and RICKEY, as at the beginning of the play.)

RICKEY. They’re about ready. There’s a multitude out there.

ROBINSON. You’re the one who ought to give the speech.

RICKEY. What? Judas Priest! Get over on this side.

(ROBINSON moves to the other side of RICKEY, the one with the “good” ear.)

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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