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P.O. Box 237060
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Email: questions@playscripts.com
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Cast of Characters

STERLING NORTH, African American, mid-40s

ELLA FRANKLIN, African American, 60s

PAUL BARROW, white, mid-40s

ALFRED MORRIS, white, 50s

KANIKA WEAVER, African American, late 20s

GILLIAN CRANE, white, mid-40s

WOMAN (*voice only*), African American

CALLER (*voice only*), white

HOST (*voice only*), white

Time

The present.

Place

The Morris Foundation, situated in a suburb of a large Northeastern city—the main gallery and Sterling North’s office. Other locations are suggested.

Production Notes

Although using actual paintings to populate the gallery is ideal, it might be possible to suggest the collection by other means—empty frames, lighting, projections, etc.

The paintings are onstage at all times. Even in scenes that take place outside the Foundation, we should always be aware of their presence.

In the original production, Alfred Morris was often onstage, “haunting” the Foundation, as if orchestrating and observing the events taking place. This was very effective.

Acknowledgments

Permanent Collection was first produced by InterAct Theatre Company in Philadelphia on October 24, 2003. Director, Seth Rozin; set by Nick Embree; lights by Peter Whinnery; costumes by Andre Harrington; sound design by Kevin Francis; stage manager, Scott P. McNulty. The cast was as follows:

STERLING NORTH..... Frank X
ELLA FRANKLIN..... Sheila Stewart
PAUL BARROW..... Tim Moyer
KANIKA WEAVER Ayoka Dorsey
GILLIAN CRANE Maureen Torsney-Weir
ALFRED MORRIS..... Tom McCarthy

All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credits on the title page of every program:

Originally produced by InterAct Theatre Company in association with the National New Play Network.

PERMANENT COLLECTION

by Thomas Gibbons

ACT I

Scene 1

(In the darkness the sound of a children's choir singing a spiritual.)

(STERLING NORTH stands facing us, alone in the light. He is an African-American in his mid-forties, slim, clean shaven, wearing an elegant and expensive Italian suit.)

(A cardboard box is at his feet.)

STERLING. Put yourself in my place.

You're driving along Spencer Avenue on your way to the Foundation. It's a glorious day—sun shining, trees blazing with autumn color, and you're in your favorite car. You pass a 7-Eleven and see a police cruiser waiting to pull out of the parking lot. And no sooner does the thought appear in your mind, the acknowledgment that it's been a while for you, quite a while in fact, and that you are not just due but overdue—no sooner does the thought exist than you hear the bleat of his siren and see his lights dancing in your rear-view mirror.

All right, you think, the universe has decided to give you one of its periodic reminders, and it is today. This day of all days. You pull over and watch the cop get out of his car. A corner of your mind automatically runs down the checklist—the one your father drummed into you and that you've drummed into your own son. Your daughter as well, of course, but especially your son because he's just turned seventeen, that dangerous age when feeling is quicker than intellect. Keep your hands in sight, don't make any unexpected movements, address him as "Officer."

You roll down your window. "Is there a problem, officer?" you say. Of course you know what the problem is—DWB—but there's a script to be followed in these encounters and you are following it. "Is this your car, sir?" he asks. Of course you know what he's thinking: You're a prize specimen—a black man in a Jag. And

behind that question is a series of other questions he wants to ask, the real questions: Is that your suit? Are those your handlasted English shoes? Is this your *life*? But he's sticking to the script too. "Yes, it is," you say. "May I see your registration, please?" "Certainly," you reply, and reach into your pocket—slowly, of course; this is the first moment when the index of danger ticks upward. You take out your wallet and hand him the card. He studies it for a moment, then says, "May I ask where you're going, sir?"

You're about to answer when a feeling comes over you, a feeling of— (*For a moment he is, uncharacteristically, at a loss for words.*) Indignation? No, not that, or not *only* that—it's there, certainly, but mixed with something else: the realization of where you are going, yes, and what that means. The triumph it represents. It's a dangerous feeling, you recognize immediately, a feeling to be resisted. But it sweeps across the barrier of your caution like an overpowering flood. And you decide that today, on this day of all days, you are going to depart from the script.

"Well, Officer," you say, "the fact is, legally, you don't have the right to ask me where I'm going." Behind his green sunglasses his eyes narrow—you can't see them, of course, but you don't have to, you sense it, this guy is *transparent* to you. "But because this is a special day, I'll answer your question. I'm going to the Morris Foundation on Church Lane. You've heard of the Morris, I'm sure, but perhaps you've never been there. It's one of the largest, most important collections of Impressionist art in the world—right here in your own back yard. And the reason I'm going there is that I've just been appointed its new director. So you'll be seeing my car quite often. Now, Officer, what I would like you to do is this. I'd like you to go back to the station and put a description of this car on the bulletin board. Burgundy 2003 Jaguar, license number ARY-3427. Make sure all of your fellow officers see it. Tell them to *memo-*
rize it. Because the next cop who pulls me over for being black is going to have his ass sued for a truly staggering amount of money." You hold out your hand. "May I have my registration, please?"

Oh, it's sweet. Stupid too, you realize. Unfathomably stupid. If your son told you he had done anything like this, you would—

(*Pause.*)

The cop stands there, studying you, and you recognize the look on his face. The same look you would see on the faces of other executives in the company—white executives—early in your career. The dismaying realization that they'd underestimated you, badly, and now they found themselves standing still while you moved up. You can hear the questions running through the cop's mind as clearly as if he's thinking out loud. He's never heard of the Morris Foundation—could you be telling the truth? You obviously have money; are you politically connected? Can you hurt him with a well-placed phone call? Are you a *lawyer*?

You've reached the moment you love—the telling moment when it becomes clear who's won and who's lost. He'll ask you to step out of the car—not to handcuff you; after all, you haven't *done* anything—but to spreadeagle you on the hood and pat you down, a roadside display of humiliation. Or he'll give you back your registration card and go on his way. Later on, over a beer in the cops' favorite bar or maybe in someone's basement, somewhere *safe*, he'll tell his buddies about the uppity nigger he stopped today. Or he'll say nothing. Nothing at all.

You watch his face, and— (*He snaps his fingers.*) —you see the decision. Without a word he hands you the card, walks back to his cruiser, and drives off.

You sit for a moment, regrouping, then you go on your way. Down the quiet, tree-lined streets of Ridgewood, past the old, expensive houses regarding you from behind their emerald lawns, and through the gate of the Foundation. You park and walk up the marble steps to the huge oak door.

(A moment, then he picks up the box.)

Yes, that is my car.

This is my suit.

These are my shoes.

This is my life.

(He turns. At once the stage brightens.)

(The main gallery of the Morris Foundation. The walls are hung with paintings from waist level to the ceiling, close together. The work is mostly Impressionist and post-Impressionist—Cezanne, Renoir, and Matisse are prominent—but other movements are represented as well.)

(On the back wall, amid the paintings, is a grouping of two African tribal masks and two small figures.)

(The room has none of the meticulous coolness of a museum; rather, the effect is jumbled, chaotic, inclusive. An individual's vision, not an institution's.)

(In the center of the room is a bench. Upstage, two arched doorways lead to other galleries.)

(STERLING sets the box on the bench, then moves around the room in silence. He stops at various paintings, scrutinizes, moves on. Eventually he comes to rest at the group of African pieces.)

(Behind him ELLA FRANKLIN hurries on, distracted. She is African-American, in her sixties. Seeing STERLING, she halts.)

ELLA. Oh—Mr. North! You're here—I had no idea—

(As STERLING turns she steps forward, her hand outstretched:)

I'm Ella Franklin, assistant to the director. *Your* assistant, I mean.

STERLING. *(Shaking her hand:)* Pleased to meet you, Ella. I was just— *(He gestures at the walls:)* No matter how many times I see it, this room still takes my breath away.

ELLA. I'm the first one to arrive in the morning, and I almost always stop here. Even after all these years.

STERLING. How long have you been here?

ELLA. Goodness, it's been— *(She thinks.)* Twenty-six years! I was Miss Sinclair's assistant for seventeen, and before that I was the Doctor's assistant.

STERLING. You knew Dr. Morris well, then.

ELLA. Yes. He was a *great man*.

(The naked devotion in her voice is startling.)

Everything in here is just as he placed it. He always said, “There are no curator’s statements beside the paintings telling us what to see. There are only the paintings, teaching us *how* to see.” That’s why he valued the Impressionists so much—they taught the world to see in a new way. To make new connections.

(STERLING has listened with a smile. Now he points at the African masks on the wall next to him:)

STERLING. Those are Bamana, aren’t they? From Mali.

ELLA. The ones on top, yes. The two underneath are—

STERLING. Kota reliquary figures, from Gabon. *(Pause.)* I remember my first visit here—how astonished I was to see them on the same walls with Cezanne, Renoir, Matisse.

ELLA. The Doctor appreciated the art of many cultures.

STERLING. Multicultural before the word was invented.

ELLA. Exactly.

STERLING. A remarkable man.

(A moment, then he speaks quietly:)

I realize this must be something of a shock, Ella. For everyone here.

(ELLA watches him, her expression unreadable.)

Instead of an orderly succession, Dr. Morris has engineered— *(He smiles.)* —a jungle coup. I feel like the rebel general walking into the emperor’s palace. Maybe I should be wearing fatigues...a bandolier strapped across my chest.

ELLA. I wasn’t shocked.

STERLING. You knew about the will?

ELLA. Oh no. I just mean...it was like he was here again. Doing the unexpected. *(A pause, then she speaks with a subtle note of formality:)* Mr. North, you are the director of the Foundation. As faithfully as I served the Doctor and Miss Sinclair, I will now be happy to serve you.

(Pause.)

STERLING. Thank you, Ella. I appreciate that.

(He seems to be about to say something else.)

(Instead he picks up the box.)

STERLING. Now I suppose I should find my office.

ELLA. *(Pointing:)* It's through there. I'll take you.

STERLING. It's all right. I'll explore.

(He goes. ELLA watches after him uncertainly.)

(PAUL BARROW enters. A white man in his forties, he wears the comfortable clothes of an academic: a denim shirt with tie, corduroys, a tweed jacket. In one hand is a worn leather satchel.)

PAUL. Morning, Ella. *(He jerks a thumb over his shoulder:)* Is that his Jag out there...?

Scene 2

(The Director's office. A desk, a few chairs, an empty bookcase. A window. STERLING is taking objects from the box and placing them on the desk when PAUL knocks.)

PAUL. Excuse me... Mr. North?

STERLING. Yes, come in.

(PAUL enters.)

PAUL. Paul Barrow. Director of Education.

STERLING. *(Warmly:)* Paul, yes! A pleasure to finally meet you.

(They shake hands.)

PAUL. Welcome to the Foundation.

STERLING. Thank you, Paul. Please, have a seat.

(PAUL sits while STERLING leans casually against the desk.)

STERLING. The board of trustees has asked me to convey their appreciation to you for filling in as acting director. We all feel the Foundation's been in the best of hands during a difficult transition.

PAUL. It was my pleasure.

STERLING. I'd like to sit down with—

(His phone rings. With a gesture to PAUL, he picks it up:)

Sterling North. *(Hand over the mouthpiece, to PAUL:)* Sounds like a bank, doesn't it?

(PAUL smiles thinly as STERLING continues.)

Oh, hi, Kanika. How's the packing going? Great—the sooner I have my books around me, the better. And are you coming tomorrow too? *(He nods.)* Well, I hope they're throwing a party for you. Oh, that's even—

(Pause.)

What, already? I'm barely in the door... All right, but let's make it Friday. What's her name? *(He writes on a pad.)* Okay, thanks, Kanika. See you tomorrow.

(He hangs up and turns back to PAUL.)

STERLING. My father was a minister—the most dignified man you could imagine. He wanted to make a statement when he named me. *Sterling...* either you live up to it or you become a joke, don't you? *(He glances at the notepad.)* Do you happen to know a reporter named Gillian Crane?

PAUL. She's with the *Herald*. I take it she wants to interview you?

STERLING. Apparently she can't *wait* to interview me.

PAUL. She's done a few stories on the Foundation since Miss Sinclair died. You know, the fuss about the will. *(He smiles again.)* Around here we're seen as the eccentric neighbor. We've always kept a low profile, so we're tolerated. But when the news broke that the will gave control of the place to an African-American university, it was—

STERLING. *(Smiling:)* “There goes the neighborhood”?

PAUL. Well, nobody used those words. But it was a big story.

STERLING. Do we have copies of her articles?

PAUL. (*Amused:*) Ella collects anything and everything about the Foundation.

STERLING. I wasn't aware there were any African-Americans on the staff. Is she the only one?

PAUL. Yes. (*He gestures at STERLING:*) Well, two now.

STERLING. Actually, three. (*Pause.*) I've asked my assistant at the corporation to come here with me. Kanika—that was her on the phone.

PAUL. But Ella's been assistant to the Director for—well, forever. Dr. Morris himself hired her.

STERLING. And institutional memory is an important thing. But Kanika has been with me for a few years now. We have a kind of shorthand. I've come to rely on her.

(Seeing PAUL's dismay, he holds up a hand:)

Relax, Paul—I'm not going to terminate Ella. I understand someone retired from the archives department a few weeks ago...?

PAUL. Ruth Harper, yes.

STERLING. Then Ella can take her articles there. And continue as the Foundation's memory. What do you think?

PAUL. You don't need me to agree.

STERLING. But I would like you to.

(A pause, then PAUL makes a small gesture of acquiescence. After a moment STERLING continues:)

Now. Once I'm settled in—which Kanika tells me will be by tomorrow—I'd like to sit down with you and go over everything. Operating budget, revenues, endowment, you name it. But first, I'd like a tour of the building. Top to bottom.

PAUL. My pleasure.

STERLING. Tomorrow, then? After lunch?

PAUL. Okay.

STERLING. Great. *(He stands, his hand outstretched:)* I'm looking forward to working with you, Paul.

PAUL. Same here.

(They shake hands again.)

STERLING. You know, I've always regarded Alfred Morris as one of our unsung heroes. The Foundation is a model of enlightenment. Being named its director is an honor—and also a responsibility, I recognize. To sit behind his desk... He hired you too, didn't he?

PAUL. Yes, a couple of years before his death. But I worked mostly with Miss Sinclair. *(He smiles.)* "The keeper of the flame"—that's what she called herself. She made sure the Foundation remained true to his vision.

STERLING. Why do you think he did it?

PAUL. Did—?

STERLING. Why give the Foundation to Haywood?

PAUL. *(With a laugh:)* For the shock of it—that would have appealed to him. *(Pause.)* Actually, I think it was all part of his battle with the art establishment—the Art Museum, the Met, the *experts*. A final gesture of contempt on his part—"from beyond the grave."

(He smiles, but STERLING is thoughtful.)

STERLING. I see. *(He indicates the box on his desk:)* Well, I'd better finish unpacking.

PAUL. I'll see you later. *(He moves to the door, then turns back.)* Almost forgot—! *(He takes a ring of keys from his pocket and holds them out:)* The keys to the kingdom.

STERLING. Thanks, Paul.

(He puts the keys in his pocket.)

STERLING. Oh, if you spot Ella out there... could you ask her to come in?

Scene 3

(ALFRED MORRIS stands in the main gallery. A white man in his fifties, he is dressed in a conservative gray suit and carries a homburg hat. His manner is formal, severe; beneath the surface we sense a barely restrained truculence.)

(Behind him, upstage, is KANIKA WEAVER. She is African-American, attractive, in her late twenties. She stands looking at the paintings, giving no acknowledgment of MORRIS' presence.)

MORRIS. There are those who complain that the admission policy of my Foundation is “mysterious”—or even worse, “undemocratic.” They are mistaken. My policy is not mysterious, it is quite simple, and it is the *essence* of democracy. The Foundation is open to ordinary people—men and women who gain their livelihood by daily toil in shops, factories, and offices. It is open to students, to the retired, to anyone who displays a sincere and intelligent interest in learning about modern art.

(Pause.)

It is *not* open to those who believe that progress in art halted three centuries ago. It is *not* open to the so-called experts in the Art Museum, that house of artistic and intellectual prostitution. And it is *not* open to the parasites, social climbers, and gaudy butterflies who see art solely as a means of placing their names in the society columns of the daily press.

(He glares at us. Without warning he roars ferociously. Then, chuckling, he thrusts his hat onto his head and stalks off.)

(After a moment KANIKA exclaims softly:)

KANIKA. Well, well. My my my...

(PAUL appears in one of the entranceways. He watches her for a moment before speaking.)

PAUL. Beautiful, aren't they?

KANIKA. Amazing... *(She points:)* That's a Cezanne, isn't it?

PAUL. Yes. *(He moves into the room.)* We have sixty-nine of his. More than all the museums in Paris combined. Sixty Matisse's. Seven van Goghs. A hundred and eighty Renoirs.

KANIKA. That's a lot of naked white women.

(PAUL smiles.)

KANIKA. When Mr. North told me he was coming here, I had no idea...

PAUL. Ah, you're Mr. North's assistant.

KANIKA. *(Extends her hand:)* Kanika Weaver.

PAUL. Paul Barrow. Education director.

(They shake hands.)

Kanika—that's a lovely name.

KANIKA. It's Mwera for "black cloth." My parents didn't want me to have a slave name.

PAUL. *(With a shrug:)* I think my parents just liked the sound of Paul. *(He gestures at the Cezanne:)* You like Cezanne?

KANIKA. Sure. I mean, who doesn't? The big show of his at the Art Museum last year—

PAUL. *(Nodding:)* The blockbuster.

KANIKA. Wasn't it terrific?

PAUL. I didn't go.

KANIKA. You didn't?

PAUL. No. Or the van Gogh blockbuster before that, or the King Tut blockbuster that started it all. I avoid all the blockbusters.

KANIKA. Why?

PAUL. They're not about art, are they? They're about *commerce*.

KANIKA. *(Laughing:)* What do you mean?

PAUL. You know how it works. You arrive at the museum doors at the precise minute stamped on your ticket, which you've had to

buy three months in advance. You shuffle past the wall of corporate logos, through the theatrically lit threshold designed to induce the proper mood of reverential awe. (*In a hushed voice:*) Yes, you are now entering the sacred realm of “Art.”

(He begins to act out his words, clowning around for her.)

There’s the Cezanne your bank uses in its ads! And there—the van Gogh that’s hanging in your dentist’s waiting room! You’d like to stop and look—truly, carefully *look*—but the line carries you forward, to use more than your allotted five seconds would disrupt the carefully timed flow and create a bottleneck. So you settle for a glimpse and move on. Finally you reach your true destination—the gift shop, strategically situated at the end of the exhibit. Of course you want to retain some slight aftertaste of your encounter with immortality. So you brave the frenzy and buy something—a coffee mug, a tee-shirt, a keychain, a tote bag.

(KANJIKA is laughing in recognition.)

And then, suddenly, you’re outside. Trying not to recognize the furtive, frustrating sensation that somehow—despite having glimpsed the paintings, despite the mug, the tee-shirt, the keychain, the tote bag—somehow you missed whatever it was you came to see.

(Pause.)

Am I right?

(In response she reaches into her bag and takes out a Cezanne coffee mug. He points a finger at her:)

Gotcha.

KANIKA. *(Still laughing, not at all offended:)* And I’ve got you, Paul. You’re a *snob*.

PAUL. A snob? No...

KANIKA. Of course you are. This place with its famous admissions policy...

PAUL. Oh, that changed after Dr. Morris died. We let anyone in now—even art critics.

KANIKA. But you can't just show up at the door.

PAUL. No, but—

KANIKA. You're out here in the suburbs. The richest suburb, in fact. And open only three days a week.

PAUL. Yes...

KANIKA. Well, that's what I mean. It's exclusionary.

PAUL. Exclusionary? *(He considers for a moment.)* So we should be like the Art Museum? Open our doors wide? Singles Night every Wednesday?

KANIKA. Sure. Why not?

PAUL. I've never been to Singles Night, I admit. But whatever it is all those toned bodies are studying, I'll bet it isn't the art.

(They smile, then he continues:)

Yes, you have to make an appointment. And Dr. Morris didn't want to be anywhere near the Art Museum, so he came out here. But what does the Art Museum charge for admission?

KANIKA. Ten dollars...?

PAUL. We charge five.

(He holds out his hands to indicate the paintings surrounding them:)

There are no corporate logos here. These paintings aren't anyone's branding opportunity. And if one of them gestures to you, you don't have to settle for five seconds. Stand in front of it all day if you want. Here you will see what you came to see. You just have to make the effort.

(He smiles beatifically, more at the room than at her. She regards him, amused:)

KANIKA. You're a happy man, aren't you, Paul?

PAUL. How could I not be? I spend my day in paradise. *(Pause.)* I'm giving Mr. North a tour this afternoon. Maybe you could tag along.

KANIKA. Thanks, I'd like that. *(She gestures, the coffee mug still in her hand:)* I should let Mr. North know I'm here. Where—?

PAUL. *(Points:)* That way. Go through the gift shop.

(She raises an eyebrow.)

PAUL. It was a joke. We don't have a gift shop.

KANIKA. *(Brightly:)* Not yet.

(She goes. PAUL smiles to himself, then exits through one of the up-stage arches.)

Scene 4

(At once STERLING enters through the other arch. He is holding an African figurine, about ten inches high. He stops in the center of the gallery, gazing at it. A few moments later we hear PAUL's voice off-stage.)

PAUL. *(Off:)* ...the environment is controlled for humidity, and the temperature is maintained at a constant fifty-five degrees. It's not open to the public, of course, but the pieces are available to scholars.

(PAUL and KANIKA enter.)

PAUL. Well, that's it—twenty-three galleries, the archives, and the storage department.

KANIKA. I feel like my eyes can't take in anything else...

PAUL. You've just had the privilege of seeing what some very famous people never saw. Dr. Morris was utterly unpredictable about who he allowed in here. Albert Einstein, yes; T. S. Eliot, no.

KANIKA. Makes perfect sense to me. *(Pause.)* So...what's your favorite piece?

PAUL. What—in the whole building?

KANIKA. You must have one.

(Pause.)

PAUL. You're standing in front of it.

(She turns, surprised, as he moves to a Cezanne landscape.)

It's one of Cezanne's views of Mont Sainte-Victoire. He did about sixty of them, but this one... *(He gestures with precise motions, the painting drawing him in:)* See how he divides the canvas into three horizontal bands? They carry your eye from the trees in the foreground to the mountain in the distance. Each one has its own compositional scheme—light-light-dark on the bottom, dark-dark-light in the middle, dark-light-dark on the top. But he puts this green in the foreground *and* the distance, to unite the separate—

(He breaks off, suddenly aware of KANIKA's eyes on him.)

Well, I could talk about it all day.

KANIKA. But why this one?

(PAUL looks at the painting for a moment, then smiles.)

PAUL. Because Cezanne's mountain is better than nature's.

(A pause, then KANIKA sees STERLING with the figurine in his hand.)

KANIKA. What do you have there, Mr. North?

STERLING. *(Quietly:)* A treasure.

(He holds the figurine out to show them:)

It's a court official. From the Edo peoples of the Benin Kingdom—Nigeria today. Seventeenth century, I'd say, maybe even sixteenth.

KANIKA. It's beautiful...

STERLING. Figures like this were used in court ceremonies to symbolize the king's power. What's unusual about it is the material. Most African civilizations used wood or stone or ivory for their art. The Edo worked with cast copper alloy.

(Pause.)

As it happens... my family is descended from the Edo. So our stories tell us.

(He is visibly moved. After a moment PAUL speaks, a new respect in his voice.)

PAUL. I didn't know you were a connoisseur.

STERLING. I have a small private collection. *(Pause.)* Nothing like this, though. This is superb—museum quality. The other pieces down there as well...

PAUL. All the objects in storage are excellent. Dr. Morris had an amazing eye.

KANIKA. It's kind of *sad*, though. Nobody sees them.

PAUL. You know, we're allowed to use works in storage to decorate our offices. I have some wonderful Pascin drawings on my walls.

KANIKA. Really? Can I...?

(She looks uncertainly between STERLING and PAUL. After a moment STERLING smiles.)

STERLING. Go ahead.

KANIKA. *(Claps delightedly:)* Great!

PAUL. We'll need to record the accession numbers for whatever you pick. Why don't you go down—I'll meet you in a minute.

(KANIKA goes.)

STERLING. Thanks for the tour, Paul. It's an amazing place. *(He lifts the figurine:)* To find something like *this* here...

(Pause.)

PAUL. You know, Sterling, when I heard that Haywood had named a *businessman* as director... Please don't take this the wrong way, but I thought it was a catastrophe.

(He indicates the figurine in STERLING's hands:)

How a person holds an object like that... it tells you everything. I'm happy to admit: I couldn't have been more wrong.

STERLING. I appreciate that.

PAUL. This collection, this *place*... It's crucial it be in the right hands, isn't it?

(He goes. STERLING stands silently for a moment, looking up at the walls. Then he holds out the figurine.)

Scene 5

(STERLING's office. He is settled in now; his desk is covered with papers, the bookcase behind him is full. On one corner of the desk is the African figurine.)

(STERLING is shaking GILLIAN CRANE's hand. She is white, in her mid-forties, neatly dressed in trousers, shirt, a linen jacket.)

GILLIAN. Thank you for seeing me, Mr. North. I know you're busy.

STERLING. Please, call me Sterling. Have a seat.

(GILLIAN sits and opens her bag, bringing out a notebook and a small recorder.)

STERLING. Can I get you some coffee, tea—?

GILLIAN. I'm fine, thanks. Do you mind if I record this?

STERLING. Not at all. *(He sits, smiling.)* I know quite a few people at the paper—we must have some mutual friends.

GILLIAN. Actually, I write for the suburban bureau. "Neighbors."

STERLING. Ah.

(GILLIAN speaks into her recorder:)

GILLIAN. Interview with Sterling North, Morris Foundation, September 20.

(She places the recorder on the desk.)

Sterling, you've been here almost a week. How are you settling in?

STERLING. *(With a practiced smile:)* Well, Gillian, I'm still getting used to seeing trees outside my window. My office at Unicom was on the twenty-first floor.

GILLIAN. Quite a career switch—from vice-president of a communications company to an arts foundation.

STERLING. It's not as abrupt as it seems. A corporate officer for community relations deals with arts organizations all the time. I've

served on the boards of a museum and a theatre company. I'm familiar with the territory.

GILLIAN. You're not trained as an arts administrator, though.

STERLING. No. (*He smiles again.*) But I've read a ton of grant proposals.

GILLIAN. It raises the question—in some people's minds—of whether Haywood University has the resources to administer this collection.

STERLING. Does it?

GILLIAN. After all, it's a small school—about eight hundred students, I think?—with virtually no art department.

STERLING. I'm sure you're aware the Foundation has its own endowment.

GILLIAN. It's not a question of money.

STERLING. What, then?

GILLIAN. Expertise?

STERLING. "Expertise." I see.

GILLIAN. The Morris is a priceless collection. One would expect it to be in the hands of a professional arts administrator. You seem to have been appointed because you're a trustee of Haywood.

STERLING. You have to admit, Gillian, an arts administrator is the last person Dr. Morris himself would have wanted.

GILLIAN. True. But—

STERLING. In any case, your question isn't really about my qualifications, is it?

GILLIAN. Isn't it?

STERLING. (*Indicating the papers on his desk.*) I've been reading your articles.

GILLIAN. "Know thine enemy"?

STERLING. I don't view the press as an adversary. I was curious to see how the issue has been presented.

GILLIAN. Fairly, I hope.

STERLING. Do you think?

(Pause.)

Upon Helen Sinclair's death a codicil in Dr. Morris' will was revealed, giving Haywood University—an historically black school—the power to appoint members of the board of directors. Control of the Foundation, in other words. The obvious question: Why?

GILLIAN. If you don't—

STERLING. *(Raises a hand:)* Please, let me finish. Dr. Morris' dislike of the art establishment was legendary—one of his numerous “eccentricities.” Thus the obvious answer—or perhaps the easy one. A gesture of contempt. A last shock to respectable society.

GILLIAN. I was quoting two art historians. Both very respected.

STERLING. And both white.

GILLIAN. *(Evenly:)* Yes.

STERLING. Who also suggest that if Dr. Morris hadn't died in a car accident, he would have come to his senses and changed the will.

(GILLIAN is silent.)

STERLING. Tell me, have you ever noticed the tiles outside? By the main entrance?

GILLIAN. I've never really stopped to look... A kind of African design, isn't it?

STERLING. They're modeled after a carved door from the Akan peoples of Ivory Coast. The original is in the collection. Above the door are two female figures modeled on carvings from the Senofo peoples of Mali. Dr. Morris designed the entrance himself. What does that say to you?

GILLIAN. I'd rather know what it says to you.

(STERLING spreads his hands as if the answer were obvious.)

STERLING. The centrality of African art is announced before you even enter the building. It's the lens through which the objects in here are meant to be viewed.

(Pause.)

Interesting, isn't it? People speculate, analyze, *invent...* when all they have to do is trust their own eyes.

(GILLIAN writes in her notebook. Then she indicates the figure on the desk.)

GILLIAN. That's an impressive piece. From the collection?

STERLING. Yes. *(He hands it to her.)*

GILLIAN. *(A wry smile:)* I have to confess, I never noticed this either.

STERLING. It was in storage. I forgive you.

(Pause.)

Gillian, you say in your articles that the Foundation has been seen as isolated from the community. Secretive, even. I want that to change. Open the place up a bit.

GILLIAN. Do you have any specific plans?

STERLING. *(Snaps his fingers:)* I have an idea.

(He stands.)

No reporter has ever seen what we have in storage. How would you like to be the first?

Scene 6

(PAUL and KANIKA are in the main gallery. She is looking at the paintings while he sits on the bench.)

PAUL. "Put yourself in my place."

That's the invitation extended to us by a painting. Through a painting, really, by the painter. Through the painting he says to us—or she, let's be inclusive!—"Set aside your own perspective for

a moment. Look at the world through my eyes. This is how I see this patch of land and sea and sky—this grouping of fruit and bowl on a table—this body. This is how I see the surface, its volume in space, the interplay of light and shadow. Don't forget, beauty lies in *singularity*: this scene and no other, this moment and no other." *(Pause.)* We look, and we're refreshed—maybe even changed, a little. Our own narrow perspective widens, if only by one degree. Over a lifetime of looking, we can learn to see the world in the round.

(Pause.)

Dr. Morris believed in a very old-fashioned idea—that art can make us better human beings. Richer, deeper, more alive.

KANIKA. Then *he* must have been a saint.

PAUL. Actually, he was the biggest bastard I've ever met. Ruthless, dictatorial...if you dared to disagree with him, you were his enemy for life. And he waged bitter warfare on you. But he was right.

(He gestures to indicate the room:)

So—what's *your* favorite?

KANIKA. Oh, I don't know anything about art.

PAUL. You've been here a week. Something must have leaped out at you.

KANIKA. I put those drawings of Egypt in my office...

PAUL. I mean here—in the galleries.

(KANIKA continues to look at the paintings. PAUL watches her. After a moment she turns, a smile on her face.)

KANIKA. Why do I have the feeling I'm about to be judged?

PAUL. What do you mean?

KANIKA. "What's your favorite painting?" You're sitting there waiting for me to reveal myself so you can decide what slot to put me in. If I pick a Cezanne, it's this slot. A Matisse, that one.

PAUL. But you asked *me* the other day...

KANIKA. *(Shrugs, another smile:)* You didn't have to tell me.

PAUL. *(Protesting:)* I'm not judging you.

KANIKA. Bullshit, Paul.

(But this has been said quietly, almost tenderly. A strange, charged moment, then she continues:)

When I came here I had no idea what to expect. Like I said, I don't know anything about art, not really. But there's something about being surrounded by these paintings, eight hours a day... Sharing the same space.

(A moment, then she gestures at the walls:)

I'd like to learn about all this. And you're obviously the guy to ask. But please, Paul... no assumptions about me. Okay?

(Before PAUL can reply, STERLING enters through one of the arches, a piece of paper in his hand.)

STERLING. Kanika—there you are. I need you to send copies of this to the board members.

KANIKA. Sure, Mr. North.

(She holds out her hand for the paper, but STERLING is looking at PAUL.)

STERLING. I'll be sending a memo to the staff, Paul. But you might as well read this now.

(He extends it to PAUL, who takes it with a quizzical smile and reads.)

KANIKA. I've drafted the proposal for the art program at Haywood, Mr. North.

STERLING. Great. Leave it on my desk and I'll—

KANIKA. Already done.

PAUL. *(Interrupting:)* No, no... you can't.

STERLING. Can't—?

(PAUL smiles gently. He holds out the paper, his voice reasonable, almost apologetic.)

PAUL. I should explain something, Sterling. Dr. Morris' will fixed the layout of the galleries.

STERLING. I know about the will.

KANIKA. Can I see?

(PAUL hands her the paper as STERLING continues:)

STERLING. They're just sitting down there, Paul. A Basonge mask that's the finest I've ever seen. An Afo fertility piece—do you have any *idea* how rare it is?

PAUL. We have over five thousand objects in the collection, Sterling. Less than half are on display.

KANIKA. *(Reads:)* “—eight African objects currently in storage, of unusual cultural and artistic significance, be integrated into the collection available to the public.”

(She looks up at PAUL:)

Well, that doesn't seem like such a big deal.

PAUL. What do you mean?

KANIKA. We could find room for them somewhere in the galleries, couldn't we? It's only eight pieces.

PAUL. The number doesn't matter.

STERLING. This is just a recommendation to the board, Paul. You're free to disagree.

PAUL. I do disagree.

STERLING. Well... *(He spreads his hands.)* Noted.

(He turns away, trying to hide his annoyance.)

(KANIKA looks between the two of them. After a moment PAUL speaks placatingly.)

PAUL. Look, Sterling, I'm not insensitive to what you're saying. The pieces are significant, no question. That's why Dr. Morris acquired them. But this place—it isn't the chaos it seems to be.

(He moves to the paintings on the nearest wall:)

Here—two paintings of bathers, one by Cezanne, one by Renoir. The contrast is striking: brushwork, the use of color... The landscapes on either side show Cezanne experimenting with Renoir's use of transparent planes of color. But the two portraits above show Renoir responding to Cezanne—the way he distributes volumes and planes. The entire grouping is a study in reciprocal influence.

STERLING. I appreciate all that, Paul—

PAUL. And here—*(He goes to the wall with the African objects:)* The portraits by Modigliani show the elongated features that he derived from African masks like these. And their colors, in turn, are reflected in the Picassos here.

(Pause.)

This is how the entire collection is organized. Juxtapositions pointing out similarities and influences. One age speaking to another, one culture to another... It's more than a collection of objects. It's a *vision*.

STERLING. I'm not going to just take some paintings down and hang something else up. Nothing would be done without your input.

(He smiles.)

Dr. Morris acquired the pieces a long time ago. African cultures had barely been studied, it's not surprising he didn't understand their importance.

PAUL. What I'm saying, Sterling, is that nothing can be taken down. Or even moved. And nothing can be added. The galleries must remain exactly as Dr. Morris hung them.

KANIKA. When was that?

PAUL. He hung his last acquisition—that Picasso, there—in 1952.

KANIKA. You mean this place hasn't changed in *fifty years*? (*She gives a mock shudder.*) That's kind of creepy.

STERLING. Let's think creatively here. (*He gestures.*) The little storeroom next to Kanika's office—perhaps we could turn that into a gallery, put the pieces in there.

PAUL. (*Shakes his head.*) You can't.

STERLING. If we sit down and explore some alternatives, I'm sure—

PAUL. You *can't*. The will forbids it. You can't change the permanent collection.

STERLING. (*A flash of anger.*) Don't tell me something *can't* be changed. Don't tell me change is not *allowed*.

(A sudden silence, then he continues quietly.)

My wife teaches civil rights law at Grant University. She tells me a provision in a will that is clearly discriminatory can be challenged in court. And overturned.

PAUL. Wait, wait, what are you—Discriminatory?

(He looks, bewildered, between STERLING and KANIKA.)

There's African art on the walls. How can you say—

STERLING. A few masks, yes. A few figures. Twenty-eight, to be precise. Among sixty-nine Cezannes, sixty Matisse's, and a *hundred and eighty* Renoirs.

PAUL. Dr. Morris' appreciation of African art is renowned.

STERLING. Then why did he put so much of it in the *basement*?

PAUL. It's not the basement, it's the storage department.

(Pause.)

You've been here one week, Sterling. I don't think you have the right to question what he—

STERLING. (*Angrily.*) The *right*?

KANIKA. Excuse me, Mr. North— *(She looks first to STERLING and then to PAUL.)* Maybe you should take this into your office.

(A pause, then STERLING speaks quietly:)

STERLING. No need. Kanika, please send that to the board. Have it put on the agenda for the next meeting.

(He exits. KANIKA turns to PAUL. His face is ashen.)

KANIKA. Paul. Hey... Look, you got him angry. Don't—

PAUL. He wouldn't even listen.

KANIKA. It's just a proposal, that's all. Can't the board even talk about it?

(He looks at her, undecided.)

KANIKA. You were about to teach me about one of these. *(She indicates the nearest painting:)* Here—this one. Picasso, right?

PAUL. *(Quietly:)* Yes. Picasso.

KANIKA. Tell me about it. I really want to know.

Scene 7

(ALFRED MORRIS appears in the gallery.)

(During the following PAUL and KANIKA move to a small cafe table downstage and set coffees in front of themselves. They converse inaudibly, showing no awareness of MORRIS' presence.)

(MORRIS gestures at the Cezanne view of Mont Sainte-Victoire.)

MORRIS. *Mont Sainte-Victoire, 1903.* One of the finest works from Cezanne's last years. And one of my favorite acquisitions.

(Pause.)

In 1931 I sailed to France on the *S.S. Paris*. In the saloon I ran into another collector, a man named Thompson. *(He snorts dismissively.)* A real Park Avenue blueblood—inherited his father's money, never had to sully his manicured hands with anything as common as *business*. *(In a mincing tone:)* “Well, Morris, going to buy some

paintings, are you? I've heard from a dealer who's come across a superb Cezanne. Can't wait to see it hanging on my dining room wall. You really will have to come to the big city and see it sometime." I asked him, casually, who the dealer was—and he *told* me, the idiot! Five minutes later I excused myself and went straight to the radio room. Telegraphed the dealer, offered him five thousand dollars more than Thompson, and bought the painting myself. Then I went back to the saloon and had another bourbon with Mr. Park Avenue. Of course, I didn't say a word about the Cezanne.

(Smiling, he indicates the painting:)

Now it's hanging on *my* wall. And he's never laid eyes on it.

(He barks triumphantly and exits as PAUL and KANIKA become audible.)

KANIKA. Before I started working for Sterling? I was a teacher.

PAUL. Really?

KANIKA. Oh yeah. Got my degree in elementary education—I was going to change the world, one student at a time. My first job was in the city—the “inner city.” *(She smiles ruefully.)* I lasted six months.

PAUL. What happened?

KANIKA. *(Shrugs:)* I discovered I wasn't tough enough. And those seven-year-old kids—those bright, ruthless little faces—they spotted it. They knew before I did.

(Pause.)

Are you still thinking about Sterling?

PAUL. Don't you think he overreacted?

KANIKA. He's a black man who's made it in the business world, Paul. The *white* world. The shit he's had to put up with...you really can't imagine.

PAUL. Yes, granted, but—

KANIKA. He's very aware of being condescended to.

PAUL. Come on, I never—

KANIKA. You *lectured* him yesterday. And me.

PAUL. I suppose you agree with him, then.

KANIKA. Why do you suppose that? Because we're both black? Or because he's my boss?

(She regards him for a moment, then sips her coffee.)

(Upstage, GILLIAN crosses holding a takeout coffee. Seeing them, she stops.)

KANIKA. Anyway, what's the big deal? Take down five or six Renoirs, put up the African pieces... What's a few less paintings of naked white women?

(She laughs at PAUL's shocked expression.)

I was *joking*, Paul.

(A pause, then PAUL speaks quietly:)

PAUL. I was only twenty-five when Dr. Morris hired me. It's the only real job I've ever had. *(He shrugs.)* It's *all* I have, to be honest. I don't mind saying that. Divorced, no kids... Sounds pretty sad, huh?

KANIKA. *(Softly:)* No.

PAUL. I can't joke about the place, Kanika. I believe in what it represents. Not just paintings—an individual vision. As odd and unfashionable and *spiky* as it may be... A world that can't accommodate that isn't better. It's just easier to digest.

(A moment, then she glances at her watch.)

KANIKA. I guess I'd better get going. Thanks for lunch.

PAUL. Sure.

(She exits. PAUL sits back and sips his coffee as GILLIAN approaches.)

GILLIAN. Excuse me—it's Paul, right? Paul Barrow?

PAUL. Gillian—how are you?

GILLIAN. May I join you?

PAUL. Sure.

(She sits and sips her coffee.)

GILLIAN. They have the best coffee here, don't they? I'm on my way to a press conference, but I just had to stop.

PAUL. What's the story?

GILLIAN. A councilman's been accused of misusing funds. He's going to respond. *(Pause.)* I used to think I'd spend a couple of years out here, then move on to the city desk. But I discovered I like writing for the B section. We have stories too, out here amidst the trees and boutiques and Range Rovers. Like an African-American taking over the venerable Morris Foundation.

(She takes another sip.)

So how are things?

PAUL. *(Shrugs:)* There's always a period of adjustment.

GILLIAN. Sterling is settling in?

PAUL. Yes...

GILLIAN. What?

PAUL. *(Waves a hand:)* Internal policy. Not interesting.

GILLIAN. I'm interested.

(Pause.)

PAUL. You interviewed him a couple of days ago, right?

GILLIAN. Yes. And I got a tour of the storage department as well.

PAUL. *(Surprised:)* A tour...?

GILLIAN. Very impressive, what's down there. I'm going to do a separate story on it.

PAUL. Did he tell you about his proposal to the board?

GILLIAN. What proposal?

(She sees that PAUL is hesitant.)

GILLIAN. Look, Paul... something's on your mind, that's obvious. I'd like to know what it is.

PAUL. The thing is... I'd like to keep my name out of this.

GILLIAN. What is it I'm keeping your name out of?

(Pause.)

PAUL. Dr. Morris built a very large collection in his lifetime. More than he could display at the Foundation. As you saw, we have quite a few objects in storage. Like all museums.

GILLIAN. And...?

PAUL. Sterling's proposing to the board that some of the pieces in storage be placed in the galleries. *(He sits back as if unburdened.)*

GILLIAN. I thought the displays couldn't be changed.

PAUL. Exactly! It's one of the provisions of Dr. Morris' will—nothing can be added. I tried to explain that to Sterling, but he—
(He hesitates again.)

GILLIAN. He what?

(Pause.)

PAUL. Sterling feels the provision is discriminatory.

GILLIAN. Discriminatory? What pieces are we talking about?

PAUL. African art. Masks, sculptures... He thinks the will can be challenged.

(A moment, then GILLIAN takes a notebook and pen from her pocket.)

GILLIAN. I'm just going to take a few notes while we talk, all right? Why aren't these pieces on display?

PAUL. Dr. Morris fixed the displays before I was hired. Before I was born! He had a very particular vision—some pieces fit, some didn't.

GILLIAN. Is the work in storage not as good?

PAUL. It's not a question of quality.

GILLIAN. I didn't notice any Cezannes down there.

PAUL. (*Smiles:*) Nobody keeps Cezanne in storage.

GILLIAN. Isn't it possible Sterling has a legitimate point?

PAUL. (*Vehemently:*) No.

(*Pause.*)

Look, I don't *idolize* Dr. Morris the way some people did. But if you say the will is discriminatory, what are you saying about the man? That he was—what, some kind of *racist*? It's ridiculous.

(GILLIAN *looks at him appraisingly:*)

GILLIAN. Tell me, Paul, how did you feel when Sterling was named director?

PAUL. What does that have to do with—

GILLIAN. You've been at the Foundation a long time. You certainly have all the qualifications. Did you resent being passed over?

PAUL. I wouldn't say I was *passed over*.

GILLIAN. No?

PAUL. Haywood wanted an African-American, that's all. Why are you...?

GILLIAN. It's the first question anyone will ask.

PAUL. You're keeping my name out of this.

GILLIAN. If I can.

PAUL. This isn't *personal*, Gillian. I don't have anything against Sterling.

GILLIAN. You're sure about that, right? You need to be.

PAUL. It's about Dr. Morris' legacy. What he created.

(GILLIAN *glances at her watch, then puts her notebook away and picks up her bag.*)

GILLIAN. I really have to go—the councilman's clearing his throat. Thanks for talking to me, Paul.

(She extends her hand. After a moment PAUL shakes it, then GILLIAN turns and exits.)

Scene 8

(STERLING is in the main gallery. GILLIAN enters behind him.)

GILLIAN. Sterling—excuse me—

STERLING. *(Turning:)* Gillian ...

GILLIAN. I was passing by, and I thought I'd stop in. I'm finishing up the story, and there's one question I'd like to follow up on...

STERLING. Fire away.

GILLIAN. It's come to my attention that you're presenting a proposal to the board of directors.

(STERLING says nothing.)

GILLIAN. Specifically, you want to take several pieces of African art out of storage and put them in the galleries.

(Pause.)

STERLING. May I ask who told you this?

GILLIAN. I'm sure you understand I can't reveal my sources.

STERLING. *(Carefully:)* That is a recommendation I'm making, yes.

GILLIAN. Are these the pieces you pointed out to me? During my tour?

STERLING. Among others.

GILLIAN. And this could entail challenging a provision of Dr. Morris' will as discriminatory.

STERLING. There are precedents for that kind of challenge.

GILLIAN. When we talked the other day, you emphasized Dr. Morris' *inclusion* of African art. Isn't there a contradiction here?

STERLING. Gillian, when I saw those pieces in storage—

(He holds up his hands:)

I saw a pair of hands. Hands shaping something—a mask, a figure. Whose hands were they? *(He shakes his head.)* His name was lost. His civilization, like so many others, was exterminated in the African holocaust. But the objects shaped by those hands survived. A testament to someone's vision. And to allow them to sit in darkness, *forgotten— (He breaks off, deeply affected.)*

GILLIAN. Is it true that some staff members at the Foundation oppose such a change?

STERLING. If you're talking about Paul Barrow—

(Pause.)

STERLING. I ask myself a question: If we were to discover an overlooked van Gogh in storage, would Paul raise the same objection? I answer myself: Of course not. No one would, would they? Yet he objects to eight African pieces.

GILLIAN. Eight?

STERLING. Ah, he didn't tell you that...?

GILLIAN. Isn't it a question of respecting Dr. Morris' wishes?

STERLING. I've encountered this before, Gillian. Every black person in America has. There is the reason *given*, and there is the *reason*. And they are two different things.

GILLIAN. What are you saying?

STERLING. I don't want to think that Paul is acting out of racism. But it's hard to avoid that conclusion, isn't it?

GILLIAN. *(Writing:)* May I quote you?

STERLING. I believe in speaking on the record. But I hope your story focuses on the art.

GILLIAN. It'll be out tomorrow.

STERLING. I look forward to it.

(GILLIAN exits as the sound of the children's choir singing a spiritual wells up.)

Scene 9

(ALFRED MORRIS appears in the main gallery. He listens to the choir.)

(Behind him, KANIKA, sitting on the bench, reads a newspaper. STERLING stands, relaxed, a cup of coffee in his hands. They show no awareness of MORRIS' presence.)

(The song ends and MORRIS steps forward.)

MORRIS. My thanks to the choir of the Bordentown Manual Training School and its director, Mr. Davies.

(Pause.)

I am often asked by people to explain my interest in Negro art and culture. "Explain" is the word they use, that is. "Defend" is the word they mean.

When I was eight years old my mother took me to a camp meeting, where I heard Negro spirituals for the first time—the same ones we've heard this afternoon. I was transported by their beauty and power—taken out of myself and given a glimpse of another world. When I began to collect paintings, I also sought out the finest examples of African art to include in my Foundation. How appropriate, now, to hear these songs echo in the hall that displays those pieces. Through the power of his music and his art, the Negro reveals to the entire world the essential oneness of *all* human beings.

(Pause.)

I like to say... I am addicted to the Negro.

(He looks at us challengingly, then exits as KANIKA reads:)

KANIKA. "This reporter had the privilege of being the first writer to tour the storage department, where more than half of the Foundation's magnificent collection is kept. The sight kindles a renewed appreciation for the scope of Dr. Morris' vision."

(She looks up at STERLING:)

This is great.

STERLING. Yes, I'm pleased with it. In general.

KANIKA. In general?

STERLING. She seems unconvinced by my reasons for coming here.

KANIKA. Well, I have to admit...

(STERLING looks at her.)

KANIKA. I thought you were happy at Unicom.

(After a moment STERLING speaks quietly:)

STERLING. Ever noticed, Kanika, how many community relations people are black? Or Asian? Or Latino, or women?

KANIKA. Well, now that you mention it...

STERLING. Why is that? After all, you get to have your picture taken handing those oversized checks to museums and theatre companies. You're invited to every fundraiser and opening. You speak for your company. Yet it's not a job white men want.

KANIKA. Why not?

STERLING. Think about it. A corporation exists to make money...

KANIKA. *(As it dawns on her:)* And you gave it away.

STERLING. Not the ideal path for career advancement. *They* understand that—but no one warned *me*.

(He shrugs.)

I was window dressing. A shining emblem of corporate virtue. Well paid for it, I don't deny. But...marooned. *(Pause.)* After a while I began noticing things about who I was giving those checks *to*. How the white museums and theatres wanted the money to put up new buildings, fund new programs...while the black groups just wanted to keep the lights on.

(He gestures at the walls around them:)

Then Haywood offered me a new path. And I've discovered...how freeing it is to speak for myself. What *I* believe.

(A moment, then KANIKA returns to the newspaper.)

KANIKA. Hey, how does she know about your proposal to the board?

STERLING. Someone told her.

KANIKA. Who?

STERLING. Paul.

KANIKA. Paul?

(She continues reading, then looks up, dismayed:)

Oh no—you can't say this.

(PAUL enters, carrying his satchel and a newspaper.)

(STERLING glances at his watch.)

STERLING. You're late, Paul.

PAUL. We have to talk.

STERLING. Let's go into my office, then.

(He turns to go, but PAUL holds up the newspaper.)

PAUL. A friend called me at six this morning. Have you seen the *Herald*, he asked. I asked him what was in it. Just get it, he said. And hung up. So I picked it off my front step and took it into the kitchen. Where I discovered that, beneath your picture—on the front page!—I was being called a *racist*.

(He throws the newspaper to the floor.)

What gives you the *right*?

(A moment, then STERLING speaks quietly:)

STERLING. Kanika, would you...?

(KANIKA stands and exits.)

STERLING. Let's talk, yes. About why you found it necessary to go behind my back. To a *reporter*.

PAUL. I didn't *go* to Gillian. We ran into each other at—

STERLING. And you told her about my recommendation. *(Pause.)* The board hasn't even had a chance to discuss it, Paul. You're op-

posed—fine, make your case to them. That's the *process*. You don't take it outside.

PAUL. And for that you accuse me of racism?

STERLING. Not only for that.

PAUL. Not *only*—?

STERLING. (*Quietly:*) "A gesture of contempt."

PAUL. What?

STERLING. My first day here. You don't remember? I asked you why Dr. Morris left the Foundation to Haywood. You told me it was a gesture of contempt. Not—

PAUL. Contempt for the art establishment.

STERLING. Not *five minutes* after meeting me. You couldn't have been quicker to put me in my place.

PAUL. It had nothing to do with you. Or Haywood.

STERLING. I see—we're just the *instrument* of his contempt.

PAUL. This is ridiculous. I—

STERLING. You really don't see how offensive that is?

PAUL. You're completely misinterpreting what I said.

STERLING. This is the conversation I gave up having a long time ago. Told myself I would never have again. The one you have in dorm rooms and classrooms, and later on—out in the real world—in apartments and bars. In which you try to explain to a white person why he's a racist when he's convinced he isn't. Because he just doesn't *get it*.

(*He bites off the last two words, letting them linger.*)

(*PAUL is silent, then speaks quietly.*)

PAUL. So the things *you* said that morning... Dr. Morris is a—what was it?—"a model of enlightenment," what an *honor* it was to sit at his desk... That was all bullshit.

STERLING. (*Shakes his head:*) No...

PAUL. That first day. The first *hour*. You replaced Ella Franklin for no reason.

STERLING. I replaced Ella with a familiar face. Someone loyal to me. That's how the world—

PAUL. You want to destroy this place.

STERLING. Why would I want to do that, Paul?

PAUL. It's perfectly clear why, isn't it? *Now*. I mean, it's obvious.

(He raises his hands to indicate the room:)

All these faces, all these bodies... The artists themselves, their *gaze*... They're white.

(A charged moment, then STERLING points at the African grouping on the wall.)

STERLING. Not quite all.

PAUL. *(Going to the African pieces:)* Except for these, yes. Looking very lonely, you have to admit. Overwhelmed, even. *(He turns back to STERLING.)* So you've decided you need a stronger presence. You need to colonize.

STERLING. You're really trying to piss me off, aren't you? *Colonize?*

PAUL. After all, Dr. Morris was just another white guy who didn't "get it," right?

STERLING. I didn't believe that when I walked in here, Paul.

PAUL. Then you've come a long way in a short time.

STERLING. Thanks to you.

PAUL. Me?

STERLING. You showed me the objects in storage. If they hadn't been there, if Dr. Morris had put every African piece he owned on these walls—

PAUL. Didn't you notice what *else* is down there? Sisley, Demuth, Prendergast—wonderful pieces other museums would love to have.

STERLING. So I should be *grateful*, is that what you're saying? Happy that we have a little patch of the wall?

PAUL. It's a question of available space. Choices have to be made.

STERLING. But who *makes* the choices, Paul? Who gets to look at two pieces—both worthy, both valuable—and say: This one will be seen, this one is invisible? (*He points a finger at PAUL.:*) A white man—always a white man.

PAUL. He lived in a different world, Sterling. To include African art in here, alongside Cezanne and Renoir—he was ahead of his time.

STERLING. Fifty years ago, yes. Now—

(He indicates the walls with a wave:)

You look at these walls, you see inclusion. I see exactly the opposite. I see a white man who built his Foundation and filled it with white art. Yes, he hung a few African pieces. Maybe he believed he appreciated them. Or maybe he was just trying to scandalize the neighbors.

PAUL. You're turning him into some kind of racist caricature. I knew the *man*.

STERLING. A man who—in all those years—hired exactly *one* black employee.

PAUL. He loved African art, he lectured on it. He had a black choir sing in this room every month—

STERLING. Yes, I've read about his little *minstrel* shows.

PAUL. It's outrageous—to question his sincerity when you never even—

STERLING. (*Explosively:*) *Fuck* his sincerity!

(PAUL is shocked into silence by his anger. After a moment STERLING continues quietly:)

The corporation where I worked, Paul, was perfectly sincere in wanting a black vice-president. I had no doubt about that. The

question was: Did they want two? I had only to look around to see I was *alone*.

(Pause.)

So I say: Fuck sincerity. *Visibility* is what I care about.

(A silence.)

I'm having this conversation again, after all.

(A pause, then PAUL exhales sharply:)

PAUL. Okay. I get it.

STERLING. Do you?

PAUL. Not totally. I admit that. But visibility...? Here of all places.

(Pause.)

And I might have a solution. A compromise, to make everyone happy.

STERLING. What kind of compromise?

PAUL. The provisions of Dr. Morris' will—they only mention the work on display. Not what we have in storage. Is it possible, then—legally, I mean—that they don't *apply* to the work in storage?

STERLING. *(Cautiously:)* I can't say. What are you...

PAUL. Change your recommendation to the board, Sterling. Ask, instead, that they agree to loan the pieces to *another* museum. One that would display them properly.

STERLING. Another...?

PAUL. It's unusual, I admit. But given their undeniable cultural and artistic significance... I think a strong case could be made.

STERLING. Do you have a museum in mind?

PAUL. As a matter of fact, I do. The African-American Museum downtown.

(The triumph in his voice is evident. STERLING moves away a few steps, thinking.)

PAUL. Everyone's interests would be satisfied. And the pieces would be *visible*.

(Pause.)

STERLING. I used to be on the board there, you know.

PAUL. That's what gave me the idea.

(Pause.)

STERLING. All right, Paul. I'll agree to it.

PAUL. *(Elated:)* Great—!

(He thrusts his hand out to shake STERLING's.)

STERLING. If.

(Pause.)

If I can ask you one question...and the answer is yes. Have you ever been to the African-American Museum? Even once?

(PAUL is silent, his hand still outstretched.)

(STERLING lets the silence lengthen before continuing.)

STERLING. I didn't think so. Not many white people go there, I've noticed. You don't seem to feel the need. *(He shrugs.)* There *is* no need, is there? Understanding *us* has no urgency. Nothing depends on it. Whereas we spend every day of our lives trying to figure *you* out.

(Pause.)

No, we are not the object of your study. You are the object of ours.

(A moment, then he moves toward his office. PAUL speaks, disbelief in his voice:)

PAUL. That's it? You're going to throw this away because I didn't pass your *test*...?

(STERLING says nothing.)

PAUL. Sterling...

(STERLING turns and looks at him.)

PAUL. I hoped it wouldn't come to this. Truly. I hoped we...

(He picks up the newspaper.)

The friend I mentioned—who called me this morning?—he's a lawyer. I just met with him—that's why I'm late. In his opinion, what you said about me in here... "acting out of racism..." I can't let that go unanswered. I have to respond. *(Pause.)* Unless you retract your words, publicly... I'm suing you for libel.

(A silence, then STERLING speaks calmly:)

STERLING. I think, Paul...under the circumstances...you have to decide whether it makes sense for you to remain here.

PAUL. You're firing me... ?

STERLING. No. You're making a choice.

PAUL. We can't even—

STERLING. What, Paul? "Talk about it"? *(He shakes his head.)* That's a job for the lawyers now.

(He gazes at PAUL levelly. After a moment PAUL speaks quietly:)

PAUL. I resign.

STERLING. Accepted.

(He gestures at the paintings on the walls:)

I'll let you say goodbye.

(He exits.)

(PAUL is left standing in the gallery. He looks up at the Cezanne, stricken, for a long moment. Then he walks out.)

End of Act I

ACT II

Scene 1

(PAUL stands facing us, alone in the light. Under one arm is a book. A few feet away is a chair with his leather satchel.)

PAUL. Put yourself in my place.

You work at an art foundation for twenty years. You love your work. The paintings that surround you are your study, your pleasure, your passion, sometimes your solace. An infallible source of beauty. *(Pause.)* One day—quite suddenly and unexpectedly—the foundation has a new director. Who is, as it happens, a black man. African American. He wants to make changes, fundamental changes that you oppose. Instead of discussing them with you, reasonably...he plays the race card.

Knowing, in our society, in this minefield of sensitivities and resentments and grievances that we daily pick our way through, knowing it will destroy you. As it's destroyed other men—white men who, in a single unguarded moment, committed the mortal sin of uttering a thoughtless or badly phrased comment, and whose careers, reputations, entire *lives* were then thrown onto the sacrificial pyre of racial diversity and publicly burned. Burned to cinders. Burned to ashes. Burned to silence and invisibility.

You are now, in the public record, a racist. And what defense can you make against that word? “But I’m not, it’s not true”? *(He shakes his head.)* The accusation is its own truth.

After the initial shock fades, you realize you need to find a job. Which shouldn't be too hard, you tell yourself. After all, you have the necessary degrees. From your years at the Foundation you have an undeniable—in fact, unique—expertise in Impressionist and post-Impressionist art. And there are dozens of colleges and universities in your area. You mail out your resume, you're invited to interview. Always you are treated respectfully, your qualifications acknowledged openly. Passed with flying colors, you think. But something unrevealed shadows the interviewers' expressions, something unspoken circumscribes their words... And nothing materializes. No offers are made. Your phone is silent. It's the economy, you tell yourself. Colleges are cutting back, positions are

scarce. (*He laughs slightly.*) Or perhaps the Foundation's aura of iconoclasm has rubbed off on you. Dr. Morris scorned these schools and their professors; it's only natural they resent it. Be patient.

Finally, after several weeks, a friend—a professor of art history at the Ivy League school—takes you out for coffee one day and illuminates what you had only sensed. On today's campuses, he explains, racial sensitivities are so extreme, the readiness to take offense is poised on such a trembling hair trigger, that no administration will consider appointing someone publicly accused of racism. Who is, moreover, suing his accuser for libel. It would be perceived as a slap in the face by the minority students and faculty. The students would protest, the faculty members would threaten to resign en masse and migrate to another university. Suddenly there's a glint of panic in his eyes. Oh God, I didn't mean "migrate," I didn't mean to imply—He stops himself with a rueful smile. This is how it is, he says. Language itself is being patrolled. Better set your sights lower, he tells you. At this level you're unemployable.

"Racist." The accusation is its own truth.

You mail out another round of resumes, this time to prep schools, private academies, even community colleges. And it is, ultimately, a community college thirty miles away that takes you on—part-time instructor, History of Painting. An afterthought of a course in a school with no art department. You have no office; your office is your car. (*Pause.*) At the Foundation you taught people trying to cut through the static and clutter in our lives...craving the ballast art can give. Now you lecture bored kids fulfilling a requirement for graduation. At the Foundation you were able to bring your students into the vivid, astonishing presence of canvases worked by Cezanne, van Gogh, Matisse. Now you give them—

(He opens the book:)

Photographs. Photographs of paintings. And you try—realizing the absurd hopelessness of it—you try to explain: the use of brushwork, the deployment of overlapping planes of color... But they don't exist in a photograph. You're talking about *nothing*.

(He throws the book on the floor. Suddenly the desperation in his voice is audible:)

You miss that presence—the very energy and imperative of art. To inhabit space with a painting, to see the brushstroke created by the artist’s hand, is to inhabit—for a moment—the artist’s *vision*. To become more than simply yourself. Being deprived of that presence is, for you, worse than a disaster. It’s a kind of— *(He searches for the word:)* Exile. In which you are, finally, nothing more than yourself.

(Pause.)

You are a “racist.” And the accusation is its own unanswerable truth.

(He picks up the book and puts it in his satchel, preparing to leave. Suddenly he looks up. GILLIAN has appeared.)

GILLIAN. You haven’t returned my calls.

(PAUL shoulders the satchel and walks past her without a word.)

Come on, Paul. Not talking to me won’t do you any good.

PAUL. *(Turning:)* “Good”?

GILLIAN. Maybe.

(She opens her bag, takes out her recorder, and holds it up:)

Here. Off, as you can see. *(She removes the tape, then sets the recorder and tape on the chair.)* It’s off until you tell me it’s on.

PAUL. Why *should* I talk to you?

GILLIAN. I’m not your enemy.

PAUL. I asked you to keep my name out of this. At the coffee shop that day.

GILLIAN. I never mentioned your name. Sterling did.

PAUL. *(Angrily:)* Come on, is that how you—

GILLIAN. Just what happened between the two of you?

PAUL. I’m not saying another word.

GILLIAN. It’s funny...people always blame the reporter when their words get them in trouble. “I was misquoted—!” It’s silly, really—

we all use these. *(She gestures at the recorder:)* We don't get quotes wrong. The problem is, we get them right.

(He is about to reply, but she holds up a hand.)

Yes, I sat at your table, I asked a few questions. You wanted to talk to me. *Anonymously.* So don't tell me I tricked you, Paul. You're not a child.

(A pause, then PAUL speaks quietly.)

PAUL. I'm not at the Foundation any more. What makes me a story?

GILLIAN. It's not about you. Not *only*.

PAUL. What, then? "Art"? *(He gestures:)* The kids who sit in these chairs, their parents who send them here, the people who read your paper—they don't give a fuck about *art*.

GILLIAN. You're probably right.

PAUL. Then why are you here?

GILLIAN. The Foundation filed its challenge of Dr. Morris' will today. Did you know that?

(PAUL says nothing. She shakes her head:)

It must be so easy in the city. Race is everywhere you look. Walking down any street. Christ, people shove it in your face—how can you *not* write about it? Out here, it's— *(She searches for the word:)* Encoded. You have to know what words to listen for...how to read the smile on a civilized face. *(Pause.)* But one word has chased it into the open—"discriminatory." Because of that one word in the Foundation's lawsuit...I can ask the real questions.

PAUL. You should have done that before. Instead you let Sterling *spin* you.

GILLIAN. *(Stung:)* Nobody spun me.

PAUL. "How about a tour of the storage department, Gillian—you'll be the first reporter to see it. Oh, by the way...Paul Barrow is a racist."

(He points a finger at her. Furiously:)

You destroyed my life. And I have no *recourse*.

(Silence. After a moment GILLIAN speaks calmly:)

GILLIAN. Do you want to stay in this room, Paul? Teaching art to kids you despise and feeding your self-pity? Or would you *do* something if I said I was sorry?

PAUL. Is that what you're saying?

GILLIAN. What *I* want is to get the other side of the story. *(Pause.)* Are you aware of a group called the Concerned Friends of the Morris Foundation?

PAUL. *(Quietly:)* No.

GILLIAN. Former students at the Foundation, a few neighbors... They talk about "preserving the integrity of Dr. Morris' vision." *(Pause.)* And there's you.

(She gestures at the classroom:)

Why are you teaching here and not at a university? What are your thoughts on the Foundation's challenge of the will? How has being called a racist affected your life? Those are questions I want to ask *you*, Paul. And if I were you, I would answer them. Because Sterling is very effective in telling his side of the story. He gets it, you see.

PAUL. Gets what?

GILLIAN. That silence is never a morally persuasive tactic.

(A moment, then she picks up the tape. PAUL is silent. She inserts the tape in the recorder.)

GILLIAN. Any e-mails from white supremacy groups? I've discovered they're on top of stories like this.

(Pause.)

PAUL. I've gotten a few.

GILLIAN. And—

PAUL. *(Angrily:)* And I deleted them.

GILLIAN. Why?

PAUL. Because that's not who I am.

GILLIAN. Well, I think people should know that.

(She gestures at the recorder.)

Is it on, Paul?

PAUL. *(Quietly:)* Concerned Friends of the Morris...?

GILLIAN. That's right. I'm not surprised they haven't been in touch with you. They seem a bit...leaderless.

(A moment, then PAUL puts down his satchel.)

(GILLIAN speaks into the recorder:)

Interview with Paul Barrow, Grove County Community College, January 16.

Scene 2

(In the darkness we hear STERLING's voice.)

STERLING. ...goal of the lawsuit is not—as some people have claimed—to destroy the Foundation. Exactly the opposite. The goal is to strengthen it by making it more inclusive. I want the story it tells to be the *whole* story.

WOMAN. *(African-American:)* We're almost out of time, Sterling, but I'd like to clarify one point. There are some African objects already in the Morris, is that right?

(Lights rise on STERLING's office. He and KANIKA are listening to the interview on a radio. He is standing by the window, lit every few seconds by a glancing red light.)

STERLING. Yes, there are, Mary. And one result that the lawsuit and the demonstrations are having—ironically—is that we've noticed an increase in the number of African-American visitors. The fact is, these pieces—as well as the pieces still in storage—represent our cultural patrimony. Our *heritage*. So I would encourage all your listeners to come to the Morris and see what we have.

WOMAN. Thanks for being here, Sterling.

STERLING. I appreciate the opportunity—

(STERLING turns the radio off. In the sudden silence we can hear the distant sound of an amplified voice, but the words are indistinct.)

KANIKA. Great interview, Mr. North.

STERLING. I think I got my points across.

(He listens to the distant voice for a moment.)

How many are out there today?

KANIKA. Two dozen, I guess... Maybe thirty. Ella told me it scares her...having to drive through people waving signs.

STERLING. Tell her it's the price of change.

KANIKA. That's a bit insensitive, don't you think?

STERLING. Let me tell you about Ella. She's been here twenty-six years and never asked for *anything* to change.

(A moment, then he speaks quietly:)

"Concerned Friends of the Morris Foundation..." It sounds so *be-nevolent*.

(He turns to KANIKA.)

Were you aware of this?

(Pause.)

KANIKA. What do you mean?

STERLING. I know you and Paul are close.

KANIKA. We're friends, that's all.

STERLING. *(Skeptically:)* "Friends"?

KANIKA. You have white friends, don't you?

STERLING. I have white colleagues. I have white social acquaintances. They invite my wife and me to their homes for dinner, we invite them to ours. It's all perfectly pleasant. But running through the center of the evening is a boundary they won't cross.

KANIKA. You could cross it.

(A moment, then STERLING smiles.)

STERLING. I always forget how young you are.

KANIKA. Please, Mr. North, don't dismiss me like that.

STERLING. *(Mollifying:)* I'm not dismissing you, Kanika...

KANIKA. I had white friends when I was growing up. I have white friends now. I have Asian friends. I'll bet your kids do too. It's no big deal for us.

STERLING. And your friendship with Paul...that's no big deal?

KANIKA. *(Irritated:)* He's been teaching me about the paintings. He *was*, I mean.

STERLING. Kanika, your personal life is none of my business. I'm just asking if you knew about this group of his.

KANIKA. No. I— *(She pauses.)* I haven't seen him in a few weeks. He's been busy.

STERLING. Well, now we know with what. *(He looks out the window again.)* Concerned Friends... Ask yourself, Kanika. What are they so concerned *about*?

(Pause.)

KANIKA. Mr. North, if I had known...what Paul was doing, I mean... I would have told you.

STERLING. I hope so.

KANIKA. I would.

STERLING. Because you can't be on both sides, Kanika. You can't be in here, with me, and out there with the Ku Klux Klan.

KANIKA. Come on, don't you think you're—

STERLING. Oh, there are no *hoods* out there. No rope, no burning cross. Now they carry words. They say you're being "divisive" and "inflammatory." You're playing the "race card." Just words... But it's a good old-fashioned lynching just the same.

(KANIKA stands.)

KANIKA. Mr. North, are you telling me I have to remember I'm black?

(A moment, then she walks out of his office.)

Scene 3

(PAUL stands bathed in the swirling red light, which we can now recognize as coming from a police car. He speaks into a bullhorn. The change in him is apparent; he seems energized, activated.)

PAUL. We are here today, and we will be here tomorrow, and next week—as long as it takes!—to protest against the mismanagement of the Morris Foundation. The changes that the director is trying to make are not only blatantly illegal, they violate Dr. Morris' vision and the artistic integrity of his collection. We who are fortunate to be associated with the Foundation—as employees, as students, as neighbors—will not allow this to happen.

(Pause.)

Those who now control the Foundation claim they are acting in its best interests. They claim that the Foundation is racist, that it needs to be *cured*. *(He gives the last word a sarcastic edge.)* We are here to speak the truth. And the truth is that they are using the issue of race as a hobgoblin. To frighten and intimidate us.

(Pause.)

We refuse to be intimidated. We refuse to be frightened. The issue is not *race*. The issue is *art*.

Scene 4

(ALFRED MORRIS appears in the dimly lit gallery.)

(Downstage, PAUL sits at a table covered with papers, writing. He shows no awareness of MORRIS' presence.)

MORRIS. A few years ago I received a phone request for an interview from a *Tribune* reporter. One of the few female writers on their staff—no doubt her editor hoped a woman might succeed in taming

“the terrible Dr. Morris.” I could hear in her voice that she expected my usual curt refusal. To her astonishment...I agreed.

(Pause.)

The next day she presented herself, an eager young thing trembling to collect her scoop. I greeted her personally at the entrance. Once we were settled in my office and she had her pen poised above her notebook, I asked, “By the way, I did mention about Tuesday, didn’t I?” *(In a woman’s voice:)* “Um, no. What about Tuesday?” “Well, you see, I travel to Paris frequently, and I need to stay in practice with the language. So every Tuesday, beginning—” *(He glances at his watch:)* “—this very moment, I see!—I speak only French. *Voulez-vous du thé ou du gâteau?*”

(He smiles.)

For the next hour I was the perfect host. I was gracious, I was considerate, I was charming. Every question she asked—the same ones *all* the reporters ask—I answered. Why I despise the Art Museum, how I decide who is allowed to see my collection... And something I’ve never told anyone: My plans for the Foundation when I myself am no longer here. Yes, I gave her her scoop. All in fluent French. She tried to write it down—bravely, I thought. But after awhile her pen stopped and she simply listened, uncomprehending but smiling. Finally, I led her to the door and kissed her hand. “*Je suis enchanté de faire votre connaissance, ma chérie. Au revoir.*” Needless to say, the interview never appeared.

(His eyes widen in mock innocence.)

Am I to blame if people don’t speak the language?

(He walks off, smiling.)

(Downstage, PAUL continues working. After a moment there is a knock. He gets up and finds KANIKA.)

PAUL. *(Surprised:)* Hi.

KANIKA. Hi yourself. *(Pause.)* Well, can I come in?

PAUL. Sure.

(She comes into the room as he moves back toward the table.)

KANIKA. I was wondering how my friend is—haven't seen you in a while. I was going to call, but you're so close to the Foundation...

PAUL. I'm fine. Busy.

(She looks around curiously.)

KANIKA. So this is where you live. *(A gesture at the table:)* Is that stuff for your group?

PAUL. Yeah. *(He makes an awkward movement toward the papers:)* Maybe I should—

KANIKA. Paul—relax. I'm not here to spy.

PAUL. Right. Of course not. Would you like a drink?

KANIKA. No thanks.

(Pause.)

Actually, I have seen you. I see you every day. My office window faces the street, remember? I look out and see you on the other side of the police barricade. With your bullhorn. *(She shakes her head.)* God, the things I hear coming out of your mouth...

PAUL. Like what?

KANIKA. Come on, Paul—

PAUL. No, tell me. What exactly do I say that's so offensive?

KANIKA. Not offensive—*ridiculous*. "The issue isn't race, it's art."

PAUL. It's true.

KANIKA. Paul, you have black people inside a building, and a crowd of white people outside the building yelling at them, and you're telling me it's not about race? Are you *nuts*?

PAUL. You were there when Sterling showed me the memo.

KANIKA. You know, the other day he called your little group the Ku Klux Klan. I thought—

PAUL. The *Klan*?

KANIKA. I thought he was exaggerating. He does that sometimes, to make a point. But...

PAUL. But what?

(She says nothing.)

PAUL. I understand that if I disagree with Sterling, I must be a racist. Now you're telling me that if I *express* my disagreement, I'm not only a racist but, what, some kind of *criminal*—?

(The fierceness of his sarcasm takes KANIKA aback. After a moment she speaks quietly:)

KANIKA. I'm telling you how it *feels*, Paul.

(Pause.)

PAUL. Look, I'm sorry. My argument isn't with you.

KANIKA. What's happened to you? *(Pause.)* When I started at the Foundation—that first day, remember?—you were funny. Mocking, too, but in a nice way. And not solemn about the art. I liked that. I liked *you*.

PAUL. What happened to me is that I was fired.

KANIKA. Hold on—you *resigned*.

PAUL. *(Angrily:)* What choice did I have?

(Pause.)

You know what's funny? Even though I hadn't done anything wrong... I felt guilty. I tiptoed through the day, cringing inside myself—trying not to be seen. *Ashamed*. Of course, when you call someone a racist, that's the intention, isn't it? To inject the venom that paralyzes.

(He spreads his hands:)

I have the right to defend myself, Kanika. And it feels like being reborn. I've discovered how energizing it is to speak up—to *fight*—for what I value.

KANIKA. Which is what?—your *entitlement*, your—

PAUL. Which is the integrity of the Foundation.

(She snorts dismissively.)

PAUL. It doesn't mean anything to you, I understand. I've spent my professional life there. It means something to me.

(A pause, then KANIKA speaks quietly:)

KANIKA. I feel like I'm caught in the middle. Between Sterling and you—your ridiculous *pissing* contest.

PAUL. Come on, Kanika, that's not what—

KANIKA. *(Suddenly angry:)* I mean, why don't the two of you just get past it? Are you both just too *old*, is that the problem?

(PAUL says nothing. When she continues her tone is softer, almost plaintive:)

I'm proud of my color. I try to be, anyway—it's what I aspire to. But it's a struggle, let me tell you. Because someone is always forcing me to be *angry* about it. Is that how I'm supposed to spend my life? Why can't I be *comfortable*, like you? That's what I thought when I met you, you know. How comfortable you were—with your job at the Foundation, with your life.

(A pause, then PAUL speaks quietly:)

PAUL. I'm not comfortable now.

(A moment, then KANIKA turns away, gesturing at the table:)

KANIKA. So how long is all this going to go on? This Concerned Friends of the Morris stuff...

PAUL. That's up to Sterling.

(He picks up a piece of paper, attempting a self-deprecating smile:)

I've heard a couple of his interviews on the radio. He's very good at getting his message out. I feel like I'm in first grade.

KANIKA. *(Smiles:)* You're not ruthless enough.

(Pause.)

See you later, Paul.

(She goes.)

(PAUL drops the paper onto the table. He stands looking at the papers for a few moments. Then he sits down, picks up a pen and starts to write.)

(After a moment he sits back, thinking.)

(He searches through the papers until he finds a cell phone. Another search turns up a Rolodex. He finds a number and dials.)

PAUL. Yes, hi, Gillian. It's Paul Barrow. Listen... I just heard something you might be interested in.

Scene 5

(STERLING's office. STERLING sits at his desk. GILLIAN, seated on the other side of the desk, writes in her notebook. On the desk is her recorder. In the background we can hear the faint sound of PAUL's voice through the bullhorn.)

STERLING. They have every right to demonstrate, of course. As long as they stay within the police boundaries, I have no problem with them.

GILLIAN. Still, it must be disconcerting for your plans to encounter this kind of opposition.

STERLING. People assume an institution will follow the same path. When they see it move in a new direction—into unfamiliar territory—they get upset.

GILLIAN. Is that response—"getting upset"—necessarily an indication of racism, do you think?

STERLING. *(Easily:)* Of course not.

GILLIAN. Is it true that you referred to the Concerned Friends of the Morris as the Ku Klux Klan?

(A silence. After a moment STERLING reaches over and turns off her recorder.)

STERLING. How dare you.

(Pause.)

How dare you *blindsides* me.

GILLIAN. Is that a denial?

(STERLING stands and goes to the window. He is silent for a moment, his back to her.)

STERLING. I was wondering when this moment would arrive.

GILLIAN. What moment?

STERLING. The one that always arrives. When you drop the fiction of your objectivity.

GILLIAN. Who are you—

STERLING. *You.* The media. And we see where your real loyalties lie. Because you have loyalties, don't you? You have a bias—you can't help yourself. So the moment arrives and suddenly the story becomes familiar.

GILLIAN. What story is that?

STERLING. *(Sharply:)* Don't pretend to be innocent.

(Pause.)

I can say it once, can't I? The truth. People pay attention once. But dare to say it twice—then I become just another irrational black man throwing accusations of racism around. A story your suburban readers can safely ignore.

GILLIAN. You live in the suburbs, don't you? Forest Glen?

STERLING. Yes, Gillian, you're right. I live in the suburbs. What was I thinking?

GILLIAN. The comment was attributed to you. I'm obliged to report it. But—

STERLING. By who? Who attributed "Ku Klux Klan" to me?

GILLIAN. You know I can't reveal that.

STERLING. *(Scornfully:)* "Protect your sources."

GILLIAN. If you deny saying it, I'll report that as well.

STERLING. But the damage will be done, won't it?

(Pause.)

We both know the steps of this ritual. First the denial, then the admission, finally the carefully worded apology that somehow accepts no responsibility.

GILLIAN. Did you call those people outside the Klan?

(In the silence we hear PAUL's voice from outside, his words clearly audible.)

PAUL. *(Off:)* Sterling North calls us racists for daring to speak up for what we believe. But who is the *real* racist?

(STERLING shakes his head:)

STERLING. No, I won't collaborate in this. It's your fiction. *You* take the responsibility.

(He moves to the desk and turns her recorder on. Looking at GILLIAN, he pronounces deliberately:)

"No comment."

(He flicks the recorder across the desk to her. GILLIAN picks it up and exits.)

Scene 6

(In the darkness we hear a call-in show on the radio.)

CALLER. *(A woman:)*—saw this comment in the paper, and I had to explain to her what it meant. Now, my daughter is only seven years old. Does she have to know what the Ku Klux Klan is? Can't she have her *childhood*?

HOST. *(A man:)* I agree.

(Lights rise on STERLING in the main gallery, standing in front of the grouping of African objects. The figurine is in his hands. As the show continues, he removes one of the reliquary figures and puts the figurine in its place. He steps back to see the change, then exits toward his office with the reliquary figure.)

CALLER. I don't know, I just think that language like this and all this talk about, you know, reparations—

HOST. Well, that's *another* issue—

CALLER. —it isn't bringing people together. And that's what we're all trying to do, isn't it?

HOST. I agree with you. Completely. Thanks for calling.

(STERLING returns, his hands empty. He glances at his watch and exits in the direction of the main entrance.)

HOST. I think the caller raises an excellent question. Who's trying to unite us, and who's trying to divide us? This is the Jack Ford show, and we're talking about what's happening at the Morris Foundation. You read the *Herald*, you saw the comment by the Foundation's director. Let me know what you think.

(The show fades out as STERLING returns, followed by PAUL.)

STERLING. *(Easily:)* I appreciate your agreeing to meet with me.

PAUL. You're welcome.

(He starts toward STERLING'S office, then sees that STERLING hasn't moved.)

PAUL. Aren't we going to your office?

STERLING. I've been in there all day. We're closed—no one will disturb us here.

(PAUL shrugs.)

STERLING. Before we start... I think we should agree that everything we say is off the record.

PAUL. It's a little late for that, don't you think?

STERLING. I simply feel it's counterproductive to carry out negotiations in public.

PAUL. "Negotiations"—is that what I'm here for? Your message said something about a "dialogue."

(He smiles, at ease, clearly thinking he has the advantage:)

Fine. Off the record.

(After a moment STERLING continues:)

STERLING. I couldn't help noticing your group seems a little smaller today.

PAUL. It fluctuates. Smaller one day, larger the next.

STERLING. That's the problem with movements—they're hard to sustain. People need to be committed.

PAUL. We are committed.

STERLING. *Deeply* committed. My father marched with Dr. King, did you know that? The stories he tells—hoses, dogs, Southern jails... *(He shakes his head.)* And still they marched.

PAUL. Are you making a point here?

STERLING. Despite what you've been telling the press, *I* think most of the Concerned Friends of the Morris are from the neighborhood. People who live on this street.

PAUL. They're people who love this place—

STERLING. And I bet they're beginning to ask themselves a question...

PAUL. —and who hate what you're trying to do to it.

STERLING. "Which is more distasteful—seeing black people walk through my neighborhood on their way here, or missing this morning's workout with my personal trainer? Which is more *inconvenient?*"

(The mockery in his tone angers PAUL:)

PAUL. The people out there are the reason I'm in here.

(He points a finger at STERLING:)

You made a stupid comment. Racist, in fact. It found its way to a reporter. Haywood's board of trustees sees a public relations mess spinning out of control. And they've told you to put an end to it, haven't they? *Make a deal.*

(Pause.)

When you play the race card, Sterling, you should understand: It's a card with two sides.

(A moment, then STERLING smiles.)

STERLING. It's a good feeling, isn't it, Paul? Knowing you've seized the moral high ground?

(PAUL snorts dismissively.)

STERLING. The board has authorized me to make you an offer, yes. They're prepared to reinstate you—same position, same salary, all accrued back pay.

PAUL. In exchange for...?

STERLING. You agree to drop the libel suit. And dissociate yourself from your little group out there.

(PAUL moves away a few steps, considering. After a moment he gestures at the figurine:)

PAUL. I see you've started making changes already.

STERLING. It took you a while to notice.

PAUL. I worked here twenty years, Sterling. I noticed the instant I came into the room. Which is exactly what you wanted, isn't it?

STERLING. I just wanted to see how it looked.

PAUL. Bullshit.

(Pause.)

I'll accept your offer.

STERLING. *(Skeptically:)* Will you?

PAUL. On one condition.

STERLING. Ah...

PAUL. You drop your challenge of the will. *(He holds out his arms to indicate the gallery:)* The collection remains exactly as Dr. Morris hung it.

STERLING. Nothing changes *and* I have to put up with you? Why would I agree to that?

PAUL. Why did you think I would agree to anything less?

STERLING. The board asked me to make the offer. I told them you wouldn't accept. But they insisted, so...

(He shrugs. A moment, then PAUL turns to go. When STERLING speaks his voice is low, intense:)

I've watched you from my office, Paul. I recognize what I see.

PAUL. And what's that?

STERLING. A man letting go. Giving full, luxuriant rein to his white anger and resentment. His hate.

PAUL. Ah, your favorite argument—

STERLING. You've *found* yourself, haven't you? Next to that, a job is a small thing.

PAUL. This has nothing to do with race. You've known that from the beginning.

STERLING. Oh, I read Gillian's article—how you refused to join one of those illiterate white-power groups. Don't congratulate yourself, Paul. It just means you're a better *class* of racist.

(Pause.)

Obviously it was pointless to invite you here. *(He turns to go.)*

PAUL. But I'm glad you did. I've learned something. All this time I thought the race card was just a tactic. But the truth is...it's a weakness. You can't *help* yourself, can you?

(STERLING says nothing.)

Step outside yourself, Sterling. See what the rest of the world sees when it looks at you. A man who wears the best clothes. A man who lives in a big house in the suburbs. A man who drives a Jag, for Christ's sake. We all know what a Jag says: "Look at me, everyone—in the great American lottery I am a *winner!*"

(He spreads his hands to indicate the room:)

And let's acknowledge one more thing: If it weren't for your race, you wouldn't be here. So where does it come from—this need to see yourself as a *victim*?

STERLING. I wouldn't be here...?

PAUL. You don't have the qualifications to run this place. Or the experience.

STERLING. And you do.

PAUL. Yes.

STERLING. So this is all about you being passed over by Dr. Morris. Seems to me you should be angry at *him*.

PAUL. He didn't pass me over, he—

STERLING. What is it, then?

(Suddenly he is on the attack:)

Step outside *yourself*, Paul. See what the world sees. A man who stands out on the sidewalk all day, shouting into a *bullhorn* that he's fighting for—what is that phrase?—"the integrity of Dr. Morris' vision." He makes it sound like I want to back a truck up to the door, load up all these paintings, and hang African art from floor to ceiling. No one listening would guess he's talking about *eight pieces*.

(Pause.)

Ask yourself why, Paul. Why so much *rage* over eight pieces?

PAUL. *(Shakes his head:)* Not rage. *Purpose*. Something I love is being attacked. I won't—

STERLING. What am I attacking?

PAUL. I won't stand by and do nothing.

STERLING. Tell me. Please. What *is* this vision you're defending?

PAUL. How can you—? Use your *eyes*, Sterling.

(He raises his arms to indicate the walls.)

We're standing in one of the most revolutionary rooms in the world. In history. These paintings capture the exact moment when

we broke free from the surface of things. The seismic leap from *what* we see to *how* we see. Once they were painted—*because* they were painted—we had to see the world in a new way.

STERLING. But it's not the *only* way of seeing, is it? Bring the African pieces out of storage, put them on display—and you have a different room.

PAUL. Build your own foundation, then. Don't *hijack* ours.

STERLING. "Ours"?

(Pause.)

You mean, white people's?

PAUL. That's not what I said.

STERLING. It's what you meant.

(He gestures at the walls again:)

That's the *real* vision here, isn't it, Paul? Western art in the center. A gorgeous mirror reflecting your own face. Everything else on the periphery. Interesting, admirable even, worth a little space on the wall—but in the end, a reflection of someone else.

PAUL. You're so wrong. More than any man I've ever met, Dr. Morris was colorblind.

STERLING. Colorblind... ?

PAUL. He wanted anyone—black *or* white—to walk into this room and be transformed. You see a Cezanne; I see a Bamana mask. We both become a little larger than ourselves.

STERLING. White shall become black and black shall become white?

PAUL. If you want to put it that way.

STERLING. Very noble. But why, when I stand here and see four African pieces surrounded by *walls* of Cezanne and Renoir and Matisse—

(He looks straight at PAUL:)

—why can't I escape the feeling that I need to become white *more* than you need to become black?

(Pause.)

PAUL. Well, there's a name for that feeling, isn't there?

STERLING. And that would be—

PAUL. Inferiority.

STERLING. *(Furiously:)* You *fucking*—

(Ignoring STERLING's anger, PAUL lets his words spill out in a rush:)

PAUL. That's why you're so determined to change this place, isn't it? Because of the *feeling* it gives you. You stand in this room and you can't deny what your eyes tell you: Some things are better than others. We can't say that any more, not out loud, we don't want to *offend* anyone. We pretend all things are equal, no culture is higher than another—but in our hearts we know it's a lie. Shakespeare is better than folk tales. Bach is better than rap.

(He points at the Cezanne:)

And this—

(He points at the African figurine:)

—is better than that.

STERLING. To *you*.

PAUL. To the *world*.

STERLING. The world? *(He laughs.)* You need to get outside this room, Paul. Go take a walk in the mall. Look in the window of the CD store. It isn't Bach they put on display. They don't even *sell* Bach. Look at the white kids from the suburbs hanging around in the food court. They dress exactly like my son—and they sound like him, too. *(Savagely:)* Even your *children* don't believe in what you want to give them.

(He is only inches away from PAUL:)

Not the world, Paul. *Your* world, that's all.

(A charged moment. Then STERLING moves away. When he speaks again his voice is calm, dismissive:)

STERLING. I should thank you. Really. You've made my job easy. Now I can go to the board and tell them— *(He shrugs.)* I offered, but...

PAUL. You won't win, Sterling. I won't let you.

STERLING. You know your way out. *(He heads toward his office.)*

PAUL. I'll be out there every day. And sooner or later you'll say something else that gets you in trouble. You can't help yourself.

STERLING. No. That, at least, won't happen again.

(Pause.)

“Found its way to a reporter...” Do you think I can't *add?* Kanika was the only person in the room with me. She wouldn't have gone to Gillian. But she went to you, didn't she?

PAUL. Where is Kanika?

STERLING. She's not here any longer.

PAUL. Not here? *(Pause.)* You *fired* her...?

STERLING. As for any trouble I'm in... *(He shrugs again.)* There's a script to be followed in these situations.

(PAUL turns and exits. STERLING continues quietly, to himself:)

And I'll follow it.

Scene 7

(In the darkness we hear someone knocking insistently on a door, followed by PAUL's voice.)

PAUL. Kanika, are you there? It's Paul. Kanika?

(KANJIKA's apartment. Night. A chair is pushed away from a table, on top of which are a notepad, a pen, and a glass of wine. KANIKA has just opened the door.)

KANIKA. Jesus Christ, Paul. What is it?

PAUL. I wanted to see how you're doing.

KANIKA. You left your suburb and came here for that? All the way into the dark, dangerous city?

(She waves at the notepad on the table as PAUL enters:)

I was just working on my resume... What a pain in the ass. How would you describe the Morris—an arts foundation with an educational focus, or an educational foundation with an arts focus?

(PAUL says nothing.)

Well, come on—you're the *expert*.

PAUL. The first one.

KANIKA. I got it right. Lucky guess. *(A pause, then, quietly:)* I was only there four months. That won't look good.

(She picks up the glass of wine and takes a sip.)

PAUL. I talked to Sterling today.

KANIKA. Really? Did you boys patch things up?

PAUL. He told me he fired you.

KANIKA. Oh, he didn't fire me. We had a little talk—after the story came out, the one about your group—and we agreed that it was time for me to move on. Well, *he* agreed. *I* didn't have much to say about it.

PAUL. Kanika, I'm sorry.

KANIKA. I'll bet you are. No more spy on the inside.

(She looks at him, suddenly direct:)

Let me ask you something, Paul. When you called Gillian or went to see her or whatever the fuck you did—didn't you realize I would lose my job? Or did you just not *care*?

PAUL. Sterling fired you unfairly. You can fight him.

KANIKA. By your side, you mean? At the barricades? You're here to *recruit* me?

(She shakes her head:)

I don't want to fight it. Because I don't want to go back. Sterling was right—it is time for me to move on.

(Pause.)

PAUL. He asked me to come to the Foundation. To negotiate. But it was impossible. He practically attacked me.

KANIKA. Really? *(She laughs to herself:)* Gotta watch out for the angry black man.

PAUL. Come on, that's not fair—

KANIKA. You've never even listened to each other. Neither one of you. Put *yourself* aside and listened. How do you expect anything to happen if you don't do that?

PAUL. I have listened to him, Kanika.

KANIKA. Technically, sure. The words have entered your ears.

PAUL. It's a question of visibility, I understand that. But that doesn't—

KANIKA. Visibility? Wow, Paul—I didn't know you'd gotten that far.

PAUL. *(Exasperated:)* I've *tried*. I've made the effort. Don't tell me I haven't.

(KANIKA regards him for a moment, then speaks quietly:)

KANIKA. A few days ago I was in the mall at Eighth and Spring. They were having a Black Art Expo—you know the kind I mean. Paintings of heroic black men with bulging muscles...serene mothers lifting their children up to the sun. Everyone looking proud and regal and *strong*.

(PAUL smiles slightly.)

KANIKA. All right, you can laugh. You know what? I did too. Part of me. I know now it's not good art—thanks to you. Not like Cezanne and Matisse. I shouldn't say that, I guess. I mean, I'm not *supposed* to feel that way, am I? *(Pause.)* But when I looked at those paintings... I could see myself. My body, my hair, my skin. They

acknowledged me. And the paintings at the Foundation—you have to admit, Paul—they don't.

(Suddenly she is close to tears, but she rushes on, intent on making him understand:)

I'm not saying those painters you love were racists, you know I'm not. No one is saying that. They were painting their world, the one they saw, I understand that. But how do you think it makes me feel, to be surrounded by all that *whiteness*?

You never asked, did you?

You never wanted to know.

PAUL. Kanika...

(He puts a hand on her arm, but she knocks it away. Furiously:)

KANIKA. No—!

Fuck you!

(Across the stage lights rise on STERLING and GILLIAN in the main gallery. The African figurine is gone, the reliquary figure restored to its place. GILLIAN is carrying her notebook.)

STERLING. It was an unguarded moment, Gillian. A private moment.

GILLIAN. But you don't deny using the words? "Ku Klux Klan"?

STERLING. I was speaking metaphorically. In a certain context.

(PAUL hasn't moved. After a moment KANIKA speaks quietly, almost to herself:)

KANIKA. You know, I used to believe all this racial shit would end one day. If enough of us managed to get decent educations and land good jobs and wear nice clothes, you'd stop being so *terrified* of us.

(STERLING spreads his hands:)

STERLING. Obviously, that's no excuse. I said something I shouldn't have. If it offended anyone...well, that certainly was never my intention. And I apologize.

KANIKA. *We'd stop being terrified of you.*

STERLING. Anyone who knows me knows I am not a racist.

KANIKA. But things come up, don't they? The simplest things that no one ever expected...like what hangs on a wall. *(She looks up at PAUL:)* What if they just *keep* coming up, one after another? What if there's always something unexpected between us?

STERLING. It's unfortunate that this controversy has been used to obscure the purpose of our—

GILLIAN. Used by whom?

(A pause, then STERLING continues carefully:)

STERLING. —has *had the effect* of obscuring the purpose of our lawsuit. Which is to bring needed change to this place.

(GILLIAN smiles slightly as she writes.)

(KANIKA gestures at the table. Quietly:)

KANIKA. Just let me get back to this, all right? I have to start looking for a job tomorrow.

(She sits at the table and picks up the pen.)

I've decided to go back to teaching. I still have my certification. And now, I think, I might be tough enough.

(She starts writing on the notepad. PAUL is still.)

GILLIAN. Given what's happened, Sterling, are you at all discouraged? About the possibility of change?

STERLING. Discouraged?

(PAUL exits.)

STERLING. I asked my father the same question once. "When you were standing there, ready to march, facing the police, the dogs, the crowds...weren't you discouraged?" And he said to me—

(Unexpectedly, he smiles:)

"Not at all. The truth is... I felt strengthened."

Scene 8

(A slow shifting of lights suggests the passage of time.)

(Everything is exactly as it was.)

(Upstage ALFRED MORRIS appears, his back to us, examining a painting.)

(After a few moments PAUL comes slowly into the room. He stops, then approaches the Cezanne and gazes at it, taking it in.)

(ELLA FRANKLIN comes through one of the entranceways. Seeing PAUL, who is turned away from her, she stops.)

ELLA. Good morning. I didn't know anyone was here yet...

(PAUL turns.)

ELLA. Paul.

PAUL. Hello, Ella. *(He holds out his hands to indicate the room:)* First one in when the doors opened.

ELLA. What are you doing here? *(Her voice is carefully neutral.)*

PAUL. It's been a few years. I wanted to see some old favorites. *(He gestures at the Cezanne:)* Particularly this one.

ELLA. Ah yes. Your Cezanne.

PAUL. Dr. Morris was especially fond of this one as well.

ELLA. *(Firmly:)* The Doctor had no favorites. Every piece in here was important to him.

(PAUL turns back to the painting:)

PAUL. The summer after I graduated from college—did I ever tell you this?—I backpacked across France. To Aix-en-Provence, where he painted this. I spent three days tramping around the countryside, trying to identify the exact spot where he planted his easel. So I could see... *(Another gesture at the painting:)* What Cezanne saw.

ELLA. And did you find it?

(Upstage MORRIS moves to another painting. PAUL turns away from the Cezanne with a smile.)

PAUL. But I'm forgetting... I should congratulate you.

ELLA. Thank you.

PAUL. When I read about your appointment last month, I was delighted. Finally this place is in the right hands again.

ELLA. The right hands...?

PAUL. You've been here longer than anyone. I know you'll run it properly.

(ELLA says nothing.)

I also read about the difficulties you're having. Gillian's article...

ELLA. That's why I gave her the interview. To let people know the situation.

PAUL. Is the deficit really that serious?

(Pause.)

ELLA. I must say, Paul... I'm surprised you'd show your face here.

PAUL. What do you mean?

ELLA. Considering our problems are your fault—

PAUL. *(Dismayed:)* That's not true, Ella.

ELLA. You helped drive us into deficit with your lawsuit.

PAUL. It was Sterling's challenge of the will—the article said so. The fees for all those lawyers—!

ELLA. But your suit made it worse.

PAUL. I had to defend myself, didn't I? I had to defend this place.

ELLA. I didn't know they were the same.

PAUL. Look, Ella, I don't want to argue. I'm here to help.

(He takes a check from his pocket and holds it out. She makes no move to take it. Finally:)

ELLA. Is this part of—

PAUL. What difference does it make—

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