

ARC OF JUSTICE

Screenplay by

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Based on the National Book Award Winner
"Arc of Justice:
A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and
Murder in the Jazz Age" by Kevin Boyle

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BASED ON A TRUE STORY

The arc of the moral universe is
long, but it bends toward justice.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

TITLE CARD: CHAPTER ONE "THE DOCTOR"

A MAN'S VOICE is heard, measured and respectful.

VOICE/SWEET

You see, I truly believe that, Mr. Beckworth, I believe a man is the sum total of the life he's lived.

FADE FROM BLACK:

INT. FIRST STATE BANK - DAY

The polished wood and marble lobby of a bank.

Seated behind a large desk, facing the camera, is a banker, MR. BECKWORTH, 50s, upright and well-groomed in a tailored suit. The year is 1925. But his expression is that of every money-lender since the trade began: pleasant and unreadable.

The owner of the voice continues speaking from off-screen.

VOICE/SWEET

If you look closely at my application, you will see that mine is a life forged in discipline and hard work. Howard medical school. Overseas study in Austria and France. Married the perfect woman; she too, a child of God who wishes only to live a proper Christian life... Even after we lost our first child, she didn't wallow. Oh no sir, she held her head high as Christ himself would teach.

Beckworth leans back in his chair. But offers nothing.

VOICE/SWEET

(a hint of desperation
creeps in)

...And this would not be a handout. Oh no sir. I wouldn't accept such a thing. A man never asks for a handout -- charity -- he forges his own path -- rises on his merits and falls just the same. And if you think about it, Mr. Beckworth -- Ralph -- if I can call you that?

At this Beckworth looks up for the first time. Making eye-contact with the owner of the voice behind the camera.

BECKWORTH
(after a hesitation)
Certainly.

VOICE/SWEET
Well, that's because I'm not some stranger off the street. You've known me...how long, ten years? Rent bills on the practice, medical supplies and such -- this bank's been my home. And I've never been late with a single payment -- no sir, not even once. This loan would be repaid in that tradition.

A beat passes, and Beckworth realizes the pitch is done. He regards the owner of the voice across his desk. REVEAL:

DOCTOR OSSIAN SWEET, 38, a handsome man in an expensive suit, pince-nez glasses, and a neatly-trimmed mustache. Everything about the doctor reads distinction and respectability.

Everything except one thing. Doctor Ossian Sweet is black.

BECKWORTH
It's a solid application...

Beckworth pages through a document as Sweet looks on. Awaiting a verdict. A sheen of sweat adorns his brow.

BECKWORTH
(looks up at last)
Let's talk terms.

Sweet stares for a moment, stunned. Elated. Overwhelmed.

SWEET
...Okay then.

CIRCUS MUSIC carries us to:

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS - DAY

Signs announce: "MICHIGAN STATE FAIR 1925 - THE FUTURE NOW!"

FOLKS in their Sunday best throng past carnival amusement rides and open-sided tents with pens of blue ribbon heifers, cages of exotic animals, an exhibition of gleaming Model-T Fords and Chrysler Phaetons. All the prides of Motor City.

The scene is a snapshot of Detroit's demographic breakdown. WHITES and BLACKS stand in lines without ill will. Just FAMILIES of every shape and size out to enjoy the fair.

GLADYS

(laughing)

Tell me you did not say that.

FIND Sweet walking hand-in-hand with his wife, GLADYS, 30s, almond skin, wry and strong-willed, with the self-possession of a black woman raised in the comfort of the middle class. Sweet pushes a stroller with their infant daughter, IVA.

SWEET

Damn if I didn't. Woman, I pulled so many words out of my ass I thought Beckworth was gonna throw the money at me just to get me to shut up. You should've seen it when I called him "Ralph."

GLADYS

You did not!

SWEET

Hell, I'd've called him Babe Ruth if it meant we'd get that money.
(Gladys laughs)
It's not enough, but it gets us closer.

GLADYS

It's really going to happen, isn't it?

Sweet looks at her, embracing the realization, smiles.

SWEET

Yeah, I really think it is.

They kiss.

SWEET

I love you Gladys Sweet.

GLADYS

I love you too Ossian Sweet.
(then)
Love you even more if you get me some of that cotton candy.

She motions to a VENDOR with a tree of colored cotton candy.

SWEET

As a doctor, I should frown upon that much sugar going into anyone's body. But since I'm going to be asking for a little of your candy later tonight...

GLADYS

Ossian!

Gladys playfully slaps his shoulder, blushing as she looks around in hopes that no one overheard the innuendo.

SWEET

What? You're my wife. I'll say it again...

GLADYS

You do and the only sweetness you'll be tasting is strained peaches out of Iva's baby jar.

Beat as Ossian considers this.

SWEET

I'll go get that cotton candy.

GLADYS

(wearing a loving smile)
You do that.

Sweet tips his hat to her and moves off. As he does, several BLACK FOLKS recognize and greet him: "Hello, Dr. Sweet," "Afternoon, Dr. Sweet," etcetera. He acknowledges them all.

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS - CARNIVAL GAMES - SAME

A young black couple has been waylaid at the baseball-tossing booth: HENRY SWEET, late-20s, youthful and intense, accompanied by WILAMAE DAY, 20's, brassy and flirtatious.

An ATTENDANT, 20s, white, hands Henry another ball.

ATTENDANT

You got two more balls.

WILAMAE

Could give him ten more and he's still not gonna knock them over.

The attendant contains a laugh. Henry notices.

HENRY

You call that supporting your man?

WILAMAE

I just call it as it is. We
already spent two dollars --

ATTENDANT

Two fifty.

WILAMAE

Two fifty on this damn game and you
ain't managed to knock down
anything but the net that's
supposed to catch the ball.

The attendant laughs out loud this time. Henry glares.

ATTENDANT

It's her, not me. She's funny.

HENRY

(winds up for his pitch)
Yeah, she's a real Buster Keaton.

He lets the ball go, knocking down one metal milk can.

ATTENDANT

Well, you got one.
(motions to a sign-board
with the game rules)
Problem is you got to knock down
three to get a prize.

HENRY

I can read.

WILAMAE

He just can't aim.
(she drags him off)
C'mon.

ATTENDANT

Come back soon, I can use the
money.

Henry frowns as Wilamae leads him, arm-in-arm, past stalls
with other games and exhibitions of the "oddity" variety;
GIANT ALLIGATORS, MINIATURE PONIES, FAT PEOPLE, etc.

WILAMAE

What you looking all mad for? Just
cause you strong as a bull don't
mean you ready to pitch in the
negro leagues.

HENRY
I put it on you.

WILAMAE
Me?

HENRY
All this Alaska talk.
(she looks away as they
continue strolling)
I got a life planned for us. And
I'm willing to work hard -- earn
the future you deserve.

WILAMAE
You mean as long as it's here? In
Detroit? In Black Bottom?

His expression betrays him.

WILAMAE
There's fences on that life, Henry.
I don't want fences on my life.
And if you love me, you wouldn't
want that for me either.
(beat)
You'd come with me.

This time Henry looks away. Wilamae rolls her eyes.

WILAMAE
But then again I guess it ain't up
to you, huh?

HENRY
Wilamae --

WILAMAE
What if I ask your brother for you?
He's who runs things, isn't he?

HENRY
It's not that simple.

WILAMAE
No? You going to be a dentist
cause you love teeth?
(then)
You don't owe him a damn thing.

HENRY
I do. Not for him, I'd be running
wild like our daddy did.
(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)

He gave me a path and you mad cause
I'm walking it? Lot of ladies
would appreciate a man like me.

WILAMAE

Be with them then.

She drops his arm and walks away. He hustles after her.

HENRY

No, no, no... Let me think this
through, okay?
(she regards him with
uncertainty)
What about the cold? Negroes are
tropical people. Them up there --

WILAMAE

Eskimos.

HENRY

Indians in fur coats if you ask me.
What they know about colored folks?

WILAMAE

Nothing. That's what's so great.
They don't care. All that matters
is what's on the inside of a
person. Henry, they got good jobs
up there in canneries. They're
even putting in a railroad. It's a
place that's beautiful beyond
compare. Where people work
together instead of fighting over
scraps. I want to die in a place
like that. And no one...even
someone I love is going to stop me.

Henry looks at her, in love but torn. Just then, two WHITE
BOYS, 9, careen past them toward a crowded EXHIBITION TENT.

Henry and Wilamae exchange looks and approach the tent.

INT./EXT. FAIRGROUNDS - EXHIBITION TENT - CONTINUOUS

Henry and Wilamae press through a throng of bodies for a
view. REVEAL: A BARKER, 40s, white, in a safari costume.
He stands on a raised platform with a long chain in his fist.
The other end is fastened to the collar of a naked BLACK
WOMAN, 30s, with two BLACK INFANTS suckling her breasts.

BARKER

From the jungles of Africa are
savages unseen by civilization!
(MORE)

BARKER (CONT'D)
 Beasts untamed by the ways of
 modern man!

Wilamae looks on in shock as WHITE ONLOOKERS gape and gawk at the "savages." Henry notices the two white boys. Pointing. Giggling. Henry glowers at them, simmering with rage.

WILAMAE
 Henry?

Henry takes a step toward the white boys.

WILAMAE
 Henry!

The FATHER, 40's, spots Henry's movement and reactively corrals his boys, breaking the spell. They hustle off.

Wilamae grabs Henry by the arm. He looks at her. Then back at the naked woman on the stage. The sadness in her eyes.

WILAMAE
 Let's move on.

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS - PARKING LOT - DUSK

PATRONS filter from the grounds, departing for the night. FIND Henry and Wilamae nursing ice creams as they stroll. In silence. Their levity supplanted now by something darker.

NEARBY, Henry notices the two white boys and their father at a car. The father and Henry lock eyes for a moment...

HENRY
 You got something to say,
 peckerwood?

Henry moves to the man with conviction.

WILAMAE
 Henry no!

FATHER
 (fearful, backpedaling)
 Hey fella I --

Before another word is out, Henry PUNCHES the man. The blow sends him reeling to the ground. His two boys scream for help as heads spin among the PASSERSBY. The father scrambles to his feet, inflamed, and leaps for Henry. The fight is on.

A pair of BLACK MEN notice and move in as a crowd of WHITE MEN rush the scene. Confusion. Heated words exchanged.

Wilamae is screaming, scrambling for Henry, but nobody hears. Shoves give way to blows. A full-scale brawl erupting, and --

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS - FERRIS WHEEL - SAME

From a BASKET of the Ferris wheel, Gladys and Sweet observe the sudden chaos down below. Bodies scuffling like insects. The shriek of a POLICE WHISTLE as POLICEMEN run to intervene.

GLADYS

Ossian...is that Henry?

Sweet spots his brother -- horrified -- and bolts out of the basket just before it touches down. He races off.

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Later now, and calm has been restored. The white father and his boys are giving statements to a pair of UNIFORMED POLICE, as Sweet converses with a SENIOR OFFICER. After a cordial beat, the two shake hands and Sweet leads Henry off.

Nearby, a ruffled Wilamae waits outside a polished four-door BUICK. Beside her in a chauffeur's uniform is JOE MACK, 40s, black. Gladys sits with Iva in the back seat, the door open.

Wilamae approaches Sweet and Henry as they step up, but Sweet moves past her with a cold look, addressing Mack.

SWEET

See she gets where she's going.
(he walks up to the Buick
and leans in, to Gladys)
I'll see you at home.

GLADYS

(stopping him; re: Henry)
He okay?

Behind them, Wilamae dabs blood from a cut on Henry's head.

SWEET

At the moment, yes. Once I get
done with him's another story.

GLADYS

Go easy.

Sweet meets her gaze and frowns. They kiss.

SWEET

(looks to Mack)
Drive safe.

JOE MACK

Yes, sir.

Mack helps Wilamae into the car, then gets behind the wheel. Sweet moves past Henry without offering a look, only:

SWEET

We're walking.

EXT. BLACK BOTTOM, DETROIT - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

The black part of town; a slum. Half-paved roads crisscross between rundown tenements and makeshift storefronts bustling with BLACK MEN and WOMEN on their evening errands.

FIND Sweet and Henry, strolling side-by-side. Brothers with the body language of a father and his son; Henry the latter.

SWEET

It's the girl, isn't it?

HENRY

She got nothing to do with this.

SWEET

Then can you please explain to me why, every time I turn my head I see you complicating your life?

HENRY

That ofay had it coming.

SWEET

Oh? He call you a name? Slight you in some way?

HENRY

I could see it in his eyes.

SWEET

Ah you read minds now. You wanna open up a booth there at the fair?
(then, off his look)
Henry, you have to see the forest, not fall prey to the trees. If it wasn't for that policeman knowing my stature in the community we'd be having this talk in the pokey. With your butt in a cell.

Henry blushes underneath his brother's gaze, shakes his head.

HENRY

Not sure how you do it. Smile when ain't nothing funny. Swallow the pill when you ain't sick. They look at us like animals.

SWEET

Some...yes. That's why it's on me not to act like one. The only way they'll ever see us for who we are is if we show them.

HENRY

And how's that gonna be? They live in their world, we live in ours.

Henry motions to the street, no white faces to be seen.

SWEET

Not for long.
(Henry looks at him)
At least for us.

HENRY

What are you talking about?

SWEET

I got the house.

This stops Henry in his tracks. Sweet is beaming.

SWEET

That's right. Got the loan at the bank and called in some funds from overdue accounts. Soon as we sign the papers it's goodbye Black Bottom, hello Garland Avenue.

Henry stares at Sweet in shock, floored by the news.

HENRY

For real? That's...incredible.

SWEET

That it is. And once we're there, I need you to grow a thicker skin. Now get your jaw off the floor and buy me a drink to celebrate.

Laughing, Sweet drapes an arm over Henry's shoulders and leads him toward the smoky entrance of a JAZZ CLUB.

INT. AUTOMAT RESTAURANT - DAY

BLOOD splatters on a surface... No, not blood. Ink.
Dripping from a fountain pen onto a table.

SWEET

Now look at the mess I've made.

Sweet blots the nib. He wears a dapper suit. Gladys sits beside him in a stylish dress. Across the table is an older couple, MR. and MRS. SMITH, 60s, white, in drab attire.

Sweet unfolds his handkerchief to wipe the table.

GLADYS

Honey, don't...don't wipe, you'll
make it worse.

Gladys takes the handkerchief and gently daubs the spilt ink. Sweet blushes. Glancing to Mr. Smith for a connection.

SWEET

Wives. Something else aren't they?

MR. SMITH

That they are.

GLADYS

There.

Gladys smiles. Pause. The common ground has been exhausted.

MR. SMITH

Well.

GLADYS

We'll have to have you two for
supper once we're settled.

This brings an awkward fluster from the white folks. Mrs. Smith offers an unsure smile but her husband cuts her off:

MRS. SMITH

That...that would be very --

MR. SMITH

Did you bring the money?

So much for small talk. Smith looks at Sweet. All business.

SWEET

Yes. Of course.

Sweet slides a small parcel across the table. Smith unwraps the butcher paper to reveal a stack of hundred dollar bills.

He starts to count it.

SWEET
It's all there.

Smith continues counting. Gladys puts a calming hand onto Sweet's knee under the tabletop and gives a squeeze. A beat.

MR. SMITH
(looks up, smiles broadly)
So it is.

Smith unfolds a LEGAL CONTRACT on the table in between them: "DEED OF SALE OF HOME - 2905 GARLAND AVENUE." Sweet flicks his fountain pen and signs his name in perfect script.

MRS. SMITH
Garland is a quiet street made up
of nice folks just like yourselves.
I'm sure you'll fit right in.

INT. JUKE JOINT - BLACK BOTTOM - DAY

The joint is jumping. A crowd of young black men and women dance and sweat it out to uptempo backwater jazz.

Henry and two friends his age sit at the bar nursing drinks and taking in the sights. They are: MORSE, 20s, intense and cynical; and DAVIS, 20s, smooth as silk, the hustler type.

MORSE
So I guess this is goodbye huh?

Henry ignores the sarcasm and sips his drink, conflicted.

DAVIS
Ain't like that, Morse. Henry here
is going out to greener pastures.
(to Henry)
C'mon now brother, let us in on the
word. Your big time doctor brother
think he too good for Black Bottom?

HENRY
Ain't no such a thing.

MORSE
Better not be. Much money I done
gave that shiny nigger.

HENRY
Man just want to live where he want
to live. That's what America say
it's all about right? Freedom.

Davis and Morse exchange a look, then bust up laughing.

MORSE

Man, who you think you talking to?
That uppity moon-cricket think his
shit smell sweet as sugar.

HENRY

(losing patience)
Put a cap on it, nigger.

MORSE

Oh now don't go getting mad. All I
want to know is why a colored man
that live better than any colored
man I know want to leave a place
that's working for him. What...he
gonna be their doctor? Help them?

DAVIS

Now if he going out to be a spy and
pluck a few off I can get with
that.

MORSE

(hoists a glass)
Damn right. Tell all them crackers
good to the motherfucking hell bye.

Morse and Davis toast. Henry glowers for a beat, then turns
his back to the duo, shifting focus to the entryway, where
Wilamae walks in. She spots Henry but doesn't move to him.

DAVIS

Look like someone in the dog house.

Henry downs the remainder of his drink for liquid courage and
walks over to Wilamae as she positions herself by the stage.

WILAMAE

Best leave me be. I'm looking for
a new man, cause word on the street
is my old one's moving to a new
neighborhood without telling me.

HENRY

It's not that way. Ossian talked
on it, but I had no idea 'til
yesterday that it was even real.

Wilamae regards him coolly.

WILAMAE

So much for Alaska then. I guess
we're done.

HENRY

I didn't say that...

WILAMAE

Let me guess: you gonna invite me to move in, too? Better run it by the doctor. Ain't no way he wants my common no-college ass up in that house...unless maybe I'm the maid.

HENRY

Baby --

She cuts him off with a look. He means this though.

HENRY

My heart belongs to you.

WILAMAE

You know something, Henry Sweet? I truly do believe you mean that.
(she leans in; lips close,
grazing his)
But your behind belongs to him.

She kisses him, leaving a lipstick trace. Then walks away.

INT. DUNBAR HOSPITAL - EXAM ROOM - DAY

A shirtless patient, WINTHROP, 40s, black, sits on the exam table. Sweet stands above him in a crisp, white lab coat, using a stethoscope to measure Winthrop's blood pressure. A NURSE, 30, black, stands with a clipboard to assist him.

WINTHROP

Telling you, Doc, them white folks gone crazy.

SWEET

Over a picture show?

WINTHROP

You know the one. With all them Kluxers riding in on horses?

SWEET

Birth of a Nation.
(to Nurse)
One sixty over a hundred.
(to Winthrop)
If your piano playing duties are going to raise your blood pressure like this, you might want to find another way to make a living.

Sweet unstraps the blood pressure cuff and moves around to check on Winthrop's lungs.

WINTHROP

Doc Sweet, you should have heard them bastards when that Geechee got his self strung up. You would've thought the Tigers won the pennant.

SWEET

The power of cinema is strong, Mr. Winthrop.

(then)

Cough for me.

He does. Sweet listening on stethoscope.

WINTHROP

You'd think all them crackers had a mandingo put some honeysuckle in their main slice.

SWEET

(laughing)

Again.

Winthrop coughs once more, shaking his head.

WINTHROP

Whole damn picture show was tailor-made to get them riled up at coloreds. Like we ain't got enough shit on us as it is.

SWEET

Lord doesn't put more on a man than he can carry. It's up to us to show our best selves to the world.

Winthrop looks at Sweet.

WINTHROP

That's why you're moving out there with them white folks?

This question was unexpected.

SWEET

I'm moving to Garland Avenue because my wife and I took fancy to a house and decided to purchase it.

WINTHROP

Everybody talking about it. Some say you think you're better than regular colored. Others say you got the right to be where you want.

SWEET

And what do you say?

WINTHROP

Me?

(thinks)

I say Black Bottom's bout to lose a real good doctor.

Sweet smiles.

SWEET

Thank you, Mr. Winthrop.

WINTHROP

That said, I put two bucks on you not making it more than a week.

HOLD on Sweet, taken aback.

INT. CROWLEY'S DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

A sprawling retail mecca with signs advertising "EVERYTHING A HOME REQUIRES." MIDDLE-CLASS CUSTOMERS (most female; all white) browse the aisles, attended to by SHOP GIRLS.

FIND Gladys, pushing Iva in her stroller, the only people here of color. They get no attention from the shop girls.

QUICK CUTS of Gladys shopping:

- She peruses draperies, running her hands over the lush, expensive fabrics. Touching silk against her cheek.
- She peers in the door of a brand-new ELECTRIC REFRIGERATOR.
- She holds a bowl of fine bone china to the light.
- She flops down, giddy, on the mattress of an elaborate FOUR-POSTER BED. She shuts her eyes, indulging in the fantasy.

FLOOR MANAGER

Can I help you, madame?

Gladys opens her eyes to see a domineering spinster of a woman, the FLOOR MANAGER, 50s, eyeing her with irritation.

Gladys meets her stare, undaunted. Smiles.

GLADYS

Yes. I'd like to buy this, please.
The whole set.

EXT. DOWNTOWN DETROIT - DAY

Gladys strides out of the store, pushing Iva's baby stroller as she brandishes the sales slip: "\$1500 - PAID IN FULL."

GLADYS

(sotto, to herself)

Hell yes, you can help me. You can
kiss my rich Black ass, bitch.

A SHOPPER overhears this, turns; but Gladys is already gone.

INT. BLACK BOTTOM SPEAKEASY - NIGHT

A step up from the juke joint frequented by Henry and his friends. More dignified decor and older, well-heeled clientele; these are the city's black elite. A BAND plays ragtime for a lively dance floor. Bathtub liquor flows.

At a private table, Sweet and six friends smoke cigars. They all wear tailored suits, Masonic rings; professionals. Among them: EDWARD CARTER, 40, blustery, is holding forth...

CARTER

So let me get this straight. You
gonna take yourself and your whole
family out there to live amongst
them crackers with no cheese?
Nigger must've lost your damn mind.

SWEET

Please don't refer to me by that
word.

CARTER

Can't take it from me, but you're
gonna take it from them white folks
on Garland Avenue? Or you think
they gonna call you "doctor."

Carter and the other men trade chuckles. Sweet regards them.

SWEET

You're trying to tell me the same
race that invented the aeroplane,
the automobile, and virtually every
aspect of civilized society are so
blinded by hate that they won't
recognize a man of value just due
to the color of his skin?

ALL

Yes.

Sweet rolls his eyes.

CARTER

Sweet, is that black skin on you or cork? You act like we don't have a few hundred years of history to go on with the white man you glorify.

(then)

And quiet as it's kept, they didn't invent the world all by themselves.

Murmurs of accordance from the others.

SWEET

Firstly, I don't glorify him, I respect him. And if the colored man will ever have a chance to make his mark in this land he's going to have to do it at their side.

CARTER

Sure. Arm in arm like brothers...
To the promised land.

This wins a hearty round of laughter from the group. Sweet fixes Carter with a stare and sips his drink.

EXT. BLACK BOTTOM SPEAKEASY - NIGHT

The men trade drunken handshakes, saying their good-byes.

VARIOUS

Good luck with the move, Doc./
We're praying for you.

Carter and Sweet grip hands longer than they have to...

CARTER

There's a part of me that wants you to be right, you know.

SWEET

(beat; he nods)

We'll have y'all for supper when it's done.

They shake and Carter walks off. Sweet's Buick is parked at the curb. Joe Mack awaits in his uniform, holding the door.

JOE MACK

Dr. Sweet.

Sweet hesitates a beat as he watches the other men depart.

SWEET

Joe, see to it for tomorrow this
car is shiny as a buffalo nickel.
(looks to Mack's shoes)
And those shoes could use a polish.
Don't forget you are a
representative of me.

Sweet puffs his cigar and climbs into the car. After a beat,
the smoke cloud dissipates. Mack, stoic, shuts the door.

JOE MACK

Yes, sir.

EXT. BLACK BOTTOM ROW HOUSE - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

Lights glow in the tiny windows of a railroad tenement. The
smokestacks of an auto factory rise in the sky beyond.

INT. BLACK BOTTOM ROW HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

A cramped room with a single bed, a bureau, and a bassinet
with Iva, fast asleep; for now. Sweet is in his undershirt,
Gladys in her slip. They lay in each others' arms, her head
on his chest, speaking softly so as not to wake the baby.

GLADYS

Just wait until my momma sees the
kitchen... And that porch swing.

SWEET

Probably have to pry her out of it.

GLADYS

And the lawn... We need to get us
one of them jockeys.

SWEET

A black one, just so's they don't
view us as too "uppity."

Sweet and Gladys crack up, laughing. A soft whimper comes
from the bassinet. Gladys shushes Sweet to quiet him.

GLADYS

You're waking her.

SWEET

Me?

GLADYS

You laugh like a foghorn.

Gladys cups his mouth. A beat. The baby returns to silence. Gladys takes her hand away but Sweet stays quiet. Pensive.

GLADYS
(staring at him)
What?

SWEET
Do you think this is a good idea?

GLADYS
The move?

SWEET
I mean...is it the right thing?
Been hearing so much from so many I
start to questioning my motives.

GLADYS
(after a pause)
Well...this is America. You have
the right to live wherever you
want. We want this so --

SWEET
"Right" don't make it safe though.
(their eyes meet)
Am I putting my family in harm's
way just because I like a house?

Gladys regards him. Love in this.

GLADYS
Once those folks see what kind of
man you are, whatever ideas they
have about the colored race will
disappear. They have never seen a
man like you Doctor Ossian Sweet.

A beat. Then Sweet smiles, flirting.

SWEET
Y'know right about now I think I'd
like to see a little more of you.

He kisses her, then slowly works his way down lower in
between her legs -- until the baby starts to cry.

Sweet groans and Gladys bites her lip, exhales.

GLADYS
...So when do we move in?

TITLE CARD: CHAPTER TWO "THE HOUSE"**EXT. DETROIT - ESTABLISHING - DAYBREAK**

Sunrise over Motor City. Factory steam clouds dot the sky.

EXT. BLACK BOTTOM ROW HOUSE - DAYBREAK

Joe Mack polishes the Buick.

INT. BLACK BOTTOM ROW HOUSE - DAYBREAK

QUICK CUTS of Sweet preparing for his day:

- He shaves with a straight razor; neatly trims his mustache.
- He buttons down his crisp, starched collar. Fastening on a pair of onyx CUFF-LINKS in the shape of a medical caduceus.
- He regards himself in the mirror, clean-shaved and neatly groomed. A doctor of distinction.

EXT. BLACK BOTTOM ROW HOUSE - DAY

Mack waits beside the gleaming Buick, accompanied by three HIRED HANDS, black, 40s, in workman's coveralls: MURRAY, jovial, heavysset; LATTING, scrappy and high-strung; and WASHINGTON, a barrel-chested mute with dip-stained teeth.

HENRY

Morning Joe.

Henry ambles up accompanied by Morse and Davis, all three still dressed in last night's rumpled suits -- and hangovers.

Mack regards them up and down, disguising his contempt.

JOE MACK

Mr. Henry.

SWEET (O.S.)

You're late.

Sweet emerges from the row house. Then stops, seeing Morse and Davis. He surveys them with disappointment, judgment.

MORSE

Dr. Sweet.

DAVIS

Sir.

SWEET

Henry why are they here?

Morse and Davis trade looks, not pleased but not surprised. Henry hustles up to keep things from unraveling.

HENRY

Well, I knew we needed a couple more hands so I asked them to help.

SWEET

You should've consulted me first.

MORSE

(chimes in, half-amused)
Why, we ain't welcome?

Sweet steps down the stoop to meet the men on even plane.

SWEET

(regards them evenly)
You reek of gin and look like pimps in last night's clothes, so no, welcome's not the word that leaps to mind. But it appears there's little time to change that now. What can be changed, at least for the moment, are your dispositions. Once we arrive at Garland I expect your best demeanor. No hard faces, smiles if possible. As soon as the truck is unloaded, you can leave. I will pay you each five dollars for your time and effort.

With that, Sweet casts a last stern look at Henry and withdraws into the house. Morse and Davis exchange stares.

DAVIS

That nigger's crazy.

EXT. GARLAND AVENUE - ESTABLISHING - DAY

A quiet street of spindly elms and modest wood-frame dwellings, each with its own postage stamp front lawn.

EXT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - DAY

FULL FRAME: The house. A quaint two-story brick bungalow sits on a corner lot surrounded by a white picket fence.

The street is empty. Quiet. Then:

The chauffeured Buick pulls up to the curb, followed by a MOVING TRUCK. Mack gets out of the Buick first, opens the rear door for the family: Sweet and Gladys, holding Iva.

They step up to the white fence, hand-in-hand, and take it in. Gladys looks at Sweet. He looks at her. They're home.

Behind them, Henry hops down from the moving truck. The hired men (Murray, Latting, Washington) climb out of the back. They stare up at the house, impressed. Soft mutters of "Damn" and "Shee-it." Washington, the big mute, whistles.

Morse and Davis get out last, taking in the block, uneasy.

DAVIS

Bet them crackers looking out the windows like the circus passing by.

MORSE

Wish I had a rock for each of 'em.

SWEET

(shoots a quick glare)
You want that five spot you'll put a cap on that sass.

Morse and Davis look to Henry, then:

BOTH

Yes, sir.

INT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - DAY

Sweet and Gladys step into the vacant house. It's silent. Lifeless. Just the ghosts of missing furniture on walls.

Gladys paces to the kitchen. Sweet peers out a window at the other houses on the street. All quiet, no sign of life.

There's a clatter from the entryway, where Henry, Morse and Davis enter with the hired men, lugging the four-poster bed. They pause there, taking in the lofty space, impressed.

ALL

Day-um.../ Oo-ee...

Even Henry swells with pride, forgetting any tension.

HENRY

It's the biggest on the block.

DAVIS

Maybe shoulda made myself a doctor too.

Sweet and Gladys trade fast looks, on the same page.

SWEET

All of you keep it down. This isn't Black Bottom. Act like you've been somewhere.

The hired men go mute, upbraided.

GLADYS

And get those work-boots off my floors, y'all tracking dirt.

ALL

Sorry, sir./ 'Scuse us, ma'am.

Morse and Davis look to Henry. Nearing an end of their rope.

EXT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - PORCH - DAY

The hired men remove their work-boots on the porch as Morse and Davis congregate with Henry, grumbling in hushed tones.

DAVIS

What, he thinks white folk can hear through walls and cross the street?

MORSE

Wasn't for that five bucks I'd kick him square up in his tight ass.

HENRY

Alright, alright, calm down. Man's got a lot of pressure on him --

MORSE

Pressure he put on himself.

DAVIS

Yeah. Didn't nobody twist the motherfucker's arm to move...

HENRY

Look, you're both justified in your feelings. My suggestion is we get this stuff unpacked then take those five spots and get blotto.

Morse and Davis look at him, then smile in agreement.

MORSE

Now the man be talking sense.

With their shoes off, the men continue moving furniture in just their stocking feet.

Sweet exits past them onto the porch. He unrolls something from a pole: a brand new AMERICAN FLAG. He fits the pole into a notch already cut into the porch and steps back to admire it. The flag flaps in the breeze. Sweet beams.

Across the street behind him, a FACE peers through a window.

INT. HOUGHBERG HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

MARY HOUGHBERG, 30s, white, reserved, stands frozen at her kitchen window. Staring at the black folks moving in.

JUNE (O.S.)
What'cha looking at mommy?

Mary nearly jumps with a start. JUNE, 6, stands behind her in the doorway clutching to a tattered rag doll.

MARY
Oh...nothing. Go play with dolly.

It's too late. June has already stepped up to the window.

JUNE
(wide-eyed)
Those are colored people.

MARY
(hesitates; uncharted
territory in this)
Yes they are.

JUNE
I wonder if they have any kids.

The SOUND of a factory lunch bell carries us to:

EXT. FORD ASSEMBLY PLANT - DAY

A throng of WORKERS (all white) trudges from a sea of picnic tables as the lunch hour ends. Paper bags and half-eaten sandwiches are tossed away as men head back to the line. Amidst the crowd is MAC, 50's, gaunt, walking with a limp.

From an upstairs office window, a figure watches him: ERIC HOUGHBERG, 35, sturdy build, kind eyes, the junior foreman.

In his hand he holds a PINK SLIP. He seems torn.

ERIC
(calling out)
Mac?

As Mac looks up from below --

INT. FORD ASSEMBLY PLANT - JUNIOR FOREMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Mac now sits across the desk from Eric. He's been gut-punched. Struggling to find the words...

MAC

How...what do you mean, "let go?"

Eric appears genuinely broken to be doing this.

ERIC

I'm real sore about it too, Mac.

MAC

I...I don't understand. Ain't I been keeping up with quotas?

ERIC

Thing is, I get it from upstairs. They don't give me any choice here.

Mac begins to weep. Openly, right there in front of Eric.

ERIC

Mac...c'mon now... You know if I could do something --

MAC

You are!

Their eyes meet. Eric, taken aback, just stares.

MAC

...You're doing this.

Mac walks out, leaving Eric dumbstruck. A man divided.

EXT. TROLLEY STOP, GARLAND AVENUE - LATE DAY

A group of men in factory attire disembark a crowded trolley. Among them, we find Eric. He looks weary, just off shift.

Some NEIGHBORS have paused ahead of him, blocking the way.

ERIC

C'mon fellas, what's the hitch?

Eric pushes through to see what they're all staring at:

The corner bungalow across the street. Lights on in the windows. Curtains drawn. All we see are moving SILHOUETTES. The Buick is still parked at the curb. Gleaming, spotless.

NEIGHBOR #1

What sort of nigger owns a Buick?

INT. GARLAND ELEMENTARY SCHOOLHOUSE - LATE DAY

The auditorium is packed with FAMILIES (all white): MEN just off work in soot-stained coveralls, WIVES with CHILDREN on their laps. Several men in supervisor uniforms are riled:

POLK, 40s, balding and unglued. KOWALSKI, 50, with a sneer.

KOWALSKI

...Smith told me he was selling to a doctor. Never said what color though.

POLK

This can't be legal, can it? What happens to my mortgage if the values drop? We're already underwater as it is.

He directs the question to a small thin man with cropped white hair and an air of authority. LEON BREINER, 60, level-headed, in a tailored vest, not coveralls; a bank teller.

BREINER

Enough, enough, calm down. We ain't in the end times yet, Polk.

Scattered chuckles buoy the mood. He spots Eric entering.

BREINER

Eric, thanks for coming.

Folks turn and acknowledge him with nods. Eric blushes.

ERIC

Sorry to barge in.

BREINER

Not at all. I take it you're informed of our predicament?

ERIC

Ran into Fitz. Says Smith sold the bungalow to negroes?

KOTKE

(chimes in)

Question is do you still got that Enfield from the army -- we may need it.

Breiner winces.

BREINER

Now then, weapons won't be necessary. What we have here is a misunderstanding, that's all. Our former neighbor Mr. Smith obviously took advantage of that colored family -- gouged them in the price, no doubt -- and told them this was a different kind of neighborhood than what it is. When they find out we're not their sort of people, I'm sure they'll listen to reason.

Breiner doffs his hat and tosses in a couple bills, adds:

BREINER

...Reason and the mighty dollar.

He passes the hat into the crowd for a collection. Women scrounge coins from their purses; men toss dirty dollars from their pockets, adding to the pot with all they can afford.

When the basket reaches Eric, he hesitates a beat. Folks stare. Eric shoves a hand into his pocket, rummages as if in vain, and pulls out a small handful of coins to toss them in.

INT. HOUGHBERG HOUSE - ENTRY - LATE DAY

Eric dumps the remaining contents of his pocket on a bureau by the door: a fold of bills. Clearly he was holding out.

He rounds a corner, entering:

INT. HOUGHBERG HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

June is pressed up to the window glass, spying on the house across the street. Mary spots her from the stove, perturbed.

MARY

June! How many times have I told you to get away from there?

She shoos June from the windowsill.

JUNE

Did you meet the neighbors daddy?

MARY

(losing it)
Get!

June scurries off. Eric looks at Mary. She stares back.

ERIC
I was at the schoolhouse.

MARY
And?

ERIC
Listening to Breiner and Kowalski
talk you'd think their people came
here on the Mayflower.

MARY
(her eyes narrow; is he
making light of this?)
We're not talking about Catholics,
Eric, this is different.

ERIC
Is it? Hell, my best friend in the
service was a negro. Stu Dorsey.
Cook. That man --

MARY
...Could make a peach cobbler that
tasted just like home. I know. I
have nothing against negroes. I
voted for Harding, remember? You
know how we Republicans are soft on
race.
(then)
But June has a window by her bed.

Eric meets her stare, torn.

ERIC
I know.

MARY
So what do we do?

INT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - TWILIGHT

The keys of a PLAYER PIANO tinkle out a ragtime melody.

Sweet, Gladys, Henry, Morse and Davis are eating at the
dining table. There are no chairs for the hired men and
taciturn Joe Mack, who sit on boxes eating off their laps.

Washington helps himself to seconds of the ham.

GLADYS
Save some room for pie, now.

LATTING

Don't fret ma'am, Wash always got more room. He nothing but room.

The others laugh.

Finished eating, Sweet leans back, lighting a cigar.

MORSE

Doc Sweet, can I ask you a question?

SWEET

You just did, son.

MORSE

What happens when we go? You think they gonna invite y'all for supper? Maybe bring a loaf of bread for housewarming?

SWEET

(blows out a plume of smoke, then looks at him)

I think that tomorrow the sun will rise and what will be will be. Whatever that is, I will accept it. That, my young cynical friend, is the key to success in life.

MORSE

(still not convinced)

Uh huh.

Sweet rises from the table and approaches Henry, brooding in an armchair nearby. He pulls out a long cigar and offers it.

Henry regards his brother and the cigar, uncertainly.

HENRY

Guess you really made it huh?

SWEET

We did.

Sweet strikes a match to light Henry's cigar. Just then:

A serving platter crashes to the floor and Gladys SCREAMS. Heads spin to see her at the window, ducking out of view.

GLADYS

Quiet! Turn that off, turn it off!

Gladys scrambles to the player piano and abruptly shuts it. Silence. Her eyes meet Sweet's. Without a word, he strides up to the window, parting the curtains to look out:

HIS POV - OUT THE WINDOW

The street outside the house is filled with WHITE FOLK. Hundreds. Bodies move like apparitions in the twilight. MEN gathered in the street, WOMEN and CHILDREN on their porches.

One of them spots Sweet in the window, and a hush falls. Everybody stares.

HOLD on Sweet, stunned for a beat... As Henry, Morse, Davis, and the hired men all join him at the window.

WASHINGTON
(his first words)
Shit.

Sweet snaps the curtains shut, collects himself.

SWEET
Hold true. This will pass.

INT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - TWILIGHT

The four-poster bed sits at the center of the room, unmade. Gladys bursts in juggling Iva and a knitted baby blanket. She sets them on the bed and swaddles Iva as Sweet enters.

SWEET
Baby, it's alright. They're just a
bit stirred up is all.
(she's not looking at him;
her hands are trembling)
Hey. Look at me.

He stops her with a steady hand. She looks up, glowering.

GLADYS
Fix this, Ossian.

INT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - LIVING ROOM - SAME

The other men crowd to the window as Sweet reenters.

MURRAY
Must be hundreds of 'em!

SWEET
Stay away from there, you're only
taunting them.
(MORE)

SWEET (CONT'D)

And hundreds is good. It means
they aren't criminals, just folks.

MORSE

(getting in Sweet's face)
Folks who want to see us hanging
from a tree. Your white god gonna
listen to your good sense then?

Henry moves between them, squaring off on Morse.

HENRY

Watch yourself nigger! You got
something to say you say it to me.

DAVIS

(intercedes)
Easy now...them whites bout to kill
us all, no need to do it for them.

Davis separates the friends as Sweet regains composure.

SWEET

Everybody keep your wits. This is
new for them, same as it is for us.

EXT. GARLAND AVENUE - NIGHT

NEIGHBORS crowd the street outside the bungalow. All white.
Most of them are simply curious. Ogling the windows for some
signs of exotic life. Rumors pass by scuttlebutt:

NEIGHBORS

Must be dozens of 'em./ I heard
the wife ain't even colored.

The occasional (anonymous) shout can be heard.

NEIGHBORS

Get out!/ Go home, niggers!

A POLICE SEDAN pulls up on the outskirts of the crowd. A
plainclothes officer emerges: BERT NORTON, 50, a cop who
came out of the womb already weary. He takes in the scene.

NORTON

(to himself)
Shit.

TWO UNIFORMED OFFICERS are posted on the sidewalk by the
bungalow to keep the peace. They seem out of their league.

Norton comes up, shoving through the crowd.

NORTON
 Alright, stand back. Stand back!
 (to Officers)
 What are you two, lollygaggers?
 Keep these people off the sidewalk.
 We don't need em starting anything.

UNIFORM #1
 This don't look started to you,
 lieutenant?

Norton shoots him a look, but he can't argue. Exhales.

NORTON
 Where's Breiner?

NEARBY

A group is gathered at the rear of the crowd where Breiner is rallying a group of local men, including Polk and Kowalski.

BREINER
 The language I'm speaking here is simple economics. The value of our property goes down every day that they remain. What's next, our jobs? You don't see us moving down to Black Bottom to take what's theirs. Now who's with me?
 (spots Eric)
 Eric?

FIND Eric on the fringes of the gathering. Conflicted.

ERIC
 ...I don't know the man.

POLK
 You want to meet the jungle bunny?

VARIOUS
 Gotta go!/ Drive em out!

NORTON
 Don't nobody go driving nothing!

Heads turn as Norton pushes up.

BREINER
 Lieutenant.

Norton tugs Breiner to the side, exasperated.

NORTON

You told me a few men. This is a carnival.

BREINER

The people were inspired.

A beat. Norton turns back toward the bungalow to take it in.

NORTON

They're in there now?

BREINER

Eight of em. All men. Sound like folks who ain't expecting trouble?

Norton digests this.

NORTON

You got cash to buy the place?

Breiner parts his jacket to reveal a BUNDLE OF CASH. In his waistband is a GUN.

BREINER

The idea is to have him consider the errors of his decision.

Norton glares at him, stern.

NORTON

Keep these people back. I'll talk to them.

Norton waits for a concurring nod from Breiner, then turns and wades back through the crowd, heading for the bungalow.

INT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

As Gladys descends from upstairs, Sweet intercepts her, whispering so that the other men can't hear.

SWEET

Baby, you need to leave. Get Iva, take her to your parents' house. I'll telephone you when it's over.

GLADYS

What? No...I'm not leaving you.

SWEET

(calls to Mack)
Joe, get the Buick. You're driving.

JOE MACK
Nigger, I ain't going out there.

SWEET
(taken aback; firm)
You work for me.

A beat. Everyone is watching now. Henry steps between them.

HENRY
You want him to die for you too?

SWEET
Stay out of this and keep your
head. Ain't nobody dying here.

MORSE
You right about that.

Morse parts his jacket to reveal a HANDGUN in his waistband.

SWEET
(stunned)
What is that?

MORSE
Protection.

DAVIS
Damn straight.

Davis parts his coat too, revealing another GUN. Sweet
stares at them, then back at Henry, apoplectic, spiraling.

SWEET
You idiots... I'm a doctor...

Just then, A LOUD FIST POUNDS THE FRONT DOOR, startling them.
Heads turn. The pounding comes again. A muffled VOICE:

NORTON (O.S.)
(from behind the door)
Mr. Sweet, this is the police. I
just want to talk.

SWEET
(panicking; thinking fast)
Put those things away and keep your
mouths shut. Gimme that.

He grabs Morse's gun and shoves it into his own pocket.

SWEET
Gladys, get upstairs.

Sweet hurries to the door, then stops. Collects himself.

EXT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - NIGHT

The mood is tense. The crowd has fallen to a hush. All eyes on Norton on the porch step with one hand resting on his gun.

A beat, then a lock clicks. Norton stiffens as the door creaks open to reveal Sweet at the threshold, one hand in his pocket; on the hidden gun. Norton clocks it but keeps cool.

NORTON
Mr. Sweet?

SWEET
"Doctor."

NORTON
Want to take your hand out of your pocket, doctor?

Sweet blushes, realizing now Norton's seen the gun.

SWEET
Forgive the precaution, officer. I know there's some tension about, but I'm sure in a few hours --

NORTON
(cuts him off, harshly)
What the hell are you doing here?

SWEET
I purchased this property. I own it.

Norton stares at him.

SWEET
Is it wrong to want to have a better life?

NORTON
This look like that to you?

Sweet looks out at the massive crowd. Then back to Norton.

SWEET
(faltering)
If we give it time --

NORTON
For what? Hell, it ain't even that nice a neighborhood.
(MORE)

NORTON (CONT'D)
 What kind of person leaves where
 they belong to put his kin into a
 bind like this?

For the first time, Sweet is at a loss. Then:

HENRY (O.S.)
 An American.

Sweet turns as Henry steps up from behind him, stern.

HENRY
 (to Norton)
 We're not leaving.

Henry shuts the door in Norton's face.

HOLD on Norton, as a murmur rises from the crowd behind him.
 He looks back, seeing Breiner. Then spots Eric.

NORTON
 Houghberg!

Eric seems surprised to hear his name. Norton approaches.

NORTON
 Your time in the war, you've seen
 hairy situations. These yahoos
 haven't. This thing gets out of
 hand, do what you can.

Norton pulls a spare PISTOL from his coat. Eric balks
 slightly at the sight of the gun. Norton notices.

NORTON
 Okay?

ERIC
 (he takes the gun)
 Yes, sir.

INT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sweet grabs Henry by the collar, furious.

SWEET
 What in hell is wrong with you?
 You trying to inflame them?

DAVIS
 (losing nerve)
 He got a point, man. Maybe we
 should leave.

The hired men nod in accord.

LATTING
I heard that.

JOE MACK
Them crackers ain't playing.

HENRY
Nobody's going anywhere.
(to Sweet)
This is your house. You put us
into this. You want to run?

The brothers are eye to eye. After a long beat, Sweet nods.

SWEET
(returning to himself)
We stay calm. We give it time.
This too shall --

SMASH! A BRICK CRASHES THROUGH THE WINDOW, cutting him off.

EXT. GARLAND AVENUE - NIGHT

The crowd goes still at the SOUND of crashing glass. Eyes dart. Unclear who among them threw the brick. For a moment, things are calm. Eric knows better. Grabs Mary by a wrist.

ERIC
Take June inside now.
(Mary hesitates)
Go!

A fusillade of stones fly past him, battering the bungalow. Eric recoils at the sound as if from mortar fire.

Some TEENAGE BOYS are chucking rocks across the street.

NORTON
(shouting futilely)
No... Stand down dammit!

But it's too late. The floodgates open. GROWN MEN in the crowd shove past Norton, hurling rocks toward the bungalow.

NEIGHBORS
Get 'em out!/ Get the niggers!

The teens rail on the picket fence with baseball bats. A CRIPPLED MAN joins in, smashing pickets with his crutch. WOMEN and YOUNG GIRLS join too, prying at the fence posts.

It's madness. Chaos.

And Eric is frozen in the middle of the melee. Eyes wide. Sweat glistening his brow. Pulse racing faster... As the noise and chaos send him spiraling into a PTSD fugue state.

INT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Broken glass rains from the windows as objects pelt the house from every angle. The hired men take cover. Gladys screams.

For a moment, Sweet stands motionless. In shock. Henry reaches in his brother's pocket, taking back the gun.

HENRY
(to Morse and Davis)
Upstairs windows...let's go!

Henry takes off running up the stairs, followed by Morse and Davis. Sweet snaps out of his reverie. Seeing them.

SWEET
No...Henry, no!

Sweet takes off bounding up the steps behind him.

EXT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Eric crouches in his fugue state, eyes wide but blank. Shuddering at each harsh sound and movement all around him. Through the frenzied crowd, he SEES Breiner and some other men up on the porch steps, tugging at Sweet's flagpole.

It snaps in half and Eric HEARS it like a thunderclap.

NORTON
Houghberg!

Norton grabs him from behind and Eric spins back, gun clenched, aiming right at Norton. Norton stumbles backwards.

NORTON
The hell is wrong with you?

Norton races off, and just then:

CHILD'S VOICE
Gun!

A YOUNG BOY is pointing at the upstairs window of the bungalow, where Henry has reached the window with his gun.

HENRY
(shouting down)
Everybody get back!

The mob panics. Some scattering, some taking cover. People shove past Eric as he wavers, frozen like the eye of a storm.

INT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - SAME

Sweet drags Henry from the window. Henry shoves him back. Iva is swaddled on the bed behind them, wailing loudly.

SWEET
Put that thing down!

HENRY
What kinda man are you?

SWEET
A doctor!

HENRY
Not to them!

Henry motions to the window.

SWEET
Get away from there --

HENRY
Look at 'em!

SWEET
You'll ruin everything!

HENRY
You think that's how they see you?

Out the window, the vast crowd down below. Sweet goes for the gun, but Henry's stronger. They wrestle for the weapon.

SWEET
Gimme it!

HENRY
Open your eyes!

INT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - SAME

The other men are crowded in the stairwell, listening, as Gladys pushes past them. Racing for the door, when:

BANG! A GUNSHOT rings out. BANG! Another.

EXT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - SAME

As the second gunshot echoes, a flood-tide of humanity races off in panic. Mass exodus, screaming, fleeing to REVEAL:

TWO BODIES fallen on the grass. Breiner. And Eric. The broken flagpole rests between them. Fabric stained by blood.

INT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - BEDROOM - SAME

Gladys rushes in to see Sweet and Henry at the window. The gun is on the floor between them, cylinder still smoking.

GLADYS

What have you done?

Sweet staggers to the window and stares out at the bodies down below, in shock. He shoves past Gladys, rushing out.

EXT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Sweet bursts out, stumbling down the porch steps to the bodies. Breiner is face down in a pool of blood. Unmoving. Beyond him, Eric is face up, bleeding profusely from a leg.

Eric looks up weakly as Sweet kneels in, checking his vitals.

SWEET

It's okay...it's gonna be okay.
It's only a flesh wound.

Sweet quickly removes his belt, loops it as a tourniquet. Other folks are crowding up now. Norton shoves past them.

NORTON

Stand back, police!

SWEET

It's okay, I'm a --

WHAM! Norton cuts Sweet off with one swing of his nightstick, kayoing him as Gladys SCREAMS. And:

SMASH TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD: CHAPTER THREE "MR. WHITE"

INT. FLATBED TRUCK, MOVING - DAY

A jalopy rattles down a rural road. Two men in front wear canvas hoods with holes cut for the eyes: KLANSMEN. The one not driving aims a pistol at a blindfolded PASSENGER in back.

The passenger is WALTER WHITE, 33, thin, with dirty blonde hair half-combed in a windblown part. He wears a linen suit and the wry expression of a man who thinks he's seen it all.

But at the moment even White has tempered his aplomb, swiveling his head to listen to the SOUNDS he can't see through the blindfold: A baying dog... A distant gunshot...

The Klansman with the pistol shouts above the wind.

KLANSMAN

First time in Alabama?

WHITE

(finding his voice; droll)

Can you believe it?

EXT. SWAMP - DAY

The Klansmen prod White, still blindfolded, into a clearing. A DOZEN KLANSMEN in full regalia step from the trees. Some carry rifles. The handlers back away from White. A beat.

White reaches to lift his blindfold.

GRAND WIZARD

Keep that on, if you don't mind,
Mr. White. We prefer our privacy.

(then)

Cigarette?

The GRAND WIZARD nods to one of the handlers, who offers White a pack. White feels for it, taking one, and lights it.

WHITE

(inhales a puff; beat)

Not my brand.

The Grand Wizard, not without a sense of humor, smiles.

GRAND WIZARD

You've come a long way to be here.
Which Yankee paper was it sent you?

WHITE

New York Post. But I'm no Yankee,
sir. I'm from Atlanta.

GRAND WIZARD

That right...? And they sent you
back home to Dixie to write about
our backwards ways, is that it?

WHITE

No, sir. As I told your men --

GRAND WIZARD

Or maybe you're here on behalf of that nigger Advancement Association. The one sending all them Yankee niggers down here, putting notions in our own good niggers' heads.

White keeps his cool under the blindfold. Beat.

WHITE

Are you asking me if I'm a nigger?

Chuckles from the hoods.

WHITE

I'm a reporter. My story is on law and order. Up north crime is high. Especially among the immigrants and coloreds in the cities. Down here on the other hand, you're seeing record lows. I'm here to find out why. How it is you keep the peace?

Grand Wizard stares.

GRAND WIZARD

Boy's in the right place then.

WHITE

And where exactly is that?
(after a beat)
Mister...?

It's quiet. Too quiet.

WHITE

Hello?

Silence. White wavers, lifts his blindfold... And he sees he's been left alone; the Klansmen are gone. White turns around to look for them, but stops short. Seeing something:

EIGHTEEN BLACK BODIES hang from the trees, flesh charred. One of them is female. Her womb split open. A fetus hangs from the umbilical cord. Ropes creak in the breeze.

White staggers. Then stumbles to his knees and vomits.

INT. GRAND HOTEL - MEN'S ROOM - DAY

White splashes water on his face and stares at his reflection in the mirror, still recovering. Long beat.

ATTENDANT

Towel, sir?

A BLACK ATTENDANT holds a towel out. White takes it.

WHITE

Thank you.

He wipes his face, then tips the man and exits.

INT. GRAND HOTEL - PHONE BOOTH - DAY

The lobby of a posh hotel. White occupies a phone booth, on the line with the door shut. Even so, he's whispering.

WHITE

(into phone)

Klan runs rampant outside Mobile.
Nineteen Negroes hanged from
trees... Yes, nineteen, the girl
was pregnant... Tell Johnson he'll
have my copy for the late edition.

(beat)

No, I'm fine... Crackers thought I
was one of them.

(beat)

I look good in white.

A chuckle on the line.

WHITE

Bye, now.

White hooks the ear piece and hangs up, opening the booth to exit. A stocky BLACK MAN blocks the door, speaks quietly.

BLACK MAN

You Mr. White?

WHITE

Who are you?

BLACK MAN

They know.

The man walks off. Leaving White completely ashen.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - LATE DAY

A RAILROAD idles at the platform, belching smoke.

White spots a POLICEMAN with a hound dog by the ticket counter. Avoiding both, he boards the train beneath a hanging sign: "THIS CAR FOR WHITES ONLY."

INT. TRAIN CAR - LATE DAY

White takes a window seat towards the rear as the CONDUCTOR moseys down the aisle, punching tickets. White finds a NEWSPAPER on the next seat and opens it, pretending to read.

He notices his hands are shaking.

CONDUCTOR

Ticket?

White looks up from the paper.

WHITE

Made it in a rush. Mind if I buy one here?

CONDUCTOR

That'll be five.

White nods as calmly as he can, takes out his wallet, and counts out five dollar bills. The Conductor writes a ticket.

CONDUCTOR

Too bad, Mister. You're leaving town before the fun starts.

(leans in)

Some yaller nigger's passing for a white man. Boys are looking. Time they done with him, he won't pass for anything but black and blue.

White stares for a beat, forgetting to breathe.

WHITE

I hope they get him.

The Conductor moves along. White sinks behind his newspaper. We notice a HEADLINE that he hasn't seen yet. He will soon: "NEGRO DOCTOR ARRESTED FOR MURDER IN DETROIT."

INT. HARLEM TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

A well appointed townhouse abuzz with a gathering of Harlem renaissance intellectuals, mainly black, but integrated. White is regaling a small group including H.L. MENCKEN, 45, white, acerbic, and several attractive WOMEN of both races.

WHITE WOMAN

You must have been terrified!

WHITE

(shrugs, flirting)

Been there before.

MENCKEN

His asshole didn't unclench 'til he
crossed the Mason-Dixon.

Wincing laughter from the group.

WHITE

H.L. Mencken, ladies and gentlemen.
Thank you for the vivid picture.

ZORA, 30s, black, shakes her head.

ZORA

I don't care if you are light as
snow, if I was you I'd keep my
Negro heinie here in Harlem.

WHITE

You making me a proposition, Zora?

ZORA

A proposal.

On cue, a young musician (DUKE) hammers out the "Bridal
Chorus" on a nearby piano, segueing into a jazzy riff.

WHITE

Say what you will about the
Southern whites, at least they tell
you what they're really thinking.

ZORA

Which is what, pray tell?

MENCKEN

By an objective measure, very
little.

WHITE

That we're beneath them. That the
black man is a taker, not a maker.

DUKE

And his woman's for the taking.

ZORA

Let em try.

Nods from the women. A young man, 20s, (LANGSTON) chimes in.

LANGSTON

So Garvey's right then, we should
all go back to Africa?

WHITE

Not me, I burn too easily.

This wins a laugh.

WHITE

Tell me...Langston, what kind of men built Carnegie Hall?

LANGSTON

(pause)

I'm a poet... White men?

WHITE

In your eyes, maybe. Dirty Irish Catholic men. Like Mencken here.

MENCKEN

Technically, I'm German.

WHITE

Which was just another nigger to the Puritans who got here first. And they were niggers to the English, who were niggers to the Romans, who were niggers to the Greeks... And whoever came before that spoke in grunts and grumbles -- but you mark my words, they had their niggers, too.

JOHNSON (O.S.)

So we'll get ours, eventually?

Heads turn at the arrival of JAMES WELDON JOHNSON, 54, debonair, the soirée's host, a poet, playwright, public intellectual, and the executive secretary of the NAACP.

MENCKEN

(lifts his cocktail; wry)

To progress.

People clink their glasses. Johnson, smiling at White.

JOHNSON

And people ask me why I let you write my speeches.

INT. HARLEM TOWNHOUSE - PRIVATE STUDY - NIGHT

SOUNDS of the soirée continue through the door, but this is Johnson's sanctum. Wood-paneled walls are adorned with framed news clippings and photos of his exploits: shaking hands with W.E.B. DuBois; visiting the White House.

One headline reads: "JAMES WELDON JOHNSON NAMED FIRST NEGRO SECRETARY OF NAACP."

Johnson is at his desk, perusing the contents of a folder filled with newspaper cuttings on the case of Ossian Sweet.

White is hovering, a manic energy.

JOHNSON

What exactly am I looking at?

WHITE

Our future, Mr. Johnson. The trial that puts the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People on the map.

JOHNSON

(skims the cuttings)
Negro doctor and his people kill one, wound another, both white...

WHITE

Both laying siege to his hearth and home, along with hundreds more.

JOHNSON

You're saying what...we run an editorial?

WHITE

We bankroll the case. A legal action fund. Backed by donations from our members. And all along, I'm there following the trial -- in print, step by step -- putting our readers in the shoes of this man. Opening their eyes to his plight and our cause -- to progress.

It's quite a breathless pitch. Johnson looks at him.

JOHNSON

No.

(White reacts)
Our efforts should be focused on the South. Negroes are dying --

WHITE

And they aren't in the north? With race riots popping up in every city? You think what's happening in Alabama can't happen in Chicago? Or St. Louis?

(MORE)

WHITE (CONT'D)

First it's housing laws and neighborhood associations, next it's courts and prisons -- one day fifty years from now, maybe we win the battle in the South but look up to find we lost the war.

Johnson digests the speech.

WHITE

You hired me because I know how to tell a story. This is the one.

JOHNSON

About a murderer...

WHITE

A doctor. Husband, father. A man who pulled himself up by his boot-strings, chasing a common dream. An American dream. And now he stands staring at the gallows, because he dared defy the mob that showed up at his door.

Johnson stares at White. A pause.

JOHNSON

You haven't met him yet.

WHITE

I've known him my entire life.

EXT. DETROIT - ESTABLISHING - DAYBREAK

Buildings scrape the sky. Smokestacks billow in the sunrise.

A PASSENGER TRAIN chugs into the rail yard, approaching the grand Beaux Arts facade of MICHIGAN CENTRAL STATION.

INT. MICHIGAN CENTRAL STATION - DAY

Sunlight beams from vaulted windows to a platform mobbed with PASSENGERS and PORTERS. FIND White amidst the throng.

To all outward appearances a well-dressed white man, he takes in the diversity around him like a stranger in a strange land. New arrivals wait to retrieve their baggage under signs marked with the cities of their origin:

White BUSINESSMEN, just in from Chicago; working class ITALIANS and JEWS from New York; and the largest cohort, poor SOUTHERN WHITES and BLACKS, just off the Jim Crow line from Georgia. They collect their bags from separate, equal piles.

An old VENDOR, 60s, black, is hawking local papers with the headline: "RACE MURDER! NEGRO DOCTOR TO STAND TRIAL."

WHITE

You think he did it?

VENDOR

Finest paper in the town, sir...
So it must be true.

EXT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - DAY

UNIFORMED POLICE bustle up and down the steps of the imposing jail. White is keeping up with a young jail guard, DUNN, 20s, white, not a bad sort just limited. Both on the move.

DUNN

Those negroes are under special guard, Mister. Reporters need to check in with the jailer and he ain't in 'til Monday.

WHITE

Look...Dunn, is it? I got me a boss, too, and he's been breathing down my neck to wire a story by the late edition in Manhattan.

Dunn pauses on the stairs.

DUNN

New York, Manhattan?

WHITE

You been?

DUNN

Got an aunt there.

WHITE

(sees his opportunity)
Well she must read news...
(thinks fast, pulling out his steno pad, a pen)
Spell your full name for me... See if I can't get it in for auntie.

OFF Dunn, a simple man, beguiled.

INT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - VISITING CELL - DAY

Sweet sits on a stool at a small table in a threadbare uniform of prison stripes. He hasn't shaved. Of the man we know, only his posture remains. Upright, ramrod straight.

The door opens with a clang, revealing White.

DUNN
(from the door)
Five minutes.

White nods, steps in as Dunn shuts the door behind him. Sweet regards White for a moment. Just another white man.

WHITE
Dr. Sweet.

White extends a hand. Sweet stares at him, not taking it.

SWEET
How can I help you?

WHITE
Actually, I'm the one who's here to help you. My name is Walter White and I'm a negro. Yes, I'm aware my skin tone implies otherwise but my grandparents were of opposing races. I live in Harlem, New York City, and I was sent here on behalf of Mr. James Weldon Johnson, executive secretary of the NAACP to cover your case for our paper.

White produces a BUSINESS CARD and slides it to Sweet.

SWEET
I didn't ask for your help.

The skepticism catches White off-guard.

WHITE
You're a brother. And you need the support of your people.

SWEET
I've already engaged a lawyer. I require no other "support" so I suggest you concentrate your efforts elsewhere. Many folks with far better stories to tell.

WHITE
Perhaps I can meet him...your attorney? Discuss strategy --

SWEET
(cuts him off, harsh)
He's fine, thank you.
(MORE)

SWEET (CONT'D)

I pay him handsomely to not spend time with journalists.

WHITE

As I said, I'm more than that. I'm here to help. This trial may drag on for some time, the attorney fees alone could be enormous. Now there's money to be had. Donations from others of our race...

SWEET

Our race is why I'm here.

White looks at Sweet, flummoxed by him.

SWEET

That's all they saw of me. Now it's all that you see, too.

WHITE

I see a colored man in need.

SWEET

Not a doctor? Not a man who's dedicated his life to becoming the best possible version of himself? Only "a colored man in need."

WHITE

I'm not negating --

SWEET

Don't you see? If your negro papers and negro readers just stay the hell away -- maybe, just maybe the people at the heart of this won't see a negro any longer... They'll see me.

White regards him.

WHITE

Which is what exactly?

SWEET

Not a begging man, for one. A hard worker. A fellow worthy of respect and empathy. And not a martyr.

WHITE

I never said that.

SWEET

Sure you did. With your donations and support? One big hosannah to the heavens that I'm here to be pitied. Just another helpless, shiftless, two-bit nigger, like they always knew we were.

For the first time, White is speechless.

SWEET

Good day, Mr. White, but no thank you. Good luck on your crusade.

INT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - HOLDING CELL - DAY

The other men (Morse and Davis, Latting, Murray, Washington, and Joe Mack) sit about a cell. Waiting for Sweet.

Henry is brooding to the side. The men are bickering.

LATTING

Doctor says we were protecting ourselves -- that's self-defense.

DAVIS

They gotta see you as a self for that, nigga. And the doctor is the reason we're all in this mess. A white man died. Another lost his leg. This was Mississippi we'd be swaying like wet willow whips.

MURRAY

But it ain't. This is Detroit.

MORSE

Yeah, they got the electric chair.

This gives Latting and Murray pause.

MURRAY

(fearfully realizing)
Electric chair? Well they can't put murder on all of us...can they? It wasn't but two shots and there's a damn sight more of us than two.

MORSE

From the looks of your black ass I don't see no mathematician.

Morse and Davis laugh.

JOE MACK

He right though. Only one in here
do know who shot them crackers.

(he looks at Henry)

Which one of y'all was it?

Heads turn to Mack, who had been silent until now. Henry
looks up for the first time, fierce.

HENRY

Motherfucker, shut your mouth.

JOE MACK

Just asking the question, Mr.
Henry. Why we all in here.

Henry moves aggressively at Mack, but Morse restrains him.

MORSE

Easy...

HENRY

(staring daggers at Mack)
Always one coon in the group. One
who wanna lick the watermelon rind.

MORSE

(to Mack)
That shot could've come from
anywhere. A ricochet. What
matters is we keep our mouths shut.

JOE MACK

Why? So seven fall for one man's
pride?

This wins nods and "Mm-hm"s from the hired men.

MURRAY

Truth.

LATTING

Yeah, we just hired men... Lord
knows if'n the doctor ain't selling
us out right now to them police.

HENRY

He wouldn't do that.

Morse and Davis trade looks.

DAVIS

Last I looked you two wasn't
exactly thick as thieves.

HENRY
 I know my brother. He's not a rat.
 (then)
 He'll get us out of here.

MORSE
 And if he don't?

The others stare at Henry. The question lingers for a beat.

JOE MACK
 ...Then y'all best hope black
 heaven is a damn sight better than
 this white hell we living in.

INT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - WOMEN'S BLOCK - DAY

The women's block. Shrieks and howls echo. Gladys, in prison stripes, faces Sweet through the bars of her cell.

A BURLY GUARD stands to the side, allowing them a moment.

SWEET
 Have you heard from your mother?

GLADYS
 She came. She says Iva's fine.
 But I'm so sick with worry...

SWEET
 Calm yourself. We'll be out soon.
 Cecil is a fine attorney and he
 believes the law is on our side.

Gladys nods, trying her best to believe it, too.

GLADYS
 (after a beat)
 I just wanted a house that's one
 room bigger than my momma's.

SWEET
 You have one.

GLADYS
 I wish we could give it back.

SWEET
 Don't say that...

GLADYS
 I do. This whole thing is because
 of that house. Jesus spoke of the
 man that was motivated by pride.
 (MORE)

GLADYS (CONT'D)

How it blinds the heart and makes
its keeper foolhardy. That's us,
Ossian. We made this.

SWEET

No. We did what was our right to
do and justice will be served.

GLADYS

Justice...in a courtroom? They
wouldn't accept us as their
neighbors, Ossian, you really think
they'll treat us fairly on a jury?

Sweet hesitates. She holds his gaze.

SWEET

They will.

GLADYS

You're a good man, Ossian Sweet.

SWEET

They will.

Sweet reaches through the bars to touch her hand, but the
Burly Guard raps the gate hard with his nightstick.

BURLY GUARD

Time to go.

He prods Sweet onward down the corridor.

SWEET

(calls back to Gladys)
You hear me? I'll get us home.

By now Sweet is out of sight. A gate slams behind him.
Leaving Gladys in the darkness of her cell, alone.

GLADYS

(after a beat, to herself)
...Too good.

EXT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - YARD - DUSK

The Burly Guard unlocks a gate leading from the women's block
across the enclosed yard. Sweet shuffles through and the
guard locks the gate behind him. As Sweet makes his way
across the empty yard towards the gate leading to the men's
block, WHITE PRISONERS leer down at him from cells above.

Catcalls come from unseen VOICES:

VOICES

Run along nigger!/ Watch your
back!

A glob of spit smacks Sweet on the forehead. He shuffles faster, jangling the chains. A rotten egg splatters on his back. Then more debris and stones rain down, pelting him.

Sweet tries to raise his arms to shield his face but chains prevent him. He grits his teeth and shuffles faster as the obscenities and taunts and filth continue to bombard him.

Sweet reaches the men's block gate... It's locked.

Behind it, the YARD GUARD locks eyes with Sweet, then slowly, very slowly, reaches for his keys and opens up the gate.

Sweet shuffles in, covered in filth. Clinging to composure with the last threads of his dignity.

The last shouts from the yard echo behind him:

VOICES

Good luck in court, nigger./
Justice for all!

As we HOLD on Sweet, humiliated, shaken...

INT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - VISITING CELL - DAY

Sweet sits across from White, eyes trained on the floor. This is difficult for him. Putting ego to the side.

WHITE

You asked to see me, Doctor?

Sweet struggles for a moment. Lifts his eyes to meet White.

SWEET

(after a pause)
I don't want to be a martyr.

WHITE

Martyrs are only called that when
they lose. I want you to win.

(then)
Pride goeth before the fall, Dr.
Sweet. Let us help you.

Sweet regards him.

SWEET

I presume you have a plan?

EXT. BELLE ISLE PARK, DETROIT - DAY

A city view beyond the trees. White and Johnson stroll.

WHITE

...He needs another lawyer.

JOHNSON

A white one.

WHITE

Not just white, he needs someone who can knock down the wall they're building up around him. I have feelers out to all the white-shoe firms. Hays, Spingarn.

JOHNSON

And?

WHITE

It's apparently a busy summer.

JOHNSON

They're scared shitless.

WHITE

Yeah.

JOHNSON

So am I.

(White regards him)

Your instincts are right on this thing, Walter, but the case is bad.

WHITE

The evidence is with us...

JOHNSON

Evidence?

WHITE

The bullets weren't found. The cops can't prove who fired the shots and even if they could, these folks had a right to self-defense. State law...hell, common law from time imperial says a man's home is his castle. Imagine a group of negroes stormed a white house. If the races were reversed --

JOHNSON

Except they're not. Are they?

White pauses to collect himself.

JOHNSON

When I found you, you were writing novels, Walter. You know how to spin shit into sugar, craft a sympathetic story. But in real life you can't write the endings.

(after a beat)

Find a lawyer by tomorrow. One who has a snowball's chance to win this thing. Or else we drop it.

INT. SILENT MOVIE HOUSE - NIGHT

White sits alone at the back of a crowded movie theater, lit by the reflected flicker of the screen. He's lost in his own world, as AUDIENCE MEMBERS, all white, settle in around him. Chatting, chomping peanuts. Ignoring the only other man of color in their midst: a black man playing music at a piano; we recognize him as Sweet's exam-room patient, Winthrop.

A NEWSREEL plays on screen. Slide reads: "MONKEY TRIAL IN TENNESSEE. LEGAL GIANT CLARENCE DARROW DEFENDS EVOLUTION."

White sits forward in his seat.

ON SCREEN: FOOTAGE of CLARENCE DARROW, 65, a rumpled lawyer in a white suit, gesticulating expansively to a jury. MORE FOOTAGE of Darrow wading through a crowd of fans and press. A slide reads: "NEXT STOP SPEAKING TOUR IN NEW YORK CITY."

White is already out the door.

INT. THE TOWN HALL THEATER, NEW YORK CITY - DAY

White enters the rear of a packed house. Standing room only. PATRONS of both genders, all white, watch the stage, rapt.

Darrow commands the stage. A tall, weathered man with a shambling gait, a mop of white hair, and suspenders. His manner is homespun, direct. He is not reading from a speech.

DARROW

I first knew I was a lawyer when I was six years old. Defending my beloved Bassett hound from going in the old man's loafers.

Chuckles from the crowd.

DARROW

Don't laugh, it was a bad case. The facts were all against us.

(MORE)

DARROW (CONT'D)

I couldn't deny the crime. I had to explain it. See, most people think there is no cause for crime, except the pure cursedness of those they call "criminals." But as a matter of fact, there's a cause for everything on Earth; be it poverty or ignorance or dandruff. When I looked at it that way, the angle of attack was clear. "He's just a dog," I said. And my father let him stay.

LAUGHTER and APPLAUSE from the crowd. Darrow soaks it in.

DARROW

You'd be surprised the verdicts you can win by just appealing to that oft-forgotten flame of decency.

HOLD on White, knowing that he's found his man.

EXT. THE TOWN HALL THEATER - STAGE DOOR - DAY

A crowd is gathered at the stage door, where Darrow has been waylaid by his fans, autographing copies of a book: "DEFENDER OF THE DAMNED: CLARENCE DARROW'S GREATEST TRIALS."

He's savoring the adulation, in his element.

DARROW

My thoughts on the White House? When I was a boy I was told that anybody could be President. The problem is, these days I'm beginning to believe it.

LAUGHTER. White has worked his way through the crowd. He holds out a folded NEWSPAPER: "SWEET TO STAND TRIAL."

WHITE

Mr. Darrow. My name is Walter White.

DARROW

That's fine.
(re: newspaper)
Is this for me to sign?

WHITE

To read. I believe that it should be your next case.

DARROW

Do you now? Well as the harlot said, I take a lot of things but not requests.

He thrusts the paper back to White and moves on, gravitating to an attractive YOUNGER WOMAN. He opens her book to sign.

WHITE

The defendant's name is Sweet, you might have heard of him. He's wrongfully accused.

DARROW

There's your problem. I prefer my clients guilty. Thrill of the challenge.

(to Younger Woman)

And who is this for?

YOUNGER WOMAN

Josephine.

DARROW

An empress! How would you like to escort me to the streetcar, Madame Bonaparte?

Darrow offers her an arm. White stops him.

WHITE

He's a Negro, Mr. Darrow. You want a challenge? That's a greater crime than teaching we descend from apes.

Darrow regards him, for the first time maybe intrigued.

DARROW

His victim?

WHITE

As white as this young lady.

(then)

As the jury will be.

White holds out the newspaper again. Darrow considers it.

WHITE

If you're looking for another chapter to your book, sir. This is it.

INT. MIDTOWN STEAKHOUSE - DAY

A corner booth. The table is spread with food, all Darrow's, and he's tucking into it with relish as he pages through a file on the Sweet case. White is still in sales mode.

WHITE

The first question one must ask is whether or not a negro is legally able to defend his home. My people, Mr. Darrow, do not know the answer to that question...

Darrow peers up from the file with his mouth full.

DARROW

Your people?

WHITE

Yes, sir.

Darrow regards White with a modicum of curiosity, and shrugs. But doesn't comment on it.

DARROW

Well did he do it?

WHITE

Sorry?

DARROW

The good Doctor. Did he fire the shot that killed the man and wounded the other?

White hesitates, starting to hedge.

WHITE

He says he did not.

Darrow smiles.

DARROW

But I'm not asking him yet.

WHITE

(wavering, unsure)
The bullets weren't found. For all we know, the shots could have come from someone in the crowd. Or the police... And when you consider the patent case for self-defense --

DARROW

Enough, enough. You're writing a column, Mr. White. I asked for an opinion. Did he shoot them?

White looks at Darrow. No sense lying.

WHITE

I don't know.

DARROW

Better. Although I'd preferred he had.

He forks a bite of steak into his mouth, chewing as he talks.

DARROW

I've never killed a man myself, but I do read many obituaries with a smile in my heart, and this is one.

(taps the file; working up a head of steam)

These so-called "victims" were members of a mob. A Noble Nordic horde the likes of which last raped and pillaged with the Vikings. Our Doctor was fighting for his home and hearth...why if it had been two hundred, or even two black men storming on a white's house, this wouldn't be a case or conversation. He'd be lauded as a hero.

Darrow finally swallows the bite and sips his drink to wash it down. He's gotten himself riled up, and White's excited.

WHITE

Which is what he is! A hero. That's the argument exactly --

DARROW

(cuts him off)
It's a fantasy.

Darrow frowns. His mind moves fast and his fleeting enthusiasm has gone as quickly as it came, replaced by doubt.

DARROW

I can convince a jury of a lot of things; that black is white will not be one of them. I'm afraid those twelve men will reach their verdict the very moment that they see the skin of the accused.

He wipes his mouth and throws his napkin to the table.

WHITE
So you won't take his case?

DARROW
(a long beat; then)
No. That's exactly why I will.

WHITE
(whiplashed)
That's...that's wonderful!

DARROW
Isn't it?

Darrow stands and stuffs a couple dinner rolls into his pockets, then glances at the bill, then White.

DARROW
(re: bill)
You get this. We're colleagues
now. I'll see you in Detroit.

Darrow trundles off as White watches him go, still dazed.

TITLE CARD: CHAPTER FOUR "THE GREAT DEFENDER"

INT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - VISITING CELL - DAY

Sweet sits alone, waiting, habitually straightening the creases on his ratty prison trousers. He finds a stain and rubs it with a finger. No help. He scrapes it harder with his fingernail, obsessing at it. But the stain remains.

He hasn't noticed Darrow enter.

DARROW
Have a go at mine next, would you?
Ruby always tells me I'm a slob.

Sweet blushes, mortified, and launches to his feet.

SWEET
Mr. Darrow. It's an honor.

DARROW
I think so, too.

Darrow shakes his hand.

SWEET

My apologies that I'm not more presentable. Conditions here --

DARROW

You're a physician, aren't you? You see folks naked. I see them like this. No shame in that.

The easygoing manner puts Sweet at his ease.

SWEET

Of course. Thank you.

DARROW

Sit.

Sweet does so. Darrow sits down in the other chair.

DARROW

I understand you studied medicine in Europe.

SWEET

Paris. At the Sorbonne. Under Madame Marie Curie. I was one of only two Americans to be admitted to the course that year.

DARROW

The only negro?

SWEET

(slight hesitation)
Yes.

DARROW

Quite a credit to your race.

SWEET

I believe a man ought to be judged on his own merits, Mr. Darrow.

DARROW

I see.

SWEET

I've lived my life by that creed.

DARROW

And now you're rotting by it. God bless America.

The bluntness wrong-foots Sweet, uncertain how to take it.

SWEET

What is your plan here, Mr. Darrow?

DARROW

To save your life. And those of your wife, and your brother, and the other men. To win this case.

SWEET

How?

DARROW

By admitting what you did. And standing by it.

Sweet stares at him in disbelief.

SWEET

You think I shot those men?

DARROW

I suppose it may have been your brother. Or your baby, Iva. She was in the room, too, wasn't she? Must have been a sight to see her shooting through that swaddling.

SWEET

You think this is funny.

DARROW

Most things are with some perspective.

SWEET

You want me to admit to murder!

DARROW

Self-defense, provoked and justified. Anybody looking out a window at a mob would do the same.

SWEET

But I'm not anybody, Mr. Darrow.

Darrow regards him, stymied.

DARROW

Evidently.

SWEET

(after a pause; evenly)
I know you can't understand it. I know you think it's pride.

(MORE)

SWEET (CONT'D)

But I have had to live my life to a higher standard just to get to where I am. A doctor who saves lives, not takes them. If I admit to firing those shots, that's gone. I'm nothing more than what they feared. That thing that I despise as much as they do... And I won't be a nigger. Not for anything.

For the first time, it is Darrow at a loss for words.

INT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - WAITING AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Dunn escorts Darrow back into an antechamber where White is waiting for him. He rapidly approaches, on the move.

WHITE

Well?

DARROW

I didn't take you for a grifter, Mr. White but you sold me a bill of goods. A sympathetic man, the kind a jury has a hankering to feel for.
(then)
...That bastard, even I'd convict.

WHITE

I understand he can be stubborn.

DARROW

As a mule.
(then)
What you need is a champion of the negro cause. That man has no cause but his own. Hell, if he thought god could make him white he'd pray every day and twice on Sunday.

WHITE

I'll give you the man you need.

DARROW

A different one?

WHITE

I'll give him to you in the press. I'll give you a hero. You just give us justice in the court.

This pauses Darrow, and he looks at White. A beat.

DARROW

I'll do my best to save his ass.
 But you keep that word out of it.
 There's no such thing as "justice."
 In or out of court.
 (he walks off)
 See you Monday.

EXT. DETROIT HALL OF JUSTICE - ESTABLISHING - DAY

An imposing neoclassical facade with the words "DETROIT HALL OF JUSTICE." Hordes of PRESS and PUBLIC ascend marble steps.

INT. HALL OF JUSTICE - COURTROOM - DAY

The gallery is packed. We recognize some angry faces from the mob on Garland Avenue, all white. The black folks are relegated to standing room in back, hemmed in by BAILIFFS.

Armed bailiffs guard the nine defendants. Sweet is seated next to Gladys, with Henry and the other men beside them. Gladys appears sallow, nursing a cold, or just bad nerves.

TWELVE MEN sit in the jury box, all white. The room is rapt. Darrow has just begun.

DARROW

I'd like to bid good morning to our jury. To the fine Judge Murphy...

Darrow nods to the bench where JUDGE MURPHY, 50s, blushes slightly, awestruck at the famous lawyer in his midst.

DARROW

...To our prosecutor, Mr. Toms...

Darrow nods to ROBERT TOMS, 45, lanky and tightly wound, at the table for the prosecution. He forces a thin smile back, as Darrow turns his attention to the crowded press box, where White sits among a bevy of NEWSMEN and PHOTOGRAPHERS.

DARROW

...And, from the papers I've read in the past few days, to what I feel safe to say must surely be the finest press corps in the land.

Fawning chuckles from the press corps, eating this right up. Among them, we recognize H.L. Mencken, sitting next to White.

MENCKEN

(under his breath; amused)
 What a load.

DARROW

Now as you all may know, I am not a citizen of Detroit. My parents had not the foresight to see that the influence of growing up in a city as fine as this one would have broadened my mind in ways their own could not conceive. But I am a citizen of these United States. Which commits me to the same ideal that we all share: justice.

This wins affirming nods from press, jury and gallery. White beams; this guy is good. Toms sinks deeper in his seat.

TOMS

(sotto; to his CO-COUNSEL)
We're fucked.

Even the defendants seem pleased, Morse and Davis trading looks with Henry; maybe they're in good hands, after all.

DARROW

The people will try to tell you this is not a case of prejudice. That race and color never entered into it. This is a case of murder.
(beat)
I say hogwash.

He gestures to the defendants. The jury looks at them.

DARROW

Gentlemen, I am here to say that there is nothing in this case but prejudice. Eight colored men and one woman stand indicted, to be tried by twelve jurors, all of you white. Now you've all told this court that you'll be fair and decent in this matter, put your biases aside, and I believe you. But let's not fool ourselves pretending that we're here to do some justice for the victims.

He gestures to Eric in the gallery, seated upright and composed. Mary and June sit with him, next to a widow in a black veil, MRS. BREINER, 50. Gladys looks at them uneasily.

DARROW

I intend to prove the only victims in this case are these defendants.
(MORE)

DARROW (CONT'D)

That if one fact was inverted and nine whites had shot and killed a black while protecting their home against a negro mob, nobody would have dreamed of having them indicted. They'd be given medals.
 (he gestures to Sweet,
 Gladys, Henry, et al.)
 And so should they.

All eyes in the room on the defendants. Sweet sits proud. Mrs. Breiner can't be seen behind her veil, but she seems to be staring right at Gladys. Glaring at her. Gladys squirms.

INT. DETROIT HALL OF JUSTICE - CORRIDOR - LATE DAY

With court recessed, Judge Murphy poses for a photograph with Darrow. FLASHBULBS POP as the duo smiles for posterity.

NEARBY, the hired men are energized, admiring Darrow.

MURRAY

White man sure got a silver tongue.

LATTING

Guess we ain't swinging from the gallows yet.

DAVIS

Electric chair, remember?

Lattling and Murray look at Davis, remembering.

LATTING

Shit.

Henry sees someone in the crowd. It's Wilamae. Their eyes meet. Love between them, but now distance too.

WILAMAE

Hello Henry.

HENRY

Hey.
 (then)
 Thought you'd be gone by now.

WILAMAE

I leave tonight. Taking the train west.

HENRY

That sounds nice.

WILAMAE

That's my hope.

(then)

Maybe when you get your fine ass
outta here, you'll join me.

She kisses him and turns to go. He grabs her wrist.

HENRY

Wait for me.

WILAMAE

See you in Alaska, Henry Sweet.

(she pulls away and moves
off; bumping into Sweet)

Evening, doctor.

Sweet nods curtly and watches her depart. He looks to Henry.
Reading heartbreak in his eyes.

SWEET

Forget her.

White hustles up, snagging Sweet and Henry by the elbows.

WHITE

Let's get a photo for the papers.

White corrals the defendants into two rows, flanking Darrow,
as the press photographers await. Sweet looks to Joe Mack.

SWEET

Joe, fix my collar.

Mack seems caught off-guard by the presumption. But habit
overtakes resistance and he does so. Sweet draws Gladys
close to him as they pose for the picture. But just then:

MRS. BREINER

Murderers!

Heads turn. Mrs. Breiner has her veil up, revealing tear-
fraught eyes. She's pointing a bony finger right at Gladys.

MRS. BREINER

You're murderers!

DUNN

(he rushes up)

That's enough, ma'am. Let's go.

Dunn, the guard, guides her away. But Gladys remains frozen.
Blanched and trembling like she's seen the devil. From
across the corridor, Toms has clocked this, observing Gladys.

SWEET
 (notices and prods her)
 Control yourself, they're watching.

Gladys looks up. All the eyes and lenses of the press corps trained on her. Assaulting her. Their FLASHBULBS POP --

THE IMAGE FREEZES TO A PHOTOGRAPH IN BLACK AND WHITE.

INT. PRINTING PRESS - NIGHT

A TYPESETTER, 50s, black, composites the same photograph onto the front page layout of a magazine, "THE CRISIS," the official periodical of the NAACP. Fifteen cents a copy.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

White sits at his hotel desk, surrounded by a mosaic of steno notes and crumpled paper, pecking at his CORONA TYPEWRITER. A cigarette dangles from his lips, burning to ash.

As he types we HEAR the copy read in voiceover:

JOHNSON (V.O.)
 "With the good doctor and his
 people wrongfully accused, one ray
 of hope remains: the Great
 Defender, Clarence Darrow, late of
 the famed Monkey Trial in
 Tennessee..."

INT. HARLEM TOWNHOUSE - PRIVATE STUDY - NIGHT

James Weldon Johnson paces in his smoking jacket, on the phone, reading aloud from a TELEX PRINTOUT.

JOHNSON
 "...If Pontius Pilate had had Mr.
 Darrow to contend with, I daresay
 Christendom would have been short a
 savior. As it stands, the negro
 race has found its own."
 (he stops reading, rolls
 his eyes; into phone)
 You're joking with this.

EXT./INT. DOWNTOWN DETROIT - PHONE BOOTH - INTERCUT

A summer rain pours down in buckets outside the phone booth. White is shouting to be heard above the rain.

WHITE
 I thought it was a decent turn of
 phrase.

JOHNSON

We're already getting dinged for calling a white man to the rescue, now you're comparing him to Jesus?

WHITE

Black folks have been calling out to Jesus for a long time. At least Mr. Darrow finally showed up.

Johnson frowns at the heresy.

JOHNSON

Do me a favor. Don't say that in church tomorrow.

INT. BLACK BOTTOM AME CHURCH - DAY

A service is in full swing. The Gospel CHOIR sways on the stage behind White, as he speaks from the pulpit to a packed congregation of BLACK MEN and WOMEN in their Sunday best.

Signs announce a meeting of the "NAACP SWEET DEFENSE FUND." Copies of "The Crisis" magazine are being passed around.

WHITE

And I was on my knees last night,
and called on Jesus for his help.

SHOUTS of "Amen" from the gallery. White is channeling a very different energy, preaching his atheistic heart out.

WHITE

I said, Jesus, this man, this good Doctor Sweet who stands accused of taking life works as a healer for his people. Mending bodies the same way you mend our souls. And now the forces of injustice want to break his body and his spirit, too, and ours right with it -- but we won't let them, will we?

Hosannas from the crowd. A HAT is passed. Dollar bills and coins are stuffed in, poor people giving everything they can.

Then suddenly: CRASH! A BRICK flies through the stained glass window high above the pulpit, shattering it.

White takes cover as the glass rains down. SCREAMS of terror and confusion from the congregation. Folks flee for the exit. White, helpless, can only watch his donors disappear.

WHITE
 (gets his bearings;
 calling out)
 It's okay, folks. Stay calm...
 The Lord will see us through!

But it's too late. White is left alone. The collection hat remains abandoned on the floor amidst some scattered bills.

Jesus stares down from the broken stained glass window.

WHITE
 Yeah, I get it. We're on our own.

INT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - WOMEN'S BLOCK - NIGHT

Gladys sits alone in darkness. She HEARS the cell unlock and looks up to see Toms. He steps in and nods back to the Burly Guard, who shuts the heavy door behind him with a CLANG.

Gladys flinches at the noise. Toms notices.

TOMS
 Heck of a sound, isn't it? Can you imagine spending, say...another forty years listening to that door close day after day, and never being on the other side of it?
 (beat)
 And you, a mother no less.

He looks at Gladys. She just stares off at the darkness.

GLADYS
 Is there a point to this or is your purpose here to see me suffer?

TOMS
 You mistake me, Mrs. Sweet. I'm here to help.
 (she looks at him)
 I saw you there in court. How you reacted when the victim's wife berated you. You're not a murderer. You're a Christian. You don't want to be here and you don't deserve it, so I'll make you a deal. Tell me who fired the shots that night. Give me that one name, and you have my word the rest of you go free. You, back to the loving arms of Iva...isn't it?

Gladys stares at him, a beat, then starts to laugh.

TOMS
 (confused)
 Is something funny?

GLADYS
 Do you have children, Mr. Toms?

Toms hesitates, unsure where this is going.

TOMS
 Two. A son and a daughter.

GLADYS
 Nice. And the house that you
 provide for them...is it nice, too?

TOMS
 No mansion, but it keeps the
 elements at bay... Damned gazebo
 could use a coat of paint.

GLADYS
 (eyes widen)
 Gazebo? I love gazebos. And your
 neighbors? Good people are they?

Gladys stands and Toms backpedals slightly as she approaches.

TOMS
 Yes...I suppose.

GLADYS
 And what if a hundred of those good
 people surrounded your house and
 tore down that gazebo -- and
 threatened to bring harm to your
 nice son and daughter and your
 lovely wife -- what then, Mr. Toms?

She's in his space now; Toms is rattled.

TOMS
 I...I'm not the one on trial.

GLADYS
 No. I am. For something you just
 said you know I didn't do. And I
 don't blame you for that, Mr. Toms.
 We all have our roles to play.
 Yours gets you a gazebo. I was a
 doctor's wife. That made me the
 cat's meow in Black Bottom, let me
 tell you. My mother, she was a
 domestic -- still is.

(MORE)

GLADYS (CONT'D)

Never had much time for lotions and nice clothes -- except the ones she put on white folks. How it must feel to feed their children, tend to their needs, and watch them go through life like they live on a movie screen and you're only the audience. If she was standing here in my shoes, Mr. Toms, mark my words -- she'd take your deal.

TOMS

(pause)

Wise woman then.

GLADYS

No, just filled with fear. Of you. A white man in a cell, alone -- why she'd admit to crucifying Christ on the cross not to incur your wrath.

TOMS

I never raised a hand to you...

GLADYS

Didn't have to. You knew that. All you had to do was smile, and you want to know the truth? Inside I'm just as scared as she would be.

(pause; eye to eye)

But I am not my mother, Mr. Toms. And I will die before I take your deal.

Gladys holds Toms' gaze, unwavering, for an extended beat. Until at last, shaken, he looks away. Nods to the guard.

TOMS

We're finished.

Toms walks out as Gladys watches. The cell door clangs shut loudly in his wake. This time Gladys doesn't flinch.

INT. DETROIT HALL OF JUSTICE - HOLDING CELL - DAY

Sweet, Henry and the other male defendants mill about the large cell, dressing, grooming, preparing for a day in court.

Latting is reading aloud from a copy of "The Crisis."

LATTING

"Sweet is no less than a beacon for his people in these darkest times."

(MORE)

LATTING (CONT'D)

(then)

Shee-it, what about the rest of us?

DAVIS

(grabs the magazine)

Who cares? Man with my picture in the paper I'm gonna get so much tail the population of Black Bottom might hit a all new high.

Laughter from the group. Sweet approaches Henry, standing at the small tin mirror by the toilet, fastening his tie.

SWEET

How are your spirits, brother?
Still dwelling on that woman?

HENRY

(looks at him)

What woman?

Sweet smiles at his brother.

SWEET

That a boy.

HENRY

Guess after that show your man put on the other day I should be happy as a clam.

(then)

He really thinks that we can win?

SWEET

More than thinks it. A man of his sort wouldn't take a case he wasn't certain of. In fact, he's so certain, he won't even take a fee.

HENRY

Is that true?

SWEET

And by the state of his attire he could use one, too.

Henry laughs. Sweet joins him.

SWEET

...I think the man spends everything he earns on food.

It's the first moment of levity between the brothers in some time. Finally, the laughter stops. Henry becomes pensive.

HENRY

I know all this is my fault,
Ossian. We wouldn't be here if I --

SWEET

(cuts him off, firm)
Stop.

Their eyes meet. A world unspoken in this. Their secret;
the only ones who truly know what happened in that bedroom.

SWEET

We all make mistakes.

Henry nods.

A CLANG breaks the moment as a BAILIFF unlocks the door.
Sweet checks his attire in the mirror; noticing his cuffs.

SWEET

My links.
(then)
Hey Joe...

He looks around to see that Joe Mack isn't in the cell.

SWEET

Where's Joe?

MURRAY

Guard took him earlier this
morning. Figured he had a guest.

The news registers on Sweet as the bailiff prods him out.

INT. DETROIT HALL OF JUSTICE - COURTROOM - DAY

Joe Mack sits on the stand. A witness for the prosecution.

The other defendants wear a look of shock. Sweet seethes
with anger, glaring ice at Mack, who doesn't meet his gaze.

TOMS

And when was it that the Doctor
himself first picked up a gun?

JOE MACK

After that police came banging on
the door, I guess.

TOMS

And what do you suppose he meant to
do with it? The gun.

JOE MACK

What else? What he done. Shoot
hisself some white folks.

This rouses a MURMUR from the gallery, even among the blacks in back. White squirms in the press box as the other (white) reporters scribble frenzied notes. Things are going south.

MENCKEN

(sotto; with a smirk)
Sounds like a party.

White shoots him a dagger.

Henry and the other men trade dire glances. Gladys looks to Sweet, alarmed. Sweet bristles angrily, leans up to Darrow.

SWEET

(whispering)
He's lying.

DARROW

(not bothering to look up)
You don't say.

Darrow is hunched over his notebook, doodling a cartoon, ostentatiously paying as little attention to this as he can.

SWEET

You should object to this.

DARROW

You should have been a lawyer.

Darrow slides Sweet his CARTOON, a caricature of Sweet like Jesus on a cross, with Mack below holding three silver coins.

DARROW

And I should have been an artist.

TOMS

(continuing; to Mack)
You're saying the doctor shot those
men himself?

JOE MACK

Him or his hoodlum brother. They
was the only two men in that room.

TOMS

The upstairs bedroom. And when you
entered following the gunshots, you
found them both at the window? The
gun between them on the floor?

JOE MACK
Still smoking.

This wins an audible reaction from the gallery and jury.

TOM
(triumphantly)
Your witness, Mr. Darrow.

DARROW
(looks up from his doodle)
Is it now? Just this morning, that
same man was still my client. At
this rate, he'll be working for the
hangman before supper.

Darrow rises to his feet with a great show of effort for the jury, as though he can only barely just be bothered.

DARROW
(to Mack, offhand)
How many pieces of silver did the
people pay you for your testimony?

TOMS
Objection!

DARROW
On what grounds, sarcasm? If I
refrained from that I'd be a mute.

This wins LAUGHTER from the press. White, still uneasy; hoping Darrow has a rabbit up his sleeve.

TOMS
That'd be a novelty.

JUDGE MURPHY
Objection overruled. Try not to be
too cute here, Mr. Darrow.

DARROW
Wouldn't dream of it, your honor.
(to Joe Mack)
You can answer.

JOE MACK
I ain't took a nickel.

DARROW
Except the price of your own neck.
The People did agree to drop the
charge of murder, didn't they?

JOE MACK

(hesitates)

That's true. But I ain't done nothing to deserve no charges. All I did was help the Doctor.

DARROW

Help? That would suggest a friendly gesture, when in fact the Doctor paid you money, didn't he?

JOE MACK

Two bucks a day.

DARROW

No small sum for a man of little training and few prospects.

JOE MACK

If you say so.

DARROW

I do say so. In fact, I say it's a job most men would be grateful for. He even tailored you a uniform.

This prompts a darker look from Mack, a glare at Sweet.

JOE MACK

Yes, sir. He had me wear it everyday, too.

DARROW

(picking up on something)
Is that right? Even hot days? Summer days? And that silly little cap, too?

JOE MACK

Even when no one was around but him.

DARROW

The tyrant. Now I see why you'd betray your race to hang him.

This raises a reaction from the black folks in the gallery.

TOMS

Objection --

DARROW

That's why we're here, isn't it?
 (to Joe Mack)
 Isn't it?

JOE MACK

He ain't give a damn about our
 race! Never did. He thinks he's
 better than the rest of us.

DARROW

Heaven forbid. A medical
 physician. That's a fine sight
 better than a man who drives a car.

JOE MACK

Maybe it is. But at least I ain't
 pretending to be something else.
 You trying to get these folks to
 think he did this for our race? He
 did this for hisself. That's why
 we're here. 'Cause he thought the
 white man's water was a little
 sweeter but it ain't, is it Doctor?
 (he stares at Sweet)
 How it taste now?

Sweet just stares back, fuming. But Toms has clearly scored
 a point. Even the black folks in the back gallery are
 shaking their heads in scorn. Mencken cocks a brow at White.

Darrow remains composed. But he, too, knows it ain't good.

DARROW

Thank you for your objectivity.
 (to the court)
 I'm done.

INT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - VISITING CELL - DAY

Sweet flings a metal chair across the floor, livid with rage.

SWEET

How dare he? How dare he! I was
 good to that man. Let him drive a
 car he couldn't have afforded in a
 million years...gave him a uniform.
 I exposed him to a world most
 colored would die to see!

Sweet kicks the chair again. Darrow watches with a wry look.

DARROW

And what exactly did the chair do?

SWEET

Everything's a joke to you.

DARROW

It was a stunt. He took a deal to sell you out. The jury sees that.

SWEET

They hear him say I'm a tyrant and a climber --

DARROW

They hear a poor, sad sap who wants to stick it to his boss. Leave it at that.

SWEET

That's easy for you. It's not your reputation on the line. The way they looked at me --

DARROW

Untie my hands then.
(Sweet looks at him)
A strategy of self defense --

SWEET

No.

DARROW

Admit to firing the shots and make them understand it --

SWEET

No.

DARROW

Put them in your shoes --

SWEET

I won't admit to something that I didn't do!

DARROW

You'd rather fry for it?

SWEET

I'm not some ruffian. I won't be seen that way. I'm a doctor!

DARROW

Don't think I don't know it.

SWEET

You're mocking me.

DARROW

No, I'm starting to think you're everything that driver said you are. A man so full of pride he cares more about his reputation than his neck! His family's!

Long beat. This lands on Sweet. But he meets Darrow's gaze.

SWEET

You've never seen a black man of honor, have you?

DARROW

(stares, a beat; no use)

It seems I'm about to see one all the way to his funeral.

INT. BLACK BOTTOM AME CHURCH - NIGHT

The stained glass window has been boarded up. This is another meeting of the "NAACP SWEET DEFENSE FUND." But now copies of "The Crisis" lay in stacks; there's nobody here.

The collection hat is empty. White sits beside it, glum.

DARROW (O.S.)

Turn out like this probably won't stir Jesus from his slumber.

White looks up to see Darrow in the aisle. He steps up and slumps into the pew beside White, exhales wearily.

DARROW

...Probably too busy saving kids from burning buildings anyway.

WHITE

Folks in the community got wind of today's testimony. Now they think Sweet's just another Uncle Tom.

DARROW

You disagree with the assessment?

WHITE

(considers it)

Let you in on a little secret, Mr. Darrow. Colored people can be assholes, too. Just turns out we put our money on a big one.

Darrow smiles, then looks out at the empty church.

DARROW

Maybe, too, a finger can be pointed
at the fickle masses.

WHITE

(knows he's right)
Black folks don't get heroes very
often. Makes it hurt worse when we
lose them.

DARROW

"We?" Don't tell me you actually
believed in this one, Mr. White. I
took you for a level-headed cynic.

White regards him; maybe a little surprised himself.

WHITE

Me too.

(pause)

When I was young I caught hell from
both sides. Wasn't white enough to
be white, or black enough to be
black. Some point I had to choose.

DARROW

Perhaps that's where you and the
good doctor differ.

WHITE

Except he never had that choice.
Thought he did. Spent his whole
life becoming what he thought he
had to be to be respected. But he
couldn't change his color.

Darrow considers this, a beat.

DARROW

You say you've never been a lawyer?
That was quite a closing argument.
(off White's smile)

This trial isn't over, Mr. White.
But I need facts. If Sweet won't
allow a strategy of self-defense, I
need to know what really happened
that night. Who fired those shots?
(beat)

Find that, and maybe we can win.

TITLE CARD: CHAPTER FIVE "THE WAR HERO"

INT. FORD ASSEMBLY PLANT - MAIN FLOOR - DAY

The factory in full swing. Workmen labor on the line, welding parts of a brand new Model-T. On a catwalk above, Eric paces with a clipboard, limping on his game leg.

SUPERVISOR/O'BRYAN (O.S.)
Houghberg.

Eric looks up to see his SUPERVISOR (O'BRYAN), 50, motioning from an office door. For a moment, Eric's color drains.

Then he sees White is standing at O'Bryan's side.

O'BRYAN
This man wants to have a word.
(then; to White)
That's O'Bryan with a "y."

WHITE
In big bold letters.

O'Bryan withdraws into his office, leaving White with Eric, who seems visibly relieved he hasn't just been fired.

WHITE
May I join you for lunch?

EXT. FORD ASSEMBLY PLANT - DAY

Scattered workmen eat sack lunches, a brief respite from the grind. Eric is rolling a cigarette as White looks on.

WHITE
As I told you, I'm a newsman and I'd like to paint a picture for my readers of that night. The sights and sounds. All that commotion.

ERIC
Already told the cops what I know.

WHITE
And I've seen their sequence of events. Warm night. Sundown. Just folks out on the street. They say everything was peaceable until the negroes fired shots.

ERIC
Reckon that sounds right then.

Eric lights his cigarette, inhales.

WHITE

I just thought a man like you,
who's been in war, might have a
keener recollection of specifics.

ERIC

There was some hollering. Then
someone said there was a gun.

WHITE

And that's when the shots came?

ERIC

Things happened fast.

WHITE

See that's what's bugging me.
Things happening so fast. How do
we know those first shots came from
the house at all? There must have
been more guns in the crowd.
(then; faux casual)
You had one, didn't you?

Eric looks at White.

ERIC

I did.

WHITE

For what purpose?

ERIC

Lieutenant Norton gave it to me.
For protection.

WHITE

Not to fire at the negroes?

Eric stares.

ERIC

I have no quarrel with negroes.

WHITE

No. Of course.
(checks his steno notes)
In fact, you served in a mixed
division, didn't you? Fort Monroe?

Eric bristles slightly, uneasy at what White appears to know.

ERIC

That's right.

WHITE
Never any conflict?

ERIC
No more than usual. Found a home
there with all sorts... Is this
about that night or not?

White clocks his agitation; then checks his steno, smiles.

WHITE
Just one more question. Your time
in the Army. Living with all
sorts. How come you left? Man
makes it through a war unharmed,
he's looking at a long career...
Instead, you're here.

The question flat-foots Eric. Hanging in the air a beat.
Just then a BELL rings, ending lunch. Breaking the moment.

ERIC
I have to go.

Eric hurries off, returning to work as White looks on with
mounting interest; like a bloodhound on a scent.

EXT. HALL OF JUSTICE - DAY

Darrow emerges from a TAXI, looking weary, probably hungover.
He lumbers toward the court steps.

WHITE (O.S.)
Mr. Darrow!

White rushes up beside him. Matching his sluggish pace.

DARROW
Where do you get your energy, Mr.
White? Must be the mongrel blood.

WHITE
I think I have something.

DARROW
Do you now? I ought to warn you
disappointing me before my morning
scotch risks harm unfathomable.

White holds out a FILE: "U.S. ARMY." Darrow regards it.

DARROW
What is this?

INT. HALL OF JUSTICE - COURTROOM - DAY

Eric sits on the witness stand. His wife Mary and daughter June look on from the packed gallery, wearing their Sunday best. Next to them sits Lieutenant Norton, in dress blues.

TOMS

I hate to ask this, Mr. Houghberg.
But would you show it to the jury?

Eric hesitates, then rolls up his pant leg to reveal: a WOOD PROSTHESIS. He unstraps the buckles to hold it up for view. The gallery emits a quiet gasp. Jurors lean forward in their seats, titillated. It's a moment of pure theater.

ERIC

Some days I still feel it.

TOMS

I'm sure you do.

NEWSMEN in the press box scribble down the quotes.

MENCKEN

(sotto; to White)
Look out, Walt, I think they just
got a leg up on you.

White cocks a brow at Mencken as Toms continues to the jury.

TOMS

Thank you, Mr. Houghberg.
(to Darrow)
Your witness.

Darrow remains seated as per usual, paying little mind. He puts the last few touches on a doodle without yet looking up.

DARROW

Just out for a stroll that evening,
were you, Mr. Houghberg? When you
strolled into a hail of bullets?

ERIC

No, sir.

DARROW

What then? Star gazing?

Eric looks to Norton in the gallery. He nods reassuringly.

ERIC

I had no meaning to harm anybody,
if that's what you're asking.

DARROW

Not precisely, but I'll take it.

Darrow rises slowly, hooks his thumbs into his vest holes.

DARROW

So you were out amongst the crowd but had no intent to cause any of the negroes harm, is that it?

ERIC

Yes, sir.

DARROW

And the gun you carried? That was just in case the family inside got rowdy? Maybe the little one took to a slingshot?

A chuckle from the room, as Darrow snaps the Army file off his table, pacing toward the witness. White leans in.

DARROW

You served in the Army, didn't you?

ERIC

I did.

DARROW

(referencing the file)

Don't be humble now, you were a war hero. Silver Star; Master Sergeant stripes. After the war you were on track to be an officer -- but then you left. Why was that? Can't be you found the fumes of an auto-plant so alluring you turned down a life of service and distinction?

ERIC

(hesitates)

I was discharged.

DARROW

So I see. And why was that? I read here you suffered episodes?

Eric stiffens. A MURMUR ripples through the gallery. Mary looks to Norton to be reassured. But he seems stunned.

MARY

(sotto; urgent)

What is he talking about?

TOMS
Objection!

Heads turn to Toms, roused now from his seat and flustered.

JUDGE MURPHY
What for, Mr. Toms?

TOMS
I...I'm not sure.

JUDGE MURPHY
In that case, overruled.
(to Eric)
You may answer the question.

Eric sees Mary staring at him. He looks away, ashamed.

ERIC
I...froze in situations.

DARROW
Situations, or combat?

ERIC
Combat at first. Then it started happening on base...any time that I got startled. By loud noises. Or confusion.

DARROW
Shell shock. Is that the term?

ERIC
I guess.

DARROW
Isn't it true, one time in such a state you even attacked an officer?

ERIC
They said so.

DARROW
But you couldn't remember.

ERIC
They called it a "fugue."
(then)
But it doesn't happen anymore.

Now the gallery is in a mild uproar; whispers rippling like waves. Eric looks to Mary in the gallery. She's mortified.

DARROW

Oh no? So take us back to Garland Avenue. You testified that you were standing in the street. A mob of people all around you. Loud noise, confusion. Someone yelled they saw a gun. Then what?

ERIC

I was on the ground.

DARROW

Next thing you knew?

ERIC

Yes.

DARROW

Just like that? With no recollection of the shot itself?

ERIC

(after a beat)

Yes.

DARROW

Which means it could have come from anywhere -- even you?

TOMS

(on his feet)

Objection!

A furor from the gallery. But Darrow is unrelenting.

DARROW

But isn't it possible, given your history, that your mind froze while your body still attacked -- just like it attacked that officer -- that you fired the shots yourself, hitting Breiner and your own leg!

TOMS

Objection, objection --

I --

ERIC

DARROW

(in his face now)

You what?

ERIC

I don't remember.

(then; ashamed)

I don't know.

Total silence in the courtroom. Darrow milks it for a beat.

DARROW

Of course. And nor can we.

EXT. HALL OF JUSTICE - CORRIDOR - DAY

Court in recess. Mary pushes through a hubbub of departing bodies with June in her arms, tears streaking her cheeks.

ERIC

(rushes after her)

Mary!

He grabs her arm and she wheels back at him, eye to eye.

MARY

Is it true?

ERIC

(hesitates)

I'd never hurt you.

Mary tugs free of his grip, repelled. She rushes off.

ERIC

Mary wait --

Several members of the press spot Eric, blocking his way.

PRESS

Mr. Houghberg, is it true you're shell shocked?/ Did you shoot at the negroes?/ Did you kill Breiner and shoot yourself to cover it up?

Eric looks into the crowd, but Mary is gone. Other folks are staring at him, neighbors and coworkers. He spots his supervisor, O'Bryan, who looks away when their eyes meet.

And for a moment, Eric stands there. Frozen. Shell-shocked.

NORTON (O.S.)

He's got nothing to say. Let him be!

Cutting through the crowd like a knife to butter is Norton. He makes his way to Eric and ushers him around a corner to:

INT. HALL OF JUSTICE - ANTEROOM - CONTINUOUS

A quiet area. Norton signals to some UNIFORM OFFICERS to keep the press at bay. Eric is still flustered, recovering.

NORTON
Let me give you a lift.

ERIC
No. No, I need to go --

Norton stops him with a palm and Eric lashes out, grabbing Norton firmly by the collar and pinning him against the wall.

ERIC
Why did you give me that gun? Why?

NORTON
I...I didn't know...

ERIC
I never asked for this!

The other officers rush up to intercede. But Eric releases Norton and limps away. As Norton looks on, guilt-ridden.

EXT. HALL OF JUSTICE - DAY

From the court steps, White watches Eric hurry off. He seems torn. Behind him, Darrow emerges from a gaggle of press.

DARROW
Well done, Mr. White. Fine job.

WHITE
You think it's true?

DARROW
True?

WHITE
That he fired the shots?
(then, conflicted)
Can't help feeling for the guy.

Darrow looks at White, bemused.

DARROW
That's the trouble with your race,
White. You really think you people
ought to win because it's right.

Darrow moves off. Leaving White behind him, speechless.

DARROW
(to himself, delighted)
Shell shock...what a world.

EXT. GARLAND AVENUE - HOUGHBERG HOUSE - NIGHT

Eric limps up the porch to find the door has been left ajar. A pair of WOMAN'S BLOOMERS lays fallen on the threshold.

Eric picks them up, confused. He enters the house.

INT. HOUGHBERG HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is in a shambles. Closets and drawers are open, emptied out. Eric limps from room to room in rising panic.

ERIC

Mary? June?

Eric stops short, seeing something. A FOLDED NOTE rests on the bureau. His name written in script. They're gone.

INT. PADDY WAGON, MOVING - NIGHT

The defendants sit in the back of a paddy wagon, handcuffed and jostled by the rutted road. They're in high spirits.

MORSE

You see how he shook that peckerwood? I'd say the motherfucker went white, but he already was!

The others laugh. Sweet, beaming, looks to Henry.

SWEET

Told you brother, did I not? The worm has turned.

HENRY

(not sure)
Looks like.

SWEET

Count on it.
(louder, to the group)
Gentlemen, mark your calendars.
When we get out, dinner's on me.

The men hoot approval. The good cheer carries into:

INT. PADDY WAGON, MOVING - FRONT CAB - SAME

The front cab of the paddy wagon. Norton is seated shotgun, stewing as the sounds of laughter filter from the rear.

He glances to the Burly Guard behind the wheel.

INT. HOUGHBERG HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Eric sits in the dark, nursing sips of whiskey from a bottle. In his other hand, he holds the pair of woman's bloomers.

Eric stares at them.

EXT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - REAR GATE - NIGHT

TORRENTIAL RAIN batters the prison compound. The Burly Guard leads Sweet and the defendants through a gate.

Sweet looks back to see Norton watching from the window of the paddy wagon. Staring coldly, as it drives away.

INT. HOUGHBERG HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Eric holds the whiskey bottle in one hand. The bloomers in the other, balled into a fist. He stuffs the bloomers down the bottle neck, upending it to douse them in the whiskey.

He holds the bottle up: a makeshift Molotov cocktail.

EXT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - YARD - NIGHT

Rain continues falling as the defendants trudge through a gate into the muddy yard.

MORSE

So what is it we eating, Doc? I just want some real food. Slop they giving us may as well be dog.

DAVIS

Might actually be dog.

Laughter echoes in the yard. Henry pauses in his tracks.

HENRY

Hold up.

Sweet and the other men follow his gaze. The Burly Guard is nowhere to be seen. The defendants have been left alone.

SIX WHITE PRISONERS step from the shadows in the yard. The LEADER holds a chain. Sweet goes still, horror in his eyes.

EXT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - NIGHT

The street is quiet. Eric stands in the pouring rain outside the vacant bungalow. A lone man staring at his monolith.

He holds the whiskey bottle in his hand. Looking down, he toes at something half-buried in the mud: it's Sweet's American flag; pole broken, fabric torn and drenched in mud.

EXT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - YARD - NIGHT

The white prisoners loom in closer as Morse and Davis stand their ground. Murray, Latting, and Washington behind them.

Henry moves to join them but Sweet holds him back.

SWEET

(to Henry; firm)

It's what they want...

The white prisoners stop mere inches from Morse and the others. The leader staring like a mad dog, eye-to-eye.

Rain pelts down between them.

MORSE

Back off, crackers.

The leader smiles. Then spits right in Morse's eye. Morse lunges at him, joined by the others -- and the fight is on.

EXT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Eric sets a lit match to the bloomers, igniting the cocktail.

EXT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - YARD - NIGHT

The white prisoners and black defendants continue brawling. Mean and sloppy. Latting and the hired men are no match for the convicts, gutting hard but taking a beating. Morse and Davis have some fight in them but they're outnumbered. Davis goes down first. Then Morse takes a chain-whip to his jaw.

HENRY

Morse!

EXT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - NIGHT

With a primal scream, Eric flings the flaming bottle through the air onto the roof, where it explodes...

EXT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - YARD - NIGHT

The white leader chain-whips Morse again as he lays prone. Henry tries to join the fray but Sweet restrains him.

HENRY
 (struggling)
 What's wrong with you? They're
 killing him!

SWEET
 I'm trying to protect you!

EXT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Eric. Lit by the glow of flames. Watching the fire spread across the pitched roof of the bungalow...

EXT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - YARD - NIGHT

The brightness of a SPOTLIGHT bathes the yard as an ALARM BELL sounds. The white inmates scatter, leaving Latting, Murray, Washington, and Davis, groaning in the mud.

Morse is face down, motionless.

Henry breaks free of Sweet and rushes over, flips Morse to his back. His head, a bloody pulp, flops lifelessly.

HENRY
 No. Morse, brother, wake up...

SWEET
 (stepping up)
 Move aside now. Let me see him.

HENRY
 Stay away from him!

Henry tackles Sweet into the mud. Straddling him, shaking him violently, furiously, with tears and hatred in his eyes.

HENRY
 You killed him... You killed him!

PRISON GUARDS rush in, dragging Henry off. As Sweet looks on, stunned, shattered. Bleeding from a cut above his brow.

EXT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Eric slowly turns and limps, with effort, back toward his house across the street. Behind him, flames lick the bungalow, but Eric doesn't watch. Just as a FIRE WAGON rumbles up, he reenters his house and shuts the door.

TITLE CARD: CHAPTER SIX "THE SHOOTER"

INT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - WOMEN'S BLOCK - DAY

A new GUARD waits to the side as Gladys regards Sweet through the cell bars. His eyes are bloodshot. His garb still caked in mud. The cut above his brow is stitched and bandaged.

GLADYS
Henry did that?

SWEET
He didn't mean it. The boy's distraught. He'll come to his senses when he realizes that damned thug brought it on himself.

Gladys stares, sees through the thin veneer of confidence.

GLADYS
Promise me when this is over we'll go home.

SWEET
Soon.

GLADYS
No. Our home. Where we belong...
Not that place.

Sweet's expression hardens.

GLADYS
(continues; urgent)
We'll find someplace new. Far away from here -- like Paris, remember?

SWEET
That house is mine. I didn't let them take it and I won't let you.

GLADYS
I'll die in that house, Ossian!
(he stares at her)
...I dreamed it. And the angels, though they saw me, left my soul to linger there for all eternity.

SWEET
You're feverish.

GLADYS
It's punishment. For pride.
Idolatry.

SWEET

Stop.

GLADYS

They're my sins, too. I always wanted more than others -- my way of separating from the common folk.

(she grabs his wrist)

Ossian, that thing is in you too. Maybe it's in all negroes. The want to feel better 'bout being yourself. Like a real person, not some...afterthought that's just plain there. But a house ain't gonna calm that feeling.

She reaches for his cheek but he stops her; stares coldly.

SWEET

I won't back down. I won't.

GLADYS

(she looks at him; and it breaks her heart because)

I know.

SWEET

(after a pause; stern)

Be presentable tomorrow. You stand before the world with my last name.

The words strike Gladys like a slap. Sweet walks away.

INT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - VISITING CELL - NIGHT

A newspaper hits the table. Headline reads: "NEGRO PRISONERS INCITE RACE RIOT; 1 DEAD; CITY ON EDGE."

WHITE

We're finished...

White is pacing. Darrow remains seated, nursing a hangover. They are alone here; waiting for their clients to arrive.

DARROW

(rolls his eyes)

Don't be dramatic.

WHITE

Easy for you to say. You won't be the one they lynch when this whole city erupts into a race war.

DARROW

Correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. White. You picked this fight to win it. To prove for all the world that white supremacy can be defeated by the very system that created it. By the time this trial's over, you'll have donations in the bank to back a dozen more. A permanent defense fund. The courts can be the battleground where you win your equality. Isn't that the idea?

WHITE

If we survive that long.

DARROW

We won the day in court.

WHITE

And the court of opinion? Even jurors read the newspaper, Mr. Darrow. They have families and children to think of, and this tells them our clients...our whole race is a public threat. Acquit them and a riot breaks out. Do you know how many black men I've seen hanged for less than that?
(tosses the newspaper)
We're finished.

Silence hangs between them for a beat. Then, from off:

SWEET (O.S.)

I want to testify.

White and Darrow turn to see Sweet standing at the cell door, accompanied by the same guard; they've just come from Gladys.

SWEET

You're right, Mr. White. That jury has no reason to believe we're anything but thugs and criminals.

(then)

So put me on the stand. Let me show them otherwise.

DARROW

No. Absolutely not.

WHITE

He's right, it's too risky --

DARROW

Toms would have a field day --

SWEET

I'm not asking for permission.

This stops them both. Sweet regards them.

SWEET

(to Darrow, then White)

You're scared I'll ruin your reputation...and you're afraid I'll hurt your cause. But this is my life. My neck. And if I'm going to swing by it, I'll do that on my own terms. I want to speak.

With that, Sweet turns and walks back out the cell door, led off by the guard. White and Darrow look at one another.

DARROW

(after a pause)

Well shoot. I need a drink.

INT. UPSCALE SPEAKEASY - DOWNTOWN DETROIT - NIGHT

A higher end establishment than what we saw in Black Bottom. A BLACK BAND plays buoyant ragtime as scantily clad FLAPPER SHOWGIRLS shimmy on the stage. The crowd is all white.

Darrow pours champagne at a corner table. White beside him.

DARROW

You're seeing culture at its finest, Mr. White. Don't get me wrong, the prohibiting of alcohol is damndest folly and a senseless law by any measure, but our nation's nightlife has become a great deal more exciting since we forced it underground.

(slides White a drink)

Drink up.

WHITE

We need to do something.

DARROW

And that we are. One of my favorite things, in fact.

Darrow sips his drink and savors it. White rankles.

WHITE

Those men on the jury don't ride chauffeured limousines. They don't have medical degrees.

(MORE)

WHITE (CONT'D)

All they do have in this world is comfort in the fact at least they're better than the negro. If you put Sweet on that stand, he'll prove that wrong. They'll hate him for it.

DARROW

Most probably.

WHITE

You aren't worried?

DARROW

Worry is a futile concept, Mr. White. Be there calm or storm, the sun will rise.

Darrow finishes his drink and pours another.

WHITE

Must be nice to live in that world.

DARROW

Forged over time, my friend. And champagne helps the sentiment.

(then)

Tell me something, I've been curious. You don't look like a negro. I mean, I understand there must be heritage to think of. Some percentage of the blood, for what that's worth. But it seems to me that you could have the best of both worlds, if you wanted. Why live your life carrying the cross for a group of people who wouldn't even welcome you to Sunday dinner if they saw you on the street?

WHITE

Why do you do what you do?

DARROW

To get laid.

(shrugs)

Mainly that. Plus, I can't help being contrary. The world's so damned wrong most of the time, it feels good being a little right.

(beat)

But I still take vacations.

Darrow sips his drink and stares out at the stage show. White regards him. No sign of any great emotion. Then:

WHITE

I watched my father lynched during a riot in Atlanta when I was six years old. He was no darker than I am on the outside. But he thought he could pass. Did it for a time. Then they strung him up and burned him, and I watched little children my own age pick off pieces of his flesh for souvenirs. His body was pretty black by that point so it worked out fine.

DARROW

(after a long pause)
Christ.

White takes his drink and downs it in a swallow. Stands.

WHITE

There's a redhead over there. I think she's seen your picture in the paper. Have fun, Mr. Darrow.

Darrow watches him walk off.

DARROW

Good advice.

INT. WAYNE COUNTY JAIL - CELL - NIGHT

Henry sits on the edge of his bunk. He looks up at the SOUND of footsteps. From the shadows, Dunn appears at the barred door, unlocks it and steps aside, revealing White.

WHITE

(to Dunn)
That's Dunn with two "n"s, right?

Dunn nods and shuts the door behind him, walking off. White waits for the footsteps to recede. Then:

WHITE

Your brother wants to take the stand himself. He wants to testify.

HENRY

(short laugh)
He always did dream of an audience with white folks. Now he's got it.

WHITE

You need to talk him out of it.

HENRY

You're not too observant for a writer, Mr. White. Nobody talks that man out of anything. He gets his mind set on a way, he takes it.

WHITE

If he says the wrong thing up there, those men will hang him. And the rest of you with him.

HENRY

Yep.

WHITE

The prospect of death sits well with you?

HENRY

Look around you, man. If this ain't death, it's cousin to -- and ain't no way them crackers letting our black asses out of here. Soon as them bullets went into them white folks, our fate was set. All else is just talk for talk's sake.

WHITE

Did Toms offer you a deal?

HENRY

(regards him; shrugs)
They say if I put it all on Ossian they'll hit us with public disturbance and we're free.

WHITE

So why aren't we having this talk at a juke in Black Bottom?

Henry stares forward for a long beat. Into the shadows.

HENRY

I remember when me and Ossian was kids... Maybe twelve or thirteen, we'd go down to this watering hole to fish. On this particular day we were with the Hillman brothers. Tommy and Kyle -- their daddy was a timber man so they got prime wood to make the best poles.

(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)

And man was them fish biting...
 (he smiles at the thought)
 Across the way this older lady,
 Miss Anna, was fishing with her
 granddaughter. We started us a
 little competition of sorts -- she
 catch a fish and stick her tongue
 out, then we would catch a fish and
 point back... It was a good time.
 On a fine, fine day.

Henry's disposition darkens.

HENRY

Then these two white boys came. We
 stopped playing the game. No more
 flirting, no more fun. Just
 fishing. One of the white boys got
 hisself a bite and got so out of
 sorts he slipped and fell into the
 water. We all looked away like you
 was supposed to, but Miss Anna's
 granddaughter... She laughed.

(pause)

Now me, Kyle and Tommy was way
 bigger than them white boys, so we
 move to step between, but Ossian
 blocked our way. He told us to
 gather up our fish and poles and go
 about our business.

(tears push to his eyes)

Miss Anna tried to tell them white
 boys that the girl didn't mean no
 harm, but they wasn't listening.
 As we walked away I looked back to
 see the one beat Miss Anna in the
 head with a flat rock. And her
 granddaughter... They did things.
 I can still hear her screaming.
 And Ossian? He whistled as we
 trekked the road. "Sonny Boy."
 You know the Jolson tune?

White is dumbstruck. Henry looks at him.

HENRY

I will not turn against my brother.
 But whether we get out of here or
 not, I'll never speak to him again.

EXT. DETROIT STREETS - DAYBREAK

The paddy wagon makes its way through town: BLACK SUPPORTERS
 cheer from church steps. WHITE PROTESTERS jeer and catcall.

The entire city is on edge.

INT. PADDY WAGON, MOVING - SAME

The defendants sit in silence. Sweet, dressed in his best suit, sits alone. Embracing neither the jeers nor cheers.

Henry is seated on the other bench. Their eyes don't meet.

INT. HALL OF JUSTICE - COURTROOM - DAY

The room is well beyond capacity, all silent. Sweet is on the witness stand. The BAILIFF holds a Bible.

BAILIFF

Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

SWEET

I do.

Darrow casts a glance to White over his shoulder, whispering.

DARROW

That's what I'm afraid of.
(then louder; as he stands
and Sweet takes his seat)
Dr. Sweet, you take this oath of your own volition, do you not?

SWEET

I do.

DARROW

You had no obligation.

SWEET

No.

DARROW

In fact no one, myself included, wanted you to testify here in your own defense.

SWEET

We had a decent argument about it.

This wins a minor chuckle from the crowd, even the jury. A good start. White allows himself an exhale. Darrow smiles.

DARROW

That we did. I warned you of the risks. If you say the wrong word.
(MORE)

DARROW (CONT'D)

Put the wrong intonation in your voice. Sit in a way that strikes these jurors as too casual. Or too confident. Grow rattled under cross-examination. Succumb to a single flash of anger... Whatever sympathy our side has won will be lost. Our defense destroyed. You understand all that?

SWEET

I do.

DARROW

But here you are.

SWEET

I want them to know the man I am. In my own words.

DARROW

Very well. Let's start with the obvious. You are a negro man.

SWEET

Yes.

DARROW

A grandson of slaves on both sides.

SWEET

Yes.

DARROW

And you yourself were born and reared south of the Mason-Dixon line, in a backwater of Florida where horrors could and would befall the negro man with frequency and prejudice.

SWEET

I saw things.

DARROW

Horrors.

SWEET

Yes.

DARROW

The lynching of a man, his wife, and their six children because they had the temerity to own a piano.

Sweet continues to respond in monosyllables, without emotion.

SWEET

Yes.

DARROW

You saw them strung up by white men while your momma hid you in the reeds with a cotton gag plugged in your mouth so that you wouldn't make a noise and be discovered.

SWEET

Yes.

DARROW

You were how old?

SWEET

Four.

The court is breathless, silent, as the horror resonates.

DARROW

Four years after that, you left the South. Came north. Looking for that America we're told about, where law is just and life's not cheap. But did the horrors end?

SWEET

They did not.

DARROW

No, you watched brothers of your fraternity in college -- a negro college -- the best men of your race shot down in a white pogrom.

SWEET

Yes.

DARROW

While policemen stood in silence.

SWEET

Yes.

DARROW

You yourself were nearly killed by fire when white men torched the colored section of Chicago.

SWEET

Yes.

DARROW

Where you were practicing to be a doctor.

SWEET

Yes.

DARROW

In fact if I asked how many violent deaths of black men at the hands of whites you've witnessed with your own eyes, close as I stand next to you, could you tell me? Could you even count that high?

SWEET

(pause)

No.

DARROW

And every one, dead at the hands of whites. You'll forgive me, Doctor, but after all that, all that horror you saw done to black men just for the crime of being black, tell me why in God's name did you move your family to Garland Avenue, a street you knew full well was lily white?

SWEET

Because I don't believe that's what defines us.

DARROW

Color.

SWEET

I believed they would see me for me.

DARROW

An upstanding citizen.

SWEET

Yes.

DARROW

A proud American.

SWEET

Yes.

DARROW
You even hung a flag that day.

This detail catches Sweet. The first hint of emotion as we:

FLASHBACK: EXT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - DAY

Moving day. The moment we saw. Sweet unrolling something from a pole: a crisp new AMERICAN FLAG. His VOICE is heard:

SWEET (V.O.)
I bought it as a student, years ago on a July Fourth. Always hoped one day I'd have a place to hang it. That's why I picked that house. My own wife doesn't know it. Never told a soul. But I knew I had to have it when I saw it had a little notch already cut into the porch post. Just the right size.

Sweet slots the flag into the notch. It flaps in the breeze.

RETURN TO SCENE.

DARROW
It was flying as those people gathered there to drive you out.

SWEET
Yes.

DARROW
You thought when they saw you, a man who works hard, at the top of his profession -- an American -- with no vices other than the ones we all have as people, you'd be accepted as a neighbor.

SWEET
Yes.

DARROW
And what was that thought met with?

Darrow stares at Sweet, confronting him. A beat.

SWEET
It looked like a human sea.

DARROW
The mob.

SWEET

Yes.

DARROW

You gave those folks a chance to see you for the man you are, and yet they came at you like an enemy. That's how they repaid your faith.

This is hard for Sweet.

SWEET

Yes.

DARROW

But here you are. Giving twelve white men a chance to judge you the same way. After all that, you still believe that they can do that fairly? You put faith in them?

SWEET

(after a pause)

Yes. I do.

Darrow looks at the jury. Meets their eyes, judgment in his.

DARROW

Let's hope they deserve it.
(beat; to Toms)
Your witness.

Darrow returns to his chair near White, who leans in.

WHITE

(sotto; hopeful)
That wasn't so bad.

DARROW

That was the easy part.

Toms rises to his feet, addresses Sweet.

TOMS

You say you're here to show this court what kind of man you are. So what kind are you. A decent man?

SWEET

I hope to be.

TOMS

A law abiding man?

SWEET

Yes.

TOMS

Well that's debatable. How about a leader of your own community?

Toms gestures to the black folks in the gallery.

SWEET

I am an accomplished man.

TOMS

Who abandoned his community.

SWEET

(flustered)

No.

TOMS

Didn't you, though? Isn't that why we're all here? You were a leader in Black Bottom. A doctor folks looked up to. Trusted with their lives. Paid hard-earned money. They made you the successful man you are. And you left them. First chance you got. You moved right out. To Garland Avenue. In a chauffeured limousine. To live among the whites.

SWEET

It wasn't about that.

TOMS

Then what was it?

SWEET

I have a family. I wanted to provide. Give them a better situation...

TOMS

This family? The ones for whom your actions led right here?

Toms points to Henry, Gladys. Their stares are cold.

SWEET

We were attacked!

TOMS

So you're a victim?

SWEET
I didn't say that.

TOMS
Then you're a murderer?

Toms is up in Sweet's face now, rattling him. This back-and-forth continuing at full-speed, almost overlapping:

SWEET
No --

TOMS
Well you must be one or the other!

SWEET
You don't understand --

TOMS
Then tell me! Tell us all what kind of man you are! A selfish man?

SWEET
No --

TOMS
A prideful man?

SWEET
No --

TOMS
You want to know who I see, Doctor? I see an angry man. That's why you had your brother shoot those men.

SWEET
No!

TOMS
You hated those white men.

SWEET
No --

TOMS
Because they hated you!

SWEET
Because they made me hate me!

The outburst echoes in the court. The gallery reacts. White and Darrow wince. Sweet is shaken with emotion. Simmering.

SWEET

(emotion pouring forth)
 I came there in peace. I put up a
 flag. My friends laughed at me.
 My own brother...
 (he looks to Henry, who
 meets his stare, cold)
 My brother, who I love more than
 anything in this world -- called me
 a coward. Because I believed in
 decency. Because I had a flag that
 I thought meant I was American.
 (beat)
 And they tore it down, Mr. Toms.
 Right off that post.

FLASHBACK: EXT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - NIGHT

The mob scene. Breiner and some other men are up on the porch steps, tugging at Sweet's flagpole.

It snaps in half and we HEAR it like a thunderclap.

SWEET (V.O.)
 They snapped it in two.

FLASHBACK: INT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - SAME

Sweet and Henry are struggling over the gun when Sweet sees it from the upstairs window. In the yard below:

The flag, snapped and trampled on the ground.

RETURN TO SCENE.

SWEET

I saw it then. Clearer maybe than
 I ever had. The way they looked at
 me. The me they saw. No matter
 how many degrees I get, or fancy
 clothes, or cars, or things. No
 matter how well I speak or carry
 myself, to every white that walks
 the earth I'm still no more than a
 low down dirty nigger... And
 there's nothing I can do about it.

FLASHBACK: INT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - SAME

Sweet, staring at the mob below. A writhing horde of rage and fear. His fingers tighten on the grip of Henry's gun.

SWEET (V.O.)
 ...Nothing.

RETURN TO SCENE.

TOMS
 (realizes; surprised)
 You shot those men yourself?

SWEET
 Yes.

Stunned murmurs ripple the gallery, whites and blacks alike.

TOMS
 You meant to kill them.

SWEET
 Yes.

TOMS
 And you'd do it again right now.

Tears streak Sweet's cheeks, but he is beyond caring.

SWEET
 Wouldn't you?

TOMS
 (turns away)
 No further questions.

SWEET
 I asked you a question.

This stops Toms, faltering. Unsure how to answer it. Sweet looks to the jury, raw with emotion. Meets their stares.

SWEET
 ...Wouldn't you?

The courtroom is in silence. Gladys shuts her eyes. Henry is still staring at his older brother. Ice in his eyes.

White leans up to Darrow, whispering. Both men at a loss.

WHITE
 Did he just save or kill us?

DARROW
 (after a pause)
 Damned if I know.

TITLE CARD: CHAPTER SEVEN "JUSTICE"**EXT. DETROIT STREETS - DAY**

The city streets are quiet. Eerily deserted.

INT. BLACK BOTTOM AME CHURCH - DAY

BLACK PARISHIONERS file into the church, packing the pews. A large tube RADIO is set up on the pulpit. For the verdict.

INT. AUTOMAT RESTAURANT - DAY

WHITE PATRONS sit in silence, awaiting the broadcast.

EXT. BRIGGS STADIUM - DAY

Home of the Detroit Tigers. But no game is in session. A large speaker is set up in the field. The crowd is still.

EXT. HALL OF JUSTICE - DAY

POLICE with helmets and billy clubs position themselves on the court steps, keeping the onlookers at bay. PRESS and PHOTOGRAPHERS crowd through the doors. The verdict is in.

INT. HALL OF JUSTICE - COURTROOM - DAY

Tenterhooks. An envelope is passed from hand to hand up to Judge Murphy, who opens it and reads impassively, then hands the page back to the Bailiff, who returns it to the FOREMAN.

White holds his breath. Darrow is not doodling.

Sweet looks to Gladys on one side, takes her hand, then looks to Henry on the other. Henry stares ahead, ignoring him.

JUDGE MURPHY

The foreman may read the verdict.

FOREMAN

We the jury, in the case of the
People versus Ossian Sweet, et
al...do find the defendants not
guilty of all charges.

The room erupts. White leaps from his seat, shaking Darrow's hand. Black folks in the gallery embrace in tears. Latting, Murray, Washington, and Davis are celebrating cheerfully.

Sweet stands alone, somewhat in shock. He looks to Gladys. There's love in her eyes. But also something else.

SWEET
We did it. We won.

GLADYS
(after a pause; says this
as a fact, no judgment)
You did.

Sweet turns to see Henry walking toward him up the aisle.

SWEET
Henry, we did it, we're free --

Sweet moves to him, but Henry walks past Sweet without a word. Sweet watches helplessly as Henry walks away.

INT. MICHIGAN CENTRAL STATION - LATE DAY

Shafts of sunlight flood the platform mobbed with people. White and Darrow stand beneath the giant flap display.

Darrow regards a new copy of "The Crisis" magazine. Headline reads: "NAACP VICTORIOUS! JUSTICE AND PEACE PREVAIL."

DARROW
Well...you did it, Mr. White. And
nary a race riot to be seen.

WHITE
That's a good thing.

DARROW
A better thing is the financial
forecast of your little group.
I've heard money is pouring in.

WHITE
(nods)
It seems this fiasco has raised
folks' hopes for the prospect of
real integration.

The way White says this makes it seem he's not so optimistic.

DARROW
Hasn't it raised yours?
(wry)
Now that we've conquered the
scourge of hatred in America?

WHITE
I guess I'll retire.

DARROW

At least a vacation. Or a bourbon
on the rocks.

White smiles drily. The flap-board clacks and reconfigures
into new departure times. Darrow checks his ticket.

DARROW

That's me.
(then, almost as an
afterthought)
You did a good thing, Mr. White.
Just because it won't make any
difference in the long run, isn't
any reason not to celebrate that.

This catches White off-guard. Darrow tips his hat.

DARROW

Safe travels, Walter.

He walks off, merging with the shifting sea of people on the
platform. Leaving White just standing there. Alone.

INT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - LATE DAY

Sweet steps through the empty house. A ghost house. Vacant.
Wind whistles through the broken windows. There's water
damage on the floorboards. Dust and cobwebs everywhere.
What furniture there was, is gone. Probably looted.

Sweet pauses at the bedroom. Steps inside.

INT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - LATE DAY

The four-poster bed is still here but its mattress has been
carved up with a knife. The sheets in tatters.

Sweet regards them for a beat. Without emotion.

EXT. GARLAND BUNGALOW - DUSK

Sweet stuffs the tattered sheets into a garbage can. It's
almost dark. The street is quiet. He shuts the lid and
wipes his hands. Then pauses. He looks up.

Eric is on the porch behind him. He is working the bloodied,
tattered American flag onto a mended pole. Sweet watches
intently as Eric fits the pole into its socket on the post,
then shapes the flag into a neat drape. He salutes it.

ERIC

Can't do much about the blood. But
then again maybe it should stay.

SWEET

Maybe.

The two men look at one another for a moment.

An eternity. Then:

ERIC

Looks like rain.

Sweet steps up the porch to follow Eric's gaze. Both men look out. A dark thunderhead looms on the horizon.

SWEET

Yeah, looks like it'll let go for a while, too.

ERIC

You better get that roof patched.

Sweet regards the charred patch on the bungalow.

SWEET

Yeah.

Both men stare at the bungalow.

ERIC

Yeah.

Eric nods and walks back toward his house across the street.

Sweet gazes at the bungalow for one more moment, then walks back in and shuts the door.

TIME LAPSE BEGINS as we hold on the bungalow, day fading into night, then day again, as years elapse before our eyes...

TITLE CARDS:

THE SWEET CASE PUT THE NAACP ON THE MAP. BUOYED BY NATIONAL PRESS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT, THE ORGANIZATION WAS ABLE TO FURTHER ITS REACH THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

IN 1929, WALTER WHITE BECAME ITS EXECUTIVE SECRETARY. FOR ALMOST A QUARTER OF A CENTURY HE DIRECTED A BROAD PROGRAM OF LEGAL CHALLENGES TO RACISM IN AMERICA.

AMONG THESE WAS THE LANDMARK SUPREME COURT VICTORY IN BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION, WHICH LED TO THE END OF LEGAL SEGREGATION.

WHITE DIED JUST MONTHS LATER IN 1955.

Then:

NEITHER GLADYS NOR HENRY SWEET EVER GOT TO LIVE ON GARLAND AVENUE. BOTH SUCCUMBED TO CASES OF TUBERCULOSIS THEY CONTRACTED IN THE JAIL WHILE STANDING TRIAL.

OSSIAN SWEET CONTINUED LIVING THERE UNTIL 1958, WHEN FINANCIAL HARDSHIPS FORCED HIM TO MOVE OUT.

THE NEXT YEAR, HE COMMITTED SUICIDE.

The TIME LAPSE ENDS in present day Detroit. The bungalow is now the only well-kept building on a rundown street of boarded houses. POLICE SIRENS can be heard in the distance.

THE HOUSE ON GARLAND AVENUE IS LISTED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES. IT STANDS TO THIS DAY.

FADE TO BLACK.