

BOULEVARD OF BOLD DREAMS

A full-length play

Written by
LaDarrion Williams

Curren Draft
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Agency Contact:

Amy Wagner

A3 Artists Agency

The Empire State Building Fifth Avenue 38th Fl.

New York, NY 10118

646-461-9373

amy.wagner@a3artistsagency.com

Artist Contact:

LaDarrion Williams

Ladarrionwilliams@msn.com

818.238.778

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ARTHUR BROOKS - Black man in his mid to late 20s, a dreamer/bartender who moved from Alabama in hopes of becoming a movie director.

DOTTIE HUDSON - Black woman in her mid to late 20s, a bit of a cynic who seems to be running from something. She and Arthur are best of friends.

HATTIE MCDANIEL - Black woman in her late forties, infamous actress currently nominated for Best Supporting Actress at the Academy Awards.

*****Characters are to be portrayed by Black actors. Also, it is very imperative that Hattie McDaniel to be portrayed by a dark-skinned and plus-sized Black woman.**

TIME

February 29th, 1940. The day of the historic Academy Awards.

PLACE

A cocktail lounge in the Cocoonut Grove. Ambassador Hotel in Hollywood, California.

SYNOPSIS

It is February 1940, the night of the historic Academy Awards in Hollywood, California. Bartender Arthur Brooks, an ambitious Black man from rural Alabama, dreams of becoming a movie director. His best friend, Dottie Hudson, is a maid at the Ambassador hotel who finds herself to be a cynic of all dreams. But when infamous actress, Hattie McDaniel stops in at the bar and decides to not show up for the biggest event in show business, Arthur and Dottie must do everything in their power to convince her to go claim her win all the while confronting their dark past and making their own dreams come to life. A play on race, class, gender, and the ever-changing landscape of Hollywood.

This play is for the immutable Ms. Hattie McDaniel. I hope and pray this play will sing your immortality. Thank you for enduring all that you had to and making way for those who could dream bold and bright dreams.

And for the Arthur's and Dottie's of the world: Your dreams matter. Your hope matters. Your pain matters. And your story matters.

You are not invisible...

Keep dreaming...

Because we gotta cut up on that red carpet on Hollywood Boulevard!

P.S. They really played in our Queen Mother Angela Bassett's face. But...amen.

Carry on.

(Clicking and a whirring sound from a camera. On the wall, the countdown numbers appear. 3...2...1...)

(The lights fade in, the color gold spills all over the stage. It's glittery and brilliant. Almost dream-like.)

(From that image, we see a dark-skinned Black girl in tattered clothing. She picks a flower from the stem and smells it. Then she places it in her hair and smiles.)

(The image quickly shifts to the infamous Tinseltown in all of its glory. Sunset Boulevard. The Hollywoodland sign. Bustling movie sets. Warner Bros Studios. Paramount Pictures. Universal Studios. A buzzing sign from the Roosevelt Hotel.)

(Voices of reporters swell to the point of notice as that little Black girl who is now HATTIE MCDANIEL strolls in. Her skin, gloriously Black and is illuminated by FLASHING CAMERAS. She stands at a pose, her smile splits her round face, and her beautiful blue gown's sleeve, scaled with white gardenia flowers.)

(The voices of reporters and protestors continue to rise. Chaotic. Overwhelming. Crashing into one another like a wave.)

(HATTIE takes a moment to herself, basking in the gold light. It blesses her. But her bright smile turns into a palpable sadness. A distinct voice comes at her.)

MO'NIQUE (V.O.)

I want to thank Miss Hattie McDaniel for enduring all that she had to, so that I would not have to.

(A mighty hush covers the stage. HATTIE finds a flower on the floor, places it in her hair.)

(With one final look to us, the lights SMASH TO BLACK.)

SCENE ONE

(Early Thursday morning. February 29th, 1940. The sconces that are attached to the wall lights up, revealing a cocktail lounge somewhere in the back of the Coconut Grove. Accenting the room are drapery curtains, a low hanging crystal chandelier, green carpeting. Chairs are mounted on top of tables. Remnants of “busy work” is scattered around the room.)

(Static then some of that Jazz filters through the speaker of a radio. Probably some Duke Ellington. Maybe some Ella Fitzgerald. But the smooth music wafts through the room like an aroma.)

(At center: A bar counter top is decorated with shimmering champagne glasses. No smudge. Just perfect. You can even hear the “ting” coming off of them.)

(A handsome and precocious Black man enters, jotting something down on a piece of folded paper. He meanders aimlessly through the bar. Spots himself in the mirror on the wall. Pats down his hair. This is ARTHUR BROOKS.)

(On the wall, a rotary phone rings with urgency. ARTHUR rushes to answer it. Before he does, he gathers himself.)

ARTHUR

Hello. Oh, yes, Mr. Dawson, I put the table cloths and center pieces out on the tables. No, suh. I did that also, suh. Oh, yes suh, I can stay late. It’s no problem, Mr. Dawson. Yes, suh. Okay, bye-bye. *(Hangs up the phone, then confidently:)* Ole pie-faced cracker. “*I need the glasses to be cleaner.*” Well, God damn it, tell that white boy to do it instead of worryin’ me. Oh, he don’t know how to clean ‘em to ya standards.

Leavin' smudge all over 'em. The bastard lazy any damn way. That's alright. Cuz he ain't finna worry me today. Not today. *(He continues to clean the glasses for a moment. Shift. And then he goes to the phone and dials. Waits until someone on the other end answers and then leans against the counter, coolly.)* Aileen, yeah, just callin' you to tell ya' that they want me to stay late tonight. Yes, the boss man asked me to. Naw, I ain't lyin'. Gon' be real busy cause they got that award ceremony here tonight. And I wants ta' stay and gets some extra money. Now, why you always thinkin' I'm lyin'? Well, you keep axein' me. I know, Aileen. You ain't got ta keep tellin' me. Lawd, woman, I'm workin'. Cuz we need the money for next month's rent that's why. Ever since you quit the laundromat job, we need mo' money comin' in. No, I *am* happy. And I'm gon make an honest woman outta ya. How many times I gots ta' tell you? Aileen, I can't be tyin' up the phone, nah. Waitin' on Mr. Lloyd to get back to me 'bout the equipment. *(Grinning like a man that's gonna get some soon.)* A'right, well, I'mma see you later on, hear? I love you, too.

(He hangs up the phone and goes back to cleaning the champagne glasses.

Suddenly, the lights shift as he holds up the champagne glass.)

“...and the Academy Award for Best Director goes to--Arthur Brooks! *(Miming clapping and waving.)* Oh, thank you! First off, I'd like to give honor to God, who is the head of my life, and-- *(Quickly realizes.)* Ah, what the hell am I doin'”? Like they'll give an award to a colored man like me. *(He puts on a smile while he holds up his hand, as if he's directing.)* LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION! I want all the lights here and the camera there. Yes, just like that. *(Then he puts on an act, bursting all over the bar.)* “Why, yes, you can rent out my club...for a fee.” And the Songstress gon' try to gut Buster Collins like a fish. But she has to sing to him first, get him all...Well-- *(acting as if he's being seduced.)* Hot and bothered.

(ARTHUR proceeds to mime as if he's directing. He's in his element. There's an air of innocence when it comes to this Black man dreaming.)

(Through the swinging door, a beautiful Black woman named DOTTIE HUDSON watches ARTHUR dramatically acts as though he's heartbroken, stifling a hearty laugh.)

DOTTIE

(Claps her hands like a movie marker.)

And that's all, folks! Well, I'll be damned! Never in my days I thought I'd see a grown ass man *heartbroken* by a champagne glass.

ARTHUR

(Embarrassed at the teasing.)

Dottie! How long you been standin' there?

DOTTIE

(Shimmying her shoulders.)

Long enough to know you all *hot* and *bothered* over that champagne glass. *(Laughs herself silly while crossing over to the bar.)* Why you in here talkin' to yourself again for anyway, crazy man?

ARTHUR

(Pulling chairs off the tables.)

Ain't nothin' wrong with talkin' to myself. They say smart folks talk to themselves all the time. It's how they get they ideas out. Makin' 'sho they sound good and what not.

DOTTIE

Hmmph, let you tell it. *(Beat. Sees ARTHUR grinning innocently to himself.)* Why the hell you grinnin' like a damn Chester cat?

ARTHUR

Ain't nobody studyin' you, Dot. It's gon' be a good night at the Cocoanut. Just tryin' to get everythin' ready. *(He takes the pencil from his ear and begins to write down on several sheets of script paper.)* Dottie, now, I done had me a real good dream last night. A dream where I was on them big ole sets, right down on the back lot of Warner Brothers Studios. I was directin' this scene, right, and you, the siren or the songstress, I haven't made up my mind yet, goes to seduce the club owner for the deed to the club. Now he's a nasty man who got everybody up in arms. It's because he comes to collect his money every Saturday night. Their most busy night. And if you ain't got the money, he'll chop ya finger off one by one. Make they asses pull back nothin' but nubs. *(Laughs to himself.)* I had to get up in the middle of the night to type on my typewriter and wrote out this whole scene.

*(He proudly shows her the pages from his script.
Her face scrunches up like she tasting a lemon.)*

DOTTIE

"I...N.T... Boulevard Night Club." The hell is a I.N.T.?

ARTHUR

That's short for *Interior*. That's when the scene gon' take place inside of a room.

(Spins a chair around, sitting.)

And Dot, you gon' be standin' on a stage, behind a microphone, singin' yo songs in a real sparkly silver dress. Like they do in them sangin' picture shows. And that's when Mr. Buster Collins gon' come in with his goons. *(Puts his hands in his pocket, trying to be smooth. He goes back and forth in the lounge.)* They gon' stroll in like this.

They some coooooool cats too. When they come in, it's like the whole world stop, and he snaps. (*Snaps.*) Now the waitresses will get him whatever he wants, and you best not mess up his order. I'm not keen on writin' songs and all, but jotted somethin' down to get me goin'. It's gon' be big musical numbers and everythin'. Dancin', singin'. 'Alla dat.

(All smiles. All energy. ARTHUR turns to find DOTTIE just staring at him.)

DOTTIE

(Handing back his pages.)

You musta had too many 'fore goin' to bed. Man, I told ya to lay off that dark liquor when you be doin' ya writin'.

ARTHUR

I'm bein' serious right now. Gon' get Mr. Oscar Micheaux to look at it when I'm done. Sent some pages in the mail to him. He gon' write me back with some notes to make it all better.

(He crosses back over to the bar, continuing his writing. A still moment, then his eyes wander over to the phone on the wall.)

DOTTIE

Well, you best stay out that note pad while workin'. Mr. Dawson gon' light a fire up ya' tail if he catches ya' lolly gaggin' on the clock.

(She starts to make her own drink.)

ARTHUR

Mr. Dawson ain't gon' do shit.

DOTTIE

And how you figure? You already know he on edge about this Academy Awards bein' in the Cocoonut. Mr. Schine gon' be here, and so Mr. Dawson is actin' crazier than he already do. He liable to cuss you out and fire ya at the same time, cuz ya' know he just *looooves* to show out in front of his rich white friends.

ARTHUR

He ain't gon' catch me. Just got off the phone with him. Told me to make 'sho the champagne glasses was spic and span before settin' them out on the tables in the ball room for tonight's ceremony.

DOTTIE

He ain't ask Lee, his head waiter to do that?

ARTHUR

Mr. Dawson ain't gon' make that white boy do nothin' but watch *us* do the work and take the credit for it. Ain't know a hard day of work if it bit him in the ass. (*Scoffs.*) And he gon' make *him* a supervisor?

DOTTIE

You know that white boy was gon' come in here and swoop up that position like it was nothin'.

(She pulls out a cigarette from her apron. Lights it. Puffs. Whew...it's one of them feel good puffs.)

(Smoke swirls in the bar and ARTHUR quickly starts to fan the smoke out.)

ARTHUR

Dottie! You ain't s'posed to be smokin' in here! Take that outside in the back. Havin' this place smellin' like some low rent bar.

DOTTIE

For what? I'm on my break. And I ain't goin' outside, it's too damn hot out there. (*Puffs.*) This city sho'll got some funny-made weather. Ain't it 'sposed to be cold this time of year? It's hotter here than an alley coochie in the middle of August in Alabama. (*Goes to the mirror on the wall, fixing her curls.*) Makin' me sweat out my *cuuuurrrlls*.

ARTHUR

That's why they call it "sunny California". (*Beat, then...*) Wayment, ain't this your third break today?

DOTTIE

What you countin' my breaks for?

ARTHUR

You 'talm bout me, Mr. Dawson gon' chew *you* out, seein' you on another break.

DOTTIE

I'll have you know that I cleaned four rooms since I've been here, and you still *pollishin'* the same tray of glasses since this mornin'. You ain't think I noticed you over there, *day dreamin'*.

(She puffs a ring of smoke into the air.)

ARTHUR

Don't you worry about me. You worry 'bout yo' self. (*Shift.*) How's it lookin' up there anyway?

DOTTIE

Busy. White folks runnin' 'round like chickens with they heads cut off cuz of this award ceremony. And Mr. Cartwright is in his usual room.

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DOTTIE

When I tell ya this man is like clock work. Me and the other girls just be laughin' our tails off cuz every Thursday mawnin', he's here around ten o'clock with a cigar to smoke and a bottle of champagne to drink himself silly, waitin' on one of his *guests*. And we all know *why* he comes here to stay. (*She puts on a sly smile.*) For the life of me, I don't know why he won't just leave his wife and run off with that woman. *Shiiidd*, he got 'fo kids, and now he messin' around with some no-talent actress? Probably promisin' her a big ole role in one of them picture shows like all these Hollywood folks do. And they believe them too. Crazy asses. I just don't understand it.

ARTHUR

They be real convincin'.

DOTTIE

I guess. And then he always come in with a snooty attitude like we did somethin' wrong to him. Don't come here, mad, cuz you all bottled up with pressure. If he ain't careful, he might POP off like the Fourth of July. And I ain't tryin' to *clean* that mess up off them sheets, if you know what I mean.

(They let out that type of laugh that makes their stomach hurt.)

ARTHUR

God don't like ugly, Dottie.

DOTTIE

Yeah, well, he ain't too fond of cute, either. He comin' in here spoutin' out demands like he the king of the world. (*Puts on a gruff white man's voice:*) "And make sure my sheets are white as snow." That peckerwood just don't know, I'll take that iron I iron his sheets with and bust him up side the head to the white meat! Keep playin' with me, if he want to.

ARTHUR

Dottie--

DOTTIE

Oh, I'm just teasin'. *(Flicks ashes in a glass cup with a flair.)* Or maybe I ain't. I just don't like the way he questions my cleanin', is all. You know I don't play when it comes to that. I makes 'sho the sheets are clean and towels are fresh. He gon' look at me like I'm crazy when I told him that.

ARTHUR

You ain't mouthed off to him, did ya?

DOTTIE

I said it in a real nice way possible cause Lawd knows I ain't tryin' to lose this gig. I went up to that room and say, "Mr. Cartwright, suh, I's make them white as snow. I's a get on my knees and scrub them sheets. Scrub 'em so hard they be white as the skin of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Hallelujah. Amen. Gloooooorrrrry tuh God." You know they like it when we talk like we ain't got a lick of sense in our heads. Make white folks feel real comfortable and what not. That's when he patted me on my ass and flipped me a nickel for a tip.

ARTHUR

He what?!

DOTTIE

Ah, don't you get your britches all riled up.

ARTHUR

I don't care. They ain't supposed to touch the maids here. And he ain't got no business puttin' his hands on you. I'll go up there myself and rough him up good.

DOTTIE

Look at ya', tryin' to be my protector. *(Off his worried look.)* Don't ya' worry, Arthur, I got this li'l razor blade to slice them crusty white fingers off he gets a little handsy with me again. I promise. *(She grabs a newspaper, turning the pages with a flair.)* A'right...What's new in the world today? *(Reads:)* "Edward Frederic Benson, English novelist, dies at seventy-two."

ARTHUR

Who dat is?

DOTTIE

Chile, I don't know. Some white man that done went on to meet his white Jesus. *(Leans back dramatically, and with an overly Southern belle styled accent:)* Oh my, and Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable is here to bless us with they presence.

Here she is at the airport, gettin' off a airplane. How quaint. Hmmph, I tell ya', she ain't as pretty as everybody makin' her out to be.

ARTHUR

You don't think so?

DOTTIE

Naw, she look like a regular white woman to me. She better hold on to the li'l looks she do got, cuz you know white folks age like goat milk. (*Beat. Flips the pages and puffs on her cigarette.*) They done gone all out for this Academy Awards. Got us puttin' out the fanciest glasses and plates. Table cloths and silverware. Got over a thousand people showin' up here tonight, and they all dressin' so rich and actin' uppity like. (*Psshhh. Flips the pages.*) Hollywood prides itself on awardin' folks for bein' so borin'.

ARTHUR

Well, it is one of the biggest nights in Hollywood, you know that. They've been doin' it for the past twelve years. That comedian actor, Bob Hope, is hostin' it for the very first time. He real funny, too. Makes me cackle when he be tellin' them dirty jokes. Did you see this year's nominees?

DOTTIE

No, and I don't care to, either. Most of that stuff they do on them picture shows, anybody with a brain can do. Hell, ya sayin' nothin' but words.

ARTHUR

Nah, it's more to it than that, Dot. They say Ms. Hattie McDaniel gon' win for *Gone With the Wind*.

DOTTIE

What that got to do with me?

ARTHUR

It's gon' make history. Especially for colored folks like us. (*With stars in his eyes.*) Can you imagine *us* winnin' an Academy Award one day?

DOTTIE

Hell naw! You know we ain't never been invited to their table. Winnin' an Academy Award...Ha-ha! You might as well wait for the Devil to be handin' out Bibles come Sunday mornin'.

ARTHUR

I said that after they didn't even nominate Ms. Beavers. Now she done made me cry, and you know I don't do that. But I believe it's different with Ms. Hattie McDaniel. She told them white folks off in that movie. And she get to come here and be in the Coconut!

DOTTIE

Well, I can't believe them folks up there in the office 'llowin' her to come in this hotel for this award ceremony. You know they don't let niggas in here unless you here to clean the toilets. Prolly gon' make her wait in the back of the kitchen or somethin' or outside in the parkin' lot.

ARTHUR

I don't know. Times are changin', Dottie. I can feel it in my bones. She gon' win!

DOTTIE

If you think they gon' give an Academy Award to a Negro woman, then we better check outside.

ARTHUR

Check outside? For what?

DOTTIE

Rainin' frogs. Cuz you know hell done broke loose.

ARTHUR

Well, I'm gon' hold on to--

DOTTIE

Get them stars out ya' eyes and keep *ooooonn* polishin' them champagne glasses cause they ain't givin' no colored woman no award.

*(ARTHUR continues to wipe the glasses.
DOTTIE takes off her shoes to rub her aching feet.)*

ARTHUR

I wonder how it is, though. To be in front of all them flashin' lights. Be on them big sets.

DOTTIE

Probably like any regular ole job.

ARTHUR

(Looking out, dreaming.)

Nah, ain't nothin' like that is regular. That's a'right, I keep workin' hard, and I'm gonna be able to do just that.

My picture show, "*Boulevard of Bold Dreams*" gon' be a successful picture. A big ole hit. Watch what I tell ya! Universal Studios gon' give me a *five* picture deal.

DOTTIE

(As if she didn't hear.)

Whew, chile, these dogs is barkin'. Gonna soak these in some hot water when I get home. Cleanin' four rooms in just under three hours ain't no picnic. Mae Ella, the new girl, lazy as a cut dog. She ain't come in today, and they got me pullin' a double. "I ain't feelin' good" my ass. That's a'right though, come next week, she better be rested up cuz she gon' work the rest of my shift because I got me a *hoooooot* date on Saturday night.

ARTHUR

Who's the *unlucky* man...?

DOTTIE

Forget you, Arthur *Leon* Brooks. It's Fonny. You know that cat that works for the city, pickin' up trash? Well, he's been *axein'* to take me out for the past month. *(Leans back all sensually.)* So, I figured I'd go out and have me some *fuuuunnnn*. *(Beat.)* You talk to Aileen?

ARTHUR

I just got off the phone with her a few minutes ago. She already called me a liar and it ain't even twelve o' clock in the afternoon.

DOTTIE

Lyin' about what?

ARTHUR

That Mr. Dawson ain't tell me I have to stay over. I don't know why that woman don't trust me. All I do is come home, and then go to work. Get a little sleep here and there whenever I can. And just before I go to work, I show her some good lovin' just to give her the faith that I ain't no mess up. And that still ain't enough. *(Pause. DOTTIE gives him the side-eye.)* What you lookin' at me like that for?

DOTTIE

Now, you know why she act like that. Don't be ackin' like you ain't done no wrong.

ARTHUR

Ah, Dottie, that was a long time ago. Ain't seen or been studyin' that woman ever since then. And I done apologized a thousand times for it. Even got on my knees and begged. How much more I gots to be punished?

DOTTIE

It don't matter when it comes to a woman. A woman will hold on to hurt till the end of her days. Hell, you might as well dig two graves: one for the woman and one for the grudge she gots against folks that hurt her. It's just the way God made us. He gave y'all men the strength and the urge to go mess around with any pretty li'l ole thang that moves 'bout yo way, but gave us women nothin' but love to play with. Oh, and childbirth. God sho'll ain't right with that one. You could tell he a man just by the way he gives hell to a woman.

ARTHUR

If only yo' mama can hear you talk--

DOTTIE

She'd beat me with the bible and make me say, "Thou has disrespected the Lawd." But you know I'm speakin' the God's honest truth. That's how we is, Arthur. Women hold on to love, and we take it to heart when that love is hurt. It's in our nature. Tell ya' the truth, I don't much blame Aileen none for doin' so. What was that heffa's name? (*As if she's tasting vinegar.*) Oh, yeah. Carla. That's it. Pretty li'l ole thang. Ain't got much of a brain in her head, but she sho'll can turn mens pockets out. She street smart, and so she caught you in her web. Took ya pocket watch and the rent money right along with it. That's how them womens is out here. Tricksters. Ain't like how they is from home. Real humble and homemade like. 'Cept for Aileen. She a good woman, and you better hold on to that before somebody else come along and claim ya treasure. Then you gon' be lookin' all kinds of crazy when that happen. I knows ya.

ARTHUR

I just got involved way too fast for my good. Come from a train ride from Birmingham and met Aileen the first night we wuz out here. Took her out on the town...she got me sayin' and doin' things that this country boy ain't never done. Got me promisin' her the world. Promised to give her the stars *and* the moon, and hell, I barely had a pot to piss in and a window to throw it out of. But she ain't care. She loved me for my dreams. She loved me for seein' a way when there was no way. When I barely had enough to my name, I would give it all to my dream so we can have a better life. And she loved that about me. (*Pause. Continues to clean the glasses.*) But, somewhere along the way, Dot, she lost that. She lost that thing that I fell in love with. And with me tryin' to get things off the ground, it's like she don't even believe in me no mo'. And now she's--

DOTTIE

She what?

ARTHUR

Nothin'.

DOTTIE

Ah, come on now, tell me. Don't be tight-lipped about it.

ARTHUR

I ain't. *(Beat. He can't help but confide in her.)* Look now don't go gossipin' about this to the other maids.

DOTTIE

Me? Gossip? Now you know I can keep a secret. That's the God's honest truth.

ARTHUR

Don't be bringin' God into yo lies, Dottie.

DOTTIE

Doncha be callin' me no lie, Arthur Leon Brooks. We've been friends ever since we was two years old. Been there for ya', through it all. You remember I pulled yo' ass from that creek cuz you 'bout drowned? I ain't had to do it. Now, I may talk shit here and there, but lie, I ain't never done. *(With faux niceties:)* So, tell me.

ARTHUR

The other night, Aileen done told me she pregnant.

(A lingering moment. DOTTIE pours herself and him a shot.)

(They both chug it.)

(Whew...they let the news and the alcohol settle.)

DOTTIE

Well, shit...

ARTHUR

You ain't said nothin' but a word.

DOTTIE

You happy about it?

ARTHUR

Would I be a son of a bitch if I said no?

DOTTIE

Naw, that's just ya' truth. I can't fault ya for speakin' your truth. Most folks be havin' trouble doin' just that.

Hell, we all got truths locked up inside of us, just waitin' to be told. Waitin' to be out in the world so they can pick it back up and throw it in ya' face. I believe that's why some of us hides that truth. It's too painful to come face to face with it.

(Her words seem heavy. She shakes it off with another sip.)

ARTHUR

You should call home.

DOTTIE

(Crosses back to the table.)

What I'mma call home 'fuh?

ARTHUR

At least talk to her. I'm 'sho Ms. Willie C misses ya'.

DOTTIE

That woman don't miss nothin' but a behind to chide and somebody to talk down to.

ARTHUR

It'd be good for you to hear your little girl's voice--

DOTTIE

Arthur, leave it alone nah! *(Beat. Looks on, apologetic.)* You just worry 'bout that chile you got comin' in this world. You finna be a daddy and that child gon' need somebody good like you. 'Cuz the world can't wait to throw trouble its way.

ARTHUR

Tell you the truth, Dot, I ain't ready to be no father. Just ain't ready to give up what I came out here for.

DOTTIE

Arthur--

ARTHUR

Naw, Dot, when you bring a child in this world, you gotta put away your dreams for the sake of theirs. And I ain't ready to do that. Fought too damn hard to get this far, and it's like this baby is knockin' me ten steps back. I can't tell Aileen that cuz it'll hurt her feelings. *(Shift.)* Remember when I first told my mama that I was movin' out here? And she gon' say "that's fast life and nothin' but sinnin' out there in California." Papa Leon, he still ain't talkin' to me.

I don't care because I knew I had to come out here and make a name for myself. Be like one of them movie stars we see on the big screen, and direct my own picture shows.

DOTTIE

Do ya hear yaself? You soundin' just like ya daddy--

ARTHUR

(Serious.)

I'll be nothin' like him.

(DOTTIE doesn't say anything else.)

It done took a lot of faith for you to move out here with me.

(They both sit.)

DOTTIE

Shit, I had to, fool. *(Jokingly:)* You need me. And this world is way too big for us to be walkin' in it alone.

ARTHUR

I'm just tellin' you this now, I'm only gon' work this gig for a few more months and go get what I came here for.

DOTTIE

I hear you--

ARTHUR

We didn't come all the way out here just to be workin'. We got dreams, and we can't let it go on the account of workin' for this white man.

DOTTIE

(Raises a glass.)

Chile, you ain't got to tell me twice.

(The phone rings. ARTHUR quickly goes to answer it.)

ARTHUR

Hello. Why, yes suh. I'll get right on it, suh.

(He hangs up with a darkened expression. DOTTIE starts to unfold the table cloths and place them over the tables.)

DOTTIE

What they want now?

ARTHUR

They want me to set a table in the *back corner* of the banquet hall?

DOTTIE

For what?

ARTHUR

For Ms. Hattie McDaniel...*(Shakes it off and snatches the tray of champagne glasses off the bar.)* Get on up them stairs now. We gots jobs to do.

DOTTIE

Ah, hell!

ARTHUR

Come on now.

DOTTIE

I'm comin', shit.

(She follows ARTHUR out of the bar. Lights smash to black.)

SCENE TWO

(At rise: A little later in the afternoon. The door opens. From the back, HATTIE MCDANIEL slowly comes into the bar. Her hair trimmed, face alight, but a palpable tiredness exudes from her.)

(After she takes a moment to herself, she finds ARTHUR behind the bar. His back is towards her.)

HATTIE

Excuse me sir, I was wondering if I can come in and sit in here for a spell?

ARTHUR

This side of the bar's closed. Ain't gon' be open for another while.

HATTIE

Oh, I promise you, I'm not gonna bother anybody. Just wanna sit here for a moment.

ARTHUR

We ain't allowed to--

(ARTHUR turns and sees HATTIE. His eyes grow so wide they're about to pop out of his head. No words from him are produced.)

HATTIE

Can I sit in here? Like I said, I won't bother anyone. *(No answer.)* Excuse me, sir. *(Still, no answer from this man.)* Did you hear what I said? *(Snaps:)* Don't just stand there looking all crazy.

(ARTHUR blinks himself out of his daze.)

ARTHUR

You're... you're...you...

HATTIE

Yeah, yeah, most folks call me Hattie. How you doing?

ARTHUR

(Catching his breath.)

Ms. McDaniel, it's an honor. Lawd, have mercy. I...um...Sorry for me bein' so rude, I don't know what got into me. Of course, you can come in here.

(He slaps his rag on the chair, dusting it off. HATTIE looks around, studying the bar.)

HATTIE

I just needed to come in and sit. Those reporters and even protesters are already lined up down the street to the hotel, and I just needed a moment to gather myself.

ARTHUR

(Guilt-ridden.)

Oh, I'm 'sho you do. Well, make yourself right at home, Ms. McDaniel.

HATTIE

Uh uh, none of that "Ms. McDaniel". Just call me Hattie. *(Sits.)* Like I said, I don't want to be no bother to nobody. I'll be out of your hair, directly.

ARTHUR

'Sho thing...Hattie.

HATTIE

A nice little bar area you got here. It's been here all along?

ARTHUR

I'm not 'sho. I've only been workin' here for about a year or so.

(ARTHUR goes to turn on the radio. Setting a mood as the jazz music warbles all over the bar.)

HATTIE

You like Jazz music?

ARTHUR

'Sho do. Duke Ellington...Count Bassie. I like a little Lena Horne here and there, but Curtis Mosby, on them drums, whew...he is out of sight! I bet he set the house on fire wherever he play.

HATTIE

He does. Real nice man, too.

ARTHUR

Wait, you know 'em? Well, of course you do. You're *Hattie McDaniel*. Betcha you know all the stars in Hollywood.

HATTIE

I do. They come over to my apartment downtown, and we do fish fries. He'd come and get himself a plate every so often. Greedy as *allll* get out, but he's a real respectable man.

ARTHUR

(Grabbing her coat.)

Y'all be doin' fish fry's out here?

(HATTIE digs in her purse. Takes out a single cigarette. Searches for her lighter.)

HATTIE

Best believe it.

ARTHUR

Well, I saw him one time. I filled his drink up to the rim down at the Club Alabam, right down on Central Ave. I did a gig over there a while back. Workin' their bar for a guy named Monty Simmons. It was a lot of cool fellas workin' in there.

HATTIE

How come you're not working there now?

ARTHUR

...I got fired.

HATTIE

What you was fired for?

ARTHUR

A white man talk slick to me and I wasn't havin' it. Cussed him clean out from here to next Tuesday. That place don't make no sense anyhow.

HATTIE

How you figure? It is the *hottest* place in the city of Los Angeles.

(A bashful ARTHUR flutters back to the bar, wiping down the surface.)

ARTHUR

That's my point. It is the hottest place in this city that's owned by coloreds. Why it be so many white folks comin' up in there, slummin'?

HATTIE

Chiiiiillee, that's how it is. White folks come there, wantin' to hear some Jazz and Bebop live. They come all the way from Beverly Hills just to hear it. *(Starts dancing in her chair.)* They get a little bubbly and dance the night away.

ARTHUR

Just takin' over like they always do, huh?

(ARTHUR notices the cigarette dancing between her fingers. Annoyed? No, he's tight-lipped. Grabs an ashtray from the bar and pulls out a lighter to light her cigarette.)

HATTIE

It's real nice in here. Never been inside the Ambassador hotel before.

ARTHUR

(Real cooountry sounding.)

They don't normally 'llow coloreds up in here. You our first.

HATTIE

(Puffs.)

You don't sound like you're from here? Where are you from?

ARTHUR

From a very small town in Alabama called Helena. About twenty minutes outside of Birmingham.

HATTIE

Alabama. What's a man from the deep South doing all the way out here?

ARTHUR

Thought I'd live somewhere different. (*Grinnnniiinnng.*) To be quite honest with ya, I wanna be in the movies myself. Moved out here, got myself a job to support myself, until things take off.

HATTIE

Well, have you been auditioning?

ARTHUR

A li'l. Almost got the part as a butler on some film a while back. Mostly try to do my own thing. Write my material and be a movie maker. Just like Mr. Oscar Micheaux. I even found somebody that got some equipment to buy. Some white man deep in Hollywood. I'm savin' up for that now. (*Eyes linger to the phone.*) I'm just waitin' on his phone call.

HATTIE

You sure a long way from home.

ARTHUR

Yes, ma'am. Came out here with nothin' but fifty dollars and a dream. But it ain't nothin' there for me no how. I mean, my mama and daddy still livin'...

HATTIE

Oh, I'm sure they still miss their son.

ARTHUR

They do. Well, my mama does. Try to talk to her as much as I can. Daddy don't want nothin' to do with me. (*Off her look.*) Oh, it's fine. He just don't understand, is all. He stubborn as a jack mule. I try to tell him my dreams and he don't never want to hear nothin' I got to say.

HATTIE

How long you have been out here this way?

ARTHUR

About two years.

HATTIE

Well, welcome to Los Angeles. Can I ask for your name?

(ARTHUR quickly wipes off his hand on his pants and offers a handshake.)

ARTHUR

Arthur. Arthur Brooks.

HATTIE

(Shakes his hand.)

It's nice to meet you, Mr. Arthur Brooks.

ARTHUR

No, it's *really* a pleasure meetin' you, Ms. Hattie.

(Eagerly crosses back behind the bar top.)

Well, what you havin'? Not everyday I get to serve a Hollywood star in this bar. We pretty much have everythin' from Cognac to Bourbon or bubbly champagne. How you take it?

HATTIE

(Dabs the cigarette in the ash tray.)

Oh, no, I don't drink that poison. Last time I had one, Clark done slipped me a real drink on set. Lawd, it tasted so nasty. But we was celebrating his birthday, and he figured I should have one too. Got cranberry juice?

ARTHUR

Sho'll do.

(He pulls out a small glass cup and pours her some cranberry juice. Shakes it. Stirs it. Puts a fancy little straw inside the glass and hands it to her.)

There you are. *Virgin* Cranberry cocktail

(The phone rings. ARTHUR quickly answers it. He puts on a gallant voice.)

Hello. Ah, yes, Mr. Cartwright, yes suh. I'll bring up one of our finest bottles. Yes, suh. Right away.

(He pulls out a bottle of champagne and places it in a bucket of ice.)

HATTIE

That's some bottle.

ARTHUR

One of our most fancy. This whole Academy Awards got these white folks drinkin' like a fish. I'll be back directly.

HATTIE

I'll be here. Don't mind me none.

(ARTHUR grabs the bottle of champagne and heads out. HATTIE is left alone. In the impending silence, her thoughts weigh on her heavily. After a moment, she pulls out a note card. As she reads, she becomes bothered. Then, to herself:)

'Academy of Motion Pictures of Arts and Sciences...my...heart is too full--'

(She stops. Stands. Paces the bar back and forth and continues reading:)

"I sincerely hope to be a credit to my race." Credit to my...race. Lord, who am I foolin'? They are not gonna give me that damn award. I don't even know why they got me at this hotel, puttin' up with these white folks.

(HATTIE looks over to the door. Thinks. Edges closer to the exit. Should she leave or not?)

(She spots the phone and marches over to dial on the rotary. Several moments pass. Someone on the other end answers.)

HATTIE

William, yes, this is Hattie. I'm fine. Look, about tonight. *(Pause.)* Huh-huh. Well, there was something I wanted to talk to *you* about. So am I sitting with the cast?

(Her shoulders visibly drop and she swallows her annoyance.)

What? Oh, I see. You talked to that hotel manager. They want me to wait in the back, in the corner? No, no, I don't want to cause no ruckus. *(Through gritted teeth:)* Well, what did Selznick say? I figured he'd be sitting with Olivia and all of them. No, I deserve to be sitting with my cast. Okay. You keep working on it. I'll call you back.

(She slams the phone back on the receiver, collecting her breath. DOTTIE enters back in with a thunderous rage.)

DOTTIE

I tell ya', that bastard put his crusty hands on me one mo' gain, I swear fo--

(She screams! HATTIE is startled as well.)

HATTIE

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to startle you. Arthur said I can come in here and rest a bit.

DOTTIE

(Looks around for Arthur.)

Oh, well, people ain't really 'lloed back behind the bar area this early. So, I don't know why he done told you that. Keep tellin' him, he don't follow these man's rules, he gon' get fired.

HATTIE

I just needed a moment to myself.

DOTTIE

Fine by me. I don't own the bar.

HATTIE

(Studies her maid uniform.)

You a maid here or something?

(DOTTIE cut her eyes at HATTIE. Then moseys on behind the bar to pour herself a shot.)

DOTTIE

Well, they ain't gon' let me be the receptionist. *(Stares daggers at her gown.)* Ain't you supposed to be gettin' ready for the award show? What you doin' in here?

HATTIE

I just wanted to come by and see how it looked over here, and figured I'd just arrive a little bit early. My agent had to talk to the manager here at this establishment.

DOTTIE

(Scoffs.)

I know. Heard them up stairs talkin' 'bout ya. They say you nominated for an Academy Award tonight.

HATTIE

Yes, I am nominated.

(DOTTIE detects a sad tone in her voice.)

DOTTIE

You don't seem happy 'bout it.

HATTIE

Oh, no, I'm most grateful. *(Beat.)* I didn't catch ya' name.

DOTTIE

It's Dottie.

HATTIE

Dottie. That rhymes with my name.

DOTTIE

You think you gon' win?

(The questions weighs between the both of them.)

HATTIE

You know, I can't really tell. But they did give me this just in case.

(HATTIE shows her the notecard. DOTTIE scans it. Chuckles to herself. Then hands it back to HATTIE.)

DOTTIE

Lawd give me strength, they done wrote a speech for ya?

HATTIE

Yes, they did.

DOTTIE

Now what kind of mess is that? They afraid you gonna go on that stage and say somethin' that's gon' embarrass them?

HATTIE

Maybe so.

DOTTIE

Well, I'm sure the movie you was in gon' get an award. Uh...hot damn, what's the name of that damn picture? *Travellin' the wind...* or somethin'?

(HATTIE laughs as if it's her first time. It's a long awkward beat for DOTTIE.)

HATTIE

Chile, it's *Gone With the Wind*. You seen it?

DOTTIE

Naw, I haven't. Arthur seen't it about two or three times. He wanted me to go, but I ain't had no time. *Workin'* and all. I never have no time to do nothin' but eat, sleep, and work.

Oh, and rest these achy feet. Goin' to the movies ain't really been on my mind lately. Got things I wanna buy and save up for. *(Makes her way back to the bar area.)* What you play on that one?

HATTIE

My character name was Mammy.

DOTTIE

(Almost spits out her drink.)

Mammy?! What the hell they named you that fuh?

HATTIE

That's just the name of the character.

DOTTIE

(Takes out her cigarette.)

Lawd, they just don't care no 'mo, I see.

HATTIE

I didn't even think I was gonna get that part. At first, First Lady Roosevelt wanted her maid to play her--

DOTTIE

Of course, she did. I bet nothin' would've made her happier to have that 'po woman on that big screen, bein' somebody's slave. Chile...

HATTIE

Then they wanted Juanita Moore--

DOTTIE

I don't know who that is.

HATTIE

Oh, lemme tell you. She just did this movie called *Double Deal*. Well, she wasn't credited for it, but she's real talented. Folks gon' see one day, watch.

*(HATTIE takes out her lighter and lights
DOTTIE'S cigarette.)*

(They both just pffffff...)

DOTTIE

My only thing is, why don't they never get no white woman to play a maid to a rich white family? It's always gotta be a colored woman up there, shuckin' and jivin'.

It's some po' white folks out there that can do it, too. Tell these movie directors to come down to Alabama and see them peckerwoods, cleanin' and washin' clothes, barely washin' they asses. I betchu we'll start seein' those picture shows.

HATTIE

Honnneyyyy, that ain't never gonna happen. They have to be seen as *superior* in these picture shows.

DOTTIE

Really?

(They both simultaneously dab their cigarettes in the ashtray.)

HATTIE

My guess is that seeing yourself up there, it's something powerful. It can sway the minds of folks to believe something that they have never seen before. That's the power of film. To see yourself, to see those that look like you...

DOTTIE

Hmmph. I guess crackers only see us lower than dogs. Chile, they love dogs mo' than they love niggers. Take care of 'em like they babies. While we wash their dirty drawers, and be a second class slave. *(Goes behind the bar and pours herself another drink.)* How you take it?

HATTIE

Oh, no, I don't drink.

DOTTIE

You don't drink? Say, ah, what's a lady like you doin' here in the cocktail bar if you don't drink?

HATTIE

I'm just waiting. I know my escort FP gon' be here after while, but I just need a little time to myself. People around me was just getting on my nerves, and whew, chile, I just needed some time to breathe. It's just so much press and reporters out there already, I thought I was gonna scream.

DOTTIE

Welp, mo' for me.

(She chugs it. ARTHUR storms back in, passing DOTTIE like a mighty storm. He dumps the ice into the sink behind the bar.)

ARTHUR

That bastard!

DOTTIE

What's wrong with you?

ARTHUR

I get up the stairs with they champagne and get to room 206, right where Mr. Cartwright stayin'. When I say he a *reeeealll* two-bit hustler. One of the richest men in Los Angeles, and sho'll don't know how to tip. Cheap ass cracker.

DOTTIE

Well, you should've known that.

ARTHUR

Got to deal with these rich ass...*(Notices HATTIE smiling.)* I didn't come to Hollywood to just wait on white folks. I came here to make my dreams come true.

DOTTIE

This was *your* plan.

ARTHUR

I know, it's just takin' too damn long. *(Crosses to the phone on the wall.)* Hey, the phone ain't rang did it? Still waitin' on that man to call 'bout that equipment. I'on know what's takin' him so long.

DOTTIE

You just impatient, is all.

ARTHUR

Dottie, leave me be. You always got somethin' to say.

DOTTIE

Don't get snippy with me, Arthur. I ain't done nothin' to ya.

HATTIE

Y'all two...a couple?

(A stone cold look from the both of them.)

DOTTIE

Hell nah!

ARTHUR

We just friends. We moved up here all the way from Alabama. Together.

DOTTIE

Don't be goin' and tellin' our business.

ARTHUR

It's fine. It's *Ms. Hattie McDaniel*.

HATTIE

Forgive me, I didn't mean to pry. (*To DOTTIE.*) You're an actress as well?

DOTTIE

More of a singer. Mostly useta sing in the church house, but nothin' too serious. I leave that actin' mess to Arthur.

ARTHUR

Dottie got one of the best voices out there. Back home, she used to *saaannng* in the church choir. Got a voice touched by God's hands.

DOTTIE

(A bit sheepish.)

Don't be over sellin' me. I ain't nothin' like how they see on the picture shows.

ARTHUR

I ain't over sellin' ya. 'Member that one time you and what was that girls name that always wanted to steal your solos?

DOTTIE/ARTHUR

Ah, oh, Willa Mae Briggins!

DOTTIE

Chile, Willa Mae couldn't carry a tune if she had it in her hand. That's why Sista Clarice gave *me* the solo in choir practice. Willa Mae couldn't get to them high notes if she tried, and she always just jealous that *I* could do it.

ARTHUR

You sho'll did show out that Sunday during revival at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church. Dottie, why don't you sang somethin'?

DOTTIE

I ain't.

ARTHUR

Sing that song you had to sing in church that one time. C'mon, nah.

DOTTIE

Leave me be, Arthur, I'm on my break. *(Rubs her feet.)* Shit, I'm tired. My feet hurt and I'm hungry.

ARTHUR

If ya' sing for me, I'll pour ya' some of that good stuff.

DOTTIE

You gotcha self a deal.

ARTHUR

Gone head.

(She steps on the stage, sees HATTIE pulling out a chair as if she's in the front row.)

(DOTTIE'S eyes shift to ARTHUR, nervous. She then takes in a sharp breath and sings with power.)

DOTTIE

*I am on the battlefield for my Lord,
I am on the battlefield for my Lord;
And I promised him that I would serve him till I die.
I am on the battlefield for my Lord.*

(HATTIE wraps DOTTIE in her arms with excitement.)

HATTIE

Wheew! I haven't heard that *soooooonng* in years! I remember my mama used to sing that all the time. Especially when we was in the church choir. People'll travel all over to hear us sing while we doin' that Vaudeville. But my mama, now she had a voice better than angels.

ARTHUR

What y'all sang, Ms. Hattie?

HATTIE

Oh, Lord, um...It was a song she wrote. Shit, I can barely remember it myself, but I think it goes a little like this...(Sings:)

*WHEN I TRAVEL THAT LONG ROAD
THE LORD WILL GUIDE MY WAY
HE'D PREPARE A LAND OF PASTURE,
FOR ALL OF MY DAYS.*

Hell, that's all I remember.

ARTHUR

Go ahead, Ms. Hattie!

HATTIE

Why, thank you. *(Crosses to DOTTIE.)* You got a voice on ya too, Dottie. You think about doin' some records?

DOTTIE

No, not really. I wanted to when I was a lil younger, but--

ARTHUR

(Jumps up.)

Told ya' she can sing somethin' good. She just don't know, when I get my film off the ground, she gon' be singin' the main musical number.

(ARTHUR shimmies playfully towards DOTTIE. They cackle amongst themselves. HATTIE watches them. A cloud of sadness hovers over her.)

HATTIE

You two sure remind me of me and my brother. Fight and argue just like y'all do. But in the end, will be there for each other. We'd sing and laugh. *(Relishing in the memory.)* Especially when I was signed at Okeh Records, and was on the radio. Ooh, that was about twenty years ago.

ARTHUR

Didn't you used to sing one called--

DOTTIE

Just One Sorrowing Heart.

(A record scratch moment. HATTIE'S eyes drift to DOTTIE, surprised.)

HATTIE

Lord, I haven't heard that one in so long.

DOTTIE

I remember that song a lot.

(A sharp ring slices through their silence.)

ARTHUR

Ooh, hold on! That might be Mr. Lloyd callin' me about that equipment. *(Goes to answer the phone. Quickly, he puts on a disappointing face.)* Hello! No, I already took it to him. Okay, well, let me know if he's comin' back here. A'right now. I'll tell her. Thanks. *(To DOTTIE:)* Room 103 just checked out. It needs cleanin'.

DOTTIE

Damn it all to hell. A'ight, you owe me that drink.

(DOTTIE exits. HATTIE stares deeply at the note card in her hand, conflicted.)

ARTHUR

You nervous 'bout tonight?

HATTIE

Nervous about making a fool of myself.

ARTHUR

You ain't got nothin' to worry about.

HATTIE

Arthur, a lot of folks wasn't happy about me being in this movie. They say it was a disgrace to the colored folks in this country.

ARTHUR

Folks are gon' talk about you till the day you die, and there ain't nothin' you can do about that.

HATTIE

Well, I ain't in the ground yet. I ain't think they was gonna make a big fuss over this movie. It was supposed to be this *one* simple part. That's all. That's it. I didn't think it was going to blow over like this.

ARTHUR

Well, you were the scene stealer. You told them crackers in that movie off. It was definitely somethin' we ain't never seen before.

*(ARTHUR leans down and writes in his pad.
HATTIE sees this.)*

HATTIE

What's that you're working on?

ARTHUR

Oh, a scene that's been hauntin' my mind ever since last night. It's gon' be a big ole musical scene. Dottie'll play Seraphine, the muse, if she acts right. The character is secretly tryin' to seduce the club owner into letting her have ownership of the club. But the only way for him to sign over his deed, is if she sang to him. But...

HATTIE

But what?

ARTHUR

I'm trynna figure out this song.

HATTIE

Don't you know how to play the piano?

ARTHUR

No, never knew how. All I did was carry them into rich white folks homes.

HATTIE

Let me see.

*(With trepidation, he hands her the script.
Getting an idea, she crosses over to the piano
and tickles the ivories with some simple
melodies.)*

HATTIE

(Sings.)

*GIVE ME YA MOONLIGHT...
I'LL GIVE YA MY SUNLIGHT...
LET YOUR LOVE POUR DOWN ON ME
I LOVE YA' DON'T YA SEE...*

ARTHUR

And the camera goes left, showing our Songstress on stage, in her sparklin' silver dress.

*(From the blue, our SONGSTRESS--aka
DOTTIE comes out in a sparkling silver dress.
She travels over to the piano, meeting HATTIE.)*

HATTIE/SONGSTRESS

*GIVE ME YOUR ALL
NO MATTER HOW SMALL
I'LL STILL LOVE YOU AFTER THE MORNING COMES...*

*(The sweet melody hits ARTHUR. It's like the
story comes to life for him. Like he see it right in
front of him.)*

HATTIE/SONGSTRESS

*GIVE ME YA MOONLIGHT..
I'LL GIVE YA MY SUNLIGHT..
LET YOUR LOVE POUR DOWN ON ME
I'LL LOVE YA' DON'T YA SEE...*

*(Our SONGSTRESS spins her web around the
room like a Black Widow.)*

*(ARTHUR is clearly under the spell of the
SONGSTRESS as they sway and dance around
the entire bar...)*

(Through this, HATTIE continues serenading.)

ARTHUR

Ooh, the club owner, sho'll is smooth. I tell ya', he'll come in, and he ain't havin' it. But he falls under the Songstress' spell. And he gives it all to her. The club, everythin'. He trades it all in for one night of passion. Her singin' draws him in, and after she seduces him, she shows him her true colors.

*(The SONGSTRESS and ARTHUR circle each
other. He becomes seduced by her power.)*

HATTIE

*YOUR MUSIC, YOUR PAIN,
DONCHA SMILE WHEN IT RAINS.
SLEEP TIGHT FOR TOMORROW WILL BE YOUR GOOD-BYES.*

ARTHUR

And as she catches him in her web, her song...

(Suddenly, the Songstress takes out a pocket knife and stabs ARTHUR right in heart, sending him back to reality.)

Out of no where, she stabs him, right dead in the heart! Because he's a crook, and takes money from other poor folks that own businesses. And now that she owns the club, she puts it back in the neighborhood, and let her people's thrive. *(With a thoughtful pause.)* And they get to live...happily ever after. *(A realization...)* We get to see ourselves livin' happily ever after.

HATTIE

Well, I see you really got it all worked out.

ARTHUR

Been dreamin' about this most of my life, Ms. Hattie. Dreamin' about havin' my own picture show. Right up there on the big screen.

HATTIE

I haven't met a lot of folks from the south with such big dreams as you. It takes a lot to pack up from home to come out here to Hollywoodland.

ARTHUR

Don't I know it. My father, he wanted me to get an honest job. And I did, I got myself a job workin' at the factory. Pushin' steel out of Helena. Workin' day in and day out, comin' back with no faith left in anythin'. But somethin' in me, somethin' just didn't sit right with my spirit workin' there. I just knew I had to get out, and not settle down. It was like I had a dream so big, Ms. Hattie, it gave me headaches at night. It wouldn't leave me alone. Now, most Negro folks, all they liable to do is wake up, work themselves to death, and not live at all. What kind of life is that? Naw, I want somethin' better for myself. *Be somethin' better. (Looks out.)* I'm a man from Alabama who dream of thangs, Ms. Hattie. I dream of thangs that most people wouldn't even 'llow themselves to. I dream of lights. I dream of me walkin' down Hollywood Boulevard and folks knowin' who I is. *(Pauses greatly, letting the stars twinkle in his eyes.)* I know you know what I'm talkin' about.

HATTIE

You know it's a dog eat dog town, Arthur?

ARTHUR

Oh, yes ma'am, I know that. But that's just how the world is. Back where I'm from, you don't need to be caught after dark 'cus they'll hang you from a maple tree just for bein' a Nigger. You don't have to bother nobody, cracker just come by and shoot you dead, and ask questions later. So, I know that this city ain't gon' be easy fuh a man like me.

HATTIE

I know what ya' mean. When I first came here, I couldn't get nothing but washer woman jobs and hotel maid work. Going all over town, having the doors slammed in my face. I didn't even want to come out here in the first place. But my brother, Sam, asked me to move out here. I thought he was out of his mind. But he did get that run on *The Three Stooges*--

ARTHUR

Yeah, but I want to make our own, Ms. Hattie. Get *our* stories off the ground. Show colored folks in a different light. Instead of maids and butlers. Makin' white folks feel comfortable. We Negro folks capable of doin' so much more than that. (*Confidently:*) Hollywood gon' come callin', you watch and see.

(A moment. HATTIE looks down at her note card once again.)

HATTIE

Well, most folks from all around the world come here to Hollywood for a piece of the pie. They get off that bus and swear they're going to conquer the world. They are so filled with hopes and dreams only to make themselves go crazy for a little piece of crumb and a seat at the table they ain't gonna be invited to. And when they find out the truth, they'll scratch and claw their way to the top. Hell, friendships ain't about loving or being there for each other anymore, it's all about using one another to get that one piece of crumb. One piece of what *they* got. Because you know they make it seems theirs is so much better. Hmmph, they say that this city changes people, but I come to find out Hollywood don't change folks, it reveals what's already there. You have to wake up, Arthur. You have to wake up to gray and misery they call reality because life is nothing but a dream. Especially the life you truly want. If not, you got to accept the hand that was dealt to you, or you'll be the one scratching and clawing your way to the top just for a *piece* of that crumb. Let me ask you this: are you truly ready for what you want?

(A pregnant beat. ARTHUR looks to HATTIE with stars)

ARTHUR

I think I am...

HATTIE

(Dead serious.)

No! You have to know that you truly are. People think Hollywood is all glitz and glam, but it ain't. You have dark days even in the midst of the brightest city. And sometimes I think to myself, maybe it just ain't worth it.

ARTHUR

I don't know about that, Ms. Hattie. I mean, I took up a dream and packed it up with three suitcases, and I came out here to California to make somethin' of myself. My mama cried all day long, my daddy looked at me as if I was a shiftless nigger. He says all I'm doin' is chasin' paper in the wind, and I'll be back before long. He just don't know that I was bred to prove people like him wrong. I'd make a sport of it. What sense does it make if God gives a man a dream and it don't come to pass? If he does that, then God is a cruel son of a bitch. That's why I'm determined to make that dream come to life, and I'll sacrifice every breath in my body, every tear in my eye, and even life itself for the sake of gettin' what I want. *(Passion rising like the sun.)* Because I don't want to be another nigger in this world with a pocket full of dreams and nowhere to plant 'em. God damn it, I deserve it.

HATTIE

Spoken like a true artist.

(A beat. HATTIE rubs her thumb over the notecard. Clearly battling the undercurrent of self-doubt and reality.)

I'm not going to that damn ceremony tonight.

ARTHUR

Wayment, you can't be serious. You gots to go, Ms. Hattie.

HATTIE

No, I don't.

ARTHUR

But there's people countin' on you to win tonight because whether you believe it or not, you gon' make history, Ms. Hattie, and you're gon' open the doors for folks like *me*. That's yo pocket full of dreams.

HATTIE

Well, I didn't ask for that! *(Shift.)* You know where they got me sittin'? Huh? In the back corner of the banquet hall, and they'll come and get me. That's what they said. Just a small little table for me and my escort FP cause the world don't want niggers in their place, and don't wanna see me sitting with white folks at these nice dining room tables.

(Snatches the note card from the bar table.)

If, and that's a mighty big if I win, they even wrote the speech for me. *(Slams the note card on the bar.)* They're gonna own every word that I say.

ARTHUR

Small price to pay.

HATTIE

Well, I don't wanna pay it. What's the point of a Best Supporting Actress Academy Award if I can't even be treated like a human being? What sense does that make? People looking at me like I'm an animal at the zoo, Arthur. All I want is to be able to sit with my cast.

ARTHUR

Ms. Hattie--

HATTIE

I'm just doing this to get myself in a place good, financially. Buy my own house. Somewhere in Los Angeles. I was thinking over there by Sugar Hill. It's some real nice houses over there. I want a lot of rooms. A big ole kitchen and dining room for the biggest parties. *(Looks to ARTHUR. He's not buying it.)* You're so fresh and new, I love it. Don't ever lose that. Because in this town, it'll try to beat it out of you.

ARTHUR

And did it beat it out of you? *(HATTIE is stunned.)* Ms. Hattie, you gots a real opportunity here.

HATTIE

Hmmph. Just watch...They gon' wanna give EVERY Negro woman that's playing a *Mammy* an Academy Award.

(Her bitter truth spills all over the bar.)

ARTHUR

But you did a wonderful job in that movie, Ms. Hattie. You reminded folks of their grandmama's, mama's, Aunties, and...

HATTIE

No, I reminded them of a slave woman who ought to mind her own business and not have such a big mouth. You know how many times the word "Nigger" was in the script? But dealing with me, they had to take it out.

ARTHUR

See, that's my point. That is exactly why you should go to that ceremony tonight and show them that. And didn't I read in the paper, that since you was gettin' all this acclaim, that you went to that producer...what's his name, Selznick, to put you on the ballot for the Academy Award? They ain't even let you go to the premiere in Atlanta because it was segregated. Mr. Clark Gable, himself wanted to boycott it too, but *you* ain't let him.

HATTIE

That's right!

ARTHUR

You was so determined to not let it steal your shine, right?

HATTIE

Right. I did that.

ARTHUR

Then why are you letting them now?

HATTIE

(A bit thrown.)

Hush all that foolishness--

(A beat as HATTIE and ARTHUR are at an impasse.)

DOTTIE

(Offstage.)

Shirley, you crazy guurrrr! *(Enters with a tray of food.)* What y'all in here talkin' 'bout?

ARTHUR

She's thinkin' about not goin' to the Academy Awards tonight.

(A quick glance and a shrug from DOTTIE.)

DOTTIE

Maybe she shouldn't.

ARTHUR

Dottie! How you gon' sit there and tell her that!

DOTTIE

Arthur, what you want me to do about it? It looks like she done made up her mind.

ARTHUR

Y'all just don't see the importance of this night, and what it'll do for Negro folks.

(DOTTIE makes her way behind the bar. She pours herself the good stuff that was promised to her.)

DOTTIE

I say, damn that award show and let them white folks have it. She don't have to go.

(ARTHUR glares at the both of them with disappointment. DOTTIE makes her way back to the table, devouring her lunch.)

HATTIE

May I use your phone?

ARTHUR

Yeah, it's over there on the wall.

*(HATTIE makes her way to the phone.
ARTHUR goes up to DOTTIE and
whispers.)*

Why you sittin' there tell her she don't need to go?

DOTTIE

I'm agreein' with her, that's all. And what's it to you? It's *her* choice in the matter. One thing is: you ain't gonna be able to change a woman's mind once it's made up. I keep tellin' you that.

ARTHUR

(Bangs on the counter top.)

Well, gahdamnit, it's the wrong one!

DOTTIE

You can't say that. It's *her* life.

ARTHUR

I see you on another break.

DOTTIE

I sho'll is. My lunch. *(Smacking like hell.)* Go on somewhere, Arthur, and leave me be.

HATTIE

(On the phone.)

FP, you might as well don't even come. Chile, they got me sittin' in the back of the ballroom and wrote this speech...I know you already ready and dressed to go. FP, I-- a'right. Just come pick me up down the street. , I'll see ya when you get here. Bye bye.

(HATTIE hangs up the phone.)

ARTHUR

Ms. Hattie--

(Feeling the stare of daggers from her.)

I should go up stairs now to see if they need any help.

(He storms out.)

DOTTIE

He's always so passionate about things. His family, his dreams, but I be tellin' him, get his head out of the clouds because everythin' ain't so peachy clean in this world. He'll be a'ight. He gots to be with everythin' that's gon' happen.

HATTIE

What's gon' happen?

DOTTIE

(Checks to see if the coast is clear.)

Arthur got himself a baby on the way.

HATTIE

A baby?

(HATTIE quickly sits by DOTTIE.)

DOTTIE

He's gon' take real good care of it.

HATTIE

Oh, yes, I'm sure. He reminds me of my brother, Otis.

DOTTIE

Was he hard headed and got on your last nerve too?

HATTIE

Oh, yes, he did. Lawd, have mercy. But he had big dreams, too. I supposed we all did. Growin' up in Denver we ain't had much. None of us did. Even my folks. They were former slaves who just wanted us to have the best life we can make for ourselves. My grandmama used to wash floor for Mrs. Mary. She used to live in a world where her voice wasn't gone be heard. *(She shakes it off.)* And folks don't want me to win this award any how. Even the NAACP had a problem with me playing Mammy.

DOTTIE

Why *do* you play nothin' but maid roles?

(The question lingers between them.)

HATTIE

It's a job. I get to be on camera, acting. And it's not like there's other parts for folk looking like us.

DOTTIE

But is it worth all of that? Don't get me wrong, I seen *Showboat* and all them other pictures, and I see why the NAACP be upset at them kind of shows. It makes us Negroes look bad. Arthur may be crazy as all get out, but he do wanna see colored folks on them picture shows as somethin' different.

HATTIE

He told me.

DOTTIE

Lawd, that picture he workin' on. He wants me to play that lady he writin' for. It's something new. I'll give him that. He's always dreamin'.

(DOTTIE makes her way by the bar to make another drink. HATTIE notices this.)

HATTIE

And what about you?

DOTTIE

(Pouring herself another drink.)

What about me?

HATTIE

You dream of things too?

DOTTIE

Not often.

HATTIE

We always got time to dream of something.

DOTTIE

Hmmph. Not me.

(DOTTIE crosses back to the table, smoking and sipping on that good stuff. She puffs. Then drinks.)

HATTIE

Well, you followed him out here. All the way from Alabama.

DOTTIE

I didn't follow him, I got my own business--

HATTIE

(Not letting her get a word in edge-wise.)

Oh, I understand. You was running away from something.

DOTTIE

I wasn't runnin' either. There are things that happened back there that I don't want to be a part of. Alabama slow. I came out here to start over.

HATTIE

That's how most folks do when they come out here. They start over because they're running from something.

DOTTIE

Now I done told you, I *ain't* runnin'.

HATTIE

Honey, you can't fool me. Look at how you drinking.

DOTTIE

Nobody tryin' to fool you, Ms. Hattie. *(A cold stare.)* I drink to calm my nerves.

HATTIE

That's how they all say.

DOTTIE

Oh, we on *me* now?

HATTIE

I'm just making conversation.

(DOTTIE abruptly stands. Drinks the last bit of alcohol.)

(Shoots HATTIE a look of daggers.)

DOTTIE

Well, why don't you make conversation by ya self? All you Hollywood folks act just a like, think y'all know everything about life. *(Drinks the last bit of her drink as a fuck you.)* Well, y'all don't know shit!

(Like a hurricane, DOTTIE storms out of the bar.)

(HATTIE is left alone.)

(The lights smash to black.)

SCENE THREE

(A few moments later. Lights rise on HATTIE stationed by the piano alone. ARTHUR rushes in, annoyed.)

ARTHUR

(Sees HATTIE lingering by the piano.)

I thought *maybe* you done went back on home by now.

HATTIE

I'm waitin' on my escort, FP. *(Beat.)* Dottie tells me you got a baby on the way.

ARTHUR

I see she gossin'.

HATTIE

You excited?

ARTHUR

About bein' a father? I ain't got no choice but to be excited, right?

HATTIE

I can make some phone calls to help you get idea out there. My agent knows some folks.

ARTHUR

Ms. Hattie, I ain't lookin' for no handout.

HATTIE

Don't be a stubborn man, let me help you.

ARTHUR

Ms. Hattie--

HATTIE

Trust me, it ain't no problem. You seem like you got what it takes to make it in this town. You just need a little bit of a chance. It'd be nice to help you along. Because that's what it's all about, helping each other along the way.

ARTHUR

Well, I appreciate it. That means a lot, comin' from you.

HATTIE

Pour me one.

ARTHUR

Another cranberry juice?

HATTIE

Nah...a shot! Or whatever you got back there. Make me something *reeeaaal* fancy.

ARTHUR

I can make you my *famous* Arthur Special.

HATTIE

Well, go ahead!

ARTHUR

A'ight now.

(ARTHUR begins to mix liquids. He's an expert at it. Then swiftly, he puts an olive inside the glass.)

HATTIE

This ain't gonna make me drunk, is it?

ARTHUR

Try it and see.

(HATTIE sips it. To her surprise, it tastes good. Reeaaaaalll good.)

It's good, ain't it? *(Beat.)* You still thinkin' 'bout not goin'?

HATTIE

Arthur--

ARTHUR

This is a dream come true, Ms. Hattie. You've accomplished things that most Negro folks can't even imagine.

HATTIE

I reckon so. Life's crazy when it only gives you things in black and white. Every since I was a little girl, I dreamed of gold. Dreamed of pretty purple and blue gowns and silver diamond earrings. Dreaming that the lily fields turn into bright lights and boulevard of dreams. How them pretty white gardenias and red lipstick look against my dark skin.

Folks may not like it. They may talk down on it, but when I take on them maid roles, I take them on with pride and responsibility. Earlier I say it's for me to pay for a house. That's why I took on the roles. But it's deeper than that. I take into account my mother, a former slave woman, who had to get down on her knees and scrubbed floors. Scrubbed 'em so hard, they were shining like the road to heaven.

(The lights shift into that dreamy blue.)

(On the wall, there are old filmed images of enslaved/ domestic working Black women washing clothes, cleaning, and tending to white babies.)

(More images pop up. A woman stares at us, smiling soooo bright. It's like she's swallowed the moon and the stars.)

HATTIE

And my mama would have the kitchen smelling so sweet. With her fresh apple pie sitting right on the window, cooling off. She would bring life into a home that's filled with death and despair. And she'd take on the cussing and yelling from her white bosses, the ridicule and envy from his wife. She'd take on all the pride and hurt when them babies she raised and loved more than her own children, call her a nigger bitch. And they'd walk right past her as if she was invisible. As if she didn't breathe the breath as them, or the milk from her bosom made them grow strong. They'd take everything from her, and she'd give, and she'd give and give until she ain't got nothing left. And I told myself that I would never be that. I told myself that the family who didn't care to know her story would one day see it on the big screen.

(ARTHUR puts up his hand, as if he's filming HATTIE MCDANIEL. Setting the scene.)

From every line I speak to every scene I steal...they gonna know my mama's story. They gonna know that her tears watered the very soil that they walk on. And if it wasn't for her, the ground would crumble, and they'd fall deep into the earth and be no more. Even if I have to play a thousand maids, they gon' KNOW my mama's story. And when I leave this world, when I close my eyes and meet my maker, I'll die happy knowing that I did my best, and God did the rest.

(A long beat. ARTHUR pours another shot. Then lifts his glass.)

ARTHUR

Well said, Ms. Hattie. Well said.

(DOTTIE storms in, and she snatches a whole bottle from the bar.)

What happened to you?!

(DOTTIE looks at him, lost. She doesn't speak.)

Speak, woman, the hell happened to you?

DOTTIE

201. Mr. McCarthy.

(She chugs from the bottle. Gulps. Drinks. Gulps some more. Drowning herself.)

ARTHUR

He put his hands on ya?

DOTTIE

Leave me be--

ARTHUR

Did he touch you?

DOTTIE

Just a card game upstairs, and they wanted me to bring some fresh towels. It was so quick, one of 'em pinned me down on the bed.

ARTHUR

(Rolling up his sleeves.)

Oh, hell naw! He must be out his rabid ass mind!

DOTTIE

Don't even worry about it, Arthur!

ARTHUR

(Stops inches from the door.)

Whatchu mean don't worry about it? Visitors ain't got no right to put they hands on ya.

DOTTIE

Whatchu gon' do, huh? They just got a little handsy, is all. I can take care of myself, Arthur.

ARTHUR

No, you can't! You sittin' here, drinkin' like a fish.

(He goes to snatch the bottle away from her. She pulls away.)

DOTTIE

Move, nah! I'm drinkin' this!

ARTHUR

Didn't I tell you ain't 'sposed to be drinkin' on the job?

DOTTIE

And you be writin' on the job?! Why can't I drink? *(Stumbles.)* Huh? We...both breakin' the rules.

ARTHUR

Dottie-- you gon' get yaself drunk. Just like--

DOTTIE

What?! Go ahead and say it! Just like last time. Ain't nobody a damn drunk, I'm me. Hell, that's what I am. I'm me.

(ARTHUR charges her and snatches the bottle from her hand.)

ARTHUR

You gon' go in that bathroom, sober yourself up, and we're gonna go tell Mr. Dawson. RIGHT NOW, DOTTIE!

DOTTIE

That cracker ain't gon do nothin'! When you gon' get that through your thick skull, man?! That bastard don't give a damn about us, Arthur. *(Pulls off her apron.)* I'm done!

ARTHUR

You can't give up! We had a plan--

DOTTIE

(Bursting out.)

I know you ain't talkin' about that damn picture show you conjurin' up? Arthur, leave it be. It AIN'T gon' happen! *(Beat. To hurt...)* Don't you see, we done came out here, left our homes, and my baby-- *(Recovers:)* And for what? For what?! To do the things we always gon' do, be under their Goddamn thumbs!

ARTHUR

Ms. Hattie said she's gon' call some people's to make it right. Dottie, I told you, I'm gon' make you a star.

*(Out of drunkenness, she laughs. And laughs.
Until it becomes full rage.)*

DOTTIE

You got to be the dumbest nigga on the face of the earth! You really think this woman is gon' help you? That's how they are, Arthur. Folks say one thing and then give you false hopes.

HATTIE

I'm really gonna call some people.

DOTTIE

(Stumbles drunkenly.)

Oh, you don't have to lie.

HATTIE

I am not lying.

DOTTIE

How can you help him when you can barely help ya self?

HATTIE

You running from something, and it done caught up with you.

DOTTIE

Why you keep sayin' that, huh? Ain't nobody runnin'. What's the point of runnin' when you ain't got nowhere to run to? Is you runnin' from somethin', *Ms. Hattie McDaniel?* Mammy, first colored woman to be nominated for an Academy Award. Whoopee damn do. You ain't did nothin' special. Look at me, I'm a maid, and I can do it too. You don't see them handin' out no damn awards. *(Mockingly as Mammy:)* "I don't don't know nothin' bout birfin' no babies." *(Scratching her head and very stereotypical like:)* Oh, yesum, you is. I's Mammy, you gon' listen to what I's gots ta say. "Oh, Lawdy, Lawdy, I done see't a ghost. I's know I's seen't a ghost." You sittin' there shuckin' and jivin' for them white folks...No wonder the NAACP mad at ya'. Talkin' 'bout you doin' it for Negroes--you done set up every one of 'em because of this! You's a sellout!

ARTHUR

(Yanks her by the arm.)

Dottie, stop it!

DOTTIE

You get yo Goddamn hands off'a me!!!

HATTIE

Li'l girl, you ain't sayin' nothing I ain't already heard.

DOTTIE

Oh, I'm 'sho. You like playin' them maids and you know it.

HATTIE

(Looks at her up and down.)

I'd rather play a maid than to be one.

(DOTTIE is gutted.)

DOTTIE

Well, you ain't nothin' but a fat pickaninny who probably slicked and tricked every Hollywood man in this town to get yo' way.

(HATTIE goes up to DOTTIE.)

HATTIE

I fought tooth and nail to get to where I am today--

DOTTIE

And you think you somethin' special cuz you got yo' li'l award ceremony tonight? You ain't nothin' special!

ARTHUR

Dottie, this is special--

HATTIE

I am the one who put my name on the ballot. I AM the first colored woman to be even nominated for an Academy Award. This is history. *(Slowly, convincing herself.)* I am *destined* to be here.

DOTTIE

Oh, you destined a'ight. *Destined* to be a mammy all yo' life. You on the silver screen, on yo' knees, beggin' for the scraps at Massa's table. *(Pause, then patronizes her with a small clap:)* Well go head, Ms. Hattie McDaniel! You may have accomplished things that most Negro people wouldn't dream of, but you ain't doin' yo own people's a favor, and now you're countin' the cost. You can't even sit with yo own cast members. To put up with ya ass, Arthur had to put a small table *waaayyy* back in the corner of the banquet hall just for you. Ya ain't welcome in they world! Was it worth it?

Was it worth it for ya family? Do you even have family left...or chi'rren...?

(Off Hattie's tense silence:)

Noooo...ya don't. Well, you gon' die alone, and in that, you gon' have to think about all that you did. When all of this blows over, you gon' be forgotten!!!

(Suddenly, HATTIE backhands her. DOTTIE crashes against the bar counter top.)

(A mighty moment between the three of them.)

HATTIE

Counting the cost, you say?! Have you counted the cost? 'Cuz you playing with fire li'l girl. And that fire is gon' burn everything down in your life if *you* let it. Don't be that spark, Dottie. Don't be that spark!

DOTTIE

Y'all just leave me alone!!!

(DOTTIE frantically rushes out.)

(ARTHUR looks to HATTIE. HATTIE looks to him. And then he rushes out.)

(Lights fade on HATTIE in the bar.)

SCENE FOUR

(Evening. Noise spills from upstairs into the bar. ARTHUR tenderly washes DOTTIE'S face. She's sobered up now.)

DOTTIE

I didn't mean any of it, Arthur--

ARTHUR

Shh...it's alright.

(She grabs his hand and hold it close to her cheek.)

DOTTIE

I'm angry. I'm sad...and I miss her.

ARTHUR

I know you do.

DOTTIE

I know I said I'm done, but I can't go back. I ain't.

ARTHUR

(Holds her face.)

And you don't have to.

DOTTIE

Why you so good to me? I ain't been good to you lately.

ARTHUR

Hush up, woman. You my best friend. You've always been there for me. Hell, I wouldn't even be alive if wasn't for you. You stay remindin' me. I thought I was all big and bold and tried to climb that tree branch, and my ass done fell in that creek. It was a *skrrronng* current that day, too. Carried me all the way down stream, and you jumped right in and saved me. My hero, Dottie.

DOTTIE

You always been brave, Arthur. That's what I love about you. *(Beat.)* I am so sorry. You've saved me too. Been such a good friend, and Lawd knows, I don't deserve you. You was there when I ain't had nobody. You delivered my chile right on the floor in Mama's kitchen. Helped me in ways I don't deserve. You my best friend. And you dream so big...

ARTHUR

Love ya', Dottie.

DOTTIE

I love you too, crazy man. *(A moment.)* You know I'd be honored to be in your picture show.

(Tears. Smiles. A simple kiss on the forehead.)

(Pure friendship.)

(HATTIE slips in, watching them.)

HATTIE

I was hoping to talk to Dottie before I left to go home.

ARTHUR

'Sho. I'm gonna go put some more of these glasses in the ballroom.

*(ARTHUR makes his way out of the bar.
DOTTIE and HATTIE are left alone.)*

(HATTIE sits down in the chair in front of her.)

DOTTIE

Ms. Hattie, I wanna apologize fuh disrespectin' ya. I didn't mean those ugly things I said 'bout ya'. I think it's wonderful for what you doin' in them movies, and to be the only colored woman doin' it and gettin' this far, it can't be easy on ya. Especially when you got folks prayin' for ya' downfall.

*(HATTIE just looks at DOTTIE with all the
world of hurt.)*

HATTIE

I ran too. Nine years ago, I hopped on the train with twenty dollars and my lucky rabbits foot. Came here to Hollywood to be somebody. Starred in so many pictures, I lost count, and hell, I didn't even get credit for it. People mad at me for playing maid roles. What do you want me to do? Play a glamour girl and sit on Clark Gable's knee? When folks ask me not to play the parts, what have they got to offer in return? Nothing. People always got things to say but no solution. My own worst enemies ain't white folks. It's my own people's. This life, honey, this life, just gave me nothing but a sorrowing heart. *(A sweet pause.)* I was just like you. Just like you. Hmmph. I couldn't go through a day without feelin' real down about myself. My brothers and sisters did all they could to try to make me laugh through it all. They tried to make me smile but no matter what, I just couldn't. Until I came up on this real pretty garden down in Sugar Hill. Real pretty Gardenias. And for the first time, I smiled. I laughed. I felt good. I ran from home, I ran from my mama because I ain't wanna end up like her. I ain't just played these maid roles to be a beacon. I ain't put my name on the ballot to bring light to my mama and grandmama. I did it for the little girl from Kansas that was running all over those pretty Lilly fields. *(A heavy truth.)* Dottie, I did it for me.

DOTTIE

Ruth Anne. That's my baby girl's name. Her daddy wuzn't no good, and I ain't had no business being a mother. I wasn't ready, and I gave her up. Told her I ain't want her and left to come out here. Lookin' an innocent soul in the face and tell them that you don't want them. She ain't understand the storm that I had inside of me. She was nothin' but a baby. But it was my truth, and one thing I don't do is hold my truth back. Been that way since I was a li'l girl. Got me in a heap of trouble a whole lotta times. Lawd knows I carry 'dat on my shoulders everyday. I hated somethin' that came from me, that God blessed me with. Tell ya the 'truf, I had some careless ways, and I do burn everything down in my life, Ms. Hattie.

HATTIE

Where she now?

DOTTIE

With my mama.

HATTIE

You had to do what you had to do.

DOTTIE

No, I was bein' selfish with mine. Always had been. I ain't never had much in my life, Ms. Hattie. Never had nothin' goin' for me. I wanted to be a singer, nothin' but night clubs and havin' my own records. Mama wanted me to sing for the Lawd, but I ain't want that either. I always run. *(Laughing through the tears:)* And the way these feets be achin', I am tired of runnin'.

(HATTIE looks at her card one last time.)

HATTIE

(Kicks off her shoes.)

Indeed. *(Beat.)* C'mon. Lemme play you something I been playin' with. *(She travels to the piano and plays a tune.)* This is for you, Dottie!

(HATTIE crosses to the piano, starts to play a real upbeat tune.)

HATTIE

*SHE'S GOT STARS IN HER EYES
THE MOONLIGHT/ THE SUN ALL IN HER SMILE...
SHE HIT THE GROUND RUNNIN',
TRAVELIN' MILE BY MILE...*

*SHE CARRIED THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD...
A CROWD FULL OF PEOPLE...
SHE STILL FELT LIKE A LONELY GIRL...*

*STICKS AND STONES MAY BREAK HER BONES...
BUT ALL IS SHE WANT'S JUST IS A HOME...
JUST CALL HER CALI GIRL!*

DOTTIE

JUST CALL HER CALI GIRL!

HATTIE/DOTTIE

AND GIVE HER THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD.
JUST CALL HER CALI GIRL!

(They hug. ARTHUR claps, having been there the whole time.)

DOTTIE

How long you been standin' there?!

ARTHUR

Long enough, *Cali Girl*.

DOTTIE

Oh, Arthur.

ARTHUR

I'm glad you two made up.

HATTIE

We gon' be good friends.

(They hear voices filtering from upstairs.)

ARTHUR

You sure you don't wanna go? *(Hearing the voices grow louder.)* I can sneak ya out the back, so those reporters won't know ya leavin'.

(She looks at the card one more time. Takes in a deep breath. Looks to DOTTIE. Her lips bend to a small smile.)

HATTIE

Lawd, you right 'bout this man. He sho'll is stubborn. Ah, hell. I'mma go.

ARTHUR

You serious right now?!

HATTIE

You right...this gon' make history. And we *do* deserve it. Even when they don't think we do. We got to make our own space in this world. You reminded me of that. *(Pulls out the notecard.)* I'mma go get MY award.

ARTHUR

Well, hot dayummmm!

DOTTIE

Oh, just one moment. I made somethin' for ya'.

(DOTTIE goes out. A crash noise comes from the back.)

ARTHUR

You a'right?!

DOTTIE

I'm fine.

(She enters back in with pretty white Gardenia flowers.)

ARTHUR

Is that the flowers we set out this mornin'? Now you know Mr. Dawson--

DOTTIE

Oh, shut up, Arthur. It's ours now. I want to give them to Ms. Hattie.

HATTIE

Oh, these are beautiful. My favorite flowers.

DOTTIE

Turn around for me. Arthur get me some of them pins, I hide 'em in the drawer behind the bar.

(ARTHUR goes to grab the pins. DOTTIE picks the flowers and places one of them in HATTIE'S hair.)

ARTHUR

Look at you, Ms. Hattie.

(ARTHUR and DOTTIE pins the rest of the flowers on HATTIE'S gown. It's a tear jerking moment. HATTIE can't help but cry.)

HATTIE

Oh, y'all don't have to do this.

ARTHUR

We want to. Want you to look good when you're acceptin' ya award.

DOTTIE

There it is.

*(HATTIE's gown is now cascaded by white
Gardenia flowers.)*

HATTIE

I want to thank y'all.

DOTTIE

No, thank you, Ms. Hattie McDaniel.

HATTIE

Arthur, I'm gon' call you. Now when I get my house, y'all gon' come over and get some home cooked meals y'all been missin'.

ARTHUR

Can't wait.

*(HATTIE places her hand tenderly on both their
faces.)*

HATTIE

Don't let this city dim y'all's light. It's too special.

ARTHUR

I promise, Ms. Hattie.

DOTTIE

I promise, Ms. Hattie.

(HATTIE smiles and then exits.)

(A moment.)

(DOTTIE and ARTHUR looks after her, proud.)

(Fade to black.)

SCENE FIVE

(Night time. ARTHUR is listening to the Academy Awards on the radio and eating pretzels.)

(DOTTIE rushes in, taking off her smock.)

DOTTIE

They announced it yet?!

ARTHUR

Shhhh...They about to.

FAY BINTER (V.O.)

"...That I present the Academy Award for Best Actress in a supporting role during 1939 to Hattie McDaniel."

ARTHUR

That's what I'm talkin' about!!!

DOTTIE

Go head, Ms. Hattie! Go head.

(On the scrim, we see the infamous video of Hattie McDaniel receiving her award.)

HATTIE

Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, fellow members of the motion picture industry and honored guests. This is one of the happiest moments of my life, and I want to thank each one of you who had a part in selecting me for one of the awards. For your kindness, it has made me feel very, very humble, and I shall always hold it as a beacon for anything I may be able to do in the future. I sincerely hope I shall always be a credit to my race and to the motion picture industry. My heart is too full to tell you just how I feel. And may I say thank you and God bless you.

(More applause. The lights dim on HATTIE and rise up on ARTHUR and DOTTIE, celebrating.)

ARTHUR

I knew she could do it! I knew it!

(They both look at the door, waiting. Hearing the applause wafting from upstairs. With a little bit of hope, they both waits some more.)

(That back to liiiiifffeee...Back to reality moment for the both of them.)

DOTTIE

I just wish she could've said her own words. *(Beat. Grabs her stuff to go.)* Wheew, shit. Well...one 'mo room, and it's quittin' time.

ARTHUR

Yeah, I'mma finish up here, and go set up for the afterparty. *(With sincerity:)* I'mma talk to Aileen.

(DOTTIE stubs out her cigarette. Crosses to the bar, and softly pats ARTHUR on the shoulder.)

DOTTIE

(Jokingly.)

Good...but don't be down here all night, *day dreamin'*.

(She exits. ARTHUR cleans more of the champagne glasses.)

ARTHUR

Go head, Ms. Hattie.

(Crosses back behind the bar, grabbing a champagne glass and lifts it in the air.)

And the Academy Award for Best Director goes to...

(Suddenly, the phone rings.)

(ARTHUR glances at it for a swelling beat.)

(Is it Mr. Lloyd?)

(ARTHUR nervously lingers to it.)

(It continues to ring.)

ARTHUR

(Answers the phone.)

Hello?

(Lights fade on our dreamer ARTHUR BROOKS.)

(And in the darkness...)

(A mountain of applause is heard. In the golden hue of light, HATTIE grabs her Oscar and looks out. A gold light shines upon her beautiful face.)

HATTIE

My name is Hattie McDaniel, and they had a speech for me to say to y'all, but I wanted to say my own words. When I was a little girl, I dreamed so big. Dreamed of being on a big stage like this. And yes, I am grateful for this honor of being the Best Supporting Actress, and a "beacon" to my race. However, being a beacon is something that I did not ask for or want, but now I understand that it is my duty to be that. Most folks didn't appreciate my portrayal in this film. They called me every name you can think of. A sellout. Stereotypical. A no good for nothing Mammy. But as I've done these films, I did it my way, made my own path, and I brought to life people like my mama, my grandmother, and the women who served as maids and caretakers before them. I made them a part of the broken system that you all call Hollywood. I made you *see* them. You know them now. And as I stand here, I know my mother and my father's faith in me was not in vain. I don't know what will happen in the future, but I stand here as a testament to the faith that women like me will one day stand up here, with their Academy Awards in their hands, and you will have to listen to them. You will applaud their Black skin, bright gowns, beautiful smiles, and their bold dreams.

(From there, DOTTIE and ARTHUR enters from the side, looking at HATTIE with pride.)

And when the Lord calls me home, I surely hope that the great streets of Hollywood will be lit up with the bold dreams of ALL Negro men and women. They will be able to plant their pocket full of dreams wherever they so choose. And you cannot ignore it. To my fellow Negro people, just know that you can best fight any existing evil from the inside. Your dreams matter. Your hopes matter. Your pain matters. *(Looks to ARTHUR.)* And your story matters. Though you grow weary, you got the strength to keep going. You keep fighting, and you keep on dreaming!

(A voice comes from a distance:)

VOICE OVER

And the Oscar goes to...

(Behind her, images consume the wall, showing decades of Black actresses winning their Academy Award.)

(From Whoopi Goldberg...)

(Halle Berry...)

(Jennifer Hudson...)

(Mo'Nique...)

(Octavia Spencer...)

(Lupita Nyong'o...)

(Viola Davis...)

(Regina King...)

(...And maybe, just maybe, so on and so on...)

(HATTIE is now revealed, and stands center, basking in the swelling applause. Tears flow from her eyes. As she holds her Oscar, she looks out to the audience, face alight, and lips part into a smile.)

(As she holds her Oscar, she looks out to the audience, face alight, and lips part into a smile.)

HATTIE

I've done my best, and God did the rest.

(With that, we suddenly infinitely fade to black on the immutable Ms. HATTIE MCDANIEL.)

END OF PLAY