

JOE: Let's drive over the Washington Bridge.

LORNA, *standing*: No, I'd like a drink.

JOE, *standing and facing her*: Lorna, when I talk to you . . . something moves in my heart. Gee, it's the beginning of a wonderful life! A man and his girl! A warm living girl who shares your room. . . .

LORNA: Take me home with you.

JOE: Yes.

LORNA: But how do I know you love me?

JOE: Lorna . . .

LORNA: How do I know it's true? You'll get to be the champ. They'll all want you, all the girls! But I don't care! I've been undersea a long time! When they'd put their hands on me I used to say, "This isn't it! This isn't what I mean!" It's been a mysterious world for me! But, Joe, I think you're it! I don't know why, I think you're it! Take me home with you.

JOE: Lorna!

LORNA: Poor Tom . . .

JOE: Poor Lorna! *The rest is embrace and kiss and clutching each other.*

THE GREAT WHITE HOPE

by Howard Sackler

ACT III, SCENE 3

The play is based on the life of the boxer Jack Johnson (Jack Jefferson in the play), the first black heavyweight champion. It takes place prior to and during the First World War. The story traces Jack's rise to the championship; his love affair with Ellie Bachman, a white woman; the various attempts by the boxing promoters, the government, and the public to destroy him; and finally, his capitulation to his enemies.

Jack's flamboyant, irreverent lifestyle, and the fact that he, a

black man, handily defeats each new "white hope," offends and enrages the powerbrokers in both boxing and government. A conspiracy is formed, false charges are brought against him, and Jack is forced to flee the country as a fugitive from the law. Frustrated at every attempt to earn a living, and threatened with a long imprisonment, Jack finally agrees to throw a championship fight for the promise of money and freedom.

The scene that follows is between Jack and Ellie. During the play we have seen them driven farther apart—by the poverty, by the need to constantly relocate, by her increasing weariness and Jack's increasing bitterness. They are now in Juárez, Mexico. Jack still has hope that he will receive a legitimate offer to fight. Ellie, all strength and hope gone, wants Jack to accept the bribe. The scene takes place in a barn, crudely set up as a training room for Jack.

ELLIE: Let them go ahead, Jack.

JACK: Take dem specs off. Ah cain hardly see ya.

ELLIE, *doing so*: I didn't think you wanted to.

JACK: You readin mah mine now?

ELLIE: Jack—

JACK: Ah toleya keep outa dis, din Ah?

ELLIE: I can't. Please, let them, you have to.

JACK: Finely battin fo do home team, huh?

ELLIE: Cable them tonight, please—

JACK: *Finely come roun to it—*

ELLIE: Jack, don't bitch me now—

JACK: Ah toleya—

ELLIE, *rises, goes center to bag*: No, I don't care! Forget what you told me! Say yes and get it over with for God's sake! You're letting them do this to you, it's worse—

JACK: Worse fo you, mebbe—

ELLIE: Jack, it's slow poison here, there's nothing else to wait for, just more of it. You've had enough, please, you're being paralyzed—

JACK: Wid you mebbe—

ELLIE, *hits bag, then goes to left end of table*. All right, yes, with me too, with everything but hammering that stupid bag there! You're not your own man any more—

JACK: Now you rollin—

ELLIE: How can you be your own man? They have you! They do and you know it, you're theirs. At least you can buy yourself back from them—

JACK: Sold—*one buck nigger fo de lady!*

ELLIE: Let it sound the way it is! Run when they push you and back when they pull you, work yourself sick in this hell hole for nothing, and tell me you're not theirs—Here, look at the grease you swallow for them, look at the bedbug bites on your arms, and the change in your pockets and the blotches in your eyes—

JACK: Doan leave de smell out—

ELLIE: The two of us smell! Whatever turns people into niggers—there—*Shows her neck.* It's happening to both of us—

JACK: Wish comin true, huh—

ELLIE: No, never this, it wasn't this—

JACK: Sing it, sistah!

ELLIE: I want you there fighting them again, that's what I wish now. I want to watch when you're knocking them down for this, dozens of them. God help them, wipe it off on all of them—

JACK: How bout rooster-fightin? Plenty right here—

ELLIE, *moves right to Jack:* Listen to me, please—

JACK: Oughta look inta dat—

ELLIE: You'd fight them and you'd be with your friends and you'd—

Jack crows like a rooster.

JACK: *Somebody wanna sign mè?*

ELLIE: Maybe we could live then, damn you!

JACK: Lil frame house, tree in front?

ELLIE: Anything!

JACK: Nice quiet street?

ELLIE: Anywhere! A place!

JACK: Lil cozy—

ELLIE: A kitchen!

JACK: Put de cat out? Tuck in de kids?

ELLIE: Oh, you're just hateful!

JACK, *grabs her from behind on the neck, swings her around and pushes her against downstage end of table:* Well, Ah gonna tellya whut de livin like, baby, far as Ah concern—

ELLIE: Get away from me—

JACK, *center:* Yeah, Ah put you straight on it—an alla you, too. Ah wen inta a fair once and dere wuz dis old pug, see, give anybody two bucks who stan up a roun widdim—professional set-up, reggerlation ring an all, cep dey had rope juss on 3 sides, dass right, de back side wuz de tent. So Ah watches a couple git laid out real quick in dere, but he doan look dat red hot ta me, see, so Ah climbs in widdim. An Ah doin awright fo a youngster, when all it once he bulls me up gainss dat tent-side a de ring an SLAM, WHAM, somebody behine dere conks me, right through de canvas, musta use a 2 by 4, an evvy time Ah stans up he shove me back agin, an SLAM, dere's anudder, down she come—good story, huh?

ELLIE: Jack—

JACK, *going around left end of table to above it:* Dass how it go like Ah knows it, baby—

ELLIE: Sometimes, sometimes—

JACK: All de way now! dass where Ah is and dass whut Ahm gittin, gonna git it de same sayin Yessuh, Nossuh, doan mattah whut Ah does—Ah in dere, unnerstan? An Ah doan wan you watchin, or helpin, or waitin, or askin, or hannin me you jive bout livin or anythin fromya but OUT, Ah mean OUT—

ELLIE: What—

JACK, *going around right end of table, left to chair:* How god-dam plain Ah gotta make it for you!

ELLIE: Jack—if you want other girls—

JACK: Git you stuff ready, train out 10 a'clock.

ELLIE: No, no, I won't, no—

JACK, *comes back center:* When Tick come Ah sen him ovah—

ELLIE: Jack—

JACK: Bettah start moving—

ELLIE: Stop it—

JACK: Ah pologize actin so yella up ta—

ELLIE: Wait, you have to stop it—

JACK: All Ah has to is be black an die, lady—

ELLIE, *goes toward him:* I want to stay, even if we—

JACK: Stay wid you own, lady—

ELLIE: What are you doing!

JACK: Quit dat, quit it, short an sweet—

ELLIE: I won't go—

JACK, goes downstage right: You knowed it comin, start movin—

ELLIE: Wait—

JACK: Doan cross me now—

ELLIE, following: Jack, I thought we'd save something, please—

JACK: Ah said MOVE—

ELLIE: Please, I only—

JACK: Move! You through widdit now—

ELLIE, kneeling, downstage right end of table: Jack—

JACK: No mo lousy grub you gotta puke up, no more a ya lookin like a wash out rag here, wid you eye twitchin alla—

ELLIE: Don't—I don't care—

JACK: Juss MOVE—

ELLIE, rises: I'll take better—

JACK: Hangin on me, dead weight—

ELLIE: No, not for you—

JACK: Start—

ELLIE: Jack, I'll find a job, please—

JACK: Ah toleya when mah momma die, Ah toleya leave me be a while, now—

ELLIE, goes to Jack: Jack, I can't run anymore, not by myself—

JACK: You got you people an you a—

ELLIE: No, listen—

JACK: You a young woman an you gonna—

ELLIE: Please, I'd never—

JACK: Gonna fine—

ELLIE: No one else, I'd—

JACK: Tough titty—

ELLIE: Just—

JACK: Move, or goddam you—

ELLIE: Why can't you wait at least! Wait till you've given me a chance to make you happy—one chance, only one—I swear I've never had one—

JACK: Too big a order all aroun!

ELLIE: No, I won't go—

JACK: Wanna drag it out, huh—

ELLIE: I won't, I can't—

JACK: Den Ah gonna wise you up good now, you gray bitch—

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out of the life of poverty they have lived. She wants to secure a home for herself and her children. Most of all, she does not want to lose Will.

The confrontation between Anne and Will in the following scene was preceded by a number of incidents: A company of traveling players arrived in town; the offer to teach school was made; Anne caught Will with one of the neighborhood "wenches"; Will promised to come home early to discuss the position, but instead went to see a play—indeed, he brought home a script to read. As the scene begins Anne and Will are sitting at the table. He is reading and she is darning, waiting for him to begin the conversation. The dialogue is written in a style that captures some of the rhythms and patterns of Elizabethan English.

ANNE: Ye said talk.

WILL, *reading*: Yes.

ANNE: Are ye taking it?

WILL, *reading*: It?

ANNE: The teaching. *She waits.* Will ye put that away and—*(she sweeps the pages away)*—mind me, if ye're sober? *Will gathers them up again.*

WILL: Of course. I'm drunk only on this play, which you disrupted there too, it tells me to pillage cities to come at my desire: and what I'm asked is walk behind our schoolmaster—that sheaf of dutiful bones—

ANNE: Are ye taking it?

WILL: —into Sir Thomas's palm. It's not enough, no, it's—

ANNE: Then why talk, ye liar.

WILL: Don't—*(Anne bites the thread off, rises, slaps the darning down)*—call me liar, and—

ANNE: Damn liar.

WILL: —sit down!

ANNE, *dangerous*: Mind it, lad, I'm not ye little wench—

WILL: I didn't say lie down. *Anne stands inarticulate, then wheels to leave.* Here, throw this, one more won't matter. *He tosses a mug, she catches it, for a moment she is tempted.*

ANNE: I don't throw things, sweet.

WILL: Not when a ladylike fit of fingernails will do. I admired the two of you, such gentle blood I saw. Will you join me? *He*

puts the text aside, Anne is moveless. I said it's not enough, not that I wouldn't, sit or not. *Anne brings the mug back, sits opposite him.* Nor that I would, either.

ANNE: Oh, God help me.

WILL: Now we can patch up our differences again—

ANNE: If I made a fool of myself there it's my doing, but ye, ye damn peacock—

WILL: —over a pleasant conversation—

ANNE: —ye make such a fool of me every time—

WILL: —that leads nowhere, or—

ANNE: —ye say a word! *She strikes the needle into his wrist, he writhes away.*

WILL: God—damn—

ANNE: Don't lose the needle, please.

WILL: Certainly not, I'm deeply imbedded to you.

ANNE, *ironic*: I'm sorry if I give ye pain.

WILL: Oh, pain is always a pleasure, it reminds me we're not the—compliant vapors that drift in and out of my daydreams, now how much of it can you bear?

ANNE: Give me it. *She catches at the needle, rises.*

WILL: I mean I've been pondering a different compact with you, a conversation we can get our teeth into.

ANNE, *turns*: What?

WILL: Truth, all or nothing, no lies, no question evaded, no mercies or delicacies, go down in the slop as—honest as pigs, and look at what each of us is married to. *He waits.* No?

ANNE: Why?

WILL: To see if it's enough. *He waits.* No?

ANNE, *a pause*: Yes.

WILL: Then sit. *Anne lifts the darning off the stool, sits.*

ANNE: I'm sitting. Start.

WILL: You.

ANNE: How many times did ye lay with her?

WILL: Fifteen. Twenty.

ANNE: Why?

WILL: Is that a question? I was agog for her—dumplings, my hands itched.

ANNE: Is she the only one?

WILL: Well, that's no answer. No, she's not the only one, I was—

ANNE: Who else?

WILL: Tumble and tell?
 ANNE: Ye said everything.
 WILL: Yes. You don't know them though, one at Snitterfield, one—
 ANNE: How many?
 WILL, *recalling*: —five, six—
 ANNE: I'll kill ye! *She comes at him, he slips around the table.*
 WILL: No more questions?
 ANNE, *grittily*: Oh, I have questions, pet, yes—
 WILL: Then don't kill the goose that laid—Et cetera.
 ANNE: Six is it, ha?
 WILL: Seven.
 ANNE, *hits the table*: Why, ye think ye're a great bull down there, ye're not—
 WILL: Is that a complaint?
 ANNE: No—yes, if that's all I thought about, now answer me—
 WILL, *a knife*: Compared to what?
 ANNE, *stopped*: Ye know what, I told ye, the—one before we—
 WILL: Compared to—ancient history, it grows longer with time. Who since?
 ANNE: Since we—?
 WILL: Since we. *Anne sits, half averted, very reluctant.*
 ANNE: One.
 WILL: Who?
 ANNE: Once.
 WILL: Who?
 ANNE: Sandy.
 WILL: Sandells! *He spins in disbelief, stops.* Compared to Sandells?
 ANNE: Oh, yes. *Will is dumb, her eye now taunts him.* Ye daren't ask?
 WILL: How—bully is—old friend Sandells? *Anne shows with her palms apart.* Needn't kill me, I'll kill myself—
 ANNE: Starts there. *She inches her palms apart, wider, wider, until she laughs.* Oh God, ye're a baby—
 WILL: It's all foreskin, was there a once? *Anne no longer laughs; she then nods.* When?
 ANNE: This summer.
 WILL: How?
 ANNE: He—he—put my hand on it, I—was—

WILL: Captured.
 ANNE: Yes.
 WILL: Womanly compassion.
 ANNE: No.
 WILL: Higgedy piggedy, two in the stew, now don't be so cleanly with me, please?
 ANNE: It's not the same. Did I have a husband so—glad to do it, or able?
 WILL, *terse*: I'm able, ask.
 ANNE: Which one? Anyone but me, so many ye—No, why, why did—
 WILL: Curiosity?
 ANNE: I wasn't enough?
 WILL: No, half the world is female—parts, I didn't think I should go to my grave in ignorance.
 ANNE: Ignorance.
 WILL: Of all others. Well, that's also no answer—
 ANNE, *scornful*: Ye find such a goggle of difference?
 WILL: Some.
 ANNE: What's so darling damn different? *Will looks at her, glinty.* Tell me, tell me—
 WILL: Size, degree of—lubricity, color—taste— *(Anne closes her eyes)* —grip, friskiness—So on.
 ANNE: And theirs is—better?
 WILL: Different.
 ANNE: Better?
 WILL: Some. *Anne puts a hand over her face, sits, without a move or sound, till Will repents.* Anne, Anne—
 ANNE: Never mind!
 WILL, *bitey*: Yes, don't cry.
 ANNE: Is that ye plan, now?
 WILL: What?
 ANNE: Half the world?
 WILL: It's why we're talking. *A pause.* Was it very—exciting?
 ANNE: Sandy? *Will nods.* Shall I tell ye the truth?
 WILL: No.
 ANNE: I didn't come, lad.
 WILL, *a pause*: Thank you.
 ANNE: I kept seeing ye ugly face, I turned like a clam, then. *Will now comes, sits opposite her, he pokes at the text.*
 WILL, *then*: I said died of complications, didn't I.

ANNE: Ye didn't tell her it was seven, twenty times each—
 WILL: Not with all.
 ANNE: Why not, they didn't think much of ye?
 WILL: Gets boring.
 ANNE: For a boy I been feeling sorry for, ye—have a grand gift to surprise me—
 WILL: But God gives each of us a fruit, and one way or another I mean to eat it, before I die, before I die.
 ANNE: When did ye start on them, I didn't guess one?
 WILL: While you were—I'm sorry—carrying the— (*He indicates upstairs.*)
 ANNE: Twins. *She nods.* Yes, that I knew, I had them all by myself, yes. And if ye hands itched for me ye'd—get the milk keeps them alive, not too pleasing to a lover, lad, is it.
 WILL: It's not that.
 ANNE: And I'm running around here with diapers and dish-rags, nobody's picture of a—doxy ye can't keep ye hands off—
 WILL: Not that.
 ANNE: Ye couldn't wait, what?
 WILL: Oh, I could wait, yes, but—Not take a wife any longer who suckles and swaddles and wipes me like a babe in public, no. *A wait.*
 ANNE: Ye liked it, lad.
 WILL: Don't call me that. I'm not always seventeen. I'm not—yours, you said I was, I'm mine, and out of whatever love you stalked in as mother tigress tonight, your tongue licks me with contempt. I like it: I loathe it. Be strong, be strong with—others, you're throttling a lover to death. And that I think is the answer.

A silence, their eyes on each other across the table.

ANNE: Is that—the worst ye have to say? *Will gazes at her.* It's a question, la—love.
 WILL: No.
 ANNE: What else? *Will picks up the text, stands up.*
 WILL: No, the game is over.
 ANNE: No it isn't, not till both of us say, and I have to know. *Will is silent.* Tell me, ye—milk-sop, what's the worst ye think, ye'll leave me?
 WILL: I think, she's older, she'll die first.

Anne hides her face in a hand, and this time does cry, it begins with a jerky breath, she keeps the crying in her gut, but at last it breaks her open. Will comes back, tosses the text on the table, stands behind her racked figure, to finger her nape.

ANNE: Don't—touch—
 WILL: Anne, nothing's impossible—the schoolteaching, family and fidelity, even Gilbert is possible—if I can— (*with both hands he caresses her hair, ears, eyes*) —ripen with it, that's all I mean by enough. Your cheek is wet. Is that the only thing? *He draws her body back against his groin, she stiffens, slowly moves against him.*
 ANNE: None of—ye business—
 WILL: Oh, I think it is. *His hands come down over her, bosom, belly, then he twists to the candle, he sees the marigolds, picks a few, sits beside her, and puts a flower in her hair.* That's for the dishrags. *She bites at his hand, he puts another into her bodice.* For the diapers. Yes, he— (*a last flower in his fingers, he twists to blow out the candle*) —did kiss her. You have no idea where I mean to put this one— (*Anne begins to laugh, in the dark, it is a marvelous laugh, also up out of her gut, hearty and prolonged, but it ends presently in a little gasp.*)
 ANNE: Not here—
 WILL: Here.

BUTTERFLIES ARE FREE

by Leonard Gershe

ACT I, SCENE 1

Don Baker is an attractive young musician living in his own apartment, in New York City, for the first time. Jill Tanner is an attractive young woman who, by happy coincidence, hap-