

A Shade or Two Darker

by

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Cast of Characters

<u>LYNDON</u> :	47
<u>GERTRUDE</u> :	45
<u>LION</u> :	18

Place
Midwest

Time
19th Century America/Evening

2.

Setting: A glamorous room complete with a large Egyptian rug, the finest hand-crafted wooden furniture, a globe, art work from the renaissance period and a grand fire.

At Rise: Lyndon paces back and forth throughout the room and Gertrude is seated. Lyndon is in a three piece suit and Gertrude in a gown.

Lights begin to rise.

LYNDON: At this point, I can't see us making much of a difference for him.

GERTRUDE: Please, don't say that.

LYNDON: We've tried everything, haven't we?

GERTRUDE: He should have gone to Cranbury with your parents for the summer. That's what I wanted him to do.

LYNDON: He can't run away from his problems.

GERTRUDE: It would have given him time.

LYNDON: Time...there is no time...we have to go on living, until we run out of time. Loathing about is not what I want to see my son doing.

Lights reach full capacity, but the room remains dimly lit.

GERTRUDE: He's suffered a great tragedy.

LYNDON: That's because he goes on with the most unruly boys from the other side of the tracks. What possesses him? What gets into his mind that he wishes to travel across town and mix up with those barbarians?

GERTRUDE: We can't discount what he witnessed.

LYNDON: If our son learned to mind his own business, he never would have seen the lynching. I warned him!

GERTRUDE: He told me he didn't want to see it, but that they forced him to see it.

LYNDON: Forced him? Who?

GERTRUDE: He doesn't know exactly.

LYNDON: Didn't they know he's my son?

GERTRUDE: We need to allow him to recover from---

LYNDON: Recover! Had he listened to me, he would have never--

GERTRUDE: Are you that detached?

LYNDON: Detached? (exploding) If I were detached I wouldn't be so Godforsaken angry!

Pause. 30 seconds.

LYNDON (softly): We provide him with everything he could ever want, right here. What's wrong with the young gentleman who attend his school? Why can't he seem to find any activity with them?

GERTRUDE: He calls them dull.

LYNDON: Yes, I suppose he does...

GERTRUDE: Yes.

LYNDON: That's because he doesn't see the difference between what is dull and what is intelligent.

GERTRUDE: But, how are we to get him to see otherwise?

LYNDON: Have you ever felt the sense that Lion was switched at the hospital?

GERTRUDE: Lyndon! How can you say such words?!

LYNDON: Someone must say it! Look at him, he looks nothing like me or you, we have known the truth, we have known it, yet we don't speak of it and it is that the color of his skin is much more than a shade or two darker than ours, have you no voice on it? Have you become so blind??

GERTRUDE: I don't wish to have this conversation.

LYNDON: We *must* not lose our honesty in this home if we are already losing our son!

GERTRUDE: My son is a handsome and clever young man and it need not matter the color of his skin!

LYNDON: ...Not one bit?

GERTRUDE: ...No.

LYNDON: It is for me.

GERTRUDE: How dare you?

LYNDON: What would you have me say?!

GERTRUDE: You *despise* our child because somewhere along our ancestry chain there must have been a dark link, and that dark link carried itself throughout time, generation after generation, until finally it landed right here on our laps! What are we to do? Not love our son? Is that what you want? To be ashamed of him because of the way he appears?

LYNDON: You are as white as a ghost and I am as white as a white sheet of canvas. How can Lion be that brown?

GERTRUDE: I told you my theory.

LYNDON: Impossible!

GERTRUDE: Is the theory all that important?

LYNDON: Yes! For me, it is all too important. Do you know what the others are saying?

GERTRUDE: What?!

LYNDON: That you had an affair.

GERTRUDE: Nonsense! I'd cut my wrists before I would ever do such a thing. Who told you such lies?

LYNDON: I happened to go into Archie's Locksmith. I was in a neighboring isle, when I overheard Mr. Cornwall and Archie himself, gossiping. Talking about how our son Lion is the son of a black man and that you are guilty of some wild orgy.

GERTRUDE: What on earth?!

LYNDON: A spirit of some kind took over me Gertrude and I walked into that isle where those two men were chattering and I punched them both out.

GERTRUDE: No! You didn't?!

LYNDON: I most certainly did!

GERTRUDE: I can't bare it!

LYNDON: Yes.

GERTRUDE: When did this---

LYNDON: Not two weeks ago. I was planning on telling you, but then I thought it best that I leave it well enough alone.

GERTRUDE: Oh no...What shall be done?

LYNDON: About?

GERTRUDE: About all this fuss that's being made?

LYNDON: I think I've put a stop to all the muttering. I don't give a damn, either. At the end of the day, he's my son and I love him...damn it, I love that boy more than anything I've ever loved...

I want what's best for him, his future...he goes off all the time because he doesn't feel as though he fits in and I understand that...I believe I'd do the same damn thing as him.

But it's not what I wanted for my son and now, I feel in my heart that he has carved out his own identity and there's nothing I can do to steer him away from it.

LION: Why must you steer me away?

*Lyndon suddenly turns to see Lion standing
in the door frame.*

LYNDON: Lion, what are you doing here?

LION: I asked you a question.

LYNDON: I heard your question...we keep finding you in trouble.

LION: NO, trouble keeps finding me.

GERTRUDE: Lion, hold your tongue.

LION: I won't hold my tongue. Ever since I was a little boy I was treated differently and I never knew why, until I saw other young men like me, look like me and befriend me...why, I thought? WHY? Well, it was because of the color of my skin. That's why! You were right to say that I don't look like you or mother. I don't and I don't wish to. It isn't my fault that I am different than the both of you. It is your fault because you made me! Rather than ridicule me and force me into a square box, why not support me and love me for who I am? Are you both not strong enough to do so? I've gone out into this world and there are things that I see, that are wrong, *wrong*, WRONG! And what hurts me most is that the both of you do nothing. You carry on with your everyday lives like everything is fine, when this world is on fire! Is that how you want to live? To hide? To remain silent?! To make it to your end unscathed? Well, I've got news for you both, I may be your son, but I am not going to live my life like the two of you have. I will never allow the injustices I've witnessed to be overlooked. Anymore! I am *not* going to keep in order, hold my tongue, or forget to defend what's right! And if neither one of you can understand that about me, then I'm sorry, I disown you as my parents.

GERTRUDE: We love you, Lion.

LION: Love is not enough! If it were enough I wouldn't even be having this talk.

LYNDON: Don't you dare shout at your mother!

LION: I'm sick of how the both of you quiver whenever I walk into a room filled with people.

LION (cont'd): Don't you think that I've ever sensed that? What, do you think I'm just going to ignore it my whole life? You think you can keep on getting away with your thoughts, as if they are never going to be felt by me?!!

GERTRUDE: We've never tried to make you feel--

LION: Don't lie!

LYNDON: LION!!!

*LYNDON stands in front of LION
threatening.*

LYNDON (cont'd): Lower your voice...son.

LION: ...I'm moving.

GERTRUDE: What?! NO!

LION: I am of age and I'm leaving.

GERTRUDE: You cannot leave!

LION: Yes, I can mother and I am.

LYNDON: You are starting work this September with my firm. You cannot just walk away!

LION: That isn't the life I envision for myself.

LYNDON: And what will you do? Where do you think you will go?

LION: I am starting a business with my two partners.

LYNDON: Partners?

LION: You've heard me correctly. I'll be around people, my people, that treat me with kindness, honor and never make me feel beneath them. That matters a great deal to me and that is where I stake my claim.

LYNDON: I feel as though you are not my son.

GERTRUDE: Lyndon!

LION: As do I, father...

LYNDON: What did your mother and I ever do to deserve such disrespect from you?

LION: You shouldn't have to ask.

LYNDON: And you abandon your family?

LION: Perhaps you've met your fate...it's too late for it to change.

LYNDON: Life will be much different for you young man.

LION: That is what I crave deep in my bones.

LYNDON: You will regret this decision.

LION: I am already free.

LYNDON: There will come days when you wish you weren't alive. What will you do then? Come back to your mother and father? Huh? You expect us to take you in? Once you leave, you leave us for good! You will not ever be welcomed back on these premises again. You would have forfeited your birth right!

GERTRUDE: That isn't so---

LYNDON: Gertrude!

GERTRUDE: This is our son! NO! I will not allow this to happen. Lion, listen to me please, I am your mother and I love you, please don't do this, please don't leave us like this, stay. Stay, you must stay, for your own safety and well being, you must stay---

LION: Mother, you weep at my knees for your own selfish desires...and father, you stand alone, knowing the truth, deep within your beating soul...I will remember this great image of you both, as I view it now...this is my moment, the moment I turn my back on you both...I may be cruel, but I am not a vagrant. I have a plan, a structure and a bright future ahead of me. I wish to start a family of my own, built on deep values, integrity and truth. Do you understand? I will not be owned by my parents or by anyone you deem fit! You gave me life and now I plan on using it.

LYNDON: ...Lion, the day those men forced you to bare witness to the lynching...son...what if that was you?

LION: ...It was me, father...it was all of us...

LION turns his back on his parents and exits the room.

GERTRUDE: ...Did I dream this?...

LYNDON: ...This is all too real...

GERTRUDE: My heart is broken.

LYNDON: ...So be it...

GERTRUDE: What sort of man did I marry?

LYNDON: You take the boy's part?

GERTRUDE: You allowed our family to fall apart. I warned you, I warned you!

LYNDON: When did you warn me?

GERTRUDE: I begged you to change your ways. I told you to love our son for who he is, not for what you want him to be!

LYNDON: That bastard child has been given everything, EVERYTHING! He is a selfish, stubborn mule.

GERTRUDE: You should be ashamed of yourself.

LYNDON: I am.

GERTRUDE: You are a disgrace.

LYNDON: Perhaps, I am.

GERTRUDE runs out of the room.

LYNDON (to himself): ...This is the truth, my truth, don't you see? I have to see it through...

From off-stage GERTRUDE screams.

GERTRUDE: OUR LIES HAVE DESTROYED US ALL!!!

END OF PLAY