

Red Line

Written by  
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First Draft

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SCENE SIX

*A few days later, in HARRIET's backyard. HARRIET has hired WIL to pick up the old construction parts and remove them from the backyard. HARRIET is planting seeds in her small pots on the porch.)*

HARRIET

'Get rid of all those rusty old construction parts, especially the sharp items that are trip hazards. I'm tired of hurting myself getting to the garage.

WIL

These old parts are made out of steel. I could sell them for you.

HARRIET

You could use the money to save for a car. Your brother Herb wants to buy your father's old car. Since you live and work at the gym, I told him he could buy it.

WIL

Mom, I need that car to get to the boxing tournaments and to my road building jobs!

HARRIET

Take the bus! Herb has landed a good-paying job doing accounting for a lawyers' firm downtown. He's offering \$300 to buy the old Ford unless you have enough for a better offer?

WIL

Mom, I've taken on a full time job training the boys at the gym and working the road construction when I need the cash.

HARRIET

Seems a bit short-sighted, Wil, putting so much energy into teaching for free. Ask for a salary!

WIL

I'm getting free rent as my salary...plus those kids don't have the money to pay for their training.

HARRIET

There are plenty of full time jobs that pay a salary; in fact, I know Arthur's been wanting to hire you full time-

WIL

Mom, I don't see a future for myself in road construction!

HARRIET

Your father started that business... and Arthur's been getting more work than he can handle. (more persuasively) Wil, if you worked full time, you could eventually become a co-owner!

WIL

Mom, I want to coach boxing!

HARRIET

Wil, boxing is a losing proposition.

WIL

I have my Golden Gloves pin to remind me that hard work pays off.

HARRIET

You mean winning bets on whose going to knock the other man out first.

WIL

So, I was going to ask you for a loan to buy the Kinloch Gym.

(HARRIET stops and stares at her son. Out of frustration, she steps inside to the kitchen, and comes out with a letter written by her husband.)

HARRIET

I was holding on to this letter your dad dictated to me when he could no longer write out his thoughts. He wrote one for each of his sons.

(HARRIET takes an envelope out of her apron pocket and hands it to WIL.)

WIL

Can I keep it?

HARRIET

No, it's legal proof of his final wishes and I'm the Power of Attorney for your father's affairs.

(WIL crosses to the construction equipment, sits to read the letter.)

WIL

"Wil, as the youngest, my hope and prayer is that you rely on the best traits of your older brothers to learn how to make wise choices for your self. Your dreams as a child are wonderful to indulge but there will be a time when you must pursue the practical path, one that can provide for you in the future. Look to your older brothers for guidance since I will not be here to help you make these decisions when you come of age."

(HARRIET puts out her hand to motion to WIL to return the letter.)

WIL

Dad died when I was eighteen...over three years ago and now you share his final thoughts with me? Did you give Arthur, Emil or Herb their letters?

HARRIET

Yes, they were older so I thought they would benefit sooner from your father's encouragement.

WIL

Why didn't you give me dad's letter when my brother's got theirs?

HARRIET

I felt I needed to wait-

WIL

Why?

HARRIET

...because I wasn't sure how far you would stray from his hopes and plans for your success.

WIL

So you were waiting till you felt I needed dad's encouragement.

(HARRIET holds up the letter.)

HARRIET

This letter is meant to help guide you through this phase you're going through.

WIL

This phase? So that's how YOU see my life-

HARRIET

Your father set up a trust fund for each of his sons. As power of attorney, I decide how that trust money is spent.

WIL

I just wish dad lasted long enough to see me compete in the ring. I know he would have supported me.

HARRIET

I wouldn't be too sure.

WIL

Mom, you never believed in anything I wanted to do-

HARRIET

I supported you...I fed you...clothed you...took care of you when you were sick...I just wish you spent more time with your brothers growing up than with James nextdoor.

WIL

I'm four years younger than Herb, six years younger than Emil and eight years younger than Arthur. We had little in common, mom. James and I are the same age. We were best friends!

HARRIET

James has been a bad influence on you.

WIL

James is a fighter, maybe not in the ring, but he's a Negro fighting to make something of his life.

HARRIET

I don't doubt he's worked hard. Working in his father's machine shop is his future. Your future is NOT with those Negroes!

WIL

We each see what we want to see, mom. James sees himself as a journalist; you see him as a second-class machine shop assistant...James has been an inspiration to me-

HARRIET

Negroes will always be ranked lower than Whites! Looking towards James as a role model cannot help you achieve your goals.

WIL

Mom, you're sounding like Adolph Hitler in his book "Mein Kaump!"

HARRIET

Adolph Hitler was a maniac with a vile hatred towards Jews! How did you know about this book?

WIL

I found a copy in Emil's duffel bag.

HARRIET

Why in God's name would Emil be carrying a copy of Hitler's book?

WIL

Maybe he wanted to understand how Hitler justified Ayrian superiority?

HARRIET

Even Lincoln referred to the Whites as "superior" and the Blacks "inferior". Call Lincoln racist if you want but the history supports his claims.

WIL

You mean our slave history! Remember Jesse Owens' four gold medals in Berlin? Hitler ignored all of the Negro athletes who won events; treated them as if they didn't exist.

HARRIET

If Hitler didn't recognize Jewish athletes, why would he recognize the Negro athlete?

WIL

I remember dad quoting some English writer who said "Prejudice is the child of ignorance." (pause) I see potential in my boxing students. Leonard and Travis are going to be winners! I know they will.

HARRIET

Well, if you are so sure, then you will just have to carry on at the gym with your tribe of Negro boxers without any support from your family.

WIL

James taught me how to build things out of junk!...things that actually worked! My brothers couldn't begin to make something out of nothing.

HARRIET

Wil, your father never intended the Negro community to live alongside our White neighbors. While he was extremely generous, he knew his place and their place in our neighborhood.

WIL

I remember dad working hard to maintain those asphalt roads he built in Kinloch, fixing their potholes, resurfacing when the road got washed out.

HARRIET

Your father took pride in his work as a road builder. He had an impeccable reputation.

WIL

So you agree that Dad took pride in his road building, even in Kinloch!

HARRIET

Of course-

WIL

Which is why I KNOW dad would never agree to put concrete blockades across the roads he built!

HARRIET

Those blockades were decided by a vote in our community.

WIL

You mean the White community of Berkeley and Ferguson.

HARRIET

The neighborhoods felt there should be a clear separation between Kinloch and their own town.

WIL

Did dad agree with their decision?

HARRIET

Why wouldn't he?

WIL

But did he ever say he was for putting in those concrete blockades?

HARRIET

You must know that your father did everything to keep the peace in our neighborhood. He was a fair player and considered everyone's feelings-

WIL

Including the Kinloch folks?

HARRIET

Wil, I don't have to defend your father now that he is dead.

WIL

(pauses) No, I see that you don't.

HARRIET

What are you implying?

WIL

Mom, you put up that chain link fence in our backyard just a few months after dad died.

HARRIET

The fence complies with the racial covenants adopted by our neighborhoods years ago. It was way over due...Your father would have wanted it.

WIL

I doubt it.

HARRIET

Your father believed in preserving what was ours, securing our property value for posterity-

WIL

but NOT by excluding our Negro neighbors of the same privilege!

HARRIET

I don't have to listen to your belligerence.

WIL

So I'm the hostile one here!

HARRIET

Take all the scrap metal you want to pay for your gym of Negroes! I'm not investing in a losing proposition.

WIL

So winning is all YOU care about?

HARRIET

Winning is all WE care about!



(HARRIET storms off the porch while  
WIL watches her leave, turns to his  
pile and throws some of the spare  
parts at the pile.)

END OF ACT ONE