

Red Line

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CHARACTERS

WIL SCHNEIDER	The Son of Harriet. Quixotic, yet struggles to find his purpose. Lamenting loss of his father. 18s/25s.
YOUNGER WIL	The 13 year old Wil. A naive dreamer, impressionable and daring with weak hearing.
HARRIET SCHNEIDER	Mother of Wil. Stoic with racist beliefs. Finds solace in status quo; fears change. 50s/60s.
JAMES MOORE	Son of Lilly Moore. Smart, ambitious and fearless Black man who challenges the status quo during the 1940s. 18/25.
YOUNGER JAMES	The 13 year old James. An intelligent, gifted mind full of self-determination.
LILLY MOORE	Mother of James. Compassionate, caring, keeper of the peace. 50s/60s.

SETTING: St. Louis, Missouri in the town of Berkeley where the white Schneider family lives and the town of Kinloch where the black Moore family lives. The Schneider's and the Moore's backyards abut each other with no direct road access to the other's home. Both families have shared backyards since JAMES' family moved into the Kinloch neighborhood when JAMES was in grade school. WIL's family have owned their property since his parents were first married over forty years ago. His parents have raised four boys in the large house. WIL is the youngest of the four boys.

The facades of both houses' back porches distinguish the financial status of each family dramatically. There is a simple wooden picket fence separating the two properties for the first three scenes of Act One. By Scene Four, the simple wooden fence has been replaced by a 6' foot chain-link fence.

TIME: 1938 to 1948 during and after World War II when segregation defined the neighborhoods.

PRODUCTION NOTES: Both the wooden picket fence and the 6' chain-link fence run from down stage center to up center to convey segregation's effect over time. The concrete blockade is a 3' x 3' divider placed on the road connecting Berkeley to Kinloch. It should appear down center parallel to the edge of the stage.

A sound track with static building into a crescendo of noise can be used to convey the fight scene at the top of Act One. Scene 4. In Act One, Scene 8, we hear a radio broadcast of a semi-pro boxing match which can be pre-recorded sounding like an older radio broadcast.

SCENE THREE

A Week Later. In a special spot. WIL is talking to Giordano, the mob owner of the St. Louis Boxing Club. He has blood on his face, his shirt ripped, he has a black eye and two of Giordano's thugs are beating on him.

WIL

Must have been someone who saw or even heard the fight... he...they were askin' lots of questions...they knew a lot about the bets...(takes a hit) Ow...I didn't rat on you! (takes a hit) STOP IT!(ducks) No, don't YOU hit me again. I told you, I don't know WHO DOUG FREDERICK IS! He didn't call me. (ouch) I don't know who gave him the information. DON'T you HIT ME AGAIN!

(WIL starts to box with a mystery thug beating on him making sounds as if being beaten brutally by two of Giordano's thugs.)

(Light shifts)

Same day, later that evening. Lights up on the backyards of Harriet and Lilly's homes.

(JAMES calls out inside their home.)

JAMES

Mother, you home?

(JAMES enters their backyard looking for his mother. Just as he enters, LILLY enters onto HARRIET'S back porch dressed in a maid's uniform shaking out the rugs on the balcony.)

JAMES

Mom!

LILLY

James!

JAMES

What are you doin'?

LILLY

James, I needed the extra money, please don't be angry.

JAMES

Mom, you can't work for this woman!

LILLY

Oh yes I can if my pride doesn't get in the way!

JAMES

Pride? What about your self-respect!!

LILLY

James, there are six more months before I own our home. Those banks do not let us miss a payment. I just need to earn the money to make sure you inherit this home debt free.

JAMES

But you could make the same kind of money at our local school cafeteria, the library/

LILLY

No, I checked. Our library, the school cafeteria, the local stores, all pay minimum wage - only forty cents per hour. I can't work enough hours to pay for groceries...Harriet's paying me seventy-five cents per hour.

JAMES

You don't need that woman's money!

LILLY

Yes I do 'cause I don't want you to support me...you have your family to care for. I don't want you carry'n me financially! I won't stand for it!

JAMES

Elinore's a nurse, mom. She makes a decent salary.

LILLY

But once your child's born, things will change, dear. She'll need to be with the child. I can help!

JAMES

...I'll pay your mortgage...I got an article published at the Post.

LILLY

You did? The one about the mob and Leonard's fight?

JAMES

Yeah, they ran it!

LILLY

Maybe there is justice for our boys. What's Wil's reaction?

JAMES

Wil was pissed at me...I told him I was going to write the article...I just didn't think the Post would print it!

LILLY

James, careful how you expose Wil. The mob's the enemy here.

JAMES

Wil and I have hurt each other before. He needs to learn from this!

LILLY

But one article isn't going to pay the mortgage, James. I need this work.

(HARRIET enters calling for LILLY.)

HARRIET

Lilly, did you finish with the upstairs bathrooms yet?

(HARRIET stops abruptly after seeing JAMES at the fence.)

JAMES

Mrs. Schneider, my mother does not need your money!

LILLY

JAMES!

HARRIET

Your mother came to me asking for work.

LILLY

James, I get off in a half hour. We can talk then.

JAMES

No, I think there's no time like the present to address our Jim Crow legacy. Wil's using our young Black men as fodder for the mob and my mother's slaving for her White master! (points to HARRIET).

HARRIET

You have no right to say that to me!

(WIL enters all bloody and beaten by the back side of the garage listening to the conversation out of sight.)

JAMES

Maybe not, but the opportunities are few for my mother! Domestic servitude has been a Black woman's station for too long!

LILLY

James, please go back inside...I'll be home soon.

HARRIET

Lilly, I think it's best you leave now. Just leave the uniform in the pantry.

(LILLY exits, changing out of her uniform into her regular clothes.)

JAMES

Mrs. Schneider, my wife, Eleanor, served as a nurse in the German POW camp just off Missouri Bottom Road. The German prisoners spat on her, called the Black nurses names...And what did our Marine Guards do in response? NOTHING! In fact, our guards played chess with the German prisoners... laughin' and drinkin' together!

HARRIET

There's no need for hostility.

JAMES

Mrs. Schneider, you and Wil are a product of privilege...and apparently so are the German POWs. Nothin's really changed since abolishing slavery except removing the shackles.

(HARRIET sees WIL standing by the garage bleeding. WILL approaches his mother.)

HARRIET

What in God's name happened to you?

WIL

I walked into a fight coming home from the park...Giordano wasn't happy about the article in the Post.

HARRIET

What article?

JAMES

I wrote an article exposing the mob fixing fights on our boys in Kinloch.

HARRIET

But Wil coaches those kids.

WIL

And now they think I went to the paper exposing the mob.

HARRIET

And did you? Go to the paper?

WIL

I'm going to let James answer that question.

JAMES

Mrs. Schneider, I wrote that article to expose the mob fixin' fights.

HARRIET

And Wil's part in the corruption?

JAMES

Wil, the mob always wins, you can't beat them.

WIL

But I outsmarted them.

HARRIET

You can't outsmart the mob, Wil!

WIL

I told them Doug Frederick is notorious for exposing corruption in all the places you'd least expect.

JAMES

So they thought you ratted on them?

WIL

Well, since Doug Frederick painted me as a pawn in the hands of the mob...yeah...they blamed me.

JAMES

And you took the hit?

WIL

When they called Leonard a "good for nothing nigger" - I couldn't stand by and do nothing! So I went 1 on 2 with Giordarno's thugs. Got some sharp upper cuts and direct hits to their ribs. You should see what they look like.

JAMES

Wil, I'm sorry you had to take the hit.

WIL

But it would have been worse if I told them who actually wrote it...You'd be hanging from a street light near the river with a noose around your neck. I know these guys and especially Giordano. They always get their revenge!

HARRIET

Wil, I'm going to call the police.

WIN

Don't bother mom. The police are paid to defend Giordano. At least some of them are.

HARRIET

Wil, this has to stop!

JAMES

Let me write the article explaining the mobs attack on you. The Post is not beholdng to the mob...they printed the article on Leonard!

HARRIET

Wil's done enough! He has to find a way to distance himself from the mob.

WIL

I know what I want to do, mom.

HARRIET

What?

WIL

I'm going to go to work with Arthur and convince him to hire Leonard, and the other athletes who can't find honest work in this town. Schneider Brother's Construction is going to integrate their crew! I'm done with these thugs.

HARRIET

Wil, don't shame our family/

WIL

Shame the family? You shamed my father!

(LILLY re-enters in her street clothes.)

HARRIET

You have no right to talk about me that way...I sacrificed every day for this family!

LILLY

Wil...James...please, let's not argue. Let's respect each other.

JAMES

Mom, the golden rule only works in your own neighborhood.

LILLY

James, I am grateful for the work which provides for the roof over our heads!

WIL

My dad didn't want those blockades put across our roads OR THIS FENCE!

(HARRIET, LILLY and JAMES all stare at WIL.)

HARRIET

Wil...You don't know what you are talking about.

WIL

I read dad's letter to James' dad explaining his disappointment about the concrete dividers.

HARRIET

What letter? (shocked) Where did you get this letter?

LILLY

I found it in Webster's things. Mr. Schneider and my husband talked in his shop about cars...improvements to the neighborhood. Your husband was a dear friend to Webster/

HARRIET

You betrayed/me, Lilly...You should have given that letter to me.

LILLY

It was MY husband's letter...and I saw how Wil was hurtin', losing his father at such a young age...losing at every turn.

HARRIET

Residents of BOTH Berkeley and Ferguson voted to place the dividers; Wil, your father was not one to stir up trouble or cause division in our community.

WIL

You're right, mom. He left that to the rest of us in Berkeley.

(HARRIET stares at WIL, unable to speak.)

WIL

James, I know I screwed up with Leonard. I want things to change.

HARRIET

What kind of change are you referring to Wil?

WIL

Gettin' rid of the concrete dividers on our roads AND THIS FENCE BETWEEN OUR NEIGHBORS!

HARRIET

Segregation keeps order in the system, Wil!

WIL

Not if the system...is rigged.

JAMES

(looks at HARRIET) Mrs. Schneider, I think your husband wanted to change the system/

HARRIET

Integrating neighborhoods? He'd never allow it.

WIL

(to HARRIET) My dad treated the Kinloch folks as any other neighbor, with respect. He may have been all alone tryin' ...I know what that feels like ... growing up in this house...wanting to fight...no one believing in me!

HARRIET

(upset) YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT STRUGGLE IS!

(WIL, LILLY, JAMES are all frozen on HARRIET)

HARRIET

You think caring for your father was all I endured? I lost two children...still birth...both girls...and then Emil shot down THREE DAYS before V-E Day! You have no idea how I'm struggling/

WIL

Mom, I understand your pain/

HARRIET

Wil, / you have no idea what it means to struggle...Lilly does, but you boys have NO IDEA what we are 'goin through day to day. (stares at them) I'd like you all to leave now.

LILLY

(beat) Harriet...mothers always carry their children's pain.

(LILLY gathers her bag of clothes, WIL offers to carry her bags down their porch stairs.)

JAMES

So does my mother have to walk the two miles home?

(WIL grabs a section of the fence, begins to shake it so that it comes loose from the other sections. He throws the section on the ground in front of his mother on the porch.)

(WIL takes LILLY'S hand and leads her to JAMES' in their backyard. He turns around to face his mother through the fence.)

WIL

Mom, this fence divides us...that's all it does. Dad would never put up a chain link fence just as he never wanted those concrete dividers placed on his roads.

HARRIET

Don't shame our family, Wil!

WIL

Mom, you can't feel shame.

(BLACKOUT)