

Red Line

Excerpt Act 2. Sc. 5-6

Written by

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## CHARACTERS

WIL SCHNEIDER (The older)	Son of Harriet. Quixotic, yet struggles to find his purpose. Lamenting loss of his father. 18s/25s.
WIL SCHNEIDER (The younger)	The 13 year old Wil. A naive dreamer, impressionable and daring.
HARRIET SCHNEIDER	Mother of Wil. Stoic with racist beliefs. Finds solace in status quo; fears change. 50s/60s.
JAMES MOORE (The older)	Son of Lilly Moore. Smart, ambitious and fearless Black man who challenges the status quo during the 1940s. 18/25.
JAMES MOORE (The younger)	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 & TIME

SETTING:	The adjacent backyards of the Schneider and Moore families in the White town of Berkeley and Black town of Kinloch respectively, both in St. Louis county.
TIME:	1940'S during and after World War II when segregation defined the neighborhoods.

SCENE FIVE

*A few weeks later. Lights up  
on the backyards of Harriet  
and Lilly's homes.*

(JAMES calls out inside their  
home.)

JAMES

Mama, 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

Mama!

LILLY

James!

JAMES

What are you doin'?

LILLY

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

JAMES

Mama, you can't work for this woman!

LILLY

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

JAMES

Pride? You mean self-respect!!

LILLY

James, after your father died, our savings covered the  
mortgage through the next three months but there are six  
more months before I own our home. I just need to earn the  
money to make sure you inherit this home debt free.

JAMES

...I'll pay your mortgage...I know business will pick up...  
It is picking up. If you need to work, you can work at the  
(MORE)

JAMES (cont'd)

local library, the school kitchen...I'm sure they'll pay you what Harriet is paying.

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'in 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! Please let me help by working to earn some money so I can pay off this house. We are so close to owning this home-

JAMES

Mama, please...

(HARRIET enters calling for LILLY.)

HARRIET

Lilly, did you finish with the upstairs bathrooms yet?

(HARRIET stops abruptly after seeing JAMES at the fence. WIL enters directly after HARRIET on the family porch.)

JAMES

Ms. 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 (points to WIL) and here's my mama laboring for her White master! (points to HARRIET).

WIL

James, you're out of line. My mother isn't forcing your mom to work for her.

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

You know my sweet Eleanor served as a nurse at 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 here.

JAMES

Miz Schneider, you and Wil are a product of privilege... Black folks have been a product of discrimination...nothin' really changed for the last two hundred and fifty years!

HARRIET

Wil, are you going to defend our family or not? Say something!

JAMES

Wil's been shielded by privilege...his white skin protects his status...

WIL

WHAT DO YOU MEAN! My family has underestimated me most of my life.

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 now. Let's respect  
each other.

JAMES

Mama, do you think Miz Schneider has shown you the respect  
you deserve?

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.

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

HARRIET

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

WIL

I have dad's letter to James' dad explaining his  
disappointment about the neighborhood installing the  
concrete blockades.

HARRIET

Where did you get this letter?

LILLY

I found it. Mr. Schneider spent time together with Webster  
in his shop talking about cars, and planning improvements to  
the neighborhood. Your husband was a true friend to Webster  
and a support to our community.

HARRIET

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

LILLY

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

HARRIET

It was a community majority that voted to place the barriers; Wil, your father was not one to stir up trouble or cause division in our community.

WIL

Your 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

The system of segregating neighborhoods based on the color of your skin!

HARRIET

The system is what keeps order in society, Wil!

JAMES

Change the system then people change.

WIL

Not if....

(JAMES finishes WIL'S thought)

JAMES

(looks at HARRIET) ...the system is rigged. Miz. 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 doing so...I know what it feels like to be all alone struggling... I've felt dad's struggle coaching my students.

HARRIET (TO WIL)

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

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

LILLY

James, it's time to leave...now.

(LILLY starts to exit, but stops  
fixated on HARRIET's outcry.)

HARRIET

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

WIL

Mom, I didn't mean to upset you...

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

JAMES

So does my mama have to walk the two miles home or can she  
take the secret passage?

HARRIET

What secret passage?

JAMES

Wil, tell her. You're the one who found it!

HARRIET

What is he referring to, Wil?

(WIL walks downstage to the edge of  
the fence and steps on two lower  
steps helping LILLY around the  
fence. The steps lead to the other  
side of LILLY and JAMES' backyard.  
He turns around to face his mother  
through the fence while LILLY  
crosses to her porch.)



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 barriers placed on his roads.

HARRIET

Don't shame our family, Wil!

WIL

You can't feel shame, mama!

(BLACKOUT)

SCENE SIX

*A week or so later. WIL sits in the gym office reading his Dad's letter but stops to listen to the broadcast of the 1949 Race Riot at the Fairgrounds Park over the integration of the public pool. At the same moment, JAMES, working on a car part in his shop, listens to the same broadcast. The scene begins with archival film images flashing on a screen above their heads center stage showing the White youth beating Black youth trying to swim in the public pool and the violence that ensued while WIL and JAMES listen to the broadcast reacting to the riot.*

(As the radio broadcast fades, lights dim on JAMES. The light focuses on WIL re-reading his dad's letter to JAMES' father. JAMES enters and sits next to WIL in his office.)

WIL

Hey.

JAMES

Hey.

WIL

Reading my dad's words apologizing to your dad... (pauses)  
Do you want to hear some of this?

(JAMES looks intently at WIL)

JAMES

Let's hear it...

WIL

"Webster, you have been a tremendous help keeping my company's equipment running and for that, I will always be indebted to you. The Berkeley and Ferguson neighborhoods voted to place the concrete dividers once the school board voted to segregate the Kinloch middle school and high school. Only myself and Doctor Wymouth, who treats many of the Kinloch residents, contested the final vote. I am truly sorry for the impact this decision will have on our neighbors in Kinloch. Please know that you, Lilly and James are always welcome in our home.

JAMES

Can I see that?

(WIL hands JAMES the letter that LILLY found in her deceased husband's belongings. JAMES takes a minute to read the letter while WIL looks on.)

WIL

I think I owe you an apology, James. I didn't see it then but I see why I wanted Leonard to win so bad...

JAMES

Go on...

WIL

Professional boxing shapes you into a pawn of sorts...uses you to make money for whoever is the highest bidder. (pauses) I was trying to win a lousy bet, one that I couldn't win...no matter what I tried.

JAMES

If a Black man bets a White man, he always loses-

WIL

I was lookin' for a fair fight but the whole system's rigged.

JAMES

Welcome to my world!

WIL

Reading my dad's letter to your dad...I felt his presence hearing his voice again...I know it sounds crazy.

JAMES

Nothing's as crazy as hundreds of White boys beating up thirty Black kids in a pool and seeing their White parents cheer them on.

WIL

If the system is rigged, then the fight is to expose the corruption. Right?

JAMES

Wil, you're talkin like an "activist"

WIL

A what?

JAMES

Someone who stands for a social cause that helps the underprivileged, like those tobacco workers down in South Carolina singing "We shall overcome!"

WIL

I think I'm going to run for public office, mayor or city council.

JAMES

Wait, of Kinloch?

WIL

No, I'm not that crazy...Berkeley or maybe Ferguson. My dad knew segregation was wrong... AND he knew he couldn't fight his neighbors...family...especially his wife. He was all alone...really alone.

JAMES

Most dissidents are ... He dangled a pretty clever carrot to entice the white folks to question the blockades. (looking at the letter) ..."I suggested to the committee that we create more bus stops closer to the three neighborhoods to limit car traffic on all our roads."

WIL

The only problem with more bus routes is you create more segregated rides...You have to desegregate the buses.

JAMES

Then you have to deal with all the angry White folks sittin' next to Black folks on public transportation. There will be no shortage of material to write about.

WIL

Desegregation is coming, James. President Truman desegregated the military last year after hearing about Isaac Woodard's beating.

JAMES

You can't legislate morality; but you can influence bias; publishing editorials using the facts that describe people's actions, how White folk discriminate against Black folk. Most importantly, White folks like your self have to call out the fear mongering conspiracies like "Black men endangering White women" talk.

WIL

Or Black children polluting our public pools...How do you suppose we stop the fear-mongering conspiracies?

JAMES

By calling them out! White folk to White folk. AND by writing about the facts surrounding these hate crimes; in fact I'm going to hire Doug Frederick to interview the cops, parents, kids, anyone at the Fairgrounds pool who will talk.

WIL

So Truman passed a bill to integrate the military recently but integration can't override a soldier's racial bias or White kids refusal to swim with Black kids in a public pool.

JAMES

...however...a common enemy does more to integrate a battalion...someone or something that threatens both the White soldier AND the Black soldier.

WIL

Like our building commissioner?

JAMES

What do you mean?

WIL

The county just bought the gym.

JAMES

What do they want with the Kinloch gym?

WIL

I have my suspicions they want to obtain lots close to Lambert Air Field so they can eventually expand their runway access.

JAMES

Buying the Kinloch gym means buying much of Kinloch and ...

WIL

...maybe even Berkeley homes...I don't expect they'll act anytime soon...they're always planning twenty or thirty years ahead. I'm just saying-

JAMES

This airport expansion could be OUR common enemy!

WIL

So, do you think I should run or not?

JAMES

I think you have a campaign agenda that could put you in the running...not to mention having the correct skin pigment.

WIL

You underestimate our democracy, James. Some of the best and brightest come from Kinloch.

JAMES

Are you complementing me or twisting my arm to run for city council?

WIL

I didn't say it! You did!

(WIL and JAMES stand and pretend to box with each other. Then they chant the following with hand claps. WIL AND JAMES struggle with the hand clap but get it after a few tries. They alternate the final lines together.)

WIL AND JAMES

Up down over up down over up (repeat) up down over up down over up.(repeat until mastered again)

WIL

You work real hard ...

JAMES  
You get no reward...

WIL  
You try your best ...

JAMES  
You'll always be blessed....

WIL  
You beat your brains ...

JAMES  
They'll say you're insane ...

WIL  
You take a chance ...

JAMES  
They'll cus you and rant ...

WIL  
Fightin' is survive'n ...

JAMES  
Deny it! You can't!

WIL  
We're in this together ...

JAMES  
Holdin' on for my friend!

(WIL and JAMES slap hands, embrace  
and laugh as they walk offstage  
together.)

THE END