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JOHN SR, JOHN

(MARY)

MONSIGNOR RYAN. They are this country. They'll change this stinking world!

MARY. They can't. One day we might change the surface of things but underneath

JOHN SR. Don't you walk away—

JOHN. I don't need to hear this again.

(Shouting from the study erupts onstage as JOHN opens the door of the study and storms into the living room, his father hot on his heels.)

JOHN SR. I'm talking to you!

JOHN. I've already heard it!

(MARY enters from the terrace. TILLIE, who has been in and out of the dining room setting the table, is also drawn in by the argument and bears witness.)

JOHN SR. No! Not like this. Listen to me! Son . . . I'm looking at man who's gone blind to the mirror. Locked up inside your hospital in your white lab coat you're safe. Safe till the minute you step back out on the streets. What's in the mirror then?

JOHN. Where would I be if I stayed in Sacramento? Doctoring a handful of patients in a run-down hospital.

JOHN SR. What you don't understand, son, is that all this country will ever do for you is steal your research and steal your skills and steal your knowledge and steal and steal as it has stolen through history. The work you do for a white man won't make him treat you any different.

JOHN. I work where I have the tools for my research. Since I first went away to school you told me keep my eyes down, stay away from white folks. You telling me that got in my way as much as every bigot who's called me "boy."

JOHN SR. They're gonna do worse if you go out walking the streets with his daughter. He's as much against this as me! Look at your uncle. They had to cut flesh off his ass to piece his face back together cause a white woman said he looked at her too long. What do you think they're gonna do to you if you go out and marry that girl? You're not just marrying his daughter. You're marrying every white man in America's daughter. And that White Only sign on her never came down. I know you. If you think that's what she wants, you're gonna try to be white. But she's gonna always be white. And she's the one gonna wake up mad one morning and call you a nigger.

JOHN. Go to hell!

JOHN SR. I will knock the . . .

MARY. No John. No.

JOHN SR. Whatever you did for yourself was because I busted my ass to make it happen. All day taught at that school then tucked my education up in my hat and punched in as a night watchman. That meant I had to wake up in the same dark I laid down in so you wouldn't end up stoking a furnace or running the streets.

JOHN. You tell me what rights I've got and what I owe to you for what you did for me . . . I will tell you now I owe you nothing! You did what you were supposed to do! Because you brought me into this world and from that day you owed me everything you could ever do for me. Just as if I ever have any more children, I will owe them everything. But you don't own me. You can't tell me when or where I'm out of line or try to make me live according to your rules because you don't even know who I am—or what I believe or what I feel . . . And if I tried for the rest of your life I couldn't explain it to you. Your whole generation believes that the way things were for you is the way they've got to be forever! And not until your whole generation has lain down and died will the dead weight of you be off our backs! Don't you understand, you've got to get off my back!

MARY. John! . . .

JOHN. Who put up the "Colored Only" signs? We didn't. I'm not blind when I look in the mirror. My skin is black, I know exactly where I come from. But "colored" is what some people say to limit us. What you can't see . . . You still think of yourself as a colored man. And I think of myself as a man.

(The lights fade down on the scene.)

Scene Two

(The lights fade up seven minutes later. All have retreated to the parlor except TILLIE who resumes setting the table for dinner and JOHN who is in private reverie out on the terrace singing a children's rhyme to himself.)

JOHN *(Singing:)* Is it all hid? (No, No!)
Is it all hid? (No, No!)
I went down to the Devil's town,
Devil knocked my daddy down
Is it all hid?