SIDE H- Dora

PETE. It's dis black trash, new Mas'r George; dey's getting too numerous round and dis property needs clearin'! When I get time, I'm gonna have to kill some of 'em fo' sure!

GEORGE. But weren't they all born on this estate?

PETE. Dem trashy darkies? Born here? What? On beautiful Terrebonne?! Don't believe it, Mas'r George — dem black things never was born at all; they grew up one mornin' frum da roots of a sassafras tree / in the swamp.

DIDO. (To Minnie, exiting.) He do this every morning. You'll get used to it.

PETE. (After Dido.) Git out, you — Ya, ya! (Minnie and Dora look at each other.)

DORA. (To Minnie.) Well, don't just stand there. Fan me.

GEORGE. Ha ha ha — How I enjoy the folksy ways of the niggers down here. All the ones I've ever known were either filthy ape-like Africans of Paris or the flabby uppity darkies of New York. Here, though, the negro race is so quaint and vibrant and colorful — much like the landscape. And so full of wisdom and cheer and tall tales. I should write a book. Why, Pete was telling me a wonderful folktale, have you heard it? It's about a rabbit who wants to put on a show for the rest of the animals in the

START

DORA. (Grief-stricken.) George, I don't understand how you can be appreciating the folksy wisdom of the niggers with your dear aunt in the condition she is in! Why, she's nearly paralyzed with grief.

GEORGE. Yes, yes, Miss Sunnyside. I'm sorry. You're right. It's just that, in the few days since I've arrived from my beloved Paris, my senses have been so overstimulated by all the raw beauty of everything here, the wilderness, the very essence of life — I can barely stay focused on the matters before me —

DORA. (Swept up, flirty.) Dear George, what poetry you seem to have always at your disposal. When you speak, you sound just like your dear dead uncle — capable of such (Butchering the French.) joi de vivre amid this gloom. If you weren't as handsome and finely-built as you are, I'd say you were his very ghost — his living ghost.

(To Minnie.) What are you doing? Stop fanning me!

GEORGE. Well, I must admit my artistic inclinations have probably rewarded me certain sensitivities …

DORA. Ah yes — From what I understand, you were living as an artiste en Paris? Oui? (Thinking she's saying something else.) Voo vay voo poo chesamaymwhah?

GEORGE. Uh … well my late uncle did very generously fund my studies abroad in the fine arts. I thought I would make a living as a photographer, but I realize now it was probably no more than a pipe dream —

DORA. Hush. I'm sure that was no time wasted. For I'd love to have my photograph taken with your apparatus.

GEORGE. That could be arranged. You know, I have brought my camera with me. I've been trying to make some improvements on it, you see — I've invented a kind of self-developing liquid which, when applied to the photographic plates —

DORA. Oh boy stuff, boy stuff — George, you are such a breath of fresh air! If only you had arrived here some years before your uncle died — things might have turned out differently! You might have fooled Mr. M'Closky's knavery …

GEORGE. Who is this M'Closky everyone speaks of with such disdain?

DORA. Oh, goodness, you do have much to learn. Thank God you've found me. M'Closky was your uncle's overseer before he died and is the man you have to thank for your family's misfortune.

GEORGE. How so?

DORA. Well, your dear uncle — rest his soul — was bad with his money — but if he thought he knew gambling, that snake M'Closky certainly knew it better, and, by the end of eight years, card game by card game and piece by piece, Jacob M'Closky has craftily found himself proprietor of the richest half of this estate. Now, because of him, you and your poor aunt upstairs have come to the ground.

GEORGE. But the other half is free —

DORA. Yes. And yours, technically, but my daddy, Mr. Sunnyside, thinks that the property is so involved that the strictest finances will scarcely recover it. (Zoe is heard singing beautifully.)

GEORGE. (Rapt.) Is that Zoe?

DORA. Ugh, yes … (Noticing her runny makeup.) Oh, I've made such a mess of myself. Will you give me a moment? (Touching up makeup, as Zoe continues singing.) Poor girl doesn't know she's tone deaf … (Notices George listening in reverie.) Do you like music? … (Off George's nod, sultry.) 'Cause I'm a singer, too. (Beat, as Zoe finishes her song. Dora is confused and unimpressed by the effect it has had on George.) I was told that you were seen riding with Zoe around the sugar crop.