

SIDNEY: Good, good. (*Takes two Cokes and hands one to MERRITT.*) Plain Coke all right?

MERRITT: Thank you kindly.

SIDNEY: Where are you from? I didn't notice your accent at first.

MERRITT: Oklahoma. My people have been there since the Trail of Tears.

SIDNEY: You're Native American?

MERRITT: Part, anyway.

SIDNEY: What...tribe...er...nation?

MERRITT: Not sure. Probably more than one. Almost everybody black in Oklahoma has some Indian blood.

SIDNEY: Black?

MERRITT: African American.

SIDNEY: You're...African American?

MERRITT: Of course.

SIDNEY: Pardon me, but your features aren't particularly...African.

MERRITT: You want me to sing *Old Man River*?

SIDNEY: No, no, I'm sorry—it's just—never mind. Oklahoma. What's it like there?

MERRITT: Racist.

SIDNEY: I would imagine. The education system—

MERRITT: That's why I moved to California, because of prejudice.

SIDNEY: But—pardon me again—you can't have suffered too much from—discrimination—

MERRITT: Why not?

SIDNEY: Surely—even in Oklahoma—you can—for lack of a better word—pass. People wouldn't see you as—

MERRITT: Black?

SIDNEY: Well, yes.

MERRITT: I'm sure you mean that as a compliment—

SIDNEY: No, no! I'm not placing a value on—

MERRITT: Most people find racial issues very awkward. I live them every day.

SIDNEY: I'm sorry if I'm behaving awkwardly. I've dealt with prejudice in my life too, as you can imagine, so—

MERRITT: Really?

SIDNEY: Well, of course, even today some people—

MERRITT: Do you personally know any black people? Invite them over for drinks, dinner?

SIDNEY: I don't drink—but dinner, certainly!

MERRITT: Of course you do. Even when you don't know it.

SIDNEY: I suppose that's possible....

MERRITT: People of African descent are everywhere, even when you can't see us.

SIDNEY: Apparently.

MERRITT: You know about the five black U S presidents?

SIDNEY: Oh—now, come on—

MERRITT: Unimaginable, is it?

SIDNEY: Well, certainly...unlikely.

MERRITT: You seem to be operating with some fairly rigid definitions.

SIDNEY: I see, you don't mean *black* black. You mean some of them may have had a bit of African ancestry?

MERRITT: What kind of distinction are you trying to make? What is *black black*?

SIDNEY: We seem to be getting in a bit of a tangle here. I'm sure Royce intended for us to talk about your grant-writing abilities.

MERRITT: You don't believe me, do you?

SIDNEY: About what, exactly? I suppose a person can be—

MERRITT: Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Harding and Eisenhower.

SIDNEY: *(After a moment)* Eisenhower?

MERRITT: His wife *was* named Mamie.

SIDNEY: But he didn't seem—

(MERRITT just stares.)

SIDNEY: I mean, there was nothing to suggest—

(MERRITT stares.)

SIDNEY: He was German, wasn't he, or Dutch? By descent—

MERRITT: We're all descended from Eve, genetically speaking, that prehistoric woman in Africa—

SIDNEY: Then you could as easily say *everyone's* black!

MERRITT: Is that somehow offensive to you?

CHRIS: *(Appearing)* Sounds like you're having too much fun.

SIDNEY: Oh, Chris, so good to see you.

MERRITT: Am I talking to the Director next?

CHRIS: Pinky only has a few minutes, so we need to get over there.

SIDNEY: And I'm overdue for a committee meeting. Terrific to meet you, Merritt.

(SIDNEY holds out a hand. MERRITT responds with a soul handshake.)

MERRITT: Thank you. This has been most enlightening.

SIDNEY: Indeed. Good-bye. *(Rushes off)*

CHRIS: *(As they walk)* How was that?

MERRITT: *(Dropping the accent)* Let me ask you this. I assume you like working here.

CHRIS: Of course.

MERRITT: Why?

CHRIS: The collection is incredible.

MERRITT: The art or the people?

CHRIS: Both. The people are great.

MERRITT: Some real characters.

CHRIS: Exactly. While the art is so...solid. So beautiful and perfect.

MERRITT: It's about contrast? Human frailty versus artistic purity?

CHRIS: Sort of. But art grows out of human imperfection. Artists aren't perfect either.

MERRITT: I keep expecting one of these bozos to poke an elbow through a painting.

CHRIS: They seem to like you.

MERRITT: Really? You've been getting feedback?

CHRIS: Some. Royce is hearing more, of course.

MERRITT: So I'm doing all right?

CHRIS: The Director's opinion is the make-or-break. Isn't sposed to be, but it is. No pressure.