



Georgia Douglas Johnson

Blue-Eyed Black Boy

one-act play, ca. 1930

Characters

PAULINE WATERS, *mother*

REBECCA WATERS, *daughter*

DR. THOMAS GREY, *fiancé of Rebecca*

HESTER GRANT, *Pauline's best friend*



Scene: A kitchen in MRS. WATERS's cottage. A stove with food keeping warm and an ironing board in the corner, a table with a lighted oil lamp and two chairs. Door, slightly ajar, leads to the front room and window opening on to a side street.

Scene Opens. PAULINE is discovered seated in a large rocker with her left foot bandaged and resting on a low stool.

PAULINE: (*calling to the other room*) Rebecca, come on. Your iron is hot now, I know.

REBECCA: (*answers from the front room*) I'm coming now, Ma. (*She enters holding a lacy garment in her hands.*) I had to tack these bows on. How you like it now?

PAULINE: (*scanning the long night dress set off with little pink bows that Rebecca is holding up for her inspection*) Eugh-hu, it shore is pretty. I don't believe anybody ever had as fine a wedding gown in this whole town.

REBECCA: Humph! (*shrugs her shoulders proudly as she tests the iron to see if it is hot and then takes it over to the board and begins to press the gown*) That's to be expected, ain't it? Everybody in the Baptist Church looks up to us, don't they?

PAULINE: Shore they do. I ain't carried myself straight all these years for nothing. Your father was shore one proud man; he put us on a pinnacle!

REBECCA: Well, I sure have tried to walk straight all my life.

PAULINE: Yes, and I'm shore proud. Now here you is getting ready to marry a young doctor. My my! (*then she suddenly says*) Ouch! I wish he would come on over here to change the dressing on my foot. Hope I ain't going to have lock jaw.

REBECCA: You won't. Tom knows his business. (*She tosses her head proudly. She looks over to the stove and goes on.*) Wish Jack would come on home and eat his supper so's I could clean up the dishes.

PAULINE: What time is it?

REBECCA: (*goes to the middle door and peeps in the next room*) The clock in position to exactly five minutes after seven. He oughter been here a whole hour ago.

PAULINE: I wonder what's keeping him?

REBECCA: Well, there's one thing sure and certain: he's not running after girls.

PAULINE: No, he shore don't. Just give him a book and he's happy. Says he's going to quit running that crane and learn engineering soon you get married. He's been mighty tied down since your father died taking care of us.

REBECCA: Everybody says he's the smartest and the finest looking black boy in the whole town.

PAULINE: Yes, he is good looking even if he is mine. Some of 'em lay it to his eyes. *(She looks far off thoughtfully.)*

REBECCA: Yes, they do set him off. It's funny that he's the only one in our family's got blue eyes though. Pa's was black, and yours and mine are black too. It certainly is strange; wish I'd had 'em.

PAULINE: Oh, you be satisfied. You're pretty enough. Hush, there's the doctor's buggy stopping now. Go let him in. *(Rebecca goes to the door while Pauline bends over, grunting and touching her foot. DR. GREY enters, bag in hand, with Rebecca.)*

DR. GREY: Well, how's my patient feeling? Better, I know.

PAULINE: Now don't you be kidding me, Doctor. My foot's been paining me terrible, I'm scared to death I'm going to have the lock jaw. For God's sake don't let me . . . *(Rebecca places [a] chair for him near her mother.)*

DR. GREY: *(unwinds the bandages, looks at foot and opens his bag)* Fine, it's doing fine. You'll have to keep off it for a week more, and then you'll be all right.

PAULINE: Can't walk on it for a week?

DR. GREY: Not unless you want to die of blood poisoning — lock jaw, I mean! *(He touches the foot with iodine and puts on new bandage.)* That was an old, rusty nail you stuck in your foot. A pretty close call. *(He looks lovingly at Rebecca.)*

PAULINE: Well, I'm tickled to have such a good doctor for my new son.

DR. GREY: You bet. *(then thoughtfully)* I saw some mighty rough looking hoodlums gathering on the streets as I came in. Looks like there might be some trouble somewhere.

REBECCA: Oh, they're always having a squabble on these streets. You get used to 'em — and you will too after a while.

PAULINE: Yes, there's always something stirring everyday. I just go on and on and don't pay 'em no mind myself.

DR. GREY: *(patting the foot tenderly)* Now that's all right. You keep off of it, hear me? Or I won't vouch for the outcome.

PAULINE: It's so sore; I can't stand up even if I was a kind to. *(A knock is heard.)* See who's at the back door, Rebecca. *(She peeps out.)*

REBECCA: *(goes to the door and cracks it)* Who there?

HESTER: Me, me, it's Hester — Hester Grant. Lemme in. *(Rebecca opens the door and HESTER comes panting in. She looks around as if hating to speak before the others then blurts out)* Pauline, it's Jack. Your son Jack has been 'rested . . . 'rested and put in jail.

PAULINE: 'Rested?

REBECCA: Good Lord.

DR. GREY: What for? *(moves about restlessly)*

HESTER: They say he done brushed against a white woman on the street. They had er argument and she hollowed out he's attacking her. A crew of white men come up and started beating on him and the

policeman, when he was coming home from work, dragged him to the jailhouse.

PAULINE: My God, my God! It ain't so! He ain't brushed up against no lady. My boy ain't! He's he's a gentleman, that's what he is.

HESTER: (*moves about restlessly. She has something else to say*) And, and Pauline, that ain't the worse, that ain't the worse. They, they say there's gointer to be a lynching tonight. They gointer break open the jail and string him up! (*She finishes desperately.*)

PAULINE: String him up? My son? They can't do that — not to my son, not him!

DR. GREY: (*excitedly*) I'll drive over the see the Judge. He'll do something to stop it.

HESTER: (*sarcastically*) Him? Not him! He's a lyncher his own self. Don't put no trust in him. Ain't he done let 'em lynch six niggers in the last year jes' gone? Him! (*She scoffs again.*)

REBECCA: (*wringing her hands*) We got to do something. (*goes up to Dr. Grey*) Do you know anybody else, anybody at all, who could save him?

PAULINE: Wait, wait. I know what I'll do. I don't care what it costs. (*to Rebecca*) Fly in yonder (*points to the next room*) and get me that little tin box out of the left hand side of the tray in my trunk. Hurry. Fly! (*Rebecca hurries out while Dr. Grey and Hester look on in bewilderment*) Lynch my son? My son? (*she yells to Rebecca in the next room*) Get it? You got it?

REBECCA: (*from next room*) Yes, Ma, I got it. (*hurries in with a small tin box in her hand and hands it to her mother*)

PAULINE: (*feverishly tossing out the odd bits of jewelry in the box, finally coming up with a small ring. She turns to Dr. Grey*): Here, Tom, take this. Run, jump on your horse and buggy and fly over to Governor Tinkham's house and don't you let nobody — nobody — stop you. Just give him this ring and say, "Pauline sent this. She says they going to lynch her son born 21 years ago." Mind you, say 21 years ago. Then say, listen close. "Look in his eyes and you'll save him."

DR. GREY: (*listens in amazement but grasps the small ring in his hand and hastens toward the door saying*) Don't worry. I'll put it in his hands and tell him what you said just as quick as my horse can make it. (*When he leaves the room, Rebecca and Hester look at Pauline in astonishment.*)

HESTER: (*starting as if from a dream*) Well, well, well, I don't git what you mean, but I reckon you knows what you is doing. (*She and Rebecca watch Dr. Grey from the front window as he drives away.*)

PAULINE: I shorely do!

REBECCA: (*comes over and throws her arms around her mother's neck*) Mother, what does it all mean? Can you really save him?

PAULINE: (*confidently*) Wait and see. I'll tell you more about it after a while. Don't ask me now.

HESTER: (*going over to the window*) I hope he'll git over to the Governor's in time. (*looking out*) Ump! There goes a bunch of men with guns now and here comes another all slouched over and pushing on the same way.

REBECCA: (*joining her at the window, with bated breath*) And look, look! Here come wagons full. (*The rumble of wagon wheels is heard.*) See 'em, Hester? All piled in with their guns, too.

(*Pauline's lips move in prayer; her head is turned deliberately away from the window. She sighs deeply now and then.*)

HESTER: Do Lord, do Lord! Help us this night.

REBECCA: (*with trembling voice*) Hussies! Look at them men on horses! (*Horses' hooves are heard in the street outside. Rebecca cries lightly.*)

HESTER: Jesus, Jesus! Please come down and help us this night!

REBECCA: (*running over to her mother and flinging her arms about her neck*) Oh, mother, mother! What will we do? Do you hear 'em? Do you hear all them men on horses and wagons going up to the jail? Poor brother! Poor boy.

PAULINE: Trust in God, daughter. I've got faith in Him, faith in . . . in the Governor. He won't fail. (*She continues to move her lips in prayer.*)

(*Rebecca rushes back to the window as new sounds of wagon wheels are heard.*)

HESTER: (*at window*) Still coming!

REBECCA: Why don't Tom come back? Why don't he hurry?

HESTER: Hush, chile! He ain't had time yet.

PAULINE: (*breaks out in an audible prayer*) Lord Jesus, I know I've sinned against your holy law, but you did forgive me and let me hold up my head again. Help me again, dear Jesus. Help me to save my innocent child, him who never done no wrong. Save him, Lord. Let his father . . . (*she stops and looks around at the two women, then cautiously speaks.*) You understand all I mean, sweet Jesus. Come down and rise with this wild mob tonight. Pour your love into their wicked hearts. Lord, Lord, hear my prayer.

HESTER: (*at window*) Do Lord, hear.

PAULINE: (*restlessly looking toward the others*) Any sight of Tom yet?

REBECCA: No, Ma. I don't see him no where yet.

HESTER: Give him time.

PAULINE: Time! Time! It'll be too late reckly. Too late . . . (*she sobs, her head lifted, listening*) What that?

HESTER: (*peers out and listens*) What?

PAULINE: The sound of many feet I hear?

REBECCA: (*looks out interested*) I see 'em, I see 'em! Wait! Wait! Ma! Ma! (*hysterically*) It's the state troops! It's the Guards, it's the Guards, Ma! They's coming. Look, Miss Hester!

HESTER: They shore is, Jesus. Shore as I'm born — them military. They's come — come to save him.

REBECCA: And yonders Tom at the gate — he's coming.

DR. GREY: (*rushing in as the others look at him in amazement*) He's saved, Miss Waters! Saved! Did the Governor send the troops?

__CURTAIN__