

# GRAND DRAGON IN POWER

By  
Donald E. Baker

# GRAND DRAGON IN POWER

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## GRAND DRAGON IN POWER

*Any gang daring enough and unscrupulous enough  
and smart enough not to seem illegal  
can grab hold of the entire government  
and have all the power and applause and salutes,  
all the money and palaces and willin' women they want.*  
—Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here*

### DEDICATION

*Grand Dragon in Power* is dedicated  
to my ever-supportive husband, Roy Hardison,  
and to Greg Hager, who, when I was searching for a subject, said,  
“Why not Stephenson?”

### PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

*Grand Dragon in Power* is set in the 1920's, but it is the stifling monochrome Midwestern twenties, not the technicolor Jazz Age twenties. Although the play is inspired by actual events and people and is informed by extensive research, it is not a documentary and some liberties have been taken for dramatic effect.

### CONTENT WARNING

A rape is enacted in darkness but later described in detail.

## GRAND DRAGON IN POWER

Panglossian Productions, Williamsburg, Virginia, produced a directed staged reading of *Grand Dragon in Power* online on November 28, 2020.

STEPHENSON .....	ROBERT WEATHERS
NIBLACK.....	BRYAN AUSTIN
GENTRY, REMY.....	BRANDON LYLES
JACKSON, SMITH, INMAN.....	JOE ZIARKO
MADGE.....	AMY LYLES
EUNICE, ARLENE, KLEIN .....	LINDSEY FOSTER
DIRECTOR.....	ED WHITACRE
CAMERA, SOUND.....	CARI RILLO

A radio adaptation of *Grand Dragon in Power* was performed before a live audience on March 26, 2018, by Radio Theatre Project, St. Petersburg, Florida.

D.C. STEPHENSON .....	JIM WICKER
NIBLACK, STANLEY HILL, JUROR .....	CHRISTOPHER RUTHERFORD
GENTRY, MR OBERHOLTZER, REMY....	MARK HANKS
JACKSON, SMITH, SHERIFF, INMAN.....	BOB HEITMAN
BAND LEADER, CONDUCTOR, KLEIN, JUDGE, GUARD.....	DEAN WICK
MADGE, EUNICE .....	ROBIN O'DELL
ARLENE, NEWSBOY .....	MILDRED MATTOS
ANNOUNCER .....	BOB HEITMAN.

DIRECTOR .....	LISA LIPPINCOTT
FOLEY ARTIST .....	MATT COWLEY.
SOUND ENGINEER.....	MARK PERFETTI.
PRODUCTION ENGINEER.....	MILDRED MATTOS.
SET DESIGNER.....	STEVEN K MITCHELL
INTERPRETING FOR THE DEAF .....	CAROL DOWNING
	OLIVIA MOORE.
MUSIC.....	PAUL WILBORN.

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## CHARACTERS

(2 adult females, 4 adult males)

D.C. STEPHENSON, age 34, KKK Grand Dragon

JOHN NIBLACK, age 23 *Indianapolis Times* reporter

MALE ACTOR, age 30-35, doubling:

EARL GENTRY, Stephenson bodyguard

WILL REMY, prosecuting attorney

MALE ACTOR, age 50+, doubling:

HIRAM EVANS, KKK Imperial Wizard

ED JACKSON, Indiana Secretary of State, later Governor

ASA SMITH, lawyer

EPH INMAN, defense attorney

MADGE OBERHOLTZER, age 28, Stephenson victim

FEMALE ACTOR, age 30+, doubling:

EUNICE, *Indianapolis Times* office worker

ARLENE, Stephenson's secretary (offstage)

IDA KLEIN, *Chicago Tribune* reporter

## RECORDED OR OFFSTAGE VOICES

RALLY CROWD

ORCHESTRA LEADER

RAILROAD ANNOUNCER

NEWSBOY

COURTROOM SPECTATORS

BAILIFF

JUROR

PENITENTIARY GUARD

## TIME AND PLACE

Various locations in Indiana in the 1920's.

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## SETTINGS

Fully realized sets and heavy furniture are not required for this play. It will flow more easily with light, easily moved pieces doing double-duty—tables can represent desks, a simple cot can be a bed or a railroad-car berth, etc.

Some scenes are implied by lighting alone. Those that require furniture include:

Hotel meeting room	1 table, 2 chairs
Newspaper office	1 table, 1 chair
Stephenson's office	1 desk/table, 3 chairs
Madge's interlude	1 chair
Ballroom	1 table, 2 chairs
Railroad sleeping compartment	1 bed, 1 chair
Hotel room	1 bed, 1 chair, 1 side table
Madge's bedroom	1 bed, 1 chair
Courthouse press room	1 table, 2 chairs
Courtroom	2 tables, 3 chairs
Prison cell	2 chairs

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## PROLOGUE

*Indeterminate space, Indiana, 1923. Time and place are established by a vintage recording of "Back Home Again in Indiana." Lights come up on an isolated part of the stage to reveal NIBLACK standing with his notepad. He is a young reporter who can barely afford a decent suit.*

**NIBLACK.** John Niblack, *Indianapolis Times*. My fellow Hoosiers like to think God is especially good to Indiana. The white, Protestant ones anyhow. They believe they live in an earthly Garden of Eden, where the dreamy Wabash wanders on through paradise. But although they read their Bibles diligently, sometimes they miss the fact that Eden was only a paradise until a snake showed up. *(Lights fade on Niblack as they come up to reveal STEPHENSON in a space apart. He is dressed in an expensive suit. (The historical Stephenson favored blue serge.)*

**STEPHENSON.** You can call me Steve. All my friends do. For a guy like me Indiana's a paradise alright. Those salt-of-the-earth types are scared. Afraid somebody is going to come along and take their nice little Eden away from them. Well where there's fear there's opportunity. If a guy knows how to stoke fear it begets anger. And if you fire up the anger it begets hate. And if you keep stirring the pot before you know it you've got plenty of hate to go around. You've got Protestants hating the Catholics. Natives hating the immigrants. Whites hating the coloreds. And everybody hating the Jews. Where there's hate there's power. And where there's power there's money. And where there's money there're politicians who are willing to be bought. And there're women who are just plain willing. Most of them anyway.

**MADGE (off).** No! Let me alone. I don't want to! No stop! Steve you're hurting me!

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**STEPHENSON.** I never killed that girl. Oh I may have played a little rough with her but she took the poison and got the fatal infection all on her own.

*(Sound of staff hitting the floor. Voice of a court BAILIFF is heard.)*

**BAILIFF (off).** All rise! Oh yes! Oh yes! The Circuit Court for the County of Hamilton is now open and sitting in the matter of the State of Indiana versus David Curtis Stephenson.

**STEPHENSON.** No Indiana jury would ever convict me of anything. I am the law in Indiana. The juries are packed with my Klansmen. My people. And my people love me.

*(Lights down on Stephenson, who exits as sound comes up on the rumblings of 10,000 or more excited people. At the sound of an approaching airplane the crowd erupts into a roar. Sounds of the crowd and the airplane diminish.)*

### SCENE 1

*Implied setting: Mid-day. Melfalfa Park, Kokomo, Indiana, July 4, 1923. Lights come up to reveal Niblack consulting his notepad.*

**NIBLACK.** Dateline: Kokomo Indiana July 4 1923. Byline: John Niblack *Indianapolis Times* political reporter. Independence Day 1923 is as hot and sticky as only an Indiana Fourth of July can be. But despite the heat thousands of proud Ku Klux Klansmen and their families have crowded into a sun-drenched Kokomo park. They swelter under their robes. Behind their masks, sweat pours down their upturned faces as they wait for their beloved Grand Dragon to descend from the heavens. *(Stephenson crosses carrying his King Kleagle Ku Klux Klan robe. He is followed by his bodyguard Earl GENTRY who is already in his white Klan robe but not masked.)*

**NIBLACK.** Mr. Stephenson! John Niblack *Indianapolis Times*. How about a word for the press before you go on?



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**GENTRY.** The Old Man hasn't got time for reporters right now kid. Especially reporters from the *Times*. He's late to his own investiture. The Imperial Wizard is here for God's sake.

**STEPHENSON.** It's all right Earl. What do you want to ask—Niblack did you say? What sort of name is that?

**NIBLACK.** Scotch-Irish.

**STEPHENSON.** Celtic then. Protestant?

**NIBLACK.** Presbyterian.

**STEPHENSON.** Almost as good as Anglo-Saxon.

**GENTRY.** Don't forget—you and the rest of the press corps signed agreements not to use our new Grand Dragon's real name.

**NIBLACK.** I remember. (*Barely containing his contempt.*) Mr. Dragon then.

**GENTRY.** Watch your mouth, smart aleck.

**NIBLACK.** Some Republican politicians worry the Klan may alienate the Negro vote.

**STEPHENSON.** I tell my good friends in the Party of Lincoln they need have no worries on that score. The Klan in Indiana will do nothing to disturb good submissive Negro voters. We let our brethren in the solid Democrat South deal with the "Negro problem."

**NIBLACK.** You don't believe we in the North have a "Negro problem"?

**STEPHENSON.** Most Hoosiers in the crossroads hamlets have never seen a Negro outside of a minstrel show. And in the bigger cities like Marion when the darkies get uppity they know how to put them in their place.

**GENTRY.** Swingin' from a tree limb on the courthouse square.

**STEPHENSON.** The necessity for such demonstrations is unfortunate but nothing to do with us. Those last comments are of course off the record. Now I do have to get cleaned up and robed. My adoring subjects would await my appearance till kingdom come but the Imperial Wizard is not so patient. Just listen to my speech young Niblack. It'll tell you everything you need to know about the Klan's program and concerns. After the ceremonies the dignitaries will retire to our headquarters

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downtown where we will be available if you have more questions. Mr. Gentry, why don't you keep our young friend here company until we're ready to begin the ceremony. *(Exits.)*

**GENTRY.** *(Producing a flask.)* You wanna swig? I used to be a bootlegger and this is good hooch if I do say so.

**NIBLACK.** No thanks. Prohibition is still the law of the land I believe.

**GENTRY.** Gee. I better get rid of this demon rum then. *(He takes a drink and replaces the flask.)* You got a death wish kid?

**NIBLACK.** Death wish?

**GENTRY.** That "Mr. Dragon" business. A word to the wise: ever'body 'round Stephenson has a gun and we're willin' to use 'em when some palooka doesn't show proper respect.

**NIBLACK.** Everybody?

**GENTRY.** *(Patting his robe where a shoulder-holster might be.)* Ever'body.

**NIBLACK.** It just all seems so silly. The robes, the masks, the secrecy. We all know who Stephenson is but everybody has to pretend they don't. They call him "Brother Steve" or else "the Old Man" even though he's just in his thirties. He's a coal broker. Coal! He preaches white supremacy but makes his living selling the blackest stuff on earth.

**GENTRY.** Weren't coal got him the big house in Indianapolis. Or the fleet of fast cars. Or the yacht on Lake Erie. Nope. It was a little piece of ever' membership fee and ever' item of regalia bought by all those white supremacists out there.

**NIBLACK.** And what's with the weird names—klegals, kligrapps, and kludds who meet in klonvocation in klaverns. All those "k" sounds.

**GENTRY.** Why you think this little shindig's being held in Kokomo? Anyhow, what's the differ'nce between the Klan and the Masons or the Odd Fellas? They all got secret rituals and passwords and special titles and outfits.

**NIBLACK.** The big difference I can see is the regalia of those other fraternal orders don't include boxes of matches and cans of kerosene. The Klan venerates the cross but they burn it. I just don't get it.

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**GENTRY.** The way Steve explains it the cross of fire symbolizes Christ as the light of the world. And purification by fire. And the beacon of truth. A holy trinity of meaning he says.

**NIBLACK.** I'll give him this. He's a master of stagecraft flying in low over the crowd like that.

**GENTRY.** Yeah he knows how to get the rubes fired up. Stephenson says prophets can't descend from the heavens in a fiery chariot no more. But in this here modern era a bright shiny airplane works just as well.

**NIBLACK.** So he considers himself some kind of prophet.

**GENTRY.** Kid, near as I can tell he considers hisself the whole Old Testament—Moses, Elijah, King David and Solomon the Wise all rolled into one.

**NIBLACK.** Solomon the king of all he surveyed? The man with seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines?

**GENTRY.** Well Steve only had two wives so far—that I heard him admit to—but he's startin' to catch up on the concubines.

**NIBLACK.** I've read up as much as I can find on him—and that's darned little—I never came across anything about two wives.

**GENTRY.** He don't talk about his past much, leastwise when he's sober. And surely not with reporters. I best get myself up on the platform. Ceremony's about to start. Just watch your step o.k.? Oh and our little conversation, it's off the record too a'course.

**NIBLACK.** There is such a thing as freedom of the press you know.

**GENTRY.** You got any idea how many subscribers to your *Indianapolis Times* are Klan members?

**NIBLACK.** No.

**GENTRY.** No you don't. And your editor don't. And your publisher don't. But Stephenson—he knows. You can take that to the bank kid. He knows. *(As Gentry exits, Niblack tears the sheet out of his notebook, crumples it, and throws it to the ground.)*

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### SCENE 2

*Outdoors a few minutes later. An implied speakers' platform facing the Klan multitude, that is, the theater audience. Sound of a brass band playing "America (My Country 'Tis of Thee)." Stephenson stands in his white King Klegal robe, his face covered by a mask. Gentry in his white mask and robe stands a step or so behind him, holding a gold Grand Dragon robe over his arm. Hiram EVANS in his purple Imperial Wizard robe and mask is also present. Niblack stands at a downstage corner taking notes.*

**STEPHENSON.** Citizens of the Invisible Empire! Klansmen all! Because I love and trust every one of you I dare to stand before you unmasked. *(Dramatically removes his mask as the CROWD cheers.)* I fear I must apologize to you and to His Excellency. It grieves me to be late. But the President of the United States detained me seeking my counsel upon vital matters of state. So without further delay, let us give our most heartfelt ovation to our illustrious national leader, Brother Hiram, the Imperial Wizard of our Invisible Empire! *(Crowd goes crazy as Evans acknowledges the crowd. He attempts to silence the ovation, but Stephenson keeps encouraging the crowd until he finally motions for silence. It is an unsubtle demonstration of who is really in charge. Evans is not pleased to suddenly recognize a potential rival, but he has no choice but to carry on as if he and Stephenson are the best of friends. Stephenson finally stands aside.)*

**EVANS.** Brothers! Thank you for that generous welcome. Like our Brother Steve, I choose to stand before you unmasked. *(Removes his mask as Crowd cheers.)* Fellow Klansmen! I bring you greetings from the Imperial Kloncilium and all the Dark Denizens of the Imperial Palace in Atlanta. We congratulate you on this splendid demonstration of the vigor of our cause here in the Midwest. This magnificent rally is the largest aggregation of Klansmen ever assembled! It is a testament to the abilities and talents of our chief recruiter, our King Klegal, your own Brother Steve. *(Crowd cheers. Evans holds up a scroll.)* Those

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manifest talents have brought me here bearing this official document addressed to the Hydras, Titans, Furies, Giants, Kleagles, Cyclopes, Terrors, and All Citizens of our Invisible Empire. Signed by all our national officers, and duly attested, it officially confers on our, uh, *(almost choking on the word) beloved* Brother Steve the exalted office of Grand Dragon of *our* Realm of Indiana. By Virtue of God's Unchanging Grace. So be it! *(Crowd cheers as Evans hands the document to Stephenson, who passes it on to Gentry.)* We will now invest our Grand Dragon with the golden robes of the high station to which *we* have appointed him.

*(Evans and Gentry help Stephenson change robes. Gentry takes charge of the white robe as he and Evans step aside and reveal Stephenson in all his golden glory. The Crowd goes wild, and Stephenson basks in the adoration before finally gesturing for calm. The following speech might be punctuated with enthusiastic crowd responses in addition to the indicted negative responses.)*

**STEPHENSON.** My worthy subjects! As I look out over this glorious sea of white extending as far as the eye can see I can only pray God will give me the strength and the wisdom to lead onward this mighty army of Christian soldiers. To Him I say "Thy Will Be Done"! It fills me with joy so many of you brought your wives and children to witness this historic gathering. Never forget the vital role our women play in our movement. They are the vessels through which we insure the purity of the white race. That is why God has laid a heavy obligation on white Christian men like us. We must defend our weak and trusting women from smooth-talking deceivers who would lure them into unclean passions. You the multitudes that fill this space, you are the Invisible Empire today made visible. Our enemies will tremble when they consider how many millions more of you are yet hidden from their sight. Speaking of our enemies. *(Possibly glances at Niblack.)* I was talking earlier today with a representative of that poor excuse for journalism the *(drawing it out contemptuously) In-di-an-ap-o-lis Times. (Crowd boos.)* To help their pitiful circulation numbers that miserable rag has embarked on a crusade against us. You will not read accurate unbiased

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stories about us in the *Times* or in newspapers like it. That is why we have begun publishing our own newspaper. We call it "*The Fiery Cross*," named after the glorious symbol of our movement. There my friends is where you will find the truth. There and there alone. Our enemies call us "Bigots in Bedsheets." (*Crowd boos.*) Look around you my friends. Do you see bigots? (*Crowd: No!*) Nor do I. I do not see bigots! I see patriots! I see men willing to do whatever they must to preserve the precious liberties handed down to us by our white Protestant forefathers—liberties which we are duty-bound to pass on to the generations yet to come. Today those liberties are threatened by traitors in our midst. Our Roman Catholic neighbors are plotting to take over this great Protestant nation. They're stockpiling weapons in their church basements. They're turning their steeples and belfries into watch towers and sniper's nests. They intend to force every one of us to bow down to their foreign Pope! (*Hisses. Nos! Nevers! from the Crowd.*) Day after day thousands of Catholic immigrants come pouring in from Ireland, from Poland, from Italy, from places nobody's ever heard of. They're overwhelming us with their alien lawlessness and immorality. On Indiana's very doorstep they've taken over Chicago and made it a cesspool of sin! Corruption! Violence! Italian bootleggers—Catholics every one of them from the Pope's own country!—they're flooding our state with liquor. They're defying the prohibitions enshrined in our sacred Constitution! They're poisoning our youth! And what do our politicians do to stop it? Nothing!! It is clear my brothers and sisters! Only the Ku Klux Klan can save us from the evils that beset us on every side. Only the Ku Klux Klan can prevent our country from being stolen away from its rightful inheritors. Fellow Klansmen our fate is in our own hands. With the help of Almighty God those hands will soon clasp in victory from sea to shining sea. Our burning crosses will illuminate every crossroad in the land. Guided by those pillars of fire we will bring our people in triumph through the Valley of the Shadow. March with me brothers and sisters. March with me and I will lead you into the great and glorious future ordained for us by God Himself! A future that is white! A future that is Protestant! A future that is one hundred per cent

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American! (*Crowd roars. Band strikes up "Onward Christian Soldiers."*)

### SCENE 3

*A hotel meeting room shortly after Stephenson's speech. Stephenson and Evans sit at a table. Gentry stands behind them.*

**EVANS.** Good show, Stephenson. But we need to talk. I was approached last evening by two of our fellow Klansmen with information about you, information that was so disturbing if I'd known about it earlier you would never have been appointed Grand Dragon.

**STEPHENSON.** There are a lot of jealous guys who don't like looking up the ladder of success and seeing my ass. Don't believe everything you hear.

**EVANS.** They said your wife filed for divorce. On grounds of cruelty.

**STEPHENSON.** Those records were supposed to stay confidential.

**EVANS.** Be that as it may they had a copy of her complaint. She says you're a violent drunk. She went into detail about what you did to her. Shocking, sickening detail. Those men also told me about wild parties at your mansion. They went so far as to use the word "orgy."

**STEPHENSON.** Lies. All lies. Somebody's obviously out to get me.

**EVANS.** The Klan movement is all about sober morality and the sanctity of marriage. Your behavior has to be above reproach. In private as well as in public. I've got my eye on you, Stephenson. Never forget that. I've got my eye on you.

**STEPHENSON.** Save me your pious little sermons, Hiram. What the Klan is all about these days is Stephenson. Before I came along you were presiding over a miserable bunch of Southern Negro lynchers. If the Klan is suddenly spreading like a rising tide it's because ambitious guys in other states are seeing how I've achieved my success in Indiana. They aren't looking to Atlanta for leadership. They certainly aren't looking to you. They're looking to Indianapolis. They're looking to Stephenson. You may not like me or my methods but you sure like the

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money flowing into the Imperial coffers. So suck it up Brother Hiram, and stay out of my way.

**NIBLACK.** (*Enters with his notebook.*) Excuse me, gentlemen. Are you ready for me now?

**STEPHENSON.** Sure, Niblack. Come on in.

**EVANS.** This the reporter you warned me about? The one from the anti-Klan paper?

**STEPHENSON.** It is. I thought we should give him a chance to hear the truth about us for a change. Before you ask your questions, Mr. Niblack, let me remind you today's program will continue far into the night. First our multitudes will march through the city in a magnificent torchlight parade. Then we'll put on the largest fireworks exhibition ever seen. We'll cap it all off with the lighting of a cross sixty feet tall. Tonight the light of Klan truths will truly overcome the alien darkness. I hope you will cover every event so your readers can see how Klansmen enjoy a patriotic American holiday. All we ask is for the *Times* to publish an accurate account.

**NIBLACK.** Well sir, I'm sure our readers are already aware the Klan does its best work in the dead of night. But you can always count on accurate reporting from the (*imitating Stephenson*) *In-di-an-ap-o-lis Times*.

**STEPHENSON.** Ah, if only that were so. Now, what would you like to know?

**NIBLACK.** If you'll bear with me, I have several questions. First, do you have a comment on the immense size of today's crowd? Some people are estimating 10,000 people.

**STEPHENSON.** I think the Imperial Wizard will agree the report of only 10,000 is very low. When I was seeing it from the air it looked to me to be at least twice that. And I wouldn't be surprised if the actual number were 50,000 or more. No doubt papers like yours will use the lowest number they can get away with.

**NIBLACK.** This is for the Imperial Wizard. What did the authorities in Atlanta see in the new Grand Dragon that convinced them to elevate him to this exalted position in so short a time?



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**EVANS.** When brother Steve joined us, only two years ago, we had just a few hundred members north of the Ohio River. As King Kleagle he demonstrated remarkable organizational skills and, as you saw earlier today, an impressive ability to communicate our message to the masses—

**STEPHENSON.** (*Barging in.*) As of today we're organized in all ninety-two Hoosier counties. At least 250,000 members and still growing by 2,000 every week. When you add in our auxiliaries—Women of the Klan, Junior Klan for boys, Triple-K Club for girls—our numbers get up to nearly half a million.

**EVANS.** (*Not pleased at having been interrupted.*) Yes. So as you can see, the new Grand Dragon's our rising star. (*Insincere grin at Stephenson.*) I just hope he doesn't have his eye on *my* job.

**NIBLACK.** (*Consulting his notes.*) My other questions are for the Grand Dragon. Let me just get them all out there and you can take them in whatever order you like. First: What do you actually plan to do with the Catholics, Negroes and Jews? Kill them? Run them out of the country? Allow them to remain here in some sort of second-class citizenship? Second: What's the ultimate objective of the Klan? Do you aim to take over the national and state governments? Third: It's common knowledge Indiana Secretary of State Ed Jackson plans to run for governor next year. Has he made any deals with the Klan—or with you personally—to gain your support? And finally: Mr. Grand Dragon, how much money do you make out of your Klan activities? Dun and Bradstreet says you're worth at least 900,000 dollars. But I imagine you'll say that figure is low.

**STEPHENSON.** Just stop right there. I see you're a part of a national conspiracy against the Klan. Except for that impertinent question about Secretary of State Jackson—a shameful attempt to malign a dedicated public servant—as I say except for that I've been asked the very same set of questions at least thirty different times.

**NIBLACK.** Well I don't know anything about that. I made up the list myself just yesterday.

**STEPHENSON.** I can also see you're a bigot.

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**NIBLACK.** *I'm the bigot?*

**STEPHENSON.** You are not for us. You are against us. Earl get him out of here. *(Gentry comes out from behind the table and roughhouses NIBLACK off the stage.)*

### SCENE 4

*Offices of The Indianapolis Times. Morning. July 11, 1923. Sound of a telephone ringing. EUNICE is sitting at a desk answering the telephone and taking notes.*

**EUNICE.** *(Answers telephone.) Indianapolis Times circulation desk. ... You wish to cancel your subscription? Certainly sir, but may we know the reason? ... You object to our editorials about the Ku Klux Klan? ... Very well, when would you like us to stop delivery. ... Immediately? Of course. ... Thank you for reading the Times. ... Yes sir. Never again. I understand. (Hangs up. Telephone immediately rings again.) Indianapolis Times circulation desk. ... You wish to cancel your subscription? Certainly madam, but may we know the reason? ... You believe we are not being fair in our reporting about the Ku Klux Klan. ... You think we should take our paper and go where? ... Really madam! (She reacts when apparently the receiver on the other end has been slammed down.) Hello? Hello? (Hangs up. Niblack enters with a Fiery Cross newspaper.)*

**NIBLACK.** Morning Eunice. Bad day already?

**EUNICE.** Mr. Niblack, one more of your anti-Klan stories and the only thing this newspaper will be good for is lighting the kindling at the foot of their crosses. We're down at least five hundred subscriptions. And the language they're using over the phone! Words they sure never learned in Sunday school.

**NIBLACK.** Good Sunday-school Christians are the bedrock of Klan support. Somehow he's made them believe he was sent by God Himself. Have you seen the latest issue of their *Fiery Cross* newspaper? *(Opens*

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*the newspaper.*) You know there were 200,000 people at that Klan rally in Kokomo?

**EUNICE.** Your story said 10,000.

**NIBLACK.** Nope. 200,000. Says so right here. Also says the crowd gave him “the greatest ovation ever given a private citizen in Indiana.” On page three we find yet another editorial against the *Times*. *And* surprise, surprise, the Klan’s endorsing Secretary of State Ed Jackson for governor. If Jackson wins it’ll give Stephenson control of the state government *and* the Republican Party.

**EUNICE.** Aren’t they the same thing? *(Telephone rings. She answers.) Indianapolis Times* circulation desk. ... Sir I can’t help you if you can’t speak rationally. ... Yes I know. Jesus plans to send all of us at the *Times* straight to hell. Frankly sir I think he already has. *(Hangs up.)*

**NIBLACK.** *(Still perusing paper.)* Speaking of the Christian connection here’s a story about Klansmen visiting a church and leaving an offering on the altar. Happens somewhere almost every week.

**EUNICE.** Couple months ago they showed up where my grandma goes to church. Bunch of them came in right in the middle of the service. Paraded down the aisle in their masks and robes. Laid an envelope on the communion table and left. Turned out to be fifty dollars. Grandma said a big argument broke out whether they should keep the money considering the source.

**NIBLACK.** Did they?

**EUNICE.** Of course. Fifty dollars is a lot of money for that little congregation. Besides their preacher is a member and the local Klan meets in the church basement. *(Telephone rings. She answers.) Indianapolis Times* office. ... He’s standing right here. *(Hands Niblack the telephone.)*

**NIBLACK.** This is John Niblack. ... Yes Mr. Gentry. I remember you. The bruises haven’t faded yet. ... Really? Tell him I’ll be right over. *(Hangs up.)* Eunice, if I’m not back by tomorrow file a missing person report. The dragon just invited me into his lair.

## GRAND DRAGON IN POWER

### SCENE 5

*Stephenson's office later that day. Desk and chair for Stephenson, additional chairs for guests. A window downstage is indicated by the acting. On the desk are an intercom box and two 1920's telephones, one of which is adorned with a U.S. Presidential seal. Lights come up on Stephenson in his suit, sitting at the desk. Gentry stands in front of him. The voice of Stephenson's secretary ARLENE will be heard as though through an intercom.*

**STEPHENSON.** Earl, I need you to nose around. Find out which of our people are loyal to me and which ones are hanging onto the Imperial Wizard's apron strings. I hear he's already trying to dig up enough dirt on me to replace me as Grand Dragon. And you know how it works. What they don't find they'll make up. I have to have around me only men I can trust. Once we know who the tattle-tales are we can do what we need to do to root them out.

**ARLENE (off).** Mr. Stephenson. There's a reporter from the *Indianapolis Times* to see you.

**STEPHENSON.** *(Into intercom.)* Thank you Arlene. Send him on in. *(To Gentry.)* I think it's safe to leave me alone with him. Go out and watch for Jackson. If he gets back from his little errand before I'm done with Niblack, hide him in one of the empty offices.

*(Gentry exits as Niblack enters. Gentry gives him an intimidating look. Stephenson stands up and he and Niblack shake hands. Stephenson will be as charming as can be wooing the reporter. Niblack doesn't fall for it.)*

**STEPHENSON.** Good to see you again Mr. Niblack. Glad you could come over.

**NIBLACK.** You have quite an establishment here Mr. Stephenson. *(Niblack wanders over to where a window might be indicated. Stephenson rushes over and pulls Niblack away from the "window.")*

**STEPHENSON.** Don't stand there in front of that window! There're people in the building across the street with high-powered rifles trying to

## GRAND DRAGON IN POWER

kill me. They might shoot you by mistake! Come over here and have a seat where we can talk in safety. *(They sit down.)*

**NIBLACK.** Who do you think would want to kill you?

**STEPHENSON.** The Imperial Wizard of course.

**NIBLACK.** What? Just last week he was singing your praises to the sky.

**STEPHENSON.** It'd all been organized beforehand and confronted with 50,000—more or less—of my ecstatic subjects he had to go through with it.

**NIBLACK.** The *Fiery Cross* now puts the number of ecstatic subjects at 200,000.

**STEPHENSON.** Who am I to dispute the reporting of the *Fiery Cross*? So His Excellency had to make nice in front of 200,000 people. But don't let his crocodile smile fool you. This is a guy from Dallas who could hardly make a living as a dentist. You know how he got to be Imperial Wizard and move into the palace in Atlanta? He staged a coup. Deposed his predecessor. He's pretty sure I want to do the same to him. But he's safe from me if he only knew it. My ambitions go way beyond Atlanta. I plan to become the most important man in the United States.

**NIBLACK.** *(Skeptically.)* Really.

**STEPHENSON.** Really. Now John...can I call you John?...and please call me Steve. All my friends do. I'm afraid in Kokomo we kind of got off on the wrong foot and I feel bad about that. So just between friends what do you really want to know about the Klan?

**NIBLACK.** And about you?

**STEPHENSON.** About the Klan.

**NIBLACK.** Well Mr. Stephenson—

**STEPHENSON.** Steve.

**NIBLACK.** Mr. Stephenson. *(Stephenson gives up graciously. He'll hook his fish sooner or later; he always does.)* What I don't understand is why so many people want to join the Klan. And how you fit in. Sources tell me you're from Oklahoma. Or is it Texas? Or maybe Iowa? Hoosiers are usually pretty suspicious of strangers coming into the state and telling them what to do.

## GRAND DRAGON IN POWER

**STEPHENSON.** They've greeted me and my ideas with open arms. To answer your question, at the heart of our movement is a cadre—huh, cadre; you know I was in the army in the Great War; sometimes these military expressions just come out of my mouth unbidden—anyway a cadre of fierce patriots and true believers.

**NIBLACK.** I didn't know you were in the war. As I say biographical details are hard to come by.

**STEPHENSON.** Joined up right after the jerrys sunk the Lusitania. Uncle Sam made me a recruiter. As you can imagine I was quite successful at it. My only regret is I never went overseas. Never got to help Pershing's boys chase down Kaiser Bill. A lot of the guys that did get to the trenches came back pretty disillusioned. America went "over there" to save Europe. Now they see Europe coming over *here* to destroy America. But those former doughboys are still hankering to be part of something bigger than themselves. They cherish American ideals and under the robe and mask all men really are created equal.

**NIBLACK.** All *white* men that is.

**STEPHENSON.** All *Protestant* white men. But it doesn't matter one guy's a farmer and the guy next to him's the banker that holds his mortgage. We unite them all in a set of common beliefs and that's a powerful thing. That's why the Klan was created and under my leadership in Indiana we've done very well.

**NIBLACK.** These offices certainly speak prosperity. There are three secretaries out there and a couple telephones on every desk.

**STEPHENSON.** Eight phone lines and we still can't handle all the business.

**NIBLACK.** A waiting room full of lobbyists and legislators wanting your advice and support. And that phone on your desk—is that the presidential seal on it?

**STEPHENSON.** Direct line to President Harding. ... Now John the real reason I asked you here. How'd you like to take over as editor of the *Fiery Cross*? I know what you're making at the *Times*—don't ask; trust me I know—and I'm prepared to double it. No doubt you'd like a little time to think about it.

## GRAND DRAGON IN POWER

**NIBLACK.** No Mr. Stephenson. I don't need any time at all.  
*(Stephenson breaks out in a triumphant smile. The fish took the bait.)* I won't be accepting your offer. *(Stephenson's smile disappears.)* Near as I can tell the job of *Fiery Cross* editor amounts to inflating your audience numbers and kissing your ass. No thanks. I'll stay at the *Times*.  
**STEPHENSON.** Then I think there's nothing more to say. Good day to you Mr. Niblack. And of course everything you heard today is off the record.

**NIBLACK.** *(Standing.)* As usual. But tell me. Is that phone really a direct line to the President?

**STEPHENSON.** What do you think?

**NIBLACK.** I think it's as phony as you are. *(Niblack exits. After a beat Stephenson picks up the telephone.)*

**STEPHENSON.** Arlene. Get me the editorial offices of the *Fiery Cross*. The number is Lincoln 5351. ... Hello. This is Stephenson. Looks like we've been too easy on the *Times*. Next issue I want you to hit 'em hard. Tell our people any paper that's anti-Klan is anti-American. They must be conspiring with the Pope. Say it's rumored their owners are Bolsheviks. *Jewish* Bolsheviks who want to mongrelize our population. You know the drill. Lay it on thick. *(Hangs up.)*

**ARLENE (off).** Mr. Stephenson. Secretary of State Jackson has been waiting to see you.

**STEPHENSON.** It's about time. While he's here I'll leave the intercom on so you can make a record of our conversation.

**ARLENE (off).** I understand sir.

**STEPHENSON.** Send Gentry in with him.

*(Stephenson checks to make sure the intercom is on. JACKSON enters; he wears a suit and carries a small suitcase. Gentry accompanies him and takes up a place standing behind Stephenson. Stephenson does not rise but indicates one of the empty chairs. Jackson sits holding the suitcase in his lap.)*

**JACKSON.** *(Indicating Gentry.)* Does he have to be here?

**STEPHENSON.** I find his presence discourages any misunderstandings.

**JACKSON.** I don't know why I do your dirty work for you.

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**STEPHENSON.** Because you want to be governor and the road to *that* office leads through *this* office. You see Governor McCray?

**JACKSON.** Yes but he wouldn't take the money.

**STEPHENSON.** Why not? We know he's in debt so bad he's embezzling government money to try to keep afloat. Why shouldn't he accept our generous offer of 10,000 dollars to help his cash flow? All we asked was for him appoint one of our guys to the county prosecutor vacancy.

**JACKSON.** When I showed him the cash he got this look of disgust on his face. He said "You can just take your money back to your master, Ed. Even if I was willing to hand Stephenson the last shred of my integrity you're too late. I already filled the position."

**STEPHENSON.** Integrity? Ha! More likely we just didn't bid high enough. So who's our new prosecutor?

**JACKSON.** William Remy.

**STEPHENSON.** So all McCray did was promote the deputy prosecutor. Waste of a good appointment. Think Remy can be bought?

**JACKSON.** Doubt it. He's really young and they're usually pretty idealistic when they're young.

**STEPHENSON.** Yeah I know all about that. Once upon a time I was a Socialist. If you're going to survive in this world you learn to shuck off the idealism pretty quick.

**JACKSON.** So I'm finding out. As he's throwing me out the governor says "I know you have ambitions to occupy this office Ed. Too bad you thought you had to sell your soul to get it." I felt humiliated standing there holding the bribe money.

**STEPHENSON.** Oh stiffen up. You knew if you wanted our support we'd ask for a few favors in return. Go on back to your office. I'll call you later if I need you to do anything else.

**JACKSON.** (*Standing and moving toward the door carrying the suitcase.*) I know you will.

**STEPHENSON.** Ed?

**JACKSON.** Yes?

**STEPHENSON.** The suitcase?



## GRAND DRAGON IN POWER

**JACKSON.** Of course. *(He puts down the suitcase and exits.)*

**STEPHENSON.** *(Into the intercom.)* Arlene? You get all that?

**ARLENE (off).** Yes Mr. Stephenson.

**STEPHENSON.** Give me the transcript when you get it typed up. It'll go into my special black-box file. Then destroy your shorthand notes. *(Turning to Gentry.)* Love this new intercom gadget. Just installed it this morning and here I already got a record of the secretary of state admitting to trying to bribe the governor. American ingenuity is a wonderful thing.

### INTERLUDE

*An indeterminate space with a chair occupied by MADGE Oberholtzer, a twenty-eight-year-old brunette. She wears a long gown, the kind a working woman with little spare cash would sew for herself for a special occasion. She is handsome rather than beautiful, but her face is animated and would interest a man. She has not yet met Stephenson but very much hopes she will.*

**MADGE.** My name is Madge Oberholtzer, and I'm thrilled to be one of the hostesses for Gov. Jackson's inaugural banquet tonight. All the important people will be there and I plan to make sure I meet every one of them. The man I'm really interested in meeting is D.C. Stephenson. He sounds fascinating. They say he's the real power behind the throne. So powerful he's untouchable and he can get by with whatever he wants. They say the politicians are afraid to cross him because he's got little black boxes full of incriminating information, enough to destroy them all. I find power very attractive, don't you? I can't wait to find out what he's really like.

*(Madge is radiant with anticipation. Stephenson enters and moves to stand ominously behind Madge's chair, his hands on her shoulders.)*

**STEPHENSON.** God has laid a heavy obligation on white Christian men like us. We must defend our weak and trusting women from smooth-talking deceivers who would lure them into unclean passions.

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*(The lights fade leaving Stephenson's grinning face in a pin spot for a few beats. Then darkness segueing into the next scene.)*

### SCENE 6

*Governor Jackson's Inaugural Ball, January 12, 1925. Bistro table and two chairs. The sound of a dance orchestra playing a public domain tune from the 1920's or earlier. Stephenson sits sipping a drink. Being Prohibition, the drink presumably is non-alcoholic. The music ends and the voice of the ORCHESTRA LEADER is heard.*

**ORCHESTRA LEADER** *(off)*. Ladies and gentlemen. The orchestra and I thank you for the honor of providing music at this elegant event. And we wish also to congratulate Mr. Edward Jackson on his election as the thirty-second governor of Indiana. *(Sound of polite applause in which Stephenson absent-mindedly joins.)* The boys and I will take a break now. We'll be back shortly for your listening and dancing pleasure.

**JACKSON**. *(Entering, carrying a drink.)* Well Stephenson what do you want? Gentry said you wanted to see me. Since the election most people approach *me*. They don't summon me into their presence.

**STEPHENSON**. The election didn't change a thing between us. Not a thing and don't you forget it.

**JACKSON**. You didn't have to make a public demonstration of it. That's all.

**STEPHENSON**. *(Standing.)* Let's take a little walk. Somewhere we're not so easily overheard. *(Stephenson picks up his drink; the two of them walk to another part of the stage.)*

**JACKSON**. Well?

**STEPHENSON**. Now that we have you safely elected—despite losing a good percentage of the colored vote—

**JACKSON**. That was disappointing. First time some of those Darkies ever voted against a Republican.

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**STEPHENSON.** The party of Lincoln is now the party of Stephenson. We're better off without them. Anyway I also provided you with the best legislature money can buy. I'll send over a list of the bills I'd like to see get passed.

**JACKSON.** Like what?

**STEPHENSON.** Religion and patriotism to start with. A bill to outlaw all parochial schools. Another to require public school teachers to teach the U.S. Constitution and read portions of the King James Bible to their students every day. And one to establish a state agency to censor immoral motion pictures. I really don't care if any of that crap passes. It's just red meat for the base. The bill I'm most interested in would reform the State Highway Commission. I want to make the commissioners directly responsible to the governor.

**JACKSON.** And you'd expect me to appoint friends of yours. Who would then award road construction contracts—worth millions of dollars—to *other* friends of yours. Friends who might be inclined to let you skim some off the top. Someday Stephenson you'll go too far. As powerful as you are you're not above the law.

**STEPHENSON.** Above the law? Where've you been Jackson? I *am* the law. I own the sheriffs, the prosecutors, the judges. I bought and paid for 'em with my Klan voters my Klan money and my Klan poll workers. No Indiana jury would ever convict me of anything because every jury in the state is packed with my people. But even if they did, who has the power to pardon? The governor that's who. And who owns the governor? ... Of course it'd never come to that. You know everything's fine in Indiana politics as long as you don't get caught in bed with a dead woman or a live man.

**JACKSON.** They may never find you in bed with a *dead* woman but they're sure likely to find you in bed with a live one. What'll our good Christian supporters do when they find out you've broken every commandment in the book?

**STEPHENSON.** They'll follow me into hell if I ask them to, that's what. Besides I do keep the big commandment.

**JACKSON.** Really. Which one is that?

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**STEPHENSON.** “Love your enemies.” The more enemies you got the more important you are.

**JACKSON.** You’re supposed to love your enemies *as yourself*. You don’t love *anyone* that much.

**STEPHENSON.** Let’s get back before people get too curious about what we’re up to. Put on a nice smile so they know we’ve just been having a friendly little conversation. *(They return to the table. Before they sit down Madge approaches them.)*

**MADGE.** Excuse me Governor. I’m Madge Oberholtzer, one of the hostesses. I wanted to ask if you’re enjoying yourself and whether there was anything you needed.

**JACKSON.** Everything has been just perfect Miss Oberholtzer. Do you know Mr. D.C. Stephenson?

**MADGE.** *(Extending her hand.)* I’m so happy to meet you Mr. Stephenson.

**STEPHENSON.** *(Shaking her hand gallantly.)* And I’m always glad to meet a lovely young lady like you Miss Oberholtzer.

**JACKSON.** I understand all of you hostesses work at the state house. What office are you in?

**MADGE.** Public Instruction. But I may not be there very long I guess. We’ve heard your new budget might cut some of our staff. I hope that isn’t true.

**JACKSON.** Well Miss Oberholtzer, I also hope it won’t be necessary but of course the state constitution requires a balanced budget. There will undoubtedly have to be sacrifices in some agencies.

**MADGE.** *(Disappointed.)* Of course. I understand completely.

**JACKSON.** I’d better get back to my table before my wife begins to think Mr. Stephenson is holding me hostage. It’s been lovely meeting you Miss Oberholtzer. Steve, I assume we’ll be speaking in a few days.

**STEPHENSON.** Let’s make it tomorrow. *(Jackson exits.)* Miss Oberholtzer, since I’ve been abandoned would you care to join me?

**MADGE.** Um ... I guess I could take a few minutes’ break. The girls back at the office will be very jealous I got to talk to the man responsible for the governor’s landslide victory.

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**STEPHENSON.** I promise not to keep you to myself very long but I always enjoy feminine company. *(He pulls out a chair for Madge and then seats himself.)* Now where did you say you worked?

**MADGE.** The Department of Public Instruction.

**STEPHENSON.** Well Miss Oberholtzer, it's possible I may have some influence with the governor. I don't think you'll have to worry about losing your job.

**MADGE.** Oh thank you Mr. Stephenson! My parents will be so relieved. They need my paycheck to make ends meet. And please call me Madge.

**STEPHENSON.** And you should call me Steve. All my friends do and I hope we'll become good friends. Very good friends indeed. In fact I feel like I know you already.

**MADGE.** I live not far from you Mr. ... Steve. You may have seen me with my mother on one of our evening walks around the neighborhood.

**STEPHENSON.** Of course! I knew you looked familiar. I'm not a man who ever forgets a pretty face.

**ORCHESTRA LEADER (off).** Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your patience. To start off our next set we'd like to play for you that old favorite, "Let Me Call You Sweetheart." *(Music begins under.)*

**STEPHENSON.** Madge may I ask you for this dance?

**MADGE.** Of course...Steve...I'm honored.

**STEPHENSON.** *(Standing and pulling out her chair.)* Oh no. The pleasure will be all mine. *(Stephenson and Madge assume a waltz embrace and dance off, their gazes locked into each other's eyes.)*

### SCENE 7

*Stephenson's office, March 15, 1925. Stephenson is at his desk.*

**ARLENE (off).** Mr. Stephenson. You asked me to get Walter Bossert for you. He's on line one.

**STEPHENSON.** *(After angrily grabbing the phone:)* Look, you sniveling little piss-ant. I don't know who you think you are. But just

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because you got a piece of paper from the Imperial tooth-puller saying you're the new Grand Dragon doesn't mean a thing. Not a damned thing. You can't replace Stephenson. My people will never stand for it. This state is mine. Hell, everything north of the Ohio and west of the Mississippi is mine. Now you just crawl back to whatever rock you live under and if you're lucky I may forget you even exist. *(Slams down the receiver.)*

**ARLENE** *(off)*. Mr. Stephenson? Now Madge Oberholtzer is on line two.

**STEPHENSON**. Tell her I'm busy.

**ARLENE** *(off)*. I did but she won't take "no" for an answer.

**STEPHENSON**. In the two months we've been dating I've noticed that about her. *(Picks up telephone.)* Madge what do you want? You know you're not supposed to call me at the office.

*(Lights come up on Madge standing apart with a telephone.)*

**MADGE**. I know Steve but I just found out about something and I really need to talk to you.

**STEPHENSON**. Whatever it is make it quick.

**MADGE**. It's not something we can discuss over the phone. Besides I want to see your face when I tell you. I'll walk over to your house tonight after supper.

**STEPHENSON**. I have a meeting this evening. It may be after ten o'clock before I get home.

**MADGE**. It doesn't matter how late. Just call me when you get in and I'll come right over.

**STEPHENSON**. Oh all right if it's really that important. Now *good-bye* Madge.

**MADGE**. I can't wait to see you. Good-bye Dear.

**STEPHENSON**. How many times have I told you not to call me that? *(Hangs up angrily.)*

## GRAND DRAGON IN POWER

### SCENE 8

**RAILROAD STATION ANNOUNCER** (*off*). Ladies and gentlemen this is the last call for Monon Railroad train number 36 the “Midnight Special.” Service to Chicago Illinois via Frankfort, Rensselaer, and Hammond Indiana. Last call train number 36.

*Sound of a steam locomotive getting up speed as lights come up to reveal a Pullman sleeping room on the Monon Railroad, 1 a.m., March 16, 1925. Berth with a chair to one side. Low-level train sounds continue as Stephenson and Madge enter. Stephenson is intoxicated but mobile. He has to support Madge, who is so drunk or drugged she can hardly stand. Madge is dressed nicely but has no hat. Both are wearing coats. Stephenson removes his and throws it over the chair. He then none-too-gently begins wrestling Madge out of hers. Train sounds fade.*

**STEPHENSON.** C’mon Madge. Try to stay on your feet. (*He throws her coat onto the chair.*)

**MADGE.** (*Slurring.*) Where are we? It’s like everything’s moving.

**STEPHENSON.** We’re just taking a little train trip. Now get in that berth.

**MADGE.** No. No I don’t want to.

**STEPHENSON.** (*Exploding with anger.*) Get in that bunk you little bitch. (*He shoves her down into the berth. As he speaks he removes his jacket and unbuttons the fly of his trousers.*) I’m going to teach you nobody—nobody!—makes a fool of D.C. Stephenson. (*He gets on top of her in the berth as lights dim. The sound of the train becomes more noticeable.*)

**MADGE.** (*From the darkness.*) No! Let me alone. I don’t want to! No stop! Steve you’re hurting me! (*Her screams blend into the wail of a steam locomotive whistle.*)

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