

**Synopsis/Sample of
On The Nature Of The Dark Matter
That Dominates The Present Mean
Mass Density Of The Universe**

by
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Story Conceived by Seymour Morgenstern and
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DESCRIPTION

Four characters become caught up in an academic controversy involving a charge of "liberal bias" by a group dedicated to a conservative agenda, a charge that also becomes mixed with questions of racial identity.

CHARACTERS

- LILLIE PERKINS, professor - white with African ancestry
- HANNAH MORGAN, student - white with African ancestry
- MITCHELL PALMER, student - African American
- LAWRENCE BOALS, Perkin's literary agent - white - British/Irish

PERKINS, in most scenes, will have a stand-up leather briefcase, with the opening at the top.

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Scene 1

PERKINS' classroom, first meeting of the class. PALMER and MORGAN seated upstage. PERKINS stands at a lectern downstage.

PERKINS

Welcome to Contracts and Property, otherwise known as "The Bottom Line." That was my lame attempt at a joke -- they don't come often, so encouraged to groan when they do. In this cross-disciplinary class you will learn the "laws" of contracts and property -- but you will also learn --

PALMER raises his hand holding a textbook.

PERKINS

-- that far from being "sacred writ," these "laws" are also a mythology that people use to cover their sins.

PALMER's hand still up.

PERKINS

Laws controlling property and contracts do not come down like the Ten Commandments but come out of the messy power struggles between those that have and those that don't have but want to have. Are there any questions? Yes, Mr. --

(consults seating chart)

-- Palmer?

PALMER stands and comes downstage, faces the audience.

PALMER

Professor Perkins, this is a course on contracts and property, is it not?

MORGAN comes downstage on the opposite side. She has PALMER in her sights.

PERKINS

Yes.

PALMER

That is what we're paying for, right?

PERKINS

And what I'm paid for.

PALMER

Because I wanted to make sure we had signed up for the right course.

PERKINS

Why would you doubt it?

MORGAN

Who is that man?

PALMER

Because we just heard something about "mythologies" --

MORGAN

Sharp --

PALMER
Maybe we wandered into a fiction class.

MORGAN
-- tongued --

PALMER
Surely not fictions, Professor Perkins?

MORGAN
Obnoxious --

PERKINS
I can't believe my luck.

PALMER
Because if you teach us that the free-enterprise
system that conserves our liberty --

MORGAN
Handsome --

PALMER
-- and keeps professors like you employed is just
a "mythology" -- well --

MORGAN
No, toothsome -- "toothsome"?

PERKINS
The SFA has arrived.

PALMER
We have arrived.

MORGAN
But "toothsome" he is.

PERKINS
It's only my first class, Mr. Palmer --

MORGAN
Too bad he's got --

PERKINS
-- at least let me get my liberal ducks in order
--

MORGAN
-- shitty politics --

PERKINS
-- before you potshot me --

PALMER
We're not trying to impose --

MORGAN
-- with a handsome face -- but damn!

PALMER
We don't want to interfere --

MORGAN
I am desiring --

PERKINS
Then go back to your seat.

MORGAN
-- what should dry me right up --

PALMER
But we do want to hear the truth.

PERKINS
You'll hear what's right.

MORGAN
But wet and in a sweat am I!

PERKINS
And you'll all hear it when the honored members
of the Students for a Free Academics move back to
their seats.

PERKINS and PALMER exchange a look.

PALMER
Not the color of their skin but the content of
their character --

PERKINS
What are you talking about?

MORGAN
What is he talking about?

PALMER
We know about your mixed-raced background,
Professor -- the liberal white-black woman -- you
have it right here in your textbook -- mixing
laws and "mythologies" --

PERKINS
It's your past, too --

MORGAN
Hers is mine, too --

PALMER
And that, professor, is where you're wrong --
that past ain't mine anymore -- we don't need it.

MORGAN
I don't want none of it either!

PALMER shoots MORGAN a "look." MORGAN does not look away.

PALMER
Not the color of their skin but the content of
their character -- let's all stick to the truth.

MORGAN
He makes my thighs hum!

PALMER back up to his seat. PERKINS turns and catches MORGAN staring up PALMER, which startles MORGAN, who moves back to her seat. PERKINS faces the audience.

PERKINS
Let me tell you all a story.

Transition.

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Scene 2

PERKINS in BOALS' office.

PERKINS
He wasn't rude -- exactly.

BOALS
So you told him about --

PERKINS
Told them --

BOALS
-- about the memoir?

PERKINS
-- the memoir --

BOALS hands her a Scotch.

PERKINS

-- thanks -- all of them -- not just him.

BOALS

Of course all of them. But you told them about the memoir --

PERKINS

And humans as property and corrupted contracts --

BOALS

In the first minutes of your first class of their first semester.

PERKINS

I was a little -- provoked --

BOALS

Because the memoir comes in, if I remember your textbook correctly, in lecture six, on the coat-tails of --

PERKINS

Property law as social control -- look, I know the sequence --

BOALS

And it comes out in later lectures as well --

PERKINS

Point taken --

BOALS

You mean point given away because of being "provoked" --

PERKINS

He just -- pushed my --

BOALS

Lillie, Lillie -- you couldn't have been that surprised that they came to your door --

PERKINS

No, I wasn't --

BOALS

The dark ooze of conservatism has been creeping over your campus for a while.

PERKINS

I just didn't think they would --

BOALS

Because you are Lillie Perkins.

PERKINS

Of course.

BOALS

The Lillie Perkins.

PERKINS

The one, the only --

BOALS

But didn't they just so-to-speak piss on the shoes of an emeritus at the school?

PERKINS

They forced the president to investigate his "bias" --

BOALS

He is a prize-winner, award-gatherer -- a lot bigger fish than you are, and yet they --

PERKINS

The charge is bogus --

BOALS

So what? These guys don't mind shitting on the altar, so why would you think they'd --

PERKINS

Because.

BOALS

Because you are --

PERKINS

The Lillie Perkins.

BOALS

(toasting)

To the Lillie Perkins, then!

PERKINS

All right, so I wasn't that surprised -- But I'm not going to consider them legit -- If the

SFA wants to shoot at me, I'll start them off early. I don't have time for the defensive.

BOALS

Or the skill.

PERKINS

You don't think so?

BOALS

Lillie Perkins is not as hard-boiled as she thinks she is.

PERKINS

That shows just how much you have left to learn about her.

BOALS

Then how'd he get to you so easily? Your house, your rules -- and he's, bam!, got you telling them about great-great-great-grandfather William and great-great-great-grandmother Ellen --

PERKINS

All right --

BOALS

-- and their escape from slavery as a first course.

PERKINS

All right --

BOALS

Now, how did that happen to such a tough gal?

They drink in silence.

BOALS

You don't think he has -- "feelings" for you? Lawrence Boals, Perkins' literary agent, adds a grin to show he's trying to lighten the mood.

PERKINS

A charge of liberal bias as a come-on?

BOALS

Tricky.

PERKINS

Not a thing for me. Enough.

BOALS
Really?

PERKINS
I'd prefer to talk about --

BOALS
Lillie?

PERKINS
Yes?

BOALS
Lillie?

PERKINS
What?

BOALS
Your face is not finished with this business.

PERKINS
You're watching my face?

BOALS
It's a good face to watch.

PERKINS
You've got a good eye.

BOALS
That's why you're my client and I'm your agent
and we're both doing well.

PERKINS
All right -- a woman -- sitting near him --

MORGAN steps into a light.

BOALS
Picture the seating chart --

PERKINS
I can't -- remember -- but she had her eyes glued
to him.

PALMER steps into a light.

PERKINS
And he ignored it. At first.

BOALS

And then at second?

PERKINS

He locked onto her. And she did not look away.

BOALS

And that struck you?

PERKINS

Stuck with me. He's black and she's white.

MORGAN and PALMER circle each other.

BOALS

White-looking.

PERKINS

True.

BOALS

By one who should know. Maybe it was all a pitch to her.

PERKINS

She just --

BOALS

Don't tell me -- show me. I'm this Mitchell Palmer.

BOALS puts down his drink.

BOALS

You are the nameless she.

PERKINS puts down her drink. They look at each other.

MORGAN and PALMER come together, move together.

BOALS

Good. What was she thinking?

PERKINS

I don't know.

BOALS

You must have estimated --

PERKINS

I don't know.

BOALS
Think of her name on the chart.

PERKINS
Hannah Morgan.

Suddenly PERKINS pulls back, though she doesn't take her eyes off BOALS.

BOALS
What do you know?

PERKINS
That can't be right.

BOALS
Lillie?
(kiddingly)
Lillie?

PERKINS
Jealous.

BOALS
That must have been unexpected.

PERKINS
I brought it out as anger.

BOALS
Your authority thwarted.

PERKINS
So I spilled the beans early.

BOALS
To show your bona fides.

PERKINS
Mark my territory.

BOALS
And while you are being righteous --

PERKINS
Lust goes marking its own territory.

BOALS
And there you are, lectern-bound, being so adult.

PERKINS
And serious. Logical.

BOALS

Selling that memoir.

PERKINS

And coming up dry.

BOALS

And how hard-edged did you say Lillie Perkins was?

MORGAN and PALMER stop moving.

PERKINS and BOALS move apart just slightly, and this "just slightly" breaks their gaze.

MORGAN and PALMER do the motions as PERKINS describes, and they mimic what BOALS and PERKINS do.

PERKINS

At the end of class she put her hand on him.

BOALS

Show me.

PERKINS puts her hand on BOALS' arm.

PERKINS

He noted it -- go ahead, note it. Then he gently picked it up -- go ahead -- and gave it back to her. And she --

PERKINS puts her hand back on BOALS. BOALS goes to do as before, to lift the hand off.

PERKINS

No. He picked it up, yes -- but then he -- brought it to his mouth --

PALMER gently nips the flesh on MORGAN's knuckles.

BOALS does not do anything with PERKINS' hand.

PERKINS takes her hand back.

MORGAN takes her hand back.

PERKINS picks up her drink, turns away from BOALS.

MORGAN and PALMER exit out of their lights.

PERKINS

You'd have thought them a couple --

BOALS

Abetted by your seating chart.

PERKINS

Yes -- abetted --

BOALS

One never knows what the one will look like.

PERKINS sips, muses.

PERKINS

The one -- musing on the one -- I didn't come here for -- that. Lawrence, you said you had something --

BOALS

Good time for a shift. And something it is I have for you. Why are we drinking my expensive single-malt? Hmm?

PERKINS

No.

BOALS

Yes.

PERKINS

You have a contract?

BOALS

For the woman in contracts. To be celebrated with matchless gaiety.

PERKINS

It's real?

BOALS

Your memoir will be --

Shift of lights. PERKINS addresses the audience.

PERKINS

The memoir will be published. Fucking A. Finally!

BOALS addresses the audience.

BOALS

She already has several best-selling books -- in contracts and property, that is --

PERKINS

So gripping!

BOALS

It's a small circle.

PERKINS

But with new editions each year, updates --

BOALS

A built-in pretty penny.

PERKINS

But the memoir -- that comes from the heart.

BOALS

The heart -- that realm of dark matter.

PERKINS

You cynic!

BOALS

Just the name for someone in his right mind.

PERKINS

Not all hearts -- and not this heart.

BOALS

She really wants to tell about the memoir. Now expanded by a contract.

BOALS smiles, raises his glass. Light out on him, stays up on PERKINS.

PERKINS

The memoir.

PALMER and MORGAN appear as William and Ellen, the main characters of PERKINS' memoir. They will also speak other voices.

PALMER is dressed in a torn shirt and pants, shoeless. MORGAN is dressed in a simple torn dress, shoeless. Think of a scene from some edition or a melodramatic theatre production of Uncle Tom's Cabin.

PERKINS

My great-great-great-grandparents -- no, I prefer to call them my primal sources. William. And Ellen.

PALMER [AS SLAVEMASTER]
I'll show you how to give a white man respect!

PERKINS
She was white, her husband was black --

MORGAN
Please, please, kind sir, don't hurt my husband!

PERKINS
But her white was a dark white --

MORGAN [AS SLAVEMASTER]
Quiet, wench, or I'll make you regret the day you
were born.

MORGAN
(eye-roll to heaven)
I already do!

PERKINS
A slave with the master's skin --

MORGAN now mimes as if "the master" is fucking her from behind.

PERKINS
-- but nothing else from the "master" -- except
the constant lash and the occasional fuck.

"The master" finishes with MORGAN.

PALMER
Don't give them no cause to strike you, my angel
--

MORGAN
Oh my God!

PALMER
God will find us a way. I can suffer this man's
lash --

PALMER [AS SLAVEMASTER]
We'll see about that!

MORGAN and PALMER fall as if thrown to their knees.

PERKINS
They couldn't take it anymore.

PALMER
I can't take no more, Ellen.

MORGAN
I got no heart left, William.

PERKINS
They only had the two choices every slave had.

PALMER
We leave --

MORGAN
Or we die. That's it.

PERKINS
They did not die.

BOALS brings on a pair of green sunglasses and a hat for MORGAN and a carpet bag for PALMER. They stand as if in a diorama -- white master, subservient slave.

PERKINS
By an ingenious illusion. She pretended to be
his white master --

Under PERKINS' words, MORGAN and PALMER begin to sing to the tune of Stephen Foster's "De Camptown Races."

[From FOSTER'S Plantation Melodies, No. 3. "Gwine to Run All Night," or De Camptown Races, <http://www.pdmusic.org/ministrel.html>]

MORGAN & PALMER
De coon dogs, dey be lickin' our trail -- Doo-
dah! doo-dah!

PERKINS
An invalid, wrapped in bandages, with weak eyes -
-

MORGAN & PALMER
Break our bones and t'row us in de jail -- Oh!
doo-dah day!

PERKINS
Traveling to Philadelphia with her "property."

MORGAN, PALMER & PERKINS
Oh! day-doo-dah day!

MORGAN and PALMER do a little shuffle/cakewalk move, then stop, hold pose.

MORGAN & PALMER
Gwine to run all night!

During PERKINS' next line, they do another little shuffle/cakewalk, then hold the pose.

PERKINS
They used property and contracts to free
themselves --

MORGAN & PALMER
Gwine to run all day!

PERKINS
Love the irony of that!

MORGAN and PALMER suddenly break out of their pose.

MORGAN & PALMER
(screaming)
What we really wanna do is tear out their fucking
hearts!

They immediately snap back into their pose. PERKINS breaks out of her "professorial" pose.

PERKINS
I really wanna tear out their fucking hearts too!

PERKINS snaps back into her "rational" pose.

MORGAN & PALMER
(singing)
Gwine to run all night! Gwine to run all day!

MORGAN, PALMER, and PERKINS "step out" and sing.

MORGAN, PALMER & PERKINS
I'll bet my money on de bobtail nag --
Somebody bet on de bay.

Everyone holds a final "button." PALMER and MORGAN take a pose.

PERKINS
And they made it -- they actually made it --

A strobe/snapshot. PALMER and MORGAN undress. BOALS brings them contemporary clothes and takes their shed clothes.

PERKINS

Eventually to England to escape the Fugitive Slave law, then back here to call it and make the states their home. And so on and so on and so on down to me.

(touching herself)

This skin?

(shows it around)

All this time you thought it was -- and that I was -- I get that all the time!

MORGAN and PALMER are now as they were at the top of the show. BOALS comes back into the light. MORGAN and PALMER move to their seats in the class.

PERKINS

So when do I sign?

BOALS

As soon as the papers arrive.

PERKINS

A good price?

BOALS

Yes we did -- does that matter?

PERKINS

I don't know --

BOALS

It's not a sin to want the money.

PERKINS

You speak with such confidence.

BOALS

Because I know with such confidence. You own what you know and you can parlay that into anything you want --

PERKINS

My intellectual "property."

BOALS

Why do you think we call them "properties" around here? In my business, the word "contract" --

BOALS with an open hand.

BOALS

-- should never mean "contract."

BOALS makes a fist. He gives PERKINS the sign of the cross.

BOALS

Enjoy.

PERKINS

Enjoy.

BOALS

I know someone's in there who can do just that.

PERKINS muses for a few moments, then looks up and give BOALS a big-thank you smile, which he returns. Transition.

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Scene 3

MORGAN at a table, with a coffee cup. PALMER, wearing a backpack, stands, not leaving, not sitting.

[continued]