

A LESSON IN CLASS

A Ten-Minute Dramatic Duet

by
Walt Vail



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CAST: AMELIA and TYISHA

Both parts are designed to be performed by students.

AT RISE: *A park bench. TYISHA, a black woman, sits, watching two children at play in the grass. We do not see the children. Enter AMELIA HAWKINS, a white girl, aged 13, who hesitates, approaches slowly and somewhat remorsefully. TYISHA glances at her with contempt, shakes her head slightly, then ignores her, looking off at the unseen children.*

AMELIA: (**Prologue**) After my family moved to New York City from New Orleans, we made our annual visit, my parents to see relatives, and I to warm myself in the love of Tyisha, my darling nanny, the black woman who nursed me as a baby, and raised me to the age of five. I was thirteen on the eighth of these visits, full of myself, and ready and determined to change the world. It was 1929. My name was the same as the great Amelia, who had just made the first transatlantic flight by a woman, after Lindbergh had done it in 1927. And only three years before nineteen-year-old Gertrude Ederly had swum the English Channel. I was brave and ready to accomplish great things. So I attempted to force a New Orleans usher to allow my Nanny to sit with me in the front of the movie house. Mr. Will Rogers was playing in "Honest Hutch," and I wanted to share him with my Tyisha. And so my Tyisha taught me one more painful lesson in respect.

TYISHA: Pauley! Don't go any further, child. Stay with your sister. That's right.

AMELIA: Tyisha? (**TYISHA glances at her. Obviously, TYISHA is angry at AMELIA for something SHE did.**) May I sit next to you?

TYISHA: It's a free country, ain't it? I don't own no park benches.

AMELIA: You won't run away?

TYISHA: Can you see me minding these children? Laura, stop hitting your brother!

AMELIA: I did something wrong, didn't I?

TYISHA: (**in a snooty manner**) Hmph!

AMELIA: Yet I think it was the only right thing to do!

TYISHA: (**rolls her eyes**) Lord have mercy!

AMELIA: I punched that old white witch a good one, right in the nose, and I got that movie usher with my book bag!

TYISHA: You know what? It takes a big wind to find you in your tree, wherever you are.

AMELIA: Taught the two of them to shove me around. What's it their business where we sit in the dumb old movie house?

TYISHA: He's the usher. It's his movie house.

AMELIA: Well, he don't own it. And what business was it of that old white whale?

TYISHA: Pauley! Laura don't want grass down her neck. Go find your ball. Over that way.

AMELIA: No reason you should be mad at me.

TYISHA: Hmph!

AMELIA: White people. Think they're so wonderful, and they're nothing but trash.

TYISHA: I suppose you ain't one of them.

AMELIA: I don't want to be one of them. Sometimes I think I'm black inside, and one of them white people bleached me on the outside.

TYISHA: Well, you ain't less prideful than any of them. You listen to me about that.

AMELIA: Why should I let you sit in back of the movie while I sit up front? I want to sit with you. I came all the way down here from New York City just to be with you, and they don't want us to sit together. It's ridiculous. It's barbaric and uncivilized to treat honest people like they wasn't good enough for the rest of us. I won't do it. I won't be told what to do by a bunch of red-necked Louisiana white trash.

TYISHA: Yes, you will! Pauley, you throw any more dirt on Laura, I'm going to let her dig a hole and bury you.

AMELIA: I will not! We don't treat people like that in New York City, and I will not change my principles just to be in Louisiana!

TYISHA: (**shaking her head**) Mercy, mercy.

AMELIA: I've been in every movie house in New York City, and all people have the right to sit wherever they please.

TYISHA: I never been to New York City.

AMELIA: Then come back to the city and stay with me...forever. You'll be a lot happier.

TYISHA: Oh, yeah. Leave my own two children for an almost full grown woman, who still doesn't know what she is, or who she is, or the difference between New York and Louisiana! And it ain't like your poppa didn't tell you he can't afford no black nanny, and it ain't like you need one, neither.

AMELIA: I miss you.

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