
The Blood Knot

Athol Fugard

Characters: Morris, Zachariah (ages not specified)

Setting: One-room shack in the non-white location of Korsten, near Port Elizabeth, South Africa

Premiere: Rehearsal Room, African Music and Drama Association, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1961

Publisher: Oxford University Press (from *Boesman and Lena and Other Plays*)

Morris takes off, "a marked man on a long road." After years, he returns to his brother's shack in a non-white area and moves in. Zachariah is dark-skinned; Morris, light-skinned.

Morris plans everything. He constantly sets an alarm for when to eat, sleep, etc. Zachariah's life changes. He no longer enjoys drinking on Friday nights as his friend Minnie plays the guitar. Instead, Morris convinces him to save for the future. Zachariah complains, "A whole year of spending tonights talking, talking. I'm sick of talking." He wants a woman.

Morris comes up with the idea of a pen pal. Through the paper they write to Ethel Lange. Ethel writes back and sends a photo. She is white.

Zachariah decides to give his date to his brother, who can pass as white. Morris objects. (In apartheid South Africa, interracial sex is a crime.) Zachariah convinces him to play along and uses their year's savings to buy Morris the suit of a gentleman.

Note: The word "swartgat" means "nigger." "Blood knot" refers to the inseparable tie binding them together . . . "the bond between brothers."

(MORRIS is lying on his bed, staring up at the ceiling. There is a knock at the door. MORRIS rises slowly on his bed.)
MORRIS: Who is there? (The knock is heard again.) Speak up.

I can't hear. (*Silence. MORRIS's fear is now apparent. He waits until the knock is heard a third time.*) Ethel . . . I mean, madam . . . no, no! . . . I mean to say Miss Ethel Lange, could that be you? (*In reply there is a raucous burst of laughter, unmistakably Zachariah's.*) What's this? (*Silence.*) What's the meaning of this? (*MORRIS rushes to his bed and looks at the alarm-clock.*) This is all wrong, Zach! It's still only the middle of the day.

ZACHARIAH: (*Outside.*) I know.

MORRIS: Go back to work! At once!

ZACHARIAH: I can't.

MORRIS: Why not?

ZACHARIAH: I took some leave, Morris, and left. Let me in.

MORRIS: What's the matter with you? The door's not locked.

ZACHARIAH: My hands are full. (*Pause.*) I been shopping, Morrie. (*MORRIS rushes to the door, but collects himself before opening it. ZACHARIAH comes in, his arms piled high with parcels. He smiles slyly at MORRIS who has assumed a pose of indifference.*)

ZACHARIAH: Oh no you don't, this time! I heard you run. So you thought it was maybe our little Miss Ethel, and a bit scared too at that thought, I think I heard? Well, don't worry no more, Morrie, because you know what these is? Your outfit! Number one, and what do we have? A wonderful hat . . . sir. (*Takes it out and holds it up for approval. His manner is exaggerated and suggestive of the shopkeeper who sold him the clothing.*) . . . which is guaranteed to protect the head on Sundays and rainy days. Because! Think for a moment! Who ever knows what the weather will be? It's been bad before. Number two is the shirt, and a grey tie, which is much better taste. Spots are too loud for a gentleman. Next we have—two grey socks, left and right, and a hanky to blow her nose. (*Next parcel.*) Aha! We've come to the suit. Now before I show you the suit, my friend, I want to ask you, what does a man really look for in a good suit? A good cloth. Isn't that so?

MORRIS: What are you talking about?

ZACHARIAH: That's what he said. The fashion might be a season old, but will you please feel the difference. It's lasted for years already. All I can say is, take it or leave it. But remember, only a fool would leave it at that price. So I took it. (*Next parcel.*) Here we have a real ostrich wallet.

MORRIS: What for?

ZACHARIAH: Your inside pocket. *Ja!* You forgot about the inside pocket, he said. A gentleman always got a wallet for the inside pocket. (*Next parcel.*) And a cigarette lighter, and a cigarette case for the outside pocket. Chramonium!

MORRIS: Since when do I smoke?

ZACHARIAH: I know. But Ethel might, he said.

MORRIS: (*Fear.*) You told him?

ZACHARIAH: Don't worry. I just said there was a lady who someone was going to meet. He winked at me and said it was a good thing, now and then, and reminded me that ladies like presents. (*Holds up a scarf.*) A pretty *doek* in case the wind blows her hair away, he said. Here we got a umbrella in case it's sopping wet. And over here . . . (*Last parcel.*) . . . Guess! Come on, Morrie. Guess what's in this box. I'll shake it. Listen.

MORRIS: Shoes.

ZACHARIAH: (*Triumphantly.*) No! It's boots! I got you boots. Ha ha! *Ja!* (*Watching MORRIS's reaction.*) They frighten a *ou*, don't they? (*Happy.*) Satisfied?

MORRIS: (*Looking at the pile of clothing.*) It seems all right.

ZACHARIAH: It wasn't easy. At the first shop, when I asked for the outfit for a gentleman, they said I was a agitator and was going to call the police. I had to get out, man . . . quick! Even this fellow . . . Mr. Moses—"Come again, my friend" . . . "You're drunk," he said. But when I showed him our future he sobered up. You know what he said? Guess.

MORRIS: No.

ZACHARIAH: He said, "Are you the gentleman?" Me! He did. So I said. "Do I look like a gentleman, Mr. Moses?" He said, "My friend, it takes all sorts of different sorts to make

this world." "I'm the black sort," I said. So he said, "You don't say." He also said to mention his name and the fair deal to any other gentlemen wanting reasonable outfits. Go ahead, Morrie. (*The clothing.*) Let's see the gentle sort of man.

MORRIS: Okay. Okay. Don't rush me. (*Moves cautiously to the pile of clothing. Flicks an imaginary speck of dust off the hat. Zachariah is waiting.*) Well?

ZACHARIAH: Well, I'm waiting.

MORRIS: Give me time.

ZACHARIAH: What for? You got the clothes.

MORRIS: For God's sake, Zach! This is deep water, I'm not just going to jump right in. Men drown that way. You must paddle around first.

ZACHARIAH: Paddle around?

MORRIS: Try it out!

ZACHARIAH: (*Offering him the hat.*) Try it on.

MORRIS: The idea, man. I got to try it out. There's more to wearing a white skin than just putting on a hat. You've seen white men before without hats, but they're still white men, aren't they?

ZACHARIAH: *Ja.*

MORRIS: And without suits or socks, or shoes . . .

ZACHARIAH: No, Morrie. Never without socks and shoes. Never a barefoot white man.

MORRIS: Well, the suit then. Look, Zach, what I'm trying to say is this. The clothes will help, but only help. They don't maketh the white man. It's that white something inside you, that special meaning and manner of whiteness that I got to find. I know what I'm talking about because—I'll be honest with you now, Zach . . . I've thought about it for a long time. Why do you think I really read the Bible, hey? What do you think I'm thinking about when I'm not saying something? I'm being critical of colour, and the first-fruit of my thought is that this whiteness of theirs is not just in the skin, otherwise . . . well, I mean . . . I'd be one of them. wouldn't I? Because, let me tell you, I seen them that's

darker than me. Yes. Really dark, man. Only they had that something I'm telling you about. That's what I got to pin down in here.

ZACHARIAH: What?

MORRIS: White living, man! Like . . . like . . . like let's take looking at things. Haven't you noticed it? They look at things differently. Haven't you seen their eyes when they look at you? (*Pause.*) That snapshot of Ethel. See how she stands there against that brick wall, facing the camera without fear. They're born with that sort of courage. Just suppose, when I'm taking her away to afternoon tea, a man jumps out and points a camera at me! I'm telling you, my first thought will be to run like hell, to protect my face! It's not that I'm a coward. It's what they call instinct, and I was born with it, and now I got to learn to conquer it. Because if I don't, you think that Ethel won't know what it means? I'll be done for, man! . . . again. How else did they know? Because we agree that I'm just as white as some of them. It all boils down to this different thing they got, and, let me tell you, it's even in their way of walking. Something happened to me once which proves it. It was on the road. The first time I had started going.

ZACHARIAH: Where?

MORRIS: Just places. I've got to explain something, Zach, otherwise you won't feel what I mean. A road, Zach, is not a street. It's not just that there isn't houses, or lamp-posts, or hasn't got a name. It's that it doesn't stop. The road goes on and on, passing all the time through nothing. And when a man, a city man, a man used to streets and things, walks out onto it . . . he just doesn't know what he's walking into. You see, you're used to people . . . but there's no people there! You're used to a roof . . . where there is only a sky . . . silence instead of sound. I'm telling you, man, it was nothing instead of something, some any old thing like a donkey, or a dog, or children kicking an empty tin . . . there was nothing, and it was the first time. This is no place for me, I thought, this emptiness! Not even trees. Zach. Only

small, dry, little brittle bushes and flat hills in the distance. That, and the road running straight. God, that hurts the eyeball! That staight, never-stopping road! You've reached the end you think, you come to the top, and there . . . t-h-e-r-e it goes again. So the bushes and the hills and the road and nothing else . . . or maybe just a car running away in the dust . . . but only a few of them, and far between, a long way between each one. You see, they never stopped. So all of that and me, there, in the middle for the first time. It hits you when the sun goes. That's when you really know why men build homes, and the meaning of that word "home," because the veld's gone grey and cold with a blind, bad feeling about you being there. (*Pause.*) So there I was on the road. I'd been watching him all day.

ZACHARIAH: Who?

MORRIS: The man ahead of me.

ZACHARIAH: I thought you was alone.

MORRIS: I was feeling alone, but there was this man ahead of me. At first it was enough just to see him there, a spot in the dusty distance. A man! Another man! Another man! There was one other man on that road with me, going my way! But then the item came for the sun to drop, and I found myself walking through the shadows of those white stones on the side of the way. When a man sees shadows he thinks of night, doesn't he? I did. So I began to walk a little faster. I think he began to walk a little slower. I'm sure he also saw the shadows. Now comes the point. The more I walked a little bit faster and faster each time, the more I began to worry. About what, you ask? About him. There was something about him, about the way he walked. the way he went to the top when the road had a hill and stood there against the sky and looked back at me, and then walked on again. And all the time, with this worry in my heart, the loneliness was creeping across the veld and I was hurrying a bit more. In fact, I was going quite quick by then. When the sun went at last, I was trotting you might say, and worried, Zach, really worried, man, because I

could see the warm glow of his fire as I ran that last little bit through the dark. When I was even nearer he saw me coming and stood up, but when he saw me clearer he picked up a stick and held it like a hitting stick, stepping back for safety and a good aim . . . so what could I do but pass peacefully. (*Pause.*) Because he was white, Zach. I had been right all along . . . the road . . . since midday. That's what I mean, you see. It's in the way they walk as well.

ZACHARIAH: So you must learn to walk properly then.

MORRIS: Yes.

ZACHARIAH: And to look right at things.

MORRIS: Yes.

ZACHARIAH: And to sound right.

MORRIS: Yes! There's that, as well. The sound of it.

ZACHARIAH: So go on. (*Again offering the hat.*) Try it. For size. Just for the sake of the size. (*MORRIS takes the hat, plays with it for a few seconds, then impulsively puts it on.*) Ha!

MORRIS: Yes?

ZACHARIAH: Aha!

MORRIS: (*Whipping off the hat in embarrassment.*) No.

ZACHARIAH: Yes.

MORRIS: (*Shaking his head.*) Uhuh!

ZACHARIAH: Come.

MORRIS: No, man.

ZACHARIAH: Please, man.

MORRIS: You're teasing.

ZACHARIAH: No, man. I like the look of that on your head.

MORRIS: Really?

ZACHARIAH: 'Strue's God.

MORRIS: It looked right?

ZACHARIAH: I'm telling you.

MORRIS: It seemed to fit.

ZACHARIAH: It did, I know.

MORRIS: (*Using this as an excuse to get it back on his head.*) The brim was just right on the brow . . . and with plenty of room for the brain! I'll try it again, shall I? Just for size.

ZACHARIAH: Just for size. (*Morris puts it on.*) *Ja*. A good fit.

MORRIS: A very good fit, in fact. (*Lifting the hat.*) Good morning!

ZACHARIAH: Very good.

MORRIS: Did it look right? (*Again.*) Good morning . . . Miss Ethel Lange! (*Looks quickly to see ZACHARIAH's reaction. He betrays nothing.*)

ZACHARIAH: Maybe a little bit higher.

MORRIS: (*Again.*) Good morning. . . . (*A flourish.*) . . . and how do you do today, Miss Ethel Lange! (*Laughing with delight.*) How about the jacket?

ZACHARIAH: Okay. (*Hands him the jacket. Morris puts it on.*)

MORRIS: (*Preening.*) How did you do it?

ZACHARIAH: I said, "The gentleman is smaller than me, Mr. Moses."

MORRIS: It's so smug. Look, Zach, I'm going to that little bit again. Watch me careful. (*Once again lifting his hat.*) Good day, Miss Ethel Lange . . . (*Pleading, servile.*) . . . I beg your pardon, but I do hope you wouldn't mind to take a little walk with . . .

ZACHARIAH Stop!

MORRIS: What's wrong?

ZACHARIAH: Your voice.

MORRIS: What's wrong with it?

ZACHARIAH: Too soft. They don't never sound like that.

MORRIS: To a lady they do! I admit, if it wasn't Ethel I was addressing, it would be different.

ZACHARIAH: Okay. Try me.

MORRIS: How?

ZACHARIAH: You're walking with Ethel. I'm selling monkey-nuts.

MORRIS: So?

ZACHARIAH: So you want some monkey-nuts.

MORRIS: That's a good idea . . . (*His voice trails off.*)

ZACHARIAH: Go on. I'm selling monkey-nuts.

MORRIS: (*After hesitation.*) I can't.

ZACHARIAH: (*Simulated shock.*) What!

MORRIS: (*Frightened.*) What I mean is . . . I don't want any monkey-nuts. I'm not hungry.

ZACHARIAH: Ethel wants some.

MORRIS: Ethel.

ZACHARIAH: *Ja*. And I'm selling them.

MORRIS: This is hard for me, Zach.

ZACHARIAH: You must learn your lesson, Morrie. You want to pass, don't you?

MORRIS: (*Steeling himself.*) Excuse me!

ZACHARIAH: I'll never hear that.

MORRIS: Hey!

ZACHARIAH: Or that.

MORRIS: Boy!

ZACHARIAH: I'm ignoring you, man. I'm a cheeky one.

MORRIS: You're asking for it, Zach!

ZACHARIAH: I am.

MORRIS: I warn you, I will!

ZACHARIAH: Go ahead.

MORRIS: (*With brutality and coarseness.*) Hey, Swartgat! (*An immediate reaction from ZACHARIAH. His head whips around.*)

He stares at MORRIS in disbelief. Morris replies with a weak little laugh, which soon dies on his lips.) Just a joke! (*Softly.*)

Oh, my God! What did I do? Forgive me, Zach. Say it, please.

Forgiveness. Don't look at me like that! (*A step to ZACHARIAH who backs away.*) Say something. For God's sake say anything! I didn't mean it now. I didn't do it then. Truly. I came

back. I'm your brother

ZACHARIAH: (*Disbelief.*) My brother?

MORRIS: Me, Zach, Morris!

ZACHARIAH: Morris?

(*MORRIS at last realizes what has happened. He tears off the jacket and hat in a frenzy.*)

MORRIS: Now do you see?

ZACHARIAH: It's you.

MORRIS: Yes!

ZACHARIAH: That's funny. I thought . . .

MORRIS: I know. I saw it again.

ZACHARIAH: What?

MORRIS: The pain, man. The pity of it all and the pain in your eyes.

ZACHARIAH: I was looking, I thought, at a different sort of man.

MORRIS: But don't you see, Zach? It was me! That different sort of man you saw was me. It's happened, man! And I'll swear, I'll take God's name in vain that I no longer wanted it. That's why I came back. I didn't want it any more. I turned around on the road and came back here because I couldn't stand that look in your eyes any more. Those bright, brotherly eyes in my dreams at night, always wet with love, full of pity and pain . . . God, such lonely eyes they were! . . . watching and sad and asking me, why? softly, why? sorrowfully, why? . . . Why did I do it? . . . Why try to deny it? Because . . . because . . . I'll tell you the whole truth now. . . . Because I did try it! It didn't seem a sin. If a man was born with a chance at a change, why not take it, I thought . . . thinking of worms lying warm in their silk, to come out one day with wings and things! Why not a man? If his dreams are soft and keep him warm at night, why not stand up the next morning, Different . . . Beautiful! It's the natural law! The long arm of the real law frightened me—but I might have been lucky. We all know that some are not caught, so . . . so . . . so what was worrying me? You. Yes, in my dreams at night, there was you, as well. What about you? My own brother. What sort of a thing was that to do to a *ou's* own flesh-and-blood brother? Because he is, you know. There was only one mother, and she's what counts. And watch out! She will, too, up in heaven, her two little chickens down here and find one missing. She'll know what you've done! If you don't mind about hell, all right, go ahead . . . but even so there was still you, because it wasn't that next life but this old, worn out, and wicked one, and I was tired because there was still you. Anywhere, any place or road, there was still you. So I came back. *(Pause.)* It's not been too hard. A little uneasy at times, but not too hard. And I've proved

I'm no Judas. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, I'm no Judas!
(The alarm rings. Neither responds.)

The Colored Museum

George C. Wolfe

Characters: Man (20s–30s), Kid (his former self)

Setting: A museum where the myths and madness of black/Negro/colored Americans are stored

Premiere: Crossroads Theatre Company, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1986

Publisher: Broadway Play Publishing, Inc.

The Colored Museum consists of a series of sketches or “exhibits” that examine the lives of black Americans. This scene is entitled “Symbiosis.”

(The Temptations singing “My Girl” is heard as lights reveal a black MAN in corporate dress standing before a trash bin throwing objects from a Saks Fifth Avenue bag into it. Circling around him with his every emotion on his face is THE KID, who is dressed in a late sixties street style. His moves are slightly heightened. As the scene begins the music fades.)

MAN: *(With contained emotions.)* My first pair of Converse All-Stars. Gone. My first Afro comb. Gone. My first dashiki. Gone. My autographed pictures of Stokely Carmichael, Jomo Kenyatta and Donna Summer. Gone.

KID: *(Near tears, totally upset.)* This shit's not fair man. Damn! Hell! Shit! Shit! It's not fair!

MAN: My first jar of Murray's Pomade. My first can of Afro-Sheen. My first box of curl relaxer. Gone! Gone! Gone! Eldrige Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*.