

ARTICHOKE INFORMATION:
THE STORY OF WINKIE AND GINNIE
By Bronwyn Rucker

downmelt@aol.com

©2025

Cast of Characters

Mary Wingfield Scott (Winkie) ages: 37 and 75, Historian and Preservationist, Academic, social worker.

Virginia Reese Withers (Ginnie) ages: 42 and 72, Life partner of Winkie, Academic, taught French and Mathematics.

Place

The time is 1932, place, Richmond Virginia, Mary Wingfield Scott 'Winkie' is 37 years old, and Virginia 'Ginnie' Reese Withers is 42. The scene opens in the drawing room. Large windows and a desk with a view of the street and pictures with ornate framed pastoral scenes on the walls and above the fireplace. There is a comfortable dark red velvet settee and two large armchairs, pillows. Winkie rises from the desk and is addressing the empty room. She is rehearsing a speech for the Women's club.

Later in the play, Ginnie's monologue occurs when she is 72 (1960) as she reads her writing reflecting a Christmas party of 1924. Winkie's 'older' monolog occurs in 1970. She is 75 years old. All scenes occur in the same drawing room.

(The monologues of the older Virginia 'Ginnie' and Mary 'Winkie' feature excerpts from their own writings. Found in papers of Mary Wingfield Scott 1977-1982, 7 items. Mss2sc0851lb. from the Ginnie Museum of History and Culture. Also: 7 Virginia Withers, Christmas at Aunt Boxie's, Ginnie Historical Society, Broad sides 1933:10. 5 Alfred Scott ed., Winkie (Richmond, 2010), 167-17, Old Neighborhoods of Richmond: Franklin Retains Vestiges of The Past, Richmond Daily Dispatch, Oct.25, 1942)

The same actresses portray themselves as young and older adults. As older women Ginnie uses a cane and Winkie is in a walker and/wheelchair.

Background

Mary 'Winkie' Wingfield Scott is noted for her work as an architectural historian and Richmond preservationist. She was also the author of ***Houses in Old Richmond*** and ***Old Richmond Neighborhoods***. She helped form the foundation of the William Byrd Branch for the Association of the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. She purchased the homes on Franklin Street called Linden Row and restored them to their present state. Linden Row rented apartments to artists, writers and musicians, and it became an artist colony, similar to the early days of the Chelsea Hotel in NYC. Scott donated them in 1980 to the Historical Society of Richmond. They are now an inn run by Savara Properties Inc. which preserved both the inside and outside structures. Scott was an MSW who studied at Barnard and Bryn Mawr and received her PHD at University of Chicago.

Virginia 'Ginnie' Reese Withers (February 12, 1888 – April 19, 1968) is the author of ***American Types in French Drama***. She taught French and Mathematics in Universities and was the life partner of Mary Scott Wingfield for 44 years. Scott and Withers adopted two boys in 1927 and lived in Europe for several years with them before returning to Richmond and their summer home in Whytheville. In 1950 Withers wrote ***"Sons of the Black Belt"***, a fictionalized account of the Reese and Withers families in Virginia and Alabama, in part, concerning their relationships with slaves and with free African Americans after the Civil War.

ACT 1

Scene 1

In scene one, the women have been together for 12 years. They adopted 5 years prior.

Winkie, 37 Ginnie, 42 Drawing Room, 1932

Winkie

Good morning, Good morning (practicing the address several times) Good Morning I am Winkie Mary Wingfield Scott. I am an Architectural Historian. I attended Bryn Mawr college in Pennsylvania wherein I received my undergraduate degree and later an MA and PHD at the University of Chicago in Art History, but my formal schooling began right here on Franklin Street at Miss Jenny's school.

It is now that I speak to you from these very home roots about the need to preserve the remarkable history and homes of our very own downtown Richmond.

Our downtown features a wide variety of architectural styles: Greek Revival, Queen Anne, Italianate and Beaux Arts. These beautiful homes were largely untouched by the destruction of Richmond in the evacuation fire after the Civil War. We must preserve their beauty and our legacy.

This is the beginning. My friends and I and my cousin Elisabeth Bocock are dedicated to preserving the history and the very structure of these great houses.... These buildings are worth saving and can be restored and reused to address the needs of modern society...downtown Richmond has played a magnificent part in Virginia's cultural history. These homes must be preserved for art and architecture and indeed they are homes. The beautiful Georgian houses of Linden Row with the Greek columns have fallen into disrepair as many of our neighbors have moved out of the downtown areas...

But I remember Franklin Street and the glory of Easter Sundays, Memorial Day or General Lee's Birthday and we would stand on the porches and sing Dixie and the houses draped in Confederate flags and watch the men in faded gray and the bearskin shakos of the Howitzers and we would march up and down Franklin in our Easter clothes...

(Virginia 'GINNIE' Withers enters listening to WINKIE as she romanticizes...puts packages and books on the desk and adjacent table).

Winkie

I'm working here. Excuse me.

Ginnie

Oh.

Winkie

Where are the boys?

Ginnie

Ruthie took them to the park. Bobby's been fighting with John again.

Winkie

Are you sure Ruthie can handle him?

I don't know why we ever took that one, the little guttersnipe...

Ginnie

You have to stop saying that. Bobby is a good boy and loves Ruthie.

Winkie

Alright... (returning to speech) The Richmond Historical and Preservation Society...

Ginnie

Would you stop that. They are our children. We adopted them. We said we would provide a better life. Remember what Bobby said, "If those ladies can make it better for me, I will go." We have a responsibility.

Winkie

I know that. We thought John needed a brother but Bobby doesn't like John.

Ginnie

They are boys, brothers...

Winkie

It's more than that.

Ginnie

Brothers fight.

Winkie

Ginnie, please, this is important. Downtown is being destroyed. City planners...

Ginnie

The painters called, Wytheville is almost ready.

Winkie

I'm happy here. I have my work.

Ginnie

The boys need the country.

Winkie

We have Ruthie here.

Ginnie

And Abraham and Margaret and John...really it's a regular ...and they need care. Ruthie takes care of all of them. It's a regular colored old folks home.

Winkie

They are part of our family. Where else can they go?

Ginnie

I'm not saying that...

Winkie

What are you saying? You want Momma Margaret to live with John in a shack somewhere out of sight? My mother would be ashamed. We take care of our colored. And what about Abraham? Where is he to go?

Ginnie

I'm not saying he has 'to go' anywhere? He takes care of the land, the gardens...The boys love him.

Winkie

He grew up here. This is his home.

Ginnie

All I'm saying is we've got our boys now. They need to run around and play. They need to make noise, they need to fight if they must...

We are the parents. They need more. This house is crowded. It may be your family home, but this is not mine. In Paris, we were able to breathe. Now we are stuck in your family tradition and your elitist attitudes. I need to leave

Winkie

My elitist attitudes? What about yours? How did you get your education? Your privilege? You can't leave.

Ginnie

Ok, I agree our past world is oppressive. You don't understand your own history. You have to stop romanticizing the confederacy.

Winkie

What are you talking about?

Ginnie

Your speech. Franklin Street? You are waxing nostalgic about the way it was when confederate flags were hung out of the windows and people paraded up and down on Easter proclaiming the glories of the old south. Really? Artichoke information...Winkie...artichoke information...

Winkie

Artichoke information?

Ginnie

It is not an onion...it's an artichoke....Ignorance prevents knowledge. Really. It is not love it's ownership...We owned people then, slaves. What is there to be proud of...? Richard said...

Winkie

Richard...Richard...Richard who?

Ginnie

Richard Wright, the poet we met at Gertrude's in Paris. He opened my eyes.

Winkie

God, that was a different world This is Richmond and the art, the architecture of our great buildings needs to be preserved. It's worth it. History is worth preserving. This has nothing to do with artichokes and onions.

Ginnie

The hypocrisy Winkie, the houses may need saving not the culture. Not the culture...people had no rights. You think Ruthie and Abraham don't hate us for what our families did to them. No rights. They still have no rights...you are rich, we are rich... We had slaves too, lots of them. It's the 'lost cause' this romanticizing of the lost days of the Confederacy.

Winkie

Ginnie stop it. You are ridiculous. Listen to what you are saying. The culture must be preserved. It is our history.

Ginnie

Yes. Please.

Winkie

Please what?

Ginnie

Listen to what I'm saying.

Winkie

I must speak this evening at the Women's Club this evening about the importance of these houses...

Ginnie

la de da de da de da

Winkie

You are just nasty.

Ginnie

La de da de da de da. You are closed. You don't listen. You can't shut me up like that.

Winkie

(going back to speech)

The Preservation Society of Richmond...

Ginnie

I'm leaving. I will take the boys.

Winkie

You need me.

Ginnie

I don't need you. We can get on without you.

Winkie

Go ahead. Where are you going to go without me? Run to your sisters, like you always do. You run away.

Ginnie

We will find a way. I do not run away.

Winkie

You are being ridiculous. We have an obligation. We have plans. The boys cannot go through anything more. We must get along...

Ginnie

Richard said there was no changing you. You are a southern aristocratic rich white woman with a family fortune made on the backs of slaves. It's 1932. Times are changing.

Winkie

My Granddaddy fought with the Union and made his money from Iron works here in Richmond, not tobacco. We haven't had slaves for generations.

Ginnie

And where did he get the money to buy the Ironworks? Family, plantation cotton money!

Money made because we owned the labor. Mary, you are blind to your own hypocrisy!

Winkie

And so your family was so different?

Ginnie

Right! That's what I'm saying... mine too, not just yours comes from the plantations. I learned from Richard Wright...

Winkie

Richard who?

Ginnie

The poet, we met him at Chez...whatever the name was...where Gertie took us...

Winkie

I don't know who you are talking about? Ginnie, you are slipping into one of your depressions....

Ginnie

What?! Don't gaslight me! This isn't my problem. All your lip service to saving culture. This is a cultural problem.

Richard worked in the restaurant. He cleared our table and recited verse for Gertie...a magnificent poet. He said colored people are treated with respect in Paris. And we saw this. They are free to be artists, writers, musicians, poets, not just servants and cotton pickers. Meeting Gertrude Stein and Richard and Mabel Mercer, Scott Fitzgerald and all the intellectuals was the most revolutionary... the most profound experience of my life other than meeting you, or so I use to think, but I don't anymore. You are ignorant. You don't understand.

Winkie

What's that supposed to mean? Ginnie, we have plans, you know that. And what are we going to do about your school, Top Knot Nursery if you go? You are abandoning John as well as Bobby.

Ginnie

I'm not the one abandoning anyone.

Winkie

You're abandoning me. I want to help. You can't go running away.

Ginnie

I'm not running away. I want us to go to Whythville like we planned. I can't talk to you.

(Ginnie Leaves).

END SCENE

Scene 2

Time: 1960

(GINNIE grabs an umbrella which she uses as a cane and walks slowly to the armchair and sits, addressing the audience. This monolog is an excerpt from GINNIE’S writing of her time (1924) with Winkie. GINNIE is now 72 years old. The scene takes place in the same drawing room.)

Ginnie

Artichoke Information. Our family story of misinformation. Winkie didn’t know what an artichoke was and called it an onion. We laughed about it. The boys thought it funny. Mary ‘Winkie’ knew everything...John Patrick loved the word ‘artichoke’. We had been on a bicycle trip and stopped by these gardens for a picnic. This was outside Paris. Mary thought we were looking at onions. John Patrick started it. The boys were playing, Winkie and I went for a walk, and rough housed on the blanket with the food. Needless to say there was spillage and a mess. They tried to deny it ...Bobby said it was ‘artichoke’ information. We all laughed. It became a code for cover up in our family. For Winkie and I, it ‘artichoke information’ became a code to address hypocrisy as well as a funny joke about lying for the boys.

I wrote this in my journal:

“Life with Mary Wingfield Scott, ah to understand Winkie. Everyone called her Winkie, a name from some childhood pet. Or toy I never really knew. In the south there are always other names. Winkie came from a southern matriarchal culture. Aunt Boxie was the matriarch. She ran the family.”

(Looking up from journal)

In our families the women were known for their charitable work, helping poor people. There were always poor people, most colored but also poor whites.

I am 72. It is 1962. I have tried to reckon with my heritage. I wrote ***Sons of The Black Belt***. It’s about my family, the Reese and Withers family’s relationship to slaves and black free men after and during reconstruction. The history needs to be recognized. On this Winkie and I agreed.

This I wrote (***indicating Journal on her lap***) in 1924. Happier times. Winkie and I met in 1920, the year we got the right to vote. We were enthralled with each other and happy to spend Christmas with Aunt Boxie. She was fun, Aunt Boxie was, so was Winkie.

(GINNIE reads from Journal)

Every Christmas it was expected that all attend Aunt Boxie's. There was never an invitation and every year the newlyweds (Ginnie and I considered ourselves of this lot, although I don't think anyone else did) fussed about having their own Christmas as maybe Miss Boxie wouldn't do it and who is she anyway to think everyone will just appear... well, she did, and it was the event...

(reads from Journal...)

Once Miss Boxie was kept in bed with a cold, and nobody came within a sneeze-length of her, but the clan assembled to a man and Christmas at Aunt Boxie's was served as usual.

There is food excellent, abundant, traditional, picturesque, local ... oysters, turkey, Virginia ham, sweet potatoes, cranberries, brandied peaches, dates, nuts, and several kinds of cake, ice cream, plum pudding, and coffee. All the children under ten are seated around the big dining-room table.

Surrounding all the children in their party clothes was a ring of starched aprons and caps. These are that inimitable group, the mammies (There were still a few in Richmond those days).

(Ginnie looks up from Journal)

Times have changed and then things haven't. The colored still serves us. Jim Crow laws of our dear south prevent equal rights for them to vote. I also read W.E.B. Dubois's ***Souls of Black Folk***. I learned a lot. The Ku Klux Klan, the lynchings, the horror of our past is still our present. Back in the day of the Christmas party, our ignorance embraced us. But now, there are protests and marches everywhere for civil rights and against the Vietnam war. Aunt Boxie's Christmas is so very far away...

(Ginnie returns to read Journal)

At some point in the festivities Miss Boxie rises and walks toward the pantry so the plum pudding will meet her at the door. She has a right to be proud of her carriage and really looks like a Goddess of Abundance or a Winged Victory as she faces the sun parlor with the flaming pudding held high. Then she makes a triumphal tour of all the rooms so that everybody may see the pudding.

After the pudding and coffee Miss Boxie reminds young and old to go upstairs and choose a present. Children's toys are on the first floor as decorations, but everything from a card-case to a luncheon set is spread out for selection in the sitting room upstairs. If you pick out something better than your degree of friendship or acquaintance would warrant you, you would be instructed to pick another, and if your choice is too modest, Miss Boxie is sure to get wind of it and back upstairs you march with instructions to take either this, that,

or the other special prize. The presents are provided with imagination and liberality, so that it is almost impossible to go off with a white elephant. When the last guest passes grateful Thomas at the door, Miss Boxie sits down, invigorated. She has seen enough.

(Closes Journal)

As we get older, I see Miss Boxie in Winkie as she too remained stalwart in her resolve to maintain tradition. Winkie did listen to my outrage at what was happening to the colored people around us. She was very aware of how they were being robbed of homes and land. She was kind...and she was astute.

Winkie had these 'hunches', like in buying the Adam Craig House and in starting the 'Old Richmond News' and for that matter our getting the boys and not girls. She knew instinctively what would work. We stayed together over the years...because of the boys. Love and friendship doesn't always make sense, but maybe it does.

It was 1935. Winkie was to meet us for lunch. She arrived hours late, after our friends went home. Bobby was away at school and John Patrick in bed.

END SCENE

Scene 3

1932

(Another evening, Ginnie and Winkie are sitting in the drawing room.

Winkie is writing at the desk and Ginnie is reading on the love seat.)

Ginnie

Winkie, I just finished reading ***The Rise of the Colored by Lothrop Goddard***. It was published in 1920. Fitzgerald talks of it in that Gatsby book. His character, Tom Buchanan justifies white supremacy.

Winkie

Tom?

Ginnie

The character in the book supports white supremacy

Winkie

Here we go again.

Ginnie

The one thing white people have not stopped is birth and babies...among the colored and the white and the colored with whites together for that point...It's a freedom people, especially people who have nothing will take. Sex.

Winkie

Really Ginnie. Call it an onion.

Ginnie

Freedom to procreate...It's a freedom. This Goddard has a point. Whites will eventually be outnumbered. That's what this Goddard says and that's why white people are afraid. This is depressing.

Winkie

Really? Another excuse for your depression. Why are you depressed?

Ginnie

I'm not. I think it's great but Mayor Bright doesn't agree. Goddard doesn't. White people don't like the thought of being outnumbered. They're depressed, maybe not 'depressed', wrong word, just angry and hateful.

Winkie

Take a break please. I need to focus on this. We need the historical preservation society. To protect these homes. Just look at the Grecian Architecture of these buildings. With Richmond rezoning there will be no one but colored living here and they can't afford to protect these homes.

Ginnie

Listen to yourself. Why is this happening? The whites are leaving to the country...the cities are left to the poor people because the white people don't want to live with the colored and they don't care.

Winkie

Do I talk about that in my speech? I want to get white people to save these houses. If I call them out on abandoning the colored...

Ginnie

They will never agree. They don't want to live with the colored. It's as plain as day.

Winkie

But will that help get their money?

Ginnie

Probably not...It is a bit too clear, a bit too direct.

Winkie

My mother always said you get more flies with honey... Grandma and Miss Boxie too for that matter.

Ginnie

Goddard does not support miscegenation.

Winkie

Neither did they. The women in our family always worked to help the colored with education and to be treated with respect.

Ginnie

Why?

Winkie

Why what?

Ginnie

Why didn't your mother and grandmother support miscegenation?

Winkie

Are you serious? We keep separate. It is the way.

Ginnie

Because white is better? The colored are less than us? They can't even vote. They are another class.

Winkie

They don't want to be us and we don't want to be them.

Ginnie

Mary, It's not right. Truth is our southern fathers have always taken southern colored women.

Winkie

Ginnie, what are you saying? My paternal grandfather was a union general. My maternal granddad, a minister. We haven't had slaves for generations.

Ginnie

But before that. How do you know? There was a little colored boy at my school who's surname is Scott.

Winkie

Do you think Grandma and my mother would let that happen?

Ginnie

Do you think they could stop it or did they just accept it as the way it was done?

Winkie

My father made money from the steel industry and the banks. He died when I was little. My mother, my grandmother and my aunts raised us.

Ginnie

And they all got the money, even your daddy, from the ole south plantation money. Where did he get the money to buy the Ironworks and build banks? The ancestors, the slave owners they were our kin, like it or not. Our family fortune started there. No labor costs. How to make America rich! We all know this happened. Black women were raped by our ancestors...no one talks about it. You get more flies with honey. Who wants the filthy flies anyway?

END SCENE

Scene 4

Time: 1970

(Winkie /Mary Wingfield Scott is now 75 years old. She uses a walker and walks slowly to a chair. The scene takes place in the drawing room.)

Winkie

...When we were in Paris we saw Flattop... Bricktop play... Her real name is Ada Smith. She's a singer and owner of the famous Parisian club, Chez Bricktop. As Gertrude's guests Ginnie and I danced to Django Rinehart and listened to a beautiful young singer...Mabel... I had a fabulous conversation with a very talented poet who was a busboy...Langston something...he was also a colored, a black fellow. I don't understand why Ginnie thinks I do not respect...my family, my grandmother, my mother, myself...Yes, our money came from the land which yes, and I do now see, our forefathers depended on slavery. My grandfather however was a Union General. There was a change.

We are a matriarchy, southern women. Women in my family are strong. We have always been a matriarchy. We have not had slaves for many years. We were kind and took care of our servants well.

Virginia Reese Withers 'Ginnie' and I lived from 1923 until 1967, 44 years. She died three years ago. She was my good friend. It wasn't always easy.

(Reading from autobiography)

"When Ginnie was most depressed, she would seek the refuge of her dear sisters and get space and time away from me until the clouds cleared.

She tried to kill herself once. We separated. I never understood really. Our relationship was stabilized by having taken on the two boys, and we felt it would be an unpardonable thing to interfere with their home life, so we stayed together despite our difficulties. I wish more people with children felt the same way. Perhaps they all ought to have sisters in Alabama to spend summers with, so as to rest from all the petty annoyances of living together.

We went to France in July 1929. As we had to have passports, we thought we had better provide the boys with proper names. Ginnie and I both had the name Walker through grandmothers and with the more great, greats added to the name, no one objected. Bobby was Robert Edward Walker and our Irish mug, John Patrick Walker. They were properly baptized as no one knew whether they had or hadn't been. I had been to Europe 13 times. This trip was different. I need hardly add that traveling around Europe with two little boys was Europe-with-a-difference.

We all owned bicycles, and used to ride them through the streets of Paris as I was too stingy to hire two cabs; so one of us rode home with John while the other pedaled the streets of Paris. We had rented an apartment and there we lived until we went to Italy in March 1931. We entered both boys in a “free school,” which was so independent of religious influence that it didn’t believe in Christmas carols, so one had to be content with a translation of **O Tannenbaum**.

Our apartment was heated only here and there by a variety of stoves. There was no bath, only a toilet, so we bathed the children by hand.

Our expeditions in daylight produced some odd adventures, such as the one when we lined the boys up against the fence to admire the artichokes, which vegetable I had never seen, though Ginnie had; so she meekly remarked that they were onions, and the term for misinformation came into our folklore as “artichoke information.” We spent the summer in Burgundy. John became an excellent bike-rider...

Ginnie caught a monumental case of flu. Here I was with the two boys to look after, and Ginnie also. It was the kind of experience you don’t know how you ever lived through, but you somehow did. We had our nice French doctor three times one day, and in the end he sent us a bill for \$28.00! After this was over, Ginnie was “poorly,” but we managed to go on a few trips and to pack up our belongings and leave for Italy the latter part of March.

Traveling with both boys was quite an experience. The discreet shopkeepers in the rue de Beaune may have wondered what our connection with the boys was, but never by the bat of an eyelid did they betray it. But the outgoing Italians were different. The boys heard so often “addotive” that John finally put the word in one of his own! They played football with the street urchins of Rome while we were looking at mosaics. In Florence we had succeeded in getting a “sitter” but in Rome we didn’t, so we had to take turns when it was a question of visiting the Vatican galleries.

Back home Ginnie started the Top Knot Nursery School, she proved a genius with little children. When she gave up the nursery school in 1946, not that she was tired of it, but because it was too difficult to get adequate help at the small salaries she was able to pay, I was afraid she would fall into one of the depressions she had had before I ever knew her. But fortunately, she got a job in Jackson, Mississippi, teaching in a regular school, and I got adjusted to living alone, which I had never done in my life.

When she came back, we settled down to some of the limitations of old age, and to getting along as best we could, and I feel that we were both as happy, or at least contented, as most old people expect to be. We lost her and now I am next.

When one is ill as long as I have been, one finds out who one's real friends are. Ginnie was mine for many years...

END SCENE

Scene 5

Time: 1935

Ginnie

(Putting cane away)

Don't need this. Now it is our dancing days.

(Winkie enters)

Winkie

Ginnie dear, don't faint but I'm buying a house...

Ginnie

Good for you.

Winkie

Is that all you have to say?

Ginnie

It's your money. You could have called. We all waited. Goodnight

Winkie

I'm sorry Ginnie. I want to talk about the school.

Ginnie

What?

Winkie

The nursery. How's John doing?

Ginnie

You know John Patrick. He's cute...people like him. Bobby is doing better.

Winkie

I know. I know. I do love him you know. He just, well, I don't know how to help him.

Ginnie

Just give him a hug every now and then. Let him know you care. We don't have to know everything, just show our love.

Winkie

I do love you too. (embracing Ginnie)

Ginnie

I know. Remember Paris...Josie and Flattop?

Winkie

Flattop?

Ginnie

She thought the boys were perfect.

Winkie

Flattop...you mean, Bricktop? The singer.

Ginnie

They were like us.

Winkie

They were like us. I know.

Ginnie

Spinsters...

Winkie

They were not spinsters, they were married to men...

Ginnie

Lesbians, Winkie...they were lesbians...book worm spinsters...

Winkie

Yes. Josie was very impressed with the boys...John Patrick in particular...Bobby well he was always problematic.

Ginnie

He thinks you don't love him.

Winkie

What?

Ginnie

He hears you and feels you. You are always annoyed with him. He is different, but he is still a little boy. He wants your love.

Winkie

You have got to remember, we were not with them as babies. They were little adults when they came into our lives. Bobby had been alone for years. We don't know anything about his young life.

Ginnie

All the more reason, he needs special attention. He hears you when you yell at him, calling him 'guttersnipe'. What is that anyway?

Winkie

Really Ginnie, you are so highbrow, you don't know what a guttersnipe is? Remember that time they fought outside Paris? We were riding bicycles. John had that little one and fell in the ditch and they fought. Covered in mud...that's a guttersnipe and when they played with the other street urchins in Paris. They were all covered in mud. We called them guttersnipes and they told us they were guttersnipes. They thought it very funny. But Bobby is the older brother.

Ginnie

Kids fight...

You need to show him you love him.

Winkie

You are a better mother than I am. I think he knows I love him. Doesn't he?

Ginnie

You need to show him.

Winkie

Alright.

Ginnie

Do you remember how demonstrative the Parisians and the artists we met were?

Winkie

I never should have taken you to Gertrudes.

Ginnie

I was invited, same as you. You always think you are the main attraction.

Winkie

Hardly in that crowd...Cole Porter... Josephine Baker, Scott Fitzgerald and that singer...Mabel Mercer.... We were just two southern ladies...

Ginnie

(puts on Django Reinhardt record) and this...Miss Otis Regrets...a lynching...

Winkie

Lynching...

Ginnie

Our southern roots...

Winkie

What are you talking about?

Ginnie

The colored in Paris are treated much better than here.

Winkie

We always treated our colored well. We take care of Margaret and John...

Ginnie

Can Ruthie read and write? She wants to, she blames us for not being able to.

Winkie

How is it our fault? We provide for her. She and her family have everything they need.

Ginnie

And they give us everything we need. They take our children to school, but we don't let them go to school.

Winkie

Ginnie, Ginnie, What are you talking about. Do they want to?

Ginnie

Of course, if you talked to Ruthie, you would know she blames all us whites for her not being able to read or write. Her mother and her grandmother were slaves. Your family owned them. They were not considered whole people, only property.

Winkie

If Ruthie wants to go to school, she can. Why didn't she go to school?

Ginnie

They had no rights...and now, even if she wanted to, no one would let her go to school...she's colored. She can't even send her kids to schools as there are no colored schools here....and she's a domestic and has work to do for you.

Winkie

She is happy.

Ginnie

Are you sure? Ask her. Ask Abraham? You know he can read now.

Winkie

I didn't know he didn't know.

Ginnie

Who would have taught him?

Winkie

I didn't think about it.

Ginnie

I've been teaching him and John Patrick and Bobby.

He's very smart. John Patrick picks it up quick. Bobby, well, he is not slow...he just gets mixed up. I've seen this before in children. They have difficulty reading, the letters are inversed. I've been meaning on doing some research on this; why some children take a longer time learning to read. But Abraham is reading well.

Winkie

My family has always done all we could. Ruthie is part of the family. We take care of our own.

Ginnie

Since the war colored may not be slaves, but they are losing their properties and redevelopment is marginalizing their opportunities further. They call it Reconstruction. The Klan is lynching and whites are moving to the country and the few colored homes are devalued. The colored can't go to our schools...our stores...ride in the front of the bus... It is all designed to keep our southern white families in power.

Winkie

I am trying to fight this segregation, here in downtown Richmond. I agree. Redevelopment is destroying our grand downtown homes, separating whites and colored. People, white people can get loans, transportation. The colored cannot. The law won't allow it. White people move to the suburbs and these wonderful homes are falling in disrepair. Downtown is being torn down to be a freeway, a roundabout they call it. You've seen the great architecture of downtown Richmond. This is history. This is what I am fighting, don't you see. I am doing my best. I'm not afraid to live with colored community. I'm not.

Ginnie

Maybe you are not. Maybe we are not. But your friends at the women's club. Do they want to live in a colored neighborhood? Face it. Whites think they are better and deserve more and are moving out because they don't want to live next to a home of colored people. They think they are better. This is white supremacy.

Winkie

Even Mr. Du Bois says despite the divisions of race, improvements have been made. There is public education now.

Ginnie

The colored cannot vote. How is that fair?

Winkie

How many battles can I fight?

Ginnie

Everyone necessary. Remember this? (Turns on phonograph)

Mary

Oh Ginnie, Ginnie...Can't you see how happy I am? It's 1935. I bought the Craig house. Top Knot is going strong. You were right about so much. It is beginning. It is happening. Let's celebrate.

(Winkie twirls Ginnie around and they laugh)

Remember this? (Ginnie shakes hip dancing)

Really?

Ginnie

Am I like Josephine Baker? (flails arms wildly, Winkie laughs)

Winkie

(Singing, on pitch) Miss Otis regrets she's unable to lunch today.

Ginnie

(terribly off pitch)

She is sorry to be delayed...

Winkie

You haven't improved. (Ginnie throws pillow).

Ginnie

(Winkie throws pillow back at Ginnie)

Last evening down in lovers lane she strayed...

(Winkie grabs Ginnie affectionately, they fall to couch laughing)

Winkie

I love you. Even though your tone deaf.

Ginnie

I love you. Even though you're a patronizing womanizer...

Winkie

What? Me? Ok, you gonna do a Miss Otis on me? (throws another pillow)

END SCENE

Scene 6

Time: 1970

Winkie

(Reading from journal notes)

“Ever since I was in my early twenties and saw no prospect of getting married, I had thought about adopting a child. At first it was to be a girl—but by the time Ginnie and I discussed the subject, we decided that it would be hard on a girl to live in a purely feminine atmosphere so a boy would be better. I tried in vain to get a child from the local Children’s Home Society, but they didn’t even bother to answer my letter. I got both boys in Baltimore. Bobby, whom we got first (he was 6), was wary of us as prospects. “If them ladies is good to me, I’ll go!”

We carried him to Wytheville in June. But he got along poorly with other children, and it was evident to us if not to him that he badly needed a little brother. In August we arranged with the Children’s Aid to take John Patrick. The “Patrick” was partially due to his having made his debut in life on St. Patrick’s Day and partly to his little Irish mug. We got the surname Walker which both of us had on our family tree from a desire not to offend anyone’s sensibilities, and to give the boys a name sufficiently usual for people not to say “Are you kin to the Walkers I know?”

Even with the break of being in Wytheville, our country home, we created quite enough of a sensation. I had given up teaching to take the boys, even before I knew I was sure of getting them. This was a mercy as I had my hands full. I entered Bobby at what was then called City Normal, and took John to Monroe Park, where I had played as a child. John fell out of the car and got a whack on the head, which then became infected. They had measles at Christmas. Luckily, Mother took an almost immediate fancy to John. Perhaps it was pity for his small size; more likely it was his Irish mug and sense of humor. One of the many things I learned was that grandmothers, even adopted ones, like to have little people to themselves. Thus, while she admired her handsome and well-born grandchildren, the ones she felt close to and enjoyed were my little “mutts.”

When we got home, John was first entered in Ginnie’s nursery school and Robert in St. Christopher’s, where he had been when we left.

So, the years passed and we struggled...As I look back on it, I am sure we expected too much of the children, especially of poor Bobby. He was rather a trying child. We must have been fairly trying mothers. It took us quite a while to realize that neither of the boys was

learning a thing in school and that we ought to help them with their lessons. How wrong I was! Bobby turned into a great man with beautiful children. How I love them! What joy my granddaughters bring me!

I still feel guilty about this neglect, not realizing the boys weren't learning anything. I assumed that if I sent them to a good—i.e. socially acceptable school—they would automatically learn. Ginnie read about an experimental school on the Gulf Coast in Alabama, so that was where Bobby went. There he fell into the hands of two wonderful women known as “Miss Bigger and Miss Hooker,” and for the first time we learned where his real gift lay, in his clever hands. But when he came back to Richmond after two years, there was no technical high school for him to go to, so he continued to do mediocre work.

Mercifully, John, who had never even graduated from high school when the draft caught up with him, had what might almost be called a vision. In the long watches of the Pacific nights, he contemplated the crude petty officers over him, and decided that, rather than be on that level, he would go to college. So, he landed at Sewanee where Mother's beloved brother Page had been, and after many years joined the ranks of teachers, just as Bobby had done by a much more circuitous route.

Remembering “Miss Bigger and Miss Hooker,” we sent Bobby first to a summer school run by the Rhode Island School of Design, where he made a beautiful pewter table-set. The first thing Bobby did was to fall in love with his landlady's daughter and the next thing was to marry her, and there ended his education for many years to come.

Eventually they broke up, but not before producing two little girls, who are my world. After having many mechanical jobs, including repairing trucks and for years working as a mechanic on the Hearst paper in Los Angeles, Bobby has at last found himself in teaching. And he is a marvelous teacher, in spite of not beginning to do it until he was fifty. He is still a slow reader; that is, he approaches a book only if he can get some technical information out of it.

(Stops reading Journal and talks to audience)

I hope dear Bobby has forgiven me for the love I did not show him. I did not mean to, and Ginnie made up for it. I hope Ginnie forgives me too.

Ginnie was so right about so many things. When we went to Paris, after we got the boys, it was perhaps the best period of our lives. We were free as two middle aged women with two children can only be, so different from our southern lives, although most just let us be, as long as we approached our lives as spinsters...not as lesbians.

We met many wonderful outlandish artists. Many negroes who were accomplished and respected experienced a freedom in Paris unlike anything back home. At Gertrudes we met Richard Wright and Langston Hughes, the young poet bus boy and dishwasher. Here we saw Josephine Baker dance with glorious abandon which I believe so inspired my Ginnie's joy, which she did not often experience and that marvelous singer Mabel Mercer who told such stories with her songs. Yes, Ginnie yes, our family, our country did horrible things, and our ancestors southern roots were very, very complicit in this tragedy.

I am still learning this. I was not, in the early days of our life together aware of the power of white supremacy although I now understand I was protected and received many benefits not in the least the family fortune. I was able to buy Linden Row, receive an education, a PHD, teach at university as Ginnie did, adopt our boys, travel my 15 trips to Europe. Each trip was at least two months wherein I learned art history and the value of historical preservation. I worked as the other women in my family in charities that addressed injustice. Yes, yes, Ginnie also reaped the benefit of this privilege. We were the elite. Ginnie in her quiet compassionate way helped me understand this privilege.

Artichoke information...I didn't know...Is that the root?

Rich white people were leaving downtown because they didn't want to live with Black people. Hence all the fine homes were falling in disrepair. I needed their help. I needed to fight the city planners who did not appreciate the architectural heritage and wanted to bulldoze our downtown. I had white privilege, but I tried to do my best with it. Linden Row became an artist colony and the Adam House a gallery for African American artists..... I realized over a lifetime, this privilege.

Yes, now I see, Ginnie was right. Racism is the root.

END SCENE

Scene 7

Time: 1935

Ginnie

Winkie, Bobby is very confused.

Winkie

What else is new?

Ginnie

Why are you this way?

Winkie

What way? Are you going into one of your fits? You are not acting reasonably.

Ginnie

What?

Winkie

You know you get this way when you are depressed.

Ginnie

This is not depression.

Winkie

Ginnie, this is part of your pattern. You become distrustful of my motives, my feelings. I am not like you I cannot express myself like you. You are a better person than me. I know this. But I know also this gets worse before I lose you

Ginnie

Bobby just wants to make you happy.

Winkie

I am sick of this. I've done everything I can think of. What can I do?

Ginnie

Why did you buy that house?

Winkie

It is the right thing. I need to show them how it is done. Put my money where my mouth is. I want the entire Linden Row redone, preserved for its architectural history and to make all of Richmond, the founding white fathers and Abraham and Ruthie proud.

Ginnie

How do you know?

Winkie

I know. I was at St. Paul's and honestly Ginnie, I just felt God telling me that I had to do it. That I had to do all I could to buy that house and begin this preservation. This is what I'm supposed to do. I know it.

Ginnie

But Bobby and John Patrick and me... Are we still a part of this mission of yours?

Winkie

How can you ask? It is my legacy, but my legacy is our legacy. I want to leave our children something. Maybe they don't understand now, but they will...Can you see that?

Ginnie

I can. Can you?

Winkie

My work to preserve these houses is important. Why can't you see that? I agree with you, and our history has not been fair to the colored, but the south and these homes are part of all our culture. What are we to do? It is our history, our history and we must preserve it...It means all our history... these are the homes we grew up in...Ruthie did too...There is more we have to do.

Ginnie

But what are we preserving? What is the part of the cultural history we want to preserve? Slavery? Artichoke information?

Winkie

But that is part of our history...all of it. Ruthie's family raised my mother's family and me and now they are raising our boys...Ruthie is going to school now... because of you she is learning to read and write. What can we do? We must continue.

Bobby is doing better...right? What can I do?

Ginnie

It's the same thing as before, tell him show him you love him...

Winkie

And what about my work and your work... what can we do?

Ginnie

We can love our children.

Winkie

Yes. And can I still love you?

END SCENE

Scene 8

Time: 1970

Winkie

I published this poem in The Old Richmond News in 1955 that described what continued to happen in Richmond.

“Fable of An American City.”

Once there was a block of fine old houses.

The owners didn’t care what kind of tenants lived there.

Whether they broke windows or used the balusters for kindling.

The houses got so bad nobody would rent them.

So, a colored family paid twelve thousand for one and the other tenants and owners

Took to their heels and sold for two thousand.

All the offices and fine big stores

Were ringed around with slums.

Nobody was left to buy anything or come to City Hall

Except to apply for relief.

So the merchants persuaded the City Fathers

To cut highways through the bad old slums.

They built low-rent houses and parking garages,

But nobody was left to pay for them

Because the people who paid the taxes

Had all moved out to the County.

Tourists stopped using the Superhighway

When they found everything worth seeing had been torn down

To build garages and low-rent housing.

So, the historic city became a ghost-town.
Where no one used the handsome stores
Save truck-drivers swirling around a clover-leaf
To pick up a cup of coffee.

(159 Scott, *Old Richmond News*, 1 February 1955, vol. 12, no. 1)

That is why I did what I did. I did my best. I believed by taking over Linden Row, saving those homes was important to the life of the city. For many years we provided affordable housing for all our citizens, especially our artists who always have made Richmond rich.

Ginnie raised my awareness as to our responsibility, but I also was raised by very strong women and knew my obligation to fight for our culture, our history and to make the world a better place. My grandmother, my mother, my aunt Boxie, and my cousin, Elisabeth. We were all strong women who did our best to take care of those less advantaged and to preserve art and culture. If we had married, our lives would have been dictated by the men. We would not have even own our property...

END SCENE

Scene 9

Time: 1935

(WINKIE in Drawing Room at desk. GINNIE enters.)

Ginnie

Abraham was arrested.

Winkie

What?

Ginnie

Ruthie's Abraham is in jail.

Winkie

Why?

Ginnie

He was arrested for vagrancy.

Winkie

Where's Ruthie?

Ginnie

I told her to go home. She said, 'ain't nothing she can do'. This is the way it is for us.

Winkie

I have to talk to her.

Ginnie

You have to do something.

Winkie

I will call the Mayor Bright, but I doubt he will help. He isn't exactly a friend of the poor.
What was Abraham doing?

Ginnie

Talk to Ruthie, he was waiting for a friend. God, you know this is what they do. Now, they will send him to chain gang.

Winkie

What?

Ginnie

Oh, really Mary, what do you think this is about?! Put the colored to work, anyway we can. Free labor, this is reconstruction. Oh my god, please Mary we have to help. I can't believe this is our world. I'm not sure...

Winkie

Not sure, of what?

Ginnie

I'm afraid.

Winkie

What are you afraid of? Ginnie, you can't do this. I'm afraid of losing you. We can't go through this. I try to listen to understand but you give up. You can't. I do all I can with my work. I cannot alienate everyone.

I am fighting against segregation...

I want to preserve our cultural history. It's all our cultural history...and our people, our white people, have the money and power to help and if I appeal to their lost cause sentimentality then so be it or else these homes will be destroyed, and the beauty of the past will die...

I can't expect George and Ruth to pay the taxes.

Ginnie

Not on what we are paying them.

Winkie

Yes, it is all about power and money. It is what makes a difference and despite the horrible, horrible, terrific despicable acts committed by our ancestors, that pains me deeply.

I need the money of the rich white people to stop the tearing down of our cultural history, Our legacy for our children and for yes, even Ruthie's Abraham.

But you, I can't lose you. Don't you know that?

Ginnie

We promised John and Patrick and we promised each other, We promised ourselves that we would take care of them....

Winkie

Why are we together? We can't marry. We have been able to work, to teach, to advocate for change. Your school makes a difference... And in our lives. We need you.

You have to stay with me and John and Patrick. I'll call the Mayor and anyone else I can think of for Ruthie, for you. But it is an edge I walk. I'll do my best. But you have to do your best. You must promise to not give in, to not give up.

END SCENE

Scene 10

Time: 1960

(GINNIE, using cane, sits)

Everyone loved Winkie. She loved me. I didn't always feel her love. She always had so many friends, and I was a little insecure, to say the least.

But we will joke now about her being a womanizer...

She was free and confident. I suppose she had her worries and concerns, but some people are just inherently happy confident people. She was like that.

I tend to be more melancholy by nature but regardless we still had remarkable glorious times. When we were in Paris with the boys. It was delicious. Such fun, bicycling everywhere. Little John had a baby bike.

Both of us loved teaching and we were very proud that we were professors, academics. Even for us, the privileged, attaining a PHD or a Doctorate or simply graduating college was still a remarkable achievement. Most of our female friends growing up were not encourage in anything but finding a rich and popular husband. This was the South, The Lost Cause...

Sorry...I was just thinking. This is what I wanted to talk to you about...

When I was a little girl, my family had slaves and my uncles fought with the confederacy...

My mother said the war was to protect our way of life. This when I asked why we were fighting the north...

The Lost Cause of the Confederacy is an American pseudohistorical negationist myth that claims the cause of the Confederate States during the American Civil War was just, heroic, and not centered on slavery.

Many of us believed this. We did not question.

Paris changed us in many ways. The artists we met were wonderful, smart brilliant, Richard Wright, Langston Hughes and dear Mabel Mercer. I learned that America was built on free slave labor. I began to see the hypocrisy. The fortunes of our families, the Scott and the Withers families were made on the plantations which were made on free slave labor.

My family had many slaves. Mary/Winkie denies it and yet she too romanticized our southern way of life. She appealed to the rich southern whites to preserve the homes, the cultural heritage.

I agreed. It was important. It is important. But I began to question...still questioning...

I was often deeply heartsick and discouraged by our world. Not anymore. As we age, I realize life is so short. There is no reason to hasten the ending. It is important to do our best to make the world a better place. To kill oneself as I once romanticized would create a great psychic whole. It damages in some very deep, deep way humanity...

Also, once I started Top Knot Nursery with Winkies help, and realized that my gift was in the education of children. They were so happy. It was so easy. I was happy and over time I gained my confidence despite myself I became myself...

Mary was there always even if she didn't understand. She and I were great friends, and we raised great boys, men. What about that?

END SCENE

Scene 11

Time: 1970

Winkie

Abraham worked for a year before his release. He was lucky it wasn't any longer, but we fought hard to have him released, claiming he was part of our family and was a friend of our own; that we had known him since birth. Ginnie and I advocated continually for Abraham's release.

They finally let him go. I gave in to the mayor and let go as well. I didn't publish an article I wrote for The Old Richmond News that I showed him in advance, to persuade him to pardon Abraham. In that article I revealed all he was doing, his own artichoke information, his own hypocrisy stealing from neighbors and destroying conservation efforts of the Preservation Committee, his involvement in Jim Crow and support of the Ku Klux Klan. He let Abraham go. I agreed not to publish. I compromised. Was it blackmail? Not really, I don't think.

Ruthie never came back to work or to live with us. She did go to night school. Abraham was never quite the same. He was more 'suspicious', not as quick to humor. That's it. He lost his joy, but he took care of Ruthie. Our Bobby always goes to visit him when he comes to visit us. They were close. Bobby credits Abraham for learning to read and inspiration.

Ruthie and I talked a little. She was gracious. Said it wasn't my fault. It was what it was.

We had known Abraham since birth. Mayor Bright was old school, believer in the Lost Cause. He was behind much of the segregation and Jim Crow reconstruction policies of Richmond. He was Mayor from 1920 to 1940. He wanted me to stop my work preserving the old homes, especially Linden Row. He did not believe in affordable housing for the colored.

Ginnie was right. I romanticized and played into the sympathies of those who believed in the Lost Cause. I thought it would help to have the support of those with money. I tried to work with Mayor Bright. I thought that perhaps I could convince him of the importance of historical preservation; that there were parts of our culture of mutual respect and love.

Mayor Bright finally lost his election because he would not support the federal housing program and lost major funding for Richmond.

Ginnie and the boys spent the summer in Wytheville and on return we started Ginnie's nursery. She was wonderful with the children. She alone is responsible for Robert's success. She never ever let him think he was 'stupid' because he had trouble reading. She

said it was a learning disability. No one talked about that then. She had seen it in other children and knew it was not a sign of lack of intelligence. It was Ginnie, Bobby ran to when he had trouble in school. Ginnie, who gave him confidence.

I cannot begin to express the love I have for Bobby and his daughters, my lovely nieces. They have brought so much joy in my life. They have the same kindness as their father, our Bobby.

When he was little, he and Abraham had a special bond. Abraham helped him read, helped him with his homework when he was a teenager, and encouraged him in his technical skills. I will always be grateful.

I will always also feel deeply saddened that Abraham and Ruthie and I grew apart. Bobby was our connection in these later years. Although they forgive me, they will always love Bobby.

My work continued.

I was always a positive person and well, Ginnie, she did have a tendency toward melancholy, but she and I remained committed to the boys, and they flourished eventually. They are fine wonderful men who do not demand of the women they love subservience. Virginia Withers was my friend for 40 years. I miss her.

Artichoke Information, our family joke, our hypocrisy.... I don't know. Is it an onion? It kept us honest I suppose but as I age, I learn and understand so much more. I hope this gives me a little wisdom. I hope.

(Ginnie plays Django record ... Miss Otis Regrets plays...the line...

Ginnie sings along with recording and moves happily with the music: *"When the mob came and got her and dragged her from the jail, they strung her on the willow across the way..."*)

Really a lynching of a white woman... But I can still learn. We can still learn.

END