

ACT II: SALLY WHO?

Characters

THOMAS, white and wealthy, elderly but vigorous  
SALLY, black, early 40s, a slave in Thomas' house  
BEVERLY, Sally's mixed-race son, late teens  
ELIAS MORELAND, white, a wealthy neighbor

Costumes

Thomas and Moreland are dressed as early 19th-century American aristocrats. Sally and Beverly are dressed as slaves assigned to Thomas' main house and to the estate grounds, respectively.

Time

200 years ago, give or take.

Setting

The dining room and study of a ruling class colonial-style house in a Jeffersonian democracy of the early 1800s. A dinner table, writing desk, two upholstered chairs, with a window actual or suggested to the side.

*THOMAS sits at his writing desk in the study, working on his accounts with a quill pen. BEVERLY enters from the dining room, loose-limbed and deferential.*

BEVERLY

I finished the windows like you said, Master Tom.

*THOMAS does not look up.*

THOMAS

Are you slouching, Beverly?

*BEVERLY snaps to attention.*

BEVERLY

No, sir, Master Tom.

*Now THOMAS looks, nodding.*

THOMAS

Good, good. You're getting much better at displaying your manners.

BEVERLY

I try, sir.

THOMAS

Now if the quality of your work were to match the alignment of your spine, I would consider you a master window washer. You do want to be the best worker you can be, don't you, Beverly?

BEVERLY

Yes, sir.

THOMAS

Soon you'll have no more excuses for shoddiness. Do you get my meaning?

BEVERLY

When I'm a man.

THOMAS

That's right. And in this house, being treated as a man means contributing a man's share of labor.

BEVERLY

*(Beat, as he absorbs the rebuke, then dejectedly.)*

Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir.

THOMAS

Then you'll have to apply yourself now. Because someday--God willing--you'll be a father yourself, and you'll want to set a good example for your own sons and daughters.

BEVERLY

I understand, sir. Do you want me to wash the windows again?

*THOMAS turns back to his papers.*

THOMAS

No, no, they'll keep for now. I have another task for you. The she-goat, the old brown-and-white, is she still giving suck?

BEVERLY

She's been dry for months, sir.

THOMAS

Well, that is to be expected at her age. I want you to prepare her for the kitchen.

BEVERLY

*(Stricken.)*

Pardon?

THOMAS

She's old, but not too tough for a stew. I want you to kill and dress her and deliver her to the cook. I'm having guests for dinner tomorrow.

BEVERLY  
*(Barely able to speak.)*  
 But... sir?

*THOMAS looks at him impatiently.*

THOMAS  
 Haven't I made myself clear?

BEVERLY  
*(Anguished.)*  
 Yes... yes...

THOMAS  
 Then go.

*BEVERLY scurries off. THOMAS settles back into work. After a few moments, a miserable wail...*

BEVERLY (O.S.)  
 Ma-ma!

*BEVERLY has an indistinct O.S. exchange with SALLY. When it's over, JEFFERSON extends the fingers of his free hand one by one. At "five" SALLY bursts in.*

SALLY  
 What are you thinking?

*THOMAS holds up a paper.*

THOMAS  
 I'm thinking that a pauper must be the most envied of men--so encumbered as to be of no further interest to his creditors.

SALLY  
 Don't be flippant. You know what I mean.

THOMAS  
 Truly. I don't.

SALLY  
 Sylvie.

THOMAS  
 Who's Sylvie?

SALLY  
 The goat, the one Beverly just told me will be your dinner.

THOMAS

I didn't realize she'd been christened.

SALLY

Eston named her. He loves that goat.

THOMAS

So do I. That's why I'll toast her with fennel and shallots at table tomorrow.

SALLY

Eston couldn't bear to see her eaten. He's a child.

THOMAS

He'll be excused.

SALLY

Eston learned to walk holding on to that doe. You'll break his heart. You can't kill her, Thomas. It would be cruel.

*JEFFERSON rises, approaching.*

THOMAS

I do apologize, Sally. I didn't mean to upset you.

SALLY

Think of Eston.

THOMAS

*(Chuckling.)*

Oh, I've seen how are together. The big eyes she makes at him. The way he makes her laugh... MMM-bahhhh!

*JEFFERSON embraces SALLY from behind and nuzzles her neck. She responds ambivalently.*

SALLY

Thank you, Thomas.

THOMAS

For what?

SALLY

For changing your mind and sparing Eston's goat.

THOMAS

Who said anything about changing my mind or my menu?

SALLY

But...

THOMAS

You jumped to a conclusion, Sally. I merely comforted you. I never acquiesced. I have a hankering for goat and I intend to serve Elias Moreland a savory stew. A savory Sylvi-en stew.

SALLY

No.

THOMAS

*(A warning.)*

Sally...

SALLY

I won't allow it... Sir.

THOMAS

Mind how you talk to me.

SALLY

No, Thomas. Spare the goat. Serve something else instead. Serve turkey.

THOMAS

Turkey?! God no. Moreland would be apoplectic. If he and Franklin had chosen our national bird, baking a turkey would be an act of treason.

*Something outside has caught THOMAS' eye. He moves to the window for a better look.*

SALLY

Please... Sir, please--

THOMAS

--That's enough. I see that Moreland is here, probably to borrow something. Show him in, Sally.

SALLY

Sir...

THOMAS

*(Ignoring her distress.)*

Oh, and I also see Moreland's daughter Emily. She's very fond of Eston and a more suitable companion. Let the two of them play together while she's here.

*SALLY makes to protest further but decides against it, given THOMAS' firm expression. She exits. Soon, SALLY reappears, ushering MORELAND in, then she exits.*