

*Tales from the  
Greenwood  
District*

**A PEEK INTO BLACK WALL  
STREET ... BEFORE THE  
MASSACRE**



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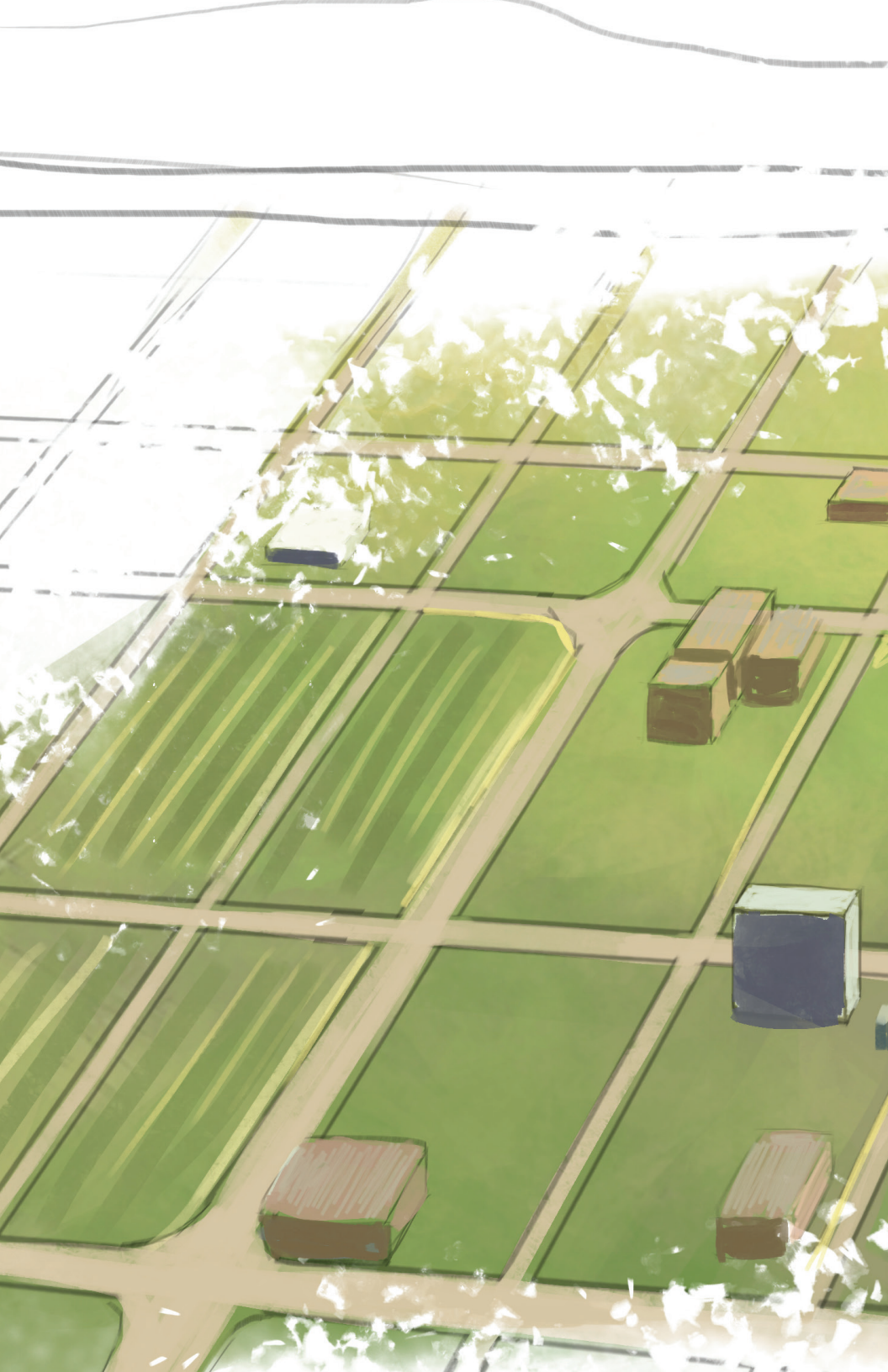
**A PEEK INTO BLACK WALL  
STREET ... BEFORE THE  
MASSACRE**

**JULIAN B. WADDELL**



*“I came not to Tulsa as many came, lured by the dream of making money and bettering myself in the financial world, but because of the wonderful cooperation I observed among our people, and especially the harmony of spirit and action that existed between the businessmen and women.”*

*~ Mary E. Jones Parrish  
1921*





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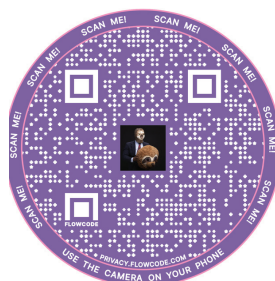
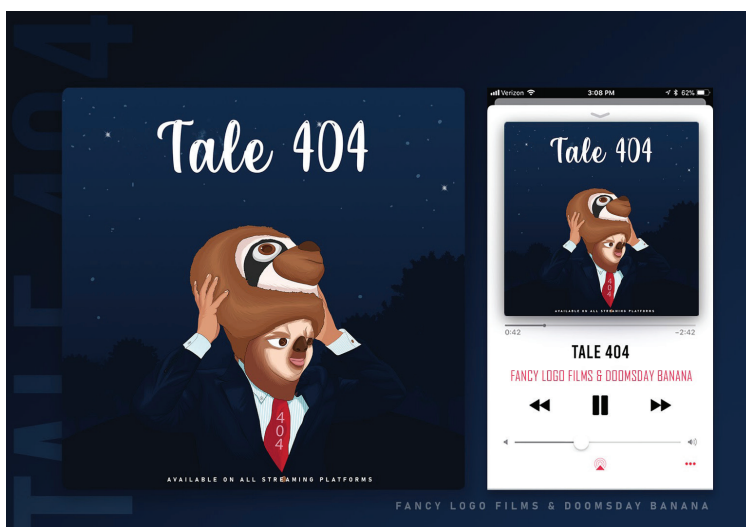
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**Tale 404 is a series of stories that will continue to edutain\* you even after you've finished with this book. Scan the QR code to access little-known historical stories and explore the rarely discussed intersection of seemingly unrelated occurrences.**



***\*Edutain is a word.***



# Dedication



*I* dedicate this book to my aunt, **Dorothy Waddell Towns**. I had so many questions I wanted to ask you ...

*I've been working on iterations of this book since the launch of the Reading Rainbow Young Writers and Illustrators Contest in 1995 (special shoutout to Levar Burton and PBS), but I couldn't have finished this book without **Sharee Moore** keeping me on track.*

*A very special thanks to my **mom**, who encouraged me to become the best me that I could be. To my **dad**, who not only got me into history but got me into deep diving, connecting the historical dots, and storytelling. To my **grandparents** who never steered away from teaching our history without sugarcoating it. To my **siblings** (blood-related or not), who always go above and beyond to help me shine. To my **aunts** and **uncles**, who've always stood in as my second parents. And, most importantly, to **Janna Peterson**, the most spectacular person I know and the reason I am the unstoppable force I am today.*



# Author Bio



**J**ulian B. Waddell is a thought leader in cyber security and a seasoned start-up strategist with a vast array of experience in both fields. That is what most people know about him. What you may not know is that he is a terrible singer and dancer, but that doesn't stop him from singing embarrassingly loud and at random while performing dance moves that look differently in his head than they do in real life. He is also a gifted storyteller with a passion for learning little known historical facts.

In order to fulfill his passion for entrepreneurial endeavors, he stepped down as the chief information

security officer at Oakwood University to focus on being a professor and start-up consultant for early-stage entrepreneurs. Well, that's partly true. The more accurate reason was that he hadn't had time to play video games for years because of his dedication to the job. The moment he realized that he had significantly improved his organization's security posture, he knew it was time to dust off the old PS4 and ride off into the sunset.

Outside of all the awesome games he is currently playing, Julian is a great business wingman. Be it a grappling hook, a sound business plan, or X-ray vision, Julian works tirelessly to equip his clients with the tools they need to run successful businesses.

What makes Julian so good at what he does? He is an empathic critical thinking strategist who has 23 combined years of experience in information security, information technology, and business strategy. He has served as one of the lead technical specialists of the Data at Rest Security Encryption initiative implemented by NASA (They are in charge of getting us to space, PEOPLE!) to increase information security for their users, and his team received national recognition for their efforts. There is a lot that can be said about Julian "The Idea Wingman" Waddell, but there's not enough time in the world. If you ever get an opportunity to meet this living legend in person, ask him to tell you about the epic project he is currently taking on, challenge

**JULIAN B. WADDELL**

him to a game of Brawlhalla, OR congratulate him on becoming a published author. (This book is his first.)





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# Author's Note



**This** book is not about the Black Wall Street Massacre. I won't be the author of another story that adds to the weight you already feel about the racial trauma most of us navigate each day. We already know the depth of race-based stress, and we're worn out by the media's negative portrayal of minorities. Yes, we're tired of viewing the deaths of unarmed Black men, women, and children at the hands of those who've been sworn to protect and serve. We're tired of watching on our screens as Black lives are interrupted by shootings, chokings, and modern-day lynchings. We all read stories about our fallen ones and even witnessed how they died; we swore never to stop saying their names.

There are countless people like Philando, Trayvon, Tamir, John, Breonna, Atatiana, Ahmaud, Botham, and George. I want you to think about what their futures could have been had their lives not been interrupted. Those are the thoughts that inspired me to write this book. I imagined them in that bubble of time and how they each had a story full of joy, pain, adventures, sorrows, love, and loss ahead of them. They had dreams!

## **TALES FROM THE GREENWOOD DISTRICT**

Just like them, there was a time **before** the massacre on Black Wall Street. I want to talk to you about those days when the Greenwood District was a haven for Black people. Through the character sketches in this book, I want you to view life through the eyes of Jean, Annalie, Shelton, Marie, Julius, Jeremiah, Eli, Jordan, and Eddie. I want you to laugh with them and cry. I want you to share in their mishaps and triumphs. I want you to imagine them in this snapshot of time before their lives were interrupted. Then I want you to decide to live your own life.

### **YOU'RE AN OVERCOMER/DESTINED FOR GREATNESS**

As kids, many of us had a favorite superhero. We grew up imagining ourselves with the special powers of our favorite costumed crusader. We wanted to fly like they could. Or we wanted to be invincible with super strength. We wanted to have X-ray vision, invisibility, or superspeed. The reason why is because those superhuman abilities would help us defeat the bad guys, be the hero, and save the day. But I need you to be confident that you can do and be just that. You can be a hero by changing the world around you. When you see a problem that needs to be solved, you can be the solution. I want you to be confident that those heroic feats are not far-fetched

at all. Maybe you can't see through walls, but you can see the solution to the problems in our world; you can BE the solution. You are the solution! You are destined for greatness, so let's go change the world.

As you read these *Tales from the Greenwood District*, remind yourself that each day is a gift. It's your opportunity to live out something bigger and brighter than what faces you today. When you arrive at your final destination, the real headline is how you lived. When and how you died is just the footnote.

We rise together,  
***Julian B. Waddell***



# Foreword



On April 20, 2021, former police officer, Derek Chauvin, was convicted for murdering George Floyd. Floyd, like me, was Black. Like many Black people before him, and many after, he had perished unnecessarily at the hands of the police. But this was different. Floyd's killer had been punished. However, in 33 years of life, I had only seen this happen once before. Dare I feel hope? Could this be the beginning of a new era of police accountability? I was allowed to ponder the possibilities of change for but a few hours before hope was stolen from me.

Democratic Majority Leader Nancy Pelosi gave a speech addressing the conviction. Two minutes and fifteen seconds in, she said, "Thank you, George Floyd, for sacrificing yourself for justice." My blood boiled. George Floyd did not sacrifice himself for anything. He was not a martyred civil rights leader. He didn't lay his life down on the frontlines of injustice. All he did was try to buy something at a store. The clerk thought the twenty-dollar bill he used was fake and called the police. The police came and murdered him. Tell me, where was the sacrifice?

## TALES FROM THE GREENWOOD DISTRICT

Human beings love to frame history within narratives. By doing this, we can look back and see clear lines between right and wrong, heroes and villains. But so much is lost in this reductive reframing of the past. On April 20th, Derek Chauvin was recast as a villain and Floyd as a hero. The villain gets punished. The hero rises above it all to become a symbol of something or whatever. Everything else is lost.

There has never been a day in my life where I wanted to sacrifice myself for anything, let alone the ambiguous concept of justice. Today, I woke up and went to the store because I wanted raspberries for my yogurt. If someone had told me that this desire would lead to me dying in a viral video, I would have stayed home and ate plain yogurt. I think George Floyd would've made a similar choice. He and I are people, not symbols, heroes, or hashtags. We have our own hopes and dreams for ourselves, and we do not want to be reframed in history so that the tragedy of a life lived under oppression is easier to digest.

If we looked back 100 years, I imagine the Black residents of Tulsa, Oklahoma would share this sentiment. One hundred years from the moment that I am writing this, the citizens of Tulsa are just starting their day. For the next few weeks, they will go about their lives just like you and me. In less than a month, many of them will be dead. But if we focus only on that, we rob them of their humanity. We do



to them what history is doing to George Floyd and define them by the worst thing that ever happened to them. So let's not do that.

Let us take a moment to remember the names of those who have passed. Let us take a moment to see them as more than victims, casualties, or statistics. Let us meditate on their thoughts, empathize with their dreams, and remember them as they were. Remember them as you and I are right now—alive.

**Justin Collier Mickens**

Executive Producer

Fancy Logo Films



# Introduction



It's the summer of 1918, and a devastating second wave of the Spanish flu pandemic was hitting America. You see, the first World War was coming to an end, and people at home were tired of self-quarantining. Returning soldiers, who were infected with the disease, were also spreading it to the general population. There wasn't a vaccine or even an approved plan for how to reduce the flu's spread, especially for those in densely-populated cities. Hundreds of thousands of people were dying in cities across America. The final death toll reached fifty million worldwide and 675,000 in the U.S.

Responsibility to make the decisions and improvise plans needed to safeguard U.S. citizens fell to local mayors and health officials. Not to mention, there was a lot of pressure on people to appear patriotic. After all, it was wartime. So with the media downplaying the disease's spread, many bad decisions slipped through undetected. To make matters worse, the second wave of deadly influenza was worse than the first.

## TULSA, OKLAHOMA

In Oklahoma, 7,350 people died of influenza and related infections in the six months between October 1, 1918, and April 1, 1919. In October alone, the *Tulsa Democrat* (predecessor of *The Tulsa Tribune*) recorded 200 flu deaths in a story printed November 3, 1918.

Tulsa Red Cross officials, doctors, and city officials gathered for an emergency meeting on October 7, 1918 in order to mobilize resources. While all this was happening, everyone expected the poorest part of the population to suffer the most. Historian and professor, Alfred Crosby, noted that the Black population, who were expected to have higher influenza infections and deaths, actually had *lower* rates than the white population during the same time. This was not the norm. Some believe that this shift had a lot to do with socioeconomic factors at the time. During this time, Black Tulsans existed in a thriving community dubbed the Greenwood District, also commonly known as “Black Wall Street.”

Also notable during that time period was the thought process of African American soldiers returning from war. They had expected to come home heroes; however, Black soldiers received a rude awakening upon their return. As these veterans tried to re-enter the labor market following World War I, social tensions and anti-Black sentiment increased

in cities with high job competition. At the same time, Black veterans also pushed to have their civil rights enforced because they believed they had earned full citizenship through their military service.

*But let's take a step back.*

## **A RACIST PRESIDENT**

Woodrow Wilson was the first Southerner and, at the time, the only candidate from a former Confederate state to be elected president since before the Civil War. His ascension to the presidency was celebrated by Southerners who believed in segregation. Several historians have looked at public records to spotlight consistent examples of Wilson's overtly racist policies and political appointments. For example, he appointed staunch segregationists in his Cabinet, who then guided the policies of the president's executive departments.

D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) was a catalyst that helped set the tone for white supremacy in America. It didn't help matters that Wilson chose it as the first motion picture to be screened in the White House. The film presents a stereotype-laden portrayal of African Americans as sexually aggressive toward white women. It also depicts African Americans as unintelligent, even as actors in blackface often carried out these depictions. In contrast, the film presents the Ku Klux Klan

## TALES FROM THE GREENWOOD DISTRICT

(KKK) as critical in the preservation of American values and a social order where white supremacy rules. Some historians have said that the movie was so popular that it increased enrollments in the KKK.

While all this was happening, there was the Great Migration of African Americans out of the South in 1917 and 1918. The surge was in response to the demand for industrial labor related to the war. However, this migration sparked race riots, including the East St. Louis riots of 1917. The public mounted a vigorous objection and Wilson responded by asking the attorney general if the federal government could intervene. He called the riots “disgraceful outrages.” However, Attorney General Thomas Watt Gregory advised Wilson not to take direct action against the riots.

In 1920, it was the end of Woodrow Wilson’s second term, and most Progressives rejoined the Republican Party. They expected their former leader, Theodore Roosevelt, to make a third run for the presidency. He was the overwhelming favorite for the Republican nomination; however, those plans ended when Roosevelt suddenly died on January 6, 1919.

As a result, Warren G. Harding ran on the platform of normalcy because of all the things happening during that time. He called for restoration and “normalcy” as a way to calm America’s turbulent waters.

## **CONNECTING THE DOTS**

- Northeastern Oklahoma was in an economic slump that increased unemployment.
- The Greenwood District flourished and drew large numbers of Black Americans.
- Racial tensions and fears existed amidst a deadly pandemic.

So, here comes Dick Rowland, the young Black man whose story sparked the downfall of the illustrious Greenwood District. Dick Rowland was a nineteen-year-old Black shoe shiner who startled Sarah Paige, a seventeen-year-old elevator operator. The reports about what actually happened vary. In general, Rowland tripped in an elevator on his way to a segregated bathroom. Another white store clerk reported the incident as an “assault” or a rape. It’s important to note that Sarah herself said that she was not assaulted or raped. Despite this, Dick Rowland was promptly arrested for the crime.

As it was in those days, after the young man was arrested, a lynch mob gathered outside the courthouse where he was being held. News got back to the local Black population. When they heard that Dick Rowland was going to be lynched, they arrived at the courthouse, too. The night ended in a fight between the lynch mob and armed African Americans, some of whom were WWI veterans. Shots were fired and twelve people were killed: ten

whites and two Blacks. The incident highlighted the height of racial fear of that time.

Dick Rowland wasn't killed. He left Tulsa soon after that night.

## THE TULSA MASSACRE

Late at night on May 31, 1921, mobs of white men retaliated by sparking a riot that lasted sixteen hours, during which time they started fires and U.S. planes dropped firebombs. These were the first records of bombs hitting U.S. soil. Between that night and the next day, angry white mobs leveled thirty-five city blocks of the Greenwood District, displaced thousands of residents, and killed hundreds. Official reports from the Oklahoma Bureau of Labor and Statistics state that thirty-nine people died: twenty-six Blacks and thirteen whites. However, a state commission gives a death toll ranging from 75-300 dead. Many of the Greenwood District residents were never seen or heard from again.

*Tales from the Greenwood District* is a series of short fictional stories that add color and dimension to Black Wall Street *before* the Tulsa Massacre. Despite the death, danger, and devastation around every turn, this exclusive Black society still thrived. Each tale shows depth to who we are as a people, our culture, and our shared happiness and pain.



## **YOU'LL READ THE TALES OF:**



- A nurse who avoids grieving a sudden loss in the midst of battling the deadly Spanish flu ...
- A returning Army veteran who fights his inner demons while looking for purpose ... yet his journey takes an unexpected turn ...
- A grandson who goes on a walking tour of the Greenwood District with his grandmother, which not only reveals the founders' stories but also a secret about himself ...
- A white Tulsa resident wrestling with the mounting tensions of the angry mobs just one day before they embark on their historic killing spree ...
- Teenagers who re-discover important truths and better understand the meaning of life and enduring friendship ...
- A WWI veteran who demonstrates his commitment to sacrifice even in the face of unexpected danger ...
- Former slaves owned by Native Americans who learn more about the American dream than anyone ever believed possible ...

- A single mother of two who defies the odds and learns new ways to turn the impossible into what's possible ...
- A white American Red Cross official who must make a harrowing choice ... If caught in the act, the consequences could cost her more than just her job ...



# *Eli and Jordan*



*Two friends uncover important revelations  
about their futures and themselves ...*



*The Lincoln Motion Picture Company in Omaha, Nebraska was founded by George and Nobel Johnson in 1916. Aimed at African American audiences, it was the first all-Black movie production unit in America. The company created five films, which were shown in Black churches and assembly halls.*



## MAY 30, 1921

Eli hid a smile before shooting a hot look of disgust at the young boy peeping through the cracked bedroom door.

"I oughta bop you on the head for spying!" Eli quipped.

"Daddy said you should help me with breakfast when mother isn't well," Stephon said as he eased the door open.

"Well, where's he at so we can ask him about that now?" Eli made a great show of searching the room. Stephon's lips puckered into a baby scowl.

"You know you're lucky you're my brother, right?" Eli reminded Stephon.

"You can have an apple and some buttered toast this morning before school," Eli said.

Stephon looked at Eli from head to toe. "First of all, we don't even have school today. But why are you wearing *that*?"

"You just worry about getting your knobby head to school on time this morning! I have a thing, so can't walk you today." Eli spoke quickly and dipped out the door before Stephon could protest.



Eli set out in the direction of Booker T. Washington High School and thought, *I've been holding this news in my heart for so long. I gotta tell somebody TODAY.*

## TALES FROM THE GREENWOOD DISTRICT

The sky was clear as Eli neared the three-story brick building of the school. Eli thought, *Jordan better not chicken out like last time. I'm ready to share my secret ... tomorrow I plan to ...*

"What are you wearing?" Jordan asked quizzically while staring at Eli.

"Applesauce! I look good," Eli retorted confidently.

"You look like a dewdropper," Jordan chortled.

"A spiffy dewdropper, though. But enough about me. I can't believe *mister* Jordan is skipping schooling. I guess your mom is right. I *am* a bad influence," Eli teased.

"Close your head, Eli. There's no school on Memorial Day! Today *is* the day that you will always look back fondly on when you think about why you *stayed here* and made it big on Negro Wall Street."

*Stephon's big head was right about school! My little sis, Anna, wouldn't have mixed up the days like this. She was the caretaker. She was the one who held things together. She was also the one taken by the Spanish flu.* Eli cut off the sad thoughts; instead, offering Jordan a testy reply.

"I doubt that! Maybe it's more like the day *you* decide to take the train to Hollywood with ME. With your business mind and my talent, we could be bigger than even the Lincoln Motion Picture Company!" Eli stood tall; feet widely planted and arms folded matter-of-factly.

There was a brief awkward silence before Jordan put his arm around Eli's shoulder and said, "Let's blouse."

The two meandered down E. Easton Street in search of one final adventure together before the summer really began. Underneath all the playful banter, Jordan knew that today he only had one shot to convince Eli to stay in Greenwood. And he couldn't mess it up.



Usually if there was some mischief to get into, it was Eli pulling Jordan along for the ride. This time, Eli thought it would be fun to let Jordan take the lead. *But first ...*

"Jo, if we actually had schooling to skip, we mighta picked the worst day ever because literally most of downtown is closed! But let's go behind Jacy's Bakery to see if they put those boxes of cakes, rolls, and the fancy French things out this morning!" Eli started skipping off in the direction of the bakery.

"Uh, Eli, those French things are called *croissants*. And how did you know they put out bread all like that? They have gingersnap cookies, too?" Jordan ran, but just a little, in order to catch up. Some might say he is short for his age, but that didn't bother Jordan one bit. From an early age, he knew it wasn't his body that would push him to greatness; it was his mind. Actually, it was Jordan's studious nature that

caused the wild and adventurous Eli to seek out his friendship almost seven years ago.

Jordan couldn't forget that day. It was after school on Tuesday, September 8, 1914. There was this big old tree he liked to sit and read under near where the other kids played hopscotch, leapfrog, skipping games, and, of course, marbles. He had just finished a chapter of *The Call of the Wild* and planned to squeeze in a chapter of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* before heading home to do chores.

That's when George Harper walked up and said, "Why do you sit over here with a bunch of dumb books?" Before Jordan could reply, George asked, "Why don't you play with the rest of us?" Tiny beads of sweat formed on George's nose. He didn't bother wiping them away. Before Jordan could figure out what was going on, George reached over and slapped the books out of his hands and into the dirt at the base of the tree. Jordan's mouth hung open as he looked at his precious books through a rising cloud of dust.

Just like that, Eli strode over and decked ole George Harper right in the face! Before that day, Eli hadn't even said much to Jordan, but he still remembers Eli's words to George.

"You better recognize who you're messing with, George! One day, Jordan is gonna be the best doctor that Greenwood has ever seen! If you mess with him, you mess with me!" Eli stared down at George, who, at that point, could only squint with his one



good eye. That was in second grade. The two have been inseparable ever since.

Jordan smiled at the memory, but his teeth practically fell out of his head when he saw Eli sorting through the boxes of sweets piled behind Jacy's. They smelled so good, and it looked like they weren't the only ones grabbing breakfast pastries. There was Ms. Alice, who worked down at the market. Oh, and there was Johnny. Everybody knew him.

"Hey, J! What's good?" Eli greeted Johnny. Eli always came up with nicknames for people.

"Sup, Eli. Getting my morning grub before I get new threads down at the Drexel on Main. You know I always gotta look cold as ice on Saturday nights." Johnny already looked cool as he smoothed the front of his jacket. He did some fancy footwork, twirled once, and tipped his hat before he walked off. Jordan made a mental note to remember that dance move for later.

"I bet that brotha knows how to parlay with the ladies!" Eli said with a laugh.

"Well, I just think a *real* lady wouldn't want somebody just telling her what she wants to hear," Jordan said.

"What you know about what the ladies want, Jo?" Eli grinned and busted out laughing.

"I know everything *you've* taught me, but the way you're dressed today has me rethinking everything I ever learned from you, Eli!" The two elbowed each

other and laughed together as they meandered down the narrow street behind Jacy's.

"You might can get away with insulting *me*, but don't try that with your girlfriend ... if you can even find one around here!" Eli said with a laugh.

"Listen, I'm trying to tell you. This place ain't it whether you're looking for a wife or a career. Literally, the world is ours for the taking! Why limit all that brainpower to a small section of town in a little ole city like Tulsa?" Eli persisted.

"I just think that Greenwood is full of lawyers, doctors, and engineers. Then we have hoteliers and businessmen who are some of the brightest around. You won't find talent like this in Atlanta, Chicago, New York, or ... Los Angeles," Jordan said.

"I've done my research, too, Jo. You're talking about MEN. What about opportunities for women? You want a wife who is allowed to do more than sew clothes and bake cakes, don't you? That's all I see around here. So, if I ever have children, I want daughters who grow up in a place where there really are no limits. What about being a movie star? Or a pilot? Or even the mayor?" Eli's passionate speech reminded Jordan of the surprise he had in store.

"Let's go," Jordan said.

"So where are we going, Jo? The train station?" Eli tried to goad Jordan into a response.

«Close, but nope! We're going to watch *The Green-Eyed Monster* up at Dreamland Theater," Jordan replied.

“Wait, wait, wait! How’d you pull that off?” Eli asked with a playful jab in Jordan’s direction.

*The Green-Eyed Monster* was Eli’s favorite movie. And even though it’s been two years since it came out, Ms. Williams promised Jordan that she would show it today just for him.

“Before we see the motion picture, let’s go out to the old trainyard. I’m ready to show you that I have just as much guts as you!” Jo told Eli.

“Wait!” Eli ran to catch up to Jordan. On the way to the old trainyard, they passed by a familiar house.

“Jo, let’s stop here at my Aunt Rhesa’s. You already know my older cousin, Shelton, always got something *good* in the back of his closet. He works over at the Stradford during the day, so ... It’s on for you and me!” Eli said in an excited whisper.

There it was. Right there on the top shelf of Shelton’s closet. The brown paper bag crinkled in their eager hands as they took a few swigs from the bottle half-filled with forbidden amber liquid. Jordan let out something that was a cross between a squeak and a squeal. Eli began to fan both hands toward their open mouths, but the liquid fire was true to its name and burned all the way down.

Suddenly, the screen door wheezed open then slammed closed with a *Whap!*

They looked at each other with wide eyes as Eli mouthed the words, “Aunt Rhesa’s back!” A silent fit of giggles seemed to overtake the two as they tried to shush each other without actually making a sound.

## TALES FROM THE GREENWOOD DISTRICT

Jordan jerked his head toward the door even as Eli used both hands to wildly gesture “no”! But Jordan was taking the lead today. He tumbled out of the closet with little to no dignity and made a run for the screen door. Eli was right behind him still choking back giggles. As the duo ducked around the corner, they could hear Aunt Rhesa call out, “Shelton? Is that you? Who’s there?”

Jordan took off at a sprint with Eli hot on his heels. When they slowed to a stroll, he tossed Eli a croissant from the shoulder bag he always carried.

“You almost got us caught!” Eli accused through a barrage of throaty laughter.

“Just eat your French thing and let’s get over to the trainyard before it’s too late to catch our movie,” Jordan said. “Oh, and your cap’s on backwards, *bro*,” he said with barely contained laughter.

Eli’s smart-mouthed retort was interrupted by an authoritative voice.

“Hey, you kids, what are you doing out this far from town?”

They turned and saw Officer Pack coming their way. He was one of the District’s few Negro police officers. Eli groaned quietly, but Jordan resisted the urge.

The trainyard was at the edge of town. The tracks marked one of the boundaries that separated Negroes and whites in Tulsa.

“Oh. You boys are headed in the direction of trouble,” Officer Pack said sternly. “Hey, what’s that

I smell?" he asked with his nose pointed in their direction.

"Officer, that's just this rum bread we got from Jacy's," Eli said quickly.

Officer Pack looked skeptical.

"Hey. I know you!" He pointed at Jordan. "You're the one who's on the Booker T. Washington Student Auxiliary Board and also the winner of the Oklahoma Science Lab Competition. Alright, son! You're going places!" Officer Pack exclaimed as he clapped Jordan on the shoulder.

"Things might feel easy for you here. But I'm from Chicago, and the world is a very different place than in Greenwood," Officer Pack warned. "I don't want you to let your guard down around here and think that the world is going to treat you as kindly as it does in Greenwood."

"Yes, sir!" Eli and Jordan said in unison.

"I had to work hard for everything I've been able to have here. Nothing was given to me for free. That's why, although I'm one of two Negroes policing these here streets, I'll always be known as one of the first of our kind to do so. Boys, ain't nothing free in this world. You gotta work for it. Now keep that in mind as you finish up your schooling. *Ain't nothing free.* Now we gotta go, but stay outta trouble." Officer Pack said with raised brows. He waited for their responses before heading back to where his partner stood on the corner.

## TALES FROM THE GREENWOOD DISTRICT

“Yes, sir!” the kids said again to his retreating back.

“Ain’t nothing free, *boys*,” Jordan twittered in Eli’s ear.

“Okay, okay, okay! Enough with the *boy* and *bro*, will ya?” Eli snapped.

“This is exactly why I can’t wait to get out of this town! I *will* go to Hollywood, where I can wear pants, be a big shot film director, live on this side of the tracks *or* the other ... *and* be called by the name my momma gave me—Elizabeth Ann Ferguson! Do you know the last thing my daddy told me before he disappeared? He said, ‘Elizabeth, you can do anything you make up your mind to do,’” Eli said before quietly adding, “even leave here.”

Eli balanced carefully on the tracks and inched towards the bridge where they liked to sit and dangle their feet off the side. Jordan had a carefully prepared speech about why he believed Greenwood District was the future, their future. It felt like Eli had been protecting him, pushing him, and believing in him since he was a kid, and Jordan didn’t feel ready to give that up. It hurt to think of her all the way across the country, where there could be no more cutting up and chilling back. No more jokes and secrets and discussions or afternoon adventures. He had felt confident that Eli’s talent would be right at home here in Tulsa.

But, as he felt the heat from Eli's impassioned speech, Jordan knew it wasn't liquid confidence he heard. It wasn't the rum talking at all. He realized that he could finally hear her heart. Jordan took a deep breath and swallowed his little speech.

"I leave on the train tomorrow morning," Eli said in a low voice. The train might leave tomorrow, but Jordan knew Eli's heart had left the Greenwood District many years ago. He lifted his chin in quiet acknowledgment. When Eli slowly reached over and touched his hand, tears began to stream down both their faces. After an awkward silence, Eli attempted a lame joke, "Oh, you're not slick! You're just trying to make me miss my favorite movie of all time!"

"My lady, *The Green Monster* awaits ..." Jordan bowed and used his best French gentleman's voice. "Would you please be so kind as to collect my shoulder bag over there?" he continued. As Eli turned to reach for the bag, Jordan sprinted off and yelled over his shoulder, "Last one to the corner sucks rotten eggs!"

"That's cheating, Jordan. Jordan! Wait up! That's not fair!" Eli protested loudly as she stumbled to her feet.

Jordan's peals of laughter and the sound of racing feet were his only response.









## **TALES FROM THE GREENWOOD DISTRICT**