

Julius Galacki
12011 Pacific Avenue # 3
Los Angeles, CA 90066

julius.galacki@gmail.com
Tel. (310) 390-7854

The Frisco Flash

by

Julius Galacki

(10 PAGE SAMPLE)

The sample begins on page 5 where we transition from the framing device of two ghosts in a graveyard in the present to a training session between Cecil Lewis Thompson - professionally known as Young Jack Thompson - and his stepfather Scipio Thompson.

This play is based on secondary, as well as my own original historical research from primary sources, e.g. newspaper accounts, marriage certificates, court and census records - of that now forgotten black welter weight champion, who was born and died in Los Angeles but came to maturity in Oakland and San Francisco.

His story closely intersected with both a Jewish and an Irish boxer who also ended up champs in the same era: the 1920s to early 1930s. (But the play shifts back and forth in time from then, to the 1940s, 1957, 1983, the 1990s as well as back to the present.)

Of course, I've fictionalized, compressed, created amalgams of multiple real people, and otherwise used my imagination to create the tapestry of the era. However, I have endeavored to always remain true to the spirit of the characters and the milieu.

The genre is heightened realism mixed with surrealism and especially the devices of the Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre.

CAST¹

- The Man, The Father - (an African American actor who plays the older version of Young Jack Thompson, former welter weight boxing champion, as well as Scipio Thompson, his step-father and boxing trainer, and other older black male characters.)
- The Boy, The Son - (an African American actor who plays a modern teenage boy, about 14 years old and Cecil, later known as Young Jack Thompson as a teen and then a boxing champion as well as other younger black male characters.)
- The Irish Boxer - (A Caucasian actor who plays Jimmy McClary - a fictionalized version of real life champ Jimmy McLarnin - as well as other younger white male characters.)
- The Jewish Boxer - (A Caucasian actor who plays Jackie Grant - a fictionalized amalgam of Jackie Fields [especially], but also Barney Ross and other Jewish boxers - as well as other younger white male characters.)
- The Manager - (A Caucasian actor who plays Da' Wright - a fictionalized version of Jimmy's trainer and manager Pop Foster - as well as other older, white male characters.)
- The Mother, The Sister - (An African American actress who plays Jack's mother and sister - as well as the other black female characters.)
- The Flapper - (An actress who plays Sharlyn the girlfriend of both Jackie and Jack, as well as the other white female characters.)

Place: a cemetery in the Adams district of Los Angeles, then Oakland, San Francisco, greater Los Angeles, NYC, Chicago, Detroit, etc.

Time: now, then 1920 – 1946, 1957, 1983, the 1990s.

¹ See after the play, Appendix 1, for a complete list of characters and which actor plays which characters.

(Again Lewis takes a step out to edge of the light.)

LEWIS *(cont'd)*

It's dark out there.

OLDER YOUNG JACK

You scared?

LEWIS

No.

(A beat. Lewis looks at Jack who clearly doesn't believe him.)

No.

OLDER YOUNG JACK

You can't see her, you can't see anything but me, can you?

LEWIS

It's dark. That's all. *(A beat.)* My... my momma was born here. She told me stories: the Harlem of the west, she called it. The mansions. The jazz clubs.

OLDER YOUNG JACK

Oh, yeah. That's when Central Avenue was the bee's knees. I was in my prime then. But before that, I was living in Oakland....

(Suddenly the sound of the cemetery gates SLAMMING shut. Blackout. A boxing BELL sounds. The ROAR of the crowd.)

*Lights up, blaring at the audience. A Projection of a **gritty gym** and also briefly: "1923 - Imperial Gym - San Francisco".*

Scipio Thompson stands behind a large body bag. Scipio is tall, but his shoulders are stooped, and he wears gold-rimmed spectacles. Young Jack Thompson, in boxing shorts and gloves, hits the bag.

Note: the actor who was playing the older "Young Jack" is now playing the stepfather, Scipio, and the actor playing Lewis is now playing Young Jack.)

SCIPIO THOMPSON

Hit me. C'mon, hit me. Not those pigeon puffs. C'mon! Show me you is a man.

YOUNG JACK

I am punching. I am. Daddy.

SCIPIO THOMPSON

You is fourteen already. You is full grown. But you wanna coo in my ear. Like a cute little dove. Hit it!

YOUNG JACK

I am! What do you want from me?

SCIPIO THOMPSON

I says, hit it. Not love it. It ain't a kitten. The bag's a bear, gonna eat you for lunch.

YOUNG JACK

Huh?

SCIPIO THOMPSON

Stop thinking. Knock me over! Damn it, boy. Just go home. Go. Go home, Cecil. Go home to your momma. Help her with the dishes. Go be with your sisters, Ceeeeee-cil.

(Young Jack lets loose a tremendous flurry of punches. Scipio gets pushed back and can't hold on to the bag.)

SCIPIO THOMPSON *(cont'd)*

Better. Better. *(A beat, as Scipio catches his breath but pretends he's not doing so.)* But not good 'nuff. Yet. Remember this: You listening?

YOUNG JACK

Yes, sir.

SCIPIO THOMPSON

You's be as nice - polite - a gentleman - with every white man in this gym and especially out in that street. Oakland's all right. But there's Klan all over Los Angeles, looking for trouble. So, when I take you down to L.A. for a match, you smile.

YOUNG JACK

I know.

SCIPIO THOMPSON

(Snorting) You know. *I know!* But in the ring, you is an equal. You is a warrior.

YOUNG JACK

Yes.

SCIPIO THOMPSON

You wanna win, you gotta knock the feller out on the other side. 'Cause no white man's gonna lose on points. The judge always,

ALWAYS, picks the white man if the match is 'nary close. So, when

SCIPIO THOMPSON (*cont'd*)

I says, hit that bag, you hit that bag. Hard. You understand?

YOUNG JACK

Yes, daddy.

SCIPIO THOMPSON

And when you get knocked down, and you will get knocked down.

(Lights up on another part of the stage. Jimmy McClary - a skinny, angelic looking 15 year old Irish-Canadian boxer sits on a stoop of a rooming house. He is literally, very hungry.)

SCIPIO THOMPSON (*cont'd*)

There's lots of good I-talians, Jew-boys and Mick fighters - just as hungry, just as mad as you. You come back. You always come back.

YOUNG JACK

I understand.

(Lights out on Scipio and Jack.)

A Projection: "W. 7th Street, Oakland, 1923" - then the lights come up full on Jimmy. Mamie Thompson walks by carrying a sack of groceries. A tin of milk falls out of the bag.

*Jimmy jumps up, takes it, looks at it longingly, then stops Mamie with shout. Note that Jimmy speaks with a slight **Irish accent** and Mamie still has a bit of her **native Texas** in her accent:)*

JIMMY McCLARY

Ma'am! Ma'am! You dropped this.

MAMIE THOMPSON

Thank you, kindly. *(She takes him in fully.)* Child, you... lost?

JIMMY McCLARY

No ma'am.

(Jimmy is quite shy, and has a tendency to look down.)

MAMIE THOMPSON

Where do you live?

JIMMY McCLARY

Right here. *(He points.)*

MAMIE THOMPSON

The rooming house?

JIMMY McCLARY

It's just for now. Till Da' can get me a fight.

MAMIE THOMPSON

All you boys - boxing. Such foolishness. And where is this "Da'" of yours?

JIMMY McCLARY

At the docks. Trying to catch some crabs.

MAMIE THOMPSON

Well, you're coming with me. You can have dinner with us.

JIMMY McCLARY

I can't ma'am. Da' said to wait for him right here on the stoop. So, I gotta wait.

MAMIE THOMPSON

You're skinnier than a stray cat. You can just leave him a note.... What's the matter, you can't write?

JIMMY McCLARY

I can.... a little. Ma'am, I appreciate your kindness. Especially as I can't stomach anymore crabs. But, Da' gave me his word that if I listen to him, I'll be champion ...So's, so's, I gotta just stay right here.

MAMIE THOMPSON

Well... here, just keep the milk then.

JIMMY McCLARY

I... I can't.

MAMIE THOMPSON

Didn't your momma teach you, it's rude not to accept a gift?

JIMMY McCLARY

Yes'um.... I won't forget your kindness.

MAMIE THOMPSON

Just say a prayer to the good Lord. That's enough child.

JIMMY McCLARY

Well, what name shall I tell him to bless when I pray?

MAMIE THOMPSON

Mamie, child. Mamie Thompson. (*Note: pronounced May-mee*)

(Mamie nearly exits, but looking back at Jimmy. She freezes in place, in dim light. Lights change to indicate sunset. Foster "Da'" Wright, walking with a limp, carries a pail of crabs and a paper bag of semi-rotten broccoli. Da' looks like the stereotype of a 1920's boxing trainer... bowler hat, cigar, an ex-boxer himself, but he's also originally from England and still has a working class English accent.)

DA' WRIGHT

I still got my crabbing skills! Twice as many as yesterday. And look, lad, the market was throwing these broccoli out.

JIMMY McCLARY

They're all yellow.

DA' WRIGHT

You cut that away. No need to waste the rest. Where'd you get that tin o' milk?

JIMMY McCLARY

I didn't steal it.

DA' WRIGHT

Didn't say you did.

JIMMY McCLARY

A nice colored lady made a gift of it.

DA' WRIGHT

(A beat.) We'll be doing better, soon enough. After dinner we'll get back to training.

(Lights out on Da' and Jimmy. A few furniture pieces are brought to where Mamie is standing. Clean and neat, the Thompson home. Night.)

MAMIE THOMPSON

Where you been?

SCIPIO THOMPSON

I went straight from the Imperial over to Moose Taussig's gym. Wanted to check out his new boys there.

MAMIE THOMPSON

So, they be fighting at 9 o'clock at night?

SCIPIO THOMPSON

Boxing's only half way legal in California, woman. I told you that, so many times. It's gotta be like in a private club.

MAMIE THOMPSON

With gambling too?

SCIPIO THOMPSON

(Lying) No. (She gives him a look. Now, telling the truth)
Well, not by me.

MAMIE THOMPSON

Why can't you do something all the way legal for a change, Scipio Thompson.... Please.

SCIPIO THOMPSON

Oh, when we was young, back in Los Angeles, you seemed to like how I beat that white man and got away with it.

MAMIE THOMPSON

Certainly, I approve of self-defense. And I'm glad you didn't go to jail. But we still had to move to Oakland on a cause of it.

SCIPIO THOMPSON

So? More jobs up here. And no Klan.

MAMIE THOMPSON

But Los Angeles is warm like Texas was. I get a chill in my bones 9 months of the year up here. And you've been different.

SCIPIO THOMPSON

Ah! I ain't been different. L.A. is just a hick town - just a downtown surrounded by a whole lot of orange groves and asparagus farms. But it's real cities up here. Where a man can make his name.

(A beat. She stares at him, working up to her deeper grievance. Meanwhile, lights up on the threadbare attic room of Da' and Jimmy.)
A Projection: bare, dirty walls.)

DA' WRIGHT

Here, now. Take these straps in your mouth and hold these weights up.

JIMMY McCLARY

Da', how is holding that up gonna do any more than pull my teeth out?

DA' WRIGHT

Jimmy, people who know nothing say, "that fighter has a weak chin" and "that one, he has a strong jaw." Like it's all in the bones.

JIMMY McCLARY

Ain't it?

DA' WRIGHT

Some of it is. But most of it is in yer neck. You build those muscles up, you're gonna keep yer head on straight when it counts.

(Da' exits as lights dim on Jimmy who grimaces and endures this exercise through the next scene.)

MAMIE THOMPSON

Cecil was a godly child, till you started taking him to that devil's play pen, you call a gym.

SCIPIO THOMPSON

Stop calling that boy, Cecil. He's Young Jack Thompson and he's got to think that name 24 hours a day.

MAMIE THOMPSON

I birthed that boy out of my womb, named him, and that's what will be on his grave.

SCIPIO THOMPSON

And all his stubbornness comes from you too. Lucky, that "child" is a man now and he wants to learn to box.

MAMIE THOMPSON

He's just sixteen!

SCIPIO THOMPSON

And that boy is stronger than ninety nine out of a hundred men at the gym. So stop your sweet mother-henning.

MAMIE THOMPSON

What's a strong body matter when you got gangsters with guns there too?

SCIPIO THOMPSON

They don't bother us. *(Holding her.)* I told you that. Them racket boys just make a good show of it, so they can run their books and sell hooch to the customers.

MAMIE THOMPSON

(Pulling away) You're playing with fire, Scipio. You're gonna lose everything. Everything. Including me.

SCIPIO THOMPSON

I don't go for threats, woman.

MAMIE THOMPSON

That's no threat. Just a promise. If you don't start acting like a husband and a father - you got daughters too - otherwise, mark this: I'll stop acting like a wife.

(Lights out on Scipio and Mamie; up on Da' and Jimmy.)

DA' WRIGHT

Now, next you gotta work on your balance and where your eyes look. Here take a swing at me.

JIMMY McCLARY

Ah, Da'. I don't want to hurt you.

DA' WRIGHT

Don't worry, lad.

(Jimmy throws a gentle punch. Da' blocks it. Jimmy is not looking at Da' but instead his eyes follow his own deflected fist. Da' counters with a shove that knocks Jimmy backward.)

DA' WRIGHT

Okay, what happened?

JIMMY McCLARY

I don't know.

DA' WRIGHT

You know.

JIMMY McCLARY

I woulda' got hit.

DA' WRIGHT

Why?

JIMMY McCLARY

You blocked me.

DA' WRIGHT

No.

JIMMY McCLARY

No?

DA' WRIGHT

I didn't get hit because I blocked you. Why did you get hit?

JIMMY McCLARY

Because I wasn't fast enough? Or, if I hit you hard enough -

DA' WRIGHT

Sometimes you hit a man who can take that punch.

JIMMY McCLARY

So... I have to be able to block you... after I swing?

DA' WRIGHT

Yes. But how are you going to block me if you ain't *looking* at me??? So, before you learn to block, you gotta learn to look. Here put this book on your head and don't let it fall. Get used to keeping yer head up.

(Lights change. Da' walks out. The Projection of the Imperial Gym returns. Young Jack walks in. Overlaying that Projection: "4 months later - the Imperial Gym". Young Jack takes in the skinny white boy with a book on his head.)

YOUNG JACK

Are you here to box or go to gentleman's school?

JIMMY McCLARY

I'm here to get paid.

YOUNG JACK

Aren't you the bold one.

JIMMY McCLARY

Just hungry. But I made two dollars a fight in Vancouver. Twice.

YOUNG JACK

Well I'm going to make... five dollars a fight here. I just don't want to rush it yet.... Why are you doing that? *(Pointing at the book.)*

JIMMY McCLARY

Watch my head when I box and you'll understand. I've seen you. You're a natural. I had to train myself to do what you do naturally.

YOUNG JACK

Man, you mess up my head. You look like some choir boy but talk like a veteran.

(Jimmy shrugs and smiles shyly.)

YOUNG JACK (cont'd)

I'm Cecil... I mean Jack. Young Jack Thompson.

JIMMY McCLARY

(Laughing.) I'm Jimmy... You say your name like it's a brand new pair of tight shoes.

YOUNG JACK

My step-daddy... I mean my daddy Scipio Thompson just gave me that name.

JIMMY McCLARY

Why'd he give you a new name?

YOUNG JACK

First of all, you're Irish so you can just be yourself.

JIMMY McCLARY

The Irish aren't as popular as you think. It was a lot of Mick this, Mick that. Da' saw me fighting on the street and then got my family to let me go away with him. Something happens to me when I start fighting. It's like I got the devil in me, you know.

YOUNG JACK

I know! I know just what you mean. My momma just don't understand. That's why I like having a new name. I can be Cecil for her. And for Scipio, well like he says, there's power in a name. Jack Thompson was a great Negro heavy weight. So, I'm Young Jack, just like him... but smaller.

JIMMY McCLARY

Sorry. Never heard of him.

YOUNG JACK

Well, people all over the Bay area know him. Even the white ones. Us coloreds especially don't forget our own. You just hear the stories, you know. On the corner. At the barber. And you think, he's remembered. He's a man. I want to be remembered, like that.

JIMMY McCLARY

I just wanted to get out of the tenement, you know, fifteen of us there. Anyway, Cecil's an all right name to me. But what do I know. Anything's better than Babyface. That's all I get called.

YOUNG JACK

No, no. Babyface is a good name. Think how great it'd be for getting the girls. They'll want to hold you tight and rock you all

YOUNG JACK (*cont'd*)

night long. Saying, "Mmmm, mmmm, my poor little baby Jimmy. Let me kiss those bruises.

JIMMY McCLARY

(*Laughs shyly*) I don't know nothing about that. That's for fancy guys like you. Da', my trainer, he don't let me see girls. He says he'll make me world champ, but only if I listen to everything he says.

YOUNG JACK

What's the point of being champ if you don't get to have some fun?

JIMMY McCLARY

Not being hungry ever again. That's point enough for me.

(*Lights dim on the boys, and in another part of the stage, come up on Scipio and Da'. They look at the boys talking.*)

SCIPIO THOMPSON

Da'.

DA' WRIGHT

Scipio. (*A beat.*) Looks like the boys are getting along.

SCIPIO THOMPSON

His mother taught him right. Your boy is fast. Has a hard right.

DA' WRIGHT

Your boy's got a great left. What you say, we let them be regular sparring partners?

SCIPIO THOMPSON

Regular? I--- don't know about that. Getting that much pounding, every day. That's lots of wear and tear. I got to save him for the real thing.

DA' WRIGHT

I'd a heard you like playing the angles.

SCIPIO THOMPSON

Angles are for pool hustlers. I just want my boy to have a shot.

DA' WRIGHT

Don't we all. We're on the same team. In a way, both outsiders... I'll give you a nickel a week. For expenses.