

## **We Should Make a Documentary About Spades**

By Terrance Hayes

And here is all we'll need: a card deck, quartets of sun people  
Of the sort found in black college dormitories, some vintage  
Music, indiscriminate spirits, fried chicken, some paper,

A writing utensil, and a bottomless Saturday. We should explore  
The origins of a derogatory word like *spade* as well as the word  
For feeling alone in polite company. And also the implications  
Of calling someone who is not your brother or sister,

Brother or Sister. So little is known of our past, we can imagine  
Damn near anything. When I say maybe slaves held Spades  
Tournaments on the anti-cruise ships bound for the Colonies,  
You say when our ancestors were cooped on those ships

They were not yet slaves. Our groundbreaking film should begin  
With a low-lit den in the Deep South and the deep fried voice  
Of somebody's grandmother holding smoke in her mouth  
As she says, "The two of Diamonds trumps the two of Spades

In my house." And at some point someone should tell the story  
Where Jesus and the devil are Spades partners traveling  
The juke joints of the 1930s. We could interview my uncle Junior  
And definitely your skinny cousin Mary and any black man

Sitting at a card table wearing shades. Who do you suppose  
Would win if Booker T and MLK were matched against Du Bois  
And Malcolm X in a game of Spades? You say don't talk  
Across the table. Pay attention to the suits being played.

The object of the game is to communicate invisibly  
With your teammate. I should concentrate. Do you suppose  
We are here because we are lonely in some acute diasporafied  
Way? This should be explored in our film about Spades.

Because it is one of the ways I am still learning what it is  
To be black, tonight I am ready to master Spades. Four players  
Bid a number of books. Each team adds the bids  
Of the two partners, and the total is the number of books

That team must try to win. Is that not right? This is a game  
That tests the boundary between mathematics and magic,  
If you ask me. A bid must be intuitive like the itchiness

Of your upper lip before you sip strange whiskey.

My mother did not drink, which is how I knew something  
Was wrong with her, but she held a dry spot at the table  
When couples came to play. It's a scene from my history,  
But this probably should not be mentioned in our documentary

About Spades. *Renegade* is akin to the word for the shame  
You feel watching someone else's humiliation. Slapping  
A card down must be as dramatic as hitting the face of a drum  
With your palm, not hitting the face of a drum with a drumstick.

You say there may be the sort of outrage induced  
By liquor, trash talk, and poor strategy, but it will fade  
The way a watermark left on a table by a cold glass fades.  
I suspect winning this sort of game makes you feel godly.

I'm good and ready for who ever we're playing  
Against tonight. I am trying to imagine our enemy.  
I know you are not my enemy. You say there are no enemies  
In Spades. Spades is a game our enemies do not play.