Briar Patch

By:

Will Carter

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Characters

John Holliday: A white man in his seventies, a big personality, a smile and a handshake fast as a quickdraw, the pastor of Eatonton First Baptist, best-friend of Sherman, father of Buddy. He has his hands in lots of different pots and if you listen to him tell it, he knows everyone on God's green Earth, save one or two.

Sherman Singleton: A black man in his seventies, good-natured, more reserved with others but open with his family and with John, works as a barber, best-friend of John, father of Jeanine, grandfather of Malcolm. His main focus is to look out for his family.

Jeanine Singleton: A black woman in her later thirties, a force to be reckoned with, a former professor of Black Studies and African American literature at Boston University, now working as a 10th grade teacher, as she lives with and takes care of her father, Sherman, and her 18-year-old son, Malcolm.

Buddy Holliday: A white man in his later thirties, came back home to take care of his dying mother, and with her passed on, he is trying to get into Emory's PhD in literature program. He is teaching at the nearby technical college. He is John's son.

Malcolm Singleton: An eighteen-year-old black young man, who is an exceptional football player. He has come down to Eatonton from Boston with his mother, Jeanine, to take care of his grandfather, Sherman. He believes football is his only ticket to success.

Setting;

There are a few settings, only one is more developed than the others.

Sherman Singleton's Front Porch:

There is a porch, complete with two rocking chairs and a front door.

Buddy's Office:

There is a desk with a chair behind and a chair next to it.

The Church Stage:

The stage, with two chairs. It will involve a briar patch and a "tar baby" when the play is performed.

BRIAR PATCH

BY: WILL CARTER

SCENE ONE

(SHERMAN Singleton is sitting on his porch. He opens the paper to read. He touches his pocket, calls inside to the house.)

SHERMAN

Jeanie! Are my glasses in there!?

JEANINE
(Offstage)

It's Jeanine.

SHERMAN

What!?

JEANINE
(Entering)

Jeanine is the name that is on my birth certificate.

SHERMAN

Mom and I always called you Jeanie.

JEANINE

Dad, I'm not 8 anymore.

SHERMAN

Look, *Jeanine*, I'll call you the President of the United States if you'll bring me my glasses.

JEANINE
(Going in)

From your mouth to God's ear.

SHERMAN

I didn't think you still believed in God.

JEANINE
(Handing Sherman his glasses)

It’s an expression.

SHERMAN

Maybe you could give him another chance. Malcolm might benefit from the church.

JEANINE

I don’t know what that boy needs.

SHERMAN

He says it was the other boys who started it.

JEANINE

You believe him? I’ve got to figure out something to do with that boy.

SHERMAN

Need to keep him occupied.

JEANINE

We had a plan. He had colleges looking at him. I swear. I worked my butt off, got him tutoring, so he could still play. And then- God, I could scream.

SHERMAN

There you go again.

JEANINE

I believe that counts as taking his name in vain.

SHERMAN

Still, you sayin it.

JEANINE

Football is his only shot at college. His grades are passing at best, and with all the money I shelled out for mom, it’s not like I’ve have any leftover for him. One fight after practice, and everything-

(Enter JOHN Holliday, an overweight man in his seventies with a belly that hangs over his belt and a smile that lights up a room.)

JOHN

Now, I know you ain’t talkin bout Sherman. Man couldn’ fight his way outta a’ paper bag.

SHERMAN

(Standing up, then good-natured)

You lyin devil!

JOHN

Well, maybe a paper bag is the only thing ya could fight.

SHERMAN

I'd tear it ta pieces.

(SHERMAN and JOHN hug.)

JEANINE

Hello Mr. Holliday. What brings you by?

SHERMAN

It's Tuesday.

(Both men laugh.)

JOHN

Nothin bring me by, cept a talk with my old friend.

SHERMAN

Now, you callin me friend lets me know you up to somethin.

JEANINE

(Checking the time)

Shoot, Dad, I've got to get the school. Malcolm is here until 8 if you need anything. Please make sure he gets on the bus and most importantly, take your pills. I will call you once I'm in my planning period.

(To John)

Sorry, Mr. Holliday, these 10th graders might burn the place down if I don't have some kind of plan.

(JEANINE is off.)

JOHN

Thank the Lord, ya got her to take care a' ya. I'm sure her cookin ain't half as good as Ruth's, but ta leave her big professor job in Boston ta come down here ta take care a' you, she's got ta really love ya.

SHERMAN

At least somebody does. Now, sit yo fat, white behind down here a tell me why you really come a callin.

(JOHN sits in the chair next to Sherman.)

JOHN

I got an idea.

SHERMAN

There's a first time for everything.

JOHN

Serious now. We've got a problem at the church.

SHERMAN

I swear it's the preacher.

JOHN

You wouldn' know a sermon from a stick in the mud.

SHERMAN

Compared to yo sermon's, the stick'd be more entertainin.

JOHN

Serious now, Sherman. We're in a deep hole. I don't know if we can keep the lights on some days.

SHERMAN

Never thought the Legacy factory'd leave.

JOHN

An with the factory gone.

SHERMAN

I'll be, the money's gone too.

JOHN

Tithin is down, I mean, real down, an I-…if…if we don't get $10,000 by the end a' summer, well…we're cooked.

SHERMAN

Nothin in yo savins?

JOHN

Nope. Not no more.

SHERMAN

I had no idea it was that bad.

JOHN

I was thinkin bout somethin. Ta help with the church, help with Malcolm.

SHERMAN

Please do. That boy all angry at his mom for bringin him down here to take care a' me.

JOHN

He's probably doubly angry he got to sit out some games, so what about somethin keep him occupied?

SHERMAN

What? You got a job for him?

JOHN

Him, me, you, heck, I got a job for everybody.

SHERMAN

Man's got one idea, now he thinks he's Oprah.

JOHN

Ya know I got me more charisma than her, but tell me, what's this town famous fo?

SHERMAN

Sides Sherman Singleton? You must be talkin bout the 2nd famous person from Eatonton, Mr. Joel Chandler Harris.

JOHN

That's right! So, Sherman, I was thinkin, since it's summer an all, and we really need this money fo the church, what if we did us a play.

SHERMAN

I don't like where this is goin.

JOHN

C'mon, we get the town all excited. Jeanine might be able to get some people from up in Boston ta do a piece or two.

SHERMAN

An the church hurtin real bad?

JOHN

Sherman, please, I can't lose this church. It's my life's work. What else I got? A dead wife? A son who hates my guts? I need you, Sherman.

SHERMAN

Gosh, I'm sure we could do somethin else. You know I ain't no actor. You got a congregation full of people.

JOHN

Gettin smaller every day.

SHERMAN

John. I don't know.

JOHN

Not just the church hurtin though.

SHERMAN

What you mean?

JOHN

Now, ya gotta swear to me you won't tell nobody.

SHERMAN

You know I ain't got nobody to tell.

(JOHN looks over his shoulder, then, back at Sherman.)

JOHN

I got cancer.

SHERMAN

John, no.

JOHN

Colon. It's not too aggressive, but still, these treatments.

SHERMAN

No, John. I'm sure. I'm sure we could-

JOHN

Even as you sayin it, you sputterin. You know we ain't got one person in this town with pockets that big.

SHERMAN

I'm so sorry, John.

JOHN

You askin bout savins, an heck Sherman, after the treatments, I ain't got a lick a' those.

SHERMAN

So, what you thinkin?

JOHN

Malcolm, me, you, Buddy, maybe Jeanine-

SHERMAN

I know you ain't got money, but ya got a magic wand in those pockets?

JOHN

C'mon, ya always been the only person she'd listen to. I'm thinkin we do us a play-

SHERMAN

Now, I know you must have a magic wand in ya pocket if ya think ya can get me-

JOHN

I got two bullets in my butt says you'll do it.

SHERMAN

Aww, hell, you ain't never gonna let me live that down!

JOHN

My butt catchin these two bullets in Nam is the only reason you alive today.

(A beat.)

SHERMAN

Dang. That's one heckuva trump card.

JOHN

Only play it when it's important.

SHERMAN

Fine. I'm in if you can get Malcolm *and* get Jeanine to agree to let him do it.

JOHN

Don't worry about that.

SHERMAN

How you figure?

JOHN

The judge's a member at the church.

SHERMAN

Now, they say they caught him red-handed. I don't want to be subvertin the justice-

JOHN

It wouldn't be no subversion Sherman, but let's just say the judge was convinced by his pastor ta bump any penalty down to community service. No time served, no fine.

SHERMAN

An would that pastor friend a' mine happen to know any college admissions officers?

JOHN

I can see bout a friend at Tuscaloosa.

SHERMAN

An, I'm guessin this pastor wouldn' just do this outta the kindness of his heart.

JOHN

As the good Lord says, ya can't get nothin in this life fo free.

SHERMAN

What?

JOHN

I might be paraphrasin a bit.

(They both laugh.)

SHERMAN

Right, let me work it out with Jeanine. Just me, you, an Malcolm?

JOHN

I'm gonna try to rope Buddy in as well.

SHERMAN

He talkin to ya?

JOHN

Workin on it.

SHERMAN

Prayin for ya.

JOHN

I appreciate it, an ya know I am fo you.

SHERMAN

Ya always done right by me John.

JOHN

An you by me Sherman.

SHERMAN

Now, get yo' self over ta that church. I'm sure ya got some repentin ta do.

JOHN

Definitely fo the clunker of a sermon I'm gonna preach Sunday.

SHERMAN

It don't matter. Yo preachin always puts me to sleep.

(They laugh. JOHN starts to exit.)

JOHN

(As he's leaving)

Don't forget ta talk to Jeanine.

SHERMAN

I will. I will.

(JOHN is off.)

(To himself)

Now, what the heck have I gotten myself into?

(Lights fade on Sherman's porch.)

SCENE TWO

(Lights up on Buddy's Community College office. All that needs to be present is Buddy's desk with a chair behind it. BUDDY Holliday is seated at his desk, working on something. JOHN enters.)

BUDDY

(Not looking up)

No office hours today.

JOHN

What bout if it's yo best student?

BUDDY
(Looking up)
I don't have time.

JOHN
Buddy.

BUDDY
We haven't had a real conversation in five years. What makes you think we'll start now?

JOHN
I ain't been the one.

BUDDY
Really? You weren't the one who let her die?

JOHN
Buddy, she didn' want to-

BUDDY
I don't remember that. I remember the Betty Holliday who was barely able to remember what day it was.

JOHN
Buddy, she toll me-

BUDDY
Look, I can't right now. Okay?

JOHN
Nothin I can do make you believe me?

BUDDY
Nope.

JOHN
Nothin? Must be somethin I can do.

BUDDY
You can leave me alone.

JOHN
There's nothin I can do make ya want ta talk ta me?

BUDDY

If you could finish my letter of application- better yet, if you could get me out of teaching at this redneck technical college and into Emory's PhD in English Program, we can talk about whatever you want.

JOHN

Emory, huh? Why didn't ya say so earlier?

BUDDY

Dad. Please. This is my ticket out of here. I can't end up like you. I can't become part of the furniture here.

JOHN

God's honest truth. Ya member Mr. Stephen from growing up?

BUDDY

Yeah, what about him?

JOHN

Well, you know how he was always yo daddy's buddy from Atlanta?

BUDDY

(Sigh)

I don't have all day.

JOHN

He's in Emory's graduate admissions office-

BUDDY

Why does it feel like you have a friend everywhere?

JOHN

To some, I'm a likable guy.

BUDDY

Too likable.

JOHN

Buddy, do you want my help or not?

BUDDY

Alright, what's his first name? I'll do anything to keep me from staying in this place.

JOHN

Before I put ya in contact, have ya ever acted before?

BUDDY

In college, I was in somebody's directing project. Why?

JOHN

I've got an idea sure ta change this town forever.

(Lights fade on BUDDY's office.)

SCENE THREE

(Lights up on Sherman's porch. JEANINE and SHERMAN are on the porch together.)

JEANINE

Just community service?

SHERMAN

As long as he does this play-

JEANINE

How is this play community service?

SHERMAN

It's directed by the pastor.

HEANINE

But it's about Joel Chandler Harris?

SHERMAN

Mhmm.

JEANINE

Dad, you know how racist those Uncle Remus stories are.

SHERMAN

I know, but-

JEANINE

I can't have my son participating in that, performing that racist man's writing-

SHERMAN

It's more complicated than that.

JEANINE

Uncle Remus promotes black stereotypes.

SHERMAN

Harris supported black education.

JEANINE

Hmm.

SHERMAN

And argued fo people not being judged by their skin color-

JEANINE

Where did you get these lines? John?

SHERMAN

Don't mind where I got them. Just think, Joel Chandler Harris was a friend ta Black people.

JEANINE

And that's supposed to excuse all the racist writing?

SHERMAN

Just sayin, it's complicated.

JEANINE

Dad, think about what I teach.

SHERMAN

10th grade?

JEANINE

I am a professor of black studies, of African American literature, and you want me-

SHERMAN

I'm not sayin-

JEANINE

Think if it got out there that I was supporting-

SHERMAN

Can ya stop thinking bout yoself for once?

JEANINE

Coming down here was not for me-

SHERMAN

I'm talkin bout Malcolm.

JEANINE

All I think about is Malcolm.

SHERMAN

This is the only way make sure he's got a future.

JEANINE

It was one fight, and if you ask me, it looks like Malcolm was on the losing side.

SHERMAN

We ain't in Boston, Jeanine. You in Eatonton, Georgia, an yo son is black. Judge is lookin to make an example outta him. He runnin fo relection, an those state senators doin the same. People are hurtin, so the judge an them senators need somethin, so they pledgin to be tough on crime.

JEANINE

We know the kind of people they mean to be tough on.

SHERMAN

With the Legacy factory gone, people are angry. Bein tough on crime is a way ta distract em.

JEANINE

I can't sacrifice my beliefs because a judge and a few state politicians are in need of a scapegoat.

SHERMAN

We must deal with things as they are.

JEANINE

He says it was all started by the Edmond and Lanier boys.

SHERMAN

The quarterback and wide receiver, both their dads rich, one a state senator. How you think that's gonna work?

JEANINE

If it's a fine. I'll put it on the credit card.

SHERMAN

We are talkin bout more than a fine.

JEANINE

For a couple of punches thrown?

SHERMAN

He is a black boy fightin two rich white ones.

JEEANINE

God.

SHERMAN

You can have all the principles you want-

JEANINE

You really think-

SHERMAN

They gonna pin it on him.

(Beat.)

JEANINE

I hate it.

SHERMAN

I know.

JEEANINE

But…God.

SHERMAN

Mhmm.

JEANINE

You're right.

SHERMAN

I know.

JEANINE

This is his only shot. I can't have him end up like his father. We have worked too hard for this.

SHERMAN

Ya doin the right thing.

JEANINE

I hope so.

SHERMAN

Lemme go tell, John.

JEANINE

Just don't get too giddy about it.

SHERMAN

Only person is gonna be giddy is you.

JEANINE

About this? Dad.

SHERMAN

No, but John said he was tryin to get his boy ta participate.

JEANINE

I had a crush on Buddy when I was *fourteen* years-old-

SHERMAN

An you let it fester ever since.

JEANINE

Stop it. I swear if you tell-

SHERMAN

I ain't sayin a word.

JEANINE

You better not.

SHERMAN

You might just want ta linger around after ya drop Malcolm off at rehearsal.

JEANINE

Funny. Real funny.

SHERMAN

Think he's applying to get his PhD in literature.

JEANINE

Buddy Holliday?

SHERMAN

Mhmm. Tryin to move up from teachin at Central Georgia.

JEANINE

And he’s not married?

SHERMAN

See! I told ya ya still had feelings!

JEANINE

I’m joking, Dad.

(MALCOLM enters.)

SHERMAN

The man a’ the hour!

MALCOLM

Hey Grandad.

JEANINE

Malcolm, son, there’s something we need to talk about.

MALCOLM

Look, I know how it looks, but they started punching me. It was self-defense.

JEANINE

It’s not that.

SHERMAN

Well it is-

JEANINE

It’s to make sure that this doesn’t mess up your future.

MALCOLM

What are you talking about?

JEANINE

Do you know Mr. Holliday?

MALCOLM

Yeah, Grandad’s best-friend, always talks about how he saved Grandad’s life.

SHERMAN

I saved his butt plenty a’ times.

MALCOLM

You took bullets for him?

SHERMAN

Metaphorically speaking.

JEANINE

Mr. Holliday says he can get the judge to drop any juvenile detention recommendations-

MALCOLM

They attacked me!

SHERMAN

Malcolm.

JEANINE

You're in Eatonton.

MALCOLM

So? This place sucks.

SHERMAN

You in South Georgia.

MALCOLM

So?

JEANINE

You're a black teenager in South Georgia.

MALCOLM

Should I be lookin for a lynch mob?

JEANINE

It's an election year, and the judge wants to give you the harshest punishment possible.

MALCOLM

I didn't do anything wrong! They came at me! Shouting the N word, and I'm just supposed to take getting punched?

JEANINE

I'm not saying that-

MALCOLM

You taught me to stand up for myself.

SHERMAN
But, you in Eatonton, and here, bein black can be a crime in itself.

MALCOLM
Don't they know what I do for the football team?

JEANINE
Your coach is benching you.

MALCOLM
Yeah, for a game or two, but scouts will be comin out soon.

SHERMAN
So, being in juvenile detention might mess that up, right?

MALCOLM
Okay. Okay. What do I sign?

JEANINE
What?

MALCOLM
I'll do it. Fine, whatever. I'll do it. Whatever it is.

SHERMAN
Mr. Holliday is doing a play about Joel Chandler Harris.

MALCOLM
This is the community service?

JEANINE
Do you want to do it?

MALCOLM
And I don't go to juvie?

SHERMAN
Nope.

MALCOLM
And I get to play on the team after these two games?

JEANINE
Yes.

MALCOLM

I'm in.

SHERMAN

Great! I'll call John.

(SHERMAN exits.)

JEANINE

You sure? We can try and fight this if you want. We might get a public defender-

MALCOLM

Look how that worked out for dad.

JEANINE

I know, but you're different.

MALCOLM

Not to them.

JEANINE

Malcolm.

MALCOLM

Screw it. If this is how they wanna play, fine. I'm gonna do the stupid play, and then, then, it's done. Like you said, college is my only shot.

JEANINE

Malcolm.

MALCOLM

Mom, I'm not dumb. I know what my grades look like. I also know how good I am on the field. If I don't finish this season, it's over.

JEEANINE

You are so-

MALCOLM

My grades might suck, but I'm smart like you.

JEANINE

Your dad is smart too.

MALCOLM

Not so smart to be free.

JEANINE

I just…Malcolm-

MALCOLM

I'm smart enough to know when I only got one shot.

JEANINE

Let's not blow it.

(Lights fade on Sherman's porch.)

SCENE FOUR

(Lights come up on the church stage. JOHN is sitting in a chair. SHERMAN enters.)

JOHN

Uncle Remus in the flesh!

SHERMAN

Oh no, we ain't startin callin me that now.

JOHN

Where's Malcolm?

SHERMAN

On his way. His mother is takin him

JOHN

Good, cause I got a problem, Sherman.

SHERMAN

Yo face.

JOHN

Serious now.

SHEERMAN

What is it?

JOHN

I got Buddy to do the play by tellin him my friend Stephen Johnson works at Emory Admissions.

SHERMAN

Don't tell me you done made him up.

JOHN

No, I ain't done that, but I did call his house.

SHERMAN

Yeah?

JOHN

Wife says he's been dead for two years.

SHERMAN

Ya know yo bible well enough ta bring a man back from the dead?

JOHN

Serious now. I'm tryin ta get close ta the boy. Build a relationship with him in case…in case…in case I go…

SHERMAN

He know the truth bout Betty?

JOHN

You know I can't tell him that.

SHERMAN

Ya need to.

JOHN

He'd never believe me. There's no way he could stand ta think that about his mom.

SHERMAN

Just cause she took her own life don't mean nothin.

JOHN

He'd probably accuse me.

SHERMAN

Did he not see her?

JOHN

Talked on the phone, an he saw her at the…the funeral. Pills don't make you look no different.

SHERMAN

You got two things you gotta tell this boy.

JOHN

Afta the play's done, I promise.

SHERMAN

You gotta tell him before.

JOHN

I don't want him ta go.

SHERMAN

That ain't fa ya to decide.

(Silence. JOHN sits with this.)

JOHN

You right.

SHERMAN

Aren't I always?

JOHN

Quiet now. Someone might figure you smart.

(They laugh. A beat.)

SHERMAN

Buddy comin?

JOHN

Finishin up his application ta Emory, an then, then he'll be here.

SHERMAN

He better be. Ain't no way I'm playin two parts.

JOHN

Was fixin to turn it into a one man show.

(JEANINE and MALCOLM enter. MALCOLM has a black eye.)

JEANINE

Really, Malcolm, I'm sure John understands.

MALCOLM

Nah, it's fine. I'm fine.

SHERMAN

Malcolm, what happened?

MALCOLM

I tripped is all.

JOHN

Looks like ya tripped on a fist.

MALCOLM

Tripped on the stairs.

SHERMAN

Who did it?

MALCOLM

I tripped.

JOHN

Son, we can all see you were punched.

SHERMAN

Is it who I think it is?

JEANINE

I don’t care if his dad is a state senator.

MALCOLM

Mom. Please don’t do anything. I cannot afford to have anyone on the team against me.

JEANINE

Malcolm.

SHERMAN

Jeanie.

MALCOLM

What?

JEANINE

I know.

JOHN

I can talk to-

MALCOLM

Please don't.

JEANINE

Malcolm, I don't care who I hurt, if someone-

MALCOLM

But I do. If the team is against me-

SHERMAN

Why are they-

MALCOLM

They were pissed I was getting so much of the spotlight. I might take the attention off them. Said they needed to finish the job.

SHERMAN

So, they beat you.

MALCOLM

What can I do? The whole team listens to them, so imagine me a running back. If I get the ball, and they don't block for me?

JEANINE

Jesus Christ.

SHERMAN

Jeanie-

JEANINE

No. I don't care if I am taking his name in vain. Do you hear your grandson?

SHERMAN

Yes.

MALCOLM

If they don't block for me, there's no chance of college-

JEANINE

The injuries you could-

MALCOLM

And I won't get a chance to play. My ability to get recruited goes out the window.

JEANINE

So what was this?

MALCOLM

Thinkin I can't play if I'm injured.

SHERMAN

Are ya?

MALCOLM

A little sore, but I'm okay.

JEANINE

I can't look at your face right now and not think of your dad. I cannot have the same thing happen to you.

MALCOLM

Mom, it's okay.

JEANINE

You didn't see his bloodied face, try to hold his broken hands.

MALCOLM

I just need to play the next game.

SHERMAN

This is your life we're talkin bout son-

MALCOLM

What does mom say is my only way out-

JEANINE

Malcolm-

MALCOLM

Football is my way to college-

JEANINE

Not if you're dead!

MALCOLM

I just gotta keep my mouth shut.

JOHN

Whatever help you need, jus let me know.

MALCOLM

I need to do this play. It'll keep the judge outta my business.

JEANINE

Malcolm.

MALCOLM

Let's just do this.

JEANINE

Son.

MALCOLM

I fell down the stairs. That's it.

SHERMAN

Malcolm-

MALCOLM

Will everybody top it!? I'm fine! I'm good. No time to stop, so can we get on start rehearsal?

JOHN

You heard the boy. Let's get started. Everybody take a script.

(He passes out scripts.)

SHERMAN

You sure he's comin?

JOHN

He'll be here.

MALCOLM

Who we talkin bout?

SHERMAN

Yo mom's old crush.

JEANINE

I swear, Dad. I will switch up your pills.

JOHN

Malcolm, we're waitin on my son, Buddy. He went to school with Jeanine here.

JEANINE

Thank you, Mr. Holliday.

(A look to Sherman)

And that is all the relevant information.

(BUDDY enters, a bit out of breath.)

BUDDY

Sorry, I was deep into my application, when I looked at the time-

(Seeing Jeanine)

Oh, hey, Jeanine. Long time no see.

JEANINE

Hello, Buddy. It is good to see you.

BUDDY

Good to see you! You doing this thing?

JEANINE

No, but I'm my dad and my son, Malcolm, here's, ride.

BUDDY

Cool. Cool.

JOHN

Who knows, we might be able to get a part for her in this thing.

JEANINE

Nope.

SHERMAN

Jeanie-

JEANINE

Don't you Jeanie me. It's a no.

JOHN

Ya ain't even read the play.

JEANINE

Mr. Holliday, you're a sweet man, but it's a "no" from me.

JOHN

Alright, alright.

(Handing a script to Buddy)

Everybody got a script?

SHERMAN

Lemme guess-

JOHN

You goin to be great as Uncle Remus.

JEANINE-

No, Dad, tell me-

MALCOLM

Wait, who's playing the tar baby?

JEANINE

Mr. Holliday-

BUDDY

And I'm Mr. Fox?

JOHN

Alright, easy does it. Easy does it. Sherman is Uncle Remus, Buddy, yes, you're Mr. Fox, and Malcolm, you are going to be the hero of the story, Brer Rabbit.

JEANINE

Mr. Holliday, if I could-

JOHN

Yes, I understand, this might be one of the harder stories to-

JEANINE

It has the phrase tar baby in the title-

SHERMAN

Jeanine. We'll talk after. This is-

JEANINE

Excuse me, I have a lot to say. First, I-

SHERMAN

Remember.

(Looking at Malcolm)

Remember, what we were talkin bout?

JEANINE

We *will* talk about this later. Good night, Malcolm, Buddy, Mr. Holliday.

SHERMAN

Good night, Dad.

JEANINE

Did you all hear something?

SHERMAN

Funny.

JEANINE

Malcolm, I'll be back at 8, and I'll pick you up and, maybe, your grandad.

(JEANINE exits.)

MALCOLM

It's not going to be a fun ride home.

SHERMAN

Lookin at yo bruises, it wasn' gonna a fun ride home no how.

MALCOLM

I'm just gonna be quiet.

BUDDY

If you knew your mother back in high school, she was on track to be a lawyer.

JOHN

She could be an actress.

SHERMAN

Doesn't have the talent of her old man.

JOHN

Speaking a' talent, let's start from the top.

BUDDY

Where do you want us to stand?

JOHN

You and Buddy can stand off to the side, and Sherman, you be stage center. Take it away.

SHERMAN

Ok. Here goes nothing.

(Switching to Uncle Remus)

One day, after Brer Fox bin doin' all dat he could for ta ketch Brer Rabbit, en Brer Rabbit bin doin' all he could fer ta keep 'im from it, Brer Fox say to hisse'f dat he'd put up a game on Brer Rabbit, en he ain't more got de words out'n his mouf till Brer Rabbit come a-lopin' up de big road, lookin' des ez plump en ez fat en ez sassy ez a Moggin hoss in a barley-patch.

MALCOLM

What?

SHERMAN

It's not your line.

MALCOLM

No, that's Malcolm's talkin.

JOHN

I'll make a note to edit this part. Keep goin.

BUDDY

Hol' on dar, Brer Rabbit.

MALCOLM

I ain't got time, Brer Fox.

BUDDY

"'I wanter have some confab wid you-

(out of character)

See, I think if we modernized it, it'd be easier to read and to understand.

JOHN

Buddy, you can help me out with that after rehearsal. Keep going.

MALCOLM

'All right, Brer Fox, but you better holler fum whar you stan': I'm monstus full er fleas dis mawnin.

BUDDY

'I seed Brer B'ar yistiddy, 'en he sorter raked me over de coals kaze you en me ain't make frens en live naberly, en I told him dat I'd see you.'

MALCOLM

All a-settin', Brer Fox. S'posen you drap roun' ter-morrer en take dinner wid me. We ain't got no great doin's at our house, but I speck de ole 'oman en de chilluns kin sort o' scramble roun' en git up sump'n fer ter stay yo' stummuck.

BUDDY

'I'm 'gree'ble, Brer Rabbit.

MALCOLM

A'ight. I'll pen on you.

SHERMAN

Nex' day, Mr. Rabbit an' Miss Rabbit got up soon, 'fo day, en raided on a gyarden like Miss Sally's out dar, en got some cabbiges-

(Out of character)

What in the heck is all this? Feel like I'm readin a child's writin.

JOHN

That's a town hero right there you readin.

MALCOLM

Mom's right, though. This stuff's racist.

JOHN

Why is that?

MALCOLM

Why are these characters talkin crazy? Why can't Uncle Remus be more, more- what's the word mom hates people to describe her as?

SHERMAN

Articulate.

JOHN

There's a five-dollar word.

MALCOLM

I've got 100-dollar ones if you're interested.

SHERMAN

Now, Malcolm, all John's done is put the words of Joel Chandler Harris here.

MALCOLM

It just seems crazy to honor this man. Grandad, don't you think this stuff sounds racist?

BUDDY

I do think we could take a look at it.

JOHN

Ok, fine….I uh…I agree we will. It's just, heck, I just…just want to get through this.

SHERMAN

Where you want us to start?

MALCOLM

I'm not sure I'm ready to.

JOHN

Malcolm, yo grandad tell you what we…we gonna do for you?

MALCOLM

Yes, sir, he did, and I thank you.

JOHN

And Ted Lanier is a member a' my church.

SHERMAN

Father to one of those boys who messed ya up.

BUDDY

Did this happen at school?

MALCOLM

I can't afford to be in the hospital, so I'm not sayin anythin. I'm just gonna admit that I was the aggressor in the fight.

SHERMAN

The heck you are.

BUDDY

They're just jealous of you.

MALCOLM

But they could really ruin my life.

JOHN

I can say somethin to their dad if ya like.

MALCOLM

An end up worse than this?

SHERMAN

Malcolm.

MALCOLM

I've got it figured out. Okay? I just confess, and the judge sees my community service.

SHERMAN

But if ya didn't do anythin-

MALCOLM

You said it yourself, Grandad. I'm a black boy in South Georgia. What hope do I have? Now, if we could get-

BUDDY

Malcolm.

MALCOLM

I got it handled. Okay? Can everyone stop with their worried looks? Can we get back to the play? I'm just struggling with this script is all.

JOHN

Son, how much you know about Joel Chandler Harris?

MALCOLM

I don't have to know much to know this stuff is racist.

JOHN

Look, I get it. There are stereotypes here. It's just a bit more complicated than stereotypes.

MALCOLM

Now you lost me. Stereotypes are what got my dad locked up.

SHERMAN

What John is sayin is that fo his time, Joel Chandler Harris was…uh

JOHN

Actually pretty ahead of it.

MALCOLM

Tell me.

JOHN

Sherman, I think it's best if you-

SHERMAN

John, now, it's your play-

JOHN

I think coming from you-

MALCOLM

Will somebody please tell me the point?

SHERMAN

Think here, Malcolm, this man was born in the 1800's.

JOHN

1858 to be exact.

SHERMAN

Right here in Eatonton.

JOHN

Worked on a plantation, and-

MALCOLM

Now you lost me.

JOHN

Spent many nights in the slaves' quarters. He felt safer there, less self-conscious. See, he was an illegitimate son a' Irish immigrants-

MALCOLM

I have a lot to-

JOHN

Judge toll me about yo case. He said he was shocked at what State Senator Lanier toll him, and he said we can't have this- and I quote- "black hoodlum causin trouble".

MALCOLM

Hoodlum? What the actual-

JOHN

He said that the town needed to make an example of you, but I stood up for ya, told him all about this community service ya doin.

BUDDY

Malcolm, look, I don't want to be here anymore than you do.

MALCOLM

Then, come on. You drive me home. At least I won't have to hear my mom yellin at me.

BUDDY

But, just think, my dad- who is not the best guy in the world believe you me-

JOHN

Hold on now-

BUDDY

He's trying to talk to this judge.

MALCOLM

Ok?

BUDDY

Why don't you see him as helping you?

MALCOLM

He gonna keep me safe? Like they kept my dad safe? Cop pulled him over for speeding, but then, he was- if I may quote the police report- "Violent, aggressive, and noncompliant". They booked him for assaulting an officer, but funny thing is he was the one with the busted face, smashed fingers, and a broken jaw. With his record, when he gets out, he can't find a job.

SHERMAN

Then, you should see how it's necessary to keep you out of jail.

MALCOLM

I'm not good at school. Ain't got rhythm, can't dance. System is broken. Sports is my only way.

BUDDY

Malcolm.

MALCOLM

Don't say my name like you know me.

BUDDY

No, I don't, but look, you said it yourself. The system is broken. Why not use a broken system to your advantage. This fat, old white guy-

JOHN

Excuse me-

SHERMAN

Don't shut the boy up when he's tellin the truth.

BUDDY

I'm making a good point, Dad, promise. John Holliday is no saint, let my mom die of cancer.

JOHN

She wanted to just trust the Lord. Didn't want the treatment.

BUDDY

Even still, you aren't a saint. Bible says it right there in Romans.

SHERMAN

He's got you there.

BUDDY

(To Malcolm)

Use the system for your benefit. Yes, he wants you to act in this play, and is Joel Chandler Harris problematic? You bet, but I see kids like you every day at the technical college. You think the system's broken, and you give up on the system, but the system's all we got. You've got to make the system work for you.

SHERMAN

Lotta wisdom there for ya Malcolm.

BUDDY

Shoot, sorry. I feel like I'm monologuing.

MALCOLM

You good.

BUDDY

I'm just trying to make what little I get out of my job now count for something.

SHERMAN

(His phone buzzes, to Malcolm)

Heck, yo momma on her way.

MALCOLM

Dang.

JOHN

Malcolm, you the star a' the show.

MALCOLM

Mom's my ride though.

JOHN

I'll drive ya home.

(To SHERMAN)

Borrow yo car?

SHERMAN

What about Jeanine?

BUDDY

I'll give her a ride. Been meaning to catch up with her.

MALCOLM

Oh, mom is going to love-

SHERMAN

Malcolm, now.

(A look to Malcolm)

You ready to rehearse?

(Lights fade on the church.)

SCENE FIVE

(BUDDY and JEANINE walk outside Sherman's House.)

BUDDY

Thank you again for letting me drive you home.

JEANINE

My dad practically insisted. He said they were both going to talk to Malcolm.

BUDDY

Poor boy.

JEANINE

From what you were saying, it sounds like he made his mother proud.

BUDDY

Absolutely. He told my dad right to his face that the play was racist. But uh…to be completely honest…I encouraged him to stay with the play.

JEANINE

Buddy Holliday. How dare you.

BUDDY

Look, my dad is a connected man. If the judge is willing to listen to my dad, Malcolm has a shot at something. You know how backwards this place can be.

JEANINE

Dad said the judge was looking to quote “throw the book at him”.

BUDDY

I don’t doubt it. Though, I don’t know how far that old Judge Walker can throw.

(They laugh. A moment.)

JEANINE

Buddy, why in the heck would you move back to this awful place?

BUDDY

Same reason you did.

JEANINE

Your dad doesn’t seem in poor health.

BUDDY

I moved back for my mom, came here right before she passed. She was really struggling. Though, dad’s not in the best health either I think.

JEANINE

Yeah?

BUDDY

I hear him groaning from the bathroom.

JEANINE

My dad groans when he sits down, stands up, makes any movement at all.

BUDDY

No, like painful groans.

JEANINE

Oh God, I’m sorry.

BUDDY

Guess that’s maybe another reason to be here, to do this. I don’t know how much time he’s got.

JEANINE

Yeah, maybe I should try and help out.

BUDDY

It would be nice to have an ally there.

JEANINE

(A smile)

Can you get your dad to write the part of the angry black woman?

BUDDY

(Laughing)

I'll see what I can do, but knowing him, he might think he can play it.

(They laugh.)

JEANINE

God help us.

(They laugh and smile. A beat.)

BUDDY

Are you planning on staying here for a while?

JEANINE

Until Malcolm graduates at least.

BUDDY

I can't wait to get out of this place. Mom dying was the worst pain I felt, especially when I know Dad could've talked her into some treatment.

JEANINE

To heal her?

BUDDY

Or at least make her last weeks better.

JEANINE

So, you are looking to get up through sooner rather than later.

BUDDY

I'm hoping to get to Atlanta as soon as possible.

JEANINE

No, I've worked too hard. Malcolm got a good thing going with football. If it gets him into college, I don't want to mess him up. Then….

BUDDY

Then…

JEANINE

I don't know. I want to go to Boston, but I don't know if I can be too far from Dad.

BUDDY

Maybe, Atlanta?

JEANINE

Isn't someone else I know supposed to be there?

BUDDY

Yeah, so?

JEANINE

If I didn't know better, Buddy, I think you might like me.

BUDDY

I think you might be right.

(They smile at each other.)

JEEANINE

So, are you going to ask me on a date?

BUDDY

Yes please.

JEANINE

Go on.

BUDDY

Shoot. Sorry. I'm not good at this.

JEANINE
(Smiling)

It's okay.

BUDDY

Do you know, like, would you, tomorrow, after rehearsal, would you go on a dinner date with me?

JEANINE

It's cute how bad you are at this.

BUDDY

You think I'm cute.

JEANINE

Yes.

(They smile. BUDDY lingers.)

JEANINE

I'll see you tomorrow night Buddy.

BUDDY

See you tomorrow night.

(JEANINE walks up the steps.)

JEANINE

I'm looking forward to it.

BUDDY

Me too.

(JEANINE walks inside. Light fade on Sherman's house.)

SCENE SIX

(Lights come up on Malcolm sitting on the porch of Sherman's house. He is holding a noose. JEANINE rushes on.)

JEANINE

I left as soon as your grandad called me.

MALCOLM

What am I supposed to do?

JEANINE

You know who did it?

MALCOLM

Who you think?

JEANINE

Did you call the cops?

MALCOLM

And make it worse? Jake and Matt were chuckling and looking as I came to my locker.

JEANINE

Nobody stopped them?

MALCOLM

They must've gotten there early to be able to put the noose there.

JEANINE

And nobody said a thing.

MALCOLM

It sends a message.

JEANINE

I'll call the principal.

MALCOLM

The last thing I need is for them to be against me even more.

JEANINE

I don't want the next noose to not be a prank and to be around you

MALCOLM

And I don't want to die from a head injury caused by my teammates.

JEANINE

We can get you into college another way.

MALCOLM

This is not just my way out. It's my dream.

JEANINE

Malcolm.

MALCOLM

I ain't good at nothin else. I got no gold stars for school, no other trophies on the mantel.

JEANINE

You are smart.

MALCOLM

How would anyone know that?

JEANINE

They could-

MALCOLM

Except when they see me on the field.

JEANINE

Son.

MALCOLM

Then, they know.

JEANINE

I just wish we could get your story out there. So, people could see who you really are, get colleges to see what a great young man you are.

MALCOLM

Those Lanier boys-

JEANINE

Screw them.

MALCOLM

Mom.

JEANINE

You heard me. Screw them. I have had about enough of their b.s. I believe you, son. You didn't do anything wrong. You are just better on the field, and they're jealous. Screw them.

MALCOLM

Thank you, mom.

JEANINE

I just need to see how we can get your story out there, so the judge, the world can know who you really are.

MALCOLM

But their dad-

JEANINE

Screw him too!

(They laugh. A moment.)

MALCOLM

I love you, mom.

JEANINE

I love you too, Malcolm.

MALCOLM

Thank you for supporting me.

JEANINE

Of course, but you have to promise me one thing.

MALCOLM

Yeah?

JEANINE

You need to promise me that you will not make me have to see your face bloodied and broken, that I won't have to hold your broken hand while you are carried on a stretcher.

MALCOLM

Mom.

JEANINE

No. You don't get to "Mom" me. I was there with your dad after the cops almost ended his life. I cannot bear to do the same thing with you or worse, lose you. You have to promise me that you won't put me in that situation or that if you are in that situation, you run as fast as those legs will carry you.

MALCOLM

I promise.

JEANINE

Because when I saw your face after that fight, my heart almost fell to the bottom of the Earth.

MALCOLM

You should've seen their faces.

JEANINE

You won round one.

MALCOLM

Now, we figure out how to get outta this mess.

JEANINE

And leave them with it.

MALCOLM

If only people knew, but I know you're worried about your career.

JEANINE

Didn't I just say screw em? Well, you know what, screw anybody who doesn't want to hire me for supporting me son.

MALCOLM

Yeah?

JEANINE

Let's get it out there.

(Lights fade on Sherman's house.)

SCENE SEVEN

(Lights come up on Buddy's classroom. BUDDY is on the phone.)

BUDDY

I'm so sorry…My condolences….Still, I lost my mom. Grief is hard…Thank you….Goodbye.

(BUDDY hangs up the phone. MALCOLM enters.)

MALCOLM

Hey Mr. Holliday, how are you?

BUDDY

Not great, my lifeline to Emory might be cut.

MALCOLM

What?

BUDDY

It's somebody my dad knows who was going to help me out.

MALCOLM

Dang, I'm sorry.

BUDDY

It's all good. What's up?

MALCOLM

I'm tryin to get my story out there. Figure I might get some college interest, might help me out.

BUDDY

Story about?

MALCOLM

Me doing this play, my football career, your dad's church.

BUDDY

Oh, but that kind of attention could really-

MALCOLM

It was my mom's advice. Says she thinks it might be the best way to save me.

(A moment. BUDDY thinks about it.)

MALCOLM

If it's too much, I-

BUDDY

Candance Bliss.

MALCOLM

What?

BUDDY

She's a reporter at the AJC. Let me see if I still have her number.

MALCOLM

Really?

BUDDY

Yeah, you got your phone?

MALCOLM

(Taking out phone, ready to enter a new contact)

Yeah.

(Lights fade on Buddy's classroom.)

SCENE EIGHT

(Lights come up on the porch of Sherman's house. JEANINE, upset, comes out of the door, SHERMAN following behind.)

SHERMAN

Jeanine.

JEANINE

They're doing a write up.

SHERMAN

I think him being in the paper is a good thing.

JEANINE

I told him to get his story out there-

SHERMAN

An that's what he's-

JEANINE

I know it's good but think about the implications.

SHERMAN

Won't this help with college?

JEANINE

Maybe for him!

SHERMAN

Excuse me?

JANINE

What about me?

SHERMAN

I thought you told him to do it.

JEANINE

I know, but I need a job after. It's just…for once, I don't know. I don't know.

SHERMAN

The play's an easy way to make sure Malcolm goes to college, an this attention gonna put pressure on the judge, maybe get some attention from colleges. To make sure all yo hard work with this boy doesn't go to waste, make sure he don't end up like his father.

JEANINE

That's not fair to Marcus.

SHERMAN

Got on the wrong side of a cop, no doubt, but he ain't no saint.

JEANINE

He was assaulted.

SHERMAN

You remember who watched Malcolm? Member who took care of him?

JEANINE

But you told me to finish my bachelors-

SHERMAN

You was doin what was right. I ain't mad at you, but I know sure as heaven, Marcus was not good enough for you, an I told ya that. He didn' have ambition, goals, no hope of nothin.

JEANINE

He was a mistake. Except that he gave me Malcolm.

SHERMAN

And I love my grandson more than anythin, and that's why he gonna do that play.

JEANINE

Dad.

SHERMAN

He gonna do it. I don't care if I havta ask him to call me an Uber.

JEANINE

Dad!

SHERMAN

What?

JEANINE

You're right-

SHERMAN

Thank you.

JEANINE

But I still need to live, need a life as well. Is that too much to ask? I will do anything for my son to be successful, but what about me?

SHERMAN

Jeanie.

JEANINE

Dang, life is such a…such a…a….

SHERMAN

Briar patch.

JEANINE

Yeah.

(SHERMAN gets a phone call.)

SHERMAN

(Answering phone)

Hey, John.….Yes, yes, we'll be there early…See you soon.

JEANINE

Who was that?

SHERMAN

John wants to talk to Malcolm about something important.

JEANINE

How important?

SHERMAN

Said it was important, and John wouldn' call Malcolm to come early if it wasn' important.

JEANINE

I need it to be good news. Right now, I can only take good news.

(Lights fade on Sherman's porch.)

SCENE NINE

(Lights come up on the church. JOHN is sitting down in a chair. MALCOLM enters, his arm in a sling.)

JOHN

Good evening, Malcolm. How, how are you…doin tonight? What happened?

MALCOLM

That write-up got me all kinds of attention.

JOHN

You…what did they…did they do?

MALCOLM

I fought em off. They just twisted my wrist is all. Ran away before they could really hurt me.

JOHN

Oh, I'm so…I'm so…sorry, Malcolm.

MALCOLM

Mr. Holliday, you doin okay?

JOHN

Oh, it's all good, Malcolm. I'm…I'm…Just tired is all.

MALCOLM

Yeah, I get that.

JOHN

Old an…feeble.

MALCOLM

Nah, you lookin good to me.

JOHN

A loud voice and a… big personality cover a… a…multitude a sins. Now, Malcolm…I wanted you to…to come here early because…because I have….have some good and bad…bad news for…for you.

MALCOLM

Yeah?

JOHN

My buddy…bud…ddy at…University of Ala…Alabam…a…he saw…saw yo…yo article.

MALCOLM

What did he say?

JOHN

Only thing is…thing is…the judge.

MALCOLM

Yeah?

JOHN

Says he…he…he…he want…want a…trial.

MALCOLM

No. No.

JOHN

His re-el…relection, an…Senator Lanier got….got other….other politicians…and…and they…they…they want to…want to put it on…on you.

MALCOLM

But what about the play?

(BUDDY enters.)

BUDDY

Sorry, I'm a little early.

JOHN

You…good.

BUDDY

Final dress rehearsal. I'm excited. Big show's tomorrow night!

JOHN

Yeah…big…show.

BUDDY

Dad, are you okay?

JOHN

Tired…I was…was…tellin Mal…colm.

BUDDY

Dad?

JOHN

I got him…a…a talk with…

BUDDY

Dad!

JOHN

Alabama.

MALCOLM

What!? Thank you!

(JOHN passes out, falls to the ground.)

BUDDY MALCOLM

Dad! Mr. Holliday!

(BUDDY takes out his phone. MALCOLM runs to John.)

BUDDY

911. I need an ambulance right now at Eatonton First Baptist!

(Lights fade on the church.)

SCENE TEN

(The scene is John's hospital room. All that is required is a hospital bed with JOHN in it. BUDDY is by the bedside. JEANINE, SHERMAN, and MALCOLM enter.)

SHERMAN

I thought you was supposed to outlive all of us.

BUDDY

He still might.

JEANINE
(To BUDDY)

What's the prognosis?

JOHN

I ain't dead yet.

SHERMAN

Quiet now, grown folks is talkin.

JOHN

God as my witness-

BUDDY

His cancer is progressing.

MALCOLM

Is that what made him pass out?

BUDDY

Yes.

JOHN

I just wanted to…do somethin…that mattered before I die.

SHERMAN

You saved my black behind. That should count for somethin.

JOHN

Less than…you think.

MALCOLM

Mr. Holliday, you can't go.

JOHN

I ain't dead.

BUDDY

It's very serious though. No introducing the play.

JOHN

Buddy…

BUDDY

No, you need to be here.

MALCOLM

Don't worry, Mr. Holliday. We'll record it for you. It's the least we can do. Mom, did Buddy tell you?

JEANINE

Tell me what?

BUDDY

Good news and bad news.

JEANINE

Bad news first.

BUDDY

You don't want to hear the best news?

JEANINE

As a black woman, I always need to start with the bad news. I need to know what I'm heading into.

SHERMAN

It's some racist crap is what it is.

BUDDY

I'm going to talk to the judge.

JEANINE

What?

MALCOLM

Those white boys think they can pin it on me, but they put a noose on my locker. I don't care what they say.

JEANINE

Will somebody tell me what is going on?

MALCOLM

The judge is interested in doing a trial.

JEANINE

No, you cannot go to trial.

BUDDY

Let me talk to him.

JOHN

I can…I can talk to him.

SHERMAN

He go to trial here, they gonna send him away.

BUDDY

I'm sure Candance can do another article.

JEANINE

What's the good news?

BUDDY

The article on Malcolm got a lot of views, got picked up all over social media. He's getting a lot of attention.

JEANINE

By whom?

MALCOLM

I'm getting looked at by Alabama.

JEANINE

What?

JOHN

If you get it…it could be..a…Full…scholarship.

JEANINE

That's great!

MALCOLM

University of Alabama here I come! Hopefully.

SHERMAN
(To JOHN)

Thank you.

JOHN
(To SHERMAN)

Now, you owe me…twice over.

SHERMAN

I might need to make sure the bullets in your butt still there.

JOHN

You want me to, to…roll over?

SHERMAN

On second thought, ain't nobody need to see that.

(They laugh.)

MALCOLM

Who is going to take over Mr. Holliday's part? Who's going to MC the show?

JEANINE

I'll do it.

SHERMAN

You sure?

JEANINE

Yes.

JOHN

Jea…nine….I thought you…you hated…hated…Joel Chandler…Hariis.

JEANINE

My feelings haven't changed, but Malcolm's article on this play got University of Alabama's attention to consider my son for a full ride. This isn't about my feelings anymore.

BUDDY

Thank you, Jeanine.

JEANINE

Plus, I've got a few things to say.

SHERMAN

Jeanine.

JOHN

Now…you all get….you got dress…rehearsal.

BUDDY

Might not be time for that.

JOHN

But I-

BUDDY

No buts, you've got surgery. I'm not letting you go that easily. You will not go like Mom.

JOHN

Thank you…son.

BUDDY

Of course.

JOHN

After surge…surgery…surgery….I need ta….ta…tell you some…somethin bout….bout yo mom….somethin…

BUDDY

Okay. Keep your energy now. You need it.

SHERMAN
(To BUDDY)

We'll see you tomorrow then?

JEANINE
(To BUDDY)

Call me after.

BUDDY

Will do.

JOHN

Thank you…all.

MALCOLM

Don't worry, Mr. Holliday. We are going to save your church.

JEANINE

Let's hope we can get people out tomorrow.

JOHN

You'll do…great.

(Light fade on John's hospital bed.)

SCENE ELEVEN

(The scene opens to the church stage. JEANINE walks out, addresses the audience.)

JEANINE

I'm sure I'm not the person you were expecting to see, but as many of you know, the person you were expecting is in surgery right now, with the hopes of removing the cancer that progressed quicker than we could believe.

I know. I know you're scared. I know you're worried, and honestly, I am too. It's no surprise to any who know me that John Holliday and I have our differences, especially when it comes to the play you are about to see, but I think John Holliday has a lot in common with Joel Chandler Harris. John Holliday can be a little deaf on issues of race, but he has a caring heart. He has been working to help my son get a future. He worked to get the judge to consider this play community service, and now, because of the article about Malcolm and this play, the University of Alabama is looking at my son.

Judge Walker, if you're here, please know that you could be putting a likely future University of Alabama football player in juvenile detention. Mr. Walker, please know you would be putting a boy behind bars who did nothing wrong. They put a noose on his locker. They beat him up. They put my son's life at risk, and you think one AJC story mentioning the racism of the senator's boy and his friend might be bad, just think of what will happen if you put Malcolm into juvenile detention. Think about how many stories Ms. Bliss might write about a racist judge. That might really hurt your re-election. And think about the videos, the hashtags, think how many influencers and activists might come to down to Eatonton. Gosh, and think, what if one of the many black people you know just happened to slip where you, Mr. Lanier, and Mr. Edmond live. That might make a whole mess of trouble for you all. Can you think of all the cars parked outside your houses?

I know who the other boys are, and you know who I am. More than that, you know who John Holliday is, and now, you know what John Holliday has done for me, for my son.
More than that, he has two bullets in his butt cheeks. I'm sorry to say- really, I don't want to put any mental images in your head, but it really is important. He has two bullets in his butt because he saved my father, Sherman Singleton's, life.

Joel Chandler Harris did write his characters as racist stereotypes. That is true. Now, don't get mad at me. I'm telling you the truth, but- BUT he did a lot of good.

He fought for black education and really believed and sought to convince his friends to judge men not by the color of their skin but rather, by the content of their character. Was Harris perfect? Hell no.

Catches herself)

Sorry. I forgot I was in a church for a second.

(A smile)

Heck no.

He was not perfect, but he tried, in his own, messed up way, to make the world better and brought a mixing of black and white culture, bringing us the stories of the slaves he befriended to the world with Brer Rabbit.

It's hard…You might know me as this year's 10th grade teacher, but before that, I was a professor of African American Literature and Black Studies. Then, my mom got sick. She died, and my dad needed help. I didn't want to come here. I wanted to stay in Boston. I had a career up

there, and I felt my son had a future. His dad was put in a terrible situation, but I was not going to let my son be in the same one. But…mom died, and family came first.

Life's a briar patch. You are jumping from one thorn to the next, trying your best to get out with getting the least amount of hurt. And people are part of that patch. Joel Chandler Harris has his briars, his faults, his damage, but there are flowers in the patch, his advocacy for black education and equal rights.

John Holliday's got his briars, sure. He is ignorant to how his prejudices come out. He is ignorant often of the feelings of those whose experiences he was unfamiliar with. However, the man has his flowers, the friendship and kindness he has shown my father over the years and how he has helped my son more than anyone else.

Judge Walker, please, I beg of you to do the right thing and give my son a chance. If not for me, do it for John.

Malcolm is just so good on the field that they put on a noose on his locker and beat him up. I know that you feel pressured to let the Lanier boy and Edmond boy off but let mine be one of thousands of black voices around the country reminding you to do the right thing.

You can't sweep this under the rug of boys being boys. What they did is racist, and if you can give my boy a chance, he can do the only thing many black young men in this situation have to do, flee to a better life somewhere else. Then, you won't have to worry about the Singletons ever again. Judge Malcolm not with the eyes of the Laniers but rather, with the heart of John Holliday.

And with the spirit of doing good, the spirit of judging men by their actions more than anything, I present "The Story of Brer Rabbit and Mr. Fox", as adapted by Reverend John Holliday.

(Enter SHERMAN, dressed as Uncle Remus, BUDDY, dressed as Mr. Fox, and MALCOLM, dressed as Brer Rabbit.)

SHERMAN

Now, I know you might all think you know me as barber man Sherman Singleton, but you need to fix you minds real quick, look again. Ain't I old Uncle Remus?

Now, listen real quick to this.

One day, after Brer Fox bin doin' all dat he could for ta catch Brer Rabbit, an Brer Rabbit been doin' all he could for ta keep him from i. Brer Fox says to his self at he should play a game on Brer Rabbit, and he ain't more got the words outa his mouth when Brer Rabbit come a-hoppin up the big road Brer Fox went to work and got some tar, mixed in some turpentine, and got him what he called a Tar-Baby.

(BUDDY enters, dressed as Mr. Fox, pushes a cart with a "Tar Baby".)

He put a straw hat on that tar baby

(BUDDY puts a straw hat on the tar baby.)

And he hid in the bushes to see what would happen.

(BUDDY hides behind some play bushes. MALCOLM enters as Brer Rabbit.)

Brer Rabbit come prancing until he saw the Tar Baby. Then, he stood on his hind legs, astonished.

(MALCOLM looks astonished.)

The Tar Baby sat there, and Brer Fox lay low.

MALCOLM

Good mornin. Nice weather we're havin.

(Silence)

And how are you feelin this nice, fine day?

(Silence)

What are you? Deaf? If ya are, I can shout louder!

(Silence)

Rude thing, I'll cure you. That's what I'll do.

(Silence)

I'm going to teach ya how to talk to respectable people if it's my last act.

(Silence)

If you don't take off that hat, I'm gonna beat ya up.

(MALCOLM punches the tar baby and gets his hand stuck.)

Let me go….Let me go!

(Beat)

If you don't let me go, I'll be forced to hit ya again.

(MALCOLM punches the tar baby with his other hand and gets his hand stuck.)

Let me go, or I'm gonna knock the stuffin outta ya!

(MALCOLM head butts the tar-baby and gets his head stuck. BUDDY enters as Brer Fox, laughing.)

BUDDY

Well, lookee here. Mr. Brer Rabbit, you look all stuck up this morning.

MALCOLM

Lemme go, Brer Fox!

BUDDY

Well, I think I got you this time, Brer Rabbit. Maybe I haven't, but I think I have. You been running around here being cheeky for a mighty long time, but I think you've come to the end of the line. You've been cutting capers and bouncing about the neighborhood where I'm in charge and poking about in what is not your business. Who asked you to chat up the Tar-Baby? And who stuck you up the way you are? Nobody in the round world. You just jammed yourself on that Tar-Baby without waiting for any invitation, and there you are, and there you'll stay until I fix up a heap of brushwood and make a fire, 'cos I'm going to barbecue you today for sure.

MALCOLM

I don't care what you do with me, Brer Fox. Just don't fling me in that briar patch over there. Roast me, but don't fling me that briar patch.

BUDDY

It's so much trouble to start a fire that I think I'd rather hang you.

MALCOLM

Hang me as high as you please, Brer Fox, but for the good Lord's sake, don't fling me in that briar patch.

BUDDY

(Thinking)

I don't have any rope. Dang. So, I think I'd rather drown you.

MALCOLM

Drown me as deep as you please, Brer Fox, but for the Lord's sake, don't fling me in that briar patch.

BUDDY

Dang. I don't think there's any water nearby. I may have to skin you.

MALCOLM

Skin me, Brer Fox, snatch out my eyeballs, tear out my ears by the roots, and cut off my legs. Only please, Brer Fox, please don't throw me into the briar patch.

BUDDY

It's not going to be much fun skinning you. You're not scared of that, but…you do seem scared of that briar patch.

SHERMAN

And with that, Brer Fox yanked Brer Rabbit off the Tar-Baby, and he flung him -KERPLUNK!- right into the briar patch.

(BUDDY throws MALCOLM into the briar patch.)

MALCOLM

Ooo! Ow! Ouch!

(MALCOLM makes an overdramatic dying sound.)

BUDDY

I got him! Brer Rabbit is dead!

(Turns around.)

It's a good day!

(MALCOLM gets out of the briar patch.)

MALCOLM

Born and bred in the briar patch, that's me. I told you not to throw me there, but in all the world, that's the place I love best!

SHERMAN

And with a lippity clip, he hopped away.

(Everyone stops and bows.)

SCENE TWELVE

(Lights come up on John's hospital bed, Buddy, Jeanine, Sherman, and Malcolm around it.)

BUDDY

Doctor said this was the first surgery of many.

JOHN

Let's focus on the good news.

SHERMAN

See, Jeanine? Ya could learn a thing or two.

JOHN

Now, Buddy, I don't want you to hate me any mo-

BUDDY

Dad, I'm not thinking about that.

JOHN

Mr. Stephen is dead.

BUDDY

I know.

JOHN

You do?

BUDDY

It's okay.

SHERMAN

John.

JEANINE

Dad, let the man be.

SHERMAN

He got somethin else to say.

JOHN

I just got outta surgery.

SHERMAN

I'm gonna get a scalpel an cut those bullet out yo butt myself.

(Pretending to call down the hall)

Nurse!?

MALCOLM

Grandad.

JOHN

A promise is a promise.

MALCOLM

What the-

JOHN

Buddy, ya need ta know the truth bout yo mom.

BUDDY

Dad, I'm really feeling good right now.

JOHN

She didn't die of cancer.

BUDDY

What the…

JOHN

She overdosed on pills.

BUDDY

Are you trying absolve yourself?

SHERMAN

He ain't lyin.

JOHN

She was so sick, and she was confused. She….She was ready to meet Jesus.

BUDDY

Did you help her?

JOHN

Buddy, how-

SHERMAN

Buddy, yo mama was a firecracker, and when she saw her wick startin ta smoke-

JOHN

She couldn' take it no more. God, I hate myself for leavin her for one second.

BUDDY

What?

JEANINE

Buddy, he's trying to do right by you.

JOHN

You have no idea the hole that's in my heart.

BUDDY

Dad.

JOHN

You mad at me, but that's what makes me mad at you.

BUDDY

What?

JOHN

That you would dare think I wouldn' do everythin to keep my Love alive, that I would in any way would not give every last drop a' my life to keep her here.

BUDDY

Then, why didn't you tell me-

JOHN

I thought you would hate me more.

BUDDY

Dad.

JOHN

She did want to…to go, toll me….toll me she was tired of….pain, ready to go to Jesus.

BUDDY

I'm just hurt you didn't tell me-

JOHN

I lost her, an….dumb as I am, I thought….thought tellin you the other thing would keep me from…from losin….losin you. Thought you'd hate me more if you…if you…knew the truth.

BUDDY

Dad.

JOHN

Yeah?

BUDDY

I know you loved her.

JOHN

More than my own life.

BUDDY

It's a lot to take in at once.

JOHN

I love you son. Don't leave me.

BUDDY

Are you stupid? You're my dad. I'm not going anywhere.

JOHN

I love you, son.

BUDDY

I love you too, dad.

SHERMAN

Jeanie, anything you want to say?

JEANINE

First, it's Jeanine, and second, and most importantly.

SHERMAN

Yeah?

JEANINE

If you tell Buddy Holliday about my journal or anything else, I will put an end to you.

SHERMAN

I don't know who I fear more. God or you.

JEANINE

Also, I love you.

SHERMAN

I love you too, baby girl.

JEANINE

Briars and all?

SHERMAN

Briars and all.

(Lights off. End of play.)