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

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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.)