

ALABAMA STORY

By
Kenneth Jones

2020 GENERAL READER DRAFT
REVISED – NOVEMBER 2019

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CHARACTERS

GARTH WILLIAMS, 50ish or older, a white writer and illustrator from the East Coast, who also assumes the roles of OTHERS, including aged, sickly Alabama State Representative BOBBY CRONE, Montgomery newspaper reporter HERSCHEL WEBB, segregationist columnist HENRY BALCH, a RADIO ANNOUNCER and WHITE PASSERSBY. GARTH should be watchful and omnipresent, when practical.

LILY WHITFIELD, 32, a white woman from small-town Alabama privilege; genteel Alabama accent. She is sheltered, ashamed, loyal, religious, garrulous, charming, unhappily married, all façade, ready to blossom.

JOSHUA MOORE, 32, upwardly mobile middle-class African-American man, who left Alabama more than a decade ago; purposely subtle and suppressed Alabama accent, which becomes pronounced when agitated. He is aspirational, loyal, kind, worldly, happily married, slow to boil, a disciple of Dr. King.

SENATOR E.W. HIGGINS, 50ish or more, a white Alabama State Senator; pronounced but not extreme Alabama accent. He is a charmer, a bully, a bull, a poisoner, a politician, a victim of the world he grew up in.

EMILY WHEELOCK REED, 50ish or more, a white librarian, the State Librarian of Alabama, born in North Carolina and raised in Indiana; no Southern accent. She has no sense of humor, she does not suffer fools, she is all-business.

THOMAS FRANKLIN, 28, a white reference librarian, Emily's assistant, an Alabama native; genteel, educated, pronounced Alabama accent. He is officious, efficient, slightly uncomfortable in his own skin. Neutral and objective when conveying information.

SETTING

Time: 1959

Place: Montgomery, Alabama; The Deep South; and Beyond.

***Alabama Story* was originally produced by Pioneer Theatre Company in Salt Lake City, Utah, in January 2015; Karen Azenberg, Artistic Director; Chris Lino, Managing Director.**

***Alabama Story* was first developed in association with the Southern Writers' Project, a program of Alabama Shakespeare Festival; Geoffrey Sherman, Producing Artistic Director.**

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PRODUCTION NOTE

Please avoid caricature, particularly with regard to Senator Higgins. He and Emily Reed must be equal, formidable forces. If he's a fool, a cartoon or a stereotype, there is no play. And don't be afraid to make Emily cool, humorless, tough. It's O.K. if she's unlikable. By the end, she will be respected and loved. Also, a less literal physical world — gestures to the locked park gates rather than literal gates, a coffee man holding cups rather than a practical coffee cart in Act Two — is both budget-friendly and imagination-friendly. As the play dwells in "the Deep South of the imagination," its scenes can float in blank space, abetted by design that is as minimal or grand as you wish, perhaps cued by the character of Garth Williams.

ACT ONE

PROLOGUE

(GARTH WILLIAMS appears on a blank stage. The others enter variously or are present at the top. They should be aware of each other as fellow storytellers, with future relationships hinted at. GARTH should be a watchful presence or stagehand throughout the play, when practical.)

GARTH WILLIAMS

This is the story of two rabbits. Two rabbits who hopped out of a children's picture book and into the hot, bright light of the real world. A world so unbelievable that you could only call it...The Deep South. Well, let's call it The Deep South of the Imagination. It was a land where the soil was rich and black, and the air was always...thick.

LILY

This is the story of a girl in a big house in a small town in that land.

GARTH WILLIAMS

Her people were in cotton.

JOSHUA

And this is the story of a boy in the shadow of that big house in that small town in that land.

GARTH WILLIAMS *(Drily.)*

His people were in cotton.

SENATOR HIGGINS

This is the story of a leader in a shining city — let's call it Munkgumry — which was in the middle of that land. Where Cotton was King —

JOSHUA

—once upon a time.

EMILY *(In a correcting tone. Matter-of-fact.)*

This is a story about books!

GARTH WILLIAMS

A picture book! My picture book — about rabbits! — with words and illustrations by me.

EMILY *(Correcting.)*

Many books.

GARTH WILLIAMS (*Referring to EMILY.*)
The story of a librarian who came to that shining city.

THOMAS (*Genial.*)
And another librarian, native to that city.

SENATOR HIGGINS
A kingdom.

THOMAS
Where royalty was scarce.

JOSHUA
And God went missing.

LILY
Where God watched over things.

EMILY
Where books were beloved. And reviled.

GARTH WILLIAMS
And there are rabbits.

SENATOR HIGGINS (*Sourly.*)
Yes, rabbits.

LILY
This is a story of children.

JOSHUA
A story of parents.

EMILY (*Correcting again.*)
No, no — books. This is about books.

GARTH WILLIAMS
Many books, but one book in particular. And, to properly peruse it, we have us! And, there are other people in this land. I will play that population. I wrote the picture book, after all. I know something about creating characters.

THOMAS
And this is certainly a story about character.

GARTH WILLIAMS (*With finality.*)
So, then, picture this: The story of a story.

THOMAS

A story within a story.

LILY

A children's story.

JOSHUA

A love story.

SENATOR HIGGINS

A local story.

THOMAS

A Southern story.

EMILY

An Alabama story.

GARTH WILLIAMS

And somewhere — between the lines — a true story.

(They address EMILY, perhaps each handing her costume pieces or props for the next scene.)

JOSHUA

Tell me a story.

LILY

Tell me a story.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Tell me a story.

THOMAS

Tell me a story.

GARTH WILLIAMS

Tell me a story.

(She enters the next scene.)

SCENE 1: FEBRUARY 1959

(Around 9:30 AM at the Alabama Public Library Service. EMILY WHEELock REED enters her office, limping. The heel of one of her shoes has broken off. She sets down a

cardboard cup of coffee, and perhaps other materials she carried. She takes off both shoes so she can walk evenly. She puts her shoes and the broken heel on her desk. A 1930s-era radio sits on a shelf behind her desk. She switches it on. Here and throughout the play, EMILY is often at her desk, focused on her paperwork, mail, business.)

RADIO ANNOUNCER *(Played live by GARTH or recorded by GARTH. Through static that may obscure singers' names.)*

It's mornin' in Munkgumry... *(Static.)* That was *(Static.)* Ank Illiams' "Kawliga." *(Static.)* Next up, The Singin' Rage *(Static.)* Miss Atti Age and "Mockin' Bird Hill" *(Static.)*

(The sound becomes all static. The radio dims and goes silent.)

EMILY

Thomas! *(No answer.)* Thomas?

(THOMAS enters.)

THOMAS

Good morning, Miss Reed. I hope you had a wonderful weekend. I took myself to a movie on Saturday —

EMILY *(Interrupting.)*

We have yet to see if it is a good morning. It was unexpected, the rain. The traffic. The roads. Thomas, this radio. How old is it?

THOMAS

Old. I don't know, exactly. Did you want me to find out its provenance?

EMILY

No, no. I just thought some music would be soothing this morning. The radio seemed to promise "Patti Page" and "Hank Williams," as far as I could make out. I am late, as you can tell. The steps out front were slippery, I have broken a heel, and I am in a mood.

THOMAS

Out front? Were you hurt?

EMILY

No. I need a cobbler, not a doctor. Do you know one?

THOMAS

I could find one. You know the back entrance on Adams Street is much less precarious.

(Somewhere here, EMILY takes a fresh pair of shoes out of a drawer and slips them on her feet.)

EMILY

I am partial to a rise of granite steps. Among the most inspiring things I have seen since coming to Montgomery are these alabaster hallways and stairs. I would like to shake the hand of the man who put the Alabama Public Library Service in this — shrine.

THOMAS

A little bit of Washington, DC, in the land of Hank Williams.

EMILY

Indeed. And, not a small thing: the coffee cart is out by the front steps, not the back. I need my morning coffee. *(THOMAS takes the broken shoes from her desktop.)*

Where are you going with my shoes?

THOMAS

I'll get them to a cobbler.

EMILY

You have a reference desk to run. Being my assistant does not mean doing my chores. Just the name of a cobbler, please.

(She holds out her hands to take the shoes from him.)

THOMAS

I've got a book. I'll look up a name of someone nearby.

EMILY

Are you telling me that the reference department of the Alabama Public Library Service has some specialized book on the Cobblers of Montgomery?

THOMAS *(Deadpan.)*

Yes, we do. It's called "The Cobblers of the Cradle of the Confederacy."

EMILY

Really?

THOMAS *(Drily.)*

No, it's called The Yellow Pages.

EMILY

State library funding put to good use. Now, if we could get funding to repair the radio.

THOMAS

I'll take it to a shop.

EMILY

No, no. I rarely use it. The signal has always been spotty, that was my point. Static. Static. Static.

THOMAS

I could get rid of it.

EMILY

No, no. I have a place in my heart for antiques, being one myself. Leave it. (*Beat. She looks at him over her glasses.*) You do not wish to argue the suggestion that I am antique?

THOMAS (*Perfunctory.*)

Oh, you're not an antique, Miss Reed.

EMILY (*Drily.*)

Thank you, Thomas, for your spontaneous response. What is the status of our agenda today?

THOMAS

The budget proposal meeting with department heads has been pushed to two P.M. There's a librarian visiting from Mobile, Mrs. —

EMILY

Sullivan. Yes, I will say hello. Is she waiting for me?

THOMAS

She's going through the collection to see what's new. And Miss Bellamy from the Montgomery City Library called, twice. She asked if you'd be willing to read aloud again at the Children's Bookworm Circle. She's eager. In fact, she wondered if you might be able to do it every Friday morning.

EMILY

I seem to have left her with the impression that I enjoyed it the first time. You have never heard such shouting: (*In a child's tone.*) "Tell me a story! Tell me a story!" This, while all of the mothers slip out of the room for coffee and cigarettes. I felt like a babysitting service. (*She flips through her day planner.*) Impossible. Friday is my busiest day.

THOMAS

I'll tell her you can't.

EMILY

Tell her I will do it. I can move things around. I will call Miss Bellamy myself.

THOMAS

She had high praise for your last reading.

EMILY

Miss Bellamy need never know that I prefer adult reading. *(She discovers a manila envelope in her pile of mail.)* Hello! Winter sunshine in the weekend mail! From the American Library Association. The new Notable Books list. The sneak preview from our publishers. *(Picking up on his earlier movie reference.)* Some people like the picture show. I see them line up down at the Empire, for the latest Bible epic. Not me. Not movies. Not ever, really. In the Beginning, it was books for me. I am sure that sounds dry to you in this age of Marilyn Monroe, but give me new books — new writing, new thoughts, in black and white, not Technicolor. Here are my coming attractions: Notable Books, 1959!

THOMAS

You are in high cotton!

EMILY

Good morning, Thomas.

(He exits. She reads and savors her coffee.)

SCENE 2: MARCH 1959

(A bench on a sidewalk on the edge of a city park, a few miles from downtown Montgomery, Alabama. LILY WHITFIELD sits reading a book through sunglasses. A light coat is casually thrown over the back of the bench. We might see a high fence and a park gate, closed and bound with chains.)

JOSHUA MOORE, dressed respectably as if for church, with Bible in hand, is walking along the sidewalk near her bench. He does a double take. She is lost in her book. During their exchange, he stands and she remains seated. He never sits; they never touch.)

JOSHUA

Excuse me.

(She's all cold caution and business.)

LILY

Yes?

JOSHUA

I think I know you.

LILY

I don't think so. *(She goes back to her book.)*

JOSHUA
Didn't we — ?

LILY
I'd like to be left alone, please. There's an entire park here — *(Back to her book.)*

JOSHUA
Not really. It looks like this park is closed. That gate's locked up with chains.

LILY
Well, an entire sidewalk then.

JOSHUA
Are your people from Demopolis? Lily? Lily Whitfield? It's Joshua. Joshua Moore. You used to call me "Rabbit." I was Br'er Rabbit, you were Br'er Fox.

(Lighting up, relieved, with a thread of anxiety inside her. LILY hides it with chatter and charm.)

LILY
"Rabbit!" Oh, my. We did love our Uncle Remus stories!

JOSHUA
And your mama read them with such flair!

LILY
Is it you? Joshua Moore! Rabbit Moore! Really? *(He beams.)* I see it is. I see a familiar dimple in your cheek. Now, what is it people say when they reunite? "Why, I bet it's been..."

JOSHUA
Twenty years. Mama and I left your place in summer, 1939. So it's just about twenty years now. I recognized you the minute I saw you — even under those glasses.

LILY
I'm hardly a girl of eleven or twelve anymore. *(She looks him over.)* You grew, you grew like a tree. It's your mama's fault. So much fine Alabama cooking. Our family treasured her! Those meals! I remember everything down to the last black-eyed pea.

JOSHUA
And on your birthday, I remember a cake with fruit filling and white frosting —

LILY
It's called Lane Cake.

JOSHUA

Lane Cake! That's the name!

LILY

For special occasions. In between the layers is a paste of raisins and nuts and sugar — with just a hint of hooch. Mama made sure you got a slice.

JOSHUA

A tray loaded up with leftovers from The Big House.

LILY

We were blessed.

JOSHUA

Mama used to say, "Got no Depression workin' at the Whitfield house."

LILY

On account of Daddy's business! Demopolis Cotton was always "Growin' Strong." At least that's what they used to paint on the side of our barns and sheds. I remember everything, like mama readin' us those stories out back.

JOSHUA

And my mama telling me, *(Heavy accent)* "Joshua, you be careful you don't trample Miss Rose's herbaceous borders! Watch them herbaceous borders!"

LILY

All those little pathways around the yard, with mint and rosemary —

JOSHUA

How's your mama doing these days?

LILY *(Ruefully.)*

— All those aromatic herb plants are gone, all gone. Mama passed on about ten years back. Her heart just — went out.

JOSHUA

I'm sorry to hear that. She was a good lady. I remember her telling me that I should call you "Lily" and not "Miss Lily." She said that "best friends don't use courtesy titles." That stuck with me. Mama once said if it wasn't for Rose Whitfield, we would be Lost People. A job and a place to live during hard times!

LILY

Bless her heart.

(GARTH WILLIAMS, as A WHITE PASSERBY, appears from the side. A heavy Southern accent.)

PASSERBY

Miss? You, miss! You O.K., there? This boy botherin' you?

(JOSHUA steps away from the bench.)

LILY *(Cheerfully.)*

No, sir. We're fine. Thank you kindly! *(The man exits. LILY and JOSHUA refocus.)* Your mama, she's well?

JOSHUA

Mama's been gone more than ten years now. After we left your place, we settled here in Montgomery: boarding houses...odd jobs...bad schools...she got sick...I got drafted. What about your daddy? He still running Demopolis Cotton?

LILY

No, no — daddy's retired. He's right here at the Jackson Hospital. *(She nods to the building, which is across the street.)* He's got trouble in his chest, his lungs. They wanted him to go to a hospital in Birmingham, but he protested. "Too far north, I don't know those people! Don't trust those people!"

JOSHUA

If Birmingham is "north," then he must think Huntsville is —

LILY

Where the Eskimos live! So, I'm here in Montgomery to give him company or moral support or — a book. But all he wants is cigarettes. He says they clear his lungs, if you can believe it.

JOSHUA

I remember your daddy saying, "Joshua, my boy, after you work my cotton fields for a few years, maybe one day you'll run Demopolis Cotton!" Well, my eyes went wide with that idea! Mama laughed, but that was a seed inside me: President of Demopolis Cotton! And I would have my own Big White House like yours instead of living with mama in that old dogtrot across the yard. I believed that —

LILY

Dogtrot? That was no dogtrot. Daddy used to call that the carriage house.

JOSHUA

Carriage house? Maybe the "cabin house." That was a shambly old dogtrot with no running water.

LILY

I don't think so...

JOSHUA

You live with your daddy still?

LILY

Yes, still in The Big House, on the edge of the river. With daddy and my husband, Jack — he's President of Demopolis Cotton now.

JOSHUA *(Taking that in.)*

Is that so?

LILY

And with my little girl, Lily-Rose.

JOSHUA

You have a little girl? "Lily-Rose," after your mama?

LILY

She's seven! And I read Uncle Remus to her, faithfully. I have every one of my childhood books, no worse for wear.

JOSHUA

I have a son, age six — almost seven. Josh. "Junior." *(He pulls out his wallet and shares a photo.)*

LILY

I just got chills. He's the spittin' image of you. Dimple! That your wife with him?

JOSHUA

That's Emma.

LILY

She's beautiful. *(She pulls a picture out of her purse.)* Here's my Lily-Rose. *(Offering the snapshot.)*

JOSHUA

She could be your childhood twin.

LILY

She's back home with her nanny, Ingrid. Ingrid is Scandinavian. All our help is now. What is it you do in Montgomery?

JOSHUA

Oh, no, I don't live in Alabama anymore. I live up in Detroit.

LILY

Michigan? Are you working for the Ford Motor Company?

JOSHUA

No, no. I'm in the soda pop business. I work for Vernor's Ginger Ale. You get that down in Demopolis? Vernor's Ginger Ale?

LILY

No, I don't believe we do.

JOSHUA

When I was in Korea, I met a man — I saved a man — who works for Vernor's Ginger Ale. I'd never heard of it, but he said if I ever wanted a job in Detroit, he had one for me. I'm a manager now.

LILY

Now what brings you back here?

JOSHUA

I made a promise to mama that I would always be a part of her church here in Montgomery.

LILY (*Noting the book in his hand.*)

You carry a better book than I do.

JOSHUA

Oh, yeah — that's mama's Bible. So, I come down here three, four times a year, on my vacation days —

LILY

Vacation days!

JOSHUA

— and I do volunteer work. I'll be back here in May, and July Fourth and in the fall —

LILY

Repairing steeples in between prayer meetings?

JOSHUA

Well, more like stuffing envelopes, mimeographing, phone calls, organizing —

LILY

You do it for the Lord.

JOSHUA

I do it for mama. And for Alabama. "Don't forget Alabama," she said to me. "Don't forget ol' Alabama."

LILY

I think I know what she meant. Why would anyone leave? *(Beat. JOSHUA takes that in.)*
I could use one of your cold ginger ales right about now. It's early this year, the heat, isn't it?

JOSHUA

You know what we could use on a day like this? The coolest thing in Demopolis — I bet you won't remember.

LILY

I remember everything. Gimme a hint.

JOSHUA

Your mama and my mama in the kitchen on steamy afternoons —

LILY

Lemonade!

JOSHUA

My mama must've squeezed hundreds of lemons over the years —

LILY

Simple syrup. That was mama's secret. I do believe that made it taste better.

JOSHUA

Plus a stalk of mint —

LILY

From mama's "herbaceous borders." I would like to go back — and have one tall glass right now, wouldn't you? Back in our time at The Big House. I'll tell you, I just don't understand why you and your mama left us.

(THOMAS crosses their path, briskly, heading toward the bus stop, looking at his watch. He has a newspaper in his hand.)

THOMAS

Mornin'.

(THOMAS exits.)

JOSHUA

Yes, well — I should be on my way, to the bus. I'm expected. I hope your daddy gets well real soon.

LILY

We're hoping for the best. Meantime, I'm downtown at the Jefferson Davis Hotel, or under this old magnolia before visiting hours. *(Beat.)* Seems silly to have a big old park here and see it locked up. There's a little give to those chains. I might just squeeze past those gates one of these days, and run wild through the weeds.

JOSHUA

Like Br'er Fox and Br'er Rabbit.

LILY

Like we used to. *(Beat.)* Would you say a prayer for daddy — at your prayer meeting?

JOSHUA

Prayer meeting? Yes, of course, Lily.

LILY

I do think that ol' lemonade was sweeter because of that simple syrup.

JOSHUA

No, I believe it was sweeter because it was made by our mamas — together.

(LILY stands to go. They smile and nod, awkwardly, as if there's unfinished business but no way to get to it. JOSHUA exits in the same direction as THOMAS. She pulls her coat from the bench to reveal the words "WHITES ONLY" painted across the back of the bench. She exits.)

SCENE 3: MARCH 1959

(The same morning as the previous scene, about a half-hour later, at the Alabama Public Library Service. Phones are ringing. EMILY is at her desk, busily looking at papers. There is always a paper coffee cup on her desk. A preoccupied, nervous THOMAS appears at her door with a handful of memos, a newspaper and a thin oversize book.)

EMILY *(Not looking up.)*

Good morning, Thomas. How unlike you to be late. Do I need to worry about you?

THOMAS

Good morning, Miss Reed. Worry? No. I was...detained at home. You're working on the budget?

EMILY

As you see.

THOMAS

Have any calls come through this morning?

EMILY

I asked Jane to hold all calls.

THOMAS

I thought you might have heard from someone in the community.

EMILY (*Deep in her paperwork.*)

"The community." Thomas, I am too busy for riddles.

THOMAS

When you started here, you said that if I ever saw a threat to the Library Service that I should come straight to you.

(She stops what she's doing, looks up, puts her pencil down and takes off her reading glasses.)

EMILY

You have my attention.

THOMAS

Are you familiar with the Montgomery Home News?

EMILY (*Impatiently.*)

Montgomery Home News? Enlighten me. Is it some ladies' periodical?

(He places a newspaper on her desk.)

THOMAS

It's the weekly...conservative paper.

EMILY

Conservative? Conservative, how? Are we talking Catholic? Or Baptist? Or — *(She puts her glasses on and examines the top of the front page.)* "Montgomery Home News.

Defending the Home. An Independent Newspaper." What is your interest in the Home News, are you selling subscriptions door to door?

(THOMAS points to a front-page article. EMILY reads aloud.)

"What Your Children Read — If It's Good Enough for Rabbits It's Good Enough for Mere Humans. (*Beat.*) The Rabbits' Wedding, by Garth Williams, a beautifully illustrated two-dollar-fifty-cent book cannot be found at privately owned bookstores in Montgomery. It is, however, in the collection of, and promoted by, the tax-supported Alabama Public Library Service. The book, published by New York City-based Harper Brothers, tells of a black buck rabbit who marries a white lady rabbit..." This is the segregationist paper.

THOMAS

Yes ma'am. This came out yesterday.

(She flips to other pages and reads headlines along the way.)

EMILY

"The Truth About the NAACP." ... "The Rosa Parks Problem..." "Liberals and Whiners Lose Again..." *(Beat.)* What, no Blondie and Dagwood? *(Beat.)* Is it well-read, The Montgomery Home News? Because on cursory glance, it is not particularly well-written — or edited. *(She circles and x's errors in the story with her pencil.)* This punctuation...! *(She pages back to the front-page story.)* There is no byline on this piece, of course. Why bother with accountability? *(Pages back to credits section of paper. Reads aloud.)* "The Montgomery Home News, published weekly by Community Advocates, Inc., established 1957." All the way back to 1957! The same year that I arrived! A rich two-year history!

THOMAS

People here do know this paper. It has its roots in a weekly that's been around for years. Before your time, before my time.

EMILY

I have seen this nonsense before, in other towns, in other libraries. And it is as old as Gutenberg. Not everyone is going to want to read every book in a library. It means nothing.

THOMAS

I picked up your messages from Jane on the way in. A half-dozen of them. *(He reads from the memos in his hand.)* "Please have the director call me regarding children's book...", "Outraged that my tax money supports this...", "Wants to talk about race-mixing book..."

EMILY

Not to doubt the accuracy of The Home News, but is this rabbit book in our collection?

THOMAS

It is.

EMILY

Is it a new acquisition?

THOMAS

Yes, just last fall.

(He presents the book to her.)

EMILY

This was among the titles that I suggested we buy last year?

THOMAS

Yes. It was a 1958 Notable Book, according to the American Library Association.

EMILY

Do you know this book?

THOMAS

I do. Shortly after it arrived, I brought it to your attention. I told you it worried me.

EMILY

Did you? What did you say at the time?

THOMAS (*Drily.*)

I pointed to the black rabbit and then to the white rabbit, and I said, "This worries me."
(*Beat.*) And you said —

EMILY & THOMAS

"Piffle."

EMILY

One sees so many books. I wish I could say I was intimate with every one of the thousands here. As you seem to be.

THOMAS

My knowledge of the rabbit book was accidental. It was sticking out of a re-shelving cart last fall. It's oversized, begging to be looked at.

EMILY

Well, it has stuck out, all right.

THOMAS

Which is why I brought it to you at the time. Because of the content, not the dimensions.

EMILY

My instinct is, if it is good enough for the American Library Association, it is good enough for me. And for the Alabama Public Library Service. Alabama is in America, is it not?

THOMAS

Some say.

EMILY (*With finality, urging his exit.*)

Thank you for telling me about this newspaper story. I am curious, though. How did you happen find the piece in the Home News?

THOMAS *(After a pause.)*

It's delivered to my house. Our house. My father takes a subscription. He subscribed to its predecessor, the Montgomery Weekly. It's...always been in my home.

EMILY

Thank you, Thomas. Please close the door when you leave.

(He exits. She continues doing her budget work for a moment. The book tempts her. She reaches for it. She opens it.)

EMILY

"Two little rabbits — a white rabbit and a black rabbit, lived in a large forest."

(GARTH WILLIAMS appears, with a folded newspaper in hand. He reads from it.)

GARTH WILLIAMS

From the "Stop, Look and Listen" column by Henry Balch, The Orlando Sentinel, March 15, 1959.

(He assumes the demeanor and voice of MR. BALCH, a Florida newspaper columnist in a perhaps humorless, chewy, Old South style.)

Have you read the story of "The Three Little Pigs" lately? Popping up from a brand-new children's picture book in Florida libraries are pigs of a different color, for a new and darker era. The pig whose home is made of straw is white, the pig whose home is made of sticks is tan, while the pig whose home is made of bricks is black as soot. The paler porcine friends flee The Wolf to find refuge in the sturdier dwelling of that black pig. White, tan and black under one roof. *(Beat.)* Clearly, "The Three Little Pigs" is no longer just a Walt Disney fable about logical thinking, but a tool to promote Negro Supremacy and the commingling of races. It's called brainwashing in Mother Russia. It's time for the Florida legislature to step into our libraries, before our own house is blown down like so much hay and sticks.

(MR. BALCH disappears. EMILY reaches the final pages of the book.)

EMILY

"The little white rabbit gave the little black rabbit her soft white paw. The other animals danced in a wedding circle around them."

(She closes the book. The light changes through the window. She might remove cardigan to suggest passage of time.)

SCENE 4: APRIL 1959

(A new day in EMILY REED's office, a few weeks later. She's busily working at her desk. SENATOR HIGGINS, hat in hand, enters.)

SENATOR HIGGINS

Excuse me, Miss Reed.

EMILY (*Not looking up from her work.*)

Yes, Thomas? (*Looks up.*) Oh, sorry. Not Thomas. Senator Higgins. Did I forget an appointment? Is our receptionist Jane out there?

SENATOR HIGGINS

No, I have come unannounced. I walked right by your Jane. I think I threw her for a loop, stompin' in here as if I owned the place. I thought I might pay you a friendly visit. I haven't seen you in while...

EMILY

I did see you at the coffee cart this morning.

SENATOR HIGGINS

The coffee cart?

EMILY

Between the library and the Capitol? You were talking to a colleague.

SENATOR HIGGINS

That was not just a "colleague." That was Representative Bobby Crone. He's a hero in my world. Been through it all.

EMILY

We share a taste for morning coffee.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Oh, yes. The lady behind the sunglasses!

(*THOMAS appears at the door with a worried look.*)

THOMAS

Miss Reed, is there anything that you need?

EMILY

No, thank you, Thomas.

THOMAS

Yes, ma'am.

(*He exits and closes the door.*)

EMILY

Senator, I did not expect to see you until the library budget meeting, which is coming up very soon now. *(She riffles through a desk calendar.)*

SENATOR HIGGINS

This is a nice office. A nice, big office. Nice to have a nice, big office. It was a good idea for the Library Service to be moved to this great building. The State Archive Building. A stone's throw from the Capitol. I can see you from out my window. *(Jovial.)* Keep my eye on you. *(He pulls a cigar out.)* Do you mind if I smoke? May I — ?

EMILY

I would prefer that you not, Senator. We are a little funny about fire here in the Alabama State Library.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Of course. *(He puts the cigar away.)* Of course.

EMILY

Is there something specific you wanted, sir? About the budget for the coming year?

SENATOR HIGGINS

Miss Reed, you've been here, what, a little over a year? As often as we met in library funding meetings last year, and as often as we might have passed each other at the coffee cart, I feel that I don't know you as well as I'd like to. Ours is a relationship of you asking for money for the libraries, and me finding the money — and giving the money, generously. That's us, doing our jobs and doing them well, but beyond that — who are we? What's the stuff inside us?

EMILY

Is this an official inquiry?

SENATOR HIGGINS

Informal, informal. Separate from our upcoming hearing —

EMILY

Hearing?

SENATOR HIGGINS

Meeting. The budget meeting. Separate from that, I wanted to talk with you about recent events. Get your perspective on them. Take your pulse.

EMILY

My pulse.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Informal. Not State Senator and State Librarian. Alabamian to Alabamian. Talking about...Alabama.

EMILY

I feel as if you are going to ask me if I know the state flower.

SENATOR HIGGINS

This is not a test!

EMILY

Goldenrod!

SENATOR HIGGINS

Correct.

EMILY

Senator, I am going to stop you there and admit to you that I have a very busy day ahead of me. Indeed I am going to be late for my eleven A.M. meeting.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Can you put it off?

EMILY

It is a regular, weekly meeting. Every Friday morning. One of the many meetings that is vital to the future of Alabama libraries. I know you appreciate that. I am the chair of the meeting, so you see —

SENATOR HIGGINS

Hot in here, isn't it? Very hot for Easter time. Don't remember it bein' this hot this early. (*Beat.*) Tell me, Miss Reed, would you prefer this pulse-taking to be a private one or a public one?

(*A pause.*)

EMILY

I think we should pick this up at our next budget meeting, with our respective colleagues present.

SENATOR HIGGINS

I'm curious, if I may keep you one moment longer. There are some book titles that the state of Alabama is concerned about. Books that might be considered...controversial.

EMILY

Controversial?

SENATOR HIGGINS

Mmm. Against the way we run things here.

EMILY

I see.

SENATOR HIGGINS

The state was wondering if these books were being promoted by the Library Service.

EMILY

I am guessing you have a list of these books.

SENATOR HIGGINS

A list. I do.

(He takes a folded piece of paper out of his jacket pocket. He hands it over. She puts her glasses on and reads it.)

EMILY

"Epitaph for Dixie." "Segregation, Is It Justified?" "Strange Fruit." "A Dangerous Woman."

SENATOR HIGGINS

That last one, my mother-in-law — a smart woman — told me she couldn't even finish it, it was so bad!

EMILY

And the list goes on. Well, I cannot tell you at the moment if these are in our collection. But I can certainly find out for you. *(She looks at her watch.)* Is that all, Senator?

SENATOR HIGGINS

We will let you get to work, Miss Reed, to your meeting on which hangs the future of our libraries. *(Sweetly.)* We understand, we agree — the future is important.

(He exits. Outside her office, he lights up a cigar, and spews a plume of smoke. She opens a desk drawer and pulls out an ashtray, a pack of cigarettes and a lighter, and lights up a cigarette. [The option exists to cut any reference to EMILY smoking here and later.] THOMAS, who carries a file folder, steps into EMILY's office.)

THOMAS

What was that about?

(She snuffs out the cigarette in the ashtray, and puts the ashtray in a drawer.)

EMILY

That was a friendly Southern meeting.

THOMAS

I know some friendly Southern meetings that end with woods being set on fire.

EMILY

He was fact-finding. I imagine Senator Higgins has been reading the Montgomery Home News. *(She hands the list to him.)* He wants to know if we have these books in the collection.

THOMAS

What are you going to do?

EMILY

I am going to honor his request.

THOMAS *(Looking at the list.)*

"The Rabbits' Wedding" is on this list. He could have learned about our collection on his own — this is what card catalogs are for.

EMILY

He is rattling his saber. I have no doubt that he knows these books are in the collection. He wanted to show me who runs the Library Service. *(She collects her bag and stuffs an oversized children's picture book in it.)* And, for the moment, I do. I need to be at the City Library in a few minutes. *(Beat.)* Senator Higgins is seeking to know me better, and I realize that I know very little about him. Do we have a surname file on the Senator?

(THOMAS hands her a file folder.)

Seriously? You already pulled this file for me? Do you pre-think everything?

THOMAS

It keeps me up at night sometimes.

EMILY

Can you give me the overview?

THOMAS *(He may be reading from the file, or he might know it by heart as she reads.)* E.W. Higgins. *(HIGGINS appears in a hypertheatrical light, smoking, on the edge of the action.)* He's a real Southern son with a Southern story. An Alabama story. Family man from Demopolis, about a hundred miles west of here.

EMILY

Demopolis?

THOMAS

"The People's City." Have you heard of "The Little Foxes" by Lillian Hellman? It's a Broadway play, the action is set in Demopolis. Her people are from there. Anyway, that's Higgins' territory. His roots grow deep into the soil of the Black Belt. Generations of Higginses. He was born in 1904. His father was a Confederate veteran.

EMILY

Good heavens, is that mathematically possible?

THOMAS

Well, the region is famous for its...fertility. Anyway, Senator Higgins worked in oil and lumber before being elected to the state legislature during World War Two. He is one of the most vocal segregationists Alabama has seen — George Wallace and Governor Patterson notwithstanding — more and more since Rosa Parks and the bus boycott in '55.

EMILY

It seems to be a kind of competition down here: maintaining the strongest grasp on the past.

THOMAS

If votes are in the balance, nobody wants to be "out-segged."

EMILY

Where does Senator Higgins fall on the segregationist scale?

THOMAS

Well, in 1956, he sponsored a resolution seeking federal funds to relocate Negro Alabamians to other parts of the country.

EMILY

You are kidding.

THOMAS

I am not.

EMILY

Other parts?

THOMAS

Other parts. West. North. (*In unison with HIGGINS.*) "Elsewhere,"/

SENATOR HIGGINS

/"Elsewhere — send 'em elsewhere,"

THOMAS

...he used to say. In fact, they called him Senator Elsewhere, and he seemed to love the moniker.

EMILY

His colleagues apparently did not pick up his torch, to "Send Them Elsewhere"?

THOMAS

No indeed.

EMILY

Is he a hero or a fool?

THOMAS *(Drily.)*

Yes. *(Beat.)* What he also demonstrated over the years, as you know, is a passion for books. *(Reading a clipping.)* In an interview in the Advertiser, he once said that his favorite book was...

(SENATOR HIGGINS steps into the light, unnoticed by the others.)

SENATOR HIGGINS

"Tom Sawyer"! None of that "Huckleberry Finn" business, which was too long and complicated for my childhood mind to understand. Like most boys, I wanted to be Tom Sawyer: getting the best of his friends, living by his own rules, watching his own funeral. My father gave me that book; it was a first edition. *(Beat.)* 'Round about 1914 the old Tombigbee River flooded its banks and swept through our home. After it all receded, I saw — like a ring around a bathtub — that my book shelves, with all my boy-books there, were brown with silt and soaked with river water. I reached for "Tom Sawyer," and the spine peeled clean off. I clawed at the remains of the book and the paper just shredded away. *(Beat.)* I had "Tom Sawyer" underneath my fingernails as they dragged me out of there, crying all the way. *(With sadness and sincerity.)* I think about my daddy's original copy of "Tom Sawyer" probably once a week. To feel it again in my hands, that would be something.

(He disappears.)

EMILY

A passion for books. Well, a passion for certain books.

THOMAS

Still, his support of libraries is unmatched in the state. And he fights for more money each year.

EMILY

More money for white libraries.

THOMAS *(Neutrally.)*
The world in which we live.

EMILY
Thank you, Thomas. It's almost eleven. The Children's Bookworm Circle awaits. Is there more that I need to know?

THOMAS
Senator Higgins was an advocate for getting the Library Service moved here, to the State Archive Building. Your favorite edifice in Montgomery.

EMILY
Good for him. Anything else?

THOMAS *(With weight.)*
Yes, one thing: Please be careful.

EMILY
Oh, piffle!

THOMAS
No, I mean it.

EMILY
I know you do. So do I.

(She exits for her Bookworm Circle appearance.)

(The following sequence, Scene 5 A-F, weaves between a public park in Montgomery — the same park seen in Scene 2 — and a meeting room in the State Capitol. The scenes are concurrent.)

SCENE 5A: MAY 1959

(LILY on the park bench on the edge of the park again. It's a few months later, in May. She is dressed in lighter clothes. She is again reading a book. She has sunglasses on. JOSHUA appears, crossing the same way he did earlier. He's dressed for summer, and carries his Bible, along with a folded newspaper. Again, during this, she remains seated and he stands.)

JOSHUA *(In a childlike tone with a thick Alabama accent.)*
Whatcha readin', Lily?

LILY *(Startled.)*
Goodness — Joshua! You surprised me.

JOSHUA

Oh, my, Lily. I'm sorry. I don't recall you being jumpy!

LILY

No, I guess I was just lost in my book.

JOSHUA

Is it good?

LILY

Well, I don't know. It's popular. A silly romance. You're back in Montgomery, I see.

JOSHUA

I go back to Detroit tomorrow. Has your father been over the hospital for two months now?

LILY

Well, he was released — for a few weeks. And now he's back. In the cancer ward.

JOSHUA

Cancer. That's...terrible.

LILY

But at least he got to see Lily-Rose in the Easter pageant at Trinity. Where did you go to church back in our Demopolis days?

JOSHUA

Lone Pine Baptist.

LILY

Lone Pine Baptist?

JOSHUA

I'm sure that little back-road church is long gone by now. Once we moved here to Montgomery, mama had her eye on Dexter Avenue Baptist. Where the professional folk prayed. Martin Luther King's the preacher there now. Have you heard of Dr. — ?

LILY

I do love Easter, it's my favorite time, probably! (*She looks at the sky.*) It wants to rain, don't you think?

JOSHUA

Maybe, yes. How is everything back in The People's City since we last spoke?

LILY

"The People's City"! Demopolis. You remember everything, just like me. Well, they installed a new fountain in Confederate Square. The goddess Persephone sits on top. Some church folks called it "pagan." I think it's beautiful.

JOSHUA

And your husband, how's he?

LILY (*Deflecting.*)

And how's Canada Dry? Your ginger-ale business?

JOSHUA

Vernor's Ginger Ale. I would've brought you a bottle had I known we'd meet again.

LILY (*Noting the Bible in his hand.*)

Got your Bible there, I see.

JOSHUA

Yes. Mama's Bible.

LILY

I guess you're still doing Bible study over at your mama's church — where is it, downtown?

JOSHUA

Like I said, down on Dexter Avenue. Near the Capitol, near the Archive Building? Do you know it?

LILY

I don't think so. Now, why are you walking downtown from here? It must be a mile or more. Didn't you drive down from Detroit? Where you hiding your car?

JOSHUA

Last year I parked it near the church, and someone smashed out my driver's side window with a brick.

LILY

Who would do that? Who?

JOSHUA

Some people in Montgomery don't like the sight of a Negro behind the wheel of a brand new car.

LILY

That's terrible — I believe a Negro has as much right as anyone to have a car.

JOSHUA (*Noting her condescension. Bowing low.*)
Well, thank you very much, "Miss Lily."

LILY
Now, I didn't mean it like that —

JOSHUA
I keep it parked at the house where I'm staying, on the Negro side of the park. I pass this way to catch the High Street bus downtown. What about you? Why don't you drive yourself down to the shopping district rather than sitting outside of the hospital?

LILY
Drive myself! I never got a license, isn't that terrible? Daddy always had drivers for us. I have a driver here in Montgomery, too. Mr. Bjornson. A sweet old man from Sweden, of all places. He carries me to the hospital in the morning and then back to the Jeff Davis, where I have an afternoon cocktail in The Drum Room before I call home and talk to my baby girl. I have a routine. (*Beat.*) Well, the shorter answer is: I don't drive. Me, traveling on my own? It doesn't happen.

JOSHUA
I remember the day Pastor Wilkes drove mama and me to Montgomery. We passed by that sign that read, "You are now leaving The People's City," and I thought: "Moving is a good thing!" I feel that same way when I drive my Buick Roadmaster down here from Detroit — with all the windows down, the radio on, a ginger ale in my hand, and my Green Book on the seat next to me...

LILY
Your Green Book? What's a Green Book?

JOSHUA
That's a book that tells colored folks where it's safe to eat and sleep when they're traveling.

LILY
The Green Book. Never heard of it.

JOSHUA (*Completing his earlier thought.*)
Anyway, when I'm driving, I have this — I don't know — "future" feeling. It feels a little like...love.

LILY
I've never known that feeling. That future feeling, I mean.

JOSHUA
But, love — ?

LILY

Oh, I've known love, yes. *(Beat.)* God's love. *(Beat.)* A child's love. *(Beat.)* A mother's love. Naturally. Yes. *(Lost for a moment.)* It really wants to rain, don't you think? *(Beat.)* I know this place, this park. Daddy reminded me that we came here one summer, for my cousin Tabitha Jane Hancock's wedding. It seemed like a storybook world to be married in: Beyond those gates there was a tiny zoo, a man in a striped suit who sold sweet and salty popcorn, a grand pavilion with all kinds of Alabama music. God seems to want me here again — I do believe it's more than coincidence that I am here. He put me in a place from my girlhood, He put daddy across the street in the hospital, and He put you in my path.

(She begins to cry.)

JOSHUA

What is it? Lily — *(He looks around to see if anyone is watching. He hands her his clean, folded handkerchief.)* Lily —

LILY *(Recovering.)*

It's just this...barometric pressure, I think. It wants to rain. *(There is thunder, lightning.)* And here it comes. *(They look to the skies. A sudden drenching downpour.)* Come this way, I know a place!

(LILY and JOSHUA run through the noisy downpour, pushing through a separation in the chained gates and exiting into the park. [The gates might not be literal, but merely an exit.] Lightning and thunder.)

SCENE 5B: MAY 1959

(Concurrent with previous scene. Indoors in a meeting room at the State Capitol. The Legislative Finance Committee's library budget meeting is starting. EMILY and THOMAS sit at a table facing another table [or they share a table], at which SENATOR HIGGINS sits. REP. BOBBY CRONE, a wizened, ancient legislator, played by GARTH WILLIAMS, cane in hand, sits with HIGGINS. There is thunder outside the window, and they all acknowledge it.)

EMILY *(To ALL.)*

It looks like we got inside just in time. *(Beat.)* Good morning, Senator Higgins and esteemed members of the Legislative Finance Committee. I am pleased to present the proposed Alabama Public Library Service budget for the coming year, 1960. Joining me is my colleague Thomas Franklin. I am pleased to tell you that the APLS...

SENATOR HIGGINS *(Cordially.)*

I am going to stop you there, Miss Reed. *(Beat.)* Good morning to you, too, by the way. *(He might look to the audience, which might be unusually large for a simple budget meeting — as if HIGGINS has packed the house.)* Because we have some new committee

members this term, we felt it was appropriate that we properly introduce you. Give them a sense of who you are and what you're thinking.

EMILY

Of course, Senator. I am an open book.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Before we go further. Sitting with me is Representative Bobby Crone, from the Alabama House. We're glad to see him back after his recent surgery. Absent too long. Now, let me tell you something about Bobby Crone. He was my introduction to Alabama politics, he is my son's godfather, he has been my guide on the Racial Screening Committee, he is my pillar in this Capitol Building. I am glad to have my dear friend at my side again. Bobby Crone.

BOBBY CRONE (*Humorlessly.*)

Is this an introduction or a eulogy? Thank you, E Dub. Let's move on.

(*Thunder outside the window.*)

SENATOR HIGGINS (*To EMILY.*)

Now, your name and position, for the gentlemen of the committee.

(*THOMAS and EMILY note the unusual formality for a budget meeting. THOMAS is uneasy and EMILY is cool and composed.*)

EMILY

I am Emily Wheelock Reed. I am director of the Alabama Public Library Service.

SENATOR HIGGINS

And what does being "director" of the library service entail?

EMILY

I and my staff seek to provide guidance, resources — and, of course, books — to libraries throughout the state. Librarians come to Montgomery, to our office in the glorious Archive Building, to view new books in the stacks, or use our research materials. We also distribute the recommended book list that is provided by ALA — the American Library Association. We —

SENATOR HIGGINS

The American Library Association. Where are they based?

EMILY

In Chicago.

SENATOR HIGGINS

And you distribute around the state of Alabama what this association recommends?

EMILY

Their biannual Notable Books list, yes.

SENATOR HIGGINS

May I get a copy of the latest Notable Books list that you have spread, like dandelion seeds, throughout Alabama?

EMILY

Of course, we will get that to you. *(She looks at THOMAS and he makes a note of it.)*

SENATOR HIGGINS

And these Notable Books are in the Alabama Public Library Service's holdings?

EMILY

Yes. Or they are probably on order.

SENATOR HIGGINS

So, going back, for our newcomers, you are, then, sort of the head librarian in Alabama.

EMILY

That is one way to put it, yes.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Don't be shy, Miss Reed, you are, really, The State Librarian!

EMILY

Well —

SENATOR HIGGINS

You are! You are! And I think it's somethin' to be proud of. Chief librarian of the great state of Alabama! Now tell me, Miss Reed, if I was a little librarian from, say, Tombigbee County, and I wanted new books for my little library, could I come to you for advice?

EMILY

Yes, that is exactly what you might do.

SENATOR HIGGINS

And you might recommend books.

EMILY

Yes. Based on the needs of your community, yes.

SENATOR HIGGINS

What was that? Say that for me once more, Miss Reed. I am a little deaf in this ear. From a hunting trip I took as a boy. Ringing — I often hear a dull ringing in this ear here —

EMILY

I might recommend books, keeping in mind the needs of the community.

SENATOR HIGGINS (*Pondering.*)

"The needs of the community." By that you mean — what? — you wouldn't want to recommend to the Tombigbee County Public Library a book about, say, how to build an igloo.

EMILY

Well, that would depend —

SENATOR HIGGINS

On what, Miss Reed?

EMILY

On the county's interest in igloos, sir.

SENATOR HIGGINS

But Tombigbee County hasn't seen snow, ever, as far as any modern history is concerned, Miss Reed.

EMILY

But, still, the community might be curious about igloos, Senator. They may, in fact, dream at night about the mystery of igloos. Books allow us to solve mysteries, satisfy curiosity, realize dreams.

SENATOR HIGGINS

I don't know about dreams, Miss Reed. But why recommend such a book? Tell me, honestly now, do you think the ladies of the Tombigbee County chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union are likely to move their Thursday meetings into an igloo? I don't — no sir. I don't.

EMILY

I agree with you on that point, but that does not preclude the county's interest in other cultures, and if the Tombigbee County librarian sought such a book for her constituency, I would do what I could to get her that book. A book funded by your good committee.

SENATOR HIGGINS

There is that ringing in my ear again, Miss Reed. Could you back up for me? Say again what you said before.

EMILY

I would help a librarian find a book —

SENATOR HIGGINS

No, earlier —

EMILY

If the library's constituency —

SENATOR HIGGINS

Before that —

EMILY

I suggested that the community may be interested in other cultures, Senator.

SENATOR HIGGINS

"Other cultures." Other cultures. What does that mean?

EMILY (*Drily.*)

A culture other than your own, Senator.

SENATOR HIGGINS

A culture other than my own. Are we talkin' about Eskimos, Miss Reed, or somethin' else?

EMILY

We are talking about any culture you wish to know about, including the Eskimo or "Inuit" people/ [as they are sometimes called]

SENATOR HIGGINS (*Interrupting.*)

/Other than my own, though.

EMILY

Yes, and including your own culture —

SENATOR HIGGINS

So there is room for my culture in the Tombigbee County Library?

EMILY

There has always been a place for you at the Tombigbee County Library, Senator. Your culture has been well represented since the very founding of the library, and the establishment of that county. You are so well represented, in fact, that the culture for which the county is named has been blotted out by volumes of books concentrating on your culture.

SENATOR HIGGINS

My culture.

EMILY

I am sure that you know what "Tombigbee" means.

SENATOR HIGGINS (*Taken off guard.*)

I admit, I don't.

EMILY

"Tombigbee" is a Choctaw Indian word, roughly meaning coffin-maker. It refers to burial boxes used by Choctaws.

SENATOR HIGGINS

I see. Well, for the record, Miss Reed, I hail from Marengo County. Named for an Italian town.

EMILY

Now, back to the budget, sir...

SENATOR HIGGINS

Where are you from, Miss Reed?

EMILY

From? I live in Montgomery, sir.

SENATOR HIGGINS

But, where are your people from?

EMILY

I was born in Asheville.

SENATOR HIGGINS (*Playing dumb.*)

Asheville, Alabama?

EMILY

No. North Carolina.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Oh, I assumed you were an Alabama lady.

EMILY

I am, now.

SENATOR HIGGINS

But not born here.

EMILY
As I said —

SENATOR HIGGINS
But you did your schoolin' here — University of Alabama, or Alabama Polytech?

EMILY
No, I —

SENATOR HIGGINS
In North Carolina, then —

EMILY
I grew up in Indiana, and I attended Indiana University.

THOMAS
Phi Beta Kappa!

(She gently gestures to silence THOMAS.)

SENATOR HIGGINS
You're a "HoozyErr."

EMILY
"Hoosier."

SENATOR HIGGINS
"Hoosier." Here, I thought you were a true Sister of the South and you are, after all, a "Hoosier."

EMILY
Well, not a Hoosier by birth, Senator, but certainly by — matriculation.

SENATOR HIGGINS *(Looking at his notes.)*
In fact, you have matriculated all over the map, haven't you, Miss Reed? You were a librarian in Dee-troit, weren't you? And in exotic and far-away Hawaii. [Pronounced "How-ah-yuh."] When I think of Hawaii, I must say, I do not think of libraries.

EMILY
For being unaware of my place of birth, Senator, you seem to know my resume. So you must know that I was also a librarian in Louisiana, prior to my work here. And I taught library science at the University of Florida.

SENATOR HIGGINS

I've been reading a lot lately, Miss Reed, but there are gaps. For example, I don't know if you are a married lady.

(Beat.)

EMILY

I am not.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Nice and smart and attractive lady like you, never married?

EMILY

No, Senator. Is that a concern?

(BOBBY CRONE discreetly presses HIGGINS' forearm or leans in, signaling his colleague away from this line of inquiry.)

SENATOR HIGGINS

No — concern. We'll move on. I would like to see you happy, Miss Reed. It's natural and normal to be married.

(Thunder. Begin concurrent SCENE 5C, in a bandshell within the park. LILY and JOSHUA find shelter in the downpour.)

LILY

Your Bible didn't get wet, did it?

JOSHUA

It's fine.

EMILY

Do you have other questions, Senator?

JOSHUA

It's not letting up.

LILY

It's like Noah, all right.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Are you familiar with The Montgomery Home News, Miss Reed?

JOSHUA

You seemed to know this bandshell was here.

LILY

When I got bored with my book, I would peek through the park gates and see this old bandshell beyond the brush. I thought, "There's a place just begging to have the sound of a human voice in it again." *(She shouts.)* HELLOOOO! *(She hears an echo. She shouts.)* I HEAR THE ECHOES OF YOUR OLD MUSIC!!!! *(Her words echo.)* Why's this old park locked up?

JOSHUA

I asked about that over at the house where I'm staying. A Federal Judge decided that white folks and black folks ought to be allowed to picnic here — together. But The City of Montgomery didn't like that idea. So they shut it down. For everybody. No more Oak Park.

LILY

Oak Park! That's what they called it! I remember that. *(More to his point.)* I think that's terrible, them closing it. I think Negroes should be allowed to picnic just like white folks.

JOSHUA

Well, we do picnic — we just do it in our own private parks, just like white folks.

LILY

The paper used to be full of these stories. Why can't people just be happy living the way they live? Daddy stopped taking the state papers 'round about when Miss Rosa Parks made the news. Made his blood boil.

JOSHUA

You don't read the newspaper? You used to be so curious, Lily. About the world. Aren't you curious about what's happening beyond Marengo County?

(He hands his folded newspaper to her, or perhaps she takes it from him. It is now hers.)

LILY

I suppose you're right.

JOSHUA

This park — these trees — it reminds me of the woods around The Big House. Don't you think?

LILY

Yes, I feel that, too. *(Carelessly.)* I'll never, never, never understand why you and your mama left us, Joshua.

(She begins fishing in her purse.)

JOSHUA

You've said that before. Do you really not remember that night?

LILY
What night?

JOSHUA
That night mama and I left The Big House.

LILY
I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about. Now, here it is! *(She finds something in her purse. A flash of lightning.)* You want a stick of Doublemint?

(There is a terrifying crash of thunder. It's 1939 and they are eleven years old. Their Alabama accents are more pronounced.)

LILY
I said, do you want a stick of Doublemint?

JOSHUA
Doublemint? I thought you said you wanted me to come here for somethin' important. You said it was important, and not to tell mama.

LILY
It is important! Take a stick of gum. *(He does, and she does, and they begin to chew.)* Sit down. *(He crouches to the ground.)* Not there, next to me. There's room next to me.

JOSHUA
If mama wake up and find me gone, she'll beat me.

LILY
If your mama wakes up and finds you gone, you say you went to the outhouse, that's all.

JOSHUA
Why we here? The ground is cool and wet. My feet is wet.

LILY
It's called "doo."

JOSHUA
I know what it's called. Why'dja wanna meet?

LILY
I wanted to see you.

JOSHUA
How'd you get out?

LILY

I sneaked out. Mama's asleep, daddy's working late.

JOSHUA

At Demopolis Cotton? Why he working so late?

LILY

Shush. Mama said he was at a meeting. Taking care of business.

(She strikes a thick kitchen match.)

JOSHUA

What you doin'? You crazy?

LILY

I wanted to see your face, but I couldn't find a candle.

JOSHUA

So you playin' with matches? Someone'll see the light out here.

LILY

No one will see. We're behind the trees. Hello, Rabbit.

JOSHUA *(Uneasily.)*

Hello.

(He blows out the match.)

LILY

Dontcha think my hair looks pretty? Girls at school pull my hair and call me "poor little rich girl." They say cotton's dead, but they're jealous. I don't need them. O.K., gimme your gum.

JOSHUA

What?

LILY

Your gum, spit it out.

(She holds out her hand. They each spit their gum into her hand. She discards the gum.)

LILY

I like being here with you at night. I want to share something secret with you.

JOSHUA

What is it?

LILY
Close your eyes.

JOSHUA
Why?

LILY
Just do it.

(He does. She leans over and kisses him on the cheek.)

JOSHUA *(Flinching, eyes open.)*
What you doing?

LILY
That was a kiss.

JOSHUA
I know. Why you do it?

LILY
I wanted to. For a long time I wanted to. Don't you want to? Now that we're older...

JOSHUA
We only twelve — next month.

LILY
Don't you want to?

(She leans in to kiss him on the mouth. He kisses her back. Sweet. Innocent. Suddenly, noise, light, commotion. Her FATHER, voiced by GARTH, calls out.)

JOSHUA *(Alarmed. Pulling away.)*
Someone coming!

LILY
It's daddy!

(They freeze. Begin SCENE 5D, at Capitol hearing.)

SENATOR HIGGINS
Are you familiar with The Montgomery Home News?

EMILY
I know of it, I am not familiar with it.

(LILY and JOSHUA snap into the present, as adults.)

LILY

I don't remember that. I would have remembered that.

SENATOR HIGGINS *(Genial.)*

But you know that it's a publication here in Montgomery. You do know that.

EMILY

Indeed.

SENATOR HIGGINS

A clipping from that publication was sent to me. The clipping is about a book, called "The Rabbits' Wedding." Do you know the book?

EMILY

The book has come to my attention recently, yes.

SENATOR HIGGINS

But you didn't know the book before "recently"?

EMILY

Not intimately.

SENATOR HIGGINS

And why has it come to your attention recently?

EMILY

I gather there has been some concern about the content of the book.

SENATOR HIGGINS

I have read the clipping and understand the concern. Particularly since the book is in the children's section of our libraries.

EMILY

Well, it is a children's book.

SENATOR HIGGINS

A children's book with some very grown-up ideas in it. Have you read it?

EMILY

I have.

SENATOR HIGGINS

What's your memory of it?

EMILY
I like the book —

SENATOR HIGGINS
Not your opinion, I mean your memory of the story.

EMILY
Well, two rabbits who have spent much time together frolicking in the woods, decide to marry each other. They do so in the company of other friendly creatures, on a moonlit night, in a meadow on the edge of a forest.

SENATOR HIGGINS
You forgot a significant element.

EMILY
They live happily ever after — ?

SENATOR HIGGINS
And —

EMILY
And — ? What about the story interests you the most, Senator — ?

SENATOR HIGGINS
The part that interests me is in the very first sentence of the story.

EMILY
Do you know it by heart?

SENATOR HIGGINS
No, I do not. But I have a copy here. *(He opens the book. Clears his throat.)* "Two little rabbits, a white rabbit and a black rabbit, lived in a large forest..." What does that say to you?

EMILY
I think we ought to ask children aged three-to-seven-years-old. They are the intended audience.

SENATOR HIGGINS
Miss Reed, my bad ear isn't so bad that I don't hear the vox populi. It says that this book is a vehicle to promote integration. To our youth. To our impressionable youth. Our "three-to-seven-year-olds"! The state House has heard about this book, the state Senate has heard about this book. The people do not like this book.

EMILY

The Montgomery Home News does not like this book.

SENATOR HIGGINS

And the Montgomery Home News represents many people.

EMILY

The paper represents members of the White Citizens Council.

SENATOR HIGGINS

And members of the White Citizens Council are residents of the state of Alabama, Miss Reed. Bawn 'n' bred. And although things may be different in Indiana, we have our ways — people stay with their own kind.

EMILY

What would you like me to do, Senator?

SENATOR HIGGINS

I think it would be prudent for The State Librarian of Alabama to pull this book from the shelves of the Alabama Public Library Service. And she should recommend that her librarians around the state do the same.

EMILY

I will not do that.

(Begin SCENE 5E, in the park.)

LILY

No, no, no. I don't remember that.

JOSHUA

Lily, how you could you forget?

EMILY

I cannot imagine encouraging the suppression of this lovely little children's book. Have you looked at the illustrations, sir? Have you noted the detail?

JOSHUA

You kissed me and I kissed you back, and your daddy found us, and there was hell to pay.

LILY

No. Not so.

EMILY

Garth Williams is one of our finest illustrators — he did the artwork for "Little House on the Prairie," "Stuart Little," "Charlotte's Web" — recognized modern classics.

SENATOR HIGGINS

I don't know who this Garth Williams is, but he is not welcome in Alabama, with his message of black marrying white.

JOSHUA

He slapped me across the face so hard I could hear it echo in the woods. He dragged me, Lily, dragged me across them — those — herbaceous borders, toward the lamplight of The Big House. I saw my blood on those herbs in your mother's garden. You screamed and I cried and mama come — came — running from our shack, and your mother ran out of The Big House in her nightgown. And your father shouted, "Never, never, never!"

LILY

No, no, no! Never did —

JOSHUA

Your daddy told you two to get in the house and close the door. I swear I thought he was gonna kill me.

LILY

Never did —

JOSHUA

Mama came between me and your daddy, and I thought he was gonna kill her, too. But she stood there, toe to toe with him at the lamppost and said, "After I wash the blood off my boy's face, we'll pack our things and walk to Pastor Wilkes' house, and you'll never see us again."

LILY

I am speechless!

JOSHUA

I turned and looked back at The Big House, and saw you and your mama at your bedroom balcony window, watching us. You say you remember everything — everything but this?

(Begin SCENE 5F.)

SENATOR HIGGINS

Let me ask you something, Miss Reed. *(Beat.)* Do you believe in racial integration?

LILY

I don't remember this. I don't. I don't.

JOSHUA

What are we doing here, Lily? I'm gonna make a run for it. The bus stop is only three blocks away. What's a little rain? Besides, what'll folks say if they find us here together?

(He dashes into the gloom of the downpour. He has left behind his Bible, underneath the newspaper that he gave her. She is stricken.)

SENATOR HIGGINS

Do you believe in racial integration?

EMILY

My feelings about racial integration have nothing to do with running the Library Service. Just as my marital status is not germane to a discussion about my job.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Your job? Well, your job and the library service itself was created — and is funded — by the State Legislature.

EMILY

Which is why we are here today.

(LILY discovers JOSHUA's Bible.)

LILY

Joshua! Your Bible —

(She takes it and exits into the rain.)

SENATOR HIGGINS

Let me put it another way: Do you believe in circulating books that promote racial integration?

EMILY

I believe that reading rescues people from the shadows of ignorance —

SENATOR HIGGINS *(Interrupting.)*

I am troubled that these hidden-message books are invited into our libraries. Tell me, are the people still welcome in the libraries, Miss Reed?

EMILY *(Finally losing her cool.)*

Which people?

SENATOR HIGGINS

The people of Alabama. The people who pay taxes.

EMILY

All of the people who pay taxes, Senator? Every last one of them? Doors open wide?

(A fed-up BOBBY CRONE leans in to whisper something to HIGGINS, who nods. CRONE exits, with cane for support.)

SENATOR HIGGINS

Well, you have just told me what I want to hear. Thank you, Miss Reed. I wish it had taken a little less dancing.

(A concerned THOMAS looks at EMILY, but she pushes on through without revealing any discomfort.)

EMILY

If the committee is clear about my biography, shall we talk about the library budget for the coming year? *(She opens her document. Beat. Pointedly:)* Gentlemen of Alabama...

(Blackout.)

SCENE 6: MAY 1959

(GARTH, who is now HERSCHEL WEBB, appears. Shortly after the budget meeting has ended. EMILY — perhaps walking with THOMAS or perhaps alone — heads toward her office.)

WEBB

Miss Reed?

EMILY *(Surprised by the ambush?)*

Yes?

WEBB

My name's Herschel Webb. I'm a reporter from the Montgomery Advertiser. Senator Higgins just gave a press conference on the steps of the Capitol. About the library budget — and "The Rabbits' Wedding."

EMILY

Did he?

(SENATOR HIGGINS appears in a light.)

SENATOR HIGGINS

Of course, boys, it's misuse of funds. They won't get an extra cent if I can help it. The book is good old-fashioned propaganda just like they do it up in Russia. And there are other books! Books yet to be named. Books against segregation...communistic books! Books no one in Alabama wants to read. Bought by Alabama taxpayers. And who

chooses them, boys? A couple of elite, liberal, local folk who carry the banner of "enlightenment." That's the smallest parade in town, fellas.

WEBB (*To EMILY.*)

I was hoping to get a comment from you. (*She is silent.*)

About the book. (*She is silent.*)

Or about the senator. (*She is silent.*)

Or about the price of milk?

EMILY (*Moving along.*)

Mr. Webb, I have to get to work. I have no comment.

SENATOR HIGGINS

This book should be burned!

EMILY (*Startled.*)

He said that?

SENATOR HIGGINS

You heard me. It ought to be burned. The South has room for only one viewpoint. Now, how about a picture, boys?

(*He gladly holds the book aloft. Flashbulbs flash.*)

EMILY (*With the feeling of a moderate and prepared statement.*)

The book was embraced by critics and other librarians around the country, and was purchased by us because of its favorable reviews. (*WEBB writes.*) I think that must be my statement for now.

WEBB

Thank you, Miss Reed. Could we get a picture of you and the book?

EMILY

Certainly not. (*She heads toward her office. GARTH exits.*) Thomas —

THOMAS

Yes, ma'am?

EMILY

Thomas, about "The Rabbits' Wedding"...I want you to find it...

THOMAS

Yes, ma'am.

EMILY

And I want you to remove it from the shelf.

THOMAS

What?

EMILY

It is to be taken out of general circulation.

THOMAS

Are you sure?

EMILY

I am. *(Beat.)* We will place it on the Reserve Shelf, for safekeeping, where anyone who asks for it may have it.

THOMAS *(Neutrally, dutifully.)*

Yes, ma'am.

(THOMAS exits. EMILY finds a cigarette and lights one up. End of Act One.)

ACT TWO

SCENE 1: JUNE 1959

(GARTH WILLIAMS appears.)

GARTH WILLIAMS

There's a villain in Alabama, folks, and I have been cast in the role. Yes, I wrote and illustrated "The Rabbits' Wedding." The infamous! The scandalous! The pornographic Garth Williams! The American-born, European-educated painter whose subject matter is bunny rabbits. How rare for me to be in the spotlight, as I can usually be found as a supporting player, illustrating books by E.B. White and Laura Ingalls Wilder. Those perverts. *(Beat.)* It's my parents' fault: My father was a cartoonist, my mother a landscape artist. Everybody in my home was always either painting or drawing. They exposed me to books filled with art from all over the world; the most outrageous and arousing images! And so my goal, like their goal, is to drown children in a watercolor world of the most unspeakable aspects of the human experience. Namely: kindness, tolerance, amity, tenderness, humor, joy, respect for others, interest in the natural world and...hope for the future.

For the record? Pencils ready? I was completely unaware that animals with white fur were considered blood relations of white human beings. The book was written for children, who will understand it perfectly, as it is only about fuzzy love. It was not written for adults; they are not smart enough to understand its simplicity. It has no hidden political message. It was never intended to wake the sleeping giants of hate. *(Beat.)* Anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of art will know that the rabbits are a different color for visual contrast. My book was published in black and white! My inspiration was 11th-century Chinese art: visual balance; yin and yang; dark and light. As in Chinese scroll art, I just think a black horse next to a white horse looks more picturesque. But that sounds a bit grand, or worse — like an explanation. And art owes no explanation.

However, if you're seeking evidence that I am a political rather than pictorial creature, then perhaps you should investigate my other shocking titles: "Baby's First Book." "Baby Animals." "Baby Farm Animals." "The Kitten Who Thought He Was...a Mouse." "Animal Friends." "Home for a Bunny." "Mister Dog." "The Friendly Book." "The Adventures of Benjamin Pink." *(Beat.)* Well, I think we all know what that last one's about, don't we?

If you're in Montgomery, Alabama, and you're curious about my latest picture book, "The Rabbits' Wedding," you can find it among 59 other books on the "reserve shelf" of the Alabama Library Service, right where it belongs, alongside the topics of abortion, contraception and communism.

My publisher, Harper Brothers, has informed me that my romance about two herbivorous creatures is shaping up to be one of my best-selling titles ever. I couldn't have done it

alone. I'd like to thank Senator E.W. Higgins, the great champion of children's literature! We never even knew that we needed him!

SCENE 2: SUMMER 1959

(THOMAS enters EMILY's office with a stack of magazines, papers and mail. Her desk is more cluttered with paper than before.)

THOMAS

Time, Life, Newsweek, New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Mirror, Times of London, Le Monde. All of this from one little story in one little segregationist newspaper.

EMILY

And one not-so-little mention of book-burning.

THOMAS

Did you see what Mr. Webb wrote in the Advertiser? *(Reading, or does GARTH put a hat on as WEBB on the sidelines and read?)* "Senator E.W. Higgins is a man of elephantine ego and gigantic convictions, but it is doubtful that mature citizens of Alabama would embrace him as their literary tutor."

EMILY

Brave Mr. Webb. *(Beat.)* The Associated Press has called me. I declined their request for a profile interview. I need to focus on other library business. We have yet to hear if we are to be funded next year — we might all be out on the steps before we know it. I am swimming in paperwork. I have received more mail in the past month than in the past year.

THOMAS *(Going through the mail.)*

Well, here's one. Addressed to "The Rabbit Lady Librarian, Alabama Library, Montgomery."

EMILY

So crudely addressed it could only be a child. I could use a lift. *(Examining the writing on the envelope.)* Atrocious handwriting.

(She slits it up the back and pulls a single folded sheet of paper out. She reads it in silence.)

THOMAS

Fan mail from the children of the Bookworm Circle?

THOMAS

Well?

EMILY

Well, this was not written by a child, though the lettering is certainly...unschooled. The epithet is misspelled.

(She offers it to him. He reads it.)

THOMAS

I'm calling the police.

EMILY

No.

THOMAS

This is a threat.

EMILY

It is not explicitly a threat.

THOMAS *(He reaches for the phone; she motions against it.)*

It's implicitly a threat.

EMILY

It is merely ugly. I do not want to invite more attention.

THOMAS

Is this the first — ? *(She drops it in the waste basket.)* Wait. Don't. That's history.

EMILY

It is now.

(She waves THOMAS away. He exits. She picks up the phone. Lots of pauses and listening here. Or does GARTH appear with his back to the audience speaking mutedly into a receiver, or with static and mumbled words being heard, from a distant office?)

Long distance. Chicago. DEarborn 8-6000. *(Pause.)* Mr. Cartright, please. Emily Reed. Yes — again. Thank you. *(Pause.)* Hello, out there, Mr. Cartright. Finally, we speak. *(Pause.)* You have my reports — you have seen the clippings...? Yes. As you might imagine, we have a lonely feeling down here. *(Pause.)* I said "a lonely" — *(Pause.)* We are wondering what sort of support we might get from the ALA... *(Pause.)* Yes. Well — *(Pause.)* I am concerned that the legislature seems to be taking an unusually long time approving our budget. It seems punitive on their part. *(Pause.)* Yes. I understand. That is a priority, but might we start addressing multiple priorities? *(Pause.)* You think this will blow over by the end of the summer? Mr. Cartright, you are in Chicago, have you ever spent a summer in the Deep South? It lasts March to November. *(Pause.)* Of course. I will. Goodbye, Mr. Cartright.

(She hangs up the phone and thinks a moment. She pulls her last pack of cigarettes out of a drawer, lights a cigarette.)

SCENE 3: JULY 1959

(The Fourth of July weekend. JOSHUA is walking with purpose to the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, near the Capitol, without Bible in hand, perhaps carrying a box of mimeographed flyers. Blazing heat of summer. LILY appears, an awkward ambush.)

LILY
Hello? Hello!

JOSHUA
Lily. What are you doing here?

LILY *(Uncomfortable and determined at once.)*
I won't keep you but a minute, Joshua. I have something of yours. You said you were coming back Fourth of July, so I thought I'd drop it by. I knew you'd be worshipping here at Martin Luther's church...

JOSHUA
Martin Luther King, Jr.'s church.

LILY
Yes, King. I asked at the hotel front desk if they could tell me where Mr. King's church was —

JOSHUA
It's Doctor King.

LILY
Yes, where his church was located, but no one at the front desk knew. So, I asked the bellman, because I thought he might know, and he gave me the funniest up and down look. He pointed me this way.

JOSHUA
You walked all the way here from the Jeff Davis? Where's your driver?

LILY
I told him I was going for a walk. He doesn't need to know my business. I had to see you, to give you this. *(She hands him his Bible.)* You left it behind at Oak Park. I wanted to return it here that very day, but I didn't have the courage. You said you'd be back in a few weeks, so here we are. You said it was your mama's.

JOSHUA
Thank you.

LILY

Can't worship without a Bible close at hand.

JOSHUA

Worship? Lily, you didn't hear a word I said before, did you?

LILY

No, no. I heard every syllable. Unforgettable what you said about our Demopolis days.

JOSHUA

Lily, I don't worship here. I volunteer here. Look, when's the last time you saw a Negro in your section of the movie theatre? Is there a Negro at your favorite cafeteria who isn't serving you? Have you shared a table at a library with a Negro? I'm here for integration — doing what I can to improve Alabama for my people. My people in this world. Not the next.

LILY

But you carry your Bible with you.

JOSHUA

Yes. As a show of respect for these people, who took in my mother. It only means something to me in that mama's name is in it. The rest of it holds no value.

LILY

I'm sure you don't mean that.

JOSHUA

Me and God? We haven't been on speaking terms since the day I left Demopolis. You understand we were cast out, Lily? Mama couldn't find work in all of Marengo County because of what happened — people talked! — so we came to Montgomery. We scraped along, mama breakin' her back workin' here at the church part time, cleaning. As we squeezed through life, God gradually got squeezed out of me. She could believe in him, they can believe in him, you can believe in him. But a God that steps aside to allow men to be cruel to men? That's not something for me to worship.

LILY

But mama sent you a cake!

JOSHUA

What?

LILY

A cake. Mama baked a Lane Cake for you and your mama. She had it sent over to wherever you went to after you left us. That was kindness. Not cruelty. Wasn't there a cake? Do you remember a cake?

JOSHUA (*Pulling the memory from deep within.*)

Yeah, I remember that cake. A car pulled up at Lone Pine Baptist after we left you.

LILY

That was Mr. Foley, the caretaker at Trinity, who drove the cake over.

JOSHUA

Wow, you remember everything, don't you? (*Beat.*) It was a beautiful cake. Yeah, I remember thinking I wanted that cake!

LILY

Yes!

JOSHUA

When mama saw it, and knew it was from The Big House, she took that cake and she walked it across the church property into the woods, and she threw that cake — plate and all — against a tree, where it broke into thick pieces and scattered everywhere. She marched back into the church and prayed. She got closer and closer to God over the years, finding a place here at Dexter Avenue Baptist. And I was the boy in the pew in the church, always looking out the window wanting — I don't know — cake, I guess.

LILY (*Numbly.*)

I just thought your Bible might be important to you.

JOSHUA (*After a moment.*)

It is. You're right. Mama's name is in it. It was her mama's before her. When she was dying over at Hale Hospital, she pressed it into my hands, and said, "Don't forget about ol' Alabama." And her face brightened and she said, "Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world..."

LILY & JOSHUA

"...I'm going to live with God."

LILY

There were nights when I would sneak across the lawn and listen outside your breezeway and hear her sing those very words. (*They are both lost.*) I could have returned your Bible to the church secretary here weeks ago, I know. But I liked having something of yours, for this little while. (*Beat.*) I need to get back to the Jeff Davis.

(*She turns to exit.*)

JOSHUA (*Softened.*)

Your daddy? How's he doing?

LILY

No improvement. *(Bitterly.)* I should just become a resident of Montgomery. I'm here often enough. But if I'm not here for him, who will be? Most of his friends are gone now.

JOSHUA

We go to great lengths for our parents.

LILY

We do indeed. *(Beat.)* How long you here for?

JOSHUA

I'll drive back to Detroit tomorrow, after the church's Independence Day picnic. I'll be here again in November.

LILY

I don't think I'll be at the Jeff Davis, but who knows?

JOSHUA

Thank you for the book.

LILY

The Bible. Of course. *(Beat.)* I wish I could say what you want me to say. What you want me to remember.

JOSHUA

You can't do what you can't do.

LILY

Go on inside and do your work.

(She walks away. He might look back to watch her walk off. He exits.)

SCENE 4: SUMMER 1959

(THOMAS enters EMILY's office.)

THOMAS *(Big smile on his face. Spring in his step.)*

Can you talk for a moment?

EMILY *(Businesslike.)*

Yes?

THOMAS *(Holding up a piece of paper with a message on it.)*

A couple of things. The Associated Press is now going through me to try to get to you. They still want to talk to you.

EMILY

Tell them no. I am glad you came by. Would you close the door, please? (*He does so.*) I have been wondering: How is it, do you think, that the Montgomery Home News originally got wind of the acquisition of "The Rabbits' Wedding"?

THOMAS

Oh. Well, it's a good question.

EMILY

Yes. Children's literature would not seem to be foremost in the minds of editors there. Yet, they had intimate knowledge of our holdings. Jane has no record of a special request from the local media.

THOMAS

Countless people have access to information about our holdings: Librarians from around the state, the public at large...

EMILY

And you.

THOMAS

Well, sure. And me. (*Beat.*) And you. And Jane. And the Library Board. The staff —

EMILY

I found it odd that when the story broke in the Home News, you had such awareness, such memory, of the title being part of our collection. And you also told me that your family...

EMILY & THOMAS

"Subscribes to the Montgomery Home News."

THOMAS

I see.

EMILY

And that morning after the story appeared, you were unusually late for work. You seemed preoccupied — I would even say "suspicious" — when you came to me with the headline.

(*Beat.*)

THOMAS (*Delicately.*)

I was late that morning, if you must know, because I am the sole caregiver of my infirm widower father, whose ailments are multiple. That morning, he soiled himself. And I had to tend to it. Do you require more explanation than that? (*Beat.*) I'm a private person, Miss Reed. I'm a bookish, peculiar, 28-year-old man who still lives with his father, out of

obligation to him, or maybe out of fear that if I leave that house I will have to face myself and my place in this world. Do you really think that I tipped off the Home News? Do you think that I scrawl in a childlike hand words that are odious and ugly to me? (*Beat.*) Do you know who Juliette Hampton Morgan is?

EMILY

Thomas, I —

THOMAS

Juliette Hampton Morgan was a refined and intelligent Southern lady who worked as reference librarian at the City Library here in Montgomery, not long ago. Like very few white folks in town, she was troubled by the treatment of Negroes on Montgomery buses. So, during the time of Rosa Parks and the boycott, she wrote a letter to the editor that appeared in the Montgomery Advertiser — right there in the "Tell It to Old Grandma" column, for all to see, with her name signed to it — praising the efforts of Dr. King and his Montgomery Improvement Association and those who chose taxis and car pools and shoe leather over the bus system. And, oh, what a little black ink in a Montgomery newspaper — any Montgomery paper — can do to stain a person. She was sneered at, at work. She was spat at, at the bus stop. She was clucked at, at church. At the drugstore, at the butcher, while crossing the street, waiting in line for a movie. Wherever she might've been, the good, white men and women of Montgomery called her all manner of names. And they didn't throw just epithets — they threw bricks. Good Southern bricks from good Southern clay, right clear through the windows of the house that she shared with her mother. One night, she pulled back the lace curtain to find a cross blazing orange on their front lawn. The next day, Miss Juliette Hampton Morgan abruptly quit the City Library. The push of the world was taking a toll on her. Her high blood pressure was higher than usual. That night, at bedtime, the thin-skinned, deep-thinking Miss Morgan took her prescription pills — perhaps one or two extra, for reinforcement — and switched off the lamp. And never woke to see another morning in Montgomery. (*Beat.*) I know this story by heart because my first job after college, was at the City Library, where I was assistant to Miss Juliette Hampton Morgan. I was her witness, Miss Reed. Unable to guide her or protect her — or save her. Her story is my story, too, Miss Reed. But even without me telling it, you should have thought better of me.

EMILY

Thomas —

THOMAS

When you put that children's book on the reserve shelf, it reminded me of her, and it clarified for me what it is we do here. You protect the books, Miss Reed, and I protect you.

(She extends her hand.)

EMILY

Here, now, Thomas, take my hand and know that I am sorry. Please. I was wrong. I regret the accusation.

THOMAS

No, you don't have to — *(They shake hands. She does not let go.)*

EMILY

I do. I was wrong. And I am sorry. Look at me, please. *(He does.)* These events, this mess — I took it out on you. I am so deeply sorry. I will not make this mistake again. I hope you will forgive me —

THOMAS

Of course I forgive you, Miss Reed. And I apologize if I came on too strong —

EMILY

Stop. You have nothing to apologize for. You were perfect. Perfect. The apology is owed to you. *(Beat.)* Now, let us move beyond this. Back to work, and back to who we are. We have work to do.

THOMAS

Yes, ma'am. Thank you.

EMILY

By the way, I spoke to ALA, in Chicago.

THOMAS

And?

EMILY

They said they have bigger fish to fry.

THOMAS

They said that?

EMILY

They said that integration of libraries must remain their primary focus.

THOMAS

So, censorship is secondary? What are their thoughts about hate mail? *(Beat.)* We're on our own, then?

EMILY

We have us. That will have to do. *(Beat.)* When you came in, you said you had a "couple" of things to discuss. I did not let you finish.

THOMAS (*Brightening.*)

Yes. I got a call from a friend at the Capitol. Our funding has been approved for the next year.

EMILY (*Relieved.*)

Something is right in Alabama!

THOMAS (*Beaming.*)

They're going to announce it tomorrow.

EMILY

Maybe I no longer need a protector.

THOMAS

Well, you've got one, that's all I know.

(He exits.)

SCENE 5: SUMMER 1959

(At the Capitol. HIGGINS encounters BOBBY CRONE, cane in hand.)

SENATOR HIGGINS

Bobby Crone, my Bobby Crone. How you holding up? How you feeling? You're looking young and healthy.

BOBBY CRONE

I am neither, and I bet you say that to all the boys.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Only the pretty ones.

BOBBY CRONE

E.W., let's have a word.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Anything.

BOBBY CRONE

How do I say this to you delicately, son? *(Beat.)* When is this business gonna end?

SENATOR HIGGINS

Which business?

BOBBY CRONE

Your endless pursuit, with bazooka in hand, of bunny rabbits.

SENATOR HIGGINS

"Bazooka"? Is that what they say? Well, by God, a bazooka's what we need, don't you think? Wipe 'em out, be sure of it, because if they remain, you know how they breed.

BOBBY CRONE

They don't breed as fast as negative press. The New York Times, E.W.? Time magazine? We're all looking like fools down here, picking on a lady librarian and holding a match to a kiddie book that no one heard of until you brung it up.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Who — who gives a carp's crap about the national media? And just how in the hell did those other papers get this, anyhow? This is an Alabama story. I was talking to local boys.

BOBBY CRONE

Have you heard of the wire services? Big deal in journalism. Been around for years. Look, E Dub, you ever read Uncle Remus?

SENATOR HIGGINS

Uncle Remus? Wasn't raised on it. "Tom Sawyer" was my book. Saw that Disney movie, though. Loved that movie.

BOBBY CRONE

We all love that "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah," all right. But, this rabbit book business — it's gonna be your Tar Baby, gettin' all stuck to you 'til you can't move. Some of the other boys in the House and Senate don't wanna get stuck along with you.

SENATOR HIGGINS

I'm not stuck. Who says "stuck"? And what boys are you talking about? I got plenty of fellas on my side —

BOBBY CRONE

Look, this is your favorite Representative giving you advice —

SENATOR HIGGINS

You're more than that to me, you might as well be my father.

BOBBY CRONE

My advice: Walk away from this. Bunny rabbits? There are other battles, E Dub. This one's done.

SENATOR HIGGINS

The world of the South is a line of dominoes falling one by one, and here's another one. Before this, the Montgomery bus boycott. Before that, Brown and the Board of

Education. Before that — a thousand others. This one falls, and the rest will follow right on into integration and ruination, and goodbye to glory.

BOBBY CRONE

Is bunny rabbits the battle?

SENATOR HIGGINS

The battle is books. The choosing of books by and for our own.

BOBBY CRONE

Fair enough. Know what your battle is. *(Beat.)* I'm late for committee.

SENATOR HIGGINS

You go on. What's the burning issue today?

BOBBY CRONE

House Bill 24. We're changing the state flower. From goldenrod to the camellia.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Jesus wept! *(Beat.)* Another domino falls!

BOBBY CRONE

Oh, I don't know about that...

SENATOR HIGGINS

No, it's worse. It's like watching your own funeral.

BOBBY CRONE

You've been readin' too much "Tom Sawyer."

(They exit in separate directions.)

SCENE 6: AUGUST 1959

(THOMAS enters EMILY's office door.)

THOMAS

Miss Reed? Mr. Webb from the Advertiser here to see you.

EMILY

I have no record of an appointment. But, you may send him in.

THOMAS

Before you speak with him, Miss Reed. I just wanted to give you a tip.

EMILY

A tip?

THOMAS

A suggestion. It's about the way you pronounce "Munkgumry."

EMILY

The way I pronounce Montgomery?

THOMAS

You might want to say: "Munkgumry."

EMILY

Montgomery.

THOMAS

Munkgumry.

EMILY

Mont-GUMMERY.

THOMAS

No. It's three syllables, not four.

EMILY

Mont-gum-ry.

THOMAS

Munk, Munk — like, with a "K."

EMILY

Munk-Ummery.

THOMAS

Munkgumry.

EMILY

MUNK-Ummery.

THOMAS

Munk-gum-ry.

EMILY

Muunk-guuumry.

THOMAS
Munkgumry.

EMILY
Munk-GOMRY

(This exchange can be continued ad lib, if the actors and director wish, with EMILY becoming more impatient, until THOMAS concludes:)

THOMAS
Close enough.

EMILY *(Irritated, shouting past THOMAS, who remains.)*
Mr. Webb, are you there?

(WEBB pushes in, hat in hand.)

WEBB
I'm following up on a library story, Miss Reed.

EMILY
The good news of the budget? That is an old story.

WEBB
No. I was just over The Capitol. You haven't heard?

EMILY
Heard what?

(The phone rings. She picks it up.)

EMILY
Yes, Jane? *(Beat.)* The Associated Press again? *(Beat.)* Tell them again I do not give sitdown interviews. *(Longer pause, listening. Looks at WEBB. She knows something is up.)* No, not even when there is breaking news. Decline it. *(She hangs up and looks to WEBB.)* What is the breaking news, Mr. Webb?

WEBB
It concerns a list.

EMILY
A list?

WEBB
Higgins says there is a list of books, books you recommend for purchase.

EMILY

Yes. A Notable Books list, it is not strictly my list.

WEBB

He gave a speech on the Senate floor. He doesn't like the list from the first half of 1959. One title, in particular. This one has nothing to do with rabbits.

(HIGGINS appears in a light on the Senate floor, speaking to his fellow legislators. HIGGINS and EMILY might cross into the same playing area in this moment.)

SENATOR HIGGINS

The list, my friends! On this list you see before you there is an especially offending entry!

EMILY

Do not tell me, Mr. Webb, let us go down the list!

SENATOR HIGGINS

Let's go down the list. You'll see here a book that gives free rein to America's number one integrationist voice! The book and the author?

EMILY *(Reading from the list.)*

"Breakfast at Tiffany's" by Truman Capote!

SENATOR HIGGINS

No, boys, no!

EMILY *(Ticking off the list. Impatience? Incredulity?)*

"95 Poems" by e.e. cummings.

SENATOR HIGGINS

No.

EMILY

"Act One" by Moss Hart.

SENATOR HIGGINS

No.

EMILY

"The Undiscovered Self" by Carl Jung.

SENATOR HIGGINS

No!

EMILY

"Dr. Zhivago" by Boris Pasternak.

SENATOR HIGGINS

No!

EMILY

"First Lady of the South: The Life of Mrs. Jefferson Davis."

SENATOR HIGGINS (*Enthusiastically.*)

No — but now, that's a title I can get behind!

EMILY

"Land Without Justice." ... "Only in America." ... "The Joy of Music" by Leonard Bernstein.

SENATOR HIGGINS

No, no, no...

EMILY

Well, here we are!

SENATOR HIGGINS

"Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story" —

SENATOR HIGGINS & EMILY

By Martin Luther King, Jr.

SENATOR HIGGINS

I am hereby asking for the wide support of my new bill — which already has the backing of the Racial Screening Committee — that says the person who runs the State Library Service must be a native of Alabama! We don't have accredited library schools here, but we'll open up that job to anyone with any bachelor's degree!

WEBB

A source on the committee told me that the bill's "purpose and intent" is to oust you, Miss Reed.

THOMAS

It's not like their gonna fire Miss Reed —

EMILY

The rabbit battle is done. A second attack begins. Thomas, would you mind contacting our friends up in Chicago? Apprise them of the...weather here.

(*THOMAS exits.*)

SENATOR HIGGINS (*As in a pulpit.*)

Let's make sure from this year forward that the books spread throughout our great libraries are chosen by one of us! No more books like these, which give a slanted view of our enchanted Southern kingdom.

(*Light fades on him.*)

WEBB

Listen, Miss Reed. Between us, and I say this at the risk of my own local coverage: I think that you should call back the Associated Press and give them that interview.

EMILY

Another reporter? No, Mr. Webb. You have been very fair. The interview is yours. The Associated Press can pick it up from you. Your business works that way, does it not? We begin now.

WEBB (*Thrown.*)

What?

EMILY

Time is short, Mr. Webb.

WEBB

Well, I — but...

EMILY

Get your Ticonderoga. (*She begins with a statement that she has already pre-thought, possibly something she has used in the past.*) Like a grocery store, a library should have a wide selection of items. The librarian, like the store manager, should not refuse to stock prunes just because he has no taste for prunes, or onions because he is allergic to onions. These are the things that cross my mind, Mr. Webb, when I go to the market here in... (*Grotesquely.*) MONK-gumm-ry... (*She corrects herself and returns to her own crisp Northern pronunciation.*) Sorry — "Montgomery." At any rate, a library must be the repository of all sides of a question.

WEBB

Were books part of your childhood, Miss Reed?

EMILY

Yes, there were books in our home. The walls of my father's study were lined with shelves and shelves of books, in cabinets made of oak and glass. They reached to the ceiling. Opening a door and choosing a book from beyond the glass, that was like Christmas. My father would let me choose one book a month. I would read in the quiet of his study.

WEBB

And what did he do for a living?

EMILY (*Tentatively. The question surprises her.*)

My father? My late father, Charles E. Reed, was a doctor. He was chief physician at Culver Military Academy in Indiana. We moved there from North Carolina when I was a baby. Physicians, at least in those days, were more transient, I think. He once told me that doctors go where they are needed. I suppose librarians are the same way. I was needed many places — Hawaii, even. I spent two years there before I returned to the mainland to be with my mother, who had become ill. At any rate, in Indiana, the Culver faculty and our family friends were more of a Southern than Midwestern culture. I am not unfriendly to the problems of the South. I think the fact that I chose to accept library positions in the South should indicate that I was aware of the patterns I would have to live by. I have never made any effort to be a crusader in changing these patterns. Like a good doctor who does not judge the reason for an illness, but just treats it, a librarian must make books available. I believe that the free flow of information is the best means to work out problems facing the South, the nation and the world.

Librarians have a difficult time trying to please everyone. Like doctors, I suppose. Nobody likes to take medicine, but it seems to me that you want it prescribed by the most informed individuals. (*Beat.*) Doctors and librarians — you know, I had not made that connection before.

(*She stops herself. A long pause. She is moved. A lump in her throat, not a sob.*)

WEBB

Miss Reed?

EMILY

Forgive me. (*Beat.*) Lately, I miss my parents. (*Beat.*) Would you mind leaving that part out? Off the record, as they say?

WEBB

Of course. You must hate this business of legislative scrutiny.

EMILY

Hate? No, defending books and budgets is part of the job. With due respect, what I dislike is this — us, here. Having to be so public, so "profiled." I had always hoped that the books would speak for me — and speak for themselves. I do not welcome glare, Mr. Webb. I prefer the warm light of a lamp, the contemplative silence of a study, like the kind my father had. But glare is sometimes a necessary evil.

WEBB

Thank you for your time, Miss Reed. I wonder: can we get a picture of you and the book?

(*Beat.*)

EMILY (*Reluctantly.*)
If necessary.

(*EMILY pulls "The Rabbits' Wedding" out of the desk drawer and she holds it up. She smiles uncomfortably, as if she is being exposed to harsh sunlight.*)

Will this do?

(*Flashbulbs flash. LILY is reading WEBB's profile feature, picking out specific lines. EMILY remains on the edge of the scene.*)

LILY

"The pert, high-strung, unflappable Miss Reed is on the griddle again, this time for advocating a book by Martin Luther King, Jr. When asked if she had a favorite book, the pale and hard-working Miss Reed replied..."

EMILY

The one yet to be written.

(*Blackout.*)

SCENE 7: SEPTEMBER 1959

(*At the coffee cart between the State Capitol and the Archive Building, BOBBY CRONE, in more pain and relying on his cane, approaches SENATOR HIGGINS with purpose; he has a newspaper in hand.*)

BOBBY CRONE (*Angrily.*)

What the hell you doin', E Dub?

SENATOR HIGGINS (*Startled.*)

Bobby. Well, I — how's that new great-grandbaby of yours?

BOBBY CRONE (*Sternly.*)

What are you doing still messing with that lady librarian?

SENATOR HIGGINS

I'm preserving Alabama. You want a coffee?

BOBBY CRONE

Rewritin' laws to smoke her out? Lowerin' the qualifications for the position of State Librarian? Hell, before you're through, the dumbest hostess over at the E-lyte Café will be runnin' the Library Service. And now there's more national press? There are lady librarians from all over the state coming to appear at a public meeting about this, and they're not happy.

SENATOR HIGGINS (*Dismissive.*)

Yeah, I heard about that. Let 'em come. I'm not worried —

BOBBY CRONE

I would start bein' worried. They are a force of nature, E Dub! They talk, and talk spreads! Very soon the ladies' groups in your backyard out there in Demopolis will decide at their tea parties to slice you out of their lives like crust on their finger sandwiches. And if you think their men don't listen to them, you really are stuck back in some sepia time that's long gone.

SENATOR HIGGINS

"Sepia time"! I have wide support. Newspapers love the work I'm doing — the Alabama Journal. You see that editorial?

(LILY appears, with newspapers in hand. She reads a line from an editorial.)

LILY

"Alabama's state librarian has willfully brought trouble upon herself by not revealing her views on segregation. She is going to find before things settle down that her views have much to do with her service."

BOBBY CRONE

Did you see the letter to the editor in Tell It To Old Grandma today?

(He pulls the folded paper from under his arm, hands it to HIGGINS.)

SENATOR HIGGINS (*Disgusted, dismissive.*)

The Advertiser! I don't read the Advertiser!

(He looks at the item.)

LILY (*Reading from the other paper in her hand.*)

"Dear Editor: If Emily Reed is removed because of a difference of opinion with a state lawmaker, what comes next? Will a professor at the University of Alabama be removed for flunking the unstudious child of a lawmaker? M'lords and gentlemen, remember your chivalry! Signed, A State Employee."

SENATOR HIGGINS

Anonymous! Where's the credibility in that? Why, Miss Reed herself might've penned it — that "m'lords and gentlemen" literary stuff sounds just like her.

BOBBY CRONE

I thought you said books was the battle. Is it the books or the lady?

SENATOR HIGGINS

It's the books! And the lady! They're tangled. Emily Reed doesn't use the judgment of the people who pay her salary, but relies on outsiders —

BOBBY CRONE (*Cutting him off. Firmly.*)

Compromise with the Library Board on this business of job qualifications for that lady's position.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Compromise! Don't you get sick of that word?

BOBBY CRONE

Everything changes! This thing you're fighting to prevent is inevitable.

SENATOR HIGGINS (*Sickened.*)

What "thing"?

BOBBY CRONE (*Sharply.*)

Oh, c'mon, what "thing" do you think I mean? I'm not talking about books now. It's comin', E Dub. You know it, and I know it.

SENATOR HIGGINS

When did Bobby Crone go soft?

BOBBY CRONE

There's something about being old and sick and surrounded by great grandchildren that makes you look at the world different. You'll know it one day.

SENATOR HIGGINS

We got fight left, Bobby. Whattaya think?

BOBBY CRONE

I think I'm not going to run for re-election, that's what I think.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Nonsense. Bobby Crone is a pillar in the Capitol. Bobby Crone is —

BOBBY CRONE

Bobby Crone is dying.

(The words are a knife in HIGGINS' heart. BOBBY exits into the sunset. Shaken, HIGGINS takes it in. He steps into a new day, a new light, and makes a public statement.)

SENATOR HIGGINS

I am proud. Proud to have been the architect of a harmonious compromise between the Legislature and the Library Board on the topics of books and staffing. *(Beat.)* The Library Board has compromised and agreed that Future Notable Book Lists will be drawn up by Alabama librarians, not far-flung minds, thus assuring local perspective in what's recommended for our use. *(Beat.)* As to the future of the State Librarian: On November twelfth, 1959, the State Legislature signed into law the option to allow graduates from unaccredited library science programs — from right here in Alabama — to be considered for the job of State Librarian. We have also compromised by continuing to allow persons who were not born and educated here to hold the position. We are not unreasonable: The office can still be occupied by qualified outsiders. But I must say: It will be a glorious day when a native Alabamian becomes our State Librarian!

(He freezes in a single flashbulb. THOMAS appears in EMILY's office, reading the article in the Advertiser to EMILY.)

THOMAS

"Emily Reed's job is not affected by the rewritten law. A legislative source suggested that the local Notable Book List will not look much different from the national one."

EMILY

Mr. Webb is a good reporter, despite his earlier characterization of me as "high-strung" and "pale."

THOMAS

Higgins thinks he won. And you still have a place here.

EMILY

Yes, well, about that: There is one last headline.

THOMAS

What's that?

EMILY

I have been offered a job in Washington, DC.

THOMAS

What?

EMILY

I have not told anyone.

THOMAS

Are you taking it?

EMILY

Yes. I plan to submit a letter of resignation before the end of the year.

THOMAS

This rabbit book business —

EMILY

This rabbit book business really has nothing to do with my decision to leave. Some librarians are nomads. Doctors and librarians. My only, only regret: In being distracted by this Higgins nonsense, did I neglect the larger fight? Opening the doors —

THOMAS *(In a correcting tone.)*

You protect the books. Make sure there's something here when the doors are finally open. We're going to need those books — more books, new books — because we're going to be getting more people, new people. Sooner rather than later.

EMILY

Thank you, Thomas.

THOMAS

Yes, of course. *(He walks toward the door.)* I just want to say: Don't go. *(Beat.)* And, of course, you really should go.

(The presence of a watchful GARTH in the following scenes, 8A and 8B, may be useful. All of the following scenes through to the epilogue should flow like cinema, with as little pause between scenes as possible. Protracted scene changes and music cues are the death of the end of the play. Although 8A and 8B are concurrently played, "A" represents Thanksgiving and "B" is closer to Christmas.)

SCENE 8: LATE 1959

(SCENE 8A. Near Thanksgiving. LILY is at the curb in front of the Jefferson Davis Hotel. A suitcase is at her side. Newspapers are under her arm. JOSHUA approaches. He carries a flat parcel wrapped in brown paper.)

JOSHUA

Lily?

LILY

Well, it's the world traveler! Happy Thanksgiving.

JOSHUA

Happy Thanksgiving.

LILY

Back for your regular visit? And here we are running into each other by chance, again. *(Corrects herself.)* No. No such thing as chance.

JOSHUA

Actually, I was looking for you; hoping you might still be at the Jeff Davis. I wanted to leave something for you at the front desk.

LILY

Well, here I am. Even if I wasn't here, I'm sure they would have forwarded anything along to me. They know me well enough by now. But as of this moment, today, I'm leaving.

JOSHUA

Your daddy?

LILY

He's discharging himself today, against doctor's orders. I'm waiting for my driver, and we'll go pick him up. We're heading back to Demopolis.

JOSHUA

Against doctor's orders?

LILY

He wants to be home for Christmas — he calls it his last Christmas, and I think he's right — so off we go. *(Beat.)* You gave up your Thanksgiving holiday to come down here for volunteer work?

JOSHUA

I did. And my wife is not thrilled about that.

LILY

My Jack is always on the road. Trying to shore up a business built on sand.

JOSHUA

I tell Emma stories about Montgomery and mama — and even about you and The Big House — and she knows that I have something important to do here. *(Beat.)* Although every time I mention The Big House she likes to point out that where her people come from, saying "The Big House" means something entirely different than it does to you and me.

LILY *(Brightening.)*

Like in gangster movies? I know. I've heard that.

(They smile. She touches his forearm with affection. She looks off and sees something across the street. Is it GARTH WILLIAMS playing a gawking PASSERBY? She lashes out, sharply.)

Here, just what are you looking at? This is a private conversation between two friends; it belongs to us! Why don't you get along on your way and mind your business? Do you have something to say, or shall I call a policeman and report a loiterer? That's it, off you go. Don't you dare look back! *(The PASSERBY exits.)*

JOSHUA *(Mortified, amused.)*
Whoa, Lily.

LILY
They were gawking!

JOSHUA
I think you scared them off.

LILY
Too much?

JOSHUA *(Imitating her.)*
"Don't you dare look back!!!"

(She covers her face, suppressing a laugh.)

LILY *(Sweetly. Calling to the disappeared person.)*
And Happy Thanksgiving to you and yours!

(Begin SCENE 8B, near Christmas, in EMILY's office. This cross-cutting is identified below with an asterisk. EMILY is in her office, which is barren except for that old vintage radio. EMILY places a small silver tray — the last of the personal items of her desk — in a final cardboard box she has packed for shipping. THOMAS appears at the door.)

THOMAS
That was quite a luncheon they gave you.

EMILY
Dale's Restaurant, very nice.

*

JOSHUA
I thought you were going to throw the newspapers at them.

LILY

I would have, but I love my papers. I'm addicted to them now. They've been such good company on my stays here.

*

THOMAS

Colleagues from all over the state.

EMILY

An engraved silver tray! And what kind of cake was that?

THOMAS

It's called Lane Cake. Very Alabama. My mama used to make it for the holidays.

EMILY

Heavenly.

THOMAS

Washington is lucky to get you. Just think: All the marble and granite that you can stand! Here, let me take that box.

(He picks it up and sets it by the door. When he returns he is holding something behind his back. She considers the old radio.)

THOMAS

You could take the radio with you. Get it repaired.

EMILY

I am not adding anything to the clutter.

THOMAS

Maybe one last thing?

(He presents a flat, thin package — an oversize book — wrapped in brown paper.)

*

JOSHUA

I have something beyond newspapers for you to read. *(He hands her the flat package.)* For you and Lily-Rose to read, I mean. It's a picture book. I bought it up in Detroit.

LILY

For me and Lily-Rose?

*

EMILY

And what is this? What have you gone and done?

THOMAS

A going-away present. Or, a Christmas present, if you like.

(EMILY and LILY remove the wrapping from their packages to reveal "The Rabbits' Wedding." They take it in.)

*

LILY *(Paging through the book.)*

I read about this. You know about this book?

*

(EMILY shakes the book in her hands, as if to strangle it.)

EMILY

This little book...

*

JOSHUA

They're writing about it in the Detroit papers.

LILY

My daddy is friends with Senator Higgins. Mr. E.W. we used to call him. And this is that book, the book!

*

EMILY

I am guessing you did not get this at the Magnolia Book Shop.

THOMAS

No. I ordered it special.

*

LILY

I can't wait to read it to Lily-Rose. Thank you.

*

THOMAS

Open it up. It's inscribed.

(She opens it, and turns to the title page. GARTH WILLIAMS appears.)

GARTH WILLIAMS

"My Dear Miss Reed, thank you for being a friend to rabbits everywhere. Sincerely
Yours, Garth Williams."

EMILY *(Closing the book. She is moved. Quietly.)*

Thank you, Thomas.

THOMAS

Do you want me to put it in the box?

EMILY

No, this — this I will carry with me.

*

LILY

You know, when you said you were going to leave something for me at the front desk,
what instantly popped into my mind was that ginger ale you spoke about.

JOSHUA *(Soberly.)*

I did bring some ginger ale, but I got thirsty along the way.

LILY

This book. That's enough. It's precious.

*

EMILY

Are you aware that I recommended you for my job?

THOMAS

Yes.

*

LILY

Do you think we might ever see you in Demopolis?

JOSHUA

No.

*

THOMAS

I told them to take my name off the list of candidates. Research and history are my specialties, not running a library system. And I couldn't do it better than you. And, I wouldn't have time: I've decided to pursue a PhD.

EMILY

Good. Good for you. I imagine that one day you will be down the hall, running the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

THOMAS

Imagine that — please, do!

*

JOSHUA

I don't think I'll ever see Demopolis again. I think this is the goodbye we didn't have twenty years ago. Meeting you by chance —

LILY

There's no such thing as chance!

JOSHUA

Meeting like we did, this year, is the closest thing I've ever known to something — spiritual.

LILY

You mean God.

JOSHUA (*Shrugging.*)

I don't know how to put it. I just know that in telling the story about what happened to us — even if you don't remember — something got lifted off of me.

LILY

By God.

JOSHUA

If you say so.

LILY

Joshua. (*She takes his hand. Extended hand-holding, an odd semi-handshake. She is emotional. He is not. They never embrace.*) I remember everything. Everything. Everything. All of it.

JOSHUA *(Tenderly. He takes her hand in both his hands, as if in a marriage ceremony.)*
I know you do.

LILY
I'm sorry that I said I didn't. Joshua, please forgive me.

JOSHUA
I do, Lily. I do. I forgive you.

LILY
Can we just forget it, all of it?

JOSHUA *(Tenderly.)*
No, we can't. But we can...travel past it. *(Car horn honks. She releases his hand.)* There's your car. Maybe you'll get behind the wheel yourself one day.

LILY
Thank you for the story — the book. *(She turns to go. Beat.)* I think I know why you went into the soda pop business.

JOSHUA
Why?

LILY
So you could always have something sweet that reminded you of lemonade.

(They walk in separate directions and don't look back.)

*

(Once EMILY's clutter has been packed up, and she puts on a winter coat, she offers her hand. They shake hands warmly and firmly for an extended time. They never embrace.)

EMILY
We will write to one another, yes? Let me know how your father is doing. I wish him good health. You are a good son. A good son. Write to me, and tell me an Alabama story from time to time. Goodbye, Thomas.

THOMAS
Goodbye, Miss Reed.

EMILY
My name is Emily.

THOMAS
Goodbye — Emily.

(They release the handshake, with EMILY stepping into:)

SCENE 9: LATE 1959

(A light shift. At the coffee cart between the Capitol and the State Archive Building. SENATOR HIGGINS is already there, ordering his coffee. Is GARTH WILLIAMS the COFFEE MAN? EMILY walks up, wearing sunglasses and a winter coat, carrying a leather tote bag.)

SENATOR HIGGINS

Is that you, Miss Reed, behind those glasses?

EMILY

Senator Higgins. Yes, indeed. Here we are again at the watering hole.

SENATOR HIGGINS

I understood you were leaving us. I thought maybe you had gone already.

EMILY

I have just now relinquished my keys. One final walk down these steps.

SENATOR HIGGINS

The Keys to the Kingdom! Here, let me buy you one last cup of coffee. *(He gestures to COFFEE MAN.)* For the lady. *(To EMILY.)* How do you take it?

EMILY

That's really not necessary/—

SENATOR HIGGINS

/C'mon now. Let me buy you a ten-cent cup of coffee for the road! The road to Washington. I used to dream that I might be in the national eye. Make change. How do you take it?

EMILY *(Straightforward, without irony.)*

Black.

SENATOR HIGGINS *(Noting that, even if she doesn't.)*

Black! *(He gestures to the COFFEE MAN.)* I like mine with lots of cream and sugar. *(He hands her the cup.)* I need that cream in my coffee.

EMILY

You never ran for a seat in Congress, did you?

SENATOR HIGGINS

It tears up my stomach — coffee without cream, I mean. Eats away at my stomach linin'. Congress? I coulda. But that's your destiny, not mine.

EMILY

I am not off to the Library of Congress, just the DC library system.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Don't reduce it, now. Don't! A job offer for a lady like you doesn't come along every day!

EMILY

Well, actually, thanks to you, Senator, I was fairly flooded with job offers from around the country this past year.

SENATOR HIGGINS

"Flooded." Is that so? One little mention in Time magazine, and now you're off to higher ground, while we are left here. It is a step up, I hope?

EMILY

The new job, in the long run, offers more opportunities.

SENATOR HIGGINS

But less money, I gather. I read in the paper you'll be making five hundred dollars less a year.

EMILY

Did you? (*Beat.*) I think you will be happy with my successor, Mrs. Beamguard. A fine person with a fine husband. Native of Tennessee. Educated in Georgia. Alas, not a native of Alabama —

SENATOR HIGGINS

Let's not speak of others today! A toast to you, Miss Reed. This past year my good ear got a welcome retreat from the noise of my least favorite library issue. I speak of integration of libraries. You see, Miss Reed, the Alabama Negroes that want them, have their libraries. Here, in Montgomery, even: The Cleveland Avenue library is there for them. It's theirs!

EMILY

Underfunded, with fewer books and less square footage.

SENATOR HIGGINS

They have theirs, we have ours. And thus it shall ever be.

EMILY

You are never wrong and you are never sorry, are you, Senator?

SENATOR HIGGINS

If I'm never wrong, Miss Reed, what have I got to be sorry about? Good luck up there in Washington, Miss Reed. The "unflappable" Miss Reed!

(She begins to exit. A thought strikes her. She fumbles in a large tote and pulls out an oversize envelope, which mirrors the size of the packages/gifts given in previous scenes.)

EMILY

Senator, I had almost forgotten. I have something for you.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Oh? *(She offers him the envelope.)* It's not my birthday. What is it?

(Please note the timing of the book "reveal." We should think "The Rabbits' Wedding" is in there. He gingerly begins to open the envelope; he is perplexed.)

EMILY

I have a friend in Hartford who deals in old books. He found me a first edition that I thought you might like. *(He slides a book out of the envelope.)* I had read in the paper that you were a fan of "Tom Sawyer." That it was your favorite book, as a boy.

SENATOR HIGGINS

I don't quite understand. Is this a Library purchase?

EMILY

No, this was a private purchase. I ordered it, it was sent to my home, and I was going to drop it at your office, but here we are.

SENATOR HIGGINS

This is for me, then?

EMILY *(Bemused.)*

Yes, Senator. *(Beat.)* This should be the least complicated of our exchanges. It is a gift.

SENATOR HIGGINS *(Undone. Moved. Inarticulate.)*

It's...well...I don't know exactly what to say.

EMILY

What would your mother have told you to say?

SENATOR HIGGINS

My mother? *(After a moment. Moved. Sincere.)* "Thank you," Miss Reed. *(He cradles the book in his hands and gazes at it.)* I will keep it on my desk at the Capitol. Where I will see it every day.

EMILY

Happy New Year, Senator.

(She exits. He looks back at her. He doesn't know what to do with himself. He regards the book. It gives him joy and pain. He watches her walk off down the steps. The light on him fades.)

EPILOGUE

(Immediately following. GARTH WILLIAMS has been watching all this time.)

GARTH WILLIAMS

New pages, new chapters...

(When he mentions them by name, the play's characters appear.)

After Lily's father died, she finally learned how to drive. Her husband drove off in a different direction when he reluctantly conceded a decades-old truth: Cotton was no longer King.

LILY

After my little girl got married, I moved to Montgomery, near Oak Park. The chains were long-gone. Today, I like to sit there under a wide magnolia.

GARTH WILLIAMS

She's not alone. She's got a gaggle of grandchildren with her.

LILY

I pull out a dog-eared picture book, and they climb on me and they say my four favorite words: "Tell me a story."

GARTH WILLIAMS

Joshua never forgot about old Alabama, and worked on other unfinished business there until 1965. You've heard of the Voting Rights Act, the Civil Rights Act...

JOSHUA

Many years later, after I retired from Dr. Pepper — which had bought Vernor's Ginger Ale — I took my grandchildren on a Civil Rights tour of the South. On a side trip from Selma to Demopolis we drove by The Big House.

GARTH WILLIAMS *(In a child's voice.)*

"Did you live there, granddaddy, in that Big House?"

JOSHUA *(Soberly, reflectively.)*

"No, I was the boy next door."

GARTH WILLIAMS

Next door, the dogtrot was gone, replaced by a sprawling two-story Colonial. Out front, skipping rope, was an African-American girl. Over at The Big House, out front, repairing a bicycle, was a white boy. They were both about 11 or 12 years old. Joshua said out loud:

JOSHUA (*Soberly, with reflective weight.*)

There is a God.

(*JOSHUA looks to LILY, who responds. He may repeat "There is a God" to LILY.*)

GARTH WILLIAMS

Thomas' father died at home in September 1963, as he watched the terrible nightly news. Birmingham was exploding.

THOMAS

I still live in that house, but not alone. I share it with my husband. Everything changes! (*Beat.*) The Library Service moved out of the State Archive Building and into the suburbs. But I remained in that edifice. I became director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. I'm just down the hall from Miss Reed's — Emily's — old office.

GARTH WILLIAMS

In 1962...

THOMAS

May I tell this part?

GARTH WILLIAMS

Of course.

THOMAS

In 1962, the Montgomery City Library — where the Bookworm Circle met — was finally opened to African Americans —

JOSHUA

Under close police supervision. For a time, there were no tables or chairs offered to patrons.

THOMAS

Today, it's known as the Juliette Hampton Morgan Memorial Library.

GARTH WILLIAMS

Senator Higgins eventually returned to Demopolis, to local politics, local committees, but not before denouncing, in the Senate, the film version of "To Kill a Mockingbird." He got some headlines.

SENATOR HIGGINS

I backed off, I backed off. I didn't want to give Gregory Peck any more publicity. I did soften with time. Hell, so did George Wallace, didn't he? (*JOSHUA scoffs. He and HIGGINS might look at each other.*) Bobby Crone was right. Bobby Crone was dead. (*To GARTH?*) And, by the by, it's not as if "The Rabbits' Wedding" is in every library in the country!

GARTH WILLIAMS

No, but it's still in print in the 21st century. Not two-fifty anymore, but seventeen ninety-nine. Amazon.com.

JOSHUA

And The Green Book — "The Negro Motorist Green Book," a relic of Jim Crow — is now highly collectible. You might find it on eBay.

GARTH WILLIAMS

The Senator died in 1984. A curtain of Spanish moss hangs from a Southern pine that towers above the polished slab on his grave. In the Alabama breeze, the moss sways and sweeps the leaves off of his marble-carved name.

(EMILY appears.)

Emily Reed retired up in DC in 1977. She and Thomas wrote many letters, but never met again. In 2000, The American Library Association named Emily recipient of the Freedom to Read Award.

LILY *(With glasses on? Reading a document?)*

"Whereas, Emily Reed never wavered from her commitment to librarianship; and Whereas, the American Library Association did not take a stand for her; therefore be it Resolved that we recognize the important role she played in the history of The Freedom to Read in the United States of America."

EMILY

I was not there to receive the award. A few months earlier, at age 89, I died in my home in Maryland, surrounded by shelves and shelves of glass-encased books. Including the book! But I had been told earlier about the award. And it pleased me. It did.

THOMAS

Her obituary appeared in papers around the world.

JOSHUA

I read it in The Detroit Free Press.

LILY

I read it in The Montgomery Advertiser.

EMILY

Accepting the award on my behalf in Chicago — was Dr. Thomas Franklin.

(THOMAS steps forward, as if to a podium. He is older.)

GARTH WILLIAMS

Tell me a story.

JOSHUA

Tell me a story.

LILY

Tell me a story.

SENATOR HIGGINS

Tell me a story.

EMILY

Tell me a story.

THOMAS *(To us.)*

"This is the story of two rabbits..."

(End of play.)

Revised, November 2019

Playwright Bio

Kenneth Jones is a playwright, librettist and lyricist. His play *Alabama Story* was a nominee for the Steinberg/American Theatre Critics Association New Play Award and a Finalist in the O'Neill Theater Center's National Playwrights Conference. By fall 2020, it will have been seen in more than 30 presentations around the country since its 2015 world premiere by Pioneer Theatre Company. His works for the stage have been produced or developed by Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Pioneer Theatre Company, Florida Studio Theatre, Human Race Theatre Company, Hudson Stage Company, Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theatre, Off-Broadway's TACT/The Actors Company Theatre, Wyoming Theater Festival, Pacific Resident Theatre, Red Mountain Theatre Company, City Lights Theatre and elsewhere. Plays: *Last Call* (Florida Studio Theatre commission); *Two Henrys* (Semi-Finalist, O'Neill Center NPC); *Hollywood, Nebraska* (workshop production at Wyoming Theater Festival; Off-Broadway reading by TACT); *Circa 1976, or Somewhere in the Suburbs of a Swing State Shaped Like a Mitten* (Semi-Finalist, O'Neill Center NPC); *Ten Minutes on a Bench*; *Tortilla Messiah*. Musicals: *It Happened One Christmas*, co-conceived with Karen Azenberg (world premiere Pioneer Theatre, 2015); *Naughty/Nice*, with composer Gerald Stockstill (published by stagerights.com); *Voice of the City* (with composer Elaine Chelton). He is a member of Florida Studio Theatre's Playwrights Collective, Dramatists Guild, BMI and The BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop. Visit ByKennethJones.com.

Alabama Story Playwright Note

In May 2000, while reading the *New York Times*, I came across the story of Emily Wheelock Reed, the former State Librarian of Alabama who had been challenged by a segregationist politician in 1959. Alabama State Senator E.O. Eddins demanded that a children's picture book — Garth Williams' "The Rabbits' Wedding," about a rabbit with black fur marrying a rabbit with white fur — be purged from the shelves of Alabama libraries on the grounds that it promoted racial integration. Their conflict was reported worldwide. Before I finished reading the article, I knew this was an idea for a play.

Strong characters and richly contrasting conflicts rarely just fall into my lap, but that's exactly what happened here. Vivid opposites — male and female, black and white, insider and outsider, Southern and Northern, private and public, child and parent, innocence and ugliness — were immediately evident in this now-forgotten slice of American history.

Emily Reed's story was widely documented in newspapers and magazines at the time, so a lot of source material existed, allowing me draw from and expand upon actual language and public personalities. In fact, the play's most outrageous proclamations from the bullying politician (renamed Senator Higgins) are direct quotes from the man who used to be known as "Big Ed." And when I read Emily's statement that "the free flow of information is the best means to solve the problems of the South, the nation and the world," I was inspired by the grandeur and universality of the sentence: This is a story

about *access*, a basic human right. Little did I know that the words “free flow of information” make up one of the foundational tenets of librarianship itself.

On research trips to Alabama, it came into focus that I was writing a play about censorship rather than Civil Rights, although the two are certainly tangled in *Alabama Story*. This was a tale about white people threatening to devour each other — and seeking to protect each other — in a time of extraordinary social change. And about how talking to one other, face to face, about difficult matters is on that continuum of “the free flow of information.” Conversations matter.

My trip to the small town of Demopolis, Alabama, was particularly inspiring. It’s the senator’s real-life stomping ground, in the middle of the state’s “black belt,” where plantation homes once thrived. I borrowed the setting to be the hometown of two characters I created for the play’s reflective story. Lily and Joshua, a black man and a white woman who were once childhood friends in Demopolis, reunite in Montgomery the same year that Emily Reed was challenged. They are meant to suggest the private heart of the public controversy. Like the others in the play, they have a deep connection to books, and the quality of their character will be challenged in their exchanges.

I hope that *Alabama Story* sparks a memory of a beloved book, the person who gave it to you and the day that you realized that a “turning of the page” — whether moving forward in a book or in your personal evolution — could be both terrifying and wonderful. Maybe the play will also be a reminder that no matter what our differences, on some level, we all share the same story.

—Kenneth Jones

Kenneth Jones is a playwright, lyricist and librettist who writes about his own work and advocates for other theatre makers at ByKennethJones.com.