

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. 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 as if for work or 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
Joshua

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. A heavy Southern accent.

PASSERBY. Miss? You, miss! You OK, 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.

Lily
Joshua

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 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. Gotta keep moving. 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. Right. Well, now you have. 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—?

Emily
Thomas

THOMAS. 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.

Emily takes a fresh pair of shoes out of a drawer and slips them on her feet.

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.

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. 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.

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.

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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?

HIGGINS. Informal, informal. Separate from our upcoming hearing—

EMILY. Hearing?

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.

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.

HIGGINS. This is not a test.

EMILY. Goldenrod!

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.

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—

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.

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?

HIGGINS. Mmm. Against the way we run things here.

EMILY. I see.

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.

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.*

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?

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
Thomas

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 offers 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 may be reading from the file, or he might know it by heart as she reads.

THOMAS. 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,"/

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

She pages back to the front-page story.

There is no byline on this piece, of course. Why bother with accountability?

She 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.

"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 and 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 to 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.

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

He assumes the demeanor and voice of Henry Branch, a Florida newspaper columnist in a perhaps humorless, cheery, Old South style.

HENRY. Have you read the story of "The Three Little Pigs" lately?

Garth
as
Henry
Branch

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.

Henry Branch 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 a 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.

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?

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

EMILY. I did see you at the coffee cart this morning.

HIGGINS. The coffee cart?

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

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

EMILY. We share a taste for morning coffee.

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

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.

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?

HIGGINS. Miss Reed, you've been here, what, a little over a year? As often as we've met at library board meetings last year, or maybe passed each other at the coffee cart, I feel that I don't know you as

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.

Henry Branch 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 a 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.

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?

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 a while...

EMILY. I did see you at the coffee cart this morning.

HIGGINS. The coffee cart?

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

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.

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

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.

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?

HIGGINS. Miss Reed, you've been here, what, a little over a year? As often as we've met at library board meetings last year, or maybe passed each other at the coffee cart, I feel that I don't know you as

Emily
Higgins

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?

HIGGINS. Informal, informal. Separate from our upcoming hearing—

EMILY. Hearing?

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.

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.

HIGGINS. This is not a test.

EMILY. Goldenrod!

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.

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—

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.

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?

HIGGINS. Mmm. Against the way we run things here.

EMILY. I see.

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.

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.*

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?

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.

Thomas and Emily note his unusual formality for a budget meeting. Thomas is uneasy; Emily is composed.

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

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—

HIGGINS. The American Library Association. Where are they based?

EMILY. In Chicago.

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

EMILY. Their biannual Notable Books List, yes.

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.

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

EMILY. Yes. Or they are probably on order.

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.

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

EMILY. Well—

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.

HIGGINS. And you might recommend books.

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

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.

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—

HIGGINS. On what, Miss Reed?

EMILY. On the county's interest in igloos, sir.

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.

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.

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—

Emily
Higgins

HIGGINS. No, earlier—
EMILY. If the library's constituency—
HIGGINS. Before that—
EMILY. I suggested that the community may be interested in other cultures, Senator.
HIGGINS. "Other cultures." Other cultures. What does that mean?
EMILY. (*Drily.*) A culture other than your own, 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—
HIGGINS. (*Interrupting.*) Other than my own, though.
EMILY. Yes, and *including* your own culture—
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.
HIGGINS. My culture.
EMILY. I am sure that you know what "Tombigbee" means.
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.
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...
HIGGINS. Where are you from, Miss Reed?
EMILY. From? I live in Montgomery, sir.
HIGGINS. But, where are your people from?

EMILY. I was born in Asheville.
HIGGINS. (*Playing dumb.*) Asheville, Alabama?
EMILY. No. North Carolina.
HIGGINS. Oh, I assumed you were an Alabama lady.
EMILY. I am, now.
HIGGINS. But not *born* here.
EMILY. As I said—
HIGGINS. But you did your schoolin' here—University of Alabama, or Alabama Polytech?
EMILY. No, I—
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.
HIGGINS. You're a "Hoozy-Air."
EMILY. "Hoosier."
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.
HIGGINS. (*Looking at his notes.*) In fact, you have matriculated all over the map, haven't you, Miss Reed? You were a librarian in Detroit, 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 résumé. 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.
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.

At the Capitol. Higgins encounters Bobby Crone, cane in hand.

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

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

HIGGINS. Only the pretty ones.

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

HIGGINS. Anything.

BOBBY. How do I say this to you delicately, son?

Beat.

When is this business gonna end?

HIGGINS. Which business?

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

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. 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.

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

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

BOBBY. 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.

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

BOBBY. Look, this is your favorite Representative giving you advice—

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

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

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. Is bunny rabbits the battle?

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

BOBBY. Fair enough. Know what your battle is.

Beat.

I'm late for committee.

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

BOBBY. House Bill 24. We're changing the state flower, from golden-rod to the camellia.

HIGGINS. Jesus wept!

Beat.

Another domino falls!

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

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

BOBBY. You've been readin' too much *Tom Sawyer*.

They exit in separate directions.