

Epilogue

Garth Williams, who has been watching all this time.

GARTH. 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. 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. 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. (*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. 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 eleven or twelve 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. 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. In 1962...

THOMAS. May I tell this part?

GARTH. 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. But the doors were open.

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

GARTH. Senator Higgins eventually returned to Demopolis, to local politics, but not before signing a proclamation denouncing the film version of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. He got some headlines.

HIGGINS. I backed off, I backed off. I didn't want to give Gregory

Peck any more publicity. I am not the villain here. People change. Hell, George Wallace apologized, didn't he?

JOSHUA. But did you?

The question lingers there. Higgins looks at Joshua, and looks away.

HIGGINS. (*Defensively, to Garth.*) By the by, it's not as if *The Rabbits' Wedding* is in every library in the country!

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

JOSHUA. And the Green Book—*The Negro Motorist Green Book*—is now a relic of Jim Crow. You'll find it at the Smithsonian.

GARTH. 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 and scratches across 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 the year 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 eighty-nine, 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.

GARTH. 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. They each address Thomas.

GARTH. Tell me a story.

JOSHUA. Tell me a story.

LILY. Tell me a story.

HIGGINS. Tell me a story.

EMILY. Tell me a story.

THOMAS. *(To us.)* “This is the story of two rabbits...”

End of Play