

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

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.