

SONNY BOY

A One Act Play

By Reg Clay

SONNY BOY

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SONNY BOY

I want to dedicate this script to my parents, Joy and Reginald Clay Sr., and my family in the Washington DC area for always supporting me. I also want to give thanks to Gary Graves and the Berkeley Rep playwriting course, which helped me grow as an artist. Finally, to Jim Kleinmann and Playground SF, which has helped me and many other budding playwrights grow their craft through readings, public performances and exposure to the New Play Exchange website, where this play was discovered. To all my ancestors, for those who have suffered the hell of the past so we can experience a more heavenly future, I dedicate this play to you.

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CAST

SONNY BOY	Young slave boy, jubilant and joyful
MAMMA	Caring, sweet, weary
DAD	Blunt, pounded by years of pain
SULLIVAN	Patriarch, noble southern aristocrat
LADY SULLIVAN	Old southern belle
MARGARET (MARGIE)	Sweet, conscientious belle
SAM	Very cruel overseer, got eyes on Margie
BILL	Conscientious overseer
SHIRLEY (young girl)	Playmate of Sonny
SHIRLEY	Worker for the old woman
PARKER	Young businessman. Sharp, direct
WELKES	Older businessman. Relaxed, basic
OLD WOMAN	Older version of Margie
BOY	Just a kid
GIRL	Just a kid

Prologue and epilogue take place in an upscale manhattan bedroom, 1910.

The rest of the play takes place in the deep south, 1860. The ballroom or diningroom are in the Sullivan plantation house, in all its regale and glory. The sets can be as grand or as sparse as needed. Lighting is important: Audience should get a feel of the storm outside and the stark lighting needed for the transformed Sonny Boy. This is a horror.

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PROLOGUE

A mansion in New York, the gilded age, 1910. An old woman sits in a chair, late at night, while her grandkids are in bed.

BOY. Grandma! Tell us a bedtime story!

GIRL. Yeah, Mamma don't tell us nothing! Just sticks us in bed.

OLD WOMAN. Ok, what kind of a story do you want to hear?

GIRL. A fairy tale.

BOY. No – a war story.

GIRL. How about the story of King Arthur and Guinevere..

BOY. No, that's boring! And it's stupid.

GIRL. No, it's not.

OLD WOMAN. Well if you can't decide what you want to hear..

BOY. Hey, how about a horror story!

GIRL. Yeah! Something really scary!

OLD WOMAN. I don't know.. you'll have nightmares..

BOY/GIRL. No we wont. Pleeeeeasee?

OLD WOMAN. Well... ok. Let's see what I can come up with... I got it. Well, this story goes back many, many years ago.. in a place very far away..

GIRL. A magical fairyland?

OLD WOMAN. It used to be. It was a magical land – for some people. It's gone now, but for a while it was a place filled with cotton, flowers, lemonade summer days and nights full of stars. A place with no traffic, no horns or sirens, no dirty sidewalks, no electricity. It was serene.

Melancholic. Full of singing in the fields. It was.. the Antebellum South. And there was a young boy, who loved to play with flowers. His name was Sonny Boy.

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SCENE 1

The fields. It's the fall of 1860 and the slaves are busy pulling potatoes from the ground while an overseer is watching. The mood is sober, almost maudlin.

A 7 year old boy, Sonny, is running around the fields, holding a dandelion, as if it were a magic wand. He plays with a slave girl, SHIRLEY.

SONNY. Buttercup, buttercup, from the ground / Pick it up and set it down / Buttercup buttercup in the sky / Throw it up and watch it fly!

SHIRLEY. I found one too, Sonny. Sonny! Hey, don't play with the grownups!

SONNY. *(to his mother)* here, Mom, I found another buttercup..

MOMMA. Later, Sonny, Ma's working.

SONNY. Look, Ma – look how big it is!

DAD. *(grabs Sonny by both arms)* What's wrong with you? Why are you playing? Can't you see we're working? Ten bushels of potatoes before sundown. Or it's a whippin' for all of us! And you're running around, playing, laughing, smiling. You see anyone else around here smiling?

MOMMA. *(to Dad)* Let him go, Daddy. Let him play. It's ok, Sonny. Go play buttercup in the house and don't get in trouble. *(Sunny runs off, singing buttercup)*. Let him play – he won't be able to play later on, not when he's grown. Then he'll understand how hard life is. But not now. Let him have fun. Let him play.

SCENE 2

The Master's house. House slaves work with members of the Sullivan family in preparation of the party. LADY SULLIVAN is in command of all the action.

LADY SULLIVAN. Margaret, the flowers go in the middle of the table. No, not the ferns – the ferns are the green ones. I'm talking about the

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azalias – look where I’m pointing, you see? Those – yes, those will look marvelous with the table covering. Move the table to the left, will you Benson? We’ll have to replace those curtains – Margie, where are those golden curtains?

MARGIE. *(a very beautiful blonde woman, the daughter of Lady Sullivan)* Mama, there’s a stain on those curtains. I told you that yesterday..

LADY SULLIVAN. A stain? Oh, Betty, check on those vegetables, we need to boil enough kale for all the guests – you say a stain? I don’t even remember us talking about a stain. Well I don’t care, I want it – the gold will go so well with the rest of the decorations. If the party goes well, ain’t no body gonna focus on one little ol’ stain. So get to it – put it up.

MARGIE. Yes ma’am.

LADY SULLIVAN. And hurry up, we got one hour before guests arrive. Sammy, put your lazy self to good use and help out Margie.

SAM. *(gruff white helper)* Lazy?

SHIRLEY. I can help with the curtains.

MARGIE. You’re too small, Shirley. Go and help in the kitchen. *(Shirley leaves)* I can handle the curtains alone.

LADY SULLIVAN. No, indeed! I’m not having my only daughter on some rickety ladder putting up curtains. You gotta put these men to work – lest they do nothing but drink all day.. *(SULLIVAN enters. The Master of the house. He brings in some unnamed guests. Both are wet from the rain outside.)*

SULLIVAN. Good lord, you people are still working? I thought the dining room was ready!

LADY SULLIVAN. Good god! You boys are soaking wet.

PARKER. No, ma’am. It’s just a light drizzle.

LADY SULLIVAN. I told you not to bring anyone til 6pm!

SULLIVAN. Oh, stop fussin! We had to beat the rain. Honey, this is Mr. Parker and Welkes. Parker is from Montgomery – this is my wife..

LADY SULLIVAN. Lord, don’t look at me like this! Y’all go ahead in the smoking room while we finish up. In a half hour, we’ll give you the proper welcome of an established plantation family..

PARKER. Yes ma’am. Hell, we’re already impressed..

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WELKES. Wow, what a beautiful home..

LADY SULLIVAN. Ok, we got work to do.. scoot now..

(Sullivan and the two distinguished men head to a private room.)

WELKES. So, you're expecting a big turnout?

SULLIVAN. Should be a good two hundred coming..

PARKER. Those are the bodies. What about the pledges?

SULLIVAN. Ain't it just like you – always got your eye on the bottom line.

PARKER. Like a hawk.

SULLIVAN. Thirty thousand pledged.

WELKES. Good god!

SULLIVAN. And I assure you, the good citizens of Birmingham are good for their word. Money, pledges, votes – the honest and true men of Birmingham will do our part for our president.

WELKES. Buchanan will be pleased.

SULLIVAN. You'll be seeing him next week?

PARKER. He's stopping in Montgomery to give a speech.

SULLIVAN. He can't stop over in Birmingham?

WELKES. I've asked already. The race has gotten too tight already. He has to go immediately to Kentucky.

PARKER. But he knows you're a true supporter – and the campaign contributions will go a long way.

SULLIVAN. I don't have to tell each of you my main goal – a cabinet seat in President Buchanan's administration. You know I'm a loyal Democrat – loyal to the bone. If we don't have loyal Democrats in the White House, we'll lose everything we've fought for. Our lands. Our prosperity.

(gestures to the slaves outside) Our hard working property. Lincoln will destroy it all. You'll see. Our little banquet will be full of supporters, loyal and ready to vote for our president's re-election. You let Buchanan know that. Tell him of our wonderful city and our wonderful people. We'll be loyal to him. But he has to be loyal to us. To me.

WELKES. We'll make sure he understands. A little money will perk up the ears. *(Thunderclap)*

SULLIVAN. Lord, can you hear that rain. No matter, we'll still have a good turnout.

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PARKER. Mr. Sullivan – the young lady I passed by..

SULLIVAN. My daughter? Ah, you saw her..

WELKES. You see? He does have eyes like a hawk!

SULLIVAN. (*chuckling*) Margaret. (*MARGIE emerges on stage, perhaps dancing, twirling in her gown*) Yes, she has a way of catching many men's eyes. She's young, unspoken for. And very charming. The Lady and I have been waiting for a promising suitor to take her hand.

PARKER. I imagine there's a long line of suitors..

SULLIVAN. You sew seed for me in Washington, I'll sew seeds for you in her heart. Quid Pro Quo, my good man. Everything has a price.

PARKER. Indeed, sir. Indeed.

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