

F IS FOR

by
Evan Baughfman

F IS FOR

© 2023 by Evan Baughfman

CAUTION: Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performance of **F IS FOR** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for **F IS FOR** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee. Inquiries concerning production rights should be addressed to genekato@nextstagepress.com

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce **F IS FOR** is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author.

F IS FOR

F is For was originally produced as part of The Quarantine Series in Houston, Texas, featuring the following cast:

DR. QUELL..... Denise Marin
KATHERINE CLEMONS..... Zoie Ellis
CLARISSA CLEMONS..... Brittney Jones
MR. WASHINGTON..... Zach Howard

The piece was directed by Muhammad Khaerisman and produced by Logan Butcher, Anna María, and Madison Sutton.

Synopsis:

The mother and sister of a troublemaking student meet with a representative from the school district to discuss an unconventional way of dealing with the boy's poor behavior.

F IS FOR

CAST (4 characters):

DR. QUELL*, *a high-ranking school district official*

KATHERINE CLEMONS, *mother of Abraham, a disruptive student*

CLARISSA CLEMONS, *older sister of Abraham*

MR. WASHINGTON, *one of Abraham's teachers*

*indicates that the role can be played by an actor of any gender

TIME: Sometime in the not-too-distant future

PLACE: A conference room

Set requirements:

-a single long table and a few chairs

-on the table, a porcelain mug is filled with pens, markers, and number-two pencils

-poster paper hangs on the walls, charting various notes and educational data

F IS FOR

F IS FOR

Act 1
Scene 1

Somewhere in the headquarters of an unspecified American school district. At a long table, businesslike individual DR. QUELL sits across from KATHERINE CLEMONS, a tired mother of four. Next to Katherine is her oldest daughter, CLARISSA, twentysomething years of age and looking almost as tired as her mother.

Behind them, poster paper hangs on the wall charting various notes and educational data. This is some kind of meeting room. On the table, a porcelain mug is filled with pens, markers, and number-two pencils. Quell silently reads papers from an open file folder, which sits in front of him/her.

QUELL. Yes. Wow. Yes.

KATHERINE. What is it?

QUELL. My colleagues didn't make a mistake with this one.

KATHERINE. No?

QUELL. Reading your son's file, it's clear, is all.

KATHERINE. What's clear?

QUELL. He's earned this.

KATHERINE. Earned what?

QUELL. You don't know?

KATHERINE. No, I don't know.

QUELL. You didn't read about it in the *Times*?

KATHERINE. The hell is the *Times*?

CLARISSA. The paper, Mom.

KATHERINE. Is that still a thing?

QUELL. Surely you came across it on the news, then?

F IS FOR

KATHERINE. Do I look like someone who can afford a Smellivision? The news is always so depressing, anyway. It smells like death.

CLARISSA. Mom. You're being antagonistic again.

KATHERINE. Thanks, Clarissa. Knew I brought you for a reason. (*to Quell*) She's the buffer, you know.

QUELL. The buffer?

KATHERINE. Keeps me in check, this one. Doesn't like me revealing my true nature. It embarrasses her. Disgraces the Clemons family name. Isn't that right, dear?

CLARISSA. Christ. Without fail.

KATHERINE. Hard to smooth out these rough edges. Not easy to make me shine.

QUELL. Shall we begin? I do have another appointment with a family, starting in—

KATHERINE. Now, don't go rushing us out of here just yet.

QUELL. I'm not rushing anyone. One of Abraham's teachers from his newest school—Mr. Washington—will be with us shortly. Unfortunately, he's running a little late, and I just wanted to get the ball rolling.

CLARISSA. Mr. Washington, Mom. That's the one I told you about.

KATHERINE. Which one? The good-looking one who's really a...?

CLARISSA. Yeah.

KATHERINE. Glad I showed up, then. (*to Quell*) I took a half-day for this. She insisted I come. Said it was important.

CLARISSA. It is important.

QUELL. Indeed, it is. Your son—

KATHERINE. Isn't it funny how you give your son a name like Abraham, hoping he grows up to do great things like other Abrahams before him, and he just shits the bed? Judas. Maybe that would've been a better fit. Or Lucifer. Little Lucy Clemons.

CLARISSA. Mom, knock it off already. This isn't like meeting with a principal. This is something else. Something bigger.

KATHERINE. (*to Quell*) Is that true? You bigger and badder than a principal?

QUELL. My official title is Third Assistant Chief Supervisor of Secondary Education.

F IS FOR

KATHERINE. I officially don't know what the hell that means, Mr./Ms. ...?

QUELL. *Dr.* Quell.

KATHERINE. Fancy. Get to correct me and everything. My apologies, doctor.

QUELL. My job for the District...is complicated. In simple terms—

KATHERINE. Yes, do keep them simple, please.

QUELL. I am one of a few people who oversees what goes on in the middle and high schools.

KATHERINE. I see. It's a big, old school district, so Abraham must've made some real tidal waves to get your attention. Some real tsunami-type shit. That's his style, alright.

QUELL. It's true. You wouldn't be here if your son wasn't of a particular breed of student.

KATHERINE. "Breed"? Is he some kind of animal?

QUELL. If I may, Mrs. Clemons—

KATHERINE. *Ms.* Never been Mrs. And never been Dr., neither.

QUELL. Ms. Clemons, your son—because of his school performance—has been flagged.

KATHERINE. Flagged?

CLARISSA. Selected. Chosen.

KATHERINE. Okay. (*looks at Clarissa*) For what?

CLARISSA. I don't know.

KATHERINE. Don't read the *Times* or smell the news, either, huh? (*to Quell*) Flagged for what?

QUELL. New District policy. New State policy, actually. Being adopted all over the country.

KATHERINE. What is it?

QUELL. First, you must understand that your son—Abraham—has had many chances to change his behavior over the years. He has been suspended twenty-seven times, been moved to nine different schools... Multiple individualized education plans have been created to ensure your son is adequately supported in each of his classrooms. Yet, there's been no change from Abraham. No real, discernible advancement in his work

F IS FOR

habits, academic achievements, or cooperation with teachers and other school staff.

KATHERINE. Yeah, yeah, I know he isn't perfect. What's your decision? You going to finally expel my son?

QUELL. No, actually, expulsion is now against District policy.

CLARISSA. It is?

QUELL. Has your brother ever stabbed or shot anyone on school grounds?

CLARISSA. No.

KATHERINE. Not that we know of.

QUELL. Then Abraham doesn't qualify for expulsion. Besides, expulsion only pushes the problem onto someone else. It doesn't make a child a better student. It won't redirect Abraham's downward spiral, if you will.

KATHERINE. So, if not expulsion, what then? Private school? Military school?

QUELL. This is a public school district. Private and military schools are not part of our system. They're alternatives, yes, that you may explore...if you have the means to do so.

KATHERINE. Oh, and what means are those?

CLARISSA. S/He means those kinds of schools are expensive.

KATHERINE. Okay, forget that, then.

QUELL. And I assume homeschooling isn't an option?

KATHERINE. No, it's not. I work all damn day. Besides, I didn't get past freshman year of high school myself.

CLARISSA. I went to college. For a little while.

KATHERINE. You aren't qualified. Get the idea out of your little head. You work almost as much as I do. And you have to watch after your own kid.

QUELL. Then, perhaps, you'll understand our decision. You see, there really is no choice for Abraham other than to publicly humiliate him.

CLARISSA. What?

KATHERINE. The hell's that mean? "Publicly humiliate him"?

QUELL. The State is paying for Abraham to have the letter "F" laserbranded onto his face.

CLARISSA. Oh, God.

F IS FOR

KATHERINE. I don't understand.

CLARISSA. They want to burn the letter "F" onto Abraham's face with one of those laser machines!

KATHERINE. The hell for?

QUELL. To shame him, of course.

CLARISSA. You can't do that!

QUELL. The State Board of Education has already implemented the policy. We in the District are only doing what we're told, what is expected of us.

CLARISSA. That has to be against the law!

QUELL. I assure you, the State Supreme Court has given the okay.

CLARISSA. You can't brand a fifteen-year-old's face. You can't brand a fifteen-year-old, period! He's not even of-age!

QUELL. The State has lifted all age restrictions in support of this very policy.

CLARISSA. This is ridiculous! Right, Mom?

KATHERINE. Why?

CLARISSA. "Why"...?

KATHERINE. (*to Quell*) Why have you people decided this is the answer?

QUELL. More students are failing now than ever before, because suspensions don't work. Interventions don't work. Expulsions don't work. But studies show humiliation *does*.

CLARISSA. How does humiliating a kid make him do better in school?

QUELL. You're familiar with the feeling of embarrassment?

KATHERINE. She is.

CLARISSA. Who isn't?

QUELL. It's a horrible feeling, right? You'll do anything to make that feeling go away?

CLARISSA. And...?

QUELL. A humiliated student will do what he can to escape that embarrassment.

CLARISSA. Like kill himself, you mean.

QUELL. That's a little extreme, don't you think?

CLARISSA. Actually, it isn't.

F IS FOR

QUELL. An embarrassed student will be motivated to get good grades. Because good grades—a total academic turnaround—will earn that student the privilege of having the letter removed.

CLARISSA. Wouldn't they just remove the brand with an even more powerful laser? Won't that be really, really painful?

QUELL. I wouldn't know.

CLARISSA. You don't know, but you're recommending it for a fifteen-year-old. Is this a joke?

QUELL. We couldn't be more serious.

CLARISSA. Mom, you can't let this happen to Abraham. It isn't fair.

KATHERINE. What else has worked for him? Nothing.

CLARISSA. You're not seriously considering this, are you?

KATHERINE. Abraham is lost. He doesn't listen to you, he hates me. I kind of like the idea.

CLARISSA. He'll somehow hate you less if you allow this to happen to him? This is a scarlet letter, Mom. Just like in the book.

KATHERINE. What book?

CLARISSA. *The Scarlet Letter!*

KATHERINE. Never heard of it.

CLARISSA. Everyone will look down on Abraham, judge him.

QUELL. Exactly. And then he'll do better in his studies to earn back a more "normal" status. Society won't see him as "lower" or a "failure," but as an "equal."

CLARISSA. The Nazis did this same kind of thing during the Holocaust, didn't they? The Jews had to wear those yellow stars on their clothes so everyone could see they were "different." How'd that make them feel?

QUELL. I really wouldn't know. That was a long, long time ago. World War II isn't a part of the content standards any longer.

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS –
ORDER A COPY AT WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM***