

STONEWALLIN'

A Play with Fire

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Characters:

Tommy Jackson—a witch looking for a soulmate; white, twenties, feminine-of-center

Marsha Lyons—a wanderer trying to find home; black, thirties, bisexual and homoromantic (more on that later)

Mamaw Jackson—an elder hoping to make sense of a changing world; Tommy's grandmother, white, sixties, old school and casually racist

Elijah Lyons—a city council member trying to protect his community; Marsha's older brother, black, late thirties, big into respectability politics

Stonewall Jackson—a Confederate general brought back to earth against his will; white, late thirties, has wartime trauma and a great beard

The setting:

Lexington, Virginia. The most charming small town in America. Also the most haunted. The present.

Locations need not be portrayed naturalistically. A little goes a long way. Remember, we're in a world of magic.

A slash (/) indicates an interruption and overlapping lines.

"Our beauty is dangerous,
has always been,
because it refuses to be contained by definition,
our beauty is a face whose scars are outlined in glitter,
our beauty is a mouth painted red for war,
our beauty is a secret that stands up to scream,
our beauty is becoming and becoming and becoming"
--Kai Cheng Thom, from "Stealing Fire"

Scene One

Darkness. A flashlight. It shines on a face, a figure, an outline, a statue of STONEWALL JACKSON in full Confederate uniform. He stands on a pedestal looming over the stage. TOMMY, an amateur witch in a skirt and bangles, carries the light and checks if anyone is watching. Then, he lays out candles and puts witchy music on a Bluetooth speaker. He prepares to cast a spell. Every now and then, he nervously consults a paper to make sure he's doing it right. He looks skyward. Breathing deeply, TOMMY takes out a can of pink spray paint.

TOMMY

I call on the ancestors!

Strobe lights flash. He winds up and in slow motion moves to spray STONEWALL. MARSHA, a woman in her thirties, enters and sees TOMMY, spray paint in hand. The flashes stop. TOMMY looks at her. MARSHA looks at him. MARSHA looks at the statue. TOMMY looks at the statue. MARSHA shuffles past TOMMY.

MARSHA

I don't exist. You don't see me. I'm not here. Keep going. I didn't see you. Bye.

MARSHA exits. TOMMY looks after her. He looks at his can of spray paint, uncertain. Darkness.

Scene Two

Fluorescents. A Wal-Mart. Marsha enters with a shopping cart. Tommy enters with a shopping cart. They see each other. Marsha goes to pass him as if she didn't recognize him.

TOMMY

Hi.

MARSHA

Hi. Do I know you?

TOMMY

I think I saw you in the park last night.

MARSHA

Huh?

TOMMY

In front of the courthouse?

MARSHA

You must be thinking of somebody else.

TOMMY

I swear it was you.

MARSHA

People always tell me I have one of those faces.

TOMMY

Are you messing with me?

MARSHA

What?

TOMMY

You were totally there at the park.

MARSHA

I don't know what you're talking about.

TOMMY

Oh, I see, you're still playing this game of acting like you were invisible.

MARSHA

What game? I don't play games. What were you doing in the park?

TOMMY

I thought you weren't there.

MARSHA

I wasn't. But now you got me curious.

TOMMY

Just hanging out.

MARSHA

You were hanging out after dark, and then you meet some mysterious woman. What happens next?

TOMMY

You sure you weren't there? I'm just saying I don't think you have one of those faces. Your face is pretty unique.

MARSHA

Sure.

TOMMY

Like you really do look like the person I saw. And I'm not just saying that 'cause you're . . . This wasn't one of those things where white people think everyone else looks the same.

MARSHA

Riiiiight.

TOMMY

Although if it was me being racist, I want to own up to it. I know microaggressions can really hurt people of color's mental health.

MARSHA

What are you talking about?

TOMMY

Sorry.

MARSHA

You have a unique face, too.

TOMMY

What?

MARSHA

It's nice.

TOMMY

Thanks?

MARSHA

I like your face. You have nice cheeks. What? You talked about my face. I don't get to talk about yours?

TOMMY

I mean okay?

MARSHA

Though you never said you liked my face. You just said it was unique. Pablo Picasso was once walking down the street in Paris, and he goes up to this woman, a total stranger, and says, "You have an interesting face. I would like to do a portrait of you. I am Picasso." I mean what do you say to that?

TOMMY

I don't know. "Yes?"

MARSHA

Well, that's what she says. She says yes and becomes his model. Just like that. They slept together for years. I always thought that was a backhanded compliment, "you have an interesting face," especially since Picasso put people's eyes on weird angles and messed with their noses. And nowadays, it'd just seem creepy. But damn, think of the courage, just going up to someone and saying they fascinate you.

TOMMY

I wish I was brave enough to say something like that.

MARSHA

But here you are telling me I have an interesting face.

TOMMY looks at MARSHA.

TOMMY

I'm gonna go get my almond milk.

MARSHA

Yeah, I should get going.

TOMMY

I must have seen a ghost. Sometimes that happens. Enjoy your shopping.

TOMMY exits. MARSHA looks after him.
MARSHA exits.

Scene Three

A home office. MARSHA's brother ELIJAH sits at his desk. MARSHA enters.

MARSHA
Do you know a guy around here who wears skirts?

ELIJAH
Skirts?

MARSHA
You know who I'm talking about?

ELIJAH
Yeah?

MARSHA
I think I just flirted with him at Wal-Mart.

ELIJAH
Marsha.

MARSHA
I said he had a nice face. What was I thinking?

ELIJAH
I don't know. What were you thinking?

MARSHA
Help me.

ELIJAH
I should get back to work.

MARSHA
You're my brother.

ELIJAH
What do you want me to do about it?

MARSHA
Talk. Tell me about him. Go.

ELIJAH
His name's Tommy Jackson. He grew up here. I know his grandma. He's a barista. He might be a goth. He hangs out with all the politically radical types.

MARSHA

How do you know what a goth is?

ELIJAH

His activist friends and him are making my life on city council a nightmare right now.

MARSHA

I thought you liked activism.

ELIJAH

If it's focused. Now, if you could let me get back to work. I actually have a job, unlike some people.

MARSHA

I start work next week. Give me a break.

MARSHA looks off into space.

MARSHA

There's something about him.

ELIJAH

You mean he's gay.

MARSHA

No well maybe yes.

ELIJAH

Yes yes obviously yes.

MARSHA

He was flirting back.

ELIJAH

Marsha, this is not a road you want to go down. The only reason a gay guy would want to date you is so he can try to look straight for like five minutes.

MARSHA

But that's just it he's not even trying to look straight. Like, does he look straight to you?

ELIJAH

No, that's what I'm trying to tell you.

MARSHA

Yeah. I think it's sexy. It shows he doesn't care what other people think. Which is kind of manly.

ELIJAH

All this time if only I knew that all I needed to do was wear lipstick and jewelry for women to dig me.

MARSHA

Maybe it's a me thing.

ELIJAH

You have a thing for feminine men?

MARSHA

Usually I have a thing for women.

ELIJAH

But you do like guys with scruff.

MARSHA

The struggle is real. Ugh, I made a fool of myself. In Wal-Mart! God, there's no way I can turn this around. So I should probably try to forget about him and pretend it never happened.

ELIJAH

That's probably for the best.

MARSHA exits. She re-enters.

MARSHA

You said he's a barista?

ELIJAH nods. MARSHA exits again.

Scene Four

A coffee shop, the Cocoa Beanery, in central Lexington. TOMMY is at the counter. MARSHA enters.

TOMMY

Hey. You're the person I didn't see at the park.

MARSHA

Funny to run into you again. I'll have a macchiato.

TOMMY

Your name?

MARSHA

Marsha.

TOMMY

I'm Tommy.

TOMMY starts making her coffee.

TOMMY

What brings you to Lexington?

MARSHA

Starting a new job.

TOMMY

You an artist?

MARSHA

Sort of.

TOMMY

What do you mean sort of? Nobody goes around casually quoting Picasso.

MARSHA

I'm an assistant at the university. You? An artist?

TOMMY

Only if you count the foam on my macchiatos.

MARSHA

I'll judge it when I see it.

TOMMY

Okay then. Now I have to impress.

MARSHA

It better be good. So what's your deal? How did you get to be making coffee in small town Virginia?

TOMMY

I'm from here.

MARSHA

But you must have spent time somewhere else.

TOMMY shakes his head.

MARSHA

Who buys almond milk from Wal-Mart?

TOMMY

I'm trying to lower my carbon footprint.

MARSHA

And your style is incredible.

TOMMY

You don't think people here dress like this?

MARSHA

I don't know. You remind me of home. That's all.

TOMMY

Where's that?

MARSHA

Berkeley.

TOMMY

Nice. You miss it?

MARSHA

No. Well yes. It's a place where everyone shops organic and bikes and puts "refugees welcome here" signs on their lawn.

TOMMY

I feel like I'd fit right in.

MARSHA

But it's more complicated than that. They say all this good stuff, but then they make it more and more expensive to live there and slowly push out all the refugees and anyone who can't afford to buy a million-dollar house.

TOMMY

I remind you of that?

MARSHA

The weather is nice.

TOMMY

I don't own a million-dollar house.

MARSHA

I love Berkeley. Ronald Reagan once called it a "haven for communist sympathizers, protesters, and sexual deviants," aka all my favorite people.

TOMMY

Then why did you leave?

MARSHA

I'm broke. My rent doubled, and I couldn't keep up.

TOMMY

That sucks.

MARSHA

Yeah. My brother lives out here, so I'm staying on his couch for a while. I'm kinda stuck, man. Everybody kept telling me the South is full of artists and food and black culture, but all I see is a sleepy town and some pretty hills and you.

TOMMY

We have our fair share of communist sympathizers and sexual deviants here, too.

MARSHA

You think you could show me?

TOMMY

(handing her the coffee)
Macchiato for Marsha.

MARSHA

Oh . . . the foam. It's supposed to be . . . a penis?

TOMMY

A heart.

MARSHA

OH. The end got extended so it seems more like a—and those were the—

TOMMY

Ugh. Sorry. I'm clearly not an artist.

MARSHA

No. I see it. Yeah, it's definitely a heart.

TOMMY

I can make you a new one.

MARSHA

No. No. I'm good. I said I wanted sexual deviants.

MARSHA takes a good, long sip.

MARSHA

Okay, I lied. That was me in the park that night when you were doing your thing with the candles.

TOMMY

I knew it!

MARSHA

Yeah, well.

TOMMY

You were avoiding me.

MARSHA

There's no way I'm gonna join a random guy defacing a statue.

TOMMY

I didn't go through with it.

MARSHA

So you chickened out?

TOMMY

I saw you chicken out, and that made me chicken out.

MARSHA

It's not chickening out if I wasn't planning on doing anything in the first place. You should've gone for it.

TOMMY

You made me think I was crazy.

MARSHA

I was giving you deniability in case the cops found you, so you wouldn't have a witness.

TOMMY

I think you were scared.

MARSHA

I wasn't scared. So what's with the candles?

TOMMY

I was casting a spell against racism.

MARSHA

What's your deal?

TOMMY

I'm trying to put my magic to good use.

MARSHA

Hah. You're what, a witch? Who's a man?

TOMMY

Not really.

MARSHA

A man-witch?

TOMMY

The term is warlock. And no, I'm not a warlock. I'm kind of not a man. I'm a radical faerie.

MARSHA

Explain, please. Talk. Explain. Go.

TOMMY

I do a kind of witchcraft that's about realizing the fabulousness of gender. You know how, like, in most societies queer and trans people used to be revered as holy?

MARSHA

Maybe.

TOMMY

Like we've always been the shamans and priestesses because we were different. And then of course colonialism happens, and they start burning us as witches.

MARSHA

Oh! Yeah yeah yeah. I've heard of this.

TOMMY

Really?

MARSHA

It was on a podcast.

TOMMY

So anyway, I'm trying to connect with my queer ancestors. I'm pretty new to this stuff. But I'm learning. From Tumblr.

MARSHA

I did Tarot with a friend in Oakland once.

TOMMY

That's cool. But not the same thing.

MARSHA

So what spell were you casting?

TOMMY

I was calling on the ancestors to protect Lexington from white supremacy.

MARSHA

How's that working out?

TOMMY

Well, it was working out fine until you came along and distracted me. The racists are gonna have a march at the statue this month, so I have to bless the space to ward them off. You want to join me this time?

MARSHA

Yeah, totally. Maybe we could do something else first, though. Get to know each other.

TOMMY

Come on, this is gonna be fun. Think about it like a game. It's like an art project.

MARSHA

I literally just got here, and you want me to spraypaint a statue with you?

TOMMY

The spell works better when there are other people.

MARSHA

You're making that up.

TOMMY

Yeah, but maybe it's true. Come on. I have a good feeling about you. You have a good aura.

MARSHA

I'll think about it. Thanks for the coffee, Tommy.

MARSHA exits. Darkness.