



Julian

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JULIAN

by toni wofford

a one act play

Characters

The Father

The Mother

The Son

Little Boy

Part I

We are in a small, poorly-kept back yard in a mid-western town. The house cannot be seen but there is a boarded pathway leading to it. Grass is sparse and grows in ugly, coarse patches. Over a fence of blackened wood, which is held up by its own ingenuity, no human hand having touched it for years, we see the networks of clothes lines, poles, bird houses etc. of other back yards similar to this one. Upstage left is the refuse area consisting of a garbage can and a trash can, both offull maturity; their contents spilling over onto the ground. But the eye is not completely irritated for there stands, like the Angel of Mercy, a lovely pear tree and it seems to lean slightly forward as if to give the most of its refreshing shade to the fat little man beneath it. It is 4:00 p.m.. August, and hot, hot, hot. The man is stretched full length in an old rocking chair. He is past forty. The heat has made his skin very red and very wet. His head is thrown back over the back of the chair and we can see the streams of perspiration running from the folds of his neck. His mouth is open and his shirt and shoes are off. In his hand is a newspaper and whenever he half-wakens he fans himself furiously with it, yawns, stretches and dozes off again. He is the Father.

We hear footsteps on the boarded path. The Mother approaches. She is a small woman of forty or so. Her hair is thin and brown; it is pinned behind her ears but little strands of it keep falling onto her face and she makes tired but automatic efforts to brush them back. Her lips are thin and pressed so tightly together it would seem they had been locked with a key. She looks worn, tired and broken. She carries a pan, a bag of peas and a newspaper. She sits in a wicker chair opposite the Father; places the newspaper at her feet; the bag in the crook of her arm and the pan in her lap. She begins shelling the peas, throwing the shells onto the newspaper. She does this as one who is accustomed to the chore. The sound of the peas striking the pan in sharp rhythmic notes (1-2-3-4....1-2-3-4....) wakens the Father.

The Father: (Sleepily) Oh, it's you. God, its hot. (Wipes under his neck with the back of his hand) Any beer left?

The Mother: No.

The Father: Christ! What happens to all the beer I bring in here? (pause, then, less irritably) Think the kid can go down and get some?

The Mother: I... I'd rather he didn't go.

The Father: Well, never mind. It's too hot to argue about it. (then, proceeding to argue about it.) But that's about the only thing that keeps me from boiling over in this heat. A cold bottle of beer. Must be an easy 98 degrees. How six bottles of beer disappear so quick beats me. (He settles back as if to resume sleep, but the noise of the peas striking the pan irritates him) Do you have to do that

out here? I work like a blasted horse all night long and when I try to get a little rest in the day here you come with a pan of peas! I got nerves too, you know. And feeding a Blast furnace for eight hours ain't no picnic! (The Mother cowers but does not stop. This outburst has made The Father even hotter. He shouts:) Call that kid out here and tell to go get some beer!

The Mother: (Pleading) Don't make him go.

The Father: Why not?

The Mother: You know why not.

The Father: Call him.

The Mother: They'll laugh at him.

The Father: He's used to it.

The Mother: The children chase him.

The Father: I said he's used to it.

The Mother: That doesn't stop the hurt.

The Father: Call him.

The Mother: Please.

The Father: Call him!

(The Mother starts angrily, relents and goes slowly. The Father watches her. When the door shuts behind her he fumbles into his pants pocket and pulls out a letter, business type, and reads it using his finger to help him and moving his mouth at the same time. Finishing it he nods his head, as if agreeing with it, replaces it, and hums the tune of "Dolores". The Mother returns.

The Father: You send him?

The Mother: Yes. (She sits and resumes her work)

The Father: You make over him too much. Makes him worse.

The Mother: I only try to keep him from being hurt. He's sensitive He is!

The Father: You know, when I was a little guy, about eight or nine,

I guess, I wanted a white pony more than anything in the world. I remember I used to pray at night..."Dear God, send me a white pony." Well, we were as poor as anybody but I determined to have that pony. I hired myself out...cherry-picking, weeding, all sorts of jobs. Took three years, and then I figured I had enough. I went over in the next county. A Mr. Matthew had a farm there and he sold fine ponys, and sure enough he had a white one. Boy, was he white! And just as spry! But he cost twice as much as I had, ^{well} I couldn't go home with nothing. Every body knew I had gone to buy a pony. Mr. Matthew let me have a ^{Cheaps one - a} brown and white one. He was nice looking ^{all} right but he was lame. Well, I treated him like he was the white pony I wanted...Fed him...Kept him clean...Rode him, too. Then one day the circus came to town. I went to see the parade. There was a boy in the parade about my age...he was riding a pure white pony. He looked real proud. I felt funny inside. Mad and jealous, I guess. I went home, but the feeling was still there. Next day I got Pop's gun...took my pony out by Timinny Ridge and shot that pony...right in the head.

The Mother: (In a thin voice) You say that to say what?

The Father: (Shrugs) Nothing. Just, some things is, and some things ain't. (A door slams) The kid's back. I'll get it. (Goes off humming "Dolores". The Mother looks confused and uncertain.)

A little boy climbs over the fence noisily. He has large eyes. He is five years old.

Little Boy: Hello.

The Mother: (Startled) What? Oh. Hello. You...you frightened me. How did you get in here? (The Little Boy goes to the pear tree and looks up into its branches) Do you live near here? (He shakes his head) You'd better go. Your mother may ^{be} worried about you. (He turns and looks at her) What is your name?

Little Boy: Are you a witch?

The Mother: (Laughs) Some folks might think I am. Come here, Boy. (He come close to her and looks into her face with that unique child-stare. The Mother puts her hand gently on his head and is immediately transformed. She smiles and her eyes fill with tears. Her eyes feast on every part of him, and she turns his hand over in her own. She touches him as though she were afraid he will break.) I have a little boy just like you, only his hair is brown. I lover him very much. Very much. He is the only thing I do love.

Little Boy: Why are you crying?

The Mother: Crying? I'm not crying. I'm laughing. These aren't tears, they're...they're laugh-water. Yes...laugh-water. For a long time now...just laugh-water. (She pushes him from her suddenly) Go away...you make me feel...strange. (He turns to go.) No! Stay! I'm sorry. You are a very beautiful boy. I want to be your good friend. Tell me what you would like most of all.

Little Boy: I want to grow up and be a man.

The Mother: Grow up? (Closes her eyes as if in pain) No.

Little Boy: What's wrong?

The Mother: Nothing. I just... you see, my little...(Her voice catches) Wait. Would you like a cookie? I have some. I'll get them. Wait here. (Runs off.) Don't go.

The Little Boy stands looking up into the pear tree, he walks around it as though he is looking for something. The Mother re-enters with the cookies. The Little Boy disappears over the fence.

The Mother: See, here are. All for...(Sees he is gone and calls for him "Little Boy." "Little Boy!". She stares down at the cookies, then lifts her head to the sky and addresses it.) I'll thank You to keep the rest of Your jokes to Yourself. (Picks up pan of peas etc. and exits hurridly.)

Scene II

The same as Scene I about the same time the next day. It is still hot but one feels there will be a summer storm soon. When the curtain opens no one is in the yard. The Father enters with a bottle of beer in his hand. He seats himself in the rocking chair thoughtfully drinking his beer. He is thinking. He comes to a conclusion.

The Father: (calling to the house) ~~Harriet! Harriet!~~ Rhoda

The Mother enters.

The Mother: What is it?

The Father: Come here. Sit down. I want to talk to you.

The Mother: I'm very busy right now....

The Father: This won't take but a minute. Sit down. (she sits)
~~Then - that's better. I don't want to talk to you~~ just relax
You wanted a child pretty badly, didn't you? You got gypped. Rhoda
I got gypped, too. Rhoda

The Mother: I have a child.

The Father: ~~Is that what you call it? I have another name for it.~~ yeah? well. yeah, sure

The Mother: ~~I've heard them all.~~ (suspiciously) What is this about?

The Father: It's about us...you and me...~~and that child.~~ (sucks his teeth for effect) ~~I have a letter here.~~ (pulls it out) It's
~~from a Mr. (reads) Winston F. Harvey, secretary to the director of~~ We're going to live much better now - just the 2 of us.
~~Blue field Mental Institute. I wrote them a letter a couple of weeks~~ - you know ~~that's a~~ Real pretty place - out by the
ago. They sent me this. ~~They say they'll take care of the kid for~~ well it's too much to read but the point is
the rest of his natural life at no cost to us. ~~That's~~ pretty fair, ~~isn't it?~~ eh? Now what do you think of that? nothing to get
way or start
me

The Mother: (clutching her throat) You wouldn't dare! You're just surprised now

The Father: ~~Dare? Dare? I have dared and done!~~ Hold on now you thought it over. You're just surprised now
~~is ruining us. He's just a mouse. He'll be better off - listen - he'll~~ Listen, that thing
you bore me is a mouse...that's all! He's eating me broke! You think about it.
ought to be glad to have some one take him off your hands. ~~and for~~
nothing! he with his kind, it'll be more than what we can give
him - better food + more of it. They'll teach him things.

The Mother: ~~I'll never consent!~~ Oh, no - no listen. I won't let you.

The Father: You will! ~~That half-wit!~~ Now - now - no need to get mad. I won't live another day around

~~He's not good for anything. Can't work.~~

answer right away

6 Mother - Please don't do this. This once let's agree. Please. I can take care of him - ~~but~~ I've got extra washing coming in anyway - I can get more. I know - it's the money with you always

Father - ^{going to be a} ~~him!~~ He spoils my appetite ~~and~~ makes me nervous. Besides, I'm ~~not~~ ^{the money with you.} ~~well.~~ I want to be a proud one. ~~My pride...~~

The Mother: ~~(shrieks)~~ ^{him - I do - let me take care of him (crying now)} ~~Pride? You murderer!~~ You don't care about him.

The Father: What? ~~please, you won't have to know he's in the house.~~

The Mother: ~~Yes. Murderer!~~ You killed him when he was five years old.

It was you...you who struck the blow that killed his manhood! Remember? His little head...twisted...laying on that iron grate. And he lay quiet for weeks.

~~You feel guilty!~~ ^{just quiet} ~~That's why you can't eat around him!~~ ~~What?~~ ^{It's your conscience} ~~Beating you to death.~~ ^{Knocking this}

The Father: Now it all comes out. ~~and you've walked around like a~~ ^{you} ~~tomb, tight-lipped, all these years.~~ ^{quit as a graveyard - you never said anything (keep in) - (you think the dead)}

The Mother: ~~Yes. A tomb.~~ Letting his corpse rot and fester inside me ~~until the stench is more than I can bear!~~ ^{I know that did it. He was alright before - a little slow} ~~He is mine and I love him.~~ ^{maybe - but alright - and now... well -}

And no one will take him from me. ~~Not even his father.~~ ^{Mr. Winston Haring is going to} ~~Father! Hah!~~ ^{can see it so plain}

Executioner! ~~(He strikes her)~~ she staggers, and recovers. Becomes very calm) ~~That's the second blow you have struck. Yours will not be the third. (exits hurriedly)~~ ^{that's all.}

The Father is ~~angry~~ furious. He wipes his forehead with his shirt sleeve. Clenches his fists. ~~Muttering "the second blow"~~ and strikes the trunk of the pear tree. It trembles. He sits in the rocking chair. Glances toward the house and grins. He pats the letter in his pocket and says "we'll see, we'll see". He settles down in the chair and tries to sleep. At first it is difficult, but the heat helps and dozes lightly and fitfully. The lights dim. There is a storm coming up.

The Mother enters. She is followed by The Son. He is tall and lean; his body out of proportion. He has the mind of a five year old. His eyes are wide open and he wears a fixed smile. He holds his mother's hand though he towers over her. He is actually 21 years

~~He was sick from the beginning. That has nothing to do with it.~~

Hit him.
+ he
fell.
OK?
can see
it so plain
No Blood
He never
cried,
just lay
there...
so quiet
My Baby.
My Baby

old. His hair is brown and long. The Mother stands apart from where her husband is sleeping. She is carrying a pillow.

The Mother: (quietly, as though giving a very routine and ordinary order) Now, place the pillow over his face, and hold it there untill he no longer moves.

The Son takes the pillow she hands to him, smile still fixed, walks aimlessly toward the Father and smothers him. The struggle is violent but not long. When all movement ceases, The Son takes the pillow away and stares at his father. It starts to rain. The Son puts his hand full on his father's face. He cries. They are man-sobs in child like fury.

The Mother: Come, Julian, it's raining. (exits, her arm around his shoulders)

Curtain.

The end.