



PEARL

By Sonhara J Eastman

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Pearl

A Full Length Play

By Sonhara J. Eastman

Dedication

* * *

Honor and respect to my Great Grandmother, Pearl, for her courage and perseverance in the face of adversity. Because of her, the world will understand the difficulties of being a bi-racial woman at the start of the twentieth century.

Thank you Mom Pearl.

* * *

After this day, may the burden of your rejection lay in peace.

* * *

And to all the Pearl's of the world, may you find freedom and healing from this day forth.

.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PEARL PULLEY, 23, a bi-racial (black and white) woman. Very light in complexion, nearly passing for White. She resides in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

CHARLES PULLEY, 22, an African-American farm worker and Pearl's brother. Dark in complexion, residing in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

LUCIE MAE PULLEY, 18, an African-American house worker and Pearl's sister. Dark in complexion, residing in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

MARGARET HASKINS, 40, an African-American teacher and Aunt to Pearl, Charles and Lucie Mae. She resides in the Mecca of Black resurgence, Harlem, New York.

JOHNNY WATERS, 51, a Caucasian Professor at Wake Forest University Law School. He was born into a well off family of slave owners and married into educational prestige. He resides in Franklinton, North Carolina.

WILLIAM THOMAS, 22, an African-American college student in love with Pearl. He attends Winston Salem State University.

DOTTIE BANKS, 21, an African-American woman and love interest to Charles.

SETTINGS

Pearl's house - Dining room, Kitchen, Living Room and Bedroom.

Pearl's bakery.

Professor Water's classroom.

TIME

1917

About the Play

While obtaining my MFA in dramatic writing at NYU, a Professor told me to think of something that's important to me and write a scene about it. Shortly after, I birthed the first scene of what would later become Pearl. As I expanded the piece, I focused on the bit of truth I knew. Pearl, my great grandmother, in fact had a White Father that never acknowledged her, yet they both lived in the same town, Wake Forest, North Carolina.

Pearl was a bold soul, who during the Jim Crow era, had the fortitude to visit her father's home in hopes of having a relationship with him. I'm told this encounter took place when she was around 20 years old.

Pearl passed away when I was 8 years old, but I remember her vividly. She was light hearted and made sure that everyone laughed while in her presence. However, I often wondered what sat behind her laughter. I've come to realize it was intense pain.

Ironically, Pearl is buried just feet away from her father. The difference is she's in the Colored's only section, while he resides in the White's only section. Much like in life, they are so close in proximity, yet so far away from each others world's.

Rejection has no boundaries
It seeks the strong, weak and meek.
It pays no mind to race, creed or color.
It has one job, to crush the soul.
-- Sonhara Eastman

ACT 1

SCENE 1

*Wake Forest, North Carolina.
1917. A dark stage, representing
mourning.*

*From offstage, voices can be
heard singing a Negro Spiritual,
Roll Jordan Roll, accompanied by
an organic percussion of hand
clapping and foot-stomping. The
voices carry the weight of a
massive choir, but they are few
in number. Once on stage, the
singing fades.*

LIGHTS UP ON:

*A dining room. Pearl, 23, an old
soul and biracial beauty, places
a pound cake on a table beside
southern comfort food. Her eyes
are puffy and watery from crying.
Charles, 22, well built, sits
stirring with anger. Lucie Mae,
18, naively honest and greedy,
rushes to grab a piece of Pearl's
cake. Aunt Margaret, 40's,
polished and educated, yet keenly
in touch with her southern roots,
eyes Pearl.*

*An awkward quiet sweeps the room
prompting Pearl to sing Roll
Jordan Roll, softly. Her singing
quickly turns to weeping.*

CHARLES

What you cryin' for Pearl? Mama done left you all she owned.
We the ones who should be cryin'.

Pearl quickly wipes her tears.

PEARL

Maybe I'm cryin' cause now I gotta play Mama to you; you oughta get yourself a wife.

CHARLES

I don't have time to find a wife looking after this land, it oughta be mine. If Poppa was livin' you wouldn't be ownin' nothin'. You just be baking cakes like Mama done and paying me rent.

PEARL

Well Poppa's long gone and the land was handed down to me.

CHARLES

A woman don't know how to take care of no land. I'm his son. Poppa made me work those fields with him, not you. Lucie Mae helped sometimes too. Hell, you ain't even no kin to him.

PEARL

Poppa is just as much my daddy as he is yours and I'm tired of your talking.

CHARLES

You's a lie. He ain't your daddy and everybody knows it. Just look at you Pearl - then look at us.

Margaret stands and gives Charles a cold stare.

MARGARET

Hush now. Pearl is the oldest and she got what she got and that's the end of it.

Pearl clears plates off the table,
while Lucie Mae nervously slices
another piece of cake.

LUCIE MAE

You don't go worrying bout me Pearl. I'll keep doing my part until I gets a family of my own.

PEARL

Don't go rushing to get no family. I'mma need you to help around here.

Lucie Mae nods. Charles moves to the head of the table. The dishes rattle as he positions himself.

CHARLES

When I gets me a wife, we gonna stay right here on the land that me and Poppa sweated for.

An upset Pearl quickly exits to the kitchen. Margaret follows.

MARGARET

You're going to be fine. Don't listen to that fool Charles.

PEARL

Why? He tellin' the truth. I've known it all my life. You know it too.

Margaret looks uncomfortable. She touches Pearl's face tenderly.

MARGARET

Don't you worry about that. You just keep up with your Mama's business.

PEARL

I don't know if I can do it without her.

MARGARET

Sure you can. You know all her recipes and you bake as good as her. Just keep busy, it will take your mind off things.

PEARL

No it wont! I'll still think about "him" like I done since I was a little girl. I wanna meet him.

MARGARET

I love you Pearl, but some things are better left alone.

PEARL

Who told you that, Mama?

MARGARET

No. That's what I know. Besides, she didn't talk about him much.

PEARL

Well, tell me what you know?

Pearl looks desperate for answers.

MARGARET

(Thinking) It's been so long...It's hard to recall.

PEARL

Listen, you the only one left who knows the truth. If you die, I mine as well die too.

MARGARET

Don't talk like that.

PEARL

That's how I feel.

Margaret considers Pearl's feelings.

MARGARET

Your mother would roll over in her grave if she knew we was even talking about this. She always said, let sleeping dogs lie.

PEARL

Please, Aunt Margaret, I got to know.

Margaret looks conflicted.

MARGARET

I don't want you to get hurt Pearl. What you planning to do, knock on the man's door?

Tears well up in Pearl's eyes.

PEARL

I just wanna see him. Please, I'm begging you.

Pearl clasps her hands together as she pleads with Margaret.

MARGARET

(Vague) I don't remember his first name, but he used to live in Franklinton.

PEARL

Where abouts?

MARGARET

I don't know.

PEARL

What does he do for a livin'?

MARGARET

I don't know what he does now, but back then he kept up his father's farm. That's where he met your mother. She used to work in the kitchen and I heard he loved her pound cakes.

PEARL

(Desperate) Is that all Mama told you?

MARGARET

They owned a family store too. I'm told everyone in town shopped there.

PEARL

Did she love him?

MARGARET

I suppose so, but it didn't matter then. She had to leave that farm when she was pregnant and never saw him again. Soon after, you was born and then she met Poppa T.

PEARL

You think he thinks about me?

MARGARET

He's married Pearl. He has a family. Mama had to leave to save him from being shamed.

PEARL

So you do know where he is?

MARGARET

He can't be seen with you Pearl.

Pearl fights back tears.

PEARL

I'm his family too. I have a right to know him.

MARGARET

And he has rights too. (THEN) Be careful with what you do with this information. They called him Johnny. Johnny Waters.

PEARL

(Thinking) Johnny Waters. (Then) Thank you! Thank you!

Pearl hugs Margaret. A look of concern takes over Margaret.

MARGARET

Please don't do anything foolish. I won't forgive myself if something happens to you.

PEARL

I won't. I promise.

MARGARET

Good. Let's get some rest. I'm leaving first thing in the morning to head back north. If you need anything, you write me and I'll be here quick and in a hurry. You hear me?

PEARL

Yes, ma'am.

SCENE 2

*Pearl's small store front bakery.
Pearl preps for the day. Lucie
Mae helps.*

PEARL

Make sure you slice that cake up nice and thick.

LUCIE MAE

If I make it any bigger, I's be giving it away.

PEARL

Listen, that was Mama's rule. She didn't want nobody talkin' bout how she gave them a lil' bitty piece of cake. So slice it how I tell ya.

Lucie Mae tries to cut the cake into thicker pieces, but they are disproportionate.

LUCIE MAE

I ain't never been good at this. This here was you and Mama's thing.

Pearl wraps her hands around Lucie Mae's. Together, they slice the cake correctly.

PEARL

Well, it's our thing now. You all I got.

LUCIE MAE

I don't minds helpin' Pearl, but I want to get married soon. I's been wanting that since I was a lil' girl.

PEARL

You still is a lil' girl in my eyes.

LUCIE MAE

Joe told me he gonna marry me soon as he gets back from the war. Then we gonna move north like Aunt Margaret did. I'mma live in New York City!

PEARL

Stop talking crazy. What you gonna do up there?

LUCIE MAE

I'mma clean houses and have me some babies.

PEARL

You gonna leave me here with Charles?

LUCIE MAE

You can come with us. (SOTTO) Charles gonna put you out soon anyway.

PEARL

What you say now?

LUCIE MAE

He fixin' to take you to court. He say he is the rightful owner of that land and he ain't lettin' you have it.

PEARL

That boy is a snake if I ever seen one.

LUCIE MAE

He's gone mad. It's like the devil done got in him.

PEARL

Well good thing I ain't scared of the devil.

LUCIE MAE

He said he gonna prove that Poppa ain't your daddy.

Pearl looks worried.

PEARL

Why can't he mind his damn business.

LUCIE MAE

You know he just worried about them crops. He gots tobacco comin' in now. He fixin' to make some real money, so he say.

PEARL

He act like I'm puttin' him out. He can make his money. I ain't got no plans to stop him.

LUCIE MAE

But you could if you wanted to.

PEARL

But I ain't.

There is a knock at the door.

PEARL

Go on and see who that is and let em know we don't open til noon.

Lucie Mae crosses to the door and peeps under the blinds.

LUCIE MAE

It's William. (Laughing) He still tryin to court you?

PEARL

Hurry up, let him in.