

ALL THINGS BEING EQUAL
By Faye Sholiton

[This scene takes place in a classroom in Liberty Falls, Ohio, as BERTA FREEMAN, a black teacher in her 30s, teaches a class on Social Justice, and her friend and colleague CARRIE BRAUN looks on.]

BERTA

[To her class]...Tomorrow, we're going to talk about one of those places the Constitution didn't reach: the U.S. Military. How many of you have heard of Port Chicago?

It's not in the textbook, children. Port Chicago was a naval installation on the Sacramento River. On July 14, 1944, something happened on the docks. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted, in some part, because of what happened that night. Look it up. This, too, is American history.

(BELL RINGS. CHAIRS SCRAPE. Then silence.)

CARRIE

You gonna give me a hint?

BERTA

There was an explosion.

CARRIE

...with racial implications.

BERTA

Well, who do you think was doin' all the grunt work?

You know, I don't think you ever told me what your daddy did during the war.

CARRIE

Is that what all this is about?

BERTA

I'm asking for a reason.

CARRIE

Fine. He was in the Army. Quartermaster Corps.

BERTA

I see. ...An officer?

CARRIE

Captain. Why?

BERTA

Then you know that his Negroes were nothing more than slaves in uniform.

CARRIE

No. I don't. I mean, he never ...

BERTA

No, I don't suppose he did. Well, my daddy was Quartermaster Corps, too. Only Navy.

CARRIE

...He was at Port Chicago?

BERTA

They got one, maybe two days of so-called "training" before pulling ammo duty. And when they didn't work fast enough, passing the bombs hand to hand, they were ordered to *toss* them, in the air...

CARRIE

How many died?

BERTA

Three hundred twenty-some. Hundreds more injured. And the ones who survived? Sent right back to work, ten days later. Except some of them made a stand. Got themselves sentenced to 15 years' hard labor.

CARRIE

My God.

BERTA

Oh, they were released after 16 months. But with *dishonorable* discharges. And you know who defended them? (...) Thurgood Marshall. ...I told you there was a link.

CARRIE

How come you never mentioned this when we were planning the unit?

BERTA

I just get weary hearing about your mama this and your mama that. It's time we talked about your daddy.

CARRIE

There's nothing to tell. He managed properties. ...In the city.

BERTA

Properties.

CARRIE

...Near downtown. That's all. End of story.

BERTA

I see. And as Captain Rice...

CARRIE

Actually, it was Captain Reisenfeld. And he requisitioned supplies.

BERTA

And he never spoke of the men under his command?

CARRIE

Hill's right. You *do* have an ax to grind.

BERTA

Did he talk about his buddies? Go to any reunions?

CARRIE

It's not as if he landed on Omaha Beach, for God's sake!

BERTA

...Show you photographs?
(The light dawns.)

CARRIE

...They were all black.

BERTA

Uh-huh.

CARRIE

Look. His point of reference back then was the silver screen. Negroes dug ditches. Indians carried tomahawks.

BERTA

So your sainted mama married Archie Bunker.

CARRIE

Like I said. He was a product of his time.

BERTA

So was she.

CARRIE

They divorced in 1962. And he's been dead for seven years, okay? Could we talk about something else?

BERTA

Carrie. Honey. When are you gonna take off those Pollyanna braids? In case you haven't noticed, we're different.

CARRIE

If you're talking about race,

BERTA

Well, *somebody* should.

CARRIE

That's what the whole Civil Rights Movement was for! To make sure it *didn't* matter!

BERTA

Perhaps it has to matter before it doesn't.

Sooner or later, race always rears its ugly head. Somebody launches a grenade and we retreat to our "bunkers." We're *wired* that way. And pretending we're not won't get us diddly squat.

CARRIE

Well, if we haven't been talking about race these last few months, what the hell have we been talking about?

BERTA

Damned if I know. But I got this feeling, keep asking myself, "What does this woman want from me?"

...Tell me, Carrie. How many black people in your address book? I'm not talking about your old housekeeper, either. I'm talking heart-friends. Peers.

CARRIE

Well, how many white people in *yours*? Or don't you have any "peers"?

BERTA

What we just experienced was a moment of pure, unadulterated honesty.

CARRIE

I was merely trying to prove a point.

BERTA

Which was...

CARRIE

...I have no idea.

BERTA

Lord, I wish you'd stop trying so hard.
(Pause)

CARRIE

Have you ever had your mouth washed out with soap?

...When I was in tenth grade, I wrote this amazing essay about the end of civilization. How we had already proven ourselves capable of pushing the nuclear button. My teacher entered it in a citywide competition and told me it was almost certain to win. ...Well, she failed to mention she'd entered another girl's essay, too. A black kid who wrote about fair housing – about the office *my mom* had co-founded! ...Well, the day they announced the winner, I have to say, I got a little steamed. I had already planned where I was going to spend the prize money. ...Unfortunately, my mother was passing through while I was venting to a friend. ...I can still taste the soap.

What's so funny?

BERTA

What that black girl was probably saying about *you*.

CARRIE

If I'm to be your heart friend, what the hell am I supposed to be doing?

BERTA

One day you will enter my world.

CARRIE

I've been waiting for an invitation.

BERTA

When you get there, I'll need you to hold it together.
(Pause.)

CARRIE

Does this have anything to do with why I've never met your husband?

BERTA

You've never met him, because he's been in the hospital.

CARRIE

Oh. ...Oh, God! You can't imagine what I thought.

BERTA

About a black man who abandoned his wife and baby. Let me guess.

CARRIE

I'm an idiot.

BERTA

He's at the V.A., Carrie. ...It's where I go on Sundays.

CARRIE

... I'll be damned.

BERTA

What.

(BELL RINGS.)

CARRIE

You know, you can be a royal pain in the ass.

BERTA

You have no idea.