

SCARECROWS WILL NEVER SEE THE
SUNSET
or The Legends of Smackover

a lie of the mind
by Darren V. Michael



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CAST LIST

JOHN LEGEND	Patriarch
MAMA LEGEND	Wife of John
JOHN “BEAR” LEGEND IV	Oldest Boy
BO LEGEND	Middle Boy
WERLYN “THORN” BRADSHAW, JR.	Oldest son of the Bradshaw Family
LILY	Wife of Thorn

SETTING

The early 20th century. The city and area around Smackover, Arkansas in the 1920s and 1930s. The scenes should move smoothly as BO welcomes and fights memories of his family. Sometimes Bo runs into these memories. Sometimes the memories seek him out. But they always linger and clash. The action is memory and distortion and often not in chronological order. Bo wanders this maze of memory.

PRODUCTION NOTES

I have been purposely vague in identifying visual staging elements within the script. When costume or visual descriptions are included, this is more for reference than for the staging. The most important thing is that whatever is decided regarding staging (fully realized set to a blank stage with lighting only), the scenes should flow easily between each other, with as few interruptions or pauses as possibly until intermission or curtain, even if the scenes (and the characters) dovetail on top of each other. Characters may even linger in scenes from one to another, even freezing in place from their last position as if spectres that linger in Bo’s mind waiting to be summoned again. Additionally, the nonlinear scene order here is what was originally produced; however, permission is given for a reordering of the scenes if needed for staging or dramatic effect. It’s always exciting to find a new interesting way of telling this story.

MUSIC NOTES

There is a simple musical score for the melody of original music if needed – as well as simple sound files; however, how the music is presented – who sings it, live or prerecorded – is really open for interpretation.

ACT I

Out of the darkness we hear singing. A refrain,
haunting and soulful. [These phrases could be sung
by any cast member or as a group – MAMA, BO,
etc.]

“O, Lord, these hands
 These hands
 These hands
 Won’t bring me home, ho---me.
 O, Lord, these hands
 These hands
 These hands
 Won’t make me strong, stro---ong.

 O, Lord, these arms
 These arms
 These arms
 Won’t keep me warm, wa---arm.
 O, Lord, these arms
 These arms
 These arms
 Won’t bring me home, ho---ome.”

ACT I

THE BARN

Lights up on a barn. A man, BO, lies back on a stack of hay bales. We see only one full side of him. His eyes are closed, possibly asleep. Opposite of the man is the barn opening. An old shotgun leans against an opposite wall. From the darkness, we hear a few voices (memories) haunting BO and possible sounds of oil wells and machinery.

MAMA

Family is everything and we all need a little more guilt in our lives.

THORN

But I also don't like someone trying to take what's mine.

BEAR

A damned married woman. You need to leave that floosy alone.

JOHN

I've never had much faith in scarecrows.

MAMA

Guilt is what reminds us of what we owe to each other, to God.

LILY

You want to go back before we all got here.

THORN

The needs of a man.

MAMA

If you take off now, don't darken my door again. Don't ever come back.

LILY

I don't see you as a family man. Doesn't fit you. Seems strange.

MAMA

...watching you make mistakes...that is the deep ache...

A young girl's scream is heard.

JOHN

Pick her up. Carry her inside. To your mama.

LILY

You're going to be a daddy, Mr. Legend.

BEAR

We're not farmers anymore.

MAMA

Winnie! You get back here and finish your chores.

THORN

I like you, Bear. Quiet, but when things need to get done or said, you don't waste time.

BEAR

We're the only ones keeping those memories alive.

JOHN

...if the fight turns dirty...then all bets are off...

LILY

God sees everything we do, right?

MAMA

(the past)

Everything else just melts away. No real pain after that.

More laughter and then it all fades. The present. BO rises and moves quickly to one of the hay bales and begins to shred it, spreading hay all over. Once the bay is completely disassembled, BO then begins to gather the hay and pile it up. As he's doing this, he speaks. It appears as if he's speaking to himself. If not, then to whom he is speaking is unapparent.

BO

(as if in a memory, enthusiastic, youthful, energized))

So the trick is to make sure that you have enough straw. Yeah, I think this will do. You know, years ago, before all the derricks and oil, there was nothing but forest and farmland. Mostly timber but there were some very nice farms as well. You could grow just about anything, but tomatoes grow anywhere. Banana peppers and purple hull peas and corn and squash. We grew almost everything.

BO continues to gather and pile straw.

BO (cont'd)

And your grandma. Now she could cook. I know that probably doesn't suit you. Not really into chores and cooking and what-not. You want to find your own path. That's ok. That's nothing to be ashamed of.

BO has really worked himself up into a hard sweat with the feverish pace of gathering the straw. Breathing heavy, he rests a moment.

BO (cont'd)

(indicating outside the barn)

So what do we have going on in there, huh? It's a long story.

After a few moments JOHN LEGEND enters. BO's entire demeanor changes as if a wonderful thing has left him. When BO speaks, he is not intimidating or gruff, just thoughtful, as if he is weighing the choices he's made, both good and bad. JOHN looks around initially to see if they're alone. John is carrying a change of clothes.

JOHN

Talking to yourself?
(Silence.)
Fine.

BO starts to speak then chooses silence again.

JOHN

So how does this play out?

BO

Waiting. Figuring.

JOHN

It's me, Bear, and the girl. She's taking a nap.

BO

Is that why you asked me to stay in the barn?

JOHN

I put you in the barn so I could figure on what to do with you.

BO

You don't need to hide me.

JOHN

Oh, don't I? Where have you been?

BO

Went to Risk's saloon.

JOHN

That's not what I'm asking.

BO

Yeah, well, that's the answer you're getting. It's her birthday.

JOHN

Three days ago. You even know how old she is?

BO

Six. No, seven. I came because of Mama.

JOHN

You're mother's been dead for two weeks now.

MAMA

(from the darkness)

Bo? Bo! Have you seen your sister? Get in here now. Fetch your brothers. Dinner's served.

BO

(searching)

Maybe...maybe I'm here for my daughter. Maybe family is the remedy.

JOHN

Maybe.

BO

Maybe I'm here for you.

JOHN

You never said goodbye. You never wrote. I thought for sure we'd see you after Lily died. We didn't see you at your Mama's funeral. Lot of things you've missed out on.

BO

Can I see her?

JOHN

After seven years she don't even know who you are.

BO

I was in Tucker for a spell.

JOHN

Yeah, I heard you were busted for nearly killing a man over in El Dorado.

BO

He was beating on some woman outside that joint across from Smitty's Kitchen.

JOHN

Is that the story? Seems like a bar fight might not warrant that lengthy stretch.

BO

I may have had some trouble inside to extend my stay.

Silence.

JOHN

So why did you really come back?

BO

(laughing slightly at the attempted joke)

I got a line on some land for sell.

(then seeing that JOHN doesn't find it funny)

I came back for absolution, Daddy. Ask your forgiveness.

JOHN

Bull. You don't want forgiveness, Bo. You never have.

BO

Don't you tell me what I want! I will look right into my daddy's eyes and he will grant me my wish. My last dying wish! I came back for you. You Daddy!

JOHN

That's why you're in this barn, right now?

BO

You "put" me here. That's why I'm in the barn. She's my daughter. You're keeping my daughter from me. My own flesh and blood.

JOHN

You came back to finally do what's right?

BO

That's all I been doing, Daddy. What's right. How to survive. Fight for what I want. Make things right.

JOHN

Like with Bear? Like with Lily? Like Thorn?

BO

I heard about Mama when I was in prison. An inmate came in from Smackover. You remember Howard McCord's son, Tommy? He got pinned for burning down his in-laws' house, but he knew about Mama.

JOHN

How long you been out?

BO

Two days.

JOHN

Served your sentence?

(No answer from BO, noncommittal.)

And suddenly you want to be a father?

BO

I figure my daughter wants to see her old man. So it gave me an excuse to see mine.

JOHN

Funny, she hasn't mentioned that. Maybe because she's all torn up over, oh, I don't know being raised by her grandparents because her own mama died three days after she was born and her daddy chose that moment to disappear for seven years. I guess being in prison was easier for you.

BO

Easy?

JOHN

The night I found Lily slumped over that kitchen table was an awful scene. She shouldn't have been on her feet at all. So soon after having a baby. The doctor told her to take it easy. Your Mama was taking care of things. I guess Lily felt with you gone, she had to contribute some way.

BO

I didn't kill her if that's what you mean.

JOHN

Nah, you don't kill anything but horses, right?

BO

Well, that's good that we got that settled. May I see my daughter?

JOHN contemplates this request then changes the subject.

JOHN

You smell like you took a bath in Risk's bar sink.

BO

(chuckles)

That would be the whiskey. You should try it some time.

JOHN

You know I had to give that up after I met your mother. She was pretty clear on that fact. Bear is ready to beat some smarts into you.

BO

(laughing)

Tell me something new. How's his leg?

JOHN

He gets around. Been great watching over Esther. Tucks her in at night. Reads to her.

BO

Reads to her?

JOHN

Well, the best he can. They're kids' books. I think he gets as much out of them as she does and they spend time together.

BO

I should be doing that.

JOHN

Well, prison and all.

BO

She know I'm out here?

JOHN

Nope. As I said she's asleep.

JOHN moves a step toward BO on the hay bales. They sit there silently for a minute.

BO

(attempting to change the subject)

You want to hear a story?

JOHN

What makes you think I don't know all your stories?

BO

It's legacy, Pa. That's what we do, right? We pass on our oral traditions.

JOHN

I know history, Bo.

BO

You remember when you took me fishing as a boy?

JOHN

We did a lot of things, son.

BO

Was it a chore for you or did you actually feel like you were passing something on?

JOHN

Is this line of questions going anywhere?

BO

What about when you taught me to fight? Or farm? Or a half dozen other things that you wanted to teach me? Because some days I think back on that and I wonder if you were doing it out of some grand obligation. Father to son thing. Passing on legacy.

JOHN

I was teaching, spending time with my boy.

BO

Yeah, I know, but why? Were you looking out for me?

JOHN

Fishing, farming, when I taught you to fight. I was showing you how to survive, endure.

BO

You do this with Bear too?

JOHN

Bear never shot a helpless animal and left it to die in a field.

BO

(fighting a memory)

Winnie.

JOHN

(ignoring the goading)

You should stay out here. In the barn. Out of sight.

(after a moment of silence from BO)

Bo?

BO

Thinking about it. You want to hear that story?

JOHN

(with great finality)

I don't want to hear any more stories from you.

BO

(almost threatening)

It's about us all.

JOHN

(referring to the gun leaning against the wall)

I thought you didn't like guns.

BO

Guns are necessary. That's what you said. "Why do you think they call that area down the road Shotgun Valley? Because of all the gunshots. Those gunshots are heading at someone most of the time. You gotta make sure they aren't coming for you. Town's a rough place."

JOHN

(conceding)

Yeah. That's why you're carrying? Protection?

BO

Nope. I'm carrying it to get right with God. Judgment day.

JOHN

For you or me?

(not letting him continue the argument and spying the pile of hay)

You leave for seven years without a word leaving your mother and me to raise your girl, then show up smelling like rotgut whiskey and expect that I'm just going to hand Esther over to you? Think, Boy. You taking your anger out on my hay bales? Or planning on bedding down here? Think again. You don't have to have that gun. The only person you're going to mess up is your kid in there.

With a brief flash of anger, BO jerks up to standing.
JOHN stiffens slightly but holds his ground.

BO

Legacy, Daddy. This here is legacy. What goes on between a father and son. LEGACY!
In time she'll understand that. Old man. You'll understand that.

JOHN

Same Bo. Same piss and wind.

BO

I'm trying to...make amends.

JOHN

I'm not going to let you –

BO

It's my daughter's birthday.

JOHN

What do you really want here? From her? From Bear? From me? Anything? What?
You're not coming in that house. Now, you can stay out here for a bit, figure out where
you're going, but then...

BO

You think this is how you stop me? Fatherly intervention?

JOHN

It's one way.

BO

Yeah?

JOHN

Yeah. There are other ways but I thought I'd try this one first.

Bo smiles then bursts into laughter.

JOHN (cont'd)

(ignoring this question and exiting)

When I come out here again, I want you gone. And if you're thinking of coming inside
my house, there will be a shotgun pointed at the front door.

JOHN exits. BO weighs a very heavy decision. He
looks at the pile of hay then back toward the area
JOHN exited. BO crumbles.