

**TATTOOED BASTARDS**  
**by Nicole J. Burton**

© 2013 Nicole J. Burton  
4712 Oliver Street  
Riverdale, MD 20737  
[Nicole@nicolejburton.com](mailto:Nicole@nicolejburton.com)  
(cell) 301-892-0402  
(home) 301-864-4863

## **TATTOOED BASTARDS**

### **Cast of Characters**

**Ray** – 22, biracial woman, recent college grad

**Henry** – 57, white gay man, theatre director and teacher. Ray's adopted father

**Judge** – DC Superior Court judge

### **Style & Setting**

Realistic, Washington, DC, near-future dystopian society.

Henry and Ray's apartment in Adams Morgan, DC  
Superior Court, Washington, DC

**TATTOOED BASTARDS**

*At Rise: RAY is already pacing their apartment when HENRY enters. He heaves his backpack and unpacks it. They both wear jeans and jean jackets. She's playing with a rubber fishing lure.*

You *won't* believe today.

RAY

What?

HENRY

You won't believe it.

RAY

Henry  
*(Unloading backpack: two cans of salmon, laptop, running clothes, DVD, other stuff)*  
Salmon patties?

HENRY

Whatever.

RAY

I'm listening.

HENRY

Dad!

RAY

What did you do?

HENRY

I can't even tell you.

RAY

Henry  
*(stills her hand)*  
What?

HENRY

*(he draws her to sit down but she leaps up again)*

They asked me to process legal papers...

RAY

Good. You're supposed to be law clerking.

HENRY

... for an adoption case.

RAY

HENRY

Oh.

RAY

File the forms. Send the records to be sealed. Arrange for her tattoo.

HENRY

It wasn't done at the hospital?

RAY

Private adoption.

HENRY

Oh.

RAY

I had to register her in the database. DC: 037.

HENRY

Honey, I'm sorry.

RAY

That's just the beginning. I'm supposed to take her on Monday to a doctor to get her tattooed.

HENRY

How old is she?

RAY

Six weeks. I can't do this.

HENRY

Jeez, can't someone else do it? I mean, under the circumstances.

RAY

That's not the point! The point is, twenty-two years after I was adopted, nothing in this evil system has changed. We're still branded for our mothers' "crimes." I'm getting my tattoo removed.

HENRY

Ray, honey. Don't do that. It's illegal. Plus, you're talking about your driver's license, bank account, passport. And if you want to be a lawyer, the bar exam. You *have* to keep your tattoo. You'll be contraband.

RAY

I don't care. And you should be standing up for me. You're always going on about civil rights and human rights and same-sex marriage.

HENRY

This has nothing to do with same-sex marriage.

RAY

Okay, human rights.

HENRY

Honey, I don't make the rules. Adopted people *are* special.

RAY

Especially separated out for unequal treatment and punishment.

HENRY

Honey, I'm hungry, it's Friday, I'm tired.

RAY

I quit my job.

HENRY

What?

RAY

I told them I couldn't participate in a system of apartheid that stigmatizes adopted people and strips us of our human rights forever by law.

HENRY

What did they say?

RAY

... she was in a hurry and we'll talk about it Monday, but I'm not going back.

HENRY

Do you know how hard it is to get a *paid* internship? In your chosen field?

RAY

And what field is that, Human Trafficking?

HENRY

Let's take three deep cleansing breaths.

RAY

This is what I want:

HENRY

*(Puts the canned salmon aside)*

Let's go to Perry's for quesidillas and pina coladas.

RAY

I'm going to petition the DC court for a waiver to get my tattoo removed. And I want you to back me up.

*(HENRY is speechless)*

HENRY

Are you sure?

RAY

Of course I'm sure. I think I'm sure.

*(HENRY takes the fishing lure from RAY and fiddles with it)*

HENRY

We should go to the lake, chill out.

RAY

It's not about you, you know. So don't make it all about you.

HENRY

I know.

RAY

Good.

HENRY

What are your chances?

RAY

Terrible. But I have to do it.

HENRY

You could tell your manager you can't take the baby... for the...

RAY

Tattoo. I'm not going back.

HENRY

Think about that first, Honey. Today's Friday, Monday's not for... a long time. I'm sure if they knew...

RAY

Of course they know!

HENRY

If they knew it upset you...

RAY

They think it's special, you know, from one generation of bastards to the next. Each One -Teach One

how to be special, compliant, grateful, accommodating, grinnin', happy little darkies on da plantation.

HENRY

Whoa, Ray. Ray, Ray, Earth to Ray: I don't look like you but I am your father and I love you. I want you to be the Master of Your Fate and make your own decisions but I've got to say, slow it down. Give it some consideration. On the table, yeah, keeping your job at a downtown firm, and whether to petition the court...

RAY

... to remove my tattoo.

HENRY

The chances are slim.

RAY

How would you feel if you had to be tattooed because you're gay?

HENRY

That wouldn't be a problem for a lot of gay guys.

RAY

Dad! Seriously. Why in this day and age does a 22-year-old who happened to be born, wait, wait, hear me out, to a resourceless woman have to be tattooed and registered? Doesn't that strike you as paternalistic and out of date? Dad. Doesn't that violate my human rights?

HENRY

*(HENRY rubs her left arm)*

Honey: I fed you and changed your diapers. No, you listen to me: I played house and fixed your hair. I've kissed your tears and commiserated about your lameass boyfriends. I put you through college and I cried at your graduation.

You think I'm *not* going to stand next to you?

*(A JUDGE enters in robes carrying folders)*

OFFSTAGE

All rise.

*(The Offstage voice repeats the order to rise until the audience itself is on its feet, with HENRY and RAY's encouragement if necessary. The JUDGE sits at his bench)*

JUDGE

You may be seated. Petitioner Ray Greer?

*(RAY stands)*

Do you have anything to add to your petition before I render my decision?

RAY

Yes, your Honor. As an adult American adopted person, having an adoption tattoo sets me apart from other citizens. I'm subjected to discriminatory laws and practices that violate my human rights as well as the Equal Protection clause of the Constitution...

JUDGE

Before you go any further, young lady. You should be grateful you live in an era in which you're protected from harsh judgments. Not so long ago so-called "bastards" like you were consigned to orphanages or left on hillsides to perish.

HENRY

Your Honor.  
*(HENRY rises)*

JUDGE

You are...?

HENRY

Your Honor, I'm Ray's father. Adoptive father. My late partner and I, well, we basically bought Ray in an alley for \$750 bucks. People do still buy babies, but the price is a lot higher now...

RAY

Dad...

HENRY

Your Honor, I agree with my daughter, it's time adopted people were allowed to live like the rest of us – without numbers, tattoos, and special constraints. Other countries stopped treatment like this years ago. Why haven't we? It's time to stop unfair treatment of adopted people.

*(HENRY sits)*

RAY

Your Honor, we want the same freedoms the rest of you enjoy...

JUDGE

So you've said. Further remarks?

RAY

Yes.

*(Touching her left arm)*

This adoption tattoo is a relic from the Way-Back. I'm not ashamed of myself. I'm not ashamed of my birthmother or my birthfather, whoever they are! And, if I'm ever able to locate them, I'll bet I find they're not ashamed of me either. This law interferes with my personal relationships. That's why I'm asking you to grant me an exemption from the legal requirement to remain tattooed.

*(RAY sits)*

JUDGE

Request denied.

RAY

*(Just to her feet)*

But your Honor...

JUDGE

Request denied. As an officer of this court, I am bound to enforce the law, which is as follows:

*(He reads)*

“Adopted children in the District of Columbia are to be tattooed at the time of adoption. This 9-digit number takes the place of a Social Security Number. The first three digits indicate birthplace” – D.C. is 037. “The second two numbers are the adoptor's identifier...”

*(JUDGE points to HENRY)*

“... the last four are a personal identifier. Black ink... outside left forearm... digits no smaller than 3/16<sup>th</sup> of an inch. Adoptees without tattoos cannot receive government identification such as a driver's license, enter into financial transactions, or be employed by the government. It is illegal to remove an adoption tattoo.”

Ms. Greer, social mores swing this way and that. But values, the values embodied in this law are immutable. Tattooing unwanted children is a form of deterrence, a *visible* warning against irresponsible behavior on the part of men and women. These tattoos are not meant to punish you personally; it's a pity you take it that way. They are about maintaining civil society, about stability and consequences...

RAY

Your Honor?

*(The JUDGE gestures for her to go ahead)*

Values are *not* immutable! How would you feel if your spouse, your daughter, or your *lover* – was denied a job on the basis of sex or gender orientation? That's the way it was until recently. If values were immutable, we could never have done away with racism. Not that we have done *away-away* with it but we're trying to. It's no longer part of the law. It's not trumpeted as a social virtue like interfering in the private lives of adoptees. We're getting rid of sex discrimination, discrimination against disabled people, gay people, and the world's getting better, not worse. Why would society go down the tubes if we gave up the shame and blame of adoption?

JUDGE

Judicial activism is not the purpose of this court. If you don't like the present law, as a DC resident you're free to take the matter up with the District Council. This hearing is adjourned.

*(Gavel)*

OFFSTAGE

All rise.

*(HENRY and RAY stand. The JUDGE exits)*

HENRY

Oh, Honey. You did good though.

RAY

I'll just cut off my left arm...

HENRY

Ray...

RAY

...or move to Canada. They consider adoption tattoos “barbaric.” I can get it removed – they haven't used them for thirty years. I can apply for residency based on my status, like being a refugee. Would you come to Canada? They have lots of theaters there, I'm sure you could find work.

HENRY

Honey, I don't want you to move to Canada.

RAY

We could get a place together at first...

HENRY

No. My life is here in DC, I don't want to move to Canada, even if I thought.... We're not going to Canada.

RAY

*Thanks.*

HENRY

We could organize a campaign to change the law.

RAY

Do you know how much influence the adoption industry has? Catholic Charities? The Christian “counselling services”? Private agencies? They all like this system. They get revenue – and control. We're their little tattooed bastards, forever grateful for being rescued. It would take a hundred years and ten million dollars to change the law. And that's just DC; forty-two states still discriminate.

HENRY

There's got to be another way, got to be.

*(HENRY comforts RAY. She's bummed. Suddenly she has an idea.)*

RAY

Dad! What about...

*(RAY leans into HENRY and whispers something. HENRY reacts negatively)*

HENRY

I don't think so.

RAY

Wait, wait. People will help us.

HENRY

But isn't it...

RAY

There are nine million of us. We have family and friends. We'll start a movement! We'll give them visible!

*(HENRY is dubious, folds his arms)*

HENRY

I don't to do that.

RAY

Then what?

*(RAY places her right hand over her heart and sings)*

“O Canada!

Our home and native land!”

HENRY

No! I refuse to be driven from my own country. Or you, that's unacceptable. All right – I'll do it. I'll do the other.

RAY

Really?

*(HENRY grasps RAY's forearm and she does the same in solidarity. Blackout. When the lights come back up, RAY and HENRY have removed their jackets and stand to take their bows. RAY crosses her now-visible tattooed left forearm across her chest and raises her right fist defiantly. HENRY, now also tattooed on his left forearm, does the same.)*

END OF PLAY