

Uncle Rooster

By Tami Canaday

ACT ONE

Scene One

***At rise:** Uncle Rabbit is sitting in a forced stress position in the springhouse. Uncle Rooster and Bob are sitting on the steps: Uncle Rooster on the top step and Bob on the bottom step. Uncle Rooster is drinking a Bourbon Sour, rattling its ice cubes, smoking a cigar using strong sucking noises, and wearing an officious ribbon with the words, "Mayor" on it.*

UNCLE ROOSTER

Now, when I heard about the ruination of the neighborhood's garden patch, (*indicates garden patch*) I was in the house with no conception, no warning, of the disaster that had befallen us. When Mrs. Fennel ran in to say the garden trellis was destroyed, aphids let loose on the raspberries, carrot tops tore up, lettuce ripped out, the garden cannibalized - at that exact moment, as only an honorable mayor can, I knew my life had changed. (*sucks long on drink. Drags on cigar*) I would be responsible for making the majestic choices. I'd be the one (*slight pause for emphasis*) to do whatever was necessary to protect, and defend the Holloway family and its neighbors. (*a pause*) So, Bob?

BOB

Yes, sir?

UNCLE ROOSTER

When it's just the two of us, you may call me Uncle Rooster.

BOB

Thank you.

UNCLE ROOSTER

So, what do you know?

BOB

Ah, well, sitting here with you is mighty comfortable.

UNCLE ROOSTER

So it is.

*(UNCLE ROOSTER swills drink. Smokes cigar.
Contemplates BOB)*

UNCLE ROOSTER

Once the neighborhood's garden patch was destroyed, there were all kinds of pressures put on me from above and from below, especially from above.

BOB

But Uncle I thought there weren't nobody above you.

(UNCLE ROOSTER takes a world-weary sip from his drink)

UNCLE ROOSTER

I'm talking about responsibility and gumption. Those are the pressures from above. Until you're tested you don't know what you might do. I, however, knew exactly how to save us.

BOB

Put Uncle Rabbit away?

(UNCLE RABBIT shifts his stress position)

UNCLE ROOSTER

Now, Bob, you're rushing the story.

BOB

Sorry.

UNCLE ROOSTER

Knowing the fundamentals, that's what. *(lowers voice)* When this great mission was demanded of me, I understood I was going to be asked to do things I might not do otherwise.

BOB

Like what we done to Uncle Rabbit?

(UNCLE ROOSTER gently clears his throat)

UNCLE ROOSTER

After the rampage in the garden patch, when our very survival was in question, I turned to the fundamentals. And what are they, Bob? *(waits. No answer)* Fundamental number one: make the majestic choices. You see I was willing to make choices regardless of the outcome. Fundamental number two? *(waits. No answer)* There isn't one. Now then, lessons learned – what are they, Bob?

BOB

Ah, I'm finally going to be a part of the family business?

UNCLE ROOSTER

No. I mean yes. But look at the bigger picture. What is it?

BOB

Ah, hum-

UNCLE ROOSTER

No further attacks! *(puts out cigar)* What's wrong with you? You're as daft as an ant walking underneath my shoe. I was responsible for keeping our family and the neighborhood safe.

BOB

Yes, yes! Why I sleep like a rat in its burrow at night.

UNCLE ROOSTER

I don't deny there were some excesses.

(Offstage LEON and MRS. FENNEL call out for UNCLE ROOSTER. He ignores them)

UNCLE ROOSTER *(cont)*

But when a single clue goes unturned that can lead to catastrophe, one cannot dither about hurt feelings.

BOB

Shouldn't we answer them?

UNCLE ROOSTER

No. Remember even with mistakes *(chuckles)* and we all make mistakes. You recall yours, Bob, don't you?

BOB

Yeah, well, I got punished for mine.

UNCLE ROOSTER

Why the kitchen floor never looked cleaner or shinier. You and Faith did a mighty fine job. So, even if I failed a little here and there, my heart has always been in the right place in wanting to keep you and your sisters safe.

BOB

Ah gees, Uncle, I know that's so. I do.

(LEON and MRS. FENNEL burst onto the stage. MRS. FENNEL has a handbag draped over an arm. UNCLE ROOSTER and BOB jump up)

LEON

Heyo, Rooster.

MRS. FENNEL

To be sure, to be sure.

LEON

Why didn't you answer us?

UNCLE ROOSTER

Why? Because my nephew and I were talking.

LEON

Sorry. But lordy Rooster, we need to talk to you now. Heyo, Bob.

MRS. FENNEL

Hello, Bob

BOB

Howdy, Leon. Howdy, Mrs. Fennel.

MRS. FENNEL

Hello, Rooster.

UNCLE ROOSTER

Yes, yes. What can I do for you folks?

MRS. FENNEL

Listen here, we've uncovered some more malfeasance done to Uncle Rabbit.

UNCLE ROOSTER

I've addressed that issue. A full report was written and disseminated throughout the community by Winny. Those that were responsible were taken care of, weren't they Bob?

BOB

(sullen)

Yes.

LEON

Yep, we got that there report n' it was a hefty one with words that floated by me like honeybees. And yep, we heard 'bout Bob and Faith getting in lots of trouble for what they done to Uncle Rabbit.

BOB

Even though we were just doing our jobs.

UNCLE ROOSTER

Now Bob, let our neighbors have their say. Continue, please.

MRS. FENNEL

Tut, tut. We're talking 'bout additional evil that continued long after Leon and I discovered the wickedness

and came to you, Rooster. We demand the truth be told 'bout the afterwards.

LEON

And our photographic proof we brought to Rooster at the time. Don't forget that.

MRS. FENNEL

No one's forgetting.

UNCLE ROOSTER

But, as mayor, I offered up my condemnation on what was done to Rabbit.

BOB

And Uncle Rooster and Winny conducted an investigation into the matter. (*sullen*) I should know.

LEON

Oh bee-gees, that investigation wasn't worth the juice of a potato. Why the bad stuff continued to happen.

UNCLE ROOSTER

I take umbrage at that comment, Leon.

LEON

(*unsure*)

Umbrage?

MRS. FENNEL

(*to Leon*)

I'll tell you what it means later. Let's move on, shall we?

UNCLE ROOSTER

Yes, the dreary past should be forgotten---

(*UNCLE RABBIT shifts his stress position*)

UNCLE ROOSTER (*cont*)

--- so we can focus on the important and challenging future ahead in Lulu's Burg. Why the price of oats and grain continues to drag. Grasshoppers were seen milling about Rudolph's cornfield recently.

MRS. FENNEL

Hold your horses. We have further proof that harm continued to be done to Uncle Rabbit after Winny's report---

(*UNCLE ROOSTER puffs up and interrupts*)

UNCLE ROOSTER

Rabbit's situation was taken care of with both a thorough investigation and a strong heart-felt condemnation. Besides, you were all given a copy of Winny's report, weren't you?

(LEON stomps)

LEON

Didn't I say so all ready?

UNCLE ROOSTER

Well? As I recall, the neighborhood wasn't all that upset after the report was issued.

LEON

We was plenty upset. *(to MRS. FENNEL)* Wasn't we?

(MRS. FENNEL looks far into the distance. LEON and MRS. FENNEL step away from UNCLE ROOSTER and BOB.)

Scene Two

(A flashback: A cow moos, a hen clucks, a horse neighs. FAITH enters carrying a pail of sudsy water and two scrub brushes. She hands one to BOB and they drop to their knees and commence scrubbing the floor. UNCLE ROOSTER stands behind them, and with disinterest watches them. LEON lulls happily on the ground. MRS. FENNEL sits next to him silently reading WINNY's report)

LEON

What do you think of Winny's report? Something I should read?

MRS. FENNEL

I dunno. It gallivants for its own pleasure And it talks 'bout Bob and Faith behind their backs. Says nothing 'bout how they got away with it.

LEON

I'll help you reckon it out. Read it to me.

MRS. FENNEL

You sur? *(LEON nods. Begins to read)* This inquiry has found there was confusion in the relationship between Uncle Rabbit and his niece, Faith, and nephew, Bob. Lack of interpersonal skills, a general lack of knowledge, and applying different rules to different situations made for an ambiguous relationship. As a result, wanton acts and grave breaches occurred. There was no clear delineation between Bob and Faith of what was acceptable behavior within the Holloway---

LEON

Stop! Stop! (*stands up*) It's making my brains jump up n' down.

MRS. FENNEL

I know it's squashy, but let me finish. (*stands up. Follows Leon around the stage*) . . . within the Holloway family. Bob and Faith engaged in flippant comments toward their uncle, which highlighted a lack of discipline. They fraternized unbecomingly, reveled in inconsistency, and maintained a questionable work ethic, which resulted in wayward acts. Acts that they initiated entirely on their own. It is not believed these siblings were part of any secret group---

(*LEON puts his hands over his ears*)

LEON

Stop! Stop! I can't bear no more! (*lowers hands*) Here let me have it.

(*MRS. FENNEL hands LEON the report*)

LEON

Does it say they're gonna scold and punish Bob and Faith for what they done to Uncle Rabbit?

MRS. FENNEL

It do near the back. But how can Mayor Rooster and Winny live in the same house with 'em and not know what's going on?

LEON

I dunno.

MRS. FENNEL

It says nothing about them.

LEON

Maybe, it says nutin cause there's nutin to be said.

MRS. FENNEL

No, that whole family is a pair of overalls needing mending.

LEON

(*holds up report*)

But this is proof we done good by Rabbit. Why Winny wouldn't have gone to all this trouble.

MRS. FENNEL

Well, it's more than I thought we get.

(*LEON admires report*)

LEON

Over a hundred pages.

MRS. FENNEL

It is rather nice.

LEON

(holds up report)

I'm awfully proud what we done for Uncle Rabbit.

(Flashback ends: A cow moos, a hen clucks, a horse neighs. FAITH exits with pail and brushes. LEON and MRS. FENNEL return to UNCLE ROOSTER and BOB)

Scene Three

(Back to the present)

UNCLE ROOSTER

Am I right? After the report was given out, folks from Lulu's Burg didn't exactly press the issue further.

LEON

Hold on there, the town council brought it up.

UNCLE ROOSTER

And?

LEON

Gees-Louise, I don't recall what the final outcome was. I think that we just felt kinda icky 'bout the whole deal. Yeah, that was it. The icky-ness was acknowledged.

MRS. FENNEL

Tsk, tsk. That don't mean we can't call into account what we know now to be a for sure.

UNCLE ROOSTER

And that is . . . ?

MRS. FENNEL

That Uncle Rabbit was taking to Farmer Brown's Springhouse and messed with.

UNCLE ROOSTER

So, what are you saying? That Rabbit should have been given an athletic uniform? Scientific equipment? Sent to the schoolhouse instead? Remember, he still hadn't come clean about the garden. Not that I know anything about the springhouse.

MRS. FENNEL

Oh lordy, bad stuff was done to him in that there springhouse, Rooster.

UNCLE ROOSTER

Hard to believe. From what I recall, Rabbit was more predator than prey. Besides, what's your point?

BOB

She's saying Uncle Rabbit was mistreated.

UNCLE ROOSTER

(irritated)

Thank you, Bob.

LEON

She's saying more than that!

MRS. FENNEL

I kin speak for myself. I'm saying after all your flapping 'bout ending Uncle Rabbit's mistreatment and it being wrong 'n all, he was sent away for more of the same.

UNCLE ROOSTER

And . . . ?

MRS. FENNEL

Well, we want the truth 'bout why that happened.

UNCLE ROOSTER

And . . . ? *(slight beat)* Where's your proof?

(LEON revs himself up like a car motor)

LEON

Vroom, Vroom. Ain't you seen nutin? We is constantly learning something new almost every day 'bout that funny business done to Uncle Rabbit. Why Scottie G. and Griselda B. have written articles for *The Gazette* detailing it---

MRS. FENNEL

(interrupts)

There's photographic evidence---

LEON

(interrupts)

And Winny's official to-do lists have been leaked over and over.

(UNCLE ROOSTER walks over to the garden patch. The others follow)

UNCLE ROOSTER

(sad)

I just don't understand why I am being treated like I was somehow responsible for the violent and senseless act done to the neighborhood garden.

BOB

My uncle is an honorable man with great integrity.

UNCLE ROOSTER

Why we've been friends for over twenty years, Leon. And Mrs. Fennel, we've known each other since we were knee high squirts. I just don't understand why you both are trying to turn neighbor against neighbor.
(continued . . .)