

THE LINCOLN VAUDEVILLE

**by
Christopher Baker**

**Trinity College
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DRAFT**

CHARACTERS

DAN RICE (any age over 30)
ABRAHAM LINCOLN (male, white, over 30)
TELEGRAPH OPERATOR (any age over 30)
MRS. SHAW (any age over 30)
MR. MOSES ABRAMSON (any age)
MARY TODD LINCOLN (female, African-American, over 30)
JEFFERSON DAVIS (male, white, over 30)
FREDERICK DOUGLASS (male, African-American, over 30)
CHARLES DARWIN (non-speaking) (any age over 30)
ELIZA JOHNSON (female, over 30)
ANDREW JOHNSON (over 30)
ANTONIA FORD (female, over 20)
REPORTER 1 (any age)
REPORTER 2 (any age)
JOHN WILKES BOOTH (over 20)

All actors are part of THE COMPANY

Except for Mrs. Shaw and Moses Abramson, the characters correspond to historical figures. At the beginning of the Civil War, the ages of the historical figures ranged from the early 20s (John Wilkes Booth, Antonia Ford) to the mid 50s (Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis). It is not very important that the actors match the ages of the historical figures.

SONGS

The lyrics of the songs "I'll Be Dar" and "Song of the Hebrew Children" are adapted from 19th century American songs.

TIME AND PLACE

19th century America or our idea of 19th century America.

PRODUCTION

I imagine productions could be, in different proportions: fantastical, presentational, realistic, playful, serious. Though the ending of each scene is indicated by a Blackout, in production scenes might end in all manner of ways.

MISS KENTUCKY

Music. THE COMPANY takes the stage.
DAN RICE comes forward. HE is a
showman, comedian, ringleader and
emcee. He looks a little like Uncle Sam.

DAN RICE

Welcome, Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome, welcome, welcome. Thank you all for joining me and my company for an evening of recreation, information, prestidigitation, illumination and procrastination. Of high drama and high wire acts. Of puns and politics. Of rousing Northern marches, and sweet songs of the South.

Singing

TOMORROW I AM GOING AWAY,
IF THE WEATHER IT IS FINE,
I'M GOING DOWN TO OLE KENTUCK
TO SEE THAT GAL OF MINE,
I'LL TELL MA WE'RE GETTING MARRIED,
AND CAN I USE HER RING?
BUT SHE'S BEEN DEAD THESE THIRTEEN YEARS
SO SHE CAN'T SAY A THING!

You know, I was in a bar a couple of months ago and Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses Grant and Jefferson Davis came in and ordered whiskeys. This was a kind of low-class place and each of their whiskeys came back with a fly in it. Lincoln looked at his whiskey and the fly and pushed it away disgusted and said "No, this ain't right." And Grant looked at his glass and drank it down without a second thought. But old Jeff Davis picked up that fly and held it over the glass and shouted "That's my whiskey! Spit it out!"

Singing

FOR I WILL BE DAR, I'LL BE DAR,
YES I'M A COMIN' HOME,
I'LL BE DAR, I'LL BE DAR,
THOUGH I'VE BEEN A ONE TO ROAM,
THOUGH MY GAL'S GONE AWAY
AND I'VE LOST MY FAMILY
I'LL BE DAR ON THE LAND,
THAT IS STILL A PART OF ME.

So sit back ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, black and white, Northern and Southern, cake eaters and pie lovers, whiskey drinkers and hemp smokers, and watch as my intrepid troupe of performers unfolds a living diorama of American history, American tenacity and the American presidency that will surely amaze you. Bigly.

Now, please give your absolute attention to the most delightful performer either side of the Mason-Dixon line, the erudite aerialist, the belle of balance, Miss Mary, the Rose of Kentucky.

Lights up on MARY TODD on a
tight rope. SHE holds a parasol.

MARY TODD

They call me a rose because the rose is the most educated of all the flowers. Gypsum, daisies, cornflowers, they're all just weeds, can't teach them. But the rose can learn to do all kinds of things. Temperamental, yes. Thorny, but smart. Tonight, in addition to exhibiting my amazing skill and daring walking the tightrope, I will also be playing the part of that most interesting woman, Mary Todd Lincoln, a part in which I will also exhibit my amazing skill and daring.

(Applause.)

It's an election year and I decided to be like a politician. Balance. Not too far to the left, not too far too the right, just right down the middle. In between. In between is hard work. You all should try it sometime.

So you know, this rope I call Kentucky. Miss Mary, why do you call it Kentucky?

COMPANY

Why?

MARY TODD

Because Kentucky is an in-between state, a balancing state, a North and South, East and West, old and new, future and past state. That pole over there represents the future. That pole over there's the past. And the educated rose of Kentucky walks on a razor thin edge between all of it.

(SHE appears to lose her balance.)

Whoa! A hush falls over the crowd. You're just waiting for me to fall, aren't you?

(Laughter)

What's it like to be in the air? To fall to the earth? What if I pushed her? Stare long enough and you project onto me all kinds of wishes and fears and regrets. Maybe next time I'll do the act with audience participation. Maybe not.

The secret of the tightrope is this: it builds character. The Kentucky tightrope has produced many fine leaders too numerous to mention who have all had their characters fortified on bourbon and the tightrope. It has given us not one, but two of our presidential candidates: Mr Brekenridge and Mr Lincoln. As well as the great Jefferson Davis. And Henry Clay, of course. And Mrs Lincoln. (*SHE curtsies.*) Whoa! When I feel as if I can't keep my balance anymore, Mr. Rice saves me with a song!

The COMPANY enters, sings "I'll be Dar."

COMPANY

WAY DOWN IN OLE KENTUCKY STATE,
WHERE I WAS BRED AND BORN,
I WORKED AMONG THE SUGAR CANE,
THE COTTON AND THE CORN.
I TOLD MY GAL TO WAIT, SOMEDAY
I'D BE THE PRESIDENT,
BUT SHE AND A BLONDE-HAIRED YANKEE BOY
MOVED TO CONNECTICUT!

FOR I WILL BE DAR, I'LL BE DAR,
YES I'M A COMIN' HOME,
I'LL BE DAR, I'LL BE DAR,
THOUGH I'VE BEEN A ONE TO ROAM,
THOUGH MY GAL'S GONE AWAY
AND I'VE LOST MY FAMILY
I'LL BE DAR ON THE LAND,
THAT IS STILL A PART OF ME.

BLACKOUT

LINCOLN WAITS

Illinois. The TELEGRAPH OPERATOR is busy with a customer, MRS SHAW, at the window. LINCOLN rushes in.

LINCOLN

Are the returns in yet?

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

Just a minute. "Happy Birthday Aunt Minnie. Stop." That it?

MRS. SHAW

That's it.

LINCOLN

Just wondering if there is any--

MRS. SHAW

Are you sending a telegram?

LINCOLN

Waiting for one.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

All set. That'll be 84 cents.

MRS SHAW

(Counting her money out) Oh, I think I only have 83 cents. Oh dear.

LINCOLN

Allow me.

HE puts a coin on the counter

MRS SHAW

Thank you. You are very kind.

LINCOLN

Not at all, ma'am.

MRS SHAW exits.

(He puts his hat on the counter.) Any returns come in yet?

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

No. Nothing yet. I bet they'll start coming in any minute.

LINCOLN

I'm sure they will.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

The East is supposed to come in at six o'clock.

LINCOLN

That's what I thought.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

It's seven. So... they're late.

LINCOLN

Would appear so..

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

They're coming. I think you'll win.

LINCOLN

Might.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

What's the first thing you'll do?

LINCOLN

Don't know.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

You know what I think? I think you should have someone in Washington invent flying machines. Take people back and forth. Imagine flying between here and Chicago. Chicago and Philadelphia. Big floating hotels all over the sky.

LINCOLN

I'll think about it.

THEY wait, staring at the telegraph machine.
ABRAMSON, a well-dressed man, enters and
goes up to the window.

ABRAMSON

I want to send two telegrams.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

We're waitin' on something important.

ABRAMSON hands the OPERATOR two cards.

ABRAMSON

Here they are.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

"Wishing you a Happy Birthday. Stop."

LINCOLN

November's a very popular month for birthdays.

ABRAMSON and TELEGRAPH OPERATOR
look at him.

I guess cuz it gets so cold in February.

HE leaves window and sits down, takes out an
apple and begins peeling.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

"Wishing you a Happy Birthday. Stop. I long to be with my beautiful girl in beautiful
Kentucky. Stop. Illinois a god-forsaken backwoods and I can't wait to return to civilization.
Stop. All my love, Moses. Stop." They both the same?

ABRAMSON

Yes.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

That'll be three dollars and 42 cents.

ABRAMSON

Seems expensive.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

Pretty long messages.

ABRAMSON

They are to my mother and my sister, who both happen to be born on the same day.

LINCOLN

The exact same day?

ABRAMSON

Yes.

LINCOLN

Peculiar. Can't make it out, unless your daddy was also your grandfather.

ABRAMSON

I beg your pardon?

Telegraph starts to receive message. The
TELEGRAPH OPERATOR quickly writes.

May I--

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

(Holds up one hand to silence him). Ttssh.

ABRAMSON sighs in frustration. HE looks at
LINCOLN who gives him an apologetic smile.

Here it is. "Returns from East to follow momentarily. Stop."

LINCOLN

All right, then.

ABRAMSON

My telegrams?

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

When do you want them sent?

ABRAMSON

Right away.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

Right now?

ABRAMSON

This minute.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

I'm waiting for returns --

ABRAMSON

Their birthdays are today.

LINCOLN

Still think it must be some freak of nature.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

Shouldn't be too long.

ABRAMSON

If I wanted to wait I would've sent a letter.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR looks cover at
LINCOLN who shrugs.

LINCOLN

Can't do nothing with a pony but praise it.

ABRAMSON

I beg your pardon?

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

(To ABRAMSON) It'll take me a few minutes.

ABRAMSON

He mentioned returns. Are you Mr. Douglas of Illinois?

LINCOLN

Mr. Douglas of Illinois? No. (*Having fun with him*) You mentioned Kentucky. Are you Mr. Breckenridge of Kentucky?

ABRAMSON

Mr. Breckenridge? No. No. I thought I recognized you. I beg your pardon.

LINCOLN

No worries. Mutual mistake. You thought it was me, I thought it was you. Turns out it was neither of us. I'm originally from Kentucky myself.

ABRAMSON

Oh! I'm Mr. Abramson. Moses Abramson.

LINCOLN

Abraham. Abraham Lincoln.

ABRAMSON

Mr. Lincoln! Well! This is an important day for you.

LINCOLN

Supposed to be.

ABRAMSON

Well I am glad to shake your hand, sir. Very glad to meet you.

LINCOLN

Glad to make your acquaintance, sir.

ABRAMSON

I don't envy you, though. No sir. A mess, that's what this all is. South Carolina's already meeting about secession, I hear. Everyone else just waiting to see if you'll be elected. What do you think? Think you'll win it?

LINCOLN

I'm like everyone else -- just waiting to find out.

ABRAMSON

Everyone on edge. My people back in Kentucky, hoping you'll be elected.

LINCOLN

Well thank them for their support.

ABRAMSON

Oh, they didn't support you. (*Laughs.*) They'd shoot you soon as vote for you. They're just ready for a fight, that's what it is. They want to get on with it.

LINCOLN

Your people are secession folks, then.

ABRAMSON

Some. Some stick their heads in the sand, think it's all going away. But there's enough support for secession that we'll be able to push it over.

LINCOLN

Most agree with you?

ABRAMSON

Not a majority, not in Kentucky. But you don't need a majority. You just need enough. And you need to be persistent.

LINCOLN

And be louder than everyone else.

ABRAMSON

Beg your pardon?

LINCOLN

Get yourself heard.

ABRAMSON

Exactly. I really don't envy you. Being president. I suppose it's a good thing, but ... who'd want it? Like putting your arms around a barrel of gunpowder.

LINCOLN

Like making love to a copperhead. On the other hand, people don't much like anything that interferes with their church meetings or reading the paper over a cup of coffee. As long as they have enough to eat and a roof over their head, some public time to be pious and some private space to be wicked, people like peace.

ABRAMSON

Don't like to be told what to do.

LINCOLN

I'll give you that.

ABRAMSON

Don't like government taking away their property.

LINCOLN

Of course not.

ABRAMSON

Take away their slaves.

LINCOLN

Don't want to take away anyone's slaves.

ABRAMSON

Let Niggers become citizens. Bed white women. Live next door to decent families.

LINCOLN

No intention to let them become citizens or bed white women. And I'm pretty sure they don't want to live next door to decent folk like you.

ABRAMSON

My people work hard. We don't want any Bostonians telling us how to live.

LINCOLN

Who would?

ABRAMSON

We just want to go about our business. Can you blame us?

LINCOLN shakes his head no.

LINCOLN

You have slaves Mr. Abramson?

ABRAMSON

I don't, no.

MARY TODD enters.

MARY TODD

Have they come in? Are the returns here?

LINCOLN

Ah, my dear. Mr Moses Abramson, may I present my wife.

MARY TODD

How do you do, Mr. Abramson?

ABRAMSON

Very well. It is a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Lincoln.

LINCOLN

Mr Abramson and I were just discussing his people's views on the Federal government.

MARY TODD
Oh. And what are they?

LINCOLN
Well, they're against it.

MARY TODD
Why?

LINCOLN
They're from Kentucky.

MARY TODD
Nuts?

ABRAMSON
I beg your pardon?

MARY TODD
Are your people nut farmers? Pecans? Hickory?

ABRAMSON
No.

MARY TODD
Whiskey?

ABRAMSON
No. We're merchants.

MARY TODD
Yes. Well you would be, wouldn't you Mr. Moses Abramson.

LINCOLN
(*Changing the subject.*) Mrs. Lincoln is from Kentucky as well.

ABRAMSON
Yes, of course. Who in Kentucky doesn't know the Todds of Lexington.

LINCOLN
Mary, Mr. Abramson's mother and sister both have a birthday today. Isn't that a coincidence?

MARY TODD
Is there a Mrs. Abramson? Other than your mother, of course.

ABRAMSON
No. I am not married.

MARY TODD

No.

LINCOLN

We're still waiting for the returns, my dear. In the meantime, Mr. Abramson was able to send birthday greetings to his family.

MARY TODD

How nice for them.

ABRAMSON

I'm glad to have met you , Mr. Lincoln. Maybe I'll be able to say I shook hands with the President. I didn't vote for you. But it is good to have met you. For your sake I hope you lose. Mrs. Lincoln.

HE exits.

MARY TODD

Finally. Knew right away I couldn't stand that man. I have no patience for these southern Jews, trying to assimilate by getting themselves some house slaves. He probably lives with his parents and sneaks out nights to meet young men behind the Western Café.

LINCOLN

Now Mary...

MARY TODD

Kosher grits

LINCOLN

Mr. Abramson doesn't own any slaves, he says.

MARY TODD

Can't afford any, most likely.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

Where'd he go? Listen to this. "Thank you for birthday wishes my dear boy. Stop. Papa says rail splitter definitely won. Stop. Will be lynched in effigy in front of church tonight. Stop. Wish you were here. Stop."

LINCOLN

Well...we won.

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MARY TODD

Mr President.

LINCOLN

Stop.

MARY TODD

We have a speech to write.

SHE exits. LINCOLN throws his apple to the
TELEGRAPH OPERATOR.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

Mr Lincoln! Your Hat! Oh well.

HE puts on the hat.

Thank you, thank you. Thank you all for coming. I campaigned on bringing you flying
hotels and I will keep my promise ! Thank you! I think this is the largest inauguration
crowd since the founding of the republic!

HE waves to imaginary crowd as he makes
crowd cheering noise.

BLACKOUT.

CIRCUS

DAN RICE

RICE

I went to the inaugural party in Washington. And these day, tensions being what they are security is pretty tight. This fellow comes up, ugly, strange lookin' fellow, and he tries to get past the captain. The captain looks at him and says, "Sorry, I can't let you in." The fellow says, "But I need to get in there!" The captain says, "Sir, I am supposed to keep out any ruffians, malcontents, embarrassments to the White House, people without the proper attire, and any potential dangers to the presidency." And the fellow pleads, "But I really got to get in there!" Finally the captain says, "I'm sorry, Mr Lincoln, I have my orders."

Different inaugural ball down in Montgomery, where they didn't much care for the way the last election went so they just decided to have their own little convention with their own little set of rules and choose their own little president. And the littlest person they could find was Jefferson Davis. Actually Jeff Davis isn't that little, unless he stands next to Abe Lincoln. Or when he gets into the liquor cabinet, well then he's about as high as the floor, if you know what I mean. Jeff Davis doesn't really have a drinking problem. He drinks fine, it's the stopping that he has a problem with.

And now, for those of you who appreciate the legitimate theater, a histrionic display of pseudo-historical tragic-comedy, in a scene we call: "*The Mysteries of Perryville, or On The Train Car.*"

BLACKOUT

ON THE TRAIN CAR

A solitary train car in a secluded, wooded place. JEFFERSON DAVIS enters, badly disguised. (As George Washington perhaps?) HE is carrying a basket. HE takes off his disguise, sits on a bench and takes knitting out of basket and begins to knit. After a while, LINCOLN and MARY TODD also enter. SHE carries a picnic basket. THEY are also badly disguised. (As pirates, perhaps?)

LINCOLN

Jefferson Davis. I'm sorry. I hope you haven't been waiting here long.

HE begins to take off his disguise.

DAVIS

(Rising to greet him) No, no. It's fine. I only just got here. Mrs. Lincoln. What a surprise! I didn't know you were coming. You are looking very well.

MARY TODD

Thank you Mr. Davis. It's such a pleasure to see you again. How is Varina? I do miss her, I hope she is well.

DAVIS

Yes, yes. Quite well.

MARY TODD

Lovely and charming as ever, I'm sure.

DAVIS

As ever. Quite anxious right at the moment, though. Wouldn't even let me say the word "Confederacy" around the house for weeks. She's worried about the boys, of course.

MARY TODD

Of course. We're all anxious. It's hard to be a mother right now. Here you are.

SHE gives LINCOLN the picnic basket.

I'll be waiting outside with the Major. Don't take too long, you two.

DAVIS

Mrs. Lincoln.

SHE exits

LINCOLN

It took us a while -- doubling back, going through the woods and all. Making sure we weren't followed. Didn't want to keep you waiting. Mr. President.

DAVIS

Well--

LINCOLN

Congratulations.

DAVIS

Thank you. I didn't really ... I didn't really want it, you know.

LINCOLN

No , no. Of course not. Best man for the job, though.

DAVIS

I really didn't want it. I said no. But, you feel a certain duty. I had to accept.

LINCOLN

Of course.

DAVIS

Congratulations to you as well. We haven't spoken since you were elected.

LINCOLN

No we haven't. Thank you. I did want it.

DAVIS

(Laughing.) Yes. You sure did. Good for you. Good for you.

LINCOLN

Are you sure you weren't followed?

DAVIS

Yes.

LINCOLN

I believe it is very important that no one knows we are here.

DAVIS

We took every precaution.

LINCOLN

Sandwich?

DAVIS

No.

LINCOLN

They are delicious. Mrs. Lincoln made them herself. She can't cook but she can assemble things. This one is tongue and this one, I think, is boiled chicken.

DAVIS

Alright. Thank you.

LINCOLN

I have apples for later.

THEY eat sandwiches.

So I think it is important that we avoid this war however we can.

DAVIS

I agree.

LINCOLN

Wonderful! This will be easy, then.

THEY eat.

It is not in the best interests of the Northern states to go to war and it is certainly not in the interest of your new Confederacy to fight.

DAVIS

If I could prevent even one drop of Mississippian blood from being shed I would.

LINCOLN

Do you want an apple now? I don't like to save them.

DAVIS

Thank you.

LINCOLN

So what do we do here? I'm pretty sure I have to keep the Union together. I said I'd do that.

DAVIS

Secession was not done on a whim.

LINCOLN

I know.

DAVIS

We need to protect our investments. It was a prudent decision.

LINCOLN

So you say.

DAVIS

We analyzed the risks and the benefits.

LINCOLN

Let me ask it this way, then. Say I'm a wizard, with a long cloak and a magic wand. I wave it and Zam! the Confederate states are back. What would that look like?

DAVIS

Slave states would still be slave states.

LINCOLN

Of course.

DAVIS

But we need growth. Expand or die. King Cotton doesn't want to die. Slavery is hemmed in on all sides. We need territory.

LINCOLN

I said I was against that, you know, y'all getting more territory.

DAVIS

We need some of the west. You don't care about the west, Abraham. Indians and bison.

LINCOLN

Yes, but...what if your analysis is not correct? I think you underestimated the costs. There's pie, here, by the way.

DAVIS shakes his head and puts up his hand to refuse.

You're looking short term. We're in a different time. Things are changing fast, so fast we can't keep up with them. Our children are growing up in a very different world than we did, and it changes them. They've got coffee grinders and water beds and lady mountain climbers. They think differently. And that just accelerates the change. See what I mean? Slavery's one of those things, just one of them, that is going to change.

DAVIS

How do we harvest crops?. Millions of crops? Without it we'd have a whole class of whites sweating at hard labor, living four or five families in one room just to get by. Like you do in the North.

LINCOLN

We have machines now, Jefferson, in case you haven't noticed. Slavery's inefficient. And nobody wants it, really. A thousand negroes out in the middle of nowhere picking cotton? Harvesting indigo? Get those slaves working machines, then you'd be able to grow. It's not expand or die, its change or die.

DAVIS

That's a very nice white cotton shirt, Mr President. So many northerners wearing their pressed cotton shirts, smoking tobacco, stirring spoonfuls of sugar into their coffee. And I wouldn't be surprised if Mrs Lincoln herself doesn't have a beautiful dress in a stunning shade of indigo. How you think that indigo, that sugar stays so cheap? I hear northerners say: "Oh the poor slave. Oh the conditions on the plantation!" But they're not willing to pay more for a shirt that isn't cotton. Not willing to give up their evening smoke. I think maybe you've underestimated. Or overestimated.

LINCOLN looks down at a piece of pie.

LINCOLN

You're right. Who doesn't love cotton shirts? And people wouldn't give up tobacco even if it killed them. The New Mexico territory. I think I can get that to go slave.

DAVIS

That won't be enough.

LINCOLN

Damn it, Jefferson. Work with me, here. Look. What happens when you run out of guns. Ammunition? When things break down?

How many young men you got? Because we've got more. A lot more. And they will march and kill your sons and then burn your cities and your fields, so there's nothing left for your wives and daughters to eat but red mud and rotting horses. And even after they've left your cities to starve and even after you have run out of young men, they will continue the destruction. Until you won't recognize your own home.

DAVIS

Mr. President.

LINCOLN

I'm sorry, Jeff. But it's just foolish. The Constitution depends on slavery, and the Union on the Constitution. But nothing is absolute. Everything has its limits. Everything is negotiable. Even the Constitution. Take the opportunity. Neither of us wants our legacies to be stained with the blood of innocent boys.

DAVIS

Well.... We'll both do our best to ...pull the reins on this.

LINCOLN

We've got to stop it.

THEY shake hands

LINCOLN

And you know I'll put you in prison, Jeff. You and the whole lot of you would be tried for treason. Most likely be shot by a firing squad. If the boys don't quarter you first. I'll have no choice.

DAVIS collects his things. Just as HE is about to go, MARY TODD enters.

MARY TODD

We should go. I hope the two of you had a fruitful meeting?

LINCOLN

Yes, dear, I believe we did.

DAVIS

Yes, Mrs. Lincoln. We have our work ahead of us, Mr. President.

LINCOLN

Yes we do, Mr. President.

DAVIS

I'll take that north trail and then cut back around through the woods near the river. Should take me and my guards about ten minutes until we're on the other side.

LINCOLN

I'll leave in eleven, then.

DAVIS

Mr. President. Mrs. Lincoln.

DAVIS exits.

MARY TODD

Sad man. Always looks like he's in pain. Can't believe he accepted the presidency. He could've had a future. He's a good politician. He was a good senator. I hear he's stopped drinking. Did you get a compromise?

LINCOLN

Yep. And I know Jeff is going to work as hard as he can to get people on board. I don't think it'll work, but it'll give us time.

MARY TODD

You're not going to compromise.

LINCOLN

No, I guess not. Just testing him. Buying some time.

MARY TODD

Privileged sons of bitches. They don't get to steer so they just sink the whole damn boat. You're not giving those stupid, whining jackasses anything.

LINCOLN

It's got to be their fault. History's gonna blame *them* for this. It's not gonna blame me.

THEY think.

MARY TODD

What if we provoke them?

THEY think some more..

LINCOLN

Confederates got Fort Sumter surrounded right now. What if we get one of our spies there to stir things up? Get the South to fire the first shot. Catch Davis and the rest off guard. Confederates'll take Sumter and then...

MARY TODD

Then it's Hell. Let's get out of here.

LINCOLN

It's not eleven minutes.

MARY TODD

Let's go.

BLACKOUT

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POLITICAL CONSULTANT

RICE is addressing the audience. LINCOLN and MARY TODD sneak into to see him, badly disguised.

RICE

Now, ladies and gentleman, if I may direct your attention, to the amazing , the astonishing, the remarkable Eliza the pig, who will gallop around this tent, through those hoops, up the ramp, over the flames, down the runway, grab the bayonet in her mouth from the hand of a beautiful lady and then plunge into the pool of water. She will swim across the pool and back again with the bayonet in her mouth. Are you ready my incredible Eliza? Then ... Go! Run, Eliza, run, run as if Robert E. Lee himself were riding you!

RICE takes a "break" LINCOLN and MARY TODD approach him.

MARY TODD

Mr. Rice. May we speak to you.

RICE

Yes, of course.

MARY TODD

I am Mrs. Lincoln. This is my husband, the President.

THEY remove their disguises.

We felt we needed to sneak in. Not be noticed. You understand.

RICE

Not your kind of crowd, Mrs Lincoln?

LINCOLN

(Offering his hand) Mr Rice.

RICE

(Shaking it) Mr. President. To what do I owe this honor?

LINCOLN

I enjoy your act very much, Mr. Rice. That pig is something else.

MARY TODD

We need your help.

RICE

My help?

MARY TODD

Mr Lincoln needs someone in the popular arena, advertising his accomplishments, his image as a good president. A leader.

RICE

And you've come to me?

MARY TODD

You are extremely popular, Mr Rice. More people get their information about current events from you than from the newspapers. Odd, to get your news from a comedian, but there you have it. Those are our times. What you say affects public opinion.

LINCOLN

You'll be well paid.

MARY TODD

We don't expect you to be pro-Union when you play the South but any notion that you can lay in that the South will join back up with the North, would be helpful.

LINCOLN

You know in the comic way you do

MARY TODD

In the North we'd need you to be generally pro-Union and ultimately pro-Lincoln.

LINCOLN

You can make jokes at my expense, but not Mrs Lincoln and not the war effort. We want public opinion on our side. You're very funny.

RICE

I try....I'd have to be very well compensated.

LINCOLN

You will be.

MARY TODD

And consultations. We want you to consult on Mr Lincoln's image. He'll be running for another term. Not now of course, but it's really never too early to be thinking about the next election.

RICE

Well for one he has to stop being so sullen all the time. There, that's a consult for free. Lighten up. But don't be a hick, don't be silly. People don't want to worry and if you are too sullen or too silly they worry. And find one thing and stick to it. Be "the guy who..." "The President who..." Who does what? Find your thing. What's your thing?

LINCOLN

Well, we've just passed the railway expansion act and the homestead law, and my...

RICE

Stop, stop. Already I don't care. People are busy, Mr Lincoln. Especially people who actually work for a living. Times have changed since you were sitting at your daddy's knee discussing corncobs and pokeweed. The telegraph brings news across the country immediately, so people can keep up with changes constantly. The newspapers are actually filled with things that are new. You can't expect people to linger over every word you say, every accomplishment in long articles. This is for free. Your thing is slavery right? Getting rid of the slavery?

LINCOLN

Our platform proposed that if we limit the expansion of slavery into the territories while also maintaining...

RICE

Stop! What's your thing? What do you really stand for? I get that you want to please everyone, be a little vague. But, What are you going to do? Not twenty things. Not ten things. One. Unless you can pull a possum out of your ass while whistling Dixie no one is going to pay attention for more than five minutes, cuz there's a guy in the next tent who is doing something even more spectacular. Who are you? The guy with the hat, but what else? I'm back on. Excuse me Mr. Lincoln, Mrs Lincoln.

MARY TODD

So are you in, Mr Rice?

RICE

I'm in.

LINCOLN

Oh, Mr Rice. I am very interested in magic tricks. Can you show me magic tricks?

RICE

Magic tricks?

LINCOLN

Yes. Maybe you can help me acquire some ... tricks. You know. Like a magician.

RICE

Sure. I'm sure I could do that Mr President.

MARY TODD

Good day, Mr. Rice. We'll send someone to negotiate your contract.

RICE

I'm here all week.

MARY TODD

Abraham, you've got a meeting with the senators. You're late.

LINCOLN

You know how I hate those yapping...

MARY TODD

You're late!

The LINCOLNS exit.

RICE

The amazing Eliza, ladies and gentlemen! Let's have another round of applause for this porcine prodigy.

Applause. Music begins

And now, ladies and gentlemen, I happened to be at a luncheon at the White House, a private luncheon, and I heard President Lincoln singing this little ditty. It's called "The Battle Hymn of the Republicans." Would you like to hear it? It goes something like this:

HE sings

SHE WEARS HER PINK PAJAMAS IN THE SUMMER WHEN IT'S HOT,
AND SHE WEARS HER FLANNEL NIGHTY IN THE WINTER WHEN IT'S NOT.
BUT SOMETIMES IN THE SPRINGTIME, AND SOMETIMES IN THE FALL,
SHE JUMPS RIGHT INTO BED WITH NOTHING ON AT ALL.

GLORY, GLORY FOR THE SPRINGTIME AND THE FALL.
GLORY, GLORY FOR THE SPRINGTIME AND THE FALL.
GLORY, GLORY FOR THE SPRINGTIME AND THE FALL
WHEN SHE JUMPS RIGHT INTO BED WITH NOTHING ON AT ALL.

FORTUNE-TELLER

MARY TODD at a séance table.

MARY TODD

Someone is about to embark on a long journey. Who is that? Anyone? I see the letter D and the letter F. And maybe J. You shouldn't worry. I am hearing a voice that says you shouldn't worry. They are watching over you. Someone—I see the letter X. Unusual name. Xora maybe? From long in your past. Watching you.

There is a sound of someone trying to get in a locked door. Finally a crash. MARY TODD is startled at first. There is no one.

Echoes in here.

Abraham is going to be late. Something important has come up. I don't like it when he comes in the middle. I began when my son died. My little Eddie. He was a tender-hearted, sweet little boy, so sick, in his last days. Angel boy. It was agony. I look at my other boys, at little Willie, and I don't think I could bear losing another. Not to sickness, not to this war. But it was destiny. Part of the plan that I want to understand. I don't have séances because I want to get Eddie back. I have them because I want to understand. I have a responsibility. To destiny, I'd say. Knowing that gives me strength. Emboldens me. Makes me impatient with the fatuous senators who smell like rotting carcasses and their drunken, viperous wives. That's why I hate everyone in this town. And everyone hates me. "I hardly think everyone hates you." Oh yes they do. They see me and they see knives. And everyone's afraid to be cut. I have Abraham and the boys. And destiny. The rest don't matter.

Abraham's running so late this evening.

Someone in the audience left their stove on. Was it you?

BLACKOUT

MR. LINCOLN/MR DOUGLASS

A vaudeville routine featuring LINCOLN and
FREDERICK DOUGLASS, or two other characters
imitating them. THEY enter from opposite sides

Mr. Lincoln. DOUGLASS

Mr. Douglass. LINCOLN

THEY shake hands.

How are you these past weeks? DOUGLASS

I'm fine, it's the weeks that have been terrible. LINCOLN

The war has been trying. DOUGLASS

Yes, it's been trying to kill a whole lot of our boys. LINCOLN

Perhaps it's time for a new vision. DOUGLASS

New glasses? LINCOLN

New vision! DOUGLASS

That's just it. With all that gunsmoke and dust, those poor soldiers got no vision at all. LINCOLN

What're they fighting for? DOUGLASS

Their lives. LINCOLN

What else? DOUGLASS

LINCOLN

Mostly their lives.

DOUGLASS

They could be fighting slavery.

LINCOLN

Slavery they could beat. It's General Lee that's giving them trouble.

DOUGLASS

Been reading your Bible, Mr. President?

LINCOLN

Nope.

DOUGLASS

How about the Declaration of Independence?

LINCOLN

Why don't you go ahead and school me, Mr. Douglass?

DOUGLASS

The Declaration of Independence says that all men are created equal.

LINCOLN

That's not what Mrs. Lincoln tells me

DOUGLASS

It's good to remember Thomas Jefferson's words all the same.

LINCOLN

I remember them all time, Mr. Douglass. Just about as much as I forget them.

DOUGLASS

Listen. I want to talk to you about Habeas Corpus.

LINCOLN

Huh?

DOUGLASS

Habeas Corpus.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----------|
| What? | LINCOLN |
| Habeas Corpus! | DOUGLASS |
| Sounds like there's an echo in here. | LINCOLN |
| You do know what Habeas Corpus is? | DOUGLASS |
| Sure I do! | LINCOLN |
| Well, what is it? | DOUGLASS |
| All I know is, I don't like it. | LINCOLN |
| You don't like what? | DOUGLASS |
| What you said. | LINCOLN |
| What I said? Habeas Corpus? | DOUGLASS |
| Yeah, that's it. Very good. | LINCOLN |
| What don't you like about it? | DOUGLASS |
| Don't like Italians. | LINCOLN |
| You don't , huh? | DOUGLASS |

LINCOLN

Don't like garlic.

DOUGLASS

Habeas corpus isn't Italian. Its Latin.

LINCOLN

Don't like Latins, either.

DOUGLASS

It means "produce the body."

LINCOLN

Sounds dirty.

DOUGLASS

It's not dirty. It means a prisoner gets to go before a judge. Whoever jailed him has to prove it was lawful imprisonment. Or else he gets to go free.

LINCOLN

Even if he's a no-good traitor?

DOUGLASS

If he was unlawfully imprisoned, the judge'll set him free.

LINCOLN

What if the judge is a no-good traitor?

DOUGLASS

That's another problem. Then you have to go after the judge.

LINCOLN

Put him in prison?

DOUGLASS

Could.

LINCOLN

But that judge'll just go to another judge to get a habeas body thing.

DOUGLASS

He could.

LINCOLN

But what if that judge is no good, too? Then you just got yourself another Latin situation.

DOUGLASS

What do you mean?

LINCOLN

Ad infinitum. Habeas corpus ad infinitum. That's why I hate Latin. It messes with the E pluribus unum. I'll tell you what I do like.

DOUGLASS

What is that, Mr. President?

LINCOLN

I like that song, "Dixie." In fact I love that song..

DOUGLASS

You love "Dixie"? Mr. Lincoln, you're fighting Dixie.

LINCOLN

Don't matter. Mrs Lincoln and I go a few rounds all the time, don't mean we don't love each other. Say, Mr. Douglass. Will you sing "Dixie" for me?

DOUGLASS

No sir, you're on your own.

DOUGLASS exits. LINCOLN whistles "Dixie."

BLACKOUT

MR. DOUGLASS EATS APPLE PIE

LINCOLN and DOUGLASS. Slices of pie and cups of tea sit on a table.

LINCOLN

There's more when you finish that, if you want.

DOUGLASS

It's good pie.

LINCOLN

We always have the best pie, here, Frederick. You know that.

DOUGLASS

That is true enough.

HE studies LINCOLN, who isn't eating.

This a bad day, Abraham?

LINCOLN

A day that boys die in battle is always a gloomy day. They're at me from all sides, Frederick. The press, Congress, my cabinet. The public. Just yesterday I had a mother here in my office crying about her son and scolding me about the war.

DOUGLASS

She lose her son in battle?

LINCOLN

Well, that's what I thought. I said, "Madame, what regiment did your son fight for?" And she says, "Oh, he didn't fight. My son was only 12 years old. He died of the fever. You see, Mr. Lincoln," she says, "everything in your presidency is bad." Can hardly be blamed for her son catching the fever. Everybody grew tired of this war mighty fast.

DOUGLASS

Mmm-hmm.

LINCOLN

What's that mean? Go ahead, tell me. I know you got something to say and I know you too well to think you're gonna keep it to yourself.

DOUGLASS

What are you doing? Where is your vision?

LINCOLN

Vision?

DOUGLASS

A vision. A Reason. With a capital R. A small group of rich southern men have convinced a lot of poor white boys that if they don't fight, hordes of free black men will take their land, their women, their jobs and any shred of dignity they think they have. You have to convince the northern white boys they're fighting for something too. Keeping the South from splitting off isn't a great motivator. You might just look down there and say, "Ah, let em go." But you have it right in front of you Abraham. You are always talking about your forefathers. "All men are created equal."

LINCOLN

You know he didn't mean that.

DOUGLASS

Sometimes you sound like an idiot, Mr President.

LINCOLN

Here we go. You want some more pie?

DOUGLASS

John Locke

LINCOLN

Never met him, never want to.

DOUGLASS

Is any baby born a king?

LINCOLN

My tea is cold.

| | |
|---|----------|
| Is any baby born a king? | DOUGLASS |
| No. | LINCOLN |
| Is any born a slave? | DOUGLASS |
| No sir. | LINCOLN |
| We are born the same. | DOUGLASS |
| Mewling and puking. | LINCOLN |
| Crying and kicking. | DOUGLASS |
| Pissing and ..all the rest. | LINCOLN |
| If a baby is born into royalty? | DOUGLASS |
| Good for him. | LINCOLN |
| If he's born in a slave cabin? | DOUGLASS |
| His life is misery. | LINCOLN |
| DOUGLASS | |
| It is what comes after the baby is born that makes the man. It is the life around her that molds the woman. It is what is taught and what is learned that makes a great individual. | |
| Or an idiot. | LINCOLN |

DOUGLASS

The mountain lion is dangerous, but does anyone fear that the mountain lion might one day be his master?

LINCOLN

Only an idiot.

DOUGLASS

Only a man can be educated. Only a man can be dangerous in that way.

LINCOLN

That is dangerous.

DOUGLASS

You came from the back woods of Kentucky, splitting rails and driving flatboats and now you are sitting in the White House. I was born in bondage not fifty miles from here and now I'm in the White House.

LINCOLN

Invited for tea.

DOUGLASS

And pie.

LINCOLN

Apple pie.

DOUGLASS

Delicious pie.

LINCOLN

Something to think about.

DOUGLASS

The future of this nation depends on what you do in this house. Right now. You determine the future. That future is going to be your legacy.

LINCOLN

My legacy?

DOUGLASS

Think about all the possibilities that are chained up right now. Look into the future. A black man might invent a completely revolutionary machine, that lets us manufacture things more cheaply. He might discover a cure that saves thousands and thousands of lives. There is a whole potential here that is chained up, an entire future that is enslaved. That future doesn't have a color. It's everybody's future. A whole future bound up! You need to figure out a way to unleash it, Mr. President.

LINCOLN

Yes!

DOUGLASS

That could be your legacy.

LINCOLN

I want that future. I want that legacy.

DOUGLASS

Then you have to act.

LINCOLN

How?

DOUGLASS

You have to act

LINCOLN

I cannot free any slaves.

DOUGLASS

Yes you can.

LINCOLN

No I can't.

DOUGLASS

Yes you can.

LINCOLN

My job does not include freeing slaves.

DOUGLASS

Some of us had very high expectations for your presidency, Mr. Lincoln. But I am afraid you are right now the white president of the White United States. And black folks have nothing to cheer for.

LINCOLN

Black folks don't vote.

DOUGLASS

Some day.

LINCOLN

Some day on the moon. I didn't get elected to free slaves. I'd be hated.

DOUGLASS

Sure. Now. But after. A whole bunch of people would love you.

LINCOLN

Negroes.

DOUGLASS

And abolitionists and poor folks and factory owners who are going to need workers and Quakers and Mennonites and Catholics I think, but who knows.

LINCOLN

Great. Poor folks and Mennonites and Italians.

DOUGLASS

But it's the future you're thinking about. And those people -- those future people -- who will be able to grow more crops and live longer and keep food from spoiling and see in the dark -- they will love you. They will have pictures of you on their walls and they will point to them and say to children: "It's him. Because of him. Father Abraham."

LINCOLN

I-I-I can't just end slavery, snap my fingers and it's gone. You know that Frederick. It's a dance. A wild country dance, where you spin your partner round and round. Do you know what I am saying?

DOUGLASS

No.

Pause.

LINCOLN

I get three letters a week saying slavery's a sin and our tribulations are God's judgment on the country, and six letters a week saying that I am Satan's whore.

DOUGLASS

Really?

Pause.

LINCOLN

Do you know "Go Down Moses"?

DOUGLASS

Yes, I do.

LINCOLN

I love that song.

Pause

Will you sing it?

Pause

DOUGLASS

No.

LINCOLN

You should eat your pie. I can't talk anymore. I'm feeling pretty low right now.

DOUGLASS

I'm sorry. You've got to act, Abraham. Doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you act.

Pause.

LINCOLN begins singing "Go Down Moses."

LINCOLN

WHEN ISRAEL WAS IN EGYPT'S LAND:
LET MY PEOPLE GO,
OPPRESSED SO HARD THEY COULD NOT STAND,
LET MY PEOPLE GO
GO DOWN, MOSES,
WAY DOWN IN EGYPT'S LAND,
TELL OLD PHARAOH,
LET MY PEOPLE GO.

BLACKOUT

TIGHTROPE WALKER

MARY TODD on a tightrope, a black umbrella in one hand.

MARY TODD

This is my recurring dream. I am in the air, floating above everything. There it is. The rushing. Makes it hard to keep my balance. But I do. I never fall. Somehow I know that I must not fall.

I see the tightrope in my mind, stretching from the past to the future. People who look down at the rope fall off. I don't look down. The line is clear in my mind, stretching, stretching to the future. To destiny. Big D Destiny, big F Future.

A gust.

You have to work at it, use every bit of your will and concentration, but if you see it you can stay on. If you focus on your costume or the color of your umbrella or how many people are watching, you'll fall. Those are details. Can't focus on details. Can't focus on where you are now on the rope, have to focus on "where is the rope going?" Feel it, sense it, be part of it.

Can't fall on the people below. I have to do well. Have to excel. Have to succeed. Look!

CHARLES DARWIN walks under her.

It's Charles Darwin. Hello, Mr. Darwin!. Darwin is ingenious, isn't he? Certain paths, certain lines are strong, vital, move forward. Others are dead ends. Each step, leads to another step, is in response to something and in turn something responds to that. He's on to it. What survives and why? What gets passed on generation to generation? He broke the code. He's a wonderful tightrope walker..

A gust.

Whoah! The rushing again. Somehow I know that Mr. Darwin is the manager of this tour. Collects all the money. Buys the raw meat for the lions. Is having an affair with the bearded lady.

Another gust.

I stay on the rope. I'm trying to break the code too. What's ahead? What do we pass on to generations to come? Survival. We pass on survival. It gets very tiring.

BLACKOUT

CROQUET

LINCOLN, ANDREW JOHNSON and
ELIZA JOHNSON play croquet. ELIZA
whacks a ball across the stage.

ELIZA

Look at that! What fun!

LINCOLN

You play this before, Mrs. Johnson? You and the senator?

ANDREW JOHNSON

No. I have no idea what this game is all about. You?

LINCOLN

No. Mary bought these on her last shopping trip to New York.

ELIZA

Seems pointless.

JOHNSON wipes his forehead.

LINCOLN

You need something to drink?

ANDREW JOHNSON

No, no. Unless it's convenient.

LINCOLN

I could send someone.

ANDREW JOHNSON

What do you have?

LINCOLN

Tea?

ANDREW JOHNSON

No, that's all right.

LINCOLN

Senator. You weren't thinking of whiskey in the middle of the day?

ANDREW JOHNSON

Mr. President, I think of whiskey during all parts of the day.

ELIZA

Well, this has been delightdful, but I am going to go inside and find Mary. Any clue as to where she is hiding?

LINCOLN

Not at all. You might ask the servants.

ELIZA

I will. Andrew, don't play too hard.

SHE exits.

ANDREW JOHNSON

So why're we out here, Mr President, playing goddam croquet?

LINCOLN

I need your help.

ANDREW JOHNSON

Yes you do.

LINCOLN

On the railway bill.

ANDREW JOHNSON

You need my help, but not on the railway bill.

LINCOLN

The railway, the tariff, conscription, Indians, the war effort, the war, the war. Congress is being recalcitrant.

ANDREW JOHNSON

I know you like to throw in big words, Mr President, so that folks forget you were born in an outhouse, but tell it like it is. Congress is screwing you any way and any time they can. They'll say yes to you and then vote no, say no and vote yes. Everything that's going wrong in the war is your fault, and everything else, too. If it rains on sister Agnes' garden party it's your fault. And the newspapers are buying it. Not all of them, but enough to make some people think we'd be better off with a goddam monkey in the white house. Or just board this place up and wait for the next election.

LINCOLN

So what do I do? I'm not sleeping, Andrew. It's all giving me headaches and nightmares.

HE takes a bottle of blue pills from his pocket and takes five.

ANDREW JOHNSON

You and I both come from dirt. My people had nothing. We didn't even have dirt. But we're fighters. We know how to get what we want and take care of ourselves in a street fight. But this isn't a street fight. The men assembled in this town are in a different game. This isn't how many punches can you take and how many can you throw. This is telling a guy to meet you for a drink and then sneaking into his house and changing the locks while he's down at the tavern. And then screwing his wife and shooting him when he tries to break back into his own house.

You don't hold all the cards, at least not right now. You have to figure out what kind of fight and what kind of friendship you're gonna have for each and every one of these guys. And when this crap storm war is over and the Confederate pigs come crawling back into *our* ring, well...I think you're gonna need a good, strong son of the South to help you control the circus because it is gonna be a goddamn circus, you know that.

LINCOLN

Mrs Lincoln keeps telling me you should be my vice president.

ANDREW JOHNSON

Oh, she does?

LINCOLN

You know she does.

ANDREW JOHNSON

Well, thank her for me.

LINCOLN

Thank her yourself the next time she comes round to visit you and Eliza.

ANDREW JOHNSON

After this war, you're gonna have the chance to re-shape this country. Build a whole new society, if you want to. You ever seen people die of starvation? Of working so hard they just drop dead? I have. Maybe that doesn't have to be so. Washington and his lot got rid of kings. Maybe we can get rid of paupers. If you want my help, you have it.

LINCOLN

Senator, I think I'm finished with croquet. I have to lie down.

ANDREW JOHNSON

You started to talk a lot more about slavery this week.

LINCOLN

Yes?

ANDREW

That's like throwing a cat in a circle of dogs. Lot's of barking. "Free slaves, don't free them, send them away. " Nothing gets done. You just leave it alone. For now. You need friends first.

LINCOLN

Not talk about slavery.

ANDREW JOHNSON

Talk about our divinely-inspired Union, our misguided southern siblings, about poor brother fighting poor brother. Don't throw punches if you don't have to. Can we go inside? I'd like some of that tea you were offering.

LINCOLN

Maybe I can find you something sweeter.

JOHNSON

Oh, please.

BLACKOUT

TARGET

Music.

DAN RICE with Lincoln-esque top hat and coat enters. An ASSISTANT brings him a rifle. ELIZA JOHNSON enters. An ASSISTANT brings her an apple, positions her on one side of the stage, and places the apple in her hand. ELIZA JOHNSON is slightly apprehensive.

DAN RICE, on the other side of the stage, aims the rifle and fires, shooting the apple from ELIZA JOHNSON's hand.

Applause.

ASSISTANT brings a large doll dressed as a Confederate soldier to ELIZA JOHNSON and indicates she should hold it up. ELIZA JOHNSON does so, more apprehensively.

DAN RICE shoots the doll out of ELIZA JOHNSON'S hand.

Applause.

ASSISTANT brings out a small dog and gives it to ELIZA JOHNSON, who initially protests, but then, very nervously, holds it out to be shot.

DAN RICE aims at dog.

Music stops.

Shot.

BLACKOUT

LINCOLN DOUGLASS DEBATE

LINCOLN and DOUGLASS at the river.

DOUGLASS

What're we doing here, Mr. Lincoln? It's freezing.

LINCOLN

Look at the water, Frederick. How far you think it's frozen over?

DOUGLASS

Frozen? I wouldn't know. Not very far, I should think.

LINCOLN

Oh, I bet it *is* very far. I bet we could skate pretty far into that darkness.

DOUGLASS

Have you been drinking Mr. Lincoln?

LINCOLN

I do not drink. I had one little drink. And I've been taking the little blue pills. The time has come, Mr. Douglass, to get away. To escape over the ice.

DOUGLASS

You need to get back inside, Abraham. You need to get a good cup of coffee and a hot fire and dry out. Come on.

LINCOLN takes out a large pair of wings.

What are those?! What?

LINCOLN

We've got to fly, Frederick! Fly!

DOUGLASS

We've got to get inside. We've got to get out of here.!

LINCOLN

Yes we do! They'll get us! They'd love to get us! They might be just over there. Out there. I got these from Dan Rice! Let's fly! You especially have to get out of here.

(MORE)

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

Everyone thinks you're an escaped slave. Someone come upon you in the night, skin you to make a map case out of your hide. Look. Just there. You know where we are? You know where we're standing?

DOUGLASS

No. Where?

LINCOLN

Right there is Maryland.

HE walks to across the stage.

Right here. Here's where you escaped from, Frederick. Here you're a slave.

DOUGLASS

No. I'm not a slave anywhere.

LINCOLN

Hear that? That's the sound of the dogs. They're coming for you. They'll hang you from a tree and shoot me through the head.

HE starts to put on the wings

We gotta fly! Fly with me!

DOUGLASS

Abraham! Mr. President! It's alright. Shh! It's going to be alright. Shh.

LINCOLN

Across the ocean. To Liberia! Or Central America. Lot's of space. You could be president there! I'm going with you. Ha! I've got \$4000 hidden in my hat and a derringer hidden in my wooden leg.

DOUGLASS

You don't have a wooden leg, Mr. President.

LINCOLN

I could, though, Frederick. I'd do that for you if you wanted me to. Why won't you fly with me? I thought you loved me.

DOUGLASS

I do love you Abraham.

THEY sit

LINCOLN

This land is on fire. This state, this so-called Merry Land, is going to burn.

DOUGLASS

It is on your doorstep. If you want to end this you have to do it now. If you want to end slavery you have to do whatever you can.

LINCOLN

I don't want to end slavery.

DOUGLASS

Yes you do. Otherwise you're a worthless president. A worthless man.

LINCOLN

I can't do it. This country's built to be run in a certain way, by certain people. A certain class.

DOUGLASS

What do you mean? You're a goddamn rail splitter,

LINCOLN

A white rail splitter. A Christian rail splitter. A tall rail splitter. I don't know why Negroes or Jews or short people stay here. Why don't they all get on boats and go back to where they came from? Go back to where they are actually loved?

DOUGLASS

You were chosen, Abraham.

LINCOLN

All those rebels here. All those so-called militia arrested in Baltimore. Courts are going to let them all go. Soon as they do, they're all coming for us. Be climbing though the back windows of the White House by next Wednesday.

DOUGLASS

Suspend the laws. Break the agreements. Don't unclench your fist because your hand is tired.

LINCOLN

Suspending laws is hard. It's...

DOUGLASS

It's against the law?

LINCOLN

Yes.

DOUGLASS

You can't be timid.

LINCOLN

I have a plan, Frederick. I really do. People keep telling me to have a goal, a mission. Well I do! I'm working it all out.

DOUGLASS

That's good.

LINCOLN

But I have to be careful. Do it right. You know the story of the frog and the lion?

DOUGLASS

I don't.

LINCOLN

This frog sees a majestic lion and thinks, "I could be as beautiful and as big as the lion." So he goes to his children and he puffs himself up, you see, and he asks his kids, "Am I as beautiful and big as the lion?" And his children say, "No." So he puffs himself up a little more and asks, "Now am I as beautiful and big as the lion?" And his children say, "No." Then he puffs himself up as much as he possibly can and then just a little more and he explodes in front of his kids.

DOUGLASS

That's a terrible story.

LINCOLN

Yes it is. Do you know what the moral is?

DOUGLASS

Don't be something you are not?

LINCOLN

No, the moral is: A father has to look as mighty and as beautiful and as big as he can for his children, but he must never explode in front of them. It scares them.

DOUGLASS

I have spent my whole life doing things that were difficult and dangerous. Some were impossible, or so people thought. I've seen a lot of other people do things even more dangerous, more impossible. So I can't really feel sympathy for a man who is trying hard *not* to do things. Not to go down *any* road. Should've stayed in your log cabin if you were afraid of exploding.

LINCOLN

So I suspend the law. Fuck the constitution. This is war.

DOUGLASS

Yes it is.

LINCOLN

I have war time powers. Let the rebels rot in prison.

DOUGLASS

Alright.

LINCOLN

When the president does it it's not illegal.

DOUGLASS

If you say so.

LINCOLN

I'm trying to do something good, right Frederick?

DOUGLASS

Yes, you are.

LINCOLN

I'm going to Hell, aren't I?

DOUGLASS

Yes you are. But they're going to erect some beautiful statues of you.

BLACKOUT

THE AMAZING ANTONIA

VOICE

And now, from parts unknown, that enchanting enigma, the human card index, the Amazing Antonia!

ANTONIA enters in a costume with many pockets, some hidden, some not.

ANTONIA

Call out a playing card. Call one out.

VOICE

Ten of diamonds!

ANTONIA produces ten of diamonds.

ANTONIA

Another!

VOICE

Jack of hearts!

SHE produces the Jack of Hearts.

ANTONIA

Another.

VOICE

Three of spades!

SHE produces the three of spades.

ANTONIA

Now, let's see the extraordinary miscellany the Amazing Antonia has at her fingertips. Instead of playing cards, I want you to call out any kind of card. In fact, any kind of printed material at all. Anything printed that I could have in a pocket.

VOICE

Pawn ticket!

SHE produces a pawn ticket.

ANTONIA

Another.

VOICE

A train ticket!

SHE produces a train ticket.

ANTONIA

Another!

VOICE

A marriage license!

SHE produces it.

VOICE

An insurance policy!

SHE produces it.

VOICE

Papers of transport across Union lines.

ANTONIA

That would be very valuable, wouldn't it? No. Too, too difficult. Another !

VOICE

A newspaper article!

ANTONIA

About what? About the Mississippi legislature passing another ridiculous law?

SHE produces it.

North Carolina?

SHE produces it.

Georgia?

SHE produces it.

About how frumpily the First Lady dresses or how extravagantly she spends on clothes?

SHE produces both.

Both from the same paper.

VOICE

Papers of transport from the Union Army.

ANTONIA

Very rare. And dangerous.

VOICE

Portrait of Queen Victoria!

SHE produces it.

VOICE

Florida ballots!

ANTONIA

I've got plenty of those!

SHE produces them

VOICE

Papers of transport!

After a brief hesitation, SHE produces them.

ANTONIA

I shouldn't really. Think of what might happen if they fell into the wrong hands?

BLACKOUT

TALKING PICTURES

LINCOLN and FREDERICK DOUGLASS are
in the White House.

DOUGLASS

You have to come out once in a while, Mr. President. You can't stay in here.

LINCOLN gives an inaudible answer.

I can't understand you. What's that? What are those? Blue pills for?

LINCOLN

Back hurts.

DOUGLASS

It does, does it? Abraham, I don't care about your dark moods, I don't care about what is going on in your head, I don't care if you are high as the moon on little blue pills, you've got to be up and out there making sure that people don't lose their way. That's what a leader does, Abraham. He makes sure people don't lose their way and he does that by standing up and stating the obvious: I am leading you and this is the way we are going to go. It's that simple. They may not listen, they may not believe you, but they'll know you're a leader, no matter what. You're tall, Abraham, stand up so everyone can see you. Because there's a lot of white boys out there wearing blue uniforms who are losing confidence. And there are a lot of black boys out there who would like to have a little bit of hope.

LINCOLN

My little boy is dead. The fever took my little Willie. We loved him too much.

DOUGLASS

I'm sorry Abraham. I am very, very sorry. How is Mrs Lincoln?

LINCOLN

It is as if she has become a ghost herself. She is very strong, but...I doubt she will ever recover. It's impossible to do anything.

DOUGLASS

It is not impossible. Grieving is what we do. Priam grieved over Hector. Abraham grieved over Sarah. We grieve. We mourn. We go on. Hundreds of people whose names you don't know died today. In the sickbed, on the plantation, in the gallows, on the battlefield. You grieve as hard as you can for a week but then you've got to stand up. And go on. That's what you do.

LINCOLN

It's a mess, isn't it Frederick? I have to get it under control. If I can just discern the shape of things. Figure out the code. The code of this particular part of history, human history. Look backwards and forwards to figure out where we are.

DOUGLASS

Mr President...

LINCOLN

But you know, Frederick, it's so hard around here. So hard. Everyone is trying to undermine what I am doing. Plotting behind my back, cooking up schemes. I hear the condescension in their voices. Vipers and rats. We used to shoot the both of them in Kentucky. Shoot them before they bite you in the ass.

DOUGLASS

You have to get a hold of yourself.

LINCOLN

Frederick. I'm not a good Presbyterian, and you're not a good Methodist, but I think the both of us should get down on our knees and pray for guidance.

THEY kneel.

Lord, I know everyone is coming to you for support in these hard times. And some of that support might be directly in opposition to the support I need right now. But some kind of guidance. Some kind of vision, Lord.

Looking at a picture of Washington.

Look at him, Douglass. Look at Washington. Did he ever falter? Did he ever look out and say "I don't know what I am doing?" Did he stand up in that boat and look at his men and think to himself, "I don't know where the hell I'm going?"

DOUGLASS

I'm sure he did.

LINCOLN

But nobody knows that. Nobody saw that. He kept that all to himself and went ahead. (*To the painting*) How did you find the calm? How did you make yourself strong? How did you stick to your mission?

HE looks at another painting

And you. You're the smartest of all of us, aren't you? The greatest thinker, the most powerful writer. But it is you Mr. Jefferson that has us in this mess. How did you mean all men are created equal? How did that work in your mind? How, sitting on a plantation with black folks cooking your dinner and working your fields and having your babies did you mean it? You didn't have any convictions either, did you? Your moral center was a bog, but still you led. You succeeded. You survived. You passed that bog of yours on to us all.

I have to do something.

DOUGLASS

Pass something on.

LINCOLN

I know one true thing I can do.

DOUGLASS

That's good.

LINCOLN

I'm going to try to do good. I'm going to try.

DOUGLASS

You will.

LINCOLN

So many boys died this week, didn't they? My boy, other fathers' boys. An awful tally in Heaven. When angels touch the earth, do they carry swords, I wonder?

DOUGLASS

Don't know.

LINCOLN

I miss him. I miss my little boy so much.

BLACKOUT

THE INCREDIBLE FLOATING WOMAN

MARY TODD is seated on a chair that is somehow high up in the air.

A band comes on stage. With MARY TODD, they sing "Song of the Hebrew Children."

MARY TODD

WHERE NOW ARE ALL THE CHILDREN?
WHO MARCHED AT YOUR COMMAND?
WHERE NOW ARE ALL THE CHILDREN?
SAFE IN THE PROMISED LAND.

COMPANY

O WHERE IS WEeping MARY?
HER HEAD IS ALL ON FIRE.
O WHERE IS WEeping MARY?
FILLED WITH VENGEFUL DESIRE.

Wind blows.

MARY TODD

This is my recurring dream. I am in the air, floating above everything. The rushing is relentless sometimes. I see my dead sons, but they do not talk to me. I try. I call out. But they do not answer. I call out to my husband. He doesn't answer either, but I know he hears me. I know that he hears me at night when I cry instead of sleep. I know he hears me when I talk to my boys. And I know it moves him. I know he tries to separate his personal tragedies from the public decisions he makes, but he cannot. No one can.

There. The rushing. It could knock me off, but it doesn't. It's frightening and exhilarating. I use the Ouija board to talk to my people. To help me know what to do. How to push and pull. All those people of the past will talk to you if you listen hard enough. These people of the past are always here. They whisper things in my ear. And I whisper them in Abraham's ear: "Destroy it all and build a new start. A new Jerusalem. A promised land. Do it because we love you so."

I'm not so high that I am in the sky, but just high enough so that I am above people's heads. If I reach down I could tap the top of a tall person's noggin. I could tap the top of Abraham's hat.

Then I hear a band playing.

Band plays.

BLACKOUT

STRANGE, UNUSUAL BLOOD

In the foreground are dressing tables, as one might find backstage. DOUGLASS, followed by LINCOLN enter the scene, DOUGLASS talking. As the scene goes on, LINCOLN removes his hat and coat, drinks bullion, mops sweat from his neck, changes his tie. HE appears very tired. DOUGLASS is more energized and involved in his argument, though he takes time to drink tea, eat a piece of candy, comb his hair and change his shoes.

DOUGLASS

(*Entering*) What is wrong with you? You keep saying that if you could save the Union without ending slavery you would. Why do you think that will work? Do you know what you're doing at all? This war keeps dragging on. Meanwhile there are thousands upon thousands of black men who would willingly put on the uniform of the Union and fight to preserve the United States, if they believed they were fighting for the freedom of their brothers and sisters in slavery.

LINCOLN

You read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*?

DOUGLASS

Yes, of course.

LINCOLN

You see it on stage? It's more popular on stage.

DOUGLASS

I've seen it.

LINCOLN

I've seen it three times. Everyone's either read it or seen it. They read it and they are appalled. They weep. "We must get rid of slavery!" they cry. "Stop this now!" I got a letter a few weeks ago, from Queen Victoria! (*Imitates the Queen*) "Mr. President, etcetera, etcetera have just read *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life Among The Lowly*, by your authoress Harriette Beecher Stowe and I am most concerned for those enslaved in your Southern states." Can you believe it? Came by secret envoy. I mean, it's not great literature. It's not Shakespeare. But it moves every Christian heart. I'm sure it even moves Catholics and Jews. To pity. That's what it does. They are filled with pity for the Negro and their hearts break and their eyes gush tears. But only their hearts are working, not their reason. What should we do once the slaves are free? Where should they go? What should we do with the land they worked?

(MORE)

LINCOLN (CON'T)

How will they live? Who will they rely on? All these charitable Christians hearts are filled with pity, but the heads are thinking: "I don't want them here." "They're not coming to take my job." "I don't know what to do with them, but it can't be my problem." And if it's not in their heads, well...how long until they move on to the next thing that makes them cry? And how long are they really gonna believe in it? Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, sure, but that doesn't say anything about Negroes voting does it? You really think white folks are going to go to a Negro doctor? Vote for a Negro senator? Some Northern folks will have free slaves in their homes like they were having visiting guests from another country. Show them hospitality, of course, but... So, you see, I've got a ways to go before this tired Union army can be fighting to end slavery. That's the dance. I've got to wait to see when things are starting to turn, catch that window of opportunity when people might actually support that kind of war. It's timing.

DOUGLASS

Surely that time is coming soon.

LINCOLN

I hope so. It's a drain keeping this war going on. Dragging it out like this.

DOUGLASS

What do you mean?

LINCOLN

Keeping it going.

DOUGLASS

Keep it going?

LINCOLN

Focus on one thing. That's what I've been hearing. Make that thing freeing the slaves. That's what you've been saying, right? So, that became my mission. My one thing. It'll be my legacy. But I have to make sure it happens. I have to be able to say "mission accomplished."

DOUGLASS

You have to make sure it happens.

LINCOLN

If we won right away, if the South surrendered right away, like they should have, then we wouldn't have ended slavery. Congress would never go for it. The Southern states would have resisted and people, North and South, just wouldn't own it. We would have enforced some concessions, but basically, that peculiar institution would have kept on and the tensions would have continued and in a few years we would have had another war, I'm sure of it. It would have been even more terrible than this one. (MORE)

LINCOLN (CON'T)

All that resentment and hatred tamped down. Of course it would explode. But it came to me, Frederick. This is the plan I've been keeping to myself. I had to keep this going on until we could figure out a way to free the slaves

DOUGLASS

Keep the war going on?

LINCOLN

Yes. It isn't easy. We have more men, more materials, better transportation, better supply of guns, more food. We should have won in the first nine months. I was so depressed at first, seeing how we weren't making any progress, how it all was grinding on. I kept looking for a solution, a way to win. But then, I realized I was being given a gift. I had to hang onto those generals who were mucking it all up. McClellan marching his troops up and down endlessly, but pretty much a little school girl when it came to actual fighting. Pope, Banks. All terrible. I just had to make sure they didn't actually stumble upon a string of victories.

DOUGLASS

That's a lot of blood flowing, Mr. President, while you figure something out.

LINCOLN

But worth it, don't you think? This bloody war will be about something. Keep it going for just a little while longer, and it will be truly important. It will change everything. That will be my legacy.

DOUGLASS

You need to settle this soon.

LINCOLN

Don't I know it? I have to. Drag it on too long Europe will show up. French love their cotton and indigo. It's all about timing.

DOUGLASS

I think you've waited long enough. I think the time is now.

Pause.

You could do it by executive order. War powers. Free the slaves. You could do it right now.

Pause.

LINCOLN

I could. Yes. Excellent.

Pause.

LINCOLN

What do you think about this Liberia idea? All the free slaves going back to Africa, to Liberia? It would be expensive, I know, but it might be a good way to solve a lot of problems.

DOUGLASS

I don't think much of it, Mr. President.

LINCOLN

You don't think Negroes would want to go back, have their own leaders and all that?

DOUGLASS

I don't think many black folks are keen on the idea of crossing the Atlantic ocean on a ship. Even if it is in the other direction.

LINCOLN

I see what you mean.

DOUGLASS

And a lot of these families have been in this country longer than your family has, Mr. President.

LINCOLN

Good point.

DOUGLASS

Send you back to England.

LINCOLN

I might just want to go. It's an interesting idea, though. A Negro democracy. You could be the president, if you wanted, Douglass. We could make that happen. Of course, if we sent everyone back they'd need more land. There are a lot of Africans there now, in the places we'd have to re-settle you all. We'd have to move them. Partition off part of the territory. I don't think it would do to mix everyone up like that. You don't think it's a good idea?

DOUGLASS

No, sir.

LINCOLN

No. Maybe not... But I'll take you up on your idea, Frederick. About Negro soldiers. I will be counting on you to get every able bodied free Negro to fight and die for this great union.

Pause.

What if I just free the slaves in the South? Confuse everyone.

BLACKOUT

CIRCUS

RICE

You know, I was reading the newspaper and I saw that a reporter asked Lincoln what he thought about his first hundred days in office. He said "Has it been a year already?"

A New Hampshire boy left home to join the Union army. He told his girlfriend that he would write every day. After about six months, he received a letter from his girlfriend that she was marrying someone else. He wrote home to his family, said "who she marry?" Family wrote back and said, "The mailman."

Now ladies and gentlemen, our intrepid troupe of polymorphic players presents a tantalizing tidbit of fake facts and alternative news, a delightful drama literally ripped from the headlines, we call The Mysteries of the Blue Dress, or After the Ball.

BLACKOUT

AFTER THE BALL

THE WHITE HOUSE.

LINCOLN and ANTONIA are apart from each other on stage getting dressed. HE perhaps buttoning his shirt, putting on suspenders and shoes. Eventually HE will put on his coat. SHE is putting on garters? Fixing her undergarments? At some point ANTONIA looks at him and then, suddenly, pulls a bouquet of flowers from out of nowhere. A magic trick. LINCOLN doesn't react.

ANTONIA

Abe!

LINCOLN

What? Oh. Yes. Very good! That's your best yet! You're getting very good. I haven't done my trick yet, have I?

ANTONIA

You are somewhere else.

LINCOLN

Just thinking. Trying to sort things out.

ANTONIA

You're restless today.

LINCOLN

Aren't I always restless?

ANTONIA

More than usual.

LINCOLN

I'm thinking about ... reputation.

ANTONIA

Reputation?

LINCOLN

Yes.

ANTONIA

Whose?

LINCOLN

Legacy. History. You know.

ANTONIA

Not reputation, then. History.

LINCOLN

Legacy. What people will think. And say. People can be cruel. And wrong, just plain wrong. Distortions take hold and then the way people think about something, the way they treat it, has nothing to do with what is actually occurring or what has occurred. Either they ignore truths or else they are simplistic in the way they can categorize or dismiss ... uh ... actions ... or a ... a ... man's intentions ... or his work.

ANTONIA

Hmm. You're in your dark mood today.

LINCOLN

There's a shift. There's more to do. I'm more important than I was when I started this. The presidency is more important.

ANTONIA

How more important? More powerful?

LINCOLN

Powerful? Yes. Bigger, more powerful. And I have responsibility to it. To think about--

Pause

ANTONIA

Abe?

LINCOLN

Look at this. Did I show you these yet? Look. I dug these up.

HE unrolls plans.

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

These were Richard Johnson's. When he was Van Buren's Vice President. Look. Isn't it remarkable?

ANTONIA

What is it?

LINCOLN

Plans. Johnson was convinced there is another civilization at the center of the earth. A whole other race of people living inside the earth. He thought if we could only get to them, who knows what we might find out? Who knows what things they know that we don't? So this was his proposal -- get to the North Pole and drill to the center of the earth. To bore a tunnel. To make a gateway between the two worlds.

ANTONIA

And he wanted the government to fund it?

LINCOLN

Yes. He tried to persuade Van Buren and then Congress, but Van Buren just ignored it. Van Buren said, "As President, I can ill afford to be building bridges to the unknown." He also said, "The Vice President is a lunatic. Keep him away from me." Congress did nothing, of course.

ANTONIA

Must be very risky. And expensive.

LINCOLN

But think about it. A connection to another civilization. It could change everything. And look. These plans. It's a massive undertaking. Think about the ingenuity it would take, the creation of new machines, completely new problems to be solved. What do you wear as you get closer to the center? Is there air? What language do the people speak? Think of all the discoveries we would be blessed with. Who knows how they might improve our lives? And there's a whole other race of men.

ANTONIA

Maybe.

LINCOLN

When this war is over. After some time. A little time. I might just propose this again. Resurrect Johnson's project.

(MORE)

LINCOLN (CON'T)

After so much bloodshed, such loss of life, this kind of endeavor, of discovery, of a kind of hope, might be a good thing. This is thinking about the future. Might be the way I want to be remembered.

ANTONIA

I have to go.

LINCOLN

Wait, wait wait. I haven't done a trick yet.

ANTONIA

Abe, I don't really have time...

LINCOLN

No. We both do a trick. You did yours. Just wait.

HE wheels a magic box over, and produces a saw.

Get in. This is a quick one. You remember.

ANTONIA

I'm not particularly fond of this one.

LINCOLN

You don't think I'm good at it?

ANTONIA

No, no, you're very good. It's taste I guess. Makes me feel uncomfortable. I have to go.

LINCOLN

Alright. I understand. Just one more minute, though.

HE calls offstage.

Mrs. Johnson, will you come in here please?

ANTONIA

What are you doing? Abe, why are you --

ELIZA JOHNSON enters.

LINCOLN

Antonia, you know Mrs. Johnson, I believe. Her husband is Senator Andrew Johnson. He's going to be my next Vice President if I can ever get rid of the one I have now. Funny how all Vice Presidents seem to be named Johnson.

ELIZA JOHNSON

Miss Ford.

ANTONIA

Mrs. Johnson.

LINCOLN

Well, I'm going to leave you two. Goodbye, Miss Ford.

LINCOLN leaves.

ANTONIA

I'm sorry, Mrs. Johnson, I have to go.

ELIZA JOHNSON

Yes, I know. You're going to Richmond, aren't you?

ANTONIA

Richmond?

ELIZA JOHNSON

I know. We know what you're doing here. You have to report back to your superiors in Richmond. You are going to tell them that the President has ordered conscription and has taken personal command of the armies. You mean to tell them he plans to starve out their cities. You'll tell them that he's brooding and that his wife is crazy. You could also say that he prefers women with bodies like young boys, that would really excite those old men down in Virginia.

ANTONIA

Mrs. Johnson...

ELIZA JOHNSON

The whole network of spies here in Washington. We know. You've all been under surveillance for some time. You were tricked into believing you wouldn't be discovered. Did you think we are stupid? The smartest, cleverest, most dedicated people in the nation are within blocks of this very spot. How could we not know?

A band begins to play "Dixie"

You probably won't be shot. Just prison.

SHE looks at the magic box.

I think he meant to save you in two for real. I love that song.

BLACKOUT

CIRCUS

DAN RICE is performing. At some point in the act, MARY TODD sneaks in to watch.

RICE

You know, I happened to be having luncheon at Jefferson Davis' house, and I heard Mrs. Davis sing a little ditty. Would you like to hear it? Well, it goes something like this:

(Singing)

OH CORPORAL GREY LOVES HIS FAMILY
SO HE WAVES GOODBYE TO GENERAL LEE
RUN AWAY, RUN AWAY, RUN AWAY, DIXIE LAD
A MODEL SOLDIER IS PRIVATE PAYNE
GOT HIS HEAD BLOWN OFF AND DON'T COMPLAIN
RUN AWAY, RUN AWAY, RUN AWAY, DIXIE LAD

THE SOUTHERN BOYS GET PLENTY TO EAT
THEY DO. IT'S TRUE
A POUND OF SAWDUST AND POSSUM MEAT
IS CALLED A FEAST IN DIXIE
AWAY, AWAY, THEY'VE RUN AWAY IN DIXIE.
AWAY, AWAY, THERE'S NO LADS LEFT IN DIXIE

GETTYSBURG

LINCOLN is on the podium upstage, with MARY sitting behind him. He is about to address a crowd of hundreds. Far downstage is the remnants of a make-shift grave marker. Surrounding it are two REPORTERS. REPORTER 1 is slightly drunk, REPORTER 2 is slightly high.

REPORTER 1

And so as we wait for the President to speak, one can't help wondering about his precarious political position. Though he has his strong supporters, many in the country, many in Congress, and, word has it, some in his own administration, are doubting his leadership abilities.

REPORTER 2

The President looks dignified in his usual black suit and his sartorial signature -- his ever-present top hat. Mrs. Lincoln is in a splendidly subdued gown of black watered silk and a pearl necklace and earrings, perfect for such a somber occasion as the dedication of a cemetery.

LINCOLN

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

REPORTER 2

A perfect gem, deep in feeling, compact in thought and expression, and tasteful and elegant in every word and comma.

REPORTER 1

As he does so often, Mr. Lincoln once again quotes the founding fathers, eager to have his agenda thought of as part of the mainstream of American political thought.

LINCOLN

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure.

REPORTER 1

Whether he's a tyrant or a savior, today Lincoln is trying to avoid controversy, as he takes on the task of mourner in chief.

REPORTER 2

I noticed a slight tremor in the president's voice. Was it accidental, deliberate or medical?

LINCOLN

We are met here on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of it, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

Pause.

REPORTER 2

The president paused.

REPORTER 1

He paused.

MARY TODD

Tell 'em about consecrating, Abe.

LINCOLN

In a larger sense, we cannot dedicate — we cannot consecrate — we cannot hallow — this ground.

REPORTER 1

Listening to the president, I can't help but be reminded of the books of a young German writer, living in England now, who has some very different ideas about how a country might be run. I am speaking of course of the author of *Tendensies of the German People* and *The Communist Manifesto*. The president is a well-read man, but it is unclear if those books are influencing him now as he tries to re-fashion our democracy.

LINCOLN

The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but can never forget what they did here.

REPORTER 2

He looks like a giraffe, the president. A sad giraffe.

REPORTER 1

Yes. Or a chimpanzee. A stretched-out chimpanzee.

REPORTER 2

But sad.

REPORTER 1

Yes. A very sad elongated chimpanzee.

REPORTER 1 (CONT'D)

The cheek of every American must tingle with shame as he listens to the silly, flat and dishwatery utterances of the man who has to be pointed out to intelligent foreigners as the President of the United States.

LINCOLN

It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they have, thus far, so nobly carried on. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us —

LINCOLN

— that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion

REPORTER 2

This ceremony is rendered ludicrous by the sallies of poor President Lincoln

LINCOLN

— that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain;

REPORTER 1

Where is the President's home town? I mean, where is he supposed to be from? I can't tell by his speech. Is he really from one of the states? Perhaps he is from the territories. Is that constitutional?

LINCOLN

—that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom; and that this government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

REPORTER 1

We pass over the asinine remarks of the President. For the credit of the nation we are willing that the veil of oblivion shall be dropped over them and that they shall be no more repeated or thought of.

As LINCOLN and MARY descend the podium, LINCOLN acknowledges people in the audience. REPORTER 1 takes a bottle of liquor from his pocket and unscrews the top.

REPORTER 1 (CONT'D)

Now comes the luncheon. Thank God! I only go to these things if lunch is provided.

The REPORTERS begin to exit. REPORTER 1 drinks. REPORTER 2 has taken out a box of pills and is attempting to swallow several. He starts to cough. REPORTER 1 GIVES him the bottle to wash down the pills.

BLACKOUT

THE SOUTH SURRENDERS

JOHN WILKES BOOTH is reciting.
ANDREW JOHNSON and ELIZA JOHNSON
watch. ANDREW is drinking.

BOOTH

O, the fierce wretchedness that glory brings us!
Who would not wish to be from wealth exempt,
Since riches point to misery and contempt?
Who would be so mocked with glory? Or to live
But in a dream of friendship?

ANDREW JOHNSON coughs, almost spilling
his drink.

To have his pomp and all what state compounds
But only painted, like his varnished friends?
Poor honest lord, brought low by his own heart,
Undone by goodness! Strange, unusual blood,
When man's worst sin is, he does too much good!

ELIZA JOHNSON

Bravo! Just wonderful.

ANDREW JOHNSON

So good. So...

ELIZA JOHNSON

Moving.

BOOTH

Thank you.

ELIZA JOHNSON

And...

ANDREW JOHNSON

And...what?

ELIZA JOHNSON

Truthful.

ANDREW JOHNSON

Yes, truthful.

BOOTH

Thank you. Thank you both.

ELIZA JOHNSON

Thank you for... this. For this gift. You are one of my favorite performers. I am always saying to Mr Johnson that we must see any performance in which you are acting. Whenever I'm in Washington I make my husband take me to the theater, isn't that right dear.

JOHNSON

She needn't make me. I would not miss your performances. Especially in Shakespeare. Any of your family. I owe my love of Shakespeare to Mrs Johnson, of course, and now, horses couldn't keep me away. I especially like your Romeo.

ELIZA JOHNSON

Oh. Your Romeo is wonderful. It is so passionate.

ANDREW JOHNSON

Best Romeo I've seen.

ELIZA JOHNSON

So arousing.

ANDREW JOHNSON

You give yourself over to the role completely.

ELIZA JOHNSON

Your Romeo is quite something. And your Iago.

ANDREW JOHNSON

Your Iago! Boo! Hiss!

ELIZA JOHNSON

You really can be evil.

BOOTH

I try.

ELIZA JOHNSON

Magnificently evil.

BOOTH

Thank you. Thank you so much for inviting me this afternoon, Mrs. Johnson. The meal, the conversation. You have shown me great southern hospitality and I appreciate it.

ELIZA JOHNSON

I thought southern hospitality might be in short supply just right at this moment.

BOOTH

Yes. Given the unconscionable surrender I fear that many things the South held dear will be lost. Thank you as well, Mr Vice President. I didn't expect such an invitation.

ANDREW JOHNSON

It is an honor to have you here, Mr. Booth. Can I offer you a drink?

BOOTH

Yes, thank you sir.

ELIZA JOHNSON

I was just speaking to your lovely fiancée, Lucy. Delightful girl.

BOOTH

I ... we are...

ELIZA JOHNSON

Don't worry. I know all about you and Lucy. I will not say a word. I know you need to keep it secret from her father, he being a northern abolitionist senator and you being, well, violently opposed to abolition and the entire North it seems and maybe even to senators, I don't know. Lucy tells me that you are giving up the stage.

BOOTH

Yes. That is so.

ELIZA JOHNSON

That is too bad.

ANDREW JOHNSON

Sad. A great loss.

ELIZA JOHNSON

You've been preoccupied with other things, Mr. Booth? We know of all of your very strong objections to Mr Lincoln. I understand you were even arrested for making treasonous remarks, is that so, Mr Booth?

BOOTH

Mrs. Johnson. I think I have misunderstood. Am I in danger at this moment?

ANDREW JOHNSON

No, not at all. Not at this moment, at least.

ELIZA JOHNSON

Our intelligence tells us that you had concocted a foolish and unorganized plot to kidnap Lincoln.

BOOTH is completely still.

We pretty much know everything you've been doing these past two years. All the clumsy, misguided schemes. Enterprises you've tried to hatch. Where you've gone, who you've been with, who you've quarreled with, what was said, what you've written.

ANDREW JOHNSON

What you think.

ELIZA JOHNSON

There is a very thorough dossier on you. Lucy doesn't know about any of it does she? She doesn't really know what you are about.

BOOTH

No.

ELIZA JOHNSON

No. Fiancees seldom do. You are a devoted and loyal son of the South.

BOOTH

Yes. Yes, I am.

ELIZA JOHNSON

Are you? The illegitimate son of a British actor and his flower girl whore?

BOOTH

Mrs Johnson!

ANDREW JOHNSON

Eliza! Now there's no need--

ELIZA JOHNSON

I am sorry Mr. Booth, I apologize. But it is very easy to question your sympathies. You are an actor, after all, and who knows what you might do to gain attention. You might adopt extreme opinions that you do not actually believe. You didn't enlist in the Confederate army. You let others die for the cause. And you are from Maryland, besides.

BOOTH

Mrs Johnson. No one who truly knows my character could doubt my loyalty to the Confederate cause. My body, my spirit, my soul are all united in this, and as long as I have breath and as God is my witness, I will continue to fight for that cause, regardless of the cowardice of generals and senators. I will see that the tyranny of Mr. Lincoln's reign is met with resistance in every southern city and town, with kindred spirits armed with truth, and courage and pitchforks, if necessary. I must take my leave. Mr Johnson, Mrs. Johnson.

ANDREW JOHNSON

Not so fast, Mr. Booth. Just a moment. Please, hear us out.

ELIZA JOHNSON

We did not invite you here to drive you away.

ANDREW JOHNSON

Besides. You'd never get beyond that door. There are eight soldiers on the other side and another eight stationed outside the windows in case someone jumps out. Usually it's me that jumps out. They're pretty good at catching an old drunken Vice President and getting him into bed where he belongs. So here's what is happening. The war is about over. We have to start putting things back together. Lincoln's plans will not work. He's not altogether right in the head. He's depressed.

ELIZA JOHNSON

And Mrs. Lincoln as well, poor thing,

ANDREW JOHNSON

He's stubborn. Not practical. He thinks everything can be federalized, thinks everyone is just going to shake hands and make up.

(MORE)

ANDREW JOHNSON (CON'T)

This was a terrible, bloody fight but we can rebuild, we can come together again, but it's never going to happen if Lincoln is President. The South just won't have it. There'll be another war. And you can already see how it's shaking out. The rich are grabbing everything they can. Before the war they called the shots and they're the first in line now. All that money, all that land, all those slaves owned by what? Five percent? Six percent? What about the tradesmen, the miners, the tenant farmers, the poor laborers? Those were the boys that filled the Confederate ranks, who took the union cannon fire. Fought for a system that treated them like dogs. How about all those newly freed slaves? What're they gonna do now that their old planter masters are in charge of everything again? Might as well just hang themselves and save the crackers the trouble. That's the future under Lincoln, Mr Booth. It'd be a sin to lose all that blood just to put those greasy plantation kings back on top again. We gotta think about a new society. A greater society. Who's thinking about it? Not the preening senators in this town. Not that wealthy traitor Davis. And not Lincoln.

ELIZA JOHNSON

When you leave here, you should go directly to Mrs. Surratt's house. You'll find a few waiting there who share your desire to show their loyalty to the Confederacy. Lincoln will be attending the theater tomorrow night. I assume you know your way around Ford's theatre?

BOOTH

Yes, of course.

ELIZA JOHNSON

The President will be arriving by carriage, of course. Major Rathbone will be accompanying the President and Mrs. Lincoln, and he will make sure that the President is seated on the right side of the carriage. You will already be at the corner window, where a Henry rifle will be hidden for you. The carriage will slow down to make the corner as it turns in front of the theater. You should be able to get off three shots. Afterwards you'll head down the back stairs and out into the alley, where there'll be a horse. Get yourself to Mary Suratt's. From there we'll have people escort you into Virginia. Here's your chance to play Brutus in real life, Mr. Booth.

BOOTH

And I'm to have your protection in all of this?

ELIZA JOHNSON

Yes. You have our word.

ANDREW JOHNSON

And you'll be a hero. Maryland boy makes good.

ELIZA JOHNSON

You'd better go now. There are many people counting on you. If there are any changes to the plan, we will contact you. We understand that we do not have the same views of the war, or of succession or even of the President. But we trust it will not matter in this particular instance. The doing is all, yes, Mr. Booth?

BOOTH starts to leave.

BOOTH

May I go out this door? The soldiers won't shoot me?

ANDREW JOHNSON

Oh, there aren't really any soldiers out there.

BOOTH begins to exit.

ELIZA JOHNSON

Yes there are!

BOOTH stops suddenly

No, I'm just kidding. There are no soldiers.

BOOTH exits.

ANDREW JOHNSON

Think he'll do it?

ELIZA JOHNSON

Yes. He'll be reciting *Julius Caesar* to himself from now until the end. I wouldn't be surprised if he shows up in a toga. Poor man. It's too bad that he has to be killed. He is so talented.

ANDREW JOHNSON

He's not that talented. Let's eat.

ELIZA JOHNSON

We just ate.

ANDREW JOHNSON

Let's eat again.

ELIZA JOHNSON

I actually need to lie down.

ANDREW JOHNSON

You go then. I'm going to have another drink. Toast a great society.

BLACKOUT

HOW WAS THE PLAY?

LINCOLN and MARY TODD are seated in the presidential box at Ford's Theater. They laugh at the play, along with the laughter of the unseen audience.

There is a sound of someone trying to get in a locked door. Finally a crash and BOOTH tumbles into the box, falling on the floor behind LINCOLN and MARY TODD who keep watching the play. A male voice is heard: "Hey, what are you doing in here?" MARY TODD glances at BOOTH who is recovering himself and trying to get the pistol out of his pants with much difficulty.

MARY TODD

Hello, Mr. Booth.

SHE continues watching the play. Audience Laughter. BOOTH struggles with the pistol and finally produces it. HE looks at it a moment, realizes it is not loaded, and begins to fish bullets out of his pockets to load the gun. A male voice: "Please keep the noise down." LINCOLN glances at BOOTH, turns to MARY TODD to indicate she look at what BOOTH is doing. SHE is startled and is about to get up, but LINCOLN indicates for her to stay seated and watch the play. BOOTH finally points the gun at LINCOLN. Laughter.

LINCOLN

Mr Booth. To what do we owe this honor?

MARY TODD

He's come to shoot you, dear.

LINCOLN

Is that so? Is that what you've come to do, Mr. Booth? Shoot me?

MARY TODD

He's pointing a pistol at your head.

LINCOLN

Ah, well. You've chosen a big, fat target, then. Hard to miss. We saw you in *The Marble Heart* here, Mr Booth. Couple of months ago. You were very good. Very convincing.

MARY TODD

Very frightening.

LINCOLN

Yes, very. It was a tremendous performance.

BOOTH

Uh...Thank you.

MARY TODD

I didn't really care for the play, though.

LINCOLN

You didn't? I thought you did. I liked it. It was sentimental, but I liked it.

MARY TODD

Too sentimental. And the language was rather un-extraordinary. It was no Shakespeare.

BOOTH

I have to agree with Mrs. Lincoln. The play is good enough, but it is certainly no Shakespeare.

LINCOLN

I'm in the minority then. Though I do agree, a good performance of Shakespeare is hard to rival. I prefer the comedies. I love to laugh at the theater. Women dressing as men, mistaken identities. I love that.

MARY TODD

I prefer the tragedies. *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*. They seem to be a better reflection of the world, of the expanse of experience. Soaring with the spirit to converse with angels, then descending to the hell of the human heart.

BOOTH

That is very well put, Mrs. Lincoln.

MARY TODD

So what kind of play is it for you? Comedy or tragedy? Or maybe History?

BOOTH

I'm with you, Mrs Lincoln. I prefer the tragic mode.

LINCOLN

That's what I would like to see. A good history play.

Laughter.

So what is it you are planning, Mr. Booth?

BOOTH

To put an end to tyranny.

LINCOLN

Yes, well, a noble cause, surely. So, you're going to shoot me in the head and then be a hero, I suppose that is your plan. Heroship is not so easily won, though. Heroship? Heroness? What's the word?

MARY TODD

Heroship.

LINCOLN

Heroship sounds wrong. Anyway it's not so easily won. Can you name a great tyrant killer? Brutus, of course, but any others? Maybe if you think about it for a bit. Even Brutus is questionable. Caesar was a tyrant, but he ran the government pretty well and the people loved him. The point is, you will shoot me in the head with your little gun and maybe kill me, probably kill me, and then escape or not, but in any case, there you'll be, the Lincoln-killer. Maybe you will have avenged the South. And then what? Then the mother of every Union boy who was killed in this long battle will hate you. They will curse your name. Every Union father who looks down at his one leg, and then looks over at his son with one arm, will imagine you in the lowest circle of hell, encased in ice. Neighbor to Judas Iscariot. "Hey neighbor" (*HE waves.*) Only you won't be able to wave, because you'll be encased in ice. And every young Penelope who has waited for her lover and finds that when he does return he comes with demons that share their bed at night. Those young women will weep uncontrollably.

(MORE)

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

And every general who led men onto the field will be disgusted at the cowardice of sneaking into a theater box and pulling a gun out of your pants. And in all the Confederate states, there will be a profound and fearful silence. Not a unified *huzzah!* for the death of the tyrant, but a silence.

Pause.

Laughter.

BOOTH

You think the South will be silent? That's what you think?

LINCOLN

If you'd ever fought in a battle, Mr Booth you would know that right before you face an enemy bent on your annihilation, it is very quiet. Part of reconciliation is forgetting, Mr Booth. It's forget and forgive. Not real forgetting, of course, but a willful, forced, manipulation of memory. Open up that bottom drawer in your head and bury it under the bed linens and never look at it again. It's pretend, of course. But then you can forgive. But shooting me in the head is going to make sure no one forgets. And everyone here in this city, charged with representing these mothers and fathers and wives and daughters will understand how toxic, how corrosive those feelings can be. How they will call for action of one kind or another. And those men--those Northern senators and representatives and whatnot --will know that either they will have to avenge this murder in the name of justice, or face an uprising of angry, sorrowful, agitated people. And they will choose vengeance, without even a thought.

And every South Carolina mother who lost a son and every daughter of Alabama that lost her lover will weep because they were on the side that lost. And until you pull that trigger they have a hope to forget they are losers. They could forget that their dead are not victors, that they're just dead. But the vengeance that will be inflicted on the losers will be harsh. It will be condescending. It will treat them like traitorous children.

And the North and the West will have license to hate them. And make fun of them. And not just now. For generation after generation. Make fun of their history. Their manners. The way they talk. The way they cook.

And all those Negroes I just freed? If ever a group of people had cause to be angry, it would be them, I reckon. White folk in those plantation states will start sleeping with guns underneath their beds.

(MORE)

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

Form their own little militias, their own little armies to protect themselves. Because they're going to be scared of what comes next. And generation after generation they'll be scared. Hard to feel good if you're a loser. If you've been taught to be scared. And they'll blame you. One bullet through the head of a man who on his bad days wouldn't mind dying one bit. For the Northerners you'll become another figure in history. The Southerners, though. They'll curse you forever.

Meanwhile. Things move on, of course. No matter who wins. Mr. Douglass is sure there will be a host of black doctors and lawyers and scientists and university professors and senators and who knows what else. And I'm pretty sure he's right. Don't you agree Mrs. Lincoln?

MARY TODD

Yes I do.

BOOTH is unsure what to do. HE looks around.
Looks at his gun, wondering what to do with it.

Probably be a black president one day.

Laughter.

Might take 150, 200 years, but it will probably happen.

LINCOLN

I agree. Might even be black opera singers.

Laughter.

BOOTH looks around again. HE begins to panic. He tries to put the gun back in his pants and drops it. He stoops down to pick it up and as he comes back up it goes off.

BLACKOUT

Laughter.

EPILOGUE -- MARY DON'T YOU WEEP

THE COMPANY sings "Mary Don't You Weep." Happy. New Orleans.

COMPANY

O MARY DON'T YOU WEEP, DON'T MOURN,
O MARY DON'T YOU WEEP, DON'T MOURN,
PHARAOH'S ARMY GOT DROWNDED -
O MARY DON'T YOU WEEP.

WELL ONE OF THESE NIGHTS BOUT 12 O'CLOCK
THIS OLD TOWN'S GONNA REALLY ROCK;
PHARAOH'S ARMY GOT DROWNDED -
O MARY DON'T YOU WEEP.

O MARY DON'T YOU WEEP, DON'T MOURN,
O MARY DON'T YOU WEEP, DON'T MOURN,
PHARAOH'S ARMY GOT DROWNDED -
O MARY DON'T YOU WEEP.

CHEER UP, SISTERS AND DON'T YOU CRY.
THERE'LL BE GOOD TIMES BYE AND BYE.
PHARAOH'S ARMY GOT DROWNDED -
O MARY DON'T YOU WEEP.

O MARY DON'T YOU WEEP, DON'T MOURN,
O MARY DON'T YOU WEEP, DON'T MOURN,
PHARAOH'S ARMY GOT DROWNDED -
O MARY DON'T YOU WEEP.

END