

IN HIS PLACE: 1867

TIME

1867, late in President Abraham Lincoln's second term, and two years after John Wilkes Booth's failed assassination attempt.

CHARACTERS

ABRAHAM LINCOLN (age 58) 16th president of the United States of America

TAD LINCOLN (14) his younger surviving son

GOVERNOR SHELBY "BULL-ROARER" BLAKE (40s-50s) white governor of a Southern state not yet readmitted to the Union

CAPTAIN LUTHER JOHNSTONE (20s) Pres. Lincoln's Negro aide

SETTING

President Lincoln's office in the White House, with a desk and chair, an upholstered visitor's chair, and a small sideboard. Separately, an office antechamber with a small settee.

COSTUMES

Lincoln wears his familiar black outfit, looking, as always, as if he had dressed in a high wind. Blake wears a plain coat with a patterned vest and, pressed firmly on his head, a Confederate slouch hat with a snakeskin band. Luther is in dress uniform. Tad wears street clothes of the time.

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Lights up on the president's office antechamber. TAD LINCOLN is on a settee, playing adeptly with a wooden yo-yo. CAPTAIN LUTHER JOHNSTON enters.

TAD

Oh!

LUTHER

Hello. I didn't mean to startle you. I'm Captain Johnstone.

TAD

You're new.

LUTHER

Yessir, as always, it seems.

TAD

What do you mean?

LUTHER

I have been new so often, I think it must be my usual condition. Cotton picker, orphan, student, runaway, prisoner, fugitive, soldier--Almighty God has reborn me so many times I suspect that little of the original Luther Johnstone remains.

TAD

And what are you now?

LUTHER

One of your father's aides.

TAD

He needs a bodyguard more.

LUTHER

How do you know that's not one of my duties?

TAD

What else?

LUTHER

I can "walk the dog."

TAD

We used to have a dog. We don't any more.

LUTHER

Let me show you.

LUTHER takes the yo-yo from TAD and demonstrates the trick.

TAD

How did you do that?

LUTHER

Did I mention yo-yo master among my accomplishments?

TAD

Let me try.

LUTHER hands the yo-yo to TAD, who begins practicing eagerly as GOV. SHELBY BLAKE enters. LUTHER takes a protective stance before BLAKE.

GOV. BLAKE

Where's Lincoln?

LUTHER

Please announce yourself, sir.

GOV. BLAKE

As I told the Sunday soldiers outside: I'm Shelby Blake-- Governor Shelby Blake--and I'm here to see Lincoln.

LUTHER

Is the President expecting you, Governor?

GOV. BLAKE

I don't need an appointment, damn it. You ever hear of states' rights?

LUTHER

I'll see if President Lincoln has a moment for you.

(A long beat, considering...)

You'll have to remove your hat.

GOV. BLAKE

I don't take my hat off to no nigger.

LUTHER

In deference to the President.

GOV. BLAKE

I don't take my hat off for no nigger-lover neither.

LUTHER composes himself, then exits. BLAKE notices TAD.

GOV. BLAKE

You must be the young Lincoln kid.

TAD

Yep. Thomas.

GOV. BLAKE

My son was your age not long ago.

TAD

Where is he?

GOV. BLAKE

You Yankees killed him... Ever hear of Second Manassas? Your kind called it Bull Run.

TAD

Uh-huh. It was in the war.

GOV. BLAKE

Goddamn right. Yankees shot off my son's arm and half his chest and bled him to death. Practically just a boy.

TAD

I'm... sorry.

GOV. BLAKE

You oughta be.

TAD

I'm also happy for the Yankees your son didn't kill because we got him first.

BLAKE is open-mouthed and about to answer when LUTHER reappears.

LUTHER

The President will see you now, Governor.

BLAKE stares furiously at TAD, before following LUTHER into the office. LINCOLN rises and extends his hand, which BLAKE shakes perfunctorily.

LINCOLN

Governor Blake, how good of you to come by.

GOV. BLAKE

Lincoln, you've got to do something about the blacks in my state.

LINCOLN

My goodness, Governor, what a handsome hat. Excuse me. The band, is that copperhead?